

“Y Viva Espana!”

Returning home from ‘sunny Spain,’ our writer faces life back in the office...

I am conflicted.

On the one hand it is great to be back with me team after a couple of weeks away.

On the other, I stare at the telephone number purporting to be the quantity of unopened emails sitting in me inbox, and wistfully me mind goes back to last week in the sun.

My mate has a place in La Manga. If you don't know, that is a posh sports resort where the England football team hang out when they want to 'train.' I admire their self-sacrifice...

Sitting in me deckchair, me and Mrs C sipping the finest unpronounceable wine from the local tourist shop, knotted hanky on me head and 30 degrees in the shade. Bliss! If all 'training' was like this, I'd be an Olympic athlete!

Getting out here was pretty easy. We just showed up at the airport, reams of pointless paperwork in our hands. All designed for the authorities to look like they know what they are doing in the wake of covid, without actually having to do much of the work themselves.

I produced my passport and proof of vaccination at the check-in desk with all the triumphant enthusiasm of Don Johnson flashing his police badge and revealing to the bad guys that he is in fact Miami Vice, and they have been busted! She seemed nonplussed... disinterested in fact.

We had already reserved our seats. I like the window, so I can see the luggage handlers loading me bags on to the wrong plane. I think if I see it happen, I'll make a note of the plane's tail number so we can report the bags missing at customs! Of course, it has never happened yet. But I reckon that's because they know I'm watching.

The check-in gal asked, "Did you pack your own bag sir?" And no sooner had I confirmed that indeed I had, ignoring the scowls from Mrs C (who had actually done all of the packing for both of us - well she is soooooo good at it, as I tell her), than we got our boarding passes and sashayed to security to be checked for exploding devices and have our paperwork ignored some more.

I always get stopped at the metal detector. Always! It would not matter if I walked through naked, the machine would still beep. I said to Sharon, "The reason the machine goes off is because of my magnetic personality." "I think you may have your poles mixed up!" comes the reply.

Wondering to meself if Mrs C is putting iron filings in me tea, or something else to get me life insurance to pay out asap, I note that the airport is quiet. Eerily so. And when we get to the other end, the lack of tourists is even more obvious. My impression is that numbers must be at least 80% down on what you would expect at this time of year.

After our two weeks holiday, getting back home was a cinch...

We had to book a PCR test, at least that was the case when we landed. Having booked the test with the local dentist - they didn't have a test facility nearby, so the local dentist picked up some extra Euros jumping on the testing bandwagon - I realised that the morning we were due to be tested, I was playing golf. So I went to the 'test centre' to re-arrange the PCR

test and they said that we did not need them for our return trip to Blighty any longer. So, they had cancelled them... Oh and were shutting down! Obviously that little money-making scheme had run its course!

Checking the UK Government website, it indeed transpired that we no longer needed a PCR test, but a lateral flow test instead. And that was great, because Sharon had packed a couple of NHS tests in me suitcase... told you she was good!

Unfortunately, in tiny print on the site, it said that a pukka lateral flow test from the NHS was NOT suitable for the task of determining if we could re-enter the UK. Instead we had to find some tourist hole and get a local one. So off we go to find one.

The Spanish have spent year's cultivating an ability to anticipate the needs of the British tourist and fleecing them for money to satisfy those needs. It used to happen with every budget set by the European Union and it still happens in Spain. Sure enough, overnight El Diablo Testing Centre had sprung up!

For twenty Euros each, a bloke (who I am pretty sure I had seen spraying weeds on the brick weave at one of the resort's car parks the day before) administered the most basic of tests for us, before stamping a grubby form. The official stamp looked rather like the hand stamps used in the local nightclubs to stamp your wrist. He handed us our forms as "proof" that were covid free.

Frankly, I think killing a chicken and divining its entrails would have been more scientific. And on closer inspection of the stamp, it did look as if we may have acquired 'VIP Guest' status at 'La Manga Resort'. But on the plus side, I saw one of the girls working there who had previously worked for the dentist... so nice to know she had found employment so quickly! And that got me thinking...

Here in the UK, we need more workers. Earlier in the week the BBC reported that the number of job vacancies had hit record levels, exceeding one million. That is mind blowing. And certainly, retail has been feeling the twin effects of covid and Brexit creating a perfect storm of labour shortage. Even at WIS we have had to respond, to make certain that we have ample staff available to cover all of our work plus the increasing number of calls we are getting from retailers who either can't afford to have their own staff count or have been let down by some other third-party stock take company.

Fortunately, as the world's biggest stock take company, we have ample resources to make sure that all of our customers are properly served on a timely basis. And I thank my lucky stars that we are in such a terrific position. However, some relief for those suffering because of the general labour shortage may be close at hand.

Looking at how empty the airports and hotels were on our trip, it is obvious that the tourism industry has been decimated. And whilst the Government has moved to bolster those businesses throughout the covid crisis, I am quite certain that the impending closure of the furlough scheme will see

hundreds of thousands of workers suddenly finding themselves out of work. And, putting aside the short-term mental strain that losing an income inevitably creates, I like to think that all of those people who have been forced to sit by whilst they wait for their industry to reopen will now burst onto the labour market anxious to play their part in rebuilding the economy.

Recently the Government has decided to raise taxes, to fund mental health treatments in this country. And whilst I am aware that opinion is divided as to whether they have fairly distributed the burden of additional tax or not, I do think that the general consensus is that the injection of funding is a good thing.

I cannot imagine sitting at home month after month with nothing to do. No matter how seductive the illusion of a carefree lifestyle on holiday may be, the reality is that you cannot live like that, because of the cost and because you would just become unproductive. As me old gran used to say, "Happiness is the pursuit of a worthwhile goal." No wonder people are struggling with mental health issues.

And of course, the reason you can sit in luxury for two

weeks on holiday is because you worked all year to save up for those two weeks. That WAS your worthwhile goal. Most people cannot afford to live like that for months and months, even if they wanted to. And actually it would be bad for their mental health if they did! Their minds would atrophy.

Just look at the drug taking, socially dysfunctional celebrities and their kids. For some that lifestyle is actually pointless, not 'carefree,' and despite having all the trappings of success that truism applies 'money can't buy you happiness.'

The truth of the matter is that most people are better off if they feel that they are in charge of their lives and can make a difference. Working at a job is an important part of that mental health kick. And that is what we need in the UK.

We have a gold standard NHS. We have a future to build outside of Europe post Brexit. And we have a huge credit card bill to pay after funding the world beating antidote to covid. Someone has got to pay.

Now, as we emerge from our enforced covid break and get back into our stride economically, we can create a golden age of innovation, health improvements and productivity.

Time to get to grips with me inbox...

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