

U3A Dénia Travel Newsletter

ISSUE March 2020



This is a newsletter from the U3A Dénia Travel Team - the purpose of which is to keep you updated on what trips/ events we have organized on your behalf for 2020/2021

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YOUR TRAVEL TEAM



Back Row - Left to right:

Ginny Whitehead

Neil Parkin

Chris Whitehead

Graham Cromack

Front:

Christine Parkin

Liz Jones

An update on our trips for this year

We hope you're all well and managing to keep yourselves occupied in these difficult times.

As you know, our trip to **Elche on 26 March** will be rescheduled for later in the year and we're keeping the trip to the **Bioparc on 5 June** under review. We break then for the summer, and our next trip is the **Cirque du Soleil on 20 September**, followed by a day trip to a bodega in **Yecla on 2 October**. Obviously, all these trips will be kept under review as well.

Graham is researching a Christmas Market trip to Berlin in late November. We were just awaiting the flight dates when the Lockdown began.

Ginny is still looking for a suitable venue for our Christmas break from 23 - 27 December. We were hoping to return to Nerja, but the hotel has insisted on a six night package, which makes it too expensive for our members. We are awaiting information on all inclusive hotels in Málaga. Failing that, we have been given a very good quote for a lovely hotel in Salobreña, on the coast due south of Granada. Ginny and Chris would like to recce it first to ensure it meets our exacting standards, and we'll do that as soon as travel restrictions are lifted.

Meanwhile, let's hope the Lockdown curbs the spread of the virus and we can soon return to normality. Stay safe.

Your Travel Team

A SWEET DAY OUT IN JIJONA

This was our first trip to Jijona, and we set off with a full coach on a sunny, warm January morning. Our first stop was Benidorm, where we picked up our local guide, Guillermo. We rarely have the luxury of a guide with us on a day trip. He gave us so much interesting information about what we were visiting, local artisan industries and the surrounding countryside.

Our next stop was Jijona. Thanks to turrón, this tiny town is famous the world over, but you'd never think so by its understated laid back air. Its one main street is devoid of any shops except a bank, the town hall and a couple of cafés. We crowded into one of them for a much needed coffee and, for some, our first taste of their famous turrón ice cream. Turrón, is made for the Christmas market and is only manufactured from July to December. The seasonal nature of turrón meant that a large number of Jijonencos took to making a living through the production of artisan-made ice cream to sustain employment throughout the year.



On, then, to the huge El Lobo/1880 factory, where we started our tour with a very informative film in English explaining the production of this toothsome, sweet nougat confection of almonds and honey. Beginning in the middle of the 17th century, it is still produced by the 10th generation of the same family, and it's exported to five continents. The accent was definitely on *quality*. Some years ago, the local almond crop was decimated due to a bacteria caused by insects and 100,000 almond trees were cut down in the Alicante area. Without the local product, almonds had to be imported from California, but were found to be of inferior quality to Spanish ones. Now, all almonds used in turrón production are sourced exclusively from the Jalón valley. Although the spread of the disease has now been halted, no almonds are grown locally any more as the area is now too dry.

After the Christmas rush, the factory itself was not in operation. We were taken to the museum, where saw a fascinating display of old machinery and tools used when turrón was literally hand made. More like instruments of torture from the Spanish inquisition, some of them looked very dubious indeed!





The visit concluded with a tasting of Alicante (hard) turrón and a chocolate variety. Queues formed at the checkout as we filled bags with bars and packs of this lovely confection.

We didn't need to walk far for lunch - the restaurant was in the building next door and we had the place to ourselves for the first hour until all the locals from the surrounding factories joined us. The noise level went off the scale!

Fed and watered, it was time to visit the Canelobre Caves, a short drive away in Busot. Discovered by an Arab goat herder over 1,000 years ago, the cave was used as an aircraft repair factory by the Republican Army during the Spanish Civil War. It was not opened to the public until the last half of the 20th century.



This awe-inspiring cave is a huge and spectacular cavern with curious, colourfully illuminated limestone formations, many of which resemble candelabras - hence its name. Those of us who braved the steps down to the bottom were rewarded with an immense sense of size and space, some compensation for the walk back up! The little café next door did a roaring trade providing us with some very welcome refreshment as we relaxed in the warm sunshine while admiring the fabulous views of the surrounding countryside below.

Toni, our driver, decided on a different, more interesting route back, and Guillermo explained that the acres of plastic-covered tents that stretched into the distance, were tomato 'plantations' (his words). Owned by Bonnysa, one of the largest tomato producers in Spain, they are grown without soil, fed nutrients through irrigation alone and spend their life completely under cover. So much for sun-ripened tomatoes!

What an interesting day out we had. Our thanks to Liz for researching and organising the trip and to our travellers for their cheerful, friendly company. See you all on another trip.

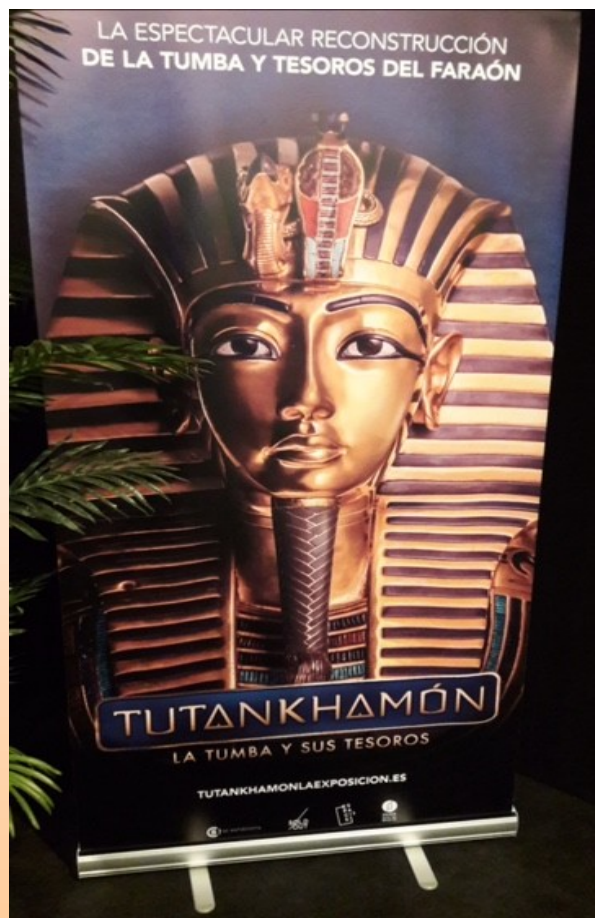
Ginny

TUT, TREASURES AND TAPAS

Wow! What a stunning and exhilarating experience awaited 42 of our members when we visited the Tutankhamun Exhibition in Madrid at the end of February. Instead of dusty exhibits in glass cases, over a thousand treasures had been laid out in three glass-fronted 'chambers,' exactly as they would have been found by British archeologist Howard Carter in 1922. Of course, the treasures weren't 'real' - they were museum replicas - but who would know the difference?

A little background is needed here and starts with the Rosetta Stone, which was found by French army engineers in 1799. On it was a decree inscribed in three ways - hieroglyphics, ancient Egyptian and ancient Greek.







By comparing the ancient Greek with the hieroglyphics, a French linguist in 1822 cracked the secret of reading the ancient Egyptian 'writing of the gods.' A hundred years later, Carter discovered the tomb he'd spent six years searching for in the Valley of the Kings, and was able to positively identify it as belonging to Tutankhamun. While in life Tutankhamun was a minor Pharo and died aged just 18, in death he is undoubtedly the most famous of them all.

The audio guide was superb, as was the film we were shown, giving us the history behind this remarkable find. Words cannot adequately describe how stunning this exhibition is. Some of the pieces are so breathtakingly beautiful that you can only gaze at them in jaw-dropping wonder. Without doubt, the stone sarcophagus, which housed three more coffins nested within each other, each one more fabulous than the other, was in this category. One of the coffins was solid gold and weighed 114 kg. Just imagine that! The intricate artistry of the gold workers was particularly in evidence on the caskets.





We couldn't stop talking about it on the coach back to the hotel - *and* over lunch, *and* we were still discussing it over tapas in the evening. This was a truly unforgettable experience.

After the exhibition and during the following morning, many of our group visited the delights of Madrid using the hop on/hop off bus, while others opted for Shanks's pony. Our superb hotel was just a ten minute walk from the Plaza Mayor and the atmospheric Mercado de San Miguel. This is an old fruit and veg market of glass and iron construction, which has been refurbished and now houses a huge selection of tapas stalls and wine bars. It has a wonderful atmosphere and is a tourist magnet for anyone visiting Madrid. Two nights wasn't enough time to sample all the wares, but we gave it our best shot!



The weather was sunny and, although cooler than Dénia (especially in the evening), not quite as cold as we'd expected. One of our group bravely wore shorts regardless! All in all, it was a brilliant trip enhanced by a great group of travellers. My thanks to Graham for his help throughout the trip, and especially for turning my requests to our driver, Paco, into intelligible Spanish.

Ginny