

Ceuta, Spanish Morocco

The city of Ceuta, perhaps one of the famous "Pillars of Hercules" lies on the North African coast across the straits from Gibraltar. We can see the distant Rock rising out of the Mediterranean heat haze as we disembark the Black Prince and make our way towards the town.

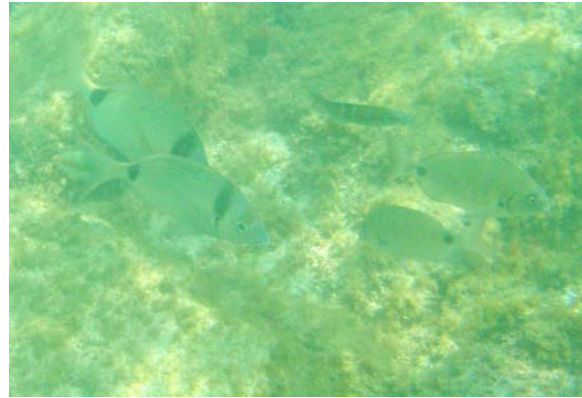
Ceuta is one of five autonomous regions of Spain which lie in Morocco, and one of the tours today is due to cross the border into Morocco proper. We are out and about before the tours depart, so it is quiet when we walk down the gangplank, and although free shuttle buses are being provided for the short distance into the town itself, we decide to walk.

The area around the port is pleasant, with gardens, palm trees, water fountains and statues. As we climb up into the shopping centre, we see lime tree lined avenues and bedding displays of petunias and geraniums. The buildings are a mixture of new Spanish and old Moorish ones, and even a quite bizarre castellated one with black dragons on the roof!



The people are dressed in either modern European clothing, or brightly coloured Kaftans. Some of the older people are wearing the traditional brown woollen Kaftans - they must be very hot! The town has pavement cafes and a number of "Duty Free" shops. The prices in these establishments seem to be expensive, so we decide to visit an internet café, catch up with our emails, and stop for an Espresso coffee in the sun before making for the beach area.

The shingle beach is picturesque, with straw umbrellas for us to use, and with a backdrop of the old city walls and Ceuta cathedral above us. The beach has been cleaned by a large vehicle which is now parked up alongside the wall. Owain sits in the sun as Alvina swims in the water, trying the new underwater camera we bought recently.



Our trip back to the ship is through a different part of the town, through the fruit and vegetable market, and past a school where scores of exuberant children are being collected. This is the start of the siesta, and crowds of people are making their way home on foot and by car. The streets are full of slow moving cars, and policemen are on every junction, waving their arms about in many different ways and using their whistles almost continually. We arrive back at the Black Prince too late for lunch, but in time for a cup of coffee as we all set sail for Cagliari, Sardinia.



Cagliari, Sardinia

We arrive at the capital of Sardinia at noon, and head off straight away with Tony and Sheila towards the town centre. This is a typically Italian town, with typical Italian drivers driving typical Italian cars. The traffic is fast and furious and pedestrian crossings are probably the worst place to cross the road! In fact, it is worrying to note that when the little green man lights up the traffic also starts off and weaves its way around the people on the crossing!

Eventually we make it across the busy roads near the port and try to find sanctuary in the narrow streets of the town. The buildings are all several stories high and are painted in warm earthy colours, their balconies hung with washing and multi coloured geraniums tumbling over the edges. The stone flagged streets however are just wide enough for the line of parked cars and the inevitable mopeds and small Fiats which race by.



We stop for a cooling drink of Coca Cola under a covered veranda before heading upwards into the old town with its shady squares and mix of Moorish and Italian architecture.



There are new blocks of flats here too, many sporting some beautiful floral balconies, and right in the middle of these an old Roman villa which is slowly being uncovered.

Our next stop is the Orto Botanico gardens where we find colourful displays of daisies and petunias and a large area of cacti and succulents, all set against the white limestone cliffs. The trees here are impressive with massive root systems that we negotiate with wooden bridges, and all have name plaques.



Further on up the hill there is an amphitheatre that was carved directly into the limestone cliff face and this is considered to be the most important Roman monument in Sardinia. Unfortunately we do not have the time to visit it, as we need to start making our way back to the ship before she sails at 5pm. We make it just in time for afternoon tea and stay on deck as the Black Prince sails towards the Aeolian Islands on the way to Albania.

