

A trip between two dams

Commence this 2-person trip in the Pousada do Torrão, nestled in the middle of the romantic environment of the Vale do Gaio Dam, 30 Km from Alcácer do Sal.

Take our suggestion and arrive in time to spend a pleasant afternoon on the esplanade, accompanied by the clinking of chilled aperitifs and stare out over the warm coloured landscape surrounding the dam.

In the morning, discover the delights of the zone by boat, via bike or on foot. Or why not take to the skies in a balloon and get a different view of the dam and the Alentejo plains.

Then, continue your journey to Grândola, to discover the history of mining activities in the region, through a visit to the Mining Museum Unit in the Mines of Lousal. Have lunch in the area and see the old market, the Electricity Power Station Museum and a handicrafts centre, where you can buy a souvenir to take home.

In the countryside environment, with quiet roads that cut across the rolling fields of Alentejo, pass through Alvalade, Santa Luzia and visit the Santa Clara Dam, one of the largest dams in Europe. Soak up the peaceful atmosphere, contemplating the water mirror in front of you, or practise some water sports to pump up your adrenalin and energy.

And since you're close to the best-conserved coastal stretch in Europe, why not visit one of the beaches of the Southeast Alentejo and Vicentine Coast Natural Park. Travelling down long straight roads that cut through the trees of this coastal area or roads that seem to lead to nowhere, discover hidden empty beaches steeped in natural beauty. This is the right place to live a romance inspired by the serenity of the sea and extensive beaches...or a story of passion to the pace of the rolling waves and sloped cliffs that take various forms and tonalities.

Points of interest along the Itinerary



- Centro Ciência Viva do Lousal - Mina de Ciência
- Parque Natural do Sudoeste Alentejano e Costa Vicentina
- Alcácer do Sal
- Small villages near Alcácer do Sal
- Santiago do Cacém
- Albufeira de Santa Clara



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Points of interest along the Itinerary

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Parque Natural do Sudoeste Alentejano e Costa Vicentina

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Suggestions

Santa Susana village

At first glance it looks like an old town built in the traditional style of rural architecture, but these geometrically shaped streets and identical white houses did not appear by chance. Built more than a century ago, they were used as temporary accommodation for the farm workers, who ended up staying here. Today, it is a peaceful Alentejo town, where you can sample the local cuisine and discover the regional handicrafts made from willow and cork.

For outdoor types, this place is fantastic. One of the branches of the Altar do Pego reservoir is near by, so water sports, fishing, or simply long walks by the lakeside are all popular activities.

A little further afield, discover Alcácer do Sal, the meeting point for visitors to the Sado Estuary Nature Reserve, and don't leave the region without a trip to the beach and a swim in the ocean.

Ballooning, Alentejo

Waking up in the night to jump into a wicker basket lifted by a balloon into the Alentejo sky is an extraordinary experience as the first rays of the sun light up the plain: miles and miles of terrain, as far as the eye can see, are filled with brushstrokes of colour.

It was in the Alentejo that ballooning began in this country: it was chosen as the most suitable region due to the vast plains that are suitable for take off and landing.

Far from being an extreme sport, ballooning is possibly the safest way to fly. During the flight you have a feeling of total peace, combined with an element of adventure: there is no defined route up there, so you are at the mercy of the wind. And the seconds before landing are enough to speed up the heartbeat of even the most fearless flyer. You can spice up the experience even more though: on a captive flight, with the help of a pulley, you can slide down the cable that ties the balloon to the ground. After a relaxing ride, this'll get the adrenaline flowing again.

The only equipment you need is a bit of courage and a real desire to fly. But you'd better not forget your camera, because once you're up in the air you will want to keep this picture of the Alentejo forever.

The Costa Vicentina Park

The Sudoeste Alentejano e Costa Vicentina Nature Reserve covers the southwest coast of Portugal, from Sines to Vila do Bispo. It is a zone of important natural and landscape value, covering almost 200 kilometres.

Within the expanse of green, it is almost impossible to distinguish the close on 750 species of flower, such as the tamarisk - a remnant of the pre-glacier forest - and the rowan tree. But it is always worth trying!

Travel along paths by foot or on bicycle, between agricultural fields, meadows or large expanses of countryside, where flowers and trees flourish beside the sea and which will take you as close to nature as possible.

It's not difficult to spot eagles soaring in the sky far away, or see otters swimming in the river, or some of the last examples of the Iberian lynx, the most threatened member of the cat family in the world. This cat knows that in this Park it is safe.

Alentejo dams

Pivotal for the development of irrigation, and for supplying towns with water, the dams are wonderful places to enjoy nature, observe the flora and fauna and indulge in water sports.

With the Alqueva dam, the Alentejo gained the largest artificial lake in Europe, but many other dams have become idyllic settings for peaceful holidays.

You can see wild duck and other water birds at the dams of Caia and Roxo. Or forget about the rest of the world at Maranhão, savouring the feeling of isolation induced by the pine and eucalyptus trees in the surrounding hills. You can bathe at the river beach of Odivelas or Tapada Grande, take a boat trip on the lake at Alvito, have a picnic at Pêgo do Altar or fish peacefully at the large lake of Santa Clara, whose banks alternate between wheatfields and dense thickets of trees. Or else you can just listen to the chirping of the birds amid the silence of the lake at Vale do Gaio.

You can go canoeing or angling, and the Alentejo lakes are excellent for water sports. Montargil is great for windsurfing or water-skiing.

Yield to the temptation of rural tourism and have a few days' rest, and appreciate the pleasures of the simple life in the country. Contemplate all the splendour of nature in the little paradises of the Alentejo lakes.

Alentejo sweets

And not just any sin, but gluttony, one of the seven deadly sins! But don't be afraid to treat yourself and let the Alentejo leads you astray.

The recipes of many sweets and cakes originally came from the convents. The variety is huge, and you can find them all over the Alentejo. The desserts are made from egg yolks and almonds, sweetened with sugar or honey, and perhaps sprinkled with cinnamon, but each area has its own specialities.

In Évora, discover the pão basto, pão de rala, toucinho do céu, encharcada (from the Convent of Santa Clara), morgados and queijadas; in Alcácer do Sal, try the pinhoada; and in Beja, be sure to taste the trouxas de ovos, the pastéis de Santa Clara, tosquiados and queijadas de requeijão. But there are also the bolo de amêndoa of Vidigueira, the tibornas and filhós enroladas of Vila Viçosa, the toucinho rançoso of Monforte, the pão de ló of Montemor, the boleimas of Castelo de Vide, the areias of Sines, the bolos de mel of Monforte, the mimosos of Crato, the cavacas of Avis...

If you are passing through Elvas or Vila Viçosa, don't miss the sericá or sericaia, an authentic Alentejo dessert in which eggs, milk, sugar and cinnamon are blended together in perfect harmony. If you're lucky, this will have been cooked in the traditional way - on a tin plate - and will be accompanied by one or two succulent and juicy Elvas plums.

Castro da Cola village

From Castro da Cola, in Ourique, come legends of apparitions of treasure and enchanted Moors, and the marks left by humans from time immemorial are scattered around the surrounding landscape.

In between discovering ancient settlements and funerary monuments, follow the archaeological circuit of Castro da Cola and travel from the Neolithic Age via the Bronze Age to the Middle Ages in the space of a few hours.

An itinerary including fifteen of the thirty known archaeological sites in the region has been designed so that you can visualise how our ancestors used to live. These sites include antas, Iron Age necropolises and settlements of the same period and a Chalcolithic village.

Agriculture, hunting and fishing are among the many activities that determined the permanent occupation of this fertile land, dominated by the River Mira.

In this unique area for discovering our history, take the chance to visit the chapel of Nossa Senhora da Cola. This receives many pilgrims, who go there every year in fulfilment of their vows.

Useful contacts

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