

## REMINISCING ON A WORLD CRUISE



### SINGAPORE/KUALA LUMPUR/THAILAND

At this stage of our odyssey, the big wide world was now becoming a blur, passing too rapidly before our very eyes. Each day brought new exciting adventures to experience and store away in our memory box. We loved being on board this great ship and were beginning to wonder whether we shall ever be able to sleep without the lull of the ship's movement and its gentle hypnotic throb and hum. For weeks we have been cocooned and pampered in this luxurious, womb-like bubble, protected from the outside world and all its cares. No thought required from us other than what to wear for dinner or which show to see. Everything else was arranged and organized for us. A totally extraordinary unreal existence! One of the highlights of this mode of transport was the absolute unique view one has of places when arriving by sea and the fascinating sights that have greeted us. At sea, while sitting on our balcony in weather which has been particularly hot and humid, a thick, fog-like heat haze rolled in to almost envelope the ship like a thermal blanket. Quite eerie with definite shades of the Marie Celeste! At other times, when the seas were particularly calm, the ship

appeared to be slicing through a sheet of glass. We spent hours watching the seas and scanning the horizon for other vessels. We saw many gigantic container ships and tankers which we



eagerly scanned through binoculars. Occasionally we would sight a tiny craft with a single occupant, floating literally in the middle of nowhere, a school of leaping dolphins or flying fish, or birds diving for fish. It's definitely a fantastic life which we embraced with arms wide open. Each dawn broke in a personally uncharted sea, with a new vista and many mountains to be climbed!

This leg of our journey was particularly interesting and eye-opening, being that of a culture so far removed from our own.

### SINGAPORE



Singapore is an island and a city, one of the cleanest and greenest in the world, and is home to people of many different races and creeds, speaking a total of 54 languages, but who all manage to live together in harmony. We started this hot and humid day with an excursion which took us firstly

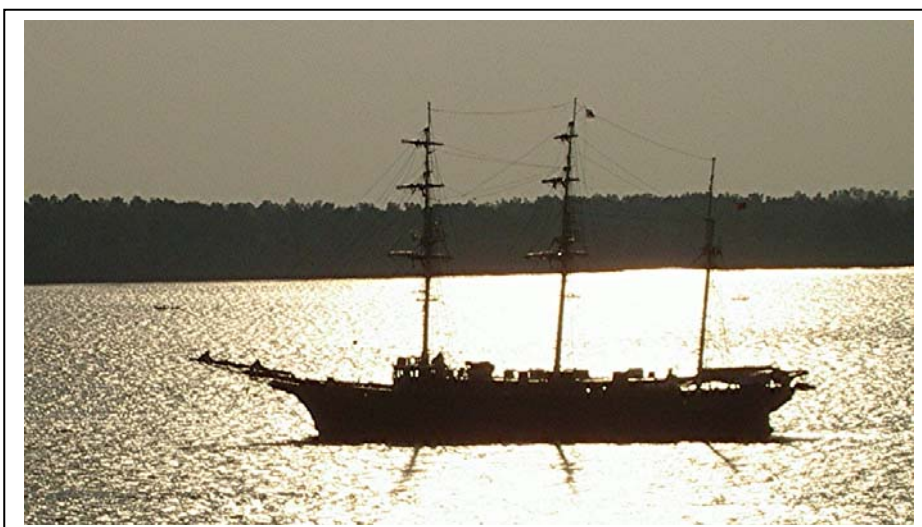
to Mount Faber, the second highest point in Singapore, where we had spectacular views of the city.

From here one can take a cable car across to Sentosa Island, a leisure resort, but unfortunately we lacked the time. As can be seen from the above picture, the cable car actually passes through the hotel, which was built at a later date. Next we visited the Botanic Gardens which were absolutely beautiful, very tropical, lush and filled with many stunning orchid species, one of which is named after Margaret Thatcher!

After the tour finished, we visited the Long Bar in Raffles Hotel where the floor is littered with the shells of peanuts, bowls of which are left on the tables with customers being encouraged to throw them onto the floor. And if the customers won't, then the staff will! We thought it would be fun to then catch a Trishaw to our next destination but oh what a mistake we made! We found an interesting version outside Raffles. Instead of the cyclist being positioned behind the seat, the bicycle was alongside, rather like a sidecar, which consequently made the vehicle rather wide. On it was sitting a tiny, exceptionally thin, frail elderly man of at least 100 who assured us he could carry us both. And so began the "Journey from Hell". Stupidly we both hopped on to the narrow seat while this man really struggled to move us. Somehow he managed to get going and manoeuvred us at a snail's pace into the fast lane of an extremely busy three lane highway which was exceedingly unnerving to say the least. How no-one hit us we shall never know! Speeding cars weaved around us, while others hooted and braked heavily to our rear. On one occasion he dismounted and tried to push us! John and I kept glancing fearfully at one another and exclaiming our horror in whispers while he slumped precariously over the handlebars. His rasping became quite alarming and by the time he was gasping for breath and looking seriously unwell with sweat cascading from every visible orifice, we pleaded for him to let us off. During his death rattle he then had the audacity to charge us £25 for this ten minute hair-raiser, presumably to pay for his medical treatment. However, we were just relieved to still be breathing and speedily legged it away into the dark depths of Singapore.



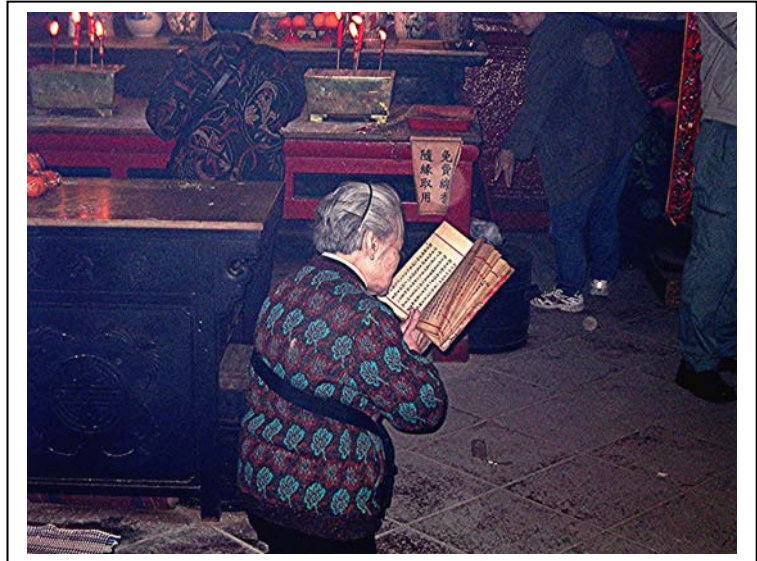
## **KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia**



Much of Malaysia is mountainous with about 80% still covered by rain forests and populated by a variety of cultures. We thoroughly enjoyed our arrival in Port Kelang, a busy commercial harbour where many interesting and varied vessels were anchored. The early morning dawn mist bathed the harbour and ships in a saffron light from the rising sun, and

the unforgettable sight resembled a Turner masterpiece. Incredibly atmospheric! Opposite our balcony was an isthmus of mangrove swamps where small fishing boats were already about their business. The day was extremely hot, humid and sunny. A one hour coach drive took us to the capital of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur (translates as Muddy River) where we spent the day. We visited the amazing Petronas Twin Towers, gigantic bullet shaped buildings constructed of glass and

stainless steel, and connected by an upper walkway. They are 88 stories in height due to the Chinese belief that the number eight has magical powers and brings luck. Travelling on to the other side of the city we reached China Town where we visited Masjid Jamek, Kuala Lumpur's oldest Mosque, with onion-shaped domes, arched colonnades and marble floors, the clock tower of which is topped by a magnificent copper dome. It is necessary for women to cover both head and shoulders here. Then on to the Sri Mahamariamman Hindu Temple which was built in 1873 and is said to be the most ornate and elaborate temple in Malaysia – intricate carvings, gold embellishments, hand-painted motifs and exquisite tiles from Italy and Spain. It was necessary to remove our shoes here. Then by pure perseverance and questioning of very helpful passers-by we managed to find two Chinese Temples which were hidden away at the back of narrow, overcrowded streets. In fact we were looking for only one, the Sze Yah, so were thrilled to uncover another.



These temples are utterly enthralling, with many individual ceremonies in progress, everyone around us performing their own personal, separate ritual. It was a long, hot and tiring day but thoroughly interesting and enjoyable.

## **PHUKET ISLAND, THAILAND**

It's impossible to describe how it felt to be anchored overnight in the very bay (Patong) where the Tsunami had struck less than three month's before. Once ashore in the morning, we were able to recognize the beachfront from television news items of film taken by guests in beachside hotels. The devastation was still in evidence but it was very obvious that everyone was working hard to repair the physical damage. We were transported to the mainland in a picturesque coach, adorned with pretty frilly curtains. The seats were extremely comfortable with an amazing amount of leg room. At the flick of a switch they swung backwards and by raising the leg rest platform one could have a very comfortable horizontal snooze. We travelled past acres of rubber plantations, pineapple farms, coconut trees etc. and glimpsed many magnificent Thai temples as we flew by. Our Thai tour guide jabbered away throughout the journey and obviously found herself very amusing, as she shrieked with laughter at whatever she was saying but none of us could understand a word during the entire lengthy coach and subsequent boat trip!



On arrival at Phang-Nga Bay we embarked a traditional motorized long boat with an exceptionally noisy engine for a very long, uncomfortable and wet journey. We sat on hard wooden unfixed slatted benches and, as the boat was very low in the water, were constantly sprayed and needed to shield ourselves from a complete drenching by holding aloft our lifejackets, which had the added effect of blocking the view. This area has incredible limestone formations bursting out of the sea and which are most familiar from their appearance in the James Bond film, 'The Man with the Golden Gun'. There are dramatic sights as towering limestone stacks rise like pinnacles out of the calm shallow waters. Peering through the raised lifejacket, we managed to see mangroves and jungle-covered limestone rocks in many weird and wonderful shapes, some like melted candle wax, as well as a spectacular high cliff that appears to



have been split in two, the halves supported by leaning against each other. During the three hour trip it was necessary for our boat to make an unscheduled stop on a minute uninhabited island to rescue passengers from another of the boats which had begun to take on water. We all sat mesmerized as it completely sank before our very eyes and then become concerned as the distraught passengers all piled onto our boat which was consequently getting lower and lower in the water with the additional weight.

Everyone being safely on board, however, our journey progressed to Ko Panyi Island. This island is



known as 'Sea Gypsy Island', and is the location of an entire Thai Muslim fishing village of about 500 households, built on stilts in the sea and connected by wooden bridges. Fishing is their economic mainstay. Although walking around this village was fascinating, in truth it was not a very pleasant experience, particularly as the tide was out. The overall smell was appalling as the conditions in which they live are foul and squalid, with the intense heat of the day adding to the nauseating stench. Interestingly, whilst walking around the village school, the children were very smartly attired in a uniform of white crisply ironed shirts and looked immaculately clean.



This joyous experience ended with a further lengthy boat trip, lunch at a waterside hotel, and two more hours of jabbering and ear-splitting shrieks from our guide. Not one of our better days!

**Maria Dillon**