

April in Portugal – Total Travelogue

Apr 2 – 17, 2013

Subj: April in Portugal Travelogue #1 Date: 4/6/2013

Hi Guys,

Well, we are starting a new adventure! We left the "Blue Lagoon", (our winter residence at Tom & Marge Brown's for the winter in Mesa) with our neighbors, Tom & Marge & Bob & Joanne Wilson. Tom & Marge's son Daniel took us to the airport so that part was certainly easy!! We arrived plenty early and enjoyed some relaxing social time prior to boarding!



We had an easy flight out of Phoenix last night, short layover at London Heathrow and an uneventful landing in Lisbon (Lisboa in local lingo) this evening! Marge got some nice pictures of how green Lisbon appears from the air.



The landing in Lisbon was easy and Customs was amazing. No paperwork other than showing our passports. The security guard was very friendly. When I commented on how beautiful & green Portugal was from the air, the guard responded that the reason for that was "It is winter!" He said it was usually very brown & dry except during the winter!! If that is true, it makes me even happier that we are seeing in early Spring! It's still green & lush!!!





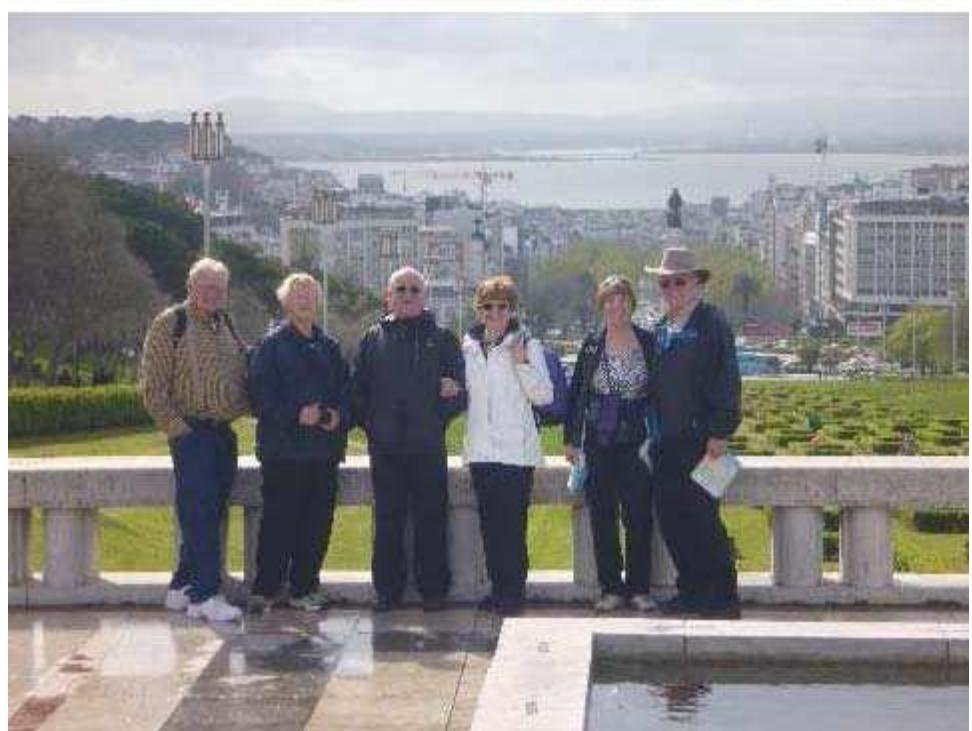


The Uniworld folks met us at the airport and whisked us across town to the Tiara Hotel. We checked into our Queen deluxe room on the 9th floor and were thrilled to see the view from the room!!! We can see the Castle in the distance on the river! It's a gorgeous room! Tom & Marge are right next door!



The hotel is a 4 star and is really beautiful!









Thursday morning we got up about 8am and enjoyed our first buffet breakfast at the hotel! Geez, I'm gaining weight already! Forgot to take pictures (I'll try to get some before we leave!!), but there are 2 kinds of scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, about 6 kinds of fresh fruit, loads of homemade bread, pancakes, crepes, cereal, sweet breads, and loads of cheese & cold meats. Not to mention lovely fresh squeezed orange juice & fresh strong coffee!!! Even champagne (haven't taken advantage of that!).

Anyway, after getting checked in with our Uniworld guide, we headed over to the Gulbenkian Museum. It was about a mile away over the quint little cobble stone streets. We enjoyed walking past a lovely city view out to the river and across the Eduardo VII city park to the statue of Marques de Pombel.

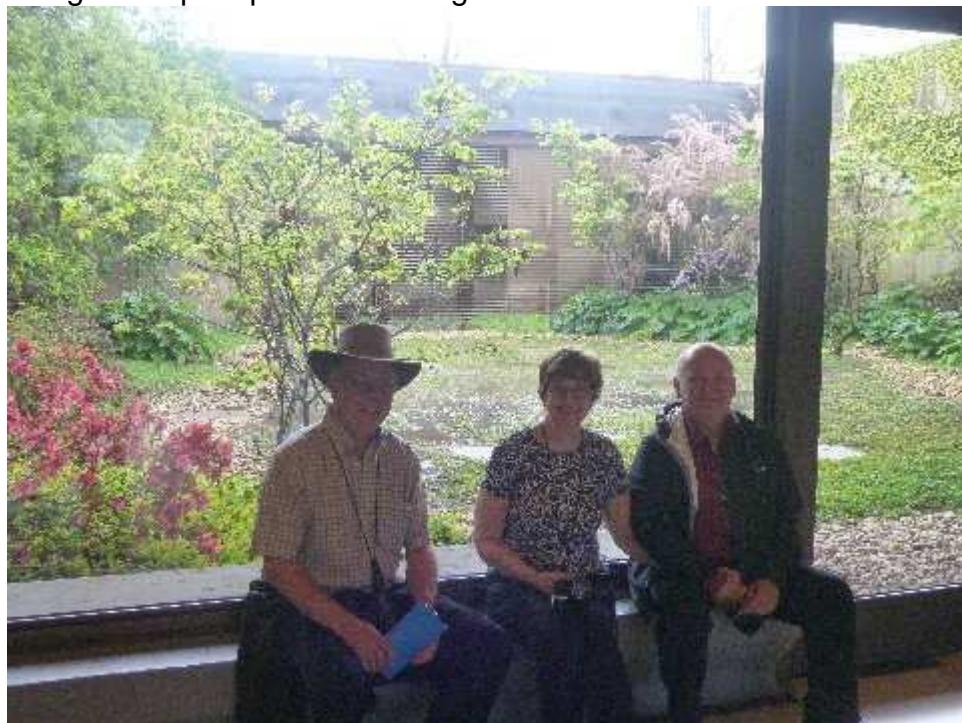
Unfortunately, Marge fell on the slick cobblestone and although we didn't realize it at the time, she broke a bone just before the elbow joint.



To return the favor of our photography of Bob in Russia after his fall, he took a picture of Marge immediately afterwards!!!



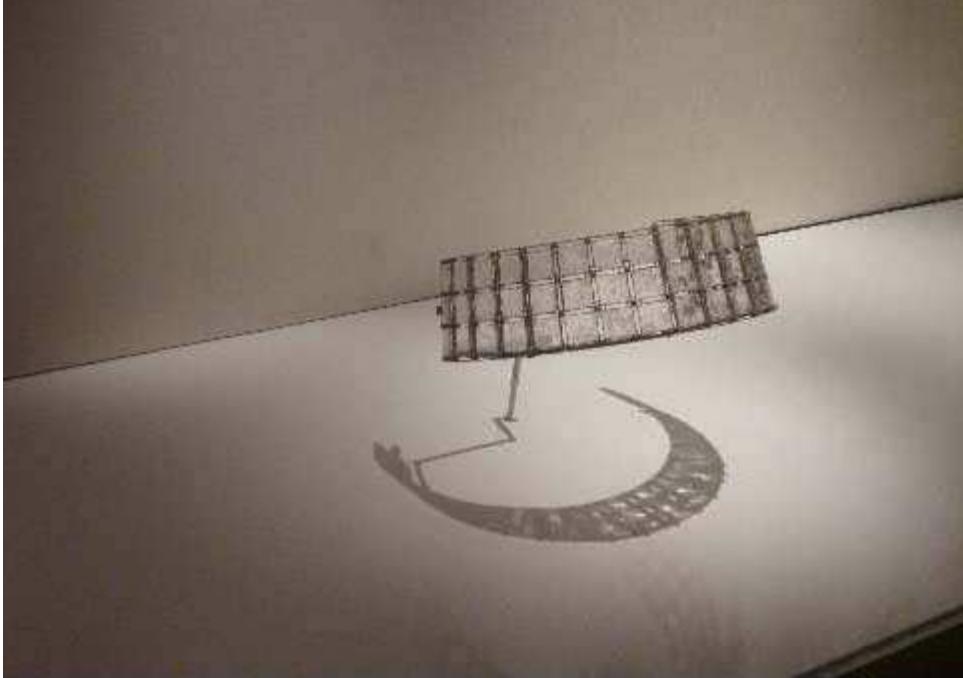
We didn't find out until later, but she ended up having to make a visit to a local private hospital where they reset it and put her in a cast until she gets back to the US in a couple of weeks. She is in some pain (getting easier every day), but she's a real trooper and doesn't want to leave the vacation, so she'll keep on with us using some pain pills and a sling!!











When Tom & Marge headed back to the hotel, we went on to the museum with Bob & Joanne. It was very interesting -a collection from the early 1900's by a multimillionaire that escaped Germany prior to the Nazi occupation. He had collected everything from Egyptian artifacts to European furniture to Turkish rugs. There was an amazing collection of jewelry. He died in 1955 and willed everything to the Portuguese government for a public museum. It was really interesting!!

Anyway, I'm falling asleep and I've got to call it quits for tonight!!

Miss you all and more later!!!!

Lots of love,



George & Pamela

Subj: April in Portugal #2 Date: 4/8/2013

Hi Everyone,

Things are going well here! We're all really impressed with Lisbon! Such a nice city!



We had a short meeting with our guide & our trip mates on our first evening here.







Then the matter at hand was to head to dinner to celebrate Joanne's birthday. We choose a restaurant that was recommended by Pilar, our guide as a Mom & Pop restaurant with good food, but not much English, so an interesting experience!! I sang Happy Birthday to him to try & explain that it was Joanne's birthday. He definitely understood because after our meal he showed up with a cake with candles and actually sang to her in Portuguese!!! Marvelous!!!





Finished up with an after party in our room! Great first full day!!! Well, could have been better if Marge didn't have the accident, but at least we're all still here!!!!



And our first full day with Uniworld was wonderful. Except that it started a bit too early! I got up before I do for any session in Mesa!!! A little before 7am!! But it wa sa beautiful sunny day -although a little too windy! Had another nice breakfast at the hotel buffet (got to get some pictures!!!!) and then onto Bus #2 with Pilar, our guide & Tom, Marge, Bob & Joanne who of course beat us onto the bus!!!





Drove past the historical Aquaduct (no longer needed or functional) and through the National Forest Park on Hwy A5, passing the going to work in Lisbon traffic jam!!! Pilar figured everyone we saw was going to be late for work!!!









First stop was the Belem Tower. This 100' fortress was built in the 16th Century of a rare local pale limestone on the Targus River. It looked amazing against that beautiful blue sky!!





At the same stop was an airplane statute to commemorate the first transAtlantic flight across by Portuguese pilots.

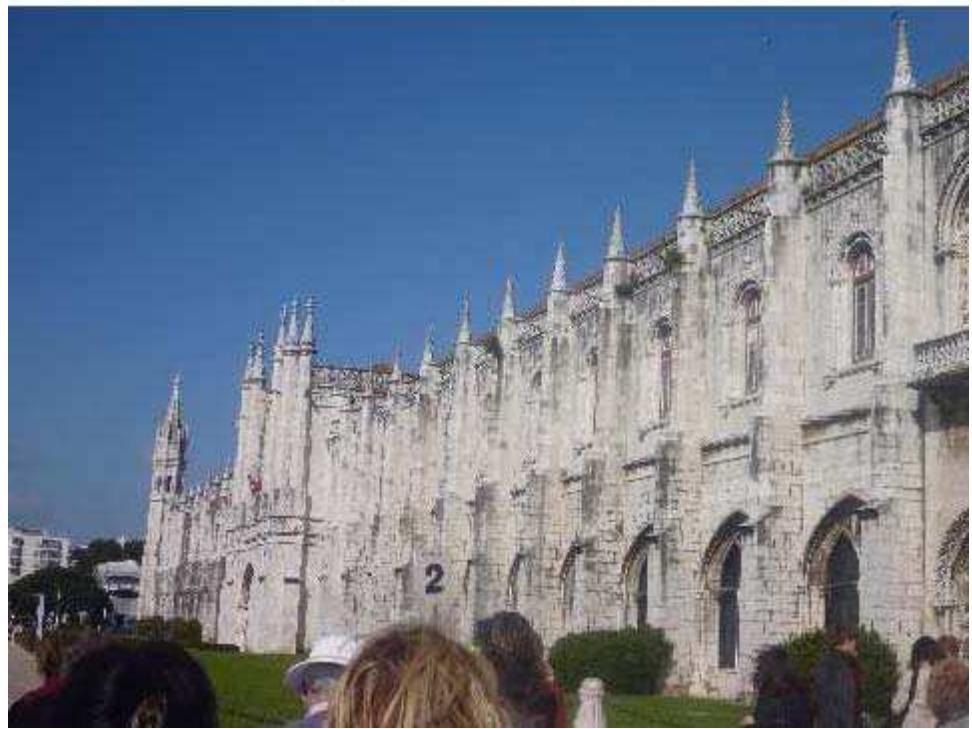


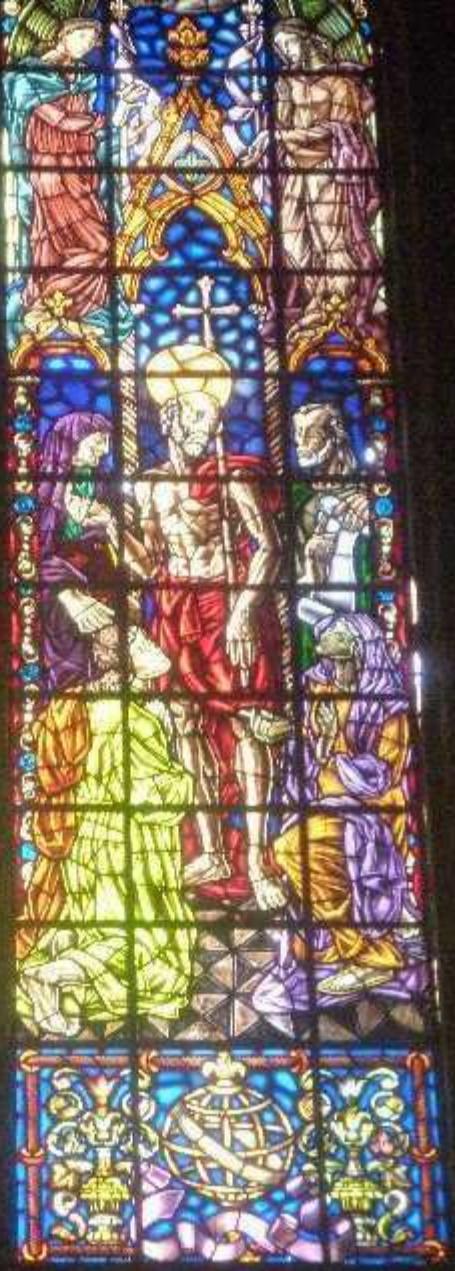


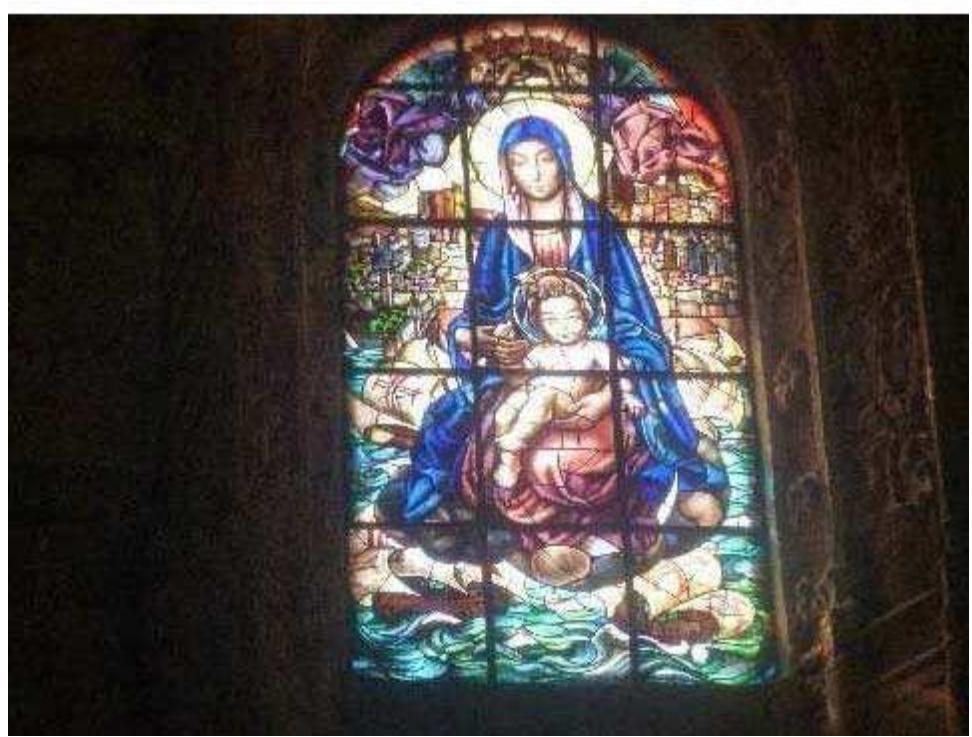


Padrão dos Descobrimentos Monument was our next stop, just about a block away. It is a huge monument celebrating the Portuguese Age of Discovery built on the Targus River. There are 33 individuals represented, but the main one is Henry the Navigator. And Vasco de Gamas.











Then on to the St. Jeronimo Monastery. It was really only across the street, but took about 15 minutes to get there because of all the one way streets. This was where Vasco de Gamas is buried. At least parts of him.

He was originally buried in a grave with 4 other individuals, so when they decided to move him, they just took several bones to place in the tomb.







After a hard couple of hours of sightseeing, we made the best stop! Actually walked there from the monastery. Belem Pastries (we actually stopped at the factory!) is famous in Lisbon for their creme cakes. Kinda like a creme brelee' in a pastry. They were yummy yummy!!!



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Our Morning tour ended with a walk through the Alfama neighborhood. It is the oldest district in Lisbon and still an active home for many folks. The homes were very very close together and originally didn't have electricity, so now the wires are run along the outside of the buildings -gotta have it for their satellite dishes!!! One home had a canary that was singing loud & long!! The neighborhood is self contained with their own shops, restaurants, etc. Saw a guy delivering bottles of wine!! Pilar said that many of them would hollar from one doorway to the other inviting each other to lunch or something! Several of them gave our tourist group dirty looks. They weren't particularly happy about our visit!!!

They dropped us off in the main square of Old Town Lisbon and we spent the afternoon on our own!!! But that will have to be a separate Tour Guide!

Enough for now! Love & Miss you! Hope things are going well back home!

Lots of love,



George & Pamela

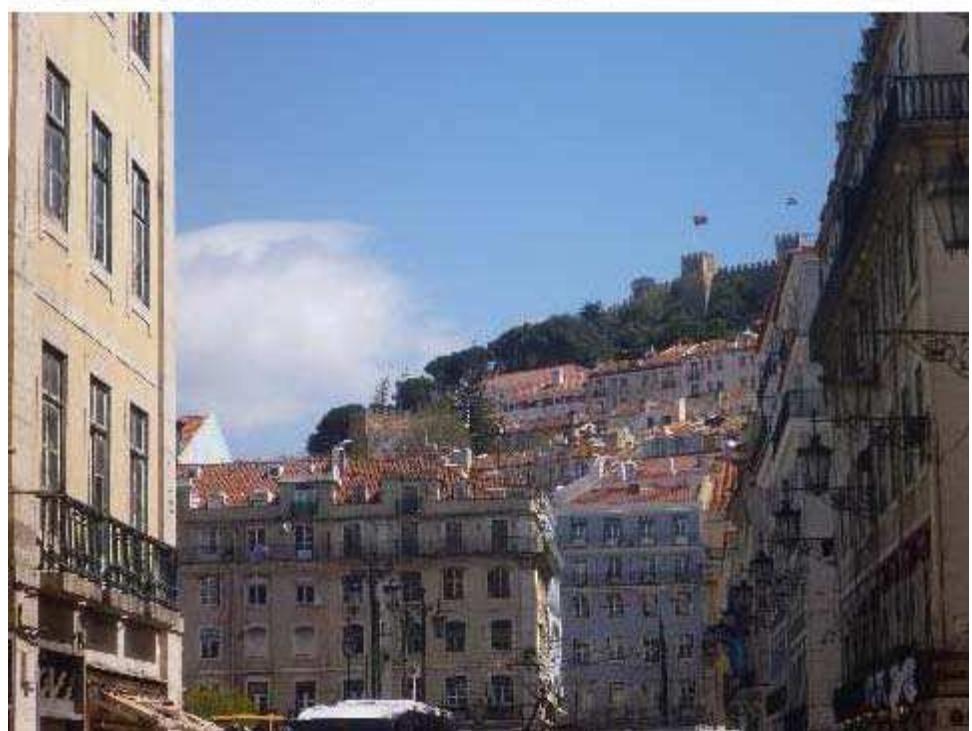
Subj: April in Portugal #3 -Afternoon in Lisbon Date: 4/9/2013

Good evening everyone!

After we finished the Morning city tour, we took Pilar's advice on a lunch restaurant and headed across the town square..







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The restaurant was Joao do Grao. This was a street of restaurants - all with outdoor seating, but the wind kept us from enjoying that and most folks were moved inside (except for a few hardy souls! I enjoyed a salad and the lovely soup common to Portugal called with just vegetable soup or cabbage soup. Our guide gave us the instructions for it - started with a clove of garlic, a leek, 5 T of olive oil, & a pound of sliced potatoes & carrots. That is all cooked until tender, then pureed. Then cabbage & some shredded carrots are added and it's all boiled again. I have had several versions of it, sometimes squash is a substitute for the potatoes and sometimes spinach for the cabbage. Apparently it is a staple of Portuguese meals and quite lovely. The others ordered lamb or pork or fish and most plates also included creamed spinach & broccoli. All the meals have been quite tasty and prices have been fairly reasonable -\$10 to \$15 per entree. The meals are generally a very relaxed atmosphere, the Portuguese enjoy their meals as a social time to relax and converse. One thing that was pointed out to us is that just after you are seated the waiters start to load up your table with baskets of bread, saucers of olives & other appetizers. They are all very tasty and all are charged for as extras at the end of the meal! It can be quite a shock if you are not aware that they are a la carte!! Even if you don't eat them, if you allow them to be placed on your table, they will charge for them as they can't be reused once they have been on your table! They aren't doing it to be mean or anything, that's just the local custom. If you don't want them, you have to mention it as they swoop in to cover your table!! They are very gracious about it and it's not a problem as long as you know!! The items are not extremely expensive (about \$2 for a basket of

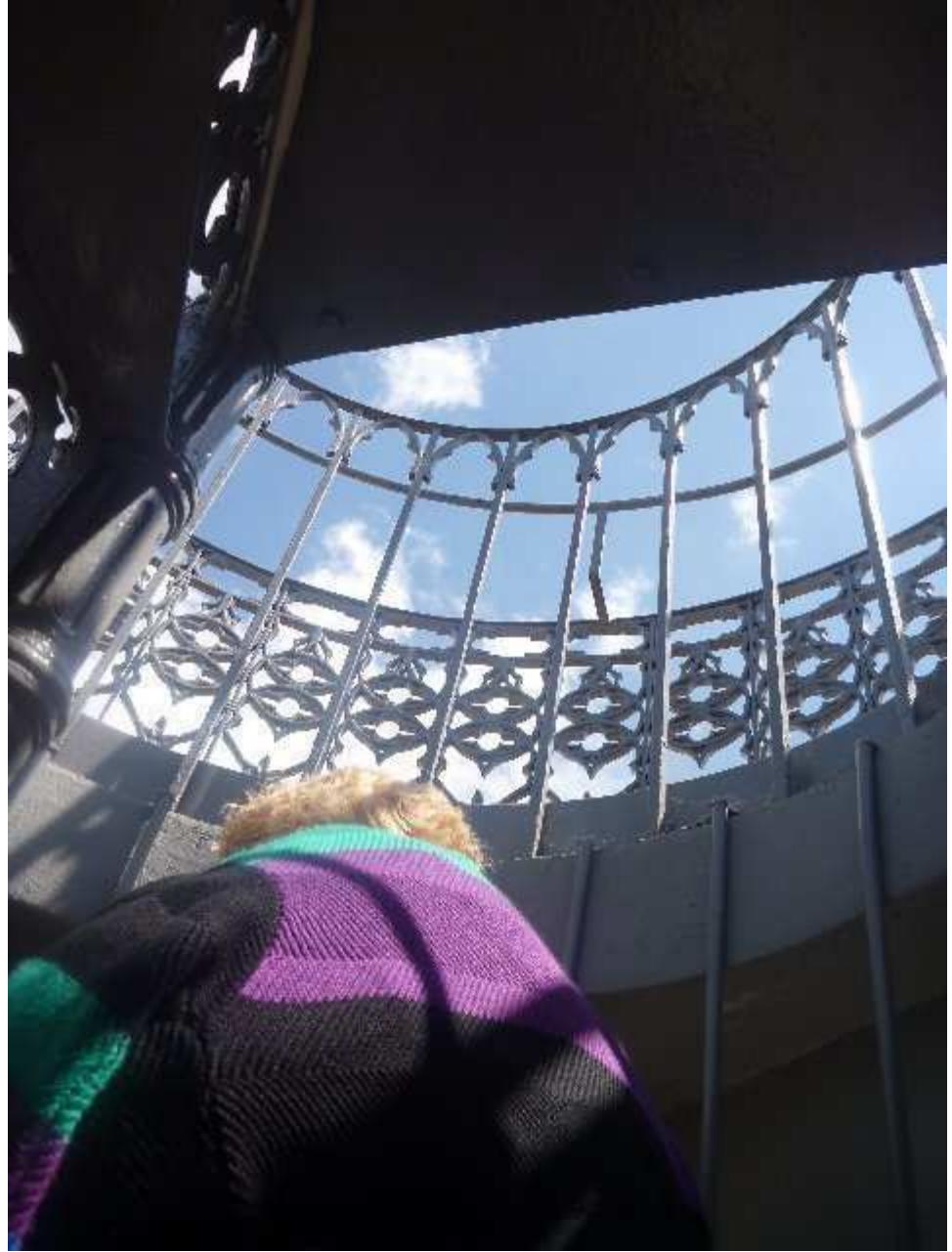
bread and \$1 or so for the bowl of olives), but it can add up to quite a shock if you are not expecting it!!! We usually allowed the olives and the bread as the bread was absolutely wonderful and the olives are a local delicacy and yummy!!







Marge, George & I took the elevator for views of Old Lisbon. Bob & Joanne had been on it when they were here a few years back & Tom decided he would rather stay below.





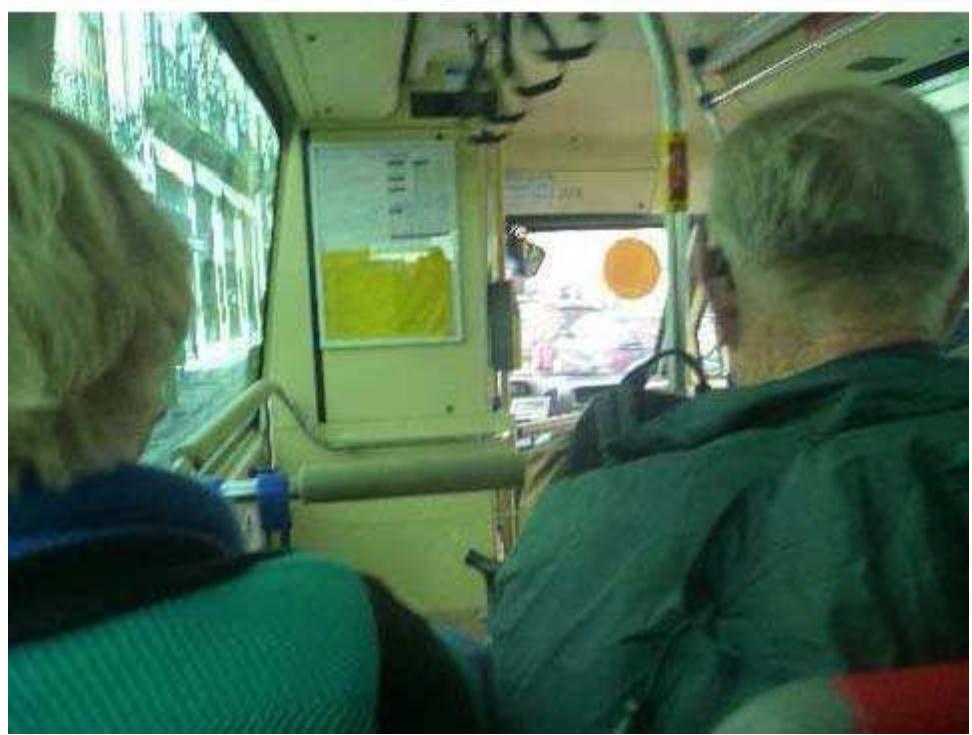






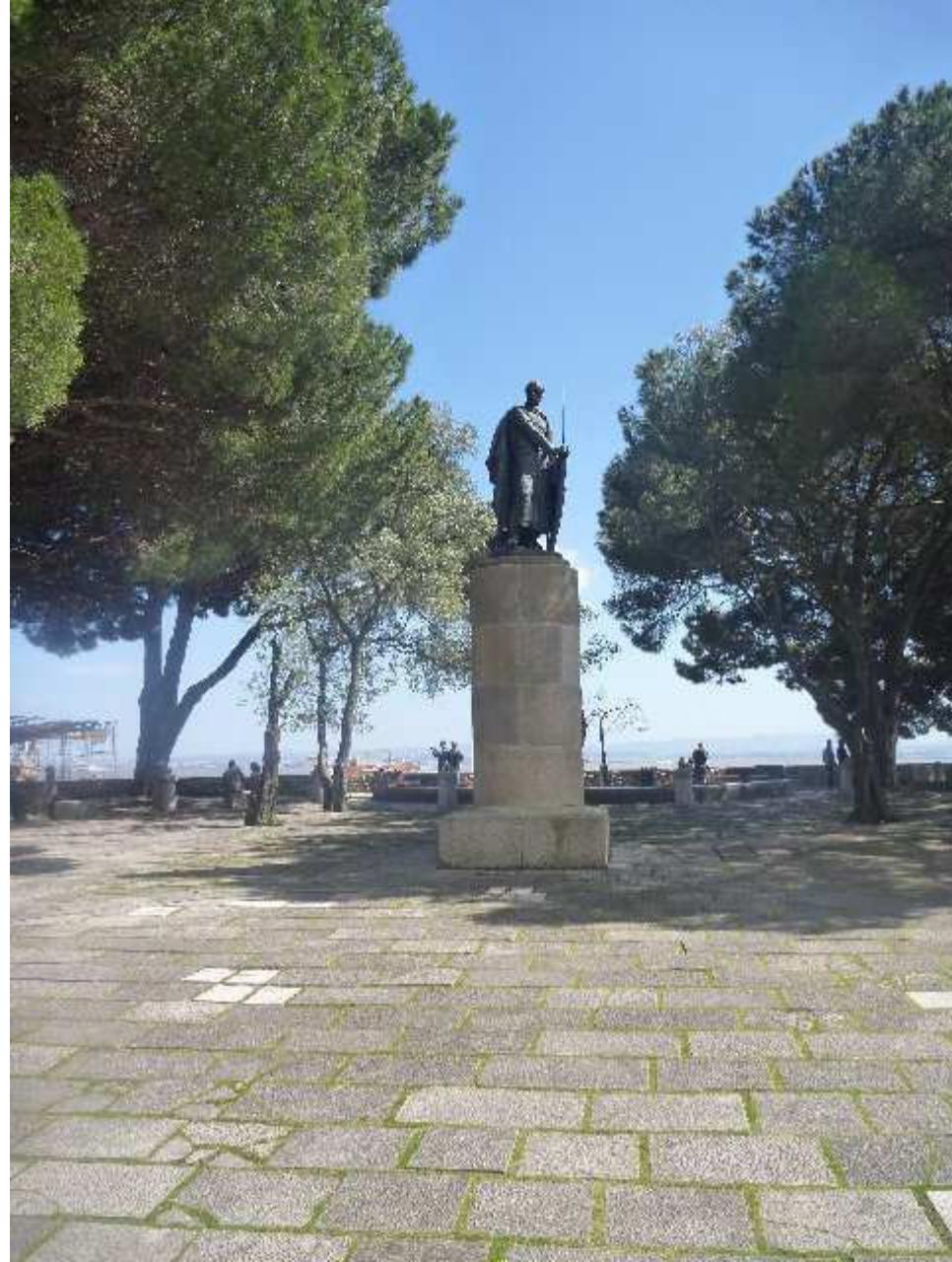
When you get off the elevator at the top, there was a spiral staircase to get up a few more feet. The views were incredible! We leaned over the side and got a glimpse of Bob down below!! We got great views of the St George Castle over on the hilltop beside us. Looked very inviting!

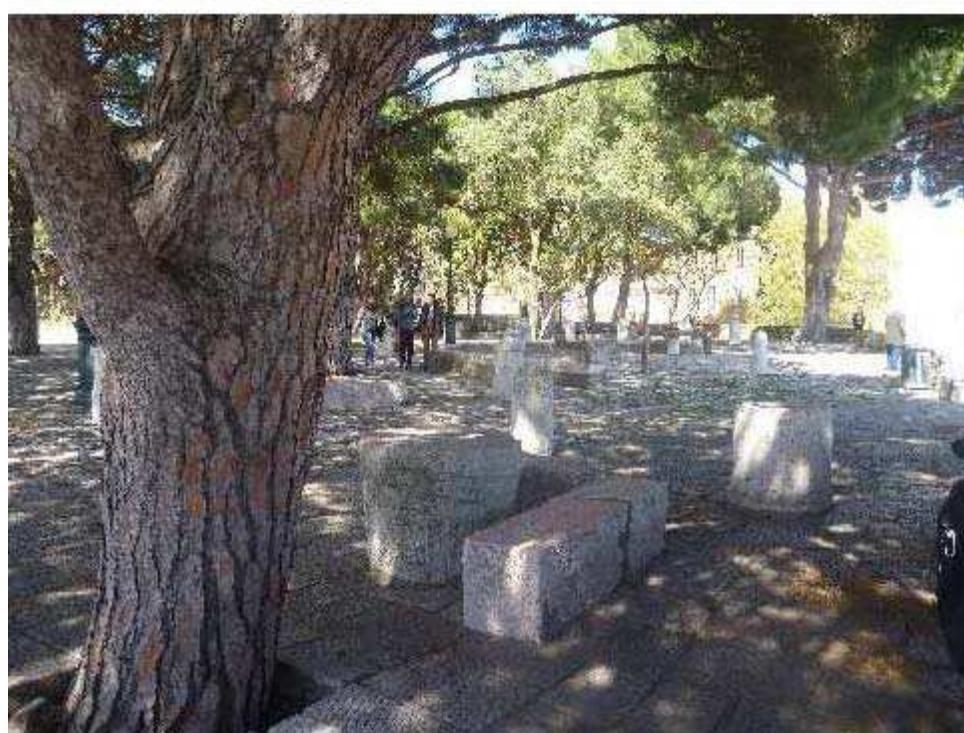






After a short stop for postcard shopping, we decided to take the little "matchbox" bus up to St George's castle. It was less than half the size of a regular bus, you can see it on the bottom right of the picture. .Had to visit George's namesake! You could walk up to the castle, but were advised that it was very steep and would take more time than we had available and the little bus was only about \$2.50 each. It took us past some cute little shops The "sexy" wine caught our eye. Didn't make it back to buy any though!!







The medieval castle grounds were landscaped quite nicely, but nothing extremely interesting.





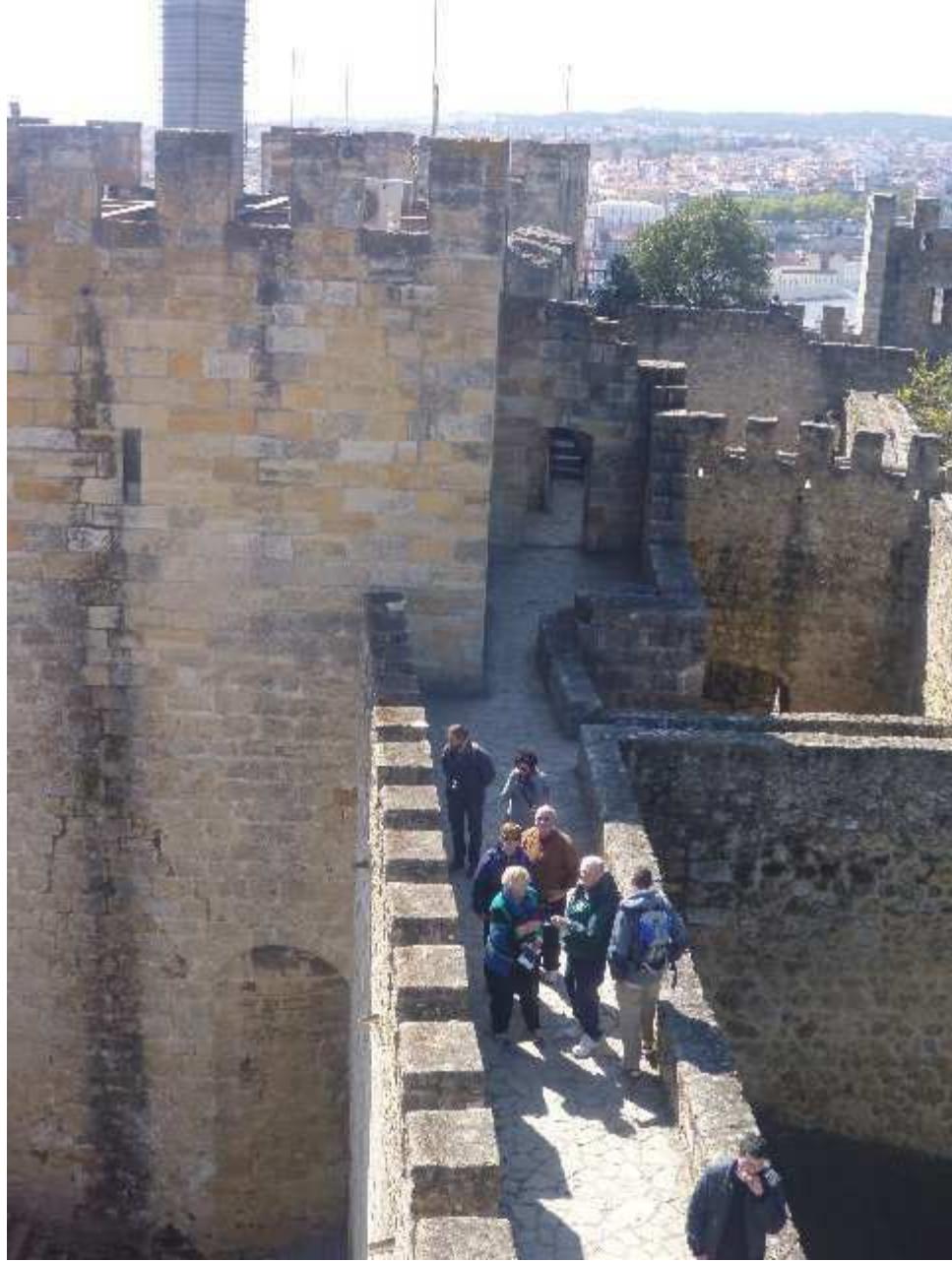


But the views from the castle walls were incredible!!! Well worth the \$7.50 per person senior discount (I didn't have to cheat -55 is considered senior usually in Portugal!!) rate!!





There were lots of peacocks wandering freely around the grounds. Found this one magnificent old fellow showing off his tail feathers and doing a little dance. Didn't seem to attract any of the females though. They were more interested in the scraps of bread crumbs on the ground. And then we found this second one that was even more beautiful, but he wouldn't show off his tail feathers for us!!!



We enjoyed walking along the top edges of the walls around the outside of the castle before we left!





I took a couple of pictures of the flags from the top and then after we got back down to the square I took a picture looking up at the flags to give you an idea of the distance!!



We took a regular city bus back to the hotel -easy ride, only about a mile and a half and we were home!!





We ate dinner at a local Portuguese restaurant and so ended our first real day with Uniworld! Marvelous! Tomorrow we tour Sintra! A lovely mountain city! And to Cascais -a seaside resort! Now it's time for bed!! Lots of love!!



George & Pamela

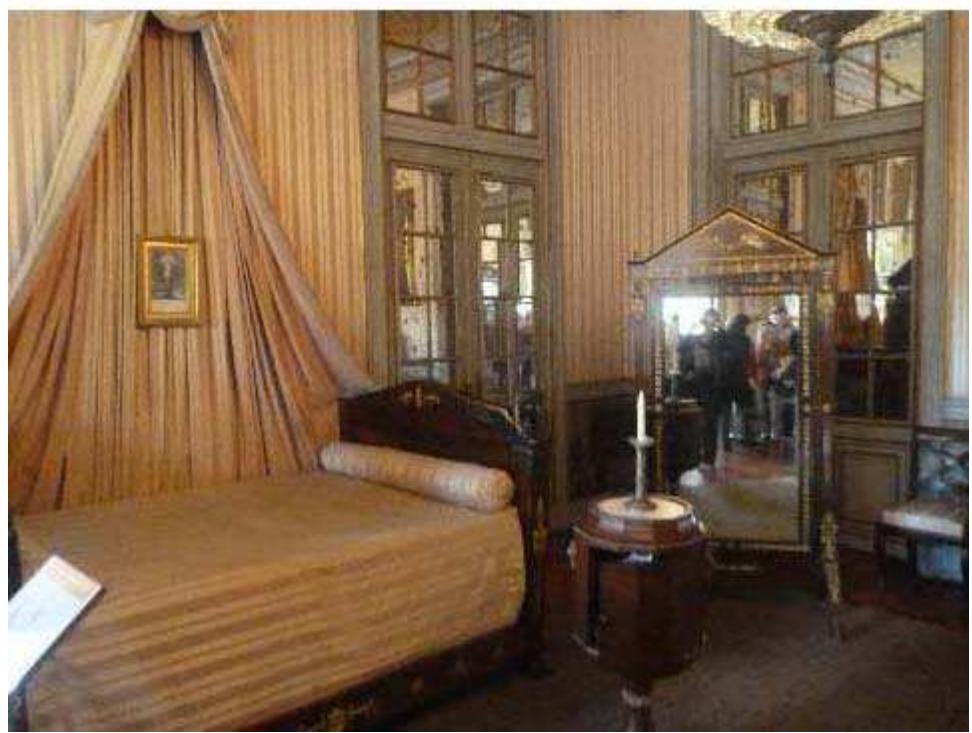
Subj: April in Portugal, Sintra & Cascais -Travelogue #4 Date: 4/10/2013

Good morning everyone! We're continuing our fabulous tour of Portugal! We all signed up for a full day optional tour of the Mountain City of Sintra & the beach resort city of Cascais. Left the hotel about 8:45am on Saturday morning and it was a beautiful day!! Pilar said it was the first sunny weekend they have had this Spring! Glad we got to enjoy it!









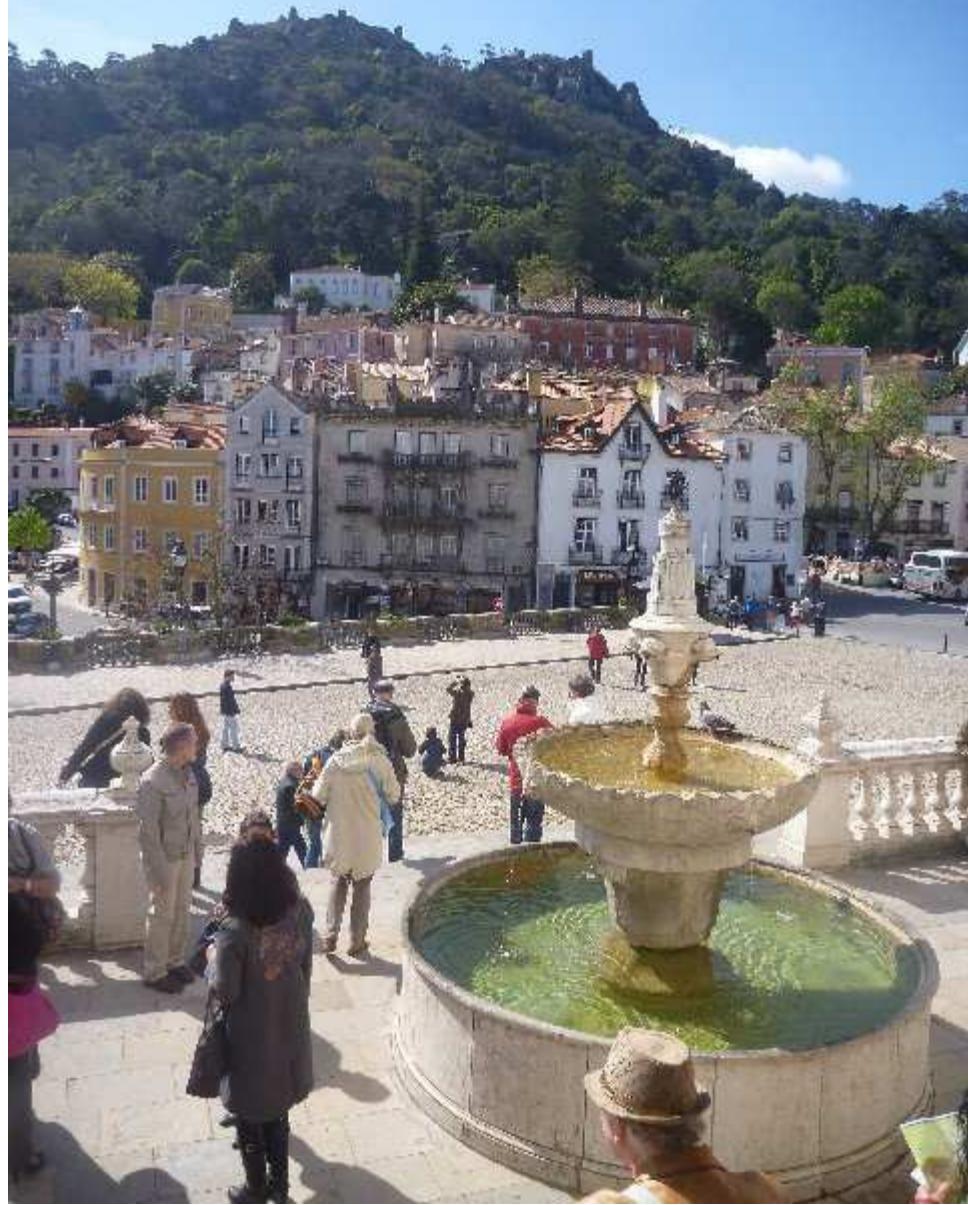






Our first stop after a short drive out of Lisbon on the A5 heading north was the Queluz National Palace. It was built in the late 1700's in the Rococo Style and used as a summer retreat for some of the royal family. It is sometimes called the Portuguese Versailles. The rooms are decorated & furnished in unbelievable opulence! It is full of Milano chandeliers!







Another short drive and we arrived in the beautiful little town of Sintra -up in the Sintra Mountains and just a few kilometers out of Lisbon. The Sintra National Palace is a World Heritage Site and is the best preserved medieval Palace in Portugal.





It was not nearly as opulent as the previous palace, but the location was stunning! From every window, the views were incredible. You could see all the way out to the ocean from many windows!!







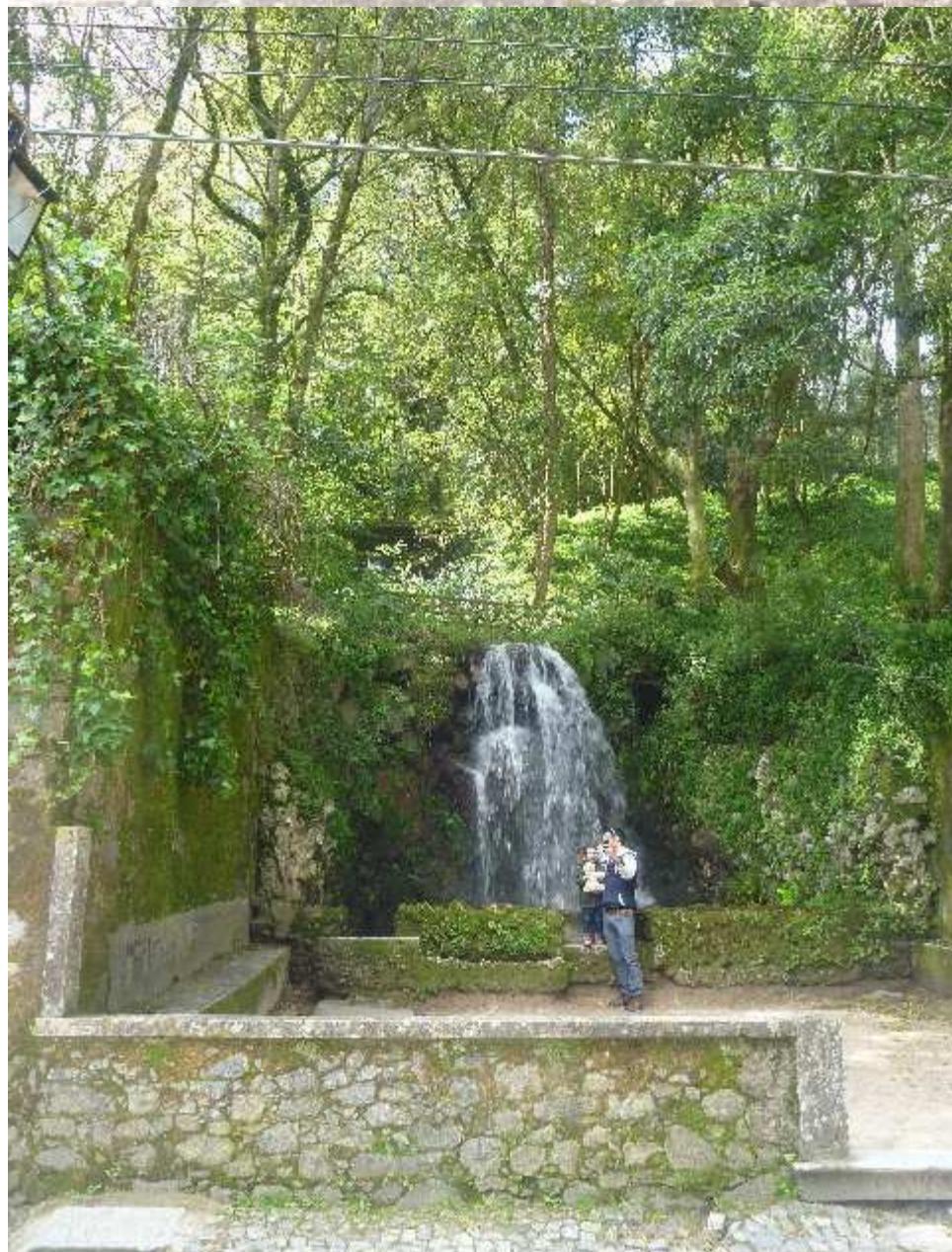
The kitchen was amazing. Built in one huge room with 2 enormous chimney's, it was set up to cook whole pigs or cows with enormous ovens for baking bread & "cook tops" for the cooking pots!







Then we had some free time to wander/shop in the quaint little town. They had everything you can imagine - including Australian boomerangs? Not sure why that was, but they were available! We did find out that long ago Eucalyptus trees were imported into Portugal for their paper mills. And now they are everywhere!



Instead of shopping, we walked out of town a little ways and found this beautiful waterfall.



We headed west to the coast and drove down it towards Cascais. Stopped for a photo op to see the western most point of Continental Europe -Cabo da Roca.









When we arrived in Cascais, the first order of business was lunch! Pilar advised us to go around behind the beach storefronts to the sunny square where the wind would be blocked and we could eat outside! Yep, she was right and we chose this marvelous restaurant called the Palm Tree. Most of us had Portuguese style fish & chips, but Bob ordered grilled sardines (a local Portuguese specialty) and the manager personally came over and showed him the trick to deboning them! It was really really a wonderful meal! And great to sit outside!









We still had time to wander around and look at the gorgeous beaches (& eat Italian gelato!!).



Found a wine shop with sentiments we could agree with!!





Finished up our last bit of time strolling through a local handicraft market (standard Saturday activity world wide, right?). Marge bought a necklace and Joanne found a scarf, but the rest of us just browsed.







The drive back to the hotel was along the coast. Saw lots of folks out enjoying the sunshine -even some surfboarders. Pilar said the Atlantic was really much too cold for swimming even during the hottest parts of the summer, but folks were still out enjoying the beautiful sand & sunshine!

It was a lovely day, but sightseeing is rather tiring work, so we didn't even get together for dinner (besides we had had a big late lunch!!). But Tom & Marge came to our room for a little visit before bedtime to exchange photos from the day and Tom brought us some fresh strawberries & carmel corn! Joanne took advantage of some down time and caught up on her sleep!!! Our last night in Lisbon!! Tomorrow we head to Porto and our cruise ship!!

Hope you've enjoyed the visit to Lisbon with us! Stay tuned for more to come!

Miss you all and hope everything is going well back in the US!!

Lots of love,



George & Pamela

Subj: April in Portugal #5 -Lisbon to Porto Date: 4/10/2013

Hi Guys! We on our way to the next segment of our adventure! But first I promised pictures of the Tiara Hotel breakfast buffet and I know that has kept you on the edge of your seats! Only had one last morning to get them, so down to the restaurant with my camera!!









It was the same all 4 mornings -delicious!!





We headed north out of Lisbon, driving right past the airport on A1. The Tagus river looks pretty full and everything was really green!!



Enroute to Porto, we had this nice stop in Coimbra -the 3rd largest city in Portugal & previous capital, but mostly known for it's University which is one of the oldest in Europe. Besides, it is just a pretty city. They slowed the bus as we drove up the hill to get to our restaurant stop for a view over the city of over 100,000.





Our lunch stop was at a family owned/operated restaurant where they served us salad, roast chicken & french fries and a fruit salad with icecream for dessert. It was very efficient and tasty!





On our way into the University central square, Pilar found a few students. They are all required to wear the Harry Potter like uniform, including the long black cape. She pointed out all the sewn on emblems which can be anything the students want to personalize the cape. These guys were hanging around watching for the inflood of tourists to sell some CD's of fado music to make a little spending money.





The main reason for the stop here was to tour the University Library. I got a couple of pictures before they said that pictures were not allowed! It is an amazing place. There are over 300,000 books dating from the 11th Century. The library itself was established in the early 1500's!!! It is a World Heritage Site. One strange fact is that a coven of bats are released inside each evening to hunt & eat any insects to protect the books!!!! Historians come from all over the world to study books which are located here. No volume can be removed from the building -instead you must sign up for a certain book and it will be delivered to one of the reading rooms where you can study it only inside the reading room.







We walked around the main square of the campus and also toured the chapel (not allowed to take pictures!). Definitely an interesting stop!





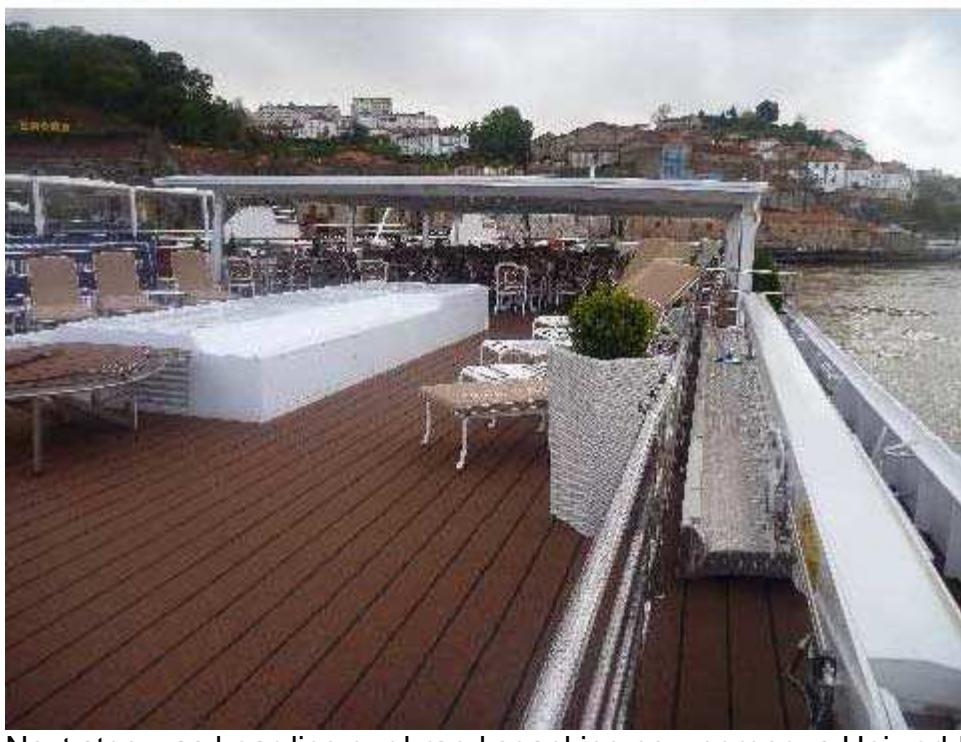












Next stop was boarding our brand spanking new gorgeous Uniworld Cruise Ship -the Queen Isabel!!! It is unbelievably beautiful!!! We are the first group of regular passengers on it! We get to take it's maiden voyage. It will hold 118 passengers. All but 2 of it's biggest suites are booked, but 30 to 40 of the cabins are filled with singles as that ran a special offering no surcharge for a single in a cabin. Gives us plenty of room aboard! Our Category 2 cabin is wonderful with a queen bed, French windows (no balcony, but floor to ceiling windows with a doors that open), nice size bathroom, 47" flat screen TV & free internet!! Everything smells brand new -because it is of course!!









We had time to unpack our bags, check out the ship, & run to the lounge to meet the staff. Then it was straight into the dining room for our first meal. It's open seating, but we claimed a table and fell in love with our waiter, Al (he said to call him Al Pacino!!) and decided to stay at the same table for every meal so that we could have him as our waiter! Also had a wonderful English couple join us and have claimed them as a part of our group too! The chef -Richard, from Holland, flamed a special Portuguese apple with port wine for our dessert! It was yummy!!!! This is going to be a very special cruise!

More later! At least we are now in Porto and on our ship!!

Missing you all & wishing you were here!!

Lots of love,



George & Pamela

Subj: April in Portugal -#6, 1st Day in Porto Date: 4/13/2013

Good Morning Everyone! We're on our brand new river cruise ship in Portugal and received some rather distressing news. Apparently the rains in Spain have been falling on the Douro River Valley rather than the plains where they are supposed to fall and the river valley is flooded, making the Douro River fairly un navigable. There are 6 dams with locks that we were supposed to traverse, but apparently the water is so high and the river is so full of debris that the River Navigation Authorities have closed it to all traffic -subject to day to day decisions. So rather than leaving Porto on Monday afternoon as planned, we might have to spend at least another day here. They told us that they'll let us know when we return from our day's tours. With that, we headed off on brand new buses owned/operated by the DouroAzul -the Portuguese Travel Company that apparently owns most everything for traveling here in the Valley.







First off, the entire center city of Porto is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It's just a quite little town (actually, not so little, it's the 2nd largest city in Portugal although I must admit I had never heard of it before planning this trip! The old town is almost medieval in appearance. There is construction everywhere as they renovate everything as required by UNESCO. We'll be back for 2 days on our own and will have to walk through all the construction! The bridge that is next to our docking site is the Ponte de Dom Luis I bridge and was completed in 1886 by a student of Gustave Eiffel, the designer of the Eiffel Tower (but this was done first).



Our first stop was what is called the Palacio da Bolsa or the Stock Exchange Palace. It is really a monastery that was converted to be a chamber of commerce. But for a time they had a Stock Exchange there and ever since, that has been its designation. We were not allowed to take pictures which is really a shame because it is a beautiful building. The interior architecture is amazing. The grand finale is the Moorish Revival-style Arab Room. I downloaded the above picture from the internet, but it doesn't even begin to do justice to the room. It was simply amazing. I looked for a postcard of it, but apparently when they took pictures even for their own postcards, they were not allowed to use flash and they were dull & dreary. We'll have to try & keep our memories of it brushed up. I've never seen anything like it! Apparently it is still used occasionally as a reception room for VIP's (and the tourist are allowed in!!).









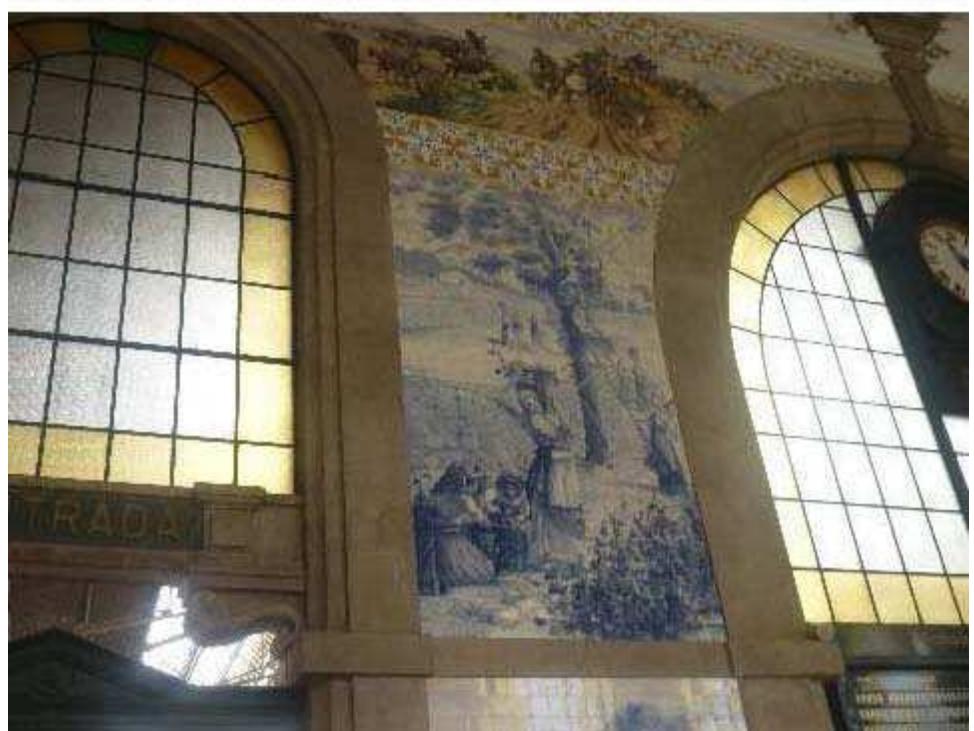






Next, our bus trundled up the tiny streets (need to talk more about the buses and how they make their tight turns!) to the Carmo Cathedral. It was near the top of the hill and had fabulous views (including one down to the river where our boat is docked).















After another short hop around the city, we got out for a walk to the old Train station. Enroute, we stopped to see a life size statute of a newspaper seller. Apparently only the businesses and elite purchased newspapers in the old days and this was to commemorate the young men who peddled the papers. Then on across the street (we jaywalked because the guide said it would take too long to get across legally????) to the train station. It is decorated beautifully with the traditional painted porcelain tiles Portugal is famous for. But not only does it have the standard blue/white ones, but the entire room has a strip around the top in colors. This strip is commemorating the history of transportation in Portugal from Roman oxen carts through to the modern day trains. The trains at this station go to stations in the Northern area of Portugal, you have to connect with the other train station (only a few blocks away) to go south to Lisbon.



VISITAS
EVERYDAY

EXCEPTO SABADOS - EXCEPT SUNDAYS

VISITAS /
VISITS



A Calem é uma marca de vinho porto que tem sido produzido na região da Douro desde 1770. A marca é uma das mais antigas e respeitadas no mundo do vinho. O vinho é feito através de um processo de envelhecimento longo, com a adição de brandy para proteger o suco de uva.

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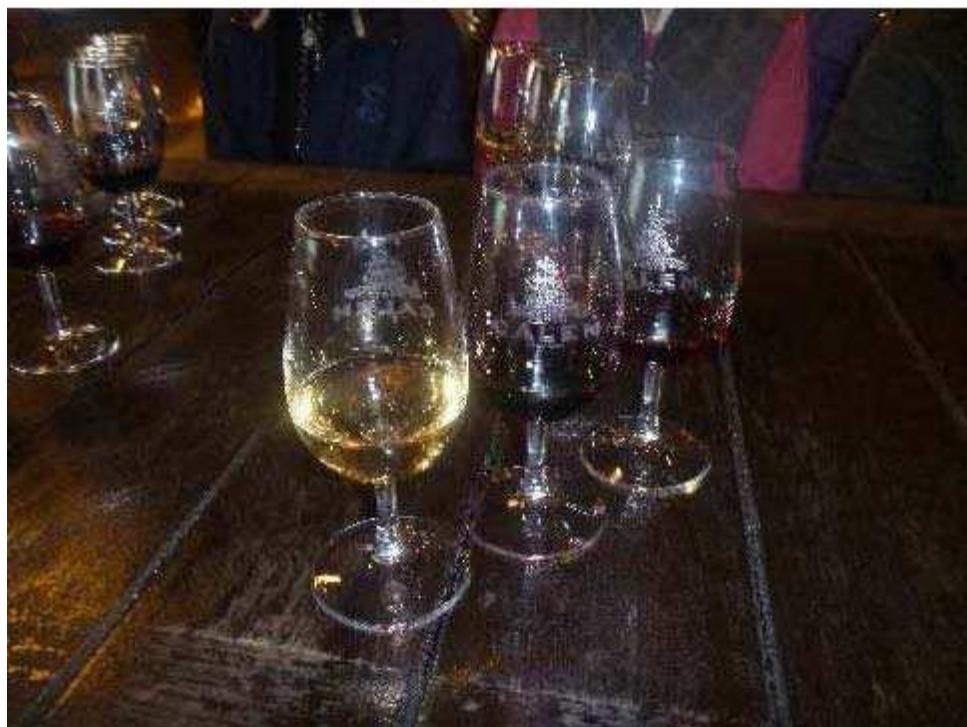
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O vinho é feito através de um processo de envelhecimento longo, com a adição de brandy para proteger o suco de uva.

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We went back to the ship for lunch and then took a very very short bus ride to the Calem Port winery museum for a tour/tasting of Port wine!!! There are 3 kinds of port -white (used for Aperitif), tawny (medium for anything), ruby (mostly dessert). Prices vary from reasonable to unbelievably expensive!!! It can only be called Port anywhere in the world if it's made in this area of Portugal! We had great explanations of how long it's aged and in what barrels, etc. Very interesting! I like the white best. At least the ones from this winery!





We took a very pleasant short walk back to the ship along the river.



Back on the, we had our first port talk and found that we will not be leaving Porto tonight! Tomorrow's tour will be by bus. Oh well!!





Dinner was yummy & very different! Had a minced vegetable puff pastry, a pureed vegetable soup, & a strip of eggplant! It was all yummy!!



As a consolation prize, for not leaving port, we get a Fado show tonight after dinner! I have to admit that Fado was not our favorite entertainment! It's a very soulful musical singing show. Probably would be better if we could understand the words!! We had planned on a dinner & Fado show in Lisbon, but because they don't usually start singing until 11pm, we had elected not to go. After hearing this demonstration, we're very happy that that didn't work out!!! We were all so sad at the end of the show that we went straight to our cabins rather than dance to Jose' tonight!!

So ended our first day!!! Marvelous! Disappointed that we can't keep up our itinerary, but loving the ship, the staff & the company!!!

Lots of love,



George & Pamela

Subj: April in Portugal #7 -Quinta da Avessada & Mateus Palace Date: 4/18/2013

Good Morning everyone,

Our 2nd morning in Porto arrived with overcast, but a promise for fun & adventure. We were supposed to have been in Bitetos with a short cruise to Regua for a tour of Mateus Palace & dinner at Quinta de Avessada. Since we are still sitting on the boat in Porto, Uniworld had arranged to take us by bus to Quinta de Avessada for lunch instead. We won't miss anything, just have to add in an almost 2 hour bus trip to get there!!!







The scenery as we crossed over the Sierra do Marao Mountains -steepest point about 4000', was wonderful. Unfortunately it was a bit overcast/foggy, so not as nice as it could have been, but we could certainly get the idea of what a beautiful area it was. And the highway was excellent.











Enroute, we stopped at the quaint little village of Favaois -known for it's Muscatel vineyards and it's lovely bread baked in pine fired ovens. We got to taste both! They made a big deal about it -met by a band with drum & squeeze box -given a sample of moscatel wine and an opportunity to knead the bread before it was slid into the pine fired oven. And then we got to eat the bread warm from the oven. Oh my! If that was not heaven!!!! The owner of Quinta da Avessada, Luis Barros, was on site to tell us how it was made & introduce us to the lady that was in charge. When we hopped back on the bus to head to Quinta da Avessada, he hopped in his van with the band to beat us there!!









It was only a 5 minute drive to the vineyard -he owns most of the lands in the village, so we were driving past lots of his grapevines. He let us relax & enjoy the sunshine outside for a few minutes before starting our tour.



It was an interesting tour with lots of decorations & sets, but it was very dark & my pictures are not worth much! But the owners was so full of energy and fun to hear! He told lots of funny stories (can't remember the to repeat unfortunately) and was just incredibly enthusiastic.







Then we were all invited into the huge dining room with glass walls overlooking the vineyards. It was lovely! Everyone was seated and they started serving drinks (white wine, red wine, sodas, or beer) while the owner continued with his stories! He related a story (now this was my interpretation and what I can remember) that when the vines were attacked by an insect and mostly destroyed, a Contessa provided food to keep the farmers from having to give up and leave. She provided a soup that had some of everything in it to keep them healthy. And that was the soup that they were giving us. It was excellent -A vegetable soup in a rich broth (they love to puree potatoes to make the broth!!).







He told more stories and they started bringing plates of food family style We enjoyed roast chicken, barbequed pork, beef, cabbage, salad, & about 25 kinds of dessert! Then the band came back to play lively tunes while they encouraged everyone to hold hands and dance around the dessert table! Wow! Just a great afternoon!



On the way out, the owner, Luis Barros wanted to shake everyone's hand and I asked him for a picture. He is certainly a boon to the local tourist trade!!



He even had his folks follow us all out to the bus and play until we were driving away!!





We made another stop at Mateus Palace. It is a baroque palace owned by the Mateus Foundation. They offer tours of the beautiful building & grounds and use the funds for upkeep of the building & grounds and to offer education scholarships to local families. This is the building that has been pictured on the Mateus Wine bottle for years. The building is known as the prime example of Baroque architecture in Portugal & is filled with beautiful antique furniture (no pictures allowed!!), but the best part of the tour is the outdoor garden surrounding the estate.



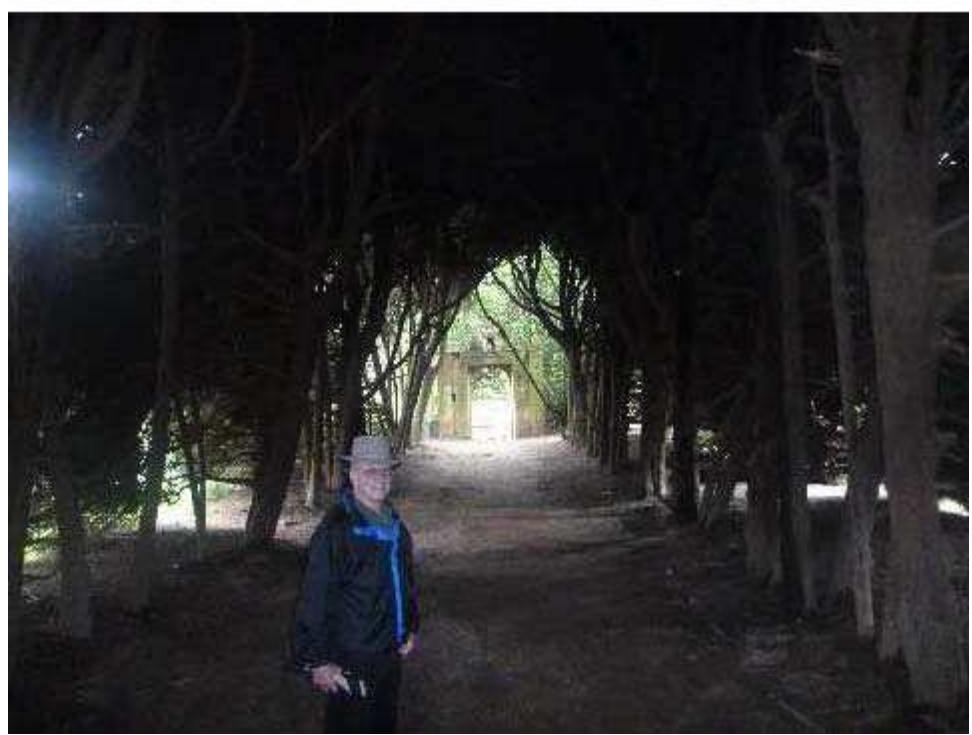




We spend almost an hour walking around the grounds. The camellias were in full bloom and awesome.









They even had something they called a Cypress Grotto to walk through. Can't imagine how fabulous this will be when everything is blooming!







The sun came bursting through for the rest of the afternoon and the drive back to the ship and left everyone in high spirits! Even stuck in Porto, we are having a wonderful time!







Dinner was wonderful. We are enjoying the most gracious & entertaining waiter and the food/wine/port is marvelous!



We finished up the evening with a few hours of dancing for Jose', the ship's entertainer. He seems thrilled to have folks to actually dance to his music -although he tends to enjoy a bit more exotic dancing than we'd prefer: every night he wants at least one Paso Doble (first time we've tried to really dance a full song free style and he wants one every night!!!!), several Argentine Tango's, a Samba, a Mambo, a several Vienesse Waltzes!! Too funny! We keep trying to encourage Cha, Rumba, & Slow Waltz!!!
Enough for now. Got behind because we lost internet for a while and just running full speed every day!!
Hope everyone is safe & happy!!
Lots of love,



George & Pamela

Subj: April in Portugal #8 -Guimaraes Date: 4/19/2013

Good Morning Everyone,

We're still in Porto, but excursions continue! Lots of see with bus travel from here! This was another tour that was scheduled, but would have happened upon our return towards Porto at the end.



About an hour's bus ride to Guimaraes. This is yet another UNESCO Heritage site. At this rate, it seems that the majority of Portugal has been chosen as important to UNESCO!! Anyway, this historical (medieval) city is considered the birthplace of the Portuguese Nationality. Partly because the first King was born here, Alfonso I or because of important battles fought & won here. Our guide like the king's birthplace idea. Regardless, these words on the wall in the center of the city mean "Portugal was born here."



We stepped off the bus to congregate at the foot of the statue of Dom Alfonso Henriques. It had been overcast, but dry. Suddenly there was a couple of big fat rain drops and the guide yells "eek" and pops open her huge umbrella. George had forgotten ours today -having toted it every other day and not needed it. Suddenly an entire deluge of rain falls out of the sky! She motions to us and 3 of us huddled under her protection as the faucets poured for about 5 minutes! We stayed relatively dry under her wings, but figured the rest of the tour would be a disaster. But the faucet turned off as soon as it started and nothing more for the rest of the day! Crazy! Luckily it was not really cold, upper 60's, so not too much of an issue! Just got our hearts going!!







G

It was in the 10th century that
the Countess Mumadona
ordered the castle built.
Closely linked to the birth and
foundation of the Kingdom of
Portugal, it was the palace of
King Afonso Henriques (1111-
1185). The castle, formed by
the keep and the high
surrounding walls,
incorporated the defensive
innovations of the 12th and
13th centuries, with the
building of towers protecting
the curtain walls and flanking
the entrances.

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Horário

Aberdeen

We walked to the Castle Ruins built in the 10th Century. Gate was supposed to open at 10am, but was still locked when we arrived a few minutes after 10am. Shortly a man in a red rain coat ran up with a huge metal key and unlocked the door. Prime example of "Portuguese time." Things are a little layed back here! And that's okay. Made for a calm vacation!!









Not much inside, but the young man that unlocked the gate soon showed up with a falcon on his wrist. Not sure where that came from!! Apparently he was getting ready for a demonstration, but we couldn't wait, our guide hurried us out the same way as we went in!













We followed our guide through the city center while she pointed out various important buildings and statues. Nothing incrediby exciting. It does seem to be in amazing repair for a medieval city and the iron balconies still seem structurally sound.





The Roman Catholic influence is very strong here and there are chapels throughout the city center that represent the stations of the cross.





We ended the tour at the main square -Largo da Oliveira (square of the Olive Tree? Aprly named!). She showed us where we were on the map and then let us loose for a wander on our own for a half hour.



We walked up the street and found this beautiful view in the newer part of the city looking up to an old monastery on the top of the hill.



We did a little window shopping. Mostly amazed at the adorable clothes for the children. Actually fashions for both children & adults here have been impressive. Kept wanting some of the tights they sell for young girls - great wild colors & patterns. Unfortunately my saddle bags didn't quite look so good encased in psychedelic colors! Think I'd better stick with black!!!



Tour ended, bus back to the ship for lunch. There was a walking tour offered over in Porto, but our group elected to skip it. Bob & Joanne and George & I took a relaxing afternoon on board and Tom & Marge went for a walk along the port shops. It poured rain again, during the middle of the tour, so we were happy to have missed it! Tom & Marge got wet, but not soaked! Tom bought Marge a sweet handicraft necklace for their anniversary!!



We had a happy hour meeting in Tom & Marge's room before our pre dinner port talk!



Got wonderful news at the port talk from Kirsten our Cruise Manager! We get to at least sail through the first lock tomorrow! So whatever else happens, at least we can say we've actually cruised the Duoro with Uniworld!! Yippee!!!











Sent us to dinner in great moods and we enjoyed more good food & another selection of port! I don't think I have mentioned before that they had promised that every night we were offered a different selection of wine and port. They exaggerated a little, there were really only about 5 kinds of each wine offered, but it was really interesting to have so many selections! The other thing that we found interesting, this has been the first country that we have ever visited that you can only get wines from this country. No other wines are for sale anywhere. I assume they must have some Government import law that prevents any other wine sale here. But no problem, Portuguese wine has been excellent.



After dinner we were entertained by Alto da Escrita, a group that performed both Portuguese Folk music and a selection of Fado. WOW! These guys/girls were fantastic! Very upbeat and rhythmic. Even the Fado was much more exciting. They gave us a program of explanation about the songs and even words so that we could sing along on 2 selections. Of course they were in Portuguese, but our enthusiasm made up for our lack of knowledge or musical abilities!!





I'm sure Tom was not really sleeping through the excitement, he was leaning forward in exuberance!!
Anyway, it made for an exciting close for the day and we all went to bed anticipating a cruise on the Duoro!!!
More later!!
Lots of love,



George & Pamela

Subj: April in Portugal #9 – Sail through Crestuma Dam & Duoro River Valley Tour Date: 4/19/2013

Bom Dia Everyone! We are finally setting sail on the beautiful Duoro River! The main reason for the trip!
Unfortunately it was a
rather dreary start, drizzling rain, but in the high 60's, so at least we could stand outside to watch our
departure!

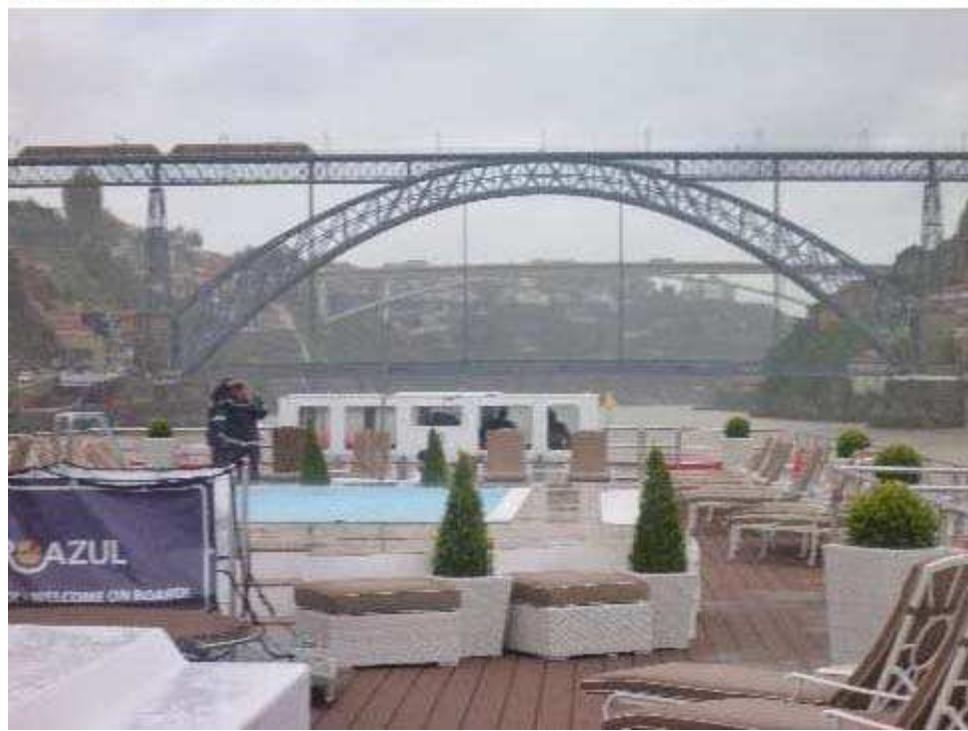




At least some folks were outside. Most of the guests sat in the upstairs lounge and watched from the warmth and security inside!!







George & I stayed outside and enjoyed the view from under the covered "sundeck." Our initial start included sailing under 5 of the 6 bridges of Porto!





Cormorants seem to be around the world over!! And as we passed this ship, the horns blew to acknowledge each others passing!!





After leaving the boundaries of Porto, we went inside to cruise in comfort with our shipmates! We saw lots of evidence of flooding.





After only about an hour of cruising (it's only 12.5 miles) we were already at the Crestuma, the first dam, and entered the lock. As this was the real maiden voyage, they took it really slow through the lock.









We carefully slid into the lock and they closed the gates.







Water lifted us up about 45' and we slid out the opposite side. Wow, the river was really really muddy on that side! And you can tell how high the water is. Still making navigation difficult!





One funny story! See that stream of water pouring from the top of the lock? As we slid under, there were several places where the water was streaming off of or out of little drains. Well someone opened the central doors just as we passed by one of them and it flooded into the reception area!!! Quite a shock to those thinking there were inside safe & dry!! We didn't realize it until we came down later to find towels & mops trying to clean things up!!!





We watched one bridge to by from our French balcony (read sliding glass windows).



We enjoyed lunch while we cruised into Entre-os-Rios where we were docking.









The buses were waiting for us and we hopped on for a 2 hour drive up and over the mountains toward Pinhao. The portion of the river between Pinhao and Regua are considered to be the most scenic. Even though we missed our river view of it, we did get to take the bus to see it!! The weather got better & better and we has sunshine for this unbelievable scenery!!!





I had chosen the wrong side of the bus to sit on this trip, so I had to stretch to get any pictures.





They drove us into the tiny little town of Pinhao for a potty stop and to stretch our legs for a few minutes. The other bus was taken straight on to start the tour of Quinta do Seixo, the Sandeman Estate.









The tiny little town felt like the inside of a postcard!! Practically nothing there. Only about 3 little coffee/port shops selling tourist junk & wine!



The train station had the Portuguese tile decorations of course!





The next 10 minutes drive was along the most precious of the scenic vistas. Just heart stopping beauty. Notice the Duoro Spirit Cruise ship in the photos above? It and the other one belong to Viking and AmaWaterways now. They made it upriver before the flooding started last month and have been stuck here for a month!!! River wise, they are several dams beneath where we docked and now cannot get back to Porto due to the state of the river past Regua. Although the scenery is beautiful here, it has made it almost impossible for them to do their excursions and you saw the size of Pinhao, so there is no entertainment for them there either!!! Things could have been worse!!!





I think I'll stop here with this one. We did a tour of Sandeman Wine Estate and I want to include lots of pictures, so rather than make this one email so huge, I'll divide it up and continue it later.
So more later! This was definitely the most gorgeous day of our trip! Thank goodness for the sunshine to make it perfect!!!!
Lots of love,



George & Pamela

Subj: April in Portugal #10 -Sandeman Wine Estate Date: 4/20/2013

Bom Dia Everyone!! I'm not going to waste any time, just want to share the fab scenery of the Sandeman Estate!







As soon as our bus pulled into the parking area, a Sandeman guide ran out to meet us. She was wearing the famous costume of the Sandeman Don chosen to represent their wine around the world. The image is a mix of the Coimbra Student cape and the Spanish sombrero to show the blend of it's 2 most famous wines -the port of Portugal and the Sherry of Spain.







They had a very professional tour, but for whatever reason it is almost totally in the dark, so the pictures did not come out very well inside. They showed us a basement almost totally full of stored bottles of port! Except for the type of port labeled "vintage," port does not age in the bottle -it remains the same regardless of the year. The "vintage" label does age and they were pointing out that there are bottles of it that are worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. They neither offered them to us for sale or for tasting!!!!



I had read before our trip that many of the wineries in Portugal still used bare feet to stomp the grapes. You can actually even participate if you are there in September when the grapes are harvested. However, our Sandeman guide pointed out these vats and those stainless steel feet that they use to squish their grapes! Much less romantic, but quite a bit more sanitary!!!!







The tour ended in their extravagant tasting room. Huge long tables and one enormous glass wall overlooking the slope down to the river. They gave us 2 samples. That evening when we were discussing it, we could not agree on whether our samples had been a white port (used as an aperitif and not nearly as sweet) and a tawny (used for dessert, but aged in the huge barrels allowing it to loose it's deep red color) -this was my remembrance! or tawny and ruby (much sweeter and usually not aged more than a couple of years in the barrels) -this was what George thought! Whichever, we enjoyed the samples, but none of us bought anything!!!





Sandeman has designed their own glasses -the overall shape is the same as port glasses everywhere, but their is a flat thumb size notch on the stem that allows you to tilt and rotate the glass to enjoy the color of the wine! Very pretty & functional, but we didn't buy any of them either!!!







Our favorite part of the whole tour was enjoying the view outside the tasting room. Just incredible!



My favorite picture of the entire cruise!!! Of course the river is a sad muddy color, but that's the way we saw it, so that's the way we'll remember it!







We followed the path on around to where our bus was waiting & on past for a look from the other side.



I asked about the building on the top of the far hill. Although they didn't tell me the name of it, they described another Vineyard and their tasting room is circular with glass on all sides! Imagine that view!!!! They said it could be rented for private occasions what do you think? A world round dance event????? Should I start collecting funds now?







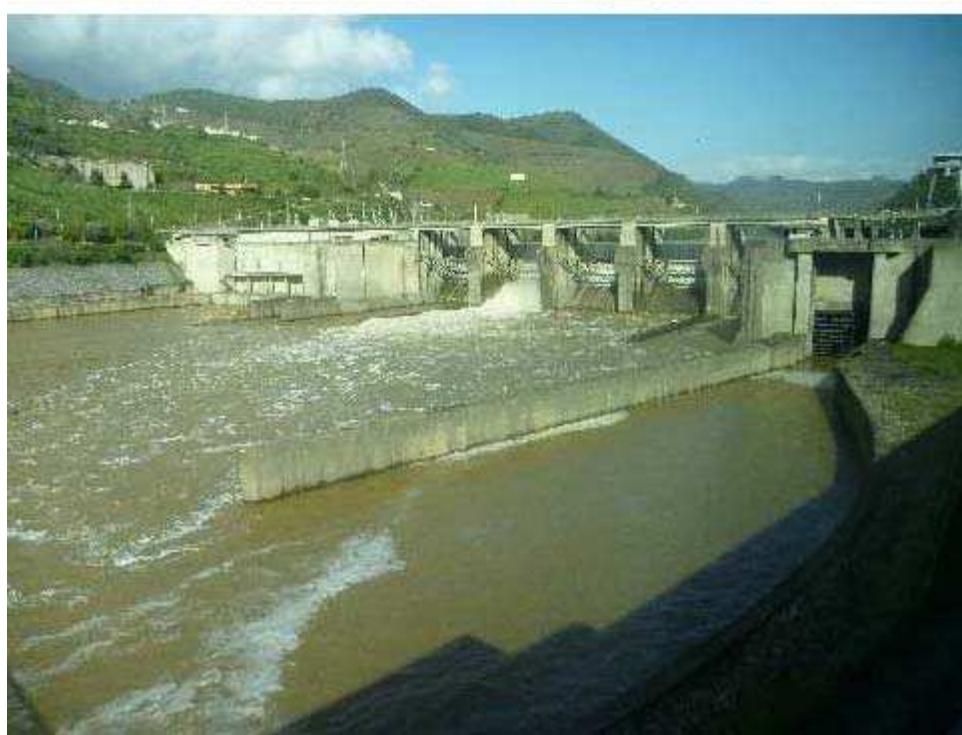
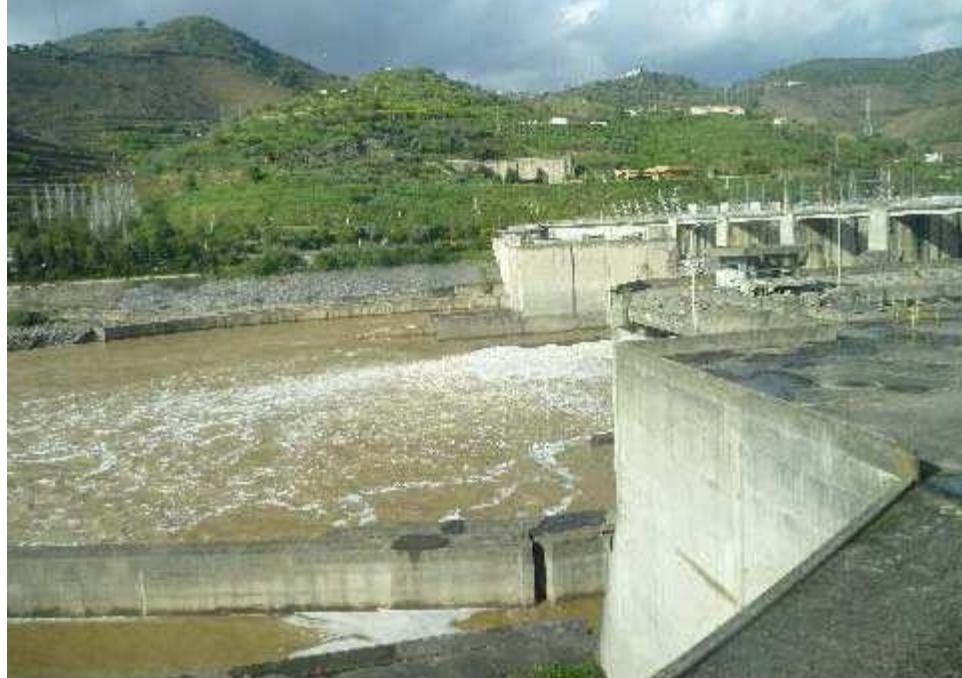






We followed the river for several miles. Just trying to imagine how it would have been floating along between the terraced vineyards. Oh well! Woulda coulda shoulda!







They drove us past the dam below Requa to give us our own view of why we couldn't navigate the ship through the other locks. Easy to understand the authorities decisions! Pretty horrifying!





And on to by pass Regua itself. Unsure where the dock was supposed to be, but they said it no longer was visible -totally underwater!! Unsure how long it will be before anyone will be able to stop here again!





This is the A1 crossing the Duroo and on over Rugua.











The views from the bus all the way back to the ship were just amazing! This must really be "God's Country!!!"



And we made it back to the ship and kept our sunny skies!!





Tonight was the Captain's Cocktail & Dinner.









Alvarno was in fine form tonight! He kept us entertained throughout the entire meal. He made the cruise for us!

Today should have been the day we visited Salamanca, Spain. Since we were not able to cover the miles inland, the trip there would be too far, either by bus or train. To offer us an alternative, they had set up a trip to Santiago de Compostela, Spain. A Catholic pilgrimage location. Since it was to be over 3 hours each way by bus, and they were departing at 6:30am!!!!, our group elected not to go and just sleep in tomorrow! We heard it was quite a nice excursion, but the chance to sleep in and relax was just too big a draw!

Soooooo, the end of the cruise is drawing near! It's been as good as it could be with the problems it has faced! Just thrilled that we got to have sunshine for the scenery today!!!

More later!!

Lots of love,



George & Pamela

Subj: April in Portugal #11 -Relaxing day aboard the Queen Isabel Date: 4/21/2013

Hi Everyone! Our day without tour was a relaxing one! We slept late, missed breakfast, & wandered into the lounge to find that quite a few folks had stayed behind.





It was mostly overcast, but not raining, so the views from the ship were still interesting! Joanne wore her most stylish boat attire into the lounge!!!







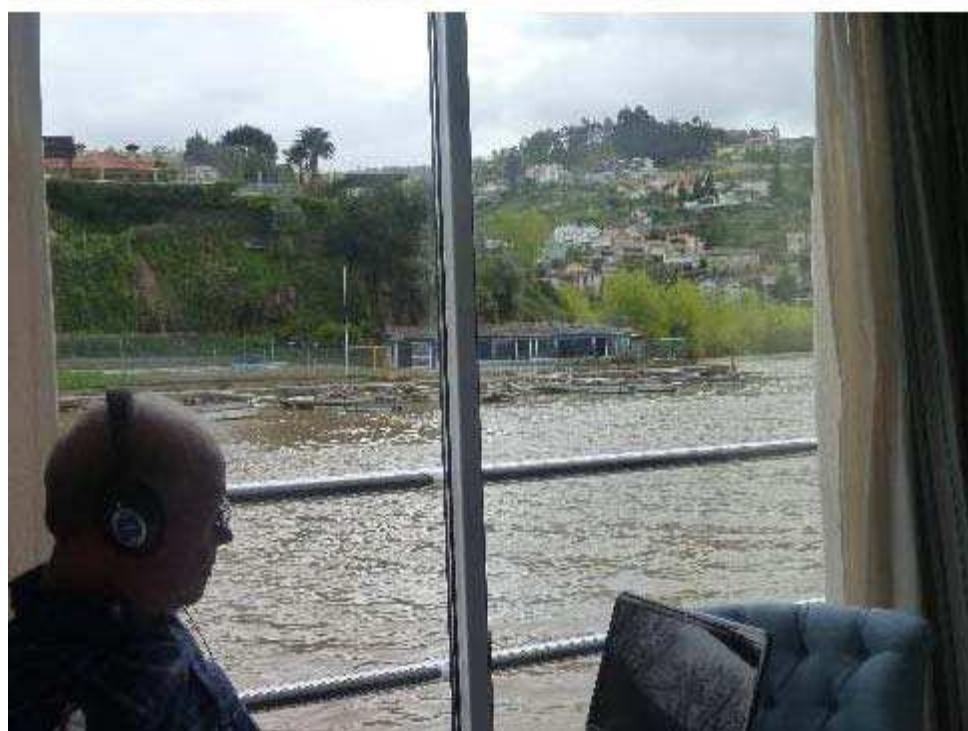
We claimed our regular table for the buffet lunch and still had our loyal special waiter, Alverno! Or Al Pacino as we called him!!













We retired to our cabin after lunch, I was working on my travelogues and George was dividing his time between movies and working on our teaching plan for our upcoming Canadian festival. Suddenly we realized we were moving! Called the front desk and we were told we were making a run to Bitetos to offer fuel to one of their sister ships that had been stuck on this side of the dam. We thought it was rather strange, but didn't think too much about it, just enjoyed the short cruise. Took about an hour round trip.







When we got back to Entre-os-Rios, George realized he was looking up at Tom & Marge on the ship we were docking against! They had gone for a walk & come back to realize that the ship was gone!!! Luckily the ship at the dock welcomed them aboard to wait for us to make it back! Rather an inconvenience! Complained a bit to the Hotel Manager, but he pretty much laughed it off! Said they hadn't had a choice -orders from on high!!



Kerstin, our Cruise Manager gave us our last port talk and explained that they were adding in one more excursion tomorrow after we get back to Porto -to visit the coastal town of Aveiro.





Had another enjoyable dinner with our entertaining wait staff!!!
Only one more day left on board our ship!!! Not ready for it to end!!!
Lots of love,



George & Pamela
Subj: April in Portugal #12 -Crestuma Dam, Ocean & Aveiro Date: 4/21/2013

Bom Dia! Our last day on the ship!!!!
We had a wonderful sunny day to cruise from Entre-os-Rios through the lock of Crestuma Dam and back to Porto. They even took us past Porto to cruise to the Atlantic and back!!!



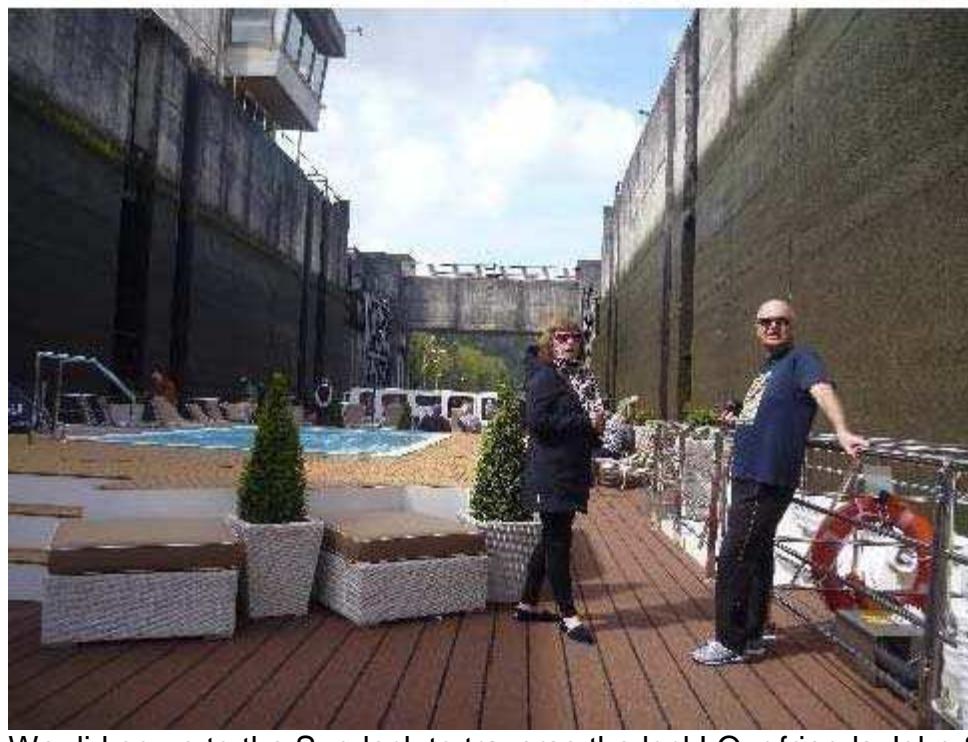






We slept through breakfast again and had coffee for the initial cruise to the dam.



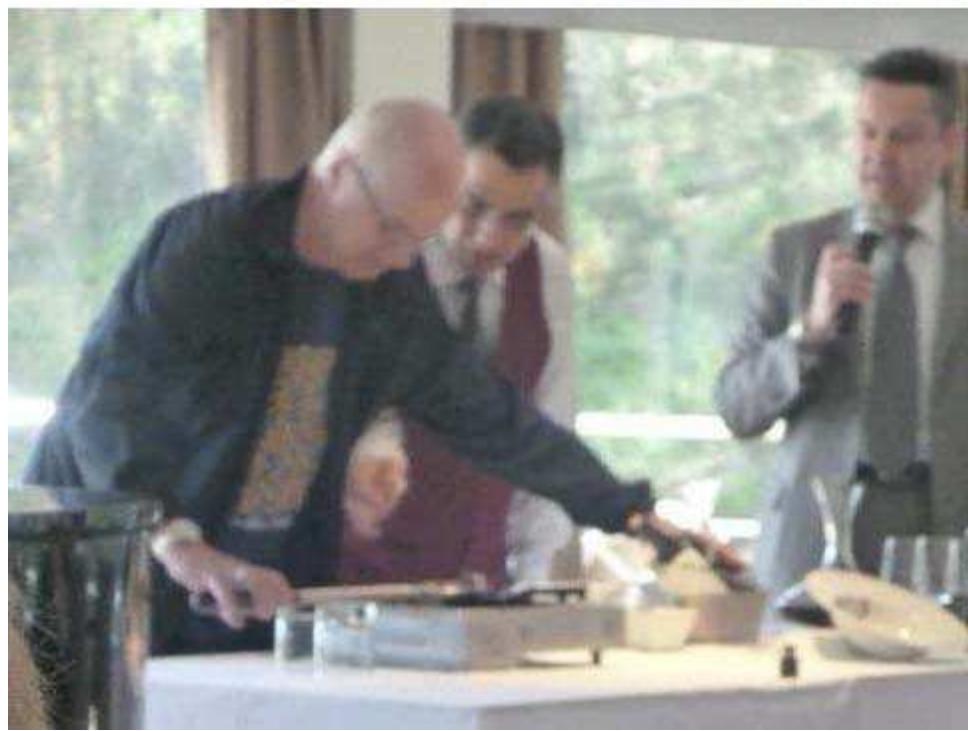


We did go up to the Sundeck to traverse the lock! Our friends John & Debbie from New Brunswick were up there with us.





After lunch, while we were cruising on into Porto, the Hotel Manager & the Bar Manager gave us a "vintage Port" decanting ceremony! They actually cut/burned off the top of the bottle to decanter it. They heated the sharp edged tongs until they were red hot, then placed it carefully around the top of the bottle below the cork and cut the glass. Had to clean off the lip to insure there were no glass shards pouring into the glass!





Then they invited a guest to open another bottle and our friend John from New Brunswick got the honor. After they had decanted the 2 bottles (& tasted them), they promised that everyone would taste it tonight after dinner!!







They cruised us past Porto and all the way out to the mouth of the river to turn around and come back into dock. We could see the Atlantic Ocean breaking huge waves beyond the narrow spit of sand.





We chugged back to our now familiar view of the hills of Porto on the south bank & Vila Nova de Gaia (with all the port winery shops) on the north bank.



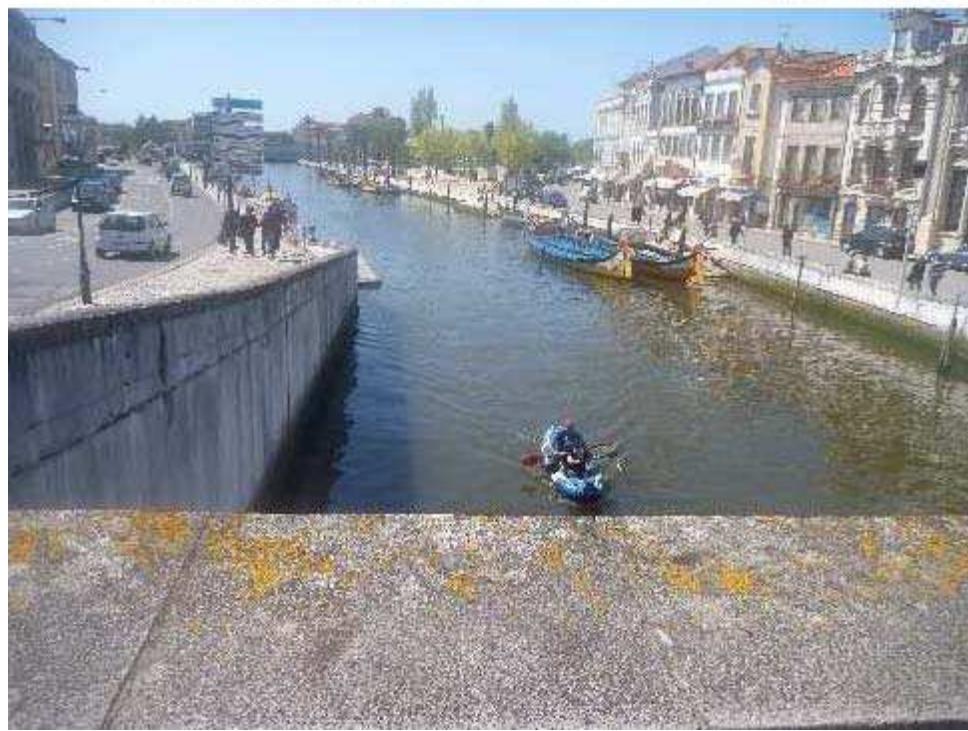






We supervised the placement of the debarkation ramp and then ran down to board the bus to Aveiro.







This little ocean town of about 75,000 (about the same as Longview in Texas???) is known as the Venice of Portugal. It's also known for a sweet dessert made from eggs & sugar. They had given us several versions of the egg sweets that they make in Portugal and we were all already feeling our arteries harden from the huge amounts of cholesterol, so we didn't bother to look for this one!!



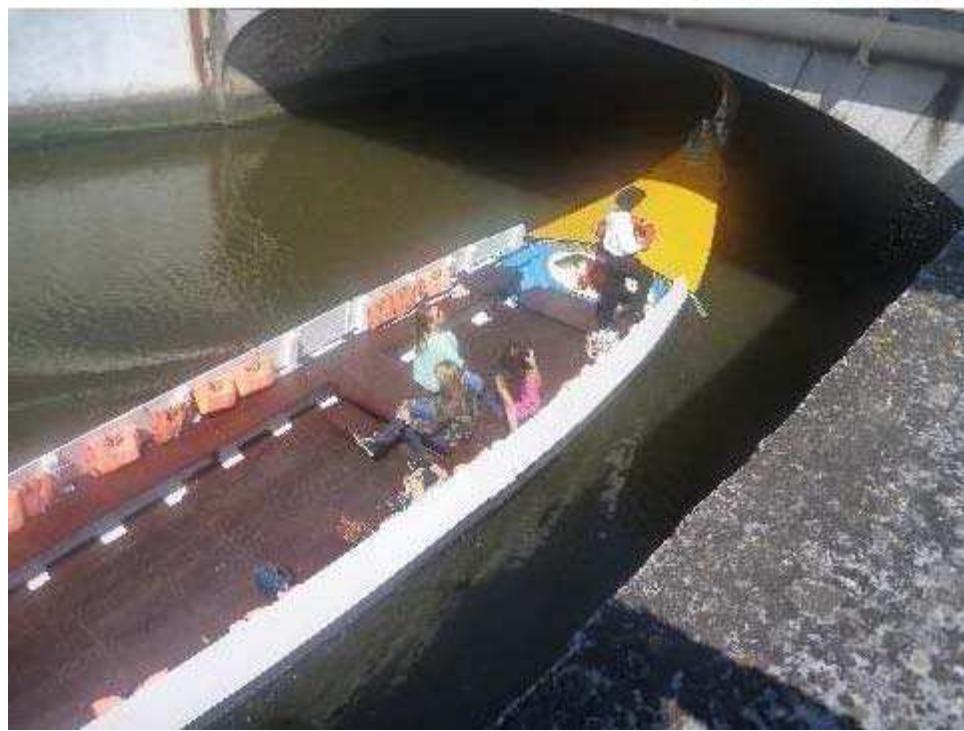




We did find a Saturday market to browse. Noticed that even the Portuguese are making the twisty scarves that became so popular in Mesa this year!



We found a shop with outdoor tables to soak up the sun & enjoy our last excursion from Uniworld! We watched the gondola type boats shuttling tourist from one place to another. Easy to see why this is the Venice of Portugal!!







They bussed us along the coast to see the lots of beaches with big sand dunes and crowded marinas.





Our last stop was Costa Nova do Prado -a small beach front town that rents out this cute little cottages that are painted in bright primary colors in the traditional Portuguese style.









We used our 20 minutes of free time to make a run for the gorgeous sandy board walk on the ocean. They say the Atlantic is too cold for swimming, but they all love the sun & the beach.



A last view of the tiny community and we were back to the ship to pack for our last supper on board!!



We had chosen to eat our last meal in the "al fresco" dining room that was positioned on both sides of the bow of the ship. Although we were docked on the inside of another boat, it was shorter, so we still had a beautiful view of Porto. Our men started our meal with their own special version of "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil!!" Set the tone for our last supper!



We were also celebrating Tom's birthday. He always manages to surprise with his placements of gifts!!



We shared the meal with the 2 couples that had become part of our group, Michael & Wendy from England and John & Debbie from New Brunswick. And Alvarno joined us even though he had his own guests to wait on at his regular tables!!





Our last gourmet ships meals!! Pork medallions, vegetable lasagne, & fruit salad! And icecream for dessert!!
And of course our taste of the Vintage Port!!!



And the men all pose with our chef Richard from Amsterdam and the Restaurant manager.



And we ended our last night on board with a Birthday Waltz with Jose'!!!
We still have 2 more nights in Porto on our own! We transfer by taxi to the Hotel B&B 1st thing in the morning!!
Hang on for the last little bit!!!
Lots of love,



George & Pamela

Subj: April in Portugal #13 -Porto on our own!! Date: 4/22/2013

Good Morning Everyone! Almost done with this vacation! We're down to the last part of the adventure!



Friday, April 26, 2013 AOL: Gphurd

We had to get up at 6:30am! It was a bit foggy out our window, but still looked like a beautiful morning! We had one last breakfast, then it was time to leave the ship!



We had ordered a taxi for all 6 of us together, & got a brand new Mercedes minivan! Took about 15 minutes to get to the Hotel B&B, mainly because there are soooooo many one way streets and lots of construction. Got there easily anyway. We couldn't check in of course since it was only about 8:15am, but they took all our luggage & Tom & Marge started asking about Taina, their exchange student daughter that was meeting us there. A little confusion at first and they said they weren't there, then they changed their minds and said yes, they had found them. They called the room and Taina came straight down!







Then we all went upstairs to meet Tom & the baby. Little Oscar was upset with me because I went out on the balcony and he had been told that WAS NOT ALLOWED!!!! Tom (that is Taina's Tom, not Tom Brown!!) had to try & explain that adults were allowed, but not children! That went over like a lead balloon!!!







Then we all took off on a walk to the waterfront. It being Sunday, many places were closed. We had to make a bee line down to the Tourist area! It was glorious weather and the walk was wonderful.





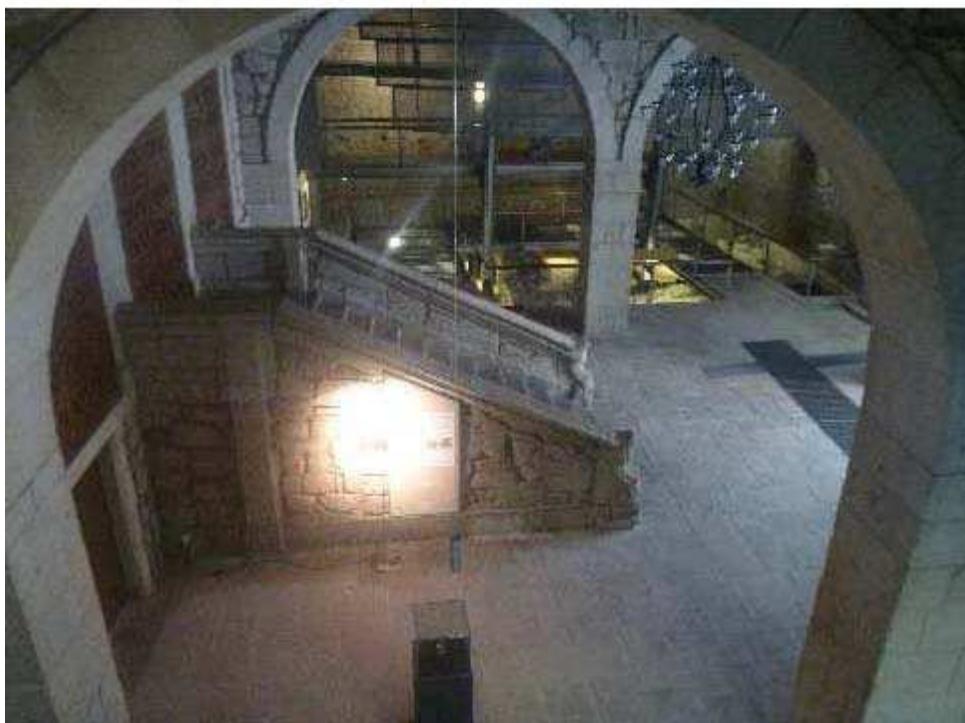
We got a closeup view & inspection of the Queen's barge. We had been seeing it across from our parking area in Porto, but it was interesting to get a close up of it. It was not really very impressive! But apparently this is the river boat that is used whenever the Queen comes to Porto for ceremonies.





We sat immediately in front of the Ribeira District wall -where in medieval days all the waterfront trade happened. We studied our map and made a plan to visit a few attractions we hadn't done with Uniworld!





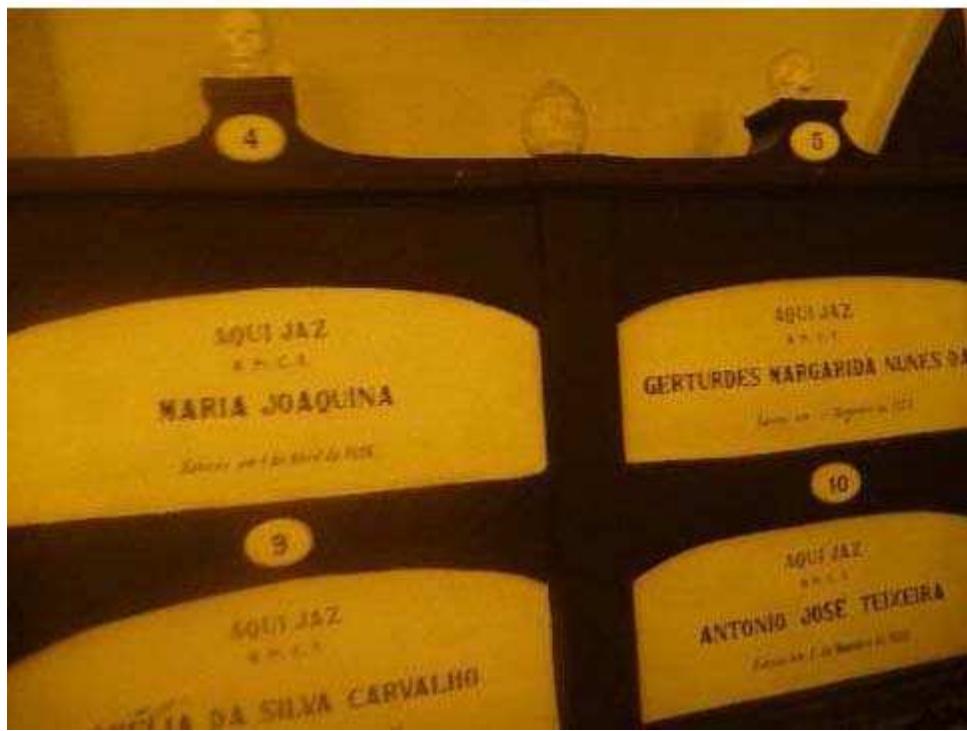
First was Infante do Casa d Henrique, the restored remains of a castle from the 10th Century that is said to be the birth place of Henry the Navigator -Portuguese Person of huge importance! Not much is really left of the castle, but they have kept some original pieces of the walls & floors. It's been rebuilt over and over, but has been used as a public or government buildings for hundreds of years!!



Next stop was the Church of São Francisco. It is a Gothic structure with Baroque interior (didn't allow pictures, so got this from the internet!!!).







There was a museum area next door and also a Catacomb where we viewed hundreds of community tombs!





Then it was time to have lunch!!!





We picked a restaurant with outdoor seating on the waterfront and decided to try the Francesinha (Little French Girl) sandwich -a specialty of the Porto area. It was toast stuffed with sausage, ham, beef, & cheese and drowned in a spicy tomato sauce. The sauce was pretty tasty, but ours was not served hot. I think it would have been much better if it was still hot.







After lunch we wandered down the river's edge, enjoying the scenery, the people watching and the craft's for sell. We all bought something, I got earrings, Marge bought an necklace & earring set and Joanne bought a scarf!



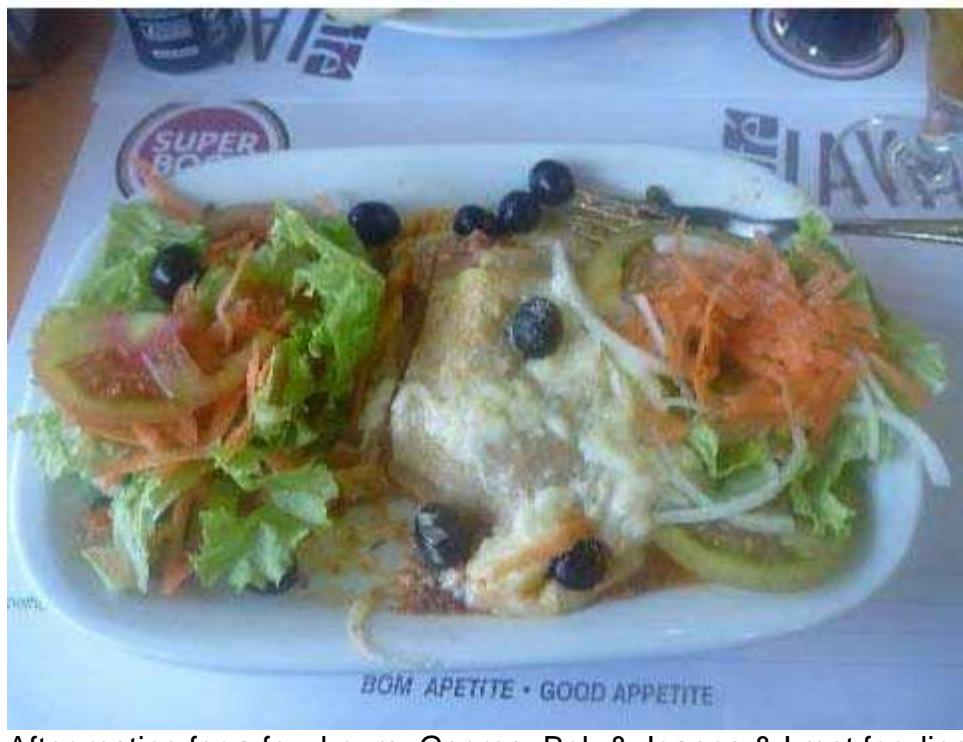




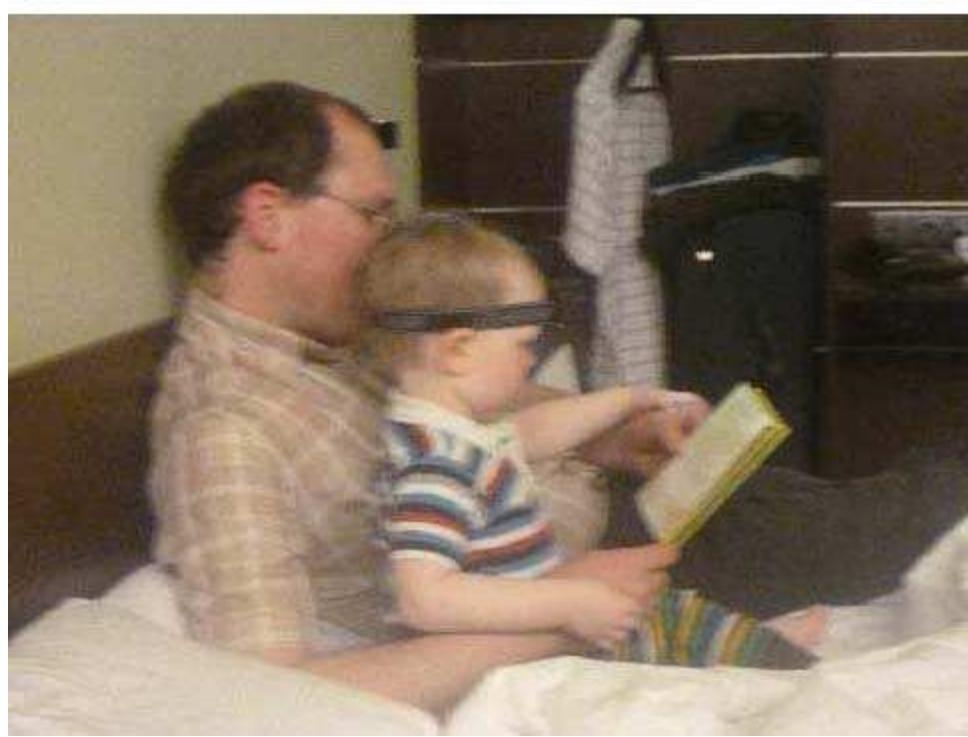
Then we took the Venicular up the side of the hill back to the Hotel B&B. It had made a nice neat square for the afternoon!







After resting for a few hours, George, Bob & Joanne & I met for dinner (Tom & Marge were with Taina & Tom & the kids). Decided to eat at a restaurant just outside the doors of the hotel & it was a great decision. Food was delicious and really reasonable! We all had something different: vegetable lasagne, pork, calamari, & octopus (no that was not me!!).





We finished up the evening in Tom & Taina's room to chat & watch the kids play & then crash!
Only one more day!!!!!! Don't want it to end!!!
Love ya,



George & Pamela

Subj: Travelogue #14 -Last day in Porto Date: 4/22/2013

Bom Dia Friends & Family,

George & I and Bob & Joanne had agreed that we would wake when we wanted and move slowly with a goal of starting the day with lunch at The Majestic -a famous restaurant on St Katarina's Street just down from our Hotel. Tom & Marge were to continue their family time with Taina & Tom & the kids.



We coordinated via phone and all met downstairs about 11:30am. We made a tentative plan for the day (Oscar was currently having a tizzy upstairs with unknown consequences!!!).



With that, we headed off down Rue de Santa Catarina toward Cafe' Majestic. This street is a mostly-pedestrian shopping street for both locals & tourists. It has a wonderful lively bustling atmosphere and it's clean & fun! Our hotel had high recommendations from Trip Advisor due to it's location at the beginning of this street. There's also a shopping mall opening off this street -Via Catarina, but we didn't venture out of the sun into it.



Cafe' Majestic was just one block down and we decided to stop for lunch before doing anything else. This cafe' is famous throughout Portugal and even throughout the world since it has received the acclaim of one of the Top 10 Most Beautiful Cafes in the World (issued by Ucityguides.com). It was gorgeous and full of happy chatter & good smells. It was opened on Dec 17th, 1921 and was designed by a famous Portuguese architect, Joao Queiroz. It is considered Art Nouveau.

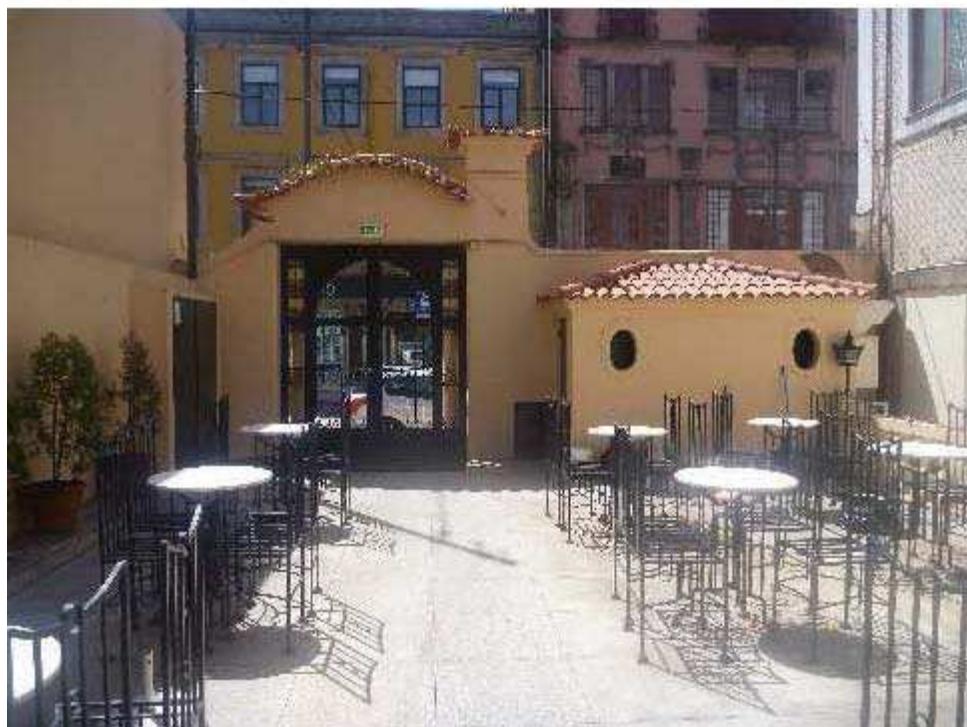




All of that aside, we were happy with the menu which offered some standard Portuguese dishes (including the Francesinha (most expensive thing on the menu!!!) that we had all tried yesterday and a Majestic burger and Club sandwich!!!! Joanne got the most exotic dish of our table, a salmon sandwich!! It came covered with cooked zucchini? Strange, but she said it was good. George & I both enjoy the cheeseburger and especially the french fries which were served in the cute little folded diaper!!! With of course the catsup in it's porcelain covered tub!!! Too funny!







After eating, we inspected the beautiful little courtyard where famous personages have been known to meet and plot political uprisings or argue artistic style. It was not in use for lunch today!!!



We took another picture of the exterior as we left. Notice the beautifully decorated tile sidewalk! We saw that throughout Porto. Amazing attention to detail!!



Kitty corner across the street was a beautiful restored building with a clock. We had read on Rick Steve's that it was a glockenspiel and it went off at noon, but when I ran out to watch, I heard the bells for more than a minute, but never saw anything moving. Couldn't find anything about it on line.











We wandered both ways on this wonderful street. Like many other pedestrian streets throughout the world, it had strange sayings in many shop windows, lots of artistic beggars and loads of places to drop some Euro!!





After a quick check at the hotel for a potty stop, we decided to walk across the upper portion of the Ponte Luis I bridge. It was only about 5 minutes from the Hotel. The upper level of the bridge is only for the Metro and pedestrians.







We heard a ships horn and saw one of the river boats leaving. At first we thought it was the Queen Isabel, but as it went under us, we could see that it was the Viking ship, Douro Prince. We think it was the one stuck up river, so wonder if it was able to make it back through the dams to Porto.







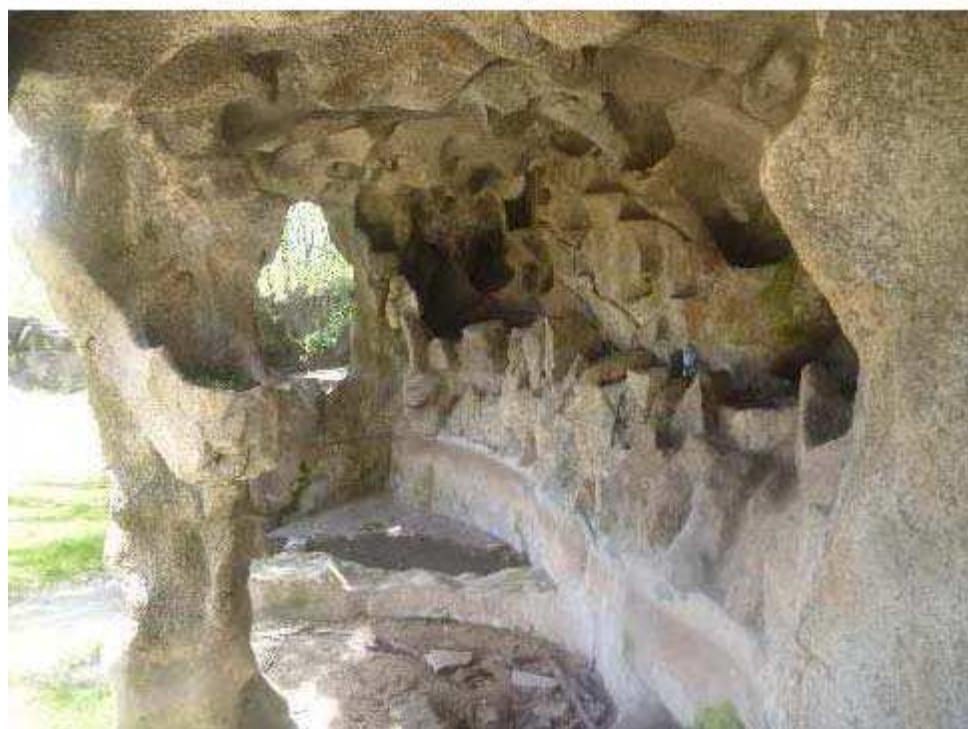
The view from the bridge was incredible. Enjoyed seeing the Venicular. Hadn't thought about how it stayed level inside until we watched the cushion under it expand & contract like an accordian.





Not sure if any of those old building are really still in use or not. Calem that is written on one roof is that Wine Cellar that we toured on our first day in Porto. The building at the top of the cliff was originally a monastery, but like all of them in Portugal, it is no longer active and this one was used as a military barracks during WWII.











There was a beautiful city park at the end of the bridge (this side is actually Vila Nova de Gaia, a separate city). We took a relaxed stroll around it before heading back across. This is a wonderful way to remember Porto. Such gorgeous weather! There were adorable young lovers taking advantage of the sunshine and green grass!





The views on both sides of the river showed all the lovely little areas just begging to have tourist enjoy them!! This town is just starting to open it's doors to the world and we're glad we saw it before it's mobbed with people!



On the way back to the hotel, we noticed this vending machine. Now we're seen everything! This was selling the small cans of Pringles! Give me a break! Is that too funny or what?





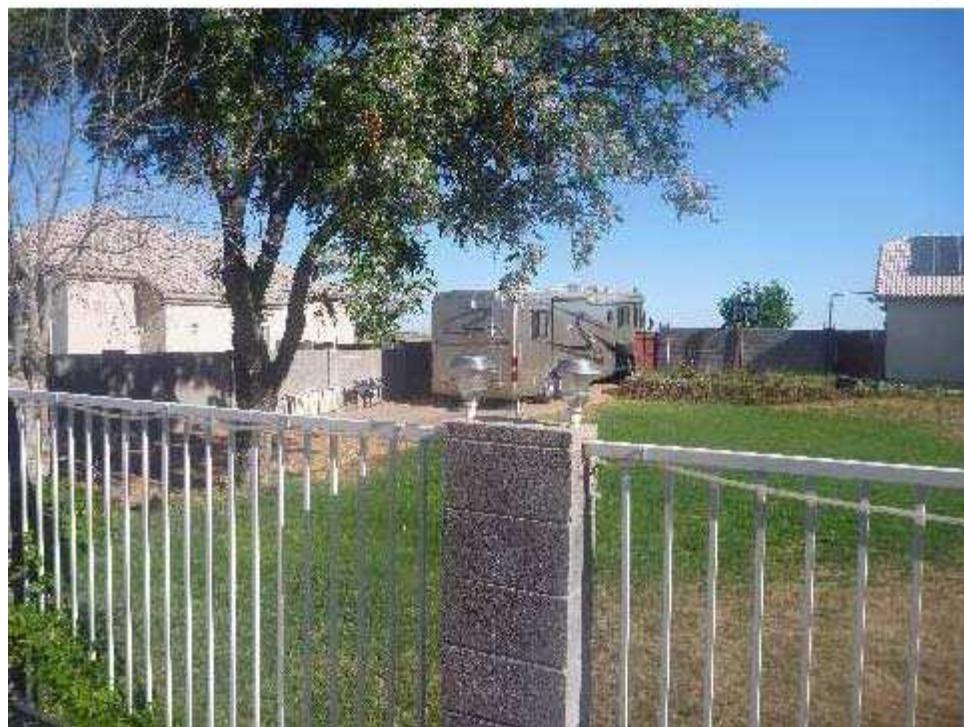
We were craving ice cream after our afternoon wander and found this innovation. You choose your flavor - chocolate, vanilla, mixed, or strawberry. He pulled a small round canister out of the freezer and attached it to this machine. Held a cone under it and pulled down the handle. Wahla!!! A twist of soft ice cream!! Cool!!!





We shared one more lovely Portuguese dinner on our last night. Taina, Marge, Bob, Joanne, George & I shared grilled meat plates (& piles & piles of french fries!!) at another little restaurant across the street from our hotel. It was so relaxing to share another outdoor meal. The 2 Tom's stayed upstairs with the kids! We did visit one last time in Tom & Taina's room while they put the kids to bed, but I didn't get any final pictures!!! We had to get up at 5:00am, so we parted ways early on!





Our trip home was complicated. The same taxi driver picked up Bob, Joanne, George & I at 6:15am on Tuesday morning. Tom & Marge were staying for a couple more days with Tom & Taina & the kids. We took the short 20 minute drive to the Porto airport and had an easy flight to Madrid. The flight there was delayed about an hour, but we eventually took off thinking everything was fine and made the 11 hour flight to Dallas with no problems. Our arrival at DFW was fine, the trip through passport control was a breeze! Never seen them direct traffic with such ease and we were probably off the plane and through to pick up our bags, in about a half hour. Then the problems started. Got our bag easily and ran through the nothing to declare line. Walked into the room which would normally be mostly empty, to leave off our bag to check for the next flight on to Phoenix. Usually no problem. We walked into the that room and it was MOBBED! There were people everywhere all milling around and yelling and running into each other. We originally thought it was a tour group or something and just tried to make our way past to drop off our bags. There were 2 Mexican workers there that were pointing and telling us to look at the board. Sure enough almost all the flights were canceled!!!! CANCELED!!! Now what? We realized that most folks were more or less forming into a line that snaked around and around in a general direction of a counter with American Airlines ticket agents. Easily a 3 -4 hour line. We elected to go to the main ticket counter on the main floor of the terminal. George & I are VIP's with Alaska Airlines and they have a reciprocal agreement with American Airlines, so we found the priority line and took Bob & Joanne with us. Thank goodness for that!!! After working with us for about a half

hour, the agent eventually got us booked on a flight on Wednesday to Tucson and then on to Phoenix. She gave us rooms at a local Super 8 and vouchers for dinner & breakfast. We were not happy, but thought we were mostly home free. Unfortunately we waited for more than an hour for a Super 8 shuttle and finally gave up and got a taxi!!! The Super 8 was trashy and we were pretty much feeling sorry for ourselves until we got back the next day and saw the cots all over DFW!!!! Apparently they had filled up the local hotels and left lots of folks to sleep at the airport!!!! And none of the local restaurants would take the vouchers for food!!! But we used the vouchers at the airport and lined up for our flight to Tucson. And waited. And waited. And waited!!!! We had already missed our connection in Tucson before we ever left DFW!!!!!! We eventually made it to Tucson and after going to 3 different ticket counters, finally were successful in getting on a US Air puddle jumper to Phoenix!!! Geez!!! What a crazy trip home! Luckily we had a Super Shuttle reservation to take us from the airport to Tom & Marge's and they had been very responsive to change every time we called them with another update!!!

Sooooooo, we finally made it back. Took 40 hours to make it from Porto Portugal to Phoenix!!! To add insult to injury, US Air lost our one checked bag for over an hour!!!!!! They eventually found it – said it had gotten stuck at the top of the luggage ramp!!!! Poor Bob & Joanne had wait patiently for us!!! And after a short night's sleep, Bob & Joanne took off for RV Specialist to get some work done on their RV and we took off to head to Texas!!!

Sadly enough, we heard from Tom & Marge and they also had their flight canceled at DFW and had to overnight there! Can't believe that none of that has been in any news! We have to fly from DFW on Sunday! Sure hope AA's got their act together by then!!!

Thanks for hanging with us throughout this adventure! Hope everyone has a wonderful summer and looking forward to seeing you all somewhere!!

So ends the final saga of the Mesa Season for 2012/13 and our April in Portugal!!!

Until the next time, Lots of love,



George & Pamela
