



February 1st, 2009,
sunny 15°C,
in the sun 28 °C

CONTENTS

1. A strong brand
2. Sweets
3. Creepy crawlies
4. Hygrocybe psittacina

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Winners 2009

Among our 2009 guests we put up a week's free stay on Monte do Casarão for raffle. The winner is the **Mollee-Courant** family from the Netherlands. Congratulations Marise, Cajo, Nina and Olaf.

We'll look forward to seeing you again!

Our raffle continues this year, so you might be the lucky winner in 2010.

1. A STRONG BRAND

The last Dutch doughnuts – a traditional new year's eve treat – have been digested. The Christmas decorations are hibernating in boxes. The new year is in full swing. I wish everybody a very happy and successful 2010 – if I hadn't done so already.

On Monte do Casarão, we are rearing to go. Prospects are good. Already, many reservations are being made, as our availability calendar will show. Many guests are coming back, for the second, third or fourth time. Our very first guests really take the cake. In June, they be staying with us for the sixth time. A Hill of your Own turns out to be a strong brand.



Be(com)ing well-known is crucial. That's what we work on continuously. By means of the news letter that is translated into more and more languages, by keeping the website up to date, by making sure we can be found through Google Maps, by working closely with the regional tourist boards. Henceforth, our promotional material can be found on all the large European holiday fairs, ranging from London, Berlin, Antwerp and Utrecht to Paris, Toulouse and Lyon. Absolutely wonderful.

2. SWEETS

The Portuguese love sweets. The sweeter the better. According to them, they eat it to sweeten the bitterness of daily life. Whatever their reasons, it is a fact that the Portuguese have traded with Arabian and Jewish merchants for centuries (and later on, with seafarers) to obtain the sugar cane, cinnamon, cocoa and vanilla they so abundantly use in their recipes. They bake or make pastries, pies, cakes and desserts galore, all of which are very tasty. What is really tasty is the *pastel de nata*, puff pastry filled with cream and dusted with cinnamon and powdered sugar. You can buy them in any *pastelaria*, but if you should happen to pass Lisbon, you must make a detour to Belém, where the *pastéis* originate. The recipe used to belong to the monks of the *Mosteiro dos Jerónimos*, but when the monastery was closed following the liberal revolution of 1820, it was sold to a con-



fectioner who marketed the pastries – called *Pastéis de Belém* – in 1837, using the original recipe that is even now known to a happy few. The coffee house of the same name sells 8000-14000 of them a day. The Portuguese are willing to stand in line for them for hours.

If you find yourself in Belém, do go in and have a cup of coffee and a *pastel* in one of the rooms tiled with azulejos. Or get two, they are too good for self-restraint to get in the way.

3. CREEPY CRAWLIES

A classic question asked by our guests is whether there are any animals around here they need to be wary of. Just like in any other nature reserve, you can come across small scorpions and snakes. Neither are lethal, but they can be painful. Wearing sensible shoes if you leave the



tracks and vigilance when lifting a rock of a piece of wood are required. We do not look favourably on killing, but sometimes we will flatten a small scorpion or the ten-centimetre centipede with the hard shell.

Furthermore, there are lizards, salamanders, (tree) frogs, toads, geckos, moles and mice, but they are all harmless, even if they can get quite large. Every now and again, they'll get indoors and we'll try to get them out again. At one time, a small mouse took up residence in the piano. We allowed him time to check himself out, but once he started stocking up on dry dog food, blocking the keys, we decided we had to take measures. Some buttered toast (Portuguese recipe) in the mousetrap and the little creature was no more.

4. HYGROCYPE PSITTACINA

In California, I once saw a shower of rain in a desert change the entire area into a vast sea of blooms within a few hours.

Here, you'll see something similar after the rainy season. Here, it's fungi. They'll grow profusely. We have discovered a species that – we think – is very rare. The parrot toadstool. According to the mushroom guides it is found in grasslands in Western Europe, Iceland and Greenland, but has been red-listed. On Monte do Casarão, it's growing on the mossy hill side. It is approximately 2 to 3 centimetres, waxy and bottle green. The colour only lasts a few days, then the mushroom becomes inconspicuous as it turns a light shade of brown and loses lustre. Apparently, they are edible, but since there are only three of them, we won't.



Nel