

USED VOLVO  
XC90 FROM £9K p80

Britain's **best-selling** caravan magazine

January 2010 £3.80

# Practical caravan

**ELDDIS  
AVANTE 556**

Full live-in test of the big family six-berth



## Tour smarter!

Essential advice for better breaks in 2010

- **Save cash!**
- **Save time!**
- **Stay safe!**

■ 52 ways to be a better caravanner p18

■ Essential advice for first-time tourers p28

■ Save cash on your European break p91

■ Used-caravan buying advice p76

### Island-bed twin-axes

Lunar Delta and Coachman Laser compared

### Best for tests

Our team report on Bailey Pageant and Freeland 2 p42



Britain's best caravan cakes p38



■ Towcar test: Land Rover Discovery 4 vs Lexus RX450h

haymarket

9 770269 942199



Camping le Domaine de la Barbannerie, St Emilion, France



# Inspiration

Head for the ferry and a dream break abroad armed with our holiday ideas and tips for towing in Europe



## 24 Getaway: Spain

In search of warm weather, a family explores Barcelona and the Costa Blanca

## 28 Euro know-how

COVER STORY

Visit the Continent with confidence using our essential touring tips

## 30 Getaway: Germany

A family adventure on a beautiful stretch of the river Rhine

## 37 Wish you were here

Readers' postcards from Luxembourg and the Loire Valley and Bayeux in France

## 91 Low-cost Continent

COVER STORY

Follow our guide to get the most out of a European holiday at the lowest cost

*"We loved everything we found, from castles to villages"* Getaway: Germany, page 30



## Tasty tourers: the winners and the competition 38



## 9 Pitchside view

Editor Nigel Donnelly looks ahead to 2010 and across the Channel as well

## 10 Noticeboard

Upcoming festivals, free days out, site deals and great giveaways

## 12 Letters

Your views from the sites, plus the Highways Agency on motorway services

## 38 Caravan cake contest

COVER STORY

We announce the winners and put a cake shop's worth of tasty tourers on display

## 42 Our month

COVER STORY

Updates from the *Practical Caravan* team's fleet of caravans and towcars

## 68 Reader Rally

Spring is around the corner and so is our Reader Rally in Devon. See you there?

## 113 Puzzles

Complete our caravan word puzzle for the chance to win Alan Rogers' new guide

## 115 Caravan cookbook

Chorizo sausage is at the heart of this easy winter warmer for the whole family

## 119 Caravan scrapbook

Jenko - the way he was - plus your sightings of rare and classic caravans

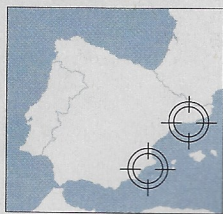
Cookbook: one-pot leek and chorizo-sausage gratin 115



## 121 From the awning

Reminiscences and anecdotes of your favourite caravanning moments





## SPAIN

CARAVANNERS  
**ANDREW AND  
JANE SULLIVAN  
WITH THEIR  
CHILDREN ELENA  
(11) AND  
MADELINE (9)**

STAY

**FIVE WEEKS**

CAR

**2007 NISSAN  
TERRANO 2.7TD**

CARAVAN

**2005 LUNAR  
CHATEAU 500**

After a fantastic summer making our way from the northernmost parts of the Continent (March, page 30) through Central Europe (July, page 40 and November, page 34), our thoughts turned to where we wanted to spend the winter. It didn't take us long to choose Spain.

An overnight ferry from Italy brought us to Barcelona and from there we made our way south during November to Andalusia for our winter layover. We didn't know that we were joining a British invasion.



The Sullivans covered a lot of ground during their Continental tour

# Barcelona *and* beyond



Jane Sullivan and family continue their European tour, heading south in search of winter sunshine





The fairytale entrance to Gaudí's Parc Güell overlooking Barcelona

OUR EPIC CARAVAN journey had taken us from Scandinavia all the way south to Italy. Now it was the end of October and we were trying to decide where we should spend our first Christmas away from home. The girls wanted to go somewhere warm, so the obvious choice was Spain. From Italy we could catch a ferry to the Catalan coast near Barcelona, then head south through Spain to Andalusia.

Landing in Barcelona in the early evening of Hallowe'en meant the girls' 'trick or treating' activities were severely hampered. But there was plenty of fun to join in at our first Spanish site, Camping Vilanova Park, south of the ferry terminal at Vilanova i la Geltrú. Spanish families were celebrating All Souls' Day, when people take picnics, visit the graves of relatives and enjoy some family fun.

### Enter the dragon

The weather at this time of year is still a lovely 18-20°C, with clear blue skies. We made the most of it as there was plenty to do.

The town of Sitges, about six miles from our site, was a pleasant surprise. We wandered to the end of the long promenade that flanks the beach, past witch-like sand sculptures, to the 17th-century church of Sant Bartomeu i Santa Tecla. As the sun set, the sandstone church turned pink. We headed back to the car via the narrow streets, shopping at the little market stalls along the way.

Another day we braved the roller coasters at PortAventura, Universal Studios' theme park just outside Salou. There was a monster parade put on especially for Hallowe'en and we rode 'Dragon Khan', an amazing roller coaster that zipped us through eight loops at 70mph and left us all feeling a little queasy.



Madeline and Elena survived Dragon Khan but did feel queasy

## ESSENTIALS

### PARC GÜELL

Carrer d'Olot, E-08024  
Barcelona, Spain.

Parc Güell is one of the best places to admire the work of Gaudí. It is full of amazing stone structures, colourful tiling and unusual buildings. After being greeted by the incredible dragon fountain, walk to the top of the park for views of Barcelona.

The closest Metro stop is Lesseps, but be prepared for a 20-minute walk with a steep uphill stretch at the end.

Admission to the park is free.

OPEN

Daily 10am-7pm

We spent a more cultured day in the Parc del Garraf visiting the Palau Novella, the main building of the only Buddhist monastery in Catalonia. Our guidebook directed us to look for a stony, bumpy road to get to the monastery, and it wasn't wrong! Since that day it has been Andrew's favourite road because it was like off-roading.

The only way to look around the Palau Novella, which is a palace built in 1890, is to join a guided tour. Our guide was a monk but we were also able to listen to an English translation of the tour through headphones. He took us around the palace, where rooms display Tibetan art, clothing, music and other Buddhist artefacts.

After the tour we walked around the Estupa, a monument that is a representation of Buddha. As you walk around clockwise, getting stimulated by its energy, you're supposed to think good thoughts about sentient and non-sentient beings on earth. I asked the girls what they had been thinking about. Elena said, "World peace, kindness to others and saving the animals."

Madi said, "Sausages and mash."

### Gaudí's Barcelona

The tourist highlight in this area has got to be Barcelona. Getting there was easy: we caught a bus from the site to the train station in Vilanova i la Geltru, and from there a fast train into Barcelona. The kids had tramped around so many cities during our travels that we decided to be selective and chose the day's itinerary very >>



## Getaways SPAIN

carefully, opting for a Gaudí day, seeing and admiring the work of 19th-century architect Antoni Gaudí across the city.

We started with Parc Güell, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Count Eusebi Güell, a successful businessman who became the architect's patron, commissioned Gaudí in the 1890s to design a 50-acre garden estate. It was supposed to include 60 houses alongside public buildings. But the initiative was unsuccessful and only two houses were built. Güell donated the land to the city in 1923 as a public park and it has been a visitor attraction ever since.

We were surprised when we reached the entrance which appeared to be flanked by gingerbread buildings that had been plucked from a fairytale. Actually, they belong to the modernist school of architecture, but they are colourful and bear eccentric twists that could only have come from Gaudí's imagination and love of nature.

When he received his degree in 1878, his tutor reportedly said, "Who knows if we have given this diploma to a nut or to a genius?" His work is certainly a far cry from the rest of the architecture in the city (or any other city for that matter), so I'm leaning towards the 'nut' end of the spectrum.

### Amazing grace

We walked around the park, finding the swings along the way, crossing the viaducts and listening to the buskers playing in the arcades beneath us. At first glance these structures looked as though they had just been thrown together. However, the viaduct design was based on trees to make the roadways less obtrusive.

We ended up on the terrace on top of the Room of a Hundred Columns, which actually has 84. The edge of the terrace is encircled by a wavy, serpentine bench faced with a mosaic of broken ceramics. It is said to have been inspired by the shape of buttocks left by a naked workman sitting in wet clay. Yes, we wondered why he was naked, too.

We posed for photos near the famous mosaic dragon fountain

## ESSENTIALS

### LA SAGRADA FAMÍLIA

Carrer de Padilla, Barcelona, Spain

WEB [www.sagradafamilia.cat](http://www.sagradafamilia.cat)

This amazing church was another of Gaudí's commissions and is considered his masterpiece. You can watch craftsmen at work as well as admire the building. The church is in the middle of the city and has its own Metro stop, which is just a short walk away.

### OPEN

Daily, 9am-6pm, October-March. 9am-8pm, April-September. 9am-2pm, 25-26 December, 1 and 6 January

### CHARGES

Adult €13. Child (under 18) €11

(Combined admission to La Sagrada Família and the Gaudí Museum)



**Parc Güell was full of surprises, from 'gingerbread' houses to a living Gaudí lizard (right)**

and headed off to Sagrada Família, Europe's most unconventional church, thanks to Gaudí again. He designed it to have 18 towers; 12 for the apostles, four for the evangelists, one for Mary and one for Jesus. Gaudí lived on the site as a recluse for 16 years, until he was run over by a tram in 1926, and died three days later.

Only one tower was completed by the time of his death and the church is still under construction. While living on site he frequently changed his mind about the design. So the rest of the church is being built without knowing how Gaudí would have wanted it to look. Eight





towers have been completed so far, along with the main entrance and the Passion façade, populated by angular figures, spooky soldiers in sci-fi masks and an emaciated, naked Christ on the cross. I can't believe even Gaudí could have made it any more bizarre.

## Festive spirits

After two weeks we began our move south. The next leg of our trip took us to Guardamar del Segura on the Costa Blanca, just south of Alicante. It was a seven-hour drive, but we wanted to get there without an overnight stop.

The campsite we had chosen for the next three weeks was Camping Marjal, which is right on the coast. We had a surprise on our first full day on site. At 5pm the public-address system sprang to life and Angie, our *Hi-De-Hi* warden, ran through the week's entertainment. It was a busy site, even in low season, with a singer on Saturday, a barbecue on Sunday, cribbage on Monday, line dancing on Tuesday and Friday and, top of the bill, an Abba tribute night on Thursday.

There were just a few weeks until Christmas, but there were still no decorations. It was a big change from the UK where towns are decked out for months. We finally got into the Christmas spirit by going to see a local amateur troupe's pantomime, *Jack and the Beanstalk*. We have friends who live in this area of Spain and their son was in the chorus. The jokes were corny, just as they should be for a panto, and Madi was brought on



Madeline and Elena get in the festive spirit while on site in Spain

stage for 'The Christmas Alphabet Song'. She was the 'M' but it didn't stand for 'Madeline'. It was for 'mistletoe', which is why one of the characters kept giving her kisses.

We also went to watch local children decorate a Christmas tree in Guardamar. It wasn't quite what we expected. It wasn't a conifer, in fact, it had no leaves at all but the kids were all having a good time making the baubles.

## A home from home

The Guardamar area is unusual in that it is very British. I read that only 47% of the population is Spanish. Of the rest, 13% is British and the rest is made up of 2-3% each of many other European nations. We did a survey of the campsite for our 'home school' and found the British and Germans are the largest groups by far.

As you'd expect from such a large UK influence, the shops cater for us. The site shop even sells Asda's



Making decorations for an otherwise bare Christmas tree in Guardamar

Smart Price tins of spag bol. Not sure how they got hold of these but they charge €1 each for them. There are lots of signs in English advertising homes and cars for sale on the sides of the roads, so it's easy to forget you're in Spain.

The area still has a pleasant, community-oriented atmosphere. Most of the campers on the site are seasonal and meet up every winter. Despite that, we and other first-time visitors were made to feel

welcome. We had our hair cut by one of the regular campers and soon found ourselves plunged into a whirlwind of campsite gossip. We must have become part of it no doubt after chatting with people about our adventures.

As Christmas approached we said farewell to the Costa Blanca and headed south to Almería and Granada, with its deserts and snow-capped mountains, for the next leg of our trip.

## CAMPSITES

### Camping Vilanova Park

Ctra de l-Arboc km 2.5, E-08800

Vilanova i la Geltrú, Spain

Tel 00 34 (0)93 893 3402

Web [www.vilanovapark.com](http://www.vilanovapark.com)

Open All year

Number of pitches 344, grass and hardstanding

WE STAYED AT this site for two weeks, making the most of the long-stay discount. We met many English caravanners, many on seasonal pitches for the winter. All pitches have 6A hook-up. Of these, 185 have mains water connections and some have drainage as well.

The facilities were great with free showers in heated blocks and

even a laundry service. The girls loved the many recreation facilities, including the indoor and outdoor pools. The nearby beach club offers sailing, scuba diving, windsurfing and jetskiing.

#### Charges

Pitch+2+hook-up... €27.25-€46.45

Full-service pitch+2.....

.....€30.30-€49.50

Extra adult.....€5.55-€10.10

Extra child (4-12).....€3.25-€6.05

Dog.....€11

#### Facilities

■ Electric hook-up ■ Heated washblocks ■ Dishwashing sinks ■ Launderette ■ Shop ■ Restaurant ■ Bar ■ Play area ■ Games room ■ Swimming pools ■ Cycle hire ■ Wi-Fi

### Camping Marjal

Ctra N332 km 73.4, E-03140

Guardamar del Segura, Spain

Tel 00 34 (0)96 672 7070

Web [www.campingmarjal.com](http://www.campingmarjal.com)

Open All year

Number of pitches 212, all full-service hardstandings

DESPITE ITS FORMAL layout – pitches are in avenues and defined by low hedges – this is a friendly site. Every pitch has electric, water, drainage and TV points.

Facilities include clean, heated washblocks and the shop is more like a supermarket. There are also indoor and outdoor pools.

#### Charges

Full-service pitch+2..... €48-€63

Extra adult..... €7-€9

Extra child (4-12)..... €5-€6

Dog..... €2.20-€3.20

#### Facilities

■ Washblocks ■ Facilities for the disabled ■ Baby-care facilities ■ Launderette ■ Play area ■ Games room ■ Pools ■ Restaurant ■ Shop ■ Wi-Fi



All pitches at Camping Marjal are 968sq ft and fully serviced