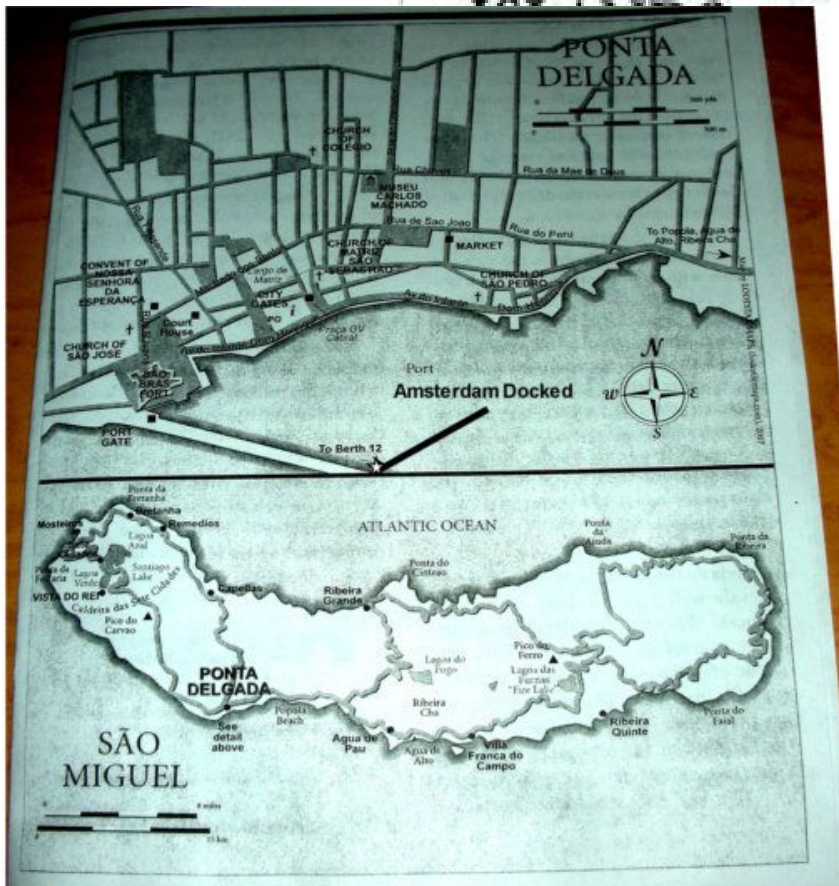
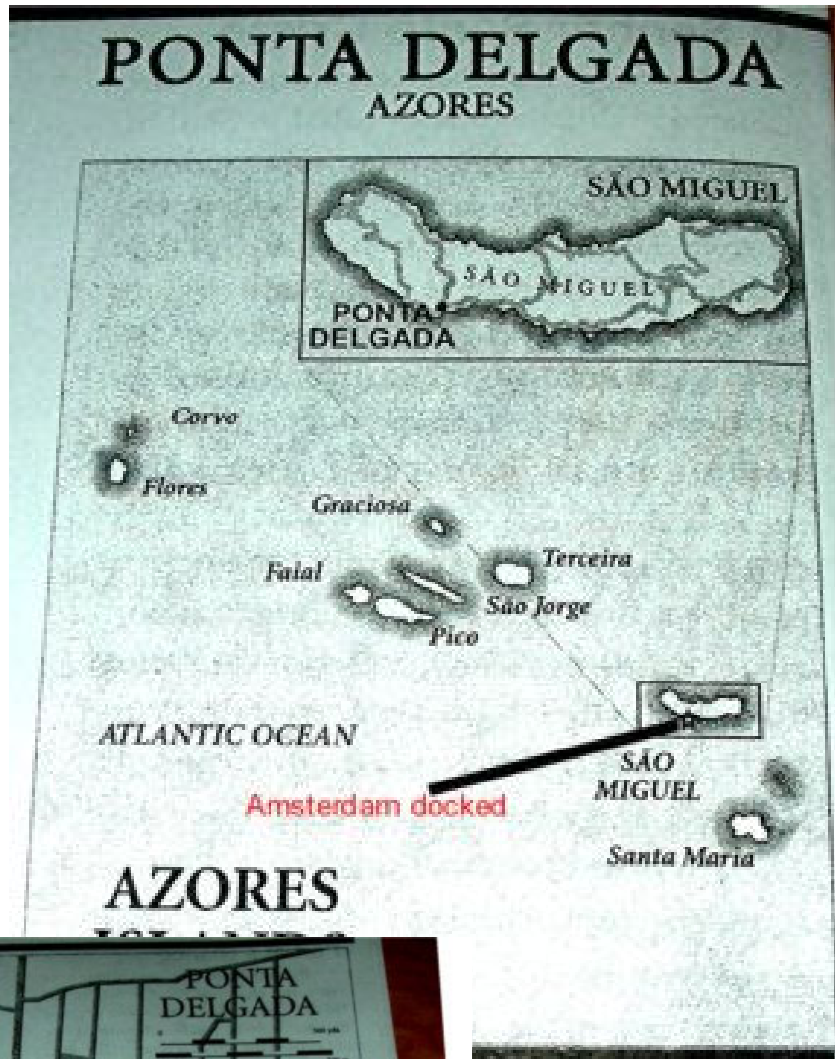


4/21/07 Day 96 – Ponta Delgada, Sao Miguel, Azores Islands - Saturday, 21 April, 2007: We arrived at the harbor of Ponta Delgada at 8am with a calm sea and cloudy sky. Here is where we were located on the map.



These photos show the port of Ponta Delgada in the area around the Amsterdam.









The Royal Caribbean cruise ship Navigator of the Seas was docked behind us at the end of the pier.

Here is another view of the Navigator of the Seas with the smaller Amsterdam in the background. The Navigator has 14 decks while the Amsterdam has 9. Both ships were in Ponta Delgada as an alternate to a scheduled port. The Navigator of the Seas was blocked from Bermuda by a major storm and the Amsterdam canceled Casablanca because of terrorism risk.



Ponta Delgada turned out to be a wonderful port of call. Many people toured the pineapple plantations with giant green houses. The lakes that have formed in ancient volcano craters were also visited by many. We chose to just walk around the town get the flavor of the place. What we saw was a bustling community with a well maintained infrastructure, intriguing narrow streets, and beautiful setting.

At the city gate Barbara showed her Oak Ridge Library card in our last foreign port of the cruise.



One uniformed city worker was busy in the morning collecting the contents of the public trash cans on the streets. He whistled a tune loudly as he worked. We could hear him whistling long after we passed by.



There was a little train with rubber wheels that for a few Euros took tourists on a tour of the city.

In a city plaza was an inviting play area for children on this sunny day.



We came upon a farmers market that sold produce, meat, cheese and plants.



The Azores Islands are famous for their hydrangea plants and we saw some examples.



Perhaps the most memorable thing about Ponta Delgada was the many artistic patterns formed by black and white stones in the sidewalks and streets of the town. We had not seen such widespread use of this technique in other cities we have visited. The striking decoration added a delightful accent to the first scenes that greeted us as we came into town. We collected pictures of 25 different arrangements of the stones in just a brief walk through the city streets. Here are some examples of the different pieces of art that were formed in the sidewalks and streets.







Here is an example of a street with a dynamic wave pattern.

As shown on the right, the main city square near the waterfront was marvelous and must be particularly enjoyable in the summertime when the trees have leafed out.



The patterns are formed by placing cube shaped white marble and black volcanic basalt stones on a bed of sand. Sand or a mixture of sand and cement is swept into the cracks between the stones and excess sand is washed away. The result is a surprisingly stable pavement with a great artistic flare.

The black stones come from local quarries of dense basalt lava and the white stones are marble that has been imported from mainland Portugal. The stone is usually in the shape of a cube with sides of 1.5 to 2 inches.

Occasionally there is evidence that the stones can be dislodged but such scenes are unusual.



The city of Ponta Delgada apparently has a good maintenance policy for the sidewalks and we were able to see a work crew in the process of installing some of the stones.



This is obviously a labor intensive way of creating public sidewalks and streets but it creates a very attractive result. It was good to see young men learning and using the skill needed to create this artwork that we found most enjoyable in Ponta Delgada.

We returned to the Amsterdam which was preparing to get underway. Our dinner table mates, Bob and Esther, Roy and Gayle, came by our cabin for a sail away party. They informed us that during the day they had seen that some of the crew had gone on the pier next to the ship and applied a little graffiti to the concrete breakwater. We have often seen this type of graffiti on seawalls usually recording the passing of some ship but sometimes just an individual's name.

This time the Amsterdam crew had painted a very clear sign indicating that the Amsterdam of Holland America Line (HAL) had been in Ponta Delgada as part of the 2007 Grand World Voyage. Luckily, Bob Robbins had a good camera with great zoom capability and he captured this photo for us.



The sail away party was delayed a little bit because a key person was just arriving at the Ponta Delgada airport when we were scheduled to leave. That person was from the International Port Services Company (IPS) and he will help passengers with the paperwork needed to get their luggage prepared for off-loading and shipping when we arrive in the United States. It was just another sad reminder that this Grand Voyage must come to an end. We tried to make the best of it.



(L to R) Barbara, Bob, Roy, Esther, Gayle (Orlin behind the camera) making the best of the closing days of the cruise.

About 6pm the Amsterdam got underway from the last foreign port of the 2007 Grand World Voyage. (sniff, sniff)