

Day 23 – At Sea – International Date Line –18 & 19 Oct. 09 – Pirate Night: The day started with broken clouds, calm sea and comfortable temperature. The Amsterdam was underway from Pago Pago in America Samoa to the city of Suva in the island nation of Fiji. Barbara spent most of the day reading on the verandah. Orlin worked on the blog for Samoa and napped a bit, still nursing the remnants of a cold.

Crossing the International Dateline: The most memorable event of the day was that the Amsterdam crossed the International Dateline at 7:45 am. When we crossed the Dateline the calendar day changed from Sunday, 18 October to Monday, 19 October but the clock time stayed the same. Most normal people could live their lives without ever having to concern themselves with the International Dateline. It becomes important only when two people at widely separated points on the earth want to communicate and know precisely when something happened at the other person's remote place. The Daily Program put out by the Amsterdam today had the following succinct explanation for the existence of the International Dateline.

Consider a traveler going around the Earth constantly in the same direction of East or West. At each of the 24 time zones he would advance or retard his clock by one hour. When he returned to the starting point he would find that his date was different by one day from that of a person who remained at the starting point the whole time. In order to prevent this violation of logic the International Dateline has been put in place so that when the traveler crosses the Dateline he adjusts his day forward one day when traveling west and backward one day when traveling east. With this protocol the traveler returning home from his round-the-world trip will have exactly the same day and time as someone who stayed home the entire time.

For those with time to kill on their hands here is a verbose mental exercise that explains why it is convenient to have a Dateline and how it works.

There is an obvious north-south line where the sun is directly overhead and it sweeps across the earth's surface as the earth rotates. Let's call that the Noon Line.

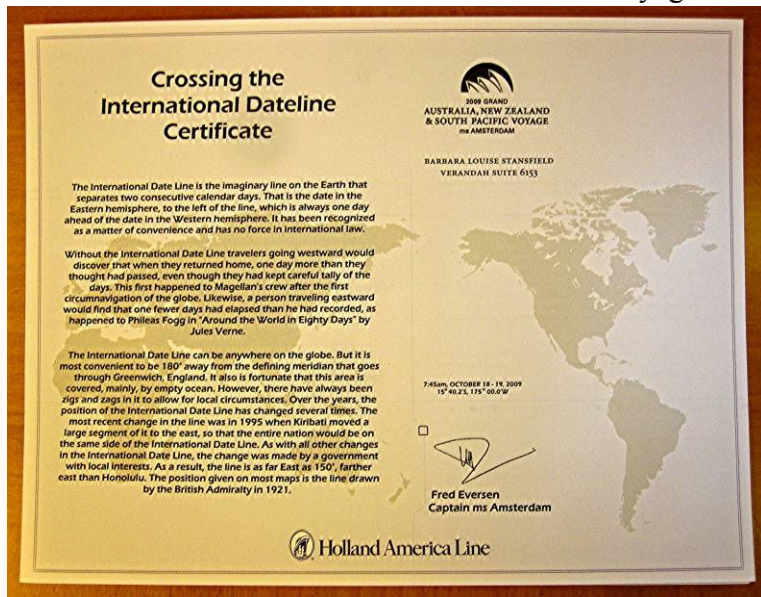
There is another north-south line that sweeps across the earth's surface and that is on the opposite side of the earth from the noon line. Call that the Midnight Line. The Midnight Line marks the beginning and end of a 24 hour period. The earth rotates once every 24 hours about its north-south axis. In principle, the surface of the earth could be divided like an orange into 24 north-south segments each 1 hour in width. Using this simple relationship a problem becomes apparent when one considers that the same 24 hour day would exist all around the world. The same day would begin and end at the stroke of midnight in your location on earth. The function of the International Date Line is to solve this logic problem and provide us with a practical international calendar for human commerce by forcing the start of the next calendar day as the earth spins. Here is how the concept of the International Date Line works.

The International Date Line is a fixed north-south oriented line firmly attached to specific locations on the spinning globe. The International Date Line lies across remote, low

population portions of the earth's surface to minimize interaction with commerce. On the other hand, the Midnight Line is not fixed but sweeps around the world every 24 hours in a westerly direction. Think of the International Date Line as having an endless supply of calendar days all correctly arranged in order. When the Midnight Line passes over the International Date Line the next calendar day is snagged by the Midnight Line and pulled into existence. The early morning hours of the new day stay anchored near the Midnight Line while the Date Line, attached to the earth, unfolds the new calendar day into the advancing morning hours as the earth rotates. While the International Date Line is unrolling the new day around the world it is also rolling up the hours of the old day as it proceeds to the Midnight Line. Thus the earth normally has two days in existence simultaneously. First there exists the new calendar day with the hours of the new day being unfolded eastward by the International Date Line. Secondly, the hours of the old day are being rolled up into the International Date Line. Using this protocol the calendar progresses in an orderly fashion around the world so that time and date of events can be precisely determined regardless of location.

If a person is not moving then he/she is not aware of the Date Line and each day begins and ends at Midnight. However, if a person crosses the Date Line from West to East he is arbitrarily moved ahead in time 24 hours into the new day. When passing from East to West he moves back in time 24 hours to the old day. By means of this arbitrary but useful process the seamless changing to a new calendar day at the Midnight line can proceed in a uniform, predictable fashion at every location around the world.

Whether or not we knew or cared about the International Dateline we all got certificates that attest to the fact that we crossed that imaginary line today. The text on the certificate makes reference to how the need for the dateline in human commerce first cropped up when Magellan's crew returned home from their westward around-the-world voyage and found their journals were behind by one day. The classic story by Jules Verne, "Around the World in Eighty Days" is also mentioned. In that tale Phileas Fogg manages to achieve his goal when he discovers that by applying the Dateline Correction of one day he took only 80 days and not 81 days to make the eastward round-the-world voyage. A copy of our International Dateline Certificate is shown on the right.



Pirate Night: The Amsterdam staff every week pick a night to decorate the dining room in some light hearted festive theme. Careful reading of the Daily Program gives a person a clue as to the special theme, if any, of the dining room for the evening meal. Tonight's theme was PIRATES. We had neglected to read the program so when we arrived for dinner there was a surprise waiting for us in the form of pirate buccaneers of all sorts. The staff really got into their roles as pirates. First of all was our table steward at the main entrance, pirate bandana in place, prepared to maim and kill all the microbes on our hands with his menacing Purell squirt bottle. Then we were met by the costumed managers of this show.



The convincing pirate costumes were matched by the decorations that had been put in place during the day by the hard working crew while we lounged around the ship. Here are some examples of the elaborate productions that looked like stage settings.



Most of the people coming to dinner were just wearing their normal clothes. After all the work that went into setting the stage for this event we felt like party poopers. However, our table mate, Karen, rose to the occasion with flying colors. She had read the literature provided by Holland America months ago and knew that tonight was “Pirate Night”. She was indeed prepared. She made her entrance to the dining room in full costume and worked the crowd as she came to our table. Here is a photo of Karen, in the full regalia of a pirate, as she graced our table tonight.

Karen is really our live wire and keeps the good times rolling.



In spite of the distraction of blood thirsty pirates lurking about, Barbara had the presence of mind to carefully photograph her plates of food prepared by Chef Bernie.

This was her appetizer plate of salmon and shrimp fritters. The dishes recommended by the captain each had a little black pirate’s flag with the classic pirate exclamation of “ARGH!” written on it. Like we said the staff thinks of everything.



Here was the main course which was a selection of lamb, beef and chicken.



The dinner time went by quickly with all the pirate activity. The ship's photographer came by with a band of cut-throats led by Henk Mensink, the Hotel Manager. That was a hilarious show stopper at our table until they moved on. We'll have to check out the photo gallery to see how we all looked with our pirate friends.

This pretty well brought the day to an end. Tomorrow we arrive in Suva, Fiji. We don't have a lot planned but it is always interesting to just wander around foreign cities and check out the hand crafts which usually reflect some unique aspect of the culture.