Madeira 11th – 15th July

After a great night’s sleep, the first in four nights, we all felt refreshed and clean! The four of us caught the local bus into Funchal to explore the capital. The scenery is amazing with sheer hills rising from the sea to great heights with roads winding precariously round the hillsides and a relatively recent infrastructure of tunnels burrowing their way through the cliffs. Whist the tunnels eliminate the amazing views, they must have made the island so much more accessible to the locals as the winding roads round and over the hills and cliffs are certainly a slow and scary at times, way to travel.

I had visited Funchal several years ago on a very different kind of cruise but only for one day and was looking forward to a better opportunity to explore. In Funchal we did the tourist thing, having lunch in a street side café followed by a trip on the cable car to the top of the hill where a lovely tropical parks festoons the hillsides. It is just amazing to see how these hills are used to grow extensive produce around houses perched precariously on what looks like cliff edges. The absence of any flat land is so evident when you see how extensively and expertly the face of the hills are utilized. Even the runway for the airport is built on stilts as there would be no flat surface long enough to build one on land. We were impressed to see how the space below this runway was being used as a boat yard, providing very high under cover boat storage for boats with the highest of masts still erect.

We received an invitation from Peter and Lorraine, a Scottish couple who had sailed here two years ago and never left! We were invited to join them at their home in the hills giving John, Colin and I, a very different experience of the island from a more local perspective. Nigel had left for home the previous day to work out what to do with the field that his wife Kate was negotiating to buy. (We did give him several suggestions, some more practical than others)! On Sunday the 13th Peter and Lorraine collected us from the boat and drove us the half hour journey into the hills to a lovely little village of Santo De Serra, where the Sunday market was in full swing. We enjoyed the local drink, Poncha, and believe me when I say it had quite a kick! After a couple of these, full bags of lovely local produce and a serious dose of the local culture, we staggerd back to Peter and Lorraine’s superb home in lovely gardens where we enjoyed a chicken lunch washed down by yet more alcohol. They later drove us back to the marina and allowed us to drool over their lovely Rustler yacht, Red Ruth, before returning to Aislig Bheag. I can see why John loves these quality yachts. We had a great day.

Porto Santo 15th – 17th July

On Monday 14th David joined us in the afternoon. We prepared to set sail for the neighboring island of Porto Santo the following day. With the wind on the nose it took us several hours tacking to reach the half way point, but then the wind dropped so we resorted to the engine for the remainder of the 40 mile journey, arriving in Porto Santo at about 7pm. We enjoyed the company of some particularly high jumping large dolphins en route. I cooked dinner whilst underway so as soon as we got tied up we sat down to some food and cold beer. We were joined by Daryl, a solo sailor from a neighboring yacht, Aerandir, who has also sailed from the UK and shared tales of the sea…..

Wednesday was a lovely warm sunny day and we wandered into the wee town of Porto Santo. It was small and quiet with only a minimum tourist impact making it a perfect place to while away the day. Apparently many Madeirans spend weekends and holidays on this idyllic little island which offers golden sands unlike Madeira where beaches are few and sands when you find them are generally dark. There was a lovely sandy beach beside the marina so John, David and I enjoyed our fist swim in the sea.

In the evening we walked back into town and enjoyed a leisurely dinner in a little restaurant just off the main square, watching the comings and goings of locals and visitors.

Before heading back to Madeira on Thursday we were chatting to Geoff, an Englishman living in Germany and sailing with his partner on Minnie Mouse. He challenged us to a race back to Quinto Da Lorde. Daryl was also heading over so we all set off in convoy. Minnie Mouse left us standing when the light wind came behind but we enjoyed a leisurely sail all the way back. During the passage I prepared dinner for Peter and Lorraine who were joining us later. Daryl arrived just are we were about to eat so we welcomed him aboard to join the party. The highlight of the evening had to be when it came to dessert of Madeira cake and ‘custard’, which much to every ones entertainment turned out to be béchamel sauce! Oh well, at least Peter gave it a try before opting for the cake on its own.

Madeira 17th – 23rd July

On Friday morning we took delivery of a hired car and a toured part of the island with the incredible scenery and enjoyed lunch in a particularly isolated hotel beside its swimming pool. David, John and I enjoyed a short walk following the paths of some of the islands intricate infrastructure of water ways which meander down the mountains bringing water to the villages.

On Saturday Colin left in the early hours of the morning when John dropped him off at the airport. John, David and I explored the north and west of the island at one point having to do a three point turn on a road so steep it became evident if we went any further we wouldn’t be able to persuade the wee Fiat Panda to get back up the hill. I found this experience scarier than anything I have ever encountered on the boat! Back at the boat, I utilized some of the Béchamel sauce on spaghetti carbonara which certainly worked better than its previous intended use.

On Sunday after John and David finished some maintenance we went back to the market to introduce David to the local culture, not least cooking our lunch on an open fire at the butchers stall and eating it along with freshly baked bread and washed down with local wine. We then let him sample the good old poncha where we chatted to the farmer who made the drink and refused to take payment of the second round. We have been astonished at how friendly, generous and welcoming the locals are. We then had a short sail and David prepared for his departure the following morning.

The next few days John and I worked on maintenance and enjoyed some rest.

Tony joined us on Wednesday evening and we shared a farewell drink with Daryl before heading off foe the Canary Island of La Palma on Thursday, 24th July.

I will update again in the Canaries.

Alison