

Day 26 Aug. 19 – Reykjavik, Iceland – Blue Lagoon – Icelandic Entertainers

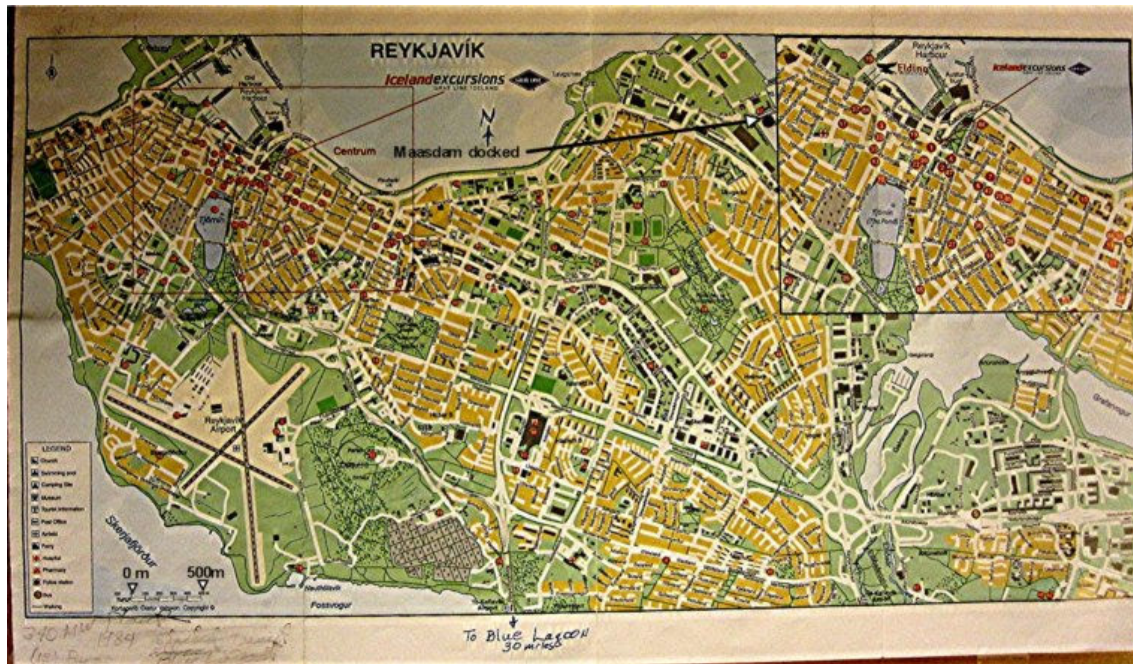
The day started with intermittent light rain falling on the decks as the Maasdam was sailing towards Reykjavik, Iceland. We weren't scheduled to dock in Reykjavik until 2pm so the morning and afternoon routine was basically in the kick-back at-sea mode. We worked on the blog and basically took it easy.

About 1pm the ship began the approach to Reykjavik harbor. The location of Reykjavik on the island of Iceland is shown in the map on the right. The entrance of the channel was kind of narrow and there were some rocks poking their heads up but we made it in safely.



We docked at Korngardur Pier in Sundahofn Harbor which was also occupied by the smaller cruise ship Black Watch of the Fred Olsen Cruise Line. The "Welcome to Reykjavik" sign (in three languages) was out in front of the Cruise Passenger Terminal to greet us when we arrived.

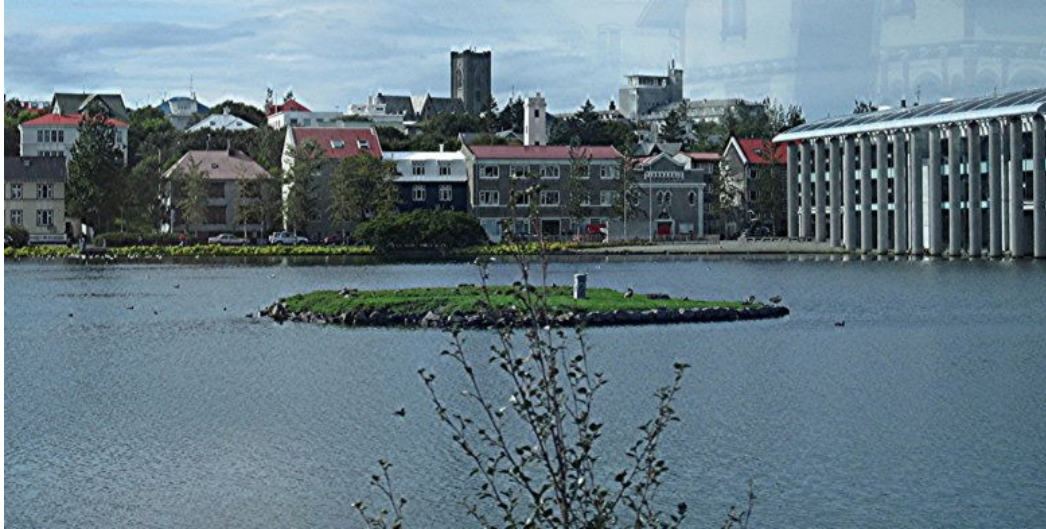
A street map for Reykjavik is shown below with the location of the Maasdam indicated in the harbor east of the center of town.



We were eager to go ashore and start our visit to this new town. Reykjavik and surrounding suburbs is home to about half of Iceland's population of 283,000 people so it was much different from the small villages we had been visiting in Iceland. It's always fun to start learning about a new city by taking a tour. However, it was raining when we left the ship about 3pm so that put a halt to any leisurely stroll around while plans congealed. We hustled over to the Cruise Passenger Terminal to see what kind of tours was available this afternoon. We had purchased a Holland America 8 hour tour of several sites outside of Reykjavik for tomorrow so this afternoon we just wanted a little touring around the Reykjavik area. We had thought of taking a Hop-On Hop-Off (HOHO) bus tour of the city and then visiting the famous Blue Lagoon spa, south of Reykjavik.

We found the passenger terminal was in chaos as about 100 wet Maasdam cruise passengers with the same agenda as us were trying to get their tours lined up and out of there as soon as possible. It turned out the HOHO buses went out of service at 5pm so with so little time left today we cancelled that option. We now concentrated on getting out to the Blue Lagoon and walking around that spa facility without going into the water. The Blue Lagoon trip by taxi seemed very expensive as posted on a sign outside indicating 170 Euro (\$260 USD) for 4 people one-way (\$65 USD each). After waiting unsuccessfully for the chaos at the Cruise Terminal tour desk to subside we made our way to the downtown office of Gray Line Iceland Excursions. There we found a very calm and efficient person who sold us two round-trip bus tickets to the Blue Lagoon for 36 Euro total (the equivalent of \$55 USD). The rain had stopped and we were on our way to the Blue Lagoon by 4:15 pm with a return ride scheduled for 7pm. Life is good!

There were only 6 passengers on the bus and the driver was a congenial guy who gave us a rather informal description of the local sites as we went along. We passed by a small lake in the middle of downtown Reykjavik lined with some nice looking homes and public buildings, as shown below.



The Blue Lagoon is about 30 south of Reykjavik and our bus took us to a major highway heading out of town in the right direction as indicated at the bottom of the Reykjavik street map.



We took this photograph to show that Reykjavik has modern and busy roads like most large western cities we have visited. They drive on the right hand side of the road, consistent with the US, Canada and most European cities.

We spotted a gas station that posted a gasoline price of 189.9 Kroner per liter. At the exchange rate of \$1 USD = 128 Kroner that works out to \$1.48 USD per liter. There are approximately 4 liters per gallon so that yields a cost of about \$5.93 USD per gallon.



The road soon took us through a vast field of broken lava that extended out to the sea on our right as we drove south. There were roads and occasional developments from time to time along the highway. For example they have managed to carve out a golf course that



winds its way through the lava. This photo on the left shows one of the greens where someone had parked his golf cart and was probably looking for a golf ball amongst the rocks.

Not far away was an aluminum production plant. It turns out that geothermal energy from the hot rocks under Iceland can be tapped to make electricity by producing steam and running turbine generators. The electricity is so inexpensive that it is economical to ship the raw materials for aluminum all the way from Australia to Iceland where the electricity is used to process the raw materials into aluminum metal. Here is a photo of part of the plant which is owned by ALCAN. Note the pier for ocean-going vessels and a few cranes for handling cargo.



About 40 minutes after starting our journey we spotted a plume of steam in the distance. The driver explained that the steam was coming from the 340MW electrical power plant that was the source of the



Blue Lagoon. He explained that during construction of the power plant holes were bored deep into the lava foundation of the site. A system was put in place to pump water down to the extremely hot rock where it is heated above 100°C but does not boil because of the high pressure at that depth.

The extremely hot water is returned to the surface where it flashes into steam as the pressure is reduced. The steam is fed into turbine generators which spin to produce electricity. Most of the steam is condensed to water in the process and pumped back into the earth but some escapes into the atmosphere which produces the white plume that we could see. There is also a waste stream of condensed steam that is water containing a high concentration of minerals dissolved from the rocks deep within the earth. That waste water was originally considered an environmental disaster as the salty water worked its way into the local water table and ponds of salty water grew in size.

Then, in about 1984, some sharp marketing people became aware of claims that the hot mineral water had curative power, especially for a skin condition called psoriasis. That claim was then generalized to appeal to anyone who wanted healthy skin and enjoyed lolling about in lukewarm water. They concluded that it would be possible to charge people money to swim or just wade around in the water that had originally been deemed an environmental problem. The whole marketing scheme was enhanced tremendously by the fact that the mineral water had a pale blue color. Venture money was raised and a portion of the lava bed near the power plant was configured to produce shallow pools of the blue water with hot mineral water from the power plant being introduced into a controlled swimming area. The overflow from the controlled pools was led out to a series of outer cold ponds in the lava field where the water evaporated or was eventually drained off into the ocean a mile or so away. Apparently some engineering was also put in place to solve the problem of the salty water in the ponds contaminating the local water table. The facility was given the alluring name of “Blue Lagoon”.

Within the controlled Blue Lagoon area a charge on the order of about \$30 USD is made for anyone who wants to shower, put on a swimming suit and immerse themselves in the warm salty water for an hour or so. Holland America sells a 3 hour round trip tour to the Blue Lagoon, including bathing in the water, for \$97 USD. A super deluxe Holland America tour, with luxurious accommodations and treatment is offered for a price of \$459 USD. Although on the expensive side, the Blue Lagoon spa is a tremendous attraction near Reykjavik. It not only makes money but acts as a wonderful icon for the Blue Lagoon Products Company that has bloomed into a significant player in the cosmetic field. Check out the rack of products in the picture on the right. Ya gotta love the entrepreneurial genius that could turn an environmental problem



into such a commercial success.



Shortly after spotting the plumes of steam we pulled into the Blue Lagoon parking lot. The bus driver told us to be back at the bus by 7pm and he would take us back to Reykjavik. He also had the suggestion for anyone going into the water to first saturate their hair with conditioner to protect it from damage by the salty water.

The first thing on our agenda was to document the fact of Barbara's visit to the famous Blue Lagoon. She triumphantly displayed her card while Orlin took this picture on the left.

We then set out to explore the place. Before a visitor even sets eyes on the blue waters there is a beautiful scene of moss covered lava boulders all around the area. We were fascinated by the moss and took these pictures. We saw similar moss on other lava fields around the region but here around the Blue Lagoon area it was most luxurious and about 2 inches deep.



Shown below is what the moss looks like close-up.



The moss is obviously a variety that can survive the cold winters and then thrive in the short summer warmth.



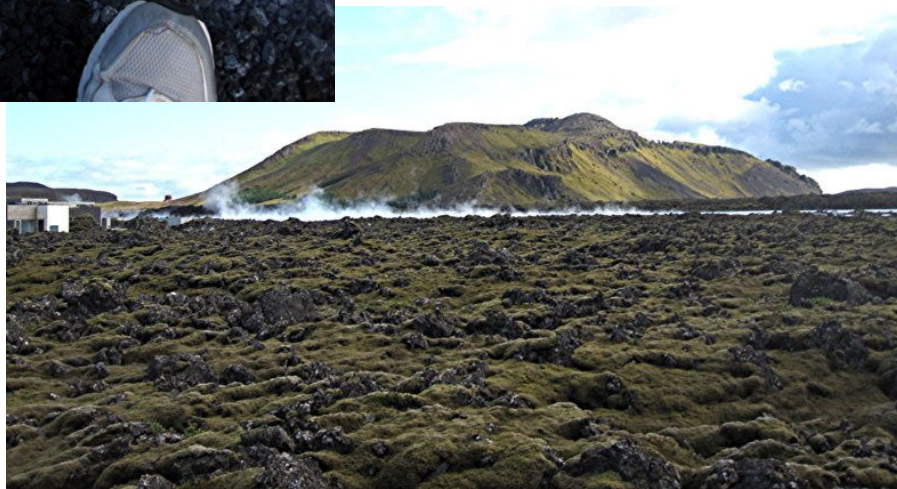
After our little moss investigation it was time to check out the Blue Lagoon. We walked through a path that had been dug through a mound of lava rock, as shown on the left.

We passed up going immediately into the bath house so that we could take a walk through the lava bed where the drainage from the warm spa area collects in pools. The water was actually a pale blue color that justifies the name of Blue Lagoon. The following are a series of photos we took of this beautiful site.

The white material around the edge of the blue water is a crystalline salt deposit. A close up view of the stuff is shown below. The toe of Orlin's shoe is in the picture to give a sense of scale.



Across a bed of moss covered lava rocks steam could be seen rising from the waste water outlet of the power plant.



After this brief stroll around the pools of blue water runoff from the spa we went inside the Blue Lagoon building which housed the business operation including the locker rooms, showers, restaurant, gift shop, and viewing platform. We immediately saw a great number of people enjoying the warm water of the Blue Lagoon as shown in these pictures. Note the white crystalline deposit of minerals that decorates the edge of the pool.



The pictures below were taken from an observation deck that is open to the public.

This photo below shows the electric power plant in the background and the Blue Lagoon by-product in the foreground.



Earlier we had decided to pass up the opportunity to soak in the warm Blue Lagoon waters and were happy to just take in the scene. However, most of the people we talked to who had gone into the water said they enjoyed the experience. The people we saw in the pool sure seemed to be having a good time.

Before leaving to catch our bus we took a break in the coffee shop next to the spa area.

We caught our Gray Line bus back to Reykjavik. The friendly driver even dropped us off at the pier where the Maasdam was docked. After this good experience with Gray Line we have resolved to check them out when looking at tour options in the future.



Later in the evening there was a group of singers and dancers from

Reykjavik who came on board and put on a show for the Maasdam passengers. The show was led by a talented and extremely energetic lady named Porunn Clausen. Rather than traditional Icelandic songs they mainly sang well known songs popular over the years in the US. However, they hammed it up making funny gestures toward each other as they sang and they got into the audience in a playful way. Here are some photos we took.



Porunn Clausen is the lady in the white sweater.

In this scene they were doing a version of the song “YMCA” with a backwards “C”.



Part of the show was four dancers who performed traditional Icelandic dances while dressed in authentic woolen costumes that were over 100 years old. Here is a picture of one scene.



We thought they all put on a great show. The audience gave them a standing ovation.

The Maasdam will spend the night docked in Reykjavik and we will be in port until about 5pm tomorrow night. We have a Holland America tour planned that will take most of the day. Now that we have our curiosity satisfied on the subject of the Blue Lagoon we will check out some other famous sights.