

2017

Spain & Portugal



“From reading too much, and sleeping too little, his brain dried up on him and he lost his judgment.”

Miguel de Cervantes

Forward

The quote on the cover is from Miguel de Cervantes' classic 17th century novel; *Don-Quixote*.

Cervantes' character, Don Quixote de la Mancha, is an aging nobleman who has become delusional from too much reading and too little sleep. Don Quixote sets out on a quest to right wrongs, restore chivalry and bring justice to the land. He is accompanied by his loyal squire, Sancho Panza, who employs earthy wit and rational judgement, as a balance to Quixote's lofty, yet irrational pursuits.

OR

Cervantes' character, Russell Paton de la Millarville, is an aging businessman who has become delusional from too much working and too little sleep. De la Millarville sets out on a quest to right wrongs, restore sanity and re-establish balance. He is accompanied by his loyal wife, Terri "Bear", who employs earthy wit and sensible judgement, as a balance to Paton's often irrational behaviour.

Russ & Bear de la Millarville, in la Mancha



Don Quijote by Pablo Picasso

February 1, 2017

Millarville, AB

The Spanish Indecision

We couldn't decide where to go for a winter break, so we spun the globe and dropped a pin in La Mancha, Spain.

Decision made, I did some reading and tried to find historical connections between Canada and our intended destination, but every association I came up with was either a mistake, or an outright lie.

The first contact between Spain and Canada would have been in 1492 – *when Columbus sailed the ocean Blue*. Cristóbal Colón, as he was called in Spanish, was actually an Italian explorer financed by the Queen of Spain. Colón sailed westward from the Spanish port of Palos, in search of Japan. When he bumped into the Americas, he thought he was in India.



This trifling (13,000 Km) navigational error resulted in native Canadians being called *Indians*, a name that has stuck for about 500 years and continues in common use to this day.

After Columbus found the New World, the Spanish set about colonizing much of it. Spain claimed vast territories in South, Central, and North America, but their only settlement in what is now Canada,

was a dismal failure. The Spanish established a colony at Santa Cruz de Nuca, a tiny outpost on the west coast of Vancouver Island, in 1789. Six years later the British pushed the Spaniards off the island and they never returned.

I looked for place names that might provide evidence of Spanish – Canadian interaction. The Straits of Juan de Fuca came to mind but, as it turns out, Juan de Fuca was actually a Greek explorer who adopted the Spanish name while on an expedition for Spain. The Strait that bears his name could, more accurately, be called the Straits of Ioannis Phokas.

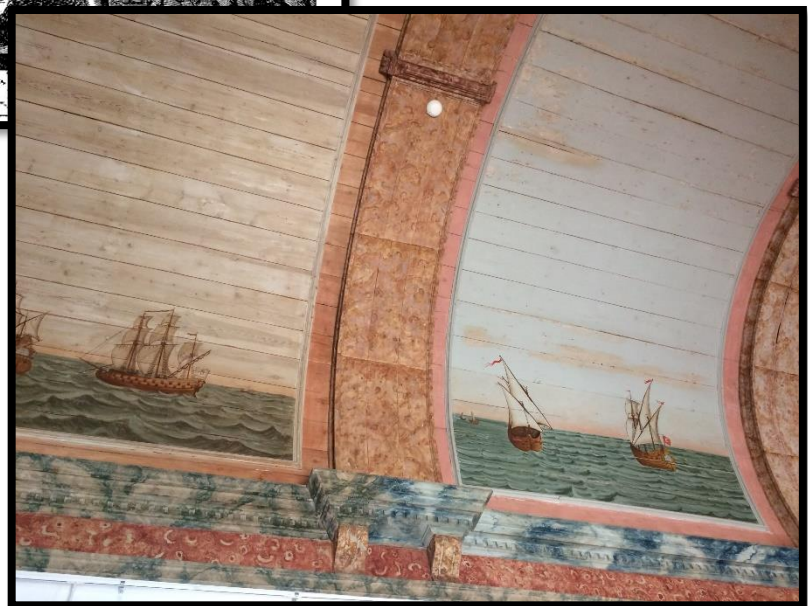
When I was a kid growing up in Arcola, SK, I read in a schoolbook that our town had been named after a Spanish city and I have held that belief for 50 years. While researching this trip I discovered that there is no such place as Arcola, Spain – never has been.

So, I am not making many Spanish-Canadian historical connections, other than a confused bunch of geographically-challenged, Hispanicised-Mediterranean explorers who couldn't find their ass with both hands.



*Stamp engraved in
Copper - by Th. de Bry*

*Ceiling of the Sintra
National Palace –
Depicting a Voyage of
Discovery*



February 1, 2017

Millarville, Alberta

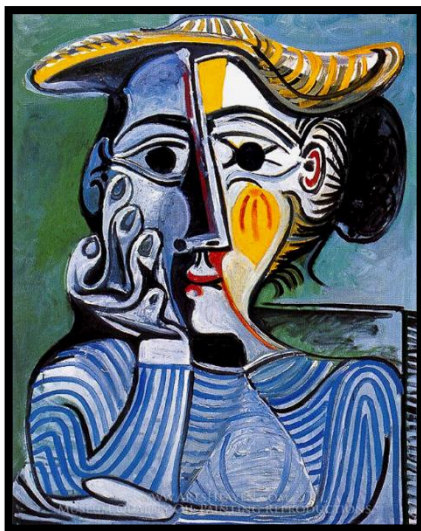
Tilting at Windmills

I wasn't having much luck making connections with Spain in a historical sense, so I turned to art, music and literature - and there I found treasure! Pablo Picasso, Miguel de Cervantes, Plácido Domingo, and a thousand other creative Spaniards have enriched the lives of generations of people around the globe.

What kind of world would it be without the songs of Julio Iglesias or Spanish actress Penélope Cruz?

It would be like music, without the guitar.

The ancient Spanish, four-string “guitarra” and its descendants are Spain's musical gift to the world. As I write this I am listening to Leona Boyd (Spanish father, Canadian mother) play Moonlight Sonata on a classical 12 string - it is audio ambrosia!



In the world of art, Spain gave us Pablo Picasso, arguably the most influential painter of the 20th century. Picasso, and his Spanish contemporaries, test our imagination; their work will continue to inspire creativity for generations to come.

You have to admire a man who can paint a picture that looks like a plate of fried running shoes, and Penelope Cruz at the same time.

Most critics agree that the greatest novel ever written is *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes. The story follows the miss-adventures of a delusional, low-rank Spanish nobleman and his squire as they set out on a quest to undo wrongs, restore chivalry and bring justice to the world.

Published in 1605, *Don Quixote* continues to influence literature and language to this day.

The Three Musketeers, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Shrek all bulge with Quixotisms’.



In fact, it was a quote from Don Quixote that got Bear and I thinking about a trip to Spain. I received a coffee table book for Christmas featuring Canadian Prairie landscapes. There was a photograph of a windmill on one page with this caption beside it:

“Pray look better, Sir... those things yonder are no giants, but windmills”.

The quote, from Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, led me to some research on the windmills of La Mancha, which led to research on the route of Don Quixote through central Spain, which led to research on Spanish towns, castles and churches, which led to me asking Bear to book us some tickets.

Buen Viaje!



Through the woodland, through the valley

Comes a horseman wild and free

Tilting at the windmills passing

Who can the brave young horseman be?

Don Quixote – Gordon Lightfoot



February 8, 2017

The Fountain of Youth

Columbus' first voyage to North America launched the Age of Discovery, and Spain jumped in with both feet. Queen Isabella sent legions of Conquistadors to colonize and spread Catholicism throughout the New World. Spanish explorer, Juan Ponce de León, was dispatched to explore the Central American islands and to search for the legendary Fountain of Youth, rumoured to be located somewhere in Florida.



The Fountain of Youth – 1546 painting by Lucas Cranach the Elder

Ponce de León was successful in annexing Hispaniola and Puerto Rico into the Spanish realm. He also made several exploratory missions into Florida, but the Fountain of Youth eluded him.

Ponce de Leon died in 1521 of wounds inflicted by a poisoned arrow in the butt, delivered by Calusa braves – he was 47.



Ponce de Leon's failure to find the Fountain of Youth has not deterred thousands of American pensioners from the quest. Seniors flock to Florida's waters in droves seeking a reprieve from the relentless effects of ageing.

No luck so far.....

February 9, 2017

Calgary to Newark to Lisbon to Madrid

Don Juan - *Tan largo me lo fiáis*

Spanish literary character, Don Juan, was the brainchild of Spanish dramatist Tirso de Molina. In 1640 de Molina created a character who gambled, drank, fought and fornicated all over the Iberian Peninsula. Handsome, womanizing characters - Don Juan wannabes - have been popping up in books and movies ever since.

Don Juan's mantra, *Tan largo me lo fiáis*, emphasizes that he is young and death is distant, so he has plenty of time to repent for his sins.

Confession and forgiveness of sin is a concept that most religions practice, with variations. In Catholicism, the belief that indiscretions performed in life may be forgiven by simple acts of contrition, confession and penance, allow the faithful a certain moral latitude that Protestants, and followers of other religions, don't have.



Don Juan by Max Slevogt

Perhaps that is why Don Juan, and Spaniards, French and Italian men in general, have a reputation of being fleet-footed lovers.

I will have to keep an eye on Bear in the company of all of these dashing libertines.

In the 4th season Cheers episode "Don Juan is Hell", Diane Chambers writes a sexual history study that suggests Sam Malone as a perfect model for Don Juanism.



February 10, 2017
Alcalá de Henares, Spain

Where babies come from.

I hadn't expected storks.

The first time we pulled the camera out in Spain it wasn't to capture a landscape or the abundant gothic architecture, it was to photograph roof-top residents of the town. On every flat spot on every roof in Alcalá de Henares there is a rough stick nest with a pair of long-legged, long-beaked storks occupying it.



Despite their lofty perch they aren't a very regal bird – they are dirty black and white, with an awkward stance. Their nests are messy, their feathers need a cleaning and their legs and beaks seem out of proportion with their hump-backed bodies.

The noise they make sounds more like a squabble than a birdsong. When they are mating, as the amorous pair out front of our hotel were, they clack their beaks like a pair of wooden castanets and gobble sweet-nothing's into their partner's ears.

After observing these urban birds for a couple of days they seem less out of place. They are quite comfortable looking down on the hustle and bustle of Place de Cervantes, raising their young and pooping on tourists.



What could be better?

Spanish Bakery Proprietor - Relatives?



Don Quixote, Sancho Panza and de la Millarville - Alcalá de Henares, Spain



Plaza de Toros - La Humosa, Spain

February 10, 2017
Catedral-Magistral de Alcalá de Henares

Pious Laughter

I love traveling with Bear. She has low expectations and can see the humour in almost every situation.

Like today, we were touring the Catedral-Magistral, an early Gothic, Roman Catholic, cathedral in Alcalá de Henares, where we are staying our first couple of nights. The church allows visitors - even a couple of clumsy Canadians. For the low price of 1€ each, we toured the nooks and crannies and cloisters of the old church, keeping just quiet enough so as not to offend the pious.

Until on the way out. We had toured the entire 16th century building, without breaking anything or causing a commotion, until Bear accidentally tripped over a kneeling bench and relocated a pew that hadn't moved since Queen Isabella was in charge.



You would have thought we had just emerged from a very funny movie as the gigantic cathedral doors clanged closed behind us and Bear let the laughter out.

*“Whoever has
guffawed
foolishly shall
do penance for
thirty days.” –
Jewish
dictum.*



February 10, 2017
El Toboso, La Mancha, Spain

Happy to Remain Insane

"...her name is Dulcinea, her country El Toboso, a village of La Mancha, her rank must be at least that of a princess, since she is my queen and lady, and her beauty superhuman, since all the impossible and fanciful attributes of beauty which the poets apply to their ladies are verified in her; for her hairs are gold, her forehead Elysian fields, her eyebrows rainbows, her eyes suns, her cheeks roses, her lips coral, her teeth pearls, her neck alabaster, her bosom marble, her hands ivory, her fairness snow, and what modesty conceals from sight such, I think and imagine, as rational reflection can only extol, not compare." [Don Quixote, about his imaginary lover, Dulcinea]



Dulcinea is a fictional character, created by a fictional character. She exists only in the muddled mind of Don Quixote. Imaginary as she may be, Dulcinea propels Don Quixote to attempt feats of extraordinary courage and gallantry. Such is the power of a beguiling woman.

I spent the day with my Dulcinea, exploring castles, looking for giants on the horizon and tilting at windmills.

If this day is but a delusion, I hope to remain insane.



February 10, 2017
La Mancha Plain, Spain

An Inconvenient Salad

The Rain in Spain Stays Mainly in the Plain – Julie Andrews – My Fair Lady

I read in *El Pais* newspaper this morning that the British call a zucchini a “courgette” and an eggplant an “aubergine”. I suppose we will let them get away with it, they invented the language after all. The problem is, Brits and the rest of Europe have a shortage of courgettes, aubergines, and a lot of other fruits and vegetables this winter.



Spain typically produces 25% of Europe’s produce, but record-setting rain, falling on the Spanish plain during December and January, has decimated crops.

Call it a tomato or a *tomoto*, if you don’t have one a salad is just lettuce.

-

In another Spanish newspaper headline; *Xylella fastidiosa*, a bacterium that kills fruit-bearing plants such as olive trees, is now threatening Spain’s agricultural sector.

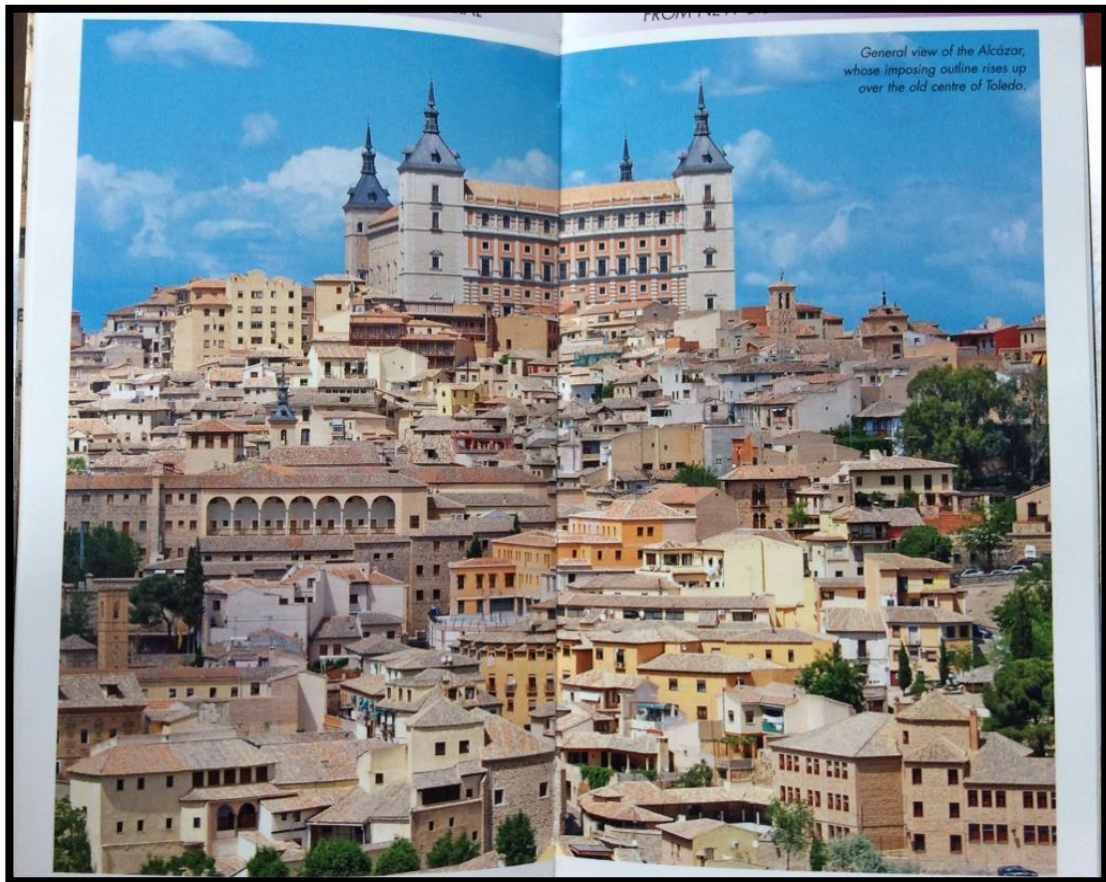
Whether weather change is man-made or natural, the inconvenient truth is; with increasing world population and declining productivity, we better get used to some missing salad ingredients.



February 11, 2017
Toledo, Spain

Travel Tip # 1:

When traveling by car in a city that looks like this:



take note of where you park. It might come in handy - assuming you want to find the vehicle again.

I was of two minds when we lost our car:

- 1) I am certain the people at Hertz would like their Opal back,

But:

- 2) "Taking the train", has a nice ring to it.

Ole!

I have driven in foreign countries before, on the left and on the right, through cobbled streets and roundabouts. I have navigated with foreign road signs, on Autobahn and freeways, but I have NEVER been in traffic like Toledo.

The roads are impossibly narrow and the map they are laid out on makes a plate of spaghetti look organized. The streets are either straight up or straight down (make that; “crooked up or crooked down”), and 100,000 pedestrians have the right-of-way.

Oh, and it was raining, and the windows kept fogging up.

The Opal is a standard so I had one hand on the shifter, one hand on the wheel, one hand on the wipers, one hand on the signal lights, and one hand on the GPS (do the math!).

I was so frazzled by the time we came to a stop I didn't so much lose the car, as abandon it.



An hour or two in La Humosa bullfight arena seemed preferable to getting back in the Opal.



February 11, 2017
Toledo, Spain

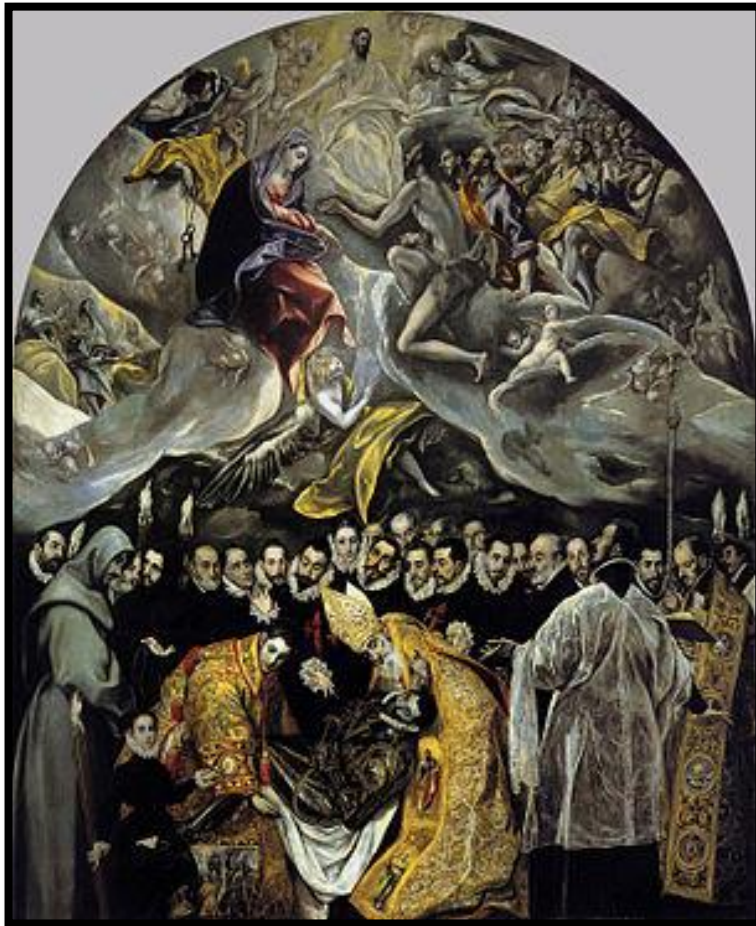
The Burial of the Count of Orgaz

You could write everything I know about art on the head of a pin, and still have room for a recipe for chicken soup.

I have been to the Vatican, the Louvre, and the Musée d'Orsay in Paris - I have seen thousands of beautiful paintings and sculpture, but I don't really understand what I am looking at.

I either like it, or I don't.

I decided to learn something about art on this trip and chose a random painting, *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* by el Greco, as a place to start. This piece hangs in the Église Santo Tomé de Tolède in the heart of Toledo, Spain.



I am determined to find the church, experience the painting and broaden my art appreciation.

February 11, 2017
Toledo, Spain

U of C - Art Appreciation Department

You have already heard what we experienced to get through Toledo, and the congestion didn't stop inside the Église Santo Tomé de Tolède.

Europeans crowded the front of the gallery, and Asians lined up on the left to await their turn, while two over-polite Canadians observed *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* from the back of the room.

I persevered and managed to get a brief, unobstructed look at the painting - it is truly magnificent.

Later, I sat down and interpreted what I thought el Greco was saying in *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*. I analysed the painting as much as I was able and then researched it on-line.

My analysis was both boring, and dead wrong. I have attached it as an appendage to this blog, along with a link to a professional analysis, but I recommend you NOT read it.

If I am ever to become an experienced art critic, I will have to start a long way back, maybe as far as the University of Crayola.



February 12, 2017
Cordoba, Spain

Here be Dragons.

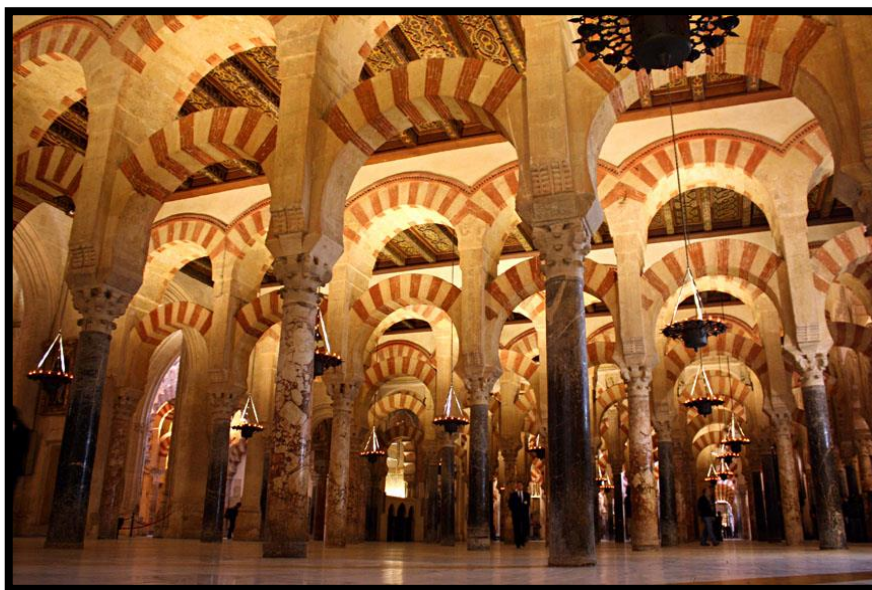
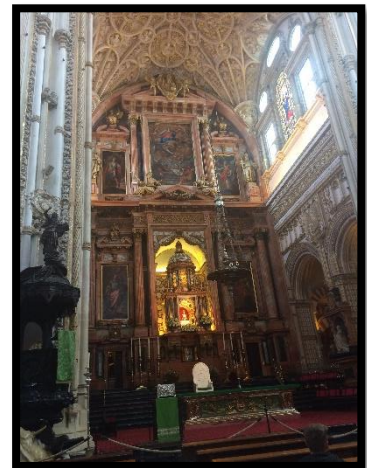
A physicist from Cordoba, Ibn Hazm (994–1064 AD) argued and calculated the speed of sound by echoes in the Mosque of Cordoba. He is credited as being the first to propose that thunder was a production of lightening.



Hazm was also the first to consider a Spherical Earth Theory - which came in handy when Columbus set out from Spain to find Japan.

Otherwise, he might have encountered Dragons.

Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption



Great Mosque of Cordoba

Granada

The Spanish cities of Cordoba, Seville and Granada all inspired American car makers to name automobiles after them. Cordoba and Seville can be proud of this - Granada, on the other hand, might want to consider a lawsuit.



Ford Granada



Cordoba Farm Equipment Dealership

February 12, 2017
Aracena, Spain

Why We Travel

In the January 23, 2017 English edition of *The Local ES* newspaper, columnist Alberto Letona lists a number of typical Spanish traits or customs that foreigners just don't get:

1. We are very noisy,
2. We go to bed late,
3. We kit ourselves for sport (buy expensive exercise clothing and equipment),
4. We like to be in a crowd,
5. We like to party...a lot,
6. We are a contradiction in terms (Agnostic by day, Religious by tradition),
7. We pace up and down the beach,
8. We all want to work in the public sector,
9. We abandon our offices en masse at 11am (for long, long coffee breaks)
and
10. We don't do queuing – nobody honours a line-up.

Surely we have something in common with Spaniards, let's go down the list:

1. Nope,
2. Nope,
3. Nope,
4. Nope,
5. Nope,
6. Nope,
7. Nope,
8. Nope,
9. Nope,



and

10. Nope.

We have nothing in common with these people – **which is why we travel.**



A Great Dad - Bullfight Practice in the Plaza

February 13, 2017
Carmona, Andalusia, Spain

A Pair of Andalusians

The Champs Elysees in Paris, undoubtedly one of the most famous streets in the world, is named in honour of southern Spain's Andalusian fields. We are perched on the balcony of a 14th century Arab castle, overlooking those fields, stretching to a distant range of mountains to the south.

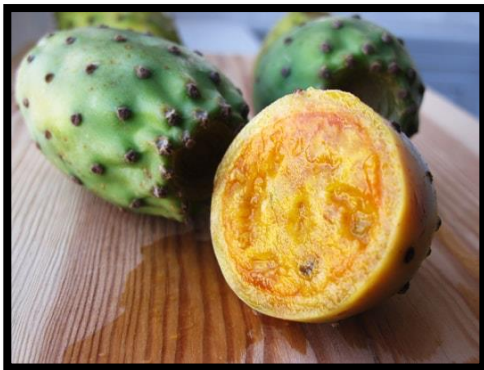


The Andalusian region has been continuously inhabited for more than 5,000 years; the castle we are staying in has *only* been here for about 650 years. Change happens very slowly in Andalusia; when you are this close to perfection, there is little need to alter course.

Roosters crow, a dog barks and a donkey brays.

Our meal on the balcony is simple; a loaf of bread, a lump of cheese, wine and an orange picked from a nearby tree.

I can't predict the future, but the next three or four hours on this balcony seems likely.



An Andalusian Pear, and a Pair of Andalusians.



February 13, 2017

Carmona, Andalusia, Spain

Travel Tip #2

When traveling by car in Spain, three tools should be carried at all times: A Shoehorn, a Can Opener and a Corkscrew.....



The shoehorn is necessary to get the car through narrow passageways (like the one on the left) and into parking stalls. The can-opener comes in handy to extricate the car from those tight spots. And the corkscrew can be used to open bottles of stress-reliever, once you get home.

Calle de Yougottabekiddin.

We drove down this street the day we arrived in Carmona. It seems a bit narrow in the picture, but in reality, it's worse! The zig I was standing in when I took the picture is about four inches wider on each side than the car mirrors, the zag up ahead (the one where some genius installed a utility box) is about 8 inches narrower yet.

There was no posted speed limit, but .001 Kmh seems about right.

Gadir - Guard Dog Extraordinaire

This big friendly mutt watched over our place in Sintra. We never saw a single burglar, so he is obviously a very effective *guarda*.

He wasn't above taking bribes of meat or cheese though.



February 14, 2017
Valentines Day - Carmona, Spain

A Case of You

We walked by an antique store and heard the most beautiful voice singing in Portuguese. I bought a CD from the shop and was surprised to hear a Canadian song on the list when I played it later.

*Oh I could drink a case of you darling
And I would still be on my feet
I would still be on my feet*

A Case of You

Written by Canadian, Joni Mitchell
Performed by Portuguese, Ana Moura

Check out the link below:



Ana Moura - Desfado

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3c7etWevJY&list=RDB3c7etWevJY#t=0>

February 15, 2017
Aracena, Extremadura

Being Dali



The Persistence of Memory - Dali

Spain has produced some colourful characters – artist Salvador Dali is their poster child. His surrealist paintings sprang from an abstract, some would say disturbed, mind.

Dali was known to wear fantastic costumes including a deep-sea diving suit (while carrying a billiard cue and leading a pair of Russian wolfhounds).

He wrote an erotic cookbook, always sported a spectacular moustache, and once showed up at a masquerade party dressed as the dead Lindbergh baby.

Salvador Dalí's mental issues may have been attributable to his upbringing – when he was five years old his parents took him to his brother's gravesite and told him he was the reincarnation of his older sibling, also named Salvador. Several of Dalí's paintings feature images of his deceased brother, including the aptly named, *Portrait of My Dead Brother*.



Salvador Dalí frequently traveled with his pet ocelot Babou. When signing autographs for fans, Dalí would always keep their pens. In the 1960s, he gave the actress Mia Farrow a dead mouse in a bottle, hand-painted.



Dali appeared in public on a number of occasions with an anteater.

Nothing moderated Dalí's eccentric behaviour, in fact he was quite proud of his persona:

"every morning upon awakening, I experience a supreme pleasure: that of being Salvador Dalí"

Salvador Dali died on January 23, 1989 at Figueres, Spain, and the world is slightly less surreal.



An apparition emerges from a temple on the sea, riding a magnificent beast. The creature's body is covered with colourful robes and plates of impenetrable steel. A monster (or a God?) carrying a stick which thunders death upon the people.

Warriors, women and children die by the thousands, breathing air exhausted from the lungs of this creature.

Its name is Conquistador.

February 15, 2017
Badajoz, Extremadura, Spain

The Man in the Moon

The quest for today is to find a Conquistador and get to know him.

Vasco Núñez de Balboa, one of Spain's more colourful Conquistadors, and a native of Badajoz in the autonomous region of Extremadura, about 200 km north of Seville, seems like a good choice. We got up early and pointed the Opal north, to see if we could locate Balboa.

We arrived in Badajoz about 550 years too late to actually meet Balboa, but his legacy is alive and well.

Vasco de Balboa was the third son of a minor nobleman, so his prospects of inheritance were limited. His family was on good terms with the owner of the Santa Maria, one of the ships on Columbus' voyage of discovery. The Santa Maria was returning to the New World and Balboa arranged to sail with it, to seek his fortune.



Vasco de Balboa, and hundreds of other young men like him, were lured into service for the Spanish Crown as Conquistadors. Their mission was to annex land for Spain and to spread Christianity, for which they would be rewarded by adventure and four-fifths of any plunder they captured - one Royal Fifth (Quinto Real) being retained by the Crown.

I won't go into detail of Vasco de Balboa's adventures and accomplishments, you can find a full account on Wiki, but I will list some of the highlights:

Balboa sailed to the islands of Central America in 1501 and managed to steal enough gold from the natives to finance a pig farm in Hispaniola (Haiti), which he operated for several years.

The farm was not a financial success and by 1509, he was deeply in debt. To avoid his creditors Balboa stowed away on an expedition ship (in a barrel, with his dog).

Balboa and *Leoncico* were discovered and the captain of the expedition, Fernández de Enciso, ordered that they be left on the next uninhabited island. Balboa, sensing that the crew disliked Enciso, befriended them. The men pleaded Balboa's case and were successful in convincing Enciso that Balboa's knowledge of the Caribbean islands warranted keeping him on board.



In a masterful piece of diplomacy, Balboa rose from stowaway to the de-facto leader of the expedition. He eventually deposed Enciso and rose to the position of Mayor of Santa María, and Governor of Veragua.

One of Balboa's first acts as governor was to put Fernández de Enciso on trial for assuming the governor's authority. Enciso was sentenced to prison and his possessions were confiscated.

The Enemy of my Enemy is my Friend

Balboa used the tactic of recruiting the enemies of his enemies, to build a sizeable army. In the years following the deposition of Fernández de Enciso, Balboa battled native tribes throughout Central America and relieved them of their gold and possessions.





Balboa was a cruel combatant, even by 16th century standards. He battled mercilessly, killing chiefs, taking slaves and pressing enemies into service for him.

Even in his down time, Balboa couldn't resist brutality. In the engraving on the left, Balboa is seen setting his dogs upon Indian homosexuals, just for sport.

Balboa collected a great deal of gold through violence and his quest for the precious metal took him through vast unexplored territory.

In September of 1513 Balboa literally reached the end of the earth; his travels had taken him across the Isthmus of Panama and he became the first European to reach the Pacific Ocean from the west.

Despite success as a Conquistador, Balboa was never able to convert those accomplishments into a successful political career. In 1518 Balboa ran afoul of his father-in-law, Pedrarias Davila, and his old enemy Fernandez de Enciso. Balboa was charged with treason, tried, convicted, and sentenced to death.

On January 15, 1519, Vasco Nunez de Balboa died as he had lived, by a blow to the neck with a broadsword.

History has an odd tendency to honour feats of exploration, no matter the methods employed to fulfil those achievements.

Vasco de Balboa has monuments erected in his honour from Madrid to Panama City. His likeness has appeared on coins and stamps. Streets, bridges, parks and buildings all bear his name.

There is even a crater on the moon named, Balboa.

Hero to some, monster to many.



February 15, 2017
(Not in) Catalonia, Spain

Gold, Frankincense, Myrrh and *Caganer*?

Are you sitting down? You might want to.

I had to find a quiet place to ponder this Spanish tradition, it just doesn't rest easy on the mind, until you sit quietly and think about it for a while.

Ok, so it is not really a *Spanish* tradition, it is confined to the specific region of Catalonia, and then only to areas within the province where the traditional Catalan language is spoken. It is traditionally a Christmas ritual, but it is gaining popularity throughout the year.



Catalans have their own language and culture, unique foods, pageantry and traditions, all of which distinguish them from their Spanish and French neighbours. But the particular custom I am talking about, the Caganer (the Shitter) is a tradition that makes Catalans entirely unique.

Every Christmas Catalans display the Nativity scene in their homes. Mixed in with Joseph, Mary, the baby Jesus, the Three Wise Men, the animals, etc., is a little ceramic man squatting down and pooping.

The Shitter became a central part of every Catalan Nativity scene sometime in the 17th century and he has been there ever since. According to Caganer.com (yes, they have a website), “with his poop, the Shitter is nourishing the ground of the Nativity scene to make the next year’s harvest better.” The website goes on to say; “Putting the Shitter in the Nativity scene brings luck and happiness, not putting it in brings misfortune.”

Kids are encouraged to join in the fun. Catalan parents place the Shitter in a different position in the Nativity scene each day; then the family tell stories and play “Where’s the Shitter?”

Fun *and* Educational!

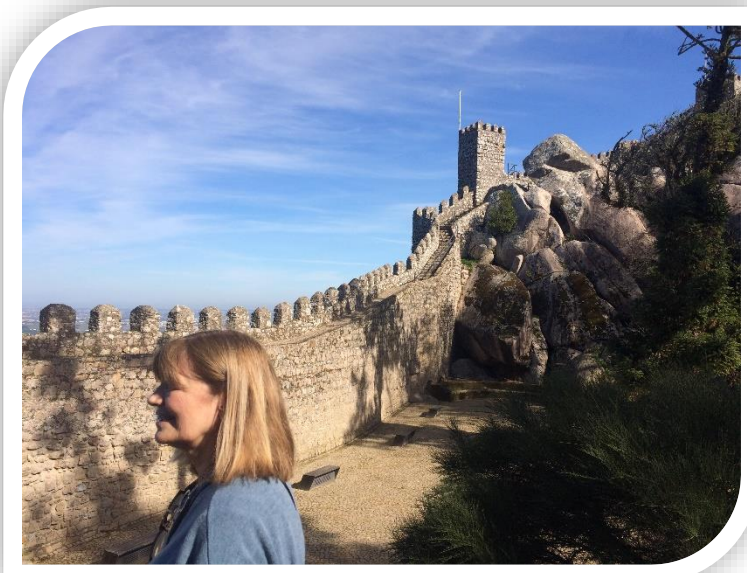
As with so many good things, the Shitter has gone commercial. Ceramic Shitters modeled after famous people are sold around the world on Caganer.com. The most popular figurine this year is the Donald J Trump Shitter.

Not surprising, when he is so full of it.

Never a dull moment in Catalonia!



Pena National Palace, Sintra, Portugal



*A Queen in her Moorish
Castle - Sintra*



February 16, 2017
Sintra, Portugal

Sixth Sense

I love to travel, but hate to arrive. Conquistador, Hernan Cortes.

We have driven about 1400 km in a meandering route from Madrid to Sintra, Portugal. Every Km of the journey has been sensational - for about 5 Km in Toledo the sensation was terror, but the other 1395 km have been filled with positive emotion – every twist in the road has presented new wonders.



Most of the sensations are visual, but there are tastes, sounds, smells, and feelings to discover as well. Like the aroma of 5,000 ripe oranges being raked from the ground in Córdoba. Or the *screeeee* of a hunting falcon, and the tinkle of bells as it lands on the leather glove of the falconer.



We felt the wind, straining to turn ancient mills, tasted olives and traditional paella, and



were held in awe at the view from our castle window.

Another sense would be required to



enhance the experience.

February 17, 2017
Sintra, Portugal

Os Lusiadas

Everywhere I go in Portugal I see images of the same one-eyed man. He first peeked out at me on a wall tile in a gift shop, then I saw him on a book cover. When I spotted the bearded cyclops in a portrait hanging in a restaurant, I decided it was time to find out who he was.

The book I had seen him on the cover of was a collection of poetry, so I Googled “Portuguese” +” poet” and, bam! – there he was - **Luís Vaz de Camões**.



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Camões is considered Portugal's greatest literary hero, in fact, Portuguese is known as “the language of Camões”; his collected writing is a compendium of Portuguese nationalism.

June 10th, the date of Camões death, is a national holiday in Portugal.

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But Camões wasn't always a hero. In 1546, he had a dalliance with a lady-in-waiting to the Queen, the next year he took a run at the King's sister,

Princess Maria. These two incidents, and a not-so-kind reference to the King, earned Camões a prolonged exile from Lisbon.

He joined the militia during his exile and, in a battle against the Moors in Morocco, Camões lost his right eye.

He moved back to Lisbon in 1551 and tried to keep a low profile – but it didn't work. In 1552, during the religious festival of Corpus Christi, Camões injured a member of the Royal Stables. He was fined 4000 réis and sentenced to another three years in the militia – this time in the Orient.

During his forced military service Camões started writing. His first public script was war correspondence, and letters home, written on behalf of the uneducated men of the fleet. When his mandatory service ended Camões was given the position of Chief Warrant Officer in Macau, a Portuguese colony in south-east Asia. It was during his time in Macau that Camões began writing his epic poem *Os Lusiadas* (*The Lusiads*).

Despite a solid career and an ambitious writing project, Camões still couldn't put bad habits behind him. As Warrant Officer he managed assets of missing and deceased soldiers. Some of those assets found their way into Camões' possession and he was charged with misappropriation.

On his way to Goa, to face a tribunal on the accusations, he was shipwrecked near the Mekong River along the Cambodian coast. Camões swam to shore holding the unfinished manuscript over his head. While Camões and the manuscript were saved, his Chinese lover, Dinamene, drowned in the shipwreck.

Camões finally made it back to Lisbon in 1570 and published *The Lusiads*, which achieved instant acclaim. So popular was the poem, it elevated Camões to distinction as the most prominent poet of his time. The new King, Sebastian, granted Camões accolades, and a pension for "service to his country".

For all his faults, Camões was, first and foremost, a patriot. In 1578 he wrote: *"All will see that so dear to me was my country that I was content to die not only in it but with it"*.

Camões died in Lisbon in 1580, at the age of 56.

*'Had there been more of the world',
Camões wrote of Portuguese
explorers, 'they would have
discovered it.'*



February 20, 2017

Cabo de Roca, Portugal

Punctuation Mark

We have gone as far west as we are able, without getting wet. Continental Europe is behind us; at Cabo de Roca, the Atlantic Ocean stretches to the horizon.

It is tempting to go further, to find a boat and let the wind decide the next adventure.....

Russ & Bear



Spain and Portugal held its allure until they ran out of ground to build it on. This little town, with its white houses and red tile roofs, clinging to the last rock on the continent, is a perfect punctuation mark, at the end of a beautiful journey.



