

## **AN IBERIAN ADVENTURE...**

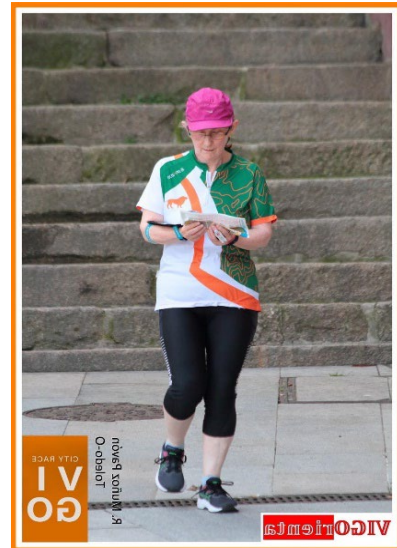
The City Race Euro Tour is an annual league of urban orienteering events, held in major European cities. This year's competition comprises of 9 city races, from Madeira in the West to Poland in the East. Most events include at least one additional competition, such as a night sprint, or a conventional woodland middle distance outing. Competitors come from all over Europe, attracted by the chance to combine racing with more traditional tourist activities... exploring the local culture; sampling good food; practicing a foreign language.

Debbie Charlton and I have enjoyed orienteering abroad in recent years, and have raced around some lovely cities. We have had some qualms, however, about jetting off for the weekend due to concerns about global warming. However, when we realised that two of this year's City Races - Vigo in Spain, and Viana do Castelo in Portugal - were connected by rail, and only a week apart, we thought that we could justify our flights if we used public transport while abroad. Neither of these cities are on direct flight routes to the UK, so we decided to fly to Porto, and take a regional train for the 2½ hour journey to Vigo. We could then use the same train line to return to Porto via Viana do Castelo. It was easy to book all our train tickets, which were very cheap, using Trainline, so we were all set. Unfortunately we were blissfully unaware that Portuguese railway workers had decided to strike throughout June! We only confirmed that there were, in fact, no trains at all, when we turned up at Porto station at 8am. Cue a "Race Around the World" moment while we jogged around with wheelie bags in tow, trying to find a viable way to get to Vigo that day. Luck was on our side... we located the bus station... there was a direct coach, and there were seats... hoorah! We arrived in Vigo the day before the City Race, and were delighted to find that our flat was located in the historic centre of town, and on the orienteering map...perfect!



Vigo's old town is on a steep hillside, below the remnants of an old castle, and runs down to the harbour. We climbed up steep steps to reach the assembly area, where it became clear that the organisation left a little to be desired. (We had wondered about this, having only received final details at 10pm the night before) The starts were all delayed by half an hour. Once we got going, however, the local club's reputation was redeemed. The map proved to be

excellent and the routes challenging, sending us criss-crossing downhill via alleyways and steps to the attractive harbourside. I only got caught out at one control (no 12 on the map), having difficulty interpreting the intricate mapping of two different levels. My control was located inside a café, under a pyramid style structure. I managed to relocate off control 13. The end of my course took me back to the old town, with a cruel climb up to the finish. I decided against the direct route, which was up a long and incredibly steep set of steps, choosing a slightly longer but more manageable diversion. Chaos reigned again at download, with only one laptop in use. I waited for half an hour to log my result, while some finishers had to wait for an hour. This would not have been acceptable in SMOC land! Debbie and I finished in solid mid table positions in our age classes, pleased with our runs on a tricky map.



After time exploring Vigo, and a fascinating day out by (Spanish) train to Santiago de Compostela, we headed off by coach back over the border into Portugal, to Viana do Castelo. This is a much smaller city than Vigo, and is situated on a large estuary on the Atlantic coast, with amazing beaches of bright white sand. The centre is largely pedestrianised, with narrow streets of terraced houses, shops and cafes. We were optimistic that this would provide another excellent race location. Viana has been designated a European City of Sport, and this was evident in the importance they attached to our event.

Details of the event had been sketchy, as with the Vigo race, but once we got the final details we realised that our hotel was on the map and handily located for the assembly area, on the waterfront. So handy, in fact, that on race day we were able to shamble over to assembly to pay our entry fees, then return to the hotel for a lie down before walking the two minutes to the start! This race was longer than Vigo, with little climb, but very hot. Portugal was in the middle of a heat wave, so temperatures were around 30 degrees, in full sun. Orienteering wise, the event was a bit disappointing. Debbie and I both thought that more use could have been made of the town centre. 6 of my 20 controls were within a park containing a large lake, not dissimilar to Priors



