

## Motril, Spain

We arrive at the port of Motril in Southern Spain at 9 am on this hot and sultry day, and are amazed to see snow on the high mountains behind the town. Many passengers have chosen to take the organised tour to the Alhambra palace today, but as it is an eight hour trip we chose to see the sights of Motril instead. A shuttle bus takes us into the town - a distance of about 2 miles, and drops us off by the tourist information centre. We collect maps from here and make our way into the old part of the town in order to find an internet cafe.

This is easier said than done, and eventually we return to the tourist information centre to ask them for directions! Apparently the nearest internet cafe is only a short walk from the info centre - but in the opposite direction!

Motril is a modern, unremarkable town with wide avenues lined by palm trees and blue Jacaranda and there are yellow bedding pansies and multicoloured varieties of Bougainvillea cascading over walls.



We spend over an hour in the internet cafe for the sum of €1.40, and are able to delete our 600 items of Spam e-mails, read the handful of genuine ones and send off our latest cruise reports for our family and friends.

A welcome cup of coffee follows, after which we set off to walk the  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile or so to the Sugar museum, which we have been told is very good. However, by the time we get there it is already 1.25pm and the museum closes for the afternoon siesta at 1.30pm!

It is now very hot and we walk slowly back towards the centre of town once more, this time walking through some very pleasant gardens, where there are many bougainvillea, huge poinsettias and sweet smelling daturas.



We stop for a bite to eat in the local Burger King, where the air-conditioning is very welcome, before catching the shuttle bus back to the ship. We arrive at the quayside in plenty of time to board the ship for the sailing at 5pm.



## Leixoes, (for Oporto), Portugal

After a day at sea we arrive at Leixoes at 8am. The port is a busy one with many cranes, containers, mountains of sand and mounds of recycling materials. Today we have a trip to Oporto, a cruise on a small boat down the Douro River on which Oporto stands, and a trip around a Port winery.

The modern air-conditioned coach whisks us towards the city centre - around 20 minutes away. We pass by poor areas where the buildings are in a dilapidated condition and much graffiti can be seen on the drab walls. In places, some of these buildings are being renovated. As we near the city, the buildings become larger and smarter, this is where the rich and famous live overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Our guide points out the old ship yards with their rotting wooden rollers, which were used to launch the old wooden boats.

As we near the city centre, we see the many different architectural styles in this large city. There are immense baroque churches, art deco theatres, gothic museums and both Portuguese and English style houses. Many English families settled here when the Port wine industry flourished, and their influence can be seen in the elegant English houses and smart tea shops along the main street. This, the old town of Oporto, is called the Ribiera district and has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



We now cross the Duoro River by one of Oporto's 6 bridges and visit the Gaia district, where the wine cellars are situated. All the famous Port Wine names are here, including Croft, Ferreira and Sandeman. We now join our boat for a cruise on the river taking in the sights along the river bank. The boat holds around 100 people, some seated outside and some inside. As it is such a nice day the outside seats are soon taken.



We cruise down river for a short way, before turning around and continuing up-stream past the old town which is crowded on the bank on our right hand side. We now have a different perspective of these fine buildings and can see how they seem to cling to the pure granite rocks.

After our cruise we are taken on a tour of the Sandeman Port Cellars, which finishes in a wine tasting! We are amazed at the sheer size of the vats that hold the Port, and are told how the whole process starts in the vineyards of the Douro valley further inland. The process is now totally mechanised and the wine is transported in tankers to the cellars by road, rather than the traditional wooden boats.

We are told that all Port Wine is a blend of wines selected for their different characteristics, and the better vintages are bottled and allowed to age in the bottles. Some of the Port here was laid down in 1917, and we can see the bottles, covered in cobwebs in one of the side cellars.



The floor we are walking on is made of blocks of old oak barrels, and in the summer the floor is kept wet to keep the temperature constant. The floor

underneath the large casks is painted white to show up any leakages. We spend some time in the gift shop where we buy some small souvenirs, although we do not buy any of the Port - it is simply too sweet for our tastes!

When we arrive back it is 1pm, and rather than go back on board for lunch we



decide to walk into the nearest town, have lunch there and see a little more of this area. We cross over the river from the port of Leixoes via a lifting bridge, and find ourselves in a quaint typically Portuguese town called Matosinhos. On the main street are numerous trams running the whole length of the town, and

regular intersections allow other traffic to cross the road when the green light shows.

The buildings are all unique and all different. There are 2 storey buildings, 5 story buildings, tower blocks, old Moorish style buildings with ornate balconies, a 1930's bright yellow curved building with a nautical theme and Portuguese houses with green, yellow and especially blue tiled walls. We also notice some of the 10 foot tall ornate doors leading down narrow alleyways between the buildings.



We have a toasted sandwich and a coffee sitting on the pavement outside a local café where no one speaks English. The food is very good and at less than €12 for 4 people is very good value too.

It is now time to make our way back to the ship for the 5pm sailing, and we just make it across the bridge as the sirens sound to warn of the lifting of the bridge for a passing ship. It's a good job it wasn't the Black Prince leaving us behind!

