
Towns and Villages

Alentejo

Alcácer do Sal

Alcácer do Sal

Graciously laid out over the right bank of the Sado river and rising up a gentle slope, Alcácer do Sal has been settled since the earliest of times. Archaeological remains have been found that date back to the Neolithic period not to mention evidence of Greek, Phoenician and other Mediterranean peoples having passed through.

Named by the Romans Salacia Urbs Imperatoria, the location took on major importance for the Empire due to its excellent location alongside the Sado river that was then an important thoroughfare. It was primarily used to transport local products (wheat, olive oil and wine) out to other parts of the Roman empire. At the time, Alcácer was one of the most important inland ports on the Western peninsula further establishing a reputation for manufacturing salt (hence the addition of Sal (salt) to its name) and salting and processing fish.

During the Moorish occupation (from the 8th century), Alcácer became capital of the Al-Kasser province. The walls of the old fort were reinforced with the Muslim city protected by two rings with the battlements overlooked by 30 towers making it one of the largest defensive forts on the Iberian peninsula.

Nevertheless, in 1217 it was conquered by king Afonso II, with the help of the Crusaders who joined the fight on their way from Syria and the Holy Land. It was then handed over to the Military Order of Santiago to establish its headquarters here.

While it may have lost its military and trading importance, Alcácer do Sal maintains intact its enviable beauty. From the castle, looking south, there is sharp bend in the river Sado, irrigating the smooth green plain that pre-empt the great Alentejan plain. Recently restored to take in a pousada (manor hotel), the castle is named after its Christian conqueror: Afonso II. From here, laid out below, around the four points of the compass, are magnificent panoramic views over the rivers and fields, ideal for reminiscing over the heavy and varied traffic that used to pass by below.

A wander around Alcácer do Sal reveals the most charming aspects of the city, with its alleys and stairways leading up to the castle. Take the opportunity to look in on some of the main points of interest such as the Church of Santa Maria do Castelo (Saint Mary of the Castle), the Chapel of Senhor dos Mártires (Lord of the Martyrs), the Church of Santo António (Saint Anthony), the Church of Santiago and the Municipal Museum of Archaeology.

In the vicinity, and all within a range of 30 km, do not miss out on the chance to see the villages of Santa Susana, Porto de Rei and Torrão or the Vale do Gaio dam. Should you prefer the coastline, there are some quality beaches to be had at Comporta, Torre, Carvalhal, Raposa or Galé.

Almeirim

Almeirim

Of very ancient origin, this region was already populated in prehistoric times, but it was in the 16th century that Almeirim underwent major development, at a time when the Portuguese Court chose it as a favourite summer resort. The journey was made in brigantines that went up the River Tagus. King Dom Manuel I, the King of Portugal at this time, ordered a Royal Palace to be built here, which was destroyed in the 1755 earthquake.

Farming is still the region`s main economic activity, with the cultivation of tomatoes, melons and huge vineyards that produce the renowned and very popular mature red wines.

Typical of Almeirim is the famous sopa da pedra (soup of the stone), the recipe for which, according to tradition, was invented by a cunning friar who visited the houses of the area with a stone, with which he would show how it was possible to make an excellent soup. When the water of the pan in which the stone was "cooking" had started boiling, he would ask for one more ingredient to give it flavour (which might be salt, sausage, beans, potatoes...) and in this way he tricked the local people.

Alpiarça

Alpiarça

Situated on the vast, alluvial plain of the Ribatejo, the region of Portugal where the traditions associated with horse-breeding and bullfighting are most deeply rooted, Alpiarça is a peaceful town which still bears the evidence of human occupation in prehistoric times, such as the burial sites of the Meijão and Cabeço da Bruxa (Hill of the Witch) on the outskirts of the town.

A place that must not be missed on a visit is the Casa-Museu dos Patudos (Patudos Museum-House), once the residence of José Relvas, a 19th-20th century Portuguese diplomat and politician, where one can admire the masterpieces of painting, and superb specimens of porcelain, bronze, furniture and tapestry that are contained in this house.

Alter do Chão

Alter do Chão

A calm and peaceful town, Alter do Chão dates back to the Roman period.

At that time, it was called Abelterium and the public baths at Ferragial d'El Rei and the bridge at Vila Formosa are some examples of Roman remains to be found in the region. From the fourteenth century onwards, the town developed around the castle, which was built by D. Pedro I in 1359 and continues to be a major feature of the town, since it stands in the main square - the Praça da República.

Currently, the municipality is investing heavily in its natural resources. Agriculture continues to be the main activity and, in terms of livestock, horse-breeding is of great importance. A great deal of investment is also being made in promoting hunting tourism.

The Coudelaria Real, the Royal Stud Farm, founded in 1748 by D. João V, has made a major contribution towards spreading the town's name. It was there that the first attempts were made to recover the Lusitanian breed, known as Alter Real, whose horses are much admired by the high school of equestrian enthusiasts. The Alter do Chão Professional Farming College is also situated here.

Alvito

Alvito

Situated at a high point in the midst of the Alentejo plains, and offering extensive views over the distant horizons, the graceful town of Alvito has grown around its palatial castle, where the Pousada de Alvito is now housed.

The white houses give Alvito the distinct and unmistakable appearance of an Alentejo town, many of them having doors framed by Manueline-style arches, revealing their seventeenth-century origin.

The settlement of this town dates back to the early days of the Portuguese monarchy. The town was granted its first charter by the king D. Dinis in 1327, later confirmed by D. Manuel in 1516.

The Alvito Castle, whose construction began in 1494, is undoubtedly one of the most curious buildings of its kind in Portugal. Visiting it helps to evoke memories of the town's historical past. The long Moorish presence in this region left its distinctive marks in the Mudejar architecture clearly visible in various monuments (which laymen can easily recognise through the small cupolas and white-painted conical pinnacles). The parish church of Nossa Senhora da Assunção, dating back to the early sixteenth century, has certain exterior decorative features that clearly identify it as an example of Mudejar architecture. A

modest Renaissance doorway leads to the interior, its walls covered in azulejo panels whose beautiful patterns are a harmonious blend of blue and yellow. In the upper choir, there is a large seventeenth-century altarpiece of carved and gilded wood. The same Mudejar influence is also to be noted in the small fortified chapel of São Sebastião, crowned by an array of chamfered merlons. Inside, painted on the vaulted Gothic ceiling are frescos depicting musical angels.

Attention is also drawn to the town hall with its picturesque clock tower, a typical feature of Alentejo architecture. Two almost adjoining churches, the Igreja da Misericórdia and the Igreja da Senhora das Candeias (the latter housing a museum of Sacred Art), are equally interesting buildings of some architectural merit, as is the small chapel of Santa Luzia on the outskirts of the town, which was originally a Muslim oratory.

Arraiolos

Arraiolos

Arraiolos is a pleasant Alentejo town, whose foundation dates back to the second century BC. The mediaeval castle was built at the orders of D. Dinis (1279-1325), although the town soon spread beyond its walls. An important part of the town's artistic heritage is the sixteenth-century Salvador church, with some extremely beautiful paintings.

The name of this town is well known internationally thanks to the famous Arraiolos carpets, which are produced here by the local craftsmen and women, having been referred to in documents as long ago as the sixteenth century. Some art historians have devoted themselves to studying and characterising this art, which has continued to grow in importance over the years. The types of pattern that are used can be divided into three distinct periods: the first period (in the eighteenth century) was based on compositions that betrayed the decorative influences of Persian carpets (these are considered to be amongst some of the finest examples); the second period (again in the eighteenth century) brought popularly inspired designs, such as figures or animals; and the third period (at the end of the eighteenth century and continuing into the nineteenth century) brought less dense and much more stylised patterns.

Avis

Avis

This picturesque Alentejo town, composed of narrow streets and white limewashed houses, holds within it the memory of the old and powerful Military Order of Avis. After the town had been captured from the Moors in 1211, the land was given by the king Dom Afonso II to Fernando Anes, the Master of the Friars of Évora, the future Order of Avis, with the aim of populating the region and building the castle, which took place between 1214 and 1223. As you walk around the town, you will find three of the castle's six original towers: Torre da Rainha (the Queen's Tower), Torre de Santo António (St. Anthony's Tower) and Torre de São Roque (St. Rock's Tower), as well as some sections of the mediaeval wall that have been incorporated into the town's houses. At the top of the granite hill, surrounded by the water of a nearby river, Avis thus came into being under the protection of the monastery of the order that gave the town its name.

You should enter the central square of Largo do Convento by passing through the gateway of Porta da Vila, next to Torre da Rainha, through which you will see framed a panoramic view of the plain stretching out into the distance before you.

In the town's historic centre, visit the church and outbuildings of the former convent of the Military Order of São Bento de Avis, which have recently been restored. The building next door, now used as the town council offices, was formerly part of the residence of the Masters of the Order. If you make your way to the left, you will find the original pillory in front of the steps leading to the municipal park, decorated with masks and gargoyles. On top of all this is an eagle with its wings outspread, which has become the town's symbol. Also worth a visit is the 15th-century parish church, lined on the inside with 17th-century polychrome azulejos.

Give yourself up to the charm that oozes from these mediaeval narrow streets and the white walls of the typical small Alentejo houses, and rest for a while in the small but delightful Jardim do Mestre de Avis, letting your gaze rest upon the town and the immense plain beneath you.

In the neighbouring area, make sure to visit the reservoir formed by the Maranhão dam, dating from the 1950s and designed to provide irrigation for the surrounding region, where you can also engage in a number of different sports. The viewing point by the dam allows you to enjoy a magnificent view over this artificial lake and over the surrounding pastureland and wheatfields.

Azambuja

Azambuja

Founded by the Romans and named Oliastrum, Azambuja was occupied by the Moors, who called it "Azzabuja", the origin of its present name. In the 12th century, King Dom Sancho I, aided by the Knights of Flanders, drove the Arabs out of this region and donated these lands to one of the Flemish nobles as a reward for the assistance given in the Reconquest.

Its 13th century Charter was confirmed by King Dom Manuel I in the 16th century, a period when Azambuja underwent major expansion. The Igreja Matriz (Parish Church) and the Igreja da Misericórdia (Church of Mercy) date back to this period. Later, in the 18th century, the building began of the Palace of Obras Novas, which was used as an inn and as a station for the steam trains from Lisbon to Constância.

Azambuja is nowadays a rapidly-expanding town, benefiting from an excellent location next to the motorway and the northern railway (which has a modern station here).

Beja

Beja

The site of modern Beja has been occupied since the beginning of modern history. However, it was the Roman empire that most contributed to its early development. It was here, in 1 bc that Emperor Julius Cesar signed a peace treaty with the Lusitanian tribes who had previously ruled these lands. Henceforth, the settlement was named Pax Julia becoming the regional legal and administrative capital.

Modern Beja retains features of those Roman times including its layout while the Évora and Mértola gateways are located on the site of gates in the original Roman walls. The level of economic development can be seen in the range and scale of archaeological pieces that have been excavated. Many can be seen in the Rainha D. Leonor Regional Museum. Right by Beja, there is the Pisões Roman Town with exhibits depicting just how a Roman family of that period would actually have lived.

In the 6th century, the Visigoths conquered the territory and would remain until the 8th century when they were defeated by the Moors as they invaded the South of the Iberian Peninsula. A visit to the Visigoth Exhibit in the Regional Museum, located in the Church of Santo Amaro (Saint Amaro), is highly recommended as a means to learn more about Visigoth culture in a city they made their religious centre.

During the 12th century and the Christian Reconquest, Beja experienced turbulent times. First conquered by Christian forces in 1162, it was then subject to various counterattacks by Moors with peace only definitively established under king Afonso III in 1253. He then rebuilt the city granting it a royal charter (1254)

and restoring its economic importance. At the end of the century, king Dinis ordered the building of the Castle, with its Torre de Menagem (donjon) becoming the city's defining landmark.

Beja enjoyed periods of prosperity throughout the 15th century when king Afonso V established the Dukedom of Beja granting the title to his brother, Prince Fernando. King João II bestowed the Dukedom on his cousin, future king Manuel I. Henceforth, the dukedom would always become the possession of the king's second son. This royal patronage took on a physical dimension in certain monuments. Among those deserving of a visit are the Convent of Nossa Senhora da Conceição (Our Lady of Conception), the Church of Misericórdia (Compassion), the Convent of São Francisco (Saint Francis), now a Pousada (Manor Hotel), the Church of Santiago, and the Church of the Pé da Cruz (Adoration of the Cross).

To help explore the city of Beja, the local Tourism Board has set up the "Sounds of Time", a guided tour of the city at your own pace through the use of headphones. The ideal time for a visit is March when the Ovibeja agricultural fair is held, a good pretext for knowing the region's culture, history and economy.

Benavente

Benavente

The village of Benavente originates from a group of foreign colonists who settled on the south bank of the Tagus in the 13th century, according to a plan drawn up by King Dom Sancho I for the settlement of these lands, which were practically deserted after the expulsion of the Moors.

This peaceful place is surrounded by the vast and extremely fertile Ribatejo alluvial plain, where horses and wild bulls are bred, essential for the bullfight, the most important form of entertainment in the region.

Near Benavente, the Tagus Estuary Nature Reserve maintains the original charm of the region in a preserved environment that is visited every year by migratory birds.

Borba

Borba

Borba was founded long ago when the Iberian Peninsula was occupied by Gallo-Celtic tribes, although the town's importance and development are, of course, closely linked to the Christian Reconquest and the defence of the Portuguese territory.

Borba was conquered by the Christians from the Moors in 1217, during the reign of D. Afonso II, who immediately ordered the building of the castle handing control of the region to the Order of São Bento de Avis. His successor, D. Dinis, who established the borders of Portugal with the signing of the Treaty of Alcanices in 1297, included Borba in the territory's line of defence, due to its location close to the border with Spain. In 1302, he awarded the town a charter, ordered the walls to be strengthened and established the region's administrative boundary. The perimeter of the municipality was then established in accordance with the limits of the neighbouring towns: Elvas, Estremoz and Vila Viçosa. In the 16th century, the charter was renewed by D. Manuel I.

The town was once again to play an important role in the defence of the territory during the 17th century, in the Wars for the Restoration of Independence waged by Portugal against Spain. The last great battle was fought in the immediate vicinity, at Montes Claros, in 1665. The Portuguese victory on this site was marked by a commemorative Monument and by the building of the Ermida de Nossa Senhora da Vitória.

If you look closely as you walk through the town, you will see a predominance of marble on the frames of the doors and windows, chimney pots, street signs and monuments. This fact is explained by the existence of several quarries in the region producing marble of the very highest quality. The Parish Church (15th century), the Igreja de São Bartolomeu (16th century), the Convento das Servas de Cristo (17-18th century) and the Fonte das Bicas (18th century) are all fine examples of how marble has been put to use in the town.

One of the best times for visiting Borba is during the Festa do Vinho e da Vinha (Wine Festival), in November. It is also an ideal occasion for tasting the wine produced in this region and discovering the local handicraft and cuisine.

Campo Maior

Campo Maior

Like so many other towns in the Alentejo, Campo Maior is a quiet and peaceful town in the south of Portugal, situated very close to the Spanish border. Tradition has it that its origin can be explained by the wilful determination of three peasant families who decided to join together to found a settlement where they would be able to afford each other mutual protection.

The town's name comes from the Roman period (when it was known as Campus Maior), although the later period of Muslim occupation is clearly visible in the whitewashed houses, with their borders and their window and door frames painted in either blue or ochre. Originally, the town belonged to the diocese of Badajoz and it was only much later, when the Peace Treaty of Alcanizes was signed between Spain and Portugal in 1297 that the town finally became Portuguese territory. Even after this, it continued to maintain a very close relationship with the neighbouring Spanish town of Badajoz.

The town's population are famous for their determined character. At that particular point in the year when everybody's wishes coincide, one of the most interesting popular festivals in the whole of Portugal is held here - the Festa das Flores (Flower Festival), also known as the Festa do Povo (Festival of the People). This is a time when the residents of each street join together to decorate their neighbourhood with paper flowers arranged in joyful and brightly-coloured compositions (normally this festival is held in the first week in September). Thousands of people come to see the town decorated in huge masses of coloured paper.

One of the most interesting historical features in Campo Maior is the Ossuary Chapel, built in 1766 and one of the only three chapels of its kind in Portugal.

Cartaxo

Cartaxo

About 10 kilometres from Santarém, Cartaxo is a village of very ancient origin, and at the time of the Roman occupation it was an important staging post on the road linking Lisbon to Santarém.

The region is still basically agricultural, and is known for its production of full-bodied red wine, popularly known as "carrascão" (rough wine). The whole tradition associated with its production can be seen in the "Museu Rural e do Vinho" (Rural and Wine Museum) and through the "Rotas do Vinho" (Wine Routes).

The grape harvest festivals in this area are very traditional, as is the "Feira dos Santos" (Fair of All Saints Day), which takes place on 1st November, with a tradition going back at least to the mid-17th century.

Castelo de Vide

Castelo de Vide

The castle, surrounded by the town's white houses, dominates the surrounding landscape and is undoubtedly the first of many surprises encountered by the visitor. When seen from this high point, the Alentejo landscape is finally revealed in all of its great splendour. Small villages lost in the midst of the open countryside disappear from sight. Close by, roughly 20 km from Castelo de Vide, the hilltop town of Marvão can be seen and, a little further beyond this, it is possible to see over the Spanish border and deep into the heart of Spain itself.

On the northern slope, between the castle and the town's fountain, are a series of narrower streets which mark out the boundaries of the historical area known as the Judiaria (Jewish Quarter). The Jewish quarter in Castelo de Vide is one of the most important examples of the Jewish presence in Portugal, dating back to the time of D. Dinis in the thirteenth century. Here is to be found one of the best preserved Jewish areas in Portugal, and for some years now it has been part of a detailed plan for the recovery and revitalisation of local buildings. This area has one of the largest and most interesting collections of architecture from the Gothic period.

The best way to appreciate the town's peculiar mediaeval charm is to stroll at random up and down these steep, narrow streets.

But Castelo de Vide also has many other monuments that are well worth visiting. We are talking for example of the Capela do Salvador do Mundo, the oldest chapel in the region (dating from the end of the thirteenth century), whose interior is covered with panels of blue and white azulejos, or the Capela de São Roque, built in the fifteenth century and then rebuilt in the eighteenth century. But these are just two of the town's 24 churches.

If you still have both the time and the energy, you should climb the hill on the outskirts of Castelo de Vide, where you will find the Capela de Nossa Senhora da Penha and from where you can enjoy a totally different view of the town.

Castelo de Vide has always been known for its rich natural resources, particularly its hot springs, whose waters are said to have great healing properties. Several fountains can be found here, with the Fonte da Vila and the Fonte da Mealhada being perhaps the best known. Just one word of warning, however. If you believe in popular sayings, you should perhaps bear in mind that it is believed that anybody drinking water from the Fonte da Mealhada will one day return to Castelo de Vide to get married.

Chamusca

Chamusca

A whitewashed town on the bank of the River Tagus, Chamusca lies in the Ribatejo alluvial plain, an extremely fertile region where farming and cattle-breeding are still the main occupations. This is evident in its traditional festivals, of which the most important are Ascension Week and the many bullfights that take place here.

As far as the cuisine is concerned, the specialities are eel stew and açorda de savel (purée of bread, herbs and garlic with shad), as well as the regional sweets like trouxas and lampreia, based on eggs and sugar, and of course the very popular regional wines.

Coruche

Coruche

Situated on the alluvial plain, in an area of the Ribatejo near the Alentejo, the town of Coruche is a typical peaceful village, whose low white houses of good quality popular architecture stretch along the plain alongside the River Sorraia.

Surrounded by fertile fields, this is a region dominated by farming and horse-breeding. The vast areas of cork oaks, from which the cork is extracted, of which Coruche is one of the main producers in the country, are prominent in the landscape.

Coruche also has various historical monuments, testimony of former times, such as the Corôa bridge (of Roman origin), the medieval aqueduct of Monte da Barca and various, mostly 17th century, churches.

In the environs, the weirs of the Agolada and Monte da Barca are very cool leisure areas, and hence very crowded in summer.

Elvas

Elvas

Anyone arriving in Elvas on the road from Estremoz immediately comes face to face with the Aqueduto da Amoreira, which has become the city's hallmark. This calm city is famous for the important defensive role that it has played throughout history.

Situated in a strategic geographical position, close to the border with Spain, it was built at different periods inside the city walls and gradually came to form a complex defensive system. The original fourteenth-century wall (built in the reign of D. Fernando, 1367-83) was later reinforced in the seventeenth century. The walled city, together with the Forte de Santa Luzia and the Forte da Graça, forms an impressive line of defence that proved extremely important during the War of Restoration fought against Spain in 1640.

Another interesting part of the city's defensive structure consists of some small fortifications built at the beginning of the nineteenth century, between 1810 and 1812, during the French invasions. These are: the Fortim de São Pedro, the Fortim de São Mamede, the Fortim da Piedade and the Fortim de São Francisco.

Present-day Elvas is a city that is investing in rural tourism, freshwater fishing and hunting tourism, in order to make the most of the region's natural resources. At the economic level, the region's main agricultural products continue to be cereals, olives and dry fruits (especially prunes).

In 2012, the garrison border town of Elvas and its fortifications were classified as World Heritage by UNESCO.

Estremoz

Estremoz

A white and noble city, Estremoz can be divided into two separate areas that testify to its different stages of development: the group of mediaeval houses near the castle and, outside the city walls, the modern town.

Estremoz has a rich cultural heritage, in which clearly the major feature is the castle with its mediaeval walls and the former thirteenth-century citadel, which now houses the Pousada de Portugal Rainha Santa Isabel.

Estremoz became particularly famous for the quarrying and trading of its high-quality white marble. In fact, the region makes a 90% contribution towards Portugal's being the world's second largest exporter of marble.

Equally famous are the region's red clays, which gave rise to the traditional figures that are found in all the city's craft shops.

Évora

Évora

Topped by an imposing cathedral, Évora is laid out over a gently sloping hill rising out of the huge Alentejo plain. It guards its historic centre with a vast outer wall and represents a valuable cultural legacy that UNESCO has classified World Heritage.

The city, with its narrow streets of Moorish origin contrasting with squares where the light floods in, holds two millennia of history. Conquered in 59 B.C. by the Romans, they named it "Liberaltas Julia". In this period, Évora gained great importance as can be witnessed from the remains of that time: the ruins of a fine temple dated towards the end of the second century, various parts of the wall and the gateway more recently called Dona Isabel in addition to the remains of thermal baths below what is now the Municipal Council building.

Little remains of the Visigoth period (5th - 8th centuries). There

then followed the Moorish period begun with the city's conquest by Tárique. This lasted through to Christian reconquest in the 12th century. Yeborah, as it became known, had already received an indelible Moorish influence, most clearly seen in the Mouraria neighbourhood.

After the Reconquest, in addition to between the inner and outer walls, urban development moved beyond the city's walls. The city was home to the court of various Portuguese kings of the first and second dynasties. During this period it was endowed with various palaces and monuments, particularly during the reigns of kings João II and Manuel (15th and 16th centuries).

Wander its streets and absorb the secret soul that a diverse range of cultural influences has laid down in this city of the World. There are also excellent restaurants and bars, esplanades, arts and handicraft stores and the youthful nature of those attending its university all adding up to a dynamic of the present with its roots very firmly in the past.

Fronteira

Fronteira

A pretty typically Alentejo village, Fronteira is situated on the left bank of the River Avis, north of Estremoz and southwest of Portalegre.

Traces of human occupation here date back more than 10,000 years, as is evidenced by the numerous megalithic monuments, among which around 30 cromlechs and dolmens of the Megalithic Necropolis of Herdade Grande and the engraved rocks of Herdade dos Pintos are particularly outstanding.

Its foundation is attributed to King Dinis, who was responsible for having the castle built, of which some ruins still remain today.

Of particular note is the site of the Battle of Atoleiros, very close to Fronteira, which was the first in a series of decisive battles for the maintenance of Portuguese independence during the dynastic crisis of 1383-1385, in which, in 1384, the Castilian forces were defeated by the army commanded by Nuno Álvares Pereira.

There are many monuments worthy of record in Fronteira, especially the Mother Church the Churches of Espírito Santo and Senhor dos Mártires, the Chapel of Nossa Senhora da Vila Velha, the Town Hall, the pillory and even the railway station, with its tile panels designed by Leopoldo Battistini depicting scenes of rural life.

Endowed with a lavish surrounding nature and lush vegetation, Fronteira offers beautiful landscapes and the possibility of various sports and leisure activities, including the Ribeira Grande Ecotourism Centre, which has a river beach, pools, footpaths and an astronomical observatory equipped with state-of-the-art technology.

Golegã

Golegã

Golegã is situated in a fertile region, irrigated by the two rivers that form its boundaries, the River Tagus and its tributary, the River Almonda. This geographical fact influenced the choice made to settle in this region and immediately benefited the city's economic development, based largely on agriculture.

After the Christian Reconquest of the Territory by the king D. Afonso Henriques, in the 12th century, this region was given to the Order of the Temple for farming purposes. The memory of these times can still be discovered in the history of the Quinta da Cardiga, currently an important local centre of agricultural production. Besides a tower crowned with battlements, which still remains from an old castle, we can also find other artistic examples of the estate's religious patronage in the building itself, in the chapel and cloisters. Again in the 12th century, an inn was built here at the wishes of a woman from Galicia, because this region was crossed by the road connecting Tomar to Santarém. The place then became known as Venda da Galega. The success of the enterprise and the region's favourable conditions for farming served as a stimulus for its later commercial and agricultural development and encouraged people to settle here permanently. The town soon changed its name to Póvoa da Galega and then to Vila da Galega. After a certain amount of linguistic corruption, this name was transformed into the city's current name of Golegã.

Before Golegã was officially raised to the status of a town by D. João III, in 1534, his predecessor as king, D. Manuel I, had also devoted much attention to encouraging its expansion. His interest and investment in the region were demonstrated by the work that he sponsored in the building of the Parish Church.

The town's large-scale involvement with agriculture led to the holding of regular fairs and markets, where farmers and cattle breeders came to exhibit their produce and animals. During the 18th century, special celebrations were held in honour of St. Martin, on 11 November, which were particularly popular amongst horse breeders because they presented them with an ideal opportunity for displaying their thoroughbred animals. At that time, horse-riding events and related competitions first began to be held. The fair itself gradually grew in importance and was the predecessor of the present-day National Horse Fair, which now enjoys great national importance as the country's major equestrian event.

On visiting the city, be sure to make the most of the opportunity to take a walk through the romantic garden around the former studio of Carlos Relvas, a famous 19th-century photographer, or else to visit the Martins Correia Museum, devoted to the work of a contemporary sculptor. These two men were both born in Golegã and have each contributed in some small way to its current recognition.

Close to Golegã is the Paúl do Boquilobo Nature Reserve, which stands at the junction of the two rivers, the Tagus and the Almonda.

Grândola

Grândola

The Grândola region has its own very special characteristics, combining the influences of the coast with those of the inland regions of southern Portugal. Farming continues to be a very important activity here, with rice being the most significant crop.

As far as the region's cultural heritage is concerned, the archaeological remains dating from the Roman period are the most important, particularly the fish-salting tanks found at Tróia, which date from the beginning of the first century AD.

The great interest of this region is the close proximity of several excellent beaches, which help to attract large numbers of visitors each year. Particularly popular amongst beach-goers is the Tróia Peninsula, and a number of other extensive sandy beaches, such as Pego, Comporta and Carvalhal.

In the recent history of Portugal, the name of Grândola has become associated with the song "Grândola Vila Morena", written and sung by José Afonso. On the eve of the 25 April Revolution, it was played on Rádio Renascença as a signal to the more distant army units that they could begin their advance on Lisbon. Sung at moments of great enthusiasm or danger, it can now be considered the anthem of the Revolution, a reminder of how freedom of expression had been freshly regained at that time.

Marvão

Marvão

Between Castelo de Vide and Portalegre, and only a few kilometres from Spain, stands the peaceful town of Marvão, on the highest crest of the Serra de São Mamede.

The hilltop village of Ammaia, as it was then known, owes its current name to the fact that it was used as a place of refuge by Ibn Marúan, a Moorish warrior, during the 9th century. The Arab domination of the area lasted for several centuries and ended when the military campaign of 1160/66 for the Reconquest of the territory resulted in yet another victory for the Christian forces led by D. Afonso Henriques, the first king of Portugal.

Geographically, Marvão is a point of natural strategic defence, marked by steep slopes to the north, south and west. Access on foot is only possible from the east, which was the direction in which the town gradually spread.

This fact did not go unnoticed by both conquerors and kings, who

always took care to strengthen both the castle and its walls. It played a fundamental role in major military conflicts, including the fight between the king D. Dinis and his brother D. Afonso (1299), the Dynastic Crisis of 1383-85, the Wars for the Restoration of Independence (1640-68), the War of Spanish Succession (1704-12) and the Peninsular Wars (1807-11). Marvão's importance was recognised when it was raised to the status of a town by D. Sancho II, in 1266. The charter was renewed in 1299, and a New Charter was granted by D. Manuel, in 1512, who left his mark on the town with the building of the Pillory and the placing of the royal coat of arms on the Town Hall.

Inside the walls are narrow streets lined with the beautiful popular houses that are typical of the Alentejo. Amidst them, it is easy to find Gothic arches, Manueline windows, wrought-iron balconies and other embellishments in the nooks and crannies of the buildings made from the local granite.

Besides the castle and the walls that no visitors to the town will ever forget, Marvão's architectural heritage includes the Igreja de Santa Maria, a church that has been transformed into the Municipal Museum, the Igreja de Santiago, the Renaissance Capela do Espírito Santo and the Convento de Nossa Senhora da Estrela, lying outside the walls.

One of the main reasons for visiting Marvão is the beautiful view over the surrounding region. To best appreciate it, we recommend the views from the top of the castle's high keep (Torre de Menagem) and from the Pousada de Santa Maria, luxurious hotel accommodation that has been formed through the adaptation of two of the town's houses and also offers you a place to rest and savour the delicious regional cuisine.

The Chestnut Festival, which is held in November, is an excellent occasion for visiting the town and getting to know more about its people and the local customs.

Mértola

Mértola

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.

Monsaraz

Monsaraz

This extremely beautiful mediaeval town has succeeded in preserving its own distinctive characteristics over the centuries. Walking through the streets of Monsaraz is like going back in time, for it is a truly unique place where one can find all the peace and tranquillity that have been forgotten by the modern era.

The most immediate visual impression in the town is that of the whitewash and schist of its houses and buildings. Every year, throughout the month of July, Monsaraz becomes an open-air museum, affording visitors the opportunity to get to know more about the customs and habits used in the production of Alentejo handicraft, appreciate the delights of the regional cuisine and enjoy the various cultural events that are held there, including music, theatre, dance and art exhibitions.

As far as the town's architectural heritage is concerned, the highlights are the mediaeval castle and keep, the former court building (built between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries) and the parish church of Nossa Senhora da Lagoa (dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries).

Moura

Moura

There are many interesting features for visitors to see in this bright and cheerful Alentejo town situated close to the River Guadiana. This is a region of undulating hills, planted with extensive olive-groves and producing some excellent wines. The town's conquest from the Moors by the brothers Pedro and Álvaro Rodrigues in 1166 is closely linked to the colourful legend of the Moorish maiden Salúquia, evoked by the old tower that can still be seen close to the Jardim Dr. Santiago.

It was D. Dinis (1279-1325) who rebuilt Moura's fortifications and gave the town its first charter in 1295. D. Manuel I (1495-1521) granted the town a new charter and ordered the Castle to be rebuilt under the supervision of the master builder Francisco de Arruda.

Any stroll through the town must surely include a visit to the Mouraria, one of the largest and best preserved Moorish quarters in the whole country, displaying all the typical characteristics of Arab residential areas. In Rua da Muralha Nova, on the edge of this quarter, visitors can see a section of the walls of the castle built in the late 17th century. Another essential item to be included in a tour of the town is the Arab Museum. This has been built around a well that dates from the time of the Moorish occupation and is in an excellent state of preservation. Above the building that was once the Town Hall but now houses the Municipal Library, there rises the impressive Torre da Taipa, also from the Arab period.

As you stroll through the streets of Moura, observe the thick chimneys following the vertical lines of the house walls, a typical feature of Alentejo architecture. You will also find some delightful churches: the parish church dedicated to São João Baptista and the churches of Carmo and São Francisco are worthy of greater attention.

Moura also contains a unique example of early 17th-century military architecture, known as the Edifício dos Quartéis. This row of buildings once included a group of south-facing and north-facing barracks. At one of the ends is the chapel of Senhor Jesus dos Quartéis.

Roughly 3 kilometres from the town, there is a picturesque military watchtower known as Atalaia Magra, standing atop an isolated hill.

Odemira

Odemira

This beautiful name is said to have originated from the Arab words wad (meaning river) and Emir, leading to the name Odemira in Portuguese.

Despite being conquered from the Moors by the first Portuguese king D. Afonso Henriques, the town was not granted a charter until 1257, in the reign of D. Afonso III, when it was populated on a definitive basis.

Odemira has not managed to preserve any really important remains from this historic past. Nothing is left, for example, of the castle that once stood at the town's highest point, not even the name of the street - Rua do Castelo - which used to lead there.

This has been rechristened Rua Sarmento de Beires, in homage to the Portuguese aviator born in the town and who, in 1924, took off from Vila Nova de Milfontes, in a small Bréguet aeroplane, heading for Macau, where he finally came to rest some 115 hours later, after having flown more than 16,000 kilometres!

In one of the town's gardens, there is a curious painted statue erected in memory of one of the region's other famous personalities: Damiano, the chemist who wrote a book in the fifteenth century teaching people how to play chess!

Odemira's charm lies in its location on top of a small hill, forming a kind of amphitheatre with its brilliant white houses facing towards the river Mira. The source of the river is in the Serra do Caldeirão, but from this point on it is navigable as far as its mouth at Vila Nova de Milfontes, over a stretch of roughly 30 kilometres, a most beautiful setting for sailing, rowing or canoeing.

The region has taken great care to preserve its handicrafts and various craftsmen can be found here making baskets, furniture, pottery and hand-woven fabrics.

The whole of this southern strip of the Portuguese coast, running from the town of Sines to Cape St Vincent in the Algarve, forms part of the Nature Park of Sudoeste Alentejano e Costa Vicentina, a region that contains rare species of flora and fauna and the only place in the world where the white swan can be found nesting on sea cliffs.

Portalegre

Portalegre

Located in the São Mamede Hills close to the border with Spain, Portalegre retained strategic importance for national defence throughout the Middle Ages. King Afonso III (1248-79) granted the settlement its first royal charter before handing it over to his bastard son Afonso Sanches. This move was far from popular with Dinis (1279-1325), his brother and heir to the throne. In 1299, Dinis, already king, returned Portalegre to the status of royal possession and ordered the rebuilding of the Castle.

Also in medieval times, the Franciscan order established a presence in Portalegre most notably in the Convents of São Francisco (St. Francis) and Santa Clara (Saint Claire).

In the early 16th century, after the founding of the Misericórdia de Portalegre (a nationwide charity institution), the Bishop of Guarda, Jorge de Melo ordered the building of the Convent Cisterciense de São Bernardo (Cistercians of St. Bernard). Already an important administrative and economic centre, it became a city under king João III who further established the Diocese of Portalegre and ordered the building of the Cathedral.

This decision was further consolidated by decisions to go ahead with the Episcopal Palace and the Diocese Seminary, now the Municipal Museum.

The 17th and 18th centuries left a strong Baroque character to the city with monuments such as the Church of São Lourenço (St Laurence) and the impressive Amarelo (Yellow), Falcões (Falcons) and Achioli palaces. These are praiseworthy examples, preserving the coats of arms of the families who built and richly decorated them in forged iron, a unique regional feature.

After the prohibition of religious orders in 1834, and with the beginning of the industrial revolution, the city turned to renewal and converted some of the former convents and palaces.

Examples of this are the Convent of Santo Agostinho (St. Augustine) becoming the headquarters of the National Republican Guard, the Convent of São Bernardo and the Jesuit São Sebastião (St. Sebastian) convent taken over by the Manufactura de Tapeçarias de Portalegre (Carpet Manufacturing) or the Castel-Branco Palace that recently became the Tapeçaria de Portalegre Guy Fino (Carpet) Museum detailing the contribution made by the textile industry to the city's development.

In Portalegre, a city easily manageable on foot, there is also the Portuguese poet José Régio Museum House. On the outskirts, attention goes to the views from the Church of Nossa Senhora da Penha (Our Lady of Suffering) and the Church of Bonfim, Located on the road heading to Marvão and Castelo de Vide, both are well worth a closer look.

Porto Covo

Porto Covo

Porto Covo continues to be the friendly fishing village full of small white houses that was rebuilt by the Marquês de Pombal shortly after the 1755 earthquake.

Some of the greatest attractions for visitors are the many beautiful beaches sheltered by sheer cliffs that are hidden here and there all the way along the coast. During the summer, many holidaymakers come to this area to rest and recover their strength, finding here the peace and tranquillity that has somehow become lost in time.

Roughly 250 metres off the coast near Porto Covo is the abandoned Ilha do Pessegueiro, an island that has long been a great source of inspiration for poets. Here are to be found some remains of its occupation by the Carthaginians during the third century BC, as well as clear evidence of the island's Roman occupation, particularly its fish-salting tanks. However, tradition and our fertile imagination tells us that it also acted for many centuries as a refuge for pirates.

Nowadays, it is possible to see the ruins of a fort that was built there in the seventeenth century and which, operating in tandem with an identical fortress in Porto Covo, defended this part of the coast. The more courageous visitors might like to venture across to the island, but they should be warned that there are no organised trips.

Redondo

Redondo

The Alentejo town of Redondo has become particularly important for the Portuguese economy as a result of its two main regional products: pottery and wine.

The local hand-made pottery is well known all over the country. It is possible to find here pots for everyday use or simply for decorative purposes, made of simple clay or decorated with floral motifs and popular country scenes. The clay in this region has the special property of being able to withstand great variations in temperature. This activity has been perpetuated in the town and is carried out at several pottery workshops.

Redondo is also well known for its wine production, being one of the regions in Portugal that enjoy the status of controlled designation of origin (Denominação de Origem Controlada -D.O.C.). Being produced in granite and schist soils, the wine has a balanced taste and a pleasant bouquet.

Reguengos de Monsaraz

Reguengos de Monsaraz

The history of Reguengos has frequently been confused over the years with that of Monsaraz, since the limits of the municipality were exactly the same until 1838, the year when the municipal seat was moved to Reguengos, a situation which contributed to its more rapid development.

The nineteenth-century parish church in the centre of the town is particularly interesting for the romantic spirit displayed during its construction in the neo-Gothic style and the interplay of different colours brought about by the combination of the stone and the whitewash of the walls.

The granite and schist soils and the local climate are particularly favourable to vine-growing and the region is well known for its production of high-quality wines with their own distinctive characteristics.

Rio Maior

Rio Maior

Nearby the Serra dos Candeeiros, Rio Maior was for centuries an important mining centre, since the local population's main occupation was extracting rock-salt from a mine in the Serra.

Farming is still the main occupation in the region, with large vineyards and orchards characterising and adorning the landscape.

In March, the town comes to life with the Feira das Tasquinhas (Fair of the Taverns), and this is the ideal opportunity to try the various regional flavours.

Salvaterra de Magos

Salvaterra de Magos

A peaceful town in the Ribatejo, Salvaterra de Magos used, centuries ago, to be one of the places favoured by the Court, so buildings, now in ruins, were constructed here, which enabled the Court to enjoy all the conveniences they were used to in Lisbon. In Salvaterra there was a palace with wonderful gardens, an opera house and a royal falconry, the only one in Portugal, showing that the region's chief attraction for these travelling noblemen were the grandiose hunting parties they organised here.

Surrounded by pine woods and pasture land, horses and bulls for use in the greatest spectacle in the region - the bullfight - are bred in its fertile fields. The bullfight is an essential ingredient in the Festa do Foral (of the Charter), dos Toiros (of the bulls) and the Fandango (a lively Portuguese and Spanish dance), which enlivens Salvaterra dos Magos in June.

The most outstanding features of the cuisine are the açorda de savel (purée of bread, herbs and garlic with shad), and the barretes (caps), whose name is inspired by one of the essential parts of the campino`s (Ribatejo cowboy's) costume.

Santarém

Santarém

The River Tagus and the fertile meadowland surrounding the plateau on which Santarém stands have been important factors in the settlement of the area since remote times. The Roman name for Santarém was Scalabis, and they were also responsible for its urban layout and for making it one of the most important cities in Lusitania. From the 8th century onwards, the Moorish domination strengthened the city's strategic and military role and its name was altered to Chanterein, the immediate predecessor of the present-day Santarém. In 1147, D. Afonso Henriques conquered the city with great expertise and definitively marked the advance of the Christian Reconquest by conquering Lisbon in the same year.

Santarém was to become one of the favourite cities of the Portuguese monarchs as early as the first dynasty. During the Middle Ages, the intense trading activity that took place here, coupled with the establishment of the nobility in the city, helped Santarém to reach its period of great social and economic development, as can be seen in its various monuments and buildings. During this period of great artistic and cultural opulence, Santarém was a royal residence and the capital of the kingdom of Portugal (1325-57), and, until the 15th century, it was frequently the meeting place of the early Portuguese parliament (known as the Cortes).

In 1491, Prince Afonso, the son of D. João II and the heir to the throne, died accidentally in the Ribeira de Santarém. After this episode, the royal family began to keep away from the city to some extent and there was a sharp decline in investment in this area, although from time to time it did figure in Portuguese History once again. Pedro Álvares Cabral, who discovered Brazil in 1500, lived in Santarém for many years.

One of the best ways of discovering Santarém is through its cultural and artistic heritage. You can also visit the city during the events that serve to highlight some of the region's best features. In June, there is the National Agricultural Fair, where agricultural produce and instruments are displayed and a cattle market is held. You also have the chance to see a bullfight if you're a fan of this particular sport.

October is the month when the National Gastronomy Festival is held, the main gastronomic fair in Portugal. These events are complemented by exhibitions of handicraft and folklore from all over the country. If possible, make sure to take the opportunity to watch the traditional dance of the Ribatejo region: the

Fandango. This involves at least two men simulating a fight and symbolises the special skills of the cowherds who work in the nearby meadows.

Santiago do Cacém

Santiago do Cacém

Santiago do Cacém is a peaceful town in the south of Portugal, whose origins date back to remote times. In the Roman period, it was an important town situated on the road linking Lisbon to the Algarve, a factor which greatly contributed to its development.

The definitive Christian conquest of the town took place in the thirteenth century in 1217, being achieved by the forces led by D. Afonso II, although there had been an earlier conquest in 1157 by the Knights Templar. It was around this time that the castle originally founded by the Moors was rebuilt. Other buildings of historical and architectural interest are the thirteenth-century parish church and the seventeenth-century chapel of São Pedro.

No visit to this region would be complete without a trip to the nearby ruins of Miróbriga, an important livestock farming centre and spa in Roman times. The archaeological site includes an important urban nucleus encompassing a hippodrome, several houses (some of which have mural paintings) and a clearly defined acropolis, where the forum and public baths are quite visible.

Serpa

Serpa

Located on higher ground just a few kilometres from the left bank of the Guadiana, the great river that crosses southern Portugal, there is the town of Serpa. The site is known to have been settled since Roman times, around 2,000 years ago.

With the Moorish occupation of the Iberian Peninsula in the 8th century, Serpa was converted to Islam and named Scheberim. Portuguese forces conquered the town in 1166, but it was retaken in 1191 in the major Almohade offensive that reconquered almost all territory to the south of the river Tagus, including Serpa. In 1232, the region returned to Portuguese rule under king Sancho II. During the reign of king Dinis, in 1295, at the time the Luso-Castile border was definitively established, Serpa was granted its first charter. Simultaneously, its imposing, defensive castle was rebuilt and enlarged. In 1707, during the Spanish War of Succession, Serpa was besieged for the final time by Spanish troops led by the Duke of Ossuna.

The first impression of any visitor to Serpa is defined by the grandiose castle walls set off by the Moura and Beja Gates, the only ones remaining of the five original gates. Backing onto the eastern wall, there is the huge count of Ficalho manor house. Also of note is the majestic aqueduct with its Italian arcade

extending to the very tip of the southern wall.

Within the town itself the layout of the streets, opening up onto large squares and simultaneously featuring traditional, erudite and religious architectural styles, bestows Serpa with a highly distinctive character enriching any stroll through its ancient streets.

The upper reaches of the town were where the primitive, medieval, Moorish and Christian settlements were concentrated. This is where you can find the church of St. Mary, what remains of the old castle prison tower, the Clock Tower and the Museum of Archaeology. In relation to clocks, there is also the Clock Museum, located in the former Mosteirinho convent, the only one of its kind on the Iberian Peninsula.

Any visit to Serpa must include the S. Gens Pousada. This historic hotel provides unbroken views over a plain broken only by the olive groves of Serpa.

Beyond the town walls, the 15th century St. Anthony Convent is well worth a visit as are the temples devoted to honouring popular saints: Our Lady of Guadalupe and, on the road to Beja, St. Sebastian. The latter is a 16th century construction which wonderfully blends Manueline and Moorish architectural styles, bearing witness to how the two cultures co-existed across the region.

About 10 kilometres to the south, and with the Guadiana river to its left, there is the Guadiana Natural Park. With its rich, natural heritage, the park contains some of the most beautiful landscapes to be found in southern Portugal.

Sines

Sines

An old fishing town, Sines has been gradually transformed by tourism and industry. Nowadays, it is a major port and oil-tanker terminal of great importance to the Portuguese economy.

Overlooking the bay are the ruins of a mediaeval castle, which was restored in the sixteenth century. Vasco da Gama (1468-1524) is said to have been born here, being the son of the governor general of Sines. One of the castle towers houses a small museum collection dedicated to this famous navigator.

Sines also has a very interesting Archaeological Museum, which contains all the archaeological remains found in the region that testify to its occupation in more remote times.

Tróia

Tróia

Situated on a peninsula on the south side of the River Sado, opposite the city of Setúbal, with which there is a regular ferry link, Tróia still has important Roman ruins, in particular a plant for salting fish (an important industrial complex at the time). These remains are evidence of the Roman settlement of Cetobriga, which was moved to the other side of the river and gave its name to the city of Setúbal.

Tróia is nowadays a tourist resort with excellent sandy beaches 18 kms long in all, plenty of hotel accommodation and a demanding golf course.

The International Film Festival in June brings world class cinema luminaries to the region.

Viana do Alentejo

Viana do Alentejo

Viana do Alentejo castle, built in the reign of D. Dinis, was later rebuilt at the orders of D. João II, who held a meeting of the cortes (parliament) here in 1482.

It is a walled enclosure with cylindrical towers in the corners. Built against the walls is the parish church, one of the most interesting Manueline churches in Portugal. It was designed by Diogo Arruda, the brother of Francisco de Arruda, who was the architect of the Tower of Belém. The royal emblem of D. Manuel can be seen above the doorway: the Cross of the Order of Christ, the shield filled with five smaller shields, and the armillary spheres.

In the church's majestic interior, the bosses in the vaulted ceilings again display the king's coat of arms. In the transept are two beautiful sixteenth-century stained glass windows depicting St Peter and St John the Baptist. The altar of the chapel that serves as the pantheon of Vasco Godinho (died 1525) is lined with beautiful sixteenth-century azulejos from Seville. Inside the castle walls is a Renaissance cross showing two quite moving figures, a Pietà and the Virgin Mary suckling her child.

Vidigueira

Vidigueira

The existence of a settlement here has only been documented since the thirteenth century. However, there is evidence of the human occupation of this region since prehistoric times. In addition to the megalithic heritage to be found here, attention is also drawn to the nearby Roman villas of São Cucufate and Monte da Cegonha.

Without any great strategic importance in either defensive or military terms, this town's development took place along essentially agricultural lines. This fact is easily proved by its wine production, since Vidigueira is also the name given to a Region of Controlled Origin. Its fame as a wine-producing centre already existed in the fifteenth century and, in the nineteenth century, it was the seventh most productive region.

The name of Vidigueira is also linked to the historical figure of Vasco da Gama, to whom D. Manuel I (1495-1521) gave the title of the Count of Vidigueira in 1519. The Casa da Vidigueira, founded at that time by Vasco da Gama, remained in the same family until the twentieth century. The town's clock tower strikes the hour with a bell carved with the Cross of the Order of Christ and the arms of the Gama family, together with the date: 1520.

Yet another memory of Vasco da Gama is evoked roughly 2 kilometres from Vidigueira. It was in the chancel of the convent church of Nossa Senhora das Relíquias (now greatly altered in its original design) that the mortal remains of the discoverer of the sea route to India were first laid to rest when they were brought back from Cochim in 1539, until his body was finally transferred to the Mosteiro dos Jerónimos in 1898.

Vila Nova de Milfontes

Vila Nova de Milfontes

This pleasant town situated at the mouth of the River Mira owes much of its recent development to the great increase in tourism in this region. The calm and beautiful beaches along the Costa Vicentina are much sought after, mainly because they still retain most of their natural features and provide excellent conditions for water sports.

There are several interesting buildings in the town's historical centre, particularly the Fortress (built between 1599 and 1602 to defend the town against constant attacks by pirates), the Parish Church and the Lighthouse of Cabo Sardão, built at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Vila Viçosa

Vila Viçosa

Situated in one of the most fertile regions in the south of Portugal, Vila Viçosa was often at the centre of some of the most important moments in the country's history.

The House of the Dukes of Bragança, the most powerful noble family after the Royal Family, was established here. The first Duke of Bragança was D. Afonso, the illegitimate son of D. João I (1385-1433). But the building of the Ducal Palace, which is now open to visitors, was actually the work of the fourth Duke of Bragança, D. Jaime, who made an important contribution to the town's development in the sixteenth century. During the holding of the Cortes or parliament in 1646, D. João IV, the eighth Duke of Bragança, crowned the image of Our Lady of the Conception, who was worshipped at the parish church, and declared her to be the patron saint of Portugal. After that time, the kings of Portugal never again wore the royal crown.

Vila Viçosa region is known for the marble, extracted and cut at more than 160 quarries, and internationally famous (especially the pink marble).

Zambujeira do Mar

Zambujeira do Mar

Affording an excellent view over the beach, Zambujeira do Mar is a small fishing village where it is still possible to enjoy a feeling of great peace and tranquillity.

The beautiful beaches are one of the main attractions for the many visitors that come here, particularly in the summer, because of the region's well preserved natural conditions and its excellent facilities for water sports.

Nature tourism and sport are amongst the most popular activities in this region, which is integrated into the Nature Park of the South-West Alentejo and the Costa Vicentina.

As far as its regional events are concerned, one of the great attractions in this area is the Festival of the South-West, which is held in August at the Herdade da Casa Branca. For three days, hundreds of young people flock to the area to listen to all kinds of musical performances.

Algarve

Albufeira

Albufeira

The progress has turned Albufeira into a city with tourism and leisure as its vocation but the streets in the hold Cerro da Vila (mediaeval area) still preserve the picturesque appeal of whitewashed houses and steeply narrow streets. In Travessa da Igreja Velha, an old moorish arch indicates the place where stood a primitive mosque, later transformed in the town's first church.

On the beach, the bright colours of the fishing boats contrast with the blue of the sea. Indifferent to the tourists sunbathing nearby, the fishermen carry on the task of mending and preparing the nets, as they have done for hundreds of years.

A walk by the sea will offer you a magnificent view over the city, the beaches and the cliffs which are part of the charm of Albufeira. The sidewalk leads to the pretty cave at Xorino, where according to the local tradition the Moors took refuge when the town was reconquered by the Christians in the 13th century.

Alcoutim

Alcoutim

Alcoutim's origins are presumably linked to the fact that it is situated at the place where the Guadiana becomes tidal. The vessels that traded metals and other wares were obliged to wait at this spot for hours, until the river conditions allowed them to sail down. Consequently there was a need for structures to support and defend them from which we can still find some vestiges.

Although it has lost the walls that for centuries surrounded it, and despite some modern constructions, Alcoutim's steep and narrow streets still maintain much of the calm atmosphere, typical of an algarvian hill town.

In a few minutes' walk we can discover simple houses, hundreds of years old and the tall white walls of the Misericórdia (Mercy) church. Don't miss the river side, where stand the humble hermitage of Santo António (St. Anthony) and the former residence of the Counts of Alcoutim. Afterwards, enjoy a moment's rest and a cold drink seated at the open air café by the riverside, and appreciate the returning of the fishing boats, the sailing yachts anchored in the little marina or the Spanish town on the other river bank.

Aljezur

Aljezur

The boundaries of Aljezur are delimited by the sea and the hills reflecting this double influence in its landscapes. While the coast is marked by high cliffs hiding sandy coves and dunes, the hinterland is a place of rolling hills covered with vegetation as far as the eye can see. Between them a wide area of fertile fields and valleys is still cultivated with traditional crops. To spend some time in Aljezur is an opportunity to recover peace and tranquility or to experience a silence broken only by the singing of birds or by the waves on the rocks.

Aljezur is a small coastal village with typical houses from the rural architecture of the Algarve, with colourful borders painted around windows and along the edges of whitewashed walls.

At the top of the hill, the castle ramparts, symbol of the struggle between Christians and Moors, remind us of its historical past. A cascade of houses tumbling down the hillside towards the river faces the plain where this centenary village found its expansion and future.

Almancil

Almancil

A small Algarvian village that is worth visiting in particular for the Capela de São Lourenço de Matos, a small chapel decorated on the inside with some of the finest examples of eighteenth-century azulejos in Portugal.

Around the chapel, the houses retain much of the character and charm of the old Algarve, and here a group of carefully preserved old buildings have been used to house an art gallery.

Almancil also offers visitors the chance to purchase some excellent traditional ceramic pieces.

Alte

Alte

Some consider Alte, which has existed since the period of the Roman occupation, to be the village most typical of the Algarve.

With their whitewashed houses, windows and façades with colourful borders, and decorated chimneys, the streets of the historical centre retain its original charm and tranquility.

The area around the church is a delightful snapshot of the real Algarve.

Armação de Pêra

Armação de Pêra

For many centuries, Armação de Pêra was essentially a small village, inhabited by fishermen, who had been drawn there by the great abundance of fish, particularly tuna and sardines. After salting, the fish was sold for consumption in the southern and central regions of Portugal.

In the eighteenth century, as a defence against frequent attacks by pirates, a prosperous fishing-boat owner sponsored the building of a small fortress on top of a hill overlooking the sea. The chapel inside this fortress, dedicated to Saint Anthony, also dates from this period.

Nowadays, fishermen can still be seen engaging in their typical activities on the beach at Armação de Pêra.

Visitors are also drawn to this area by the great expanses of white sand and warm water, so that the village has a lively, colourful and, above all, cosmopolitan look.

Castro Marim

Castro Marim

On the top of one hill stands a castle, on the other a star-shaped fort. Between them the houses of Castro Marim, with their white walls with brightly-painted borders, their flat roofs and their ornate chimneys sculpted into lace-like patterns. Linking the church, the castle and the fort, the streets of Castro Marim are lined with houses whose simplicity is typical of the architecture of the Algarve. White predominates, broken here and there by ochres and luminous blues.

Looking out from Castro Marim castle you have the sea on one side and on the other the rounded shape hills as far as one can see. These are the uplands challenging those who like bird-watching, to walk or to cycle, and who appreciate the charming of the natural world.

Faro

Faro

It was during the Roman period that this region developed and gained standing. It was then known as Civitas Ossobonensis, with its borders stretching to where modern Tavira lies, and included a number of towns with specific productive, rural and maritime functions.

This historical past come from interpreting archaeological finds made in the city which can now be seen in the Infante D. Henrique (Prince Henry the Navigator) Archaeological Museum, and the Milreu Ruins to be found in the suburbs of Faro.

In the 9th century, the town was renamed Saint Mary Ibn Harun

after the Arab family that governed the region. The name, would result in Faro. Throughout the period of Muslim rule, Christian religious practices were allowed, hence "Saint Mary" remained as part of the name. In addition to archaeological remains from that period, the Arab Gateway (part of the Arco da Vila (Town Arch)) recalls one of the entries into the walled centre, known as Vila-Adentro (Inner Town).

Vila-Adentro would be definitively returned to Christian rule in 1249, during the reign of Afonso III. The Sé Cathedral would be built on the site of the former Mosque and the walls, reinforced to highlight new rulers had taken over.

In the 16th century, Faro became an important trading centre on the Algarve, a role it kept up throughout centuries. It became a city in 1540 and the Bishopdom formerly located in Silves was relocated to Faro. Many of the city's religious monuments date from that period reflecting the economic wealth in the artistic grace of the Church of Misericórdia (Compassion) and the convents of Saint Francis, Nossa Senhora da Assunção (Our Lady of the Assumption - now the Infante D. Henrique Archaeological Museum), of Santiago Maior and of Saint Anthony of Capuchin.

In the 19th century, Faro was administratively reorganised, centralising regional powers and, along with its role in the regional economy, became one of the most important cities in the Algarve. The nobility and bourgeois contributed to this urban renovation building palace-like residences. the wealthier families built second homes on the outskirts. These include the impressive Palace of Estói.

In addition to the architectural heritage already described, a wander around Faro must also include a family visit to the Museum of Living Science, with its interesting range of activities especially for the younger visitors.

On the outskirts of the city, the sheer beauty of the Ria Formosa Natural Park ensures it is well worth a visit.

Lagoa

Lagoa

The date of Lagoa's foundation remains uncertain, although it is known that the first settlement grew around a lagoon (lagoa), from which its name derives. One or two interesting examples of Manueline architecture can still be found in the town, testifying to its development throughout the sixteenth century, even though its most clearly documented history begins essentially in the eighteenth century, when Lagoa was raised to the status of a town and the local municipality was formed. The town was badly destroyed in the earthquake of 1755, and its reconstruction is clearly visible in the many monuments and other buildings that date from this period.

At the end of the nineteenth century, fishing and its accompanying canning industry brought great prosperity to the

town. Nowadays, however, the most important role is played by tourism and this has led to an ever-increasing diversity of economic activities that have turned Lagoa and its surrounding region into an emblem of the modern Algarve.

The town developed around its parish church, which dates back originally to the sixteenth century, although it was completely rebuilt in the eighteenth century. The surrounding streets of typical white houses still exude the atmosphere of the past, and here and there it is possible to catch sight of the ornamental white chimneys with their intricately carved tracery that have become the hallmark of the Algarve. A walk around these narrow streets affords visitors a series of different views of the town, offering them the chance to appreciate the altars of the Passos (the Passion of Christ), which mark the ancient ceremonies held in Holy Week, and to discover Manueline doorways and windows that testify to the town's sixteenth-century past.

The name of Lagoa has become well known internationally because of the region's production of a much-appreciated white wine. It is one of Portugal's demarcated regions.

Lagos

Lagos

Lagos has a long history linking it to the sea. Its original name, Lacobriga, reflects the fact that the first inhabitants of this port, in roughly 2000 years BC, were of Celtic origin. After them came the Phoenicians, Greeks and Carthaginians, but it was the Romans that brought growth and prosperity to the town. The Moors built walls around Lagos in the 10th century and gave it the name of Zawaia. They remained here until the town was conquered by the Christians in 1249 and became part of the Portuguese territory.

The 15th century was the golden age for the town of Lagos, with its immediate involvement in the period of the Discoveries. Due to the port's location, directly across from Africa, it became the major point of departure and arrival for the ships that, year after year, set sail in discovery of that continent. As an important trading centre for a range of exotic products, including the ivory, gold and silver brought from Africa, Lagos saw a dramatic increase in the number of its houses, traders and monuments at that time.

New walls were built in the 16th century to keep pace with the city's expansion, and, from 1572 onwards, Lagos became the see of the bishopric and the official residence of the governors of the Algarve. These defences were further strengthened in the 17th century with the building of a series of forts at strategic points. The earthquake of 1755 and the seaquake which followed it destroyed a large part of the city, which only began to recover its prosperity from the 19th century onwards, with the introduction of the canned fish industry and the consequent increase in trade. Today, Lagos is a dynamic and active city,

which is justifiably proud of its past.

Loulé

Loulé

The date of the city's foundation is uncertain, although it most certainly dates back to the distant past. There are, however, clear traces of the area's occupation by the Romans, with the fishing and fish-salting centre of Cerro da Vila in Vilamoura being the best example, and it is known that when the Moors arrived in Loulé in 715, it was already an important town.

Loulé was reconquered by the Christians in 1249, in the reign of Dom Afonso III, having been awarded a charter in 1266. Remaining from the Middle Ages is the Castle, whose towers can still be seen amidst the houses, as well as some sections of its walls. In 1291, the king Dom Dinis set up a fair in Loulé, making it the region's main trading centre.

As Loulé was an inland town, it did not directly benefit from the wealth of the period of the Discoveries as much as several other places along the coast, although it is nonetheless possible to find here a number of Manueline decorative features in the city's houses and monuments, such as the Igreja de São Clemente or the Igreja da Misericórdia. The region's economic development resulted from its farming activity, especially from its dry fruit products (almonds and figs), and the handicraft articles that have continued to be produced over many centuries. Loulé was raised to the status of a city in 1988.

Nowadays, Loulé is the economic centre of Portugal's largest municipality, where the coastal towns live from tourism and the inland areas depend on trade and agriculture. On the city's outskirts are some of the best-known tourist areas in the Algarve, such as Vilamoura or Quarteira on the coast and Salir or Alte inland.

Very close to the city, nature lovers will be pleasantly surprised by the Protected Areas of Benémola and Rocha da Pena, which help to preserve a different Algarve, one that is filled with native vegetation and where it is possible to enjoy some organised walking tours.

Loulé's carnival celebrations are amongst the most famous in Portugal.

Monchique

Monchique

The houses of Monchique display many of the traditional features of the architecture in the Algarve - white walls, carved stonework, stripes of color around doors and windows - but with their "saia" chimneys (literally "skirt") quite different from those found on this part of the country.

The narrow streets that wind up the steep hillside, revealing fresh and green views at every turn, lend the town a certain exoticism to which camellias, hydrangeas and fruit trees add a fragrant suggestion of gardens and orchards. An opportunity to discover an aspect of the Algarve unlike any other.

Monchique is best visited on foot. A walk through the steep streets of the town centre is rewarded with the views of magnificent hills, glimpsed between houses, and moments of calm in unsuspected corners. At the end, the memory of a hill town with a history and character all its own and a strong desire to return will remain.

Monte Gordo

Monte Gordo

For centuries fishermen's shacks were the only sign of human life on the broad sands surrounded by pine woods.

The beauty of the beach and the warm, safe waters attracted the first foreign tourists in the 60s, making Monte Gordo something of a pioneer in the development of tourism in the Algarve.

Today it is an international tourist destination and counts a casino among its more urbane attractions.

Olhão

Olhão

To discover the hidden charm of Olhão you have to go up to the top of the main church tower, the higher point. Only then you can see the hundreds of roof terraces - the "açoteias" -, typical of the Algarve, which create a unique urban panorama, as if a multitude of cubes had been scattered across a flat surface, their regular shapes repeating each other in three dimensions.

Back at the ground level it is worth wandering through the fishermen's quarter, which stands between the quay on the Ria Formosa and the earth of the city defined by the main church. The houses here are small and white, their walls topped with bands of geometric decoration that are in effect the verandas of the roof terraces. The streets that border the Avenida da República, itself a symbol of the urban development that took place at the turn of the century, reflect a city of industrialists and ship-owners who grew rich from the fish processing business and

trade, displaying their wealth by decorating their homes with verandas, tiles, carved stonework and wrought iron.

Any tour of Olhão should end among the refreshing gardens and open air cafés to be found along the long quayside. But first, take a few minutes and plunge into the colourful atmosphere of the market, where the stands sell fish straight from the sea, fresh vegetables and sweet fruit from the farms of the interior.

If you still have time, there are regular boat connections with the islands of Armona and Culatra which provide an opportunity to take a trip along the Ria and visit its attractive beaches.

Portimão

Portimão

The white contour of a church on a hilltop, the narrow streets of the old fishermen and tradesmen quarter, the presence of the sea and the immense beach known by the name of Praia da Rocha are some of the aspects that identify the character of this centenary city.

All that is left of medieval Portimão are a few stretches of the city walls now hidden by houses. The old town is dominated by the architecture of the late 19th and 20th centuries: houses on two storeys, with wrought iron balconies and ornate stonework around windows and doors, decorated with balustrades of stone and ceramics and walls covered with tiles.

To savour the spirit of Portimão, there is nothing better than to sit in the shade of the trees in the gardens Manuel Bívar and forget about time, to watch the fishing boats and to walk through streets and squares that exude the ambience of an active, hard-working town which has succeeded in keeping pace with progress.

Quarteira

Quarteira

Once a simple fishing village, Quarteira has become in the last decades in a cosmopolitan tourist centre, main reason to receive hundreds of visitors every year.

Its past identity can be glimpsed in a 17th century church and in a nucleus of houses decorated with coloured borders, usual in the architecture of the Algarve.

Sagres

Sagres

Dating back from the Roman conquest times, it was in the 15th century that Sagres achieved great importance.

The frequent presence of Prince Henry the Navigator during the first days of Atlantic navigation and the Discovery of the African coast as far as the Gulf of Guinea has forever linked this picturesque fishing port with the Discoveries.

On Ponta de Sagres, a giant finger of rock pointing to the ocean, stand the buildings which evoke the past of a place that is part of the history of the world, remembering the Vila and the defensive fortress founded by Henry the Navigator.

Nearby, at one of the most westerly points of the European continent (after Cabo da Roca), is the Cape of S. Vicente (a sacred place for the Romans that named it Promontorium Sacrum) opening on to a vast horizon of sea and sky.

São Brás de Alportel

São Brás de Alportel

This village still shows a tranquil and unhurried lifestyle by the friendly local population. The streets of white houses whose ranks are broken only by the lofty outline of the church and its bell tower, the ring of hills around the town that look out on the sea and the mountains are the simple charms of São Brás de Alportel, a typical Algarve town.

The low and white houses, typical of popular architecture, stand alongside more substantial buildings, with their façades decorated with tiles, ornate stonework and cast iron verandas, whose opulence goes back to São Brás de Alportel's prosperity in the years when the cork industry was booming.

The high and low points of the town's changing fortunes are thus written in the stones of its streets and squares, while such details as the baroque mortar decoration of the Passo da Paixão (Stations of the Cross) near the Episcopal Palace and the pretty flower pots in the windows add colour and interest to their story.

Silves

Silves

Located on a hill in the Serra de Monchique chain, Silves owes its foundation and development to the Arade river. This was long an important means of communication attracting settlers as far back as the Iron Age, 3,000 years before Christ.

The Arade also proved the point of entry for the Romans that came to exploit the copper reserves and trade other products such as olive oil, wine, dried fruits and salt.

In the 5th century, the Visigoths arrived and would stay until the 8th century when the southern regions of Portugal fell under Muslim domination. It was then that Silves became truly prosperous. It became an important city, a regional capital in one of the kingdoms of Taifa and a commercial and cultural centre.

It became a refuge for poets, scientists and other educated people who endowed it with the statue of "birthplace of Arabic-Andalusian poetry". The Castle and the Almohade Storage Well bare witness to the city's level of development at that time. The area around the Well is now part of the Silves Museum of Archaeology.

After a weak and ultimately doomed attempt to return Silves to Christian control by Sancho I, in 1189, Silves was definitively retaken by Afonso III, in 1242. With Silves being attributed a bishopdom, a cathedral was built on the site of the mosque.

Through to the beginning of the 16th century, it kept up its economic status. In the era of the Portuguese voyages of discovery, many inhabitants would serve for Prince Henry and help in the defence of Portuguese held cities in north Africa.

There was also the role played by Diogo de Silves who participated in the discovery of the Azores. This was the period in which the Matrix Church was built. In the reign of king Manuel I there is a New Royal Charter in 1504 and the Cross of Portugal was awarded.

The silting up of the river, rendering it non-navigable, and the bishopdom being transferred to Faro in the middle of the 16th century, was the beginning of a long, slow decline. Much destroyed in the 1755 earthquake would only be rebuilt during the industrial revolution of the 19th century with its development of the cork and dry fruit businesses. From that period date a series of houses belonging to the bourgeois who made their fortunes.

Tavira

Tavira

In the Algarve, archaeological remains have been discovered tracing settlement back over 6,000 years. However, it was under the Roman empire that the southern coastline was settled in a more organised fashion. The city of Balsa was established in the 1st century ad on the route between Ossonoba (Faro) and Baesuris (Castro Marim). Its main activities were then fishing and fish salting. Benefiting from a favourable geographical location, between the Algarvian hills and the course of the Gilão river, it was also chosen by the Moors for settlement between the 8th and 9th centuries. It was then named "Tabira", root of the current Tavira. However, there is no conclusive evidence linking Balsa and Tabira to exactly the same site...

The Christian Reconquest took Tavira in 1242 under Paio Peres Correia, a knight of Sant'Iago. Two years later, king Sancho II gave these lands to the Order for their reorganisation and settlement. Also in the 13th century, the Castle and walls were strengthened and the Church of Santa Maria (Saint Mary) was built.

A period of great expansion began in the 15th century after the Conquest of Ceuta in 1415 that was itself to result in the Voyages of Discovery. It became an important fishing port and provided support to the armies and armadas that defended the Portuguese coast and the coastal cities that had been conquered to the north of Africa. It further exported salted fish, dried fruits, wine and other products. In 1489, king João II resided here for several months and in 1520 it became a city under Manuel I. This royal patronage was reflected in the architectural heritage and in the city's expansion.

Along the banks of the river and close to the main thoroughfares, more humble families took up residence while the nobility opted for the centre so as to be close to the political and administrative powers residing in the Castle. The Church of Misericórdia (Compassion) remains as witness to those times.

In the 17th century, Tavira remained a major commercial centre on the Algarve. From this period dates much of the cultural heritage further revealing a profound religious influence. Hence, there are today 21 churches in the city including the highlights of the Church of São Paulo (Saint Paul), the Church of Santo António (Saint Anthony), the Church of Carmo (Carmel) and the Church of São Francisco (Saint Francis).

In the course of the 18th century, Tavira lost economic prominence before recovering in the following century mostly due to tuna fishing and preserving.

In Tavira, attention also goes to the traditional residences with their latticed entranceways and "treasury" roofs. The latticed doors are made of strips of wood and allow for ventilation even when the windows and the doors themselves are closed. The

"treasury" roofs are four-directional small roofs with each representing one room in the house. "Treasury" is the name given to the crossing of the beams on which the beams rest.

In the surroundings, don't miss a visit to the small village of Cacela Velha or to the small island of Tavira, a white sand beach, 11 Km long, which is integrated in the Ria Formosa Natural Park. The connections between Tavira and the island are assured by a regular boat line (departing from the city market or from a place called "Quatro Águas") and by taxi-boats.

Vila Real de Santo António

Vila Real de Santo António

In the sixteenth century, there existed a town known as Vila de Santo António de Arenilha, which was probably much closer to the sea. By the eighteenth century, this town had disappeared, having been engulfed by the sea and sand. It was, however, necessary to control the influx of goods up the river Guadiana, as well as to place the fishing business of Monte Gordo under royal supervision and stand firm against the Spanish, with whom Portugal had been at war in 1762/63.

The building of the town of Vila Real de Santo António, which brought evident economic and political advantages, was therefore more than just a mere royal whim.

The successful experiment of the reconstruction of Lisbon after the earthquake in 1755 was therefore repeated in Vila Real de Santo António. First of all, there was the careful grid-like planning of the urban structure, which was facilitated by the flat terrain on which the town was built. Next there was the adherence to rigid architectural units. And finally, there was the use made of pre-fabricated standard building blocks, such as the square-hewn stones that were brought from Lisbon, by boat, cut and shaped for immediate laying.

To appreciate the town planning that was followed in Vila Real de Santo António, you have to walk around the city's streets. Begin in Praça Marquês de Pombal, in the heart of the town, with its black and white cobblestones radiating from the central obelisk built in 1776. This square contains three of the major urban features commonly found in the eighteenth century: the church, the Town Hall and the old guardhouse. Afterwards, you should walk a few blocks and see the privately commissioned buildings, which nonetheless continue to adhere to an obvious architectural formula.

We suggest that you end your tour at the former Customs House, next to the gardens planted along the bank of the River Guadiana.

Vila do Bispo

Vila do Bispo

The windmills which recorded the fact that for centuries Vila do Bispo was the breadbasket of the Algarve have disappeared. What remains, however, is the charm of whitewashed houses scattered down the slopes of a hill crowned by the looming bulk of a church tower.

The narrow streets which surround the church contain many houses typical of the old algarve, with whitewashed walls, bands of bright colour, carved stonework around doors and windows and coolshade even in the dog days.

Vilamoura

Vilamoura

Vilamoura is nowadays one of the biggest centres in Europe.

Golf, tennis, horse-riding, equipment to go shooting and fishing, a casino and an aerodrome are complemented by a tourist complex where the big star is the marina.

Not only for its size - the biggest in the country, with 1300 moorings - and its exceptional infrastructures, but also for its visual beauty and its waterfront, where bars, hotels, restaurants and a yacht club comprise the attractions for those who pass by. The marina is the fashionable hangout for the tourist complex.

Azores

Angra do Heroísmo

Angra do Heroísmo

Associated to the Discoveries during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Angra do Heroísmo is the example of the creation of a city closely linked to its maritime function and was an obligatory port of call of the fleets of Africa and the Indies. In 1983, UNESCO classified it as a World Heritage Site.

Stroll through the grid of streets reflecting the new world of brought by the Renaissance and that the Discoveries set in Angra, a city bathed by the Atlantic Ocean born for trade and navigation. Visit the dark walls of a powerful fortress designed to protect and dominate. Get to know the history told by its monuments, by the art treasures that it has cherished for centuries. These are three good reasons that will make turn your visit to Angra do Heroísmo into a unique experience and a wonderful journey through time.

In the city, be sure to visit the Igreja do Santíssimo Salvador da Sé, or Sé de Angra (Cathedral), the Igreja da Misericórdia (Church), the Convent and Church of São Francisco, the Convent and Church of São Gonçalo, the Town Hall, the Palácio dos Capitães Gerais (Palace), the Monument of Remembrance, the Castle of São Sebastião, the Castle of São João Baptista, the

Angra Museum and Monte Brasil.

Horta

Horta

The city of Horta has plenty to see, scenically built between two bays, divided by the isthmus that leads us to the Monte da Guia.

Its streets tell us the story of a city founded five centuries ago, which saw the arrival of the caravels that brought the first inhabitants with their implements, livestock and seeds. It experienced a period of prosperity due to its strategic position as a safe haven between Europe and the American continent and more recently was the axis of communications between continents. Today it is a major point of reference of international yachting.

Visit the city of Horta, the monuments and its points of interest such as the Igreja Matriz de São Salvador (Main Church), the Church and former Convent of San Francisco, the Church of Nossa Senhora das Angústias, the Horta Museum, the Scrimshaw Museum, the Sea Centre, the Viewpoint of Monta da Guia e da Espalamaca, the Horta Marina and Peter Café Sport, where you just can't go by without trying the famous gin and tonic.

Ponta Delgada

Ponta Delgada

Ponta Delgada began as a simple fishing village whose fishermen were once attracted by its safe coves, but soon began to play the role of main port of the São Miguel Island.

The city grew and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the convents, churches and manor houses flourished and still today they integrate the historic centre.

Ponta Delgada is today a cosmopolitan city, outward looking, with a lively economic and cultural life. The extensive coastline road, which borders the harbour and the sea outlining the city, is the expression of its dynamism, adapting to new times and also the access road to the city.

Boasting a history of over five centuries and precious testimonies of the past, Ponta Delgada is a multifaceted city where tradition lives hand-in-hand with the present and cosmopolitanism with wholesome tranquility of the Azorean life.

When in Ponta Delgada be sure to visit the Igreja de São Sebastião, the Igreja de São Pedro and Igreja São José, the Convent and Chapel of Nossa Senhora da Esperança, the Tesouro do Senhor Santo Cristo dos Milagres, the Carlos Machado Museum, the City Gates and the Jose do Canto Garden.

Centro de Portugal

Abrantes

Abrantes

Situated on a hillside next to the River Tagus, Abrantes has always been an important place in terms of military strategy, since from its highest point one can enjoy an immense panoramic view, including most of the River Tagus, and extending to the Lower Beira, the Ribatejo and the Alentejo.

It was right here that the Moors built a castle, which was captured by Dom Afonso Henriques, the first King of Portugal, and donated to the Religious and Military Order of Santiago de Espada (St James of the Sword) for defence and settlement.

In the 19th century, this region was invaded by Napoleon`s troops, who looted it and were billeted here, remaining until they were driven out four years later in a battle that combined the heroic participation of the population with the assistance of British troops.

Abrantes is nowadays a peaceful town, where it is worth taking a walk round the whitewashed houses, which have been considered to have the richest floral decoration in the whole country. Don't miss the chance to try the famous regional confectionery based on eggs and sugar - the Tigeladas (egg, flour and sugar pancakes cooked in the oven) and the Palha de Abrantes.

Alcanena

Alcanena

At the foot of the Aire and Candeeiros Mountains, an area classified as a Natural Park, the village of Alcanena underwent considerable development in the 19th century, when several factories involved in the tanning industry were established. It was a time of prosperity that brought great wealth to this region, and many of the fine buildings in Alcanena date from the late 19th to early 20th century.

In the environs, in an extremely fresh and green area, are the "Olhos d`Água" (water springs) - the sources of the River Alviela, one of the points that capture the water for Lisbon`s domestic water supply.

Alcobaça

Alcobaça

Alcobaça lies in the valleys of the Rivers Alcoa and Baça, which according to some authors is the origin of its name. It has also been suggested that it was the Arabic name of the place which was split to name the two rivers.

Alcobaça owes its fame and development to the Monastery or Royal Abbey of Santa Maria, founded by the Order of Cistercians in 1153. Building began in 1178 on land donated by Dom Afonso Henriques, the first King of Portugal, to Friar Bernardo of Claraval, founder of the Order of Cistercians, in fulfilment of a vow made after the Christian reconquest of Santarém, held by the Moors until 1147.

The Monastery owned a vast area of land, also known as "sanctuaries" of Alcobaça, where the Cistercian Order put order into the settlement by organising villages and estates. It also boosted agriculture by introducing new techniques and agricultural products that turned out to be lasting characteristics of this region, which is still today one of Portugal's main fruit producers.

With its building modelled on the Abbey of Claraval, the headquarters of the Cistercian Order in France, the Monastery of Alcobaça is a very fine monument and is classified by UNESCO as a World Heritage site.

The cuisine and confectionery have been strongly influenced by the local Cistercian monasteries and convents, with the nuns' Monastery of Cos and the Capuchin Convent in Évora de Alcobaça along with the Alcobaça Monastery itself. The most famous sweet is "Pão de ló" cake, which took its name from the place where it is made - Alfeizerão.

It is important to mention the excellent quality crystal, and the earthenware and porcelain.

Alenquer

Alenquer

Of Moorish origin, the village of Alenquer was recaptured for the Christians by Dom Afonso Henriques, the first King of Portugal, in the 12th century, in his offensive towards Lisbon, which is only 35 kilometres from Alenquer.

Alenquer is popularly known as the vila-presépio ("crib town"), due to the harmonious layout of its houses on a slope, giving it the shape of an amphitheatre.

Several important figures in the history of Portugal were born in Alenquer, such as Pêro de Alenquer, a 16th century Portuguese navigator who rounded the Cape of Storms (Cape of Good Hope), and Damião de Góis, a great humanist and important figure of the Renaissance in Portugal (17th century).

The main event in this place is the Fair of the Ascension, held annually in May or June (depending on the date of that moveable feast), which attracts many visitors to the region.

Almeida

Almeida

Classified as a historical village, Almeida is a fortified town that, when seen from the air, has all the appearance of a 12-pointed star, this being the number of bastions and ravelins enclosing a space with a perimeter of 2500 metres. This remarkable fortress was built in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, around a mediaeval castle, in what amounted to a very important place for the strategic defence of the region, since it was situated on a plateau roughly 12 km from the border with Spain, as defined by the Treaty of Alcanices in 1297, which was the date when Almeida first became Portuguese.

Almeida is one of the finest examples of a ramparted fortification still standing in Portugal, of which the most typical features were the ashlar masonry walls surrounded by a vast moat that made it difficult for invaders to enter, the strategically placed bastions that made it possible to keep a close watch over the whole of the surrounding territory, the three arched gateways in the form of a tunnel, the false doors designed to fool invaders, and the underground casemates equipped with everything that was necessary for survival in the event of war and which could be used as a bunker to provide shelter for the whole of the local population.

Over the centuries, Almeida was the site of a number of hard-fought struggles, particularly during the seventeenth-century War of Restoration (when the Spanish were definitively removed from the Portuguese throne) and the French invasions in the nineteenth century, when the town was laid siege to by Napoleon's troops for a long period, its castle and part of its walls being seriously damaged by the explosion of an enormous quantity of gunpowder kept in the ammunition stores, which led to its eventual surrender.

Inside the fortress walls, it is worth taking some time to admire the harmoniously built houses, as well as the numerous religious and civil buildings scattered around the narrow streets and helping to preserve the atmosphere of earlier times.

Arruda dos Vinhos

Arruda dos Vinhos

Founded in the 12th century by Dom Afonso Henriques, the first King of Portugal, the district of Arruda dos Vinhos was donated by this King to the Religious and Military Order of Santiago de Espada for defence and settlement.

Traditionally an agricultural region, Arruda dos Vinhos is a peaceful town, where it is worth visiting the Igreja Matriz (Parish Church) and the Chapel of Nossa Senhora do Monte.

Aveiro

Aveiro

The capital of the Ria, a vast lagoon where the freshwater of the River Vouga joins with the sea, Aveiro is intersected by canals, genuine streets of water, along which can be seen gliding the brightly coloured boats known as barcos moliceiros. Originally founded in the time of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, Aveiro is now one of the most interesting cities on the Portuguese coast.

Due to the large numbers of web-footed birds that once inhabited this lagoon area, the city's first name was Aviarium.

D. João I (r. 1383-1433) gave Aveiro to his son, Prince Pedro, who ordered the city's first walls to be built, although these have since disappeared. Later, D. João II (r. 1481-1495), gave the city to his sister, Princess Joana, a lay sister at the Convento de Jesus, which now houses the Museu de Aveiro.

In the 16th century, the development of the salt industry, agriculture and fishing and the first cod-fishing expeditions to the distant Newfoundland in 1501 brought Aveiro a period of great prosperity, which led to its being awarded a charter by D. Manuel I in 1515.

However, in the winter of 1575, heavy storms destroyed the deep channel that had once linked the Ria to the sea, this was where the great ocean-going vessels would dock in Aveiro thereby destroying the maritime trade, fishing and salting businesses.

Barra Nova was built in the 19th century. Being opened to the ocean in 1808, it gave rise to the formation of a wide channel measuring roughly 264 metres across and about 4 to 6 metres deep. This channel opened the Ria to the sea and restored the source of the region's life and its very survival.

The Ria is linked to Aveiro via three canals: the Canal das Pirâmides (marked at its entrance by two stone pyramids), which extends into the Canal Central, the Canal de São Roque, which marks the limits of the city to the north-west and separates it from the salt-pans; and the Canal dos Santos Mártires (or the Canal do Paraíso) which leads to the south-west.

Using the Canal Central as the city's main axis, we suggest two tours of Aveiro:

- On the Left Bank, begin by admiring the graceful Art Nouveau buildings, which are beautifully reflected in the canal, stroll through the Mercado do Peixe (Fish Market), wander around the Beira Mar district and along the canal banks and savour the gentle sea breeze.
- On the Right Bank, visit the city museum housed in the Convento de Jesus. Monuments and churches, as well as the hustle and bustle of city life taking place under the diffuse light of the Ria, all add to the charm of this coastal city.

Evidently, all visitors will also want to discover more about the Ria de Aveiro. The two suggested itineraries will introduce you to the labyrinth of canals, the white sand dunes by the sea and the vast expanses of salt-marshes with their pyramids of white salt. If you enjoy nature trekking, the Reserva Natural das Dunas de São Jacinto is truly irresistible.

Batalha

Batalha

The town of Batalha developed alongside the Monastery of Santa Maria de Vitória, constructed in 1386 to keep a vow by Portuguese King Dom João I to the Virgin Mary that he would build it if Portugal defeated Castile at the Battle of Aljubarrota on 14th August 1385. Extravagant celebrations commemorating this victory are held next to the monastery in August of every year.

The Monastery of Batalha, a masterpiece of Portuguese Gothic, is a magnificent piece of architecture that combines various influences from its lengthy period of construction, which lasted several reigns.

Outstanding in the interior are the Founders' Chapel with its fine stained-glass windows, the cloisters, the Unfinished Chapels with their Manueline and Flemish Gothic features and the Chapter House.

Belmonte

Belmonte

All roads in this ancient settlement - its first charter was granted by king Sancho I in 1199- lead up to the hilltop granite castle. A document dated 1258 describes the construction: the lofty donjon, walls, bulwarks and the noble residence. Breaking this austere design, on the western wall, there is a fine twinned Manueline window finished with the symbols of Manuel, the armillary sphere and the shield of the Cabral family with its two goats. The family's most famous son is undoubtedly Pedro Álvares Cabral. Discovering Brazil in 1500, he had been born in Belmonte in 1467.

Next to the castle, there is the small, Roman-gothic church dedicated to St. James. Inside, a granite statue of Piety is

impressive for its crude beauty, fitting well into the harmonious simplicity of this church. A church annex houses the Cabral pantheon although the remains of Pedro Álvares Cabral are to be found in the Church of Graça, in Santarém.

An important Jewish community settled in Belmonte, substantially increasing in size when the Catholic Monarchs of Spain issued a decree ordering the expulsion of all Jews in 1492, with the king of Portugal following suit in 1496. During this period, many Jews originating from Spain settled in towns and villages close to the border, such as Belmonte. Their houses are located, as was the rule, beyond the castle walls in the Bairro de Marrocos (Morocco Neighbourhood). There, it is possible to make out, engraved in stone by the sides of the doors, the resident's professions with scissors depicting the tailor, for instance.

Belmonte retains much of the medieval atmosphere of times when the Jewish community would have to practice its prayers, traditions and customs in secrecy even if Belmonte is now more than proud to be home to the Bet Eliahu synagogue.

On the road to Guarda, there is the Centum Cellas Tower. The origins of this odd construction have never been fully determined.

Bombarral

Bombarral

In a predominantly agricultural region, with a tradition going back to the 14th century, when this area was part of the farm of the Monastery of Alcobaça and was looked after by the monks, Bombarral is famous as a fruit and wine-producing centre, a fact reflected in its coat of arms, which is decorated with a bunch of grapes.

The two most important events in the region also bear witness to this, namely the Festival of Portuguese Wine in July and the Fair of the Pêra da Rocha (Rock Pear) in August.

This association is also evidenced in the early 20th century tile panels that cover the walls of the railway station, which reproduce scenes relating to grape-picking and the preparation of wine. It is therefore an excellent introduction for visiting the region, where the main buildings are the manor-houses and stately homes.

As for church architecture, the most important buildings are the Igreja da Madre de Deus (Church of the Mother of God) and the Ermida de São Bras (Chapel of São Brás).

Buçaco

Buçaco

A large and majestic forest, the Serra do Buçaco is a genuine botanical garden where roughly 700 native and exotic species can be found, all of them protected by a Papal Bull issued in the seventeenth century threatening anyone damaging the trees with excommunication.

It was in the sixteenth century that the Vicar General of the Barefoot Carmelites considered this to be the ideal spot for building a retreat, a place where the friars could devote themselves to a life of contemplation in contact with nature. A modest convent was therefore built here, as well as various penitential hermitages and chapels scattered around the forest. Together with the numerous lakes and crosses, these buildings lend this spot a truly magical atmosphere. The breathtaking beauty of the Serra do Buçaco, particularly the Vale dos Fetos (Fern Valley) and the Fonte Fria (Cold Fountain), can be admired from the Miradouro da Cruz Alta (High Cross), from where there is a panoramic view over the whole of the surrounding region.

Today, the only parts of the original monastery that can be visited are the cloisters, the chapel and some of the monks' cells, since in the nineteenth century some of its original area was replaced by a neo-Manueline palace that has since been converted into a luxury hotel.

In the nineteenth century, the Serra do Buçaco was the site of a famous battle in which the Portuguese obtained an important victory over Napoleon's invading French troops. Today, this event is permanently commemorated by an obelisk and remembered in the Military Museum, with the victory being celebrated each year on 27 September.

Cadaval

Cadaval

A picturesque town surrounded by vineyards and orchards, Cadaval is a region where agriculture, especially the extensive vineyards and orchards, continues to dominate the economy.

In the environs, on the Serra de Montejunto (the highest point in the area), one can visit the 13th century Chapel of Nossa Senhora das Neves, and the ruins of the Royal Ice Factory, where in the 18th century the ice was collected in deep valleys, stored in tanks, and then taken to Lisbon to supply the Court and the cafés.

The natural conditions of the region make it possible to practise various forms of active Tourism, such as hang-gliding, speleology and various walking tours.

Of the main events in this predominantly wine-growing region, the highlight is of course the grape harvest festival in

September, which exhibits, besides the exhibitions and re-creation of all the ethnography relating to the grape harvests, examples of the local cuisine.

Caldas da Rainha

Caldas da Rainha

The town owes its name to the thermal spring that was much appreciated by Queen Dona Leonor, wife of the 15th century King Dom João II, who had the opportunity to confirm the curative properties of these waters when they cured her of a wound that for a long time had not healed, although she had tried various treatments.

As the waters were much in demand at the time by the local people, who bathed in them to cure their ailments, the Queen ordered a hospital to be built so that they could treat themselves in some comfort. Around the hospital a village was formed, which came to be known as "Caldas da Rainha" (The Queen's Hot Springs).

The town continued to grow, reaching its heyday in the late 19th and early 20th century, at a time when it was fashionable to take a holiday in a spa resort, and Caldas da Rainha was one of the places chosen by the nobility and aristocracy.

During the Second World War, too, the town was chosen as a place of refuge by many foreigners fleeing from persecution by the Nazis.

Caldas was the birthplace of important figures in Portuguese culture, notably the painter José Malhoa (C.19), whose work can be admired in the museum named after him in the Thermal Park (Dom Carlos I garden); also born here was Rafael Bordalo Pinheiro, the 19th century caricaturist, who founded the pottery factories of Caldas da Rainha where the popular Caldas pottery began to be manufactured, of which the best known pieces are those containing characteristics humour.

Castelo Branco

Castelo Branco

The origins of Castelo Branco can be found in Roman times with the settlers who established Albi Castrum on the slopes of the Cardoso hill. In 1214, king Afonso II bestowed this land on the Order of the Templar Knights, entrusting them with its fortification and defence. The Order set about building the Castle that became the focal point for the new town that would gradually expand outwards. In 1285, king Dinis and his queen Santa Isabel stayed here while visiting the region to survey and plan the reinforcement of border defences.

In 1510, Manuel granted a Charter to Castelo Branco. The original document is still held by the Municipal Council. The Misericórdia was founded simultaneously with the arrival of other

religious orders including the Augustinian Friars, in the Convent of Graça, and the Capuchin Friars, located in the Convent of Santo António.

In 1535, king João III granted the settlement the title of "Eminent Town" and towards the end of the century the bishop of Guarda, Nuno de Noronha, ordered the building of the Episcopal Palace as the Winter residence for the clergy. The Palace survived both as a marker of the perimeter of old Castelo Branco and a major attraction of the current city. It currently houses the important Francisco Tavares Proença Júnior Museum that features the history behind the traditional Castelo Branco Silk Embroidery.

In 1771, king José I moved to recognise the growing commercial importance of the town in establishing the diocese of Castelo Branco, raising it to city status with the Church of São Miguel (St. Michael) becoming the Cathedral.

This became the focal point for the expansion of the city with the emerging bourgeois class choosing the location for their palaces and residences. After recovering from the Napoleonic invasion, with a major battle fought out in the vicinity, it was the inauguration of the railway line towards the end of the 19th century that resulted in Castelo Branco becoming an important industrial centre. Much of the development focused on the textile sector - a tradition that still continues.

Castelo Branco can easily be visited in a day. Head up the steep streets towards the Castle to take in the wonderful views out over the surrounding countryside.

Castelo Mendo

Castelo Mendo

Built on the top of a hill at a point of great strategic significance, on the remains of earlier fortresses dating back to the Bronze Age and Roman times, Castelo Mendo is a historical village surrounded by walls that were rebuilt in the twelfth century at the orders of D. Sancho I.

In 1229, D. Sancho II ordered the castle to be enlarged and granted the local population a charter to organise a fair, on condition that this was held three times a year. This was the first fair to be held on a regular basis in the whole of Portugal, and in 1281 D. Dinis ordered that this should be a free fair to be held on an annual basis. The fair's original storehouse still exists in the village on the site of what was once the fairground.

The village's name derives from that of the first governor, D. Mendo Mendes, appointed by D. Dinis in the fourteenth century. On one of the walls of the former jailhouse, it is still possible to see a stone sculpture which, according to popular tradition, represents Mendo, whilst on another house nearby one can see a representation of Menda, who was the wife of Mendo. This house is therefore known as the Casa da Menda.

Encircled by walls with six mediaeval gates (the main gate is flanked by two statues of pigs), the village essentially consists of simple stone houses, all of which originally had two storeys, the lower one being used to house the cattle, whilst the upper one was used as a residence. The extremely narrow streets made the village easy to defend, although a number of battles were fought here during the various wars in which Portugal was involved, especially those with the Spanish.

Restoration work has recently begun in the village and it is gradually regaining some of its original features, offering those visitors who venture inside its walls the chance to enjoy a journey into its rich and interesting past.

Castelo Novo

Castelo Novo

Set in the superb amphitheatre formed by the Serra da Gardunha, Castelo Novo has some surprisingly beautiful manor houses that once belonged to the region's noble families.

Built in the 12th century but badly damaged by the earthquake in 1755, the castle was described as "new" (novo) because another one already existed in the immediate vicinity, having been abandoned because it was inadequate for the region's defence. This is how the village came to acquire the name of Castelo Novo.

In the Largo da Bica, the mediaeval Paços do Concelho (Town Hall) has a number of curious aspects, most particularly an 18th-century Baroque fountain built against its granite façade and crowned by the coat of arms of the king, D. João V, introducing a somewhat discordant note into the building's mediaeval simplicity.

Behind this stands the ancient castle keep, like a protective and attentive sentry. Now stripped of its warlike functions, it peacefully keeps the time for the local population. As a reminder of an earlier communal life long since erased by time, there stands the Lagariça, an enormous tank cut out of the rock, where for many centuries the grapes were trodden by the local inhabitants.

Close to Castelo Novo is the beautiful town of Alpedrinha, which is also well worth a visit.

Castelo Rodrigo

Castelo Rodrigo

From its lofty hilltop position, the small village of Castelo Rodrigo looks down over the plateau stretching eastwards to Spain and northwards to the deep valley of the River Douro. According to tradition, it was founded by Alfonso IX of León, in order to be given to Count Rodrigo Gonzalez de Girón, who repopulated it and gave it its name. With the Treaty of Alcanices, signed in 1297 by D. Dinis, poet and king of Portugal, it came into the possession of the Portuguese crown.

Castelo Rodrigo still preserves scars left by the constant disputes over the territory. The first such episode took place less than a hundred years after its integration into the kingdom of Portugal, during the dynastic crisis of 1383-1385. D. Beatriz, the only daughter of D. Fernando of Portugal, was married to the king of Castile. With her accession to the throne on the death of her father, Portugal was set to lose its independence in favour of Castile. Castelo Rodrigo sided with D. Beatriz, but D. João, the Master of Avis, defeated the Castilians at the Battle of Aljubarrota, in 1385, and as a result was crowned king of Portugal, taking the name of D. João I. As a reprisal for the lords of Castelo Rodrigo having sided with Castile, the new king ordered that the shield and the coat of arms of Portugal should always be displayed upside down on the town's coat of arms.

Later, in the 16th century, when Philip II of Spain annexed the Portuguese Crown, the Governor Cristóvão de Mora became the defender of the cause of Castile and suffered from the revenge of the local population, who set fire to his enormous palace on 10 December 1640, as soon as they received the news of the Restoration of Portugal (which took place on 1 December). The aftermath of this historic event was the ruins that can still be seen on the top of the hill next to the castle.

In the olden days, it also stood on the route taken by the pilgrims travelling to Santiago de Compostela. Legend has it that none other than St. Francis of Assisi spent the night here on his pilgrimage to the tomb of St. James.

Now a quiet peaceful village, Castelo Rodrigo is worth visiting for its past glories, the beauty and freshness of its location, the houses contained within its walls, its Manueline pillory and also the somewhat touching statue of Santiago Matamouros housed in the igreja do Reclamador.

Celorico da Beira

Celorico da Beira

Celorico da Beira sits 550 metres high but still at the foot of the Serra da Estrela mountains, with the Mondego river running through. Any visit to this region takes in centuries of history set against a granite mountain background cut by crystal clear rivers and streams.

The Castle, the symbol of Celorico da Beira. Its military architecture is in a Romantic-gothic style and irregular in design, corresponding to the Citadel. Furthermore, there is the Church of Misericórdia, with its façade a fine example of the Joanine style. Within, the main altar is lavish and there are also paintings by Isidro Faria. Also of note is the Baroque highpoint of the Matrix Church of Santa Maria, built on the former site of the lower quarter of the Castle neighbourhood. Its narrow streets also feature a rare collection of Gothic entranceways and Manueline windows.

Coimbra

Coimbra

Long ago, this site was occupied by the Celts, but the process of Romanisation brought a great cultural transformation to this region. The presence of the Romans is still visible in the various archaeological remains housed at the Museu Nacional Machado de Castro, built over the cryptoporticus of the Civita Aeminium, the forum of the Roman city. After them, between 586 and 640, came the Visigoths, who altered the name of the town to Emínio. In 711, it became a Moorish and Mozarab city. In 1064, the city was conquered by the Christian Fernando I of Castile and governed by the Mozarab Sesnando.

The most important city to the south of the River Douro, it was for some time the residence of the Count Dom Henrique and Dona Teresa, the parents of the first king of Portugal, Dom Afonso Henriques, who was born here. It was the latter king who integrated the city into the Portuguese territory in 1131. Dating from this time are some of the city's most important monuments: the Sé Velha (Old Cathedral) and the churches of São Tiago, São Salvador and Santa Cruz, representing the religious authority and the various orders that became established here.

Coimbra was the setting for the forbidden love of Dom Pedro I (1357-67) and Dona Inês, a lady at court. Inês was executed at the orders of the king Dom Afonso IV, who saw in this romance the danger of Portugal being submitted to the rule of Castile. An inspiration to poets and writers, their story still forms a major part of the city's rich heritage.

Coimbra was the capital of Portugal during the Middle Ages, but it was the Renaissance that transformed the city into a place of

knowledge, when Dom João III (1521-57) decided to move the University to the city on a definitive basis, whilst at the same time numerous colleges were created to provide an alternative to the official form of teaching.

In the 17th century, the Jesuits arrived in the city, immediately announcing their presence with the building of the Sé Nova (New Cathedral). In the following century, the royal work instituted by Dom João V (1706-50) was to enrich some of Coimbra's monuments, including the University. Dom José I (1750-77) also introduced some alterations into the city through the influence of his minister Marquês de Pombal, particularly in the field of education.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the French invasions and the Portuguese liberal wars were to mark the beginning of a period of great agitation that brought no great developments to the city. Since then, it has been the students who have brought most changes to Portugal's quintessential university town.

There are several routes that you can follow to discover more about the heritage to be found in Coimbra. Following the layout of the city until the 19th century, we suggest that you begin with two walking tours, one through the Upper Town and the other through the Lower Town.

Constância

Constância

Located at the confluence of two rivers - the Tagus and the Zêzere - Constância has a characteristic physiognomy on account of the row of white houses harmoniously inset on a hillside.

It was its geographical position that formed the characteristics of this town, which in the 14th century was an important river port and a busy trading post.

The name of Constância is linked to that of Luís Vaz de Camões, the great 16th century poet and author of the *Lusíadas*, who lived here for some time. The "Pomonas Camonianas", festivals that portray the medieval age, are held on June 10th every year, when the town pays homage to its poet.

Another annual event that draws many people to Constância are the Festivals of Nossa Senhora da Boa Viagem (Our Lady of the Safe Journey), which take place at Easter, when the residents present themselves in all their splendour, with the streets adorned with coloured paper and enlivened by the many small bars and restaurants that are scattered around the town. The high point of this festival is on Easter Monday, when there is a procession of decorated boats.

Covilhã

Covilhã

Lying among rivers and mountains, the city of Covilhã is one of the gateways to the Serra da Estrela.

The original inhabitants of the land were Lusitanian shepherds. Covilhã was reconquered from the Moors by King Dom Sancho I, who built city walls to protect it. It became a strategic point in the Middle Ages, especially in the reign of Dom Dinis, who set about reinforcing the defence of the territory.

The town was granted royal status by Dom Manuel, who gave it a new charter in 1510, and it was also a land of discoverers. Prince Henry the Navigator was given the title Lord of Covilhã by his father, King Dom João I, after conquering Ceuta in 1415.

It was the birthplace of Pêro da Covilhã, the explorer sent to the Orient by King Dom João II, and whose information helped Vasco da Gama to discover the sea route to India.

One of Covilhã's claims to fame is the art of making woollen goods. This began in the time of Dom Sancho I, and was developed by the Jewish community that settled here at that time, where they remained until the 15th century. The textile industry, which produced all the uniforms for the Portuguese army during the reign of Dom João V, was given a new boost when the Marquis of Pombal established the Royal Cloth Factory here, making it into the country's largest centre for the production of woollen goods. Due to economic growth that followed, Covilhã was raised to the status of a city in 1870.

A visit to Covilhã's historic heritage should not omit the old Judiaria (Jewish Quarter), with its narrow streets and Manueline windows, the Chapel of São Martinho, the Chapel of Santa Cruz and the Wool Museum.

In Covilhã and surrounding areas, discover the Land of Castles and Historical Villages, the Wool Route, the Old Judiarias Route, and the Serra da Estrela Nature Reserve, by taking one of the itineraries that show you the region's natural and cultural heritage. Find us on the Covilhã Council website.

Entroncamento

Entroncamento

Entroncamento started developing at the end of the 19th century around the most important railway station in the country, at the junction of the Northern and Eastern railway lines. The railway junction led workers from all over the country to settle here; they lived in what were called "railway districts" - small houses, festooned with flowers.

Everywhere there are echoes of this close link between the trains and the city, an example of which is the public garden in which the decoration consists of an ancient locomotive, which is used as a Tourist Office.

As for the cuisine, the outstanding dishes, like the inhabitants, have their roots in other regions of the country, such as the açordas (purées of bread, herbs and garlic), bacalhau assado com batatas a murro (roast salted cod with small baked potatoes), the feijoadas (pork and bean stews), and the sweets, such as the pão-de-ló (sponge cake) and the tigeladas (egg, flour and sugar pancakes cooked in the oven).

Fátima

Fátima

With its origins deep in history, it was during the Arabian occupation that this settlement developed and was named. According to legend, during the Christian Reconquest, the Templar knight Gonçalo Hermingues, also known as Bringer-of-Moors, fell in love with Fátima, a Moor captured in the course of an ambush. Reciprocating the love, the young woman converted to Christianity and adopted the name Oureana.

In the sixteenth century, the settlement became a parish in the collegiate church of Ourém within the Diocese of Leiria.

Its subsequent development dates from the events known as the Apparitions of Fátima, in the early part of the twentieth century. It has become one of the key centers for the Cult of the Virgin Mary in Portugal and has been recognised world-wide by the Catholic Church.

The first apparition took place in 1917, in Cova da Iria, at the site of the current Sanctuary. The most important celebrations are held on 13th May (including the Candlelit Procession on the night of the 12th and the Farewell Procession closing the event on the 13th) and 13th October. Furthermore, the 13th of every month between these two dates is also a day of devotion.

For those interested in the historical context of the apparitions of Our Lady of Fátima, visits can be made to the houses of the shepherd witnesses in the village of Aljustrel.

In the gardens of Casa de Lúcia, there is a monument commemorating the second apparition of the Angel of Peace and the end of the Via Sacra which begins in the Sanctuary. Along this route, there are 14 chapels donated by Hungarian Catholic

refugees in the West. Of particular note is Valinhos, 400 metres from the village where monuments commemorate the fourth apparition in 1917 as well as the place chosen by the angel. Here, in 1916, the shepherds saw the Angel of Peace for the first and third times.

Ferreira do Zêzere

Ferreira do Zêzere

Situated between a large area of forest and the River Zêzere, which is transformed here into the enormous blue lake of the lagoon of the Castelo de Bode dam, Ferreira do Zêzere is a peaceful town with some notable palacelike houses and the Igreja Matriz (Parish Church), the interior of which contains fine gilded woodcarving, paintings, sculptures and 18th century stalls.

In the environs the high point is of course the Castelo de Bode lagoon, where it is possible to practise a wide variety of water sports, just take a rest, or visit the picturesque villages surrounded by the waters, an example of which is Dornes, with its row of white houses and the pentagonal tower built by the Templars.

The gastronomic specialities are kid with greens and suckling pig prepared in the local style.

Figueira da Foz

Figueira da Foz

Figueira da Foz took its name from its situation at the mouth (foz) of the River Mondego and it has developed into one of the main seaside resorts in the centre of Portugal. A cosmopolitan and lively city, it first began to gain in importance towards the end of the nineteenth century when "bathing in Figueira" was to become a popular pastime amongst the aristocracy of Centro de Portugal region.

Figueira da Foz has a vast range of different kinds of accommodation for visitors, a casino that was founded in 1900 and an excellent beach which has the most extensive stretch of sand in the whole of mainland Portugal and provides ideal conditions for all kinds of water sports, with both sailing and powerboat championships being held here.

In the surrounding area, it is well worth taking a trip to the top of the Serra da Boa Viagem to appreciate the panoramic view from the Miradouro da Vela. From here, one can see not only the city and the salt-pans of the River Mondego, but on clear days the coastline is also visible as far as the Berlengas islands.

Fundão

Alpedrinha

Built on the southern slope of the Serra da Gardunha and protected from the harsh winter winds, Alpedrinha offers its visitors the chance to enjoy clean, pure air.

The Romans called the village Petratinia and perhaps they took away with them the secrets to the mysterious tunnel that begins in one of Alpedrinha's streets and ends in what is still an unknown destination, for any excavation might endanger the safety of the houses.

Although Napoleon's armies brutally laid the village to waste, the narrow picturesque streets of Alpedrinha still conserve some fine old examples of both noble and popular architecture amongst their gardens and orchards. Many of the popular houses have wooden balconies decorated with pots of geraniums and porched steps, whilst the Baroque fountain of the great Chafariz Real evokes memories from the time of D. João V. Together with the harmonious Igreja da Misericórdia, the palatial façade of the Casa da Comenda, founded very long ago, the Capela do Leão, whose portico is said to be the work of the sculptor Nicolau de Chanterenne, and other exemplary buildings from the 16th and 17th centuries, these are just some of the many reasons for visiting Alpedrinha and succumbing to its charms.

Guarda

Guarda

Set at 1,056 metres on the slopes of the Serra da Estrela, this is the highest city in Portugal. Given its strategic location, it has served as a battleground since pre-history and settled since pre-Roman times.

Recognising its importance as a key border defence position, king Sancho I founded the city of Guarda in 1199, bestowing a bishopdom and the Cathedral. With the castle built, the walls were strengthened by kings Afonso II and Afonso III. The remains, some now parts of houses, are most clearly noticeable in the Keep, the Tower of Ferreiros and the Gates of Erva and d'El Rei. The city of Guarda has strong royal connections: king Dinis stayed here after his marriage to Isabel of Aragon in Trancoso, Fernando came for its weather as he tried to rid himself of lung disease and Afonso V held court here in 1465.

In 1510, the city's charter was renewed by King Manuel I. Also in the 16th century, bishop Nuno de Noronha set about improving the ecclesiastical presence carrying out notable projects including the Seminary and the Episcopal Palace, now the Museum of Guarda.

In the 18th century, Guarda did gain a modest share of the period's royal ostentation with the rebuilding of the Church of São Vicente and the Church of Misericórdia. The beginning of the

19th century saw a period of transformation. After the Napoleonic wars had devastated the border regions, Guarda became district capital in 1835. In 1881, it would recover jurisdiction over the short-lived bishopdom of Pinhel and that of Castelo Branco, both established under the Marquês de Pombal. Improvements to means of communication and infrastructures helped in offsetting some of the problems caused by its remote location. While this did open the door to progress and development, it did not prove enough to fully overcome all regional difficulties.

Idanha-a-Velha

Idanha-a-Velha

Successive settlements of the region by different peoples have left Idanha-a-Velha with a most valuable historical heritage.

Anyone visiting the modest village to be found here nowadays and observing its peaceful pace of life will have difficulty imagining that this was once the site of the ancient and prosperous Roman town of Civitas Igaeditanorum, which was situated on the great Iberian road linking Emerita (Mérida) to Braccara (Braga). At Egitânia, the Episcopal see in the time of the Visigoths (6-7th century), gold coins were minted for almost all the Visigothic kings, from Recaredo to Rodrigo; later on, the Muslim Idânia (8-12th century) grew to be a large and prosperous city, almost as rich as Lisbon.

After this came the battles between Christians and Muslims in the first century of Portuguese nationhood, when D. Afonso Henriques gave the city to the Order of the Knights Templar in order for it to be repopulated. His son, D. Sancho I, gave Idanha its first charter in 1229, recognising its strategic importance.

Over time, with a shift occurring in the major military and strategic axes, the city gradually diminished in size. Yet it has never lost its atmosphere from the past, seeming more like an open museum for the culturally-minded tourists, who will find here a system of signs clearly marking their itinerary.

Ílhavo

Ílhavo

Around 3km from Aveiro, down the coast road heading southwards, there is Ílhavo, formerly called Illabum which is believed to have been originally settled by the Greeks. Similar to Aveiro, it is located on the flatlands surrounding the lower reaches of the river Vouga. From time immemorial, this unusual geography has conditioned the livelihoods of settlers coming in search of fishing grounds or the distant New World and its abundant cod. The Sea Museum is well worth a visit with impressive exhibits dedicated to the river and the sea ensuring we do not forget what the old vessels looked like as they slipped out of the river. The Museum also contains a range of navigation

instruments and fishing equipment.

On any itinerary there has to be a visit to the local church. Dating back to 1785 and dedicated to St Salvador, and in addition to other interesting pieces, attention turns to a portrayal of the Lord of the Navigators and the Devotion of Seafarers. In the chapel of Our Lady of Pranto, look out for the statue of Mary in polychromatic limestone completed in the fifteenth century.

Much of the land around Ílhavo has been reclaimed from the river over centuries and at great cost to the Ilhavense people. These were termed "gafanhas". Their rich soils proved so ideal for cultivating potatoes, corn, beans and cabbages that the name gafanha was used by various local parishes: Gafanha da Nazaré, Gafanha da Encarnação and Gafanha do Carmo.

Right by Ílhavo, there is the Vista Alegre Factory that for 170 years has been producing world famous porcelain. The factory features a museum, stores and an interesting complex of industrial buildings dotted along the banks of the river providing a truly worthy stop off on any tour of the region.

Head across the fertile terrain of Gafanhas towards Vagos, a rural municipality famous for its milk production. Cross over the southernmost arm of the river delta and head towards the beach at Vagueira. The road running parallel to the sea leads to Costa Nova, where the special charm of the brightly-coloured fishermen's houses awaits you.

Leiria

Leiria

Leiria has a river that flows uphill, a tower that does not have a cathedral, a cathedral that does not have a tower, and a High Street that is not straight. (According to a popular Portuguese rhyme.)

For Dom Afonso Henriques, the first Christian conqueror of Leiria in 1135 and the founder of its castle, the town was the advance guard for his strategy of conquering Santarém, Sintra and Lisbon from the Moors, which took place in 1147.

For more than fifty years, Leiria would once again be subject to the devastating sporadic attacks of the Moorish forces and its definitive conquest only took place in the reign of Dom Sancho I at the end of the 12th century, with the king awarding the town a charter in 1195.

In 1254, Dom Afonso III held his first Cortes (parliament) here, attended by the representatives of all the kingdom's boroughs, an event that was considered extremely important in the history of Portugal, for it was the first time that the common people had been allowed to express their opinions and make representations to the king.

In the 14th century, Dom Dinis and in particular his wife, the Queen Saint Isabel, resided in the castle on several occasions,

perhaps because they considered this to be a pleasant place to live with its sweeping views over the charming countryside all around.

The king's reign was particularly marked by the planting of the Leiria pine-forest all along the coastal strip in order to protect the sand dunes from erosion. Its maritime pines were to provide the timber and pitch used in the building of Portuguese ships, especially during the period of the Discoveries, and even today this immense patch of green is a very pleasant place for a country walk.

Of all the parliaments convened by the Portuguese kings in Leiria, the most tragic session was the one that was held in 1438, summoned by the king Dom Duarte to discuss the handing over of Ceuta to the Moors in exchange for the release of his brother the Holy Infante, Dom Fernando, who was imprisoned in Tangier. The parliament voted for the sacrifice of the Infante in exchange for retaining possession of the Moroccan stronghold, and the king, overcome by grief, died shortly afterwards.

The city spread outside the walls of its mediaeval castle, the first phase of its growth being marked by the building of the Romanesque Igreja de São Pedro, followed by the building of the cathedral and the Igreja da Misericórdia in the 16th century. The city then spread all the way down to the River Lis and various religious buildings were built on its tree-lined banks.

Yet it was only in the 19th century that the city of Leiria entered upon its next real phase of development with the firm establishment of its bourgeoisie, very well portrayed by Eça de Queirós, who set his novel "The Crime of Padre Amaro" here. But, above all, the major influence on Leiria's development was the work of the architect Ernesto Korrodi, which greatly enhanced the appearance of the city. Since then and until the present day, the modern and somewhat disorganised spread of new buildings and streets has again changed the face of the city, transforming it into an expanding industrial centre.

Linhares da Beira

Linhares da Beira

Situated on the western slopes of the Serra da Estrela, Linhares da Beira was originally a Lusitanian hill fort. In fact, the Montes Hermínios (this was the Lusitanian name for the Serra da Estrela), with its pastureland and abundant water supply and enjoying the protective shelter of the mountains, was one of the regions inhabited by this Iberian tribe, from whom many Portuguese people believe themselves to be descended. Flax (linho in Portuguese), which in the old days was one of the most important crops in the region, lay at the root of the name Linhares, which literally means flax fields.

The remains of a Roman road close to Videmonte and the discovery of milestones on the right bank of the River Mondego

suggest that the Roman road connecting Viseu to Guarda passed through here. Later invaded by Visigoths and Muslims, who recognised its ideal strategic position for watching over the surrounding region, Linhares became definitively Portuguese in the time of D. Afonso Henriques, who gave it its first charter in 1169.

Peace, however, was not yet definitive. In 1189, troops from León and Castile invaded the region, pillaging and setting fire to the surrounding villages, whilst preparing to capture the castle of Celorico. Linhares came to the defence of Celorico and, finding itself encircled at the rear, the enemy's army took flight as fast as it could. Tradition has it that all this took place on a night when there was a new moon and that this is why the coat of arms of Linhares bears a crescent and five stars.

A walk through the village gives the impression of a charming whole, in which the simple granite houses stand side by side with manor-houses still displaying signs of their ancient nobility. If you look closely, you can still see many 16th-century windows. The parish church, originally Romanesque but rebuilt in the 17th century, has three valuable wood paintings attributed to the great Portuguese master painter Vasco Fernandes (Grão Vasco). A rustic tribune standing over a bench around a stone table is a unique example of the mediaeval forum, from where community decisions were announced to the local population. This is where the arms of the ancient town are displayed. Next to this stands the 16th-century granite pillory, surmounted by an armillary sphere.

Standing proudly above the whole village is the sturdy castle that follows the geology of the terrain by being built on an enormous rock. From this viewpoint, at a height of more than 800 metres, one of the spurs of the Serra da Estrela can be seen, as well as the valley along which the River Mondego flows. Rebuilt in the 13th century by the king D. Dinis, most probably on the ruins of a Moorish fortification, it was part of the front-line defences of the Beira region and the best place for surveying all movements around. The city skyline is crowned by the impressive castle that traces the curve of the land over a huge rock outcrop and further serving as a fantastic viewpoint. Two large crenellated towers can be seen at the corners of the perimeter wall, one facing east and the other facing west. Still visible in the parade ground are the remains of some old cisterns.

Lourinhã

Lourinhã

Inhabited since ancient times, it was in the Lourinhã region that the most important evidence of the presence of dinosaurs in Portugal was discovered - the fossilised eggs and respective embryos, which are displayed in the Municipal Museum.

On the hill where the Moors built a fort, later rebuilt by the Christians, it is worth visiting the Church of Santa Maria do Castelo (St Mary of the Castle), a fine example of 14th century Gothic style. This is one of the best points from which to admire the diversity of the region.

Besides the fertile valleys and highly productive farmland, with large vineyards and orchards, there are also excellent beaches, some almost inaccessible and practically deserted, and others very crowded and cosmopolitan.

Lousã

Lousã

Located right in the centre of Portugal, Lousã is a town with much of interest even though many of its visitors are sports enthusiasts seeking it out for the nearby Serra da Lousã, the true highlight of this region.

In the far south-west of the Central Cordillera, Serra da Lousã extends over 4,200 ha and reaches its highest point at Alto do Trevim, 1,202 metres up. The geography is conditioned by the predominance of schist and there are remnants of an evergreen temperate forest to be found such as holly and laurel. Annual trees took over from the former with coppices of oak dotting the valleys and slopes around villages. Corks and olive trees are to be found on southerly slopes. On the upper slopes, given the poor soils, heathers, gorse, genista and woadwaxen predominate. The natural surroundings are further enhanced by the presence of species such as birch, American oak and chestnut in addition to cedar and wild pine.

Sites of special beauty include the Mata do Sobral, with its micro-climate and rather Mediterranean vegetation and the São João River Valley that extends as far as Caminho da Levada. Here, the paths are flanked by schist walls and the lands dotted with coppices to provide a very striking colour scheme.

Mação

Mação

In the hinterland of the country, in the area of Pinhal, so called because it belongs to the largest forested area in Europe, Mação is a peaceful town which mingles characteristics of the Lower Beira (especially the landscape of hills and valleys) with those of the Ribatejo, especially in the architecture, with the predominance of whitewashed houses, with windows and doors surrounded by colour.

Special mention must be made of the 16th century Parish Church, and to the many archaeological remains of the presence of ancient peoples found in the environs, as in the case of the Iron Age Castle of the Caratão and the Roman bridge of the Coadouro.

In the environs, the thermal springs of the Ladeira de Envendos are recommended for various therapeutic purposes, and for hotter days the best suggestion is undoubtedly the riverside beach of the lagoon of the Ortiga Dam.

On summer weekends there is always a popular festival in one of the council's villages, but the Exhibition Fair at the beginning of August, where one can enjoy the regional cuisine and handicrafts, and the Festa de Santa Maria (Festival of St Mary) in the first week of September, are the high points.

Among the gastronomic specialities, the lamprey risotto, cabbage with beans, sausages and smoked ham are outstanding, and, as for desserts, the bolos fintos (leavened cakes) and the Fofas de Mação - or cavacas - (a light, crisp kind of cake).

Marialva

Marialva

Because of its splendid location on the top of an almost inaccessible cliff, on the left bank of the River Alva, the small village of Marialva was an important military stronghold in the Middle Ages.

The same position was, in fact, also the cause of its decline. When wars began to be fought with firearms, the old mediaeval castles became obsolete and lost their function of defending and protecting the local populations, who began to live outside the walled enclosures of the citadels.

This ancient settlement was already inhabited in the 6th century BC by the Aravi tribe. It was successively occupied by the Romans (who gave it the name of Civitas Aravorum), by the Suevi and Arabs, who installed themselves in its defensive fort. It was conquered in 1063 by Ferdinand the Great, the king of León, who gave it the name of Malva, later changed to Marialva. It is also said that the king of Portugal, D. Afonso II, gave the settlement to one of his lovers, D. Maria Alva, in 1217, and that

she was the one who gave her name to the village. The castle was rebuilt by D. Sancho II of Portugal, around the year 1200, on the ruins of the Romanised hill fort.

Mediaeval cobbled streets flanked by Gothic walls and doors lead to a small square with an elegant 15th-century granite pillory, the former prison and the court. The 16th-century parish church, with its Manueline door, is dedicated to St. James.

Standing on the ancient pilgrims' route, Marialva still celebrates the annual fair of Santiago (St. James) on the Apostle's Day (25 July).

Marinha Grande

Marinha Grande

The history of Marinha Grande is closely linked to the 11,500 hectares of the Pinhal de Leiria, also known as Pinhal do Rei (the King's Pine-Forest). This forest of maritime pine-trees was planted in the 13th century by D. Afonso III and later enlarged by his son D. Dinis.

Initially intended to hold back the coastal sand which was beginning to invade the fields where crops were planted, the forest gradually began to supply the wood needed for building the carracks and caravels used in the Portuguese maritime discoveries. Together, both the pine-forest and the sands of the Atlantic beaches were fundamental in establishing the region's crucial position within Portugal's metallurgical and glass industries.

This development was clearly seen by the Marquês de Pombal, prime minister to D. José I, when in 1769 he granted a charter to the English industrialist William Stephens, allowing him to found a glass factory here, the Real Fábrica de Vidro de Guilherme Stephens. The project was continued by one of William's brothers, João Diogo Stephens, who, on his death, bequeathed the factory to the Portuguese nation.

Supplied by an abundance of the raw materials (wood and sand) needed for the manufacture of glass, the region has become the epicentre of the Portuguese glass and crystal glass industry. It has benefited from the skilled workmanship of many generations of craftsmen, producing a series of unique articles whose quality is recognised worldwide.

In the centre of the main square of Marinha Grande, dominated by the Town Hall, is a bust of William Stephens, sculpted by Luís Fernandes. This homage was financed by all the workers of the Factory, who, in 1941, clubbed together to pay for the work. A beautiful iron gate leads to a garden where the Glass Museum is housed in the Palácio Stephens. Here visitors will find admirable collections of artistic objects created over more than 200 years, as well as the manufacturing centre.

Your visit to the region should ideally be completed by enjoying

the invigorating fresh air of the Atlantic Beaches.

Meda

Meda

In the mediaeval period, Meda was the setting for hard-fought skirmishes between Christians and Muslims, since at that time it was essentially a border town. Its watchtower (formerly known as the Torre de Vigia, but referred to nowadays as the Torre do Relógio - the clock-tower) was one of the most important strategic points for the defence of the region, being complemented by the nearby castles of Longroiva and Marialva.

Nowadays, Meda is a quiet town, where the main activity is farming, with wine-making being the major activity.

Monsanto

Monsanto

In their geography, climate and fauna, the plains of the Beira Interior region, between the foothills of the Serra da Gardunha and the River Ponsul, form the transitional zone between the north and south of Portugal. Standing above them on a high crag is the historical village of Monsanto.

It is said that, from this bulwark, the village was able to withstand the siege imposed by the Romans in the 2nd century BC for as long as seven years. This extraordinary feat is commemorated by the villagers in their Festa das Cruzes (Festival of the Crosses), every year on 3 May.

The village offers visitors some of the most interesting human landscapes in Portugal. It spreads along the hillside, making use of the granite boulders to form the walls of the houses. In some cases, a single block of stone forms the roof, which is why the houses are popularly said to have "only one tile".

A stroll through the village's steep and narrow streets is enlivened by a number of emblazoned palaces, Manueline doorways, and the house where the doctor and writer Fernando Namora lived and practised. It was in fact here that he found the inspiration for his novel "Retalhos da Vida de um Médico" (Fragments of a Doctor's Life). One of the most notable buildings amidst all the houses is the 14th-century Torre de Lucano (Lucan's Tower), crowned by a silver cock, the trophy awarded to Monsanto in a competition organised in 1938 to find the most quintessentially Portuguese village in Portugal, in recognition of the authenticity of its culture.

The steep climb up to the castle is rewarded by one of the most breathtaking views in the whole region.

Monte Real

Monte Real

Previously known as the Póvoa (hamlet) of Monte Real, this town developed considerably during the 20th century, due to the increasing demand for the acknowledged therapeutic qualities of its waters.

The hot springs, within the Pinhal (pine forest) of Leiria, in a region with several attractions, such as the beaches, the towns of Leiria and Marinha Grande and the Monasteries of Batalha and Alcobaça (classified as World Heritage sites), are the ideal resort for those intending to combine a period of curing and rest with leisure and cultural tourism.

Montemor-o-Velho

Montemor-o-velho

Overlooking the fertile valley of the River Mondego, the streets of Montemor-o-Velho reveal the town's long history in all their nooks and crannies and in the many architectural details that it is well worth taking some time to discover.

The region has been inhabited since Roman times and Montemor-o-Velho played a most important strategic role in securing the southern frontier of Portugal established on the line of the River Mondego, until the Christian conquest of Lisbon and Santarém in 1147.

Its castle is the largest fortification on the River Mondego and also one of the largest castles in Portugal: it played a major role in the various struggles for the Reconquest of the territory from the Moors and was the focal point for the settlement of the lower Mondego valley in the early days of the foundation of Portugal as a nation.

Besides the castle, one of the town's most impressive monuments is the Convento de Nossa Senhora dos Anjos. Also well worth a visit are the Igreja de São Martinho, a single-nave Gothic church dating from the 12th century, the 16th-century Igreja da Misericórdia, the Renaissance-style Capela de São Sebastião and the Fonte dos Anjos, a 16th-century Manueline-style fountain. Inside the walls of the castle, from where there is a sweeping view over the fields of the Mondego valley, there are remains of the Capela de Santo António and the Igreja de Santa Maria Madalena from the 15th century. Better preserved than these churches is the Igreja de Santa Maria de Alcáçova. The various alterations to which it has been subjected have given the church both Manueline and Renaissance features, most notably the 16th and 17th-century altarpieces.

At the end of your tour of the town, there is nothing better than to sample the local espigas doces, small cakes that are typical of Montemor. If this is not enough for you, then you can always pay a visit to the town's most characteristic restaurant, Ramalhão,

famous for its fish and eel stews.

For nature lovers, there is the Paúl do Taipal, a specially protected area, next to the castle of Montemor-o-Velho and absolutely essential if you want to engage in some bird watching. Many different species come to Paúl do Taipal in the winter months, and it is home to more than three thousand ducks of eight different species, as well as being a nesting area for herons.

Nazaré

Nazaré

A typical fishing town, Nazaré is nowadays a busy summer resort, where side by side with the crowds of tourists, one still sees all over the streets of the town the fish-sellers, and the carapaus (horse mackerel) laid out to dry. The Sítio district, at the town's highest point (accessible by a funicular), is without doubt the best viewpoint in the area. But it is also associated with the cult of Our Lady of Nazaré who, according to the 12th century legend, was invoked by the alcaide (commander of a fortress or castle) Dom Fuas Roupinho who, while stalking a deer, was about to fall down into an abyss with no possible salvation. As a sign of gratitude for the mercy he received, Dom Fuas Roupinho ordered a small chapel to be built - the Ermida de Memória. A little way away, in the 18th century the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Nazaré was built, in whose honour grandiose festivals are held in September.

The Nazaré people's connection with the sea is reflected in the local handicrafts, in particular the nets, buoys, baskets and traditional puppets dressed in the typical costumes of seven skirts, as well as in the cuisine, with its emphasis on fish and shellfish dishes, such as caldeiradas (fish caseroles), soups, açorda (purée of bread, herbs and garlic) and the dried horse mackerel.

The most important feature of the surrounding area is the 7th century Chapel of São Gião, one of the rare holy places of the Visigoths existing in Portugal.

Óbidos

Óbidos

The delightful town of Óbidos, with white houses adorned with bougainvilleas and honeysuckle was captured from the Moors by the first king of Portugal, D. Afonso Henriques, in 1148. D. Dinis later presented it to his wife, Queen Santa Isabel. From then until 1883, the town of Óbidos and the surrounding land was always the property of the queens of Portugal.

Encircled by a ring of medieval walls and crowned by the Moorish castle rebuilt by D. Dinis, which is now a pousada, Óbidos is one of the most perfect examples of our medieval fortress. It is in

olden times, the town is entered through the southern gate of Santa Maria, embellished with eighteenth-century azulejo decoration.

Inside the walls, which at sunset take on a golden colouring, one can sense a cheerful medieval ambience of winding streets, old whitewashed houses bordered with blue or yellow, Manueline embrasures and windows, reminding us that King D. Manuel I (sixteenth century) carried out major works here, and masses of colourful flowers and plants.

Be sure to visit the Igreja Matriz de Santa Maria (Parish Church of Santa Maria), the pretty Capela de São Martinho (Chapel of S. Martinho) and, outside the town walls, the Igreja do Senhor da Pedra (Church of the Senhor da Pedra).

Among the events that take place every year in Óbidos, the most important are the Holy Week Festivities (recreating the steps on the Way of the Cross), the Ancient Music Festival in October and, for the more gluttonous, the International Chocolate festival in March, which includes an international competition in which the recipes are judged by an international jury of experts.

Oleiros

Oleiros

The town of Oleiros, situated in a region usually referred to as the Pinhal area, and nearby the Cabril Dam, is an excellent place for a few days of rest in contact with nature.

It still preserves from its distant past the vestiges of the presence of ancient peoples, like, for example, the old castle of Cova da Moura.

The town itself deserves an unhurried visit, which must include the Parish Church (16th-18th century) and the 18th Church of the Misericórdia (Mercy), which have a wealth of gilded woodcarving.

In the surrounding area, it is worth passing through the picturesque villages, such as Álvaro with its row of whitewashed houses along the village's only street, or Estreito, where the same houses made of schist have stood for four hundred years.

The cuisine has such a variety to offer that it is difficult to choose. Outstanding examples include the maranhos (sheep's innards with rice, chicken etc.) and the bucho recheado (stuffed pork stomach), skinned kid, grilled trout and the various game dishes, such as hare, rabbit and partridge.

Ourém

Ourém

At the top of a high hill, which was the ideal place for the building of a settlement in the old days, stands the older part of the town of Ourém, founded under the name of Abdegas. The Moorish occupation of the region from the 9th century onwards lies at the origin of the town's current name, reminding us of the story of the Moorish maiden Fátima, who converted to Christianity because of her love for the Knight Templar Gonçalo Hermingues and thereafter adopted the name of Oureana.

In 1136, the town was conquered from the Moors by Dom Afonso Henriques, the first king of Portugal, who gave it to his daughter. Dona Teresa ordered the Castle to be built in 1178, and granted the town a charter in 1180.

The 15th century was the most crucial historical period for the town's development, when the fourth Count of Ourém, Dom Afonso, the grandson of Dom João I and Dom Nuno Álvares Pereira, settled here. Dating from that time are the reinforcement of the town's walls which still encircle the old mediaeval centre today, the Count's Palace, the Igreja da Colegiada, a church that was remodelled in the 18th century, and the Pillory.

Roughly two kilometres away, down in the valley, is the new town of Vila Nova de Ourém, built after the earthquake of 1755 and now the main residential and commercial area. During your visit to the town, make sure to sample the local cuisine, in which the highlights are the dishes cooked with lamb, kid and rabbit, whilst amongst the pastries make sure to taste the famous Bolos de Arco de Ourém. You are advised to accompany your meal with a glass or two of one of the regional wines. Grapevines are one of the oldest plantations in the region, dating back to the time before the town's actual foundation.

If you're a devout believer in the Virgin Mary, make sure to visit Fátima close by, where there is a most important shrine dedicated to Our Lady. If you're a nature lover, then we recommend that you set off to discover the Serra de Aires e dos Candeeiros, a range of hills that marks the municipality's southern border.

Peniche

Berlengas

Located opposite Peniche, the Berlengas Archipelago consists of 3 groups of small islands: Berlenga Grande (the only inhabited one, that can be visited by boat from Peniche) and the nearby reefs, Estelas and Farilhões-Forcadas; their geological nature is different from that of the Portuguese coast.

The Islands have their own particular fauna and flora, with characteristics that make their ecosystem unique in the world, the importance of which was recognised by the creation of the Berlenga Nature Reserve in 1981.

Peniche

In Peniche, the fortress that D. João IV ordered to be built in the seventeenth century was, like the forts on Consolação beach and the S. João Baptista fort on the Berlenga Islands, an important military complex for protection against invasions from the sea. The fort in Peniche, which was turned into a political prison in the period of the Estado Novo or "New State" (1933-1974), was the scene of one of the most extraordinary escapes of the twentieth century in Portugal. In 1960 a group of political prisoners escaped from it, among them Álvaro Cunhal, the communist leader. Visit the interesting museum space, which recreates the prison environment and contains various thematic areas relating to the region.

Fishing is still an important activity in Peniche, and people love to watch the the boatloads of fish coming into port. The regional gastronomy takes full advantage of the abundance of fish in the sea. We therefore heartily recommend that you seek out restaurants in the Avenida do Mar that will serve you a caldeirada (fish casserole), sopa de lagosta à moda de Peniche (Peniche-style lobster soup), arroz de marisco (shellfish risotto) and many other dishes that all use the best fresh fish available.

Peniche is the largest centre in Portugal for bobbin lace, a centuries-old art whose origins are lost in time. It may have been a way for the women to occupy their time while their husbands were away at sea. A delicate art acquired through skill and patience, it is represented at international events, and is an artistic legacy that is well worth preserving.

Before entering the town of Peniche, go to the coast and gaze in wonder at the marvellous view of the sea. Whether it is bright blue or deep green, calm or breaking against the rock cliffs in fierce waves, this sea has formed sculptures on the rocks that have taken on strange and dramatic shapes resembling enormous tumbledown monuments.

Visit the beach of Baleal (meaning whale), which stretches between two seas as if it was an island (which in fact it was). Like Consolação beach further south, its excellent conditions for surfing and bodyboarding make it very popular. The Papôa promontory, protruding on the left, brings to mind tragic shipwrecks, such as that of the "São Pedro de Alcântara", a Spanish galleon wrecked in 1786 on its return voyage from Peru.

On the way to Cabo Carvoeiro, stop to visit the chapel of Nossa Senhora dos Remédios, hollowed out of the underground rock and lined with fine eighteenth-century azulejos. Further on stands the lighthouse, built in 1796. To the west lies the Nau dos Corvos, an impressive formation of rocks where seagulls and crows perch, and on the horizon you can see the Berlenga Islands, the only island nature reserve in mainland Portugal.

Piódão

Piódão

Buried deep in the Serra do Açor (a protected landscape area), which is full of breathtaking views, springs and pastureland, the historical village of Piódão is reminiscent of a crib because of the harmonious way in which its houses are arranged in the form of an amphitheatre. At night, when the village's lights are turned on, this picture is particularly magnificent.

The distinctive feature of this mountain village with its narrow winding streets is schist, a stone found in great abundance in the region and used to build the houses and pavements, forming a large patch of uniform colour, interrupted by the vivid blue of the windows or doors of some houses. This note of dissonant colour owes its origin to a practical consideration, for it is said that the only shop in the village had nothing but blue paint to sell, and in view of the village's isolation it was not easy for people to travel anywhere else. It has in fact been this isolation and the difficulties in travelling elsewhere that have helped to preserve many of the characteristics of this ancient village intact.

Amongst the group of small two-storey houses, the one building that particularly stands out is the parish church dedicated to Our Lady of the Conception, which is whitewashed and supported by some rather peculiar cylindrical buttresses. It was built by the local population in the early 19th century, with their gold and money.

In view of its hidden setting in the foothills of the serra, Piódão was once an ideal location for fugitives from justice, and it is thought that one of the murderers of D. Inês de Castro went into hiding here, thus escaping the wrath of D. Pedro I (14th century).

A historical village that has never actually played a major part in the History of Portugal, Piódão has become famous more recently because of its scenographic setting in the heart of the Serra do Açor. Such beauty is more than sufficient reason for visiting the village.

Pombal

Pombal

It was the Master of the Templars Dom Gualdim Pais who, in the 12th century, ordered the building of the Pombal Castle (which the town developed around), in a region that was then the dividing line between the territory already reconquered by the Christians and that still in the power of the Moors.

By order of the Marquis of Pombal, who in the 18th century spent the last years of his life here, the lower part of the town was planned and a number of public buildings constructed. At the end of the 18th century, with the building of the Lisbon-Oporto royal road, which passed through the middle of Pombal, the whole region gained a fresh impetus in terms of development.

Nowadays the road no longer passes through the centre of Pombal, but the region has excellent accessibility, making it easy to travel round the surrounding area and to visit the Serra de Sicó, with its caves, and the typical villages where they still produce the traditional cheeses and cakes, as well as the handicrafts, especially carpets, wicker baskets and mats, ceramics and weaving.

Going down to the coast, crossing the Mata Nacional do Urso (National Bear Wood), quiet beaches can be found where one can practise all kinds of water sports.

Porto de Mós

Porto de Mós

The name is thought to originate from the time of the Roman occupation, when there was a port here on the River Lena, navigable in those days, in which the millstones (Mós), extracted from a quarry in the region, were loaded and unloaded.

The fact that the Porto de Mós region has been inhabited for thousands of years is very apparent in the Municipal Museum, which contains various fossils and bones of dinosaurs, as well as evidence of human occupation in various periods, such as objects of polished flint stone (Paleolithic and Neolithic), and coins and iron lances from the Roman period.

The castle, built at the highest point in the area, and rebuilt by order of King Dom Sancho I in the 13th century, and two centuries later, was converted into a fortified palace with a fine and unusual design that has been preserved up to the present day.

In the surrounding area there is the Nature Park of the Serra de Aire and Candeeiros, with its limestone slopes, whose open porous interior contains beautiful underground tunnels that can be visited in grottoes such as those of Santo António, Alvados and Mira d'Aire. On the surface, between traditional villages and quarries, there is evidence of the movement of dinosaurs along the recently discovered trail of the Pedreira da Galinha, and of the Roman occupation, of which the best example is the causeway in Alqueidão da Serra.

Proença-a-Nova

Proença-a-Nova

Surrounded by large areas of forest and cultivated fields, in particular the olive groves and cherry trees that blossom in the spring, covering huge areas with a white shroud in a stunning spectacle, Proença-a-Nova is a town waiting to be discovered right in the centre of Portugal.

There is the ancient Roman bridge over the River Pracana in São Pedro do Esteval, the typical villages of Figueira and Pedreira, and in the town it is worth paying a visit to the Parish Church, with its superb 18th century woodcarving, and the traditional mill made out of schist, with its enormous millstones.

In the environs, the riverside beaches of Aldeia Ruiva, Fróia and Malhadal are popular relaxation spots, especially in the summer.

Outstanding features of the cuisine include the maranhos (sheep's innards with rice, chicken etc.), feijoadas (pork and bean stews), sausages and the goat's cheese, as well as the cavacas (a light, crisp kind of cake) and the honey and olive oil cakes.

São Martinho do Porto

São Martinho do Porto

The bay of São Martinho do Porto, shaped like a closed shell, has been frequented for years by the same families who long ago chose it as their favourite place for holidays and weekends.

Very crowded during the summer, when it turns into a truly cosmopolitan holiday resort, it has been enlivened in recent years by the practitioners of various "radical" sports such as climbing, windsurfing and canoeing.

Sardoal

Sardoal

Inhabited since prehistoric times, as demonstrated by several archaeological finds, the oldest document proving the existence of Sardoal dates back to 1313, and consists of a letter written by Queen Santa Isabel, the wife of King Dom Dinis, now kept in the Municipal Library.

The town, perched on a hilltop, is most picturesque, with its whitewashed houses decorated with flowers, and with the streets of the old town paved with pebbles from the river.

Among the several churches and chapels, which during the Holy Week ceremonies are decked with carpets of flowers, pride of place is taken by the 16th century Parish Church, where there are various notable works by the great Renaissance painter born here and therefore known as the Master of Sardoal.

Sertã

Sertã

According to legend, Sertã owes its name to the wife of a Lusitanian nobleman who, after her husband died in a battle against the Romans, threw a "sertã" (frying pan) full of boiling oil from the battlements of the castle over the Romans, forcing them to retreat.

The castle, founded by the Romans, belonged to the Order of the Templars, and later to other religious and military Orders, such as the Hospitallers and those of Malta and of Crato, who made a large contribution to the settlement of the region. The castle is now partially in ruins, but still offers an excellent view of the town. It is essential to visit the 15th century Parish Church, inside which one can admire the baroque woodcarving and the 16th and 17th century tiles.

The region is bathed by the Amioso and Sertã rivers and the lagoons of the River Zêzere - Castelo de Bode, Cabril and Bouçã. It is situated in the largest forest area in Europe, so that there is a dominance of green and blue, where one can find the ideal setting for relaxation in contact with nature; alternatively, one can go in for active tourism, especially the various kinds of water sports.

Outstanding among the typical dishes are the famous maranhos (sheep's innards with rice, chicken etc.), bucho recheado (stuffed pork stomach) and sausages, and for desserts the cartuchos de amêndoa (almond cornets) and the merendas doces (sweet buns).

The Festivals of São João (St John) (24th June) and São Pedro (St Peter) (29th June) enliven the streets of the town with their bonfires. Other festive occasions also deserve to be mentioned, such as those of Nossa Senhora dos Remédios (Our Lady of the Cures) (14th and 15th August) and the Holy Week ceremonies.

Sobral de Monte Agraço

Sobral de Monte Agraço

Situated in a region where farm smallholdings are predominant, where the landscape is harmoniously composed of vegetable gardens and vineyards, the peaceful and picturesque town of Sobral de Monte Agraço contains some interesting buildings, decorated with tiles and wrought iron.

In a region with good restaurants, the cuisine is very varied, and the specialities are dishes of dried salted cod and kid, which can be washed down with the excellent red and white regional wines.

Sortelha

Sortelha

Surmounted by a castle built on a formidable crag at an altitude of 760 metres, Sortelha still retains its mediaeval appearance intact through the architecture of its rural granite houses.

Sortelha had therefore part of an important line of defence formed from a series of castles built on the borders of the territory, most of which were either erected or reconstructed on the earlier hill forts of ancient Iberian civilisations. The village's name derives from the nature of its terrain, being surrounded by rocky escarpments in the shape of a ring (sortija, in Castilian), its walls also having been built in a circular fashion.

The entrance to the village is through a Gothic gateway, over which there is a balcony (Pilate's balcony), with machicolations through which all kinds of projectiles were thrown at assailants. Before entering, you should note the beautiful pillory, surmounted by an armillary sphere, the symbol of D. Manuel I, and the building that once served as the town hall, both dating from the time of this king. On the post of another gate, facing westwards, two grooves have been cut into the stone to represent measures of length (the larger one is a vara [1.1 metres] and the smaller one is a côvado [0.66 metres]), used as measuring aids by mediaeval traders, at a time when the systems of measurement were not yet standardised.

The 14th-century parish church has an interesting Spanish-Arab ceiling, whilst the carved and gilded woodwork of the high altar was added in the Baroque period.

The great charm of this village is its evocation of a mediaeval atmosphere, with all the houses having been built of granite and generally consisting of just one storey. Their foundations have been built into the rock and follow the topography of the terrain. Another more modern village has grown beyond the walls, unfortunately displaying architectural styles that have little or nothing to do with the traditional roots of this region.

All around Sortelha, the landscape has the rugged beauty of the large granite boulders and the chestnut groves that frequently accompany these. At Casteleiro, on the road to Belmonte, was the medicinal station of Águas Radium (Radium Waters), considered to be amongst the most radioactive in the world. You can also enjoy a healthy walk following the old Roman-mediaeval road, along which the pilgrims used to pass on their way to Santiago de Compostela.

Two interesting towns are to be found roughly 20 kilometres from Sortelha and each of them is undoubtedly worth a visit: Belmonte, to the west, and Sabugal, to the north. To the south-east, nature lovers can visit the Serra da Malcata Nature Reserve, where there are special trails for observing both flora and fauna in a landscape that is rich in mementoes from the Mediterranean woodland. The Iberian lynx is the symbol of this

Nature Reserve. As it is a fairly mistrustful and rarely seen creature, it prefers to hide itself in the woodland, so that you may require a great deal of perseverance if you are hoping to catch a glimpse of it.

Tomar

Tomar

The development of Tomar is closely linked to the Order of the Templars, which received these lands in 1159 as a reward for the assistance they gave Dom Afonso Henriques (the First King of Portugal) in the Christian reconquest of the territory.

It was Dom Gualdim Pais, the first Grand Master of the Order in Portugal, who founded the castle and the remarkable Convent of Christ inside. Enlarged and altered over the centuries, this retains the influences of various architectural styles; it is the centrepiece of the city and classified as a World Heritage site by UNESCO.

Tomar, known as the city of the Templars, reveals other traces of their influence, particularly the Sete Montes Park, where traditionally rites of initiation are said to have taken place, and the Church of Santa Maria do Olival, founded by the Templars in the 12th century and containing the tombs of various Masters of the Order.

The Order of the Templars was suppressed in France in the early 14th century, but in Portugal it was transformed into the Order of Christ on the initiative of King Dom Dinis. This was subsequently approved by the Pope, and it was decided that the immense wealth they possessed should pass to the Order of Christ, which came to play an important part in the historic Portuguese Discoveries.

The Jews, after being expelled from Spain, founded a colony here in the narrow streets of the historical centre, in which one of the oldest synagogues in Portugal is conserved, complemented by the Abraão Zacuto Luso-Hebrew Museum.

The spectacular Festas dos Tabuleiros (a procession of white-clad "virgins" carrying headdresses made of bread loaves) are held every four years in July. Their origin is associated with the cult of the Holy Spirit.

About 14 kms from Tomar lies the lagoon of the Castelo de Bode dam, which captures the water to supply Lisbon, and whose islets and banks are covered with pine groves. There are ideal places here to spend some holiday time in contact with Nature.

Tondela

Caramulo

For the very best in clean and pure airs, and a sure remedy to any concept of stress, spend some time in Serra do Caramulo. So healthy are the surroundings, this region has long since been sought out as a cure for lung and breathing ailments.

Located in Centro de Portugal region, the hills are within easy reach of Coimbra, Viseu or Aveiro. Visit in spring and take in the rich colours as the forests return to life. The ideal point for taking in the wonder of these hills is the Caramulinho viewpoint perched 1,074 metres up.

In the small town of Caramulo, there is a rather unusual Museum home to 65 of the most fascinating automobiles ever built, some of which are antique in years.

On the hills, wander the Roman pathways past dolmens and menhirs placed there in the distant mists of early history. However, if you are after more adrenaline charged activities, there is one of the longest slides in Portugal and rivers ideal for all kinds of rafting or canoeing. And find out more about the origins of Portugal from the imposing history of the city of Viseu.

Torres Novas

Torres Novas

This region has been inhabited since Roman times, as evidenced by the ruins of the Vila Cardílio, with its precious polychrome mosaics.

The most prestigious monument in Torres Novas is its castle with eleven turrets, the former residence of the alcaide (commander of a fortress or castle).

The town, traversed by the River Almonda, enveloped in a charming garden with esplanades, has many attractions to offer the visitor, such as the churches of São Salvador, Santa Maria do Castelo, São Tiago (St James), São Pedro (St Peter), the Chapel of Nossa Senhora do Vale (Our Lady of the Valley) and the Carlos Reis Municipal Museum.

In the surrounding area, it is worth visiting the Museu Agrícola de Riachos, where various aspects of rural life are portrayed, the Gruta (Cave) do Almonda - considered the largest natural cave in the country - and the Grutas (caves) das Lapas, with their curious labyrinthine formations.

Around seven kilometres from the city, the Pául do Boquilobo Nature Reserve, a protected area where the landscape is dominated by willow trees and reeds, is of great ornithological significance, since it is the place where various birds choose to nest, of which the most important are colonies of storks.

The town festivals in July and the dried fruit fair in October are the most important events in the region, as well as the

gastronomic Festival of the Goat in March.

Torres Vedras

Torres Vedras

Inhabited in prehistoric and Roman times, Torres Vedras received its Charter in the mid-13th century.

The Convent of Varatojo, one of the most important religious monuments in the region, was founded in 1470 by King Dom Afonso V, in gratitude for the conquests in North Africa.

In the 19th century, during the Napoleonic invasions, Torres Vedras had a very important role, because it was the scene of the beginning of the retreat of the French army and Napoleon's loss of hegemony in Europe. In fact, the building of the "Lines of Torres Vedras", a series of military fortifications lined up around Lisbon, was successful in its aim of preventing the French troops from advancing on Lisbon, and forced them to retreat.

In the environs, besides the beaches of Santa Cruz and Porto Novo, with all the activity typical of a holiday resort, with golf courses, riding schools, hotels and swimming pools, there are also the hot spring spas of Cucos and Vimeiro, much sought after for the therapeutic qualities of their waters.

The Carnival is the highlight of the town's events. It has strong traditions in Torres Vedras, and is known as the most Portuguese in Portugal, because it maintains the allegorical parades and processions of decorated floats, gigantones (giant carnival figures) and zés-pereiras (carnival rhythms), without yielding to foreign influences.

Trancoso

Trancoso

With a past that parallels the history of Portugal, Trancoso is a town whose narrow streets and stone houses preserve the medieval atmosphere. The plateau on which it is situated, at an altitude of 870 metres, gave it a strategic position in the defence of the frontier with Spain and made it an important fortress during the Middle Ages.

The Porta d'El Rei is the main entrance in the walls and a homage to D. Dinis, who celebrated his marriage to Isabel of Aragon here in the Chapel of São Bartolomeu in 1282. D. Dinis presented the town to the Holy Queen as a dowry, and established the tax-free market, the origin of the great Trancoso fair that still takes place every 15th August, the day of Nossa Senhora da Fresta, the patron saint.

The labyrinth of stone streets leads to the town centre and the Pillory, where the Old Town and New Town meet. In the oldest part stands the Castle, much contested by Moors and Christians and finally captured by D. Afonso Henriques in 1160, and the

Church of São Pedro, the eternal resting-place of the mysterious Bandarra (1500-45), a cobbler-poet who prophesied Portugal's loss of independence in 1580 and its restoration in 1640.

The population settled in the New Town. In the fifteenth century there was a large Jewish community that contributed much to the development of commerce. This period has left its mark in the architecture of the houses with two doors (a wide one for the shop entrance and a narrow one leading to the living quarters) and in the Casa do Gato Negro, or House of the Black Cat, (in the Largo Luís de Albuquerque), one of the town's most emblematic buildings identified as being the former synagogue and home of the rabbi.

Magriço ("the Lean One"), one of the "Twelve of England" and the protagonist of a historical episode between Portugal and England, lived here in the fourteenth century. It was also in this town that General Beresford set up his general headquarters in 1809 when he was in Portugal as an ally against the Napoleonic invasions. Five years later, Beresford was given the title of first Conde de Trancoso.

On 29th May the town celebrates the anniversary of the Battle of São Marcos (1385), precursor of the great victory of the Battle of Aljubarrota against Castile, in which D. João I defended and consolidated Portuguese independence. On this day bread and oranges are distributed to the children of the São Marcos plateau, where the battle was fought, because according to tradition the Portuguese left the Castilians to "bread and oranges".

Vila Nova da Barquinha

Vila Nova da Barquinha

Located right next to the River Tagus, in an extremely green and fertile area, Vila Nova de Barquinha is a very picturesque place.

Opposite it, on an islet in the middle of the river, is one of the most attractive Portuguese castles - the Castle of Almoural, built by the Templars in 1171. It is associated with legends of enchanted Moorish women and captured princesses saved by itinerant knights.

This castle, often the setting of performances that take advantage of its location by using son et lumière effects, can be visited by a boat that leaves from Tancos.

Vila Nova da Barquinha has the second oldest bullring in Portugal, which bears witness to the tradition of the festa brava ("festival of daring"), a vital ingredient of the important events in the council, such as the Town Festivals in July and the "Festa do Rio e das Aldeias" (Festival of the River and Villages) on 15th August, in which the celebrations take place on both sides of the river, in the villages of Tancos and Arripiados.

In the environs, a visit to the 16th century Parish Church of Atalaia, whose façade is one of the best examples of the

Renaissance style in Portugal, is worth taking some time over.

As for the local cuisine, the highlights are the river fish dishes, such as the caldeiradas (fish casseroles), the fish soup, the striped mullet cooked on a tile, the açorda de savel (purée of bread, herbs and garlic with shad), and the eels cooked in the fisherman's style.

Vila de Rei

Vila de Rei

If you imagine a line crossing Portugal from north to south, and another from east to west, Vila de Rei is situated right in the geodesic centre of the country, a fact that is marked on a peak of a geodesic pyramid in the Serra de Melriça, a point that is also an excellent viewpoint of the region.

Vila de Rei owes its name to King Dom Dinis, who gave it its Charter in the 13th century, and conceded it various privileges, and it is in honour of his wife Dona Isabel that the Festivals of the Rainha Santa (Holy Queen) are held annually in May.

In a region where the pine tree is the main type of vegetation, the air is pure, and one finds villages that seem to stand still in time, such as Água Formosa with its houses inlaid on the hillside, the streets paved with schist and the medieval bridge.

One of the main belvederes in this area is the Penedo Furado (rock with a hole), from where one can admire a fine panoramic view of the riverside beaches of the valley of the Ribeira de Codes, which before reaching the beaches rushes down the waterfalls of the Bufareira between charming natural swimming pools.

Viseu

Viseu

According to some explanations, the city's name derived from the Roman term "viso", which means a good view, and in fact from its highest point, where the original settlement was formed in Roman times, Viseu offers its visitors some quite magnificent panoramic views.

One of the most interesting features remaining from this period is to be found in the city's outskirts and is known as the Cava de Viriato (an embankment which must date from between the second and the first century BC). This is the largest monument from this period in the Iberian Peninsula, although it has not yet been totally uncovered, and it is thought to have been a fortress where the remarkable warrior Viriatus, the chief of the Lusitanians and the heroic leader of the rebellion against Roman occupation, entrenched himself for defensive purposes. In the twelfth century, the city was granted a charter for a free fair, which is still held today in August and September. This is known as the Fair of São Mateus and is one of the city's main events.

The city has a number of green and leafy parks and is very cool and pleasant, yet it also preserves a rich heritage in terms of monuments, amongst which the highlights are the cathedral and the Misericórdia church.

It was in Viseu that one of the most important Portuguese artists was born in the sixteenth century, Vasco Fernandes, who came to be known as Grão Vasco (the Great Vasco) and founded an important school of painting here. Many of his own paintings can be admired in the local museum which bears his name.

Viseu is located in the centre of a demarcated wine region that has taken the name of the river passing through it - Dão. It is an area that produces reds and whites of exceptional quality, ideal accompaniments for the region's excellent cuisine, with a special mention being reserved for the roast veal cooked in the Lafões style.

Lisboa Region

Alcochete

Alcochete

Alcochete was founded by the Moors and called "Alcaxete", meaning ovens, which is thought to be due to the large ovens for baking clay that existed here. Alcochete was captured by Dom Afonso Henriques, the first King of Portugal, in the 12th century.

In the 15th century, this region, with an abundance of species such as deer, wild boar and wolves, was much frequented by the nobility, who used to organise big hunting parties, staying here for long periods in their summer residences.

The salt-works are the area's major natural resource, and Alcochete was for a long time considered to be the most important centre of salt production in the country. Even today this activity is fundamental to the local economy.

As in almost the whole of the Ribatejo, Alcochete breeds horses and bulls, and the inhabitants enjoy the "festa brava" (festival of daring), which reaches its high point in the "Festas do Barrete Verde e das Salinas" (Festivals of the Green Cap and the Salt-Works"), that take place every year in the second week of August, when the running of bulls and bullfights are the most characteristic spectacles.

Nearby is the Tagus Estuary Nature Reserve, where one can see the various birds that pass through here on their migrations, among which the flocks of flamingoes are particularly striking.

Almada

Almada

Almada, on the south bank of the River Tagus, has undoubtedly the best view of the city of Lisbon. The most outstanding views are from the castle, the panoramic funicular of the Boca do Vento (Mouth of the Wind), and above all the statue of Christ the King, built in 1959.

In past centuries, Almada was a popular summer resort for the Court, which ordered the construction of stately homes and buildings that are still preserved in the city.

Life in Almada does not revolve only around the capital, where most of its inhabitants work; it is a city with its own life, the setting for well-attended events like the Theatre Festival.

The Costa da Caparica, much sought after during the summer season by the population of Greater Lisbon, who are lured by the long sandy beaches, is also part of the council of Almada. The area's cuisine deserves a special mention, especially the delicious caldeiradas (fresh fish casseroles) that are typical of places like Cacilhas, Porto Brandão, Ginjal and the Costa da Caparica.

Amadora

Amadora

The town of Amadora, a suburb of Lisbon, has experienced extraordinary development in the 20th century, as thousands of people who work in the capital have chosen to live there, since it is easy to commute by train or car.

The most important of the cultural events in this modern town are the Town Festivals in September/October (with various cultural activities and a Book Fair), the International Cartoon Festival in October/November and the Corrida de São Silvestre (St Sylvester Race) on New Year's Eve, one of the most hotly contested athletic trials in Portugal.

Barreiro

Barreiro

Raised to the category of town in the 16th century, the original nucleus of the village of Barreiro was composed of various fishermen from the Algarve, who settled here and worked in the barra (river mouth) of the port of Lisbon, and hence were known as "barreiros".

In the 18th-19th centuries the area developed enormously, due to the establishment of the terminus of the South and Southeast railway line. This made it a busy place, with many people passing through, and led many people and industrial concerns to settle there. The town of Barreiro continued to grow, and in 1984 it was

raised to the category of a city.

Cascais

Cascais

Situated close to the sea and traditionally a fishing village, Cascais enjoyed an important period of development in the 14th century, when it was a major stopping off point for boats on their way to Lisbon, turning it into a very busy port at that time.

It was, however, in the second half of the 19th century, when sea bathing became a popular activity, that Cascais was given the impetus that transformed it into a very fashionable summer resort. The great driving force behind this transformation was the king of Portugal, Dom Luís I, who, in 1870, converted the Fortaleza da Cidadela into the summer residence of the Portuguese monarchy. The king's example was immediately copied by the nobility, who built palaces and extremely beautiful villas in the town, where they spent the hottest season of the year, completely transforming the appearance of the former fishing village.

Cascais also began to attract the attention of the curious, who came here to enjoy a stroll by the seaside, and access to the town was greatly facilitated by the opening of the railway line between Pedrouços and Cascais in 1889. Nowadays, Cascais is a very lively and cosmopolitan town that still preserves a great deal of its earlier aristocratic atmosphere.

Particularly recommended is a stroll through its streets, where you will find shops of the highest quality, or perhaps you might prefer to enjoy a few moments' rest at one of the many outdoor cafés and restaurants scattered about the town. The beaches continue to be one of Cascais' greatest attractions, and it is possible to choose from amongst those that are situated in the town's sheltered bay or those a little further away in the area around Guincho, (already forming part of the Sintra-Cascais Natural Park), where there are excellent conditions for surfing and windsurfing. The Boca do Inferno (literally the Jaws of Hell), an inlet along the coast that is surrounded by steep rocks and caves, continues to be a natural curiosity attracting many thousands of visitors to marvel at the brute strength of the sea.

A special mention is reserved for the local cuisine, especially the fresh fish and shellfish dishes that are served here and which can be enjoyed in the region's many restaurants.

Guincho

Near to Cascais, the long sandy beach of Guincho is very popular with bathers, and all through the year with surfers and windsurfers, sports for which the beach offers excellent conditions.

Along the road by the sea there are several top quality restaurants, offering excellent fish and shellfish dishes.

Costa de Caparica

Costa de Caparica

A traditional fishing village, Costa da Caparica was transformed in the 20th century into the busiest beach in the Lisbon region. Its location and easy accessibility attracts crowds on summer weekends.

The strip of sand about 25 kilometres long makes it possible to choose between the more crowded beaches near the town and areas that are practically deserted. A picturesque train, the "Transpraia", runs between the town beaches and the Fonte da Telha at the end of the line, with various stops on the way.

The many beaches are excellent for several sports, such as surfing and beach volleyball (in places adapted for this), and there are lots of bars that, besides being support infrastructures, are also centres of nightlife.

As it is a fishing region, it is fish dishes, especially the caldeiradas (fish casseroles), that are the major gastronomic speciality, and every year there is a gastronomic festival dedicated to fish.

Ericeira

Ericeira

A traditional fishing village, Ericeira has developed enormously during the 20th century due to the growing interest in it as a summer resort. It has, however, maintained its original characteristics and its own individual atmosphere.

Fifty kilometres from Lisbon, in an easily accessible area, its beaches are very crowded during the summer, and are considered among the best in Europe for surfing. Ribeira d`Ilhas Beach, where one of the World Surfing Championship contests is held every year, is worth a special mention.

A visit to Ericeira is also an excellent opportunity to try the shellfish and fresh fish dishes, the speciality of the regional cuisine.

Estoril

Estoril

Estoril, a world-famous resort, is a true cosmopolitan centre with wonderful nightlife and all the infrastructure for a summer centre - beaches, excellent hotels, golf courses, a casino and even a motor-racing circuit.

The planned transformation of this area began in the early 20th century, due not only to its proximity to the sea, which was starting to be a focus of attraction, but also to the existence of thermal springs, at that time much in vogue (they are currently closed).

The centre of this new luxury resort was the Park and the Casino (Estoril's trademark), surrounded by buildings, arcades and excellent hotels.

Estoril was previously known for the several forts along the coastline which ensured the defence of one of the possible entries to Lisbon, and for the Retreat built here by the Mendicant Order of Franciscan Friars in the 16th century, now the Salesian College.

In the 1930s Estoril became one of Portugal's main tourist centres, and the chosen place of exile for a lot of deposed European monarchs (King Juan Carlos of Spain among them).

During the Second World War it was the refuge of writers, politicians, artists, businessmen and many Jews persecuted by the Third Reich.

Lisboa

Lisboa

On the right bank of the broad Tagus river estuary, the capital of Portugal graciously reclines over rolling hills. This is a spectacular geographical location and does much to explain the cosmopolitan history of the city. Its exceptional natural light, which has long inspired writers, photographers and filmmakers, the brightly coloured buildings straddling the slopes, the striking ochre of the roofs, the tiling on so many facades and the narrow twisting alleys of the medieval districts bestow Lisbon with the peculiar atmosphere of a city perched somewhere between the European north and the Mediterranean south.

Throughout millennia, the superb natural harbour of the Tagus was used by traders and seafarers. Lisbon's long history begins under the Phoenicians as Alis-Ubbo, before becoming the Roman settlement of Felicita Julia Olisipo in the second century.

With the arrival of the Moors from the 8th century, it was renamed Aschbouna. The city fell to the Portuguese in 1147, when conquered by the first king of Portugal, Afonso Henriques. It became the national capital in 1255.

Wandering its distinctive neighbourhoods, taking the tram through historic neighbourhoods, riding the century-old lifts up

and down the steep slopes, taking a boat ride on the Tagus, or even jumping on the metro, itself a veritable underground museum of contemporary Portuguese art, there are so many means to discover the great diversity and cultural depth that Lisbon has to offer.

To the west, close to the mouth of the Tagus, visit Belém with its gardens and monuments to the Lisbon of the Voyages of Discovery now declared UNESCO World Heritage.

Much was rebuilt after the 1755 earthquake. A regular, symmetrical plan was established for the "Baixa (Downtown)" opening it up to both the light and the river. There, you will come across the traditional commerce. There is also the seductive appeal of the Chiado; a neighbourhood evoking the bourgeois tastes of 19th century Lisbon. To the east, the Parque das Nações (Park of Nations) concentrates a huge range of leisure facilities and features the Oceanarium.

By night, the traditional neighbourhoods fall under the spell of Fado, the melancholic style of Portuguese folk music, while a younger crowd flock to lively, stylish bars of the Docas, down by the river, or the Bairro Alto, adjoining the Chiado.

Loures

Loures

In the outskirts of Lisbon, the Loures region is traditionally known as the saloia (country) area, because the gardens that used to supply the city of Lisbon with vegetables and fresh produce were situated here.

From the former times when it was in demand as an area of leisure, and the nobles built their residences here, the 18th century palace and estate of the Correio-Mor (Postmaster-General) and the estate of the Conventinho (small convent), now the premises of the Municipal Museum, still survive.

There are several important architectural buildings in the surrounding area, such as the Parish Church of Odivelas, built in the 13th century and rebuilt in the 17th, and in Santo Antão do Tojal there is the 18th century Palace of the Archbishops, which has a monumental fountain inset in its façade, in front of which there is a lively 18th century fair at the end of September.

Also in Loures council, the Demarcated Winegrowing Region of Bucelas produces excellent quality white wines, which achieved international renown after the Napoleonic invasions of the 19th century, although they had already been mentioned by Shakespeare in the 16th-17th centuries. All the ethnographic tradition associated with it is celebrated every October at the Festival of Wine and the Grape Harvests.

Mafra

Mafra

This town near Lisbon, in the "saloia" (rustic) area, which used to supply the capital with garden produce, is famous for its imposing Palace-Convent, the largest edifice in Portugal, built by order of King Dom João V in the 18th century.

The king, who still had no children three years after his marriage to Dona Maria Ana of Austria, promised the Franciscan friars that he would build them a convent in the Mafra area if his prayers for an heir to the throne were answered.

So, on the occasion of the birth of his daughter Dona Maria Pia, he began the building, the plan for which was initially quite modest. After the German architect Ludwig was contracted, however, the plan underwent considerable changes as a result of the luxury Portugal was experiencing at the time on account of the wealth coming from Brazil. Hence this grandiose monument was built, (including a convent for 300 friars, a basilica and a 666-room royal palace), in a record time, from 1717 to 1730, to be inaugurated on the king's 41st birthday.

The Mafra Preserve which adjoins the Convent, acquired by King Dom João IV in the mid-18th century to enhance the value of the set of buildings, was used as a game reserve, and is now open to the public.

In the surrounding area, it is worth visiting José Franco's ceramics workshop in village of Sobreiro, where you can appreciate the more traditional aspects of life in the local villages, life-sized or in animated miniatures.

The traditional fishing village of Ericeira, on the seaside near Mafra, is much sought after as a holiday resort, and by surfers attracted by the excellent opportunities this beach and the ones near it (Ribeira das Ilhas and Lizandro) afford for their sport.

Moita

Moita

Originally a fishing village, on the south bank of the Tagus, near Lisbon and Setúbal, Moita started to be frequented by the nobility as a place of leisure, and in the 16th century as a refuge, on account of the plague which was sweeping Lisbon.

The crossings of the Tagus were made in typical boats, such as the faluas (Tagus barges) and varinos (long narrow boats), which are now used for tourist excursions.

Bullfighting has a great tradition in the history of Moita. The celebrations of Nossa Senhora da Boa Viagem and the Feast of Nossa Senhora do Rosário are among the most important events of this locality.

Montijo

Montijo

Situated next to the River Tagus, this area was donated in the 12th century by the King of Portugal to the Military Order of Santiago de Espada which controlled a vast territory with the Castle of Palmela as its highest point. For centuries it bore the name of "Aldeia Galega", and it was only in 1930 that it came to be called Montijo.

In the 16th century the population grew immensely, due to the arrival of workers from various regions to take part in the works whose aim was to make the river navigable by counteracting its tendency to silt up. This work had a definitive effect on the village, and opened up the possibility for the local economy to diversify, which until then had depended entirely on fishing.

Like almost everywhere in the Ribatejo, Montijo has a strong tradition of the festa brava (festival of daring), and bullfights and the running of bulls are an essential part of the town's most typical festivals, such as the Festivals of São Pedro (St Peter) which take place every year at the end of June.

Oeiras

Oeiras

Situated by the sea and around 10 kilometres from Lisbon, the town of Oeiras has for centuries been the place chosen by many noble or wealthy families for their summer residences. The most important of these buildings are the 18th century palace of the Marquis of Pombal, King Dom José's minister who contributed greatly to the development of Oeiras and its elevation to the category of a town, and the Real Quinta in Caxias.

In the 17th century a series of fortifications was built along the coast to defend the mouth of the Tagus, and therefore the entrance to Lisbon. The most notable are the Forte do Areeiro, the Forte das Maias, the Forte de Catalazete, the Forte de São Bruno in Paço de Arcos and, the most typical, situated in the middle of the Tagus - the Forte do Bugio.

In the environs, it is worth visiting the Museu da Pólvora Negra (Gunpowder Museum) in the premises of the Antiga Fábrica da Pólvora (Old Gunpowder Factory) in Barcarena, which has been deactivated and turned into a leisure area, the Museu do Automóvel Antigo (Veteran Car Museum) in Paço de Arcos, and the Vasco da Gama Aquarium in Dafundo.

On Sundays the bric-à-brac markets enliven the council's gardens, taking place on the first Sunday of the month in Santo Amaro de Oeiras, then in Paço de Arcos and, on the last Sunday, in Algés.

Palmela

Palmela

This town, located on one of the foothills of the Arrábida mountain range, has over the centuries attracted the various peoples who have passed through the Iberian Peninsula.

It is believed to owe its name to the Romans, specifically to a praetor called Palma, while the Arabs were responsible for building the castle at its highest point, from where it dominates the whole of the area between the Sado and Tagus Rivers, and even the Sintra mountain range can be seen.

This explains its importance at that period for reasons of military strategy, just as nowadays it is one of the best belvederes in the entire district.

Palmela was recaptured from the Moors by Dom Afonso Henriques, the first King of Portugal (12th century), with the aid of the Knights of the Order of São Tiago (St. James), whom he rewarded by donating these lands for settlement and defence. In the 15th century a Convent was founded inside the Castle, which served as the headquarters of this Religious and Military Order, and is currently a country-house hotel.

Palmela is also an important wine-growing region, producing excellent table wines and a fortified wine called Moscatel of Setúbal. This is the origin of the town's most important celebrations, the grape harvest festival that takes place at the beginning of September and includes processions, performances and the release of bulls.

Seixal

Seixal

On the south bank of the River Tagus, the extremely fertile region of Seixal was used during the Moorish occupation for introducing various Mediterranean cultures, such as vineyards, olive groves and fig trees.

Because of the characteristics of its sheltered bay, in the 14th-15th centuries Seixal was chosen for establishing naval shipyards, an industry that developed immensely at the time of the Discoveries, and has continued here over the centuries. For a long time, however, the traditional occupation of the population was fishing, which was why St Peter was chosen as the patron saint, in whose honour the council's chief festivals are held in June.

A visit to Seixal's Municipal Eco-Museum is a must in order to gain a better knowledge of the region's history and traditions. Another suggestion is to take an excursion on a typical boat, and visit the still functioning tidal watermill at Corroios, which shows visitors the processes of an operation that was very common in the region in the 15th-16th centuries, since there were around

60 tidal watermills in this area, responsible for supplying flour to the city of Lisbon.

Sesimbra

Sesimbra

Sesimbra, a picturesque fishing town set in a sheltered bay, was founded on the hilltop around the Moorish castle that Dom Afonso Henriques (the first King of Portugal) captured in 1165. This castle fell back into Moorish hands in 1191, and was recaptured in the reign of Dom Sancho I (13th century), who donated it to the Order of São Tiago (St. James) for defence and settlement. It was restored in the 18th century, and is now an essential place to visit for admiring a truly marvellous view of the town and the sea.

Sesimbra's wealth of seafood persuaded the population to go down the hill and explore the neighbourhood, turning this town into one of the region's main fishing ports.

It was the sea too that during the 20th century has attracted outsiders in search of the excellent sheltered beaches with prime conditions for water sports, making this peaceful place a busy summer resort.

In the surrounding area, the Sanctuary of Nossa Senhora do Cabo Espichel is worth a visit, and on the cliff next to it one can see dinosaur footprints.

The excellent local cuisine, specialising in shellfish and fresh fish, deserves a special mention, and this can be sampled in the numerous local restaurants.

Setúbal

Azeitão

Situated in the Nature Reserve of the Serra da Arrábida, the Azeitão area includes various characteristic villages, in particular Vila Fresca and Vila Nogueira, which adopted the names of the quintas (country houses/estates) around which they developed.

Vila Fresca de Azeitão grew up around the Quinta Fresca, where King Dom João I founded a palace in the 15th century, later known as the Palácio da Quinta da Bacalhoa, from the nickname of one of its owners, a name that has survived up to the present day.

Vila Nogueira de Azeitão developed around the Quinta da Nogueira, the property of Dona Constança, wife of King Pedro (14th century). The village grew and was raised to the category of town and seat of the council in 1786, a category it lost in 1855.

Several aristocratic families made this delightful region, of great natural beauty, their summer residence. They built fine country

Setúbal

Setúbal was inhabited in ancient times by the Phoenicians, and by the Romans who settled on the south bank of the River Sado (in Tróia, opposite the present town), who called it Cetobriga, from which the name Setúbal is derived.

It was the Romans who started one of the region's most traditional activities - gathering salt and preserving food in salting tanks whose remains still exist on the Tróia Peninsula.

The development of Setúbal has always been linked to the seafaring activities facilitated by its location at the mouth of the River Sado, and it was already one of the country's main ports in the 14th century.

Its agricultural produce is also important, some of which is mentioned in documents dating back to the 14th century, in particular grapes, wine, oranges and fish. The wines produced in the surrounding area are still famous today, especially table wines and the moscatel called Setúbal, which can be tasted in

houses and mansions, such as the Quinta das Torres (now converted into an inn or country house hotel), and the palace of the Dukes of Aveiro, which is built in pure Renaissance style.

A visit to Azeitão also provides the opportunity to taste the excellent regional products, such as the cheeses, the famous tarts and the wines, in particular the table wines made from Periquita grapes, and the Moscatel of Setúbal.

the cellars in nearby Azeitão, which also produces excellent cheeses and delicious tarts.

The city was the birthplace of outstanding Portuguese cultural figures, particularly Bocage (a 19th century poet, famous for the ironic tone and social criticism that he put into everything he wrote), and Luísa Todi (an important lyric singer). The Convent of Jesus, which houses the Municipal Museum, is in the Gothic-Manueline style, and the Fort of São Filipe, now converted into a "Pousada" (country-house hotel) from which one can enjoy a fantastic view of the city, the River Sado, Tróia and the Arrábida mountain range, also deserve special mention.

Around Setúbal there are nature conservation areas, in particular the Sado Estuary Nature Reserve, where it is still possible to watch dolphins in the wild, and the Arrábida Natural Park, which has unique characteristics and contains species that can only be found in areas near the Mediterranean.

There are also excellent beaches, especially Figueirinha, Galapos and Portinho da Arrábida (a magnificent sheltered bay), and on the other side of the River Sado, within easy reach by ferry, there is the Tróia peninsula with about 18 kms of beaches and a golf course.

Sintra

Colares

At the foot of the Sintra mountains and very close to the sea, the town of Colares is absolutely delightful and has long been a very popular summer resort.

Colares is also a demarcated wine-growing region, producing the very popular and increasingly rare Colares wine, which can be tasted at the Adega Regional, in a very beautiful building in the town centre.

Right next to it is the tram station which links Sintra with Praia das Maças in the summer months.

In the environs of Colares are the beaches of Praia das Maças, Praia Grande and Adraga, and the typical village of Azenhas do Mar, with its whitewashed houses inset in the side of a cliff.

Sintra

A beautiful town at the foot of the mountain range of the same name, its unique characteristics have led UNESCO to classify it as a World heritage site. It was even necessary to create a special category for the purpose - that of "cultural landscape" - taking into account its natural riches as well as the historic buildings in the town and mountains. Endowed with luxuriant vegetation, the mountains are part of the Sintra-Cascais Natural Park.

From early times Sintra has been the place of choice for the settlement of various peoples who have passed through the

Queluz

Queluz is a populous area in the municipality of Sintra about 12 kms from Lisbon. In the early 18th century it was the idyllic country setting of the royal family's estate and hunting lodge, which the Infante Dom Pedro, son of King Dom João V, ordered to be converted into the Summer Palace.

The conversion work between 1747 and 1760 was supervised by the architects Mateus Vicente de Oliveira and the Frenchman Robillion, who added a new west wing to the initial plan, known as the Robillion Pavilion, and worked on the decoration of the finest spaces such as the Throne Room, the Music Room and the Ambassadors' Room.

The palace, predominantly in the "rocaille" and Rococo style, contains an important collection of decorative art - Portuguese furniture, painting, carpets, porcelain and tiles. The geometrically designed gardens, too, are very beautiful, surrounding the palace and concealing lakes and sculptures, and in the park there is a tiled canal through which a stream used to flow and where the royal family would take boat trips. The annexes to the main building have been converted into a "Pousada" (country-house hotel).

The palace salons are open to the public for classical music concerts and every Wednesday there are performances by the Portuguese Riding School in the open-air riding arena.

Iberian Peninsula and left traces of their presence, which are now displayed in the Archaeological Museum of Odrinhas, in the outskirts of the town.

In the 12th century, Dom Afonso Henriques, the first King of Portugal, captured the Moorish Castle, and his successors later built their holiday residence. Their physiognomy is marked by the two enormous conical chimneys built in the Middle Ages.

Much appreciated by kings and nobles as a country resort, and praised by writers and poets like (inevitably) Lord Byron who called it "glorious Eden", Sintra has a wealth of cottages and manor houses, some of which now provide accommodation in the form of country-house tourism.

The palaces, too, are outstanding, such as the Pena Palace, built in the Romantic period on one of the mountain peaks, and the 18th century Palace of Seteais, now converted into an elegant hotel, and the Palace of Monserrate, famous for its beautiful gardens with their exotic species that are unique in the country.

Sintra's confectionery deserves a special mention, particularly the travesseiros (puff pastes stuffed with a sweet egg mixture) and the famous cheese-cakes, which according to ancient documents were already being made in the 12th century, and were part of the rent payments.

Near Sintra are the beaches (das Maças, Praia Grande, Praia da Adraga), Cabo da Roca (the westernmost point of mainland Europe), Colares (after which a demarcated wine-growing region is named), and the picturesque village of Azenhas do Mar, inset in a cliff.

Vila Franca de Xira

Vila Franca de Xira

On the bank of the River Tagus, Vila Franca de Xira is surrounded by fertile plains - the lezírias (alluvial plains), where the campinos (Ribatejo cowboys) keep constant watch on the horses and bulls that are bred there. Vila Franca de Xira is famous for the unswerving loyalty of the fans of the bullfight, the favourite entertainment in the region, which takes place between April and October almost every weekend in the Palha Branco Praça de Touros (bullring). For those interested in this, an absolute must is a visit to the Ethnographic Museum in the Praça de Touros, and to the stud farms and equestrian centres of the Lezíria Grande and the Morgado Lusitano.

The bullfights and running of the bulls in the streets are also an essential feature of the main festivals of the region, such as the October Fair and the Festival of the Colete Encarnado (Scarlet Waistcoat), which is held every year in June and owes its name to one of the components of the campino's (Ribatejo cowboy's) costume.

Some of the most important dishes in the varied cuisine are

typical riverside dishes, such as eels, dabs, açorda de savel (purée of bread, herbs and garlic with shad), galinha de cabidela (chicken with giblets, cooked in its own blood and with rice), mutton stew and tripe cooked in the Vila Franca style.

In Alverca, the Museu do Ar, the only one in the country, has a collection of objects that illustrate the history of aeronautics in Portugal.

In the environs, the Nature Reserve of the Tagus Estuary is the stopping-point for migratory birds - flamingoes, storks, sandpipers, avocets, duck, kites and kestrels. In the rural hinterland, life is peaceful, the environment unpolluted, and the main occupation is smallholder farming.

Madeira

Funchal

Funchal

No-one visiting Funchal can be indifferent to its beauty and the hospitality of its people. There are many places to visit in this 500-year old city, and some cannot be missed...

The capital of Madeira, Funchal is situated on the south coast of the island, on a beautiful bay of the same name. It was awarded its first charter in the mid-15th century, and its name comes from fennel (funcho), an aromatic herb common in this region.

The city became an important trading post, first with the trade in sugar cane and bananas and then due to Madeira wine, and it was a key stopping point for maritime expansion voyages. Due to its mild climate throughout the year, it became early on a favourite destination for the European elite.

Rich in history, cosmopolitan, and with a fantastic life of its own, Funchal today has much to see and admire, beginning with the historic centres of its parishes, such as São Pedro, Santa Maria and Sé, which are very interesting to walk around. Funchal also has a strong cultural life, including museums and other cultural amenities of similar interest.

Don't miss the Farmers' Market, where the flavours and aromas of fruit and flowers mingle with the usual bustle of a market.

Since Funchal is known as a "garden by the sea", we cannot fail to mention its green spaces, such as the Botanical Gardens and the Garden of the Quinta do Palheiro Ferreiro, both containing plants from the four corners of the world.

There's nothing better than a cable car ride to best enjoy the beauty of the city and its surroundings, and you can take either the cable car from Monte to the Botanical Gardens or to the city centre. Once in Monte, a return in the "basket car" is a must.

Back in the city centre, you can stroll towards Funchal Marina

and watch the yachts and, further ahead, the cruise ships, coming from various points of departure.

The range of events and tourist activities is constant throughout the year, the most important of which are Carnival, the Flower Festival and the New Year's Eve festivities. But there are many other activities: golf, tennis, diving, fishing, horse-riding and boating are always good suggestions. These activities are complemented by the large number of terraces and restaurants in historic sites, where you can refresh yourself with a drink or simply take delight in the typical flavours of the region.

Whatever the option, you can relax and enjoy the charms and magnificent conditions that Funchal has to offer. And discover the hospitality of the people of Madeira in the varied range of quality accommodation that will make you feel at home.

Ilha de Porto Santo

Ilha de Porto Santo

Getting to know Porto Santo means discovering the first port that provided access to the epic maritime adventure of the Portuguese discoverers.

This was the first of all the islands discovered by the Portuguese navigators and it contains within its shores an important historical legacy.

It was here that Gonçalves Zarco, Bartolomeu Perestrelo and Tristão Vaz first landed in 1418. History tells us that the island's name derives from the fact that the navigators found a safe haven on the island after the violent storm that had blown them from their intended course. With this discovery, the Portuguese mariners opened up new horizons for nautical science and cosmography, becoming the masters of all nations in the art of navigation.

In bygone days, this island served as an advanced station that could be used for study and observation by the great navigators, most notably the discoverer of America, Christopher Columbus, who spent some years here. The house where this navigator once lived has been transformed into a museum and is situated in the town's historic centre.

Pico Castelo, a small fortress built on top of this hill, is the home to many history-laden mysteries.

The history and culture of this island are waiting for you to discover them!

Porto and the North

Alfândega da Fé

Alfândega da Fé

The town has been inhabited since prehistoric times, as can be seen by the numerous archaeological remains that have been found in the area. Its name comes from Arabic - "alfândega" meaning inn - to which the words "da fé" (of the faith) were added after the Christian reconquest.

Alfândega da Fé is situated in the "terra quente" (hot lands) of the Northern inland region, so-called because the region is very cold in the winter and has very high temperatures in the summer. The region is also famous for its almond-trees in blossom, which lend great beauty to the landscape in February/March.

Alijó

Alijó

Located in the heart of the Douro demarcated region, its importance is closely linked to the production of wine, for many of the estates that produce the famous Port Wine are to be found in this municipality.

The town's first charter dates back to 1226, although some remains have been found that prove that the site has been inhabited since prehistoric times.

Amarante

Amarante

All visitors to Amarante will most certainly be impressed by two imposing natural features: the great Serra do Marão rising above the city in a series of majestic landscapes and the river Tâmega, the longest tributary of the river Douro, whose journey begins in Galicia and which flows through the heart of Amarante, giving added colour to the picturesque houses standing on its banks.

Some historians have attributed the foundation of this transitional city linking the provinces of Minho and Trás-os-Montes to a Roman centurion by the name of Amarantus. In the thirteenth century, St Gonçalo, a Benedictine monk and popular saint, arrived in this area, where he eventually settled after completing a pilgrimage to Italy and Jerusalem, later becoming the city's patron saint. He is accredited with the building of a sturdy bridge over the Tâmega on the same site as the current one.

The bridge at Amarante perpetuates the memory of the local population's heroic resistance against Napoleon's troops, who invaded Portugal in the early nineteenth century. In view of its position as a major gateway to the region of Trás-os-Montes, the city was besieged by Marshal Soult, although he met with stiff

opposition from the local inhabitants, who bravely withstood his fierce attacks for a fortnight, until finally surrendering when the French bombarded them with barrels of gunpowder.

Amarante's sweets and cakes are extremely famous and easy to find in many of the region's cake-shops and cafés. Remember some of the names and make sure to taste them for yourself: papos de anjo, brisas do Tâmega, toucinho do céu, bolos de São Gonçalo, galhofas.

At the first Saturday of June takes place the Feast in honour of the Saint Gonçalo, much sought after by old spinsters in search of a husband.

No visitor to the region can afford to miss visiting the Serra do Marão in order to admire its breathtaking landscape. Roughly 20 kilometres away along the A4, travellers will find restful accommodation at the Pousada de S. Gonçalo, which has one of the most beautiful views in the whole of Portugal. Close by is the delightful valley of Ansiães, where you can visit the trout farms on the right bank of the river Ovelha, providing you with an excellent pretext for enjoying a walk through the dense woods that surround them.

The village of Travanca do Monte, which is reached by the road leading to Peso da Régua, is an extremely picturesque spot, offering a magnificent panoramic view of the whole region. On fine days, you can see the mountains of Marão, Gerês and Cabreira. In the village itself, your attention is drawn to the Casa da Levada, belonging to the family of the writer Teixeira de Pascoais. In the courtyard, notice the two enormous granite espigueiros (granaries used for drying and storing corn). At Chão de Parada, one can see a well-preserved dolmen.

Amares

Amares

Situated between the valley of the River Cávado and the mountains of the Serra do Gerês, this is a very fertile region, known particularly for its oranges and its production of vinho verde.

Right from the early days of Portuguese nationhood, the development of the region around Amares was heavily influenced by the different religious orders that settled here, such as the Benedictines, who founded the monastery of Rendufe in the eleventh century, and the Cistercians, who founded the monastery of Santa Maria do Bouro in the twelfth century.

The spa of Caldelas in the surrounding area is very popular for the healing properties of its waters.

Arcos de Valdevez

Arcos de Valdevez

Inhabited since prehistoric times, as can be seen by the various archaeological finds on display at the Mezio Megalithic Centre, the town is situated in the valley of the River Vez and still retains much of the typical charm of the Alto Minho province - luxuriant green landscapes and the traditional architecture of its buildings, amongst which the most impressive are the manor houses.

The municipality of Arcos de Valdevez is located inside the boundaries of the Peneda Gerês National Park, where nature still conserves all of its original charm. Hidden within the region are many delightful communal villages, such as Soajo, where the local populations continue to maintain their ancestral customs and practices.

Armamar

Armamar

Standing on the banks of the River Douro, which has always exerted such a distinctive influence on the surrounding landscape, the town of Armamar still has a peaceful feel to it.

Here, in a region where farming is the predominant activity, wines of the finest quality are produced, together with some of the country's tastiest apples.

Armamar's Romanesque parish church, built in the thirteenth century, is a particularly impressive monument.

Baião

Baião

This is a very ancient territory taking its name from the Christian warrior D. Arnaldo de Bayan or Bayão, who conquered the region from the Moors in the tenth century.

The countryside's distinctive features are influenced by the River Douro and scattered about the landscape are a number of small chapels, manor houses and large estates. Magnificent views of the surrounding landscape can be appreciated from the Alto do Baião.

Barcelos

Barcelos

After crossing the old bridge over the River Cávado, we enter into one of the most emblematic cities of popular Minho art, Barcelos.

Is an ancient city, situated in an area that has archaeological remains dating back to prehistoric times, although it was really in the 12th century that its history began, first when D. Afonso Henriques granted the settlement a charter and turned it into a town, and then later, in 1298, when D. Dinis rewarded his chief steward by making him a count and giving him the town as part of his title.

In 1385, the Constable Nuno Álvares Pereira became the seventh Count of Barcelos. He then gave Barcelos as a dowry in the marriage of his daughter D. Beatriz to D. Afonso, the bastard son of D. João I. There then followed a period of great development and dynamic growth for Barcelos, displayed by the building of the bridge, the city walls, of which there still remains the Torre da Porta Nova, the Paço dos Duques and the Igreja Matriz.

It is these monuments that today form the city's historic centre, which still retains a pleasant mediaeval atmosphere and amidst which are scattered manor houses and other historic residences, such as the Solar dos Pinheiros or the Constable's House.

A stroll around Barcelos must necessarily include the old fairground, now known as the Campo da República, where you will find the 18th-century churches of Bom Jesus da Cruz and Nossa Senhora do Terço and where Portugal's largest handicraft fair is held every Thursday.

If you miss the weekly market, you should definitely visit the Ceramics Museum and Barcelos Handicraft Centre, where you can get a good general view of Minho arts and crafts. The brightly-coloured Barcelos Cockerel is the most representative of all the pieces produced here, but one should not forget the brass bands and the figures depicting the region's customs and habits.

Boticas

Boticas

The town is situated in the rugged, mountainous region of Barroso, where the famous barrosã breed of beef cattle are reared. The meat that they produce has long been appreciated as the food of kings and was recently awarded a certificate, thereby giving it the designation of a region of protected origin.

Boticas is also the home of the famous "Vinho dos Mortos" (Dead Man's Wine), so called because after bottling it is buried beneath the ground and left to ferment in the dark for roughly a year, acquiring an excellent taste. This technique was discovered by sheer chance in the nineteenth century, at the time of the

French invasions, when the local population hid their possessions and crops in the most unexpected places in order to avoid being pillaged. When the danger had passed and the wine was dug up, it was discovered that, after all, the wine now had an excellent quality.

The region's mineral water is also of the highest quality, with the "holy waters" from the spa of Carvalhelhos being particularly famous.

Braga

Braga

Work on the Roman "Bracara Augusta", a regional juridical capital, began during the reign of emperor Augustus in 27 bc. It was part of the Empire's network criss-crossing the Iberian peninsula to link it with Rome. Demonstrating the importance of the settlement, Emperor Caracala raised it to the status of capital of Galician province in 216. In the same century, the Diocese de Braga was established under the rule of Bishop Paterno.

With the decline of the Roman Empire, the city was first taken over by the Sueves, who made it their political and intellectual centre, before the Visigoths and Muslims moved in. It was mid-11th century before the city was reconquered by Christians and the archdiocese restored to Bishop Pedro. Throughout Muslim rule, the bishops had moved their place of residence to Lugo (Spain). In 1112, with archbishop Maurício Burbino, the religious history of Braga gained predominance. After a dispute with the Se in Compostela, in 1199, Pope Innocence III transferred jurisdiction over Oporto, Coimbra and Viseu, along with five other dioceses in what is now Spain, to Braga.

The Se in Braga is the oldest in Portugal and was the major religious reference point throughout centuries. Thus comes the popular saying "older than the Braga Se", to denote something that is extremely old. Always subject to the ecclesiastical influence that has naturally reflected on the city's heritage, it is possible to conclude that the 16th and 18th centuries represent peaks in its history and development. First, there was the role of the Archbishop Diogo de Sousa, "the rebuilder of Braga". As from 1505 he took over civil and religious rule and set about transforming the "village into a city" (in his own words). Then came Archbishops Rodrigo de Moura Teles and José de Bragança who left behind the exuberant Baroque style.

Industrialisation and the founding of a university did much to contribute to the current development of the city that has held onto both secular and religious traditions. This is played out every year during events in Holy Week or the Festival of St. John the Baptist in June. These are wonderful opportunities to visit Braga, touring its Historic Centre or reliving the Pilgrimages to Santiago that would pass through here. Outside the city, there is the Way of the Marian Sanctuaries or the particular charm of the

Cordophone Museum.

Bragança

Bragança

A wander around the historical centre inevitably leads to the calm of the medieval citadel, the home to the Dukedom of Bragança.

As a recognised settlement, dates back to the 12th century. Fernão Mendes, a member of the Braganções family, and brother-in-law of the first king of Portugal, Afonso Henriques (1139-85) first established his residence here. Then, in 1187, king Sancho recognised the contribution of the town to regional development and granted it both legal autonomy and a charter. The medieval centre remains to this day and is characterised by the imposing Castle Keep, the Pelourinho (Pillory) resting on an unusual Lusitanian berrão (pre-historic granite pig), the Church of Santa Maria (Saint Mary) and the Domus Municipalis, a unique piece of architecture.

In 1442, the marriage of Afonso, the bastard son of king João I, to Beatriz de Alvim, the daughter of High Constable Nuno Álvares Pereira, resulted in the founding of the Dukedom of Bragança. The importance of this House is made perfectly clear by the fact they were simultaneously also the Dukes of Barcelos and Guimarães, the Marquises of Valença and Vila Viçosa, Counts of Ourém, Arraiolos, Neiva, Faro, Faria and Penafiel, and Lords of Monforte, Alegrete and Vila do Conde, among others. In 1640, the 8th Duke of Bragança, became king João IV, establishing the final Portuguese dynasty that would survive through to the founding of the Republic in 1910.

Beyond the walls, the city expanded to the west as can be seen by any short walk through its administrative and retail centre where noble residences and monuments still depict the history of Bragança's royal past. After king Manuel granted the New Charter in 1514, the city's development was largely due to the bishops who would reside here for half of the year. The Bishopdom was divided with Miranda do Douro before Bragança unified the bishop's seat in 1764.

The royal and Episcopal influences characterising those times are reflected in the Church of São Vicente (St. Vincent), the Museum of Abade Baçal, the Chapel of Misericórdia, the Church of Santa Clara (Saint Claire) and finally in the Cathedral.

No visit to the city is complete without paying a visit to the nearby Church of Castro de Avelãs, or a wander through the Montesinho Natural Park, where there are still commune style villages that form part of the region's heritage.

Cabeceiras de Basto

Cabeceiras de Basto

The town is situated in a region known as the lands of "Basto", its name being linked to the legendary Lusitanian warrior, "Basto", who fought so bravely against the Moorish invaders and was later depicted in a series of granite statues. Such statues were made from what were originally warriors' tombstones dating back to the period before the Roman occupation (first century BC) and one of them has been placed on a pedestal at the entrance to Cabeceiras de Basto.

The region's development was greatly influenced by the monastery of São Miguel de Refojos, which was founded some time before the twelfth century, and the town was also once known as Refojos do Basto.

The surrounding countryside is extremely beautiful, with clear streams and luxuriant green hills. Particularly impressive is the Parque de Moinhos do Rei, which includes the communal windmills of Abadim, commissioned in the fourteenth century by D. Dinis, the king of Portugal.

Caminha

Caminha

A fortified border town situated at the mouth of the River Minho, where several battles were fought between Portugal and Spain, Caminha now enjoys much more friendly relations with its neighbour and there is a daily ferry-boat linking the two banks of the river.

Standing on a tiny island in the middle of the estuary are the ruins of the fort of Ínsua, built to defend the entrance to the river in the fifteenth century.

But this region lives from much more than just its past. Vilar de Mouros, a picturesque spot in the most beautiful countryside, roughly 6 km to the north of Caminha, is the setting for a highly popular festival of modern music, held every August and the first of its kind ever to be organised in Portugal.

Carraceda de Ansiães

Carrazeda de Ansiães

In an area where granite tends to predominate, it is well worth paying a special visit to the mediaeval castle, Romanesque churches and the remaining evidence of the region's occupation in prehistorical times, with some excellent examples being provided by a number of well-preserved rock paintings and dolmens.

A natural curiosity of this area is the "pedra bulideira" (swaying stone) in Ribalonga, a gigantic round boulder that stands uneasily on the top of a hill and which moves when you touch it, although it always remains in place.

Celorico de Basto

Celorico de Basto

Standing close to the River Tâmega, this town was of great importance in the mediaeval period, as it was here that the most strategic points for the region's defence were to be found - the castles of Celorico de Basto and Arnóias.

In more recent times (from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries), Celorico de Basto was much sought after by noble families who built their manor houses here and left their imprint on the region's landscape.

Chaves

Chaves

During the time of its occupation by the Romans, the city of Chaves was known by the name of "Aquae Flaviae", given to it by the Emperor Titus Flavius Vespasianus (Vespasian), who recognised the excellent quality of the thermal springs located here. The healing properties of these waters, the warmest in Europe with a temperature of roughly 73° C at their source, are still greatly appreciated and the spa is an extremely popular one.

Standing on the banks of the River Tâmega and close to the border with Spain, Chaves has always been very important from the military and strategic point of view. The city heroically withstood annexation by Castile in the sixteenth century, and later, in the nineteenth century, it was here that the invading Napoleonic troops suffered their first defeat on Portuguese soil. Remaining as a testimony to the city's defensive importance are the castle and its keep, as well as the mediaeval quarter contained within the city walls.

Chaves is also famous for its richly varied cuisine, and particularly for its sausages and smoked ham.

Cinfães

Cinfães

Situated between the banks of the River Douro and the Serra de Montemuro, it was here that the first king of Portugal, D. Afonso Henriques (1139-85), was brought up by his tutor D. Egas Moniz, who was the lord of this region in the twelfth century.

The region is very cool and green, and there are several beaches along the river close to the Carrapatelo dam, ideal for those who enjoy water sports.

Everywhere there are traces to be found of the region's occupation in prehistoric times, whilst the Romanesque period can be appreciated in the churches of Escamarão and Santa Maria Maior at Tarouquela.

Espinho

Espinho

Originally a fishing village consisting of wooden houses ("palheiros"), the town was transformed in the nineteenth century into a seaside resort, becoming one of the most popular in a period when people were strongly advised to bathe in the sea because of its healing properties.

Nowadays, it is a lively city with a long and extensive beach, but it also offers visitors a thalassotherapy centre, the oldest golf course in the Iberian Peninsula, founded by British citizens at the end of the nineteenth century, a Casino and a full range of hotel accommodation.

Amongst its various annual events are the Music Festival in June and the Cartoon Festival in November.

Esposende

Esposende

At the time of the Portuguese Maritime Discoveries, Esposende was an important fishing and sea port. These activities have continued into the present day, although it is also a very popular seaside resort. In the nearby village of Apúlia, besides fishing, one of the most typical activities is the gathering of seaweed at low tide.

The coastal strip stretching from Esposende to Ofir and Fão has been classified as a protected landscape area and is considered to be one of the most beautiful stretches of Portugal's northern coastline.

Roughly 6 km to the north, São Bartolomeu do Mar is famous for its religious festival of 24 August, which includes the "Banho Santo", a ritual of bathing in the sea that according to tradition cures illnesses and makes children strong and healthy.

Fafe

Fafe

Having only recently become an administrative centre (in the nineteenth century), Fafe is heavily marked by the influences brought back by many of its inhabitants who emigrated to Brazil in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On returning to their native land, they built themselves palatial residences in an imposing architectural style that is referred to locally as "Brazilian", whilst also making a major contribution to the region's development by investing in the textile industry and commercial activities.

Felgueiras

Felgueiras

All around Felgueiras, set in the midst of a luxuriant green landscape, are a series of villages with small Romanesque churches.

The town is also famous for its embroideries and lace-work, its production of vinho verde and the much appreciated pão de ló (sponge cake) from Margaride.

Freixo de Espada à Cinta

Freixo de Espada à Cinta

There are many explanations for this town's curious name (literally it means "Ash-tree girded with sword"). Some say that it was derived from the name of a Gothic nobleman called "Espadacinta"; others say that it comes from the coat of arms of a Leonese nobleman that bore both an ash-tree and a sword; whilst yet others attribute it to a legend claiming that when D. Dinis, the king of Portugal, founded the town in the fourteenth century, he tied his sword to an ash-tree before leaning against it to rest.

Located in the Douro demarcated wine region, this part of the country is particularly beautiful in the spring when the almond-trees are in blossom. An excellent view of the landscape can be enjoyed from the top of Penedo Durão, from where it is possible to see over an area that stretches well beyond the Spanish border.

Gondomar

Gondomar

Standing in the midst of gentle, fertile valleys, Gondomar is famous for its goldsmith's work, an activity that has been carried out here for several centuries and is believed to date back as far as the time of the Visigoths and Celts. The origin of this activity is directly related with the gold mines that used to be found dotted around the region and were closed more than two centuries ago.

Of the many different articles produced, the most beautiful are naturally those in gold and silver filigree, whose delicate and complex openwork designs are thought to derive from the aesthetic and artistic influences of the Moors in the Iberian Peninsula. These rich and original hand-made pieces form an indispensable part of the ornate regional costume worn by the *minhotas* (the girls of the Minho province).

Guimarães

Guimarães

On 13 December 2001, UNESCO inscribed the historical centre of the city of Guimarães on the list of World Heritage. A distinction that is fully merited by this city, one that is full of historical memories and has so carefully preserved its heritage and public spaces for the pleasure and delight of its visitors.

For Portuguese people, Guimarães has a very special symbolic value, for it was in a field close to the walls of its castle that D. Afonso Henriques fought the Battle of São Mamede, on 24 June 1128. By emerging victorious from this struggle against the army of D. Teresa, his mother and the daughter of Alfonso VI of León and Castile, Afonso Henriques began the process that would lead to the foundation of the kingdom of Portugal, of which he was to become the first king.

You should therefore begin by visiting the site known as Colina Sagrada (Sacred Hill), crowned by Guimarães Castle, itself full of so many evocative memories, as well as the small Romanesque church of São Miguel. According to tradition, it was in this modest church that Afonso Henriques was baptised in the font that can still be seen inside. In an interpretation created by the sculptor Soares dos Reis (1834), an imposing statue placed further down the hill makes it possible for us to imagine both the face and physical features of the first Portuguese king.

In the immediate vicinity is the Ducal Palace, now both a palace and a museum, originally built in the 15th century.

After visiting these important points of reference to the time of the foundation of Portugal, you should stroll down into Guimarães, where we suggest you choose the Largo da Oliveira, the very heart of the historical centre, as the starting point for your visit.

If you would like to see the city at its most magnificent, you should drive up the 7-kilometre road to the top of Monte da Penha, from where you will have the chance to enjoy one of the most impressive panoramic views in the north of Portugal.

This road will take you past the Pousada de Santa Marinha da Costa, an old convent founded by D. Mafalda de Sabóia, the wife of D. Afonso Henriques. This building contains an interesting mixture of styles and epochs, which the skilful intervention of the architect Fernando Távora has transformed into a pousada. The church (rebuilt in the 18th century), the cloister, the cells adapted to form bedrooms and the beautiful balcony of São Jerónimo (St. Jerome), with its view over the gardens, are all more than enough reasons to stop off here for a while.

You may also choose to take the cable car to the top: it is only a few minutes' journey connecting the centre of the city to this spot suspended on high, the site chosen for the shrine of Nossa Senhora da Penha.

Lamego

Lamego

Roughly 12 kilometres from the banks of the Douro, Lamego enjoyed a period of great prosperity in the eighteenth century when the city produced the so-called "fine wine" that later gave rise to the world famous Port wine. It is a very ancient city, having been raised to a bishopric by the Visigoths, under the name of Lamecum, as early as the seventh century.

Later, it was to suffer the same fate as so many other towns and villages that thereafter became Portuguese: it was captured by the Moors, reconquered by the Christians, and then returned once again into Muslim hands, until it was definitively reconquered in 1057 by Ferdinand I, the Great, king of Castile and León, and the great grandfather of D. Afonso Henriques, the first king of Portugal. Remaining as evidence of these mediaeval times are the castle, on the hill overlooking the city, the Cathedral and the small church of Santa Maria de Almacave.

The Church's powerful influence over many centuries, later curtailed by the suppression of the Religious Orders in 1834, has left Lamego with a large number of churches revealing the classical influences popular at the time of their construction in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Whenever you pass by one of these, make sure to enter inside and appreciate the stories recounted on the azulejos lining the walls, the sacred paintings and the beautiful carved and gilded wood decorations added in the baroque period. Particularly impressive are the Church of the Convent of Santa Cruz, offering a delightful view over the city and the sumptuous and monumental baroque shrine dedicated to the Virgin Mary, in the form of Nossa Senhora dos Remédios, who, from her lofty position some 600 metres above the town, responds to the appeals of distressed

worshippers by granting them a remedy for their afflictions. Each year, the city pays Our Lady much-deserved homage by devoting a festival to her - the splendid Romaria de Nossa Senhora dos Remédios.

At the opposite end of the city, but in direct line with the staircase leading to the shrine of Nossa Senhora dos Remédios, stands a beautiful eighteenth-century palace, built in an elegant and sober baroque style, which was once the residence of the bishops of Lamego. Carved above the front door is the coat of arms of the bishop D. Manuel Vasconcelos Pereira, who was responsible for the rebuilding and enlargement of the old episcopal palace. About 1940, this space was altered to house the extremely rich collection of the Lamego Museum, an essential item on the list of all visitors.

The fact that Lamego is situated so close to the banks of the river Douro means that there are a variety of walks and tours offering remarkable panoramic views over the extensive valleys planted with the vineyards that produce the famous Port wine.

Lousada

Lousada

Being situated in a region that is highly developed in economic terms but still maintains a strong farming tradition, Lousada also has an architectural heritage that is well worth visiting.

In recent years, Lousada has become known for the motor racing events held on the excellent circuit situated just outside the town.

Macedo de Cavaleiros

Macedo de Cavaleiros

Situated in the north-east of Trás-os-Montes, Macedo de Cavaleiros is a land of manor houses in the midst of a fertile valley, close to the Serra de Bornes mountain range, where adventure sports, such as paragliding, are particularly popular.

In the eighteenth century, one of the region's main activities was the breeding of the silk-worm, as can be seen from the ruins of the Chacim Royal Silk Factory. This building is due to be restored to form part of the "European Silk Route", of which Macedo de Cavaleiros is the headquarters in Portugal.

Maia

Maia

The municipality of Maia is highly developed in economic terms and is now an important industrial centre, although it still preserves many of its ancient traditions and customs.

Not far away, at the convent of Moreira da Maia, there is a relic of the Holy Cross, to which the local inhabitants have traditionally attributed miraculous powers, praying to it for help in moments of great trouble.

Marco de Canaveses

Marco de Canaveses

Marco de Canaveses is a destination that features the **Douro and Tâmega rivers**, which have a strong impact on the identity of local customs and traditions. As well as the rivers there are the **Carrapatelo and Torrão reservoirs**, excellent bodies of water for water sports. The **Parque Fluvial do Tâmega**, the pier and the **river beach at Bitetos**, together with the recreation parks in the city and in Alpendorada are also charming places to meet friends and enjoy leisure time and playing sports.

Discover the wonderful architectural heritage of the municipality and visit the **Roman city of Tongobriga**, more than two thousand years old. You can also follow an interesting Romanesque route that includes 8 churches and 2 civil monuments. Marvel at the Baroque architecture of the churches linked to the monasteries in **Vila Boa do Bispo and Alpendorada** and the unfinished palace known as **Obras do Fidalgo**. In contemporary architecture, it is worth mentioning the **Church of Santa Maria**, by the renowned architect Álvaro Siza Vieira.

Nature lovers will be enchanted by the **Aboboreira and Montedeiras** mountains, where they can take long, exhilarating walks and find fascinating prehistoric remains, including dolmens and tumuli. To better enjoy the city and the region, we recommend the **7 Short Routes (SR)** that include nature and architectural heritage.

A visit to Marco de Canaveses will not be complete without a visit to its **museums and handicraft shows**, in particular the Museu Municipal Carmen, the Museu da Pedra [Museum of Stone], the Museu do Linho e do Vinho [Flax and Wine Museum], the Centro de Promoção de Produtos Locais [Centre for the Promotion of Local Products] and the Casa de Produtos Tradicionais de Bitetos [Centre for Traditional Products from Bitetos].

Take the opportunity to rest by staying in a **Turismo em Espaço Rural** - Rural Tourism house and give in to the traditional flavours and aromas of the local cuisine, such as the roast lamb with rice baked in the oven, Vinho Verde and lamprey, 'pão podre' (literally 'rotten bread', a sweet, leavened bread), 'pão-de-ló' (a light sponge cake), 'cavacas' (made from eggs, flour and milk, with a sugar syrup glaze) and 'fatias do Freixo' (soft cakes made from eggs, sugar, flour and water) and biscuits from Soalhães.

To finish the visit, take the Marco de Canaveses Wine Route. Part of the **Vinho Verde demarcated region**, here you will find

unique, fresh and aromatic wines, respected in Portugal and abroad.

Matosinhos

Matosinhos

Tradition and progress in this Atlantic coast city...

Founded at the mouth of the river Leça, Matosinhos has always benefited from its close proximity to the sea. Early references to a settlement known as Matesinus date back to the 11th century. In 1514, a royal charter was granted by king D. Manuel I even if it was not until the 19th century that Matosinhos gained town status (1853) before becoming a city in 1984.

The roots of this city lie in fishing and salt production.

Matosinhos still remains Portugal's most important fishing port although industrialisation (canning, engineering and wood processing) and diversification means Matosinhos is now home to three of the key components of the regional economy: the Leixões container port, the Petrogal refinery and the Exponor conference centre that regularly puts on major international events.

The Sanctuary of Senhor Bom Jesus is the most important monument in Matosinhos but attention must also be drawn to the heritage of Leça da Palmeira. This is the oldest parish in Matosinhos and well worth a visit and when not for its beaches then for the artistic grace of many of its buildings. Siza Vieira is just one architect to have made his mark here with the Salão de Chá (Tea House) and the Piscina das Marés (Salt Water Swimming Pool). There are also other historical landmarks including the Boa-Nova Lighthouse, the Conceição Farm and the Nossa Senhora das Neves Fortress.

Melgaço

Melgaço

Situated close to Galicia, the original settlement developed around the castle built in the twelfth century at the orders of the first king of Portugal, D. Afonso Henriques.

In the heart of the cool and luxuriantly green region where the famous vinho verde is produced, Melgaço has one place that everyone must visit - the Solar do Alvarinho, where it is possible to taste the many different varieties of this unique wine, unrivalled anywhere else in the world.

In the surrounding area are a number of beautiful Romanesque monuments, such as the monastery of Fiães, the churches of Senhora da Orada and Paderne, as well as the traditional village of Castro Laboreiro. Its foundation dates back to the Iron Age and it has since given its name to a breed of dog that originates from

here.

Roughly 4 km from the town is Termas do Peso, a spa which is much sought after for the healing properties of its waters.

Mesão Frio

Mesão Frio

A quiet town situated in the Douro demarcated wine region, Mesão Frio has always been linked to wine-making.

The vines grow in terraces on the banks of the river, lending great beauty to the landscape, and dotted here and there are large estates and manor houses, most notably the Solar da Rede, which has been transformed into a Pousada.

Miranda do Douro

Miranda do Douro

This very ancient city was once a Roman settlement and later on, in the eighth century, was occupied by the Arabs, who gave it the name of "Mir Andul", which later gave rise to Miranda.

Its location by the border gave it great importance as a strategic point of defence and, in the twelfth century, the first king of Portugal, D. Afonso Henriques, ordered a castle to be built there together with the town walls, which transformed the settlement into a genuine stronghold.

In the sixteenth century, the town was raised to the status of a city and made the episcopal seat of Trás-os-Montes, whereupon it embarked upon a period of great prosperity with the erection of such grandiose buildings as the church of Santa Maria Maior, which for more than two centuries enjoyed the status of a cathedral.

In the seventeenth century, with the wars fought to restore Portuguese independence from Spain, and later during the French invasions, the city suffered a number of major reverses and lost much of its former importance.

Miranda do Douro is well known for its lively and colourful folklore - the Pauliteiros de Miranda, dressed in their traditional white flannel kilts, perform their famous stick dance to the sound of bagpipes. The origin of this dance dates back to the time of the region's Celtic occupation in the Iron Age. Listen out for people speaking "mirandês". This is one of the official languages in Portugal and is spoken in this region. And when it's time to eat, watch out, too, for "Posta mirandesa", made with the excellent beef produced in the area.

Mirandela

Mirandela

This beautiful city stands on the banks of the River Tua and is often referred to as the garden city. It is popularly said by the local inhabitants that "when people see Mirandela they inevitably want to stay here".

The festivals held at the end of July in honour of Nossa Senhora do Amparo are typically marked by a majestic candlelit procession and a firework display that is considered to be the most spectacular in the whole of the region.

Mirandela is also well known for its regional cuisine, with the most famous dish being the greatly appreciated traditional sausages - "alheiras".

In the surrounding region, the typical village of Romeu is well worth a visit.

Mogadouro

Mogadouro

Mogadouro first became part of the kingdom of Portugal when it was conquered from the Moors in the thirteenth century. The land was then given to the Order of the Knights Templar, who founded a castle here, although this now stands in ruins.

The best time to visit this region is in February/March, when the almond-trees are in blossom and the fields are covered with a blaze of white. These beautiful landscapes are best admired from the hilltops of the Serra da Castanheira or from the nearby castle of Penas Róias.

Moimenta da Beira

Moimenta da Beira

The name of "Moimenta" refers to a funereal construction or mausoleum and is thought to derive from the fact that in prehistoric times there was once a burial ground here.

Aquilino Ribeiro, a Portuguese writer from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, christened this region "Terras do Demo" (The Devil's Land), although it is in fact a very pleasant area producing fine wines and fruit of the highest quality.

Surrounded by picturesque villages, such as Alvite and Leomil, Moimenta da Beira is situated close to the River Távora, where on the reservoir formed by the Barragem do Vilar dam there are excellent conditions for water sports enthusiasts.

Monção

Monção

This fortified city on the bank of the River Minho, home to spas and the Alvarinho wine, was once the backdrop to the many battles between the kingdoms of Portugal and Castile... Its Sueve name Orosion was translated to Latin as Mons Sanctus that subsequently evolved into the Portuguese Monção. In 1291, Portuguese king Afonso III granted it a royal charter and in 1306, king Dinis ordered the construction of the old defensive castle. Its walls still welcome the visitor.

Looking out over the river Minho, with its appealing terraces and belvederes, such as the Neris esplanade, it would be hard to imagine that this was the scene of ferocious combat in the battles between the kingdoms of Portugal and Castile. Not to mention that such combat would draw out the great bravery of three women: Deuladeu Martins, Mariana de Lencastre and Helena Peres. Now, memories of the good and the bad are relived in the charming popular traditions of the Coca Festival, celebrated every year on Corpus Christi Thursday.

The 16th century walls guard the historic centre replete with monuments such as the Matrix Church, the Church of Misericórdia and the Church of Santo António dos Capuchos. Beyond, the Monção Spas complement any visit to the city with their therapeutical waters.

On the outskirts, there is the Church of Longos Vales, a rare example of Romanic architecture, and the impressive Palace of Brejoeira, where the famous lightly sparkling Alvarinho wine is produced. This completes the heritage of Monção.

Mondim de Basto

Mondim de Basto

Situated close to the River Tâmega, Mondim de Basto was founded in the twelfth century in the reign of D. Sancho I and it still retains many traces of its occupation over the years by the various peoples that passed through here.

Overlooking the town is the Monte Farinha, whose pyramidal shape is reminiscent of a volcano. This mountain rises abruptly to a peak with an altitude of 990 metres, and on its top stands the hermitage of Senhora da Graça, a chapel which is the setting for a popular religious festival held in July.

In the surrounding area, close to the village of Ermelo are the waterfalls of the River Olo, known locally as the "Ermelo Catapult", which are well worth a visit.

Montalegre

Montalegre

Located in the heart of the Peneda-Gerês National Park, this region offers visitors a wide range of stunning views, in an area where nature has been allowed to preserve all of its many charms.

The town of Montalegre is dominated by its castle, built in the thirteenth century on the remains of a much older fortification, which demonstrates the importance that this site has always had as a strategic point of defence for the whole of the region.

In the surrounding area, close to the typical communal village of Pitões das Júnias, is the small and curious monastery of Santa Maria das Júnias, which today is in ruins but once belonged to the Cistercian Order (in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries).

As far as regional cuisine is concerned, Montalegre is famous for its sausages and smoked ham, and the Feira do Fumeiro (the smoked meats fair), which is held in January every year, is the ideal occasion for buying some of these tasty delights.

Murça

Murça

The symbol of this town is the famous "Porca de Murça", a great stone statue in the shape of a pig, originating from the Iron Age and believed to be linked to the ancient fertility rites of the Celtic peoples. It is also said that this figure represents a very ferocious wild bear, which used to terrify the local population. According to this version, the lord of Murça organised a hunting party, finding and killing the animal, and this statue was then erected to mark the occasion.

In the heart of the Douro demarcated wine region, Murça gives great importance to the activity of farming, with the region's economy being dependent not only upon wine-making, but also on the production of olive-oil and honey.

Paços de Ferreira

Paços de Ferreira

This region has been inhabited since the very earliest of times and still preserves some very ancient remains from this period, such as the dolmen at Lamoso and Citânia de Sanfins (one of the most important archaeological sites in the north of the Iberian Peninsula). Dating from the twelfth century is the remarkable Romanesque church of the monastery of Ferreira.

Nowadays, Paços de Ferreira is a thriving and prosperous city, largely as a result of the many furniture industries that have been set up locally, which explains why the city is generally referred to as the "Furniture Capital".

Paredes

Paredes

Due to the region's particular geographical characteristics, the conditions here are ideal for water sports such as canoeing, as well as rock climbing and mountaineering.

A special mention should be made of the many Romanesque monuments in the surrounding region, with the church and monastery of Cete being one of Portugal's oldest places of worship, for its foundation dates back to the twelfth century.

The city is situated close to the River Sousa, which flows through this region in a series of gorges, and one of the most famous of these is the one known as "Senhora do Salto" (The Lady of the Leap). According to legend, a knight was tempted by the devil to jump into one of these gorges, but, after calling upon the Virgin Mary to help him, he landed gently on the opposite bank. As a sign of gratitude, he ordered a small chapel to be built, which has become an important place of worship in the area.

Paredes de Coura

Paredes de Coura

Situated in a region that has many sites of great archaeological interest, Paredes de Coura was particularly important during the Wars of Restoration fought between Portugal and Spain in the seventeenth century.

In recent years, the town has begun to attract large crowds of young people in August, who are drawn here by the music festival held on the banks of the River Coura.

Penafiel

Penafiel

In a region that is known to be of very ancient origin, it is said that there were once two castles here, one by the name of Aguiar de Sousa and the other known as the castle of Pena. When the Moors occupied this region, they tried to invade the latter castle, but did not succeed because it was defended so heroically. This is why it was considered "loyal" (fiel), so that it became known as the castle of Penafiel, a name which then spread to the rest of the area.

Standing at the heart of a region of granite and vinho verde, Penafiel is also the centre for various lively and popular religious festivities held around the time of Corpus Christi.

In the surrounding region, attention is drawn to the many Romanesque churches, such as the monastery of São Salvador at Paço de Sousa and the churches of São Miguel at Eja and São Salvador at Gandra.

Penedono

Penedono

Penedono's mediaeval castle stands on a huge rock, a unique example of military architecture that dominates the surrounding countryside.

There is plentiful evidence of the region's occupation in prehistoric times, in particular the dolmen in the village of Penela da Beira which was used to act as the chancel at the chapel of Nossa Senhora do Monte.

In the twentieth century, Penedono began to develop quite notably when people started to mine its mineral-rich land (gold and wolfram). Nowadays, however, these mines are to be found in a state of total abandon and remain as nothing more than interesting examples of industrial archaeology.

Peso da Régua

Peso da Régua

It is thought that the town's name originated from the name of a Roman house that once stood here - the "Villa Reguela". Its great development was, however, only to begin after 1756 with the creation of the Real Companhia Geral da Agricultura das Vinhas do Alto Douro (Royal Company of Vine-Growers from the Alto Douro Region), which set up the world's first ever demarcated region for wine production.

Situated on the banks of the River Douro, Peso da Régua played a fundamental role in the production and sale of Port wine, for it was from here that the barrels were transported in the special boats known as barcos rabelos to Vila Nova de Gaia, where the wine was left to age in the local wine lodges.

In this region, the vines are grown on terraced slopes leading down to the river, providing visitors with a series of spectacular views, which are best admired from the area's many viewpoints, such as those of São Leonardo at Galafura and Santo António do Loureiro.

In the surrounding area, the spa of Caldas de Moledo, which is situated on the right bank of the River Douro, has its own moorage points and is a most delightful place for those wishing to spend a relaxing holiday.

Pinhão

Pinhão

Pinhão is considered to be the geographical centre of the Douro demarcated wine region, and it is here that many of the Port wine estates are to be found, some of which offer accommodation under the system of rural tourism.

Worthy of particular attention here is the railway station, built at the end of the nineteenth century, the inside of which is entirely lined with panels of azulejos.

Ponte da Barca

Ponte da Barca

Situated in a luxuriant green region by the banks of the River Lima, Ponte da Barca is thought to have taken its name from the boat (barca) that connected the two banks before the bridge (ponte) was built in the fifteenth century. Previously, this region was known as Terra da Nóbrega or Anóbrega, which is thought to derive from the Roman name "Elaneobriga".

The town's historical centre has a number of manor houses (some of which have been adapted to provide accommodation for tourists), as well as some beautiful monuments dating from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. These are well worth careful investigation, just like the surrounding area, where two monuments of special interest are the thirteenth-century Romanesque church at Bravães and the castle at Lindoso (again from the thirteenth century), which played such an important role in the defence of the region.

Ponte da Barca belongs to the vinho verde demarcated wine region. Part of the municipality is included in the Peneda-Gerês National Park, which has excellent facilities for sports and leisure activities.

Ponte de Lima

Ponte de Lima

The Roman bridge that gave its name to this very ancient and very beautiful town, which received its first charter in 1125 from D. Teresa, the mother of the first king of Portugal (a number of years before the foundation of the kingdom).

In the centre of a rich farming region, where the famous vinho verde is produced, the greatest number of manor houses and palaces are to be found, many of them offering accommodation to tourists under the system of Turismo de Habitação.

Every fortnight, this traditional town is brought to life when a huge and lively fair that dates back to the Middle Ages is held on the banks of the river. This same stretch of sand is also the site for another traditional event held in June, known as the "Vaca

das Cordas" (when ropes are tied around the horns of a bull, which is then led onto the sand to "fight" with the local population). In September, the town once again bursts into life with the jolly event known as the Feiras Novas (New Fairs). This is the town festival, which includes a huge market, fireworks, a funfair, carnival costumes and a brass band competition.

Porto

Porto

Capital and gateway to the north of Portugal, Porto is both the city that provided a nation with a name and a fortified wine known world-wide: port.

With its splendid geographical location on the mouth of the river Douro and an architectural heritage of exceptional quality, the historic centre of Porto was declared UNESCO World Heritage in 1996. Porto is the capital of the North and the second largest city in the country; its hard-working inhabitants are noted for their commercial enterprise, always standing firm against outside impositions and foreign invaders, which explains why Porto has become known as the «unvanquished» city.

In addition to its history, any visitor to Porto will be quickly impressed by the forceful character both of the city and its inhabitants.

If you want to get to know the city better, we recommend a gentle stroll through its streets, taking time to admire the typical granite houses and monuments, enjoying a tram ride along the banks of the river, or even going for a boat ride under the city's six bridges, from where you can enjoy an entirely different view of the city. These itineraries seek to demonstrate the impressive contrasts this city has to offer. The "Baixa (Downtown)" of Porto, with all the rhythms of city life, its movement and intense retailing. There is a very peculiar expression which bestows a Nordic, mercantile tone onto a city that is both spiritually and intensely baroque. In sharp contrast, in the Serralves Park, there is the sheer modernity of the building housing the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the romantic, soothing surroundings of the surrounding leafy park.

Póvoa de Lanhoso

Póvoa de Lanhoso

The castle built on the top of the hill known as Monte do Pilar is the most important monument in the region and, according to tradition, D. Teresa, the mother of the first king of Portugal was held prisoner there in the twelfth century after the Battle of São Mamede, in which mother and son fought on opposite sides. In the seventeenth century, the monastery of Nossa Senhora do Pilar was built next to the castle.

In the nearby village of Fonte Arcada is a twelfth-century Romanesque church that is well worth a visit.

Situated in the heart of the vinho verde demarcated wine region, Póvoa de Lanhoso is well known for its granite quarrying and cutting industries and its remarkable goldsmith's work (filigree).

Póvoa de Varzim

Póvoa de Varzim

This ancient settlement was given a charter in the fourteenth century, although it was not until the eighteenth century that it began to be known as an important fishing port, when a large number of fishermen settled here and soon formed a tight-knit community.

The excellent beach, which is a most popular attraction in the summer season, was the main driving force behind the town's development and it is now a busy resort offering visitors a full range of hotels, a golf course, a casino and excellent facilities for all kinds of sports.

In the surrounding region, the town of São Pedro de Rates, which was once the municipal seat, is well worth a special visit, particularly its Romanesque church built from the eleventh to the thirteenth century, as well as the eighteenth-century former town hall and pillory.

Resende

Resende

Resende is believed to take its name from the Christian knight "Rausendo", who conquered the town and then repopulated it in the eleventh century.

This is the region in which D. Afonso Henriques, the first king of Portugal, was brought up by his tutor D. Egas Moniz. The prince, who was born with an incurable disease, miraculously recovered at the age of 4, after D. Egas Moniz had taken him to a place where he found an image of the Virgin Mary, in accordance with certain instructions that he had been given in a vision.

He later ordered a church to be built at this place, which was known as Cárquere. The church was altered in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but there is still a small ivory figure of the Virgin Mary to be seen here.

Standing on the slopes of the Serra do Montemuro, and close to the reservoir formed by the Carrapatelo dam, Resende offers visitors some extremely beautiful panoramic views over the River Douro.

In the surrounding area is the spa of Caldas de Aregos, whose waters are said to have excellent healing properties.

Ribeira de Pena

Ribeira de Pena

Situated in a transitional zone between the provinces of Minho and Trás-os-Montes, Ribeira de Pena is located deep in the heart of the vinho verde demarcated wine region. The municipality is crossed by several rivers, which make the countryside cool and green and provide excellent conditions for fishing.

Some of the remains left by the region's previous inhabitants date back to prehistoric times. Examples of this earlier occupation are the shrine of Lamelas, built out of rocks, and the pre-Roman hillside forts dotted around the region.

Mention should also be made of the Ponte de Cavês, a bridge across the River Tâmega, and the church of São Salvador, which was built in the eighteenth century, having been commissioned by a man who was born locally and had recently returned home rich after emigrating to Brazil.

Sabrosa

Sabrosa

Situated in the Port wine demarcated region, Sabrosa still retains various features from the time of its settlement in the Neolithic period (dolmens and cromlechs) and some hill-top forts from the Iron Age, amongst them Castro da Sancha, which was altered during the period of the region's occupation by the Romans.

Still remaining from mediaeval times are some Palaeo-Christian tombs, and in the surrounding region is the village of Provesende, whose foundation dates back to the period before Portugal formation as a kingdom.

Sabrosa was the birthplace of Fernão de Magalhães (Magellan), the great fifteenth-century Portuguese navigator and the first man to circumnavigate the world.

After the Douro region had been demarcated for wine production in the eighteenth century, the town embarked on a period of great development, and most of its impressive manor houses date from that time.

Santa Maria da Feira

Santa Maria da Feira

Situated in the centre of a region that, in the 11th and 12th centuries, was known as "Terras de Santa Maria" and provided the link between the north of the country and Coimbra, this place gave its name to a fair that was held in the area at that time. The city's most distinctive feature is its castle, built in the 15th century with a design and layout that is unusual amongst Portuguese castles, looking more like something that has been plucked straight out of a book of fairy tales.

Nowadays, Santa Maria da Feira is a city that boasts some excellent infrastructures, such as Europarque - a modern conference centre with a varied programme of cultural events - and the Visionarium - an interactive science museum. Equally worthy of special attention is the Paper Museum.

In the calendar of traditional events in this town, the most important is undoubtedly the Festa das Fogaceiras. This is a popular festival held on 20 January each year, which has as its high point the parade of the fogaceiras, the name given to the girls who carry on their heads the local delicacy known as fogaças (a kind of sweetened white bread).

Santa Marta de Penaguião

Santa Marta de Penaguião

Situated in the Douro demarcated wine region, Santa Marta de Penaguião is famous for its wine-making co-operative where some greatly appreciated table wines and fortified wines are produced.

The landscape in this region is filled with vineyards stretching as far as the eye can see.

Santo Tirso

Santo Tirso

Situated in the valley of the River Ave, this town first developed around the monastery of São Bento, founded in the tenth century, which was also known as Santo Tirso de Riba de Ave.

The region's largest religious festival is held here every July in honour of São Bento (St. Benedict).

Close by is the spa of Caldas da Saúde, which is not only equipped with all the facilities necessary for thermal cures, but also has a curious exhibition of the instruments most commonly used in spa treatments at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Of particular interest in the surrounding area is the Romanesque church of Roriz (whose origin dates back to the eighth century)

and Citânia de Sanfins de Ferreira, an old pre-Roman settlement that was probably inhabited as long ago as the sixth century BC.

São João da Pesqueira

São João da Pesqueira

Situated on the banks of the River Douro, São João da Pesqueira owes its name to a natural lake that was once full of different species of fish. This turned the spot into a paradise for fishermen and it therefore became known locally as the "pesqueira" (fishing-ground).

The lake was created by a series of rocks that formed a dam across the river, causing it to continue its course in the form of a waterfall known as Cachão da Valeira, where a number of boats were wrecked. The uneven and rather treacherous course of the River Douro was eventually tamed by the various dams built here in the twentieth century.

In the heart of the Douro demarcated wine region, the landscape in this area is marked by extensive vineyards, resulting in some truly breathtaking views that are best admired from the shrine of São Salvador do Mundo or Monte da Frágua.

Sernancelhe

Sernancelhe

Reconquered by the Christians in the eleventh century, this town had previously been occupied by the Romans and the Arabs, who each left behind them distinct traces of their presence.

The Romanesque parish church is considered by many to be one of the finest in the country.

In a region where farming is still by far the most important activity, Sernancelhe is particularly famous for its chestnut production.

In the surrounding region, the monastery of Nossa Senhora da Assunção at Tabosa, the last monastery founded by the Cistercian Order in Portugal, is well worth a visit, as is the shrine of Senhora da Lapa, where an important religious festival is held every 15 August.

Tabuaço

Tabuaço

Tabuaço is situated close to the River Távora, a tributary to the region's most important river, the Douro. In the surrounding area are several important Romanesque monuments, such as Barcos parish church (dating from the thirteenth century), the chapel at Sabroso or the monastery of São Pedro das Águias, founded by the Order of Saint Benedict, which was later incorporated into the Cistercian Order.

Tarouca

Tarouca

The region's monasteries played an evident role in the town's origins, in particular the monastery of São João de Tarouca, the first to be founded by the Cistercian Order in the Iberian Peninsula (XII century) and whose dominion extended over a major portion of Northern Portugal.

The other main Monastery in the Region, denominated Santa Maria de Salzedas, was probably founded in the XII century and was also a very rich monastical house.

The fortified bridge of Ucanha, built in the XIII century, is a unique example in Portugal. It is an emblem of the feudal past in which a toll was charged to anyone who crossed this territory, between Lamego and Riba Côa.

Another noteworthy feature is the region's agricultural wealth, in particular its vineyards which are the source of the country's finest sparkling wines.

Terras de Bouro

Terras de Bouro

Situated close to the River Homem, most of the municipality of Terras do Bouro is contained within the borders of the Peneda-Gerês National Park.

Close by are the extremely beautiful reservoirs formed by the dams of Caniçada and Vilarinho das Furnas. When the latter lake was created, the village that gave it its name was completely submerged, and its remains are now exhibited at the Ethnographic Museum in Terras de Bouro.

In the surrounding region are the shrines of São Bento da Porta Aberta and Senhora da Abadia, which are both important centres of pilgrimage and the sites of regularly held religious festivities.

Torre de Moncorvo

Torre de Moncorvo

The name of this town is linked to that of a Leonese noble, Mendo Curvus, the lord of this region, who, after taking part in the Christian Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula, ordered a castle to be built both as his residence and for the defence of the territory. D. Afonso Henriques, the first king of Portugal, confirmed the privileges that had previously been given to the inhabitants, by granting the settlement charters in 1128 and 1140.

A century later, Torre de Moncorvo gained renewed importance when it was promoted to the status of a town, at the initiative of the king D. Dinis. During this same reign, the castle was rebuilt and the town's walls strengthened, confirming its importance during the Middle Ages as an advanced point of defence along the Portuguese border.

In 1512, D. Manuel granted Torre de Moncorvo a new charter, which thus became one of the largest administrative districts in the country. Situated in the fertile Vale da Vilariça, close to the Serra do Reboredo, the town became an important trading centre between the territories to the north of the River Douro and the wine region of Beira Alta. The wealth of this region was reflected in the building of two important churches: the imposing parish church of Torre de Moncorvo, known as the Igreja Matriz de Nossa Senhora da Assunção, and the Renaissance Igreja da Misericórdia.

In the 17th century, the Real Feitoria dos Linhos e Cânhamos (Royal Linen and Hemp Factory) was created at the initiative of the king, D. João IV. During the 18th century, the use of silk began to spread and gradually the breeding of silkworms replaced the growing of flax, providing continuity for the region's textile production. Another area of great investment was mining, an activity which began in 1874 due to the fact that one of the country's largest deposits of iron ore was to be found in the region. The present-day Museu do Ferro e da Região de Moncorvo (Moncorvo Regional and Iron Museum) reminds us of the way in which this industry developed and provides a great deal of interesting information about the local history and customs.

One of the best times to visit Torre de Moncorvo is at the end of winter, when the Municipal Council organises a handicraft fair and promotes the region through its special initiative known as "Amendoeiras em Flor" (Almond-trees in Blossom).

You should also make sure to visit Adeganha, a village some 19 kilometres from Torre de Moncorvo, which still preserves many of the typical rural characteristics of the region of Trás-os-Montes. Here, you should take time to visit the Igreja Matriz de Santiago Maior, an interesting example of the Romanesque architectural style in north-east Portugal.

Valença

Valença

Standing on the border with Spain and overlooking the River Minho, Valença is surrounded by walls and displays all the characteristic features of a town that was fortified in the seventeenth century in the style of the French military architect, Vauban.

Its first name was "Contrasta", which referred to a village standing opposite another one and was clearly a reference to its position directly across the River Minho from the Galician town of Tui.

Today, it is a city with a flourishing trade, in which some of the most popularly sought after items are the pieces produced by the local craftsmen.

Valongo

Valongo

Situated almost within the city limits of Porto, of which it is now an extension, Valongo was probably founded by the Romans, who mined gold in the region.

Today, it is a bustling city, which still retains a number of typical features from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, being very well known for its traditional manufacture of bread and biscuits.

Valpaços

Valpaços

The municipality of Valpaços was founded in the nineteenth century, although it is thought that this region was already inhabited in prehistoric times and later occupied by the Romans, as is in fact proved by the many remains to be found here from that period.

It is a fertile region and naturally agriculture plays a major part in the local economy, with particular attention being drawn to the production of cherries and wine.

As far as the town's cuisine is concerned, amongst the most popular items are the local sausages and the Valpaços Easter cake, for which the region is particularly famous.

Viana do Castelo

Viana do Castelo

Situated close to the mouth of the river Lima, 65 kilometres to the north of Porto and 50 kilometres from the Spanish border at Valença, Viana do Castelo was founded in the thirteenth century by D. Afonso III, the king of Portugal, under the name of Viana da Foz do Lima.

The sea was always the main reason for the city's existence: at one time it had 70 merchant ships and, in the period of the Discoveries (in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), carracks and caravels set sail from the shipyards of Viana to follow the sea routes to India and North and South America, returning laden with sugar, ebony, ivory and other exotic goods. A native-born son of Viana, João Álvares Fagundes, pioneered the navigation route to Newfoundland in the North Atlantic. Without knowing it, he was to pave the way for the beginning of the cult of the many different ways of cooking cod in Portugal.

In the mid-twentieth century, a fishing fleet was built in the shipyards of Viana do Castelo to fish for cod in the cold waters of the northern seas. The tomb of João Álvares Fagundes can be found in the chapel of Christ the Lord, inside Viana do Castelo Parish Church.

Until the sixteenth century, the town belonged exclusively to the common people, and the nobility were forbidden to settle here. When its doors were finally opened, Viana was suddenly enriched with palaces, churches, convents and fountains forming a remarkable heritage that is well worth a visit. In 1848, the queen D. Maria II raised Viana to the status of a city and gave it its new name of Viana do Castelo. A beautiful, extrovert and lively city, Viana do Castelo has successfully preserved the wealth of its deep-rooted popular traditions.

The Romaria de Nossa Senhora da Agonia (Festival of Our Lady in Sorrow), including one of the most beautiful religious processions in Portugal, is an explosive mixture of colour and happiness that no-one can afford to miss.

Vieira do Minho

Vieira do Minho

Located in a very mountainous and densely forested region, the municipality of Vieira do Minho is an ideal place to spend one's leisure moments, with the lakes formed by the dams of Caniçada and Ermal being extraordinarily beautiful. Scattered all over the region are a number of small villages that still maintain their long-standing and typically rural customs.

In the first weekend of October, the town comes alive with the holding of its Feira da Ladra, a huge flea market at which everything is sold, with the special highlights being the typical regional handicraft, such as copper ware, basketwork and woven

articles.

Vila Flor

Vila Flor

The town was previously known as Póvoa de Além-Sabor, until D. Dinis, king of Portugal, visited the area and was so enchanted by its beauty that he gave it the name of Vila Flor (Flower Town), ordering walls to be built around the town, although all that now remains of these is the southern gate or the Porta de D. Dinis.

Time should always be set aside for a visit to the parish church, which was rebuilt in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the baroque style, as well as to the D. Berta Cabral Museum, which contains a number of interesting archaeological exhibits found in the region.

Vila Nova de Cerveira

Vila Nova de Cerveira

Founded in the 14th century by Dom Dinis, on the condition that one hundred residents would be brought together to form the community, the town took the name of Cerveira due to the colony of deer (cervos) that were to be found in the region.

Situated close to the border with Spain on the banks of the River Minho, where there is a ferryboat linking the town to Goyan in Galicia, Vila Nova de Cerveira has a wide variety of monuments, testifying to its rich past.

Since 1978, Vila Nova de Cerveira has been famous for its biennial exhibition of visual arts, an important national event whose fame has now spread to other countries and has begun to attract many international artists.

Vila Nova de Famalicão

Vila Nova de Famalicão

Famalicão, which was founded in the thirteenth century by the king D. Afonso III, is believed to have existed even before the foundation of the Portuguese nationality as the regional seat of the Terras de Vermoim.

Its great development did not, however, take place until the nineteenth century, when various workshops and factories were set up in the municipality.

This same period also witnessed the appearance of a number of small palaces and luxurious buildings financed by the capital of emigrants who had lived in Brazil.

Camilo Castelo Branco, one of the most important figures in nineteenth-century Portuguese literature, lived in the village of São Miguel de Seide in the surrounding area and his house has

recently been converted into a museum.

Vila Nova de Foz Côa

Vila Nova de Foz Côa

This small inland town stands on a plateau in the region known as the "terra quente" (hot land), so called because of the scorching heat that is felt here throughout the summer.

It has recently gained international recognition as a result of the discovery nearby, along the banks of the River Côa, of a series of rock paintings and carvings dating back to the Upper Palaeolithic times. In fact, the River Côa valley is the only place known to exist in the world where such a large group of Palaeolithic figure drawings are visible in the open air, so that in 1998 these paintings and carvings were classified as world heritage by UNESCO.

Vila Nova de Gaia

Vila Nova de Gaia

Standing on the left bank of the River Douro, this city had been inhabited since very remote times, although it was not until the eighteenth century that Gaia was to gain its present-day prosperity with the building of the Port Wine Lodges.

It was here that the wine was brought by the barcos rabelos and left to age in the cellars until it had acquired the particular qualities that have since made it famous world-wide. It is impossible to come to the city without taking the time to pay a visit to one of the many wine lodges along the banks of the river in order to discover more about this truly unique wine and enjoy the opportunity to appreciate its different varieties.

Amongst the architectural heritage of Gaia one may highlight the monastery of Serra do Pilar, whose privileged setting has resulted in its being used as a fortress, and from where visitors can enjoy one of the most spectacular views of the city of Porto.

Vila Pouca de Aguiar

Vila Pouca de Aguiar

Situated near the the Alvão Natural Park, the area around Vila Pouca de Aguiar still contains a number of remains from its very ancient settlement in the Iron Age (Castro de Cidadelhe), as well as evidence of its occupation by the Romans, such as a number of bridges and cobbled streets. In the town itself, the most obvious signs of its former glory are to be found in the old buildings and manor houses.

Also in the surrounding area is the spa of Pedras Salgadas, situated in the heart of a luxuriant green region and still retaining much of the grandiose atmosphere of the "belle époque", when it was a particularly popular watering hole

amongst the aristocracy. Its naturally sparkling water is much sought after because of its healing properties, being very easy to obtain, as it is bottled and distributed all over the country.

Vila Real

Vila Real

The provincial capital of Trás-os-Montes, Vila Real stands on a 427m high outcrop that forms the watershed between the Corgo and Cabril rivers with its elegant houses harmoniously descending the slopes.

The first royal charter was granted to Vila Real by king Dinis (reigned 1279-1325) in 1289. In it, the king granted its inhabitants the right to refuse hospitality to nobility and knights who thus had to seek shelter beyond its walls. That did not prevent Vila Real welcoming in many noble families whose residences were incorporated into the city as it grew in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

Whoever visits modern Vila Real cannot but be surprised by the sight of so many stone coats of arms dignifying the facades of so many buildings, and the city's coat of arms, featuring a sword and gaming stick tells the story of its first count.

The city's coat of arms features a sword and a gaming stick. To fully enjoy this attractive city, where looking up there are always the surrounding mountains, begin at the place where, in the 13th century, the first residents began building what has become "medieval Vila Real", followed by "old Vila Real ancient" and completing the stroll in the leafy Municipal Park, bordering modern Vila Real. From here, one possibility is to head up to Calvário, where there is a wonderful semi-circular view out over the city, including to the west, the Marão and Alvão hills and, to the south, the Montemuro mountains. To the north of this viewpoint are the more recent neighbourhoods of the last hundred years.

Roughly 3 Km from the city, visit one of the most outstanding jewels of Portuguese Baroque the Mateus Palace.

Vila Verde

Vila Verde

Standing in the heart of an extremely fertile region, at the point where the River Homem flows into the River Cávado, Vila Verde offers visitors the chance to appreciate some of the most beautiful countryside in Portugal, in a bucolic setting that is ideal for hunting and fishing enthusiasts.

In the summer, almost all of the villages have their own special religious festivities, attracting many visitors from outside and breathing even more life and colour into the region.

As far as the local handicraft is concerned, the region's most

characteristic products are the "lenços de namorados" (lovers' handkerchiefs) made of linen or cotton and embroidered with a simple phrase expressing the great love and admiration felt by those offering them as a present.

Vila do Conde

Vila do Conde

A quiet city that gained in importance and increased its prosperity as a ship-building yard at the time of the Maritime Discoveries.

The sea has always had a major influence on the life of the local inhabitants, inspiring the motifs used in the famous bobbin lace that has been produced here at least since the seventeenth century. Later, the techniques and knowledge of this remarkable art spread all along the rest of the northern coast of Portugal as far as Galicia itself, and some of its beautiful products can be appreciated at the local Lace Museum.

The important role played by handicraft in the life of this city is not limited to its lace-work, however, for each year in July/August, Vila do Conde plays host to the National Handicraft Fair, one of the most important events of this kind in Portugal.

Vimioso

Vimioso

The town of Vimioso received its first charter in the sixteenth century, although the region had already been inhabited since prehistoric times, as can be seen from the remains found on the hill of Atalaia, which overlooks the town.

This frontier region was of great importance for the defence of the Portuguese territory against the Castilian invaders and one of the safest and most strategic points was the castle of Algoso, built next to the river in the thirteenth century, on a precipice overlooking a sheer drop of 681 metres.

In addition to its rich historical heritage, the municipality also contains the marble and alabaster quarries of Santo Adrião, which are well worth a visit.

Vinhais

Vinhais

The military road built by the Romans to connect Braga, Chaves and Astorga passed close to the present-day site of Vinhais and the Ponte da Rauca bridge also dates from that time.

The town was founded in the thirteenth century by the Portuguese king D. Sancho, being situated on top of a hill that the Romans had used as a lookout post, from which they could supervise the whole region. It was later fortified in the fourteenth century at the orders of D. Dinis.

Vinhais has succeeded in preserving a number of very interesting monuments, such as the church of São Facundo (founded by the Goths) and the convent of São Francisco, although, perhaps more than anything else, it is famed for the great richness of its cuisine, particularly its sausages, which are best purchased at the annual Smoked Meat Fair held here in February.