



Jason the sun god in the Picos de Europa Mountains, in Spain



Christmas in Portugal with dog Charlie.



Santas in Porto, Portugal.

Notts couple Julie and Jason Buckley ditched their jobs and rented out their home to set off on a trip of a lifetime last October. LYNETTE PINCHESS follows their adventures

EVERY day is one big adventure for Jason and Julie Buckley.

The Eastwood couple escaped the rat race in October, quitting their well-paid nine to five jobs at E.ON, selling most of their belongings and renting out their home.

Julie, who worked in marketing and Jason, in IT, hit the road in a motorhome – nicknamed Dave – for a trip of a lifetime around Europe.

Since then they’ve notched up more than 4,000 miles across France, Spain and Portugal, joined by their King Charles Cavalier spaniel Charlie.

Jason, 39, says: “We’re taking a break from our careers and lives in the UK to ‘do the dream’ and travel Europe for a year. “We got Charlie a pet passport and had a vague look at the map of Europe.”

The trip is everything they hoped for and more, says Julie, 39.

Surviving on a daily budget of 38 Euros means avoiding campsites and not eating out too often.

As well as their friends and family, there are a couple of things they miss about home.

Julie says: “Jason misses Castle Rock’s Harvest Pale beer. I miss our regular Friday night treat of fish and chips from Giltbrook Fish bar and Ribena – I brought three bottles with me and am on the very last dregs now, panic!”

They are writing a blog of their adventures at www.ourtour.co.uk – we’ve picked out some of the highlights:

October 12
We’re in pole position for the ferry. We got pulled over for a security check and entertained the bloke when we told him we were leaving for a year. “Don’t blame you,” he said as he waved us through.

October 16
After the emotional rollercoaster of saying goodbye to everyone, the last-minute stress of getting the house sorted and the minor technical issues of a warm fridge and no skylight, it now feels good.

Villers-sur-Mer is just what we needed. The only downside is the ‘no dogs on the beach’ signs – they’re everywhere. But it seems the locals pay no attention to them so Charlie has had some major stone chasing and dead crab eating sessions.

After watching a beautiful sunset from the beach last night, it’s time to move on.

October 20
We’re on our way to St Jean-de-Monts, stopping for a light lunch at a town called Notre-Dame-de-Monts – this is the life!

October 29
The old town of Cognac is quite pretty, but sadly our memory will be of the brilliantly over-engineered dog poo bags that are free around the place. We picked up a load of them and Charlie will proudly fill them in the next few days.

October 31
We went for another stroll around Brantome. We decided to take a tour of the caves behind the Abbey where it was first established. It was a bit like the Broadmarsh caves as the place had

We’re living our DREAM



Jason and Julie Buckley in Beynac, in the Dordogne region of France.



The Buckleys on Boca do Rio beach, in the Algarve, Portugal.

saw were the rows of confession booths. Some even had a light on top so you would know when the priest was in. But here there was no privacy for the person confessing – they knelt on the outside of the booth!

December 11
Porto in Portugal has an event every year to break the world record for Santas in one place, and it was today. They were aiming for 15,000 – that many Santas we had to see.

December 23
We’re checked in at our Christmas campsite for the next few days near Cascais. The gang (other travellers met along the way) are all here, the fridge is stocked, carols are playing, the BBQ is lit and the gluwwein hot. We’ve set up camp around the Christmas grotto (tent) and bought a fire pit to keep us warm at night.

Christmas Day
This morning we were all up bright and early for family Skype sessions. It was great to see everyone. We had a trip to the beach for a quick swim in the Atlantic. It wasn’t as cold as we’d expected. We’re back at the campsite now and the BBQ is going, more cones have been collected to burn this evening and we’ve started on the beer and wine; all that remains is to wish you all a very Merry Christmas.

Boxing Day
With Xmas over it’s time to move on and find somewhere for New Year’s Eve. We’re thinking of skipping Lisbon completely, as big cities, motorhomes and dogs don’t seem to mix very well. It’s also quite a liberating feeling that we can really do whatever we please, ignoring guidebooks and lists of ‘must see’ places, buildings and things.

December 29
We headed off to Setubal and walked to the local market where the fish is as fresh as it can be – crabs still walking and eels still slithering. Some were as big as a small dolphin (which I hope it wasn’t as there’s a pod of them living in the estuary here).

December 30
At Evora is the ‘Bones Chapel’, a room lined with the bones of 5,000 people, taken from nearby graves. For some reason the Franciscan monks thought it would help prayer and meditation. A comforting inscription welcomes you to the room: ‘We bones that are here, we are waiting for yours’.

New Year’s Eve
As is traditional at this time of year, we’re looking back. Our lives have changed beyond recognition in 12 months.

We find ourselves living in a camper van. And we love it. We have some luxuries with us, like a laptop, but find much of the time we don’t use them.

Looking forward to 2012, we have an awesome prospect ahead of us. Nine to 11 months (we decide) of freedom to travel the continent, probably visiting Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Bulgaria and a few as yet undecided countries.

We do of course miss one thing: our friends and families. This blog has proved a fun and fulfilling way for us to stay in touch and we’re so grateful to you for reading and sending your comments.

New Year’s Day 2012
In Dave last night, after everything turned out to be shut in town, we put the TV on to watch the New Year celebrations elsewhere. Of the three channels we could get one had a three-hour finale of Portugal’s Biggest Loser, one was a cross between Big Brother and Beadle’s About and the final station was showing Gone with the Wind. Maybe it’s not New Year here – do the Portuguese have their own calendar like China? To double check we nipped outside at midnight and were relieved to hear cheers, whistles, vuvuzelas and a few fireworks. Time to retreat back into Dave and consume our cheap box of wine and petrol station-purchased beer.

January 4
We went for a walk around the Cabo de Sao Vicente. Next to the fort was a plaque commemorating a German tourist who fell to his death there in 2001, and sadly we’d heard that another German tourist died a couple of days ago just a bit further along the coast – we made a point of keeping extra far from the edge.

January 9
Finally having some time off from sightseeing and touring has given us time to think about the future.

Do we go back to what we were doing (or similar), make good money to take time off and retire early, or do we seek out something we enjoy doing which will inevitably pay less? There’s a lot of thinking to be done, but one thing we both know and agree on is that wherever we end up we want a real wood fire!

January 10
We heard today that our sometime travel buddies Chris and Tina, who have their dog Loli with them, are heading over to Morocco this week. Turns out Defra have changed the Pet Passport scheme on January 1 2012, so Morocco is now allowed as a destination. Ooooh, we think. Do we head over there?

January 24
We’re heading for Morocco.

Spain, like a huge bull fighting ring, black silhouette bull stickers and the odd Spanish-registered car.



The couple's motorhome 'Dave'.

changed a lot over the centuries and has become a hotch-potch of different eras.

We’re now back in Dave and we’ve had two lots of children at the door asking for bon-bons for Halloween. There’s nowhere to hide like we used to at home, so it’s a good job the naughty cupboard is well-stocked.

November 1
Our first night ‘wild camping’ (parking up and sleeping in a non-designated motorhome spot) close to Beynac-Et-Cazenac. Hard to describe this place.

Tomorrow’s plan? There is no plan. I love it.

November 5
We took a wander around Dax centre ville. There are hints that we’re getting closer to

November 6
We got talking to a fella called Harry who is on his way south to spend the winter months in his motorhome in Spain. He’s 85 and has been vanning for about 20 years – before that he sailed about in a 30ft steel yacht he’d built from scratch. He had some excellent stories he shared with us over a cup of tea and some biccies.

November 10
We managed, with the help of satnav, to make it into Spain. A few hairy minutes on a stretch of road where the slip road is immediately after a tunnel.

November 12
It seems that San Sebastian is THE place for Pintxos, and it appears I got the ratio of pintxos to drinks totally wrong last night! If you like bar snacks you’d love it here, no room for resting your drink on the bar, they’re laden with food. Jason even managed to find a full English breakfast version!

November 14
We took the decision to head further along the coast to a small town near Santander.

Suddenly there was a loud bang. Jason grabbed the jack and the spare tyre, but because the tyre was totally flat there

wasn’t space for the jack to get it high enough off the floor to replace the wheel. Time to call ADAC, the German version of the AA. They told us to lock ourselves in the van until their man turned up as there were thieves on this stretch of road.

November 17
We’re discovering that ‘open all year’ in our campsite book translates roughly to ‘closes in September’. Tourist information told us wild camping is illegal in this area. However, she also told us the police turn a blind eye out of season. So, here we are. The beach is 30 metres away and we can hear the waves crashing.

November 22
We set off early(ish) this morning to walk some of the most famous pathways in the Picos mountains.

The scenery was breathtaking with peaks sticking up above the cloud and sheer rock cliffs towering over us.

December 3
Tomorrow we’ll also be putting up Dave’s Christmas decorations, assuming stuff will stick to the damp walls. It’ll be a very different Christmas for us this year, but we hope to find a campsite somewhere in Portugal with a bit of sun to relax in.

December 5
Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Now I’ve been in a few cathedrals over the years, but this one took some beating. It all looked so beautiful. The strangest thing I



The couple on a French beach.