A beach trip to 10 Portuguese beaches

ABOUT

On a never-ending coastline like this, it’s the culture of the sun that sets the rules. All beaches are a microcosm with a host of fans who might travel great distances just to take a dip.

Our selection of highlights is distributed over many kilometres across the mainland, the Azores and Madeira, a parade of aquatic attractions that will entice all who go there. Atlantic horizons of natural architecture and solitary features waiting to be conquered: start your own Road Trip along the Portuguese coast and discover these havens the water and sand.

Praia da Marinha
Its qualities are famous - white sand and rocky cliffs that flank Marinha beach on both sides - and it is a favourite of those exploring the Algarve. Ochre, white and yellow join the blue-green water in an explosion of colour. Access to the beach is via steps that lead to a panoramic view of a stone fortress that extends into the sea and displays only part of the beauty that it holds inside. Like you do with tree trunks, counting the centuries in the rings of sediment that surround it is a mandatory challenge before plunging into the Atlantic. And make sure you take a boat ride to see the arches and crevices that dot the surroundings of this small paradise from the sea.

Comporta
With miles of sandy beach along the sea, the only dilemma is to choose the place to put down your towel. Just one hour from Lisbon and in the heart of the Alentejo coast, here nature remains intact, which is not surprising if we take into account that it is part of the Costa Vicentina Natural Park, which makes this place the ultimate VIP paradise. The rich and famous patronise its beachfront cafés, its design hotels and the exclusive villas that stretch along the coast. Andrea Casiraghi, Carla Bruni and Nicolas Sarkozy and Kristin Scott-Thomas are just some of the stars that brighten the beaches here, so much so that it has started to be known as the Hamptons of Portugal.

Praia do Camilo
About 200 steps lead, like a Jacob’s ladder, directly to paradise. Praia do Camilo is a succession of coves and beaches, which are linked through arches opened up by the sea in the rocky cliffs that protect the beach from civilisation. Around here, the Algarve shows itself under the impossibly blues and greens and the golden hues of its rugged topography for which it is famous. Enjoy the crystal clear waters of the area to investigate the seabed with the help of a good diving mask and snorkel. And after a “gruelling” day at the beach, visit Lagos to enjoy the Atlantic cuisine in one of its restaurants.

Praia do Guincho
Here it is the wind that is king and that who gives surfers, windsurfers, kite surfers, bodyboarders and other adrenaline junkies all the thrills at sea they need to be happy on a surfboard. The landscape is not the only thing: a
huge promenade connects Guincho beach to a bar de madeirawith a superb view and prodigious mojitos, perfect for showing off the tan and the swim suit. This wild horizon remains spared by civilisation, yet you can reach it by car, bus or even bike - a cycle path runs along the five kilometres that separate the beach from Cascais – by a road covered with white sand, a sample of what to expect when you get there.

Praia Formosa, Santa Maria Island, Azores
On Santa Maria, the Azores’ golden island, there is one of the most beautiful beaches in the archipelago, the bright white sand of Praia Formosa. This was the first island of the Azores to be discovered in 1427, and is undoubtedly the first you should get to know if you visit this Atlantic paradise. Located in a nature reserve, Formosa beach is famous for its crystal clear waters and its highly suitable conditions for water sports. Don’t miss the ruins of the fortress built centuries ago as a defence against pirates, the fort of São João Baptista or simply the "sand castle". It is easy to get to, but hard to leave, so we suggest you set aside a whole day for it, and take a picnic. And if you want to spend the night, you're in luck, since there is a place nearby ready to receive you.

Praia de Vila Baleira, Porto Santo, Madeira archipelago
On the wild island of Porto Santo, in the Madeira islands, you can enjoy a 360 degree Atlantic horizon, where the beach that stretches from Vila Baleira to Ponta da Calheta is one of the most beautiful beaches in Portugal. Framed between the peaks of Ana Ferreira and Castelo, this heavenly nine-kilometre long stretch of fine sand is set against the Atlantic, which emerges in a thousand shades of blue across from the dream-like island of Fora. Here there is a causeway that is crossed every afternoon by children and a few adults who use the opportunity to dive in unlikely pirouettes, providing a little spectacle on this quiet island touched by the beauty of the sea.

Praia de Santa Cruz
This beach is known for its dizzying dimensions and colossal attractions. The beach at Santa Cruz is a veritable institution in Torres Vedras, about 15 kilometres from this paradise, a strip of sand that seems to have been created for experiencing the Atlantic at leisure and is protected by stunning gorges. This is something that is especially appreciated by surfers, who choose these beaches for their manoeuvres in the water. Amongst its cliffs bordering the sea, don’t miss the famous Penedo do Guincho, 30 metres high and with an arch inside it. The perfect setting to enjoy the sunsets in the area.

Praia das Azenhas do Mar, Sintra
In the heart of Azenhas do Mar, whose origin is in Arab water mills, and is protected by high natural walls, one of the most picturesque and photographed beaches in Portugal looks out on to the Atlantic. This little cove delights even the most metropolitan of city-dwellers, who settle down on their towels to look out to sea and admire the architecture of its overhanging cliffs. The best thing about this beach is having a really charming town to discover after sunbathing. Or vice versa, ending the day in a setting worthy of a movie after walking its steep streets.

Foz do Arelho, Óbidos
As if it were an amphitheatre, the slopes bordering Foz do Arelho beach, littered with villas and beautiful houses, watch the onslaughts of the sea every day, a sea that has created a unique natural spectacle in the Óbidos saltwater lagoon. The force of the Atlantic pushes its waves inland in this wonderful portion of golden sand, to merge with the lagoon. Lovers of water sports can take advantage of this momentum to ride the sea, while others come here simply to enjoy the beauty of the Portuguese coastal landscape. If you arrive by car, be sure to take the road that connects Foz do Arelho to São Martinho do Porto, a route with spectacular views of the cliffs.

Praia do Castelejo, Sagres
Near Sagres, the Algarve has a less well known but equally breathtaking face. Castelejo beach mixes fine golden sand with the ochre hues of its rounded boulders and the almost red stone of its gorges, in a succession of coves lapped by the deep blue of the Atlantic. Access to it is a little bumpy, but the reward is a much sought-after retreat, with only a few dozen people, almost a wild coastline and hundreds of metres from which to choose your spot. It is one of the meccas of surfers in these parts. A visit may well represent a promising start to an amateur career in water sports. If this is not the case, the sunsets alone are worth the trip.