

SPAIN

SIGGY AND HEATHER | EUROPE 2015 | WEDNESDAY, 22 APRIL 2015



What's it all about?

Its hard to describe why we come to Europe. Its certainly not about seeing the big cities. Cities are like cities all over the world - busy. The Spanish ones only vary with different "supermacto" names and masses of terracotta tiles. A bit more actually! Like other countries, the road systems within the cities themselves are not at all pleasant. Give us the gentle backroads and the peace and quiet of the countryside any day. But not too quiet. Without people going about their normal business a place can feel quite sterile. Our first love is

geography and history. We love architecture too. But the most memorable moments on our trip so far have been fleeting personal experiences such as being able to stop in the middle of a country road to admire 14 enormous raptors soaring quietly just over our heads, admiring a hare slowly traversing a ploughed paddock (a hopping brown spec on a white background) and startling a fallow deer who watched us approach on a quiet country road and then quickly and quietly jumped into the undergrowth. Forever memories.

Along the Coast

Last night we planned to take a 6km bike ride along the coastal board walk to Getaria before the morning traffic rush. The place is described as a pretty fishing village and not to be missed. As usual we woke late and as we cleaned up to go, it started to spit with rain so instead of riding we opted to drive there. The traffic was pretty heavy and the signs prevented vans like ours from parking on the port surrounds. Our sadness was palpable but this was not going to dissuade us. I found a place just big enough for our van and parked - probably illegally - however, as in other places, like Greece, this seems to be the go. We hopped on our bikes for a quick peek. Wow. Lucky we persevered. What a gem. THIS is what our trip to Spain is all about. F

or the next hour we flitted around the port and snapped from many angles. We watched as the fishing boats came in, saw the vendors slicing and dicing the fresh fish and were even able to observe a group of women mending nets. One of them had her baby happily snoozing beside her. We then strolled slowly through the old town centre. The cathedral, with it's slanting creaky wooden floor, was so dark we almost could not see the door handle to get out. The village streets were narrow and cobbled and jarred our old bones.



SECOND HAND Its bad enough that the stuff in the second hand shop was pretty rusty but the sign was appropriately rusty too.



TORTURE INSIDE? The skeleton left to rot inside this metal cage made the Museum of Torture a less than inviting place to visit.



NETS This massive pile of nets looked like a tangle from a distance but up close it was cleverly put together so as not to get tangled when panned out from the trawler,



Lekeitio Harbour

Lekeitio & Santillana

Our next “port” of call was Lekeitio - west along a marvellous winding coastal road. Like Getaria it is another fishing village. On the way we came across Ondarroa - certainly worth a visit but unfortunately no place to park. Apart from its beautiful but very busy harbour area, its most notable asset for me, was a football field, located in the very centre of the town surrounded on three sides by roads and buildings and looking just like a Roman amphitheatre. I could easily imagine a match being played there against a rival village team and all the traffic and spectators watching the action below. This cauldron has no need for a grandstand. No time to take a photo.

Lekeitio was much quieter but far more impressive. We had difficulties in finding a park again so went some distance out of town. After a quick lunch in the van we again used our bikes to great advantage and spent an hour admiring many aspects of this place. The sheltered harbour full of brightly painted moored vessels on one side, the rocky island at its entrance and a large expanse of sandy beach on the other side, made for a beautiful view. A most impressive group of multicoloured, half timbered buildings lined the quay. Capping it off was a massive out-of-scale cathedral. This place is a must see. It was quite some distance until our next intended stop, and, because it was well into the afternoon we gave our GPS its head and followed our trek on Heather's iPad.

The spaghetti road system around Bilboa is a total nightmare and without a GPS you would get totally lost. Speeding along at around 100mph you



Tending the nets in Getaria

cannot afford to make a mistake or you will be transported to heavens knows where. A lot of the drive was through extremely mountainous terrain. Despite the need for total concentration to ensure we were going in the correct direction, we were very impressed with Spanish transport infrastructure.

Our final destination, Santillana del Mar, capped off a great day. We are totally impressed with this place. At its heart is a 12th century Romanesque monastery but it is the 15th to 18th century nobles houses that take the cake. Strict planning regulations were first introduced back in 1575!! Today these are extended to no vehicular access to visitors. This makes for a village that has genuine authenticity and old world charm. The obvious attention to architectural detail was very impressive. The massive stonework amazed us and lots of wrought iron decorated/barrred windows and doorways.

We spent some time wandering the streets and are currently camped in the car park for the night. They have done it well. No cars in the town but a good carpark outside.



Hot enough for shorts!



SANTILLANA DEL MAR

