

The Cruise

Wednesday 14 November 2007



The night before I had an urge for something sweet after the curry so thought I would try one of the toffee's that come with the takeaway. I remember saying to Rick that it was a dreadful toffee as it had crunchy, crystallized bits in it and I later realized it had taken best part of one of my back teeth – no wonder I couldn't chew it!!! We had to get up at 3.15 am to drive to Heathrow. The flight was uneventful and when we arrived at Barcelona we all assembled around the reps sporting the Marco Polo sign. Oh my god – everyone was so old, what have I done subjecting us to 3 weeks of this. Got on the coach and they seemed even older, I refuse to think of myself as retired, just taking a year out instead. I looked around the coach and tried some positive thinking; I could learn something from their experience which must be enormous looking at them. Perhaps if they ask I could say I am a travel correspondent working for the Daily Telegraph. Our ship, The Marco Polo is quite old but I like it as its not too big and can carry about 650 passengers, it's a bit dated but homely. We weren't expecting too much as it was a 2 for 1 deal. We have an outside cabin with a porthole that you can't open, I expect that is because we are near the sea and if there was a big wave we would be drowned. There are 2 single 2' 6" beds, dressing table, wardrobe and a chair. It's well designed with a small shower room but being near the bottom of the ship there is a fair amount of engine noise. Had a buffet lunch on deck, it was a bit breezy, you needed to wear a jumper, but pleasant in the sun. There were a couple on the next table who looked interesting as they were younger. I think they were Scandinavian, he looked about 45 and she was blonde and about 25. They were chain smoking and drinking lager. Thought we would start the holiday off with a glass of wine but it was better value to buy the bottle which they said they could save any we didn't drink for dinner. It was a strange white Chardonnay at £11 a bottle, completely translucent and only 9.5% so we drank it all. It must have been stronger than we thought or we were tired from the early start as when registering our cards etc we couldn't keep our eyes open. Slept for about 2 hours and went to the IT centre to sort out the internet connection. Ordered a Pina Colada but couldn't drink it as it was awful so will stick to the g & t's or wine. At dinner I sat next to David and Sylvia who have been on lots of cruises. They were saying that the cruise lines hire men just to dance with the ladies as there are usually a lot on their own and also many husbands are not keen to dance. By the way this is not disco city so I can't see me dancing. Rick sat next to a very interesting big, big American from Phoenix and this is his 75th cruise. He just spends his whole life going round the world; he doesn't live at home in the summer because it's too hot. He didn't like the Mediterranean but enjoyed the steaks in Argentina. The couple next to me enjoyed the Indian Ocean. After dinner we went to the theatre where they were showing the film "As Good As It Gets". After about 20 minutes we were just getting settled and looking like it

may be enjoyable film when the credits came up so it was pointless staying for the next showing as we knew the ending.

Thursday 15 November

Day at sea. Woke up quite late and had breakfast on deck by the swimming pool. Bit chilly and we were too late for cooked breakfast although I managed to get an omelette. Bought razor as Rick forgot his. Had first Spanish lesson, learnt los numeros, el alfabeto, saying hello and getting to know someone, palabras interrogatives (interrogative words i.e. why, what, who, how, when etc.). Sat on pool deck and tried to read but distracted by people. Spoke to 2 men who I think might be paid to dance with the single women. After lunch had a look at the Art Exhibition, there wasn't anything striking there but they were talking about £5000 pictures. Watched "The Transporter" which was a good action film. Read my book. The gym, that was surprisingly well equipped with up to date machines, was really busy. They hold Pilates and Yoga classes in the adjoining room but you have to pay \$10 to attend. As I couldn't get on the running machine I ran round the deck a couple of times. It was a semi-formal evening. I put on my black dress, it was the warmest and safest option and I didn't want to appear overdressed. We checked out where the 2 for 1 drinks were and made our way to the swimming pool bar where all the smokers were hanging out. The ship is mostly non smoking except for the casino and casino bar so that is a no go area for us. It's only a small casino and Rick hasn't had the urge to use it yet but he did mention he might do a spot of internet betting. Lots of men were in djays and the couple on our table had been to the Captain's Cocktail Party. They said there was loads of champagne and the Captain had obviously had a few as he had to ask someone where we were heading. They had drunk so much champagne that they couldn't drink any wine with their dinner. David had spent some time in the sauna where he says most of the men were naked – not something to get too excited about considering the average age must be about 75. Most people we have spoken to have been on the Marco Polo several times before and this is to be its final voyage. When we leave it in Rio it goes on to Antarctica and then onto its new owners. I need to check out where it is going. It does have a homely feel about it and I should think in its early days it was quite splendid. Checked out the entertainment before going to bed but it wasn't good enough to keep us up for long. If I am to succeed in my new role of pseudo travel reporter I must try and speak to more people.

Friday 16 November - Malaga



It was Rick's 57th birthday today and I gave him an Ipod and Jen gave him Ian Botham's autobiography. Met a couple at breakfast who I thought were American but he turned out to be a retired German pilot with an American wife. If you fly from Germany to another European destination i.e Barcelona and you want to take more than 16 kilos, you have to pay something like 1500 euros excess baggage, so they flew to Philadelphia for one night and went from there to

Barcelona as it was cheaper. Also spoke to a Dutch couple who I originally thought were German who were very keen on cycling. Walked into Malaga and followed the traditional and monumental walking routes. Highlights were the Bull Ring, a Roman Theatre dating from 1st century AD but was rediscovered in the 50's and is now being restored and the Cathedral that has 2 magnificent 18th century organs that are still working. There were two buildings, one being a former department store, where all that was left standing was the façade and this was held up by scaffolding. It seems that they are rebuilding some of the older buildings but trying to save the beautiful, original outside features. Many of the city buildings need renovating and there was a fair amount of graffiti about. We went into the 19th century Central Market where there were lots and lots of stalls selling fish, meat and vegetables, it is probably the biggest food market that I have seen. Had a relaxing lunch washed down by a bottle of wine and Rick had at least a quarter pint of brandy served in one glass! We then went to the Picasso Museum; we think we prefer Dali. After downloading our emails and reading the paper we had a big sleep.



For under \$3 a day the ship will print the Daily Telegraph for you, however, there are a few gaps where the articles are not printed due to legal reasons. It would be interesting to know what was in middle of the front page of today's Telegraph and also all the editorials on pages 10 and 11 were removed – perhaps it was a continuation of the front page. Rick felt really unwell when he woke up but managed to come with me to see an entertaining Russian couple perform a magic show. He couldn't face the formal dinner so we opted for the informal fish buffet in Raffles Restaurant. The relaxed atmosphere was just right and the fish was good. Rick had visions of downing lots of champagne to celebrate his birthday and there we were drinking glasses and glasses of water as it seems we must have got dehydrated with all the wine, brandy and walking. Rick was in bed by 9.30pm feeling a bit better and catching up with the news in the Telegraph and reading his Botham book. He says thanks to Mike and Thyra for the Andy McNab book. Our cabin steward, Romel, managed to get us both a dressing gown but we have to keep quiet about it as they are only issued to the upper cabins. We enjoyed Malaga today even though I had been there 21 years ago but that was with my sister Julie when Jen was 6 months and Jess was 3 months. Between us we had 4 children (Julie was still breastfeeding), pushchairs, portable cots and a multiple packets of Pampers each. The apartment was called La Breeza and was right at the top of a hill which was ok to go down and required 2 taxi's to get us all back each time. It was much easier today with just the 2 of us. Here we are in bed by 9.30 pm while all those oldies are dancing, gambling and drinking the night away!

Saturday 17 November - Cadiz



Breakfasted with a German couple (no mistaking that as she was about 25 stone) and a really nice Dutch couple who looked more our age. The German couple have been on a World Cruise and preferred the splendour of Royal Caribbean to our present ship. When they were in Australia they put some money in a slot machine and won \$7500. Every time I asked them if they were going into Cadiz today they said they came from Hamburg. Cadiz was founded in 1100 BC which makes it one of the oldest cities in the Western World. It has a population of about 164,000 inhabitants but in recent years its population has been steadily declining. One reason for this is that it lies on a narrow spit of land and is almost entirely surrounded by water. This means that there is very little vacant land and the older part of the city is full of buildings that because of their age and historical significance are not suitable for redevelopment. Despite the declining population the Old Town is one of the most densely populated urban areas in Europe and it also has the highest rate of urban unemployment.



We made our way to the Tourist Office and got the map with the walking routes, however, it was difficult to follow as the city is full of narrow streets. You aren't allowed to bring alcohol onto the ship so we stopped at a little shop in a narrow street and bought a bottle of gin and a bottle of water. He obviously doesn't sell much gin as he had to dust the bottle off. There weren't so many obvious interesting buildings but it was a busy place and a lot of the shops were tiny and old fashioned. There were some classic cars being exhibited outside the cathedral some were really old with wooden spokes and a lot of them were previous diplomatic cars. We made it to the top of one of the cathedral towers and it was worth the effort as you got a great view of the city, lots of churches and no high rise apartments. It was 4 euros each for the tower and another 4 euros for the cathedral. The cathedral was relatively new (finished in the 1830's) and built in a variety of styles and various tastes of the different architects. It was quite plain inside and they obviously haven't

been putting the 4 euros admittance fee towards its maintenance. We found another indoor market selling fish, meat and vegetables. We just don't have those sorts of markets at home; I suppose everyone is so busy it's easier to buy it all in one place. On the Route 66 trip Rick kept pointing out trains, now he keeps pointing out Wireless Hotspots. By the way the weather has been pleasant about 19 degrees but you need a light jacket to be comfortable. We sat outside in one of the busy narrow streets to have a leisurely lunch. They had some funny translations on the menu i.e. Crock of Watery Rice 19.00 euros and Pure of Cheese of Ship 10.00 euros. You will be pleased to know that Rick is back to his hedonist drinking habits and during lunch I had to go to the toilet and tip away the water and replace it with the gin. Feeling like a real alkie I had to walk around with an empty gin bottle in my bag until I could find a suitable place to dispose of it when nobody was looking. I don't know why we can't keep to the 2 for 1 bars. Yes, it was difficult to follow today's map and I realise that I have absolutely no sense of direction. I am not sure if it is something to do with being left handed but it always seems to be the complete opposite way to what I think it is. Even if I use the theory that it is the opposite to what I think somehow it is still wrong.



Back at the boat Rick read the paper while I went and watched some local Spanish dancers. The 25 stone German lady from breakfast seems to be smiling and waving at me from everywhere, don't want to get into another conversation with her as she answers Hamburg to everything I say. Went to the gym while Rick slept on deck. To answer Sue's David and Sylvia are our dinner companions, we are travelling on our own and our cabin is just above the water line.

Sunday 18 November – Casablanca



Clocks went back an hour so we are on the GMT. Refused the offer of taxi and decided to walk into Casablanca. The walk out of the docks seemed to go on forever; there was loads of freight with piles of wood everywhere. When we eventually reached the town it didn't appear as exotic as I had imagined but really run down. Some dock workers were finishing their shift and driving off on clapped out mopeds, others were pushing hand carts. As it was Sunday many of the shops were closed and the roads weren't too busy. We thought we would make our way to the Mosque but despite being told to stay in busy areas we found ourselves walking through back streets where some live in absolute squalor. There was rubbish everywhere and then we found ourselves walking through the street markets where they were selling a fantastic assortment of fruit and vegetables, meat, fish and live scrawny chickens. Both the meat and fish were displayed unfridgerated and covered in flies. The streets were absolutely packed and the smell was terrible. At one time we were sliding about on what seemed like a sea of mud but it was fish heads, guts and rubbish. The cats were round our feet eating the fish heads. Rick thinks you need a scratch and sniff video to appreciate the awful smell.



We eventually made it to the Mosque and what a fantastic building it was and what a huge area it covered. Apparently there are poor people living in shelters underneath the concrete wall that surrounds it. There are lots of small red cars about called Petit Taxis (French is the second language) and we negotiated an hours trip for \$20. We only had dollars as our money was locked in the safe and I had messed up the lock by putting in the wrong combination number. Luckily Rick had drawn out \$100 in the Casino last night. I don't know if we will be going back to the Casino because everything including the roulette was electronic and fixed. The taxi driver was great and took us all over Casablanca including the seaside resort, golf and horseracing course, posh houses, Habous quarter, Kasbah, Medina and all the places of interest. He kept stopping and taking photographs of us with our camera. When returning after a stop Rick admired the tyres on the taxi, I said it wasn't our taxi but he didn't hear, and promptly went and sat in it much to the amusement of both drivers. We took a bottle of water with us because we didn't want to get dehydrated again but I had used it to clean my teeth and it tasted of mint. It wasn't safe to have lunch in Casablanca so we went back to the boat. I am pleased we did the taxi tour because after seeing the Mosque we would have walked back to the boat thinking that Casablanca was a squalid place whereas there were palaces and other fine areas to been seen.

When we got back we had to wash our feet and shoes as they stank of fish. Romel asked if we had been to the fish market as our room must have smelt. After lunch we had a leisurely afternoon sunbathing and reading on deck. At 4.45pm we were invited onto the pool deck for a Scenic Sailaway to wave goodbye to Casablanca with music by Andre from the Marco Polo Trio. Suddenly we were surrounded by all these people doing old fashioned dancing. I think I know now who the men are that are paid to dance with the ladies. A lady in her late 60's or early 70's from Florida and her friend Townsend (aged 77) joined us. She had a good figure and was wearing quite a short skirt but had excellent legs. She and Townsend got up and danced, it was all a bit overwhelming but it was also 2 for 1 time so I got caught up in it all. I offered to take a photograph of them but her memory card was full and she didn't know how to delete or download them. She was mightily impressed when Rick took over and it appears she had used the memory up by taking videos without realising it "oh my that's me in the john". We have been moved to a central table for dinner in the Restaurant. Tonight we were joined by our big American of 75 cruises and David and Sylvia and were laughing and chatting so much that we were almost last to leave. Before going to bed Rick finished cleaning out the drain in our bathroom so it would have a chance to dry overnight.



Monday 19 November – Agadir



Didn't arrive in Agadir until 9.30 am. Had breakfast on deck but it was a bit windy and it was difficult to get anything in my mouth without taking in a load of hair too. We had booked our first excursion and the initial waiting to get on the coach was quite painful, luckily it's a small ship. Agadir which means Fortified Palace lies on the shoreline of the Atlantic Ocean and at the foot of the Atlas Mountains and is an important fishing and commercial port. It is not a typical Moroccan city because as a result of the earthquake on 29 February 1960, which almost totally destroyed the

city and an estimated 15,000 were killed, it has been rebuilt with wide roads, modern hotels and buildings.



Our first stop was at a viewing point that overlooked the town and port. Our tour guide then went on to tell us about the Argan Tree that is only native to Morocco whose oil is a wonder cure for almost anything from haemorrhoids, high cholesterol to wrinkles and can also be used as a salad dressing or for cooking. He said he uses it and is really 90 but only looks 30 something so we were all dying to get some. He took us to a shop where they demonstrated the uses of this oil and also other spices and herbs. The demonstrator put some herbs in a piece of muslin and crushed them to release the vapours and then proceeded to stuff it up his nostrils as a cure for sinusitis, that was OK but he then stuffed it up everyone else's nostrils. Thank goodness we were at the beginning of the queue as goodness only knows what germs we may have caught from sharing it.



Our next stop was the Inezgane's visitor complex which is located in a rustic setting on the outskirts of Agadir. We were welcomed by Moroccan singers and dancers with Andalusian music and served mint tea and pastries in a traditional Berber tent. There then followed some more traditional entertainment with acrobats, snake charmers, a belly dancer and horse races with men in traditional costumes who frightened the life out of everyone by firing their rifles at the end of each race. These horse races are part of the Moroccan culture and are a symbol of manhood, courage and hospitality. We also had a ride on a camel and I was lucky enough to be offered two rides. The scenery on the way back was barren but there is loads of development taking place, mainly houses and apartments. We were back in time for lunch and as it was about 26 degs we spent the afternoon reading and sunbathing. At 5pm we once again went on the pool deck for the Scenic Sailaway with music provided by Andre from The Marco Polo Trio. Rick had previously sorted Anne's sunbed out for her and checked that she hadn't taken any more videos instead of photos. She and Townsend were dancing away again. Rick thinks she is going to kill Townsend

off with all her dancing. David and Sylvia came over to show us their photos of today's trip where they saw some goats up a tree. It was 2 for 1 time again and they were playing the Zorbas Dance and we were sailing away into the sunset and it was all quite nice. Discussion at Dinner centred around someone's remark that the earth was a bit top heavy. I stupidly said maybe because it's hot up there. David said I must be left handed as Sylvia is and she always says the opposite to what it is. Well that is so true, when it says push I pull, when it says turn right I turn left etc. How was he so sure I was left handed and he said he has had 40 odd years experience of left-handed comments with his wife. Leif (the big man of 75 cruises) joined us again and he said they have built 25,000 new houses in Phoenix that they can't sell and they also built some roundabouts that they had to tear up because nobody knew how to use them. David has been to the new Wembley Stadium to watch his beloved Derby County and thought it was fantastic. I have just finished a boring book about horse racing and can't get any sense out of Rick as he is well into his Botham book.

Tuesday 20 November 2007 =Arrecife



Today we were in Arrecife which has been the capital of Lanzarote since 1852. We stayed in Puerto del Carmen one February about 18 years ago but never visited Arrecife. I remember that there wasn't really much of interest apart from the volcano that you reached after a long coach journey and where they threw some sticks into it and they caught fire. They also cooked steaks over the heat coming from it. In 1993 the island was declared by the UNESCO a Reserve of the Biosphere and since then it has been committed to the preservation of nature and to practicing development that prevents the destruction and degradation of its values by restricting development for tourism until 2010. It was too far to walk to Arrecife so we paid \$10 each for a round trip on one of the ship's coaches. Other more enterprising passengers had a round the island trip on a local bus for a few euros. We found it difficult to stop comparing it with Tenerife, however, it was quite different. We expected that being the capital it would have more prestigious buildings and wouldn't look quite so run down. As usual we made our way to the local Tourist Office to find a map that showed places of interest but there weren't really any. There was one 5 star hotel by the sandy beach where we stopped for coffee. It was jacket on, jacket off weather as it was cloudy. Rick then thought he would look for a more sophisticated camera, one with a wide angled lens. This proved to be one real advantage over Tenerife as the Asian shopkeepers were not one bit pushy when we said a few times that we would think about it. In Tenerife they would start trying to reduce the price and sometimes go as far as chasing you up the road to secure a deal. Also, the general pace was much slower, we couldn't believe that the cars actually slowed down to let you across the road whereas in Tenerife they just try to mow you down. Nowhere was very busy and we had a great Tenerife style lunch by the beach – garlic prawns, grilled fish and Canarian potatoes with mojo washed down with a bottle of Vina Sol. As we made our way back to the ship almost all the shops were closed for their siesta. Back on the ship it was the Scenic Sailaway with music provided by The Gennadi Orchestra. People are getting friendly with others now and little groups are forming. The staff are getting to know us and they now know how we like our gin and

tonics – it must be Gordons and not too much tonic. We actually managed to make the star evening entertainment; a comedian called Tony Stevens who was quite good. At Dinner Rick sat next to Leif again who said that he has been on holiday since 1981 only spending as little as 2 – 3 months a year at home. He said that for the first two years of his retirement time went fast but it goes quite slowly now. As a commercial fisherman in 1953 he visited the Galapagos Islands where the population was only 60, it is now 6000. David and Sylvia have been on excursions every day and are completely exhausted but we are now on our way to Cape Verde and have two days at sea. No wine with Dinner and an early night.



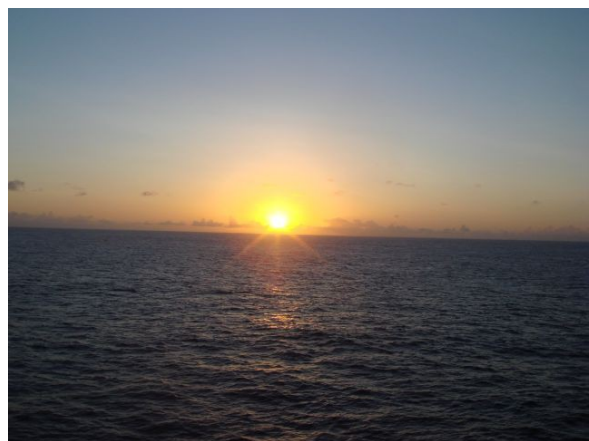
Wednesday 21 November 2007 – At Sea



Rick woke me up at 8.50am, I don't know how long I would have slept otherwise. We are lulled to sleep each night by the soporific rhythmic beat of the engine and the sound of sloshing water, it's as I imagine it to be in a mother's womb. These new found literacy skills are getting to me as I woke up in the night and wrote that down. On the way to breakfast we saw the couple in the next cabin (American's call it State Room) and he asked if I was the Gluten Free lady as he was too and there were also three others on board with coeliac disease. It's a bit of a coincidence he being next door and I suppose it's about right as they say one in a hundred have it. After breakfast we had a chat with Mike from Newbury who I originally thought was a paid dancer, he's very pleasant. Then it was off to our Spanish lesson, after revising the previous lesson we learnt a few more useful phrases like days of the week, the months, colours and eating and drinking examples. Even though we were at sea it was quite a warm day and we spent quite a bit of time on deck. The staff are great they even know that I don't like my tea cup refilled until it is empty. They mentioned that I look like Susan Sarandon. Leif had been negotiating a 2 for 1 Happy Hour at 11.30 am in the Polo Lounge and asked if we would support him. Rick couldn't be bothered and although I personally thought it was a bit early in the day I went along. Fortunately, it hasn't been agreed yet but he was propping up the bar as he likes to have a Bloody Mary in the morning so he can get all his vitamin intake in one so he can gorge himself for the rest of the day. Barbeque lunch by the

pool. While Rick was downing his Fosters and peanuts I went to a Chamber Recital by The Marco Polo Trio who are all Polish. Most of the entertainers are Eastern European's as I expect they are much cheaper to employ. After the concert I couldn't find Rick anywhere although the his empty Fosters can was where I had left him, so I sat next to it on my own for about 30 minutes before we both realised we were sitting opposite each other. He had moved to get into the sun. Rick was the first to spot the dolphins. Went to the gym and ran round the deck 3 times. Before Dinner we went to see a music playing comedian who was absolutely terrible, it was as if he were entertaining children. We sat next to a couple from Harrow who kept making scathing remarks and walked out; we followed shortly after being forced to sing Waltzin Matilda, Rick said if only Thyra could see him now!!! Leif said that there is no point in ordering good wines as the sediment spoils it when the bottles are rocked about. In the new Royal Caribbean ship they have a gyroscopic control room for the wine. He then entertained us by telling us that his first visit to Rio was in 1950 for his 16th birthday and it was a first for many things as they have lots of beautiful, friendly women. Rick went to watch The Da Vinci Code but we got the time wrong and missed the first half hour. The bathroom smells better since Rick cleaned out the drain in the floor. I tried to watch a film on television but fell asleep almost immediately.

Thursday 22 November 2007 - At Sea



A very lazy day. Rick has been in his element spending the day doing crosswords, sudoku's and internet betting on his mobile. There aren't many Brits on board only a coach load, but there are over 200 Dutch and about as many Americans and Germans, a few Swedish, French, Australians and a couple of Japanese. We are following the trade winds that go the same speed as the ship so it is quite warm. Highlight of the day was when the Captain spotted some dolphins and as we didn't get a good view he turned the ship round in a circle to chase them. We were then into the wind and everything went flying. The Norwegian Captain is really friendly and for meals alternates between the bistro called Raffles and the main restaurant. We celebrated Thanksgiving with pumpkin soup, turkey and pumpkin pie after which we staggered to the entertainment theatre. It was a very enjoyable and energetic show being a tribute to the music of Broadway and The West End, tried to stay on to watch Mission Impossible 3 but were too full and tired. We are missing Commander Scott who usually has a full itinerary for us follow and I am a bit ashamed to admit that I have found out that there is a disco from 11.15pm until midnight which we haven't been able to make yet! Didn't even make the gym so just getting fatter and fatter. Perhaps we had better have a no drinking day in Cape Verde tomorrow. Something strange is happening, everyone is starting to look younger. Please let me know if you want to be taken off the circulation list, we won't be at all offended especially as we seem to be growing old and boring very fast and we have only been on this ship for a week. Forgot to say that Rick's jam making skills keep coming into the conversation over dinner.

Friday 23 November 2007 – Porto Grande, Sao Vicente, Cape Verde



Very disappointed about the England football result. It was only 9.55 am when David and Sylvia passed us in the corridor, they were back already from their trip into the town. Cape Verde is an archipelago off the western coast of Africa that was uninhabited until it was colonized by the Portuguese in 1460. There are 10 main islands and 8 islets, all are volcanic but only one, Fogo has an active volcano. The Island of Santa Luzia and five of the islets are uninhabited. They gained their independence from Portugal in 1975 but still retain strong links. Their main language is Portuguese and currency is the Escudo. Most of the inhabitants are a genetic blend of sub-Saharan Africans and Europeans. All the younger men seemed to be dressed in Nike gear and the girls in jeans and tight tops but some of the older women wore traditional coloured robes and walked with baskets full of fish, fruit or vegetables on their heads. The Islands were initially a watering station, then sugar cane plantations and later a major hub for the trans-Atlantic slave trade. During January and February the average temperature is 24° going up to 29° in September with only 2.7 inches of rain a year. Because of the lack of rain there isn't too much agriculture so they mainly rely on the service industry. The bus was full so we walked into the town which was quite tiring as it was very hot, about 30° with a strong wind and little shade. We were immediately accosted by the young men trying to sell us sunglasses, jewellery etc – for a minute we thought we were back in Tenerife as they were difficult to shrug off. Also there were a few people begging, a Canadian couple we keep bumping into said that they save all the chocolates that are put on our pillow each evening to give to the children. I thought that was a wonderful idea, why didn't I think of it as we are always too full to eat them. However, I had a chocolate craving the other night and ate both our whole weeks supply in one go but I will save them in future. Mindelo was a bustling town and our first stop was the market which was much smaller and more basic than the Spanish markets. The fruit and vegetables were dirty and bruised, there wasn't any meat but a lot of salted fish for sale. We visited the church that was plain and then made our way to the fish market via a colourful street with women sitting with baskets of fruit, vegetables and herbs for sale. The fish market was just a couple of baskets of fish but beside it was a canopied area full of men gambling or playing card games. It was hard to get Rick away from them. The heat and strong wind made us tired and dirty so we made our way back to the ship where we spent the rest of the day battling against the strong wind. I did make it to the gym. On the Pool Deck there was an Al Fresco BBQ and dancing under the stars with a tribute to Glenn Miller by The Gennadi Orchestra. Although this is definitely not Rick's thing we made an effort but spent most of the time talking to Anne. Townsend who used to be a superb athlete and great dancer was tucked up in bed. At each port he buys and posts a postcard for his grandchildren and then goes back to the ship to read his book. I am fascinated by two women who look like older versions of the two girls in Kevin and Perry at Large. We dined in the Bistro for a change, it was an Italian Night and as we were on our own we

had a bottle of champagne that we didn't have on Rick's birthday. We had a look in all the bars afterwards but the dancing and entertainment was just too old fashioned for us, there wasn't even a disco we could have tried to stay up for, and dare I say it, we were in bed by 10 p.m. and on a Friday night too !!!!!

Saturday 24 November 2007 - At Sea

Woke up to Christmas, it was everywhere, garlands and Christmas trees all over the ship. Went to a lecture on the Economic Recovery of Eastern Europe which I found fascinating but Rick thought he ran out of steam towards the end. We missed a bit of our Spanish lesson so have to revise a bit for tomorrows. Leif was at the bar having his daily dose of vitamins in his Bloody Mary. The Captain makes a speech each morning but it is usually difficult to understand what with his accent and mumbling. However, this morning we were on deck and it was a little clearer. He gave the usual weather and progress report but then starting going on about the full moon and stars and the wonders of nature and all sorts of romantic stuff, he even read out a romantic poem. It's difficult to get a sunbed until after lunch so we spent the rest of the morning in the Polo Lounge typing up my diary and Rick was working on his betting strategy for the day. I went to the gym and ran round the deck a few times but it was a bit slippery so I went flying. My knee is still not quite right from my fall in Chicago as it feels like there are some crumbly bits that move about. After my fall I went to the cabin and watched a weepy film called "The Last Time I Was in Paris" with a young Elizabeth Taylor; she was quite beautiful. It was the usual crowd in the Restaurant and since being moved we are now in pole central position. The adjacent table of gay men has grown from four to six, they appear mostly German but tonight they have been joined by a much younger, good looking blond who looks Swedish. David and Sylvia have had some fantastic holidays and they were recounting their "All Inclusive Indian trip" where they rode on Elephants and paddled canoes. It all sounded very exciting so I asked them who they booked with and they whispered "Saga". We couldn't stop laughing and said I wonder what our friends would think if we came back from the cruise and said we have booked a Saga holiday. Had a nightcap in one of the bars and had another early night made even earlier by the clocks going back another hour. I think we are having on average 10 hours sleep every night. Leif is joining the Captain for dinner tomorrow evening.

Sunday 25 November 2007 - At Sea



At 8.45 am Rick tried to find us a sunbed but they had all gone so we sat at a table on the pool deck to have our breakfast and a bit of a read after. The couple from Harrow said when they got their sunbeds at 6.30 a.m. there were hardly any left. Can't see us getting up that early and we usually manage to get some in the afternoon when they all have their snooze. It was a bit of a shame that the Spanish Lesson and Wine Tasting were on at the same time. We opted for the wine tasting and sat with a couple from San Francisco who joined the ship in Venice and another couple

from Holland. We tested a 2006 Pinot Grigio, 2006 Ferrari-Carano, 2004 Primus Veramonte, 2004 Valley of the Moon and a sparkling French. The Primus Veramonte got our vote at \$37.00 and 14.5%. The couple from San Francisco told us a story about one of the Californian wines on the wine list at \$74.00 and we feel obliged to try it soon. We seemed to be the only people to drink our samples. Picked up the notes on today's Spanish lesson but it is difficult to know the pronunciation just from reading it. As we missed part of yesterday's and today's lesson we are getting a bit behind. The Captain gave us another sentimental speech about the wonders of the earth, stars and everything in general and ended with a poem. He said that the water temperature is 27° and the air temperature 29° and that we should cross the equator on Monday. I read my book while Rick continued with his internet betting. I still can't get my sense of direction on this ship and after my session in the gym it took quite some time to find Rick again. I met some people jogging round the deck and they asked if I was OK after yesterday's fall. I said it was nothing but thanked them for their concern and continued to try and locate my sunbed again. It was a semi-formal night so I wore my favourite green dress. I think there is only one formal night which is disappointing as I want to wear my long dresses. Leif was on the Captain's table and the gay table have gone back to their original four. It was a lovely meal complimented by the wine we had chosen at the wine tasting. Had a look at the pool deck and the heat hit us as we stepped out but it was also pouring hot rain. Went into the theatre to watch the multi instrumentalist entertainer Tufty Gordon, but we were both woken up by the Harrow couple about 15 minutes later. Made it to 11 o'clock before going to bed!!!!

Monday 26 November 2007 – At Sea

Woke up to a note from the Purser's desk informing me that they were having trouble with my credit card. At breakfast Anne told me that she had been to a party organised by the Captain for previous Marco Polo guests. It was very well done and she met someone who had been on 55 Marco Polo cruises. I think I mentioned before that the ship has been sold. Anne said the Captain had tears in his eyes when he told them that he had wanted to buy the ship but was too late.



Talked at length with Clive and Liz from Swansea who have a house in Spain, they were also going to the Spanish lessons. Listened to a bit of Fitness "Burn Fat Fast" lecture but have heard it all before and really need a "How to Keep Motivated" lecture instead. Spanish was hard going after missing a lesson.

The Captain's morning talk was sentimental again, all about how motivational the clouds were, how Michelangelo drew inspiration from them in his paintings. He said we were now in the Doldrums and me being in complete nautical ignorance didn't understand about the Doldrums and the Trade Winds he keeps going on about so I checked it out on the internet:

Solar radiation warms the air over the equator, causing it to rise. The rising air then proceeds south and north toward the poles. From approximately 20° to 30° North and South latitude, the air sinks. Then, the air flows along the surface of the earth back toward the equator.

Doldrums

Sailors noticed the stillness of the rising (and not blowing) air near the equator and gave the region the depressing name "doldrums." The doldrums, usually located between 5° north and 5° south of the equator, are also known as the [Intertropical Convergence Zone](#) or ITCZ for short. The trade winds converge in the region of the ITCZ, producing convectional storms that produce some of the world's heaviest precipitation regions. The ITCZ moves north and south of the equator depending on the season and solar energy received.

Between about 30° to 35° north and 30° to 35° south of the equator lies the region known as the horse latitudes or the subtropical high. This region of subsiding dry air and high pressure results in weak winds. Tradition states that sailors gave the region of the subtropical high the name "horse latitudes" because ships relying on wind power stalled; fearful of running out of food and water, sailors threw their horses and cattle overboard to save on provisions. (It's a puzzle why sailors would not have eaten the animals instead of throwing them overboard.) The Oxford English Dictionary claims the origin of the term "uncertain."

Major deserts of the world, such as the Sahara and the Great Australian Desert, lie under the high pressure of the horse latitudes.

The region is also known as the Calms of Cancer in the northern hemisphere and the Calms of Capricorn in the southern hemisphere.

Trade Winds

Blowing from the subtropical highs or horse latitudes toward the low pressure of the ITCZ are the trade winds. Named from their ability to quickly propel trading ships across the ocean, the trade winds between about 30° latitude and the equator are steady and blow about 11 to 13 miles per hour. In the Northern Hemisphere, the trade winds blow from the northeast and are known as the Northeast Trade Winds; in the Southern Hemisphere, the winds blow from the southeast and are called the Southeast Trade Winds.

The ship is going at about 14 knots. We are expected to reach the Equator at 10 a.m. tomorrow morning when there is to be a "Crossing the Line Ceremony" King Neptune and his court rise from the deep to board the Marco Polo and welcome the initiates to his watery kingdom at the Equator. The Captain ended with another poem. Rick kept quiet about his internet betting but I found out he had lost £50 plus the internet charges. It was very embarrassing as I found out that you have to book the running machine and ski walker, I have been telling people that there is a 20

minute limit on their usage and have probably been taking someone else's place who have booked. Before Dinner we listened to Dallas Boern, one of the dancers, sing music from various Broadway shows. Good Dinner again after which we watched the Filipino Folkloric Show put on by the staff. The Filipino staff are so friendly as they are always smiling and can't do enough for you and as they work long hours the show didn't start until 10.45 pm; the theatre was packed in support of them. They put on a really great show, it was very colourful but you were left with the feeling of gentleness. We talked to a girl from Salt Lake City and apparently there are about 8 others from Utah on the ship. After a few phone calls and emails I had to cancel my credit card as it appears Getaway Club have been trying to use it fraudulently. The next bit you just won't believe, we made it to the disco and it was just great as I suddenly felt alive and got the buzz. Rick tolerated it but kept wanting me to go outside to feel the heat, he was getting nervous thinking I might want him to dance. Didn't go to bed until nearly **1.00 a.m.** this is a record but we will be alright as the clocks go back another hour tonight. I am afraid I ate the chocolates again, might have to buy some to give to the children. Does anyone know how to remove gel nails?

Tuesday 27 November – At Sea

Watched "Gangs of New York" before breakfast, it was a bit bloody and violent. Everyone was waiting for the celebrations that were due to take place as we crossed the Equator at 10.00 a.m. We sat with David and Sylvia who are still in shock about the sacking of Derby's manager; perhaps Mourinho will get the job. Mike and Norman are such easy going great guys, who take part in all the quizzes and games and who look so relaxed with everyone, managed to get front row seats and that was not easy.



The Crossing the Line ceremony is a Naval initiation rite. Sailors who have already crossed the equator are nicknamed (Trusty) **Shellbacks** and those who have not are nicknamed (Slimy) **Pollywogs**. After crossing the line the Pollywogs receive subpoenas to appear before King Neptune and his court, her Highness Amphitrite and various dignitaries who are all represented by the highest ranking seamen who officiate at the ceremony. This is often preceded by a Beauty Contest of men dressing up as women and each department of the ship being required to introduce one contestant in swimsuit drag. Afterwards, some wogs may be interrogated by King Neptune and his entourage. During the ceremony, the Pollywogs undergo a number of increasingly disgusting ordeals (wearing clothing inside out and backwards; crawling on hands and knees on and the use of 'truth serum' (hot sauce + after shave + ?) being covered in whole uncooked eggs; being swatted with short lengths of firehose; being locked in stocks and pillories and pelted with

mushy fruit; being locked in a water coffin of salt-water and bright green sea dye (fluorescent sodium salt); crawling through chutes or large tubs of rotting garbage; kissing the Royal Baby's belly coated with axle grease, hair chopping, etc). This is all largely for the entertainment of the Shellbacks.

A watered-down version of the ceremony was carried out on the Marco Polo with King Neptune and his entourage descending from the upper decks to fan fares. The guilty wogs were thrown into the swimming pool after being covered in all sorts of muck i.e. eggs, baked beans, milk, orange juice, spaghetti and some green liquid. Once the ceremony was finished there was the usual scrabble for chairs. There are two fairly attractive buxom, German girls in their late 30's who stole 2 chairs from a cocky, curly haired man and his girlfriend of about the same age. He was a bit put out and later offered them another chair but as they went to accept it he sniggered and snatched it away. The girls made the signs of "in one ear, out the other" - they definitely don't look like girls to mess with. It was funny to watch as people are getting possessive about the chairs and deckchairs. It seems that the ship has been sold because it's owned by Norwegian Cruise Liners (NCL) but they now want to advertise it as Newest Cruise Liners, therefore, the Marco Polo doesn't fit into their Business Plan. Spent 25 minutes on the phone to the Fraud Department resulting in my card definitely being cancelled as someone else tried to present another payment today. Being on the phone so long meant I missed twenty minutes of my reserved time on the running machine. In the afternoon's we nearly always sit next to a very nice tall, well spoken single man in his sixties, surprisingly he is reading a book called "Love". Gay table is back up to six tonight. Rick recovered his previous day's losses so he was pleased. We found out that a few years ago one of Leif's daughters was burgled then raped and brutally murdered. When her attacker was tried and convicted he also confessed to other murders. Leif kept us entertained by telling us stories about his time in Japan where they had a toilet that wiped your bottom and another that washed it and dried it with hot air. No disco tonight as we are both tired, can't do two late nights in a row. The four days at sea with nothing but sea and the horizon surrounding us has gone remarkably quickly and at 7.30 a.m. tomorrow we dock at Fortaleza, Brazil.

Wednesday 28 November – Fortaleza



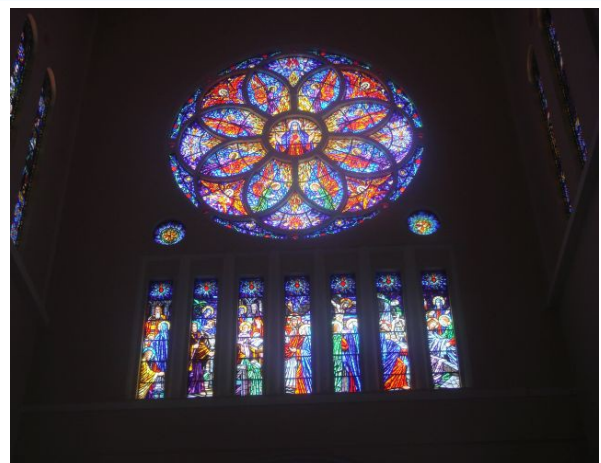
I'm behind with my diary and it's now Thursday night. Have just got back from the Karaoke and it was so great. I requested "Delilah" but they didn't have it. I was almost prepared to sing it on my own as I love it so much. Rick danced with me too, that was a first. I love the buxom German girls. Back to Wednesday when we had our breakfast on the pool deck so we could get our first view of Fortaleza and Brazil. The coastline was full of high rise buildings and it looked much bigger than we expected. Fortaleza has a population of approximately 2.4 million who mainly speak Portuguese; the currency is the Real. It has a typical tropical climate with warm to hot

temperatures and high humidity throughout the year. January is the warmest month, with a high of 32°C and low of 22°C and more sun; July experiences the coolest temperatures, with a high of 28°C and low of 18°C and more rain. There are rarely extreme temperatures and it enjoys the pleasant trade winds blowing from the Atlantic.

It's a major fishing port and a main exporter of cashew nuts and lobsters. Some of the high rise buildings were coated in coloured tiles or marble but many were also covered in graffiti and had dilapidated buildings around them. We were dropped off at the Central Market that was housed in what seemed like a multi story car park that sold lace, hammocks and the usual souvenirs. There were lots of buffet style eating places and the people weren't too pushy. We then made our way to the gothic styled Cathedral that was only inaugurated in 1978 but was already being refurbished inside. The interior was modern with the walls being painted and benches re-varnished, you didn't get the feeling that you were somewhere sacred, but the stained glass windows were magnificent. The outside of the Cathedral badly needed cleaning and was full of graffiti. We had been given lots of warnings on how to keep safe so we were a bit reluctant to wander too far and made our way to a park where we had a view of the sandy beach, however, it wasn't easily accessible as it was across a busy freeway. We were told that the beaches near the port were polluted but tourists are attracted by Fortaleza's 24km of crystal clear, palm fringed beaches cooled by sea breezes and the 550 km of magnificent beaches east and west of the city.



It was really hot about 32°C and we were wilting so we went back to the ship and had a lovely glass of wine with our lunch and this was followed by another and then another and a long sleep then the next thing I knew it was nearly 5p.m. Missed the Scenic Sailaway with music provided by Jerzy from The Marco Polo Trio. Decided to skip the gym and watch "The Holiday" instead. Main topic of conversation at Dinner was our weight, my trousers are tight, Rick had trouble fitting into his and David couldn't do his shirt up. Leif is already very big and has to have two beds put together. I think he said he brings his own "G-clamps". I was really tired and just about made it to the end of the meal, Leif offered me his stick. In bed before 10.00 p.m. and didn't even have the energy to do my diary. We are starting to notice a few younger passengers; perhaps they have been locked away in their cabins and only come out once we have gone to bed.



Thursday 29 November – At Sea



After breakfast I did a bit of Spanish revision but got sidetracked talking to Welsh Liz. Also, I couldn't help overhearing the conversation between the two men near us. The man who dominated the conversation began by saying that his parents never really wanted him and this was made worse by him being dyslexic. As he had low self esteem when he was a young man he came really close to joining a terrorist organisation but then visited Africa where he felt completely at home because he could see that he could do something worthwhile for the people there. This led him to specialize in African Studies and then he discovered religion. We just couldn't believe some of the things he was saying; I have always wondered how reasonably intelligent people can be brainwashed into terrorist activities, maybe they just sometimes want to be noticed. Then we had the real highlight of the day when two humpback whales gave us a wonderful display, the Captain turned the ship around to get a better view. He said in all his time at sea he had never seen anything like it – One of the whales waved its tail in the air for ages, amazing!! Good job I did some revision as the Spanish teacher gave us an exam paper to take away. I didn't finish it until 1pm and Rick didn't finish his until 2.30 pm as he was internet betting at the same time but we did stop for lunch. Rick nearly lost his float as he wasn't concentrating but is now back in front again. Anne & Townsend saw us with our heads down and surrounded by bits of paper. Didn't get outside until 2.45 pm and then found that I had already read the book I had chosen. We haven't seen any wild life (not expecting any on the ship) so far but today some sea birds were following the ship. Quite often they were flying close to us and at the same level and then they would swoop down to catch the flying fish. I was booked into the gym but a Greek looking man was on my machine. I thought I would give him another 10 minutes as I had already had 30 minutes on the cross trainer. I had to give up as he couldn't understand what I was saying to him, he kept saying he would be another 10 minutes and I didn't want another fight. Looked in at the entertainment but it was standing room only and she was singing jazz type songs so we had a 2 for 1 drink at the pool bar, it was still lovely and warm outside. Dinner was a bit uneventful except that Leif says he is going to get himself a Pilipino girl to look after him when he gets back. We then went to the Karaoke which as I mentioned before is one of my favourite things. I didn't get to sing Delilah but we all sang a few together, even Rick, although he did it under protest and said "If only Thyra could see me now" and kept asking me to see how warm it was outside. It had been over 30 deg all day and it doesn't seem to cool down much at night despite being so far from land. After the Karaoke the disco started and I had a great time dancing with all and sundry including Rick for a short time. Although it was late when we got back to our cabin I did try to type up a bit of my diary but when I checked it this morning it was a load of twaddle.



Friday 30 November 2007 - Recife



Woke up with the first hangover of the holiday and I blamed it on Rick who must have been plying me with drinks at the Karaoke. At breakfast saw a man who looks like King Neptune who I was dancing with last night, he doesn't seem to walk very steadily but he appeared to dance well. The dock is full of grain depositories and quite industrial. Rumour has it that the Captain has to do a bit of bribing to make sure we get all the supplies on time. David and Sylvia joined us on our visit to the city. As it was low tide some fishermen were hanging crab lines off the bridges. The city was very different to Fortaleza and was just as I imagined – hot, vibrant, exciting, and full of smells and music. The shops were amazing, loads and loads of shoe shops each managed by rows of shops assistants all in uniform. The shops were all close together and assistants with microphones were outside advertising their wares - music was all around. There weren't just shoe shops there were all types of shops, loads and loads of shops. We looked in a church that was very ornate inside.



We wanted to see the beach before our afternoon excursion but unfortunately, we just missed the courtesy coach; after a bit of negotiation we took a taxi. Rick said we are going to be stitched up here and he was right. We asked to be dropped off at the pick up point but he said he didn't know where that was as the Boa Viagem beach which is one of the most famous urban beaches in Brazil, goes on for miles. Ahh, we thought we will look for someone from the ship but there wasn't a white man in sight. We eventually found someone who could speak a little English but his gorgeous Brazilian wife said the main part of the beach was about 2km away. On the way we saw a German couple from the ship, with very limited English, who described the hotel pick up point but we all seem to have short term memory problems and only Sylvia thought he mentioned Palace. The sandy beach was fantastic but there are lots of Shark Warning notices advising you not to surf or swim past the reef. We paddled in the sea but time was getting on and we eventually found the pick up point after stopping for a coconut drink. We made friends with the men at the stall and a little boy who had his photo taken with us.

We were exhausted from the long walk in the heat and fell asleep as soon as we got on the coach for the afternoon excursion so missed the commentary. However, Recife (Portuguese word for reef) is protected by a long coastal reef. It is the 4th largest city in Brazil with a population of about 2 million and the capital of Pernambuco. It is surrounded by rivers and canals which divide it into islands that are crossed by bridges and is known as the Brazilian Venice. Pernambuco is a large producer of sugar cane and from 16th to 19th century many black slaves were imported to work on the plantations making it one of the Brazilian States where black culture is very visible. The Dutch invaded several sugar producing Brazilian cities and took control of Recife from 1630 to 1654. There are still many parts of the city where the Dutch architecture is prevalent.

Brazil is by far the largest producer of alcohol fuel in the world, they ferment ethanol from the sugarcane and sugar beets. Alcohol cars first appeared in Brazil in 1978 and were very popular as they were heavily subsidized but as the price of alcohol fuel rose in the 80's petrol regained popularity. Since 2004, as a result of new technologies involving hybrid fuel car engines called "Flex", whereby engines work with petrol, alcohol or any mixture of both fuels, it is raising its market share once more. As of February 2007 approximately 80% of new vehicles sold in Brazil are using the hybrid fuel.

The first stop was at a former prison that is now full of souvenir shops. Some rather senior ladies from the ship decided not to buy a bottle of the local liqueur as they didn't have an empty water bottle, we laughed and said we didn't realise others knew about that trick. Before getting on the catamaran we were given a liqueur made from sugar beet. It was strong and we must find some to bring back with us. We then viewed the city from the catamaran going up and down the canals and under bridges. Four days before Lent is carnival time in Brazil the largest one of all is Galo da Madrugada actually takes place in downtown Recife.

Back on the boat I bought a DKNY watch and Rick bought a cheap one for \$10. Couldn't get any nail varnish remover and tried unsuccessfully to remove my nails with varnish remover pads. Couldn't wait to get back in my bed and managed it before 10.0 pm. You may be wondering how much longer this is going to go on, well we have yet to visit Salvador and Rio de Janeiro and will be back home next Thursday. The Marco Polo will continue its journey to Antarctica - wish we could go with it.



Saturday 1 December 2007 – At Sea

Still behind with my diary, I think I am spending too much time researching the places we are visiting, but it's hard not to as I am finding it fascinating. My bruise has come out on my thigh where I slipped up, it's taken a long time and is no where near as big as it should be considering the discomfort, I suppose it's got to make its way through my fat. Doesn't look as if I am going to get a chance to wear my long dresses which is disappointing, perhaps I will wear one anyway and just look a little overdressed. Romel is doing a fine job looking after us, everything is kept very clean and he even fills the ice bucket up for us at night. Had our last Spanish lesson and received a diploma to say that we have completed the course, must keep it up. Clive shot off to his Bridge lesson afterwards and his wife Welsh Liz chatted to me for ages, she occasionally paused for breath and looked Rick's way, said that he looked bored and then carried on for ages afterwards. They are on the early sitting for Dinner and she said that they are sometimes in bed by 8.30 pm so we are not doing as bad as we thought. Had another go at writing my diary but just couldn't get it to flow, what do you say "writers block" or something like that. Saw some flying fish, they look a bit like a bat and fly quite a long way. There was an oil rig on the horizon. Couldn't be bothered to go to the gym, did 30 press-ups instead. Rick has been quiet about his internet betting today and it turns out he has lost his float so that's it until the next holiday and or next system he thinks up. Rick's now reading "The Quest" by Wilbur Smith, I have read most of my books but none of them are to be recommended. Checked out future Marco Polo cruises, the one to Antarctica over Christmas is full but they have another 24 day one in February that starts in Chile and takes in the Falkland Islands and cumulates in Buena Aires, that sounds interesting. Leif rejoins the Marco Polo in February at Buena Aires to Lisbon and then takes another cruise in April from Alaska to Bangkok. He is then going to Norway for 3 months and will order a new Volvo in Sweden that will be shipped to Arizona free of charge. I don't know how he will find time to fit in the Philipino girl and if he does I wonder if he will take her travelling with him. Watched the Marco Polo dancers who put on a really great show. It's countdown time now, only two more stops.

Sunday 2 December – Salvador da Bahia "Holy Saviour of All Saints"



They forecasted 36°C today but it was overcast and trying to rain at times, still hot and humid though. The air temperature is going up but as we make our way to Antarctica the sea temperature is cooling. Salvador was founded in 1549 by a fleet of Portuguese settlers headed by Tome de Sousa (his name kept coming up but sounded like Tomato Sauce) who became the first Governor General of Brazil. It has a population of 3 million. The city was built on a high cliff overlooking “All Saints Bay” and like Recife quickly became an important centre for the sugar industry and slave trade. It’s divided into an upper and a lower city. The upper city was the administrative and main religious area and where most of the people lived. The lower city was the financial centre with the port and market. A gigantic elevator (the first installed in Brazil), known as Elevador Lacerda has connected the two sections since 1873. The local terrain is diverse ranging from flat to rolling hills and low mountains. The coastline is equally diverse featuring sandy beaches, sea cliffs, mangrove swamps and a number of islands. There is still a strong African influence; the Cathedral had oval shaped doors for the whites and rectangle ones for the blacks. There was a service being held in the Cathedral a black priest sang what seemed like a love song and everyone was hugging each other. They demolished the original cathedral to make way for a tram line. We also visited the stunning church of Sao Francisco that was full of ornate carved wood covered in 700 kg of gold.



Near to an area where the slaves were sold there was a church that took the African slaves 100 years to build. With its pastel-painted houses, open public squares, old historic buildings and narrow cobblestone streets Salvador is rich in culture and history and in 1985 was declared a World Heritage Site. Everywhere you looked they were setting up stands for concerts, they love to party. We were told not to enter the unrestored area of the city as it is full of prostitutes and drugs. Over 2 million people attend the week long carnival each year; the shops all shut and people leave their cars in the garage for the week. Provision for car parks is big here as they want to encourage people to come into the city to spend money. The average person only earns £100 a month. Saw the football stadium that they are re-building for the world cup. Seven spectators died when part of it collapsed during a football match last week.



Back on the Marco Polo Sylvia got me up to date on all the gossip. A 90 year old (a bit older than average) lady has been taken to the hospital and they are going to fly her home. It's a great shame as she has managed all the excursions. On the way back to the ship one of the passengers shoulders were held back by two men while another ripped her necklaces off. They got one necklace but the other got caught in her cleavage, they fired a shot and the police came rushing to the scene. Some Brazilian's tried to rob one of the male passenger's at the beach in Fortaleza and the same man was attacked again today but was saved by another Brazilian who pulled a gun on the would be robbers. Usual mess up in the gym, someone was on the machine I booked and it turns out that I must have put my name down on yesterday's sheet it, I am now told you can only book on sea days. Last chance to get it right tomorrow as I am booked in for 10.30 a.m. Still can't tell one end of the ship from another, whether the destination is left or right or up or down. The pre Dinner entertainment was an Opera Singer who was quite good but Rick managed to sleep through most of it. Some of the passengers are getting very friendly with each other; there is a lot of hugging going on. Each day "Friends of Bill W and Doctor Bob" appear on the Daily Program, it's a meeting for Alcoholics. The ship has increased it speed to 20 knots as its 700 miles to Rio and that should ensure that we get rocked to sleep. Who's going to rock me to sleep when I get home. The good news is that tomorrow night is the Captain's Farewell Reception so I get a chance to wear one of my long dresses' and better still there is another Karaoke session

Monday 3 December 2007 – at sea

Went to the gym, finally got it right. When Rick downloaded the email at 10.00 am in the Polo Lounge and he said everyone was asleep, they were even laying out on the seats. I did my packing because I am very organised while Rick went to see a photographic presentation on the Engine Room. I should think that nearly all the passengers turned up at the Captain's Farewell Party as there was standing room only. If you wanted to shake hands with the Captain you had to enter the room by the Starboard side, well can you believe it Rick got it wrong and he being a Captain's son and all that. After a glass of champagne we re-entered on the right side, or is it the left? I am still confused with the up, down, left and right. At the end of the Gala Dinner all the restaurant staff stood behind the Captain's table and sang to us, it was such a lovely, family atmosphere. Off to the Karaoke which was disappointing but we got talking to the cheeky, curly haired man and his partner who we originally thought were Norwegian but turned out to be German; the buxom German girls turned out to be Dutch. The cheeky, curly haired mans partner writes articles for a woman's magazine. We drank and danced the night away with them and at one time went out on deck and did the Titanic bit, you know arms outspread and felt the wind. Much, much too much to drink and didn't get back to cabin until about 1.30 am. Amazing how I don't remember going to bed but my dress was hung up and jewellery all put away.

Tuesday 4 December 2007 – Rio



Went to a lecture on “Identifying Investment Opportunities in the Stock Market”. Rick did some panic packing as we were running out of time. As we approached Rio it was hot but overcast. There are lots of companies in Brazil who mine and make jewelry with semi precious stones, but it is very expensive. Everywhere we have been there have been representatives from these companies offering to give you a free tour and all you have to do is to look at their shop. The ship’s tours are quite expensive so we said we would go along with David and Sylvia who were going with a Jewelers’ called Ben Brothers. We were given a blue “Ben Brothers” sticker but on the way out “Stern” stuck their yellow sticker on top of Rick’s blue one. They were all trying to poach each others potential customers. We were introduced to our guide, Serge and led to a mini bus where we were joined by another couple. He was a bit Chinese looking with an American wife and they had a factory that did something with Soya beans. We said we wanted to go to see The Statue of Christ the Redeemer (now one of the new Seven Wonders of the World) and then onto Copacabana beach for a swim. You travel by train through forests with exotic flowers, plants and fruits to reach the top of the mountain to see the statue. Unfortunately, the statue was covered in thick cloud but for the odd moment you would get a glimpse of the gentle Christ who was looking over the city. Even though there was no view at all of the city below, it was worth the trip.



The traffic in Rio is horrendous, between 6am and 10am weekdays they reverse the traffic on one of the main roads into the city and they close the road completely on a Sunday to make it safe for families. Serge was not keen to take us to Copacabana beach as it’s not very safe. He let us have a paddle at Ipanema beach instead; also it was getting quite late and was dull and cloudy. The time had come to pay the price for the free tour and wonderful guide as we were then subjected to the Jewelry Shop hard sell. Once they found that we weren’t going to buy anything they led us into the souvenir shop where we caught up with David and Sylvia again. We were keen to get back to the ship for the Brazilian dancing but had to wait ages while the other couple must have bought up the place. Rick managed to get them to give us a drink of the local liqueur, Caipirinha. It was very strong and Sylvia had to put her sun glasses on as she was going cross-eyed!! However, we began to forget how fed up we were with the waiting. Somehow managed to get in a gin and tonic plus the last ten minutes of the show. Leif wasn’t expecting us to Dinner so we surprised him, had a good laugh and were able to say goodbye properly.

Wednesday 5 December – Rio de Janerio – population 6 million



Rio is a city of contrast: there are enormous disparities between the rich and poor, many people live below the poverty line and the poor education and health systems are not doing anything to help the situation. Rio's favelas (slums) are very close to the city's wealthiest districts such as Ipanema and Copacabana. Rio has very high crime rates, especially homicide in poor areas dominated by gangs. As of 2007 the homicide rate of the city stands at nearly 80 victims per week, these numbers are comparable with war conflict zones like Baghdad and Kabul. Rio de Janeiro's low paid and ill-equipped police are violent and often corrupt. In 2006 the police were killing 3.7 people a day, that's 1350 a year. In comparison the American police killed just 347 people in whole of the USA during 2006



On our visit to Sugar Loaf Mountain some of us took a helicopter ride over the city, it was fantastic. As it was clear the pilot circled round the statue, over the forest, the race track, the football stadium, airport and beaches, it was the highlight of the trip. I have enjoyed Brazil, especially Recife, but have not desire to go back because of the crime rate; however, we would like to visit the Rain Forest. Decided we don't like big cities. It's such a shame that despite Brazil's many natural resources there is still so much poverty because of bad management.

Wrote this on the plane:

Sylvia, David, Liz, Clive, Norman and Mike are all on our flight. Waiting for Norman to take his sleeping pill and put his pajamas on, we are traveling BA Premium Economy not First Class. The lights are all wrong, some peoples operate others and not their own and the entertainment system is not what it should be. A man in front of us went ballistic and Clive said it's just like the fight for the sun beds on the ship. A young Brazilian man is sitting next to me but his light is being operated by Clive who is in front of us. The Brazilian thinks there is something wrong with the seat as by coincidence every time his elbow touches the arm rest his light goes off, ha ha. The steward has now turned all the lights off to work out who controls what lights. They have also run out of red wine. Announcement after announcement keeps coming apologising for this and that.

It's been a great trip, very memorable and we have been lucky to share our evening table with Sylvia, David and Leif. Sylvia is very bubbly and is also left handed and gets her left, right, push, pull wrong. It's a shame that Liz and Clive were on the early sitting as we have had good fun with them today. David and Rick will be missing their 2 for 1 Fosters about 5pm each day. The weather has been fantastic; both the times it has rained have been during the evening. Back to reality now- no Romel to look after us and no engine noise and gentle swell to send us to sleep. We are thinking of cycling along the Normandy Landing sites next.

	Miles		Miles		Miles
Barcelona – Malaga	480	Malaga - Cadiz	161	Cadiz - Casablanca	198
Casablanca - Agadir	294	Agadir - Arrecife	227	Arrecife – Cape Verde	975
Cape Verde – Fortaleza	1481	Fortaleza - Recife	431	Recife – Salvador de Bahia	407
				Salvador – Rio de Janeiro	773
			Total No of Nautical Miles		5427