

From Siberia to Iberia – part two.

Madrid and Lisbon, March 2007.

Okay, okay, I know exactly what you're thinking, how's he going to get 10,000 words out of Madrid and Lisbon when there's jack all worth drinking in either place? Well, as I have a backlog of reports to complete and - true enough - there's not a fat lot beer-wise to report from either city, you can rest assured that I shall be making this report as short as possible; well, short in Scoopergen terms, anyhow...

This trip wasn't a beer scooping break, but I'd done my utmost to maximise the scratching potential in both cities and felt reasonably assured that I'd get at least something; Madrid had two brewpubs very close to each other (and our hotel was fortuitously just along the road) whilst Lisbon had promise of beers from an out-of-town brewpub – which we'd seen an advert for on our last visit back in 2001 - plus a branch of the Superbock-owned Republica da Cerveja chain. Not forgetting, of course, the most outrageous tram system in the world!

We'd wanted to return to Lisbon for a number of years as it had been Sue's first "proper" foreign trip six years previous and I've liked the place ever since I first visited on my interrail in 1991. Madrid was chosen as a partner to Lisbon as I'd heard it was well worth a visit and there was the small matter of the aforementioned brewpubs to scoop, although the decisive factor was when I was able to secure flights between the two cities for €10 all-in; yes, you heard right, £6.74 (at the prevailing exchange rate) single with Vueling airlines of Spain! We'd been planning to do the overnight "Lusitania" sleeper train to Lisbon as it's a very sociable (if expensive) way to link the destinations, but I just couldn't refuse this special offer and so that was it, all flights booked, but unfortunately from Luton again...

Wednesday 21st March 2007.

No magnetrons permitted on-board.

The outward flight was at the usual time of very early o'clock so we cruised the M1 in the wee small hours before leaving our car with the extremely efficient [Central car storage](#) in their slightly dodgy-looking lockup close to the old Vauxhall plant. On entering the terminal we found it already busy but managed to persuade a spotty McDonalds reject youth on an "all flights" check-in to open the Madrid flight for us; result, boarding group A and sequence numbers 1 and 2 yet again, and we weren't even offered fries with our flight! It's funny to think that just a few years back we thought we'd never get these first numbers and now we've had them at least half a dozen times... interesting, eh? Ok, not really.

Whilst waiting for the disaffected youth to complete the check-in process I cast my eyes over the lists of things you can't take on-board to see if anything amusing was on it; I already liked the Ryanair small print which says you're not allowed to take lawnmowers onboard even if you book a seat for it (bollocks, and I was going to take it, too...) and I'm happy to report that to the list of such downright dangerous and terror-inducing items as lawnmowers, party poppers, cutlery and cap guns we can add... magnetrons! Did we have any idea what one was? Did we hell, and I'm just glad the pimply adolescent didn't ask us if we had one in our bags or we might have had to lie and would have therefore been, by default, "insurgents" or something akin to Pol Pot.

After checking in early we had loads of time to kill; Luton isn't the best airport to do this and we moped around looking in the various tat shops to waste some time before we braved the crap departure lounge, but at least we had time to check a dictionary in WH Smiths and discover that a magnetron is "a high-powered vacuum tube that generates coherent microwaves"; so now you know. Once through the vaguely SS-esque security (I had to take off my boots, as usual, and they were so big – size 12 Magnums – that they jammed the x-ray machine) we skulked around in the piss-poor lounge until the flight was called.

Levitation, that's what you need.

The boarding priority system worked fine as usual and we were first on the plane – which was yet another scoop – and so able to choose decent seats for the 2-hour flight. Europe was bathed in sunshine as we headed southwards giving a great view from our vantage point in row 5 although there was quite a bit of turbulence around including a particularly fierce bout which caused levitation and a brief bout of weightlessness in the toilet as the plane dropped quickly! And people pay hundreds of pounds for the experience...

We touched down early but such was the size of the airport that we spent a good ten minutes taxiing to the gate where, uncommonly for low-cost airlines, we were to be given an airbridge (one of those tunnel things on wheels that attaches to the plane) but, predictably, it didn't work and so we sat there for ten minutes whilst an engineer arrived to fix it! Eventually we were disembarked, through security and in possession of our day passes on the metro and so, with no real idea of what we were going to do with ourselves until the brewpubs opened, we set off on the subway in the general direction of the city centre to see what would take our fancy.

I say general direction as the metro line to the airport frustratingly doesn't go through the centre of the city but ends at the Nuevos Ministerios terminus some way to the north of Sol, the focal point of the city, resulting in journeys to the airport not being as easy as they should be; surely that's the whole point of having a metro there? Whoa, sorry about that, I did promise that this article would be positive for once and so we'll move on, shall we?

We alighted at Plaza España to have a look around as it seemed, from the map we'd acquired, close to some important buildings and so we reasoned we may as well start there. On the way out of the subway more buskers were in position and strumming away industriously, but these seemed to have amplifiers for their guitars and accordions; full marks for professionalism boys, but isn't busking supposed to be basic and – well – acoustic? Needless to say they received no shekels from us, but that's just because we're tight bastards and was no reflection on their musical abilities, although should one of them have launched into the Dropkick Murphys then you never know...

The touristy bit.

The square was ringed by interesting buildings and we sat there for a while formulating a move with the aid of our maps and gen. After soaking up some of the sunshine - although the strong wind was a tad chilly and soon brought the fleeces out - we wandered off towards the Palacio Real and cathedral to have a look at a bit of culture, and so we trekked past the police vans parked along the square (it used to be a bit dodgy according to the Rough Guide) towards the towering façade ahead of us. Admittedly the whole area was impressive, even more so as it had been pedestrianised, so we were able to wander along gawping at the stonework with only

the motorised street-sweeping machines to watch out for, but going into museums and suchlike isn't really our thing and we kept our visit to the exterior.

There's only so much staring at buildings I can do before my eyes glaze over and so, after admiring the Teatro Reale and its accompanying gardens complete with Brownie-esque¹ statues, we headed back down the metro tunnels in order to storm around and see what else we could find in Madrid. I know that scooting around underground isn't the best way to see a city but, with the absence of a tram system, we decided to take the subway to a few places that looked interesting and then see what we could find there; after all, it was still only just gone midday and we had hours to go before the brewpubs opened their doors...

First off we went to the strange-sounding La Peseta in the hope of finding something of interest but when we poked our heads above ground all we saw was newly-build apartments, a huge construction site and a vets... not quite what we were after and so it was back down the stairs for another try. We then spent a couple of hours seeing Plaza Mayor and the La Latina area before checking into the hotel (why do we always get beige rooms? I didn't know Lawrence Llewelyn-Booth was so influential) and then off we went for more exploration. One amusing incident occurred on the subway when a brat playing an accordion for money was evicted by a policeman wielding a hungry-looking Alsatian - which stared at the youth in much the same way I do when confronting a pie - before licking its lips several times, but the kid wisely decided it was worth living to fight another day and got off before the dog could rip off one of his limbs for its dinner.

Let the scooping begin!

We decided that it was time to begin our search for food and drink and so returned to Plaza de Santa Ana for a look around and immediately stumbled upon the Vinoteca Barbechera where we scooped a couple of glasses of rare wines as a prelude to the evening's scooping. Next up was a superb little bar called Viva Madrid which was covered kerb to roof in blue tiles with a magnificent interior of tiles and wooden beams; the ceiling gave the impression of being in the captain's quarters of a sailing ship (remember the one in the Jolly Roger, Hereford?) and the whole atmosphere was quiet and relaxed. We sipped glasses of Ribiera del Duero wine for €2 a pop as we soaked up the ambience of the bar whilst I attempted, unsuccessfully, to work out what beer was available on draught from the old metal tap-type contraption.

Our glasses drained we headed back to Santa Ana via a great little pishop (I'm sure they're not called pies, but it's the best way I can describe them) where we had spicy chicken and *Bacalao* (dried, salted cod) with raisins to set us up for the serious business of scooping which we were about to commence. The first brewpub (Naturbier) was easily located but it was decided to try out the Cervecería Alemana next door first as it looked like a cracking place - which it turned out to be, if a little full of American tourists as it was apparently Hemingway's favourite bar when he lived in Madrid. Notwithstanding the grating voices I really liked the bar with its bustling feel and plain interior and we enjoyed a couple of *raciones* (large tapas) of *Albondigas* (meatballs in sauce) along with our drinks. Sue scooped a Spanish brandy whilst I tried a bottle of Heineken's Legado de Yuste (6.5%) Belgian-style beer which was amber, very candy-sugary and toffeeish yet with a grainy, fruity taste and not a bad try to be honest, especially when you consider it's by a multinational and also an island of ale in a sea of crap lager.

We moved next door to Naturbier, the first brewpub of the evening, and although I was at first doubtful that a pub in such an area would actually brew I was put in my place as soon as we

opened the door as a haze of brewing smells enveloped us with its dreamy sweetness. After finding the brewery at the rear I was finally convinced that beer production took place here and so ordered the two beers on draught, the rather Germanic-sounding Helles and more Spanish Tostado, and parked myself at the bar to see if the character of the brews matched the admittedly delicious reek of their manufacture.

The Helles was first and was much, much better than I'd hoped it would be with a cloudy amber appearance, fresh malt and bread aromas, then a sociably smooth, full, sweetish and intensely grainy flavour ending strongly malty. Tostado looked the business with its reddy/amber colour but wasn't really as pleasant as its flavour was too biased in the facet of toffee and caramel with little else to add a spark of interest save a slight smokiness in the toasted malt finish; you may really like this beer if you enjoy sweet and toffee tasting brews, but the style just isn't my thing and, although it was fairly well brewed, it just didn't match the Helles in my opinion.

"I don't know what I've done, but he's not happy!"

The second brewpub - Magister - was next and so we trolled around the corner to see what would be available there; I'd heard through the beer grapevine that the beer was much better than our first call and so was hoping for some top stuff seeing as Naturbier had exceeded my expectations already! At the bar I asked what beers were available but, before I could decide which of the four I wanted, I was handed what I assumed was a tasting tray which followed the usual pattern of a plank of wood holding four glasses each containing a small pour of the relevant brew: this was a result and so, along with Sue's scoop of another Spanish brandy, we retreated to a table to see what this place could do with its brewplant, some of which we could see behind glass to the rear.

I started with the Rubia (5%, golden) which I immediately noticed had a distinct cidery character to it; surely a sign of an infection somewhere along the line? The taste was fairly malty but the sour appley taste put me off totally. Next up was Tostada (6.5%) and the same infection was obvious in this beer too, perhaps more so than the rubia; cheers then, maybe we should have stayed in Naturbier... Doblebock (8.2%) was next and – happily – this wasn't infected but wasn't particularly impressive either, being a banana-rich and fruity amber brew with a strong toffee-malt character and some alcohol noticeable in the finish.

We got talking to an American beer enthusiast who was sat next to our table and it seemed he was scooping in as much of Europe as he could in a month's visit; he'd done Naturbier the previous evening and was settled in for the night next to us, but I couldn't help think that if I had a month in America I'd be getting on with the scooping by doing some serious drinking and not sat there reading bloody books! Finally I supped the Caramelizada (5.5%) which brought the infected percentage down to 50% and was, probably, the best of Magister's beers being a near-black, frazzled, caramelly and dry beer with hints of smoke, malt and treacle.

With the beers consumed, I tried to pay – and that's where the pantomime began! Our barman was off on his break so I approached who I assume was the owner or at least manager with my money. Rather than charging me for the tasting tray, however, he only charged us for the brandy and then began ranting away in Spanish and pointing at my tasting tray; I had no idea what he was on about and neither did the American, so I offered a €10 note for our drinks: that was waved away with more ranting and pointing at the tray! Sue and I had no idea what was going on, but we decided to leave before the Bert got even more agitated so we left, only €4 the poorer for our session, but with no idea what we'd done wrong... we've subsequently guessed

that the “tasting tray” was probably nothing of the sort and I was probably supposed to buy a beer after sampling them all – but how the fuck was I supposed to know, it looked just like a tasting tray I’ve had in numerous brewpubs around Europe to me! So, if you decide to scoop the beers in Magister, just remember to buy a beer and not just stick with the tray...

Pub of the evening.

We had one more call before some well-earned doss and that was the Venencia sherry bar just a little bit further along the street towards our hotel. It looked just like any other locals’ bar from the outside but, once through the door, it became obvious that the Rough Guide and Mark Enderby were right to tell me this place was a must-visit! The bar stretched back seemingly to the horizon and was furnished in a Spartan manner with old sherry casks and adverts littering the walls. A large stillage sat by the bar, populated by sherry casks, and the only drinks on sale seemed to be the four sherry varieties of fino, manzanilla, palo cortado and oloroso which came from bottles filled from the casks. I must state that I’m not sure if these casks are replaced as and when necessary or if they’re simply fakes with pipes to the taps as in some other brewpubs I could mention but, looking at the overall feel of the place I’d guess they were real... but if anyone knows better then please tell me!

At first we sat in the lower level but as that progressively filled up we moved to the raised area at the rear where we immediately found the cat that Mark had told us about; he said that once the cat was on your lap the only way to leave was to pass it to someone else but the cat, a small long-haired critter, was hunched on a table looking as if he couldn’t really be arsed to do anything never mind expend the energy to climb onto a lap. As we claimed his table, however, he suddenly showed a remarkable turn of speed and ensconced himself on Sue’s lap before we’d put our glasses down!

We stayed in this superb little bar far longer than we intended, being tired from an early start and having another early one the following morning, but we just loved the atmosphere of the place – and, anyhow, the cat wasn’t letting us go anywhere! We tried all of the sherries available but, sadly, I wasn’t able to ascertain which producer they came from which gives me the impression that they are from whoever is cheapest that week, but that’s just the old cynic in me talking, sorry... after a quick *tapa* of some gloriously acidic and tongue-curling *Manchego* cheese we finally evicted the cat - who quickly sidled up to the occupants of the neighbouring table in search of a lap - and paid the remarkably small bill before heading off into the night and some eagerly anticipated doss at our über-beige hotel.

Thursday 22nd March 2007.

Too good to be true.

We were awake far too early the next day as we had an appointment with the 10:10 flight to Lisbon. Whilst showering I studied the bathroom and I can honestly say I’ve never seen such a beige room in my life; everything was beige including the shower, bath, sink, walls and even the bloody hairdryer was beige! With no time for breakfast we were soon on a metro train heading for the airport but, as nothing is ever simple, we had a problem in that our flight left from the new terminal 4 and we weren’t sure, despite our map telling us that it was, if the metro extension had been completed as yet! Despite signs urging us to get off at the Barajas airport T3 station, we carried on to the end of the line with a blind faith that we’d end up at terminal 4...

... Which of course we didn't as the train terminated, as booked, at Barajas town. Once up the stairs we assessed the situation and decided we'd either have to take the train back one stop or catch a bus – when bus No.201 appeared heading for the airport! We tried to blag our way on by flashing the metro tickets and, had the vehicle been busier, we may have got away with it but the driver called me back and extracted €2 from me in return for passage to the airport. We'd considered walking it but, as we stormed further and further along a dusty road, I realised we'd still have been walking at midday so the €1 each suddenly seemed a much better deal than it had done five minutes previously.

The new terminal looked very new indeed and was also about twice the size of most other airports by itself. We had a confusing minute when we realised we had no idea what gate the flight left from and there were no screens anywhere in sight to find out... I resorted to asking the information desk and, predictably, the gate was about as far away as it physically could be so off we trudged along the gigantic building which seemed to stretch away into the far horizon. The further we walked the hotter it became and we'd soon removed the fleeces which the early morning chill had necessitated the wearing of and bought a refreshing fresh orange juice from a café; feeling much better after the jolt of vitamin C we arrived at the gate to see the plane already sat on stand; result!

Well, it would have been a result had other matters not conspired against us; various announcements told us the flight would be delayed but the reasons given were undecipherable although an American nearby who seemed to speak Spanish told everyone who wanted to hear - and everyone else who didn't - that we might be there some time as "the plane was broken". Cheers then; suddenly the €10 flight didn't seem such a bargain as, if it didn't run, we'd have to ching out vastly over the odds for another flight, if one existed, and this had the potential to make a right arse of all our carefully laid plans.

Time dragged on and still nothing happened but, suddenly, there were signs of activity at the desk and then a pilot jogged up, looking rather flustered, and went straight down the airbridge to the plane. Five minutes later we were ready to board and we soon found out what had happened as the new pilot informed us that his colleague had gone sick and so, being on-call, he'd had to rush the 50km from his home straight to the airport! Okay, we were leaving an hour late, but at least we were leaving and, as we turned west towards Portugal with the landscape already turning noticeably greener, I had a feeling of great relief that everything would be okay – thanks to the stand-in pilot!

We love Lisboa.

With our seats already selected during the online check-in we'd gambled on sitting to the left for what promised to be a great view of the city on final approach, but we'd no idea we would be treated to such a spectacular view as we did; the Airbus made it's final approach very low right over the Alfama district, directly over the castle, with the whole of central Lisbon laid out below. We'd made up a small amount of time and so once through the formalities it was straight onto the waiting No.91 Aerobus and thence straight into the centre of Lisbon to begin our re-acquaintance with one of the most interesting European capitals.

The €3 ticket from the 91 bus is basically a "day rover" and so we were straight out onto the superb little trams which ply Lisbon's remaining routes. Route 28 must rate as one of the world's greatest tram rides – probably the best – as it careers up and down impossibly steep

hills (in fact the very top of Cal. de São Francisco is the world's steepest adhesion rail gradient at 1 in 6.9)² and charges down streets which don't look wide enough to allow passage; some of the streets in the Alfama are so narrow you can reach out and touch the buildings if you feel so inclined. Add to this 1930s-vintage 4-wheel tramcars, glorious architecture and (generally) magnificent weather and you may see why I rate Lisbon's – and its trams - so highly.

We took a 28 for the full tortuous climb through the Alfama to its terminus at Martim Moniz and, without any hyperbole, it's an absolute thriller of a ride and like no other tramway I've ever been on with single track most of the way in the oldest streets and numerous sharp gradients which physically slide you forwards or back in your seat as you feel (and hear) the protesting tram lurch over the summits and squeal around the 90-degree corners. There's no way I can fully describe just how amazing a trip this is, even with some photos, so my only advice is to get yourself to Lisbon and experience it first-hand; okay so the beer situation is poor, but when you have trams this good does it really matter?

Once at Martim Moniz - which, after the 30-minute run on tram 28 seems miles out of town but is in fact a mere 200 metres from Praça da Figueira – we did the circular route 12 all the way round through the Alfama again and then, delirious with tram-fever, we did it again up to the Sé (cathedral) for another back down to Praça do Comércio on the waterfront. We decided that it was time we checked into the hotel and so strolled north up the arrow-straight Rue Áurea towards Praça Restauradores but, despite the time being 13:45, we were denied and told to come back at 15:00; cheers, time for a coffee and cake then...

With so little beer-wise to gibber about you can see I'm clutching at straws here by discussing coffee, but not any old coffee; Portuguese coffee is superb, probably the best I've had anywhere, but be warned that if you're the kind who likes the weak instant crud which somehow gets around the labelling laws in the UK and is still called coffee then you're going to be in for a shock when you get your first *Bica*; this is probably the smallest espresso you'll ever see (similar to an Italian Ristretto) and is an explosion of flavour for such a small measure. It's very smooth and roasty, though rarely harsh, and once you acquire a taste for it you're up and away – literally! Try one in any streetside café you come across (we randomly chose them and never had a duff one) with the local speciality of Pasteis du Nata (a custard tart, but not sloppily revolting like the ones we get back home) and you'll probably get change from €1.50. We decided to indulge in a meal in the back room of the Casa Chinoise café which we remembered from our last visit and had a loaded plate of *bacalao* (dried salt-cod) with vegetables for €5 or so and rather nice it was too, although I didn't think fish could physically contain that many bones...

A room with a view.

We managed to check-in at the second attempt and were allocated a room on the 9th floor which, when we got there, seemed too good to be true; we had a little kitchen, a room which an estate agent would almost certainly pronounce to be a "good size" and a balcony overlooking the castle: all for £40 a night! We soon decided we were very lucky as rooms any lower than ours would have their view blocked by the hotel's façade and wouldn't be anywhere near as impressive. We even trolled up onto the roof (where there was a small swimming pool) to get the proper view out over the city and it's fair to say it was stunning – not a word I use often, but this was – with views down the Baixa to the Tejo, across to the castle, and then north up to the Pombal roundabout; I've not been in a hotel with a view this good for a long time, probably since I worked in the County Hall Marriott and my room overlooked Westminster bridge and Parliament... but I'd still chose the panorama of Lisbon over London any day!

One black mark on the hotel was the absence of our supposedly complementary bottle of port as I'd booked a special "Welcome Lisbon" rate which was supposed to include said beverage. I even went back to reception to ask them where it was and the smiling staff, who obviously didn't intend to do anything about it, said they'd look into it and get one sent up to us... as expected the bottle never arrived but maybe it was just as well as it would presumably have been some non-scoop and may have prevented us drinking the bottles we bought that evening.

After a quick rest it was back out for the No.12 tram around the Alfalma yet again but not before we'd found a great little wine shop on Rua Dona Antão Vaz Almada - which connects Rossio and Praça da Figueria - where we had an amazing choice of ports and wines for extremely reasonable prices; we just couldn't help ourselves from buying a couple of half bottles to drink on our balcony during the two evenings we had in the hotel, and this trip we didn't even have to buy a corkscrew (see the Channel Island and Carcassonne articles if you're sad enough to be interested) as there was one sitting in the kitchenette drawer! We also wandered in to what we assumed was a supermarket and bought some water and a bottle of Sagres Bohemia (which was being advertised to death everywhere around the city) although, when we tried to return the following day, we were ejected as it was in fact a wholesaler for the local hotels...

Tram 12 was taken around the loop again (I don't think I could ever grow tired of that route, it's just amazing) and then we did a 28 all the way to its western terminus – cresting the steepest part of line in the process, and it felt as if the little tram would topple over backwards it was so precipitous – before scooping in route 25 back to Praça do Comércio via a route which was equally as hilly as the 28. With the Glória funicular out of action we took cabin 1 of the Santa Justa lift (yes, I know I'm sad, but it had a number on it so it felt rude not to write it down) up to the Chiado district and then wandered past the Carmo monastery and along the cobbled streets following long disused tramlines with overhead wires still in-situ; what a waste, and it looked like a cracking route too.

The Institute of Port.

We passed the Cervejaria Trindade, a classic beer hall with superb [azulejo](#) tiling, but unfortunately it was heaving with normals queuing for tables and, anyway, the beer selection is only Sagres swill so we carried on towards our target, the forbiddingly-named Institute of Port Wine, where we knew we'd be able to scoop rare ports by the glass as we'd done the last time we were in Lisbon, and we've got the photos to prove it of us standing outside the door with a receipt roughly as long as King Kong's cock listing our scoops; strangely enough neither of us remember that bit, I've no idea why that should be...

We were soon inside the institute and were relieved to observe that it hadn't changed a jot in five years! We settled into what must have been the same table we'd occupied on our previous visit and spent the next couple of hours ordering ports from the extensive menu which are brought to your table by the aloof yet sociable waiters. We began with LBV's and tawnys, moved on to *colheitas*, dabbled with aged tawnys and finished with some very old tawnys indeed, all helped on its way by some lovely sheep's cheese and fresh bread, before deciding we'd had enough and wandering over the road just to see if the Gloria funicular was running – which it wasn't, owing to maintenance - so we had to make do with a walk down the steep hill of Calçada da Glória which led us out onto Restauradores, a mere minute from the hotel's front door.

On our balcony all was peaceful and we had a sublime view over Resturadores square and onwards to the castle perched atop the hill beyond. We opened one of the half bottles of port from the cracking little shop (the bottle opener was slightly reluctant and it took Sue's touch to persuade it to operate correctly) and sat on slightly flimsy plastic chairs, resembling the type you might have in your garden after visiting Homebase, and sipped appreciatively whilst watching Lisbon's life go on below us. We were both amazed by the good fortune I'd had in choosing this hotel and vowed to stay here if – no, when – we returned to Lisbon. As we sat and supped a very depressed looking pigeon crouched not two metres from us, fluffed up against the evening chill, seemingly unconcerned that we were intruding onto his patch although both of us agreed that if we were pigeons we'd try to sneak into the room when the humans went for a piss!

Friday 23rd March 2007.

Back on the trams again.

The bed was remarkably comfortable and encouraged a long lie-in which we sort of accepted, although we were still up at a reasonable time as we had more trams to ride and – during the evening – beers to scoop! I flung open the balcony doors to see what the new day had in store for us and saw it was business as usual with a blue sky peppered by fluffy clouds and a blazing sun, but what caught my eye more was the huge pile of shit on our balcony wall where the pigeon had been sleeping the night before – cheers then! On our way down in the lift we stopped at an intermediate floor for some Americans to join the “elevator” but, in typical fat Yank style, they overloaded it and the alert light began blinking furiously; they got back out muttering something about the lift being a “terrorist asshole” or “goddam eye-rakki” (or something like that) but it certainly made us laugh – and we're not the thinnest people around!

Breakfast wasn't included in our rate and so we made do with a superb cake and kickstart *bica* in the Casa Chinoise just off Rossio to start our day. We bought a day ticket from the little Carris stand on Figuera before trolling back to the funicular Sue still required, the Lavra, which fortuitously had recently re-opened after a long refurbishment; this was taken up to the top where, in order to scoop the other car back down, we had enough time for a wander over to the nearby gardens where - had the trees been shorter and less leafy – we would have been offered a magnificent view over the Baixa. As it was I had to settle for some photos between the trees but the views down to the Tejo were still amazing and it was with reluctance we braved the automatic sprinklers busy watering the gardens to catch the Lavra back down to street level.

Feeling hungry (again!) we tried the very sociable café opposite the entrance to the funicular where we had a great *bica* and cake to keep us going until the next one; the owner was concerned that we should sit down lest our fragile English legs buckle under the heat but we knew that standing at the counter costs around 40-50% less than sitting so, the stingy skinflints that we are, we stood at the bar to finish our coffee. To be honest it's not really worth sitting down to drink a *bica* as they're so small all is gone within two sips anyhow, so 50¢ for standing at the bar suits us just fine, thanks very much. I scooped a cheese and ham pasty-type snack too, on the premise it looked nice, and the total bill came to less than €5; excellent!

We decided to give the 28 tram a bit more hammer and after a trip out to Prazeres again we fell onto an amazing piece of luck; the tram was absolutely wedged and we managed to squeeze in to the left of the driver and saw the whole trip through the open front window which certainly brought the incredible gradients and narrow alleys into focus. We also witnessed the amusing

signalling system used in the Alfalma where one bloke runs ahead to see what's coming round the corners and then beckons the tram on – health and safety, anyone?

We then took another winning route, the 18, along the racetrack of the riverfront to its terminus at Ajuda cemetery via some surprisingly precipitous gradients where we thought we were in for a nice gentle ride along flat streets – not in Lisbon! We then took one of the hideous plastic trams out to Belém to see the famous Torre de Belém, one of the only surviving pre-18th century buildings in Lisbon the rest having been demolished by the 1755 earthquake and subsequent firestorm which razed the city to the ground.

Pasteis du Nata to the max!

After viewing the imposing monastery then an old tram trailer car in the loop at Belém (which sadly impressed me much more) it was time to return to the city centre, but not before we'd sampled the famous *pasties du nata* made at the Belém bakery just along from the tramstop. I wasn't sure about this place as it seemed to be packed with tourists doing what the guidebook told them to do but, as we found a space at the capacious counter, I noticed some locals defiantly standing their ground and enjoying a *bica* with accompanying *nata* at the counter in the face of a tide of humanity baying over their shoulder for the little cakes. We decided to go native and ordered the same whilst watching the pantomime unfurl before us; the *pasties* were brought out at shoulder height on a huge metal tray fresh from the oven which, owing to the phenomenal custom front of house, was emptied within a few minutes and service stopped until the next tray wound its way from the kitchens. Okay, so the whole carry-on may be put on for the hordes of tourists, but it's still an impressive sight to see so many cakes being doled out to a baying mob!

What we weren't prepared for was the taste of the little tarts; they were still warm and came with a sprinkle of cinnamon and icing sugar which transformed them into something quite special and pretty much indescribable – they were so good we did the tourist thing and bought a tube of them to take away, although two of them didn't make it past the tramstop – before going for a look at the manic kitchens where hundreds of the little sweet things were sitting at various stages of the process being attended to by hordes of chefs and waiters; it's one of those things which is utterly enthralling and I could have stood there and watched for ages had we not had beers to scoop that evening.

We joined a considerable mass of people waiting for the next city-bound tram. Several passed going out of town but it was a good fifteen minutes before the first one appeared going in the right direction and, unsurprisingly, it was absolutely wedged out even before it had stopped! Somehow the horde of people managed to squeeze onto it and off we went; we were going to see if the Carris transport museum was still open and somehow managed to weasel our way off the tram only to find it closed in five minutes; d'oh!

Ah well, nothing for it but to take the next tram (which was slightly less full) a few stops further in before alighting for a much better form of transport in the form of a 1930's *remodelado* tram on route 18 all the way to its terminus at Alfândega. From there we took a 25 back out to the bottom of the Bica funicular then scooped the amazingly cute little tram up its mountaneous hill for a 28 back into town before a quick look around the superb Napoleão port shop on the corner of Rua dos Franqueiros and Rue da Conceição where we bought a winning miniature of port; we'd considered buying some luggage to pack with port to take home but reluctantly rejected this idea and settled for the miniature.

Beer time!

Right, it was time for some scoops – and I knew the only place in Lisbon to have any realistic chance of getting some was at the Parque das Nações at Oriente where a branch of Super Bock's Republica da Cerveja was located along with one of Lusitana's restaurants which served the beers brewed – allegedly – at their brewpub out in the west which is almost impossible to reach by public transport. We made our way down in to the metro station and as we clattered down the steps a train pulled in; breaking into a brisk trot we approached the train as it's doors opened but I suddenly heard footsteps very close behind me and a tug on my bag – some bastard was trying to steal it! I shot a glance behind me and saw a young kid who, having been rumbled, immediately released his hold on the rucksack and made a run for it with nothing to show for his efforts. All I can say is that he's very lucky he ran as, had I caught him, he'd have received a special present from this tourist – a magnum in the head! As it was I jumped aboard the metro with the lesson well and truly learnt.

After that small piece of excitement – which, if truth be told, could happen anywhere – we settled down for the short ride up to Oriente. We emerged in the bowels of the Vasco de Gama shopping centre and made our way towards the Tejo where the first of the evening's scoops would hopefully be found in the Republica da Cerveja; these places are owned by Super Bock (one of the 2 major brewers in Portugal) and I'd heard that they try to pass themselves off as brewpubs. The building was soon located alongside the estuary and it looked like a concrete bunker which had received a glass wall in lieu of one of its concrete ones... not the most atmospheric of buildings, but we weren't there in an architecture criticising mode but a beer (and food!) one so in we went and bagged a table from which to observe happenings.

Reading the menu it soon became clear that this venue didn't try to give the impression it brewed anything and, aside from this honesty, there were six draught beers available; Pils, Stout (the normal stout usually found bottled), Artesanal, Puro Malte, Malte de Whisky and Bock, and best of all they were available in tiny glasses of 0.1l! I can almost hear the howls of indignation at my scooping of beer in such small measures, but I really don't give a fuck – I expected the beers to be poor and so saving money and drinking less of them seemed a bright thing to do – and it's my rules at the end of the day!

As we were – as usual – starving, two plates of food were also ordered as well as the four specials in their cute little glasses. The beers arrived first (with the waiter being slightly withered delivering four tiny glasses of winners) and so I made a start with Artesanal (5.2%) which, sadly, confirmed my suspicions about the beers; a yellowy fluid, quite industrial and "lagery" (meant in the fizzy, tasteless shite sense) with a very vague hint of malt in the finish – or was it popcorn? Next was Puro Malte (5.2%) which was slightly darker and, to be fair, did have some maltiness to the flavour although this was drowned out by a syrupy, toffeeish and artificially fruity overtone.

The food arrived and so scooping was postponed for ten minutes whilst the surprisingly good comestibles were consumed, which were far better than the beers it must be said! With plates mopped spotlessly clean I resumed the ticking with Malte de Whisky (8%) which wasn't so good; a pale beer with an intense TCP taste, thick corn syrup body and heavy phenols and syrup in the finish. Okay, so I know that phenols are great in beers from Bamberg, but these just didn't work in this beer whatsoever and it gave the impression of a cheap, sweet lager with flavourings added afterwards!

The final winner of the range was Bock (6.8%) and I had higher hopes for this one owing to its deeper brown hue. Sadly it didn't live up to its potential and was yet another toffeeish, sweet, plain and woefully underpowered beer with very little to recommend it save a touch of treacle on the tongue early on before the overwhelming sweetness swamped it. I was tempted to have a quick snifter of the stout, seeing as it's rather decent in bottle, but a glance at the time persuaded me not to bother and so, after paying the reassuringly cheap bill, it was off to find the other beery attraction in town – the local Lusitana pub. There had previously been a proper brewpub here at the Parque das Nações in the form of a Frog and Rosbif, but an email from the company confirmed that it had closed the previous year as “we couldn't wean the locals off cheap wine and strong coffee”! Shame, they would have probably been the best beers in the country...

Room at the bar.

Back into the huge shopping centre we went and took the escalators to the “food deck” as it was called; this deposited us in an area with the usual array of multinational shit-peddlers but then Sue saw the sign for the “beer deck” up yet another escalator! At the top were a few bars but, most importantly for me, there was Lusitana right in front of us – with a queue to get in!

Joining the queue was the only option available and so we shuffled into position behind a couple of local families; it looked as if this pub was in reality a restaurant which served Lusitana's beer on draught although whether anyone would actually notice what beer was on sale was a debatable matter in my opinion! We reached the front of the queue and spotted two seats at the bar just begging us to fill them and so, when the welcoming Bert came round next, I managed to convince him we didn't mind sitting at the bar and that was it, we were in!

We perched on our stools and surveyed the menu; six beers were listed although I'd already decided to ignore the two wheat examples leaving us with Pils, Abadia (amber), Preta (dark) and the seasonal. A barman soon arrived and asked what we wanted; seeing as the place was so busy I didn't fancy trying to catch him again and so ordered all my beers in one go which somewhat confused him! After discovering that the seasonal was off (cheers then!) I settled for the other three brews which were brought across by the barman with a look that said “Three beers at once? Bloody English!”

I didn't know quite what to expect from Lusitana's beers despite them being brewed locally; yes the company was a brewpub, but it also had alleged ties to Super Bock in a way that no-one really knew so there was a suspicion that some (or indeed all) of the beer was from the big brewery and not the one out at Carnaxide. Pils was first up and the signs weren't encouraging, as the yellowy fluid had a faintly industrial flavour with syrup tastes: it certainly taste like a big brewer's product and I was quite disappointed it was so poor, but I suppose that's what you get when there's no real quality beer to beat – everyone just aims low by default.

Abadia came next and this was much better – thankfully – with a pleasing amber colour, a toffee-malt flavour with some lovely honeycomb hints coming through in the finish giving a very tasty and drinkable beer if a touch sweet for my tastes. The Preta was last and I'd been right in assuming it would be the best; it lurked in its glass with a Dylan Thomas “bible black” colour and gave off a good roasty aroma. The taste was satisfyingly similar with a complex mix of roast, toast, malt, tar, bitterness and grain on a light-ish body with a well-balanced toasty, burnt and sweetish finish making it the beer of the evening by quite a way!

With nothing else to detain us it was back on the metro again, being super-cautious of any passing brats just in case they took it upon themselves to make a lunge for my bag, and it was then back out onto the balcony for some more port scoops! Before that, however, I supped as much of the bottle as I could of Super Bock Abadia (6.2%) which was a sweet beer full of toffee and grainy tastes and a lack of any kind of dryness or bitterness gave a flaccid and rather unpleasantly sickly end result. Last and certainly least was Sagres Bohemia (6.2%), a reddy/amber beer with some toffee tastes but swamped by syrup and toffee leaving me wanting a hefty swig of water to refresh myself afterwards! The Portuguese may have great coffee, port and trams but beer certainly isn't their strong point...

Oh yes, and our pet shitting pigeon was back, more or less in the same place as the night before, looking ready to add to the already commodious pile of turds already there...

Saturday 25th March 2007.

Not valid.

We had near enough a full day before our return to the UK and so, after glancing onto the balcony to see if our pigeon had left us more presents (he had), we checked out and headed off for yet more tram-bashing but not before taking the ferry across the Tejo to the one-horse town of Cacilhas just across the river. We'd decided to do this trip as it looked like it offered a decent view when approaching Lisbon and so, after purchasing the €0.77 single ticket (Carris day tickets aren't valid on the TransTejo boats) we were off across the water.

Once at Cacilhas we realised that there was absolutely nothing there and nothing to do and so, ever willing to scoop everything that moves, we waited for the other boat to arrive and sat on the waterfront admiring the view over Lisbon. A quick *bíca* later and we were en-route back to Cais Sodré station and, as we'd expected, the views from the little ferry were excellent although there was no sign of any dolphins as some guidebooks had suggested!

Back on dry land it was time for a last storm around on the superb little trams; I'll not bore you any more with the details, but we did the 12 and 28 routes to death and still went back for more before a quick meal in the Casa Chinoise (where I learnt that "Portuguese style" means the resulting food has a fried egg on top!) and we saw some local drinking his soup via a straw... back out on the trams we went, where despite temperatures in the mid-20's a group of Adas besuited in coats went around closing the windows! After this prime example of what European train cranks call "fresh air syndrome" it was time for us to catch the airport bus from Praça do Comércio – and that was where the day went downhill!

Coming from the airport on the No.91 bus it's necessary to buy a ticket which then entitles you to a full day's public transport in Lisbon. We'd assumed, wrongly it turned out, that the ordinary city day-ticket would be valid on the airport bus but, when one arrived, the driver informed us that we could either pay €3 for a ticket or take one of the local buses to the airport instead. Neither option sounded particularly appetising but we had to choose one and so, ever the tight bastards, we let the 91 go and went off searching for the bus 45 stop as, in our opinion, we already had a ticket and we were going to feckin' use it!

The stop was soon located and after a short wait the required bus arrived, but these buses take at least 15 minutes longer to reach the airport than the express bus and it soon became clear

that we'd made a right arse of the move. This was reinforced when, upon arrival at the airport, we joined a massive queue checking in for the Luton flight and it took us almost 45 minutes to get checked in and sorted! Frustratingly, our bus cock-up had put us in boarding group D and it was only by luck that we managed to get two seats together on the booked-solid flight as the buses from the terminal dropped us off by the back door and I managed to make a dash for it ahead of the other gibbering normals to bag two seats!

Not the best end to the trip, but I suppose it was our fault and, funnily enough, the same thing happened the last time we'd been in Lisbon; we really should learn lessons from our balls-ups! One thing we both decided was that Lisbon was one of our favourite cities and we'd be back as soon as our busy schedule allowed... not for the beer, but for everything else which makes the city such an amazing place to visit.

Conclusions.

Let's be honest here; Lisbon isn't a great city for beer scooping although, if you're persistent, there are a few beers to be had even if you'll not do as well as Madrid where the two brewpubs give at least a semblance of scoopability. That said, most people aren't going to either place to fill their books with winners and any beers ticked off will probably be incidental to the main purpose of the trip, so it's really not a massive problem that you'll not scoop dozens of ticks – if it is, then just go to Vienna or Berlin instead!

Madrid first; I was surprised what a pleasant place it was and, of more interest to the beer scooper, how good one of the brewpubs turned out to be! To be honest I think we caught Magister on a bad day and I've been told since that the beer is usually rather good so, if I'm in Madrid again, then I know where to go! There are also quite a few nice old sherry and wine bars scattered around the centre, conveniently close to Place Santa Ana where the brewpubs are, and these provide an excellent change from drinking beer; the Venencia sherry bar was probably the find of the trip pub-wise and is somewhere I'd recommend anyone to visit in the way I'd recommend a visit to an unspoilt rural pub serving excellent beer in the UK.

Lisbon is, not to put too fine a point on things, a write-off beer wise; apart from the surprisingly poor Lusitana beers there's not a lot else worth drinking although both big brewer's *preta* dark beers are surprisingly decent and available in the majority of bars but rarely displayed as they're for the locals only! Of course it doesn't make sense to visit Portugal and not drink any port and, luckily, one of the branches of the Institute of Port is in town to fulfil all your port drinking requirements.

But it's not all about drinking, is it? Both cities are good places for exploration although both Sue and I love Lisbon more than most cities; it's human in scale, it's cheap, and of course there are those amazing trams... Lisbon is one of Europe's most under-rated capital cities in my opinion and a few days wandering around it's streets will amaze those who think they've seen all Europe has to offer; there's Moorish Arabic architecture everywhere, and the districts go from the steep winding lanes of the Alfama through the grid-like but still intriguing Baixa to the well-to-do streets of Chiado, and best of all it's a cheap city with the staples such as transport, drink and food costing far less than in Northern Europe.

So, to summarise, a beer expedition to Lisbon is a waste of time, one to Madrid won't take much longer than an evening but at least you might get something half-decent, but life's about more

than beer and I'd recommend a visit to Lisbon wholeheartedly if you want to see somewhere different and interesting plus, if you like trams and suchlike, then Lisbon should be very high on your list of must-do's anyway! For a trip away from the desperation of ticking beer after beer, Madrid and Lisbon will both do very well, thanks very much.

How to get there and get around there.

Madrid's [Barajas airport](#) is one of the biggest air hubs in Europe and it's a pretty safe bet that you'll be able to find an airline to take you there from wherever you want, although to find a cheap one may require slight flexibility in your departure point as only easyJet have really put it on the low-cost map. Barajas airport is a huge, sprawling, multi-terminalled monster and not recommended for those who like small, folksy airports with lots of local colour to them, as the only colour you'll see at Barajas is the glare of rampant capitalism. Saying that it's not too bad an airport to arrive or depart from, just make sure you know which terminal you're using and – unlike us – check if the metro has opened to Terminal 4 when you visit!

This is an overview of [who flies to Madrid](#) as of May 2007, see [skyscanner](#) for more details.

- [easyJet](#) go from Luton, Gatwick, Bristol, Edinburgh and Liverpool,
- [Ryanair](#) fly from East Midlands and Bournemouth.

Madrid has no trams, sadly, but does have a pretty decent [metro system](#) which comprehensively covers the city and can whisk you to and from the airport although note that the direct line to Barajas (line 8, the pink one) doesn't pass through Sol, the city centre, but terminates short at Nuevos Ministerios so you'll have to change at least once which, with a lot of bags, could be a right pain in the arse. A [day ticket](#) is available (abono transporte turístico) from metro stations and the Metro ticket offices at the airport and costs €3.80 for one day with other add-on days being available at a discount.

[Lisbon airport](#) is a far smaller and more manageable destination and has only recently made it back onto the low-cost radar via easyJet's new routes there – I say new, but they used to fly there after the Go takeover although they discontinued the route for an unknown reason in 2001. Well, now it's back and it's possible to reach the airport via the following services, although note that Monarch and Thomson aren't really "low cost" as we know it!

- [easyJet](#) fly from Luton,
- [Monarch](#) go from Gatwick,
- [BMIBaby](#) fly from Birmingham and
- [Thomsonfly](#) from Manchester.

Getting from the airport is easy; the [No.91 aerobus](#) leaves every 20 minutes or so and calls at all the main places en-route such as Restauradores, Rossio, Praça do Comércio and then on to Cais Sodré rail station where it turns around. Tickets can be bought on the bus; it's currently €3 which then allows you freedom of the city's [Carris](#) public transport system; it's an airport transfer and day ticket, basically yet cheaper than the standard day ticket – work that one out! There are also local buses (the 44 and 45 both basically mirror the 91's route to Cais Sodré) which stop far more often but are valid with the day ticket. As for getting [back to the airport](#), day tickets aren't valid on the No.91 and therefore I assume you need to spend an extra €3 to get a ticket. I don't know if you could simply buy two 91 bus tickets when you arrive then use the other for the final day's tram bashing and travel back to the airport...? See the Carris [map](#) and [website](#) for more details.

Getting around Lisbon is easy with the city centre being eminently walkable owing to its compact size and attractive architecture, but that misses out one of the city's most precious possessions; it's Eléctricos, or trams. One of the main reasons for coming to Lisbon for many tram lovers is the now scandalously depleted tram system which, despite its rationalisation to a mere 5 routes, provides passengers with the best public transport rides anywhere in the world as the little 1930's 4-wheel vehicles clank their way around (and over) the precipitous gradients and curves of the routes, in particular the 12 and 28, and to do the full 28 route is to spend an hour of pleasure and admiration for the little trams as they master seemingly impossible gradients (Cal. de São Francisco, on the way out of the Baixa towards Parazeres, has a 40 metre stretch at 1 in 6.9, the steepest adhesion gradient anywhere in the world²). The city also has an underground metro system and loads of buses which means you can get anywhere you wish by public transport for a mere €3.35 a day (plus the €0.50 one-off fee for your rechargeable "7 Colinas" card, get these from the Carris booths or metro stations).

Connections between Madrid and Lisbon exist in the form of planes and the "Lusitania" overnight train from Madrid Chamartin to Lisbon São Bento which offers sleeping carriages for the 9-hour journey. We had planned to do the train but weren't sure it was actually running and the €102 fare each was easily bumped by Vueling's €10 special offer flight! Both Iberia and TAP run frequent flights between the cities, but only Vueling are priced for the ordinary traveller especially if you get one of their frequent €10 or €20 special offer tickets. Even booking a couple of months in advance you'd be lucky to break €120 return for the flag carriers so I'd either do the train or use Vueling! To be honest I'd prefer the train as it leaves at a sociable hour (around 22:00) and drops you off near enough in the centre of the respective cities at around 08:00 the following morning and you get breakfast thrown in too.

Staying around there.

We stayed in the Hotel Regina in Madrid basically because it was the most convenient hotel in proximity to the brewpubs and metro; it's a mere five minute walk from Pl. Santa Ana to the hotel via the Venencia sherry bar and there's a metro station right outside the front door. The price for a double is around €90 via the hotel's website although using hotel search engines such as the excellent hotel.de you can easily find cheaper – it's just that the Regina fitted our requirements perfectly (apart from having a Lawrence-Llewelyn Booton-designed bathroom) and there are loads of other options in the area.

Lisbon has fewer hotels than Madrid in the centre of the city with most being in the outskirts, although our choice of the VIP Eden was a superb art-deco building (a former theatre) which was visible from the plane on approach it's so conspicuous! Situated on the busy yet pretty expanse of Restauradores this imposing building houses self-contained suites which include a tiny yet fully-equipped kitchenette; we bagged a bargain deal for €59 a night although the standard rate isn't too excessive and varies between €80 and €100 per room. You don't get breakfast but you do get a rooftop pool and outstanding views over the city centre.

Beer and Brewery gen.

As you've probably gathered - if you've actually read this gibberish rather than, sensibly, in my opinion, skipped straight to the useful bit here – there's not a lot of beer to be scooped in either

destination, although at least Madrid has two brewpubs which kind of beats Lisbon's none (or one maybe if you include the distant Lusitana). Madrid would probably support a scooper for a day, but in Lisbon you'd struggle to fill a couple of hours beer hunting; it's just as well that there's a branch of the [Institute of Port](#) (IVP) to fulfil your scooping needs... well, when in Rome...

Madrid.


Madrid's two brewpubs are very close to each other at Plaza de Santa Ana which is less than 500 metres to the Southeast of Sol. Most of the city's nightlife is to be found in this area and so the bars can get very busy, although they stay open late to compensate! Also recommended for wine scooping are the Vinoteca Barbechera bar on Santa Ana, the [Viva Madrid](#) bar at Manuel Fernandez y Gonzales 7, and the superb Venencia sherry bar on Calle de Echegarary 7 which has no beer (I think!) but draught sheries from the wood (allegedly!).

Cervecería Alemana, Plaza de Santa Ana 6. ()

Situated almost next door to Naturbier on the south side of the square; you can't miss it.

This famous old beer hall serves up the usual multinational junk but, maybe as a token effort, does have Heineken Spain's solitary ale in the form of Legado de Yuste. It's generally full of tourists through the double-edged sword of being right in the middle of the tourist area and being famous as one of [Hemingway's](#) favourite bars; quite why that matters in the great scheme of things is a mystery to me, but some people consider it a positive point and thus the place is usually jam-packed with Americans.

Beers :


- Heineken Spain Legado de Yuste (6.5%) - Amber, very candy-sugary and toffeeish yet with a grainy, fruity taste and not a bad try to be honest, especially when you consider it's by a multinational and also an island of ale in a sea of lager. ()



Naturbier Cervezas, Plaza Santa Ana 9. ()

On Plaza de Santa Ana, very close to the Alemana; you can't miss it!

Almost next door to the Cerveceria Alemana (a famous old bar which stocks the rare Heineken Seville Legado de Yuste Belgian-style beer in bottles) this brewpub was a sociable and relaxed venue for a couple of scoops with gleaming coppers situated at the rear. They had, by the smell of things, just concluded the day's brewing and the luscious aroma of beer-making hung heavy in the air. There are two beers, a Helles and a Tostado, both average but very drinkable.

Beers :

- Helles - A cloudy amber appearance, fresh malt and bread aromas, then a sociably smooth, full, sweetish and intensely grainy flavour ending strongly malty. ()
- Tostado - looked the business with it's reddy/amber colour but wasn't really as pleasant, as it's flavour was too biased in the facet of toffee and caramel with little else to add a






spark of interest save a slight smokiness in the toasted malt finish; you may really like this beer if you enjoy sweet and toffee tasting brews. ( )

Magister Fabrica de Cervezas, Calle Príncipe 18. Opens from 16:00 ? ( )

Head North off the right-hand side of Santa Ana and you'll see the brewpub after only a few metres on your left.

A very long, thin bar with the stainless steel plant to the rear behind glass. I asked what beers were available and received what I assumed to be a tasting tray of four brews (Rubia, Tostado, Doblebock and Caramelizada) but by all accounts this was supposed to help me decide which beer to drink - when I tried to pay, the barman gibbered away in Spanish something which I reckon translates along the lines of "Stupid Englishman, we give you little tasters to see which beer you want to buy, but then you sit there for an hour sipping them and don't buy anything else! Get out before I call the police". A nice place, but some of the beers tasted infected and weren't the kind of thing I'd want to drink a lot of - other reports say the beers are usually decent so we must have picked a bad night!

Beers :

- Rubia (5%, golden) - I immediately noticed this had a distinct cidery character to it; surely a sign of an infection somewhere along the line? The taste was fairly malty but the sour appley taste put me off totally. ()
- Tostada (6.5%) - The same infection was obvious in this beer too, perhaps more so than the rubia; cheers then, maybe we should have stayed in Naturbier... (**0 points!**)
- Doblebock (8.2%) – Happily, this wasn't infected but wasn't particularly impressive either, being a bananary and fruity amber brew with a strong toffee-malt character with some alcohol noticeable in the finish. ( )
- Caramelizada (5.5%) - Probably the best of Magister's beers being a near-black, frazzled, caramelly and dry beer with hints of smoke, malt and treacle. ( )

Madrid is also home to El Aguila (owned by Heineken), a Damm brewery, and Carlsberg's Mahou factory. Beers from all of these operations can be found in bars around the Santa Ana area if you so wish, although personally I'd not bother - they're all absolute rubbish unless you like identikit fizzy tasteless lagers to bump up your score; it's your choice!

Lisbon.

Republica da Cerveja, Parque das Nações, Atlantic Pavillion, Passeio das Tágides. ( )

By the waterfront, this hideous concrete bunker-like object is easy to find and on the site maps.

This place looks like a WW2 concrete bunker on the waterfront of the Parque das Nações with great views of the enormous bridge. Contrary to what I've heard before it didn't try and pass itself off as a brewpub and the beers are available in 0.1cl glasses to aid scooping - and believe

me you don't want any more than that! Six were available (including the regular Super Bock stout on draught) and all were bland, industrial and not particularly pleasant. The food was good, however, and there was no problem with ordering four 0.1cl glasses of scoops! Owned by Super Bock so you know what to expect in terms of beer quality...

Beers :

- Artesanal (5.2%) – This beer, sadly, confirmed my suspicions about the beers; a yellowy fluid, quite industrial and “lagery” (meant in the fizzy, tasteless and shite sense) with a very vague hint of malt in the finish – or was it popcorn? 🍺
- Puro Malte (5.2%) - Slightly darker and, to be fair, did have some maltiness to the flavour although this was drowned out by a syrupy, toffeeish and artificially fruity overtone. 🍺🍺
- Malte de Whisky (8%) - A pale beer with an intense TCP taste, thick corn syrup body and heavy phenols and syrup in the finish. Okay, so I know that phenols are great in beers from Bamberg, but these just didn't work in the beer whatsoever and it gave the impression of a cheap, sweet lager with flavourings added afterwards! 🍺
- Bock (6.8%) - I had higher hopes for this one owing to it's deeper brown hue. Sadly it didn't live up to it's potential and was yet another toffeeish, sweet, plain and woefully underpowered beer with very little to recommend it save a touch of treacle on the tongue early on before the overwhelming sweetness swamped it. 🍺

Lusitana, Cervejeira Lusitana de Carnaxide, Avenue do Forte no.9.

This place is allegedly a brewpub situated out in the western suburbs of Lisbon, physically beyond the city boundary, and is thus almost impossible to reach by public transport. Luckily they also run several branches in the city proper and so the beers are easy to get. We scooped the beers in the following one which is very much a restaurant;

Cervejeira Lusitana do Vasco da Gama, Av D Joao II, Parque das Nações, Oriente. 🍺🍺

It's on the “beer deck” of the huge Centre Comercio Vasco de Gama shopping centre; when you exit the metro you are in the bowels of the place, simply head upwards a few floors to the so-called beer deck and you'll find the restaurant – for it's not really a bar, although you can drink sat at the counter.

A strange place up in the rafters of the garish shopping centre and correspondingly very busy with normals indulging in post-shopping munchies. The beers were only average and not as good as I'd hoped, but for Portugal they weren't bad although I've heard rumours they don't brew all (any?) of their own beers but I'm unable to confirm this. No seasonal beer was available and the barman was withered when I ordered three glasses of beer at once - well, it was busy...

Beers :

- Pils – The signs weren't encouraging, as the yellowy fluid had a faintly industrial flavour with syrup tastes: it certainly taste like a big brewer's product and I was quite disappointed it was so poor, but I suppose that's what you get when there's no real

- quality beer to beat – everyone just aims low by default. 🍺
- Abadia - A pleasing amber colour, a toffee-malt flavour with some lovely honeycomb hints coming through in the finish giving a very tasty and drinkable beer if a touch sweet for my tastes. Tastes like an ale to me. 🍺🍺🍺
 - Preta - I'd been right in assuming it would be the best; it lurked in it's glass with a Dylan Thomas "bible black" colour and gave off a good roasty aroma. The taste was satisfyingly similar with a complex mix of roast, toast, malt, tar, bitterness and grain on a light-ish body with a well-balanced toasty, burnt and sweetish finish making it the beer of the evening by quite a way! 🍺🍺🍺

There also used to be a "proper" brewpub at the Parque das Nações in the unlikely shape of the **Frog & Rosbif** chain. The pub, at Rua da Pimenta on the Northern Riverfront, has now been sold and no longer brews according to an email I received from Frog's boss, Paul Chantler; "The pub used to brew its own beer, but we shut it down at the end of last year (2006); We couldn't wean the Portuguese off strong coffee and cheap wine, I'm sorry to say!": Full marks for honesty to him then!

There is also a bar called **Real Fabrica** at Rua Escola Politecnica 277 which I think maybe used to brew but I'm sure doesn't now and only sells Super-Bock/Cristal beers. If you want to have a look, it's close to metro stop Rato.

Apart from that, it's beers from the country's two huge giants (Sagres and Super Bock) and nothing they make is pleasant except the rare dark beers, or *Preta* as they are known – you'll have to ask for them in bars as they are for locals only and the staff may be confused as to why an Englishman (if, indeed, that's what you are) wants one instead of usual fizzy lager!

Both companies are trying to enter the "quality" beer market with equally lamentable results; Super Bock run several **Republica da Cerveja** outlets and these give the vague hint they brew the beer themselves although it all comes from Super Bock's main plant. They also do a few different beers in bottle (Abadia, 🍺) although they needn't have bothered as they are crap too.

Sagres make a similar range of beers in bottle, including one called Bohemia (🍺), but they are – as could be predicted from a massive brewery owned by multinational S&N – atrocious.

Beer and Bar of the weekend.

Quite an easy task this time owing to the limited amount of beer consumed during the four days! Of that sixteen brews I managed to find nothing scored higher than 3 out of 5 and an amazing eight beers managed the appalling score of 1 or less! This just shows the comparative cruddiness of Iberian beer in comparison to the rest of Europe – in my opinion, at least – and is a great big "must do better" for them!

So, here goes with the gongs... the best beer I had was **Naturbier Helles** of Madrid, narrowly beating Lusitana Preta, although the best bar has to be one without beer of any form in the form of the **Venencia sherry bar** at Calle de Echegarary 7, also in Madrid although I did enjoy Naturbier's relaxed ambience and this would probably be my pick of beer bars in either city.

Notes.

1 – Dave Brown, Bacchus-lookalike scooper from Frodsham.

2 – Source; The Tramways of Portugal, [LRTA](#)

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