

FOOD & DRINKS • WINE

Why You Should Visit Alentejo, Portugal's Underrated Wine Region

by Laura Giannatempo July 21, 2017



Photo by Jorge Simão
Herdade da Malhadinha Nova is a chic B&B in the middle of a 1,100-acre estate.

Dreamy scenery and world-class vineyards make Alentejo a wine-lover’s paradise—and it’s all just a short drive from the Portuguese capital.

Porto and Douro might get most of the attention, but Alentejo, a 1.5-hour drive southwest of [Lisbon](#), is quietly becoming one of the best destinations in Europe for [wine travel](#). Its wines—rich, voluptuous reds and elegantly balanced whites from local grape varietals—are getting better every year; and young winemakers have poured resources into sleek design and cutting-edge technology, turning many of the wineries into destinations unto themselves. Add to that some of the most soulful food in Portugal, [UNESCO World Heritage sites](#), and landscapes that have drawn comparisons to Provence and Tuscany, and it’s easy to see why the region is worth a detour on the way to (or from) [Lisbon](#).

Day 1: Start North Around Estremoz

From Lisbon, head east to the village of Monforte and check in at the 19-room, boutique [Torre de Palma Wine Hotel](#), meticulously restored from the ruins of Ancient Roman and medieval houses. While the sprawling grounds have a cypress-lined outdoor pool, spa, and wellness center, the main attraction here is the winery. Inaugurated in 2016 and led by award-winning Portuguese winemaker Luís Duarte, it makes just two wines in small batches: a full-bodied red and a fruity white.

From there, take a 20-mile drive south toward Estremoz for an afternoon at [Dona Maria](#) winery, named after King João V's lover. The impeccable wines are made with the robust local red varietals—Touriga Nacional, Aragonez, and Alicante Bouschet among others—as well as international ones like Viognier. Book a private dinner in the estate's blue-tiled dining room for regional specialties like *sopa alentejana de tomate* (tomato bread soup) and *bacalhau fresco* (fresh cod) paired with the estate's wines. Or, head back to Torre de Palma to [take in the sunset](#) from the medieval tower—wine glass in hand.



Courtesy Dona Maria

Dona Maria winery was named after King João V's lover.

Day 2: Head South to Monsaraz

As you wind south to the white-washed hilltop village of Monsaraz, where local artisans still hand-weave traditional rugs in vibrant colors, stop half-way at [Herdade do Freixo](#). The winery, designed by renowned Portuguese architect Federico Valsassina in 2016 and housed entirely underground, uses wood and earth tones to create a sense of harmony with the land (call ahead to book a tour). Then, continue another hour south to the [Herdade do Esporão](#) winery to enjoy a prix fixe tasting menu lunch with a vineyard view at [Esporão](#) restaurant, helmed by one of Portugal's rising chefs, Pedro Pena Bastos (reservations recommended). If you still have it in you, book a tasting to sample wines straight from their aging barrel, or make your own wine blend with the "blending experience" offering. Wined-out for the day? Take a guided tasting of estate [olive oils](#), made with local galega, cordovil, and moura olives.

Spend your second night a 30-mile-drive south at the Beja-area [Herdade da Malhadinha Nova](#), a chic B&B in the middle of a 1,100-acre estate surrounded by vineyards and olive groves. Here, the Soares family breeds horses,

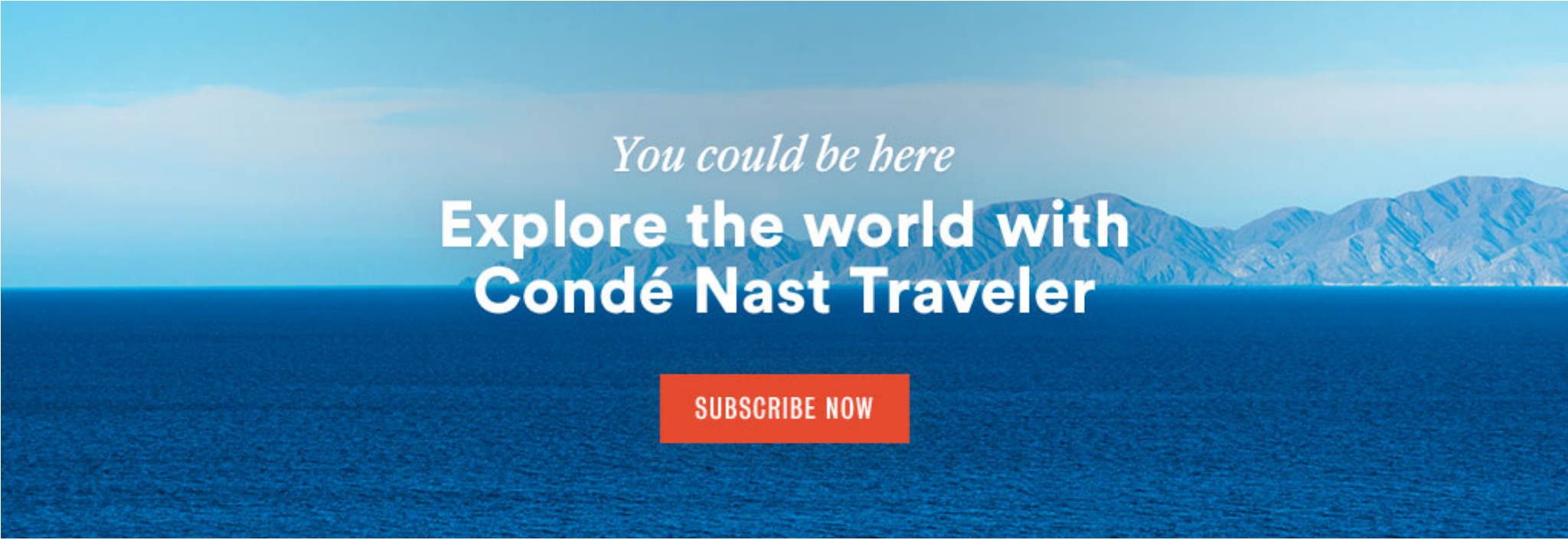
Alentajana cows, and black pigs, and makes lovely olive oils and wines, including the refreshing Monte de Peceguina rosé. Relax at the B&B's [swimming pool](#) or spa, and come evening, head to its restaurant for seafood from the nearby Algarve, or pork and beef entrées with a decidedly modern flare.



Photo by Goncalo Villaverde
Owned by Dutch art collectors, Quinta do Quetzal is both a winery and art gallery.

Day 3: Finish in Southern Alentejo

Start your day in Cuba (no, not [that one](#)) at [Herdade do Rocim](#). Bridging tradition and modernity like no other winery in Alentejo, Rocim makes many of its wines the ancient way—in [beautiful clay amphorae](#) that feel oddly at home in the ultra-modern facilities. Book a tasting of amphora wines at the bar, then stay for a bite of buttery *presunto* ham made from Alentajano black pigs. Before heading back to Lisbon, stop at [Quinta do Quetzal](#). Owned by Dutch art collectors Cees and Inge de Bruin, Quetzal is both winery and art gallery: On the top floor is an airy restaurant with large windows overlooking Vidigueira vineyards, while one flight down is a contemporary art center with works by emerging artists commissioned by the de Bruin family.



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