

*Tunis is both the capital and the largest city of Tunisia. The greater metropolitan area of Tunis, often referred to as Grand Tunis, has some 2,700,000 inhabitants. The country (Tunisia) has a population of about 11 millions.*

*Situated on a large Mediterranean Sea gulf (the Gulf of Tunis), behind the Lake of Tunis and the port of La Goulette, the city extends along the coastal plain and the hills that surround it. At its core lies its ancient medina, a World Heritage Site. Beyond this district lie the suburbs of Carthage, La Marsa, and Sidi Bou Said.*

*Just through the Sea Gate begins the modern city, or Ville Nouvelle, traversed by the grand Avenue Habib Bourguiba (often referred to by popular press and travel guides as "the Tunisian Champs-Élysées"), where the colonial-era buildings provide a clear contrast to smaller, older structures. As the capital city of the country, Tunis is the focus of Tunisian political and administrative life; it is also the center of the country's commercial activity. The expansion of the Tunisian economy in recent decades is reflected in the booming development of the outer city where one can see clearly the social challenges brought about by rapid modernization in Tunisia.*

*Carthage was the center or capital city of the ancient Carthaginian civilization, on the eastern side of the Lake of Tunis in what is now the Tunis Governorate in Tunisia.*

*The city developed from a Phoenician colony into the capital of an empire dominating the Mediterranean Sea during the first millennium BC. The apocryphal queen Dido is regarded as the founder of the city, though her historical authenticity has been questioned. According to accounts by Timaeus of Tauromenium she purchased from a local tribe the amount of land that could be covered by an ox hide. Cutting the skin into strips, she laid out her claim and founded an empire that would become, through the Punic Wars, the only existential threat to the Roman Empire until the evolution of the Vandals several centuries later.*

*The ancient city was destroyed by the Roman Republic in the Third Punic War in 146 BC then re-developed as Roman Carthage, which became the major city of the Roman Empire in the province of Africa. The Roman city was again occupied by the Muslim conquest of the Maghreb, in 698. The site remained uninhabited, the regional power shifting to the medina of Tunis in the medieval period, until the early 20th century, when it began to develop into a coastal suburb of Tunis, incorporated as Carthage municipality in 1919.*

*The archaeological site was first surveyed in 1830. Excavations were performed in the second half of the 19th century and the Carthage National Museum was founded in 1875 by Cardinal Charles Lavigerie. Excavations performed by French archaeologists in the 1920s attracted an extraordinary amount of attention because of the evidence they produced for child sacrifice, in Greco-Roman and Biblical tradition associated with the Canaanite god Baal Hammon. The open-air Carthage Paleo-Christian Museum has exhibits excavated under the auspices of UNESCO from 1975 to 1984.*

We were then driven to the ancient Phoenician/Roman town of Carthage. Apparently there is significant evidence of both cultures having built here but it is the Roman ruins that are prevalent today. We didn't have long there but we were able to see the enormous water storage tanks and the aqueduct that had carried water to many parts of the North African coast. It would appear that a day or two should be devoted to this UNESCO site in order to see the full extent of the Roman city.



## Carthage



On the way back to the ship we stopped (but couldn't get off the bus) near a 4<sup>th</sup> century Christian cathedral (now mostly in ruins) standing right next to one of the biggest mosques in the country. We also caught a very distant glimpse of a modern (20<sup>th</sup> century) cathedral which has already been de-consecrated and is used for large events.

The makeup of Tunisia is 97% Moslem, 1% Christian and the rest of various faiths, including a fairly sizeable Jewish population. The population of the country is about 12 million, with 3 million being concentrated in Tunis, and most of the rest in two other cities.

The guide pointed out that Tunisia had been a major tourist destination for many years but recent events (the Arab Spring and the massacre of about 30 [mostly British] tourists a couple of years ago) have resulted in a significant decline. It was suggested that more stability was required before Tunis regained its former level of attraction and achieved a full democracy after a long period of dictatorship.





It was presumably recent events and a desire not to repeat that caused the authorities to provide our group with a police escort. We left the dock in groups of four buses with a motor cycle leading the way and a police van bringing up the rear. In addition, at all major intersections there were police holding up traffic while our buses crossed. There was a massive police and military presence almost everywhere but no-one on the bus seemed at all concerned about safety.



*The Viking Sea and the Atlas Mountains  
to the east*

In the afternoon we relaxed and/or walked before meeting Jay and Gord for dinner. We also attended the port lecture for our visit to Sardinia tomorrow.

#### **Thursday March 2**

Today was the earliest start for our shore excursion, so we were up soon after six and on the bus by 7:30. It was a cool but clear morning and became very pleasant as the sun got higher in the sky.

We had docked at Cagliari around seven and saw the sun rise over this beautiful city that rises steeply from the port. The hillside is covered with homes, businesses and churches and effect is of a pink/light orange coloring.



*Cagliari  
Sardinia*



The bus took us first through the port area and then to the highest point in the city where we got a great panoramic view towards the sea. The guide – who was very good – gave us a brief history of Sardinia and of its place in history as well as its strategic importance geographically. Although we didn't see it, Cagliari is the Mediterranean HQ of NATO and houses several thousand troops. This southern end of the island of Sardinia is only about 90 miles from Algeria and so is a prime "jumping point" for illegal aliens trying to gain access to Europe.



### *The Oldest Church in Cagliari, with the new cathedral at its side*

Historically, too, there have been many conquests and an influx of people from North Africa as well as from Spain and, further back in time, Phoenicia (Lebanon) and Rome. Although it is now a part of Italy, Sardinia has a good deal of autonomy (its own parliament, for example) and even has its own language. Italian is also spoken by everyone, whatever their heritage.

The main part of our tour was to the Ruins of Barumini, about an hour's drive from Cagliari. This structure (one tall tower, surrounded by four smaller towers) dates from 1500BC (or somewhat earlier by some accounts) and is one of two dozen in this area. There was no mention of a religious connotation and, despite its size, it didn't give the appearance of a fortress so it is assumed that the main purpose was as a lookout for the village encircling the towers. As we walked along narrow pathways at ground level, we were in and out of homes, meeting halls and even a parliament building in a village



### *Barumini*





of just few hundred inhabitants. This part of the ruins was so reminiscent of similar villages in Skara Brae on Orkney.

Rising steeply from the village was the remains of the central tower which we were invited to climb. The “pathway” was steep and, at times, very narrow and covered so not the place for those suffering from claustrophobia. Most of our group did make the climb to see the internal rooms (with little by way of explanation as to their use) but most were complaining bitterly about the climb as they returned. However, the stop was well worth the drive if only to see a structure made up of huge slabs of basalt rock that had been dragged here from a site four kilometers distant. Once again we were reminded of



just how advanced were these ancient people in design and engineering and how well these structures have stood for millennia. We were told that there were perhaps a few dozen of these settlements in a relatively small area and that, while there may have been some warring, they also seem to have had quite close communications. Certainly we saw several mounds as we drove through this beautiful countryside. Appendix 1 contains a little more information on both the archaeological site and the island of Sardinia.

After this interesting visit, we returned to port and to our ship. Obviously in a five hour excursion we got just a tiny sampling of the island but found it to be beautiful farmland, at least in the area we covered. Sardinia certainly merits another visit.

The rest of the afternoon was spent on board ship as we sailed south across the Mediterranean to our next port of call, Algiers. I went for a walk on deck and experienced a very heavy wind. The ship was sailing directly into it so there was little side to side motion, but it's possible we could expect some slightly rougher seas overnight.

Tonight Molly and I ate at the Chef's Table, a second specialty restaurant. It was a five course tasting menu with wine pairings and we both felt it was the best meal so far. We joined Gord and Jay for an after dinner drink and retired about 10:30.

### **Friday March 3**

When we woke about 8 (after a very smooth crossing) we were just starting the docking process in Algiers on yet another sunny morning. We had some great views of the city from the ship and it, like Cagliari, seemed to rise vertically from the port and was filled completely with buildings. The obvious French colonial section near the harbor had many large European style buildings whereas the Arabic section further up the hill contained much small homes and civic buildings.



***Morning in Algiers from the ship***





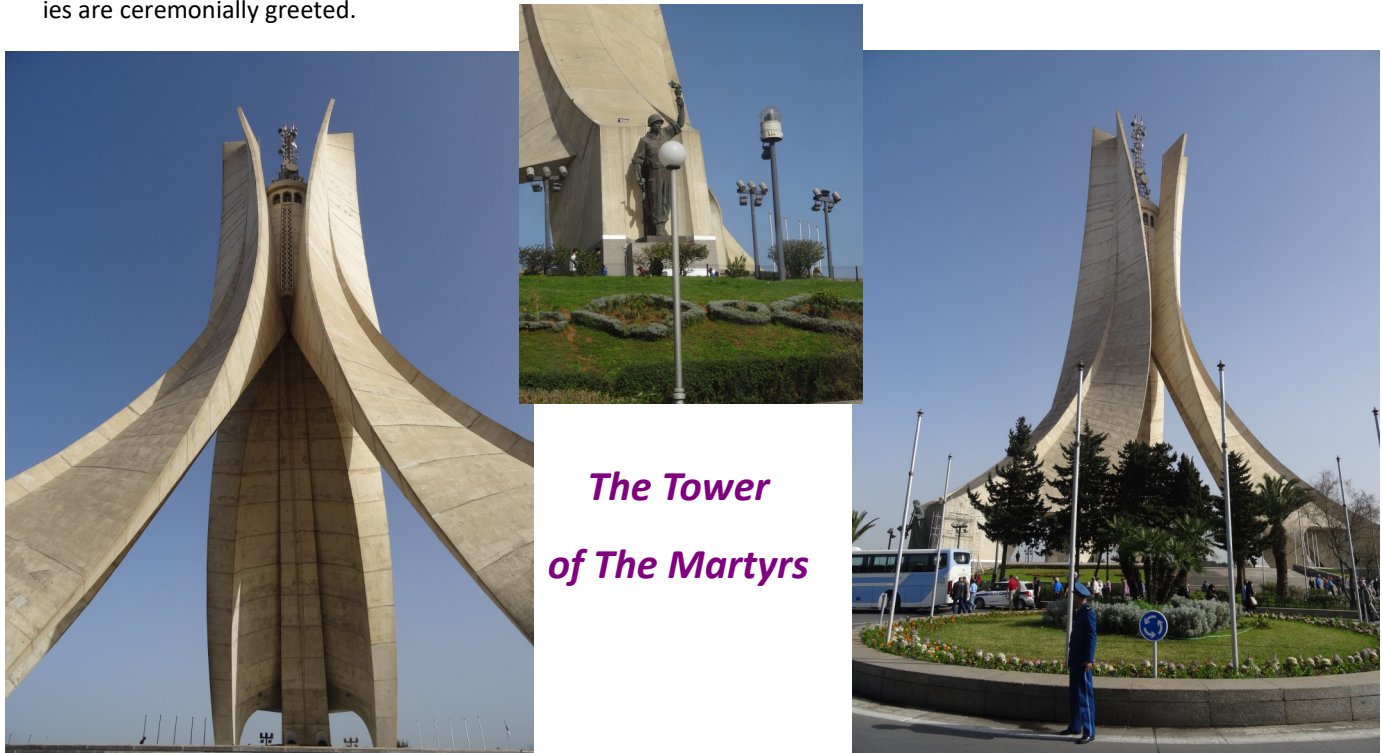
*Algiers is the capital and largest city of Algeria. In 2011, the city's population was estimated to be around 3,500,000. An estimate puts the population of the larger metropolitan city to be around 5,000,000 and the population of country as a whole is about 35 millions. Algiers is located on the Mediterranean Sea and in the north-central portion of Algeria.*

*Sometimes nicknamed Alger la Blanche for the glistening white of its buildings as seen rising up from the sea, Algiers is situated on the west side of a bay of the Mediterranean Sea. The modern part of the city is built on the level ground by the seashore; the old part, the ancient Ottoman Empire city of the deys, climbs the steep hill behind the modern town and is crowned by the casbah or citadel, 400 feet above the sea. The casbah and the two quays form a triangle.*

*In 1962, after 130 years of French rule and a bloody independence struggle in which hundreds of thousands (estimates range between 350,000 and 1,500,000) died -mostly Algerians but also French and Pieds-Noirs (Christians and jews who had migrated to Algeria from all across the Mediterranean) - during fighting between the French Army and the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale, Algeria gained its independence, with Algiers as its capital. Since then, despite losing its entire pied-noir population, the city has expanded massively.*

Algeria's independence from France came in 1962 after an eight year war in which over a million lives were lost. Apparently, France had let go of Morocco and Tunisia quite peacefully but wanted to retain Algeria for its oil, so there is still a pocket of resentment in this country. However, French influence is everywhere: it's the second language, many streets still bear the French names and baguettes are as plentiful as on any street in Paris.

Our tour for the day didn't start until 2:30 so we had a lazy morning on board. The bus tour – again with police escort – took us to the Monument of the Martyrs, which is a huge structure on top of a hill to the east of the city center. It is shaped in the form of three giant palm leaves and bronze statues adorn each leaf at its base. It was dedicated in 1982 (the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Independence) and is a major attraction for locals and tourists as well as a place where visiting dignitaries are ceremonially greeted.



We also had some great views from this location over the harbor and hillsides of Algiers.







The balance of the two hour tour took us through several main streets of Algiers and we saw most of the parliament and civic buildings, many beautiful mosques and, of course, the colonial additions to the Arabic backdrop. It was a good tour and the guide spoke good English and gave us an explanation of what we were seeing but it was difficult to capture much of the city on film through narrow streets and a bus window. However, it was a good introduction to yet another North African country. In fact, Algeria is the largest country (by area) on the entire continent. Much of it is the Sahara Desert so 80% of the population lives in the major coastal cities.



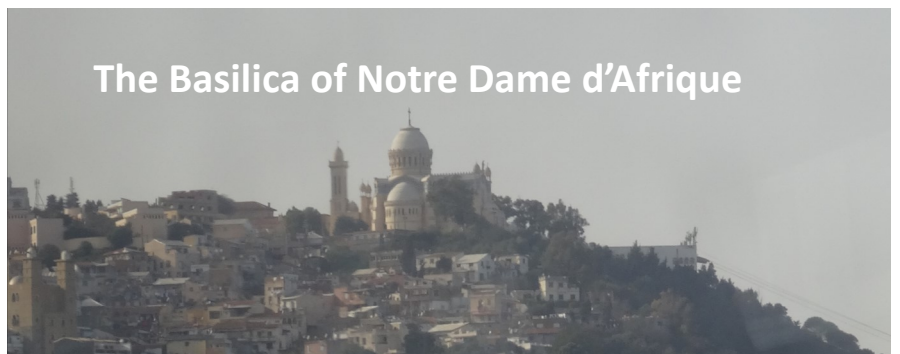
The Mediterranean climate would seem to be ideal here although we were surprised to learn that Algiers had experienced a lot of rain and even snow this past winter. The country grows a large amount of wheat and a number of different fruits and vegetables – as well as being a major exporter of oil. There



was little, if any, evidence of manufacturing in the area we covered today and we were told that many goods are imported from China.



Despite the fact that we had the police escort, our guide assured us that Algeria was a very safe country and, at least from the “safety” of the bus, we were greeted quite enthusiastically by the locals. It was another interesting day. In yet another very different and interesting country.



Tonight we met Jay and Gord for a pre-dinner drink and then had a good meal in the main restaurant. The captain had announced before dinner that we might have a rough crossing to Spain but it was still relatively calm when we went to bed.

#### **Saturday March 4**

It turned out that the captain had been right and we had a very rough couple of hours between about 3 and 5 this morning. However, neither of us suffered from sea-sickness and we awoke to a calm, if cool, morning as we docked in Valencia. Our tour for the day didn't start until 12:15 so we had a leisurely breakfast and then I had a walk before getting ready to go ashore.

What we saw when we were on our four hour ride and walk around the city was absolutely amazing. Valencia has been a city since Roman times but the areas we saw dated primarily from the 13<sup>th</sup> century (when the Moors were sent home) and more specifically from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when Spain gained its independence from France. So, there is the Old Town (originally walled but with only two gates remaining today) and a very modern (late 20<sup>th</sup> century) new area between the port and the Old Town.

The modern part that we saw has a number of buildings and bridges across the river that were designed primarily by one architect (not Gaudi, but with some similarities) and they are strikingly ultra-modern in concept. There is an opera house, a museum, an art gallery and an enormous Imax theater as well as some smaller but equally impressive buildings. The whole area is set along wide boulevards and has some beautiful flowers and trees lining the roadways. In all, it is comparable to cities like Lisbon, Barcelona or Madrid but on a somewhat smaller scale.



*Ultra-modern Valencia*





Impressed as we were with the new area, we were completely amazed when we reached the old town. Here the main streets and squares were once again spacious and grand – with some narrower areas to add character – and the buildings were superb. The predominant styles were representative of the past two centuries but with a number of older churches and civic buildings to enhance the “newer” classics.

It is difficult to pick out what was the more impressive but the Silk Exchange (Valencia had been important in the silk trade), the cathedral, the basilica and even the railway station and post office stood out. It is no exaggeration to say that there were hundreds of buildings that would have been a major attraction in many other cities of the world, making Valencia one of the most memorable cities we have ever visited. Four hours certainly gave us a good overview but I suspect most on the tour are already planning a much longer stay in this wonderful city. See Appendix 2 for a little more.



**Main Gate**



**Silk  
Exchange**



**Old Town**









***The Old Post Office***



***Bull Ring***



***The Old Railway Station***

# ***Amazing Valencia***

We returned to the ship about 4:30 and prepared for a relatively early disembarkation tomorrow. We set sail soon after 6pm and then had a pre-dinner drink with Jay and Gord before Molly and I went once more to the Chef's Table for dinner.



### Sunday March 5

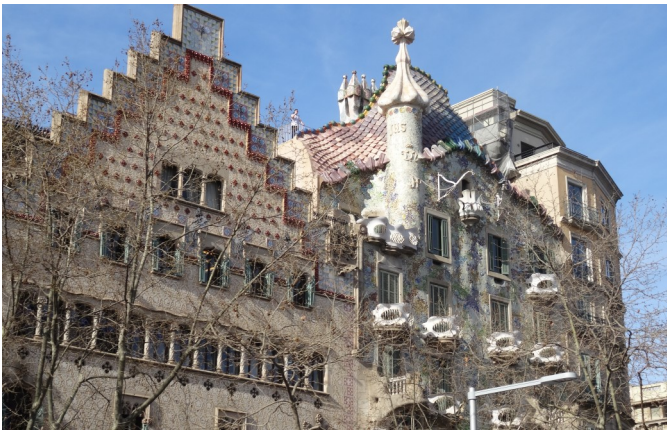
Today we arrived in Barcelona and reached the end of our cruise. We had breakfast on the ship and then got the taxi that Jay had ordered to take us from the dock to the Royal Ramblas Hotel in the city. We arrived very early – too early to get in our rooms – so we took a stroll for an hour on La Rambla, the main boulevard of town with a central pedestrian walking area.

Our rooms were ready about noon and we had a pizza lunch around 1pm before relaxing for the rest of the afternoon. We all met up again at 7pm and walked to a local tapas restaurant for dinner. It was a good meal and we followed it with a nightcap in a local bar. We then said our goodbyes as they are leaving for home early Monday morning.

### Monday March 6

We were up a little before nine and had breakfast at a local café before starting our day of sightseeing. We had bought tickets for the Hop on/Hop off bus which has three routes, all of which left from the Placa de Catalunya, about a block from the hotel.

We first went on the Red route, which took us through the central part of the city and then to the port, before returning to the starting point by a different route. It was a very interesting ride on wide boulevards and we saw many buildings by Gaudi and his contemporaries, for which this city is famous.



## *Barcelona Modernista Architecture*

We also saw the 1992 Olympic village and the sports venues near the waterfront and which apparently created a major revitalization of the city of Barcelona. Certainly the venue was magnificent and the area is now an upscale residential neighborhood transformed from run-down old mills and derelict buildings.

After this 1 ½ hour ride we had lunch in a Tapas Pintxos restaurant where we selected five small open sandwiches from a huge selection. Each was held together by a wooden skewer and the price of the meal was determined by the number of skewers left in a container on the table. It was an excellent way to provide a meal and the food was good and fresh.