

Shakura Summer 2021

Diary



The Beginning

Leaving Home

The house was cleaned to within an inch of its life, we were packed, the car was loaded to capacity and we were almost ready to leave for the Santander Ferry.

At 2pm we were off, bound for the petrol station at Brixton to fill up with petrol and check the tyres for air as we were carrying rather a lot of luggage for our four month trip. Both of us felt nervous, unsure and full of anticipation after being cosseted in Covid-19 lockdown for the past 18 months, mainly because of the travel restrictions, but also because of the changes which Brexit had brought to the table, and what we would find at the other side of the channel as regards to border control.

The queue at the ferry terminal seemed to take forever because of the additional checks, the dog health certificate took the longest as instead of the pet passport which was only a couple of pages, this certificate was a six page document which had to be carried out by a registered Vet (which took over an hour to complete by the way also cost £170.00) Beware all dog travellers abroad.

Eventually we got to the check in stage, the certificate and passports were fully scrutinised and the microchip scanned. It brought home the fact that we are actually a Third World Country! 'No longer a member of the European Union.'

Eventually at around four o'clock we were on the ferry and heading to install Archie into the Dog kennels, he doesn't particularly like it, and once seen and remembered he wanted to turn around and drag me back the way we came. Once there, tucked up with his own bed in the kennel and his own water and food bowls he lay down quietly although there was a great cacophony of whining and barking of 87 other various species of canines. I was very proud to say he was one of the better behaved dogs in there. I just felt awful and cruel and worried about leaving him to it.

The Pont Aven left on time at 17:00 and was only one-third full to capacity. It's always fun trying to find your cabin as it's such a maze of decks and corridors, a compass would have come in very handy. After locating our cabin and making ready for the night and journey ahead, we went back up to see Archie and take him for a stroll and interact with the other dogs. (I didn't mention 'toilet', as he never does it on the boat, he just waits till we land to find the smallest six inch patch of grass on which to piddle.)

Bill doing his best to entertain me on the way back to our cabin!



After seeing Archie settle down for the night we went down to the restaurant for dinner and drinks before settling ourselves down.

We were so glad too that the weather was very good and the sea very calm, also the Bay of Biscay crossing couldn't have been calmer and more gentle to allow us to break into our sea legs and rock us gently to sleep, Archie hopefully would have a quiet night.

We woke up next morning refreshed and getting excited to be on our way. First went down to breakfast, the sea was still so unbelievably calm. The sun was shining and we had smuggled some bacon from breakfast to take for Archie, he got out of the kennel with great relief for fresh air and possibility of toilet happening, BUT! Nothing doing there, again! Although he did enjoy the bacon.

We docked at 15:00 Spanish time and were about another hour and half getting thorough passport control in which our passports were stamped, and then sent to Mascotas "animal" declaration for Archie to enter Spain on which his new Health Certificate was stamped and Chip Scanned. Not one official or customs on either side of the channel asked to see proof of COVID vaccinations or proof of COVID testing, we were very surprised at that.

All was in order, and then we were off on a relatively short drive to a Parador in the Cantabrian Mountains, just a small treat to start our adventure.

The Spanish Paradores are luxury Hotels in Castles, Palaces, Monasteries and other historic buildings, making use of them instead of ruination. (We have actually stayed at quite a few all of which are most beautiful). They stretch from Galicia in the North West through Catalunya to Andalucia in the South of Spain. They are also in the Canary Islands and the Spanish Cities in North Africa)



Our Hotel was in Cervera de Pisuerga which is located in the Fuentes Carriones Nature Reserve, in an area of unique splendour in the Northern Palencia Province (and only a two hour drive from Santander). It is said to be the habitual refuge of the Brown Bear, although we did not spot any.

The Hotel is in a wooded area with spectacular views to the Rueda Reservoir beside it and the Picos de Europa Mountains as a backdrop.



After checking in and stowing our bags into the room, we took Archie out for a well deserved walk around the grounds and also to stretch our own legs. We marvelled at the fabulous scenery, just breathtaking. Devon scenery is wonderful but not a patch on this.

I think it possibly it would be on a par with the Trossachs and Aviemore in Scotland.



We had pre dinner drinks on the terrace but as no dogs were allowed, unfortunately Archie had to be left behind whilst we had dinner.



After a delicious 3 course meal in the very traditional restaurant, we went back to the terrace with our wine to relax and watch the sun disappear over the mountains.

In the morning after a very hearty breakfast (well, Bill's was very hearty!) We paid our dues and set off at 9am for a very long drive to Puerto Santa Maria near Cadíz.

The drive down was extremely hot, thank goodness for Air Con in the car. Crossing a remote part of upland plateau the temperature rose to 40 degrees C. The motorway was pretty straight for most

of the way, I think the Spanish road systems are very well maintained thanks mainly to European Market funding, the scenery just amazing too.

We had driven this route a few times before lockdown so was pretty familiar. We shared the driving, two hours on and two hours off but poor Bill had the Lions share I think, especially coming into City areas.

Tuesday 8th June, we arrived at Puerto Santa Maria at 7.30pm, total of 625 journey miles. Total Journey time with Petrol stops, driver change and lunch stops 10.5 Hours.

As we couldn't wait to see Shakura, we dropped our bags off at the apartment we had booked in Puerto de Santa Maria and headed to Puerto Sherry to the marina. Unfortunately, the Boat yard was locked up for the night very securely so we could not get a close look, what we did see from a distance did not look too promising, so, resigned to the fact that we were unable to see or do anything we went over to one of the restaurants on the Marina and had a bite to eat for supper and a cold glass of beer/wine.

The very kind restaurant manageress called a taxi for us to take us back to our place in Santa Maria leaving the car in the marina for the night.

The next morning (9th), early after the usual Archie walk and breakfast in the nearest cafe, locking up the apartment and packing the car, and another taxi back to Puerto Sherry and installed ourselves in an apartment very close to the Marina for the coming week. This apartment is very spacious and clean, with a huge balcony with views of the Marina entrance and out to Cadiz Bay. The luggage for the week was taken up to the apartment, and the rest to be taken to the boat for our coming three/four month live-aboard life.

***(Puerto Sherry Marina** is a magnificent leisure port located in El Puerto de Santa María, in the Bay of Cádiz, a compulsory place of passage for those crossing the Straits of Gibraltar. At this marina you will find the perfect place to combine nautical activities and leisure all year round. You can also enjoy local cuisine at the Central Market or wander the marvellous streets of El Puerto de Santa María as far as the Santa Catalina Fort)*



Once that task completed we drove around to the other side of the Marina to the boat yard and were horrified, distraught and dismayed to see such carnage onboard after being in Spain during 18 months of COVID lockdown. For a start she was covered in 18 months worth of caked in sand from the Sahara desert blown over by the Levanter winds. Our Canvas Bimini and tenting was ripped with a couple of the perspex window panels missing, the Dingy (Rib) cover was completely trashed and not worth mending, we will eventually replace it before over wintering her in October. It was completely soul destroying to see the state she was in.

We also were dismayed to learn that the 2 large boxes containing our bedding, equipment and tools for maintaining the boat that we had sent via UPS Parcel Service three weeks previously still had not arrived. Apparently one was held by customs in Madrid which contained bedding and other necessities for boat life, and the box with the tools and maintenance items required was still in a London Customs House, it gets worse!!!

Bill decided that we would just leave everything to do with the boat until the next day, and he would start work on the boat himself, and I would go and unpack the car luggage into the apartment and go get provisions for the coming few days. Then do battle with UPS and customs.



Thursday 10th - Bill Started work 08:00 in earnest cleaning Shakura's decks of the ingrained dust, washed off the canvas bimini and side panels which attach with zips (this forms a tent for inclement weather). He thought on further inspection, that the Bimini could possibly be repaired, but that the side panels not being immediately essential could be repaired at a later date.

After 18 months away we did not know whether the Batteries would still be alive and well, they were found to be almost dead so started work to try and charge them up. Meanwhile I spent most of my day dealing with paperwork and constant phone calls to UPS parcel service and UPS customs services to try and release our boxes for delivery....TO NO AVAIL.

Friday 11th Bill went to work on Shakura at 08:00 until 12:00 to avoid the hottest part of the day. More cleaning to be done on deck, more battery charging. He took the Bimini to a local Company and arranged for the repairs to be done. Arranged for a local company to clean off and repaint the anti slip panels on deck which were peeling and beyond cleaning, and started to check and renew anodes (which he had to purchase another set as ours were in the boxes!!

Once again, I spent most of the day on the phone to UPS Customer Service Department to help sort out the necessary steps to release our boxes from the various Customs holding points.

I asked Marina Port Manager if he would kindly print the forms which I had been sent by UPS email (eventually by the fourth person I had spoken to) and on the email he explained exactly how to complete the forms and a power of attorney form required by customs. These were duly filled out and signed by both of us.

There was another big problem there, due to lack of scanning and printing equipment I had to photograph all the relevant pages and forward via email. I am not sure that these will be accepted as were JPEG's and not PDFs, GIFs nor any of the other types in which were acceptable to send by. This is more difficult, I think because of lack of experience, I have done the on line forms wrong.

Bill also bought another seacock required to replace a broken one, even though we had already bought one which...Yep you guessed it! it was in the tool box, in London Customs Clearing House. GRRRRR! He came to the conclusion that buying new seacocks and anodes would be cheaper than having to have another week paying for an apartment as Shakura is due to be launched on Thursday 17th, hopefully she will be sea worthy by then. One positive is that the inside of the boat was fine, as all doors and windows were sealed.

Saturday 12th

Bill once again went to work on the boat at 08:00 which has become the normal. More cleaning and finished fitting anodes. We then drove to investigate either the maintenance of or purchase of new batteries, we were promised a quote by Monday.

That done we went for lunch at one of the many Marina restaurants and then shopped for dinner ingredients and the local supermarket.

We then spent the rest of our day relaxing in the cool of the apartment until I had a phone call from one of my lovely friends to say a package had been sent care of the security office as the marina office had closed. So off we went to find the security office, eventually we found the emergency out of hours security office right at the opposite side of the marina. We had been sent the most beautiful bouquet of flowers to cheer us up !

After dinner we had a game of bridge via zoom with the two of them then a glass of wine or two and a chat which was a lot of fun and cheered us up no end.



Sunday 13th,

No work for us today, just Archie walking, Local shopping for food, relaxing in the cool apartment (did some washing/laundry) not really work as the washing machine did that.

We learned today that congratulations were in order for our friend Chris Robinson who had been awarded an M.B.E. Very well done and very well deserved.

We had a very lazy day, and caught up with the children via mobile telephone.

Monday 14th,

Bill started his day by fitting the seacock he had bought after learning that the boxes still had not arrived, The batteries were not responding to the charger so Bill ordered a new bank of four, also completed a diesel bug test which proved 90% negative thank goodness.

I spent the day walking Archie and chasing UPS for our much needed boxes and cleaning the apartment “exciting”???

Tuesday 15th,

Much the same, Me chasing the boxes from UPS and Bill cleaning and servicing various equipment & preparing the boat for a local Company on the Marina, TechnoFibrasCadiz to clean and polish topsides (Hull).

Bill also ordered new fenders as over the Covid lockdown most had perished and gone a very dirty shade of brown. I cleaned the cockpit!

Wednesday 16th,

During the 18 month period of lockdown the anti-slip areas on deck had become very tatty and sand blown chipped and flaking making them all look extremely grotty, plus, you could not scrub the dirt out, no matter how hard you tried.

Bill fitted the frigoboat (Fridge and Freezer) anodes he had purchased, cleaned and prepared the decks for TCF to replace non-slip areas not with white as previous, but with a light grey colour.

Thursday 17th,

More boat cleaning, and Bill bought a new socket set as he found his was beyond use, all rusted up and not worth cleaning up, so it had to go!

The Bimini that had been destroyed by the levanter winds was due for delivery shortly so Bill did a bit of chasing up, to ensure that it would be delivered by the time of launch, BUT, on chasing he was informed that they hadn't started on it yet! yikes!!

Friday 18th, Checked out of the very spacious Apartamento Puerto Sherry (Marked in black outline) not the very air conditioned one on the left Ha Ha! at 12:00, then we had lunch out at one of the local restaurants on the marina site prior to checking into a very cramped room at a nearby Hotel Dunas at 14:00,



This was an extra which the apartment was sorely lacking. Such a joy to have a relaxing swim in a cool pool after all of the packing and then unpacking was completed. Very refreshing.

I did feel a BIT guilty having a swim whilst Bill went back to the boat to start the engine (one quick turn) to test the starter and to take delivery of and help fit new bank of four new large batteries.

Saturday 19th,

We took a day off from the boat work and took a trip to Jerez de la Frontera, parked the car about a mile away from the centre and had a walk in to the centre with is very pedestrianised, we had been before in 2019 but it's a beautiful city and we needed to go to an industrial zone to pick up some bits Bill needed for repairs to Shakura.

But first we stopped for a cold beer in a picturesque square before having a walk and remembering some of the beautiful features of the city



Just a picturesque square



I'll have to persuade Bill that this paving would be great at home on our garden path, "some hopes"!!

I loved the tree lined streets (these were orange trees) and of course Jerez is the home of Harveys Bristol Cream Sherry.



Sunday 20th (It's FATHERS DAY)

So we had an easy day, made a few texts and phone calls to the family back in England. Bill was thrilled with the card, txts and chats to the Adult Kids.

Monday 21st,

Still at Hotel Dunas.

Deck anti slip was completed by TFC, looking very smart, we love the colour, Good choice by Bill.



A local Company "Nautica" exchanged exhaust elbow connecting pipe and Bill changed 2 diesel filters and had a general tidy up.

Checked out of Hotel Dunas as Boat lift back into the water due tomorrow.

Tuesday 22nd, Bill's new fenders arrived, so he will be busy blowing them all up, Well NO, not literally, with a foot pump!.

Unfortunately and disappointingly Shakura's launch was postponed due to the boat travel-lift breaking down. We had to re-book ourselves back into Hotel Dunas. It was lucky that they had not re-booked our room so we went back to a familiar place for another 2 nights, and reinstalled the baggage into the room.

We then returned to the marina and emptied all of the luggage which had been kept in the car (only basics came to the hotel) into Shakura. Bill going many times up and down the ladder, and I was in the boat distributing to the various cabins to get ready for the off.

Wednesday 23rd, Another day at Hotel Dunas, as Travel Lift still under repair, so it was boat jobs day for Bill, and me to chase UPS for our boxes which are still being held by customs at Madrid. (I could cry!)

Thursday 24th, Checked out of the hotel today. Hope it's for real this time.

As the travel-lift was still under repair the Marina Manager decided to use the larger Travel lift so as not to hold us up, we were due to be lifted in at 12:00 noon and whilst we were waiting for our turn, we watched a massive catamaran being lifted in by a gigantic crane, the people doing the crane work knew their stuff and were extremely meticulous about the strap distribution and weights, it was very interesting to watch.



By the time it was our turn we had great confidence in the lift and personnel driving it.

We were lowered in very gently, the weather helped by being a very calm day, it was lowered down to the pulpit so that we could step aboard. As we had not really tested the engine, the man from Nautica came with us to ensure that there would not be any problem.



Shakura now on Pontoon E8 Same as in 2019 - 'Home from home'.

It felt fantastic to be on the water, like had never been away.

we

Bill couldn't wait to get going with the rest of the work once we had electricity and water, so commissioned Aft heads, CW and Fridge.

It was my job to do the unpacking of the items we brought over by car, I had clearly forgotten what was already on the boat in the way of clothing, foot-ware and galley items since we hadn't been aboard for 18 months, so had meant lots of duplications.

I think once we do have the boxes, there may even be triplications.

Had a celebratory drink over the Zoom App with Sue and David this evening, such a pleasure to see and hear from them, always a laugh or three to lift the spirits.

Friday 25th

Heavens above a miracle happened today, the Tool Box Arrived! at Puerto Sherry "YAY! "

We were so pleased that one of our boxes had arrived safely, all be it too late, AND we had to hand over 564.00 Euros a Duty payment for the pleasure.

Bill soldiered on with the tasks he had planned for the day, Cleaned foredeck teak with a new product recommended to him, Commissioned Freezer, Fwd Heads & Gas. Not an enviable task in the searing heat of the Spanish sun, with hardly a breeze to speak of.

I helped by not getting in his way sorting the items brought with us and cleaning the heads, cabins, saloon and galley. It's not what I would have called a great day, but having done it for the first time since 2019 it really felt like a pleasure.

Saturday 26th

Bill completed the cleaning of all deck teak, what a difference, almost looked like new. "Good Job!!" well done that man.

After completing all our tasks for the day we went shopping at the local Lidl Supermercado to provision Shakura. I had to throw away most of the tinned, canned goods including beers, all out of date and such a shame to have to ditch a lot of the herbs and spices we had left.

Oh well, we were certainly not prepared for a pandemic to halt our plans for summer of 2020.

Sunday 27th

Today was a kind of a rest day, we caught up with the family by telephone and face time. Also, started sorting clothes to go back to Britain as we still had a lot of the cold weather clothing on board which we needed in Northern Spain and Portugal. It left so much more space (for new, dare I say).

Bill worked on the Rib, cleaning and pumping up the squishy sides.

At 8:30 we played a couple games of Bridge with David and Sue (We won both games second week running).

Monday 28th

More Cleaning!, Bill Cleaned the Genoa, Completed cleaning the Rib and also emptied and cleaned out the Deck lockers. He then tested the Raymarine and AIS.

7:30pm we took Archie to Vet in Puerto Santa Maria to enquire about applying for a European passport as recommended by our vet back in Ivybridge.

Tuesday 29th

Bill emptied and cleaned out the Anchor locker, polished all white on foredeck and saloon tops, I on the other hand, cleaned below decks, walked Archie, and generally acted chief cook and bottle washer.

Now Shakura is starting to look so much better by having a lot of TLC and hard graft both below and above decks.

Wednesday 30th

Started Visa application for extension, if only the website was a bit friendlier and we knew a lot more Spanish than we do, it would be a piece of cake, instead it's taken us hours just to get to be able to upload the forms. In the afternoon Bill collected 2 new fire extinguishers.

We also had another appointment with the vet for Archie to be given his booster shot and new Seresto flea and tick collar, the vet was able to enter all into his UK Pet Passport which is actually still valid in European Countries.

Thursday 1st July

Hooray! Second Box arrived (at last) only took 32 days from Stag Cottage. I was overjoyed to be able to unpack all of the bedding required for all 3 cabins, and was extremely glad to pack away the sleeping bags. Sounds really quite sad to be excited about receiving bedding and galley items, but we could not live comfortably on board for a 3 month period without the vast majority of them.

We both carried on with preparations to leave Puerto Santa Maria.

Completed application to apply for extended visa interview, now all we need to do is book ourselves an interview with the Spanish Government.

Friday 2nd July Worked our way through departure jobs list and paid the Marina Fees. Had our last meal out in the evening in Restaurant Berdo in the Marina not far from our berth, which was also the first restaurant we ate in when we arrived in Puerto Santa Maria on 8th June.

Left car near TFC Offices for the period of sailing to the next port which will be Gibraltar.

NEXT - THE HOLIDAY.....AT LAST