

Post



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Rum at 6 am - April 25, 2023

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SUMMARY

Near dawn ANZAC memorial ceremony. Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum! Arrived early at the Taiwanese port of Keelung and headed out for a full day excursion to Taipei. The first stop was the beautiful Martyrs Shrine and The Changing of the Guard ceremony. Next stop - the National Palace Museum of Taipei which we're informed is one of the top five museums in the world. We fly through it with our guide so we get to see the very best stuff and then have a little time on our own. Lunch is a 100+ dish buffet at the luxurious Grand Hotel. We waddle away from there to the Bao-an Temple where we nearly suffocate from the incense offerings being burned. (Lots of people

needing a favor from their favorite god!)
Then on to the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial
Hall (89 stairs) and finally a photo stop at
the amazing Taipei 101 building, briefly
the tallest in the world. - Karen

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DETAIL

Tell me I'll be drinking rum on the cruise
ship and I'll say "tell me something I don't
know". Tell me it'll be at 6 am and now
you have my attention. Not just me but
maybe 100 others, as well. For those in
the know, April 25 is always Anzac Day
and so all of the Aussies and Kiwis aboard
are up early for their annual
remembrance. All of the ship officers are
here, too, in full dress uniform, and one of
the passengers too, from Scotland in his
kilt and all, ready to play his bagpipes.

Normally this would be happening at
sunrise, but as that's 5:21 am today, the
event organizers opt instead for the
slightly more reasonable 6 am. There are
15 items listed in the program. Originally
intended to honor those A/NZ soldiers
who gave their lives in the Gallipoli
campaign during WWI (in what is now
Turkey), today it recognizes all troops of
those two countries who gave their lives in
any war.

The campaign in Gallipoli didn't go well and part of it is recreated in the program. That's the part where 'The Last Post' is played on the bugle after which there's a minute of silence, followed by the playing of "Rouse". Normally any surviving soldiers would have responded to 'The Last Post', but there weren't any. It's heartbreaking. The very end of the ceremony is the playing of Amazing Grace on the bagpipes. The performer (passenger) is one deck above us and towards the end he turns, continues playing, and marches away. The tune fades into nothing. Extremely moving.

Next? The alcohol. As happens every Anzac Day what comes next is the meal these soldiers had before battle, to steady the nerves: Anzac biscuits and hot milk with rum. Everyone partakes. My goodness the drink is strong! And if you've never had these biscuits (er, cookies), they're awesome. Find a recipe and make a batch.

We're at port, on the island of Taiwan, about 13 miles from Taipei, in the city of Keelung ("Cheelong"). We board the bus for our tour and head towards the island's capital. We note that the buildings look quite grungy and that theme holds for the remainder of the tour (with the exception of the Taipei 101 building area).

Along the drive our hilarious grizzled old-ish male tour guide, Loo, keeps us in stitches while conveying information, and 'allowed' opinion. The first stop is Martyrs Shrine, where we watch the changing of the guard, followed by a visit to the National Palace Museum of Taipei.

What palace, you might ask? It's the Forbidden City Palace, in Beijing. When Chiang Kai-shek was packing up to depart from the mainland (for Formosa/Taiwan, just temporarily, don't you know) he just grabbed all of the valuable stuff in the Forbidden City and brought it with him. The most awesome stuff in China? We're about to see it. I can imagine Mainland China being a tad miffed about this.

The museum is pretty amazing. The craftsmanship in forming these works of art on (or out of) wood, jade, porcelain, paper, etc. would be amazing today. That it was done 100s (and more often 1000s) of years ago is even more astonishing.

After a couple of hours at the museum we're hungry and so do what Chiang Kai-shek would have done, we head to The Grand Hotel. Many people have stayed here, including Eisenhower, Nixon, Reagan, and Clinton. With a roster like that you can imagine how many other famous people, actors, and heads of state visited. Our lunch is impressive and yummy. There is a tap with beer (help yourself), crispy duck, soups, rice dishes, sushi, sashimi, things you can't identify, and for dessert: coolers with tubs of Hagen Das and other ice creams (again, help yourself).

It's here that Karen realizes she must have set her sweater down somewhere and not picked it back up. The tour guide calls the museum, but no luck. Thankfully the ship will be motoring south to Hong Kong and on to Vietnam, so onto warmer climes (with no sweater).

We visit a temple that, single handedly, seems to be keeping the incense industry afloat. We see all of the examples of donations and money people (and businesses) are willing to give to help ensure good fortune. Next stop is the Chiang Kai-shek memorial hall. 89 steps to the entrance (one step for each year of his life). We see pictures and examples of the extremely lavish lifestyle of this self-proclaimed 'simple man of the people'.

Finally it's our last stop. The Taipei 101 building. It had briefly been the world's tallest building. It is very impressive, especially for being somewhere that the earth quakes with such regularity. We hop off the bus and take a few pictures. This is sad as we'll not see the gargantuan pendulum at the top (inside) that keeps the building from toppling in a good sized trembler.

Back on the ship we opt for dinner in the buffet Windows Café. There's featuring Indian food, which we love. The main (more formal) dining hall tonight is highlighting "A Taste of Britain" which we think is funny. Anyone in London, looking for some good food, is going out for Indian. What are we missing by not taking a "Taste of Britain"? Roast Beef and Beet salad appetizer with stilton cheese and horseradish sauce, Bubble and Squeak Cake (i.e. poached egg and sausage), Fish and Chips (with mushy peas), and Bread Pudding. Just sayin'.

Photos



Observance of Anzac Day on the ship at 6 am. We're not sure if there's a requirement to have a giant behind the speaker, but whatevs.



Anzac Day biscuit. So good. To be eaten with hot milk with lots of rum. It's not just for breakfast anymore (well, maybe it is).



The National Revolutionary Martyrs' Shrine. The changing of the guard. Karen in lock step with the soldiers. Wearing her black sweater for the last time (before leaving it somewhere).



One of two huge dragons at the National Revolutionary Martyrs' Shrine. One male, one female. How to tell them apart? Below the foot of the male is a sports ball. Below the foot of the female? A dragon cub. One plays, one works. Same as it ever was.



The changing of the guard. Performance
(and helmets) very polished.



At the National Palace Museum in Taipei.
Their religion says all things in moderation.
Including drinking. Thus they have this
drinking vessel. Drink too much? too fast?
you'll put an eye out. Smart.



An ivory ball within a ball, etc. etc.
Amazing. The ivory pagoda to the left is
many more levels tall than pictured here. It
took three generations to finish.



File under 'No accounting for taste'. One
of the categories for the valuables? Rocks
that look like meat.



If you're going to have meat out of rocks, you should have veggies, too. This is Jade bok choy. With two grasshoppers, one shown here. This is one of the top artifacts at the museum. Alas it is currently on loan so we didn't get to see it.



Back on the bus... off for more food,
groan...



Chiang Kai-shek's Grand Hotel. Very grand
indeed.



The dining hall (where we ate)



Guide Loo gives up his official tour company vest to Miss Karen to keep her warm, after she mislaid her sweater.



FARNSNIENTE



Many many ways to show that you've donated. Each light has a label saying who donated for that bulb.





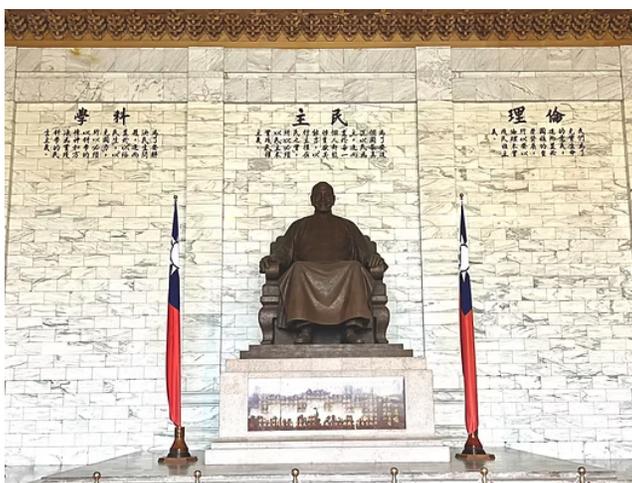
A big ole' dragon. (So many dragons)



The humble white marble memorial hall for the humble Chiang Kai-shek. Taipei 101 in the background.



The view looking out from the memorial.
The entrance gate in the distance is
amazing and huge.



Chiang Kai-shek smiling down on the
people (and guards who are mid-change)



Chiang Kai-shek in his office (ok, maybe a replica thereof)



Taipei 101. Supposedly built to look like a stalk of bamboo.



The multi-story suspended steel ball that keeps the Taipei 101 standing despite high winds and earthquakes.

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