

Of excess and exercise

14.09.2018, Episode 45

Owen in China

Hello everyone, this is Owen and this is my podcast for Friday 14th September, 2018. I hope you all had a nice summer. First off [1], I want to wish my father Gerry a happy retirement now that he's recorded his last podcast. He's been recording his diaries and news digests for 10 years now. I got to interview him for his last episode, so check that out if you haven't had a chance to listen to it yet. 10 years is a really long time, so well done, Gerry, and thanks for all the stories and anecdotes. I'll try my best to keep the family business going.

Today, I'll be talking about my summer of food and my attempt at some exercise.

I spent part of my summer in Portugal. I expected southern Portugal to be a very popular tourist destination in the summer, so I decided to head north. I flew to Porto and met up with an old friend. We didn't look for anywhere to stay until the last minute and we were really surprised at all the different types of accommodation that were on offer in Porto. There were the usual hotels and guesthouses and hostels but there were also a huge number of self-catering [2] apartments. A friend in Beijing once told me about a Chinese friend of his who owns something like 30 apartments in Portugal that he rents out using various websites and apps. Despite not booking anything ahead of time [3], we managed to find a nice apartment for a week. It was a newly renovated apartment that reminded us a bit of an IKEA showroom. Porto itself was very pleasant. It lies on the Douro river and there's a fantastic bridge with two levels that crosses the river. The city is very hilly and there are stunning [4] colourful facades [5] everywhere you look. Not far from the city there are some spectacular beaches because the city stretches all the way to the Atlantic coast. We visited a couple of places further inland as well. We had a great time but we were shocked by the number of tourists. We thought we were being clever by not heading south but there were huge crowds of tourists everywhere we went. One of the other cities we visited - Guimarães - almost felt like a theme park [6]. It was like going to Disneyland. It didn't feel real, it was like the city had just been built for tourists to give them an impression of what life used to be like.



The buildings were all in beautiful condition but they looked like they were just facades with nothing behind them. All the cafes were filled with tourists and you didn't get the impression that anyone actually lives there. It would be interesting to see what the city is like in the winter when there are no tourists. It might be a better time to visit.



We spent a lot of time in Porto in restaurants and bars and cafes. To be honest eating and drinking took up most of our time. We had some fantastic meals. Lots of fresh fish and lovely red wine from the Douro valley. And, of course, we had to attend some port wine tastings. We ate and drank far too much but I think you should be allowed to overindulge [7] when you're on holiday. My friend had to get back after our week in Porto but I still had another week. I hadn't decided what I was going to do with my remaining time. But after overindulging for a week, I was feeling pretty unhealthy. So I decided I needed some exercise. I considered a few options. I thought about cycling to Lisbon but I reckoned [8] there would be even more tourists in Lisbon



and I was hoping to get away from the crowds at this point. Then there was the option of doing some hiking in a national park but I wanted an actual destination. So, in the end, I decided to head to Santiago de Compostela along the Camino de Santiago. I'd heard someone mention [9] a path that starts in Portugal and then crosses into Spain. I really didn't know anything about it, so I looked it up online. It turns out that there's a path that is part of the network that pilgrims [10] use that starts in Lisbon and goes all the way along the coast, through Porto and on into Spain. I didn't have enough time to walk all the way from Porto to Santiago de Compostela, so I caught a train to the border and set off from there. I was looking forward to getting away from all the crowds and just enjoying nature for a bit. I didn't set myself any goals [11], I just thought I'd start walking and see how far I could get. According to what I'd read online it takes about seven days to walk all the way to Santiago de Compostela from the border. I started walking and very quickly realised that I wasn't going to escape [12] the crowds.

It's quite a busy stretch of [13] road with lots of tourist towns and resorts [14] and beaches that are packed with people. And then there are all the pilgrims. It hadn't occurred to me that there would be quite so many pilgrims. In fact, I had real trouble finding accommodation. All the hostels and guesthouses along the way that cater to [15] pilgrims were already fully booked. I was clearly unprepared and not just for the lack of [16] accommodation. I was carrying a heavy backpack full of stuff I didn't need and I was wearing quite possibly the worst pair of shoes for a pilgrimage [17]. The only shoes I had with me were an old worn-out [18] pair of Converse All-Stars. If you've ever worn a pair of Converse All-Stars, you will know that they are not suitable for long walks. The soles [19] are completely flat. After a few days of walking up to 30km a day, my feet couldn't take it anymore. I was in a lot of pain but I kept telling myself that this was part of the experience. But after four days I'd had enough. I caught a train the rest of the way. If you're going to walk to Santiago de Compostela, get a decent [20] pair of shoes. That's my advice.

Well, that's it from me for this month. Thank you for listening. You can find all our episodes, including a special multilingual podcast to celebrate 10 years of PodClub, on our website or by downloading our app. You can also download our vocabulary trainer and you can find me on Instagram using the hashtags #PodClubOwen and #oweninchina. I'll be back on 12th October with Gerry. He'll be interviewing me this time, so if there are any questions you'd like him to ask me, just let us know by leaving a comment. Have a great month, everyone! Bye!

Glossar: Owen in China

[1] first off: expression used for introducing the first of a series of things you're going to say

[2] self-catering: provided with cooking facilities

[3] stunning: stunning: very impressive or beautiful

[4] facade: the front of a building (especially if it's large or impressive)

[5] theme park: a large park where people pay to go on rides and play games (e.g. Disneyland)

[6] to overindulge: to allow yourself to have too much of sth. (especially food and drink)

[7] to reckon: to have a particular opinion about sth.

[8] to mention: to say sth. during a conversation but not really talk about it

[9] pilgrim: so. who travels to a holy place that is important in their religion

[10] to set a goal: to decide what you hope to achieve

[11] to escape: to get away from

[12] stretch of sth.: a continuous area of land or water

[13] resort: a place where many people go on holiday (sometimes for a particular purpose, e.g. ski resort, seaside resort)

[14] to cater to so.: to provide so. with what they want or need

[15] lack of sth.: the state of not having enough of sth.

[16] **pilgrimage**: the journey that a religious person makes to a holy place

[17] **worn-out**: here: too old or damaged to use any longer

[18] **sole**: here: the bottom part of a shoe

[19] **decent**: here: good or good enough