



A Safari in Alentejo

Plan something different and allow your family to discover all the charms of the Alentejo coast.

Depart from Alcácer do Sal, after climbing to the top of the castle with your children, in order to marvel at the small houses clustered by the river's edge. Then travel through the Sado Estuary Nature Reserve, pass through Comporta and on to the coast, visiting beaches such as Carvalhal and Melides. These huge golden sand dunes that mingle with the Lakes of Santo André and Sancha Nature Reserve invite us to partake in great moments of escape and tranquility and whet our appetite for some fresh fish. As you calmly look out over the infinite sea, allow your children to run and play on the beach.

In Santiago do Cacém, you'll encounter a history lesson in the Roman ruins of Miróbriga. Take the kids on a safari in the heart of the Alentejo. Show them animals of all species in Badoca Park and don't miss the opportunity to take them to the Pedagogical Farm in order to get a glimpse of everyday life in the countryside.

Returning once again to the coast, learn about the itineraries in the South-East Alentejo and Vicentine Coast Natural Park, that starts to the south of Sines. Choose the most enjoyable means to explore this fabulous coastal area with the family – on foot, horseback or by jeep - and see unique species of animal and plant life, such as the marine otter.

This is the best conserved coastal stretch in Europe and the small, secluded beaches include São Torpes and Porto Covo. Why not take a short, enjoyable boat trip to the Island of Pessegueiro and then visit Vila Nova de Milfontes and Almogrove, and many other spots.

If you're in the area in July and enjoy varied styles of music, watch the "Festival Músicas do Mundo" (World Music Festival) in Sines. In the first week of August the compass needle of fun points to the pop-rock sounds of the Sudoeste Festival, in another beach that's not to be missed - Zambujeira do Mar.



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Points of interest along the Itinerary

- Praia da Comporta
- Badoca Park
- Praia de Melides
- Praia Grande de Porto Covo
- Praia da Ilha do Pessegueiro
- Zambujeira do Mar



Points of interest along the Itinerary

Badoca Park

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Suggestions

Beaches of Tróia

The beaches of Tróia are kilometre after kilometre of white sand gently lapped by the sea. Along the coastal road, or on the dunes, all the way between the beaches of Comporta and Pego, it's easy to find a pleasant restaurant in which to enjoy a meal of tasty fresh fish.

And you only have to travel a few kilometres to change the scenery. At Praia da Galé, for instance, the line of dunes is interrupted, giving way to a five million-year-old cliff that stretches all the way to Melides.

If you enjoy playing volleyball, football or rugby, you'll find the goalposts and nets already set up for you on the beach of Tróia-Mar, close to the ferry that connects the Tróia peninsula to the city of Setúbal. It's well worth taking the short ride across this narrow gateway between the mouth of the Sado estuary and the Atlantic Ocean. You may even be lucky enough to see some friendly dolphins swimming beside your boat.

Further inland are the cork and holm oak groves, pinewoods, and the undulating carpet of rice paddies that form part of the Sado Estuary Nature Reserve, where families of birds come to build their nests and spend the winter.

Miróbriga ruins

Nowadays it is one of the treasures that the Romans left behind them and an essential place to visit.

In the ruins of the Roman town you can find the only existing example in Portugal of a hippodrome - the place where they used to hold horse-drawn chariot races, such as those mythologised in the film 'Ben-Hur'. The races were a spectacle for crowds, attracting visitors from distant lands. News of the exploits of charioteers like Caius, Apuleius and Diocles, and the fieriness of the Lusitanian horses, is known to have reached Rome.

Go to the forum (the public square, political, administrative and religious centre) and imagine what the main temple dedicated to the imperial cult, and another one dedicated to Venus, must have been like. Commercial areas, public baths, sewage systems - it is not difficult to visualise a town brimming with activity that reached the height of its splendour in the first century.

See the two excellently preserved bath buildings, a bridge and many other things that made Miróbriga the celebrated city that Pliny the Elder, the first-century Roman sage and author of a famous 'Natural History', wrote about.

Safari, Alentejo

You could be in the African savannah. But you're not – you're in Badoca Park, in the heart of the Alentejo.

Don't miss the chance to go along and make sure you take a camera. Go to Herdade da Badoca, Vila Nova de Santo André, and board the tractor-pulled train and listen to the commentary that will guide you throughout the tour.

And don't forget to take some extra film for your camera. Here in Badoca Park you can take some of the best shots of your life! Take photos of the aggressive tigers, majestic giraffes, nervous kangaroos, zebras, yaks, buffalo, llamas, red and fallow deer, ostriches and chimpanzees, as well as the more familiar cows, donkeys and sheep.

After an hour and a half in the wilderness, go to the park restaurant. On the way you'll discover an amazing variety of exotic birds in a huge cage, whose chirping will serenade you as you taste some typical Alentejo flavours.



Sines of the Discoveries

Linked to a nautical past by the navigator Vasco da Gama, (born in the town in 1468), Sines exudes a sense of history that is tied with the sea and the period of exploration known as the Discoveries.

Vasco da Gama left Lisbon on 8th July 1497 with three naus under his command, his mission to reach India by sea. As he rounded the coast of Africa, he caught sight of the dreaded Cape of Good Hope on 18th November. The cyclonic winds pushed back the fragile naus, but after a seven-day struggle against the storm he finally headed north along the coast of Africa, eventually dropping anchor off Calicut on 20th May 1498. Of the 150 men who had set off with Gama from the beaches of Belém, little more than 50 returned to Portugal. But the sea route to India had been discovered and the high seas were Portuguese. Vasco da Gama was to undertake two more voyages to India, and on the third he met his death, on Christmas Day 1524.

In the historical centre of Sines you can take a short tour based on the 'Gama monuments'. The son of a local nobleman, Estevão da Gama was born in the castle that overlooks the town. Begin your visit here and look across the ocean that Vasco da Gama conquered. Admire the Igreja Matriz (parish church) where he was baptised and the chapel of Nossa Senhora das Salas, patron saint of fishermen, to whom the navigator was especially devoted.

As you admire the panoramic view from the fishing harbour over the splendid beach, remember that the fishermen leave from here every day to go to work. You will have many opportunities to sample good fish and come into contact with these locals, who have the sea in their souls. It is no wonder that every year a 'World Music' festival takes place at Sines Castle. There is nothing more appropriate for a town that gave the world one of its greatest discoverers.

Beaches of the Alentejo

The Nature Park of the South-West Alentejo stands guard over the regions wildly beautiful beaches. Nestling between rocks or stretching out to form vast expanses of sand that are perfect for long walks, these beaches are the ideal place for enjoying complete rest and relaxation.

Along the coast roads you'll find many small towns serving fish in various restaurants that look out over the sea. Such as Porto Covo, a picturesque fishing village, where visitors are immediately welcomed by a pretty square ringed by low, one-storey houses. The beach is also very welcoming and in the village's small harbour, where you'll see brightly coloured boats bobbing up and down, you can ask one of the fishermen to take you to the Ilha do Pessegueiro. This is a small, curious-looking island that King Filipe I once considered linking to the mainland. All that's now left of this royal dream are two small fortresses, one on the island and the other on the coast.

If you'd prefer somewhere more lively, go to Vila Nova de Milfontes at the mouth of the River Mira. Here you can choose between the ocean beaches and those along the river. And you can also take an enjoyable canoe trip along its banks.

Another quite different spot is the small beach at Zambujeira, nestling between beautiful cliffs, where you can walk along footpaths once used by the fishermen as you set off to discover the Fonte dos Amores (the Fountain of Love).

Sport on the Costa Vicentina

Dominated by cliffs, rolling dunes and clean waters, the Algarve's Atlantic coast is perfect for water sports and sea fishing. The region is famous for its fish, including sea bream, catfish and rock bass, and for a range of shellfish such as goose barnacles, limpets and mussels.

The Natural Park also boasts the only national colony of otters that heads out to sea in search of food. Find them in the Carrapateira estuary and at the Praia do Castelejo beach.

The breathtaking geographical landscape is another of this region's attractions. The large expanses of sand at Praia da Amoreira turn into beaches of schist and limestone, in a landscape with an almost lunar feel to it.

After heading down past Porto Côvo, through Vila Nova de Milfontes and Zambujeira do Mar, you reach Aljezur. Spend some time here to explore the



beaches of the west coast, such as Arrifana, which remains in demand among surfers and body boarders even out of season.

To the north, and bordering the Alentejo region, is Odeceixe beach, which along with Vale Figueiras is a favourite destination for all kinds of water sports fans.

To the south, are the beaches of Bordeira and Amado (Carrapateira), which have hosted national and international surfing and body boarding events. You'll find the Algarve Surf School & Camp here, offering both lessons and surfing-safaris. Further along the coast, the beaches of Carriagem, Vale dos Homens and Samouqueira are generally free of crowds even in peak season and are ideal for nature lovers.

In the district of Vila do Bispo, head to the beach at Tonel, which is particularly good for surfing, or Martinhal, where you'll find a water sports school.

Along the west coast, many rural estates and properties open their doors to guests, providing quality accommodation, food and service to further enhance your visit to the Algarve.



Useful contacts

Ruínas romanas de Miróbriga

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Parque Natural do Sudoeste Alentejano e Costa Vicentina

Website : <http://www.icnf.pt/cn/ICNPortal/vPT2007-AP-SudAlentejanoCostaVicentina/Visitar+Area+Protegida/Como+Chegar/> | <http://www.icnf.pt>

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