



CUT-OUT-AND-GO GUIDE | SECRET PORTUGAL



instant escapes

# Secret Portugal

Far from the Algarve crowds, you can find a beach to call your own...

Costas Prata, Azul and Verde, or the 'silver', 'blue' and 'green' coasts — tellingly, that's what they call the stunning Portuguese sands that run from around Lisbon up to the Spanish border. Never-ending dunes, nature reserves and a piddling population make these some of Europe's least seen, but most magical, shores. Keep them to yourself. **By Katie Bowman**



## SEE & DO

Starting in the north, near Spain — so close, in fact, you can take a £1 ferry across the watery border — Caminha is **the fantasy ancient Iberian village-on-sea, but with none of the flag-following crowds.** Its medieval Centro Histórico packs in cobbles, fountains, turrets, clock towers and pealing bells. After a potter, stop for lunch on the main square and order any dish with *robalo* — sea bass — in the title. It's the local speciality and found in stews and rice, or just grilled.

A half-hour walk along Caminha's seafront boardwalk, you'll find Praia da Foz do Minho, literally 'beach at the mouth of the Minho River'. With its grass-speckled dunes and soft, white sands, were this beach on the Algarve it would be mobbed. But that's the point: this isn't the Algarve, and it's Foz's unique position on a calm inlet that creates **tropical-style talcum powder alongside deep, cooling waters.** The unusual view across to Spain, and the cheap-as-chips kiosk selling cold Super Bock beers, make it Costa Verde's best beach.

The drive southwards to Porto may only take an hour, but it could fill a week of your secret-Portugal adventure. There's Praia de Moledo, a cool surf beach with a contemporary cafe; Viana do Castelo, with hilltop Santuário de Santa Luzia — **a church that looks as if a fairy-tale princess might be trapped within;** and, tracking back a little, is eccentric Vila Nova de Cerveira, an arty

**MARKET DAY**  
Vila Nova de Cerveira has a brilliant Saturday market, selling everything from custard tarts to handmade sandals. The market is supposed to close by lunchtime, but runs all day

**Bench impress:** sit back and enjoy the view over Nazaré's rooftops to the sea; below left, pretty painted homes in Porto; the hilltop Santuário de Santa Luzia, in Viana do Castelo

town where shopfronts and signs are made of crochet. Photo opps abound.

Now for Porto — it's the perfect size to slot into your trip, with the riverside good looks of Lisbon, but a tangle of pretty streets that can be seen in a day. If you do only one thing, make it a cruise, taking in the Douro's 'six bridges'. At 60 minutes, the tour is leisurely rather than laboured and alfresco seating means you **get great snaps as you pass the sherbet-coloured wharves and the iconic port houses** of Taylor's and Sandeman (cruzeiros-douro.pt; £12).

Aveiro, an hour away, is a tale of two cities. Be sure to **see its Venice-like canals in the centre, where colourful gondolas sail** and the only thing to outshine the tiles in the elegant Museum of Art Nouveau (mca.cm-aveiro.pt; £1.50) are the ovos custard sweets served in its cafe. Make time for its beach, Praia da Costa Nova, a sweet strip of vintage striped cottages and parasol-dotted, deserted sands.

You might have heard of Nazaré, further south, not because of tourism, but because it's **where the biggest ever recorded wave was surfed in 2011 — roaring in at 23 metres.** Watch the wetsuits do their thing from the shore, then walk over the headland to the village of terracotta-tiled rooftops and a calm family beach.

Shuttling down towards the capital, stop at Praia do Guincho, another windswept surf beach, with a **bohemian beach scene (sundowners at Bar do Guincho are mandatory).** It's little-known to the day-trippers from Lisbon who make it to famous Cascais and venture no further. Book surf lessons through Moana (from £26pp; moanasurfschool.com).

Now you're at the most southerly point, the Costa Azul, which can claim the best of all these beaches, in Comporta. For miles surrounding the fishing village (recently-turned-hip, Hamptons-style enclave), **deserted stretches unfurl, punctuated only by a gourmet gelato stand or designer beach shack.** Get here by ferry from Setúbal, where dolphins flip in your wake and the boat doesn't fill to capacity, even in summer. >



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EAT

● **Food-court find**  
**SABORES DE CHURRASCO**

(Mains about £5)  
**Because:** The Portuguese love this fast-food chain dishing up typical plates at outlets across the country.  
**Travel's tip:** The branch at Alegro Setúbal mall means you needn't detour from the road to Comporta. Various; saboresdochurrasco.pt.

● **Late-night dinner**  
**GALERIA DE PARIS** (Mains about £9)  
**Because:** You want food, but also live fado songs. Come to this fabulously old-fashioned music hall on a tree-lined Porto street. **Travel's tip:** Performances run all day — from 3.30pm until 4am — so make a stop even if you've eaten. *Rua da Galeria de Paris 56, Porto; 00 35122 2016218.*

● **Post-surf pizza**  
**HAMILTON** (Mains about £10)  
**Because:** Keep walking through this modest-looking pizza joint near Moledo Beach and your curiosity will be rewarded with a bright, all-glass annexe where families lose hours over lunch. **Travel's tip:** Don't dig pizza? The other option is chicken (*frango*) — half a bird in piri-piri spices, served with salads spilling over. *Ave Santana 395, Moledo; 00 351926 459 1250.*

● **From rod to table**  
**SABOR DO MAR** (Mains about £12)  
**Because:** Of the many fishy restaurants in seaside Comporta, this one strikes the perfect balance on atmos: modern and fresh, yet unpretentious. It has tables outside, too. **Travel's tip:** You're within wine-spitting distance of the vineyard on the Herdade da Comporta estate, so order the rosé: exquisite and affordable. *Rua do Comercio 13, Comporta; 00 351960 249667.*

● **Sand under foot**  
**SAL** (Mains about £17)  
**Because:** A simple wooden beach shack has no right being this stylish, but Sal pulls it off. Gorgeous staff, hand-crafted plates and the weather all help. **Travel's tip:** The dangerous job of catching *percebes* (barnacles) makes them expensive, yet here they cost half what they do in Spain. Now's the time to try. *Praia do Pégo; 00 351 265 490129, restaurantesal.pt.*

WHAT TO ORDER

The *picanha* com abacaxidish is the best value as it throws together steak, rice, fries, salad, plantain, and black beans — for just £5.50! No need for dinner

MORE LOCAL LOWDOWN

'I also love Livraria Lello, a beautiful Art Nouveau bookstore. It's said to have inspired Hogwarts in Harry Potter (JK Rowling lived in Porto). The €5 entrance fee (to deter Instagrammers) is deducted from any sale

SHOP & DRINK

● **One-off souvenirs**  
**HATS AND CATS**

**Because:** You might enter this little shop planning to buy a hat, but you'll leave with much more: beach totes, leather wallets and stylish picnic blankets perhaps. **Travel's tip:** Beware odd lunchtime closures in Portugal; this place shuts according to business. *Rua do Infante D Henrique 117, Porto.*

● **Under one roof**  
**CASA DA CULTURA**  
**Because:** Local designers (of clothes, shoes, jewellery and more) who can't afford permanent prime Comporta real estate display their wares here, in converted stables. **Travel's tip:** The old building gets hot, so shop late; it shuts at 10pm. *Rua do Secador 8, Comporta.*

● **Design marvel**  
**ESTRALGEM MUCHAXO**  
**Because:** This too-easy-to-miss hotel has a sea-facing bar and cafe out back — right on Guincho Beach. **Travel's tip:** Estralgem allows diners to swim in its retro sculpted-rock ocean pool whether they're guests or not. *Praia do Guincho; muchaxo.com.*

ASK THE LOCAL

Maria Antonia and her husband, Francisco Mourão, live in Porto but also spend time in their home on the Minho River

“We are architecture nuts (everyone is in arty Porto) and send friends to see lesser-known sights such as Casa de Serralves, now a modern-art museum (a very wealthy man spent all his fortune to build this dream house) and the beautiful diamond-shape Rem Koolhaas concert hall. You must eat at Cafe Majestic, an original Belle Epoque cafe (Rua de Santa Catarina 112). We also like Vinum restaurant on the quieter side of the river (Rua do Agro 141) — it has a lovely veranda hanging over the River Douro. And if, like us, you are into arts and antiques, explore Porto Art District at Rua Miguel Bombarda — too much to see and buy!



● **Waterfront work of art**  
**MINHO RIVER HOUSE** (Sleeps eight, from £1,087 a week — about £39 for two per night; self-catering)

**Because:** A contemporary concrete house built in the Brutalist style, this place-with-a-pool has a lawn down to the Minho. Its many terraces give groups room to breathe. **Travel's tip:** If it's booked, scour Boutique Homes's other cool villas — many local holiday houses are designed by Porto School of Architecture alumni. *Vila Nova de Cerveiro; boutique-homes.com.*

● **Beside the seaside**  
**TROIA RESORT** (Apartments sleeping two from £61, room only)  
**Because:** Tucked away in the dunes behind Praia Tróia Mar — not far from Comporta — is this village of modern apartments and beach houses, with marina shops and restaurants on hand. It's practical — with personality. **Travel's tip:** Don't fork out on a long dolphin-spotting trip — you can see them from the shore here. *Tróia; troiaresort.pt.*

PHOTOGRAPHS: AXL-IMAGES, GETTY, 4 CORNERS. MAP: MAIDENHEAD CARTOGRAPHIC

● **Lagoon living**  
**POUSADARIA** (Doubles from £81, B&B)  
**Because:** Pousadas are charming, often historic Portuguese-owned properties that have been converted into hotels. This one has its front garden on Aveiro lagoon, and its back leading to the dunes of Praia do Muranzel. **Travel's tip:** It's worth choosing the rate with dinner included (only £45 a night more for two people) as the hotel is fairly remote. *Bico do Muranzel, Torreira, near Aveiro; pousadas.pt/uk.*

● **Steps from the surf**  
**THE OITAVOS** (Doubles from £129, B&B)  
**Because:** Hire bikes (ideally, electric with fat beach tyres) from this resort-style hotel to cycle to Guincho Beach, on the Silver Coast. There are dedicated bike lanes and you'll return to pools, spa and golf. **Travel's tip:** Beware the hefty charge to sleep a third person in your room (£112) — even a child on the sofa; check first whether two rooms make better financial sense. *Rua da Oitavos, Quinta da Marinha; theoitavos.com.*

**Step up to the plate:** clockwise from top left, beachfront Sal restaurant; bags for sale at Casa da Cultura; hip haven Quinta da Comporta; poolside loungers at the Oitavos; Hamilton does pizza with panache

**BANG FOR YOUR BUCK**  
If you find trendy Comporta too expensive, look at Turismo Rural properties inland. Pretty Monte do Brejinho de Agua is 15 minutes' drive from the beach, but has doubles from £64, B&B (fb.com/montedo brejinhoagua)

● **City sleep**  
**INFANTE SAGRES** (Doubles from £138, B&B)  
**Because:** On opening in 1951, it was Porto's first five-star — and it's still the finest, with a vintage telephone booth (now an elevator), stained glass and the grandest breakfast room you've ever seen. **Travel's tip:** Nab as many of the Claus Porto bathroom goodies as your conscience allows — the cult beauty brand is expensive at the airport. *Praça D Filipa de Lencastre 62, Porto; infantessagres.com.*

● **Comporta cool**  
**QUINTA DA COMPORTA** (Doubles from £230, B&B)  
**Because:** Among Comporta's rice paddies, this hip new haven is a collection of rooms within whitewashed cottages. Inside, it's a foray into farmyard chic — wood beams, wicker, raffia roofs — yet the glass-walled pool is mod. **Travel's tip:** Dodge August if you can — rates halve by September but the weather's still beautiful. *Rua de Alto de Pina 2, Carvalhal; quintadacomporta.com.*

GET ME THERE GO INDEPENDENT

This part of the Portuguese coast can be accessed via both Porto and Lisbon airports. If you're spending most of your time in the north (Costa Verde), you can even fly into Vigo, in Spain, and drive south. Flights depart from all London airports, as well as Manchester, Bristol, Liverpool, Birmingham and Edinburgh. Fares range from £39 return (midweek, low season) to £300 in peak summer.

**GO PACKAGED**  
**Sunvil** (sunvil.co.uk) has a three-night break in a five-star hotel in Praia do Guincho from £647pp, B&B, including flights. Or try [expedia.co.uk](http://expedia.co.uk).

**GET AROUND**  
Your best bet is to rent a car; petrol is cheap and it's easy to pick up your vehicle from one airport and drop off at another. Compare rates at [skyscanner.net](http://skyscanner.net) or try [portugalrent.com](http://portugalrent.com).

**FURTHER INFORMATION**  
See [visitportugal.com](http://visitportugal.com).