

Gybe in Gib

Since the September 1st, Yo! is moored in Ocean Village in Gibraltar. This is the end of the Mediterranean leg: 5 years since we came back from the Red Sea – back in 2008, on August 31st in Canet- , 1 month along the Spanish coast in August 2013, a little more than 1 000 nautic miles.

And an original landing.



The rock, continuously cloudy with easterly winds and its 426 meters high is a notorious sea mark. You need to check tidal times. Leaving Porto Duquesa, 4 hours before high tide in Gibraltar, allows you to benefit from tidal stream, otherwise you will have 1 to 2 knots adverse. Uncool. We sail round peak Europa with wind gusts and cross sea, wind against stream; but steering is very easy, you just need to line up the lighthouse, the mosque Ibrahim al Ibrahim named after the keeper of the holy mosques – 5 million pounds donated by Saudi Arabia in 2007 – and the catholic sanctuary of Holy Mary of Europa, dedicated to the Virgin after the Moor had been expelled in 1309 – the statue was crowned in Rome by Pope John-Paul II-.

Benjamin Franklin one of the founding fathers of America used to say: “Lighthouses are more useful than churches”, here you get both, lighthouse **and** church, one never knows...



Yo! now sails in the shade of the rock in a large bay lined up with the oil refinery of Algeiras and a huge container terminal all located in Spain and jammed with big, very big ships on anchor in the English part. Gibraltar is a tax-free harbor, one of the most important "To Be Notified" destinations; cargos wait here for the highest bid.

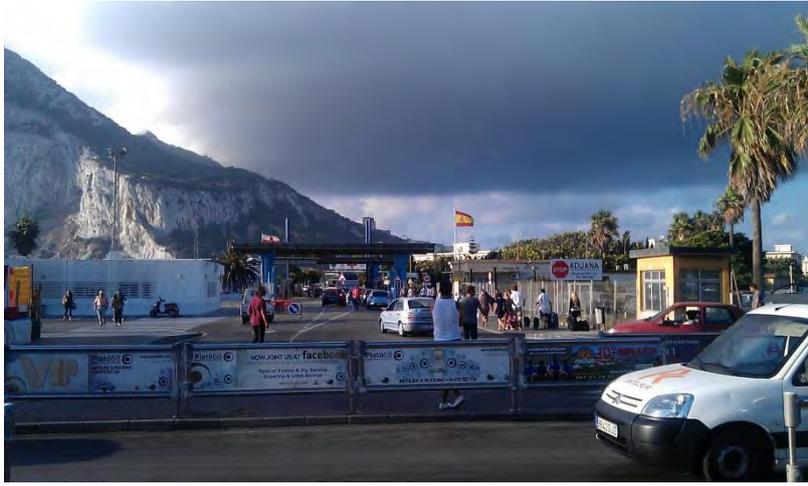


To enter the marina, no need of a beacon, just follow planes landing or taking off the tarmac which marks the frontier with Spain. The marina is just South! Mooring is North and it is highly recommended not to drop anchor in line with the control tower.

There are 17 names on the United Nations lists of non-autonomous territories. Gibraltar is the only one to remain in Europe. At South end of Spain, Gibraltar which area obstructed by the Rock is smaller than 7 km² and population of 30 000 people is an English oversea territory. Note the Spanish got a similar oversea territory on the Moroccan coast in Ceuta.

The frontier is of 1200 meters. It is the shortest in the world and is highly disputed since this summer; Gibraltar local authorities threw 70 blocks of concrete into the sea to build an artificial reef to protect submarines endangered species. Spanish fishermen felt under assault. By this action, Gibraltar claims territorial waters which are denied by Spain. Immediately Spanish custom went overzealous penalizing "Llanitos" (people living in Gibraltar which 6 700 have a house on the Spanish side), people on holiday and Andalusians working on the Rock (10 000), an island of prosperity backed to a country under recession (2.5 % unemployed in Gibraltar versus 35.8 % in Andalusia).

Car traffic is nevertheless harsh as the road cross the plane runway and stops every time a plane takes off or lands. Fortunately, there are not so many: no plane leaving Gibraltar is authorized to land in Spain.



Justification of custom officers is simple: Gibraltar doesn't belong to the customs union or EU or Schengen area, smugglers and financial offenders have to be stopped.

Gibraltar, which is VTA free, got out of OCDE anti-bribery list. But Madrid continues to affirm that the United Kingdom still rules over tax havens like the Island of Jersey, the Island of Man, Bermuda's Islands and... Gibraltar.

Gibraltar economy relies on bank and financial services, tourism, port activity and games on line (the first three produce 25 to 30 % GDP and the last one around 15 %). Gibraltar authorities refuse the so called nomination of tax haven, but agree that revenue or corporate taxes are "slightly below other European countries."

People living in Gibraltar should decide on their future via a referendum, like the UN ask London. But the scenario of Hong Kong handing to China in 1997 is unlikely to be reproduced here, as we can imagine from all the Union Jacks hanging at windows or persisting islands of English chauvinism: pubs, posters of the best Fish & chips in town, Marks & Spencer... to the national day on the 10th of September in remembrance of the first self-determination act when people of Gibraltar voted against annexation by Spain. As the legend goes, when Berber macaques will leave, so will the English... From now on, the queen Elisabeth II still rules over the English enclave. Even the time is of London unlike the rest of Europe.



« We're gonna rock around the clock tonight ». Not much fun here and Bill Haley is far from the Belgian rock group which with humor exhorted its fans to all go to Torremolinos.

We WON'T go to Torremolinos, because we saw Torremolinos. And we won't go either to Benidorm, or to Porto Banus, or to Estepona, or to Fuengirola, or to Malaga. Simply because it is the worst that Spain produced in 25 years.



Costa Blanca is the most urbanized coast in Spain, more than 96 % is concrete. Only rocky or swamp areas are free of buildings. All the countryside is under plastic. We sail off a white landscape and could think we are on snowy mountains slopes. Urban legends say that in case of storm, plastic sheets more than 100 meters long take off and wind around masts of cruising ships.



Further south, it's no better, 80 % of the inhabitants of Malaga live by the sea since tourism developed at the end of the 50's driven by the catch line : "Costa del Sol : more than 300 days of sun". Progressively, roads and airports were built thanks to EU subventions so 36 millions of tourists, retired people from all North Europe and investors could come.

For tourists and retired expatriate residents, it's « todo incluido », for others it's « sea, sex & sun... & corruption ».

In the 80's, English tabloids already called this region "Costa del Crime" because it became notorious that criminals escape English justice taking refuge in Spanish luxury and keep on thriving business through real estate speculation.

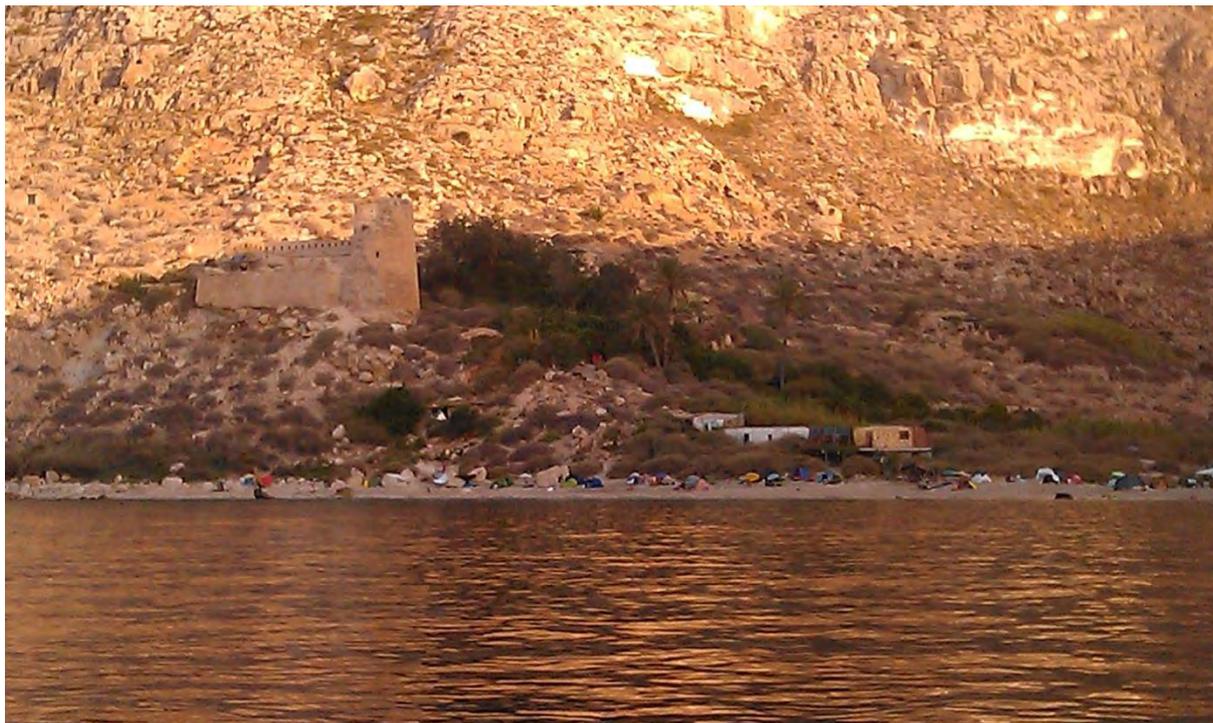
It's all benefit for local authorities: a job for the booming population out of rural exodus, a boost to the local economy and personal enrichment. In June 2012, started the "Malaya affair" trial, a huge money laundering and real estate corruption network in Marbella. The public prosecutor wants an exemplary verdict for what is a symbol of Town Hall corruption: more than 90 persons concerned including 2 mayors, 15 town council members and many builders accused of taking more than €670 million in bribes. And jet set all around the world could be involved.

It's difficult at the moment to predict the outcome of this trial as corruption in Spain and especially in la Costa del Sol is as common as sunburns. Only 2 winters were enough to forget "Indignados" : "No hay pan para tantos chorizos" (not enough bread for all the thieves).

Today, nothing seems able to stop the property developers' frenzy who have adapted. Russian customers are much coveted: Russian products in supermarkets, flights from Moscow to Malaga, Cyrillic information boards, specialized real estate agencies... In 2012, one out of 10 property deals of more than €1 million was made by Russians. Most of them would be issued from money laundering operations by the mafia.... To be continued.



Sailing from the East, la Costa del Sol starts at the Cabo del Gata, the only part of the coast which is not covered with concrete, protected under the status of the “wildest park in Andalusia”, in fact the rugged cape is a natural beacon separating the Alboran Sea from the Mediterranean Sea, where you start feeling the tidal streams from Gibraltar. Walking paths under a temperature of 35°C prevent too much tourists to come. The Cala San Pedro is a natural shelter, a historic crib of the “freaks” culture, those that were called hippies in the last century with an old castle, a small valley and stream. Anybody can use it, some built huts with solar panels and satellite dishes, but most of people camp on the beach (love, still water and ganja), “flower power”.



Unfortunately, no toilets. You have to wait for winter storms for cleaning. Here too, stupas are duly pruned with a local distinctive feature: in caves.



Upstream the Capo del Gata, one find nice names made for dreaming like Carthagene for example, a natural shelter like Marseille or Mao or Syracuse but it is in fact industrious, commercial and forbidden for mooring.

On the contrary, a magnificent encounter with an ugly gas tanker on anchor delivering gas from Qatar to Spain (another demonstration of shale gas impact on worldwide trade). It is so ugly that we take photos and look out for him in the web: it is called the "Berge Arzew". We then discover than we are not the only ones to appreciate this kind of nautical ugliness, here internet address: <http://uglyships.wordpress.com/>



Like Russian puppets, the « Mar Menor » is an internal sea -a large salty lake- separated from the Mediterranean Sea by a narrow land strip, la Manga. There is a small harbor in the middle with shallow waters of 2.5 meters and a bridge opening at regular times.



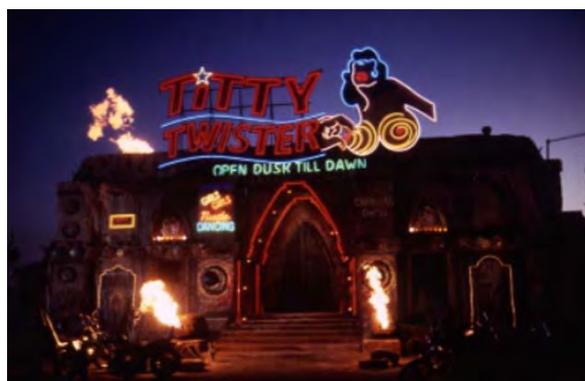
In the Mar Menor islands and water which is not deeper than 5 meters, you can moor anywhere, wind and no waves, glide heaven. Buildings all around, surprise, surprise...

We were sometimes suspected of being only interested by the darker sides of the regions we travel, which is untrue, so hereafter some of the things we liked the most :

- The small marinas of Porto Duquesa and Herradura in which we went under a violent hail storm
- An evening with Miguel and his family at Campello, north of Alicante (when we talked about the octopus third arm... but we will get to it another time in a page called "Discovery channel")
- The encounter of a fishermen wild bunch at sunset



- BB initials : With each little quiver one could detect/Little bells of silver around her neck/Ringing could be heard as she came near/And spoke the word Almeria! (Gainsbourg/Mick Harvey).
- Tests of foresail on pole, it works ok.
- Understanding that earthmen too have red and green lights, which have other functions than pointing to the port entrance and can be used for car traffic lights. Thank you Tchako !
- Straight out of an old Tarantino movie, « From dusk till dawn » in Aguadulce: ghouls, bare feet, musicians, and gin & tonic....



Wish you the best, Sanity & Sobriety.

Stéphanie / Christophe
London
18 Septembre 2013