

## Portugal Today

Most people don't have the adventure of visiting Portugal, even though it is a country very much in the news today. You may wish to see our short image of Portugal Today. Leticia and I just spent three weeks exploring Portugal.

The first thing we noticed in the countryside was that all the people live in white houses with orange tile roofs. Some houses had blue trims, they say, to keep the devil away. Some trims were yellow, the color of the old royalty, and a few were light red. I don't know what rationale they use for red. Most all houses in the small cities still have a small yard planted with fruit trees, including orange trees, sometimes olives and grape vines. Their front yards are nicely tended flower gardens.



Typical white building with blue trim.

Everything is clean, no trash in the streets. The street trees in the towns were mostly orange fruit trees! When we arrived in early April the orange trees were in blossom giving a nice aroma throughout. We saw no slums and few wealthy homes. Not many children, mostly older folks in the streets. There are a lot of wealthy Portuguese, but their houses are mostly in the coastal resort areas.



Workers loading cork which doesn't look too attractive at this stage.

The whole country is semi mountainous with just a small acreage of normal crops such as wheat. The most agriculture up and down the state consisted of small orchards, olive groves, small vineyards, and, particularly toward the South, naturally growing cork trees.



Leticia with cork tree that was harvested in '06.

The Portuguese road system is the best we have seen. They adopted the English system of roundabouts, so there are few traffic lights or stop signs at intersections. Interesting, the Portuguese drivers are polite and don't honk. The super highways run everywhere. When Portugal joined the common market 20 years ago the common market subsidized half the cost of new roads and highways. The new road network has been successful in attracting European tourists, so in the long run, it should help Portugal's lagging economy. Unfortunately Portugal borrowed money from the banks for its share of the highway cost and now it has to pay off these bonds.



Modern highway next to old cork forest.

There is quite a wine making tradition in Portugal. Leticia and I visited two of the best wineries and found a real blend of the old with the new. They have stainless steel tanks for other purposes, but fermentation is still done in three foot high open concrete vats, about six feet by ten feet. And, believe it or not, they still have a team of five men (sometimes women, who they say are really the best) jump bare footed and bare legged in the fermenting wine



Garden of Quinta Doña Maria Winery

vat (five times a day) and dance around stirring up the juice and skins. This is equivalent to our pumpovers and punch downs. I asked our host how these dancers survive in the air which is rich in the CO<sub>2</sub> of fermenting wine. He said, "They open the windows which are next to the tanks." But he added that at a nearby winery there were two male dancers lost last season, being overcome by the CO<sub>2</sub>. From the recent Napa Register we see that a Napa winemaker may have also been lost from CO<sub>2</sub>, dangerous stuff.

The capital city Lisbon is something else, a charming city built on seven hills, they say the same as Rome, and it reminded us of San Francisco. Many of the older buildings are faced with colorful ceramic tile. It took us a week of sightseeing to just see the most important city centers, parks, shopping, churches, museums, and castles.



Museum of Azulejos (ceramic tiles)

In the museums we saw many relics from the famous Portuguese explorers who made discovery sailings and extended Portuguese influence around the world. Those were the glorious days of empire for Portugal. During our trip we made a most special discovery of how these explorations really came about, quite an eye opener of things not included in our history books. (We are writing this up in a separate note; how such a small country could lead the world in exploration.)



Entrance to Fado Restaurant

In the evenings we tended toward the Fado restaurants. We noted more than 50 of these spots in Lisbon where three or four singers, usually female, sing tuneful but melancholy songs late at night, accompanied by neat little stringed instruments. Portuguese is so similar to Spanish that Leticia understood all the words of the Fado music.

Our real payoff in visiting Portugal was in the extreme Southwest of the country. There we visited Sagres, a small promontory into the ocean. Sagres was the site of Prince Henry's famous school for navigators which he founded in 1418, a prelude to Portugal's grand



Cross and sword are symbols of Knights Templar who financed the Portuguese exploration. See next memo.

exploration of the world. At Sagres there is a brand new Pousada, a very special hotel. It is called El Infante which means the heir apparent to the throne, referring to

none other than Prince Henry the Navigator! This will be the subject

of a special write up on our discoveries, things not in our history books.



These Caravelle sailing vessels explored the world.



Anchor for 15th Century Caravelle

Also in this extreme Southwest of Portugal is a region called "Tres Hermaos" (three brothers) a truly great place to visit, and to stay at one of the five Pestano Hotels. The best of the five is called Pestano Praia (Beach) hotel. It is the closest to the pristine beach itself where large rock formations reveal neat little natural tunnels that decorate the beaches. It is a natural wonder, not over populated with tourists, probably the best place for tourists in Portugal.



All in all, we had a great visit. The Portuguese are an admirable and friendly people. They have sometimes been a little beaten down by history, but have survived nicely; and now their situation is turning again for the worse as they come under debt pressures from the Common Market. The sad Fado music may portend the immediate future of Portugal, but surely Portugal will always be around to welcome visitors. There is a lot to see and be reminded of how this country was able to explore the world ahead of all the great powers of Europe.

William and Leticia