

SUNNY SICILY

Craig | Joanne | Peanut



Peanut gets stuck in to more yogurt. Note the peg



Flip Flop Feet



Am I a lemon or a lime?

We ended on a high in Italy before setting sail to Sicily. Overall lovely weather except for the day we went to Etna and it picked it down, more about that later. Loads of ladybirds came to say hello to Homer and we've seen quite a few eagles and the odd rabbit.

Homer's had another spring clean, I became a great auntie for the second time and Peanut is in need of a serious colonic.

This week we spotted spiderman clinging on for dear life, see if you can spot him in the photo's.

Tuesday 20th May: Scillia to Chianalea

Craig woke in a mischievous mood and there is only one thing for it, hide under the covers until the mood passes. Tuck every limb in tight and wait. Five minutes later, I could hear Peanut sneezing. Peanut failed to take shelter and got woke by a nose flick. Craig found it highly amusing and continued to flick the dog's nose until Peanut went in to hiding. As we sat having our morning coffee, I suddenly remembered about last night and started to smile. It was one of them oooops smiles. Craig looked at me and said "what, what have you done?" I grinned and quietly said mobile phone. "Yeah, what about the mobile phone?". **Eer I dropped it last night behind the sofa.** "Which, sofa. Not that sofa?". Stupid me placed the phone on the top of the sofa and then knocked it down the back. The only way to recover the phone was to take off all the cushions and unscrew the back panel. To unscrew the back panel we needed the screw driver, which is under the van. Half an hour later Craig returned the mobile phone to its rightful place. That will teach me!

The waters here are crystal clear and just down in the bay are a couple of fishermen. Out to sea you can see a little fishing boat but its mast looked awful high. As the little fishing boat got clearer we could see why it was so tall. There was a man plonked on top, looking out for the shoals of fish. Wait a minute he is actually steering the boat from up there. Well I have never seen that before. I bet he doesn't have vertigo! The waters are pretty calm today but by god the boat still bobbed around. The chap looked like a pendulum just waiting to be dunked.



I did a bit of admin whilst Craig cycled around the shore line. half an hour he was back with a tub of ice-cream. Italian ice-cream is so yummy and this tub was no exception...pistachio and chocolate gateaux. Later that day we took a cycle round the headland, Craig found something that I would like. What could it be? The most beautiful little fishing village, It is like the Italian version of Newquay some 50 years ago. It gets a gold star and definitely one on the list of potential places to retire to. Hopefully the pictures do the place justice...

Homer is tucked in the very far right hand corner looking across the bay.



This is the view as we approached the headland. Castle on top and tunnel at the bottom. We continued along the front.



Just finished painting the beach toilets. I just love the colours



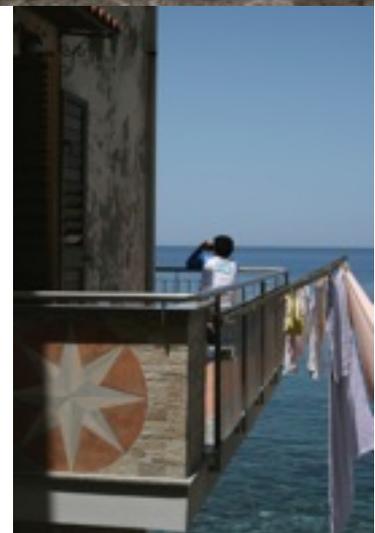
As we entered the tunnel we got a lovely surprise, Beautiful shrine inside with benches for people to pray.



As we came out the tunnel we found another little fishing village....



We cycles up and down the little streets





Its like one big rock with a castle on top. On one side you have the beach (R) and the other side (L) you have the village. And if you stand on the headland you can see Sicily.



Fishing village and harbour to the left



Beach to the right.

After seeing the little fishing village we decided to move Homer a few meters round the headland from the beach bit to the fishing bit. We had to wait a little while for a few cars to move but once they did we nicely snugged our way in a little spot over looking the fishing boats, 'Newquay' to the right, castle above us and the coast of Sicily to the left. We watched the day go by and the fishing boats return with the days catch. Today we learnt that the boat with the tall mast is called a felucche and they are used to catch swordfish and marlin. When the felucche pulled in everyone was eager to see what it had on board. They took their time to come ashore but when they did...8 swordfish were quickly whisked off in to the back of a van and no doubt straight to one of the top restaurants in the area.



Wednesday 21st May: Chianalea to Sant'Aléssio

Terrible nights sleep. Despite the fishermen going home around sunset this little harbour didn't go to sleep. It went quiet around 10 for an hour but that is it, it was like trying to get to sleep in the middle lane on the M6 during rush hour....impossible, until you get stuck in a traffic jam and then you start to doze off until some idiot beeps his horn and makes you jump out your blinking skin. At 3am it was pretty quiet but there was a lot of flashing lights. We couldn't work out what was going on, so we got up to have a look. We could see about 8-10 men at the other side of the harbour. 2 at a vehicle, 2 on the steps which led up to a 20ft wall, 2 on top of the wall and the rest over the wall? We have no idea what what they were doing but it looked suspicious and we recon it was an international drugs ring. And there's us two goons right in the middle. Their flash lights changed colour and every so often one would flash in amber and the other would respond either red or green. Craig managed to polish off a whole tub of cottage cheese on crackers and still didn't find out what they were up to. Where is Sherlock when you need him.

At 5am I gave up tossing and turning and got up. I watched all the fishermen arrive, get their boats ready and then set sail just as the sun was rising. I recognised some of them from yesterday with their little flat caps and wrinkled faces. There is something about toothless smiles that just want to make you want to chuckle.



We sat most of the morning looking out across the bay just watching the fishermen unload their catch and the locals wander around looking busy when all the time they were just curious about Homer. One old chap fitted a new engine to his little wooden boat and once ready, Craig with the help of a few locals, heave ho'd the boat in to the water.

We decided to have a ride in Lidl and do a shop before heading off to Sicily in the morning. Once stacked up we headed back to Chianalea via the ferry terminal except we didn't manage to get out the terminal. Before we knew it, we were on the ferry and heading to Sicily. The ferry cost €55 in total and the journey took about 20 minutes. We arrived in the port of Messina and got straight on the motorway. It was getting late in the day and we wanted to find somewhere to stop before the sunset, so we pulled in





to a family run campsite at Sant'Aléssio. The campsite was right on the beach and was pretty quiet. It had the usual facilities and cost €16 a night. It was a really nice site but for the high barbed wire fence and sound of German accents, which gave it a sort of concentration camp feel.

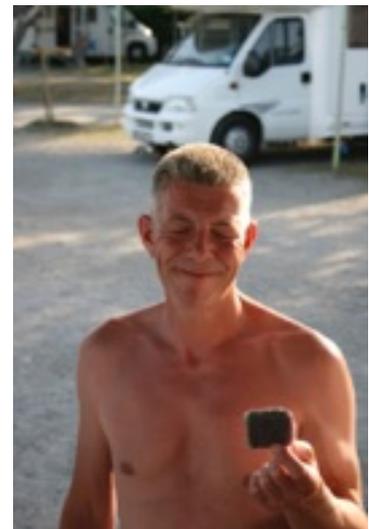
Craig popped to the local shop for a beer and then we fired up the BBQ and celebrated our 1st night in Sicily.

Thursday 22nd May: Sant'Aléssio

Not much to say today. We washed everything in sight from clothes to cupboards to Homer to Peanut. A full blown spring clean.

Our German neighbours are the sort that keep to themselves. He's a rather large chap who sweats all day and drinks pepsi, whilst his wife does a spot of sunbathing. However, our neighbours to the rear are the opposite. A Swiss couple with 2 children - 3 years and 6 months. They are travelling for about 4 months in a tiny camper and like us they only pull on to campsite to clean and do washing. Once she started to wash and hang out all the clothes, I didn't feel so guilty about all our washing. I thought we had loads but jeeze she had a lot but guess you do with two children and she did it all by hand.

Craig had another mad hour where he lost his marbles and started playing the maraquer with the coffee and sugar tubs. He does make me laugh at times. He also had a scrub with a brillo pad to get rid of the flaking skin.



Friday 23rd May: Sant'Aléssio to Etna

It's Sicily's highest mountain, and it's also the largest volcano in Europe and one of the most active in the world. The ancient Greeks viewed it as the home of Vulcan, god of fire, and home of the Cyclops, the one-eyed monster. Craig looks like a cyclops when he's had a drink, so he should feel right at home. Much of the landscape in and around is covered with solidified lava, great for skiing in winter and walking in summer. The crater is dangerously active, so so certainly a sense of adventure as we slowly drive up to the 2000m car park on the south side. It's certainly feels very different to Vesuvius. Etna has green foothills that give way to wooded slopes, then to bare, black-and-grey seas of volcanic debris, spotted with the odd plant, the yellow-green Spino Santo and Etna violets. We passed the most recent lava streams to the right of the road, as well as smaller craters. At one point we pulled over to admire the view and Craig noticed a condom wrapper. On the back in bold letters it said "retard applica", clearly Italians are very discrete.



We stopped on a lay-by right near to the refuge centre. It was very quiet and hardly another around just the odd insanely fit cyclist. I stepped outside for a bit of fresh air and when I turned around there were 4 dogs all sniffing at Homer. Clearly they could smell Peanut and they didn't like a smell on their patch. These were no ordinary dogs, they were wild dogs and one glimpse of their pearly white made me jump back in Homer without so much as a word. I quickly shut the door and grabbed hold of Peanut, so he couldn't bark. I didn't fancy unsettling a pack of wild dogs.



At 8pm we moved Homer to the car park as it is free from 8pm to 8am and is located right at the bottom of Etna. The views of both Etna and the surrounding countryside are just stunning from here. As the sunset behind Etna we ate our sausage butty and then called it quits for the day.



Saturday 24th May: Etna to Francavilla di Sicilia

6.30am and I lied in bed wondering what day it was and trying to remember where we were. Then all of sudden there was one almighty bang. We both jumped up and as we looked at each other we both thought the same thing. Is that thunder or is that Etna exploding. Next minute Homer was in the firing line, again. Craig said that's either lava bombs or bloody big hail. Thanks Craig, I was anxious enough and now I am just damn right petrified. I shot out of bed and as I looked up at Mount Etna, the thunder and lightening seemed louder and brighter than ever before. Was it thunder or was Etna's activity causing the storm. My mind was ticking away. As I looked around, where were all the other motorhomes? Why were we the only one left up here? Did they know something we didn't. In about 10 minutes I managed to scare myself half to death. How stupid are humans...why on earth do we scare ourselves to death, what a stupid function. Proves god must have a sense of humour.

We watch the storm and after a couple of hours it certainly wasn't calming down. The visitor centre should be open by now but nothing. We decided today is not a good day for visiting the

summit even though Craig quite fancied the challenge. Hey Ho and I was looking forward to the cable car ride up another 500m to Monte Montagnola point

We took the scenic route back down, which was slight off the beaten track or should I say a rather unused, rough terrain track. No idea where we were but we drove through some sort of forest and it was just beautiful. All sorts of trees, bushes and wild flowers all naturally hedged with lava flow walls. It was pretty cold up here and so Craig jacked the engine heater on to high setting. After about half an hour we noticed the temp gauge hadn't moved and neither had the heat. What was



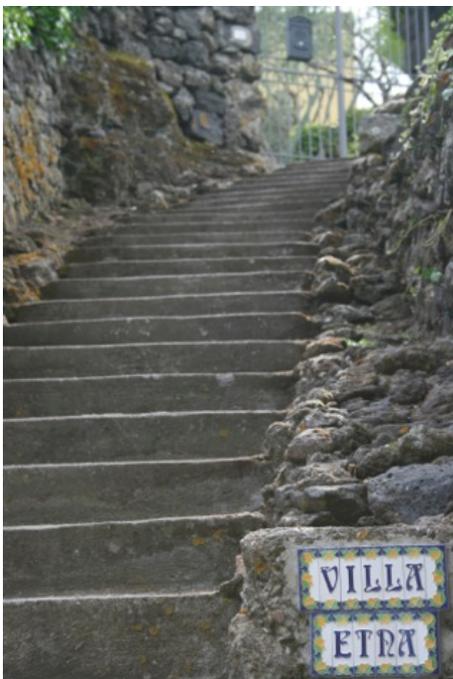
going on?

Was Homer feeling a little poorly with altitude sickness? His oil light showed he was a little low on fat, which felt strange. We'll need to get that sorted asap. Another few miles down the road and the thought of going in to an Italian garage made Homer think twice and we're back to normal with nice warm air blowing on our little tootsies.



As we reached the end of the decent

we drove around the circumference of Etna. We passed lots of little tiny villages all growing something different. The fertile soil from the volcano makes a good base for all sorts of vegetation - lemon, lime and orange trees, figs, vines and pistachio nuts are all visible and within reach from the road. Some of the villages we wandered around include - Bronte, Castello Nelson, Randazzo and Linguaglossa. Oh meet Sammy the Snail, it rained that much he came out of his shell for a while. Just before we reached our stopping point we wandered through little lanes and it was like driving through rock



gardens. When I say rock garden, I mean like an English rockery with staggered rocks and wild flowers peaking out of every nook and cranny. It was so pretty.



Today is our Russell's birthday and can't help but think of family back home. Its only two months since he passed away and everyone is getting together to remember him. I tried to facetime our Mandy but the connection here was too weak, so I called her instead. We had a good chat and a little cry and I so wanted to give her the biggest hug ever.

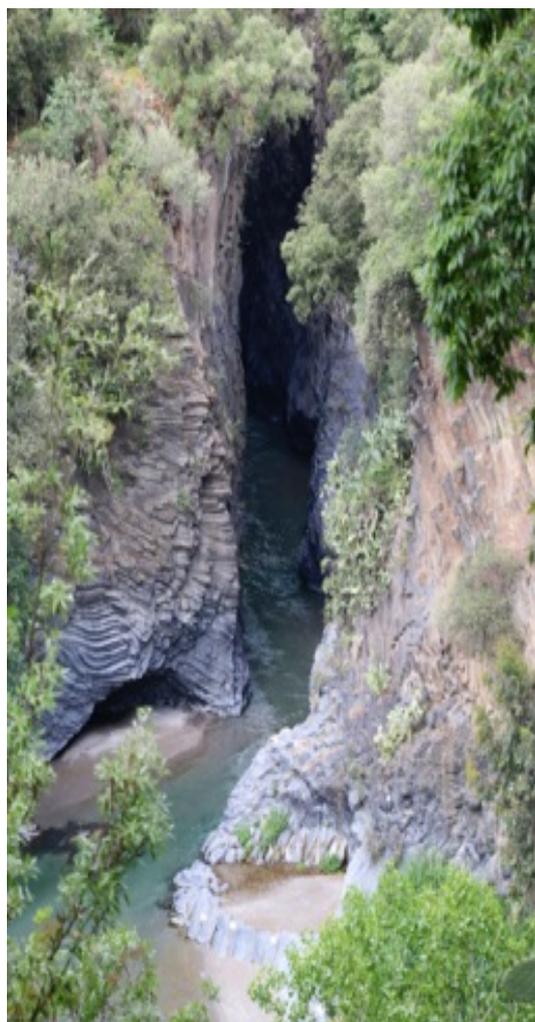


We found a tiny picnic area right beside fresh water tap. To our right Mount Etna and to our left Mojo Alcantara (or so we think), which is a village perched right on top of a cliff. What a wonderful parking spot. All evening cars pulled up with empty bottles to fill them from the water tap - they were quite well to do folk, so guessing it is natural water straight from Etna or some holy water, as its near to shrine of

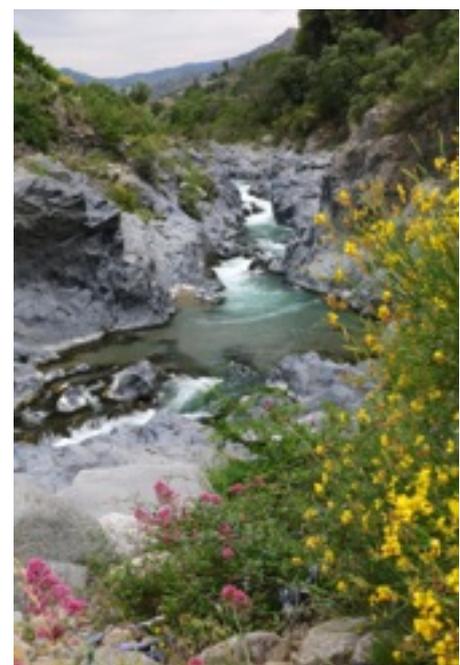
Madonna. After dinner Craig watched a film and fell fast asleep in the chair. I left him for a while, he looked to comfy to wake. When I finally woke him, he was clearly mid dream and thought he was in Llandudno. It was ever so funny because he was convinced we were there visiting his granddad.



Sunday 25th May: Francavilla Di Sicillia to Castiglione Di Sicilia

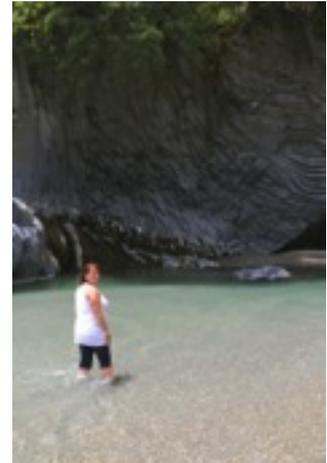


We blessed Homer with the holy water and headed through the lush Alcantara valley. At the end we pulled in to the Gole Dell'Alcantara. A few thousand years ago when Etna had one of its tantrums, it spat a load of lava into the Alcantara river, blocking its way. Over many years the force of the water eventually wore away the rock and created a beautiful, deep gorge with some fierce rapids. At the top of the gauge we walked passed loads of different vegetation and plants before descending through the gauge to the little beach area at the bottom. At the bottom we kicked off our shoes and waded across the river to the other side. Unfortunately we couldn't wake right through the gauge because





the water levels were too high. The water was freezing and it had a fair current at certain points. All in all it was a good morning exploring before heading off to Castiglione Di Sicillia.



We managed to park just round the corner from the piazza but it felt oddly quiet for a sunday afternoon. Just as we were about to go for a cycle, a funeral procession went by. First the car with loads of flowers, then 8 men carrying the coffin closely followed by what I assume to be his close family and finally hundreds of people. Everyone in the village turned out to mark their respects and slowly they walked from the church to the cemetery. It was so moving to see the whole community come together and celebrate the person's life. Later on the streets were buzzing with people. Not necessarily doing anything other than chatting and watching the children play in the street.



We spent a couple of hours cycling around the village. There is a castle perched on the ledge of the village, its abandoned but the ride up to the top was good. Once at the top it felt like being on top of the world just because you could see for miles across the plains below. You could clearly see the ruins at Francavilla Di Scilia, a town we passed through earlier in the day. The old

mountain retreat hasn't got much to visit but it does offer character and charm.



Yesterday it rained all day and today its scorching hot. How do you go from 11 to 32 in

one day, its bonkers and bazaar but love it.



Monday 26th May: Castiglione Di Sicilia to Siracusa

We wound further up the hill once more admiring the view of Mount Etna. Today was a good day for viewing with bright blue skies and very little haze. You could see the snow and ice in between the gorges of the lava flows. I wonder if that priest still collects the ice, rolls it in ash and then sells it to people on the island? If so, he's still got a lot to go at.

Just heard the news...my nephew Phil and his partner Amy have just welcomed little Lucas, their 1st baby in to the world. I can't wait to see the pictures but no internet!

We wandered through Linguaglossa on the north side of Etna and then slowly meandered to Catania. We planned on staying in Catania but we really struggled to get through the narrow streets and one way system. It wouldn't be so bad but the italians can't park and don't give two hoots about other traffic, so driving around narrow streets becomes virtually impossible. Every time you go to turn a corner, you stop, glance down and see how the cars are parked. They park any way up, upside down, double parking is standard and triple is slowly becoming fashionable. The only place they don't park is in the disabled parking spots or in front of someone's garage. As we got further down the town toward the sea front the roads just got too silly, so no choice but to get out of here. I must admit I find the whole culture fascinating whilst Craig just finds it frustrating.

By mid afternoon we were in Siracusa. Its on a headland with a bridge that links the little rocky island of Ortigia. We found a free parking spot near the harbour and then off we went for a quick look around the joint. Today is way too hot, so time for cold shower followed by the movie of the week...Godfather I.

Would you believe it, a French motorhome pulled up at the side. A couple in late 50's or early 60's. They did a load of messing around to park and then when he got out he completely disregarded the parked car at the side and dented his door. Not one bit of care on his face despite his acknowledgement of the dent. Some people!

Tuesday 27th May: Siracusa to Avola

Craig woke early and set off to fill Homer with some water. He'd cunning spotted a fresh water tap last night and now he was on a mission to utilise. All this happened whilst I was still in bed and if you've ever tried sleeping whilst on the move, don't bother. Apart from the fact you can't sleep, the coordination between your head and your body ceased to function and you have no blinking idea where you are or what position your body is in. The only certain thing is you'd get £200 for showing it on "you've been framed".



After all the upheaval the tap didn't really work it only dribbled.



Craig filled 2 x 5L bottled in half an hour whilst I untangled myself from the duvet and got my bearings. When he returned he had two huge croissants in his hands. One with cream and one with chocolate. After scoffing them we went to find a parking spot.

Siracusa isn't anything special but Ortigia is a beautiful place. It has a very medieval and baroque feels about it. Its history is fascinating and the buildings tell the story with lots of tiny streets going off in all directions. Its like one of those garden mazes, once your in, its hard to get out and you bump in to the same people all the time, who look equally as lost. Today is market day and the streets are manic with frantic sellers shouting their goods for sale and bewildered tourist and locals wandering around looking at what tasty morsels to buy. The fish market was a bustle and



the fresh tuna was huge. The sea urchins are a tiny delicacy but some how not sure its my cup of tea.

After filling up Homer we set off to Avola, a quite beach front until after the sunset when 100's of teenagers on scooters parade up and down the coastal road. Feels like mating season in the



human world and all that's missing is David Attenborough's narration although you'd be hard pushed to hear anything over the 50cc engines. Later that evening a young couple pulled up on a scooter and parked it at the side of Homer. They all were all over each other like a rash but I am not sure she was that keen as half way through a passionate cuddle she typed something on her phone. Tomorrow we're off to Noto, good night for now xxx

