



SPAIN and PORTUGAL

2014



Lovely.....I was both surprised and pleased by my vacation in Portugal. Surprised with the variety in its landscape, architecture and beaches. We started in Algarve, the most southern part of the country. We rented a car and with it came the freedom to explore. We quickly adapted to the highway fees and parking tickets and driving the round-about. The first thing I noticed was the extreme amount of green. The hills were almost totally covered with trees! Organized, pruned and abundant.....never could figure out how anyone could keep up with that amount of maintenance. Next I noticed the huge nests clinging to the power poles. Come to find out those were stork nests. More were to be found throughout our travels and most had new chicks inside. Sweet. Next what impressed me most was the seafood. Really fresh and always delicious. It was a treat to see squid and octopus on every menu....yummy. The beaches were exceptional, each one with unique appeal. Some were wide vistas of clean, white sand, others with fishing boats hugging the surf. And other beaches were surrounded by cliffs and gorgeous rock formations. Inland we saw prehistoric rocks dating back to 4-5,000BC, Moorish forts, cork trees and fantasy castles. We got plenty of exercise checking things out at every stop. The people were friendly and seemed to take pride in their past. They also seem actively working on their future- the newly touted "HOTSPOT" of places to be.

Spain.....we traveled north into the Basque country. It too was a culinary delight with a unique identity. The restaurants and bars were filled with Tapa's and we tried to taste most of them. Bar hopping was our exercise in this area but the price added up more quickly than our tummies filled up. Steeped in history, this part of Spain takes pride in its cultural heritage and staying a bit different from the rest of the country. We found the charm of smaller cities, old towns and religious customs still being practiced from the past. Every tourist must see the art form of the Flamenco Dance and feel heartfelt emotion in both its music and dance. Our last stop was in Barcelona. I had been there before but this time I saw it with renewed appeal. BIG city to be sure, this city is graced with its own special charm. Gaudi's famous architecture oozes with genius creativity and can easily be recognized everywhere. The La Sagrada Familia is actually making progress in its restoration. It alone is worth another visit to see —if and when— it might ever be finished. Spain is must visit for history buffs.