

flojohn

Edition 2021



Letter from the Editor

(and production manager, staff writer, photographer, graphic designer, office janitor and ...)



This was the year of “island visiting” as we traveled to the islands of Madeira in Portugal, Noirmoutier in France and Syros, Mykonos, Kythnos, Paros and Santorini in Greece. We began with a spring trip to Madeira, one place we could travel to without it being too covid complicated. We had to have tests done before leaving Lisbon, (vaccines weren’t available yet), and controls were quite tight on the island. They actually sent us a text message each day asking how our trip was going and inquiring to how we were feeling - any headaches, fever or such. The only flights going to Madeira were out of Lisbon, so few of those on the island were anything but Portuguese natives. We had most popular tourist places to ourselves with few line-ups and on most hikes we were the only ones on the trail.

I had planned to go to Canada but that just got way too complicated so we spent the summer in Noirmoutier with a couple quick trips to Paris and Bretagne, making contact once again with family and friends. By now everyone had received their shots so we were able to socialize a lot more freely.

In the fall we joined up with our good friends John & Tina on their boat the Prosecco III in the Cyclades Islands. This was a first for us as the only parts of Greece we had previously seen were a few islands off of Turkey, such as Simi and Rhodes.

On the technical side, this will be the last issue I’ll be doing using an iPhone 8. Yes, I’m still on an 8. I’ve been waiting for a major camera upgrade and it finally came with the 13. The only camera I use these days is the iPhone, except for drone shots. The days of packing a bag full of camera bodies and lenses is long over. With the quality and flexibility of the 13 I should be able to really improve the shots I get, and the type. It’s going to open up a lot of possibilities, and I’ll be able to shoot in RAW again, something I’ve been wanting to be able to do for a long time.

To fill out the magazine I’ve included a trip from the past, this one to Croatia in 2014 with Alison. I’ll continue doing that to get in as many trips from the past as I can into Flojohn Magazine.

A stylized signature or logo consisting of a large, flowing letter 'A' followed by a vertical line and a small flourish.

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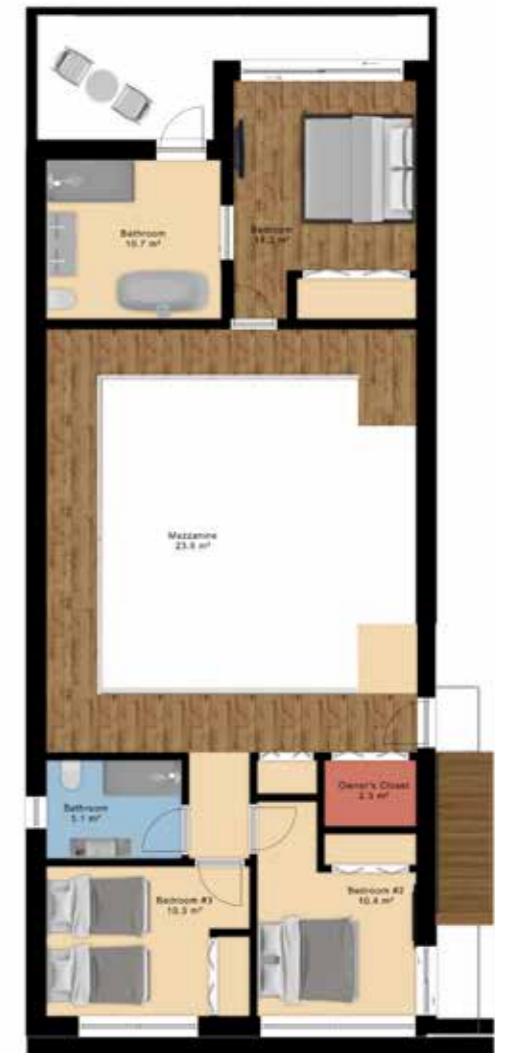


FlojohnNews

Albufeira Lake House

For much of our time in Mexico we had a second property north of Puerto Vallarta located closer to the ocean. It allowed us quality time with family and friends and easy access to the ocean to enjoy waterskiing, boarding, surfing and swimming.

In early 2021 we started looking for property near Lisbon so that we could have something similar to that. And we found such a place just south of Lisbon, about a 45 minute drive, at Lagoa de Albufeira. This is a small community that resides beside a large saltwater lagoon, separated from the ocean by a narrow stretch of beach. Its waters are clear and shallow, warmed by the sun and great for swimming and paddle boarding, and when the wind is up, for kite or wing boarding.



Stepping Out with friends

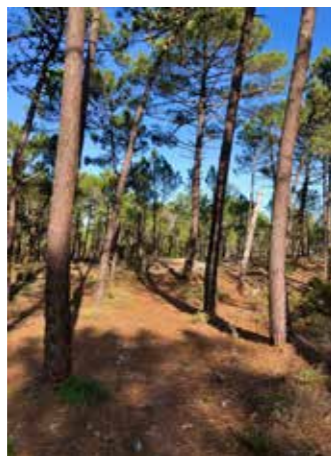


The ocean is a short walk away, accessible from the lagoon, or, through a pine forest that is a few blocks west of our new property. It is part of a coastal park with walking trails both within the forest or along the ocean cliffs.

We found a small residential lot a few blocks from the beach (Portugal has very strict waterfrontage rules - it is difficult to get waterfront properties), that fits our needs, so we bought it and started working on plans.

We hired an architect to help us with the design of the home and to assist in getting a building permit from the local municipality. Plans were finalized in November and we hope to start building some time next year.

On the main floor is an open kitchen and living room with a vaulted ceiling, with a staircase that leads to an upper mezzanine which provides access to three upper floor bedrooms with a fourth bedroom downstairs. In the backyard will be a pool, lounging area, gardens and outdoor dining. Something to keep us busy in 2022, and 2023...



With Ted and Dru at Paradise Beach Club on Caparica Beach, just south of Lisbon



Again with Ted and Dru, along with Tina and John, and Ranaia and Jeff, in Ermoupolis, Greece



With Susan and Marc on Caparica Beach



In Paris with Virginie and Jean Paul



With John and Tina in Mykonos



With Rosanna, Marc, Britt, Yvonne, Jack, Susan, Eddie and Flo at Jack's 94th birthday party in Puerto Vallarta



With Andrew and Donna in Lisbon

Stepping Out with family



Bertrand, Muriel, Paddy, Sebastian, Chloe, Jeff, Maxime, Florence and John in St. Gildas



Paddy cooking "les pommes de terre" in St. Gildas



Bertrand and John, and Jeff and



John, Paddy, Alison, Joao and Florence in Noirmoutier.



Sebastian shucking oysters in St. Gildas



John, Joao, Florence, Alison, Laura and Jeff in Lisbon



Above: Morgan, Florence, Jeff, Alison and Paddy in Noirmoutier.

Below: Tony, Christine, Florence, Jeff, Paddy and Laura in Noirmoutier



Left: Paddy, Florence, Alison and Morgan in Noirmoutier.

Right: Morgan and Alison in Noirmoutier



Left: Laura with an oyster feast celebrating her birthday in Noirmoutier

Right: Morgan, Virginie, Jeff, Alison, Paddy, Florence and John in Noirmoutier





Portugal

Douro River Paddle

On my return trip from France I spent a night at the border of Spain and Portugal in the Spanish town of Mirando do Douro, which sits snugly on a ledge looking across at Portugal and overlooking the Douro River. At this portion of the Douro the river is narrow and its banks are steep granite cliffs that offer few places to access the river. I'd spent quite a bit of time on Google Maps looking for a place where I could reach the river but the only place I could find, that also had a town nearby, was at Mirando where a road snaked steeply down to the water's edge and a dock had been secured for local fisherman.

I arrived in the late afternoon but as I crossed the river strong winds were blowing upstream which would make it very difficult for paddling. The next morning, however, the winds had subsided

and the river was like a lake. It was still dark as I set out, paddling downriver. The sun's rays slowly made their way down to the river, casting a golden hue on the steep granite embankments.

The river meanders southward with Portugal on one side and Spain on the other. One can paddle for miles and not see any sign of civilization, just the type of paddle I was looking for. After an hour I turned back just as the wind came up, but fortunately in my favor as it pushed me along to where my journey began. I returned to the hotel to enjoy a hearty brunch and then I was back on the road, a few hours away from Lisbon.







Portugal

Algarve Paddle

The Algarve has become a favorite getaway for us to escape the hustle-bustle of Lisbon. It's just a couple of hours away but offers a completely different experience and landscape.

And one of our favorite activities while there is hiking or boarding along the golden cliffs that stretch from Ferragudo to Armacao de Pera. Usually there is a lot of boat traffic along the cliffs of Carvoeiro,

which creates a lot of waves and poor paddling conditions, but during covid all tours were suspended. So we enjoyed exploring the caves and coast with no one else around – we had it all to ourselves.



Dao River Bike & Board

The Dao River runs diagonally across Portugal, beginning at the Spanish border and eventually emptying into the Atlantic at the coastal town of Figueira da Foz. About halfway through this journey it passes by the sleepy town of Santa Comba Dao.

It is here that an railway line once ran from Comba to the larger town of Viseu in the north. In 1998 the line was converted into a bike path and today it is the longest (49 km) "Rails-to-Trails" in Portugal, and arguably the most beautiful.

And because it was once a railway line, the slope is gentle, providing a very enjoyable bike ride.

The path follows the Dao out of Comba for about a third of the distance, then branches off to follow a narrow tributary to Tondela. It continues, making its way through numerous small villages and as many abandoned train stations before reaching Viseu in the north. A few of these stations have been turned into restaurants, bar, and cafes to serve hungry and thirsty bikers passing through.

The landscape is quite stunning with panoramic views of mountains and valleys covered with oaks, cork oaks and chestnut trees, along with vineyards and orchards.

We biked half of the path from Comba in the morning on our first day and returned later in the afternoon to paddle the calm waters of the Dao. The following day we drove up to Viseu and biked the second half, returned for lunch and then began our return trip to Lisbon - by car!



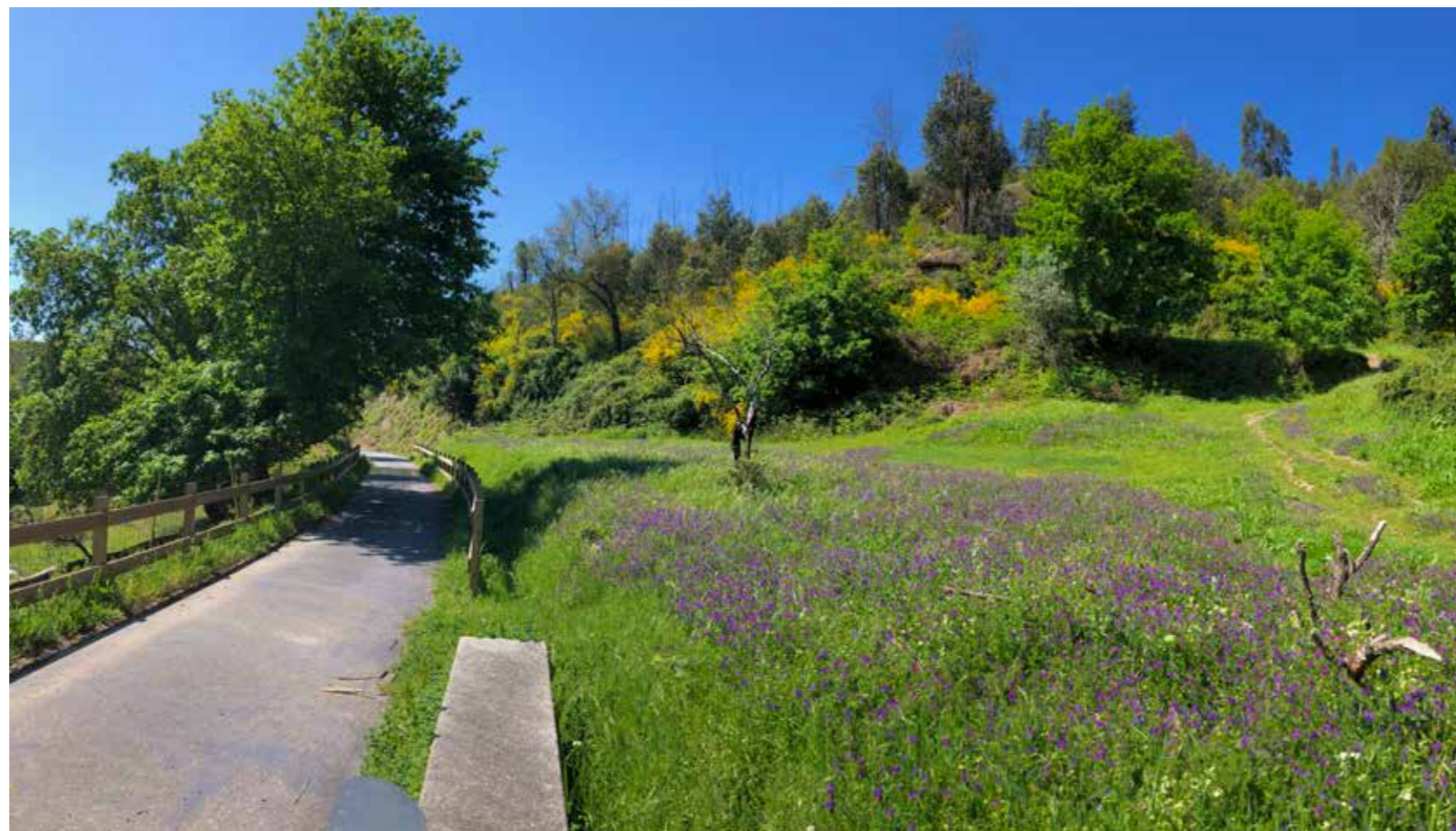
A tributary of the Dao River with the bike path to the right



The sleepy town of Comba da Dao



The Dao River



Portugal Paris and a Wedding

In July we made a trip to Paris, something that has become a bit of a regular annual event for us during the summer. We like Paris during these months as the Parisians depart for the coast and traffic slows down, leaving the downtown area much less congested. Plus, with less aggressive-driving Parisians on the road, biking becomes a lot more enjoyable, and safer.

Paris has come a long ways implementing dedicated bike lanes throughout the city, especially along the Seine. So we enjoyed exploring Paris for a few days, both on foot and by bike.

But our main reason for going to Paris was to attend the wedding celebration of Alex and Carol Flamant. Alex is the son of our good friends Christian and Corinne who we've known for many years in Mexico, and grew up with Jeffrey and Alison.

Alex and Carol met in their first year of university at McGill in Canada and have been together now for more then ten years.

It was a beautiful event, held at a chateau just outside of Paris. It was wonderful to see the Flamants again, as well the Sinanian family, who are also French (and Thai), and Cathy Denoun and her kids, who have also have lived in Puerto Vallarta for many years. It was a mini-Mexico night!



To France and back...

Once again we decided to drive to France for the summer rather than fly, primarily because of covid complications, but also so we could take our bikes and boards with us. The drive is about 1,800 km, and we take our time, averaging 4-5 hours of driving time per day, with days off in between.

Our first stop was in the very small village of Aldeia de Montesinho situated close to the Spanish border and about 30 km from Braganca. Montesinho is old, with most of its homes made of large granite boulders and slate-tiled roofs. People still live here, although quite isolated from the outside world. A few rent out their homes to tourists looking for something off the beaten track, such as ourselves. Our home was small and quaint, but the bed was comfortable and that's all we needed.



Although it was just a place to stop over on our longer journey, we did stay an extra day to explore the town (max 5 minutes) and visit Braganca to the south. Braganca has a lot more to offer, especially with its hilltop castle that's surrounded by defensive walls one can circumnavigate while taking in exceptional views of the surrounding countryside.

The next morning we headed northeast, crossing Spain and passing through Zamora and Valladolid before reaching Burgos where we stopped for lunch and a little exploring. In the heart of old town lies the Burgos cathedral which rises so high it can be seen from all parts of the city. There was a celebration of some sort going on while we were there with residents dressed up in folkloric clothing and the city in a very festive mood.

Next stop was the French town of Espelette, famous for its dried chillies and sauces, but also offering many other French specialties that attract bus loads of tourists. We unloaded the bikes and enjoyed a wonderful ride through the countryside and along the Nive River to the seaside town of Bayonne. Here too we enjoyed lunch and afterwards we explored the streets of old town Bayonne.

The next day we were on the road again, stopping at the Bay of Arcachon for a lunch of oysters in the town of Cap Ferret, and then on to our stay at a farmhouse near the town of Saintes. It was recently refurbished and had a big open bathtub that overlooked the garden and we both enjoyed a long soak after our drive.

The next day we were back on the road, arriving to the island of Noirmoutier in the late afternoon, just in time to still be able to take the Gois land passage over to the island. It can only be done at low tide, and more than one car driver has been swept away who thought they could beat a rising tide. We remained in Noirmoutier for the summer, with John making the return trip home by himself.



Bike path from our hotel to Bayonne
Below: *The city of Bayonne*



The Dune of Pilat near Arcachon.
Above: *Oyster Bar in Arcachon*



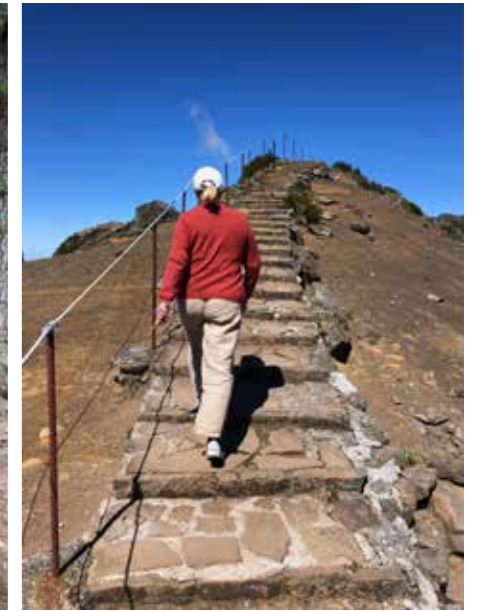
The Gois Passage to the island of Noirmoutier



The island of Noirmoutier

Following Flo...

When we travel I often found myself following behind Flo as I frequently stop to take photos. After awhile she gets tired of waiting for me and just continues on. So I started taking photos of her walking in front of me as I try and catch up to her.



Madeira

Lush and diverse in the east, raw and rugged in the west

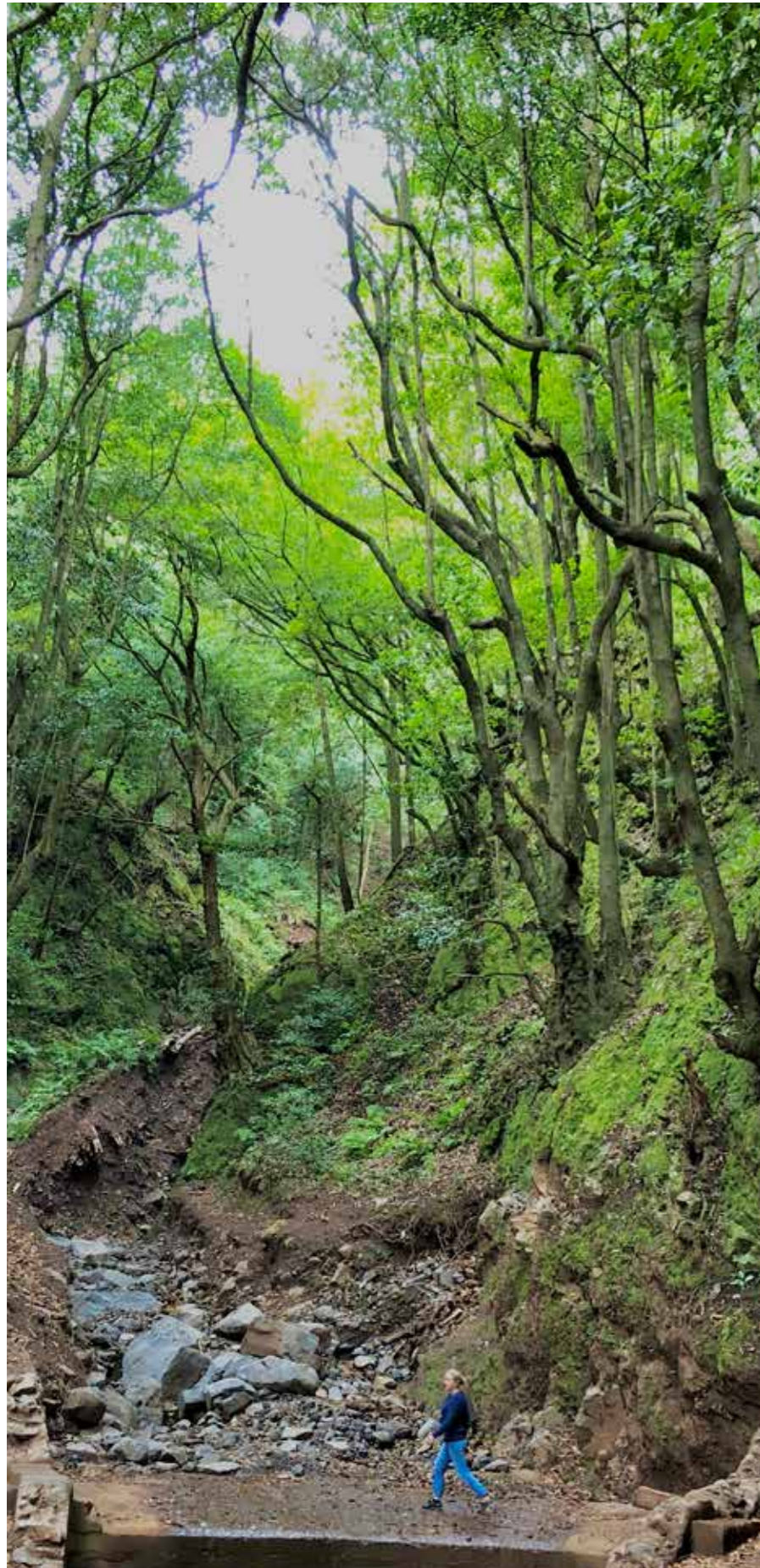
We'd been wanting to visit Madeira ever since our first visit to Lisbon some five years ago and discovered that the island group was also part of Portugal (along with the Azores). Covid caused us to cancel our planned trip last year, but in March we decided to try again as Madeira was open to Portuguese residents only as long as you'd recently had a covid test done.

Our flight from Lisbon was just a little over two hours and we arrived to wonderful weather, about 20° (the average temperature throughout the year) with bright, clear blue skies. Madeira's weather is similar to parts of the Med with a mild and moderate subtropical climate. It varies dramatically, however from north to south and east to west creating small microclimates. The northwest is much wetter whereas the southwest is arid and dry.

Madeira is an archipelago that consists of the three islands - Madeira, Porto Santo and Desertas, with an overall population of less than 300,000. It's situated a 1,000 km south of Portugal's mainland and about 500 km off the coast of Morocco. Because of its volcanic origin it has a very rugged landscape that's never monotonous, with high mountains and deep valleys in varying shades of green. On top of that are exotic flowers that dot the landscape in a myriad of colors.

It is basically one steep volcanic mountain range that juts out of the ocean leaving little flat terrain. For the airport they had to build up the land at one end and at the other construct a huge elevated concrete platform to support the landing strip. Nearly all of the farming is done on the sides of the mountain in steps, held in by rock walls to level off





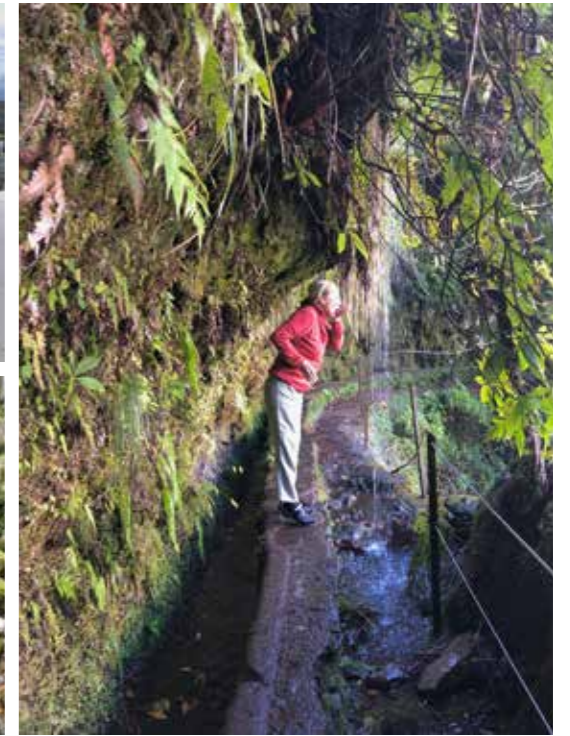
the land. Living in Madeira means if you aren't going up then you're going down, with little in between!

As there's so much vertical on the island every highway, road, trail and levada has at least one side where they've had to cut into the mountainside and build a retaining wall of rock or concrete. With time these walls have become beautiful natural vertical gardens creating covered in moss, ferns, plants and flowers as nature has reclaimed the space.

Getting around the island is best done by car as you don't want to be on any of the main highways on a scooter, at least I wouldn't. The main one, the VR-1, has two lanes - one really slow and the other really fast. In the former are large trucks that have difficulty getting up the many hills that have to be climbed while in the fast lane are the locals, seemingly always in a hurry to get somewhere fast. And the on raps entering onto these highways that circumnavigation the island are very short, which also makes driving here challenging. Because of the terrain the highways are made up of mostly bridges and tunnels - meaning if you aren't going over a hill, you are going through it.

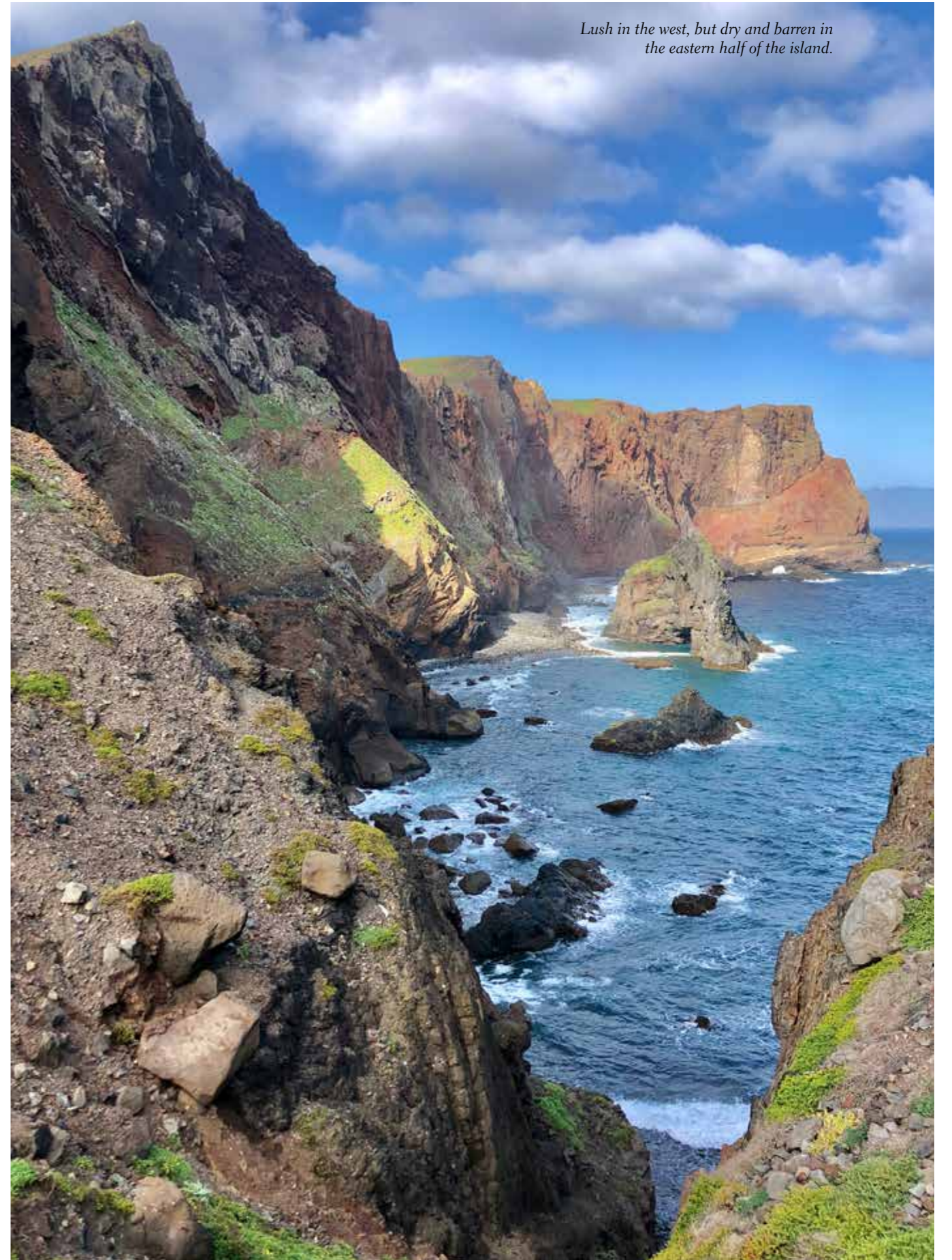
We enjoyed the "levada" hikes most during our time on Madeira. During the 16th century the Portuguese started building canals, or levadas, to carry water to the agricultural regions in the southeast. With its steep mountains the building of the levadas, often using convicts or slaves from Africa, was difficult and treacherous. Many of the mountains have a nearly vertical cliff face and onto this the levada builders had to cut away a path to carry the water, which was used to irrigate crops and power windmills for sugar cane cultivation. Years later the sugar industry collapsed so the levadas were hardly used or maintained. But then the Madeirans came upon another use - hiking paths for tourists. Today there are about 200 levadas stretching 2,200 km across the island with some now also being used to provide electricity through hydro power. Over our seven days we did five hikes, three of which followed a levada.

We spent our time just on the main island of Madeira with three days in the capital city of Funchal, two days near Curral das Freiras in the mountains and our final two days in Porto Moniz on its far northwest





Remnants of how the lava once flowed and reached the surface on the far eastern shore of Madeira



Lush in the west, but dry and barren in the eastern half of the island.

Town of Câmara de Lobos



corner. Funchal is the largest city on the island, perhaps the only city as the others are really small towns or villages. Our hotel was right in the center making it easy to explore the downtown area and oceanfront. Our favorite street was Rua da Santa Maria with its painted doors and small restaurants, which follows the shoreline to a viewpoint east of town where there's a swimming platform and the very popular (and good) restaurant/ cafe Barreirinha.

After Funchal we headed to our next hotel, Eira do Serrado, situated high in the mountains behind Funchal and which looks down upon the small town of Curral das Freiras. The hotel has incredible views from the rooms, but especially from the dining room and swimming pool area. Curral is completely surrounded by mountains except for a narrow passage that leads up from the south. It was originally settled by nuns who went there to escape marauding pirates, appropriately known as the Valley of the Nuns today.

We were the only people staying at the hotel - a rather strange sensation having so many hotel staff there caring just for us. The swimming pool area is quite large and we had it all to ourselves, enjoying the panoramic views while swimming.

On our first day here we hiked a portion of the Pico Areerio/Ruivo trail where you follow a path along the crevasse of a mountain with both sides falling for hundreds of meters. The path, made up of rock and concrete, has safety wires on each side, but it still makes for a rather uneasy, though exhilarating, hike. At the bottom it levels out and passes through a large rock pinnacle via a tunnel, then opens up to another peak on the other side and commences its climb up to Pico Ruivo. To do the whole hike can take 4-5 hours, there and back. Too much for me as I had Flo waiting so I turned back at the halfway point and started the climb back up. It was difficult, consisting mostly of stairs, and I could hear my heart racing with each step. It was a long climb, but what views! Pico Areerio/Ruivo is one of the more challenging hikes on the island.

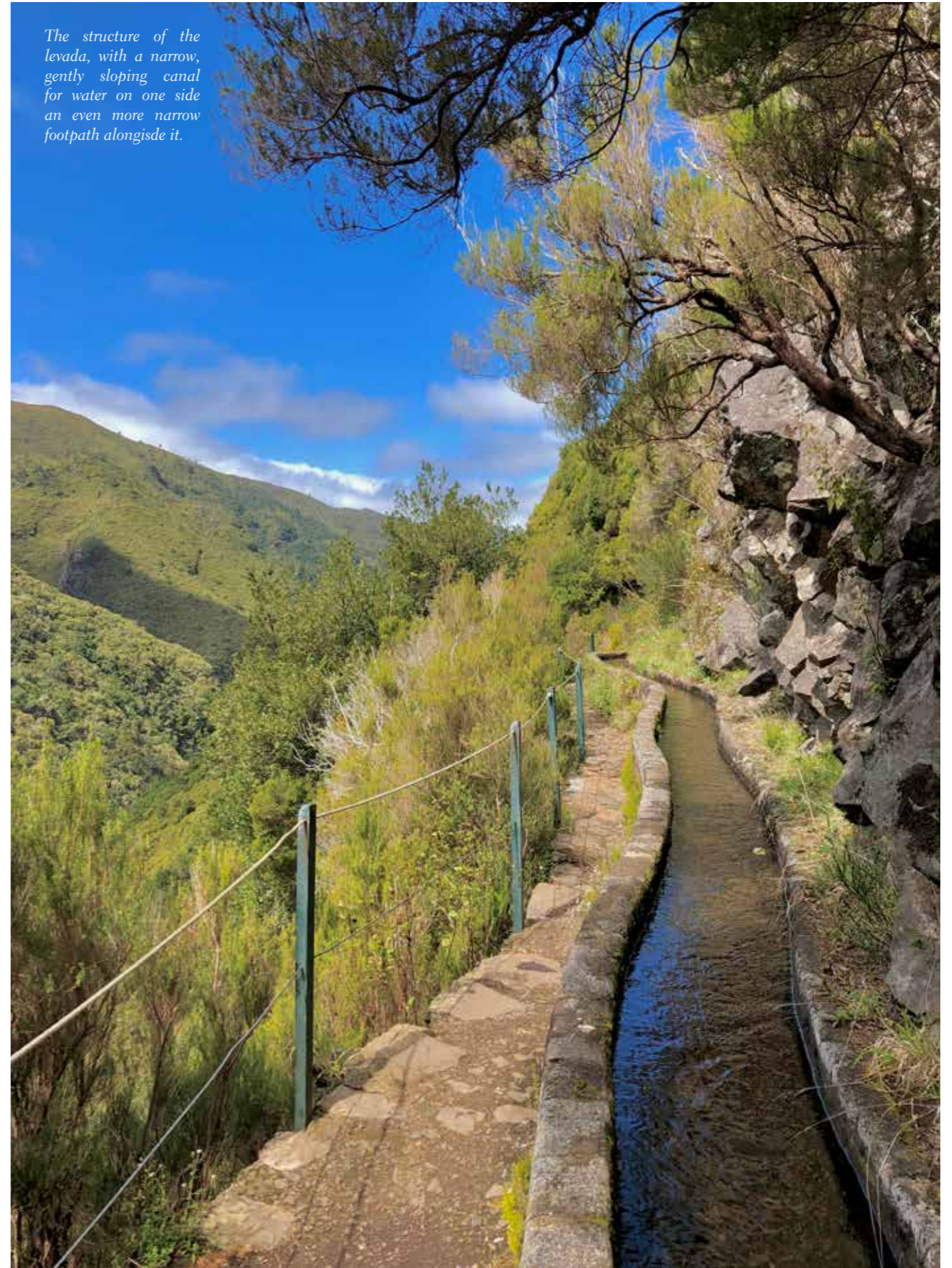
The next day we took the road up to Areerio again and then down past Ribeiro Frio, through the town of Santana on the northside of the island, and then back up



The climb to Pico do Areeiro



The structure of the levada, with a narrow, gently sloping canal for water on one side and an even more narrow footpath alongside it.



another valley to reach the hiking area of Queimadas. This hike is set at a grade so that the water it carries slowly makes its way down to Santana and surrounding agricultural region. It passes through rich jungle-like foliage and some dramatic scenery, finishing at an impressive waterfall that descends more than 100 ft.

Our final days were spent in Porto Moniz, known for its saltwater pools. We enjoyed a swim in those, as well as two hikes, which left us exhausted by day end. To recuperate we enjoyed the hot tub at the hotel, again, all to ourselves.

Looking back on our trip what stood out for us was the kindness of the people. Simple things, like trying to navigate the narrow streets and not being able to see traffic around a corner and a passer-by sees our situation and signals to us when it is clear to pull out. All of the people working in the hotels we stayed at went out of their way to make our stay a pleasurable one. As we departed each hotel we were given a small gift – a box of chocolate, homemade compote, a small Madeira cake. Nice touch.

The village of Curral das Freias as seen from the pool and our room at the Eira do Serrado hotel

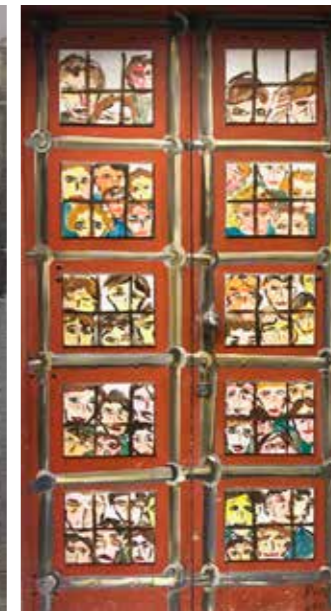




The **Painted Doors** of Santa Maria Street

One street worth visiting in Funchal is Rua de Santa Maria for its painted doors. The project was started by a local photographer who wanted to revive the rather dilapidated area. He managed to excite a number of Madeira artists to give their rendition of what a door should look like on this street, and the result has

been the creation of a street that is now a work of art in itself, and a lot of fun to wander through. There are over 200 painted doors on Rua de Santa Maria and its neighboring streets. This has attracted tourists, which attracted restaurants and bars, and now Santa Maria is one of the most popular streets in Funchal.





The Cyclades Islands

Greece!

Cruising the Cyclades Islands



Ermoupoli on the island of Syros



In the Spring of 2015 we cruised the eastern seaboard from Florida to Washington with our good friends John & Tina Philippon on board their 80-ft Nordhavn yacht, the Sockeye Blue. We enjoyed three fun-filled weeks exploring the coast and its communities. They would eventually sell Sockeye Blue, but in 2021, eager to get another Nordhavn and this time to explore the Mediterranean and the rivers and canals of Europe, they bought Prosecco III, a 41-footer fresh off the production line in Turkey. Prosecco was purchased purposely smaller so it could fit inside the locks and canals.

We joined up with them in late September at the Olympic Marina just south of Athens. We provisioned right away and by mid' afternoon we were cruising out of the marina towards Kythos, our first stop on our cruise of the Cyclades Islands.

The Cyclades consists of about 220 islands situated in the middle of the Aegean Sea, southeast of Athens, north of Crete and halfway between mainland Greece and Turkey. They are known for their barren landscapes, mostly void of trees, but delightfully highlighted with beautiful beaches of white, red and black sand, and their famous white-washed architecture accented with brilliant-blue doors, shutters and railings. Of these 220 islands, most of the smaller ones are uninhabited while the larger, about twenty, are populated and have become very popular tourist destinations.

Prior to our arrival Prosecco had been port-tied for some time because of the strong Meltemi winds. These are dry and cool northerly winds that appear in the Aegean from the north, most commonly during July and August, but sometimes as early as June and as late as September. And as we were to find out, sometimes even into October. They can blow up to 40 knots, and during our trip, were often around 20-25 knots. A benefit is that they clear up the skies, but it can make for challenging boating.

After a few nights in Kythos we made our way over to Paros, dropping anchor in a bay across from the town of Nassau. We lowered the dinghy and motored over to the town to walk its streets and enjoy a seafood lunch next to the marina. The winds dropped the next day so we headed north to the island of Mykonos.



Left: Ermoupoli on the island of Syros.
Right: The church of Agios Nikolaos in Ermoupoli.



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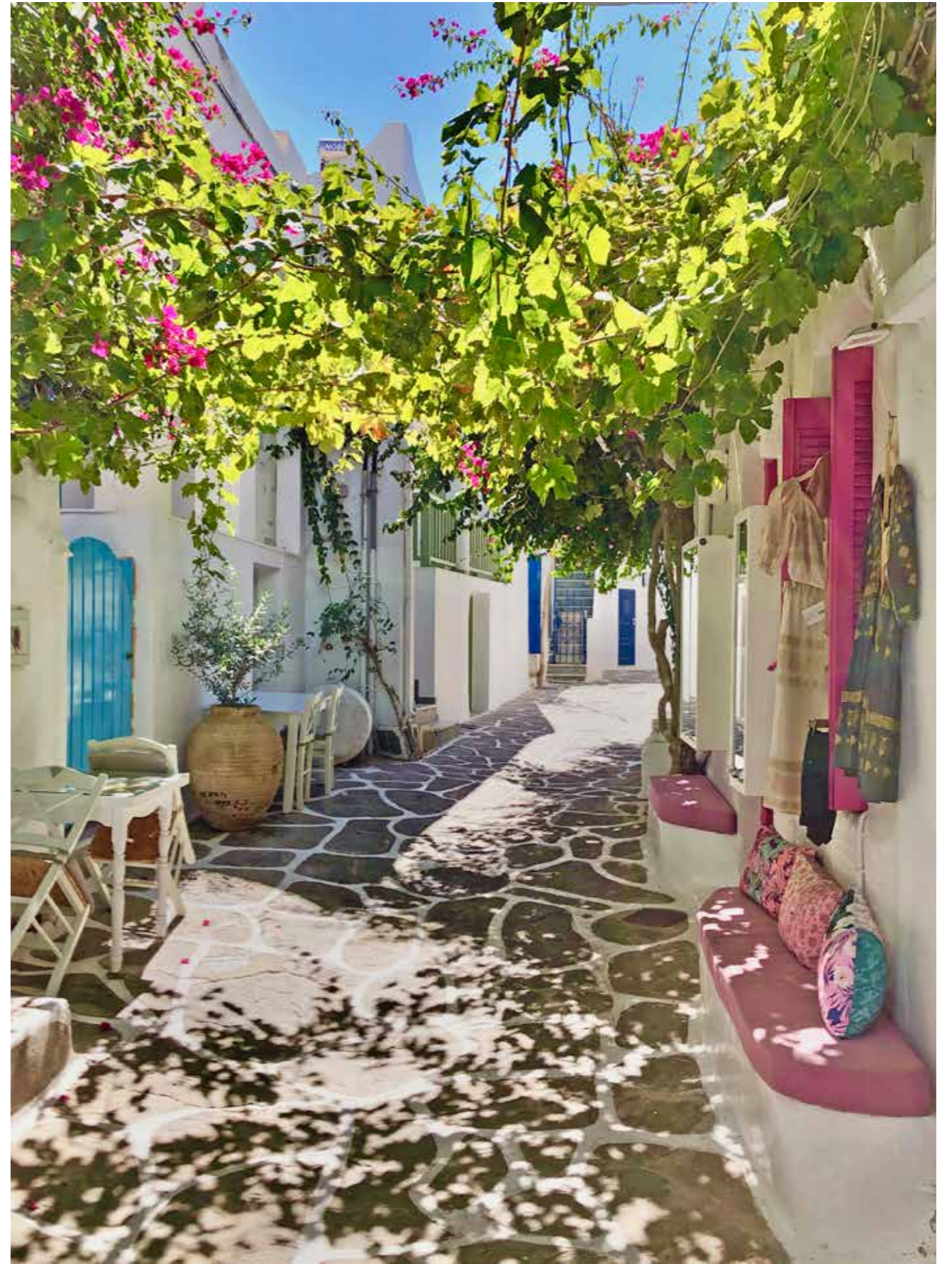
Top left: Emporio. **Top right:** Sunset on the island of Kythnos. **Above left:** Emporio. **Above right:** Oia. **Below:** Oia looking back at the villages of Imerovigli and Thera on the cliffs in the background.

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Top left: Prosecco III at anchor on the island of Paros. **Top right:** Crew of Prosecco - Florence, John, Tina and John. **Above right:** Red Beach on Santorini. **Bottom left:** Old village of Emporio on Santorini. **Bottom right:** Oia on Santorini.

The cliffside village of Ermovigli on Santorini, with Skaros Rock to the left and Oia in the distance.







Mykonos is known to be quite a bit more expensive than the other islands. If you want to spend money, it's easy to do so here. The highlight of Mykonos is walking the narrow streets of the old town that meander behind the boardwalk, up and down the hillside, often leaving you so disorientated you have no idea where you are. They are really not streets but paths of inlaid rock with white grout, lined with many high-end, name-brand boutiques, but also many local shops and boutiques that all look exquisite and are also fun exploring. Everything's, again, white and accented with blue doors and stair railings, along with bright pink and red bougainvillea.

Mykonos is also known for its night life which goes on into the early hours of the morning. We frequented the Paradise Beach Club for lunch a few times and it was often made up of slow-moving people recovering from the previous night. The music would be quite subdued but as the afternoon went on the beat would get build up, louder and quicker. For lunch there usually aren't many people, it really is more of a nighttime experience for a younger crowd. We lounged on the beach drinking piña colodas, enjoyed a few dunks in the sea, and had a smorgasbord of appetizers for lunch.

There are few streets for cars, so most people have scooters. The narrow streets/walkways are laid in marble and work into stairs as they climb up the hillside. For a couple of days we rented a scooter so we could explore the island and visit a few beaches. I feel that you haven't experienced the Med or a Caribbean island until you've toured some of it by scooter. We went south to avoid the winds, to the towns of Vari and Finikas. At Vari we found a restaurant that also had lounge chairs, so swam, sunbathed and then had a lunch of lamb and moussaka.

Mykonos is a town to be discovered inside its narrow streets. The exterior of the city isn't much to see or photograph, it's the narrow pathways, stores and homes with the whitewashed walls and bright blue doors and wooden railings on their stairs and terraces that make Mykonos special. This contrasts with the next town we visited, this time by ferry, on the island of Syros. Ermoupolis is more externally photogenic, mostly in the Vaporia area with the church of St. Nicholas and its blue dome prominently standing out above the town. Its pedestrian streets are wider and fun to walk, but not as photogenic as those in Mykonos. Here we had a small studio that looked over the one beach/swimming area in Ermoupolis and enjoyed morning swims before heading out to explore the town. John and Tina joined up with John's sister Druanne and her husband Ted to stay in a small hotel situated way up on the hillside behind Ermoupolis. And there they were joined by Ranaia and Jeff, all from my hometown back in Canada. We had a wonderful time with them, talking about old times and catching up on what's going on in their lives now.

After Syros John and Tina headed back to Mykonos to take Prosecco back to Turkey for warranty work while we took another ferry down to Santorini, the last island of our visit to the Cyclades.

I had no expectations going into Santorini, and perhaps that's the best way to do it. I had done very little reading about it



All photos are shots taken while on the island of Mykonos.





The island of Paros, looking back at the town of Naousa in the distance.







prior or during our trip, just knew it was our last stop before flying back to Portugal. My education on Santorini began when Hariz, who we rented our car from, picked us up at the ferry port and delivered us to our car at his office. Vehicle transportation is essential on Santorini, where on other islands in the Cyclades, not so much. There are tours you can take that will move you around, or you can do it on your own. There's public buses, but for many people it comes down to either a car, scooter or ATV for freedom of time and movement. Distances can be long, however, and a long time on a scooter or ATV they quickly lose their appeal. And although I love moving around an island on a scooter, the way people drive (I'm speaking mostly about how the tourists drive), and how busy the island can get, I felt much safer in a car.

On the way Hariz told us what we should see and do in Santorini but also about Thera, the islands volcano. Santorini is, essentially, one big volcano, which is quite evident when viewed from above. Its islands form a circular band around a core island where the volcano is still somewhat active today. One island makes up most of this outer wall, formed during its last and largest blast about 1,500 years ago. The interior of the volcano collapsed, leaving vertical cliffs (calderas) where today we find those picturesque villages perched on the edge and that flow down the caldera with the most amazing and dramatic architecture. The exterior of the volcano walls, however, slope gently down to black volcanic beaches on its southeasterly shore.

Oia, Imerovigli and Fira, so famously portrayed in travel photos, are the villages perched along rim of the caldera. There are then a few towns in the middle of the island worth visiting, such as Emporio, Pyrgos, Megalochoria, and Akrotiri. But if you want to take in the beach, have some privacy and escape the hustle-bustle of these villages, there are seaside towns such as Perissa, Perivolos and Kamari.

Early Santorini architecture consisted of homes built into the mountainside, caves actually, which was a common way of building dating back to the 7th century. They burrowed in, leaving just a door and terrace out front, bedrooms and living areas in the back. Examples of this still exist in Emporio today where

less damage occurred during the 1956 earthquake, providing a good idea of how the island people lived hundreds of years ago. Throughout the Middle Ages and up to the 18th century safety became a major issue and which brought on the next form of housing. Residents had to find ways to protect themselves from pirates so fortified castle-towns were constructed. Examples of this can still be seen today in Pyrgos, Emporio and Fira.

By the late 19th century the island, with a population of about 2,500, was becoming prosperous because of burgeoning maritime trade with a fleet of more than 130 sailing ships. The high-ranking wealthy officers that chose to live here weren't about to live in caves, instead they began building impressive and elaborate homes, many of which we see today cascading down the hillside, featuring large terraces that became the roofs of a lower level blow, with courtyards and domes, and are now luxurious hotels, villas and apartments.

The cliffside towns offer amazing panoramic views, stunning apartments and villas, and incredible sunsets, but can be expensive, crowded, and you lose a sense of privacy with thousands walking by daily looking down on your "private" terrace below. They look amazing, but are they? We chose to stay at the beach and were very glad we did. We had privacy, access to the ocean and no crowds. It's great to walk and see the cliffside towns, but stay there? Not for us. We drove and visited and then returned to our sanctuary on the beach.

But they are very crowded, just like Mykonos, with people lining up at popular photo op locations to get their pictures taken. Women are dressed up especially for this in amazing outfits to have their photos taken with this picture-perfect backdrop. The shops in Oia are amazing – they alone are worth taking a picture of. A somewhat wide pathway follows the edge of the caldera, although for most of it you can't see the ocean, but there's paths regularly leading regularly off the main path, giving access to views of the cascading architecture, caldera, ocean and surrounding islands.

We really enjoyed Santorini and three days wasn't enough. It was the one island we both agreed we need to return to.

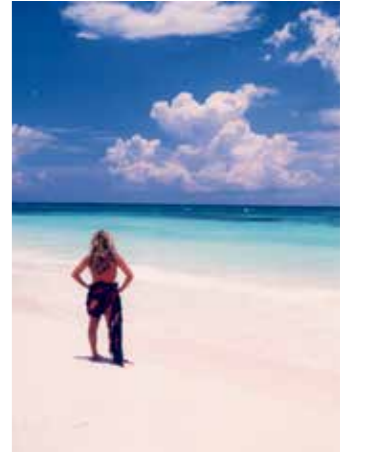


Village of Oia on the island of Santorini

Looking back

The early years...

Below are a few photos of the four of us over the past 25 years, mostly taken in Puerto Vallarta, but also a few from our skiing vacations in Whistler, sailing in the Sea of Cortez, and summertime in France.

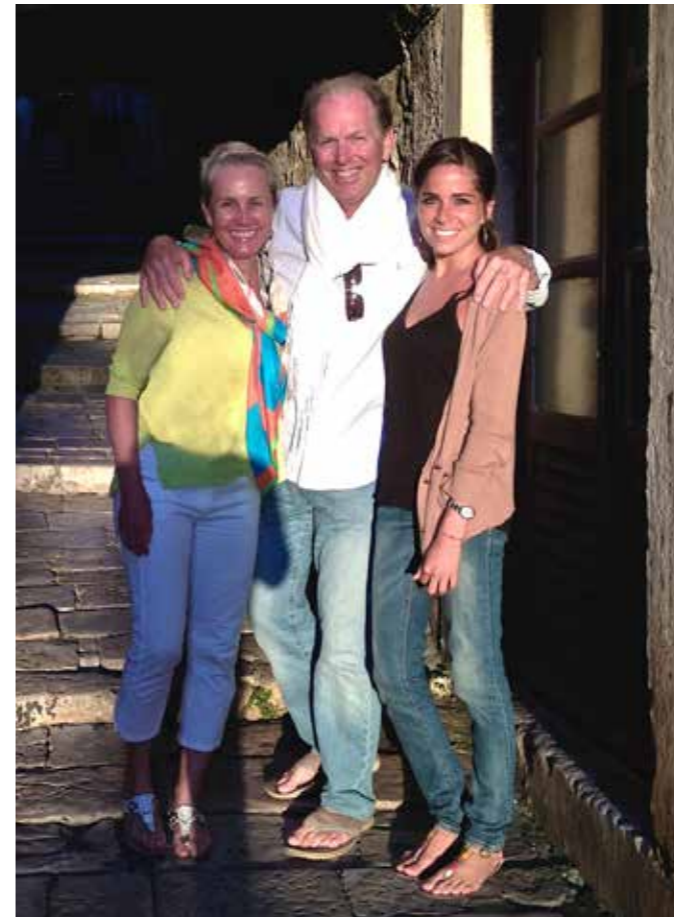
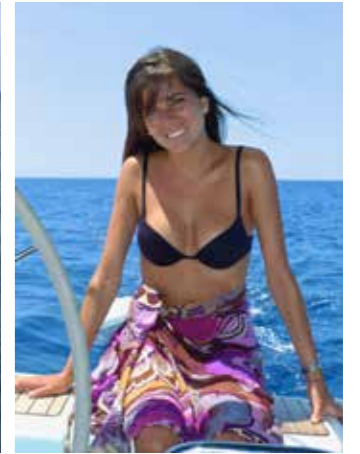


Looking back

Sailing Croatia

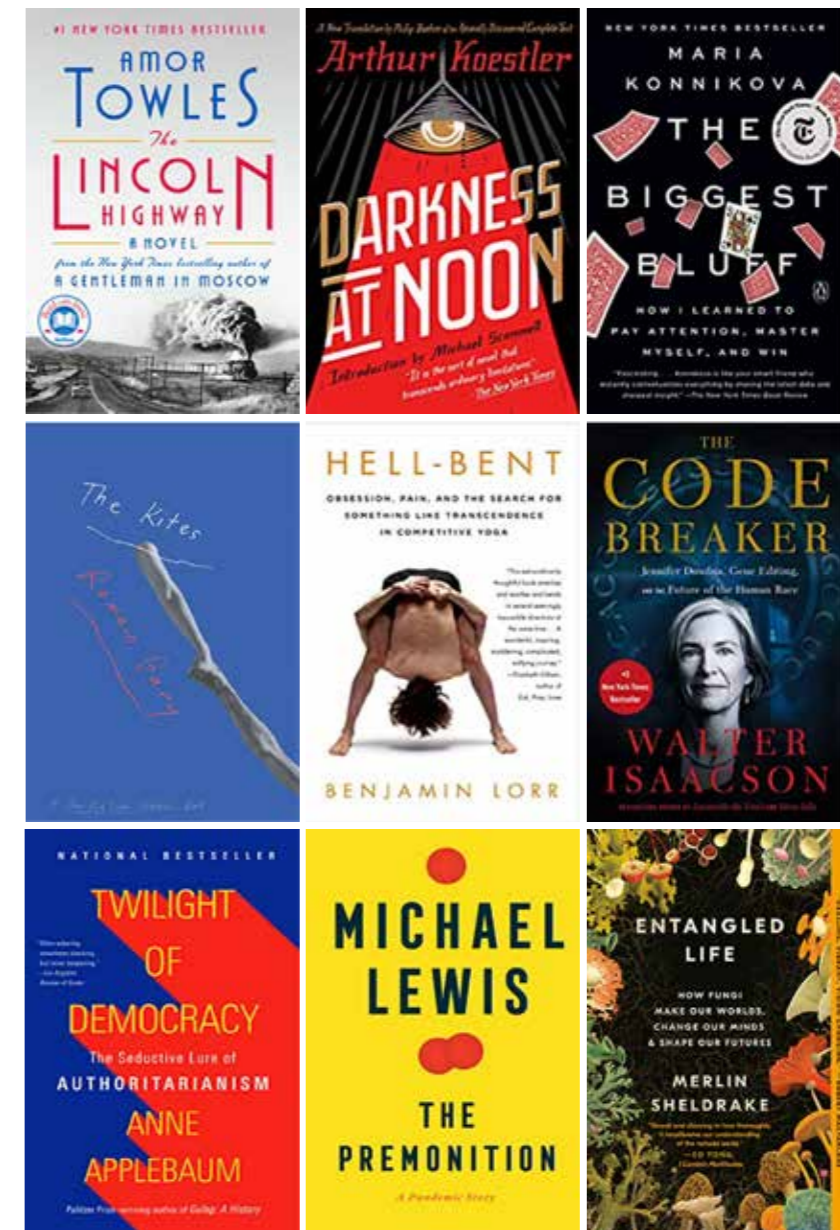
In 2014 we chartered a sailboat in Croatia, out of Split, and Alison came along with us. It was for two weeks, and we visited four islands (Hvar, Vis, Lastovo and Korcula), had great wind and weather, along with some fine wines and excellent food. Croatia remains our favorite sailing destination in the Med. We've done four trips, from Dubrovnik in the south to Pula in the north as bases, and have come to really enjoy exploring the many islands

and quaint towns where you can tie up, Med style, right in town along a boardwalk lined with cafes, bars and restaurants. And there's enough of these places so that it hasn't become overcrowded, at least not during the twenty years we've been sailing here.





GOOD READS



Lincoln Highway: I very much enjoyed Amor's *Gentleman in Moscow*, and this didn't disappoint as well. **Darkness at Noon:** A old classic, portraying what life can be like under an autocrat. **The Biggest Bluff:** From novice to a pro gambler in a year - what it takes. **The Kites:** My favorite Roman Gary novel, and perhaps my favorite novel overall. **Hell-Bent:** Inside take on the personal and yoga worlds of Bikram. **The Code Breaker:** If you really want to understand MRNA's role and future role in the medical world. **Twilight of Democracy:** Love all Anne writes, and this is exceptional. **The Premonition:** Not Lewis' best, but still love his writing. **Entangled Life:** Absolutely fascinating journey into a world most of us don't even know exists.

