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THE BEST OF THE ALENTEJO

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THE BEST OF THE ALENTEJO

A GUIDE AND SOME SUGGESTIONS

(...) "He who sets out to sea prepares himself on land", as the saying goes. Applying the maxim to the Alentejo, we should prepare ourselves before we enter. We must first cast aside the eyeglass we use for small horizons and then broaden the compass by which we usually measure our surroundings.

Now the distances are endless and, on high, the stars shine with a tropical brilliance. We must change our rhythm and adjust our sights accordingly. (...)

Miguel Torga

TECHNICAL TEAM

Title:

The Best of the Alentejo – A Guide and Some Suggestions

Author:

Ana Barbosa/TurAventur

Informational support:

Ana Seixas Palma, António Lacerda, Libânio Murteira Reis

Tourism services:

Turismo do Alentejo

English version:

Michael Roberts (with John Coston)

Photographs:

Teresa Vilas-Boas/TurAventur

Ana Seixas Palma (ASP)

António Cunha (AC)

CM-Crato

(COY) (UFF)

David Francisco (DF)

LPN

José Manuel Rodrigues (JMR)

Nicola di Nunzio (NdN)

Rui Cunha (RC)

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André do Rosário

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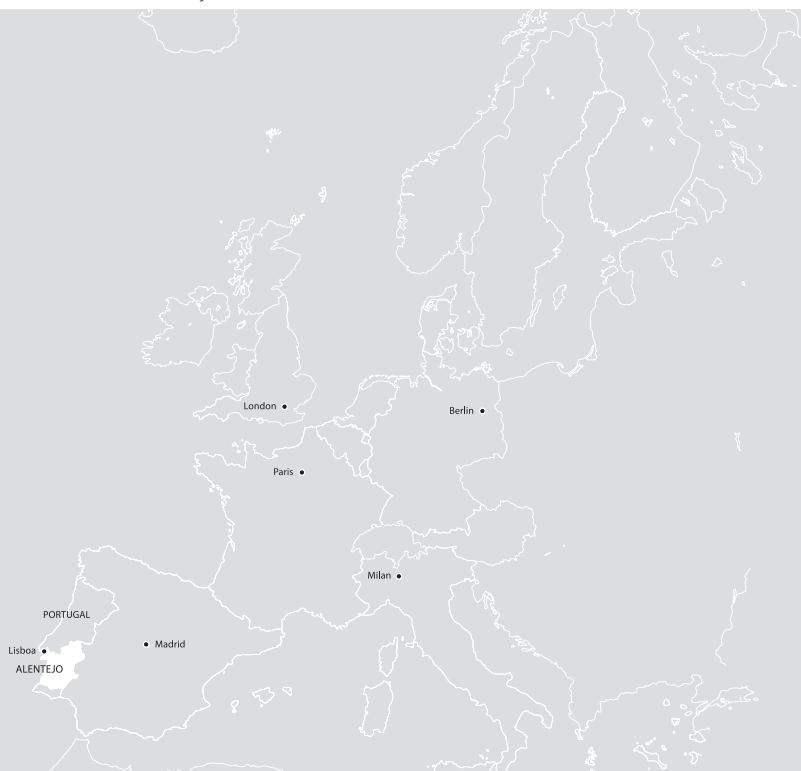
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- Where to stay
- Where to eat
- What to do
- Where to shop



(Map 1)

PRACTICAL DETAILS

The Alentejo is situated in the south of Portugal, between the River Tagus (Tejo) and the Algarve. To the east, its frontier is with Spain and to the west it is bathed by the Atlantic Ocean. It is an extensive region, essentially rural and thinly populated, occupying a third of the whole of continental Portugal. The beauty of its landscapes and the quality of its archaeological, monumental, architectural and ethnographic heritage and, par excellence, its gastronomy and wines, provide it with exceptional legacies to be discovered through **nature tourism** and **cultural tourism**.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

1. In this guide you will find all of the information you need for organising your travels to and in the Alentejo. The Region is presented through the themes that best characterise it – its heritage, its nature, its rural quality, its gastronomy, its wines – qualities that you will find in every part of the area. This approach places in your own hands the enticing task of constructing holidays that are wholly tailored to your own needs, designed to suit your own interests and the time you have at your disposal.

2. How should you proceed? Read the text and use the pictures to get a clear idea of the things that you are going to find here and, theme by theme, tick off everything you would find interesting to visit. Then take the map of the Region and mark down your choices. Once you have done this, which provides you with a first plan for your journey, decide where you want to begin, where you want to stay and what you want to do. In the section called “Tourism Services” you will find the necessary references. If you need help in switching more easily between the themes and the area itself, go to www.visitalentejo.pt or www.visitalentejo.com websites.

Add them to your “Favourites”, because they will provide you with up-to-date information about the Region as well as the GPS coordinates of the tourism firms and the places to visit.

3. Under each theme, at various places, you will find the expression (*The Alentejo is ...*), leading you to other themes. This reference means that the place or the resource in question is referred to or is specifically dealt with under other themes. When you need it, remember what you can find in the “Tourism Services” chapter, with its mention of the respective sections.

4. To understand and more closely locate the information we have provided, consult Map 2, where the four large sub-regions of the Alentejo are mapped out – North Alentejo, Central Alentejo, Lower Alentejo and Coastal Alentejo – together with the *concelhos* (council areas) and the local municipal authorities that constitute them. The location of the *concelhos* is important because, with a few exceptions, it is in the towns or cities that house their administrative centres that you will find the Tourist Offices. At the same time, given the municipal tradition of Portugal, on your travels you will find a good deal of tourist information produced by each municipality.

5. In the chapter “Tourism Services”, the information is organised in exactly the same form – sub-regions and *concelhos*, with the *concelhos* arranged in alphabetical order within each sub-region. The information is, in turn, organised into the following sections: **How to make a reservation, Where to sleep, Where to eat, What to do, Where to shop**. The section **What to do** appears outside this geographical organisation under the heading “Throughout the Whole Region”, because it takes you to the offers provided by different activity tourism enterprises which operate throughout the whole of the Alentejo, as well as aquatic tourism operators and wine-tourism providers.

6. To enhance the preparation you have already made at home, when you arrive, you should always visit the **Tourist Office** of the area you find yourself in. It is in these welcoming centres for tourists that you will find the local support you are going to need – maps of towns and cities, tourist routes and itineraries, information about organised excursions and guided visits, the opening hours of monuments and museums. You can also obtain useful information about such things as transport timetables and the opening times of traditional commercial enterprises, restaurants, bars and discotheques, pharmacies and filling stations, contact details for taxis and rent-a-car services, as well as up-to-date information about events, exhibitions, shows, festivals, fairs and pilgrimages.

USEFUL INFORMATION

AREA AND POPULATION

The Alentejo occupies an area of 27,000 kms² and has around 500,000 inhabitants. The population density is low, varying between six and fifty inhabitants per square kilometre. Space and silence never fail you.

CLIMATE

The Alentejo has a temperate climate, with continental and Mediterranean characteristics. The summers are hot and dry, the winters wet and cold, and in spring and autumn temperatures are delightful, with moderate highs and lows.

The average lowest temperature in the coldest months, December and January, is 6°C, and the average high in July and August, the hottest months, is 30°C. These averages include, in winter, days with temperatures around or a bit below 0°C and, in the hottest summers, the mercury can climb above 40°C. The differences in daily temperature in summer are significant, sometimes in the order of 15° – 20°. In the coastal areas, the temperatures and variations are modified and made more agreeable by the influence of the sea. In winter you need to wrap up well and in summer wear fresh, light clothing with a jacket for the evening. Sunglasses and a good sunblock are important.

HOW TO GET AROUND

People with their own transport will have no difficulty in moving around and orientating themselves within the Alentejo. Cyclists should be aware that there are no cycle lanes or tracks except for small sections close to urban centres. There is a good network of roads, with rapid transit along the principal routes: motorways (signalled by "A") and main roads (signalled by "IP"). If you use the motorways you will need to pay tolls. Once you are in the Region, you should choose to travel by secondary and "municipal" roads. The latter are the best, since they are simply the oldest asphalted routes through the countryside and carry little traffic, thus offering the best means of enjoying the landscape, of getting to know traditional ways

of living and working, of coming across the most hidden cultural heritage and of making contact with a people who are naturally courteous and welcoming.

When planning to travel by public transport, you should note that the timetables are designed to cater for residents and are not always best suited for the purposes of tourist travel. Information: www.rede-expresso.pt; www.cp.pt; www.rodalentejo.pt
There are taxi services in almost every locality.

24-HOUR HEALTH PROVISION

In the case of an accident, phone the national emergency services number: 112

Health Problems

Citizens of the European Union, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland, who belong to the social security system in their own countries, should have with them a European Health Insurance Card.

Pharmacies

There is always a pharmacy open 24 hours in each of the towns and cities that are the administrative centres of *concelhos*. Information about these is posted in all of the pharmacies. In some shopping centres there are *Áreas de Saúde* ("health areas") where some medicaments can be bought.

OPENING HOURS

Traditional Commerce

Weekdays: 9.00/9.30 – 19.00/19.30

Lunchtime closure: 13.00 – 15.00

Saturdays: 9.00/9.30 – 13.00/13.30

Some establishments do not close at lunchtime and remain open on Saturday afternoons.

Banks

Weekdays: 8.30 – 15.00. They are closed on public holidays.



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THE ALENTEJO IS HERITAGE

In the Alentejo, you travel naturally with and to History. The abundance and the quality of the Heritage which it expresses become easy for you to discover but, if you are visiting the Region for the first time, you could be spoiled for choice. If this is the case, don't hesitate: opt for our suggestions and you will discover that the magic of the Alentejo is to be found, with endless pleasure, everywhere.



ENCOUNTERS WITH HISTORY

So that you don't miss out on any aspect of these thousands of years of history, it's important that you have an idea of the different epochs which have clearly and abundantly made their mark on the rural and urban landscapes of the Alentejo. This is the thinking behind our selecting the suggestions we make here.

From the times dating back to the Palaeolithic up to the 12th century AD, we suggest that you concentrate on three fundamental periods of time: the **Neolithic**, which offers us interesting examples of the **megalithic** era, the the **Roman occupation** and the **Arab occupation**, which left us with an important inheritance, material and non-material, throughout the whole Region.

During the so-called Christian reconquest, Portugal was born as a nation, which means that from the 12th century until the present, we have almost 900 years of history in our hands. From this long period, we will suggest that you discover some of the **castles and historical centres that have a mediaeval flavour** and that you visit the emblematic expressions of **civil and religious architecture**, built during the prosperous times of the Discoveries and the time of exploiting gold from Brazil (15th – 18th centuries).



Finally, because history never stops, we will direct you to some of the **contemporary work** that demonstrates how the creativity of today is set into and integrated with the values of the past.

A final piece of advice. When planning your travels, in order to experience the essence of the Alentejo to its full, you should leave yourself time to enjoy, freely and in tranquillity, everything that today opens up, conserves and brings life to the heritage present in the monuments. To achieve this, you need to install yourself in the comfort of a palace, monastery or manor house, to lunch or dine in the former refectory of a convent, to enjoy a drink on a castle terrace, to listen to a concert of sacred music in the setting of a Baroque church, to attend a play in one of those beautiful spaces that formerly received kings, to take part in the spectacles which enliven village, town and city squares on warm summer evenings. And, because nothing makes sense if you don't understand what truly creates the soul of this people, you should make sure that, at an appropriate time, you are in some ancient or modern tavern where you can still find yourself listening to the sound of spontaneous Alentejan singing. (*Tourism Services: Where to sleep, Where to eat, What to do*)



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(...) 'none of our cities, apart from Évora, was able to say to me, with purity and beauty, "I am Latin", "I am Arab", "I am Christian", "I am Iberian", "I am Portuguese" (...)’ – Miguel Torga, 1942, Diary II.

ÉVORA. A WORLD HERITAGE CENTRE

Évora is the inevitable reference point for anyone coming to the Alentejo inspired by the theme of Heritage. Classified by UNESCO as A World Heritage Site, Évora justly occupies an important place in any Cultural Tourism itinerary.

Its architectural and artistic heritage is so omnipresent and impressive that this alone guides the steps of anyone who loves strolling around with no fixed direction: from the Roman to the Neoclassical, by way of the Gothic and various expressions of the Manueline, the Renaissance and the Baroque, all the epochs of history are documented with works that fully satisfy the eye and the soul.

Referring only to what is essential, you need several hours to visit the **Roman Temple**, the **Cathedral of Santa Maria**, the **Igreja** (church)



de São Francisco and the **Chapel of Bones**, the **Palace of King D. Manuel**, the **Ermida** (chapel) **de São Brás** (St Blaize), the **Mirador-Terrace** of the **Casa** (house) **Cordovil**, the **Manueline Window** of the **Casa de Garcia da Resende**, the **Colégio do Espírito Santo**, now part of Évora University, the **Igreja da Misericórdia**, **Praça do Giraldo** (the main square) and the **Teatro Garcia de Resende**.

In the Tourist Office, you will find tourist information relevant to your visit as well as equipment for audio tours. If you opt for a guided visit, always advisable for a first experience of the city, ask for the contact details of local professionals.

After you have finished this initial reconnoitre of the Historical Centre, venture further afield. As you will quickly understand, Évora is not a museum of disconnected pieces. What is unique about it is that it is an exceptional collection of streets and buildings with a thousand and one details to discover, it is inhabited, it has a living present, where you can feel the pulse of a contemporary city that is culturally active and that naturally integrates and reflects a heritage it has known how to preserve. Stay a few more days, live all of this and, when your intuition tells you it is time to leave, begin the adventure of discovering the many delights that are beyond its walls and contribute so much to making sense of it: other cities, towns and villages, so many other places of distinction.

ORIGINS

The human presence in these places has been documented since the Palaeolithic period. Its finest expression is found in the Gruta (cave) do Escoural, a tour of which should be preceded by a visit to the Centro de Interpretação (interpretation centre) located in the town of Escoural itself.

The highest point of megalithic culture lies between the 4th and 3rd millennia BC, with hundreds of monuments from this period having been identified in the Region. Setting out into the countryside to discover the dolmens (passage graves), cromlechs (megalithic enclosures) and menhirs (standing stones) is one of the most gratifying of the experiences to be enjoyed in the Alentejo. That is what we suggest you do.

If you have only a little time, it is best if you explore the Montemor-o-Novo – Évora – Monsaraz axis, where you will find some of the most important cultural monuments. After a visit to the Núcleo Arqueológico do Convento de S. Domingos, in Montemor-o-Novo, or the Centro Interpretativo Megalítica Eborá do Convento dos Remédios, in Évora, excellent introductions to the theme of the period of the megaliths, you will easily find: in the area around Évora, the Anta Grande (great dolmen) do Zambujeiro, the antas (dolmens) do Barrocal and the menir e cromeleque (standing stone and megalithic enclosure) dos Almendres; in the area around Monsaraz, the antas do Olival da Pega, the cromeleque do Xerez and the imposing menhirs of Outeiro, Belhõa, Barrocal and Monte da Ribeira, the last re-erected inside an adega patrimonial (a heritage winery). Still within the Évora Region, it is well worthwhile making a short detour to the town of Pavia to take a look at the anta-capela (dolmen-chapel) de S. Dinis, a curious example of the Christianisation of a monument that is considered pagan.

On the Castelo de Vide – Marvão axis, you should visit the Centro de Interpretação do Megalitismo (centre for the interpretation of the Megalithic), situated in a former magazine of Castelo de Vide castle. You could then visit the Anta da Melriça, the Parque Megalítico dos Coureiros (dolmen 2) and the Menir da Meada; and, in the village of Aldeia da Mata (Crato/Flor da Rosa), the Anta Grande do Tapadão, one of the most beautiful and best-conserved in the whole of the Alentejo.



>The Cromleque (cromlech/megalithic enclosure) dos Almendres is a spectacular conjunction of 95 monoliths, some of which display engravings that are geometrical or astral in character. Although many questions about these types of monuments remain unanswered, it is possible that the theories that relate them to an astral cult have some foundation. Recent excavations have shown that many of the monoliths are not now in their original positions and that the monument dates from the period between the Neolithic and the Chalcolithic. Surrounded by lush *montado* (cork oaks and pasture), it affords an excellent view of the City of Évora.

ROME IN THE ALENTEJO

The Roman period in the Alentejo began in the 2nd century BC and lasted until the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century. From these times, and from their influence on later periods, there remain many memories: mining and agricultural exploitation carried out on great estates crowned by luxurious and richly decorated houses (the Roman villas); ceramics industries, salt mines, fish-salting and ship-building; fortresses, temples, bridges, paved roads and pathways, sanctuaries, theatres, dams, aqueducts; municipalities as the basis for the structure of local administration. And there remains with us, obviously, Latin as the mother tongue of the Portuguese.

The remains of this period can be visited in and from urban centres. Take a note and make these sites part of your itinerary.

On the Marvão – Alter do Chão – Monforte axis you should see the **Civitas de Ammaia** (S. Salvador de Aramenha, Marvão); the **ponte** (bridge) **de Vila Formosa** (road between Alter do Chão and Ponte de Sor); the **villa at Torre de Palma** (road between Monforte and Cabeço de Vide); and the **Núcleo Museológico** of the **Igreja** (church) **da Madalena** (Monforte).

In Évora, the **Roman-Goth-Arab walls**, the **Roman temple**, the **Termas** (baths) in the **Paços do Concelho** (Town Hall), the **Arco** (arch) **de D. Isabel** and the **Casa de Burgos**, all in the historical centre; outside the city, the **Termas** of the **Roman Villa of Tourega** (road from Évora to Alcaçovas).

Between Alvito, Vidigueira, Cuba and Beja, the **bridge** at **Vila Ruiva** (road between Vila Ruiva and Albergaria dos Fusos) and the **Roman villa** of **Cucufate** and **Casa do Arco** (Vila de Frades).

In Beja, the **Portas** (gates) **de Évora and de Avis** the gigantic **capitals** next to the Regional Museum and the **Núcleo Museológico Romano da Rua do Sembrano**, where you will also find important vestiges of the Iron Age.

Between Beja, Castro Verde and Mértola, the **Roman villa** of **Pisões** (road from Beja to Aljustrel, next to Penedo Gordo); the **Museu da Lucerna** (museum of Roman lamps) (Castro Verde); and the **Núcleo Museológico Romano** (Mértola).

On the coast, the **Estação Arqueológica de Miróbriga** (Santiago do Cacém) and the **Cripta** (crypt) **Arqueológica do Castelo** (Alcácer do Sal), situated under the former Aracoeli convent.



> **Miróbriga** was inhabited from at least the Iron Age until the 4th century AD and experienced its major development during the Roman period. In the highest part, the forum was built, in the centre of which the two temples are visible, eventually dedicated to the Imperial cult and to the cult of Venus. In one of the best-conserved parts of the complex, the baths are of particular note. Away from the centre is found the hippodrome, the only one of its kind known in Portugal. There is an information centre and a shop. Guided visits are available, with prior booking, for groups (minimum 5). There is an entrance charge.

Opening hours: Tuesday to Saturday: 9.00-12.30 and 14.00-17.30
Sundays: 9.00-12.00 and 14.00-17.00. Closed on Mondays and on the public holidays of 1st January, Easter Sunday, 1st May and 25th December.

THE MOORISH AMBIENCE

The period of Arab occupation, begun in the 8th century, lasted in the south of Portugal for almost 500 years. From this long period of shared occupancy, we have inherited agricultural plants and techniques, systems for capturing and storing water, culinary customs, hundreds of different words, construction techniques, decorative tastes, artistic styles, urban environments.

The archetypes of many of our castles from the Reconquest are Moorish in character and a number of Christian churches were built over earlier mosques. **Mértola**, the most Arabic town in Portugal, is a place where you can really understand this inheritance.

The last interior port of the great river route, the Guadiana, Mértola has been an active centre of commerce since the Roman period of occupation and earned the prestigious title of *municipium*, was the **capital of a Muslim kingdom during the Islamic period**, and became the main headquarters of the Order of Santiago.

The **mosque**, converted to a Christian church, is the only Arab religious space still conserved in Portugal. The **Núcleo Museológico Islâmico**, with a valuable collection that is the fruit of twenty years of investigation, offers us the best testimony to and the finest lesson in the richness of the period of Arabic occupation of the south of Portugal.

But it is not only the mosque and the *Núcleo*. There is also a variety of other reflections of the past that justify a visit to Mértola. What makes it unique is that the **whole of the historical centre is a field of activity in relation to archaeological work**. Thanks to the daily commitment undertaken by a team of researchers and technicians, we can see a living example of the unveiling of history, meet archaeologists in the street returning from their excavations and have personal contact with important new discoveries. The way in which this project has transformed the very poor town of some years ago to a point of reference for multiple cultural itineraries from Europe and other parts of the world has made **Mértola a demonstrative experience** of the role that Culture can play in the sustainable development of a place, with an impact that is perhaps unique in Portugal.

If you want to visit Mértola at festival time, choose the dates when it is in particular celebratory mood: during the **Islamic Festival**, every odd year, in the month of May.



>The **Mosque in Mértola** is the only one existent in Portugal that is still recognisable as such by reason of its shape and space and its decorative elements. Despite being adapted as a Christian church, there are still four doors with horseshoe arches, and it retains its *alfis*, the mihrab and the compartment for the *minbar* (pulpit). The mihrab retains its sculpted plaster, though the polychrome work has disappeared. The compartment for the *minbar* is alongside the mihrab and held the movable pulpit needed for Muslim worship.

It is thought that the construction of and major repairs to the mosque must date from the 12th century, during the Almohad dynasty



> **Moorish Quarters.** After the Reconquest, a lot of Moors accepted the rules that were imposed on them for allowing them to remain in Portugal. This process brought about the creation of **Moorish Quarters**, at the time situated on the outskirts of the urban centres. These districts, today fully integrated within the general rows of houses in towns and cities, retain some, though few, traces of their presence, but they do maintain the names and layout, as is the case in Évora, Beja and Moura, among others.



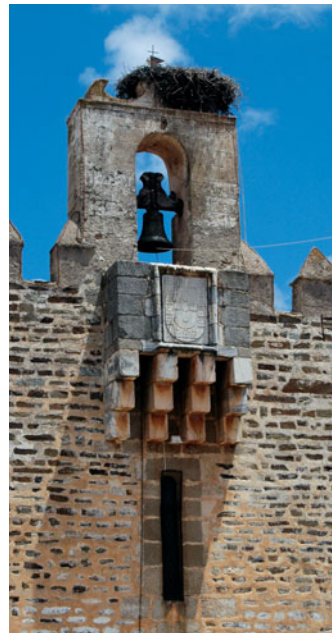
EXCURSIONS WITH CASTLES

The whole of the landscape of the Alentejo is dotted with castles, forts, watchtowers and fortified towns and villages, bearing witness that, with the Reconquest firmly established in the south, it was necessary to continue to defend the frontiers of the country to the east, responding to wars with Spain, to prevent attacks by sea from the west and, throughout the interior, to slow down any advances not contained by the frontier defences.

For those who bring with them an interest in fortifications, which itself is an excellent pretext for getting to know the exquisite **historical centres** that these fortifications were created to protect, there is a seemingly endless list of places, each with a particular history and a unique setting within the landscape: in the north of the Alentejo, there are **Amieira do Tejo, Nisa, Belver, Castelo de Vide, Marvão, Portalegre, Alegrete, Alter do Chão, Cabeço de Vide,**



> **Marvão.** Built on the most inhospitable, abrupt, inaccessible and steep ridge of the Serra do Sapaio, in the 9th century Marvão witnessed the tribulations of the Muslim rebel, Ibn Maruan, a celebrated name which would have given rise to the town's present name. It later, during the 12th and 13th centuries, became an advanced post for Christian troops and then the stage for the history of Portugal up to the Peninsular Wars and the Liberal movements of the 19th century. In an exemplary state of conservation and with all the phases of its evolution well documented, Marvão could be considered as the paradigm of the history of most of the fortresses of the Alentejo. It is worth a visit just for this reason. But Marvão has other enchantments. Against all odds, the small settlement was born and grew in the shadow of the castle, with the rows of houses clambering along at the will of the ridge in that desolate place that they call "the eagles' nest", remaining intact for century after century, squeezed inside its protecting wall. So it is today, an example of both erudite and vernacular architecture, between the ancestral austerity of granite and the constantly renewed lightness of whitewash.



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Avis, Arronches, Ouguela, Campo Maior and Elvas; in central Alentejo, **Montemor-o-Novo, Arraiolos, Évora, Evoramonte, Estremoz, Veiros, Borba, Vila Viçosa, Juromenha, Alandroal, Redondo, Terena, Monsaraz, Mourão, Portel** and **Viana do Alentejo**; in lower Alentejo, **Beja, Alvito** (today a Pousada), **Moura, Noudar, Serpa** and **Mértola**; on the Alentejan coast, **Alcácer do Sal** (today a Pousada), **Santiago do Cacém, Sines, Pessegueiro** and **Vila Nova de Milfontes** (today a *Turismo de Habitação*).

Those who appreciate military architecture should at least visit the imposing **torres de Menagem** (castle keeps) in Beja and Estremoz, both dating from the 13th and 14th centuries, the **fortified chapel of Nossa Senhora da Boa Nova** in Terena, one of the most unusual monuments in Portugal, and **Elvas**, justifiably considered a **museum-city of fortifications**. And as a visit that is obligatory for everyone, whatever the thematic purpose of their travels, we would highlight **the fortified hill town of Marvão**. (*The Alentejo is Nature, The Alentejo is Rural Quality*).



THE CONVENT AMBIENCE

Everything begins, once more, at the time of the Reconquest, when kings and military religious orders joined forces to put to an end the occupation of the “infidels”. From the origins of Nationality to the 19th century, first with the help of the military, then through the not always pacific mission to civilise, evangelise, educate and, in the dark times of the Inquisition, to defend the orthodox Catholic faith, the Clergy, ordained and secular, have played an important part in Portuguese history.

The Alentejo was no exception: quite the contrary. It is not by chance that a large part of its heritage is of a religious nature and that, for centuries, the church and the religious orders were the major landowners in the Region.

In the 19th century, a major volte-face in the story occurred: the religious orders in Portugal were closed down by decree and their goods and estates were either taken over by the state or were sold by public auction to some of the wealthy families of the time.

As far as the convent and monastery buildings are concerned, the problem soon presented itself: what was to be done with these structures, many with great value in terms of heritage but now lacking their original function?

Two of the responses made are of great interest to those who visit the Alentejo. Some have been adapted as museums, such as the **Convento de S. Domingos** in Montemor-o-Novo, the **Convento de N.ª S.ª da Conceição** in Beja and the **Convento de S. Francisco** in Mértola.

Other have been transformed into hotels, initially those of the state – the Pousadas – an experience that, from the end of the 20th century, has served as an inspiration for private initiatives.

It is this history that allows us today, in the Alentejo, to stay in the refined ambience of former convents and monasteries. The examples are many: in Crato, the **Mosteiro da Flor da Rosa**; in Redondo, the **Convento de S. Paulo**; in Arraiolos, the **Convento de Nossa Senhora da Assunção**; in Évora, the **Convento dos Lóios** and the **Convento do Espinheiro**; in Vila Viçosa, the **Convento das Chagas**; in Beja, the **Convento de S. Francisco**. Because of the care that has been taken with their restoration, they are all places not to be missed.

(Tourism Services, Where to Stay)



THE ALENTEJO OF THE DISCOVERIES

Between the 15th and the 18th centuries, Portugal enjoyed a period of great prosperity. Though the human costs of the epic that was the Discoveries had been many, it is a fact that they brought with them riches without precedent, the fruit of an active commerce in spices, gold and precious stones, whose principal source was India and Brazil. The Alentejo, which during this period was several times the residence of kings, participated in and benefited from this movement. Nobles' houses, palaces, churches, convents and monasteries arose, works of consequence were constructed, such as the Água da Prata aqueduct, in Évora, and the Amoreira aqueduct, in Elvas. Beautiful fountains and pillories were built and those in existence were created anew and embellished. Portuguese and foreign artists were summoned, stone and wood were worked with great skill, painting, sculpture and the decorative arts flourished. In a word, everything was done so that the future would be marked by the greatest works, erected to the glory of man and of God.

The styles succeed each other – Gothic, Renaissance, Mannerist, Baroque, Neoclassical – as in other European countries. But in Portugal there occurred an original style that is called **Manueline**. Although the name comes directly from King Manuel (1495-1521), a fortunate monarch in whose reign India was reached and Brazil was discovered, this style preceded him and continued after his death. It has its roots in the late Gothic and, in the Alentejo, has also tasted something of the Mudejar style, giving rise to the curious examples called Manueline-Mudejar. In its final phase, it existed alongside Renaissance and Mannerist styles.

Since the essence of all this heritage was constructed in the cities and towns that will make up part of any travel in the Region, the most practical way of appreciating it is to follow the **urban tourism itineraries** that are available from the Tourist Offices. They have enough detail. They combine religious and military heritage with civil architecture, erudite or formal and vernacular, a perspective that provides for stimulating excursions on foot along the oldest and most agreeable streets in the Historical Centres. (*The Alentejo is Rural Quality*)

Those with little time could choose to make a small excursion into history through a single monument: many of them include elements from all these periods and have their origin during the Middle Ages. This is the case with, among others, **Évora Cathedral** (13th to 18th century), **Igreja de S. Francisco** in Estremoz (13th to 18th century), **Igreja de Santa Maria** in Beja (15th to 18th century), or **Igreja de Santa Maria do Castelo** in Alcácer do Sal (13th to 18th century).

Museum-lovers should not miss the **Museu Municipal de Portalegre**, the **Museu Municipal do Crato**, the **Museu Regional de Évora**, the **Núcleos Museológicos do Paço Ducal** (ducal palace) **de Vila Viçosa** and the **Museu Regional de Beja**.

Thinking in terms of the absolutely essential and running the risk of being greatly unjust, given the sheer abundance of what is there, we would suggest you visit the finest examples of the **Manueline**, the **Gothic** and the **Baroque**.

Manueline. The Manueline period has left us hundreds of works of art related to architecture, sculpture, painting, illuminated manuscripts, engravings, everyday ceramics, tile work, jewellery. The discovering of these is almost inevitable.



If you would like to have a quick look at a clearly differentiated collection of expressions of this period, you should go to the small town of **Alvito** where, in the short space of a single morning, you could take in the **Pelourinho** (the pillory), the **castellated Palace** (today adapted as a Pousada), the **doorway of the Igreja Matriz** (parish church), and the **chapel of S. Sebastião** and still be able to walk through almost all of the streets in search of the doorways of the period, taking as your guide the **Roteiro do Alvito Manuelino** (the Manueline Alvito itinerary).

A few kilometres away, in **Viana do Alentejo**, it is well worthwhile completing this excursion with a visit to the **Castle** and the **Igreja Matriz**. If the Manueline attracts you, as well as the emblematic works that are found in the historical centres of the main cities and towns of the Region, make sure you visit the former **Sé** (Cathedral) **de Elvas** and, in the **Paço Ducal de Vila Viçosa**, the rooms of the **armoury**.

The Renaissance. If we understand the Renaissance as a cultural movement associated with a taste for the archetypes of classical culture and a source of funding for the promotion of artistic creation, one of the most distinguished examples of this period in the Alentejo is, without doubt, the “court in the village” which was **Vila Viçosa** from the 15th to the 17th century. Visiting its most emblematic building, the **Paço Ducal** (ducal palace), and the principal monuments that make up its extremely rich heritage can be a way of understanding the history of this



period. To complete this, it is important to take a look from the same perspective at the urban layout of the new town built outside the original walls, its geometry so characteristic of Renaissance rationality. But there are many other places where you can discover the various expressions of this period, from its civil and religious architecture to its sculpture and painting.

In the field of architecture, we would highlight the **Igreja da Misericórdia** in Beja. It has a curious history. It was designed by the architect Diogo de Torralva as a kind of civil loggia to serve as a slaughterhouse but, because of the beauty of the building, it was given over to the *Santa Casa* (a charity) early in the 16th century and in the second half of the century was converted into a church. You can contemplate the open part of this building at any time of the day or night, in Praça da República.

Also from this period, which was greatly marked by the construction of *igrejas-salão* ("nave" or "hall" churches, with the aisles and chancel the same height as the nave), some already Mannerist in style, it is worth taking a look at the **Igreja do Bom Jesus**, in Valverde (near Évora), and the chapel of **Onze Mil Virgens** (eleven thousand virgins) in the Igreja de Santo António in Alcácer do Sal.

If you are interested in painting and sculpture, you must allow yourself to appreciate two unavoidable examples in Portalegre: the finest collection of **Mannerist painting** in the Region, to be found in the **Sé** (cathedral); and in the **Mosteiro** (monastery) **de S. Bernardo, the**



group of sculptures on the tomb of the founding bishop, D. Jorge de Melo, attributed to Nicolau de Chanterenne. Two other singular groups by the same artist are striking, clearly seen on the façades of the **Igreja da Graça**, in Évora, and in the **Igreja Matriz**, in Arronches.

Baroque. It is in the reign of King João V (1707-1750), a time when peace and riches came together to allow the royal wish to affirm the greatness of Portugal to be realised, that Baroque art reached its apogee in Portugal. This is a time when important contributions of Portuguese and foreign artists crossed paths, as happened in earlier periods, something that never failed to make its mark on architecture, sculpture, painting, and what is important in Portuguese Baroque, on a great diversity of decorative arts. The wood carving, gilded and polychrome, together with the tile work, is considered the most original manifestation of Portuguese art of the period.

We suggest you begin your discovery of this period in Portalegre, recognised as the Baroque capital of North Alentejo. More than simply looking at interiors, try to sense the ambience through the **Roteiro das Casas Brasonadas** (itinerary for visiting houses with coats of arms), available from the Tourist Office. Together with either the **Roteiro da Cidade** (itinerary for visiting the city) or the **Roteiro das Fontes** (itinerary for visiting the fountains), it is a very interesting way of getting to know Portuguese heritage (www.cm-portalegre.pt). If you would like to see an interior, choose the **Palácio Achioli**, where



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today the Escola Superior de Education is situated. Continuing your visit to this Region, you can enjoy various **palaces, houses of the nobility, churches and fountains**, which are mentioned in the itinerary-guides for some of the towns which you will certainly want to visit for other reasons, too: Crato, Alter do Chão, Monforte, Fronteira or Avis. In Alter do Chão, don't miss the **Palácio do Álamo**, where the Tourist Office and some of the services of the Câmara Municipal (municipal authority) are located. When you arrive in Central Alentejo, you are truly spoiled for choice. If you have only a little time, you should see: in Estremoz, the former **Armária (armoury) de D. João V**, the present Pousada da Rainha Santa Isabel; in Borba, the **Passos Processionais** (wayside altars representing stations of the cross, used for processions), sculpted in marble; and in Redondo, the extraordinary array of **panels of tiles in the Convento de S. Paulo**. In Évora, you must visit: the **Capela-Mor** (Chancel) of the Cathedral, designed by Ludovice, the architect of the celebrated Convent of Mafra; the **Capela do Calvário** of the church of S. Francisco, perhaps the most astonishing work of carving in the Alentejo; and the churches of **S. João Evangelista** (also known as the Lóios church), **Misericórdia** (a charity church) and **Mercês**, the last converted into the museum-nucleus for sacred art of the Regional Museum. To end this little itinerary in a burst of beauty, travel a few tens of kilometres further to be presented, in Beja, with the surprising pearl of the Baroque, the **Igreja dos Prazeres**. Definitely not to be missed.



Adega Mayor. Essentially inspired by rural architecture, the artworks of today enhance the cities, towns and countryside with buildings that are assuredly contemporary, minimalist, economical and well integrated into the landscape.

IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

We are going to make a leap into our present times by way of the revivalism of the 19th century, the architecture in iron that accompanied the arrival of the railway in the interior, the modernism of the early 20th century and the heavy architecture that characterised the period of the so-called Estado Novo (New State) of the time of the dictatorship of Salazar. From these times we have **the panels of tiles in the railway stations**, places certainly worth visiting. And a symbolic reference full of the future: in 1919 there was created in Évora the first civil association for the defence of heritage – the Grupo Pro-Évora – which, anticipating much later causes, stopped the walls of Évora from being dismantled, proposed the classification of dozens of monuments in the city and promoted the cleaning of the magnificent cloisters in the Cathedral, all at a time full of ruination.

From the second half of the 20th century, a process of the urban rehabilitation of the historical centres was begun. The past was restored, monuments which otherwise would have been destroyed by time were provided with new functions, and also new work was undertaken. The sculptors of our times were invited to enhance the beauty of squares and gardens, renowned architects were and still are summoned to design work as disparate as new suburban areas, cultural installations, churches, *adegas* (wineries) or private houses. Essentially inspired by rural architecture, they embellished cities, towns and countryside (the last very conservative by nature) with buildings assuredly contemporary, minimalist, sober and well integrated into the landscape.

If you would like to appreciate some of this, take a look at the **Bairro da Malugeira in Évora**, (designed as social housing), and the **Adega Mayor in Campo Maior**, both designed by Siza Vieira; the **Centro de Arte in Sines**, from the Aires Mateus studio; the **Mora Fluviarium**, from the Promontório Arquitectos studio; the **Adega da Herdade de Rocim**, in Cuba, by Carlos Vitorino; or, completely unexpected in a tiny Alentejan village, the new **Igreja Paroquial** (parish church) of **Albergaria dos Fusos**, by Victor Figueiredo and Jorge Filipe Pinto. These and many others, such as the **sculptures of João Cutileiro** in Évora, or the investment by Elvas in its **Museu de Arte Contemporânea** – installed in an 18th century Baroque building – are signs of the times that should not be missed.



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THE ALENTEJO IS NATURE

The Alentejo has a clear vocation for Activity Tourism and for Nature Tourism. The beauty of the landscape invites excursions on foot, on mountain bikes and on horseback, and the country lanes known as estradas municipais, despite the absence of cycle lanes, are excellent for cycling-tourism. On the rivers, the reservoirs and the coast, many water-based activities are possible. The beaches are of the highest quality. And the sky, with this fantastic climate, is ideal for parachuting, paragliding, ballooning and microlight flights.



ORGANISED EXCURSIONS

Those of you who like to travel independently should be aware that you will not, in every part of the Alentejo, find the kind of support that is usual in places that are more established as Nature Tourism destinations. For those in search of adventure, this could be an advantage. Those who don't like the unexpected would benefit from combining some exploration on their own with participation in organised excursions.

There is a wide offer provided by local enterprises: it includes excursions on foot, on mountain bike, in 4x4s and on horseback, activities such as climbing, cycle-tourism, canoeing, sea and river cruises, observation of flora and fauna, surfing, wind-surfing, diving, sailing, sports fishing and golf. Some hotel and rural tourism establishments include nature-tourism activities in their offers of accommodation.

This kind of provision, combined with the very high quality of the hotel accommodation and restaurants and the wonderful resources that nature offers, has contributed to the fact that the Alentejo is increasingly sought after by company groups who take part in incentive schemes and outdoor training programmes here.

(Tourism Services: Where to sleep, Where to eat, What to do)

Very important. Before setting out on a nature excursion, those travelling independently should check at Tourist Offices whether there is any possible hunting activity in the area.



THE TEJO IN ALENTEJO, BETWEEN NISA AND BELVER

What we propose is the discovery of the unknown River Tejo (in English Tagus), very different from the river we see flowing into the wide estuary that washes Lisbon's shoreline. First in the region of **Nisa** and then close to **Belver**.

In Nisa, a municipality that has invested heavily in pedestrianization, you are faced with a variety of walking excursions, all PR (pequena rota – short route), which offer unexpected landscapes in the Tejo basin and the Serra de S. Miguel. Informational leaflets are available in the Tourist Office and for download on the website www.cm-nisa.pt/desporto_percursospedestres.htm

Signposting has been maintained in an exemplary fashion.

If you only have time for some of these tours, we would suggest three: PR1, "**Trilhos das Jans**" (the Jans trails – begins in Amieira do Tejo, 12.6 kms, medium difficulty); PR8, "**Trilhos do Moinho Branco**" (the white mill trails – begins in Montalvão, 14 kms, medium difficulty); and PR4, "**Trilhos do Conhal**" (the Conhal trails – begins in Arneiro, 9.8 kms, medium difficulty). The last is interesting for its inclusion of the **Mina de Ouro Romana do Conhal** (Roman gold mine), extensive terracing formed by piles of pebbles, which bears witness to the mining for gold that would have taken place here in



Roman and in mediaeval times. This place makes up part of the geological monuments that are brought together in **GeoPark Naturtejo**, one of 30 European “geoparks” classified by UNESCO (www.naturtejo.com).

Lovers of fortresses, of beautiful views and of canoeing should take a trip to Belver. From the top of this castle you have an exceptional panoramic view over the River Tejo. On the further bank you will find the **Praia Fluvial** (river beach) **da Quinta do Alamal**, with a number of facilities, among which are canoe rental and other boat-board activities which will allow you to navigate the Tejo, here its waters calm, retained by one of the oldest dams in Portugal. Don't miss walking along the magnificent 2 km **percurso ribeirinho** (river excursion), set out with wooden posts, constructed between the bridge and Quinta do Alamal.

To “close with a golden key” any programme in this area, you should keep one day for a journey by train on the section of the Linha da Beira between Belver and Fratel. Be careful about the timetable, because this has not been designed for return tourist excursions. (*The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Rural Quality, The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines*)



THE NATURAL PARK OF THE SERRA OF S. MAMEDE

Nature expresses itself in an especially exuberant way in the Natural Park of the Serra (sierra/range of hills) of S. Mamede. From a geological point of view it is extremely rich, immediately drawing the visitor's attention to the imposing quartzites, which mark the landscape with bizarre sculptures. In the northern zone, the chestnuts and Pyrenean oaks share the area with cork oaks and holm oaks, while the vineyards, allied to olive groves, grow on the generally gentle slopes which border the streams. To the south, great ownership is affirmed. This is the Alentejo of the *montes* (traditional farm complexes), of farming that is in natural symbiosis with the *montados* (oak woodland combined with pasture) and with the small villages of low whitewashed houses surrounded by vegetable gardens and orchards.

Despite the pressures of human occupation, fauna is abundant: rare



birds such as Bonelli's Eagle and the Griffin Vulture, Sparrowhawks, the Short-toed Eagle, the Black Kite, the Eagle Owl, the Tawny Owl and many others, live alongside Wild Boar, Red Deer, Badgers, Egyptian Mongooses, Wild Cats, Foxes and the Common Rabbit. The history of humankind has left its thousands-of-years-old mark in the dolmens, menhirs, camps, Roman and 15th century bridges, and also in the network of paved tracks and pathways, some of which form part of the walking excursions in the natural Park.

Eight excursions are signposted in the Park. The leaflets are available in Quinta dos Olhos d'Águia, the park's headquarters (S. Salvador de Aramenha) and in the Tourist Offices in Marvão and Arronches. The **Marvão (8 kms)**, **Galegos (11,5 kms)**, **Alegrete (11 Kms)** and **Esperança (16 kms)** excursions, all accessible to anyone in good physical condition, together provide a sufficiently complete image of the Park's landscape. The last two can be done on mountain bike. Before setting out, always check about the state of the signposting. At **Penhas de Portalegre**, practitioners of **climbing** will find the only authorised and equipped walls in this protected area. For **cycling-tourists**, the secondary roads and municipal lanes provide a true paradise waiting to be discovered. (*The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Rural Quality, The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines*)



ECOTOURISM CENTRE OF THE RIBEIRA GRANDE

The countryside that extends between Fronteira and Monforte is irresistibly beautiful: there are undulating, verdant meadows where sheep and cattle graze; olive plantations, in neat order, climb up the hillsides; the *montado* (oak woodland and pasture) of cork and holm oak provide a stunning play of light and shade; the vineyards change colour with the seasons; thousands of wild flowers paint the fields as spring bursts forth. This is the valley of the small river called Ribeira Grande, with a vegetation that is dense and leafy, dozens of species of birds, ruins of ancient water mills, and curious vestiges of history such as the Sanctuary-Caves of S. Bento das Lapas, which only those venturing on foot can get to know.

The best discovery activity we can suggest for this area is precisely that – a walking excursion: the **“Rota (route) da Ribeira Grande”** (PR2, 9 kms, medium level of difficulty, with some steeper inclines) which sets out from and ends at the **Centro Ecoturístico da Ribeira Grande**, close to **Fronteira**. At the Tourist Office you will find an information leaflet for the excursion, a guide to the birds of the region (*Guia de Observação da Avifauna*) and also information to help you



get to know the **heritage** of this beautiful town. On the way to the departure point, walk up to the **Igreja (church) da Senhora da Vila Velha**, a visit to which is well worthwhile, and fill your eyes with the panorama that can be enjoyed from this viewpoint. And don't forget to take a packed meal with you; the three or four hours that the trip needs are short enough time for seeing all the places you are going to encounter. On your return, have a rest on the river beach and also inform yourself about the **Centro de Observação Astronómica**, which is situated in this complex. If you get a chance to observe the night sky, take it; in the Alentejo it is exceptional. If you love walking, there are four more PR signposted excursions. If time is short, you should do at least one more: the **"Rota da Serra das Penas"** (PR 5, 11 kms, around 3h30m, level of difficulty, low), an excellent pretext for getting to know the town of **Cabeço de Vide**, its Historical Centre, its very ancient lanes and paths and the **antas (dolmens) da Serra das Penas**. While in Cabeço de Vide, visit the **Termas da Sulfúrea** (sulphur baths), next to the former railway station and today converted into a hotel, where the characteristic **theme-based panels of tiles** by the artist Jorge Colaço are still conserved. If you continue in the direction of Vaiamonte, you again meet the Ribeira Grande at the **Praia Fluvial da Ponte Romana** (Roman bridge river beach). (*The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Rural Quality, The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines*).



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FROM THE ECOLOGICAL PARK OF GAMEIRO TO THE MONTARGIL AND MARANHÃO RESERVOIRS

Spend some of your leisure hours at the **Parque Ecológico do Gameiro** and visit the **Mora Fluviarium** and enjoy a programme for people of all ages. Access is from Cabeção, a land of small *adegas* (wineries) and good wine producers. (www.fluviariumora.pt)

The Park includes the Gameiro reservoir, where you can bathe, take a trip in a pedalo or paddle a canoe for a stretch of around 3 kilometres. The equipment can be hired on the spot.

For **sports fishing**, the Raia river has a concession zone of almost 10 kilometres with two stretches; one on the left bank, with space for 200 rods and the other on the right, with 65. There is an abundance of fish species: black bass, barbel, boce, *bordalo* (a species of goldfish), carp, goldfish, sun perch, *pimpão* (another species of goldfish) and eels.

The **Fluviarium**, an interesting freshwater aquarium, offers us



"Excursion along a River", a live, informative exhibition about river fauna, from the source to the mouth. Side by side and at a steady pace, between rocky outcrops and sandy riverbanks, we make our way, learning about the mysterious inhabitants of the riverbed, of the pools, of the streams, of the waterfalls, of the reservoirs, of the migration zones, of the estuary, of the mouth. At the end of this trip, comes a surprise: the habitat of the agile and amusing otters, who have as their privileged viewing place the glass wall of the restaurant, which provides one of the boundaries to their enclosure. *(The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines)*

Montargil and Maranhão

From Cabeção, it's a small step to Montargil and Maranhão, two dams responsible for beautiful stretches of mirrored water in northern Alentejo, ideal for the practice of water sports.

Montargil is a true waterside resort where you can participate in waterskiing, sailing, windsurfing, rowing, trips in a hovercraft and sports fishing. The **Maranhão** reservoir, today provided with a leisure complex integrated within the new municipal Camping Park, is yet one more Alentejan location intimately associated with heritage. Overlooking the lake rises the town of **Avis**, with a historical centre which certainly deserves a visit.

By car or bicycle, the simplest and most beautiful excursion to make in the area is **Avis – Ervedal – Figueira and Barros – Benavila**. In Benavila, if you go in the direction of Alter do Chão, you will discover, soon after crossing the first bridge, the simple **chapel of Senhora de Entre Águas**. *(The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Rural Quality The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines)*

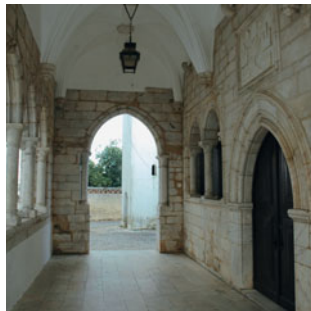


SERRA D'OSSA AND THE ZONE OF MARBLE

The range of hills of the Serra d'Ossa, reaching barely 650 metres in height, is the main area of high land in Central Alentejo. It is oriented NW-SE and its centre is close to the council areas of Estremoz, Borba and Redondo. From its slopes run the streams which feed, on one side, the Guadiana basin, and on the other, the Tejo basin. Contrasting with the relief here present, essentially schist, extends the so-called Zone of Marble, on an axis linking Estremoz, Borba, Vila Viçosa and Alandroal.

It is not possible to get to know one without passing through the other. Nor is it desirable. With such diversity of landscape and such abundant riches in terms of heritage, travelling in this region is an absolute must.

We would offer two suggestions: one travelling through the Zone of



Marble by bicycle or by car; one walking along some of the signposted pathways of the Serra d'Ossa.

For the first excursion, you do not need many directions; it is enough to choose the secondary roads which connect the urban centres, bearing in mind that the best route for seeing the enormous craters caused by marble quarrying is the one that connects Borba, Vila Viçosa and Bencatel. But take care, because the movement of heavy lorries is considerable. As a complement, you should visit the

Museum of Marble in Vila Viçosa, its centre of attraction being the presence of this "white gold" as the greatest exponent of its heritage, and thus being "the cherry on the cake"! (*The Alentejo is Heritage*)

The discovery of the Serra d'Ossa is a less obvious prospect. In the 1960s it underwent the planting of the largest continuous area of eucalyptus in Portugal (6,000 hectares). However, in some parts, it maintains its original *montado* (cork woodland and pasture), together with scrubland of cistus, gorse, furze and lavender. Although these Mediterranean oases can be found at various points on the Serra, the easiest way to come across them for yourself is by walking excursions. We would suggest two: PR1, "**Percurso das Antas**" (dolmens excursion), 5.9 kms, easy, with departure and return in the village of Freixo (Redondo); and PR, "**São Gregório – Memórias da Aldeia**", 5kms, easy, with departure and return in Aldeia de S. Gregório (Borba). They are both interesting from the point of view of the environment, landscape, archaeology, and also for the observation of many aspects of Rural Life. The informational leaflets are available, respectively, in Redondo Tourist Office and in Aldeia de S. Gregório. (*The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines*)



BETWEEN ÉVORA AND MONTEMOR-O-NOVO

The Évora – Montemor-o-Novo axis, apart from being immensely valuable in its heritage, has excellent conditions for participating in Nature Tourism. The range of organised activities is appreciable, although a number of them are restricted to a minimum number of participants (usually 4 to 10). On your own, you can do the **Évora “Ecopiste”**, whose track results from the conversion of part of the railway branch line from Évora to Mora. It begins inside the city and extends for 21 kilometres to Herdade da Sempre Nova. The excursion can be made on foot or by bicycle.

The **Água da Prata Excursion** follows part of the Évora aqueduct, which still today carries water to the city. It was constructed in the 16th century and has undergone reconstruction and improvements since the 18th century. The route, which is very interesting from both a heritage and an environmental point of view, begins on the Évora – Arraiolos road and extends for about 8 kilometres. Although it is most suitable for walking, it could also be done by mountain bike. The



informational leaflets are available in the Évora Tourist Office and for download at www.evora.net/percursos

Environmental Excursions have been developed for the **Sites of Monfurado and Cabrela** within the Natura 2000 Network programme. They link various rural settlements in the council areas of Évora and Montemor-o-Novo and, as well as providing access to the environmental treasures responsible for their classification, allow you to have a privileged encounter with the principal megalithic monuments in the Region, and with some of the agricultural activities and traditional pastoral activity associated with *montado* (oak woodland and pasture) as well as with olive growing. You can collect information from the Tourist Offices in both cities and from the Núcleo de Interpretação Ambiental dos Sítios da Cabrela e Monfurado, situated in the former Escola Primária of the village of **Baldios** (Montemor-o-Novo). To download the informational leaflets, consult the sites www.evora.net/percursos and www.cm-montemornovo.pt/natura

(The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Rural Quality The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines)



LANDS OF THE ALQUEVA

It was in the Alentejo, a region of scarce water supplies, that the great Alqueva Dam, built across the River Guadiana between Moura and Portel, created the largest artificial lake in Europe. The immense expanse of water has an area of 250 km², extends for more than 80 kms up the course of the former river and, with its thousand inlets, has a perimeter of 1,160 kms. Downstream from the massive wall was built the **Açude** (weir) **de Pedrógão**, partly integrated into the complex, clearly visible from the road that links Pedrógão (Vidigueira) to Moura. The new beauty that came into being with this lake is surprising and it has many aspects that make it a special case compared to the many reservoirs that can be found in other parts of the world: the typically Alentejan landscape that surrounds it, made up of thousands of olive trees, cork oaks and holm oaks; and, because we are in a frontier zone, the notable heritage of fortified towns and villages which have defended it throughout the centuries.



For those **travelling independently**, whether by cycle or by car, we strongly suggest you travel round the whole of the lake. The opportunities for finding accommodation are many and the roads offer panoramic views. Of all the places this route will take you to, these are the ones you should feel obliged to visit for their interesting heritage: on the western bank, **Juromenha, Alandroal, Terena, Monsaraz** and **Portel**; and on the eastern, **Mourão** and **Moura**. (*The Alentejo is Heritage*) The new **Aldeia da Luz**, which has taken the place of the former (the only village to be submerged by the waters of the Alqueva), has a symbolic value that is undeniable. Don't miss the Museum, which is a precious repository of memories of the former village and of the River Guadiana.

(The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Rural Quality, The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines)

What can you do in this area?

Beginning with those on the reservoir, there is a substantial range of activities offered by local enterprises: as well as sports fishing for various species, among which is the famous black bass, you can engage in canoeing or in trips in small motorboats, you can cruise for several days and, something unique in Portugal, you can rent



houseboats for 2 to 12 people. Also available: sports-fishing trips, floating landing stages with motorboats, canoes and kayaks, sailing boats, motorboat excursions and windsurfers.

As far as flying activities are concerned, emotion waits for you. By helicopter, light aircraft or balloon, all are unforgettable experiences. In respect of earthbound experiences, those who enjoy organised excursions can make trips on foot, by bicycle, on horseback, by horse and carriage and by 4x4.

Within the area that comes under the influence of Alqueva, independent travellers will find some signposted excursions (PRs). This is the case with three PRs in the council area of Alendroal: PR1, **“Rota do Giro”** (begins at the Igreja (church) de N.ª S.ª da Consolação, 4,5 kms, medium difficulty); and PR3, **“Passeios pelo Campo”** (begins next to the cemetery in Terena, 11 kms, medium difficulty). For more information, consult the website www.cm-alandroal.pt

There are many others at the project stage, particularly in the Reguengos de Monsaraz council area, where you can now do the **Percurso do Telheiro**, which begins at the beautiful fountain in the village. When you visit the Tourist Offices in the Alqueva region, ask for updated information.



> **Nature Park of Noudar.** Noudar is one example of this conjunction of circumstances in relation to the great lake. You are obliged to take a detour to get to the edge of the reservoir, but it is worth it: for Noudar Castle, for the famous Barrancos ham (*The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines*) and for the **Nature Park**. Built within the ambit of measures for planned compensation within the Programme for the Environmental Management of the Alqueva, the object of this complex is to promote the management of sustainable development in Nature in association with environmentally-friendly agriculture and tourism. (www.parquenoudar.com). Because of the value of its natural heritage, especially the holm-oak montado (woodland and pasture) and the bird life (raptors and vultures), this zone has been included in the Natura 2000 Network.

You will gain a better understanding of the essence of the landscape through three excursions: the **Trilho Geológico-Mineiro** (geology-mining trail), the short walk O Monte (traditional farm complex) and the excursion **A Estrada** (the road). You can do these independently, on foot or by bicycle, with guides or with digital guides.

Returning to Moura, don't forget to pass by **Amareleja**, where the largest photovoltaic solar power-station in the world has been built.



LPN

IN CAMPO BRANCO

If you enjoy great open spaces and are dedicated to birdwatching, Campo Branco will be a place of choice for you. This area is the most important area of pseudosteppe or cereal-growing steppe in Portugal, resulting in the extensive cultivation of dry-land cereals in rotation with fallow land. On the maintenance of this ecosystem depends the existence of many species of birds that are at risk, such as the Great Bustard, the Little Bustard, the Lesser Kestrel, the Bittern, the Black-bellied Sandgrouse, the Crane and Montagu's Harrier. The importance of the zone was the reason it was made part of the Natura 2000 Network. As well as the pseudosteppe, other types of landscape can be observed, together with a range of fauna. Observation is today made much easier by the signposting of six walking excursions, supported by the brochure "**Percursos Pedestres do Campo Branco**", published by the Liga para a Protecção da Natureza (LPN – League for the Protection of Nature). (*The Alentejo is Rural Quality*)



How should the visitor proceed? If you would like to take part in an organised programme of birdwatching (or "birding"), you need to book a visit, by telephone, fax or email, at the Centro de Educação Ambiental de Vale Gonçalves – the heart of the estates that the LPN acquired within the ambit of the Sustainable Castro Verde programme – giving at least eight days' notice. If you have your own equipment and would like to walk through the area independently, just go to the Castro Verde Tourist Office and ask for the booklet for the excursions (www.cm-castroverde.pt). Even without booking, you can visit the Centro de Vale Gonçalves and do Percurso (excursion) 6, "**Vale Gonçalves – Pereiras**". As far as the best time for these walks is concerned, you can do almost all of them throughout the year, except for July to September, when it is too hot. If you would like to see the nuptial rites of the male Great Bustards, you should choose March and April.

Whatever your programme, visit the heritage and savour the particular atmosphere of the town of Castro Verde.

(The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Rural Quality)



IN THE GUADIANA VALLEY

The Natural Park of the Guadiana Valley, with an area of approximately 70,000 hectares, extends between the area upstream of the Pulo do Lobo waterfall and the Ribeira do Vascão to the south of Mértola. It includes landscapes that are very different from each other: the enclosed valleys of the river and its tributaries, the quartzite heights of the Serra de Alcaria and Serra de São Barão and an extensive and wild peneplain where dry-land trees grow – *montados* (woodland and pasture) of holm oak and areas of *cistus*. In the steepest parts of the serras and river valleys, where there has been little intervention by humans, you can still find the so-called Mediterranean scrub, an expression of the original vegetation of the region. In a word, we are in the part of the Alentejo that best expresses the inhospitable beauty of the south. But, now that the Alqueva has submerged a substantial part of the Guadiana, we are also in a place that is privileged in every way for discovering the



memories of the way the river used to be as it continues to flow freely to the sea from the Açude de Pedrógão.

The urban centre at the pole of this Park is **Mértola**. (*The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Rural Quality, The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines*). Local enterprises offer excursions on foot or by bicycle, canoeing activities and trips in motorboats for the whole navigable section of the river, which extends between Mértola / Pomarão and Vila Real de Santo António. These small cruisers can operate regular programmes or are available for private bookings.

With an information base available at the Tourist Office, we suggest that, on foot, by bicycle, or by car, you don't miss places full of bucolic delights, such as the **Moinho dos Canais**, the **Azenhas de Mértola** or the **small fishing port of Penha d'Águia**. As places that should be seen, we suggest the **Pulo do Lobo** waterfall and the conjunction of the **Mina** (mine) **de S. Domingos** and the **Praia Fluvial** (river beach) **da Tapada Grande**.

Outside the Natural Park, we also suggest that you don't miss visiting the beautiful stretch of river that extends upstream between the **Pulo do Lobo** waterfall and the **Açude de Pedrógão** weir.

Excursion to the Pulo do Lobo ("leap of the wolf") Waterfall

The Pulo do Lobo is the most fantastic geomorphological accident in



the Alentejo. To understand it, we must go back to the last glacial period – called the Würm glaciation – which, in its final phase, caused a fall in the level of sea water. During this long period of time, in the mouth of the river we today call the Guadiana, a declivity was formed which, thanks to a wave of regressive erosion, slowly advanced upstream, carving a new course within the old river bed. At a certain moment this process stopped, because it met a harder rock – the greywacks of the Pulo do Lobo. What we observe in front of us is, then, much more than the vertiginous landscape of the river between rocky banks – suddenly so narrow that we are within reach of a “leap” – and its spectacular fall of almost 14 metres into the serene Pego (pool) dos Sáveis. It is the clear, and rare, vision of distinct geological epochs, corresponding to the formation of the two beds of the river: the older, the wide platform sculpted in stone where the old Guadiana ran; and, carved into its interior, the new riverbed, here in the form of an extended rectilinear corridor around 12 kilometres in length, called, appropriately, “the corridor”. Water and stone in tumult, a story of millions of years and, with luck, perhaps the chance of seeing a Black Stork, and everything else that makes the Pulo do Lobo a must to visit.

Access to the Pulo do Lobo is signposted on the Mértola – Serpa road on the eastern (left) bank, next to the village of Vale do Poço, and on the Mértola – Beja road on the western (right) bank, from Corte Gafo.



The most spectacular view is from the eastern bank, although a better view of the fall itself is from the western bank. It is a dangerous area on both banks. If you are travelling with children, every care is necessary because there are no protective railings.

Between the Açude de Pedrógão and the Pulo do Lobo

The stretch of the Guadiana which runs between the Açude (weir) de Pedrógão and the zone that is upstream of the Pulo do Lobo is the most expressive living memory of what the river used to be. As well as the beauty of the landscape, the birdlife and the bucolic watermills, inactive for decades, there are falls from the openings in weirs and diverse small rapids, which make the canoeing activities organised by enterprises in the region a lively experience. The most accessible place to observe it is the **Serpa bridge**. If you are travelling on your own, on foot, on mountain bike or in a 4x4, once you arrive at the village of Quintos, you will easily find the well-trodden dirt road which leads to the river. Once here, there are several kilometres which can be explored along the banks, upstream and downstream.

As you are in the region, don't miss a visit to the **Historical Centre of Serpa** and taste the renowned **sheep's cheeses** of the region. (*The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Rural Quality, The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines*)



THE ALENTEJAN COAST

Discovering this part of the Alentejo, open to the sea, is always fascinating. From the marshes bordering the Sado estuary, there stretches an immense coastline which, from the Point of Troia to the cape of Sines, takes the form of uninterrupted beach. In the interior, where the exuberant greenery of the hills of Serra de Grândola stands out, the cork-oak *montado* (woodland and pasture) lives alongside blankets of pinewoods, the rivers are retained as beautiful reservoirs and the abundance of water provides for extensive rice fields. Suddenly, the landscape changes. To the south of Sines, the most capricious fantasies of geological time have made the sea and the wind their gouges and chisels, carving out cliffs, contorting blocks of schist, creating cordons of dunes bordering the beaches, making and unmaking the beaches in small and secret coves, defining new contours for the vegetation, tempering the coastal plane, providing food for the algae, fish, reptiles, birds and rare mammals to live on ...

It is a museum throbbing with history and with natural life and merits the classification of three Protected Areas: the Nature Reserve of the Sado Estuary, the Nature Reserve of the Lakes of Santo André and Sancha and the Natural Park of Southwest Alentejo and the Vicentina Coast.

ORGANISED EXCURSIONS

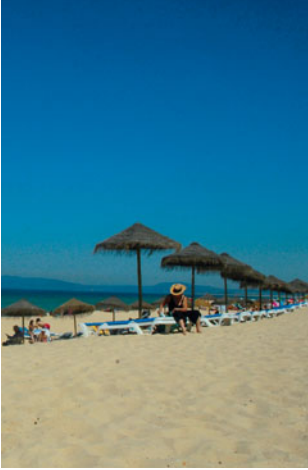
The excursions organised by local enterprises include on-shore programmes that are similar to those found throughout the Alentejo – on foot, by mountain bike, by 4x4 and on horseback – as well as a number of activities on rivers and on the sea, as you would expect from a coastal area: trips on the Galeões do Sal (“salt galleons”) on the River Sado, observing dolphins and flamingos, boat and canoe trips on the River Mira, sea-fishing trips by boat, maritime cruises, diving (courses, “baptisms”, open water, underwater hunting), surfing, windsurfing, kitesurfing and bodyboarding. Some of these enterprises rent out mountain bikes, motorboats, canoes and kayaks. (*Tourism Service: What to do*)

TRAVELLING INDEPENDENTLY

We offer here some suggestions organised into two geographical areas. Depending on whether you are travelling by car, by bicycle or on foot, the trips we propose should be made in well-defined stages in relation to the support that exists (*Tourism Services: Where to sleep, Where to eat*). If you are travelling by bicycle, take into account that, on the coastal cliffs, the tracks are very sandy: opt for secondary roads or for well-compacted dirt roads.

From the Sado Estuary to the Cape of Sines

We begin at **Alcácer do Sal**, the *Salatia* of the Romans which, for those arriving from Lisbon by the A2, is a beautiful portal through which to enter the Alentejan coastal area. It welcomes us right here on the edge of the Sado, with seafood and candied pine-nut kernels and a Historical Centre that winds up between the river and the castle. After gazing at the panoramic views over the river, take a trip on a **Galeão do Sal**, a traditional sailing boat, in search of dolphins and flamingos. Before heading off for the coast, those interested in traditional rural architecture would get pleasure from visiting **Santa Susana**, a village with typically Alentejan rows of low, whitewashed houses. (*The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Rural Quality*)



Bordering the river, towards the mouth, it is important to visit the **Porto Palafítico** (palaphytic – elevated on stilts) **da Carrasqueira**, a curious fishing port with a labyrinthine system of piers constructed on props sunk into the mud. Good views over the marshes. Heading off to Comporta, land of rice fields, you should make a detour to the Tróia Peninsula, a zone of major tourism complexes, and contemplate the panoramic view over the Serra da Arrábida. The beaches are much sought after by windsurfers. It is on this peninsula that the extensive beach, called the **Costa da Galé**, begins and continues unbroken to the Cape of Sines. It is an area with excellent conditions for windsurfing and body-boarding, as the adept practitioners always to be found on the beaches of **Comporta** and **Carvalhal** bear witness. Nor should you miss the welcoming and protected beaches of **Pinheirinho**, **Galé** and **Aberta Nova**, enclosed by beautiful cliffs.

If you feel the call of the interior and are a lover of long walks, you have many possibilities between **Grândola**, **Santiago do Cacém** and **Lagoa de Santo André**. (*The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines*). Obtain information from the respective Tourist Offices about the PR (walking routes) and GR (accommodation guides) of this area and at least do PR1, **“Rota da Serra”** (17 kms, starting and finishing in Grândola).



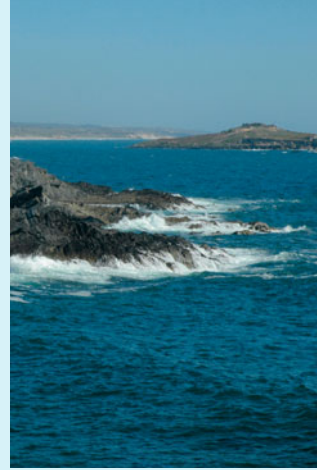
From **Lagoa de Santo André**, where you will find good tourist accommodation and many natural beauties to explore, don't miss taking a look at the fantastic dunes of **Praia do Monte Velho**. There is an excursion of great environmental interest starting from this beach: "Poços da Barbaroxa" (4kms, low level of difficulty). It is advisable to be accompanied by a guide. Booking can be done through the Centro de Interpretação do Monte do Paio, a space providing reception for and information about the Natural Park, with a permanent exhibition about the natural heritage of this Protected Area. From this centre there is the signposted "Percurso da Casa do Peixe" (4kms, low level of difficulty), which can be done without a guide. Don't do the walk between December and April as stretches of the lake can spread. As far as **Lagoa da Sancha** is concerned, it is practically a secret place. Discover it!

Before the Cape of Sines, if you like contemplating rough sea, you should make a detour to **Praia do Norte**. The agitation of the water and the dangerous depths advise against bathing, but there are rich shoals of fish in the submarine caves, which attract divers and hunters.

To do the beach again, it is necessary to go round the Cape.

From Cabo de Sines to Porto de Azenha do Mar

Sines, land of Vasco da Gama. Without rush, go into this ancient fishing port, travel through the mediaeval streets of its Historical Centre and visit the heart of its heritage.



And, of course, enjoy being next to the sea in a land of fishermen and call to mind the taste of fresh fish that has just been caught. Here and in all places on the Alentejan coast is where you will find *tascas* (small taverns) and small restaurants, close to the beaches and fishing ports. (*The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines*)

It is to the south of Sines that we find the **Parque Natural do Sudoeste Alentejano e Costa Vicentina**, with its small beaches surrounded by schist escarpments. The signposted access normally indicates beaches with some kind of support: parking, lifeguards, bars and restaurants. Followers of Nature Tourism who wish to extend their exploration will not feel cheated: almost all of the cliffs can be traversed on foot along the fishermen's tracks. Among the beaches for families, we would advise, in the Sines area, **Morgavel**, **Vale de Figueiros (Figueirinha)**, the **Praia Grande de Porto Covo** and that of the **Ilha do Pessegueiro**, close to the fort. **S. Torpes** is the preferred beach for windsurfers and kitesurfers.

If you seek the intimacy of small beaches, you have various options among the so-called "**Prainhas**" ("little beaches") of **Porto Covo** such as **Vieirinha**, **Oliveirinha** or **Samouqueira**. Not all have lifeguards and sometimes access is complicated. What is guaranteed is beauty, quiet and privacy. Among them, **Praia do Salto** has been, since 2002, part of the restricted group of **naturist beaches** officially recognised in Portugal. In Porto Covo, you must visit its small square, the Largo



Marquês de Pombal, considered one of the jewels of popular Portuguese architecture.

Continuing south, we reach the zone of **Vila Nova de Milfontes**, first with the beach of **Malhão** and then with the **Portinho do Canal**. In the town, it is enough just to follow the movement to find the beaches of **Franquia**, **Farol** and **Furnas**.

In this area, the conditions for sports fishing and for diving are good. The River Mira, which here discharges its waters into a lovely estuary, can be navigated by canoe or motorboat as far as Odemira. It is a trip that is well worth making.

Some kilometres further on you will find the **Praia do Almogrove**, considered one of the most beautiful in the south west of the Alentejo. It has excellent support facilities and good conditions for surfing and bodyboarding. In the town, a walking excursion is signposted: PR1, "**Lapa de Pombas**" (8.9kms, low level of difficulty, duration approximately 3.30 hours).

The beauty of this coast deserves time for contemplation and we are close to one of the most fantastic viewing points: Cabo Sardão. For birdwatchers it also has another objective: this is the only place in the world where the White Stork nests on sea cliffs. Go and visit it now and, from there, even if you are not adept at long walks, stroll a little along the cliff top. It is a dazzling experience and, if you wish, you can go from here on foot or by mountain bike to Zambujeira do Mar.



If you would like to take a rest from beaches and breathe the air of the countryside and of the hills, you are in an excellent place from which to make a detour to **Odemira**, a white town which hangs in a cascade over the River Mira.

From Odemira or Vila Nova de Milfontes there are two more walking excursions you can do: PR2, "**S. Domingos**" (starting in the village of S. Luís, 8.1 kms, medium difficulty) and PR3, "**Troviscais**" (starts in the village of Troviscais, 13.5 kms, medium difficulty).

Returning again to the coast, the next destination is **Zambujeira do Mar**. As well as the beach next to the town, with good facilities and good surfing and bodyboarding, there are others to discover, to the north and to the south. To the north, make sure you take a look at **Praia de Nossa Senhora**. In the area of the fishing port of **Entrada da Barca**, next to Touril, where you can eat good fresh fish, you will find well-trodden paths over the cliff which reveal, a long way below, small hidden beaches. To the south, it is scarcely 500 metres to **Praia dos Alteirinhos**, classified in 2008 as a naturist beach.

If you are travelling with a family and want to make use of a beach, there are good sands at **Praia do Carvalho**, with easy access from Brejão. From this village leads the road to the fishing port of **Azenha do Mar**, in the extreme south west of the Alentejo.

(The Alentejo is Rural Quality, The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines)



>> >> >>

THE ALENTEJO IS RURAL QUALITY

It is open space that appears to have no end. It is colours and smells that burst from the earth. It is the unmistakable outline of rural architecture, present in the "montes" (farm complexes) of the great estates, in the oldest rows of houses in the cities, towns and villages or in the chapels, which paint with white the tops of hills. It is what is gleaned from the ways of being and doing, from the arts and skills that are conserved and renewed, from the tradition that is maintained and recreated, from the "choral chanting" that, with heart and soul, only the Alentejans know how to sing. But the rural quality of the Alentejo of the 21st century is not exhausted in simply "country matters". Through the not always positive changing fortunes of its history, this Region has preserved what today confers on it a value full of future promise: the smallness and environmental quality of its urban centres, the human scale, the silence, the peacefulness, the freedom, the freshness of the air we breathe. It is time. A way that is so peculiar of understanding time, making us feel under our skins that, finally, it is possible to live time in this dizzying world, allowing it to be exactly what it is: the most precious of our possessions.



How can this rural quality, which has no secrets, be discovered? Living it from within, moving through it, picking up signals. If you want to understand this, in the face of so much that is authentic in the Alentejo, don't think twice: begin by staying in a Rural Tourism establishment. The offer is diverse. There are houses that are genuinely simple, others assuredly elegant; they can be within and close to urban centres or far from everything and everyone; aimed at contemplative relaxation or with active tourist programmes, excursions, activities for children, cooking courses, courses about wine, or participation in the agricultural work that makes up the daily life of the farms and estates.

(Tourism Services: Where to sleep)



THE RHYTHM OF THE SEASONS

To get to know the Alentejo well, you should visit it in all of the seasons. The landscape changes a great deal during the year and the rural activities that are most interesting to observe are seasonal. We begin the cycle in autumn.

September is the time for harvesting the grapes and making the wine. You can see this from any road where there are vineyards, but you would gain much from choosing an organised **enotourism** programme: you will be able to understand the skills, participate and, at the same time, taste the wines of previous years.

In October, stroll with no clear destination to contemplate the palette of colours provided by the chestnut trees where **cultivation** transforms the Alentejo. Enjoy the sun of the so-called "Summer of the Quinces" and, if there are quinces where you are staying, ask your hosts if you can attend the making of home-made *marmelada* (quince jam). In November, taste the **new wine** on St Martin's Day (11th November), a time when we are again blessed with several days of summer weather. It is an excellent time to visit places that have festivals, such as **Marvão, Cabeção, Borba** or **Vila de Frades**.



Between November and January, watch the harvesting of the olives (the traditional way, not mechanised) and go inside an olive press. In Spring, the countryside is filled with thousands and thousands of wild flowers, which are an inexhaustible subject for photographers. And when the first heat arrives, the sheep shearing begins. If there are no flocks where you are staying, ask where you might attend this. On Ascension Day (a Thursday), take part in the ritual called **Dia da Espiga** (ear of wheat/rye/barley etc). Join with the people who go into the countryside and always put together a spray as tradition dictates: 5 ears of wheat, 5 poppies, 5 olive twigs, 5 white corn marigolds and 5 yellow corn marigolds. Hang these outside your front door for a year in the belief that they will bring, for you and for your family, bread, peace and happiness.

Suddenly, the yellows and golds take over the countryside. It is in June and July that the cereal harvest takes place, a time to imagine, at the height of the heat, the life of the men and women who, years ago, did by hand from sunrise to sunset what is now done by combine harvesters and balers. Later, when you listen to Alentejan singing, you will understand it better.

But it is not only the yellow of the dryness that you will see in the countryside: in the months of summer you can see the brilliant yellow of the fields of sunflowers and of lupins, the exuberant green of the vines and, around the reservoirs that irrigate the interior of the Alentejo, the strong colours of corn and of horticultural plots. In the



Sado valley, it is an excellent time to see the rice fields and, above them, the painted pink and white of flamingos in flight. In June and July and sometimes in August, don't miss the cutting of the cork and the surprising orange colour of the bare trunks, which suddenly brighten up the *montado* (oak woodland and pasture). Since bark of the cork oak can only be removed every nine years, again ask your hosts if they can tell you where you can watch the activity happening.

At every season, whenever you sense in the air the strong smell of burned wood, stop and go to take a look at the **traditional ovens making charcoal from holm-oak and olive wood**.

If you are on the coast, visit a fishing port. Here, as in the rest of the world, the fishermen are courageous folk and fail to venture out to sea only when they are prevented from doing so. Go and watch them set out in search of everything that makes the difference in the Alentejan cooking of the coast and, when they return, attend the activity of the fish auction. (*The Alentejo is Nature, The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines*).



AC

IN OUR WHITEWASHED HOUSES

During your travels you will discover the great example of wisdom that makes up traditional architecture. The buildings are integrated into the landscape as if they make up part of it, using materials and solutions to problems adapted to the climate and to their function. They assume groupings which are naturally balanced and which, still today, are the source of inspiration for contemporary planning and building. Travelling through the Alentejo is a constant encounter with this reality and with the two types of architecture that express it: the **erudite** or **formal**, sometimes of great value from the point of view of architectural heritage and clearly visible in the manor houses of the great estates and houses that once belonged to nobles in the urban centres: and the **popular** or **vernacular**, which reveals to us other faces of heritage, of genuinely rural taste, which is found in the oldest rows of houses in the villages, towns and cities. (*The Alentejo is Heritage*)



This encounter is not only made up of perfect moments. But in this time of change, when there are contemporary building ventures of quality, justifiable modernisation of traditional habitations and excellent examples of restoration, it is architectural form and outline that identifies the Alentejo, that continues to dominate the landscape and that catches our eye. For this reason, we invite you to visit, now from this perspective, some of the locations that remain essential references. We suggest only a half dozen examples because, from these, you will learn everything that you need to continue your discovery independently, in other places.

In North Alentejo, the towns of **Marvão** and **Castelo de Vide** are unmissable, the latter with a **Jewish Quarter** that is the most astonishing in the whole Region. But also look at **Alegrete**, inside and outside the castle, and at the tiny **Flor da Rosa**, at the Historical Centre of **Cabeço de Vide** and at **Alter Pedroso**.

In Central Alentejo, it is essential to get to know the three jewels, which are **Evoramonte**, **Terena** and **Monsaraz**. As an example of a town that is lively and well cared for, visit **Redondo**. A paradigm of the restoration of a totally abandoned village is **S. Gregório**, at the foot of Serra d'Ossa, the first Tourism Village in the Region.

In Lower Alentejo, the Historical Centres of **Alvito**, **Serpa** and **Mértola** are outstanding, each with its own specific atmosphere, but you should also look at the ancient rows of houses in small places



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such as **Vila Alva**, between Alvito and Cuba, **Casével** and **Aivados**, near to Castro Verde, and the beautiful **Messejana**, a short distance from Aljustrel.

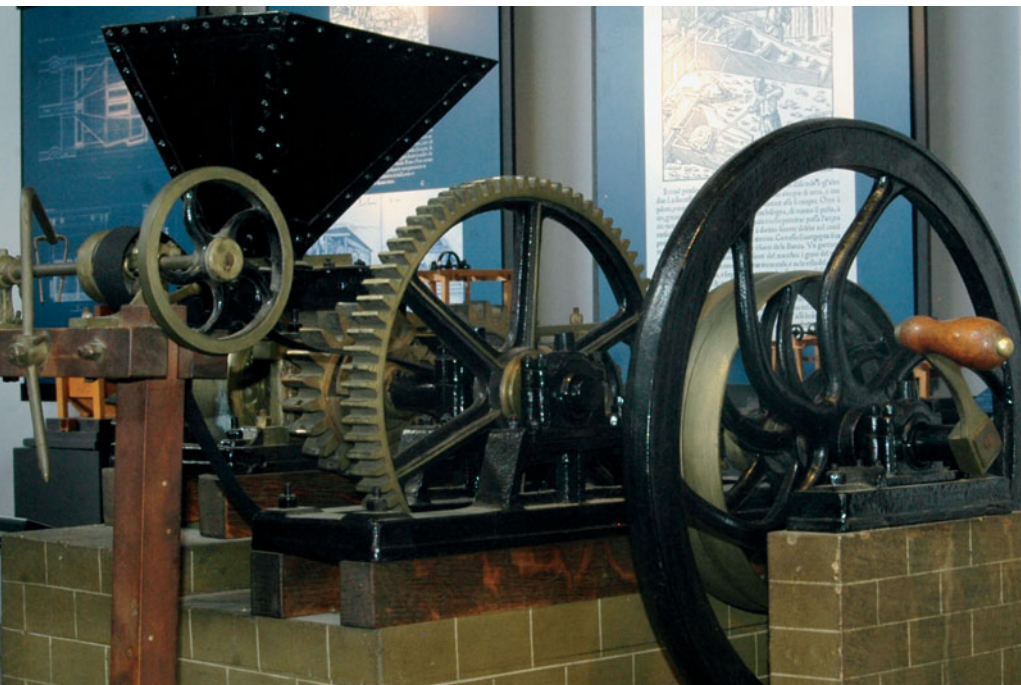
On the Alentejan coast, three small villages, with very different layouts, are sufficient to demonstrate to those who spend their holidays in this area for the sun and the sea that it is worthwhile giving the beach a rest from time to time and making a trip into the interior: **Santa Susana** (Alcácer do Sal), **Lousal** (Grândola) and, in the hills of the Serra, **Vale de Santiago** (Odemira). (*The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Nature*).

Whenever you visit a village, look for the most striking characteristics of the rural architecture: the single-storey houses; thick walls with few openings, traditionally built of lath and plaster, a solution well known for keeping in the heat in the winter and the cool in the summer while using few means; the enormous chimneys, sometimes higher than the house, whence exit the fumes from the hearths that heat the cold nights and cure the home-made sausages and prepared meats; the privileged place the kitchen occupies; the bread oven, sometimes common to the whole village, with its unmistakable arched roof; the texture of the outside and inside walls which, every year, the women cover with a layer of fresh whitewash; and the coloured edges and skirting which, in olden times, were predominantly painted yellow-ochre or blue.



MEMORIES NEVER TO FORGET

In the Alentejo there are dozens of small ethnographical museums which preserve memories of the traditional house, of trades, crafts and skills that have disappeared, of tools and implements that have fallen into disuse, of the life of villages and of their customs. They have been built up with so much love and devotion, almost always relying on pieces donated by the inhabitants. Whenever you come across one, you should visit it. But among the many that could be called the most interesting, there are three you should not miss: the **Museu do Chocalho** (livestock-bell museum) in Alcáçovas, with more than 3,000 bells, each with its own sound, installed in the workshop of Sr. João Penetra, a professional bell maker; the **Museu Etnográfico** in Serpa, with its permanent exhibition ("Workshops of the Land"); and the **Museu Etnográfico e Arqueológico** in Santa Clara-a-Nova (Almodôvar), which offers an exceptional creation, with life-size figures, of the everyday life of the village. In Santa Clara, also visit the **povoado** (hamlet) **da Mesa de Castelinhos** and, in Almodôvar, the unexpected **Museu da Escrita do Sudoeste** (the Sudluisitanian-Tartessian Writing Museum), believed to be the first written expression in the Iberian Peninsula.



INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Besides agriculture, fishing, livestock rearing, forestry and quarrying (for marble, schist and granite), the rural landscape is still marked by other activities connected to the earth's resources which, in golden times, provide people with a living. This is the case with milling and with mining.

The milling of cereals using water mills built on the rivers and windmills set on the hilltops was, from the 1960s on, finally replaced by mechanical milling. The ruins remain, some of them beautiful, such as the mills of the Guadiana. But there were others that came to know other destinies: they were restored, some by private lovers of such art, some by local authorities, who transformed them into living museum pieces. Among the latter, the windmills of **Castro Verde**, of **S. Miguel do Pinheiro** (Mértola) and of **Santiago do Cacém** are always visitable; and, with prior booking, the water mill of Alferes, on

the Vascão river, the southernmost Alentejan tributary of the Guadiana (information from the Mértola Tourist Office).

As far as the exploitation of the extensive seams of Alentejan pyrite is concerned, as well as the disused mine at S. Domingos (Mértola) (*The Alentejo is Nature*), those of **Aljustrel** and of **Lousal** deserve mention as interesting sites of Industrial Archaeology.

The **Mines of Aljustrel**, in use since Roman times (*The Alentejo is Heritage*), when the town was known as *Vipasca*, have had a troubled history, with successive phases of exploitation and closure. This saga has continued until present times, but the grave problems that it has caused should not deter you from taking a look at it from the perspective of its great historical and archaeological value. This is a major reason for visiting Aljustrel. Today, we can get to know about the treasures extracted from the mine in the Municipal Museum and we can take a Mining Excursion, marked by various points of interest such as the Compressor Centre, the White Stones, the Industrial Area of the Caverns, the Vipasca Whim (a kind of windlass), the Trastagana Chimney and the hillock where stands the chapel of Nossa Senhora do Castelo, emblem of the heritage of the town and with a spectacular view. Begin your visit to Aljustrel at the Tourist Office, where they will supply you with all of the support information and documentation you need.

The **Lousal Mine**, today the property of the Fundação Frederic Velge, has a completely different history. It began and ended its activity in the 20th century and is to be the object of a curious project to revitalise it, bringing together industrial archaeology and state-of-the-art technology. Appreciate the mining village, a good example of traditional rural architecture; visit the **Museu da Central Eléctrica** (electricity power-station museum), very complete and well organised, which is a true delight for those interested in the evolution of machinery connected to the production of energy; take a look at the beautiful pieces in the **Centro de Artesanato** (handicrafts centre); and, of course, embark on a virtual voyage, conceived and realised with the advanced technology which allows you access to the depths of the mine while you remain on the surface.



BELIEFS AND DEVOTIONS

Linked to Marian cults or to devotions to the saints, for those who enjoy benefits or seek mercy, the chapels are a fundamental element of rural life and of traditional architecture itself. Almost all of them date from the 16th to the 18th centuries, although there are treasures from earlier times. Normally they consist of three parts: the chancel, with vaulted dome, the central nave and, on the exterior, a covered porch, well ventilated and lined with benches for pilgrims to rest on. They are located either in or outside villages, on hilltops, or with party walls shared with isolated farms. Some have interesting tile cladding, frescos and extraordinary collections of votive offerings. They are always impeccably whitewashed for the festival days in honour of Our Lady or the Patron Saint. On these days they are guaranteed to be open. But they are almost all so beautiful in their genuinely rustic layout and outline that, even when they are closed, they are worth seeing.

Whenever there is a festival, there is also a fair. And, in some cases, the movement of people attracted to both is so great that the chapel has become too small to cope with so many pilgrims and has led to the construction of large sanctuaries.

Between chapels and sanctuaries, which should not be missed? There are so many and they are so interesting that, once more, we have had to make a selection. This certainly does not do justice to them and, again, is simply a point of departure. The annual festival day for each of them is specified in the annexe.

In the north of the Alentejo, have a look at the granite and bucolic **Senhora da Redonda**, near to Alpalhão (Easter Monday); **Senhora da Lapa**, with a superb panoramic view, in Besteiros, Portalegre (September); **Senhora de Entre Águas**, in Benavila (last weekend in July); and the **Santuário do Senhor Jesus da Piedade**, in Elvas, where an important collection of votive offerings is on view (20th to 27th September, pilgrimage and fair of St Matthias).

In Central Alentejo, there are four important sanctuaries of great value as regards heritage: **N.ª S.ª das Brotas**, in Brotas, Mora, set among the former houses of the fraternity, is an excellent example of rural architecture (2nd weekend in August); **N.ª S.ª do Monte do Carmo**, in Azaruja, covered with more than 1,500 votive offerings, is today part of a Rural Hotel installed in the former pilgrims' houses (2nd Sunday in September); **N.ª S.ª da Boa Nova de Terena** is a fortified chapel of the 14th century (Easter Sunday and Monday); and, in Rococo style, **N.ª S.ª d' Aires**, in Viana do Alentejo, also has an important collection of votive offerings in the Casa dos Milagres (house of miracles) and, every festival year, is the occasion of a major horseback pilgrimage (pilgrimage, 4th weekend in April; fair, 4th weekend in September). As an example of a "mirador" chapel, we suggest you go up to **N.ª S.ª da Visitação**, in Montemor-o-Novo (2nd July).

In Lower Alentejo, have a look at **Senhora da Represa**, on the road from Cuba to Vila Ruiva, with a fantastic interior that is visitable on the day of its festival (Easter Monday) and through the programme called "The Fresco Route" (information from the Tourist Offices in Alvito, Cuba, Viana do Alentejo, Vidigueira and Portel); **N.ª S.ª da Guadalupe**, also known as **S. Gens**, in Serpa, is a beautiful church of Mudejar appearance (from Good Friday to the following Tuesday); **N.ª S.ª de Arcelis**, close to the hamlet of Salto, S. Marcos da Ataboeira



(Castro Verde), is truly a “roof onto the world” of the south (1st weekend in September); and **N.ª S.ª da Cola**, between Ourique and Santana da Serra, is part of the **Circuito Arqueológico da Cola**, another weighty reason for visiting the place (7th & 8th September). Finally, on the Alentejan coast, despite the many chapels to be found there, especially in the villages in the hills, we would highlight those whose religious festivals include sea or river processions involving decorated fishing boats, such as those at **N.ª S.ª do Rosário**, in Tróia (beginning of August), **N.ª S.ª das Salas**, in Sines (14th and 15th August) and **N.ª S.ª da Graça**, in Vila Nova de Milfontes (15th August).

You will find the calendars of festivals, fairs and pilgrimages for each locality in the Tourist Offices. Of the posters you will come across during your stay, take special note of their musical programmes and don't miss those that include “**Saias**”, characteristic songs and dances of North Alentejo; the popular songs, called “**Despique** and **Baldão**”, typical of some of the council areas in Lower Alentejo and Coastal Alentejo; and the activities of choral groups who can offer you the magic of **Cante Alentejano**.



TRADITIONAL ARTS AND CRAFTS

Handicrafts in the Alentejo are changing. The time has gone when they were identified only with the rugged faces of the old masters, who worked in clay, iron, pewter, wood, cork, wicker, leather, hide or horn, and with the skilled hands of women who painted everyday dishes, made lace, did embroidery or spent endless hours in front of their looms.

The tradition passed from parents to children, but the masters became teachers of a wider public. In this way a new generation of artists began to emerge, who invested in what people sought after, leaving the rest to the place which is always kept for what is valued but has no use: the museum.

Among the Arts that are establishing the right to have a future, we here highlight only three: **pottery and painting, work in hide and leather and textiles**. They are linked to three well-defined centres of



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production/creation, which provide training, can be visited and have products for sale, in the workshops themselves and in shops selling regional handicrafts. Begin by going to the Tourist Offices, where good collections are on display, and pick up information about where you can see the artisans at work and can purchase some of their products.

Pottery and Painting

The Alentejo offers an interesting diversity of pottery and painting. The **Barros (clays) da Flor da Rosa** fulfil all of the requisites to deserve the classification of “artisanal handicrafts”: they use the raw material of the region, dug from the so-called “*barreiras*” (clay pits), and still maintain traditional methods of production. They are represented by a selection of 14 utilitarian pieces, each with its own form and function, on display in the Tourist Office. (*The Alentejo is Heritage*)

The **Olaria (pottery) Pedrada de Nisa** is unique in the Alentejo. After the red-clay pieces are shaped, they are decorated with designs involving small quartz stones, gathered from the Serra de S. Miguel, encrusted on the surface. In Nisa, also take a look at the Núcleo do Bordado (embroidery), situated in the Centro Transfronteiriço de Artesanato e Produtos Tradicionais (trans-frontier centre for traditional handicrafts and other products) (*The Alentejo is Nature*) In **Estremoz**, its famous Barrística (figurines in clay) is outstanding.

The best way to get to know it is to visit the Museu Municipal Prof. Joaquim Vermelho, which exhibits a notable collection of popular art from the 18th and 19th centuries. The traditional themes continue to inspire the city's artisans. The niche saints and the nativity scenes are the best known and most sought after, especially by collectors. The nativity scenes include both sacred and profane figures and some of the latter are created and sold separately. But there are other recurrent themes: the whistles and the "nightingales"; the hooks for making socks, lace or mesh; the "Napoleons", soldiers dressed in uniforms from the time of the French Invasions; the "blacks" with red skirts; the "Springs", figures of a woman dressed as a dancer with an arc of roses from shoulder to shoulder and a hat decorated with little bows and flowers; and, laden with symbolism, the metaphor "love is blind", the figure of a woman with eyes blindfolded.

As far as utilitarian and decorative pottery is concerned, although there is production in various locations, there are three names of reference: **Redondo**, **Viana do Alentejo** (today producing less) and **S. Pedro Do Corval**, the biggest centre of pottery in the Iberian Peninsula. Pitchers, amphorae, vases, jugs, plates of all shapes and sizes, cups, candle-holders, decorative garden pieces, all can be found in these welcoming places, which deserve a visit for this and other reasons. All the potteries are open to the public, which allows you to follow the process of creation from the shaping of the piece, through the drying, the firing in the kiln and the final decoration. (*The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Nature, The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines*).

Work in leather and hide

Harness for animals, saddles for bullfighting and for rides into the country, bags, shoes and boots, padded slippers, clothing for everyday wear and for hunting, these are some of the items in leather and hide which continue to be made and sold in the Alentejo.

In **Terugem**, near Elvas, and in **Nossa Senhora de Machede**, near Évora, there are tanneries which, despite some mechanisation, conserve a truly mediaeval atmosphere. It's worth visiting them and having contact with the stages the leather goes through before

arriving in the hands of the person who transforms it and produces the final piece of work.

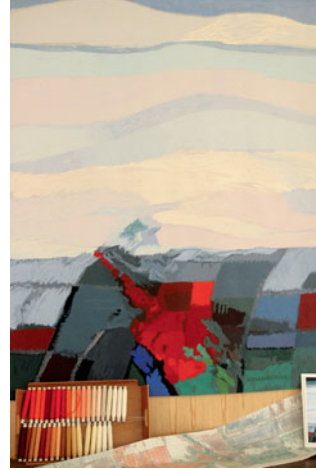
As well as these two places, you can find excellent artisans working in leather and hide in **Alter do Chão** (belts and straps), in **Cuba** (footwear), in **Almodôvar** (footwear) and in **Alcácer do Sal** (belts and straps).

BLANKETS, COVERS, RUGS AND TAPESTRIES

Traditional Alentejan blankets and covers are made on looms, using sheep's wool, white and black. They are very beautiful pieces. They can be put on beds, hung on walls and, in some cases, serve as rugs. Traditional patterns are joined with others, with new colours, the fruit of the creativity of the designer and the maker. Today, using the same techniques, but also using cotton, are made curtains, pieces to decorate any table, cloaks, ponchos, cushion covers, bags, travel bags, socks and towels ... The main centres of production which provide training in this craft and continue to be active are **Reguengos de Monsaraz** and **Mértola**. (*The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Nature, The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines*).

The **carpets and rugs of Arraiolos**, embroidered throughout the centuries, have come down to our present time thanks to the work, ingenuity and art of the various generations of embroiderers who, even today, are often to be seen sitting in the street doorway to their houses continuing to create, stitch by stitch, the traditional designs. As far as is known, everything began in the 15th century when, on the orders of King Manuel I, various Moorish families were expelled from Lisbon. On the road to North Africa and southern Spain, some stopped off in Arraiolos and stayed there. Faced with a warm welcome from the locals, the artisans of these groups, disguised as "new Christians", began to work in the manufacture of rugs and carpets. Thus the carpet-making of Arraiolos was born. Up to the present day, it has known three epochs, which correspond to three distinct decorative compositions.

Arraiolos continues to be the capital of this art which, in June, enjoys a high point of self-revelation in the celebration called "O Tapete está na Rua" (the carpet is in the street). Its shops are often places where



the work is carried out and can be visited throughout the year and it is worthwhile watching live the skills of the embroiderers. But it is also worthwhile going up to the castle, the only circular one in the Alentejo, and to stroll along the narrow streets that cut through the rows of traditional houses, to go into the **Igreja da Misericórdia** (charity church) whose nave is covered in tiles which tell the story of the Misericórdia's work. And, not to miss the local delicacy, you must taste the succulent **pastéis de toucinho** (sweet tartlets). (*The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines*).

Portalegre Tapestries

The tapestry of Portalegre, fine decoration for one's walls, is a special case in the creation of textiles in the Alentejo. It was born in the *Manufatura de Portalegre* of Guy Fino, a manufacturing process which placed Portugal on the list of the great tapestry producers in the world. Its originality comes from a specific technique invented by Manuel do Carmo Peixeiro in the 1920s, known as "*ponto de Portalegre*" (the Portalegre stitch). This stitch allowed models to be exactly reproduced, in this case work by some of the great names in painting such as Almada Negreiros, Vieira da Silva or Vítor Pomar. You can get to know the history and see the permanent exhibition in the **Museu Guy Fino**, installed in the Palácio Castel-Branco, in Portalegre. (*The Alentejo is Heritage*)



As well as the crafts mentioned, don't miss a chance to appreciate the **painted wooden furniture** of Évora, Redondo and Ferreira do Alentejo, always complemented by **chairs with rush or wicker seats**; the **furniture and decorative objects in wrought iron** of Campo Maior and Ferreira do Alentejo, among which you will find contemporary pieces that are highly sought after; and throughout the region, the **baskets**, the **objects in cork and horn**, and the various expressions of **pastoral art in wood**.

In the Tourist Offices, you will find up-to-date information about the many **Handicraft Exhibitions and Fairs** which are held throughout the year.

The **Museu de Artes Tradicionais de Évora** (traditional arts and crafts museum), situated in the space that was the former Celeiro Comum (communal granary), has on display an excellent collection which brings together rare pieces associated with the heritage of the region, together with interesting contemporary creations. Its inexhaustible documentation centre, open to visitors, fulfils well the function of being guide to what is the essence of Alentejan handicrafts.



FLOWER FESTIVAL OF CAMPO MAIOR

Dedicated to St John the Baptist, patron saint of Campo Maior, this is one of the most extraordinary festivals in Portugal. Also called the Festival of the Artists or of the People, literally overnight it transforms a town into an ocean of paper flowers: tens of thousands of roses, carnations, tulips, wisteria, poppies. Born suddenly in people's homes, the flowers clamber up the walls of the houses and grow from one side of the streets to the other, transforming them into tunnels of a thousand colours.

The creators of this miracle: the people living in each street who, closely guarding from all the others the secret of the decoration of their own site, day after day, over months of work, devote countless hours of their own leisure time to creating these paper flowers. Willingly, with great love, dedication and care and, also, with great art.

Here, as everywhere, the truth is that nothing is a substitute for the living experience. You must go to see it. In the month of September, but with one reservation: **this festival only takes place when the people want it to.**



FIGHTING BULLS AND STUD FARMS

The Alentejo and Ribatejo are the two regions in Portugal with a recognised tradition for breeding the Lusitanian Horse and for rearing fighting bulls, bringing fame to the equestrian arts and to national bullfighting activities. In respect of the latter, the bullfights held throughout the year in many bullrings in the Alentejo are various. They are spectacles that are widely reported and highly competitive. It is noteworthy that only one bullring – that of Barrancos – is, exceptionally, allowed to kill the bull, a practice that is prohibited in other Portuguese bullfights.

To visit the fighting-bull studs, all situated on private property, you need to use the services of local enterprises.

For the horse-breeding studs, the situation is different, There is one whose doors are open to the public and which should not be missed: the Coudelaria (stud) de Alter Real, 3 kms from Alter do Chão.

The Lusitanian Horse – The Alter Real Stud

The Coudelaria de Alter Real was founded in 1748 by King João V, with the object of improving national horse breeding and giving to the "Real Picaria", the equestrian school of the Portuguese court in the 18th century, a necessary quality and dignity. 250 years later, it is still in the same premises – the Tapada do Arneiro – and gives continuity to the tradition of providing the Lusitanian breed of horses for the Portuguese School of Equestrian Arts, heir to the Royal Equestrian School, which today functions in the Palace of Queluz.

At the Coudelaria de Alter Real, there is an interesting and varied programme of guided visits for those interested in equestrian arts. These visits, depending on the days of the week and the season of the year, include the Cavalaria da Eguada (mares' stable), the Falconry, the Pátio D. João VI, the Depósito de Garanhões–Reprodutores (the stallions' depot), the Casa dos Trens (carriage and harness museum) and the Museu do Cavalo (horse museum). The visits last about 1.30 hours.

Among the most spectacular attractions of the Coudelaria are particularly the **release of the mares** into the open pasture and the **displays of falconry**.

In Pátio D. João VI, you can attend the selection and testing activities as well as the diverse activities of the riding school.

As for the permanent exhibitions, in the Casa dos Trens is the exhibition of harness and horse-drawn carriages of the 19th century; in The Horse Museum, you can see "The Horse and Humankind – A Relationship of Thousands of Years", with pieces from the private collection of Rainer Daehnhardt, some around 3,000 years old.

The Coudelaria de Alter Real breeds the Cavalo do Sorraia, considered to be the first Iberian breed of horse, which is in danger of extinction. It is one of the trustee institutions of a nucleus dedicated to the Przewalski horse, the last species of horse found in the wild (in 1880), and participates in the international programme for its conservation.

The complex is closed to the public on Mondays. You need to pay for guided visits. With prior booking, it is possible to ride a horse or travel in a carriage at weekends and on public holidays. In April, the Coudelaria Week takes place, when there are various equestrian activities and it includes the famous Leilão de Equinos (horse auction) on the 24th. In May, there is the Horse Festival.

(The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Gastronomy and Wines).



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THE ALENTEJO IS GASTRONOMY AND WINES

In the Alentejo, you eat and drink very well. Eating, drinking and snacking (*petiscos*) are rituals, ways of socialising, of entertaining friends and guests, of celebrating. It is customary to say that, in a true Alentejan's house, whether rich or poor, the table is always set. It is true. And this truth confers a very special flavour on the discovery of the gastronomy and the wines. They are products of recognised value for tourists, but it was not Tourism that created them for outside consumption: they are part – and a happy part – of the most authentic daily life of the Region. In the light of this, we can offer only one invitation: be Alentejan for a few days!

TASTING THE ALENTEJO

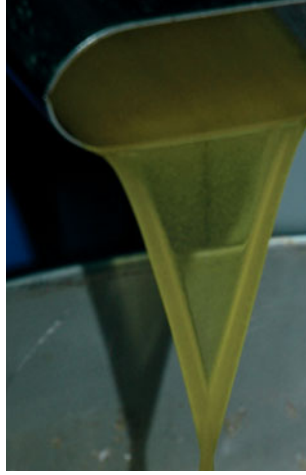
From traditional recipes to recent innovations in gourmet cooking, from savouries to traditional sweets and puddings created in convents, in the Alentejo you will find everything, created with the finest products of the land, a lot of imagination and that mysterious thing called "touch". Wines, cheeses and cured meats are excellent, sweets and puddings a divine sin. There has been serious investment in the certification of products. There are new projects for organic products. As regards the table, there is a curious understanding between generations. Dedicate time to discovering all of this. Experience a fine restaurant, offering a meal prepared with sophistication, as well as genuine popular cooking, which is often found in a village *tasca* (small restaurant) where people are found at the end of the day enjoying their *petiscos* (snacks). Taste the wines in the *adegas* (wineries) alongside the producers. Participate in cookery courses. And worry not about your diet: good walks will burn off the calories.

EAT WHAT THE EARTH PROVIDES

The Alentejan cuisine, highly rich in flavours, has always been connected to the products of the countryside and has as its base a fundamental trilogy: bread, olive oil and aromatic herbs.

Bread has many applications. It is eaten as an accompaniment to every *petisco*; it is present in *açordas* (traditional soups and stews) as well as in dozens of other soups made here, such as *gaspachos*, fish (*peixe*) soups, thistle (*cardo*) soup, purslane (*beldroega*) soup or *catacuzes* (soups made from red dock); and it is the great ingredient of *migas*, which can be made from cauliflower, codfish, green asparagus and many other things.

Olive Oil, today recognised by dieticians as a factor in healthy eating, is the touchstone which distinguishes the excellent from the good or bad. We don't need to be experts in gastronomy to perceive the difference there is between cooking and seasoning with virgin olive oil and with the mixtures that are produced to pass as olive oil. Alentejan olive oil is among the best.



Aromatic herbs –coriander, pennyroyal, water mint, rosemary, laurel or bay, savory, oregano, to name only the best known – are the magic wand of the imagination which characterises this cuisine. They are crushed, chopped or placed in sauces according to the dish they are going to flavour. And they are used in a specific measure because, when the products are genuine and of high quality, as happens in the Alentejo, the seasonings exist not to hide but to enhance the flavour as much as possible. It should be noted that there are various farms which specialise in their production and which, in Vendas Novas, are to be the subject of research in the *Horto Experimental das Plantas Silvestres Alimentares* of the Ecomuseu de Recursos Florestais (forest resources museum), which functions and can be visited in the Escola Agrícola D. Carlos I.

To enjoy to the full the seductive gastronomic adventures this region has to offer you, we suggest you travel with three ideas in your baggage. The first is that you forget the globalised world in which we live, dominated by homogenised tastes and freezing technologies and enjoy your holidays in the Alentejo by reviving the most ancestral ways of eating: **fresh products in the right season, when the tastes are expressed in all their splendour**. Some examples: in winter, taste fresh pork; between winter and spring, depending on whether the rains are early or late, the ingenious soups made from thistles,



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carrasquinhas (a shrub), beans with common dock or red dock, wild green asparagus with eggs, truffles, *silarca* (brown gurumelo mushrooms) grilled over charcoal seasoned only with ground salt; around Easter, *sarapatel de borrego* ("pluck" – heart, lungs and liver – of lamb cooked in blood), cottage cheeses and curd tartlets; at the end of spring and during summer, the dishes made with broad beans, the gaspacho, the tomato dishes, the purslane soups, the black bass; at the beginning of October, the game dishes.

When you eat with the seasons, the difference is vast.

The second is that you **experience dishes that are always different.**

There is only one Alentejo, but it is large and it is diverse. It is Atlantic and Mediterranean, hills and plain, coast and interior, rivers, lakes, reservoirs and sea. Therefore, although you will identify in everything you taste that "something" which marks out so strongly the way of doing things and flavouring things, you will be surprised to discover how infinite and varied is the traditional table.

The third is that **you should have these experiences in the right place.** Is there anything that can match a good fish on the grid, being grilled above a beach with a view over the sea? A sophisticated game dish, as the light of autumn softly penetrates the woodland of the *montado*? Or a fresh gaspacho, when dry yellow has taken over the



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wheat fields and there is heat enough to roast you? If you don't soon find what you are looking for, don't give up. Insist on someone helping. But for this reason, be sure that you can't, under any pretext, allow yourself the luxury of not tasting these pleasures.

On the coast, it is evident. From Troia to the port of Azenha do Mar, the Alentejo is rich in seafood (the *percebes* [goose-necked barnacles] of the south west are excellent!), in cuttlefish and octopus, in fish such as sea bream, stone bass, sea bass, mackerel and sardines. And as well as the common but delicious grilled and poached fish, there are dishes that are characteristic of this zone: the *massinhas de peixe* (fish with pasta), the *arroz de camarão, de choco e de navalhinha* (prawns, cuttlefish, razor clams with rice), the fish soups and the fish stews. Dogfish stew is universal: it is on the menus of almost all Alentejan restaurants even, as long as nothing is amiss, in the interior. As far as fresh water is concerned, the geography broadens. You should not miss the eel stew of Lagoa de



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Santo André, nor indeed the lampreys of the Tejo (Nisa and Gavião) and of the Guadiana (Mértola); nor the black bass, fried or grilled, which you find in Odemira and in at least two places where they have fishing competitions – in the Alqueva zone and on the Raia river, close to Cabeção. Where there is fresh river fish, try the succulent *caldeiretas*, stews made with barbel, black bass and carp, which are seasoned with bay, pennyroyal and water mint.

We pass on to meat

The Alentejo is one of the regions of the world where free grazing is still possible. There is no lack of space. The flocks graze in the countryside, the Alentejan pigs live in the cork oak and holm oak *montado* (a system of woodland and pasture), which provides acorns, and the cows and bullocks graze calmly in the meadows of the great estates. There are various producers throughout the region who have invested in the certification of their products and today display with pride the various denominations of quality attributed to their meat. You must taste these: the **Borrego** (lamb) of **Montemor-o-Novo**, of **Baixo Alentejo** and of **Nordeste Alentejano**, all of the **IGP** – Indicação Geográfica Protegida (PGI – protected geographical indication); the **Bovino** (beef) **Carnalentejana**, **Mertolenga** and **da Charneca**, all **DOP** – Denominação de Origem Protegida (PDO – protected denomination of origin); and the famous **Porco Alentejano**, also **DOP**.



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The dishes are many: the grills, always excellent, the *sopa da panela* (meat, sausage and vegetable stew), the *ensopado de borrego* (lamb braised in liquor and served with bread), the *borrego assado* (roast lamb), the *sarapatel* (braised “pluck” of lamb), the *migas com carne de porco* (herby breadcrumbs with pork), the *feijoada com cabeça de porco* (beans with pork), the *cozido de grão* (stew of chickpeas and meat, which in some restaurants is served in cork pails), the *burras assadas no forno* (roast cheek of pork) ...

Finally the game dishes. Always made with great sophistication, they are the highest emblems of the most refined Alentejan cooking. Between the *coelho bravo à S. Cristóvão* (rabbit), the *lebre com feijão branco* (hare with white beans), the innumerable recipes for *perdiz* (partidge), the *canja de pombo bravo* (woodpigeon stew), the *estufados* (braises) and *assados* (roasts) for *javalí* (wild boar), do you think you can make a choice?



THE PETISCO (snacks or tapas)

This is a truly Alentejan institution. There is no end of the day when you do not feel the slow movement of steps that know how to follow the route to the meeting points where amenable chat can be enjoyed, accompanied by a glass of wine and one of the innumerable "*pratinhos*" (little plates): *torresmos* (a kind of pork crackling), roast peppers, lamb's head roasted in a wooden oven, pig's ear, *cabeça de xara* (brawn), liver with coriander, carrots in olive oil and garlic, baked mushrooms, octopus salad, cod and chickpeas ... the list is endless. But it would be incomplete without *caracois* (snails), our "seafood of the stubble", the cooking of which perfumes the terraces of summer with the unmistakable aroma of oregano collected from the countryside.

Some of these *pratinhos* are also served as starters in restaurants. But *petisco* is *petisco*. Now it is no longer only for men – who formerly went to the tavern while the women looked after the children and made dinner – and is increasingly being adopted by young people from here who, even when they eat fast food, never forget their preference for the homemade taste of traditional cooking.

Have a *petisco*, wherever you are, because it is one of those experiences which, as you are being Alentejan for a few days, you cannot miss.

THE NECTAR OF THE GODS

In the Alentejo, there is no haggling over the honour to be paid to Bacchus. The wines are emblematic of the Region. There are more than 250 producers, with an area under cultivation in the order of 22,000 hectares.

You will find two types of white and red wine: the **Vinho Regional Alentejano**, which is produced throughout the Region; and **Vinho DOC – Alentejo**, produced in the eight regions defined as suitable for the production of wines with the seal of Denominação de Origem Controlada (Registered Designation of Origin) – Portalegre, Borba, Redondo, Reguengos, Vidigueira, Évora, Granja/Amareleja and Moura. The **Vinho Reserva**, considered top of the range, can result from regional or DOC wines.

The wines produced in the northern part of Coastal Alentejo – Grândola, Alcácer do Sal, Santiago do Cázem and Sines – belong to the wine-growing region of Setúbal. Don't find it strange, then, when you see on the label the denomination "**Vinho Regional – Terras do Sado**".

The DOC seal is a guarantee of quality. But in all justice it must be said that there are also Alentejan wines of the highest quality that do not have the DOC seal.

The typical quality of the wine comes from various factors: the perfect marriage between the grape varieties used and the various types of soil (granitic in Portalegre, crystalline calcareous in Borba, Mediterranean grey and red in Évora, Granja/Amareleja and Moura, schist in Redondo, Reguengos and Vidigueira); the thousands of hours of sunlight that benefit the whole of the Alentejo; the discipline of the growers who understand that a good wine begins to be made on the vine; and finally the skills that the oenologists have revealed in the art of making the wine, bringing together tradition and modernity.

The white wines are aromatic, fresh, harmonious and sometimes complex, the result of the blending of varieties. The reds, ruby or garnet in colour, have intense bouquets of well-matured red fruits and are smooth, slightly astringent, balanced and full-bodied. Although they gain in complexity as they age, they can also be drunk young.

The great secret for enjoying them fully is in knowing how to make the right choice: what wine to drink as an aperitif, with a good cheese



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or during a meal; and inversely, when the wine is chosen first, what delicacies to accompany it with.

In the Alentejo, there are many ways of getting to know the wines: in good restaurants, leaving yourself in the hands of those who know; by visiting the *adegas* (wineries) during wine-tastings accompanied by the wine-makers, who are available to explain all that you might wish to know; on enotourism trips which, accomplished in the art of making you feel welcome, organise interesting activities around the subject of wine; and finally in some establishments providing accommodation, which have gourmet gastronomy as their principal trademark, an image that is obviously inseparable from the nectars that accompany it. (*Tourism Services: Where to sleep, Where to eat, What to do*)

The **Rota dos Vinhos do Alentejo** (www.vinhosdoalentejo.pt) association, an organisation which you should use to book visits to *adegas* and to wine-tastings, suggests various excursions, organised around three routes. Using the **Rota de S. Mamede**, you can visit

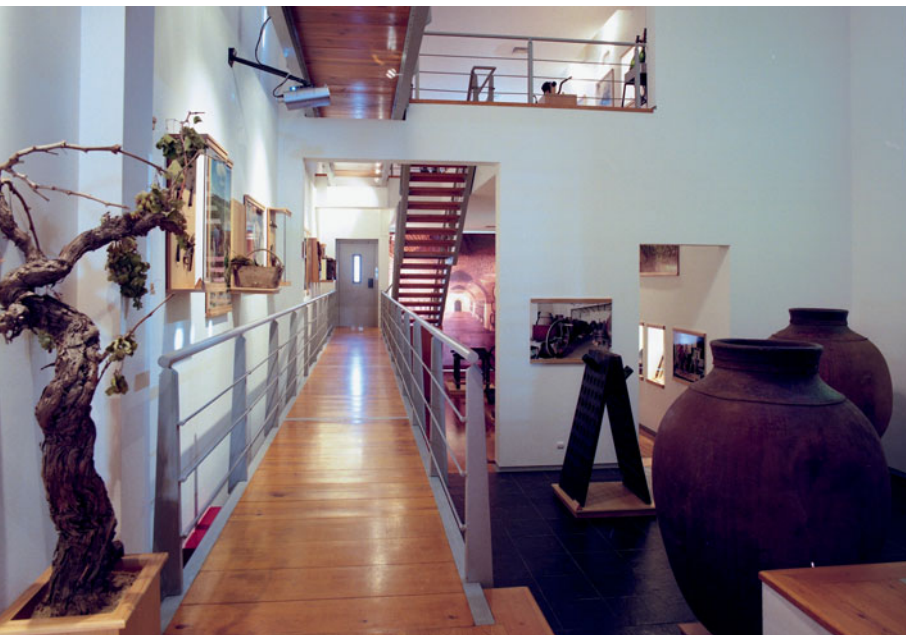


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producers in Portalegre, Benavila (Avis), Casa Branca (Sousel), Monforte and Campo Maior; using the **Rota Histórica**, in Montemor-o-Novo, Évora, Azaruja, S. Sebastião da Giesteira, Arraiolos, Igreja, Estremoz, Arcos, Glória, Borba, Rio de Moinhos, Terrugem, Juromenha, Redondo, Aldeias de Montoito, Monsaraz, Reguengos de Monsaraz, Vendinha and Vera Cruz de Portel; using the **Rota do Guadiana**, in Cuba, Vidigueira, Marmelar, Moura, Granja, Ferreira do Alentejo, S. Brissos (Beja), Albarroa and Trindade. Whatever your choice, you will see how the theme of Wine can be an excellent guide to discovering the Region.

To complement this, let us make a couple of suggestions.

One is to go to **Borba**, if possible in November, when the **Festa da Vinha e do Vinho** (festival of the vine and of wine) takes place. In the Historical Centre there are various "*tasquinhas*" (small taverns/restaurants), some with enormous clay wine-pots, where the wine used to be made, that offer local products. During the festival, they are places on a special route visited by the Confraria dos Enófilos do Alentejo (confraternity of wine-lovers). The other is that, in



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December, you should visit **Cabeção** and **Vila de Frades**, when the tasting of the new wine from the producers is the occasion for a festival. In Vila de Frades, within the framework of the **Vitifrades** event, there is a competition for local "pot-made" wine (2nd weekend in December). In this town as much as in two others nearby, Vila Alva and Vila Ruiva, wine of this kind is still produced using methods very close to those used by the Romans. (*The Alentejo is Heritage, The Alentejo is Nature, The Alentejo is Rural Quality*).

Finally, you should not fail to visit the **Enoteca** and the **Museu do Vinho** in **Redondo**. Begin with the museum, which has the advantage of being located in the Tourist Office, make an excursion into the Serra d'Ossa, enjoy a succulent lunch and spend the afternoon in the town. Visit the potteries and the workshops making painted rustic furniture, walk through history within the tiny **Cerca Medieval** (mediaeval walls) and, at the end of the day, enjoy some *petiscos* (snacks) in the welcoming space of the Enoteca. If there is a show in the Cultural Centre, you could enjoy live music into the night. (*The Alentejo is Nature, The Alentejo is Rural Quality*).



CHEESES, OLIVE OILS, CURED MEATS AND HAM

Let's now complete the table of savoury goodies: with the traditional olives and olive oils; with the little cheeses which, depending on the season, the area and one's taste, can be from goat's milk or sheep's milk, fresh or cured, hard or soft; with the inevitable sausages and cured meats of various qualities; and with the cured ham. For all of these products, a great deal of investment has been made by the producers to achieve certificates of quality. But in this field too, the same is true as we pointed out to be true of wine: there are excellent producers who have never put forward their products for the certification processes that are in force – some out of choice, others because the size of their operations does not justify it. You will find the contacts for all of these in Tourist Offices, as well as information about where the products are for sale. Here, because we have to be selective, we provide only information regarding the products with a DOP – Denominação de Origem Protegida (PDO – protected denomination of origin) and IGP – Indicação Geográfica Protegida (PGI – protected geographical indication) classification, subject to the systems of certification and control of the European Union.



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Cheeses

In the Alentejo, there are three regions which produce *DOP queijos* (PDO cheeses): **Nisa**, **Évora** and **Serpa**. All are obtained by the slow draining of the curdled milk, followed by the coagulation of the untreated sheep's milk with an infusion made from thistles. They continue the traditional ways of manufacturing the cheese, revealing characteristics that are attributable both to the milk and to the traditional way of handling the ewes.

Queijo Nisa DOP, cured, semi-hard in texture, closed, with small holes, is exclusive to a region in North Alentejo which embraces eight council areas. In the same geographical area is produced the **Queijo Mestiço de Tolosa IGP**, using milk from both sheep and goats.

There are producers in Nisa, Monte Claro, Gáfete, Tolosa, Alpalhão, Vaiamonte and Monforte. In Tolosa and Vaiamonte, organic cheeses are produced which, when certified, display the seal AB – Agricultura Biológica (organic production).

Queijo Évora DOP is a cured cheese, hard or semi-hard in texture, with few or no holes, which can be produced in an extensive zone which includes 14 council areas in Central Alentejo and 3 in North Alentejo. You will find producers of this cheese in Évora, Arraiolos, Alcáçovas, Aldeias de Montoito (Redondo), Rio de Moinhos (Borba) and Sousel.

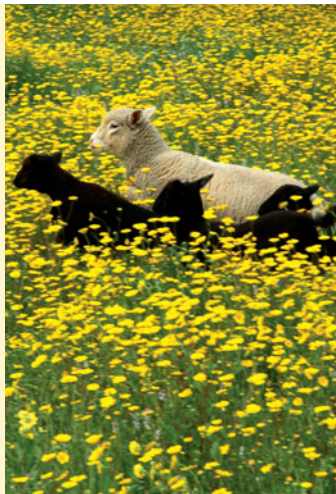
Queijo Serpa DOP is, perhaps, the most famous cheese in the Alentejo. It is a cured sheep's cheese, semi-soft and buttery in texture (it can even be poured) and has few or no holes. The cheeses are kept in so-

called “linen cupboards” (cheese stores) for at least one month, in a cool, humid environment, until they reach maturity. Their provenance is a region that embraces 12 council areas in Lower Alentejo where the climate, soil and pasture provide Serpa DOP with the characteristics that make it a unique cheese. There are producers in Beja (Santa Clara do Louredo and Penedo Gordo), Moura, Pias, Serpa and Mértola (Corvos and Corte da Velha).

Azeitonas (Olives) and Azeite (Olive Oil)

Just travelling through the Alentejo would resolve any doubts about the importance of olive cultivation. Olive groves and plantations occupy more than 150,000 hectares and are one of the factors adding beauty to the landscape of the region. For keen photographers there are many hundreds-of-years-old olive trees that still exist, with trunks that are truly sculptural, an excess of material providing hours and hours of pleasure. It is from these companions of humankind throughout the centuries that the olive springs forth, a food with a long tradition, which continues to “be sweetened” as in olden days, to be seasoned with salt and oregano and to make its presence felt in all Alentejan cuisine that is prized and respected. The customs of home cooking, which have been passed on to restaurants, are maintained: the first olives, gathered from October onwards, are eaten after being cut into pieces or pounded; for the rest of the production, the olives are conserved until they become ready in the following March. As far as industrial production is concerned, the only conserved Alentejan olives that have the DOP – Denominação de Origem Protegida (PDO – protected denomination of origin) seal are those of **Elvas** and **Campo Maior**.

In relation to *azeite* (olive oil), there are three **DOP** brands: **Azeite de Moura**, **Azeites do Norte Alentejano** and **Azeite do Alentejo Interior**, all with distinctive flavours. DOP olive oil is Virgin or Extra Virgin, that is, it is produced exclusively through mechanical processes using low temperatures. It only receives its classification when the unequivocal connection between its quality and the natural and human factors of its region of origin are proved. The production of **Azeites biológicos** (organic olive oils) is famously expanding. Producers of **Azeite DOP** are to be found in: Sousel, Santo Amaro, Borba, Redondo and Reguengos de Monsaraz (Azeites do Norte



Alentejano); Moura, Serpa and Vila Verde Ficalho (Azeite de Moura); Portel, Vidigueira and Torrão (Azeite do Alentejo Interior).

In **Moura**, don't miss a visit to the **Lagar** (olive press) **de Varas do Fojo**, transformed into the Olive Oil Museum, and in **Campo Maior** to the **Lagar-Museu do Palácio Visconde d'Olivã**. In the latter town, it is worth getting to know the **Museu do Café** (coffee museum).

Enchidos – Cured Meats and Sausages

They are eaten in every way possible: as they emerge from being smoked, boiled, fried, roasted, alone, as accompaniments, and as ingredients in various traditional dishes.

The process of production is slow. It begins with the selection of the most suitable meat, which is then pricked and seasoned. The seasonings are not always the same, but the most common involve pimento, garlic, salt, wine and spices. After being seasoned, the meat is left to marinate to absorb the flavours. When it is ready, the natural skins are filled and hung on battens while they go through various stages of curing, all of which is done slowly, in the open air and in the smoke from holm-oak wood. The tradition is still maintained today: a person who kills a pig, whatever the number of fridges and freezer rooms may be, never gives up curing meats and sausages. At the same time, this ancestral way of doing things has entered industry, as one of the requirements for obtaining certification which, with respect to different kinds of sausages



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(*painho, chouriço, morcela, cacholeira banca, lombo enguitado, farinheira*, etc.), is identified by the **IGP** seal.

There are producers in Portalegre, Póvoa e Meadas, Elvas, Arronches, Fronteira, Sousel, Cano, Estremoz and Borba. Many of these belong to the the "Rota dos Sabores do Alentejo" ("Alentejo Tastes Routes"), an initiative which makes it possible for people to visit their establishments, with prior booking, to taste their products and to buy directly from the producer. Information from www.rotadossabores.com

Presunto (Cured Ham)

The *presunto* in the Alentejo is produced in Campo Maior, Elvas, Santana da Serra (Ourique) and Barrancos.

Presunto de Barrancos DOP, the only one with this seal of origin, is obtained solely from the leg of pigs of the Raça Alentejana breed, reared under the Montanha regime. The leg must have a minimum weight of 5 Kg, have an agreeable taste, be very smooth, delicate and slightly salty, and sometimes a touch piquant. The fat is shiny and aromatic. One of the characteristics which differentiates it from other brands is the fact that, thanks to the microclimate of the zone, it is air-cured, slowly, without any use of smoke. The result is excellent and justifies a trip to visit the producers who, as well as ham, also delight us with tasty *enchidos*. (*The Alentejo is Nature*)



THE SWEETMEATS THAT NEVER TASTED BITTER

We end with the sweetmeats, another flavourful voyage that is not to be missed. Gluttons will have to contain themselves because each area has its own sweets – and there are many! – and the nuns in the convents of time past never let their reputation fall into alien hands as far as sweetmeats are concerned.

The tradition has come down from long ago and has brought us aromas of spices which the Alentejo has practically never ceased to have, whether they came by land, in the hands of Arab and Jewish merchants or, later, when they began to arrive by sea. This is the case with the perfumed *canela* (cinnamon), which goes into the composition of so many traditional sweet dishes.

In the houses of the poor and the rich, on days of celebration or to sweeten the harshness of everyday life, the imagination of the artists of the kitchen was creating a full recipe book. As well as the cakes from



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the bakery, which are baked in the same oven as where the bread is made, throughout the Alentejo we find the *nógados* (nougats) and the *filhós* (puff pastries), the *bolos fintos* (fermented cakes) and the *folares da Páscoa* (Easter cakes), the *azevias natalícias com recheios de gila ou de grão* (pastries filled with gourd or chickpeas). Among many others, all linked to local traditions.

Many of the well-known cakes and sweets of the Alentejo have their origins in the convents (*conventual*). The ingredients that make these delicacies are easy to find: sugar, eggs (lots of eggs!), bread, milk, cheese, curd, cinnamon, almonds, gourd and little more. Anyone could lay their hands on a recipe and try. Making them with excellence, though, is not for everyone, because the secrets have been guarded and passed down, jealously, from generation to generation. And the sweetmeats, like the savouries, also demand the "touch".

Happily, today we have a weighty factor in our favour: so strong is the conviction that "conventual" sweetmeats and puddings are also part of our heritage that, in order to taste them, we do not have to be the privileged guest at one of those houses where there was always a grandmother or an aunt who made some sweets to eat and to cry for more. They are now part, as in the Alentejo they always were, of the menus of good restaurants. But, delight upon delight, they are also sold in specialised *pastelarias* (cafes/pastryshops), whole or in slices, which allows us to transform a simple lunch into an experience that lifts us heavenwards.

Honey (*mel*) is an emblematic product of the Alentejo. When certified, it is produced by the bee species *Apis melifer melifer* (sp.iberia) and can include five variants: *rosmaninho* (lavender), *soagem* (viper's bugloss), *eucalipto* (eucalyptus), *laranjeira* (orange tree) and *multifloral*. It is sold in glass jars with the label "Mel do Alentejo – DOP".



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Only to have a whiff of the abundance that the Region has to offer in the chapter of cakes and sweetmeats, take note and experience the taste: in Castelo de Vide, *boleimas de maçã*; in Elvas, *sericaia com ameixas*; in Portalegre, *rebuçados de ovos* and *pastéis de Santa Clara*; in Borba, *doce dourado*; in Arraiolos, *pastéis de toucinho*; in Mora, *queijinhos do céu*; in Évora, *morgado* and *pão de rala*; in Mourão, *encharcada* and *bolo rançoso*; in Alcáçovas, *Conde das Alcáçovas*; in Beja, *porquinho doce* and *queijo conventual*; in Serpa, *queijadas de requeijão*; in Almodôvar, *bolo chibo*; in Alcácer do Sal, *pinhoadas*; in Grândola, *bolo de torresmos*; in Santiago do Cacém, *alcomonias*; in Sines, *areias* and *vasquinhos* ... There are many more and to suit every taste. There is no lack, too, of drinks to accompany them: *vinhas licorosas* (fortified wines) and, popular or "conventual" in origin, excellent liqueurs.

WHERE TO SHOP

There are products that you will need to consume during your travels. Others that you will want to take away with you as souvenirs or to offer to friends: wines, liqueurs of pennyroyal or *medronho* (arbutus berry), olive oils, conserved olives, cheeses, cured meats, cured ham, honey, jams, pasties, biscuits, Elvas plums, chestnuts of Marvão, you can find them all. In the markets and the fairs; in gastronomy festivals and exhibitions; in traditional shops and, ever more numerous in the Alentejo, in gourmet shops.



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