
A walk around Tavira

ABOUT



Photo: Associação de Turismo do Algarve

A walk around Tavira

Tavira is very seductive, and from the streets along the River Gilão to the castle walls from which you have the best view over the town, it makes you want to discover its hidden corners and unlock its secrets.

There is a certain oriental charm in this town, in its “scissor” truss or hipped roofs which are outlined against the sky in a unique way and its latticed timber doors that shelter homes while still letting air and sound in, a heritage from the Arabs who inhabited the region.

Tavira straddles both banks of the river in an intricate design of narrow streets and white houses that call for an unhurried stroll. The **Jardim do Coreto** (Bandstand Garden) is the liveliest area, where people wander around savouring an ice cream and the fresh air, especially at night when shows and other events bring additional life to the area. Here you will find the Mercado da Ribeira which, after its original function as a market finished, is now devoted to entertainment and leisure.

The oldest bridge, which is believed to be originally Roman, is a 17th century structure with a walled parapet from which you can enjoy a beautiful view over the houses. An even better view is the one you will see by climbing the **Castle Tower**, arguably the best viewpoint over the town, taking in the undulating roofs, the domes of the churches, the river and the salt pans, right up to the blue line of the sea on the horizon.

In addition to the panorama, the exertion of climbing to the top is rewarded by everything you can admire on the way. For example, when you cross the gate in the wall, you suddenly come across the beautiful Renaissance portal of **Misericórdia**, one of the Tavira’s 37 churches. You can also visit the **Islamic Centre** to learn more about the history of the town, or the **Municipal Museum**, housed in the Palácio da Galeria, its most remarkable building. A little further up stands the **castle and Santa Maria Church**, which is on the site of the old great mosque; here is the resting place of D. Paio Peres Correia and the seven knights of the Order of Santiago who led the campaign to conquer Tavira from the Moors in 1242. Nearby, the **Church of Santiago** was also built over an ancient mosque, the lesser mosque.

There are more churches to visit across the river, on the opposite hill, such as the **Chapel of São Brás** of mediaeval origin, the **Church of Carmo**, one of the Algarve's most sumptuous churches, with lavish Baroque decoration, and the simple and austere **Church of São Paulo**.

There’s nothing like trying the culinary specialties to recover from so much walking. The fresh fish and seafood are especially good, including octopus cooked in various ways or razor clam rice. Tuna, in steaks or estopeta (tuna salad), is also recommended, since tuna fishing is one of the area’s more traditional activities. You can learn more about it in

the Museum at the **Arraial Ferreira Neto** at the mouth of the River Gilão, built to house the fishermen and their families and now converted into a hotel.

The town's charms continue as far as the **Ria Formosa** (Formosa estuary) which you can reach by following the road alongside the River Gilão, flanked by the white salt pans, where you can admire birds like the black-winged stilt, the flamingo and the pied avocet. At its end, at Quatro Águas, you can take the boat across to the beach on the spit of sand that separates the lagoon from the sea. There are 11 kilometres of beach here, including the **beaches of Tavira Island, Terra Estreita, Barril and Homem Nu**, where you can rest after this packed tour.

Don't miss

- > enjoy the panoramic view from the castle tower
- > walk around the ancient streets and discover the remains of the Islamic walls
- > visit the Camera Obscura (Tavira Tower) in the old water tank to see the full splendour of the town
- > visit some of Tavira's 37 churches
- > try the regional specialities such as octopus or tuna salad and the Tavira pastries
- > enjoy an ice cream in the Jardim do Coreto
- > buy some salt flower extracted from the region's salt pans
- > take a walk by the sea on the long sandy beach of Tavira Island
- > be surprised by the anchor "graveyard" on Barril Beach
- > visit the waterfalls at Moinhos da Rocha and Pego do Inferno, 8km from Tavira

NEARBY

- Cachopo, about 40km inland from Tavira, is the most mountainous of the parishes. Here you can enjoy houses with intricately decorated "lacy" chimneys and a more rural way of life with traditional products like honey, medronho brandy, sausages and cheeses, and handicrafts.
- Santa Luzia, home to fishermen who traditionally engage in catching octopus. Take a regular boat from here to Terra Estreita beach. Continue along the shore on foot or take the tourist train to get to the Barril Beach.
- Cabanas de Tavira - a fishing village that owes its name to the buildings where the fishermen kept their tackle. The boats that leave from the jetty provide access to Cabanas-Mar Beach.
- Cacela-velha - about 13kms away, a charming village of Arab origin that is worth strolling around and enjoying the stunning views of the Ria Formosa from the fortress.

USEFUL INFORMATION

- A trip on the mini-train that goes around the city is a convenient way to get to know its main features, from the castle to the salt pans. The circuit begins by the old bridge, on the bank opposite the Jardim do Coreto.
- Access to Tavira Island is provided by boats that depart regularly from two locations: the quayside behind the old Mercado da Ribeira and the jetty at Quatro Águas.

GETTING HERE

By road:

- From the North: A2 - Autoestrada do Sul - exit at the last toll at Paderne and then follow directions to Tavira; or the IC1 if you want to avoid the motorway
- if you are already in the Algarve: A22 - Via do Infante or the EN125
- Ayamonte in Spain, near the border with Vila Real de Santo António, is about 30km away.

By coach: www.rede-expressos.pt e www.eva-bus.com also with connections to other places in the Algarve

By rail: Tavira Railway Station is roughly half way on the line connecting Faro to Vila Real de Santo António. Coming from the north, you have to change trains in Faro.

By air: The Algarve International Airport at Faro is about 40km away