

Algarve

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The **Algarve** is the southernmost region of [Portugal](#), on the coast of the **Atlantic Ocean**.

Regions

- [Barlavento](#) ([Lagos](#), [Silves](#), [Portimão](#), [Lagoa](#), [Albufeira](#) areas)
- [Serra Algarvia](#) ([Monchique](#), [Caldeirão](#))
- [Sotavento](#) ([Faro](#), [Loulé](#), [São Brás de Alportel](#), [Olhão](#), [Tavira](#), [Vila Real de Santo António](#) areas)

Cities

- [Faro](#) — the regional capital
- [Albufeira](#)
- [Lagos](#)
- [Sagres](#)
- [Monchique](#)
- [Paderne](#)
- [Portimão](#)
- [Silves](#) — first capital of the Algarve which has a Moorish castle
- [Tavira](#) — a city near the [Ria Formosa](#) (lagoon).

Other destinations

- [Castro Marim](#)
- [Quarteira](#)

Understand

The Algarve is Portugal's most popular holiday destination due to the clean beaches (approximately 200 km of them), the cool, unpolluted water, and the fact that it is relatively cheap, very safe, and overall welcoming. English is spoken at most resorts.

The Algarve is rich in culture and diversity. If you are looking for fast-paced resorts or a calm tranquil setting either is attainable. The entire region is approximately 5400sq km and is graced with over 100 different beaches. Of those 100, 88 beaches are designated as [blue flag beaches](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_Flag_beach) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_Flag_beach).

If you are into nature the choices are many from the Ria Formosa to Monchique mountain, from Caldeirão mountains to the Sagres cape, in fact, there are over 30 hiking trails (as per official Turismo de Portugal guidebooks). There are over 30 courses dotted throughout the region. Although the permanent resident population is under 500,000 the area receives more than tenfold that in tourism each year. The busiest times of the year tend to be July/August.



Falesia Beach

History

Following the neolithic period of the region's history, approximately 1000 BC, settlements and trading ports were established by the Phoenicians who were attracted by deposits of copper, manganese, and iron. They came from the coastal regions of the eastern Mediterranean of modern-day Syria, Israel, and Lebanon. Circa 550 BC Portimão was one of the ports founded by the Carthaginians who came from North Africa. In the 2nd century, BC the region came under the control of the Romans as they spread throughout the Iberian Peninsular. Many Roman ruins still remain today throughout the Algarve and can be seen in many areas, but the best to visit is probably at the Milreu ruins, 7km from Faro, where buildings that started construction as a Roman villa later became a Christian Church.

Following the collapse of the Roman Empire, the Visigoths took control of the Algarve until the invasion of the Moors from North Africa in 711 AD. At this time, the Visigoths who came from central Europe were defeated in the Battle of Guadalete by a force of invading Arabs and Berbers.

There followed a period of five centuries of Arab rule in Iberia. The Moors conquered the Algarve in 716. Faro, which had been called Santa Maria, was renamed Faraon, meaning 'the settlement of the Knights'. Even the name of the



Secluded beaches bordered by rocks near Albufeira

region owes its origin to the Moors who knew the region as 'al-gharb' meaning 'the west'. There is evidence of the moors throughout the Algarve and Southern Spain, illustrated by chimney stacks, pottery, and the Moorish style of architecture, particularly, the Arabic castle at app Silves. The castle was built by Almoravid Arabs in the 11th century out of red sandstone and dried mud and is the best preserved Moorish castle in the country. In the 12th Century, King Afonso III, with a little help from English mercenaries, finally evicted the Moors and once again the Portuguese dominated the region, although the area was not fully secure from Moorish attacks until the middle of the 13th century.

Born in Porto in 1394, Prince Henry the Navigator based himself somewhere around Lagos/Sagres, and is considered to be responsible for many of the 'discoveries' made by the Portuguese in the middle ages sending out expeditions to Africa, the islands of Madeira and the Azores. In 1419 he was appointed governor of the province of the Algarve.

Disaster struck on 1st November 1755, with a huge earthquake whose epicenter was reported to have been 200km South-West of the country and registering 9 on the Richter Scale. The coastal areas of the Algarve were devastated by the earthquake and subsequent tsunami. The devastation was not only limited to the Algarve, British naval reports from the period indicate the arrival of a huge wave in the port of Lisbon. The damage to Lisbon was almost total, and following huge political turmoil the person responsible for the reconstruction of the city was the Marquis of Pombal, the then Prime Minister.

Climate

Mediterranean.

Get in

International flights into Faro airport (FAO) then (1) by bus: national buses run from outside the airport to the bus terminal regularly throughout the day time on weekdays or (2) by taxi: which will be under €10 from the airport to the train station.



Spectacular rocks on the beach

By plane

Faro Airport [1] (http://www.ana.pt/portal/page/portal/ANA/AEROPORTO_FARO/) is the main airport for the region. On arrival, there is a wide selection of car hire options both at static desks in the airport and also within the terminal at a meeting point. From Faro airport, the train station and bus terminals can be reached by taxi.

By train

There are daily(fast) train connections between Faro and Lisboa (4 hours).

By bus

There are daily bus connections between Lagos, Olhao, Faro (and many other cities), and Spanish cities such as Seville and Huelva. A single ticket to Sevilla - Faro costs €20 and the journey takes 4 to 5 hours.

By boat

There is a ferry service between Vila Real de Santo António and Ayamonte (Spain). The ferry was once a main means of transportation although, after the construction of the Guadiana International Bridge, it is nowadays mostly used by tourists. Naviera Armas [2] (<http://www.navieraarmas.com/>) operates a ferry to Portimão from Madeira (connecting with Gran Canaria) with a couple of departures per month.

Get around

Take the train or bus.

By train

The Algarve railway is the most convenient way to get around in Algarve. It connects Lagos in the west with Vila Real de Santo António on the border to Spain, calling at most towns and cities along the way. You will probably need to change the train a few times although there's little waiting time.

By car

A car is often the best way of seeing the Algarve, owing to the limited public transport services. Cars can be hired at Faro Airport and in other towns and cities in the Algarve. Most car rental companies will stipulate a minimum age of 21. Prices start from about €30 a day for a small car during the summer but can be as low as €5 a day outside the holiday season. There is often a wide range of cars to choose from. Be sure to have a high enough spending limit on your credit card to have the excess blocked off while you rent, which can easily be over €1000, or else you will have to buy the usually expensive extra insurance from the rental company. Getting third-party excess insurance is often much cheaper, but that will not necessarily persuade the rental company to forgo blocking a large sum on your credit card.

The Algarve has a good network of roads, but be aware that some country roads are little more than dirt tracks. Roads are generally well maintained, however, road markings may randomly disappear (in this case stick to the right as far as possible - a favorite Portuguese habit is to overtake, still they are mindful). After many years,

the A22 (IP 1) motorway was finally completed in 2007, which goes from Bensafrim in the west all the way to Monte Francisco on the Portuguese/Spanish border. The Algarve, like the rest of Portugal and mainland Europe, drives on the right.

Petrol stations are found all over the Algarve. All stations will sell standard unleaded (95 RON) and super (97 RON) and diesel. Some stations sell LPG (*GPL*) as well. Unleaded petrol is known as *gasolina sem chumbo* and diesel *gasoleo*. Petrol prices in Portugal are high in comparison to other European countries; as of August 2009 95 RON unleaded costs around €1.33 a liter, 97 RON super €1.47 a liter, and diesel €1.06 a liter.

See

- **Lagos** - The old inner city inside the remnants of a protective wall. You'll find winding streets barely wide enough for small cars, quaint shops, and wonderful restaurants.
- **Monchique Mountains** - a beautiful area covered by eucalyptus forests with a wonderfully fresh smell, and small waterfalls in winter. You will find great hiking trails and unexplored quiet fields. The view from Foia Peak is absolutely amazing, you can see both the south and west coasts and even see the swell!
- **Silves** - The red stone castle. The road there is narrow and winds through some rural areas, but it is definitely worth a half-day trip if you like castles.

Do

There are many activities to do in the Algarve, such as mountain biking, jeep safaris, and SPA, but the Algarve is mainly strong with maritime tourism, offering beautiful boat trips along the Algarve coast, wild dolphin watching tours, trips to the caves of Ponta da Piedade, Kayak Tours, Diving at the spectacular Ocean Revival Park, Sailing, Windsurf, Surf lessons, Kite Surf, wakeboard or just a fast ride on the ocean. During the cooler winter months, Monchique is a popular destination for walking.

Buy

Portugal is a large producer of cork and you will find a great number of cork products, such as handbags and wallets,



Amazing Rock formations

for sale. Locally produced alcoholic drinks, such as medronho and Amarguinha (an almond liqueur) are always well-received gifts.

Eat

The Algarve is famous for its hot and spicy **Piri Piri Chicken**, which can be found all over. It is said to have originated in Guia, a small village near Albufeira. Since it has a big and rich coast, it has a very interesting array of wonderful fish and seafood, from sardines to *cataplanas*, and many dry fruit sweets that will make your mouth water for more. Fish, along with meat, is often grilled and served with a salad and either boiled potatoes or chips (in the case of meats). In August, Portimao celebrates its annual sardines festival and this is one of the best times to try fresh sardines and experience a small Portuguese festival. Javoli (wild boar) and Leitão (suckling pig) are two other dishes worth trying, along with cabrito no forno (goat roasted in the oven). Although originally from Lisbon, Pasteis de Nata are also worth trying and you will find them in every café on the Algarve as well as in the supermarkets.



seafood rice

Drink

Medronho is a traditional fruit brandy, traditionally produced and drunk in The Algarve. Medronho can be fiercely potent and is available in variations ranging from unlabelled local homebrew bottles, moonshine style, to connoisseur tipples at more of a premium price range.

Portugal has many wonderful wine regions (Duoro, Dao, and Alentejo are the three most common), and while the Algarve is not traditionally famous for its wine - nationally or internationally - more and more vineyards are starting up and producing good quality wines. Several vineyards also offer tours and tastings, for example, Quinta dos Vales and Quinta do Frances.

Stay safe

According to Conde Naste Traveler, Portugal is one of the top ten safest countries in the world to visit. However, as always, you should exercise caution and keep an eye on your valuables.

According to several retirement publications, including Huffington Post and U.S. News, citing research from publishing group Live and Invest Overseas, the Algarve region was named the world's top retirement destination in 2014, 2015, and 2016.

The reasons cited include excellent health care, a relatively low cost of living compared to other destinations in Europe, and a large number of foreign retirees (currently over 100,000).

Get out

- Alentejo Costa Sudoeste (coast).
- Huelva province, Spain
- Mértola
- Mina de São Domingos
- Serpa
- Evora



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