

SUMMER 2014 - ONAWAY IN MEDITERRANEAN SPAIN

Introduction.

For our 4th year of extended sailing and after spending the winter at Marina de Lagos, Portugal, my wife Judith and I sailed east into the Mediterranean. Our boat, ONAWAY, is an 11.6m, 1999 Bavaria 38 (draft 1.6m). We have purposely put off heading in to the Med in order to fully enjoy the Atlantic coasts of Spain and Portugal. This year however we felt the time was right to move on. We put a great deal of thought as to where we might like to winter in 2014, the options are "mind boggling".



Into the Mediterranean after 3 years cruising down from our home in Plymouth.

Important to us is a summer base where we can leave ONAWAY and return home to Plymouth during July and August. We usually combine this with a period ashore to undertake our annual maintenance and to offset costs. We had decided on Spain and with this in mind a location was required where we could live and work on the boat whilst out of the water. In Spain these locations are few and far between, I could only find 3, Almerimar, Aquadulce

and Sant Carles Marina. Barcelona was our preferred location for the winter so we decided on Sant Carles Marina for mid July.

Marina de Lagos had lived up to our expectations and we have made many friends there. It had become our "objective" over the last 3 years and it would have been very easy to stay, as so many do. The winter had been busy and we enjoyed the carol singing on the pontoons, Christmas dinner at the Marina Bar and New Years Eve was particularly special. We swam in the sea just before Christmas and enjoyed the company of many other cruising folk. The Lagos Navigators are unique and long may they continue their good work.

The marina is not cheap however and even with CA discounts comes in at over 3300E / 9 months for a 12m berth. Given that we left in May, a month early, this turned out at over 400E / month and we have subsequently discovered that prices in Med Spain can be much cheaper than that. Having said that we believe it was well worth the cost.

We were happy and settled in Lagos and when it came time to leave it was not without doubt. On our departure date we had a lovely send off from friends on the pontoon and even a little "tear" from the ladies. Deep down however we knew it was the right thing for us, as it is the exploring new places and meeting new people that is the experience for us. We are not live aboards and enjoy the variety of returning home, at least for short periods.

Whilst deciding on our passage plan for this year I was able to seek the help of several Cruising Association HLRs, Martin Godfrey (Barcelona), Mary McKnight (Almerimar) and more recently Jeffrey Kempton (Mallorca), all were extremely helpful and enthusiastic in answering my questions. We also made good use of a number of CA discounts throughout the trip. I am a relatively new member and want to say what a great organization the CA is, in all respects. It has been a positive experience for my wife and I and a real pleasure to be able to seek support from like minded cruisers with such a depth of knowledge. The CA really is a "must" for anyone thinking about extended cruising.

This log is part 4 of our trip from the UK and previous years can be found on the CA website. I have tried to capture aspects I would like to have known when cruise planning and I do hope that others may find the detail

informative and helpful.

2011 - ONAWAY in western France - Plymouth to La Rochelle

<http://www.cruising.org.uk/node/16037>

2012 - ONAWAY in North Spain and Portugal - Arzal to Lisbon.

<http://www.cruising.org.uk/node/19414>

2013 - ONAWAY in Portugal and SW Spain - Lisbon to Cadiz.

<http://www.cruising.org.uk/node/23150>

During my planning phase "NOONSITE" was an excellent source of information (<http://www.noonsite.com/Countries/Spain>) and I recommend it highly, particularly important for current updates from cruising sailors worldwide. The Internet enabled me to identify web sites for many of the marina's we were going to visit and establish some idea of costs along the way. Most of the websites include visitor rates, with a little delving but I have also included our own costs for 11.6m. The exchange rate at the time was 1.23 euro's to the pound and all costs quoted are in euro's.

Weather forecasts in Spain are abundant both online and via VHF in English. Navtex provides good detail on conditions along the coast. I've included the weather sources we used and although WI FI reception much better than in Northern Spain it is still very mixed so investing in a local 3G device proved a good choice for us. PYG costs are significantly higher than in Portugal however, so WI FI is still our primary source of connectivity and we have found an external aerial of great benefit.

Fitting out in Lagos was enjoyable and services much better than elsewhere in Portugal. SOPROMAR is an excellent boatyard where most things are achievable at a cost. By far the best chandlers on the Algarve is AYAMAR just over the border into Spain at Ayamonte. You can browse the website and John will deliver to Lagos or anywhere else on the Algarve for that matter. (<http://www.nauticayamar.com/>)



Fitting out in Lagos April 2014.

The plan for this year was to leave Lagos in May and cruise up to Sant Carles by mid July. We would re-trace our steps to Cadiz and then onward to Gibraltar. After a stay in Gib, cruise along the Costas with a stop in Cartegena and then finish up at Sant Carles Marina. Return home for July / August then relaunch and carry on to Barcelona with Port Ginesta or Baddalona as potential places to winter. As it turned out we decided to stay in Sant Carles where we now have an annual contract.

In total it is 850nm from Lagos to Sant Carles so not an insignificant trip. We were aware that the Portuguese and Spanish Atlantic coasts are relatively inexpensive at that time of year but had heard that Med Spain was horrendously expensive and availability a problem. Our experience was completely different and we found that we could cruise when and where we wanted and availability was not an issue, quite the opposite in many cases. Costs were no more expensive than cruising the English Channel and often much less. We were of course in "shoulder season" and I suspect costs are higher in the more popular locations during July and August.

We have visited many places in Spain and much prefer a more Spanish influence.



Aquillas town square, a delightful Spanish holiday resort.

With careful planning and selection of ports visited we were spared the places that have become over run with the north European hoards, it wasn't difficult. You will see from the notes that the majority of places visited were Spanish resorts where the locals go on holiday. This was a real surprise to us, as was the coastline, which is spectacular in places. Even the Costa del Sol, to the west of Malaga is dramatic with high mountains in the background, from 2nm offshore, of course.

It was a great achievement for us to transit the Straits of Gibraltar and we enjoyed our stay in the area around Gib. I guess Gibraltar is an acquired "taste", some parts we loved, others we hated. The history is undeniable however and it takes a good few days to take in what is on offer.

The longer we are in Spain the more impressed we are with the Spanish. They have used their coastal resources wisely. Clearly the year round temperatures

mean that tourism is a main stay of the economy but they have been thoughtful in how they have allocated these resources. Everyone knows the wall to wall developments to the west of Malaga but to the east the coast is steep too, dramatic and unspoiled with beautiful villas "perched" high up. A little further on in Almeria they have sacrificed large areas of hinterland to plastic greenhouses. This appears to me to have devastated the landscape but it serves a purpose and another major source of income. Just beyond at Cabo de Gata there are 30nm of coastal National Park, pretty much deserted, save the odd concrete works and a power station. Between here and Cabo de Palos more unspoiled coastline with lots of really nice Spanish ports, Garrucha and Aquilas to mention two. Then Cartegena which is a tremendous location and not to be missed, crammed with history.

After Cabo de Palos I'm not sure what happened and who would dare lay claim to the "strip" at Mar Menor, is a mystery. Up to Alicante is fine but our favorite stretch of coast was north of here around to Denia which has been developed sympathetically and is spectacular, particularly around Calpe. This includes Benidorm, which they have carefully confined to one large bay. When sailing past seems to compliment the area. Denia is a great location and probably the place we enjoyed most and then who could not be tempted by a few nights in Valencia at 20E /night including water and electricity just to the north. Beyond here and up to Sant Carles was totally unfamiliar to us but we found an interesting coast to cruise. Sailing past Peniscola and its fortified walls was a delight and the Ebro Delta with Monstia mountains behind a fitting conclusion to our cruise.

We enjoyed our trip thoroughly and it far exceeded our expectations. I do hope that what follows proves helpful.

Lagos, Portugal to Cadiz, Spain.

This area includes the whole of the Portuguese and Spanish Algarve coasts which we believe covers some lovely cruising with secure anchorages and beautiful beaches in the west. There is much interesting history and cities to explore Faro, Cadiz, Jerez and Saville which you can visit by boat if you wish.

We cruised this area last year and our experiences are recorded below.

<http://www.cruising.org.uk/node/23150>

Much of the detail has remained unchanged but I have updated costs for 2014 and some marina notes for the places we visited en-route during May 2014.

Portugal

Vilamoura (Pontoon) - 15.60E / night inc water and electricity - free marina
WI FI .

Spain - Region Andalucia.

Ayamonte (Pontoon) - 16.66E / night inc water and electricity - No marina
WI FI . Cafe nearby.

Mazagon (Pontoon) - 16.66E / night inc water and electricity - No marina
WI FI . Cafe nearby.

Cadiz - Puerto America (Pontoon) - 16.66E / night inc water and electricity -
No marina WI FI . Cafe nearby.



Cadiz - A fascinating city with Moorish influence.

Atlantic Spain - Cadiz to Barbate

Leaving Cadiz and heading towards Gibraltar requires studying tides again. We took a fair tide out from Cadiz which carried us past Cape Trafalgar. Distance wise it is entirely feasible to carry on directly to Gibraltar in one leg but we decided to visit Barbate.

The trip down was fairly uneventful but we did notice a trail of fishing floats stretching half a mile or so in length. These floats were plastic water bottles and at regular intervals of 30m or so and hard to see. I can only assume that it was an illegal set. As they were running parallel down the coast it caused us no problem but a good watch is required.

We rounded Cape Trafalgar and made our salute to Nelson and the English Navy. I was reminded of a book I had read "The man who shot the man who shot Nelson" the tale of a man from Cawsand, near Plymouth who served as a sniper during the Battle of Trafalgar and is reported to have shot his French counterpart following Nelsons fatal shooting.

On then to Barbate a short sail from the Cape.

Barbate (Pontoon)

<http://www.eppa.es/en/marina-barbate>

Barbate - 16.66E / night inc water and electricity - No marina WIFI .

The approach to Barbate is complicated by an enormous tunny net that extends from close to the harbour entrance for over a mile out to sea. It is very obvious indeed so hard to miss and there is much room between its inner end and the harbour entrance.

Barbate harbour is large and the marina located in an inner basin. No pictures I'm afraid but the arrivals pontoon is obvious to port on entry close by the marina office. If you require diesel this is located opposite with a good pontoon. It is a very long way to walk from the visitors area.

The marina team are very helpful and speak a little English, a berth will be allocated in one of the two docks. If you are going to stay a while ask for a

berth in the basin over to starboard as it is much nearer town. A good safe marina but little around, in fact nothing, so a walk into town is required.

No WI FI so 3G needed for planning the next leg through the Straits.

Straits of Gibraltar

Without doubt the best reference for planning a passage through the Straits is "The Straits Handbook". Don't worry if you can't get an up to date version, a friend purchased one from 2006 which contains the same detail and tidal flow charts. The "tactics" here are based on advice from the handbook and in our experience work well.

First thing to remember is that you are now transiting an area with strong tidal conditions not unlike cruising back home in the channel, this becomes apparent as you approach Cape Trafalgar. As such wind over tide conditions prevail and there are over falls. For entering the Med ideally you need a westerly wind. It is possible to use Wind Guru to select strategic points along the coast through the Straits to give an indication of wind and swell. To be honest there is little point as it is simple really. I quote.....
"what ever the wind speed at Tarifa expect it to be double by the time you reach Gibraltar" and this is exactly what happened.

The tide at Cape Trafalgar / Barbate becomes slack and then turns SW at HW Gibraltar -3 but close inshore it will turn earlier HW -5 (neaps) HW -4 (Springs). This makes Barbate an ideal departure point and provides a tidal window of 6-9 hours fair tide This can be clearly seen in the tidal flow charts contained within the handbook.

On the day we chose in May, LW Gibraltar was 0815, it was a medium sized tide between springs and neaps. The forecast was westerly 3 to 4 with low swell. Perfect you might say and not by chance, we had been watching this window for some time. Ideal departure time around 10.00 or slightly earlier.

From what happened next I do hope others will learn from our experience. Personally I don't like a 1000 departure its too late. We were up early and wanted to get going. Close by some friends from Lagos were leaving on the same passage. What to do, we were a bit early, c'mon lets go its 20nm down to

Tarifa. We left at 0800 which is an hour and a half early, not too bad you would think.

I had read the pilot the following evening which talks about several "tunny nets" extending from the coast enroute towards Tarifa and this had me thinking about staying close inshore. We passed inside the large tunny net off Barbate with plenty of room and then I noticed that our friends were heading offshore. I had studied the tactics and knew full well that the tide would turn inshore sooner, much better as we were leaving early, so what did I do, followed them offshore. I think it was probably the inshore tunny nets that had me do this but it turned out to be a mistake.

The Straits Handbook is really very informative and it talks about a number of areas of over falls that can become dangerous in strong winds and big swell. One of these is Los Cabezos reef 3 or 4nm west of Tarifa. Here the depth shoals from 200m to 300m at the northerly edge of the main Straits channel rising to 10m LAT in just over 2nm. It is a very steep sided under water mountain sat just off the main tidal stream through the Straits.

Our progress was relatively slow on the trip down from Barbate enabling us to make up some time on our early departure and we were making around 5 knots into the tide. Sea was flat and apparent wind light being behind us, a lovely day and we admired Morocco to the south. At about 1100 we had reached a point about 1nm west of Los Cabezos. I was cutting the corner as our course took us close to the southern side of the reef but not too far out into the shipping lanes, which were getting closer. The wind began to increase to 18 to 20 knots and our speed started to slow. Over falls began to appear in front and inshore of us so I headed further offshore. Too late we were now down tide of the reef with a rising wind and a 2/3 knot adverse tide, right in the over falls. The over falls increased to 2 to 3m standing waves and we had no option but to press on through the worst. We were now doing 3 knots and making headway but behind the standing waves were well above deck level and as high as our solar panel which sits on top of our davits a meter above the deck. As the waves were standing and we were moving forward they did not breach the boat as a similar sized breaking wave would had done in conventional swell. After 30 minutes of anxious moments we pulled away from the reef as the tide subsided.

At the height of this experience we were joined by a “fast sports fishing” boat who clearly intended to be on the reef after game fish, given the ideal conditions for him. I could tell by the look on the skippers face that he was thinking “what on earth are they doing here !”

Throughout our ordeal I could see half a dozen yachts sailing down the coast inshore about an hour or so behind us. They were not at all pressed and came inside these over falls with no difficulty at all, exactly as described in the handbook. Hindsight is a wonderful thing.



Approaching Gibraltar, mid Straits. Europa Point in the distance.

On then for Tarifa and the wind began to ease a little. It really was a lovely day and we soon regained our composure. Approaching Tarifa the sea was flat and I spotted a fast moving object approaching on the AIS at over 20 knots. This turned out to be the fast ferry (think Condor in the Channel Islands) heading for his turning mark off Tarifa. This turning mark was of course on our rhumb line but there was little avoiding action that could be taken given his distance off. The AIS told us he would pass close too, so we carried on. A few minutes later we could now see the ferry approaching from the south when another similar decides to clear the dock from inside the harbour. The

outbound ferry passes to the west of the turning mark and the inbound to the east of the mark. For a few short moments this left us sandwiched between the two. The AIS was "flashing red" on both ferry's and indicated that we would be close but that was all. As they both approached and "eyeball" navigation took over, they cleared us easily.

We were now to the east of Tarifa with about 14knots of westerly wind blowing directly through the Straits. It is 11nm from Tarifa to the Bay of Gibraltar. Again the sea was flat and a lovely day, we relaxed and took pictures as we made our way down the Straits. About half way through the wind began to pick up a little so I reefed the main. Good job as in the last 2nm to go the wind went to 30 knots plus and we screamed into the Bay. Another excellent prediction from the Handbook.

We "hung on" into the Bay and hardened up to get some shelter from the high ground on the Algeceiras side of the Bay. After a mile or so heading up a "switch was thrown" and the wind disappeared. Just to the east and across the Bay you could see a distinct line between no wind and 30 knots stretching out into the Bay of Gibraltar. amazing. We plotted a course around this and headed for La Linea.

Gibraltar.

Once into the Bay of Gibraltar it soon becomes apparent that this is a very, very busy port with ships at anchor and maneuvering at all times, think 50 or more. As you make your way over to the eastern side of the harbour towards Marina Bay and La Linea you will pass very close to some big ships bunkering in the Bay. The ones moving slowly are difficult to pick out so AIS is a real advantage.

There are a number of locations to choose from here and I have covered the two we considered which I believe are the most popular. Marina Bay, Gibraltar and Marina Alcedeisa, La Linea.



Essentially the main facilities in the area around Gibraltar. Marina Bay, Gibraltar (foreground) and Marina Alcaidesa, La Linea (central).

Marina Alcaidesa, La Linea.(Pontoon)

<http://www.alcaidesamarina.com/>

The approach to the marina is straightforward, as can be seen from the above. On the approach and once around the outer breakwater you will see the marina office with the diesel quay directly in front of you. This can be exposed and has some very large rubber bumpers that would require very large fenders to keep a boat off. Advice would be to progress past here and come alongside as in the picture below. You can see a yacht moored here (in the background) and this offers a much better approach. There are great views from the marina, especially at night.

Cost (June 2014) - Marina - La Linea, Marina, Alcaidesa - 136E / week inc metered water and electricity and 5% CA discount applied to first 5 days. Generous discounts by negotiation for long or short term stays.

WIFI available at marina office but this is expensive. It is available in the

marina cafe which can just be seen in the picture with red chairs. Diesel at the arrivals quay.

Anchorage - It used to be possible to anchor between Alcaidesa marina and the airport runway but we saw several boats moved on from here during our stay. We did see boats at anchor and not disturbed off the beach to port in the approach to the marina, see picture above.

We enjoyed Marina Alcaidesa which is a large modern marina. Being Spain prices are much cheaper than in Gibraltar. La Linea is very Spanish and all facilities can be found in the town including supermarkets. There is a large Carrefour supermarket within reach but this is a good walk (ask at marina for directions). Access to Gibraltar is easy from here being only a short walk to the border. The crossing was extremely simple and there are many buses and tour guides waiting just inside the crossing. We did have to wait on one occasion when the Spanish customs decided to exert their authority. This created enormous queues and we did have a 30 minute delay as they chose the busiest time of day, 17.00 when everyone was leaving work.



Marina Alcaidesa arrivals pontoon. Arrive where yacht (in the background) is moored, in front of office not at diesel pontoon which you will see first.

Marina Bay, Ocean Village, Gibraltar.(Med style).

<http://www.marinabay.gi/>

During our stay in Gibraltar we decided to stay in Marina Alceidesa but we did visit Marina Bay on a number of occasions and despite its reputation for being difficult to acquire a berth we found them very accommodating. E-mailing a few days ahead (May) they were flexible in our arrival date and prices were comparable to Marina Alceidesa.

The entrance is straightforward enough being to the south of the airport runway. On entry the marina is to port and the fuel dock to starboard. Calling ahead to announce your arrival would seem sensible as the marina looked crowded and complicated when maneuvering. Berths are stern or bows too a jetty that is high for most boats. A friend who regularly visits tells me he moors bows too with his boarding ladder attached to the top of his pulpit.

The Marina Bay complex is a social area in Gibraltar with many bars and restaurants, think Port Solent.



Marina Bay and Ocean Village Gibraltar, you are inside the marina at this point

On entering marina Bay you will see the diesel berth to starboard. This is large and contains 3 stations in all. I visited by foot to ascertain prices beforehand which was competitive depending on the amount you were to take on board. As can be seen access is easy and well fendered. Prices are very reasonable but check opening times.

Gibraltar - Diesel in Marina Bay - 67p/litre. No filling cans on deck, tank only.



The fuel quay opposite Marina Bay. There are 3 diesel stations here. Visit before hand to find the best price.

There are many, many things to do in Gibraltar and some lovely walks. We took the bus from the border crossing to the Mediterranean Steps out by Europa Point. This commences at the Pillars of Hercules monument and traverses the cliff face from the Gibraltar side around to the Mediterranean side. The views are spectacular across the Straits to Morocco and is from where the next photo is taken. Caution.. this walk or rather scramble is serious stuff so take care. On reaching the summit we then walked across the top of Gibraltar and returned via the Moorish Castle back in to town.

Into the Mediterranean.

Well after 3 years of cruising the western seaboard of France, Spain and Portugal we finally rounded Europa Point and entered the Mediterranean Sea. We arrived at the point just after slack water with the tide just “making” around the point and into the Med. It felt fantastic to have finally arrived and our arrival “moment” is captured in the opening picture.



Europa Point with Morocco beyond. The gateway to the Mediterranean Sea passing between the Pillars of Hercules.

Spain - Region Andalucia.

Estepona.(Med style)

The approach is straightforward and a short distance from Gibraltar. On entering the marina the arrivals pontoon is to port and very obvious as can be seen in the picture. We were met on arrival and driven the short distance to the marina office. Failing this exit the marina through the secure gate and turn right, follow the marina for 150m or so and the office is in the blue and white tower.

Med style mooring to a wall, running lines and mariner will help. The wall was high so we chose bow first.

<http://www.marinasmediterraneo.com/>

Cost (June 2014) - Marina - 30.55E / night inc water and electricity.
Excellent shower facilities.

WI FI (free) available at marina office or many bars around the marina. Diesel from filling station on pontoon ask at marina office. Small supermarket on the marina, larger further back, up the hill and across the main road, look to your left.



Estepona arrivals quay. The fishing boat is in the entrance to the marina.

Estepona is part of the "Marina Mediterraneo group which includes Puerto Duquesa and Marina del Este, they will book a berth for you in advance if you ask in the office.

We enjoyed Estepona, our first Med harbour. The area around the marina was a little touristy but with some Spanish restaurants. There is a very good

chandlers in the north west corner of the marina beyond the office.

Marina Bajadilla, Marbella.(Med style).

<http://www.eppa.es/en/marina-la-bajadilla>

Marina Bajadilla, Marbella (M) - 14.28E / night inc water and electricity - No marina WI FI. Cafe nearby.

We arrived in Marina Bajadilla ahead of a rising easterly wind. Do not confuse this marina with Marina Marbella which is only a mile or so to the east, they are very different places indeed. Care is needed in the approach as there is a submerged breakwater extending from the beach. You can just see the white water in the approach at the center of the harbour entrance. As the wind increased after our arrival the waves on this obstacle continued to rise and entry in very strong easterly winds and swell would surely be problematic.

The arrivals quay is as pictured and the visitors berth is where the blue boat is moored stern too just beyond. As you can imagine in strong easterlies this would become very uncomfortable. There were many spare berths inside the marina and they were happy to give us a better protected berth when I enquired.

Marina Bajadilla is a relatively new addition to the EPPA marinas and is part of the fishing harbour in these parts. It carries the same costs as other EPPA marinas and as can be seen very reasonable for the location, a 10 minute walk to downtown Marbella. I do feel that we were charged at the April rate however.



Entrance to Marina Bajadilla. Exposed to the east and breaking waves can be seen just beyond the entrance. There is room but would be difficult in strong winds and swell.

All infrastructure was new and Spanish widely spoken. Close by was a beach and some reasonably priced restaurants. If you are looking for value and the real Spain, rather than the "glitz" in other areas on this stretch of coast, then this is the place to break your trip along the Costa del Sol.

Caleta de Velez.(Med style)

<http://www.eppa.es/en/marina-caleta-de-velez>

Caleta de Velez (M) -31.55E / night inc water and electricity - No marina WIFI. Cafe nearby.

The approach to Caleta is straightforward and the arrivals pontoon is the short jetty pictured. Caleta is very Spanish and the mariners speak little English, things are better in the office. Located to the east of Malaga you have now passed through the high rise of the Costa del Sol that runs west from Malaga towards Gibraltar. It is a "sleepy" sort of a place and people are

very friendly. Prices are reasonable and we ate fresh fish at a beach bar 150m up the coast from the marina. There are supermarkets and all facilities in town. We particularly enjoyed the "jaz music" at the bar opposite the marina on Sunday afternoon. Very Spanish with some tourists from Nerja just up the coast.



Caleta de Velez harbour entrance with marina arrivals quay in foreground, the nearest shorter quay in the picture.

We enjoyed Caleta and would definitely visit again.

Marina del Este. (Med style)

Marina del Este is set in one of the most picturesque stretches of coast in this part of Spain. High cliffs cascade straight into the sea and villas perch high up with amazing views. The water is crystal clear.

The entrance to the marina is spectacular being surrounded by high cliffs, as can be seen in the picture. The arrivals pontoon is to starboard on entering the marina.

<http://www.marinasmediterraneo.com/en/marinas/port-of-marina-del-este.html>

Marina del Este (M) - 45.52E / night (June) exc water and electricity, there was no charge as so little used - free marina WIFI.



Marina del Este a spectacular location set in a dramatic coastline.

Marina del Este is a lovely spot but sadly like many similar locations in Spain is suffering from decline. Many of the buildings are unoccupied and the place does not seem to have many permanent residents. We visited in June but even at this time of year many apartments were unoccupied. This leaves the place a little "soul less". On a positive note there are a number of restaurants on the quay side and several shops. We could find no where to purchase basic foodstuffs on site so this would require a trip in to Alumencar. I did notice a bus stop in the entrance to the marina complex.

Anchorage are shown in the pilot just beyond the marina entrance and also off the pebble beach in the approach. During our stay there were boats anchored in both but swell made things uncomfortable.

Sailing up from Marina del Este we encountered an enormous pod of dolphins, 200 or more all heading south. We are used to these lovely creatures coming to play but these were intent on heading south, presumably feeding.

Once the high cliffs around Marina del Este fade into the distance they are replaced by a flat, arid landscape. This area is one of the "market gardens" of Europe having exactly the climatic requirements. Mile after mile of plastic greenhouses stretch inland for what must be 10 miles. These are not small structures as we discovered on a bus trip inland but very large 8ft high greenhouses.

Almerimar.(Med Style)

<http://www.almerimar-resort.com/en/puerto-deportivo>

Almerimar - 21.60E / night inc water and electricity - Expensive pay marina WIFI. Cafe nearby.

The approach to Almerimar is straight forward but the entrance is shallow and is clearly dredged on a regular basis. There is a dredger permanently located just inside the marina. You can easily see the leading marks (red) in the picture. The arrivals quay is to port on entering and to the right of the tower in the picture. To the left of the tower is the diesel quay. The mariner's are attentive here and will surely be around on arrival. If not, English is spoken in the office. On arrival visit the office in the tower but be prepared for a wait as progress is slow. It did amaze me that with 4 boats waiting to check in, there was one person undertaking the task, another sat alongside doing office admin, 4 ladies in the office next door and a manager "doing what they do best".

Once a berth is allocated you will be directed to a berth, make sure you have everything as it is a very long way back to the office. The mariner will be sure you know where you are going then head off on his motorbike to your berth. Visitors are directed to one of 3 darsenas, berthing areas surrounded by apartment blocks and shops. These are very sheltered being well inside the marina but the berthing quays are directly onto the main road that serves the complex. We did not like this so a better option would be to seek a berth on

one of the two quays that form part of the marina away from the darsenas. These at least are not on the road and were gated.



The entrance to Almerimar appears wide but note the red leading marks into the marina. Arrive outside office on facing quay in picture.

I had heard much about Almerimar and had long wanted to visit. I can only report that I was disappointed. The marina is not at all attractive and most of the apartments remain unoccupied. We did not like the berth for reasons outlined and the facilities were well used, poor.

The prices here are very competitive indeed however and there are some extremely good deals to be had for over wintering, where I understand there is a healthy live aboard community.

There is an excellent Mercadona on site and the bus will take you to a large commercial center not far inland. I'm sure that every service could be found within the marina complex and there is an excellent chandlers.

The boat yard looked safe and in the main boats were "chocked off" on unmade ground. I can remember reading some where about water standing. Security was OK but I walked into the yard to look around. loos etc close by. There were boats ashore here long term. Importantly this is one of few

marinas in Med Spain where you are able to live and work on your own boat out of the water.

The climate here is warm in the winter and an attraction for many but the hinterland has been destroyed for miles around with the greenhouses (demand of our own making). Having said that you don't see this from the marina. Some people love the place and I can see the attraction but we decided that we would not want to over winter here.

[Aquadulce.\(Med style\)](http://www.puertodeportivoaguadulce.es/)

<http://www.puertodeportivoaguadulce.es/>

Aquadulce (M) - 28.25E / night (June) inc water and electricity - free marina WIFI.

Approach to Aquadulce is straightforward and the arrivals quay can be seen in front of the tower pictured. English is spoken and they are very friendly here. We were berthed from where the picture is taken and this is to be desired as to the right of the tower is the alternative visitors area which is surrounded by discos.

The marina is set in a spectacular location being surrounded by high cliffs. It is a Spanish holiday resort and very pleasant. The town is a short walk away up the hill where you will find supermarkets but best ask at the marina office for directions.

We have friends overwintering here and they are very pleased with their choice.



Aquadulce another rather exposed entrance. Arrivals quay immediately to port on entry, shown here in front of marina office / tower.

I found the boatyard here to be very clean and tidy with some big boats ashore. All boats were in cradles on a made up surface. Security looked good and it was not possible for me to enter the yard without appropriate key/clearance. Loos etc close by. I did not see much in the way of support infrastructure, chandlers etc but Almerimar is only a short distance away. There are boats ashore here long term. Importantly this is one of few boat yards in Med Spain where you are able to live and work on your own boat whilst out of the water.

Passage around Cabo de Gata.

When cruising along the coast the next leg is a long one from Almerimar up to Garrucha some 75nm with little or no shelter between. Cabo de Gata has a reputation for strong winds and it is easy to see why. In summer it is very very hot and the coast dry, arid rock, a recipe for strong afternoon, catabatic winds. The coast has some formidable headlands but little tide. Yachts based in this area regularly cruise the peninsula which is remote and not densely populated. In complete contrast to the area around Almerimar it is wilderness

for 25nm north of Cabo de Gata.

We chose to make the passage in one leg arriving off the cape early in the morning with a departure from Aquadulce which reduced the overall distance a little. Our arrival at Cabo de Gata was in a flat calm and another enormous school of dolphins. There are many charted tunny nets in these parts but these are predominantly in shore so not a problem. We passed the anchorage at San Jose which looked fine but I understand becomes a problem with swell and little availability in the small marina.

From a calm at Cabo de Gata the wind increased steadily throughout the day from the south until by the time we reached Garrucha it was a good 30 knots. I was left with the feeling that this was typical and heading south would require greater planning and earlier departure times. This southerly wind blows straight into Garrucha harbour.

Garrucha (Med style)

Garrucha is the last of EPPA marinas which started back with the border of Portugal on the Guadiana River.

<http://www.puertosdeandalucia.es/en/marina-garrucha>

Garrucha - 30.70E / night inc water and electricity - No marina WIFI. Cafe nearby. (This was the older marina, new marina close by a better bet).

The approach to Garrucha is straightforward but is exposed to the south. The port exports "rubble", so it seems and it is likely that the first thing you will see is a large ship moored in the entrance. In the picture you can see where the ship would be moored. The entrance is wide however and not a problem. On arrival it is confusing as there are actually 2 marinas here. The arrivals quay for the first is as pictured with the quay and diesel area to the right of the picture. Generally speaking this is what you are looking for when entering a Spanish harbour. With 30 knots behind us and minimal shelter on this quay we had little option but to go in. A marinero arrived but no English spoken so I closed on the quay. Immediately it becomes obvious that this quay is not straightforward and large black tractor tyres make up fenders to compensate. "Crunch" in we went and picked up some nasty black marks. We were then

moved to a stern first berth that looked impossible in the wind. Eventually we made it with help from the marina team. The motion however was so bad that we retired ashore for a "crackin" meal on the quay. An hour later the wind had gone and it was a different place.



Garrucha harbour entrance. Old marina arrival pontoon / diesel quay to right of picture (caution) see notes. New marina entrance to left of picture, leave wavebreak to starboard and quay in foreground to port.

On reflection, the preferred option would have been the second marina pictured below which is new and alongside berths. It would have been much easier in the wind. Caution however as the wave break in the entrance, pictured to the left above is low and not easy to see, particularly in the dark.



New marina looking out through harbour entrance. Old marina to right of picture.

Garrucha is a Spanish holiday resort and appeared a nice place to spend a few days. It is a large town and I suspect that there would be supermarkets etc not too far away. Unfortunately I cannot confirm this.

Spain - Region - Murcia.

Aquillas

Our next stop was Aquillas. The RCC pilot edition 6, describes only one marina here, the Club Nautico. There is in fact a new marina 2 miles to the south at the other end of Aquillas, Marina Juan Montiel. I'm pleased to say that the 7th edition now includes this new marina. Such is the rate of change in Spain over the last few years.

Aquillas - Marina Juan Montiel.

<http://www.puertodeportivojuanmontiel.es/inicio/>

We did not visit on this occasion but it maybe a better choice as space was limited in the Club Nautico.

Aquilas - Club Nautico. (Med style)

We felt fortunate to get a berth at the CN as it is charming.

<http://www.cnaguilas.com/puerto.html>

Aquilas, Club Nautico - 28.25E / night inc water and electricity - No marina WI FI but cafes close by.

The Club Nautico is situated inside the larger harbour at Aquilas. The north end of the harbour is protected by the rocky headland pictured. Between this headland and the Club Nautico was one of the better anchorages we found, protected from the north.



Entrance to CN Aquilas. Narrow but well marked. The anchorage beyond.

The entrance to the Club Nautico is narrow with leading marks, as can be seen in the picture. The diesel quay is immediately to starboard in the entrance and

this would be a good place to land to inquire if a berth is available. Little English was spoken so calling ahead would be problematic. We carried on beyond this point and were just reversing out when a marinero called us into a free berth.



Inside CN Aquilas marina. There is no arrivals area. If there is room the marinero will direct you. Onaway can just be seen to left of picture.

As can be seen the Club Nautico is not large and the only option is a spare berth to the left of this picture. The marineros and locals here were amongst the friendliest we found. We loved Aquilas, which is a holiday resort and very Spanish. Good shopping can be had in the town center and the square is a real gem. A larger supermarket can be found at the north end of town a medium distance walk from the Club Nautico

Cartegena

The approach to Cartegena is interesting and once past the outer industrialization becomes a natural harbour. It is easy to see why it was coveted by so many nations over the centuries. There are in fact 2 marinas here. To port the Real Club de Regates, to starboard Yacht Port Cartegena.

Real Club de Regates.

Closer to town and potentially more disturbance at night. Many people seemed happy to moor alongside the harbour wall which becomes busy in the evening.

<http://www.clubregatascartagena.es/>

Yacht Port Cartegena (Pontoon berths)

We chose to visit here and found the berth to be safe and secure whilst within easy walking distance of the town.

<http://www.yachtportcartagena.com/en/>

Cartegena - 45.70E / night inc water and electricity and 5% CA discount - No marina WIFI but convenient on site PC. Generous deals to be had for long term winter berthing.



Entrance to Cartegena harbour. Real Club de Regates marina in foreground. Yacht Port Cartegena to left out of picture.

The entrance to Yacht Port Cartagena is not at all straight forward but English is spoken by the office and the marineros, so calling on the VHF would be the best plan on your approach. Unfortunately our call was not responded too and later the marinero apologised for this. The marina is split into two basins and the entrance is at the outer wall pictured here. The best of these basins is pictured below and is to port on entering. The other basin is to the left of the picture beyond the harbour wall shown. The first is best as it gets shelter from the outer breakwater and I saw much movement in the other basin from passing traffic. Cartagena is a busy working port.

If you get no response on the VHF head for the basin pictured. Once passed the outer breakwater head straight towards where I am standing where you will find a long pontoon.



Entrance to YP Cartagena is not at all obvious. Call on arrival. If no reply enter basin to port shown here and proceed to pontoon from where picture is taken.

When visiting Cartagena try and set aside a few days for sightseeing. The city is superb and every facility can be found, the shopping is excellent. Historically

the city is ancient and there are monuments and museums everywhere.

<http://www.eurotourguide.com/en/costa-calida/travel-guide/day-out-cartagena-city>

Amongst our favorites are the Naval Museum (free to enter, leave a donation) and ARQUA - National Museum of Underwater Archaeology (provides an interesting understanding of the history of the Mediterranean), located very close to YPC and only a few euros to enter. The Roman Theatre Museum is particularly impressive and if you don't pay to enter, wander around the back from where this picture was taken.



Cartegna is full of historical interest and a must visit on this coast.

Cabo de Palos.

The passage north from Cartagena is another interesting one with high sea cliffs and spectacular scenery. Watch out for the "quirky" winds when leaving Cartagena which are gusty and can catch the unwary. Eventually Cabo de Palos and its off lying islands appear and you can pass inshore for a delightful passage. Behind the cape is another good anchorage sheltered from the south.

Spain - Region - Valencia.

Santa Pola.(Pontoon style)

<http://www.marinamiramar.com/en/>

Santa Pola - 35.50E / night exc water and electricity. We were charged 2E on top for services - free marina WIFI. (I have subsequently checked my receipt, paid before the 2E and it includes a charge for services. Check on arrival.) Cheap diesel from car filling station part of the marina complex.

The entrance to Santa Pola is straightforward and the arrivals quay is to port on entering, as pictured. Once checked in the mariners were efficient in directing us to a berth. This is a good safe marina and one that I would consider as a winter berth being within easy traveling distance to Alicante. Security was good and the marina staff very helpful. The town itself is another Spanish holiday resort with a pleasant sandy beach and all facilities in town.



Entrance to Santa Pola, straightforward. Picture taken from arrivals quay.

Vilajoyosa - Club Nautico. (Med style)

<http://www.cnlavila.org/>

Vilajoyosa - 35.50E / night inc water and electricity - free marina WI FI .

The approach to the harbour is straight forward but getting access to the marina less so. Little or no English is spoken and there is no arrivals quay or anything resembling one to attach too. Best bet is to persist calling the office and eventually a mariner will appear on the quay and direct you to a berth on the first quay to port. The office is the white building at the head of this quay. If you land on the opposite side to here you are in the fishing harbour where no berths are available.

It is not the most protected marina and does suffer from swell but once in everything was fine and the office staff helpful and friendly. A delightful spot and another favorite. Nicely manicured Club Nautico and you could use the club. Good facilities and restaurants on site.



Entrance to Vilajoyosa. There is no arrivals quay. Call on VHF for a berth and they will send a mariner. Not much English spoken.

Vilajoyosa is a Spanish holiday resort and a gem given the proximity of Benidorm just up the coast. Every facility in the town, a walk up the hill outside the marina and access to Alicante is regular via the modern narrow gauge railway that connects the whole of this coast from Alicante to Denia.

Penon de I fac - Calpe to Cabo de la Nao.

The stretch of coast from Vilajoyosa to Denia is almost certainly the most scenic so far. High sea cliffs, mountains in land and not over populated like some of the costas. This stretch also includes Benidorm, which again has been managed well and how they crammed so many hotels into one bay is a mystery to me. To seaward and sailing past Benidorm the whole resembled Hong Kong with its high rise. Penon de I fac at Calpe at 328m towers above the sea and it is a memorable sail. Once beyond I fac the coast stretches on to Cabo de la Nao where the sea cliffs are vertical and as high above as they are deep below. Few obstacles off Cabo de la Nao as it is so deep however there is a busy TSS some 9 miles offshore.

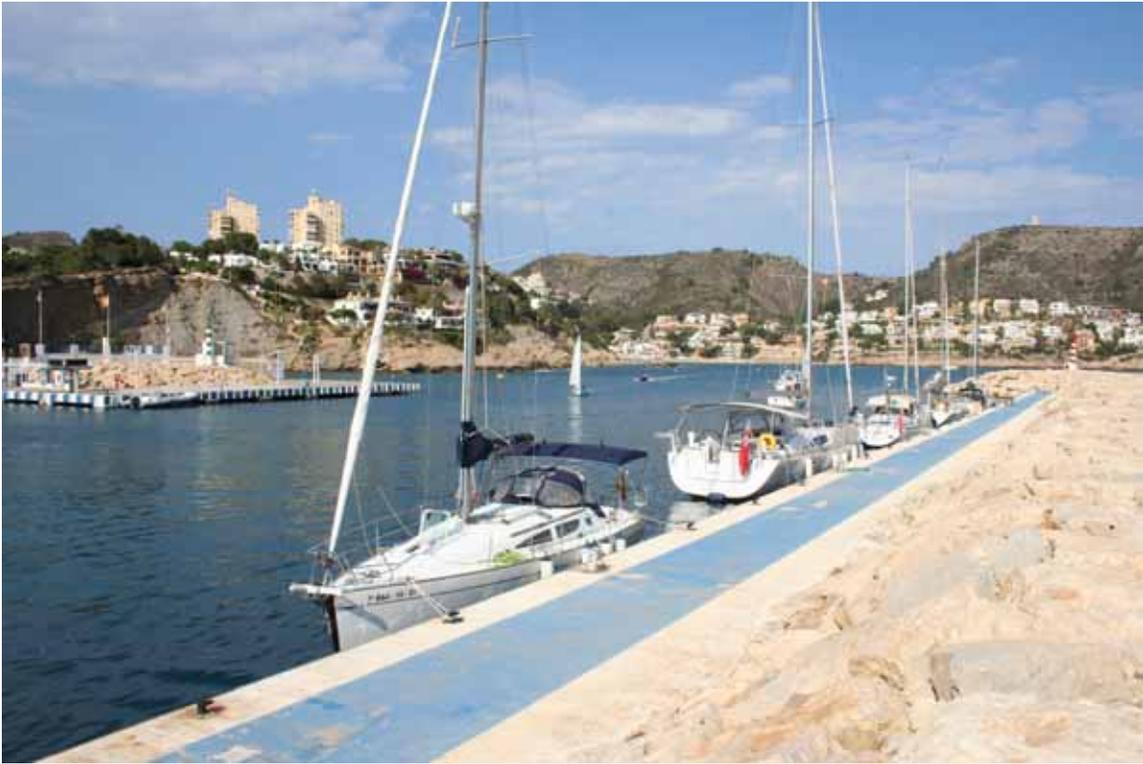
Moraira - Club Nautico. (alongside berthing).

<http://www.cnmoraira.com/>

Moraira - 52.30E / night inc water and electricity - free marina WI FI available in Club Nautico.

The approach to Moraira is straight forward and there is an anchorage in the bay beyond. Sheltered from the north but prone to swell. The arrivals quay and diesel quay are to starboard on entering the marina where you will be met by a mariner and then directed to a berth on the harbour wall opposite as in the picture. This was fine during our stay in June but I understand that in high season you would almost certainly raft up. This makes the 52E / night (most expensive since leaving Lagos) high.

Once moored up you must visit the harbour office to check in, which may take a little time. The marina is part of the Club Nautico and you are able to use the facilities which include free WI FI at the club and although it is a little walk, the showers are much better than on the visitors side of the marina.



Moraira arrivals quay to left of picture, or to starboard on entry. Visitors berths in foreground alongside. I understand that you will raft here in high season.

The marina has a pleasant aspect and the place has an upmarket feel, hence the price. It is surrounded by lovely villas with little or no high rise so is really very nice. The view back south from the visitors berths is spectacular.

Moraira town is a little touristy but "swanky", I felt. There was some Spanish appeal but sadly it has lost the real Spain. Every facility available in town and plenty of choice for restaurants available.

Denia.

The first thing to note when approaching Denia is that the port is busy and has large ferries coming and going at a regular basis. These serve the Balearic's only 50nm or so to the west. There are 3 marinas, as described below, so hundreds of yachts coming and going and not least the fishing fleet.

The approach from the south is straight forward and a striking feature is the

extent of the harbour wall to the north which no doubt provides shelter from northerly gales. The approach is spectacular with high mountains behind which during the heat of the summer seem to generate strong catabatic gusts during the afternoon, so take care. Once up to the fairway, follow the short canal into the main harbour as in the picture. As the main harbour opens up just beyond here you will find Marina de Denia, immediately to port, The Real Club Nautico to port but straight on and Marina El Portet to starboard, beyond the fish dock in a separate basin. The ferry terminal and fish dock are to starboard so it is likely that any large traffic will come out from this direction.



Entrance to Denia Harbour, watch out for large traffic. Marina de Denia, hard to port, Club Nautico to port and straight on, Marina El Portet to starboard.

Marina de Denia. (Med style)

<http://www.marinadedenia.com/indexEN.html>

Marina de Denia - 45E / night exc water and electricity, we were charged 2E for one night, nothing for 3 nights - free marina WIFI.

On entering the harbour you will see the arrivals quay immediately to port. After landing here make your way to the office to check in. This is an up market place with some very large and expensive yachts so the office are quite formal, but pleasant. Once a berth has been allocated check clearly that you know where it is located. We were berthed in the area pictured which was not straight forward to find so be sure you know where you are going. The mariners are very helpful and will take your lines on arrival. This visitors area gets very busy with the charter fleet.



Marina de Denia visitors area. Arrivals quay immediately to port on entering the harbour. Visit office for a berth, ask them for a plan and show you where this is, not obvious from seaward.

We preferred Marina de Denia of the locations on offer as there are a good selection of restaurants on site. It is also a little way out of town which sets it apart. Some people see this as a disadvantage but we did not. The shower facilities here are the best we have seen and for fresh croissant in the morning walk to the store just past the entrance to the marina.

The negatives here are distance from town, expensive and I suspect the outer berths would be prone to swell.

Marina El Portet. (Med style)

<http://www.elportetdedenia.es/>

El Portet - 39E / night inc water and electricity - free marina WIFI.

As can be seen El Portet is slightly cheaper than Marina de Denia and the price includes water and electricity.

On entering the harbour come to starboard and leave the ferry terminal to starboard. A little further and you will see the fish dock which is left to port. By now you will see Marina El Portet. There is no arrivals pontoon here or diesel quay in which to use temporarily. It is a little confusing and you must call the marina office where you will find English is spoken. I suggest you do this in the main harbour as you arrive as maneuvering in El Portet is a little tight particularly in the strong afternoon wind that seemed to blow each day when we were there from the south. Eventually a mariner will appear and direct you to a berth. They are very helpful and will make sure you are berthed correctly.

Location wise, El Portet is probably better placed than Marina de Denia being closer to the center and restaurants on that side of town. There are some restaurants on site as part of the ferry terminal which dominates this side of Denia harbour. The berths are fine and more sheltered than the other marinas being away from any swell. Security is good on the marina and the facilities adequate. At the time of our visit there was much building work in progress developing the area around the marina and providing a new shower block. The office team are extremely helpful.

From our perspective and why we preferred Marina de Denia was all the ongoing building works. There is a noisy (not too bad) bar/disco close by and the seasonal fairground was problematic. It was not rowdy or late closing but the generators used to run the rides and lights were very noisy and smelly, exhaust fumes, despite being some distance away.



Entrance to Marina El Portet. Leave big grey building to starboard, fishing harbour to port. No arrivals quay. Call them on VHF, English spoken.

Real Club Nautico de Denia. (Med style)

<http://www.cndenia.es/>

We did not stay here but had a good look around. The marina looked fine and it had the benefit of a short walk in to town.

We loved Denia and considered the town to be one of the nicest we found since leaving Lagos. It is residential Spanish and has a good mix of Spanish and more mainstream restaurants without losing its identity. The location is enhanced by the proximity of the mountain and the area to the south very nice indeed with luxury villas rather than high rise apartments.

Every amenity can be found in town with 2 or 3 large supermarkets, ask at the office for directions. There are 2 large chandlers Acastillage Diffusion and USHIP plus other smaller ones and pretty much all other services. I really enjoyed cycling most mornings to fetch french bread and croissants, the real thing. I guess this was due to the large number of French tourists and we are

getting up near the French border now.

The harbour itself is interesting with all sorts of vessels coming and going and plenty of yachting interest from the 3 marinas plus the town quay where some very large yachts were moored.

Strategically Denia is only 50nm from Ibiza and being part of Alicante, public transport links back to the city are very good including a modern narrow gauge railway which connects the two.

Valencia - Marina Juan Carlos. (Med style)

<http://www.marinarealjuancarlosi.com/?lang=en>

Valencia - 20.55E / night inc water and electricity - free marina WIFI. Be here in July as there are fireworks every Saturday night.

This is a relatively new marina built for the Americas Cup in 2007. It has to be said that the facilities could do with an overhaul, which I understand is planned.

The approach to the marina is straightforward once you have established where it is. The harbour of Valencia, which is vast has been extended and many of the new harbour walls are not on my 2010 Navionics chart cartridge. If approaching at night or reduced visibility take care.

On entering the arrivals pontoon is to starboard as in the picture. Once checked in a berth will be allocated and the mariners will assist you in berthing. The marina is safe and secure being away from the sea but I have heard that swell can enter the harbour but I would be surprised if it affected the berths we were allocated at the far end of the marina to starboard.



Marina Juan Carlos arrivals quay and diesel to starboard on entering. Arrive here for allocation of a berth.

Valencia is a very interesting city with much regeneration around the marina area. There is a lovely beach, promenade and restaurants fronting the sea. Most food requirements can be found within a short walk but the public transport infrastructure is excellent and it is easy to catch the bus to one of the large commercial centers close by or even into the city and onward to the airport. For information on these aspects call at the Tourist Info office just outside the marina. This is a great place to visit with much interest ashore and the price is definitively right. Make sure you are not around however when the Grand Prix is in town as prices rise dramatically.

Burriana - Marina Burrianova. (Med style)

<http://www.burriananova.com/en/Home.aspx>

Burriana - 38.34 / night inc water and electricity - free marina WI FI but we could not get it to work. No cafe with WI FI nearby.

Burrianova is a large new marina and is strategically placed whilst cruising up

the coast from Valencia towards Barcelona. It is part of a larger harbour containing a fish dock and Club Nautico marina, the latter is better placed in terms of protection.

The approach is straight forward and arrivals quay to port on entry. It is obvious and close to the marina office tower. An anchorage exists to the south of the marina, sheltered from the north but prone to swell.

I have to say that I was disappointed in Burrianova and our experience was not great. The office team were indifferent and not particularly customer focused. They seem to keep office hours 0900-1700 with a 2 hr lunch break. Outside of these times everything was left to the mariner (singular). This poor guy was stressed to say the least. Receive, allocate berths, take money and be on the marina to take lines, a shambles and not his fault. Shower facilities were closed outside of office hours and the WIFI would not work whatever.

The town close by was not very nice and we could find no supermarkets. I understand that the main town a little further in land was better. There were a couple of small cafe's on site but none had WIFI.

I felt that Marina Burrianova was struggling, half empty and I'm not at all surprised given our experience. Having said that the marina was safe enough, new pontoons and we did meet people on longer stay rates who seemed happy enough. I suspect however that this was due to cost as there are some very good longer term deals to be had here.

Club Nautico Oropesa. (Med style)

<http://www.cnoropesa.com/>

Oropesa - 34.46E / night inc water and electricity - free marina WIFI.

A delightful location and Spanish holiday resort.

The harbour is exposed from the south and I would not want to be here in strong winds and swell from that direction. The the visitors berths are a little further in from where I have taken the picture. Castellon, just to the south

would provide a safer location in these conditions.

The approach is straight forward and arrivals quay sharp to port on entering.



Club Nautico Oropesa. On arrival turn hard to port around breakwater in picture. Marina office can be seen.

There is no actual arrivals quay and the wall in front of the office says "no landing", do it anyway, there's no where else. Visit the office upstairs for allocation of a berth. They are really nice in here and its a real locals club. Not much English spoken but they understand you. Once a berth is allocated a mariner will meet you and help with mooring. There are some nice restaurants around the marina and it is a pleasant place to enjoy an evening. The Club Nautico is at the entrance to the marina but we were not given access. The area around the marina is surrounded by high ground and wooded so is very nice and there is good walking along the coast. It is a little way in to town but we enjoyed the walk. Oropesa is a busy seaside resort, popular with the Spanish. It had a great atmosphere. On the seafront is a tourist info office and they were helpful in directing us to the supermarket which is a short walk away. We liked it here and will definitely visit again in good weather.

Benecarlo.(Pontoons)

<http://www.marinabenecarlo.com/ingles>

Benecarlo - 54.39E / night inc water and electricity - free marina WI FI .

The entrance to Benecarlo is straight forward. It is a big harbour and the marina is over to port. There was no arrivals area and little English spoken in the office, by choice I'm sure. We arrived and a helpful mariner guided us into a berth then directed us to the office. ONAWAY is berthed in the centre of the picture and it is a new marina in a pleasant enough location.



Entrance to Benecarlo harbour. No arrivals area, call ahead and a mariner will meet you.

From here it went down hill. The lady in the office was positively "rude" and seemed to me to be anti-English refusing to help we with my limited Spanish, quite unlike any other marina we have visited. Then I was presented with the bill for 1 nights stay and I immediately concluded that we will not visit here again. In virtually every marina visited the 12m berth beam upper limit is 4m

or just below. Here it is 3.69m pushing our 11.6m by 3.95m berth into the 15m price range. All of the berths were the same so I feel this is unfair.

Vinaros only 2.5nm up the coast is a delightful spot and the town is a firm favorite of ours. If you visit try "Cafe Mozart" on the sea front. You can see Vinaros harbour from Benecarlo, a much better option.

The area around the marina has several restaurants and we had a good meal at very reasonable prices. This and the proximity to Peniscola are the only positives for Benecarlo, in my opinion.

If you have approached from the south you will have sailed past Peniscola and its fortified town perched on a rocky outcrop. This and the new town are a good excursion ashore.

Spain - Region - Catalonia.

Sant Carles de la Rapita.



Sant Carles de la Rapita, fish dock and Monstia mountain.

Sant Carles is located well inside the Badia dels Alfacs, a sort of large lagoon formed by the River Ebro Delta. Inside the depths shallow but there are scores of opportunities for anchoring. Located 2nm from the open sea is Puerto de los Alfacs a large harbour with both commercial traffic and a very large fishing fleet. There are two marinas here. The older Club Nautico, nearest to the town and the newer Sant Carles Marina operated by MDL.

When approaching the Badia dels Alfacs from the south you will pass the distinctive cement works at Alcanar. The leading marks for this facility are very evident but you pass straight through the red and green marks. To seaward here you will find a large fish farm but there is plenty of water between this and the mainland. Eventually you will pick up the channel markers for Puerto de los Alfacs designed for large ships so there is plenty of water immediately outside the channel. Follow this channel until the large outer breakwater appears and is left to port. From here the Club Nautico is around to port and Sant Carles marina straight on and to starboard.



View from Sant Carles marina. Background main harbour wall (cranes). Mid way entrance to marina, fish dock to port, marina wall to starboard on entry. In the foreground is the breakwater and entry to the Med style part of marina, conventional style marina and arrivals keep to starboard.

Club Nautico Sant Carles de la Rapita.

<http://clubnauticlarapita.com/>

Being based at Sant Carles Marina we have not visited here by boat but the marina seems sound with good shore side facilities and hard standing. We have used the cafe at the Club Nautico which is a pleasant place to sit. It is very Spanish however and I suspect the office would be the same, so I suggest arriving at the diesel quay to port as you are entering the marina.

Sant Carles Marina

Sant Carles Marina is large and accommodates some big boats. It is split into two halves of about equal size. To port is a Med style berthing marina and to starboard a conventional pontoon style berthing marina, beyond this is the boatyard or "varedero".



Entrance to Sant Carles Marina, adjacent to fishing harbour. Med style to port, conventional to starboard. At this point call the marina for advice. If in doubt arrive on any pontoon amongst yachts that can be seen here and walk to marina office.

<http://www.mdlmarinas.co.uk/mdl-sant-carles-marina>

Sant Carles Marina - 42.22E / night inc water and electricity - free marina WIFI.

On approaching here leave the fish dock to port and to starboard you will see the entrance to the marina. It is a little confusing when entering, as to port is the area of the marina which has med style berths and to starboard the more conventional pontoon type berths. The channel is marked by small red buoys. By now you should have contacted the marina by VHF, not a problem as excellent English is spoken and they are very helpful. They will direct you and the marinero's are very attentive. Depending on your size, a berth will be allocated in one of three areas. I've mentioned the Med style berths and the pontoon berths for larger boats (GT 12m) is straight ahead in the first part of the marina. Smaller boats will be directed beyond here where the marina basin opens up again and there are more marina berths. Watch on the pontoon for the marinero. Access to the boatyard is also in this direction which you will see over to starboard.

The attached video describes the marina far better than I

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c70X9WEVdRI>

The folk here are very friendly and we are enjoying our stay very much indeed. Should you require more local information then the Sant Carles Marina Chat website is a great place to start.

<http://www.scmchat.com/scm2/>

SCM Boatyard.

Excellent boatyard and one of few in Med Spain where you are able to live and work on your own boat. Thomasz the manager is very helpful. Very clean and tidy yard, excellent cradles on a concrete yard. then strapped down. Very secure with gated access, good loos and showers on site. No charge for electricity. Most support services close by and chandlers in town. There are boats ashore here long term. We were very happy here for 2 months in the summer.

Sant Carles de la Rapita.

The setting for Sant Carles is spectacular being fronted to seaward by the Alfacs Bay and behind the high Monstia mountain.

Sant Carles is very Spanish and there are no concessions to tourism from other nations. This is a pleasant change and you feel as though you are in the real Spain. It is located in Catyluna and has a very strong regional identity, the regional flag is everywhere. The town is delightful, very friendly and every amenity you could want including 3 large supermarkets. A car is best for longer stays as Sant Carles Marina is a good walk from town but more importantly there is so much to see and do close by. The attached describes this well.

<http://www.enlarapita.com/en/>

We particularly enjoy the mountains a little way inland where the cycling and walking are truly memorable.

Sailing perspective.

There is much opportunity for day sailing locally and the Balearics at 100nm make that a relatively easy passage. 70nm to the north is Barcelona and the same distance to the south Valencia.

Live aboard potential.

We have met people who are living aboard here so there is a community. The marina bar is very sociable and the town stays open through out the winter being residential. Personally I don't think it would be my ideal choice, particularly without a car, as it is a hike in to town to go shopping. Equally, the weather is not as good as further south on the Costa del Sol, Algarve or even Cartagena.

Finally a word of caution.

We had heard about the mosquito's and hull fouling in Sant Carles and this is

worthy of a mention. The "mozzies" are not great but we are learning to live with them like everyone else. So far it has not been too bad but you will get bitten regularly. We have not experienced the hull fouling yet but have seen some real "horror" stories, so it is definitely an issue. I have changed my antifouling to "scrubbable" and we will come out of the water in April for a wash off before we leave for the summer. My advice would be budget for this accordingly.

Travel connections to Sant Carles

Nearest airport is Reus at Tarragona which can be reached by bus or train from Sant Carles. Similarly Barcelona airport and the train ride along the coast is very scenic. Buses run from both these airports directly to Sant Carles but the nearest train station is Aldea which is a little way away and adds complexity.

Alternatively the airports at Valencia or even Girona can be used.

Being a little further north it is practical to travel by car from the UK. Bilbao and Santander are about a 6 hour drive but we have enjoyed using the channel ports and having a couple of nights stay on the trip up or down. This has the added advantage of being able to bring things out from the UK and take larger items home.

Weather & Forecasts.

Firstly I am no expert and these are my rather simplistic views.

I am a west coast sailor and I understand about depressions approaching across the Atlantic and once passed the inevitable ridge of high pressure that provides a weather window. Similarly the deeper that depression the stronger the winds and the larger the swell. The Mediterranean however is a mystery to me at present although I am beginning to develop a picture. For the whole of the passage from Gibraltar to Sant Carles the pressure was high at 1025mb and barely moved. We had winds from zero to force 7. What I have noticed is that it will invariably be windier in the afternoon and just how windy seems to depend on the heat of the day, the proximity of land and the height of the surrounding hills and mountains which force the wind in a particular

direction. This I guess is the classic sea breeze scenario but on a much greater scale.

There were some more obvious examples which I found predictable and well forecast. Along the coast of Andalusia and closer to the Straits of Gibraltar, winds were either easterly or westerly. The westerly Levante can hinder progress eastward into the Med. Winds from a westerly direction, the Vendeval or Poniente are much more helpful and I found each blew in about equal proportion. The further away from the Straits the less they had influence.

After rounding Cabo de Gata the weather seemed more influenced by the high pressure system sat in that area and winds were predominantly from the south. Cabo de Gata has a reputation for strong winds and it is easy to see why. The coast line is very hot, deserted rock, a wilderness with some big headlands.

Denia is also blessed with some strange afternoon winds, very strong and gusty. I assume the proximity of its mountain is the reason for these catabatic winds.

As you progress north the Gulf du Lion becomes an inevitable feature. Whilst we were having light winds further south it was often the case that there were 40 knots being forecast to the north of Roses. These northerly Mistral winds would reach out as far as Minorca but being further west we were spared this blast. More recently however I have noticed that in Sant Carles a prolonged northerly Mistral will spawn a similar northerly over the Ebro Delta. This is particularly bad with high pressure over Iberia and a low in the Gulf of Genoa.

I have found the "The Mediterranean Weather Handbook for Sailors" by Roberto Ritossa is a good publication and provides some enlightening explanation on the Med weather without being too technical. It is interesting that the introduction opens with "*The Mediterranean Sea in indeed a very difficult area for analysis and forecasting*" I fully support that view!

To try and make some practical sense of all this we now use web based forecasts as our primary source of weather information for passage planning. I have found that it is helpful to have a range of forecasts to assess

probability of conditions to be expected. I am no expert at interpreting these forecasts but these sites have worked for us.

Spanish weather forecasts.

El Tiempo

<http://www.eltiempo.es/baleares-costa/> - This covers the whole coast of Spain and Portugal with hourly graphics for wind and swell. Good longer term land area forecasts. Regular updates throughout the day.

AE Met

This covers the whole mainland coast of Spain and Balearics with hourly graphics for wind and swell. Regular updates though out the day. There are also text forecasts for sea area and coastal forecasts. Note that these are updated later in the day, presumably for the following morning which is of course different to our normal early morning updates. They are also broadcast in English on the VHF, check the pilot for channels and times. You will need to listen carefully as they speak really quickly. Also broadcast on Navtex.

Sea area forecast (text).

http://www.aemet.es/en/eltiempo/prediccion/maritima?opc1=1&opc2=martot&opc3=1&area=med1&zona=9204_Cabrera

Inshore waters forecast (text).

<http://www.aemet.es/en/eltiempo/prediccion/maritima?opc1=0&opc2=martot&opc3=1&area=val1>

Hourly graphics for wind & swell.

<http://www.aemet.es/en/eltiempo/prediccion/maritima?opc1=0&opc3=0&area=val1&opc2=martot>

Wind Guru - Local forecasts. <http://www.windguru.cz> Excellent detail and useful but a little too location specific.

Large area and medium range forecasts.

<http://passageweather.com/> Excellent source of information for sea and swell, regularly updated throughout the day.

ECMWF - Longer term synoptic charts.

http://www.ecmwf.int/products/forecasts/d/charts/medium/deterministic/msl_uv850_z500

Note - I have used all of these sites extensively during our 4 years of cruising and have some confidence in the forecasts. During our few months in the Med I have had to adapt the way I now use the forecasts. Passage weather is good for medium term planning and a convenient way of depicting Grib data. For daily passage planning I am using the local forecasts more and more, then confirming my theories with Passage Weather.

El Tiempo has served me well since arriving in Northern Spain and I am comfortable with the wind profiles it forecasts. For sea and swell I prefer AE Met as its "Mar Total" forecast is more pessimistic than El Tiempo and has invariably proved right.

Be assured however that neither of these will account for local conditions which should be considered in addition to the forecast. How hot is it going to be, what's the coastline topography and are there any notorious spots in the passage.

Summary.

In 3 years my wife Judith and I have cruised down from Plymouth, UK to the Algarve coast of Portugal and Spain. We have enjoyed ourselves so much and I would encourage anyone considering likewise to take your time. Throughout that time our objective had been Lagos and consideration of destinations beyond that not really an option. Last year we achieved that long held ambition and on arrival in Lagos really did think that there was little point continuing on. Lagos is one of those places that "gets you" like that and we know many people who are very happy to just stay put.

We had heard such negative things about cruising in the Med that it was

difficult to plan where we might like to winter at the end of 2014. We have always wanted to visit Barcelona and being further north this provided the opportunity to travel down from the UK by car. This would be another first for us and add a new dimension. We were also conscious of maintenance costs, antifouling, availability of spares, liferaft servicing to mention but a few of the things we take for granted cruising in northern Europe.

We had heard good things about Sant Carles Marina from friends and were aware of their boatyard policy for our summer lay up out of the water. This all fitted together nicely and so became our plan.

In this 4th year of extended cruising, I can only say, moving on has been the right decision for us and we now feel as motivated as we were when we commenced our trip back in 2011. We are filled with enthusiasm for the places we might visit and there are destinations to keep us going for years to come, of that I'm sure.

Our transit of the Straits was as epic as rounding Cabo de San Vicente or crossing Biscay. We enjoyed Gibraltar and sailing out into the Mediterranean sea for the first time was such a delight.

Spain continues to impress us and we really did enjoy cruising what is almost the length of the Spanish Med coast. Sant Carles is a good location strategically, with not only some great cruising to the north and south on the mainland but it is also only 100nm north of the Balearic's. It is not without its issues but we are learning to live with those and being a little further north it will not suit everyone. I'm writing this in December and we are traveling out just after Christmas to 13 degrees. However we feel that deciding to stay at Sant Carles was a good choice and we were fortunate to meet some locals at the wedding of a mutual sailing friend (met in Lisbon) during August on our trip home. This was a great introduction for us and we have been able to make many new friends.



We always thought that in time we would return to Lagos for a more extended stay and maybe we will but as a cruising friend once said "our plans are firmly set in jelly". Moving on was right for us and now our "wanderlust" is strengthened. We will continue our adventures onward into the Mediterranean, taking our time as we go.

"Fair Winds", as they say.
sv ONAWAY.

Foot note. Details above should not to be used for navigation and are based on our own personal experience and views of the places visited.