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# Portugal *Letter*

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# Expats Interview



## Figs On The Funcho—How Cheryl And Graham Smith Set Up This Stunning Algarve Holiday Accommodation

Cheryl Smith grew up in South Africa, partly on a farm and partly in a town, and her husband, Graham, in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). They both dreamed of exploring Europe's history and culture.

Reflecting on the past and recalling happy memories in Africa helped them make the decisions that have shaped their new life in the Algarve. Cheryl tells us what brought them here...

"In 2002, we watched the reality program, 'No Going Back' on U.K. TV, and that really inspired us to make Portugal our 'living the dream' destination. It was a documentary about U.K. families escaping the rat race and forming new, quieter lifestyles in sunny European destinations.

"When we recalled the countries of our childhood, where we took our holidays, and where we enjoyed good food and wine, it was the Algarve that reminded us most of our home countries within Europe."

The Algarve won their hearts over a period of 23 years of vacations, and they purchased their first coastal property here in 2005.

"The Algarve was ideal for our family holidays, with a huge array of facilities and activities available. Our children have some

fabulous memories of holidaying here. My daughter, Lara-Ann, and I enjoyed the beach life, while Graham escaped to the golf course to play with our son, Robert.

"With a view to purchasing a property where we'd like to live in the future, we found a waterfront property in 2007 that had two buildings: a 100-year-old farmhouse with stables on either side and a barn with adjacent pigsties. Both buildings offered complete privacy with a 360-degree view of the countryside. →



"The farmhouse, now known as The River House, was restored into a modern, stylish, and spacious villa with five double bedrooms. We added an infinity pool overlooking the river and decking areas designed for dining, entertaining, and most importantly—relaxing under the carob trees. Winding pathways to the water's edge were created in the garden for easy access for canoeing, stand-up paddleboarding, and fishing.

"We were not living in the Algarve, so it was an obvious choice for us to offer both properties as holiday rentals when we weren't using them. The self-catering villa became a popular choice for families looking for privacy and peace, allowing the guests to disconnect from their hectic lifestyle.

"I started taking bookings, marketing, and making recommendations about the highlights of the region to our guests. We were constantly maintaining and improving the properties, creating a home-away-from-home experience and making sure our visiting guests had everything they needed—from toddler and baby equipment, to kitchen appliances, and a DVD library for the children.



"We've started renovating The River Barn, and when complete, it will accommodate an additional eight guests, making the location well suited for small group activity holidays.

"We named the location (including The River House and The River Barn) Figs on the Funcho. The river Funcho flows past the property, and there are several fig trees on our land.

"Spring begins in February, when the almond blossom appears. It's a gorgeous time to be outdoors in the fresh air, exploring the countryside with its abundance of wildflowers.

"The hills surrounding us are filled with nature's bounty—the fragrant wild lavender, the white rock rose, with its floppy large white petals, aromatic rosemary, and sweet-smelling almond blossoms.

"At the start of spring 2020, we popped over to Portugal to oversee the pre-holiday season tasks, expecting a very busy few months ahead. Unfortunately, we (and the whole world) saw about half the world's population move into lockdown, with many businesses closed and a complete halt in holiday travel, something we, nor

anybody else, ever expected. We got a flood of cancellations due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

"It was during the stay-at-home orders, with no pressure to be anywhere or do anything, that we were able to take stock of what we deemed important pre-COVID, and what we were enjoying doing in the moment...

"Portugal's tourist board's 2020 campaign strapline was 'Can't Skip Portugal.' It aimed to promote Portugal as a year-round holiday destination. We said to ourselves, why not turn it into a year-round living destination by making the Algarve our new home?

"It was time to make that leap of faith, and we had plenty to do before the Brexit deadline. We made plans to sell our house in England, apply for Portuguese residency, and exchange our current driving licenses for the Portuguese equivalent. Nothing like a deadline to get you moving!"

Cheryl and Graham now offer special-interest holidays from Figs on the Funcho. Painting workshops are led by experienced and qualified art tutors, and →



there are walking excursions along the panoramic river Funcho, passing vineyards, orange, carob, olive, and cork oak trees, and aromatic lavender and rosemary plants.

Bird-watchers are spoilt for choice here, as Cheryl explains...

"Vita Nativa's project, 'Local Accommodation for Birds', aims to encourage nesting sites for birds in the Algarve region. It also promotes the important role birds have in the biological control of the pests the farmers have to endure, without having to resort to the use of poisonous products.

"They installed several nesting boxes on our site for the little owls, blue tits, hoopoes, and starlings. While the team was fixing the nesting boxes to our carob and cork oak trees, they identified 41 different bird species in less than two hours. This is a very creditable bird spotting total for an inland site.

"The Iberian magpie and Iberian green woodpecker are of particular interest, as their habitat is limited to the Iberian Peninsula. Other species sighted that are not present in much of Northern Europe were the white stork, Eurasian hoopoe,



Thekla's larks and crested larks, Sardinian and Dartford warblers, spotless starlings, and European serins. This bodes well for bird enthusiasts interested in visiting us."

They now offer culinary cooking courses, wine tasting, detox breaks, and yoga workshops. They even host weddings at their exclusive location.

Cheryl and Graham are delighted that they made the move to live in the Algarve, and Figs on the Funcho is testament to their hard work and vision.

"Living a healthy and safe lifestyle is important to us, and the Algarve fulfils these qualities in many ways. The air quality, according to the QualAr network of monitoring stations, is positively rated as either 'very good' or 'good' across the Algarve region; and Portugal achieved third position on the 2020 Global Peace Index, which is very encouraging.

"Moving to a new country can be challenging, but the Portuguese are lovely, gentle, genuine people, and they're particularly welcoming.

"We moved for the lifestyle, the sunshine, the gorgeous beaches, outdoor living, excellent food, and award-winning wines. In those respects, the Algarve actually reminds us a little of South Africa. Combined with the friendly welcome and relaxed style of the Portuguese, it's not hard to imagine why we spent so many holidays here and eventually made it our home."

For more information about Figs on the Funcho, see their contact details in the [Rolodex](#).

