

Portugal: Alentejo – A Walking Tour

Tour code: JPA

Revised: Oct 09

The Alentejo is an extensive region covering almost a third of Portugal. It stretches from the river Tagus to the north, which flows out to Lisbon, to the hills of the Algarve in the south. In the east the Alentejo shares a border with Spain, and to the west it opens onto the Atlantic Ocean. Essentially rural and sparsely populated, it offers a landscape that is uncommonly well conserved in this age of either intensive over cultivation or over commercialisation. Its scenic beauty, moderate climate and the abundance and quality of its heritage (monuments, architecture and ethnography); make the Alentejo an exceptional place to visit. Motorways make the region easy to reach but on leaving these routes visitors enter the rich landscapes of cork-oak woodland, wheat-fields, vineyards and olive groves, beaches and cliffs. Whilst walking, you will see the region's traditional ways of living and working; meeting with local people who are by nature friendly and hospitable.

The area's value at some points, in terms of geology, landscape, flora and fauna; has brought about their classification as

"Protected Areas". Such regions offer a warm welcome to lovers of nature, these coupled with the wonderful coastline, ensures that anyone seeking water and sun will find them throughout the interior of the Alentejo. The area offers over 20 lakes.

The Alentejo is excellent for easy to moderate walking as the landscape is rolling rather than mountainous. The area enjoys a very pleasant climate and is warmer in the spring and autumn than most other parts of Europe. This has traditionally made it extremely popular with Portuguese tourists in July and August, and yet it remains largely undiscovered by northern Europeans who tend to flock the Algarve.



Travel Information

Season: February to December, but July and August are not available due to the heat that makes it uncomfortable for walking and because at this time accommodations tend to be block booked by the Portuguese on vacation. This tour can also operate in January; generally the daytime temperatures will be around 16 or 17C and night-time temperatures of around 9 degrees centigrade. The days can be clear and sunny but of course there is a greater risk of rain during these months.

Travel: Flights to Lisbon using British Airways everyday of the week from London Heathrow. Alternatively charters are available from Gatwick, Manchester and Birmingham (Thurs, Sat and Sun), Glasgow (Thurs and Sats). Alternatively you can use the low cost airlines Easyjet & Flybe. My Travel Light and Monarch all now fly scheduled to Faro as well.

Arrival and departure: Both our first & final nights are spent in Vila Nova de Milfontes. From the airport in Faro you can transfer in about 1.5 hours by taxi for Euro 150. We will of course set this transfer up on your behalf. The journey by public transport is complicated as there is no direct route so we strongly recommend the private transfer at each end of the tour. Transfers are also available for those clients flying in and out of Lisbon; the cost is Euro 150 each way with a maximum of 4 clients in the vehicle.

Alternatively if arriving into Lisbon by lunchtime you can use the public bus to Milfontes. Taxi to bus station approx Euros 10-15. Bus then operates at 0700, 1030, 1500, 1700. Bus price is approx 13 Euros.

General Information

Baths: it is not normal for your room to have a bath, the main reason being that it takes up a lot of space, some hotels/guesthouses may have a separate room in the house where a bath is available to guests, but in the main it is showers.

Breakfast: In Portugal usually consists of coffee and toast/croissant and jams etc. if you want more for breakfast then we would suggest you purchase some food the night before. It is important for you to tell us if you have any dietary requirements when you book your holiday so that we can inform everyone that you are staying with.

Language: When travelling in less frequented areas you will not necessarily come across people speaking English. Remember you have left home to find things different. Buy a phrase book and try to learn a bit of Portuguese!

Luggage: When staying in hotels, sometimes your luggage will have been taken to your room awaiting your arrival. However don't be surprised if your luggage is waiting for you to take it up to your room.

Level of Difficulty

This tour is classed as Easy, but with some long moderate graded stages.

Fitness: This holiday should present few difficulties to anyone in reasonable condition and accustomed to undulating walking in warm conditions.

Waymarking: There is **no** way-marking as such on this route, so clients should have experience of route finding with map and compass. However our ground operators have now marked posts with unobtrusive yellow marks to aid in navigation. They also provide a mobile phone pre-programmed with their numbers in case of navigational difficulties, or if the weather deteriorates and you wish to be collected, so there is plenty of back up on this tour.

Singles: This tour is not available to the single walker.

Footwear: Some tracks are quite stony and may have loose sand and pebbles; footwear with a degree of ankle support is important, but you don't need heavy mountain boots.

Day Stages: Day Stages Max 30km Min 10km.

Accommodation & Meals

Accommodation is on a bed and breakfast basis, 1 evening meal is included on your arrival day which is included in the tour cost. The places we stay at during the tour are all privately owned, and have plenty of Portuguese character. You will spend your first and last nights in a small hotel in Vila Nova de Milfontes, and the other nights are spent in guesthouses in Cavaleiro, Zambujeira, Odeceixe, Sao Teotónio and Odemira. A recommended list of local restaurants will be supplied on arrival listing delicious traditional dishes of fresh Portuguese cuisine.

- ❑ **Day 1:** Vila Nova de Milfontes, this beautiful town on the Mira estuary is well worth exploring; it has wonderful panoramic views over the river and places to enjoy nature.
- ❑ **Day 2:** After breakfast a coastal walk of 15 km will take you along sand dunes and cliffs to the village of Cavaleiro, where cliff-nesting storks can be watched from the light house. The night will be spent in a rural guesthouse.
- ❑ **Day 3:** Continuing south the route passes by the tiny fishing port of "Entrada da Barca" then on to the bay of Zambujeira do Mar (10 km) where fresh bream and sea bass can be sampled in the local restaurants. Overnight in Zambujeira.
- ❑ **Day 4:** A coastal path starting at the beach leads us onto Carvalhal bay, past the former residence of the famous "fado" singer Amália Rodrigues. Next it drops down over the river into the town of Odeceixe, the first town in the Algarve (15 km); and here we will stay the night in a "Pensão".
- ❑ **Day 5:** Heading into the interior, through traditionally farmed agricultural land, a walk of 15 km takes us to the market town of São Teotónio where we will rest overnight in a "Residential" (a type of guesthouse).
- ❑ **Day 6:** Following the path east from S. Teotónio, leads through fields where cork oaks grow and black pigs graze. Eventually it brings us onto the tributary of the river Mira, this we follow into the county town of Odemira to spend the night in a guesthouse in the heart of the town (10 km).
- ❑ **Day 7:** Following the river Mira, a 30 km walk along its banks passing the villages of Troviscais and the working windmill of Vale Bejinha, will complete the circuit and take us back to the Vila Nova de Milfontes for a well earned rest at the hotel.
- ❑ **Day 8:** End of tour, return to Lisbon or Faro airport.

Outline Itinerary