

In search of CPD in the sunshine

THERE appeared to be very good reasons why so many peasants committed petty crimes in mediaeval England, I grimly concluded, wrapping myself ever more tightly against the cold.

Winter was really starting to bite, and with the daylight vanishing hours before I had any chance of reaching home after work, I was rapidly becoming nocturnal. Perhaps I too could steal a loaf of bread or something, and get shipped back to Australia.

The trouble was, I didn't think I'd be allowed back in. Australians sentence their worst convicts to England, and I'd received six and a half years for repeated beach vagrancy. I still had one year, five months, 13 days and 18 hours left to serve.

Fortunately, however, just when things were starting to look really grim,

salvation appeared in the form of the Southern European Veterinary Conference. Set on the Mediterranean coast in Barcelona, the conference was sure to be blessed with balmy weather, sunny skies, and – best of all – near perfect beaches. Of course, truly perfect beaches are not found outside of Australia; however, this was hardly the time for scruples.

I therefore arranged urgent scholastic leave to address my continuing education deficits, dusted off my board shorts and sunnies, and headed for London City Airport as fast as I could.

In Barcelona I discovered to my delight the palatial surroundings of the “Mountain of Montjuic”, which cascaded in a series of waterfalls and stone steps down to the conference venue. I rapidly located my Australian colleagues, aided by their deep tans and professional-strength sunglasses.

They'd made the long flight from the Lucky Country to experience the novelty of life this far north, and to sample the delights of Barcelona. Of course, as dedicated veterinarians, we also planned to briefly visit the conference itself.

We discovered therein more than 200 lectures in seven simultaneous streams, covering most clinical

disciplines, even including practice management. A nursing programme proceeded concurrently with the veterinary programme, and additional workshops offered hands-on lab experiences in subjects such as radiology, ultrasonography, cytology and many others.

More important, however, was Barcelona's Gothic Quarter which, I was thrilled to discover, was one of the world's largest and best-preserved mediaeval old cities, with buildings dating back to Roman times. We explored its labyrinthine streets for hours, which soon merged into days.

Palm-lined squares would mysteriously appear as we wandered for miles beneath and between canyon-like walls, only to reappear later that day, or sometimes the next. Certain shadowed alleys were eerily quiet, whilst others were lined with quirky shops and shadowed cafés, with a steady buzz of tourists, street artists and hard-eyed pickpockets, who cruised their schools of human prey like sharks.

We discovered wonderful vegetarian and vegan cafes, each with fare more delicious, and décor more bizarrely coloured, than the last. In a pokey café in the heart of the old city, Peter scared us by predicting our futures with uncanny insight, using the grounds from our authentic Turkish coffees.

Male intuition

Either the syllabus in his veterinary school had been distinctly more advanced than mine, or his male intuition was developed beyond anything previously thought possible by our female colleagues.

As night fell, the main street – La Rambla – came alive with street theatre and artists. We witnessed amazing displays of breakdancing and costumery, some of which became delightfully spooky as the night wore on. Above it all, thrown glowsticks descended like miniature helicopters, thanks to rotor-like attachments.

The next day, the girls elected to study the Spanish shopping culture in

closer detail, whilst Peter and I headed underground, to discover some of the largest Roman ruins in the world. Among ancient fortifications we found a well-preserved wine factory, with vats big enough to fully submerge oneself, a “salted fish guts” factory (apparently these were a Mediterranean delicacy), and even a laundry, where well-dressed Romans had their clothes cleaned with urine, ash and lime, before being starched.

Finally, after our strenuous scholastic efforts, it was time for some serious R&R. Fortunately, Australians are expert in this, and we instinctively, simultaneously and independently detected the shortest route to the beach. *En route* we passed Barcelona's beautiful marina, where the luxury mega-yachts of the rich and famous have now replaced Roman galleys.

After navigating the palm-lined promenade, we soon found ourselves reclining on a beautiful, scalloped beach, with moderate breakers, warm water and highly acceptable intermediate to finely grained sand. One feature that differed distinctly from the Australian experience, however, was the kindly souls that appeared every 15 minutes or so offering everything from beer to necklaces, food, and even Thai foot massages!

It was, of course, profoundly cold and grey in London where I was shortly due to return to work. But perhaps a veterinary career might not be so bad after all, I considered, as I struggled to keep my gaze an appropriate number of centimetres from the local topless beauties. Although sadly, as a chronic

ANDREW KNIGHT continues his series on 'CPD with a difference' with a report on his trip to the Southern European Veterinary Conference



The author and friend in the conference exhibition and (below) one of the many shops visited in the old city.



slow learner, I feared I was going to need a great deal of additional continuing education.

SEVC survival guide

1. The free drinks end at 10 pm at the conference fiesta. However, the sturdy tables at the back will support a surprising weight of stockpiled sangrias acquired early on.
2. Never join the end of a line during a group dance unless you know the moves, or well under 200 of your colleagues are watching.
3. When exploring Barcelona's gothic quarter, wear your backpack on your front to deter thieves.
4. If you want to have your future predicted from your coffee grounds, do not lick, slurp or drink your cup clean. The results can be disturbing.
5. Never let anyone with Greek ancestry read your coffee grounds. The results can be even more disturbing.
6. The most dangerous thing at the conference is the traditional flamenco dancer at the cocktail poster session. Stray within arms' reach and you are liable to be publicly humiliated with her on the main stage.

■ This year's conference is in Barcelona from 29th September to 2nd October.

Andrew Knight, BVMS, MRCVS, an Australian graduate currently engaged in locum work in the UK, is keenly interested in novel means of satisfying his continuing education requirements, particularly when these involve beautiful beaches in exotic locations.



A sight for sore eyes: sun, sea and boats at the Barcelona Marina.