

ROTAS[®]

tours around the algarve





The Algarve is the most westerly part of mainland Europe, the last harbouring place before entering the waters of the Atlantic, a region where cultures have mingled since time immemorial. Rotas & Caminhos do Algarve (Routes and Tours of the Algarve) aims to provide visitors with information to help them plan a stay full of powerful emotions, a passport to adventure, in which the magic of nature, excellent hospitality, the grandeur of the Algarve's cultural heritage, but also those luxurious and cosmopolitan touches all come together.

These will be tours which will lure you into different kinds of activity and adventure, on a challenge of discovery.

The hundreds of beaches in the Algarve seduce people with their white sands and Atlantic waters, which sometimes surge in sheets of spray and sometimes break on the beaches in warm waves.

These are places to relax during lively family holidays, places for high-energy sporting activity, or for quiet contemplation of romantic sunsets.

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

Things that are always mentioned about the people of the Algarve are their hospitality and their prowess as story-tellers, that they are always ready to share experiences, and are open to change and diversity. The simple sophistication of the cuisine, drawing inspiration from the sea and seasoned with herbs, still retains a Moorish flavour, in the same way as the traditional architecture has.

By the end, you will have discovered an Algarve where the traditional and the modern can both be found, as well as Baroque and minimalist art, a way of life that is religious yet tolerant, popular kinds of entertainment and discos, terraces and whitewashed walls decorated in blue and ochre, cliffs and dunes, mountains and rugged plateaux, with the depths of the sea never far away.



CREDITS

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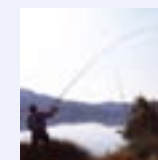
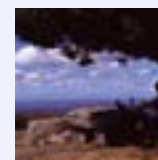
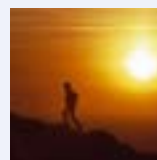
Com o apoio:



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tours around the algarve barlavento

Barlavento (western Algarve) is the name we have given the tours which we cover in the most westerly part of the Algarve, and the pages describing them will be blue. On the western side of the Algarve, we invite you on the Tours of Sagres, of Fóia, and of the West Coast (Costa Vicentina), and we will go on a trip to the East of the region in *A Tour beyond the Barlavento*.

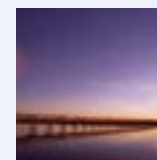
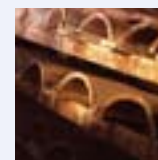
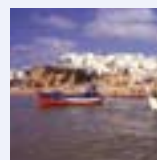


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tours around the algarve centro

The Central Algarve includes tours which wind between the sea and the hills, and the pages for these tours are identified by their magenta colour. In *Tours around the Central Algarve*, between the south and the north, there will be Tours of the "Caldeirão", of the Ria Formosa and the Tour of the Villages.

A Tour beyond the Central Algarve makes suggestions about having a look at routes near the coast and in the hills in other parts of the Algarve.

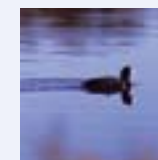


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tours around the algarve sotavento

The Sotavento (Eastern Algarve) is the title for the tours which start in the area bordering Spain. The ochre colour (yellow) is the one chosen to guide us on the Tours of the Guadiana, of the Serra and the Tuna Tour, and the wide range of sensations to be encountered.

A Tour beyond the Sotavento will take us to places that are further west, a tour that will allow us to discover something of the Algarve's diversity.



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CONTENTS OF TOURS OF THE BARLAVENTO

This area is redolent of the discoveries, with places where brave fishermen live, and here we shall dive back into history in the dark waters of Sagres and São Vicente.

On the roads in the *serra* we will be travelling around the least Mediterranean of the Algarve's landscapes. They say that there is greater similarity with Sintra, and Monserrate. But also with the Black Forest, and other hilly parts of Europe.

On this side of the cliffs, where the storks' nests perch, there are fields dotted with unusual flowers, yellow, red and purple to welcome the migrating birds.

We shall visit old cities which once had dark Moorish walls and then became white. The thousand churches of Tavira, the thousand gardens of Loulé, the thousand restaurants smelling of the sea on the edge of Olhão. We shall be charmed by the Algarve of the Sotavento.

P.

08 SAGRES TOUR

+/- 122 km

Lagos » Ponta da Piedade » Vila do Bispo » Fortaleza de Sagres » Cabo de S. Vicente » Vila do Bispo » Pedralva » Budens » Barão de São João » Barragem da Bravura » Odeáxere » Meia Praia » Lagos

20 FOIA TOUR

+/- 112 km

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

32 COSTA VICENTINA TOUR (WEST COAST)

+/- 172 km

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

44 A TOUR BEYOND THE BARLAVENTO

+/- 286 km

Silves » S. Bartolomeu de Messines » Alte » Salir » Querença » Barranco do Velho » Montes Novos » Cachopo » Martinlongo » 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



There are some magical sights to behold in parts of the Western Algarve or "Barlavento".

The sea beating against the rugged cliffs in Sagres, as if playing a symphony to the indomitableness of nature, while in the tiny shells in the sand or the huge dunes of the beaches, the only sound is the noise of the sea and the seagulls flapping their wings, the singing of the wind laden with salt and the perfumes of forest flowers. We shall wander through the places where the sun sets, its light glowing on the vastness of the ocean.

We shall visit places like Monchique, nestling in the hills, surrounded by the wide panoramas of the *serra*, others clinging to the cliffs, touching the edge of the sea, or spread out along languorous bays.

We shall be surprised by the legacy of history, which in Silves, for example, is so Islamic.

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

Indoors we will venture into the culture of the Algarve, made up of many contrasts and syntheses. We shall come across cosmopolitan and traditional aspects side by side, both very much alive.

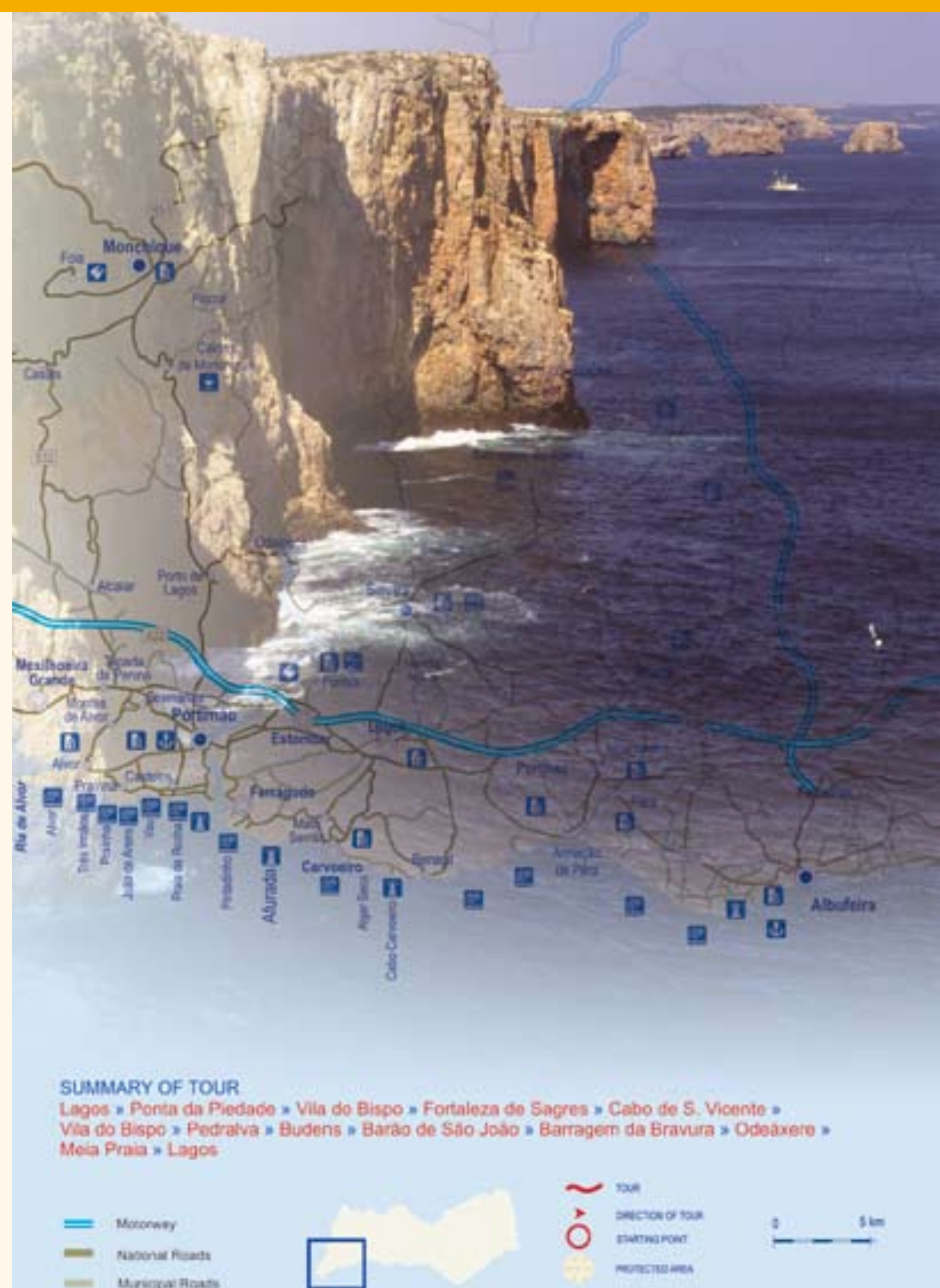
The Tours around the Barlavento are perfect for your holiday, the sort that you always want to repeat.

Welcome!

We shall trace the route of Prince Henry the Navigator, from the picturesque houses of Lagos to the west. But we will also have a look at the *barrocal* inland: we shall gaze into the watery calm of Bensafrim, where not even the herons trouble us with news from urban centres of the Algarve. Everything feels unspoiled amongst the gentle undulations in the west. Even the people: for a while we break free from the routine of obligatory stops, and straight after, break the silence in the bar in the midst of the houses. We can hear them, as we know they were already there at the time of Prince Henry. They have never ceased to be there, in amongst the silence. Closer to the cliffs, we will feel the dizziness of the seagull, soaring over the rocks.

On the cliff-tops, we will be excited by the flight of the fishing birds as they dive into the clear waters. Later we will be thrilled by the frothing ocean, close our eyes for a moment, a few seconds of travelling through space and time. The Americas, Africa, the 14th century. This area is redolent of discoveries, there are places where brave fishermen live, and here we shall dive back into history in the dark waters of Sagres and São Vicente.

Man's present comes together with the grandiose past in this the wisest part of the Algarve: the one that knew how to conserve the primeval, natural and human landscapes. And so, even there amongst the rocks and water, we find something of significance for Humanity.



It is difficult to leave Lagos, even if it is to go and see the brute force of the sea at Sagres, the focal point on this tour. **Sagres**, which continues to attract those people who want to “feel existence outside their body”, let their skin be pricked by the salty breeze, listen to the ancient, silent dialogue coming from the gaping mouth of the rocks, of the sea and the sun, which here takes its leave of the old continent.

And so we cannot leave Zawaya, which means “mosque” and was the name given to Lagos by the Arab poets, without first losing ourselves a little in the lanes of the old city, where there is a mix of craft shops, and typical restaurants, with art galleries and well-known shops, alongside the grandeur of its monuments.

From early on, **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** that Gil Eanes set off, the first to round 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 India put into

port. More modest were the battles of the fishermen who fished in the Mediterranean and also arrived there following the fish in the spawning season.

Lacobriga, which means “fortress” in the Celtic language, was founded in 2000 B.C. by Brigo, by joining together small settlements previously located on the banks of the Bensafrim river.

First the Romans, then the Visigoths and later the Arabs, left traces of their cultures, which are visible in more than 50 monuments of interest in the city. The final re-conquest was achieved in



View from the Promontory of Sagres



Lagos

1241 by the sword of D. Paio Peres Correia. Always an important military objective, **Lagos** had a defensive wall, now classified as a national monument and divided into two sections which nowadays wind their way through the maze of streets in the old city, broken occasionally by turrets like the Torreão da Ribeira in the extreme southwest. Impressively beautiful, the stretch of wall bordering the *marginal* (waterfront) with its pleasant gardens, is interrupted by the Porta S. Gonçalo, a gate with impressive arches and fine stonework. The Rua da Barroca retains a mediaeval 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 the Santa Maria Church in the Praça do Infante was later built, begun in 1498, and since the 1755 earthquake, the city's main church.

Nearby is the Slave Market, nowadays transformed into an art gallery, an appropriate way to lessen somewhat the suffering witnessed by those ancient



Church of Santo António



Lagos Castle

stones. It will be very difficult to resist the temptation to discover everything there is to know about the city in the Lagos Municipal Museum.

As regards the *Alcácer* or palace of the caliph Banu Mozaine, this is hidden in the foundations of the Palace of the Governor of Portugal, which later became the Cais Velho (Old Quay), and nowadays an integral part of the Lagos Hospital.

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

The Carmo church, on one of the hills of the city, commands a wonderful view over the built-up areas, gently rolling down towards the shore.

Once again beside the clear waters of the sea, we find the statue of D. Sebastião, the Boy King, the creation of the sculptor João Cutileiro. Next to the Town Hall in the Praça Gil Eanes, can be found one of Lagos' many fine mansions, and we head towards the Forte da Bandeira, right next to harbour entrance.

After crossing the drawbridge, you go in through a doorway of carved stone on the ground floor, where there are small shops selling handicrafts. On the upper platform, the graceful curve of the bay can be seen from the esplanade, along with the sailing boats slowly approaching the Marina.



Almádena Fort

Another stop is Ponta da Piedade (Point of Piety) which is where the cliffs begin in stark contrast to the beaches of the bay. Leaving the city on the old road which 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 place which combines holiday-makers and fishermen. A short distance ahead, you take the gravel road to **Boca do Rio**. On the small beach, where there was once the mouth of a river, an archaeological dig discovered a Roman salting station where "garum" was prepared, a shellfish sauce which was a delicacy at the banquets of Imperial Rome to where it was transported in clay amphorae.

On a nearby hill, there are the ruins of the fort of Almádena. Built to keep watch over the Almadrava, a device for catching tuna which is no longer used, the fort gradually crumbled away. But the scenery and the magnificence of the location continue unaltered.



Via do Bispo: Chapel of Guadalupe

And so we continue to **Salema**, a place which is still close to its roots as a fishing village, where you can watch the small fishing boats arriving as they use the incoming tide to reach the beach. At this point, it is advisable to get back on the EN 125, at the crossroads where the road

leads to the village of **Figueira**, where once the seafarers stocked up on toasted figs, a food that would keep them going during their long journeys. After a further bend in the road, we find the small chapel of Guadalupe. This is where prayers were said before they set off in their ships and caravels, at the mercy of the waves.

Continuing in a westerly direction, **Vila do Bispo** appears on a small rise, visible from the EN 125. The town is a place of windy streets, whitewashed houses trimmed in bright colours. By the doorways, high steps made of granite slabs, polished by age and use. From time to time, a decorated chimney-pot stands out against the sky.

The Main Church, next to a small garden, is also the town centre, bus stop and meeting point, and it has a beautiful 18th century façade, and a nave clad in tiles which are painted with images of flowers and dolphins. In an annex, there is a small museum with items of sacred art. The new Cultural Centre is an attraction with its permanent exhibitions.

In the surrounding area, the menhirs dating from 3000 to 4000 BC are a true archaeological treasure. There is an excellent guide

published by the local Parish Office which shows its exact location and can be obtained free from the Parish Office or the Tourist Office in Sagres. The walk starts a short distance away, on the old road to Sagres in a place called Monte Salema. From there, there is a stretch to be covered on foot, to discover the menhirs dotted around the green fields where there are some rare species of plants flourishing.

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

The **Fortress of Sagres** is one of the best-known monuments in the whole of Portugal. The symbol of the Portuguese



The Promontory of Sagres



São Vicente Lighthouse

discoveries, the enigmatic “*rosa-dos-ventos*” (wind rose) carved in the paving stones of the fortress, has been known throughout the world since the end of the middle ages, owing to Prince Henry the Navigator. He conceived the most ambitious and adventurous plan that had been known in history up to that time.

His Nautical Academy brought together a pleiad of men of knowledge, experts in the fields of cosmography, astronomy, mathematics, geography, navigation and naval construction. Portuguese, Spaniards, Italians, Germans and Jews came for the dream of sailing to distant lands. “Navigation is needed...”.

At the Sagres School, they invented the caravel, perfected other vessels like the “nau”, improved astronomical calculations and sea-charts, and developed techniques for navigating on the high seas. This is where the navigators Christopher Columbus, Bartolomeu Dias, Vasco da Gama were trained, who broke through the limits of the Old World “with skill and art”.

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 unequivocal evidence of the ability of the human species to overcome apparently insuperable obstacles.

The fortress has walls with elegant lines and a strong bastion. As the target of piracy, of the 1755 earthquake and subsequent undersea earthquake, it was almost destroyed.

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

Untouched until the 21st century, the magic of the Promontorium Sacrum has remained, the most southwesterly point in Europe, reverently named by the Romans.

In sight, and 6 km away by road is **Cabo de S. Vicente**, (Cape St Vincent), thus called because the body of this Franciscan monk rests there. Tradition has it that the Mozarabs, Muslims who had

converted to Christianity, brought the body here from Padua to preserve it during the Saracen occupation.

The legend speaks of crows transformed into sentinels against the approach of strangers. The birds followed the saint, whose body was ordered to be moved to Lisbon by 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 that the Bishop of the Algarve had built for the safety of the sailors. On the huge rocks, rough and steep, the symphony of the sea echoes continuously. The light, filtered by the salty spray multiplies the ochre reflections of the clay or the golden yellow of the limestone on the steep cliffs.

Between them, beaches look out over the immensity of the ocean. This is so at **Mareta**, with its picturesque port, or **Beliche**, or **Tonel**. However, you can never be too careful. The sea on these beaches can become very rough, and sometimes makes the large rocks roll with a frightening rumble. Together with the wind, it rises up in powerful waves that are perfect for surfing or bodyboarding but that beat against the rocks and create treacherous currents hidden by curtains of the white spray of the waves.

Already full of *saudade*, a kind of nostalgia that is a uniquely Portuguese feeling, we take the road that is 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 *sargo* (sea-bream), a succulent lobster, a fish *caldeirada* (stew with potatoes, tomatoes and peppers) or fresh *perceves* (barnacles).

There is still time for a short detour to the left towards the beach of **Castelejo**, 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 of special interest to people who enjoy watching the dizzying flight of birds of prey who



Tonel Beach



View from Torre d'Aspa



Vila do Bispo: Traditional architecture

choose the steep cliffs to breed.

In Vila do Bispo, we shall choose to head in the direction of **Aljezur**, this time, into the heart of the Natural Park of the Costa Vicentina and the South-east Algarve, a special landscape, different somehow, with nature that has remained untouched by time and by people. In a short time we will arrive at a crossing where a road leads to **Pedralva**, a tiny village which is immediately followed by **Pero Queimado**, in amongst the fragrant eucalyptus trees. Continuing in a southerly direction, we will arrive once again at the EN 125 in the fishing village of **Budens**, in search of the Main Church with its altars in gilt carving, and two pretty chapels: one of Santo António surrounded by verdant countryside, and the other of São Lourenço, which has a fine altar front with tiles dating from the 18th century. Nearby, there are some windmills that are nowadays merely picturesque and decorative.

Turning inland once again, it is only a short

distance to **Barão de São João**, where the rural charm of traditional architecture predominates, going through **Barão de S. 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, derived from the verb *sahara* (to enchant).

And so here we can see charming houses of red sandstone, in amongst green vegetable plots and groves of almond trees, whose fruit has always been carried in the locally made baskets made of *esparto* grass or palm leaves.

We are now feeling the need to feast our eyes once again on a stretch of water and so we head for the *Barragem da Bravura*, a man-made lake, and thence to **Odeóxere** and, along a gravel road, we will arrive in Palmares, a hill overlooking Meia Praia.

This is one of the most beautiful beaches in the Algarve: there are 7 kilometres of fine unpolluted sand, undulating dunes and small but sophisticated restaurants, serving as specialities what the fishermen caught in the sea the same day. We must also mention the water sports and the Palmares Golf Club, whose fairways follow the contours of the hill, accentuating the contrast between the horizon of the sea and the rural world, where the beginnings of rural tourism were seen in some of the country houses, and other small farms were transformed into luxury resorts.

Having arrived at the **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 lit up brightly and in the end you are spoilt for choice.

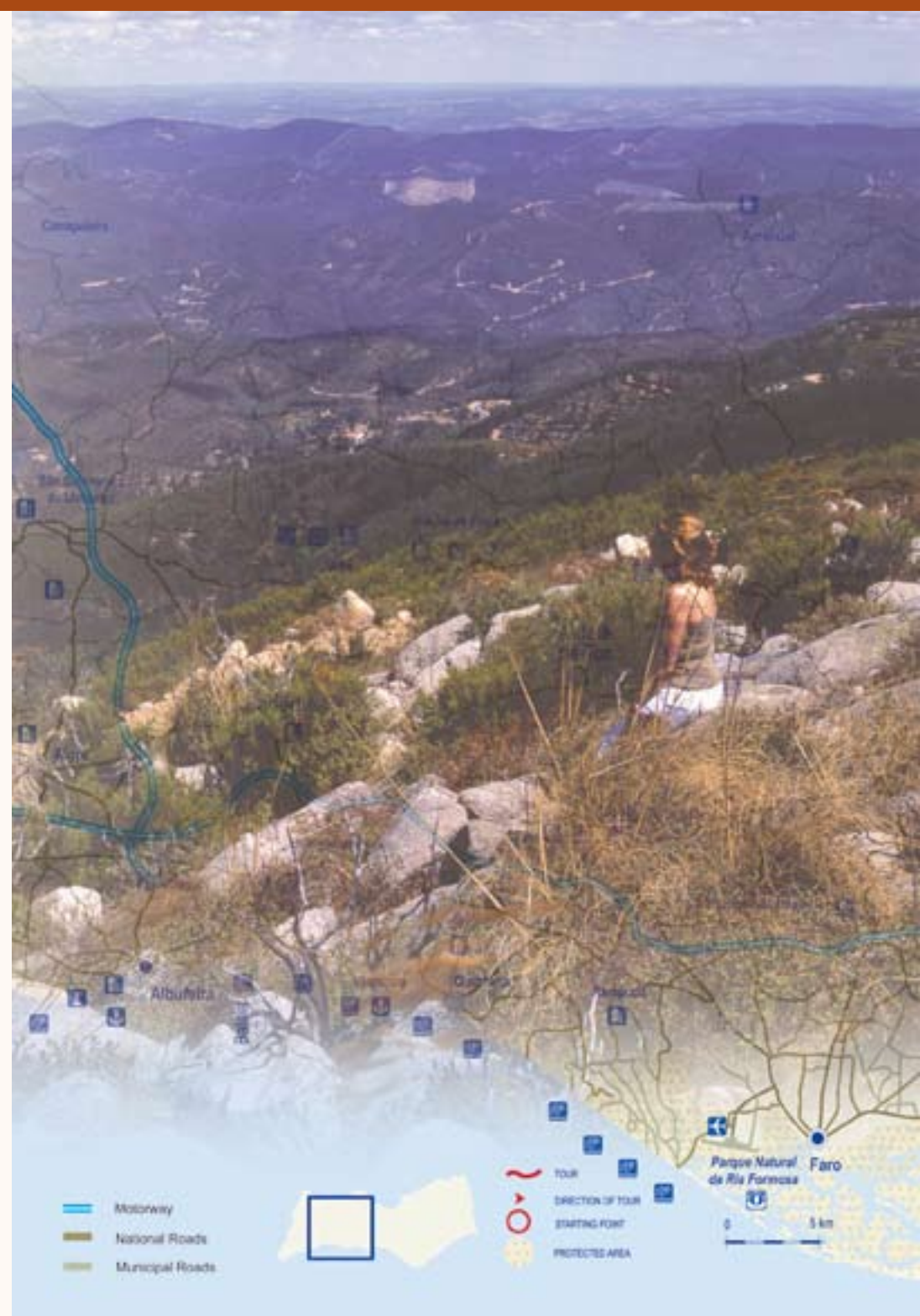
The cultural activities on offer include shows of a traditional nature, alongside many others such as theatre and classical music, in the Lagos Cultural Centre. There is often live music to be heard in the squares in the town centre, or in the bars and restaurants. There is also no shortage of discos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



Lagos Marina

From up there in Monchique, the view towards the southwest is magnificent. Two seas can be seen in the haze; there is that luminous quality of the whitewash at our feet, nearby and in the distance, where we know Lagos and Portimão to be. We shall also go round old fishermen's houses, nowadays second homes often full of occasional holiday-makers, beaches with cliffs, steep rocks and seagulls who love the foam and sands which mould their feet in the late afternoon. On the preserved battlements of the towering Silves castle we will get a sense of wars fought with arrows, catapults and boiling oil, we will discern the same red blood spilled by Moors and Christians 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. They say that there is greater similarity with Sintra, and Monserrate. But also with the Black Forest, other hilly parts of Europe, and the leafy landscapes of Madeira. Between the alder trees and the smell of the pine trees, between the freshness of the wind and the moistness all around, this forest paradise sings: this is a different kind of experience for the skin and the eyes.

But also for the soul: there in the area surrounding Fóia, in amongst the ruggedness of the rocks, can be discerned other tourist paradises over the dozens of kilometres of the southwest of Portugal.



This tour takes us from Portimão to Fóia and back again, and we will travel from the mighty rocks at Praia da Rocha, lapped by the sea and moulded by the wind into such charming freaks of nature, up to the highest point in the Algarve, Fóia, which rises up proudly from the green landscape of the Serra de Monchique. This will be a look at different parts of the Algarve, a tour consisting of contrasts and surprises.

Before leaving **Portimão**, we can discover something of the tourist city, buzzing with life, a town which was born between the banks of the river Arade and the sea. History tells us that Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans and Arabs all went up the river Arade to Silves, and left remains in the area. But it

was the Portuguese Discoveries in the middle of the 15th century, which 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 mediaeval walls still stand in between the houses. But 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 and window surrounds and walls clad in tiles. The narrow streets of the old quarter of fishermen and merchants, like the Largo da Barca, in the Rua Nova, or of the Postigo da Igreja are examples of this.

In terms of monuments, the church of Nossa Senhora da Conceição (Our Lady of the Conception) should be visited with its sandstone doorway, engraved in a fine façade. Near the river, not far from the harbour entrance is the Convent of São Francisco built in 1535.



Monchique - Fóia



Portimão - Rocha Beach

All that is left of the church, which was as sober as the convent section, is a very fine doorway. After that 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 "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 which 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.

The Portimão Marina, for its part, provides a busy area of entertainment and shopping, and a nice artificial beach.

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

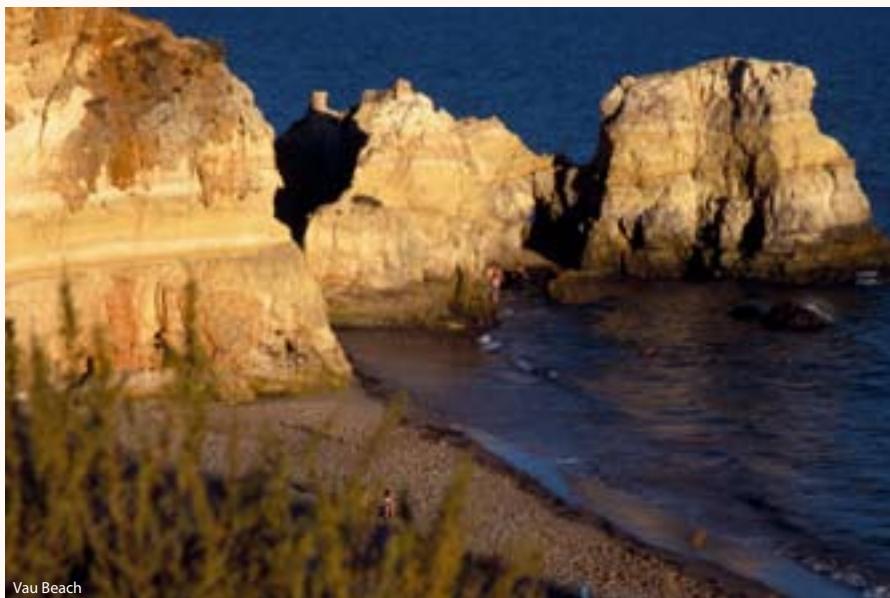
The Fortress of Santa Catarina de Ribamar keeps watch over the mouth of the Arade and together with the Fort of São João on the other side of the river (in **Ferragudo**), ensured that the city and the harbour were defended in former times. Leaving the town to the west, we reach **Praia do Vau**, whose hallmarks are its warm, calm waters and fine sands. A little further on, the Ponta de João Arens is a natural viewpoint, forming 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 that have been shipwrecked here over the centuries.

The next stop is in **Alvor**. A small paradise without equal, the Ria de Alvor has the sea on one side and the vast estuary of the river on the other, separated by a long dune. This is a place of total calm, which can best be enjoyed on unforgettable boat trips.

The traditional fishermen keep alive the skills of fishing and gathering shellfish, 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 had their huts on the beach pulled down to force them to live in Vila Real de Santo António. Migratory birds make their nests in the salt-marsh, gliding and circling over the shallow waters next to the shore, skimming the blue sea



Ferragudo



Vau Beach

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, which is joined to the church and is an old Arab marabout (the shrine where a Muslim holy man is buried). The churchyard affords an excellent view over the Ria.

The chapels of São João and São Pedro, which are square in shape with rounded cupolas are also Arab marabouts. The only traces of the Castle of Alvor are two lengths of wall with houses backing on to them. And next to the peaceful village of **Montes de Alvor**, the aerodrome has facilities for sports such as parachuting, as well as fast private transport.

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

In this former rice-field, the first golf course in the Algarve was created, designed by Sir Henry Cotton and surrounded by huge leafy trees. Aficionados of the game will find other courses of recognised 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 from 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 on, there are the remains of a Roman villa built in the 3rd century A.D., by a rich rural 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 wind up a mountain road through spectacular cork-oak plantations and cultivated valleys. Wild olive trees, olive and carob trees alternate with wild aromatic plants. Linked to this impressive diversity of plants, there is abundant wild life. The highlights in terms of birdlife are the diurnal and 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 the Chapel of Santo António, founded by the Bishop of Silves, D. Fernando da Silva Coutinho, (1501 – 1536). In **Casais**, you turn on to the EN 267 in the direction of Marmeleite and after 4 km you come to **Portela Baixa**, from where the whole coast can be seen, from Quarteira to Cabo de São Vicente. Take the small road which leads to **Chilrão**, on a slope buffeted by the Atlantic winds; the vegetation gets more and more sparse as we climb up, until there is just heather and gorse. And here we are at the **Fóia Viewing Point**, on the top of the *serra*, 902 metres above sea level, with one of the finest panoramas in the south of the country, stretching from the coastline to the hills of the Alentejo. On clear days, you can see from Sagres to Faro to the south, and the Serra da Arrábida in the north.

The landscape is different from the rest of the Algarve, unfolding in terraces and with bubbling springs. The Fóia spring, at a height of 798 metres on the northeastern slope, flows constantly, both in winter and in summer, with a steady temperature of 14° Celsius, giving the illusion of coolness on hot days and of warmth when the weather is most wintry.

From here we go down to **Monchique**, where there are hydrangeas and camellias all around and the Largo de São Sebastião just has to be visited. In the town centre can be seen the Main Church with the main portico in the Manueline style, the Capela do Santíssimo (a chapel), the churches of São Sebastião, of the Misericórdia and the Chapel of Senhor dos Passos. The ruins of the Convent of Nossa Senhora do Desterro (Our Lady of the Exile), less than 1 km away, are surrounded by trees and provide a wonderful view. Just nearby stands the largest magnolia in Europe, which is classified as part of the natural heritage. The nearby farms and villages are ideal for walking and horse riding, for cycling and for the taking of panoramic photographs.

After being out in the countryside, it is good to have a break to try out the local cuisine: in **Monchique** this is especially interesting and with unusual combinations such as rice dishes with chestnuts, dishes of a kind of maize porridge, or the local speciality of roast pork. Particularly delicious are the locally made sausages of the meat from “black pigs”, and smoked hams cured in the old style. In terms of sweets, one



Fóia Viewing Point



Fóia Viewing Point

of the highlights is “bolo de tacho”, a kind of cake made of honey, chocolate and cinnamon, and honey pudding. This is the land of the *medronho* fruit: growing wild and spontaneously, it is famous for its brandy and honey.

And then it is time to start the journey back to the coast, leaving the town along the EN 266 where, by the roadside, the little craft shops are tempting, with their famous “scissor” chairs, inspired by Roman seats, basketwork and pottery.

Caldas de Monchique appears near a bend in the road, between the green of the mountains and the blue of the sky. This is where the Monchique spa is, with its spring of light, pure and crystalline water, which the Romans referred to as “sacred” and used to alleviate rheumatism and ailments of the respiratory tract. The most illustrious guest here was King D. João II. The air here is full of romantic perfumes, and it is nice to walk between the cork-oaks and the eucalyptus trees, and up to the top of Picota, from whose slopes a magnificent view can be enjoyed.

On the same road, with luxuriant vegetation at the sides, we get to **Porto de Lagos** in the valley of the **Ribeira de Odelouca**, an old river port which was used until the 14th century. Legend has it that a Moorish princess and a Christian prince ran away together. In a rage, her father pursued them as far as the river where the



Monchique - Caldas de Monchique



Ribeira de Odelouca

poor princess drowned as she was trying to stay with her lover. Her desperate father called out “*Oh! de louca!*” (Literally translated as: Oh, what madness!) and the name stuck.

10 kilometres further on, we get to **Silves**, the magnificent city of Xelb, where caliphs, princes and poets lived in the “Palace of the Verandas”, looking out over the river Arade. 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. Other essential places to visit are the Igreja da Misericórdia (Misericórdia church) with its door in the Manueline style, and the cathedral.

Now is a good time to pop into the Cork Museum, which forms part of the “Fábrica do Inglês”, a leisure complex built in an old cork factory.



Silves - Municipal Archaeological Museum

Next, take the road going east from the city in the direction of **Enxerim**, to the Cruz de Portugal (Cross of Portugal), a sixteenth century cross which is three metres high and richly carved.

In the quiet surroundings of gentle hills and rocks full of history can be found the somewhat exotic *Centro Cinagético*, some 6 km outside Silves. Here there is a tourist hunting centre set up in a restored former primary school. The timid stags and deer share the area with pheasants and eagles which recover here when they are hurt or sick, before being



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 the delicate snowflakes. The princess's homesickness was cured and they lived happily ever after.

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

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

The most important monument in Lagoa is the Convent of S. José, which is now used as a cultural centre, and 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 wheel of foundlings; where in the past abandoned children were placed anonymously. A menhir stands in the gardens, taken from the area near Porches.

Handicrafts are 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 move on another two kilometres to **Estombar**, a small village whose church strikes us immediately because of its 18th century tiles and the two columns, unique in Portugal, which are totally covered in ornamentation, reproducing exotic plants and shapes which give them an

set free again.

The cuisine in Silves is based on fragrant old tastes, such as traditional potato soup, with mint and home-made bread. The "carapaus" (horse mackerel) were brought up the Arade, to be marinated in salt for the famous local dish "carapaus alimados"; and from the hills came game meat. Some of the local sweet specialities are "bolo real" (a cake made of crystallized fruits, nuts and a sip of Port wine), "doce de ovos" (a sweet made with eggs) and "meias luas" (crescent-shaped cakes filled with a mix of almonds and yolks). And in terms of fruit, there is nothing better than a nice Algarve orange.

The Legend of the Almond Trees is one of the oldest, and in **Silves** it involved the love of the Nordic Romaiquia and Al-Mu'tamid, poet and prince of the city, the son of the Caliph of Seville. The legend has it that the beautiful princess was dying of homesickness because she wanted



oriental touch.

After driving the 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 that can be visited by boat and are accessible through secret routes along the cliff.

Don't miss the chance to visit the **Sítio das Fontes**, located about one kilometre away on the left bank of the Rio Arade; this is a park, or more precisely an eco-museum with hundred-year-old olive trees, wild lilies, wild orchids, thistles and poplars, in an orgy of colours of natural abundance.

After viewing the beautiful Praia do Pintadinho, from the clifftops around, we need to retrace our steps and go through Mato Serrão on the way to Ferragudo. This fishing village owes its name to a "ferro agudo" (literally: sharp iron), used to pull the nets full of sardines from the sea. The Church of Nossa Senhora da Conceição, high above the port and at the top of a curious stairway, has an interesting collection of offerings from seafarers, in recognition of miraculous rescues.

To guard the mouth of the Rio Arade, the Fortress of S. João was built in Ferragudo. Today, the fortress and the village are a special place to spend your leisure time, with boat cruises up the river leaving from the harbour, passing by a small island where the Rosário Chapel stands with a panorama of crags, hills and caves on the shore of the river.

Returning to **Portimão**, it is time to sample the local cuisine in the numerous restaurants which offer

it. The closeness of Portimão to the sea means that grilled sardines and clams are some of the main delicacies. The sweets show off the importance locally of dried fruits and are a basic element of the gastronomic heritage. Portimão bubbles with life: the only problem will be deciding where to have dinner and where to end the day (or rather the night) on a happy note; the casino, with its shows, would appear to be a good option.



The part of the Algarve that is most similar to the Alentejo stretches along the Atlantic coast. From Odeceixe to Vila do Bispo, the view that passers-by see is covered 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, of the houses, follows us as we head south: the whitewashed houses in Odeceixe, and again in Aljezur, bits of history which break up the flat landscape of the Vicentina coast. Down below, along the whole coast, winding watercourses cut through the countryside before losing themselves in the vastness of the Atlantic. On the banks, as if stopped in time, dreamers in caps and checked shirts try their luck, which might emerge occasionally from the warm waters.

We will find others on the same trip, but further south, their rods pointing to the sky and the Americas, performing a brave balancing act out on a rock, watching the fight from the edge of the precipice. On this side of the cliffs, where the storks' nests perch, there are fields dotted with unusual flowers, yellow, red and purple to welcome the migrating birds, and there appear to be obstacles in the unconscious zig-zagging of the reptiles.

We take pleasure simply in looking, our senses are touched, suddenly forgetting the crowded city.



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 Natural Park of the Costa Vicentina and the Southwest Alentejo: the road forms the boundary of the park, which goes right up to the coastline. A rough translation of "Aljezur" from the Arabic is "the river of the bridges" – they would have been necessary when the river was navigable.

Siltation led to the stagnation of the water and this made the life of the people very difficult. Concerned about their health, the 19th century Bishop, D. Francisco Gomes, wanted to move the village to the hill in front, and for this reason had the church built in the new town.

Either because the health problems were solved, or because of a certain reluctance on the part of the populace, Aljezur remained divided in two. The old town slopes down to the river with the houses on terraces, from the octagonal castle which was taken from the Arabs by Pedro Peres Correia in 1246. The construction of Aljezur castle is attributed to the Arabs, who, at the highest point, limited themselves to erecting a cora of schist and two towers, one round and the other square, for the perfect defence



Aljezur - Arrifana beach



Town of Aljezur

of the place. Legend has it that the Arabs were taken by surprise while they were bathing on the magnificent beach at Amoreira, some 6 kilometres from Aljezur, and were decimated there, the water turning red. Time has erased the horrors, but the natural beauty has remained.

You get to the castle up the steep streets of the old town, and, although the monument is not in a very good state, it is worth going for the panorama alone. Down below is the fertile, cultivated plain. Then come the hills of the Cerro das Mós and finally the slopes of the Serra de Espinhaço de Cão.

When you go down again, it is worth having a good look at the Museum and House of the painter José Cercas, which allows you to find out about the life of one of the illustrious sons of Aljezur, and his time. Nearby, there is the Municipal Museum with an ethnographic and an archaeological centre, as well as a gallery. The Antoniano Museum of Religious Art is in a former chapel built in the 17th century.

If you are starting to feel hungry, don't forget that one of the local specialities is *papas mouras* (Moorish porridge): the classic Algarve "xarem", made from maize flour but with a special seasoning that smells of cumin. Other essential things to try are a tender piece of veal or a succulent sea-bream. In season, which comes at the beginning of autumn, sweet potatoes start to appear in stews, and they are turned into *pastéis* (patties) which they make here like nowhere else.



Aljezur Castle

There are many craftspeople still living in the old town. The Rua do Nascer do Sol is where you can catch the women unawares as they are making lace. A little lower down, there are others making delightful dolls. The men concentrate more on basketwork, weaving their cane or wicker in rivalry with their neighbours. Continuing our search for craftspeople, in other streets of white houses we can find pottery and items made of shells collected on the beaches: these artefacts have put their stamp on popular culture and become part of the daily lives of those who have chosen a quiet way of life.

After crossing the bridge to the new town and turning a corner, the Main Church, stands in front of you

with the image of the patron saint Nossa Senhora de Alva standing 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 kilometres, try this walk so as not to miss a small wonder. Leaving the town to the north on the EN 120, we turn towards the coast for the first time after some



Aljezur – Main Church

seven kilometres to have a look at the beach of **Praia da Carriagem**. Here you will have the chance to observe the flight of numerous marine birds. Eagles, goshawks and sparrow-hawks looking down from above, and using the wind

for gliding.

We have to return along the same track to get back to the tarred road, although people who are more adventurous and have an appropriate vehicle can take the short cut to the left, about 3 kilometres from the coast. Along this track, there are fields planted alternately with sweet potato and vines.

Very soon we reach **Rogil** where a recently restored mill is essential viewing. The sails once again sing in the wind, making a symphony of sound together with the blackbirds, nightingales and goldfinches.

Something to try is the local Rogil wine, but be careful because it is made in the traditional way and the refreshing taste is deceptive! To accompany it, there is nothing better than *pastéis* (patties) made from sweet potato, or the latter, baked. Or perhaps a sandwich with fried moray eel, if these were in the day's catch and if the tides were favourable. Simple flavours, strong and unique.



Carriagem Beach



Windmill in Rogil

It is well worth having a peep into the little shops by the roadside, especially if you are fond of handicrafts. The typical Algarve chimney pots are made here. Richly decorated, there are chimneys of all sizes, both for rooftops, and simply as a decoration.

Another detour, also on a gravel road, takes us to the little village of **Esteveira**, and from there to the Samoqueira beach.

Getting there is not that easy, but it is definitely worth the effort. There is a deserted paradise to be found here, the dream of all travellers. A small river created a little beach at its mouth. At low tide, there are tiny, transparent prawns moving around in the puddles 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 items of handicraft. 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 and functioning mill, with a fine view over the village. Inside, there is a display of implements following the whole milling cycle. In terms of handicrafts, items made of leather are much sought after. It is four kilometres from here to the mouth of the river Odeceixe, with a beach on each

bank. On the southern side there is a viewing point.

What surprises us about the landscape is that it is constantly changing. When the tide turns, suddenly a small sand shelf appears. When the river fills up again, suddenly the reed beds disappear. As if by sleight of hand, at one moment we can see a beach, then an impetuous river, and then a docile stream.

All of this is because of the meeting between the impetuous sea and the fresh waters 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.

But we shall stay in the Algarve and return to Aljezur on the EN 120, this time passing through the town



and 2 km later turning off to **Vale da Telha**. Near the coast, if you head north, you get to the beach at **Monte Clérigo**. The sea has carved out caves in unusual shapes, left rocks scattered around in the sand, and the waves are waiting for practitioners of radical sports. Before turning at the crossroads, we shall go up to the top of the cliffs which command a fabulous panoramic view. Sometimes the flight of the birds competes with the wings of the ultralites and the sails of the hang gliders.

Heading south this time, towards the **Praia da Arrifana**, imposing rocks appear before us which shelter 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, the sea rose up in anger and wanted to drag bits of the dark rock away with it. An unending struggle, with the waves crashing furiously on days with a spring tide, or else powerful and calm. On the road which leads down to the port, the fishermen's houses balance precariously. They know that this is where the best fishing grounds are on the Costa Vicentina, 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, in the traditional way, tie themselves to the rocks with a rope, and wait on the razor's edge for the wild toing and froing of the waves to allow them access to the shellfish beds, located under the water line. Afterwards they come out with their 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 we keep going south on the EN 120 passing through Alfambras. And in **Espinhaço de Cão** – the name of both the village and the surrounding hills, we turn to head west again on a road surrounded by luxuriant vegetation with places where time seems to have stopped, until we reach **Monte Ruivo**.

Nature abounds in smells and colours, and our reason for being in the Natural 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 the strawberry trees, wild and spontaneous, whose berries are used to make that famous brandy, *medronho*.



Goose Barnacles



Arrifana Beach

The eucalyptus trees sway in the breeze. A phlegmatic herd of golden brown cows watch us curiously, their hiding place in a small narrow valley, which the track went round, now discovered. The green of the cistus is speckled with red, yellow and mauve wild flowers. It is here that lynxes, wild boar and wild cats 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 they see foxes.

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



Carrapateira - Church

style, with gilt carving. Next to the church, is the cemetery with a fine portal in the Manueline style.

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, 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 D. 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 from the cliffs. On seeing the enemy, the inhabitants would light fires which would lead them to the rocky coast from where they would no longer be able to escape. The dunes all around have their shape changed by the wind and the tides. This is resisted by fragile wild plants, standing watch against the whims of the ocean. There are reptiles and tortoises peeping out from the tops of the coloured rocks. And on the banks of the stream, otters splash around heedlessly.

Once at the top of the nearest hill, you can enjoy the view over the dark blue of the ocean far away, the greens of the vegetation closer by, broken occasionally by the whitewashed houses, man's contribution to the unique landscape.

Between **Praia da Bordeira** and **Praia do Amado**, the road along the shore allows you to see the profile of the high cliffs as they plummet into the frothing waves. The beaches stretch inland in wide dunes, or else

are like small nests, bordered by rocks. The beaches at Praia da Bordeira, **Pontal**, **Palheirão**, or Ilha do Forno 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, the only noises the sound of the waves and the flapping of the seagulls' wings. You can feel the strong breeze from the sea and the colours of the sunset are 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. About five kilometres outside the town you can find the Grutas do Francês (Frenchman's caves), an unexpected trip into the world of stalactites and stalagmites.

A land of abundance, Vila do Bispo was the breadbasket of the Algarve, a past that is attested to by numerous windmills.

Fishing and shellfish gathering developed to complement agriculture. In the wild seas, strange monsters appeared, what we know today as whales. For centuries, these cetaceans followed a migratory route along the Costa Vicentina. The locals only made use of the skeletons of these fearsome creatures, washed up by the sea: huts supported by ribs and vertebrae turned into seats.

To return once more to gaze upon the vastness of the ocean – something we never tire of – we can make a detour to the beach at **Praia do Castelejo**, Cordoama's twin. 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, accepting the challenge of pulling the fish, shellfish and molluscs from the choppy waters, sometimes 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, the immense sea, salty with the tears of Portugal, as the poet Fernando Pessoa wrote, invoking the Discoveries, the saga which took Portuguese seafarers all over the world in search of other lands and other peoples. Even today, the land where they were born and the sea into which they ventured, maintain that unspoiled beauty, an enviable natural heritage, 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 the Portuguese Lagos.



Vila do Bispo



For a few days, we shall leave the rugged coast behind us. We will travel to parts of the Algarve which are home to swirling, diving birds, where the water buries shells in billions of grains of sand along the gentle coastline. We will walk between 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 always with our eyes on the infiniteness of the 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.

But we shall never lose sight of the people who live there: embraced for ever by the land of the Caldeirão, building their lives in this land of carobs and almonds, living far from the seas just for them. By whitewashed doorways, in the shade of virgin walls and decorated chimney pots, they weave wicker and shape whatever they can find, which they sell to foreigners, and rushing car-borne travellers. We shall visit old cities which once had dark moorish walls and then became white. The thousand churches of Tavira, the thousand gardens of Loulé, the thousand restaurants smelling of the sea on the edge of Olhão. We shall be charmed by the Algarve of the Sotavento. We shall lose ourselves and find ourselves again amongst the most enduring remains of the Moorish era.



SUMMARY OF TOUR

Silves » S. Bartolomeu de Messines » Alte » Salir » Querença »
Barranco do Velho » Montes Novos » Cachopo » Martinlongo »
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



- | | | | | |
|-----------------|---------------|----------------|----------|--------------------------------------|
| Nature Reserves | Lighthouse | Viewing Points | Beach | Natural Recreation and Leisure Areas |
| Airport | Boat Terminal | Monument | Spa | Ferry-Boat |
| Dam | Marina | Museum | Windmill | |



0 10 km



- TOUR
- DIRECTION OF TOUR
- STARTING POINT
- PROTECTED AREA

The tour beyond the Barlavento is a long excursion which will allow people who are staying in the western part of the Algarve to discover a number of cities and the different landscapes of the Eastern Algarve.

However, the people of the Algarve do not refer to these places by using the normal points of the compass: there are specific names which 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



Serra - Barranco do Velho



Sagres - Salema Beach

wind direction by watching the movement of the clouds and the ocean currents.

The terms *Barlavento* and *Sotavento* have become part of the everyday language in this region, where the culture is a synthesis of the hills of the *serra* and the sea.

Another reason for having a tour beyond the *Barlavento* is that maps cannot describe the pungent smell 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 sides 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 Mutamid 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!..."

And 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 the Arab

façades of the palaces shining in the almost tropical sun, with its terraces and minarets, the streets filled with bazaars, and down below 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 Mutamid longed for and the crusader admired so much, is still intact.

We will take the EN 124 to **S. Bartolomeu de Messines** which is about 25 km away. The town is located close to the hill of Penedo Grande in the Serra do Caldeirão, and this was where the poet and pedagogue João de Deus was born. A visit to his Museum-House 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 S. 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).

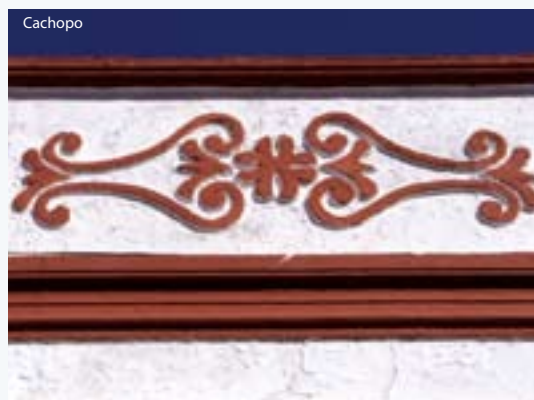
For people who are fond of handicrafts, there are shops and craftspeople making baskets, items of leather, ceramics and handmade pottery. For those with a sweet tooth, now is the time to try out

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 around which are ideal for walking, horse riding and cycling,



Silves



Cachopo

especially up to the refreshing expanses of water in the Funcho and Arade dams. Once there, it is possible to hire canoes.

Just out of interest: it was in a place called Benaciate, just a few kilometres from Messines, that some of the most important steles were found with records of the writing of the southwest of the peninsula, which even today remain undeciphered.

The next stopping place is **Alte**, about 15 km to the east, still on the EN 124. We are now right in the middle of the Serra do Caldeirão, and this is a different Algarve. Here waves of land take the place of 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 a many different greens 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 species of plant in this part of the *serra*, many of them medicinal or aromatic. The landscape is full of beauty: the climbing wild roses, the delicate wild orchids and the perfume of rosemary.

The streets of **Alte** are worth having a walk round, to see the chimneys and the parapets, those picturesque details of traditional architecture. The waters at the spring of Fonte Grande sparkle in a gentle cascade, conveying all the freshness of the valley of the Ribeira de Alte. A 3.5 km detour on to road to Santa Margarida takes us to the craft workshop at Torre, where they make wooden dolls. The “Casa da Memória” (House of Memory) and the Ceramics Workshop show something of the local ceramics and tiles, and allow you to find out a bit more about Alte. And it would be terrible not to try the delicious sweets and cakes, especially those made with almonds and honey, in the local cake shops. 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 said about this area: “It is really 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”.

Mention must be made of 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 on to the EN 525

and after passing through Tôr with its fine old bridge, we continue on 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 gastronomy. For this reason, this is an ideal



place to have a few tasty lessons! 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 made in the village, as well as rag dolls wearing traditional costumes to represent different occupations. The richly decorated chimney pots and parapets give this area a feel of untouched tradition. Nearby are the caves of Salustreira and the "Igrejinha dos Mouros" (Church of the Moors), a cave in the shape of a church.

Continuing towards the sea of hills which form the Serra do Caldeirão on leaving Querença we 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 to



Medronho brandy



Cachopo

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 portrays the expertise of the *serra*, and to get there you go between houses which are either whitewashed or made of schist, with threshing floors and decorated chimneys. The weavers in Lançadeira have their workshop right in the middle of the village. On a detour to Mealha (9km) you can see circular constructions, an old form of dwelling with thick schist walls and conical roofs made of straw or rushes. Nearby is Anta da Masmorra, a dolmen, located near to the windmills and the Anta das Pedras Altas, pre-historic monuments.

After another 16 km, we are in **Martinlongo**. The plateau where 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 create 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 this region in the northeast of the Algarve, with its sparsely populated land, in the 19th century was a refuge for people who had fallen into debt. It was sufficient for them to sign a bond at the council in Alcoutim and promise to defend the frontier to avoid having to try their luck 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, crowned by the castle which dates from the time of "Al-Gharb". In front, on the other bank and in a different country is San Lucar del Guadiana. There are many

secrets held here from the times of smuggling and the earlier frontier wars. Nowadays the strongest ties come from lives that crossed a long time ago, and are now part of the family rather than mere neighbours. You can rest your gaze on the waters of the Guadiana from the walls of the castle, which sometimes 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 that the beautiful Saracen girl was enchanted in the old castle, and guarded a great treasure. The charm to remove the spell and keep the treasure only worked if a monster was defeated in combat which took place beside two holm-oaks, worm-eaten with age, on the "night of S. João" (close to the summer solstice) using only a dagger or sword. Even today, such is the power of popular imagination, many people have tried without success, because of the thick mists that hide the place. The trees were cut down, but stubbornly started to shoot again. And they are still there, hiding who knows what prodigy, guardian of treasure and of the spell over that ill-starred Moorish maiden.

It will not be easy to resist the typical cuisine of the north-east, flavoured with aromatic herbs. Here's a menu to try out: start with a goat's cheese or a "chouriça", a spicy sausage, with olives and home-made bread. Following this with "açorda" (bread-based stew) of country chicken or a "caldeirada" (stew with potatoes, tomatoes and peppers) of lampreys; and end with a dessert of the local sweets made from almonds and figs. And then it is time to move on.

We take the riverside road, going through **Guerreiros do Rio**, with its museum about the art of fishing, as far as the mouth of the Ribeira de Odeleite. In the steep lanes, the basket-makers work beside the doorways. Had we more time to follow the route past water-mills and weirs as far as the dam, there

would be much to see. But we shall head for **Almada de Ouro** and then **Azinhãl**, a distance of less than 6 km. The bobbin-lace from Azinhãl or the baskets made of cane bear all the signs of work done without rushing.

The Nature Reserve of the Salt-Marsh of **Castro Marim** and **Vila Real de Santo António** is one of the favourite places for migratory birds. You can also see the incredibly beautiful flight of storks, or the pink clouds of flamingos. The reserve was the first to be created in Portugal in 1975 and encompasses an area of salt-marshes,



Alcoutim



Sausage



Nature Reserve of the Castro Marim and Vila Real de Santo António Salt-marsh

a tailor-made habitat for many creatures living in the water, on the land and in the air. Salt is gathered using traditional methods, and it glistens in the sunlight, unexpectedly white in between the green of the fields and the blue of the river.



Castro Marim

And 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 can be seen “lands of Spain and sands of Portugal” just like the cry of the look-out on board the caravels which is celebrated in a popular song.

But it forgot to mention the beauty of the marsh and the salt-pans, with the whiteness of **Vila Real de Santo António** and Ayamonte shining in the distance, between the waters of the Guadiana and the Atlantic. Vila Real de Santo António resembles Alcoutim in having the Spanish town of Ayamonte opposite and the Guadiana in between.

The heart of the old city is the former royal square – nowadays called the Praça Marquês de Pombal – which is paved in magnificent Portuguese calçada, radiating out from the centre in black and white. On the coast, the lighthouse, which is over 40 metres high, commands a fine view over

the nearby pine forests, the mouth of the River Guadiana, the Atlantic and neighbouring Spain. Behind the magnificent beaches, there is the forest of Monte Gordo, a pine-wood with a special inhabitant: the chameleon. It is protected because it is in danger of becoming extinct. If you see one, treat it carefully. Catching them is not permitted.

This is a land of delicacies: there are well-known dishes made from tuna like “estupeta”(tuna salad), “moxama” (a dried, pressed fillet), or a “espinheta” (stew with potatoes), not forgetting “conquilhas” (a type of clam) open and *au naturel*. In terms of sweets, there are many different ones to savour: “carriços”, (made only of egg white, sugar and trimmed almonds) “bolinhos de amor” (love cakes) and almond tart. At this point there is a choice: if you wish to get back quickly, you can take the Via do Infante motorway (70 km) to the junction 3 km from Silves where we started the tour. On a fast road, however, the delightful details that take us by surprise cannot be properly appreciated.

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 which stretches as far as the Ancão peninsula to the west of Faro. With islands, salt-marshes and beaches, the Ria is a true paradise which we can explore on a tour especially dedicated to it.

Cacela is a tiny village perched on a cliff top looking out over the sea, surrounded by wonderful scenery, a jewel that has remained untouched over centuries. In the main square there is a cistern of mediaeval origin, 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 see the best sunsets in the Algarve, while savouring delicious oysters, succulent clams, the freshest grilled fish, or a tasty plate of



Cacela Velha



Cacela Velha

sautéed shellfish.

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

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

Moncarapacho is to the north of the EN 125: take the turn-off near Fuzeta, 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 five hundred year old Main Church and the Parish Museum, with archaeological items

and precious pieces of religious, numismatic and ethnographic art. At the northern exit from the town and after having a look at the pottery, turn towards the Cerro de S. 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 in the plain below. It would be difficult to find anywhere else where the sunset has so many shades, lighting up

such a diverse landscape, from the Algarve of the beaches to the Algarve of the *serra*, with the *barrocal* in between.

At the main crossroads in Moncarapacho there is a turn-off which takes us in a few minutes to the Palace at Estói, the only example of romantic architecture in the Algarve. It is a sumptuous 18th century building surrounded by fine gardens and interesting statues, such as the triptych 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 Roman temple. We now head west, and at the junction with the EM520-2 keep straight on. Continue on this road for 7 km; it leads along the slopes of the *barrocal*, which are like an extended viewing point, and then we get to **Santa Bárbara de Nexe**. Here the traditional occupation is that of the "calceteiro", the layer of stone paving. From modest pieces of stone, masterpieces are created which embellish the



Cabanas de Tavira



Tavira



Paderne Castle

squares of numerous cities, paved in the typical Portuguese "calçada". It is on the EN 270, passing through Loulé, that we get to **Boliqueime**. Apparently, the name Boliqueime is a corruption of the Italian for "olhos de água" (literally meaning "eyes of water", i.e. underground springs). The chapel and the carved stone "arco do cruzeiro" (arch of the cross) are sights which should be seen. It is now just 8 km to **Paderne**, our next stop. This is a place that will always feature in the history of Portugal because its castle is one of those that appear on the national flag. From up there, you can see a water-mill and a weir on the Ribeira de Quarteira: the water-mill is an even older device than the windmill. There is a four kilometre walk in the area around the castle which takes you over the mediaeval bridge and which will reveal some of the secrets of the region's flora and fauna to you. From Paderne, take the EM 524 towards Algoz and then the EN 269, which on this stretch has a number of viewing points and will take us back to **Silves** once more.



Silves

CONTENTS OF TOURS OF THE CENTRAL ALGARVE

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, passing through the countryside of the barrocal in flower, where every curve in the road heralds a new panorama.

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.

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 houses of great antiquity, the second ingrained with sun and salt, for ever linked to the sea and to fishing. This tour will open up the wonderful world of the Ria Formosa Natural Park to us.

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 Estói, the monuments of Tavira and the fine beaches of Monte Gordo.

P.

60

TOUR OF THE VILLAGES

+/- 98 km

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

68

TOUR OF THE CALDEIRÃO

+/- 123 km

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

78

TOUR OF THE RIA FORMOSA

+/- 102 km

Faro » S. João da Venda » S. Lourenço » Almancil » Quinta
do Lago » Vale do Lobo » Santa Bárbara de Nexe » Estói »
Moncarapacho » Quelfes » Olhão » Ilha da Culatra » Ilha da
Armona » Ilha do Farol » Ilha da Deserta (Barreta) » Faro

92

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 » Estói » Faro » Olhão » Tavira » Cacela Velha »
Vila Real de Santo António



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 by the beaches of Albufeira.

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

By the end we will have a collection of unforgettable memories, many stories to tell, and will have enjoyed a wide range of unusual flavours. We will be able to distinguish the accent of the people of Olhão from other "Algarvios", we will discover the pointed roofs of Tavira constructed with four sloping sides, along the banks of the river Gilão.

We will be able to follow the magnificent flight of storks as they fly from their nest in the Arco da Vila, the gateway to Faro's old city, to the Ria Formosa. Little delights, great emotions, delicacies from the sea one day, and sweets from the hills 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.

You blink your eyes and suddenly you find yourself between the modern houses and the cistus-filled landscape. More to the north, but alongside the bikini-clad heat of a different Algarve; and beside lanes redolent of people and lunches of grilled fish; late afternoons spent glancing at each other with the ball of fire hanging there, still undecided between different blues; and then other balls of fire, twinkling, silvery, turning above the serendipity of wandering heads, at night.

Beside the frenetic Algarve, of people, landscapes and lives in contrast, there is another Algarve, of whitewashed houses, ancient boulders, and old tar roads.

From the Algarve that is cooled by the sea and warmed by the masses, we will move to one that has witnessed time, the castle walls in Paderne, worn by the winds and rebuilt by men. From the road, we can see lines of houses in Alte, we will travel to see swans at Fonte Pequena; we can dive heart and soul into the freshness of abundant water: these are the pleasures of Portuguese villages which have not been allowed to be spoiled.

On the way, there is a riot of colour on this tour of terraces, people with lined faces, toiling in the ancient ploughed landscape. And there are also plenty of culinary delights to discover in the Barrocal.

A world of contrasts in one small corner of the Algarve.



The **Tour of the Villages** is a wonderful journey through the contrasts of the Algarve, from the cosmopolitan city of **Albufeira**, with its magnificent beaches to the traditional village of **Alte**, with its picturesque houses, passing through the countryside of the *barrocal*, in flower, where every curve in the road heralds a new panorama.

And then we will see new villages, built for leisure and for a life of ease, shaded by the freshness of the 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, which is where this tour begins. The cliffs surround the Maria Luísa beach and the Praia dos Pescadores, where the boats lie, waiting for the moment to ride the waves again and



Albufeira, view from the Miradouro do Pau da Bandeira



Albufeira, Church of São Sebastião

creating a colourful scene.

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

Albufeira was built by the Arabs on the top of the Cerro da Vila, a cliff which 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 known as Baltum, and they set up their fishing equipment there. The integration of Al Buhera into the Kingdom of the Algarves was not easy. It was only at the second attempt in 1249, that it was successfully retaken by the Christians from the Moors.

The 1755 earthquake destroyed practically all the buildings. That is why the Church of São Sebastião which kept its 16th century Manueline side doorway and the Church of Sant'Ana both dating from the 18th century, with the design inspired by popular architecture, are so precious.

For its part, the Misericórdia chapel replaced the old Arab mosque and it retains the doorway, the triumphal arch and the apse from the 15th century gothic building.

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



Albufeira

A broad avenue leads us to **Montechoro**, on a hill, where leisure activities take pride of place and there is a wide range of shopping outlets. In the numerous outdoor sitting areas, almost all the languages in the world 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 features of chimneys, parapets and roof terraces. There we take the winding EM 395, from which we can see windmills and water-wheels. In the village that goes by the strange name of **Purgatório** (Purgatory) we will turn west, and on the EN 270 we travel as far as **Paderne**, on a gentle hill with its white houses standing out against the background of the surrounding countryside. There is an interesting decorated chimney dating from the 18th century that seems to be welcoming us.

On top of a rocky spur, around which runs the Quarteira river, stands the castle of Paderne,

which is of Arab origin. Nearby there is an intact Roman bridge with part of the old cobblestones preserved. The water-mill and the weir at the foot of the hill still keep the traditional way of milling in operation. The freshness of the location makes it ideal for walking, in particular because the fields all around conceal beautiful wild orchids, with exuberant colours and unusual forms. Between the hills which gradually rise up to form the Serra do Caldeirão, we get to **Alte**. The cool waters at Fonte Grande and Fonte Pequena are very inviting, and there is a pleasant walk around the village streets to see the decorated chimneys, the



Alte

coloured parapets, 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 is behind the **legend** about the origin of the name of the village.

There was once a rich and respected lady who owned land in Freixo Verde, and she had become accustomed to the priest only celebrating mass when she was present in the only chapel in the whole parish. Until one day, tired of the continual waiting, the cleric did not wait for the noblewoman. The faithful were already on their way home when they met the land-owner 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 a perfect place to buy **handicrafts**, to try the cakes whose recipes are sweet family secrets, jealously guarded.

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



Alte, Fonte Grande

Algarve, proud of its identity.

After about ten kilometres on the EN 270, an especially beautiful stretch of road, we arrive in **Boliqueime** on the slopes of a small hill, at the beginning of the *barrocal*. Merchants from Flanders were amongst the earliest to import the best figs, almonds and carobs from this area. Add to these magnificent oranges, juicy and sweet, and you get a prosperous community.

One of the best farms belonged to the famous Quarteira Esquire, Martim Mecham, who received it as a gift from the King D. Diniz in 1297.

The Quarteira farm was what 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



Boliqueime

in terms both of ecology and landscape. The bittern and the purple gallinule are the stars of this eco-system, 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 humans to it. In Vilamoura, there is a whole range of outdoor activities on offer, but it is also possible to go shopping in stores of international quality, to savour dishes from all over the world, to go to shows and try your luck in the **Casino**. Or else, simply enjoy the spacious beaches with their warm waters.

We have to return to the EN 125 and then head south again near **Maritenda**, to reach the marvels of the beach at **Aldeia das Açoteias**, the unspoiled beauty of **Olhos de Água**, the beaches at Praia Maria Luísa and **Balaia**, until we get to **Oura**.

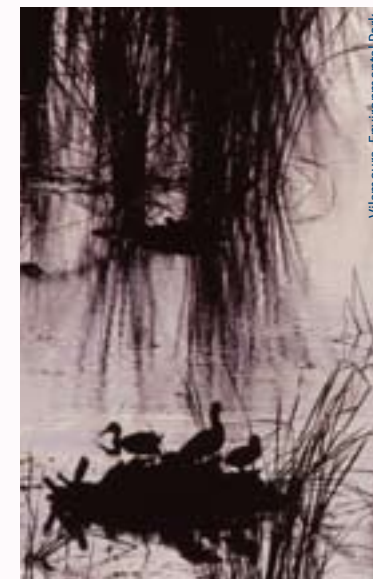
The Algarve has some of the finest beaches in Europe, and Oura is part of a series of beaches, nestling between colourful cliffs, which stretch from Praia da Falésia in the east to **Galé**, in the west, with **Castelo**, the exclusive beaches of Praia da Coelha and **São Rafael** and Baleeira in between. 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 "conquilhas"

(a kind of clam) seasoned with bay leaf and coriander, mackerel cooked with oregano, sardines with a tomato sauce: these are alternatives to the grilled dishes which you can also find here, and are very, very tasty. And then, all that remains is to dive into the buzzing nightlife in Albufeira.



Albufeira, São Rafael beach



Vilamoura, Environmental Park

There is also an Algarve up above the major roads which traverse it, a place where the storks peer down at us from the chimney tops; where the streams babble as they cut their way through the green fields; where nature remains unspoilt.

There, in a realm of solitude, far from the hustle and bustle near the ocean, the maternal arms that have become rock stretch out, as if caressing the other, cosmopolitan Algarve. But there are still bits of the Alentejo on this side of the Caldeirão, where the year-round summers boil: between the cistus and the cork-oaks, you can still make out a wide, golden plateau. But the smell of the sea is already permeating the houses, still inebriating the people who sought it without ever having it. So many people in the low-lying areas who have spawned numerous shelters from the heat. And streets, and life, in cities and towns like Loulé and São Brás de Alportel.

ROTAS

tour of the caldeirão centro



SUMMARY OF TOUR

Loulé » Tôr » Fonte da Benémola » Salir » Rocha da Pena » Querença »
 S. Brás de Alportel » Santa Catarina da Fonte do Bispo » Malhão » Santo Estêvão » Luz de Tavira »
 Pedras d'el Rei » Fuzeta » Moncarapicho » Cerro de São Miguel » Santa Bárbara de Nexe » Loulé

- | | | | |
|-----------------|---------------|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Nature Reserves | Lighthouse | Viewing Points | Beach |
| Airport | Boat Terminal | Monument | Natural Recreation and Leisure Areas |
| Dam | Marina | Museum | |





Loulé

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. But 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 which was the way through to the settlement. We can also visit the Main Church, in the Gothic style (13th century) and whose bell-tower was adapted from a Muslim minaret. In the city centre, the Espírito Santo Convent functions as the Municipal Art Gallery. In the shops around the walls, you can still find artisans working pieces of copper or clay, or selling items made in the nearby villages. There are hats and baskets made of palm leaves, which is work done by women and an age-old skill. The palm leaves



Loulé, Castle

are worked in the same way as for 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 carobs. The descent into the **salt mines**, located right in the middle of Loulé, is very interesting. The galleries are between 230 and 350 metres deep and cover an area of 1200 hectares. The salt which was extracted was left by the sea some 300 million years ago. The air in the mines is therapeutic for respiratory illnesses.



Loulé, Convent of Espírito Santo

Where the EN 270 leaves Loulé for Boliqueime, the sanctuary of the **Sovereign Mother**, can be seen, perched on a hill which is also an excellent viewing point. Local people honour their patron saint with one of the biggest processions in the south of the country, which has been held at Easter time for over 400 years. The menfolk carry the heavy litter up the steep slope, while the enthusiastic crowd greet her by uttering loud cries and waving white cloths. 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. Soon we get to **Tôr** a little village with narrow streets and an old Roman bridge.

From the ER 524 road, the natural park of **Fonte da Benémola**, is on the right hand side surrounded by ash and willow trees, poplars and oleanders which grow alongside rosemary, thyme and lavender. This is a Classified Site because of its natural wealth.

On the road going out 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 arrive in **Salir** a village on the edge of the serra and whose origins are lost in time. In the castle, there are remains going back to the Celts, but parts are of Arab origin (12th century) and the towers and part of the walls, known to the locals as the "wall of wisdom", are visible. The local **cuisine** is rich and original, and some things to try are "xaréim" (maize porridge) with pork crackling, or "mountain" soup. Goat and sheep cheeses, or homemade sausages are



Tôr

perfect as starters while the “medronho” brandy is the ideal accompaniment for the 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. 390 plant species and 122 species of bird have already been 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 the “Rocha da Pena”, there are two ancient constructions probably from the Iron Age and nearby is the Gruta do Algar dos Mouros (Cavern of the Moors). **Tradition** has it that they took refuge here at the time of the Christian reconquest.

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, good will. Located near to two streams, the village is full of charm and beautiful views.

In the main square, the **Main Church** of Nossa Senhora da Assunção (Our Lady of the Assumption) has a fine Manueline doorway and in December 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 S. Romão**, with a line of houses by the roadside in the tradition of the rural Algarve, until we get to **S. 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



“Festa da Espiga” (Festival of the Maize Cob)

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 “Verbena”, with its fine bandstand, which is joined to 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 which houses the Casa da Cultura António Bentes and the Ethnographic Museum of Costumes of the Algarve which relives



Festa das Chouriças (Sausage Festival)



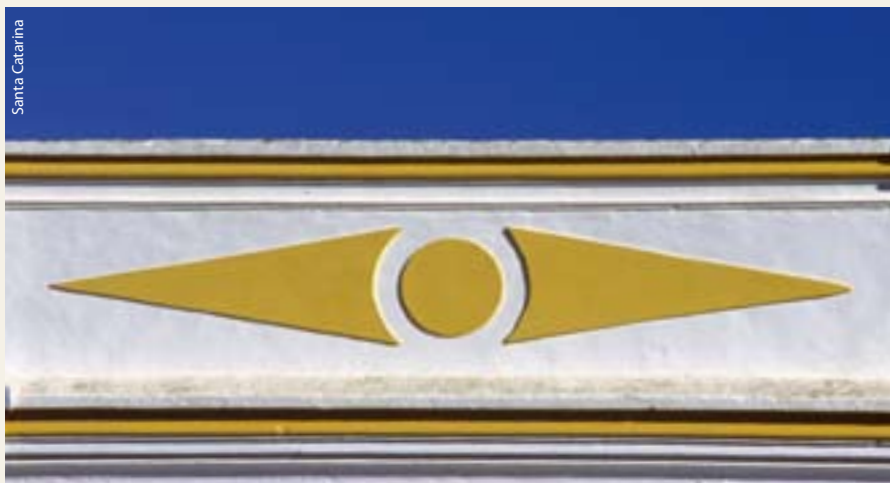
São Brás de Alportel

the days when they used to dance the “corridinho” on the threshing floors at threshing time. The **cork** from São Brás de Alportel is one of 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 as the previous year’s fruit ripens, they 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 of bucolic scenes where time passes slowly and full of the simple pleasures of life.

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. There is a smell of holm-oaks on the air, or the almond shells burning in the ovens where the tiles and Moorish roofing tiles are baked. In the orchards all around, almond and orange trees flourish, and the single-storey houses have pieces of stone in the white of the limewashed walls. On the same road, we get to **Malhão**



São Brás de Alportel, barber



Santa Catarina



Santa Catarina da Fonte do Bispo, tile makers



Medronho

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 from the 16th century, was redecorated with one of these parapets. The side doorway in the Manueline style is one of the finest in the Algarve.

We will take the EN 125 until near the village of **Pedras del Rei** and the beach **Praia do Barril**, with its warm, crystal-clear waters where the estates of Quinta de Torre de Ares and Quinta das Antas are, and where the ancient Roman city of Balsa stood at the time of Julius Caesar and Augustus (1st century B.C.). The site is on the edge of the **Ria Formosa** and extremely important archaeological finds were made



Barril Beach

here, now housed in the Archaeological Museum in Lisbon. We go back to the EN 125 and on reaching **Alfandanga**, we turn off to **Fuzeta**. 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 **Cerro de S. Miguel** (hill), 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 which leads to the Chapel, almost buried in the hill and 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 **Estói**, 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 imposing holiday homes, but without losing their original lines.

These are quiet, pleasant places where a large foreign community has settled in search of quiet and the friendliness of 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 have traditional dishes on their menus. In July, the Jazz Festival organised by the Casa da Cultura (House of Culture) brings the nights to life. And within the same municipality, just a bit lower down, you can find the Casino, the Vilamoura marina and many other possibilities in terms of entertainment.



View from the Cerro de São Miguel (Hill)

From Faro to Olhão passing through a paradise of birds. We will turn our backs on the ten-kilometres of dual carriageway between the cities, and turn instead to an area of great beauty.

We fly as if in a dream between the barrier islands, like birds. We will enjoy 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. And 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 which seem to have withstood the centuries. Within the present-day Algarve, we will discover other aspects of the Algarve.

The timeless white houses in Moncarapacho, and the arts of clay and oils in São Lourenço.

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 which is lacking in the flat landscape on the rest of the walk.

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

ROTAS[®]

tour of the ria formosa centro



SUMMARY OF TOUR

Faro » S. João da Venda » S. Lourenço » Almancil » Quinta do Lago » Vale do Lobo » Santa Bárbara de Nexe » Estói » Moncarapacho » Quelfes » Olhão » Ilha da Culatra » Ilha da Armona » Ilha do Farol » Ilha da Deserta (Barreta) » Faro

	Nature Reserves		Lighthouse		Viewing Points		Beach
	Airport		Boat Terminal		Monument		Spa
	Windmill		Marina		Museum		Natural Recreation and Leisure Areas



Motorway
 National Roads
 Municipal Roads



TOUR
 DIRECTION OF TOUR
 STARTING POINT
 PROTECTED AREA

0 5 km

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 houses of great antiquity, the second ingrained with sun and salt, for ever linked to the sea and to fishing. And this tour will open up the wonderful world of the **Ria Formosa Natural 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 was marked by numerous earthquakes, fires, sackings by pirates and military action, but despite this the city attracts people because of its bright and sober 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, a time when it became one of the most important urban centres

in the south of the Iberian Peninsula, its importance has not diminished. The Arab geographer Rasis considered it to be "the best in the world amongst those of similar size". 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. In front, there is the Bishop's Palace dating from the 18th century, with its sober lines 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.

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 Infante D. Henrique Archaeological Museum is housed, with one of the highlights amongst the permanent exhibitions being the Islamic room.



Ria Formosa



Faro – Castle Walls

The Arco do Repouso (Rest Arch), the eastern gate in the wall, leads us to the Largo de S. Francisco, where a convent by 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 which has, after Evora, the most important Ossuary Chapel in the country. The whitewashed houses, with their roofs with four sloping sides (known as "scissor" (tesoura) roofs to the locals), the arches and the narrow streets are the details that define the architecture of the Algarve capital: they can be seen in the Rua de Santo António and in the pedestrian precinct nearby, where there are lively outside sitting areas and cosmopolitan shops.

Having made a promise to return, for example to visit the Praia de Faro beach, which you get to through the main channel of the Ria Formosa, we leave Faro heading east on the EN 125, go through **S. João da Venda** and after a short distance following the signposts we get to **S. Lourenço**, whose small church is completely covered in 17th century tiles, and has a gilt carved altar on the inside



Faro, Convent of Nossa Senhora da Assunção

with eight figurative panels. The S. Lourenço Cultural Centre is an oasis of culture, with permanent exhibitions by contemporary artists, including works by Günter Grass.

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 which are designed to encourage the 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 by the light of the setting sun. Here, almost all types of sport are on offer 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 Garrão and Vale de Lobo**, cosmopolitan tourist destinations and yet carefully integrated into the landscape. When we return through **S. João da Venda** we will leave the EN 125 and head north, crossing 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 **Estói**.

Without doubt, the jewel in this large village is the “Jardim”



Faro Beach



Church of São Lourenço



S. Lourenço Cultural Centre

(Garden) which is the name given to the garden and palace, classified as a building of public interest. This complex is a sumptuous 18th century construction, one of the best exemplars of the Romantic period. The Parish Church (16th and 17th centuries), which is 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: 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) at Easter time, 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 Pinhal do Ludo, near the coast. There, large bonfires are lit and bunches of perfumed rosemary are burnt, around which a picnic is held and a lively, popular ball.

One kilometre away are the **Milreu Ruins**, (2nd century A.D.), remains of a grand, Roman Patrician's villa, where we can find



Ruins of Milreu



Vale do Lobo beach



Palace of Estói

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 Estói, and it is only 9 km away.

There are pomegranate hedges to be seen as far as the Moncarapacho Pottery, a family business of **craftspeople** creating typical local pieces. This is an ideal place to find a souvenir of the Algarve.

There are a number of 19th century and early 20th century houses in the village, and the main 15th century church is an enlargement of the original Gothic chapel. The Parish

Museum, an annex to the Espírito Santo Chapel, contains, in addition to an interesting collection of archaeological items and pieces of local ethnography, a valuable collection of religious imagery from the 16th to 18th centuries, the main attraction being a 17th century, 45-piece Neapolitan nativity set. It is only 6 km to the top of **Cerro de S. Miguel (Barranco de S. 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 there is a bridge of Roman origin, which has been rebuilt a number of times and where in 1808, Napoleonic troops were defeated in a battle which was the starting point for the uprising in the whole of the Algarve.

One of the most attractive cities that can be seen from the top of the Cerro de S. Miguel is **Olhão**, with its houses with roof terraces, and its minarets, a patchwork of white cubes which earned it the epithet of the “cubist” city. Olhão is a place which should not be visited in a hurry, to give you time to walk 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



Pottery



View of the Cerro de São Miguel



Olhão

water supply and this attracted 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 that is refreshed by gardens and restaurant and café terraces, with one of the highlights being the colourful atmosphere of the Municipal Market, which fulfils its traditional function by day and then is the setting for lively nightlife in the evening. It is a display of colours, smells and tastes, a delight for the senses.

Near the old city centre, the Main Church dated 1695 declares on its façade that “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 people, this church was made, 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.



Sardines

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 for the drying of fish, look-out points for watching the sea. In other streets and avenues, there are grand façades clad in tiles, with verandas and wrought-iron work.

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” (a kind of maize porridge with a type of clam), stuffed squid Olhão style, stews made with dog-fish or eel, rice with razor clams, cuttlefish with broad beans, and the famous “cataplanas” in many versions; this is the food of fishermen, 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. Sweets are also a



Olhão Market



Olhão Market



Ria Formosa

temptation. “Bolachas bêbedas”, which are made with brandy in; stuffed figs, fig cake, cakes 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 Natural Park**. We set off down a track from where we can see migratory birds, and plants growing in dry or marshy soil.

The famous water-dogs, an indigenous species which was endangered and whose survival is guaranteed by the park, are another of the attractions. A tidal mill murmurs 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 “ludoteca”, a play area for children.



Quinta de Marim



Quinta de Marim

The Ria Formosa Natural Park covers an area of some 17,000 hectares, from Cacela-Velha to Ancão, and it 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.

But the most tempting idea is to go on a cruise through the channels of the Ria to the islands of **Culatra**, **Armona** and **Farol**, or even to the island of **Fuzeta**.

Golden beaches stretch as far as the eye can see, with the waves lapping at their edges.

There are no words to describe the little paradise of the **Ilha Deserta (Ilha da Barreta)** and this trip through the channels is the perfect way to bring this tour to a conclusion.

There are dozens of unspoiled, warm beaches, for the most part deserted. 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 – clams and “conquilhas” – followed



Tidal mill



Quinta de Marim



Quinta de Marim



Island of Farol

by a typical fish soup, a tasty rice with razor clams, or as an alternative a “cataplana” of monkfish or shellfish, or baby cuttlefish fried with their ink; these are some of the favourite dishes. There is still time to immerse ourselves in the lively nightlife of **Faro**, where the young people of the University of the Algarve lead the way as far as entertainment goes, alongside a huge range of cultural activities.



Dunes

This is the Algarve over which the sun makes its great trajectory. 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. In between, we go on an adventure to the west, following the tourist routes on the land. We will venture on to 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 and Paderne and Silves, an Algarve of whitewashed houses, and decorated chimneys, which the sun shines through with difficulty, and castles which bear witness to the beginning of the adventure. We will go down to the coastal strip again but we will still be high up; cliffs at our feet, 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 taking another dip 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. And finally, we shall visit the thousand churches of 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...



tour beyond the central algarve

SUMMARY OF 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 » Estói » Faro » Olhão » Tavira » Cacela Velha »
 Vila Real de Santo António



- | | | | | |
|-----------------|---------------|----------------|----------|--------------------------------------|
| Nature Reserves | Lighthouse | Viewing Points | Beach | Natural Recreation and Leisure Areas |
| Airport | Boat Terminal | Monument | Sea | Ferry-Boat |
| Dam | Marina | Museum | Windmill | |



- | | | |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Motorway | National Roads | Protected Area |
| Municipal Roads | | |
- 0 10 km
- TOUR
 DIRECTION OF TOUR
 STARTING POINT
 PROTECTED AREA

This **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 have put together a unique album of photographs. On the **coast**, the long beaches of the Sotavento with their gentle waters are replaced by the abrupt contours of the cliffs, and surprising small beaches in the Barlavento.



Carvoeiro

In the serra, the undulating hills of the Caldeirão and the plateaus of the northeast, stand in contrast to the wild garden of Monchique or the smell of the Atlantic in the Serra de Espinhaço de Cão. In the **cities**, the things that stand out are the Islamic heritage of **Silves**, the elegance of **São Brás de Alportel**, the vivaciousness of **Loulé**, the imposingness of **Faro**, 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. It was founded in 1774, right in the middle of the Enlightenment, as a replica of the street layout 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 sitting areas. The old market, now transformed into the António Aleixo Cultural Centre, replaced the fish, fruit and vegetable stalls with cultural venues. The city was always associated with fishing; ferries cross the river to neighbouring Ayamonte on the opposite bank, while other boats go up and down the Guadiana river, and the marina gives the Avenida da República,



Vila Real de Santo António

the charming waterfront avenue, a cosmopolitan air.

The lighthouse watches over the coast and the whole city, from its top commanding a wide view of the mouth of the **Guadiana river**, of the deep green of the pine forest, which was planted there to protect the dunes which frame the beautiful bay of **Monte Gordo**, of beaches as far as they eye can see, lapped by the Atlantic which here is warm and gentle.



Vila Real de Santo António – waterfront

To the north, the **Nature Reserve of the Salt-marsh of Castro Marim and Vila Real de Santo António** is a magnificent place, which is home to unique flora and many species of birds. The smell of the sea is combined with the perfume of the woodland and the marsh, soaked 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 **gastronomy** with famous dishes made from tuna, a long-established tradition. To this can be added the “conquilhas” clams or 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 the salt-pans which are used for traditional salt production, which reflect the sunlight in their white expanse. 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 an important centre of Arab power until 1242. The town was once 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 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 constructing the **Castle**, the Fort of S. Sebastião and the walls. Its battlements command an excellent view over the whole of the surrounding



Castro Marim – salt pans

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 **handicrafts** which will delight people who appreciate popular art: wooden miniatures, baskets made from cane, and tapestry, unique and original items.

The Mediaeval Days of Castro Marim, is an interesting festival held every year in September which brings an eye-catching parade on to the streets, with all the inhabitants participating in period costume.

We suggest that you head for the **Central Algarve** on the Via do Infante (A 22) motorway, which has a junction only a few hundred metres away. Taking advantage of modern facilities after enjoying the heritage of history provides a pleasant and stimulating contrast.

At the different stopping areas on the motorway, you can enjoy a panorama which is surprisingly varied. To the south up to the coast can be seen 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 exit for Tavira, and there we head in the direction of **São Brás de Alportel** on the EN 270.

After 7 km, we arrive in **Santa Catarina da Fonte do Bispo**, a village which was once part of the **smugglers' route**, which was used until the end of the 19th century and provided a link between the



Mediaeval Days of Castro Marim



Santa Catarina da Fonte do Bispo, tile makers

Atlantic coast, via Monchique, and the border on the Guadiana. The village is surrounded by groves of orange and lemon trees, and the clay which is used to make paving tiles, wall tiles, "tijolo burro" (solid bricks) and "Moorish" roof tiles, comes from its calcareous soil. With advance booking, the Associação de Telheiros Artesanais (traditional tile-makers association) organises visits to see the tile-makers, a craft that has been going on for centuries. Working with clay is a complex business. Before the potter's wheel can start to turn, the clay has to be extracted from underground and the impurities removed: a small piece of wood or a stone would be enough to break the pieces. The ovens are previously heated with wood from the holm-oak and then with almond shells which leave an earthy smell in the air. The final products, after being burnished, are coated with whitewash to make them lighter and tougher. Heading east, it is only 9 km to **São Brás de Alportel**.



São Brás de Alportel



Cork

Xanabus or Xanabras – is the heart of the **cork industry**, the point where the roads cross which have joined Loulé to Tavira and Faro to Almodôvar (Alentejo), since the time of the Romans. The "Calçadinha Romana" (Roman Road) is one of the remains from that time which is still visible today. Cork oaks, eucalyptus, pine and strawberry trees shade the hillsides around the town. The Episcopal Garden also known as "Verbena", with its beautiful bandstand, can also be visited.

Then we have to head for the **Ethnographic Museum of Algarve Costume** which is part of the Casa da Cultura António Bentes, in a mansion of Moorish inspiration with its interesting collection of garments once worn by the people of the Algarve, and toys.

The names of the villages in this municipality are very interesting. **Tareja** (Teresa), Desbarato (selling at a very low price), **Tesoureiro** (Treasurer), Parises, Mealhas (Coins) or Mesquita (Mosque) are just a few examples. In almost all of them, the **craftsmen** stick to tradition. Rag rugs, baskets made of wicker and cane, brooms and brushes, items made of tin, wrought-iron work, wooden spoons: these are all made alongside the production of honey, cheeses, sausages, "medronho" brandy and regional sweets. The **gastronomy** is rich and varied, with game dishes the speciality, complemented by sweets, amongst

which the "morgado serrano" (traditional cake made of almonds or fig, eggs and malabar gourd preserve) is the highlight.

Continuing in the same direction and on the same road, we head for Loulé. This was an important Arab urban centre until 1249, and the creation of the free market in 1291, turned **Loulé** into one of the major centres in the mediaeval Algarve.

The city walls of Arab origin breathe history; culture is the focus in the Espírito Santo



Regional Sweets

convent, which has been turned into an art gallery and whose cloisters host the annual jazz festival. But it is for three days of intense merry-making at carnival time in February that Loulé is transformed, the focus of entertainment throughout the Algarve.

As we leave the city on the EN 270 towards Boliqueime, the **Mãe Soberana**, (Sovereign Mother) can be seen on the left, on a hill which serves as a viewing point over the city, the countryside and the sea. This is a 16th century monument in the Renaissance style, dedicated to N. Sra. da Piedade (Our Lady of Piety), the patron saint of Loulé. The **legends** about the Sovereign Mother date from several centuries ago. One of them concerns 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. And so the little chapel was built on the hill which can be seen from wherever you are in Loulé. The **procession** that is held in her honour



Loulé, Mãe Soberana (Sovereign Mother)

at Easter time is one of the most impressive and best attended in the south of Portugal. Thousands of people waving cloths and shouting praise, accompany the litter, as it is carried at a run by the bearers on the steep ascent which leads to the **Sanctuary**. In the heart of the *barrocal*, Loulé is a place of **handicrafts** and in the shops near the walls, craftspeople can still be found at work. With unparalleled skill, they make baskets and carpets and hats of esparto grass, belts, bags and items made of copper and tin.

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

The name of the town, which is derived from "olhos de água" (literally meaning "eyes of water", i.e. underground springs) in Italian, is attributed to the Genoese, Sicilians and Venetians who went fishing for tuna and whales off the coast of the Algarve and came across this place with abundant supplies of potable water.



Boliqueime



Olhos de Água Beach



Olhos de Água Beach

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 reached today's location. Old Boliqueime (1 km to the south) was destroyed by the 1755 earthquake. The soil was so rich that King João I had the first trials for planting sugar carried out here. In the area, there is still an important centre for processing carob, or St John's Bread. It has 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 preparation, it releases a sweet and unmistakable aroma. On the banks of the river Algibre, reeds are harvested which are used for the craft of basket making, a long tradition, as 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 the famous Quarteira Esquire donated in 1297 by D. Diniz to Martim Mecham and where the tourist complex of **Vilamoura** stands today.

You need to be careful not to miss the road out of Boliqueime in the direction of **Paderne**, once again on the EN 270. The route takes us up into the hills, with the landscape around making up for the rather tight bends.

Paderne stands on a gentle hill, with its old white houses standing out from the surrounding countryside. In the main street, there is an interesting decorated chimney dating from the 18th century. On a nearby hill, the castle is different from usual: it is not made of stone, but of "taipa", a technique of Arab military construction, a mixture of sand and lime which, as Ataíde de Oliveira, the first Algarve archaeologist said, is "so strong and tough that it exceeds stone walls in strength". It is one of the oldest castles in the Algarve and features on the Portuguese flag, and 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.



Paderne



Built from sandstone, with its reddish tone, and surrounded by the old Silves cathedral and the white houses, it appears to be immutable to us today, as if time did not pass. 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 Portas da Cidade (City Gates) and the Town Hall. Nearby, on the other side of the tower of the Portas da Cidade is the Municipal Archaeological Museum which houses one of the most important 12th century cistern wells in the whole of Al Andaluz. Another important place to visit is the old cathedral. Inside the castle there is a garden and archaeological ruins, not to mention the walls where you can climb up for the best view over the city.

In the "Fábrica do Inglês" below, a former cork factory, you can visit the Cork Museum. The traditional gastronomy is a synthesis of produce from the sea and the land, and the best known sweets include "bolo real" (made of crystallized fruits, nuts and a sip of Port wine), the Silves "morgado", sweets made from eggs and "meias luas" (crescent-shaped cakes filled with a mix of almonds and eggs). This is a land of oranges, and there is nothing better than buying them, sweet and juicy, in the lively local market where the local accent echoes, sweet and strange, quite different from other places in the Algarve.

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

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

When she arrived in his new kingdom, the princess became

There is a short walk around the castle, passing over a mediaeval bridge, with a stretch of the old stone road leading to a water-mill with its weir.

We leave Paderne in the direction of Silves on Regional Road 269, which takes us to **Silves** via **Algoz**.

Overlooking the Arade river, the former Islamic capital, which was notable in the past for being so advanced culturally and commercially, still impresses people today with its proud castle dominating the landscape.



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 he had the idea of having thousands of almond trees planted to cover the hills and the valleys with tiny white petals when in blossom. And one fine winter's day, the castle awoke to see a marvellous blanket of "snow" covering the countryside all around.

And, according to the legend, Gilda was immediately cured by looking at the beautiful landscape, and from then on lived happily in Al-Gharb, a hot land, where, from that day to this, the miracle of almond trees in flower is repeated every winter.

The legend of the almond trees has inspired many poets and writers, such as the troubadour José Carlos Ary dos Santos who wrote "O Romance da Princesa do País dos Gelos que em Terras da Moirama suspirava" (The Romance of the Princess from the Land of Ice who pined away in the Lands of the Moors). The poet wrote a poem "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."



Lagoa

Lulled by the lines of Ary dos Santos, we head for **Lagoa**, which during the Arab period was called "Abenabece" apparently owing to a nearby lake. Protected from the northeast by the Serra de Monchique and from the northwest by the Caldeirão, Lagoa enjoys a mild climate with gentle winters and cool summers which are ideal for playing golf, for horse riding, cycling or walking. The Espírito Santo Convent, which has been turned into an art gallery, has a wheel of foundlings, where abandoned children were placed anonymously in the past. A menhir stands in the gardens, which was found in the parish. Nearby, many potters came together in, **Porches** a tradition that still continues to this day. Only five kilometres from Lagoa is **Carvoeiro**, with its picturesque beach and houses on the hillsides around overlooking the beach, which is 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).

Cape Carvoeiro is the place to start a fascinating boat trip through the 18 caves in these cliffs, which reveal secret accesses to the sea. The strategic importance of Cape 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 crystal clear waters by the beach, which is magically framed by cliffs, more than



Carvoeiro

compensate 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 an "armação" for catching sardines and tuna, a type of net which gave the place its name. What was once a small fishing village, next to a huge beach with calm blue waters which lap the fine sands, tinged with gold by the sun, is today a cosmopolitan town.

This stretch of rugged coast has nothing to equal it 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 which stretches from the **Ponta da Galé** to this point, with beautiful beaches such as "Pescadores" (Albufeira) "Maré Grande" and "Beijinhos".

We now leave on the EN 125 for **Alcantarilha** a village built on a hill and dominated by the church. So that the Tour does not continue for too long, we can travel on the "Via do Infante" A 22 motorway and in a short time we are close to Faro. On leaving the motorway, it is only 2 km to **Estói**, 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 demand plenty of time.

The beauty of the Old City is indisputable: the historical centre includes the Cathedral, the Convent of Nossa Senhora da Assunção (Our Lady of Assumption), the Arco do Repouso (Rest Arch) – the gate where D. 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.



Estói - Milreu Ruins

We return to the EN 125 to go to **Olhão** maybe to join in the Festival of Shellfish 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 sitting 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 which was built in 1695 declares on its façade that “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 people, this church was made, where there were only some thatched huts”).

Nearby is the “Compromisso Marítimo” founded in the 18th century with its distinctive roofs with a chapel cupola in the middle. From the church tower can be seen the huge and impressive panorama over the traditional buildings of Olhão, the Cubist Town: the 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, starting with “xarem com conquilhas” (a kind of maize porridge with a type of clam), stuffed squid Olhão style, stews made with dog-fish or eel. Other surprises are rice with razor clams or cuttlefish with broad beans.

On the way to **Tavira**, we cannot forget a visit to the **Ria Formosa Natural Park**, which has its headquarters less than 2 km from the city. We set off along a track which allows us to see migratory birds, the adaptation of plants to different habitats, the famous water dogs, those skilful divers which are another of the park’s attractions. The tidal mill is completely restored and the murmuring 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**, and the story of Floripes, a very beautiful but enchanted Moorish 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 lament being sung, begging to have the spell 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 and there are very few who



Olhão, drying fish



Shellfish Festival

dare to spend the night in this place of “apparitions” where they fear the “callings”.

We are already on the way back to the **Sotavento**, and we will stay in the coastal area of the Ria Formosa which, from Faro to Cacela Velha, forms small islands of sand and many other idyllic beaches like **Fuzeta** and **Cabanas**.

We arrive in **Tavira** to admire the Gilão river in which the decorated city is reflected. The river divides the city in two, 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 climb up towards the castle.

It is presumed that this was where the old town of Balsa was, founded by the Romans. It was later a Moorish town as shown by the numerous church towers where once the minarets of mosques stood. 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 seat in the electrical mini-train to follow the historical heritage route, and also the other train which links 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.

On arriving in the village, there are fine examples of popular architecture which show us 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, or 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 comes to an end.



Ria Formosa

CONTENTS OF TOURS OF THE SOTAVENTO

The Tuna Tour will take you to see the blue of the ocean, the golden yellow of the beaches, the green of the pine forests, the white of the houses and salt pans, and into the heart of the Nature Reserve of the Salt-Marsh of Castro Marim and Vila Real de Santo António, home to a wide range of species of birds.

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 right up to the coast. An impressive landscape, sometimes undulating, sometimes with deep gorges.

The Tour of the Guadiana takes us in search of the secrets of an age-old culture, from the time of Al-Andalus. We will follow the Guadiana, the great river of the south, on which different peoples travelled, through enchanting landscapes where man left his mark, but without preventing other species from living here, in remarkable harmony.

The Tour beyond the Sotavento takes us to places in the west or Barlavento, a tour that gives people who are staying in the east or Sotavento the chance to find out about the diversity of other parts of the Algarve. On the coast, the long beaches of the Sotavento with their gentle waters are replaced by the abrupt contours of the cliffs in the Barlavento. The undulating hills of the Caldeirão and the plateaus of the northeast, stand in 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 things that stand out are the Islamic heritage of Silves, the strong sense of identity in Portimão, the vivaciousness of Lagos and the imposingness of Faro.



P.

110

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

120

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

130

TOUR OF THE GUADIANA

+/- 163 km

Castro Marim » Monte Francisco » Junqueira » Azinhal
» Alcaria » Foz de Odeleite » Álamo » Guerreiros do Rio
» Alcoutim » Pereiro » Alcarías » Martilongo » Vaqueiros
» Cortelha » Corte do Gago » Santa Rita » Vila Nova de
Cacela » Cacela Velha » Castro Marim

142

TOUR BEYOND THE SOTAVENTO

+/- 351 km

Faro » S.Lourenço » Almancil » Quarteira » Vilamoura
» Albufeira » Armação de Pêra » Porches » Lagoa »
Carvoeiro » Ferragudo » Portimão » Odeáxere » Lagos »
Vila do Bispo » Sagres » Carrapateira » Bordeira » Aljezur »
Marmeleira » Monchique » Picota » Silves » Faro



Following the Guadiana river in search of ancient secrets, or wandering through the paradise of the Nature Reserve of Castro Marim and the Ria Formosa Natural Park, this is a tour of the warm blues of the sea, the deep green of the Serra do Caldeirão, of the rugged plateaus of the northeast, and the sensual curves of the dunes on the bay of Monte Gordo.

Tavira appears reflected in the waters of the Gilão river, wrapped in the unique luminous quality of its fine churches. S.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, its proximity to the Alentejo flavouring 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, 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 ready ourselves for lively and entertaining evenings.

The Tours of the Sotavento shows you some tempting ways of spending unforgettable holidays. Welcome to the Algarve!

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. Where the Ria Formosa comes to an end, the tour through the hottest part of the Algarve begins.

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 resigned to, or maybe even happy with this choice. But still there are the sons of the brave tuna fishermen. Few and far between, with white hair and seemingly 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. And still looking out into the blue, we can discern the glorious feats and the wars of those men from the past, on the tuna 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 and traditional-style 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.

The Marquês de Pombal, at the time of the 1755 earthquake, 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 boats and went to Meia Praia in Lagos, where the bay and the beach are of similar proportions. Some refused to move.



Monte Gordo Beach



Vila Real de Santo António

It was perhaps because of these problems, because of this unequal struggle between the power of the Marquês and the modest fishermen, that the habit arose of relieving one's feelings by swearing, in colourful and sometimes unrepeatable language. The curses of Monte Gordo are famous all over the Algarve. In the 1940s, wealthy Alentejo families began to build houses here to spend the bathing season and in the 1960s, in the early days 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 which 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 - Praça Marquês de Pombal

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, something that is unique in the Algarve, and was inspired by the experience of rebuilding Lisbon after the 1755

earthquake. The streets are laid out in a grid pattern and converge on the square Praça Marquês de Pombal, paved in Portuguese calçada, radiating out from the centre. Around the square are the Church, the Town Hall and the old Casa da Guarda, 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 30th 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, and they make **dishes with tuna**, put shellfish and molluscs to creative use and have turned the lively shopping district into to an almost continuous outdoor sitting area.

We will leave the city to the north on the IC27 in the direction of **Castro Marim**, passing through the Nature Reserve of the Castro Marim and Vila Real de Santo António Salt-Marsh, which is home to more than a hundred species of birds. To these must be added those that look for a refuge during particular seasons, and yet others that stop here on their migratory routes to the heat 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 a year-round feature.



Castro Marim

The wild ducks, for their part, seemingly responding to some invisible signal, all of a sudden flap their wings and head for the 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 which the Guadiana spills into as it nears the coast. The salt crystals shine in the sun, piled into pyramid shapes, a traditional activity which still continues today. From the battlements of the old castle, there is a view over the river and the reserve, with the cities of Ayamonte and Vila Real on the horizon. At the foot of the walls, an outstanding feature of the traditional architecture is the Main Church dating from the 18th century. On the surrounding hills can be seen the Fort of São Sebastião and the Chapel of Santo António.

The traditional **gastronomy** 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" (Portuguese bread soup with garlic and coriander) are just some of the local specialities.

Items of rustic **handicrafts** include delightful miniatures made of wood, basketwork, bobbin lace and tapestry. Every year in September, the "Mediaeval Days of Castro Marim" is held, a three-day festival during which the inhabitants dress up as people from that time. The banquets are especially popular, but there is also a market and a handsome parade. To return to the coast, we take the 125-6 connecting road which 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 biggest in Europe. This area has the warmest waters in Portugal, as the bay protects the beaches from the ocean currents. Manta Rota has managed 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 mediaeval water-



Castro Marim – Main Church

Manta Rota



wheel, but just the view over the Ria from next to the walls of the fort that was built in 1749, makes a visit worthwhile.

One of the houses has a poem by Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen on display on its walls, which translates as:

*"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 Natural Park** can be seen from here in all its splendour. On one side is the ocean, on the other the creeks, marshes and islets interspersed with channels and small areas of sea. In between 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 contrasts with the mirrors of water in the Ria, bordering on the beaches and dunes which herald "terra firma". Cacela is a very old place, which developed on the right bank of a river of the same name, on the top of a cliff.

It was first settled by the Phoenicians around 800 B.C., the Romans in turn built fishing facilities and the Arabs built a fort. D. Paio Peres Correia, Master of the Order of Santiago, re-conquered it in 1242. Still today, the walls of all the houses are painted with whitewash, with the door and window frames picked out in blue or grey, creating a harmonious whole which has remained practically intact. On leaving Cacela, we take the turn to **Fábrica**, which is right beside the water and gets its name from



Cacela Velha



Cacela Velha – D. Paio Peres Correia Fort



Fábrica

an old fish processing factory. The area is rich in breeding grounds for oysters and clams which can be savoured in the nearby restaurants.

Returning to the EN 125, after 8 km we come to **Cabanas**, hidden in the Ria Formosa and which is worth visiting for its beautiful beach which is only accessible by boat. To start with, there were only fishermen's huts there, fragile dwellings which were occupied temporarily during the tuna fishing season. This was replaced by the catching of octopus, until Sebastião Viana, a local man, discovered the technique of the **alcatruz** (a clay pot) which 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 back to pre-historic times as a port for shipping minerals from the northeast Algarve and unloading produce from the Mediterranean. During the period of Islamic rule, it was one of the main places of settlement in the Algarve. It became the main supporting port after



Cabanas



Cabanas



Tavira



Tavira – Four-sided roofs

the conquest of Ceuta (1415) which led to it being elevated to the status of a city in 1520.

The **Gilão river** is the key influence on its appearance and identity, and its banks are linked by means of a seven-arched Roman bridge. There are beautiful streets in Tavira, and an important historical centre with a huge architectural heritage and a wide range of archaeological remains.

An example of this is the famous **Tavira Vase**, probably dating from the 11th century, it is a lavishly decorated piece. 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 (island) 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 road's ease of 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 oaks. Here and there, a splash of colour coming from the limewashed walls of the rural houses makes the green of the cistus even deeper.



Tavira Beach

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 on the way to Praia do Barril, with Santa Luzia behind us, the golden beach with white spray can be seen 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, with the combined smells of carob and lavender.

But the Serra also has its people. For decades they have resisted the call of the sea, and there are men and women who will wave when they see a stranger. Let's go closer. They wear waistcoats and aprons, white hair under the brim of their hats and decorative scarves folded in a triangle. They open the *tasca* (a local eating place) for us, and their lives, invite us to partridge in soup, tempt us with the age-old pleasures of wild boar, refuse to let us leave. This is still the Algarve, far far away from the city of churches which we will also visit on this journey. From up above on the rocky hill, they can see the reddish roofs and the rows of tiles which personalise the city on the Gilão river. Under the clearest skies in Europe there are secrets to tell, in white and green, on every kilometre of melted tar.

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 right down to the coast. An **impressive landscape**, sometimes undulating, sometimes with deep gorges. In the villages, there are often **parapets**, decorated façades, at the top of the houses.



Serra do Caldeirão

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, of lavish decoration, of bright **colours**. The poet Emiliano Costa said about the Algarve: "surge of waves and sap – blue and green – colour always resounding in your senses." There are also **chimneys**, with round bases or tall and slender, like minarets in miniature with their geometrical patterns.

In **Tavira** the Gilão river divides the city into two, joined by a fine **Roman bridge** which has one end near the town hall, a building with arcades facing the garden which has a 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 sitting areas where it



Cachopo



Tavira

would be nice just to linger a bit.

On the other side, there is a row of grand houses with wrought-iron verandas, and the famous **"scissor" roofs** with their four sloping sides. This is the popular name for the roofs which are one of the city's hallmarks.

It is thought that it was the seafarers coming back from the Far East who invented these roofs. Wanting



Tavira – Four-sided roofs



Tavira

to show off the fortunes they had made in the spice trade, this different way of building houses ensured the admiration, or even envy, of their fellow countrymen.

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

The city has some very beautiful streets and there are many churches to see in Tavira too.

The tour of the churches and convents of Tavira is, on its own, a wonderful walk. Located in the **Vila-Adentro (the old part of the city)**, the Main Church of Santa Maria do Castelo is classified as a National Monument. Right in front, the Main Church of Santiago is a majestic church with one nave, with a lavish medallion of shell shapes on the façade. The Misericórdia Church (Mercy) is regarded

as the best Renaissance building (16th century) in the Algarve, with an imposing façade.

There is also the church of São José do Hospital, formerly known as Albergaria do Espírito Santo which was founded in 1425. The church has tiles dating from 1760 in an interesting rococo style. Amongst the convents, the Former Convent of São Francisco



Tavira – salt pans

(14th century) and the 16th century Convent of Nossa Senhora da Piedade (Our Lady of Pity) are the highlights, both of them in the historical centre of the city. Other things not to be missed are the exhibition centre in the Palácio da Galeria and the castle which was part of the city's defensive system along with the walls surrounding it, still visible between the houses, and the Porta da Misericórdia.

Since time immemorial, the proximity of the **Ria Formosa** has given Tavira advantages in fishing and as a port for sheltering in.

The city has the only "arraial" in the country: this is a building where fishermen and their families were housed and the equipment for catching tuna fish was stored. The Arraial Ferreira Neto, today turned into a hotel, preserved one of the fishermen's dwellings and made it into a museum about this way of

fishing, which was 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 place of killing. The net at Medo das Cascas located on the Tavira coast, was the last to operate.

The Chronicle of the Conquest of the Algarve tells that, in 1242, Tavira was taken from the Moors by D. Paio Peres Correia. For its part, tradition has it that the attack on the city came about in reprisal for the fact that seven of his horsemen were treacherously killed while hunting in the surrounding area.

No traces of the Roman city of Balsa have survived, which many historians locate in Tavira. What is striking about the city's architecture is its Arab heritage. There are a number of towers in the wall still standing and the Church of Santa Maria developed from a mosque.

Our first objective on leaving Tavira is to get to **Cachopo**, on the ER 397; it is time to keep an eye open for the rural style houses with their decorated **parapets**. The fronts of houses in the Algarve began to be decorated in the 1930s, with bright colours made from natural pigments mixed with whitewash. Red ochre, diluted to a pinkish tone or red bull's blood, a simple ochre the colour of the sun, or burned like the earth,



Tavira - Arraial Ferreira Neto



Cachopo



Cachopo - Detail of the traditional architecture

black derived from smoke and ash, the luminous blue of the sea. The decorative motifs are secular ones, 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** already 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 looking for



Saddler



Ameixial

the blacksmith's and saddler's workshops, who make saddles and harnesses, we can see decorated chimneys. Some of the local aromatic dishes which can be tried here are wild mountain rabbit, "açorda de poejo" (a bread-based dish flavoured with pennyroyal), chicken with cherries, and eggs with tomato. Heading northeast on a road bordered by broom, planted many years ago by road workers, we get to **Mealha**.

The only access to the past mysteries of the menhir at **Anta das Pedras Altas** is on foot.

Unexpectedly we go back to pre-historic times at this monument where split stones and artefacts for personal decoration were found. Around, there are the **round houses**, of Celtic origin, which are used nowadays as barns. Their thick walls are made of carefully assembled pieces of schist, the roofs are conical and thatched. In the **spectacular countryside**, with deep ravines and high rounded hills, the lavender, white heather and cistus add plenty of colour in between the cork oaks.

We keep going for another 4 km to the northeast as far as **Corte João Marques**, a place name with a flavour of the Alentejo, and 8km later we get to **Ameixial**. 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" pointing vaguely in a southerly direction.

In the surrounding area, the Chavachã mill, built entirely of schist, is one of the few that is still in operation. It stands next to the Ribeira do Vascão, in the direction of Portela (5km) with signs on the road. The tour now continues on the EN 2 heading south. Unusual place names appear such as **Besteiros** (Archers) and the affectionate **Catraia**, meaning "little girl".



Barranco do Velho - Cork

As we get closer to **Cortelha**, we can appreciate the cultivated terraces and the imposing eucalyptus trees. We are now only 2 km from **Barranco do Velho**, once a thermal station sought after for its cool waters, but above all a crossroads on the road which was at that time the main link between the coast and the inland areas. This is where the muleteers passed, carrying goods and news to and fro, from the time when they used to take honey, medronho and firewood to the Arab "chenchir" (both a garden and a vegetable plot) on the **coast**. On the return journey they would bring dried fish and in the **barrocal** they carried figs and almonds.

A majestic plantation of cork oaks flows through the hills and that is where the best **cork** in the world comes from. Black pigs feed on the acorns and are then turned into tasty presunto (smoked ham) and sausages. There are also dishes of game meat seasoned with aromatic herbs, inimitable rural specialities.

Heading south, it is not long before we get to **Alportel** and the Pousada, which is strategically located and affords a fine view from the windows of the restaurant where you can enjoy the best regional cuisine. Nearby there is a restored windmill.

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 handicraft as well as regional sweets with the omnipresent flavour 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 Torches, a procession in which the men-folk 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** (lagar) has been turned into a restaurant, but the olive trees are still there. Then comes **Pereiro**, 6km away, **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**, flowing through, which feeds small weirs with their waterfalls. The most beautiful is the **Pego do Inferno**, which is 5 metres high, an excellent area for relaxing with its deep pool which is perfect for swimming.



Handicraft - Barranco do Velho

The road ends at the main square in **Luz de Tavira**, next to the **church** with a splendid façade and an equally magnificent side door in the Manueline style with carved masonry work. It is worth making a short detour to the fishing village of **Santa Luzia** to see another monument, but this one created by nature: a **two-thousand-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 **"zambujeiro"** a wild olive, developed spontaneously.

Olives from this tree nourished primitive peoples, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Suevi and Arabs, and the oil extracted from them provided light. In its shade, crusaders, sailors, traders and farmers all rested. It will certainly live throughout the 3rd millennium, which has just begun.

And now we are back in **Tavira**, in time to try out the excellent **cuisine** with the highlight inevitably being dishes made with tuna, the **cataplanas** made with molluscs caught in the **Ria Formosa**, the fish from the seaward side of the **Ilha de Tavira**, where there is an idyllic beach that you can only get to by boat. Finally, we shall treat ourselves to some of the local sweets, the "D. Rodrigo", the "morgados de amêndoa" (made with almonds), "fios de ovos" (egg threads), and miniatures of fish, flowers and fruit.



São Brás de Alportel



Tavira - Ria Formosa

On this tour, we shall see the place where the weary peninsular river runs into the warmest waters in Portugal; and where the border is not the great water course, but other borders – less clear, of course, that divide the coast, the hills of the serra and the barrocal in between.

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 that provides water to half the Algarve. From the landscapes of low shrubs, which are only guarded by humans, dark figures, to the mirage that is Martim Longo, an unusually young town – and lively – lost in an Alentejo-like landscape.

In between we find places with pre-historic menhirs and enchanted mediaeval castles from where the sails of today's dreamers can be discerned on the meandering Guadiana. Once we have taken in its beauty, we can enjoy the freshwater fish in any of 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. And in the serra we can find the produce of looms and potteries, and the accumulated expertise of centuries.

SUMMARY OF TOUR

Castro Marim » Monte Francisco » Junqueira » Azinhal »
Alcaria » Foz de Odeleite » Alamo » Guerreiros do Rio »
Alcoutim » Pereiro » Alcarias » Martilongo » Vaqueiros »
Cortelha » Corte do Gago » Santa Rita » Vila Nova de Cacela »
Cacela Velha » Castro Marim

- Nature Reserves
- Ferry-Boat
- Dam
- Lighthouse
- Boat Terminal
- Museum
- Viewing Point
- Monument
- Beach
- Natural Recreation and Leisure Areas
- Windmill



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) which the Arabs knew, or founded, at 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, but without preventing other species from living here, in remarkable harmony. And nature reciprocates with colours, smells and flavours.



Rio Guadiana

Castro Marim, the starting point for this tour is one of the oldest places in the Algarve, with evidence of there having been an ancient settlement here. As long ago as 5000 B.C., there were people exploiting the metal resources here: they built a fort to defend themselves on the spot where the present-day castle stands. The Romans built a road through here which would follow the river to Lisbon, passing through Alcoutim, Mértola and Beja. Through here, trade flowed from the Mediterranean. The Arabs added to its importance during their period of rule, which lasted for about four centuries until 1242, when it was re-conquered by D. 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 with, we shall visit the **Castle**, headquarters of the Order of Christ in the 14th century. The old castle dating from the 11th and

12th centuries stands in an open space, surrounded by the defensive walls which were built in the 13th and 14th centuries and were the limits of the mediaeval 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 bordered in colour, follow the pattern of traditional architecture. The Main

Church stands in the Praça 1º de Maio, with a fine panel of **azulejos**. (tiles). Tile making is an Arab art which the Portuguese developed with imagination and versatility.

On two nearby hills can be seen the **Chapel of Santo António** and the **Fort of S. Sebastião**, an integral part of the walls that enclosed all the houses and of which some stretches can still be seen.



Castro Marim - Castle

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 the Salt-Marsh of Castro Marim and Vila Real de Santo António**, 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 salt-pans, pools, 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. The heron is one of the resident birds 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 **crui**ce upstream. Continuing with one's feet on terra firma and one's eyes



Stork



Castro Marim

on the river banks, the turn-off to **Monte Francisco**, on the IC27 takes us to the headquarters of the Reserve, the ideal place to find out more about this small piece of paradise.

Heading north on 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 get to **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 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 and Spain.

Even more unusual is the **Museum** “O Saber das Mulheres” (The Expertise of Women) which is in the Azinhal Cultural Centre and provides a detailed look at 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**



bobbin lace making



Azinhal

of bobbin lace making. The **lace-makers of Azinhal** created leaf-shaped lace, inspired by the leaves of different plants. Lace-making came originally from Flanders and is thought to have been brought to the Algarve by traders who travelled to the port of Antwerp to sell dried figs and other produce. The bobbins are used on a pillow, which is supported on a wicker basket made especially for this purpose. The pattern, on thick card, is pierced by the needles which are used to hold the embroidery. The bobbins which hold the cotton thread are made of oleander wood.

You cannot leave Azinhal without first trying the **regional sweets**, another example of produce made by women, made in the “A Prova” Pastry Shop, where traditional methods are still used.

As we continue in a northerly direction, do not miss the signpost to the alternative route to Alcoutim, after km 16: turn there in the direction of the river. In **Fonte do Penedo** the low houses conceal weaving looms, and the schist walls protect cultivated plots and cattle. **Alcaria** 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 ewe’s cheese and a slice or two of best presunto (smoked ham). If there is a pot on the stove with a hare soup or fried rabbit producing that special aroma, it will not be easy to resist.

After a few more curves in the road, we can see water in between the hills. **Foz de Odeleite** is a tiny



Guerreiros do Rio

village, perched above a ravine near the spot where the river flows into the Guadiana. 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, and vegetable plots and vineyards going down to the river, where there are also small moorings. From time to time **traditional fishing** boats pass by, or just sailing boats.

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 this 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 of its fishing activity since the time of the Carthaginians.

It would be nice to stop for a while in a place called **Montinho das Laranjeiras** o visit the oldest



Guerreiros do Rio



Fishing nets



Álamo

tavern in the whole municipality of Alcoutim, with decor to match its many years of service. The Romans also liked the area, as testified to by the ruins of a villa that was built here in the 11th and 12th centuries. **Alcoutim** then appears on a hillside after a sharp bend in the road and river. **San Lucar del Guadiana** is the town on the opposite bank.

Through the narrow lanes of the **old city**, you can get to the

Castle of Alcoutim which was built in the 16th century, but first you should go to the Misericórdia (Mercy) 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, in place of a mediaeval church.

The gardens of the castle, which are perfectly cared for, provide an excellent viewing point. Built using the 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 5000 B.C: up 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 their love, becoming enchanted.

There are other secrets to do with smuggling in amongst the rocky banks of the Guadiana, which ended up forging close ties with the Andalusian people on the left bank. It is now time to delve a bit more into the northeast of the Algarve: for this we shall take the turning to **Corte Tabelião** (EN122-1) 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** where a short stop will enable us to spend some time with the **craftspeople** who work with wicker and cane in their doorways.

We then turn on to the EN 124 and nine kilometres 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. It is easy to find a **saddle-maker**, making **colourful miniatures** in between the real work of making saddles and harnesses worn by animals on their neck to carry loads. Some of them are lavishly decorated.

Here we can go on a short detour to visit the **Alcarias**. To get to **Alcaria Queimada**, you go through



Alcaria Cova de Cima a little further on is **Alcaria de Baixo** and then **Alcaria**, quite simply. These are old hills which have kept their Arab place names and stretch along the **Ribeira da Foupana**.

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 mediaeval 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 which stands 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 of the village. The made-to-measure shoes crafted by the shoemaker of Giões are famous. To get to the Ribeira do Vascão 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 on getting to the water there are mallard ducks. There is a water-mill near the bridge.

Once again on the EN 124, we reach **Martinlongo**, the most populous 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 southwest, on the Cerro do Castelo (2km) there are the 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 which

are given the names of the original “models”. Wood-cutters, shepherds and reapers are all given a name and a history. Also, don’t miss the chance to have a look at the pottery and ceramics workshop in Martinlongo. The Main Church was originally an old mosque, from which the minaret is preserved, now turned into a bell-tower.

In terms of the local **gastronomy**, the highlights are honey, bread, sausages, regional sweets and ewe’s cheese. Stews made from lamb or chick peas are delicious alternatives.

It is only 12 km along the EM 506 to **Vaqueiros**, where one of the Algarve’s hidden treasures awaits us.

In **Cova dos Mouros**, there is a mining park which tells the story of iron and the extraction of metals in the region. Old mines, artefacts, old dwellings cover some 1800 years of history “live”.

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**, a village where a craftsman has made an incredible collection of miniature animals which he made himself from old branches and roots.

In **Fortim**, there a “casa de pasto”, a café, which is decorated in an original way, and then comes 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 to **Anta das Pedras Altas**.

The places here, known as “montes” (hills) are only home to a few dozen inhabitants and follow one



Martinlongo – Handcraft



Cova dos Mouros



Nandu

after another at just a few kilometres distance, silhouettes of the culture of the serra, with colour and traditional motifs brightening up the houses.

It is easy to get to **Cortelha** meanwhile enjoying a magnificent view over the **Ribeira do Beliche** (brook) meandering through the valley below. On the EM 509, we pass through **Corte do Gago** and then **Alcarias Grandes** - a name which occurs several times on this tour – which is on the banks of the reservoir which you can reach on a road from the last village; once back on the EM 509 we go through Marroquil (6km). Mills and water-wheels sing their gentle tunes, and from the wood- burning ovens a plume of smoke rises. Larks sing, and partridges take to the air in fright.

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

For 30 kilometres, beaches can be seen on one side of the road, while on the other we can see the rural landscape of the serra. The **Parque da Rocha dos Corvos**, which is a nice place to stop and enjoy the scenery, is only 1 km from Santa Rita, a transitional point between the coast and the hills where

there are still remains of a Roman dam

which crossed the valley from side to side allowing the waters of the river to be used for irrigation. The houses are topped by typical chimneys, and, with their open doors, exude hospitality and friendliness.

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 comes to an end amongst the smells of the past, where traditions still put their stamp on daily life, shaped by the fresh waters of the rivers and streams, of springs and weirs, and 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, we can recall the words of the Trás-os-Montes writer Miguel Torga , in a quotation that is perfect to conclude the tour: “The Algarve for me is always a day on holiday in one’s homeland.... I feel like doing everything, apart from being responsible, or sceptical!...” And, we would add, one feels like taking advantage of all the pleasures that are provided by the different parts of the Algarve.



Beliche Dam



Cistus

From one sea to another, with the hills of the serra in between. From the centre of the Algarve to the west of Europe, we will enjoy a great tour of the south. Starting and ending in the capital, travelling through the Algarve of cliffs, rocks and caves, of sandy retreats and hidden gullies. Along the slopes as far as the land of Prince Henry the Navigator, climbing up cliffs and going down to unexpected beaches. But people will also never be far from our thoughts: white houses standing out against the emerald sea; we shall see skilled, cracked hands sewing the nets which 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 (smoked ham) in Monchique, from sweet potato in Aljezur to barbecued fish in Armação de Pêra or Lagos. To finish with, 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 which are so typical of the Algarve. And on this tour, we shall smell a different Algarve before returning to the capital, to rest.



- | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|----------------|----------|
| Nature Reserves | Lighthouse | Viewing Points | Beach |
| Airport | Natural Recreation and Leisure Areas | Monument | Spa |
| Dam | Marina | Museum | Windmill |

SUMMARY OF TOUR

Faro » S. Lourenço » Alcantaral » Quarteira » Vilamoura » Albufeira » Armação de Pêra » Porches » Lagoa » Carvoeiro » Ferragudo » Portimão » Odeixe » Lagos » Vila do Bispo » Sagres » Carrapateira » Bordeira » Aljezur » Mameleto » Monchique » Picota » Silves » Faro



- | | | |
|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Motorway | National Roads | Municipal Roads |
| TOUR | DIRECTION OF TOUR | STARTING POINT |
| PROTECTED AREA | 0 10 km | |

The “**Tour beyond the Sotavento**” will take us to the most westerly parts of the Algarve in the Barlavento, a tour that gives people who are staying in the east or Sotavento the chance to find out about the diversity of other parts of the Algarve. We set off from **Faro**, the capital of the Algarve of ancient origins, but first we should have a look at the **Vila Adentro** the old city where the Cathedral, the Convent of Nossa Senhora da Assunção, the Arco do Repouso, where D. Afonso III rested, the Town Hall and the Episcopal Seminary can be seen. We get there through any of the three gates in the 17th century walls. If we choose the Arco da Vila, we will have the Governor’s palace on one side, with its front facing the Jardim Manuel Bivar. The Arco do Repouso gives access to the Largo de São Francisco, which has the **Ria Formosa** as a backdrop, and 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 which takes us to the harbour and the Centre for Live Science. Inside the walls stands the cathedral, gothic and imposing. From its tower can be seen the whole of the historic centre, surrounded on the northern side by the modern buildings of the city and on the south by the waters of the sea. In the old Convent of Nossa Senhora da Assunção, there is the Archaeological Museum with its unusual cloister on two floors. The city is worth spending more time in, perhaps going to the Alto de Santo António



Faro, Cathedral



Faro, Carmo church

and the **Carmo Church**, passing between the traditional houses of Mouras Velhas (Old Moorish Ladies) or going out to the Ilha de Faro.

But we shall opt to continue our journey on the EN 125 towards Almancil, stopping briefly in **S. Lourenço** to admire its small church whose inside is clad in *azulejos* (painted tiles), as well as the Cultural Centre which is housed in a carefully restored, old rural house.

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 luxurious **tourist resorts**, built in a way that does not impinge on the natural beauty of the Algarve and that provides the delights of the “*dolce fare niente*” on the holidays of one’s dreams.

We cross the town from one side to the other and then, as we are leaving it, we turn on to the road signposted to **Quarteira**. There are other routes, but on this road with its gentle curves, we head for the fishing village that was turned into a tourist resort because of its marvellous beach. Our next stopping point is **Vilamoura**, and its **Marina** filled with boats and sophisticated



São Lourenço Cultural Centre



Vilamoura Marina

surroundings of terraces and shops. The former Quinta de Quarteira has been turned into an excellent leisure complex and there is even an **Environmental Park**, next to the reed beds of the Ribeira de Quarteira, where bitterns and purple gallinules nest, amongst 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. However, it is **golf** that is king 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. And 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 river mouth. After a visit to the viewing point at Pau da Bandeira, we will walk through the narrow streets to Meia Laranja, the heart of the tourist area of Albufeira. The western end includes the old centre with some details of traditional architecture. But what is really nice in Albufeira is to ramble along the marvellous beaches of fine sand and turquoise-blue seas. Continuing from east to west, from Baleeira to Galé, passing through São Rafael and Ponta do Castelo, there is much to enjoy.



Golf Course



Albufeira, Pescadores Beach

The regional road number 526, which we take west of Albufeira, takes us to **Armação de Pêra**, on a huge bay which stretches from Ponta da Galé to Ponta da Senhora da Rocha. There is nothing more serene than its huge beach with calm seas and an immense area of blue, lapping repeatedly against 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 cliff next to the old Roman fort, and the chapel with its Visigoth capitals. We then move on to **Porches**, where traditional ceramics production is still an important activity, with many shops ideal for buying a souvenir, either a delicate miniature or a piece which makes use of the colours of the Algarve in its decoration: the 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 which shelters 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 the many caves hidden in the cliffs, and the Cabo 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. Over the centuries, these coastal caves near Carvoeiro served as dwellings for the different peoples who lived in the



Carvoeiro



Handicraft



Ferragudo

area, either for access to fishing or as a defence against attacks by pirates and corsairs.

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

Continuing in a westerly direction, follow the signs and you will easily find your way to **Ferragudo**, on the left bank of the **Rio Arade**. 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 **sardines** which arrive in the port a few metres further on. In the old centre, the architecture of the late 19th century and early 20th century is distinctive, in the two-storey houses, with their wrought-iron verandas, carved masonry work on the windows and doors, and walls clad in tiles. The white churches and



Portimão Marina

the narrow streets of the old fishermen's 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 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, and in the 20th century, it was tourism that left its mark on the city.

The **Marina** is a pleasant area, with an artificial beach which 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, for its part, is a huge stretch of golden sand hidden between magnificent cliffs of red stone. The **Ria de Alvor** is sometimes referred to as a hidden paradise, a surprising enclave of different landscapes where hundreds of birds fly as the sun dives into the waters.

The EN 125 takes us to the picturesque village of **Odeáxere** and if we cross it in the direction of the sea, we pass through **Palmares** and get to **Meia Praia** from where a fine view over the bay of **Lagos** can be enjoyed.

This is not the normal way to enter the city, but it is certainly one of the nicest. The beach at **Meia Praia**, stretching away as far as the eye can see, and framed by green hills, ends at the **Marina**, on the



Praia da Rocha



Lagos, Meia Praia

edge of the city. It was from this bay that the caravels set off on the great saga 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 are part of history: King D.

Sebastião elevated it to the status of a city, after a journey to the Algarve in 1573, because

he was so impressed by the warm welcome from the populace. It is well worth visiting its churches, museums, the castle and the walls. The **Ponta da Piedade**, in turn, is another place that should not be missed. You can stand there with the bay at your feet, the blue vastness stretching to the horizon.

There is a close connection of course between the sea and the local **cuisine** tempting dishes include a stew made with eel, a bean stew with whelks, not to mention a delicious tuna steak or a tasty cataplana. Finish with that essential sweet, the D. Rodrigo, with its delicate egg threads and almond.

We enter a different Algarve, that of the **Barlavento**, when we get to **Vila do Bispo**. Here you should



Vila do Bispo

go on the **Tour of Menhirs**, which takes you to see pre-historic stones in rugged, open countryside, where the winds coming off the Atlantic can be felt. Another suggestion is to go on the **Smugglers' Tour**, starting here, going through the Serra de Espinhaço de Cão, and then crossing the hills around Monchique and then the Caldeirão, along which things were carried inland which the people there needed and didn't have.

We cannot leave the town without trying the delicious fried moray eel and "bolo de mel" (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 Avienus in the following way: "the Cynete Cape, where the sidereal light goes down, emerges proudly as the extreme point of the rich Europe and goes into the salt water of the ocean, inhabited by monsters. There is 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 imposingness continue.

In the **fortress**, the presence of Prince Henry the Navigator can be felt: this is where he dreamed up the magnificent epic of putting to sea and finding New Worlds, an adventure that was without parallel until five centuries later when astronauts went to the moon.

Just a stone's throw away is the **Cabo de S.Vicente**, 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 beaches, almost empty, where that paradigm of the perfect beach can be found, that we yearn for in our imaginations.

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

The Promontory of Sagres



Carrapateira



We return to Vila do Bispo which is located in the **Southwest Alentejo and Costa Vicentina Natural Park**, one of the few parts of the Algarve where untamed nature together with a very rich cultural and historical heritage remain intact; then we head for **Aljezur**, also part of the park. Here, in their natural habitat, 200 species of bird have been identified, and 750 plant species of which 46 are unique to Portugal, and 10 of them unique to this area. On the coast, there are 460 species of algae, important in the production of agar-agar.

We go through **Carrapateira**, nestling in the dunes and where surfers say that almost perfect waves occur. The village developed next to the river, and the fort grew around the existing chapel. You can also visit the Carrapateira “Museu do Mar e da Terra” (Museum of the Sea and Land) which gives a portrait of the lives of fishermen and farmers.

A little bit further on, **Bordeira's** roots go back to pre-historic times. The Mira culture (7,000 B.C.) of nomadic people moving between the mouth of the rio Mira 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 the knights of Santiago, headed by D. Paio Peres Correia, used an invigorating potion before every important battle, 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, and the miraculous potion? Aljezur's famous bean stew with **sweet potato**.



Aljezur



Aljezur



Monchique

On the coast of the municipality, the main feature is the cliffs, interspersed with dunes and beaches. There are natural swimming pools set in the rocks, which lead to the sea, with its clear cool waters. We leave the Costa Vicentina Natural Park and head for the **Serra de Espinhaço de Cão**, on the EN 267, in between the forests of pine trees, eucalyptus trees and cork oaks.

Marmeleite appears in the midst of the hills, a small, quiet village where forest tracks start, cut into the

ochre-coloured slate, different from the grey granite which is 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 waters fall in cascades. Hundreds of kilometres of footpaths have been made, linking natural forests, botanical



Caldas de Monchique



Caldas de Monchique

gardens and sites of historic interest.

In this small city, there are hydrangeas and camellias everywhere, and one place that has to be visited 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), a ruin surrounded by trees, from where there is a fine view and where there is the biggest **magnolia** in Europe, classified as a monumental tree.

The cuisine of Monchique is interesting and there are some quite unusual combinations, such as dishes of rice with beans, and roast pork, with the best known being the home-made sausages, the “presunto serrano”, pork cured in the old style. In terms of sweets, the highlights are “bolo de tacho” (traditional cake made of honey, chocolate and cinnamon) and “pudim de mel” (honey pudding). This is an area that is famous for its *medronho* brandy, and around Carnival time guided tours of a distillery can be arranged with the producers, where the red fruits are turned into this “water of life”.

We drive up to **Fóia**, on the road that winds round the hill, in search of the widest views over the Algarve. The Quinta de S. Bento, former holiday home of the Dukes of Bragança, has an unusual mediaeval kitchen, delicious both in its cuisine and its architecture.

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

Caldas de Monchique is located on the way down: here a light water bubbles out of the ground, pure and crystalline, which the Romans called “sacred”. They were the ones who built the first baths for the relief of rheumatism and illnesses of the respiratory tract. A walk through eucalyptus trees and cork oaks brings us to the top of **Picota**, whose slopes command a magnificent view.

In **Porto de Lagos**, the old Roman Lacobriga, which is built on a slope above the right bank of the river, we cross the bridge as we drive towards **Silves**. The Moorish Shielb appears clustered around the castle which dominates the surrounding countryside. It is the Algarve city where the Islamic heritage

is most striking. Here lived scholars and poets of the Al Garb (the West) of Al Andaluz, the powerful caliphate which dominated the Iberian peninsula for centuries.

The gates of the city open on to the walls which, even today, guard the castle, whose battlements provide us with a kind of winged walk, with a view over the **River Arade** flowing lazily down below. In the Archaeological Museum, centuries of history are on display. But the most unusual feature is its **modern**

architecture, 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, cleverly lit, the castle takes on mysterious shapes, and the legends of enchanted Moorish maidens suddenly make sense.

The **legend** of the Great Cistern of the Castle tells of the misfortune of a princess who, on the night of S. João (summer solstice) sails over the deep waters in a boat of silver with golden oars. Disconsolate, she sings sad songs. And she can only escape from there when a Moorish prince pronounces the magic words that will break the spell. We cannot leave Silves without trying a “morgado”, one of the best recipes for this cake which is so typical of the Algarve *serra*.

So that we can still visit other places in the region, we will now use the Via do Infante (A22) motorway, which we can join about 3 km from the city. It will not take us long to get to the junction for Loulé. And then, driving down what remains of the *serra*, we are soon back in **Faro** again. If this tour has whetted your appetite, try the rest of our tours which will make your holidays that little bit different: with an authenticity and a different pace, slow, friendly and full of flavour, in the true Algarve style. Exactly like holidays are supposed to be.



Morgado



Ria Formosa

USEFUL INFORMATION

TOURIST INFORMATION OFFICES

www.visitalgarve.pt

Região de Turismo do Algarve (Algarve Tourism Board)
Head Office: Avenida 5 de Outubro, n.º 18,
8000-076 Faro, Algarve-Portugal
Tel.: 289 800 400
Fax: 289 800 489
E-mail: rtalgarve@rtalgarve.pt
www.rtalgarve.pt

Associação Turismo do Algarve
(Algarve Promotion Bureau)
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Address: Aeroporto Internacional de Faro
8001-701 Faro. Tel.: 289 818 582

ALBUFEIRA
Address: R. 5 de Outubro
8200-109 Albufeira. Tel.: 289 585 279

ALCOUTIM
Address: R. 1.º de Maio - 8970-059 Alcoutim.
Tel.: 281 546 179

ALJEZUR
Address: Lrg. do Mercado - 8670-054 Aljezur
Tel.: 282 998 229

ALVOR
Address: Rua Dr. Afonso Costa, 51
8500-016 Alvor. Tel.: 282 457 540

ARMAÇÃO DE PÊRA
Address: Av. Marginal
8365 Armação de Pêra. Tel.: 282 312 145

CARVOEIRO (LAGOA)
Address: Praia do Carvoeiro - 8400-517 Lagoa
Tel.: 282 357 728

CASTRO MARIM
Address: Rua José Alves Moreira, 2 - 4
8950-138 Castro Marim. Tel.: 281 531 232

FARO
Address: Rua da Misericórdia, 8 - 11
8000-269 Faro. Tel.: 289 803 604

LAGOS
Address: Rua Belchior Moreira
de Barbudo (S. João)
8600-722 Lagos. Tel.: 282 763 031

LOULÉ
Address: Av. 25 de Abril, n.º 9 - 8100-506
Loulé. Tel.: 289 463 900

MONCHIQUE
Address: Lrg. S. Sebastião - 8550 Monchique
Tel.: 282 911 189

MONTE GORDO
Address: Av. Marginal - 8900 Monte Gordo.
Tel.: 281 544 495

OLHÃO
Address: Largo Sebastião M. Mestre, 8A
8700-349 Olhão. Tel.: 289 713 936

PONTE INT. GUADIANA
Address: Monte Francisco
8950 Castro Marim. Tel.: 281 531 800

PRAIA DA ROCHA
Address: Avenida Tomás Cabreira
8500-802 Portimão. Tel.: 282 419 132

QUARTEIRA
Address: Praça do Mar - 8125 Quarteira
Tel.: 289 389 209

SAGRES
Address: Rua Comandante Matoso
8650-357 Sagres. Tel.: 282 624 873

SÃO BRÁS DE ALPORTEL
Address: Largo S. Sebastião, n.º 23
8150-107 São Brás de Alportel.
Tel.: 289 843 165

SILVES
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Tel.: 282 442 255

TAVIRA
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Alte. Tel.: 289 478 666

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8600-670 Lagos. Tel.: 282 764111, Fax:
282 769317

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8100-495 Querença
Tel.: 289 422 495

SALIR
Address: Rua José Viegas Gregório.
8100-202 Salir. Tel.: 289 489 733

SILVES
Address: Praça do Município, 8300 Silves
Tel.: 282 440 442
Praça Al-Muthamid, 8300 Silves
Tel.: 282 441 578

TOURIST HELPLINE: 808 78 12 12

OPENING HOURS:

Pharmacies: Working Days – open from 9 am to 1 pm and from 3 pm to 7 pm; Saturdays – from 9 am to 1 pm. In every area, there is always a duty pharmacy open 24 hours a day; Some pharmacies are open to the public from 9 am to 8 pm without closing, on working days.
Post Offices: most post offices are open from Monday to Friday from 9 am to 6 pm.
Shops: Shops are mostly open from 9 am to 1 pm and from 3 pm to 7 pm, on working days. On Saturdays, they open from 9 am to 1 pm. In shopping centres, shops open for longer, usually from 10 am to midnight.
Banks: open on working days from 8.30 am to 3 pm.
Restaurants: mostly open for lunch from midday to 3 pm and for dinner from 7 pm to 10 pm.

HEALTH:

Emergencies:
in case of emergency,
telephone **112**, the
national emergency number;

If you need medical
assistance, go to the nearest
Health Centre; hospital
casualty departments should
only be used in serious
circumstances.

SECURITY:

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Pública (Public Safety
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