



March 3 2009, Cloudy, 19°C

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Winners 2008

A free week's stay at Monte do Casarão was raffled among last year's guests.

Winners are Mirjam van Engelen and Stefan Larssen from the Dutch town of Ridderkerk. Mirjam's firstborn is due any moment now and we wish her and Stefan health and happiness.

1. FEELS LIKE SUMMER

The weather has been quite wonderful for several days. After six weeks of winter (which the Portuguese claim was the coldest, wettest and longest since 1978) we have sunshine galore. There's hardly a cloud to be seen and by day temperatures rise up to 22 °C.

The swallows are back in the nest in the garage they built last year. The storks are busy preparing for their new offspring. The toads just started their annual migration. And wherever you look – and this gives us that lovely summery feeling – the mimosa is blooming.



2. CALDAS DE MONCHIQUE

Speaking of mimosa: if you were to drive from Monchique to Portimão by way of the N266, it would feel like a fairy-tale. We strongly advise it. The air is pregnant with the scent of mimosa and you'll drive through a forest that has turned completely yellow.

You can visit Caldas de Monchique along the way, famous for its hot springs. The spring water that wells up has a temperature of 33°C



and its healing properties were known to the Romans and Moors alike. The Pico da Foia, the highest peak in southern Portugal at 902 metres, is worth stopping at too. On a bright day the view is stunning. And if you have time and energy to spare, you can visit the Parque da Mina, a cultural heritage that offers you an impression of how a rich Portuguese family lived at the end of the 19th century.

3. CARNIVAL

Enthused by a husband who had his roots in the Dutch province of Limburg – a catholic stronghold – year after year we immerse ourselves in the bustle of carnival. We went to see the parade of revellers in Loulé twice before, but this year we stayed closer to home. Zambujeira has a modest parade of its own, with a unique character, mostly lacking Brazilian influences. It's a true village fest, where



young and old are dressed up. Princesses, Spidermen, witches, vampires and Snow Whites walk everywhere. The inmates of the old people's home have their own outfits.

4. BUFOS DA VELHA

Many of our guests enquire whether they can spy out elks or other big animals at Monte do Casarão. Their reason for asking are the big brownish yellow heaps that look a lot like horse shit.

I'm sorry to disappoint them the only large mammals living here are wild boars. After the dictatorship, dire poverty led many people to hunt for their daily food which didn't bode well for the stock of game. Fortunately over the past few years, deer and roe have once again been sighted and now they are fiercely protected.

Those brown heaps? Bufos da velha, as they say here in the Alentejo. Grandmother's farts, or simply boletes.



5. WEB MARKETING

In the next couple of weeks, the Spanish- and German-language versions of the website will go online. Cause to show our appreciation to all those who selflessly 'do their bit' for our main marketing instrument. Firstly, webmaster nephew Koen, who designed the entire site and has a full day's (night's) job managing and updating the content. Secondly, the translators: son Bas, who translates from Dutch into Portuguese, his Portuguese friends Tiago Cardoso and Fred Martins, who check if he's done a good job; former colleague Josee Koning who translates from Dutch into English; Heidi Schmidt and Beate Rositzki, German friends who live locally, who render the Portuguese site into German and Sheila Menéndez, a Spanish friend of Bas's, who translates the English-language site into Spanish. Thanks a million, all of you!

