

TONY AND JILL'S ISLAND NOTES SPRING 2012

Life will never be the same again! How so? Well, when we took possession of our new home in 2008 the developer/builder had specified all Bosch kitchen equipment. Fab-u-lous we thought, except that we, naive Brits that we are, did not realise that although an appliance



maker of renown, Bosch market a wide range of specifications, some more basic than others and ours were so basic they were close to being obsolete - no doubt bought at a massive discount as end-of-line stock to boot. This was discovered when our fridge/freezer packed up recently and we were advised to replace it rather than repair what came up on the computer as a 10-year old model! Discovering that the Canarian government have a 6-month 'renove' scheme which allows the shop to 'buy back' the old appliance if a more energy saving model is purchased, we duly bought the latest model. No argument there, apart from the length of time at the check-out to complete endless forms with proof of residency, passport, bank etc., in order to satisfy the bureaucratic process! I should add that these had to be redone when my signature didn't look exactly like the one on my passport which requires a magnifying glass to see!

Having taken advantage of the generous discount, we decided to change the oven and hob as well to stop the endless complaints from kitchen staff every evening because they were so slow. That meant a protracted safari to suss out satisfactory replacements. To our dismay we discovered that even on a small island like Tenerife there are numerous brands with umpteen models from which to choose. After seemingly hours spent with head in ovens, chief cook decided on an all singing and dancing fan-assisted oven complete with self-cleaning ultra-hot capability, and the [relatively] new concept of 'induction' heated hob - which is as controllable as gas I'm told and doesn't burn you if you put your hand on the surface. The instruction manuals came in Spanish and were unavailable to download in English so Jill spent happy [frustrating] hours scanning them and using Google translate which threw up some interesting results. She no longer cooks in an oven but in a furnace! Despite the agonies of oodles more paperwork generated for the 'renove' scheme, the results are excellent, despite the expensive new special 'magnetic' utensils necessary [don't ask] for the induction system. Talk about spending the kid's inheritance, but can't wait to try that crispy duck and roast spuds - an impossibility since leaving the UK!



CLIMATE - Here in Tenerife the difference between the four seasons is muted. With an average temperature of 20°C it's either hot, hotter or hottest. Except when we have a 'Calima' which is a meteorological event. Basically it's a very strong, hot wind that blows out of the Sahara and is characterised by picking up a lot of the the desert's finest sand, holding it in suspension while it blows over the few hundred miles to Tenerife then dumps it on us. One sees a thick yellow fog, [somewhat like the old London 'pea soupers'] approaching across the sea which then envelopes one and takes the breath away

- certainly not recommended for those with asthma or other breathing difficulties and making it necessary to close all windows and doors to prevent the sand getting everywhere. One characteristic is that the air becomes ultra dry. We have an almost full set of navigation instruments on the wall [as one does] and the hygrometer reading of relative humidity went below 0%. Normally it reads 30%/40% but it literally went off the dial. Definitely the time for the air conditioning system, although it tends to clog up the filters so an annual service is essential.

The most unpleasant factor is the insect life that travels with it. Friends have given us a fly/mosquito electronic zapper which looks like a small tennis racquet but has power coursing through its strings. When you connect with a bug it goes Pzzzzstzap... and the little so-and-so evaporates - very satisfying. The authorities go down every street for days after the 'Calima' has blown through with vast water cannons washing the sidewalks and roadways to kill the little blighters.



We have subsequently invested in the fitting of fly screens which should cut down on the fly spray needed.

Fortunately the 'Calima' is not a frequent event, but, like so many other parts of Europe, the Canaries are experiencing some climate extremes and we've had several already this year, although fortunately not quite up to the mid-summer height of 40°C. It does however produce some stunning sunrises.

SERVICES - Of course, water on an island within the tropical belt at 28° N is precious. The source of mains water is from subterranean aquifers which are fed from the rainstorms and

winter snow on the mountains and forests in the north of the island. Some 10% is supplied by desalination - we happened on one of the plants way up in the mountains during an exploratory outing. Apparently they pump up the seawater then use vast reverse osmosis filters to purify it, then let gravity feed it into the system. With the drought conditions we've experienced for the last 12 months, farmers are having a hard time keeping their crops irrigated. Amazingly there does not appear to be a shortage as can be seen by our golf course evening routine, although the authorities request that one is careful in its use.

Water from the tap is potable but tastes horrible. The distribution system is amazing and looks haphazard. Black surface pipes snake their way down hillsides and into buildings. Our complex has a water pump room with five vast water storage tanks as reserve for when the system fails - which it does quite regularly - with pumps to keep them full and supply each of the apartments. It also feeds the fire fighting appliances although our developers declined to get the system licenced/commissioned and we had to do it retrospectively.

Tired with lugging litres of bottled water from the supermarket, Jill and I took advice and our friendly neighbour Tom, installed a reverse osmosis plant under our kitchen sink to supply a separate drinking water tap. It tastes at least as good as the bottled variety and we keep jugs of it in both the fridges in order to keep up the essential liquid intake.

There is no gas on the island [other than propane] so we all rely on the electricity supply - sometimes a bit hit and miss, although with the absence of thunderstorms this year there have been no failures so far. We've just had a 7% cost increase, the first for eleven years apparently, but it is still very much cheaper than the UK. Of course, it is very rare to need any heating, washing dries very quickly outside, showers tend to be used more than baths and one tends to eat more salads in hot weather or have BBQs. The main consumption is air conditioning, but being on the 3rd and top floor, we tend to benefit from the normal island breezes, so its use is kept to a minimum. There is a large wind farm further up the east coast which supplies power for the tram service in Santa Cruz. At the time of writing, our street lighting has been off for over a week and our Administrator is having great difficulty finding who is responsible for keeping it on. Of course, it might well be a cost cutting ploy!

The postal service [once we were provided with a proper address after 2 years of owning the property], is excellent and deliveries made in bright yellow vans or on small motorbikes [with matching yellow helmet] and mostly with a cheery smile, especially with our frequent deliveries from Amazon!

Goods deliveries are also normally within 24 hours, but unlike Comet, Curry's etc., none of the appliance shops have their own engineers/service people - you have to get the manufacturer's engineer. So, to change the door handles to the the other side of our new fridge/freezer, we had to get an accredited engineer [at, of course, a cost of €50 which ate into our original saving] otherwise we would invalidate the guarantee. If they don't get you on the way up they'll get you on the way down! I can report that the chap, a Spanish-Canarian, turned up at 6.30pm in the evening having 'phoned at 4pm to say "not to leave our home" as he is coming. He wrestled with the doors for an hour muttering all the time '... is too complicated... is too complicated.' He then went off to another job muttering... 'too busy...too busy.' A super chap in every way with limited but very expressive English, but he left us with the knowledge that it was good we hadn't tried to do the changeover ourselves!



Appliances and furniture tend to be expensive while cars are definitely so. Petrol and Diesel are about the same price as in the USA as in €1.03 per litre [85p in GB£'s] but has risen because of an increase in VAT from 5% to 7%. There are very few self-serve garages so they still have pump jockeys - who don't take tips either! Our Nissan Qashqai had it's first service last week at a year old and less than 5000km on the clock. It cost €100 for the full check and oil change. Wages are low so services tend to be very good value.

We have both now had experience with Doctors and healthcare out here and are impressed. As in all countries, including the UK, there are severe government cutbacks in what free help one can get, and, like elsewhere, attempting to prevent many non-residents abusing the healthcare system. So far, we have insured ourselves and paid very reasonable costs for the medical services provided, but also know that in an emergency we will be well looked after. Dental insurance is very cheap and provides access to a large choice of multinational dental practices.

SHOPPING & EATING OUT - Food shopping is great. Not the actual experience [for me] but the choice available. We alternate, as one does, between Mercadona (Spanish), Carrefour (French), Lidl (German), Iceland (British), plus a traditional [wholesale] greengrocer for fruit and vegetables plus the excellent weekend Farmer's Market which can only sell fresh produce from the islands, with prices strictly controlled - traders cannot compete on price, only the quality of the product. We also have a small 'Corner Shop' supermarket just down the road run by a couple - English wife Mel, Belgian husband Herman - who always have everything one could possibly want in stock and will get it if they haven't. They know their market, the old fashioned way - prices to match of course!

Booze is cheap and includes everything from local - very good and some award winning wines, spirits from all over the world and beer that is brewed either here or in Europe.

Restaurants at a holiday destination are obviously numerous and some very much better than others. We avoid places that serve 'English breakfasts' and go where the Spanish/Canarians eat - mostly excellent food and from every part of the world at reasonable prices except in the more exclusive tourist areas. We've been introduced to a delightful, small family run place in our local town of San Miguel. It used to be the main Post Office but now holds about six tables for a maximum of 20 covers and serves really delicious home cooking. Close by there is also an old Bodega [wine store], which has many more



tables and is still very much as it would have looked in it's original state with wine barrels lining the walls and a lower cellar which acts as a bar. Plus, of course, all the other places to be found in the small fishing villages scattered up the east coast or further up the mountain - in fact, it's an endless mission of research!

THE DOG - Our lives are dictated by Muffin, our Welsh border collie sheepdog, who will be 14 in September. We have now found a very friendly dog home for her - 'Poochies Pet Hotel' - run by an English couple. They have an old farm up in the hills which covers nearly six acres of fenced-in scrubland. On our first visit to sus' out the place, a group of four doggy holiday makers were digging frantically by the fence, apparently they had formed themselves into an escape committee and their holes have to be filled in every day with rocks. Talk about keeping dogs stimulated!



Muffin loves it there and is considered to be a house dog and lives with the family. Others like having their own private fenced in kennel area while Muffin likes watching television and being played with so lives on a sofa.

There are a lot of dogs in Tenerife, many are loved and cared for, some not so and when not wanted anymore are just released into the wild. Our pet hotel handles lost and stray





dogs and reported recently that they had rescued a family of mother bitch with five puppies that had been taken into the hills and thrown out of the car. After looking for three weeks they found all of them, little sweeties as you can see from these three.

QUALITY OF LIFE - Before we moved out here, and ever since, people ask us to compare the quality of life here and in other places we have been, lived in or visited.

Well as middle class expatriates with adequate resources it is absolutely super. Without those resources, as everywhere, it is much less so and many who came here when the exchange rate was in the region of €1.50-£1 have returned to the UK. The population of Tenerife is very cosmopolitan with residents [as opposed to holiday makers] being the indigenous Spaniards plus 10% British and 20% other Western Europeans including German, Dutch and Italian. Eastern Europeans and Russians are coming in at a stupendous rate. We have a Russian family as neighbours who would live here all the time if they could amass enough of the readies. In Moscow they drive BMW 5 series and Mercedes C class so clearly they are on their way.

However, there is the risk that anyone living here will go native. We find that we are tending to do just that and think of 2pm to 4pm as siesta time. Services are provided by all the above nationalities and the national characteristics shine through. Employ Spanish people and they may or may not turn up as promised and then may or not finish the task.

Germans tend to be thorough, as always, and the Brits are OK as long as you sift out the cowboys here for the easy life. On the whole we get things done. Equally, we find the natives very friendly and our community at Palm Gardens is not only increasing as more apartments are sold, but beginning to work as it should with people helping each other out and making friends.

TRAVEL & VISITS - In January we had lived in Tenerife for a year and so could officially log for the British tax authorities that we have established residency here. Also, having found a holiday home for Muffin we were able to return to England for the first time in February - a meteorological culture shock. Boarded aircraft in 22°C, deplaned in -6°C and then walked to the hotel! Woke up to see snow falling. In fact we were lucky to enjoy some of the excellent early spring weather and see daffodils, snowdrops and primroses all blooming together in the Devon hedgerows!

We really don't miss what used to be home because the whole family is coming out again for a holiday in June, we had friends with us in November, at Christmas, and other friends are visiting during the year. We have our Kindles

to read and the five main UK TV

channels on the box and thanks to free delivery from Amazon can add to our selection of DVDs from time to time. However, great entertainment is provided watching some excruciatingly bad golf players hacking their way across our fairway and watching the world go by at our local marina with an ice-cold beer, and, of course, taking lots of photographs.

Going in to the office every morning made every day seem like a Monday. Now - with no bank manager breathing down one's neck, no salesman's pitches to avoid, no customer's wanting something yesterday and with so much to enjoy,

every day seems like Friday. Dream on! You are welcome to visit - just give us a call.

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