



# The Algarve

## Includes ➔

Faro.....	153
Milreu & Estói.....	163
São Brás de Alportel.....	163
Tavira.....	167
Castro Marim.....	177
Loulé.....	178
Albufeira.....	182
Carvoeiro.....	185
Silves.....	186
Portimão.....	189
Lagos.....	191
Sagres.....	199

## Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Vila Joya (p184)
- ➔ A Eira do Mel (p202)
- ➔ Restaurante O Barradas (p188)
- ➔ Pastelaria Chicca (p198)

## Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Casa d'Alagoa (p159)
- ➔ Pousada do Palácio de Estoi (p163)
- ➔ Tavira House Hotel (p171)
- ➔ Vila Monte (p166)
- ➔ Mareta View Boutique B&B (p202)

## Why Go?

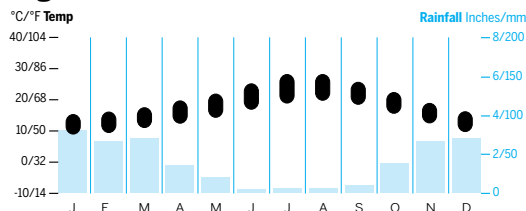
The alluring coast of the Algarve receives much exposure for its breathtaking cliffs, golden beaches, scalloped bays and sandy islands. But 'sun, surf and sand' is far from the end of the Algarve story; there's no shortage of other attractions, activities, beach bars (and discos), castles (both sand and real), diving, entertainment, fun...

Let's be frank: Portugal's premier holiday destination sold its soul to tourism in the '60s and never really looked back. Behind sections of the south coast's beachscape loom massive conglomerations of bland holiday villas and brash resorts. However, the west coast is another story – one more about nature and less about development.

Yet the coastal Algarve is a 'drop in the ocean' for any visitor. The enchanting inner Algarve boasts pretty castle towns and historic villages, cork tree- and flower-covered hillsides, birdlife, and the wonderful Via Algarviana hiking trail crossing its breadth.

## When to Go

### Lagos



**Any time** The region is blessed with good weather – a mild winter, and sun almost year-round.

**Feb–Mar** See and smell the abundance of almond and orange blossoms.

**Apr–May** Hike inland amid the wild flowers and leafy hillsides or get in pre-season swims.

## History

The Algarve has a long tradition of settlement. Phoenicians came first and established trading posts some 3000 years ago, followed by the Carthaginians. Next came the industrious Romans who, during their 400-year stay, grew wheat, barley and grapes and built roads and palaces. Check out the remains of Milreu, near Faro.

Then came the Visigoths and, in 711, the North African Moors. They stayed 500 years, although later Christians obliterated what they could. Many place names come from this time and are easily recognised by the article 'al' (eg Albufeira, Aljezur, Alcoutim). The Syrian Moors called the region in which they settled (east of Faro to Seville, Spain) 'al-Gharb al-Andalus' (western Andalucía), later known as 'Algarve'. Another Arabic legacy is the flat-roofed house, originally used to dry almonds, figs and corn, and to escape the night heat.

Trade, particularly in nuts and dried fruit, boomed, and Silves was the mighty Moorish capital, quite independent of the large Muslim emirate to the east.

The Reconquista (Christian reconquest) began in the early 12th century, with the wealthy Algarve the ultimate goal. Though Dom Sancho I captured Silves and territories to the west in 1189, the Moors returned. Only in the first half of the 13th century did the Portuguese claw their way back for good.

Two centuries later the Algarve had its heyday. Prince Henry the Navigator chose the appropriately end-of-the-earth Sagres as the base for his school of navigation, and had ships built and staffed in Lagos for 15th-century explorations of Africa and Asia – seafaring triumphs that turned Portugal into a major imperial power.

## Dangers & Annoyances

This is Portugal's most touristed area, and petty theft is prevalent. Never leave valuables untended in the car or on the beach.

Swimmers should be aware of coastal conditions, especially on the west coast; these include dangerous ocean currents, strong winds and sometimes fog. Check the coloured flags: chequered means the beach is unsupervised, red means don't even dip your toe in as it's currently unsafe to do so, yellow means paddle but don't swim, and green means it's safe to swim. Blue is an international symbol that means the beach is smashing – safe, clean and with good facilities.

Cliff instability is a problem, especially heading westwards from Lagos. Erosion is ongoing and serious rock falls and smaller landslides do occur. Heed the signs at the beaches and along the cliffs.

## Getting Around

### BUS

A good bus network runs along the Algarve coast and to Loulé. From here, you can access inland Algarve, although services become more limited. Two big bus companies, **Eva Transportes** ([www.eva-bus.com](http://www.eva-bus.com)) and **Rede Expressos** ([www.rede-expressos.pt](http://www.rede-expressos.pt)), zip frequently between the Algarve and elsewhere in Portugal. Smaller lines include **Renex** ([www.renex.pt](http://www.renex.pt)) and **Frota Azul** ([www.frotazul-algarve.pt](http://www.frotazul-algarve.pt)).

### CAR

Most main towns have reliable car-hire outlets.

### TRAIN

Trains run along the coast between Faro and Vila Real de Santo António, and Faro and Lagos (and Loulé). Express trains run to/from the region's main towns to Lisbon. Both the national train company and the various bus companies all have easily searchable online timetables.

## Faro

POP 50,000

The Algarve's capital has a more distinctly Portuguese feel than most resort towns. Many visitors only pass through this underrated city, which is a pity, as it makes for an enjoyable stopover. It has an attractive marina, well-maintained parks and plazas, and a historic old town full of pedestrian lanes and outdoor cafes. Its student population of 8000 ensures a happening nightlife, and its theatre scene is strong. Marvellously preserved medieval quarters harbour curious museums, churches and a bone chapel. The lagoons of the Parque Natural da Ria Formosa and nearby beaches, including the islands of Ilha de Faro to the southwest and Ilha da Barreta (aka Ilha Deserta) to the south, add to Faro's allure.

## INFORMATION GUIDES

Algarve Tourism has produced some excellent full-colour information guides covering the Algarve – everything from wine trips, driving routes, the best beaches and the Via Algarviana walking track, among others. These are available from tourist offices for €7 (the full-colour waterproof diving booklet is €25).