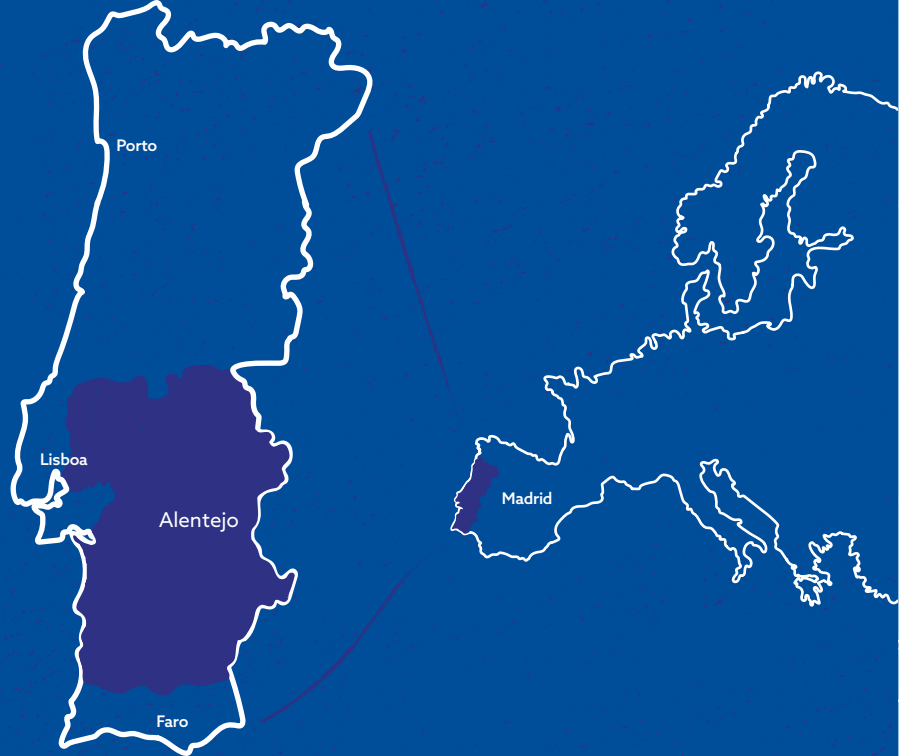


CORK COUNTRY

CULTURE · HISTORY · HERITAGE

ALENTEJO

 visit Alentejo  
Portugal



# ALENTEJO

CORK COUNTRY

The vast province that flows from the lands around the River Tejo to the mountains framing the Algarve is the heartland of Portugal.

For millennia, the Alentejo, with its endless cork forests, has been a cultural crossroads. Phoenicians, Celts, Romans and Moors all came to the Alentejo, and each left a lasting imprint. But the story doesn't end there.

With the rise of the Portuguese nation in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Alentejo evolved into a country within a country, with its own style of pottery, rugs, song, way of seeing life and manner of speaking.

A land of poets, captains, builders, farmers, artists and ranchers – the cultural past of the Alentejo is alive, vibrant and yours to discover. Come and see for yourself. Come alive to the incredible span of history. Come alive to the stunning architecture, the sturdy castles and the ancient villages. Come alive to the exquisite craftsmanship, the sensational gastronomy and wine. Come alive to the passion of this extraordinary region.

Come alive in the Alentejo.





**ALENTEJ** 





ALMENDRES CROMLECH (ÉVORA)

## *ROOTS*

In the Alentejo, history and art are everywhere.

The Alentejo's villages and cities are open-air galleries of history carved in stone. One of the most fascinating prehistoric sites is the Cromlech of Almendres, not far from Évora. Called Portugal's Stonehenge, but more ancient still, this large circle of stones set within the forest of cork trees was tied to the stars and may have been a religious place of worship. Easily explored by bike, foot or car, this is just one of the Alentejo's many mysterious prehistoric sites that offer a glimpse back at ancient rituals, gods and the founding of human culture millennia ago.

They include cave paintings at Santiago do Escoural and several other megaliths, such as Anta do Tapadão (Aldeia da Mata/Crato), Anta do Olival da Pega (Reguengos de Monsaraz), Cromeleque do Xerez (Monsaraz), Anta Grande do Zambujeiro (Valverde/Évora) and Castro da Cola (Ourique).



**ALENTEJO** 





## *ROMAN LEGACY*

The Romans loved the Alentejo and flourished here for centuries, building roads, vast farms, wineries, temples, baths and aqueducts.

Their language is preserved in the names of several historic areas:

*Ébora Cerealis* in Évora, *Mirobriga Celticorum*  
in Santiago do Cacém and *Myrtilis Iulia* in Mértola.

In the Serra de São Mamede, explore the lost Roman city of Ammaia.

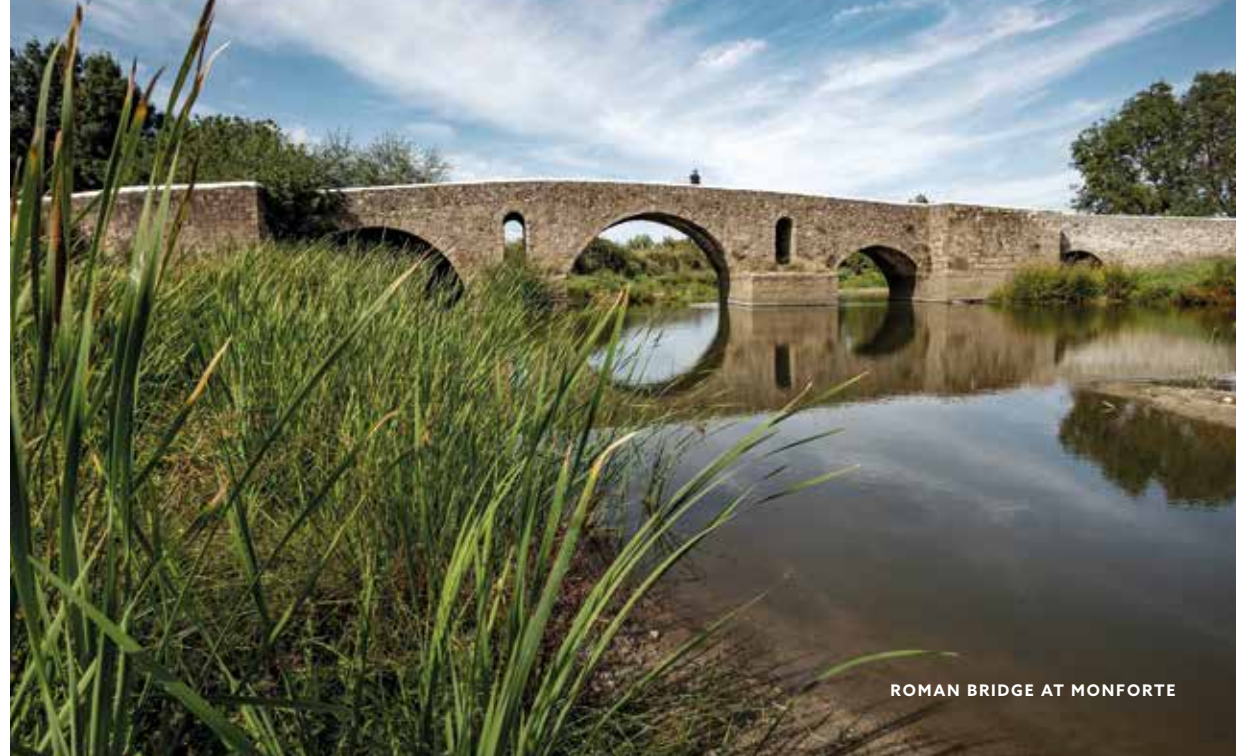
Initially thought to be just an ancient villa, it was a thriving outpost abandoned and lost over time until being rediscovered in 1935.

Excavations began in 1994, and today the city and its past are yours to explore.

At Torre de Palma villa, near Monforte, you can see how Romans lived in the Alentejo 3,000 years ago.

Follow the old Roman road that connected Mérida and Lisbon, and cross the still-standing Roman bridge of Vila Formosa.

Évora's rare standing Roman temple columns, thermal baths, arch of D. Isabel and Casa de Burgos are a testimony to the city's vibrant Roman past.



ROMAN BRIDGE AT MONFORTE



MIRÓBRIGA ROMAN RUINS (SANTIAGO DO CACÉM)

Further south, the amazingly preserved São Cucufate villa was discovered only a few decades ago and offers a rare glimpse of the Romans' lifestyle in the Alentejo.

*Pax Julia*, now known as Beja, still has two Roman arches and a rare bust of Julius Caesar, whose name was given to the city. The Rua do Sembrano Museum offers archeological remains, preserved under a glass floor, that tell the tale of this city.

Head south to Castro Verde to see the Lucerna Museum of Roman oil lamps. Toward the coast, you'll find the city of Miróbriga and the ruins of a Roman forum, as well as some of the best preserved murals and thermal baths in Portugal. Farther north, explore Troia, the largest known fish-salting center of the Roman Empire.

As the Roman Empire in the West collapsed, new people arrived in the Alentejo, first Germanic tribes and then Moorish armies from North Africa, which ruled for 500 years.





**ALENTEJ** 



MÉRTOLA

## *MOORISH INHERITANCE*

The arrival of the Moors in 711 AD profoundly changed the Alentejo. The Portuguese words for watermill, rice, olives, olive oil, wild boar and wonderful bread stews are a testimony to the Arab influence on agriculture and cuisine, from chimneys and water wheels to the way houses are built and how foods are seasoned.

But it's in the Arabic names of villages, towns and cities that the legacy lives. Just look at the map: Alcácer do Sal, Beja, Elvas, Marvão, Monsaraz, Odemira, Serpa and many others are Arabic-based names. It is in one of these villages, Mértola, perched on the edge of the Guadiana River, that the Moorish heritage is most striking. Its former mosque, today the parish church, is the only still-standing ancient mosque in Portugal. Mértola also has a museum featuring rare Islamic pottery, and it hosts an Islamic Festival in May, every two years.



**ALENTEJ** 



ESTREMOZ

## *THE DEFENSE AND EXPANSION OF THE YOUNG KINGDOM*

Portugal emerged as a nation after a mythical battle in 1139 on Alentejo soil, near Ourique, according to historians. The Reconquest would frame the character of Portugal and change the fate and culture of the Alentejo.

The Reconquest lasted for more than a century in the Alentejo and brought the construction of dozens of imposing castles and fortified villages, especially in Estremoz, Beja and the fortress towns of Marvão and Monsaraz. Of note is the unusual fortified chapel of the Boa Nova in Terena, dating to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. And you can explore the imposing castle of Monsaraz and the well-preserved medieval churches in the walled city of Santarém, known as the Capital of the Portuguese Gothic.

Beyond the walls were new seas and new lands to explore.

The history of the Portuguese Renaissance would not be complete without noting the Jewish community's contributions to science, commerce and culture. Many were forced to convert and become "New Christians," such as Rabbi Abraham Zacuto, the royal astronomer to King João II; Garcia de Orta, who pioneered the use of plants as drugs; and Pedro Nunes, one of the greatest mathematicians of his time.

There are still strong traces of the Alentejo's Jewish past in places such as Pedro Nunes' hometown, Alcácer do Sal, Évora as well as Castelo de Vide, the hometown of Garcia de Orta and the location of an exceptional medieval synagogue and Jewish quarter.



CASTELO DE VIDE SYNAGOGUE





**ALENTEJO** 

BEJA CASTLE

*ATURE*



## *EXPLORATION AND REBIRTH*

Between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Age of Exploration took Portuguese ships to every corner of the globe and brought the world back to the Alentejo.

This period saw the building of new churches, convents, imposing aqueducts and palaces worthy of kings.

A university was founded at Évora. The times inspired the new Manueline style of architectural design. Distinguished by its maritime elements, these ornamental flourishes are still visible on churches, monasteries, palaces and castles around the Alentejo. Of special note is the Paço Ducal (Palace) of Vila Viçosa, the masterpiece of Portuguese Mannerism. And with Baroque Age would come even more elaborate churches and monasteries.



TERREIRO DO PAÇO AT VILA VIÇOSA



ROMAN TEMPLE OF ÉVORA

## *ÉVORA*

Walled Évora is an open museum of a city and a bucket list must for any visitor. Its historic center has Roman, Visigoth and Arab influences, preserving traces more than 2,000 years old. Most notable are the city's Roman temple, cathedral, and its churches, namely the Church of São Francisco, with its famous Chapel of Bones, and the Church of São João Evangelista.



But don't miss the ornate exterior window of the house of the Portuguese poet Garcia de Resende or leave without grabbing a drink at a café near the fountain in Giraldo Square, which hasn't changed much since its construction in 1571.

Évora reached its peak in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, when it became the second seat of the Royal Court. Today, its history and beauty remain intact and an example of that golden period in Portugal.

The architectural preservation of its Roman temple, Moorish influences, walls and other historic wonders led UNESCO to name it a World Heritage Site.



GIRALDO SQUARE (ÉVORA)



NOSSA SENHORA DA GRAÇA FORT (ELVAS)

## *ELVAS*

The legend of Elvas, "Guardian of the Frontier," is written in every stone of this town's walls, which form a star. The fortifications date to many periods and include mighty fortified walls, a historic center, an aqueduct and the Santa Luzia and Nossa Senhora da Graça forts.

Elvas has the world's largest extension of fortifications, which earned it UNESCO recognition as a World Heritage Site.





**ALENTEJO** 



FIGURADO EM BARRO DE ESTREMOZ (CLAY FIGURINES)  
— INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE (UNESCO)

## *CRAFTS WITH A SENSE OF PLACE*

With centuries of tradition and cultural mingling, there is a wealth of fine crafts to explore in the Alentejo. Portalegre tapestries, Arraiolos rugs, Monsaraz and Mértola blankets, clay creations and painted furniture, leather, cork and copper are all truly unique.

UNESCO recognizes the region's handcrafted Estremoz Clay Figures for their cultural significance. These figures, a popular souvenir, are sometimes dressed in Alentejo clothing and depict local trades, traditions, events and religious scenes. The traditional cowbells, or *chocalhos*, have also been recognized by UNESCO.

## *LOCAL SONGS, WORLD HERITAGE*

Within the Alentejo, there is a unique song unlike any other: the Cante Alentejano, a group sing-along with no instrumental accompaniment. Once the song of field workers, the Cante is a tradition at festivals and in local cafés. The words preserve stories of the Alentejo's countryside, of melancholy, love and longing. Stories so beautiful they, like the clay figurines, have been included on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Come listen to the soul of the Alentejo!

The Fandango folk dance is another cultural tradition of the northwestern area of the Alentejo. Two dancers, most often both male, face each other in a contest of lightness and repartee. The dancer with the most eye-catching steps wins.



CANTE ALENTEJANO  
— INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE (UNESCO)



CAMINO OF SANTIAGO ALENTEJO AND RIBATEJO TRAILS

## *THE “CAMINO” OF SANTIAGO: AN ANCIENT JOURNEY*

Legend has it that the pilgrimage to worship the relics of the apostle St. James in Spain began in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The *Camino's* trail network, which dates back centuries, has spread all over Europe and across the Alentejo.

In Alentejo, the origin of the *Camino* is linked to the Order of Santiago (St. James), which had its regional headquarters at Alcácer do Sal.

The pilgrimage has had a lasting impact on local culture.

Whether on the Alentejo's Central or Eastern Way, with every step you will discover relics, adventures and faith.

More than just a hike, it is the opportunity to discover secret places that unveil the natural beauty, art, cuisine, history and stories that this ancient tradition has preserved.

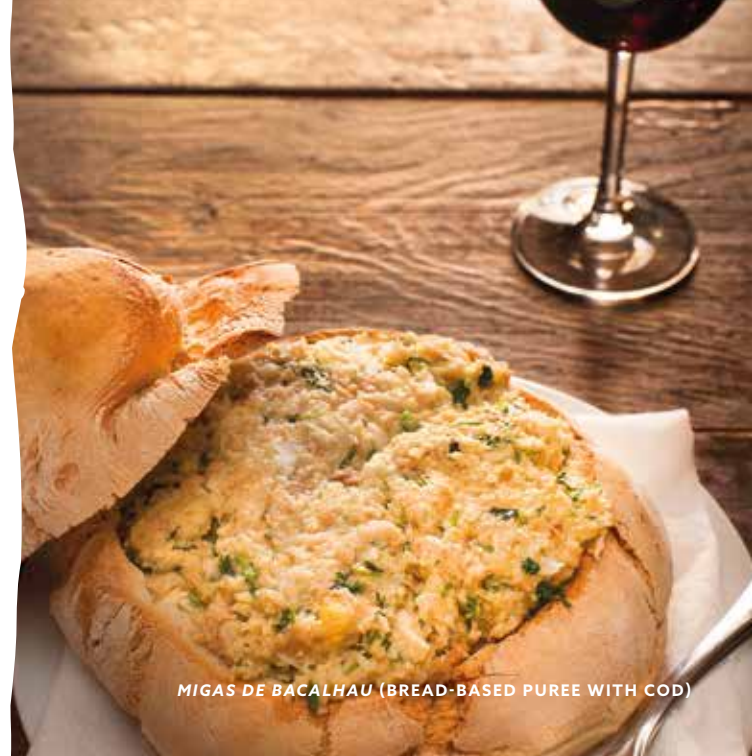
## *FOOD AND WINE*

Creativity and local ingredients are part of the cuisine, which is significant to the culture of the Alentejo.

Home to wheat, grapes, olives and fresh herbs, the flavor of the Alentejo dates back centuries. Local pork, raised for centuries, is prized here. And the Alentejo table embraces fresh breads, olive oil and the many flavors of the land and sea. Imagine scrambled eggs with wild asparagus, roasted peppers, *migas* of bread, and local cheese and sausages.

Wines, cultivated for millennia, are a treat too, with dozens of local grape varietals and excellent local table wines.

The Rio Maior Salinas salt production, which dates back thousands of years, is a wonder of nature as the ocean is 15 miles away. Salt water, a remnant of an ancient sea, makes the water here seven times saltier than seawater.



MIGAS DE BACALHAU (BREAD-BASED PUREE WITH COD)



## *FESTIVALS*

The Alentejo is a celebration of life.  
And its many annual festivals are a window  
into its unique culture and place.  
They celebrate saints, miracles, musical traditions,  
food and wine and the past and future.



FESTAS DO POVO DE CAMPO MAIOR (POPULAR FESTIVITIES)



FMM SINES — FESTIVAL MÚSICAS DO MUNDO

#### *CAMPO MAIOR*

This summer festival of the people is held when the locals agree to hold it, usually in August at the Festas do Povo.

The streets of this town explode in bright themes, paper decorations and music.

#### *SINES*

The FMM Sines World Music Festival is held in July, with global stars.

#### *MÉRTOLA*

The Islamic Festival, held in May every odd year, celebrates the history of this special town set on the banks of the Guadiana River.

#### *ALENTEJO REGION*

The Festival Terras Sem Sombra is an internationally acclaimed festival held from spring to summer in a variety of towns throughout the Alentejo region. It showcases the folk musical heritage and biodiversity of this land.

#### *SERPA*

The Noites na Nora festival in July offers theatre, music and dance against a backdrop of the monumental aqueduct.

#### *MARVÃO*

In July, classical music fills the ancient castle of Marvão at the Marvão International Music Festival.

#### *ARRAIÓLOS*

The June Carpet Festival is marked by beautiful rugs hung from windows and balconies around the town.

#### *GOLEGÃ*

The National Horse Fair is held each November in Golegã, a region where the equestrian tradition is part of the culture.

#### *SANTARÉM*

Enjoy the best in Portuguese cuisine at the country's National Gastronomy Festival, held in Santarém in October and November.



MARVÃO INTERNATIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL





NOSSA SENHORA DA COLA SANCTUARY (OURIQUE)

**Turismo do Alentejo, ERT**  
Rua dos Infantes, n.º 10 R/C  
7800-953 Beja, Portugal  
Tel.: +351 284 313 540  
[geral@turismodoalentejo-ert.pt](mailto:geral@turismodoalentejo-ert.pt)

**Agência Regional de Promoção Turística  
do Alentejo/Alentejo Promotion Office**  
Rua Manuel Batista Reis, n.º 6, R/C  
7570-284 Grândola, Portugal  
Tel.: +351 269 498 680  
[info@turismodoalentejo.pt](mailto:info@turismodoalentejo.pt)

**Turismo de Portugal**  
Headquarters: Rua Ivone Silva, Lt. 6  
1050-124 Lisboa, Portugal  
Tel.: +351 211 140 200  
[info@turismodeportugal.pt](mailto:info@turismodeportugal.pt)



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