

Post



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Bombs on the 23rd floor - March 29, 2023

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SUMMARY

On the 28th, I went on a morning excursion with our two German couples and their German-speaking guide. Happily one of the guys was willing to translate for me, although I was surprised at how much I was able to grasp in German. We visited an organic grocery to purchase the famous Kampot pepper and then stopped at the Russian Market. Not sure why it is called that - it was a couple of acres of junk in a steamy hot building. No purchases made! Afterwards we went to the Wat Phnom (a famous temple/pagoda) and then stopped by the Hard Rock Café where some people bought souvenirs. This afternoon all nine

of us went on a bus to the Central Market, a HUGE building built by the French in 1937. Fake everything could be purchased - gems, bags from Chnale (sic) and Gucc (sic). The most interesting part was the wet market with live chickens and fish and lots of fruits, vegetables and nuts. We were allotted two hours - I was over it in about 30 minutes! Five of us met up and spent the last hour in an air conditioned coffee shop having beers. Native dance demonstration this evening and tequila shots! - Karen

On the 29th we melted (temp + humidity feels like 112 degrees) as we toured the Royal Palace with its beautiful throne room and the (tarnished) silver-floored (6 tons) Emerald Buddha Temple. Skipped the un-air conditioned National Museum in favor of our nicely air conditioned cabin. Afternoon of leisure time. After dinner, eight of us climbed into tuk-tuks for a trip to Eclipse Skybar. Jägerbombs for all! - Karen

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DETAIL

[Gentle reader, due to the sad nature of yesterday morning's shore excursion we didn't have a blog post for the day. However there were other, happier, activities that took place that day. Those will be captured in today's necessarily longer post. Thanks for your indulgence.]

After lunch, yesterday, we took a bus ride to the central market. This is a huge, octopus-shaped building with stalls everywhere. The program calls for two trips there and back, each for an hour. Thinking we need all need more time than that, we beseech the cruise director and end up with a single two hour excursion.

To say the organization of the market is haphazard would be generous, but there are general areas where you'll find meat/fish, or jewelry, tee shirts or kitchen good, men's shoes or ladies' unmentionables. If you find a booth selling something, undoubtedly there are fifteen more booths, within the radius of a swung cat, where they're hocking the exact same products.

There are shoppers there, and some transactions going on, but most of the humanity present are tourists, like us, or bored sales people glued to their smart phones. In the produce and meat/fish areas, the goods are neatly stacked as high as they'll go and behind that is a hammock hidden away with someone sleeping. There are booths with raw fish and meat, and not far away (certainly not far enough) are vendors selling the same things only for immediate consumption, hopefully cooked.

They do a good job keeping (some of? most of?) the meat and fish cold. There's chipped ice all around and it's east to find from whence it comes. There are long 12" x 12" x 6' blocks of ice stacked like cord wood and a shirtless guy feeding it through a Fargo-style chipper into big bags.

They have the gifts for deceased family members (i.e. big houses, smart phones, shoes, and fancy cars) all made of thin cardboard and all readydy to be burnt. There are stacks and stacks of (fake) currency to send along, too, in case you can't figure out that perfect your deceased wants in the afterlife. We did not see any fake, flammable gift cards for Amazon or Alibaba. Give them time.

If you can think of a brand, it's here. Well, you'll find something that looks like it. Whether it's truly that brand, or a knock off, you don't always know. (That's not true, they're likely all knock-offs). A few have gross spelling errors that betrays the product's authenticity. We see lovely Chanel hand bags, with the company name is written as "Chnale" and Louis Vuitton shirts with the logo spelled out as "Louis Vusitton". These companies need a good spell checker.

There are fifty pound bags of pepper corns, wire cages stuffed with live chickens, fancy watches and sparkly jewelry, and the opportunity to have your hair cut and styled. There are fancy booths selling jewelry with dark, sweaty nooks in the back where it's being made. It's hard to know what we've already seen or not, but it's so hot, you don't care. Many of the booths have fans (either for the clients or sales people). At those, you slow down and feign interest while you briefly cool your body.

After an hour, we agree that an hour is all we need. But, as our bus isn't coming back for an additional hour, we slink off to a near by coffee shop with cold air conditioning and even colder beer.

Back on the ship we get our evening briefing followed by a series of dances, accompanied by live, local music. It is delightful. One of the dances involves a monkey (obviously with fleas) who falls in love with a mermaid. Is this relationship doomed to fail, or what? Eventually we're invited up to join the dancers to show off our Cambodian dance moves. (Spoiler alert: we're nowhere as good as these professionals who've been practicing since they were 10).

We have another delicious dinner. Grith and Jakob Groot (our Danish couple) and big Niclas and wife Ann (one of our German couples) jump ship, so to speak, for dinner ashore. That leaves us with Jörg and Margret from Germany (with their more limited English) and Elizabeth. We have a marvelous time discussing East Germany in the old days, the Baltic Sea, grandkids, pets, travel, and life in Bahrain. It is such fun (helped by lots of wine). Then this morning we do our normal breakfast and then head out. Before we leave Sarik gives Karen a tightly wrapped package, containing a tightly wrapped package, containing her Apple AirPods that she'd left in Siem Reap.

We drive all over town, one couple in each of four tuk-tuks. Our destination is the royal palace, but we go by the most circuitous route possible. It's peak of rush hour and the ride is thrilling and fun. At the palace we learn where and how the King lives. We see buddhas made from precious stone and temples with floors made from tiles of countless tons of silver. We see where previous kings are buried and the statue of Napoleon on a horse, given by Napoleon himself, to a prior king. The king happily accepted the kind gift and then had the head lopped off and replaced with a likeness of his own head.

Some of our group continues on to the national museum to see the buddhas there, (i.e. the few that aren't in museums in London or Paris). Karen and I head back to the ship to relax and cool down. Earlier today we got an email from Vietnam Airlines informing us that our 1 pm flight from Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi on April 2nd (a four-plus hour flight) will now leave at 9 pm. Time to make other arrangements.

We lunch together and learn that Liz is indeed gone (on her way back, eventually, to Bahrain), that our replacement couple (from Italy) will join us this evening, and that our replacement guides, for Vietnam, will join us tomorrow, after we've crossed the border.

This afternoon is just for relaxing and sightseeing, should we so choose (we don't). We do laundry and Karen gets a pedicure. We look forward to dinner onboard the ship followed by a group tuk-tuk caravan out for after-dinner drinks at a very high-up "sky bar" in town. Relaxing is good.

Before dinner we hang in the ship's bar with the ever proper and cheerful Nevel. Eventually Grith and Jakob join us, followed by all four Germans. The volume increases. Karen has offered Grith my services to get her cellphone working with an e-sim she bought online. I do my best, puzzling out the Danish instructions with Grith's help.

Finally the Italians show up. Two guys. We'd been expecting one person of each gender but now are questioning why we would make that assumption. Diego and Luca.

After another raucous dinner we give up our room keys, pile into our respective tuk-tuk, and charge into the nighttime Phnom Penh traffic.

On the 22nd floor we pour out of the elevator and climb the stairs towards the Eclipse rooftop bar. A sign equivocates "Probably the best skybar in the world".

Arriving last, we miss that Jacob and Nicholas have already ordered each of us a Jägerbomb. I'm sure I don't need to tell you, but this is Red Bull in a glass into which a full shot of Jägermeister has been dropped.

A few beers and other drinks later and we're ready to head home. I pay and sign, being careful to get **my** copy of the charge slip! Halfway down the stairs our waiter catches us to give me back my credit card which I'd left behind.

We get back to the dock just before 11 pm, but the gates are already closed and locked. As promised, all tuk-tuk drivers (and probably everybody else in town) knows the combination. Before long we're stripped, splashed our faces, and crawled into bed, soon we're sawing Cambodian logs.

Photos



Karen and Nicholas check to see who is taller



The entirety of the shipboard clients, pre-tuk-tuk ride to the Royal Palace



Tuk-tuk fun in Phnom Penh



Karen trying to fit into the role of
Cambodian dancer



Vegetable sales in front, sleeping in the
back



How big bags of shaved ice are made



Real flowers by the stem, so pretty



Fake money by the box-full. Ready for burning.



Chanel, my favorite luxury brand



The age-old 'monkey-falls-for-mermaid'
love story. But will it last?



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Sweating in front of the model of Angkor
at the Royal Palace



Jägerbombs at the Skybar on the 23rd
floor



Marketing (with a bit of hedging thrown in)



The cruise's newest members: Diego and Luca (or is it Luca and Diego?)

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