



Taste Life The Spanish Way

Memorial Day weekend we got back from visiting Danielle who has been studying at the University of Madrid since January. We traveled to the southern coast of Spain, Morocco and Gibraltar. There were so many Polaroid picture moments where I reminded myself, "Chere take a mental picture of this so you can remember this forever." Years ago, when I rafted the Grand Canyon for a week (a once in a lifetime trip for me and the 2nd time Gary rafted) I did this and to this day can recall certain rock formations and almost feel the chill of the rapids. Talk about COLD water!

First off, Morocco didn't "feel" like Africa. Picture busy hustle bustle markets where you feel like YOU the tourist will provide their next meal of the day. The market areas are narrow with winding cobblestone roads that are confusing and people are shouting at you as aggressive child beggars walk alongside you with their hands outstretched, pleading eyes begging you for money. They don't go away from your side if you give them 5 seconds of eye contact which I soon found out. I had a goal to have a camel ride in Morocco. I did! Little did I know that it would be a 3 minute camel ride around a parking lot with more Moroccan men yelling at me. I must have appeared as "great scare material" as the snake charmer got a kick out of trying to put the snake closer to my face. I screamed, opened my mouth and got snake tail in my mouth. Yuck!!!

The following are the top 5 lessons of living richly in the present; in the NOW that I took away from this delightfully delicious trip with no emails, computers or multi-tasking for 10 glorious days.

1. Eat to live not live to eat.

Spaniards eat their major meal at lunch time. Stores close, schools let out and everyone gathers for a siesta with family and friends from 2:00 – 4:00. I don't think you could even buy a stamp during those hours. Then they go back to work and work until 7 pm and eat another light meal, usually consisting of tapas, which are truly appetizer-sized portions, around 9 or 10 pm.

Before I went on this trip, my thoughts were this may be the way people in Spain eat BUT I have a lot to pack in my day and I will eat earlier so I can get to bed and get "going" early the next day. I tried that for about 2 days — didn't work. The last evening of our trip we found ourselves in the "flow" and going out to dinner around 11:00 pm.

My action step: Smaller servings of starch and protein in the evening. My standard will be one fistful of each. And practice self care in the evening, which to me means eating less in the evening and wake up hungry just like I did in grade school.

2. Drink wine with every meal but drink it in a juice glass.

Yes, I drank wine or beer probably two times each day most days of our vacation, but in very, very small quantities. Wine and beer are cheaper than Coke.

My action step: Drink 4 ounces of red wine only on weekends. Do I need to say more?

3. Walk, walk, and actually stroll!

The streets, no matter what city I was in, were packed with people walking — actually strolling arm in arm — walking a little more leisurely than we do here. The first day back from our trip, I noticed I jumped out of the car at church and was already walking probably 10 feet ahead of Gary who was still getting out of the car. What's the deal with that!?

My action step: Be mindful of what I call my “treasure relationships” and even when doing “errands” stroll side by side. And, always remember relationships are the oxygen of my life.

4. Produce stands are on every other block.

Danielle buys produce every day or every other day in Spain. We visited a fruit market daily and bought fruit. Bananas are more expensive than wine, to Gary's dismay, who eats a banana or two every single day.

My action step: Prepare a big bucket of fruit salad on Sunday nights in the summer and store in clear plastic containers in the fridge for ready to go meals and snacks. (My fave is 2 cans of pineapple chunks drained, 1 cantaloupe cubed, a few slices of watermelon chunks, 2 pounds of grapes, 1 quart of strawberries, 1 pint of blueberries, 1 can of mandarin oranges)

5. Be grateful for the present moment.

One evening we were done eating at 9:30 pm (beginning of the travel week when we were eating earlier) and Danielle told us it was not polite to ask for the check. So I waited and waited and waited. Finally, at 10 pm I asked for the check which “promptly” arrived 30 minutes later at 10:30. This part of Spanish life drove me absolutely nuts and Danielle tells me I could never ever live there. I could. I think.

My action step: The words of the song, “Feeling Groovy” are etched in my brain since our arrival home, “slow down you move too fast...you gotta make the morning last...”

Focus on the present and DO ONE thing just ONE thing at a time. Focus on the person talking and quit being ready for what I am going to say. Focus on the food I am eating — taste, smell — in other words, use all my senses to truly savor life.

Give these action steps a try. When you do you, will find out, like me, you truly savor those moments which you are grateful for, and gratitudes are memories of your heart...and what could be more delicious than that!? Joyfully, Chere