

Traveldiary Brigitte & Heinz

Back in Europe: Naturism, Nature & Culture



Chapter 19

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Switzerland: Short return - before setting off again

At around 9 PM on the evening of June 14th 2007, we finally arrived at Zurich airport, only one hour later than initially scheduled with our flight via Qatar from Singapore. We took a train to Affoltern, where we were noisily greeted by a starting thunderstorm – or was it firecrackers, as they use in Asia to celebrate big events?

For us, a great journey had ended where it began 3 ½ years ago. We had grown even richer in experiences and now our hearts were full of good memories.

Heinz' sister Edith picked us up from the train station and took us home to Merenschwand. We truly enjoyed her and her partner Karl's warm welcome and hospitality in their house. After a few years overseas, we indeed enjoyed to be back to Switzerland again - at least for a couple of months.

We instantly felt, what a Singaporean had once described to us: “One thing I love about [Switzerland](#) is the crisp air”. We didn't quite know what he was talking about back then, but after a long time in the tropics, we both agree; breathing here really does feel different!

We had experienced, that freedoms and restrictions for the people are often not set up by the government, but by society itself, through taboos and peer pressure. We visited fully democratic countries, where most inhabitants take themselves much less freedom, than people of some dictatorships. In this case reasonable political leaders managed to rise the amount of individual freedom and quality of life for most citizens during the last few years. We still think that theoretically, democracy is the best form of governing a country. However, in practice we experienced, that many, unfortunately far too many people on our globe are sadly not mature enough for it (also in some western countries). It's simply impossible to export democracy to countries without democratic traditions, as the West likes to do it. Democracy doesn't only mean that the majority has to grant rights to the minority, but also that it has to accept a possible landslide loss in elections. All this has first to be learned, before it can become part of the political culture. By the way, once we heard some locals complaining in one of the newly transforming countries: “It's true; the government gave us now freedom, but we didn't learn how to deal with it. Right now, we don't want freedom, what we really want is wealth!”



We both agree: every leg of our trip was absolutely worthwhile and rewarding. We both feel, our understanding of most places we visited, is now much different (hopefully better). Many controversial testimonies had led us to think differently about prejudices or clichés people so readily adopt and often are untrue or incomplete because that's the way the media has put it for its readers... We also realized that the free press in Western societies does not always report the full truth about second and third world countries, as often only those fractions are reported, readers (and advertisers) want to hear about, but the other 80% or so would put many things in a different light...

It was very nice to rediscover our home country again and after eating our way around the globe, it was indeed also very pleasant to taste Switzerland's local specialities again. Especially our consumption of bread, baked sweets, yogurt, chocolate and sausages rose dramatically.

For whatever reason, we were not motivated at all, to visit our friends as yet, during the first few weeks. We just enjoyed that we could stay with Edit & Kari and at our friends Annemarie & Beat's house in Root. It was also very relaxing to be back in a familiar cultural environment.

Otherwise we just visited our parents, (often a good mix between comedy and tragedy at the same time) and sucked everything in (not only food) we might have missed, because we had opted to travel (trying to understand) the world. But we also needed some more time to digest our experiences abroad.

As we decided to stay in Europe for the time foreseen, we needed to look for a reasonable car. But it was not as easy as we had hoped for. Reliable “value for money” secondhand cars, as we had found in Canada and Down Under, are not available in Switzerland. Swiss don’t believe old cars can still be reliable. Most consider their new car an “old bomb” already after a few years driving and exchange it against another brand new vehicle.

The dealership sets most of the older cars aside for export, as no Swiss would buy them. If a 8 -10 year old car exceptionally comes on the local market, the dealer sets the price usually well above sFr. 10’000 (€ 6’000), as he wants to



cover the cost for panel beating and extensive service and warranties. Therefore, it’s cheaper to buy a brand new car, if you opt either to a compact car, or a brand without any prestige-value. After running around unsuccessfully for ages, we finally opted for the latter. So we got a brand new **Dacia Logan**, a Romanian make owned by Renault. The cheapest models, were available for just sFr.10’600, but we paid 5’600.- more, as we opted for an energy efficient diesel engine, that survives on only 4.7 lt./100km. We calculated, that we should have amortised the additional cost within three years. Our Version also has some additional luxury as air conditioning. This car is also much bigger than our Twingo, which we drove until 4 years ago. Now we have a mere 510 lt. trunk on dispense for our travel luggage.

On July the 11th 2007, we picked our new 4 wheeled companion up. First we had to get used to driving on the right side of the road again, after having been used to the wrong side, as they do in most countries we’ve visited during the last few years.

Three days at Thielle

Now, our priority was to drive out into the countryside. So, we combined this three days later with a weekend in Switzerland’s largest naturist club, where we are still members. Our new car drove very well during the first twenty minutes, but then.... we got stuck for almost three hours in a traffic jam! Now we realized that traffic bulletins are maybe not as entertaining, but certainly more useful, than listening to our favourite songs we could now hear from the brand new Memo stick in the car stereo! Needless to say we were annoyed, but never mind; afterwards we still enjoyed the drive through the beautiful Emmental.

Due to the jam and our extensive sight-seeing, the reception at the naturist club “[DIE NEUE ZEIT](#)” in Thielle had just closed when we arrived. Luckily, the reception team, who was about to leave, felt pity and opened again to check us in. The ‘ONS Naturist Club’ is a very traditional affair; it still keeps the NO Alcohol, NO nicotine and NO meat rule. We hadn’t been back here for the last 8 years but to both of us, it immediately felt much more natural than most naturist places we had been visiting overseas, during the last 3 ½ years. On this sunny weekend, several hundred, if not more than 1’000 people were visiting, many families with children. Naturists here sunbathe, walk around, go swimming, play boules, volleyball, badminton or some other sport.

Some members and visitors were socializing in the “drug free” vegetarian restaurant “Café des Philosophes”. Others were joining the many lectures on offer: about re-incarnation, spirituality and alternative lifestyle and so on... Soon thereafter, many can be seen in the very popular sauna, engaged in serious discussions about the lectures they had enjoyed before, trying to re-shape the world... Rules and regulations are not really to our taste, but the alternative atmosphere this creates here, is much more appealing to us, than the socializing with “booze and talking bullshit” culture, we often experienced overseas.

After a very relaxing weekend in Thielle, we went back to Central Switzerland again. We chose the slow, but interesting and very scenic route, which was abt. 150km long. It first brought us to Fribourg and then via Schwarzenburg and

Riggisberg to the shores of lake Thun, where we drove the more scenic route along its northern shore. After we had driven over the Brünig pass road, it was already around 10 PM. As we had now tuned in on the traffic info of our radio, we learned about another traffic jam in Lucerne, about half an hour down the road. So we decided to stop for dinner in a small restaurant in Lungern. It worked out perfectly to us and we later drove to Edith & Kari's home without delay.

Now, we easily could drive around and see all our friends again, so we did! We just had to make sure, that we allowed ourselves enough time and get some breath in between, as some told us about dramatic changes in their lives, which we needed to digest.

We also stayed for three days with Andrea and Peter, an interesting couple we had only met on Borneo last February. As they had also been globetrotting (Andrea is also working for the travel agency "Globetrotter") for several years, we had many stories to exchange.

Five days at Dreiländereck

On August 2nd 2007, we drove to [FKK Dreiländereck](#) (meaning edge of 3 countries), a naturist camp situated in southern Germany, close to the border of France and Switzerland. During the next 5 days, we initially wanted to camp, enjoy the site and see some of our friends we know from Costa Natura in Spain, where we previously wintered a few times. But, as we hadn't seen them for 4 ½ years, especially Christiane and Klaus, but also Bruni and Erhard felt the urge to "organize us". So we hadn't too much time, to enjoy this indeed very nice resort. First of all: Christiane organized that we could sleep at their friend Monis's place. Of course, we enjoyed this special treatment much more than sleeping in a tent.

Klaus (he is a Berliner), a retired chef, prove his superb cooking skills daily. What he calls "nur ein ganz normales Frühstück" (just an ordinary breakfast) was probably a combination of everything, Berlin's top three hotels have on offer on their breakfast buffets. Even in five days, we couldn't try everything!

As Gisela & Klaus from Friesland and Agie & Jürgen were visiting at the same time, just arriving and leaving a few days before us, Christiane and Klaus unexpectedly provided full board for up to 10 people during eight days.

In between, Bruni & Erhard did also invite us for dinner and we were invited out by Doris to a Strauss (a German type farm restaurant). On some nights, we had several invitations for dinner. Choosing between many good options was the only problem we had, but we don't expect you to feel pity.

Finally, during our five days, we had met about twenty people we knew from Costa Natura. Many of them are now living in chalets on that campground permanently during summer. Others again, live in the surrounding countryside and were "organized" in our honour to pop in. On top of it, some sightseeing was also organized for all visitors, with a bunch of us enjoying a wonderful ride on a river barge without motor gliding over the tranquil "Inneren Rhein" river in scenic



[Taubergiesen](#) nature reserve near Rust. Afterwards we visited the town of Staufen, where we all had lunch with entertainment by Thomas, a musician-friend.

Still, we could manage to have at least a few hours to enjoy the beauty of FKK Dreiländereck. The swimming pool is in fact a little artificial pond, situated between the Sauna and a big sunbathing lawn. This family orientated naturist place, owned by the community and managed by a tenant family, feels very natural and attracts many young families. Here, a family with two children pays a fair bit less than a childless couple, but still a bit more than a single person. This is certainly a good way to bring the younger generation back to naturism.



Back to Switzerland

After 5 very sunny and warm days in southern Germany, we did leave with the arrival of the first raindrops. We drove back to Switzerland to stay for some more time with our friends Annemarie & Beat in Root. We arrived just in time, as we soon realized. Heavy rain poured over central Europe and the same night, a neighbour came up to the house that is situated almost at the top of a hill. He asked us to help him and a member of the fire brigade, to build barriers to prevent the rising creek (normally just a rivulet) from flooding the garages.

Luckily, we could warm up afterwards in the cosy warm sauna of Annemarie and Beat's house, while the river was in check.

We just visited a few more friends, before we went back to Edith & Kari's place. We wanted to support Edith in dealing with Heinz' and her mother's hip operation, so we decided to stay until the end of August. We also used this additional time to enjoy a bit more of our home country. Among them was a big day-trip that brought us through the Valley of Uri, then over the Oberalp pass road into the countryside of the Grisons. Here, we continued over the Lukmanier Pass into Ticino, Switzerland's Italian part. While Brigitte had a good look at the architecture of traditional villages along the way, Heinz was more interested in the exhibition centres about the construction of the new [Gotthard Base Tunnel](#). With 57 km, this rail tunnel will be the longest in the world, when it finally opens - about 2017.

Naturist autumn in France: Lively and Popular

On September 1st 2007, after 2 ½ very enjoyable months in our motherland, we finally said farewell to Edith & Kari and continued towards [France](#). Due to cool weather, we waved our initial plan to visit the naturist club in Thielle again. Instead, we headed directly south towards the Domaine de la Sablière near the Ardèche valley. As this is a 700km long drive, with lots of sightseeing opportunities in between, we split the trip over three days. On the first day, we explored a bit more of Switzerland and chose a route via the very scenic Berner Oberland. We continued over the Jaun pass to Bulle in the French part. From there, we followed the motorway down to Geneva, where we crossed the border to France.

Our first overnight stop was in [Annecy](#), just another 34 km down the road. As it was a weekend, the towns budget hotels were already booked out. It took us about 2 hours and some nerves, to find a place to stay. Indeed, it was very nice to visit this charming town again, which is nestled along the shores of the lake with the same name. Although, it got a bit late, we could still manage to get a superb French dinner in the old town, where we strolled around afterwards and again on the next morning. Annecy's old town, along canal Thiou is particularly charming and the market on Sunday morning was absolutely worthwhile.

In the afternoon, we followed the motorway to Chambéry, where we left it to continue through the Vecors mountain range. Along the way we saw spectacular scenery and charming villages, which made this a very interesting detour. We were quite amazed that most French villages have now a 30 km/h speed limit. Our routing was via Voiron, Romans and Tournon sur Rhône, before we reached Aubenas, where we stayed overnight.



We remembered this place from another visit but right now on Sunday night, it was very, very dead. The manager of the place we stayed, advised us to have dinner at Vals-les-Bain, the village we had passed 10 km earlier. "As this is a thermal resort", he said "it shouldn't "close down" on Sunday nights" and there was certainly more than one place to satisfy our culinary desires.

On the next day, we first visited the small, but very charming village of Lanas, a very traditional place, with most houses built of big stones. Over small country roads, we continued to Vallon Pont d'Arc and then to Barjac.

Domaine de la Sablière

Mid afternoon, we arrived at “[la Domaine de la Sablière](#)”, a large and very comfortable naturist resort in a wild and uninhabited area near the [Ardèche gorge](#). The cabin- and camp park is situated in a stunning valley, on the shores of the small Cèze River. To us, it was probably our tenth visit there, but our first in autumn. Now, the atmosphere was quite different to our previous visits. First thing: the camping-areas ‘Mesange+Fauvette’ on the bottom of the valley were now near empty, whereas ‘espace Pinson’ further up the hill, was nearly full. No wonder: now in September, it takes quite a while until the sun reaches the bottom of the river valley. Second: it was busy, but very quiet. September is an odd month in Europe, as (almost) all European countries have ended summer school holidays now. Therefore, except on weekends, only couples were roaming around la Sablière, and so it was much quieter than in spring and summer, when there are also lots of kids around. We rented a simple “Bambi” mobile-home with kitchen, but without bathroom.

After three days, if only to us, the frightening quiet days were gone, as our friends Moni und Bruno joined us. Those two had fallen in love in 1994, when the 4 of us visited the Domaine de la Sablière for the first time. In the meantime, they had gotten married in Sydney!



Weatherwise and from the quiet atmosphere, autumn can also be an excellent time to enjoy this very natural naturist heaven. However, we felt that everything in the resort itself and also many (tourist) businesses in the surrounding countryside are slowly, but surely heading towards the well earned “hibernation”.

The otherwise very well stocked Sablière shop stocked less and less, and some of our favourite restaurants in the region were already closing for the season. It was a big difference to spring, when everything is opening up and the offerings are getting more plentiful by the day.

Of course we ventured out to the region’s different restaurants to sample French culinary delights. We also visited the Ardèche gorge and some charming villages like [Barjac](#), [Vallon Pont d’Arc](#), Ruoms and la Bastide du Virac again.

Luckily, we could enjoy excellent and sunny weather, sunbathe or swim in the river with its stunning scenery as a backdrop that makes nudity just normal. Halfway up the valley on our way back to our accommodations, we often jumped in the pool and visited the sauna.

After twelve very sociable days, we left Moni and Bruno, who spent another three days there, before heading back home to Switzerland to their working duties.

Bélézy en Provence

We only changed to the other side of the Rhône River and headed to another rural naturist resort: the [Domaine de Bélézy](#). It was September 15th and by the time we arrived at around 4 o’clock, people were queuing out of the reception, in order to check in. The poor receptionist told us, that it was like that, since she opened at 8 o’clock in the morning. She had been working here by herself all day long, unlike last week, when the reception was constantly attended by 2-3 staff, but nobody had been arriving. Obviously, there was a reason to this massive show-up of guests; on that very day the prices dropped to the lowest level of the season and we were by far not the only ones, who had been waiting for that. Despite the arriving crowd, we were luckily still given a choice of different Mobile-Homes, as most other arrivals had their own caravan in tow.

Also B el zy feels very different in autumn than in spring. The area with the deckchairs around the big pool looked now almost as busy as a beach in Rimini, but: it was dead quiet! Hundreds; mainly pensioners, were lazily sunbathing and reading. Nobody talked. Everybody seemed to enjoy, that children had to attend school on this time of the year. Somehow, it felt that even the excess noise of turning newspaper pages, would disturb this crowd. The large playgrounds in the centre of B el zy were deserted, there were no more animations and the tourist information was closed.

Again; it felt very different to our previous visits in April, when children, adolescent and adults alike, were happily playing or doing sports on the fields. Communal BBQ's were arranged to bring people together, later socialising all through their holidays. It seems that maybe the Management purposely optimizes conditions for those who like to be active and socialise from spring to the beginning of September and after that, for the remainder of the season: for those who like it peacefully quiet. Therefore, in the midst of September, no animation and no communal BBQ's were offered anymore. We know from some friends, that B el zy had still been very lively in the beginning of September!

The restaurant at B el zy still served excellent French food for a very competitive price. The shop, which closed after a week, sold many items at a discounted price, but still stocked some fresh fruit every day. Fresh bread was still available at the reception after the grocery store closed a few weeks before the end of the season (probably because so many "campers" carry half of Aldi & Lidl's range in their caravan from home.).

Shopping and dining is also very easy outside B el zy. The village of [Bedoin](#) is only an easy 20 min. stroll away and it has an excellent Shopi-Supermarket and several good restaurants. Every Monday a market is held, presenting a true feast for the eyes and the palate. We also visited some charming villages in the Provence district, many offering some more superb dining options and often great scenery along the way. After ten very sunny and mild days, we left B el zy on September 25th 2007.



Port Leucate Naturist Village on the Mediterranean Sea

After only a few hours' drive, mainly along the freeway, we reached [Port Leucate](#) on this extremely windy day. Our car's diesel consumption had risen by more than 10%, as the Mistral blew against us for half of the way, just to be replaced by the Tramontagne, the wind from the other direction, for the other half, obviously none of which was from behind...

When we reached [Oasis reception](#) at the "Village Naturiste Port Leucate", the very friendly reception staff handed out the keys to a very nice and well equipped two storey terrace-house. It was situated directly on the  tang (inlet) and less than 100 meters away from the beach. This was certainly the perfect place to stay for the next six weeks.

The holiday village had changed a lot since our last visit in 2004. The project of 50 new semi-detached houses and 24 new apartments, called "Les Jardins de V enus" was already completed. The different naturist villages are now probably offering more than 1500 apartments and holiday houses altogether.

Most Dwellings are rented out and sold through specialised nudist Real-Estate agencies like "Oasis". However, in stark contrast to the (English influenced) overseas countries we visited recently, some nudist holiday-units are also marketed in the surrounding villages and towns through agencies operating worldwide; like Century 21 or Remax. This is part of the liberal attitude we have in Europe. In their branches Down Under or in North America, the personnel would already giggle or turn red just by the thought of marketing a nudist property!

Most shops and restaurants in the adjoining Aphrodite village seemed to close earlier this year. Only the excellent bakery and the fish restaurant were still open. We don't know, whether the early closings were because the operators didn't see enough business during the late autumn season, or by the (for this time of the year) exceptionally strong and exceptionally often appearing winds, that certainly blew some of the French visitors away. During our other autumn visits to Aphrodite/Oasis, the disturbing Tramontagne wind hadn't been so much of a nuisance, but this time, it blew more often and stronger than we ever experienced.

Luckily, just in time, when Heinz's sister Edith and her hubby Karl visited us between October 7-20th the winds calmed down and went on holiday as well. In the naturist area, it was now pleasantly quiet, but certainly not dead. The four of us could enjoy the quiet beach almost daily. With only calm winds, it was even enjoyable to walk in the raw along the 1.5 km long beach, or along the inlet.

We enjoyed the cosy little "tasting localities" set-up by oyster-farmers next to the nudist settlements. What you get for a few Euros straight from the producer as „dégustation de coquillages“ is a little feast for every seafood-lover. Most textile resorts around Leucate & Les Barcarès had basically closed down until spring. Only tourist traps have to close after the summer-holiday-folks disappear. Even some ATM's were firmly closed for the season (with a padlock)! Luckily, the best rewarded gourmet-temples are not for tourists only and therefore remain open. So the four of us dived in and fully enjoyed the culinary highlights France has on offer.

Of course we also made some worthwhile trips to the surrounding region. One of the highlights, was indeed the world heritage listed fortified town of [Carcassonne](#). The very impressive fortification of the old town consists of a double ring of ramparts and 53 towers. Most of the narrow paths and roads inside the walls are cobble stoned and the buildings are well preserved. It was very charming, but also very touristy to stroll around this "cité" on the Aude River. Other pleasant towns we visited were [Perpignan](#) and [Narbonne](#). The cathedral Saint-Just, dating from 1272 is certainly Narbonne's most impressive sight. Another trip led us on very small roads to Guissan, where we passed an area with salt-fields. There we sighted some flamingos, as are commonly seen around this area. Our meal in a Gault Millau rewarded restaurant was afterwards appreciated by all of us, except Brigitte. She was very, very annoyed as this gourmet temple served her garlic-mayonnaise in an ashtray! Only a few weeks later, over the border in Spain, we sighted "that yellow ashtray" again and again; sold as a serving dish mainly for Ali-Oli (garlic-mayonnaise)!

Another pleasant trip led along the coastal road to Collioure and then further south into Spain. The first part through the tourist villages (and towns) of Barcarès, Canet Plage and St.Cyprien Plage was not exactly joyful, as they were nothing but lines of hotels, tourist shops and restaurants. The highlight was [Collioure](#), a very charming and naturally grown village, beautifully situated on the Mediterranean Sea. From there, we followed a fascinating coastal road to Portabou, the first Spanish settlement after the French border. The spectacular road led in countless bendings to Llanca, from where we continued inland to Figueras, where Salvador Dalí was born. From there, we headed back to Port Leucate, using the freeway.



On October 19th 2007 we had to rise early, as we had to bring Edith & Karl to the railway station in Perpignan. There we learned that the French railway workers were currently very busy being on Grève (strike), an extremely popular national sport which seems to be a favourite of "La Grande Nation". Never mind, Kari decided, it's best to go back to the Oasis-beach as quickly as possible and try it again the next day. Amazingly, his concept even worked out; Edith & Kari *had to* leave on the next morning, as their train did. So they were quite (un)lucky. We know of a teacher's strike some 4 years ago, that lasted for more than 6 weeks...

One thing that changed dramatically around the Naturist Villages of Port Leucate: The many motorhomes that usually camped illegally on the shores of the inlet, just opposite Oasis village, had disappeared completely. After the local authorities tried for years unsuccessfully, to convince the proud motorhome owners to stay with their expensive vehicles on campgrounds, they finally opted for the hard way to enforce the law. Now, all over the coast around Port Leucate, if not even all around Languedoc-Roussillon, every entrance to a parking lot or any other place, where a motor home could camp overnight for free, is newly "decorated" with a 2 meter high iron frame. Now all motorhome owners are punished, including those who stay overnight on campgrounds. They cannot park their vehicles anymore, just to visit the beach during the day.

Toward the beginning of November, the atmosphere at "Village Naturiste Port Leucate" changed. It seemed to us that probably some apartment owners in Aphrodite & Oasis offered their holiday home to friends that are not naturists, as they probably thought; at this time of the year it will be too cold for naturism anyway. On top of it: by then Aphrodite and Oasis Receptions were closed for the season. However, in 2007 the end of October/beginning of November-period was exceptionally warm, so for the few remaining naturists, there was no need to wear any cloths at all. Some of the "textile" families obviously didn't now know where to look to, whereas most naturists just had great fun watching them... Surely we enjoyed the exceptional warm weather as well, so this was just the perfect final to our 6 weeks at Oasis, which we enjoyed very much.

Natsun in Vera Playa: Naturism in the change of seasons

From Port Leucate to Andalucia

Just 4 days before we left to Spain, Christiane & Klaus, whom we know from Costa Natura visited us for two days at Oasis. When we told them that we wanted to visit the nudist resort of Natsun in Vera Playa, they were convinced, that we would want to leave after two days maximum, as they had seen construction sites only, when they passed by 5 years ago. To us, this promised brand new and nice accommodation, so we were looking forward to move south.

On November 6th 2007 we left Port Leucate and ventured towards southern [Spain](#). We chose the inland route, which brought us first through the Pyrenees. Just before reaching Andorra, we took the turn off towards La Seu d'Urgell, from where we took road Nr. C14 through beautiful landscapes down to Lleida, where we stayed overnight. From there we continued through the impressive Ebro River valley along road N211 and N420. We found some very impressive Rock formations, just before reaching Teruel. From there we continued on the N330 southwards. Overnight we stayed at the small village of Ayora. On the next morning we continued via Lorca to Aguilas, where we hit the Mediterranean Sea again. Now it was only 40 km along a spectacular coastal drive to the naturist urbanisations of Vera Playa, situated between Garrucha and Villaricos on the Costa de Almeria, [Andalucía](#), where we had pre-arranged an apartment for the next five weeks.



Arrival at Natsun



At [Natsun's](#) reception, we were given the key to a very nice and big top floor apartment with an even bigger balcony overlooking the pool and the beach. So we started to explore the surroundings and we were pleasantly surprised to find many good walking opportunities just at our doorstep. Even now in the middle of November, more people were still sunbathing on the long naturist beach than we had expected. As most beachgoers were Spaniards, we didn't feel like being in a foreigner dominated ghetto. At around three o'clock in the afternoon, the autumn winds usually made sunbathing on the beach a bit too chilly. We put on some cloths and either walked the five kilometres along the beach into the nearby village of Garrucha, went around the naturist urbanisation or made some strolls to the countryside just behind Vera Playa.

Natsun in Vera Playa is that sort of place, many people get "addicted" to and before we even realized, the "roving spirits" had become "stationary rovers"! Every time we were "scheduled" to leave this paradise, we took advantage of our freedom and extended our stay. So our initial 5 weeks became finally more than 50! We immediately fell in love with this place, so that we soon waived our initial plan to continue to Costa Natura, where we had spent a few winters some years ago.

The spirit of Vera Playa

What makes Vera Playa so special? It's the openness and tolerance of the Spanish society. After dictator Franco died in 1975, the Spanish society, especially the younger generation, started to break many taboos from the old times. Some of those were reversed and became constitutional rights soon thereafter. For example, nudism is not punishable any more since 1978, but a Constitutional Right. (Surely) we hadn't seen anybody naked outside the nudist area and the beach, but this very liberal approach means in practice, that everybody has the right to be nude in any public place (like beaches, rivers, lakes, open fields, paths, roads, streets, plazas, parks, etc.), but not in private places (like restaurants, shops, etc) as they have their own regulations.

Therefore, the “naturist urbanisations” of Vera Playa are integrated borderless into neighbouring “textile” urbanisations. The main road leads for only the main access road indicating “Zona Naturista”.



leading from the nude to the prude indicating that the naturist area Shopping Centre “Centro neighbouring nudist area from its A few years ago, the municipality naturist section on the beach, but alike protested against it by the other section.



1.5km along the naturist urbanisations and into the “naturist quarters” has a sign Neither the beach, nor any of the roads

sections of Vera Playa, has any signage ends (or starts) here. Just next to it is the Hispania”, which allows good views to the car park and rooftop terrace. of Vera built barriers to mark the ends of the they were removed after naturists and textiles walking demonstratively in big groups into

In Vera Playa, naturists and textiles obviously mingle very well with each other on the beach. The stretches 500 m north and south of Natsun are mainly used by naturists. A few hundred meters further south it’s fairly mixed and then it gets more and more textile. Beach walks are very popular among everyone and nobody cares if those wearing bathers walk a few hundred meters into the naturist section, as naturists walk a few hundred meters into the textile section. This is totally accepted and nobody stares, it’s totally natural for everybody. Surely, there are some teenagers wearing bathers in the naturist section, but other teenagers are sunbathing fully naked in the middle of the textile crowd and also here: NOBODY stares at them and nobody tells them to wear more or less.

In North America or Down Under, probably at least half of the textiles would peer, and the others would call the police we guess! We think that it is this tolerant and natural environment that encourages so many single women of any age to go naked at Vera Playa to be even with nature. Here in southern Spain it got so obvious, that in some Victorian influenced countries, the society itself breeds and later prosecutes its perverts! Peeping Toms are a big exception in Vera Playa and usually rather immigrants from the other shore of the Mediterranean Sea (or the UK) than Spaniards.

English invasion

Vera and Garrucha are Spanish villages with a long tradition. Most Spaniards either dream of owning a holiday apartment or already own one. In Vera Playa, the vast majority of (textile & naturist) holiday flats are owned by Spaniards, often residents of Madrid or Barcelona. On the other side, some of the nearby villages like Antas, Mojácar or Turre are very,



very British. In some, the majority of registered residents are UK passport holders. Those immigrants are “supplemented” by Latvians, Rumanians, French, Dutch, Germans, Scandinavians, Ecuadorians, Chinese and even Indians, so in those places, the Spaniards are a minority in their own country. Consequently, there are lots of foreign, mainly English-run businesses around. In many shops it’s easier to practise English rather than Spanish. Fish & Chips or Cornish Pies can be found very easily. Apart from many (sports TV polluted) English bars and pubs, there are also entire industrial areas (Poligono Industrial) where almost all businesses like builders, hardware stores, pool maintenance and so on are owned by British expats. MR. UK doesn’t sell only baked beans and tinned spaghetti, but also lots of Asian spices and unbelievable but true: “original Spanish Paella” made in UK!

Ordinary Andalusian food is normally wholesome, but not that much of a culinary delight. Fish is fish, meat is meat and almost everything, including Fries, is prepared with Olive Oil. This is normally very healthy, but rather the contrary if used for deep frying. Thanks to the many British immigrants, Vera’s surrounding has now attracted a good selection of Chinese Restaurants (unbeatable value for money) and Indian restaurants, plus some excellent (but not too expensive) upmarket places, aiming at those Brits (and other expats) seeking a delightful dining experience rather than cheap crap.

Also Bingo- and Quiz nights are held regularly and we even sighted a note board at a post office, where everything was posted in English only. Before Christmas, flea markets and fund raisings for charities are held around the English communities in southern Spain, exactly as we had seen it Down Under. Also here, participants wear elk antlers in plush and red Santa caps. Even the Royal English legion has many branches down here!

Winter in Vera Playa

The winter in Vera Playa is dominated by pensioners (and dropouts) from Northern Europe enjoying the relatively mild winter climate along Southern Spain's coastline. On four out of six winter weeks it's possible to sunbathe stark naked for a few hours each day (in a wind sheltered corner) even though night temperatures can fall very close to freezing, even on the coast. But also the "bad weather days" are normally fairly dry (naturally, there is no rule) but they can happen for two consecutive weeks, just to be replaced by a mainly sunny winter month.

Whether people experience good or bad weather during the winter in southern Spain is often a matter of one's own attitude. Those with nothing better to do, than desperately waiting for the sun again, as soon as it's hidden behind a cloud, are probably less satisfied with the weather than those who know many other things to do.

In winter, most of Natsun's terraces are dominated by (big) satellite dishes. Whenever new winter guests arrive, the thing they usually do first, is setting up their satellite dish, before unpacking anything else. Many are convinced that they couldn't come here, if they wouldn't have the possibility to receive their favourite TV stations from home. Most of the other winter escapees were probably convinced that we only didn't set up a satellite dish on our patio, because we wanted to save money! Therefore, during our first few weeks at Natsun, we were offered several times receivers and satellite dishes. We stubbornly refuse to use dishes anywhere else than in the kitchen. To us, cooking and eating is already an evening filling program. We hope that people still grow wiser by compiling experiences outside the TV environment with all its soap-operas!

Shall the society become ever more brainless? We were already amused when we spotted fruit jam in Australia a few years ago, that was declared to be at least 99% fat free! The best we know of so far is a packet of peanuts we bought here in Spain. It had a warning in ten different languages: "Product may contain traces of nuts".

During the winter period, we felt a bit like being in a ghetto dominated by foreign long term visitors who come here every year. Some of them seem neither willing to speak any word of Spanish, nor to adapt at least a bit to the Spanish rhythm of life. Sometimes life penalizes them, as some restaurants serve excellent dinners after 8 pm, but pretty average if not even bad fare beforehand!

A few excursions

Vera Playa is already a sight in itself; sometimes we had to kick ourselves for motivation to discover the sights around (the fact that we discovered such a lot during the 8 ½ years before our stay here had often functioned as a good excuse). The surrounding landscape is very barren and dry. Nevertheless the mountain ranges and marble mines around Tabernas are all very fascinating. It also happened that we drove along a track and suddenly a large golf-resort came into view. Aguilas, nestled on the sea 40 km east, is a very nice town. The coastal drive from there, via Vera Playa to Carboneras is truly spectacular. Also the white washed villages of Mojácar and Bedar, as well as Cuevas del Almanzora are worthwhile.

Bedar's typical Andalucían cemetery is especially interesting. The ancestors rest in small buildings containing "rooms" just big enough for a coffin. As some graves offer superb views over the mountain ranges or the sea, many families secure a grave at a good location long before their time is due... If the owners move to another village (before the inevitable has happened) they just put a "se vende" (for sale) sign with their phone number on the grave and buy a new one wherever they settle down.

Most tourists (not all) rave about the markets in the surrounding villages. We got the impression that most veggies that are grown here are being exported only. In Spanish markets, the section with (rather old fashioned) cloths is usually way bigger than the one with vegetable & "comestible" stalls. After seeing big colourful and varied markets across Asia and also France, Spanish markets appear to us pretty unexciting with such a limited food section and selection; probably we're just too spoiled.



Along the freeway to Almeria and Murcia there are many plastic tunnels under which vegetables and fruits are grown. This region of Spain also got the nickname 'Costa Plastica'. In this very dry and sunny area, the water for the huge orchards and plantations is fetched in large artificial inland lakes. Most labourers working the fields and greenhouses come from Africa, Eastern Europe and South America.

When touring around, we often stopped in small villages, where the local bar is the only place to get a quick cheap lunch. There, smoking seems to be compulsory for the locals and television is omnipresent, with the volume usually greater than the tolerance levels of the human ear. The floor of a Spanish bar is usually covered with used napkins, although you can also find a collection of other objects such as cigarette butts, olive pits or seafood shells. Any good bar incorporates these elements of decoration - if you don't find them, either it's not a good bar or you're not in Spain!

The Spanish way of life

Spanish people like to be out and about, to see what's going on and to be seen. They always dress up, even if going out only for a few minutes. In government offices, dressing up is important for being taken seriously. Spaniards spend a good part of their income in improving their appearance. They are a very proud bunch of people. Even along the naturist beach they walk with pride, but "au naturel". Otherwise, you can't tell them apart from other Europeans any more once they disrobed.

Spaniards are very sociable people. Not only a hike or a visit to a restaurant, but also shopping, ordering a new telephone line or visiting the doctors is often done within the circle of family and friends. Once we found a notice posted in a dentists waiting room, which politely asked the patient to enter the consultation room without the family or friends.

At the time when many northern Europeans start dinner, Spaniards just finished their lunch. Later, when the foreigners switch off their TV-sets and go to bed, the locals start cooking dinner, or go out and about; children and adults alike. As this is a normal part of Spanish life, there is no reason to be particularly quiet when they come home between 1 and 4 o'clock in the morning, it's just as normal as coming home between 8 or 11 pm in the rest of Europe.

Every time when some of our country mates who regularly spend the whole winter in Southern Spain (but don't speak any Spanish at all) complain about the incredible noise those "bloody Spaniards" made again on the last long weekend, we would like to sink in the ground. Spaniards are not noisier than other Europeans; they just have a different rhythm of life!

We fully agree with our exceptionally well integrated German neighbours Waltraud & Dieter who say it bluntly: "Those who can't cope with the Spanish rhythm shouldn't come here in the first place!" Surely, it's easier for them and for us to integrate, as we tend to eat late and go to bed late anyway.

In any respect, we get along very well with our good humoured neighbours. They showed us the best restaurants; we could also use their internet access and their sun-sail. Brigitte took care of their plants while they were away working in Germany.



Except baking, growing and planting flowers was one of Brigitte's big hobbies during our stay at Vera Playa. At one stage, our terrace was decorated with almost 100 flower pots.

Unfortunately she got a bit discouraged after a while, when she realized how easily plants attract living little plagues; she moaned: "I wanted a garden, I didn't want a zoo!"

Meanwhile, Heinz was assembling some self-made furniture for our patio, with wood Brigitte had collected from the rubbish. All that was still necessary were some additional rather expensive pieces for a couple of hundred Euros from the furniture and wood-work-shops.

The legacy of the Franco era

Spain, obviously being a western country, has developed to its present modern state mainly thanks to the EU who helped it to transform from a suppressed, almost third world country, to a modern state very fast, in some respects too fast! We shouldn't forget; it was only in 1975 when the Spaniards finally got rid of the Franco junta. After 40 years of dictatorship and no democratic history at all, it's almost impossible that the mentality of people and local governments would change as quickly as the EU was able to raise living standards and helped to put a modern infrastructure in place. Therefore it's not surprising that bureaucracy and corruption are still alive in Spain. Building permits are often issued (faster or only) after a bribe has been paid and even local governments sometimes build their infrastructure on land, that was not designated to be built on.

Almost weekly, the press reports that the provincial government issued some demolition orders for buildings that were being built without legal permits. Affected are not only holiday homes, but also big and fully operational shopping centres and even a (not yet operational) Club Med. In most cases, nothing happens, but in some rare exceptions, the Government states an example. Meanwhile, more and more Majors and local councillors end up in prison for corruption or misuse of public funds. Of many Spanish villages and towns, not only local council, but also many of the city halls office clerks end up having a "holiday" behind iron bars, just to share this destiny a few years later with the new government who replaced them! It certainly needs another generation, until all of the Franco epoch's bad government habits finally belong to the past.

The lack of democratic history is also apparent in common people who have still not changed their way of thinking completely. Many still don't dare to oppose against unfair treatment they received from the government, as they are still in fear of retaliatory measures...

Not that surprisingly, the church supported the dictatorship also in Spain, and vice versa. So for a long time Catholicism was forcefully imposed by the government. Spain's pre democratic governments are responsible for some of the world's worst inquisition crimes; not only in Spain, but also in the Americas and the Pacific, where Spanish troops "helped" the missionaries holding forced baptisms!

Today, religion is still actively practised especially among the older generation. Maria, José and Jesus are very popular names and many towns or villages have street names like "Calle Isabel la Católica".

The modern state

It's almost unbelievable, how swiftly Spain transformed into a modern wealthy state went. Around 1985, traffic in big parts of Andalucía was still dominated by donkeys and for most locals, owning a car was not more than an unreachable dream. Now, cars are as common as in the rest of Europe, and they are not cheap old cars. However, the small roads in the villages are not built to cope with it.

In Spanish country villages, some side roads are so narrow, that a car and a pedestrian can hardly pass each other, but this is no reason, not to park on these roads. Spaniards are real masters in seeing spaces for parking; their fantasy is certainly not as limited as ours! Even during peak season, there was never a lack of parking spaces. Many roundabouts were used to park all around and in its centres. Also all along the sides of any road, sometimes even the middle, zebra crossings and also footpaths are quite popular parking opportunities. Double line parking in front of stores and restaurants is common; if one is locked in, he just needs a bit of insisting by tooting his horn and sooner or later he will be freed! This is almost the only reason, Spaniards would use their horn, but otherwise they are very relaxed drivers! Even if someone blocks the entrance to a big parking lot, because he stopped in the middle of the road just to chat to his mate who came by in the other lane, most locals patiently wait until the ad hoc conference finishes.



Spaniards (or rather their cheap labourers washed up to their shores) are very fast when building new roads. While Swiss still argue about the least disputed alignment and how many more millions should be spent to make it last for two centuries, the Spaniards are already happily using the new road for five years. Not surprising, that some of the former landowners are still not compensated for the expropriated land by then. Only foreigners reproach them that the new addition to the road network already had to go through some major repair during the first few years of use - Spaniards are just happy that the construction was completed so quickly!

As a direct result of Spain's transformation into a wealthy country, prices rose substantially. Overall, the cost of living is still a bit cheaper than in France. But according to statistics, prices for food in supermarket- shelves are already more expensive than in Germany. In our experience, basic no frills products (quantity) or fish are still quite a bit cheaper than in the rest of Europe, but everything a bit more sophisticated (quality) is often substantially more expensive than further north. Electronics cost about 50% more in Spain than in Switzerland. Some identical products on sale in the same supermarket chain in France, (neither French nor Spanish made) often cost more than double in Spain. Basic restaurant meals are still very cheap (if focused on quantity rather than quality) but quality meals (except Chinese) cost more than in France, but still don't match the creativity. Fine Spanish dining focuses on high quality ingredient and generous portions rather than fancy preparation.

Prices to buy or rent properties are still relatively modest around eastern Andalucia and a far cry away from the overheated prices on the Costa del Sol.

In 2005, the average Spanish salary rose above EU average for the first time. In 2007, Spain's GDP per head was 5% above Italy's and 3% below France's.

But wealth is not evenly distributed in Spain. Andalucia has Spain's biggest unemployment rate and except for the heavy seasonal tourist industry, there are not that many other employment options. Therefore, some salaries are still fairly low in this part of Spain. Andalucia relies heavily on its wealthier country mates from northern Spain, with many industries abound.

On one hand, the Spanish industry today produces many good quality High-Tech items, like for instance major components for the modern Airbus Jets or prefabricated elements for giant bridges, like the Öresund link between Denmark and Sweden. On the other hand, caused by the rising cost of labour, manufacturing of cheap products is not possible any more. Spain has a few manufacturers aiming at producing low priced products like electric household appliances, but more often than not, the price and also the quality is very cheap, so for budget items, "made in China" products are usually the better bet.

A good proof how much the economic situation improved is, that the Spanish Army lowered its IQ requirements in order to fill the about 82'000 positions in its regular army. After this desperate move didn't bring results, the Spaniards started to recruit foreigners, mainly from its former colonies in the Americas!

Natsun & Vera Playa

[Natsun](#), the naturist urbanisation we stayed at Vera Playa is owned by Jan and Hedy, a Dutch couple with two children. They operate it very personal (and at moderate prices). We stayed at the three storey building called "ELCANO III", which offers Natsun's most sophisticated accommodation options. Most apartments are facing south. Only a nicely landscaped large pool separates the building complex from the beach. The apartments are very generously sized, some 4m wide to 13m long, with a large balcony facing the sea. The interior is very functional, with Spanish style furniture and many decoration elements. All apartments are equipped with glass ceramic stove and a big fridge with a good size freezer compartment, perfect for a long stay. The work surfaces in the kitchen is unfortunately "polluted" with a microwave oven, taking most of the space (ours made a long hibernation in the wardrobe together with the TV). We considered the impressive



1mx2m table with 6 comfortable wooden chairs in our (and most other) apartments a big asset. Only if it comes to small kitchen accessories like bowls or cutlery, it's not always as well equipped as one would hope for. This little inconvenience (sometimes caused by tenants who redistribute everything movable to other apartments when visiting friends) seems to be even worse in other resorts.

As we stayed a bit longer than the average visitor, we invested in some additional luxury, like an Italian espresso machine, a shaker, a baking oven, table-ware and cutlery that matches our taste and copes with our extensive cooking.

The section we stayed in was only about four years old, but Natsun does also offer accommodation in older buildings: "ELCANO I & II mostly only rented out during the peak of the season.

Also on the naturist beach is "Vera Playa Club Hotel" that doesn't only offer 4-star comfort, but applies rules and regulations: it requires guests to dress up when attending the restaurant. No less than long trousers for Gents, which we find ridiculous for a naturist resort!

The Hotel and the two older buildings of Natsun were the first naturist developments on this part of the coast. When they were completed, they stood for a long time by themselves on a long stretch of sand. During the last decade, more and more naturist urbanisations were built around them, offering now altogether about 2000 naturist apartments. During the last few years, holiday developments for "ordinary textiles" were added, now surrounding the "Urbanisations Naturistas". There are no barriers between those and the naturist urbanisations and as the Spaniards are very tolerant, this blends all right.

Seeing the many construction sites around Vera Playa on the beginning of 2009, you think that the financial crisis hasn't arrived here as yet. Currently, dozens of kilometres of roads are being built between the hills in the hinterland (starting 500 m behind the beach) to develop land for thousands (rather tenthousands) of holiday dwellings. Nevertheless, the Costa de Almeria is still by far not as developed as the Costa del Sol. As all these massive developments want to be sold, the marketing is not always as honest as it should be. We heard about several cases where naturists discovered that their new purchased naturist apartment was actually situated in a textile urbanisation and vice versa; a very annoying situation in both cases.

Disaster nearly struck

Things could have turned out quite different around here. On January 17, 1966 one of the worst nuclear weapons-incidents of the entire Cold War had taken place off Spain's coast near Vera Playa (another one happened in Greenland, where we're going to go in summer). During an aerial tanking manoeuvre, an American B-52 bomber and a KC-135 tanking aircraft collided in mid-air at 9'000 meters and both planes exploded in a giant fireball over Palomares. Of the four hydrogen bombs in the hold of the B-52, one fell into the water somewhere off the coast, one landed unharmed in a tomato field near the village and from the other two, luckily only the non-nuclear fuse detonated, causing bomb fragments and plutonium dust to rain down on the impact site.

In a huge cleanup effort, 1'590 tons of contaminated material were excavated and sent to the US for disposal. Two months after the incident, the Spanish information Minister and the US Ambassador went demonstratively for a swim with their families near the crash site to reassure the public that everything is save now. Geiger counters were installed around Palomares and on the beach in Vera, to record the ambient radiation. After no radiation was found for several years, the go-ahead was given for new developments including the large "Zona Naturista".



The population and the environment still went through a radiation measurement program, by which a nasty surprise was uncovered only in 2006, because of snails. Not all of the contaminated material had been transported to the US, but some had been buried in two small trenches near the crash site. Consequently, Palomares was decontaminated once more this time in a joint American/Spanish cleanup effort and declared clean in march 2009. Luckily, the people of Palomares do

not suffer a higher cancer rate than the average Spaniards - only the snails were affected, but this is certainly their fault: nobody told them to go walkabout into the drenches where radioactive soil is hidden!

The inhabitants of Palomares feel safe; some even think that the whole story about the snails was over accelerated as justification for the nuclear agency to keep working! When our neighbours once measured the radiation level in Vera Playa with a Geiger counter on pure curiosity, they were astonished to discover that radiation in Vera Playa was several times lower than the natural radiation in the Bavarian forest! No reason to worry.

More information in the following article: [New York Times \(November 2008\)](#)

The real disaster

To us, Vera Playa's biggest annoyance during our entire stay was the strike of the truck drivers, because they felt that petrol prices got too expensive. Within three days only, they managed (with the massive help of the Spanish population, who hoarded whatever they could get hold on) that most supermarket shelves around the country got empty. But, if petrol would really be too expensive, Spanish oranges wouldn't get cheaper on their way to the consumers in France and Switzerland. On top of it, some of Vera Playa's permanent residents wouldn't drive their cars several times a day for less than a few hundred meters (some less than fifty) just to visit their favourite bar (where they probably moan on the table for regulars about the high petrol prices).

Shopping

While staying at Natsun, shopping is a breeze. Two mobile bakers regularly pass by in the morning and the cafeteria "Paso Doble" in the basement sells bread all day. The big Consum Supermarket (just outside the naturist zone) is within easy walking distance and offers the area's best selection in fresh food. Here you can pick and weight your own vegetables or buy meat, fish, sausages and cheese from fresh food counters. Within a 10 km radius there are also several Mercadona Supermarkets, Intermarché and Lidl.



The town of Garrucha, only 5 km away has also several qualified opticians offering 'rip offs' to those believing in designer brands and real bargains for those who insist that they don't need brand names to improve their self-confidence. Those who are happy with the tabloid press find a selection of papers and magazines from all over Europe, but those looking for a paper a bit more serious and cosmopolitan like the "International Herald Tribune" have to look more insisting.

If it comes to non food items, like clothing, lamps or furniture, we discovered very soon that most offerings around Vera reflect the more traditional taste of the older generation. The younger generation prefers the big shopping temples in Aguilas, Almeria or Murcia, where branches of the same stores as found in Paris, London, Frankfurt or Shanghai sell the same modern Chinese made items that can be found all over the world.

Visiting a traditional Spanish store is also a very interesting experience. One of the most typical we know, is a large Ferreteria (hardware store) near Mojácar. Although, during the year, it's mainly frequented by English residents, you're in for a very typical traditional Spanish shopping experience. Around Christmas it's as Spanish as it can be! On two rather large floors, almost everything you can think of is on sale. By navigating through the narrow corridors, it's not always an easy task to find what you are looking for, especially the smaller items are hard to find. Don't worry, just ask one of the sales attendants and they immediately will show it to you, either well hidden beneath or buried underneath something you're not looking for. You're trying to find a new coffee-maker but think their selection looks a bit modest? No need to go to another store to have a bigger choice. Just lift those unappealing looking coffee-makers off the shelf, wipe the dust off whatever you see behind it, and another row of brand new shiny coffee-makers will appear. You can do this again and again, until you find your favourite model.

At Christmas time, the narrow corridors in this hardware store (and many others) are tested to capacity. In Spain, major investments like a new toaster or hand mixer are discussed within the circle of family and friends. They often will then

come along, so shopping is more about socialising than about buying. It's not uncommon that three generations including their friends visit a store together, helping those who are willing to invest to make the right decision. Passing these large groups is a major task, made even more challenging by the fact, that piles of cardboard boxes containing all those irresistible X-Mas offerings block the corridors further. Exhibition space is very sparse, but you shouldn't make your choice from the (often untrue) pictures on the boxes. Just ask and a friendly sales attendant will open the box and show you the desired item. Don't worry if the content is broken, as the attendant knows immediately that you won't buy it. She will put it back into the box, seal it again and put it back on the shelf. You just need to bring a little bit of extra time, as she will do this for you again and again, until she finds a set without any broken pieces at all.

Peak season in Vera Playa: busy but calm

Everybody, including our Spanish friends thought we're very tough to spend the peak of the summer in a holiday resort that is popular with Spaniards. By the end of June, the vast majority of foreign residents around Vera Playa were already hiding back in their home countries to escape the incredible noise the Spaniards supposedly are expected to make during their summer holidays. But to us, being in Spain without spending the summer holidaying among the locals would be like being in Paris without seeing the Eiffel tower. So we were excitedly waiting for the crowds to arrive.

On May the first, the beach was suddenly bustling with thousands of sun seekers and therefore we thought this could already mark the start of the season. But after this long weekend, the locals went back to work as suddenly as they had arrived. In the middle of June, Live-Savers started patrolling the beach.

Now on the weekends there were regularly a few thousand nude bathers worshipping the sun, but during the week, they were reduced to a few hundreds. In stark contrast, the textile section was still near empty during the whole week including the weekends. In the middle of July it was still the same situation and we were already thinking, whether the season will arrive at all? Suddenly, building teams arrived to accomplish last minute renovations to those restaurants and souvenir shops that had still been closed up until then. Slowly some ice cream kiosks and additional sun beds with umbrellas were brought to the beach. Beginning of August everything was finally functioning. Probably due to prediction of traffic-jams, the first weekend was still not much busier than the previous weekends, but on Monday and Tuesday thereafter the masses finally arrived!



Natsun is the only naturist resort in Vera Playa which is popular year around, due to its setting and competitive pricing. The other naturist resorts have a few guests most of the time, but Vera Playas textile resorts are definitely near empty for 11 months a year. In August finally, every holiday accommodation was occupied.

So, we didn't need to go on holiday, holiday practically came to us. So now we were curiously sitting on our terrace, prepared for the unbearable noise our friends had predicted we would have to endure. We waited and waited for the noise to arrive, but it was only slightly noisier than during off-season. That's weird; peak-season in a Spanish resort, and we hear no disturbing noise at all! Something must be wrong with us! We decided to act; cleaned our ears and listened again: Now, on a few nights we heard a little bit of noise from a disco near the Vera Playa Club Hotel, but it always stopped before 1 o'clock in the morning.

We had to listen more carefully! Oh: children could be heard regularly even after midnight, playing on the lawn and on the playground. That's not disturbing; it's a sign of life! As Spanish children are allowed to stay up late, they are invisible and inaudibly before 11 o'clock in the morning; Spanish parents are very clever Tapas-eaters!

We still tried desperately to find some disturbing noise. Maybe it helps if we lean over our terrace. Really, this worked; now we hear and see people eating and chatting until late at night, but the conversation level was very moderate - probably our own conversation about the unbelievably quiet Spaniards produced more noise! After we were already convinced that all this talking about the noisy Spaniards is just rumours spread by foreign agents, we learned otherwise: At nine o'clock in the morning, the two mobile bakers announced their presence by repeatedly pressing the horn (disturbing people's sleep)! In off season they arrive one hour later... Seriously: the thing that annoyed us much more than that were all the barking dogs brought along by holidayers - at least they were banned on the beach.

On the beach in front of Natsun, there is one of several Chiringuitos (a simple Spanish beach restaurant). Additionally, since Easter, Natsun's new and popular café bar Paso Doble offers internet access and serves tapas as well as simple meals. Fortunately, Natsun and its surroundings don't have a night time drinking venue. This certainly helps to keep the atmosphere calm and quiet. On top of it, also in Spain, naturists are in general more civilized than the bulk of the holiday makers. The noise level in the nearby textile resort town of Mojácar-Playa, a big tourist resort for beachgoers from Europe's largest English speaking island, is much more disturbing. During summer nights girls (wearing hunting gear) and guys (in sluggish jeans) crawl noisily and drunk from pub to pub and from one Irish bar to the next!



The atmosphere on Vera Playa's large naturist beach feels very natural. Thousands of beachgoers, often large family groups, enjoy sunbathing, swimming, playing beach ball, building sand castles or walking along the beach, the most popular activity. As Spain is very family oriented, up to four generations are visiting the beach together. Spaniards are a very relaxed and tolerant bunch of people. Sometimes the granny wore a bathing costume, obviously enjoying being surrounded by her children, grandchildren and their children happily frolicking around her in the buff. The big majority of beachgoers striped off, but sometimes the odd family could be seen, where the only nude sun seeker was the one that should at least wear some napkins. During August, about 95% of beachgoers were Spaniards, but still: the noise level was much more moderate than on many foreign dominated beaches.

The beach was most crowded at around 13:30h and again at 18:30h. During this time the beach probably looked like a big meat loaf from a distance. On the other hand, siesta is taken seriously by the Spanish society, even while on holiday, it's strictly observed. Therefore, from the thousands of beachgoers, only a few hundred are enjoying the sun between 3 and 5 pm. It seemed that the unwritten rule of society is obeyed even stricter by those wearing bathers. Therefore, it's regularly possible even in August to have several hundred meters of sand to yourself on the textile section, but just during siesta time!

In another respect, Vera Playa is quite different from the naturist centres we visited outside Spain. Within the naturist area, nudity is of course also normal away from the beach, but only for those venturing out in a mission; e.g. straight away from the apartment to a café, the rubbish bins or the beach. But those who do a little detour in the buff (still within the naturist zone) in order to reach their destination feel a bit as outsiders!

Year around, the area here is very dry and during summer there is usually no rain at all. From time to time, even without any storm, there was a week with impressively big rolling waves. On those days everybody captured his admiration of the power of Mother Nature with the camera. Those powerful waves sometimes wash away big sections of the beach, but the government fights back by later placing truckloads of new sand to the worst hit areas.

As in third world countries, beach hawkers (mainly from Africa) are invading the beach during the summer holiday. At least they are not as insistent as those in Asia, except to those who naively engage in conversation...

During the summer holiday period, life at Vera Playa is much more lively and refreshing than during the rest of the year. Until late after midnight, lots of Spanish families are promenading with their children on the "Paseo Marítimo" and take advantage of the ice-cream kiosks all being open now, after some are closed during the day. Here, and also on the beach it was eye-catching how many Spanish couples adopted some Chinese girls. To us it seems that, as in many other countries as well, also the Spanish adoption law requires so many conditions, that a "shopping trip" to Asia seems to be a good alternative... In ten year's time or so, probably many Asian tourists will be astonished, how many "Chinese" women sunbathe naked on Spain's naturist beaches.

One warm summer night, while we were sitting on our terrace at half past midnight, we heard some noise from the rooftop terrace of our neighbours (who weren't there then). After seeing a man screwing on the TV antenna, we shouted at him and asked what his justification is? He calmly replied that he is adjusting the antenna. Brave and stark naked as she was, Brigitte immediately went up to the rooftop to chase him away, as she didn't believe him at all. Heinz thought that a gang is maybe using a dirty trick to distract us, so he first moved everything of value, from the terrace into our apartment and locked it properly, before helping Brigitte hunting the suspicious intruder.

To Brigitte's big surprise, the man didn't even attempt to escape. Instead he had a Laptop connected to the antenna and insisted that he is the urbanisations TV technician who got the order to adjust the antenna, as TV reception in some apartments wasn't as good as it should be. When asked why he is doing this job after midnight, he introduced himself as Christobal and replied: "I'm a naturist as well and prefer to spend the day on the beach. Now it's simply too hot to work during the day". Brigitte wasn't fully convinced, but next morning Jan, Natsun's owner, confirmed that it is quite possible, that Christobal works in the middle of the night on the rooftop. Later we met him often on the beach, sometimes chatting with him for a while (trying to improve our Spanish a little bit). He said he knew we'd make trouble when he learned that we were Swiss – they surely would never work voluntarily at such an odd hour.

Unfortunately, most of the Spanish neighbours we had were rather reserved; therefore we didn't have as many free Spanish lessons in the buff as we had hoped for. If foreigners stayed in the apartment next to ours, they were often more socialising!

In general, it's very rewarding to speak at least some Spanish. Most sales attendants are very likely to start a small conversation, while serving foreigners trying to speak some Spanish. Learning Spanish is not that difficult, as some words can be used for several meanings. For example: "mañana" can mean "morning", "tomorrow", "tomorrow in a week", "tomorrow in a month", "tomorrow in a year"... Unfortunately it's not always that easy: A "Piso Piloto" for instance is not a pilots dwelling but a show flat.

During our stay in Vera Playa, we realised in what a short time most tourist related businesses need to earn their money. In nearby Garrucha many restaurants and souvenir stores only opened in August, just to close again in the middle of September. Therefore it's not surprising that tourist-traps are predominant during the summer. From the many small beach restaurants and sun bed rentals along the beach, most were open from "Semana Santa" (Easter week) to the end of September. Except in August, only those on the naturist beach could make reasonable business, as the textile beach was only frequented during "Semana Santa" for a few days plus around August for maybe 5 weeks. The vast majority of visitors to Vera Playa are Spaniards, followed by French, Dutch, English and Germans. We realized that the people who grow up in southern Spain need a few degrees more to feel warm than people from Madrid or northern Europe. Many Andalucians we had seen stark naked all summer long, suddenly wore layers of clothing while walking along the beach that was still dotted with brave unclad "Madrileños" and foreigners enjoying the autumn sun!

In contrast to resorts dominated by Germans and English, the owners at Vera Playa are allowed to alter their holiday units year round. This is more sensible (and produces less noise) than the accelerated "no building time" regulations in German resorts. This often results in "do-it-yourself-lovers" running an extra loud mower all day long parked but unused on their lawn, just to hide the construction noise in the background!

Among friends

Our time at Vera Playa vanished very quickly. During the winter period, many of our friends we know from our previous stays at Costa Natura, came for a short visit, enjoying (or enduring) Heinz' extensive cooking and spoiling us with presents like Dutch cheese or German sausages. Some, including Gisela & Klaus and more surprisingly Christiane and Klaus who previously had predicted that we wouldn't stay here for more than three days, liked it immediately that much, they reserved an apartment here for next winter. For others like Bruni & Erhard, this was out of question, as they are owners at Costa Natura.

We also made new friends like Brita & Holger, or a Swiss man who as a single parent, regularly took not only his own children but also his neighbours' and even his apprentices along to naturist summer holidays. Those children and youth later told their parents so excitedly about it, that some later also became naturists and joined him. He is a good example that naturists, who talk openly about being a naturist, might share this hobby often with their friends and relatives. The



sometimes bad reputation of naturism is to a big chunk caused by those participants that don't talk about it outside the resorts and clubs.

Also in our circle, after identifying ourselves as naturists, some friends admitted that they enjoy naturism as well, others said it seems very natural to them although they didn't try it yet and some were a bit sceptic in the beginning, but tried and enjoyed it later. We also met up with Birgit & Norbert, a nice couple who booked an apartment for a month. Beforehand they asked us for some advice about Natsun after discovering on our Web Site that we know the place.

Of course we soon became acquainted with many holidayers, whether they came here for just a few days, a few weeks or months. Some days we met that many known faces on the beach, we should almost have organized a raffle in order to know whom we should talk to first.

We had several times friends visiting, sharing this comfortable holiday place for a few weeks with us. At the end of May we drove the 140 Km to St. Javier Airport near Murcia and fetched Annemarie & Beat, with whom we could stay several times whilst in Switzerland. Although they have a sauna at home, they were at first a bit sceptic about naturism, but they wanted to give it a try. Without hesitation, but a bit worried they stripped off immediately. It didn't take long until they discovered with relieve, that the atmosphere among the other "nudes" is much more natural and also quieter, than the atmosphere they experienced in the textile resorts they had been visiting during the previous years. The naturist life appealed to Annemarie & Beat obviously so much, during daylight they hardly wanted to make an excursion, and (almost) daily they worshipped the sun to its last sunrays.

Beat went for a second opinion to a local dentist who was recommended to us by Natsun's Dutch owners. He immediately saved € 2'000.-(two thousands) as the Spanish dentist found the dental treatment recommended by his Swiss colleague was absolutely unnecessary for now and a waste of money.

Beginning of August, Magy a former office mate of Brigitte, visited us for 4 days. Together with her partner, who unfortunately had already died in the meantime, she moved to southern Spain a few years ago. At nighttimes, she runs her own restaurant specialized in chicken-dishes, about 200 Km away from here. During daytime she often visits the local naturist beach. We were glad to meet again after five years and of course she was also interested in discovering the beach and the restaurants at Vera Playa.

On September 9, Angelika & Karsten, an interesting easy going couple from Denmark permanently living at Costa Natura, paid us a three day visit. Every winter, the two are globetrotting with almost no luggage around Asia, where we met twice during the last 5 years.



On the same day we said farewell to Angelika & Karsten, we went to the airport to pick up our friends Moni & Bruno. During our first naturist holiday together in 1994 they got together and later married in Australia.

We regularly meet up for holidays, sometimes for six days only, sometimes for an entire six weeks. This time we had 2 ½ weeks together, during which we enjoyed the beach, made a few small excursions to the surroundings and visited some restaurants in the evenings.

Our last visitors arrived mid October at Almeria's Airport, 90 Km away; Heinz' sister Edith with hubby Kari. When we told them 1994 about our first naturist holiday (with Moni & Bruno) they couldn't really imagine it for themselves. But after joining us in 1999 for eight days, nudity became so natural to them, that they visited us in the meantime on five naturist holidays.

Just three weeks ago, they came back from a trip around Iceland and they could give us some valuable travel tips. On return, they could take advantage of us knowing our way around the restaurants, in culinary-wise not that appealing Andalucía, as we already separated the ordinary from the extraordinary. As Edith & Kari always keep themselves busy, they could only stay for 10 days.

Natsun's service was excellent: they provided bed linen and towels to all of our many visitors.

There were, however, a few visitors we didn't like. At certain times of the year, sparrows got almost a pest. They were quicker shitting on our terrace, than we were able to clean it. The chance to ever get rid of them is slim due to the fact that many holiday folks feed them with unhealthy stuff...

Spring excursion

Beginning of February, spring arrived in Andalucía so we wanted to take advantage of the area's famous almond blossom as long as we are still here.

Trix and Gernot told us about the beautiful mountain range called **Alpujarra** and therefore we went out on February 8, 2009, to discover it for ourselves. Before we left, we contacted Magy, our friend with the chicken-restaurant in La Herradura. This gave us a chance to meet again and we could stay there for a few nights.

After we started our trip via Sorbas and the 'Desierto de Tabernas' we soon saw the first snow-capped mountains. We rode on the A348 into the Alpujarra Mountains and spared the northern route along the Sierra Nevada for our way back.

Not only the almond trees were beautiful to look at, also the scenery was very nice with changing landscapes all the times. Here it was high rocks, there it was green hills or cultivated land. Then again it could be rugged and raw with hardly anything growing. Colours changed just as much; from grey to ochre to almost red or the strong brown resulting from iron in the rock.



We could stop every few kilometres, but because there were so many bendy roads, it took us all day to reach Magy's place. When we reached the Costa del Sol at Motril, we were suddenly surrounded by dense traffic, the first time for a few months. Here we realized how much more tranquil the area around Vera is. We arrived at Magy's, just in time to join her and her friends for dinner at a restaurant where they served white asparagus.

Next day, we went out on our own to explore the spectacular coastline towards Nerja and later some white washed villages in the hills further west. We came to beautiful Competa and later on to Alhama de Granada, which thrones spectacularly on top of a cliff, which was washed out from the river below.

Next day, Magy had her day off and played tourist-guide for us. She directed us into the Sierra de Guajares, where we went for a long walk in the mountains. After lunch in a typical Spanish restaurant, we later drove back along a pass road lined with almond plantations in full bloom.



On Wednesday, we went sight-seeing to [Malaga](#). After ticking-off all the "must see" buildings, we steamed up the hill of Gibralfaro fortified by Alcazaba Castle. The view reached from the blue sea to the green hills and snow covered mountains behind.

However; in front of all that, a desert of concrete made of ugly high rise buildings was an eyesore. But also this is Andalucias Costa del Sol, even though the clusters of white washed villages clinging to the hills were much nicer.

That night, Magy's restaurant was open again and so we could experience the nice atmosphere it had when guests were there. We chose some of the chicken specialities and enjoyed Magy's service.

Next morning, we said farewell and went on our way back through the Alpujarra Mountains. First we drove up a pass road that afforded unlimited spectacular views. It was absolutely worthwhile, even though we had to turn back as the road was closed further up.

After driving through the thermal resort of Lanjaron, we visited a few small villages that were recommended to tourists for their beauty: Pampaneira, Bubion and Capileira. The only difference we noticed to other less famous white washed villages was, that they had countless tourist-shops and restaurants.

Our next stop was Trevélez, situated on an altitude of 1750 m, which makes it the highest village in Spain. Snow along the streets was helping to make it noticeably cooler than previous places. Finding accommodation was more difficult than expected, as most of the many hotels and hostales were closed for holiday, for renovation or because they didn't expect enough guests or didn't want to heat the rooms.

We asked various people for advice but it was fruitless.

Looking around, we had noticed a building with expensive looking rental apartments and soon that seemed to be our last hope. Curious how high the price would be we rang the bell. We were lucky and actually got quite a luxurious room for € 40 and the best of all: it was heated with a modern floor heating system!

Relaxed we walked around the snow covered village a bit more. Many buildings in Trevélez house nothing but big legs of ham hanging in "secadores" in the clean cool mountain-air to dry for up to two years. The most expensive of these approximately 7 kg heavy pig legs, fetch up to € 700. These originate from white pigs that lived under oaks in Extremadura province.



Trevélez is a very touristy place and its souvenir stores sell, apart from many irresistible but useless items, also those famous hams, trouts and Soplillos, a local Meringue speciality with almonds.

On the next morning, we passed many white washed villages again, where the streets were still used to park on, despite the difficulty for cars to pass. However, the high standard of minor roads between urbanisations is impressive. The "scenic" road we chose at the end of our tour was a big exception. It was cut into a straight, if not even overhanging rock face along Rio Adra's gorge. The track was about three meters wide at best and full of pot-holes. The landscape, in contrast, was of such beauty that we were glad we didn't turn, even if we would have found a chance to do so somewhere...

This gorge stays in our memory as no ordinary road ever would. Once we reached the artificial lake Beninar, the valley opened up and the road became wide and civilised again and all the magic had vanished. That drive through the gorge was a fascinating end to our tour and we returned to Vera Playa very happy.

Final thoughts about our stay at Vera Playa

We frankly enjoyed our stay at Natsun in Vera Playa in any respect. It is certainly one of the better naturist places we know. Nudity feels very natural here, just the way it should be. This is also thanks to the openness and tolerance of the Spanish society.



There was nothing to complain, although the weather was almost boring: just sunny every day!

We are not aware what generated it, but meanwhile we have itchy feet again. Meanwhile we have plans to travel to areas with much less boring weather. We now intend to visit the Faroese Islands, Iceland and Greenland this summer. Afterwards we'd like to spend next winter, as well as the following summer in Scandinavia. After getting so much sun in southern Spain, we should withstand the harsh and cold conditions and probably even enjoy the weather's different moods; which is certainly all but boring near the arctic!

When we arrived at [Natsun](#), we just looked for a reasonably warm naturist place to escape winter at least a bit. For continental Europe, it is quite mild here. However, winter is noticeably cool here too. Vera Playas biggest draw card: the beach, can only be fully enjoyed during the warmer half of the year.

To us, the best time at Vera Playa was between April and November. We preferred the summertime, because then we were surrounded by Spaniards; by the lively Spanish way of life, which was even more appealing than we had imagined!!!

Farewell from Spain: on an inland route back to France

On April 7th we finally left our sunny paradise in southern Spain and drove towards the French border. Again we chose an inland route, away from the highways.

The landscapes we came along were again as fascinating and diverse as if we drove across various continents at once. Sometimes the soil was dry and red and then there were alpine pine forests or fertile farmlands. All those tourists who know nothing but the coastal highway, don't know what they miss out on.

Upon reaching Jumilla Pass, temperatures had dropped from 20°C to 10°C. Needless to say, our socks and jackets were on the bottom of our baggage. After passing a high plateau with tall pine trees, we arrived in a village called Sinarcas around 8 P.M. After taking a hotel room we had a look around the village. Now we soon realized why the Señora was puzzled, after we had told her that we were not yet sure, whether we would eat in the hotel's restaurant or somewhere else. We had booked into the hotel with THE restaurant ... the one and only!

One last time we could experience Spain as Spanish as it can be. The next morning, almost the entire village population squeezed into the bakery that barely measured 2m². We went along and brought our „panes con chocolate“ (chocolate buns) afterwards over to OUR restaurant. It seemed the entire workforce squeezed into here too, to have their mid-morning sugar-fix. Some people ordered 'Tostadas', others brought their own sandwiches or something from the bakery along. One man tried to distribute apples to everyone "because they are so healthy" he said. Some just smiled about him and preferred to fill their glasses with wine and water.

The second day brought us near Teruel, where we could admire many beautiful rock-formations in all sorts of colours. The Ebro River valley with its artificial lake was also a very impressive sight.

After Lerida we took a new Motorway and hoped it would bring us quickly to France. At this point the landscape became less spectacular and more inhabited, meaning: full of concrete. Unfortunately we came through town centres twice, which always takes a while as is generally known. So it was almost 9 P.M. and dark by the time we reached the French border.



Spring in France: Naturism, Nature & Culture



We believed it would only be a short drive from the Spanish border to Leucate but it was actually still more than 90 km through the rain. It was already 10 P.M. when we arrived at the doorstep of the Gourmet Temple “Le Clos Ninon”. Now we only hoped not to be refused, knowing the eating times are quite different to those in Spain! Might be thanks to the fact that the restaurant was almost full to the rim or because the owners remembered our faces, we were shown to a table. We ordered a 5-course gourmet menu for 32 Euros which we enjoyed very very much!

As many hotels in France are equipped with a credit-card operated check-in system, we didn't worry about finding a hotel room after midnight.

Bélézy en Provence

For the next day, Heinz had worked out that the small route D25 would bring us through the “Gorge de la Vis”. It was absolutely spectacular and later led us on to a village called Ganges (in France). Further on, the valley opened up and the landscape got greener and flatter. Temperatures were higher here than in Vera and reached already 23°C.

Around 5 P.M. we arrived at the naturist resort [Domaine de Bélézy](#) in Bedoin. Here we had reserved a modern mobile-home for the next 10 days. Now in spring there were not that many guests around as during our last stay in autumn but the average visitor was a fair bit younger. Therefore Bélézy felt much livelier. Communal BBQ evenings were organized and guests met in the sauna.

We made a few excursions and enjoyed the beautiful cherry blossom in the Provence but also headed up to Mont Ventoux which was still covered in snow.

We also visited the Monday-market in Bedoin just 15 minutes walk from Bélézy away. For every food lover, the offerings there are a real feast for the eyes and the palate.



Short visit to Switzerland

At the end of April we continued on minor roads via Dieulefit and Annecy to Switzerland. We chose to drive via Chamonix and through the Wallis valley, hereby coming through the worthwhile but not touristy village of Selkingen. As planned, we attended the 70th birthday celebration of Brigitte's father. We also visited Heinz's mother but only a few of our friends. We didn't want to stay too long in Switzerland, as we had a big summer “project” ahead of us.

Already on May 10th 2009 we returned to [France](#) and stayed again one night in Annecy. This time we let ourselves talk into going to prison, after the receptionist highly recommended the restaurant situated in the former jail. As we were released after paying the bill, we could continue south to the Ardèche district the next day.

Domaine de la Sablière

As we arrived at [Domaine de la Sablière](#) at the end of a long weekend but without reservation, there was not that much choice in Mobile-Homes; but we got a sunny spot anyway.

We thought we would have quiet times but only one hour after we had checked in to our Accacia Mobile home our friends Moni & Bruno appeared in front of us.

When we had met in Switzerland, they purposely didn't mention that they plan to holiday here as well, as they wanted to give us a surprise. Then they were puzzled not to find us here, not knowing that we had left Switzerland two days later than initially planned. So, now the surprise was perfect and we spent ten very pleasant days together.

On May 13th, we celebrated our anniversary in an excellent restaurant: ten years of travelling as roving spirits. This jubilee brought us another surprise: before breakfast Moni & Bruno secretly left their chalet Lavande and drove to Barjac to buy a nice cake, not knowing that we did the same. At 10 A.M. we met up, realizing that we now had two cream tarts. Now there was certainly enough importance added to celebrate that event. We all had a big laugh and were looking forward to cope with our "destiny". This was made even sweeter, as we meanwhile carry an Italian espresso machine with us, as part of our travel equipment, which was also very much appreciated by Bruno!

Sablière is also one of the favourite places for Moni & Bruno to which they like to return to regularly. We all love the big size of the domain which allows long walks in the nature. The only drawback is that many guests use their cars only too often on the steep and narrow roads. For some (even young and fit) visitors, no way seems to be too short, not to be done by car. Not only were the beloved cars, also the beloved pets sometimes a kind of a nuisance. Unfortunately many pet owners do not respect the ban of dogs on the river-beach. This is annoying for those visitors who purposely chose Sablière because of the officially "pet free beach"!



In spring also Sablière felt very different. It's much livelier than in autumn, which seems to be the preferred season of retirees. On long weekends, the resort proved very popular with families from the surrounding area and all of Sablières '150 plus' rental units and many camp sites filled up. The very moderately priced shop was "fully loaded" now and all of the regions many restaurants were eager to receive some tourist-Euros. The best Gourmet Temples filled quickly and reservations were already necessary.

Many new Mobile-homes had been added to Sablière during the last few years and free Internet access via WiFi is now available around the reception. As more and more families have a mobile home for the entire season, the place became livelier and feels more French now, which makes this naturist resort even more charming.

Sablière with its many possibilities for walking "au naturel" remains one of our favourite places. The many camp-sites, rental-units, the pools and also the restaurant and the shop are perfectly integrated into Sablières otherwise very intact nature along a steep astonishing river valley. It's one kilometre from the reception down to the pool area and another one to the shop and restaurant. Another few hundred metres more and you're down by the river Cèze. Sablières natural atmosphere makes it also perfect for first time naturists and for everybody who likes big grounds in natural surroundings.

Re-discovering the Dordogne area



After two weeks at Sablière we left towards the [Dordogne](#) area. On our way along a picturesque inland-route we visited the pretty villages Les Vans, Tournel, St.Laurent d'Olt, Saturnin de Lenne, Bertholène, Aubin and Gourdon.

We normally find good off-season deals, where renting a cabin can work out cheaper than staying in a tent on a powered pitch. However, after Cro Magnon got textile, we couldn't find such sweet offers in the Dordogne anymore and therefore pitched up our small tent. To tell the truth, we have to confess that because we saw some dark clouds, we first stayed at a hotel in Roc Gageac. This picturesque medieval village is glued to a sandstone cliff above the

river. It was also a perfect base to explore nearby Beynac and Sarlat la Canéda, two other tourist highlights. Of course we also had daily evening programs: visiting a different gourmet-temple each night. Fine dining is such an integrated part of French society, that even the telephone directory lists an extract of gastronomic guides as e.g. “Bottin Gourmand”.

Terme d'Astor

Now we moved on to the naturist campsite [Terme d'Astor](#). They have mobile homes and nice wooden chalets that look like Finnish summer cottages but for off-season, we found them too expensive. So we played Neanderthals and sneaked into our small tent. The terraced pitches were big and the lawns were totally straight. Terme d'Astor didn't have all that many guests on the end of May, so the restaurant and shop were not fully operational yet but improved during our short stay. We enjoyed a few days at the pool and on the forest paths, where we could go for nude hikes.

Also from here we made a few excursions and visited Belvès and Les Eyzies de Tayac that sits nicely on the Vézère river.



Domaine Le Portrait: a new small naturist retreat in the Charente

Now we went to [Domaine Le Portrait](#) to meet up with Tineke and Wim, a Dutch couple we had met in Australia in 2005 during a naturist Sailing Trip out to the Great Barrier Reef near Cairns.

They told us about their plans to escape the rat race and to live up their dream and open a naturist resort. We were impressed by their ideas and wondered whether their dream would finally become reality or whether they would just dream on, as too many others do...

Tineke and Wim proved very soon, that they were serious about their project. They looked patiently, but not desperately for a suitable property somewhere in France or Spain. After waving several opportunities because either the Major didn't cooperate with the necessary permits for a naturist ground, or because of other problems, they finally succeeded on the end of 2007. They bought an old farm on a hillside in the midst of farmland outside Saint-Séverin near Bordeaux. Here the mayor supported their project, as he realized that the new naturist camping would also give a welcome boost to local businesses.

Tineke and Wim left the “security” of their jobs in the Netherlands and worked pretty hard to convert the old farm into a naturist heaven. Already in May 2008 they were ready to accommodate the first guests, but as the central government worked at lower speed in issuing permits than the local mayor, they were only allowed to host “some Dutch friends” during the first season. Consequently, their informative internet site was then available in Dutch only, but in the meantime “<http://www.leportrait.nu/>” learned also several rather exotic languages including English.

When we arrived at [Domaine Le Portrait](#) in June 2009, Tineke and Wim gave us a very warm welcome and told us about the joy, but also about a big variety of difficulties they had encountered. In the meantime they were finally granted the necessary permits. Word of Mouth advertisement brought them already the first guests. When we were visiting, also three other couples enjoyed the good facilities and the excellent service.

Domaine Le Portrait is situated in Saint-Séverin near Ribérac, about 90 km northeast of Bordeaux. It belongs to the Charente region, which is less known (to naturists), but certainly worthwhile exploring. The famous Dordogne region is also on the doorstep. Périgueux and Bergerac are only about 50, respectively 60 km away and Tineke and Wim have a lot of information about interesting tourist sites.

Domaine Le Portrait is a small intimate place on a hillside, offering superb views to the surrounding pastoral landscape. It offers 25 terraced caravan- and campsites, plus one “on-site van” and one large Dutch camping style tent as rental options. Soon, two wooden chalets will also complement Tineke and Wim's offerings for those who prefer more space than in a caravan and comfort rather than “Neanderthal-style” living in a tent, just to meet all those animals you would kill immediately, as soon they enter your home!

Seriously; particularly for those travelling with basic camping equipment it is very comfy. Guests can make use of a fridge and a common room (part of the former stable), that houses also a small library. There is a swimming pool for hot days and several ice cold drinks are available with an honesty box system. The toilet and shower facilities are uniquely integrated in and around the old stable. In 2010 they will be complemented with a new sanitary block that will contain also a Sauna.

Sometimes a drawing-course or massage week is being organized with expert teachers but otherwise no regular animation is on offer, as this site should be a quiet place, so guests can relax.

During our stay, we enjoyed Tineke and Wim's many services that match those of much bigger naturist-sites. Fresh bread from the bakery can be ordered from an impressive list that should match any taste (sorry guys, no toast - this is France, but what you get is really excellent!). A set meal served on a communal table (with a maximum of six diners) is also on offer. Every night it's a different menu. Tineke does a very good blend between the quality of French "cuisine" and the generosity of Dutch meal size. Best of all: the "restaurant" and also the bread service are "on" even if only one person stays at Domaine Le Portrait! Guests were invited to pick cherries from the domains own trees and Tineke's excellent home-made jams were just delicious. Try her fig-jam; it's a delightful culinary sensation.

As many other Dutch, also Tineke and Wim are very talented in languages and are fluent in English, German and French. They certainly run Domaine Le Portrait in a very personal and sympathetic way. It's their intention to have only as many guests at any one time that they can still remember everybody's name. We enjoyed our time at Domaine Le Portrait very much and can indeed recommend this little paradise to everybody who looks for a small intimate and personal naturist site. It is just perfect to relax for a while, be it for a longer stay or only for a stop-over.

La Jenny

Now we went to the Atlantic coast, spending a week at [La Jenny](#), where we could hire a small studio with en suite bathroom for less than a powered site would cost in the Dordogne region. We chose the cheapest type of accommodation that was a bit old but still had new equipments like a steamer oven, which we appreciated more than a microwave.



This large naturist resort consists of hundreds of chalets nicely dotted around a pine forest. They are of all different colours, standards and prices. At La Jenny everything is of generous size: the clover-leave shaped swimming pool, sports grounds and even the 6 hole golf course. The network of separate pedestrian and cycling paths is several kilometres long and very inviting for nude strolls under the shady trees.

The small „centre commercial“ was not in full swing yet (beginning of June) with still very limited opening hours. The resort is set up in a way that people are motivated to cycle or walk rather than taking their car. Several paths through overgrown sand dunes lead to the beach. The water was still a bit cold but the waves were tame; for the Atlantic anyway.

CHM Montalivet

Only 200km north from there, we visited our old friends Val and Alan who are permanent residents at [CHM Centre Heliomarin Montalivet](#). The check-in procedure in this huge resort is still complicated as ever and takes ages. The selection of shops and restaurants on the other hand, is as great as ever!

Many old ramshackle bungalows had been removed and replaced with lots of new mobile-homes. They certainly offer more comfort, but in such narrow and close lanes of cottages, with no space in between, all the charm is gone. We could stay at Val and Alan's second mobile-home that looked more appealing as they had arranged a nice garden in front of it, adjoining their own. We had a few delightful meals together which we enjoyed very much, especially as they are more into French, than into English cuisine.

Except on our arrival day, weather continued to be nice and warm. Aussi-trained Life-Savers arrived in the afternoon of June 13th and started supervising the beach. Only 10 minutes later, the water was suddenly teeming with bathers, although before all those people had obviously only been interested in sun bathing...

Heliomonde and Paris

For our last stop in France we chose [Heliomonde](#) near Paris where we had made an internet-booking on a “last minute” offer for a chalet Tonga. We were curious whether we would like it as much as the Tongan Islands – and indeed, we did! In fact, the entire resort was very much to our liking. Despite Heliomonde’s proximity to the big city (~ 45km) it is situated among pretty pastoral landscapes near St. Cheron. Not only nearby Dourdan, but the entire area is worth visiting. Heliomonde is set in a large forest where 350 chalets are owned by club members, most of them from Paris. We enjoyed the many walking paths around the woods. Heliomonde also offers a restaurant, a popular pool, several sports- and playgrounds, as well as a superb indoor complex with sauna and hamam that could all be used at no extra cost.

Even though we had chosen Heliomonde for its proximity to Paris, we finally visited this city only once during our week, as it was almost too nice to leave this naturist ground. Heliomonde was a discovery in its own right and its location makes it only more attractive.

We could buy a day-pass to get to [Paris](#) by train from St. Cheron 3km away. With this, we could also reach all tourist attractions, including “La Défense” a very modern suburb. We already liked the futuristic buildings when we first discovered Paris 19 years ago, but they seem to get ignored by most tourists. We also admired all the great old buildings in the centre e.g. Louvre, the Grand- and Petit-Palais or the Arc de Triomphe. They were still fascinating but in a completely different way to La Défense.

In Paris we were surrounded by heaps of other tourists, many of them from Asia. Even at 7 P.M. a queue of several hundred metres was sneaking around Eiffel Tower with people keen to go up that night still. We know that only a tiny percentage of Chinese can afford to travel but seeing how many queued at this landmark, it’s easy to imagine how many more might come in the near future.

Although we have been to Paris years ago, we enjoyed the calm and space in this beautiful capital with its many parks once more.



Belgium: discovering Brussels & Ghent

On Sunday, June 21, 09 we said farewell to France and drove to Belgium. Traffic was relatively low, but as we reached the outskirts of Brussels, it got very dense and very hectic. We got to our hotel in Ruisbroek south of the city mid afternoon and were soon ready to get to Brussels downtown.

We found the station and boarded a train. After what we believed to understand from the Dutch-only sign at the unmanned station, we contacted the train-attendant to buy the ticket. However he wasn’t sure what kind of ticket he should sell us and therefore decided to let us ride into the city for free and we should buy the right ticket at the counter. In the main-station a highly unmotivated employee told us there is either the bus or the train. He didn’t (want? to) know anything about the combined tickets and even asking a second government railway employee wasn’t more fruitful. Anyway; it was 8 P.M. by now and we really liked to see something of the city!

It was all shiny in the evening sunlight and we quickly found the great “Grand Place/Grote Markt”, a big square framed by mostly well preserved gothic guild-houses. As we discovered the next day, Brussels tourist sites are all very well maintained. Away from those, we saw parts that were less clean and rather ramshackle. Outside the centre, we also visited the Atomium and the big area of modern office-buildings that house the EU headquarters. They are not set up in a newly developed area, but instead squeezed between existing quarters.

Around the EU buildings, many languages can be heard and also Belgium has two. The city of Brussels is officially bilingual, so French as well as Flemish (Dutch) are common but relations between the country’s two linguistic different areas are much tenser than in Switzerland.

Without too many expectations, we continued to [Ghent](#) in the Flemish part. Our Hotel (Formule 1) was perfectly situated at the outskirts from where it was a pleasant stroll to the centre of town. We found charming houses, picturesque canals and great squares throughout. For the next two days, we discovered one quarter after another.

Pretty as Ghent is, we were surprised it is not touristier. Never the less, there are hundreds of cafés and restaurants that are

full most of the time with local guests. Belgians love to go out and it seems they don't obey fixed meal times – they all go as it pleases them and thus restaurants offer hot meals all day long. All over the country, “pommes frites” (French? fries) are ever present. Not only small kiosks sell them, but also in ethnic restaurants they figure on the menu, along with Basmati or Jasmine rice. On the other end of the spectrum, Belgians have deservedly built a good reputation for fine food and also for their legendary Belgian Waffles of which we've had the world's best in Ghent.

On both days we visited the river shore plazas “Gras- and Koren-lei-sites”. They frame the Leie River on both sides with beautiful medieval ornate guildhouses. The quays were bustling with people day and night. Though most sat down for a while, to soak in the special atmosphere, the crowds were constantly changing. Everyone seemed very relaxed and happy in stark contrast to the people of Brussels. To us Ghent was very diverse and charming and definitely would deserve to be high on every tourist agenda.



The Netherlands: tidy and neat

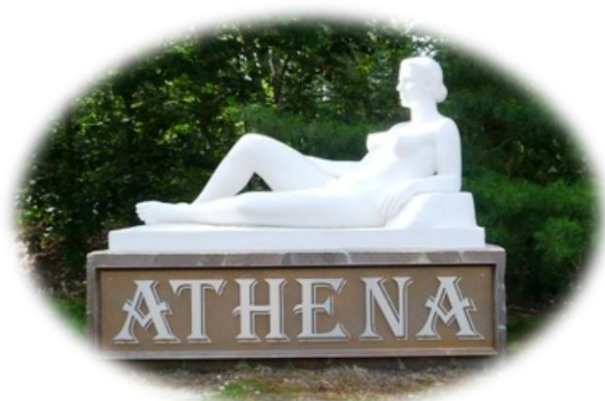
From Ghent, it wasn't very far to the [Netherlands](#). We chose the route to Zeeland, which we reached through the new Westerschelde subsea tunnel. We stopped quite a few times in small Dutch villages along the way like Nisse, Gravenpolder and Kapelle. They all were incredibly tidy and proper with neat houses that most had wonderful gardens. Tidy and proper: that's how we experienced the Netherlands throughout. In villages most roads were paved with red cobble stones. There were cycle-lines on both sides of the road that used up more space than the cars had in the centre. Therefore cars often need to stop to pass each other. In villages, the speed limit was normally at 30 km per hour and Dutch drivers were rather relaxed. People use their bicycle whenever they can and as every place is connected by cycling paths, they are used not only for fun but also for work.

Athena Naturist Club

Almost back at the Belgian border, we stayed at the [Naturist Club Athena](#) near Ossendrecht. About half of the 250 member-Families are Dutch and half are Belgians. We got friendly with many of them but soon realized that it was not as easy to communicate with Belgians, (despite our French) than it was to communicate with Dutch, who often master various foreign languages.

As Athena's new mobile homes had been booked out, we had to rent a caravan. The camping is set in a forest and was well equipped with playground, pool and a clubhouse, although we had to pay extra for use of sauna, showers and even hot tap water to do the dishes.

After staying in France and Belgium it was quite obvious that Dutch supermarkets are rather offering low price- instead of quality products (but in big quantities). Bread-loafs can be so unbelievably light and we still guess how you can pack that much air into one loaf.



Zeeland and the Delta Project

Surely we used our stay to explore some more of the Zeeland-district and visited the town of Tholen and Zieriksee, where we could get close to some beautifully restored windmills and in the case of Zieriksee to a harbour teeming with old Windjammer, as there had just been a yachting event.

Another impressive sight was the “Krammer Sluizen” (locks of Krammer) that are part of the huge [Delta Project](#). As we all know, about one third of the Netherlands lay below sea-level. Therefore these guys had to come up with some smart idea on how to keep the saltwater out and gain some more land. Giant dams were built along the coast and also inland.

There can be quite a big difference between the levels of the salt- and fresh-water. To have ordinary locks at every canal would be too easy. Huge quantities of salt would enter the inland canals and lakes, each time a boat would pass a lock. To prevent that, Dutch Engineers invented a sophisticated system that replaces the water in the lock with fresh- or salt-water respectively, before a boat can get out. At the same time the Delta-Project and other engineering marvels like the 32 km long “closure dike”/[Afsluitdijk](#) that shuts off the IJsel-Sea from the Atlantic Ocean, help minimize the risk of another disastrous flood. This way, more land could be gained for cultivation and to accommodate the 16.5 million Dutch.

Windmills and water ways

In earlier times, the beautiful windmills served mainly to pump water out of the swamplands that had to be partitioned for reclamation. Today most of the mills are well restored (by specialist companies), which improve national pride and pleases the tourist crowds. For many people, the mentioning of Dutch windmills is associated with the village of [Kinderdijk](#), which we passed on our way to Amsterdam. In fact that’s probably the place with the highest density of windmills all over the country. We stood at one spot from where we counted 18 windmills around us, and there are many more in this area north of Dordrecht! All along our way, we also passed old and new houses with thatched roofs.



Some of the world’s busiest sea-ports are located in the Netherlands and also domestic cargo is often transported on water. Despite all efforts to gain more land as we just described, the Netherlands are still full of water. A huge grid of man-made water ways was constructed. Some are small canals used either to drain or water cultivated land – depending on the purpose. Some others are big canals used by large cargo vessels or smaller ones for leisure boats only. A big percentage of Dutch own a boat that is often moored just in front of the garden. Boating is definitely the favourite pastime, although many foreigners believe there’s nothing nicer for a Dutchman than towing a caravan across Europe...

With that much traffic on water, it’s only natural that it also affects traffic on the road. In summer there are often long queues of boats waiting to pass bridges. Some very busy junctions have aqueducts that cross either the road or another canal but mostly there will be a bridge that opens up. Most are operated by a bridge-guard but others can be operated semi automatically, by captains dialling some magic numbers on their mobile phone. Sometimes a fee is payable for the passage that unfortunately is not being distributed among the waiting traffic on the road. In traditional manner, the token is placed in a wooden shoe that is lowered by the bridge-master on a rope to the boat. There must be thousands, if not ten thousands of such intersections between land- and water-ways where a red light or the lowering of the barrier is just a normal part of life, even on freeways.

As the country is densely populated, freeways are busy or jammed most of the time. On the other hand, small roads in the countryside can be refreshingly empty. Apart from the big cities, villages are rather small and quiet. When we drove into Amsterdam, we were astonished how green and pastoral the landscape was until only a few kilometres before the city centre. On our map it looked like suburbia would have started long before, but only a few houses were dotted between the canals and the fields.

Discovering Amsterdam from Zaandam

We based ourselves in **Zaandam**, where we arrived rather late after all that sight-seeing along the way. To find a place to eat, we headed for what we thought is just a suburb of A'dam but discovered it is actually a very nice town of its own. Many restaurants were grouped around the nicely restored town square. Contrary to our prejudice we found quite a few menus that promised gourmet-style food and what we saw on people's plates looked just delicious. We gave it a try and what we got was just superb, absolutely justifying its price. As we praised the food to the waiter and mentioned that the portion was just too big, he replied: "ten years ago, we were the only restaurant on this square. We filled up easily and people were happy with whatever they got, as long as the portion was big. However, in the meantime more and more restaurants have popped up and as some offered better quality, competition began. Today we focus on inspiring menus and additionally just keep a few simple classics to please our few long-time regulars".

We have observed that upmarket restaurants in the Netherlands were really popular and he confirmed this swing in preference.

When strolling around Zaandam, we discovered there is a new part with modern nice buildings but also an old part with many well restored traditional houses that give a village feel. So we decided to come back another time to soak in some more of that nice atmosphere – and nice food...

Next day, we took a bus to dive into the hustle and bustle of [Amsterdam](#). The ride took a swift 20 minutes on a special bus-road that offered good views to the freeway which was completely chocked. How can we describe Amsterdam? It's big and beautiful, gentle and quiet but there is also "something going on". It's fascinating but sometimes also rough, gubby and annoying. It's historic but young and people mostly ride on bicycles which are permitted also in pedestrian areas. It's amazing how little other traffic can be found in the city centre. The concept that works here is based on very efficient public transport and deterrent parking fees payable from early morning to midnight!

Throughout the city cheap bicycle parking can be found. For instance the multi storey "bike ramp" next to the main railway station can accommodate 7'000 bicycles. Every railing and every tree is also used to safeguard bikes, as theft is a big problem, despite the fact that Amsterdam counts 750'000 bicycles.

The squares and many parts of the old town are very charming. Here, as all over the Netherlands, many front façades of [canal-houses](#) with more than two stories are inclined and a pulley is mounted to a "Hijbsbalk" (lifting beam) under the gable. Thanks to this simple but smart installation, goods can be lifted up from outside and taken in through the windows, which is much easier than up a narrow staircase. Water canals (Grachten) trench the city like a spider web. As elsewhere in the Netherlands, some people live permanently on a moored boat.

As the city is very multicultural, it offers a big array of ethnic restaurants. On the other end of the food scale, fast-food dispensers containing deep-fried "treats" from little transparent drawers can be found all over the city. Never the less, obesity doesn't seem to be a big problem, that's probably thanks to all the exercise on bikes.

As the night falls, the atmosphere in the city changes. Foreigners and locals are attracted to the bright lights and the liberal attitude. What is called a Coffee-Shop here is unlike a Coffee-Shop elsewhere. We don't know exactly what's going on inside but it's an open secret that Hippies don't go there for Coffee and Cake.

Another notoriety of Amsterdam is window shopping in the red light district. You have probably heard of the prostitutes posing in show-case windows that must be well heated, judging from how little they wear... The ladies clients come often from rather prudish countries (like the U.K.). In and around the rather big red-light districts, many drunks can be seen with all the consequences they cause, making Amsterdam at night a rather unpleasant experience to us.

We rather headed off to the beautiful new OBA library near the train station. On the top floor, there is a good cafeteria with a splendid birds-view of the city. The library also offers almost one thousand internet-terminals that could be used for free – if you found a free one.



Pretty countryside towns and villages



We took a train from Zaandam to the nearby city of [Haarlem](#). Our travel guide's words "*everybody loves Haarlem*" were not exaggerated indeed. The historic main square really has grandeur and there are of course the compulsory canals, where small boats are parked alongside cars on the road. A beautifully restored windmill is just minutes away from the centre. Again, there were much more bicycles than other traffic on the road and some had push-cars or trailers mounted to their bikes to transport a couple of children (or other ballast).

Even though we still hadn't completed our sight-seeing program entirely, it looked like we had to move out from our budget hotel Formule 1, as it was fully booked on the weekend. After bothering reception often enough, they offered us to stay at Ibis Hotel instead,

at only 10 Euros more. So we gladly accepted, relocated and headed off to [Alkmaar](#) afterwards. We had heard about the cheese-market that is held there every Friday. Plenty of cheese, Dealers and Experts filled the square, along with porters wearing traditional dress, as well as some young girls straight out of the Dutch picture book. Samples of the big round loafs were taken, then the cheese was put on a sort of stretcher and porters run the heavy load to a weighing station in the building. We soon got the impression that the same loafs kept coming and going and that the whole market was just set up to please tourists. In fact, later a local confirmed to us in a Café, that this market is, what he called "a replica" of how it was in the olden days. However, Alkmaar is a proud city worthwhile visiting and in some little street we found a real cheese-shop with yellow loafs in all different sizes and flavours like paprika, herbs or grains.



In the afternoon we left Alkmaar just as a thunderstorm started. There were many windmills and nice little hamlets along the way. We stopped at **Noordeinde**, where most houses had romantic gardens with flowers growing rampantly. Following some road-signs that looked like indicators of a tourist drive, we found our way into **De Rijp**. This is a particularly charming village with canals on both sides of the road, covered by greenery called "duck weed". Many houses are connected with the mainroad over a small private bridge. The heart of the village consists of well preserved houses in traditional style only and was a picture perfect postcard.

Our next stop was in **Volendam**, a somewhat touristy place on the inland sea of Markermeer. On the dam, houses all had souvenir shops and restaurants but the older ones, away from the dam, looked much more appealing to us. Soon we drove on to **Marken**, which sits on a nice harbour. Here, we found ourselves again almost like being in a museum-village. Here too, we found lots of old traditional houses with new paint and a glorious sunset and good food in a restaurant to finish off this great sightseeing day.

Visiting friends in Friesland



After a good night's sleep in the luxury of Ibis hotel, we headed north over the causeway on the "closure dike" [Afsluitdijk](#) to Friesland, where our friends Gisela & Klaus expected us. They own a house on a canal in **Workum** where they can moor their boat in front of the garden. As we were invited to spend a few days, they showed us around in their pretty neighbourhood. First we had a look around **Lemmer**, a holiday retreat popular with German tourists and hobby captains cruising around the canals. In **Sloten** we could visit a working mill that was used to grind flour.

Most impressive was our visit to [Giethoorn](#). First we joined a boat trip on some particularly nice canals from where we had good views to pastoral landscapes and the bordering farmhouses with thatched roofs. Giethoorn looks very much like a museum-village but all houses are inhabited and the real estate prices are amongst the highest in the Netherlands. Consequently, today there are hardly any farmers but the city elite who live there. They often have to bear thousands of tourists cruising in front of the gardens, pointing their cameras at the beautiful thatched roof houses. There are 800 small electric powered boats for rent. Additionally, dozens of bigger tour-boats cruise on a one-way circuit through the village.

Some barges cater also for the disabled and can accommodate wheel chairs by lowering them in on an electric platform. Disabled people are very well integrated into Dutch society and we've come across various projects, where handicapped people run café's and bakeries under professional supervision. Many companies sponsor vehicles, outings or holidays for handicapped people, to allow them to mingle with the crowds.

Despite having visited the Netherlands before, this country delighted us more than we had expected. We got to know friendly people, beautiful landscapes and well maintained historic towns in a clean and orderly country that can convince more and more also from a culinary side.



Fighting traffic in Germany

After bidding farewell to Gisela & Klaus on July 7, 2009 we set out to cross Germany. We decided to spend the night in Bremen as the rush hour was approaching soon after we crossed the border. We took a room in an Etap Hotel at the outskirts of the city and remained there, as we found several shops and restaurants nearby. The area was a good mix between industrial- and suburban zone and we didn't want more.

The next morning when we drove on the freeway towards Hamburg, we were very lucky not to get stuck in traffic jams. In the opposite direction, we saw one jam after another. There was a never ending "section" of road work all the way to the Elbtunnel (~100 km) and therefore traffic speed was mostly reduced but as we said: we were happy that we could keep on moving.

Denmark: 6 days in Jutland

By the time we arrived in [Denmark](#), it was already 6 P.M., about 3 hours later than we had anticipated. It didn't take long until we came across the first beautiful building with a brand new thatched roof. Break n'stop – picture! Then we wanted to find an ATM but didn't like to waste time to get into a town. So we arrived empty handed in [Ribe](#) but got into the Youth Hostel, thanks to genuine Swiss plastic.



We realized that the night, now on July 8th, fell much later here than further south and therefore we had still enough time to explore the historic old town of Ribe after dinner. We admired the beautiful half-timbered houses along the cobblestoned streets again the next morning. Then we continued to Esbjerg on the coast, where we stopped for the four 9 metre high figures in white stone "Mennesket ved Havet" (Man meets the Sea), erected at the beach. Following Jutland's west coast up, we passed Vesterlund. In this area, there are thousands of sometimes very luxurious holiday homes dotted around the sand dunes.

The drive through the overgrown dunes along the coast was very rewarding. After crossing by ferry from Thyboron to Agger across the inlet Nissum Bredning, we turned inland and soon the scenery changed dramatically. Instead of water

and gentle dunes, we saw now lots of wind generators and cultivated hills with golden wheat fields. We stopped for the night at a campground in **Humlum**, where we rented a simple cabin. The village was tiny but the local Kro (restaurant) offered a superb buffet, featuring local seafood that night.

The next day took us to **Viborg** and because it was now rainy, we looked for a B&B instead of camping at the naturist ground we have had in mind. Surprisingly, in Denmark staying at a B&B often works out cheaper for a couple, than staying at a Youth Hostel. The house of our Landlady was situated in a quiet street and tastefully decorated. We didn't only get a room, but an entire apartment. She also invited us to use her balcony which offered lake view. Viborg is a pleasant town and while we wandered around the sun reappeared again. On the next morning, we made a day-visit to **Vedsolejren naturist camping**. It is situated above a lake in beautiful surroundings near Birgittelyst but the temperature was only just enough to enjoy it in the raw.

After two days at Viborg, we moved further north, detouring through Tranum Strand and Slettenstrand, where the weather would have been good enough for bathing. In Slettenstrand a fun fair was held, giving us the opportunity to watch how Danish kids are being spoiled and to sample one of the most popular Danish fast food delights: Franske Hot Dog.



Past the very blue Lundfjord we arrived at **Thisted** in the evening. With help of a Danish couple we had pre-arranged (long ago from Spain) to stay at a B&B, where the Landlady didn't speak anything but Danish. We managed and got a big room in her old house. She didn't understand any of our questions but her "betal nu" was as plain as it can be (*pay now*).

Thisted was very dead on Sunday evening but came very much to life on Monday, as the shops were open and people filled the streets. It is a modern town of almost 13'000 inhabitants.



Late afternoon we went for a drive to the seaside villages of Klitmøller and Nørre Vorupør that attracted many holiday makers. They enjoyed the evening sun and had dinner at the small restaurants overlooking the beach. We had read about a famous Seafood Restaurant but this was the only one closed that night – and so many people wanting to get in, only during the short time when we hung around it.

Finally, July 14th 2009 had arrived. Heinz supplemented his breakfast with a couple of "Mercalm" tablets because on that day we had a reservation on the big car-ferry Norröna that should bring us out to the North Atlantic, where we intended to visit the Faroese Islands, Iceland and Greenland.

We will describe our North-Atlantic trip in our the next chapter, where we are going to bore you with our tales of immense blue skies, pure light, huge lava deserts, steaming mud-pools, endless glaciers and gargantuan icebergs...

Brigitte & Heinz



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