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Introduction

Portugal has been in the history books for many years, known for having a great empire across the world. The Algarve in the south of the country is seen as farming and fishing industry. Little was known about the Algarve until it became a popular holiday destination, renowned for its golf courses. Yet its hidden history goes back centuries and has left its mark for visitors to see and enjoy today. These days the Algarve boasts some of the most highly rated coastlines and beaches in Europe. When visiting most people are unaware the Algarve has a coastline of around 160 kilometres.

It is possible to drive from the far eastern point of Cape St Vincent, with its lighthouse that can be seen for miles out to sea, to the impressive architectural city of Vila Real de Santo Antonio on the Portuguese/Spanish border in less than three hours, passing through sixteen districts with ten cities. On the 160 km journey you would also be missing many castles, Roman ruins, palaces, museums, as well as the 54 cities, towns and villages this guide book gives you.

The many beaches that sit along the Atlantic Ocean have a unique character like no others in Europe. Some locations have the feel of the Mediterranean – turquoise crystal clear waters, and palm tree backdrops – whilst others show the rugged cliffs with swirling waves which surfers look for, not to mention the many fascinating coves and caves. Local fishermen will offer day trips to explore these hidden gems that are normally just seen on postcards.

The Algarve is noted for having 300 days of sunshine a year. The Atlantic offers a friendly and welcomed gentle breeze in summer months, making the temperatures of 35°C pleasant. Outside, alfresco dining becomes magical; with little light pollution, the dark, starlit skies offer memorable romantic evenings.

Portugal still retains its many traditions. Most noticeable is when greeting: a handshake or kiss on the cheek shows just how friendly the Portuguese are. With close family ties being apparent, courtesies are heard when entering most public places with 'Bom Dia' (Good Day). When being served whether in a supermarket or daily local market, it would be unspeakable not to be addressed with a smile and 'Bom Dia' (Good Day), 'Bom Tarde' (Good afternoon) or 'Bom Niete' (good evening).

The Algarve has more of a relaxed atmosphere, with the pace of life seeing shops in villages close from 1pm until 3pm, keeping the tradition of the siesta alive. But not so much for an afternoon sleep as to let a heavy lunch go down and enjoy a game of cards or do some socializing. Public holidays are also seen as a time to get together: everybody is made welcome to these events, no matter what part of the world you come from. There seems to be no exclusion from these joyous events as the atmosphere will soon have you wanting to take part; you will receive the warmest of welcome from locals.

Even for those staying in a resort or complex can be guaranteed that a hidden gem is not too far away and should not go unexplored; this guide will show you those that are well worth a visit.



Algarve Beaches

Karl Bradshaw-White 2014

A Brief History of the Algarve

Portugal has a long history which could easily fill the whole book; here we give you a brief insight into the Algarve. The Algarve has been found to go back to Stone Age; evidence can still be seen today, in the form of megalithic stones (called menhirs) found in Vila do Bispo. Jumping past other ancient periods to the Romans, we find settlements in the Algarve as early as the 2nd century BC: as with many countries, the rivers and the coast were always important to control. Much evidence of Roman settlements has been discovered in the Algarve. One fine example well worth a visit is in the centre of Vilamoura: a preserved Roman site and museum, Cerro da Vila. Other sites include Lagos, Estoi, and Praia do Luz.

By the 5th century AD the Roman occupation had ceased; the Algarve was now in control by Visigoths who had defeated many Roman armies. Their rule was to last until 711, a year which saw the arrival of the Moors, who swiftly conquered much of the Algarve including the important towns of Lagos and Silves. They settled, establishing themselves like no others had done before. Soon the whole region was under their rule. By 716 they named it Al-Gharb meaning 'The West'. The Moors ruled for more than 500 years, until 1249. In a long takeover bid during the Reconquista, the Kingdom of Portugal conquered the region in a series of successful military campaigns against the Moors that lasted years.

Not wanting to give up what they had ruled for more than 500 years, Islamic armies tried to regain what they had lost. From 1242 a new Kingdom of the Algarve was formed, and by 1250 the Algarve was fully controlled by Portugal. The main capital of Portugal shifted to Lisbon in 1255. Portugal continued to push the Moors back, even conquering parts of North Africa which were now they classed as part of the Algarve. In the 13th century Portugal and England became great allies; this led to Portugal being able to grow in size. By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Portugal ranked in size, stature and importance with England and Spain. The Algarve was now well established, having great farming potential and as a trading post with ships leaving for other continents trading spices and slaves, with Lagos as the capital. Then everything crumbled when the earthquake of 1755 destroyed most of Portugal and the Algarve. It still is one of the worst earthquakes ever reported causing so much destruction and thought to have been a 9 on the Richter scale. The fact that it fell on November the first, the public holiday of All Saints' Day, meant that the death toll was one of the worst in history.

In later years the Algarve carried on defending itself from others who tried to conquer it and failed. The best known was the Peninsular War which lasted seven years at the start of the 19th century before Napoleon was defeated and captured. The Algarve saw its own King and Governor until the formation of the Portuguese republic in 1910, when the Kingdom of the Algarve disappeared. Portugal then saw another war in 1961, known as the Colonial War: Portugal fought against her African colonies, including those of the Algarve in Northern Africa. The dictatorship of Salazar ended in 1974, overthrown by a military coup. Now a public holiday is celebrated on April 25th each year, known across Portugal as Freedom day.



