

Post



Scott Farnsworth

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Melting statues - April 26, 2023

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SUMMARY

Another "Day at Sea" and thus another opportunity to practice our Farnsniente philosophy. We don't do much better today at "doing nothing". I spent a fair amount of time in the gym while Scott attended a couple of lectures and we both played BINGO for a chance to upgrade to a suite. We were not successful but it was a lot of fun! - Karen

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DETAIL

We awaken to another overcast day. There are whitecaps, signaling a bit of wind, but thankfully the swells are only about one meter. We hardly feel it as the boat motors along towards Hong Kong. On the horizon are a few container ships, all in the direction of the Chinese mainland and seemingly heading north. We don't see (and don't expect to see) any Somali pirates. No need for Captain Philips.

What we also haven't seen are other cruise ships. Neither when we're underway nor when we're in port. If we were going to Alaska from Vancouver, or in the Caribbean or the Mediterranean, for sure we'd see other ships. Here in the China Sea they're apparently not as common.

It's another 'day at sea'. We're starting to have a love-hate relationship with such days. The days in port are exciting and sometimes exhausting, so the "at sea" days give us a time to relax and recharge. But there's a limited number of things to do, and so it can get a little boring. Today, as with most days at sea, we have a couple of briefings we can attend.

The first briefing is at 10, after we've gotten up, dressed and had some coffee. Karen opts instead to spend a couple of hours in the gym while I attend the briefing. Again it's the learned Colonel Heino Klinck. His previous talks have been very interesting, but not always uplifting. This morning he's telling us about "Sino-Russian cooperation: the axis of authoritarianism", so again, maybe an eye opener but a bit depressing. It is indeed fascinating, and I learn a lot.

China and Russia are neighbors and cooperate when they have shared interests to keep the west in check. They'd love to change the current world order. But, earlier in history, the west gave a large amount of China's land to Russia and China would love to have it back. China is more of an 800 pound gorilla (or is it dragon) than Russia and so maybe they need to be kept more in check. And Russia isn't always thrilled with playing second fiddle to China, so maybe we can figure out a way to take advantage of those feelings.

Earlier in the trip we learned about the hotline between North and South Korea (to help keep things from getting out of hand). When we were in Seoul we gathered that there's a lot of calls to the north that simply go unanswered. Between the US and China we now hear about a similar hotline. A planned trip by US Secretary of State (Blinken) to China was cancelled due to the recent spy balloon issue. Now, as we call over there to try to reschedule, the phone in Beijing just rings and rings. Eesh.

Lunch we have in the main (formal/fancier) dining room. We're at a table for two, but our table is almost touching another table for two. Seated there are Lasse and Ingrid, young retirees from Oslo. Needless to say we practice what little Norwegian we know and discuss the joys of traveling in Scandinavia. I relate having lived near Oslo for a few months when I was ten years old. We told them the family name of the owners of the house we rented. It sounds familiar and they surmise that maybe it is Mentz Schulerud, author, Oslo expert, and the father of Norway's ambassador to Belgium (and spouse to a former Prime Minister of Norway). Googling it later we find they are right. Small world!

The afternoon briefing is on Hong Kong. What a fascinating place with an interesting history. We all know that Coca Cola originally contained cocaine, which was quite the pick me up. At the time cocaine was felt to be a medication and not a drug to be abused. In this part of the world the same was thought about Opium. The British needed to level out the trade imbalance from exporting so much tea and silk from China. Their solution was to import huge quantities of medicine (opium) into the country. This worked out for the British, but less so the Chinese. A disagreement on this resulted in a big shipment getting dumped (waylaid?) and the opium war that followed ended up with Hong Kong being given to (taken by?) the British. They leased it for 99 years (nine being a very luck number for the Chinese).

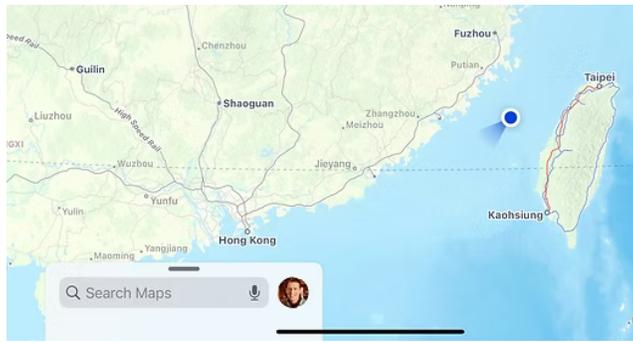
The more modern history of Hong Kong is well known, with the 1935 pegging of the Hong Kong dollar to the US dollar, and UK's 1997 return of Hong Kong to the Chinese. That last act included assurances that nothing would change for 50 years. We're now 25 years into those 50 and some stuff has changed. And not all in Hong Kong are thrilled with it. Some laws have been proposed and then scrapped (when mass protests broke out) only to be unilaterally imposed later.

We look forward to our first visit to Hong Kong tomorrow. We have a couple of excursions planned. One place we're not sure if we'll get to is Statue Park which doesn't have... you guessed it: statues. All the metal statues were absconded by the Japanese while they were occupying a good bit of China. The statues were melted down for weapons. One, of Queen Victoria, was spared and later returned to Hong Kong by the Japanese.

Later this afternoon we both attend a special BINGO game. We haven't attended any so far. The big prize for this one? The chance to move to a larger suite. Some passenger had to get off the ship and go home early, so a big suite opened up. The game was fun and we got close, but thankfully someone else was able to declare BINGO before either of us. This saved us from the ordeal of packing and re-unpacking, so it was a win-win. We're staying put til the end of the cruise.

We again have dinner outside and later Karen does her normal retreat to read in bed while I attend the ship's big 9pm music review. The ship's singers and dancers perform songs by The Byrds, Earth Wind and Fire, Simon and Garfunkel, Coldplay, The Beatles, Pharrell Williams, and others. It's campy but entertaining.

Photos



Sandwiched between the island of Taiwan and the Chinese mainland.



Hearing about the challenging, and sometimes scary, Sino-Russian relationship



In the more formal main dining hall for
lunch



Our waiter taking advantage of my camera
for a quick selfie. I take the opportunity to
photo bomb.



When Great Britain controlled Hong Kong, and wanted to land 747s, the limited land made it tricky and kept the buildings somewhat low.



FARNSNIENTE





Time for Bingo! Will we win??



No. No we won't. We, and all other losers, crumple our cards and throw them at the host. A long tradition.

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