

ORANJESTAD, ARUBA, DECEMBER 21<sup>st</sup> 2007

We have been experiencing some rough weather since leaving the Panama Canal, and we have been told that our arrival into the Caribbean island of Aruba will be delayed. We are told that we will dock at 7 pm or thereabouts, instead of the 1 pm arrival time given in the itinerary.

However, we are not prepared at all for the further announcement this afternoon which informs us all, lecturers, crew and passengers alike, that Travelscope have ceased trading. Fortunately for us, we are preparing work in our cabin for the next computer lesson, and do not have to face the disgruntled and disappointed passengers face to face.

By the time we surface on deck, the mood is one of reluctant acceptance, although many rumours are circulating amongst the passengers. Stories so far include "the ship will be impounded because it cannot pay the berthing fees", "passengers who get off the ship will not be able to get back on", "we will have to go straight back home", "deposits paid for the next world cruise will be lost" and "there will be no transport laid on for disembarking passengers in Falmouth".

Passengers are worried that they will not be able to contact their families back home to arrange alternative travel arrangements for the 4<sup>th</sup> of January. After all, we are only 3 days away from the UK's 2 week Christmas holiday. Travelscope staff are walking around with very glum faces, not only do they have to cope with angry or despondent passengers, but they also have no idea whether they will be paid this month, or even if they have a job at all. It is a worrying time for everyone.



The ship docks at 4.30 pm, ahead of the revised schedule, and there is a mass exodus of passengers and staff towards the town of Oranjestad. We do not want to stay on the ship and listen to the moans and groans, so we decide to find a quiet restaurant and have a meal.

Firstly though, we walk along the length of the waterfront to take a few photographs. The island of Aruba is only 20 miles long by 6 miles wide, and its capital, Oranjestad is an immaculate, up market town with designer shops, which include Louis Vuitton and Gucci. The houses are all Dutch style, and in bright

shades of yellow, orange and pink, with white embellishments. In fact, the whole town has a Disneyland feel about it.

Christmas is a low key affair here - just a few Christmas trees dotted around the seafront, and a nativity scene outside a local church. It is nice to shop without all the fuss and hassle we would have at home: no queues in Tesco, no parking problems and no stocking up with food we would have to eat for weeks to come!



This is obviously an affluent island, with a casino, lots of jewellery shops and big named stores, and all at duty free prices. We both buy matching Skagen watches at less than half the price we would have paid back home.

There is a regular procession of passengers returning to the ship with carrier bags full of duty free spirits, cigarettes, electrical goods and other souvenirs. As the sun sets, and the evening rush hour begins, we see the large new expensive cars queuing around the town's narrow streets. In fact, we are amused at one posh, two-seater, open-top sports car, with twin DVDs set into the headrests. The only people who could see, and hear the very loud DVD playing were the pedestrians walking down the pavements behind the car!

We decide to eat at an Indian restaurant called the Taj Mahal, where we sample the local beer, called Bilashi, and have some totally different, and pleasant tastes. The prices are dearer than we have experienced so far on this cruise, but still cheaper than in the UK. Only 2 more passengers have found this restaurant, which is in a side street in the town, so it is nice and quiet.

When we arrive back at the Van Gogh, we congregate up on deck to watch the ship sail at 10pm. More rumours are circulating; a member of the ship's crew tells us that the owners of the ship, (Club Cruise) are going to buy out Travelscope and continue with the next world cruise as normal. However, another passenger tells us that his son back home has seen a report on the BBC's website which states that ABTA will not allow the cruise to go ahead at all. We will all just have to wait and see.

