

Tuesday 29th March

Hi people,

Cruising the Arabian Sea off the coast of Oman at present between Muscat and Salalah, with the cruise going well on all counts. Enjoyed our time with Simon & Dani in Abu Dhabi and they drove us to Dubai to catch our ship, it was lovely seeing it in port, it is a very beautiful looking ship, all white and sparkly. It is basically identical to the one we sailed on last time so we are familiar with it, though do get disorientated frequently as you are moving up and down all the time and things are spread out all over the ship. We have recognised many of the staff from last time, including our favourite entertainer. Left Dubai late evening and headed off for Khasab [Oman]. Oman is the second largest of the Middle Eastern countries and has a huge coastline. Most of the country is desert and, by the looks of it, the rest is rocky mountains. Oil is 30c a litre while water is \$1 a litre, though it rarely rains. We did a 4 wheel drive tour inland and up to nearly 2000m on narrow switchback dirt/rock roads and from the day one could summarise;

- National flower; plastic bag in tree
- National animal; goat in tree
- National tree; thorny stunted acacia
- Main agricultural crop; rock
- Main building material; rock
- Road construction material; rock

Geographically quite interesting with signs of massive uplifting, marine fossils at 1500m, wadis, scree slopes etc. To the non-Geographers it is nothing but rocks.



The next port was Muscat [capital] and this city was strung along the coast on a very narrow coastal plain backed by the inevitable rocky mountains. We did an interesting cultural tour in the morning



and a bit of a rush shop at the souk as we need costumes for an Arabian Nights themed evening that is coming up this week. Personally I was thinking along the lines of palm tree costumes but a little tricky so we set Bruce up with a Dishdash [traditional white robes and hat] and I have a long black sequined coat thingo and matching head cover, baulked at the idea of a burka. Lots of frankincense, silver and gold on sale at the market.

It was an extremely busy little port and we spent quite a bit of time in the afternoon on our balcony watching and directing ships being berthed and tug boats coming and going. You can believe the small spaces these huge ships

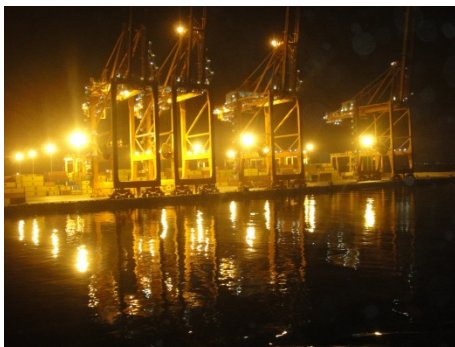
can glide into.

Ship life is as busy or as quiet as you like, we have seen two of the evening shows and this afternoon we did a guided tour of the galley which was an amazing stainless steel set of work stations that at 5 in the afternoon was clean and empty, but all ready to go for the evening meal serving close to 400 people across 4 different restaurants. [not sure what happens to the crew]. They make everything from breakfast bread to croissants, pastries, ice-creams, stocks etc. Needless to say it is very easy to eat and drink yourself silly and the choices are so varied. Crew is fabulous, over 27 nationalities and all so very friendly. They pop up all over the place in a range of different



roles, for example one of the singers the other night was a tour organiser on our bus yesterday. A waiter at lunchtime may pop up in another uniform at one of the other restaurants at night. They get to know you very quickly [they are tested and quizzed all the time] and your likes etc.

Spent quite a bit of time with a couple from Arizona, but also chosen to have a few meals on our own. Probably an older bunch as many have been on the cruise since the start [inaugural cruise from Fort Lauderdale to London.....3 months!] Head a few Aussie accents along the way. Weather has been milder than I expected which is great for touring. Everything air-conditioned to really cool temps which is a pain in some of the entertainment locations. Wardrobe holding out, all shoes worn by now.....chose not to do the first black tie night so haven't had to dress up too much. Started doing some of the classes today e.g. relaxation, total body work out [that is going to hurt tomorrow] and even visited the gym this morning at 6.30 am!!!! We were lucky as we witnessed a huge pod of dolphins, hundreds and hundreds of them!!!! Bruce has had a massage and we are both into our second books.



Wednesday morning saw us gliding into Salalah in south east Oman [very close to the border of Yemen]. Quite a different landscape as they pick up the monsoons so there are crops of bananas, coconuts etc and a very ancient and sophisticated irrigation scheme. As with everywhere else in Oman this has all happened in the last 30 yrs or so, with new buildings and massive road systems. Did a tour of an archaeological site, a frankincense museum, souk etc. Very hazy but believe it to be dust/fine sand [plenty of that around]. Much hotter today so spent the afternoon around

the pool where the staff spoil us rotten.....cocktails, champagne in the spa, little dishes of raspberry sorbet in champagne....only thing left was a snooze. The staff are really unbelievable and go out of their way to be obliging. Big discussions over the best dessert so the waiter brought us tastes of all of them. Tonight we had dancing on the pool deck with this great musical group, a balmy evening and the lights of the port in the background.

Tomorrow we start our journey through the Straits of Aden [off the coast of Somalia....check your Atlas] and we are in full safety lock down.

We leave port tonight and then rendezvous with a convoy and race full speed for 30 hours into the Red Sea. The back decks restaurant and pool areas are closed and they have strung barb wire around the back decks!!!! A tad off- putting to say the least. Breakfast on balconies not permitted. This is all standard procedure.

Will keep in touch with our wanderings,

Toodles,

Jill & Bruce

xx

