



BUMBLING ALONG
EXPLORING EUROPE IN
OUR MOTORHOME



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PORTUGAL



MONTE GORDO

Sunday 21 December

After a breakfast of quails eggs and toast we set off to Portugal or as Michelle would say, Portugawl. The sleepy Seville River bank looked calm and ideal time for a quiet cycle, maybe next time. As we headed out of the city we chatted about our favorite bits of Seville even down to the chirping alert of the zebra crossing, which we both found amusing. The road to Portugal was like driving through an orange grove with fields upon fields of orange trees. That reminded me about the orange we picked in Seville, it was so juicy but by got it was sour, it made my eyes water.

As we crossed over a large suspense bridge in to Portugal the sun put its hat on. It felt like perfect timing and we couldn't believe how warmer it felt. The weather station showed 21 but it certainly felt much warmer. We pulled over at the boarder crossing to register the Motorhome details and credit card information, a mandatory requirement for the tolls roads. Craig was only too eager to take a walk and feel the sun on his aching bones. He was grinning like a Cheshire Cat, he loves the sunshine.

Only minutes after the boarder we entered the 1st Portuguese town. To the left little white house dotting the shore line and to the right a wall of Motorhomes. All parked in a neat row on one of the many free Motorhome Aires. I don't think I have seen as many Motorhomes in



one place. We didn't know whether to be happy or sad. Happy because at least there are places to stay or sad because the place is overrun with camper vans. We decided best to move on to the next town and see what options lie in store. On the way we spotted a huge Lidl and Craig couldn't resist. This one even had Motorhome parking now that's a first. The Lidl was huge and by far the largest Lidl to date. Craig was excited until he checked out the prices and realised it was cheaper in Spain. He was gutted. Maybe it's expensive because of all the Motorhomes, we will just have to see. The further down the store we bumped in to a load of gypsies. They were what we call 'proper' gypsies with tatty clothes, unbrushed hair, no teeth and very dirty. Umm, I hope the Aires are not full of gypsies, if they are I am not sure we will be staying here long.

Back in Vin we headed to the next place on the map, Monte Gordo. We parked up on some waste land and then put on our shorts and headed to the beach. What a lovely beach, the sand is a nice light golden colour and it is very clean. Calm waters and loads of little beach showers. Not at all what expected. Looking back to the town we spotted the odd couple catching a few rays whilst snoozing in

their deckchair but other than that is was very quiet. The beach front had half a dozen little bars offering snacks then behind that what looked like low rise villas followed by a couple of high rise hotels. This looks like it could be a great resort for people looking for a quiet beach holiday with option for a few drinks in the evening.

Just as the sunset Craig cracked open a bottle of beer and poured me a refreshing spritzer. We sat on our little chairs wondering what adventures Portugal would bring us. Slap, ouch, what the blinking ek, that is one huge mosquito. That thing is either on steroids or its come out of some lab, it is massive. As we looked around we could see the massive blood sucking horrid creatures and quickly scurried in to Vin.

Something didn't feel right about staying on the waste land. Not sure why but something just didn't feel right, so we headed down the road to a little beach lane we spotted when we were entering Monte Gordo. At the end of the lane, a little bar and several Motorhomes, it felt good. We said hello to our German neighbors before we all shut shop and retired for the evening.



CASTRO MARIM

Monday 22 December

Up with the crack of dawn and after breakfast we set to with our chores. Craig went in the garage to sort out the storage and scrub down the garage door pockets. We'd noticed some mold on the material which we assume is from the condensation. I did the admin chores like banking and paying the bills.

After a late lunch more and more Motorhomes started to arrive at our little spot. Apparently the police don't mind you wild camping but they do mind when droves of campers start to congregate, which is fair enough. With that we packed up and moved 4 km down the road to a little sandy bay at Castro Marim. Again nothing there just 2 beach restaurants, which were closed for the winter. Ideal spot for us with no noise and just the sound of waves gently lapping on to the beach.

A nice stroll on the beach at sunset and that's it for today, folks!



MANTA ROTA

Tuesday 23 December.

An early rise and we set to giving Vin a good old clean. It is not that he is dirty but traveling around and it soon gets dusty. We also like to wipe down all the surfaces, so you don't attract any cooking odors. With Vin clean we put the bedding on its first wash cycle - water and washing powder in to a box with a lid. Now drive for several miles and let Vin do the swishing and all the hard work.

Today we wanted to find somewhere to stay for Christmas. A nice campsite or Aire with facilities and somewhere to put our feet up for a few days. That means our updates will be pretty short with limited traveling. The first campsite we pulled up was not our cup of tea at all. It looked like an old Butlins site from 1960 with cabaret lounge full of old people singing Christmas carols. We quickly shuffled to the next village...beautiful place but no Motorhomes. Eventually we found a lovely Aire at Manta Rota right on the beach. €4.50 per night including water and Internet access. It held about 80 Motorhomes and it was clean and secure, perfect. The village itself was only small with a few bars and restaurants but just what we like. Before we hooked up we headed to the supermarket and stocked up on Christmas food and goodies. We spoiled ourselves and bought some tiger prawns and steak for Christmas Day...for some reason they don't have turkeys here! Vin was stuffed up with I am sure this food will last us to the New Year.

Back in Manta Rota and we found our little parking spot right in the middle of the aire. Chocks out to get Vin nice and level then sun loungers and coffee table, we were now ready for Christmas or nearly ... I put up our cards from home and turned on the Christmas lights. Now it feels like Christmas.

We took a stroll on the beach collecting shells and pebbles. It was a beautiful afternoon and felt so good to walk around in jeans and T-shirt. We watched a few chaps fishing then as we strolled further along we noticed a dead jelly fish. It was massive and by far the biggest jelly fish we have ever seen, at least a meter in diameter!

Back at the aire and we said hello to a few neighbors before turning on our neon, flashing Christmas lights and waiting for the aliens to land.

Vin soaking up the sunset





MANTA ROTA

Wednesday 24 December

As we stepped out of Vin the sun hit you...nice and warm. We sat on our chairs and said good morning to everyone passing by. Not in English of course but in what ever language our neighbors spoke..Bonjour, don Diaz, Buenos dia, ciao, gut morgen.... Not sure I have said good morning in so many languages, it was fascinating. As the each couple walked passed we tried to guess their nationalities before they spoke. We were doing quite well until we hit the Gordie ascent then we were snookered,..why I man. I do love the Newcastle lot.

Craig had a full blown conversation with our French neighbor about Motorhome sizes, weight, mpg , etc., I however, did the bedding part 2. Took them out the box, put them in our new spinner to spin out the dirty washing water. Put fresh clean water in the box and then rinsed them clean. Giving them one last spin before hanging them out to dry. God that is so easy to do with our new spinner. You could see people passing by Looking at our little utility garage with envy. Having s section of the garage purely kitting out for washing made it a lot easier and more organised. Well worth time to set it up plus it keeps all the washing in one place.

Christmas Eve and sunny. We spent the rest of the day chilling in our sun loungers. Craig's had itching feet, so I nailed them to the floor



which kept him still for half an hour until he found the claw hammer. I chilled and updated our journal. This time I am using iBooks to record our trip then hopefully people can read on iPad etc. Plus hopefully at the end, I will have a complete book rather than just lots of daily files. it just takes time setting up the templates and getting used to the program. I am OK with computers but I am not s whizz like Craig, so it takes me a lot longer to get used to things. Once I'd finished updating, I asked Craig to have a look. 10 minutes later and I felt totally deflated. Craig told me everything I had done wrong like too many pictures and hogging memory. Think it's time to pack up and have an early night.





MANTA ROTA

Thursday 25 December

Merry Christmas everyone!

Up nice and early to open our couple of family presents and lovely little surprises they were. Then we got dressed and went outside to say good morning and Happy Christmas to all our neighbors. I tried to call mum but she wasn't answering...bet she is having shower and getting ready to go to Mandy's for dinner. We got a lovely email from Dave with pictures of Oliver opening presents...a one year old at Christmas, his face was priceless. By now the people traffic passing Vin was picking up and people were running back and forth saying "whiff fee whiff fee". At first we didn't know what they were saying but eventually we realised they were asking if we had wifi. The Internet was very slow and most people couldn't even access. We managed to get on but it was painfully slow, so after sending a few emails to family, we had Christmas breakfast and a nice cup of coffee.

Later that morning we cycled to Alto, a little village. To be honest, it was like a ghost town with all the shutters shut. We couldn't decide if people where in, out for the day or shut shop for winter. We saw two people, an old guy in the middle of his field tending to his crops and another guy in his front garden looking at his lemon tree. None the less it was a nice bike ride and peanut got plenty fresh air sat in his

little bicycle bag. Poor little chap is now blind and deaf with limited sense of smell but he still loves a bike ride.

Back in Vin and the atmosphere in the Aire was buzzing. People were chatting away and having fun. The temperature was 23 degrees just nice enough to sit outside but not too hot to burn. We had a good chat with a guy from Belgium now living in Hungary, an English family touring Portugal and Spain for 6 weeks and loads of 5 minute conversation with passers by, it was good.

For Christmas lunch we had our bbq and it was damn tasty. King prawns, chicken kebabs, pork, sausages, chorizo, pineapple etc. We started cooking around 2 and finished around 5. We just kept nibbling all afternoon, chatting to people and we loved it but come 5 we were stuffed. Even Peanut was stuffed. To finish the day we had one amazing sunset which gave the row of white Motorhomes a beautiful red glow.

Craig making Christmas bread





MANTA ROTA

Friday 26 December

Honk honk. Honk honk. Sounds like the bread man. We opened the blinds and yip the bread man was back on his rounds closely followed by the veggie man, orange man and laundry woman. The site holds around 80 Motorhomes and so the locals drive through the aire selling their goods from the boot of their car. It's a good earner when you think about it and it helps people who don't have a bike or transport to pick up food. You see it's hard to drive off in your camper once on an aire because you have to go through a barrier system and pay up. Plus you could lose your plot and end up paying again just to come back in, so having locals come around is brilliant.

Today we walked and walked along the beach. It is a massive beach that doesn't seem to end and great if you just love strolling in the sand. We spent hours combing the shore line looking for usual shells and stones. We also spotted quite a few skeletons from what look like baby rays? More dead jellyfish but nothing compare to the one the other day. At one point we let Peanut off the lead so he could have a good roam but he just stood there confused. Poor thing didn't know which way to walk without his lead.

Back home and a bbq for lunch with everything that we didn't eat yesterday. It was good but I think we have had our fill of bbq for a few



days. In the middle of the carrot bag we found a strange looking carrot!

It was nice to just sit and let the sun warm ya cockles. Craig and Peanut did a big of DJ Dude stuff and Peanut put on his headphones and did a bit of scratch-in. It was just the right temperature for snoozing and Peanut couldn't agree more especially after his DJ stint. He sat on my lap, kicked his head back and snored liked a nothing you've heard before. Everyone around kept looking over and then when they realised it was the dog they burst out laughing.

We finished the mulled wine and couldn't believe it when I knocked a glass over the table. Good job it didn't go everywhere in the van otherwise it would have been a nightmare to get red wine stains out of light grey velour seating. Thank god for kitchen roll!



ILHA DA ARMONA

Saturday 27 December

Today is our 13th wedding anniversary, it is also 29 years since our 1st date. Hard to believe we've been together so long, as it only feels like a few years. Still love him to bits even though he drives me nuts at time but sure Craig would say the same about me.

Time to move on to the next place. We packed up Vin and then drove around to the service area and joined the queue of campers all waiting to dump their waste and fill up with fresh. Must admit I hate the service area when it is busy, it tends to be excessively smelly with odour de toilet. The smell is nothing like you've ever smelt before, it is horrendous and can often turn your stomach. Once empty of dirty water and full of clean we paid our dues, thanked the staff and said our goodbyes.

We tootled in and our of beach towns but struggled to find anything decent. Quite a lot of the towns stated no Motorhomes, whilst other towns just didn't do anything for us. This area of the Algarve that we are entering has like a marsh / wetland next to the town then the sea and then these sand islands. So to go to the beach you have to catch a boat. The islands don't allow any traffic but you can stay (tent) over on the larger islands. Not sure I fancy leaving the comfort of our Vin for a tent. The marshes are good for bird watching but they also stink of rotting seaweed and sulphur, so not somewhere to

park up for a few days. Or not unless you are partial to smells that burn your nostril hairs.

We had brunch at a little village called Fabrica. Pretty place overlooking the harbour with locals wadding in low tide for cockles, razor clams and winkles. We finished our brunch coffee on the harbour wall. With spotting scope and binoculars in hand to see how many different birds we could spot. Not that we know anything about our little feathered friends but we do try to learn a little. The spoon pipers were quite interesting to watch as they scurried around on the edge frantically looking for food whilst equally trying to stay in front of their mates. We weren't too sure if Motorhomes could stay on the Carpark, so rather than risk a €600 fine we moved on. Shame really cause it was a nice spot.

Eventually we stopped at Ilha da Armour on a bit of wasteland looking out to one of the estuaries / wetlands. We had hoped to find a nice restaurant for our anniversary but not here! Looks like we'll have to wait until we hit one of the towns. This place is not much to right home about but good place for sleeping tonight. The local farmer took his goats for a walk along the sand

Craig having a snooze at sunset



dunes and we fed the daddy a carrot. The mother and babies weren't too keen on getting up close, shame cause the kids were well cute. Just before sunset an old chap rode passed on his horse. Clearly his pride and joy. The horse had fancy white socks and plated tail. The old chap wore his best red shirt and black sombrero, very smart.

Sunset in the middle of marsh land is not a safe place. The Mosquitos venture out and eat you alive. We could see the big ugly buggers outside Vin waiting to pounce on us. Well, not tonight, we locked up and chilled. The sunset was amazing and Craig sat in his front chair looking at the beautiful sky, watching all the birds do their final dance of the evening. Clearly a hypnotic dance as he dozed off to sleep and didn't wake until the next morning. I don't think I have ever known Craig to sleep so long

Wet lands





FARO VIA OLHAO

Sunday 28 December

Peanut woke at 4am and his little tapping claws on the hard floor woke me up. I kept telling him to go back to his basket but he kept walking around. Eventually I got up to find him stuck in the bathroom.

Poor sod got lost and couldn't work out where he was. He was just staring at the sink bowl with his legs trembling hoping this object would help him get out of there. Old age and cushions disease is cruel. I gave him a cuddle and reassured him before putting him back on his bed.

As soon as the sun rose around 9am we set off. Our first stop of the day Olhao. We parked at the harbour with a load of other Motorhome and then cycled around town. We cycled and cycled looking for something to grab our attention but struggled. This place feels like a cross between Beirut and Fleetwood. Stinks of rotting fish with abandoned derelict buildings covered in graffiti. The town also had its fair share of beggars, which made us feel uneasy. Needless to say we headed back to Vin and moved on to the next town. The best thing about this place are the storks, huge nesting storks on the chimney pots and boy do they make a racket when they have a chin wag with each other. On route we called in Lidl and filled up with GPL. By the way, all the Portuguese Lidl's have Motorhome parking spaces and toilets. A first in Europe!



We drove to Faro and had a bit of lunch before cycling in and around Faro. Again another ghost town. Where is everyone? We cycled around and whilst Faro was better than Olhao, it wasn't that great. I was expecting Faro to have some nice aspects but other than the shopping street, which was very tiny and decorated with cardboard Christmas trees made by the school children, it wasn't interesting in the slightest. Craig and I looked at each other with confusion. We didn't come to Portugal with any preconceived ideas but so far the towns and cities are very disappointing. Hard to believe this little country was once the richest country in the world. With booming empires, the spice trade and then the Brazilian gold mines.

After dinner we planned our route for the next week and chatted about route options for the next few months. We don't really want to fix a route then we can just go with our gut feeling but equally we don't want to just meander and miss out big chunks of potential highlights.

By the way, I forgot to mention, we picked up a bottle of red wine for €1 and Craig made a classic comment "it tastes of grapes". A comment I am sure he will live to regret.





ARRIFES

Monday 29 December

Breakfast in bed with eggs on toast, fresh juice and a cuppa coffee. Wow, I could get used to this. Ta Chucky x

As we headed out of Faro towards the airport the buildings became less derelict and eventually turned in to modern retail complexes. Not sure I like either although strangely enough I do find comfort in retail parks simply because if we ever need anything then you will guarantee to find it in one of the centres.

Heading to the Brit stretch of the Algarve (towards Albufeira) the road was littered with car showrooms and park n fly compounds. At one point we thought Marg our GPS was gonna stick us on the motorway but thankfully she stuck to her preferences and avoided the toll road. Once out of Faro it started to feel very different. Built up but not in bad way or not just yet.

We headed to the first coastal resort of Quarteria. It was certainly built up with typical high rise hotels and rows of sea front bars but for a resort, it was nice. It was clean, tidy and the beach was superb. It's on the tip of a huge bay, so as you look west you can see for about 50 km, the whole of bay, pepper potted with hotels and mini complexes. Of course it looks built up but it has a nice feel about it. I didn't expect to like it but I was pleasantly surprised.



Ring ring, ring ring....a call I wasn't expecting. We booked Lucy and Dave an adventure day at muddy good fun but the ground is so frozen they've had to close the facility. So gutted for them as I was hoping to give them a bit of quality fun couple time without Oliver. Mandy, my sister had put together a picnic for them with hot flask for lunch. The joys of British winter! I do hope they get to reschedule soon, it's brilliant fun.

We drove along the beach resorts and headed towards Portimao. We want to be at Alvor for new year, as many people are saying its a good place and brilliant aire. We are hoping to meet up with the couples we met at Manta Rota. However, on route we aim to spot any potential wild camping spots or Aires, so hopefully we can back track later. Summary of the 50 km stretch...

1. Vilamoura very posh with casino, nice bars and tennis academy
2. Then drove through loads and loads of busy golf courses
3. Now you can tell the Brits are here, the road is full of speed ramps!
4. Then nice well to do country clubs, no doubt blessed with every spa facility, so when the men go golfing the ladies go pampering.
5. Alderia Das Acoteias with lots of villas and orange groves
6. Branqueria had plenty small town houses and condos
7. Areias de Sao Joao - small apartment blocks, run down hotels. Lots of bars and shops but quite a few closed and vandalized. Hotels closer to beach were slightly better.
8. Albufeira - big hotels and many holiday activities like karting and beach sports. On a headland so nice rock backdrop and clearly a



good sun trap as we passed many a well baked and over cooked tourist.

9. Round the other side of the headland, a nice marina with colourful pastel apartments

And for our final stop Praia dos Arrifes. A little cove with just one restaurant - Sardinha. It's closed for winter but bet it does a roaring trade in summer. We parked up right on the cliff face and what a stunning view. The sun was shining and the sea was glistening, what a brilliant spot. There are about half a dozen Motorhomes parked up, so not too crowded at all. We had a chat to an English couple who were contemplating buying another Motorhome and selling up. They had Motorhomes for years but now retired they thought of just buying a villa and settling down but they are struggling to stay put. After seeing Vin they decided to sell up and buy another Motorhome...good luck to them.

Did a spot of washing before watching the cormorants dive for fish right next to the fishermen. Were they giving the chaps a clue where to fish or were they just taking care of their own bellies? Craig made a pineapple pancake for an afternoon sunshine snack, so good. In the evening we watched the film Aurora Borealis. Not a top 100 film but great story about a chap with Parkinson's and Dementia played by Donald Sutherland. A couple of funny but equally very touching scenes.



ALVOR

Tuesday 30 December

We couldn't resist opening the blinds and just taking time to lye in our bed watching the sunrise. It was such a beautiful sunrise with birds diving in every direction for their morning feed and the waves noisily crashing on to the beach. Before long I was in Shirley Valentine mode, silently chatting away to a rock. It was a big rock with plenty detail and it listened to me for hours. Before we knew it, it was 9am.

We decided to head to Alvor for new year. It comes highly recommended and we should meet up with some of the crew from Manta Rota, which will be nice for celebrating the new year.

The drive to Portimao was mainly through barren land with the odd vineyard. We crossed a huge suspension bridge over the Rio Arade in to Portimao. As we drove towards the centre there were signs everywhere for Aqua-land closely followed by signs for splash and go. Not sure I would be tempted to take a plunge in the water slides this time of year not unless my name was Pingo.

We opted to call at the supermarket and stock up for the next few days then when we get to site we have nothing to do but chill and relax. No Lidl around so Craig followed the '2 minutes away' inter-marche signs...30 minutes later and in the middle of no where we parked up at a rather small supermarket. Apart from a good butchers



the supermarket wasn't that great, so we moved on to an Aldi. With bare essentials in basket we checked out and set off.

On the way to Alvor Craig spotted a new supermarket brand ...Jumbo. He also spotted China Shopping Centre. He got rather giddy and I promised him a visit as a New Years treat! Not long and we arrived in Alvor. The Aire looks like one massive piece of sandstone land with Motorhome around the perimeter and then another bunch of Motorhomes huddled together in the middle. Not bad priced at €4.00 per night but not as good value nor as nice as the one in Manta Rota. We filled up Vin with water and then found a spot near the perimeter. Looking around and must say Alcor doesn't look at pretty as people made out but let's not judge until we've had a look around.

Not long and we spotted the English couples in the far corner. We gave them a wave and then set to setting our stall out. Chairs, table, canopy... We also did a pile of washing including towels and bedding before we sat down and chilled in the afternoon sun. Our rear neighbors are English and to the front is an elderly French lady on her own with a lovely spaniel.

The washing didn't take much to dry and just in time for sunset by which time we were starving. Craig did a wonderful garlic pork with jasmine rice, it was scrummy. Come 8.30 and we were dozing and dribbling like two old farts. We turned everything off and went to bed.



ALVOR

Wednesday 31 December

Craig it sticks in here of garlic, I mean absolutely hums. He just grunted at me and rolled over, only to be expected at 3am. I couldn't get back to sleep and the smell was driving me nuts. I huffed and puffed until eventually I decided to get up for a pee. Mid flow, I had a good idea...spray my pillow with a bit of perfume. Not a lot just a sprinkle. WTF are you doing woman, trying to kill me? With that he threw his head under the duvet and I snuggled up to my scented pillow and eventually drifted back to sleep.

When I woke Craig was already up and guess what I could smell? I flickering cooks candle! Clearly the smell of garlic had got to him to. We will open the windows and let some fresh air in once it gets a little warmer but right now it's only 4 degrees, so the candle will have to do. We both chuckled and agreed no more smelly cooking in Vin without all windows and doors open.

We had a good chat with our neighbors Cliff and Irene from Yorkshire and Roger and Pauline from the Devon. They gave us all the best tips on where to go in Alvor and with that we set off on a bit of a cycle ride. Up the main high street which was so nice. Very quaint with the odd grocery shop, cafe bar and restaurant. At the top of the street the main church painted white and yellow which looks especially nice against the bright blue sky. At the church we took a left



down towards the harbour. This is nice Craig, I take back what I said yesterday this is a lovely village. At the harbour there were a number of fish restaurants, some rather glamorous whilst others rough and ready with nothing more than oil drums to chargrill the catch of the day. It smelt so good. As we cycled further along we came across the fishermen huts, stacked with all sorts of fishing goodies. We carried on passed and joined the boardwalk. What a brilliant idea, this boardwalk went for miles and miles. If you like walking you could be gone all day, it's fab. As we cycled to the end we had the estuary to our right and to the left the sea. Once at the end we could see the lighthouse on another stretch of boardwalk...one for another day.

We cycled back and started to prepare our new year eve dinner..bbq style. Huge rib chop, jacket potato, fresh corn on the cob, roasted aubergine and julienne carrots and turnips. As we prepared Cliff and Irene came over for a toot. Cliff was like a kid and got all excited. He watched Craig do the prep and then turned around to his wife and said look that's what you need to cook for me. Poor Irene but she told him jam butties is all he's having and she wasn't wrong! Later, Craig took down the Christmas lights from inside the Vin and transferred them to outside, ready for this evening. As sunset everybody went inside their vans. We had a walk in to the village and it was dead, not a soul around but it was damn cold. We came back to the motorhome and by 9.30 we were snoring our heads off. The New Year fireworks woke us up but 10 minutes later and we were back in z land.



2

ROUTE SO FAR





OUR TOP 10

1. Seville
2. Salamanca
3. Alvor

OUR HIDDEN GEMS

1. Praia Do Arrifes