

September 7th 2022, sun, 25° **TEMPUS FUGIT**



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35 dreamy places to stay in the Alentejo

On 23 June, this was the headline in *The Times* followed by the blurb

From cutting-edge design hotels and breezy seaside pads to arty rural suites and palaces with pools — we pick the Portuguese region's top hotels and villas

Some time ago, a photo editor of *The Times* approached us with the request to send her photos of Monte do Casarão, to illustrate an article on the Alentejo.

Obviously, you comply, if only for the free publicity it generates. And you might like the list yourself, in case you want to stay elsewhere in the Alentejo.



You can find the entire article through Google.



Time flies. O tempo voa. Tímmin flýgu. Even old Virgil knew: Tempus fugit. Isn't it remarkable how universal many proverbs are? That should really make you think. By now, it's the beginning of September. The summer holidays are all but over. On to autumn and winter. It's been hot and dry here, too. Since March, we haven't had any rain, and it's not likely to rain any time soon. The reservoir is 3 metres below the desired level, and if it doesn't start raining in the very near future, we can kiss our vegetable garden and vineyard goodbye.



Still, the variety of colours in nature is amazing. The Bougainvillea, the trumpet vine, the oleander, the leadwort: they haven't had any water for six months, but they are blooming like never before.

The grapes are doing well again, too. Obviously, they have been watered. They need to be picked this week. We are always so fortunate to have such helpful guests.

THE CERAMIC SWALLOW

The sparrows must have been really startled by my anger. One swallow chick has actually been born in the nest underneath the eaves next to the kitchen. It was sheer coincidence that I saw it, for fifteen minutes later it flew off. Obviously, it didn't trust me. It is wonderful to see how swallow show up from everywhere to assist the chick in its first attempts at flying.

The swallow belongs to Portugal. Across the country, you can see small ceramic swallows hanging on the walls of the houses. The design, by Raphael Bordallo Pinheiro, dates back as far as 1896. The original design is still for sale as well, among various other versions.

The swallow always returns to its old nest, and that longing for home is something the Portuguese recognize only too well. The Portuguese have always roamed the earth, but the longing, the homesickness, the melancholia, remain. They have a concept for it, *saudade*, an untranslatable word that can only be described. Very many Portuguese would dearly love to return to Portugal, and the swallow symbolises that, somewhere in Portugal, there is a nest for them.



There is a Dutch proverb that translates something like this:

Swallows under the roof, guilders are the proof. Which is said to mean that swallows bring luck to where the nest is. How cool is that?

BANHO 29

The Portuguese dabble in more than longing and homesickness. They also love parties, processions, festivals, anything that is sociable and colourful, really. Holy days abound, so throughout the year there's plenty to celebrate. And if there isn't a saint to celebrate, a village will dedicate itself to some edible product or other: sweet potato, largemouth bass, squid, corn, you name it, the focal point of various festivities. The Algarve, Lagos and Aljezur celebrate the feast of Banho 29. Originally, this was a pilgrimage to the sea, dating back to Moorish times. A sea bath on 29 August counts as 29 normal baths, or so the story goes. Therefore, small farmers would come from miles and miles away, taking their children, their carts, and donkeys to bathe in the sea on that day. An additional advantage was that the sea would cleanse your soul from the bad influences of the Devil, who was always lurking about somewhere or other.



Nowadays, it is celebrated somewhat differently. With lots of music, fireworks, and a procession in your grandmother's pyjamas. And then late at night, a sea bath, of course.

ANYTHING ELSE?

- This year, we have again received the Green Key Award. We have further green plans for next year. For instance, we consider installing sun boilers at all the houses, and we are going to explore the possibility of installing charging points for all the future electric cars.
- There are tortoises in the reservoir. About a year-and-a-half ago, our neighbour gifted us with two fairly large tortoises. He had taken them from a ditch. We haven't seen them since, except when Henk showed up carrying one in his mouth, but now I regularly spot them swimming, including a small one. They are very shy, so there's no chance of taking a picture of them.
- We are pretty much back to the pre-Covid level. We could do with more guests, but the chaos at airports doesn't really help.
- So far, we hadn't had any Spanish guests yet. Well, we have now. I stand corrected: one of the guests was Catalan, as he emphasized himself.
- For the first time in our history, the planned painting week cannot take place. As a result of various medical mishaps, a number of the participants had to cancel, leaving too few course members. You will receive the dates for next year soon.

So, so much for Newsletter 60.
Best regards,

Nel