
Mértola

ABOUT



The nesting site of storks where the gracious white houses roll down to the Guadiana contains all the charms of a thriving and surviving museum town.

Formerly a Roman town before becoming the capital of the Arab kingdom and the original national home of the Order of Santiago, Mértola is replete with history. As the most northerly port on the Guadiana, the great thoroughfare of the south, it was the transport centre for the region's mineral riches. Mértola stands guard over a Roman, Sueve and Moor legacy that the Portuguese took on in 1268, and now preserved in a series of museum centres.

After a period of decline, the town was revitalised thanks to an archaeological project that not only set about developing the innovative concept of the open museum but also committed itself to regenerating its traditional arts.

Along the irregular course of its still medieval streets, these historical origins become clear. In the Municipal Council building, the Roman Myrtlis settlement is featured while in the Castle Keep, with its fabulous views over the river, there is the Pre-Islamic period. The Islamic Museum, a longstanding dream of the early archaeologists here, brings together one of the most important collections in the world. In the medieval church, visit a collection of religious art.

In the matrix church, the iron archways and mihrab date to the former mosque while the Renaissance entranceway and cylindrical towers belong to Christian times. The building is a reference point in the history of religious architecture and is a fine example of the adaptation of a place of worship to a different faith.

There are also the workshops to visit for a greater awareness of the traditional arts of this region. Get the best of Alentejan cuisine and all right down on the banks of the river.