

'ALGARVE' ANYTHING TO BE BACK SOON



FIRE INTERNATIONAL 2022

Authored by: Jon Felce and Natalie Todd - Cooke, Young & Keidan LLP

The sense of anticipation was palpable. It had taken some time to get there, but the final step in a long journey was about to be taken. For the hordes of excited and enthusiastic Scottish football fans on their way to Seville for the Europa League final, Gatwick Airport beckoned. They were determined to get there whatever obstacles were thrown in their way, with flights to the Iberian peninsula taken over by a stream of blue. Many were to join us on our flight to a not so Faro-way land. As we snaked through the queues towards security, the air permeated by the sound of song (a theme of the next few days), we too were looking forward to kick-off, our very own kick-off – the start of Cooke, Young & Keidan's community partnership with the TL4 FIRE and Disputes communities, which had been announced the previous day.

A mere two and a half hours and several football chants later, we arrived in Portugal ahead of the start of FIRE International, the exciting new flagship summit run by TL4 for the asset recovery community. The conference itself was to be held in Vilamoura, a short taxi ride from the airport. A golfer's dream, Vilamoura boasts six lush green golf courses, a marina and beautiful villas. It holds fond memories for Nat of family holidays in the 90s, and she was looking forward to reacquainting herself with the area. Meanwhile it was Jon's first time in Portugal, so he was hoping that Nat's local knowledge would prove handy.

But before then we dropped off our bags, put on our sunglasses and headed out for drinks. Dinner followed shortly after with our old friends Philip Riches QC and Paul Lowenstein QC of Twenty Essex, in a spectacular outside setting at Julie's overlooking the beach under the glare of a dazzling blood red moon and local fishing boats. For a nightcap we headed back towards Vilamoura to meet up with some of the other delegates at the conference hotel, the Anantara, which conveniently sits next to the prestigious Victoria Golf course and close to Vilamoura's beaches, marina and nightlife. That brought an end to a great first day in Portugal - and the conference hadn't even officially started yet!

Whilst Tuesday was the warm-up, it was not until Wednesday lunchtime that the whistle blew to mark the start of the conference (although there was time first to enjoy a swim outside to cool down from the pleasant heat - and some not so pleasant



HIIT). That opening lunch set the scene for the next few days, with everyone really enjoying their tables. The conversation and the food flowed with friends new and old, who had made their way from all corners of the world to the heart of the Algarve.



Suitably refreshed, we both ventured over to the first session of the day - an interactive discussion about asset recovery against states, a topic close to Jon's heart and led by Philip Riches QC and Joshua Folkard of Twenty Essex. This was an excellent start to the educational content and an absolute highlight - the audience was really engaged, and the session was pitched perfectly for both sovereign enforcement experts and those newer to the area.



Through the conference, the educational sessions were punctured by numerous breakouts, where delegates had the opportunity to chat and compare notes. During the first of those, we had the pleasure of meeting Rachel Sleeman and David Portch from Five Paper. A Spurs fan, Rachel kept to her word and didn't mention the football (at least not until the following day), and we are looking forward to connecting further when back in London (subject to what happens on the last day of the season).



The end of the first day at the conference hotel was marked by drinks outside on the terrace, overlooking the hotel swimming pool. Being outside for the social sessions was one of the great features of the conference, as everyone enjoyed lapping up the heat and the refreshments. Delegates then moved on to a host of excellent dinners arranged in and around the vicinity of the resort. The night then ended (and the following morning began) with everyone coming back together in Vilamoura's marina, with drinks hosted by RAIDAR at the Atlantic Bar under the light of the stars (and some flashing bunny ears), before some of the delegates were lulled into the neighbouring Irish bar by (so we are told) the sweet sounds of live music and even livelier dancing.



Day 2 of the conference kicked off with a thought-provoking and very topical discussion between keynote speaker Tom Burgis, the author of *Kleptopia*, and Colin Diss of Grant Thornton, before the first panel of the day involving IWIRC grandee and good friend Leyza Blanco from Sequor Law in Miami. Having not seen Leyza in person since FIRE UK in September, the conference gave us a great opportunity to do so. Lucky Leyza was as usual one step ahead, and was following up the conference with a family holiday in Portugal. A number of the delegates brought their families over before, during and after the conference, and some also managed to squeeze in a round or two of golf. Maybe we'll do that next year...



The next panel involved an interesting cross-border comparison exploring the interplay between common and civil law jurisdictions in a successful asset recovery strategy, and that was followed by a discussion around asset recovery in divorce proceedings – a really topical subject which was quite rightly described by the panel as increasingly part of the asset recovery practitioner's diet. After lunch, the multi-disciplinary and multi-jurisdictional panels continued, exploring the worlds of crypto and international enforcement. The audience then stopped to collaborate and listen to a heated discussion around whether freezing orders were too easy to obtain, in a session aptly entitled Ice, Ice, Maybe? That debate was certainly the Match of the Day, and if you don't want to know the result, look away now...



As the educational content for the day drew to a close with a helpful update on cross-jurisdictional damages (another topical subject on which Natalie is coincidentally writing an article...), a glass or two of prosecco followed at one of the sumptuous hotel pools, where it really was a case of a (Tim) Penny for your thoughts as we continued to mull over the hot topics of the day. For that we were initially joined by Fiona Simpson and Sue Thackeray of Kingsley Napley, before we enjoyed a lively debate with Andrew Barnes and the team from Wilberforce amongst others about dressing down (or should that be a dressing gown) for dinner. This led into the evening drinks, by the main pool, and a buffet dinner outside permeated by local entertainment – a real FIRElight! The night then ended perfectly as delegates returned to the oasis of the marina for the second half of our Irish-Atlantic odyssey.

The final morning of the conference completed our tour around the world, with a host of regional streams. We particularly enjoyed the Asia session, where Abraham Vergis SC, Sheila Ng and Kwong Chiew Eee gave us the (Jho) Low-down on the latest developments in the 1MDB case in Malaysia and sovereign enforcement in Singapore. And with that, the conference was unfortunately over – the last few days had flown by, and it was time to return home. As we bumped into fellow delegates around the airport, the chatter on the journey back was already about what TL4 delights lay in store for the next year...



So, how to sum up Vilamoura? Whilst for Glasgow Rangers' fans, not all of their team's shots had hit their targets, the same could not be said for the TL4 team – the inaugural FIRE International had been a resounding success, shaped by a tripod of great people, great content and a great location. On behalf of the c.250 attendees from 27 jurisdictions, a big obrigados goes out to all those who organised and sponsored a fantastic few days.



*We can't wait for the next one –
(Vila)mora the same please.*

