

The latest travel letter stopped early September, just before we entered the estuary of Faro-Olhão to [anchor off Culatra island](#). The same place we are early May, 7 months later. It's the first time in our 9-year' live-aboard-life we have been without a 5-6 month' marina wintering contract.

### Why??

Well, in September and October the weather was still very warm, predictable and perfect to anchor. Secondly, according to our plan, at the end of the year, we would sail to and stay in Morocco for a couple of months, before cruising further on to the Canary Islands.



### Flexible planning due to politics and weather

Our plans frequently changed during the time we spent along the Algarve coast. First was due to the stormy and rainy weeks in November/December. Thereafter dear Dutch friends flew out to us. At the beginning of 2011 again an unavoidably plan adjustment the moment all newspapers broke news of the uproar in the North-African countries.



The Dutch newspapers, mentioned even Morocco was to follow the line of her next-door countries. As we didn't like another unexpected and hastily departure out of a semi-war zone (like Israel '09), we skipped our plans for Morocco for this winter.

All of a sudden we had extra time on our hands to explore the Algarve again which suits us fine! While pottering around this beautiful coastline and the Guardiania River, time slipped as quickly as sand grains through our fingers. Therefore we decided to skip also the Canary Islands this winter. Now, you might wonder what we have done all those months. Well, read on and you will know!

### Gorgeous anchorage' and unexpected visitors

As we said before, 7 years ago we skipped most of the anchorages in the Algarve because we were too eager to sail eastward. This time we started our renewed acquaintance in the estuary of Faro-Olhão heading for the marina in Olhão. There we intended to bath in luxury for a few days after 8 days at sea.



7 years ago this was an "unfinished and free of charge" marina. Today it's still in the same condition of not finished but more annoying they do not have (free) moorings anymore as we discovered at arrival.





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A guard ordered us to leave without delay, because the marina is private property without any visitor berths. A bit sad and very reluctantly, we slipped the lines to head for the anchorage behind Culatra.

After the anchor dug in properly, shut down the engine and a bit of clean-up, we sipped our drinks in the cockpit to enjoy the new scenery. At first sight, the anchorage looked packed but every boat has enough swinging space hence privacy was excellent. It is an excellent place to chill-out; peaceful and very sheltered from the sea swell behind the flat sandy island.

One of our first days at anchor a text message announced unexpected guests. Marianne & Rob as well as Lidy & Johan were nearby with their camper-van and wanted to pay us a visit. They inquired how to reach the isolated island, without roads or cars. Luckily a little "pedestrian-ferry" sails several times a day from Olhão to Culatra. The next morning the four of them arrived by ferry.



The entire day was spent at Culatra, drinking coffee and chatting all the time.



Together we enjoyed an excellent Portuguese lunch in the tiny village. To digest the excellent meal we undertook a walk to the Atlantic side of this beautiful island. Too soon it was time for our visitors to take the last ferry back to Olhão.

### Back in time

The next day we explored Culatra by ourselves. By dinghy we arrived in the fishing harbour. Here the fisherman were working on their nets and did not bother when we moored our dinghy out-of-the-way but in-between their boats.



Daily life in this relaxed but lively fishing-community is like a hugh step back in time. The village is a gathering of well-maintained colourful houses dressed up with pot-plants and sea shells. They are building straight on the sand while the roads/walkways are strips of approximately 1m wide concrete blocks.

Transportation is by means of tractors of various sizes. Those drive along the "roads" but also along the waterfront to transport heavy loads to and from the small fishing boats, which are their "cars". In



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the village, are next to quite a few nice restaurants, 2 tiny but well stocked supermarkets, a primary school, a church and a community-house as well as an ATM and post office.

The large fishing harbour, full of small multi-coloured fishing boats which are moored at floating pontoons but many others are just moored on the shelving beach. The remaining part of the waterfront is taken by the ferry dock. The residents are very friendly and helpful, even to the ferry-loads of the only-one-day beach-tourists. No fancy shops though and no disco at night therefore a lovely place to be!

### November & December

After a couple of weeks, we switched the anchorage of Olhão for Portimão marina due to a forecast of strong westerly winds (8Bft). It's a real comfort to be in a marina for a few days. No worry about the weather or water shortage (washing machines available) and the luxury of plug-in 220V for endless electricity supply.



During those days we met with a couple of old Dutch friends again who drove us around for shopping rally's where after we enjoyed a lovely dinner in a Japanese restaurant together. We were even allowed to use their home address in Portugal to send us spare parts and mail, which is very, very convenient. The week at the marina was followed by a week at the anchorage opposite the

marine before we changed the surroundings for the exquisite [anchorage of Alvor](#), 6 nm west of Portimão.

The Alvor- anchorage is situated in a very shallow area, which we only dare to enter after our friends did some depth-sounding with their little fishing boat a few days earlier. The narrow channel up to the beach near the town should be at least 3.1m at low water. So near high water, we carefully entered the channel one eye glued to the depth sounder while the other scanned the changing watercolour indicating depth differences. 50m off the town beach was a perfect spot to drop anchor.



The anchor fell in a depth of 4m and we were waiting anxious for low tide. Luckily, at low water we were still floating, but just! Only 30cm of water left beneath the keel! A few of the huge catamarans at anchor were now high and dry on the sandbanks both sides of the channel. Very encouraging!

Alvor town is beautiful and loved by tourists. There are many restaurants along the beach, serving all kinds of European dishes next to the special Portuguese fish specialties.



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But the most we loved, was sitting in Zeezwaluw' cockpit observing the scenery change due to the tide. At low tide, you could walk over the dry sandbanks almost to the entrance of the estuary while at high tide it was hardly imaginable that only a narrow channel could be used in this now immense inner-sea.

We had a lovely fortnight in this paradise but left just before spring-tide. At spring low-tide, the excess of water should be only 10cm and we did not fancy that, suppose strong winds or a gale were imminent.... Suppose again....., the anchor starts to drag.... So it was Portimão marina again, this time till the end of the year.

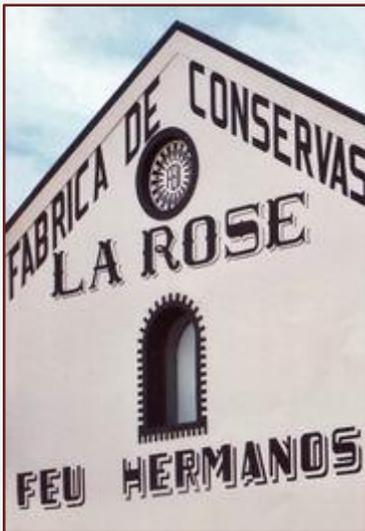


### End of the year cheerfulness

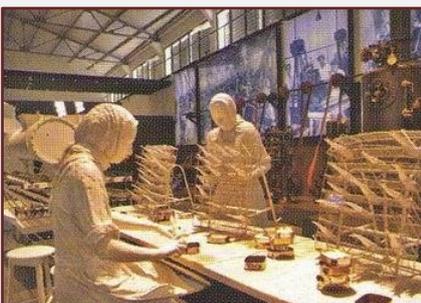
The sunny December days were used for stocking-up with Lidl shopping's, buying chandlers necessities like new Genoa rail-cars, Sikaflex Primer and other bits and pieces. To relax and to have fun after hard work we walked a lot or visited friends.

Our totally worn and slightly stained 9 year old saloon carpet needs replacement. Therefore we bought, cut and fitted new carpet at the last day of the year. The saloon looks great now but since we have the new carpet we have spilled more than the 9 previous years. Luckily they sell more at the shop it came from so next year .....

On a beautiful Sunday (entrance free) we went to the very special Sardine Museum in Portimão. The museum is situated in the former fish-canning factory building that covers an area of approximately 1'000 m<sup>2</sup>. We were pleasantly surprised by the excellent explanation and visualisation of the fish-canning industry of Portimão.



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The pictures (from the museum leaflet) take you from catching the sardines by traditional sailing boats to the Portimão fish auction.

From there to the canning factory where the fish comes in fresh and leaves cleaned, steamed, canned and boxed

ready for world-wide transportation.



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This museum highlights especially the role of men and women in the economically most relevant activity in Portimão and the Algarve before the change to a new paradigm: the tourism industry. We continued in sardine-mode and went for a sardine-lunch in one of the riverside restaurants full of mostly regular Portuguese customers. Our dinner came with a delicious Portuguese house wine which made the excellent meal a feast!

Rainy days were used for indoor-activities like relaxing or reading a book, socializing with fellow live-a-boards, entertaining our visitors from Holland, updating the website, downloading stuff from the internet and preparing the next journey/place to stay as well as sewing the required curtsey flags. Nothing too impressive.

This year, Christmas and New Year celebrations were not big events. The 2 of us (neatly dressed up) had a wonderful Christmas dinner by candle light at Zeezwaluw, which was transferred in a 5-star Boatel that day!



New Year celebration was a gathering at the beach near the marina to enjoy the fireworks together with many live-a-boards amongst thousands of other spectators. By 1 o'clock we were back at Zeezwaluw in our bunk to get a good night sleep.

10 am New Year's Day, we left the still very quiet marina. This sail on New Year's day was great due to a light westerly breeze, which is perfect for the big Genoa only to take us slowly but gentle all the way to Culatra.



### January to April

These months were equally divided between Culatra anchorage and Ayamonte marina at the Spanish side of the river Guardia.



Weather permitted we occupied ourselves with the normal winter jobs; Like the maintenance of the Chinese generator & Japanese outboard engine.

Of course the never ending story of Sikaflex the deck seams. Also did maintenance of the rigging and halyards to get prepared for the next sailing season.

We hope to go to the Azores again but in a more gentle way and less destructive as last year!

The spare parts and other bits and pieces we need, were easily obtained at the excellent chandlery in Ayamonte.





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The owner speaks Dutch (born and raised in Holland!) among several other languages, so that's perfect. He knew even a place to weld the cracks in our anchor chain U-beam. He took it in and brought it to the place in Portugal. 5 days later we could pick it up again. All this cost us the huge amount of €25,-!!

The only work we had to do was get that piece of equipment off and on the boat. To be honest that was real hard work, 2 days to get 3 bolts out which had been in place since 1983!

From March 17 to the end of May we were at anchor at Culatra and had to go for shopping to Olhão by dinghy (Aldi & Lidl) to stock up for 3-4 months. We had to do the shopping on quiet days though, because we still had many days with strong winds (E or W between 5-8 Bft) and lots of rain.



The water surface became very choppy than so a 30min dinghy-ride became a very wet one which we tried to avoid if possible! Nevertheless we enjoyed exquisite sundowns at the almost empty anchorage of Culatra as well as in [Ayamonte marina](#) in Spain. Even de Swiss 3-mast schooner was next to us in Portimão and Culatra.

### How we experienced this extra-ordinary winter?

Well, basically very good, especially for the budget because prices of Portimão marina had tripled since 2003-4) but ....

The December month we were moored in Portimão marina was great for shopping, visiting friends and special places in the Algarve as was eating out and to have our Dutch friends staying on board. It was very convenient. The time spent in the marina, was too short to engage us intensely in social contacts due to our own reluctance. Also the socializing amongst the wintering live-a-boards was well on their way and we were only staying for a few weeks.

We did have a lovely time though, met lovely people and unexpectedly met Hans & Ina long-standing Dutch acquaintances. It was almost the same situation in Ayamonte; there were only 2 boats with ancient (80+) live-a-boards at our pontoon.

At the anchorages we met only a few boats, which is not unusual for this time of the year. Most of the boats are moored in a marina. But a few were on the move during these months and some of them we saw at different places.

In hind side the advantage was, to spend quality time in one of the most beautiful areas of Portugal without paying through the nose! The only negative aspect this winter was, the minimum of socializing with live-a-boards and locals as well as the inability to get off the boat during strong winds. Would we do it again?? Probably, yes!





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### June the start of the real sailing season

End of May we sailed to Portimão anchorage to visit some friends and shared last delicious "Indonesian Wok meal". Thereafter it was waiting-time for the perfect weather window to sail to the Azores. After almost 2 weeks of intense crunching on the weather forecasts' the 11<sup>th</sup> of June was the day of our departure.

Read more in: "[To the Azores and back](#)"



*Riens and Ineke Elswijk at SY Zeezwaluw*

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