With many of the country’s safest and loveliest beaches, and a year-round balmy climate, it is not surprising that the Algarve is Portugal’s most popular region for holidaymakers. Inevitably, this also means that stretches of the coast – in particular from [Faro](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/faro-around/) west to [Albufeira](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/albufeira-around/) – are heavily developed, though even here the beaches are first-rate, as are the facilities. Elsewhere in the Algarve, especially around [Sagres](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/sagres-around/) and [Tavira](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/tavira-around/), the surroundings are more attractive, with laidback resorts and low-key development.

Continue reading to find out more about...

* Olhão and the islands
* Fuseta
* Cabanas
* Alcoutim
* The central Algarve resorts
* Loulé
* Armação de Pêra
* Silves
* The Serra de Monchique
* The western Algarve
* West Coast Portugal
* Cacela Velha
* Vila Real de Santo António and around
* Alcoutim
* Carvoeiro and Around
* Ferragudo
* Portimão
* Alvor

To the west of Vilamoura, you’ll find the rocky outcrops and cove beaches for which the Algarve is best known, especially around the main resorts of [Albufeira](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/albufeira-around/), Armação de Pêra and [Lagos](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/lagos/). The coast becomes progressively wilder as you head west, where attractive smaller resorts include the former fishing villages of Burgau or Salema, and the historic cape of [Sagres](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/sagres-around/) – thought to be the site of Henry the Navigator’s naval school. The string of villages along the rougher west coast, as far as Odeceixe, are quieter still, with limited facilities but fantastic wild beaches ideal for surfing.

The eastern coast between [Faro](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/faro-around/) and the Spanish border is very different. Most of it is protected within the Reserva Natural da Ria Formosa, a series of barrier islands fronted by extensive sandy beaches. That means taking a short boat trip to reach the sands, which has helped preserve the towns from large-scale development. The resorts here have a more Portuguese feel than those in the central stretch, and first-choice bases here would be [Faro](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/faro-around/) itself – capital of the entire region – as well as Olhão, Fuseta, Cabanas or [Tavira](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/tavira-around/), all of which offer easy access to the sandbank islands.

Inland Algarve is still relatively undeveloped, especially around Alcoutim on the Spanish border. The Roman ruins of Milreu and the market town of Loulé are both worth an outing from [Faro](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/faro-around/), while the old Moorish town of Silves is easily accessed from Portimão. Towards the west of the region, Caldas de Monchique is a quaint spa town in verdant woodland that makes up much of the picturesque Serra de Monchique mountain range.

**Olhão and the islands**

There are few actual sights in OLHÃO, 8km east of [Faro](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/faro-around/), but with a vibrant market, attractive riverfront gardens and atmospheric backstreets, it’s an appealing place to spend some time. It also makes a great base from which to visit the surrounding sandbank islands of Armona and Culatra or the Quinta da Marim environmental centre. The largely pedestrianized old town boasts some superb tile-fronted buildings, quirky shops and bars, while the flat roofs and narrow streets are striking and give a North African look to the place – perhaps not surprisingly, as Olhão had traditional trading links with Morocco. The town was granted its charter by exiled king João VI to thank the local fishermen who sailed a small boat, O Caíque de Bom Sucesso, across the Atlantic to Brazil in 1808 to give him the good news that Napoleon’s troops had left Portugal. The amazing journey was completed with the most basic navigational aids, and a replica of the boat is now moored on the water behind the market: it occasionally runs boat trips along the coast – ask at the turismo for details.

**Fuseta**

Around 10km east of Olhão, and served by regular bus as well as the main Algarve rail line, the fishing town of FUSETA (or Fuzeta) is one of the Algarve’s least “discovered” resorts, probably because of its shortage of accommodation. It is not the region’s most beautiful town, but it does retain some character as a working fishing port. Its daily routine revolves around its fishermen, whose colourful boats line up alongside the river in town, though in summer Fuseta also attracts a lively community of campers. The two communities usually mingle at the line of lively kiosk-cafés spreading down from the ferry stop towards the river beach.

The town’s backstreets straddle a low hill facing the lagoon, sheltered by the eastern extremity of the Ilha da Armona. Many of the local fish find their way to the small covered market on Largo 1° de Maio, on the road running parallel to the river. On Saturdays the market expands into a flea market that lines the adjacent pedestrianized Rua Tenente Barrosa. Continue up this road to reach the town’s little palm-tree-lined central square.

The waterfront of modern shops and apartments faces broad gardens that are largely taken over by the campsite. Beyond this is the estuary beach, a fine stretch of white sand that weaves up to a wooden lifeboat house, though more exhilarating and cleaner waters are found over the lagoon on the Ilha da Armona.

**Cabanas**

Six kilometres east of [Tavira](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/tavira-around/) – past the golf course at Benamor – lies Cabanas, named after the fishermen’s cabanas (huts) that formed the original settlement. Today a kernel of backstreets is still made up of pretty fishermen’s houses along with a line of low-rise shops, cafés, restaurants, and bars facing a picturesque river estuary edged by a neat wooden walkway. Moored fishing boats testify to the village’s former mainstay, though today the economy is largely driven by tourism thanks to the glorious sands on Praia de Cabanas over the estuary.

**Things to do in Cabanas**

Ferries shuttle passengers to the Praia de Cabanas from a small jetty opposite Restaurante O Monteiro in the east of town. Cross the dunes and you’re faced with kilometres of golden sand, plus a couple of seasonal beach cafés, a perfect spot for swimming, sunbathing and relaxing before grabbing a yummy lunch or sunset dinner. There are three golf courses in the area for golfers, a 17th century Sao Joao da Barra fort, now turned into a luxury seafront hotel for those who love relaxing. For nature lovers, you can take a boat ride to the waterways of the Ria Formosa Natural Reserve, ideal for birdwatching.

**Weather in Cabanas**

The best time to visit Cabanas is typically during September and October, when the temperature is in the high 20s. The Summer months are of course the hottest, with temperatures sitting in the mid 30s. Spring is cooler, as with winter, at around 17 - 20 degrees; perfect if you want some winter sunshine.

**Alcoutim**

Some 40km north of Vila Real – and best approached by car along the road that hugs the Guadiana River – is the extremely attractive border village of ALCOUTIM. It has a long history as a river port, dominated in turn by Greeks, Romans and Arabs who all fortified the heights with various structures; the castle dates from the fourteenth century and offers fine views over the river. The entrance fee includes access to a small archeological museum by the main gates, which traces the history of the castle, its active service in various battles and the remnants of earlier structures on the site. From the castle, cobbled backstreets lead down to the small main square, below which is the appealing riverfront. Currents are too strong for safe swimming, but you can take a boat across the river to the Spanish village of Sanlúcar, a mirror image of Alcoutim, with its own ruined castle; or swim at the river beach (praia fluvial) in a small tributary off the Mértola road.

**The central Algarve resorts**

The central Algarve from [Faro](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/faro-around/) to [Lagos](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/lagos/) encompasses some of the region’s best beaches – but also its most intense tourist development. Despite this, Quinta do Lago, Vale do Lobo and Vilamoura are low density and upmarket: purpose-built resorts with great facilities including marinas, top golf courses and tennis centres. These resorts don’t have much traditional culture, though there’s a little more of that at neighbouring Quarteira, a high-rise resort with a fine town beach and a renowned fish market.

**Getting around Central Algarve resorts**

A road train trundles along the seafront, round town and back to the market every hour or so (May–Sept daily 10am–dusk; €2).

**Loulé**

LOULÉ, 18km inland from [Faro](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/faro-around/), has always been an important centre of commerce and is still best known for its markets. It has recently grown to a fair size, though its compact centre doesn’t take long to look around. The most interesting streets, a grid of whitewashed cobbled lanes, lie between the remains of its Moorish castle (now a museum) and the thirteenth-century Gothic Igreja Matriz, with its palm-lined gardens in front.

**Armação de Pêra**

ARMAÇÃO DE PÊRA, 15km west of [Albufeira](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/albufeira-around/), fronts one of the largest beaches in the Algarve, which spreads east all the way to Galé. Beach aside, it is not the greatest looking of resorts; high-rise buildings and apartments straggle along the town’s main through-road, tempered only by a pedestrianized promenade overlooking the central part of the sands. The remains of Armação de Pêra’s fortified walls are at the eastern end of the resort, where a terrace in front of a little white chapel provides sweeping views. But the town beach is fine and if the main section is crowded, just head further east, beyond the cluster of traditional boats on the fishermen’s beach towards Galé, where things are quieter. Aside from the beaches, the other local attraction is 4km up the main N125 at Porches, where the most famous of the Algarve’s chunky and hand-painted pottery comes from – the main road is lined with shops that sell it.

**Silves**

Eighteen kilometres northeast of Portimão, with a superb castle whose dramatic ring of red walls gradually reveal themselves as you approach, SILVES is well worth at least a half-day’s visit. While under Moorish occupation, the town was the capital of the Algarve – indeed it was the Moors who named the region al-Gharb (“the west”), and built Silves into a well-fortified and sophisticated place. The town’s golden age came to an end, however, in 1189 with the arrival of Sancho I and his large, unruly army of Crusaders, who laid siege to thirty thousand Moorish inhabitants in the citadel for three months. When the Moors’ water and food supplies finally ran low they agreed to open the citadel gates in return for Sancho guaranteeing the safety of its inhabitants. The Crusaders, however, ignored Sancho’s pledge and killed some six thousand Moors as they gleefully took the fortress. Silves passed back into Moorish hands two years later, but by then the town had been irreparably weakened, and it finally fell to Christian forces for good in 1249.

**The Serra de Monchique**

The Serra de Monchique is a rolling mountain range separating the Algarve from the neighbouring Alentejo district. Its slopes are made up of deciduous oaks and chestnut woods and it’s one of the few areas of Portugal that shows off dazzling autumn colours. Its highest peak – at nearly 900m – is Fóia, from where, on a clear day, the views stretch over the south coast of the Algarve and west across to Cabo de São Vicente. Sadly this area also bears the brunt of the summer fires that seem to rage annually, though the woodland is generally quick to recover.

**Caldas de Monchique**

Set in a beautifully wooded ravine, CALDAS DE MONCHIQUE was a spa even in Roman times and was once popular with Portuguese royalty. It was sympathetically restored in 2000, transforming a somewhat ramshackle spa resort into a tourist village – and the results have been fairly successful. The cobbled, tree-shaded main square, fronted by the pseudo-Moorish windows of the former casino (now an exhibition hall), is surrounded by lovely nineteenth-century buildings and the wooded setting is a delight. At the foot of the village, the modern thermal spa offers specialist treatments – including water massage, jet-showers and a steam room.

**Monchique**

MONCHIQUE, 6km from Caldas, is a sizeable hilltown best visited for its market, held on the second Friday of each month (by the helipad): check out the local smoked hams and distinctive wooden furniture – especially the distinctive x-shaped chairs. There’s also a weekly Sunday market on the main square, Largo 5 de Outubro, though the town is liveliest during the Feira dos Enchidos Tradicionaes (Traditional Sausage Fair) in March, when restaurants lay on special menus. The old town is dotted with beautifully crafted metal sculptures of local characters made by a contemporary Lisbon artist, which you can spot on the waymarked route to the ruined seventeenth-century monastery of Nossa Senhora do Desterro, signed uphill from the bus station. Only a rickety shell of this Franciscan church remains, but it’s a lovely fifteen-minute walk up.

There’s a beautiful, winding 8km drive from Monchique up to the Serra’s highest peak at Fóia, though the summit itself – bristling with radio masts, and capped by an ungainly modern complex sheltering a café-restaurant and shop – can be an anticlimax, especially if clouds obscure the views. On a clear day, however, the vistas are superb.

**The western Algarve**

The coast west of [Lagos](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/lagos/), as far as [Sagres](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/sagres-around/), remains one of the least spoiled parts of the Algarve, largely thanks to the Parque Natural da Costa Vicentina which prohibits large-scale building on the coastline west of Burgau. As a result, the resorts – certainly west of Luz at Burgau and Salema – remain largely low-rise and low-key. Most of the coast is linked by a craggy coast path and you can easily walk between the villages: Salema to Luz, or Luz to [Lagos](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/lagos/), in particular, are beautiful routes.

**Burgau**

Once past the modern suburbs, BURGAU, 5km west of Luz, is a pretty little former fishing village of narrow cobbled lanes which tumble down a steep hillside to a fine sandy beach set below low cliffs. Fishing boats still line the lower roads, which double up as slipways, while narrow alleys weave around to a miradouro viewpoint. In July and August the village is somewhat mobbed, but at other times it retains a distinct character, with locals cooking fish on tiny grills outside their homes.

**Salema**

At the bottom of an attractive valley, Salema is no longer the thriving fishing village it once was, but its tight warren of fishermen’s houses above the eastern end of a fine, sandy bay now form the hub of an attractive resort. Many of the old houses are now converted into inexpensive holiday lets: look for signs in the windows. A plume of modern development spreads steeply uphill, but at least the white villas are in keeping with the old town, and its beach only gets busy in high season.

**West Coast Portugal**

The Algarve’s west coast faces the full brunt of the Atlantic, whose crashing breakers and cooler waters have largely deterred the developers. Nevertheless, the rocky coastline is punctuated by fantastic broad beaches accessible from the small villages of Carrapateira, Odeceixe or, a little further inland, Aljezur. This is popular territory for surfers, campervanners and hardy nudists who appreciate the remote beaches, but be warned: the sea can be dangerous and swimmers should take great care. The designation in 1995 of the stretch of coast from Burgau to Cabo de São Vicente and up through the Alentejo as a nature reserve – the Parque Natural da Costa Vicentina – has afforded the rugged scenery a certain amount of protection, though it also means that accommodation is scarce and it certainly helps to have your own transport.

**Aljezur**

ALJEZUR (pronounced “alj-ezoor”), 16km north of Carrapeteira, is the liveliest town on this coast, though some way inland from any beaches. The main coast road passes through a prosaic, modern lower town where you find banks, the post office and a range of cafés and restaurants. The more interesting historic centre spreads uphill beyond the bridge over the Aljezur River, a network of narrow cobbled streets reaching up through whitewashed houses to the remains of an eleventh-century Moorish castle, a lovely picnic spot and where you can see the remains of the cistern and grain silos. It’s a lovely walk up to the castle with sweeping views over the valley, via a cluster of museums (see also Walks in and around Aljezur).

The Casa Museu Pintor José Cercas displays the works and collections of local artist José Cercas, who lived in the house until his death in 1992. His well-observed landscapes and religious scenes are complemented by the attractive house and pretty garden.

Some 10km southwest of Aljezur, Praia da Arrifana is a superb, sandy sweep set below high, crumbling black cliffs which shelter a tiny fishing harbour. The beach is excellent, and surf competitions are sometimes held here. Several simple café-restaurants lie along the road above the beach, all serving grilled fish at moderate prices.

**Walks in and around Aljezur**

The active historical society in Aljezur has marked out an attractive 4km Circuito Histórico around the old town, with historical sights marked by plaques in English and Portuguese. Before the river silted up in the fifteenth century, Aljezur was a major port, and the route passes buildings such as the tollhouse, once used to check weights and goods as they arrived. The town also marks the crossover point of two major long-distance walking trails: the Via Algarviana, which runs for 300km from Alcoutim in the west to Cabo de São Vicente in the south; and the Rota Vicentina, which runs for 340km from Santiago de Cacém in the Alentejo, sharing the southern route to Cabo de São Vicente with the Via Algarviana.

**Odeceixe**

The attractive village of ODECEIXE tumbles down a hillside opposite the broad valley of the Ribeira da Seixe, below the winding, tree-lined main coast road. Sleepy out of season, its character changes in summer when it attracts a steady stream of surfers, campervanners and families, lured by a superb beach and a very laidback atmosphere. Everything centres on the single main street and a small square, Largo 1 de Maio, where you’ll find some lively bars, plenty of cafés, a couple of minimarkets, post office, bank and craft shops.

The beach, Praia de Odeceixe, is 4km west of the village, reached down a verdant river valley, the fields either side neatly cultivated with corn. A road-train trundles between village and beach during July and August, but it’s a lovely walk along the road as well, following the river to a broad, sandy bay framed by low cliffs. Praia de Odeceixe is one of the most sheltered beaches along this stretch of coast, offering superb surfing and relatively safe swimming, especially when the tide is out. There’s lots of parking above the bay, as well as a cluster of houses and cafés, some offering quartos (rooms to rent).

**Carrapateira and its beaches**

Some twenty kilometres to the north of [Sagres](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/sagres-around/) is the low-key village of CARRAPATEIRA. There’s not much to the village itself, but most people are drawn by the nearby Praia da Bordeira, a spectacular beach backed by giant dunes, a tiny river and crashing surf. A couple of kilometres south of Carrapateira (signed off the main road), there’s a further fantastic broad, sandy bay, Praia do Amado, with a couple of seasonal cafés. Backed by low hills, it’s particularly popular with surfers, and there’s a surf school here.

**Cacela Velha**

Perched on a low cliff facing the estuary, 10km east of Cabanas, the whitewashed village of CACELA VELHA is a reminder of how the Algarve must have looked half a century ago. Apart from a few café-restaurants, there are no tourist facilities, just a pretty church and the remains of an eighteenth-century fort – and even that houses a maritime police station and is closed to the public. Offering exhilarating views from its clifftop, Cacela is highly picturesque and, despite the Quinta da Ria/Quinta da Cima golf courses just to the west, it’s rarely overrun by visitors. The only time the place gets busy is during the Moorish Nights in July – a four-day festival of Arabic food and Moorish-inspired events, including a souk.

The beach below the village has been rated as one of the best in the world, and it would be hard not to agree. To get to it, follow signs to “Fábrica”, just west of the village, around 1km downhill. From here a ferryman can take you over to the beach (daily in summer, but only during good weather the rest of the year).

**Vila Real de Santo António and around**

VILA REAL DE SANTO ANTÓNIO (aka Vila Real) is a pleasant border town, the terminus for the trans-Algarve railway line. The ferry across the Guadiana from here to Ayamonte is still the most fun way to cross the border, but the construction of a modern road bridge just north of the town in the 1990s greatly affected the town’s former role as the Algarve’s main access point to Spain. Nevertheless, it’s still an interesting place to spend a few hours, exploring a central grid of streets that radiates out from a handsome main square, Praça Marquês de Pombal, ringed by orange trees, low, white buildings and pleasant outdoor cafés. The square is named after the king’s minister, who helped rebuild the original town after it was destroyed in a tsunami following the 1755 earthquake. Indeed the grid plan, dating from 1774, is very similar to that of Lisbon’s Baixa.

On the north side of the square, Rua Teófilo Braga, the pedestrianized main street, leads inland from the riverfront Avenida da República to the Centro Cultural António Aleixo, the town’s former market building now used as an innovative space for temporary exhibits and the occasional film, and which also dispenses tourist information. The streets surrounding the cultural centre have a certain low-key charm, bristling with linen shops, electrical retailers and grocers, while the riverside gardens offer fine views across to the splash of white that is Ayamonte in Spain.

**Alcoutim**

Some 40km north of Vila Real – and best approached by car along the road that hugs the Guadiana River – is the extremely attractive border village of ALCOUTIM. It has a long history as a river port, dominated in turn by Greeks, Romans and Arabs who all fortified the heights with various structures; the castle dates from the fourteenth century and offers fine views over the river. The entrance fee includes access to a small archeological museum by the main gates, which traces the history of the castle, its active service in various battles and the remnants of earlier structures on the site. From the castle, cobbled backstreets lead down to the small main square, below which is the appealing riverfront. Currents are too strong for safe swimming, but you can take a boat across the river to the Spanish village of Sanlúcar, a mirror image of Alcoutim, with its own ruined castle; or swim at the river beach (praia fluvial) in a small tributary off the Mértola road.

**Carvoeiro and Around**

A whitewashed former fishing village nestled into sea cliffs, the small resort of CARVOEIRO must once have been very attractive, but now its small cove beach has to support the prostrate bodies of hundreds of tourists shipped in to what has become an overblown resort.

**Things to Do in Carvoeiro**

Apart from the obvious activities such as swimming, sunbathing and generally just relaxing and enjoy the beach, there are other places to explore should you want more of an adventure. From the beach itself, local fisherman run boat trips to the nearby caves. You can also visit the impressive rock formations of Algar Seco, 1km east of town, where steps lead down low cliffs to a series of dramatic overhangs above blow holes and grottoes. They are accessible via the coast road, or by a road train that trundles out from Carvoeiro every hour or so.

There are two superb cove beaches a few kilometres to the west of Carvoeiro, though you’ll need your own transport to reach them from town. First up is Praia da Caneiros, with a rock stack jutting from the sea off its lovely beach and a superb beachside restaurant, Rei das Praias. A couple of kilometres further on, Praia Pintadinho is almost as appealing, with a simpler café-restaurant.

**Best time to visit Carvoeiro**

The Summer months in Carvoeiro can be quite hot, the best time to visit the Algarve region is between April and June, when temperatures sit nicely at around 25 degrees, the same for September and October. It is never particularly cold, with the lowest avergae temperature sitting at 11 degrees in January, when rainfall is at its highest.

**Around Carvoeiro**

Carvoeiro is a small town, so once you've explored it's streets and relaxed on the beaches, you may be looking for a day trip. Nearby is Silves, a historical town with a Moorish castle and pretty riverside walks. A nice way to see Silves is by taking a boat trip up the Arade River from Portimao.

**Ferragudo**

Facing the sprawl of Portimão across the Rio Arade estuary, FERRAGUDO is an attractive former fishing village centred on a strip of palm-fringed gardens that spread up to the cobbled main square, Praça Rainha Dona Leonor. A waterfront promenade lined with fish restaurants skirts the estuary – you can take various boat trips from here, most linking up with those departing from Portimão.The old town spreads steeply uphill behind the estuary, its warren of atmospheric cobbled backstreets gathered around Ferragudo’s church, with a terrace that offers great views. The town has an estuary beach, which gets progressively more appealing as it approaches the impressive Castelo de São João do Arade. The castle (closed to the public) faces its partner fort in [Praia da Rocha](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/praia-da-rocha/) across the river, both of which were built in the sixteenth century to defend Portimão against attack.

The nearest ocean beach lies a couple of kilometres south, where you’ll find the broad sands of Praia Grande at the mouth of the Rio Arade, with a scattering of restaurant-bars.

**Portimão**

Sited on the broad estuary of the Rio Arade, Portimão has made its living from fishing since pre-Roman times, but today it's a sprawling modern port of around forty thousand people. Few of Portimão’s buildings made it through the 1755 earthquake – the Igreja da Nossa Senhora da Conceição is a rare survivor, retaining a fourteenth-century Manueline door, though most of the church was rebuilt in the late seventeenth century. The surrounding streets are pleasant enough, filled with shops selling lace, shoes, jewellery, ceramics and wicker goods, while the main shopping streets are around the pedestrianized Rua Diogo Tomé and Rua da Portades de São José.

The most attractive part of town is the riverfront, where a series of squares – Largo do Dique, Praça Manuel Teixeira Gomes and Praça Visconde de Bivar – are filled with outdoor cafés by gushing fountains. Heading up the river and under the road bridge you’ll find a series of open-air restaurants serving inexpensive grilled-sardine lunches. The narrow streets just back from the bridge – off Largo da Barca – are Portimão’s oldest, with more than a hint of their fishing-quarter past.

**Alvor**

Set slightly inland on the Rio Alvor, the port of Alvor, 6km west of [Praia da Rocha](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/praia-da-rocha/), briefly achieved fame as the place where Dom João II died in 1495. Although much of the town was razed in the 1755 earthquake, it still boasts a sixteenth-century Igreja Matriz with Manueline doors and pillars carved into fishing ropes and plants. Despite the inevitable development, the old core around the church and the central Praça da República retains some character, while the harbour itself is a delight, lined with colourful fishing boats and aromatic fish restaurants. Two-hour boat trips to various places along the coast leave from here. From the harbour it's a short walk uphill to the ruins of Alvor’s castle, which dates back to the thirteenth century but now houses a children’s playground.

**Exploring Alvor**

From here, Rua Padre David Neto leads onto Rua Dr Frederico Romas Mendes, the main drag lined with bars and restaurants. This stretches down to the riverside Largo da Ribeira, marked by a modern statue of a fish, where you’ll find half a dozen fish restaurants overlooking the picturesque Rio Alvor. Head right as you face the river and a path leads up the estuary for a tranquil walk; bear left and it is a ten-minute stroll past fishermen’s huts and riverside cafés to the Praia de Alvor, an enormous beach backed by café-bars.

**Praia de Alvor**

Praia de Alvor is a beach of stunning measures - spanning several kilometres, the sands are soft and the waters blue. You will find a long boardwalk close to the beach that leads you to the pretty Ria de Alvor Nature Reserve. When you're not busy enjoying the beach and sunshine, check out the local church and castle.

**Getting to Alvor**

If you are staying in the town of Alvor, the beach is just a short walk away. From [Lagos](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/portugal/algarve/lagos/) and Portimao there are buses to the village, and if traveling by car; Alvor is well sign-posted. Close to the beach is a parking lot that is shockingly cheap at 1.50€ for the full day.