

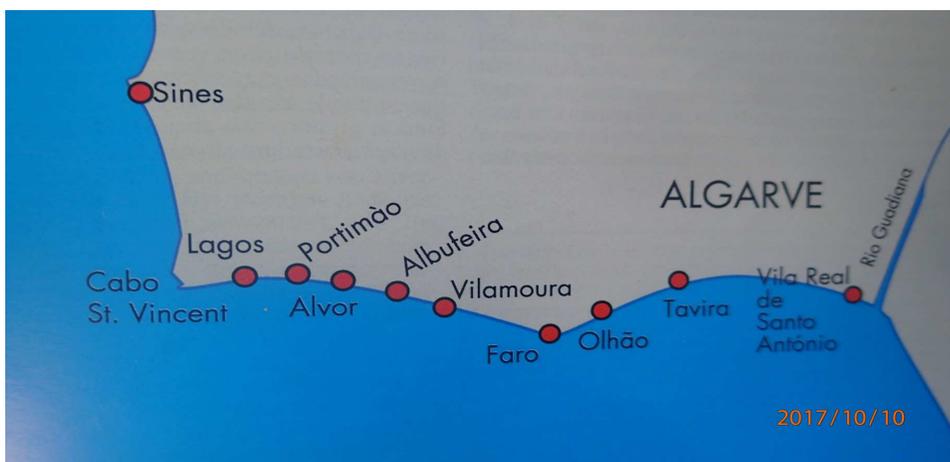
## Sunny Spray's Travels, Episode 23

Puerto del Este, Almuñecar, Spain

October 16, 2017. Translated and edited October 20, 2017

Dear all,

The previous episode dated from August 28, and described our passage from the Azores to Lagos, Portugal. In the meantime, we have leisurely visited the Portuguese Algarve and the Andalucian coast, and we have also already crossed the Straits of Gibraltar. At the time of writing we are halfway up the Costa del Sol. So far, on this stretch, we have traveled 445 nm, and enjoyed nearly all of it. In particular the Algarve was an unknown to us, but turned out to be very pleasant. Below is an impression of our travels.

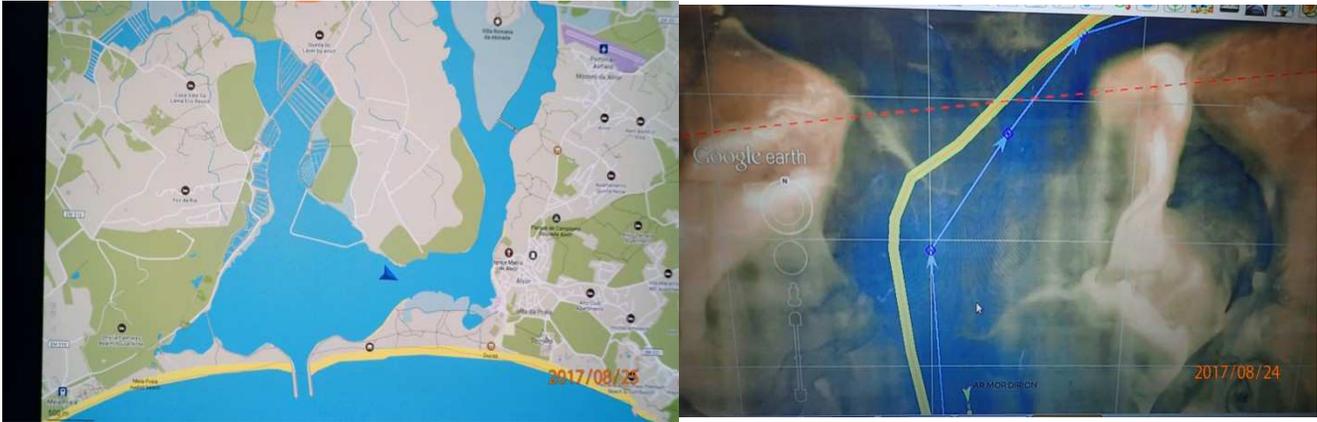


Our first stop in the Algarve was Lagos, an attractive town which we also visited in 2005 with our previous boat, *Fint*. The location was excellent, since the marina is near the centre of town. Furthermore, we were given a berth not even 200 m from a large supermarket. Lagos is very touristic, but fortunately has not succumbed to touristic shops and eateries. No MacDonal'd's, but a lot of Portuguese bars and restaurants, all with excellent food and drink for minimal prices. To our great delight, there were numerous quality shops which sold beautiful, "made in Portugal" products: shops with handbags, men's hats, colourful ceramics for everyday use, even more colourful woollen table cloths, imaginative cloths, there was no end to it! We enjoyed this hugely, and although we are not shoppers at all, we splashed out on hats, ceramics and table cloths.



Unfortunately, it was still high season, so we had to pay a top price for a berth. Consequently, we moved after only two days to drop anchor in a lagoon, near the town of Alvor.

This lagoon was rather typical for the kind of lagoons along the southern coast: one or more rivers form a lagoon with a narrow opening towards the sea. The tide comes in and goes out pretty fast. At low tide there are numerous sandbanks that dry out and form a haven for birds. On the outside of the lagoon are often islands with beautiful white sandy beaches. It looks a bit like the German, and Dutch, Wadden Sea.



*The entry into the lagoon of Alvor is very shallow. We had foreseen a route that would take us just in between the sandbanks (blue line in the picture to the right). However, all of a sudden, we spotted a large green buoy, which (as is the rule) we needed to pass on its left side. That we did, and it caused the deviation of our course to the left (yellow line). The consequence: we hit bottom and became stuck on a sandbank. Fortunately, the tide was coming in, so after some 10 minutes we were floating again. Later, we noticed that boats familiar to the area passed the green buoy on its righthand side, against all the rules! When leaving the lagoon, we did the same and experienced no problems. Below the anchorage at low tide.*



*Alvor itself was more of a village than a town. There was excellent walking, through the dunes on wooden walkways (to protect the flora and fauna against the numerous tourists), along the beach (nice rocks!), through woods and along the lagoons border (lots of water fowl, even flamingos).*



Álvor had a regular bus connection to nearby Portimao, so we decided to pay it a visit. Quite a nice town, but we preferred our quiet anchorage to a busy marina in Portimao. The town did have a nice museum housed in a disused sardine factory. We happen to love industrial architecture and the big mechanical machines used in the pre-electronic age, so the site was a delight to us.



*The cutting of cork floaters for sardine fishing nets (left). A carousel with wickerwork baskets delivered the sardines into the factory (left below), where women cut off the heads, cleaned them and put them into tin cans by hand (below right). Everything needed for a can of sardines was made on site, including stamping and cutting of the cans and lids.*



On September 2 we left Alvor, which we had really liked. With a stop in Albufeira (a very boring marina, not more than a large concrete rectangle), we arrived on Sunday into a large lagoon that was home to the cities of Faro and Olhao. We decided to stay on the perimeter of the lagoon, at a large anchorage in front of the island Culatra. From the anchorage one could go to Culatra, and pick up a not too frequent ferry into Olhao. In the summer months there is also a direct ferry into Faro, but it being September, that ferry did not run anymore. Thus, to get to Faro, you first had to take the ferry to Olhao (45 min), then wait nearly an hour for the bus ride to Faro (lasting 40 min). We did it once, left the boat at a quarter to 9 am and arrived in Faro at 11.30 am, only to discover that everything was closed because of a local holiday!



*Culatra itself is a popular tourist destination, with beautiful white sandy beaches and as a main street, a narrow concrete path laid in the sand. There are no roads, but they do have two small supermarkets for daily shopping. The anchorage had plenty of space with good holding, but Bob detested the many speedboats, fishing boats and sailors' dinghies that would speed past continuously.*

Olhao is quite a large town with houses with flat roofs, that give the town a North-African feeling. Not really pretty, but interesting. The town is in stark contrast to Faro, which has a continental atmosphere and a walled in historical centre (picture below, to the right).



*The flat roofs of Olhao formed the inspiration for this cubist painting (left). Below the artistic exploits of amateurs working on the "Flamingo" project. Everywhere in Olhao we would meet these colourful birds, such as the bumble bee-flamingo, the patchwork flamingo, the rasta bird, and the Portuguese rooster flamingo.*





Close to Olhao was a nature park (with a campsite), where there were some nice (short) trails to walk. Along the trail we found many relics of industrial activities and architecture. New to us was a tidal mill: a rectangular building built above the entry to a lagoon. When the tide is in, water flows into the lagoon. When the tide goes out, the water flows through openings under the mill, there turning a water wheel. The waterwheel transfers the movement to grinding stones, as in any type of mill. The miller can only work the stones according to the tides!



As mentioned earlier, when we visited Faro we found all of the town closed because of a local holiday. The only building open was the tourist office, where they had organized a mini-concert of Portuguese guitar music (Guitarra Portuguesa). We decided to attend it, there was nothing else to do!

The guitar player had various instruments and showed an explanatory video, while playing Fado music. Some nice facts; the "Guitarra Portuguesa" finds its origin in the medieval "lute", not in the guitar! There are two kinds of Fado: The Fado Lisboa, and the Fado Coimbra. There are quite some differences between the two: the Fado Lisboa is from the people (Coimbra is from the nobles), is cheerful (Coimbra sad), is sung by both men and women (Coimbra men only), one is expected to applaud after a song (Coimbra no applause), and the tail end of the guitar is shaped differently (a curly shape in Lisboa, a tear shape in Coimbra). Thus, Amalia Rodriguez became famous singing the Lisboa Fado!



On September 8 we left for our last Portuguese destination: the river Guadiana, which forms the border between Portugal (left shore) and Spain (right hand shore). We spent some nights in Ayamonte (Spanish side), a nice town with, as in Lagos, many shops with beautiful original products.



*Ayamonte: many cozy squares and shopping streets, and everywhere heavily ornamented tiled benches, ceramic murals and pillars.*

We went under the connecting bridge (clearance 22 meters) onto the river, which meanders through a beautiful, green hilly countryside, dotted with many cork oaks and almond trees. Occasionally one finds a small pontoon, where one may tie up for free (such as in Odeleite) or has to pay a small fee (such as in Guerreiro, Farrangeiro and Alcoutim/San Lucar de Guadiana). Navigation is utterly simple, because contrary to what the cruising guides are writing, the river is bouyed up until Alcoutim. You only have to keep a sharp lookout for floating trees and reeds.



*Sunny Spray meandering on the Guadiana. The map is a Google Earth picture; in reality it looked as green as the map indicated. We made long walks on both shores.*



*Very special were the thick and tall cork oaks, and the rock layers that were shedding fine splinters (picture to the right). The splinters looked soft, as if they were fallen leaves, but were rock-hard, and used to pave the paths.*

Among fellow sailors the word was that the Guadiana is a river to stay for a longer period of time. I could easily imagine that, it was beautiful, very quiet, far from the hubbub of modern day society and the people encountered were invariably very nice. In addition, it offered all that makes Europe so precious to us. One of our bicycle trips is a good example of what I mean.

This trip started in Odeleite, a tiny hamlet straight out of the Middle Ages, including narrow one-person cobble stoned streets. We cycled over a good, asphalted road (very little traffic) to Guerreiro and Farrangeiro, where we visited the river museum; very small, cute, with nice exhibits of fishing gear dating from the Roman times and onwards, an exhibit with model boats still sailing the Guadiana, and a video about the prevalence and importance of border smuggling in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Costs (pensioners like us pay only 50%): 1,50 for the two of us, while the ticket also gave free admission (valid for one week) to the castle in Alcoutim. We cycled on and 500 m down the road we found the remains of a Roman villa. We cycled back to Farrangeira, and relaxed with a pint of beer (2 Euros per pint). Where else can you find in one morning both culture, history, beautiful nature, affordable prices and nice people?



*Twenty-nine lovingly built model boats of ships sailing the Guadiana, made by Jose Murta Pereira, citizen of Guerreiros. He does not think of himself as an artist, he says he is just someone who loves all the beauty offered by the Guadiana. To the right Sunny Spray at the pontoon of Odeleite, a good spot to discover the area by foot or bicycle.*



*Alcoutim (left, Portugal) and San Lucar de Guadiana (to the right, Spain) are opposite each other on the left and righthand shores. It is a favourite spot of live-aboards to leave behind their boat or to spend the winter. We were anchored between the two towns and went across with the dinghy. We did our shopping in San Lucar (no shops in Alcoutim), but on Saturday we visited the fresh vegetable market in Alcoutim and the “butcher on wheels”.*



*Shopping at the “butcher on wheels” and the line of waiting customers. There were only three other women ahead of me, so I thought to be ready within half an hour. One-and-a-half hour later it was still not my turn! The local women buy for the entire week, a bit of this, a bit of that, and everything is cut to order. That takes a lot of time! When my turn finally came, I could not resist the temptation to buy for ten days myself, a little bit of this, a little bit of that.*



*More art and culture: we visited (gratis) the castle of Alcoutim, which dates from the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Very interesting was a special exhibit on ancient board games, in particular when the gaming board was scratched into a stone or slab of rock. Mostly, seeds or small pebbles were used as pawns. These ancient games all looked a bit like tic-tac-toe and backgammon.*

*Art was to be found literally on the street: along the exit road from Alcoutim towards the interior were some twenty large ceramic murals, based on water colour paintings! Each mural depicted a scene from history or a scene from daily life in Alcoutim throughout the ages. Beautiful! One mural would be at least 1 square meter, sometimes even bigger. Design Carlos Ruz, realization Anabela de Vasconcelos (2005).*

It was hard to leave the Guadiana, but Sevilla, and meeting my sister Ineke, were waiting. Thus we left the Guadiana on September 24 and arrived the following day in Chipiona. That made a complete circle of our “Tour d’Atlantique”. Chipiona was another spot with good memories, and once more it lived up to expectations: within one day we found a shop where both our bicycles were repaired (new brake and gear cables and some other odds and ends).

Since we are both very fond of the Guadalquivir, we took three days to sail the 50 miles north towards Sevilla. Our first stop was at our “own” pontoon near to the lagoon with the flamingos. “Own” referring to the fact that we had spent a good ten days there more than two years ago, equipping *Sunny Spray* with mosquito and fly screens.

Visiting the river a second time turned out to be even better than the first time. It was as hot as two years ago (far into the 30 degrees Celsius), but the season was more favorable: end of September thousands and thousands of birds are meeting up in the wetlands around the Guadalquivir, and every day we hugely enjoyed the flights of migratory birds which passed in more or less orderly formations. We are sure that the birds were practicing how to fly in formation with the least expenditure of energy.

Unchanged was the beauty of the rivers vastness, the silence, and the wonderful, dragon-like silhouettes of the special fishing boats. It was a delight to sail, just before sunrise, over the river.





*In the foreground, Sunny Spray is disturbing flocks of seagulls, quietly resting on the river's surface. In the background huge amounts of migratory birds. On "noonsite" ([www.noonsite.com](http://www.noonsite.com)), a website with a lot of information for and by sailors, a trip up the Guadalquivir is described as long and tedious. We thought it was the opposite and enjoyed every minute of it!*

On September 29 we arrived in Gelves, in the marina where we had also stayed during our previous visit to Sevilla. Gelves is an ugly small town close to Sevilla, but the marina itself is situated beautifully in a tributary of the Guadalquivir, with a view of Eucalyptus trees, wild horses, and sheep. We thought it would be the ideal starting point for Ineke and ourselves to visit Sevilla, also because there is an excellent bus service from the marina to the city centre.

When approaching the marina, we could not fail to see a large party tent erected on the marina's parking lot, just above the pontoon where we and other boats were to be moored. We arrived at 11.00 am, and at 12.00 am the boom-boom music started in earnest. There was a *feria* celebrating products from the river, so most of it concerned drinks and seafood. The marina staff told us the *feria* would only be there for Friday and Saturday, by Sunday it would be gone. We gritted our teeth, and closed every window and hatch of *Sunny Spray*. Unfortunately the noise penetrated everything, in particular the uno-dos-tres yelling of the so-called DJ. We considered ourselves lucky that we would spend most of our time in Sevilla town.

After a short night with very little sleep, we left Gelves on Saturday morning and took the bus to Sevilla. It was a bit of a wait before Ineke arrived, because the bus from Granada (where she was taking a language course) to Sevilla was full. She had to take the bus to Cadiz an hour later, and that bus did not stop in the city centre but dropped its passengers only at the outskirts of Sevilla. Fortunately, she took a taxi to the square in front of the Museo de las Belles Artes where we were patiently waiting her arrival.

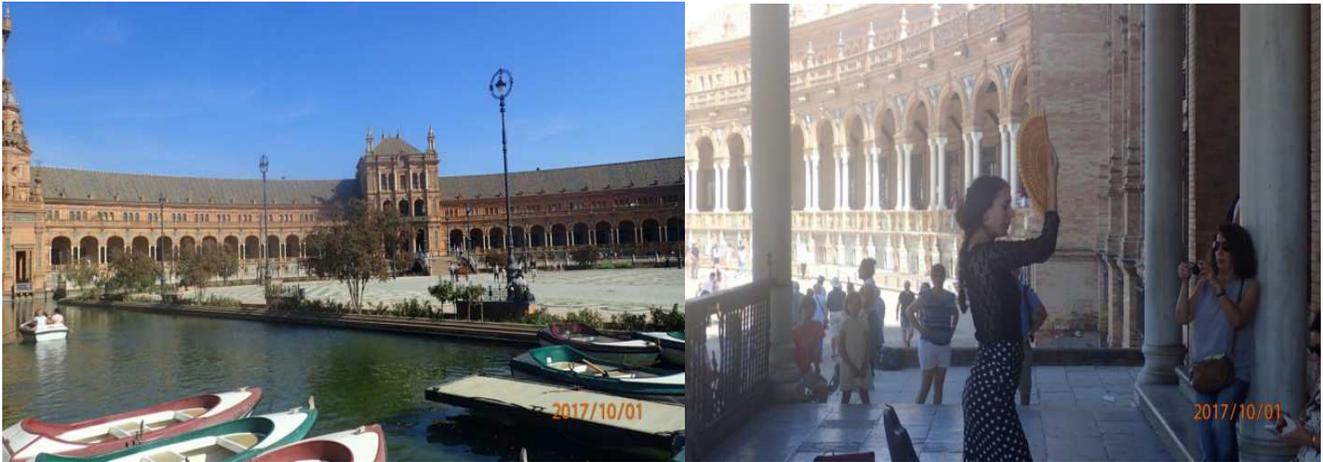
All is well that ends well, it was fantastic to see my sister again, we had not seen her since our stay in Surinam. Together we strolled through Sevilla and enjoyed all the beautiful sights. We skipped a visit to the cathedral though; the waiting line of visitors standing outside in the heat was a bit too much for us.



Sunday October 1 we visited Sevilla again, after a very short and noisy night. This second visit we concentrated on the Plaza de España and surroundings. The Plaza de España was built for the Ibero-American exhibition of 1929, and consists of a large square with a palace-like structure (now used as government offices), some canals

you can sail on with a rowing boat, a large park with two museums and several bars and restaurants. In short, a place where one can easily spend a day.

We started with a visit of the palace alongside the Plaza, where we encountered halfway a small group of two flamenco dancers, a singer and two musicians. They were very good, and it was particularly nice for Ineke, since she had had to miss a flamenco evening in Granada by coming to visit us in Sevilla.



Very amusing was a walk along the palaces front, where there are numerous ceramic murals, all depicting a province of Spain. Like every Spaniard we had our picture taken in front of our province/Comunidad, in this case Valencia. It was a very nice tableau, depicting the victorious entrance of a Christian king into Sagunto. In fact, this mural depicted the events on which the well-known Valencian fiestas of Moros and Christianos are based. Double nice!





*Ineke and Bob at the Palace at the Plaza de España.*

We also visited two museums located in the park: a historic museum and an industrial museum. Both were nice to visit and delightfully cool, since by early afternoon the temperature had risen to a staggering 40 degrees Celsius. In the historic museum I finally found the large Roman floor mosaics that were on my “must see” list since Portugal.



*Large Roman floor mosaic from the excavation at Italica, close to Sevilla. Here exhibited as a mural. I never knew that the Romans used tigers (!) as pulling-war animals. Where did they get them from? India?*

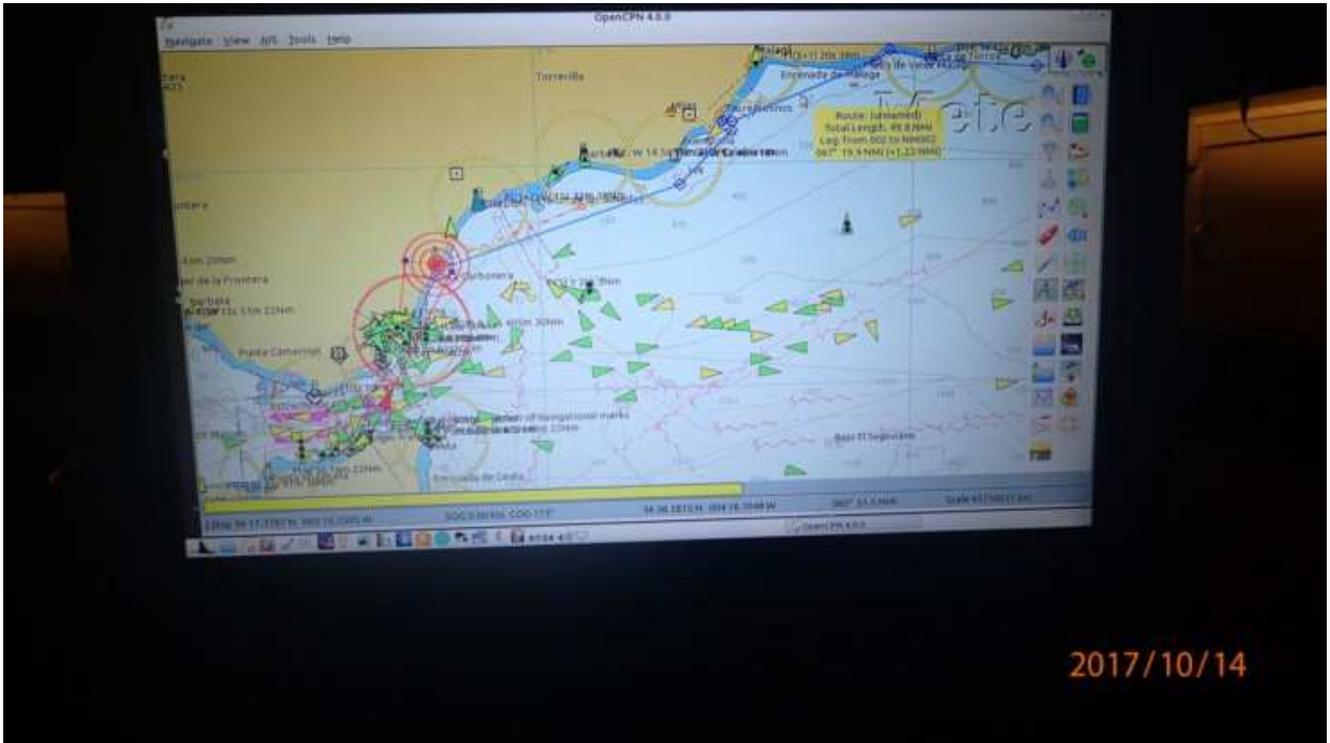
After seeing Ineke off on her bus back to Granada, we came back in Gelves only to find that the *feria* was still in full swing, with accompanying boom-boom music. So, we cast loose and sailed to a spot outside hearing distance, where we anchored. Next morning, we went back by dinghy to pay. A real pity, because we would have loved to visit more of Sevilla, but we were by now sick and tired of the lies and unkept promises of the Gelves marina staff.

After Gelves we returned over the river to Chipiona, stocked up on our fresh food reserves and left for Barbate. Barbate had a terrible marina, nothing more than a concrete structure with not a bit of living green in sight. The surrounding countryside, though, was very beautiful, with many beaches, forests with walking trails and migratory birds in wetlands. We had planned to stay a couple of days to wait for westerly winds, but the weather forecasts did not predict Westerlies for the next 10 days. This prompted us to leave on the first day it would be nearly calm (although with Easterly winds). Unexpectedly early we left Monday morning October 9 heading for the Straits of Gibraltar.

To profit as much as possible from a favorable current, we left at 03.00 am. The first six hours everything went fine, but when passing Tarifa (a notorious windy stretch at the beginning of the narrow Straits of Gibraltar), we encountered strong headwinds and a very agitated sea (caused by over falls). For the first time on this entire voyage I became seasick. Fortunately, the situation improved once we had left Tarifa behind, and without any mishaps we navigated between the commercial shipping, passed the Bay of Gibraltar and rounded the Rock. Ten miles further we found the beautiful and affordable marina of Sotogrande.



*The Rock of Gibraltar. We passed The Rock for the fourth time in our lives, but never visited the town proper.*



*The AIS screen near the Straits of Gibraltar. If you see it this way, one gets acute shivers of fear. In reality there is, of course, sufficient room between the ships. But navigating through it you have to remain very vigilant, in particular for ships entering or leaving the Bay of Gibraltar.*



*The Rock of Gibraltar seen from the Marina de Sotogrande. This is a well-protected marina with reasonable prices, situated within a complex with private side harbours, squares, apartments and some shops. Because of some highways close by it was difficult to explore the surroundings, but the marina complex was attractive, with attention to the “human measure”. Highly recommended for everyone looking for a marina just before or after passing Gibraltar.*

On Saturday October 14 we left for the last part of our trip, stopping at marinas along the Costa del Sol heading for Cartagena, where we will stay a couple of days to visit friends.

Seen from the sea the Costa del Sol is not particularly attractive, every meter seems to be built with high rise buildings. Once up close or inside a town, it all looks better, with attempts to liven the place up by creating green zones and long sea-side boulevards.



For example, on October 17 we visited Benalmadena, where we walked/cycled along a long boulevard and visited a large park. Both were equally packed with visitors. Costa del Sol in a nutshell: full, full, full.

Also, the marinas tend to be very full (or not happy to receive visitors), despite it being off season. Today I had to make numerous calls to secure a place for the night, because the weather is not sufficiently stable to risk anchoring in the not very well protected anchorages. We found a place in Marina del Este at Almuñecar,

according to an enthusing website “the most beautiful marina in the Mediterranean”. We’ll see, but prepare for a hefty bill. So be it, we are glad to have found a place for the night!

After leaving Marina del Este we will make a stop in Almerimar, waiting there for westerly winds to round Cabo de Gata. From there in one go to Cartagena, around the corner, and with stops in Mar Menor, Alicante and Altea to Denia. As the saying goes: “we smell home”.

Lots of love, Helma and Bob

Hasta la próxima!

We can still be followed on [www.marinetraffic.com](http://www.marinetraffic.com), ships name Sunny Spray, MMSI: 244780434

### **Animal of the month: the migratory bird**

*Our own “trek” is nearing its end, so it is quite fitting to make the migratory bird the animal of the month.*

*Large flights of migratory birds were our everyday companions during our second trip on the river Guadalquivir. Sometimes there were that many that various flights of different birds were crossing each other’s paths. The groups were enormous; one moment the sky next to us literally saw black because of the number of birds! It was clearly visible how a large flight attracts smaller groups that join up with the larger group. It is also obvious that the birds are practicing to learn to stay in formation within such a large mass of birds. Probably they also select the leaders during these practice flights.*

*There were also hundreds of storks. Waiting to join a group, they were sitting like soldiers in a row on the embankment of a particular part of the river.*

*Unfortunately, my camera cannot zoom in enough to show you details of these flights. However, I do hope that these pictures show a little bit how awesome the flights of these migratory birds were.*

