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NATURE NOTES FROM NERJA



Hi to everyone,

As it is that time of the year again when thoughts of Nerja may be descending upon us, we thought we would warm things up by taking a look at what those people lucky enough to be going this year might look forward to.

For those who have been in past years but not going this year, the following notes may serve as some pleasant memories.

As with our previous efforts, these notes will largely be nature/flora based but there are a few other reflections!

All the best,

Helen and Gordon.



Orange Trumpet Creeper or Brazilian Flame Vine (Pyrostegia Venusta)

Let's start with this one which we are often asked about as it seems to proliferate around Nerja.

It is a plant species of the genus *Pyrostegia* of the family Bignoniaceae (*Begonia*) originally native to southern Brazil, Bolivia, northeastern Argentina and Paraguay; today, it is also a widely cultivated garden species.

Venusta means 'beautiful', 'charming', or 'graceful'. *Pyrostegia* from the Greek *pyros* means 'fire', relating to the colour of the flowers and the shape of the upper lip, and *stegia* means 'covering'. When the flowers cover a building, it may appear to be on fire.

The plant is sensitive to cold winds and prefers sunny, sheltered locations.



El Cielo from a distance.....

El Cielo is a peak in The Sierras de Tejeda, Almijara and Alhama Natural Park.

Translated as 'The Sky', Cielo is 1508 metres high and is a seven to eight hour return trek from Nerja Club Hotel. On a warm sunny day it is a great walk and climb. If you are looking for the best and most unobstructed views of the entire coast, the hike up Cielo is the one for you. On a clear day, the views are spectacular, the Moroccan coastline is clearly visible.

The peaks of the Sierras de Tejeda Mountains are more than just scenic destinations for avid hikers; these peaks are significant in their role as a natural border separating Málaga and Granada. The Tejeda and Almijara mountains skirt along the Malagueña side and are located in the heart of the Axarquía region.

(The plant in the foreground is an *Asphodel* which are common in Nerja).



9 to 5

A typical bucolic scene when walking in the lower woodland on dusty tracks. We were once asked by a herdsman to help him locate some of his goats which had wandered away from him.

Cabra is Spanish for goat. Caballo is Spanish for horse.



Window Art

Looking in doorways, up at balconies and even the floors and walls of many houses you will see fantastic examples of tiling, art, plants and who knows what (see adjacent photo!). Try not to get arrested though!!

In town there are many streets lined with cobbles set out in patterns. The sunshine lends itself to a colourful environment. There is much to enjoy just wandering through the local and nearby towns and villages.



Osteospermum

Although we have this one at home, it grows with gay abandon in Nerja.

Known as daisy bushes or African daisies, its species have been given several common names, including South African daisy, Cape daisy and blue-eyed daisy.

The scientific name is derived from the Greek osteon (bone) and Latin spermum (seed).



Figs (Higos)

The fig is often referred to as a fruit, though it's actually a group of tiny flowers growing inside an edible shell.

Each flower contains a seed and they're covered by an edible pear-shaped pod, which is often thought of as the fig "fruit." Traditionally, figs were used as the sweetener for desserts prior to sugar.



Kalanchoe Delagoensis

Common names include Chandelier Plant and Mother of Millions, it is a succulent plant.

It produces plantlets at the margins of the leaves, these then fall to the ground and readily root and grow in just about anything. It has become invasive in some parts of the world.

In addition to plantlets, it will also bloom occasionally in winter with a cluster of drooping tubular flowers at the tops of stems.

This plant is adaptable to most growing conditions. It can grow at low levels but beware, it is a toxic plant.



Lantana

Lantana's aromatic flower clusters (called umbels) are a mix of red, orange, yellow, or blue and white florets.

The branches, leaves and flowers of Lantana dispel an odor that is very sensitive for mosquitoes and flies but no harm to humans.

Therefore, it has the dual functions of expelling mosquitoes and beautifying courtyards.



Typical view from up in the hills.

Those of you who have walked in the hills of Nerja will be familiar with this classical view which never fails to please.

You don't have to venture too high to get some fantastic views so, if you are unfamiliar with the area, ask some of our more experienced walkers about which walks would be ideal for you.



Casa DDaDDaDDaRaTaT

We have walked past this villa many times on a route up to Pinto.

We have asked various locals and even a next door neighbour but to no avail, no-one seems to know what this title means. However, it makes a great talking point!



Hitching A Ride!

Sometimes you have to look twice (or thrice) to make sure what you are seeing is real.

So when you are next asked what has eight legs, the answer may not be an octopus but a dog on a horse!!



Dutchman's Pipe (Caution: This plant has high severity poison characteristics).

A perennial vine which belongs to the Aristolochia/Birthwort family, with common names "Dutchman's Pipe" and "Pipevine" being an allusion to old-fashioned meerschaum pipes at one time common in the Netherlands and Northern Germany.

The leaves are up to 12 inches long and heart-shaped. The flowers are usually inconspicuous because they are hidden or lost in the vine's dense foliage. The small blossoms are yellow-greenish with brownish-purple lobes in the shape of a smoking pipe.



Echium Pininana

The common names for Echium Pininana are Giant Vipers Bugloss, Tree Echium, Tower of Jewels, and Pine Echium and is one of the true giants of the herbaceous plant world.

You can be walking down a street or on the road to Maro and see examples of this stunning biennial plant. In its first year it forms a low rosette of silver, hairy, spear-like leaves, and then in the second year it sends up a huge spike loaded with small blue flowers. It makes a dramatic statement in a sunny, sheltered garden, and is extremely attractive to bees. After flowering, it scatters seed and dies.

Pininana is Latin for "small pine", although it is neither closely related to the pine, nor does it resemble that plant.



Grasshoppers, Crickets and Bushcrickets

Orthoptera is a group of insects that include crickets, bush crickets and grasshoppers all of them characterized by their long hind legs that allow them to jump through the vegetation.

There are at least 185 species of grasshopper, cricket and bushcricket in Andalucia. You are bound to see (or hear) one if you go walking in the hills.

In Spanish "grasshopper" is "saltamontes" (literally hillhopper).



Tiered landscape agriculture

Agricultural terraces are an essential part of the Spanish Mediterranean landscapes.

The first terraced fields dated from the second millennia B.C. used as a way of taming the land for growing crops and a resource for the development of mountain areas. Terraces were built to cultivate cereals and, to a lesser extent, vineyards and almond and olive trees. Their main function was to feed the great population who lived in the mountains



Avocado

The land around Nerja is reserved for agriculture, and the town and its surroundings are kept marvellously green thanks to the abundance of natural springs and wells.

Indeed the name Nerja is derived from the Moorish word Narixa, meaning 'rich in water'. The fields are filled with exotic fruits such as chirimoya, avocado, kiwi fruit, figs and bananas, and the range of local vegetables is superb.

The avocado could well serve as a symbol of Nerja as you will see them being grown far and wide. Ceramic images of the avocado also adorn walls and gateposts everywhere.

Oh, and apparently, they are very nutritious.



Almond Tree

Almond trees were domesticated as far back as 3,000 BC and have been part of Mediterranean culture for millennia. Spain is the second-largest almond producer in the world and relies on Andalucia and Valencia as its main producing regions.

Almond trees add a special charm to the landscapes of Andalucia. Their willowy, wispy branches and delicate flowers grace hillsides and craggy cliffside areas with an elegant beauty. In full bloom some are white, and others are pink. The white blossoms produce sweet almonds while the pink ones produce the bitter variety. The latter contain cyanide which must be removed before consuming the extract of these nuts.



Typical day in the hills.....

Great walks, hopefully in good sunshine and warm weather.

This pictured walk is descending to one of the lovely white walled villages that you can come across.

A cup of tea, coffee or maybe a cold beer welcoming you.



Mango Tree

Mango trees grow on hilly landscapes near to the coast, situated between Málaga and Almería in southern Spain. The coastal region – also known as the Costa del Sol – is one of Europe’s sunniest stretches of land. With its very particular microclimate, it is the perfect region for cultivating exotic fruit such as the mango.

The “Osteen” mango variety is particularly well-suited to the climate and the soils; it is the most widely cultivated organic mango in the region. The “Osteen” mango has an oval shape and is green and violet in colour. The mangoes are harvested shortly before they are fully mature, but they can then continue to ripen, their colour often taking on red and yellow tones in the process. However, the skin colour does not necessarily say anything about the degree of maturity; the smell and the resistance of the fruit pulp are the crucial factors as far as this is concerned.



Chinese Hibiscus

Chinese hibiscus is a small flowering tree. It is a common plant in Andalucía. Its fragrant flowers are well known the world over, leading to many cultivated variants. Although the Latin name, *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*, means “the rose of China,” it is not related to true roses.

Red hibiscus flowers often symbolize intense love, passion, and romance. They can also represent courage and power.



Cabra

Another common sight on our walks. You can often hear them before you see them as many will be wearing bells around their necks, an obvious aid to the herdsman who are often a long way behind!

The goats shown here are of the domesticated type and not the 'Cabra Montes', of the hills which tend to have prominent horns.



Bougainvillea

You will see this shrub everywhere on your walks. It can be seen on trellises, walls, fences, or pergolas, creating a lush and colorful display.

Bougainvillea is a genus of flowering plants native to South America. It is widely known for its vibrant, colourful bracts and rapid growth. It is named after French explorer and botanist Louis Antoine de Bougainville who encountered the plant during his voyage around the world in the 18th century.

Bougainvillea flowers are believed to symbolize resilience and perseverance. Just like the plant itself, which can thrive in harsh conditions and bloom even in the midst of drought



Stone Crop

Sedum is a large genus of flowering plants in the family Crassulaceae, members of which are commonly known as stonecrops. They are characterised by succulent leaves and stems.

Many sedums are cultivated as ornamental garden plants, due to their interesting and attractive appearance and hardiness. The various species differ in their requirements; some are cold-hardy but do not tolerate heat, some require heat but do not tolerate cold.



Chamaerops humilis (European Fan Palm)

This is a shrub-like clumping palm, with several stems growing from a single base. The stems grow slowly and often tightly together, eventually reaching 2–5 m (10–20 ft) tall with a trunk diameter of 20–25 cm (8–10 in). It is a fan palm.

The leaves of the adult plants have been used to make brooms and for weaving mats, carrier baskets, and similar articles.



Candelabra Cactus (Euphorbia Ingens)

Candelabra cactus sounds like a cactus and looks like one but is actually a euphorbia. As they grow, they add a sophisticated look to the scenery with their tall and upright stature. When very mature, they turn into magnificent 30-foot trees.

This columnar, upright euphorbia grows out branches from the side of the trunk. Although the branches are quite irregular, giving each plant its own unique shape, overall, it stays upright and compact, giving it a clean look.

The green stems have 4-6 ridges that have very sharp spines. Yellow-green flowers emerge from the top, attracting pollinators.

Other names include, Dragon bones, Cowboy cactus and Good luck cactus.



In the Avenues and Alleyways.....

You cannot but admire the areas of Moorish influence. The narrow winding streets, passages and whitewashed houses are typical of Berber architecture, which the Moors brought with them from North Africa.

In the town of Frigiliana there are 12 wall mosaics depicting the Moorish life and diaspora of the area. Well worth a look.



Green Parrots (Monk Parakeet)

You will see these green parrots everywhere! The city's parks have been home to non-native species of birds for several years now and the colony of Monk parakeets, which are everywhere, continues to grow.

These parrots are actually from South America (specifically Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia). The term "parakeets" just refers to smaller species of parrot. Introduced to Spain in the 1970's as pets, owners let them loose (probably because of their loud, annoying shrieks) and it didn't take long for them to multiply.



Another Great Day.....

At the end of a good days walking and after dinner, what better than to watch the sun set from your balcony. Maybe with a glass of wine or suchlike, reflecting on the day and what the following day will bring...



Well, we hope these photos remind people who have visited Nerja in the past of the area and whet the appetite for those who are going this year.

If you are going, we look forward to seeing you and maybe join up for a walk.

All the best,

Helen and Gordon.