

Thursday 1 March 2012 - Pacific Ocean on way to Papua New Guinea 27° GMT +10

I didn't realise it was a leap year and got the date wrong yesterday. We have to keep reminding ourselves what day it is by looking at "Horizon", the ships newsletter,. First real sign that the cruise is coming to an end is that we had the form to complete should we like to leave a couple of cases on board to be picked up on 30 April at Southampton - £35 a case, not bad. It could be quite expensive though if you are unable to collect. Made Bridge more competitive by swapping partners, girls against boys. There was a bit of doubling going on but the boys won mainly because we had poor hands – low points and we lost a double. The sea has settled and it's a lovely day again, however, the sick bags (sorry Motion Discomfort Bags) are still out. **King Neptune, his wife and the pirates**



We had the ship's version of "Crossing the Equator Ceremony" where permission has to be sought from King Neptune, ruler of the Seven Seas. A team of pirates representing King Neptune had a contest against the Arcadia Engineers. They were set four tasks: tug of war, diving in the pool to collect spoons, a relay pool race, and a synchronised swimming contest. The officers won overall and then it was the part that we were all waiting for when some of the contestants were covered in a mixture of raw eggs, flour, baked beans and other horrid slosh that looked like motion discomfort with kissing the dead fish as a finale. We have an Australian mother and daughter, aka "The Cruise Queens" who always dress in identical sportswear with Ma and Bernie printed on their outfits. They hadn't crossed the line before and took part in the ceremony in good spirit.



It appears the Sydney hotel we have booked is situated in one of the less salubrious areas, full of strip clubs, prostitutes, nightclubs, pubs and drunks – should be interesting.

Osaka to Rabaul, Papua New Guinea 2578 nm

Friday 2 March 2012 - Papua New Guinea 32° Humid



Former Japanese submarine base

The port of Rabaul is on the east coast of the island New Britain, part of Papua New Guinea and is surrounded by active and dormant volcano's. German control of the Island from 1884 came to an end at the start of World War I when the Australian's took it and made Rabaul the capital. The town had to be rebuilt after the 1937 catastrophic earthquake. In January 1942 the Japanese invaded and turned Rabaul into a fortress and a major supply base for their Pacific fleet. They used slaves to build hundreds of miles of tunnels and one tunnel housed a hospital capable of treating 2500 patients. During World War II and during the Japanese occupation Rabaul was subjected to frequent air raids by the USA. It remained in Japanese hands until they surrendered at the end of the war. In 1994 the town was once more devastated when Mount Tavorur erupted violently, closely followed by Mount Vulcun. Very few buildings survived and the town also lost its golf course and airport.



As we sailed into the third world port of Rabaul we were confronted by volcanic mountains covered in rich vegetation and a puffing Mount Tavorur in the distance. The shops and market in the town mainly cater for local needs and much of the eastern parts remains covered in deep ash. We made our way through the beautiful countryside passing lots of tunnels dug by the Japanese to seek refuge from the bombs to the Volcanology Observatory. Unfortunately, we only got to look at the machinery through the windows as a meeting was taking place but Lisa and David said that when they visited later they were told that there had been an earthquake that morning, measuring 5.5. We were then driven along the bumpy road to Tavui Point the former Japanese submarine base where they would take up supplies and set down troops. It was a lovely spot where we saw snorkellers and dolphins. We had to climb over rocks, and through the sea to get to the caves. The locals are very friendly, everyone waves to the tourists and they don't beg but the older ones have red teeth through chewing beans. We then visited the Matupit village where they live right underneath the active volcano. In our honour the children were given a day

off school and we were treated to a wonderful performance of local dancing by some of them. They have so little but seem happy and I wonder if it's right for us to always think that everyone wants to aspire to the western way of life. We commented on the children's light coloured hair and were told that it darkens as they get older. The women and girls all seem to wear a patterned smock type dress with flip flops.



There was very little that the villagers could sell to us apart from things made from sea shells and basketry. However, you are not allowed to take shells or anything that might contain an insect into Australia. We then drove across the ash flats to a hot spring where the young boy dressed in red is



standing. The sea behind him was too hot to put your foot in. Rick has the active volcano in the background. We weren't very impressed with the Japanese Peace Memorial but the view from there was impressive. This is one of our favourite places but it was hot and humid.

We now have two days at sea before reaching Australia.