

HAWAII – part 1

DAY 34 – 26th July 2008 – AGAIN!!!

Today it is the 26th July 2008, again!! During the night we crossed the International Date Line, which meant that we moved from about 11.00 pm on the 26th July to 11.00 pm on the 25th July, which also means we are living this day again, though, of course, unlike groundhog day which plays out the same, our day is very different!!

The flight from Sydney to Honolulu took just under 10 hours. This was one of the longest flight sectors in the whole of the round-the-world trip, though we have another returning to London coming up too!

The flight was smooth, except for some violent turbulence just before breakfast, which woke everyone up, which meant that the flight-stewards did not have to do so! We landed at Honolulu shortly before 10.00 am, and headed for the usual long queues (lines) that always greet visitors at U.S. Immigration. It took us just under an hour to get through – we had landed behind a Japanese 747, and sadly many had not filled in their forms correctly – which meant checking, sending back for completion, rechecking and then processing. If someone had but checked all the Japanese visitors before arriving at the Immigration desk we would have been through in a fraction of the time.

Anyway, we were finally on American soil once again! We took a taxi to the port, and were able to check our luggage in for delivery to our cabins. We had to wait a little while before we were able to check ourselves in and finally board the “Pride of America”, which is our cruise-ship for the next week.

Incidentally, we read about an incident on a Qantas 747 which had an emergency following a mid-air explosion. Imagine how we felt, though, when we found that it was the “Spirit of Australia”, the same plane that we had taken from Perth to Sydney – and the one that was delayed because they could not find the bags that needed to be taken off the plane at Perth. I wonder if the two incidents are connected!

We were welcomed on board our cruise-ship with the customary drink, which in practice was a delaying tactic, since our rooms were not ready. It was then suggested that we might have lunch in one of the restaurants – since our rooms were not ready! By mid-afternoon, we were told that our rooms were finally ready, so after three days and two nights without having a proper bathroom, I was looking forward to freshening up. But the bags did not arrive in the rooms for another hour.



At 4.00 pm I was finally able to have a shower and shave, and feel human once again (please don't make any comments!!). But at 4.30 pm we had our compulsory emergency drill – with everyone gathering at their muster stations complete with orange life-jackets. Dominic did not believe me that we had to go through the drill, and only attended reluctantly, after he saw everyone else in their life-jackets.

Formalities over, we were then able to get down to the serious business of cruising. We explored the ship and then finally at 8.00 pm we sailed out of the port of Honolulu, turning left past the famous Waikiki beach, and out into the night. That also meant that we were able to get down to some serious eating. There are many restaurants on board, each specialising in different cuisines. On this first evening back in the US, it had to be steak!! Whereas Dominic settled for a “New York Strip” – similar to a sirloin, but cut differently – I had to have prime rib of beef. I have yet to find the equivalent in Britain, though our beef these days is as good as any found in the US or Australia!



After a tiring few days and nights travelling, we were ready for bed.

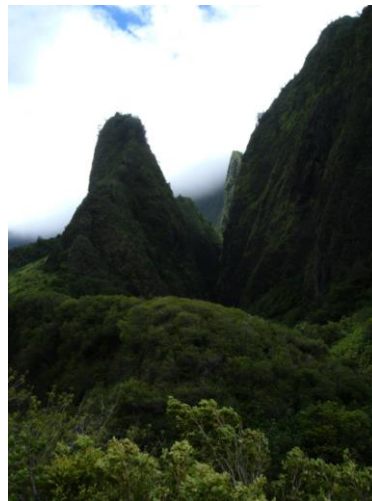
DAY 35 – 27th July 2008

Today is Sunday, so we started the day with Mass in our cabin. Overnight we had travelled to the island of Maui and had docked in the port of Kahului. Although there were several tours offered by the cruise-ship, experience has told us that these tours are 20% seeing what we want to see, 40% travelling, and 40% visiting some factory or shop where the tour-guide will get commission. So we decided to do our own touring.

We disembarked and took a shuttle bus to the car hire firms near the airport – some 2 miles away. There we hired a car for two days, and set off! Thanks to Dominic's clever map reading we ended up back at the ship!

We made a U turn and made for the nearest shopping mall – not that we like shopping, but to stock up on Pepsi – they only have Coca Cola on board – and in any case we needed some for the time that we would spend in the car. This, after all, was the middle of the Pacific in mid-summer with temperatures in the upper 80's in the early morning, climbing well into the 90's in the afternoon – a lot warmer than Australia!!

Having stocked up on Pepsi, the plan was to drive up Mount Haleakala, a relatively extinct volcano, to see the crater and cinder cones. Several years ago I came to Maui with my friend, Kevan, but when we reached the summit we could just about make out the two or three feet in front of the car – the cloud covering had made everything invisible. On this occasion, we checked the summit before leaving, and once again it was covered in cloud, and so we abandoned the idea, for today, of driving the 25 miles or so up the side of the volcano to reach the summit.



Instead we headed for the beautiful Iao Valley. This is a lush valley between the two volcanoes that make up the island of Maui. Due to climatic conditions, and the trade winds, this valley has one of the highest rainfalls in the world – some 400 inches a year! That is the reason why it so beautifully lush!

Afterwards we took the coast road round to Kaanapali and then to the town of Lahaina, which used to be the capital, and where the kings used to have their palaces before moving to the main island of Oahu. We walked along the sea front and visited

a few of the sites, had an ice cream, and generally began to relax into life in the Hawaiian Islands.



By about 6.00 pm we decided that it was time to head back to the ship. We parked the car nearby, noticing just how many other passengers had done the same as us – the closest car park to the ship was full, and so we had to park a short distance away.

Tonight we had dinner in the French restaurant. Again the quality was superb, though I think Dominic thought the quantities were perhaps not what he really wanted – I caught him eating a Snickers bar later in the evening!!

Each evening there is a show of some kind in the ship's theatre. Tonight it was a Hawaiian singer, who entertained us. All in all, a please end to an interesting day.

DAY 36 – 28th July 2008

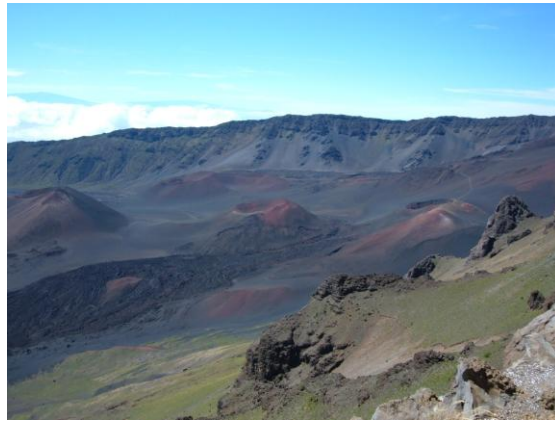
Today I celebrate my 24th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood. I look back and wonder how quickly the time has flown, though as with all life's episodes, the first few years seem to take an age – I was always part of the group of “younger clergy” – now I am regarded as one of the “older clergy” – and if Dominic thinks that I am “almost a senior” and able to get into places at a reduced rate because of that, I am sure that I am not alone in wondering how time changes with age!!

We woke early, since we were told that if we went up Mount Haleakala at sunrise there would be no cloud on the summit. Although sunrise had come and gone when we woke, it was still early enough to warrant trying the drive. We had a quick breakfast and then headed towards the volcano.

Thanks to Dominic's improved map-reading skills we did not have to make any U turns, though we did miss a turning or two, which we were able to pick up again through a slight detour. The drive to the summit was slow – going up hill, and going round countless hair-pin bends, and about half-way up we ran into cloud, which emptied itself on us in the form of rain. However, we eventually passed through the cloud and reached the top of the mountain, where we were able to look down on the clouds that were slowly creeping up the sides of the volcano.

However, this time I was able to see the crater and cinder cones that I had missed several years ago. It was also a lesson in how disorientated things can be in cloud.

Last time we had been looking in completely the wrong direction. No wonder we couldn't see anything! This volcano has been dormant since at least 1600 but has taken several thousand years to reach its present state.



As a geologist, Dominic was in his element. Although we are warned not to take anything from the islands, I am sure that his pockets are full of different rock samples. He even went off walking on one of the trails while I stayed in the comfort of the visitors' centre – not because of the temperature, but because of the winds, blowing around 30 mph, with gusts over 50 mph!

We spent most of the morning exploring and taking in the views, and as we left the summit, the cloud was finally slipping into the crater, ready to cover things for the rest of the day.

After our descent, we called into one of the tourist offerings at the Maui Tropical Plantation. This is a venture that has been put together to show tourists what fruits are grown in the Hawaiian Islands. We are all familiar with the coconuts, bananas, mangoes, papaya and guava, but the pineapple crop, which used to be the main export from Hawaii, has been reduced in recent years, since other countries are able to produce them at a vastly reduced price, thanks to cheap labour! However, the coffee beans are still grown, and the coffee is roasted and sold locally. On the other hand the Ti leaves do not make tea!! They are put to many uses, including the making of the famous Hawaiian skirts!!



We had a snack at the plantation, and then moved onto our final call for the day, the Sugar Museum. This was next to the present working sugar mill, but provided an interesting account of this important industry for the Hawaiian peoples and many others who immigrated here. And of course, there was an opportunity to sample the end product too, in the form of unrefined sugar and fudge – how could I resist!!

We then dropped off the car at the airport, were returned to the ship and then we celebrated Mass to mark my anniversary of ordination. Lobster was the main entrée being offered throughout the ship this evening – I suppose they got to hear of my anniversary too, and knew just how much I like lobster!!

After dinner we went to the onboard theatre where we were entertained by the resident comedian – who boasts that he is not smutty and will not offend. He kept to his word and was very funny too – especially since the stage curtains were swinging a lot more than usual as the ship battled with a roughish sea. Needless to say, the comedian had much to say about staying upright. And as everyone left the theatre it seemed that we all danced the same dance, lurching from one side of the corridor to the other as the ship hit wave after wave. What fun!