

John & Sandra O'Reilly's

Eastern Odyssey, 2014



2014 was the Chinese Year of the Horse

Introduction

"If we're going to do it, now is the time," so said Sandra as we were browsing through a brochure for Road Scholar's Eastern Odyssey 2014. Road Scholar is a nonprofit travel agent based in Boston that specializes in travel with an educational orientation for the 55 plus group.

This Eastern Odyssey ran for three months, from January 1st through March 29th. Most of it was based on a cruise ship, the MV Voyager. Facing the prospect of spending three months in a rather small ship's cabin, there was some concern as to whether or not we'd still be talking at the end of March. Our neighbor, Doug Erickson, had the perfect answer when he was asked if he was still talking with his wife, Marlene, after the long, cold Minnesota winter. He said, "Yes, we're still talking, just not to each other." We went one better and were still talking to each other at the end of the trip.



The MV Voyager is rather small by today's standards with about 450 passengers and 250 crew members. With a good eye, you can see Sandra on the deck outside our cabin, the first one on the port side

Most of the non-Road Scholar passengers on the ship were from Great Britain and were great fun.

During the Odyssey, we visited 14 countries with several days spent in Vietnam, Japan and India and shorter visits to China, Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan, Philippines, Brunei, Cambodia, Thailand, Singapore and Sri Lanka.

A Few Fellow Road Scholars

Our Road Scholar group consisted of about 40 "lifers" who were along for the full trip plus a couple of dozen other people who were along for parts of the trip.



Brian Fenlon, a retired Catholic priest from Scottsdale AZ with Clare Heiberger, a retired aeronautical engineer from Rapid City SD



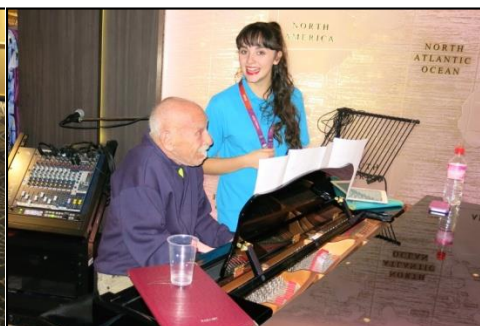
Marcie & Peter Smith, Arizona. Peter is an electrical engineer and retired Honeywell executive. For part of their career, they lived in Minneapolis. They own and occasionally use a Volkswagen camper bus they bought new in 1985!



Sandra with Faye Alexander, California. Faye is 96, in great shape and an inspiration to all of us!



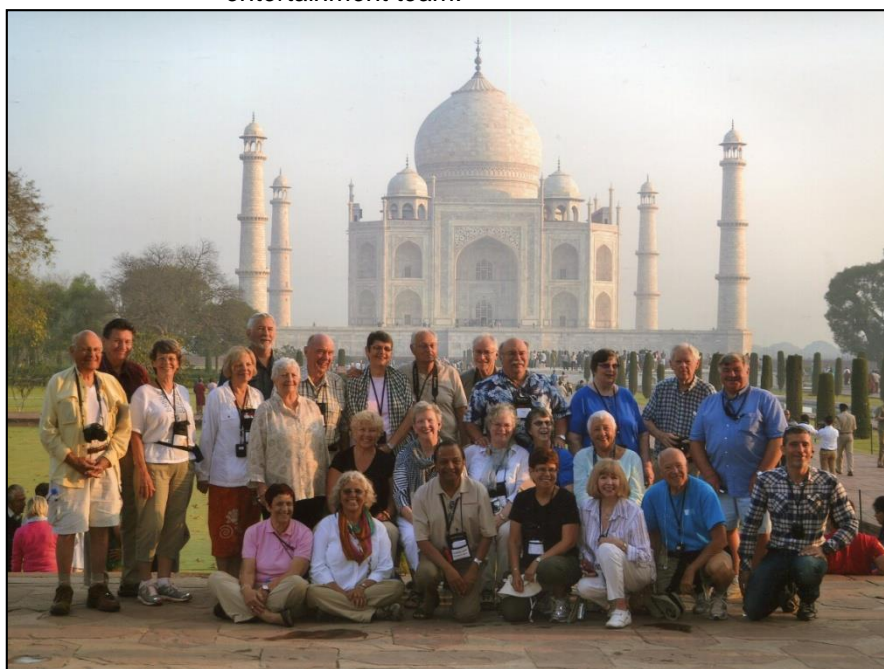
Celia & Bob Foss, California. Bob looks so good in his hairpiece, he promised to send the name of the maker to John.



Mark Snyder, New York, pianist and retired teacher, with Seren a member of the ships outstanding entertainment team.



Jobea Lindley, Georgia, who loves to dance, with Bing, the band's drummer, who also loves to dance.



Half of our Road Scholar group in front of the Taj Mahal on a hazy morning.

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

We left home on New Year's Day. After three flights and 22 hours in the air, we boarded the ship in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

One of our first impressions of the Far East was the number of people living there. Kuala Lumpur has 6.5 million people of the 28 million in Malaysia. For comparison, Malaysia is about the same size as Vietnam, which has 90 million people and New Mexico with two million. A question we asked ourselves repeatedly was, "If there were as many people per square mile in the U.S. as in most of the Far East, how many could we accommodate?" We currently have 300 million people and one billion would still leave lots of room compared to many of the Far Eastern countries.



Kuala Lumpur is a modern, growing city. We heard that "everyone in Malaysia wants to move to Kuala Lumpur".

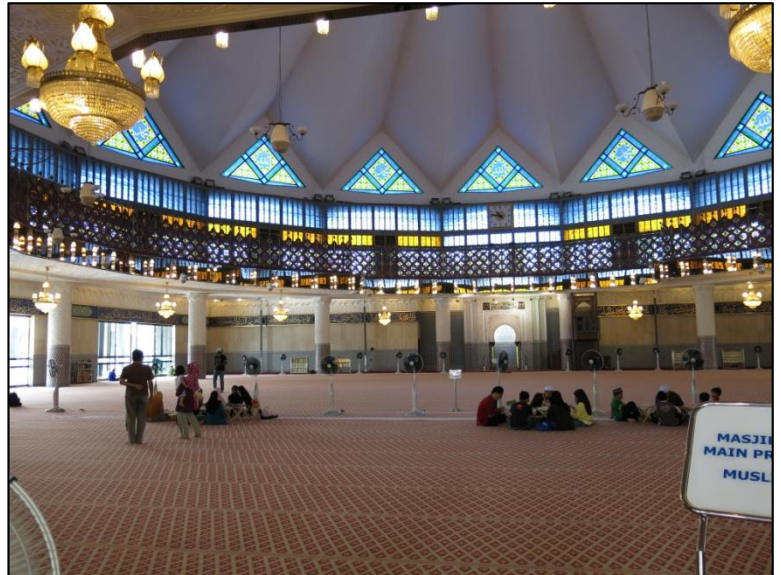


John with Twin Towers that were the tallest in the world for a short time.

Cheryl Bailey served in the Peace Corps here in the 1980s. We said that whatever seeds she planted while she was here have taken root very well! We could see no current need for the Peace Corps. In fact, Malaysia has what they call their "2020 Goal", to be a fully developed country by the year 2020. It looks to us as though they will make it.



Sandra dressed for the Mosque



The National Mosque. All Malaysians are required by law to be Muslim.

Singapore

We were anxious to see Singapore because of all we have heard such as the fact that one can get fined for chewing gum or throwing any trash on the street.

Singapore is as clean as we expected and, clearly, very prosperous. There are many high rise condominiums and office building with innovative design. There is construction going on everywhere. It is a city-state with just 275 square miles, 25 of which have been recovered from the sea in recent years.

Singapore was part of Malaysia but spit off peacefully in 1963. Part of the reason for the split is that 75% of the population is of Chinese descent and just 15% are Malaise, whereas, in Malaysia, 60% are Malaysian and just 30% are Chinese. In both countries, the Chinese own most of the businesses.

Gross Domestic Product per person for countries we visited with the U.S. for comparison	
Singapore	60,789
Brunei	54,114
United States	51,704
Hong Kong	50,936
Taiwan	38,400
Japan	35,855
South Korea	31,950
Malaysia	16,794
Thailand	9,503
China	9,055
Sri Lanka	6,046
Philippines	4,380
India	3,843
Vietnam	3,788
Burma	1,692



Old buildings from colonial days in the foreground with high rise condos and offices behind.

Singapore's prosperity is due to the stable leadership of Lee Kwan Yew, founder and prime minister for 50 years. The country's second prime minister is Lee's son.

A former British colony, they adopted the British legal system but modified it to make it more stern. The jury system was abandoned in 1974; now all trials are decided by the judge. Capital punishment is common. Canning is a punishment that applies to may crimes committed by 18 – 50 year-olds. Maximum is 24 strokes. There is no fear of crime here. We heard the population is so controlled that when they get to Kuala Lumpur, they go crazy with the independence



Unique sculpture of kids jumping into the river



Bride & groom wedding photos.



Neat markert.

Vietnam

We came to Vietnam with three questions:

1. Why did we get into the war?
2. Why did we lose the war?
3. What has happened since?

Peter Heaps, one of the ship's lecturers, answered the first two questions:

- The war was conducted under four presidents, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and, in a minor role, Ford. None of them were stupid or evil. They, as well as their advisors and generals, did their best to figure things out.
- Based on the context of the time, it was reasonable to take a stand against the military expansion of communism. A succession of eastern European countries had recently fallen to communism. In Asia, communism had expanded from China to North Vietnam and might have been pushed on from South Vietnam to the Philippines, etc.
- The memory of the Korean conflict was less than 10 years old. That memory was that the U.S. and allies had prevented North Korea from overtaking the south. It was thought this could be done again. A major difference was that the Korean conflict was between armies and Vietnam was mostly against guerillas.
- Based on this, Heaps concludes that taking a military stand at the time was not unreasonable.



Starting in the 1940s, when they were fighting the French, and continuing through the 1960s, the Viet Cong dug an extensive tunnel system in the Cu Chi area just southwest of Saigon.

The tunnels were barely 24" high by 18" wide. Larger sections were dug out for living areas and for bomb shelters. The entrances to the tunnels were well camouflaged. Some families spent most or all of five years living in the tunnels.

When the U.S. sent troops starting in 1965, they built a main base right in this area, not realizing there were tunnels below. Viet Cong could emerge from a tunnel in the evening, kill a couple of Americans and then disappear back into the tunnel.



The next major question was, "Why did we lose the war?" According to Peter Heaps:

- Because of restraints imposed by our politicians, the U.S. fought the war with one hand behind its back.
- The U.S. did bomb military targets in North Vietnam but never attacked the central city or government targets. Also, never invaded the north.
- Beyond some bombing, never dealt with the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and Cambodia.
- South Vietnamese troops were not as dedicated as the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese troops.
- Many South Vietnamese army units were infiltrated by Viet Cong.
- Russia and China provided supplies.
- The North's willingness to take huge numbers of casualties. 3 million North Vietnamese & Viet Cong were killed, versus 58,000 Americans.
- Domestic and international opposition to the war.

We were invited to go down into a tunnel that was expanded for tourists. John tried it but had to crawl on his hands and knees where the Viet Cong simply walked bent over. It was not a pleasant experience and he took the first available exit.



In addition to the tunnels, there were examples of the various booby traps used by the Viet Cong to kill American troops. The traps were ruthless. Our guide talked about them with great pride, implying the Americans were too dumb to figure them out. In the one shown here, the points of the sharpened sticks were coated with human excrement to maximize the chance for infection.

One can see how American troops might have been enraged when one of their comrades was killed by a booby trap, the location of which was known by all the local people.

What has happened since the war?

Ho Chi Minh was actually more anti-colonialism than he was pro-communist. He went communist primarily to secure the support of China and the U.S.S.R.

The period after the war, from 1975 to 1986, Vietnam went full speed communist. During this period, the communists were very vindictive toward the people in South Vietnam, particularly the 600,000 who had served in the military and the others who had worked in or supported the government. Some southerners escaped as the Boat People. Some were executed while others were sent off to Re-education Camps. Our local guide had a grandfather who was an officer in the southern army. After the war, he was sent to a re-education camp for eight years. He died just two years after release. The grandfather of another guide, Vin, was an officer in the South Vietnamese army and got 10 years of re-education. His father had a less important job and got only five years. During this re-education they were required to recite communist propaganda over and over daily.

Currently, no one can work for the government unless they are at least three generations removed from anyone who worked for the south during the war.

The communists confiscated land, homes and other assets of wealthier people. We heard of one family whose driver turned out to be Viet Cong and who was given their house by the communists.

The government owned everything. Any crops grown had to be brought to the cooperative in exchange for certificates to buy rice and other staples. The certificates were not enough for good nutrition and people had a hard time getting enough to eat. "Everyone was equal because no one had anything."

Our guide for Da Nang said that when he was a boy in the 1980s, they didn't have enough to eat breakfast. Their noon and evening meals were sweet potatoes and rice.

In 1986, the government essentially admitted that communism was not working and began permitting private enterprise. Since then, the economy has boomed. People have gone from bicycles to motor bikes and are headed toward car ownership. There are many privately owned shops, some doing very well.

Conclusion: If only our leaders in the 1950s and 60s could have foreseen that Communism would eventually implode on its own, we could have saved a lot of lives and money.

In Vietnam, Motor Bikes Everywhere!



Motor bikes come in waves by the hundreds. With few stop signs, the only way to walk across a street is to raise your hand and walk at a steady pace, counting on the bikers to miss you!



The Vietnamese carry almost anything imaginable on their motor bikes. The face mask is not for pollution but to protect from the sun, since they believe only poor people have tanned skin.

Boat Tour of the Mekong Delta



Lunch



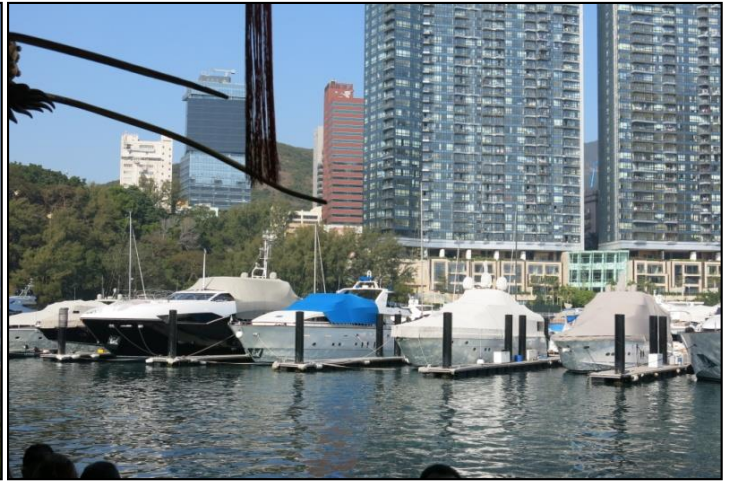
Believe it or not, the fish was good!



We sampled durian, the fruit that smells like hell and tastes like heaven.

Hong Kong, China

Hong Kong, the former British colony, was turned over to China in 1997. At the time, China signed an agreement by which Hong Kong would be left to its own affairs for 50 years. While many wealthy Hong Kong residents immigrated to Vancouver, British Columbia before the turnover and, while China has designated Shanghai as its main financial center, Hong Kong is still doing well.



There is virtually no building room left in Hong Kong. The pollution is thanks to mainland China.

Can you imagine what it costs to keep a boat here?

Our local guide said Hong Kong has the second lowest birth rate in the world. Tongue in cheek, he said only the Vatican has a lower rate.

Familiar Names



Because of the low birth rate, and an unemployment rate of less than zero, 150 people from the Chinese mainland are admitted each day.



Innovative architecture.



Kids from the Chinese mainland riding a tram.



Lunch in a nice restaurant.

Shanghai, China

Shanghai is located half way between Hong Kong and Beijing. Our local guide said that Beijing is all about politics while Shanghai is all about making money.



We heard that during the 1990s half the construction cranes in the *world* were in Shanghai. The city currently has 23 million residents and they are preparing for 50 million!



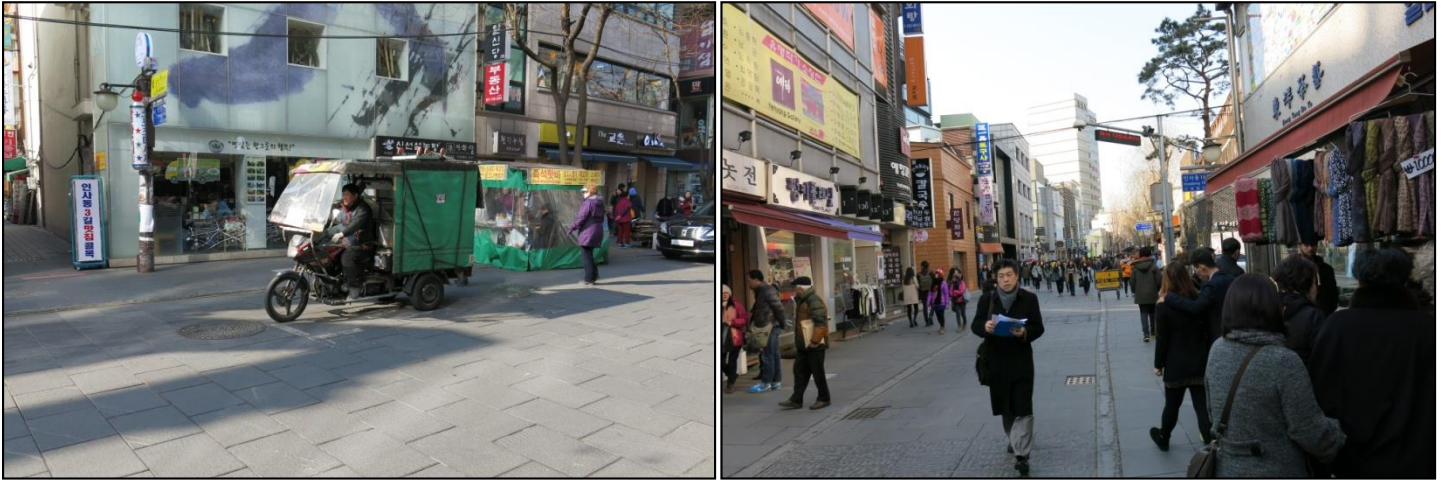
One of the highlights of the entire trip was our visit to the Rainbow Kindergarten in Shanghai. The school is for kids from three to seven, with about 30 in each class. All the students were brought into a larger room as one class at a time performed while singing a song. At the end, there was a game involving a balloon attached to each student's leg. The object was to break others' balloons. In the game, there was a winning team and a losing one!

The kids were all well behaved and nicely dressed, most with a uniform shirt. We were very impressed with the facility, the teachers and the students. It sounds as though the school is a public-private hybrid. Tuition paid by parents is \$330 per month. After seeing them in action, we concluded this school, and the students' performance, were superior to Kinderberry Hill. We were assured this school is typical of those in Shanghai, although it is superior to those in rural areas.

South Korea

We briefly visited four cities in South Korea: Incheon, the port for Seoul which is 20 miles inland, Seoul, Mokpo and Pusan.

Pusan is located in the southeastern corner of the Korean peninsula. At the start of the Korean War, the North Koreans had everything but this corner. When the allies landed here, they pushed the North Korean army all the way to the Chinese border and then China entered the conflict.



Considering that Seoul was totally destroyed during the War, it is well developed today. They do have high rise office and apartment buildings but not as many and not as fancy as Shanghai. In fact, the city seems rather bland.

After the war, the South Koreans had nothing left. They believed that they could change their destiny with education and it is still their first priority.



We saw a lifetime supply of palaces, temples, pagodas and mosques.



The food was generally good everywhere. Even Sandra, who is not an adventuresome eater, liked some of it!

Japan

We spent a week in Japan and visited Fukuoka, Hiroshima, Osaka, Tokyo, Kagoshima, Nagasaki and Okinawa.

Impressions of Japan

Size and Population Density

Japan is the size of California and has 126,000,000 people, more than three times California's 38,000,000. Further, since Japan is mountainous, 90% of the people live on just 10% of the land. In the cities we saw, there are virtually no open spaces and no big yards.

Foreigners

There are small populations of Koreans and Chinese, mostly brought to Japan during WWII for forced labor. Now, two or more generations later, these people speak Japanese but are still considered to be foreigners by the government. There is a very small population of westerners.

The Japanese are very polite to foreigners but also want to keep them at a distance. We heard they do not like foreigners who become fluent in the language because they are likely to figure out how things really work.

Trash

There is no trash anywhere. We were told the reason is not because of stiff fines for littering but because of a belief system that everyone feels a responsibility to keep things clean for others. A social belief system has a better chance of working here because there are so few foreigners.

Drivers and Pedestrians

Both drivers and pedestrians are well behaved. Drivers wait patiently at stop lights and do not cut each other off. Pedestrians do not jay-walk. At marked crossings, they wait for the "walk" signal, even on narrow streets with stopped traffic.

Slums

We saw no slums. Again, part of the reason might be because there are so few foreigners and minorities. We did hear about Korean workers living in slums; need to find out more about this.



Bathrooms

The bathrooms we saw were all very clean. Most of the toilets were high tech with heated seats and a control panel for bidet and other functions that most women were afraid to try. Sandra did push a button in one bathroom that set off an alarm. Two women and one man came rushing to her rescue. Most toilets were "western style" but there were a few squatter toilets in both men's and women's restrooms designed for the Japanese who are used to squatting.

Crime & Safety

We did not hear of any street crime such as muggings and pick-pockets. There is a Japanese Mafia that controls most of the construction industry and some real estate. Most Mafia business is kept within the Mafia, although some building owners have to pay a protection fee. The Mafia is big enough that it may control 1/5th of the Japanese economy and, since it mostly keeps to itself, is tolerated by the government.

Education

Kids wear uniforms. They are essentially required to belong to an extracurricular club such as baseball, reading, Kendal, archery, scouts, etc. These clubs consume most of the kids' time before and after school. In the 3rd year of junior high and senior high, the kids take exams. To prepare for the exams, most go to Cram School run by private organizations. These Cram Schools take all the students' free time. All and all, the life of a student in elementary and high school is not very pleasant. College is a different story. Once they are admitted, thanks to good performance on the tests, it is party time. During their 3rd year of college, they start looking for a job through various programs. If they do not have a job by the 4th year, it is panic time.



Employment

The idea of lifetime employment with a single company was strong after WWII and lasted into the 1990s when economic conditions forced some companies to lay off some workers. Still today, people work long hours, leaving home at 6 a.m. and getting back home as late as 10 p.m. The primary reason for the long hours is not company requirement but peer pressure. One does not want to be seen leaving early, before their boss and peers.

Religion in Japan

If asked, most Japanese would say they are not religious. In practice, however, most practice a combination of Shinto, Buddhism and Confucianism. Shinto is the ancient religion which is very informal. People visit Shinto shrines today mostly at the beginning of life and to pray for success in school, tests, etc. Buddhism was imported from China in about the year 500. Most turn to Buddhism at the end of life and for the afterlife. Confucianism is as set of recommendations for living in society.



We came across this couple outside a temple who was having their new car blessed by a holy man.

Nuclear Energy

Japan, with no natural resources including no oil, gas or coal, turned to nuclear energy. They have 54 nuclear plants in the country. After the near meltdown of one plant following the tsunami in 2011, all 54 plants were shut down. The country now spends \$100 million a day to fuel their conventional plants. It is not clear whether the

nuclear plants will ever be restarted. Part of the problem is that the people do not believe they are being told the full story by the government, despite "transparency" being one of the goals of the nuclear program.

Vending Machines

Vending machines are everywhere. We heard there are 20 million vending machines in a country of 120 million people. The machines are so numerous that when there was a problem with the 100 yen note, they created new notes rather than going to a coin that would have required modification of the machines.

The vending machines are versatile, offering both hot selections, like coffee and tea, and cold ones like Coke. Each machine typically has one to two dozen items from which to choose. The machines are far more advanced than anything available in the U.S.



Gambling

Gambling is mostly illegal. They do have lots of Pachinko parlors with machines that are like vertical pinball machines. We walked through one in Hiroshima and found the noise to be deafening and the smoke from cigarettes thick. Players purchase a supply of small metal balls, each about the size of a pea. If they are lucky and skillful, the machine will produce more balls. We saw one lady with two baskets full of balls. They can turn their winnings in for cigarettes or other small gifts or, they can sell them on a black market which is tolerated by the government.



Leading the World in Innovation

Joe Kass, our Road Scholar lecturer for this leg, did a nice presentation on Japanese innovation. They have led innovation and set trends in a bunch of areas: flat panel screens, robots, electronics, video games, etc.

The Tuna Market Excursion

On a free day in Tokyo, we planned to see the tuna auction at the Fish Market. They admit only two groups of 60 people, with the first group from 5:25 – 5:55 a.m. and the second group the following 30 minutes. It is first come so we planned to get there by 5:00 a.m.

We left the ship at 4:30 a.m. and found no bus and no taxi at the port. We considered going back to bed but decided to walk a few blocks to a main street and try to hail a cab. After a block and a half we noticed a cab with the motor running. The driver was sleeping inside so we rapped on the window and woke him. He was happy to take us to the Fish Market where we arrived at 5:00 a.m. only to discover the market is closed on Sundays and Wednesdays. Of course, today was Wednesday!

Again we considered going back to the ship but decided to have coffee at a Jonathan's, which turned out to be a rather nice chain restaurant, and then try riding the subway. After a cold (30 degrees or so) and windy 190 meter walk, we found the station, bought our tickets and were off for a destination about six stations down the line. With that successful trip, we bought more tickets and rode the subway to the end of its line.

We met a young man who helped us plan our subway adventure. He had mastered English when he was at the University of Arkansas as an undergraduate. He said he knew he wanted to major in political science and chose Arkansas because of Bill Clinton! Now he is in computers and makes occasional trips to San Jose in Silicon Valley.



We found the subways to be spotlessly clean, free of graffiti and running exactly on time. Early in the morning, they were not crowded but by 8:00 they were packed. People came down the stairs to the subway in droves. Many of them were running. We learned from our guide that you stay to the left on escalators so that those in a real hurry can pass on the right. In the most crowded cars, there was barely room to turn around but we were not squished together. On the train, few people talk; many play with their I-Phone. Most of the people appeared to be well dressed office workers.

In Okinawa our group happened to be touring a Peace Memorial Museum at the same time Carolyn Kennedy, who is currently the U.S. ambassador to Japan, came through. I got a couple of photos of her and exchanged a greeting.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki

We toured both cities on which the two atomic bombs were dropped at the end of World War II. The first bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. On August 8th, under an agreement with the allies, Russia declared war on Japan. On August 9th, the second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Some speculate that Japan's surrender was more a result of Russia's entering the war, and Japan's fear of what territory Russia might claim, than of the two atomic bombs. In fact, while about 30,000 people were killed with each of the atomic bombs, many more people were killed during the firebombing of Tokyo on March 9 and 10, 1945.



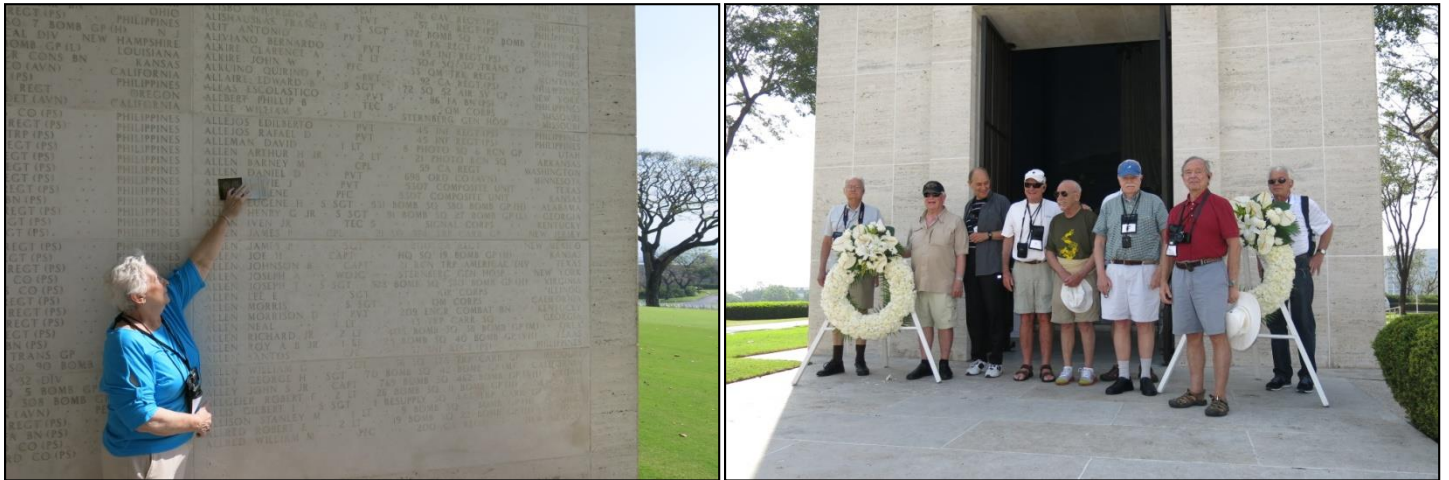
Carolyn Kennedy

Philippines

Manila was fairly disappointing. There is plenty of trash everywhere. The city is run down; does not look modern or prosperous.

Traffic is really bad. One can almost move as fast through town by walking as by driving a car. About 80% of the vehicles are cars and 20% are motor bikes. The motor bike riders all wear helmets but also cut through traffic & drive between the lanes. In an attempt to reduce traffic, some of the cities ban cars one day per week based on the last number of their license plate. Those ending in 1 or 2 are banned on Mondays, those ending in 3 or 4 are banned on Tuesdays, etc. The rich people get around this by buying another car with a different license plate number.

The American Cemetery area, which is just two or three miles but a one-hour drive from the port, is much more prosperous and clean than the port area. It includes the financial area with several 45-story buildings followed by 45-story condos. While we saw lots of trash along the road near the port, there is very little here. Apparently, trash pickup is budgeted by each of the 13 subsections of Manila.



Sandra points out that Daniel D. Allen, from Minnesota, was among those killed on Okinawa while the veterans in our group placed two wreaths at the memorial.

The public transportation is mainly via **Jeepneys**, which look like modified WWII jeeps. They are fancy outside and grungy inside and are clearly for locals only. At the end of WWII, an enterprising individual bought a bunch of surplus Jeeps and tried modifying them for use as public transport. After several modifications, they came up with the current design in which passengers sit on benches facing each other. They have 16 and 20 passenger models. The bodies are made in the Philippines and the drive trains are made by Isuzu. They cost from 500,000 to 700,000 pesos (\$11,000 - \$16,000) each. A person who obtains or leases a Jeepney has to apply to the city for a license to operate. The application has to specify the route they will follow. If the city determines more Jeepneys are needed on that route, the license is granted. Riders climb in the back, yell up to the driver how far they are going and pass their fare forward. It costs 8 pesos for 4 km and about 1 peso per km after that.



Our conclusion on the Philippines is we wouldn't go back. There are some wealthy people but also a lot of poverty. There are safety concerns with walking on the street as well as with taking a taxi or horse-drawn carriage. For the close relationship the Philippines has with Uncle Sam, they should be doing better. One of the problems might be political corruption

Cambodia

We got off the ship for four days in Cambodia and Thailand.



On several occasions, Road Scholar arranged for rides on rickshaw-type vehicles for everyone

Khmer Rouge

In the early 1970s, the Khmer Rouge, supported by North Vietnam, was engaged in a civil war with the Cambodian government supported by the U.S. When the U.S. pulled out of Vietnam in 1975, we also pulled out of Cambodia. As a result, the Khmer Rouge, lead by Pol Pot, won the civil war and took over the country.

The Khmer Rouge believed government corruption was a problem and that the educated people in the cities were responsible. Anyone with glasses, a pen in the pocket or who understood French or English was considered to be the enemy and were sent to the countryside for “re-education”. Phnom Penh and other cities were virtually empty.

The Khmer Rouge then somehow decided that re-education was not enough and began transferring the educated people from the countryside to places that are now known as Killing Fields where they were executed.

The Killing Field we saw was located just outside Phnom Penh in a Chinese cemetery. It was remote enough that the Khmer Rouge could do their killing with just music over loudspeakers to drown out the cries of the victims. Victims were killed with make-shift knives, like the serrated leaves of sugar palm trees, to save the cost of bullets. This was just one of 388 such Killing Fields in the country! The Khmer Rouge reign of terror lasted from 1975 to 1979. In total, as many 3 million citizens were killed.

When Pol Pot died in 1998 things began getting better for the people and continue getting better each year.

We visited Angkor Wat, the largest temple in the area around Siem Reip, Cambodia’s third largest city. We were there by 6:00 a.m. to see the sunrise over the temple. It was amazing that there were at least 1,000 people there at sunrise. The temples are a major (the only) tourist attraction in the area. It is a little bit like Disney World. A 3-day pass for all the temples in the area cost \$40.

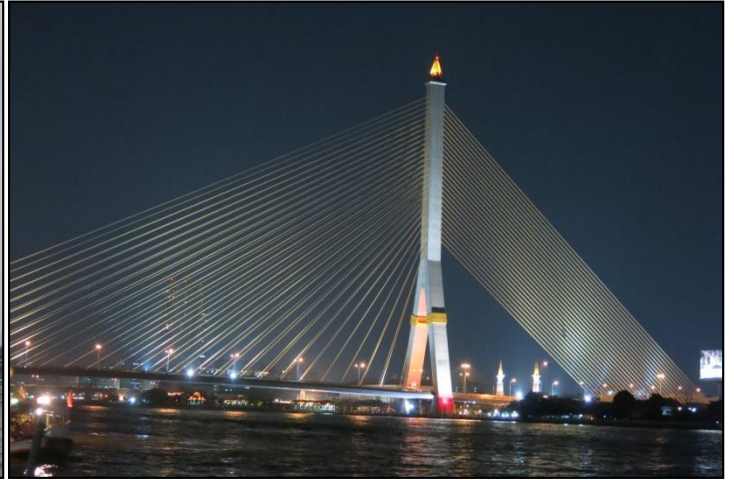
Angkor Wat was discovered by the French in about 1860. It had been built around 1100 and abandoned, with most of the people moving to Phnom Penh, around 1500 because of either lack of water or war. At its peak, the area had one million people. By comparison, London had just 30,000 at the time. Even though it was abandoned by the main population, the temple area was occupied continuously by local people.



In the evening after dinner, Sandra and I walked through the Pub Street area, a night time party area for tourists and took a Tuk Tuk back to the hotel for \$4.

Bangkok

From Siem Reip we flew to Bangkok. The next morning we took a boat ride through some of the canals. The postcard images of the canals are much more colorful than the mostly industrial facilities we saw.



Scenes on a cruise through Bangkok canals.



At the end of the day, we met up with the ship and everyone was happy to get "back home".

India

In preparation for the week we would spend in India, Ashok, our Indian group leader, gave us some tips:

- Health-wise, **water is the main concern** since the bacteria that cause diarrhea live in water.
- Most Americans are surprised by the number of people. When Indians come to the U.S., they ask, "Where are all the people?"
- Pedestrians and traffic look to Americans like chaos, but it is normal for Indians. They have very few traffic crashes.
- India is like a museum with photo ops everywhere you look.
- There will be beggars; do not look at them.
- The word "no" does not exist in India. If you ask a question and they do not know the answer, they will mumble something.



- Indians do not say "yes", rather they will nod their head left and right.
- Many Indians do not speak English but they will not tell you that when asked; they will mumble.
- Big differences between southern and northern India.
- Ladies should carry toilet paper.
- Politics: While the Congress Party has been in power for most of the time since independence in 1947, they are likely to lose in the upcoming election to the BJP party.
- 80% of Indians are Hindu.
- Cows are sacred to Hindus and are allowed to roam free in cities and the countryside. Most Hindus are vegetarian; none eat beef. McDonald's in India serves no beef or pork, only chicken.
- In Hinduism, there are no set rules. They do firmly believe in reincarnation which explains how the caste system holds together. People believe that, if they want to be re-born into a higher caste, they have to behave themselves during their current life. As a result, there is no movement between castes and no rebellion by those in the lower castes.
- There is free education for everyone. However, everyone who can afford to send their children to private schools for grades 1 – 12 do so. In higher education, it is reversed; the government universities are the best and there is great competition for admission.
- There is no "zoning" so you might see a nice, gated community next to squalor.



Our hotels were "four star", reasonably clean with good food. We even used some of their ice in our drinks without problems.

We were told you'll either love India or hate it. Maybe you can decide for yourself from these photos..



Water buffalo milk for sale.



Cows are sacred and roam free.



Donkeys too.



Traffic!



In Mumbai, there is an absolutely remarkable lunch delivery system. People working in Mumbai live as much as two hours by train out of the city. Indians do not like leftovers; they want freshly prepared food for lunch but they have to leave home too early in the morning to prepare it themselves. So, someone else at home prepares the lunch and puts it in a container. A lunch person picks up lunches from peoples' homes and takes them to the train station to be transported to Mumbai. On the sidewalk outside the Mumbai train station, lunches are sorted for delivery. One person delivers two dozen or more lunches at precisely the right time each day. Later, the containers are picked up and delivered back to the workers' home. The service costs \$8.50 per month. 5,000 lunch people deliver 200,000 lunches each day with 99/9% accuracy!