

Hobby Times

I.A.H Newsletter

Issue No. 31



'free as the bird'

Easter Edition

March 2009



Letter from the Editor:

It's that time again! Spring is here and it's freezing! However, we must not complain as we have had some glorious sunshine of late and the flowers are blooming in the gardens and hedgerows – daffodils, primroses, snowdrops, crocus and violets – the forsythia is in all its golden glory and a pink froth of cherry blossom lines some of the urban roadways (we even have a camellia in full flower). It is quite amazing after the harsh winter with all that snow and frost only a month ago. It was lovely to see the landscape transformed by the snow but not so pleasant when it came to trying to get the car out - or walk without slipping over. I am sure some of you have lost someone near or dear to you during the winter months, including beloved pets such as Baz (Tony and Jan Charity's Alsatian, who came to all the rallies and took part in the long walks until recently, when his legs began to fail him); and Toby, Gordon and Jenny's cat who accompanied them everywhere they went and has finally succumbed to old age at 23! These pets are as much Hobby Club members as their owners and become famous in their own right!

For those of you who do not log on to the website, the most recent news concerning our Chairman, David Jackson, who has battled with illness for a long time, is that he is once more in hospital after a bad fall in the kitchen at his home. He had to undergo surgery for his head injury, spending several days in intensive care and then in the high dependency unit. His recovery is very slow and will take a long time but he is making progress. His wife, Ann, has been at his bedside daily, updating us with information via Margaret Woodhead. She is naturally very stressed by the situation and does not want anyone to contact her directly and asks that anyone requesting news of David should contact Margaret Woodhead [*on no account should anyone ring Ann*].

There has been little news of club members' activities since the last newsletter – you have obviously all been hunkering down in front of the fire and the 'telly' - or perhaps like some we know, have escaped to the sunshine in Spain? Since Christmas, we have had a rally at Moreton-in-Marsh in the Cotswolds, in January, when 16 of us got together. On the Saturday morning we all made our way to Wellesbourne, where there is a huge open air market on a disused airfield. People come from miles around to spend the day browsing around the hundreds of stalls. We found lots of bargains (a fleece with matching mini-skirt for £1!). I also found some cartridges for my old printer at half price so that was a lucky find as I can no longer buy them from my nearest supplier. Toni decided it was time she joined the SAS and went in search of the appropriate headgear – or maybe she was just cold!



Wellesbourne Market



Guess who?

At lunch time we all piled into David and Christine's van for hot coffee and biscuits which was very cosy! As soon as we had all thawed out, we set off again to make sure we didn't leave a stone unturned before returning to the campsite.

On Sunday some of us went for a marathon cross-country walk to Blockley, arriving cold and very muddy at the local hostelry around 2 pm. Having shed our boots outside the door we were dismayed to find they had finished doing Sunday lunches but, taking pity on us, and being completely smitten by Toni and Len's husky dog Misha, they relented and provided us with soup and rolls. We were all so exhausted we hoped there would be a bus to take us back to Moreton – or even a taxi – but no luck there, we had to squeeze our feet back into our boots and do the walk back over the hills and fields. Eric nearly had to do it barefoot as when he came to put his boots on one of them was missing – he eventually found it in the middle of the road – someone's idea of a joke! In the evening, Jan and Tony Charity had arranged for us all to go to a Thai restaurant for a meal, so, in spite of being tired and footsore, after an hour's rest and a change of clothes, we set off again to walk into town. The meal was superb and our aches and pains soon forgotten. We were all seated at a long table and were joined by our previous newsletter editor, Dawn, and her husband Jim. It was lovely to see them again and catch up with their news. (The last time we met was at the Dusseldorf Show in Germany, where, as well as looking at all the new motor-homes, we also celebrated Eric's birthday at a fabulous fish restaurant).

Of course, the snow put paid to any motor-homing in February, but we have recently been up to Cheshire for a few days staying at a Caravan & Camping site at Delamere Forest, a very pleasant site surrounded by trees, adjacent to a small railway station with an hourly service to Chester and Manchester. We had great difficulty finding a campsite with any vacancies – even midweek – and could not believe how crowded the site became at the weekend when we left. All I can think is that it has become a very popular leisure activity which many people have taken up in preference to holidays abroad. I cannot imagine what it will be like in the summer months and will have to be sure to book well in advance.

We are all looking forward to a good summer and not a repeat of last year's dismal weather. Eric and I escaped to Greece last year in the van, the first time we have taken it quite so far afield, and an account of our travels can be found on the next page. In the meantime, we wish you a very pleasant Easter and look forward to seeing you at one or all of the forthcoming rallies.

Pat Miller (Newsletter Editor).

Forthcoming Rallies:

BINSOE

Wednesday, 29th April – Wednesday, 6th May 2009

Christine and David Lawson are planning a rally in North Yorkshire after Easter during the Spring Bank Holiday (details on the website) in a picturesque field close to the tiny hamlet of Binsoe (HG4 4DW). A 10 minute walk down a track will bring you to pubs, village shop, and filling station. Masham is the nearest small town within walking distance and a small Saturday market. There is a fresh water tap and basic toilet emptying facilities in the field. Site fee £5.00 per night per unit. Six to ten units will make this viable – please contact Christine on 07845 961115 or e-mail >clawson7@tiscali.co.uk<.

The following rallies have been arranged by Toni Browning, our Rally Co-Ordinator. Bookings to be made through our Membership Secretary, Christine Lawson (as above).

SALISBURY

3-10th June, 2009

Alderbury Caravan Park, Southampton Road, Whaddon, Nr. Salisbury. SP53 3HB

WEYMOUTH

10-17 June, 2009

South Buckland Farm, Nottingham, Weymouth, Dorset, DT3 4BQ

CHAINBRIDGE

15-22 July 2009 (Ring Toni Browning after May 6th 2009).

UPTON-UPON-SEVERN

26 Aug.-2nd September 2009

Tony & Jan Charity will be holding a rally during the August Bank Holiday, when the annual Water Festival takes place at Upton with a free firework display. As there are only

18 places available, if you would like to attend please send a £10 deposit to Tony & Jan to secure your place on the site, details of which are on the Upton-upon-Severn website.

Travels in our Hobby to Greece - September 2008

After two days of packing all the essential items for a five week trip (and a lot of non-essentials as one does) we were finally ready to depart on our first leg of the journey by ferry from Dover to Dunkirk. It was a long drive through Belgium to Switzerland where we stayed the first night with friends near Rheinfelden, continuing on our way next morning in bright sunshine but, as we emerged from the St Gotthard Tunnel the other side of the mountain, it was raining. The miserable weather continued all the way to the campsite at Camping Cisano, an excellent site on the shores of Lake Garda. From here we were not too far from our next destination at Camping Fusina, a waterside location looking across to the 'picture postcard' view of Venice, also not too far from the port where we were to board our ferry to Corfu. We stayed here for two nights, allowing ourselves a full day to explore Venice. We caught the water taxi from the campsite for the short trip across the water, but being a Sunday, the locals as well as the tourists were out and about. It was a blazing hot day and we tried to avoid the crowds by keeping away from the tourist 'hot spots'. I particularly wanted to visit the Peggy Guggenheim Museum, which had been closed on my last visit, to see her personal collection of art and sculptures. We stood on the steps leading down to the Grand Canal and imagined what it must have been like to own such a house with your own gondola stage at the 'back door'. We sipped a leisurely coffee in the conservatory and gazed at the people wandering in and out of the sculptures in the courtyard garden. The rest of the day was spent exploring the network of alleyways and little bridges crossing dark blue-green canals, occasionally interrupted by a passing gondola, magical!



Camping Fusina



View of Venice from campsite

Most of the following day was taken up with waiting around at the ferry port (getting there early was essential) to board the ship taking us to Greece. After much whistle blowing and shunting the vehicles around, we found ourselves neatly parked on the Camping Deck next to a large square open 'porthole'. Each van was connected to overhead electricity cables so no problem if you wanted to do your own catering. We went up on deck to watch as the boat made its way slowly past the ancient cityscape of Venice (in the glow of the setting sun it resembled a painting by Canaletto, or Turner) until we entered the Adriatic Sea. There were bars and restaurants as well as the usual shops on board so plenty to do and see until bedtime. As we returned to the van for the night, our neighbour, an Italian, was experiencing problems with his motor home door not shutting properly. Eric at once got out his tool kit and proceeded to mend the door (he is not our technical officer for nothing!), the gentleman was so grateful he gave us a bottle of wine from his own vineyard, and very good it was too. We arrived in Corfu harbour at 11 pm the following night, just in time to spend Easter with my son and his family for the Greek Easter holiday (a month later than ours as they have a different calendar). One of the Corfiat traditions on Easter Saturday is Pot Smashing Day in Corfu town. We joined the crowds lining the narrow cobbled streets, huddling under shop canopies where red banners hung from balconies above us signifying they have a pot to hurl down onto the stones below. At the appointed time, the church bells rang out as earthenware pots of all shapes and sizes, filled with water, came hurtling down, splashing the contents and shards of clay in all directions (it is a wonder no-one is killed!). As the mayhem draws to a close the town bands march along, blowing trumpets and beating drums, crushing the debris under foot. In the evening the townspeople gather for a candlelight ceremony which is held in silence, everyone takes a candle which is lit from one person to the next until all are alight. At midnight all the churches ring their bells and this is followed by a gigantic firework display. Easter Sunday is a family day when a lamb (or two) is roasted on a spit and everyone gets together for a feast and enjoy themselves. It is a far bigger celebration than at Christmas.

All too soon it was time to leave the island and board another ferry to Igoumenitsa, on the mainland of Greece, we were packed in like sardines, not an inch to spare (if you did not get out of the van quickly you were trapped inside for the whole voyage) - all this was achieved with a lot more whistle-blowing. The roads on the mainland were clogged with traffic, everyone returning home after the Easter break, so it was slow-going and we soon realised there was no way we were going to reach our intended campsite at Delphi that night. Instead, we wild-camped on the sea shore on the outskirts of Nafpaktos where there was a good view of the bridge at Antirio spanning the gap between the mainland and the Peloponnese. By mid-morning we had reached Delphi, high up in the mountains where, according to legend, Zeus released two eagles from opposite ends of the world, their paths crossing in the sky above Delphi, establishing the centre of the Earth. The Delphi Oracle was the means through which worshippers could hear the words of the god Apollo spoken through a priestess. A temple has stood on this site since the 6th century BC. By the time we had seen all there was to see the sun was high in the

sky, time to find a quiet place for a spot of lunch. We eventually stopped at a roadside taverna, shaded by trees, and ordered some cheese pies (flaky pastry stuffed with creamy cheese, in the shape of a Catherine wheel, and deep fried) - very tasty, very filling!

Our next stop was Athens, we were not looking forward to driving through this large and busy city but, as we had planned to stay at Camping Athena, on the eastern side, we did not have to venture too far into the city traffic. It is a small, secluded site with trees providing shade, a quiet and peaceful oasis from the roar of the motorways. As it was early in the season there was no shop or restaurant open but further along the road there were plenty of places to buy food, including two excellent bakeries. The following day was the May Bank Holiday - and a general strike! All archaeological sites were closed, as were the shops, and no public transport. So, after a walk and a coffee in a nearby park, it was back to the campsite for a bit of relaxation and swotting up on my Greek! Fortunately, the next day everything was back to normal and we were able to catch the bus to the city centre (50 cents each way) where we walked the busy streets, wandered through the famous market area, the Roman Agora, and the Acropolis - which I found disappointing due to the ongoing 'reconstruction' work, scaffolding and cranes everywhere - no hope of taking a decent photo - better to buy postcard. We were continually moved on by whistle-blowing guides (I don't know what the Greeks would do without a good whistle!). The rest of the day was spent exploring the Plaka area with its ancient buildings, winding narrow streets, pavement cafes and colourful shops. We wandered around the Temple of Zeus and Hadrian's Arch until we were tired and footsore. We had done as much as we could in a day.

We passed from the Greek mainland to the Peloponnese via the bridge over the Corinth Canal - quite mind-blowing to think it was dug out manually hundreds of years ago to allow ships to pass through without having to make the long journey around the southern tip of Greece. Maybe we should have visited the ancient city of Corinth but instead we continued onwards to the hilltop city of Mycenae, a fortified palace for the ruling classes during 1700-1100 BC. As you enter the site through the ancient Lion Gate along a stone pathway worn smooth over the centuries, you first of all see a Grave Circle - a large circle of upright stones - where these ancient people buried their dead. As we scrambled around the hillside it was difficult to visualise the city that had once stood here, the crumbling walls and fallen stones now sprouting colourful clumps of wild flowers like some gigantic rockery. Feeling hot and tired we moved on to our next destination, the old fishing village of Tolo situated in a very pretty bay dotted with small islands. From the campsite (Camping Lido) we caught the bus to Nafplio, the former capital of liberated Greece, with its elegant Venetian buildings and Byzantine churches. We lunched in a shady little outdoor café on delicious swordfish, with a bottle of rose wine, then a lazy afternoon exploring the narrow streets of the old town with its paved waterfront, harbour, and marina, before catching the bus back to the campsite. The sun shone as we drove along the coast road and then into the mountains towards Sparta - it was all very beautiful and leisurely - a tortoise ambled across the road in front of us so we stopped to let it pass! We were making for the now-deserted Byzantine town of Mystras which, according to our guide book was open all day until 7 pm but, as we have discovered many times, the Greeks have their own opening hours and are invariably closed after lunch (whenever that may be!). This we found to be so, refusing to be thwarted as we had driven such a long way to get here, we drove up the narrow road following the contours of the hillside, managing to take a few photos of the tiled rooftops in the distance. As the sky clouded over we moved on to the Mani Beach campsite near Githio - a lovely site by the sea where it would have been nice to stay longer but there are always more interesting places around the corner! We drove all the next day through the mountains to the tiny fishing village of Stoupa - very pretty but not a place to take a camper van!! The road suddenly became very narrow and very steep as it dipped towards the sea - I thought we were going to end up head first in the water - only to find the campsite was closed which was disappointing after such a long drive to find it. This meant going on a bit further to Kalamata, a large busy town with a small airport, and then around the bay to Petalidi. The roadsides were ablaze with the colours of wild flowers, blood-red poppies, bright yellow daisies, flowers of every hue, purples, pinks, white and blue, and huge cacti growing everywhere among the trees, everything so green and lush at this time of year. The sea an unbelievable deep aquamarine blue, contrasting with the bright green, tree clad mountains.

Our best campsite was Camping Thines - and the cheapest yet at 15 euros a night - it was quite small, well laid out under shady trees, with a view of the bay and its two islands. As soon as we drove into the campsite we saw another Hobby motor home with a GB registration - amazingly the first Brits we had seen in Greece! They were just preparing to leave so could not resist having a word with them and they were keen to talk to us too as they had recently bought their Hobby and were anxious to find out about a Hobby Club. We passed on the details and hoped that, by the time they returned from their year out traveling around Europe, they would contact us with a view to joining. We waved them 'goodbye' thinking that was probably the last we should see of any British people when, to our surprise, we found ourselves parked opposite a couple from Nottingham who had been coming to this same spot for years as it was so idyllic. We had a few days 'rest' here, exploring the nearest village of Finikouda with its white-washed cottages, bright flowers spilling from window boxes and the colourful fishing boats in the harbour. A sleepy little town, with a straggle of shops and cafes strung along the waterfront (a more modern town hidden from view behind the old village houses). The temperatures were way up - but not as high as those in the UK apparently - it was good to relax in the sunshine, read a book, or even do nothing!

We found some lovely places to eat - the fish was so fresh and tasty, cooked straight from the fishing boats that morning - and everyone seemed happy and friendly.



Camping Thines



Finikouda

Unfortunately, all good things come to an end and it was soon time to begin the return journey to Patra, visiting one more archaeological site on the way - Olympia - this site had been a religious and athletic sanctuary for 3,000 years. First we visited the Museum displaying the history of the Olympic Games which began in 776 BC. These games were restricted to male Greek athletes only, boys and women's events came later. As we made our way to the main entrance I was surprised to discover that in spite of the number of visitors, how quiet and peaceful it seemed. There was plenty to see, although it was difficult to visualise how it must have looked when those ancient Greeks and Romans occupied this vast area, paved roads lined with colonnaded buildings and temples - now a mass of stones amongst the grass and trees - huge pillars, some standing, some fallen and broken. Eventually, hunger drove us away in search of food, but not in the touristy town of Olympia itself. At a family run taverna we had a good meal of roast pork, potatoes and a Greek salad, followed by a delicious baklava, at a very reasonable price. Our last campsite in Greece was at Camping Allissos, 30 kms from Patra, situated in an olive grove with a few lemon trees dotted about (handy for the G&Ts). Several small toilet and shower blocks were based at regular intervals down the centre of the site, quite basic but very clean. There was even a shop and restaurant open, with an enormous 1,000 year old olive tree growing in the centre of the courtyard, and a good view of the bay where we could see the big ships coming into port at Patra. We discovered that many of our fellow campers were stuck here because of a fuel strike, they had come off the ferry hoping to fill up their vehicles with cheap fuel only to find all the petrol stations shut - some vans had to be towed to the site! Luckily, we had enough to get us to Patra the next day when we boarded the Olympia Palace to Ancona, hoping the same situation would not await us there. Fortunately, we did not encounter any more problems as we made our way back across Italy, Switzerland and Alsace, filling up with fuel at Luxembourg before driving across the Belgian border and returning home the way we had come. It was good to be home again, even though we were exhausted and surrounded with piles of washing - no more looking for campsites, this one will do us fine!

PS. For those who have not considered travelling in your motor home to Greece - go for it - there has been a lot of EU money pumped into the infrastructure, with big improvements to the roads, not the dirt tracks of years ago, and the road signs are clearly marked (although still in old Greek in some of the more outlying areas). There are plenty of well-equipped campsites (many of them English-speaking). We found the Greeks friendly and helpful and wished we had been able to spend more time in some of the places we visited.

Pat & Eric Miller

Eric's 'Snippets'

Automatic Fuel Stations in France:

It has been reported that many more fuel stations in France are likely to introduce more unmanned automatic pumps, particularly supermarket chains which offer the cheapest fuels. In the past these pumps would not accept UK credit cards but I am given to understand that these new automatic pumps, as they are introduced, will accept UK credit cards. The instructions on these pumps will be shown in French and English and allowed up to 118 euros worth of fuel. Let's hope this is true!

Eric Miller.

UK SHOWS 2009

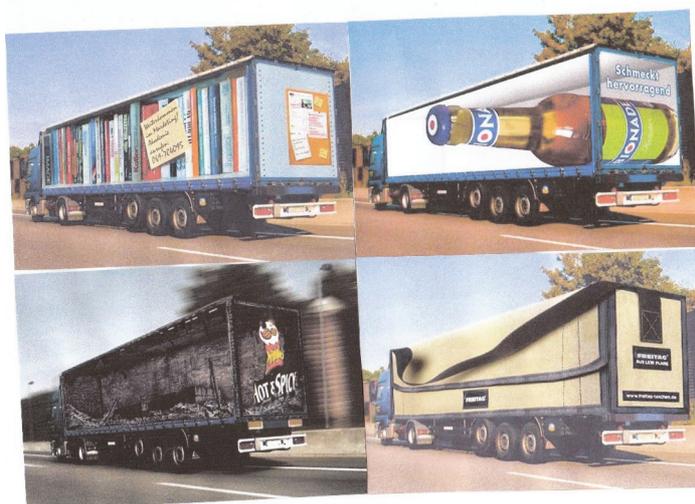
April 10-13 Leeds. Caravan & Motorhome Show at Temple Newsam
April 17-19 Camarthan. The Caravan & Motorhome Show at the United Counties Showground
April 24-26 Peterborough. National Motorhome Show at the East of England Showground
May 15-17 Newbury. Southern Motorcaravan Show
June 5-7 Stratford-upon-Avon. Motorhome & US RV Show
July 17-19 Pickering. Northern Motorhome Show
August 14-15 Malvern. Western Motorhome Show at the Three Counties Showground
September 11-13 Shepton Mallet. Motorhome & US RV Show at the Royal Bath & West Showground
September 25-27 Lincoln. The Motorhome Show Season Finale at the Lincoln Showground
October 13-18 Birmingham. International Caravan & Motorhome at the NEC

GERMANY 2009

August 29-September 6
Dusseldorf Caravan Salon

Hobby Club members meet up in a German layby on their way to Dusseldorf.
(sent in by Dot Bridgehouse)

Some odd sights you might see as you travel the motorways in Germany (sent in by Toni Browning) – they have some clever artists!



Some places to visit at Easter :

April 10th Marbles Championships, Tinsley Green, W.Sussex.
April 10-13 Traditional Easter Celebrations at the Weald & Downland Open Air Museum, Singleton, Chichester.
“ Spring into Easter at Leeds Castle, Maidstone, Kent
April 11-13 Chester Food & Drink Festival at Chester Racecourse
April 12-13 Easter Egg Hunt, Burghley House, Stanford, Lincolnshire
April 23-26 National Police Dog Trials, Leeds Castle, Kent

In honour of stupid people (not us of course!) – here are some actual label instructions on consumer goods:-

Tesco's Tirimasu Dessert (printed on bottom) 'Do not turn upside down' (a bit late huh!)
Boot's children's cough medicine – 'Do not drive a car or operate machinery after taking this medicine' (a lot could be done to reduce accidents if we could just get those 5-yr olds with head colds off those bulldozers!)
Marks & Spencers Bread Pudding – 'Product will be hot after heating' (...and you thought?)
Packaging on a Rowenta iron – 'Do not iron clothes on body' (but wouldn't this save time?)

Recipes for Easter:

TSOUREKI

Of all the feast days celebrated in Greece, Easter is the most important and involves much preparation in the kitchen as Christmas does for us. Dozens of eggs must be dyed red and polished with olive oil, the Paschal lamb prepared for the spit and the *tsoureki* made – Easter Bread:

Ingredients: 3 lb flour; 2 oz yeast; 1 cup milk; 4 oz butter; 5 eggs; 1 teas. Caraway seeds; Sugar; 2 tablesp. Brandy.

The secret of a good *tsoureki* is to prepare it in a constant and warm atmosphere, free from draughts and changing temperature.

First put the yeast in a bowl and soften with a little warm water. Add one cup of warm milk and mix to a creamy consistency with one and half cups of flour. Cover and leave to rise for one hour. Sieve the remainder of the flour into a large mixing bowl and make a hole in the middle of the flour. When the yeast has risen pour it into the hole and flick in some of the flour from the sides. Add the well-beaten eggs, sugar, caraway seeds and brandy and knead in the flour until the dough begins to leave the sides of the bowl. Melt the butter and knead into the dough until it becomes elastic. Form into a large ball and leave to rise in a warm place covered with a cloth and, if necessary, a blanket. Leave the dough to rise for about 3 hours, or overnight. When well risen, tear off pieces of dough and roll out thickly on a floured baking board. Shape into braids, large or small or, if preferred, place in a round shallow cake tin, cover and leave to rise once more. Decorate with split almonds, brush with white of egg and press in one or more red eggs. Bake in a moderate oven for about one hour.

Although bakery shop windows are an appetizing sight during Easter Week when they are filled with many different shapes and sizes of *tsourekia*, all decorated with red eggs, many housewives still feel compelled to make the traditional *tsoureki* at home.

SIPHNOPITTA

This is a special Easter sweet made on the island of Siphnos. It is made with the Greek cheese *mizithra*, an unsalted soft cheese made from ewe's milk. In England a fresh cottage cheese may be substituted.

Ingredients: 1 lb mizithra or cottage cheese; 8 ozs butter; 8 oz honey; 4 eggs; 4 oz sugar; 8 oz flour; Salt; Cinnamon

Mix the cheese, sugar and honey together in a bowl. Beat the eggs well and add to the cheese mixture and work thoroughly. Prepare a flaky pastry with the flour, butter, a little salt and water. Line a greased baking tin with pastry and spread with the filling. Bake in a moderate oven for 30 or 35 minutes until golden brown. Dust the top well with cinnamon. Cool and cut into squares for serving.

KOURABIEDES (Almond Cakes)

Ingredients: 8 oz butter; 4 oz caster sugar; 1 lb flour; 4 oz ground almonds; yolk of 1 egg; Rose water; 1 dessertspoon Brandy; ½ teaspoon baking soda; pinch of salt; 4 oz icing sugar.

Beat the butter together with 4 oz of sugar until white and creamy. Add the brandy and well-beaten egg yolk, followed by the sieved flour, baking soda, pinch of salt and ground almonds. Knead well for a few minutes and form into balls about the size of an egg. Flatten slightly onto greased baking sheet and bake in a cool oven for 20 minutes until firm and crisp but not browned. While still warm from the oven, sprinkle each one with a little rose water and dredge very liberally with the icing sugar. Serve piled into a mound on a cake plate.

Here's a final word on nutrition and health:

Japanese eat very little fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than us.

Mexicans eat a lot of fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than us.

Chinese drink very little red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than us.

Italians drink excessive amounts of red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than us.

Germans drink beer and lots of sausages and fats and suffer fewer heart attacks than us.

The French eat foie-gras, full fat cheese and drink red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than us.

Conclusion: Eat and drink what you like. Speaking English is apparently what kills you!