Protected Areas

Alentejo

Barrancos

Parque de Natureza de Noudar
Protected Areas
Website: http://www.parquenoudar.com

Signposted routes; Guided Tours;

Located in Barrancos, next to the border with Spain, Noudar Nature Park maintains a preserved environment in which agricultural and forestry activities are conserved in profound respect for the natural ecosystems. With a landscape dominated by holm-oak plantations, the Park is bounded to the north by the River Ardila and to the south by the Ribeira da Múrtega stream. In the centre of this territory, the Castle of Noudar stands out as a majestic defensive bastion overlooking the plains - providing one of the finest belvederes of the region. The great wealth of vegetation, makes this space the ideal habitat for deer and wild boars and attracts various species of birds such as the black vulture, black-stork, crane, the rufous bush robin, the black wheatear and garden warbler.The Interpretation Centre is the best place to start your visit to the Park. Located in Monte da Coitadinha it offers excellent conditions in order to receive visitors, including a restaurant and a library. The centre also provides information concerning existing trails that may be followed autonomously or with the support of digital guides or multimedia PDAs applications, with geo-referenced content. It's possible to walk along trails or use environmentally-friendly all-terrain vehicles provided by the Park, such as bicycles or "Noucars" (solar powered electrical vehicles). Visitors may also be accompanied by local guides or, if they make a prior booking, by specialists in areas such as ornithology, geology, botany, history or ethnography, in conformity with the visitors' interests.

Castro Verde

Centro de Educação Ambiental de Vale Gonçalinho
Protected Areas
E-mail: lpn.cea-castroverde@lpn.pt Website: http://www.lpn.pt

Signposted routes; Guided Tours;

The Vale Gonçalinho Environmental Education Centre is the obligatory starting point for a visit to the Special Protection Zone for birds in Castro Verde, providing information on the region's natural heritage. Known as the "Campo Branco" (White Field), this vast area of plains in Alentejo, has almost no trees, and is fully occupied by cereal production. In order to conciliate agriculture with bird conservation, the Nature Protection League has developed the "Sustainable Castro Verde" programme in an area of around 1,700 hectares where hunting is prohibited and where traditional agriculture is practised, respecting nature. This initiative has transformed the region of Castro Verde into one of the finest birdwatching zones in Portugal, where species that are protected worldwide can be seen frequently, such as the greater bustard, lesser kestrel and bittern. In Vale Gonçalinho, visitors will find a series of didactic activities and information concerning the best trails in order to observe and photograph nature in the Special Protection Zone. The Environmental Education Centre

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also provides equipment for rent and a tour guide service. Inside the centre, visitors can see exhibitions of regional or environmental products, a documentation centre and a support area for technical experts carrying out scientific studies in this region.

Mértola

Parque Natural do Vale do Guadiana

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/p-nat/pnvg

Signposted routes; Park area: 69.773 ha.; Altitude: Máx - 370; min - 9m; Accommodation facilities available;

Located in the valley of the River Guadiana, winds its way through narrow riverbanks dotted by age-old watermills, or sharp ravines covered in Mediterranean undergrowth, and offers magnificent landscape views. The area of the Natural Park also includes towns that exemplify well preserved traditional architecture.On the northern border of the Park, in a place of exceptional natural beauty, we find the steepest natural decline in the course of the River Guadiana, the waterfall in Pulo do Lobo (Wolf's leap), that was given this name due to the proximity of the rocks on the two sides, which give the idea that it would be possible to cross the river in a single bound. But don't try – it’s much more difficult than it seems at first sight.Marked by the immense plains that extend from the Corte Gafo to the Serra de Serpa, home to cereal crops and pasture land, this area preserves unique species of vegetation. One of the rarest is the four leaf clover (Marsilea batardae) that according to tradition will bring luck to anyone who finds it.Visitors may discover the protected area, by following the various pedestrian trails proposed by the Park. But during the summer, it’s necessary to take precautions against the intense heat recorded in this zone, that has the highest temperatures and longest numbers of sunshine in Portugal. Perhaps a more refreshing alternative would be to descend the river Guadiana in a canoe.At any time of the year, make sure to visit Serpa, a town of narrow and picturesque streets, enclosed in 14th century mediaeval walls, that produces excellent cheeses; and Mértola, a town museum, with nuclei dating from the Roman, Visigoth and Islamic periods. The vestiges from these periods, have inspired the Park’s symbol -- a bird of prey as represented in a sixth century Islamic dish.For those who admire industrial archaeology, it's well worth visiting the former mining complex in São Domingos, in the mountain range of the same name, that was once an extremely important centre for the extraction of copper pyrites.

Odemira

Parque Natural do Sudoeste Alentejano e Costa Vicentina

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/p-nat/pnsacv

Traditional Country House Accommodation: Casas-retiro de Aljezur Serro do Mosqueiro, 8670-056 Aljezur Phone: +351 96 325 65 81E-mail: info@carpe-vita.com www.carpe-vita.com; Signposted routes; Park area: 75.000 ha.; Altitude: Máx - 156m; min - 0m; Profundidade máx - 50m;

The South West Alentejo and Vicentine Coast Natural Park is the finest preserved stretch of European coastline, covering over 100 km, from Porto Covo in the Alentejo, to Burgau in the Algarve. The Park includes various unique species of animal and plant life,

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and is visited by many zoologists and botanists from all parts of the world.The landscape is marked by steep cliffs, represented in the Park's logo, that have been given various forms and colouring by centuries of erosion.Many bird species can be seen, such as rare fishing eagles. The rarest species is the white stork, given that this is the only place in the world where they build their nests in the seashore rocks. Another rarity is the otter, since this is the only place in Portugal and one of the last places in Europe where it is possible to find otters in a marine habitat. Plant life includes the largest number of priority species in Portugal, including unique indigenous species such as Biscutella vicentina or Plantago Almogravensis.The beaches, are highly popular amongst surfers, and are the finest in the country. There is a tremendous variety of beaches, including long stretches of sand and small beaches nestled between the cliffs and rocks. The long list includes beaches such as Porto Covo, Malhão, Vila Nova de Milfontes, Almograve, Monte Clérigo, Arrifana and Praia do Amado. If you have the energy and desire to stray from the beaten track, albeit with difficult access, it’s possible to discover many other beaches that have been preserved in a virtually unspoilt state.In the extreme South Western section of the Park make sure to visit the lighthouse in the Cape of São Vicente after whom this stretch of coastline has been named and the nearby Sagres promontory, that housed the famous nautical school founded by the Infante D. Henrique in the 15th century.

Portalegre

Parque Natural da Serra de São Mamede

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/p-nat/pnssm

Signposted routes; Park area: 29.694 ha.; Altitude: Máx - 1.025m; min - 350m; Accommodation facilities available;

In the Serra de São Mamede we encounter an unexpected Alentejo, constituted by high mountains instead of rolling plains, where it's possible to discover vestiges of human presence from various historical periods.The highest point in the Park, at 1025m above sea level (the highest peak south of the river Tagus offers an exceptional belvedere). The mountain range functions as a barrier to condensation, creating a microclimate with levels of precipitation and humidity that are higher than the surrounding zones, thus originating a rich and diversified vegetation cover. In the northern section of the Park, oak and chestnut trees predominate, while to the south, traditional cork oak and holm oak groves are found.In order to discover the many treasures of this protected area, the Park proposes five pedestrian trails, by means of which it is possible to appreciate the varied vegetation and observe rare birds of prey such as the vulture, kite or Bonelli eagle - the symbol of the Park. With a bit of luck, you might see a wild boar or deer, that are now returning to the Serra de São Mamede, after an effort made to reconstitute their habitats.If you're more interested in archaeological heritage, make sure to visit the mediaeval towns of Castelo de Vide, Alegrete and Marvão or the city of Portalegre, the regional capital, that has many manor houses and convents which give it an aristocratic air, and is also the headquarters of the Manufactura das Tapeçarias company, where many genuine works of tapestry art are produced. In order to restore your energies, enjoy the many tasty regional specialities - lamb stew, roasted kid, and desserts such as Boleima cake or Sericaia pudding with plums from Elvas.

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Rio Maior

Parque Natural das Serras de Aire e Candeeiros

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/p-nat/pnsac

Signposted routes; Park area: 39.900 ha.; Altitude: Máx: 678m;

The greatest riches of the Serras de Aire e Candeeiros Natural Park are hidden within its interior. This chalk massif is a paradise for speleologists who will be able to discover grottoes and ravines in its depths, with surprising rock formations that have been sculpted by water over time. Several of these areas are prepared to receive visitors such as the grottoes of Santo António, Moeda, Mira d'Aire and Alvados, that have various support infrastructures.At the surface, there are neither rivers or streams. The landscape is barren, dotted here and there by boulders, fissures and slopes. Notwithstanding this arid appearance, there is a rich and varied range of animal life, including 18 species of bats (the symbol of the Park) that find ideal shelter in the various grottoes.Close to the River Maior, we find the rock salt mines, where it is possible to see salt-extraction activities, in accordance with management and utilisation principles that have been used for over eight centuries.On the eastern flank of the Serra de Aire, around 10kms from Fátima, we find the world's largest and most important collection of sauropod dinosaur footprints from the mid Jurassic period (175 million years old). Several of the 20 or so tracks, discovered by chance in a former quarry - the "Pedreira do Galinha" - measure over 100 m in length. The site includes some of the largest and clearest footprints known to man, that attain up to 95 cm in length and 70 cm in width, which gives an idea of the dimension of the largest of beings that have ever inhabited the planet.In order to get to know this protected area, visitors may choose between the 16 pedestrian walks proposed by the Park. If they prefer a more original and less tiring approach, they may go on a donkey ride, organised by the excursion companies in the zone.

Santiago do Cacém

Reserva Natural das Lagoas de Santo André e da Sancha

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/r-nat/rnlsas

Park area: 5.274 ha;

Located in the Alentejo, the Lagoas de Santo André and Sancha Natural Reserve occupies a 15km-wide coastal sector inland from the shoreline, in the municipalities of Sines and Santiago do Cacém.The Natural Reserve consists of the Lagoa de Santo André, the largest lagoon (500 hectares) on the Alentejo coastline, and the smaller Lagoa da Sancha (15 hectares). Its protected status recognises the high ecological value of these two wetlands and their surrounding areas which also include the ridge of dunes that separates them from the ocean and the adjacent seashore.The existence of fresh and brackish waters gives rise to a diverse set of aquatic ecosystems and riparian areas that include small marsh areas, willow plantations, rush and reed beds, bogs, heathland and wetland pastures.These natural conditions attract many birds that remain here at times when other areas are already fully or partially dried out, making the late summer/early autumn the most recommended season for observing them. In Lagoa de Santo André, one can see some species in much greater numbers than any other area in

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Portugal, such as the common coot, the red-crested pochard and the Eurasian reed warbler, which is the symbol of the Reserve. In Lagoa da Sancha, there is a colony of nesting red herons, and it is also chosen as a place of refuge for the red-crested pochard.The Reserve is a place of outstanding natural beauty and offers excellent conditions to practice many activities like hiking, canoeing and windsurfing, or simply strolling and relaxing in the sun on the adjacent long sandy beaches of Costa de Santo André and Fonte do Cortiço.

Algarve

Olhão

Parque Natural da Ria Formosa

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/p-nat/pnrf

Signposted routes; Park area: 17.664 ha.; Altitude: Máx - 26m; min - 0m; Accommodation facilities available;

A humid zone of international importance, the Ria Formosa estuary is a labyrinth of canals, islands, marshland and sandy beaches that extend 60 km along the Algarve coast between the beaches of Garrão and Manta Rota.This diversity of eco-systems attracts a varied range of animal life including many bird species. One of the rarest species is the purple swamphen, the symbol of their Natural Park that cannot be found in any other part of the country. Visitors who would like to admire the elegant plumage of this bird and learn everything about the protected area, should start their visit in the Marim Environmental Education Centre, that will indicate the most appropriate pedestrian trails and observatories where it is possible to spy on the day-to-day activities of the various species. The Park also organises various rides in a traditional boat that was formerly used for tuna fishing.One of the most friendly species that can be found here is the Portuguese water dog. This is a long-haired dog, which helps fishermen in their work, by diving and catching fish caught in the nets.Other traditional activities of the local population living in the estuary area include extraction of salt and gathering of shellfish and bivalves (mussels, oysters, clams, razor etc). These are then used with great skill and art in order to create delicious gastronomical specialities, such as fish soup or razor fish rice, that can be enjoyed calmly in the seaside restaurants.All those who love the sun and sea, will encounter genuine paradises in the islands located in the Ria Formosa estuary. From west to east, we find the islands of Faro, Barreta, Culatra, Armona and Tavira, with extensive stretches of sand and relatively deserted. In order to round off the trip, it's well worth visiting Cacela Velha, a white town with a notable historical heritage. From the top of the fortress, there are spectacular views of the surroundings – mingling together the blue tones of the estuary, sea and sky.

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Vila Real de Santo António

Reserva Natural do Sapal de Castro Marim e Vila Real de Santo António

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/r-nat/rnscmvrsa

Signposted routes; Park area: 2.089 ha.; Altitude: Máx - 50m; min - 0m; Accommodation facilities available;

After journeying around 850 km from its source in Spain, and just before flowing into the sea in Vila Real de Santo António, the River Guadiana winds its way through the plains, branching out into creeks and canals that flow into lakes, marshland and salt pans, that provide a habitat to a wide variety of species.This humid zone, known as the Marshland Nature Reserve of Castro Marim and Vila Real de Santo António, was the third zone to be declared a Nature Reserve in Portugal and is a privileged site for the reproduction of fishes, crustaceans and shellfish, who find shelter here in order to grow before they venture forth into the sea. It is possible to see birds throughout the year, such as the white stork, flamingo and the black-winged stilt that is the most common species in the zone and was therefore chosen as the symbol of the Nature Reserve.If visitors follow the itinerary proposed by the Interpretation Centre they will discover a different Algarve, far from the hustle and bustle of the beaches, where the silence is only disturbed by bird cries. On foot or by bicycle, the trails lead us to the salt pans that occupy around one third of the protected area, and which for many centuries constituted the main source of riches in the region. Salt continues to be produced in many of the salt pans, in accordance with artisanal processes, delivering a product whose quality is certified by the Nature Reserve.In drier zones, agriculture is the main activity, including typical trees from the Algarve such as the carob-shrub, fig tree and almond tree that provide the ingredients for delicious regional desserts such as D. Rodrigo and Morgado.In order to round off the trip, visit the castle in Castro Marim, that offers a fresh perspective on the Nature Reserve, and the town of Vila Real de Santo António, that was built in the 18th century on the basis of a meticulous and innovative urban plan.

Azores

Ilha de São Miguel

Centro Ambiental do Priolo

Protected Areas

Signposted routes; Guided Tours;

Located in the Cancela do Cinzeiro Forestry Park within the Special Protection Zone of Pico da Vara/Ribeira do Guilherme, Priolo Environmental Centre aims to preserve this small bird and its habitat. The priolo is Europe’s second rarest bird species, and also the most endangered, that can only be seen in the municipalities of Nordeste and Povoação, in the eastern part of the island of São Miguel. Also functioning as a reception and welcome centre for this Special Protection Zone, the space was created by SPEA – the Portuguese Birdwatching Society – in collaboration with the Regional Directorate of Forestry Resources and the Regional Secretariat for the Environment and the Sea. The Environmental Centre is constituted by two buildings - where visitors will encounter interactive exhibitions concerning the local fauna and flora, a shop, a relaxation area, and a bar where it’s possible to have a drink or sample a regional speciality. Outside

Reserva Natural Regional Ilhéu de Vila Franca

Protected Areas

Ilhéu de Vila Franca Regional Nature ReservelIhéu de Vila Franca was classified as a Regional Nature Reserve in 2004.The area resulted from a submarine eruption that produced an almost perfectly circular caldera, measuring around 150 m in diameter with a connection to the sea.The zone is constituted by two islets, the Small and Large Islet. It is an important nidification and flyover zone for several marine species such as the Cory's Shearwater and Common Tern. It also includes natural woodlands of myrica faya trees and heather. Numerous species of algae and invertebrates live in the surrounding waters.

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the centre, Cinzeiro Forestry Park includes a plantation of native species and a small garden with endemic plants from the natural forest found in the Azores. Here, visitors may take part in the activities organised by the Environmental Centre or follow several pedestrian footpaths in order to identify existing species.

Ilha do Faial

Vulcão dos Capelinhos - Faial

Protected Areas

Capelinhos Volcano - FaialThe Capelinhos Volcano is located in the "Capelo Peninsular", formed by the lava flows from a line of volcanoes located along a fault, with a WNW-ESSE orientation.The Capelinhos volcano is the last of the volcanoes in the line, resulting from an eruption that took place between 1957 and 58. The eruption began in the sea, next to the Ilhéus dos Capelinhos, originating violent explosions. The expelled materials fell next to the caldera, forming a small island connected to Faial Island. From that time it lost its submarine characteristics.The lighthouse and several of the houses destroyed by the eruption accentuate the dramatic characteristic of a truly unique landscape in the Azores.The common Sea Swallow regularly makes its nests in the Capelinhos volcano. The lava flows in the more humid zones are now colonised by lichens and species of coastal vegetation.

Centro de Portugal

Arganil

Paisagem Protegida da Serra do Açor

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/p-prot/ppsa

Signposted routes; Park area: 346 ha.; Altitude: Máx - 1.012m; min - 400m; Accommodation facilities available;

Located next to Arganil, the protected landscape of the Serra do Açor includes a zone of great natural beauty included within the European network of biogenetic reserves - the Margaraça Woodlands. The luxurious vegetation found on these slate slopes is one of the rare examples of primitive vegetation cover in the mountainous areas of the centre of Portugal that have survived until the present day.The fresh air and invigorating atmosphere resulting from the abundance of water inspires us to take long walks or bike rides on hot summer days. Many streams originate in the Serra do Açor and it's possible to hear the sound of running water almost everywhere and find small lagoons or riverside beaches. One of the most beautiful spots is Fraga da Pena, a paradisical setting, where water falls in cascades about 70 m high, forming a delightful natural swimming pool.Key animal species include the goshawk, a bird of prey that gave its name to this mountain range, which serves as a symbol of the protected landscape area. The goshawk lives alongside other birds such as the screech-owl and hawk. Various mammals can also be found such as the wild boar and genet and a wide diversity of invertebrates, including around 240 butterfly species.Also make sure to visit the historic village of Piodão, nestled against the mountain slopes. The houses of this village, crowded along narrow sloping streets, are built of shale and slate, found in abundance in the Serra do Açor mountains. Visitors can also sample many regional products including honey and whisky, and purchase baskets or wooden spoons produced by local artisans.

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Aveiro

Reserva Natural das Dunas de São Jacinto

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/r-nat/rndsj

Signposted routes; Park area: 666 ha; Altitude: Máx - 17m; min - 2m; Accommodation facilities available;

Scenery that remains undecided between land and sea, composed of sandy beaches, marshland, freshwater and saltwater, and home to many valuable species. You are guaranteed an unforgettable visit.The reserve is located at the southernmost tip of the line of sand dunes separating the northern branch of the Ria de Aveiro from the Atlantic Ocean. It occupies an area of roughly 700 hectares and belongs to the parish of São Jacinto, roughly 50 km from the district capital, Aveiro.It is a coastal area with a beach backed by both shifting and fixed sand dunes, maritime pine-woods and freshwater ponds, an area frequented by migratory waterfowl, some of which spend the winter here. This protected area consists of three different and characteristic zones, including a line of sand dunes, consolidated by spontaneous vegetation. The dunes are bordered by a forested area planted at the end of the 19th century, with the aim of preventing the sand from shifting, and consisting mainly of maritime pines and acacias.In the heart of the protected area, freshwater ponds have been dug to provide a shelter for the anatidae of the Ria de Aveiro and to help the herons to become established in the region. The largest of these ponds, known as the Pateira, is the perfect spot for various waterfowl to pay a temporary visit or spend the winter.The Information Centre will organise guided visits for you, offering you the chance to follow the special Nature Discovery Trail. At the reserve´s headquarters, make sure to see the interesting collection of miniature boats of the Ria, made by local artisans from São Jacinto. Part of the reserve´s heritage includes a brightly-coloured barco moliceiro, the typical boat of the Ria, which takes part in the lively Moliceiros Regatta, held every summer.

Castelo Branco

Geopark Naturtejo da Meseta Meridional

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.naturtejo.com

Signposted routes; Park area: 4.625 Km2; Altitude: 40 m2 - 1.227 m2; Accommodation facilities available; Guided Tours; Buses; Train stations;

Discover the first Portuguese Geopark recognised by UNESCO. The Naturtejo Geopark, an exponent of Nature Tourism in Central Portugal, invites you to discover 16 geosites and a land of valuable natural history and cultural heritage.Travel back in time 600 million years to see the ichnofossils of Penha Garcia. Stroll through Monsanto, the most Portuguese of villages, and the former Roman and Visigothic city of Egitânia, and also discover the spectacular castles and benefices.Take a boat trip, pay a visit to the Tagus International Natural Park, embarking at Portas de Ródão and revel in the vultures, the black storks and the imperial eagles, the colourful bee-eaters, the singing nightingales, the rutting deer and the flourishing vegetation.Passing through the 6 municipalities that comprise the Geopark also means getting to know the customs, legends, tales, ancestral rituals and the kindness of their wise people, and to savour the aromas and flavours of the regional cuisine. Enjoy the diverse cultural expressions in spaces of excellence and the

Parque Natural do Tejo Internacional

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/p-nat/pnti

Signposted routes; Park area: 27.968 ha.; Altitude: Máx - 383 m; min - 120 m;

The River Tagus is the longest River flowing across Portugal. Its source is in Spain and the river travels a great distance before reaching Portuguese territory, where it establishes the frontier between the two countries over a 50 km stretch that has been classified as a Natural Park, before continuing its journey to the river’s estuary mouth in Oeiras, close to Lisbon.The Natural Park encompasses a portion of the municipalities of Castelo Branco and Idanha-a-Nova, in a transition zone between the mountains of the Centro de Portugal region and the plains of the Alentejo. Here we find valleys with sharp slopes that provide a spectacular natural setting next to the River Tagus and the streams that flow into it (Pônsul, Erges and Aravil), where around 154 bird species make their nests, that have been classified by the Park. This zone is excellent for birdwatching. It's possible to see colonies of black storks (the Park’s symbol), eagles and eagle owls. But those who are looking for more active tourism activities, may opt for pedestrian walks or BTT rides, mountain climbing or canoeing.The diversity of its exceptional natural heritage is due

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craft activities performed by the skilled hands of talented artisans.

to the harmonious coexistence with human activities such as agriculture and pastoral activities. Regional products are of fine quality, in particular pure honey, olive oil, home-made bread or cheeses, made using traditional techniques, that may be purchased directly from the producer.

Coimbra

Reserva Natural do Paul de Arzila

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/r-nat/rnpa

Signposted routes; Park area: 535 ha; Altitude: Máx - 88m; min - 6m;

The Paul de Arzila Nature Reserve was created in order to protect an important internationally recognized marshland zone in Ribeira de Cernache, next to the River Mondego. The zone encompasses part of the municipalities of Coimbra, Condeixa and Montemor-o-velho and includes the valleys of Moinhos, Meio and Costa and a forestry area.As the name Paul (marshland) indicates this is a zone whose main characteristic is the abundance of water. It has produced a highly diversified range of vegetation that attracts a large number of animal species. The local fauna includes birds such as ducks and various types of herons that build their nests in the area, including the red heron, which has been chosen as the symbol of the Nature Reserve.Certain birds live here permanently, while others only stay during certain seasons of the year, and others pass through the Paul da Arzila zone in their migratory routes and find shelter and foodstuffs in this zone.If you have a two-hour period to visit the Nature Reserve, contact the Interpretation Centre and follow the recommended 3 km itinerary.

Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo

Área Protegida Privada da Faia Brava

Protected Areas

E-mail: geral@atnatureza.pt Website: http://www.atnatureza.org

Situated in the Vale do Côa, the Private Protected Area of Faia Brava, a wilderness teeming with wildlife, hosts the nesting sites and feeding grounds of one of the most important centres of rupicolous birds in the Vale do Côa Special Protection Zone. This area also has an important set of protected and very rare habitats in the region, as part of the most extensive cork oak plantations in the Guarda District.Faia Brava is formed by a series of properties that stretch for a continuous 5 kilometres along the highest escarpment on the River Côa, and covers about 600 hectares in the parishes of Algodres (municipality of Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo) and Cidadelhe (in Pinhel). This protected area is owned by ATN (the Transhumance and Nature Association) which aims at preserving, enhancing, studying and disseminating natural and biodiversity values through a model of sustainable management.To enable you to fully enjoy your visit to Faia Brava, the Transhumance and Nature Association offers guided tours on which you can enjoy the slopes of the River Côa, the largest expanse of cork oaks in the region, the ancient houses and trails and a traditional pigeon loft, as well as birds of prey like the griffin, the golden eagle, the Bonelli's eagle, the Egyptian vulture and the black stork.

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Manteigas

Parque Natural da Serra da Estrela

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/p-nat/pnse

Signposted routes; Park area: 101.060 ha.; Altitude: Máx - 1.993m; min - 300m; Accommodation facilities available;

The Serra da Estrela Natural Park is the largest protected area in Portugal, located in the central mountainous massif, in a high plateau that inclines towards the North-East, cut across by rivers and streams that have their source here such as the Mondego and Zêzere.The landscape is marked by rocky outcrops, boulders and crags, several of which resemble human forms that have given rise to popular names such as "head of the old woman " and the "Pitchers" (fat, thin and flat), that may be admired as visitors hike along the many existing pedestrian trails.Given that this is the highest peak in mainland Portugal, it is also one of the zones with the highest levels of precipitation, with abundant snow in the winter, enabling winter sports to be practised.The "ice crystal" was the symbol chosen by the Natural Park, in allusion to its climactic characteristics and the glacial origin of this mountain range, as can be seen in the valleys of Zêzere and Unhais, large gaping holes in the mountain side and around 25 natural lagoons.Extensive flocks of sheep can be found here in the pasture land, tended by the Serra da Estrela dogs - a breed of stocky dogs that are highly resistant to low temperatures. Sheep’s milk is used to produce the region's most characteristic product -- the renowned Queijo da Serra cheese, that is produced on an artisanal basis following ancestral techniques that use cardosins as a curdling agent. Make sure you try some of this yellow buttery cheese, between two slices of regional bread. If you want to take some with you, you'll find it on sale at any time of the year, although the most varied offer is in the market fairs held in various parts of the region in the months of February and March.

Penamacor

Reserva Natural da Serra da Malcata

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/r-nat/rnsm

Signposted routes; Park area: 16.347 ha; Altitude: Máx - 1.078m; min - 425m; Accommodation facilities available;

The main reason why the Serra da Malcata Nature Reserve was created was preservation of the Iberian lynx and its habitat. This endangered feline is an endemic species of the Iberian peninsula. It is considerably smaller than Eurasian lynxes and its most marked characteristic is its black brush-like tufts of hair on top of its triangular ears. For its habitat, it prefers quiet places covered in dense and creeping vegetation, far from humanity, where it can freely hunt wild rabbits and hares - its favourite source of nourishment.It obviously won't be easy to see an Iberian lynx, but the animal life in the Nature Reserve is highly diversified and visitors will be able to see other mammals and various types of birds of prey, including the black vulture, whose open wingspan can attain up to 3 m.The Nature Reserve is located between the towns of Penamacor and Sabugal, in an area of law population density and abundant vegetation, in particular large areas of heather and genista, that scatter their scent into the air. Various water courses flow through the area such as the River Côa and Bazágueda and the Meimoa Stream, offering various riverside beaches that are ideal for leisure activities.In order to get to know the area better, try one of the

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pedestrian walks proposed by the Park's services, and if you have the energy choose a more radical activity such as BTT rides or canoeing.

Peniche

Reserva Natural das Berlengas

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/r-nat/rnb

Signposted routes; Park area: 9.560 ha.; Altitude: Máx - 94m; min - 0m; Profundidade máx: 555m; Accommodation facilities available;

At a distance of around 10 km from Peniche, the Berlengas Archipelago is a natural haven maintained in a virtually unspoilt state. Constituted by three groups of small islands - Estelas, Farilhões and Berlenga - the zone maintains extensive undergrowth, including unique species such as the Armeria berlegensis and Herniaria berlengiana, whose names indicate their origin.Many bird species find an ideal refuge here in order to nidify or as a stopping point in their migration routes. By far the most apparent presence is that of seagulls, which can be seen everywhere. Endangered species can also be seen such as the puffin, which resembles a small penguin and has been chosen as the symbol of a Nature Reserve. The protected area also covers an important 985-hectare marine reserve, with a highly diversified range of animal life.Berlenga, the largest island, is the only one with inhabitants throughout the year, limited to those persons required for indispensable services -- operation of the lighthouse and surveillance of the Nature Reserve, thus living in absolute isolation. Between May and October there is daily maritime transport from Peniche. If this timetable does not suit you, or you would like to visit the islands during a different period of the year, there are small boats that can take you there, subject to seafaring conditions.Berlenga is the ideal spot for those who are looking for tranquillity, far from the normal hustle and bustle of daily life, given that the island can only be visited by a maximum of 350 persons at any one time. In order to get to know the island better, you may follow the pedestrian walks that will lead you to the grottoes, to the Fortress of São João Baptista or simply find excellent spots in order to marvel at the spectacular landscapes.

Torres Novas

Reserva Natural do Paul do Boquilobo

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/r-nat/rnpb

Signposted routes; Park area: 530 ha.; Altitude: Máx - 22m; min - 16m;

Located around 6 kms from Golegã, Paul do Boquilobo is an alluvial plain of marshland and humid zones, where the local life depends upon the volume of the current of the River Tejo and River Almonda that flow around its borders.the landscape is marked by a huge network of canals, covered by aquatic plants and the willows growing on the banks, where white herons (symbol of the Park) make their nests. This is the largest colony of herons in the Iberian peninsular, who visit the protected area from February/March in order to nidify and remain here until the summer. Impressive for its silence and tranquillity, Paul de Boquilobo is an excellent spot in order to observe various migratory birds that pass through the zone during various seasons of the year.But we don't only find herons here. There is

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a total of around 200 bird species, most of which are aquatic species, that find shelter in the Paul do Boquilobo zone, that has been justly declared as a biosphere reserve by UNESCO.There is no resident human population within the area of the Nature Reserve, but the surrounding region benefits from the reserve's humidity and fertile terrain and offers excellent conditions for agriculture and raising livestock. One often finds herds of horses in the protected area that run free in the green fields or are simply passing through.In order to visit the site, we suggest that you make prior contact with the head office of the Nature Reserve, given that access to certain locations may be restricted during nidification seasons. Guided visits are organised and pedestrian trails may be indicated for those who wish to visit the zone by themselves.

Lisboa Region

Alcochete

Reserva Natural do Estuário do Tejo

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/r-nat/rnet

Signposted routes; Park area: 14.192 ha; Altitude: Máx - 11m; Profundidade máx - 10m; Guided Tours;

From its source in Spain, in the Serra de Albarracin, to its estuary mouth close to Lisbon, the River Tagus travels a distance of 1.100 kms, making it the longest river flowing across Portugal.The vast estuary in front of Lisbon's eastern zone has earned the name of the "Mar da Palha" (the Straw Sea). The area classified as a Nature Reserve, lies to the north of Alcochete, and is the largest humid zone in Portugal and one of the ten largest zones of its kind in Europe. The Nature Reserve was created in order to protect the migratory aquatic birds that live here. During the migration season, the estuary receives over 120,000 birds, in particular the black cowbirds that concentrate in this zone, constituting over 20% of the species' population in Western Europe.But it's the flock of pink flamingos that offers a truly spectacular sight. It always seems impossible that it is precisely these birds which concentrate in the salt pans of Alcochete, close to Lisbon, in an image that conjures up more distant locations, much further south.The Tagus Nature Reserve extends to Vila Franca de Xira, in a zone of marshland where bulls and horses are reared for Portuguese bullfights. Other traditional activities, now in decline, have left vestiges of their presence such as the salt pans in Samouco and the seafront watermills in Seixal, that have now been transformed into eco-museums.It is possible to visit the reserve on foot, by bicycle or car, following the proposed itineraries. If you want a different perspective, take a boat trip on one of the typical vessels that formerly crossed the river, transporting people and goods, such as the frigates and long, narrow boats.

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Costa de Caparica

Paisagem Protegida da Arriba Fóssil da Costa de Caparica

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/p-prot/ppafcc

Signposted routes; Park area: 1.594 ha.; Altitude: Máx - 111m; min - 0m;

The fossil cliff is constituted by a succession of sedimentary rock strata, one of the most important examples of its kind in Western Europe, whose origin dates back to the Pliocene period, around 10 million years ago. At that time, the Sea reached the base of the cliff, but over time it progressively pulled back due to the movements of the tectonic plates of the Earth's crust and the impact of the 1755 earthquake, that originated coastal plains dominated by sand dunes. In order to prevent the sand dunes from advancing inland, thus damaging farming land, in the 18th century King D. João V ordered the Mata dos Medos to be planted - the woodland of "medos" (which normally means fears), that was so named not because it was a dangerous location, but because “médão” or “medo”, also means sand dune.The woodland, which is dominated by stone pines and mastic-trees, is a botanical reserve, where it is possible to take pleasant walks following the trail signs in the zone.The unusual shapes of the fossil coast can be seen in their full splendour at dusk, when they acquire golden tones. Over time, erosion has sculpted shapes into the steep cliffs, where several birds of prey such as the round winged eagle and the barn owl build their nests. If you also want a bird’s eye view of the area, ascend to the Belvedere of the Convent of the Capuchos and admire a landscape that covers a vast area from the Serra de Sintra to Cabo Espichel.The greatest attraction of the Costa de Caparica are the beaches, which are the most popular beaches in the Lisbon region, covering a 10 km stretch. Here, it is possible to practice nautical sports or simply sunbathe. Those looking for more entertainment will find a series of restaurants and bars that provide intense nightlife.

Setúbal

Parque Natural da Arrábida

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/p-nat/pnar

Signposted routes; Park area: 10 821 ha.; Altitude: Máx - 499m; min - 0m (até 100m profundidade mar); Guided Tours;

Located next to the sea, between Setúbal and the fishing town of Sesimbra, Arrábida Natural Park has incomparable natural beauty, where the blue of the sea alternates with the white tones of the chalk cliffs and the depths of the green vegetation that covers the mountain range.One of the main attractions of the Park is the wealth of its indigenous vegetation. One of the rare examples of Mediterranean maquis in Portugal can be found here, and its preservation was one of the reasons which led the Arrábida zone to be considered as a genuine international scientific relic. In order to preserve these vegetation species, it is only possible to visit certain areas when accompanied by an official guide indicated by the Park’s services. There are also various accredited companies that organise radical activities, such as speleology, diving and mountain climbing.If you want to learn more about the animal and plant life, visit the Oceanographic Museum, installed in the Fort of Nossa Senhora da Arrábida, next to Portinho beach. Almost directly in front, it's possible to see the Pedra da Anixa, a small island that

Reserva Natural do Estuário do Sado

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/r-nat/rnes

Tradicional Country House Accommodation: Carrasqueira A Cabana do Pai do Tomás CCI n.º 3700 Carrasqueira, 7580-613 Comporta Phone: +351 265 532 996/ 79 - Fax: +351 265 539 663 E-mail: acabanadopaidotomas@mil-andancas.pt www.mil-andancas.pt/pages/cabana/; Signposted routes; Park area: 23.160 ha.; Altitude: Máx - 36m; min - 0m; Accommodation facilities available;

The River Sado is born in the Serra da Vigia, near Beja, and winds its way across the plains of the Alentejo, travelling 180 km north until they flow into the sea near Setúbal. The river’s estuary commences close to Alcácer do Sal, a highly fertile humid zone, where the landscape is marked by rice fields, cultivated in platforms, and nests of white storks, perched on top of church towers or electricity pylons. This elegant bird always chooses the highest places in order to build its nests and is one or 200 bird species that inhabit the Sado Estuary, which has been declared a Nature Reserve and a zone of special protection in order to protect the species.The most friendly local inhabitants and symbol of the Nature Reserve are the dolphins. It's rare to find them in Europe, freely swimming in their natural habitat, but

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constitutes a zoological reserve, due to its underwater vegetation.In addition to the Serra da Arrábida, the Park also includes other mountain ranges such as the Serra do Risco, which contains the highest peak along the Portuguese mainland coast -- it is a magnificent cliff measuring 380 m high, that overlooks the sea, from which it is possible to appreciate an unforgettable panoramic view over the Atlantic.The action of the sea against the mountains has originated a line of beaches characterised by fine sand and transparent waters, that we might otherwise believe could only be found in the Mediterranean, such as Figueirinha, Galapos and the Portinho da Arrábida.The zone was appreciated by Franciscan friars between the 16th and 19th centuries, who inhabited the convent that still exists in the zone and meditated in the isolated chapels dispersed throughout the mountains. Arrábida has excellent conditions for farming activities and pasture, and has thus originated high-quality products. Examples include the wines that can be discovered by following the Costa Azul wine route, which leads visitors to the friendly town of Azeitão where they can sample some delicious cheeses.

Sintra

Parque Natural de Sintra-Cascais

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/p-nat/pnsc

Signposted routes; Park area: 14.583 ha; Altitude: Máx: 528 m; min: 0 m;

The westernmost point of the European continent, was considered in antiquity to be the place where "the land ends and the sea begins" - the Cabo da Roca is one of the most spectacular locations in the Sintra-Cascais Natural Park. Its vertical cliffs rise up around 100 m above sea level, offering spectacular landscapes. When you visit the site, ask for the diploma that proves you've been there.If you're interested in geology, make sure to visit notable formations such as the consolidated fossil dunes in Magoito and Oitavos, the fields of calcareous stone eroded by the seawater next to Cabo Raso (Cascais) and the “living” cliff in Azenhas do Mar, on which a picturesque village has been constructed by great human skill. The dinosaurs also left their mark in the zone, in the almost vertical chalk layer of the South Cliff of Praia Grande where an important collection of 11 trails and isolated footprints can be seen.Praia Grande is one of the many beaches found on the coastal rim of the Park, that also includes Adraga, Samarra, Praia das Maçãs or Guincho, integrated within a highly characteristic system of sand dunes. Visitors will encounter excellent conditions for practising windsurfing, surfing and bodyboarding or simply for relaxing by the sea.Inland, in the northern zone of the mountain range, a rural zone still has picturesque villages, where the landscape is marked by dry stone walls, that demarcate the different agricultural fields and protect them from maritime winds – home to Colares wine.The landscape is dominated by the Serra de Sintra that is covered in rich vegetation, and gives rise to a microclimate that makes this Park such a special place. The fresh and varied aromas that can be found here make a walk through the mountains an unforgettable experience. Set off on a personal adventure, but don’t venture to far afield or go on a walk proposed by the Park, visiting places such as the Convent of the Capuchos, a modest 16th century convent, or the Hermitage of Peninha, erected on a high point near the coast, offering a spectacular panorama.Sintra, was adopted as a summer place of residence by Kings, nobleman and wealthy members of the bourgeoisie, and still conserves a notable architectural heritage. Due to its harmonious blend with nature, UNESCO classified Sintra as a world Heritage site in the there is an important colony of dolphins in the River Sado, who are known locally as “roazes-corvineiros” (gnawers of corvine fishing nets), because they gnaw at fishing nets and primarily eat corvina sea fish. Don't miss the opportunity to go on a boat trip and observe several examples of these playful mammals.The protected area has great natural riches that man can use to his benefit, including cork oak groves from which cork is extracted, pine groves, whose pinenuts are transformed by skilled hands into highly appreciated regional desserts, and the now defunct salt pans, which were of great economic importance over many centuries.The fish salting tanks that can be seen in Tróia, in the Roman ruins, vestiges of an ancient production practice. With white sand dunes and tranquil waters, Tróia is an excellent beach resort that may be used as a starting point in order to discover this beautiful region.

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category of cultural landscapes.

Porto and the North

Arouca

Geoparque de Arouca

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.geoparquearouca.com

Signposted routes; Park area: 328 km2; Guided Tours;

The Arouca Geopark is a classified area by the European and Global Geoparks Networks, under the auspices of UNESCO since 2009, with 328km2. It is located in northern Portugal about 50 km far away from Oporto and Aveiro cities. This is an unique geotouristic destination renowned due to its exceptional geological heritage of international relevance, with 41 geosites (the Giant Trilobites of Canelas and the Castanheira's "stones that give birth" are the most emblematic ones), and its national archaeological, historical, cultural and mining relevant legacy, offering singular experiences for visitors. This mountainous region is famous for activities of nature tourism, especially for adventure sports such as rafting, canoeing, canyoning, rock climbing and the network of walking trails. It allows visitors to discover the majority of the geosites, to enjoy breathtaking landscapes, to meet people and to experience local traditions. Visitors can also taste the famous local gastronomy, based on the indigenous cattle breed and the conventual sweets with traditions, dating back to the foundation of the Arouca Monastery in the 10th century.

Braga

Parque Nacional da Peneda-Gerês

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/pnpg

PAN Park The Peneda Gerês National Park has been officially certified as a PAN Park. This distinction has been awarded to only 11 European parks covering an area of no less than 20,000 hectares, and in which the “wilderness area” amounts to no less than 10,000 hectares, so that the fauna and flora can develop freely. The parks awarded this certificate must promote a strategy of sustainable development, through the implementation of measures for the conservation of nature and the local biodiversity, a policy for the management of visitors and the certification of tour operators.; Signposted routes; Park area: 70.290 ha; Altitude: Máx: 1.545m; min - 140m; Accommodation facilities available; Guided Tours;

In the extreme north-east of Portugal, between the Alto Minho and Trás-os-Montes, the Serra da Peneda and Serra do Gerês constitute the only Portuguese protected area that has been classified as a National Park. It is a world apart, where human activity is integrated in a harmonious manner with nature, preserving ancient values and traditions that can be seen in the community villages of Pitões das Júnias and Tourém.The exuberant vegetation covering the mountains, exhibit every shade of green, include a holly bush wood - unique at a national level - and endemic species such as the Gerês lily, whose blue-violet colours grace the fields. The rugged mountainous terrain is cut across by rapidly flowing rivers and streams, including many waterfalls, which finally slow down their pace in dams such as those of Caniçada, Vilarinho das Furnas or Portela do Homem. The landscapes are quite stunning.Keep your eyes peeled,

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because you may be able to spot a roe deer (symbol of the Park) or its predator, the Iberian wolf. It is more common to come across garrano ponies -which are small wild horses that run freely across the hills. You're also likely to find Barrosã cattle and dark haired Castro Laboreiro dogs, that look after the flocks of goats and sheep which move between the “brandas” and “inverneiras” in the different seasons.If you want to expend some energy there are plenty of opportunities, since you'll find ideal conditions for practising activities such as canyonning or canoeing. If you just want to go for a walk, follow the winding and well conserved path of the Roman road or "geira" and admire the milestones that are almost 2000 years old. Other itineraries will enable you to see dolmens and cromlechs, mediaeval castles or monasteries and sanctuaries, that are perfectly integrated in the landscape.

Bragança

Parque Natural de Montesinho

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/p-nat/pnm

Signposted routes; Park area: 74.229 ha.; Altitude: Máx - 1.486m; min - 438m; Accommodation facilities available;

Throughout the Park one senses an intense rural atmosphere, expressed in the villages where the traditional slate or granite houses merge with the landscape itself. Sometimes one can hardly sense the presence of these houses, given the almost perfect harmony between man and nature.The Park’s landscape is characterised by gentle rolling hills and rounded rocky outcrops, complemented by valleys where rivers flow between poplars, alders, willows and large woodlands of black oak, chestnut trees and holm-oaks.The different settings denote variations in soil characteristics and climate -- lush and green in the western part, still influenced by maritime breezes, and more rugged and open to continental influences in the eastern section. The mountain ranges of Coroa (1273 m) and Montesinho (1486 m) constitute the highest points in the Park, and benefit from a light, invigorating breeze above all during the summer.The geological diversity of this space includes a predominance of slate and areas of chalk in the mountain plateaus and granite in the higher zones of the Serra de Montesinho. These factors, together with climatic variations, originate a highly varied plant life, and an ideal habitat for animals such as the wolf, wild boar, roe deer and around 240 other animal species.

Esposende

Parque Natural do Litoral Norte

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/p-nat/pnln

Signposted routes; Park area: 440 ha; Altitude: Máx - 20m; min - 0m;

Located between the rivers and the sea, the North Coast Natural Park stretches for nearly 18 kilometres between the Cávado River estuary and the village of Apúlia in a line of white sand dunes. Dotted with low vegetation that helps to anchor the sand, these dunes act as a natural barrier against the sea winds that give them their shape and prevent the ocean from encroaching upon the nearby farmland.Their soft, harmonious colours, which take on warm hues at dusk, make this one of the most beautiful landscapes on the Portuguese coast. The traditional windmills, blending perfectly into their natural surroundings, no longer

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grind corn but are now used as summer homes.The North Coast Natural Park is one of the main bathing areas in northern Portugal and features nearly deserted beaches lapped by transparent waters, ideal for long, invigorating walks.To experience the protected area in its entirety, stand back slightly from the sea’s edge. Fill your lungs with the pure air of the Ofir Pine Forest and follow the Natural Park’s suggested hiking trail along the banks of the Cávado River, where you will spot migratory birds such as capped herons, terns, mallards and herring gulls.The farmland that you see from a distance has the distinctive feature of being fertilised by “sargasso”, the seaweed washed up onto the beaches by the ocean. Indeed, the harvesting of sargasso has been the traditional occupation of the men of this region for centuries, and the "Sargaceiro of Apúlia" (Sargasso harvester) is one of the most traditional characters in the folklore of this region.

Macedo de Cavaleiros

Paisagem Protegida da Albufeira do Azibo

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.azibo.org/

Facilities: Bar, WC, safety equipment, access for disabled visitors, control of water quality, picnic area. Access: take the IP4 from Macedo de Cavaleiros – beaches are less than 1 kilometre away. Signposted for the reservoir (Albufeira) and the village of Santa Combinha. The EN 216 road leads to the visitors’ centre and the museum.; Signposted routes; Park area: 4897 ha; Altitude: 602 m;

In the heart of the north-eastern region of Trás-os-Montes, you should take some time to discover the Protected Landscape Area of Albufeira do Azibo.Situated in the municipality of Macedo de Cavaleiros, the dam that forms this reservoir was built in the early 1980s. Its great capacity for water storage has led to the creation of an ecosystem that favours the presence here of numerous species of migratory birds that, all year round, attract many ornithologists and nature lovers to the region. This important Protected Area was recently incorporated into the Natura 2000 Network.In the reservoir known as Albufeira do Azibo, many different kinds of water sports are permitted, such as swimming, rowing and canoeing, and you can also enjoy the two river beaches of Fraga da Pegada and Ribeira, equipped with a floating swimming area, close to the village of Santa Combinha. The Protected Area also has a series of footpaths and cycling trails.In the visitors’ centre, between the villages of Vale da Porca and Salselas, you can also enjoy a visit to a small archaeological museum with an auditorium and bar, as well as an ecological library.

Mogadouro

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Parque Natural do Douro Internacional

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/p-nat/pndi

Signposted routes; Park area: 86.500 ha; Altitude: Máx - 895m; min - 125m; Accommodation facilities available;

The Douro Internacional Natural Park covers part of the municipalities of Miranda do Douro, Mogadouro, Freixo de Espada à Cinta and Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo, along the national frontier formed by the river Douro (in an extension of around 122 km).The steep banks of the deep valley form highly spectacular and monumental ravines in which various bird species, that are endangered at the national and international level, build their nests, who are undoubtedly also attracted by the proximity of farming and cattle raising units, where it is easy to locate and obtain sources of nourishment. The endangered species include the Egyptian vulture or Britango, which has been chosen as the symbol of this power.There are major thermal fluctuations in the region's climate, with cold winters and dry hot summers. The southern area of the Park is integrated in the so-called "hot land ". During the months of February and March, with the almond trees in blossom, nature offers a highly appreciated spectacle of beauty and colour, that is celebrated in popular festivities.

Vila Real

Parque Natural do Alvão

Protected Areas

Website: http://www.icnf.pt/portal/naturaclas/ap/p-nat/pnal

Signposted routes; Park area: 7.239 ha; Altitude: Máx: 1.339m - min: 260m; Accommodation facilities available;

In the western section of the Serra do Alvão, that includes the imposing mountainous massif that incorporates the Serra do Marão, the River Olo runs through this protected area, between cranks and rocky outcrops and cuts across the rocks of the Fisgas de Ermelo, falling in cascades around 250 m high. This area is one of the most beautiful zones of the region, due to the impressive force of its waters and is represented within the Park' s symbol.The course of the river Olo joins together two distinct realities. At an average altitude of 1000 m, in the zone of Lamas de Olo, granite stone and mountainous vegetation predominates; whereas down below, in Ermelo, where the altitude is around 450 m, slate and green landscapes such as in the Minho region predominate.Slate, granite and straw are the main materials used in order to build the houses of the characteristic villages in Lamas de Olo, Anta or Ermelo, where time moves so slowly that we seem to be far from urban life, even though Oporto is only a one-hour journey away. In order to gain a better idea of the lifestyle of the people living in these locations, visit the eco-museum in Arnal, that recreates the environment of a traditional village in the Serra do Alvão.Follow the itinerary suggested by and appreciate the magnificent panoramas with attention. You may be able to see a wolf or peregrine falcon, but it will be almost impossible to see a golden eagle, given that this species is almost extinct. If you still have any energy left, why not get your adrenalin running by rafting down the various watercourses and then recover from your efforts in a banquet of excellent regional gastronomy including delicacies such as meatballs and roasted veal, with high-quality meat from the “maronesa” autochthonous race of cattle.

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