

MALAGA 2016



January 21 – April 15

January 22-24, 2016

Mom sure knows how to pick them. The weekend is not out yet and we already fell in love with Malaga. The old city is beautiful and only a 10 minute walk from our apartment. Malaga is charming, it has lots of

character, is very European, Mediterranean and is entirely pedestrian centric. It is a walking city with charming alley ways full of side walk café's bars stores and restaurants.



The pace is typically Mediterranean: slow paced and worry free. What a good time to be in Malaga when the storm of the century engulfs the East Coast, when it is 19 degrees here and -10 in Toronto.



Walking everywhere is the order of the day, at least 5-6 kilometers every day. Exactly what the Doctor prescribed for Mom and for me. Our apartment is charming, small but not cramped and in an excellent location next to fruit, fish, meat stores and a supermarket just around the corner.



First order of business on Saturday a walk to Estadio de la Rosaleda to watch Barcelona beat Malaga 2:1 with Messi scoring a spectacular scissor kick goal and assisting with a Messi-only pass for a tuck away for Munir on the far post.



On Sunday we explored the water front and the city park. There are lots and lots of locals on a warm and sunny Sunday afternoon stroll. We are so relaxed as if the world is not what it shows on CNN or BBC news.

January 25-27

We are continuing to explore Malaga by foot both as a function of curiosity but more so for fitness. We average about 5-6 kilometres a day. It is painful but seemingly "good for you". Go tell it to our aching shins, hips, ankles and the adjoining organs.



We are settling into a domicile routine. I am responsible for dishwashing on odd days, mom on even days. This sounds fair except that there are seven days in a week. Mom is a magician when it comes to cooking even without access to her herbs and spices rack. We now had a few dinners at home and they were delightful. The chickens here are by consensus much better and tastier than at home. We do a lot of reading and as of next week we go to school to learn Spanish for the next month or more if we get it.

Malaga is a beautiful town (I am deliberately not using the term city). As they say in Hebrew: "col pinna-pinna". But it is also pleasant, safe and pedestrian friendly. It probably holds the world record for the number of restaurants, tapas bars, café's per capita. We may be the only ones in Malaga to eat at home.



The same goes for museums although the first two we visited were somewhat disappointing.



January 28-29

Today was Erin's Birthday. We recorded our greetings and that's it. Mom's developed a lower leg swelling and redness which according to Google could be anything or nothing. But seriously we think that the amount of walking we did this week took its toll. We are watching the situation and may seek medical help if it persists. So Thursday we did nothing but reading, watching TV and playing backgammon on the computer.

Friday we went to the only Jewish synagogue in Malaga. We had serious problems finding it online and when we did there was no contact information, address or telephone number. When we finally discovered the address of the synagogue (inside a residential apartment building) there was no sign or reference to its existence on the floor directory. This is the new Europe where European Jews are keeping a low profile for fear of terrorism, Anti-Semitism or plain harassment, how sad!

We joined the Kabbalat Shabbat service conducted entirely in Hebrew. Nevertheless and as in any synagogue and any language I was humbled (is that how you spell "humiliated") flipping through the pages and pretending to follow the prayer sequence. Malaga has according to the Rabbi a Jewish community of some 800 people. This is a Sephardic Orthodox synagogue so mom was behind the screen and was surprisingly joined by another woman who happens to be a Toronto resident who like us is spending the winter in sunny (although tonight stormy) Malaga.

January 30 -31

The price of almost all food items in Canada is outrageous by comparison to Spain even when converting the Euros to the lowly Canadian dollar. Every time we walk out of the supermarket or the butcher shop we are surprised how little by comparison we have to pay. A full chicken cost \$8 and bread \$0.90. This cannot be said about restaurants although we estimate that they are still cheaper by comparison, somewhere around the 80%. It is possible that basic food items here are subsidized, or that more local food is available throughout the seasons unlike Canada where it has to be imported. Mind you it may not be cheap for the locals as the average salary here (need to check) is likely lower than in Canada. The combination of relatively inexpensive food and a having a trained chef and master cook as a partner is just awesome. Cleaning of the apartment takes 5 to 10 minutes depending on the frequency. Food for thought about living in a two story 4 bedrooms home but mom isn't that hungry. The slow pace, nice weather and beautiful surroundings have done wonders to my self-imposed depression.

Tonight is the beginning of the Carnival De Malaga (not Rio or Mardi-Gras but just as lively). They sure know how to have a good time here in Malaga. It is now official. After a week of extensive observation it is safe to say that Spanish women of every age are not very pretty. This is just a factoid.



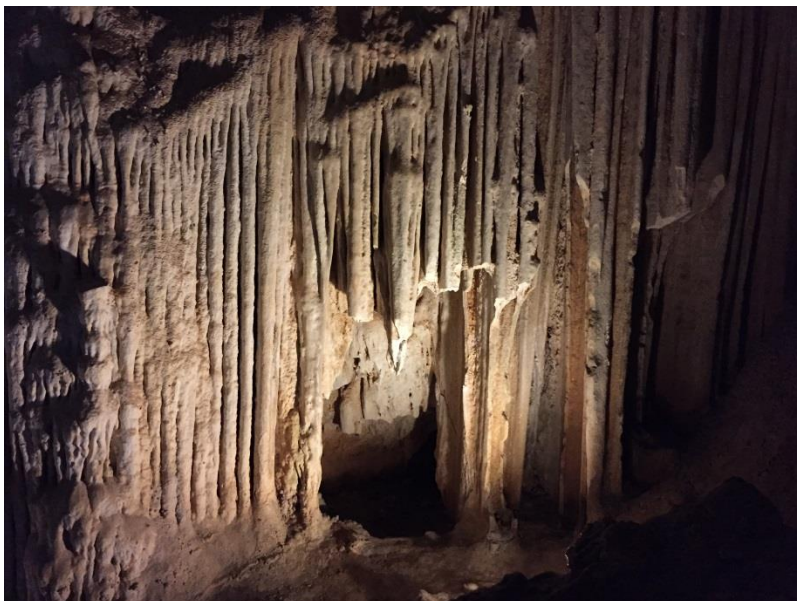


February 13

We are having a branch on the Balcon de Europa in the town of Nerja, an hour and a half by bus from Malaga. We feel awfully guilty. We just checked the weather in Toronto: sunny alright but -21 before wind chill. We are wearing T Shirts at 23 +. Sorry, we really feel bad for you. The Balcon De Europa overlooks the Mediterranean to the East and the mountains to the West. The vistas as you can see are spectacular. The old city of Nerja is what you would imagine a sea side Mediterranean town. White washed homes, narrow allies, quaint. No wonder the Spanish live in the manana.



We just came out of the world famous site of the Netja caves which is touted as Spain's top attraction. We've been to Spain many times and we tend to agree. The iPhone camera cannot do justice to the majestic stalagmites and stalactites formations. See for yourself.





February 5-7

We completed the first week of Spanish language school. We have lots of notes, enjoy the lessons, even study at home but our Spanish has only improved marginally from a Zero start. All the same we settled into a wonderful routine. Wake up at 8, have our coffee, pack a sandwich for the 11 O'clock break, listen to what transpired in the world on either CNN or BBC World and head out for school, a 1.5 Kilometers walk. Back at 2 in time for a sumptuous lunch cooked by the chef herself at Chez Zohar and do whatever or even nap during the siesta. In the evening there is plenty to do in town especially last week during the Carnival. Last night we went to a screening of La-Traviata performed at Covent Gardens by the Royal Opera House. Awesome.

We again went to Kabalat Shabbat at Bet Saadia synagogue. Tonight it was a packed house including many younger folks and even a few children and more than a few women. There is something special to being in a synagogue service amongst your people with whom you develop immediate affinity cemented by an all Hebrew service which the congregation recites in a Sephardic accent, even though most of them do not speak Hebrew.

We're back at home waiting to join Emily and Zachary's 15th birthday by Skype. This weekend we dedicate to rest. In the past 2 weeks we walked a total of **91** Kilometers. Shabbat Shalom.





Major event in Malaga: Election of Drag Queen of the Malaga Carnival. You decide:





Get the idea?

On our way home from the Drag Queen contest signalling the end of Carnival around mid-night





We are yet to see or visit a mall which we're certain exist in Malaga. But this is Europe and we are shopping in the quaint little stores around our apartment:





February 27

School is out and we are in our second month of our Malaga escape or escapade as you wish. Today we took the bus to Mijas a magical village (pueblo) or town perched high on the mountains overlooking the Mediterranean some 50 kilometers west of Malaga. It is truly a magical place with spectacular vistas as you can see in the photos.





We knew it was going to happen sooner or later. We mostly eat at home. We find that food is much cheaper and yet tastier than at home and mom's cooking is just as good either way. Add this to the fact that mom doesn't like the Tapas or for that matter the local restaurants' food. But in Mijas mom's senses led her to a superb restaurant overlooking the sea side town of Fuengirola where we had a Seafood Paella that finally met with mom's approval. Good for the restaurant not so much for our pocketbook but mom no careo.



Of course we also checked out the museum of the Three Tenors of Spanish Art



March 3

Mom's and Sharon's Birthday! We spent the day in the company of the Cohen's. It started at the Hamam for a bath and massage, a wonderfully relaxing experience in a uniquely authentic place. When in Malaga – Don't miss the experience. After a short city tour that we felt proud of conducting for the Cohen's, we went out for dinner and a Flamenco show as you can see, Mom was happy to receive so many well wishes from the people she cares for the most.



All in all it was a great birthday to remember and I even received kudos for planning it this way. Sharon was equally happy to receive Mom's diamond ring and our and her brothers' well wishes.

March 20 - 26

This week is Semana Santa in Malaga. It is the most important and most famous event in Malaga. Every day from Sunday to Sunday there are numerous processions all across town. Each procession represents a community or church. The procession would remind a Westerner who did not know any better a KKK rally as the traditional dress includes the pointed hood with only the eyes showing.



The processions are spectacular, but even more so is the atmosphere in the city. Virtually the entire city is out on the streets all week long. Families young and old with their children and even infants are out on the street lining up 4 or 5 deep to watch the processions. They sing, they clap they celebrate a traditional religious ritual. We are loving it.







Our agenda this week is simple: wake up as late as possible, have breakfast, get updated through CNN or BBC World on all the recent horrors that occurred in the world in the last 24 hours. After the siesta we head out to town to watch at least two processions every day. This is such a unique experience and we're lucky to have chosen this time to be in Malaga.

March 25 – Purim



We have never seen anything like it! Today is the climax of Semana Santa with the 3 most attended events: The landing of the Legionnaires at the port of Malaga in advance of their participation in the Cristo de Mena procession and finally the La Esperanza with its five ton iconic carriage carried by 260 men.



In my estimation there were at least a quarter of a million people from as young as one week to as old as they come. The atmosphere is hard to describe: excitement, energy, pride, faith and tradition.



We were pointing out to each other that culture and tradition start at birth. The way you educate and expose your children forms their culture the norms and core values when they become grown members

of the society/community. We remember how we, like the tiny little kids dressed up in traditional garb walking in the procession way past mid-night, used to walk in parades on holidays and other major events and the way in which it shaped our values. What if the Palestinians did not educate their young to hate, kill and sacrifice their life for a better after life?



Most amazing is that even in the face of the recent Brussels terror attack that occurred just 24 hours earlier, the crowds are so calm, respectful of each other. No pushing, no shoving, no elbowing and an extremely light police presence for crowd control. It's a sense that the people have taken over their city and treating it with the pride and respect and that of each other that is befitting the occasion.



You don't need to be Christian or a believer to get caught in the excitement of the moment. If planning to go to Malaga Semana Santa is the time.

We arrived home well after midnight (while many residents were still flowing into the old city for yet more processions) totally exhausted with aching legs, backs and the rest but truly excited. Tomorrow is Good Friday. There are still many processions taking place but this is a day of mourning if you remember what happened on the day. Therefore the processions today are dark, quiet and void of band music. In fact at night lights are dimmed into almost total darkness on the procession route. We don't plan to go today. We are too tired of the hours of walking and standing and we are not at all in a mourning mood. Final impression: the power of religion for good or for bad over the lives of billions of people.



March 27-29

For the first time since we arrived in Malaga we stayed home for two days in a row. Semana Santa exciting as it was took the steam out of us and we were limp. However two days in a 200 square feet apartment with someone you knew for 67 years is about the limit. So today we took the train + bus combination to Marbella. Why? Why not? We have been to Marbella many years ago but it was worth making the day trip again. Marbella is branded as the resort town of the rich (and famous) on Costa del Sol. Indeed it is. The old city is quaint, elegant and expensive (in a "good" way). It has great boutiques, bars and restaurants in a beautiful old fashion pueblo setting.

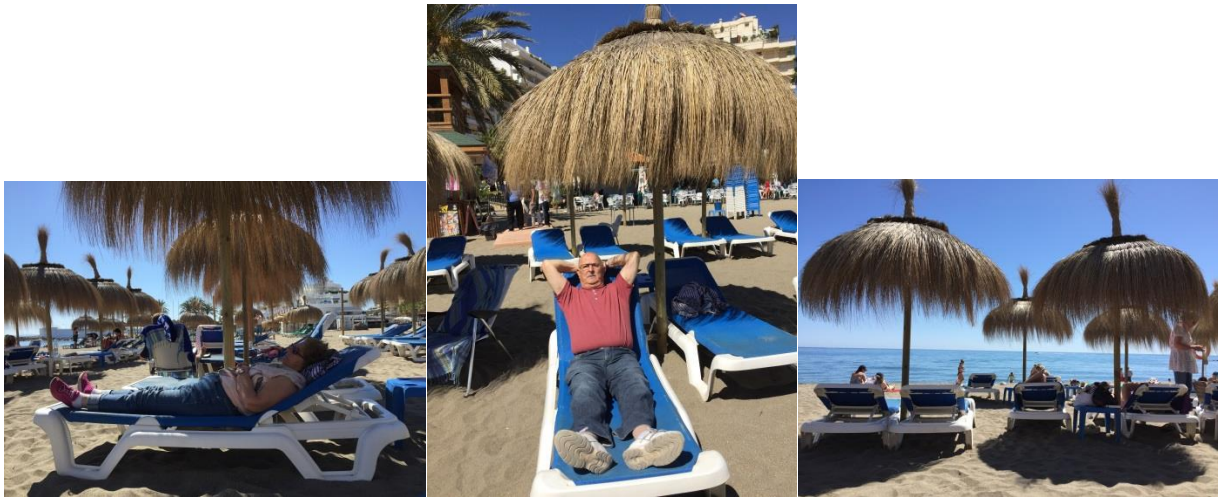




Even more striking is the avenue leading to the beach with its large and beautiful statues.



We have now rented two recliners on the beach and are vegging under the umbrellas in 27 degrees sunshine with not a single cloud in the sky.



Oops, short memory. I did leave the apartment yesterday. I went to the barber shop downstairs for a trim and a shave. When I say barber shop I mean the kind you see in gangster movies. He is an old, white bearded single proprietor using the tools of the trade from years gone by. Wears a white coat, it is a tidy one seat shop with a white couch for waiting patrons, most of them white haired Spaniards in their mid to late 70's. It is only 11:30 de la mañana you see. But this is a static description of the scene. This is more of a social club than anything to do with hair. They all know each other and immediately engage in fast loud talk sounding more like arguments eventually leading to handicapping the upcoming Classico between Barcelona and Real Madrid. All the while the barber wielding a sharp knife is doing most of the talking while at the same time shaving my face. I'm dying to get into the conversation especially the one about football but I can't. First I don't understand most of what is being said (too many words and too fast for simultaneous translation in my head) secondly I know what I want

to say but I am missing some critical words for it to make sense. Thirdly I am certain that if I move my lips the barber may slash my throat so I remain quiet. Speaking of hair today I trimmed my three months old goatee to try to reach a compromise between the KEEP and REMOVE forces in the family referendum. Hours later the gauntlet fell when mom finally uttered the verdict: "Take it off". You could be the jury but mom is the judge. I know that it's not fair but life in the Zohar household is like that.

