



**BUMBLING ALONG
EXPLORING EUROPE
IN OUR MOTORHOME**

STATISTICS

Date	Country	Location	2,617 km	Weather	High	Low	Latitude	Longitude
Mon, 8 Dec 14	UK	Folkestone	468 km	Overcast	8 °	1 °		
Tue, 9 Dec 14	France	Calais	32 km	Overcast	10 °	3 °		
Wed, 10 Dec 14	France	Rouen	136 km	Rain	12 °	7 °		
Thu, 11 Dec 14	France	Chartres	218 km	Rain	17 °	11 °	N.048.43410	E.001.49928
Fri, 12 Dec 14	France	Chambord	118 km	Rain	17 °	9 °	N.047.61593	E.001.51135
Sat, 13 Dec 14	France	Chaunay	220 km	Rain	16 °	6 °	N.046.20585	E.000.16371
Sun, 14 Dec 14	France	Bordeaux	196 km	Overcast	15 °	5 °	N.044.86526	E.000.51801
Mon, 15 Dec 14	France	Biarritz	221 km	Sunny	17 °	5 °	N.043.46603	E.001.57189
Tue, 16 Dec 14	Spain	Estepar	303 km	Rain	17 °	4 °	N.042.27638	W.003.89911
Wed, 17 Dec 14	Spain	Salamanca	225 km	Fog	14 °	3 °	N.040.95757	W.005.67615
Thu, 18 Dec 14	Spain	Caceres	206 km	Fog	11 °	6 °	N.039.48066	W.006.36656
Fri, 19 Dec 14	Spain	Zafra	140 km	Fog	15 °	-1 °	N.038.42672	W.006.41037
Sat, 20 Dec 14	Spain	Sevilla	134 km	Fog / Sunny	17 °	4 °	N.037.39578	W.006.00711



2 FRANCE



CALAIS



Tuesday 9 December

First port of call Folkestone for a 2015 camping card then a quick trudge around Dover for some last minute shopping and a McDonalds breakfast we clambered in to Vin. Ferry ticket and passports in hand we gave each other a cheesy grin and set off for the Port of Dover.

Check in complete we wound our way to lane 144 and parked up behind a Latvian white van. We couldn't make out what the van was carrying but the logo suggested seal meat. Highly unlikely but just shows the power of logo's...or not!

The "My Ferry" boarding crew arranged for all the cars to board first, followed by the lorries then the vans and then finally one little motorhome called Vin Diesel. Vin was the only motorhome and the last vehicle to embark the 13:30 Dover to Calais crossing. He looked rather meek and mild parked up against all them big trucks.

We filled Peanut's bowl with fresh water, squeaked his favorite toy and then waved good bye to Vin and Peanut whilst we stumbled around the ferry for an hour or so.

Once in Calais, we headed straight to the seafront Aire. Jeez what happened? The place is dead! Last time we were here it was jammed packed with motorhomes but not today, only a handful of in-transit motorhomes waiting for their ferry. We had a quick stroll along the front where you can just about see the white cliffs of Dover before settling down for our evening meal...beans on toast and an early night.

**Peanut admiring the
White Cliffs of Dover
from Calais beach.**





ROUEN



Wednesday 10 December

About 3 in the morning the weather turned and boy did it get windy. Every so often we'd get one almighty gust of wind that would leave Vin rocking like a pendulum. Every time a gust hit the van my heart would skip a beat wondering in Vin would survive the blast. By 5 am my heart was pounding like crazy, and I was wide awake. The racket outside was getting louder as more and more tin cans decided to dance around outside our bedroom window. Enough is enough, time to get up and face the elements.

We had a quick cuppa and a shower before hitting the road and making the most of our early start. Furthermore we got to miss the ticket attendant...free nights camping! Yippee. Once on the road we could see the extent of the weather and so glad we opted for the earlier ferry otherwise we'd still be in Dover.

After a couple of hours we pulled in to a service station for some fuel and a bite to eat. The services were absolutely beautiful. More like a nature reserve with little streams, watering holes and quaint picnic areas. You could stop here for a weekend never mind a quick tea break.



Back on the road and Craig was quite happy with the new in built navigation system until it made the first boo boo. A sting of €17.90 for a toll road just outside Abbeyville. Not good news especially when its settings clearly state - avoid all toll roads. There was nothing for it, out came Marg the old faithful GPS. When we turned her on, she started chatting away, telling us what to do and where to go. It was like she'd never been tucked away for all those months...bless ye owd faithful.

We arrived a Rouen just before lunch and found a great little spot on the River Seine. We had an absolute brilliant panoramic view of the city, the bridge and the river from Vin just a shame the weather was so gloomy. After lunch we dusted down the Brompton bikes, kitted out Peanuts basket, wrapped up warm and cycled in to town.

Rouen is full of historical sights and it sort of feels a bit like Chester. An elegant and dominant cathedral surrounded by a warren of cobbled streets and arch ways. As you wander around the streets you notice the beautiful detail of the architecture. Unfortunately with places like this you end up with neck ache because you constantly walk around gawking at the sky. The town didn't much in the way of Christmas decorations but it did have a little Christmas market. Mainly selling food and hot drinks with the odd gift shop selling local handmade good-



ies. We found a great shop tucked down the side of the cathedral, a violin shop. It had 100s of violins in every shape and colour and if you couldn't find what you were looking for, they would make it for you. The fabulous gothic cathedral was closed (not sure why) so we didn't get to see the Monet art work but we did get an au natural shower from the heavens above. To be honest, all three of us got soaked to the skin. So on that note, time to head back to Vin for a hot shower, dry clothes and a nice cup of hot chocolate.



CHARTRES

Thursday 11 December



Woke to find the weather still cold, wet and miserable. After breakfast we locked everything away, secured the cupboards and set off to the next pit stop...Chartres. The drive was really boring. France is so flat and on a grey, rainy, miserable day, it looks even flatter. Nothing to see, not even a bump or a mound of dirt. We reckon the French need to buy a load of giant moles to dig them some hills and give shape to their landscape. Think we'll take that suggestion to the EU and get them an EU grant.

I was like a nodding dog for most of the journey, trying desperately to keep awake, so I didn't tup the dashboard. I don't fancy dinting our



new motorhome. Ever blue moon we'd drive through a little French village. Population of around 20 and predominantly farmers. Quaint little things but not much to see or do especially when it is raining so hard.

Once in Chartres, Craig did his usual of giving me heart failure by taking Vin a 2.3 m wide motorhome up in to a windy, narrow town that only caters for 2 m vehicles. After getting dirty looks from half of Chartres we found a parking spot about a mile outside the town.

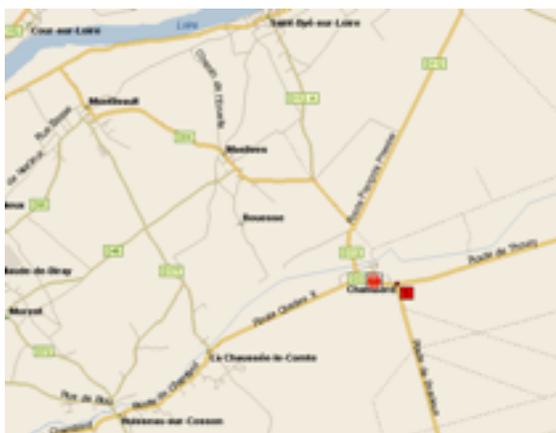
After a fresh croissant and pain au raisin we headed inside the cathedral. Reputably once of the finest gothic cathedrals in all of Europe. Inside they had started restoration and you could clearly see the difference on the stone work. The stained glass windows donated by royalty and priests in 1210 were pretty amazing with 176 windows illustrating biblical stories. During both world wars they removed each piece of glass for protection and then carefully placed them back, piece by piece.

We had a little walk around the grounds of the cathedral and the town but the drab weather made the place look uninviting. Back in Vin and we headed to the outskirts of the Chartres to Grande Prairie where we settled down for the night.



CHAMBORD

Friday 12 December



Craig woke with a cold, so looks like both of are full of it. Good job we bought some buttercup syrup before we set off. I know what will make Craig feel better...a trip to Lidl! We did a quick shop for key essentials and then set off to our first chateau. The roads in France are not at all like we expected them to be. We try and avoid the motorway, so we get to see the most of where we are. Well, here is France the roads are in great condition, no massive pot holes! However, they are like single track roads with no pavements or gutters, a bit like our single track farmer roads. In terms of getting a feel for where you are they are great but sure slow when you get a little on coming traffic.

You travel for several miles and then you come across a little French village. Nothing much to see just half a dozen houses and a bakers, thats it. Lovely little places and often full of character and charm. Out of the villages, it felt like you were driving across a golf course and Vin was one big golf buggy zipping from one hole to the next.

As we were both feeling under the weather we didn't feel like cooking, so we stopped at a little bakers. Craig came back with croissants, fresh bread, choc au pain and the biggest profiterole you have ever seen. It was the size of a football but it managed to fit nicely in to our bellies...yum yum.

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Back on the road we crossed over the Loire River and in to a lovely forest full of wild deer and boar. We spotted the odd deer but the piggies were in hiding. A few kilometers and we entered the grounds of Chambort Chateau. The grounds were well maintained and full of parking spaces to pull over and take country walks. We ignored the little parking spots and carried on toward the chateau. It was raining hard and we didn't fancy getting wet





MADAME
J'OANNE

SIR
CRAIGEE



through and then walking around a chateau in wet clothes. The car park at the chateau had a barrier system, which felt a little strange. Once we entered we then realised you had to pay for parking. Seemed odd given all the other car parks were free. Never mind, you live and learn.

The chateau was built by Francois I in 1519 as a hunting log. Unfortunately he died before it was fully completed, so left to his son Henry II to finish the 440 room chateau. The nearby Cosson River was diverted to run past the chateau although Francois did intend to divert the Loire River at one point. Chambord is the largest chateau in the Loire Valley. The state acquired it in 1932 and started restoration. Externally the architectural detail is just superb and rumor has it Leonardo De Vinci had something to do with the design. The external skyline of the chateau is fascinating and you could just spend hours looking at the detail (when its not raining). There are chimney pots, miniature spires, shell domes and shaped gables. It almost looks like a village on a roof.

Inside the rooms were minimally decorated and quite surprising you could just wander around where ever. The grand staircase was fascinating - designed so the person ascending didn't meet the person de-



scending. The bedrooms were interesting, I didn't realise the chambermaid would often sleep in a tiny room at the side of the monarchs main bedroom. Some of the servant rooms were quite nice. The salamander became the emblem of choice and during the construction over 800 salamanders were sketched or carved in to the stone or wood work.





They had a massive log fire burning on the ground floor. It filled the whole chateau with the smell of burning wood. The best bit was warming ya bum on the fire just before we left for the cold drizzly outside.

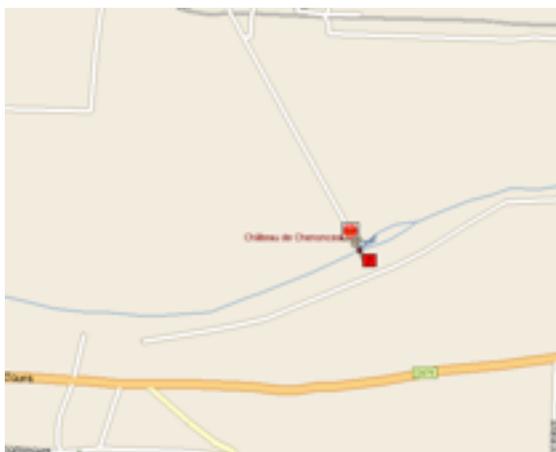
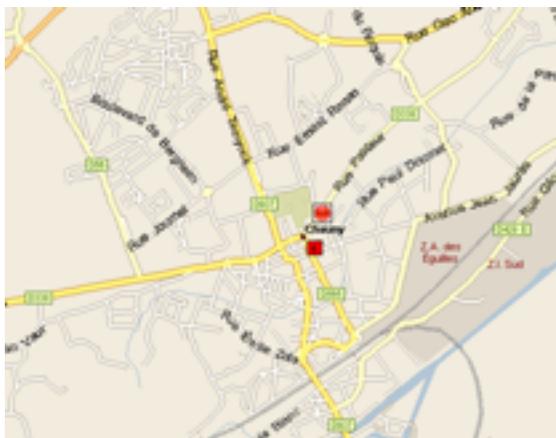
Outside we wandered around the best we could but it was raining quite hard. A shame really because the 12,990 acres looked amazing.

Back in Vin and we decided to stay in the chateau carpark for the night then we could admire the floodlit chateau over dinner.

Admission in to the chateau €11 per person and €10 for parking. Well, worth a visit if you are in the area.



CHAUNEY VIA CHENONCEAU CHATEAU



Saturday 13 December

We had to be up early and out the carpark by 7am to avoid another €10 parking fee. It was wet and very cold outside, so neither of us wanted to get up out of our cosy bed. Peanut too had cocooned himself inside his fluffy blanket with just a little black snout peeking out. After grumping at each other we both reluctantly clambered out of our bed and braved the elements.

We set off the next chateau on our agenda.

About half an hour before we reached the chateau we passed through a little village where they had carved homes out of the rocks. Most of the cave homes were now used as a garage but there quite a few still used as dwellings. Unfortunately the village was too small for us to pull over in the motorhome and have a wander.

Chateau Chenonceau felt very different to the last one except for the weather...wet and miserable. The walk up to the chateau was lined with trees and flower boxes. To the right, a small working farm with vegetables gardens, pigs, hens and donkeys. To the left perfectly maintained symmetrical gardens. This 1533 pleasure chateau was created by a series of aristocratic women and sits on the River Cher.



Externally, the building of Chambord is far grander and internally Chenonceau is far more elegant. Catherine Briconnet was the wife of the first owner and she built the pavilion. Then Diane de Poitiers added her touch with the formal gardens and bridge over the river followed by Catherine de Medici who did the gallery. The pattern of change continued right up to 1863 when Madame Pelouze undertook a full restoration. Inside the rooms were amazing and we especially liked the kitchen which included a walk way over the river.

We spent several hours in the chateau but needed to head off before dark at the carpark didn't allow overnight parking. We passed through Poitiers and it was a massive city with 1000s of retail parks and warehouses. We did contemplate stopping here but with all this Christmas traffic we opted to find something a little quieter. Chauney is a little village just south of Poitier with a free air, water and electricity. How nice it that, free stuff for motorhomes. As we pulled up an old couple were sat in their car singing away to some old French music. They were clearly enjoying the singalong and so lovely to see. As we left Peanut out for a walk the old chap came across to us for a chat. From what we could gather they were waiting to go in to the church hall. Tonight is the start of the 12 days of Christmas and they start by everyone in the village getting together to celebrate with a Santa pa-

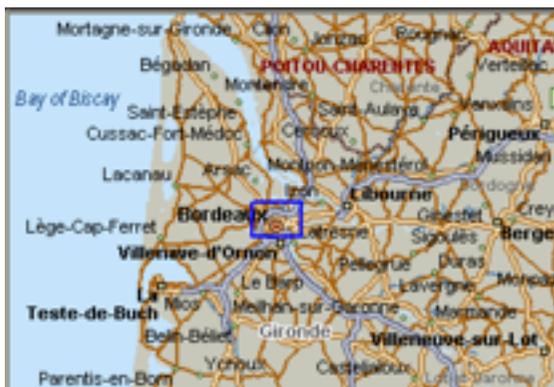


rade. Later that evening the hall was full to the brim and everyone celebrated with a good old fashioned game of bingo! I do love seeing towns and villages celebrating their traditions.





BORDEAUX



Sunday 14 December

With free water and no rain we opted to do a spot of washing. Hey, I forgot we have a new washing aid...little spinner! I did all the washing by hand and then used the spinner, it was great. The clothes were nearly dry. Poor Vin, he wasn't impressed when I hung all our clothes inside, they sort of ruined his contemporary land stylish look. Well, I had a chat with Vin and asked him to catch plenty rays for the solar panels then we could have the heating on and dry the clothes.

We set off to Bordeaux traveling through Cognac region. We passed loads and loads of vineyards with bare vines. Not long in to our journey and it started to rain. Poor Vin was trying his best to keep steam free but with damp clothes inside and pelting rain outside he struggled. We spent most of the journey constantly wiping the windscreen and side windows to get rid of the moisture and condensation. It was a nightmare.

Once in Bordeaux we headed straight for the centre in the hope we could find a central carpark. We were in luck, they had opened on of the central parks for Christmas shopping, so we parked Vin right next to the park statue. It was only later we discovered it was The Monument aux Girondins. The streets were busy with people rushing to buy



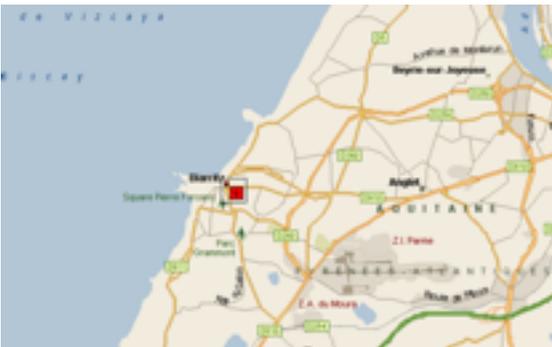
Christmas presents. The street markets were jammed packed selling their local produce. Outside the shopping area it was pretty quiet and it was a good to be able to see the elegant 18 century buildings without dodging the crowds. Bordeaux like many cities is built on a river, which is also a buzzing port and marine life. Being a Sunday most of the buildings were closed but we did get to see the grand theatre, place de la bourse,

Later we moved Vin to a...wait for it...retail carpark. Yep, we couldn't find anywhere to park except the retail park, so we tucked ourselves in the corner. We jacked the heating on high and snuggled up giving each other comfort with our sniffing colds.





BIARRITZ



Monday 15 December

Woke to very cold thick fog! What happened to nice blue skies? After a quick Lidl shop we tootled on down to Biarritz. After an hour or so the fog lifted and the sun popped out to say hello and so nice to feel the warmth of his little rays. We opted for the toll road as in the long run it was cheaper than taking the smaller French Road. The whole journey Peanut potted around in the Motorhome chasing the sun rays, he is a sun god. And when he wasn't bathing he was licking the floor. No idea why he feels the need to lick the floor like mad? With the sun in full swing we took advantage and dried all the clothes on the dash. Every 10 minutes or so I would turn the clothes around to optimise on the heat whilst taking care not to distract Craig whilst driving. It only took an hour and everything including our jeans and towels were dry.

Once in Biarritz we headed towards the sea to take a first glimpse of the ocean (excluding Calais). We parked up on an Aire Miladi and got ripped off. The aire only accepted credit card and by default it takes for 2 nights stay. No option for just one and with such a convoluted barrier system we had no option to reverse out and find somewhere else. Ah well €24 for one night, well we will not be using this aire again. We quickly parked up and headed down to the beach. It was gorgeous. Blue sky, crashing waves and golden sands. We walked and walked admiring the views and watching the occasional brave surfer. Biarritz was once the Monte Carlo



of Atlantic Coast popular with monarchs and rulers until the rise of Côte d'Azur then Biarritz went to the dogs. The resort bounced back and is now popular with French yuppies and surf bums.

On the beach looking backwards you see the coastline dotted with grand hotels. Not the modern tower blocks like today but the old traditional hotels with massive bay windows. In many ways it reminded us of Llandudno. Just before the sunset we walked along the waters edge dodging the tide and making the most of the last few rays of sunshine. Just before we headed back we took time to scatter a few ashes of our Russ and take time to remember what a great guy we sadly miss.

Back in Vin and we watched another Motorhome pull up and get frustrated with the stupid barrier system. This time not only did they get charged incorrectly but the machine chewed their ticket. Fortunately another Motorhome was leaving and handed them their ticket with a valid code, so they finally got through. Val and Pete from Swansea were just putting their head down for the night, like us they were on their way to Portugal. We were having a good chat when an old French guy appeared from nowhere. He started rabbiting on about their ticket. The old chap assumed they had been paid but when he realised that wasn't the case he disappeared in to the bushes, at which point we all went back in to our little abodes.



3
SPAIN



ESTEPAR VIA SAN SEBASTIAN



Tuesday 16 December

We left the little radiator on all night and it did the trick, bedding all dry and crisp. Good job! Wish I could say the same about the weather, it is horrid. After blue skies yesterday we are now back to grey cloud and much rain. We topped up water whilst Peanut did his favorite chore of licking the floor clean and then headed on towards San Sebastián in Spain. Have to say, We weren't too keen on the exit to the aire, it was a double barrier exit system and it was a close call for nearly giving Vin a smack up the bum. Given it is an aire dedicated to Motorhomes you would think they would know the size of the damn things!

Not long and we crossed over from France to Spain you could tell the difference. France is so flat, orderly and clean where Spain is hilly, hectic and rustic. The good thing with France is they are Motorhome friendly and traveling around is so easy. Plenty parking, fresh water, great services and friendly people. Wonder if Spain offers the same hospitality to Motorhomes? I didn't know that the Pyrenees were as a result of Spain crashing into France

We arrived in San Sebastián and it felt busy, especially compared to France. We drove through the town which looked pretty good with old

buildings and lots of unusual shops. We headed along the coastal road and pulled up right on the head land for lunch. The Atlantic Ocean was wild today, crashing waves against the sea wall and ever so often, whoosh a big wave would send water shooting 50 feet in to air and right over the sea wall. There weren't many people out walking but occasionally you see a lone soul get absolutely drenched. I know you shouldn't laugh but we couldn't help it. We were sat nice and snug in Vin and watching the waves provided great lunchtime entertainment. Clearly the entertainment rubbed off on Craig as he slipped on his croc shoes and placed a piece of bread on his head...what am I, he asked. Apart from stupid, I said, I don't know, what are you. A Croc Monsieur. Only Craig would think of that. After lunch we decided to travel a little further because the weather was so awful. If it wasn't raining then we would have stopped in San Sebastián but hardly any point in this weather.

Left: San Sebastian and below one of the deserted towns.

After a few hours down the road we pulled in to Burgos. It seemed a nice city with river, old historic buildings etc but no parking options at all unless



you went underground or parked on steep street. We tried to get help from a parking attendant but she was as friendly and helpful as our UK attendants. We seemed to search for parking for ages and in the end we headed out of town. We pulled in a few tiny villages but they all seemed weird. We couldn't decide if they were abandoned or just some Hicksville. It was like a movie set from the Wild west were everyone has locked up and hiding inside waiting for the bad boys to arrive. In the end we decided to stop in what appeared to be the nicest of the abandoned towns. This town had a general shop and a...dentist. How bazaar, a dentist of all things but I guess that just adds to the weirdness.

We didn't explore the town for fear of getting gunned down in El Cid country. When we let Peanut out for a pickle his scent shot across town and set every wild dog howling. Next minute, a mad scurry of alley cats shot across town in every direction, no doubt making way for the pack hunters. Sorry Peanut your gonna have to finish you pickle later, I picked him up and made a quick dash in to Vin. Needless to say we had a tense nights sleep.

Estepar aka hicksville





SALAMANCA



Wednesday 17 December

Woke up in the Wild west village and it looked even more spooky this morning. Covered in a blanket of fog just made the place look well dodgy. Nothing for it we went for the great escape just in case the hermit bandits decided to shoot us down and take us hostage. We joined the main road towards Salamanca along with trucker brigade.

Not much to report with the fog limiting visibility but we did see plenty roadside scrap yards, if that sort of thing takes your fancy. One yard even had a London taxi cab suspended 30 foot in the air advertise his garage. It's funny because every where you go in Spain they have loads of billboards in fact they must be the king of billboards. I remem-



ber as a child visiting Benidorm and the whole drive from the airport to the hotel was covered with posters and large billboards advertising everything from donkeys to sunscreen.

As we got closer to Salamanca the fog started to clear and the colours of the landscape were amazing. Beautiful green trees and lush meadows with the odd bright orange dirt track, so pretty.

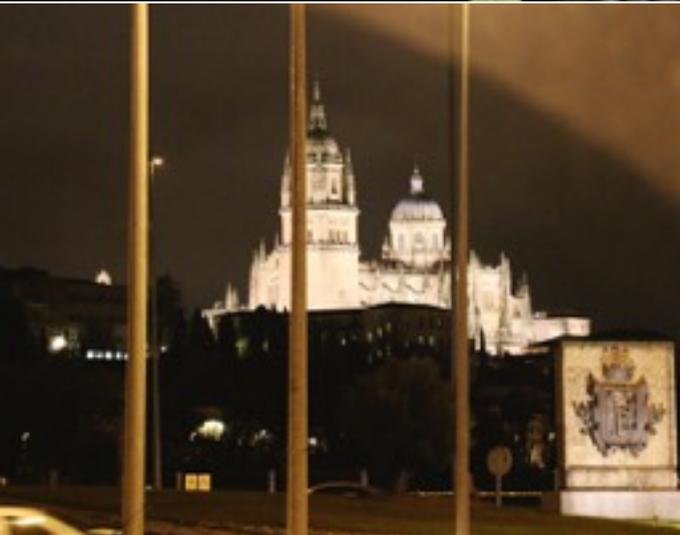
We had a quick drive around before parking up on a Carpark just outside the city. As we parked up another Motorhome pulled up alongside and out jumped a young lad with a pug dog. Poor little dog had a nappy on or so we thought but on closer inspection it was a handkerchief with four knots. What they thinking! Later on we got chatting to the French family and discovered the dog got sick when traveling and to use their words...it shit everywhere. Hence the makeshift nappy.

It was still very cold so we wrapped up and got peanut a blanket for his basket and cycled into the city. It was bitterly cold but we spent several hours cycling around what I can only describe as one amazing city. Salamanca has to be up there on our top city list it is beautiful and has the wow factor. Salamanca is an ancient Romanesque City with honey coloured palaces, churches and monasteries. It is famous for its university and attracts students from all around the world,



we bumped in to a student from Brazil. The plaza major is a fabulous square with loads of shops, tavernas and tapas bars, which comes alive at night. The whole town is built out of stone and rock with the most amazing shades of orange and red. Even in the most gloomy of weather this place looks amazing. I went in to the old cathedral and it was nothing like I imaged it to be. It was a labyrinth of stairs and corridors all leading to different parts of the cathedral, it was beautiful. Each turning revealed another surprise and they just got better and better. Eventually you ended up high on the roof top with a panoramic view of the city and surrounding district, it was ace. You were right up close to the cathedral tower and could see all the detail of the beautifully sculpted stonework. Back in side and the tiny spiral staircase lead you right up in to the bell tower. Then to top it all you went back inside on to the cathedral balcony with the most beautifully elevated view of inside the cathedral. Well, worth €3.75 entrance fee. On our way back to Vin we passed the House of Shells built as a monument to Santiago de Compostela.

But for the weather being icy cold we would have stayed out longer but we could not longer feel our finger tips and poor peanut had dew

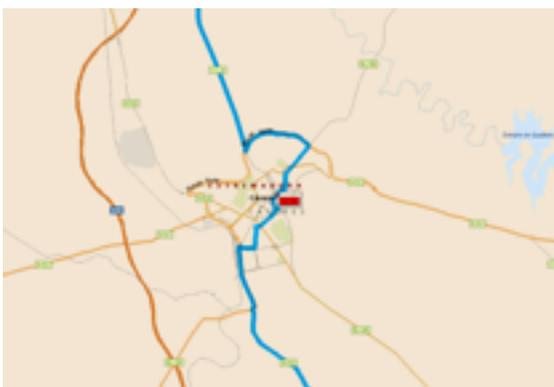


drops on the end of his snout. Back at Vin and we jacked up the heating and went for a quick shop in Lidl...or so I thought. Craig loves his food shopping and this Lidl was exceptional. It had fresh prawns, crab, full hams and a massive choice of chorizo. Craig was off on a mission to find a great dinner feast and he didn't disappoint. We had the most scrumptious garlic prawns, tomatoes in olive oil, fresh bread and a huge selection of Spanish hams and chorizo. We even tried a black chorizo that looked well passed its sell by date. Dinner was washed down nicely with a refreshing shandy. Have

to say the backdrop of a warm flood lit Salamanca cathedral helped create a brilliant atmosphere. Then to top the day, I took the rubbish to the bin and found €25.



CACERES



Thursday 18 December

Craig went to bed early so he was up at crack of dawn. Me on the other hand snuggled up and grabbed another hour, it's still pitch black outside. Finally I crawled out of our pit at 8am to find thick fog, much worse than yesterday. Today we planned on visiting the cathedral tower and taking some panoramic pictures of the city but not sure there is much chance with this weather.

After a shower we set off in thick freezing fog to Caceres. I do hope it gets a little warmer soon. After about an hour of driving in thick fog all of a sudden it just lifted and then we realised we'd actually climbed up to 1110 m and therefore climbed above the cloud. As we looked



Above: scrap yard

back we could see a thick band of cloud covering the landscape. The temperature jumped from 3 to 12 degrees in matter of seconds. As we approached the top of the road the scenery changed WOW. Loads of mountain peaks all topped off with a dusting of snow which just looks amazing against the intense blue sky. Nothing for it we need to pull in at the next lay by and have lunch. We pulled over, grabbed the little stools and sat by the road with a cuppa soup admiring the most amazing view. It was only 12 degrees but tucked in behind Vin and no breeze it felt much warmer. So good to have a little sunshine after months of cloud and rain.

We checked our location on the GPS, ahhh that figures with the landscape, we have just entered Extremadura. As we drove through the craggy landscape it was clear this land wasn't for the faint hearted with rough terrain and extreme weather. As we started to descend soon the land was filled with millions of olive trees. The road signs warned of bulls crossing and boy did they have some big Bulls. Also plenty of storks riding on the thermals and even a few nesting in top of the odd post and boy do the have huge nests. All of a sudden Craig let out one almighty cry, I wondered what the hell happened and was not amused when I discovered he was getting excited over a splat bug on the windscreen. Bloody fool. Well, at least that's means the weather is getting warmer if the bugs are out, yippee.



In Caceres we pulled in to a nice little free sosta (Spanish parking spot for Motorhomes) to be greeted by French, Spanish, German and Dutch. Not long and we were chin wagging with the Dutch, nodding with the Germans and waving at the Spanish. That's the great thing about traveling in a Motorhome you get to meet all sorts of people with some fascinating stories to tell. Not sure what happened to the French, think they prefer to sit in their camper and watch from afar.

As I lay in bed, I wondered if mum was enjoying her Christmas Challenge. Before I left the UK, I decided to do the 12 days of Christmas for mum. Every day she gets a challenge from Secret Santa and the answer gives her a clue to where to find a present. Some are hidden over her flat whilst others are in safe keeping with her friends and family. The presents are all little daft things that mean something to both us.



ZEFRA



Friday 19 December

Caceres might be a small town but it sure is a noisy one. Our sleep was interrupted several times by a mixture of budding Pelos, teenage giggling girls, boy racers and then to top it the bin men started their rounds at 4am. By the time we got up and dressed most of the other Motorhomes had already moved on, I guess they couldn't hack the noise and decided to make an early start. We had a cycle in to Caceres town and it was really nice especially with two guys playing guitar and singing Spanish songs. White washed and stone walls made the place look bright but still plenty character. It was really cold and the freezing fog was making it difficult to see never mind appreciate the buildings. It was so colds even the pigeon coo's sounded like they had bronchitis. Once we started to shiver there was nothing for it, an early return to Vin much to our disappointment. We warmed up with a nice bowl of hot soup and crispy bread before setting off to Merida.

The journey to Merida was as dull as dish water because once again we were surrounded in fog. I ended up doing my nodding dog impression again with the occasional snort that made me jump out my skin. Once in Merida we had a quick drive round but the place didn't



do much for us. The Roman ruins were all scattered amongst an industrial estate. Not sure our idea of exploring includes truck spotting, so we moved on to the next place but not before Craig cursed Marg the Tom Tom. He couldn't find any of the locations and just before he slung her out the window he realised he hadn't change the country and poor Marg was still in France!

By the time we reached Zafra the fog had started to lift and the sun was shining. Zafra is only small but it had a nice feel about it. The Grande Plaza was pretty quiet but for the odd person sat sipping cof-

fee in one of the many taverna's. The sound of gypsy kings in the background made it feel quite we were in holiday. However, come 4pm and the fog was back with a vengeance - thicker and colder. We headed back to warmth of Vin once more and decided early tea and early night wouldn't do us any harm. The sweet and sour chicken tasted like a tomato chasseur and we really didn't enjoy our tea at all. Early night long side half a dozen tramps who have taken shelter in the doorway behind Vin. other gloomy day/

Ps: no photo's of Zefra only Caceres.



SEVILLE



Saturday 20 December

Jeez Craig this weather is getting worse not better. I looked at the weather station and it said -1 and as I opened the blinds I could see Vin covered in a dusting of frost and once again, thick fog. I didn't expect glorious sunshine but I did expect the weather to be a little milder than home but looks like we are not the only ones to get miserable cold weather in winter.

We set off towards Seville...question for everyone...why do we call it Seville and Spain calls it Sevilla? Why do we have to change the spelling it? As we travelled about 20 km out of Zefra we hit beautiful countryside with rows upon rows of oranges. We'd drove above the cloud and as we looked back we could see the cloud covering the town. You know when you are in an airplane and you look out the window and all you can see are blankets of fluffy clouds, well the view from where ever we where was just like that, it was beautiful. We travelled for a good hour and the view hardly changed, it was captivating. The bulls were taking shelter under the trees to get away from the cold frozen ground unless of course their owner had placed fresh food in their trough and then they didn't seem to care about the frost.



As we approached Seville all the traffic light wallers were dressed in Santa selling bits of Christmas tat. We drove down the main street just to get bearings and then found a good little parking spot about 1 km away on the other side of the river. It was just opposite the tobacco factory were the operatic singer Carmen met Don Jose. After a spot of lunch we cycled in to the city. One word...wow. What a fantastic city. The sun had come out and it was buzzing. Seville is steeped in history with Jew and Moorish architecture, Columbus bringing interna-





tional trade and new worlds. On top of that the city attracts endless painters, poets and sculptures all of which leave their mark on the city and to an array of styles and surprises..

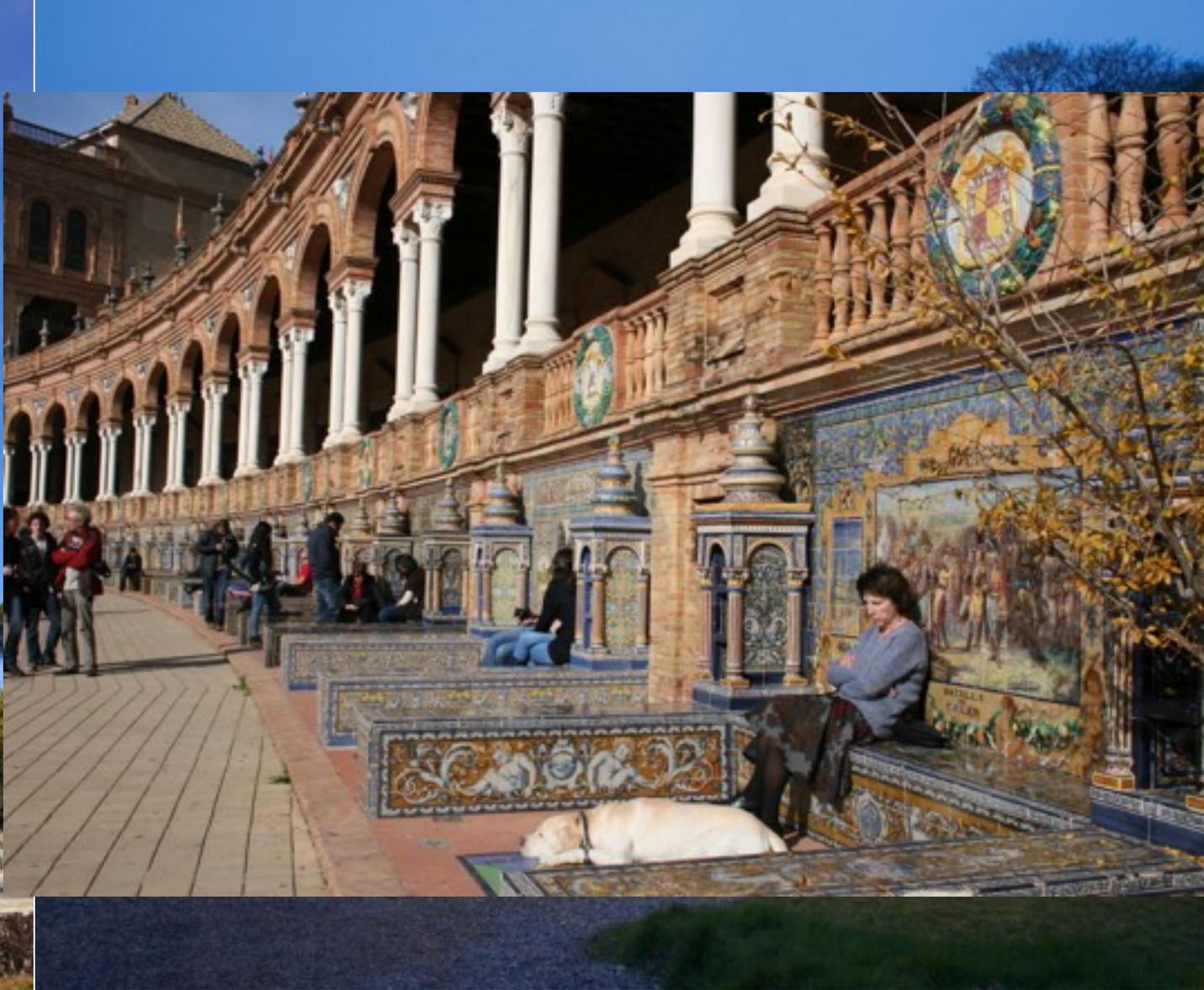
First we went to the cathedral and the square was amazing. Ever 50ft or so you had a different group of people singing Spanish Christmas songs. Some operatic, some to brass band, some flamenco but the best to Spanish guitar. Everyone one of them singing their heart out, it gave you goose bumps. It was the last Saturday before Christmas and it was heaving but not with frantic shoppers but with families all coming to the city to embrace the Christmas mood, have something to eat, a glass of wine, a wander around and no doubt buy the odd bit of present but shopping certainly not the focus of the day. We cycled around this amazing city and its myriad of streets, stopping at all the wonderful sights - the cathedral, real alcazar, Torre de Oro, several museums, the hospital de la Caridad, plaza de Espana, parks and endless different districts. We saw a few catholic priests in their brotherhood attire, which spooked us out at first until we remembered an in times of religious festivals they were their hoods, a look later adopted by the Ku Klux Klan.

The whole city just fascinated us like no other city, we just kept cycling around and around. Every corner you turned you could smell some-



thing different - pipe tobacco, incense, oranges, roasted chestnuts, all different aromas that remind trigger your senses and remind you of Spain. And yes, the streets are lined with orange trees! I tried one but it was so sour it nearly took the lining out my gob. I won't be doing that again in a hurry.

We wandering upon Magic Kingdom, an abandoned fun park, space centre and futuristic technology complex. We are guessing this place boomed in 1992 when Seville hosted the World Expo and since, its gone to rack and ruins. Even though it was abandoned, it still fascinated us but we have no idea why. As we were leaving we could hear live music, so off we went to have a toot. It was some ceramic factory and artist college and they were holding their Christmas party. It was like a picnic in the park sort of feel with live heavy metal sort of band in the grounds and everyone eating and drinking, whilst sat on the grass. The air was filled with smoke from the endless bbq's all offering mouth watering tasty morsels. That reminds me, I am hungry but too much going on to stop. We cycled back in to the middle of the cobbled streets and plaza's and found ourselves a couple of tasty croissants to eat on the go.



As night fell the Christmas lights came on, fire crackers came out and various light shows started across the city. The bars got a little louder and street parties began. I thought it was buzzing before but now it is just alive and no way are we going back to Vin this place is too good to miss. The air was filled with excitement as everyone from young children to glamorous grandmas watch the snow flakes (light show) fall on the city buildings. Snow flakes everywhere with jugs of sangria for everyone. I don't know if I have mentioned but this city is fab and if you ever want to visit a Christmas market, Seville is the best. We wandered around the streets in a daze watching people enjoying the Christmas spirit.

On the way back to Vin we stopped at a local taverna and had a couple of beers and some tapas. Peanut stuck to the water but we did catch him drinking the dregs and licking the froth on a couple of occasions. I guess he felt like washing down the garlic pork. It only took a couple of beers and we were both tipsy, so heading back to Vin on the Brompton's was a challenge but funny.

Back in Vin we locked up and closed the blinds and fell fast asleep. What a fabulous day.

Tomorrow we head to Portugal and find somewhere for Christmas.

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French motorhome parking site.

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VIN DIESEL

The name of our motorhome.

Craig kept calling the motorhome Van, which just didn't sound right plus Craig all the names very short & simple. We discussed a few options and came up with our late scuba diving friend Vinny. Plus Vin is DEC and short. Diesel because his diesel engines and would he would have loved the motorhomes 3 liter, 6 cylinder turbo.

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