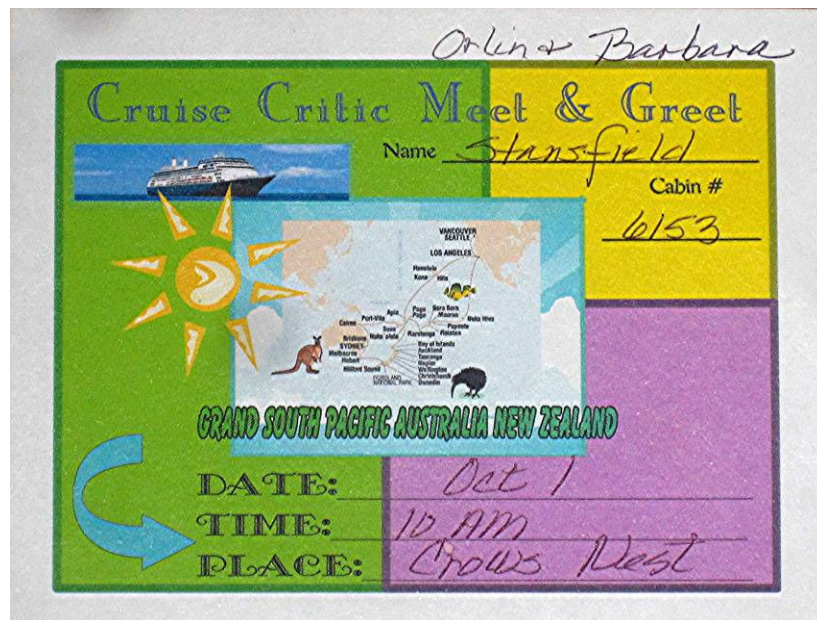


Day 6 – At Sea – Cruise Critic Meet and Greet: The Grand Australia, New Zealand & South Pacific Voyage of the ms Amsterdam started in Seattle Washington 6 days ago. Therefore, our check-in yesterday and start of our part of the cruise took place on Day 5 of the complete Grand Voyage rather than what appeared to be Day 1 for us. We wanted to avoid confusion when comparing events discussed on the blog with official documentation of the cruise activity in the Daily Program that we receive each day. Since the Daily Program counts the cruise days from the start in Seattle, the blog reported our first day on board as Day 5 of the voyage and we will show the days increasing from there.

This day opened with bright sun and smooth sea. We had breakfast in the Lido with Karen, our dinner table mate. We discussed all the events leading up to the cruise and some of the details of blogging. Karen has a great blog of the cruise going at the following URL: www.kweenkaren.com. Our son, Steve, helped Karen with some blog issues over the past year and he is monitoring both of our blogs to keep us up and running during this cruise.

The main event of the day was a Meet & Greet of Cruise Critic contributors in the Crow’s Nest Lounge at 10am. The Cruise Critic group communicates mainly through the website at www.cruisecritic.com where information about cruising is shared in the interest of entertainment and enhancing the cruising experience for everyone. We like these Meet and Greet sessions at the beginning of a cruise because it gives us a chance to meet fellow Cruise Critic fans and put faces with the names we have seen on the webpage. Karen was in charge of organizing the Meet and Greet event and had distributed colorful invitations that she had printed out before the cruise.



When we arrived at the meeting the Crow’s Nest Lounge was already starting to fill and the chatty Cruise Critic people were making good use of all the refreshments that had been provided. There were eventually at least 50 people attending the meeting.

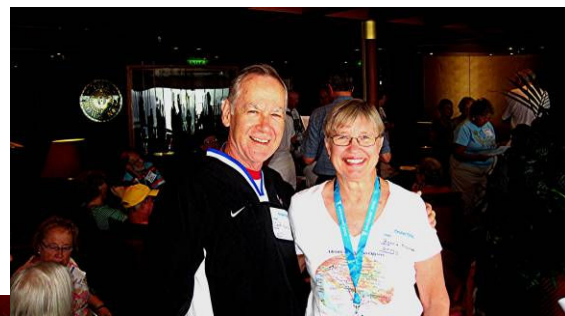
Karen got our attention and welcomed everyone to the Meet and Greet session. She had arranged for the Hotel Manager, Henk Mensink, and the Cruise Director, Bruce Scudder, to attend and make presentations at the meeting. Henk and Bruce made some welcoming comments to our group. Here on the right is a picture of Karen, Henk, looking on while Bruce makes a point.



Both Henk and Bruce indicated that the dedication of Cruise Critic folks to the cruising experience was appreciated by Holland America and they would do their best to keep us happy. There was some instant delivery on that promise during a discussion about the problem that exists in ports where tender boats must be used to get passengers ashore. Some Cruise Critic people have tours leaving very early but typically only the people who have signed up for Holland America land tours can take the first tender boats going ashore. Between Henk, Karen and Bruce it was agreed that Cruise Critic people on private tours would be able to take the early tender boats ashore. That will take some coordination but the gesture by Henk was appreciated.

There was some additional discussion of arrangements for Cruise Critic lunches in the dining room while at sea and a sign-up list for interested people was provided. The meeting then broke up into small groups and before everyone got away we took the following pictures of fellow Cruise Critic members.

Here are Geoff and Elizabeth on the right.



Below, Barbara and Elizabeth are deep in discussion.



Below, Anne is in discussion with Ron who kindly provided a list of all the Cruise Critic people on board.



Here are our friends Jean and Doug from near our home in East Tennessee.



Jeff, the consummate cruiser, was sitting next to Jean and Doug.

After the Cruise Critic meeting there was a lecture in the Queen's Lounge by Dr. Bill Bendel on the subject of constellations in the sky that we may be seeing from the deck of the ship on these nights at sea. Later a second lecture by Bill Hendricks on the subject of Islands: Why the Fascination. These lectures were part of the Explorations Series that Holland America provides on long cruises to provide both entertainment but also some interesting facts to enhance what the passengers may see or do while traveling through new places.

Before dinner we invited Karen to drop by for a drink and a chance to get better acquainted after our 18 months of exchanging emails and now finally getting together in the same room.



At 5:30 we went down to dinner in the main dining room. Tonight we were pleased to see that, as promised, Valerie had arranged to join our table. Our steward, Romli, took a picture of our happy group which we look forward to getting to know better over then next two months of cruising.



From left to right: Sandy, George, Judy, Valerie, Karen, Barbara, Orlin

After dinner we decided to drop into the casino and try our luck. This was our lucky night as Barbara quickly hit four of a kind in a video poker machine and walked away \$30 richer.

This slot machine win was a great way to start the evening. We finished off the evening by going to the show in the Queen's Lounge put

on by the Amsterdam Singers and Dancers. The title of the show was Love Songs from Broadway and we thoroughly enjoyed all the familiar songs sung so well and with a lot of exciting dancing.

