
Natural parks and reserves

ABOUT



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You will find scattered around the country places of preserved beauty, inhabited by a wide diversity of species of flora and fauna, where Man and Nature live in perfect harmony. Protected in order to maintain their biodiversity, many of these areas are classified as Natural Parks and Reserves.

Peneda-Gerês, the only one to be classified as a National Park, stands out from them all. It is located in the northwest of the country and has stunning landscapes between mountains and reservoirs where unique species like the wild garrano horse and the Castro Laboreiro dog breed. Here, like in **Montesinho** Park, a rural way of life is preserved, with community villages where the people share the work and facilities.

Further down, in **Alvão** Natural Park, rivers flow between crags and cliffs and there are spectacular waterfalls, such as Fiskas de Ermelo. To the east, the river that makes the border with Spain gives its name to another Park – **Douro Internacional**, whose deep valleys form canyons which are nesting sites for birds of prey such as the Egyptian vulture. Quite close by you find another protected area, the **Azibo Reservoir**, also ideal for bird watching and for a few moments of leisure on its river beaches.

But for those who prefer the invigorating sea air, there's the **Litoral Norte** Natural Park, a succession of beaches and dunes, matched only by the **São Jacinto Dunes** Nature Reserve, which attracts many sea birds. The largest is **Serra da Estrela**, with its imposing uplands where the highest point in mainland Portugal is to be found. Between slopes and lagoons, it offers a multitude of options for the most varied sports activities, in both summer and winter. Footpaths and cycle tracks, mountain climbing and canoeing are just some possibilities, also available in the **Tejo Internacional** park, where more than 154 bird species nest, of which the highlight is the black stork. The Iberian lynx roams free in the **Serra da Malcata**, and in the **Serra do Açor**, amid the lush vegetation typical of these mountains, there are villages of schist and slate houses that resemble nativity scenes.

In the **fens - Paul de Arzila and Paul de Boquilobo** – wading birds predominate, the purple heron in the former and the white egret in the latter. In the **Berlengas** Nature reserve, a small, almost wild archipelago, only the ubiquitous seagulls break the absolute tranquillity. And bats of the most diverse species live in the surprisingly shaped caves in the **Serras de Aire and Candeeiros**.



Photo: Reserva Natural das Berlengas

Close to Lisbon, by the sea, there are two more natural parks of breathtaking beauty: **Sintra-Cascais**, with beaches and lush vegetation, where farms and palaces blend perfectly together, and **Arrábida**, a harmonious patchwork of colours, where the green covering the mountains alternates with every shade of blue in the ocean. In the **Arriba fóssil da Costa da Caparica**, the sea cliffs carved by erosion take on golden hues, especially at sunset. And in the river estuaries, it is the fauna that provides the most spectacular views - both in the **Tagus** with its pink-feathered flamingos, and in the **Sado**, with its dolphins and white storks. Further south, the **Santo André and Sancha Lagoons** also boast a diversified group of ecosystems.

In Alentejo, the **Serra de São Mamede** should be mentioned, with its unusual altitude and vegetation for this area of the country, and to the west the **Sudoeste Alentejano e Costa Vicentina** Natural Park stands out, forming one of the most well-preserved coastal stretches in Europe. In the **Vale do Guadiana** Natural Park, the river flows at times between narrow banks to branch out further south, in the Algarve, into creeks and canals across the plain within the **Castro Marim and Vila Real de Santo António Marshlands**. **Ria Formosa**, in turn, extends along 60km of labyrinthine canals, marshlands and islands which form a barrier with the sea and provide the Eastern Algarve with a landscape of rare beauty.



Photo: Parque Natural da Madeira © Associação Promoção Madeira / Francisco Correia

And there's more in the middle of the Atlantic! In **Madeira, the Natural Park** covers two thirds of the island and extends into the sea. There are many preserved areas, from the Nature Reserves of the Selvagens and Desertas islands to Garajau, Rocha do Navio and Ponta de São Lourenço. In the **Azores**, each of the nine islands has a Natural Park with various protected reserves and areas where landscapes are at their most pristine. This is nature in Portugal which you can enjoy as a fellow traveller for memorable experiences.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more:

At the web site of Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas
<http://www.icnf.pt>

If you're going for a walk or a bicycle ride, we suggest you check the recommendations about safety and fire prevention issued by the Portuguese authorities in the document "Portugal is calling. For you. For everyone."