

## **SPAIN UNSPOILT**

Madrid-Segovia-Granada-Gibraltar-Málaga-Ronda-Sevilla & Lisbon  
October 2018

We had been thinking of going back to Spain for a longer visit for some time. The last time we were in Spain we took an overnight train from Paris to Barcelona in 2010 and spent a few days. This time we were going to spend ten days in Spain traveling around to several interesting places. Mike also arranged the trip so that we would stay a few days in Gibraltar to visit the Rock of Gibraltar and three days in the capital of Portugal, Lisbon, including a side trip to Sintra.

Mike contacted a handcrafted travel agency called Zicasso who can match you up with top travel specialists. He told them where we wanted to visit, for how long and our budget. We were contacted by a luxury travel advisor specializing in Spain and Portugal. Her name is Elena Florez and she is the founder of Spain Unspoilt, a destination management company that creates and crafts tailor made experiences in Spain. I have to say that Elena was a perfect match for what we expected on our vacation to Spain. All of the transfers, hotels, guides and suggestions were top notch. The itinerary was easy to understand and follow to make our trip as stress free as possible. We had time with friendly knowledgeable guides and plenty of free time to explore on our own.

Our trip began in Madrid with private transfer to Petit Palace Savoy Alfonso XII Hotel, located in a convenient location to explore parts of Madrid. We did have a slow start getting organized as we were too early to get into our room. The hotel was just across the street from the Buen Retiro Park one of the largest parks in the city of Madrid so we went for a stroll in the park. It was a Saturday and the park was full of people having a good time. We headed toward a man-made lake where people had rented rowboats for a few Euros to paddle around the lake. Situated on the east edge of the lake is the massive Alfonso XII monument. A grand colonnade surrounds the equestrian statue of King Alfonso XII, cast in bronze. In the central base of the monument are the statues Peace, Freedom and Progress. Stairs descend from the central monument toward the lake, with four stone lions. Under the pedestals, in bronze, are four mermaids. We continued to walk around in the park and passed several beautiful fountains, gardens and trees. We even saw groups of green parrots flying around and gathering in open green areas. Went back to our hotel and waited again for our room...the staff was not very clear on when we could get into our room. Finally with just enough time to put our luggage in our room we rushed back to the lobby to meet our arranged guide.

We had a private guide for a four hour tour of some of Madrid's main historical attractions located in the neighborhood of the Habsburgs. It was a walking tour and our first stop was at the best known old city gates, Alcala Gate in Independence Square. Mike and I had visited this arch earlier when we went to Buen Retiro Park. We had walked all around this arch and saw the inscription right over the central arch that read "Rege Carolo III. Anno MDCCLXXVIII" (King Charles III, 1778). It was placed here in honor of King Charles III, who built the gate. It is spectacularly lit up at night. As we stopped and admired the arch our local guide Alberto told us about the history of Madrid

and its iconic buildings. I was amazed at the architecture of the Cybele Palace (City Hall) located in the Plaza de Cibeles, a very large square with the Cibeles fountain in the middle. The Fountain of Cibeles represents the mother goddess Cibeles, identified in the Greek pantheon with Rhea, mother of the Olympian gods and symbol of the earth and fecundity, on a chariot drawn by lions

We made a stop to have a rooftop view of the city at Circulo de Bellas Artes. From its 7<sup>th</sup> floor you have a 360 degree panoramic view of Madrid. If you start looking North, the first thing you'll notice is the amazing view of the Gran Via and Alcalá street, with the prominent look of the Metropolis Building in the intersection of both streets. At the distance you'll spot the mountains, and the skyscrapers of the financial district. Walking clockwise in the rooftop you'll see the Colon Building, the National Library, the Salamanca district, the National Bank, the Palace of Communications, the Retiro Park, The Stoke Market, the Prado Museum, the Saint Jerome Church, the Atocha station, the Congress of Deputies, the Santa Ana square, the domes of the churches in the Madrid of the Habsburgs, etc. There are two bars, a restaurant and places to recline and listen to lounge music while you enjoy your drinks and snacks. We passed the Puerta del Sol the place where the last night of the year, known as Nochevieja in Spanish is where the tradition of eating 12 grapes, one for each chime at midnight is still carried on and people party all night long until the sun comes up, the metro re-opens, and the first churros of the new year hit the fryers. Just swap out the glitzy ball for an old-school clock adorning the top of the Real Casa de Correos building as it strikes out the New Year. On the east side of Puerta del Sol stands the sculpture of The Bear and the Strawberry Tree representing the main heraldic symbols of the city. It represents in a real-life form the coat of arms of Madrid, with the tree taller than the bear, who supports his paws on the trunk and directs his attention towards one of the fruits. According to legend the original name of the city was "Ursaria" (land of the bears in Latin), due to the high number of these animals the were found in the adjacent forests, which together with the arbutus trees (Madrño in Spanish) have been the emblem or symbol of the city from the Middle Ages. Madrño trees have fruit the closely resembles strawberries. The fruit of the Madrño tree ferments on the tree if left to ripen, so some of the bears become drunk from eating the fruits. We stopped at a popular spot, a stone slab that marks the point from which the distances of Spain's six national roads are measured - "Kilometre Zero". Kilometre Zero is also the starting point for Madrid's numbered streets; the closer to the Km 0 mark, the lower the street number.

Continuing on we passed the Teatro Real the major opera house located just in front of the Royal Palace, the official residence of the Queen Isabel II who ordered the construction of the theatre in 1818. We walked through the Sabatini Gardens situated on the north side of the Palace. It was a perfect spot for a restful break while sightseeing in Madrid. We didn't stop for a break but continued on as we had a ticket to tour the Royal Palace at a designated time with our guide...good thing as the lines were long with people trying to get inside the palace. The Royal Palace is not the official residence of his Majesty the King of Spain, but rather where state ceremonies, official banquets and other state functions take place. The King lives in Zarzuela Palace, which is just outside of Madrid. The interior of the palace is notable for its wealth of art and the use of many

types of fine materials in the construction and the decoration of its rooms. These include paintings by artists such as Caravaggio, Francisco de Goya, and Velázquez, and frescoes by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, Juan de Flandes, Corrado Giaquinto, and Anton Raphael Mengs. Other collections of great historical and artistic importance preserved in the building include the Royal Armory of Madrid, porcelain, watches, furniture, silverware, and the world's only complete Stradivarius string quintet. After viewing at least 24 rooms in the palace I was getting kind of tired as jet lag was beginning to kick in, "I couldn't decide if I need XL coffee, a hug, 8 shots of vodka, 824 chicken nuggets, or 2 months of sleep" lol. But as we exited the palace and stood in the Royal Palace square I saw the Almudena Cathedral and asked the guide if we could have a short visit in the cathedral. The Almudena Cathedral is a Catholic church, the seat of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Madrid consecrated by Pope John Paul II in 1993. The Neo-Gothic interior is uniquely modern, with chapels and statues of contemporary artists, in heretogeneous styles, from historical revivals to "pop-art" decor. The Blessed Sacrament Chapel features mosaic from known artist Fr. Marko Ivan Rupnik. Our guide Alberto took us to a street he suggested had tapas that locals enjoy instead of the many tourist places that serve tapas. We took a seat at a table that was outside on the street served by the restaurant 'La Casa Del Abuelo Tapas Bar'. Alberto helped to translate the menu and beer selections. We picked out several tapas, (olives, garlic shrimp, roasted potatoes, razor clams, Jamon Serrano ham, and bread). It was time to walk slowly back to our hotel and rest. We ran into a large rally that drew thousands of anti-government demonstrators protesting against the Socialist-led government. Many were waving the current Spanish flag and some holding its predecessor, a flag representing the dictatorship of General Franco. The Franco-era, pre-constitutional flags are increasingly seen at right-wing rallies in Spain, particularly at gatherings opposing Catalan independence. I saw many organizations with large banners expressing their views on many topics. One was Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca a Spanish grassroots organization that takes direct action to stop evictions and campaigns for housing rights. Not wanting to get involved in a political rally in another country we silently squeezed through the crowd (taking a few quick photos) and made our way passed and walked back to our hotel. Quite a full day! Needed rest as our next day was our free day to explore Madrid on our own.

Sunday is market day and after breakfast we hailed a taxi to take Mike and me to the El Rastro a popular open air flea market located along Plaza de Cascorro and Ribera. The place was mobbed with streets lined with stalls selling second-hand clothes, vinyl records, jewellery and just about any object you can imagine. Rastro comes from the trail of blood from carcasses dragged from the slaughterhouse down the Calle de la Ribera de Curtidores to the tanneries. Rag and Bone men selling clothes and gypsies from southern Spain selling antiques to dealers were the original traders down this street. We tried to arrive early to avoid the raging river of shoppers trying to elbow their way against the current as the vendors waged a shouting war over who had the best deals. But the river of shoppers were ahead of us. We didn't care as it added to the experience of the hunt for goodies. Had to really take care as pick-pockets could be present as in any crowded event. I liked looking in the many stalls but was really interested to peek into the many antique shops in the area. I ended up buying a small painting from a dealer in one of the

shops. He said it was a painting of a street scene maybe in Naples, Italy. At first I refused the offer to buy the painting and later on Mike and I went back to the shop and I brought the painting. I later purchased some buttons from a lady at a table set up on a side street. I was surprised to see in a bowl a bunch of buttons made in Arita, Japan. I had just purchased one of these buttons in an antique store for what I thought a good price, then I saw ten Arita buttons in this bowl for unbelievable prices. I couldn't hold my excitement to purchase these buttons as another person was thinking of buying them. As that person left without buying any of them I grabbed all of them and ask the price of them. Even after she gave me a great price for each I still bargained with her and told her I wanted all of them and she said OK. I almost got a full set of the Seven Lucky Gods of Japan but one of the gods was chipped and I did not take that one...she might have just given it to me for free but I didn't think fast enough to ask. The flea market gets crazy at first and later as it closes around 3:00 people start packing up and going home. We took a break and stopped at a small pizza bar and ordered a pizza and Mike had a beer and I ordered my standby drink of a Fanta. Made our way back to the center of town and stopped to buy some of Madrids violet candies a local confection of sugarcoated sweets. We then pushed our way inside the famous bakery La Mallorquina's, packed with people buying their delicious cakes and pastries. You were very lucky to get a seat at a counter; just getting a spot at one of the cases to buy something was a challenge. I made it to one of the cases with showcased my favorite macaroons. I got some to go as we were heading to stand in the lines at Chocolateria San Gines for some churros and hot chocolate to dip them in. We took our place at one of the white marble tables downstairs with our number and a waiter came later with our order of churros and chocolate. The place was built in 1890 to be an inn and a hostelry, but in 1894 it became an establishment for making churros with the traditional technique called "on the shoulder". Headed back to our hotel to get ready for our next day trip to visit Segovia.

We got a taxi in front of our hotel to go to the Madrid Chamartin Train Station 20 mins from our hotel. We had 2 round-trip tickets on AVE Fast Train to Segovia (30 mins each way). We were met at the pickup in the Segovia Train Station by of guide Leticia for a 3 hr. tour for our medieval adventure. A taxi took us from the train station to the Alcazar Fortress a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Rising out on a rocky crag above the confluence of two rivers near the Guadarrama mountains, it is one of the most distinctive castle-palaces in Spain by virtue of its shape – like the bow of a ship. The Alcázar was originally built as a fortress but has served as a royal palace, a state prison, a Royal Artillery College and a military academy since then. It is currently used as a museum and a military archives building. Its most usual use was as a prison. It was almost impossible to escape from here. The tenants used to be characters of high condition, which is why they enjoyed certain comforts in their cells such as tapestries, carpets, and furniture. The last state prisoner was the Cuban General Dámaso Berenguer in the thirties of the last century. Cuban General Dámaso Berenguer, born in Cuba was a Spanish soldier and politician, who served as the 122nd Prime Minister of Spain. When King Alfonso XIII fled Spain and the Republic was declared, Berenguer was imprisoned. After viewing many of the interior rooms we went to climb the Tower of John II of Castile for a great view of the city on the large panoramic terrace. We left the Alcazar and walked down the narrow cobblestone streets with barely enough room for you to walk and cling to the

walls when a car came traveling down the street...watch out for the side view mirrors, many with scrapes on them from previous accidents of being too close to walls, maybe to avoid hitting pedestrians. Leticia pointed out the brass symbols you saw on the cobblestone walk shaped like an aqueduct. This symbol indicated the route of the aqueducts water supply that went underground that provided water to Segovia until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. We had time to visit inside the Cathedral of Segovia, the last Gothic cathedral built in Spain. Later outside Leticia told us the story of Segovia's Jewish Quarter. Segovia's position on trading routes made it an important centre of trade in wool and textiles. The end of the Middle Ages saw something of a golden age for Segovia, with a growing Jewish population and the creation of a foundation for a powerful cloth industry. Walking through the Jewish Quarter you will see embedded in the cobblestone streets the Sephardic Jewish symbol made of brass in the shape of the Iberian Peninsula which marks the Jewish Quarter.

The main reason Mike picked Segovia was to see the aqueduct. The Aqueduct of Segovia, located in Plaza del Azoguejo, is the defining historical feature of the city, dating from the late 1st or early 2nd century CE. Like a number of other aqueducts in Spain, Segovia's Roman-built aqueduct receives attention for being one of the "extraordinary engineering accomplishments" existing in the country, wrote Alejandro Lapunzina in *Reference Guides to National Architecture: Architecture of Spain*. It is still used to deliver drinking water. "The aqueduct of Segovia is – because of its long span, architectural beauty, uncharacteristic slenderness, and dramatic presence in the center of a dense urban fabric – the most impressive Roman structure in Spain, and one of the most famous among the numerous aqueducts built by the Romans throughout their vast Empire," Lapunzina wrote. It consists of about 25,000 granite blocks held together without any mortar, and spans 818 meters with more than 170 arches, the highest being 29 metres high. Segovia is also famous for cochinito, or the suckling pig. We had heard about the Meson de Candido on the square right next to a large part of the aqueduct. We were told it might take time to get a seat...guess we were lucky and we were seated quite fast. We were seated upstairs at a table with a widow where we could see the aqueduct. I read that they had a tradition here where the owner cut the suckling pig with a plate and then smashed the plate on the floor only done if a whole pig (6 portions or more were ordered), but I didn't see or hear the sound of a plate breaking while we were dining. We had plenty of time to walk around some more in Segovia before getting a taxi to take us back to the train station for our return trip to Madrid.

Next morning we packed up our stuff and checked out of the hotel. We were met by our private transfer to the Atocha Train Station and took the AVE Fast Train to Antequera a 2 hr. and 30 min journey. Upon our arrival in Antequera we were met by a local driver who drove us to Granada. He took us to our hotel the Museo Palacio de Mariana Pineda Hotel for our two nights stay. Located in the shadow of the Alhambra, this hotel dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, built by the aristocratic family Los Pisa. After settling in our room we took a walk around and went inside the Granada Cathedral. The Cathedral had been intended as the royal mausoleum by Charles I of Spain, but Philip II of Spain moved the site for his father's and subsequent kings' tombs to El Escorial outside of Madrid. This cathedral is a masterpiece of Spanish Renaissance style. Afterwards we went to

Caldereria Nueva a pedestrian street that has Moorish craft shops and stalls and many Arab tea rooms. We did not have tea today in one of the many tea rooms but did the following day. Instead it looked a bit like rain so we rushed up the steep streets to get to a viewpoint Mirador de Los Carvajales in the lower part of the Albaicin district. From this square you can get magnificent views of the Alhambra and the surrounding areas. We were going to visit the Alhambra the next day with a private guide. We had a quick dinner at a Moroccan restaurant.

Earlier when we had arrived at our hotel we told the lady at the front desk that we wanted to book tickets for a flamenco show, the Zambra Maria la Canastera show in the Sacromonte area known (as the gypsy quarter) for its cave houses. She made reservations for us and gave us two tickets. We were to meet at a designated pickup area for the shuttle that took guests to the flamenco show. The route follows the narrow streets of the Albayzin until reaching the Sacromonte quarter and La Zambra de María La Canastera. Now over 50 years in operation, the cave is one of the oldest flamenco cave venues in the city of Granada. Inside the former cave home it has been decorated with photographs of famous visitors as well as traditional pottery and copperware typical of the region. With a capacity of approximately 60 people, the nightly flamenco shows are intimate and familiar, and continue to feature the family of Maria La Canastera. There were two guitarists, one doing a beautiful tremolo while the other the bass line....both singing along with the others. Three women dressed in traditional dresses, scarves and shawls took turns dancing while the others sang songs about the Sacromonte district and clapped their hands in a passionate rhythm. Another male was clapping and singing along with the three women, his name was Enrique the manager of the group. When it was his turn to dance he took the floor and everyone was amazed at his dancing. We were very close sitting in the front line by one wall of the cave and Enrique's sweat would sometimes get flung on us when he turned and twisted our way....he was really working. The ladies were giving it their all also and sometimes they danced solo and other times in a pair.

Good morning! We were to meet our guide for a 2 ½ private tour of the Alhambra. We met her at the entrances to the Alhambra and she told us our entrance time was at 11:30 so she was going to take us to see the Alhambra Gardens of the Generalife. It occupies the slopes of the Hill of the Sun (Cerro del Sol), from which there is a complete view over the city and the valleys of the rivers Genil and Darro. There are different interpretations of the meaning of its name: the Governor's Garden, the Architect's (alarife) Garden, the Vegetable Garden of the Gypsy Festivity Organiser, etc. The Generalife became a leisure place for the kings of Granada when they wanted to get away from the official affairs of the palace. The Generalife is one of the oldest surviving Moorish gardens. The complex consists of the *Patio de la Acequia* (Court of the Water Channel or Water-Garden Courtyard), which has a long pool framed by flowerbeds, fountains, colonnades and pavilions, and the *Jardín de la Sultana* (Sultana's Garden or Courtyard of the Cypress). We then follow our guide to go inside the Alhambra. On the way was a shop called Artesania Gonzalez where a family-owned and operated store makes handmade marquetry pieces are crafted on site. I purchased a marquetry box from this store and I love it.

The Alhambra is a palace and fortress complex located in Granada, Andalusia, Spain. Constructed on a plateau that overlooks the city of Granada, the Alhambra was built chiefly between 1238 and 1358, in the reigns of Ibn al-Ahmar, founder of the Naşrid dynasty, and his successors. The splendid decorations of the interior are ascribed to Yūsuf I (died 1354). After the expulsion of the Moors in 1492, much of the interior was effaced and the furniture was ruined or removed. Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, who ruled in Spain as Charles I (1516–56), rebuilt portions in the Renaissance style and destroyed part of the Alhambra in order to build an Italianate palace designed by Pedro Machuca in 1526. In 1812 some of the towers were blown up by a French force under Horace-François-Bastien Sébastiani during the Peninsular War (War of Independence), and the rest of the buildings narrowly escaped the same fate. In 1821 an earthquake caused further damage to the complex. An extensive repair and rebuilding program was undertaken in 1828 by the architect José Contreras and endowed by Ferdinand VII in 1830. After the death of Contreras in 1847, his son Rafael continued his work for nearly four decades. Upon Rafael's death in 1890, he was succeeded by his son, Mariano Contreras Granja (died 1912). Additional restoration and conservation work continued through the 21st century. This place has quite a history and some beautiful tiles and decorations and courtyards. Today over 8,500 people visit the Alhambra every day, it is therefore Spain's most visited monument. Our guide left us to explore more on our own in one of the outside gardens. She pointed the walking trail that led back to the city center.

We took a leisurely walk down the path and passed the statue of Washington Irving (1783-1859) an American short story writer, essayist, biographer, historian, and diplomat of the early 19th century. He is best known for his short stories "Rip Van Winkle" (1819) and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820). His historical works include biographies of Oliver Goldsmith, Muhammad, and George Washington, as well as several histories of 15th-century Spain dealing with subjects such as Alhambra, Christopher Columbus, and the Moors. Irving served as the U.S. ambassador to Spain from 1842 to 1846. I stopped on the way in a shop to buy a ceramic Pomegranate, the official motif or "heraldic symbol" of the city of Granada. The Spanish word for the fruit is Granada and therefore the symbol of the city. You will see images of pomegranates all over Granada. We stopped for lunch at a place called La Gran Taberna that had a menu of various tapas popular with the locals. I saw a man with a plate of food that looked tasty to me so I asked him what he was eating. He pointed to the name on the menu so I ordered it when the waiter came to our table. I believe it was small grilled medallions of pork served with French fries a sauce and small sliced tomatoes. We also ordered a plate of cheeses and Spanish ham. Mike had a beer and I ordered a small bottle of Cava. On the way back to our hotel we stopped for some gelato. Stopped at our room to freshen up and then went back out to go to one of the tea rooms that looked cozy. The tea was good and the booths looked cozy but the seats were so small you could not get very comfy in them so we drank our tea and left. Back at the room we had to pack up to get ready to leave the next morning for our drive to Gibraltar.

After checkout we got in a taxi to take us to the SIXT Rent a Car Office close to the Granada Airport to pick up our scheduled rental car. We had a 3 hr. drive to our hotel in

Gibraltar, a British Overseas Territory and headland, on Spain's south coast, dominated by the Rock of Gibraltar, a 426 m high limestone ridge. Today was our free day so we were not in a hurry to get to Gibraltar so we stopped off to visit Málaga. Málaga is a port city on southern Spain's Costa del Sol, known for its high-rise hotels and resorts jutting up from yellow-sand beaches. Looming over that modern skyline are the city's 2 massive hilltop citadels, the Alcazaba and ruined Gibralfaro, remnants of Moorish rule. The city's soaring Renaissance cathedral is nicknamed La Manquita ("one-armed lady") because one of its towers was curiously left unbuilt. The painter and sculptor Pablo Picasso, Hebrew poet and Jewish philosopher Solomon Ibn Gabirol and the actor Antonio Banderas were born in Málaga. The Alcazaba is a palatial fortification in Málaga, Spain. It was built by the Hammudid dynasty in the early 11th century. This is the best-preserved Alcazaba in Spain. Adjacent to the entrance of the Alcazaba are remnants of a Roman theatre dating to the 1st century BC, which are undergoing restoration. The Alcazaba of Málaga is built on a hill in the centre of the city, overlooking the port, and comprises two walled enclosures. It was formerly connected to the city ramparts which formed a third defensive wall but only two inner walls remain. The first, built around the topography of the hill, completely encloses the second inner area and is dotted with defensive towers. The views from the Alcazaba were wonderful. In the distance you could see the La Farola lighthouse at the entrance of Málaga harbor. This is Spain's oldest lighthouse and stands 38 meters above sea level constructed in 1817. It has been damaged by earthquakes and it was damaged during the Spanish Civil War. Its light is visible over 25 miles away out to sea. You could also see at a distant the Plaza de toros de La Malagueta which hosts top-class events during the Spanish-style bullfighting season. We're not bullfight fans but it was interesting to see.

We left to go stand in line to enter the Museo Picasso of Málaga that opened in 2003. Photos were not allowed inside the galleries featuring the works of Pablo Picasso. He was born in Málaga, Spain and died in Mougins, France where he spent most of his adult life. Besides many of his paintings other works of his were displayed. Christine Ruiz-Picasso donated 14 paintings, 9 sculptures, 44 individual drawings, a sketchbook with a further 36 drawings, 58 engravings, and 7 ceramic pieces, 133 works in all. Her son, Picasso's grandson, Bernard Ruiz-Picasso donated another 5 paintings, 2 drawings, 10 engravings, and 5 ceramics, for an overall total of 155 works. The collection ranges from early academic studies to cubism to his late re-workings of Old Masters. Many additional pieces are on long-term loan to the museum. There is also a library and archive including over 800 titles on Picasso, as well as relevant documents and photographs. Before heading to Gibraltar we stopped for some tapas in Málaga and they were the worst ones he had on our trip...the only fun thing to take my mind off the horrible tapas was to watch a street performer yowling out a song that no one wanted to listen to...hoping he would finish and go away. He looked like a bum version of Bono of the rock band U2, maybe it was Bono trying to make some extra cash. We crossed the border into Gibraltar and checked into our room at The Rock Hotel with a sea view room complete with a chilled bottle of Mandois Champagne waiting for us in the suites sitting room. We had a nice balcony to sit on and relaxed drinking the bottle of champagne with snacks of Almond M&M's, Kit Kats and Goldfish crackers I had retrieved from my suitcase...got rid of those snacks in one night. We had a nice time after a long day of sightseeing and



just took in the night views sitting around in our cotton bathrobes left in our room for lounging. Had to make sure our windows were secured properly so the Barbary macaque could not get into our room.

Today was our free day to explore the Rock of Gibraltar, also known as one of the Pillars of Hercules or The Rock, is a monolithic limestone promontory located in the British overseas territory of Gibraltar, near the southwestern tip of Europe on the Iberian Peninsula. It is 426 m (1,398 ft) high. In ancient times, the two points marked the limit to the known world, a myth originally fostered by the Greeks and the Phoenicians. Gibraltar is surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea and has no contact with the Atlantic Ocean. Most of the Rock's upper area is covered by a nature reserve, which is home to around 300 Barbary macaques. These macaques, as well as a labyrinthine network of tunnels, attract a large number of tourists each year. The flora and fauna of the Gibraltar Nature Reserve are of conservation interest and are protected by law. Within it is a range of animals and plants, but the highlights are the Barbary macaques (the famous *Rock apes*), the Barbary partridges, and flowers such as Gibraltar's own Chickweed, Thyme and the Gibraltar Candytuft. The Barbary macaques may have originated from an escape of North African animals transported to Spain; it is also possible that the original Gibraltar macaques are a remnant of populations that are known to have spread throughout Southern Europe during the Pliocene, up to 5.5 million years ago. We got passes to visit the Gibraltar's Skywalk standing 340 meters directly above sea level. The skywalk was dedicated on 21<sup>st</sup> of March 2018 with guest Mark Hamill of Star Wars. You walk on thick glass panels that reach out over the edge of the rock. The view is nice...part of the panels had large cracks so that part was taped off and you were not to walk on them. The Sky Walk was built on a former military lookout and now the walkway gives views across the Mediterranean. We liked going to see St. Michael's Cave, a network of Limestone caves located within the Upper Rock Nature Reserve. According to Alonso Hernández del Portillo, the first historian of Gibraltar, its name is derived from a similar grotto in Monte Gargano near the Sanctuary of Monte Sant'Angelo in Apulia, Italy, where the archangel Michael is said to have appeared. We had a nice dinner at The Rock Hotel that night with great views of Gibraltar's seascape. We had our dinner on the terrace and watched the sun set enjoying our delicious meal.

Checked out after breakfast and took a short visit to the Europa Point Lighthouse. The lighthouse is strategically located at the southeastern tip of the Rock of Gibraltar at Europa Point, between the Atlantic and Mediterranean. Europa Lighthouse was inaugurated on 1 August 1841 in a brief ceremony witnessed by about 10,000 people. The first upgrade of the lighthouse occurred in 1864, when the single-wick lamp was replaced with a Chance Brothers four-wick burner, with further changes in 1875 and in 1894 when the amount of light emitted was increased. A three incandescent mantle burner was added in 1905. Following further modernization in the 20th century, the lighthouse was fully automated in 1994. The lighthouse is the only such building outside of the United Kingdom which is operated by Trinity House, a lighthouse agency based in England. Near the base of the Rock of Gibraltar in the same area of the lighthouse is the Ibrahim-al-Ibrahim Mosque. The mosque faces south towards the Strait of Gibraltar and Morocco several kilometres away. The building was a gift from King Fahd of Saudi

Arabia and took two years to build at a cost of around £5 million. It was officially inaugurated on 8 August 1997. It is the southernmost mosque in continental Europe, and is one of the largest mosques in a non-Muslim country. The Gibraltar–Spain border is the international boundary between the British Overseas Territory of Gibraltar and the Kingdom of Spain. It is also referred to as "The Fence of Gibraltar" or simply "The Fence". Getting to the border exit was kind of fun. We watched as a group of people on bicycles heading towards the border, they must have been on an outing to Gibraltar for fun. The funny thing is you have to drive, walk or ride your bike across the airport runway to reach the exit.

Continuing on we drove about 2 hrs to Ronda, a mountaintop city in Spain's Málaga province that's set dramatically above a deep gorge. It is one of the towns and villages that is included in the Sierra de las Nieves National Park. The drive to Ronda was very scenic. The Sierra de las Nieves Natural Park is a natural park in the Sierra de las Nieves range, Andalusia, southern Spain. It is located behind Marbella and to the east of the road to Ronda from the Costa del Sol. We arrived in Ronda and it was full of people walking around. We found our state-owned hotel, the Parador de Ronda with unparalleled views of the Tagus River 120 meters below. This cliffside hotel was once the former town hall and is located just beside the monumental New Bridge. The town of Ronda is one of the most beautiful in Spain, sitting high upon a hilltop, precariously close to a 100-meter drop-off that ventures down into a gorge of the Gaudalevin River. An 18<sup>th</sup> century bridge crosses the chasm, linking the old town to the new and allowing for breathtaking views. Straddling the deep gorge, Ronda enjoys a commanding view of the surrounding mountain range and wine region. The town's location was cleverly chosen thousand so years ago to protect it from attacks and sieges.

After checking in Mike and I went for a walk in Ronda. We started exploring at the Plaza de Toros – The Bullring. The Plaza de Toros de Ronda arena has a diameter of 66 metres (217 ft), surrounded by a passage formed by two rings of stone. There are two layers of seating, each with five raised rows and 136 pillars that make up 68 arches. The Royal Box has a sloping roof covered in Arabic tiles. Soon after the ring's creation in the 18th century, the Romero family of Ronda emerged to provide over three generations of bullfighters. The most important of them was Pedro Romero (1754-1839), a key figure in the history of bullfighting who slew more than 5,600 bulls. The Romero and Ordóñez families were known for their great bullfights in the Plaza, and bronze statues of Cayetano Ordóñez and son Antonio Ordóñez stand outside one of the entrances to the bullring. The bullring also houses a museum dedicated to the spectacle. In 1994, US singer Madonna shot her music video, *Take A Bow*, in the bullfight arena, and planned to invite fans to take part as extras, but just before shooting, that plan was discarded. Madonna's co-star in the video was Spanish bullfighter Emilio Muñoz, who played her Latin lover who leaves her after spending a passionate night with the heartbroken blonde. In 2001, the bullring was the location of the final quiz and execution in the first season of the U.S. reality TV show *The Mole*, hosted by Anderson Cooper.

I found on line the Michelle Obama Tour of Ronda. I thought it would be fun to follow the tour that Michelle Obama and her daughter Sasha Obama were taken on when visiting

Spain. We took the route around the Casco Antiguo area, Ronda's old Moorish city, where we visited the Casa Don Bosco that is located on the Tajo's edge at the heart of the city quarter. It belonged to the Granada family, which willed it to the Salesian Priest Order as a nursing home for old and ill priests. It has a nice courtyard, decorated with Arab style ceramics and a very complete collection of regional ceramics. It is also has 19th century tapestries and walnut furniture. The gardens are very interesting due to their location having a view of the gorge and mountains. From there we walked to Plaza Maria Auxiliadora to admire the Pinsapo trees in the plaza, these are ancient pine trees that have survived in Ronda since before the last ice age, and are unique to the district. We then went inside Iglesia de Santa Maria la Mayor. The church stands on the site of a mosque, which was part of Ronda's Moorish medina. Prior to this, a Visigothic-era church and possibly a Roman temple occupied the grounds. The church dominates the north side of Plaza Duquesa de Parcent, the one-time town hall square of the old town. Pay attention to the façade, which resembles as much a typical town hall building as it does a church. It has an arcaded porch topped by two balconies, each supported by a series of columns and capitals. Dignitaries watched bullfights and festivals from the balconies during the mid-16th-century reign of Philip II. We admired the Baroque altarpiece and the Renaissance choir, made from cedar wood and walnut. After a break we decided on a restaurant for dinner called Albacara located in the Hotel Montelirio. We didn't have a reservation but were able to get seats on the terrace overlooking the gorge. Mike ordered the sea food paella for two. He loved it, I didn't....but he ate all of the seafood I could pick out from my portion. Walked back to our hotel and stopped to look at the bridge and gorge lit up at night.

Today we checked out of Parador de Ronda and had time to explore Ronda a bit further till we had to return the rental car by 7:00 p.m. We decided to visit Ronda's water mine under the Casa Del Rey Moro. Carved in the cliffs of the 'El Tajo' gorge is a surprising mine and fortress that dates back to the Moorish era when constant wars in Al-Andalus required the city governors to protect the water supply. Within the mine there are 231 steps carved into the rock that lead to the river below. The chambers were built using a complex latticework of stacked vaults that made it possible to defend the lowest chamber and the entrance from chambers higher up the fortress. Directly above the fortress, about 25 metres above the river, there is a terrace known as the Terrace of the Conquest, from which Moorish and then Christian conquerors could watch the river for signs of attack, and this is now known to have been the first line of defense of the water mine. We grabbed a take out lunch of sandwiches, olives, cookies and drinks and went back to our hotel Parador de Ronda and had a picnic lunch in the nice large sitting lounge before heading out.

We had a nice pleasant 2 hr. drive through the mountain terrain and stopped to take some photos of some of the charming White Villages of Andalucia before returning our rental car at the train station in Sevilla. The scenery was beautiful with rolling meadows, olive groves and cork tree forests. We caught a taxi and he took us to our hotel the Casa del Poeta Boutique Hotel located in the heart of Barrio de Santa Cruz a famous neighborhood in Sevilla. Our hotel was located less than 10 mins walking from most of the major sites in Sevilla. This evening our local guide Andres met us in the hotel lobby for walk

through the neighborhood to seek out tapas bars that are known most to the locals. Andres took us first to Bodega Paco Gongora for some tapas that he chose for us. He asked what we might like and made suggestions. We had a plate of Jamon (ham), hot spinach dip with chick peas and toast and a plate of pork cheeks. Andres wanted to order us some mushrooms that he said were excellent but they were out of them. We then went to another tapa bar, Taberna Alvaro Peregil and Andres ordered us a plate of squid with roasted peppers and a plate of Patatas Alinadas (Spanish Potato Salad with onions and tuna) all excellent tapas. We finished off with some gelato and walked back slowly to the hotel.

Each morning in Sevilla we had breakfast in a room off the hotel's courtyard and it couldn't have been presented better. The waiters were all dressed up formally and so were the lady servers. Plates of prepared fruits and fresh hot toast were brought to our table. We had a buffet of pastries, ham, muffins, eggs...each day different. And what I liked was the dessert of the day on a cake pedestal. The dessert was different each morning we were there. The first day was a mound dessert decorated with slices of pear and some fresh red currents. I asked what it was and the waiter told me it was cheesecake. However they made this delicious cheesecake it was quite light and perfect with breakfast. The next day the dessert served were small key lime tarts with a wonderful meringue on top.

Our guide Estela met us in the hotel lobby for a private half-day tour of Sevilla. As she took us for a walk through the narrow streets she told us the history of Sevilla and pointed out places of interest. Sometime residents had their doors opened so you could peek at the courtyards inside their homes. Some of the highlights were the Royal Alcazar and the Cathedral Santa Maria de la Sede. Estela had secured tickets for our visit to the Royal Alcazar a medieval Islamic palace showcasing a unique fusion of Spanish Christian and Moorish architecture. Alcazar was built for the Christian King Peter of Castile. It was built by Castilian Christians on the site of an Abbadid Muslim residential fortress destroyed after the Christian conquest of Seville. Although some elements of other civilizations remains. We made our way inside to the courtyard entrance. Water plays an important role in the concept of the gardens. It's trickling and gurgling sounds in the fountains and ponds, the irrigation channels and waterfalls invite you to slow down your pace and just enjoy the moment. The palace, a preeminent example of Mudéjar architecture in the Iberian Peninsula, is renowned as one of the most beautiful. The upper levels of the Alcázar are still used by the royal family as their official residence in Seville. The stunning golden dome in the Hall of Ambassadors was spellbinding. The tiles lining the walls and ceilings were fantastic. Without doubt, the hit show Game of Thrones put the Alcazar in Seville on the map for many visitors who were previously not very familiar with Spanish royal architecture. We left and made our way to Cathedral Santa Maria de la Sede.

Cathedral Santa Maria de la Sede was built to demonstrate the city's wealth, as it had become a major trading center in the years after the Reconquista in 1248. The interior has the longest nave of any cathedral in Spain. The central nave rises to a height of 42 meters. In the main body of the cathedral, the most noticeable features are the great boxlike choir

loft, which fills the central portion of the nave, and the vast Gothic retablo of carved scenes from the life of Christ. This altarpiece was the lifetime work of a single craftsman, Pierre Dancart. The builders preserved some elements from the ancient mosque. The mosque's sahn, that is, the courtyard for ablutions for the faithful to conduct their ritual cleansing before entering the prayer hall is known today as the Patio de los Naranjos. It contains a fountain and orange trees. However, the most well known is its minaret, which was converted into a bell tower known as La Giralda, and is now the city's most well-known symbol. Christopher Columbus and his son Diego are buried in the cathedral.

We saw a stuffed crocodile hanging from the ceiling as we entered the courtyard of the oranges. It was called the Gate of the Lizard. Why is there a crocodile just outside the Cathedral? Once upon a time (in the Middle Ages) there was a king of Castile (the central region of Spain) called Alfonso X, also known as the Wise because of his love of learning, especially esoteric learning. His father, Ferdinand III, had conquered Seville from the Moors in 1248, and made it the capital of the kingdom, which Alfonso inherited in 1252. Alfonso had a beautiful daughter, named Berenguela and Emir of Egypt wished for her hand in marriage. To this end, the Emir sent a magnificent embassy to Seville with rich and exotic gifts for the king and princess. Among these gifts was a live crocodile, whose size astonished the Spanish. To say the least Berenguela didn't think the crocodile was a romantic gift for her. It has been said that the crocodile lived for many years and converted to Christianity, but a second version of the tale, that the crocodile languished in its captivity and shortly died, seems more likely. In either case, a wooden model of the beast was carved, and covered with its skin, and this was hung in the corner of the Courtyard of the Oranges, where it can still be seen today. And the Emir never got the girl. Charming though the tale may be, there are those who see a deeper meaning in the crocodile. In ancient Egypt the crocodile God, whose name was Sobekh, was of great power, as a savant like Alfonso would certainly have known. He was important to the cycles of fertility and vegetation through his connection to the Nile, and devourer of the souls who failed to pass the judgment of Osiris after death. More importantly, he was able to protect against the evil eye, and the placing of a crocodile over the entrance to the cathedral was probably intended to help to keep the forces of evil at bay.

Estela left us in the cathedral and explained that we could walk up the series of ramps winding around the perimeter of the Giralda (the bell tower of the cathedral) for great views of the city. The Giralda is the former minaret of the mosque that stood on the site under Muslim rule, and was built to resemble the minaret of the Koutoubia Mosque in Marrakech, Morocco. It was converted into a bell tower for the cathedral after the Reconquista. After climbing the bell tower we left the cathedral found a nice spot for lunch at the Hotel Boutique Palacio Pinello located in an ancient palace dating back to the late fifteenth century. Mike had a dish of shrimp with peppers and I ordered the pork cheeks, everything was well prepared. We did some more walking around the shopping district and when it started to rain we stopped in a pub that was quite lively with people having beers in the small covered porch. Guess they were getting an early start on partying for the day. Mike had a quick brew and we left and darted in a store that sold religious icons and other religious items. I brought a small pendent "The Cross of

Caravaca”, an emblem to bring good fortune, gain wealth and riches, and ward off evil. The Caravaca de la Cruz is a double crucifix, meaning there are two bars extending through the vertical part of the cross instead of just one, as with more common Christian crosses. Upon the crucifix is the figure of Jesus Christ. On either side of the cross is an angel. The pair of angels face the figure at the center of the crucifix. In keeping with the legend, it appears that the two angels are carrying or holding the cross. Popular legend holds that the Cross of Caravaca that it first appeared in the town of Caravaca, Spain in the 14th century. At that time in history, the once Christian country of Spain had been conquered by the Moors, a Muslim people. The Moorish king, Zeyt-Abuzeyt, was doing his best to keep the Christian armies from retaking their home in Spain. Along with soldiers, the Christians also sent many missionaries into the country, hoping that they could spread the message of Christ. As the story goes, one of these missionaries, a man named Don Gines Pérez Chirinos de Cuenca, was captured and taken before King Zeyt-Abuzeyt. One legend says that the king was curious about the Christian faith, while another said he demanded the missionary show him the skills of his trade to see if he had any use to the kingdom. Either way, the captured missionary prepared to perform Communion, the ceremony that honors the Last Supper of Christ and his Apostles. The king gave the missionary the altar, cloth, candles, bread, and wine he needed to complete the ceremony, but did not have a cross to give because the Muslim kingdom did not allow Christian objects. Suddenly, the king saw two angels appear at the window, carrying a cross. This was the Cross of Caravaca, which was said to contain a piece of the True Cross. Some say this miracle led the Muslim king to become a Christian. I liked this legend and purchased the small cross.

I also became interested in the figures we saw of people dressed in robes with pointed hats (capirotes) covering their heads. These were not people of the KKK. A capirote is a pointed hat of conical form that is used in Spain. It is part of the uniform of some brotherhoods including the *Nazarenos* and *Fariseos* during Easter observances and reenactments in some areas during Holy Week in Spain. Historically, the flagellants are the origin of the current traditions, as they flogged themselves to do penance. Pope Clement VI ordered that flagellants could perform penance only under control of the church; he decreed *Inter sollicitudines* ("inner concerns" for suppression). This is considered one of the reasons why flagellants often hid their faces. The use of the capirote or corroza was prescribed in Spain and Portugal by the holy office of Inquisition. Men and women who were arrested had to wear a paper capirote in public as sign of public humiliation. The capirote was worn during the session of an Auto-da-fé. The colour was different, conforming to the judgment of the office. People who were condemned to be executed wore a red corroza. Other punishments used different colours. When the Inquisition was abolished, the symbol of punishment and penitence was kept in the Catholic brotherhood. However, the capirote used today is different: it is covered in fine fabric, as prescribed by the brotherhood. Later, during the celebration of the Holy Week/Easter in Andalusia, penitents (people doing public penance for their sins) would walk through streets with the capirote. The capirote is today the symbol of the Catholic penitent: only members of a confraternity of penance are allowed to wear them during solemn processions. Children can receive the capirote after their first holy communion, when they enter the brotherhood. I purchased three mini figures of the hooded

characters...maybe put them in my fairy gardens. It was starting to rain pretty hard so we ducked into a glove shop called Pino. Every glove style and color you could ever want was for sale in this shop. I have never been fitted for glove before. In this shop the saleslady had me put my elbow on a cushion mound on the counter and took my measurements and picked some sizes and pulled them onto my hand. After finding out my size I told her I wanted to purchase a pair of white gloves and showed her the style I liked after she took out many pairs of white gloves. I will wear them the next time they are required at a DAR event. I also stopped to stare at a few jewelry store widows and ended up buying a pair of gold earrings at one store. Enough shopping in the rain ... it was getting to get serious, not the shopping/buying but the rain was coming down in buckets. Mike set his cell phone GPS and we darted in and out of covered areas as we made our way back to our hotel.

The next day we had a trip for a full day tour to Donanna National Park with a guide but we cancelled that tour. We decided we wanted not to spend all day traveling and just explore Sevilla a bit more on our own. We went inside the El Salvador Collegiate Church. This church stands majestically on the site of the former Great Mosque. Its construction lasted until 1712 and many artists were involved in the process. The Baroque façade laden with ornamentation harmoniously blends pink brick with stone. The interior is home to the finest Baroque retables in Seville. It was very quite and relaxing in this church as it was not as crowded and it gave you a feeling of peace. We then went to visit La Casa de Pilatos an Andalusian palace which served as the permanent residence of the Dukes of Medinaceli. The building is a mixture of Italian Renaissance and Spanish Mudejar styles. Inside there was a beautiful courtyard garden. Several films have been shot in the Casa de Pilatos, including four Hollywood blockbusters: *Lawrence of Arabia* in 1962, and Ridley Scott's *1492: Conquest of Paradise* in 1992, and *Kingdom of Heaven* in 2005. And at the end of 2009, Tom Cruise filmed the movie *Knight and Day* with Cameron Diaz at the palace. We made our way back to Taberna Alvaro Peregil for some tapas for lunch. We tried the hot brie cheese, skewered shrimp, pork medallions with fries and also ordered the Patatas Alinadas (Spanish Potato Salad) again as I really liked that tapa. Heading off in a different direction we went to the climb the Torre del Oro, translated it means Gold Tower sitting on the city side of the Guadalquivir River. Torre del Oro was built during the 13<sup>th</sup> century by the Almohad rulers of Al Andalus to protect the city from Castillian invasions. Originally the tower was part of a pair, the other being located across the river in Triana, and together they were the end points for a solid chain that could be lifted or lowered in the river to prevent ships from passing. Last stop was to take a stroll in the Plaza de Espana, built in 1928 for the Ibero-American Exposition of 1929. The Plaza de España has been used as a filming location, including scenes for the 1962 film *Lawrence of Arabia*. The building was used as a location in the *Star Wars* movie series *Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones* (2002) — in which it featured in exterior shots of the City of Theed on the Planet Naboo. It also featured in the 2012 film *The Dictator*.

Leaving Spain today and taking a flight to Lisbon, Portugal. We checked into the LX Boutique Hotel. Mike researched a place for us to have dinner. Right next to our hotel was a street called Rua Nova do Carvalho – The “pink street” Cais do Sodré, located near

the old port along the riverside in downtown Lisbon, was once considered Lisbon's Red Light District: Sailors, thieves, drifters, guys looking for problems, and of course... prostitutes. Now it is beaming with clubs, bars, and restaurants. The street is indeed painted pink and really shows up at night and especially when it rains. You can see the street from our hotel room's window. We got a table in the restaurant called Povo Lisboa that featured live Fado. When we got our bill we saw that we were charged each four Eros to be there when the Fado show was being held. We liked the food that we ordered: a caprese Salad, roasted potatoes and two different cod dishes. Fado music is a form of Portuguese singing that is often associated with pubs, cafés and restaurants. This music genre has much earlier origins but is generally placed as being originated in the 1820's in Portugal. In popular belief, Fado is a form of music characterized by mournful tunes and lyrics, often about the sea or the life of the poor, and infused with a sentiment of resignation, fatefulness and melancholia. Our show consisted of two men playing Portuguese guitars and one woman singing.

We enjoyed breakfast in our hotel waiting for our guide Rui that took us on a half-day tour of sites in Lisbon. We started at the Praca do Comercio (Commerce square) and from there we walked through the beautiful arch and into the Rua Augusta. In this street we saw lots of stores and places to have something eat and drink. Many bakeries are to be found on this street, lots of them making the famous *Pastéis de nata* a Portuguese egg tart pastry dusted with cinnamon. It is also made in Brazil and other countries with significant Portuguese immigrant populations. *Pastéis de nata* were created before the 18th century by Catholic monks at the Jerónimos Monastery in the civil parish of Santa Maria de Belém, in Lisbon. These monks were originally based in France where these pastries could be found in local bakeries. At the time, convents and monasteries used large quantities of egg-whites for starching clothes, such as nuns' habits. It was quite common for monasteries and convents to use the leftover egg yolks to make cakes and pastries, resulting in the proliferation of sweet pastry recipes throughout the country. Mike and I had our first taste of this pastry when our limo driver that picked us up at the airport gave us some *Pastéis de nata* that he had purchased at the *Pasteir de Belem* bakery, and everyday a platter of these pastries was at the table in the vestibule at our hotel. As of any street visited by tourists you have many street performers. Ladies with white painted faces and dresses of white sit like statues, bands, singers, puppeteers, and even a man dressed as an American Indian in a loin cloth...he made me laugh so hard that our guide Rui couldn't stop laughing with me. He said if you take his picture he will hunt you down till you give him a coin.

We went inside the Church of Sao Domingos near the site of the 1506 Jewish massacre that took place here in the square. The church was dedicated in 1241 and was, at one time, the largest church in Lisbon. Prior to the establishment of the modern Portuguese republic in 1910, the church typically hosted Portuguese royal weddings. Formerly the home of the Inquisition, Jesuit missionary Gabriel Malagrida was famously executed at the church in 1761 after being accused of treason. The church was damaged by the 1531 Lisbon earthquake and almost completely destroyed in the 1755 earthquake. Rebuilding began quickly but wasn't completed until 1807. In 1959 the church was devastated once more when a fire broke out in the building. The fire, which killed two firefighters, took



more than six hours to extinguish and completely gutted the church, destroying many important paintings and statues. In 1994 the church reopened. The restoration left many signs of the fire in place. We then took a break at a viewpoint for a drink near the Santa Justa Lift, also called Carmo Lift, an elevator, or lift, in the civil parish of Santa Justa. Situated at the end of Rua de Santa Justa, it connects the lower streets of the Baixa with the higher Largo do Carmo. Went took the Santa Justa Lift for a nice view of Lisbon. We passed the Museum National Republican Guard that explains the history of the GNR and lots of military information. We watched the changing of the guards that were at the front entrance. It was about lunch time and Rui was leaving us, he made suggestions on where to have lunch. He recommended a restaurant that was housed in a former monastery called Cervejaria Trindade decorated with tiles, frescos, arches & courtyard in a former monastery. Mike ordered a seafood tower and I ordered a steak. We stopped at the Miradouro da Graca square with a great view point of Lisbon and St. George's Castle.

We saw an entrance to the Convent of São Pedro de Alcântara a Franciscan monastery in the Bairro Alto district of Lisbon, founded in the late 18th century. It is a large Baroque building, with a highly decorated chapel. When the religious orders, convents, and monasteries in Portugal were closed by the government in 1833, the monastery buildings were handed over to the Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa (a society charged with helping the old, the sick, and abandoned or orphaned children). At present the Santa Casa uses the buildings as a home for young girls. This convent is small in size but grand in baroque decor. The inconspicuous box-like facade hides a chapel (1690s), and a church (1681) that survived the 1755 earthquake and is greatly ornamented, with blue-and-white tile-covered walls and intricate Italian-inspired marble floors. This place was very interesting and very quiet as only Mike and I were inside....loved the blue and white tiles that told stories of long ago. We kept walking through neighborhoods with bars, restaurants, stores and dwelling. We went inside a bakery shop called Padarias E Pastelarias decorated in a historic interior with marble columns and gilded angels....and glass cases filled with bakery goods. We walked through Principe Real Garden a small green space in the Bairro Alto neighborhood built in the 1800s. The park covers an area of only a little more than 2.5 acres but it is filled with impressive cypress trees that are hundreds of years old and have grown to diameters of more than 65 feet. While searching around for some antique stores and finding a few we continued to our destination to see the Mae de Agua Lisbon Aqueduct. Part of it can be seen at Jardim das Amoreiras City Park. We took a short break in the park that had a small cafe selling drinks and snacks. Mike got a beer and we sat at one of the tables. We looked for the Chapel of Our Lady of Montserrat that was built beneath one of the aqueducts arcades. In the park was a pretty fountain that children liked to put their hands in the water and dogs jumped in for a swim. In the park was an unusual statue. The statue was in dedication of a man named Doctor Joao dos Santos, the good doctor. He was a pedagogist, doctor and psychoanalyst and was one of the great figures in education and child mental health. It said that "the man's secret was in his childhood". Walked slowly back to our hotel to get ready for tomorrow's adventure.

We were met by our guide Ines for our full day to tour Sintra and Cascais. On our way we passed a very large section of the Mae de Agua Lisbon Aqueduct, "Aqueduct of the

"Free Waters" is a historic aqueduct in the city of Lisbon. It is one of the most remarkable examples of 18th-century Portuguese engineering. The main course of the aqueduct covers 18 km, but the whole network of canals extends through nearly 58 km. The city of Lisbon has always suffered from the lack of drinking water, and King John V decided to build an aqueduct to bring water from sources in the parish of Caneças, in the modern municipality of Odivelas. The project was paid for by a special sales tax on beef, olive oil, wine, and other products. Construction started in 1731. It is considered a masterpiece of engineering in the Baroque period. On November 1st, 1755, the 1755 Lisbon earthquake hit the city, but the brand new aqueduct managed to remain intact.

Our guide wanted to get us early to see the Pena Palace and Quinta da Regaleira. It gets very crowded at these popular places so Ines drove us up first to Quinta da Regaleira and was able to get a great parking spot right by Quinta da Regaleira. Right where we parked he took us for a short look at a gorgeous looking hotel called Tivoli Palacio De Seteais Sintra Hotel, a five star hotel set in an 18<sup>th</sup> century palace. He took us towards the back of the hotel so we could see wonderful views of the hotel's gardens and of the Pena Palace in the distance.

We then went to the entrance of Quinta da Regaleira where people were already waiting for the gates to open. The property consists of a romantic palace and chapel, and a luxurious park that features lakes, grottoes, wells, benches, fountains, and a vast array of exquisite constructions. Quinta da Regaleira is one of the most astonishing and unfathomable monuments of Sintra's cultural landscape, classified by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. Set on the elegant promenade connecting Sintra's National Palace and Palácio de Seteais, the state was purchased in 1893 by philanthropist António Carvalho Monteiro for his family's summerhouse. Between 1898 and 1913, in the hands of Italian architect and scenographer Luigi Manini, António Carvalho Monteiro converted his dominion into an ambitious total art project, submitted to a complex landscape and architectural program that materialized the imaginary garden concept, much in vogue since the late 1700's. We had a surprise to learn about this park when our guide took us into several caves on the property. The caves were used by the Freemasonry for their secret rituals. I guide said that men being initiated into the society had to prove they could find their way out of these labyrinth caves (in the dark) without a map. With a 38-yard vertical shaft it could prove to be a dangerous place to wander around in the dark, even during the day. Also was an interesting chalet and a tower that you could climb that some say it reminds them of the German fairy tale "Rapunzel". Quinta da Regaleira nowadays is considered a masterpiece of Neo-Manueline Art from the last period of romanticism in Sintra.

As we drove though the mountain top our guide pointed out places of interest, massive boulders and ancient trees of Capuchos. Our destination was Cabo da Roca (*Cape Roca*), a cape which forms the westernmost extent of mainland Portugal, continental Europe and the Eurasian land mass. The cape is in the Portuguese municipality of Sintra. There is a monument right at the point that declares Cabo da Roca as the westernmost extent of continental Europe or (end of the world). The Cabo da Roca Lighthouse is a beacon/lighthouse located 165 metres above the Atlantic Ocean. The lighthouse stands

22 metres at its base (its light commands a 165-metre beam from sea level). In addition to the main tower, the complex is composed of nine buildings. Currently, the lighthouse supports a team of three lighthouse keepers, in order to monitor the lamp and signal/communicate between Cabo da Roca and Ericeira.

Before our last tour to visit Pena Palace our guide suggested places for Mike and I to have lunch in Sintra. We took his advice to have lunch at Dom Pipas with traditional Portuguese food. The place was quiet and relaxing with a rustic country décor and a fair way outside the noise of the city. The menu was highlighted in English to make it easy to order lunch. We ordered the appetizer of a delicious melted cheese. I had the grilled pork tenderloin kebab with Moscatel sauce served with rice and fries, Mike ordered sea food stew with shrimp, clams, fish and boiled potatoes. For dessert I ordered a slice of almond cake with raspberry ice-cream. We walked around Sintra for a quick look darting in and out of narrow streets and peeking into shops.

Our goal was to get to Pena Palace hopefully after a lot of crowds had left and find a parking space close to the entrance. Our guide Ines was great at securing a close parking space wherever we went. After arriving at the entrance (with no lines) we stood for a short while at a shuttle stop that took us up a steep hill to Pena Palace. The Pena Palace is a Romanticist castle in São Pedro de Penaferrim, in the municipality of Sintra, Portugal. The castle stands on the top of a hill in the Sintra Mountains above the town of Sintra, and on a clear day it can be easily seen from Lisbon and much of its metropolitan area. The palace is one of the finest tourist attractions of Portugal and exemplifies the 19th century Romanticism style of architecture. The palace is a hedonistic mix of vividly painted terraces, decorative battlements and mythological statues, all of which stand in stark contrast to the lush greens of the forests that encircle Pena. The interior of the palace is equally as fascinating, being restored to reflect the decor of 1910, when the Portuguese nobility fled to Brazil to escape the revolution. The palace in its present day form was commissioned by Ferdinand August Franz Anton from Austria, who married into the Portuguese royal family and became King Ferdinand II. King Ferdinand II marveled at the stunning views from the rocky outcrop and wished a castle built to rival the Neuschwanstein castle in Bavaria. His only design input was that the palace should reflect an opera and it was left to Baron Wilhelm Ludwig von Eschwege to create the magical palace. King Ferdinand II spent much of his later life based in the palace with his second wife, Elise Hensler. On the death of Ferdinand the palace was inherited by Elise Hensler who had become Countess of Edla. In 1995, the palace and the Cultural Landscape of Sintra were classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. The architectural styling is classified as a 19th century Romanticism styled building. The palace has grotesque gargoyles that peer down over the main entrance, and illusionary spiked walls all below the vividly painted exterior. This place was magical and I loved it.

We sure had a full day and instead of spending more time driving the coast line we beelined it back to Lisbon. On the way Ines drove past the Belem Tower a fortified tower located in the civil parish of Santa Maria de Belem and The Monument to the Discoveries built in 1939 to honor the Portuguese Discoveries of the golden 15th and

16th centuries. He explained how to get there by tram if we decided to go the next day on our own.

Today is our last day in Lisbon to explore on our own. We took a taxi to go to the Feira da Ladra flea market in the Alfama neighborhood. The Feira da Ladra market translates into the dubious name of Market of the Female Thieves, but the whole flea market is perfectly safe and even fun if your pleasure is rummaging through 80% junk and haggling the price down for that one standout item. I enjoyed just looking through the junk and stuff and people watching. I liked asking some of the dealers if I could take their photos and they would nod yes. I purchased a few things, not even bothering to haggle much...after a while I let Mike haggle with the dealers to see how good he was at it. Lot of stalls, tents and tables and lots of items just laid out on blankets and sheet. Everything you could think of was there and in the mist of it bands were playing for the crowd and dogs and cats were making friends with others of their kind or friendly people they met. I saw on the next street an interesting building and told Mike, lets go and see what it is. We walked over and saw it was the Church of Santa Engracia currently the National Pantheon of Portugal. Construction began towards the end of the 16th century and was only completed in the 20th century. This 400-year delay originated the proverb "Obras de Santa Engracia" meaning any work that never ends. A unique testimony to Portuguese Baroque art the National Pantheon stands on a hill overlooking the river Tagus being an icon of Lisbon's cityscape. From its terrace you can have a majestic view of the city and its river. On the inside the Pantheon houses the remains of some of the most distinguished personalities of the country. It was getting late for getting in a restaurant for lunch before it closes and reopens for dinner. I told Mike lets catch a taxi and see if we can get in Bairro Do Avillez for lunch. When we got there the room looked full. The hostess took our names and asked which restaurant of we wanted as they have two. I said we wanted the seafood restaurant I'd researched. She said follow me, it is in the back. The room was big and designed like an open air square with three terraces. This is the great house that Chef José Avillez opened in the summer of 2016 in Chiado. The food was excellent. I ordered the cheese board and the waiter brought us a basket of hot bread and some great tasting olive rolls. Mike and I both ordered the lobster and crab hot pot, so good and for dessert we shared the elegant dessert Pavlova with fresh berries and strawberry cream served in a pink paper lined box. With lots of time to enjoy we strolled back to Rue Augusta shopping area and darted into bakeries (watching them bake the pastel de nata (custard tart) or a café serving up a traditional codfish cake with Serra cheese at Pastel de Bacalhau. Looked in the window of a place specializing in drinks of Sangria and Aperol Spritz. We stopped to watch some of the street performers...I liked the man with the skeleton marionette that danced and sung in a toy microphone. One little girl with her mom was dancing away with the music and the skeleton till the music stopped and the man approached her with the skeleton and she screams and ran back to her mom hugging her legs. We stood at a corner and let the 28 tram pass through. It is one of the most popular trams in Lisbon and always very crowded so we never did go for a ride in it or any other tram in Lisbon.

This was our last night in Lisbon and went back to our hotel just as it started to get dark and it was lightly raining. Mike and I had a wonderful trip to Spain, Gibraltar and Portugal. Maybe go back and see some more one of these days.

Hola and Hasta luego,

Audrey & Mike Lambert - October 2018