

## MINDELO, SAO VICENTE, CAPE VERDE ISLANDS

Last year when we visited the islands of Cape Verde, we berthed in the port of Praia, on the island of Sao Tiago. We were not impressed with the town, there were many dubious characters crowding the pavements, and the whole town felt intimidating. This time, we initially planned to stay on the ship for the short stay in Cape Verde.

However, a few days before our planned arrival in Praia, the port and town in Cape Verde were changed. This time, when we arrive in the town of Mindelo, on the neighbouring island of Sao Vicenti, we choose to go ashore with our friends Tony and Sheila.

We are pleasantly surprised with the town, and its inhabitants, and feel fairly safe wandering around on our own. OK, there are a few persistent street sellers, who try to sell us shawls, necklaces and hand carved wooden items. Apparently these sellers are from Senegal which is the nearest country to these North Atlantic Islands.

The town is clean, with paved squares where we rest on wooden benches surrounded by flower beds. The buildings are a mixture of old Colonial, some renovated, and more modern low rise buildings. We even spot an ALDI, with bright pink, peeling paint! The usual method of carrying goods here appears to be by brightly painted round bowls, which are balanced on the owners' heads. Underneath the bowl, the owner places a ring of cloth which helps with the balance.



The climate here is very dry, and there is no grass at all, the bare cliffs rising sharply outside the town. Overlooking Mindelo is an ancient fort, and those

passengers who climb to the top of the hill can see many new houses being built on the other side. The Cape Verde Islands are being hailed as the "New Tenerife", and in the town itself are many real estate agents. There is just one hotel here, a modest 2 story affair, and the reception staff seems overwhelmed with the large number of Van Gogh passengers who want to buy postcards, stamps and maps.

Prices in the shops are very cheap, and we buy a few souvenirs for very little money. A number of Van Gogh passengers can be seen carrying carrier bags full of cheap drink, clothes and shoes. We sit at an open air cafe and enjoy a cup of coffee, and visit an internet cafe to catch up on our emails. An hour's use of the fast service is just \$1.

As we walk back to the ship, we pass a large wall which has been painted with many different murals. It is refreshing to see that the wall has not been vandalised, and in fact we have not seen any graffiti in the town at all.



We are pleasantly surprised by Mindelo. There is a great deal of potential here, and the people are polite and helpful, such a contrast to the other island that we visited last year.

