

Day 2, July 26 Cruise Critic Meet & Greet, Table Mates, Captain's Welcome:

The day started with calm seas and very foggy conditions. Several times during the day it was necessary for the ship to sound the fog horn as we cruised slowly along.

Cruise Critic Meet & Greet: One of the benefits of following the Cruise Critic (CC) message board (<http://www.cruise critic.com>) is that it puts you in touch with a lot of people with interest and experience in cruising. Each active participant has a "handle" that identifies them with their message on the board. Our handle is TENNcruisers. On the message board not much time is spent in criticism of cruise lines but if someone has had bad experience it is mentioned for others to know about. Conversely, good experience and how to maximize enjoyment of cruising is shared by the participants. Usually on multiple week cruises one of the Cruise Critic (CC) participants taking the cruise volunteers to act as a coordinator in facilitating the members of the message board getting together while on the cruise. In the case of Voyage of the Vikings we were fortunate to have Louise (handle -happyglobetrotter) act as coordinator for our "Meet & Greet" get together. Before the cruise Louise compiled a list of CC people on the cruise and she invited them to a Cruise Critic Meet & Greet at 10:00 this morning in the Crow's Nest Lounge.

About 40 people attended the meeting where refreshments and cookies were provided along with nametags to facilitate introductions. This was a very friendly and chatty group as shown below.



Louise, shown on the right, made some introductory remarks and then kicked off the meeting by having everyone introduce themselves to the gathered crowd. Most of the people had been reading each other's messages on the board for months so it was good to put the faces together with the names.



Some of the people had humorous stories to go along with their introductions and there were several good laughs as shown on the left.

Jeff (tanningpro) was dressed in a tee shirt identifying himself as a Greenland Native. It turns out that his parents were in the military and stationed in Greenland when he was born. With tongue firmly in cheek he says he took this cruise just to visit his homeland. We quickly added "Greenland Native" as an interesting and rare fact about one of our friends.



After everyone was introduced, Susan, the Maasdam Cruise Director, made a few remarks and thanked the Cruise Critic group for sailing with Holland America. Louise then called the meeting to a close and we made our way to the next event in our schedule.

We went down several decks to the Rembrandt Lounge where Thomas Foggins gave a lecture about early Viking exploration. He explained that there were three different ethnic groups that could be called Vikings and were active in the time period 800 to 1000 AD. There were the Swedish Vikings who explored what is now mostly Russia down to the Black Sea. Then there were the Danish Vikings who concentrated on England and Ireland and the west coast of the European continent. Finally there was the Norwegian

Vikings who explored and settled northern Atlantic places like the Faroe Islands, Iceland, Greenland and what was called Vinland but we now call Newfoundland. A difficulty for historians is that no written documents exist to document the travels and exploits of these intrepid adventurers. Much of what we know today is pieced together by matching up archeological findings with events described in sagas that were written 200 years after the fact. This was just the first in the Explorations Speaker Series that Thomas Foggins will be presenting as we proceed along the Viking route toward what he called the “hearth” of Viking people in Europe.

The evening dinner was formal tonight and we joined our table mates in the Rotterdam Dining Room. In addition to Lee and Caroline, whom we met yesterday, tonight Mary joined us. Mary is a nurse from York, Pennsylvania who is traveling alone. We had our camera with us so we got pictures of everyone. Here are Lee and Caroline on the right. It was necessary to take a quick candid shot of Lee who instinctively closes his eyes for a posed picture. Below is a photo of Mary.



And finally here we are.



After dinner we went to the Rembrandt Lounge where stewards were passing out champagne for the Captain's Welcome Toast which was to take place at 7:30. After introductory remarks by Susan, the Cruise Director offered a toast to Captain Andre van Schoonhoven. The Captain then introduced the senior officers and crew of the Maasdam and thanked the audience for joining the Maasdam on this cruise. The event was brought to a close by the Beverage Manager bringing a large champagne bottle on to the stage. When he went through the motions of uncorking the bottle, confetti and streamers shot into the audience. Our poor little camera struggled with the lighting situation and was able to capture the photo below. The captain is the fourth man from the left in the back row and Susan the Cruise Director is the lady on the far right.



After the Captain's Welcome event we stayed in the Rembrandt Lounge for a comedy magic show put on by Bob Brizendine. He relied heavily on "victims" called up on stage from the audience and we all enjoyed it.

Tomorrow we arrive at our first port of call which is the village of Cap-aux-Meules, Quebec on the island of the same name in the archipelago known as the Magdalen Islands. This will be the first time that the Maasdam has visited Cap-aux-Meules and Barbara, the tour guide on the ship said that we are assured a warm welcome by the town. We will have to endure the delay of tender transportation to and from the village because of the shallow harbor but we are looking forward to the visit.