



algarve

tours and trails

contents

004 | tours and trails of the western Algarve

006 | tour of sagres

018 | tour of fóia

030 | tour of the costa vicentina

042 | tour beyond the western Algarve

056 | tours and trails of the central Algarve

058 | tour of the villages

066 | tour of the caldeirão

076 | tour of the ria formosa

090 | tour beyond the central Algarve

106 | tours and trails of the eastern Algarve

108 | tuna tour

118 | tour of the serra

128 | tour of the guadiana

140 | tour beyond the eastern Algarve

156 | tourist information offices

*from barlavento to sotavento,
the whole Algarve is waiting to be explored*

This could be just another publication offering suggested routes for you to explore during your visit to the Algarve. It could be, but it's not. So what makes it different from all the others? I would say, first of all, because it is so comprehensive. Inside, you will find routes that take you from place to place – some of them quite long at 286 or 351 kilometres – and give you an opportunity to discover what lies beyond the cliffs or amid the scenery reminiscent of a 19th-century novel.

As you leaf through the book, you will soon see that there are themed trails to suit the taste of every visitor to the Algarve. There's one that takes you through the region's villages, ideal for those who enjoy getting close to the traditions of the people and their hamlets; another lets you explore the Ria Formosa, as beautiful as its name suggests; and yet another gives tuna aficionados a greater insight into the fish and its ocean habitat. Altogether, there are 12 routes to choose from; each and every one worth spending days and days exploring.

Take it from me; book your holiday to the Algarve (if you haven't already done so), use this guide book to explore the region in depth, and on your return you will take home memories of an Algarve that you've never experienced before – your own. And largely due to the way the book is written. Let me explain what I mean by that. When you read its over 150 pages, you may very well feel the strange sensation of having someone with you, telling you about all the sites and monuments you encounter on your route. The language is so familiar that it really does feel as if you have a real human tour guide by your side as you explore the region.

Now, set off on your journey with the innocent eyes of one who is seeing everything for the first time. And at the end, let us know if the Algarve moved you as much it moves us every day.

Desidério Silva
President of the Algarve Tourism Board

The Algarve is the westernmost part of mainland Europe, the last harbour before entering the waters of the Atlantic. It is a region where cultures have mingled since time immemorial.

The aim of Rotas e Caminhos do Algarve (Algarve Tours and Trails) is to give visitors information to help them plan an exciting holiday. It is a passport to adventure. Visitors will experience the magic of the landscape, the excellent hospitality of the people and the rich cultural heritage of the region, as well as enjoy those luxurious and cosmopolitan touches. These tours introduce you to different kinds of activity and adventure, with the challenge to undertake a voyage of discovery.

Hundreds of beaches in the Algarve seduce visitors with their golden sands and Atlantic waves, which surge up in lacy foam or extend in warm waves along the beaches. These are places to relax during lively family holidays, places for high-power sporting activity, or for quiet contemplation of romantic sunsets.

Inland, there is unexplored countryside, with vast stretches of nature reserves, where you can follow the majestic flight of eagles or the smooth gliding of the storks.

The people of the Algarve are famous for their hospitality and their exceptional talent for storytelling, always ready to share experiences and open to change and diversity. The delicate simplicity of the regional cuisine is inspired by the sea and seasoned with herbs, influenced by its Moorish history, as is the traditional architecture of the region.

At the end of the tour, you will discover an Algarve in which traditional customs live side by side with modern life and the Baroque with minimalist art. You will find a religious but tolerant people; popular forms of entertainment and discos; as well as terraces and whitewashed walls, decorated in blue and ochre; cliffs and dunes, mountains and rugged plateaux, and the deep sea always so nearby.



tours and trails of the western Algarve

Western Algarve tours explore the westernmost part of the Algarve, known as the Barlavento, with the pages describing them colour-coded in blue. In the western Algarve, we invite you to tour Sagres, Fóia, and the west coast (Costa Vicentina). We also travel to the east of the region, beyond the western Algarve.

tours and trails of the central Algarve

The Central Algarve includes tours winding between the sea and the hills, with the pages describing these tours highlighted in green. Included among these tours between the south and the north of the Algarve are tours of the Caldeirão uplands the Ria Formosa and the villages. Tours beyond the central Algarve also invite you to follow trails along the coast and in the hills in other parts of the Algarve.

tours and trails of the eastern Algarve

Tours of the eastern Algarve, known as the Sotavento, start at the border between Spain and Portugal. Brown is the colour chosen to guide us on tours of the Guadiana and the Serra (uplands), and on the Tuna tour, with a wide range of sensations to be experienced. Tours beyond the eastern Algarve will take us to places further west, allowing us to discover diversity in the Algarve.



Sagres (AF)



tours and trails of the western Algarve

Here, there are magical sights in western Algarve, or Barlavento in Portuguese.

The sea crashing against the rugged cliffs in Sagres strikes up a symphony to the indomitability of nature. However, in the tiny sandy shells or the vast expanses of dunes on the beaches, there is only the sound of the waves, the seagulls flapping their wings, the singing of the wind laden with salt and the fragrance of wild flowers.

We shall wander through the places where the sun sets, its rays stretching across the vastness of the Atlantic.

We shall visit towns like Monchique, nestled in the folds of the hills, without disturbing the wide

panorama of the mountains, or clinging to the cliffs, reaching down to the edge of the sea, or spread out along languorous bays.

We shall be amazed by a historical legacy that is so Islamic, for example in Silves.

We shall be tempted by the delicious flavours of traditional cuisine.

Within these towns, we will explore the culture of the Algarve, with its many contrasts and syntheses.

We shall be immersed in both cosmopolitan life and traditions that are still so very much alive.

The tours of the western Algarve are perfect for your holiday; the sort that you would always want to repeat.



contents

- 06 | **TOUR OF SAGRES** **+/- 122 km**
Lagos » Ponta da Piedade » Vila do Bispo » Fortaleza de Sagres » Cape St Vincent » Vila do Bispo » Pedralva » Budens » Barão de São João » Barragem da Bravura » Odiáxere » Meia Praia » Lagos
In an area full of places yet to be discovered among the hills inhabited by fishermen, we immerse ourselves in history through the dark waters of Sagres and São Vicente.
- 18 | **TOUR OF FÓIA** **+/- 112 km**
Portimão » Ponta de João Arens » Alvor » Alcalar » Fóia » Monchique » Caldas de Monchique » Porto de Lagos » Silves » Lagoa » Estômbar » Sítio das Fontes » Carvoeiro » Algar Seco » Ferragudo » Portimão
We travel along mountainous roads around the least Mediterranean landscapes of the Algarve. The scenery bears a strong resemblance to Sintra and Monserrate, and also the Black Forest (Germany) and the Picos de Europa (Spain).
- 30 | **TOUR OF THE COSTA VICENTINA** **+/- 172 km**
Lagos » Rogil » Odeceixe » Alfambras » Monte Ruivo » Bordeira » Carrapateira » Vila do Bispo » Lagos
On this side of the cliffs where storks have cosy nests, fields dotted with unusual flowers of yellow, red and purple welcome migrating birds.
- 42 | **TOUR BEYOND THE WESTERN ALGARVE** **+/- 286 km**
Silves » São Bartolomeu de Messines » Alte » Salir » Querença » Barranco do Velho » Montes Novos » Cachopo » Martim Longo » Pereiro » Alcoutim » Guerreiros do Rio » Almada de Ouro » Azinhal » Castro Marim » Vila Real de Santo António » Cacela Velha » Cabanas de Tavira » Tavira » Moncarapacho » Santa Bárbara de Nexe » Boliqueime » Paderne » Silves
Finally, we will visit ancient cities with walls once painted dark and later whitewashed; a thousand churches in Tavira, a thousand gardens in Loulé, a thousand restaurants with the smell of the sea at the edge of Olhão. We will be enchanted by the eastern Algarve in our tour beyond the western Algarve.





tour of sagres

We shall retrace the route of Prince Henry the Navigator, from the picturesque houses of Lagos to the west. However, let us not ignore the Barrocal region inland: we shall gaze into the calm waters of the Bensafrim River, where not even the herons can trouble us with news from the urban centres of the Algarve. Everything feels unspoiled among the gentle undulating lands in the west, even the people. Let us take a short break from the routine of obligatory stops and break the silence at the village bar. Let us hear their stories, as we know they were already there at the time of Prince Henry and they have always been there, amid the silence.

Closer to the cliffs, we will experience the dizzy flights of seagulls, swooping down from the rocks. At the cliff edge, we will shiver with excitement at the flight of the fishing birds as they plunge into the clear waters. Later, we will be thrilled by the frothing ocean, close our eyes for a moment to travel through time and space - the Americas, Africa, the 14th-century. In an area full of places yet to be discovered among the hills inhabited by fishermen, we immerse ourselves in history through the dark waters of Sagres and São Vicente.

Man's present-day life has welcomed the magnificent past in this, the wisest part of the Algarve, that knew how to preserve its primeval, natural and human landscapes. Therefore, even among the rocks and water, we find something of significance for humanity.



Sagres fortress (AF)

tour of sagres

SUMMARY OF THE TOUR

Lagos > Ponta da Piedade > Vila do Bispo > Fortaleza de Sagres > Cape St Vincent > Vila do Bispo > Pedralva > Budens > Barão de São João > Barragem da Bravura > Odiáxere > Meia Praia > Lagos

KEY TO THE MAP



Beach



Marina



Nature Reserve



Dam



Monument



Viewing Point



Lighthouse



Museum



Windmill



Motorway



Municipal Road



Starting Point



National Road



Tour



Protected Area



EN 125 National Road



Direction of Tour



0 5 km



It is difficult to leave Lagos, even if it is to go and see the sheer force of the sea at Sagres, the focal point on this tour. Sagres continues to attract those people who want to “have an out-of-body experience”; allow the salty breeze to work into their skin; and listen to the ancient, silent dialogue emanating from the gaping mouth of the rocks, the sea and the sun, and from here bid farewell to the old continent.

We cannot leave *Zawayya*, which means “mosque”, the name given to Lagos by Arab poets, without first losing ourselves a little in the lanes of the old city, where craft shops and traditional restaurants mingle with art galleries and international shops, alongside imposing monuments.

From ancient times, Lagos was a gateway to the Mediterranean and continues to be a meeting place for people from all over the world. It was from its wide bay, encircled by the fine sands of *Meia Praia* (Meia Beach) that Gil Eanes set off, the first man to sail around Cape Bojador. It was here that privateers like Sir Francis Drake hid, and galleons full of gold and precious stones from the Americas or spices from the Indies put into port. More modest were the battles of the fishermen who fished in the Mediterranean and arrived there following fish in the spawning season.

Lacobriga, which means “fortress” in the Celtic language, was founded in 2,000 B.C. by Brigo, by bringing together small settlements previously located on the banks of the Bensafirim River.

First the Romans, followed by the Visigoths and later the Arabs, left traces of their cultures that are still visible in more than 50 monuments of interest in the city.

The final re-conquest was achieved in 1241 by the sword of Paio Peres Correia.

Always an important military objective, Lagos had a defensive wall, now classified as a national monument and divided into two sections that wind their way through the maze of streets in the old city today, broken occasionally by turrets like the *Torreão da Ribeira* in the extreme southwest.

Impressively beautiful, the stretch of wall bordering the waterfront with its pleasant gardens is



Lagos city walls (HR)



Meia Praia (HR)

interrupted by the Porta São Gonçalo, a gate with impressive arches and fine stonework. The Rua da Barroca retains its medieval flavour and gives access to the Town Hall through the Porta da Vila (Town Gate).

The wall defended the town centre, around the mosque (*zawaya*) where, in later times, the Church of Santa Maria in the Praça do Infante was built, with building work starting in 1498, and since the 1755 earthquake, it has been the main church of the town.

Nearby, the old Slave Market, now converted into an art gallery, has become a worthy place to lessen some of the suffering witnessed by those ancient stones. It will be hard to resist the temptation to find out everything there is to know about the town in the Lagos Municipal Museum.

The *Alcácer* or palace of the Caliph Banu Mozaine, hidden in the foundations of the Palace of the Governor of Portugal, later became the Cais Velho (Old Quay) and is now an integral part of Lagos Hospital.

The Church of São Sebastião stands there proudly, but one of the brightest jewels of the heritage of Lagos is the Church of Santo António, built in Baroque style, the interior of which is lavishly decorated with tiles and gilt carving, and paintings by the Master José Joaquim Rasquinho.

The Church of Carmo, on one of the hills of the city, offers at a glance an impressive view of the town, gently unfolding towards the shore.

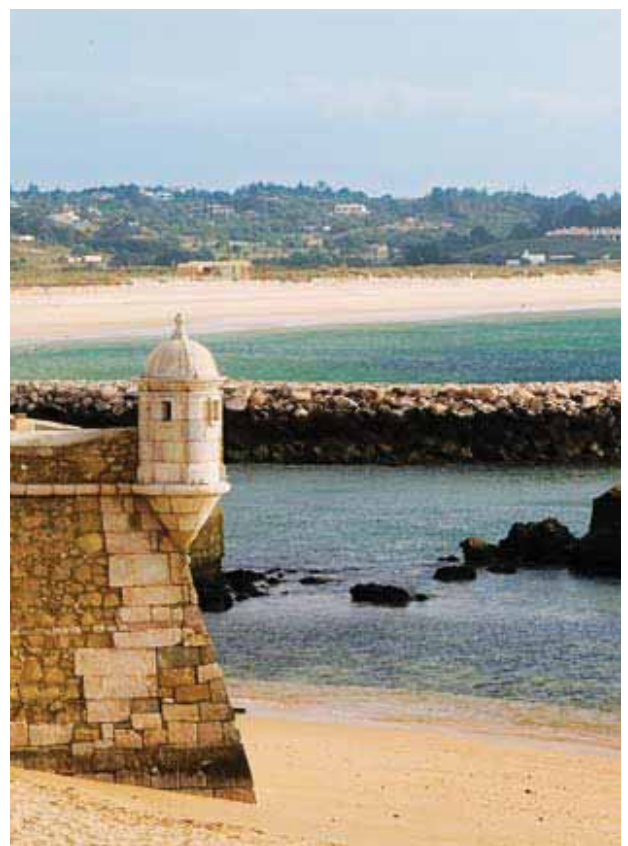
Once again, beside the clear waters of the sea, we find the statue of King Sebastião, the Boy King, created by sculptor João Cutileiro. Next to the Town Hall in the Praça Gil Eanes is one of Lagos many fine mansions. Then we head towards the Forte da Bandeira (Fort), right next to the harbour entrance. After crossing the drawbridge, you go in through a gateway of carved stone.

On the upper level, the esplanade extends towards the graceful curve of the bay, revealing sailing boats slowly approaching the marina.

Another stop is at the Ponta da Piedade (Point of Piety) where the cliffs begin, providing a stark



Church of Santa Maria (St)



Fort of Ponta da Bandeira (St)

contrast to the beaches of the bay. Leaving the city by the old road that goes through Montinhos da Luz, a village which is finely balanced between the rusticity of the fields of almond and fig trees and the coastal strip, we get to Praia da Luz, a cosmopolitan town with holidaymakers and fishermen.

We then take the road to Boca do Rio. On the small beach, which was once the mouth of a river, an archaeological dig uncovered a Roman salting station. There, *garum*, a shellfish sauce and a delicacy at banquets in Imperial Rome, was prepared and transported to Rome in clay amphorae.

The ruins of the Fort of Almadena stand on a hill nearby. Built to guard the *Almadrava*, a device for catching tuna that is no longer used, the fort gradually crumbled away. The scenery and the magnificence of the location, however, remain unchanged.

We continue to Salema, a place which has remained faithful to its roots as a fishing village, where you can watch the small fishing boats arriving as they come in with the tide to reach the beach. Now, it is time to get back on the EN 125, at the



Luz (HR)



Ponta da Piedade (HR)



Main Church of Vila do Bispo (St)

crossroads where the road leads to the village of Figueira, where once the seafarers stocked up on toasted figs, a delicacy that has sustained them during their long journeys. After another bend in the road, we come across the small Chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe. This is where seafarers prayed before setting off to the mercy of the waves in their ships and caravels.

Going west, we come across Vila do Bispo on a small rise, visible from the EN 125. The town is an area of winding streets and whitewashed houses trimmed in bright colours. At the doorways, there are high steps made out of granite slabs, polished through age and use. From time to time, a decorated chimney stands out against the sky.

The Main Church, next to a small garden, is also the town centre, bus stop and meeting point. It has a beautiful 18th-century façade and a nave clad in tiles decorated with images of flowers and dolphins. Attached to the church, there is a small museum of sacred art objects.

In the surrounding area, the *menhirs* (prehistoric standing stone monuments) dating from 4,000 BC to 3,000 BC are a true archaeological treasure.

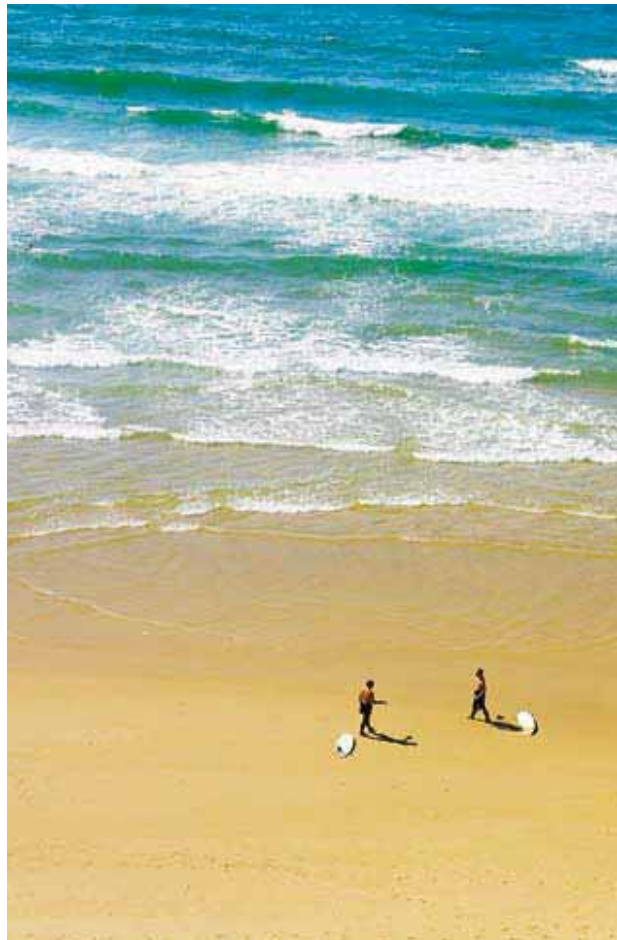


Chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe (St)

The walk starts a short distance away, on the old road to Sagres at Monte Salema. From there, we go on foot to discover the menhirs scattered around the green fields where species of rare plants are in bloom.

The nearest beaches of the town are Castelejo and Cordoama, small semi-circles of fine, golden sand, encircled by high cliffs that are not too steep and, therefore, a popular place for hang-gliding. We then continue through stunning countryside to the place that gave rise to the audacious dreams of one man who dared to discover a world beyond the sea...

The Fortress of Sagres is one of the most famous monuments in the whole of Portugal. The symbol of the Portuguese discoveries, with the enigmatic *rosa-dos-ventos* (wind rose) carved in the paving stones of the fortress, it has become world-famous since the end of the middle ages, owing to Prince Henry the Navigator. He came up with the most ambitious and adventurous plan ever to be conceived up to that time.



Cordoama (HR)



Fortress of Sagres (HR)

His Nautical Academy assembled a plethora of men of learning, experts in the fields of cosmography, astronomy, mathematics, geography, navigation and naval construction. Portuguese, Spaniards, Italians, Germans and Jews were all attracted by the earthly dream of sailing to distant lands. "Navigation is necessary..."

In Sagres, they improved astronomical calculations and navigation charts, developed techniques for navigating on the high seas and trained pilots who, with ingenuity and art, broke through the boundaries of the Old World.

It was a feat of such importance for humanity that it would only be emulated 500 years later with the arrival of man on the moon.

This golden era left the world with unmistakable evidence of man's ability to overcome apparently insurmountable obstacles.

The fortress has walls with elegant lines and a strong bastion. Targeted by pirates, and affected by the 1755 earthquake and subsequent gigantic tidal wave, it was almost destroyed.

Cape St Vincent Lighthouse (St)



Rebuilt by Dona Maria I, its former lines were largely lost. Today, there is a museum and an exhibition room. The historical chapel is also preserved.

Untouched until the 21st-century, the *Promontorium Sacrum*, the most south-westerly point in Europe and reverently named by the Romans, continues to weave its magic.

In the distance, at a glance and 6 km away by road, is Cabo de São Vicente (Cape St Vincent), named after the Franciscan monk who was buried there. Tradition has it that the Mozarabs, Muslims who converted to Christianity, brought the body here from Padua to protect it during the Saracen occupation.

The legend says that crows changed into sentries to guard against strangers approaching. The birds followed the saint, whose body was moved to Lisbon by order of King Afonso Henriques, and it is for this reason that they appear on the capital's coat of arms.

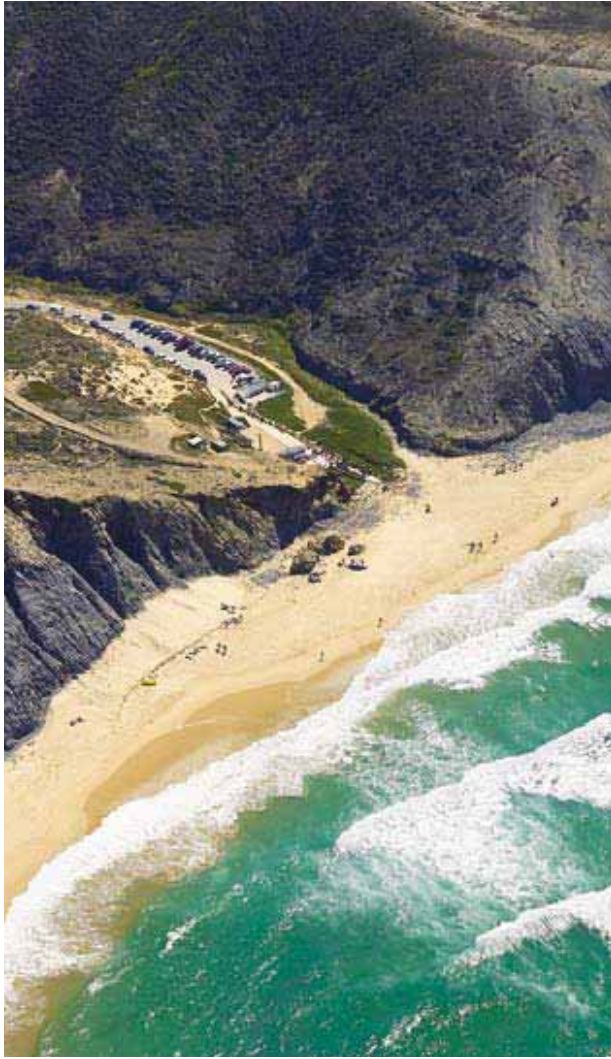
At the point of the Cape, there is a lighthouse, a more recent version of the one originally built by the Bishop of the Algarve for sailors' safety. On the huge rugged steep rocks, the symphony of the sea continues to echo. The light, filtered by the salty spray, creates a myriad of ochre reflections of the clay or golden yellow reflections of the limestone on the steep cliffs.

Between them, beaches look out onto the immensity of the ocean. This is so at Mareta with its picturesque port, Beliche or Tonel. However, you can never be too careful. The sea on these beaches is very rough. Affected by the wind, it rises up in powerful waves that are perfect for surfing or bodyboarding, but which crash against the rocks and create treacherous currents shrouded by curtains of morning spray off the rocks.

Filled with nostalgia, a strange feeling that is so uniquely Portuguese, we take the road nearest to the coast and return to Vila do Bispo. This is a land that smells of the sea and of shellfish, despite being surrounded by pastures and forests, and it is now time for a break for something to eat, to savour a grilled sea bream, a succulent

Beliche (HR)





Castelejo (HR)

lobster, *caldeirada* (a fish stew with potatoes, tomatoes and peppers) or fresh barnacles.

There is still time for a short detour to the left towards Castelejo beach, on the road that leads to Torre de Aspa, the highest point in the area. This is a very old look-out point for smugglers, who used to bring their merchandise ashore in small rowing boats. It is particularly interesting for people who enjoy watching the dizzying flight of birds of prey, like falcons and ospreys, which choose to breed on the steep cliffs.

In Vila do Bispo, we head off to Aljezur, deep in the heart of the Costa Vicentina, a special landscape of natural beauty untouched by time and people. We soon arrive at a crossing where a road leads to the tiny village of Pedralva, immediately followed by Pero Queimado, surrounded by fragrant eucalyptus trees.

Continuing south, we soon get back to the EN 125 in the fishing village of Budens, in search of the Main Church with its gilt carved altars, and the two pretty shrines. The first, dedicated to Santo António (St. Anthony), is surrounded by verdant countryside; while the other to São Lourenço (St. Lawrence) has a fine altar front with tiles dating back to the 18th-century. Nearby, there are windmills that are now purely picturesque and decorative.

Turning inland once again, the short drive takes us to Barão de São João, where the rural charm of traditional architecture predominates, and then on to Barão de São Miguel, both of which are on the edge of a national forest. Now on our way up into the *Barrocal*, recognisable by the fig, almond and carob trees, we get to Bensafrim which means "sorcerers" in Arabic and is derived from the verb "*sahara*" (to enchant).

Here, we can see charming red sandstone houses amid green vegetable plots and groves of almond trees, the fruit of which has always been carried in the locally-made baskets, made from esparto grass or palm leaves.

Now ready to feast our eyes once again on a stretch of water, we head for the Barragem da Bravura, a man-made lake, then on to Odiáxere and, finally, to Palmares, a hill overlooking Meia Praia.



Main Church of Santo António (St)



Meia Praia (HR)

This is one of the most beautiful beaches in the Algarve. There are 7 km of fine unpolluted sand, undulating dunes and small but sophisticated restaurants, serving up specialities caught by fishermen on the same day. We must also mention water sports and the golf course, where the fairways follow the contours of the hill, highlighting the contrast between the sea and rural horizons, where some rural buildings have been converted into tourist accommodation, while larger farms have been transformed into luxury resorts.

Having arrived at Lagos Marina, we are back in the city, ready to take advantage of the wide range of nightlife and cultural activities on offer. Doing justice to its reputation as a place where peoples and cultures meet, the city is brightly lit up and in the end you are spoilt for choice.

The cultural activities on offer include traditional shows, alongside many others such as theatre and classical music, in the Lagos Cultural Centre. There is often live music in the squares in the town centre, or in the bars and restaurants. There is no shortage of discos and pubs, where you can experience *joie de vivre* in abundance.



Lagos Marina (PR)





tour of fóia

From the top in Monchique, the view of the southwest is magnificent: two seas in the eager gaze at twilight; the brightness of whitewash at our feet, far and near, where we know Lagos and Portimão would be. We shall also go round old fishermen's houses, nowadays second homes often full of occasional holidaymakers, beaches with cliffs, steep rocks and seagulls that love the foam and sands which mould around their feet in the late afternoon. On the preserved battlements of the towering Silves castle, we will imagine wars fought with arrows, catapults and boiling oil, and discern the same red blood spilled by Moors and Christians alike in the last of the conquests, seven centuries ago. On the roads in the Serra, we will be travelling around the least Mediterranean of the Algarve's landscapes. It is said that it bears a strong resemblance to Sintra and Monserrate, and also the Black Forest, the Picos de Europa and the leafy landscapes of Madeira. Between the alder trees and the smell of the pine trees, the freshness of the wind and surrounding moisture, this forest paradise sings: a different experience for the skin and eyes. Also for the soul, in the area surrounding Fóia, among the rugged rocks, you can discern other tourist paradises over dozens of kilometres in the southwest of Portugal.



Alvor (HR)

tour of fóia

SUMMARY OF THE TOUR

Portimão > Ponta de João Arens > Alvor > Alcalar > Fóia > Monchique > Caldas de Monchique > Porto de Lagos > Silves > Lagoa > Estômbar > Sítio das Fontes > Carvoeiro > Algar Seco > Ferragudo > Portimão

KEY TO THE MAP



Beach



Monument



Viewing Point



Dam



Museum



Windmill



Lighthouse



Natural Recreation and Leisure Area



Marina



Spa



Motorway



Municipal Road



Starting Point



National Road



Tour



Protected Area



EN 125 National Road



Direction of Tour



This tour takes us from Portimão to Fóia and back again. From the mighty rocks at Praia da Rocha, lapped by the sea, caressed by the wind, and moulded at the enchanting whims of nature, we will travel up to the highest point in the Algarve, Fóia, which rises up proudly from the green landscape of the Serra de Monchique.

A look at the different faces of the Algarve is a tour full of contrasts and surprises.

Before leaving Portimão, we can discover something of the tourist city, buzzing with life, a town that was born between the banks of the Arade River and the sea. History tells us that Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans and Arabs all went up the Arade River to Silves, and left behind traces of their presence in the area. It was, however, the Portuguese Discoveries in the middle of the 15th-century that gave birth to what has become the modern city of Portimão.

Any tour around the city inevitably starts in the historical centre where some sections of the



Church of Nossa Senhora da Conceição (St)



College of the Jesuits (St)

medieval walls still stand between the houses. However, it is the architecture from the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th-centuries that characterises these streets, with their two-storey houses, balconies with wrought-iron railings, stone door, window surrounds and tiled walls. The narrow streets of the old quarter of fishermen and merchants are examples of this, like the Largo da Barca in the Rua Nova, or the Postigo da Igreja.

In terms of monuments, with its sandstone doorway, engraved in a fine façade, the Church of Nossa Senhora da Conceição (Our Lady of the Conception) deserves a visit. Near the river, not far from the harbour entrance is the Convent of São Francisco built in 1535. All that is left of the church, which was as sober as the convent section, is a very fine doorway.

Then, there is the College of the Jesuits, with its austere and majestic lines, commissioned between 1660 and 1707 by Diogo Gonçalves, a nobleman who became rich in the Far East. Its church, the largest in the Algarve, has only one nave (a characteristic of the *igreja salão* or

Portimão Marina (PR)



“hall church”). The Chapel of São José with its simple façade is located in an old part of the city, in front of the naval shipyards. Nearby is the old Feu Canning Factory that has been turned into the Municipal Museum. It is a building dating from the end of the 19th-century and a fine example of industrial archaeology.

Portimão Marina is a lively area for entertainment and shopping, with a beautiful artificial beach.

Nearby in Praia da Rocha, the cliffs encircle a huge area of sand. From the Bela Vista viewing point, the blue of the sea sparkling in the sunlight merges with the horizon.

The Fortress of Santa Catarina de Ribamar keeps watch over the mouth of the Arade River and together with the Fort of São João on the other side of the river (in Ferragudo), ensured that the city and the harbour were defended in former times. Leaving the town to the west, we reach Praia do Vau, whose hallmarks are its warm, calm waters and fine sands. A little further on, the Ponta de João Arens is a natural viewing point located at the end of the cliffs which surround the Três Irmãos beach, while the Prainha (small beach) lies hidden away between the rocks where seagulls fly and whose waters are frequented by divers. The clear waters allow underwater mysteries to be uncovered and, who knows, some treasure from one of the many vessels shipwrecked here throughout the centuries.

The next stop is Alvor. A small paradise of unparalleled beauty, the Ria de Alvor is bordered by the sea on one side and the vast estuary of the river on the other, separated by an extensive dune. This is a place of total tranquillity, which can best be enjoyed on unforgettable boat trips.

The traditional fishermen keep their fishing and shellfish-gathering skills alive, as well as their brightly coloured boats. Tradition has it that they came from Monte Gordo, some to try and get on board a ship heading for the New World, others fleeing from the Marquês de Pombal, who ordered their huts on the beach to be pulled down to force them to live in Vila Real de Santo António. Migratory birds make their nests in the

Fortress of Santa Catarina (PR)



salt marsh, gliding and circling over the shallow waters next to the shore, skimming the blue sea with their wings.

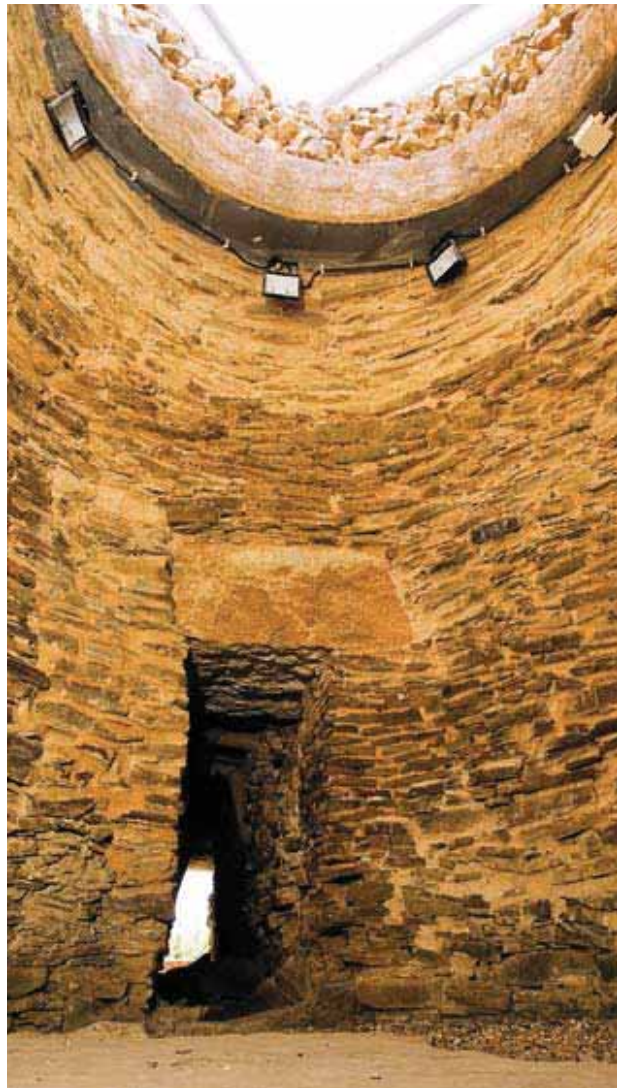
The Main Church is well worth a visit, with its richly-carved porticos in the Manueline style. A point of interest is the sacristy adjoining the church which is an old Arab *marabout* (the shrine where a Muslim holy man is buried). The churchyard affords an excellent view over the ria (estuary).

The Chapels of São João and São Pedro, which are cuboid structures with rounded cupolas, were also Arab *marabouts*. The only traces of the Castle of Alvor are two lengths of wall with terraced houses. Located next to the peaceful village of Montes de Alvor, the aerodrome has facilities for sports such as parachuting, as well as a fast private transport.

We shall then move on to the park of Penina, which in Hebrew means “pearl”.

Designed by Sir Henry Cotton and surrounded by huge leafy trees, the first golf course in the Algarve was created in this former rice field. Fans of the game will find other courses of recognized international standard in this area.

Taking the EN 125 in the direction of Lagos, follow the signs to get to the Ruins of Alcalar. The archaeological remains are proof of a human presence here dating back to the Neolithic period. The monument lasted for more than 4,000 years. In the Interpretation Centre, visitors will find plenty of information to satisfy their curiosity. A little further, there are the remains of a Roman villa built in the 3rd-century A.D. by a rich country landowner at the confluence of the Farelo and Senhora do Verde Rivers. The beautiful mosaics are the greatest treasure of the Ruins of Abicada. At this point, we are already in the *Barrocal* area of the Algarve and we will pass through the village of Senhora do Verde as we make our way up a mountain road through spectacular cork-oak plantations and cultivated valleys. Wild olive trees, olive and carob trees alternate with wild aromatic plants. Together with this impressive plant diversity, there is abundant wildlife. The highlights in terms of birdlife are the diurnal and



Ruins of Alcalar (St)



European Goldfinch (HR)

Fóia (PR)



panoramas in the south of the country, stretching from the coastline to the hills of the Alentejo. On a clear day, you can see from Sagres to Faro in the south, and the Serra da Arrábida in the north.

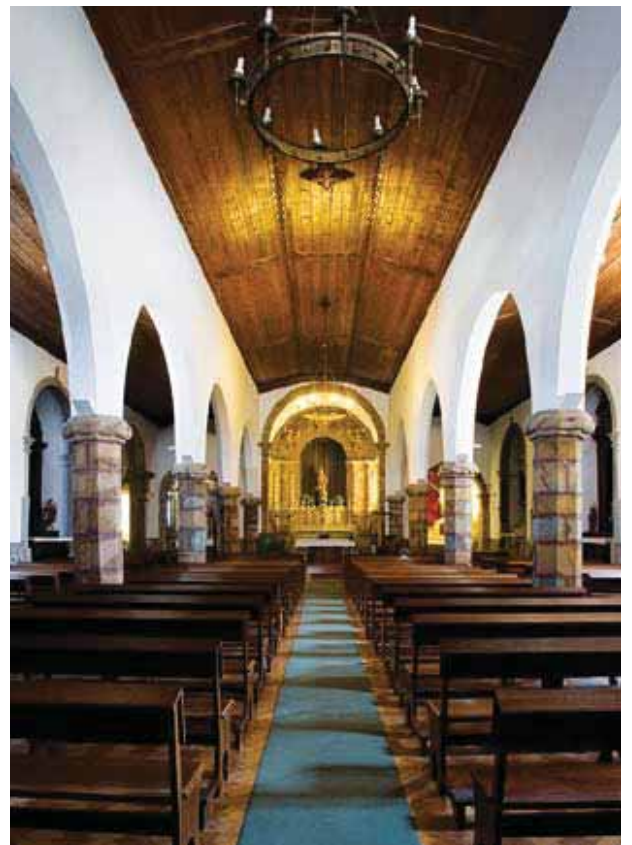
The landscape, unfolding in terraces with bubbling springs, is different from the rest of the Algarve. At a height of 798 metres on the north-eastern slope, the Fóia spring flows constantly both in winter and in summer. With a constant temperature of 14°C, it gives the illusion of coolness on hot days and of warmth in the most wintry of weather.

From here, we go down to Monchique where there are hydrangeas and camellias all around. A visit to the Largo de São Sebastião is a “must”. In the town centre, there is the Main Church with the main portico in Manueline style, the Capela do Santíssimo (a chapel), the Churches of São Sebastião and Misericórdia, and the Chapel of Senhor dos Passos. Less than 1 km away, the ruins of the Convent of Nossa Senhora do Desterro (Our Lady of the Exile), surrounded by trees, provide a wonderful view. Just nearby stands the largest magnolia tree in Europe, which is classified as part of the natural heritage.

nocturnal birds of prey, and other birds such as the bee-eater, the beccafico, the blue magpie, the woodpecker, the goldfinch, the greenfinch and the blackcap.

Soon we arrive in Casais, at the foot of Fóia, eight kilometres away; not far away are the Quinta and Capela de Santo António (Chapel of Santo António), founded by the Bishop of Silves, Don Fernando da Silva Coutinho, (1501 – 1536).

In Casais, we turn onto the EN 267 in the direction of Marmeleite and after 4 km we reach Portela Baixa, from where the whole coastline can be seen, from Quarteira to Cabo de São Vicente (Cape St Vincent). From there we take the small road which leads to Chilrão, on a slope buffeted by the Atlantic winds; as we go higher up, the vegetation gets sparser and sparser, until there is just heather and gorse. Here, we are at the Fóia Viewing Point at the top of the Serra, 902 metres above sea level, with one of the finest



Main Church of Monchique (St)

Caldas de Monchique (LC)



The farms and little villages, referred to by the locals as “sítios”, are ideal for walking, horse riding, cycling and taking panoramic photographs.

After being out in the countryside, it is good to take a break to taste the local cuisine. In Monchique, this is especially interesting, with unusual combinations such as rice dishes with chestnuts, *papas moiras* (Moorish porridge), an Algarve classic, made from maize flour and a special seasoning with the aroma of cumin, or the local speciality *assadura* (roast pork). Particularly delicious are the artisanal sausages made from pork from Iberian black pigs, and smoked hams cured using ancient methods. Among its desserts, specialties include *bolo de tacho* - a kind of cake made from honey, chocolate and cinnamon - and the honey pudding. This is the land of the *medronho* (strawberry tree) fruit. Growing wild spontaneously, it is famous for its brandy and honey.

Leaving the town behind, we head back to the coast on the EN 266 where there are tempting little craft shops along the roadside, with their famous *tesoura* (scissor) chairs, reminiscent of ancient Roman seats, basketwork and pottery.

Caldas de Monchique appears near the bend in the road, between the green of the mountains and the blue of the sky. This is where the Monchique Thermal Spa is located, with its spring of light, pure and crystalline water, which the Romans called “sacred” because it alleviates rheumatism and respiratory ailments. Its most celebrated guest was King John II (João II). With romantic fragrances permeating the spa, it is very pleasant to walk among the cork-oak and eucalyptus trees, up to the top of Picota, from where you will enjoy a magnificent view.

Along the same road, lined by luxuriant vegetation, we get to Porto de Lagos in the valley of the *Ribeira de Odelouca*, an old river port used until the 14th-century. According to legend, a Moorish princess and a Christian prince eloped together. In a rage, her father pursued them as far as the river where the poor princess drowned while trying to be with her lover. Her desperate father called out, “Oh, de louca!” (Literally translated as: Oh, what madness!) and the name stuck.

Cross of Portugal (PR)





Marinated horse mackerel (RTA)



Partridge cataplana (TV)

Not more than 10 kilometres away, we get to Silves, the magnificent city of *Xelb*, where caliphs, princes and poets lived in the Palace of the Varandas, overlooking the Arade River. Its fine sandstone castle dominates the surrounding landscape.

A short distance away is the Municipal Archaeological Museum, built around a 12th-century cistern on several floors. A visit to the Igreja da Misericórdia (Misericórdia Church) with its Manueline door or the ancient See is a must.

Next, we take the road east from the city in the direction of Enxerim, to the Cruz de Portugal (Cross of Portugal), a richly-carved 16th-century cross which is three metres high.

Located in the quiet surroundings of the gentle hills and rocks full of history is the exotic Quinta Pedagógica (Teaching Farm), some 6 km outside Silves. The Quinta Pedagógica is housed in a restored former primary school. Timid stags and deer share the space with pheasants and eagles recovering here when they have been injured or sick, before being released into the wild.

In the regional cuisine of Silves, ancient aromatic flavours recur, such as the traditional potato soup, with mint and home-made bread. The *carapaus* or horse mackerel were transported up the Arade River and marinated in salt for the famous local dish *carapaus alimados*. Game was hunted and brought from the hills. Local sweet specialties include *bolo real* (a cake made with crystallized fruits, nuts and a splash of port wine), *doce de ovos* (a sweet made with eggs) and *meias luas* (crescent-shaped cakes filled with a mixture of almonds and egg yolks). In terms of fruit, there is nothing better than the Algarvian orange.

The “Legend of the Almond Trees” is one of the oldest. In Silves, it involved the love of the Nordic princess Romaiquia and Al-Mu’tamid, poet and prince of the city, and the son of the Caliph of Seville. According to the legend, the beautiful princess was pining for her homeland because she wanted to see the snow, as in her native country. To please her, the prince from the south, who had captured her, ordered almond

trees to be planted in all the fields so that the white blossom would look like delicate snowflakes. The princess was cured of her homesickness and they lived happily ever after.

Warmed by the legend, we cross the Arade River and leave the city to continue on to Lagoa, passing through Venda Nova with its orange groves on the way.

Originally called *Abenabece* by the Arabs, Lagoa is only 6 km away. This is a place where grapes of excellent quality ripen in the sun. The city is about 5 km from the coast. It is a peaceful place, with mild winters, and is ideal for outings on horseback or on foot.

The most important monument in Lagoa is the Convent of São José, which is now used as a cultural centre, with a gallery for exhibitions. Built in the 18th-century, it has a tower with a viewing point and an arch over the road. At the entrance, there is a foundling wheel where, in the past, abandoned newborn children were placed anonymously. A menhir stands in the gardens, taken from the area near Porches.



Almond trees in bloom (RTA)



Pottery (PR)

Handicraft is still part and parcel of everyday life in Lagoa, especially pottery, painted with beautiful blue tones and decorated with rustic and marine motifs. The delicate miniatures of fishing boats and carts are some of the trademarks of popular art.

We continue another two kilometres to Estômbur, a small village in which the first thing that catches your eye is the church with its 17th-century tiles and two columns which are the only ones in Portugal to be totally decorated with exotic plants and shapes which give them an oriental look.

After driving four kilometres to Carvoeiro, we are once again beside the sea, in a place where the colourful fishing boats head out to sea. Nearby (800 m) you can see the unusual rocks at Algar Seco, sculpted by the wind and the sea, their fantastic shapes forming the romantic Varanda dos Namorados (Lovers' Terrace). This is a fascinating place with 18 caves accessible by boat, through secret routes along the cliff.



Pintadinho (HR)

Located about a kilometre away on the left bank of the Arade River, the Sítio das Fontes is a place not to be missed. This is a park, or more precisely an eco-museum with hundred-year-old olive trees, wild lilies, wild orchids, thistles and poplars, in a riot of colour at nature's whim.

After viewing the beautiful Praia do Pintadinho (Pintadinho Beach) from the clifftops, we need to retrace our steps and go through Mato Serrão on the way to Ferragudo. This fishing village owes its name to the *ferro agudo* (literally: sharp iron) which was used to pull the sardine-laden nets from the sea. High above the port, at the top of an intriguing stairway at the Church of Nossa Senhora da Conceição (Our Lady of the Conception), there is an interesting collection of offerings from seafarers in recognition of miraculous rescues.

The Fortress of São João do Arade was built in Ferragudo to guard the mouth of the Arade River. Today, the fortress and the village are ideal places to spend your leisure time, with boat rides going up the river from the harbour, passing the small island where the Rosário Shrine stands amid the panorama of crags, hills and caves on the shore of the river.

Back in Portimão, it is time to sample the local cuisine in the many restaurants that offer it. The closeness of Portimão to the sea means that grilled sardines and clams are some of the main delicacies served. The sweets highlight the importance of dried fruits and are a basic element of the city's gastronomic heritage.

Portimão is bubbling with life. The only problem is deciding where to have dinner and where to end the day (or rather the night) on a happy note. The casino in Praia da Rocha, with its shows, would appear to be a good option.



Fortress of São João do Arade (St)





tour of the costa vicentina

From Odeceixe to Vila do Bispo, the view that passers-by see is shrouded in white: in the distance, the sea spray engulfs the fine sand of the beach landscape as far as the eye can see. The other white, the white of the houses, accompanies us as we head south: the whitewashed houses in Odeceixe and those in Aljezur are pieces of history, which break up the flat landscape of the Costa Vicentina without spoiling it. Down below, all along the coast, channels of clear water wind their way through the countryside before losing themselves in the vastness of the Atlantic Ocean. To one side, standing on the banks, as if frozen in time, dreamers in caps and checked shirts try their luck to see what they might catch from the warm waters. On the same trip, we will find others further south, with their rods pointing to the sky and the Americas, performing a brave balancing act out on the tip of a rock, awaiting the contest at the edge of the precipice. On this side of the cliffs, where storks have cosy nests, fields dotted with unusual flowers of yellow, red and purple welcome the migrating birds. We can make out obstacles in the unconscious zigzagging of the reptiles. It is a pleasure simply to look; our senses captivated, we suddenly forget the crowded city.



Aljezur (LC)

tour of the costa vicentina

SUMMARY OF THE TOUR

Lagos > Rogil > Odeceixe > Alfambras > Monte Ruivo > Bordeira > Carrapateira > Vila do Bispo > Lagos

KEY TO THE MAP



Beach



Marina



Nature Reserve



Dam



Monument



Viewing Point



Lighthouse



Museum



Windmill



Motorway



Municipal Road



Starting Point



National Road



Tour



Protected Area



EN 125 National Road



Direction of Tour



If you are on the south coast, you can get to Aljezur on the EN 120 from Lagos, the last city on the coast. Then we drive into the area of the Southwest Alentejo and Costa Vicentina Natural Park the road forms the boundary of the park, which goes right up to the coastline.

“Aljezur”, derived from the Arabic, roughly means “the river of the bridges”. Bridges would have been necessary when the river was navigable. Siltation led to the stagnation of the water, which made life for the people very difficult.

Concerned for their health, the 19th-century Bishop, Francisco Gomes, wanted to move the village to the hill opposite and, for this reason, he ordered a church to be built in the new town.

Either because the health problems were solved or because there was some reluctance by the people to move, Aljezur was divided in two parts. The old town slopes down to the river with houses on terraces from the octagonal castle captured by Paio Peres Correia from the Arabs in 1246.



Aljezur (PR)



House Museum of the painter José Cercas (St)

Aljezur castle was built by the Arabs who, at the highest point, simply erected a dome of schist with two towers, one round and the other square, to provide the perfect defensive structure for the place. Legend has it that the Arabs were taken by surprise while they were bathing on the magnificent beach at Amoreira, some 6 km from Aljezur, and were massacred there, the water turning red. Time has erased the violent horror of that event, but the natural beauty remains.

You can get to the castle by walking up the steep streets in the old town. It is worth going for the panorama alone. Down below is the fertile, cultivated flood plain; then the hills of the Cerro das Mós; and finally the slopes of the Serra de Espinhaço de Cão.

When you go back down again, it is worth having a good look at the House Museum of the painter José Cercas, which gives you information about the life and times of one of Aljezur's illustrious sons. Nearby, there is the Municipal Museum with an ethnographic and an archaeological



Main Church of Aljezur (St)

centre, as well as a gallery. The Antoniano Museum is in a former 17th-century chapel.

If you start to feel hungry, one of the local specialities worth trying is *papas mouras* (Moorish porridge, an Algarve classic, made from maize flour and a special seasoning with the aroma of cumin. Other essential dishes to try include a tender piece of veal and a succulent sea bream. At the beginning of autumn, when sweet potato is in season, it is added to stews or turned into patties made like nowhere else on earth.

After crossing the bridge to the new town and going round a corner, you will find the Main Church in front of you, where the images of the patron saint Nossa Senhora de Alva stand out, along with a Gothic chalice and a Eucharist chest.

It is now time to leave the town in search of beaches hidden between the cliffs, but first we must mention a walk: the path between the castle mound and the beach of Praia da Amoreira, along the riverbank. If time permits, and it is only 6 km, try this walk so as not to miss a small wonder.

Leaving the town in the north on the EN 120, we turn towards the coast for the first time after some seven kilometres to have a look at Praia da Carriagem (Carriagem beach).

Here you will have a chance to observe the flight of numerous marine birds: eagles, goshawks and sparrowhawks watching from above and gliding on the wind.

We have to return along the same track to get back to the tarred road. Adventurous people with an appropriate vehicle may want to take the shortcut to the left, about 3 km from the coast. Along this track, in the fields, you can see sweet potato cultivation alternating with peanut cultivation.

Soon we reach Rogil where it is worth visiting the recently-restored mill of Arregata. With regard to food, there is nothing better than sweet potato patties or baked sweet potato, or perhaps a sandwich with fried moray eel, if caught fresh on the day and if the tide is good - simple flavours, strong and unique.



Sweet potato (TV)

It is worth having a peek in the little roadside shop, especially if you are fond of handicrafts.

The typical Algarve chimney is made here. Richly decorated, there are chimneys of all sizes, both for rooftops and simply for decoration.

Another detour takes us to the little town of Esteveira, and from there along the same track to the viewing point on Samoqueira beach.

Getting there is not that easy, but it is definitely worth the effort. There is a deserted paradise to be found here, every traveller's dream. A small river created a little beach at its mouth. At low tide, there are tiny, transparent prawns moving around in the pools of warm water.

Returning to the EN 120, we go through Maria Vinagre, where the whelks found on the idyllic beaches all around provide the raw material for handicrafts. And in the nearby restaurants, you can eat freshly-caught shellfish.

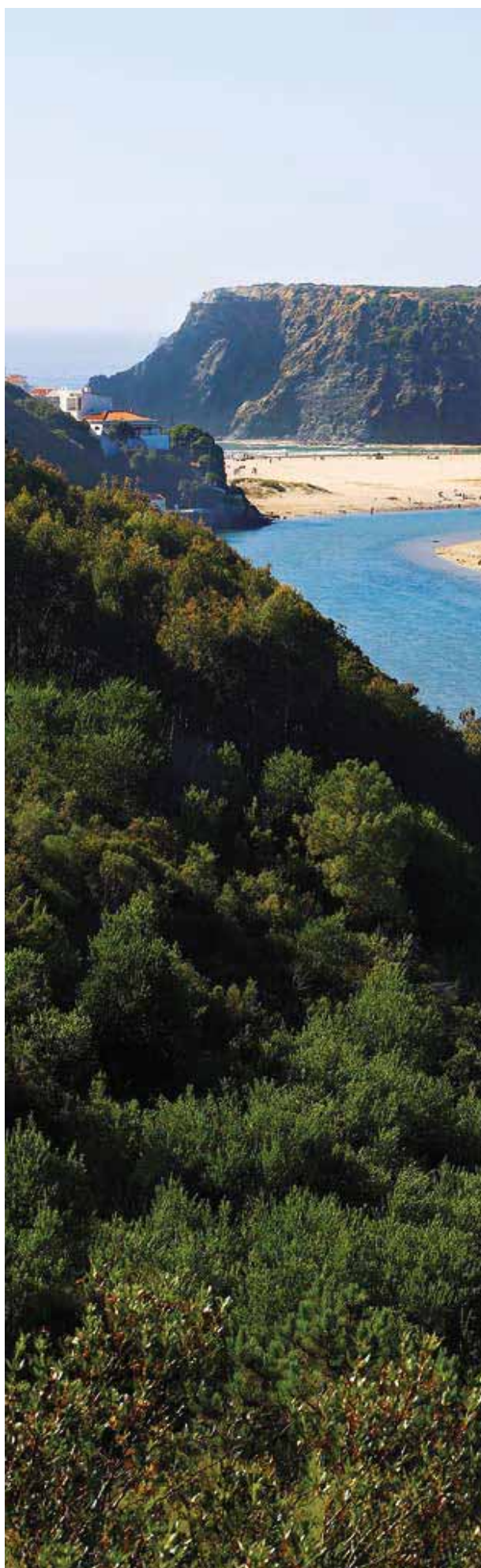
The route to Odeceixe is lined with leafy trees. The town is located in a narrow valley and there is a clear symbiosis between the countryside and the beach. There are majestic pines and eucalyptus trees. Up above, there is a rebuilt mill, with a fine view of the village. Inside, there is a display of implements used throughout the whole milling cycle.

In terms of handicrafts, items made from leather are much sought after.

It is four kilometres from here to the mouth of the river Odeceixe, with a beach on either bank. On the southern side, there is a viewing point.

What surprises us about the landscape is that it is constantly changing. When it is low tide, a small sand bank appears. At high tide, the reed beds disappear. As if by magic, one moment it is a beach, then a turbulent river, and then a quiet stream.

All of this is caused when the sea meets the fresh water of the river. On the other side of the hills is the Alentejo; as rivers have always served as boundaries, men have built bridges over them so that they serve to unite and not to divide.



The mouth of the Odeceixe (HR)

Arrifana (HR)



We stay in the Algarve and return to Aljezur on the EN 120 as planned, this time passing through the town and 1 km later turning off to Vale da Telha. Near the coast, going north, we will get to the beach at Monte Clérigo. The sea has carved out caves in unusual shapes and left rocks scattered around in the sand, while the waves are a delight for those who practise extreme sports.

Before turning at the crossroads, we shall go up to the top of the cliffs for that fabulous panoramic view. Birds in flight sometimes compete with the wings of the microlight aircraft and the sails of the hang-gliders.

Heading south this time, towards the Praia da Arrifana, we come across imposing rocks sheltering the small fishing port.

This part of the coast between Pedra da Carraça and Atalaia is particularly irregular in shape, and

all the more beautiful for it. There, with the angry sea rising up and dragging away bits of the dark rock, it is an unending struggle, with the waves crashing furiously with the spring tide or in calm but powerful waves. Fishermen's houses balance precariously on the slope leading down to the port. They know that the best fishing grounds on the Costa Vicentina are among these "rocks, and their produce can be savoured in the little local restaurants.

At Pedra da Agulha, a conical rock rising up in front of the beach, the barnacle fishermen tie themselves to the rocks with a rope in the traditional way, and wait on a knife-edge for the wild coming and going of the waves to allow them access to the shellfish beds, located under the waterline. Afterwards, they come back up with sacks on their backs, soaked to the skin, to pick out this delicious seafood, whose taste can only be described with the simple phrase: it tastes of the sea!

A short 3-km drive takes us to Vales and then further south on the EN 120 through Alfambras. At Espinhaço de Cão, the name of both village and surrounding hills, we head west again, on a road surrounded by lush vegetation and with



Monte Clérigo (HR)



places where time seems to stand still, until we reach Monte Ruivo.

Nature abounds in smells and colours, and our reason for being in the Nature Park is clear. The air is filled with the smell of lavender and rosemary. On the slopes of the hills, there are cork oaks and pines, as well as strawberry trees, growing wild and spontaneously, the berries of which are used to make that famous brandy, *medronho*.

The eucalyptus trees sway in the breeze. A placid herd of golden brown cows watch us curiously, their hiding place in a small narrow valley circumented by the track, now discovered.

The green of the cistus is speckled with red, yellow and mauve wild flowers.

It is here that wild boar and wildcats hide away. The flight of the quails takes them sweeping over the road. It is not difficult to spot a hare skipping past, and sometimes the locals say that they see foxes.

At the junction with the EN 268, we head south once again. After 5 km, we arrive in Bordeira and

Nature (LC)



Flora (LC)



Bordeira Church (St)

are only a few metres from the Parish Church. White and simple, it predates the 1755 earthquake.

Inside there is just one nave, supported by the triumphal arch. The altars are in the neoclassical style, with gilt carving. Next to the church is the cemetery with a fine Manueline gate.

The houses in Bordeira are built in the Berber style, with just one sloping side. They are protected from the winds and bad weather by being built close to the hillside.

The next stop is in Carrapateira. This is a very old village, almost hidden in the dunes and overlooking the river that flows nearby.

History tells us that the presence of corsairs from Morocco and elsewhere led to the construction of the fort in 1673 by Nuno da Cunha de Ataíde, Count of Pontevel and Governor of the Kingdom. The fort enclosed an earlier church, as shown in the altar pieces of Santo António and São Pedro (16th-century).

Legend has it that many of the shipwrecks of corsairs were caused by incorrect signalling



Bordeira (HR)



Amado (HR)

from the cliffs. On seeing the enemy, the inhabitants would light fires that guided the corsairs onto the rocky coast from where they could not escape.

The dunes everywhere change according to the wind and the tides. This is resisted by fragile wild plants, standing watch against the whims of the ocean. Tortoises and other reptiles peep out from the tops of the coloured rocks. On the banks of the stream, otters splash around heedlessly.

At the top of the nearest hill, you can cast your eye over the dark blue ocean in the distance, the green vegetation in the foreground, interspersed by whitewashed houses - man's contribution to this unique landscape.

Between Praia da Bordeira and Praia do Amado, the road along the shore allows you to see the outline of high cliffs as they plummet into the frothing waves. The beaches stretch inland in wide dunes or like small nests, surrounded by rocks. The beaches at Praia da Bordeira, Pontal and Palheiro follow the rows of steep cliffs, as if challenging the sea.

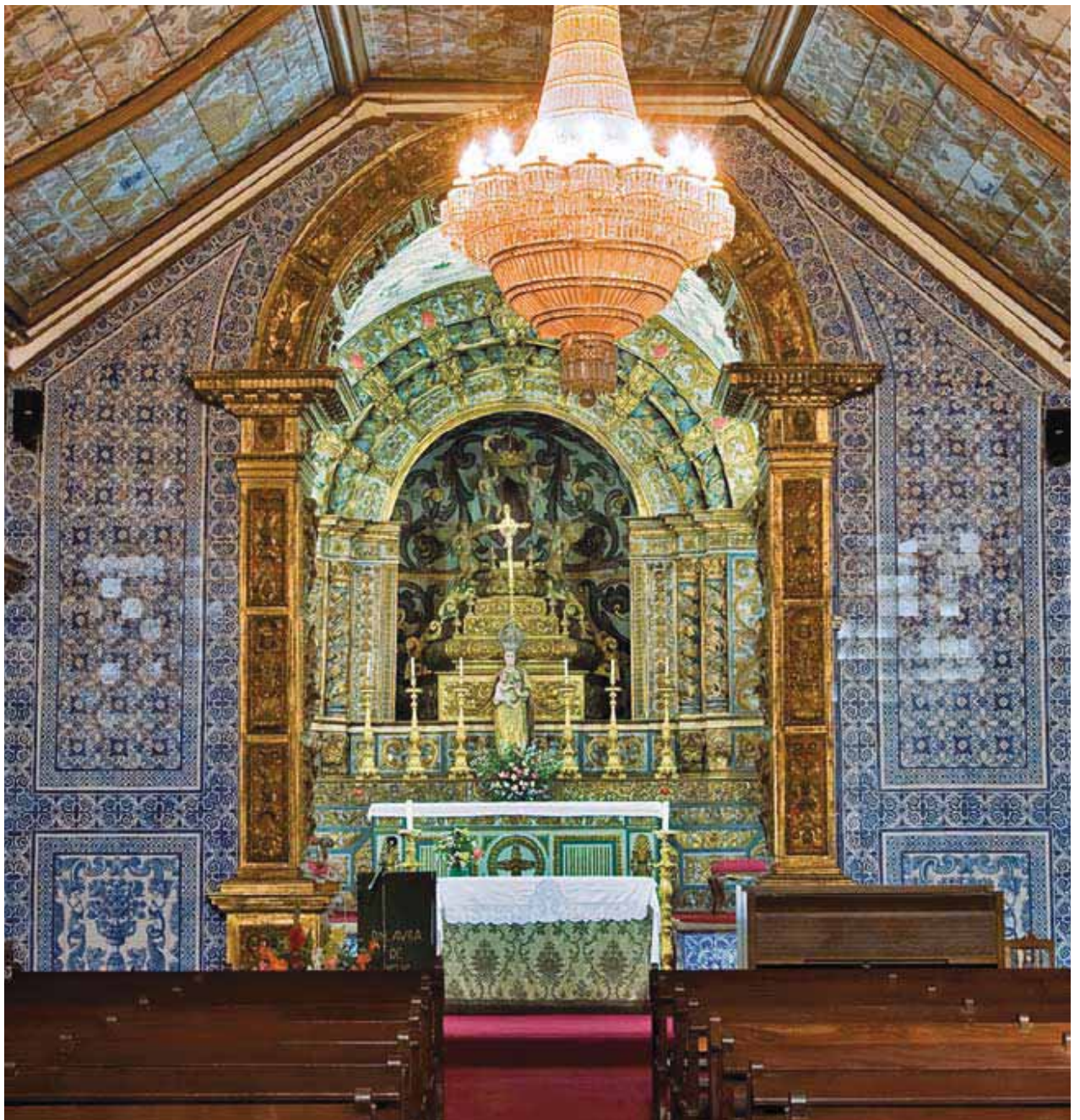
Here you can see the sun setting over the vastness of the Atlantic Ocean, with the sea beating against the rugged cliffs. You can hear only the sounds of the waves and the flapping of seagulls' wings. You can feel the strong breeze from the sea and see the colours of the sunset reflected in the choppy sea.

Continuing south, on the EN 268, the next stop is Vila do Bispo, known originally as Santa Maria do Cabo. In the Main Church, there is a fine collection of 18th-century tiles and there are frequent exhibitions in the cultural centre.

A land of abundance, Vila do Bispo was the breadbasket of the Algarve, as demonstrated by the many windmills.

Fishing and shellfish-gathering developed to complement agriculture. In the wild seas, strange monsters, which we know today as whales, appeared. For centuries, these cetaceans followed a migratory route along the Costa Vicentina. The locals made use of the skeletons of these

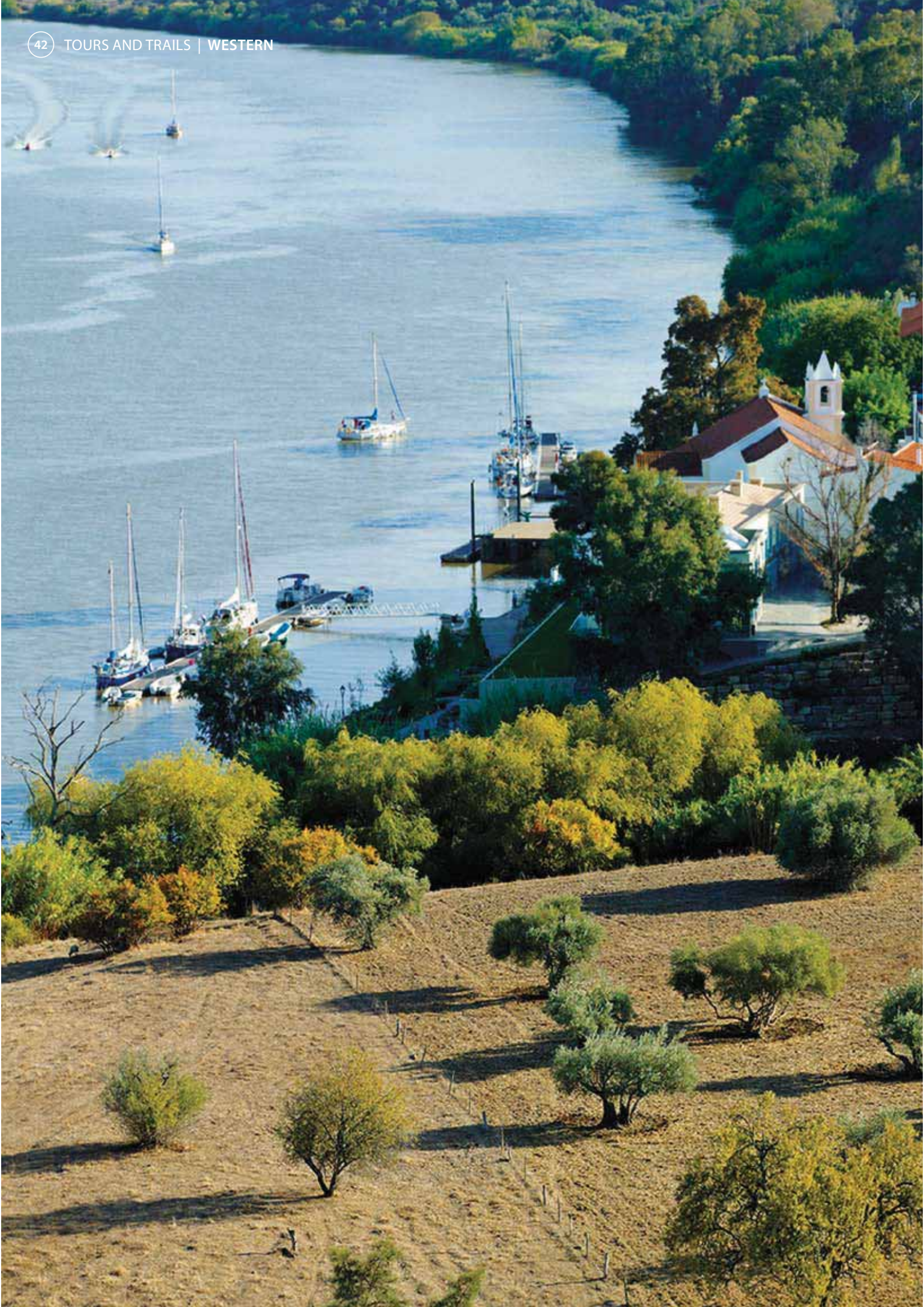
Main Church of Vila do Bispo (St)



fearsome creatures as spoils washed up by the sea, using the ribs to support their huts and the vertebrae to make seats.

We make a detour to the beach at Praia do Castelejo, the twin beach of Praia da Cordoama to return once more to gaze upon the vastness of the ocean, of which we can never tire. At Ponta da Águia (Eagle Point), the shellfish-gatherers from Vila do Bispo stand on the little shelves of rock and drop their lines into the water. The brave men stand there, facing the infinite blue stretching away from their feet, with their faces and hands soaked with salt water, accepting the challenge of pulling the fish, shellfish and molluscs from the choppy waters, and even risking their lives.

Returning to Vila do Bispo, park your car and walk to the Torre d'Aspa, one of the highest points along the coast. At your feet is the immense sea, salty from the tears of Portugal, as the poet Fernando Pessoa wrote, invoking the Discoveries - a saga that took Portuguese seafarers all over the world in search of other lands and peoples. Even today, the land in which they were born and the sea into which they ventured, maintain that unspoiled beauty - an enviable natural heritage that is still untouched. It is now only a short distance on the EN 125 back to the beautiful, cosmopolitan *Zawaia*, as it was known to the Arabs, the city the Romans called *Lacobriga*, and which the Portuguese now call Lagos.





tour beyond the western Algarve

For a few days, we shall leave the rugged coast behind us. We will travel to parts of the Algarve, home to swirling, diving birds, where the water buries shells in billions of grains of sand along the gentle coastline. We will walk among the reeds, which are full of endless surprises and in the salt marshes where there are herons and storks, and many other migrant birds. We shall warm our feet in the fine, soft sand and our spirit in the lazy, peaceful water; we shall drink in a bit of the Mediterranean, but with our eyes always on the infinite ocean. Later, on a gentle detour into the Alentejo, we shall catch sight of Spain, the shimmering banks of the great river of the peninsula, which rises there. We will hear the sounds of Andalusian clapping carried on the wind, mirages of pleated skirts and people of haughty bearing on horseback. However, we shall never lose sight of the people who live there, embraced forever by the land of the Caldeirão uplands, building their lives in this land of carobs and almonds, but living far from the seas. In whitewashed doorways, in the shade of virgin walls and decorated chimney pots, they weave wicker and shape whatever they can find. We will visit ancient cities with walls once painted dark and later whitewashed; a thousand churches in Tavira, a thousand gardens in Loulé, a thousand restaurants with the scent of the sea at the edge of Olhão. We will be enchanted by the eastern Algarve. We will lose ourselves and then find ourselves again among the most enduring remains of the Moorish era.



tour beyond the western Algarve

SUMMARY OF THE TOUR

Silves > São Bartolomeu de Messines > Alte > Salir > Querença > Barranco do Velho > Montes Novos > Cachopo > Martim Longo > Pereiro > Alcoutim > Guerreiros do Rio > Almada de Ouro > Azinhal > Castro Marim > Vila Real de Santo António > Cacela Velha > Cabanas de Tavira > Tavira > Moncarapacho > Santa Bárbara de Nexe > Boliqueime > Paderne > Silves



KEY TO THE MAP



Beach



Lighthouse



Museum



Pier



Dam



Marina



Natural Recreation and Leisure Area



Viewing Point



Ferry Boat Harbour



Monument



Nature Reserve

Motorway

EN 125 National Road

Tour

Starting Point

National Road

Municipal Road

Direction of Tour

Protected Area

The tour beyond the western Algarve is a long excursion that will allow people who are staying in the western part of the Algarve to discover a number of cities and the various landscapes in the eastern Algarve.

However, the people of the Algarve do not refer to these places by using the normal points of the compass but, instead, by giving them specific names that may seem difficult at the beginning: the most westerly part of the region is called the *Barlavento*, while the east is referred to as the *Sotavento*.

These expressions have a maritime flavour, and it is easy to imagine seafarers trying to work out the wind direction by watching the movement of the clouds and the ocean currents.

The terms *Barlavento* (western Algarve) and *Sotavento* (eastern Algarve) have become part of everyday language in this region, where the culture is a synthesis of the hills of the *Serra* and the sea.

Another reason for a tour beyond the western Algarve is that maps cannot describe the powerful scent of the cistus, the gentle sensuality of the foothills of the Serra do Caldeirão, or the sing-song accent heard in Vila Real de Santo António. To experience these things, you have to go there, and discover other facets of the Algarve.

This tour starts in Silves, the magnificent capital which was home to poets and men of science during the period of Islamic rule. In 1063, Al Mu'tamid evoked the city as follows:

"...Salute the Palace of the Verandas on behalf of a nobleman

Who feels a permanent longing for its Castle.

*Once warriors lived there like lions and white gazelles
And in such beautiful forests, and such beautiful
dens!..."*

From a different perspective, a crusader who kept a record of the conquest of the city by the Christians in 1189 was just as enthralled:

"Silves... rises up like an amphitheatre, splendid like an Asian city, with Arab façades of the palaces shining in the almost tropical sun, with its terraces and minarets, and streets filled with bazaars. Down be-



Silves Castle (St)

low and all around the luxuriant groves of almond, orange and fig trees, and up above, standing out against the bluish background of the hills, the red stone Castle, built on ground that falls away steeply and crowned by a large tower..."

Eight centuries later, and albeit without the brilliance of yesteryear, Silves still has a magic aura and the castle, which Al Mu'tamid longed for and the crusader admired so much, is still intact.

We will take the EN 124 to São Bartolomeu de Messines that is about 25 km away. The town is located close to the hill of Penedo Grande in the Serra do Caldeirão, and is the birthplace of poet and teacher João de Deus Ramos. A visit to his House Museum is highly recommended. Outside, there are fine examples of popular architecture to be seen in the lanes nearby, which you get to through the Arco do Remexido.

The Chapel of São Sebastião has an unusual history: it was built in the 16th-century to protect against plagues and other diseases. And to enjoy a splendid panoramic view over the town, you can climb up to the 18th-century Chapel of Nossa Senhora da Saúde (Our Lady of Health).

For those with a sweet tooth, now is the time to try out the famous *Messines folhados* (pastries), and the orange-, lavender- and rosemary-flavoured honey.

On the outskirts of the town, you can immerse yourself in the tranquillity of the Serra. The rounded hills to the north are covered with cork oaks, strawberry trees and holm oaks. To the south is the *Barrocal*, with its reddish, fertile soil, orange groves and orchards of fig, almond and carob trees. There are many natural beauty spots ideal for walking, horse riding and cycling, especially up to the refreshing expanses of water in the Funcho and Arade dams.

Once you get there, it is possible to hire canoes.

Just out of interest, in a place called Benaciate, just a few kilometres from Messines, some of the most important stelae were discovered with evidence of early writing in the southwest of the peninsula, which still remains undecipherable.

The next stopping place is Alte, about 15 km to the east along the EN 124. We are now right in



Fig tree (HR)



Orange tree (RTA)

the middle of the Serra do Caldeirão, in a very different Algarve. Here, undulating lands replace the waves of the sea; there are hills and valleys, with the highest points in the Serra in the distance, bluish in the mist.

There are many different shades of green in the scenery, and the breeze carrying the pollen of the thistles and the perfume of the lavender is also different. There are many sounds to listen out for - the bee-eaters, which make their nests in banks in the earth, spotted woodpeckers and titmice. It is thought that there are more than 390 plant species in this part of the Serra, many of them medicinal or aromatic. The landscape is full of beauty: wild roses, delicate wild orchids and the perfume of rosemary.

It is worth having a walk round the streets of Alte to see the chimneys and the parapets, those picturesque details of traditional architecture. The water at the spring of Fonte Grande sparkles in a gentle cascade, conveying all the freshness of the valley of the Ribeira de Alte. A 3.5 km detour from the road to Santa Margarida takes us to the craft workshop at Torre, where they make wooden toys. The delicious sweets and cakes, especially those made with almonds and honey, in the local cake shops are a treat not to be missed.

The time has now come to set off again, passing through Benafim and near Rocha da Pena, a limestone ridge 479 metres high, a furious gash in the gentle hills, indomitable and beautiful. After a 15 km stretch on the same road, we come to Salir.

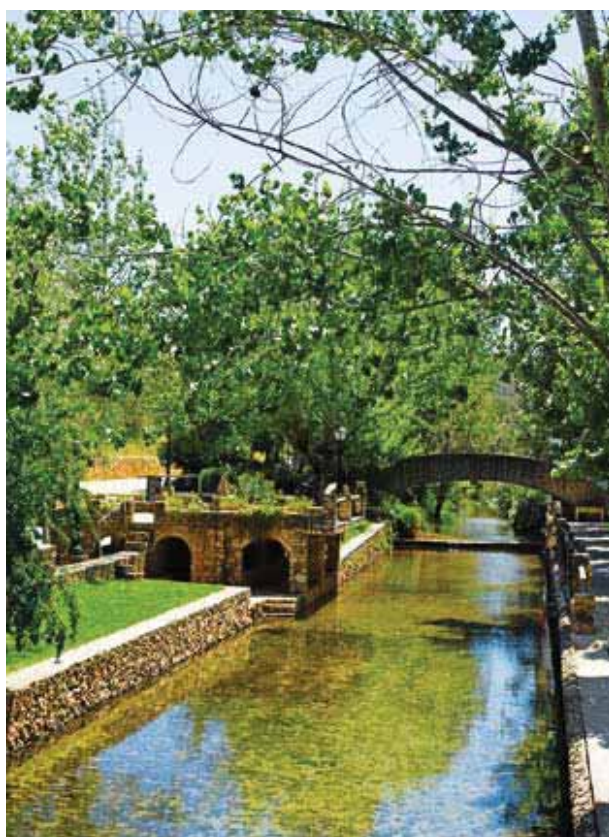
The writer Raul Proença describes this area as *"...a sea of mountains that we can see – but a sea of mountains that are all the same height, equidistant and rounded, and so soft that they appear to be made of velvet. There is grandeur at the same time as softness, something caressing and gentle in this enormous range that both entrances and subdues us."*

Let us not forget the Castle of Salir, built on land inhabited by the Celts and constructed by the Arabs in the 12th-century when the area needed defending.

We now turn onto the EN 525 and after passing through Tôr with its fine old bridge, we continue



Alte (PR)



Fonte Grande (HR)



Cistus (HR)

made in the village, as well as rag dolls wearing traditional costumes to represent different occupations. The richly-decorated chimneys and parapets give this area a feel of untouched tradition.

Nearby are the caves of Salustreira and the Igreja dos Mouros (Church of the Moors), a cave in the shape of a church. Continuing towards the sea of hills that form the Serra do Caldeirão, we leave Querença and take the EN 396 heading north until we get to Barranco do Velho, which was the crossing point of the roads between the coast and the interior of the Algarve. It is only 4 km to Montes Novos, where the *medronho* brandy is better than anywhere else, or at least this is the claim of those who distil the fruits.

After 22 km, you get to Cachopo, still on the same road which winds between the cistus plants. Fonte Férrea, a very beautiful place with tall trees, shade and water, good for having fun, for romance and letting your imagination run free. The local museum centre portrays the expertise of the Serra, and to get there you go between houses which are either whitewashed or built with schist, with threshing floors and deco-

along the EN 525 towards Querença, passing through the classified site of Fonte da Benémola. This is a protected area of great natural beauty. There are ash trees, willows, tamarisks, reed beds, brambles and oleanders. On the slopes of the valley to the sides of the river, there are carob trees, thyme, rosemary and holm oaks. On the banks, the otters share the space with kingfishers, titmice, herons and bee-eaters.

On the road to Querença (9 km), a typical Algarve village perched on the top of a hill, there are a number of restaurants where the cuisine is quite clearly part of the local heritage. It is difficult to get to know the culture of a people if you do not know about their cuisine. For this reason, this is an ideal place to have a few tasty lessons! In January, the colourful “Festa das Chouriças” (Sausage Festival) echoes with the sweet, sing-song language of the people of the Serra. One of the most popular sausages in the region is

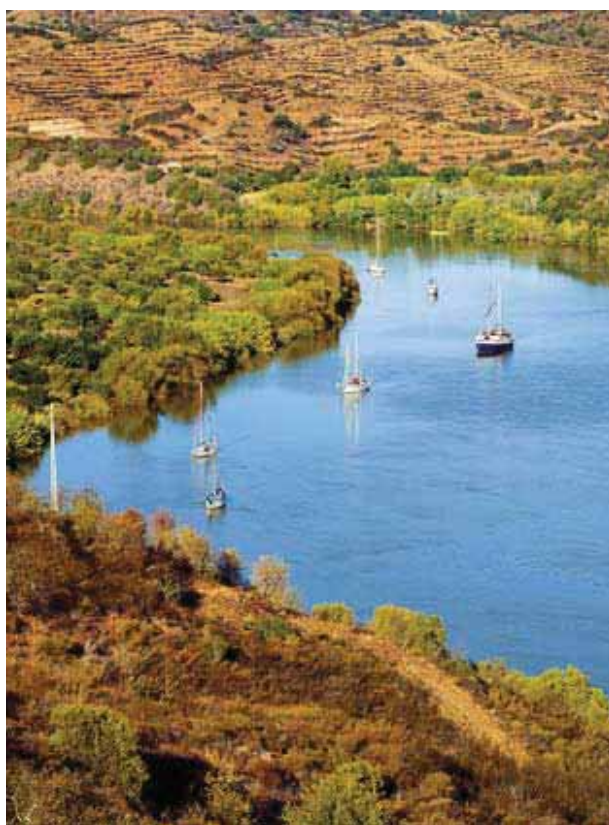


Grilled chouriça sausage (HR)

rated chimneys. The weavers in Lançadeira have their workshop right in the middle of the village. On a detour to Mealha (9 km) you can see circular constructions, an old form of dwelling with thick schist walls and conical roofs made of straw or rushes. Located near the windmills nearby are prehistoric monuments or dolmens, the Anta da Masmorra and the Anta das Pedras Altas.

After another 16 km, we are in Martim Longo. The plateau on which the village developed is beautiful, because of its size and its ruggedness. In the workshop A Flor da Agulha (The Flower of the Needle), women make dolls from jute, representing the inhabitants of the village, their clothes, customs and occupations. It is nice to try the sweet rosemary honey or the sweet-smelling goat cheeses.

We pass through Pereiro remembering that, in the 19th-century, this region in the north-east



River Guadiana (HR)



Alcoutim (LC)

of the Algarve, with its sparsely-populated land, was a refuge for people who had fallen into debt. All they had to do was to sign a bond at the town council in Alcoutim and promise to defend the border in order to avoid having to be in the military.

It has been a long trip through arid lands and so it is good to arrive in Alcoutim on the banks of the River Guadiana.

The town stands on the bank of the river, dominated by the castle that dates back to the period of *Al-Gharb* (the original Arabic name for the Algarve). Opposite, on the other bank and in a different country is Sanlúcar del Guadiana. There are many secrets within these borders, from the times of smuggling and the earlier frontier wars. Nowadays, the strongest ties have grown out of lives that have become intertwined so long ago, and now form part of the fabric of the family rather than mere neighbours.

You can gaze on the waters of the Guadiana from the walls of the castle, which serves as an excellent viewing point. Down below, the riverside beach looks inviting. In Alcoutim, "The Legend of the Enchanted Moorish Maiden", a common theme throughout the Algarve, tells



Alcoutim (LC)

of a beautiful Saracen girl who was bewitched in the old castle and compelled to guard a great treasure. The charm to remove the spell and keep the treasure would only work if a monster were defeated in combat beside two holm oaks, worm-eaten with age, on the Night of St John the Baptist (*Noite de São João*) (close to the summer solstice), using only a dagger or sword. Even today, such is the power of popular imagination, that many have tried but without success, because of the thick mists that shroud the area. The trees were cut down, but they have stubbornly grown back. Today, they are still there, hiding who knows what kind of wonder, guardian of treasure and spell over that ill-fated Moorish maiden.

It is not easy to resist the typical cuisine of the north-east, flavoured with aromatic herbs. A menu to try out is a starter of goat's cheese or *chouriça* (a spicy sausage), with olives and home-made bread. Then, for the second or main course, free-range chicken *açorda* (a bread-based stew) or lamprey *caldeirada* (stew with potatoes, tomatoes and peppers); and to finish, a local dessert made from almonds and figs. Then it is time to move on.

We take the riverside road, going through Guerreiros do Rio, with its museum of fishing, as far as the mouth of the Ribeira de Odeleite. In the steep lanes, the basket-makers work in the doorways. If we had more time to follow the route past the watermills and weirs as far as the dam, there would be much more to see.

Instead, we head for Almada de Ouro and then Azinhal, a distance of less than 6 km. Bobbin lace from Azinhal and cane baskets bear all the hallmarks of being crafted.

In the Nature Reserve of Castro Marim and Vila Real de Santo António Salt Marsh, one of the favourite places for migratory birds, you can also see the incredibly beautiful flight of storks, or the pink clouds of flamingos. In 1975, the reserve was the first to be created in Portugal and it encompasses an area of salt marshes. It is a tailor-made habitat for many creatures living in the water, on the land and in the air. Salt is gathered using traditional methods. Glistening in the

Main Church of Vila Real de Santo António (St)



sunlight, it is stunningly white amid the green fields and the blue of the river.

Then, we get to Castro Marim, one of the oldest towns in the Algarve. The Fort of São Sebastião and the Castle of Castro Marim, each on its own hill, were defended by a system of walls. From their walls, you can see the “lands of Spain and sands of Portugal” just like the cry of the look-out onboard the caravels, which is celebrated in a popular song. The young man forgot to mention the beauty of the marsh and the salt pans, with the whiteness of Vila Real de Santo António and Ayamonte shimmering in the distance between the waters of the Guadiana and the Atlantic.

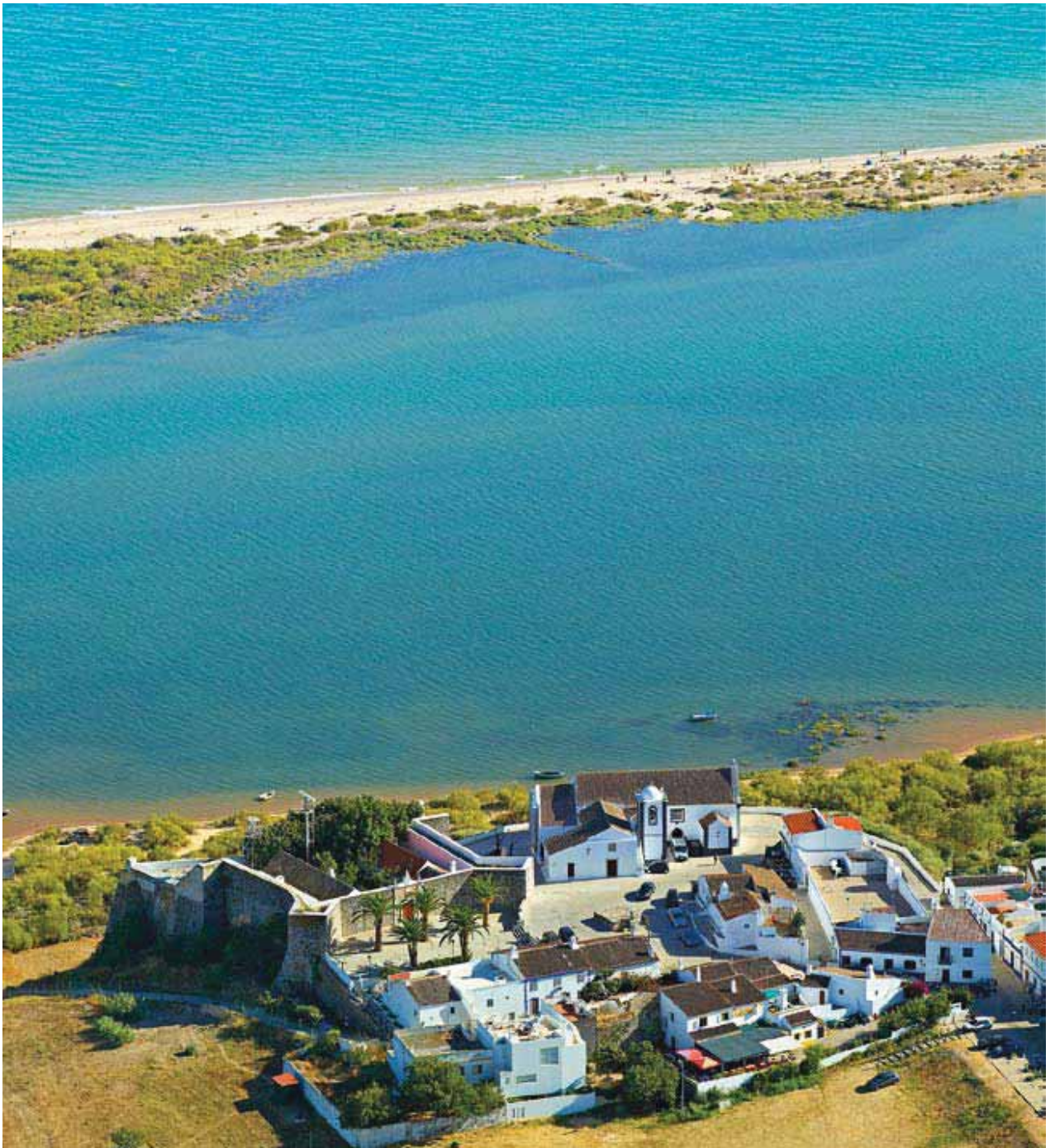
Vila Real de Santo António is like Alcoutim, with the Spanish town of Ayamonte opposite and the Guadiana between them.

The heart of the old city is the former royal square – nowadays called the Praça Marquês de Pombal – with its magnificent Portuguese *calçada* (crazy paving), radiating out from the centre in black and white. On the coast, the lighthouse, more than 40 metres high, commands a fine view of the nearby pine forests, the mouth of the River Guadiana, the Atlantic and neighbouring Spain.

Chameleon (JEP)



Cacela Velha (HR)

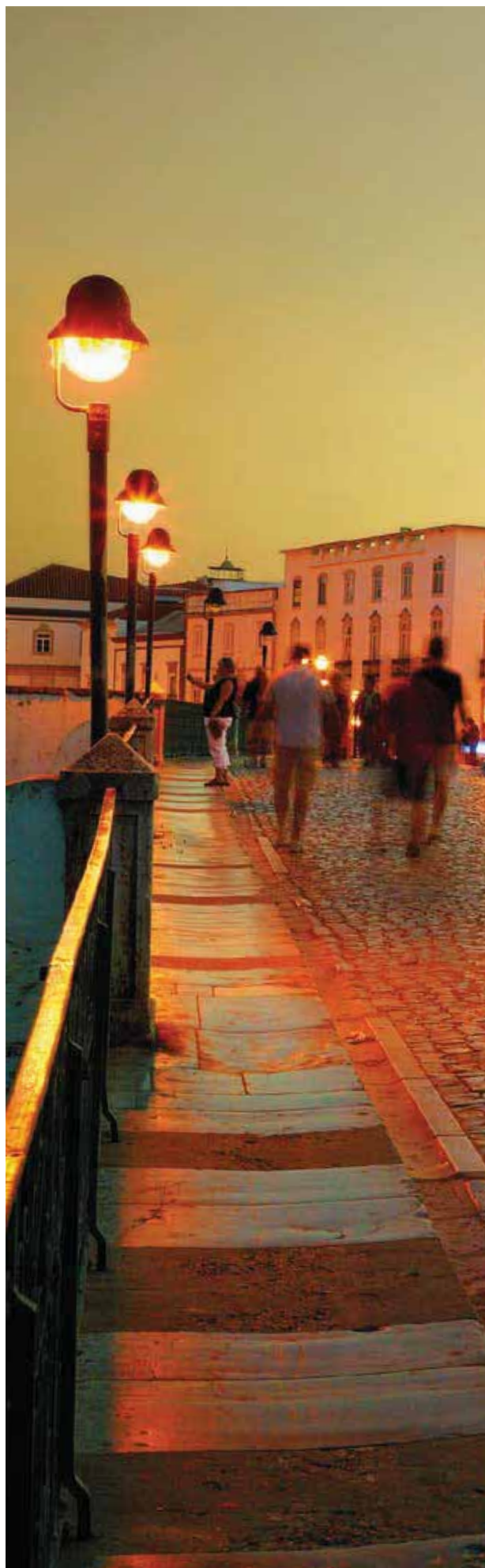


Behind the magnificent beaches, the pine forest of Monte Gordo is home to a special inhabitant: the chameleon. It is on the list of endangered species at risk of becoming extinct. So, if you see one, treat it carefully. Catching them is forbidden.

In a land where fishing is the main industry, there are famous tuna dishes like *estupeta* (pickled tuna), *moxama* (a dried, pressed fillet), or *espinheta* (stew with potatoes), as well as open-shell cockles. In terms of desserts, there are many different ones to taste - *carriços* (made only of egg white, sugar and trimmed almonds), *bolinhos de amor* (love cakes) and almond tart.

At this point, we have a choice: if you want to get back quickly, you can take the Via do Infante motorway (70 km) to around 3 km from Silves where we started the tour. On a fast road, however, you miss all those delightful and surprising details.

The slower EN 125 takes us to Cacela Velha (12 km), a very old village built on top of a cliff bordering the Ria Formosa. This is where the Natural Park begins, stretching as far as the Ancão peninsula, west of Faro. Comprising islands, salt marshes and beaches, the Ria is a true paradise that we can explore on a specially arranged tour.



Tavira (HR)

Cacela is a tiny village perched on a cliff top overlooking the sea, surrounded by wonderful scenery, a jewel left untouched throughout the ages. In the main square, there is a medieval cistern, which is the heart of the village. The fortress was built in 1794 and the Main Church has a Renaissance doorway and a fine collection of religious art.

This is the place to enjoy the best sunsets in the Algarve, while savouring delicious oysters, succulent clams, the freshest grilled fish, or a tasty plate of sautéed shellfish.

Cabanas de Tavira (6 km to the east) is a fishing village with a magnificent beach, accessible only by boat.

We pass through the city of Tavira on the Gilão River, with its pointed roofs and many churches. The city is so beautiful that it is worth a longer stay in order to visit the lanes in the old town, the fine gardens and the marvellous beach on Tavira Island.

Moncarapacho is north of the EN 125: take the turn-off near Fuseta, which leads to the Via do Infante motorway, and then follow the signs. This is a fruit-growing country, and important places to visit are the 500-year-old Main Church and the Parish Museum, with archaeological objects and precious pieces of religious, numismatic and ethnographic art. At the northern exit of the town, and after having a look at the pottery, we turn towards the Cerro de São Miguel or Monte Figo, 411 metres above sea level. On a clear day, the coastline unfolds in front of us, with the cities of Olhão and Faro spread out across the plain below.

It would be difficult to find a place where the sunset has a myriad of shades, lighting up such a diverse landscape, from the Algarve of the beaches to the Algarve of the hills (Serra), with the *Barrocal* in between.

At the main crossroad in Moncarapacho, a turn-off takes us in a few minutes to the Palace at Estoi. It is the only example of Romantic architecture in the Algarve. It is a sumptuous 18th-century building, surrounded by fine gardens with interesting statues and carvings including the trip-

Estoi Palace (St)



tych of the Três Graças (Three Graces) on a shell, a copy of a work by the Italian sculptor Antonio Canova (1757-1822).

Less than one kilometre away are the Roman ruins of Milreu (2nd-century A.D.), a grand patrician's villa, with baths and fine mosaics, as well as the ruins of a 4th-century Christian basilica built on the site of a Roman temple.

We now head west and at the junction with the EM 520-2 continue straight ahead for 7 km; it leads along the slopes of the *Barrocal*, which are like an extended viewing point. We arrive at Santa Bárbara de Nexe. Here, the traditional occupation is laying stone paving.

From these humble stone workmen come those masterpieces, which embellish town squares in numerous cities, paved in the typical Portuguese paving stone. Travelling along the EN 270, passing through Loulé, we get to Boliqueime.

The name "Boliqueime" is a corruption of an Italian expression which means "eyes of water" (or underground springs).

It is now just 8 km to Paderne, our next stop. This town features in the history of Portugal because its castle appears on the national flag. From the castle, you can see the watermill and weir on the Ribeira de Quarteira: the watermill is an older device than the windmill. There is a 4 km walk in the area around the castle that takes you over the medieval bridge, revealing some of the secrets of the region's flora and fauna. From Paderne, we take the EM 524 towards Algoz and then the EN 269, which has a number of viewing points on this stretch, and will take us back to Silves.

Paderne Castle (St)





tours and trails of the central Algarve

Explore routes along the coastal strip and through the hills of the Serra, dive into the clear waters off the islands, weave between the canals of the Ria Formosa, or dive into the gentle waters along the beaches of Albufeira.

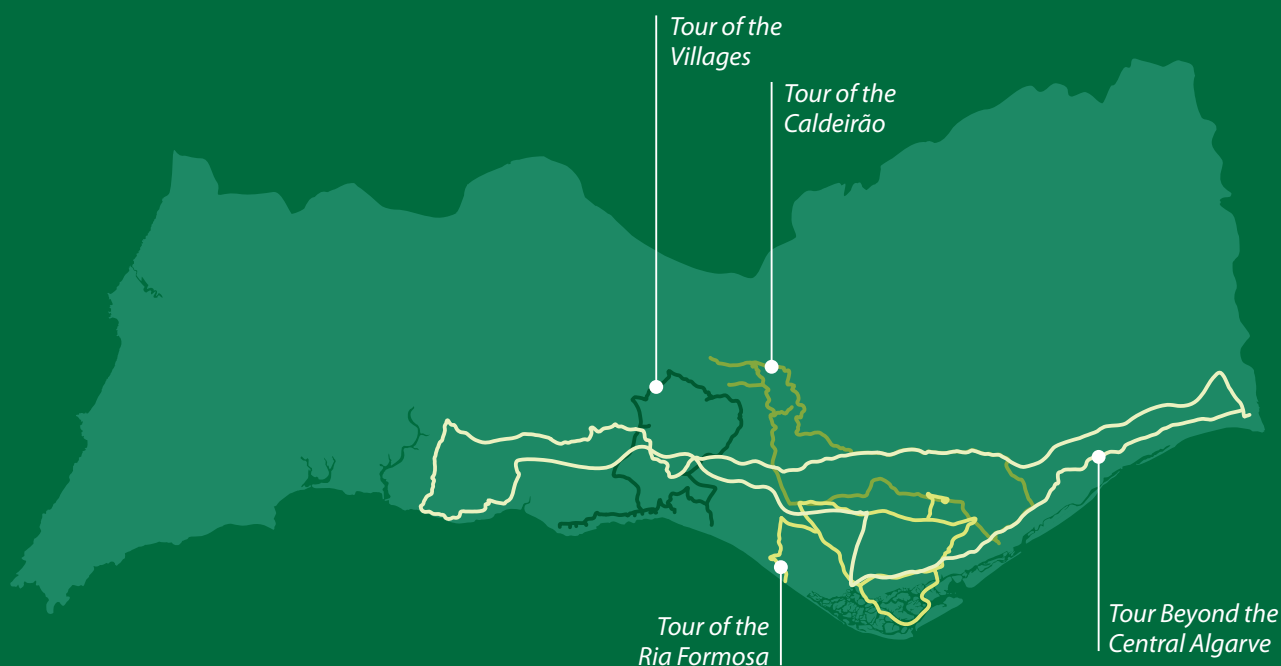
We will be discovering many other areas of the Algarve during this Tour of the Central Algarve, including towns that are still home to fishermen. There are also international centres with cosmopolitan shops and nights full of music and interesting people.

At the end of the tour, we will have a collection of unforgettable memories; we will have many stories to tell; and we will have enjoyed a wide range of unusual flavours.

We will be able to distinguish the accent of the people of Olhão from those who live in other parts of the Algarve and we will discover the pointed roofs of Tavira constructed with four sloping sides, along the banks of the Gilão River.

We will be able to follow the magnificent flight of storks as they fly from their nests in the Arco da Vila, the gateway to Faro's old town, to the Ria Formosa. Little delights, great emotions, delicacies from the sea one day, and sweets from the hills on the next; this is how holidays in the Algarve will be filled.

In the end, you will feel like coming back again and again to these different parts of the Algarve.



contents

- 58** | **TOUR OF THE VILLAGES** **+/- 98 km**
 Albufeira » Montechoro » Ferreiras » Purgatório » Paderne » Alte » Espargal » Boliqueime » Vilamoura » Maritenda » Oura » Galé » Albufeira
The tour of the villages is a wonderful journey through different aspects of the Algarve from the cosmopolitan city of Albufeira, with its magnificent beaches, to the traditional village of Alte with its picturesque houses. Finally, it goes through the countryside of the Barrocal in flower, where every curve in the road heralds a new panorama.
- 66** | **TOUR OF THE CALDEIRÃO** **+/- 123 km**
 Loulé » Tôr » Fonte da Benémola » Salir » Rocha da Pena » Querença » São Brás de Alportel » Santa Catarina da Fonte do Bispo » Malhão » Santo Estêvão » Luz de Tavira » Pedras d'el Rei » Fuseta » Moncarapacho » Cerro de São Miguel » Santa Bárbara de Nexe » Loulé
The tour of the Caldeirão takes us to the undulating hills of the Serra, between thyme and lavender plants and carob trees, where we will hear the babbling of the streams and discover the skills of the craftspeople. We will savour traditional sausages, get a glimpse of the Ria Formosa and the beaches on the other side of the islands. But everything starts in Loulé.
- 76** | **TOUR OF THE RIA FORMOSA** **+/- 102 km**
 Faro » São João da Venda » São Lourenço » Almancil » Quinta do Lago » Vale do Lobo » Santa Bárbara de Nexe » Estoi » Moncarapacho » Quelfes » Olhão » Ilha da Culatra » Ilha da Armona » Ilha do Farol » Ilha da Deserta (Barreta) » Faro
The tour of the Ria Formosa attracts visitors because of the contrasts between its expanses of water and the islands with their shifting sands and fabulous beaches. There are also contrasts between the cities of Faro and Olhão, the first with its old houses, the second ingrained with sun and salt, linked forever to the sea and to fishing. This tour will reveal the wonderful world of the Ria Formosa Nature Park.
- 90** | **TOUR BEYOND THE CENTRAL ALGARVE** **+/- 260 km**
 Vila Real de Santo António » Castro Marim » Santa Catarina da Fonte do Bispo » São Brás de Alportel » Loulé » Boliqueime » Paderne » Silves » Lagoa » Carvoeiro » Alcantarilha » Estoi » Faro » Olhão » Tavira » Cacela Velha » Vila Real de Santo António
The tour beyond the central Algarve contains ideas for exploring routes on the coast and in the hills of other parts of the Algarve. By the end, we will be able to put together a photo album after visiting the Palace of Estoi, the monuments of Tavira and the fine beaches of Monte Gordo.





tour of the villages

In the twinkling of an eye, we have travelled from the modern cosmopolitan houses to the landscape of cistus. The tour continues further north, alongside that other Algarve of sun-loving beachgoers and along lanes filled with the smells of village life and lunches of grilled fish. You will spend the late afternoons glancing at each other, outlined against the great ball of fire suspended in a sky still undecided between different blues; and, at night, other celestial bodies twinkle with silvery light and spin at random, over wandering heads.

Beside a frenetic Algarve, one of people, landscapes and contrasting lives, lies another: an Algarve of modest whitewashed houses that are less flamboyant than their coastal cousins, hundred-year-old stones, and crumbling roads winding through fields of restless gold.

From the Algarve that is cooled by the sea and warmed by the masses, we will move to one that bears witness to the passing of time. This is where Paderne Castle stands, its walls eroded, eroded by winds and rebuilt by men. Along the way, we can see lines of houses in Alte, our eyes follow the movement of the swans at Fonte Pequena and we can refresh body and mind with the abundant cool water. These are the pleasures of Portuguese villages, which the people have safeguarded and will not allow to be spoilt.

Along the way, on this tour of terraces, you will encounter a riot of colour, and people with lined faces, toiling in the ancient ploughed landscape. And, of course, there are also plenty of culinary delights to be discovered in the Barrocal. This is a world of contrasts in one small corner of the Algarve.



Alte (PR)

tour of the villages

SUMMARY OF THE TOUR

Albufeira > Montechoro > Ferreiras > Purgatório > Paderne > Alte > Espargal > Boliqueime > Vilamoura > Maritenda > Oura > Galé > Albufeira

KEY TO THE MAP



Airport



Marina



Nature Reserve



Beach



Monument



Viewing Point



Dam



Museum



Lighthouse



Natural Recreation
and Leisure Area



Motorway



Municipal Road



Starting Point



National Road



Tour



Protected Area



EN 125 National Road



Direction of Tour



The Tour of the Villages is a wonderful journey through the contrasts of the Algarve. We will travel from the cosmopolitan city of Albufeira, with its magnificent beaches, to the traditional village of Alte, with its picturesque houses. Finally, we will explore the *Barrocal* countryside in flower, where every bend in the road ushers in a new panorama.

Then, we will see new villages, built for leisure and a life of ease, in the shade of the freshness of pine trees, next to the finest beaches.

The “Pau da Bandeira” viewing point is an excellent starting point for a tour of the city of Albufeira, the start of our tour.

The cliffs surround the Maria Luísa beach and the Praia dos Pescadores (Fishermen’s Beach), creating a colourful scene.

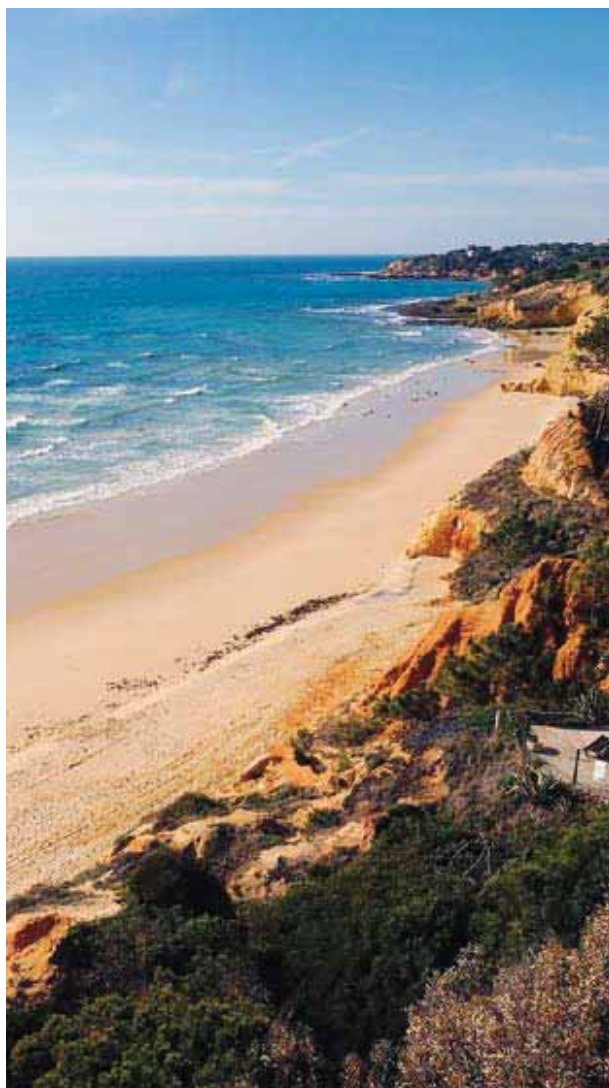
Nearby, the commercial town buzzes with life and entertainment. Along steep lanes, we get to the 18th-century Main Church, with its imposing bell tower. It is well worth going inside to have a look at the altarpiece created by the painter Samora Barros.

Albufeira was built by the Arabs on top of Cerro da Vila, a cliff that is almost like a peninsula, an invincible position, which is why they called it *Al Buhera* (fortress).

Before them, the Romans liked the place, which was originally called *Baltum*, and they set up their fishing equipment here. The integration of Al Buhera into the Kingdom of the Algarve was not easy. It was only on the second attempt, in 1249, that it was successfully retaken by the Christians from the Moors.

The 1755 earthquake destroyed practically all the buildings. For this reason, the Church of São Sebastião, which kept its 16th-century Manueline side doorway and the Church of Sant’Ana with the design inspired by popular architecture, both dating back to the 18th-century, are so precious.

The Misericórdia Chapel replaced the old Arab mosque. It retains the doorway, the triumphal arch and the apse of the 15th-century Gothic building.



Maria Luísa (AF)



Church of Sant’Ana (St)

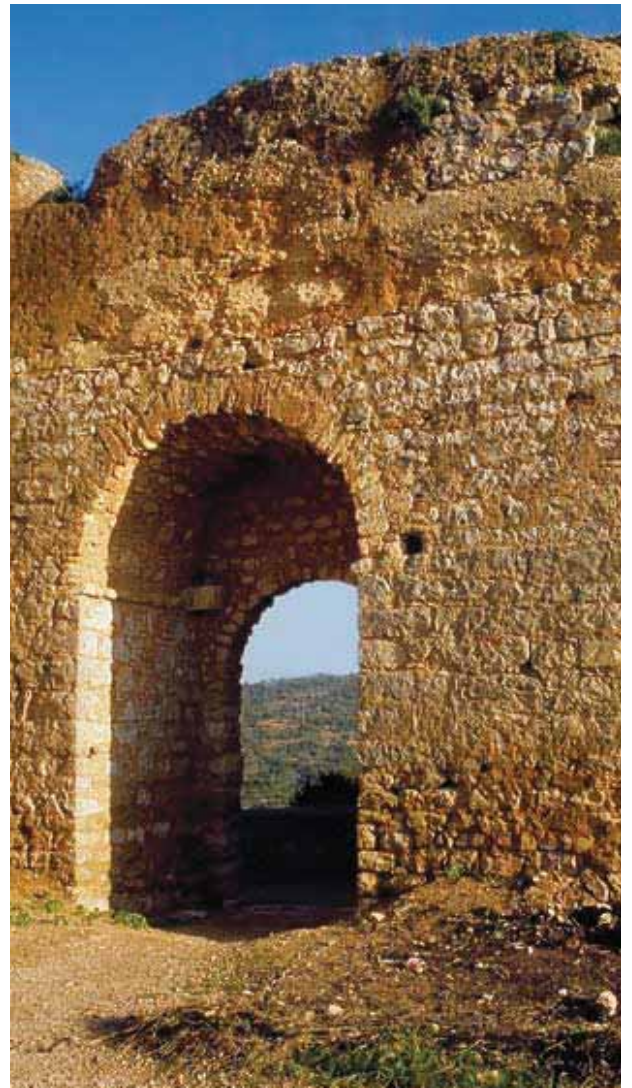
All that remains of the castle walls is a defence tower at the North Gate, which is used as a restaurant.

A broad avenue leads us to Montechoro, on a hill where leisure activities take pride of place. There is a wide range of shopping outlets. In the many outdoor seating areas, almost all world languages can be heard.

In just a few minutes, we are back in a very different sort of landscape, with small, friendly groups of houses stretching all the way to Ferreiras, 5 km north of Albufeira, where some of the houses still have the typical chimneys, parapets and roof terraces. There, we take the winding EM 395, from which we can see windmills and waterwheels. In the village that goes by the strange name of Purgatório (Purgatory), we will turn west; then on the EN 270, we travel as far as Paderne, on a gentle hill with its white houses, silhouetted against the background of the surrounding countryside. In the village itself, an interesting decorated 18th-century chimney welcomes us.

On top of a rocky spur, around which the Quarteira River runs, stands Paderne Castle, which was built by the Arabs. Nearby there is an intact Roman bridge with a section of the old cobblestones preserved. The watermill and the weir at the foot of the hill still maintain traditional milling operations. The freshness of the location makes it ideal for walking, especially since, in spring, the fields all around conceal beautiful wild orchids, with exuberant colours and unusual forms.

Travelling between the hills that gradually rise to form the Serra do Caldeirão, we get to Alte. The cool waters of Fonte Grande and Fonte Pequena are very inviting, with a pleasant walk around the village streets to see the decorated chimneys, the coloured parapets, and then up to the Main Church. The original church was founded by Dona Bona, wife of Garcia Mendes da Ribadeneyra, second Lord of Alte, at the end of the 13th-century, in thanks for the safe return of her husband from the eighth crusade to Palestine. Another woman lies behind the legend of the origin of the name of the village.



Paderne Castle (St)



Fonte Pequena (PR)

A rich and respected lady owned land in Freixo Verde. She had grown accustomed to the priest celebrating mass only when she was present in the only chapel in the whole parish. One day, however, tired of the continual waiting, the cleric decided not to wait for the noblewoman. The worshippers were already on their way home when they met the landowner who indignantly gave the order to her servants: "Alto! (Halt!) Here I shall build a church!"

In time, this became the Main Church in the parish and Alto became Alte, mainly because of the accent in the Serra, where the ends of words are often swallowed.

Alte is the best place to buy handicrafts and to try the cakes whose recipes are sweet, jealously-guarded family secrets.

A country road at the northern exit of the village takes us into countryside with esparto grass and fig and almond trees until we get to Nave dos Cordeiros, followed by Espargal and finally Ribeira de Algibre, impressive glimpses of an unspoiled Algarve, proud of its identity.

After about ten kilometres on the EN 270, an especially beautiful stretch of road, we arrive in



Palm Weaving (HR)



Vilamoura Marina (HR)

Boliqueime on the slopes of a small hill, at the beginning of the *Barrocal*.

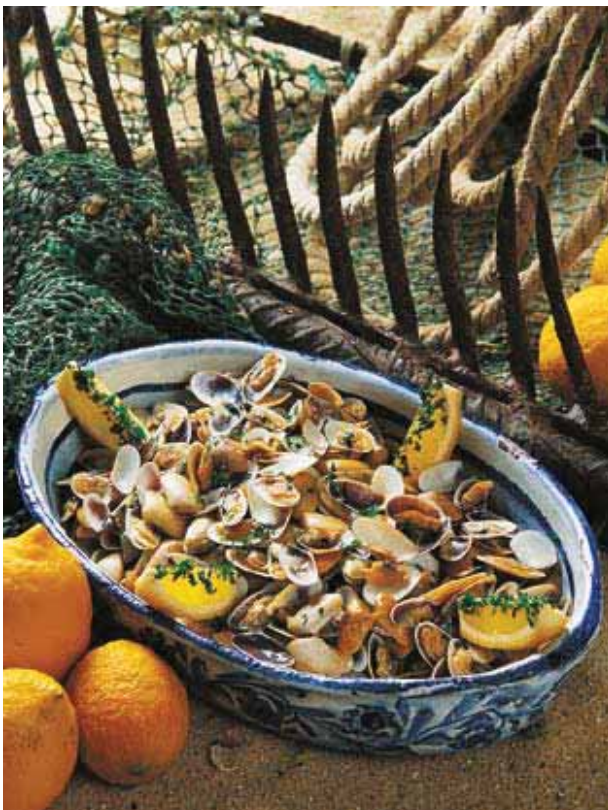
Merchants from Flanders were among the earliest to import the best figs, almonds and carobs from this area. In addition to these, there were magnificent sweet juicy oranges, no wonder the community was prosperous.

One of the best farms belonged to the famous Quarteira nobleman, Martim Marcham, who received it as a gift from the King Denis in 1297. The Quarteira farm later became Vilamoura, a luxurious tourist complex built around a beautiful marina. We only have to follow the EN 125 to the east until the road signposted to Vilamoura, and we get to the sea, between golf courses and the well-tended gardens of this holiday centre.

The Environmental Park in Vilamoura is an asset for both ecology and landscape. The bittern and the purple gallinule are the stars of this ecosystem,



Roman villa of Cerro da Vila (St)



Baby Clam Soup (RTA)

where more than a hundred species of birds can be observed.

For something different, the museum and Cerro da Vila archaeological site offer visitors an imaginary journey through a 1st-century Roman villa, attesting to the fact that this delightful place has always drawn people to it.

In Vilamoura, there is a whole range of outdoor activities on offer, but it is also possible to go shopping in internationally famous stores, savour international cuisine, go to shows and try your luck in the casino. Otherwise, you can simply enjoy the warm water along spacious beaches.

We have to return to the EN 125 and then head south again near Maritenda to reach two marvellous beaches -Praia da Falésia and Praia do Barranco das Belharucas -, the unspoilt beauty, the unspoilt beauty of Olhos de Água, and then two more beaches - Praia Maria Luísa and Praia da Balaia, before arriving in Oura.

The Algarve has some of the finest beaches in Europe, and Albufeira encompasses a series of beaches, nestling between colourful cliffs, which stretch from Praia da Falésia in the east to Galé in the west, passing through Castelo and the exclusive beaches of Praia da Coelha and São Rafael. You will not be able to resist the call of the fine sand and the turquoise-blue sea, or the chance to seek out a restaurant or café terrace and sit there with your feet almost in the water, enjoying the sunset.

Or you could return there after dinner to listen to the music and dance on the terraces.

Meanwhile, there is a wide range of restaurants where you can sample the local cuisine: soup made with cockles, seasoned with bay leaf and coriander; mackerel cooked with oregano; or sardines with a tomato sauce; and you can also find grilled dishes here, which are very, very tasty. Then, all that remains is to soak in the buzzing nightlife in Albufeira.





tour of the caldeirão

There is also another Algarve high above the great roads which criss-cross the region. Here, storks peer down from the chimneys of the ceramic kilns and babbling streams cut their way through green fields. Here, man has not harmed Mother Nature's creation; rather, he lives in harmony with her, gratefully accepting her many gifts, stripping the bark from the cork oaks and moulding the clay into roofing tiles to fit atop the rough-hewn door jambs typical of the region. There, in this kingdom of solitude, far from the hustle and bustle of the coastal developments that have arisen next to the ocean, her rocky maternal arms encircle that other, cosmopolitan, Algarve, holding it in her embrace. And although we are still on the Algarve side of the Caldeirão, signs can already be seen of the neighbouring Alentejo region: the sizzling summer that seems never-ending and a wide, golden plateau glimpsed amid the cistus and the cork oaks. The smell of the sea already permeates the houses, intoxicating the people who have sought it without ever owning it. So many people are they that the foothills are populated with a host of identical shelters against the heat. And streets and life, in cities and towns like Loulé and São Brás de Alportel.



tour of the caldeirão

SUMMARY OF THE TOUR

Loulé > Tôr > Fonte da Benémola > Salir > Rocha da Pena > Querença > São Brás de Alportel > Santa Catarina da Fonte do Bispo > Malhão > Santo Estêvão > Luz de Tavira > Pedras d'el Rei > Fusetas > Moncarapacho > Cerro de São Miguel > Santa Bárbara de Nexe > Loulé

KEY TO THE MAP



Airport



Lighthouse



Nature Reserve



Beach



Monument



Pier



Dam



Museum



Viewing Point



Motorway



Municipal Road



Starting Point



National Road



Tour



Protected Area



EN 125 National Road



Direction of Tour



Loulé Castle (St)



The Tour of the Caldeirão takes us to the rolling hills of the Serra, between thyme and lavender plants and carob trees, where we can hear the babbling of the streams and discover the skills of the craftspeople. We will savour traditional sausages, and get a glimpse of the Ria Formosa and the beaches on the other side of the islands. However, everything starts in Loulé.

Our first stop is at the castle walls, of Arab origin but rebuilt in the 13th-century and with three brickwork towers still in evidence today. In the courtyard, there is a well and the arch of the old gate that was the entrance to the settlement. We can also visit the Main Church, built in the Gothic style (13th-century) with a bell tower that was adapted from a Muslim minaret.

In the city centre, the Convent of Espírito Santo (Holy Spirit) functions as the Municipal Art Gallery. In the shops around the walls, you can still find pieces of copper, clay, hats and baskets. This is an age-old skill, carried out by women. The palm leaves are worked in the same way as plaiting hair and, for a hat, 5 or 6 metres of thin plaits are needed. At one time, the baskets made from palm leaves were used for packing figs, almonds and carob beans.

Where the EN 270 leaves Loulé for Boliqueime, the sanctuary of the Sovereign Mother (one of the titles of the Virgin Mary) can be seen, perched on a hill, an excellent viewing point. Local people honour their patron saint with one of the largest processions in the south of the country, which has been held at Easter time for over 400 years. The men carry the heavy litter with the statue up the steep slope, while the crowd greet her enthusiastically, waving white handkerchiefs.

Loulé is in the middle of the Algarve and is a lively commercial centre organised around the market with its Moorish lines. Loulé is located in the area known as the *Barrocal*, the area between the coast and the hills of the Serra, which stretches from the Costa Vicentina to the west as far as the Guadiana River in the east.

Very famous, indeed the most famous in the Algarve, is its celebration of Carnival, with a joyous procession.

Sovereign Mother (LC)





Regional Sweets (HR)

Soon we get to Tôr, a little village with narrow streets and an old bridge.

Along the ER 524 road, the protected reserve of Fonte da Benémola is on the right-hand side surrounded by ash and willow trees, poplars and oleanders growing alongside rosemary, thyme and lavender. This is a Classified Site because of the wealth of its environment.

On the road towards Salir, we will not be able to resist a little detour to Nave do Barão. There are huge fields of almond trees filling the valley, with the hillsides planted in terraces.

Soon we will arrive in Salir, a village on the edge of the Serra, whose origins are lost in time.

In the castle, there are traces of a Celtic past, but the fort is of Arab origin (12th-century). The towers and a portion of the walls, known to the locals as the “Muro da Sabedoria” (Wall of Wisdom), are visible.

The local cuisine is rich and original, and some things to try are *xarém* (maize porridge) with pork crackling, or mountain soup. Goat and sheep



Strawberry tree (HR)

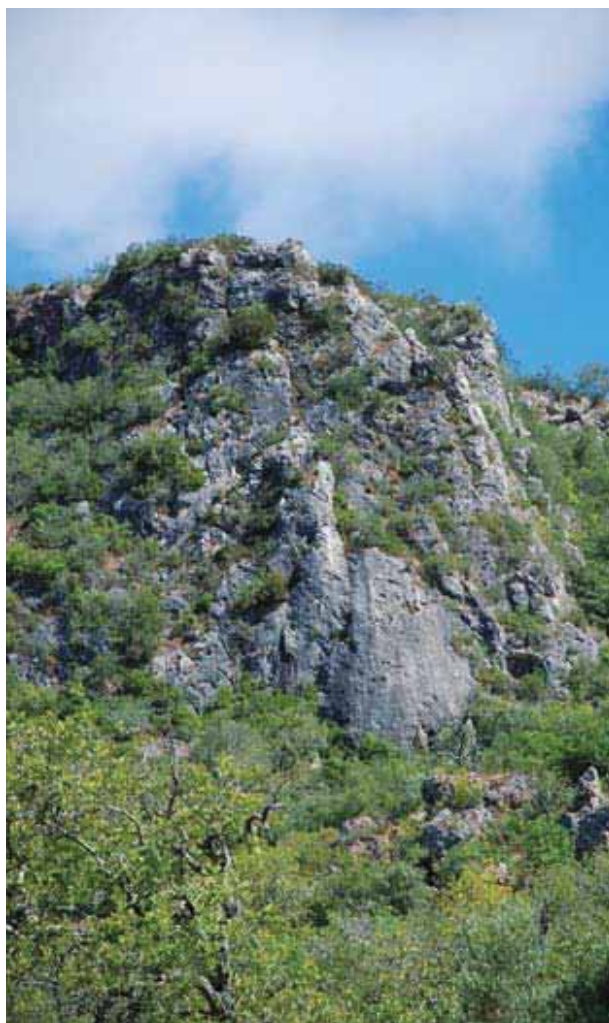
cheeses or homemade sausages are perfect as starters while the *medronho* brandy is the ideal accompaniment for sweets, which are made with honey, figs and almonds.

A good time to get to know Salir is during the Festa da Espiga (Festival of the Maize Cob), a combination of religion and paganism, with an interesting ethnographic procession which always takes place on Ascension Thursday.

To the north of Salir, there is another small paradise: Rocha da Pena is a colourful showcase of the beauties of the *Barrocal*. There are 390 plant species and 122 species of birds already identified there. In order to have a closer look at the area, we suggest that you go for a walk through this landscape of dreams. At the top of Rocha da Pena, there are two ancient constructions probably from the Iron Age.

We have to return to Salir to get back on the EN 124 and then head south to Querença.

The older folk say that Querença means affection, love and good will. Located near two streams, the village is full of charm and beautiful views.



Rocha da Pena (PR)



Main Church of Querença (PR)

In the main square, the Main Church of Nossa Senhora da Assunção (Our Lady of the Assumption) has a fine Manueline doorway; and in January, the Festa das Chouriças (Sausage Festival) is held in the courtyard there - a unique opportunity to try out some of the local dishes.

Following the signposts as we leave the village heading south, we pass through Porto Nobre and São Romão, with a line of houses by the roadside in the tradition of the rural Algarve, until we get to São Brás de Alportel.

As we arrive in the town, in front of us in the historical centre, there are whitewashed, single-storey houses built in the popular architectural style, and the grand houses of the former industrialists and businessmen of the cork trade, with their façades clad in tiles, carved stonework and wrought-iron verandas.

There is a fine view up to the hills of the Serra from the courtyard of the Main Church. Next door, there is the Episcopal Garden known as the Verbena Garden, with its fine bandstand, adjoining the palace built between the 17th and 18th-centuries for the Bishops of the Algarve to spend their holidays, owing to the pleasant climate in the region.

We then go into the palace housing the Casa da Cultura António Bentes (House of Culture) and the Ethnographic Museum of Algarve Costumes, reliving the days when the local people used to dance the *corridinho* on the threshing floors at threshing time.

Cork from São Brás de Alportel is among the best in the world, and is used for the corks of the most famous champagnes. The cork oaks stand there majestically, with the strawberry trees growing in their shade - beautiful spontaneous small trees. In the autumn, at the same time when the fruit of the previous year is ripening, the trees are covered in clusters of white flowers. From the red fruits, the strong *medronho* brandy is distilled.

In this town, it is easy to come across pictures portraying a time when the pace of life was slow and full of simple pleasures.



Serra do Caldeirão (PR)

Main Church of Luz de Tavira (St)



We get to Santa Catarina da Fonte do Bispo on the EN 270, in search of the tile makers who have been there for centuries. The air is full of the aroma of holm oaks and almond shells, burning in the ovens where the various different types of tiles are baked. In the orchards all around, almond and orange trees flourish, and pieces of the original stone can be seen peeping through the whitewash on the walls of the single-storey houses.

On the same road, we get to Malhão and turn towards Santo Estêvão, which emerges from between orange groves; and from some of the bends on the roads we can already glimpse the sea.

In Luz de Tavira, people are proud of their houses with decorated parapets, real masterpieces showing the influence of Art Nouveau. The façade of the Main Church, which dates back to the 16th-century, was redecorated with one of these parapets. The Manueline side doorway is one of the finest in the Algarve.

We will take the EN 125 until we are close to the village of Pedras d'el Rei and to the Praia do Barril beach with its warm, crystal-clear waters. The estates of Quinta de Torre de Ares and Quinta das Antas are located there, where the ancient Roman city of Balsa once stood at the time of Julius Caesar and Augustus (1st-century B.C.).

Barril (HR)





Cerro de São Miguel (LC)

The site is on the edge of the Ria Formosa. Extremely important archaeological finds were made here.

We go back to the EN 125, and when we reach Alfandanga, we turn off to Fuseta.

A short boat trip takes us to the far shore, to a beach of dreams, with sand as far as the eye can see.

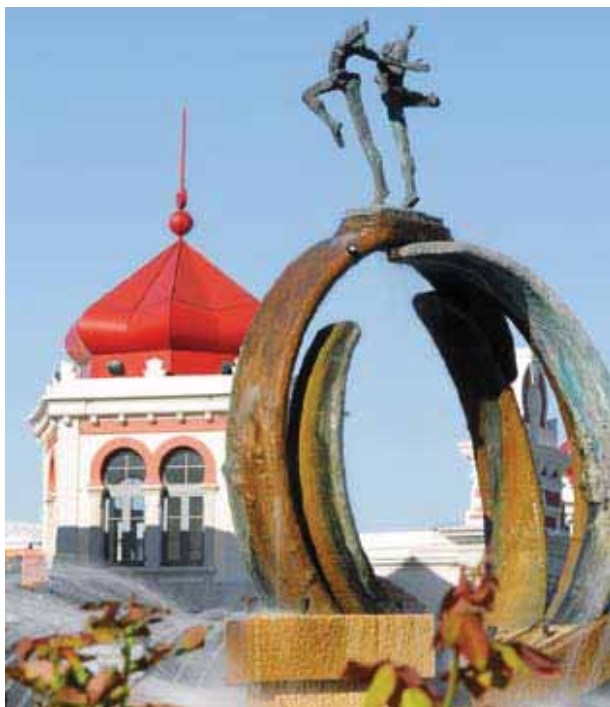
It is only a short distance to Moncarapacho, and once there, you can have a look at the pottery and the parish museum.

It is well worth going up to the top of the hill called "Cerro de São Miguel", from where you get a view from Vila Real de Santo António to Albufeira in the south, and the rolling hills of the Serra do Caldeirão to the north. We will take the small winding road on the northern side leading to the chapel, which is quite difficult to spot and is built in a very simple style. We go through Azinhal/Amendoeira, a quiet spot near the Malhão ridge, from where you can get a glimpse of Estoi, and finally we get to Santa Bárbara de Nexe.

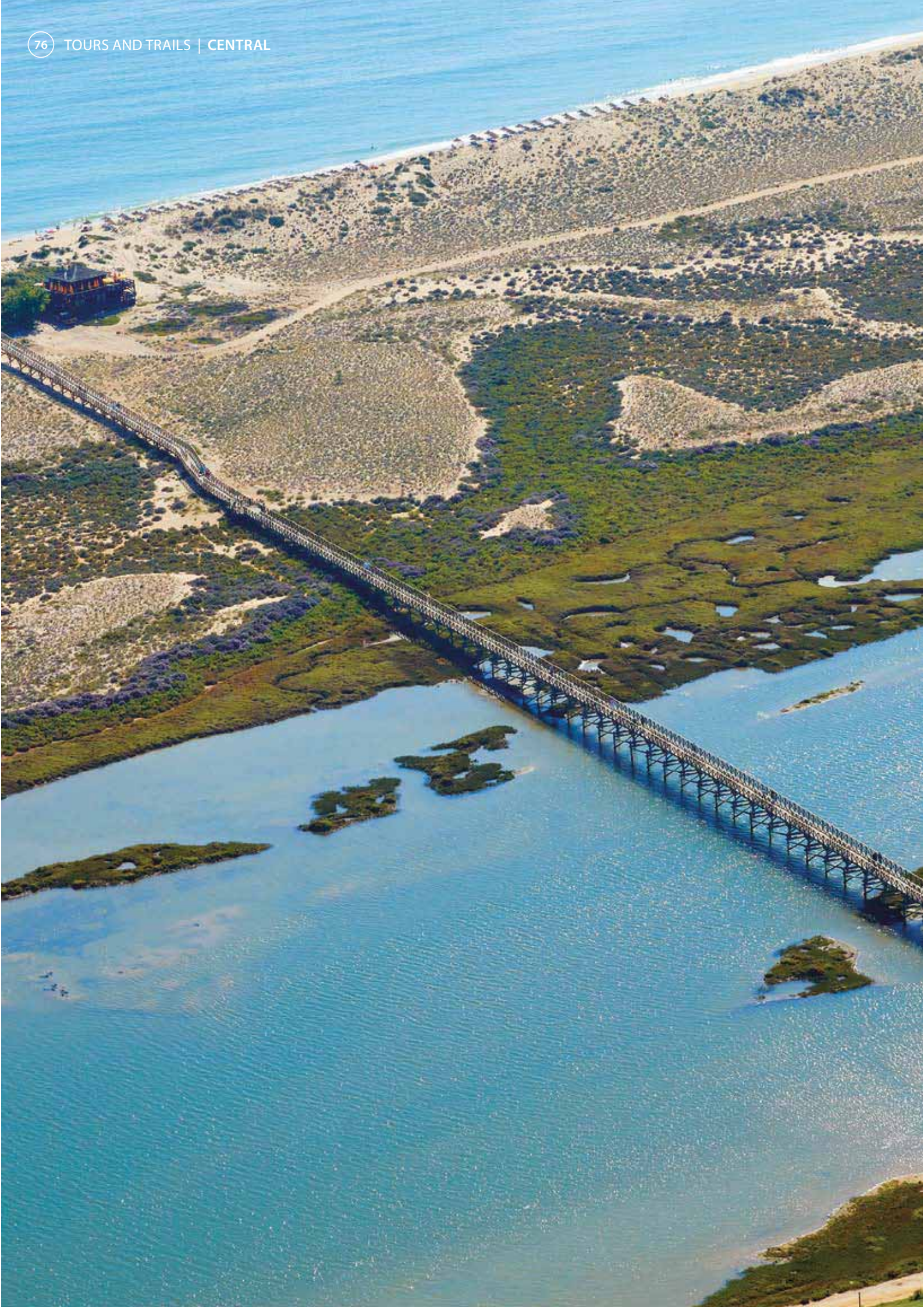
The whole of this area is a kind of natural viewing point and many of the rural houses have been turned into impressive holiday homes, but without losing their original lines.

These are quiet, pleasant places where a large foreign community has settled in search of peacefulness and friendliness from the local communities.

We will soon be back in Loulé, in time to seek out one of the many restaurants in the city and surrounding area, which offer traditional dishes on their menus. In July or August, the Jazz Festival organized by the Casa da Cultura (House of Culture) brings the nights to life. Within the same municipality, but a little further south, you can find the casino, Vilamoura Marina and many other possibilities in terms of entertainment.



Loulé (HR)





tour of the ria formosa

From Faro to Olhão, passing through a paradise of birds and like the birds, we will fly as if in a dream between the barrier islands. We will enjoy the Quinta do Marim; we can have a look at the everyday life of the black-headed seagull and the proud stork, flying between the land and the sea without touching either. By watching the African fishing birds, which spend the summer there, we can deduce which fish are swimming around the islands. Later, we will savour them in the land of the fishermen, where we will also taste delicious clams and nibble other molluscs.

On land, we will be like time-travellers: from the old city of Ossónoba to the even older Milreu, to the palace in Estoi, which is surrounded by plants and flowers that seem to have withstood the centuries. Within the present-day Algarve, we will discover other aspects of the region, such as the timeless white houses in Moncarapacho.

We shall enjoy the comforts of Quinta do Lago; but, once again forgotten by people, we shall breathe in the green of nearby Ludo, as we go in search of the shade that is lacking in the flat landscape on the rest of the walk.

Between the land and the sea, between men and birds, we will have our fill of the Algarve, in the heart of the Ria Formosa.



Ria Formosa (HR)

tour of the ria formosa

SUMMARY OF THE TOUR

Faro > São João da Venda > São Lourenço > Almancil > Quinta do Lago > Vale do Lobo > Santa Bárbara de Nexe > Estoi > Moncarapacho > Quelfes > Olhão > Ilha da Culatra > Ilha da Armona > Ilha do Farol > Ilha da Deserta (Barreta) > Faro

KEY TO THE MAP



Airport



Lighthouse



Nature Reserve



Beach



Monument



Pier



Dam



Museum



Viewing Point



Motorway



Municipal Road



Starting Point



National Road



Tour



Protected Area



EN 125 National Road



Direction of Tour



The Tour of the Ria Formosa attracts visitors because of the contrasts between its expanse of water and the islands with their shifting sands and fabulous beaches.

There are also contrasts between the cities of Faro and Olhão, the first with its houses of great antiquity, the second ingrained with sun and salt, forever linked to the sea and to fishing. This tour will open up the wonderful world of the Ria Formosa Nature Park.

The starting point for the tour is Faro, a sizeable city of ancient origins, with its own style and a distinct personality.

The history of the city has been marked by numerous earthquakes, fires, sackings by pirates and military action. Despite this, the city attracts people with its bright and serene appearance.

Faro has been the capital of the Algarve since the 16th-century, protected by the cordon of dunes of the islands of the Ria Formosa. Over the centuries, and since the Roman period, it became one of the most important urban centres



Faro (LC)



Culatra island (HR)

Faro Cathedral (St)



Arco da Vila (St)



in the south of the Iberian Peninsula. Its importance has not diminished. The Arab geographer Rasis considered it “the best in the world among those of similar size” in his time. Its exact origins are unknown, but there are people who argue that this was where the legendary Ossónoba was located.

Surrounded by a 17th-century wall, the Vila Adentro – the oldest part of the city centre of Faro – contains some of its most important examples of cultural heritage, making this a key place to visit.

You go in through the Arco da Vila, one of the gates in the wall, located near the Governor’s Palace, and walk up to the cathedral, a Gothic building (12th-century) with a tower which commands a fine view over the city. Opposite, there is the Bishop’s Palace dating back to the 18th-century, with its sober but imposing aspect, rebuilt straight after the 1755 earthquake. A short distance away is the town hall, and this group of buildings creates a spacious square of elegant proportions.

Convent of Nossa Senhora de Assunção (St)



Church of Carmo (St)



A narrow lane leads us to the Convent of Nossa Senhora de Assunção (Our Lady of the Assumption) with its graceful cloisters. This is where the Faro Museum is housed, with one of the highlights being the Islamic room.

The Arco do Repouso (Gate of Rest), the eastern gate in the wall, leads us to the Largo de São Francisco, where a convent of the same name has been turned into a Hotel and Tourism School. From the Porta Nova to the west, we reach the Ria and the harbour.

The city is rich in churches, old palaces, museums and galleries, with one of the most important being the Church of Carmo that has, after Évora, the most important Capela dos Ossos (Ossuary Chapel) in the country.

The whitewashed houses, with their roofs with four sloping sides, called “tesoura” (scissor truss) roofs by the locals, the arches and the narrow streets are details defining the architecture of the capital of the Algarve. They can be seen in



Ria Formosa (HR)

Rua de Santo António and in the pedestrianised area nearby, where there are lively outdoor seating areas and cosmopolitan shops.

Having made a promise to return, for example, to visit the Praia de Faro beach, which you can access through the main channel of the Ria Formosa, we leave Faro heading west on the EN 125. We go through São João da Venda, and after a short distance, following the signposts we get to São Lourenço. Its small church is completely covered with 17th-century tiles and has a gilt carved altar with eight figurative panels.

Almancil is the gateway to some of the most luxurious tourist developments in the Algarve.

We pass the famous roundabouts of Quinta do Lago as we go through to the coast in order to enjoy the walks designed to encourage an appreciation of hundreds of birds, the profusion of flowers, pine woods and wide freshwater lakes. There are moments of rare natural beauty to be enjoyed here, especially at daybreak or in the light of the setting sun.



Golf in Quinta do Lago (HR)

Here, you have a choice of almost all kinds of sports from horse riding to sailing, with golf taking pride of place. There are numerous attractions on the huge beaches and plenty to enjoy in terms of cuisine!

We can return to Almancil by making a small detour through Vale do Garrão and Vale do Lobo, cosmopolitan tourist destinations and yet carefully integrated within the landscape.

When we return through São João da Venda, we leave the EN 125 and head north, going through Esteval and heading for Santa Bárbara de Nexe, half way up to the hills of the Serra and crossing into the Algarve *Barrocal*. The next stop will be in Estoi.

Without doubt, the jewel in this large village is the Palace of Estoi, converted into a hostel and classified as a building of public interest.

This complex is a sumptuous 18th-century construction, one of the best examples of the Romantic period.

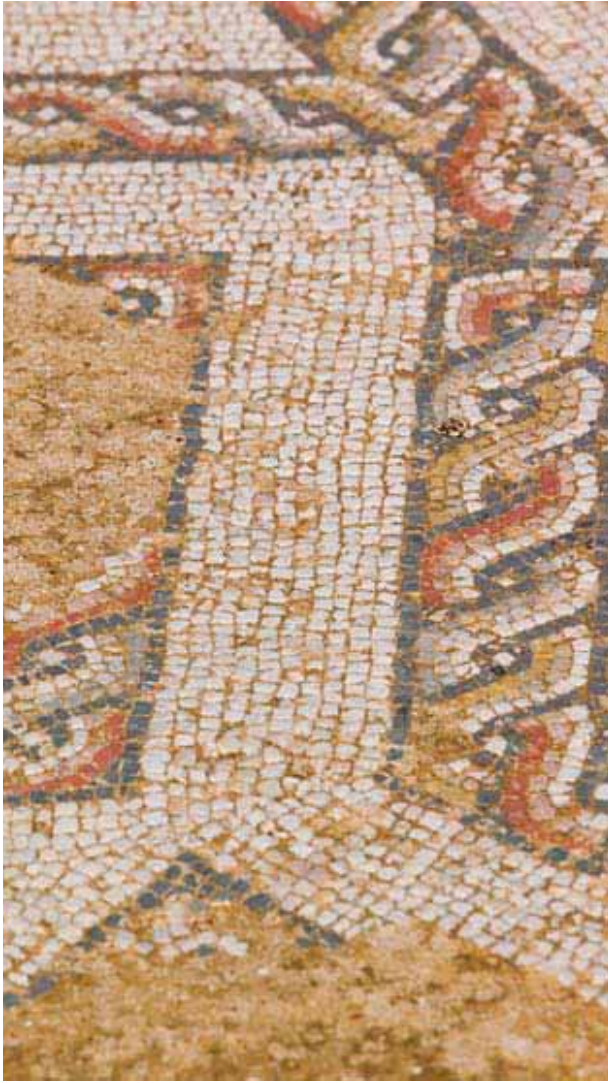
The Parish Church (16th and 17th-centuries), surrounded by buildings in the popular style, commands a delightful view from the top of its bell tower, on a level higher than that of the palace:



Palace of Estoi (St)



Vale do Lobo (HR)

*Milreu Ruins (St)*

it is magnificent when the groves of almond trees all around are in blossom.

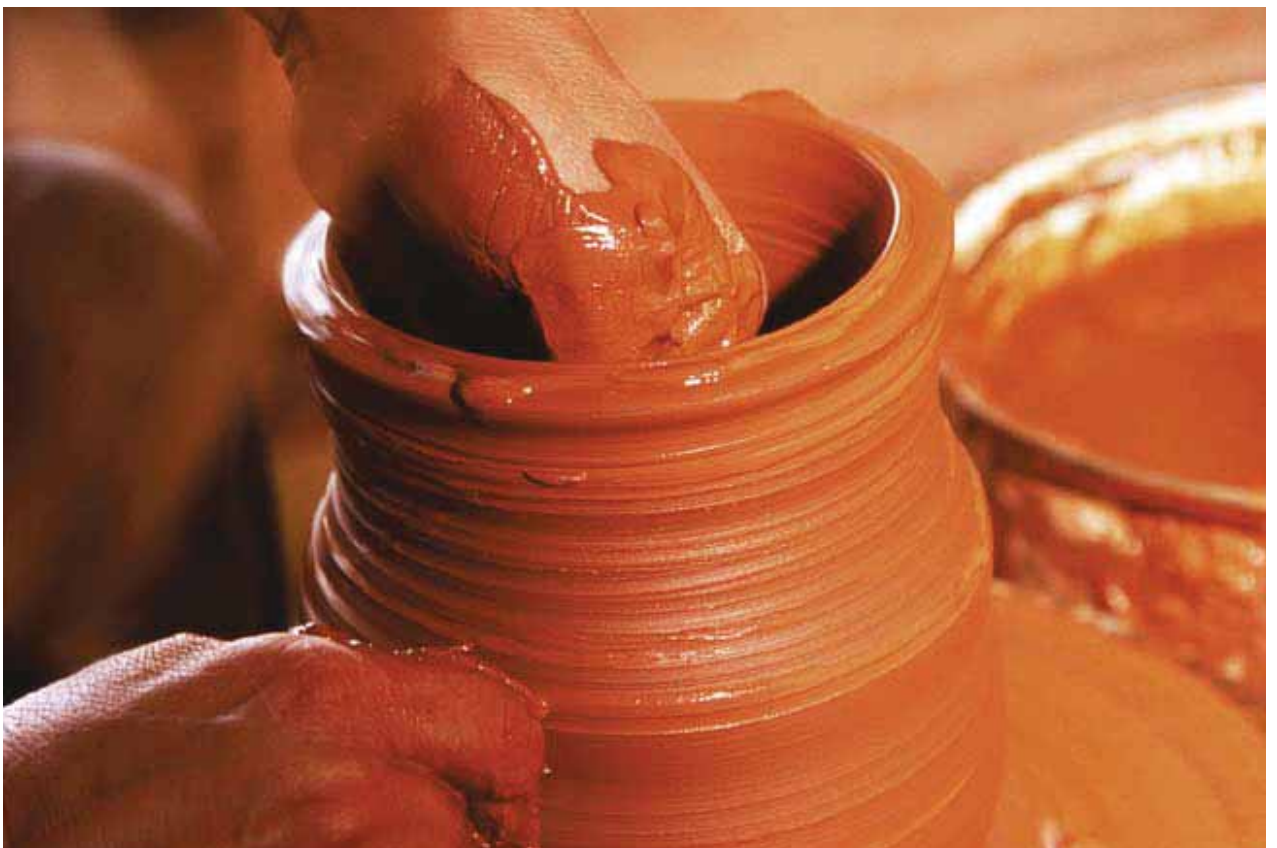
The tradition of the Festa da Pinha (festival of the pine cone) in May, which began in the era of the muleteers, includes an interesting ritual. The carts and horses are decorated, and the procession goes from the village to the Ludo pine forest, near the coast.

There, large bonfires are lit and bunches of perfumed rosemary are burnt. Around them, there is a picnic with a lively, popular ball.

One kilometre away are the Milreu Ruins, (2nd-century A.D.), the remains of a grand Roman patrician's villa, where we can find baths with colourful mosaics and the ruins of a 4th-century Christian basilica, built on a Roman temple. Full information about the complex can be found in an Interpretation Centre.

The road to Moncarapacho is next to the church square in Estoi, and it is only 9 km away.

There are pomegranate hedges to be seen as far as Moncarapacho Pottery, a family-run craft business, producing traditional local pieces. This is an ideal place to find a souvenir of the Algarve.

*Pottery (St)*



Main Church of Mocarapacho (St)

There are a number of 19th-century and early 20th-century houses in the village; and the main church, dating back to the 15th-century, is an enlargement of the original Gothic chapel. The Parish Museum, adjoining the Chapel of Espírito Santo (Holy Spirit), contains a valuable collection of religious imagery from the 16th to 18th-centuries, the main attraction being a 17th-century 45-piece Neapolitan nativity set, in addition to an interesting collection of archaeological items and pieces of local ethnography.

It is only 6 km to the top of Cerro de São Miguel (Barranco de São Miguel), 411 metres above sea level, from where one of the most beautiful views in the Algarve can be seen.

Passing quickly through Quelfes, we can enjoy the green of the fig trees and the vines growing around the village where, in the streets around the church, houses with whitewashed walls and decorated chimneys can still be seen. Nearby



Moncarapacho Parish Museum (St)

there is a bridge of Roman origin, which has been rebuilt a number of times. In 1808, it was the site where Napoleonic troops were defeated in a battle which led to an uprising throughout the Algarve.

One of the most attractive cities that can be seen from the top of the Cerro de São Miguel is Olhão, with houses with rooftop terraces and minarets, a patchwork of white cubes which earned it the epithet of the cubist city.

Olhão is not a place for a rushed visit. You will need to have time to stroll through the alleys, and the labyrinth of lanes and little streets discovering interesting corners.

The origin of the name “Olhão” goes back to the 15th and 16th-centuries. In “Logar de Olhão”, as it was known, there was an abundant water supply, which attracted the fishermen who settled there. The writer Raul Brandão described it as ‘a city ingrained with salt and with sun.’

The visit to the city of the sea should end on the waterfront avenue near the ria, an area, refreshed by gardens and café terraces, with one of its highlights being the colourful atmosphere



Olhão (St)



Main Church of Olhão (St)

of the Municipal Market which fulfils its traditional function by day and then, at night, becomes the setting for the lively nightlife. It is a display of colours, smells and tastes, a delight for the senses.

Near the old city centre, the Main Church, dating back to 1695, bears an inscription on its façade: *"À custa dos homens do mar deste povo se fez este templo em que só haviam umas palhotas"* ("At the expense of the fishermen of this town, this church was built in the place where there were only some thatched huts"). It was the same fishermen who, in the 17th-century, built the first brickwork building, the Chapel of Nossa Senhora da Soledade.

From the tower of the Main Church, there is an impressive panorama over the traditional houses of Olhão: cubes piled on top of each other, terraces used to dry fish, viewing points for watching the sea. In other streets and avenues, grand façades are embellished with wall tiles, verandas and wrought ironwork.

Throughout the city, sometimes in a simple restaurant or a *"casa de petiscos"* (a place for trying traditional appetizers), dishes representing traditional cuisine will be brought to your table, prepared in a simple way, but with an unforgettable flavour.

All types of seafood play a part in the gastronomy of Olhão: *xarém com conquilhas* (maize porridge



Olhão (PR)



Shellfish (HR)



Birds (St)



Tide mill (HS)

with baby clams), stuffed squid Olhão style, stews made with dogfish or eel, rice with razor clams, cuttlefish with broad beans, and the famous *cataplana* in many versions; this is the food of fishermen and prepared with expertise.

Shellfish is so important in this part of the world that, every year in August, it is honoured with its own festival.

The desserts are also a temptation: *bolachas bêbedas*, made with brandy; stuffed figs, fig cake, *empanadilhas* (stuffed pastries) and small pies made with orange and almond. These are all a good way to round off a delicious meal.

Now it is time to discover the Ria Formosa Nature Park. We set off down a track from where we can see migratory birds, and plants growing in dry or marshy soil.

A tidal mill hums its liquid songs as the tide comes in or goes out.

The chalet of the painter João Lúcio, surrounded by a mysterious pine forest, displays an esoteric architectural style and one that is full of symbolism. Inside, there is a play area for children.

The Ria Formosa Nature Park covers an area of some 17,000 hectares, from Cacela Velha to Ancão, and provides an opportunity to discover the wonderful world of the fauna and flora of this part of the Algarve coast. The Information and Interpretation Centre in Quinta de Marim, 1 km from Olhão, has a museum and exhibitions that are well worth visiting.

Having returned to Faro, either by boat or by road on the EN 125, there is plenty to sample from the capital's cuisine: delicious molluscs – mussels and cockles – followed by a traditional fish soup, tasty rice with razor clams or, as an alternative, monkfish or shellfish *cataplana*, or baby cuttlefish fried in its own ink. These are some of the most popular dishes.

There is still time to immerse ourselves in the lively nightlife of Faro, where the students from the University of Algarve lead the way as far as entertainment goes, alongside a huge range of cultural activities.





tours beyond the central Algarve

This is the Algarve over which the sun makes its great journey across the sky. We rise with the sun where it is a red ball somewhere over Andalusia, and we end with it as it disappears into the infinity of the ocean. Between the rising and setting, we will go on an adventure to the west, following the tourist routes on the land.

We will venture onto routes where the hill breezes in the Serra make the cistus, heather and strawberry trees dance, and we will dance with them as we wind our way along the roads of this other Algarve, from Castro Marim to São Brás.

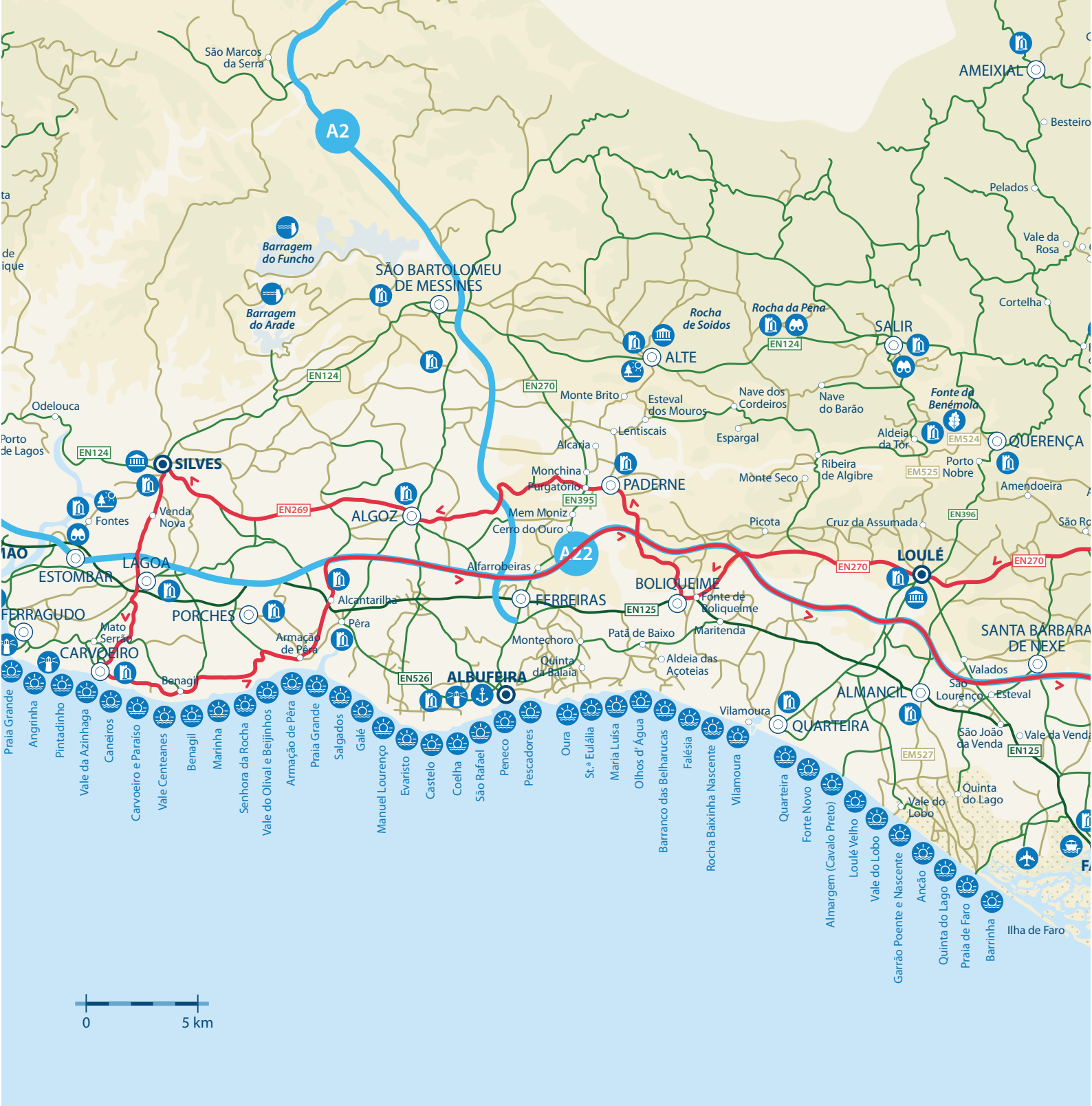
We will be amazed by the unusual precipices right next to the roads, which disappear into the blue distance.

We will yield to the delights of the Mediterranean landscape between Loulé, Paderne and Silves, an Algarve of whitewashed houses and ornate chimneys, through which the sun shines with difficulty, and castles which bear witness to the beginning of the adventure.

We will go back down to the coastal strip, but be still high up, with the cliffs at our feet and toy houses the size of your hand in the village of Carvoeiro. We will be dazzled by the fine, white sand and might even have a dip before returning through the Barrocal and soaking in the cosmopolitan life of the biggest city.

We shall get lost in the labyrinth of Olhão and wander through the channels and islands of the Ria Formosa, with its palette of blues in which we can discover a bird from Africa.

Finally, we shall visit the thousand churches in Tavira, go up and down the rocky slopes of this city on the Gilão River, before returning home to rest our gaze once again on the eastern side of paradise, from the other side of the Guadiana.



tours beyond the central Algarve


SUMMARY OF THE TOUR

Vila Real de Santo António > Castro Marim > Santa Catarina da Fonte do Bispo >
 São Brás de Alportel > Loulé > Boliqueime > Paderne > Silves > Lagoa > Carvoeiro >
 Alcantarilha > Estoi > Faro > Olhão > Tavira > Cacela Velha > Vila Real de Santo António



KEY TO THE MAP

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---------|---|--------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---|----------------|
|  | Airport |  | Ferry Boat Harbour |  | Monument |  | Nature Reserve |
|  | Beach |  | Lighthouse |  | Museum |  | Pier |
|  | Dam |  | Marina |  | Natural Recreation and Leisure Area |  | Viewing Point |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------|---|----------------------|---|-------------------|---|----------------|
|  | Motorway |  | EN 125 National Road |  | Tour |  | Starting Point |
|  | National Road |  | Municipal Road |  | Direction of Tour |  | Protected Area |

This tour beyond the Central Algarve contains ideas for exploring routes on the coast and in the hills in other parts of the Algarve. By the end, we will have put together a unique album of photographs.

On the coast, the landscape changes from the long beaches of the eastern Algarve, with gentle waters, to sheer cliffs and surprising small beaches in the western Algarve. In the cities, what stands out are the Islamic heritage of Silves, the elegance of São Brás de Alportel, the vivaciousness of Loulé, the dominance of Faro and the gracefulness of Tavira.

Before setting off on our journey of discovery, it would be good to have a closer look at Vila Real de Santo António, the starting point for this tour.

Founded in 1774, in the middle of the Enlightenment period, it is a replica of the street layout



Marquês de Pombal Square (PR)



António Aleixo Cultural Centre (St)

of central Lisbon after the 1755 earthquake, with its geometrical plan of streets converging on the well-known square Praça Marquês de Pombal. The central area is a shopper's paradise, with hundreds of shops and outdoor seating areas. The old market is now the António Aleixo Cultural Centre, with former fish, fruit and vegetable stalls replaced by cultural venues.

The city has been always associated with fishing; ferries cross the river to the neighbouring Spanish town of Ayamonte on the opposite bank, while other boats go up and down the Guadiana River; the marina gives a cosmopolitan air to the Avenida da República, the charming waterfront avenue.

The lighthouse watches over the coast and the whole city. From the top, there is a commanding view over the mouth of the Guadiana river; the deep green of the pine forest, planted there to protect the dunes framing the beautiful bay of Monte Gordo; and beaches as far as the eye can see, lapped by the waves of the Atlantic Ocean, which is warm and gentle here.

To the north, the Nature Reserve of Castro Marim and Vila Real de Santo António Salt Marsh is a magnificent place, which is home to unique flora and many species of birds. The smell of the sea mingles with the perfume of the woodland



The Medieval Days of Castro Marim (RTA)

and the marsh, drenched by the coming and going of the tide, and pulsating with life: fish, molluscs and crustaceans find an ideal habitat here.

The city is also proud of its rich cuisine with famous dishes made from tuna, a long-established tradition. To this, we can add cockles, the delicious Monte Gordo prawns, grilled dishes and fresh seafood salads.

We leave the city to the north in the direction of Castro Marim (IC 27), winding between salt pans used for traditional salt production, their white expanse reflecting the sunlight. On the horizon, you can see the birds flying and the calm waters of the Guadiana.

Castro Marim is one of the oldest places in the Algarve, and it was an important centre of Arab power until 1242. The town was originally closer to the sea, and was an island surrounded by shallow waters, an important port and the starting point for the Roman road which ran parallel to the Guadiana River, passing through Alcoutim, Mértola and Beja, and going as far as Lisbon.

Its strategic position on the border with the Kingdom of Castile and the need to repel the Moorish attacks from North Africa were the reasons for building the castle, the Fort of São Sebastião and the walls. The battlements command an excellent view over the whole of the surrounding area. With such a weight of history, it is easy to understand why the legends of Moorish princesses and chivalrous knights, who wanted to rescue them from their enchantments, became so deeply rooted in the popular imagination.

It is not difficult to find genuine handicraft to delight people who appreciate popular art: wooden miniatures, baskets made from canes, and tapestry, unique and original items.

The Medieval Days of Castro Marim is an interesting festival, held annually in August, which brings an eye-catching parade onto the streets, with all the inhabitants participating in period costume.

Salt pans (PR)



We suggest that you head for the central Algarve on the Via do Infante (A 22) motorway, with the junction only a few hundred metres away. After enjoying the historical heritage, the modern facilities provide a pleasant and stimulating contrast.

At the different stopping areas on the motorway, you can enjoy a surprisingly varied panorama.

To the south up to the coast, you can see fishing villages and coastal cities against the blue backdrop of the sea. To the north, there are the lands of the *Barrocal*, planted with carob trees or groves of almond trees.

It is only 20 km to the Tavira junction, and then we head towards São Brás de Alportel on the EN 270.

After 7 km, we arrive in Santa Catarina da Fonte do Bispo, a village that was part of the smugglers' route until the end of the 19th-century. It links the Atlantic coast, via Monchique, and the border on the Guadiana River. The village is surrounded by groves of orange and lemon trees. The clay from its calcareous soil is used to make paving tiles, wall tiles, bricks (solid bricks) and Moorish roof tiles. With advance booking, the Associação de Telheiros Artesanais (The Association of Traditional Tile Makers) organises visits to see the tile makers at work, performing a centuries-old craft.

Working with clay is a complex business. Before the potter's wheel can start to turn, the clay is extracted from under the ground and the impurities are removed; a small piece of wood or a stone would be enough to break the pieces. The ovens are heated with holm-oak wood beforehand, and then with almond shells, which leave an earthy smell in the air. After being burnished, the final product is coated with whitewash to make it lighter and tougher.

Heading west, it is only 9 km to São Brás de Alportel.

Xanabus or *Xanabras* – is the heart of the cork industry, the meeting point between the roads linking Loulé to Tavira and Faro to Almodôvar (Alentejo), since the time of the Romans. The road, which dates back to Roman times, is still visible today.

Cork oaks, eucalyptus, pine and strawberry trees provide shade on the hills around the town.

São Brás de Alportel (St)



Ethnographic Museum of Algarve Costume (St)



The Episcopal Garden, also known as Verbena Garden, with its beautiful bandstand, can also be visited.

Then we should head for the Ethnographic Museum of Algarve Costumes, a part of the Casa da Cultura António Bentes (House of Culture) located in a Moorish-inspired mansion. Here, there is an interesting collection of toys and traditional garments, worn by the people of the Algarve in former times.

The names of the villages in this municipality are very interesting. Tareja (Teresa), Desbarato (selling at a very low price), Tesoureiro (Treasurer), Parises (from Parisii, a people of Celtic Gaul), Mealhas (Coins) or Mesquita (Mosque) are just a few examples. In almost all of them, the craft-people stick to tradition. Rag rugs, wicker and cane baskets, brooms and brushes, tin objects, wrought ironwork, and wooden spoons are all produced alongside honey, cheeses, sausages, *medronho* brandy and regional sweets.

The cuisine is rich and varied, with excellent game dishes; and to finish off, desserts, among which the *morgado serrano* (a traditional cake made from almonds or fig, eggs and Malabar gourd preserve) is the highlight.

Continuing west on the same road, we head for Loulé. This was an important Arab urban centre until 1249. The creation of the free market in 1291 turned Loulé into a major centre in the medieval Algarve.

The city walls of Arab origin breathe history; culture is the focus at the Convent of Espírito Santo (Holy Spirit). It is during the three days of intense merry-making at carnival time in February that Loulé becomes one of the main entertainment venues in the Algarve.

As we leave the city on the EN 270 towards Boliqueime, the Chapel of the Mãe Soberana, (Sovereign Mother) can be seen on the left on a hill, a viewing point over the city, the countryside and the sea. This is a 16th-century Renaissance monument, dedicated to Nossa Senhora da Piedade (Our Lady of Piety), the patron saint of Loulé. The legends about the Sovereign Mother are several hundred years old.

Sovereign Mother (St)



One of them is about the building of the church, which was initially planned to be near a cave. The workers left their tools at the site and the next day, without knowing how, they found them on the top of the hill; and so they thought that the Saint did not want her church to be hidden in a hollow. The little chapel was therefore built on the hill which can be seen from wherever you are in Loulé. The procession, held in her honour at Easter time, is one of the most impressive and the best attended in the south of Portugal.

Thousands of people waving cloths and shouting praises accompany the litter with the statue of the Virgin, as it is carried by bearers running up the steep ascent to the sanctuary.

Still on the EN 270, the next stop is Boliqueime, located on a hillside and surrounded by other hills except on the southern side.

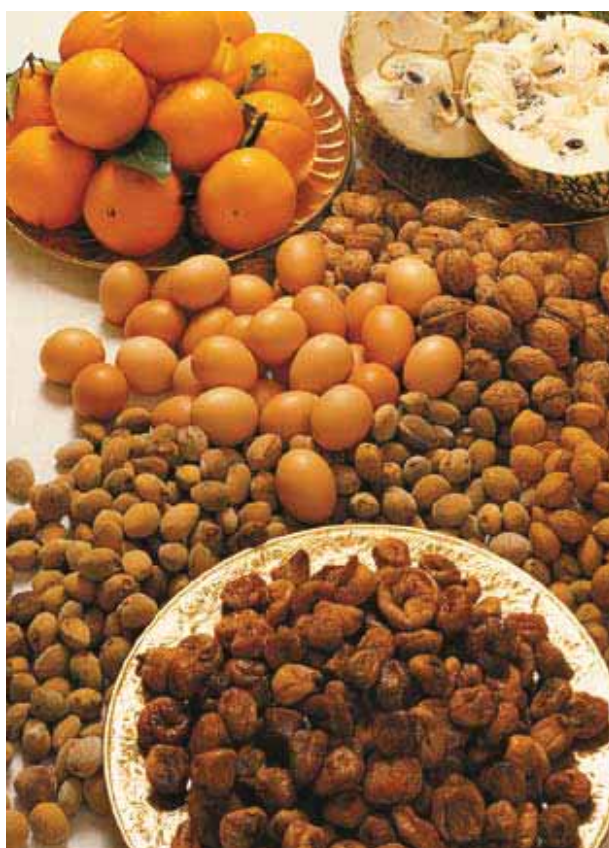
The name of the town, derived from the Italian meaning “eyes of water” (i.e. underground springs), is attributed to the Genoese, Sicilians and Venetians who fished for tuna and whales off the Algarve coast and discovered this place with abundant supplies of potable water.

The first settlement was closer to the sea, probably at the present-day beach of Olhos de Água. The movement of the coastline and earthquakes caused the inhabitants to move away on two occasions until they came to its present location. Old Boliqueime (1 km to the south) was destroyed by the 1755 earthquake. The soil was so rich that King John I (João I) had the first sugar cane planting trials carried out here. In the area, there is still an important centre for processing carob, or “St John’s Bread”. It was given this name because St John the Baptist fed himself on it in the desert, which shows the high energy value of the fruit. During the process of removing the pod and the preparation, it releases a sweet unmistakable aroma. On the banks of the Algibre River, reeds are harvested and used for basket making which is a long-standing tradition; it was in baskets of different kinds that the dried fruits were shipped to Flanders.

It is only a short distance to the estate of Quarteira’s famous nobleman, which was donated in 1297



Main Church of Boliqueime (PR)



Frutos secos (RTA)



Paderne Castle (St)

It is one of the oldest castles in the Algarve and features on the Portuguese flag. It is thought that the original fortress was built by the Lusitanians. A Lusitanian hill fort, a Roman fort, an Arab military fortress, a Christian castle: Paderne is rich in history.

There is a short walk around the castle, passing over a medieval bridge, with a stretch of the old stone road leading to a watermill with its weir.

We leave Paderne for Silves on Regional Road 269, which takes us to Silves via Algoz.

Overlooking the Arade River, the former Islamic capital, famous for being so culturally and commercially advanced, still impresses people today with its proud castle dominating the landscape. Built from sandstone, with its reddish tone and surrounded by the old Silves cathedral and white houses, it appears unchanged to us today, despite the passage of time.

The Roman bridge arches gracefully over the river, and we climb up through the narrow lanes to the Largo do Município, where you can see a pillory, the city gates and the town hall. Nearby, on the other side of the tower of the city gates

by King Denis to Martim Marcham. This is now the tourist complex of Vilamoura.

You need to be careful not to miss the road from Boliqueime to Paderne, along the EN 270. The route takes us up into the hills, where the landscape more than makes up for the rather sharp bends on the road.

Paderne sits on a gentle hill. Its old white houses stand silhouetted against the backdrop of the surrounding countryside. In the main street, there is an interesting decorated chimney dating back to the 18th-century. Located on a hill nearby, the castle is quite unusual; it is not made from stone, but of rammed earth or adobe, an Arab military construction technique, with a mixture of sand and lime which, according to Ataíde de Oliveira, the first Algarve archaeologist, is *“so strong and tough that it exceeds stone walls in strength”*.



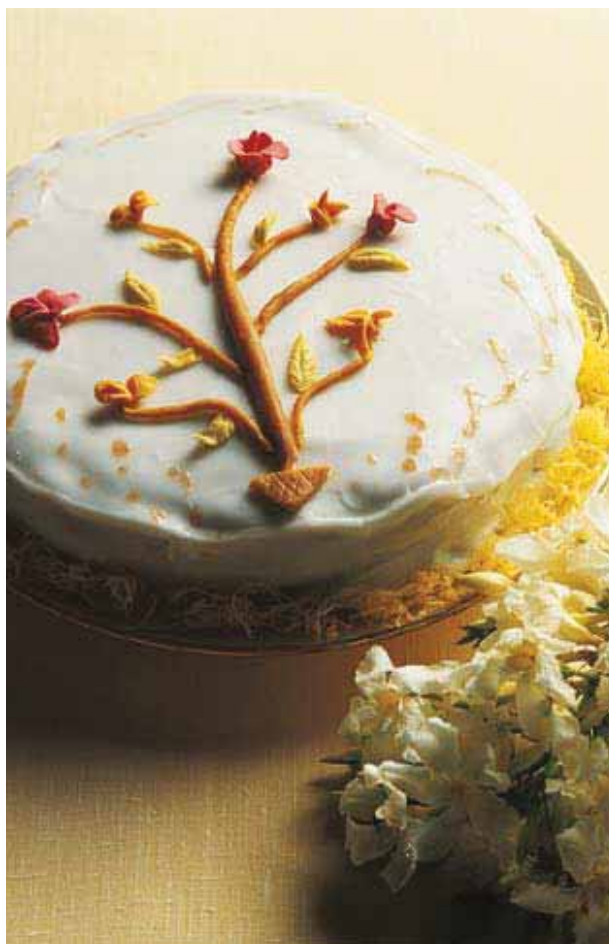
Main Church of Paderne (St)

is the Municipal Archaeological Museum that houses one of the most important 12th-century cistern wells in the whole of Al-Andaluz. Another important place to visit is the old see.

Inside the castle, there is a garden and archaeological ruins, and you can climb up on the walls for the best view over the city.

The traditional cuisine is a synthesis of produce from the sea and the land, and the best-known desserts include *bolo real* (a cake made with crystallized fruits, nuts and a splash of port wine), the *Silves morgado*, sweets made from eggs and *meias luas* (crescent-shaped cakes filled with a mixture of almonds and egg yolks). This is a land of oranges, and there is nothing better than buying sweet and juicy oranges in the lively local market where the local accent echoes, sweet and strange, in quite a different way from other places in the Algarve.

It is in Silves that the beautiful legend of the almond trees makes most sense.



Silves morgado (RTA)



Almond Blossom (RTA)

The legend tells the story of a Moorish prince from the Al-Gharb region, who fell in love with Gilda, the daughter of a grand lord from the north, whom he had defeated in combat; and she returned his love.

When she arrived in his new kingdom, the princess became sadder and sadder every day. The princess suffered, the young Moor also suffered from seeing her looking sad, and the people suffered from seeing their ruler and his princess suffering. Nobody managed to find a cure for such total desolation.

Then, the young prince had the idea of planting thousands of almond trees to cover the hills and valleys with tiny white petals when they were in blossom. One fine winter's day, the castle awoke to see a marvellous blanket of "snow" covering the countryside all around.

According to the legend, Gilda was immediately cured as she looked out on the beautiful landscape and, from then on, lived happily in the hot land of Al-Gharb. Since that time, the miracle of almond trees in flower is repeated every winter.

Convent of Espírito Santo (St)



The legend of the almond trees has inspired many poets and writers. One such poet is José Carlos Ary dos Santos, who wrote *The Romance of the Princess from the Land of Ice* who pined away in the Lands of the Moors 'in praise of the imagination of a people who are born, live and die between the sky and the water'.

Here are some extracts from this beautiful poem, inspired by the legend of the almond trees:

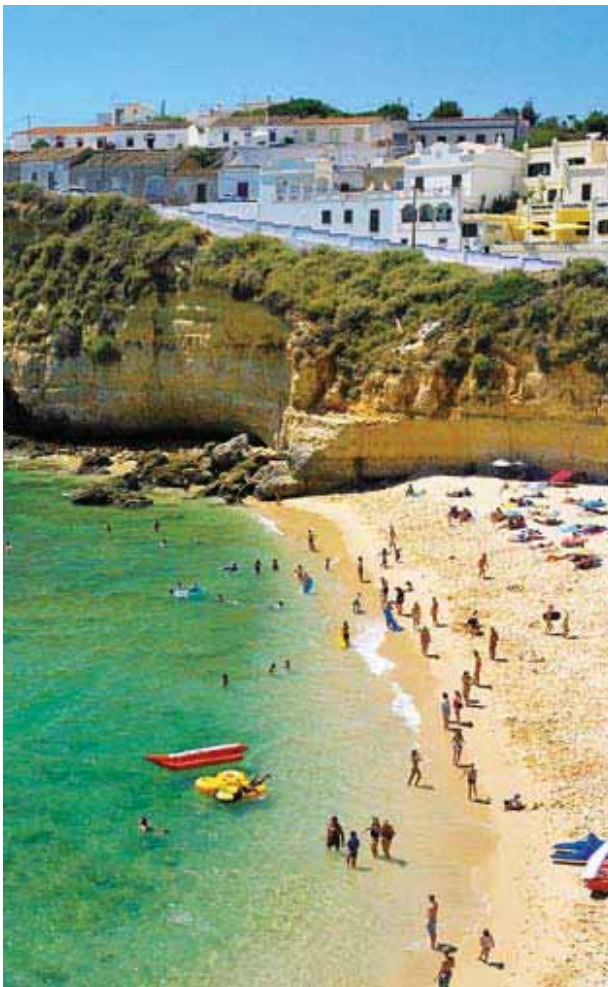
(...) *The Princess:*
Oh, doors of my silence,
Oh, windows of my voice,
Oh, crystals of my absence,
From the land of my forefathers
Who collapsed in sobs
With their tousled hair.

(...) *The King:*
Tell me magi, oracles
Dwarves, goblins, prophets
Soothsayers and jesters
Witches seers poets
How should I dry the tears
Of those river eyes?
How should I silence the cries
Of that summer mouth?
How should I break the spell
That, in an afternoon of stone,
Carved by sadness,
Sealed, with fingers of lead,
The smile of the princess
Who was pining for snow
At the very end of the earth?

Lulled by the lines of Ary dos Santos, we head for Lagoa, called Abenabece during the Arab period because of the nearby lake. Protected from the northeast by the uplands of the Serra de Monchique and from the northwest by the Caldeirão, Lagoa enjoys a mild climate with gentle winters and cool summers, ideal for playing golf, horse riding, cycling or walking.

The Convent of Espírito Santo (Holy Spirit), which has been turned into an art gallery, has a foundling wheel, where abandoned children were placed anonymously in the past. A menhir, which was found in the parish, stands in the gardens. On the outskirts of the town, in Porches,

Carvoeiro (HR)



many potters came together, a tradition that continues to this day.

Only five kilometres from Lagoa is Carvoeiro, with its picturesque beach and houses on the surrounding hillsides, overlooking the beach full of the traditional fishing boats. 800 metres away are the extraordinary rock formations at Algar Seco, sculpted by the wind and the sea into fantastic shapes, and the romantic Varanda dos Namorados (Lovers' Terrace). Carvoeiro is the place to start a fascinating boat trip through the 18 caves in these cliffs, which reveal secret passages to the sea. The strategic importance of Carvoeiro is such that it appears on what is regarded as the first map printed in Portugal, based on another which was published in Rome in 1561.

A nice surprise is the beach at Carvalho, an unusual place with access hidden between the rocks.

Once there, the clear crystalline water along the beach, magically framed by cliffs, more than compensates for the difficulty of getting there.

From Carvoeiro, on the road along the cliff top, which goes through Benagil, we get to Armação de Pêra where there was a trap for catching sardines and tuna. It is a kind of net, called an "armação", from which the place gets its name. What was once a small fishing village, next to a huge beach with calm blue water lapping the fine sands, tinged with gold by the sun, is today a cosmopolitan town.

This stretch of rugged coast is unrivalled in the rest of the Algarve. One of the highlights is the beautiful scenery near the Chapel of Nossa Senhora da Rocha, which was once a defensive bulwark against pirate attacks, and a refuge for those who worked on the sea and used it to defend themselves from pillage. Down below is the idyllic beach of Senhora da Rocha. It is cradled by a wide bay stretching from the Ponta da Galé to this point, with beautiful beaches such as Pescadores (Albufeira) Praia Grande and Beijinhos.

We now take the EN 125, heading for Alcantarilha, a village built on a hill and dominated by the church.



Carvalho (HR)



Chapel of Nossa Senhora da Rocha (HR)



Main Church of Olhão (St)

Convent of Nossa Senhora da Assunção (Our Lady of the Assumption), the Arco do Repouso (Gate of Rest) – the gate where King Afonso III rested – and the town hall and episcopal seminary. The Rua de Santo António and nearby area which is for pedestrian access only, combine tradition with the sophistication of modern shops.

We return to the EN 125 to go to Olhão, maybe to join in the Shellfish Festival in August, or walk in the Jardim dos Pescadores park on the waterfront, or stroll around the labyrinth of lanes and alleys, all built in the “southern” style.

The colourful atmosphere of the market lasts throughout the day.

In the morning, there is freshly-caught fish for sale; in the afternoon, the outdoor seating areas are a popular meeting place; and in the evenings, there is an area of bars right next to the river. This is a display of colours, smells and flavours – a delight for the senses.

The Main Church, built in 1695, has an inscription that states *“À custa dos homens do mar deste povo se fez este templo em que só haviam umas palhotas”* (At the expense of the fishermen of

So that the tour does not continue for too long, we can travel on the Via do Infante motorway (A 22) and, in a short time, we are close to Faro. On leaving the motorway, it is only 2 km to Estoi, where there is a Roman manor house and a 3rd-century temple to be discovered in the Milreu Ruins. The villa was embellished with mosaics representing marine life. In the baths, there are fish depicted which are exaggeratedly fat. This was intentional because when seen through the water they not only appear to be moving but their size returns to normal because of an optical illusion.

In the Welcome and Interpretation Centre, there is information about the whole complex.

We now approach Faro, the capital of the Algarve, through fertile and flowery fields. There are many treasures in *Faro*, which require plenty of time to appreciate fully.

The beauty of the old city is indisputable: the historical centre includes the cathedral, the



Faro city walls (St)

this people, this church was built, where once there were only a few thatched huts).

Nearby is the “Compromisso Marítimo”, currently the City Museum, founded in the 18th-century with its distinctive roofs with the chapel cupola in the middle. From the church tower, there is an impressive panoramic view of the traditional buildings of Olhão, the “cubist town”: houses with roof terraces instead of roofs give the impression of cubes piled on top of each other.

All types of seafood feature in the gastronomy of Olhão, including with “*xarém* with baby clams” (maize porridge with baby clams), stuffed squid cooked in Olhão style, and stews made with dogfish or eel. Other surprises include rice with razor clams or cuttlefish with broad beans.

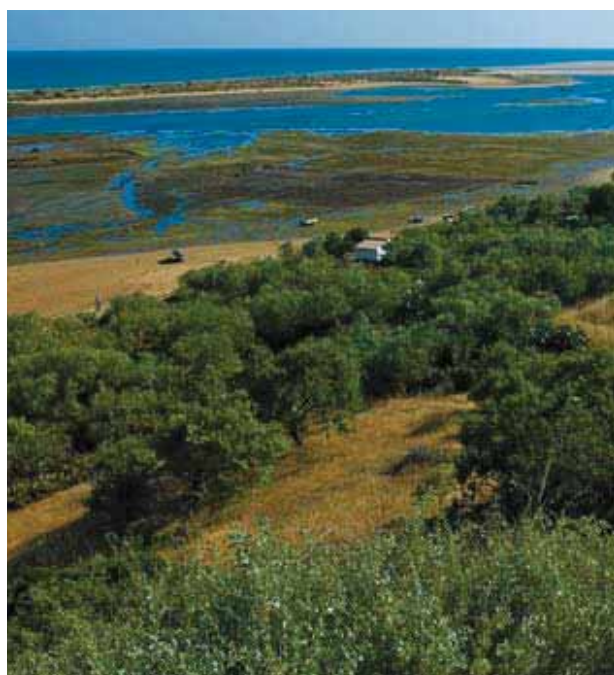
On the way to Tavira, we cannot forget a visit to the Ria Formosa Nature Park, which has its headquarters less than 2 km from the city. We set off along a track that allows us to see migratory birds and the adaptation of plants to different habitats. The tidal mill has been restored and the murmur of the waves rivals the singing of the birds.

Regular boat crossings or hired boats take us to the islands of Culatra, Armona and Farol, in search of the wonders of the Ria Formosa.

Olhão is a place of many legends. The story of Floripes, a very beautiful but enchanted Moorish



Armona island (HR)



Cacela Velha (LC)

maiden, is an example of the power that the Ria Formosa exerts over the people of Olhão. The oldest members of the community say that, on certain nights, you can hear her song of lament, begging for the spell to be broken, promising happiness and riches in return.

The difficulty is in the stringent tests for such an endeavour: walking with a lit candle to one of the islands and back, at low tide. If the candle went out during the crossing, the adventurer would be swallowed up by the waves. Fishermen continue to fear the calls of Floripes, but there are very few who dare to spend the night in this place of apparitions where they fear the “callings”.

We are already on the way back to the eastern Algarve. We will stay in the coastal area of the



Tavira (LC)

Ria Formosa that forms small islands of sand and many other idyllic beaches like Fuseta and Cabanas, from Faro to Cacela Velha.

We arrive in Tavira to admire the Gilão River, which reflects the decorated city. The river divides the city into two parts, which are joined by a fine Roman bridge made up of seven arches.

There are beautiful streets in Tavira, and a historical centre where the narrow lanes rise up towards the castle.

Later, Tavira became a Moorish town. The many church towers were once minarets of mosques. We recommend that you visit the Palácio da Galeria exhibition centre, the castle and one of the many churches that Tavira has to offer. For this, it is worth taking a ride in the electrical mini-train and following the historical heritage route. You can also take the train linking the town to Quatro Águas where you can catch a boat to the marvellous Ilha de Tavira, certainly one of the best beaches in the Algarve.

There will still be time to enjoy a fabulous sunset beside the fort in Cacela Velha, a picturesque village at the top of a sandy cliff on the edge of the Ria Formosa.

The village was possibly founded by the Phoenicians around 800 B.C. The Lusitanian tribe of the Cúneos were also living in the region.

In the village, there are fine examples of popular architecture that reveals another, more authentic Algarve. The sea stretches away into the distance, shining brightly as we take our leave at sunset to go in search of some delicious oysters, clams, a nice grilled fish or a tasty plate of sautéed shellfish, before returning to Vila Real de Santo António where this tour beyond the central Algarve ends.



Clams (PR)



tours and trails of the eastern Algarve

We follow the route of Guadiana River in search of ancient secrets, and explore the paradise of the Nature Reserve of Castro Marim and Vila Real de Santo António Salt Marsh and the Ria Formosa Nature Park. This is a tour of warm blue seas, the deep green Serra do Caldeirão uplands, the rugged plateaux in the northeast and sensual curves of dunes on the bay of Monte Gordo.

Tavira is reflected in the waters of the Gilão River, enveloped in the uniquely luminous quality of its fine churches. São Brás de Alportel, refined and serious, commands a magnificent view over the greens of the serra. Alcoutim stands right on the edge of

the Guadiana River, its proximity to the Alentejo influencing its cuisine with aromatic herbs.

We will discover another dimension of time, lilting accents, ancient legends, seas of land in the heart of the Serra and warm waves off the beaches of the bay. There will be irresistible fascinations to be relished: sailing on rivers, discovering the past amongst stone relics, watching the sunset as we savour seafood dishes and get ready for lively and entertaining evenings.

The Tours of the eastern Algarve introduce tempting ways of spending unforgettable holidays.



contents

- 108** | **TUNA TOUR** **+/- 72 km**
 Monte Gordo » Vila Real de Santo António » Castro Marim » Aldeia Nova » Manta Rota » Cacela Velha » Fábrica » Cabanas » Tavira » Ilha de Tavira » Vila Real de Santo António » Monte Gordo
The Tuna Tour will take you to the blue ocean, golden yellow beaches, green pine forests, white houses and salt pans. You will also explore the heart of the Nature Reserve of Castro Marim and Vila Real de Santo António Salt Marsh, home to a many different species of birds.
- 118** | **TOUR OF THE SERRA** **+/- 115 km**
 Tavira » Cachopo » Água dos Fusos » Mealha » Anta das Pedras Altas » Corte João Marques » Ameixial » Besteiros » Catraia » Cortelha » Barranco do Velho » Alportel » São Brás de Alportel » Javali » Pereiro » Foupana » Santo Estevão » Luz de Tavira » Santa Luzia » Tavira
The Tour of the Serra, starting in Tavira, will take you along the south facing slopes of the Serra do Caldeirão, with its olive and almond trees, fig, carob and palm trees. Gentle hills continue right down to the coast. It is an impressive landscape, undulating with deep gorges.
- 128** | **TOUR OF THE GUADIANA** **+/- 163 km**
 Castro Marim » Monte Francisco » Junqueira » Azinhal » Alcaria » Foz de Odeleite » Álamo » Guerreiros do Rio » Alcoutim » Pereiro » Alcarias » Martim Longo » Vaqueiros » Cortelha » Corte do Gago » Santa Rita » Vila Nova de Cacela » Cacela Velha » Castro Marim
The Tour of the Guadiana takes us in search of the secrets of an age-old culture, from the time of Al-Andaluz. We will follow the Guadiana, the great river of the south on which different peoples travelled, through enchanting landscapes where man left his mark in remarkable harmony with nature, but without preventing other species from living here.
- 140** | **TOUR BEYOND THE EASTERN ALGARVE** **+/- 351 km**
 Faro » São Lourenço » Almancil » Quarteira » Vilamoura » Albufeira » Armação de Pêra » Porches » Lagoa » Carvoeiro » Ferragudo » Portimão » Odiáxere » Lagos » Vila do Bispo » Sagres » Carrapateira » Bordeira » Aljezur » Marmeleite » Monchique » Picota » Silves » Faro
The tour beyond the eastern Algarve takes us to places in the western Algarve. It is a tour that gives people who are staying in the east an opportunity to find out about diversity in other parts of the Algarve. On the coast, the long beaches of the eastern Algarve with their gentle waters are replaced by the sheer cliffs of the western Algarve. The undulating hills of the Caldeirão and the plateaux of the northeast stand in stark contrast to the wild garden that is Monchique or the smell of the Atlantic in the Serra de Espinhaço de Cão. In the cities, the Islamic heritage of Silves stands out as well as the strong sense of identity in Portimão, the vivaciousness of Lagos and the dominance of Faro.





tuna tour

From the watery realm of the herons – those slender birds that have become symbols in Castro Marim – to the cosmopolitan oasis of Monte Gordo. From the monuments of Tavira with its 32 churches, to the warm clear waters of Manta Rota. Nowadays, there are few signs of that old trade in the place where men set off to catch tuna: nets and boats cover the calm waters, as if in resignation or maybe by choice. However, there are the sons of brave tuna fishermen. A rare breed, with white hair and large petrified fingers, they now sew the fishing nets by hand. We can also see them, poles in hand, searching for shellfish in the sands of the Cacela peninsula at dawn. At the same time, the grandchildren of the tuna fishermen spread out along the coast, filling the buildings in Monte Gordo and friendly eating-houses in Cabanas and Altura. Later, with the eternal blue of the south in sight, we shall try the produce of the sea, cooked over charcoal. Looking out into the blue, we can discern the glorious feats and the battles of those men from the past, on the tuna tour.



Tavira island (HR)

tuna tour

SUMMARY OF THE TOUR

Monte Gordo > Vila Real de Santo António > Castro Marim > Aldeia Nova > Manta Rota > Cacela Velha > Fábrica > Cabanas > Tavira > Ilha de Tavira > Vila Real de Santo António > Monte Gordo

KEY TO THE MAP



Beach



Lighthouse



Nature Reserve



Dam



Monument



Pier



Ferry Boat Harbour



Museum



Viewing Point



Motorway



Municipal Road



Starting Point



National Road



Tour



Protected Area



EN 125 National Road



Direction of Tour



The Tuna Tour will take you to see the blue of the oceans, the golden yellow of the beaches, the green of the pine forests, the white of the houses and the salt pans.

Monte Gordo is the starting point. Have a look at the wide bay and the immense beach. The colourful boats lined up on the western side of the beach show that tradition is still what it was. Small-scale fishing still continues.

There were already fishermen living here at the beginning of the 18th-century and, apart from Portuguese and Andalusians, there is evidence of people coming from the coasts of France and Catalonia.

At the time of the 1755 earthquake, the Marquês de Pombal wanted to force them to move to the recently constructed Vila Real de Santo António. The fishermen did not like the idea; some went to Andalusia, others got into their



Monte Gordo (HR)



View from the Vila Real de Santo António Lighthouse (St)

boats and went to Meia Praia in Lagos, where the bay and the beach are of similar proportions and some refused to move.

Perhaps it was because of these problems or because of this unequal struggle between the powerful marquis and the modest fishermen, that the habit arose of relieving one's feelings by swearing, in colourful and sometimes unrepeatable language. The people of Monte Gordo are notorious throughout the Algarve for their swearing.

In the 1940s, wealthy Alentejo families began to build houses to spend the "bathing season" here. In the 1960s, with the advent of the tourist industry, one of the first hotels in the region was built here.

We now move on to Vila Real de Santo António on the road that runs alongside the deep green forest of stone pines where a protected species, the chameleon, lives.

On the right, we can see the imposing lighthouse, standing 46 metres tall. Sailors depend on its light at night to know where the sea ends and land begins. By day, the blue bars painted on the tower show them where the coastal area is.

Vila Real de Santo António (PR)



The coast road then turns towards the mouth of the Guadiana River, where you can see the buildings of Ayamonte on the other side, despite the width of the river.

It is now just a short distance to the historical town centre built in the Pombaline style, unique in the Algarve and inspired by the rebuilding of Lisbon after the 1755 earthquake.

The streets, laid out in a grid pattern, converge on the square Praça Marquês de Pombal, which is paved in Portuguese stone, radiating out from the centre. Around the square, are the church, the town hall and the old guardhouse, decorated with masonry work and wrought iron. Built to replace Santo António de Arenilha, which was destroyed by the earthquake, the town came into being on 30 December 1773 to defend the border. In time, it became an important centre for canning and a lively commercial centre.

The inhabitants are well-known as food-lovers. They make dishes with tuna, put shellfish and molluscs to creative use, and have turned the lively shopping district into an almost continuous outdoor seating area.

We will leave the city to the north on the IC 27 towards Castro Marim, passing through the Nature Reserve of Castro Marim and Vila Real de Santo António Salt Marsh, which is home to more than a hundred species of birds. Added to these, there are birds that seek refuge during particular seasons and others that stop here while migrating to the warmth of the south.

In the autumn, you can see the pinkish colour of the flamingos in the marshes, whereas the elegant flight of the resident stork is visible all year round.

The wild ducks seem to respond to some invisible signal as all of a sudden they flap their wings and head south.

Castro Marim has existed for millennia: it was the Roman port of Besarius and the headquarters of the Military Order of Christ in the 14th-century. Since time immemorial, the geometric shapes of the salt pans have been a feature of the salt marshes into which the Guadiana River empties

Castro Marim Salt Marsh (LC)



as it nears the coast. The salt crystals, arranged in piles, shine in the sun. This is a traditional activity, which still continues today. From the battlements of the old castle, there is a view overlooking the river and the reserve, with the cities of Ayamonte and Vila Real de Santo António on the horizon.

At the foot of the walls, an outstanding feature of the traditional architecture is the Main Church dating back to the 18th-century. On the surrounding hills, the Fort of São Sebastião and the Chapel of Santo António can be seen.

The traditional cuisine is based on fish, crustaceans and shellfish. Fish soup, crabs from the salt marsh, *favas sapatadas* (made with broad beans) and fried fish with *açorda* (a Portuguese bread soup with garlic and coriander) are just some of the local specialities.

Items of rustic handicrafts include delightful wooden miniatures, basketwork, bobbin lace and tapestry. A four-day festival, the Medieval Days of Castro Marim, is held every year in August, during which the inhabitants dress up in period clothes. The banquets are especially popular. There is also a market and a colourful parade.

To return to the coast, we take the 125-6 connecting road that winds through the Reserve as far as the EN 125 proper, near Aldeia Nova.

There we head west for about 4 km to the turn-off to Manta Rota.

Between the Guadiana estuary and the Ria Formosa, which starts here, there are 12 km of continuous beach, one of the largest in Europe. This area has the warmest waters in Portugal, as the bay protects the beaches from the ocean currents.

Manta Rota manages to remain a small town where it is nice to live or spend the summer.

A small road near the sea allows us to cover the half a dozen kilometres to Cacela Velha.

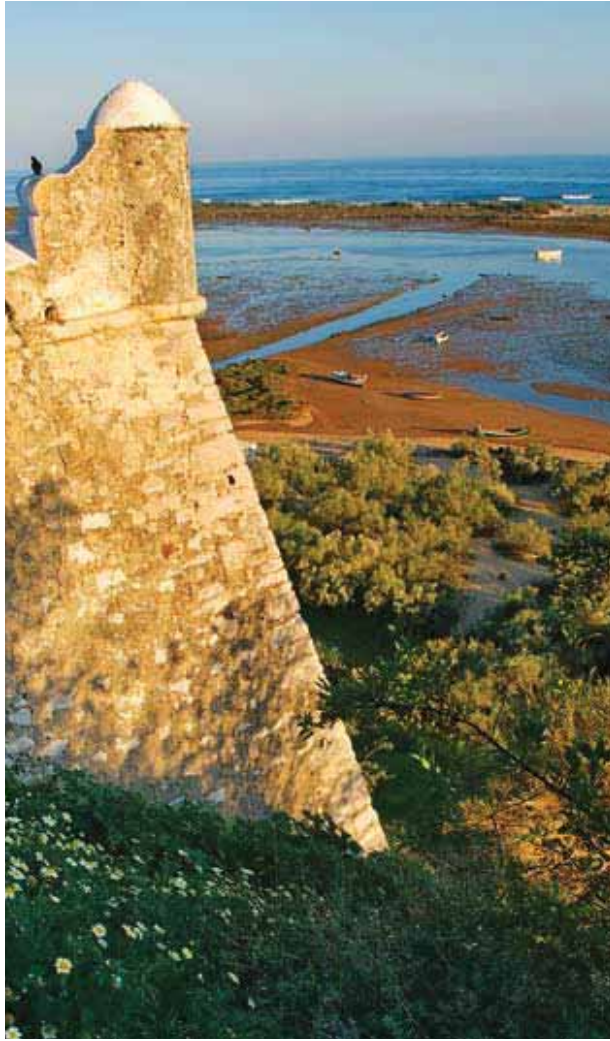
This old village is built around the medieval water wheel, but the view of the Ria from the railing at the fort, built in 1749, makes the visit worthwhile.



Tuna (TV)



Manta Rota (HR)



Cacela Velha (LC)

One of the houses has the following poem by Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen inscribed on its walls:

*"The strongholds were conquered
With their power
the cities of the sea were besieged
For their riches,
But Cacela
was wanted just for its beauty."*

The Ria Formosa Nature Park can be seen from here in all its splendour. On one side is the ocean; on the other, creeks, marshes and islets interspersed with channels and small areas of sea. Between them, there is a barrier of narrow, sandy islands stretching away almost parallel to the coast: Barreta, Culatra, Armona, Tavira and Cabanas. The movement of the sea and the tides contrast with the mirrored water of the Ria bordering the beaches and the dunes heralding *terra firme*.

Cacela is a very old place, which grew on the right bank of the river of the same name, on the top of a cliff.



Armona island (HR)

It was first settled by the Phoenicians around 800 B.C. The Romans, in turn, built fishing facilities, and the Arabs built a fort. Paio Peres Correia, Master of the Order of Santiago, re-conquered it in 1242.

Today, the walls of all the houses are painted with whitewash, with the door and window frames trimmed in blue or grey, creating a harmonious whole that has remained practically intact.

Leaving Cacela, we take the turn-off to Fábrica, which is right beside the water and gets its name from an old fish processing factory, since the Portuguese word “fábrica” means “factory”. The area is rich in breeding grounds for oysters and clams, which can be savoured in nearby restaurants.

Returning to the EN 125, after 8 km we come to Cabanas, hidden in the Ria Formosa, which is worth visiting for its beautiful beach that is only accessible by boat. Initially, there were only fishermen’s huts there, fragile dwellings occupied temporarily during the tuna fishing season. This was replaced by octopus fishing, when Sebastião Viana, a local man, discovered the technique of using the “clay pot”. This is still used along the whole coast.

This is the right place to try out the delicious range of octopus recipes.

On the EN 125 once again, we will drive 5 km to Tavira, the city of 32 churches, which dates



Octopus (LC)



Tavira (PR)



Tavira (PR)



Tavira (HR)

back to prehistoric times as a port for shipping minerals from the north-east of the Algarve and unloading produce from the Mediterranean. During the period of Islamic rule, it was one of the main settlements in the Algarve. It became the main supporting port after the conquest of Ceuta (1415) which led to it being elevated to the status of a city in 1520.

The Gilão River has had a major influence over the city's appearance and identity, and its banks are linked by means of a seven-arched medieval bridge.

There are beautiful streets in Tavira, and an important historical centre with a huge architectural heritage and a wide range of archaeological finds.

An example of this is the famous Tavira Vase, a lavishly decorated piece, probably dating back to the 11th-century.

It is thought that it must have been used for Islamic wedding ceremonies. There are small carvings of a couple, warriors symbolising strength, musicians and animals. Of these, the doves symbolise feeling and the turtle, fidelity.

At that time, the town was known as Alcaria Tabila.

In the surrounding area, there is fine countryside to be enjoyed, but it is certainly in Quatro Águas or on the Ilha de Tavira that the city is in greatest harmony with the sea, with calm and luminous nuances of light. The Ria Formosa is a perfect setting for a city with history and full of stories to be discovered.

We shall return to Vila Real de Santo António on the Via do Infante motorway, taking advantage of the easy road access. To the south, we can see the different blues of the bay of Monte Gordo, with the neat rows of houses close to the beach. To the north, the undulating hills of the *Barrocal* stand out on the horizon. The perfume of orange trees in blossom fills the air, with the steeper slopes populated by olive trees and holm oak. Here and there, a splash of colour coming from the limewashed walls of the rural houses makes the green of the cistus even deeper.





tour of the serra

Before the road into the hills of the Serra, two carriages balance as they devour the breeze that resists them. There is just a bit of land and lots of sea to get to Praia do Barril. With Santa Luzia behind us, we can see the golden beach with white spray in the distance, beyond the tree-lined footpath. There is time for a dip in the warm waters there, before immersing ourselves in the heather, strawberry trees and cistus of the Serra, and breathing in carob and lavender fragrances. The Serra also has its people. For decades, they have resisted the call of the sea. Men and women wave when they see a stranger. Let us get closer. They wear waistcoats and aprons, white hair under the brim of their hats and decorative scarves folded in a triangle. They open up their “tasca” (a local eating place) and their lives to us, invite us to eat a partridge soup, tempt us with the age-old pleasures of wild boar, and refuse to let us leave. This is still the Algarve, far, far away from the city of churches that we will also visit on this journey. From up above on the rocky hill, you can see the reddish roofs and the rows of tiles that characterise the city on the Gilão River. Under the clearest skies in Europe, there are secrets to tell, in white and green, and on every kilometre of country road.












Tavira (PR)






tour of the serra

SUMMARY OF THE TOUR

Tavira > Cachopo > Água dos Fusos > Mealha > Anta das Pedras Altas > Corte João Marques > Ameixial > Besteiros > Catraia > Cortelha > Barranco do Velho > Alportel > São Brás de Alportel > Javali > Pereiro > Foupana > Santo Estevão > Luz de Tavira > Santa Luzia > Tavira

KEY TO THE MAP

| | | | | | |
|---|---------|---|------------|---|----------------|
|  | Airport |  | Lighthouse |  | Nature Reserve |
|  | Beach |  | Monument |  | Pier |
|  | Dam |  | Museum |  | Viewing Point |

| | | | | | |
|---|----------------------|---|-------------------|---|----------------|
|  | Motorway |  | Municipal Road |  | Starting Point |
|  | National Road |  | Tour |  | Protected Area |
|  | EN 125 National Road |  | Direction of Tour | | |



The Tour of the Serra, starting in Tavira, will take you along the south-facing slopes of the Serra do Caldeirão, a marvellous landscape with its olive and almond trees, fig, carob and palm trees. Gentle hills continue right down to the coast. It is an impressive, undulating landscape, with deep gorges.

In the villages, there are often parapets, decorated façades at the top of the houses. Some of these hide terraces, where figs are dried and sometimes fish. Others are purely decorative. These parapets are characterised by a love of contrast, lavish decoration and bright colours. The poet Emiliano Costa described the Algarve as a 'surge of waves and sap, blue and green in colour, always resounding in your senses'.

There are also chimneys with round bases or tall and slender like miniature minarets with geometrical patterns.

In Tavira, the Gilão River divides the city into two parts, which are joined by a fine medieval bridge with one end near the town hall, a building with arcades facing the garden and fine bandstand in the middle. The garden runs along the bank of the river as far as the old municipal market, which has been turned into a pleasant shopping centre with little shops selling handicrafts inside and seating areas where it is nice just to linger a bit.



Tavira (PR)



The bandstand in Tavira (PR)

On the other side, there is a row of grand houses with wrought-iron verandas, and the famous "truss" roofs with their four sloping sides. "Tesoura", which also means "scissors", is the popular name for these roofs that are a hallmark of the city.

It is thought that seafarers returning from the Far East invented these roofs. Wanting to show off the fortunes they had made in the spice trade, this different way of building houses ensured the admiration, or even the envy, of their fellow countrymen.

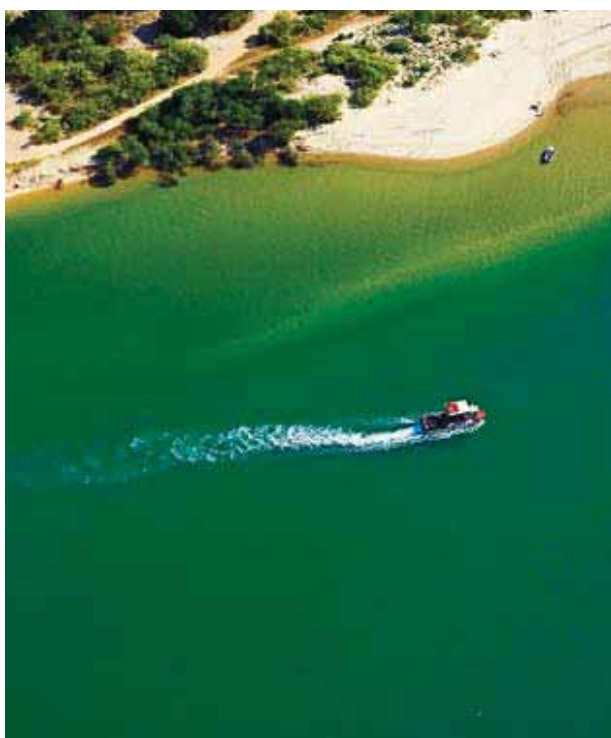
This type of construction became known as a "tesoura" roof because the initial timber frame looked like the open blades of a pair of scissors.

The city has some very beautiful streets and many churches to visit.

Church of Misericórdia (PR)



Tavira (HR)



The tour of the churches and convents of Tavira is, on its own, a wonderful walk. Located in the old town, the Main Church of Santa Maria do Castelo is classified as a National Monument.

Opposite, the Main Church of Santiago is a majestic church with one nave, with a lavish shell medallion on the façade.

The Misericórdia Church, with its imposing façade, is regarded as the best Renaissance building (16th-century) in the Algarve.

There is also the Church of São José do Hospital, formerly known as Albergaria do Espírito Santo, founded in 1425. The church has interesting rococo tiles dating back to 1760.

Located in the historical centre of the city, the former Convent of São Francisco (14th-century) and the 16th-century Convent of Nossa Senhora da Piedade (Our Lady of Piety) are highlights among the city's convents.

Other things not to be missed are the exhibition centre in the Palácio da Galeria (Galeria Palace) and the castle that was once part of the city's defensive system together with the walls surrounding it, which are still visible between the houses and the Porta da Misericórdia (Gate of Mercy).

Since time immemorial, proximity to the Ria Formosa has given Tavira advantages in fishing and as a safe haven.

The city has the only *arraial* in the country. This is a building that provided housing for fishermen and their families, and storage for tuna fishing equipment. The Arraial Ferreira Neto, converted into a hotel, has preserved one of the fishermen's dwellings and made it into a museum of this way of fishing, already known to the Phoenicians, Genoese and Sicilians. The Arabs called the fixed net for catching tuna *almadrava* - *alma* (place) and *darab* (kill), in other words a place of killing. The net or "armação" at Medo das Cascas located on the Tavira coast, was the last to remain operational.

The Chronicle on the Conquest of the Algarve tells that Tavira was taken from the Moors in 1242 by Paio Peres Correia. According to tradition, the attack on the city came about in reprisal

for the slaying of seven of his horsemen while they were hunting in the surrounding area.

No traces of the Roman city of Balsa, which many historians believe was located to the west of Tavira, have survived. What is striking about the city's architecture is its Arab heritage. A number of towers along the city wall, built in that period, still survive. Another example of this heritage is the Church of Santa Maria, which was originally a mosque.

Our first objective on leaving Tavira is to get to Cachopo, on the ER 397. It is time to observe the rural houses with their decorated parapets. The custom of decorating the fronts of houses in the Algarve began in the 1930s, with bright colours made from natural pigments and mixed with whitewash. Red ochre was diluted to achieve a pinkish tone or red bull's blood, simple ochre to obtain a sunny yellow or burned to get an earth tone; black was obtained from smoke and ash, and finally there was the luminous blue of the sea. The decorative motifs were secular: stylised maize cobs, eyes or leaves.

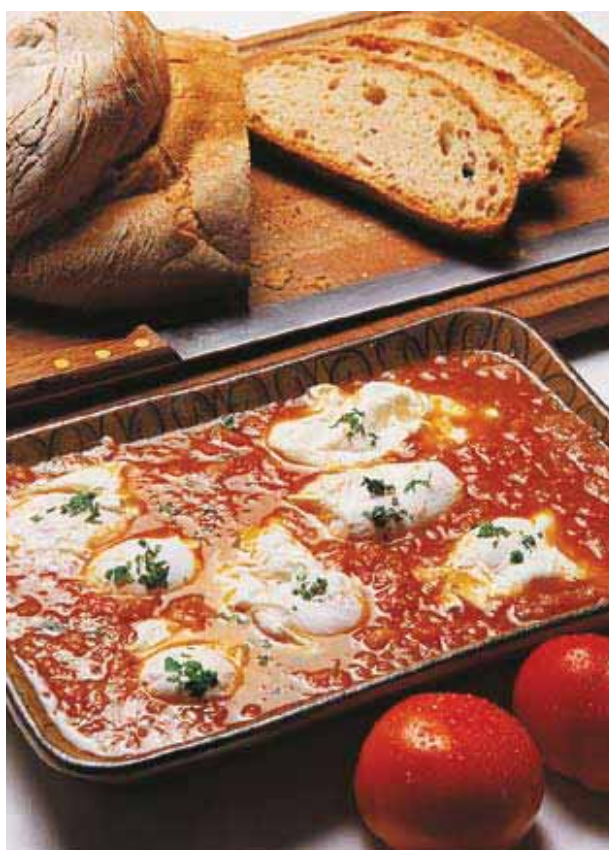
The road follows the undulating hills of the *Barrocal*. The turn-off to Picota takes us to a viewing point.

Palheirinhos is 4 km away and after a further dozen kilometres, we get to Água dos Fusos in the Serra do Caldeirão. The village of Peralva (5km) is the final landmark before Cachopo. At the entrance to this small 16th-century village, we can see the Fonte Férrea, which is surrounded by leafy trees. In the village itself, the Cachopo Museum expressively illustrates the identity of the Serra.

In the traditional weaving workshop *Lançadeira*, everything is woven on the eight looms, from heavy curtains to delicate scarves. Linen, cotton and wool are patiently worked. As we go in search of the blacksmith and saddler's workshops, where saddles and harnesses are made, we can see decorated chimneys. Some of the local aromatic dishes you can try are wild mountain rabbit, *açorda de poejo* (a bread-based dish flavoured with pennyroyal), cherry-coloured chicken, and eggs with tomato.



Serra do Caldeirão (PR)



Eggs with tomato (RTA)



Figs (RTA)

8 km later. The village has remained quiet, hesitating somewhere between the Alentejo and the Algarve.

It is one of those places where people say, “The Algarve is over there”, vaguely pointing to the south.

In the surrounding area, the Chavachã mill is built entirely of schist.

It stands next to the Ribeira do Vascão, on the way to Portela (5km), and is signposted on the road.

The tour now continues on the EN 2 heading south. There are unusual place names, such as Besteiros (crossbowmen) and the affectionate Catraia, meaning “little girl”.

As we get closer to Cortelha, we can see the cultivated terraces and the imposing eucalyptus trees. We are now only 2 km from Barranco do Velho, once a thermal spa sought after for its cool waters but also, above all, for the crossroads on the main road linking the coast and the interior. This is the route that muleteers took when they carried goods - honey, medronho and firewood – and news to the Arab *chenchir* (garden

Heading northeast on a road bordered by broom, planted many years ago by road workers, we get to Mealha.

The only way to access the past mysteries of the menhir at Anta das Pedras Altas is to go on foot. Unexpectedly, we return to prehistoric times when we get to this monument, where split stones and artefacts for personal decoration were found.

All around, there are the round houses of Celtic origin, used nowadays as barns. Their thick walls are made from carefully assembled pieces of schist while their roofs are conical and thatched. In the spectacular countryside, with deep ravines and high rounded hills, lavender, white heather and cistus add plenty of colour between the cork oaks.

We keep going for another 4 km to the north-east as far as Corte João Marques, a place name influenced by the Alentejo. We arrive at Ameixial,



Rosemary (JEP)

and a vegetable plot) on the coast. On the return journey, they would bring dried fish. In the *Barrocal*, they carried figs and almonds.

A majestic plantation of cork oaks covers the hills. This is where the best cork in the world comes from. Iberian black pigs feed on the acorns. They are then turned into tasty *presunto* (smoked ham) and sausages. There are also dishes of game meat seasoned with aromatic herbs, a distinctive feature of rural specialities.

Heading south, it is not long before we get to Alportel.

In São Brás de Alportel, the unmistakable importance of the town as a centre of the cork-growing area comes across clearly.

All around, there are places with strange names such as Tareja (Teresa), Tesoureiro (treasurer), Javali (wild boar), Cova da Muda (dumb woman's grave), Desbarato (selling at a very low price), Mesquita (mosque) and Soalheira (blazing sun). In these villages, it is easy to find items of handi-craft as well as regional sweets with the omnipresent flavours of almond and carob.

There is evidence in the town of this long history, especially in the historical centre. Grand houses with iron verandas and façades clad in tiles alternate with houses in the popular style. The churchyard of the Main Church, where there is an excellent viewing point, is the site for the annual Festival of Flower Torches (Festa das Tochas Floridas), an Easter procession in which the menfolk carry candles lavishly decorated with flowers.

We now take the EN 270 heading east and after 2 km, we follow the signs to Mesquita where we turn south. The village olive-oil press (called a "lagar") has been turned into a restaurant, but the olive trees are still there.

Then, there is Pereiro, 6 km away, followed by Foupana and a tiny village, Estiramantens, which has changed little since the last century.

Santo Estêvão appears in a valley of lush vegetation with the Ribeira da Asseca that flows through the area, feeding little weirs with their waterfalls.



Cork (PR)



Main Church of São Brás de Alportel (St)



Dom Rodrigo (HR)

The road ends at the main square in Luz de Tavira, next to the church with a splendid façade and an equally magnificent Manueline side door with carved masonry work.

It is worth making a short detour to the fishing village of Santa Luzia to see another monument, but one created by nature: 2,000-year-old olive tree, located in Pedras D'el Rei. It takes five men to wrap their arms round the hole-filled trunk: there is also a kind of door to the inside of the tree, where a *zambuheiro*, a wild olive, grew spontaneously.

Olives from this tree nourished primitive peoples – Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Suevi and Arabs – and the oil extracted was used for lighting. In its shade, crusaders, sailors, traders and farmers all rested. It will certainly live throughout the third millennium, which has just begun.

We are back in Tavira, in time to try out the excellent cuisine highlighting the inevitable tuna-based dishes, *cataplana* made with molluscs caught in the Ria Formosa, fish caught on the seaward side of the Ilha de Tavira, where there is an idyllic beach accessible only by boat. Finally, we shall treat ourselves to some of the local sweets, *Dom Rodrigo*, *morgados de amêndoa* (made with almonds), *fios de ovos* (egg threads), and sweets in the form of miniature fish, flowers and fruit.



Ria Formosa - Tavira (PR)





tour of the guadiana

On this tour, we shall see the place where the weary peninsular river draws the last glow of beauty with ecstatic glances before emptying itself into the arms of the warmest waters in Portugal. Here, the border is not the great watercourse, but several borders – less outlined of course – dividing the coast and the hills of the Serra between which the Barrocal is located. We shall enjoy the three different Algarve landscapes on this tour: from the extensive salt marsh guarded by the castle and the whitewashed houses of Castro Marim to the extensive group of aquifers providing water to half the Algarve. We go from landscapes of low shrubs, tended by man, dark figures in the distance, to the mirage that is Martim Longo, an unusually young and lively town, lost in an Alentejo-like landscape. In between, we find places with prehistoric menhirs and enchanted medieval castles, from which the sails of today's dreamers can be seen on the meandering Guadiana. Once we have taken in its beauty, we can enjoy the freshwater fish in the little eating places by the river in Odeleite. In places where schools have been turned into museums as people have moved away, we will have a look at times past. Around the bends in the Serra, we shall transport products from looms and potteries, and an accumulation of centuries-old expertise.



Castro Marim (PR)

tour of the guadiana

SUMMARY OF THE TOUR

Castro Marim > Monte Francisco > Junqueira > Azinhal > Alcaria > Foz de Odeleite > Álamo
> Guerreiros do Rio > Alcoutim > Pereiro > Alcarias > Martim Longo > Vaqueiros > Cortelha
> Corte do Gago > Santa Rita > Vila Nova de Cacela > Cacela Velha > Castro Marim

KEY TO THE MAP



Beach



Lighthouse



Nature Reserve



Dam



Monument



Pier



Ferry Boat Harbour



Museum



Viewing Point



Motorway



Municipal Road



Starting Point



National Road



Tour



Protected Area



EN 125 National Road



Direction of Tour



The Tour of the Guadiana will take us in search of the secrets of an age-old culture, as we go round a circuit of *alcarias* (tiny villages), known or founded by the Arabs, during the Arab occupation of *Al-Andaluz*.

We follow the Guadiana, the great river of the south, on which different peoples travelled through enchanting landscapes where man left his mark in remarkable harmony, without preventing other species from living here.

Nature has reciprocated with colours, smells and flavours.

Castro Marim, the starting point of this tour is one of the oldest places in the Algarve, with evidence of an ancient settlement here. There is evidence that people exploited the metal resources in the area as far back as 5,000 B.C. They built a fort to defend themselves on the spot where the present day castle stands. The Romans built a road along which they would follow the river up to Lisbon, passing through Alcoutim, Mértola and Beja. It is from here that trade flowed from the Mediterranean.

The Arabs increased its importance during their rule, which lasted for about four centuries until 1242, when it was re-conquered by Paio Peres Correia.

At that time, the mouth of the Guadiana was different and the town was closer to the sea, an island surrounded by shallow waters. To start the tour, we shall visit the castle, headquarters of the Order of Christ in the 14th-century. The old castle dates back to the 11th and 12th-centuries and stands in an open space, surrounded by the defensive walls, which were built in the 13th and 14th-centuries. They were the limits of the medieval town. Located on a hilltop, it provides an unparalleled view over the Guadiana, the salt pans and the marshes.

The whitewashed houses, with their doors and windows trimmed in colour, conform to the traditional architectural style. The Main Church, with a fine tiled panel, stands in the Praça 1º de Maio. Tile making is an Arab art, which has been further developed with imagination and versatility by the Portuguese.



Castro Marim Castle (St)



Castro Marim (St)



Salt pans (St)

From the two nearby hills, you can see the Chapel of Santo António and the Fort of São Sebastião, an integral part of the walls enclosing all the houses, of which some stretches can still be seen.

You just have to go down to the garden near the river to see the salt pans nearby.

The minute crystals shine in the sun, the white pyramids standing out against the blue of the sky. You can see the age-old movements of the salt makers and their unchanging tools as they pile up the salt on the mountains of white, which are typical of the area.

The town enjoys the privilege of being located on the banks of the Guadiana River, close to the Nature Reserve of Castro Marim and Vila Real de Santo António Salt Marsh where there is neither too much water nor too little land - a delicate balance of colour.

This was the first Nature Reserve to be created in Portugal and it includes the salt pans, pools, the salt marsh, pasture and large areas with no vegetation.

In the winter, numerous bird species seek food and shelter here, and it is a special place for fish, molluscs and crustaceans to reproduce.



Castro Marim Salt Marsh (PR)

The heron is one of the residents here, but it is not difficult to see storks flying over, flamingos and the white heron among many others, some of which are rare and difficult to spot in other parts of the country.

If it is difficult to resist the attractions of the river, it is possible to go on a short cruise upstream.

Continuing with one's feet on terra firma and one's eyes on the river banks, the turn-off to Monte Francisco, on the IC 27, takes us to the headquarters of the Reserve, the ideal place to find out more about this small piece of paradise.

Along the same road, it becomes clear in Junqueira that the making of handicrafts is something that is done in the street, with items being made in doorways, while chatting away to the neighbours.

Half a dozen kilometres further on, we arrive at Azinhal. This enchanting village, whose name means "a grove of holm oaks", is one of six villages thus named in the Algarve. The Main Church, on the eastern side of the village is unusual, with



Little Egret (HR)



Bobbin lace (RTA)

a cupola resembling a lighthouse, a round nave and a small cusp. The nearby windmill, although not in use, has a magnificent view over the Guadiana River and Spain.

Even more unusual is the museum, "O Saber das Mulheres" (The Expertise of Women), in the Azinhal Cultural Centre. It focuses on the role of women in the community. They are still the ones who take care of the family, look after the fields, and still have time for the delicate craft of bobbin lacemaking. The lacemakers of Azinhal created leaf-shaped lace, inspired by the leaves of different plants. Lacemaking originally came from Flanders. It is believed that it was brought to the Algarve by traders travelling to the port of Antwerp to sell dried figs and other produce.

The bobbins are set on a lace pillow, which is supported on a wicker basket made especially for this purpose. The pattern, on thick card, is pierced by the needles used to hold the embroidery. The bobbins holding the cotton thread are made from oleander wood.

You cannot leave Azinhal without first trying the

Regional sweets (RTA)



regional sweets, another example of produce made by women using traditional methods.

As we continue north, after 16 km, we look out for the signpost to the alternative route to Alcoutim. Turn off towards the river. In Fonte do Penedo, the low houses conceal weaving looms, and the schist walls protect cultivated plots and cattle. Alcária is at the top of a gentle slope, and if you stop at one of the cafés or little *tascas*, it is worth trying the cheese made from ewe's milk and a slice or two of the best *cured ham*. If there is a pot on the stove with a hare soup or fried rabbit producing that special aroma, you will not be able to resist.

After a few more bends in the road, we can see water between the hills. Foz de Odeleite is a tiny village, perched above a ravine near the spot where the river flows into the Guadiana River.

Having crossed the bridge, we can see that the surrounding area is like a natural paradise with houses on the highest slopes of the bank of the Guadiana River, and vegetable plots and vineyards sloping down to the river, where there are also small moorings. From time to time, small fishing or sailing boats pass.

It is less than 4 km to Álamo where a Roman villa was discovered, as well as a notable dam 40 metres long from the same period, with thick walls and six buttresses; it was used for storing water from the Fornalha River.

The Museum of the River has pride of place in the village that goes by the unusual and beautiful name of Guerreiros do Rio (Warriors of the River). It tells of the history of the Guadiana River and the fishing activity since the time of the Carthaginians.

It would be nice to stop for a while in a place called Montinho das Laranjeiras. The Romans also liked the area, as seen from the ruins of a villa built here in the 11th and 12th-centuries.

Alcoutim then appears on a hillside after a sharp bend in the road and river.

Sanlúcar del Guadiana is the town on the opposite bank.

Odeleite dam (HR)



Through the narrow lanes of the old city, you can get to the Castle of Alcoutim, built in the 16th -century. First, you should go to the Misericórdia Church, the Chapel of St António and the country house of the counts of Alcoutim. The Main Church was one of the first Renaissance buildings in the Algarve, built between 1538 and 1554, on the site of a medieval church.

The gardens of the castle, which are carefully tended, provide an excellent viewing point.

Built with schist from the region, the battlements, loopholes and most of the walls are still there. The main door is protected by a fine gate made of wrought iron.

Its strong walls bear witness to many centuries of history and in the Castle Gallery, for which guided tours can be booked, there are archaeological remains on display, from 5,000 B.C. to today's museological projects, in the exhibition "From the Past to the Future".

There are myriad legends involving the castle. They tell of brave knights and beautiful Moorish princesses, frustrated in love and becoming enchanted.

There are other secrets about smuggling among the rocky banks of the Guadiana River, which ended up forging close ties with the Andalusian people on the opposite bank.

It is now time to delve a bit more into the north-east of the Algarve. We shall take the turning to Corte Tabelião (EN 122-1) as we leave the town, which takes us to the area surrounding the Alcoutim dam.

There are few words to describe the magnificent scenery.

At the junction with the EN 122, we turn south as far as Balurcos.

We then turn on to the EN 124, and nine km later, we get to Pereiro. Its small museum is dedicated to the theme "The Construction of Memories".

The cistus exudes a strong resin and covers the rocky plateau, making the Algarve here look almost like the Alentejo. The houses are immaculately white and sometimes have ovens outside. Here,



Alcoutim Castle (LC)



Cistus (LC)



Dolls from Martim Longo (RTA)

of the village. To get to the Vascão Stream, we have to go through Cerro das Relíquias (Hill of Relics) where there are archaeological remains. On the way, you can see many birds and in the water, there are mallard ducks. There is a water-mill near the bridge.

Once again, on the EN 124, we reach Martim Longo, the most populated village on the plateau of Cumeada do Pereirão. History says that the name of the village comes from an inhabitant called Martim who was very “long”. What is not known is whether he was “long” in stature or long in years! To the south-west, on the Cerro do Castelo (2km), there are ruins of a Roman castle.

A group of craftswomen set up a workshop here for making dolls from sacking called “A Flor de Agulha” (Flower of the Needle). The miniatures portray typical figures from the region, and are given names of the original “models”. Woodcutters, shepherds and reapers are all given a name and a history. The Main Church was originally an old mosque from which the minaret is preserved and is now turned into a bell tower.

In terms of the local gastronomy, the highlights are honey, bread, sausages, regional sweets and

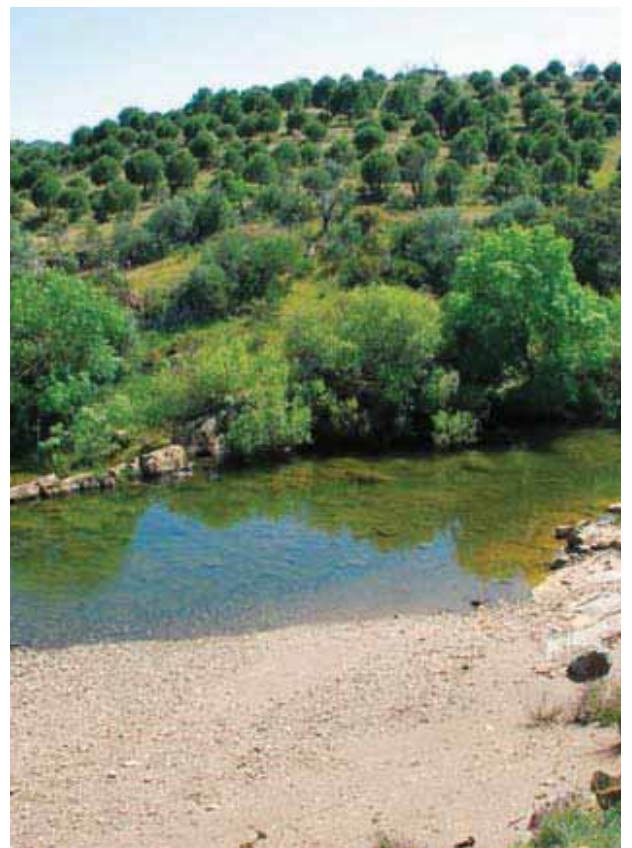
we can go on a short detour to visit the Alcarias. To get to Alcaria Queimada, you go through Alcaria Cova de Cima and Alcaria de Baixo, a little further on, followed by Alcaria. These are old hills, which have kept their Arabic place names and stretch along the Foupana Stream.

This is a different kind of landscape where the rugged feel is softened by the water.

Returning to Pereiro, through schistose countryside, we cover the 10 km to Clarines, unmoved by time and with its identity intact. The Ermida da Oliveira (Chapel of the Olive Tree), a medieval building, is hidden away in the narrow streets.

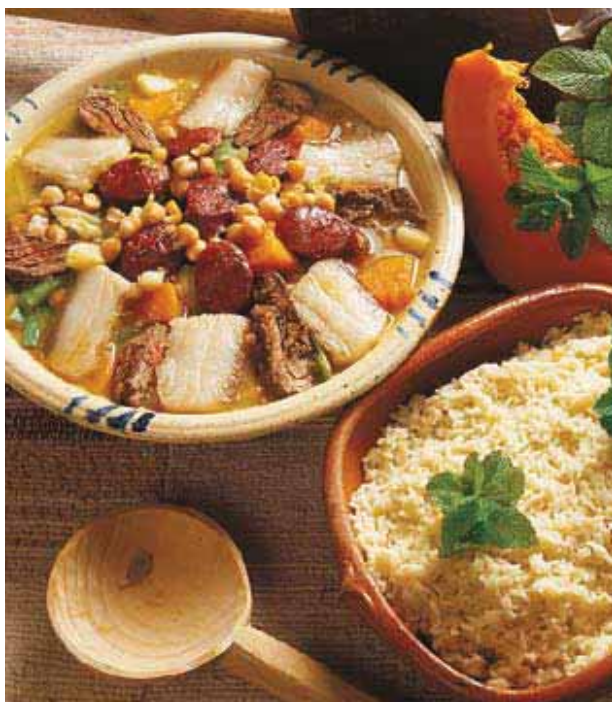
Legend has it that people who put their heads in the hole in the trunk of the olive tree standing next to the church are cured of chronic headaches.

It is time to move on to Giões where the streets follow the gentle contours of the hills. Its 15th-century church stands at the highest point



Foupana Stream (RO)

Chick-pea stew (RTA)



ewe's cheese. Stews made from lamb or chick-peas are delicious alternatives.

It is only 12 km to Vaqueiros on the EM 506. Ancient mines, artefacts and primitive dwellings are covered in a living display of 1,800 years of history.

In the Main Church, there are storks nesting next to the belfry.

On a particularly beautiful stretch of the EM 506, we pass through Fernandilho and Fortim, and then we are at Monte da Estrada. Here, we head south, leaving the EM 506 1 km after the village. It is 24 km from Vaqueiros and it is just a few more kilometres to Anta das Pedras Altas.

The hamlets here, following one after another at a distance of a few kilometres between them, are known as "montes" (hills) and are home to only a few dozen inhabitants. They stand out as silhouettes of mountain culture, with colour and traditional motifs brightening up their houses.

It is easy to get to Cortelha, while enjoying a magnificent view over the Beliche Stream meandering through the valley below. On the EM 509, we pass through Corte do Gago and then Alcarias Grandes - a recurring name on this tour - located on the banks of the reservoir, accessible by road from the last village. Once back on the EM 509, we go through Marroquil (6 km). Mills and waterwheels hum gentle tunes, and from the wood-burning ovens plumes of smoke rise. Larks sing and partridges take to the air in flight.

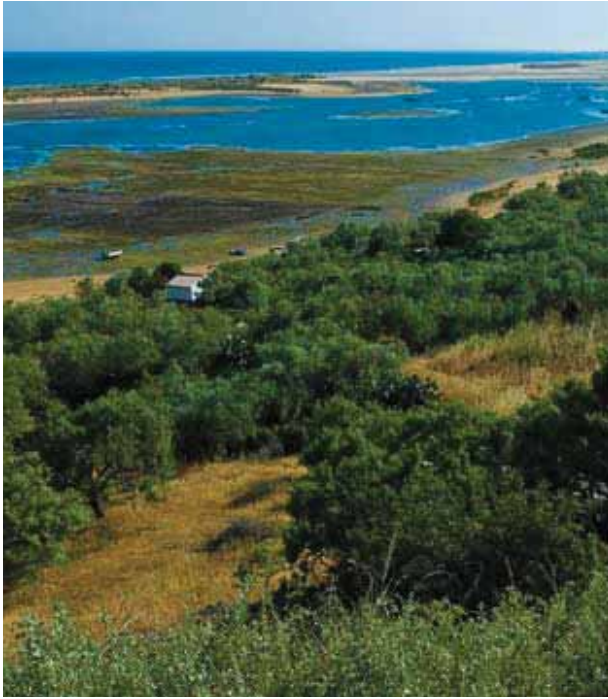
We turn south towards Santa Rita, passing through the picturesque Corte de António Martins on one of the most beautiful roads in the Algarve.

For 30 km, beaches can be seen on one side of the road, while on the other we can see the rural landscape of the Serra. A nice place to stop and enjoy the scenery, the Parque da Rocha dos Corvos is only 1 km from Santa Rita. This is a transitional area between the coast and the hills where there are still remains of a Roman dam, which criss-crossed the valley allowing the waters of the river to be used for irrigation. Topped by typical chimneys, the houses exude hospitality and friendliness with their open doors.

Vaqueiros (PR)



Cacela Velha (LC)



It is easy to follow the signs to Vila Nova de Cacela, the rural side of the parish, which continues as far as the sea and the village of Cacela Velha. This tour ends amid the smells of the past where traditions still put their stamp on daily life, shaped by the fresh waters of the rivers, streams, springs and weirs. Then, we take advantage of the modern facility of the Via do Infante motorway (A 22) to return to our starting point: Castro Marim. In the meantime, as a perfect way to conclude the tour, let us recall the words of the *Trás-os-Montes* writer Miguel Torga: *"The Algarve for me is always a day on holiday in one's homeland.... I feel like doing everything, without responsibility or scepticism!..."* We would add, we feel like taking advantage of all the pleasures provided by the different areas of the Algarve.

Ravelin of Santo António (St)







tour beyond the eastern Algarve

We will enjoy a great tour of the south, from one sea to another, with the hills of the Serra in between. We will travel from the centre of the Algarve to the west of Europe, starting and ending in the capital, travelling through the Algarve of cliffs, rocks and caves, sandy retreats and hidden gullies. We will go along the slopes as far as the land of Prince Henry the Navigator, climbing up cliffs and going down to unexpected beaches.

People will also never be far from our thoughts. White houses are silhouetted against the emerald sea. We shall see skilled, cracked hands sewing the nets that will catch the next day's sustenance. We shall watch their boats dotted around on the vastness of the beaches, humanising it and giving it a sense of history. We shall celebrate humankind through different flavours: from cataplanas in Albufeira to presunto in Monchique, from sweet potato in Aljezur to barbecued fish in Armação de Pêra or Lagos. To finish, we will treat ourselves to delicious sweets like figs and almond cake. On the journey to Aljezur, we shall go back to the hills of the Serra.

We shall marvel at the roads, hills and vegetation that are so typical of the Algarve. On this tour, we shall smell a different Algarve before returning to the capital to rest.



tour beyond the eastern Algarve

SUMMARY OF THE TOUR

Faro > São Lourenço > Almancil > Quarteira > Vilamoura > Albufeira > Armação de Pêra > Porches > Lagoa > Carvoeiro > Ferragudo > Portimão > Odiáxere > Lagos > Vila do Bispo > Sagres > Carrapateira > Bordeira > Aljezur > Marmeleite > Monchique > Picota > Silves > Faro



KEY TO THE MAP



Airport



Marina



Nature Reserve



Windmill



Beach



Monument



Pier



Dam



Museum



Spa



Lighthouse



Natural Recreation
and Leisure Area



Viewing Point

Motorway

EN 125 National Road

Tour

Starting Point

National Road

Municipal Road

Direction of Tour

Protected Area

The tour beyond the eastern Algarve will take us to the westernmost parts of the Algarve. It is a tour that gives people staying in the eastern Algarve, the chance to find out about diversity in other parts of the region.

We set off from Faro, the capital of the Algarve and a city of ancient origin. First, we should have a look at the old city with the cathedral, the Convent of Nossa Senhora da Assunção (Our Lady of the Assumption), the “Arco do Repouso” (Gate of Rest) where King Afonso III rested, the town hall and the Episcopal Seminary. We get there through any of the three gates in the 17th-century walls.

If we choose the “Arco da Vila”, the Governor’s palace will be on one side, facing the Jardim Manuel Bívar (Garden). The Arco do Repouso (Gate of Rest) gives access to the square called Largo de São Francisco, with the Ria Formosa as a backdrop. It is the setting for the convent of the same name, which has now been restored and turned into a Hotel and Tourism School. The “Porta Nova” opens directly on to one of the canals in the Ria taking us to the harbour and the Living Science Centre.



Arco da Vila (St)



Faro (PR)

Vilamoura Marina (HR)



tourist resorts. Built in a way that does not affect the natural beauty of the Algarve, they provide delights of the *dolce fare niente* or pleasant relaxation on dream holidays.

We cross the town from one side to the other and then, as we leave it, we turn onto the road to Quarteira. There are other routes, but along this road with its gentle curves, we head for the fishing village that developed into a tourist resort because of its marvellous beach.

Our next stopping point is Vilamoura and its marina, filled with boats, sophisticated bars and restaurants with open-air seating and shops.

The former Quinta de Quarteira has been turned into an excellent leisure complex. There is even an Environmental Park, next to the reed beds of the Quarteira Stream, where bitterns and purple gallinules nest among about a hundred different species.

In Vilamoura, you can do almost anything you want. At the marina and on the magnificent Falésia Beach, there are water sports.

You can go for walks, go riding or cycling in the ample gardens. It is golf, however, that is king

Inside the walls stands the imposing Gothic cathedral. From its tower, you can see the entire historical centre, surrounded on the northern side by the modern buildings of the city and on the south by the sea. In the old Convent of Nossa Senhora da Assunção (Our Lady of the Assumption), there is the Archaeological Museum with its unusual cloister on two floors.

It is worth spending more time in the city, perhaps going to the Alto de Santo António and the Church of Carmo, passing between the traditional houses of "Mouras Velhas" (Old Moorish Ladies) or going out to Faro Island.

However, we shall continue our journey along the EN 125 towards Almancil, stopping briefly in São Lourenço to admire its small church whose interior is clad with painted tiles.

It is in Almancil and the surrounding area that some of the best known restaurants in the Algarve can be found, given the proximity of the luxury



Church of São Lourenço (St)

here. You can round off the day with a show at the casino, or go dancing in the discos. In terms of culture, the museum of Cerro da Vila and the restored ruins of the Roman villa remind us of the past.

Sticking to secondary roads, we will take the exit to the north of Vilamoura to head towards Albufeira, stopping briefly in Balaia, a beach surrounded by coloured cliffs, with a range of tourist and sporting facilities.

Then we get to Albufeira, with its golden cliffs and beaches with light-coloured sand.

The Arabs called it *Al Buhera* (fortress) because they settled on the Cerro da Vila, an invincible position overlooking the sea and the mouth of the river.

After a visit to the viewing point at the “Pau da Bandeira” (Flagpole), we will walk through the narrow streets to the square called Largo Eng. Duarte Pacheco, the heart of the tourist area of Albufeira. The western end includes the old centre with some details of traditional architecture.



“Pau da Bandeira” viewing point (LC)



São Rafael (HR)

A nice way to spend some time in Albufeira is to wander along the marvellous beaches of fine sand and turquoise-blue seas. Continuing from east to west, from Balaia to Galé, passing through São Rafael and Ponta do Castelo, there is much to enjoy.

The regional road number 526, west of Albufeira, takes us to Armação de Pêra, a huge bay stretching from Ponta da Galé to Ponta da Senhora da Rocha.

There is nothing more serene than its enormous beach with calm seas and immense blue, lapping repeatedly on the fine golden sand reflecting the sun. In the town centre, there are numerous café terraces, if you feel like stopping for a bit.

Do not miss the chance of going to the natural viewing point of Senhora da Rocha, at the top of the chapel with its Visigoth capitals.

We then move on to Porches, where traditional ceramic production is still an important activity, with many shops where you can buy a souvenir, either a delicate miniature or a piece that reflects the colours of the Algarve in its decoration: the

Carvoeiro (LC)



blue of the sea and the ochre of the land. In Lagoa, we turn off for Carvoeiro. The houses on the hillsides overlook the beach sheltering the colourful fishing boats. Less than 1 km away are the unusual rock formations sculpted by the wind and the sea at Algar Seco, with its fantastic shapes and the romantic Varanda dos Namorados (Lover's Terrace).

This area is fascinating for its many caves (grutas) hidden in the cliffs. Carvoeiro is the right place to take a boat trip to get to know the secret ways into the Gruta do Pintal or the Gruta dos Roazes.

Throughout the centuries, these coastal caves near Carvoeiro have served as dwellings for the different peoples who lived in the area, either for access to fishing or as a defence against attacks by pirates and corsairs.

Carvoeiro was of such strategic importance that it appears on the first map printed in Portugal, based on another published in Rome in 1561.

Continuing west, follow the signs and you will easily find your way to Ferragudo, on the left bank of the Arade River. The name explains the origin of the village: on the coast there was a *ferro agudo* (pointed iron) used for pulling the nets full of fish out of the sea. The bay of Ferragudo ends in a small, gracious castle, nowadays a private house.

Portimão stretches away on the right bank. You get to Portimão by crossing over one of the branches of the river and then you can immerse yourself straight away in the typical ambience of the restaurants under the arcades of the bridge. There is no better place to try the freshly-caught sardines arriving in the port.

In the old centre, the architecture of the late 19th-century and early 20th-century is distinctive in its two-storey houses with their wrought-iron verandas, carved masonry work on the windows and doors, and tiled walls. The white churches and the narrow streets of the old fishermen and traders' quarter are some of the features that define Portimão's character as a centuries-old city.

Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans and Arabs all sailed up the Arade and left their mark

Ferragudo (LC)





Praia da Rocha (HR)

on the region. With the Portuguese Discoveries, the modern city of Portimão developed in the middle of the 15th-century. In the 19th-century, it became an important centre for the fishing and canning industries. In the 20th-century, it was tourism that left its mark on the city.

The marina is a pleasant area, with an artificial beach that is a continuation of Praia da Rocha, one of the most beautiful beaches in Portugal. The fantastic shapes of imposing rocks stand above the light-coloured sand.

The beach at Alvor is a huge stretch of golden sand hidden between magnificent cliffs of red stone. The Ria de Alvor is sometimes called a hidden paradise, a surprising enclave of different landscapes where hundreds of birds fly as the sun dips into the waters.

The EN 125 takes us to the picturesque village of Odiáxere and if we cross it going towards the sea, we pass through Palmares and get to Meia



Alvor (HR)



Meia Praia (HR)

Praia from where we will enjoy the fine view over the bay of Lagos.

This is not the normal way to enter the city, but it is certainly one of the nicest. The beach at Meia Praia, stretching as far as the eye can see, is framed by green hills and ends at the marina on the edge of the city. It was from this bay that the caravels set off on those great epic journeys of the 16th-century, in search of new worlds. Today, the old cosmopolitanism is preserved, along with the long-standing intimacy with the sea, in one of the most beautiful cities in the Algarve.

The friendliness and welcoming nature of the people of Lagos played their part in history: King Sebastião elevated the town to the status of a city, after his journey to the Algarve in 1573, because he was so impressed by the warm welcome he received from the people.

It is well worth visiting its churches, museums, the castle and the walls. The Ponta da Piedade is another place worth visiting. You can stand there with the bay at your feet and the blue vastness stretching out to the horizon.

There is a close connection between the sea



Lagos (PR)

and the local cuisine, with tempting dishes like eel stew, bean stew with whelks, not to mention a delicious tuna steak or a tasty *cataplana*. Then to finish, try that must-have dessert - Dom Rodrigo with its delicate egg threads and almonds.

When we get to Vila do Bispo, we would be entering a different Algarve, that of western Algarve. Here, you could go on the Tour of Menhirs, which takes you on a visit to prehistoric stones in a rugged, open countryside where you can feel those winds coming off the Atlantic. You could go on the Smugglers' Tour that starts here, going through the Serra de Espinhaço de Cão and then crossing the hills around Monchique and afterwards, the Caldeirão, the route along which goods were taken inland for the people who needed them.

We cannot leave the town without first trying the delicious fried moray eel and honey cake, as well as having a look at the beach of Praia do Castelejo, nestling between the cliffs.

Finally, we get to Sagres, the legendary promontory. In 350 A.D., it was described by the Roman Rufus Festus Avienos as a: *"vigorous cape, where sidereal light goes down, emerges proudly at the extreme point of rich Europe and goes into the salt water of the ocean, inhabited by monsters. There is*



Castelejo (HR)

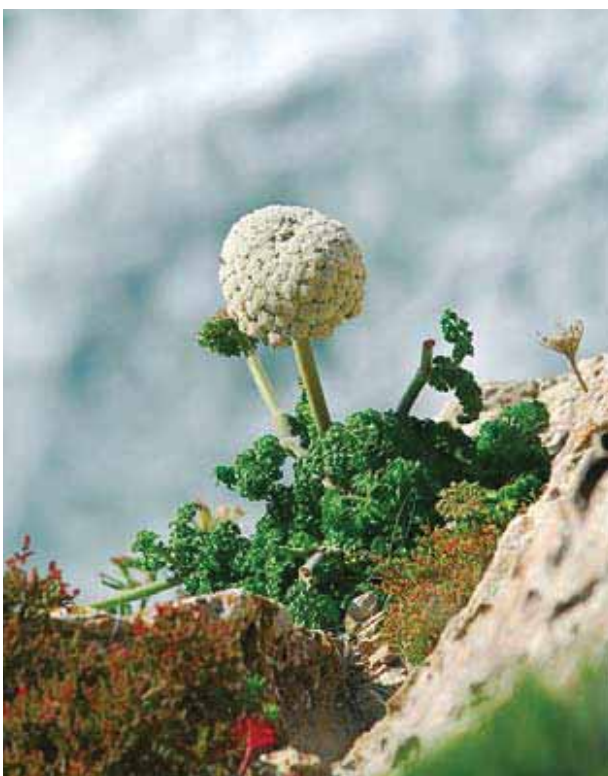


Sagres Fortress (St)

Sagres (PR)



Flower (LC)



then a promontory with frightening cliffs dedicated to Saturn. The choppy seas boil and the rocky coast stretches for a long way". Almost 22 centuries later, the magic and magnificence continue.

In the fortress, the presence of Prince Henry the Navigator can still be felt. This is where he dreamed up the magnificent epic of putting to sea and finding new worlds, an adventure that remained unparalleled for five centuries until astronauts went to the moon.

Just a stone's throw away is the Cape St. Vincent, with its chapel, convent, fortress and lighthouse, the most south-westerly point in Portugal and in Europe. The cliffs are 60 metres high, dropping down into the furious spray of the waves and often hiding many tiny, almost empty beaches where the paradigm of the perfect beach that we yearn for in our imagination can be found.

Keen botanists will find several dozen plant species that are unique to this area, and, as Sagres is on the migratory route of a large number of birds, and with a bit of luck, you can watch their arrival or departure - a unique spectacle that can last for several days.

We return to Vila do Bispo, nestled in the Southwest Alentejo and Costa Vicentina Natural Park. It is one of the few areas in the Algarve in which untamed nature and the rich cultural and historical heritage remain intact. Then, we head for Aljezur, which is also part of the park. Here, in their natural habitat, 200 species of birds have been identified, as well as 750 plant species. Of these, 46 are unique to Portugal and 10 are specifically unique to this area. On the coast, there are 460 species of algae, important for the production of agar-agar.

We go through Carrapateira, nestling in the dunes. Surfers say that you get almost perfect



Surfer (HR)



Aljezur (PR)

waves here. The village developed next to the river, and the fort grew around the existing chapel. You can also visit Carrapateira's Museu do Mar e da Terra (Museum of the Sea and Land) which portrays the lives of fishermen and farmers.

Located a little further along the coast, Bordeira is a town with roots that go far back to prehistoric times. The Mira culture (7,000 B.C.) of nomadic people moving between the mouth of the Mira River in the Alentejo and the beach at Burgau in the Algarve, also left its mark.

Aljezur is divided between the two banks of the river: on one side, the old settlement with houses on the slopes of the hill; and on the other, the new town on the marshy land on the left bank of the river, known as the Rio de Aljezur.

Legend has it that, before every important battle, the knights of Santiago, led by Paio Peres Correia, consumed an invigorating potion, as carrying weapons and iron suits of armour was no easy task. The strength of the invasion and the speed with which the castle of Aljezur was taken left the Moors aghast, as they were unaware of the Christian knights' potion and its effects. The conquest took place in 1249. What was this



Monchique (LC)

magic potion? Well, it was Aljezur's famous bean stew with sweet potato, of course.

On the coast of the municipality, interspersed with dunes and beaches, the cliffs are the predominant feature. There are natural swimming pools set in the rocks, which lead to the sea, with its clear cool waters.

As we leave the Costa Vicentina Natural Park, we take the EN 267 towards the Serra de Espinhaço de Cão, located within forests of pine, eucalyptus and cork oak trees.

Marmeleite appears in the midst of the hills. It is a small, quiet village at the edge of the forest, cut into the ochre-coloured slate, different from the grey granite typical of the Serra de Monchique, a few kilometres further on.

Monchique is in a valley with a wonderful climate.

There are magnificent forests of chestnut trees, and water flows down in cascades. There are hundreds of kilometres of footpaths linking natural forests, botanical gardens and sites of historical interest.

In this small city, there are hydrangeas and camellias everywhere. One place to visit is the Largo de São Sebastião, as well as the main church and the Convent of Nossa Senhora do Desterro (Our Lady of the Exile), which is a ruin surrounded by trees. From here, there is a fine view with the biggest magnolia tree in Europe, which is classified as a monumental tree.

The Monchique cuisine is interesting, and there are quite a few unusual combinations, such as dishes of rice with beans and roast pork, with the best known being the homemade sausages and *presunto serrano*, ham cured using the traditional method. In terms of sweets, the highlights are *bolo de tacho* (traditional cake made with honey, chocolate and cinnamon) and *pudim de mel* (honey pudding). This is an area famous for its *medronho* brandy, and around Carnival time, guided tours of a distillery can be arranged with the producers. Here the red fruit is turned into this "water of life".

We drive up to Fóia, on the road that winds round the hill, in search of the most panoramic views over the Algarve.

Caldas de Monchique (PR)



On a clear day, you can see Portimão and Lagos in the south, areas of white next to the sea, and the peaks of the Arrábida to the north.

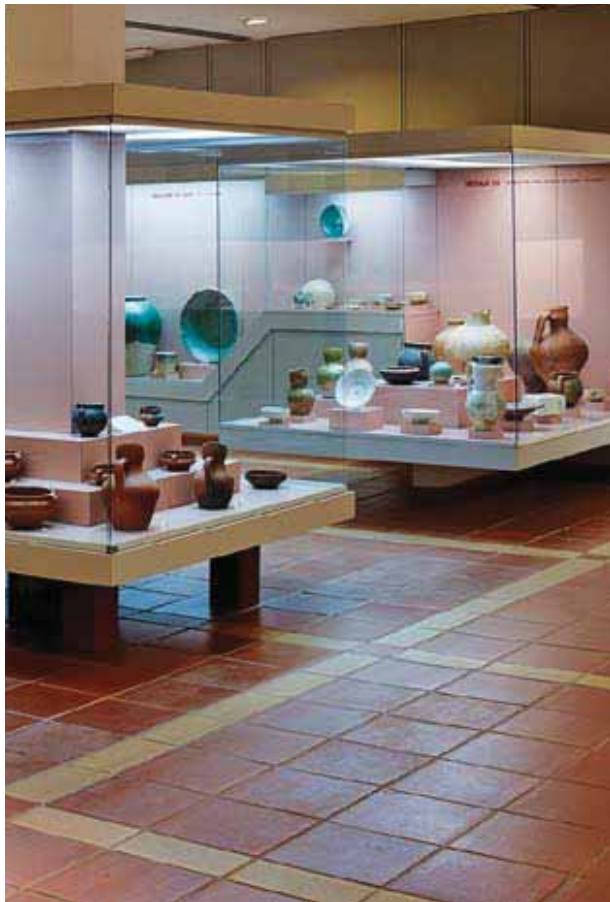
The spa village of Caldas de Monchique is located on the way down. Here, a light, pure, crystalline water bubbles out of the ground. This water was regarded by the Romans as sacred. They were the ones who built the first baths for the relief of rheumatism and respiratory illnesses. A walk through eucalyptus trees and cork oaks brings us to the top of Picota, the slopes of which afford a magnificent view.

In Porto de Lagos, the old Roman *Lacobriga*, built like an amphitheatre on the right bank of the river, we cross the bridge as we drive towards Silves. The Moorish *Shielb* appears clustered around the castle dominating the surrounding countryside. It is the Algarve city in which the Islamic heritage is most striking. This was the home of the scholars and poets of *Al-Gharb* (the West) of Al-Andaluz, the powerful caliphate

Silves (PR)



Silves Archaeology Museum (St)



which dominated the Iberian peninsula for centuries.

The gates of the city open on to the walls that, even today, guard the castle, whose battlements provide us with a kind of winged walk and a view over the Arade River flowing lazily below.

In the Archaeological Museum, there is a display of centuries of history. The most unusual feature, however, is the modern architecture built around the 12th-century cistern well, which is more than 20 metres deep and has a staircase at the side for going down to the bottom. At night, the cleverly-lit castle creates mysterious shapes and, suddenly, the legends of enchanted Moorish maidens make sense.

The legend of the “Great Cistern of the Castle” tells of the misfortune of a princess who, on the night of São João (summer solstice), sails over the deep waters in a boat of silver with golden oars.

Disconsolate, she sings sad songs, but she can only escape from there when a Moorish prince pronounces the magic words to break the spell.

We cannot leave Silves without trying a *morgado*, one of the best recipes for a cake that is so typical of the Algarve Serra.

To visit other places in the region, we will now use the Via do Infante (A22) motorway, which we can join 3 km from the city. It will not take us long to get to the junction for Loulé.

Then, driving down what remains of the *Serra*, we are soon back in Faro. If this tour has whetted your appetite, try the rest of our tours, which will add something special to your holidays, offering authentic experiences, a leisurely pace, friendly company and flavourful cuisine in the true Algarve style. Just like a holiday should be.

Faro (PR)



tourist information offices

Faro International Airport

Aeroporto Internacional de Faro
8001-701 Faro
T. 289 818 582
turismo.aeroporto@turismoalgarve.pt

Albufeira

Rua 5 de Outubro
8200-109 Albufeira
T. 289 585 279
turismo.albufeira@turismoalgarve.pt

Alcoutim

Rua 1º de Maio
8970-059 Alcoutim
T. 281 546 179
turismo.alcoutim@turismoalgarve.pt

Aljezur

Rua 25 de Abril, n.º 62
8670-054 Aljezur
T. 282 998 229
turismo.aljezur@turismoalgarve.pt

Alvor

Rua Dr. Afonso Costa, n.º 51
8500-016 Alvor
T. 282 457 540
turismo.alvor@turismoalgarve.pt

Armação de Pêra

Avenida Marginal
8365-101 Armação de Pêra
T. 282 312 145
turismo.armacaodepera@turismoalgarve.pt

Carvoeiro (Lagoa)

Praia do Carvoeiro
8400-517 Lagoa
T. 282 357 728
turismo.carvoeiro@turismoalgarve.pt

Castro Marim

Mercado Local (Local Market)
Rua de São Sebastião
8950-121 Castro Marim
T. 281 531 232
turismo.castromarim@turismoalgarve.pt

Faro

Rua da Misericórdia, n.º 8-11
8000-269 Faro
T. 289 803 604
turismo.faro@turismoalgarve.pt

Lagos

Praça Gil Eanes (Former Town Hall)
8600-668 Lagos
T. 282 763 031
turismo.lagos@turismoalgarve.pt

Loulé

Avenida 25 de Abril, n.º 9
8100-506 Loulé
T. 289 463 900
turismo.loule@turismoalgarve.pt

Monchique

Largo de S. Sebastião
8550-000 Monchique
T. 282 911 189
turismo.monchique@turismoalgarve.pt

Monte Gordo

Avenida Marginal
8900-000 Monte Gordo
T. 281 544 495
turismo.montegordo@turismoalgarve.pt

Olhão

Largo Sebastião Martins Mestre, n.º 8 A
8700-349 Olhão
T. 289 713 936
turismo.olhao@turismoalgarve.pt

Guadiana International Road Bridge

A22 - Monte Francisco
8950-206 Castro Marim
T. 281 531 800
turismo.guadiana@turismoalgarve.pt

Praia da Rocha

Avenida Tomás Cabreira
8500-802 Praia da Rocha
T. 282 419 132
turismo.praiadarocha@turismoalgarve.pt

Quarteira

Praça do Mar
8125-193 Quarteira
T. 289 389 209
turismo.quarteira@turismoalgarve.pt

Sagres

Rua Comandante Matoso
8650-357 Sagres
T. 282 624 873
turismo.sagres@turismoalgarve.pt

São Brás de Alportel

Largo de São Sebastião, n.º 23
8150-107 São Brás de Alportel
T. 289 843 165
turismo.saobras@turismoalgarve.pt

Silves

EN-124 (Picnic Park)
8300-000 Silves
T. 282 098 927
turismo.silves@turismoalgarve.pt

Tavira

Praça da República, n.º 5
8800-329 Tavira
T. 281 322 511
turismo.tavira@turismoalgarve.pt

municipal tourist information offices

Albufeira

Estrada de Santa Eulália
8200 Albufeira
T. 289 515 973
posto.turismo@cm-albufeira.pt

Estrada Nacional 395 (entrance to the city)

8200 Albufeira
T. 289 599 502
posto.turismo2@cm-albufeira.pt

Alte

Pólo Museológico Cândido Guerreiro
e Condes de Alte
8100 Alte
T. 289 478 060

Portimão

(Ed. TEMPO – Municipal Theatre)
Largo 1.º Dezembro
8500-538 Portimão
T. 282 402 487
info@visitportimao.com

Querença

Largo da Igreja
8100-495 Querença
T. 289 422 495

Salir

Centro Interpretativo de Arqueologia
8100-202 Salir
T. 289 489 137

Silves

Centro de Interpretação do Património
Islâmico
Praça do Município
8300-117 Silves
T. 282 440 800
turismo@cm-silves.pt

CREDITS

Edition and Copyright

Algarve Tourism Board
turismoalgarve@turismoalgarve.pt
www.visit Algarve.pt

Head Office: Av. 5 de Outubro, 18
8000-076 Faro, Algarve, Portugal
Telephone: 289 800 400
Fax: 289 800 489

Coordination

Communications and Image
marketing@turismoalgarve.pt

Texts

Conceição Branco (tours)
João Prudêncio (opening sections)

Translation

Inpokulis

Photography

Archive of Algarve Tourism Board (RTA)
Stills (St) - Vasco Célio, Virgílio Rodrigues,
Melanie Maps, Manuel Barros, Filipe Farinha
Luís da Cruz (LC)
Pedro Reis (PR)
Hélio Ramos (HR)
Hugo Santos (HS)
Rafaela Oliveira (RO)
Telma Veríssimo (TV)
João Eduardo Pinto (JEP)
Aero Foto (AF)

Graphic Design and Layout

NEWINGS design agency

Printing

Greca, Artes Gráficas Lda.

Print run

500 copies

Distribution

Free

Legal Deposit Number

400360/15

Second Edition

2015

algarve.
europe's
most famous
secret



Sponsor:

TURISMO DE
PORTUGAL



www.visitalgarve.pt

EN 2015