

Dancing in the Algarve, Portugal

November 2 – 4, 2007

Wali & Ariënne



This was our second trip to Portugal to support our mentee Lila Ventura to help spreading the dances in Portugal. She works with small groups in the area of Porto, Lisbon and the Algarve. Lila opted for the Algarve for our workshops "because of the foreigners that can help to make a full circle". Now we know what she meant: the circle of 20 counted dancers from Angola (a former Portuguese colony), Germany, Austria and England. With us, almost half of the group was foreign or immigrant. Let's haste to say many immigrants have lived in Portugal for many years, having arrived there with hippy ideals ten to twenty years ago and are now assimilated, their Portuguese born children speaking perfect Portuguese and visiting local schools. The reason why these people immigrated is easy to see. Even in November the thermo-

meter rose to above 25^o centigrade (80^o F) and often we needed the shade as shelter for the burning sun. In the gardens grow olives, grapes, tangerines, lemon and oranges. We saw fig trees and carobe. Here people build with thick walls to shelter for the sun, not for the cold! Nature is abundant and gave the Algarve a very generous part of her beauty, with white houses pasted to the green hills, valleys and more rugged hills. The climate and the different nationalities coming together because of nature and climate reminded us of New Zealand, all the way at the other end of the globe. Our workshop was at Karuna, Monchique, all the way up to one of the highest parts of the Algarve (1,000 m or 3,000 feet). The view of the dance hall with one wall of glass was stunning and in the far distance you could even see the sea.



We started with a Dharma attunement (Hindu dances) followed by Jewish melodies with their joy and tear (the laugh and the tear). Inspired by our eagle view over the surroundings and by Karuna, a Buddhist Retreat Center, we counterbalanced this in the afternoon with the Buddhist theme of equanimity, which led us to chanting and dancing of the Gayatri (thank you, Bernie), in the evening followed by a zikr night full of deep longing, inspired by the Portuguese fado and its saudade (the Portuguese 'city blues' with its *ishq* of longing & homesickness). Portugal is a deeply religious (Roman Catholic) country, so on Sunday we opted for a concentration on the Aramaic work. Afterwards one person told us why we hadn't done the Universal Worship like last year. Our answer was that this time the whole weekend was one big and expanded Universal Worship.

Almost all participants joined us in the Sufi morning practices. Announced as facultative (but what is compulsory in these weekends?), we over and over again notice how starting with spiritual practices in the morning is bonding and has a direct effect on the dances in daytime and evening.

We welcomed the extra time between workshop and flying home to enjoy the warm sun and the wonderful hospitality of the three women who were our host, organizer and mentee, sipping tea and going through dances in the garden. Sightseeing brought us to Monte Mariposa, where a wonderful valley with 2 person log cabins and a square wooden dance hall with windows around made our heart beat faster: what an exquisite place for a retreat! Next time inshallah we'll try it out for our third trip to Portugal, for they want us to come back and, even though the circles are small, so do we!

Wali & Ariënne,
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