



BUMBLING ALONG EXPLORING EUROPE IN OUR MOTORHOME



ET CUM FECISSE QUASI
FLAGELLUM OMNES
EIECIT DE TEMPLO.

Chap. 2. v. 14.

1

PORTUGAL



Sintra To Mafra

Thursday 29 January

We certainly know how to pick our wild camping spots. We parked right in front of a prostitutes house and she was a busy woman. Cars arrived at every hour and she welcomed them with a very loud, hearty laugh and after a bit of banter before luring them to her pad. Every time we drifted in to a nice sleep, a new punter would arrive....takes 40 winks to a whole new meaning.

When we finally got up, it was foggy and wet. Yesterday was grey but today is even grayer. With that we had breakfast and headed towards the coast. Sintra is one hell of a confusing place and it took ages to get out of the hilly town and on to the main road or should I say country road. It was a pleasant drive if you like fog, rain and misty screens. Shame really because it did look pretty from what we could see. Eventually we hit the coast but you'd never know as the sky and sea were the same colour. We travelled to the town of Ericeira but as soon as we entered the town we were hit with no Motorhome signs. We travelled along the coast in the hope we'd find something but nada. This place clearly didn't welcome Motorhomes and we got a feeling it would do everything in their power to get rid of you. So with that, we turned around in a Ilha car park. What a cracking view out to sea, a hairy butt cheek from some wannabe surfer dude. As it turns out this was our highlight of the town.



With no option but to move on we headed back in land to Mafra. On route, we passed time by calling in Aldi and Lidl for some bits and bobs. We even treated ourselves to some beetroot to accompany our Lancashire lobby made with the finest corned beef. Thinking about it, who the heck thought of putting beef in a tin? Then to go one further they added a special little key to peel open the tin.

Here the fog was thicker and the rain was heavier and to top it, it was getting damn cold. We'd bought some burger baps from Lidl and we were very tempted to get a piece of bungie and strap half a bun to each ear to act as ear muffs. But for the sunflower seed getting in our ears think we might have give it a try. Eventually we arrived in Mafra although we couldn't quite see much. We parked up at the side of the convent which also happens to also be the entrance of a military base. Craig felt a little uneasy just parking up so he walked over to the army guard and asked if we could stay overnight. The guard was very pleasant and said no problem. He then went to show Craig how to get free car park tickets from the machine. What a chap! Craig was well impressed and prompted immediately him to a Sargent Sid.

The weather wasn't backing down, so we decided to take a little stroll around to the entrance of the convent and check out the opening times for tomorrow. On the way we noticed the Basilica was open, so we popped in for a look...amazing. Then we called it a day before we got too wet.



Mafra To Bélem

Friday 30 January

The entrance fee to the Monsteito Palacio National de Mafra was only €6. When they built this place it nearly bankrupted the country and it is clear to see why, it is massive with over 2500 windows and 5000 doors. King Joao V started the palace in 1717 with initial plans to house 13 Friars but as wealth poured in from Brazil he got a little carried away. In the end he'd created a palace with two royal wings, a basilica and a monastery for 450 monks. The German architect Ludwig was Italian trained and you can tell, as you walk around the detail certainly has an Italian feel about it.

It is hard to describe how massive and elaborate this place is. Everything is just huge and with no one around it was hard to put a scale to things. The wall lights look like some sort of gas lights and are absolutely beautiful in brass but they must be 3ft tall. First we went in to the monastery section with all the friar bedrooms, the kitchen and then...a medical ward. Something we didn't expect. It was like one wide, long corridor with cubicles on either side and then a simple but effective alter at the end. In each cubicle a bed with Jesus at the head and Maria at the foot. Each bed had a small chest of draws with bed pan. On Sunday's, they would pull all the beds to the middle of the ward and deliver mass to the sick. Unsurprisingly the burial chamber was located down a small passageway under the ward.



Then in to the palace quarters. The king had two wings, one for winter and one for summer and the grand corridor that linked them both was extremely long and the view from one end to the other was captivating. All the rooms were grand and unique but few rooms stood out more than most, the hunting room where they even made elaborate chairs out of their skins and horns. An impressive entertaining room with bright yellow decor. The nursery with private chapel for blessing the birth of a new royal. For us the highlight was definitely the library. It was spectacular both in design but also in its collection of books. Mixture of marble, different woods and various paintings all creating a very relaxing but inviting place. Loved the neighbours, a little colony

of bats that live in the eaves to keep the books free of insects, how cool.

Outside we ventured in to the basilica for a second time. It is rather impressive and definitely worth a second look. The baroque sculptures are beautiful and the attention to detail is outstanding, you can even see the intrinsic lace detail on one of the reliefs. Jose 1, set up Mafra school of sculpture with Italian sculpture Alessandro Giusti in 1754 and the school is still active today, attracting students from all over the world. The basilica is also the only



church to have 6 organs and all the music is specifically written for it.

Just as we were leaving the guide from yesterday recognised us. She walked over and asked if we'd been in the palace. She then went on to tell us more and more about the palace and the basilica including how the sculpture school recreated all the basilica oil paintings in white stone, so they could place the original paintings and place inside for safe keeping. The stone reliefs were marvelous. She showed us one carving of a friar, it was spookily real looking and legion has it, it is real. Then she told us this year they are holding an international competition for the best 6 organ piece of music. Each week they will hold concerts to play the music and the winner will be announced later in the year. The guide was lovely and clearly passionate about her job and the basilica. Mafra palace is one very special place.

Outside the weather was horrid and within minutes we were soaked to the skin, so no nice shots of the outside I am afraid. Back in Vin and we set off in the hope we could escape the fog and rain.



We tootled off out of Mafra and not long and we were stuck in the Lisbon traffic. We tried to take several detours but struggled until we saw a sign for Belém, which we quickly took a right turn. Not long and we were on familiar territory and back in Belém were we parked up for the night. Great end to the evening we found out we have guests coming to stay with us in a few weeks, yippee, can't wait.



Belem To Lisbon

Saturday 31 January

Several days ago, we got chunked out of Lisbon cause the road system is naff. With another chance to see the highlights we decided to do all the stuff we didn't do last time. First, we moved a little closer to the centre and parked Vin in Alcantara, so the statue of Jesus could look over him and keep him safe.

Just before we were due to go out the phone rang...it was mum. She sounds so good and must admit, I always feel happier once we've spoken. If anyone can put a smile on my face then mum can.

We cycled back to the black horse square but it was no where near as busy as last weekend. Probably something to do with the weather and the fact, it's dull, grey with high chance of pissing down. Only fools with an old dog would come out in this weather! Once at the square we headed up to Castelo de Sao Jorge and boy what a jaunt. I was shattered and out of puff by the time I reached the top, probably due to being unfit and the fact I just cycled up the steepest hill in Lisbon and its cobbled with 100's of pot holes. Oh and the tram lines didn't help cause my little wheels kept getting stuck in them. On route we passed Sé, the cathedral and whilst nice outside, it wasn't that special inside. We had a good old toot around but found Alfama district more interesting even if a little bit dodgy. Lots of tiny cobbled streets with unsavory characters that smelt of wee. The view from Miradouro da Graca over the city is pretty cool, which did lead us to



Sao Vincent church. Inside the priest was conducting a christening, so we gracefully tiptoed backwards, so as to not spoil their service. Outside started the Feria da Lada, Lisbon's weekly flea market. It sprawled across the back side of Lisbon and went on for as far as the eye could see. Personally, we don't like flea markets and whilst you might find some interesting things, we'd rather not bother. The little carpet stalls just looked like tat pinched from last weeks tourist or ruffled from out the bin - watches, wallets, odd socks and tatty clothes. In all fairness, some of the people looked like honest, homeless people just trying to make a few bob, so fair play to them. You never know how or why people end up on the streets. In many ways it's the odd nasty character that gives them all a bad name and it is unfair.

Back in the Baixa area and we headed towards the parliamentary buildings. Half way there and the heavens opened. Peanut didn't have his waterproofs and he was not impressed. By the time we reached Vin he looked like a drowned rat and we didn't look any better! We dried out but I just couldn't get warm, so I climbed in to bed and nodded off.

Before the sunset we moved Vin towards the karting circuit. At night, it is a little quieter by the karts and its further away from the night clubs, so less boom boom boom and more zzz zzz zzz



Lisbon To Evora & Os Almendres

Sunday 1 February

Today is Oliver and Lucas's naming ceremony and whilst we can't be there, we will certainly be thinking about them and hoping everyone has a great day. We hope the weather is a little dryer than here!

Rain and more rain in Lisbon, so we set off along the Tagus River. It was nice to drive through the city with no one around. Although it was wet and cold, it still looked pretty. Following the waters edge all the way to the longest suspension bridge in Europe where we cross the Tagus and waved good bye to Lisbon. In a strange way, I am sad to leave.

The countryside is just starting to twinkle, not a lot but enough to see spring is on its way. The farmers fields were full of calves and lambs, all wobbly as they try to get to grips with walking and keeping up with mum. The almond blossom is flowering in patches and it doesn't half brighten up the land. Not long and it will soon look like a carpet of white petals. We were hoping to find somewhere to stop but this badly damaged road is the only main road around here and not much option for stopping. We passed through a few little villages but not really anywhere to park a Motorhome. Eventually we pulled in at Venas Novas and parked up right next to the military base. During lunch we gawked at a few canons and tanks before strolling the ghost town in hope we'd find a human being. Nah, nothing here, think we need to move on in case the military shoot us.



We bumbled and bumbled along the road and admired the endless cork trees. Cork, cork, cork... I went in to a day dream thinking about when I did mums kitchen. I was only around 16 and we hadn't any cash but we scrimped and scraped to modernise the kitchen. I bought cork floor tiles for both the kitchen and utility room. I then covered the kitchen doors in thin plywood and stuck beading on the outside for a little detail. A lick of varnish, a quick change of work top, a new window and hey presto, we had a new kitchen. Do you remember it mum and all the red accessories including your matching red pinnie?

Look at that road kill! What is it? I dunno but it's dead. Thanks Craig, I'd rather look at big storks on top of pylons than some squashed fluff in the middle of the road. Our journey along this road was starting to wear thin and although the countryside is nice, it's not stunning or entertaining and especially on a grey day.

We pulled over for a comfort break just outside Montemor where locals were just packing away their goods. Looks like we missed the flea market, what a shame. A few of the stalls were still hanging on, in the hope of one more deal for the day. Not sure what we could do with a big copper paella type pan, 3



brass pigs and saddle, so we declined the bargain of the day.

We turned off the main road a few kilometers outside of Evora. We drove along a single track dirt road for a few kilometers, passing wild pigs and horses before we reached a sort of lay-by. The rain had certainly left its mark around here with pot holes the size of craters. Poor Vin struggled to climb over them but with a good guardian, he managed to find a way. Once parked up we trundled off to Os Almandres. Not long and we arrived at the circle of stones. 95 of them to be precise. According to the information board they date back to around 6000 BC, so pretty old stuff. We had a walk around and

whilst we were impressed with the age and curious about their purpose that was it. The mystery of the stone boulders is far more interesting than the boulders themselves. If we are honest, it is just a group of rocks, plonked in a dirty field, in the middle of nowhere and if you are passing...don't stop.

Back to Guadalupe and right turn for Evora. We went straight for the Aire but someone had pinched it. Guess AKI store is more rewarding to Evora than an aire. Ah well, let's head for the overnight car park. As we pulled up alongside the old aqueduct and next to another Hymer, we noticed a GB plate. Not long and we were best mates with our fellow campers, exchanging stories and comparing shoe



sizes. Must admit, it is nice to chat with someone, it's been a while since we had a decent chat. All the campers of late are Portuguese and they just like being hermits, so nice change to have a welcome party waiting for you when you step out your van. Like us, they were sick of the fog and rain, so tomorrow they are heading back down south to the sunshine.



Evora

Monday 2 February

If you are sat at home nice and snug and thinking wish I was in Portugal, think again. We know we are very lucky to be here but right now we could do with a quiet, snuggle in front of the fire, watching TV. It is cold, wet and miserable and its been like this for what seems an eternity. Vin our Motorhome is great but it's no fun sitting in a tin box when it is cold and raining. Last night, the temperature dropped right down to the same as Manchester (don't all cheer at once), so we were pretty cold. Even Peanut wrapped himself up in his blanket. I didn't want to get out of bed this morning and I would have stayed in longer but for a full bladder.

Around 10am and the rain stopped. We looked around and decided to take a chance and head in to town. We put on all our thermals, jumpers, socks and anything that looked warm and fluffy. We walked under the arches and in to the walled city. The cobbled streets and white washed houses and stone door frames looked pretty colourful even in this gloomy weather. Not long and we were in the town square. Usual Portuguese Square with fountain, half a dozen cafes, a selection of banks, a church and a vendor selling roasted chestnuts. We wandered in the tourist office, not because we wanted more information but because we needed shelter from the rain. We looked at the hotel brochures and played with an interactive map until the rain clouds passed. We wandered up one of the streets until we bumped in to the cathedral. We popped our head inside but it didn't



look fantastic, so we quickly back tracked, so as not to feel obliged to pay the €5 entrance fee. To our left the Roman Temple ruins dating back to the second century. Not massive but impressive and with the gardens over looking Evora, a great viewing platform,. To the side, a convent but it was closed. Walking behind the cathedral and down through an arch way we passed a tiny chapel but again, it was closed. Signs pointed us to the university building but before we arrived there, Craig heard someone rapping in a church. Of course, he was bluffing but the house of God got its sweet revenge. As he walked in the church he walked straight in to a load of priests all saying pray and a congregation of people all looking at him. He quickly did a 180

without a rap. Then we walked in the university building, not because of anything but because the doors were open and we fancied a toot. We walked down the corridor and peeked in some of the lecture rooms. It's only after a while, it dawn on us, this was or still is a university for monks. In each room there was a culprit from which the head monk would deliver his lecturer. Each room had little blue and white tiles coving the lower half of the room, all telling a different story of bible. The detail was amazing but the rooms felt abandoned. We walked around the corridors, up and down the stairs, in to the cafe and around the gardens and didn't see a soul. Only a couple of canteen staff waiting for, well

we are not quite sure. There were certainly no students or hordes of tourists around today.

Back outside and it was starting to rain again. We dashed round the streets to find something interesting to shelter in but with just one eye, I was useless. Every time I looked up my hood would stick to my face and covered an eye. It was that cold, I daren't lift my hands out my pockets and move my hood for fear of losing my fingers. I looked at Craig and immediately began to howl with laughter. He was trying to shelter from the rain so much, he was doubled over with his head virtually touching the floor. He looked like an old fart, all hunched and screwed up. Eventually we found shelter in a church. In the doorway we shook off the rain and tried to make ourselves look decent. Once inside, we were amazed. This tiny church wasn't on any tourist map but it was absolutely beautiful. Instead of religious paintings, it had blue and white tiles telling the story of Jesus. A bit like the university but in a much prettier surrounding. We walked up and down admiring the detail until a little chap started to close the door. It's lunch time and everything shuts at 12.30.

The amazing unknown church





Out again, this time the fine rain that doesn't feel too harsh but before you know it you are soaked to the bone. Nothing for it, back to Vin for lunch and a warm. A change of clothes, cup of hot coffee, bowl of soup and we felt half human again. Blinking weather.

Just before round two and the phone rang...hey it's Stu. Craig had a good chat with his mate Stu and caught up on all the latest Kirkwall gossip. Sounds like Stu's not been diving for a while, damn weather causing him grief too.

Back in the town, passed the theatre and half a dozen historic buildings and straight to church of Francisco. Entrance fee €2 but at least you can see

why with a full restoration project underway. We followed the path all the way around to the little chapel. Wow. We both stood in the doorway, it was weird and eerie but amazing. A chamber full of human bones. The walls, pillars, archways are all constructed with bones. The remains belong to over 5000 monks and date back to 15th century. Apparently space became an issue, so they dug up the remains from all the 42 local monastery cemeteries and placed the bones in to one chamber. They arranged the different bones in an artful way, creating arches and pillars and oddly enough it looks good until you remember what they are. The inscription above the door reads "We bones here await your bones"....spent a shiver right down my spine. Unfortunately, we were kicked out of the

chamber because the lady wanted to go home for the evening. We sort of lost track of time, trying to find a missing tooth and the other half of a shin bone.

So back on the streets of Evora we wandered around soaking up the ambience, a change from soaking up the rain. We ended up walking to the beginning of the viaduct where little houses are built inside the archways. Evora is like an historic toffee shop with so many wonderful buildings and street full of character, it's absolutely brilliant. We then just followed the viaduct all the way round until we found Vin with his arse tucked in the viaduct reservoir. This time we made it back without getting wet but we were cold and tired, so an early night for all of us.

The amazing chapel on bones







Evora To Beja

Tuesday 3 February

What is the weather doing today...rain, rain and more rain. The weather is getting colder and wetter over the coming days, so we are heading south back to the Algarve in the hope we get a little heat. Anything above 3 degrees would be nice!

The northern part of Alentejo region is very flat with not much to look at other than pending wheat fields, so the drive to our next stop was a nodding dog route. The first village Viana do Alentejo and what a desolate place. The sign posts pointed us towards a castle but there was no castle here, so we carried on. Next stop, Alvito. After driving around the little village we parked up in the square and took a walk. Five minutes later we were back in Vin wondering if anyone lived here and if the mini castle turned hotel was closed full stop or just for the winter.

We moved on to Beja driving through boring and nondescript flat plains. Craig was in a quiet...a do not disturb mood. I think we are both struggling with Portugal. We desperately want it to be great but at best, it is only good. We get snippets of good things but they are rare and it makes the journey through Portugal mentally difficult, at times. We are only here to ride out the winter chill and when it is cold, wet and drab, it does cause you to question should we move on.

Beja car park

We arrived in Beja and it was bitterly cold. We found a car park just out of the town centre and put Vin on the chocks. The outer rear tyre looked a little flat. Craig disagreed and said it always looked low on the chocks. He moved Vin so the tyre sat better but it still looked low to me. Craig tutted at me and got out the tyre gauge but struggled with the valve. He plugged in the tyre pump in to 12 volt socket but after a few seconds it stopped. He yelled at me to wiggle the wire but nada. The fuse had blown. Brilliant now we can't charge Marg the Tom Tom or the iPad...well not that easy. Then a big sigh. Houston we have a puncture. A damn big nail piercing Vin's tread. Think we'd better find a garage before night fall. Don't fancy driving Vin on a flat tyre plus a good chance we can get repaired in current state. I looked on the iPad for vehicle repair centres but just up the road, a petrol station. Craig popped inside to ask for a garage and a young gentleman kindly offered to take us to the nearest garage. He drove us 5 minutes to the other side of town to a Pnues. No sooner had we said thank you and he was off! Half an hour later and we were sorted. The hairy mechanic had repaired the puncture and all for €10. The garage owner let us fill up with water and he also showed us his prize possession, a puppy. The garage dog, an old American bulldog was now father to some puppies and he gets to keep the





Great customer service from the tyre place

pick of the litter. And what a cutie. The little pup was so soft and full of love, I just wanted to take him with us. But the father was pretty protective and...strong, so thought best to leave him. However, the garage owner did say the father did like me..probably something to do with the dog trying to piss on my leg.

With Vin all fixed up we set off back to the car park. Not much daylight left and I need to book a flight. As we headed back, we found a McDonald's drive through so decided to take advantage of their free wifi. A few hours later and I had booked a flight home to coincide with my hospital stuff. Craig had managed to download all the updates for his Mac and the iPad, so everyone was sorted.

By now it was pitch black and we weren't too sure the whereabouts of the car park. Craig tried to trace his footsteps but it was too dark. Eventually we found some flat, hard ground with a few cars. It was well lit, so will do for tonight even though it is damn freezing. I put the heating on to number 4 but Craig turned it down to number 3. Ah well, I will just sit here in my jumper, body warmer, coat and scarf. Eventually, I didn't get warm!



Beja To Mértola

Wednesday 4 February

Happy 85th birthday dad! Hope you have a good day and do loads of stuff that you enjoy x x x

Craig, I think we need to move.

Why?

Because we are surrounded with police

What do you mean?

We are parked on a police car park and the police station is just there.

Ha, you are joking

Nope

Craig jumped up and got dressed. I had no need, I didn't get undressed last night, it was so cold. Not like me to feel the cold, so can only assume I am coming down with something or Craig's just being a tight arse. Craig went for a fag and discovered it wasn't the police station but the office of justice and the county jail car park, so the police, national guard and prison officers were parking up ready for a day's work. We thought it prudent to move on especially given a



busy mortuary on the other side! That's the danger of picking your spot after sunset, you never quite know what you will wake up to and with.

We set off back to the original car park. We got the Brompton's out and went in search of a 25 amp fuse. As we closed shop last night, we discovered that the fuse is also connected to the alarm. We didn't fancy leaving Vin without alarm, so a priority of the day. As we cycled around, I can't describe how cold it got. It was around 3 degrees but the icy wind made it feel more like -3. I felt like a block of ice and it got so cold, I just wanted to curl up and cry. We had to keep going though to find a fuse. Eventually we came across a Mercedes dealer and Craig went

inside. Half an hour later and he emerged without a fuse! The Mercedes dealer didn't have the fuse but suggest we go to a place near Lidl. We found the Lidl, climbed over the barriers, crossed the main round, cycled down a dirt track to some dodgy looking out post and went inside. It was the local electrical store but guess what...they didn't have a 25 amp fuse. Craig got the next best thing, a 30 amp fuse. At least it will do until we get to a main town.

We went back to Vin to defrost and warm up. Despite a warm cup of coffee and load of warm clothes, I didn't warm up. A cuddle from Craig would help but he wasn't for cuddling today. I must admit, I



wasn't in the best of moods, his mood yesterday combined with the cold had a knock on effect. I was grumpy and in need of some TLC but with no TLC, I opted for next best thing, windscreen sunshine. It's warm, if nothing else.

We'd been up since crack of dawn, so even with a full morning of activities, it still was only 11 o'clock. Only a kilometer away from the centre we walked in to town. I was still grumpy because it was so cold and even though I wanted to see Beja, I longed for my bed. Eventually we came across a small church and I quickly dashed inside. A gentleman explained that the museum part was closed but we could wander around the church, it was free. It was a small

and compact church but didn't care, it was shelter from them blinking winds. Eventually, guilt took over and we wandered back on to the streets. In the square, the main building looked pretty nice but on closer inspection we found out it was a tat shop. It was dead in Beja and not a soul around. Is that because of the weather or because there is nothing here? We ploughed on and eventually came across the museum. I wasn't too fused but we went in and I am so glad we did. It was only €2 and the cashier was every so polite and helpful. First we went in to the church section which mentioned John the Baptist quite a lot and the date 1695. Then a little coats of arms room. The cloisters were split in to 4 district elements - blue and yellow tiled seating area,



John the Baptist court, entrance hall and St. John's court. Right at the back, a little chapel covered in tiles and paintings. Almost a feel of a Turkish bath with how the seats were tiled. Just before going upstairs we went in to the chapter house with gorgeous doorway leading to several tombstones. Finally, we went upstairs to Marianna's window. In 1669' Marianna, a love stuck nun declared her undying love for a French chap. It is from this convent and window she wrote her now famous letters. Overall the museum was exquisite and more should be done to promote this wonderful treasure and its dedicated staff.

Once outside in the bitter cold we headed back in to town. Walking down the streets we noticed a hospital museum. In Portugal, everything becomes a museum once it starts to crumble, so you are never quite sure if worth a visit or not. Anyway, we wandered in and after using their toilets we found a little church. The woman inside was ever so helpful and informed us that behind the green alter was the stairs to the original alter. She moved a panel and we could see a corridor and staircase, wow. Also behind the gold leaf front were paintings dating back to 1500. Our lack of Portuguese and her very good but limited English meant we couldn't ask as many questions as we wanted to. The little chapel was in fact a rather large church and over the years



they have built panels to hide and protect the original church. It really felt like a rare find. As we popped our head outside we could see the castle, it was beautiful. The views were amazing. Beja is one of those places that is full of rough diamonds just waiting to be polished. Truly a wonderful place with the most friendly people.

In terms of landscape, Beja is the first big bump in this landscape, so building a castle here is a no brainer. But equally, the first bump in middle of Portugal means you get a load of people trying to invade it. Over the years this place has seen its fair share of wars and battles. The oldest historic battle goes back to Julius Caesar time and the last one, 1962 to Salazar regime.

Wandering back to Vin we picked some wild Rosemary, which accompanied our lunch quite nicely, thank you. Mum telephoned and I can't tell you how good it was to hear her voice. I recon she has a sixth sense and knows when I really need a friendly voice...thank you mum for calling xxx

I continued to defrost whilst Craig checked out the plan and before you know it, we were on our way again. Within half an hour it was sunny and warm, just what I needed. And this time, the landscape was beautiful. Lot of little bumps in the ground to give texture and definition to the countryside. We also had lots of tiny lambs and spring flowers..the first signs of spring! How exciting. Spring is here! That means the worst of the weather is behind us, I do hope so.

As the sunset, we were in Mèrtola. It looked pretty awesome and more like the scene from Mama Mia, you know the one where they walk up the hill to the church? Well, Mèrtola from the river bed certainly gave that feel. Looking forward to tomorrow, so good night all xxx

Beja





Mèrtola

Thursday 5 February

Happy birthday to my wonderful sister, Mandy. I do hope you have a great day and get spoiled rotten by your children and grand children.

Last night, was bitterly cold. I ended up getting up in the middle of the night and turning the heating up. By the time morning arrived, we were still shivering and grumpy. Despite two quilts and a fluffy blanket. We kept out of each other's way for most of the day. Craig disappeared in to the garage and I took a chair and book and sat beside the river. It wasn't warm but the sun was out, hip, hip, hurray. It felt so nice to have blue skies and a sun even if it was warm, it felt nice. In between reading my book, I watched the ducks, storks, geese, birds and goats all do their thing on the river. The two female ducks had eight young chaps to choose from and boy did they lead a merry dance. The geese were strange, ugly things, white chunky body but red face like a turkey.

Two young guys went canoeing whilst two older fellas went fishing in their little boat. The older chaps clearly knew the ducks and as they shouted the ducks went flapping over to the boat for their daily treats.

In the afternoon, truce was called and we strolled in to Mèrtola. After a toot around a couple of local shops we bought some vegetables for dinner and headed back just as the sun was setting.





Mèrtola

Friday 6 February

Another cold night but with the heating on, we were snug as a bug in a rug. We were up before the sunrise and whilst it was cold, it was a lovely time of day. The mist on the still river with little ripples from the trail of the mallard ducks was lovely. Hardly any colour just shades of black and white. Every so often the mist would rise up the hill and a tiny rock island would appear from out the steely river. How can something so colourless be so atmospheric!

Just thinking, I haven't told you anything about Mèrtola but I can tell you, it is beautiful. The village sits on a hill with the River Guadiana running on one side and then a smaller river (something beginning with O) running on the other, so in many way it is more like an island. The whole village is classed as an historic museum and there are pockets from different periods dotted around the whole village. It starts with Phoenicians who built the inland port, then the Romans with their bridges and roads followed by the Moors and their castle walls. At the top of the hill, the castle dates back to 1200 and then from here the streets just wind down to the river. At the river, you look up and you see the castle surrounded with white washed houses, churches and loads of ruins. As you walk around Mèrtola you can see ruins of all these ages and whilst there are museums exhibiting stuff there are loads of ruins just dotted around. The old blacksmiths domain is still in operation and you can just wander in off the street for a look. If the door is locked then just next door and they will willingly let



you in! Down by the river side you find old arches, bits of port etc, all untouched and just left for you to discover. Plenty of stray cats too. We had a field day in Mèrtola often wondering and guessing what stuff used to be.

After lunch we watched the world go by on the river and had a chat to our new neighbours. A lovely couple from Holland. They'd been here for 3 months and planning to stay until early summer. Portugal seems to be a favorite haunt for the Dutch. Around 4pm the rowers arrived with their canoes. The instructor, the chap with 1 leg and about half a dozen school children. Once they donned their flip flops they plopped in their canoe and they were off.

Up and down the river. By which time we took a hike up the hill to watch the sunset over Mèrtola. Tomorrow we leave for a new destination and say goodbye to charming little village.





2

ROUTE SO FAR

THE LAST 7 DAYS OF OUR JOURNEY



Our Top 10 Places

1. Seville
2. Salamanca
3. Alvor
4. Lagos
5. Belem
6. Mertola
7. Mafra
8. Evora
9. Beja
10. Prai do Rocha Marina

Our Hidden Jems

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