

3/25 - 26/07 Days 69, 70 – Dubai - Sunday, Monday; 25 - 26 March 2007: We arrived in Dubai harbor about 5am when it was still dark. The Amsterdam was docked at Port Rashid Pier 10 close to the cruise terminal. We woke up early and went out on deck. It was just like in the movies. There was the mysterious city way off in the distance and you could actually hear the 5 am call to prayer being broadcast from the minarets around the harbor. The Captain had explained yesterday that we were cruising at a higher speed than normal so that we could arrive in Dubai earlier than originally planned. The haste was necessary because of a medical emergency that had developed with a passenger and we needed to get to Dubai as soon as possible. Sure enough, an ambulance was waiting for us on the pier and soon the patient was wheeled off the ship and taken away in the ambulance.

When it eventually got daylight we saw that we were surrounded by the usual sights of busy industrial harbors. In particular, Dubai is rapidly building their infrastructure to support a huge tourist industry and they are attracting many cruise ships which we saw.

Here are some views from around the Amsterdam.



A cargo ship and oil tanker was docked near cranes at the port facility across from the Amsterdam in Port Rashid.

The cruise ship Silver Whisper was tied up behind us.

In front of the Amsterdam was the Costa Classica cruise ship docked next to the new cruise terminal that is shaped like a boat hull.

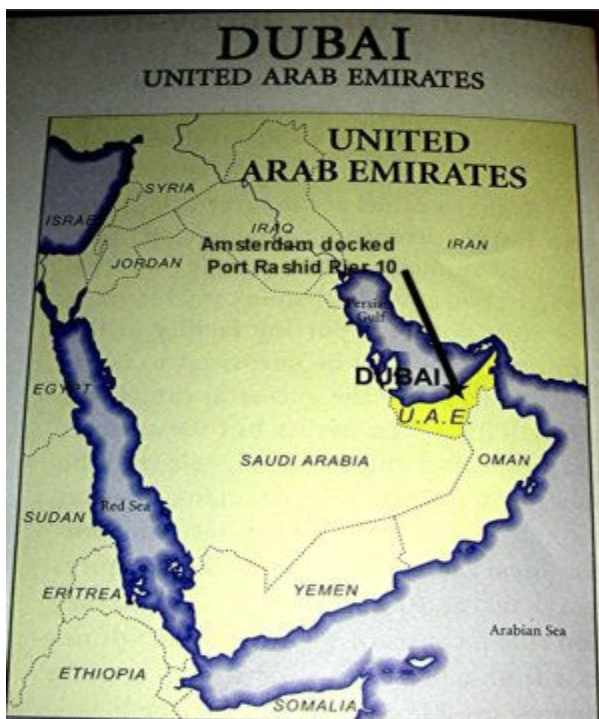




During the two day period that the Amsterdam was in port both the Silver Whisper and the Costa Classica left the harbor and the cruise ship Oriana arrived and docked next to the cruise terminal. The Oriana is on a world cruise, similar to the Amsterdam, and we had seen her last in Fiji on February 10 (Day 26 of our world cruise).

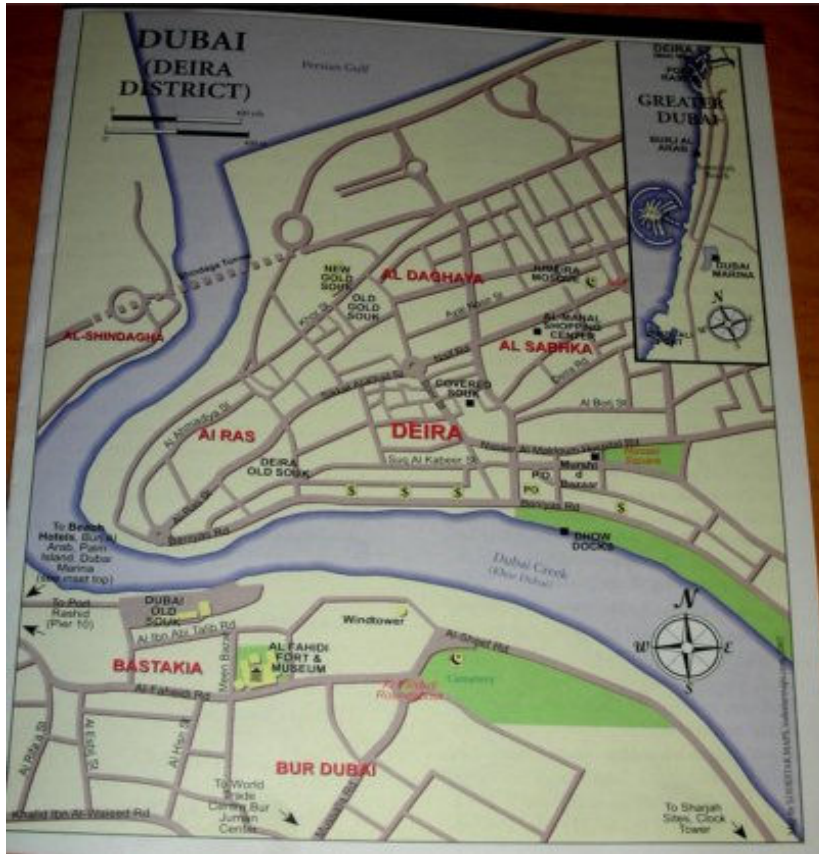
Dubai was a major transition port for the Oriana where many passengers left the ship and new passengers arrived. Briefly the cruise terminal was filled with hundreds of Oriana passengers going through the check-in procedure. The Dubai government and business community has invested in the infrastructure needed to service this kind of tourist activity and they are now being rewarded economically.

The following map shows where we were located in the Dubai Emirate of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).



The city of Dubai is divided by Dubai Creek which is not really a creek but just a narrow salt

water bay that extends into the city from the Persian Gulf. The city is made up of two main districts with the Deira District north of Dubai Creek and the Dubai District south of Dubai Creek. Here is a map of the city showing some of the markets.



This map on the left shows the Deira District where the gold and spice markets are located in the old part of town. The gold market is where all the tourists go and is known as the Gold Souk (pronounced "suke"). On the south bank of Dubai Creek is the former home of Sheikh Said Al-Maktoum. The home is known as Al-Shindagha as shown on the map near the entrance of Dubai Creek. Sheikh Said died in 1958 but he and his descendants are given credit for transforming Dubai into the modern success story that it is. Another important tourist site is the Al Fahidi Fort and Museum which is Dubai's oldest building and defended the city since the early 1800s.

We took a guided bus tour of the highlights of Dubai. We were joined by our friends Paul and Maria for this four hour adventure.

We started out with a quick walk by the historic former home of Sheikh Said (a 30 room mansion) and then went on to the Al Fahidi



Fort and Museum where we spent more time.

It would have been easy to spend at least four hours in the museum to study the exhibits of former Arab life around Dubai but we had only 45 minutes. The guide pointed out that the houses and craft work shown in the museum had roots in antiquity but up until the 1950s much of it could have been seen in practice here in Dubai. Since the 1950s the changes in Dubai have been fast and revolutionary. Some photos of the museum area follow.



Pearl diving and fishing were important occupations around Dubai in ancient times so boats and boat construction facilities and technology were part of the ancient infrastructure.

After touring the Al Fahidi Fort the guide took us for a ride on a water taxi known as an "abra" in order to cross

Dubai Creek and enter the Gold Souk on the north side of Dubai Creek.







We exited the water taxi and walked a couple blocks to the Gold Souk shown on the left. We saw more gold on display in one place than we had seen before. There was the occasional shoe and clothing store but the majority of stores sold gold and jewelry. Here are some examples of what we saw. The gold in Dubai is more likely to be either 22 karat or pure gold at 24 karat and because of this feature it has a more yellow color than

the 18 karat gold that people in the US are used to seeing.

The gold is sold by the troy ounce at whatever the international market price may be. In addition to the cost of gold in a piece you may buy there is the cost of the labor and other material that may be used in making the item. We had no idea of whether the prices asked for the gold items were reasonable or not. However,



because of the large number of gold merchants concentrated in this area it would seem that a person knowledgeable in gold items would be able to get the best price possible for gold jewelry.

At this window Barbara does some wishful thinking.

In addition to the Gold Souk we also visited the nearby Spice Souk where spices of all types were on display.



We found the prices of these items more to our liking when compared with our Gold Souk experience. Here are some photos from the Spice Souk.

While in the Spice Souk we had fun passing on our new knowledge of Dubai to some newly arriving Oriana passengers searching for the Gold Souk.

We had not ever seen the spices frankincense or myrrh even though from childhood we had read about the Wise Men bringing those gifts to Baby Jesus. The spice merchants quickly educated us about frankincense and myrrh. The frankincense and myrrh are made by collecting the resin from certain trees. The resin is processed to dry it and produce chunks of the material. Myrrh is a dark brown and frankincense a light yellow color. These resins are used for many things but they are primarily used as incense within the home. They release a pleasing aroma when heated. The spice merchants had made up a little kit for tourists that included frankincense and myrrh in plastic bags along with a small ceramic pot and charcoal to burn. The charcoal could be burned in the ceramic pot and the frankincense or myrrh powder sprinkled



over the hot coals to release the aroma. We engaged in a little haggling over the price of one of the tourist kits and some additional frankincense and myrrh chunks in plastic boxes. We got the whole package for about \$20 USD. We suspect someone who really knew what they were doing could get it for \$10 USD. On the right is a picture of the frankincense and myrrh resin that we bought in the plastic boxes.





Barbara couldn't resist some camels that were for sale in the souvenir shops. Here she proudly displays her new toys as well as a new caftan she picked up at the Gold Souk.

Our guide in the morning tour had pointed out to us that only 7 percent of the Gross National Product of Dubai comes from oil. The major income is from tourism and various other trade and service business arrangements. The current ruler has made the decision to diversify from a trade-based but oil dominated economy to one that is service and tourism-oriented.

The tourism effort in Dubai is strong and appears to be well managed. In the morning the things we saw emphasized the culture and heritage of Dubai. In the late afternoon and evening of the first day in Dubai we took part in what can only

be described as a pure tourist experience in the back country. We took an extended four wheel drive through the sand dunes of Dubai to a camel farm where we had a ride on a dromedary followed by an outdoor barbeque while a lady performed a belly dance by firelight. We joined with our dinner table mates in this adventure.



We were picked up by our driver, Stallin, in a new Toyota four wheel drive Land Cruiser. Stallin, who was from Nigeria and spoke good English, pointed out that the Land Cruiser had roll bars installed. At the time we didn't give the comment much thought but later, during the sand



dune roller coaster ride we were glad those strong braces were in place. We drove north from the city about 45 minutes on an excellent and busy road into the desert. There were about 45 identical Toyota cars and about 140 tourists, mostly from the cruise ships, in the caravan. The caravan stopped at a gas station and the drivers proceeded to let air out of their tires so that they would have better traction in the sand dunes. We then proceeded to drive out into the

sand dunes where the drivers, still maintaining a caravan alignment, roared up, down and over the sand dunes at high speed. We were buckled in securely and felt relatively safe but for us senior cruisers this was wild and woolly stuff we hadn't planned on.



The following scenes are from along the way as we soared over the dunes.



Just before we all got car sick Stallin and the other drivers stopped for a

break from the dune driving.

Left to right: Driver Stallin, Barbara, Orlin, Esther, Bob, Roy and Gayle taking a break from the wild ride.



Part of the caravan is shown in the photo on the left.

After the exciting dune ride it was time to see some camels. We stopped to make friends with the tame dromedaries that were at the farm.



Then it was time to actually get on one of the animals and take a ride.

Roy and Gayle leading the pack

Bob and Esther coming back safely from the trek



Barbara may have some second thoughts about this venture.

On the right our Amsterdam neighbors, Don and Gloria give camel riding a try.



We got all the camel riding we ever wanted and gratefully retreated to an outdoor banquet that had been prepared. The event took place just at night fall and the temperature and atmosphere could not have been better. Cushions and carpets had been laid out on the sand for us to lounge on while we ate a barbeque dinner. Here are the happy camel riders ready for a barbequed dinner.



Back row: Orlin, Barbara, Esther, Bob,
Front row: Roy, Gayle, Linda

To cap off the evening we had a belly dancer entertain us in the fire light with her graceful and titillating moves.

Before the night was over the dancer had several of

the ladies and even some men from the audience dancing with her under the desert sky. It was a memorable experience and the operators of the tour conducted it in a very professional and enjoyable manner. This particular part of the tourism business in Dubai (Orient Tours) is really doing things right.

We spent part of our time in Dubai savoring the sights and sounds of the desert and ancient sections of Dubai. We found that experience most enjoyable and it left us with a better appreciation for the geography and culture of this part of the Arab world.



The rest of the time in Dubai was spent in guided tours through the part of the emirate that is being built up as the new world class business and tourist activity center. That experience left us in a state of **ECONOMIC SHOCK AND AWE!** We had read of the innovative real estate projects, international business interest and enormous construction activity but what we saw was beyond what we imagined. We have not been to China to witness the business development taking place there but we understand that what is happening in Dubai can be compared with what the Chinese are doing in some of their fastest growing cities.

A most remarkable sight was the number of construction type vehicles parked in the storage lot next to our ship.

In this picture there are eleven transit concrete mixers lined up next to enumerable large yellow dump trucks suitable for quarry or mining operations. On the left were lots of new tractor trucks for pulling semi trailers and other heavy duty construction work.



A guide told us later that

35 percent of all the world's construction equipment was now located in Dubai. On the face of it that large number is hard to believe. However, after seeing nearly every large building with a construction crane on the top and miles of high rise buildings in various stages of construction



the 35 percent figure could be close to correct. In the foreground of this picture on the left is part of the vehicle storage yard of the Port Rashid Pier 10 area. In the background is the new skyline of Dubai. About half of the buildings have a construction crane on top indicating that work on the building is continuing. The tallest building near the middle

of the background has two cranes on top of it. It is currently taller than the 88 story Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur. The plan is to make it the tallest building in the world when it is completed at around 220 stories.

We took a bus tour that was designed to give us some insight into the enormous real estate projects of the Nakheel Company and end up with afternoon tea served at the beautiful Burj Al Arab Hotel. We had background information from our three different tour guides in Dubai. The following factoids are unverified but seemed consistent with what we saw: (1) Dubai is one of seven emirates that make up the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the agreement to form the UAE was signed in 1971, (2) while 80 percent of the total UAE income is from oil in Dubai only 7 percent of the gross national product comes from oil, (3) in preparation for a future with even less oil income the Dubai leader, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, has decided to develop tourism and business activity other than oil, (4) Dubai has a population of about 4 million people with and without citizenship, (5) about 20 percent of the population of Dubai enjoy citizenship (6) 80 percent of the Dubai population comes from other countries around the world, for example our three guides were from Russia, Nigeria and The Netherlands. (7) citizens of Dubai receive free housing and medical care (8) there is virtually no way for a person to move in to Dubai and receive citizenship (9) there is no income tax in Dubai (10) the foreign construction workers are brought in on contracts and receive free housing and transportation to and from work, (11) there is no unemployment in Dubai because when a foreign person loses his job he also loses his visa and must leave the country, (12) 35 percent of the world's construction equipment is now located in Dubai, (13) gasoline costs about \$1.70 USD per Imperial Gallon, (14) bottled water costs about \$6 per gallon, (15) Dubai is a right hand drive traffic country.



We started out with a visit to the sales offices of the Nakheel Company (see www.thepalm.ae and www.nakheel.com). The reception area for the building was an example of beautiful architecture and good construction practices. This room contained models of the two major projects,

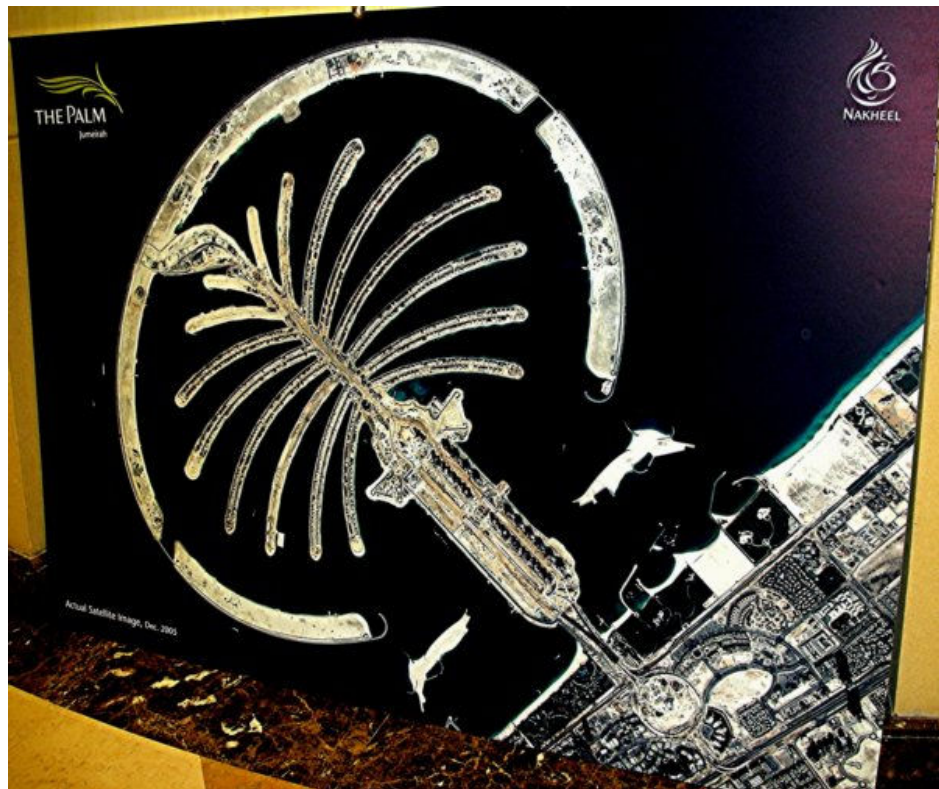
The Palms and The World.



Looking up we could see a beautiful capital dome and chandelier.

We were treated to a 10 minute video show describing the vision behind the Nakheel Company projects and status of construction.

The Palm is the most mature project and consists of an island made from rock that is brought in from quarries and sand that is dredged from the Persian Gulf. The Island is in the shape of a palm tree silhouette with an outer protective series of barrier islands in the form of a circle around the palm. The location of The Palm is south of the main city as illustrated in the upper right corner of the "Dubai - (Deira District)" map shown earlier. Here on the right is a picture of The Palm project as displayed in the sales lobby.





On the left is a photo of a model showing a portion of the palm tree trunk with buildings that will be in place when construction is completed.

People who follow the activities of the American real estate financier, Donald Trump, were interested in knowing that he has a project located about halfway up the trunk of the palm tree. In the picture above the

structure in the middle of the palm tree trunk in front of Barbara is the ground floor of the new Trump International Hotel and Tower. The Nakheel brochure describes the Trump project as "The striking centerpiece of the island" with completion of construction expected in 2009.

On the circular outer barrier island will be "Atlantis, The Palm" hotel as shown by the model in the picture on the right.



After viewing all these grand plans, one of our fellow passengers from the US commented that compared with the economic activity in Dubai he felt the US was becoming a third world country.

The Palm project has some buildings that are either complete or under construction along the trunk of the tree and we were able to take our bus for a drive up the tree trunk. Here are some photos taken from the bus as we maneuvered through the construction site.



The bus shown in the picture on the right is part of the

transportation system provided to carry the foreign workers to and from their living quarters that are located in another emirate outside of Dubai. The workers all wear uniforms with various colors depending on which contractor they are associated with.

The other Nakheel project called "The World" is a collection of individual islands distributed inside a circular protective breakwater. The individual islands are being created using quarry stone and sand dredged from the Persian Gulf. The status of the island building process was unclear but the price per island is set at a figure between \$25 and \$45 million USD for the bare sand island. If you purchase an island you have to start building your project within 2 years.

After the tour of the Nakheel project we went over to the Burj Al Arab hotel which is one of the pearls along the southern Persian Gulf Coast of Dubai. Here are some photos of the hotel from several vantage points.

Paul, Maria and Orlin at the beach near the Burj Al Arab Hotel. The protrusion high on the right side of the hotel is the restaurant and the protrusion near the top on the left side is a helicopter landing pad. We observed a helicopter coming and going from the pad.



The view on the right with Barbara on the approach to the Burj clearly shows the helicopter pad.



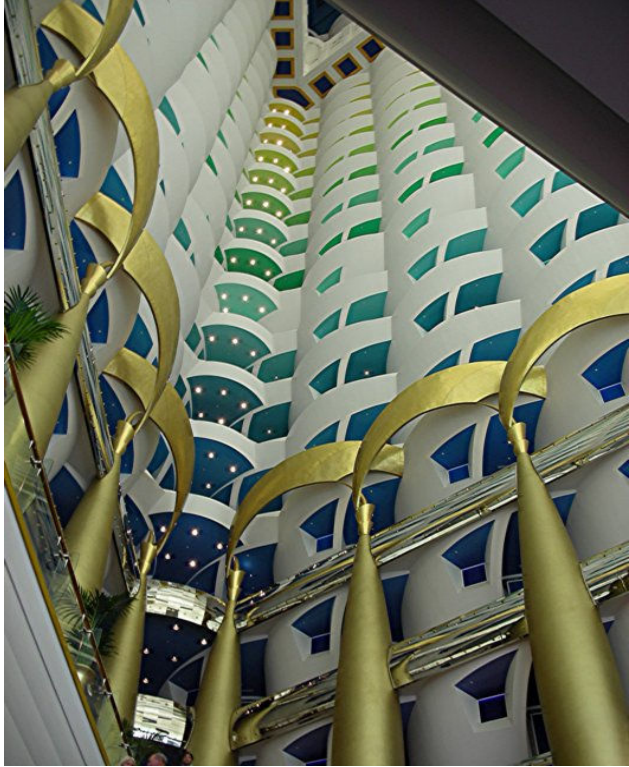


Here is the beach that is between the Burj Al Arab Hotel and the neighboring hotel.

The Burj Al Arab Hotel is beautiful (a seven star hotel) but the two story suites are so large and the architecture inefficient so that the number of rooms is limited to about 250. Needless to say, the room rates have to be high to make this pay off (per the brochure \$2000 USD to \$13700 USD per night, breakfast not included).



The entrance lobby of the hotel was as beautiful as you might expect. Here are a couple of photos.



On the left is the view looking up from the escalators that move you up from the entrance lobby.

The hotel is hollow, like The Luxor Hotel in Las Vegas. There apparently are no interior rooms. Every suite gets an outside view.

We had a very nice service of tea and small sandwiches then it was time to return to the ship.

On the way back to the Amsterdam we passed another fabulous innovation. A developer has created a ski slope adjacent to one of the major shopping malls. The slope appears to be at least 150 yards long and it is covered with artificial snow. The building is maintained below the freezing point of water at a constant minus 3 degrees centigrade (about 27 F). The cost of 2 hours on the slope is \$40 USD. All the equipment you might need is available for rent. Here is a picture of



the ski resort building taken from our bus.

As we came to the end of our visit to Dubai, we struggled to understand how this amazing scene of construction and growth made any economic sense. Obviously the Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum is convinced of the wisdom of this venture for the future of his emirate. Pictures of his son, the crown prince and next ruler of the emirate, are posted prominently on billboards around Dubai. The ultimate in this regard is the side of a high rise building decorated with the image of the crown prince.



The public policies appear to be designed to keep the Dubai citizens happy and the laws are set up to get unemployed foreigners out of the country fast so little resistance to government policies develops. American companies like Haliburton are planning to move headquarters to Dubai and probably other companies will make that move depending on the incentives that are offered. Tourism and the flourishing business environment may support the vision of Dubai into the future. We hope so.

However, a photo we took from the ship suggested to us the image of Dorothy and Toto in the story "The Wizard of Oz" as they approached the Emerald City. At this point our minds are still boggled by what we saw and we wonder if this venture in the desert sands of Dubai will turn out to be the Emerald City. We hope not.

