

A photograph taken from the interior of a motorhome, looking out through a large window. The view outside shows a sunset over a body of water, with a horizon line of orange and yellow light. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds in shades of blue and grey. The motorhome's window frame and interior structure are visible in the foreground, framing the view. The overall mood is peaceful and scenic.

# BUMBLING ALONG EXPLORING EUROPE IN OUR MOTORHOME





1

PORTUGAL





## Praia do Rocha

## Thursday 15 January

Craig what happened to the weather, it is very overcast? Craig logged on to the painfully slow internet connection and half an hour later we were doomed. The week ahead is nothing but wet and windy with potential storms. But but but we were gonna have a bbq today Mr sunshine. Well thank our lucky stars we are not at Cabo de Vincente in this weather!

As Craig stepped outside our next door neighbour (an Austrian we first met in Sagres) waves and walked over. He started to speak to Craig in his native tongue. Craig said "no spacken de dautche". The guy said nah dautche, Dutch. With that Craig shrugged his shoulders and said well "no spacken de Dutch". I burst in to fits of laughter, it sounded so wrong. Why the hell did we not study a language at school!

With that I logged on and did my admin and banking, which takes an eternity with poor internet access but hey ho what else I am gonna do in this weather? As a rule of thumb we only log on to the Internet once a week. This way it stops us from spending all our time surfing the net and makes us do other things with our time. We have a mifi device and a Europa sim. It costs €3 per day for 500mb, which believe me gets chewed up before you know it. If we logged on every day then that's a €1000 pa, which we'd rather spend on entrance fees and such like. You can access wifi in and around towns but often you

need to register before access and to be honest, we can't be bothered registering with every place it takes too much time and you end up with loads of spam emails that chew up your data. McDonald's aren't too bad because you only need to register the once but their wifi range is often limited unless of course you fancy a s'maci.

Craig walk'd his head and then he handed me the trimmers to tidy up the edges. As usual, we had a queue of birdies waiting to pinch Craig's bog brush hair...makes good insulation in this weather.

By early evening the wind had picked up and Vin was rocking like Bon Jovi. Then as we looked out the window there were bits of chairs and tables scurrying around with frantic owners hot on their heels. Don't you just hate that...you chase something and just as you go to grab it, a gust of wind whips it away. You end up bending down several times before patience snaps and your foot ends stomping on the thing. Fortunate Craig had put everything away nice and neat in preparation for the windy weather. By 8pm Vin had rocked us fast asleep.

Craig at entrance of  
Praia Do Rocha Aire







## Praia do Rocha

## Friday 16 January

As we stepped out of Vin there was a massive puddle but not half as bad as some campers. Half the Aire was like a lake and there were lots of people stood around scratching their head as they pondered about puddles. Well mate, it ain't gonna go away if you scratch your head. Craig did the sensible thing and move Vin 5 feet backwards to a dry patch.

I had a shower and then got attacked by a clothes label. Why do they make them so big? I'm sure there is no need other than to wind you up and make you itch like crazy.

The weather still looked a bit hit and miss. Was it going to rain or not? We decided to brave the weather and cycle in ti Portimao. As Craig got out the Brompton's the heavens opened. We sheltered. We got ready. We sheltered. We got ready and eventually after several hours of dodging the rain we finally set off. We cycled around the marina, up fisher man wharf, across the cultural centre and hey presto we were in historic Portimao. That was a neat short cut. We cycled around the cobbled streets hoping to find some good Portuguese shops to toot in but we were disappointed. Just like in England the retail parks and shopping centres on the outskirts of the town have killed the high street shops. Only a handful of 'basic need' shops existed like the grocers, bakers and launderette. Even they looked run down and in need of some customers. Portimao is the second largest





town I. The Algarve but it was dead and certainly didn't feel large at all. the And then the heavens opened. We quickly cycled under a veranda and took shelter. As the rain slowly backed off we headed further in to the centre. Nothing but a few run down cafes and bars. The most interesting thing was an old chap walking around with a ghetto blaster strapped to his chest and playing the marackers, not sure it's traditional but certainly original. Well as there is nothing here we might as well head to McDonald's and see if we can use FaceTime. Just as we set off it rained again. Peanut didn't care he was snug in his sleeping bag (old rucksack) and happy to be out and about. At McDonald's we entered in the secret password...Big Mac and Houston

we are connected. I FaceTime my sister and then my niece, who happened to be at my mums. I called my niece and was able to see and say happy birthday to mum (for tomorrow). She looked great as ever especially for 82. Double jackpot, I got to say hello to Lucas and Amy. Poor Oliver was at home with the dreaded lurgy.

Eventually the cloud lifted and we cycled back to Vin via Praia do Rocha beach front. Very quiet no matter where we cycled and it was hard to imagine this place in the heart of summer, swarming with tourists. Rocha was one of the first holiday destinations in the Algarve and you can see why. Beautiful broad



beach, jagged cliffs and the walls of the old fort. After a toot around the marina we made our way back to the aire.

BBQ for dinner. The weather isn't great but we planned on a BBQ yesterday when it pickled down, so we have food that needs eating. Thankfully the rain stopped and Craig cracked open the bbq. The wind was quite gusty, so Craig put the table on its side and created a wind breaker. Next minute he had the bleach out..what you doing? There are little creatures under the table and they just hatched. Eh, what sort of creature? I quickly ran over and could see something had plonked a sac on eggs under the table. Cheeky little sod, never paid any rent! We scrubbed everything with bleach before proceeding with the bbq. After the yummy corn on the cob Craig did a big cheesy grin. I couldn't stop laughing, it looked like he'd got half of Lego land lodged in his teeth. Peanut eager to join in the fun peered out of Vin...thud, thud, thud. Poor little bugger stuck his nose out a little too far, lost his balance and tumbled out of Vin right on to the hard ground. Lucky he slid out in slow motion, so no harm done. I dusted him down and gave him a little BBQ pork, which seemed to do the trick. With full bellies we cleaned up and headed in to the comfort of Vin.

### Views from the marina





## Sao Marco de Serra

## Saturday 17 January

Most important think of the day...Happy 82 Birthday Mum xxx

Shall we move on today? Yeah, let's head in land for a change and with that comment we cracked on and got Vin ready to bumble to the next stop. As I had a shower, Craig went in to the garage and started to bleach everything. The little sac of eggs was playing on his mind and he wanted to be sure we hand no more unwanted passengers. He did such a good job he ruined his shorts. His khaki shorts now looked camouflage with random splashes of yellow. God he is a dopey sod at times.

We eventually set off and called at yep, you guessed it Lidl. Craig wanted to get a few things before heading in land. A quick shop, I was impressed but...upon returning to Vin we got distracted. The ceiling extractor had got a leak, which turned out to be a couple of broken clips. Craig had all the tools out to create open heart surgery on the extractor. Several hours later and the fan survived the ordeal and we finally got to set off.

It felt good to be back on the open road. We headed north to Caldas de Monchique traveling through green, woody mountain range. It was very picturesque and scenic with not a soul or car in sight. Caldas is set in a ravine and so called the main spa place in the Algarve. We looked and looked but couldn't find anything that resem-





bled a nice spa unless of course you are referring to the handful of corrugated iron sheds at the bottom of a very tiny town. Ummm maybe we will not stop here. We stepped back in Vin and set off further up the hill. We did spot a great cork tree, so stopped to admire the peeling tree. We hadn't seen a cork tree up close and personal and it was good to take a close look. Weird how they peel but certainly a great 'green Eco ' tree.

We drove further up to the town of Monchique but again, it didn't do anything for us. We are desperate for inland Portugal to be captivating but we are struggling. Where now? We just got on the small road and drove. The altitude should be around 1000 m but we didn't get any higher than 250 m. Maybe someone pinched the hills? The scenery was nice but it wasn't anything special. We pulled over on a number of spots but the terrain looked a little too soft. The rock around here is very fragile and it only takes a big down pour and the land gives way. Don't fancy going for a ride on the Big Dipper in the middle of the night! Eventually we found a spot looking right down a valley with rolling hills, cork trees and eucalyptus trees. The place doesn't have a name other than in the middle of nowhere, the nearest town is Sao Marco. We admired the view until we could see no more and then tucked up in readiness for the rain. And boy did it rain...all night.







## Vila Nova do Milfontes

### Sunday 18 January

What a night, poor Vin took a battering with the wind and rain. I am so glad we found a safe spot, I would never have slept if we'd gone on soft ground for fear of sliding down the hill in the middle of the night. It is so remote out here that no one would have a clue if you'd slipped off the cliff. Outside it was foggy and quietly spooky. The stunning valley view were all gone, along with the dirt track road. We couldn't see a thing. We waited until the fog lifted albeit only slightly.

We headed north towards Odemira along single track country lanes full of pot holes and bits of fallen trees. The roads were completely saturated and the fields were more like shallow lakes. We did pass one beautiful green lake, it was so still you could even see fog in the reflection. Now that's a first. We meandered all over the show, passing field upon field of cork, lemon, orange, olive and chestnut trees. We were no longer in the Algarve but in the agricultural plains of Alentejo. The region gets its name from Alem do tejo, which means beyond the tejo river. Every so often we came across a patch of land that looked like someone had been with a wahl and shaved it. We then tracked the road to Vale Touriz..which happened to be a dead end, so we turned around and drove towards Quintas. At Sao Teatino we called in the market and I tried one of the local deserts, pastel de Belem. It is like our egg custard tarts only the mixture is half creme brûlée and have custard. Certainly very yummy. Craig opted for the adventurous bread roll! By mid afternoon we were at Zambujeira the





first of Alentejo coastal villages. The majority of this coast is undeveloped with only a handful of passing tourists. The beach cove was quiet but then again it was blowing a gale, so not gonna get many sun worshipers in this weather. We had a little walk around and the place seemed nice enough but they didn't allow campers, so we moved on to Vila Nova do Milfontes. A quiet, pretty place that lies on the river Mira estuary. The white washed houses and shops offer the odd Portuguese tasty delight but as usual everything was shut. The ivy covered castle overlooking the estuary looked pretty albeit....closed. It looked even nicer from a distance with the odd little fishing boat bobbling in the water.

We parked Vin right on the beach front road overlooking the entrance to the estuary. We could see the dramatic cliffs and crashing waves if we looked to the right and to the left, the castle. Perfect view. The road was dead end, so nice and quite with minimal passing traffic....a good spot to get some shut eye.





## Porto Covo

## Monday 19 January

What a night. We had hardly any sleep with the gusty wind. Every time we nodded off a huge gust of wind would come and knock Vin virtually horizontal. It made us jump out of our skin. Come early morning we were tired and not in the best of moods.

Craig found a tap with fresh water, so he filled up all the water bottles, so we had plenty to go at. We put a couple of washes on and set off. Half an hour later we were in Porto Covo. We parked up at the free Aire and finished some of the washing.

After lunch we had a walk in to the town. It's an attractive old fishing village with tiny square, church, municipal market and main street. The cobbled, white washed streets are home to cafes, bars and odd gift shop. We continued down the main drag to the end of the cobbled road. Plenty parking here for Motorhomes but not in this weather. The views out to sea and the surrounding bays were stunning but the wind was bitter cold. Waves crashing on the rocks sending the sea spray up and over on to the headland. We found some steps down to the beach cove and whilst we didn't go down to the beach, it was a good place to shelter for 5 minutes. Jeez it was so cold my ears were ringing. We meandered in and out of the street before dashing back to Vin for a warm drink.





Craig did a reshuffle on a few bits and bobs but nothing seemed to fit quite right for him. He got frustrated and went all moody. Not long and he was chewing my ear...time to take shelter me thinks! I wrapped up and went for a nice, refreshing stroll along the coastline. Just in time for sunset, which was pretty amazing, a shame I haven't got my camera. A couple of hours later I returned but the mood was set for the night, so I snuggled down with my book and spent the evening with Naomi Klein.





## Porto Covo (dunes)

## Tuesday 20 January

Another windy and rainy night but at least it wasn't too gusty for Vin. Craig got up early but I stopped in bed in the hope he might be in a better mood once he'd had his coffee fix. Eventually I crawled out of bed at 9 just as the rain stopped and the sun broke through the grey storm clouds. After about half an hour Craig apologised for yesterday.

We took a walk along the coastline, admiring the cliffs and endless sandy coves. Portugal has some awesome coastline walks that never seem to end. This chunk of coastline is extremely beautiful but the downside is the Atlantic freezing winds, the sort that makes your ears ring, your jaw ache and your cheeks nice and rosy. Ahhh there is the port! Down there in that tiny cove. Well, this place certainly deserves its name. We carried on passed the lighthouse and up around the headland to the tiny Portuguese ocean villas with private stepped down to their own little cove...a pair of ladders for one dwelling. Then round back through the sleepy town.

We filled Vin up with fresh water and had a chat a guy looking for some specific dog food. He wanted the one his UK breeder had recommended. Not sure he'll have much choice out here! Our pampered pooch gets Lidl's own brand when he meaty chunks runs out.

The free aire isn't bad just wish the ground was a little harder, so not as boggy when it rains. But can't complain for free! Looking around





all the vans and it is clear this place is popular with French. 12 vans all French with the exception of a lonely UK Hymer tucked in the corner. With that we waved goodbye to Porto Covo and headed off down the coast.

This coastline is pepper potted with wild camping spots. Lots of little dirt racks with secluded bays and coves just perfect for an overnight stop. After passing the ostriches....yes ostriches, we pulled in behind some sand dunes. Perfect spot for today. Flat hard surface with sand dunes for protection and glorious view over coastline to Porto Covo. After lunch we had a stroll along the beach but not for long as the battering wind was soon joined by horrid

rain. Peanut was none too pleased and his little ears were flapping all over the show. We rushed in to Vin and dried off, put the kettle on! An hour or so later Craig nipped outside but his shoes were nowhere to be seen. I found them a few meters or so away in the bushes...that shows how windy it was. The sunset wasn't the best in terms of colours but it was a good moody sky. Full of dark, grey clouds tinged with fringes of silver. The type that creates a good black and white photo.





## Praia do Santo Andrè

## Wednesday 21 January

The wind died down and the sun got his hat on...hip hip hip hurray. In our pyjamas and crocks we headed down to the beach and had a good old toot in the rock pools. It was brilliant looking under the rocks, in the pools and in every little crevice. The sea urchins were looking mighty handsome this morning, bright red with spots, a bit like a juicy strawberry. Lots of them and plenty babies too. We did spot a couple of urchins with large tentacles, a purples on and then a tiny pink one. Further down we found some broken rock and when we lifted it up a load of baby flat fish came swimming out. Not sure who jumped the most!

After lunch bumbled on down to Andrè. On route we passed loads of little coves and beaches, this stretch is brilliant for Motorhomes. Not long and we were driving through Sines the industrial port of Portugal stacked high with oil tankers and terminals. Before heading to the beach we stopped in the town at Lidl for some basic shopping like bread and milk. At the beach it was damn windy. Beautiful stretch of beach with very pale beige sand. Nothing round for miles so as you can imagine we were the only folk here. Pretty peaceful apart from crashing waves. Just before sunset we moved round the corner to the lagoon in order to try and get some shelter from these sandblasting winds. It was a little better but still pretty fierce. Poor Vin's paintwork was getting scratched to bits. The lagoon is home to 100's





of different birds and being the bird watchers that we aren't we struggled with anything other than the moorhen and the seagull.







## Setūbal

## Thursday 22 January

We opted to set off early and give Vin a run down the motorway. Every 500 miles or so we like to give him a bit of a blast to get rid of any build up. A good run over 2000 rpm will help clear his throat! We prefer to avoid the motorway's as they often carry toll charges but the A roads in Portugal are not great and so you often struggle to get about 30 km unless of course you fancy killing yourself.

We never made it to the motorway because sods law...the A road was damn good. It was a truckers run and ran straight alongside the motorway. We passed all sorts of little towns and villages but in the main they were quite industrial in their feel. We spotted a BP fuel station selling GPL but before we pulled in we checked out the price on the BP station over the road and yep, it was cheaper. Same distributor but one sold for 0.78 litre and the other 0.67 litre. How mad is that? Craig filled up with GPL and I went to empty our loo, one of the horrid jobs of motorhome traveling!

Back on the road and we started to pass lots of salt plains. Then every so often a prostitute in one of the side lane...a what, yep, a prostitute! Guess the trucker run must be good business for some of the young girls. Such a shame. The next town had tons of potatoes for sale and they were very cheap 75 kg for €5.





Not long and we were arriving at our destination of Setúbal home of Portugal's 3rd largest port. Well it certainly was a big place and very mixed in its feel. Some areas were run down and others were quite nice. Strange how they'd built contemporary buildings right in the middle of industrial bit and vice versa. We found a parking spot right on the harbour next to the fish market. It was a bit smelly but Craig didn't care, it had a water tap! Within minutes of arriving the heavens opened and it pickled down, so we had a spot of lunch. Once the rain backed off we cycled to the highlight of the town, Church of Jesus. This is one of the first Manueline buildings, with flamboyant door entrance and internal twisting columns. The church didn't look half a grand as it could due to all the graffiti in and around its grounds. This place certainly has its fair share of graffiti and it sure spoils the feel of sacred and historic buildings. We spent the rest of the day meandering in and around town just tooting at fish restaurants, shops, museum and life in general. One think for sure, this place sells a lot of umbrellas as everyone carries them even in the shopping district! Back in Vin for sunset and it looks like the local fish market is the main meeting spot of local residents. It was chocker with folk having a good old chin wag.



A t l a n t i c  
O c e a n



2

ROUTE SO FAR









# OUR TOP 10

- 1. Seville
- 2. Salamanca
- 3. Alvor
- 4. Lagos



# OUR HIDDEN GEMS

1. Praia Do Arrifes
2. Prais Do Amado
3. Vila Do Bispo (forest)
4. Porto Covo (dunes)