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New Years dive 2020

www.a-hill-of-your-own.com

www.montedocasaraao.com

info@montedocasaraao.com

www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVtr-TOeEcc&feature=youtu.be

PAINTING WEEKS 2020

As most of you know, the teacher of all our 22 painting weeks up to now, Jenny Helder, will not be coming back to Monte do Casarão.

We have been fortunate enough to find a new teacher fairly quickly: Margot Verhoeven from Amsterdam. She will mentor the painting weeks in April and October. We are happy with Margot, and have no doubt that she will manage to challenge the participants to unparalleled artistic performance.



The painting weeks will take place from 8 to 15 April and from 30 September to 7 October.

This year, we have chosen for the Wednesday as arrival and departure day rather than Thursday. The flights tend to be cheaper on Wednesdays.

SUMMERY WINTER

The weather is exceptionally fine. Ever since a week before Christmas. During the day, the temperature increases to about 25° C, and the sky is radiantly blue. The main difference with more northern parts of Europe is that here the sun really warms you. Our Christmas and New Year guests have reaped its many benefits. The guests who are here now likewise enjoy the sunshine.



There is another vast difference with northern Europe: 2019 goes out without any annoying bangs. There is a fireworks display, but it has been organised on central level. November and the first half of December saw a lot of much-needed rain. In north and centre of Portugal, the reservoirs have finally refilled, as opposed to in the south. There, the rain did not really help much. The large reservoirs, for instance, Santa Clara and Alqueva are not even 40% full. Fortunately, our own reservoir has refilled. Once the hinterland has been satiated and the stream starts running, the reservoir fills up in two days' time and the surplus water crashes through the overflow into the river below. We are good for another year.

PUKARA

We have a new fungus species on the menu. The pukara, or parasol mushroom. The cap is 20 cm in diameter, and the thin stipe is approximately 20 cm as well. We had seen it before, but following enthusiastic reviews from a neighbour and some further inquiry (just to be sure) we took the plunge and cooked it as the Portuguese do, like a schnitzel: you coat the pukara with beaten egg and then with bread crumbs, after which you bake it briefly. Scrumptious! Here to stay.



While I was searching for edible fungi, I found a book on the subject by Dutch wild harvester Edwin Florès. As his book was sold out, I sent him an e-mail to enquire if he might still have a copy I could buy. He responded immediately, telling me he'd be happy to send me a copy. He also suggested coming here before next winter to explain various aspects of wild harvesting to me and pick fungi together. What a wonderful man! I love him already.

THE GROUNDNUT

Groundnuts sound exotic to me, but they are also grown as nearby as in the Alentejo. Here you can find them in any supermarket, large bags full of unpeeled nuts, and they are a favourite snack with a beer, too. As are lupin beans, by the way, but that's another story.



We are curious enough to see if we can grow our own groundnuts. And what do you know: we harvested quite a few. We have left part of them to dry indoors and part in the garage. The latter venture did not work out quite well. The mice turn out to like groundnuts too. We even found the shells under the bonnet of the car. The mouse responsible for that thanked us by gnawing through the motor's wiring as well. We only found this out when we drove back from Faro airport at night. Oh well, we live and learn every day.

NEW YEAR'S LOTTERY

Monte do Casarão always get the new year off to a good start. With the draw of the New Year's lottery. The people who stayed with us last year, participate with one ticket per booked week. The prize is a free week's stay here. Over the years, we have managed to make quite a few people happy this way. The most striking element is that, so far, the prize has always been won by a couple or family who were here for the first time. Our loyal guests take part every year with 3, 4 or even 5 tickets, but they have never managed to win as yet.



This year, Marianne, Maurice, Lieuwe, Moos and Ymke are the happy winners. Our Finnish neighbour Päivi Mannerkorpi had the honour of pulling the winning ticket out of the top hat. We enjoy giving it an official look and feel.

Even if etiquette says I can't, I want to wish you a very happy 2020. Maybe, we'll meet this year (again) at Monte do Casarão.

Nel