

**Day 24 Aug. 17 – Torshavn, Faroe Islands – VAT Refund – Medical Evacuation Cost**

The day started with a calm sea, a light breeze, temperature of 55°F and intermittent sun through broken clouds. The Maasdam was cruising through a series of small islands that are part of the Faroe Island chain.



Closer to the harbor were these wind turbines, on the right, which seem to be located in most of the port cities we visit.



We got these photos of the city of Torshavn as the Maasdam was being docked.



From this distance the housing development up on the hill looked like a typical suburban subdivision scene in the US.

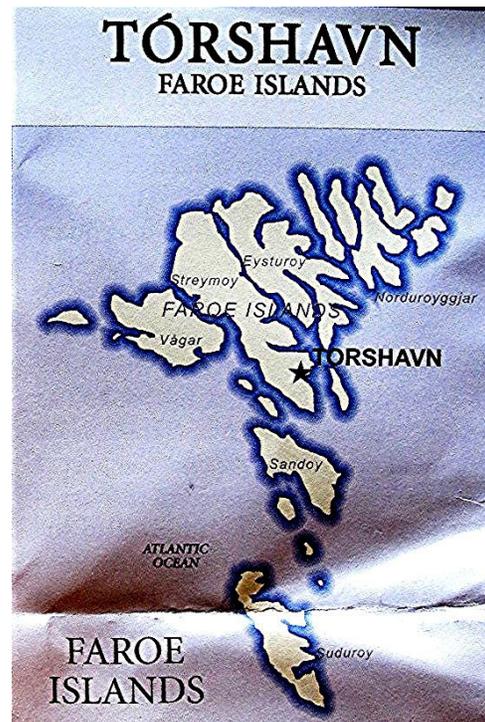
The housing down closer to the port looked more like old European style houses with winding streets as shown below



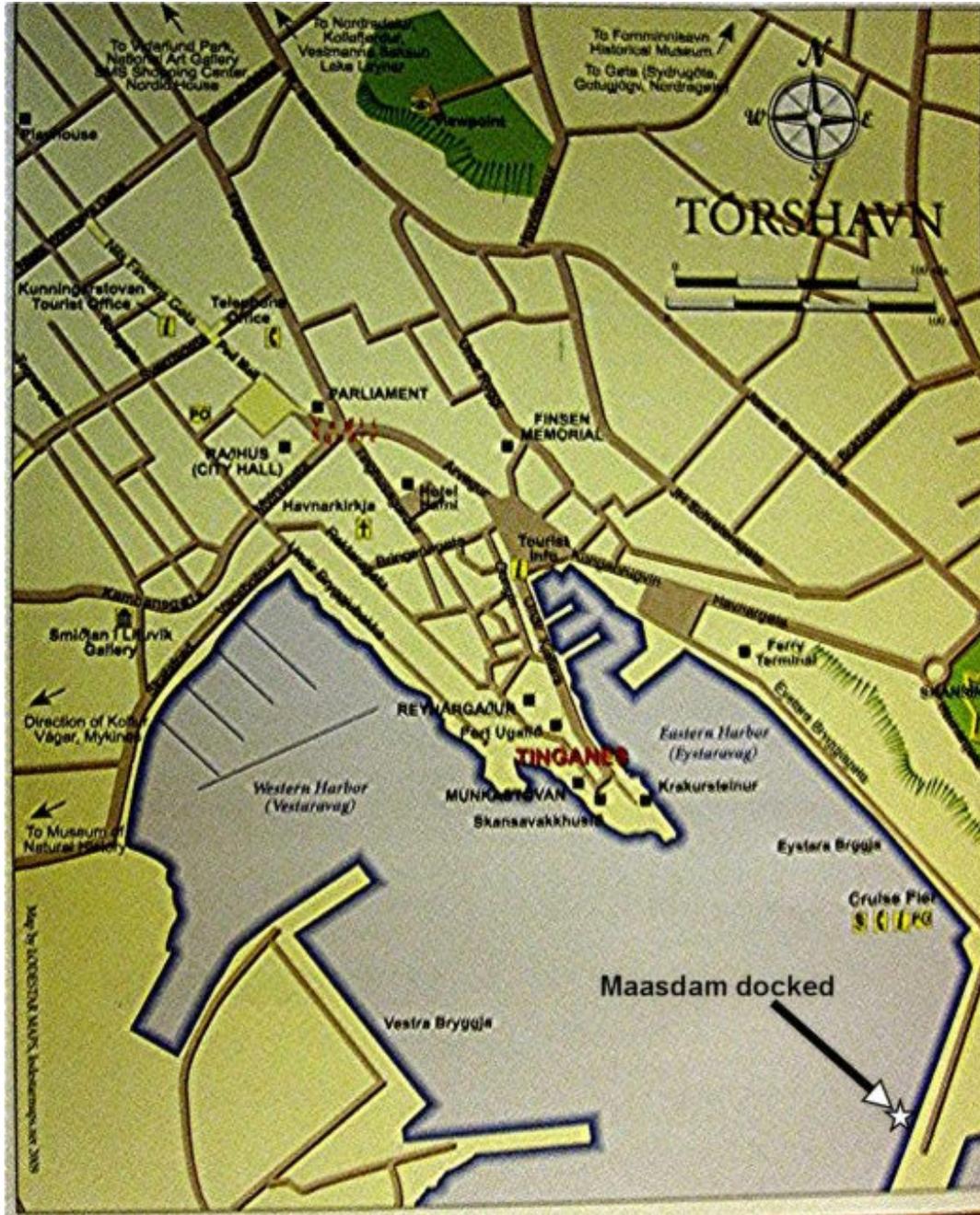
About 7:30am the Maasdam was docked at the Cruise Pier in the harbor at Torshavn.

The map on the right shows where Torshavn is located in the Faroe Islands.

Torshavn is the capital city of the Faroe Islands, Denmark, and is located on the southeastern end of Strymoy Island. In the early 9<sup>th</sup> century, the first parliament, called the Althing, was set up. This government was dissolved when the Faroe Islands were incorporated into Norway in 1035, and then reformed in 1380 when Norway was absorbed into Denmark. The town of Torshavn has served as the central place for economic activity, such as fishing, transport and trade, in the Faroe Islands over the years.



**Touring Torshavn:** By 9am we were ready to leave the ship and take a walking tour around Torshavn. Below is a street map showing some of the sights of the city.



The cruise ship, Tahitian Princess, had arrived after us and was anchored out in the harbor, as shown on the right.

The Tahitian Princess passengers had to take the tender boats to and from the ship. We were glad to have escaped that ordeal in this port. There was an

interesting phenomenon during the day in Torshavn when people passed on the streets. The cruise ship passengers were a mix of the world nations but somewhat

more US and Canadian. We could usually distinguish between residents and cruise ship people but we couldn't tell which ship the passengers came from.



There was a shuttle bus to take us from the bottom of the gangway to the entrance of the port about a half mile away toward town. The bus dropped us off and the short walk in to town took us by the busy ferry boat landing. Torshavn is a central port for transportation between the various Faroe Islands and international destinations in Europe. Every hour large ferry boats were coming and going and the process of loading and unloading cars and trucks was a study in efficiency. Shown below is one of the large ocean going ferry boats arriving. There was a ramp at the back that could be let down to load and unload vehicles.



This ferry boat had an opening at the front to load and unload the cars and trucks.



It was a short walk from where the bus let us off to the central part of Torshavn. We stopped at the Tourist Information Center to get maps and some postcards. There was a bookstore as part of the building and Barbara found a book in two languages

with a title consisting only of her name. The book is the life story of a woman who grows up in the Faroe Islands. We asked the store clerk if Barbara was a popular name for girls in the Faroe Islands and they said it was very popular. Later we found this boat with the name "Barbara" in the harbor as shown below.



There just might be some Viking heritage hiding in Barbara's otherwise English woodpile.

We found a pedestrian mall here in Torshavn, just like in the big cities of Liverpool and Glasgow. However, at this early hour, before many of the shops opened, the traffic was sparse. We enjoyed the lack of crowds as we toured Torshavn in the cool morning air.

The commercial areas looked prosperous and were sometimes blended with residential buildings. Here is an example of what we saw.



There was a modern covered shopping mall about a half mile from the waterfront. The exterior was very plain without the flashy signage that we are used to in the US. However, inside it was much like any shopping mall that

might be found in a small US city. Here, on the right, is an example of how it looked.

Torshavn is the capital of the Faroe Islands province in the nation of Denmark. It claims to be the smallest capital city in the world.



When we checked our map we found that we had walked by the Parliament Building and hadn't even noticed it. We backtracked down some picturesque winding lanes, like the one on the left, toward city center to see if we could find the Parliament Building.

Sure enough, there was the rather undistinguished Parliament Building with a bronze bust of an important historical person (Rasmus Feersoe) in the front yard.



Next door to the Parliament Building was the City Hall. In the front of the City Hall was an interesting bronze sculpture of a man carrying a huge stone. An unusual feature of the sculpture was that the bronze man was carrying a real rock as shown on the left.

We next went down to the waterfront where we found another great bronze statue honoring Nolsoyar Pall. The birds circling overhead look a bit like ravens and we wondered if this fellow was the one referred to by Michael Millwood yesterday in his lecture about early Norse explorers. He was the one who, while sailing the uncharted waters of the North Atlantic, used ravens to show him the direction to land. We thought the name referred to in the lecture was “Flock” rather than Pall so we will have to ask about this the next time we see Dr. Millwood on board the Maasdam.



Close to the statue of Pall was a nice store that had all kinds of woolen goods.



Barbara was able to find several wool head bands with colorful designs. She had been searching since we arrived in Greenland and these were just the ones she was looking for. As per our custom, a photograph was taken of the place of business where a particularly enjoyable souvenir purchase has been made.

About this time we ran into Louise and Brian (happyglobetrotters) and they told us about a wonderful local feature. The Town of Torshavn runs city buses all over the area and doesn't charge for the service. We immediately went to the bus stop and found Cruise Critic friends Carney and Kay just exiting a bus. They said the tour around town was great. We hopped on the bus and took a seat. Here, on the right, is an interior view of the standard looking bus.



The bus took us on a 30 minute round trip ride to the outskirts of Torshavn with townspeople getting on

and off the bus without paying a fare. We got to see parts of Torshavn we would never have reached on foot. We stopped at a nice looking grade school and a bunch of kids got on. They got off as the bus stopped in their neighborhoods. At one point we passed a gas station and through the bus window we snapped this picture of the posted price of gasoline. The price of gas was 8.60 Krona per liter. At the exchange rate of 1USD = 4.84 Krona that works out to about \$7 USD per gallon. The high price of gas may help the tax payers justify the “free” bus ride we were getting.



We completed the bus ride and got out at the original bus stop. We wanted to resolve a small mystery. While entering the harbor we had seen a very distinctive pyramidal structure on the hillside in Torshavn. This picture, on the left, shows the brown pyramid in the center of the photo. It seemed most likely to be a church but

there were no notations on the tourist maps we had. It was not a strenuous walk from the town center so we made the trip of discovery. It turned out to be a rather large church with this striking statue in a garden area at the front. The church had no obvious sign identifying it. As we have found in all these North Atlantic cities, they do not identify public structures with prominent signs. It's as if the thinking is that



the locals know what it is so why spend money on a sign? Anyway we eventually found this small sign near what was probably the main entrance. The name of the denomination is apparently “Vesturkirkian”. In the US such a large church would have a 6 x 8 foot sign in the front with the church name in 10 inch letters followed by the subject of next Sunday’s sermon.



Here, on the left, is what the pyramidal structure looked like close up.

We had satisfied our curiosity about the identity of the large pyramid and went on about our exploration of Torshavn.

Sprinkled around the town were many examples of sod roofed houses. Apparently the benefits of sod roofs make them worthwhile. Maybe there is also some cultural value in

clinging to the distinctive old style roofs. Here are some photos we took on our meandering walk around town.

You have got to love the sense of humor displayed by the owner of these three houses on the right. One house at the back-left appears to be a standard wooden house with a sod roof, the house in the foreground is an older looking house made of stone and with a sod roof. Then comes the ultra modern geodesic dome house with highly reflective walls, expansive windows and, surprisingly, a sod roof.



Here are some examples of more conventional sod roofed houses around town. The roof next to the lawn in this picture on the left is sod.





These examples of sod roofs we saw today did not look as thick and healthy as the ones we saw previously. The sod houses at the farm tourist site near Akureyri, Iceland, on Day 11 had thick luxurious sod roofs. These thinner ones that we saw today may be more typical of what would be found in the countryside.

Another interesting example of architecture we liked was this yellow house perched on the hillside. Next door was a house proudly flying the flag of the Faroe Islands.



We were getting well in to the afternoon and departure was approaching so we decided to return to the Maasdam.

On the way to the ship we got this photo of a small lighthouse on the edge of the harbor.



Then we suddenly remembered that we hadn't got a photographic record of the visit of Barbara's library card to Torshavn, Faroe Islands. Fortunately, there was this sign near the passenger terminal so we quickly shot the picture below.



#### **Value Added Tax (VAT) Refund:**

After our return to the Maasdam we had a pleasant surprise while dealing with the customs officers of the Faroe Islands. When Barbara bought the wool head bands we had paid a value added tax equivalent to \$12 USD. The clerk had filled out some paperwork for us and he told us to file it with Faroe Island Customs before we left Torshavn. The nice folks on the Maasdam arranged to have the Customs Officers come on board the Maasdam about 3pm, before we got underway, so that passengers could conveniently file the paperwork. We went down to file our receipt and met with two Customs Officers sitting at a table. One checked out the tax form we had, stamped it and handed it to his associate. That person checked another list and then reached into a money pouch, pulled out \$12 USD, and handed it to us. We walked away amazed at the efficiency of this system. In value added tax refund situations with other countries we have had to mail in the paperwork and wait months before receiving the cash. This was really a step in the right direction for keeping visiting tourists happy!

**Helicopter Medical Evacuation Costs:** On Day 17 of the cruise we were at sea and headed for Rotterdam when a medical emergency with one of the passengers required a military helicopter evacuation to a hospital in Newcastle, UK. That was the third medical

evacuation by military helicopters that we had witnessed on cruise ships. We were curious as to how the expense of such an evacuation was determined and how much of the expense was billed to the patient. A couple days ago we wrote a note to the Maasdam Guest Relations Manager asking for a description of how cost was determined and how much it might be. Today we got a phone call from the Guest Relations Manager, Christiana Beks, and in a lengthy conversation she explained everything we wanted to know. Here is the basic story.

1. If a passenger is seriously injured or ill the patient is examined by the Maasdam medical staff and a decision is made whether to request helicopter evacuation or evacuation by a second-party boat or wait until the next port to remove the patient to a hospital. Helicopter evacuations are much more hazardous than the other options and are not selected unless there are life threatening circumstances.
2. If the decision is made for helicopter evacuation the Coast Guard of the nearest country is contacted and helicopter evacuation is requested. The Coast Guard contacts their own unit or a military unit with helicopter rescue capability and the request for evacuation is made.
3. When the operation is approved the evacuation is carried out and the patient taken to the nearest appropriate hospital.
4. The cost of helicopter and other services on the ship and on shore can be from \$20,000 to \$200,000 USD in the experience of Christiana. She knew of a medical evacuation from the Falkland Islands that cost \$200,000. The patient is responsible for all costs.
5. If the patient has adequate insurance the bills are paid by the insurance. If the patient does not have adequate insurance Holland America accepts a secondary financial responsibility in order to get an expeditious evacuation response. The government unit providing the helicopter evacuation service then submits a bill to Holland America and Holland America works with the former passenger to arrive at a payment schedule. Christiana said that in some very sad cases the patient dies as a result of the illness or accident and the surviving spouse is left with the problem of paying the huge medical evacuation bill.
6. Christiana offered some additional information about Port Agents. Whenever the ship is in a port the Daily Program gives the name and contact information for the Port Agent. The Port Agent is on contract to Holland America (and usually other cruise lines) to provide assistance to any passenger who might have to be left in that port as a result of injury or illness. The Port Agent, in the absence of a Holland American Officer, would assist the patient dealing with local agencies and act as the contact and facilitator for communication between the patient, spouse, relatives, and the medical institution giving care to the patient.

We appreciated the effort Christiana Beks put in to answering our questions. We can accept the high cost of medical insurance more easily now. Also, knowledge of the role

of a Port Agent in resolving problems related to a stranded passenger could be useful if an emergency ever occurs. Port Agent name and contact information should be added to the toolbox for dealing with cruising emergencies.

By the way, Christiana said that the man evacuated by helicopter on Day 17 to Newcastle, UK is doing fine. She didn't comment on his financial situation.

**Leaving Torshavn:** The ship got underway about 5:30pm and we sailed out of the harbor. The ship passed many of the 18 islands making up the Faroe Island chain and finally we were in the open sea. Later, the sun was setting and Barbara was able to get this nice picture of the sun setting on the western horizon.



Tomorrow at about 8am we will be anchoring in the harbor of Djupivogur, Iceland (The Captain and Cruise director can actually pronounce the name!). We will have another day of touring a site along the Voyage of the Vikings.