



Adjacent to Praia de Benagil is the amazingly cavernous Benagil sea cave, offering a chance to spelunk and swim in one of the Algarve's most beautiful, must-see destinations.

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All along the coastline, crystal-clear waters lap the silky-sand beaches and age-old towering rock formations that have been shaped by the sea. Topped with green foliage, these craggy cliff faces play host to a variety of bird species.

From the west flows a gentle breeze that provides optimal conditions for all kinds of watersports. Visitors will spot parasailers, kitesurfers and paddleboarders beyond the sand. The ocean is warm and abounds with marine life, and the dining is superb. (There are eight Michelin-starred restaurants in the Algarve — the highest concentration in the country.)

Whether you seek a relaxing retreat or are ready for adventure, here are some must-do activities for your Algarve itinerary.

### 1. EXPLORE CAVES AND GROTTOS

You'll have to get out on the water to admire the striking features in Lagos' famed sea caves and grottoes. Local fishermen will whisk you off onto secluded beaches and into the caves to explore these unspoiled natural wonders. Many of the formations have distinct shapes that are easily recognised, and identifying them is a favourite activity. Look out for the elephant-shaped (apty named) Elephant Cave and the Arch of Triumph, named for the famous Paris monument it resembles.

At the Marina de Lagos, there are several boat tours available that range from one to two hours. And if you're feeling adventurous, the excursions offered by Kayak Tours are an exciting option. Kayaking allows you to easily navigate through the caves and see all the rock formations up close.

### 2. WINE AND DINE

You've probably heard of Porto and Douro wine, the fruits of the Douro Valley, Portugal's most famous wine region. Vineyards in the Algarve may be limited, but after some exploring, you'll find that this sunny region has a lot more to offer than umbrella-garnished cocktails.

Take Monte da Casteleja for example, a family-run vineyard on the outskirts of Lagos that has been producing organic wines since 2008. The owner, Guillaume Leroux, inherited the estate from his Portuguese grandfather and a passion for winemaking from his French father. Monte da Casteleja combines new technologies with traditional techniques, such as grape stomping, the art of crushing grapes with your bare feet. The grape harvest is the vineyard's most important event, and involves long days spent out in the field, hand-picking grapes that will result in years' worth of wines. If you visit the farm during the harvesting season, you might end up squashing the grapes yourself.

There are guided tours every Wednesday and Friday that give visitors a chance to learn more about the vineyard and its eco-friendly production. The tour — which you can skip if you prefer to head straight to the shop to buy a bottle or two — ends with a sampling of the wines and regional tapas.

If you're craving a nice meal after a day at the winery, there are several area restaurants worth checking out. The Michelin-starred Vista Restaurante, in Portimão, offers national and Mediterranean-inspired cuisine with classic flavours and absolute freshness. Seafood options include Algarvian clam, flounder and giant Azores squid. And if you're looking for something a little more casual, try Caso do Prego in Lagos. Enjoy traditional Portuguese dishes and soak up the sun at the rooftop bar.

# 6

## STANDOUT ALGARVE ACTIVITIES

BY JOANA TABORDA

THE ALGARVE'S LAID-BACK SEASIDE TOWN OF LAGOS IS FAMOUS FOR ITS HONEY-HUED CLIFFS AND BREATH-TAKING VIEWS.



Arroz de marisco (shellfish rice) combines prawns, clams, mussels, scallops and other seafood fare sourced fresh from southern Portuguese waters.

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## Adventures in the Algarve

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### 3. PLAY GOLF WITH A VIEW

For four years running, World Golf Awards has named Portugal the World's Best Golf Destination, and the iconic courses of the Algarve are a large contributor to the title. With its dramatic coastline and year-round sunshine, it's easy to see why many golfers choose to play in this corner of Europe. In Lagos, there's one golf course that has been delighting visitors with its sweeping views since the 1970s — Onyria Palmares Golf. Built by Frank Pennink, this golf course was one of the Algarve's first. It was fully transformed in 2010 by the American golf course designer Robert Trent Jones Jr. The result is a 27-hole course that blends perfectly with its seaside environment, featuring incredible ocean views, valleys and dune lands.

The course is divided into three nine-hole loops: Alvor, Lagos and Praia. The Alvor Course occupies the hilly terrain and offers stunning views of the Monchique Mountains, the Lagos Course incorporates lakes and the Praia Course brings you extra close to the beach. And if you're worried about having to be a pro to play here, you'll be pleased to know they have a practice ground for golf novices.

### 4. VISIT THE PARADISIACAL BEACHES

The Algarve boasts 130 *praias* (beaches) covering about 200 kilometres (125 miles) of coastline, and Lagos is its little patch of paradise. The town offers beaches for all tastes, from the vast sandy stretch of Meia Praia to the sparkling waters of Praia Dona Ana and the sheltered coves of Praia da Batata, all within walking distance from the centre.

Praia Dona Ana has previously been named one of the best beaches in the world by *Condé Nast Traveller* magazine, thanks to its stunning rock formations and unique grottoes. If you're into water-sports, Meia Praia offers parasailing and windsurfing lessons. You can also join the kayak tours departing from Praia da Batata that take you straight to Ponta da Piedade.

Whilst it's tempting to linger around the town centre, it's worth venturing to the less touristy Praia de Porto de Mós, Praia do Camilo and Praia da Luz. Praia de Porto de Mós is a favourite with surfers and has plenty of space to stretch out your beach towel and lounge. And the shallow waters of Praia do Camilo attract a variety of marine life, making it the ideal spot for snorkelling. There is also a restaurant here with the same name, which serves delicious seafood dishes.

Only a short drive away from Lagos is Luz, a former fishing village that has managed to maintain its charm even with the rise of tourism. The town features a glorious beach tucked away between the Rocha Negra headland and the Fortaleza da Luz.



Sculpted rock formations and crystal ocean waters create a pristine paradise that makes Praia Dona Ana one of the most popular and oft-visited Algarvian beachfronts.

### 5. ENJOY THE SUNSET AT PONTA DA PIEDADE

As evening sets in, there is no better place to catch the last rays of sunshine than at Ponta da Piedade. The jaw-dropping cliffs and sea stacks that bound this famous headland highly contrast against the deep blue waters of the Atlantic, making it one of Lagos' best natural wonders. Sculpted by sea and wind erosion, the cliffs have acquired some interesting shapes over the years. The most popular ones are Gruta do Amor (grotto of love), Chaminé (chimney) and Catedral (cathedral). You can reach Ponta da Piedade by car, on foot or by sea. Drive along the coast of Lagos, past Praia Dona Ana and Praia do Camilo until you reach a lighthouse. Near the lighthouse is a stone stairway that takes you down to the sea level. At the bottom, you'll find a maze of caves, grottoes and arches, which you can navigate through by joining a boat trip or renting a kayak. The walk from the city centre to Ponta da Piedade is 2 kilometres (1.2 miles) long, but bear in mind, it passes over some hills.

Whichever manner you choose to view Ponta da Piedade, be sure to stay for the sunset, a sight to behold as the fiery orb drops behind the coast of Sagres and illuminates the sea.

### 6. SPOT THE DOLPHINS

Stray from the beaches and head out to sea once more to observe the area's dolphins. Catch a glimpse of these friendly and intelligent creatures along the Algarve coast between June and September. Marina de Lagos has plenty of operators offering dolphin-watching tours, and if you're not lucky enough to see these mammals on your first try, they'll often take you on another trip for free.

Sealife and Seabookings both provide a marine biologist on board to help identify the dolphin species and interpret their

behaviour. The bottlenose and common dolphin are most frequently seen, along with a variety of seabirds and, occasionally, sea turtles and whales.

For a guaranteed up-close encounter, visit Zoomarine, a water-based theme park in Albufeira, where you can swim — and even waltz — with an adorable bottlenose dolphin. ■

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### AREA RESORTS



#### Baia da Luz (VBA)

Baia da Luz is nestled against the striking black rock of the Rocha Negra in the Algarve village of Praia da Luz. Each flat is designed to complement the natural landscape and is equipped with under-floor heating and electric window shutter systems. On-site, guests can indulge at the Italian restaurant, play tennis and go swimming in the two large pools.



#### Belmar Spa & Beach Resort (BMS)

The resort overlooks Porto de Mós Beach and is just five minutes from the bustling town of Lagos. Spacious units are surrounded by secluded landscaped gardens. Resort facilities include a spa, gymnasium, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, a multi-use sports pitch, restaurant and bar.

To view all of the Algarve resorts in Interval's network, go to [intervalworld.com](http://intervalworld.com).

Accommodation at BMS is available for purchase through the Getaway programme and generally will not be available for exchange.



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