

PNG

Day 1 Oct 12

We had a wonderful night's sleep last night. While we often try to stay in boutique hotels when traveling, we were in a Marriott last night and there is a lot to be said for a great bed and a great shower. We arrived in Brisbane after midnight last night and crashed. This morning we re-packed for our PNG trip, grabbed some breakfast at a local patisserie (Le Bon Chioix – fabulous French baguettes) and then headed to the airport where we planned on meeting up with Arnie and Roberta Krumholtz. They had spent a few days in Sydney and were flying up this morning. We were a bit worried as they only had a 2-hour layover, had to pick up their bags, transfer from the domestic to the international terminal, find a locker for the bags staying behind and then check in for our flight. They made it, but only by a few minutes.

The Air Niugini plane was a large, beautiful one. It had the biggest business class section I have ever seen, but we were in coach this time. Comfy seats with plenty of leg room. For some reason I was expecting an old plane from a different century.



We flew up the east coast of Australia and over the Great Barrier Reef. The color of the water was a dark blue with swatches of turquoise. Three hours later we saw land again as we approached PNG (as Papua New Guinea is called). The landscape was very green, mountainous with the aluminum roofs reflecting the sun.

Haro met us at the airport with a sign with our names (actually it just said Krumholz x 4). He drove us to our hotel, the Airways, which was 3 minutes from the airport. The hotel is surprising modern, beautiful rooms with good air conditioning (important in this hot, humid city), and the room had a safe which was nice in this very, unsafe city. There is a library and art everywhere as well as a swimming pool and spa, none of which we had time to use. Seems quite a contrast to the city itself. We were warned not to leave the hotel as Port Moresby is so dangerous. In fact, there are guards at the entrance to the hotel and a soldier with a rifle at the front door. Rather than scaring me, it made me feel secure. According to a survey of world cities done in the Economist, Port Moresby is one of the world's least liveable cities (ranked 139 of 140 cities rated).



PNG is the second largest island in the world and is about the size of California, but the most rural in the world.

While in Sepik (more on that later in the week) we watched the movie, First Contact and learned the following: The first white man to enter the interior of PNG were the Leahy brothers in 1930. It was the last place on earth to be colonized by Europeans. Australia tried to bring civilization to PNG and used the people as cheap labor for the plantations. But there was little to attract the white man until gold was discovered. The natives had no idea about civilization. They thought the white man was lightening from the sky or that their ancestors had turned white and were returning from the place of the dead. They knew nothing of the outside world; in fact they thought they were the only people in the world. The Leahy's had bag packs with them and the natives thought that the white men's wives were inside their bag packs.

The main industry of PNG is mining. Tourism is still very low, although it is picking up. There are four main lodges around the country (although we heard there is now a new one in Lake Murray), all owned by the same company. These lodges are all small ranging from 10 rooms to 40 rooms. Not enough for lots of tourists. This is a good thing as you will read later on, the PNGians are losing their culture and traditions quickly. Port Moresby is the capital of PNG and its largest city. It is located on the shores of the Gulf of Papua, on the southeastern coast the island of New Guinea. In the late 19th century, Port Moresby became a major trade center. Later, during WWII, the Japanese captured it to use as a base to cut Australia off from the rest of

Southeast Asia and America. The area had been inhabited by the Motu-Koitaabu people for centuries and was isolated from the rest of the world until 1873 when Captain John Moresby landed there. He named the city in honor of his father, Admiral Sir Fairfax Moresby. As of 2011 Port Moresby had a population of 3-400,000 but even that was a low estimate as hundreds come into the city each day looking for work. Haro told us the rents here are expensive, about 3-5000kina a month.

So our plan was to stay in the hotel all day until our pick-up tomorrow. But Haro offered us a side deal. Rather than sit in the hotel all afternoon, he took us on a tour of Port Moresby. He wanted 300 Kina for the 4 of us as this was separate from our organized tour. We negotiated it down to 200 kina as we figured it was worthwhile to see the town. So we dropped our luggage room in the room and came back downstairs to see the sights, such as they are.

Our first stop was to be the government building. But on the way we passed groups and groups of people, often with children, just hanging out (or so it seemed). In the green areas (parks) or along the side of the road there would be large groups just sitting under a tree. It is Sunday today, and this is their leisure. There were umbrellas everywhere, not because of the rain, but rather because of the strong sun.

We passed quite a few local markets (too bad it wasn't safe to stop). People grow their own vegetables and then come to sell them. The produce is very cheap in these markets so people can afford to eat. They looked quite crowded; in fact, they looked like wall-to-wall tents and people.



We passed a field filled with kids playing and adults lined up watching. We thought it was soccer but it turned out to be rugby which is the most popular sport here.

The roads were decent and there were cars, but not many. Most people walk or travel by bus. We saw little busses with curtains and full of people and we saw lots of pick-up trucks filled with people, which seem to also operate as buses. There are lots of roundabouts and in the center of each was a sculpture – of a boat, a fish, a shell, abstract etc. They at least try to make the city pretty, although they have not quite succeeded.

Haro told us that the city was filled from people coming down from the mountains looking for work, but few can find good jobs. They learn English in school (remember there are over 700 languages spoken in PNG), and Pidgin is the second most spoken language. We learned some Pidgin on our plane ride in the airplane magazine: Monin (good morning), tenkiu (thank you), nogat (no), wanem nem bilong yu? (What is your name?), mi no laikum (I do not like it), stoa (store), hia (here).



We got to the Parliament building and Haro spoke to the guard to let us in. As it is Sunday, it was really closed. Whether there was a promise of money changing hands, we will never know.

Parliament members are elected for about 5 years. Those from the Highlands are constantly being bribed, but those from Port Moresby are not. They get all sorts of allowances and perks and by the end of their turn they are millionaires and never have to work again. The one theme we kept hearing is that there is lots of corruption here. The way parliament members get elected is that they go to the villages, buy them a tractor or some other big item and in that way, they buy their votes.

The building itself was designed and built by a NZ architect. It is divided into four sections, each representing an area of the country. The main building is in the style of the Sepik area, the round house represents the type of homes found in the Highland area, etc). The front comes to a point with a mosaic representing the different things people do (their pets, growing vegetables etc). Part of the building is made of wood native to the region and was absolutely beautiful.

From there we drove onto the “freeway”, a slightly wider road lined with trees. Haro told us the story of the building of the freeway. There was a large rock in the middle of what was to be the road. The workers moved it to the side, but the next day it was back. This happened 2-3 times. So they build a shed over the rock. The next day the rock had moved out of the shed. So instead, they planted flowers around it and the rock lived happily ever after. And Haro took us to see the rock.



Along side the freeway were towers, about 3 feet high, made of stones. Turns out the young unemployed boys collect the rocks, stack them up, and then see them to builders to use for stone walls. Entrepreneurs....

Roberta asked Haro about drug and alcohol use. Seems it is a problem here. In fact, we passed large billboards discouraging alcohol and drug use.



Haro decided to continue our tour and take us past the harbor up to a view point to see the city from up above. The hills across from the harbor are filled with homes which he told us were for the “rich people.” These are houses owned by companies who rent them out for 3-4000 kinas a month, which here is very expensive. Many of the homes are also consulates. One thing that you can’t miss is that all the houses are surrounded by walls covered in barbed wire. Many of these homes also have private, armed guards. We drove the narrow road up, up the mountain, past all these larger homes with amazing views with people inside living like prisoners. We made it to the top and the view of the harbor was really beautiful. We

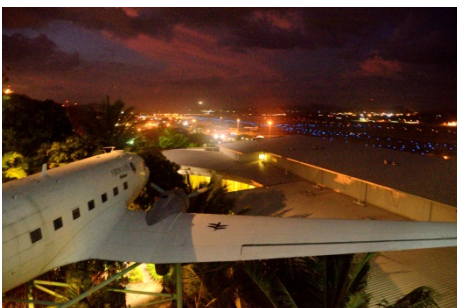
could see a village that had been built on stilts in the water. There are quite a few of these around. We saw a Korean flag waving and a British flag. That’s who can afford to live in the hills.

We drove back down the mountain to the beach. There is only one beach here that before PNG had its independence was closed to the natives with only whites being allowed there. Now it was full of families and hordes and hordes of people having a fun Sunday afternoon.

We passed more little markets, and more groups of people sitting under trees. We saw a large rock wall with one piece of graffiti on it; it said ISRAEL. Maybe they were welcoming us....

We drove back into the main part of the city, past the US embassy, into an area that was quite deserted but that during the week would be wall to wall people and cars shopping.

We got back to the hotel about 5:30, past our security guards and adjourned to the library area for sparkling wine and martinis. Back on safe territory.



Since we can’t leave the hotel, dinner was in the hotel restaurant. We went up to the seventh floor and to our surprise, walked out on a bridge connecting the two sides of the hotel with an airplane hanging between the two buildings.

Dinner was a choice of a buffet for 89 kinas (about X dollars) or a small menu of daily specials. Andy and I had the local reef fish with chips and salad. Reef fish is.....

And now it is time for bed. We begin tomorrow at 600am to continue our adventure.