

Aldebaran

Bayona in Spain to Cascais in Portugal Report 4

Having first arrived in Spain on 15th Aug., it was time to depart from Bayona for Viana do Castelo in Portugal a distance of 35 miles.

THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE:

Our month in Spain was, as expected, most enjoyable in magnificent cruising grounds and meeting new friends. You meet a great variety of people cruising from all walks of life and all sharing a common aspiration for sea faring. At a dinner with three other boat crews, we were the only ones with a land home and also the only couple in a first relationship. An American boat called “SITOA” which stands for “**Sailing Is The Only Alternative**” sums it up.

Last year when bringing “Aldebaran” back from Majorca we encountered the predictable Portuguese Northerly trade winds and had said “well at least next year we will have the winds with us”. Not so, we had Southerly winds, you just cannot win.

PORTUGAL:

In Viana do Castelo we again had a lovely meal in The 3 Potes restaurant, with the crews of “Pooh Bear” and “Mon Reve” a German boat. We had visited this restaurant last year and can highly recommend it. While there we joined in a Chinese birthday party and accompanied them in singing happy birthday in our best Chinese, and, as a reward they presented us with half the birthday cake. We did not therefore have to order a desert much to the annoyance of the restaurant staff.

On Friday 17th Aug. we left Viana do Castelo for Leixoes a distance of 40 miles and of course into headwinds. We are now of the opinion that the northerly trades only blow every second year. Leixoes is about five miles North of Porto and is the most popular place from which to visit the city made famous for it's port wine. **This is the only reason to visit Leixoes.** It is without doubt the dirtiest harbour we have ever or indeed ever hope to come across. You name it and it was floating in the marina, including dead rats, plastic bags, condoms and sewage. There are no facilities anymore in Porto itself for yachts.

The weather was now blowing a gale resulting in a forced 8 day stay in this cesspool. However everybody was very cheerful and helpful which compensated somewhat. As happens during such enforced stays in small marinas, everybody got to know each other. This culminated in a dinner party attended by 67 yachties from 24 boats and nine nations. The meal, in a clubhouse at the marina, consisted of six courses of excellent food and wine and only cost IR£10.

The day after arriving in Leixoes, together with Bob and Judy, we took the bus to Porto. To start our day we climbed the 225 steps to the top of Portugal's highest tower built in 1763. It provided us with a good panoramic view of the city. This was followed by a walk on the upper level of the Ponte de Dom Luis Bridge spanning the River Douro in blinding wind and rain. It had a very narrow footpath and with the heavy traffic, each one seemingly trying to outdo the vehicle ahead in spraying us, we were drenched. Visiting wine cellars in such condition is not to be recommended. But visiting such cellars is a must in Porto. We visited two and bought wine in one of them, mainly because the girl guide was very nice.

AN UNFORGETTABLE DOWNPOUR:

By the time we got the bus back we had dried out somewhat. However, on the journey back the heavens opened, I have never seen rain like it. In less than fifteen minutes the roads became rivers and visibility was reduced to a few metres. As the bus stopped to let us off at the Marina the road just ahead suddenly erupted leaving a wide crater, an underground pipe bursting caused it. We had to wade ankle deep through fast running water to reach the marina.

TRAGEDY:

In our absence the wind had risen to gale force and crews had taken lines from the boats to the harbour wall for fear of the pontoons breaking up. With huge seas lashing the coast many ports were closed. It was the following day we received the tragic news of the loss of two French yachtsmen with a third rescued and in hospital. Their boat was capsized when trying to enter Aveiro about 30 miles South of us. Also a Danish boat trying to enter Porto was rolled and two crewmembers washed overboard. They were picked up later by the rescue services after the Skipper put out a MAYDAY. It was a very emotional scene when they were reunited with their boat beside us in Leixoes. The boat suffered a torn sails, a broken window, a flooded engine and electrics. To say we were all stunned is an understatement.

However life must go on and on Sat.25th Aug we left for Cascais, near Lisbon, a distance of 165 miles. The wind veered to the West and gave us lovely sailing for the first 24 hours. Another one of those beautiful nights with a full moon, a starlight sky and warm breeze. The next morning the wind eased and backed to the South resulting in a motor sail for the last six hours. With lots of badly marked fishing pots along this coast I decided to be outside the 100 metre depth contour during the hours of darkness. This proved to have been a wise decision as three of the boats which took the inshore passage got caught in pots and nets. One of the boats drifted for two nights on a windless sea, unable to start his engine due to a rope round their propeller.

A FREE MARINA:

Cascais is reported to be the richest city in Portugal and the fifteen-minute walk from the marina to the city centre confirms this. The marina, still unfinished, opened about six weeks ago and they were not charging boats until the 1st October. When completed it will be an excellent facility although very expensive. Throughout Portugal we have got the impression of bad and shoddy workmanship, the work here confirms these suspicions. One toilet bowl in the ladies loo was fitted with the door opened, the door cannot be closed, it stops at the bowl. Apart from this I would highly recommend a visit here. On leaving the marina gate a picturesque twenty minute walk to the left brings you to an open air souvenir market and cliff top restaurants. Also directly opposite the marina is a public park with children's playground and mini zoo. In addition a visit to O'Neill's Irish Bar owned by an Iranian is worth a visit. The resident musician is from Dundalk, my hometown, his surname is Lambe, apologies I forget his first name.

Our plans from here were to cruise down to Lagos and the Algarve on Portugal's Southern coast, before heading for the Canaries. Our next report will include our change of plans and describe the storm damage we incurred.

Sorry, must go now, going socialising.

Regards

Pat and Olivia, Aldebaran, Somewhere beyond Cascais, Portugal
11th October 1999