

St Helena

We are on deck at 6 am today to watch the Van Gogh sail into the harbour area of Jamestown, on the island of St Helena. We had hoped to pick up an internet signal as we neared the shore, but this was not to be.

The ship is at anchor, and all passengers have been issued with tickets for the tender boats to take us ashore. Each boat is capable of carrying 50 people, and 2 boats will be used to speed up the process.

Unfortunately, because of the heavy swell today, it is taking around 20 minutes to load up each boat, and we wait patiently on deck for our numbered tickets to be called. Some of the local people come aboard the Van Gogh, and we buy postcards and stamps from them, we can write the postcards while we wait and post them ashore. Eventually we set foot on St Helena at 10.30am. We have just 1 ½ hours on the island, as the Van Gogh sails on to Ascension Island at 12.30.

Jamestown is a charming little town, with a 1950's feel about it. Faded colonial style buildings with wrought iron balconies sit alongside brightly coloured shops which are accessed via stone steps. There is a small park with colourful Crotons, Geraniums and Impatiens. In the centre of the park is a fountain, a small pond and some interesting topiary, including a bird and egg in a nest, and a large hand complete with wrist watch!



The town has only one street, and is in a narrow valley between steep brownstone cliffs. If we had enough time we could walk up the 699 steps of "Jacob's Ladder" to see the old English fort there, and the view of Jamestown from the top of the cliff. Some of the passengers from the earlier tenders are already making their way back down. Alongside the Ladder, which was hewn out of the cliff side in 1829, is a small museum depicting the history of this fascinating island and its inhabitants who are called "Saints".

Who is coming down Jacobs Ladder?

The people, who are descended from British colonials, freed African slaves and Asians are very friendly. They all speak English with a strange (to us) accent, and the pace of life seems relaxed and peaceful.

Some of the passengers have opted to travel on organised tours to the centre of the island, where they visit the old Governor's house, complete with its ancient tortoises, and also Napoleon's house and tomb. The transport for these excursions is a mix of old trucks and buses, and we see many old cars on the roads



Jamestown, St Helena

All too soon it is time for us to leave this island, taking with us some wonderful memories of this lovely land and its charming people.