

Spain and Portugal

March 21-April 10, 2013

Our Spring 2013 trip to Spain and Portugal (with a day trip into France) covered many miles and consisted of visits to twelve cities and towns. The first week was spent with Tom, Alexander, Genevieve, and Olivia and it was a blast being with them. We believe the kids enjoyed Spain and so did Tom, it being a good trip and a respite from Malta. Cindy and I spent the second part of the trip alone in Portugal and we had a great time.

March 21-22 - We drove to Portland Transportation Center and took the 11:30 Concord Coach bus to Logan International in Boston. We were hoping that our recent enrollment into Global Entry would gain us access to the TSA Pre✓ security line but, alas, we didn't make it. However, once we cleared security in Terminal A, it was nice to have access to the Delta Sky Club after a hamburger lunch at Fuddrucker's. Our flight left right on time and we arrived at JFK in New York where we had to take a shuttle to the terminal and yet another Sky Club. Finally, we boarded our flight and we were off to Madrid. Our lie-flat seats were very comfortable and Cindy slept most of the time after our delicious dinner of grilled shrimp, cream of vegetable soup, mixed green salad, chilled deli plate, and roasted chicken breast. I was intrigued by the availability of The Godfather as a movie selection so I stayed awake watching it (something I've been wanting to do). After arriving at Madrid Barajas airport, we found the bus to the [Axor Barajas](#) hotel, which got us there at about 9:30 AM. Fortunately, our room was ready so we checked in, dropped our bags in the room, and proceeded to get directions into central [Madrid](#) from the hotel desk clerk. That involved walking to a bus stop, taking the 22 bus to the Cannillejas Metro station, and riding the train to the La Latina station. After walking around for a while, we stopped for lunch at a little tapas restaurant called [La Perejila](#). Afterwards, we were so tired that we reversed our trip and went back to the hotel. We stayed awake as long as possible anticipating the events of tomorrow, but finally, sleep overcame.

March 23 - We awoke, had breakfast at the hotel buffet, checked out of our room, and took the shuttle to Terminal 1 at Madrid Barajas. There we picked up our rental van and parked it in the short-term parking lot so we could leave as soon as Tom and the kids arrived. When they did arrive, we began our drive on the A1 to [Burgos](#). The van was just barely large enough for the six of us and our luggage, but

we made do. The lone seat at the back of the van became a subject of conflict since it was very tight and surrounded by luggage. Olivia was the first victim. We arrived in at the [Palacio de la Merced](#) hotel in Burgos around 8:00 PM and drove into the hotel parking garage. It was packed and after driving all the way to the bottom floor, we finally just parked and went into the hotel to check-in. After we got to the rooms, we noticed that they were very hot and they remained that way until the next morning. Tom didn't realize that the key had to be inserted into a slot inside the room to turn on the electricity and had gone to the front desk to complain. When he returned, I explained how the electricity was to be activated. Then I went to retrieve the car and move it to another garage but someone had parked another car behind ours and it took about forty-five minutes to finally get it parked. By that time, of course, it was very late but we headed into town for



tapas anyway (late night dining is not unusual in Spain). We found a place called Veintedos (see picture) where we had lots of different tapas and a couple of bottles of wine. Finally, we went back to the hotel. Tom got lost but I was able to remember how to get back and we got to sleep very late although the heat in the room was stifling.

March 24 - After breakfast at a little restaurant in Burgos called [Gaona](#), we piled into the van (Gen was the victim for this trip) and headed for [Vitoria](#) and lunch at a restaurant called Olarizu (now closed) which was highly rated in Trip Advisor. When we arrived, we were treated to a prix-fixe menu that was wonderful. Unfortunately, I didn't record any of the many dishes that we had but I do recall that some of them were foie gras, cabrito, bacalao, and duck. Anyway, after lunch we headed off to [San Sebastian](#). We arrived in late afternoon, met Beatriz and Emy at the apartment, and parked the van. After settling into the apartment, Tom and I went to a local corner tapas bar where we procured some gin (stores were closed) and then to a nearby pizza place to get supper for the kids.

March 25 - We all walked into San Sebastian and then to the aquarium, which was fantastic. There was the usual litany of information about fish and fishing but the fascinating thing was the huge walk-through [aquarium](#) with all kinds of fish, including some large sharks, which glided overhead as we walked through. As we were walking back, we passed a seafood restaurant called [Sebastian](#) which we had been told was very good. We stopped for



lunch and it was great. We started with fish soup (except for Olivia) which was excellent. Next, Cindy had grilled sea bream, Tom and I had grilled squid, the girls had mussels, and Alexander had bacalao. After Gen finished her mussels, she decided to have the grilled squid as well. Since it was her birthday, we ordered it for her and she finished most of it. Then because we had mentioned it to our waiter, he brought a nice piece of cake for her with a Roman candle on it. She seemed very pleased.



After Lunch, we walked around San Sebastian and found the supermarket Super Amara where we bought supplies for breakfasts, etc. Then we walked along the



beach back to the apartment where we relaxed and planned our trip to [Asador Etxebarri](#) tomorrow. Of course, everyone had to catch up on what was going on with their iPads. Later, we walked back into San Sebastian and found [Taberna Gandarias](#) where we had some fabulous tapas and wine. Then, back to the apartment for some sleep.

March 26 - The day we had been anticipating, lunch at Asador Etxebarri. We picked up the van and started our trip to the village of [Axpe](#). We arrived around noon and were greeted in the downstairs bar where we had some



drinks (Cokes for the kids, wine for us).

We were then led to the dining room upstairs. We wanted to have the tasting menu (at right) but decided to get only four since the kids probably wouldn't want some of the dishes. We thought we could share the more popular ones. The carrot juice was popular except for Olivia. The butter of goat's milk was great on the hot bread served with it. The buffalo mozzarella was the best I've ever had and was also very popular. Then came the anchovies, which turned out to be more popular with the kids that I would have thought. The goose barnacles, however, did not go over with Olivia. The next four dishes were popular with everyone but I was the only one who really liked the egg scramble. The rest of the meal was well received and we were all very satisfied. Four hours later we started home.

After that meal, Cindy, Tom, and I weren't hungry for dinner so Tom prepared some cheese sandwiches for the kids and we ended our day in the apartment.

March 27 - Shopping day! We walked into San Sebastian and found the Zara department store to shop for clothes for the kids. Olivia found some nice shorts and a bathing suit but Cindy and I couldn't use our credit cards because we had forgotten our passports. Fortunately, I had enough cash to complete the purchase. Afterwards, I went back to the apartment to retrieve our passports so we could continue shopping. We found a little shop called Boutique Esther where Cindy



bought a silk scarf and Genevieve found a bathing suit she liked. After walking around some more, we were getting hungry so we stopped into [Bar Baztan](#) for some pinxtos (tapas) and drinks. Next, we decided to go back to Super Amara to get food for preparing dinner at the apartment. We bought some pork tenderloins, potatoes, onion, red pepper, and wine. The only garlic we could find was in bags of several bulbs but we found an interesting package that contained garlic suspended in olive oil which proved to be useful for marinating the pork as well as cooking the potatoes and pepper. We were able to prepare a very tasty meal that night. One of the advantages of renting an apartment.

March 28 - Jueves Santo (Maundy Thursday) is the day before Good Friday and a holy day for Catholics, which resulted in closure of everything in San Sebastian. We decided to drive into France to a town called [St. Jean de Luz](#). There was a long line of cars waiting at the toll station on the Spain-France border (I guess lots of Spaniards had the same idea as we did) but we finally arrived at a shopping center where we were able to shop more for supplies and clothes for the kids. After shopping, we drove to [Txopinondo](#), a cidrerie restaurant between St. Jean de Luz and [Ascaïn](#). There we were introduced to various types of apple cider (hard and sweet) and a fabulous lunch of brandade, cheese, fried potatoes, and grilled beef. The ebullient owner and his wife were friendly and helpful, making this a memorable day trip and last day in Basque country. We returned to the apartment to start packing for our departure tomorrow.

March 29 - We drove to [Pamplona](#) where we parked in a garage next to the [Pamplona bullring](#) then had lunch at a popular tapas bar called [Bar Gaucho](#). After lunch, we walked through the streets of Pamplona and found a small store where we bought supplies for a picnic dinner we would have at the hotel in Madrid. We then set off to drive to Madrid. The first part of the drive (which was on a turnpike) was pleasant but we had to make a long part of the trip on minor two-lane roads and it



began raining very hard, making the drive very stressful. Finally, we reached the A1 turnpike and, although it was very foggy and raining, made the drive into Madrid much easier. We arrived at the Axor Barajas hotel and Cindy, Tom, and the kids got settled in while I returned the rented van to Alamo at the airport. After getting it filled with gas, I checked in at the rental counter and was told that there was some minor damage to the left rear fender of the van to the tune of 240 euros. Ouch! I assume it occurred in the garage where we kept the van while in San Sebastian. Hopefully, I can get Chase to reimburse us since we charged the rental on my credit card. Anyway, I went back to the hotel on the shuttle where I had a well-deserved martini and a sandwich from our picnic larder.

March 30 - We got up early so we could say goodbye to Tom, Alexander, Genevieve, and Olivia since they had to take the 8:00 shuttle to the airport. After having breakfast, printing our boarding passes, and checking out of the hotel we took the shuttle to the airport. When we arrived at terminal 4 and checked in for our flight to [Lisbon](#) with Iberia, we were told our checked bag was overweight (it had also somehow lost a wheel during the flight from Boston) because it was so big. We had to take a few things out and put them in our carry-on bags but were able to get the weight down to the required twenty-three kilograms. Ugh, I hate that big bag (more on that later). We flew to Lisbon and found the representative from Sixt car rental. He had to call their shuttle to take us to the offsite rental counter several miles away in what appeared to be the commercial part of Lisbon. We got our car and began the search for the apartment, which was in an old part of Lisbon with narrow streets that were one-way mostly, making it difficult to find the street (Rua de São Boaventura). Finally, we ventured onto it and saw what appeared to be the building. I parked the car and spoke to a man standing near the door. Although he didn't speak English, he understood when I asked him where [Convento dos Inglesinhos](#) was and



he said this was it. Amazingly, we had driven right to it. Anyway, we met the owner and his wife (Martin and Dinora), they took us to the apartment, and he showed me how to get to the garage where I parked the car. Then they gave us some information about places to go and recommendations for local restaurants. They were very friendly and



helpful, a great beginning to our stay in Lisbon. After they left, we did some unpacking and generally settling into our new home for the week. By this time, it was getting late and we decided to walk around the neighborhood and find a nearby place to eat. We found a little place called [Restaurante Floresta do Calhariz](#) on Rua Luz Soriano, about four blocks from the apartment. We learned two things with our first dining encounter in Portugal: 1). They always bring a basket of bread but it isn't free, 2). The dishes are large, especially in the Portuguese restaurants. We did not accept the bread and ordered a grilled shrimp starter, which was huge. Then I ordered a dish called Arroz Polvo (roasted octopus in rice) and Cindy ordered Dourada Grelhada (grilled Dourade) and they were both very large as well. We ate as much as we could and returned to the apartment for a good sleep.

March 31 - We awoke to a rainy Sunday. I walked down Rua da Rosa to Travessa das Mercês to a bakery that Martin had mentioned where I bought some pastries, juices, and milk for breakfast. Most stores were closed because it was Easter but we found a restaurant called [Petiscos](#) on Rua Atalaia where I had lunch of grilled sardines and fried potatoes and Cindy had a traditional bacalao dish with rice. We had decided to buy two smaller suitcases to replace our large damaged one (that I mentioned earlier) so we drove to a shopping mall where there was a Samsonite outlet that Cindy had seen advertised at the airport. It was a long drive over [Ponte 25 de Abril](#), a very long bridge, and it was very windy but we found the mall and bought two very nice little bags. We also found a phone shop where we were able to get a mobile phone for 25 euros (I found out after we arrived in Spain that mine no longer worked in Europe). Then we made a harrowing drive back in hard rain and heavy wind over that long bridge. Thanks to Cindy's 3G iPad, we were able to find our way back to the apartment. When we arrived, I emptied the old, large, disabled bag and, when we went to dinner at Casanostira (an Italian style restaurant about two blocks from the apartment on the corner of Rua da Rosa and on Travessa da Cidade), I left it on the street by some bags of trash. At the restaurant, we started with the bread and olives. I had a wonderful fettuccine with wild mushrooms and Cindy had grilled fish of the day. It was so much food that we took the leftovers back to the apartment to have dinner for tomorrow night.



April 1 - We had been told that the [Castelo São Jorge](#) was a good place to see so we began walking down the hill to the [Baixa](#) district where we had a quick lunch then started the long uphill walk to the castle. After taking several wrong turns and lots of



walking up stairs and steep streets, we arrived at a snack shop near a beautiful vista overlooking Lisbon and the river. We stopped for a rest and had a short beer and I learned from the shop attendant that the castle was a short distance away up a hill. Meanwhile, I noticed that there was a tram stop across the street from the shop. That was the inspiration to take the tram back to the apartment and avoid all that uphill walking. So, we continued walking to the castle (about three more blocks). It was interesting, with beautiful views across the river and a good museum but after all that walking, we were pretty tired so we walked back to the tram stop and took the crowded tram back to Travessa das Mercês and walked back to the apartment



where we rested from our adventure. We decided to have dinner at the [Bistro 100 Maneiras](#), which was the sister to the highly rated [Restaurante 100 Maneiras](#). It was a good choice. We started with empada de caça (rabbit in puff pastry with truffles), Cindy had leitão a baixa temperatura (roast pork loin), and I had peito de pato (duck breast) accompanied by a bottle of Quinta da Ponte Pedrinha from the Dão region of Portugal. We finished with a cheese platter (pedra de quei jos).

April 2 - We drove to [Sintra](#), a beautiful little town west of Lisbon that we had heard was worth visiting. We were quite hungry when we arrived so we attempted to find a restaurant we had seen on Trip Advisor called G Spot (now closed). Cindy somehow got the wrong directions for the iPad and we made a long trip around the countryside only to discover later that the restaurant was right in Sintra. Anyway, we finally got there and had Cheddar soup and smoked salmon salad. Then, we drove toward the [Castelo dos Mouros](#), which was on top of a steep hill, so we drove back into Sintra and walked around the beautiful town.



When we returned, it was getting late so we had dinner of leftovers from Casanostra then took a stroll around the neighborhood. There was a great park a few blocks away with great views over the [Restauradores](#) area of Lisbon. However, it was cold and windy so we didn't spend a lot of time there and walked back to the apartment.

April 3 - I wanted to go to a seaside town for lunch so we drove to [Cascais](#). Cindy had read in Trip Advisor about a restaurant there called Hemingway Cascais which was highly rated. We parked the car in a lot and began walking in search of the restaurant. After about twenty minutes of searching, I found it but it was closed. We walked back to the [Baia do Peixe](#) (which was the



restaurant I chose) where we had a nice lunch of grilled squid and fish with a bottle of house white wine followed by gelato while overlooking the ocean. By this time, our parking ticket was about to expire so I went back and bought us fifteen more minutes so we could walk around the town some more. On the way out of town, I went into a little market that we passed to see if I could find tomato juice and peanut butter for my breakfast and was pleased that I actually found them. Apparently, these are two items that most Portuguese people don't enjoy because they are very hard to find. Anyway, we happily made our way home. We are getting pretty good about getting to the apartment now. After a short rest and some drinks, we walked to BA Wine Bar (now closed) in Bairro Alto which was just around the corner from the apartment on Rua da Rosa. There we encountered a delightful gentleman who spoke perfect English and introduced to several wines which we drank with some assorted pinxtos (Portuguese for tapas).

April 4 - Cindy suggested we drive to the ancient village of [Evora](#) where there are



Roman ruins and a cathedral. It was a long but beautiful drive and we arrived around lunch time. We stopped into a local café where they served lamb soup, which we soaked



up with the bread offered, and a half bottle of the house red. After lunch, we toured the cathedral and the Roman ruins. We got back to the car just as it started raining so we drove back to Lisbon. We decided to dine at Bistro 100 Maneiras again since we were intrigued by their offering of seafood soup. It was very good but we were still hungry so we had the empada de caça again. Wonderful!

April 5 - In preparation for leaving the apartment tomorrow, we wanted to recycle the glass and plastic. We had heard that there were recycle bins but didn't know

where they were located. So, I decided to drive the car around the area to find one. I tried to stay on streets I was familiar with but got a little lost anyway (although I did find a recycling bin). However, using my sense of direction, I was able to find my way back to Rua do Século, which was the key street back to the apartment. While I was waiting to turn left onto it, one of Lisbon's impatient taxi drivers attempted to pass the line of cars I was waiting for but found himself in my lane so he tried to slip back into the line of cars and ended up rear-ending one of them. Served him right! Anyway, I got back to



the

apartment where we had lunch from the BA Wine Bar leftovers and the green wine that Martin gave us. After lunch, we decided to walk around the neighborhood some more (since this was our last day in Lisbon). We were pleased to find a funicular called the [Elevador da Gloria](#) which we rode down to the Restauradores, a very touristy area. However, it had some beautiful squares ([Praça dos Restauradores](#) and [Praça Dom Pedro IV](#)). Then we started packing for our departure to [Porto](#) tomorrow and decided to have the prix-fixe dinner at Restaurante 100 Maneiras. It started with cod tripe chips (which were presented on a clothesline with clothespins) with

aoli and pimentón. The Amuse Bouche was a barely cooked scallop served with cauliflower purée and chard. The first course was thinly sliced octopus in lemon and olive oil served with lemon foam, a clam, an oyster, and a barnacle in squid ink. Delicious, probably our favorite dish. The second course was smoked duck. The fish course was grilled swordfish followed by a Hendrick's gin palate cleanser. The meat course was veal cheeks and there were four desserts: pineapple and coconut, foie gras, chocolate brownie, and lichee soup with tropical fruits.

April 6 - After meeting with Martin to return the keys to the apartment (and get our 200 euro deposit back), we



began driving to Porto. We noticed that the motorway (which is a toll road) was almost devoid of cars. It seems that the Portuguese don't drive on them much because the tolls are so high and so many people just can't afford it. We stopped in a town called [Fátima](#) to get lunch. Fátima is famous with Catholics because it is the site of a vision by three children on May 13, 1917, of a woman in white, referred to as Our Lady of the Rosary. Pilgrims come there by the thousands. Anyway, after lunch, we walked to the site and were surprised to see a huge area by the chapel



built there to mark the location of the apparitions. We continued to drive to Porto and the apartment, which was actually in [Vila Nova de Gaia](#), across the [Douro](#) river from Porto. When we arrived, I called Shaz, the apartment owner, and she gave us directions. We met her and Yvonne in front of the apartment and she took us there. It was on the tenth floor of the building and had a beautiful view of the town, river, and Porto from the west balcony. It also had an east balcony but the view wasn't nearly as spectacular. We settled in after I moved the car to another place where the parking was free until the next morning. I will need to move it to a nearby garage tomorrow. We decided to walk down to the river. It was a long downhill walk and we decided to take a taxi back to the apartment after dinner. We stumbled into a nice place called [Beira Rio](#), which we later learned was highly rated in Trip Advisor. It turned out to be a grill and Cindy ordered a grilled chicken for which she had been wanting. I had grilled sardines and we had a nice bottle of red wine. It was delicious and inexpensive (only twenty euros). We ended the long day with a taxi ride back to the apartment.

April 7 - I retrieved the car and drove to El Corte Inglés (a large department store that Shaz told us about) where they had a great supermarket and I was able to find tomato juice as well as some other supplies, including an ice tray so we could make ice. Then I drove the car back to the garage where it would be safe from parking tickets for the next two days. Later, we went back to the river and had a great paella at [Rabelos](#) where we were able to enjoy lunch on a terrace outside that was protected from the rain. Afterwards, we walked around looking for a port house to visit. Since it was raining, we decided to go to the nearest one, which was [Vasconcellos](#). We enjoyed a tour where we learned all about how port was made and the differences between styles of port; i. e., ruby and tawny, amongst other things. We ended our tour with a tasting of ten, twenty, and thirty year-old ports. We bought two sampler boxes that we could safely take back to the states in our luggage. We rode the [Teleférico](#) (a ski-lift type conveyance) back up the hill to the apartment. It was beautiful overlooking the river, Porto, and the [Ponte Luiz](#). We decided to have dinner at a nearby churrasqueira (grill house) named [Nova Cidade](#)

which Yvonne had told us about. We thought it was going to close early (although we found out when we arrived that it wasn't) so we ordered our dinner of chicken, salad, and veal steak to take back to the apartment.

April 8 - We walked across the [Ponte Luiz I](#) high above the river in the wind (frightening, especially when the Metro train crossed) to São Bento station where we bought twenty-four hour transportation passes. This would allow us more flexibility in our travel since we could use it on the Metro and buses around the city. We walked down Rua das Flores toward the river. There was considerable construction on many of the streets. Between that and the traffic, it was a bit harrowing but we passed a small restaurant called [Solar de Pátio](#). It offered a daily special consisting of bread, an entrée (this was an interesting dish of chicken or cod wrapped in puffed pastry, baked, and served with rice), a half carafe of house red wine, and coffee. Very satisfying, and only eight euros each. Then we walked to the [São Francisco church](#). It is a fifteenth century building with an



art museum, an ornately carved wood main chapel, and an underground burial chapel, where citizens of Porto were buried until 1866. After our tour of the church, we used our transportation passes to take a bus back to the Ponte Luiz I and then the [Funicular dos Guindais](#), which took us back up the steep hill where we were able to walk back to the São Bento station just in time to beat the rain. Cindy wanted to see the

supermarket at El Corte Inglés so we took the Metro there and walked around the place. It had a great gourmet section but our time in Portugal was almost at an end so we couldn't justify any purchases. So, we took the Metro back to the apartment and decided to have our last dinner in Porto at Rabelos again. It is an Italian themed restaurant so we had a starter of beef carpaccio and main course of pasta which, was huge so we couldn't even finish it. Then we took another taxi back to the apartment and began preparing for our trip back to Madrid.

April 9 - I finished packing, retrieved the car from the parking garage, and loaded the luggage into it. We drove to the airport and dropped the car at Sixt after

filling it with gas. Our short flight to Madrid was uneventful but when we arrived and took the shuttle to the Axor Barajas hotel, we were told that they didn't have a reservation for us. I determined that I had made the reservation at another hotel, the [NH Barajas](#), by mistake. We had to take a taxi there but, fortunately, it wasn't too far away and was still close enough to the airport that we could take their shuttle tomorrow morning. Also, we discovered that it was only a few blocks from the El Capricho Metro station. We went there and took the Metro to the Banco de España station (after transferring at Venta). From there, we walked down the Paseo de Prado to the [Museo del Prado](#). By the time we arrived, there was a long line of people waiting to get in. However, we found out, from talking with one of the guards, that they were there to gain free entry at 18:00 on Tuesday evening. We didn't want to wait so we paid for our tickets (mine was half-price since I am now a senior). We walked around the museum for a while. It was good but we began to get tired, especially since a lot of the art was based on the same religious themes. So, we walked out and decided to find a tapas restaurant for a light dinner. We walked toward what we thought was the center of Madrid but got a little lost. We passed the [Teatro de la Zarzuela](#) (which was apparently having a performance that evening since there were many patrons at the entrance). It provided us an opportunity to establish our location and we were able to walk to a nice tapas place, had some fabulous boquerones and a glass of wine, then walk to the Sevilla Metro station, which was only one stop down from Banco de España. We went back to the hotel and straight to bed, since we had to get up at 4:30 to catch the shuttle to the airport.



April 10 - We got up and caught the 7:20 shuttle to the airport. When we arrived, we checked in for our flight and went to the airline club (one of the perquisites of flying first-class) where we had a nice breakfast and a Bloody Mary. Finally, we boarded our 11:00 flight, had a great lunch after takeoff, and flew back home (this time I did get some sleep). When we arrived in New York, our Global Entry passes really paid off. We were able to get our luggage and go right through Customs. Then we took our flight back to Boston, caught the bus back to Portland, and drove home in a driving rain.