

Sunny Spray's Travels - Episode 7

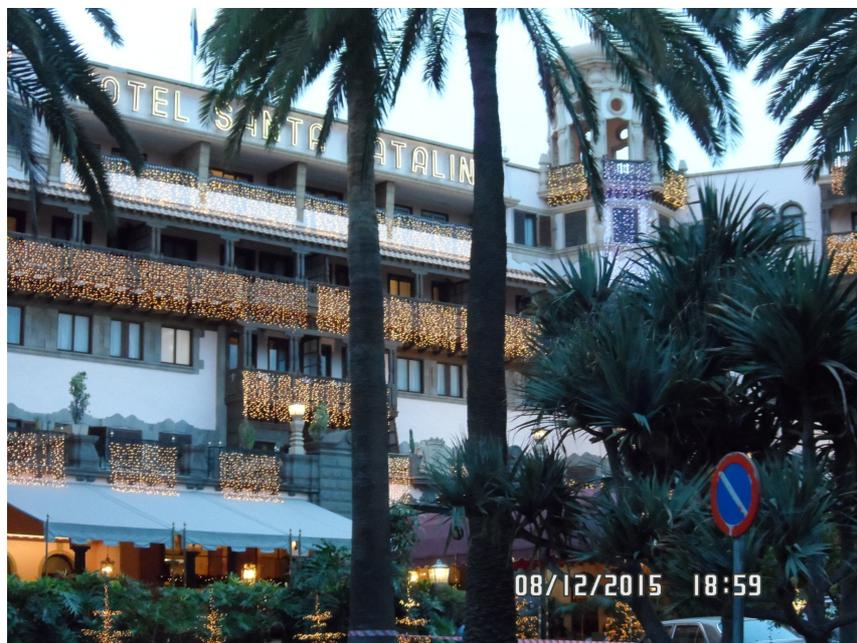
Las Palmas, Gran Canaria, December 16, 2015

Dear all,

Episode 6 of Sunny Spray's travels dates to October 28, and since then time has been flying at double speed. So, an update is surely needed. But first to all of you:

Merry Christmas, and a prosperous but above all else a healthy and happy 2016! May all your dreams come true, and if not, keep on wishing, that makes life so much nicer!

And this is how Christmas decorations look at 28 degrees Celcius:



The picture shows a beautiful hotel (Hotel Santa Catalina) in Gran Canarian style, with richly carved wooden balconies. Its location is right behind the marina in which we have found a berth, and bordered by a complex of buildings called Pueblo Canaria. This complex was built in the 1920s by a local architect, again featuring the typical carved wooden balconies and a large inner courtyard, where music, singing and dancing groups perform each Sunday morning.

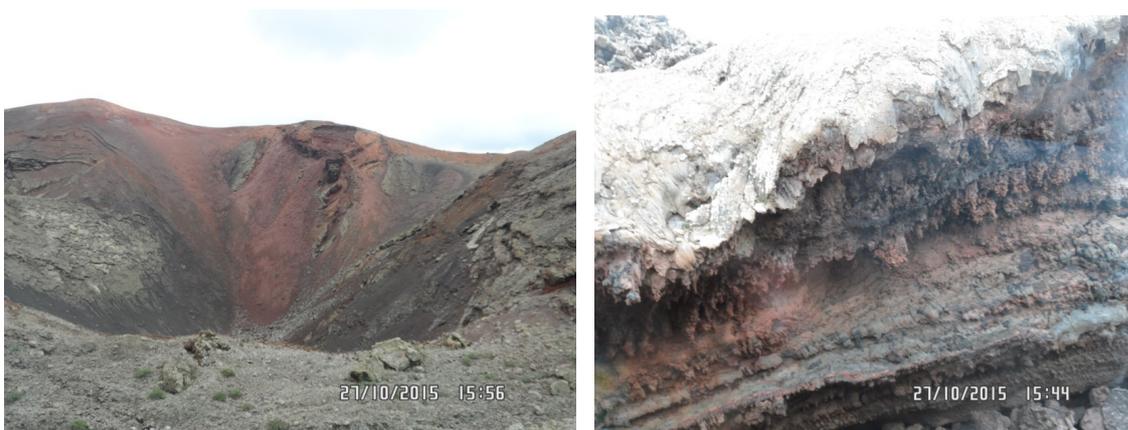
We like to make a stop there on Sunday mornings, when we go for a bicycle ride. Very cosy (*gezellig!*). On top of all this beauty, Pueblo Canaria borders a large park, Parque Dorama. When we first came there we were struck by the many water features and ponds. Beautiful, it felt a bit like any moment a polar bear could turn the corner! We sat down on a nice small terrace, (by now our *favourite* terrace in Las Palmas), and started chatting with the waitress. She happened to share our fondness for the park, and said that as a kid she used to come there every Sunday with her dad, to watch, yes yes, the polar bears. The place happened to be a city Zoo until the mid 1980!!

In short, a lovely green, quiet oasis in a big city. Because that is Las Palmas: very extended, very busy, very noisy, very crowded. It is the first time during our trip that we are staying in such a big city. And moving on will not happen soon, as you will learn later on.



So let me go back to where I left off at episode 6, at the end of October. We were then still moored in Marina Lanzarote in Arrecife, and were busy perfecting a steel chain and clog construction meant to get our windvane selfsteering device working properly.

In between working, we visited, with Yves and Joanna, the Timanfaya National Park, a Must See in Lanzarote. It is an area where the most recent volcanic eruptions took place (between 1731-1736). Spectacular scenery, but to get into the Park we had to wait (in the car) for more than 1 hour. Once we were inside, we found out that we were not allowed to wander around, all you could do was hop on a touring car and be driven around. We found that quite nice, we toured slowly, and the stories told were informative and in four languages. Yves, however, was in a foul mood, very disappointed, he had been looking forward to wandering around with his camera. Joanna meanwhile got car sick.



One of the many volcanoes that erupted during 1731-1736, and the coloured layers of volcanic ash. Nice for a painting!

Fortunately the good atmosphere came back during lunch, which we used on top of a volcano in a restaurant designed by, indeed, Cesar Manrique. A very modern white stone building, with an enormous array of glass panels, which made the place quite hot. Yves and Joanna ordered meat that was barbecued in a pit above naturally heated stones, which we found quite nice. But oh my, it was so hot inside!

Afterwards, we found we had been sitting at a table right above a place where an outside barbecue had been built, no fire necessary, the stones were hot because of the volcano. A German who lived at Lanzarote had taken family and friends on an annual outing to barbecue their own sausages and steaks.



Spectacular view from the restaurant. Our table was the one just to the right of the curtain, above the German. No wonder we had hot feet!!



On the way back we made a stop in the South East, at Lago Verde. The lake was indeed emerald green. A strange place, where, on the beach, the area between red and black gravel was as straight as if drawn by

a ruler: very weird, it being exposed to the elements and all. Until the last moment Lanzarote kept surprising us!

The time to leave was near, so the four of us decided to make a test sail with Sunny Spray. First to test the selfsteering device, and second to please Yves, who for weeks had been looking forward to sail on a junk-rigged ship. The outing was very nice, but as a test sail a big failure. There remained an awful lot of resistance on the lines, the wheel turned with difficulty, and the line only pulled to the left, not to the right. So now what? Another problem?!

Nevertheless, we cast off the next day and left for Fuerteventura, again steering by hand. After a stop in Rosario, the capital of Fuerteventura, we arrived on a Saturday in Gran Tarajal, a sleepy small town recommended by fellow sailors. There was plenty of space in the marina.

We had timed this perfectly. That same Saturday Yves and Joanna left for Tenerife, and on their way over suffered very strong winds and 4 m high waves. Joanna was seasick the entire trip. Also on the Sunday there was a very strong wind, but the MiniTransat boats left Arrecife anyway. Later we learned that quite a number of the Mini-boats had suffered damage. The Polish guy who had been moored right opposite us on the pontoon, (the one that upon arrival kept saying, O my God, I am still alive, I can't believe it, I made it, I am still alive!) suffered so much damage that he had to activate his EPIRB (emergency beacon) and needed to be rescued.

For weeks it remained blustery in Fuerteventura, but it did not bother us, the marina was nice and cosy, the village just big enough, with a bakery with the tastiest loaves of bread you could imagine and a Spar supermarket which you would expect in Madrid, and not in sleepy Gran Tarajal. Although, sleepy?? On Friday and Saturday nights the town hosted an open air discotheque on the beach, and the second week of our stay the beach was home to the 6th World festival of Music and Dance (Womad).

We cycled in the surrounding area, walked in the mountains behind Gran Tarajal, and cycled to a nearby holiday resort to pick up a rent-a-car.



View from a mountain top during one of our walks. The marina of Gran Tarajal is all the way south (at the top of the village in this picture).

Although the landscape directly around Gran Tarajal was bleak and dry, the island appeared to be much greener than we had thought. Occasionally clumps of trees, and near tourist resorts many parks and avenues with tall Casuarinas (the pine-like trees we also have at home, bordering our entry). In particular the Northern and Western part of the island were beautiful, with dramatic mountains, green valleys and attractive small towns.



Variety in the landscape during one and the same walk, starting from La Vega de Rio Palmas. The tiny white casita is a difficult to reach hermit's hut, formerly used by monks but now a pilgrim's place for the Virgin Mary. Inside the hut a table with writing material and cahiers, for people to leave a wish, make a plea or say thanks. I left some words for Chico (friend Monika's dog), who had died the previous day.



Inner courtyard at the German-run restaurant in La Vega de Rio Palmas. Close by a raven on the siderail bordering the road, looking inside the car in search of something edible or stealable. Close up that beak is mighty sharp and big! As a precaution, we closed the window (hence the shady look of the picture). He was not the only one being that fresh: close by we found a pair of squirrels (ardillos), right beneath a yellow sign with a picture of a squirrel and the text Do Not Feed the Squirrels!

At Fuerteventura we also encountered a large number of small musea; in fact so many that even I, an avid museum visitor, had had enough. As a result, we skipped the wool museum, the cheese museum,

the fisherman's museum, the windmill museum and the ethnological museum, to enjoy to the full the beautiful nature. But we did visit a private museum, called Casa de Naturaleza, which housed a very beautiful collection of photos and videos, inside a well done restaurant run by Germans. Nice courtyard and terrace as well. The exhibition was colourful and informative, showing all the sea animals, fishes, small creatures, birds and plants and trees that can be found on Fuerteventura.



Although Gran Tarajal was more like a village sizewise, it had an excellent Centro de Salud (Health Center), which we could visit using our Tarjeta Sanitaria of the Comunidad Valenciana. Although you can use the Center, at each visit you have to register anew as a Displaced (!) Person (Desplazado). This is a bit time consuming and annoying, but once registered the service is excellent and the local doctors happily write subscriptions for our regular medication. We also received the third and final injection for our hepatitis-B vaccine, and got pills to vaccinate against typhoid. As far as vaccinations are concerned we are now completely up to date and ready for further travel.

Before we moved on Bob made the remaining three mosqueteros (fly screens) for the wheel house: two for the outward opening windows and a special door for the access opening. I made a cover for the dinghy, and we managed to solve the mysterious problem of the left but not right moving ropes of the windvane construction. Carefully reading the instruction manual, in the section Maintenance we found a

reference to “make sure that the small nipple X is completely pushed downwards in tube Y. We decided to open up the machinery part, which is always scary to do, hanging above the water and afraid of nuts and bolts or springs jumping out and falling into the water. As a precaution we manoeuvred our dinghy below the vane to catch anything jumping away. Once opened, nipple X was indeed not all the way down (manufacturing error?), and pushing it in solved the problem of the left yes and right no pulling. Hopes were up again.

But not for long. Fellow long distance sailor and neighbor Roy was convinced it would be impossible to get any pendulum-based windvane selfsteering device to work properly on such a large and heavy hydraulically steered ship as ours. He suggested that we would need a system with a separate auxilliary rudder, hanging at the back of the stern. This would result in the ship having two rudders and the windvane installation driving the second rudder. Before making such a big decision we decided to go to Las Palmas Gran Canaria to consult a highly recommended expert.

We phoned the marina and since the ARC boats would be leaving the 22nd, we made a reservation for the 23rd of November onwards. All was set, and we asked friend Monika to send Bob’s new driving licence to Las Palmas (which had arrived in Pedreguer from Lanzarote), allowing a good week for it to arrive. Unfortunately, the mail system was quick for a change, so instead after the anticipated 5-8 days, it arrived already after 2 days! This put us in a bit of a spot, because the 24th of November would be the ultimate day that the post office would hold it; after that they would return it to Pedreguer!! We needed to arrive earlier than the 23rd!

On Thursday the 19th of November we left Fuerteventura for Gran Canaria, taking the southerly route. The wind was quite strong, but fortunately from the East, so we had it on our back. That was needed, because the moment we came out of the lee of Fuerteventura we were hit by very high seas. Oeps, we had not been used to waves that high for many many years! Fortunately, Sunny Spray behaved like a dream. With two reefs in the mainsail and three reefs in the mizzen, we raced down the waves at more than 6 knots boatspeed. Although Sunny Spray moved a lot, her movements are quite smooth, not sudden at all, so it is quite easy to move about, make something to eat or drink. We did not take a drop of green water, and the wet weather gear stayed inside the closet. We comfortably stayed in the wheelhouse. As a result of all this we arrived much sooner than foreseen at Las Palmas: at midnight we entered the commercial harbor, dodging ferries all leaving at the same time. Both the marina and anchorage were chockful of boats, but Bob managed to find a spot just outside the commercial shipping lane, we anchored and got out our best bottle of wine. This trip was certainly cause for celebration!



The marina in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria was chockful with ARC-boats waiting to leave on their Atlantic crossing. Sunny Spray is one of the smaller boats: nowadays, the average ARC boat is 14-16 meters.

Next morning, Friday the 20th, I phoned the marina, explained why we were arriving earlier, and asked if they could maybe accommodate us. Silly question, because dozens of boats at the anchorage were waiting already for weeks! But whether it was because of me speaking Spanish, or because of them recognizing how annoying missing your driver's licence would be, they said yes, do come in, we have a space for such a barquito (small boat) of only 12 meters!. However, once the barquito came into the marina and they saw our width, faces fell a bit. Fortunately the marineros were good sports and they went ahead to the space intended, moving the neighbours a bit to the side, and we finally squeezed in. Hurray, we had scored a berth (much to the annoyance of others waiting out at the anchorage, sorry!!!).

Sunday the 22nd the ARC boats left, all heavily reefed, because there was a 25-30 knots wind. We would not have left on such a day, but they did, and I felt sorry for all the boats with small children. By the way, they take it seriously, and the boats leave in three classes: racers (with 6-8 crew members), catamarans, and cruisers.

All in all it was a nice day. We joined the hundreds of people lining the piers wishing the boats a good passage. The atmosphere was festive, with a permanently playing street orchestra lining one pier, and the other pier being visited by the typical canarian walking groups of guitarists and singers.

The same afternoon many of the boats at anchor arrived back at "their" regular berths. So the marina is full again.



The following days and weeks we developed a bit of a routine. When there are no workmen expected, we sleep late, read a bit in bed. We get up around 9, take a hot shower (what a luxury!), dress, one of us goes out to buy fresh bread, we have breakfast. Followed by the job or activity of the day. In the evening we have dinner at 8, most often followed by a movie (we have hundreds). Normally we are off to bed again around 11.

While staying here, many small and larger jobs have already been done. We got a mechanic in to check the engine support, about which Bob was worrying. The same mechanic fixed the leaking hydraulics; it turned out that during installation in Doesburg, the Netherlands, they had used the wrong sealing nuts. We now have nuts with a type of rubber ridge in the interior, providing a much better seal. Bob spent a couple of days trying to reach watertank 5, which is located under the floor of our kitchen unit. It can hold 600 liters, so important that it could be filled, which was not the case. He made holes in the floors of my kitchen cabinets, had to saw through the pipes of the central heating system, and finally managed to reach the manhole. Just before the last breakaway job we decided to check once more the drawings of the inled tubes and inled valves (there are several, in total serving three tanks). So we discovered that there was one combination of valve, tube and valve which we had not yet tried before. Lo and behold, that combination led to the tank nicely filling up with water. A pity for all Bob's work, but glad that tank 6 is working!

In addition to this serious work, Bob hung small decorations (paintings), secured doors with latches (of course, at sea, as we had predicted, the doors do not stay closed with the 'normal' pushbutton locks). I have started the last of the sewing jobs.

And we started looking for THE expert in windvane selfsteering devices. This turned out to be Pierre, who, together with his equally knowledgeable wife Candida, arrived the same evening. Pierre had designed, built and commercialized his own windvane system, the business has now been sold. Within 10 minutes of their arrival the curtain fell on our CapHorn system: Pierre and Candida agreed with Roy, it would be impossible to get ANY pendulum based system working properly on a yacht of our size and weight. The problem being in ropes from the pendulum to the rudder being too long, too many blocks needed, too much friction, therefore loss of power, and insufficient power to move the already very stiff and heavy rudder. Do not ask us why the people who sold us the CapHorn did not warn us that the system would be inadequate for our type of ship!!! Let's not go down that road.

In the end, Pierre advised us, as Roy had done, to go for the system with the additional, auxilliary rudder. The extra rudder is then directly connected to the windvane, with or without a pendulum. It so happens that there are two systems on the market which offer that, and only one that is fit to be placed offcentre, as is needed on our boat because of the platform and the steps leading to the water. That is the Hydrovane, it also comes from Canada (Vancouver), and, just our luck, of course it is the most expensive one.

After studying very extensive documentation we received from a Dutch neighbour, we have decided to bite the bullet: the CapHorn has to go, and we will order and install a Hydrovane.

As of now, we are talking with the manufacturer in Canada, and we just had a visit from a stainless steel outfit here in Las Palmas who will help Bob with the installation, once it arrives. It will weigh more than 50 kilos, so brackets and supports need to be made and welded on to the ship. Quite a job!

With the end of season holidays looming, we expect that it will take a couple of weeks before the system arrives here and installation can start. We will stay and do that here because here are the most facilities, and the marina is quite comfortable.

All in all it is a real pity. Not only because of all Bob's work over the past six months trying to get the CapHorn working, but also because of all the money the system has cost us: the CapHorn itself, its installation in Oliva, the hauling out and adaptations made in Cadiz, the making of the chain and clog system in Lanzarote: and all the expenditures still to come ordering and installing the Hydrovane!

All this makes a big hole in our budget. But for us it is clear: if we do not do it now, it is end of the line, end of our plans, because we will NOT cross any ocean without a properly working windvane selfsteering installation. We know that many people cross without a windvane pilot, only relying on their electronic autopilot. The accepted advice when you do that is to carry as many spares as you can for the electronic autopilot. That says enough about its long-term reliability. And we will not accept the noise an autopilot makes (although we seem to have a particularly noisy one, other boats have more silent ones, but they all make noise nevertheless). So, discussion closed, we go for it!

When waiting for spare parts or new acquisitions, there are worse places in the world to be than Gran Canaria. The marina in Las Palmas is very full, but at the same time rather quiet. Eventually, you get used to the 4-lane highway running between the marina and town. There are many dedicated cycling paths, but distances are large. It is possible to rent a car for €25 a day. The interior of the island is spectacular, with high, young mountains, interlaced with deep canyons. In particular in the centre and the north, the island is VERY green.



Mountains in the West of the island. Spectacular canyons.



There are more than sufficient museums: I try to not do them all at the same time, many weeks still to come. There is a Corté Inglès. There is an IKEA. And many, many walks to be made, nearly all of them inland. Some walks can even be reached by taking a bus (the bus company advertises which walks you can do taking certain buses). Roy and Caroline arrived yesterday. Today it is still 26 degrees.



Replica of one of Columbus' four ships during his first trip to the New World. A very interesting exhibition in the museum Casa Colon. Nearly every island in the Canary Islands boasts its own Columbus House.



In the north, in the town of Galdar, we went to see an archeological museum, called Cuevas Pintadas. To our surprise, it was right in the middle of town, on a hillside. They had excavated a large area, and built a gigantic construction covering the entire site. Many video exhibitions explained what you saw. And on site, next to the foundations of an old pueblo, 4 reconstructed houses, including an interior. They looked quite cosy to me! And very helpful, because wandering inside the houses you could much better appreciate what we saw among the remains and the foundations on the site. A gem of a museum.

This time no animal of the month. We are in the wrong part of the world to spot reindeer!!

Hasta la próxima! (until the next time)!

Helma

You can follow us on www.marinetraffic.com. Ship's name Sunny Spray; MMSI: 244780434

PS: for everyone fascinated by the esoteric:

On Tuesday November 17, around 13.00, I thought about the fact that the MiniTransat boats had been underway for 18 days. That meant maybe some had already arrived in Guadeloupe, and for the first time ever I visited the MiniTransat website. There I learned that the first boat had arrived the 15th. Next popped up a small text box, announcing NEXT ARRIVAL: boat 668 and boat 454. 668 is CARL CHIPOTEL's boat!!!! Half an hour later the website announced that Carl had arrived and crossed the finish line as 17th. Of course I immediately sent him congratulations by email. I do not really believe in these sort of things, but have to admit that this is quite convincing evidence of telepathy!!!!