

Cruising

The quarterly magazine of the Cruising Association

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Cover Picture: Flying the CA burgee on the River Douro



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Bienvenue à Algérie!

Tom Partridge won the Love Cup for the best log for a cruise of fewer than 30 days. This is an extract of Tom and Susie's adventurous cruise along the Algerian coast.



Adina in Annaba Harbour tied up next to the coastguard

It was a hazy day when we headed out of Tabarka, Tunisia, with the Tunisian Navy wishing us well on the radio. Destination Algeria, hard won visa to hand. A destination not well travelled, with a sad history of terrorism, which few have sailed to. The wind was up and the waters bumpy. We were intent on calling Algeria Coastguard as soon as we were in their waters. They beat us to it.

Politely we answered their questions. Ten minutes later, out of the haze appeared two black RIBs speeding towards us with three men in each, carrying guns. We hadn't even had time to hoist the Algerian courtesy flag; they promptly told us to drop the Tunisian flag and get the Algerian one up. No questions asked, we did it. We explained we were tourists with a visa and where we were going. No problem – off they went. Quite an introduction, this was going to be interesting.

Many hours later we arrived in Annaba. Entering the large shipping harbour, nobody answered when we called on the radio. Eventually a pilot boat appeared and boomed out on his loudspeaker "follow me" and escorted us to a spot.

We tied up outside the police station and then started what would become a regular habit everywhere we went – the arrival of officials and their forms to be

completed. The standard is a visit from the coastguard, police, customs, and the harbour master. Eighty per cent of the officials here are very friendly, efficient and curious.

Twenty minutes later a policeman came over with two bowls of food. Where else in the world would that happen?

As soon as they knew we had a tourist visa, nothing seemed to be a problem. But you need to factor in time for all that paperwork. We were well prepared, had written lists of our electronic equipment and our spirits on board, which we placed in a locker as it was Ramadan and we didn't want to cause any offence. Most officials weren't interested. Relief – would hate to see all that good Lagavulin spirited away. Some would ask to see around the boat, but this was more out of curiosity.

First night, they asked us to stay on board. We got chatting to the police. Friendly, they were concerned that we had everything we needed; we assured them we did. Twenty minutes later a policeman came over with two bowls of food. Where else in the world would that happen? We were touched.

Next day we headed out on foot. There had been a change in watch and we had to show passports and explain all over again. The pilot book had said to expect armed guards on trips to town, but this is no longer the case.

We attracted attention as we explored the streets. Stall owners were delighted to serve us and, rather embarrassingly, we were often served ahead of any locals waiting. In the streets every now and then a cry of "Welcome to Algeria" would ring out.

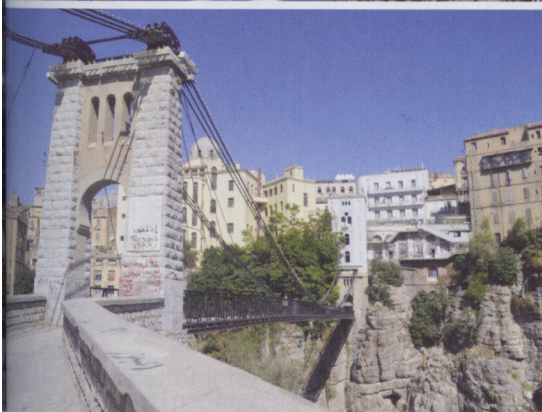
Being Ramadan, coffee shops and restaurants are closed in the daytime, but come night-time after final prayers everyone comes out. And the police had no problem with our going out at night. While many coffee shops are male territory, we easily sat together in the squares drinking café or a mint tea – served with delicious sweet cakes.

We headed on to our next destination Chetaibi El Marsa (try pronouncing that to the coastguard), a quaint little bay with a fishing port. We were squeezed onto a working floating pontoon but told, due to works in progress, we could only stay one night and would need to be gone by 06:00. We went for walks, trying things from the assorted street stalls.

Next destination Skikda, another large harbour. We felt tiny being placed in



Above: Tipasa ruins



Left: Bridges of Constantine



Right: The sign we should not have passed, which got us into trouble

the corner, but we were able to watch the workings of a harbour and see how the large cargo ships manoeuvred. We shared a taxi to see the city of Constantine. Perched on a large ravine, it is famous for its bridges, which are a fascinating sight. It also had a wonderful medina full of souks and we got gloriously lost buying nougat and a pot of honey for a mere 40p!

Next was Collo in a beautiful bay. Another fishing port, they squeezed us in, separating fishing boats to make space, taking our lines. After the usual line of officials, we were ready to explore. Exploration usually starts around 17:30 as anything earlier is simply too hot. The harbour master drove us into town and insisted on giving us money to spend. Again, we were amazed by the kindness.

Collo is a town of streets lined with bread shops, fish stands, and general shops. We were standing outside one bread shop, watching the making of some sort of pancake, trying to ask in French what was in it. A local fluent in English explained it was a type of pancake base, with mashed potato, some parsley, a little meat, spices and an egg, fried in oil. Delicious, we'll have one please. His English being so good, we proceeded to order bread as he explained the different types of local bread. Soon he was offering to take us around and became a good friend during our time in Collo.

Well educated, Abderrahmane was concerned about the western views of Algeria and wanted us to know Islamists believe in peace first and foremost. His positive view on life was striking. In the evening our newfound friend walked us around, finally depositing us on a beach where people had gathered. Chairs were brought for us, mint tea with cakes served, and they wouldn't take a penny from us for it.

Not so sure putting a spotlight on Adina all night and lighting us up like a Christmas tree really was the best idea.

Back on *Adina*, we were getting used to the crowds she draws here. Sailing boats are a rarity and Abderrahmane told us many had not seen the English flag before. People just stand there and look and chat. We even saw some young men park their car so *Adina* was in the background while they took pictures of each other. Love it!

Collo had enchanted us, so it was with heavy hearts we headed on. Destination Bajaia – a city with a massive port in a beautiful setting. We weren't so sure sailing vessels were welcome given we

were dumped in a grubby corner with oil everywhere. *Adina* is going to need one big clean at the end of this trip! Much to our amazement we were told to raft up to a French sailing boat heading the opposite way along the coast.

It took us 20 minutes to walk to the exit dodging loading and unloading cargo ships, lorries hauling stuff away. We headed to Cap Carbon, a beautiful headland. The Algerian coastline is stunning. Walking up to the lighthouse we fell foul of the law, accidentally entering a military zone and having to apologise profusely and beat a hasty exit. Ups and downs, that is Algeria.

We were now sailing along coast that was mountainous and possibly still home to terrorists. We kept asking the locals for advice and trusted the coastguard who called us up on the radio every day, often several times. Indeed they twice advised us to stay three miles offshore. No questions asked, we'll make it five miles.

We headed into Dellys, in theory a potential trouble spot. The coastguard escorted us in. There were a few more military than normal, but they were friendly and said they would look after us. Not so sure putting a spotlight on

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View of Oran port



Susie buying honey in the souks of Constantine



Salim, our policeman, Susie, and Hakim, our guide, with the present they kindly bought for Susie

Adina all night and lighting us up like a Christmas tree really was the best idea.

Next on our travels was Algiers, Algeria's capital, halfway across this vast country, in Algeria's only marina rafted up to a local sailing boat. The man who owns it has given us his electricity, offered us his water supply. Tomorrow we'll go exploring, dive into the souks, try it all. Roll on the next half of Algeria!

Algiers is known as the white city. The French left a lot of wonderful French architecture, boulangeries and pâtisseries! With mosques and monuments, there is plenty to see.

Our favourite stops were the fishing ports, where people were friendlier and more relaxed, so we decided to head off to Cherchell the next day. The forecast was windy, but we were determined. A shame the officials hadn't done their paperwork on our arrival. Our departure was delayed by two hours, meaning we had to adopt an aggressive departure, fighting wind and building waves in a shallow exit, notorious for silting, where we felt *Adina's* keel bump against a fortunately sandy bottom.

Our crossing to Cherchell was fast and we headed into the port. You always have to ask to go into town and it's always fine after they have checked your visa. In the past visitors were escorted by armed officials. We were given a guide, a policeman called Salim. Dressed in civilian clothes, he showed us around town. Helpful, kind and good fun we soon warmed to him. Stick with it – there's more to this!

The next day we were allowed into town on our own. The museum was closed, but we saw a man entering it and asked if we could be let in. The man, called Hakim,

showed us around some incredible Roman statues and mosaics and offered to show us some of the sites around town in his lunch break.

We voted Oran our favourite city, the perfect end to our three-week trip along the Algerian coast.

The next day Hakim took us to the nearby town of Tipasa. A quick look around the port and some astonishment at the size of the tuna that had been caught before heading for the outdoor museum and ruins. Hakim said the man at the entrance had asked if we were the tourists of Salim, our friendly police guard from the day before. Five minutes on and Salim arrives out of breath! We never got a full explanation, except to say even on his day off he wanted to look after us. He remembered we were talking about heading to Tipasa and contacted police at a checkpoint on the outskirts of Cherchell where we had been spotted leaving in Hakim's car. We were now in a blind panic that we had not told the police we were off for the day and that Hakim was now in serious trouble.

However, Hakim and Salim were soon chatting away and we enjoyed their fabulous company. They insisted on buying both of us souvenirs, going out of their way to charm Susie. We learnt a lot about Algeria from them.

We were keen to get to the city of Oran, but it was three days' sailing away. We

overnighted in Tenes then headed to Mostaganem. Paperwork here was more painful than anywhere and we were shocked when an immigration official calmly asked for "a present". This was so out of character for Algeria. In the past people have not been allowed out of the port, but we were given a plain clothed detective and a big muscular captain to accompany us for some sightseeing and food shopping.

And so we sailed on to Oran, our last stop. By now we were becoming jaded with all the paperwork and formalities. Oran more than anywhere else has some stunning French, Italian, and Spanish buildings. We voted Oran our favourite city, the perfect end to our three-week trip along the Algerian coast.

Algeria is certainly a place for the adventurous; it has some stunning sights and we would like to have seen more of the interior. Tourism is yet to be encouraged and the official paperwork was a killer for us. But it's the people of Algeria that made this country for us.

"Algeria Coastguard, this is *Adina*, thank you for looking out for us, standing by on channel 16."

You can follow *Adina's* further adventures at <http://www.yachtadina.co.uk>



Tom Partridge