

Post



Scott Farnsworth

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# In sickness and in health - April 3, 2023

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## ***SUMMARY***

Up early and in the lobby for the bus to Ha Long Bay. We take a tender boat out to our (small) ship and are given a buffet lunch and our cabin key. On the way we're told that Ha Long Bay is now considered one of the 7 Wonders of the World and it is beautiful. Unfortunately it's overcast but we're also told that sunny skies are accompanied by 40-45 C temperatures! Our room is nice with a balcony running along one side. We explore the ship then go back to our room to relax. Scott starts feeling really dizzy and is sick to his stomach. We hang out in the room, skipping the scheduled activities but do head to dinner. Scott has white rice and

an electrolyte drink while we are presented a multi-course dinner for two that I can't remotely do justice to! - Karen

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### ***DETAIL***

In Bali they talk about having Bali Belly. In Thailand tourists strive to avoid the dreaded Thailand Tummy. In Cambodia you definitely don't want the Cambodia Craps. Thankfully we've managed to avoid all such maladies... until now.

But we'll save that for later. For now, read on. Soon enough you'll be at the scene of the grime.

In making our arrangements for the 72 days we'll be in the Far East, different companies have different ways to communicate. Some are OK by phone or email. Some have chat boxes on their website. And some strictly use WhatsApp. The company for our cruise today, Halong Bay Cruise Hunters, falls into this last category. It hasn't been easy and one big question mark for us is 'where and when do we get picked up for the bus to the cruise ship?' We do eventually get an answer... "Sit in the hotel lobby, like a boss, at 8 am"

In our hotel we look, sitting like a boss, at everyone else, trying to figure out who might also be on our boat. After we pile into our big bus we do the same. It's a two and a half hour drive to the boat. Step one is stopping for a potty break. In the bathroom there are lots of urinals and toilets and a fair number of mosquitoes, thankfully all quite lethargic. We buy two coffees (hot) with milk and one steamed bun, presumably with something inside. The something turns out to be a big pork meatball. Karen has one small bite and I eat most of the rest. Then a two hour drive to the next potty/coffee break. No narration.

Of course there is so much to see along the way, whizzing by. In town we see more retail shops, artfully spilling their goods out onto the sidewalk. With the New Year celebration coming up there seems to be a lot of products specifically for that. There are big (one meter tall) flower panels for placement on graves. There are sparkly gift baskets wrapped in cellophane as protection from the ubiquitous grime. If you see one business selling one set of products, there will be four more right next door going down the street.

Further out of town it gets less dense and you get the nurseries and tree farms with amazing bonsai and shaped trees. It's obviously hydrangea season with big blooms throughout the nurseries. On the big boulevards the wide swaths of land between the road and the buildings have been converted into packed community gardens.

Even further out there are the inevitable rice paddies. Mostly these are just verdant squares of consistent green, but occasionally you'll see someone in native costume and a conical hat bent over attending to something. Periodically we see a big block of white. These are duck farms, with so many pure white ducks happily wandering around looking for a hapless snail.

As we drive along we convince ourselves that the sky is getting brighter. We imagine blue sky and sunshine when we get to the coast. At the second coffee stop it's still grey. Maybe we were fooled. We're dropped at one end of a long rest stop and will be picked up at the other, at the coffee shop. Between here and there is a dazzling pearl shop, very impressive but we remain strong. Not even enough spare room in our luggage for a pair of pearl earrings, we figure.

At the drop point at Halong Bay we find no one on our bus (and certainly no one from our hotel) is getting on our ship. Couple by couple passengers are dropped at their respective cruise ships. We hang out in our ship's A/C'ed lobby as more and more passengers arrive. We know it's almost New Year's here, but apparently it's also spring break, there are lots of kids. We estimate the ship will be 50% westerners and 50% asian. We are pretty sure we're the only Americans.

On the 30 minute ride in the cramped tender we're told the critical information about our boat, including lifting the door handle to open rather than pushing down. You break it you buy it. And be sure to have a coaster under your drink beside your bed. We learn the boats here are in eight classes. We're on one of the better class five boats. The class eight boats go for US\$3,000 to \$4,000 a night. Yikes.

We get to the boat in time for lunch. It's a quick turn around so they use the time we're having lunch to finish cleaning up our room. It's a buffet and we heartily dig in, especially me. It's been a month so I figure it's OK for me to now have fresh green salad. The lettuce is gorgeous. We meet our waiter, his name is Tequila, easy enough to remember.

After eating we're shown to our room. It's quite nice, with a private balcony. There's a fruit basket and a bottle of wine. It's French and 25 cl (a third of a normal bottle) and the label says "Just Merlot". We enjoy the room and the balcony while we motor between some of the 2,000 tall rock islands that make up these bays. We read and periodically check to see if we have any internet. We don't.

Right at 2:30 I get quite dizzy and my body warns me to stay very close to the toilet. This is fortuitous for the next hour while I give up (orally) everything I've eaten in the past day or so. Our toilet is one of those quite fancy Japan-style automated under-bum-squirt-guns. I briefly consider using it to gargle, as I sit on the floor. I thankfully think better of the idea. Eventually I am done with that and crawl into bed for a few hours of curled up rest. So much for being safe and avoiding dangerous foods!

At dinner they bring an enormous spread of beautiful seafood. It's not for us to select from, it's for us. There are three courses plus dessert. I have a small bowl of white rice, washed down with my electrolyte water. I do my best to keep it together while the smarter of our couple, Karen, enjoys dinner and our bottle of wine. We're anchored and there are rocks and illuminated boats, not unlike ours, bobbing in the distance. It's pretty.

Back at the room I'm feeling better. For a while we do have some internet and we catch up on the news again and send a few emails. There's definitely not enough internet to add a post to the blog, sadly. That will have to wait.

I look forward to sleep (perchance to dream).

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## Photos



Karen sitting in the lobby, LIKE A BOSS. As directed.



The Pearl Store/Coffee Shop, en route



On the tender, getting important information, we guess.



Finally on the boat. It must be time to eat!  
(Lunch)



The name of our waiter. It seems scary to yell "Tequila!" from across the dining room.



Our room and you can see the patio



Scott, patio, rocky islands



Karen watching the parade of boats  
motoring in front of us.



The "pool" (6" deep) and the line of boats behind us



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Karen enjoying the sun deck, watching us get overtaken



The busy kitchen. Not a lot of room.



Our first course (after soup)



Our second course (with more/different soup)



Scott's dinner



We, and all the other boats, anchored and  
quiet for the night

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