Travel.

PORTUGAL: CHANGE, CHEAPNESS AND CHARM.
By MAJOR-GENERAL HOWARD CARR, C.B.

LUNCHING recently in the Millbank Mess, I mentioned, perhaps unduly optimistically, that I had discovered the ideal holiday resort and refuge for seekers after winter sunshine and warmth; combining restful peace, ease of access and cheapness. These remarks excited so much interest that I suggested to the Editor that if I sent him a few notes on my journey and personal experiences they might prove useful, as so many of the Corps desire a cheap residential quarter on the Continent free from all the amenities of the various Riviera much-boosted places.

My find is Praia da Rocha, Portimao, in the Province of Algarve, Portugal—on the Atlantic in Lagos Bay—close to Cape St. Vincent, facing due south and protected by a low range of hills from the north. It enjoys a semi-tropical climate and vegetation.

Algarve is that province of Portugal lying south of the Tagus, about one-fifth of Portugal, and is almost unknown to Englishmen, most of whose knowledge of Portugal is acquired by a visit to Lisbon, Cinfra, Estoril and the well known towns of the north.

Praia da Rocha derives its name from its beach with curious rock formations. The beach is most extensive, composed of fine clean sand,
very flat, with breakers which should lend themselves to surf-riding, and perfect shelter for sun-bathing; there are numerous caves and curious arches made by erosion of the soft red sandstone.

The whole country bears testimony to the Moorish occupation, it being their last stronghold in Portugal. The towns contain old forts, typically Moorish. The gentleman tilling the land uses a wooden plough drawn by oxen or mules, and digs with the same implement as used by the Indian ryot. Water is raised by sukeyas turned by a blindfolded bullock, and donkeys are the most popular mode of village transport.

I think the easiest way to give information of practical utility is to describe in detail my own journey from start to finish, and the impressions I formed as a resident.

As Southampton was my most convenient port of departure I had the choice of lines calling at Lisbon, which is the port of entrance. Having previous experience of the Rotterdam Lloyd Company, I selected that line in preference to the Royal Mail, although both are equally good and are the same price. I booked a second-class berth, leaving Southampton on
November 12, and had a single berth cabin with every luxury one could wish for—return ticket £11, available for one year.

The "Dempo" pulled out at 5 p.m. punctually on Friday, the 12th, and being fortunate in having a smooth passage arrived at Lisbon on Monday, 15th, at 7.30 a.m. All baggage was put on shore by the Company and conveyed to the Customs sheds by Portuguese porters and dumped in a heap, from which one had to seize one's own belongings, having first obtained, on presentation of one's passport, a permit to land a fixed number of packages. Armed with this document, after rescuing one's belongings and getting them on to the bench, the examination for Customs was got through fairly easily; the only question put to me was concerning tobacco, but the number of packages must absolutely correspond with the number on the permit, and I had to add a small attache case and a bundle of sticks to make my tally correct. Another set of porters then took possession, and finally one reached the exit and could load on taxis or motor buses. My departure was further complicated by having to clear my motor car and get my documents signed by the Customs; in this I was assisted by the representative of the International Auto-Association who had been notified of my arrival by the British A.A. All this entailed the payment of what seemed to me a never-ending demand for about 20 escudos.

Having at length got clear, with my baggage loaded on my car, we crossed by ferry to the south bank of the Tagus and took the road to Algarve, via Setubal and Ferriera—about 200 miles. The road surface is excellent and the drive interesting, but rather too long—there are miles of up and down grades with sharp turns every quarter of a mile or less, but there are also long stretches absolutely straight on which we touched fifty-five to sixty miles by the speedometer.

We halted at Ferriera for a meal, which we partook in a little restaurant. There was no business doing, but after a wait the house produced a dish of boiled fish and potatoes, followed by an excellent dish of fried pork steak and chip potatoes, with a dessert of apples and bananas, and red and white wine in abundance; for this the charge was 9 escudos per head, equal to 1s. 8d. The Portuguese driver sat at the same table with us, and the girl who waited leant with both hands on the table and conversed all the time. She told my Portuguese friend that she had never before spoken to an English gentleman. We arrived at the Hotel Rocha at 7.30 p.m., in time for an 8 o'clock dinner.

This hotel is the principal one. There is one other that the English patronize; both are quite comfortable and well run. The "Rocha" has about forty bedrooms and is under English management, having recently been taken over by a Mr. and Mrs. Muir, who are making progressive improvements, both structural and in the furnishing. I have an excellent bedroom looking over the sea, about fifty yards distant, quite well if plainly furnished, for which I pay 35 escudos, inclusive of wine; baths, extra 5 escudos—this is equal to 7s. 3d. The food is good, well cooked and served English fashion.
The first two days were disappointing, as there was rain with a high wind, but not cold. My window was at all times wide open, even at night, and one light blanket was sufficient covering. As I write there is glorious warm sunshine with a cool breeze. The air and water are sufficiently warm to allow the young members of the community to appear in sun-bathing dress—this on November 20. The dress that one needs on a normal summer day at home is quite adequate, although after sundown it gets colder.

There are plenty of villas to be hired by the month, varying in price according to size from £8 to £10 per month, fully furnished but not luxurious. For a stay of a couple of months I fancy the hotel would be best, unless a family with children had to be accommodated. The hotel has ample bath rooms, each bedroom has hot and cold running water and the beds are quite comfortable—although not exactly Vi. sprung—and scrupulously clean, as is the whole establishment. The floors are plain polished hard wood; no superfluous curtains, carpets or hangings; the public rooms are not numerous, but in hot weather would be little used, as there is a fine broad verandah facing south and the sea.

At the time of writing there are about twenty people in the hotel, all British, and two tables for bridge can be filled. Practically all are ex-Service people. There are four or five villas occupied by English families who have been here for some years for reasons of health, of which more anon.

Regarding the amenities of Rocha—it is a very quiet little village. The Casino is only open for badminton and tennis, there is no gambling or
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music, during the winter months. A 9-hole golf course has just been made and, I am told, will provide an excellent sporting sand dune links—the "greens" are "browns." Residents in the hotel can play for half the fees, as the proprietor has subscribed liberally to the funds of the syndicate leasing the land and has secured that privilege for his clientele. The fees are: Men, £2 for three months; women, £1. Men, £1 for one month; women, 10s. Caddies, 1.50 escudos for 9 holes, i.e. 3½d. There is boating of a rough kind and it is possible to get taken out in a boat of the sardine fleet from Portimao, where there is a flourishing sardine canning industry.

Praia da Rocha is virtually a suburb of Portimao, only about one kilometer distant. Three quarters of an hour's drive up a well-surfaced and graded road, 2,000 feet up, is Caldas da Monchique, where are the famous hot mineral springs and ancient baths. These are most interesting; there are two distinct sets of baths, one very ancient, going back to 1400. New modern baths have been quite recently constructed and equipped with absolutely the latest apparatus, the installation being supervised by a German expert. There is an excellent Ear, Throat and Nose Department with the very latest appliances for chronic and lavage treatment. A highly qualified English-speaking doctor is in charge.

There are numerous places of interest to visit; all the roads are excellent, quite up to English standard, and motor cars can be hired at very reasonable rates.

Now as regards climate. In "Playtime in Portugal," a book that everyone who contemplates a visit to the Algarva Province should read, it it stated that "you can be naked all the time; even at midnight the sea is still warm." This is not literally true. There are days when the sun is behind a cloud and one is glad to wear a fairly thick suit, and in December and January quite a strong wind blows for some days, but there is no venom even in an East wind, and the sun is glorious. It is said to be warm in summer in Praia da Rocha, but I do not think sufficiently so to disturb those accustomed to the tropics and there is always a fresh sea breeze and cool nights.

The cost of living is of interest to a family man who contemplates taking a villa—of which there are a fair number—all are to let fully furnished and are supposed to contain everything necessary for the size of family they are intended to accommodate. They are let by the month, rent payable in advance and varying from 750 to 1,200 escudos per month (there are 110 escudos to the £1). The smaller ones only contain two bedrooms but the large have as many as six good bedrooms. Most of them have hot and cold running water, and all have bathrooms and good indoor sanitation, electric light, but no gas. All the drinking water is carried down from Monchique and is said to be the best in Portugal. The pipe water supply is unfit to drink; this apparently does not upset anyone as all the population drink wine, even young children. The following budget
was given me by an officer who has had a villa here for some years and who lives comfortably and keeps a good table. Rent 750, Servants 200, Market 200, Fish 100, Baker 100, Milk 30, Fuel, wood 100, Water 60, Light 50, Grocer 1,000, Beggars 10 = Total 2,500 escudos—say £23—for two people per month. Fish is cheap and plentiful, also meat but not so good. Fruit, according to season, abundant and very cheap. Figs, grapes, oranges, flowers in profusion. English stores rather dear, tea 6s. to 7s. a pound, wine dirt cheap, tobacco and whisky about the same as in England, Portuguese brandy good, about 4s. a bottle, coffee excellent.

I cannot, for a short stay, recommend bringing out a motor car, as carriage hire is very reasonable, 1s. 1d. for a taxi to carry four from Praia da Rocha to Portimao; a two wheel carinha can be had for the same journey for 2½d. a head, i.e. 1 escudo. The cars for hire are excellent saloons, either Ford, Opel or some other American or German make. My Vauxhall is the only one of its kind here and the only one in the hotel.

The Portuguese maids are hard working and do all the work of a house including washing. They work for 15s. to 20s. a month living in the house and, I think, provided with uniforms.

From Lisbon there are only two fast trains a week, on Wednesday and Saturday, taking about five hours to reach Portimao. There is a slow train every night and a goods train, with a passenger carriage attached, each day. The fare first class by Rapido is £1.

The item in the budget "Beggars" requires explanation. By law beggars are permitted to knock at your door on Saturday and solicit alms; the legal amount is 10 centavos, about a farthing, and I have been told that if given more they tender the change.