



July 2 2009, sunny, 25°C

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## Solar energy



Much sooner than we'd expected, our energy supply has 'turned green, thanks to a state subsidy that hadn't been used up yet. It took a lot of hard work for everybody involved, but here it is. And it works too.

## 1. REPTILE COURSE

Since there are quite a few creatures walking/crawling around Monte do Casarão which we know nothing about, Lies and I enrolled in a course called *Recognising and identifying reptiles*. I must say we underestimated what we let ourselves in for. Our fellow-students turned out not to be nature lovers of a certain age (as I'd expected), but biology students and people who work with reptiles professionally. From



Lisbon, Porto, Évora and even further away. Some amount of foreknowledge was assumed. All in Portuguese technical jargon. It lasted an entire weekend, from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. And both days were very warm. We learnt to make a lasso from floss thread, we counted tiny scales and legs, we looked at snakes preserved in formalin, did field work, walked and lifted stones. Every now and again, we managed to grasp what was said. Still, we were given enough information to leisurely repeat the course at home. And our efforts earned us yet another certificate!

## 2. SHOCKING

Many, especially young, Portuguese don't understand that someone from the rich and thriving Western Europe would move to Portugal of his or her own volition. The same goes for Manuel Domingos, our very inspired and erudite teacher of *Portuguese for foreigners*. He loves his country, but would still like to live



in the Netherlands or Britain. And let's be fair: of course in Portugal it is definitely not all roses.

Thus, Manuel wants to know from each of us what we, foreigners, find most *shocking*.

That yields an interesting list.

- \* The Portuguese do not assert their rights
- \* The unfriendliness and lack of interest on the part of staff
- \* The government is unpredictable and lax
- \* The way they treat animals
- \* Their driving style
- \* The arbitrariness of official authorities
- \* The mountain load of forms that need to be filled in everywhere

Of course, it's not as black-and-white, and gradually things do improve, but in essence it is true. Gerrit Komrij, a Dutch poet/novelist/playwright who has lived in Portugal for years, described his experiences in the (Dutch-language) short story compilation *A business lunch in Sintra*. As he puts it: 'I'm in love with this country, but not blindly'.

## 3. A REAL GEM

In unexpected places, you may suddenly happen upon something really special. That happened to us in Aldeia das Amoreiras, the friendly, sleepy, but very idyllic village where the reptile course was conducted.



Frescos in the shape of a comic strip, designed and painted by young people, adorn the walls of the public laundry and tell the story of the beautiful Oliva, who slowly changed into an olive tree and richly endowed the village with olives and oil. Really extraordinary. So, if you are in the vicinity, do go and have a look.

## 4. JUST INDULGE

Enjoying a week's holiday in beautiful surroundings with your friends, or all your brothers and sisters, spend days playing bridge with your bridge club, or going for walks with your walking club. You like the idea, but nothing comes of it. There is so much to organise. Before you know it another year has passed. That's a shame. That's why we make you an offer: we can take the organisation off your hands. We'll arrange everything: the voyage, the stay, the food, the day-trips, the shopping. All according to you wishes, that goes without saying. There is one restriction. Your party cannot exceed the total of 18 persons. If you'd like to see an impression of how an earlier party fared, click on [Extra newsletter VKA](#).



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