

On Wednesday 29th April, a group of about 10 people got together in Hotel el Toro, just outside Pamplona. We were all looking forward to a few days' break in sunny Spain, and our suitcases reflected our expectations. Luis arrived with an impressive 5 kilo pamphlet including the programme for the weekend, and he had also made the effort to print T-shirts for the entire group. After a short discussion as to where and when to eat, we finally decided to have dinner at the hotel, the first in a row of numerous Tapas meals. Being a little tired after the travel, and looking at the contents of the heavy programme starting next morning at 10, we had a relatively early departure to the idyllic Farmhouse anno 1730 where part of the group was lodged.

On Thursday 30th April at 10 sharp, Luis came to pick us up at the Farmhouse and brought us to the Hotel El Toro where the rest of the group was waiting with a bus. Being near the Rioja region, wine tasting was a safe winner. The bus took us to the "La Rioja Alta" Winery, where we during the tour learned everything about Grandes Reservas, Reservas and Crianza wines. There we also had a delicious lunch where we could taste the distinction between the various wines the winery offered. Due to its popularity, Luis had to book this visit a year in advance, so he was really a well prepared host. This activity took some time, and on our way back we visited a couple of villages, so in the end we only had 15 minutes rest at the Farmhouse before leaving for the Tapas bar where we were to spend the evening. The rain was pouring down outside, but the cheese we were served tasted deliciously with the wine, and on our second night we went to bed at about 4 a.m

Friday 1st May – Did I say May? The rain was still pouring down and it was quite cold, but that was no problem on this well organized trip. Again we were picked up by the bus and this time we were taken to Bilbao and the Guggenheim museum. This was an incredible experience – even for those of us not being so familiar with modern art. There were so many colors and shapes and impressions to absorb. Looking in the programme after this visit, we could only see that the programme for the day had just started. Our next stop was at a Tapas bar, and later at the beach restaurant KA in Zarautza for a coffee. We were well fed during these days!

In San Sebastian we went to place some bets during the Jai-Alai game. I suppose this was a new experience for the majority of the group. The best way to explain is that there were 2 men on each team, with "something" attached to their right hands, smashing a ball, like tennis or squash. Lots of Spanish men were watching – placing bets. Our group collected a few pesetas each, and as far as I could understand we won 30.000 pesetas. After spending a couple of hours in this sports centre, the bus took us down town. Unfortunately – because of the heavy rain – only a few of us were dressed for a walking tour in the old town. The rest of us took seats in a bar overlooking the beautiful harbour of San Sebastian.

The next item on the programme was dinner at "The Sidreira", a farmhouse with home made cider. Again we ate well, but the horrible cider was exchanged for some local wine. We now counted 8 circle members and 16 groupies. Later in the evening the bus took us back to Pamplona where we went to bed, quite exhausted.

The plan for Saturday 2nd May was a visit to the Pyrenees Mountains with outdoor activities like climbing, walking, a train ride, etc. Due to the bad weather, the programme had to be completely changed. The bus took us to the natural Garden Park, and on the way there was a beautiful scenery. To me it looked more like Switzerland or Tyrol than Spain. Anyway, we had a wonderful lunch at a local restaurant, and again – lots of wine. After lunch we said goodbye to Bernard, Marlyse and the children, headed for the bus, and made a few more stops in small villages on our way back. Then we had 2 hours! break before dinner. I think everybody slept except Luis who was an ever-going never-tired host. The day was concluded with more Tapas, more wine, and the Annual Meeting at La Olla.

On Sunday 3rd May people started to leave, but those that were left planned a barbeque at the Farmhouse. Cato and I were lucky to get a ride with Dirk and his girlfriend to the airport, so we never made it for the barbeque.

We were a little surprised and disappointed that the other Spanish did not show up, but many thanks to Luis for organizing this Annual Meeting on his own. We never had a sight seeing in Pamplona, so we figured that maybe there is nothing to see there, or maybe Luis kept us away to stimulate our curiosity so that we would come back later. We probably will! See you in Baden Baden next year!

Anne