The Towns Times

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And we are off.... again.

By our reporter Keith Towns

We have decided all this relaxation is just too much and we have to move on. The regulars here (there are many) have told us this has been the worst winter here for 5 years. For us it has been great.



Dune Jumping

I have not been really cold since the time we were back in England, however we have had a few rainy periods here. Anyone I have teased about the weather can take revenge from the other night when we had an absolute downpour. The awning was flooded with muddy brown water and we were treated to thunder and lightening at 4am.

But today, one week later, we have hot days that are just like a good British summer.

Portugal is a wonderful country with really friendly people and a great climate, but we have to keep to our commitment to explore Europe, we can always return in September.

So Spain here we come……

I was in the War you know

Sitting here on our 'patio' typing on my laptop I was struck with one of those 'Ahhhhhhh….!' eureka moments.

Although we get on with those from the Camping and Caravan Club who have invaded our little piece of heaven, we have not really clicked with the majority of them.

Of course we talk to them, but its a little chat here and there, hardly any have really bonded with us. It then occurred to me that I was in a 'can't see the woods for the trees' situation.

They are all older than us. This may seem obvious to you but I had not thought it through completely. It seems to me that as one gets older you find you are attracted to people of a particular ilk.

We, fortunately, are still attracted to people of our age or younger. The average age of the C&CC members is 15 to 27 years older than us. We would be able to bond with anyone of that many years younger, but there seems to be a pivotal point at which you either swing one way or the other, so to speak.



Algarve Sunset

The majority of the C&CC membership is on its downward swing into old age, that's why they all relate to each other.

Now for my rule to be proved there has to be exceptions, and there are. There are small clusters of 55-70 year olds that we get on with very well. Guess what, they do not get on as well with the other C&CC members. It appears that they, and their friends, are still on our side of the pivot looking for young companionship rather than being the other side looking for the old.

It also transpires that they are the happier, spending less time complaining. Whereas the 'over the hill' gang, for the most of the time, have their heads up their own backsides.

I do hope I never 'swing the other way'.

Chasing the Coffee

Once you are in 'Euroland' for any period of time, you stop saying 'that's £12 you know' and just keep to the price in Euros.

We started out comparing the price of everyday objects to their UK equivalent to gauge how much cheaper it is here to live. However, as most things are cheaper we soon dropped that and needed a new benchmark to chase.

Our chosen product is coffee. You can soon gauge a restaurant or café by its coffee price. This is not the rubbish served in most places in the UK (that we frequented anyway). It's not from a machine, freeze dried or filtered, its freshly ground coffee from an Espresso machine as that's all they do here. This is served in cup and saucer, rather than a paper cup made of recycled paper that was probably once a newspaper that someone has sneezed on or used to wipe up the dogs wee.

The locals, by far, drink Espresso but you can order a Cappuccino, Americano, Ristretto and all the other variations. For consistency I have chosen a Caffé com Latté (coffee with milk). The barista's (the trade name for a coffee maker) proficiency ranges from the barman who had a ½ hour lesson on the Espresso machine to the dedicated coffee girls who really know their stuff.

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The most expensive coffee I have found is at the airport, as expected. It is £1.90 a cup, which equates to the Starbuck price in the UK (I guess).

So there is our maximum. Before I go on I must say I have suffered to bring you this information. It has required me to frequent many bars, cafés and restaurants. I do hope you appreciate the effort I have had to put into this on your behalf.

Okay then, here we go. The next down the price list are restaurants. These are in abundance in the Algarve, actually you could say more than abundance, more like proliferation. Sometimes we still can't find anywhere that will satisfy everyone's requirements, but that's probably just us.

There is a great deal of variety in Albufeira, Portuguese (obviously), Chinese, Indian, English and Dutch to name a few. The price of the coffee, to quote Einstein, is relative.

Einstein's theory of relativity is based on where you observe the object in question. The same is true of our coffee. If you are close to the sea or if you have just had an 'eat all you like' meal, your coffee will be in the region of £1. Away from the sea or a la carte and you will pay about 60-75p.

English breakfast can be purchased for only 1.50€ (about £1). It is actually quite a nice for the price, sausage, baked beans, egg, bacon and toast. They get some profit by charging £1 for the coffee.

When we go for a cycle ride outside the camp site, we usually end up at the local Pastelaria. These are not cafés, they are more like a bakery with a bar. Very clean and brightly lit, they remind me of a Hilton breakfast bar. I suppose you would call it a upmarket café. Unfortunately, the cakes they sell only have yellow confectioners cream rather than fresh, probably due to the heat, but they do replenish our fat intake after the healthy bike ride. Anyway, coffee in here is 90p a cup.

A few doors up is the local café-bar. These are usually a small affair, full of locals and quite smoky. I like these as they are real Portugal with no pretence. You often find workers here after they have finished doing a hard days Portuguesing (whatever that may entail), up at the bar with a beer or brandy.

Everything in these bars is cheap, from the beer to the snacks the barman creates on the electric grill. They like a deal, and often have a drink/food combination for a bargain price. Coffee in here is only 50p.

And the winner is….it's the place we try to avoid as much as possible, but have to succumb every now and then…. good old McDonalds.

Even here the coffee is far better than in the UK. Usually there is a separate bar area for serving coffee, and yes it comes from an espresso machine in a proper cup. Not like the UK where it comes out of a machine in a paper (recycled) cup. The cost for all this service? 39p, the winner.

A coffee quote:
Nancy Astor to Winston Churchill: *"If I were your wife, I would put poison in your coffee."*

Winston Churchill (in reply):*"And if I were your husband, I would drink it."*

Other commodities:
Here are some of the prices we have found that show how we are being ripped off in the UK:

- Bottle of local beer from a supermarket - 21p (also a 6p refund on bottle)
- Round of drinks from a local bar; bottle of beer, ½ larger shandy, 2 chocolate milkshakes - £2.02
- 'steak' sandwich and beer served in a bar - £1.90
- 5kg of local Oranges - 70p
- 20 cigarettes (not that we smoke) - £2
- A meal out. Omelette for Debbie, toasted sandwich for each of the children, steak and chips for me. 1 pint of beer, 3 soft drinks - £10
- Hog roast inc. all you can drink soft drinks, wine, sangria and beer - £4 adults, £2 children

And at the opposite end….

- In a hotel restaurant, £2 for the 21p local bottle of beer quoted above.

House!

Since the Camping and Caravan Club arrived we have not attended any of their evening social events since we were warned off at the un-welcome party.

However, there is one event that anyone is welcome(?) to attend on a Tuesday night; bingo.

Of course, we are the only ones to bring children and have the audacity to let them play. Well actually, over the weeks it has ended up being just James and I who play as Debbie has given up the pretence of being interested.

Fortunately there are no real bingo types who go to these events and it can be quite fun for James and myself.

Well the other night James and I had our card each and were duly crossing off our numbers and getting close but never quite managing to win.

That was until the jackpot round. The house prize was 70 Euros. As we played, James signalled to me he had 4 numbers to get. This often happens so I was not too excited. Then came the signal of 3 fingers, keep calm, there are pensioners playing with 3 cards and a proper bingo pen.

A little later, two fingers, now I am getting interested. I loose interest in my rather pathetic card that has 6 numbers yet to be crossed out.

The one finger signal came. We both let out a little squeal that could be mistaken for a 3 year old girl being given a Barbie with accessories. The moment was tense, there were others, mostly past their prime, in the same position. We hung on to the callers every breath.

No longer did we cry ‘wobble-wobble’ to ‘two fat ladies…. 88’ or ‘quack, quack’ to ‘two little ducks… 22’. We were waiting for the number 73 and this was serious stuff.

Then, he called the right decade, ‘seven and …..’ we held our breath, ‘three’ - James instantly crossed out his last number and shouted something that was a mixture of the words ‘yes’ and ‘house’.

For the first time since we have been here, the C&CC showed appreciation towards our children and they all clapped and cheered.

James was given his 70 Euros and left with his head held high. As we got outside the hall he shouted a great big loud ‘Yesssssss!’

Worth every penny.

Did you know?

The expression ‘son of a gun’ began life as a dismissive remark but has now developed to imply shock or disbelief.

But, do you know where it comes from? Back in the days of naval ships traversing the globe and women were allowed on board, unexpected pregnancy was a regular occurrence.

The child was usually born in an area behind the mid-ship gun and behind a canvas screen. If the father of the child was uncertain, as would often happen, the birth would be recorded as the ‘son of a gun’.

Gallery

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Licking the bowl



Dr James in his surgery



Strike a pose



Building a castle with moat



Debbie is cooking with real ingredients!



Baking bread



Spot the difference

All the best,

Keith, Debbie, James and Hazel.