

Friday 10 February 2012 – Laem Chabang, Thailand - 30° overcast



Back in Thailand and most of the other passengers will be taking the two and a half hour journey each way to Bangkok. We're not keen on those long coach journeys and have a two centre holiday, Bangkok and sea resort in mind for the future. Nong Nuch Village, a real tourist spot was our choice for today. The visit started off with a Thai show featuring folk dances from various regions of Thailand. The beautiful dancers with long curling finger nails and amazing costumes looked like painted dolls while they moved gracefully to the exotic music. This was followed by some Thai boxing, the number one sport in Thailand, and then sword fighting. I was so enthralled and then even more so when the elephants came on. It was straight onto the Elephant Show which we both enjoyed enormously. I know a lot of people have problems with these type of shows but elephants have an age old affinity with man much like the camel. They rode bicycles, played football, darts and netball and lots more. In between events they would come to the audience and eat the bananas. You have to be careful to separate the bunch otherwise they will eat the lot, they love bananas. Jen would have been in heaven seeing all this. On the way back to the coach you could have have your picture taken with a tiger, this I was really uncomfortable with. They were subdued which made me think they may have been sedated. Next stop was the orchid gardens and also lots of lakes where we enjoyed watching the school children feed fish to the snapping tuna. On the way back to the ship we had the usual shopping stop which I hate, I am not a shopper! Anyway, it was at a supposedly gem factory with a huge shop full of loads of jewellery and handbags that I could buy if Rick had remembered his credit card. Actually thank goodness he didn't.



Since the dynamics of our table have changed nobody turned up tonight in the restaurant. We found Hilly and Stu in the Buffet area and we had a catch up as we hadn't seen them for a couple of days. It's

exhausting visiting a different country every other day and am looking forward to a day off tomorrow.

Italian divers searching the cruise ship found two Glaswegians at the bar, they have told the divers to clear off. They are "All Inclusive" and they still have twelve days left.

Paddy and Murphy are on the cruise ship Costa Concordia and Paddy says "It's awfully quiet on deck tonight" Murphy says "Everyone will be watching the band" Paddy says "There isn't a band playing tonight" Murphy says "I definitely heard someone say "A band on ship".

Saturday 11 February 2012 – At Sea on way to Vietnam - 30° overcast

Breakfasted with a couple who said that last January they were on a cruise from Southampton to the Caribbean when they were hit by storms and had to stay on board for 8 days and at one time all the glasses flew off the table and smashed. We're feeling a bit pathetic having to spend almost a day in bed when there was just a slight swell. The husband is usually in a wheelchair but walks with a stick when he can. However, despite his handicap Lisa beat him in the quarter finals of the table tennis competition today and his wife has won the competitions 3 times. The chap next door is also a little unsteady on his feet as well and he found the steps on the coach and theatre too much yesterday. I feel sorry for him, he is a widower and always looks so lonely and lost even though he has Jackie the Ghost Writer for company.

We're playing pre dealt hands in Bridge and learning about Doubling, Celia and Clive have had all the points so not much needed from us again today. Listened to Jeff Chandler on "The Fall of Singapore" which was the greatest British military disaster. We were told how 30,000 Japanese overcame the island in just 6 days resulting in the capture of over 80,000 Allied troops. Never thought I would be so interested in history. Mind you how can you not be when we are travelling through such troubled areas and with Syria dominating the headlines. There has been trouble in a few areas we have visited with the economic turmoil in Athens and the football massacre of 74 football fans in Port Said. British warships in the straits of Hormuz to prevent the Iranians blockading the oil tanker route. There is now tension in the Falkland Islands where we have sent an advanced warship to act as a deterrent against the belligerent Argies.

Lunched with some Fred Olsen fans who, like us, are experiencing their first P & O cruise. They share similar views to us on the differences: Fred Olsen has better quality and variety of food and much more of it; friendlier staff who are mostly Filipino; more of a family atmosphere; there is closer contact with entertainers who double up roles and the Captain who is often seen around the ship; smaller ships meaning less tendering and best of all beef tea at 11am and free cocktails at the sail-away parties. Whereas P & O have generally better cabins, possibly better entertainment and you can bring alcohol on board with you. Both have the facility to buy alcohol at duty free prices, neither harass you into buying photographs

Lisa joined me for the 5pm legs, tums and bums, she won't be able to walk today! Rick came back to the cabin and said he had a surprise for me and I said that I thought perhaps he should keep it until Valentine's Day. Big disappointment, he then produced a glass with some lime pieces in it to go with the gin and not the earrings I was hoping for. We splashed out and paid an extra £12.95 each to go to the Ocean Grill and it was worth every penny to have food that actually tasted of something. Onto the Beatles cover band which is obviously in the era of most of the passengers including Rick. Even without any encouragement he was up dancing and then onto watch the live England and Italy rugby match.

Laem Chabang, Thailand to Phu My -647 nm

Sunday 12 February 2012 – Phu My Vietnam - 30° hot at port but overcast in Vung Tau

Most of passengers have set off for Ho Chi Minh City but the 2 hours coach journey each way in the stifling heat put us off and once again we are hoping to do a Vietnam tour at a later date. We have been recommended to use Vietnam Selective Asia tour company.



The ship docked in Phu My where on the starboard side there was nothing but Mangrove forest but on the port side there was a lot of heavy industry. We had a 30 minute coach ride to the town of Vung Tau and it was apparent that the industrial area on the way had been well planned as the infrastructure was all marked out. This was so different from the place we stopped in Cambodia where it was really third world. Taxi negotiations cumulated in us sharing with with a husband and wife and an ignorant, dragon of a mother. It took about 30 minutes to reach the seaside resort and the central reservation of the very long road on the way was full of topiary and colourful plants. The taxi was going too fast for us to take any pictures. The beach was bustling and we asked to stop to take a photo but the dragon only gave us a few minutes. We were going too fast to take a photo of the 100 foot statue of Jesus Christ on the top of Nui Nho Mountain. Next the old bag wanted to stop at the market for 30 minutes, we tried to get her down to 20. Actually, the market was good, there was an amazing amount of fruit, vegetables and meat, some of which was still alive. They sold almost anything but you had to be careful to avoid the mopeds as they made their way through the narrow alleyways. Back in the taxi it turned out that the family we shared it with are shopping fanatics and needed to buy a suitcase to accommodate all their purchases. They didn't return until after at least 45 minutes with no apologies. The taxi was almost new with air conditioning but as the driver couldn't speak any English he just turned the radio on full blast. The two women never said a word to us and the husband was ineffectual. We were chased up the road by the driver as he wasn't given a tip and we ended up just paying him off to get rid of him. Another lesson learnt, get a taxi on your own and pay a bit more to get good service.



Had an embarrassing evening when the magician called both of us and another couple onto the stage and asked us to do a simple drawing. Rick had to shuffle them and the magician then had to guess who had drawn each one. Of course he guessed each one correctly but I had drawn a simplified tree which unfortunately looked like something rude no matter what way up he held it! The audience found it very funny and from now I will be known as the lady who did that drawing. They were all laughing about it in the lift.

Monday 13 February 2012 – At Sea on way to Halong Bay Vietnam - 23° Windy

Bit of an average day with usual Bridge, Gym and not much else. We did try to make the most of the sun as we will be losing it when we reach China and Japan. It was very windy and I have lots of strap marks, not good with a low dress. Rick had a bout of sea sickness but has taken a pill and recovered. Big embarrassment as lots of people are recognising me from last night's fiasco. It did get me preferential treatment in the lift and the queue to the restaurant. Also, another big embarrassment is that I have found that we had tickets for a paid tour yesterday so we didn't need to take a taxi and put up with the most ignorant people on the ship. If we were going to miss a tour, yesterday's was about the best one to do so but it was a waste of money.

Phu My to Halong Bay 732 nm

Tuesday 14 February 2012 – Halong Bay - 22° initially fog



After me forgetting we had a trip booked Rick has decided to take charge. We approached Halong Bay in heavy fog which gave it a rather eerie atmosphere as the small, forest clad, rocky islands appeared through the mist. There were barges unloading onto cargo ships which is something now seen in very few places in the world. Coal is very important to the economy and there were many primitive coal barges in the bay. We took a junk boat to voyage into the mystical Bay of the Descending Dragon which is yet another world heritage site. The legend goes that Halong is the translated name of a family of dragons who came to help the Vietnamese fight against the northern invaders. The dragons spat out jewels and jade which turned into islands to act as a natural barriers against the invaders. There are over 3000 islands and many limestone caves. We explored the Thien Bung and Dau Go caves that were only discovered by a fisherman in the early 90's. These islands only have monkeys for inhabitants but the vertical island rock formation is strange. The Thais, Cambodians, Vietnamese, Chinese and Japanese cultures appear to merge into each other. Generally, the Thai's and Cambodians are very friendly but the Vietnamese faces are harder perhaps reflecting the years of war and hardship. Vietnam is one of the

world's last remaining one-party communist states with a population of 84 million, half of whom are less than 20 years old.



After the junk cruise we took the ship's tender across to the town where all the passengers we saw said there was nothing to see apart from a market. The locals were trying to sell us pearl jewellery and handbags. They were right, there wasn't much to see apart from a recently built promenade all lined with trees and lights. There were a few fair sized hotels but only one of them appeared to be open and most of the restaurants were closed. We found a large restaurant on 3 levels with tanks of fish and a small vegetable garden. There were lots of staff but only a couple of tables being used., they needed a sign or a tout outside. Arcadia's first officer for navigation sat beside us and ordered a beer, prawns with chilli and hot oysters. He happens to be Italian and I kept thinking of all those jokes going around about the Italian Captain on the Costa Concordia. We had fun working out what to eat and some more deciding what to drink. A bottle of Jacobs Creek was 40 US\$ but we settled for a small bottle of local vodka for \$5. Incidentally, US\$ seem to be accepted in most countries. On the way back we saw all the other passengers clutching their bags with their purchases from the local market. It amazes us that they still find so much rubbish to buy after all the ports we have visited. Our previous visit to Phu My where there is lot of industry, gave us the wrong impression of how the country is developing. Apart from the main cities not much has changed in the rest of the country especially the appalling conditions of the roads.



As we leave Halong Bay the fog has descended on us again and I am bit worried that our Italian navigator will be able to find his way through all the rock islands!

Fabio Capello resigns from England job

An Italian abandoning a sinking ship who would have guessed