

It occurs to me now that these “travelogues” are going onto a blog my salutation is no longer “Dear Friends and Family” as before.

To summarize, I organized this trip starting in Porto to which my friend and I flew on Ryan Air from Bordeaux, our previous stop. I had spent a week based in Lisbon in 2012 so we would split there and I could fly Royal Air Maroc back to Agadir.

We are not Port wine lovers so we planned no winery tours, but were glad we opted to travel from Porto to Coimbra via a few hours in the Douro Valley wine region. And, of course, other Portuguese wines do not disappoint. I particularly appreciate the Vinho Verde and this brand I had had most recently in Rio back in January and found again in Nazare.

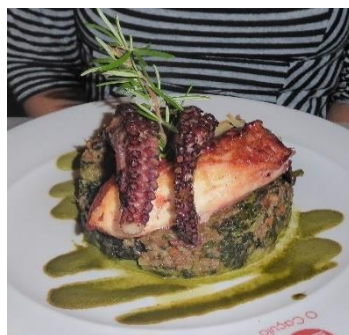


I had thoroughly enjoyed my prior time in Portugal and this visit reconfirmed how much I appreciate the country. It seemed as if I found much more English spoken this time.

It was a treat to have a rental car that allowed for flexibility and spontaneity. My readers will laugh to learn that this was my first experience to be navigating using a GPS! Fortunately, the TomTom is ancient technology and hence probably the easiest of those devices for me to learn. The Europcar agent was very patient and made sure I understood all the various steps as he helped me program in the first leg of our journey.

But first a few words about our two days in Porto. It is hilly, which we knew! Even in October it was crowded with tourists. I found the city fascinating, varied, and in a beautiful setting.

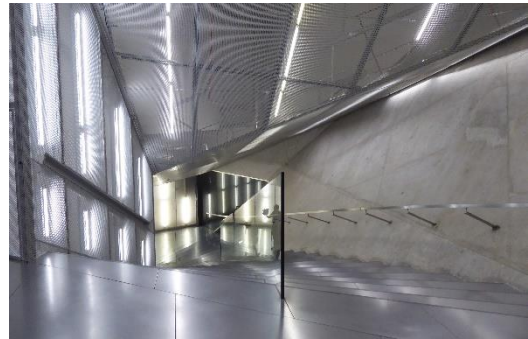
Searching for dinner the first evening we stumbled upon Rua de Cedofeita which terminates at Plaza Carlos Alberto. Everything was closed, but the next day I learned it is a very trendy shopping street. We lucked out to find O Cacula restaurant, the first of our unanimously fine culinary experiences during the trip. I had pork layered on mashed potatoes with asparagus and olives, a portion so large I took half home for a future meal. My companion had octopus.



Rarely a day went by that I didn't have octopus or squid for at least one meal. So much so that when I got home, I asked friends if I now had eight arms like the Hindu Goddess Durga?

We stayed in an Airbnb near the Casa da Musica and were fortunate to be able to take in an evening jazz performance. The building, by the Dutch architectural firm Rem Koolhaas (which also designed the Seattle Central Library) is stunning both outside and inside.

I especially loved the second performing group, a trio of Portuguese pianist, English saxophonist, and Norwegian percussionist. The percussionist, a giant of a man, used everything from feathers to bells, rarely drumsticks.



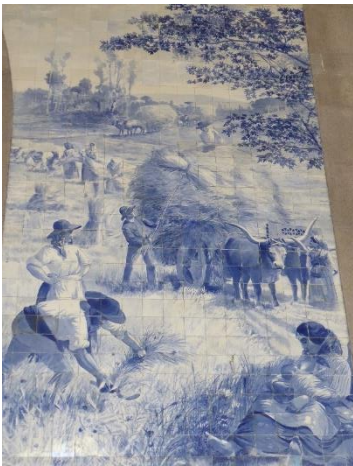
When we exited it was raining heavily and extremely windy. We were on the edge of Hurricane Leslie, the strongest hurricane to hit the Iberian Peninsula since 1842. It had already been wandering around the northern Atlantic for twenty days at varying intensities, when on October 12 it reached its peak with sustained winds of 90 mph. It was pounding Coimbra where we were headed the next day. So, we called an uber, and even though we only lived a few blocks away, a driver came and we got home mostly dry. Uber is very popular in Portugal (as it was in Brazil).

On my first full day in Porto I chose to do the walking tours from Rick Steve's Portugal guide, but in reverse order since we were staying uphill, near Plaza Carlos Alberto where the tour ends. That way I was walking downhill towards the river, while the tour groups were walking up hill towards me!

The first highlight of my walk was the Carmo Church, with one whole street frontage of azulejos tiles depicting the history of the Carmelite order. The two adjacent Rococo buildings are separated by what is called the "narrowest house in Portugal" which was the passageway allowing the nuns and monks to move between the two churches without venturing outside.



The next highlight was the Sao Bento train station. The early 20<sup>th</sup> C tiles depict Portuguese historic events related to transport and otherwise.



Next, I descended pedestrian Rua das Flores, once known for its booksellers. I loved the flower decorations often seen on buildings in Portugal. Some buildings are still under renovation, their former grandeur evident. This was certainly true throughout the city.





At the bottom of the street you come to two notable buildings, the red iron Borges market, now a nightclub, and Palace de Bolsa stock exchange building with its magnificent library. This is Henry the Navigator Square, who was born in Porto. Later in the trip we will see his tomb, along with that of his parents King Joao I of Portugal and Queen Philippa of England in the monastery at Batalha, and the school of navigation he founded at Cape Sagres where sailors from around the world were trained.



I then visited San Francisco church where no photos were permitted of its magnificent Baroque gold interior, so I have included a photo of one of the “treasure rooms”.



Across the street is St Nicholas Church which was closed for lunch, but down the narrow street of the same name at Routard-recommended A Grade I had a fabulous

lunch.



This narrow street with the laundry hanging out is typical. While I ate, a man negotiated the steep grade to deliver several hand-cart loads of potatoes for the restaurant next door.



Then I descend to the mobbed famous Ribeiro riverfront district and fortunately was able to immediately catch one of the Six Bridges tour boats.

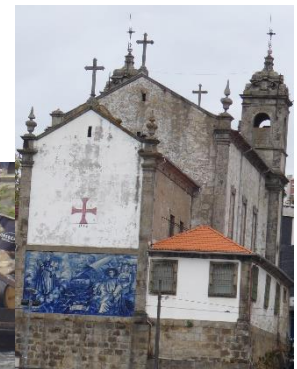
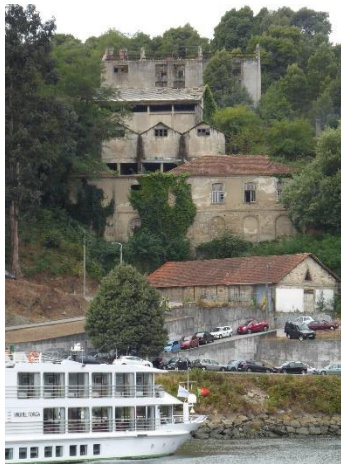


This tour is super as these bridges within the space of 5 km vary from iron creations of Eiffel (1876) to longest suspension bridge when built, to largest concrete arch when built in 1963 (made me think of Dubai where everything had to be in the superlative).



The opposite side of the river where all the port wine storage facilities and tasting rooms are is actually a separate town called Vila Nova de Gaia. The cape the Sandeman Port symbol is

wearing is that worn by Coimbra University students. The boats brought the casks of wine down the river from the vineyards to be aged here.

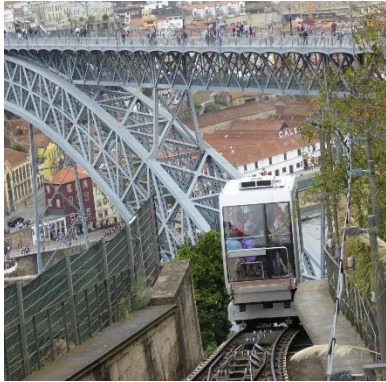


You can see the Atlantic Ocean surf over the breakwater protecting the mouth of the Douro river.



After the boat tour I was able to take the funicular at Don Luis I bridge up to connect with the historic trolley #22 which makes a loop including the major shopping street, Saint Catherine. The  
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traditional covered market, Bolhao, is under restoration. But it is operating in temporary quarters nearby. I really appreciated the way they introduce all of the vendors with banners at the entrance, making it a much more personalized experience.



Since we are both seafood lovers, our host recommended that we head to the fishing port for our Saturday lunch. A ride on the blue metro line took us through many upscale neighborhoods eventually arriving at the port and wholesale fish market. Unlike many other such experiences, this one was highly civilized with small upscale restaurants across from the market, each with their grills and displays of fresh seafood. We chose O Lusitana, also Routard-recommended, and



shared a large sole. Then we walked the 5 km along the coast back to the river mouth with various parks and other sights along the way.

It is now time to say good-bye to Porto, rent the car at the airport, and head out into Port wine country along the Douro river. It is difficult to describe, or even photographically depict the steep canyons that have been terraced to make horizontal space for grape vines, olive and almond trees. Memories of other such efforts include the Banaue rice terraces in the Ifugao mountains of the Philippines, Machu Picchu (without the religious aspect), and Green Mountain near Nizwah in Oman.



Although we were technically following the Douro, what was most notable (other than the grapes, of course) were the numerous tributary rivers we were crossing and how elevated the

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bridges we were on. This topography is easily 2000' elevation above the river gorges and the coastal mountain range rises to 7000'. The port producers have their welcome centers like the vineyard chateaus in France.



We lunched at what I call a “hole in the wall” local restaurant, which is what we both love. When we arrived, it was full of local families having a big Sunday mid-day meal. As we left, the staff was having their meal. The tiles along the railroad tracks illustrated the Douro.



This is a good time to explain the food service in Portugal. You will be brought bread, it is not free. Either decline, or if you take one piece you pay for the basket. Ditto olives, ditto other snacks – usually some sliced sausages or other local specialties. Wine is different. If you order a glass of the house wine, they will bring you a pitcher and charge you for however much you consume. Food portions are generally quite large.

We arrive in the University town of Coimbra (another steeply hilly town) in early evening. Some students headed our way very nicely helped with our suitcases (and we were only staying about 1/3 of the way up the hill!). Fortunately, we found a tiny bar nearby that reminded us of our



favorite bar in Havana while we waited for a table to be available at the restaurant, Fangas Major, across the lane from our Airbnb.



The university is the major attraction in Coimbra and we headed there (more climbing) in heavy rain the next day. The university dates from 1290 and from 1537 at its present location in the former royal palace (Coimbra was the capital of Portugal until 1255). There are magnificent views over the River Mondego and lower town. You could see the results of hurricane Leslie in the uprooted poplar trees.



The chapel and library are the highlights. Interestingly, bats resident in the building eat the insects which otherwise would destroy the collection of rare books, each dating prior to 1755 and



in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin.

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As we began the walking tour downhill, we discovered that there are both a bus and a funicular (adjacent to the central market) to access the top of the old town. Café Santa Cruz, next to the market is in a former church. The ladies' room is in what was the confessional.

When I was in Lisbon in 2012 I really enjoyed the Fado music and had read that Fado in Coimbra

was different, sung by university students or graduates wearing their black capes. So, I decided to take in two performances, one at the educational Casa Fado Ao Centro and the second at A Capella. The singer is accompanied by both a Portuguese and Spanish guitar.



There is a lot else to see in Coimbra, including the successive defensive walls, handsome buildings, a good shopping street. Plus, I have forgotten to mention the Portuguese equivalent of the croissant, called the pastel, the breakfast choice with coffee most mornings.



When departing Coimbra we stopped to enjoy the 14<sup>th</sup> C medieval gardens at the boutique hotel Quinta das Lagrimas. The garden had also suffered damage from the storm and cleanup was still



underway.

It is open to the public for a small fee. Its history is documented since 1326, and among its significant plantings and fountains are a sequoia planted in honor of the visit of the Duke of Wellington in 1813. The fountain of love witnessed the love of D. Pedro (King Peter I) with Ines e Castro (more about them later). The neo-gothic arch dates from the 19<sup>th</sup> C. There was a great view back to the university.

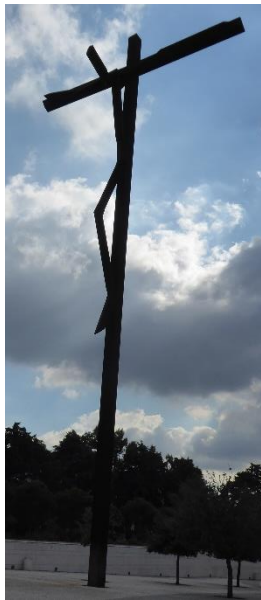


The next stop was the nearby Roman ruins at Conimbriga which date from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD. Excavations include homes, shops and bath areas. The highlight is the fountain house under

a UNESCO-provided protective roof with many of its rooms and beautiful mosaic floors.



En route to Nazare we visited the shrine to the Virgin of Fatima. This is one of the three main Virgin Mary pilgrimage sites in Europe along with Lourdes in France and Medugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Neoclassical basilica (1928) is now anchored at the other end of the giant plaza by the multinational Church of the Holy Trinity (2007) which can hold 9000 worshippers. Every 13<sup>th</sup> of the month from May to October ~ 100,000 pilgrims arrive.



Highlights for me were the iron crucifix, and the golden mosaic altarpiece in Church of the Holy Trinity. The symmetry of the layout is moving and there are sculptures of each Pope who has visited the site.

The final stop today is the Batalha (battle) monastery. This is a huge complex and to me as beautiful as the Manueline Basilica in Lisbon. The church has very tall Gothic arches. The Cloisters Gothic arches date from ~1400 and are topped by Manueline decoration circa 1500.





The double tomb of King Joao I and his English Queen, Philippa is here. They are the parents of “Prince Henry the Navigator”, also buried here.

Portugal’s Tomb of the Unknown Soldier sits under a crucifix which actually accompanied Portuguese soldiers into battle on the western front of WWI. I was fortunate to witness the changing of the guard.



Arriving in Nazare I couldn’t find the Airbnb address with the GPS. Usually you communicate with your host via Airbnb email so that they can provide the translation, but since we were en route we were texting, she in Portuguese and I in French. I found the local library which we knew was close and she could understand that we would be there. She and her husband came and walked us to the apartment, well-located in the center of town. They recommended Taberna da Praia for dinner. It was an excellent choice,

with garlic clams on offer (repeated many times during the rest of the trip), fish soup (a different recipe every place we had it but always excellent) and rice with shrimp and calamar, another staple.

My traveling companion had seen that for the next week there would be Men's Professional Surfing Championship competitions at nearby Peniche. I was very excited because I had never seen professional surfing before. I love it when things you could never plan for in your trip happen! Turns out the waves weren't great when we were there but I got to learn a little bit about



such competitions and feel the vibes. It is the first time I have seen people doing pirouettes on their surf board while taking the wave!



All the competitors were featured with their current point levels and of course we are almost three times the average age of the competitors and fans. There was a map showing all the surfing spots along the Portuguese coast and which type of waves are at each. The action was being filmed by a drone and the announcer narrated in Portuguese and English.



Another nearby attraction is the 14<sup>th</sup> C walled town of Obidos with its 16<sup>th</sup> C aqueduct. It is worth a brief walk along the very touristy street of artisan shops and the ramparts with excellent

views. The town is known for ginja, a cherry liqueur often served in tiny edible chocolate cups.



One more stop today was the Monastery of Santa Maria in Alcobaca. Although its façade is Baroque it is primarily a Gothic complex and the largest church in Portugal. This was the home of upwards of 1000 Cistercian monks. Ceramics were their primary product.



The tombs of King Peter I and Dona Ines de Castro rest feet to feet. Theirs was a love story of romance and political intrigue climaxing in Peter's father, the then King Alfonso, ordering the murder of Ines. Ceramics continue to commemorate them.

One interesting architectural feature in the cloisters is that each of the numerous circle openings has a different pattern in its interior.





The oven in the 18<sup>th</sup> C kitchen could roast seven oxen simultaneously (remember they are feeding 1000 monks, actually 999, triple the Trinity).



We chose to stay in Nazare because of all the attractions in close proximity as described above. It is a small town and obviously everybody knows everybody because in the shops and along the streets there are constant greetings and conversations.

The women here were known for their seven petticoats which could serve as cape and coat layers (much like the Scottish kilt) when they watched for their fishermen husbands to return from the sea. Since this is no longer a significant fishing town they seem to have switched to an apron (still short like the petticoats).



The pace is slow – these men are peeling potatoes outside one of the small food stalls near our apartment.

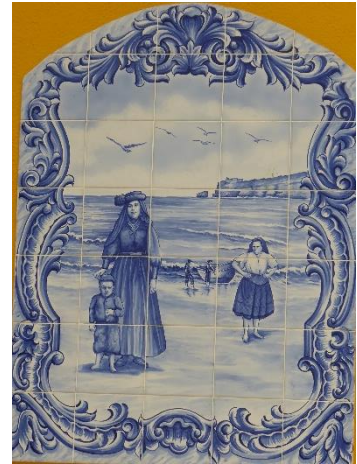
The harbor illustrated my prior confusion about the buoys where in the US you followed “red right returning” to harbor, but here it is the opposite. There is also



an upper town overlooking the beach.



Tiles are abundant, from those above house entrances, to a small fountain, to scenes of Nazare life.



We had our clams with garlic and olive oil at Casao Santo one night.



Now we are ready to head southeast to the center of the country and the one night we will splurge on a high-end accommodation.

En route our lunch stop is Mora. We were assuming a quick café stop but were commandeered to a regional landmark – award-winning Restaurant Alfonso, since 1964. I had a pork tenderloin, what they called black pork, so I am assuming sanglier (wild boar). My companion had a huge fish soup, again a unique recipe. Our young waiter spoke excellent English.



We are now in the Alentejo region, about 1/3 the total area of Portugal. This is farmland - wheat, cattle, wine and trees: cork oak and other oaks, olive, and eucalyptus (for pulp).



We learned that the number painted in white on the stripped cork trunk is the year it was harvested, i.e. 8 being this year. It takes 9 years for the bark to regrow to harvestable thickness. Later in the trip we saw the slabs being transported.

A wide variety of wines, white, rose and red, are produced here and we enjoyed them.

We detoured slightly to pass through Estremoz, center of a marble-producing area. We only looked at the outsides of buildings, museums and the City Hall, with its blue tiles. Plazas, benches, curbs and buildings are built of white marble. A small market on the town square

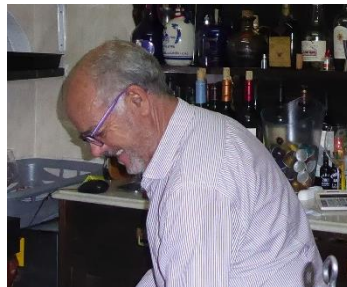
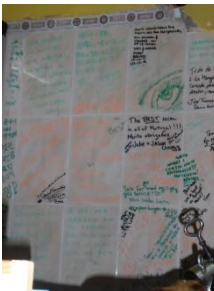
provided the opportunity to buy handbags made from cork. There was much more to be appreciated here, had we provided the time in our itinerary.

Evora was an important center in both the Roman and Muslim periods. A temple that was part of the Roman Forum still remains at the high point in town adjacent to the Cathedral, home to one of Portugal's three Archbishops. The 16<sup>th</sup> C aqueduct passes through town with shops and houses constructed inside its arches, sometimes so low you have to crawl to access them. We had a beautiful sunset that evening.



We enjoyed the hospitality, breakfast and accommodation at Albergaria do Calvario conveniently located just inside the old town walls where the car was left in underground parking and we could enjoy roaming this hilly town on foot. Bistro Bared was recommended by the hotel for dinner as the female chef is vegetarian as is my traveling companion. Her husband served the most tender octopus yet!

yet!



An interesting company, Comur, we have seen in several locations specializes in canned sardines (and other fish) in beautiful cans.



Leaving Evora we head southeast towards the fortified hill town of Monsaraz. This region has been a historic crossroads and evidence of civilization is marked by megalithic sites dating from 5500 to 3000 BC. We found a couple of them.



Passing through a pottery town we saw pottery on roof tops, as I

have seen in Le Mans, France.



This area is dominated by the largest artificial lake in Europe, Reservoir do Algueva which is 83 km long covering an area of 250 km<sup>2</sup>. It supplies drinking water to over 200,000 people and irrigation to 100,000 hectares of farmland in Spain and Portugal. Additionally, it is a beautiful recreational amenity in the region.

I loved the “selfie” sign at one of the overlook viewpoints.



As we traveled south towards the Algarve, virtually along the Spanish border we rarely encountered another vehicle. We started to see plantations of a different kind of pine with branches rounded upwards forming a bowl-looking canopy. That evening in Tavira we learned that these are the trees that produce pine nuts, which are harvested strictly between December 15 and March.



We stopped for lunch in Mertola which was a thriving commercial center in Carthaginian then Roman and Moorish times. The region was a source of copper but the last mine closed in 1965 and the silting of the river rendered it useless for commercial shipping. We had simple toasted

sandwiches and I liked the café's adaptation of a juice bottle into a napkin holder.

This region is Portugal's "bread basket" and one result of the extensive agriculture is that it can support a very large stork population.



Virtually every other electric pole contained a nest. This is in stark contrast to my experience in Slovakia where each village could only support one stork couple. They would spend summers in northern Europe and then migrate to southern Europe for the winter season.



We knew we had reached the Algarve when we first saw a palm tree and citrus



Orchards.

We arrived at Tavira, which straddles the Gilao River about two miles from its mouth, late in the afternoon. A major industry is salt production from the extensive salt marshes between the town and the Atlantic Ocean.



Archeological excavations have found evidence of an 8<sup>th</sup> C BC Phoenician wall and Islamic residential structures beneath the medieval residence of a family of Portuguese adventurers headed to Africa.



Some place names are further reminders of the Arab influence.

Silting of its harbor and departure of its tuna industry have left Tavira mainly dependent on tourism. A few fishing boats are still evident.

The main church on the hill and adjacent former castle gardens form a centerpiece of the right bank.



Tavira's beach island is a six-mile-long sand bar accessible by shuttle boat which, unfortunately, we didn't have time to visit.



You cross to the left bank on what looks like a Roman bridge, but isn't. Historically there was a bridge, the current one dates from 1652.

After exploring a bit in early evening I opted for a Guinness at an Irish pub on the left bank and found a good dinner in the small alleys of this neighborhood.





I loved the door handles on the Municipal Archives building. Tavira has a pleasant vibe and our hotel staff happily answered (or researched) all our questions from our day passing through farmlands.

Next day we hot-footed our way on the toll highway about 100 miles west through the Algarve to Lagos. There is a good covered market and we were surprised to not see pine nuts being featured for sale to visitors since they are so expensive in the US. It was from Lagos that the royal-sponsored expeditions would depart in the 1400's, then the slave trade, tuna fishing and military. But the 1755 earthquake-tsunami devastated the city. Today it has a well-protected harbor.



From Lagos heading west there is a series of steep cliffs with beaches in between. We drove leisurely stopping and walking at the various beaches (or at least the promontories above them).





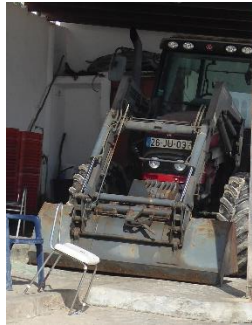


Many people were enjoying hiking/cycling the route. We lunched on huge portions of sautéed baby squid at O’Camilo restaurant at Praia Dona Ana.



Eventually we reached tiny Salema about a two-mile detour from the east/west highway to take a beach-walking and beverage break. There are a few fishing boats and an appealing beach below a

hillside of condo’s. The tractor for hauling out the fishing boats is still there as well as fishermen’s residences. We were glad we had decided to make Sagres our base as there was too much “nothing” in Salema.



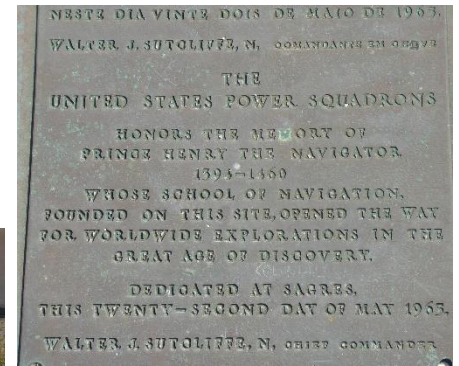
In Sagres we stayed in an apartment hotel with a great ocean view overlooking Cape Sagres with its lighthouse, small church and museum of the former navigation school founded by Infante Dom Henriques, our “Henry the navigator”. Such famous explorers as Vasco de Gama and Magellan were trained here. The 1755 earthquake also destroyed the fortress and school.



I walked to Cape Sagres where there were excellent information signs explaining the flora and fauna of this ecosystem. I was surprised to see fishermen on the top of the bluffs. I can't imagine how anything they caught could actually be hauled up to the top! There were also good views to Cape St Vincent.



A knitting project “The scarf that warms Portugal” started with a kindergarten class in nearby Vila do Bispo. In 2016-17 they received scarves from all over Europe and Brazil. The follow- up project Rose of the Winds is displayed now.



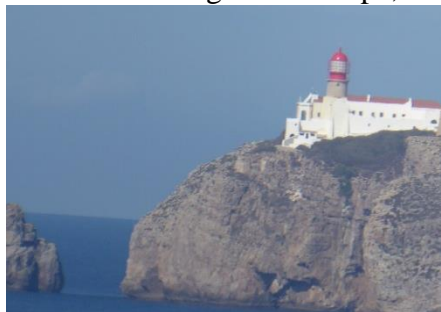
I appreciated the plaque installed in honor of Henry by

United States Power Squadrons.

Back in Sagres, lunch is at a surfer hangout with super food: a sandwich of eggplant, tomato and cheese and nachos with red beans and garbanzos. Then a quick visit to the marina/fishing harbor which on a Sunday afternoon was totally empty of life except for a cat and seagull happily napping in the sun.



Then we drove to Cape Sao Vicente. This is the southwestern tip of Europe. The lighthouse is one of the strongest in Europe, said to be seen from as far away as 60 miles. And here again were fishermen (and women) on top of the cliffs!



Among all the tourist souvenir shops is “The last hot dog before America”.



There were spectacular views back towards Cape Sagres.



A hearty seafood stew, cataplana, rounded out our coastal visit.

We had been told that we could overlook the morning fish auction starting at 7 am at the harbor. However, when we arrived the next morning there was nothing happening except a few fishermen landing their catch and we were told that the auction would take place at



3 pm. Perhaps because it was a Monday.



Our final day's 3 ½ hour drive on toll roads got us to Sintra, 15 miles NW of Lisbon, in early afternoon.

En route we got to see cork being transported, as well as the Lisbon Christ statue and aqueduct!



In Sintra the GPS failed us as the streets have all been recently re-routed. By mistake I got us on the loop road up to the Moorish Castle and Pena Palace. The town was mobbed with visitors and vehicles as we knew it would be as many attractions in Lisbon are closed on Monday so visitors head to Sintra for the day. We finally got to old town, parked the car, and found our pension on foot. Then the staff very nicely guided our car circuitously to find them and their parking place.

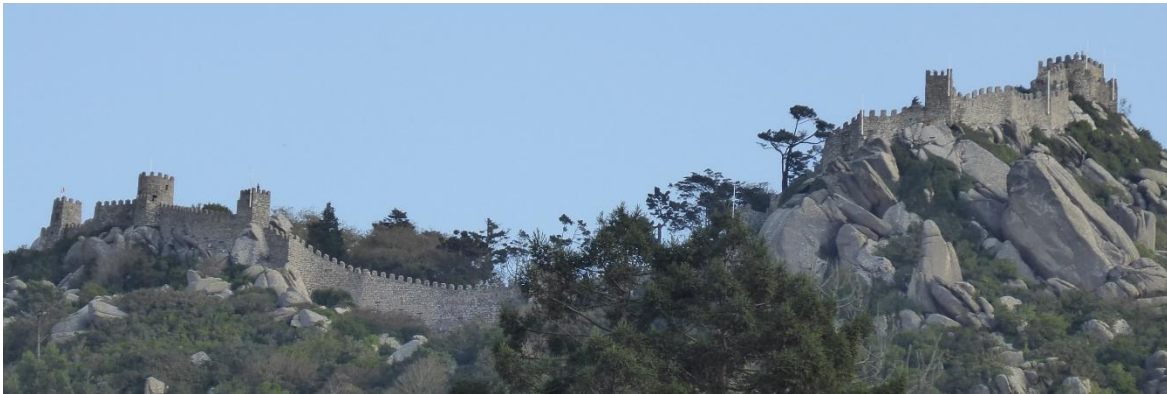
I had visited Sintra's main sights when staying a week in Lisbon in 2012 at the end of my Club Med cruise. Given the intense crowds at the main attractions, we opted instead to visit the magnificent Quinta da Regaleira garden and mansion. Full of fountains, underground passages, wells, rock walls, towers and dramatic vegetation the visitor can easily spend half a day here.



Parts of the mansion are under renovation and guide books don't rave about it. However, I loved the interior and especially the murals and woodwork on ceilings and walls.



I was able to glimpse views of the Moorish castle and Palace Pena from the garden.



On the return walk from the garden to the center of town I stopped at Lawrence's Hotel where I had my first vinho verde in 2012. This hotel, opened in 1764, has seen lots of history including in 1809 Lord Byron writing part of his Childe Harold's Pilgrimage here. There have been many other famous guests including former U.S. President Bill Clinton and Margaret Thatcher. I again had a vinho verde along with assorted samosas.

Back in historic Sintra, excellent dinner was at Routard-recommended Tulhas.





Everything went smoothly the following morning as we drove from Sintra to the airport to drop the car. I was flying Royal Air Maroc back to Agadir via Casablanca and my friend was going to have a couple of days in Lisbon.

I highly recommend Portugal travel. The prices in general provided good value for what you paid, the service was excellent and the Portuguese were always pleasant and helpful.

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