

Day 19–At Sea–Cruise Vacation Month–Formal Night-14 Oct 09: The day started at sea with overcast sky and the waves giving us a good rocking and rolling ride. The bobbing action wasn't severe enough to cause any sea sickness but it was noticeable. We were on our way to the next South Sea Island destination of Rarotonga in the Cook Archipelago.

Barbara's head cold was in its latter stages so she was feeling pretty good but now Orlin was experiencing a scratchy throat. The day at sea came just in time to rest up from several days of intensive sight seeing and get ready for the next island visit.

World's Largest Cruise Event: October has been designated as National Cruise Vacation Month. Starting in 2008, a day in October is selected by the Cruise Industry and Travel Agent community for what is called "The World's Largest Cruise Event". On that day thousands of Travel Professionals all over the world join in promoting cruising as the vacation option of choice. This morning from 7:30 to 10:30am there was a Champagne Continental Breakfast Buffet on the Lido Pool Deck as part of Holland America's promotion of the event. The Amsterdam's Future Cruise Consultant, Leah Shlykhov, was there to make passengers aware of special promotional benefits that are available for those who, before the end of October, can commit to specific cruises that are planned for 2010 and 2011. Leah normally can be found at a very busy desk near the Explorer Lounge on Deck 5 but this morning she was ready for business at the Champagne Continental Breakfast on the Lido Deck.



The beautifully arranged Continental Breakfast had been set up by the stewards near Leah's desk so that interested passengers could munch a roll and sip Champagne while they consider future cruising vacations. We had already consulted with Leah several times about future cruise options. She has efficiently

answered our questions and for the moment we had no others so this morning we left the field clear for other passengers.

Most of the day was spent updating the blog with events in Raiatea or lounging around the ship. During the morning and through lunch we minimized walking around because of the motion of the ship. However, by mid afternoon the Captain had found some smoother ocean and conditions improved.

Tropical Paradise Formal Night: In the afternoon we wandered by the dining room entrance and saw that the place had been festooned from top to bottom with colorful parrots, palm trees, and a variety of other “Tropical Paradise” decorations. The themes of the formal nights on board are published well in advance and we had been looking forward to an exciting evening. Late in the afternoon we dressed for early seating in the dining room and made our entrance to the Tropical Paradise.



Henk Mensink, the Amsterdam Hotel Manager, was near the entrance so we got a picture of him with Barbara.



Near the start of the cruise we had talked with our table mates about inviting officers to our table. Because Henk and Karen (KweenKaren) had worked together to make the Cruise Critic group feel so welcome on board, we sent him a note a week or so ago inviting him to our table. Tonight Henk informed us that he was going to be sitting at

our table this evening. Wow! Our formal evening had suddenly become a lot more exciting.

As we walked to our dining room table we saw just how elaborate the decorations were. Here are a couple views to provide some idea of the beautiful scene utilizing colorful parrots as highlights.





We arrived at our table and our table mates already knew that Henk would be joining us. The stewards were busy arranging chairs to accommodate our guest. Unfortunately, two of our table mates, Sandy and Wanda, were dining elsewhere tonight so they would miss this opportunity to talk with Henk. Our stewards, Romli and Didi as well as the wine steward Nestor, were carrying out the Tropical Splendor parrot theme by wearing hats that looked like parrots, as shown in this photo of Romli helping George. This was one of the most elaborate theme nights that we had seen while cruising.



After taking care of greeting formalities at the dining room entrance, Henk joined us at the table. He was already well acquainted with Karen and after introductions all around it was like we were all old friends.

Henk was very smartly dressed in his white uniform sporting the four gold shoulder bars of a senior department head for Holland America. Even before the food arrived we managed to get another picture, this time with Karen to make it a foursome.



Henk ordered wine for the table and after our glasses were filled he offered a toast as this picture was taken. As the saying goes, “It doesn’t get any better than this”.



In the group photo of our table the food on Karen's plate is the Lobster Pot Pie. Many of us ordered that dish. Henk looked around and was pleased because, as he explained, the Lobster Pot Pie is the result of his collaboration with Bernie, the head chef on board. Barbara had a picture taken of her Lobster Pot Pie for foodie friends back home in The States. We will certainly order this dish again when it shows up on the menu.



There was no lack of conversation around the table. We all had questions for Henk and he answered with humor and grace. Judy asked a provocative question about the cruise Holland America provided for nudists. She had heard that at the port where the nudists got off and the new passengers arrived there was an unusual delay while the furniture received a thorough cleaning. Henk handled the question diplomatically saying that as a major corporation Holland America could not discriminate against a specific group so, indeed, accommodations for a nudist cruise had been provided. He added the additional comment that there was a rule in the dining room that loin cloths must be worn. Further, on the anti-discrimination issue, he said Holland America could not deny booking to non-nudist passengers on that cruise. As a result many souvenir photos show a few fully clothed people mixed in with the nudists around the decks.

Henk told the interesting story of how he and his wife Christel came to work for Holland America on the same ship. Christel is the Guest Relations Manager on the Amsterdam. Early in their marriage they both had professional jobs that separated them for periods of time that they found objectionable. They both came to work for Holland America and wanted to work on the same ship. As Henk tells in a humorous way, they were eventually successful in getting the company to change their policy regarding married couples so that they could serve on the same ship without getting a divorce.

The conversation flowed as we all took advantage of this opportunity to dine with the ship's officer we had first met at the Cruise Critic Meet and Greet get-together after leaving Long Beach. It was at that meeting that he impressed us all by arranging for the Cruise Director, Bruce, to escort Cruise Critic tour groups down to the tender boats as a tremendous help in getting ashore in ports where the Amsterdam had to anchor out in the harbor. We had never had this measure of accommodation on any prior cruise.

Too soon we looked around and found that our table was the only one with people still seated in the dining room. We reluctantly said our goodbyes so that the stewards could get our table ready for the late dinner seating.

Tonight we skipped the entertainment in Queen's Lounge featuring Bernie Fields, the harmonica virtuoso. Tomorrow at about 7am we expect to anchor in the harbor of the town of Avarua on the island of Rarotonga.