



algarve

beach guide



Keep cool.

Visiting the Algarve means being surprised by some of the most beautiful, most welcoming and safest beaches in the world. Stretching over roughly 200 kilometres, the Algarve coastline offers visitors coves, cliffs, caves, rocky beaches and vast expanses of sand, which can be enjoyed all year round.

Most of the Algarve's beaches have been awarded the European Union's Blue Flag and are bathed by calm, clear and refreshing waters, being widely sought after every year by tourists coming to the region for some reinvigorating holidays. Enjoy yourself while you're here, and, with this guide, you can choose the beach that is best suited to your tastes and requirements.

This is our greatest natural heritage. Help us to preserve it.



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Aljezur





Aljezur.

The coastline is essentially a rocky one, interrupted by long stretches of sand around the mouths of the main rivers and streams. Here, the freshwater mixes with the saltwater, making changes in the landscape and opening up possibilities of different life forms. The cliffs stand tall and proud, carved out of schist and greywacke, their thick grey colour contrasting with the pearl-coloured hues of the sand. This vast coastal plateau, shaped by the constant advances and retreats of the sea over countless geological eras, is exposed and vulnerable to the waves and winds from the sea, resulting in a wide range of curious rock formations and very specialised living beings. The coastal strip in this municipality,

known as the Costa Vicentina, forms part of a Natural Park that includes some unique natural heritage, which in some cases has remained untouched by the actions of humankind. Adventure sports are particularly favoured by this coastline, with activities ranging from surfing to diving, but also including paragliding and sports fishing. The Costa Vicentina is also highly popular amongst those who appreciate good fish and seafood, which are caught here using the traditional, non-industrial methods, most notably the picking of gooseneck barnacles, an activity carried out by men who were once known as "Warriors of the Sea". The mist and clouds of the Atlantic coast invite you to discover their secrets...

Praia de Odeceixe and Praia das Adegas

The road to the beach winds its way for three kilometres along a lush green valley by the side of the Ribeira de Ceixe, through planted fields that are gradually replaced by marshland. On the slopes of the valley, you can see cork-oak groves that, as you draw nearer to the beach, give way to coastal scrubland where sweet-smelling aromatic plants abound. The white houses seen nestling in the cliff are mainly holiday homes. The beach is a wide tongue of sand between the sea and the river emerging at the northern end, forming several shallow lagoons which are the delight of children. Canoes can also be rented and you can paddle up the river, the home to animals such as the otter, the grey heron or the brightly coloured kingfisher. On either side of the beach are black schist cliffs, highly stratified and fissured, with seams of pearl-coloured quartz, reminiscent of structures made of Lego.

To the south of Praia de Odeceixe, after passing by the enormous, oddly-shaped rocks that mark out its boundaries, you will find a small cove containing Praia das Adegas, an official naturist beach. At high tide, it can be reached by a footpath running down the cliff from the viewing point.

-  You can bathe all along the banks of the Ribeira de Ceixe, which is particularly recommended at high tide. The currents can be very strong close to the bar across the mouth of the river. The footpath leading to Praia de Odeceixe is fairly steep.
-  There is a tarmac road from Odeceixe (EN 120) to the beach, which is three kilometres from the town. There is a limited but organised parking area at Praia de Odeceixe, and there is much more parking space at Praia das Adegas, although this is not organised. Support facilities include a restaurant and toilets and the beach is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces west.



Odeceixe



Odeceixe and Adegas

Praia do Vale dos Homens



This is a fairly large and peaceful beach situated in the heart of the plateau that forms the Costa Vicentina, an extensive area of farmland and pinewoods interrupted from time to time by deep and lush green gullies. The beach is bordered by tall and proud-looking schist cliffs, so that it is reached by climbing down an enormous set of wooden steps. There is an intense aroma of rock roses surrounding the beach and you can walk for a short distance up the valley carved out of the rock by a small, crystal-clear stream. The position of the rocks in the sea makes the water calm enough for bathing at low tide.

- 🚗 There is a tarmac road through Rogil (EN 120), leading to the beach (Vale dos Homens – South) roughly three kilometres away. There is an ample but disorganised parking area and there are no support facilities, although the beach is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces north-west.



Praia da Carreagem



The path leading to the beach takes you through pinewoods and an extensive area of sand dunes dotted with splashes of pink due to the abundance of prickly thistle flowers, a typical plant in coastal regions. The beach is reached by a network of paths leading down the cliff, which are not advisable for children or people with reduced mobility. The beach is narrow, and there are signs of rocks and other material falling from the cliff, which has practically no vegetation apart from the enormous aloes that are scattered all around the landscape, so that bathers are generally advised to keep away from the strip close to the cliff. At the northern end of the beach, at low tide, you can see a curious natural amphitheatre carved out of the schist. The beach is very peaceful and almost always deserted, being favoured in particular by anglers.

- 📖 The paths leading down to the beach are steep and difficult to walk on. At low tide, it is possible to walk as far as Praia da Amoreira, five kilometres to the south. However, the strip of sand here is narrow and not very safe.
- 🚗 There is a dirt track leading from Rogil (EN 120) to the beach (Carreagem) roughly four kilometres away. It is not signposted, but you must keep turning towards the sea. The parking area is limited and disorganised, and the beach is unsupervised. The beach faces north-west.



Praia da Amoreira



This beach lies at the mouth of the Ribeira de Aljezur, which forms a lagoon system of great natural beauty. Inland from the beach is an extensive area of sand dunes, which gradually turns into marshland, typical of these estuary systems, where you can find animals such as the otter, the grey heron or the colourful kingfisher. There are two highly impressive landscapes here: to the north, the black cliffs form a shape that is reminiscent of a recumbent giant lying on the sea; to the south, on the verdant slopes of the valley are some impressively shaped rocky outcrops, the remains of an old sand dune that has since become fossilised and is now home to some unique plants. At low tide, extensive lagoons are formed in the sand, which are very appealing and safe for children.

-  It is possible to bathe along the banks of the river, which is particularly recommended at high tide. The currents close to the bar across the mouth of the river can be very strong.
-  There is a tarmac road starting at the northern entrance to the town of Aljezur (EN 120) and heading towards Praia da Amoreira, seven kilometres away. There is ample and organised space for parking, as well as basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets), and the beach is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces north-west.



Praia do Monte Clérigo



The beach consists of a vast expanse of sand to the north and an interesting rocky platform at the southern end, where you can observe all kinds of marine species at low tide, ranging from crabs, starfish and octopus in the recesses amongst the rocks to shoals of young bream. You can also swim in the various natural pools that form amongst the rocks and are revealed as the tide goes out. Although the beach is fairly exposed to winds blowing from the north and west, the two ends are both sheltered. Inland are some impressive sand dunes, lying on either side of the beautiful valley formed by an occasional stream. There is a small group of summer residences by the beach, as well as a pinewood with a picnic area. There is a fabulous panoramic view to be enjoyed as you walk down to the beach.

-  It is only possible to visit the other beaches to the south at low tide. These consist alternately of sand or shingle. The cliffs are very strangely shaped, but stones can occasionally fall from them, so that special care is recommended when walking at their foot.
-  There is a tarmac road starting from close to the southern entrance to the town of Aljezur (EN 120), heading towards Praia do Monte Clérigo, roughly seven kilometres away. There is an organised parking area and various other facilities (restaurants and toilets), and the beach is supervised during the bathing season. The beach has a network of wooden pathways and is classified as an accessible beach. The beach faces north-west.





Praia da Arrifana

This beach nestles in a beautiful shell-shaped cove, sheltered from the cold north wind and the waves coming from the same direction. There is a small group of fishing boats and the beach is long and narrow, being bordered by high black cliffs, most notably the Pedra da Agulha, a tall rock shaped like a needle, which has become an icon of the south-west coast. There are excellent conditions for diving at the northern end of the beach, and this is also one of the most popular beaches among surfers and bodyboarders. The panoramic view from the Arrifana fortress, now in ruins, is breathtaking. Further north, at the headland of Ponta da Atalaia, which is famous for its gooseneck barnacles, there are the remains of a Muslim Ribat, a convent-fortress of great archaeological value.

-  There is a fairly steep footpath leading down to the beach.
-  There is a tarmac road starting close to the southern entrance of the town of Aljezur (EN 120) and heading towards Praia da Arrifana, roughly nine kilometres away. Parking is not possible close to the beach, and it is only possible to drop off passengers here and then park at the top of the cliff. There are some basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and the beach is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-west.



Praia do Canal

Praia do Canal begins immediately to the south of Praia da Arrifana, enjoying a particularly special view over the Pedra da Agulha. The beach consists mainly of shingle and has formed at the mouth of a valley filled occasionally with a stream, with dense vegetation on either side. Lying between the sea and the valley, the beach is large and very exposed, while its vegetation (endemic juniper bushes and plants that are resistant to salt spray) spreads across the land like a carpet, shaped by the strong winds. The shingle that is not reached by the tide is coloured with warm-coloured lichens, which contrast with the black background. When the sea is rough, it stirs up the shingle and produces a hollow sound. Although highly popular amongst surfers and anglers, this is a peaceful beach.

-  At low tide, a narrow strip of sand appears to the south, leading to Praia de Vale Figueira.
-  Access to the beach is from Alfambras (a scattered group of houses on the EN 120, between Aljezur and Bordeira). The road is not signposted and is a dirt track with loose stones over a distance of six kilometres, and because of its deep ruts and sharp drops is recommended only for off-road vehicles. There are no support facilities and the beach is not supervised. The beach faces west.



Praia de Vale Figueira



The road to the beach takes you along a narrow valley, whose slopes are covered with thick and quite tall shrubs consisting of heather, rock roses and arbutus-berry trees. There is an incipient stream running along the valley, which reaches as far as the beach in the rainy season. The beach is a vast and peaceful expanse of sand maintaining its width both at its northern and southern ends. The schist cliffs are covered with rock roses, whose aromatic oils glitter in the sun and impregnate the air with their characteristic smell. All along the beach, it is possible to observe the stratified layers of the cliffs, overhanging and deformed, bearing witness to the incredible strength of the sea that has pounded against the rocks over the years.

-  The road to the beach begins at Alfambras (a scattered group of houses on the EN 120, between Aljezur and Bordeira). The road is not signposted and is a dirt track over a distance of three kilometres. Parking by the beach is not organised and there are no support facilities, although it is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces west.



Praia da Bordeira



In Bordeira, the black schist is suddenly interrupted and gives way to a limestone cliff, with bright warm colours, leading to greater diversification in the vegetation. From the beach, the extensive sand dunes make their way inland to the village of Carrapateira, on either side of the Ribeira da Bordeira, which occasionally forms a lagoon of warm water close to the mouth of the river and where it is possible to catch a glimpse of otters. Also to be noted here are the woods in the dunes filled with enormous and very old stone pines, some of which are used as agricultural stores because of the great diameter of their crowns. The beach is a vast expanse of sand, more than three kilometres long, but exposed to the winds from the sea and continuing almost deserted to the Pedra de Matez, an enormous reddish-coloured rock to the north of the beach. The cliffs of Praia da Bordeira are famous for their almost inaccessible fishing grounds and are highly sought after by various species of marine birds, which find shelter there.

-  The best access to the beach is from the cliff at the southern end, where there is a wooden path leading from the car park, although you then have to cross the very shallow river on foot. You can bathe along the banks of the river, but this is best done when it is joined to the sea at high tide.
-  There is a road starting at the northern entrance to Carrapateira and leading to the beach, roughly two and a half kilometres away. It starts out as a tarmac road, but it ends in a dirt track. Parking is not organised and there are no support facilities, but the beach is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces north-west / north.





Praia do Amado

This is a large beach, although not as extensive and exposed as Praia da Bordeira, which stretches over three valleys. To the north, the predominant colours are the red and orange of the cliffs, and to reach the beach from this direction you must pass through the breathtaking landscape of Pontal, through the limestone karrenfeld (rocks that are deeply furrowed by erosion), as well as past the curious fishing harbour of Zimbreira, where the boats are anchored to wooden platforms hanging from the cliffs. To the south, the landscape is once again dominated by the grey of the schist. The vegetation is turned into a low-lying carpet by the frequent winds. Praia do Amado is famous for its very versatile and varied waves, justifying the constant presence here of surfing and bodyboarding schools. National and international competitions are also frequently held here. Although this is a very popular beach, it is always possible to find a peaceful spot – all you have to do is walk a short distance along the beach.

-  There is a tarmac road beginning at the southern entrance to the village of Carrapateira, heading for Praia do Amado, roughly two kilometres away. The beach can also be reached from Praia da Bordeira, by heading southwards over the cliff tops (along a dirt track roughly 500 metres long), past the extremely beautiful spot known as Pontal. The parking area is fairly large but disorganised, and the beach has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets), being supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces west.



Vila do Bispo



Murração
Barriga
Cordoama
Castelejo
Ponta Ruiiva
Telheiro
Beliche
Tonel
Mareta
Martinal
Rebolinhos
Barranco
Ingrina
Zavial
Furnas
Figueira
Salama
Boca do Rio
Cabanas Velhas (Almádena)
Burgau



Vila do Bispo.

A land of contrasts, this municipality is a buffer zone between the cold wet Atlantic Ocean and the hot dry Mediterranean region, simultaneously representing the meeting point between the great ancient schist massif of the western coast and the more recent carbonate rocks of the southern coastal strip (namely the Algarve's Barrocal region). There are frequent testimonies to the region's past, with a human occupation that dates back to prehistoric times, possibly linked to the existence of seams of flint in the region and the great wealth of its marine fauna. The landscape is most impressive, encouraging visitors to engage in aesthetic contemplation and to get (back) in touch with the natural world. The key point here is Sagres,

with its unique biophysical and ecological features. The area forms part of a Biogenetic Reserve in view of the exceptional nature of the local vegetation. Also remarkable here is the migration every autumn of the great hovering birds of prey, which brings to this coastline such birds as the griffon vulture or the Egyptian vulture. There is a very diversified range of beaches to choose from: the windswept sandy beaches of the western coast, battered by the waves of the Atlantic Ocean, nestle amongst sheer rocky cliffs; whilst, on the southern coast, the cliffs are less imposing, but have been sculpted into some impressively aesthetic shapes and the beaches take the form of small coves sheltered from the wind and waves.

Praia da Murração



Known as the "Jewel of the Costa Vicentina", this is an extremely beautiful and unspoilt beach. It is one of those rare beaches where the vegetation of the sand dunes stretches right down to the high tide line, resulting in a pleasant combination of the green of the landscape and the blue of the sea. To the north, the cliffs are quite low, covered in endemic juniper bushes and marking out the boundaries of a small stream that flows into the sandy beach. To the south, the cliffs rise higher and exert an imposing presence over the landscape, being composed of black schist with numerous red and orange seams. On the distant cliff tops, carbonate rocks can be seen, furrowed and with lighter colours, as well as sheep grazing on the edge of the precipice. At the southern end of the beach, the wall of schist has been dug away by a small clear stream, which cascades onto the beach in the form of a waterfall. All along the vast expanse of sand are rocks with curious shapes and colours, the debris of earlier landslides.

-  At high tide, the beach becomes narrower and there is the possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them. You should also be careful not to step on the vegetation of the dunes, helping to preserve these as much as possible.
-  There is a road to the beach from the EN 120, starting to the north of Vila do Bispo, near the Wind Park. The road, which covers a distance of six kilometres, is not signposted, consisting of a dirt track with loose stones. It has some sharp drops and deep gullies, so that it is only recommended for off-road vehicles. The parking area is very small and disorganised, and the beach has no support facilities or supervision. The beach faces north-west.



Praia da Barriga



Praia da Barriga comes into sight as you round a sharp bend in the road at the end of a wide green valley. First, you can see natural grassland both at the mouth of the small stream and on the low sand dunes around this; after this comes a wide sandy beach protected by huge black cliffs. The vegetation on the cliffs is low-lying and resistant to salt spray and strong winds, replacing the young pine trees on either side of the beautiful road leading to the beach. This is a peaceful beach with interesting nooks and crannies amongst the jagged cliffs. To the south, the Praia do Castelejo can be reached at low tide, passing by the Praia da Cordoama. You should note the rocky walls here with their intensely deformed layers, bearing witness to the incredible forces to which these rocks have been subjected.

-  At high tide, the beach becomes narrower and stones and rocks may fall from the cliffs, so that it is recommended that you only walk between the beaches at low tide.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beaches from Vila do Bispo (Municipal Market). After the turning to Praia do Castelejo, the road turns into a dirt track and is not signposted, so that you should keep heading northwards for roughly eight kilometres. The parking area is small and disorganised, and the beach has no support facilities or supervision. The beach faces north-west.



Praia da Cordoama



This is a vast sandy beach, disappearing from sight both to the north and south. The highly shaped and progressively more hazy-looking cliffs provide a breathtaking view. Because of its enormous length, it is always possible to find some peace and quiet on the beach, despite its frequent use by surfing and bodyboarding schools. The cliffs have an imposing and haughty appearance, reaching heights of up to a hundred metres. There is a small hillock on this beach, providing a natural viewing point and frequently used as a jumping-off point by paragliders. On the rocky faces of the north-facing cliffs, gleaming strata can be seen bleached white, although this is nothing more than extensive patches of lichens. A small stream runs down a gully to the beach. The smell of rock roses is intense here and, amidst the small dunes that have formed on the beach, it is possible to see plants such as European beachgrass, sea holly or the eye-catching sea daffodil.

-  At high tide, the beach becomes narrower and stones and rocks may occasionally fall from the cliffs, so that it is recommended that you only walk between the beaches at low tide.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beaches from Vila do Bispo (Municipal Market), over a distance of four kilometres. After the turning to Praia do Castelejo, the road turns into a dirt track for roughly two kilometres. The parking area is large but disorganised, and the beach has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets), as well as being supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces north-west.



Praia do Castelejo



The road leading to the beach is a winding one, running along the narrow valley of an occasional stream, which forms a small patch of damp grass on the sand. The slopes of the valley are green, being dotted here and there with stone pines. Here the cliffs are tall and dark, with the Torre de Aspa (an old watchtower) standing atop the southern cliff and reaching a height of more than 140 metres. To the north, the Pedra da Laje is a rocky complex that juts out into the sea and is a popular spot for fishing, whilst closer to the beach it provides an opportunity for observing marine life between tides and offers children the chance to bathe in calm water. The schist cliffs to the north are covered with lighter-coloured rocks – arenites (ancient fossilised sand-dunes) and small ridges of dunes with rock roses. It is a much more crowded beach than Praia da Barriga or Praia da Cordoama, being very popular amongst surfers and bodyboarders and used in particular for the teaching of these sports. It is occasionally covered only with shingle, which produces a hollow sound when it is whipped up by the waves.

-  At high tide, the beach becomes narrower and stones and rocks may occasionally fall from the cliffs, so that it is recommended that you only walk between the beaches at low tide.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beaches from Vila do Bispo (Municipal Market), over a distance of four kilometres. The parking area is large and partly organised, and the beach has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets), as well as being supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces north-west.



Praia da Ponta Ruiva



The beach owes its name (Ponta Ruiva = Red Headland) to an enormous ochre rock formation at the southern end of the beach, near which there forms a particular wave that is famous amongst surfers. The reddish tones of these rocks establish a sharp contrast with the black of the high schist cliffs all around. The footpath to the beach takes you down a relatively difficult trail at one of the more gently sloping points of the cliff. It is a very peaceful and unspoilt beach with an intense smell of rock roses, and you can also see endemic juniper bushes, bent to form a carpet by the strong prevailing winds, while closer to the beach itself are plants that can withstand the salt spray. A small stream cuts its way through the cliffs and flows onto the beach in the rainy season. Along the road to the beach, you can see stonechats (small birds perching on the high branches) and birds of prey, especially kestrels.

-  At high tide, the beach becomes narrower and stones and rocks may fall from the cliffs, so that it is recommended that you take care when walking near the cliffs.
-  There are various roads leading to the beach from Sagres and Vila do Bispo. These are not signposted and are all dirt tracks over a distance of six kilometres. The track leading down to the beach is particularly difficult and is only recommended for off-road vehicles. There is a small and disorganised parking area, and the beach has no support facilities or supervision. The beach faces north-west.





Praia do Telheiro

Despite being relatively sheltered from the cold north wind, this is a quiet beach due to its difficult access by road and the long footpath that has to be walked along to get there, over the limestone tiers of the cliff. In the surrounding area, there is a predominance of farmland and pastureland, and birds of prey hovering in search of food are a common sight, especially kestrels. This is the last beach on the western coast before the headland of Cabo São Vicente (Cape St. Vincent), and it is remarkable for the beauty and diversity of its rock formations, not unconnected with the fact that this is the point where the black schist massif that crops out along the western coast (an ancient furrowed and deformed mountain chain) meets the southern sedimentary coastal strip, composed of orange-coloured arenites, the red-coloured sandstone of Silves and lighter-coloured limestones, all of which have been sculpted into strangely capricious shapes. Various aromatic plants have colonised the limestone karrenfeld (rocks that are deeply furrowed by erosion) of the cliff, whilst the banks of the stream that winds its way down to the beach are covered with exuberant vegetation, composed of tamarisks and common reeds.

-  The footpath to the beach is a fairly difficult one. There is the possibility of stones and rocks falling onto the beach, so that you should take care when walking close to the cliffs.
-  There is an unsignposted tarmac road to the beach from Sagres, heading towards Cabo de São Vicente (EN 268) and then Torre de Aspa. After you have driven five kilometres on a tarmac road, there is another two kilometres to be driven towards the sea over difficult terrain and along a dirt track, which is recommended only for off-road vehicles. Parking is disorganised and there are no basic support facilities or supervision at the beach, which faces west and south-west.



Praia do Beliche



This beach is sheltered from the northerly and westerly winds, nestling in the wide cove formed by the headlands of Ponta de Sagres and Cabo de São Vicente (Cape St. Vincent). The beach seems to have been dug out of the high, warm-coloured cliffs, and can only be reached by climbing down a long set of stone steps. As you walk down these steps, you can appreciate the numerous endemic plants that have spread across the limestone karrenfeld (rocks that are deeply furrowed by erosion) and the reddish terra rossa earth, as well as the steep limestone slopes, highly stratified and shaped, with their spectacular caves and landslides. On the beach, you will find a wide diversity of jagged and sculpted rocks, forming some most curious shapes. The beach is very popular amongst surfers and bodyboarders.

-  As we are now in the heart of the Biogenetic Reserve, the picking of flowers and plants is strictly forbidden, as these are vital for the preservation of this area. Traffic must keep well away from the edge, as this may destabilise the cliff and lead to landslides.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from Sagres, heading for three kilometres in the direction of Cabo de São Vicente along the EN 268. The parking area is fairly large but disorganised, and the beach has basic support facilities nearby (restaurant and toilets), as well as being supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south and south-west.



Praia do Tonel



Although this beach is less sheltered than Praia do Beliche, it is still located in the cove formed by the headlands of Ponta de Sagres and Cabo de São Vicente (Cape St. Vincent). The headland of Ponta de Sagres, with its sheer cliffs, can be seen from the beach, as well as the Fortress of Sagres, a 16th-century construction with a 14th-century chapel contained within it, where St. Vincent is said to be buried. You can also see Cabo de São Vicente and its lighthouse at the opposite end of the cove. Access to the beach is by foot along a wide ramp carved out of the warm-coloured cliff, where you may come across very steep gullies dug out of the rock by the flow of water. The sandy beach stretches southwards and all the way along it you can appreciate the shape of the limestone cliff and the vegetation that has spread across it, such as rock samphire and sea orach, plants that are highly resistant to the salt spray.

 As we are now in the heart of the Biogenetic Reserve, the picking of flowers and plants is strictly forbidden, as these are vital for the preservation of this area.

 There is a tarmac road to the beach from Sagres, heading for roughly 500 metres in the direction of the Fortress of Sagres. The parking area is fairly large but disorganised, and the beach has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets), as well as being supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces west.



Praia da Mareta



This is the first beach on the southern coast and it is contained within a spacious bay to the east of Cabo de São Vicente (Cape St. Vincent), which protects it from the prevailing winds and waves. The large expanse of sand nestles between sheer limestone cliffs where enormous nooks and crannies and undercut slopes can be seen. Close to the high tide lines, it is common to find limestone karrenfeld (rocks that are deeply furrowed by erosion), with their curious shapes, and colonised by all kinds of eye-catching plants, such as the Mediterranean beach daisy. Contained within the town of Sagres, Praia da Mareta is a highly popular beach that is greatly appreciated because of the calm water that it provides for bathing, as well as being a good starting point for diving into the bay's submerged caves. On this beach, there are traces of mediaeval grain silos and ovens, which were used until the 16th century.

 The beach can be reached either by car or on foot, as it is in the town of Sagres, close to the GNR headquarters. There is ample but disorganised parking space, and there are basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) both on the beach and nearby. The beach is supervised during the bathing season and faces south.



Praia do Martinhal and Praia dos Rebolinhos

Situated to the east of the town of Sagres, and despite being sheltered from the prevailing westerly and south-westerly winds and waves, Ponta da Baleeira (where the Sagres fishing harbour is located) is nonetheless fairly windy due to the persistent northerly winds that blow down the wide valley from inland. The water is, however, calm and very good for windsurfing and diving, and there are frequent boat trips taking people to visit the beautiful limestone islets that are situated off the beach, famous for their rocky inlets and underwater grottoes. The beach is basically sandy, with high dunes in the centre and marshland vegetation stretching inland up the valley. To the east, the cliffs begin to reappear, with a lot of shingle on the beach, used by bathers to build shelters that serve as windbreaks. Here, you will find the ruins of an important Roman pottery centre and, on the islets, you can find remains of fish salting tanks.

To the east of Praia do Martinhal is Praia dos Rebolinhos, nestling between cliffs and facing south. On this beach, you can find some well preserved coastal scrubland and a great abundance of pebbles, the so-called *rebolinhos*. The beach is deserted and can be reached on foot through the resort that has been built there. It has no basic support facilities or supervision.

-  There is a tarmac road through the Martinhal beach resort in Sagres, leading to the beach roughly two kilometres away. The parking area is fairly large but disorganised, and the beach has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets), as well as being supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-east.



Martinhal

Praia do Barranco

The beach stands at the mouth of one of the most beautiful valleys in the region, with slopes that are covered by fairly high and dense thickets of junipers and where there appear some imposing limestone outcrops and a narrow area of grassland occupied by fruit trees and riverside vegetation. The sandy beach is small but wide, forming a small area of sand dunes to the west and spreading inland up the gully, where it mixes with the shingle. This is used by bathers to build small stone semicircles that serve as windbreaks. At either end of the beach are light-coloured limestone cliffs and you can see the lofty ruins of a 17th-century fortress.

-  Although access to the beach is via a dirt track, it is nonetheless very popular, particularly amongst surfers and caravanners.
-  There is a dirt track roughly five kilometres long, leading to the beach from the village of Raposeira (EN 125). The beach is not signposted. The parking area is reasonably large but disorganised, and the beach has no support facilities or supervision. The beach faces south.



Martinhal and Rebolinhos



Praia da Ingrina

As you travel along the road leading to the beach, it is worth taking some time to appreciate the extensive wheat fields and the frequent megalithic monuments that are to be found dotted around this region, especially the menhirs carved out of white limestone. Close to the sea, the farmland gives way to low-lying coastal scrubland. The shell-shaped beach is small and has an idyllic appearance, inviting you to take a dip in the calm waters of the bay. A large platform of limestone karrenfeld (rocks that are deeply furrowed by erosion) to the west and jagged limestone cliffs to the east mark out the edges of the bay. The beach is particularly good for diving, with an extensive area of submerged and highly attractive rock formations, both to the west and east.

 There is a tarmac road from the village of Raposeira (EN 125), leading to Praia da Ingrina, roughly four kilometres away. The parking area is fairly large but disorganised, and the beach has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets), as well as being supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south.



Praia do Zavial and Praia das Furnas

The beach stands at the mouth of an occasional stream, whose riverside vegetation and small pebbles reach all the way down to the sand. On the east bank is a small eucalyptus wood with the typical scrubland of the “Barrocal” clay region amongst its undergrowth, which is sometimes used for unauthorised camping. The beach here is wide, with a small sand dune where you can find such plants as European beachgrass. This spreads over some distance eastwards, since at the western end there is an enormous rocky spur that marks out the boundaries of the beach. Exuberant endemic juniper bushes, together with the vegetation that has successfully adapted to the salty atmosphere, are the main features covering this limestone cliff. Praia do Zavial is very popular among surfers, with the eastern end of the beach being calmer with its jagged cliffs and rock formations that are known locally as *furnas*. It is possible to reach this part of the beach by walking along the sand or by climbing down from the top of the cliff. In the area close to Praia do Zavial, you can also visit the ruins of a 17th-century fortress.

To the east of Praia do Zavial is the small Praia das Furnas, which owes its name to the shape of the cliff, greatly eroded by the elements and where *furnas* have developed: enormous undercut slopes dug out of the base of the cliff and grottoes. The coastal scrubland reaches right down to the sand, where a small stream also finds an outlet. This is a very peaceful beach.

 There is a tarmac road from the village of Raposeira (EN 125), heading towards Praia do Zavial or Praia da Ingrina, roughly five kilometres away. The parking is disorganised, but the beach has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. Access to Praia das Furnas is via a dirt track from the village of Figueira (roughly two kilometres away). The parking area is disorganised and the beach has no basic support facilities or supervision. The beaches face south-west (Zavial and Furnas).



Praia da Figueira



Cars have to be parked roughly 500 metres from the beach, after which access is gained by foot along a narrow path that runs along one of the most beautiful valleys in the region, with lush green slopes, pinewoods and impressive outcrops of limestone, amongst which you can see some enormous caves. On the grassy banks of the small stream, you will find orchards of fig-trees and olive-trees in particular, with lots of birds busily entertained in eating the fruit. The beach is very peaceful and feels somewhat like the end of the world, possibly due to the absence of vehicles in the surrounding countryside. It nestles between warm-coloured cliffs with some very curious shapes, and at the eastern end are some ruins of a 16th-century fortress. The shingle is also used here by bathers to build semicircular shelters that serve as windbreaks.

-  There is a tarmac road from the village of Figueira (signposted on the EN 125), heading towards the fortress roughly one kilometre away. The parking area is small and disorganised, some 500 metres from the beach, which has no support facilities. The beach faces south-east.



Praia da Salema



The beach is located in the small fishing village of Salema, where it is used as a fishing harbour, so that the central part of the beach is occupied by boats and all the necessary fishing tackle, such as the basket trap and the longline with its hooks. You can watch the boats returning to the beach after a fishing trip and then sample some of the octopus, moray or white seabream that the fishermen have caught at one of the local restaurants. In the village of Salema, there are also some ruins of a Roman villa, as well as of an old fish canning factory, testifying to the area's longstanding fishing traditions. The beach has a beautiful promenade, as well as café and restaurant terraces overlooking the sea. To the east, the landscape is wilder and more peaceful, and in the rocky cliffs you can see some of the footprints left by the dinosaurs that inhabited this region roughly 140 million years ago.

-  The beach can be reached on foot in the village of Salema (signposted on the EN 125). There is an organised car park and the beach has a range of support facilities (restaurant and toilets), as well as being supervised in the bathing season. This is classified as an accessible beach. The beach faces south/south-east.



Praia da Boca do Rio

Two streams flow together at this peaceful beach, one of them with a wide valley that gives rise to a vast floodplain currently used for agricultural purposes. Along the two valleys, you can observe some hydraulic irrigation devices that bear witness to the longstanding occupation of this region. At Praia da Boca do Rio, there was once an important Roman villa, and some remains can still be seen of its frescos and mosaics, baths, stores and the structures used for salting and preserving fish, with two associated cemeteries, all of which suggests that it was possibly once part of a fishing port. In the cliffs to the east (Ponta de Almádena), you can visit the 16th-century Forte de Almádena. In the area around these streams, it is quite common to spot some otters or at least the signs of their presence.

- 🚗 There is a tarmac road from the village of Budens (EN 125) to the beach roughly three kilometres away, or there is also a dirt track from Salema, running along the top of the cliff for roughly two kilometres. There is a spacious but disorganised parking area, and the beach has no support facilities. There is a picnic area amongst some eucalyptus trees, close to the beach, which faces south.



Praia de Cabanas Velhas (Almádena)

This is a small and welcoming beach, which becomes very narrow at high tide, with some small, jagged and highly eroded limestone cliffs, where there are all kinds of nooks and crannies resulting from the slipping of the various strata of the rock. The beach stretches eastwards and you can see some peculiar rock formations at either end. The hillsides overlooking the beach are covered with the typical low-lying scrubland of rocky coastlines, with an area of young pine-trees to the west. The beach is not greatly used by bathers, although the pontoon at the eastern end is very popular with anglers. The abundant shingle of the beach is used by bathers to build small semicircular shelters to serve as windbreaks.

- 🚗 There is a tarmac road from the village of Burgau, heading westwards to the beach roughly three kilometres away. There is a spacious and organised car park, and the beach has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets), as well as being supervised during the bathing season. Classified as an accessible beach, it faces south.





Praia do Burgau

Contained within the village of Burgau, this is an urban beach marking the western border of the South-west Alentejo and Costa Vicentina Natural Park. It nestles in a small cove that is sheltered from the elements and is used as a fishing harbour, where many of the traditional fishing arts are still to be found, such as the basket trap and the longline with hooks. Just as at Praia da Salema, you can watch the boats returning to the beach after their fishing trips and then sample some of the octopus, moray or white seabream that the fishermen have caught at one of the local restaurants. Those using the beach thus share the sand with the fishing boats and the fishermen. On the cliffs is a 17th-century fort and the ruins of a 16th-century tower.

 The beach can be reached on foot in the village of Burgau (signposted on the EN 125). There is an organised car park and the beach has a range of support facilities (restaurant and toilets), as well as being supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south/south-east.



Lagos





Lagos.

Lagos is a city that is full of history and tradition, being at the same time one of the most cosmopolitan places in the Algarve, where, for many years, different peoples have seemingly come together in complete harmony. The result of this meeting of traditions and customs is a social and cultural life that is as dynamic as it is diversified, its excitement lasting all year round. As well as tourism, the region's inhabitants live off fishing, the production of honey and *medronho* (brandy made from the berries of the arbutus-tree), or the region's traditional confectionery, such as the famous *Dom Rodrigues*, sweets made of almonds, eggs and sugar. The local craftsmen work with such raw materials as wood, stone, iron or the leaves of

the dwarf fan palm, the only palm-tree native to the Mediterranean basin. All these products, the fruit of ancient knowledge, can be found in the picturesque and traditional local shops. But this is also the *Costa d'Ouro* (the Gold Coast), so-called because of the golden and ochre colours of its cliffs, one of the features that makes Lagos such a special municipality. Ponta da Piedade, the promontory that shelters the city of Lagos, consists of many small welcoming coves, full of caves, natural arches and water so transparent that it is possible to make out the outlines of the submerged rocks. The municipality's breathtaking landscapes are an open invitation for you to enjoy long pleasant walks or boat rides along the coast.

Praia da Luz



The beach is associated with a small but very cosmopolitan resort, where a paved avenue runs along the seafront, offering visitors a variety of sun-filled outdoor cafés and restaurants, as well as some street entertainment. Bordered by large palm-trees, this avenue leads in the west to the walls of the fortress originally built to protect the church from attacks by the Moors. On the beach, at the foot of the wall, is an extensive rocky platform of warm colours, sculpted by the sea and displaying marine fossils and some of the typical life of intertidal environments: sea anemones, buckshot barnacles, limpets and top shells, wrapped in a carpet of green seaweed. On these ochre-coloured rocks and out of reach of the tides grow typical cliff plants, such as sea lavender. The cliff rises up to the east, becoming grey in colour and with many crevices that have been formed by the effects of trickling water. Standing out against this landscape of whitened cliffs carved out of limestone and marlstone is a notable rock formation: the so-called *Rocha Negra* (black rock), a volcanic seam originating in the Serra de Monchique that has reached all the way to the sea. This bay of calm water is particularly suited to water sports: windsurfing, kitesurfing, sailing and diving, and there is a variety of support facilities available for the use of holidaymakers.

-  There is the possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them at the eastern end of the beach.
-  The beach can be reached on foot through the town of Luz (signposted on the EN 125, roughly seven kilometres from Lagos). There is an organised parking area near the beach, which has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach is classified as an accessible beach and faces south/south-east.





Praia do Porto de Mós

The beach is situated in a wide open valley, forming a vast expanse of sand framed by high cliffs at either end. Seen from the viewing point of Miradouro da Atalaia, at the top of the cliff, the landscape is superb, it being possible to follow the coastline all the way to Sagres. To the west, there is a predominance of light-grey colours and the cliffs are carved out of heavily stratified layers of marlstone (limestone with a high clay content) that seem to overhang in a very precarious state of balance. In the rainy season, a thick layer of clay builds up at the foot of the cliff, which the local people claim has special medicinal properties. Growing on the cliff face are plants that can withstand the spray of salt from the sea, such as sea orach, wormleaf saltwort and shrubby seablite, or common reeds in those places where there are signs of trickling water. To the west, the cliffs display very warm ochre colours and it is already possible to see the rock formations that are part of the headland of Ponta da Piedade. Despite the proximity of the city of Lagos, the area around the beach still maintains its natural characteristics and there are some very quiet sections to be found.

-  There is the possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them.
-  There is a tarmac road leading to the beach from Lagos. Drive up the Avenida dos Descobrimentos and turn left at the roundabout next to the fire station, heading towards Porto de Mós. There is a fairly large parking area near the beach, which has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach is classified as an accessible beach and faces south.



Praia do Canavial

The name of this beach derives from the dense reed bed (*canavial*) along the banks of a fast-flowing stream that cascades in a waterfall down the cliffs in the rainy season. The beach can be reached by a series of footpaths over the top of the cliffs, where the rich scrubland of the Algarve's "barrocal" region has slowly begun to occupy the old fig-tree orchards, so that it is now possible to see there enormous mastic-trees, wild asparagus and dense entanglements of honeysuckle. The narrow, winding path to the beach takes you down some steps carved out of the cliff face, with a predominance of very intense fiery red and ochre tones. The carbonate rocks that form the cliffs are highly sculpted and cracked by the rainwater passing through them, and growing in the small cavities that have formed in them are the typical plants of these rugged environments, such as pale stonecrop, Mediterranean beach daisy, sweet alyssum and sea lavender. The beach is a narrow one, sheltered by the scenically shaped cliffs, isolated and very peaceful. The water is so transparent that you can see the aesthetically aligned rows of submerged rock formations, forming a series of long ridges.

-  The beach is very narrow and should only be visited at low tide. There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them, as well as when walking on the cliff top, keeping a safe distance from the edge.
-  There is a footpath to the beach over the top of the cliffs from the urban development to the east of Porto de Mós (roughly 200 metres) or from the lighthouse of Ponta da Piedade (roughly one kilometre). The beach, which has no support facilities and is unsupervised, faces south.





Praia da Balança

The beach owes its name to a rock formation at its eastern end, which is reminiscent of an enormous set of scales. This is the first beach to appear on the eastern side of the jagged headland of Ponta da Piedade, a place where there is a remarkable diversity of geographical relief features resulting from the ravages of time and the elements on the carbonate rocks: isolated groups of rocks, potholes, arches, caves and lots of nooks and crannies amongst the rocks. The intense ochre colours of the cliffs have already earned this coastline the name of *Costa d'Ouro* (the Gold Coast). From Lagos, you can take a boat ride to appreciate the remarkable design of the coastline, as well as to reach some small sandy beaches such as Praia da Balança, since access to these beaches by land implies some very definite rock climbing skills. The beach is small and isolated, nestling amongst high cliffs of many different colours and textures, which, depending on the material from which they have been carved by the elements, give rise to distinct shapes and furrows. On the isolated rock formations, you can see shags opening their long black wings so that they can dry more easily in the sun.

-  The beach is very narrow and should only be visited at low tide. There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them, as well as when walking on the cliff top, keeping a safe distance from the edge.
-  The recommended means of access to the beach is by boat from Lagos. It can be reached on foot from the lighthouse of Ponta da Piedade (roughly 200 metres), but such access is very difficult. The beach, which has no support facilities and is unsupervised, faces south-east.



Praia da Boneca

This small cove forms a kind of natural rock pool, sheltered by enormous rock formations, amongst which is one that the popular imagination has attributed to the shape of a woman, explaining why the beach has been baptised with the name "Boneca" (doll). Access to this beach is a little easier than it is to the neighbouring Praia da Balança, and in order to get here you have to cross over some exuberant coastal scrubland and walk through a small pinewood that has clearly been shaped by the wind. As you walk, you will see birds such as blackbirds or hoopoes emerging from this wood. The path then winds its way down a narrow deep gorge, which has been dug out of the steep face of the cliff by the passage of water. Here and there are some steps carved out of the rock to help you in your descent, but the rocky cliff faces are very steep. Dotted here amongst the warm colours of this cliff are the typical plants of these rugged environments: Mediterranean beach daisy, sweet alyssum and sea lavender. Once you are on the beach itself, you can see countless marine fossils in the cliffs, as well as large bushes of sea orach. Snorkelling among the submerged rock formations will reveal to you the surprisingly different and brightly-coloured world of the sea.

-  The beach is very narrow and should only be visited at low tide. There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them, as well as when walking on the cliff top, keeping a safe distance from the edge.
-  The recommended means of access to the beach is by boat from Lagos. It can be reached on foot from the lighthouse of Ponta da Piedade (roughly 300 metres), but such access is difficult. The beach, which has no support facilities and is unsupervised, faces east.





Praia do Camilo

From the terrace on the top of the cliff, there is a fabulous panoramic view over the coastline between Lagos and the municipality of Albufeira, with a sweeping perspective of the ocean dotted with the white triangles of sailing boats. A large set of stone steps leads down to the beach, passing through an area of scrubland with the typical plants of the Algarve's "barrocal" region: kermes oaks, mastic-trees, spotted rock roses and sage-leaf rock roses. On the face of the cliff that is most exposed to the sea, the predominant plants are sea orach and wormleaf saltwort, which have adapted to the salt spray from the sea. An enormous rock formation divides the beach into two and it is possible to pass through this by means of a damp narrow tunnel that has been dug by hand and where you can observe many different kinds of sea shells embedded in the rock. Behind the beach, the cliff is soft and red, being of the sand-clay type with lots of crevices. On either side, the predominant colour is ochre and the cliffs are carved out of calcarenites, forming typical features such as isolated groups of rocks, arches and undercutting. Countless birds appreciate the platforms of the isolated rocks because they are inaccessible to predators, with birds such as shags, herring gulls and black-headed gulls being a common feature of this beach.

 There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them.

 There is a tarmac road leading to the beach from Lagos. Drive up the Avenida dos Descobrimentos and turn left at the roundabout next to the fire station, heading towards Ponta da Piedade. Praia do Camilo is signposted. There is a small but organised parking area near the beach, which has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south.



Praia Dona Ana

The road to the beach brings you out onto a small viewing point from where you can contemplate the curious carbonate rock formations sculpted by both freshwater and seawater: crevices, isolated groups of rocks, the remains of potholes and caves. Countless white dots can be seen shining on the isolated groups of rocks scattered along the horizon: these are herring gulls, herons or black-headed gulls resting on the platforms overlooking the sea. Plants that have specially adapted to the salt spray from the sea, such as wormleaf saltwort or sea orach, cover the rocky faces of the cliffs, forming some enormous bushes. The beach consists of a series of small inlets caused by the shape of the cliffs, providing all manner of sheltered nooks and crannies for bathers. Once you're in the water, you will find that snorkelling offers you the chance to discover a whole new range of different colours: seaweed, sea anemones, starfish, sea urchins, shrimps or shoals of small fish, all inhabit the submerged rock formations. There is a footpath along the top of the cliff, to the east of the beach, leading to Praia do Pinhão. Praia Dona Ana is a famous and very popular beach, with a wide range of tourist facilities all around it.

 There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them.

 There is a tarmac road to the beach from Lagos. Drive up the Avenida dos Descobrimentos and turn left at the roundabout next to the fire station, heading towards Ponta da Piedade. Praia Dona Ana is signposted. There is a fairly large and organised parking area near the beach, which has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-east.



Praia do Pinhão



This beach can be reached along a footpath running along the cliff top from Praia Dona Ana and allowing you the chance to observe some of the typical coastal vegetation: Mediterranean beach daisy, sweet alyssum, sea orach and wormleaf saltwort all grow profusely in the cavities between the rocks. Further inland, there is a predominance of the characteristic species of coastal scrubland, such as mastic-trees and olive-trees, which are gradually beginning to occupy this previously barren area. The beach is a small one, nestling between high cliffs, carved out of warm-coloured carbonate rocks. An enormous natural arch appears to the east of the beach, and, on the other side of this, a special viewing point has been built with a set of steps leading down into the sea, allowing you to dive into the water without having to cross over the beach. An extensive submerged area of rocks offers you the chance to enjoy some attractive underwater swimming. Although it is small and very close to the urban centre of Lagos, the beach is relatively peaceful and quiet.

-  There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them, as well as when walking on the cliff top, keeping a safe distance from the edge.
-  There is a footpath to the beach from Praia Dona Ana, as well as a tarmac road from Lagos. Drive up the Avenida dos Descobrimentos and follow the signs to Praia do Pinhão. There is a very small car park near the beach, which has basic support facilities and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces east.



Praia dos Estudantes



The cliffs become a little lower on this beach and are covered in reeds, hinting at the existence of a fairly constant flow of fresh water. The typical cliff plants are also to be found in abundance here, especially wormleaf saltwort, sea orach and shrubby seablite, species that have adapted well to the salt spray coming from the sea and which also grow in the saline soils of the salt-marshes. The beach is very small and sheltered by rock formations that continue into the sea, providing the possibility of calm water for swimming in. Tunnels have been dug by hand out of these cliffs: one to the west offers access to a tiny beach from where you can see a curious archway built by human hands in order to connect an isolated group of rocks in the sea to the land; another, to the east, connects Praia dos Estudantes to the neighbouring Praia da Batata. The tunnel to the west has been worn away quite severely by the action of the sea and is full of nooks and crannies where you can see the characteristic organisms of the intertidal environment: mussels, limpets, top shells, buckshot barnacles, sea anemones, shrimps and brightly-coloured seaweed. In these cavities, the atmosphere is humid, heavily laden with salt and impregnated with an intense smell of the sea.

-  There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them, especially near the tunnels that have been dug out of the rocks.
-  The beach can be reached either on foot or along a tarmac road from Avenida dos Descobrimentos in Lagos. There is an organised parking area near the beach, which has some support facilities (restaurant) on the cliff top, but is not supervised. The beach faces south-east/east.





Praia da Batata

The beach is situated between Praia dos Estudantes and the mole built on the western side of Ribeira de Bensafrim, only a few metres from the historic centre of the city of Lagos and already displaying urban characteristics: most of the cliff behind the beach has been covered with stone and the very top is occupied with a sunny paved square, along which there runs a small footpath. Various leisure facilities are available for the use of holidaymakers. Beyond the mole is a tiny area of sand called Praia de Solaria, and the Fortaleza da Ponta da Bandeira stands right at the entrance to the harbour. There are many sheltered nooks and crannies on the beach, a common feature on this stretch of the coastline, which is very exposed to the effects of the elements. It is a fairly popular beach, appearing as a continuation of the long waterfront avenue of Lagos, accompanying the route from the sea to the marina used by the yachts and small boats that offer trips around the so-called *Costa d'Ouro* (Gold Coast), a name that derives from the golden hues of the cliffs along this stretch of coastline.

-  There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them.
-  The beach can be reached either on foot or along a tarmac road from Avenida dos Descobrimentos in Lagos. There is an organised parking area near the beach, which has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-east/east.



Meia Praia

The sandy beach of Meia Praia accompanies the shore line of the wide bay at Lagos, starting at the eastern mole of the Ribeira de Bensafrim and stretching for more than four kilometres to the sand barrier of Ria de Alvor. To the west you can still see the city of Lagos, with its groups of rocks stretching into the sea. The horizon spreads into the distance between the low dunes of the beach itself and the gentle and very green hills that stretch inland, covered with patches of pinewoods and the typical scrubland of the "barrocal" region with carob-trees and olive-trees scattered here and there. A network of raised footpaths runs over much of the sand, helping to preserve the vegetation of the dune system, this being thicker at the seafront with a predominance of plants such as sand couch grass, European beach grass, sea holly, Cretan trefoil and the eye-catching sea daffodil. As this is the only essentially sandy beach in the municipality, and also because of the huge expanse of sand that forms it, it is a particularly attractive spot for all kinds of water sports and beach sports: windsurfing, surfing, kitesurfing, sailing, water skiing, fishing, beach volleyball, beach football, etc., and various support facilities for these sports are made available on the beach for the use of holidaymakers. A little further away from the coast, it is also possible to enjoy some deep-sea sports fishing.

-  Avoid walking on the vegetation of the sand dune system, thus helping to preserve this vulnerable habitat.
-  There is a tarmac road leading to the beach from Lagos, heading towards the Marina. Meia Praia is signposted from this road. There is a fairly large and partly organised parking area near the beach, which has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach is classified as an accessible beach and faces south-east.



Portimão





Portimão.

The shore line of the municipality stretches between two important wetland areas: the Ria de Alvor to the east and the estuary of the River Arade to the west, places where the wave-battered rocky coast gives way to peaceful water and banks of fine sand and mud. In the Ria do Alvor, a recognised wild life sanctuary, you can appreciate the peaceful way of life of those who live from the great wealth offered by the tides: fish farming, salt-pans, shellfish picking and non-industrial fishing are the livelihood of the local communities. In its turn, the River Arade was for many years a vital communication route between the coast and the inland regions, providing an outlet for essential goods such as cork and playing

host to the Algarve's most important fishing port. Nowadays the river is navigated above all by fishermen and tour operators, forming part of the municipality's tourist supply. But Portimão's most famous and distinctive feature is the beautiful scenery of its jagged and intensely coloured rocky coastline, along which, nestling amongst the cliffs, are many welcoming beaches of golden sand. The varied supply of shops and accommodation, as well as the support facilities offered for enjoying water sports such as windsurfing, sailing, diving or deep-sea sports fishing, have made the municipality's beaches even more valuable as highly attractive tourist destinations.

Praia do Alvor Poente and Nascente (Três Irmãos)



Alvor Nascente

The beach is situated along the wide sand barrier that, by protecting the Ria do Alvor from the ocean, permits the existence of an inland lagoon with an extensive area of salt-marshes and channels of calm water. Not only is this habitat a sanctuary for countless species of water birds, both those living here all year round and migratory birds passing through the region, but it also functions as a breeding ground for many highly valuable species of fish and molluscs (ranging from bivalves to cuttlefish). The sand barrier is a huge one, stretching into the distance and out of sight: on the inland side of the barrier is the picturesque fishing town of Alvor, with its typical houses and with many sailing boats and fishing boats anchored in the lagoon; after the mudbanks come the sand dunes, held in place by their vegetation and extending all the way to the beach. On the seafront, you can see such delicate plants as sand couch grass, European beach grass, cottonweed, Cretan trefoil or sea daffodil. Despite their hot, dry environment, the dunes are the home to various species of birds, micro-mammals, reptiles and lots of insects. To the east, the sand dune system becomes narrower and gives way to an area of tourist developments. The carbonate cliffs, highly sculpted by the elements, reappear at the eastern end of the beach, where it is already possible to see some groups of rocks appearing in the sea.

-  Avoid walking on the vegetation of the sand dune system, thus helping to preserve this vulnerable habitat.
-  There is a tarmac road leading to the beach from the town of Alvor, (signposted on the EN 125, roughly five kilometres from Portimão). The beach is clearly signposted. There is a fairly large and partly organised parking area at Alvor Poente; and a fairly large but disorganised parking area at Alvor Nascente. The beach has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. It is classified as an accessible beach and faces south/south-west.



Alvor



Prainha

Prainha consists of a series of small, sheltered and shell-shaped sandy beaches, separated from one another by scenic rock formations with very irregular shapes, intensely sculpted by the action of both freshwater and seawater. They each have many different nooks and crannies among the rocks, as well as the typical features that are formed amongst these cliffs: arches, caves, isolated groups of rocks and potholes. Below the tide level, these same rocks are the home to a rich and colourful marine life, making these coves an ideal place for diving. To the east, these carbonate cliffs are rich in marine fossils and result in the rock formation of Ponta João d'Arens, an excellent place for spotting such birds as the shag, the jackdaw, the rare rock dove or the yellow-legged gull. At the top of the cliffs, the predominant plants are those that have adapted well to these saline environments, such as wormleaf saltwort, shrubby seablite, sea lavender and Mediterranean beach daisy. Growing in the crevices of the rocks are such plants as pale stonecrop, and in the spring, in the clearings between the mastic-trees, you will find various species of orchids.

 There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them, as well as when walking on the cliff top, keeping a safe distance from the edge. In order to get to the beach, you have to pass through a tourist development built around the sand and then walk down some steps carved out of the cliff face.

 There is a tarmac road leading to the beach from the road between Alvor and Praia da Rocha/Vau, heading towards Prainha. The beach, which has basic support facilities and is supervised during the bathing season, faces south.



Praia do Barranco das Canas (Alemão)

The name of the beach derives from the watercourse that flows onto the beach down a narrow gully (*barranco*), with thick beds of reeds growing on either side. To the east you can see the rock formation of the Ponta João d'Arens, surrounded by numerous isolated groups of rocks that have stood firm against the receding coastline and provide shelter for many different species of birds. The top of these cliffs is covered with a dense and very green pinewood, which gives way to enormous olive-trees and fig-trees, growing in the valley just before the beach. The backdrop to this sandy beach is a succession of highly furrowed, soft red cliffs formed from a sand-clay material (their clays are highly sought after by the local people for therapeutic purposes) and the ochre cliffs carved out of biocalcarenes (carbonate rocks with a great abundance of marine fossils) in which the effects of erosion have given rise to isolated rock formations, arches and enormous caves, such as the ones that are visible at the beach's eastern end. The beach is a peaceful one, set in what are still very natural surroundings, despite its proximity to the major and very busy tourist centre of Portimão.

 There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them, as well as when walking on the cliff top, keeping a safe distance from the edge.

 There is a tarmac road to the beach from Av. V3 (Portimão), heading towards Praia da Rocha/Vau. The beach, which has basic support facilities and is supervised during the bathing season, faces south.





Praia do Vau

The red and ochre cliffs that mark out the two ends of the beach become lower in height and are interrupted in the central area. Behind the beach are a succession of tourist support facilities set amongst areas planted with gardens. Most of the vegetation in the area around the beach (aloes, ice plants and cactuses) is exotic in nature, having been introduced in a vain attempt to stabilise these cliffs, which are extremely vulnerable to contact with rainwater and seawater. At the edges of the beach, towards Praia do Barranco das Canas or Praia dos Careanos, the cliff is covered in the typical vegetation of these systems, especially wormleaf saltwort and sea orach, species that are highly resistant to the sea breezes laden with salt spray. The faces of the rocks have been heavily moulded by erosion and form countless nooks and crannies that are the delight of bathers. To the west, on the top of the cliffs, there is a nature trail that runs along the breathtaking stretch of rocky coastline between Vau and Prainha. This is a fairly popular beach amongst holidaymakers and is much sought after for its clay, which falls off its cliffs and is believed to have medicinal properties.

-  There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them, as well as when walking on the cliff top, keeping a safe distance from the edge.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from Av. V3 (Portimão), heading towards Praia da Rocha/Vau. The beach is signposted. There is an organised parking area near the beach, which has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach is classified as an accessible beach and faces south/southwest.



Praia dos Careanos

This beach is bordered on its western side by Praia do Vau and forms part of the stretch of coastline that precedes Praia da Rocha and includes the beaches of Praia dos Careanos, Praia do Amado and Praia dos Três Castelos, extending over an area of more than one kilometre of sand. These beaches have as their backdrop a continuous line of high cliffs, in which red and ochre colours alternate with one another, showing the different materials out of which the cliffs have been carved: soft and vividly red sand-clay rocks alternate with biocalcarenes, which are lighter-coloured and more resistant rocks with a great abundance of marine fossils. To get to Praia dos Careanos, you have to walk down a set of steep steps that seem to lead you down through the remains of an old pothole. There are countless caves and nooks and crannies which follow on from one another along the beach, the most notable features amongst the rocks being an enormous pothole at the western end of the beach that drops down all the way to sea level and an isolated rock formation that is reminiscent of a small fortress, displaying a large natural arch and the remains of potholes. Between Praia do Vau and Praia dos Careanos, there is a footpath along the top of the cliff, duly marked out and protected, offering the possibility of establishing close contact with nature and with the fabulous rocky landscapes of this coastline under relatively safe conditions.

-  There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them, as well as when walking on the cliff top, keeping a safe distance from the edge.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from Av. V6 (Portimão), heading towards Praia da Rocha. Access to the beach is from the roundabout with a fountain. There is an organised parking area near the beach, which has various support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south/south-west.





Praia do Amado

Praia do Amado is situated between Praia dos Careanos and Praia dos Três Castelos, framed by the typical cliffs of this stretch of the coastline, where there is an alternation in colour between bright red and ochre, as well as a different moulding of the contours of the rocks, resulting in some rather strange and fantastic shapes. The beach is reached via a set of steep steps that run down the cliff face, bordered by thick vegetation that has adapted to the saline environments created by the sea spray: wormleaf saltwort, sea orach, sweet alyssum and Mediterranean beach daisy. On the beach itself, in those places where the sand has accumulated next to the sand-clay cliffs, there is an abundance of Cretan trefoil and sand couch grass, leading to the formation of small sand dune systems. An attractive footpath and cycle track runs along the cliff top between this beach and the viewing point of Três Castelos (also known as Bela Vista), which marks the border between Praia dos Três Castelos and Praia da Rocha. This track is paved and has various resting points, being planted with some garden areas and a series of terraces, allowing you to enjoy the sunshine and the panoramic views over the sea from the cliff top.

-  There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them, as well as when walking on the cliff top, keeping a safe distance from the edge.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from Av. V6 (Portimão), heading towards Praia da Rocha. Access to the beach is from the roundabout with a fountain. There is a fairly large and organised parking area near the beach, which has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south/south-west.



Praia dos Três Castelos

The beach, whose name (three castles) alludes to the isolated rock formations that have stood firm against the retreating coastline, is bordered by the jagged promontory on which the viewing point of Três Castelos is to be found. You can reach the beach via a set of steps that run down the cliff from this viewing point, from where there is a remarkable view over the highly sculpted rock formations of this beach, allowing you to see such features as arches, caves and isolated groups of rocks, as well as rocky platforms on the cliff faces, very popular with birds such as kestrels, herring gulls, black-headed gulls, rock doves and swifts. On the gentler rocky slopes, there is a profusion of mastic-trees and plants that are resistant to the salt spray from the sea, especially wormleaf saltwort and sea orach. At the foot of the cliffs, living as a parasite on the roots of these halophytic plants, there grows a small and extremely rare plant known in English as Maltese mushroom, but with the suggestive vernacular name in Portuguese of Moor's penis (*piça-de-mouro*), which derives from its phallic shape and its restricted geographical distribution (being found only in a few places in the Mediterranean basin). Warm colours tend to predominate on this sandy beach, which is quite extensive and has some more peaceful areas at its western end.

-  There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them, as well as when walking on the cliff top, keeping a safe distance from the edge.
-  You can reach the beach on foot through the city of Portimão. There is a tarmac road to the beach from Av. V6 (Portimão), heading towards Praia da Rocha. There is an organised parking area near the beach, which has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south/south-west.





Praia da Rocha

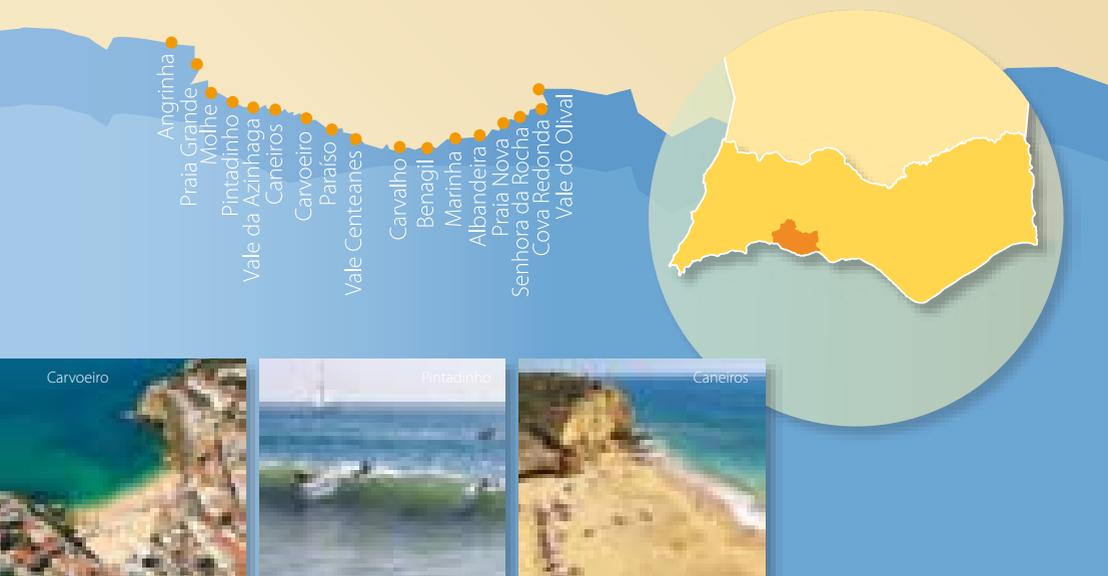
With a vast and spacious area of sand, stretching over more than one kilometre, protected by warm-coloured and aesthetically shaped cliffs, Praia da Rocha is an increasingly popular beach amongst holidaymakers and one of the best known beaches in the whole of Portugal. It has been subjected to major improvement work, so that the beach is now provided with a network of wide wooden footpaths that cover almost the whole of its area, along which you will find a wide variety of different support facilities designed for bathers. The avenue that runs along the seafront of Praia da Rocha has a succession of hotels, bars, open-air cafés and restaurants, discos, and a casino, finally culminating in Portimão Marina. This greatly diversifies the tourist supply and provides the beach with its distinctive lively and colourful atmosphere. From the high viewing points to be found at either end of the beach, Três Castelos to the west and Fortaleza de Santa Catarina de Ribamar to the east, the latter standing at the bar across the River Arade estuary, visitors can enjoy a fabulous panoramic view over the coastline between the scenic rock formation of Ponta João d'Arens and the lighthouse of Ponta do Altar. The landscape is also marked by the mouth of the River Arade itself and the nearby hills of Serra de Monchique. Despite the heavily urbanised and tourist atmosphere of the area surrounding Praia da Rocha, the natural landscape also seems to impose itself here because of its extraordinary beauty.

-  There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them, as well as when walking on the cliff top, keeping a safe distance from the edge.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach through the city of Portimão, following the signs to Praia da Rocha. There is an organised parking area near the beach, which has a wide variety of different support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach is classified as an accessible beach and faces south/south-west.



Lagoa





Lagoa.

Inland from the sea, the landscape consists above all of undulating fields planted with never-ending vineyards and dryland orchards of almond-trees, fig-trees or carob-trees. Now to be found growing in the gullies and fields that are no longer used for agricultural purposes is the lush green scrubland that is typical of the Algarve's "barrocal" region. The municipality's towns and villages have preserved their narrow cobbled streets, their rustic and dazzling white houses, their intricately designed, lace-patterned chimney-pots and their great wealth of traditional crafts, embodied in particular by the ceramics and pottery of Porches. The coastal strip of the municipality of Lagoa is essentially a rocky one and is characterised by the jagged cliffs that mark out its coastline, resulting in unexpected and

truly breathtaking landscapes, their appearance permanently changing because of the erosive effects of time and the elements. The cliffs, carved out of ochre-coloured carbonate rocks, are vulnerable to the action of water: the saltwater from the sea that wears them away and undercuts them at their base; and the rain that slowly erodes them from inside, giving rise to some curiously shaped crevices and furrows. The persistent action of water upon the rock has resulted in unusual eroded limestone landscapes, where different features have been formed, such as isolated groups of rocks, potholes, arches and caves. But it is not only humankind that has allowed itself to be seduced by this landscape, for countless species of birds and bats have chosen these rock formations as their place of shelter and their breeding grounds.

Praia Grande and Praia da Angrinha

The beach is situated in the heart of the River Arade estuary, at the foot of the town of Ferragudo. The main access to the beach coincides with the opening marked by the two great moles at the river's mouth, with it being possible to see, close to the western mole and already in Portimão Marina, a great profusion of masts and white triangles. The beach is a large and spacious expanse of sand, framed by a line of cliffs that have been greatly eroded and eaten away by the elements. The rocky faces of the cliffs are covered with all kinds of vegetation, especially those plants that have adapted to the spray of salt from the sea, such as wormleaf saltwort and sea orach, or the typical plants of sand dune systems, such as Cretan trefoil, all of which grow in the small rocky cavities where there has been an accumulation of sand. A raised wooden footpath has been placed over the sand and runs along part of the beach, next to which are a variety of tourist facilities, open air cafés and restaurants and even a children's playground. It is a very popular beach, although there are some quieter and more peaceful areas to the south, where a green patch of pine-trees interrupts the warm colours of the cliffs.

To the north of the Forte de São João do Arade, which, together with the Fortaleza de Santa Catarina on the other side of the river, once guaranteed the defence of the estuary, there appears the sandy Praia da Angrinha, whose shape changes in accordance with the mouth of the stream that flows into the river there. This is a small beach situated at the foot of the hill of Ferragudo, a traditional fishing town, which overlooks the eastern bank of the River Arade, descending the hill in a series of white terraces.

-  There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them.
-  There are footpaths from the town of Ferragudo (roughly five kilometres from Lagoa) to both Praia Grande and Praia da Angrinha. There is a small but organised parking area near to Praia Grande, and a fairly large parking area close to Praia da Angrinha, 250 metres from Praia Grande. Only at Praia Grande are there various support facilities (restaurants and toilets), and this beach is also supervised during the bathing season. Both beaches face south-west.



Praia Grande

Praia Grande and Angrinha



Praia do Molhe

This is a small beach that has spread around the eastern mole of the River Arade. Moving inland from the estuary, there is a small accumulation of sand next to the mole and the water here is calm, whereas on the seaward side of the same mole, both sand and sea are more consistent, with it being frequent to find waves leaping over the breakwater and to see surfers patiently waiting on the horizon for the breaking waves. The beach is reached by walking down a set of steep steps carved out of the rocks of the cliffs. Here, the cliffs are very jagged and full of crevices and furrows, and countless blocks of rocks can be seen on the sand, the remains of earlier landslides. Plants that have adapted particularly well to the salt spray from the sea, such as wormleaf saltwort and sea orach, cover the rocky faces of the cliffs and form enormous bushes. Wormleaf saltwort is a plant that has a high sodium carbonate content (since it absorbs sodium from saline soils), so that it is widely used in the manufacture of soap, whereas sea orach is a plant that “transpires salt”, and in the morning or early evening you can see salt crystals glittering on its leaves.

-  You can walk to Praia do Pintadinho at low tide, although you should pay close attention to the area at the foot of the cliffs, due to the possibility of falling stones.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from Ferragudo (roughly five kilometres from Lagoa), heading south for roughly three kilometres. There is a fairly large and organised parking area near the beach. Although there is a restaurant here, it is not authorised to provide facilities for bathing and the beach has no supervision. The beach faces south-west.



Praia do Pintadinho



This is the beach that lies immediately to the west of Ponta do Altar, a narrow and elongated promontory on which a lighthouse has been built. The rich scrubland of the Algarve’s “barrocal” region reaches all the way down to the coastline and joins with the typical vegetation of the exposed cliffs of the headland of Ponta do Altar. The beach is therefore framed by a dense green patch of vegetation: mastic-trees, thyme, myrtle, dwarf fan palms, Spanish broom, sage-leaf rock roses and spotted rock roses, over which lianas grow in great profusion. In the warm-coloured cliffs, various marine fossils can be seen, as well as the remarkable shapes that have been produced in the limestone rock as a result of the sea’s erosion, such as the clear undercutting that has taken place at the foot of Ponta do Altar. On the cliff that marks out the beach’s northern end, attention is drawn to the gallery that forms a kind of enormous vault with two arches. The beach faces west and, from Praia do Pintadinho, it is possible to see the mouth of the River Arade marked out by its moles, as well as the city of Portimão in the background.

-  There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from Ferragudo (roughly five kilometres from Lagoa), heading south for roughly three kilometres. There is a fairly large but disorganised parking area near the beach, which has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces west.





Praia do Vale da Azinhaga

This small sandy beach appears to the east of the headland of Ponta do Altar and is notable for its distinctive natural surroundings. The cliffs rise up at either end of the beach, dropping down almost to the level of the sand in the middle and forming a beautiful valley suspended above the present-day sea level. To the west is the high and almost straight line of cliffs that form the headland of Ponta do Altar, where enormous caves can be seen. On the line of the horizon, two isolated groups of rocks can be seen in the water, one smaller and closer to the beach and the other larger and further removed from the coast, with a large ledge covered with plants that have successfully adapted to the constant winds laden with the salt from the sea. This is the Leixão da Gaivota, designated a specially protected area for birds, under the scope of the Natura Network Initiative, because of its importance as a habitat for various sea birds. It is therefore a common sight to spot large colonies of shags on these rocks, who use the area as their preferred sleeping place in the winter. But it is also used as a sleeping and nesting place by egrets (cattle egrets and little egrets), this being a particularly rare case in Europe, since these birds are normally to be found nesting in trees on dry land.

-  The preferred means of access to the beach is either by boat or else on foot from Praia dos Caneiros at low tide. Trying to reach the beach from the cliffs is very difficult and is normally only managed with the help of the ropes placed there by the fishermen, so that this approach is not recommended for children or people with reduced mobility. There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from Ferragudo (roughly five kilometres from Lagoa), heading south for roughly three and a half kilometres to Ponta do Altar. There are no parking places in the area around the beach, except for a small parking area close to the lighthouse. The beach, which has no support facilities and is not supervised, faces south-west.



Praia dos Caneiros

This beach is a continuation of Praia do Vale da Azinhaga, and to the west of the beach it is still possible to see the lighthouse of Ponta do Altar and the Leixão da Gaivota. The beach is, however, much wider and longer than the previous one and is framed by high cliffs in which the most prominent features are the alternate strips of colour, with shades of ochre, pink and white. The rocky faces of these cliffs become smaller towards the centre of the beach and are intensely furrowed and eroded by the rainwater. At the foot of the cliff, the erosive action of the sea is quite visible, resulting in some impressive caves, severe undercutting and a whole host of nooks and crannies amongst the rocks. The remains of an earlier landslide are also quite visible along the eastern stretch of the beach, with many blocks of rocks already in the water and allowing for the colonisation of the area by the typical marine organisms of intertidal environments. At some points, the cliff has the appearance of having been "cemented", through a chemical reaction that involves the effects of calcite. These are areas of the rock that are grey in colour and are more resistant, and here they have been colonised by a great diversity of typical cliff plants: thyme, rock samphire, Mediterranean beach daisy, sea lavender, wormleaf saltwort and sea orach.

-  There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from Ferragudo (roughly five kilometres from Lagoa), heading south and following the signs to the beach over a distance of roughly three and a half kilometres. There is an organised parking area near the beach, which has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-west.





Carvoeiro

Praia do Carvoeiro and Praia do Paraíso

Carvoeiro, an old fishing village that has been converted into a cosmopolitan tourist centre, came into being through its association with a small and welcoming cove of calm water. The dazzlingly white village forms a natural amphitheatre with the surrounding cliffs and it has successfully taken advantage of the aesthetic work of time on the rocky faces of the cliffs to establish itself as the visual hallmark of the municipality in terms of tourism. The beautifully scenic cliffs are covered in green and filled with enormous caves. The fishermen's brightly-coloured boats share the beach with the bathers and are still taken out to sea for fishing purposes, although they are also used to take holidaymakers on fabulous tours of the sea caves. The footpaths and viewing points on top of the cliffs offer visitors some fantastic opportunities for walking and some magnificent views over the ocean. The beach is continued by the sunny central square, which forms an attractive space for social conviviality and shopping. It is a very popular beach, with lots of life and entertainment.

If you're in Carvoeiro, then we dare you to pay a visit to Praia do Paraíso, a small shell-shaped piece of sand that comes into view as you round the cliff marking the western end of Praia do Carvoeiro. This tiny beach nestles amongst some tall warm-coloured cliffs and is reached by walking down a narrow, winding set of steps.

 There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them.

 There is a tarmac road to the beach from Lagoa, heading south for roughly three and a half kilometres. There is an organised parking area near the beach, which has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. Praia do Paraíso is 1500 metres to the west of Carvoeiro and has a very small and organised car park, although the beach has no support facilities or supervision. The beach faces south-west.



Carvoeiro



Praia de Vale Centeanes

The beach is a large expanse of sand stretching westwards and flanked by imposing sheer cliffs, aesthetically sculpted by rainwater and seawater. On the rocky face of the cliff to the west, you can see that the base has already been severely undercut by the sea, while in the central section of the beach the front of the cliff is marked by a series of minuscule furrows along which the rainwater runs. A wide wooden footpath runs across the beach, accompanying a rocky ledge where the typical plants of the cliffs and some marine fossils are to be found. Walking is particularly favoured at this beach: a set of wooden steps takes you to the top of the cliff at the eastern end, covered by exuberant coastal scrubland and offering you a magnificent view over the coastline; snorkelling will help you to discover the secrets of marine life, from the characteristic animals of the intertidal environment (buckshot barnacles, mussels, limpets and sea anemones) that can be seen on the rocks to the shoals of common two-banded seabream, white seabream or sand smelts that can be seen swimming around the rock formations in the sea itself.

 There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them.

 There is a tarmac road to the beach from the lower end of Carvoeiro, heading east for roughly two kilometres. There is an organised parking area near the beach, which has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south/southwest.





Praia do Carvalho

The coastline forms a narrow V-shape, in the midst of which there nestles a small and welcoming patch of sand flanked by heavily eroded ochre cliffs. An attractive and enormous group of rocks marks the beach's central area and cuts the horizon into two. The cliffs maintain their great height all along the edge of the beach. Access to the sand is through a tunnel dug by hand out of the rocks, where you can see lots of marine fossils embedded in the walls. And it is not only the tunnel that was dug with great care and patience, but also a number of tasteful nooks and crannies, porticos and even a comfortable space for a bar in the face of the cliff itself. The gully before the beach is very lush and green and is home to thick coastal scrubland, with a predominance of juniper trees, mastic-trees and dwarf fan palms, the only palm-tree native to Europe. A great entanglement of lianas grow profusely over the shrubs, which are coloured with lichens in the rainy season. Growing in the limestone rock exposed to the salt spray from the sea are the typical cliff plants, such as sea lavender or the eye-catching Mediterranean beach daisy.

-  The beach is reached via an enormous set of stone steps, descending gently down the cliff face. There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from the lower end of Carvoeiro, heading east for roughly five kilometres. There is an organised parking area near the beach, which has no support facilities or supervision. The beach faces south.



Praia de Benagil



The beach appears at the bottom of a deep valley and is closely linked to the fishing harbour of Benagil. The fishing village that gave its name to the beach is placed higher up on the cliff top. Access to the beach brings you out into the area reserved for the fishing boats, which also take visitors on trips to see the sea caves and the isolated beaches of this region. Once you have passed by the brightly-coloured boats, the beach stretches eastwards as far as the imposing ochre-coloured cliff, carved out of carbonate rocks and very rich in marine fossils, also known locally as *concheiros*, which testify to a past time when the sea reached further inland and submerged the present-day coastline. These rocks are now highly sculpted and shaped by the joint action of the waves of the sea and the dissolving of the limestone rock caused by rainwater. In Benagil, it is possible to see the typical features of this type of highly eroded limestone landscape, such as caves and potholes in the face of the cliff.

-  There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from the EN 125, turning southwards at the Algarve International School and following the signs to the beach, roughly five and a half kilometres from the EN 125. There is a tiny parking area near the beach, which has some basic support facilities for fishing (restaurant). The beach, unsupervised for bathing purposes, faces south.





Praia da Marinha

A long but gently descending set of steps leads down into a small cove, and only by advancing to the line of the cliffs does the visitor manage to see the sand that stretches away westwards. The beach is surrounded by warm-coloured limestone cliffs, highly fissured and creviced and giving rise to a remarkable range of curiously shaped rock features: arches, caves, isolated rock formations and potholes (naturally formed shafts in the rocks that, in this case, can only be seen from the cliff top). There is also an impressive diversity of marine habitats: the rocky environments are home to sea anemones, sea urchins and starfish, shrimps, greater pipefish and shoals of white seabream, common two-banded seabream, rainbow wrasse or sand smelts. The most westerly area of sea grass along the Algarve's coastline conceals within it young fish and the curious octopus and cuttlefish. You can follow an underwater nature trail here, accessible either to snorkellers or those with their own diving suits. When you're back on dry land, allow yourself to be seduced by the fields of orchids that grow here in the spring, visible around the picnic area at the top of the cliff.

-  There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from the EN 125, turning southwards at the Algarve International School and following the signs to the beach, roughly four and a half kilometres from the EN 125. There is a fairly large and organised parking area near the beach, which has some basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south.



Praia da Albandeira

The path to the beach takes you through fields filled with the typical shrubs of the Algarve's "barrocal" region, with an abundance of sweet-smelling carob-trees. Closer to the sea grow the exuberant plants normally found in coastal scrubland areas, with juniper-trees and the typical species that grow on cliffs, such as rock samphire, wormleaf saltwort, sea orach and the eye-catching Mediterranean beach daisy, forming a patch of green that surrounds the whole beach. The beach itself is a small stretch of sand and is divided by a rocky outcrop giving rise to various sheltered nooks and crannies, almost always taken advantage of by the bathers, as well as some beautiful natural swimming-pools. On the cliffs around the beach, it is possible to see the way in which the sea has shaped the rocks, resulting in enormous undercut slopes and caves. The typical eroded limestone landscape of this stretch of coastline, with its caves, underground galleries and raised rocky ledges full of cavities, provides the perfect habitat for all kinds of different animals, especially bats and seabirds. Herring-gulls, black-headed gulls, kestrels, swifts and shags can easily be spotted in this landscape.

-  There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from the EN 125, turning southwards at the Algarve International School and following the signs to the beach, roughly six kilometres from the EN 125. There is a fairly large and organised parking area near the beach, which has a restaurant, but is not supervised. The beach faces south.



Praia Nova



The beach appears to the west of the Capela de Nossa Senhora da Rocha, a chapel built on a very narrow promontory jutting out from the rest of the coast and affording a magnificent panoramic view over the different coastal landscapes. The beach is a large expanse of sand, roughly 300 metres long, bordered by a continuous line of red and ochre cliffs where you can see remains of earlier landslides that have resulted in the formation of tiers in the cliff face. These terraces are covered with profuse vegetation that has adapted to the salt spray from the sea, such as wormleaf saltwort, sea orach and shrubby seablite, plants that have also colonised the saline soils of the salt-marshes. The beach is reached via a set of fairly steep steps that run down the slope from the cliff top, emerging roughly in the middle, or else through a tunnel painstakingly dug out of the cliffs by hand, passing through the whole of the rocky headland of Senhora da Rocha, over a distance of roughly 60 metres. In the walls of the tunnel, at those points where the light reaches, you can see countless marine fossils embedded in the rock. At the other end of the tunnel is Praia da Senhora da Rocha.

-  The set of steps leading down to the beach is roughly 200 metres from the parking area on the promontory of Senhora da Rocha. To reach the beach by tunnel, you have to make your way down onto the neighbouring Praia da Senhora da Rocha. There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from the EN 125, turning southwards at Porches and following the signs to Senhora da Rocha, roughly four and a half kilometres from Porches. There is a fairly large and organised parking area near the beach, which has no support facilities and is not supervised. The beach faces south-east.



Praia da Senhora da Rocha



This very welcoming beach is associated with the fishing harbour of Senhora da Rocha, so that the sand is shared with the fishing boats, the various fishing equipment (especially the octopus pots) and the fishermen's huts. At the request of holidaymakers, the same boats are also used for taking people to visit the region's sea caves, where you will find a fascinating interplay of light and colour, as well as isolated beaches that are only accessible by sea. The beach is marked out to the east by the line of cliffs, where it is possible to see various potholes, and to the west by the prominent promontory of Senhora da Rocha, from where you can see the whole of the coastline all the way to Albufeira. The beach is surrounded by a patch of deep green, with junipers, wild olive-trees and mastic-trees, over which there grows a great profusion of lianas. On the cliff face, it is common to see the typical plants of these saline environments, as well as the countless birds that seek shelter here: shags, kestrels, black-headed gulls, herring-gulls and swifts.

-  The beach is roughly 150 metres from the parking area on the promontory of Senhora da Rocha. There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from the EN 125, turning southwards at Porches and following the signs to Senhora da Rocha, roughly four and a half kilometres from Porches. There is a fairly large and organised parking area near the promontory of Nossa Senhora da Rocha, although parking is limited and subject to special restrictions near the beach. The beach, which has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season, is classified as an accessible beach and faces south.





Praia da Cova Redonda

In order to reach the beach, you have to make your way down a long set of gently descending steps paved in the Portuguese style and bordered by lots of vegetation on either side: pine-trees, mastic-trees and Spanish broom. The bay in which the beach nestles is not a large one, but the space is full of sheltered nooks and crannies provided by the warm-coloured, sinuous and jagged rock formations. The shapes that have been formed in the cliffs by the erosion and wearing away of the rocks are quite extraordinary. In some places, amongst the furrows of the cliffs, are some greyish areas where the rock almost appears to have been “cemented”. These are more resistant rocks that have been colonised by a great diversity of typical cliff plants: thyme, rock samphire, Mediterranean beach daisy, sea lavender, wormleaf saltwort and sea orach. An isolated rock formation with a shape that is reminiscent of an enormous ship can be seen to the east. These groups of rocks have withstood the effects of erosion, while the rest of the coastline has retreated much more quickly. Providing an ideal habitat for countless seabirds, these rocks are of great interest for nature conservation.

-  There is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from the EN 125, turning southwards at Porches and following the signs to the beach, roughly four kilometres from Porches. There is a very small but organised parking area roughly 200 metres from the beach, which has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south.



Praia de Vale do Olival and Praia dos Beijinhos

Although it is situated at the western end of the sandy bay of Armação de Pera, the beach of Vale do Olival is still contained within an area of rocks marked by the effects of erosion. The cliff surrounding the beach is highly furrowed, revealing the existence of trickles of rainwater, around which dense vegetation has begun to grow in the form of reeds and tamarisks.

To the west, the rocky faces of the cliffs rise up and there is a footpath along their top leading to the neighbouring Praia dos Beijinhos, although due care must always be taken when walking close to the cliff edge. The path is bordered by the typical coastal vegetation and affords some fantastic views over the ocean. Another remarkable feature is the profusion of rock formations sculpted by the effects of freshwater and saltwater: isolated groups of rocks, arches and potholes are the distinctive marks of this stretch of coastline. At Praia dos Beijinhos, a set of steps bordered on either side by aromatic thyme plants and the eye-catching sweet alyssum run down the cliff face to the small and welcoming beach, where two enormous isolated groups of rocks, separated only by a narrow gap, interrupt the line of the horizon. These rocky walls overlooking the sea are the chosen habitat of many seabirds.

-  Praia dos Beijinhos can only be reached on foot across Praia de Vale do Olival. Traffic on the cliff top is highly restricted, in order to prevent further destabilisation of the cliff. On the beach, there is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, so that care should be taken when walking close to them.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from the EN 125, turning southwards at Porches and following the signs to Armação de Pera, roughly five kilometres from Porches. There is a fairly large but disorganised parking area near the beach, which has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season, although this only applies to Praia de Vale do Olival. The beach faces south/south-east.



Silves





Silves.

The municipality consists of essentially hilly terrain, with important historical and cultural features and a diversified natural landscape that offers tourists other possibilities than simply sunbathing on the beach. But Silves, an inland city that stands proudly overlooking a broad fertile, farming valley, has long enjoyed an excellent form of communication with the coastline via the River Arade, which once functioned as an important means of maintaining contact and an outlet for its trade. It is currently the second largest municipality in the Algarve in terms of its surface area, although the coastal strip that it occupies is relatively small, amounting to roughly five kilometres in length. Nonetheless, this area includes two of the Algarve's most famous beaches: Armação de Pêra, a well-known urban

centre for tourists, and Praia Grande, noted for its natural landscape and its habitats of great ecological value, which are home to some very interesting species of flora and fauna. The stretch of coast belonging to the municipality of Silves occupies a special area in the context of the Algarve's western region: the large bay of Armação de Pêra. Here, the typical rocky coastline is interrupted to give way to one of the rare long expanses of sand in this region, forming a continuous beach that stretches over more than six kilometres and is bordered by an immense line of sand dunes and wetlands of great importance for water birds, not only those that live here all year round, but also the migratory birds that stop off here on their way to different places.

Praia de Armação de Pêra



The western end of the beach is marked by the jagged limestone cliffs that are a typical feature of the Algarve's western region. To the east, however, is the beginning of a large sandy bay, as well as the tourist resort of Armação de Pêra, which provides all kinds of important services for beachgoers. A promenade runs along the beach by the sea with areas of gardens and many sun-drenched outdoor cafés and restaurants where you can stop for a drink or a meal. To the east of the beach, doing justice to the longstanding fishing traditions of Armação de Pêra, the beach is full of brightly-coloured fishing boats and huts where the fishing equipment is stored. The beach's name derives from the fact that this is the place where the fishermen from the village of Pêra (situated further inland to the east of the beach) used to prepare the "armação" (fishing equipment and nets), which was the very basis of their subsistence. Once you have passed the fishermen's beach, the evidence of the human presence in the area gradually disappears and the horizon opens up before you. What you now see are never-ending dunes stretching into the distance and the wetland that is formed at the mouth of the Ribeira de Alcantarilha, with its typical vegetation and countless water birds, such as the enormous grey heron or the small and tireless plovers.

-  The beach can be reached on foot through the town of Armação de Pêra (signposted on the EN 125). There is ample but disorganised parking space at each end of the beach. Various facilities are provided (restaurants and toilets) and the beach is supervised in the bathing season. This is classified as an accessible beach and it faces south/south-west.





Praia Grande

The beach and sand dunes at Praia Grande stretch over more than two kilometres of open countryside, without any signs of human presence. Two wetland areas mark out the perimeter of the beach: the marshland of Alcantarilha to the west and Lagoa de Salgados to the east, this latter area being an internationally famous lagoon for watching water birds since it is home to important populations of different species, such as the elegant black-winged stilt or the emblematic purple gallinule. The system of sand dunes is a robust one here, reaching widths of up to 300 metres, where there is a predominance of aromatic plant species, such as the helichrysum with its typical curry-like smell. In the central area of the beach, there is a wooden pathway and bridge offering a delightful panoramic view over the area, and once you have crossed over it you can observe arenites (ancient dunes that are more than 3000 years old and have now become fossilised) and the eye-catching prickly thurst. When you stand on the beach close to the mouth of the Ribeira de Alcantarilha, you will see some rock formations that correspond to ancient beaches that have since been transformed into stone. On the other side of the immense sand dune is a farmland area, consisting essentially of wheat fields and dryland orchards, now semi-abandoned, where there is no shortage of old mills and hydraulic irrigation devices.

-  There is a nature trail running along the beach and through the fields, offering you the chance to discover the various habitats of the area.
-  There is a tarmac road leading to the beach from the village of Pêra (close to the EN 125). After one and a half kilometres, the road turns into a dirt track for roughly 2 kilometres, heading both westwards and to the central area of the beach. The eastern end of the beach can only be reached on foot either across the sand or from the neighbouring Praia dos Salgados. There is a fairly large but disorganised parking area in the centre of the beach area and at the western end. There are some support facilities provided (restaurants and toilets) and the beach is supervised in the bathing season. The beach faces south-west.



Albufeira





Albufeira.

The city of Albufeira was known by the Arabs as the “castle of the sea” (Al-Buhera was its name in the 8th century), because of its lofty position overlooking the sea and its appearance of a natural amphitheatre. Remaining from the period of the region’s Moorish occupation are its narrow streets, the old castle and the very white houses with their arches. What remains from the city’s longstanding fishing tradition and its prosperous fish export industry is Praia dos Pescadores (the fishermen’s beach), with its brightly-coloured boats that are today used for taking tourists to see the fabulous caves along the coast. Nowadays, Albufeira and its municipality are one of the country’s main tourist centres, with roughly thirty kilometres

of coastline and over twenty beaches, all of them very different from one another, not only in terms of their natural setting but also in terms of their use and occupation and the different facilities and amenities that they offer to tourists. Although the municipality’s tourist facilities and its nightlife are perhaps the most famous in the Algarve, these continue to exist alongside another reality: that of peaceful villages where traditional handicrafts are still practised, such as the manufacture of the hand-painted decorative tiles known as azulejos, copper articles or rugs and mats made from esparto grass, surrounded by dryland orchards with almond trees in blossom and brightly-coloured orange groves.

Praia dos Salgados



The beach is a continuation of Praia Grande to the east of Lagoa dos Salgados, the lagoon that is formed at the very end of the Ribeira de Espiche. To reach the beach, you have to pass through a tourist development linked to the golf course along the shores of the lagoon, walking down an avenue flanked by tall palm-trees. The area close to the beach still remains in its natural state: to the west are the robust sand dunes of Praia Grande and the broad mirror-like surface of the lagoon, surrounded by thick vegetation where coots in particular and sometimes shags can be seen fishing; to the east are sand dunes stretching into the distance, now much lower but just as abundant in flora and fauna. The beach is a vast expanse of sand with some very quiet and peaceful areas. Crossing over the area around the mouth of the Ribeira de Espiche, which communicates sporadically with the sea, you can follow the Praia Grande nature trail, which allows you to discover the flora and fauna of the sand dunes and Lagoa dos Salgados.

-  Lagoa dos Salgados is not suitable either for bathing or for water sports.
-  At Vale de Parra on the road between Albufeira and Pêra (EM 526), there is a tarmac road signposted to the beach roughly 2 kilometres away. There is a fairly large and organised car park near the beach, which has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach is classified as an accessible beach and faces south-west.



Praia da Galé Oeste and Praia da Galé Leste

Praia da Galé lies at the eastern end of the wide sandy bay of Armação de Pêra. On this beach, the characteristic rock formations of the Algarve's Barlavento or western region emerge once again from the sand, providing small coves, nooks and crannies, and above all shelter for bathers, especially at the eastern end, with the western end being more exposed. These warm-coloured carbonate rocks are very rich in marine fossils, known as *concheiros*, testifying to a distant past when the sea reached further inland, submerging the present-day coastline. Nowadays, these rocks have been heavily sculpted by rainwater and polished by the sea, and are covered with plants that have adapted to the salt spray from the sea, such as wormleaf saltwort, known for its high content of sodium carbonate (since it extracts sodium from saline terrain), and are therefore used in the manufacture of soap. In the areas where the sand has accumulated more heavily, mainly at the western end of the beach, the typical vegetation of sand dunes can be seen, such as European beachgrass, prickly thrift and the aromatic helichrysum, providing a continuation of the sand-dune system of Praia dos Salgados and Praia Grande. To the east, the dominant feature is the rock formations, and there is an area of stone pines on the top of the orange-coloured cliff.

-  There is a tarmac road signposted to the beach from the road connecting Guia to Galé. There is a fairly large but disorganised parking area at Galé Oeste, 200 metres from the beach, and a large but organised car park at Galé Leste, 100 metres from the beach, as well as a very small parking area near the beach itself. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season, both at Galé Oeste and at Galé Leste. Galé Leste is classified as an accessible beach. The beach faces south-west.



Galé Leste

Praia do Manuel Lourenço

This area of sand is smaller than the beaches to the west, but it is a very diversified area because of the many recesses and shelters provided by its sinuous and jagged rock formations. The shapes formed by these rocks are quite unusual, especially to the west, originating from the corrosion and wear and tear that they have suffered over the years. To the east is an intricately shaped platform of rocks, where, at low tide, it is possible to observe marine life in the intertidal environment. Snorkelling is also recommended amongst the submerged rocks. The landscape is dominated by warm colours, softened by the green of the pine trees and mastic-trees that surround the beach. On the cliff, but out of reach of the tides, are aromatic plants such as thyme and helichrysum, whilst on the beach are sea orach and wormleaf saltwort, plants that are resistant to salt spray and grow in abundance here. An occasional stream flows onto the beach in the rainy season, so that the vegetation is thicker in this area. Green is the predominant colour of the area surrounding the beach, which has been planted with species that are native to the region.

-  The beach is reached by walking down some wooden steps or down a wooden ramp.
-  There is a tarmac road signposted to the beach from the road between Guia and Galé. There is a fairly large and organised car park 100 metres from the beach, as well as a very small and restricted parking area nearer to the beach. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. It is classified as an accessible beach and faces south/south-west.



Galé Oeste



Praia do Evaristo



This is a small and essentially rocky beach, nestling between low and aesthetically shaped cliffs. Enormous blocks of rocks are scattered around the sand and under the water and the smell of the sea is intense here. The hot dry sand is backed by areas covered in plants and trees, especially stone pines, mastic-trees and enormous aloes. Closer to the sand, the predominant plant is the wormleaf saltwort, which is resistant to salt spray. It is possible to walk eastwards along the cliff top, observing the curious landscapes produced by these rock formations, intensely sculpted and fissured by the elements. Snorkelling is recommended among the underwater rocks, where you can observe the marine life of the region, ranging from the fish and animals typically found in intertidal environments (buckshot barnacles, mussels, limpets and sea anemones), and which are visible on the faces of the rocks, to the shoals of common two-banded seabreams, white seabreams or sand smelts, which swim in and out of the rocks.

-  The beach is reached by walking down some wooden steps or down a wooden ramp.
-  There is a tarmac road signposted to the beach from the road between Guia and Galé. There is a disorganised parking area, but the beach has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south/south-west.



Praia do Castelo



Praia do Castelo is backed by high cliffs that dominate the landscape. The sandy beach nestles between these imposing rocky walls and is full of hidden nooks and crannies and small creeks. At the eastern end of the beach is a scenic rock formation that is reminiscent of an enormous castle, hence the name of the beach. It is a small and jagged promontory with groups of rocks that are more resistant to erosion, while the remainder of the coastline is being driven back more rapidly. The area surrounding the beach is dominated by the deep green of a wood of stone pines. On the flat top of the different groups of rocks, green is also the predominant colour, this time consisting of plants that have adapted to the marine environment, such as wormleaf saltwort, sea orach and rock samphire. Various sea birds, such as kestrels or shags, appreciate these places that are inaccessible to predators, for they find shelter and refuge here. This area is ideal for clifftop walks, giving you the chance to observe the graceful shapes carved out of the rocks by erosion.

-  The beach is reached by walking down some wooden steps or down a wooden ramp. Traffic is strictly controlled on the cliff top in order to minimise destabilisation of the cliff. When you're on the beach, particular care is recommended when walking near the cliffs because of the possibility of falling stones or rocks.
-  There is a tarmac road signposted to the beach from the road between Guia and Galé. There is a disorganised parking area 600 metres from the beach. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south/south-west.



Praia da Coelha



The beach is reached by a footpath that passes through farmland, where you can see olive-trees and carob-trees that look to be centuries old. As you draw nearer the sea, the typical coastal scrubland begins to appear, with junipers, kermes oaks, mastic trees and dwarf fan palms, the only palm tree that is native to Europe, entangled in lianas and coloured with lichens. The vegetation grows thicker around the stream that flows along a narrow gully. Once on the beach, visitors will find themselves in a small cove protected by high rocky walls, with the Alto da Coelha to the east. Various marine fossils can be seen in the warm-coloured cliffs, as well as severe undercutting at their base and galleries that have been caused by the erosive action of the sea on the limestone rocks. At the western end of the beach, there is evidence of a major landslide. Once again, you will feel like walking along the cliff top, for the area around the beach still preserves much of its original rich vegetation and the different formations sculpted and worn out of the rock by time and the elements are quite fascinating.

-  The beach is reached by walking down some wooden steps or down a wooden ramp. Since there is a possibility of stones falling from the cliffs, care is recommended when walking below them.
-  There is a tarmac road signposted to the beach from the road between Guia and Galé. There is a small but organised car park 400 metres from the beach. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south/south-west.



Praia de São Rafael



This is a large sandy beach set amidst warm-coloured limestone cliffs, full of furrows and crevices. On this beach, there is a wide diversity of very curiously shaped rocks, for example the *Ponte Pequena* (small bridge) and *Ninho das Andorinhas* (swallows' nest): arches, undercutting at the base of the cliffs, potholes and isolated groups of rocks, shapes and forms resulting from the combined action of the mechanical force of the waves on the cliffs and of the rainwater which dissolves the limestone. In the area around the beach are green patches of pinewoods and enormous mastic trees, hanging over the deeply furrowed and fissured cliff tops. On the sand and exposed to the marine environment is an abundance of sea orachs, a plant that, so to speak, transpires salt, it being possible in the morning or early evening to see salt crystals glittering on its leaves. When the water is sufficiently clear, you can see the mysterious outlines of the submerged rocks, so that a little snorkelling is recommended to discover the abundant marine life in this section of the coast.

-  The beach is reached by walking down some wooden steps or down a wooden ramp. Traffic is strictly controlled on the cliff top in order to minimise destabilisation of the cliff. When you're on the beach, particular care is recommended when walking near the cliffs because of the possibility of falling stones or rocks.
-  There is a tarmac road signposted to the beach from the road between Guia and Galé. The beach has a fairly large and organised car park and basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets), as well as being supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south.





Praia dos Arrifes

This small cove is sheltered by low and intensely sculpted rocks, amongst which can be seen potholes, arches and countless galleries in the faces of the rocks, eroded and worn away by time and the elements. Three enormous isolated rocks, clearly disproportionate in relation to the size of the beach, dominate the line of the horizon, giving bathers the illusion that they are swimming in an enormous rock pool. This is why the beach is known locally as *Praia dos Três Penecos* (the beach of the three rock formations). All of these rocks are highly sculpted, with the central group and the one closest to the beach forming a curious window shape at the top. Plants that are resistant to salt spray, such as wormleaf saltwort and rock samphire, manage to grow on the rocks, although they remain above the high tide line. The area around the beach is covered by a patch of pines, and the dwarf fan palm, the only palm-tree that is native to Europe, can be seen in the undergrowth.

-  The beach is reached by walking down some wooden steps. Traffic is strictly controlled on the cliff top in order to minimise destabilisation of the cliff. When you're on the beach, particular care is recommended when walking near the cliffs because of the possibility of falling stones or rocks.
-  There is a tarmac road signposted to the beach from the village of São Rafael. The beach has a fairly large but disorganised parking area and basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets), as well as being supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south.



Praia do Túnel (Peneco)

This is the first beach to the east of Albufeira Marina and is situated in the midst of an urban area, in the old centre of Albufeira. The beach is reached through a tunnel dug out of the limestone cliff and situated amidst the narrow streets of the tourist centre, where there are all kinds of bars, handicraft shops and sun-filled squares. The tunnel leads onto an enormous balcony overlooking the beach, with outdoor cafés where you can sit and contemplate the sea. To the west are the moles of the marina and the high cliff, on the top of which is a line of very white houses, with a viewing point that offers you a fantastic panorama over the beaches of Albufeira and from where there is an enormous staircase leading down to the sand below. At the foot of this cliff is a footpath that takes you round the mass of rocks towards the marina, although you must pay careful attention to the cliff face in view of the possibility of falling stones. An enormous rock has remained isolated in the middle of the beach, resisting the general erosion of the cliff and representing the most distinctive feature of the beach, since these rock formations are known locally as "penecos". This is an urban beach and is very popular.

-  Care is recommended when walking near the cliffs because of the possibility of falling stones or rocks.
-  The beach is reached on foot from the old centre of Albufeira, or from the viewing point in the western part of the city. There is organised car parking nearby. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south.



Praia dos Pescadores

Praia dos Pescadores is a continuation of Praia do Peneco, being situated in a lower area where there is a break in the cliffs and bordered to the east by the quay. Doing full justice to Albufeira's longstanding fishing traditions, this beach is largely reserved for the brightly coloured and highly decorated fishing boats, although there are also many boats setting off from here to show the tourists the region's caves and potholes. The bathing area is thus limited to the western part of the beach. The surrounding area is entirely urban: Albufeira is arranged in the shape of an amphitheatre overlooking the sea and the foundations of the brilliant white houses seem to blend into the rock out of which the cliffs have been carved. The vegetation cuts the yellow tones of the cliff walls and is composed of the typical plants of these marine environments, especially sea orachs and wormleaf saltworts, which grow profusely in the crevices. Behind the beach is a large shopping area with countless bars and restaurants. The beach can get very crowded, because of its urban nature and its use as a fishing harbour.

-  There is a tarmac road leading to the beach through the city of Albufeira, or it can be reached on foot from the city centre. There is a large and organised parking area nearby. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-west.



Praia do Inatel

The beach owes its name to the Inatel complex, which is situated at the eastern end of the sand on a kind of rocky balcony overlooking the sea. The beach is a long stretch of sand flanked by a continuous line of steep cliffs, where there is an abundance of wormleaf saltwort and sea orach, plant species that have adapted to the saline conditions of these marine environments. There is a footpath along the top of these cliffs with a number of points where you can stop and enjoy a view over the beaches and the brilliant white houses of Albufeira. To the west is the quay of Praia dos Pescadores and the town is laid out in the form of an amphitheatre facing the sea; to the east is the enormous Inatel building that dominates the landscape, next to which are some rock formations that crop out in the sand itself. This is an urban beach, which means that it can get very crowded.

-  Care is recommended when walking near the cliffs because of the possibility of falling stones or rocks.
-  There is a tarmac road leading to the beach through the city of Albufeira, or it can be reached on foot from the city centre. There is an organised parking area near the beach, which has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-west.



Praia dos Alemães



This beach continues to the east of Praia do Inatel. In the period when the canning industry was flourishing in the city, the present-day Inatel building was a factory belonging to a German family, so that the vast expanse of sand adjacent to it was given the name of *Alemães* (Germans). When Inatel became installed here, the stretch of sand to the west of the building was given the name of this organisation and the rest of the beach remained with the old name. Praia dos Alemães has more natural surroundings than the beaches to the west, for here there is less pressure from the urbanisation of the area, the cliffs are lower in height and they lose the more rectilinear shape of the central part of Albufeira, taking on more gentle contours and forming a number of nooks and crannies. The cliff is interrupted by the frequent lines caused by the trickling of rainwater, which has sculpted the rock as it passed through. There are patches here and there of stone pines and enormous mastic trees along the cliff top. Closer to the sand, there are frequent clumps of sea orachs, and reed beds have developed around the streams.

 Care is recommended when walking near the cliffs because of the possibility of falling stones or rocks.

 There is a tarmac road leading to the beach through the city of Albufeira (follow the signs to Inatel or Forte de São João), or it can be reached on foot from the city centre. There is an organised parking area near the beach, which has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-west.



Praia dos Aveiros



The beach begins immediately after the rocky massif that marks out the eastern edge of the bay of Albufeira, and, looking away from this to the east, you have a panoramic view of the coastline as far as Vilamoura. It is a small sandy beach, nestling between cliffs and with several rock formations along the shore marking out the bathing area. The cliffs have been heavily eroded by the elements, and a stroll westwards along the platform of rocks at their foot stretching to the beach in front of the Forte de São João shows a profusion of undercutting, galleries and potholes. A small stream flows onto the beach in the rainy season, with reed beds and a line of poplars growing along its banks. There is abundant vegetation in the area around the beach, ranging from the typical plants that have adapted to the salt of the sea, such as the sea orach and wormleaf saltwort, to the plants that grow in the scrubland of the region's clay soil, such as the dwarf fan palm, the only palm-tree that is native to Europe. The landscape is dotted with the enormous aloes that have been planted here in a vain attempt to prevent the cliffs from crumbling.

 Care is recommended when walking near the cliffs because of the possibility of falling stones or rocks.

 There is a tarmac road leading to the beach through Areias de São João. There is an organised car park 200 metres from the beach and a tiny and restricted parking area near the beach itself. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-east.



Praia da Oura Poente and Nascente

This is a vast and highly diversified expanse of sand: to the west, there is a predominance of tourist amenities with the beach being framed by an urban development, while to the east the beach gradually becomes more natural leading to the Pedra dos Bicos, a jagged rock formation that marks the eastern end of Praia da Oura, where it is possible to bathe in complete peace and tranquillity. The western end of the beach can therefore be reached through the town itself: after passing through the streets and small squares full of sun-drenched outdoor cafés and restaurants, visitors arrive at a sandy beach framed by relatively low but aesthetically shaped cliffs. The eastern end of the beach can also be reached on foot through Areias de São João or through the tourist development at its far end by climbing down a huge and steep set of wooden steps, running down one of the cliff's many gullies filled with dense and cooling patches of stone pines. There are various tourist amenities at the beach, but, if you walk further east, it becomes less crowded and more peaceful, and you can reach a small isolated cove by walking past the Pedra dos Bicos. The surrounding area is characterised by the warm colours of the sand and cliffs – yellow, orange and ochre – softened only by the deep green of the stone pines.

 Care is recommended when walking near the cliffs because of the possibility of falling stones or rocks

 There is a tarmac road leading to the beach through Areias de São João. The parking areas are very small, except for the paid car park (large and well organised) in the centre of the beach. The beach has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-east.



Oura Nascente



Oura Poente and Nascente

Praia de Santa Eulália

In Santa Eulália, the blue of the sea and the bright colours of the sand blend harmoniously with the cool green surroundings of the pinewoods that frame the beach. The deeply orange cliffs are low and greatly furrowed by the rainwater, interrupted here and there by deep gullies. The stone pines form a dense wood at the top of the cliffs and seem to balance precariously overhanging the small precipices resulting from the crumbling away of the edges. Seen from the beach, the cliffs have been worn away and highly polished by the action of the waves and the stream that flows onto the sand in the rainy season, on the banks of which a thick reed bed has developed. The beach is quite large and has a number of pleasant little nooks and crannies provided by the various rock formations. There is a small promenade along the central part of the beach, lined by tall palm trees. To the east, you can see the continuous line of red and white cliffs that provide the backdrop to Praia da Falésia.

 Care is recommended when walking near the cliffs because of the possibility of falling stones or rocks.

 There is a tarmac road signposted to the beach off the road between Areias de São João and Olhos d'Água. There is a fairly large and organised car park. The beach has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-east.





Praia da Maria Luísa

The walk to the beach takes you through the surrounding tourist development, along a valley of dense vegetation, down which there flows a fast moving stream. This is a cool gully, flanked by a row of bougainvilleas and some ancient stone pines and cork trees. The beach is backed by a patch of pine trees, growing denser in the various gullies, while the plants that predominate on the sand itself are rock samphire and wormleaf saltwort, both of which are resistant to the salt spray from the sea. The beach is fairly large, framed by warm-coloured cliffs, polished at the bottom by the action of the sea and furrowed at the top by the rain. Highly eroded by the elements, these rock formations offer visitors the shelter of a number of nooks and crannies, as well as the possibility of observing some curious shapes resulting in such features as potholes and arches. Quite remarkable are the remains of one enormous pothole that has formed at the eastern end of the beach and is reminiscent of a house with an arched doorway, where one of the walls and the roof are missing. The beach is fairly large, stretching over roughly a kilometre.

-  Care is recommended when walking near the cliffs because of the possibility of falling stones or rocks.
-  There is a tarmac road signposted to the beach off the road between Areias de São João and Olhos d'Água. There is a tiny but organised car park 300 metres from the beach. Both access to the beach by road and parking are restricted here. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach is classified as an accessible beach and faces south.



Praia dos Olhos d'Água



The beach is contained within the picturesque village of Olhos d'Água. The local fishermen continue to occupy the eastern end of the beach with their fishing boats and loading ramp. The famous freshwater springs in the sand gave both the beach and the village their name (*olhos d'água*). These are visible by the shoreline at low tide. But Olhos d'Água is also noted for its limestone cliffs, since, for those coming from the east, this is the first beach where, for example, you can observe marine life between tides: limpets, topshells, buckshot barnacles, sea anemones and brightly coloured seaweed. The jagged rock formations give rise to isolated groups of rocks, undercutting, arches, cavities and small sheltered coves, especially at the western end of the beach. Because of its urban and tourist nature, this is a very popular beach and there is a central square with outdoor cafés and restaurants where you can sit and contemplate the sea, as well as a small promenade along the seafront, lined by palm-trees.

-  Care is recommended when walking near the cliffs because of the possibility of falling stones or rocks.
-  There is a tarmac road through the village of Olhos d'Água, which is signposted both from Albufeira and on the EN 125. There is a tiny but organised car park near the beach. The beach has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south.





Praia do Barranco das Belharucas

After this beach, the jagged limestone coastline of the Algarve's western Barlavento region gives way to softer cliffs, carved out of sand and clay that stretch all the way to the municipality of Loulé. It is recommended that you make your way to the beach on foot, both because it is a pleasant walk and because the road is unsuitable for vehicles. The path leading to the beach is a winding one and takes you along a gully carved out of the ochre cliffs, filled with exuberant leafy vegetation. The sides of the cliffs are full of grooves made by the trickling of rainwater, giving rise to some deep, sinuous and exquisitely sculpted furrows. The vegetation, especially the stone pines and the typical plants of the coastal scrubland, such as juniper, is sometimes to be seen hanging over the edge of small precipices created by the crumbling of the earth, exposing their intricately tangled roots. Many birds frequent the woodland and some build themselves shelters and nests in the rocks of the cliffs. This is the case, for example, with the brightly-coloured bee-eaters (*abelharucos*) that have given their name to the beach. It is a fairly large and spacious beach, particularly to the east, stretching all the way to Praia da Falésia.

 The road leading to the beach is a dirt track covering a distance of 500 metres, but this can frequently become impassable in the rainy season as it occupies the bed of a fast flowing stream. It is possible to drive to the west mole of Vilamoura Marina and then walk over the sand to the eastern end over a distance of roughly five and a half kilometres.

 There is a tarmac road signposted to the beach off the road between Olhos d'Água and Aldeia das Açoteias. There is a fairly large parking area near the beach, which has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-west.



Praia da Falésia

This beach is extremely vast and stretches eastwards over more than three kilometres, backed by a continuous line of high cliffs with the typical colours of this region, either deep ochre or brilliant white, which create interesting contrasts of colour with the green patches of stone pines overlooking the beach. At the western end, the cliff is high but very soft, being carved out of sand and clay, so that the rain has no difficulty in creating deeply grooved sinuous patterns and furrows down its face. To the east, the cliff becomes gradually lower, but remains highly sculpted by the elements. It is the wearing away of this rock that produces the sand that forms the beach. It is therefore possible to see small cones of sand at the foot of these cliffs, on which the typical plants of dune areas can be found growing: sea daffodils, sea bindweed, prickly thrift, Cretan trefoil and sea holly. These eye-catching and brightly-coloured species mix together with the typical vegetation of the cliffs, which are more monotonous in colour, consisting here mainly of sea orachs. The beach is a spacious one and has some very peaceful spots. All you have to do is walk a short distance.

 The beach is reached on foot down a set of wooden steps and a wooden ramp, both at the western and eastern ends.

 There is a tarmac road to the beach through Aldeia das Açoteias. There is a fairly large parking area at the western end and a smaller parking area 250 metres from the beach at the eastern end. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-west.



Praia da Rocha Baixinha and Rocha Baixinha Poente

Doing justice to the name of the beach (*Praia da Rocha Baixinha* literally means the Beach of the Low Rock), the ochre-coloured cliffs of Praia da Falésia gradually become lower and give way to ridges of sand dunes on which there grow the typical plants of sandy areas, such as sea holly, sea medick and sea daffodils. Tourist developments also give way briefly to the farmland of the valley of the Ribeira de Quarteira, which has already earned Praia da Rocha Baixinha the suggestive name of Praia dos Tomates (Tomato Beach). The road to the beach takes you through cultivated fields, past greenhouses and grazing flocks of sheep and goats, as well as past some more ancient traces of the earlier agricultural exploitation of the valley, such as norias. Between the beach and this broad open valley are some deeply furrowed ochre rock formations, where thick patches of pines blend together with groves of age-old olive-trees, carob-trees and cork-oaks. There is a great abundance of animals in this woodland: rabbits, foxes and many different kinds of birds, such as the typical hoopoes, find food and shelter in this region. The beach is fairly large, and to the east it is already possible to see the moles of Vilamoura Marina.

-  There is a tarmac road signposted to the beach running through Aldeia das Açoteias. After three kilometres, the tarmac road turns into a dirt track, continuing for roughly one kilometre to Praia da Rocha Baixinha Poente and one and a half kilometres to Praia da Rocha Baixinha. There is a fairly large parking area providing access to Praia da Rocha Baixinha Poente, and a slightly smaller car park near the central part of the beach. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-west.



Rocha Baixinha Poente



Rocha Baixinha

Praia da Rocha Baixinha Nascente

This is a fairly large sandy beach, marked out to the east by the moles of the Ribeira de Quarteira and Vilamoura Marina. The soft ochre cliffs disappear under sand and give way to a broad system of sand dunes, with a very diversified flora, which can be observed from the network of raised wooden footpaths crossing over the dunes and the sandy beach. The dunes here are protected at their front by guards, who prevent people from treading on the vegetation, thus allowing certain pioneering plants to spread profusely across the area, in particular those that help to keep the sand in one place and maintain the height of the tops of the sand dunes. Further inland from the dunes, around the end section of the Ribeira de Quarteira, is an extensive floodplain with reed beds (Caniçal de Vilamoura) and the Vilamoura Environmental Park, places that are noted for their great diversity of water birds, both those that live permanently in the area and those that stop off here in the course of their migratory flights to other places. It is therefore possible to follow some nature trails in the area and observe species such as grey herons, purple herons, purple gallinules and even mammals such as the otter, close to the mouth of the river.

-  The beach can be reached through Aldeia das Açoteias, following the signposts to Praia da Rocha Baixinha. After three kilometres along a tarmac road, access to the beach continues along a dirt track for roughly two kilometres. There are no parking facilities for motor vehicles at Praia da Rocha Baixinha Nascente, for these can only be found at Praia da Rocha Baixinha Poente. It is recommended that you gain access to the beaches via Vilamoura, either through the parking area at the eastern end of the beach, or through the Marina, walking across the wooden bridge over the Ribeira de Quarteira.
-  There is a tarmac road leading to the beach through Vilamoura (signposted on the EN 125). There is a fairly large and organised parking area at the western end of the beach. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach is classified as an accessible beach and faces south-west.



Loulé



Vilamoura
 Quarteira
 Almargem (Cavalo Preto)
 Loulé Velho
 Forte Novo
 Tratalha
 Vale do Lobo
 Garrão Poente
 Garrão Nascente
 Ancão
 Quinta do Lago



Vilamoura



Quinta do Lago



Vale do Lobo



Loulé.

The municipality of Loulé is centred upon an inland city that enjoys a magnificent view of the sea from the top of its hills dotted with almond-trees. This region is marked by the coexistence of different realities that contribute to a very varied supply of features of interest to tourists: there are the Moorish streets of the busy and lively centre of the city itself, where you can still find artisans stitching leather or working with brass; the hills offer us the honey produced from wild flowers, the typical arbutus-berry brandy and the cakes made of almonds and figs; there is the hustle

and bustle of the densely populated tourist centre of Quarteira, coexisting side by side with the town's traditional fishing activities; Vilamoura Marina with its sophisticated tourist developments; the luxury holiday resorts and golf courses of the beaches of Vale do Lobo and Quinta do Lago, as well as the extensive natural areas of pinewoods, salt-marshes and sand dunes contained within the Ria Formosa Natural Park, a genuine wildlife sanctuary favouring such activities as nature trekking and bird watching.

Praia de Vilamoura



The welcoming Praia de Vilamoura is situated between the eastern mole of the Marina and the dock in the town of Quarteira, framed by one of Europe's largest tourist and real estate developments. The former Quinta de Quarteira has been transformed into an enormous leisure complex in the form of a garden city, where, besides golf, which is the prime activity here, visitors will also find a casino, aerodrome, horse-riding centre and shooting range, as well as cross-country courses, cycle tracks, tennis and squash courts, art galleries, mini-cruises, and, finally, the Marina, a vast sheet of water filled with luxury boats set amidst the delightful surroundings of outdoor cafés and restaurants and sophisticated shops. Vilamoura is also to be noted for its ecological importance: in its Environmental Park, which incorporates the final section of the Ribeira de Quarteira, more than a hundred different species of birds can be observed amongst the dense reed beds along the banks of that wetland area. At the Cerro da Vila Museum and Archaeological Site, you can take an imaginary journey into the past of a Roman fishing villa from the first century AD.

-  The beach can be reached on foot from Vilamoura (signposted on the EN 125). There is a fairly large and organised parking area. The beach has various support facilities (restaurants, toilets and others) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach is classified as an accessible beach and faces south-west.



Praia de Quarteira



Once a peaceful fishing village, the town has greatly developed in order to support the growing demand for its beaches, so that it is now a major tourist centre. The local fishing activity, with its boats and equipment stores, continues to exist, but it is now limited to the western end of the beach. Most dining-tables in Quarteira would not be complete without a dish of grilled fresh fish and the sea also supplies the ingredients for traditional recipes such as bread soup with banded wedge shells or squid cooked in its own ink. The extensive sandy beach spreads over roughly three kilometres, and is interrupted by a series of breakwaters, next to which the sand tends to accumulate, thus offering holidaymakers the chance to swim in calm water. Running along the whole of the seafront is a busy and lively avenue, known locally as the Calçada, offering all kinds of tourist amenities for the support of bathing activities, with sun-filled pavement cafés and restaurants, and lots of life and entertainment during the bathing season. This is an urban beach and therefore tends to be very crowded.

-  The beach can be reached on foot from Quarteira (signposted on the EN 125). There is a fairly large and organised parking area. The beach has various support facilities (restaurants, toilets and others) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach is classified as an accessible beach and faces south-west.



Praia do Forte Novo



Praia do Forte Novo is situated at the eastern end of Quarteira, but already in a more natural setting, far from the hustle and bustle of the urban environment and without the protection of breakwaters, which immediately results in a drastic reduction in the width of the beach. Here, once again, there appear the soft, low cliffs that are characteristic of this stretch of coastline, their intense ochre colour contrasting sharply with the deep green of the pinewoods that grow at their top and the pearl-white colour of the sand. The sea frequently reaches as far as the foot of these cliffs, and here and there you can see pine trees with their roots exposed. This is a buffer zone between the tall buildings of Quarteira and Vilamoura to the west and the area to the east where the urban sprawl gives way to the green pinewoods that cover the tops of the red cliffs, occasionally interspersed with small coastal lagoons.

-  A tarmac road leads from the eastern end of Quarteira to the beach, where there is an organised parking area. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-west.



Praia do Almargem (Cavalo Preto)



The typical red cliffs of this stretch of the coastline are interrupted to accommodate the final stretch of the Ribeira do Almargem, which does not always manage to pass beyond the bar of sand and flow freely to the sea, so that it floods the surrounding land and creates a peaceful sheet of water that is very inviting for water birds. It is therefore possible to be on the beach and calmly watch the cormorants fishing or the enormous grey herons searching for food in the brackish water. The wetland vegetation of reeds and rushes mixes with the European beachgrass of the incipient sand dunes. The small lagoon is surrounded by a vast wood of stone pines and cork-oaks, which is also home to such plants as Portuguese thyme and *tuberaria major* (a variety of rock rose) that are exclusive to this region of the Algarve. The beach is very quiet and peaceful in comparison with the neighbouring beaches of Quarteira.

 You are advised not to use the lagoon for bathing purposes, since it becomes eutrophic during the summer season when there is no communication with the sea.

 Praia do Almargem is signposted on the tarmac road from the eastern end of Quarteira to Al Mancil. After the turning, the road turns into a dirt track over a distance of roughly three kilometres. There is a disorganised parking area near the beach. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) at its western end, and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-west.



Praia do Loulé Velho and Praia do Trafal



Loulé Velho

The road to the beach takes you through a broad rural valley, where you can see some of the ancient hydraulic irrigation devices such as aqueducts and norias, extensive cultivated fields and some very ancient olive-trees, cork-oaks and carob-trees, around which you may spot the unmistakable azure-winged magpie or the typical Algarve hoopoe flying. Closer to the sea, the terrain becomes more marshy and the Ribeira de Carcavai spreads out to form an extensive wetland area with reed beds, tamarisks and rushes. To the east (the old Praia do Trafal), the sand dunes advance into the wetland area, the beach is fairly large and spacious and in the distance there once again appear the ochre cliffs and pinewoods, only in this case with the grass of the golf courses as their undergrowth. To the west (Praia do Loulé Velho), the beach narrows, the red cliffs advance towards the sea and the roots of the pine trees are exposed as the face of the cliffs begins to crumble. Here, when the wind whips up the sand, it leaves uncovered some ancient Roman fish-salting tanks and the silt of an ancient estuary-lagoon system, the remains of a period when the sea was much further away. Also submerged in this area are the ruins of a Carthaginian fishing village.

 Praia do Trafal is signposted on the tarmac road leading from the eastern end of Quarteira to Al Mancil. After the turnoff, the road continues to be surfaced for a further 300 metres, after which it turns into a dirt track over a distance of one and a half kilometres. There is a fairly large but disorganised parking area near the beach. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) at its western end and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-west.



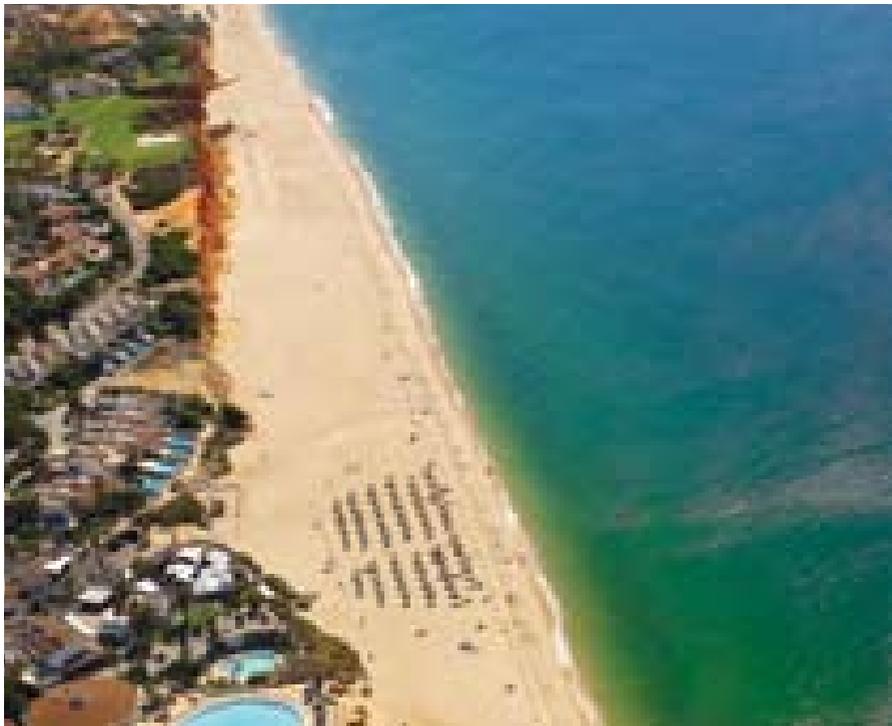
Trafal

Praia de Vale do Lobo



Praia de Vale do Lobo is surrounded by a high-quality tourist complex and has as its distinctive trademark the red and ochre cliffs, which are soft and vulnerable to contact with both fresh and saltwater. Erosion has resulted in some deep gullies and crevices in the face of the cliffs that are exposed to the elements, forming some very curious natural shapes. The red colours of the cliffs form a sharp contrast with the pearl-white colour of the sand and the deep and refreshing green of the stone pines, which provide shelter for the golf courses below them. The beach is long but somewhat narrow, the sea frequently reaches as far as the cliffs, leaving the vegetation with its roots exposed and some buildings and some of the holes on the golf course in danger. For this reason, Praia de Vale do Lobo has already had sand added to it artificially on two occasions, in order to make the beach larger. There is a wide range of leisure and sports amenities to choose from, starting with golf, but also including tennis and water sports.

-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from Escanxinas, on the road between Quarteira and Almancil, heading in the direction of Vale do Lobo for roughly six kilometres. There is an organised but relatively small parking area. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-west.



Praia do Garrão Poente and Nascente



Garrão Poente

At Praia do Garrão, which appears as a continuation of Praia de Vale do Lobo, the cliffs give way to vast sand dune systems, covered with typical vegetation, which are then continued by the sand barriers of the Ria Formosa lagoon system that follow on from this. The beach accompanies two valleys divided by a low cliff, in each of which a lagoon has formed: in the western valley is Lagoa das Dunas Douradas, and in the eastern valley is the smaller Lagoa do Garrão. Both are freshwater wetland areas, a rare feature along this coastline, and very popular amongst water birds. A footpath along the shores of Lagoa das Dunas Douradas invites visitors to observe the different birds that feed, rest and nest here, such as the coot, mallard or the emblematic purple gallinule. The line of pine trees which has accompanied the coastline since Quarteira continues here with its natural undergrowth along the shores of the lagoons, offering protection and shelter to the region's aquatic life. A network of wooden footpaths crosses over the dunes and, as they walk over them, visitors can observe the rich and aromatic flora growing in the sand.

-  The lagoons are unsuitable for bathing. Keep to the wooden footpaths in order to protect the sand dunes.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from Escanxinas, on the road between Quarteira and Almancil, heading in the direction of Vale do Garrão for roughly six kilometres. There is a relatively large and organised parking area near the beach, which has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-west.



Garrão Nascente

Praia do Ancão



The beach is situated at the western end of the Ria Formosa lagoon system, already within the confines of the Natural Park. Although the lagoons are not yet visible, the marshy areas are quite noticeable since these flood at high tide and are covered by the typical salt-marsh vegetation. Behind this is the wood of stone pines and cork-oaks that stands atop the red cliffs, where it is common to spot rabbits and the unmistakable azure-winged magpies. Crossing over the marshland, visitors will encounter a wide system of sand dunes opening up before them, filled with aromatic plants such as thyme and helichrysum. Already on the ridge of the dunes, on the side opposite the sea, you must make sure to see the eye-catching sea daffodils, the delicate sea bindweed and the typical prickly thrift, dotted about the white and pink dunes. The beach's existing support facilities are carefully integrated into the landscape, giving you the chance to enjoy a snack while at the same time contemplating the sea.

-  Keep to the wooden footpaths in order to protect the sand dunes.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from Escanxinas, on the road between Quarteira and Almancil, heading in the direction of Clube do Ancão for roughly six kilometres. After passing through the tourist development, you will begin a circular drive along a dirt track roughly two kilometres in length. There is a fairly large parking area near the beach, which has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-west.



Praia da Quinta do Lago

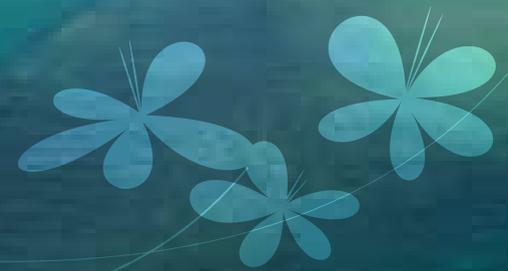


This beach is associated with a high-quality tourist resort and is situated in the heart of the Ria Formosa Natural Park. Access to the beach is provided by a 300-metre-long wooden bridge over the branches of the Ria, making it possible to contemplate the ebb and flow of the tides, the vast accumulations of mud, sand and organic matter covered with the typical marshland vegetation, the shellfish pickers at their work, and, if you're lucky, flocks of gracious flamingos standing by the bright white saltpans. This is an excellent area for observing bird life and there is a nature trail in the area whose high point is the observation of the Lago de São Lourenço, where you can spot from close up such birds as the mallard, coot or purple gallinule. The dunes are well preserved and display a highly diversified flora. Despite the natural surroundings, there are excellent support facilities for high-quality tourism, including golf courses, tennis courts and a horse-riding centre.

-  Keep to the wooden footpaths in order to protect the sand dunes.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from Escanxinas, on the road between Quarteira and Almancil, heading in the direction of Quinta do Lago for roughly seven kilometres. There is an organised and paid parking area at the beach. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-west.



Faro





Faro.

Marked by the unmistakable presence of the Ria Formosa, an extensive lagoon system protected from the sea by 60 kilometres of beach and dunes, the municipality of Faro has always benefited from the specific riches of this region: fish, shellfish, salt and, of course, its beauty. This vast area, consisting of two peninsulas and five barrier-islands between which the sea is able to circulate freely, has been classified as a Natural Park due to its remarkable biological diversity. The lagoon system is labyrinthine and the intricate network of branches of the river estuary,

marshland, mud banks, sand banks and salt-pans results in one of the most productive ecosystems on the planet. The landscape is constantly changing, whether because of the shifting of the sands, giving rise to new shapes and forms in the sand barriers and the bars of the river estuary, or because of the constant ebb and flow of the tides, which hide and then reveal the life that is to be found on the marshland banks. The municipality of Faro includes the Ancão peninsula and the islands of Barreta and Culatra.

Praia de Faro (Península do Ancão)



Mar - Also known as “Ilha de Faro”, this long expanse of sand is, in reality, part of the Ancão Peninsula, which marks out the western boundary of the Ria Formosa. The “island” is reached by a narrow road bridge that crosses over a branch of the lagoon system with its marshland and mud banks. Despite the beach’s urban development and its intense tourist use in the summer months, at the eastern and western ends of the beach the holiday homes are replaced by the picturesque houses of the fishermen and shellfish pickers, themselves gradually giving way to the sand dunes and marshland that dominate the landscape. At the eastern end of the beach, there is a nature trail in the form of a raised wooden pathway that runs along the line of dunes almost as far as Barrinha (Barra de São Luís).

Ria - It is possible to bathe on the northern side of a line of sand dunes facing one of the channels of the Ria Formosa lagoon system, although the beach here is narrow and is occupied by a large number of boats. There are no waves here, except for the small ones caused by the fishing boats and pleasure boats, as well as the waverunners that are constantly racing by. This vast expanse of water is in fact used most intensively for water sports (jetskiing, windsurfing, sailing, etc.). The water quality remains quite acceptable, however, since the water of the Ria Formosa is completely renewed with every tidal cycle. The view from this side of the island is wonderful, overlooking the distant mountains and the city of Faro framed by the lagoon.

 There is a tarmac road from Faro, heading towards the airport (roughly eight kilometres away). There is an organised parking area and the beach has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets), as well as being supervised during the bathing season. During the summer, it is also possible to travel to the beach by boat from Faro (leaving from Cais da Porta do Sol). Faro-Mar is classified as an accessible beach. Ria and Barrinha are not supervised. The main beach faces south-west.





Praia de Faro (Península do Ancão)

Barrinha – Barrinha is an area of great natural beauty without any buildings, where it is possible to observe the flora of the sand-dune system, as well as the countless birds that seek food and shelter in this region, such as the little tern, gull-billed tern, turnstone and plover. Here the coastline is constantly changing shape due to the action of the wind and waves, and it is possible to see the Ilha Deserta (or Ilha da Barreta), wider and with much denser vegetation, on the other side of the bar. This is a very peaceful and normally deserted area, which can be reached on foot from Faro beach, over a long wooden bridge and pathway, or by boat.

-  Care is recommended as the currents close to the bar of the estuary are normally very strong.
-  There is a tarmac road from Faro, heading towards the airport (roughly eight kilometres away). There is an organised parking area and the beach has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets), as well as being supervised during the bathing season. During the summer, it is also possible to travel to the beach by boat from Faro (leaving from Cais da Porta do Sol). Faro-Mar is classified as an accessible beach. Ria and Barrinha are not supervised. The main beach faces south-west.



Ilha da Barreta (Deserta)

Access to the beach is by sea, from the suggestively-named quay of Cais da Porta do Sol (Quay of the Gateway to the Sun), in Faro. It is always a worthwhile experience crossing the labyrinths of sand and mud banks formed by the Ria Formosa, and the boat is obliged to wend its way down a series of channels and marshland banks. During the trip, you should pay attention to the various birds that can be seen feeding here, such as the gracious flamingos. Once you arrive at the beach, you will discover a never-ending expanse of sand stretching over roughly ten kilometres in an atmosphere of total peace and quiet, both on the side facing the sea and the side facing the lagoon. This is a completely uninhabited area of the Ria Formosa. The line of sand dunes still preserves its original vegetation, as well as providing shelter for a variety of wildlife, especially birds: plovers, sandwich terns, common terns, gull-billed terns or little terns can nest here peacefully, safe from their natural predators. From the harbour, it is possible to follow a nature trail over a raised wooden pathway, built with railway sleepers. To the east, the island becomes more robust and forms the headland of Cabo de Santa Maria, the southernmost point of the Portuguese mainland.

-  Care is recommended as the currents close to the bar of the estuary are normally very strong.
-  During the summer months, or upon special request, the beach can be reached by boat from Faro (leaving from Cais da Porta do Sol). The beach has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south/south-west.



Praia do Farol and Praia dos Hangares



Hangares

Situated on the Ilha da Culatra, Praia do Farol owes its name to the enormous lighthouse built at its western end, at Barra Nova close to Cabo de Santa Maria. This bar across the river estuary has been stabilised with breakwaters and marks a change in the orientation of the coastline: the barrier-islands now face south-east, being exposed to the warm Levante wind and its waves. When you arrive at the quay, you will note the island's intense urban (mainly holiday homes) and tourist occupation, but the beach is a vast one and, as you move east, it gradually becomes more peaceful and deserted. The large mole to the west of the island is used by diving schools for their lessons, as well as by countless underwater fishers and anglers. Surfing is also possible here, taking advantage of the waves brought by the Levante wind.

As you move eastwards, Praia dos Hangares begins to appear, where you can still find an old bunker and a lot of barbed wire, legacies from the time when the navy's seaplanes used to be moored on this island. There is a small village formed from fishermen's houses and holiday homes, facing inland towards the Ria. The line of sand dunes is immensely long, hot and dry, and the beach is very peaceful.

 Care is recommended as the currents close to the bar of the estuary are normally very strong.

 The beach can be reached by boat from Faro (in the summer) and Olhão (all year round) and there are various support facilities (restaurants and toilets). It is supervised during the bathing season, but there is no supervision at Barra Nova. The beach faces south-east.



Farol

Praia da Culatra



The beach is situated at the eastern end of the island with the same name, being associated with an old fishing village that until twenty or so years ago consisted entirely of wooden huts. The village is still inhabited by fishermen, but it is now equipped with a variety of infrastructures and services. In the surrounding area, you can observe the countless shellfish pickers scattered over the mud banks that are revealed at low tide, as well as discover some of the traditional equipment of artisanal fishing that is still used here, such as the basket trap and the octopus pots. The beach is a vast expanse of sand stretching both eastwards and westwards, so that it is possible here to observe the rich flora of the sand dunes which follow on from one another as you move inland, as well as to enjoy the warm peaceful water and the warm easterly winds. After two hours spent walking eastwards, you will reach Barra Grande, where you can bathe in the inviting natural pools formed in the sand and enjoy the constantly changing landscape.

 Care is recommended as the currents close to the bar of the estuary are normally very strong.

 The beach can be reached by boat from Faro (in the summer) and Olhão (all year round) and there are various support facilities (restaurants and toilets). It is supervised during the bathing season, but there is no supervision at Barra Grande. The beach faces south-east.



Olhão





Olhão.

An unmistakable feature of this stretch of coastline is the brightly-coloured set of square-shaped houses built in the Cubist style, with Moorish roof terraces, which can be seen advancing gradually into the lagoon system. The fishing traditions in this region date back a very long time, and it is possible to find in the municipality remains of fish-salting tanks of Arab origin dating from the 11th century, as well as various *concheiros* (marine fossils). Located in the heart of the Ria Formosa Natural Park, the municipality of Olhão is known not only for the great skills and competence of its fishermen, but also for the biological wealth of the Ria, since the water of this estuary region functions as an area of shelter and refuge that allows for the growth and

reproduction of many species of fish, molluscs and crustaceans. In this way, it represents a very special region, both for the chance that it provides to enjoy such delicious traditional dishes as *xarém de conquilhas* (clams and corn mash) or *arroz de lingueirão* (rice with razor clams), and for the opportunity to visit the markets, filled with a wide variety of fresh fish. It is also an ideal place for enjoying such water sports as canoeing, windsurfing, sailing or power boating. In Marim is the Visitors' Centre of the Ria Formosa Natural Park, where it is possible to plan trips for watching the park's water birds, visit the breeding centre of the famous Algarve water dog, a native breed to this region that was once close to extinction, or take a closer look at a working tidal mill.

Praia da Armona



The beach is situated at the western end of Ilha da Armona, close to Barra Grande and the small village inhabited by fishermen and shellfish pickers, and, once again, in order to reach the beach you have to pass through the labyrinth of sand and mud banks of the Ria Formosa lagoon system. There is a campsite on this island and you will find that it is fully equipped with all the facilities that you need to engage in a wide variety of water sports. The sand barrier is consistent and very wide and the beach disappears from sight as it stretches unendingly eastwards towards Praia da Fuseta, providing moments of pure peace and quiet for all those who enjoy walking or who have their own private boat. The sand banks by the bar of the river estuary contain some delightful natural swimming-pools. Here, you can also observe the rich and aromatic flora of the sand dunes, as well as savour the warm easterly winds and admire the invariably fiery hues of the sunset.

-  Care is recommended as the currents close to the bar of the estuary are normally very strong.
-  The beach can be reached by boat, with regular services from Faro, Olhão and Fuseta. It has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach faces south-east.



Praia dos Cavacos



This lagoon beach is situated in the heart of the salt-marshes, close to a group of support facilities for both fishing and shellfish picking, consisting above all of stores for fishing equipment. The small bay is used as a mooring point for various boats and is surrounded by some very bright white salt-pans. Very close to the west of the beach is the headquarters and visitors' centre of the Ria Formosa Natural Park with its working tidal mill. The area around the beach is an excellent place for observing animal and plant life in the marshland and salt-pans, ranging from the typical halophytic vegetation (plants that have successfully adapted to the saline conditions) to the timid crabs, and in particular the countless waders that scour the mud banks with their long beaks in search of food: the black-winged stilt, avocet, black-tailed godwit, little stint, white stork, flamingo and various species of herons. The beach is somewhat narrow, but the sand continues into the water, the branch of the river estuary here being wide and offering the opportunity for some very peaceful bathing. In the distance, beyond the channel, you can see the mudflats and sand dunes of Ilha da Armona. The peace and quiet of this spot is only broken by the regular passing of the train, with the railway line being situated right behind the beach.

-  The beach is the venue for the Festa Anual dos Cavacos.
-  There is a tarmac road from the EN 125, turning towards Marim (Águas Santas) roughly one and a half kilometres after the last roundabout heading eastwards from Olhão, and continuing for a further kilometre to the beach. There is a disorganised parking area near the beach, which has no support facilities and is unsupervised. The beach faces south/south-east.



Praia da Fuseta



The beach is situated at the eastern end of the Ilha da Armona, opposite Fuseta, a fishing town located on firm land. Here, the Ria Formosa narrows to some extent and the boat wends its way through the same channels bordered by mud banks and salt-marshes, but on this occasion the journey is much shorter. You can even swim across to the Ilha da Armona or ford your way across from Fuseta when the tide is very low, although you are advised not to interfere with the numerous shellfish nurseries scattered around the mud banks. The spit of sand that forms the beach is also very narrow, but equally attractive and extensive. There is a small group of houses close to the anchorage point, but the natural landscape imposes itself once again both to the east and west of this area. After walking eastwards for roughly 45 minutes, or possibly travelling by private boat, you can reach the deserted and unspoilt beach of Barra da Fuseta, as well as enjoy its countless naturally formed pools in the sand, which are particularly attractive at low tide.

-  Care is recommended as the currents close to the bar of the estuary are normally very strong.
-  The beach can be reached by boat, with regular services from the quay in Fuseta. There is a fairly large and organised parking area close to the quay (except on market days). The beach has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. Barra da Fuseta is an unsupervised area of the beach, which faces south-east.

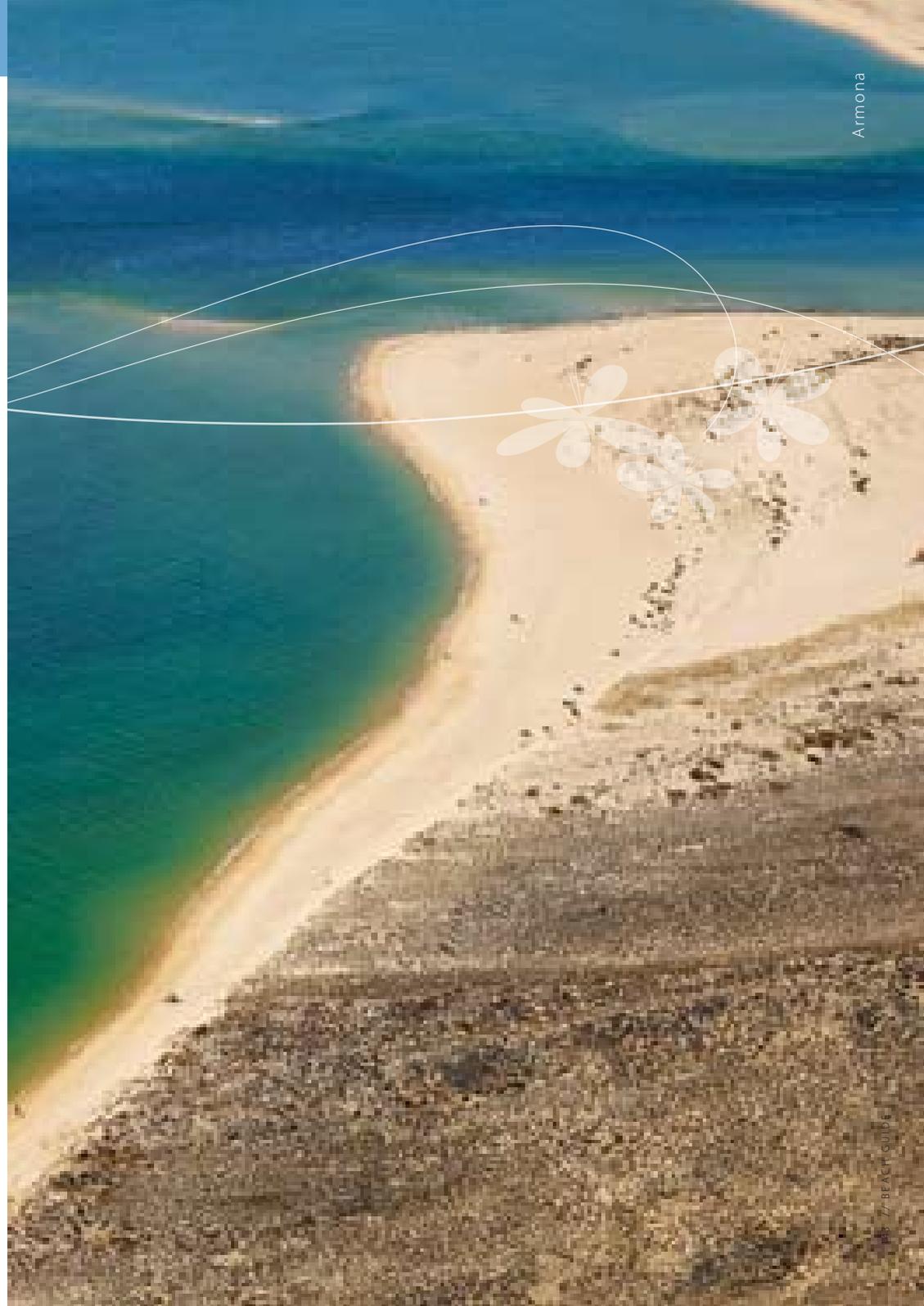




Praia da Fuseta Ria (Tesos)

This is a small sandy cove situated close to the town of Fuseta, overlooking a branch of the Ria Formosa. Greatly appreciated by children because of its calm warm waters, the narrow stretch of sand tends to become very crowded in the summer months. At low tide, you can walk around the countless branches of the lagoon and the mud banks of the surrounding area (taking due care not to disturb the shellfish nurseries) and observe the local fauna, especially the crabs and shellfish, but also some shore-birds, scouring for food in the mud with their long beaks. Despite the proximity of the nearby urban area, the quality of the water normally remains quite acceptable during the bathing season, since the water of the Ria Formosa is completely renewed with every tidal cycle.

 You can walk to the beach from the town of Fuseta. There is a fairly large and organised parking area close to the quay (except on market days). The beach has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach is classified as an accessible beach and faces south-west.



Tavira





Tavira.

In Tavira, a succession of gentle hills descend from the Serra do Caldeirão to the sea, planted with dryland orchards, where olive-trees, almond-trees, fig-trees and carob-trees spread their sweet-smelling aromas into the air, blending with the smell of the sea at low tide. The coastline is calm and peaceful, and extremely inviting in its eleven kilometres of unending fine white sand and very warm water. Here too, before it finally comes to an end at the Cacela Peninsula, the Ria Formosa lagoon system has to be crossed, offering pleasant boat trips and the chance to observe the typical wetland flora and fauna, most particularly the water birds. It is estimated that, counting both the resident and migratory species that can be seen here,

the Ria Formosa plays host to more than 30,000 birds each year. The close proximity of the Ria also provides the municipality with excellent fishing conditions, and Tavira can proudly claim to have the country's only fishing museum, the Arraial Ferreira Neto, which once housed the families of the fishermen and all the tackle and equipment used in tuna fishing. Now transformed into a hotel, the Arraial still preserves its museum dedicated to the theme of this ancient and special art of fishing. There are other features that also paint the picture of this municipality: the salt-pans, where the reflections of the brilliant white salt almost dazzle you; and the city's very common and curious *telhados de tesoura* (four-sided, hipped roofs), found particularly on the more palatial houses.

Praia do Barril and Praia do Homem Nu

The beach is situated more or less in the middle of the Ilha de Tavira, a narrow tongue of fine white sand. To get there, you have to cross a narrow footbridge over one of the channels of the Ria and then continue on foot, or on one of the small tourist trains, for roughly one more kilometre to the beach. Along the way, it is worth taking some time to observe the different fauna of the mudbanks, especially the *bocas* (the typical crabs of these areas) which run and hide in the holes in the mud as the holidaymakers pass by, and, closer to the beach, the vegetation of the extensive sand dune system, from which there comes a very characteristic curry-like smell, originating from a small plant known as *helichrysum*. The tourist facilities at the beach have been adapted from old tuna fishing equipment, and it is still possible to see the original fishermen's houses and some of the objects that they used in their work, as well as a group of anchors arranged in the space around the beach, planted with dune vegetation.

The beach is a huge expanse of sand, and, by walking towards the western end of the island, you reach Praia do Homem Nu, a deserted and wild beach with a magnificent view over Barra da Fusetta and Ilha da Armona, to the west. Praia do Homem Nu is an official naturist beach.

-  In order to help preserve this area, you should cross over the sand dunes using the raised wooden footpaths provided. Care is recommended as the currents close to the bar of the estuary are normally very strong.
-  Access to the beach is on foot, or on the small tourist train from Pedras D'el Rei (signposted and roughly one kilometre from the EN 125). There is a fairly large parking area near the village. The beach has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. It is classified as an accessible beach. Praia do Homem Nu has no support facilities or supervision. The beach faces south-east.



Homem Nu



Barril

Praia da Terra Estreita (Santa Luzia)



To the east of Praia do Barril, the Ilha de Tavira narrows, resulting in a strip of sand no more than 50 metres wide, the so-called Praia da Terra Estreita (the Narrow Land Beach). The beach is also known as Praia de Santa Luzia, as it is from this picturesque fishing village that the boats set off to cross to the island. The boat ride over the Ria shows you the pots used for capturing octopus and the many local fishing boats, as well as the typical marshland flora and fauna. The beach here is a large one and is more deserted than at the neighbouring beaches of Praia do Barril or Ilha de Tavira, providing complete peace and quiet and isolation. On this beach, you can admire the eye-catching flowers of the sea daffodils and enjoy a swim in the warm seawater, and in the summer it is common to see great profusions of green seaweed next to the island, giving you the strange sensation that you are swimming in a warm soup. Back in Santa Luzia, the beautiful avenue along the waterfront is filled with restaurants and bars where you can enjoy some of the best shellfish picked in the Ria, as well as some typical dishes such as the tuna salad known as *estopeta de atum*.

 In order to help preserve this area, you should cross over the sand dunes using the raised wooden footpaths provided.

 There are boats to the beach from Santa Luzia, signposted on the EN 125 and roughly three kilometres from the car park at Praia do Barril. The parking area is fairly large and organised. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. It faces south-east.



Ilha de Tavira



Costa

The beach is located at the eastern end of Ilha de Tavira, close to Barra do Cochicho, right in front of the city of Tavira itself. Access is by boat from the Cais das Quatro Águas, in Tavira, but the journey does not take long and there are even some people who prefer to swim out to the island. The route to the quayside accompanies the River Gilão and the artisanal fishing fleet that sails up and down the river or just rests there, as well as extensive areas of salt-pans, where black-winged stilts, small birds similar to miniature white storks, can be seen feeding. This is the more densely populated part of the Ilha de Tavira, with various holiday homes, a campsite and all kinds of tourist facilities in the surrounding area, including various bars on the beach itself. It is also possible to find local support for a range of water sports and even for cruises around the Ria Formosa. On the side of the island facing the Ria, the water quality is good, and children in particular appreciate the warm still waters of the lagoon, as well as the facilities provided for diving.

 Care is recommended as the currents close to the bar of the estuary are normally very strong. In order to help preserve the sand dunes, you should use the already existing footpaths.

 There are boats to the island from Cais das Quatro Águas in Tavira (EN 125). The parking area is fairly large and organised. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. It faces south-east.



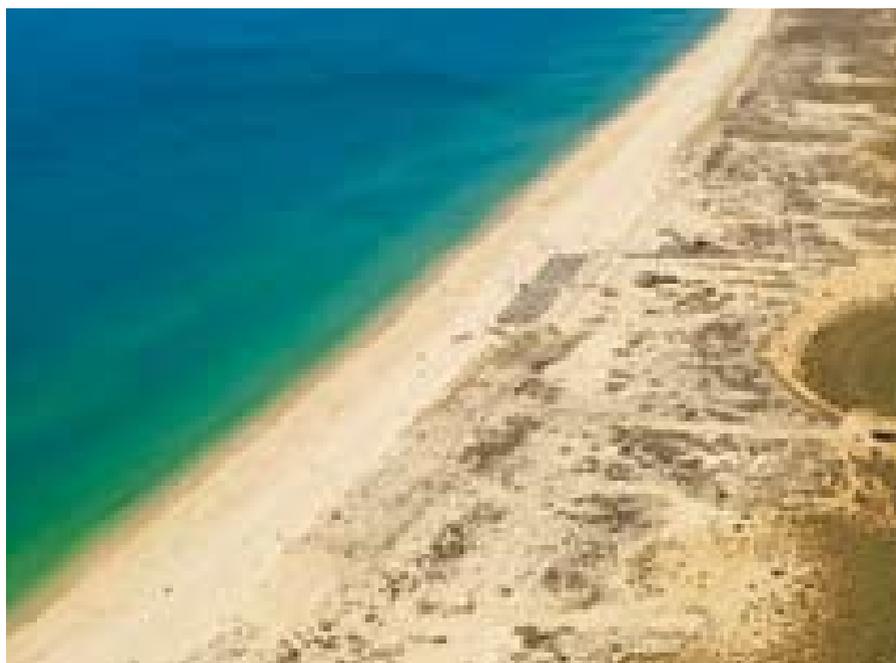
Ria

Ilha de Cabanas



To the east of Ilha de Tavira is Ilha de Cabanas, a narrow but long strip of land before the last bar across the river estuary to the east. The beach is situated opposite the village of Cabanas, whose origin dates back to the old days of tuna fishing in this area, and which even today remains a fishing village. From the long waterfront at Cabanas, fishing boats can be seen anchored in the Ria, together with the stores of fishing equipment. The branch of the Ria that separates the island from the mainland is quite narrow and you can swim across it at low tide. The preferred means of access is, however, by boat, a journey that only takes a few minutes from Cabanas. Walking along the beach is a pleasant experience and you only have to walk a short distance to be able to enjoy a few moments of peace and quiet and perfect isolation. On returning to Cabanas, you can visit one of the many restaurants along the waterfront and sample the local oysters and clams picked in the nearby nurseries, as well as the various octopus dishes.

-  In order to help preserve this area, you should cross over the sand dunes using the raised wooden footpaths provided.
-  There are boats to the island (in the form of a taxi service) from the waterfront at Cabanas (signposted and roughly one and a half kilometres from the EN 125). The parking area is organised. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurant and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. It faces south-east.



Praia do Lacém



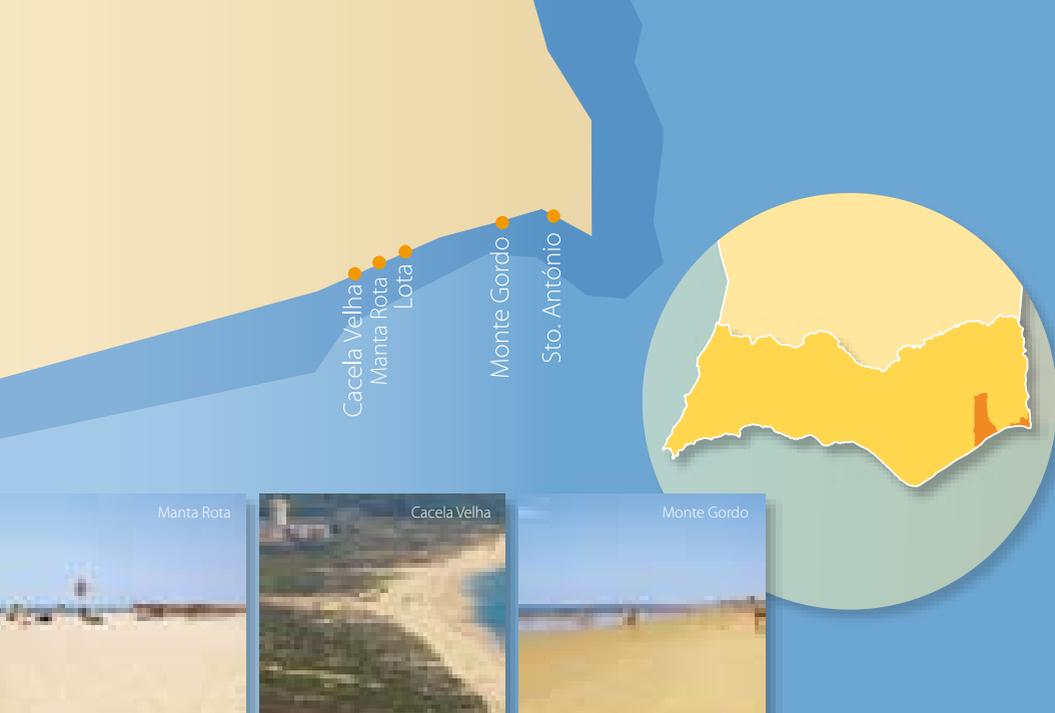
This small lagoon beach is surrounded by farmland, amongst allotments, vineyards and dryland orchards. The beach is reached by a small cross-country footpath which accompanies an occasional stream, along which there grows some thick riverside vegetation, with reed beds and lots of brambles. The beach itself is quite narrow with some low-lying sand dunes where the main plant is European beachgrass. The predominant habitat is in fact the salt-marsh, and the smell of the sea and the mudflats is intense. Beyond the narrow branch of the Ria, you will find the Ilha de Cabanas, very thin and low in this area and only covered with some small grasses (sea couch), not offering any great resistance to the advances of the sea. Here you can observe various shore-birds calmly scouring the mud with their long beaks in search of food. If you have a private boat, you can cross over the branch of the Ria and reach the sand barriers of Cabanas or Cacela.

-  There is a dirt track from the EN 125, heading towards Lacém over a distance of roughly one and a half kilometres. There are no parking areas, and the beach, which has no support facilities or supervision, faces south-east.



Vila Real de Santo António





Vila Real de Santo António.

The municipality is situated at the eastern end of the Algarve, bordered by the River Guadiana to the east. Sardine and tuna fishing off the Algarve coast turned Vila Real into an important fish canning centre throughout almost the whole of the 20th century. At the same time, as a port, Vila Real de Santo António witnessed a great deal of traffic through the boats that transported the ores extracted from the mines of São Domingos, having at one time been one of the richest and most dynamic towns in the Algarve at the beginning of the last century. Later, in the 1960s, the bay of Monte Gordo, with

its immense sandy beach and safe, warm waters, began to attract huge numbers of tourists and became one of the largest seaside resorts in the Algarve, acting as a pioneer in terms of the tourism supply that it offered. Nowadays, the municipality is noted for the diversity of its natural habitats, with its broad river estuary and salt-marshes to the north and east and the protected area of pinewoods formed by the Mata Nacional das Dunas Litorais between Vila Real and Monte Gordo, while the town of Cacela Velha to the west marks the eastern boundary of the Ria Formosa Natural Park.

Praia de Cacela Velha



The beach is situated on the Cacela Peninsula, which marks out the boundary of the Ria Formosa Natural Park to the east. It is therefore possible to arrive at the beach on foot, by walking along Praia da Manta Rota, but it is preferable to travel by boat from Sítio da Fábrica in Cacela Velha, although there is no actual quay or regular boat service here. Cacela Velha is surrounded by dryland orchards that spread all the way to the salt-marsh in the form of gently undulating hills. The town grew around a mediaeval noria, and there is a magnificent view over the Ria from its high point close to the Forte Dom Paio Peres Correia. Once you have crossed the branch of the lagoon, with its countless nurseries of oysters and clams, you will find yourself standing on a narrow tongue of sand, deserted and wild, which stretches all the way to Praia da Manta Rota. Here, you can enjoy complete tranquillity as you contemplate the rich flora of the dunes formed by this sand barrier, interrupted only in those places where the sea manages to penetrate through this natural wall, and the countless birds that find food and shelter in these same dunes, such as plovers, sandwich terns, common terns, gull-billed terns and little terns.

-  In order to help preserve this area, you should cross over the sand dunes using the raised wooden footpaths provided.
-  There are boats to the beach from Sítio da Fábrica in Cacela Velha (signposted and roughly one and a half kilometres from the EN 125). There is a small and organised parking area nearby. The beach has no support facilities or supervision and faces south-east.



Praia da Manta Rota



This is an extensive beach linked to the town of Manta Rota, which still retains some of its original character as a fishing village, although it is now an important tourist centre. The beach marks the eastern end of the Ria Formosa lagoon system. The line of sand dunes is wide, especially to the east and west of the town, since in the central part of the beach there is a predominance of tourist facilities. Raised wooden footpaths lead onto the sand, allowing visitors the chance to observe the vegetation of the dunes, stretching from the seafront, where there is a predominance of European beachgrass and sea holly, to the inland area where the more aromatic plants begin to appear, such as helichrysum, which impregnates the air with its intense curry-like smell, as well as some large-sized bushes, such as bridal broom, a characteristic plant of the sandy soils of the Algarve's eastern region. A refreshing line of poplars marks the edge of the car park at the eastern end of the beach. This beach is less frequented than the neighbouring bathing area of Praia de Monte Gordo and offers some peaceful nooks and crannies, particularly at the ends of the beach.

 In order to help preserve this area, you should cross over the sand dunes using the raised wooden footpaths provided.

 There is a tarmac road to the beach from the EN 125, heading in the direction of Manta Rota for roughly two kilometres. There is a fairly large and organised parking area. The beach has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach is classified as an accessible beach and faces south-east.



Praia da Lota



Close to this beach, you can still see the brightly-coloured fishing boats and the respective non-industrial fishing equipment, reminding you of the time when this beach was used as a fish market where the freshly caught fish was sold by auction. Nowadays, it is essentially used for bathing purposes, consisting of a huge sandy beach that stretches into the distance and out of sight. The dunes are low and their predominant vegetation consists of European beachgrass and the fluffy cottonweed, which are typically found at the front of sand dunes nearer to the sea. Further inland, there is an abundance of tall bushes, such as the characteristic bridal broom. The beach is relatively peaceful, very hot and sunny, and the sea is warm with very gentle waves.

 In order to help preserve this area, you should cross over the sand dunes using the raised wooden footpaths provided

 There is a tarmac road to the beach from the EN 125, heading in the direction of Manta Rota, Praia da Lota, for roughly two and a half kilometres. There is an organised parking area. The beach has basic support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach is classified as an accessible beach and faces south-east.



Praia de Monte Gordo



This area shows signs of human settlement from long ago, having been used for many centuries by fishing communities. Now the brightly-coloured boats and their fishing equipment are to be found only at the western end of the beach, although the activity is still continued on a non-industrial basis. Having been a pioneering region in the history of tourism in the Algarve, Monte Gordo is now an important tourist centre, equipped with all kinds of facilities, including a casino. The beach forms part of a wide bay and the environment here is one of the hottest, driest and sunniest in the Algarve, whilst the sea is famous for its warmth and the gentle nature of the waves. To the west and in the central area of the beach, the sand is backed by a busy seaside avenue, built with the typical Portuguese paving stones, along which there are gardens and a wide variety of tourist facilities. In the small dunes, which continue to be formed, only the prickly sea holly has withstood the constant treading of visitors' feet. To the east, the beach is wilder, the line of sand dunes grows wider and you can already see the typical vegetation of sandy beaches. There is a picnic area nearby, shaded by pine trees and close to the campsite.

-  There is a tarmac road to the beach from the EN 125, heading in the direction of Monte Gordo for roughly one kilometre. There is a very large and organised parking area. The access to the eastern end of the beach is next to the picnic area along a dirt track of roughly 100 metres in length. The beach has various support facilities (restaurants, toilets and others) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach is classified as an accessible beach and faces south-east.



Praia de Santo António



The beach starts close to the mouth of the River Guadiana, marking the beginning of twelve kilometres of uninterrupted sand and calm warm water stretching all the way to the Ria Formosa lagoon system. The Mata Nacional, a protected woodland of stone pines and maritime pines growing on the sand dunes, lends a refreshing green dimension to this hot, dry and very sunny Mediterranean environment. The use of this beach for bathing purposes is restricted to Praia dos Três Pauzinhos, which begins at the small breakwater and then stretches westwards. The most interesting access to the seafront is via a footpath, along which a small tourist train also runs, through the pinewoods filled with the aromatic smell of thyme and the unmistakable helichrysum, which gives off a strong curry-like smell. If you pay careful attention, you will be able to spot the slow-moving and generally camouflaged chameleons, crawling through the woodland. Close to the beach, you will find that the predominant feature is the high bushes of bridal broom (a typical plant in this region of the Algarve). By the seafront on the ridges of the sand dunes are plants such as European beachgrass and sea holly. To the east, you can see the mouth of the River Guadiana, and on the other bank of the great southern river lies Spain. To the west, the beach opens up to form a vast and never-ending expanse of sand, backed by the green mantle of the pinewoods growing on the sand dunes.

-  In order to help preserve this area, you should cross over the sand dunes using the raised wooden footpaths provided.
-  There is a tarmac road to the beach along the EN 125, heading in the direction of the breakwater of Vila Real de Santo António for roughly four kilometres and then passing through the Mata along the wide road running parallel to the beach. There is a fairly large parking area near the beach, which can also be reached on foot, by bicycle or by taking a tourist train from close to the sports complex at Vila Real, over a distance of roughly one kilometre. The beach has basic support facilities and is supervised during the bathing season. It faces south-west.



Castro Marim





Castro Marim.

The municipality stretches from the inland hills covered with wild flowers to the sea, following the banks of the River Guadiana until quite close to its mouth. The water overflowing from the great southern river has flooded large areas of land, giving rise to the planting of orchards and allotments, but above all creating one of the planet's most productive habitats: the salt-marsh. The Sapal de Castro Marim and Vila Real de Santo António Nature Reserve, with its river branches, canals, mudflats and dazzling white salt-pans, is home to a great diversity of plants and animals, but it is the birds, the flamingos, black-winged stilts, avocets, etc., that are the

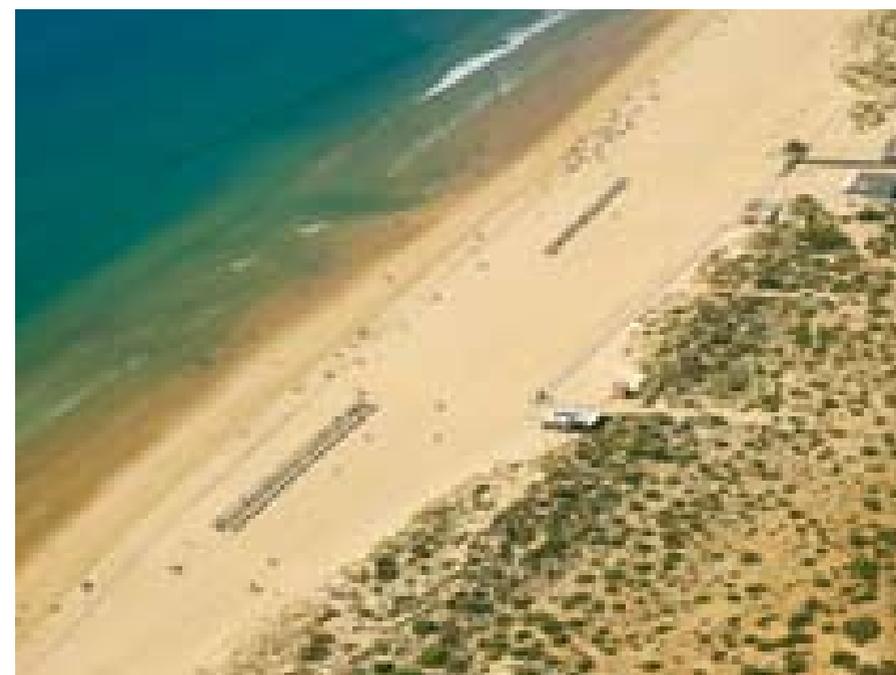
really distinctive feature of the habitat. The municipality's four beaches are part of the same stretch of sand, a thin strip of land that links the estuary of the River Guadiana to the Ria Formosa lagoon system, framed by the deep green pinewoods growing on the gently undulating sand dunes. The human occupation of the municipality dates back to the Neolithic period (roughly 5000 years BC) and there are traces of an old Roman fort located on the hill of Castro Marim, where there now stands the Moorish castle, benefiting from its strategic and lofty position overlooking the River Guadiana and the border region with Spain.

Praia da Alagoa (Altura)



The village of Altura, essentially a summer holiday resort, accompanies the extensive sandy beach and its wide sand dune system, which is crossed over by a network of raised wooden footpaths, making it possible to observe the difference in vegetation between the seafront and the more inland region. Close to the immense expanse of sand from which the dune gradually rises up is an abundance of European beachgrass, sea holly, the fluffy cottonweed and the eye-catching sea daffodils. Further inland, the vegetation grows taller and there begin to appear the typical bushes of bridal broom, which at least afford some shade and visual relief from the dazzlingly hot sunny environment of the summer season. The line of the horizon opens up eastwards, where the landscape remains green, with the buildings of Monte Gordo framed by a vast area of pinewoods.

-  In order to help preserve this area, you should cross over the sand dunes using the raised wooden footpaths provided.
-  There is a tarmac road from the EN 125, heading towards Altura, for a distance of roughly one kilometre. The beach has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach is classified as an accessible beach and faces south-east.



Praia Verde



Doing justice to its name (Praia Verde literally means Green Beach), this beach is surrounded by a vast area of stone pines, which make their way down the gentle slopes of the hills to the sand, and in the midst of which chameleons crawl around unhurriedly. The pine trees have the curious shape of giant mushrooms, and the undergrowth is rich and very green throughout the wood. The car park is sited in a planted garden area equipped with all the necessary tourist facilities and offering a fabulous panoramic view over the sandy coastline. In the middle of the beach, marking the landscape is a curious old pool that grows in size when the sea carries the sand away. The sand dunes exhibit the wide variety of their flora: European beachgrass, the beautiful sea daffodil, the aromatic helichrysum and, further inland, the bridal broom, the characteristic bush of the Algarve's sandy eastern region. The environment is hot, sunny and dry, while the sea is calm and warm.

-  There is a tarmac road from the EN 125, heading in the direction of Praia Verde for 1500 metres. There is a fairly large and organised parking area and a footpath from there to the beach (100 metres). The beach has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach is classified as an accessible beach and faces south-east.



Praia do Cabeço (Retur)



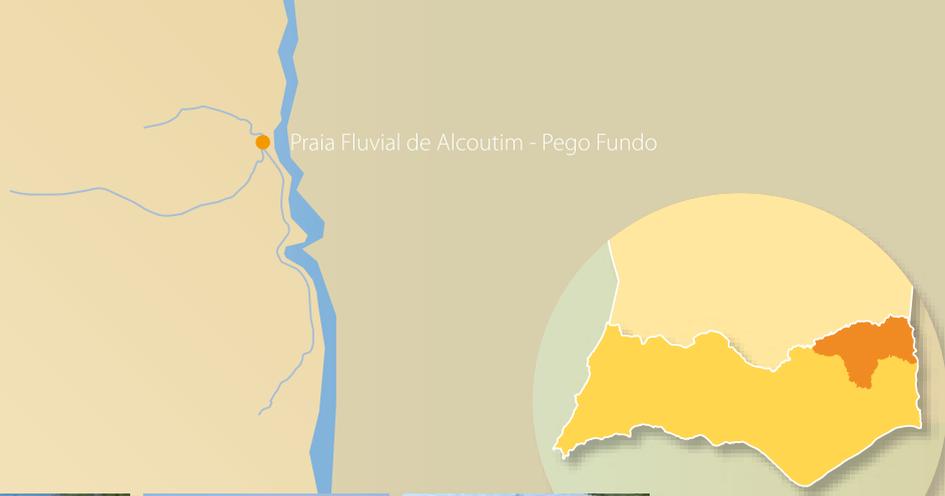
The beach is located in what is still a rural landscape, where extremely old trees, especially olive-trees and cork-oaks, gradually give way to the typical pinewoods growing on the coastal dunes. Closer to the beach, the stone pines form a densely wooded area, being accompanied by arbutus-berry trees, enormous mastic-trees, rock roses with white and red flowers, wild asparagus and aromatic plants such as helichrysum and rosemary. The shade and deep green colour of the vegetation are a comforting sight. If you pay close attention, you can see the slow-moving chameleons, and birds such as the hoopoe, which looks rather like a giant butterfly. Close to the beach, the pinewoods give way to sand dunes covered by the typical bridal broom, European beachgrass and the fluffy cottonweed. The beach is an extensive and quiet area of land, offering bathers the chance to swim in safe, warm waters

-  In order to help preserve this area, you should cross over the sand dunes using the raised wooden footpaths provided.
-  There is a tarmac road from the EN 125, heading in the direction of Praia do Cabeço for roughly two kilometres. There is a fairly large and organised parking area near the beach, which has various support facilities (restaurants and toilets) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach is classified as an accessible beach and faces south-east.



Alcoutim





Alcoutim.

Far from the coastline, facing the great southern river, Alcoutim has the form of a natural amphitheatre overlooking the River Guadiana, with its brilliant white houses. On the other bank, you can see the village of San Lucar del Guadiana in Spain. The traces of the human occupation of the region date back over thousands of years, ranging from the Neolithic period to the times of the Moors, and the local people still maintain their rich

links with the land, occupying themselves with farming, grazing, hunting and traditional handicrafts. But the river imposes its presence on the landscape, and, at each bend in the road, you will find streams, chasms, mooring points and dams. Local fishing traditions have been continued, being embodied in such dishes as the stews made with eels or the extremely tasty lamprey.

Praia Fluvial de Alcoutim - Pego Fundo



In the heart of the rural agricultural landscape of the Algarve's north-eastern region, this river beach takes advantage of the natural features of a beautiful chasm in the Ribeira de Cadavais, a tributary to the River Guadiana. Some of the clear white sands from the coast were brought here to help build this river beach, making it quite an unusual sight. The surrounding area has been planted, particularly with poplars, oleanders, lavender and some fantastic flowerbeds with roses. The sides of the chasm are covered with reed beds and, here and there, fruit-trees. Throughout the dry season, due to the effects of evaporation, the flat surface of the water becomes smaller and smaller, although the quality of the water normally remains quite acceptable during the bathing season. This is a very peaceful and bucolic spot, where the background noise is composed of the sound of birds chirping and the tinkling of the bells around the necks of the sheep and goats.

 There is a tarmac road from the town of Alcoutim, crossing the bridge over the Ribeira de Cadavais and continuing roughly 500 metres along its left bank. There is an organised parking area near the beach, which has basic support facilities (bar, toilets and showers) and is supervised during the bathing season. The beach is classified as an accessible beach and faces south/south-west.



FLORA

Alcar-do-Algarve, a variety of rock rose, *Tuberaria major*



Almond-tree, *Prunus dulcis*

Aloe, *Agave americana*

Arbutus-tree, *Arbutus unedo*



Asparagus, *Asparagus spp.*



Bridal broom, *Retama monosperma*



Carob-tree, *Ceratonia siliqua*



Common reed, *Phragmites australis*



Cork-oak, *Quercus suber*



Cottonweed, *Othanthus maritimus*



Cretan trefoil, *Lotus creticus*



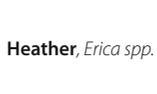
Dwarf fan palm, *Chamaerops humilis*



European beachgrass, *Ammophila arenaria*



Fig-tree, *Ficus carica*



Heather, *Erica spp.*



Helichrysum, *Helichrysum picardii*



Ice plant, *Carpobrotus edulis*

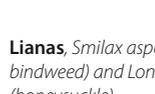
Juniper, *Juniperus turbinata*



Kermes oak, *Quercus coccifera*



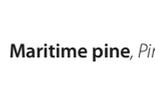
Lavender, *Lavandula sp.*



Lianas, *Smilax aspera* (rough bindweed) and *Lonicera implexa* (honeysuckle)



Maltese mushroom, *Cynomorium coccineum*



Maritime pine, *Pinus pinaster*



Mastic-tree, *Pistacia lentiscus*



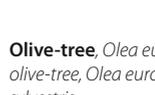
Mediterranean beach daisy, *Asteriscus maritimus*



Myrtle, *Myrtus communis*



Oleander, *Nerium oleander*



Olive-tree, *Olea europaea*; Wild olive-tree, *Olea europaea* var. *sylvestris*

Orchids, *Ophrys spp.*



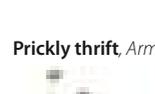
Pale stonecrop, *Sedum sediforme*



Poplar, *Populus sp.*



Portuguese thyme, *Thymus lotocephalus* and *Thymus carnosus*



Prickly thrift, *Armeria pungens*



Rock rose, *Cistus ladanifer*



Rock samphire, *Crithmum maritimum*



Rosemary, *Rosmarinus officialis*



Sage-leaf rock rose, *Cistus salvifolius*



Sand couch grass, *Elymus farctus*



Sea bindweed, *Calystegia soldanella*



Sea daffodil, *Pancratium maritimum*



Sea grass, *Cymodocea nodosa*



Sea holly, *Eryngium maritimum*



Sea lavender, *Limonium spp.*



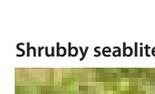
Sea medick, *Medicago marina*



Sea orach, *Atriplex halimus*



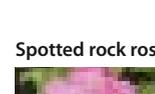
Sea rush and spiny rush, *Juncus maritimus* and *Juncus acutus*



Shrubby seablite, *Suaeda vera*



Spanish broom, *Spartium junceum*



Spotted rock rose, *Cistus crispus*



Stone pine, *Pinus pinea*



Sweet alyssum, *Lobularia maritima*



Tamarisk, *Tamarix africana*

Thyme, *Thymra capitata*



Wormleaf saltwort, *Salsola vermiculata*



FAUNA

MOLLUSCS

Buckshot barnacle, *Chthamalus sp.*



Clam, *Ruditapes decussatus*



Cuttlefish, *Sepia officinalis*



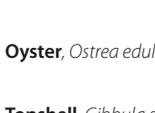
Limpet, *Patella sp.*



Mussel, *Mytilus galloprovincialis*



Octopus, *Octopus vulgaris*



Oyster, *Ostrea edulis*



Topshell, *Gibbula spp.*

CNIDARIANS

Sea anemones
Anemonia sulcata and *Actinia equina*



CRUSTACEANS

(Green) crab, *Carcinus maenas*



Shrimp, *Palaemon serratus*

ECHINODERMS

Sea urchin, *Paracentrotus lividus*;



Starfish, *Marthasterias glacialis*

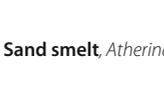


FISH

White seabream, *Diplodus sargus*;



Common two-banded seabream, *Diplodus vulgaris*



Sand smelt, *Atherina presbyter*

Rainbow wrasse, *Coris julis* and *Symphodus spp.*



Greater pipefish (seahorse),
Syngnathus acus



REPTILES

Chameleon, *Chamaeleon*

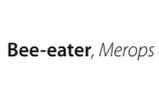


BIRDS

Avocet, *Recurvirostra avosetta*



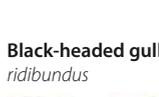
Azure-winged magpie,
Cyanopica cyana



Bee-eater, *Merops apiaster*



Blackbird, *Turdus merula*



Black-headed gull, *Larus ridibundus*



Black-tailed godwit, *Limosa limosa*



Black-winged stilt, *Bimantous himantopus*



Cattle egret, *Bubulcus ibis*



Common tern, *Sterna hirundo*



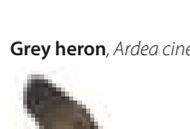
Coot, *Fulica atra*



Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*



Flamingo, *Phoenicopterus ruber*



Grey heron, *Ardea cinerea*



Gull-billed tern, *Gelochelidon nilotica*



Herring-gull, *Larus argentatus*
(=Yellow-legged gull), *Larus cachinnans*



Hoopoe, *Upupa epops*



Jackdaw, *Corvus monedula*



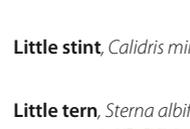
Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*



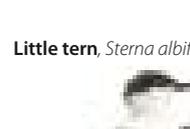
Kingfisher, *Alcedo atthis*



Little egret, *Egretta garzetta*



Little stint, *Calidris minuta*



Little tern, *Sterna albifrons*



Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*



Peregrine, *Falco peregrinus*



Plover, *Charadrius spp.*



Purple gallinule (=Cayman),
Porphyrio porphyrio



Purple heron, *Ardea purpurea*



Rock dove, *Columba livia*



Sandwich tern, *Sterna sandvicensis*



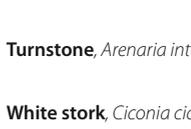
Shag, *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*



Stonechat, *Saxicola torquata*



Swift, *Apus spp.*



Turnstone, *Arenaria interpres*



White stork, *Ciconia ciconia*



MAMMALS

Bat, *Rhinolophus spp.*



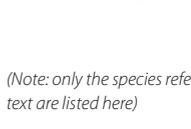
Fox, *Vulpes vulpes*



Otter, *Lutra lutra*



Rabbit, *Oryctolagus cuniculus*



(Note: only the species referred to in the text are listed here)



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