

Durban

We arrive in Durban, South Africa at 8 am on a grey and humid day. We have a city tour planned for this morning, and we will spend the afternoon on the ship, where we will catch up with our writing and e-mails.

We have been told of the worsening crime situation in South Africa, where tourists are advised to stay together in a group of no less than 6 people. We have also been told to take off all jewellery and to take only essential items such as bottled water ashore. Most people take a camera, well hidden on their person, and a small amount of the local currency. After our incident in Mauritius, we are not going ashore at all this afternoon, except for the local traders stalls set up on the quayside.

The city tour this morning gives us an insight into this cosmopolitan city. Durban has the largest Indian population outside India, and part of the tour involves driving through the Indian quarter, where hundreds of pavement stalls sell everything from fruit to Saris.

The area around the docks is very run down, with collapsing buildings covered in graffiti, litter strewn everywhere and ragged children sleeping in the rubbish on the pavement. Our guide tells us that most of these children have lost their immediate families through AIDS, and many have been introduced to drugs by unscrupulous people who wish to use them as prostitutes. They paint a very sorry picture indeed.

However, there are also some very rich people here too. One area of the city is being redeveloped right now: buildings are being levelled, new roads are being built and a new waterway is being prepared, so that the rich who buy homes here can sail their private yachts to their front doors.

The city tour also visits the Natural History Museum where we see stuffed birds and animals, including elephants, lions, vultures and even a dodo. There are a number of school trips here today and the school children, dressed in their crisp uniforms are polite and friendly.



Central Durban



Natural history museum, Durban

The Botanical Gardens are next on the list, and they certainly are impressive. Ibis fly overhead and strut around on the grass, and the orchid house has many beautiful orchids and bromeliads. There are a few specimens of Woods cycads which are very rare, and are being propagated here by cuttings from the all male plants that are only found in this part of Natal.



Durban Botanical Gardens



Tonight we sail towards our next South African stop at Cape Town.