

April 6, 2005

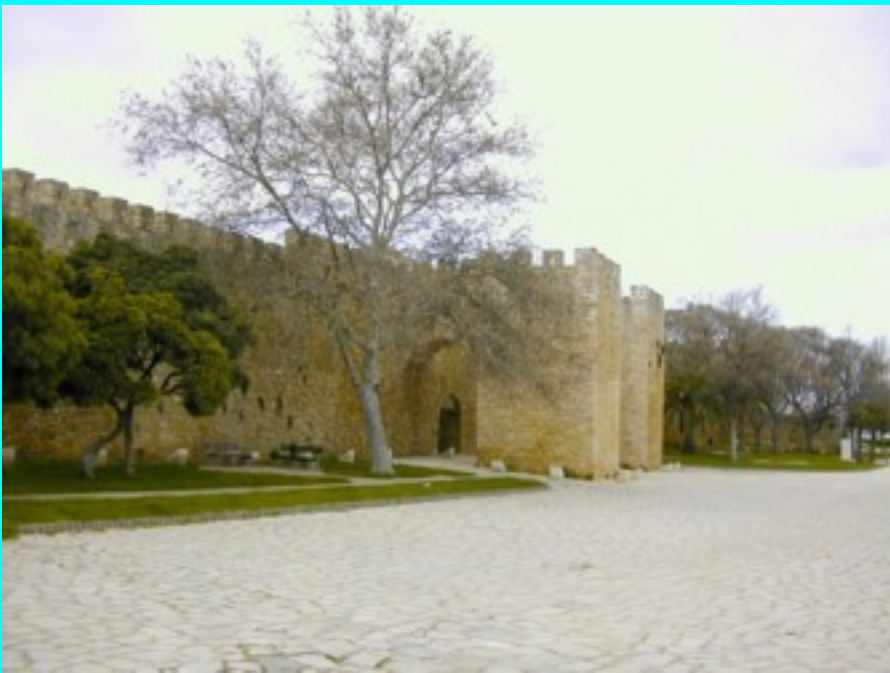
Our time in Lagos, Portugal will soon be coming to an end. This winter has been special, full of fun times and wonderful memories. The charming town of Lagos and the cruisers in the marina all contributed to making our stay so delightful. Around forty boats stayed the winter, and we became friends with many. Most of the boats were British, although many other nations were represented: Ireland, South Africa, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, Canada, and the United States.



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Everything in Lagos was within a short walking distance from the marina: food, supplies, the town center, the bus and train stations, and the beach. In Lagos, we had the choice of many good restaurants and were able to enjoy events at the town's cultural center. In September at the Lagos Cultural Center we experienced an evening of Flamenco. In February we listened to the Algarve Orchestra and also to a quartet playing a medieval repertoire from the 12th to 14th centuries. Throughout the rest of our travels in Europe, it will be hard to find another marina and town as convenient and wonderful as this one.



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Amidst the usual town stores, Lagos also had a daily municipal market where one could buy fish fresh off the local fishing boats, a local Saturday farmer’s market, and a Gypsy market held on the first Saturday of the month. Our favorite market was the local farmer’s market held each Saturday morning. At this time we’d pick up our weekly supply of oranges, almonds, olives, and figs plus various other vegetables needed during the week. The Gypsy market was interesting as nowadays the Gypsies came by large white vans. Around thirty vans would be parked in a large circle out in the gravel parking area by the Municipal Stadium, and people from miles around would come to find bargains.



The town of Lagos was full of much history, and it was fun to walk and explore the narrow streets within its old medieval walls and visit many of the places of historic interest. Noticeable in town were three sculptures/statues of men important in Lagos’ history. Of prime importance was Prince Henry, known in Portugal as Infante D. Henrique. During the 15th century with the launching of the Portuguese Discoveries by Prince Henry, Lagos became an important maritime port and trading center. As the operational center of Prince Henry’s voyages overseas, most of the “caravels” during this period departed from and returned to Lagos. These caravels were small, light, easily maneuverable ships with three lateen-rigged sails that pivoted quickly to catch the wind, making them ideal for the early explorations.



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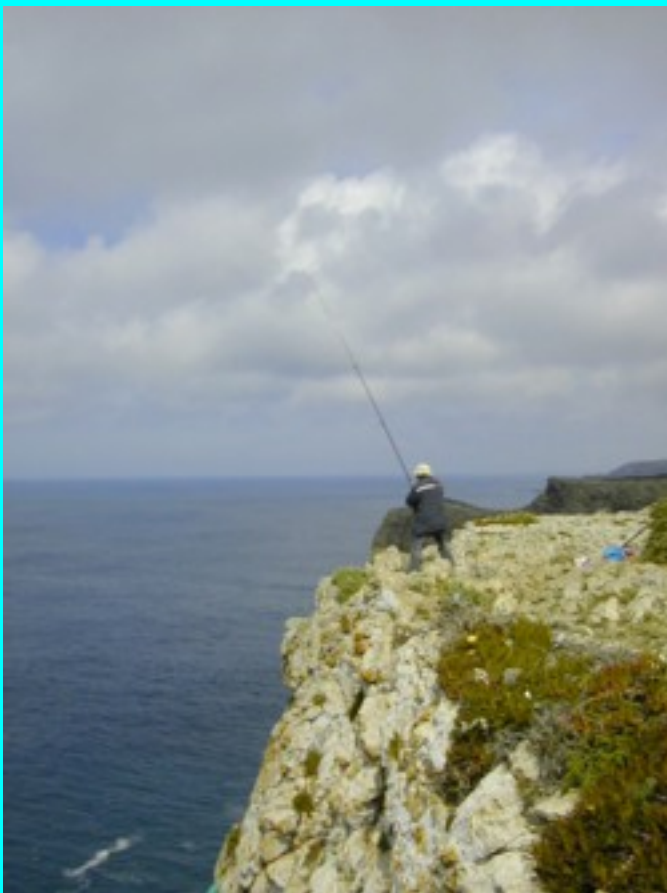
Another man important in Lagos' history was King Sebastian. He became king at the age of 14, and during his reign he honored Lagos in 1573 with the royal title of "city", a rare occurrence in those days. In 1578 when King Sebastian died at the age of 24 in battle in Morocco, he left Portugal heirless. Because of this, Spain was able to easily invade Portugal in 1580, and for 60 years Portugal was ruled by Spain.



The third man held in high regard by Lagos was Gil Eanes. He was a native of Lagos and a squire of Prince Henry. It was he who in 1434 commanded the first ship to sail beyond Cape Bojador in West Africa and actually return. At this time that cape was considered the "cape of no return" by Europeans, and his successful return opened up the Discovery period.



soon after our arrival in Lagos, we went out for a day to Cape Sagres and Cape St. Vincente, the two jutting headlands at the southwestern tip of the Algarve and Europe. For ages this area was considered the "end of the world." Like many, we believed the myth that Prince Henry's Navigational School had been located at Sagres. This never was the case, and in fact, Prince Henry never had a navigational school anywhere in Portugal. Instead, Sagres was a fortress in which Prince Henry's town "Vila do Infante" had been located and where he spent much of his last years. Before leaving the area, we watched fishermen casting their lines off the 150 foot cliffs, standing ever so close to the edge.



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Prince Henry is probably the most celebrated figure in Portugal as it was he who launched the Age of Discovery bringing Portugal into the spotlight. Prince Henry was the one who persisted in “pushing the limits” of his time by doubting the navigational perils of Cape Bojador and proving the superstition wrong. After Prince Henry’s death, writers embellished his name so that he became known as Prince Henry the Navigator or Henry the Navigator, thus helping to create the myth about his having had a navigational school. In truth, Prince Henry never went out on any voyages of Discovery and never was a navigator. Instead, with his wealth and power, he was the encourager and financier of the explorations and the hands-on controller of all its operations.

Before flying to Florida from Lisbon on October 19, 2004, we spent six days exploring Portugal. (See Portugal land trip log.) While in Florida we enjoyed the holidays with our family and helped our son Scott get his sailboat ready for his Caribbean cruise. On January 13, 2005, we flew back to Portugal. Upon our arrival back in the Algarve, the almond tree was in full bloom and its pink and white blossoms added a lovely color to the landscape. Once back in the marina, we used the wireless modem which we had brought back with us to connect to the Internet.

Upon our return to Lagos, we started enjoying the “cruiser walks” taking place every other Wednesday. We would take the bus or train to the beginning of each walk and then stroll along the back roads and paths of the Algarve’s countryside enjoying the varied scenery plus socializing with fellow cruisers. Each cruiser walk was organized by a different boat and was usually around six miles in length. A highlight of one of the walks was seeing the pilgrimage of the processional caterpillar (also known as the palmerworm, pine tree worm, or scientifically *Thaumetapoea Pityocampa*). These caterpillars had just left the pine tree and were traveling along the ground in a long head-to-tail procession in search of some warm, soft earth in which to penetrate and chrysalise. What was amazing was that the length of the procession was around nine feet long, and each caterpillar was only about two inches long.



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In early February we enjoyed the carnival days just prior to Ash Wednesday, a special time throughout all Portugal. Besides parades and festivities, people enjoyed dressing up in costumes. On the Friday prior to Ash Wednesday, Lagos had a big children's parade. Groups of school children, all dressed-up in different themes, paraded around the main avenue. Tuesday, being a holiday and the day before Lent, many more parades and festivities took place around the Algarve. The biggest one occurred in Loule, but it was too far away for us to attend. So instead, we hopped a bus and enjoyed the parade next-door in the village of Odiaxere. Set amidst a provincial backdrop, this parade of about eight floats was quite entertaining. Each time the floats traveled around the same few streets in the village, more people would join in the parade. Everyone was definitely having a good time.



With our wintering in Lagos, we really enjoyed two cultures. Besides the Portuguese culture, we had a taste of the British culture. With quite a few of our fellow cruisers being British, we enjoyed watching the game of Rugby Football at one of the local pubs during the Six Nation Championship. The six nations consisted of England, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, France, and Italy, and the games were played throughout the two months of February and March. On our pontoon we had people from England, Wales, and Ireland, and what fun it was to watch the rivalry. Wales won the Championship with a Grand Slam victory on March 19, and the memory of the singing of Welsh songs in that local pub after the victory will linger long afterwards with us. Another custom shared with us by our fellow British cruisers was that occurring the day before Lent. Known as Shrove Tuesday, or Pancake Tuesday, we were treated to some pancakes by one of the boats. This custom came from housewives down through the centuries wanting to clear out their pantries before the fast of Lent.

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The last week in February and the first week in March we rented a car and took a ten day “land trip” into Spain visiting the historical cities of Seville (Sevilla), Granada, Toledo, Madrid, and Cordoba. (See Spain land trip log.) Shortly after our arrival back in Lagos, one of Mary’s friends came to visit us for a week.

The weather this winter in Lagos was different from what we had originally expected as the temperatures in January and February were cooler than usual, and there was almost no rain. Although cooler, we felt like we were in the sun-belt capital of Europe awaking almost every day to blue sky. It wasn’t until the last week in February that the weather pattern began to change. The month of March saw much more unsettled weather and many more days of cloudy skies, plus some much needed rain. We returned to Daylight Saving Time the last Sunday in March.

This time in Portugal has been special. We have enjoyed the laid-back atmosphere of the Portuguese people. Whenever we think of Portugal we will always be reminded of old men wearing hats sitting in village squares “pondering life,” beautiful tile designs on buildings, interesting mosaic patterns on sidewalks, the cork tree, the smell of bacalau (dried cod) laying in flat sheets in the grocery stores, and the partaking on board our boat of Portugal’s delicious bread, wine, almonds, olives, figs, and oranges. Special just to the Algarve and Lagos will always be memories of beautiful beaches, high cliffs and exotic rock formations, groves of almond and orange trees, and storks’ nests.



It will definitely be hard to leave Lagos, but it’s time to move on. There are many more ports and countries to explore and our “adventurous spirit” is calling. The present plan is to leave Lagos sometime around the second week in April when the weather is a bit more settled. From Lagos we plan to day-hop down the coast of Portugal and Spain to Gibraltar and finally into the Mediterranean. From Gibraltar our first stop will be Morocco. After Morocco, we will quickly move along the eastern coastline of Spain to the Balearic Islands, wishing to enjoy these beautiful islands before the huge crowds arrive in July and August. After the Balearics, we plan to visit Corsica and Sardinia before heading to Italy’s mainland. At the present time our plan is to keep the boat next winter in Rome, Italy.

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