



*Typical walkways and structures found in Asilah, Morocco.*

## Cruising the Mediterranean

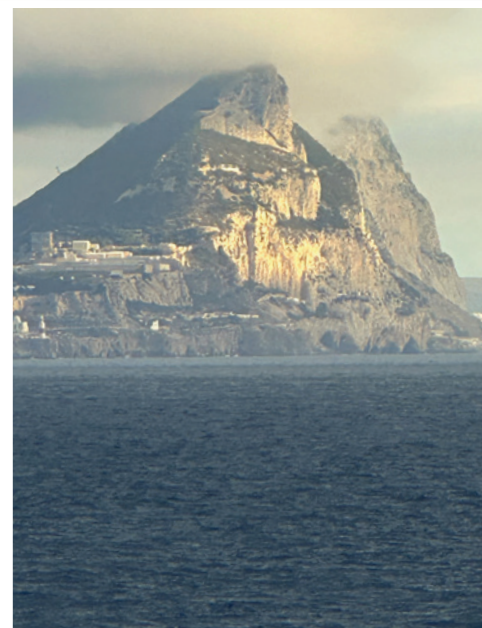
AFTER LEAVING the Spanish port city of Alicante, we passed Malta en route to Morocco. We had an extensive walking tour of the town of Asilah which was very clean and well planned vis-à-vis its layout. Most of the structures were blue and white and surrounded by spotless walkways. After our tour, we had appetizers and traditional drinks at a beautiful hotel by its pool. We finished the day with a great dinner on board our ship which included some of the best lobster and tiramisu I've had.

The next day involved a long walking tour in Sintra, located near Lisbon. I think this town is one of the best reasons to live here, or near Lisbon. We spent several hours exploring the Quinta da Regaleira's beautiful grounds and palace. It is a World Heritage Site by UNESCO with endless ponds, flowers, and on our visit, we were impressed by great music played on a musical implement made from a large gourd. It provided just the right touch

to appreciate this fabulous setting. The tour of the palace was full of historical events, well chronicled by photos and antique furniture. All in all, this was a wonderful tour.

After enjoying a glass of rosé in Sintra, we went to the seaside fish restaurant Azenhas Do Mar. The restaurant was perched on a high cliff of a cove directly facing the high-breaking waves of the sea. The roar of the waves crashing on the cliff, as well as parts of the restaurant's glass walls was impressive and memorable. We had several courses of fresh seafood with most having large lobsters to finish. Given the quality of the food and the uniqueness of the location, this meal will be well remembered for a long time.

Our dinner at Alexandre Silva's Guide Michelin restaurant, Loco, was impressive. For starters, we had the entire restaurant to ourselves. We also had 18 courses over four hours with attentive servers. Because of my high sensitivity to noise, I



*Malta as seen from the ship.*

especially appreciated the quietness. Although no photo can do perfect justice to this dinner, I have selected some of the most picturesque offerings to recreate the evening's most memorable moments. We were so lucky to be able to participate in this phenomenal artform.



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The Quinta da Regaleira castle and its beautiful grounds.



A gourd musician entertains our group.

The following day was very special to me. I was the only person in our group, other than my wife, who had ever heard, much less had a wine named Zambujeiro. The owner of the greatest wine cellar in Switzerland had served this wine to me and I was so impressed I bought all that was exported to the U.S. Now it was time to visit the winery, which is located in Portugal's largest wine region, Alentejo. After a two-hour drive from Lisbon, we arrived at the winery and were met by our hostess and guide, Isabel Piteira. The property was small, but in great condition, with the buildings immaculate and covered by splendid flowers and shrubbery. The tasting was well organized, and all the wines were impressive. Memories of my first exposure to the top wine were validated and most of us bought wine to be delivered to us in the U.S. where it is not available. We had a very nice lunch at Herdade Do Esporão, which was accompanied by several of their red wines. We finished the meal

with their tawny port (10 years).

Leaving Lisbon en route to Oporto, we had an interesting winery tour at São João da Azenha. The cellar was ancient and very inviting, as well as immaculate. We have a great lunch with exceptional suckling pig accompanied by older, as well as current, vintages of their best wines. The wines ordered for U.S. delivery come with pre-loaded memories of this great visit and feast. We checked into our hotel, The Yeatman in Oporto, which was one of the finest hotels ever experienced by this road warrior. We had a very good meal in the main dining room and retired to rest for a busy next day.

After breakfast, we left in two motor coaches for a trip up the Duoro River. The highly terraced vineyards are generally regarded as perhaps the most beautiful wine terrain on earth. In most of the landscape, not only the vineyards are distinct and beautiful, but the Duoro River is evident as

it meanders between the sculptured hills. Occasionally, one can find robalos, which are the small boats on which port wine was transported from the lodges along the Duoro to Oporto for ages.

We had an excellent tour of the cellars at Quinta Da Foz, including a lagar in which grapes are "foot-trodden" to be made into wine. We enjoyed a fabulous lunch of many courses with well-paired wines from the estate. All of this was served in a beautiful cellar with an inviting ambience.

Our next stop was another port lodge, Quinta De La Rosa. After the white wine, we tried two red grape table wines, a tawny port, and ended with two vintage ports—the 2016 and the 2009. Everything served was excellent-to-outstanding and made for a long-lasting memory. The drive back to Oporto was extremely beautiful with sculptured, terraced vineyards and the meandering Duoro. À Votre Santé! 🍷



The elegant, micro-seasonal, zero-waste offerings at LOCO Ristorante in Lisbon.



Terraced vineyards along the Douro River.



Robalo boats used to transport port wine along the Douro River.



Lunch is served in the cellar at Quinta Da Foz.



Wines served at Lunch at Quinta Da Foz.



Quinta Da Foz lagar where grapes are foot-trodden to make Port.



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

Barrington resident Jim Bryant is pursuing his passion and love of wine as an international wine consultant. This follows a 30-year career in senior financial and general management positions at two Fortune 100 companies. He is the owner of James R. Bryant L.L.C.; contact him at [profwino@comcast.net](mailto:profwino@comcast.net).