

TRAVEL

Couple discovers the best of Spain, France, Morocco

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER

Carl Argiroff popped a videotape into the player.

Guitars rang and voices sang Spanish folk songs as a crowd of happy people danced in a town square, the night lit by modern lighting but surrounded by ancient red clay buildings, in the shadow of a Roman aqueduct.

The scene is Segovia, Spain. Carl and Susan Argiroff of Livonia and their traveling companions had arrived just in time to savor Spain at its festive best. Carl said the singing, dancing and merry-making "set the tour off" on just the right note.

In April, the Argiroffs joined some relatives for a European tour that included the Netherlands, Spain, Morocco and France.

"We flew on five different airplanes, took two trains and rented two cars," said Susan.

The trip included a little bit of everything - visits to European relatives, superb meals, a sampling of the arts and a chance to compare Europe's infrastructure with America's. This worked out well for Susan, an artist, and Carl, retired after 33 years with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The Argiroffs are seasoned travelers, having been to Turkey, Greece, Scotland, England, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Bulgaria and China. In 1988 Carl and his daughter took a trip in China down the Burma Road, almost to Tibet.

On this trip, the Argiroffs began by flying into Amsterdam, where they stayed a couple days, exploring the city's unique architecture and visiting the museum. Then the real trip began with a flight to Spain.

"In Spain, an American could move in tomorrow, it was so clean and neat," Susan said.

The Argiroffs were especially impressed by how warm and friendly the people were.



Artist's view: Susan Argiroff's artist's eye focused in on these picturesque Spanish windows.

Carl tells a story on himself.

"I went through a parking lot gate and I thought it was going to stay up. I was supposed to press a button and I didn't know it so the gate came down on the windshield and I was trapped," he said. "But instead of being upset, everyone in line came out to help me. Even the attendant was apologizing and said it was probably the equipment, but it was really my fault."

The Argiroffs said this helpful, understanding reception was repeated everywhere they went in Spain and France. Carl said the French reputation for being "cold" wasn't deserved based on their experience.

The Argiroffs visited Madrid, Toledo and Segovia. They stayed in "paradors," historic Spanish buildings that have been restored and revitalized as restaurants and hotels.

They rented a car and made their way through the countryside.

"We didn't realize there were so many hills in Spain. It was very hard to drive," Susan said. "We were going up hill and someone shouted 'good luck,' when we got to the top we realized why."

In Madrid the Argiroffs took in the Prado museum, noted for its collections of works by Goya, El Greco and Velazquez. In Toledo they viewed more works by El Greco.

From Spain they took a side trip to Morocco.

"The belly dancer was the greatest," Carl said.

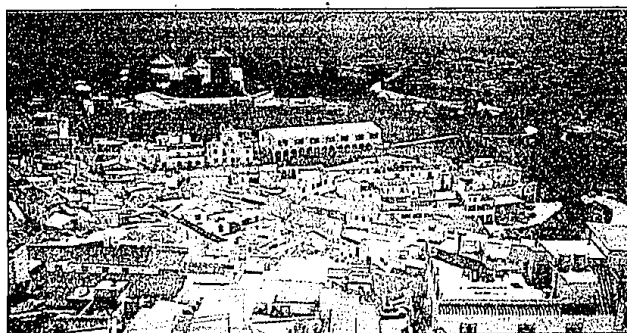
"The belly dancer attacked Carl," Susan said with a laugh. "He has that on video, too. We were entertained in a tent with a Persian carpet. Men stood at the front with sabres."

Carl bought a richly decorated Moroccan sabre as a souvenir. The Argiroff group took a train from Spain to the south of France, where Carl has relatives in Sommers.

"In France I found I had a cousin who lived only two kilometers from where we were staying," Argiroff said.

The Argiroffs enjoyed visiting relatives in the red tile roofed, picturesque town. The colorful outdoor markets provided Susan inspiration for a series of note cards capturing the lush colors of fresh vegetables and colorful market displays. Susan is active with several local arts groups including Michigan Surface Design and Women of Artistry. She has exhibited in group shows and individually, most recently in a Michigan Surface Design show at the Livonia Library.

"I'm busy with watercolors, marbling and arranging pictures I took. The flowers in Spain and France are wonderful," she said. For Carl, the trip was another chance to observe the infrastructure of two European countries. He was also able to examine the ancient workmanship of the Roman aqueducts.



Mediterranean views: A hillside setting gives this French village a stunning view of the sea.

"The highway system is much superior to Michigan's. In Spain and France, you don't have the decay we have here in the U.S. But the water system is very inferior. I don't understand why they don't do something about it," Carl said.

He said that in some places bottled water was more expensive than wine. The Argiroffs were especially impressed by the bullet train they took from Nice to Paris. The 600 mile trip took 6 1/2 hours and "was as smooth as flying."

"I loved Paris," said Susan. "You'd think after standing on the Great Wall of China nothing could match it, but coming up the Champs Elysee was very

impressive."

In Paris, they visited the Louvre and stayed in a house once owned by Napoleon III's doctor. Despite an enjoyable, activities

full vacation, the Argiroffs were ready for home after nearly a month away.

"You miss the conveniences of the states," Susan said simply.



Moroccan tent: Susan and Carl Argiroff were entertained by belly dancers at a feast in a Moroccan tent.

GREAT ESCAPES

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GRAND RAPIDS EXHIBIT

The Grand Rapids Art Museum will hold the first exhibition ever in the United States and first international exhibit in more than 50 years of the work of Italian Renaissance master painter Pietro Perugino, opening Nov. 16. Perugino (c.1450-1523) is considered one of the most distinguished painters of the Italian Renaissance and his art provided the foundation for the aesthetic development of the High Renaissance, especially the work of Raphael.

Highlighting the exhibition, "Perugino: Master of the Italian Renaissance," is the unprecedented loan of nine works by Perugino from the Galleria Nazionale dell' Umbria in Perugia, Italy, the largest repository of works by Perugino in the world. The exhibit includes more than 30 works in all. The exhibit runs through Feb. 1, 1998.

The Grand Rapids Art Museum is at Pearl Street and Division Avenue in downtown Grand Rapids.

THE L.A. SCENE

Richard H. Axman, professor of art history at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, is conducting a tour of the contemporary art scene in Los Angeles, Calif. Jan. 7-11. The trip includes round trip air fare from Detroit, four nights accommodations at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, full buffet breakfast each morning and tours of Arata Isozaki's Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art and several L.A. galleries. Cost is \$929 double occupancy, \$979 triple and \$1,149 single. For more information, call

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