





**Ribatejo**  
Share the passion

# Nature

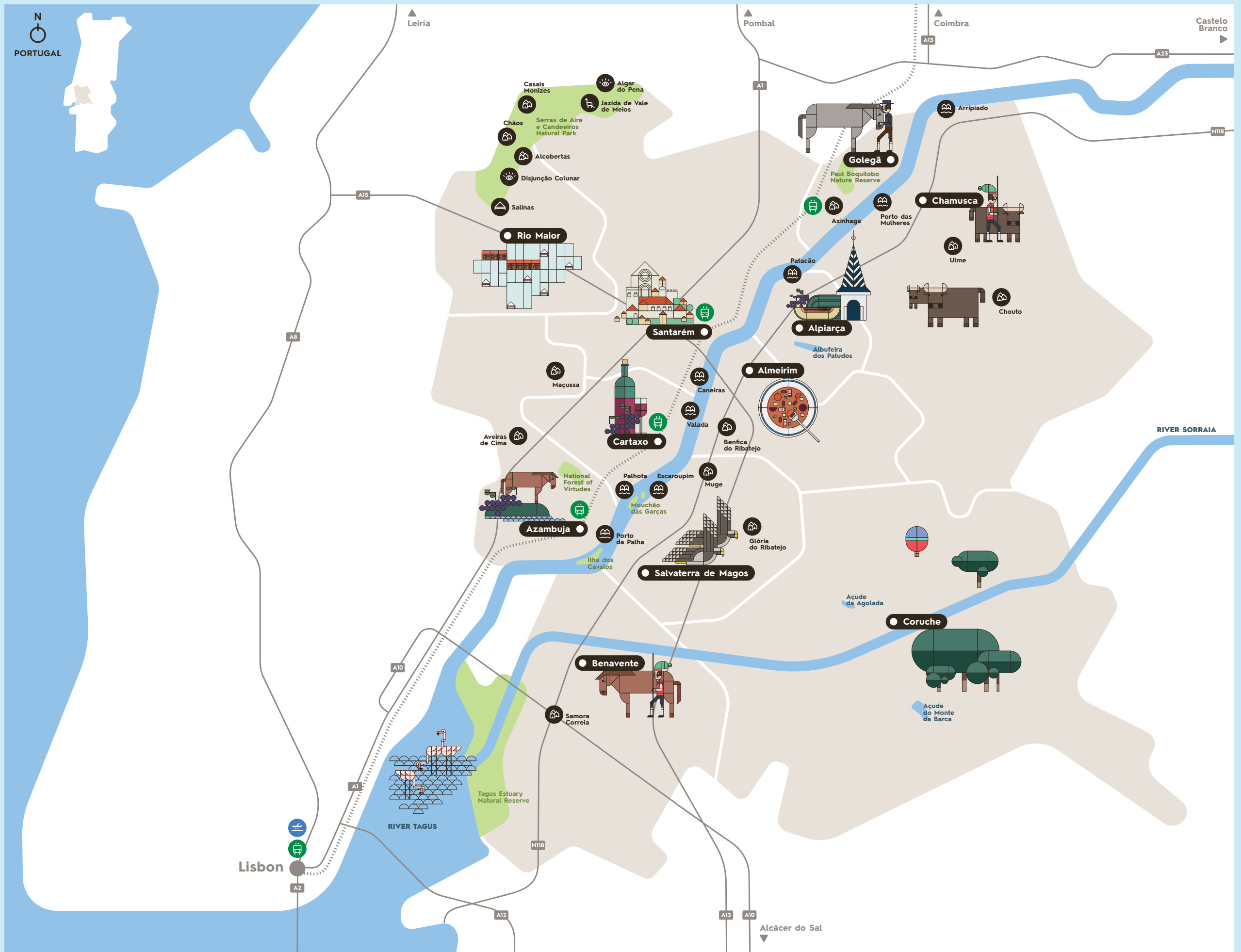
**Discover  
the Ribatejo.**



### Getting there:

-  **by car**  
various routes and options
-  **by train**  
connections to Santarém  
cp.pt
-  **by bus**  
rede-expressos.pt
-  **by air**  
flights to Lisbon

# Nature



## The Natural Environment

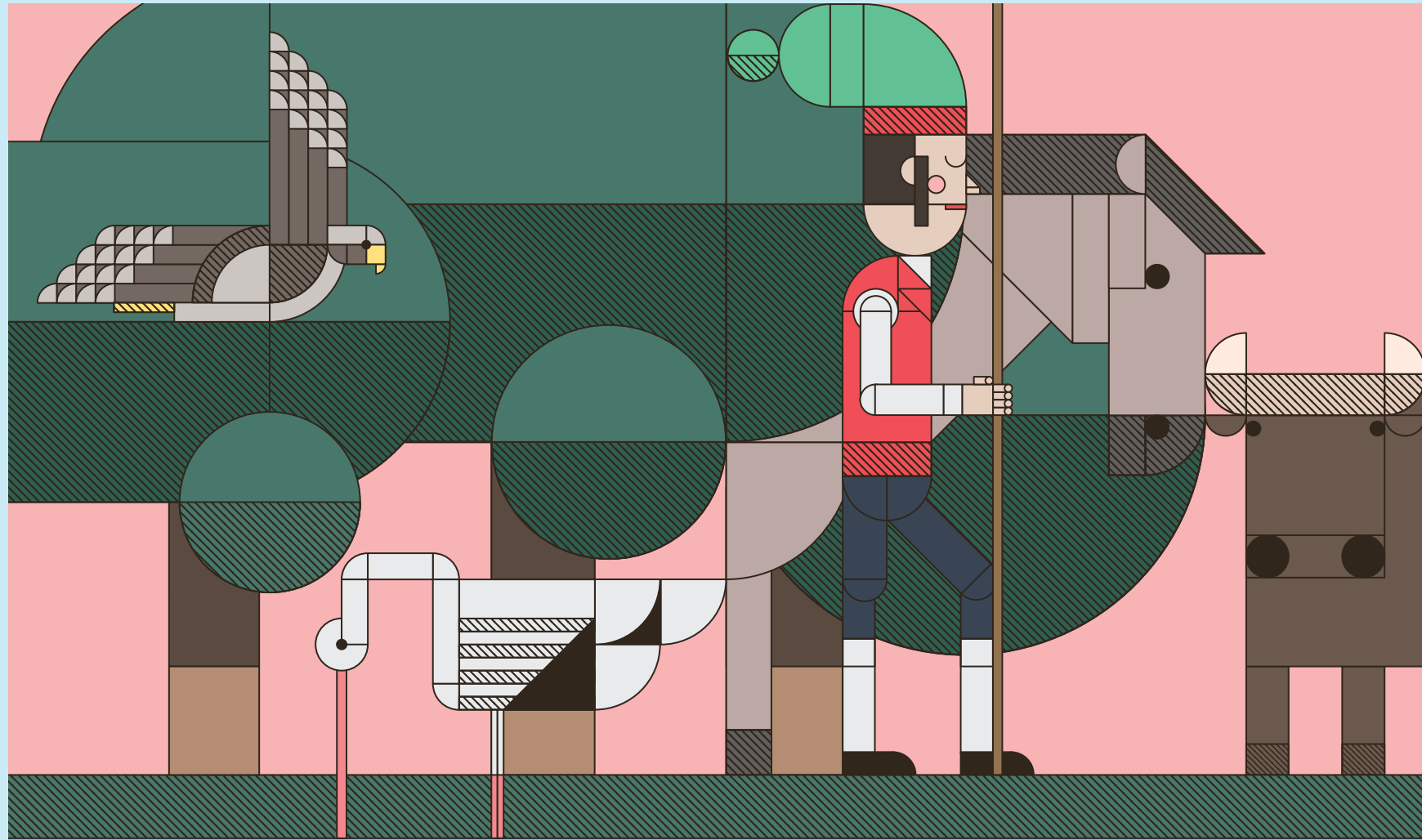
Discovering the unspoilt landscape

The Ribatejo landscape is dominated by the Tagus river. It flows through the region, irrigating the fertile floodplains and creating Portugal's richest pasture. It provides livelihoods for generations of fishermen who live along its shores. Its waters have carved out exquisite caves and grottoes, and created wetland habitats for countless birdlife, from the island *mouchões* to the vast expanses of the estuary and its famous reserves.

Above all the Tagus is the life giver to a thrillingly diverse wildlife as well as the people here: their iconic horses and bulls, the talismanic *campino* herdsmen.

Elsewhere the terrain is more barren: rocky escarpments and limestone cliffs where dinosaurs once trod and left their mark. Olive trees and vines thrive here, cork trees too, whose bark is a perfect metaphor for demonstrating how the ancient and traditional merge and sit so well with the modern world.

Come and see this remarkable, unspoilt region for yourself.



## Municipalities

### Alpiarça

A charming area where you can enjoy excellent gastronomy, fascinating history and innovative architecture at the Casa dos Patudos, where some of Portugal's finest art works are displayed.

Visit the reserve to learn about the Sorraia horse, descended from the early wild horses.

### Benavente

Benavente borders the Tagus Estuary Nature Reserve, which spans 50 square miles and is part of Portugal's largest wetland area and one of Europe's most important.

A huge variety of wildlife and migrating birds put on quite a show! The famous Carolino rice is cultivated here as well as some of the region's finest wines.

### Chamusca

Set on the edge of the fertile flood plain of the Tagus, this is the agricultural heartland. Here the iconic horses and bulls are revered and tradition and faith go hand in hand, while the people are always ready for a celebration.

The beautiful village of Arripiado, just upriver, is one of the region's gems.

### Golegã

The passion for horses runs deep here. Held since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Horse Fair is the highlight of the year, showcasing some of Portugal's finest thoroughbred horses. It's a spectacle not to be missed.

Away from the livestock, the rows of vines and the riverside marshes, is the Casa-Estúdio of Carlos Relvas, a polymath and pioneering 19<sup>th</sup> century photographer.

### Salvaterra de Magos

The former Royal Palace in Salvaterra de Magos today still houses the Falcoaria Real (Royal Falconry). Recognised on the UNESCO register of Intangible Cultural Heritage, the interaction between man and bird is impressive.

Elsewhere exquisite embroideries and the Muge pottery workshops dating from Roman times are on show.

### Almeirim

Lying on the fertile plains not far from Santarém, the Almeirim landscape is dominated by magnificent horses, black bulls and endless rows of vines. Superb wine and fresh, local produce is plentiful, giving rise to a vibrant gastronomic tradition.

The famous *sopa da pedra* (stone soup) is a signature dish with a great back story – be sure to try it.

### Azambuja

A rural area, where the *campino*, the traditional mounted herdsman, holds sway.

To get to know the area better, taste the distinctive goats' cheese and the artisan breads, walk through the vineyards and learn about the local wine at the innovative wine museum in Aveiras de Cima, or take a kayak trip along the Vala Real or Royal Canal – look out for the colourful wildlife along the water's edge!

### Cartaxo

Surrounded by vineyards, this is real wine country. Several renowned *quintas* are based here, some dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Down by the water you'll find the colourful wooden houses of the Aveiros fishing communities – traditionally painted and raised up on stilts.

### Coruche

The cork capital of the world, 5 million corks are produced here daily and you'll learn a lot more about this most sustainable of products at the eye-catching Cork Observatory. The Sorraia river nourishes some of Portugal's finest crops.

For the best views of this picturesque district, take to the skies in a hot air balloon.

### Rio Maior

The salt pans at Fonte de Bica are unique, quietly producing salt since 1177. Also unique is the Dólmen de Alcobertas, dating back 4,000 years: a pagan burial site now annexed by a Christian church to create a side chapel.

On a larger scale, the Serras de Aire and Candeeiros Natural Park is an enduring magnet for walkers and cyclists. It's all about the rock.

### Santarém

With Roman and Moorish influences, Ribatejo's largest city had a long history well before Portugal was a fully formed nation.

This is the gateway to the Ribatejo with its narrow streets, elegant squares, Gothic architecture and unsurpassed views from the *Portas do Sol*.

# Discovering the Tagus Estuary Nature Reserve

Benavente

Spanning over 50 square miles, the Tagus Estuary Nature Reserve is part of Portugal's largest wetland area and one of Europe's most important.

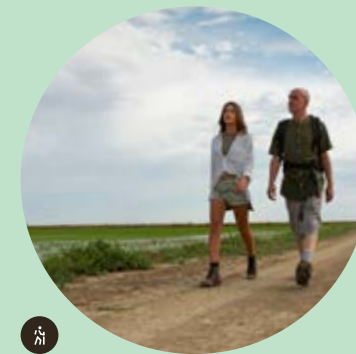
The birdlife is exceptional with thousands of birds setting up home here in winter (the best time of year for keen bird watchers), including ducks, flamingos, geese, avocets, bluethroat and . recrests, as well as raptors like ospreys and marsh harriers. The estuary is well located as a perfect stop over for birds migrating from northern Europe to Africa.

So visit the reserve to enjoy the wide open spaces and the big skies, as well as the colourful array of wildlife on show along the various specially created birdwatching trails.

The diversity of the vast reserve's landscape is breathtaking. The wide open waters are bordered by silent marshes, ancient salt pans, lush fields and hedgerows, all home to countless varieties of birdlife. Overlooking the estuary is Olhos da Praia, offering a magnificent viewpoint over the Pancas marsh where heron stand patiently at the water's edge while birds of prey circle overhead.

Spring and summer months are the best time for birding, with an early morning start usually yielding the best results. Stars of the show are the colourful, pink flamingos, gangly and ungainly, but mesmerising as they stalk about in the shallows.

For more information on the reserve and its activities visit: [natural.pt](http://natural.pt)



## The Tagus Estuary Reserve

The Tagus Estuary Natural Reserve is one of the best places in the country for bird watching. The reserve is a delicately balanced ecosystem, with a fascinating variety of wildlife and flora that attract enthusiasts from all over the world.

Tucked away in a protected area of the Tagus Estuary is the Companhia das Lezírias. Established in 1836, it is home to some 4,000 cattle, reared organically. Here you can try your hand at riding the magnificent Lusitano thoroughbreds - riders of all abilities and experience are welcome.

There are also well planned and waymarked trails for both hiking and mountain biking, taking you to some of the most interesting corners of the estuary.

The Lezírias Route, for walkers and cyclists, takes you away from the reserve and into the heartland - a spectacular combination of stunning scenery and wild nature.

\*info: [visitribatejo.pt](http://visitribatejo.pt)

1.



The Paul Boquilobo Nature Reserve is part of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, which protects such habitats for wildfowl. Since 1971 this treaty has preserved numerous eco-systems and has 2,200 designated sites in 169 countries.

Here the highlights for birdwatchers are:

1. The Eurasian Spoonbill  
*Platalea Leucorodia*
2. The Cormorant  
*Phalacrocorax carbo*  
©Andreas Eichler

2.



### Bird watching

Whether you are a keen ornithologist or simply like the idea of immersing yourself in the serenity of nature for a while, then the Paul do Boquilobo Nature Reserve will suit the bill. It's wonderful watching the birds going about their business and the surrounding scenery is fabulous.

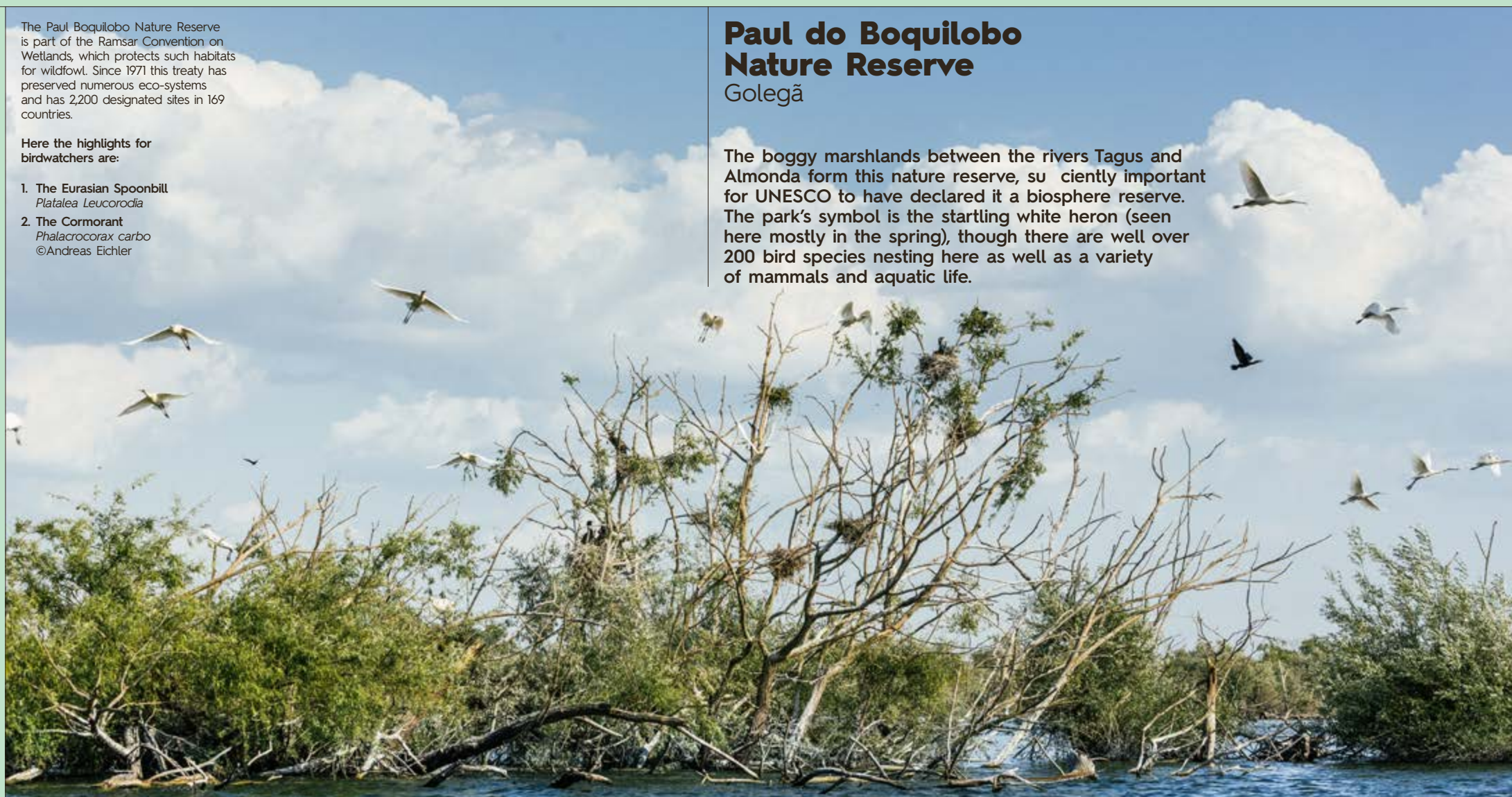
Follow the walking trails, or maybe accompany a knowledgeable guide who can bring the reserve to life for you.

Visit [www.pauldoboquilobo.pt](http://www.pauldoboquilobo.pt) for more information.

## Paul do Boquilobo Nature Reserve

Golegã

The boggy marshlands between the rivers Tagus and Almonda form this nature reserve, sufficiently important for UNESCO to have declared it a biosphere reserve. The park's symbol is the startling white heron (seen here mostly in the spring), though there are well over 200 bird species nesting here as well as a variety of mammals and aquatic life.





### Aldeia de Chãos Rio Maior

The village of Chãos is a real throwback. On the southern slopes of the rugged Serra dos Candeeiros, it has an ancient agricultural heritage with old stone water cisterns still standing as a reminder of times when water ran on the land and had to be captured and stored.

The olive grows freely here and, after pressing, the bagasse, the dense residue, was also stored for animal feed and fertiliser, kept in stone pits until needed.



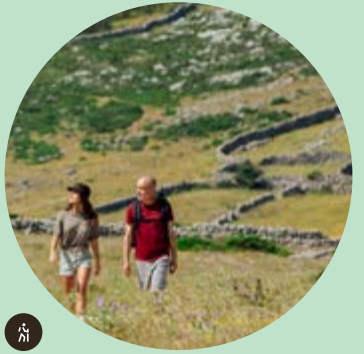
## Exploring the Salt Mines Rio Maior

At the foot of the Serra dos Candeeiros, far from the salt water of the coast, the Salinas da Fonte da Bica have been quietly producing salt since 1177. This is a salt mine, where fresh water passes through a subterranean layer of rock salt and transforms into salt water seven times more salty than the sea.

### Aldeia das Marinhas de Sal Rio Maior

In the village of Fonte da Bica, where two tons of salt are produced each year, everything is geared towards the production of salt. The traditional wooden huts where salt was stored are well preserved, down to the

inventive wooden latches that are resistant to the corrosive effects of salt. Enjoy a meal in the restaurant overlooking the salt pans, then pick up a bag of salt to take home as a souvenir.



### Mountain Trails

The Aire and Candeeiros ranges are ideal for caving, climbing and abseiling, but there's plenty more on offer.

The rugged, barren mountainsides are home to a unique variety of flora and fauna - 50% of all Portuguese orchids can be found here, along with some exotic birdlife.

The park also has several hiking and biking trails, designed for all levels and abilities. Some pass the salt flats, such as the **Marinhas de Sal Route**, others link picturesque villages, such as the **Alcobertas Route**. To visit the caves and grottoes follow the **Chãos à Gruta Route**, or the **Algar do Pena Route** where a guide will be required.

For those preferring to cover the ground a little quicker, it's possible to drive the 137 km of the **Carso Route** and see the main highlights and vistas of the park in a single route.

\*info: [visitribatejo.pt](http://visitribatejo.pt)

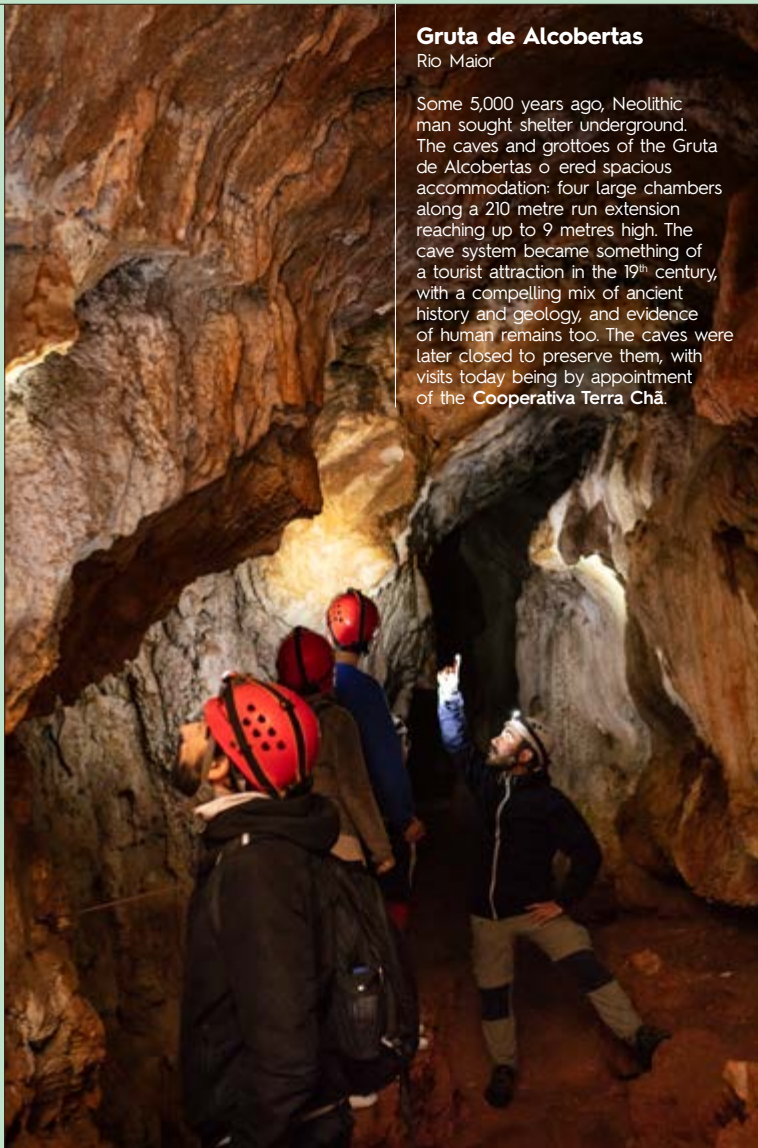


### Jazida de Vale de Meios Santarém

An unprepossessing quarry, but soon you are walking in the footsteps of dinosaurs! At this working limestone quarry countless dinosaur footprints have been discovered, dating back 170 million years to the Middle Jurassic period. It's really quite easy to imagine dozens of long extinct dinosaurs scurrying around you. There are numerous imprints, in excellent condition, with more emerging as the quarry work continues.

### Gruta do Pena Interpretation Centre Santarém

Only discovered recently in 1985 by Joaquim Pena, the Algar do Pena is the largest underground cave, or grotto, in Portugal. A deep shaft drops down 35 metres, before opening out into a vast chamber of 125,000 cubic metres, with exquisite stalactites and stalagmites all around. Quite simply, this is one of the most extraordinary underground landscapes you will ever see.



### Gruta de Alcobertas Rio Maior

Some 5,000 years ago, Neolithic man sought shelter underground. The caves and grottoes of the Gruta de Alcobertas offered spacious accommodation: four large chambers along a 210 metre run extension reaching up to 9 metres high. The cave system became something of a tourist attraction in the 19th century, with a compelling mix of ancient history and geology, and evidence of human remains too. The caves were later closed to preserve them, with visits today being by appointment of the **Cooperativa Terra Chã**.



### Serras de Aire and Candeeiros Natural Park Santarém and Rio Maior

Always an enduring magnet for keen geologists and geographers, this park lies 30 km from the sea and divides the coast from the Ribatejo heartland. It's all about the rock: the rugged escarpments, craggy gorges, rocky ravines and stony outcrops that define the landscape. In many places water flows deep underground, over millennia carving out caves and grottoes along the fault lines and creating stalactites and stalagmites. Bats inhabit these dark places, a vital part

of the delicate ecosystem, while outside the barren, wild heights are criss-crossed by hiking trails, suitable for trekking enthusiasts of all levels and abilities.

#### Chouços and maroiços

This arid region may be beautiful and wild but in times long past the huge quantities of stones strewn across the landscape made agriculture difficult. The only solution was to remove them and, over centuries, the stones were hauled away and used to build lengthy dry stone walls, or *chouços*, surrounding the fields. The larger rocks were piled into mounds or *maroiços*, some really quite large.

#### The limestone landscape

Rock is the key feature of the Serras de Aire e Candeeiros Natural Park, occupying more than two thirds of the Estremenho Limestone Massif. It's the most important limestone area, or karst, in Portugal. Over millennia, rain water and underground streams have worn away a unique landscape, carving out over 1,500 caves running deep underground and marking the landscape with sinkholes, depressions and dramatic formations, sculpted by nature.

More information about the park and activities at: [www.natural.pt](http://www.natural.pt)

## Celebrating Life on the River

Along the banks of the Tagus and the Sorraia

The Tagus and the Sorraia rivers are, inherently, the embodiment of the Ribatejo. Their waters irrigate the fields and pastures. Their banks provide homes and village communities. Their currents move produce and goods downstream and facilitate trade, while the spirit of the river is revered and forms a deep-rooted religious function.

Today's visitor can admire the serene beauty of the rivers, their unique landscapes and habitats linking the deep interior to the open seas.

### The Avieiras Villages

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the *avieiros*, migrants from up-river, began to move down the Tagus. They settled in villages along the river bank, constructing palafite houses raised on stilts above the waters and painted in bright, gaudy colours. Some of the villages are preserved to this day and can be visited. For a taste of immigrant life of over a century ago visit the villages of **Caneiras**, **Santarém**, **Palhota** and **Valada do Ribatejo** in the Cartaxo area, and **Escaroupim** in Salvaterra de Magos.

### The Boats of the Avieiros

These traditional boats were simple and designed for fishing in the Tagus.

Typically used by husband and wife teams, she rowed while he threw the nets and gathered in the catch.

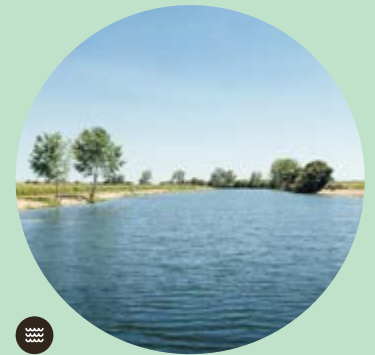


### On the Water

Take a boat trip, ideally with a knowledgeable local guide, and potter about the *mouchões*, the little islands of the Tagus where horses graze. You'll pass by the distinctive *Avieiros'* villages, best seen from the water for their colour and unique design.

Keen anglers will not be disappointed and the more energetic might enjoy canoeing along the river or paddle boarding.

info: [visitribatejo.pt](http://visitribatejo.pt)



### Sorraia River

Coruche

The Sorraia river has its origins in Couço and flows for 60 km before joining the Tagus at Vila Franca de Xira. En route it flows through Coruche, whose fields are well irrigated and consequently produce Portugal's best rice, as well as corn, tomatoes and vegetables. The river Sorraia is popular among anglers, particularly those looking to catch carp and barbel, and other activities include wonderful nature walks along the river, balloon rides, riding, cycling and canoeing.



### Ilha das Garças

Salvaterra de Magos

Garças Island, or Heron Island, is a small island on the Tagus not far from the village of Escaroupim. Being an inaccessible river island or *mouchão*, it is popular with thousands of birds for nesting. Herons and other birds set up home here and raise their young between March and June, creating quite a spectacle - especially when viewed from a boat with the setting sun casting a rich glow over the village behind.



### Cruzeiro Religioso e Cultural do Tejo, Nossa Senhora dos Avieiros e do Tejo

Rio Tejo

This is a special procession along the Tagus river, made in honour of the patron saints of the coastal fishermen. Traditional river boats are colourfully decked out in celebratory adornments and carry a statue of Our Lady of *Avieiros* and the Tagus on a water borne pilgrimage. The lively flotilla of jaunty boats passes riverside communities along the way and runs from May to June in twelve stages, honouring age-old customs.



### Museu Escaroupim e o Rio

Salvaterra de Magos

Opened in 2017, the Escaroupim museum of local life is a tribute to the riverside communities of the Tagus, and celebrates the traditions and memories of the *Avieiros*.

The exhibition explains the importance of the Tagus river to the Ribatejo region, provides context for socio-economic activities and brings to life the human stories behind this great migration that shaped the riverside forever.

### Fishing for All

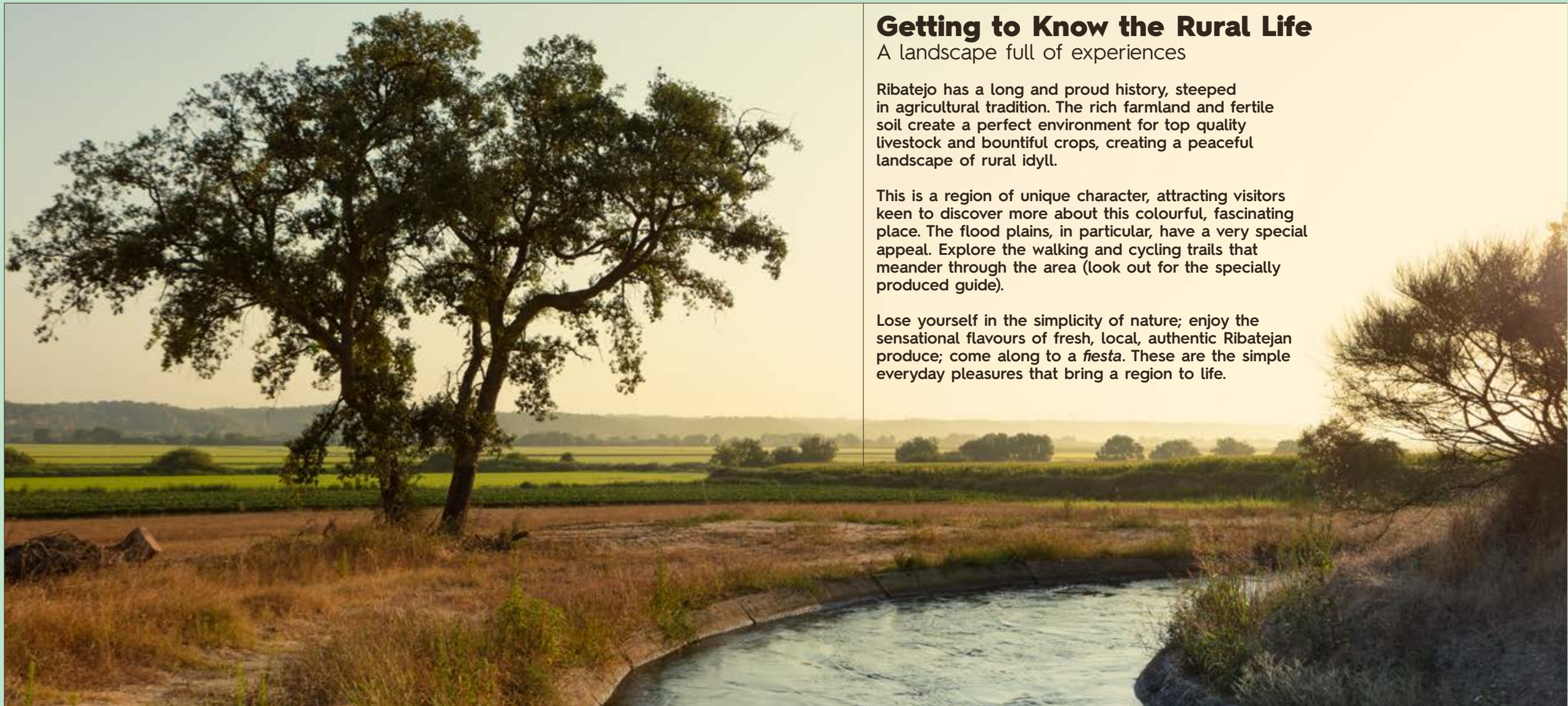
Ribatejo offers fantastic fishing, from the river and the sea. The shad is a popular fish, especially among keen anglers, seen in the rivers from February to July when it heads out to sea. The lamprey is commercially fished during a season that runs from January to April and it was long a staple of the *Avieiros* migrants' diet, caught from their little boats and still a classic Portuguese dish.

The fish section of any menu will always be worth studying. Try any variety of soup, the *sopa de peixe*, or the *fataça* on the tile, *molhata* or *açorda de sável*. The fish will be superbly fresh and will not disappoint.

Another staple of Ribatejan cuisine is the eel. Cooked many ways, fried, stewed, roasted, or made into a rich soup, they are plentiful during spring when they are caught swimming up the Tagus.

The eel also features in other dishes like kebabs or fried eels with beans and rice and can be sampled during special festivals in Salvaterra de Magos and Benca do Ribatejo.





# Getting to Know the Rural Life

A landscape full of experiences

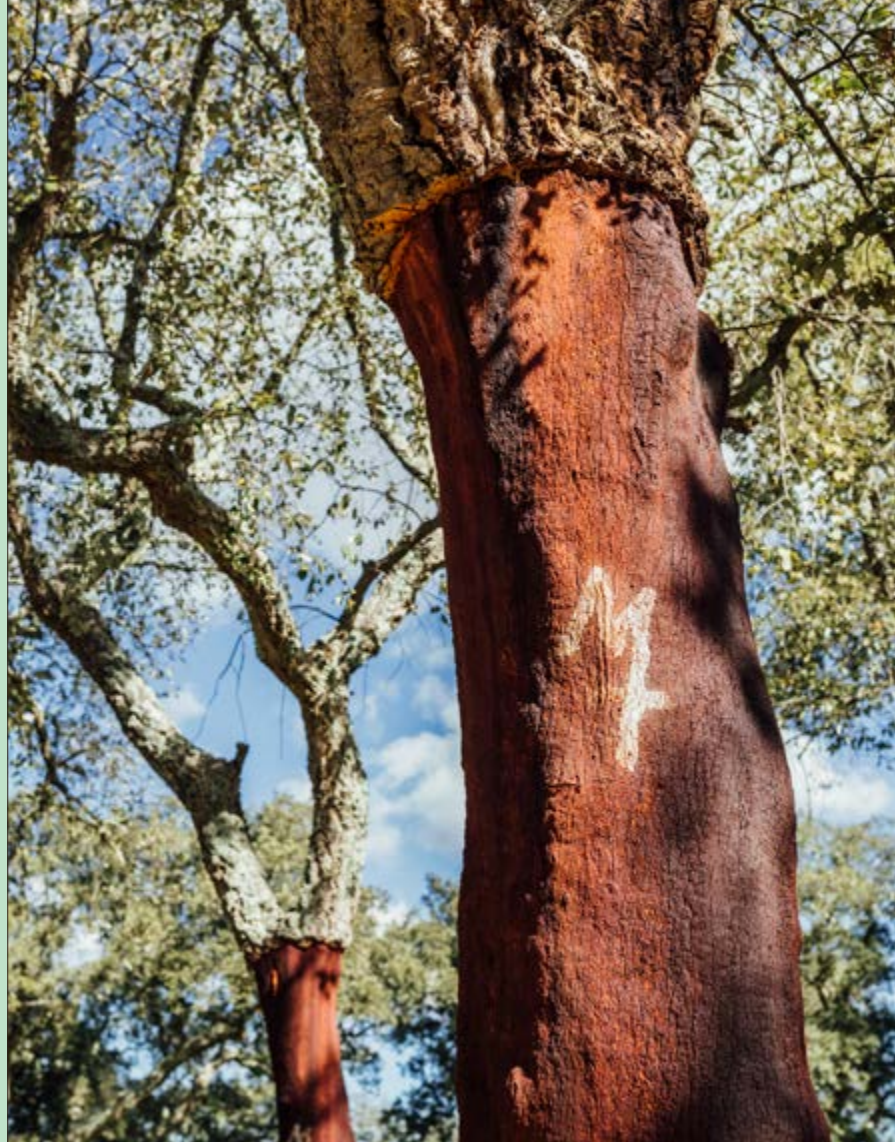
Ribatejo has a long and proud history, steeped in agricultural tradition. The rich farmland and fertile soil create a perfect environment for top quality livestock and bountiful crops, creating a peaceful landscape of rural idyll.

This is a region of unique character, attracting visitors keen to discover more about this colourful, fascinating place. The flood plains, in particular, have a very special appeal. Explore the walking and cycling trails that meander through the area (look out for the specially produced guide).

Lose yourself in the simplicity of nature; enjoy the sensational flavours of fresh, local, authentic Ribatejan produce; come along to a *fiesta*. These are the simple everyday pleasures that bring a region to life.

**Cork**

One of the most sustainable and environmental friendly materials in the world, cork is the bark of the cork oak. A natural raw material with a range of useful properties. It is light, waterproof, compressible and elastic, is a thermal and acoustic insulation, resists friction and has slow combustion. In addition, it is 100% biodegradable, renewable and recyclable. Learn more about cork at the **International Cork Fair** or come for the harvest between May and August



**Observatório do Sobreiro e da Cortiça**  
Coruche

Coruche is the cork capital of the world, with 5 million corks produced every day. The Cork Observatory is an eye-catching building, clad in cork, a few minutes from the village centre. This funky looking building houses a wealth of information, as well as laboratories, workshops, a documentation centre and a library. Who knew cork was such a fascinating material?



**Arripiado Village**  
Chamusca

One of the most beautiful villages in the Ribatejo, Arripiado lies in the Chamusca district south of the Tagus river. It is built on a slope leading down to the waterfront where the slow-moving waters provide a superb reflection of the village. Take the little ferry across the river for spectacular views looking back at the village, notable as the gateway to the wetlands of the Ribatejo. Arripiado has much to offer, so take a stroll along the riverside and look out for the colourful festivals which run through August.



**Ulme Village**  
Chamusca

One of the oldest settlements in the district of Chamusca, with origins going back to Roman times, Ulme is well worth a visit. Famed for its rice (on which the local economy was built), the river Ulme irrigated the rice fields and powered the mills that ground the rice to remove the husks. The little church of Santa Maria yields a little more archaeological history and the surrounding landscape includes the Alto de Santa Marta from where you get a sense of the vastness of this epic land.



**Maçussa Village**  
Azambuja

The village of Maçussa is a haven of artisan bread and cheese production. On the **Terras de Pão** trail, celebrating authentic, traditional bread, visitors travel from far and wide to taste the Maçussa offering. They also seek out the fabulous handmade goats cheese, soft and creamy and coated with ash to encourage desirable bacteria for an intense and unique flavour. It's a sleepy village of about 400 inhabitants; life is calm and unhurried here and visitors are always welcome.

**Bicycles and Balloons**

Take a cycle tour along the banks of the Tagus, meandering through spectacular scenery as you follow the course of the river. Spend a leisurely afternoon sunbathing or testing one of the new golf courses. Or just simply drift over this epic landscape in a hot air balloon, letting the cascading waterfalls, craggy outcrops and lush pastures pass beneath you. The annual **International Balloon Festival of Coruche** is always a spectacle not to be missed.

\*info: [visitribatejo.pt](http://visitribatejo.pt)



**The *Mouchões* of the Tagus**

Azambuja

Countless small but fertile islands are dotted along the Tagus river. These lush havens are often used for grazing horses who nibble contentedly in family groups as the waters pass on either side.

Such bucolic scenes are common and a boat trip is a good way to observe these gentle animals.



**Pure Blood Lusitano Horses**

The Pure Blood Lusitano is one of the oldest horse breeds in the world, with a lineage tracing back to 20,000 BC. With a noble bearing, docile manner and hard working attitude, it has always been versatile and, to no surprise, it is an icon of the Ribatejo landscape.

Across the Ribatejo there are many studs and ranches where this elegant horse is bred and where visitors can admire these magnificent animals up close.

Golegã is the horse capital of the region, with two major events, the **National Horse Fair** and the **Expoégua**. All around is exhilarating riding terrain, whether along the banks of the Tagus, through the vast open plains or over the heathland scrub. And handily, there are a number of routes to follow, either by car or on horseback.

The **Rota do Cavalo** is the Route of the Horse that runs for over 60 km through the Golegã district (also good for cycling).

The **Rotas do Sorraia** put the spotlight on other notable creatures of the Ribatejo, with four suggested routes focussing on the owl, the horse, the sh and the stork.

info: [visitribatejo.pt](http://visitribatejo.pt)

**Dominating the Landscape**

The revered icons of the Ribatejo

Throughout the Ribatejo region, horses, cattle and bulls are an integral part of the landscape. Ranches and stud farms are scattered liberally and their livestock form an economic bedrock as well as ensuring the ancient traditions and the near-religious reverence of these noble animals are perpetuated.

The Pure Blood Lusitano horse, one of the oldest breeds in the world, is always a majestic sight whether mounted or grazing contentedly on the verdant pastures. The statuesque black bulls might be seen on the horizon, aloof and imposing and creating real visual impact.



**The Majestic Bulls**

This statuesque bull is one of the symbols of the Ribatejo, reared for centuries on the lush pastures of the region's farmland.

It is one of fifty indigenous breeds unique to Portugal and has always been much prized for its wild nature, majestic bearing and size.

It is a ubiquitous and iconic sight in the vast pastures of the Ribatejo, often standing alone and majestic as you travel past.



**Reserva do Cavalo Sorraia**

Alpiarça

The Sorraia is the last descendant of the wild horse of the southern Iberian Peninsula. It was rediscovered in 1920 when steps were taken to protect the endangered breed.

The Horse Reserve in Alpiarça is a wide open space, ideal for a relaxing picnic and a chance to meet these wild but docile animals.





**Porto das Mulheres**  
Chamusca

Once, well before the arrival of the railway, this was a busy, important port. The boats of the Tagus river were the main means of transport but now they are tourist or fishing boats and the Porto das Mulheres (Port of Women) is a huge sandy river beach, a pleasant spot to relax and enjoy some sun and perhaps a refreshing splash.



**Albufeira dos Patudos**  
Alpiarça

Close to the town of Alpiarça, this is a great spot for a little R & R, a chance to stroll around the large lake in the warm sunshine. There are activities available like tennis, riding, cycling and canoeing, while keen anglers are drawn by some of the best fishing in the area.

End with a visit to the **Casa dos Patudos**, a distinctive building constructed by the statesman José Relvas, and today one of Portugal's leading art establishments.



**Barragem de Magos**  
Salvaterra de Magos

This lovely village sits alongside the Tagus river in a landscape once favoured by royalty for hunting.

There's plenty of historical interest here, the São Paulo church dating from 1296, the Arneiro fountain of 1711 and an iron bridge designed by Gustav Eiffel in 1906. But it is the dam, the *barragem*, that is the most dramatic in scale. Initiated in 1934, today it is a wildlife haven and offers pleasant walks and natural unspoilt scenery.



**Parque Bico da Goiva**  
Salvaterra de Magos

Not far downriver from the village of Escaroupim lies the Bico da Goiva, a pleasant riverside park with views over the shimmering water of the Tagus.

Spread out the picnic blanket, lose yourself in a good book and while away a relaxing day.

**Relaxing with the Rhythms of the Ribatejo**

Enjoy a change of pace

The Ribatejo is a place to unwind. Relax and recharge. Go with the flow. There are plenty of peaceful parks and formal gardens where you can wander and rest.

Find a shady spot, preferably with a great view; enjoy a leisurely mid-morning coffee or a long, late lunch.

Just kick back and ignore the time for once. This is the place to escape the routines of normal everyday life at home and surrender to the rhythms of the Ribatejo.



**National Forest of Virtudes**  
Azambuja

As long ago as the 13<sup>th</sup> century, King Dinis recognised the importance of timber for bolstering agricultural production and helping with the defence of the fledgling state of Portugal. He instigated a vast forest, designed to help prevent soil erosion and to provide raw materials for ship building. The Mata Nacional das Virtudes was one of the first forests to be planted, with pine trees, cork oaks and eucalyptus trees. Today it is an idyllic spot for a country walk or cycling.



**Fluvina de Valada**  
Cartaxo

The area around the village of Valada has a long and illustrious history of agriculture and wine production. Today the marina here attracts yachts which bob on the slow-moving waters of the Tagus.

There's a wide sandy beach with picnic area, café and opportunities for swimming and enjoying watersports, all creating a pleasant spot for a lazy afternoon by the waterside.



**Vala Real**  
Azambuja

Constructed in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, the Vala Real is a mighty canal linking Azambuja with the Tagus river. The original purpose was to facilitate transportation, as well as providing irrigation and drainage to the farmlands along its way. The canal stretches 26 km, so be sure to take a trip on one of the traditional boats for a deeper understanding of the surrounding landscape and eco-systems.



**Jardim e Miradouro das Portas do Sol**  
Santarém

Stroll through the peaceful gardens, overlooked by romantic towers and high walls, and you'll see. From here the epic Ribatejo landscape unfolds before you, with the vast Tagus river, wide and lazy, flowing slowly through the fertile plains.

Visit the **Urbi Scallabis Interpretation Centre**, part of the Santarém museum, to get a better understanding of life here from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC.

## Blending the Old and the New

The best of local produce

The food produced in the Ribatejo is a serious matter and the region's produce is extensive: melon, Carolino rice, tomatoes, salt, olive oil, cheese, bread and much more. This is a region that celebrates flavour, freshness and quality.

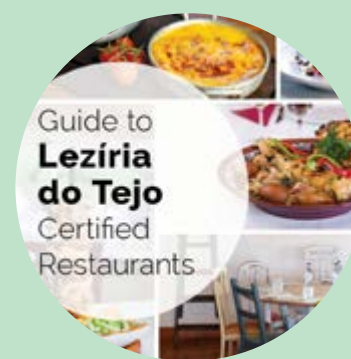
Why not take time to visit a working farm, admire the traditional values and the modern techniques, see how the wine is made, experience the olive harvest. It's all about simplicity and authenticity. In a world where slow food and distance from farm to fork is an ever bigger issue, you'll discover that in Ribatejo this has been a way of life for centuries.



### The Rice Growing Cycle

Spring is when thoughts turn to the new crop, the fields are prepared for sowing which takes place at the end of April. By June weeds have begun to crowd out the crop so they are controlled to allow the rice to flourish. After the high summer growing season the harvest takes place in September. Once hard, manual graft, it is now mechanical of course. The rice is dried and prepared for storage before eventually arriving on our plates.

The Festival do Arroz Carolino in Benavente, or the Sabores do Arroz in Coruche showcase just what this rice means to the region.



### The Flavours of the Ribatejo

Whether you are a serious foodie, a wine enthusiast or simply a lover of good food and wine, there are a couple of guides to help you on your way to understanding the wonderfully authentic gastronomy of the Ribatejo.

The *Guide do Lezíria do Tejo Certified Restaurants* and the *Tejo Wine Tourism Guide* are a great place to start your gastronomic journey. You'll be guided through traditional farms, state of the art estates and artisan producers.

Participate in the olive harvest and watch the rumbling mills extract the precious oils; learn how rice is grown in the flooded fields, then harvested and dried; watch artisan cheese makers and bakers at their craft. See first hand how the famous, and not so famous, Ribatejo produce is created. Follow the processes, watch the preparation, and finally taste the end results.

You'll also get to know the fabulous Ribatejo wines - one of Portugal's most important wine regions. Taste the juicy, rich reds and aromatic, fresh whites. Discover the local grape varieties, see how the wines are created and perhaps even tread some grapes yourself!

A couple of events to watch out for are the Cartaxo Wine Festival and the Wine and Cellar Festival in Aveiras de Cima, Azambuja. Foodie heaven!

Pick up a copy of the two guides from a tourist office or download eBook editions at: [visitribatejo.pt](http://visitribatejo.pt)





## Turismo do Ribatejo

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## Getting there:

-  **by car**  
various routes and options
-  **by train**  
connections to Santarém  
cp.pt
-  **by bus**  
rede-expressos.pt
-  **by air**  
flights to Lisbon

