

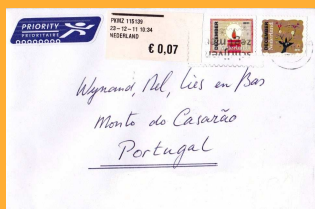


March 11th 2012, sunny 22°

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We wish to thank everybody for all the Christmas and New Year cards and emails we received. Many thanks to the mailmen as well, who really gave the best they got.



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And the winner(s) is / are...



Peter, Inge, Joost, Pim, Frank and Sharina van Gelder from Almere. Congratulations on winning the New Year's lottery. We're looking forward to seeing you back.

http://www.montedocasarao.com/Nl/n_winners_2011.html

1. THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WINTER EVER

We have never ever had such a beautiful winter. Since the end of November, there was hardly a day without a sheer blue sky, a blazing sun, no wind. During the day, it felt like summer. Wonderful. We loved it and so did our guests.



It's much harder for nature. For many months, there was hardly any rain. Until last week, we had frosty nights, really frosty. The bougainvillea, agave, oleander, eucalyptus, the palm trees, cacti: they all suffered frost damage. Therefore, our lady gardener takes a gloomy view on the chances of survival of the new plantings by the pool. The grass in the fields has all been eaten. We still have some, so every now and again António comes along with his cows. Fernando and Maria's chickens don't lay eggs. There's something about the swallows as well. Er, swallows? Actually, there's only one. Five weeks ago, he suddenly came flying up. He sat around singing for a day, but got no response. Every night, he returns to his old nest in the garage. We have no idea where he goes during the day. He's probably on the look-out somewhere, wondering what's keeping the others. He'll have to show a little more patience. Summer is on its way. All's well that ends well.

2. PO(O)RTUGAL

Whether all shall end well for Portugal, downgraded to junk status, remains to be seen. The country is weighed down by numerous measures that are to result in debt relief. The VAT on gas and electricity has risen from 6 to 23 per cent; Christmas bonuses and holiday allowances have been halved, if not abolished altogether; the personal contribution in health care has been increased considerably; unemployment benefits are cut; fines are doled out lavishly, and so on. Recognizable, for other European countries as well, but Portugal never had much to begin with.

Obviously, the carnival is a delightful way to break free from the day-to-day worries, to shake off your frustrations and to ridicule the politicians in a playful manner. Thus, the carnival procession in Loulé was, apart from some clowns and ladies with feathers, totally dominated by the Troika.



3. YELLOW, PINK AND ORANGE

In any case, a drive from Monte do Casarão to Loulé is highly recommended at this time of the year. Even if you don't much care for the festival, the Loulé carnival is inextricably bound up with blooming almond trees. Drive south, towards the Algarve, by way of Monchique. At first, the bright yellow of the mimosa catches you unawares, but as soon as you turn onto the N 125, the colour of the landscape turns a soft shade of pink. Add the orange trees and the picture is complete. That's one thing you shouldn't deny yourself: buying oranges along the N 125. They cost next to nothing and they really are the best oranges you can imagine. Better than the ones from Spain, South Africa or Israel.

In that respect, I do not understand the Portuguese at all. I would consider oranges to be a wonderful export product. However, I sometimes feel that the Portuguese don't

set great store by money and making money. After all, it doesn't always make you happier.



4. GUIMARÃES

While Loulé lies in the southeast of Portugal, on the very other end, due northwest, lies Guimarães, the town where 'once Portugal was born' as can be read from one of the medieval towers in the historic town centre.

Guimarães has played an important role in the coming into existence of Portugal. It became the seat of the county of Portugal, which was founded in 1095, and in 1139, it became the capital of the kingdom of Portugal. In that year, D. Afonso Henriques, who was born in Guimarães, claimed the title of King of Portugal. From Guimarães, the islamised area was recovered from the Moors and in 1249, the Algarve was captured. The Portuguese borders haven't really changed since then.

Guimarães has been on the Unesco World Heritage list since 2001. This year, it may call itself the European Capital of Culture. Lonely Planet put Guimarães in its top ten cities to be visited. Portugal still is a wonderful holiday spot.



The painting week in April has been fully booked. There are still places available for people who only wish to paint and stay over elsewhere.

Of course, you can apply for the painting week from **4 to 11 October 2012**.

Info: http://www.montedocasarao.com/Nl/n_painting.html