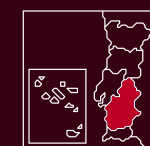


# alentejo

time is everything...





The beach towel laid out over the fine sand, the castle which rises vertically from the lands of wheat – the time to recover the genuine scents of the earth, of spices, of salt...

The mirrored surface of a lake, the lofty climb in an ultralight – the time of freedom, of going beyond limits, of emotion...

The long table whose fare gives us back our strength, the bell tower of a church clad in stories and in tiles – the time for social gatherings, for tranquillity, for finding ourselves again...

The eagle which circles on the thermals in the afternoon, the menhir which rises vertically in an enigma – the time to share what is new, to smile warmly and broadly, to grasp the world!

Time is everything...

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nature and environment



Low population density and large estates have provided the Alentejo with an exceptional environmental quality. The collective awareness of its inestimable worth is clearly seen in the pioneering zeal with which protected areas have been demarcated, within and outside the perimeters of the towns and cities. True emblem of the Alentejo, the cork oak (*quercus suber L.*) is a tree that is protected by law and shows itself to be a strong presence, not only within the landscape but also in the Alentejan way of life. It is not for nothing that the Alentejo is crossed by the largest continuous cover of *montado* (cork woodland combined with pasture) in the world. Cork is a valuable export, traditionally for insulation and for stoppers for bottles, but today with many

wider applications, extending even as far as the realm of fashion accessories. The notion of the protected area in Portugal is a little different from other regions of Europe. Here, it has acquired the sense of safeguarding the harmony of humans in their interaction with the landscape rather than being a region forbidden to human presence. Hence there are five classified regions in the Alentejo where the human landscape is as important as the natural habitats for migratory or resident species. These delimited zones are fundamentally spaces where people can contemplate particular aspects of flora and fauna, while the construction of buildings which will integrate fully with the landscape is also promoted.



In the valleys of the River Sado and the River Guadiana, which contain areas that shelter various migratory species as well as complex ecosystems of flora and fauna, some threatened with extinction, two natural parks have been demarcated. They contain conservation zones that are integral to natural conditions, but also integrate inhabited areas within them and oversee the observance of regulations concerning new housing and fishing activities. In the interior, this same principle of the integrated preservation of nature is reflected in the protection of the Serra de São Mamede. On the coast, the Natural Park of the Alentejan South-west and

the Coast of St Vincent were mapped out independently of any administrative frontiers, in the clear sense that the environment does not accept there are any frontiers for the Alentejo. And all the rest is landscape. The wild *serra* of the northern interior. Placid rivers that cross the plain with difficulty, twisting themselves into omegas before their wide mouths empty into the sea. The plain, golden with ears of wheat, unpopulated, undulating, watched over by storks and eagles from a vast and open territory. Flocks and herds that know no roof and wander all day through enormous fenced parks in search of food and water. A typical rural habitat, of low, terraced

houses in villages that look like railway carriages, of "giants" fastening them to the ground, or solitary dwellings straggling in the landscape, projecting for long distances the immaculate whiteness of *cal* (whitewash). The rigour of the vegetable plots. The importance of trees. The pleasure of the shade during the apex of the heat and of the peaceful conviviality of the philosophical inhabitants. And, finally, the materialisation of a conviction that is grounded in good sense: the supremacy humans gain by living in harmony with what surrounds them. Enter here, into a time of the full enjoyment of Creation.



cuisine  
and wine



Various gastronomic events bring to the daily life of appreciators coming from all over the most characteristic elements in Alentejan cooking, in large part fruit of the imagination which poor country people have applied to the business of providing food. To mention first the most essential element, bread. Present at every meal, it is baked in a wood oven and has a dense texture. It is central to *migas* (bread puree, often accompanying pork and soaked in the pork liqueur), *açordas* (dishes and main-course soups with a bread base), *ensopados* (stews with a bread base) and *fatias douradas* (slices of bread rolled in milk and fried in eggs whisked with sugar). The variety of savoury titbits to accompany a drink, savouring of the seasons and the toil of the fields. Aromatic herbs fill the air around the houses and escape from

the cooking pot: coriander, pennyroyal, oregano, parsley, thyme and rosemary. Thanks to them, the palate experiences a melange of delightful sensations, the result of what was a desire, in bygone days, to relieve the tedium of poverty or simply a means of preserving fresh food. Add a drizzle of pure, virgin olive oil, which accompanies most things perfectly. Alentejan cheeses and wines have consolidated their fame as excellent starters and even better desserts. Their variety and quality pleasantly surprise those who go looking for them. Denomination of origin has had a notable effect in the diversification of artisanal produce. The wines have been typified in this way since the 80's: the average quality improved instantly and meant that each one could be easily recognised according to vineyard and location. The reserve wines

from some of the most highly regarded labels, and therefore of limited production, go to better quality restaurants or are exported, so it is a good idea to seek them out in the finer hotels, so as to sample these exquisite nectars that do not reach the public at large. At the same time, the programme *Rota dos Vinhos do Alentejo* (wine route of the Alentejo) has opened wineries to visitors, so that they may taste the wine at the vineyard of the actual producer. Cured meats are another regional speciality – highly specialised, to tell the truth, due to the fine nuances in the skill that creates them, as well as the variety in seasoning. The person doing the smoking undoubtedly affects the outcome. It is a job requiring patience, and it is plodding work and should not be done in haste.





Fresh from the ocean, fish arrive at the auction and disappear in boxes. Nowadays, the freshness of catches is guaranteed by modern cold storage techniques, even in the hot interior. But tradition still dictates *caldeirada* (fish stew) on the coast, dog-fish and river fish inland, and eels and marinated sardines everywhere. Is it time for lunch yet? At the end of any afternoon establishments selling beer and seafood bring all sorts of connoisseurs together. Goose barnacles, prawns and crabs are so linked to the leisure time of a group

of friends, just like love is to a romantic encounter, that it is hours before they wend their way homewards. Pork, lamb and beef, all from livestock reared in open spaces and not fed at a stable trough. The meat has an intense, natural flavour! These are beasts which know nothing of fixed rations but which graze during all seasons at any time of the day or night, wandering in the meadows. And for those who appreciate wild boar, hare, partridge and wood pigeon, they can sample from fine menus, when the season is favourable, some of the famous

delicacies from the *montado* (cork woodland combined with pasture). Eggs, sugar or honey, almonds, pine nuts, gourd, all turned into miraculous recipes in convents, cooked with great patience and some secret ingredients, continue to afford moments of unequal pleasure, in equal measure in the shape of cakes and puddings. Meals go on forever. At times, one seems to merge into the next one, if the conversation and company are good. Time becomes intoxicated, the senses languid, satisfied.





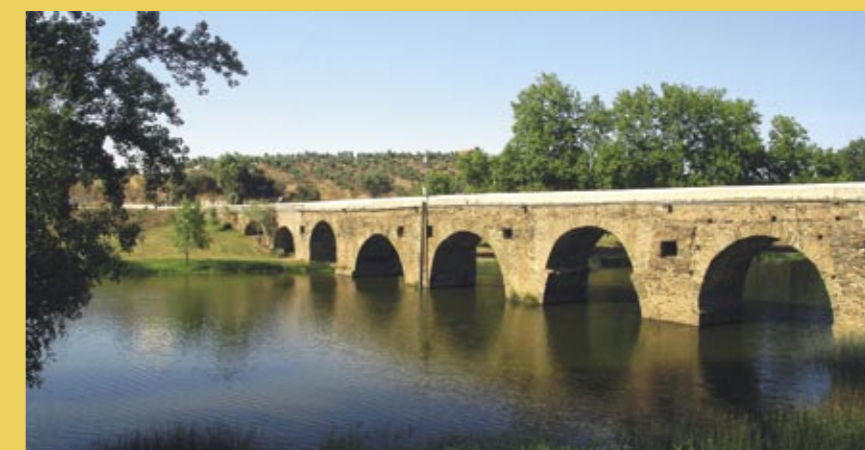
culture  
and heritage



It is with difficulty that one's imagination wanders over the great concentration of evidence that points to successive habitation, between the *Tejo* (Tagus) and the Guadiana, by people who again and again claimed the land as their own. There are caves with engravings, dolmens (passage graves), camps, Phoenician remains, aqueducts, monasteries, fortified cities. There are legends and there are rites. And cities and towns which have grown and become modern with respect to the people of today and the heritage they have taken over.

From deepest antiquity there have emerged from the earth dolmens (passage graves), menhirs (standing stones) and cromlechs (megalithic enclosures) and their respective artefacts hidden for centuries in the shade of the attendant holm oaks. Universities and other centres of study have made advances in the knowledge of those who erected them. Museums where these and other historical items are housed have proliferated.

Roman remains are scattered among *Miróbriga*, *Ebora de Sertório*, *Pax Julia* and others. They are encountered during the daily round, unexpectedly appearing as an "interrupted" arch in the middle of a shop, or under glass set into the paving of a square, or discreetly emerging from the floor of a public building. The Alentejo owes more to the Moors than is generally believed. The evidence of tiles, pillories, decorative motifs, the taste for patios, the narrow streets or the whitewashed houses are found together in many habits and traits – in a tolerant and contemplative philosophy which remains engraved on the soul of the people. Great churches, castles, urban centres: the heroic face of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in their splendour. A nation defending itself against its peninsular enemies by strong walls, by treaties and by legends. The mystical fervour of Catholicism diffused through chapels and religious festivals and through decorative expressions in carved and





gilded wood and through exuberant tiles. With a living history of millennia, the urban environment nevertheless continues to renew itself, accommodating its ancient heritage in airy public spaces with attractive urban furniture, giving life to social contact on café terraces and in squares, with traditional commerce and open-air cultural activities inviting one to occupy the streets. Outstanding in Alentejan cultural heritage is singing (the "a capella" singing of popular songs), of which the song "Grândola Vila Morena" is universally known since it is the emblem of the most recent Portuguese revolution. Also the incredible diversity of the artefacts, when the exiguity of the territory is taken into account, making use of ancient techniques and knowledge that have been updated to a variable degree.

At the extreme of modernity are the fantastic tapestries of Portalegre, which reproduce works by great contemporary painters, national and foreign. Coming from remote origins, the carpets of Arraiolos today allow for personalised patterns, on a par with the classic patterns that characterise them. In the same way, clay pots are adopting new motifs and shapes, ever more frequently found as bases for lamps, or as ashtrays or fruit bowls side by side with traditional serving plates, salt tubs or olive dishes. Modern life beats on in the everyday serenity of the Alentejans, filling the summers with festivals of music, and with feasts, parties and shows in every city and town. The Alentejo is a land yearned for over thousands of years. Today, it is your turn.





sun  
and sea



On the extensive golden sands of the Troia Peninsula and in the coves of the capricious rocks and cliffs further to the south, those who love sun and sea can add to their pleasures the peacefulness of the innumerable different stretches of water. Surfing and bodyboarding, naturism, dolphin-watching and birdwatching live together in scenery of perfect harmony, on the edge of vast extents of clear water. The setting will satisfy the taste of anyone who knows what to look for.

There is wild seclusion for those who wish to immerse themselves in a nature that is generous in its colours, its smells and the purity of its sounds. The bustle of excursions and markets, bordering beaches which vary in their busyness, is in relation to the distance that separates them from the villages, with their typical low, whitewashed houses, with the strong coloured band marking out what belongs to the earth and what stands out against the almost year-round blue of the sky.



The beaches of the Alentejan coast come in two distinct types. To the north of the Cape of Sines there are 47 kilometres of uninterrupted sand, placing lovers of sand and sea face to face with limitless horizons of gold and blue, and the irresistible appeal of endless dips in the sea together with strolls along the sand without any destination to reach. To the south, you can escape, here and there, to a place of solitude, with the privacy that the small enclosed beaches surrounded by cliffs provide; the rocks and the tides dictate the activities, which range from observing small Crustacea from the surface to diving and fishing in limpid waters. In total, there are 165 kilometres of coast, where the sunset invites you to the restaurant terrace nearest to the edge of

the sea to enjoy a refreshing drink and the authentic taste of seafood. While the gold of our own star becomes red as it dips into the sea, it encourages us to make our own forecasts for the coming day. The 20<sup>th</sup> century brought a number of reservoirs of diverse sizes to the Alentejo, including those of Montargil and Santa Clara. And at the start of the new millennium appeared the great lake of Alqueva. This, the most extensive mirror of water in Europe, has transformed the landscape of the plain, whether arid or golden with wheat, and already eases the summer heat of inland Alentejo. Populated by small river fish, these places are frequently visited by patient sports-fishermen and women. But the tranquillity and the freshness found there

offer a powerful attraction for all kinds of people. The purpose of irrigation is allied to peaceful hotels and businesses providing a diversity of leisure offers. An afternoon spent in quiet and languid conversation or in meditating on one's reading accompanied by a tea or a snack; simple solutions among so many open-air pleasures, eyes dreamingly lost among the varied inlets of the captured water. The rhythm of each is wholly respected, in a natural setting that, while very beautiful, is wholly unpretentious. The time is yours.





active tourism





On foot, by bicycle, on horseback, in a 4-wheel drive, in a canoe, in a balloon, in the pursuit of hunting or fishing – there is always a different way in which to spend a wonderful day.

The Alentejo allows you to discover other worlds, by affirming yourself in various activities, by having new experiences. The tourist offices spread over the province have information on walking excursions in each region, each route usually relating a story about the area. In addition, the

discontinuance of some railway lines has allowed the area where the rails once ran to be used as eco-tracks, extending over several kilometres, for exercise in the form of walking or cycling.

Equestrian tourism has justifiably experienced a great increase, due to the quality of the excursions and the level of preparation for the proposed activities, resulting in highly creative adventure excursions in all types of countryside.



Canoeing has fervent supporters on the main rivers. But it is on the mirrored surfaces of the region's lakes that leisure activities are at their most diversified, navigating through the centre of the flooded plain. For those who feel the overwhelming call of the air, hang gliding and paragliding are just two of the possibilities open to you, affording a glorious, panoramic vista of coast and interior. For the more daring, there is also parachuting. And the real

enthusiasts can engage in ballooning. On land, on water or in the air there are a significant number of people who do not see themselves as spending the entire holidays merely lolling about, getting a suntan or dozing. Or even just doing the rounds of museums and other places of culture. There are those with an enthusiasm for doing, for experimenting and for conquering. These are not mutually exclusive approaches. There is time for everything.





business  
tourism



For there to be a perfect connection between body and mind, so desirable in the complex human being, subject every day to prohibitive levels of stress, pauses are required, relaxation, changes of scene and activity. Holidays have this aim of recharging the batteries. But why not erase the pressure of work, from time to time, without entirely putting work aside? Work does not have to be a closed environment, preferentially urban-based from nine to five, with a returning home at the end of the day. The enterprises that set one on the right road through business tourism confirm that it is an initiative that is a real investment with admirable returns. For the variety of the scenarios it offers – from self-contained and isolated rural tourism to a hotel with

auditoriums linked to accommodation and to equipment for relaxation – the Alentejo is the ideal place for bringing together a work team which has to focus on delineating strategies or learning new concepts to fulfil its activity. At the present time, with mobile phones, the Internet and wireless computers, being at a distance is an abstraction as far as management is concerned. And for those involved it is an opportunity for social contact, for a break with routine, for relaxation and even for renewal of energy. And clearly, during free time, for the enjoyment of the cultural, sports and leisure programmes available in the region. It is time to allow those good professional ideas to breathe in a more relaxed and more independent environment.



golf



It is incomparable! Only those who pluck up their nerves one day and accept the “shame” of putting themselves in the hands of an instructor understand that nothing compares to the relaxing sport of golf.

A green course, an attainable goal, a slight dispute, a wandering conversation, a wise choice, the helping golf club, the silence filled with the sounds of nature, the strategy and its realisation, the walk in the pure air. Luck smiling. Surpassing yesterday's score, or another person's score. The weariness at the end. The repose of the warrior on arrival at the club. The vaguely malicious commentaries. The pleasure that unites different generations. The sharing of a “temple”. The well cared for spaces, the excellence, the details for comfort. The energy after a shower. The prospect of the next outing...

The Alentejo is investing in the creation of quality golf courses. It started in 1980

in Tróia, next to the sea, and extends as far as Marvão far inland. Among other idyllic settings where this sport can be enjoyed, the area around the Alqueva reservoir and the Alentejan coast stand out.

Climate is a decisive element in relation to golf. Sunny days throughout most of the year, abundance of space and favourable landscape have attracted to Portugal tourism that is specifically directed towards golf. The excellence of the courses and of the attendant services explain the solidity of the growth in this sector.

And then there is the delight of seeing the experts competing, understanding how they can perform even better. Is it worth making the effort to get this far? A question that is resolved over an aperitif and ends up with the attempt. But if not tried today, there is always... tomorrow! Time is suspended because of a small, temperamental ball.

