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## Cruising the Algarve coast

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### ABOUT



Photo: John Copland

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**With about 200 kilometres of coastline, great weather and calm waters, the Algarve is ideal for sailing, even if you don't own a boat, since there's always the option to rent one or to join the cruises that explore the beauty the coastline.**

**Seeing the region from the sea** is something completely different, with surprises at every turn. From the golden cliffs where erosion has carved out caves and exuberant shapes, especially between Lagos and Albufeira, to the red cliffs and the dunes of white sand that frame wide beaches, there's a great variety of scenery. The choppy seas to the west, near Sagres, warm and become calm as you head east, making this a more relaxing adventure.

There are navigable **rivers** too, such as the **Arade**, which has places of great beauty between Portimão and Silves, with springs of crystalline water, huge swathes of vegetation and memories of the Arab presence. In the far East, going up the **Guadiana** offers a pleasant trip between its huge banks, where you can glimpse windmills, typical houses and grazing lands. And there's the **Ria Formosa**, a protected area of marshland, dunes and uncrowded islands with seemingly endless beaches, bathed by clear waters.

You can discover this diversity aboard **small licensed vessels or on organised tours** run by a number of companies. Many of them include lunch on board, or a typical Portuguese sardine picnic in some secluded bay. And there are also tours with an ecotourism focus, to observe the flora and fauna in the Ria Formosa Natural Park and the Castro Marim and Vila Real de Santo António Marshland Nature Reserve.

But for those who have the skills, there's nothing better than cruising at the helm of a boat and discovering the hidden coves between the dunes and the cliffs, deserted untouched beaches inaccessible by land. Diving in these waters, under the hot Algarve summer sunshine, is like being in paradise. And you don't even have to own a boat, because there are several companies that **rent** them for a few hours or days. In addition, if you like to fish, and push up your adrenaline levels trying to catch some of the larger species, you'll find the Algarve a great destination for big game fishing, especially in the westernmost waters.

The sea and the tailwinds provide fantastic conditions for **sailing** competitions that attract participants from different parts of the world. As the setting or as a staging point, the Algarve features in the calendars of the most prestigious international sailing events. And sailing is available to everyone, as there are many schools and yacht clubs in most of the coastal cities and towns where you can learn. It's yet another way to discover the Algarve: just plot a route, hoist the sails, cast off and set out exploring!

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## **BOAT HIRE**

To learn about companies providing boat hire services, search on [www.visitportugal.com](http://www.visitportugal.com)

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## **BOAT TRIPS**

For more specific information, see list of companies organising cruises in the Algarve on [www.visitportugal.com](http://www.visitportugal.com) or contact the Tourist Offices

We highlight several possibilities:

- Boat trips depart from Porto da Baleeira (Sagres) to discover the far western end of the Algarve coast near Sagres;
- There are licensed companies in Lagos, Armação de Pera, Carvoeiro Beach and other places in the area that offer boat trips that take you to enjoy the beauty of this heavily indented stretch of coastline, with its caves and grottoes excavated out of enormous boulders;
- Mini cruises along the coast depart from the Marinas in Albufeira and Vilamoura, many of them with lunch on board or in small coves where it's possible to moor. There are also tours with entertainment on board, starting in the late afternoon to enjoy the night lights of the seaside towns;
- Several boat trips depart from Faro, Olhão and Tavira for the Ria Formosa Nature Park, where boats glide through channels between islets and peninsulas observing the wildlife (especially birds) and flora. Along with water taxis, these boats also connect with the islands where there are quiet beaches;
- There are also departures from Vila Real de Santo António and Alcoutim to take you up the River Guadiana, introducing you to a rich natural landscape in an area that is less explored by tourists;
- You can get information and guided environmental tours with detailed explanations about the flora and fauna at the headquarters of the protected areas - the Ria Formosa Natural Park and the Castro Marim and Vila Real de Santo António Marshland Nature Reserve.