
The Alqueva Dark Sky Route

ABOUT



Photo: Dark sky Alqueva, Miguel Claro

The Alqueva Dark Sky Route

Imagine a place where we feel covered by a majestic starry sky.

The feeling is indescribable, and usually only possible artificially, in a planetarium, where we sit comfortably for a lesson on the stars. In Portugal, we are lucky to have that feeling in the open air.

Right in the middle of Alentejo, the wonderful Alqueva sky is like dark velvet cloaked by a huge blanket of stars. It is a protected area and internationally certified as a Dark Sky Reserve, or "**Starlight Tourism Destination**", which extends over an area of about 3000 square kilometres.

Recognising it as an exceptional place for star-gazing, the municipalities around the great Alqueva lake - **Alandroal, Reguengos de Monsaraz, Portel, Mourão, Moura** and **Barrancos** - joined together in an effort to preserve this special feature and so at night public lighting is reduced to a minimum to enable a better enjoyment of this natural phenomenon.

You can see the Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, Cassiopeia, and a wide variety of other constellations, visible depending on the season. You can locate the signs for Leo, Virgo and Libra, discover Scorpio and Sagittarius, and even follow the mysterious Capricorn, as well as Cygnus, Aquila and Lyra.

You can identify the majestic Milky Way and behold Aquarius and Pisces, Pegasus and Aries. Then you'll see Taurus, which night after night defies the glorious Orion. And there is still time to see Gemini, Auriga and to select your favourite star.

The quality of the Alqueva sky enables naked eye observation of a large number of celestial bodies. But to make everything perfect, the ideal is to have binoculars or a telescope. If you don't have any with you, no problem, because the companies that are part of the Dark Sky Route make this equipment available and are ready to teach you how to look at the sky and identify the stars.

In addition to accommodation and restaurants, the initiative also includes tourism companies and guides with which you can learn more about the area through hiking trails, signposted tracks for observing flora and fauna, canoeing, workshops, astrophotography and other activities during the day or even at night.

In the midst of nature, you will be surprised by the ever mysterious megalithic monuments such as the **Cromlech of Xerez**, near the Orada Convent, and the dolmens and menhirs that are part of a tour of the heritage of the region, and you mustn't miss a trip to the admirable walled village of **Monsaraz**, where the streets and houses are made of

schist.

There are a number of suggestions for discovering the Alentejo region and Alqueva, but the Dark Sky Route is undoubtedly a journey of surprises and discoveries that you will always remember.

Don't miss

- > take a boat ride in Alqueva
- > gaze at the sky at night
- > go up to Monsaraz

USEFUL INFORMATION

All information on the Dark Sky reserve is available at www.darkskyalqueva.com.

GETTING HERE

From Évora, take the N254 to Redondo and Alandroal or the N256 to Reguengos de Monsaraz.

From Beja, follow the IP2 to Portel or the N260 to Serpa and then the N255 to Moura. From here, take the N258 until Barrancos.