

March 22nd 2022, cloudy 20°



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Painting Weeks 2022

**Wednesday april 13 till
wednesday april 20**

**Wednesday september 28
till wednesday october 5**



New year Lottery

Like every year in January, we drew our New Year lottery, awarding a free week's stay on Monte do Casarão. The winners are Frans and Geke Riemsdag.

It's so nice that loyal guests have won at last. It never usually happens.



Is it Edwin Flores's lucky hand?

TERROR SPARROWS

Even if house sparrows are on the RSPB's Red List, we have plenty of them here. Obviously, house sparrows are really social creatures. They found us some five years ago, and now they simply won't go away. 'Isn't that cosy?' you may think. Certainly, we thought so too. Until the sparrows started bullying and harassing the swallows that used to come here every year. They vandalised their nests and chased them out of the garage. Be it the barn swallow or the red-rumped swallow: the sparrow simply didn't want them anywhere near. Sheer spite, for they make their own nests in a box containing rags or books, or on the surfboard. Or in the chimney, as it happens. For a while, we had smelled gas in the kitchen while the geyser was on. As it turned out, the entire drainpipe, a meter-and-a-half long, was full of straws. That means the sparrows have been dropping straws and rubbish into the pipe until it was high enough to make a nest. You might also admire their resourcefulness. Still, that can be sorted. I won't forgive them about the swallows, though.



CORK

On Monte do Casarão, we have quite a few cork oaks. Once every ten years the oaks are peeled. The cork is sold. Guests are often surprised: 'Cork? That's worthless, isn't it? What's the use? Nowadays wine bottles have screw caps!'



Nothing is further from the truth. Generating a value of 1,1 billion euros in 2021 (a record year), Portugal is still the world leader where the production and export of cork is concerned. The wine industry – topped by France and the US – is the primary destination by far, accounting for 78%. the rest of the cork finds its way in construction and the design industry. Consider how cork is used as insulation and covering material. Also, cork is used in the fishing and car industries. For instance, in the new Mazda MX-30 (Mazda started out as a cork producer) the interior consist for a large part of cork. And there is more. It may be an idea for when you are here: a visit to one of the shops that exclusively sell cork products. Nice for the folks back home.

THE MUSHROOM MAN

And then he was here. Edwin Flores, the mushroom man. The first contacts dated from December 2019, but due to the perils of corona, appointments had to be postponed time and again. I wanted to know more about fungi, particularly about mushrooms, and after a bit of googling, I found Edwin. He offered to visit us and teach me the tricks of foraging for mushrooms. We went out for an entire week. The harvest was meagre, as it was far too dry and



too hot for mushrooms, but Edwin found them anyway. At night, he used the boletuses, portobellos, oyster and parasol mushrooms and the green-orange milk-caps in special dishes. Edwin was our private chef.

The next stap has been taken. At the moment, it looks as if this week will be continued, and we will organise a mushroom / foraging course together. Here, on Monte do Casarão, in January. If you cannot wait that long, and you live in the Netherlands, you can apply <https://casaforesta.nl/>

NEW NEIGHBOURS

We have new neighbours. Both to our left and to our right, ruins with acres had been for sale for years, which have now been sold. Within just a few months. First *Atalaia*, on the left, the *Portela de Missa*, the grounds to our right. To young people, Dutch people. I must admit I wasn't too happy about it at first. There is a reason why we moved to the middle of nowhere, and then suddenly, you have neighbours who may have all kinds of plans. Still, we can hardly buy everything around us because we don't want neighbours.



It turns out I made a fuss over nothing. The couple to our left have a daughter and live here permanently. The other couple alternate their residence here with living in the Netherlands. They are each sympathetic, inspired, intelligent people who respect nature and have an open view of the word. For now, they are living in their campers. The ruins continue to be ruins.

Nel