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# Fine wine and warm hospitality: Uncovering Portugal's Alentejo

Touring family-run tabernas, wineries and olive groves, Georgia Hopkins enjoys the simple way of Alentejan life

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**Portugal's** magic and charm can be felt all over the country, mostly thanks to its kind and warm-hearted people, but none more so than in the beautiful region of Alentejo.

In Alentejo, things move at a slower pace. A region full of authenticity, many local artisans still take pride in mastering their crafts the old-fashioned way. Dotted with historical hilltop villages, and with olive trees, vines and oak trees as far as the eye can see, Alentejo is a place that will capture your heart immediately.

creatives and artisans. Not one for tours, I knew this one would be different - our trip around the Alentejo was more like travelling with a couple of dear friends.



A mouthwatering Alentejan spread

Our first day saw us taking in Evora, an enchanting city surrounded by fortified walls, and one that has been recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Getting lost in its narrow, cobblestoned streets, wandering past its colourful houses, we found ourselves dining at Taberna Tipica Quarta-Feira, a wonderful family-run restaurant hidden down a side street in the centre of town. The set menu showcases the region's best dishes, and you certainly do not leave hungry! The slow cooked pork with potatoes (a very Alentejan dish) was a definite highlight, as were the local wines they serve.

The beautiful Gente Da Minha Terra store, for "prazeres do dia a dia" (pleasures of everyday life), was another special find. This is where you go if you are in the market for a beautiful local gift to take home - quality olive oils, azulejos (hand-painted tiles), homewares and bags. The gorgeous Fonte de Letras bookshop was another perfect stop, for its excellent range of children's books.



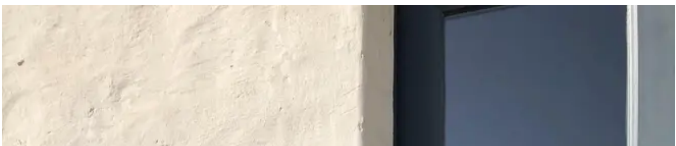
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Rustic style in the Alentejo

From Evora we carried on to what is quite possibly my favourite hotel in the world - **São Lourenço do Barrocal**. A 200-year-old farm estate which has been lovingly restored and reopened as a luxury hotel about two years ago.



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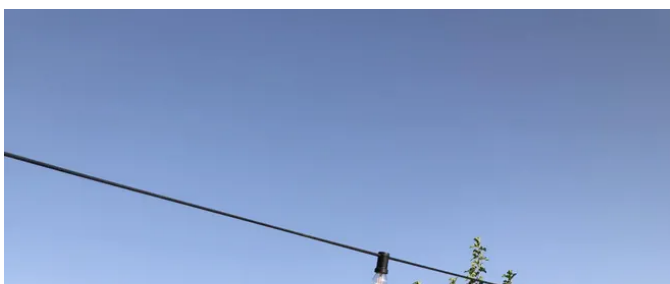
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Close to the medieval hilltop village of Monsaraz, Barrocal is as much about the place itself, as it is about the incredible family and story behind it. Every detail has been so thoughtfully considered, from the design to the food to the service and the staff uniforms, to the beautiful spa and the lovely treatments.

In summertime, you can choose to eat a farm-to-table seasonal menu out by the abundant veggie garden under the stars, while listening to local musicians play live music. Another special experience not be missed is a tour of the property with one of Portugal's most revered archaeologists, Manuel Calda.





Al fresco dining in the Alentejo

Not far from São Lourenço do Barrocal, on the slopes of Vidigueira, we then journeyed to [Quinta do Quetzal](#), an impressive winery where the focus is on producing a limited run of top quality wines. Owners Cees and Inge de Bruin are collectors and patrons of contemporary art, and through the winery aim to share their passion for Portuguese culture, nature, food and wine with others.

Quetzal is also home to a contemporary art exhibition space - showcasing their favourite works by established international artists - a shop and restaurant. With views overlooking the vines, and a stunning colourfully-tiled wall mural, this is a beautiful place to while away a few hours.



The charming Alentejo landscape

Over the days that followed we were lucky enough to meet with a number of inspiring local artisans. One of whom was Antonio Rocha - a (self-taught) Tahla artisan in Alentejo's Vidigueira. A builder by trade, Antonio is preserving the ancient art of hand crafting these large clay vessels known as Tahla de Barro - that are an integral part of Alentejo's winemaking heritage. Outside of the nation of Georgia, Alentejo is the only place in the world where this ancient method of winemaking has never ceased. Here in Alentejo, it co-exists alongside other more modern winemaking techniques.



home and welcomed us for lunch under a shady tree, where we learnt all about their production. Their property is now 22 hectares, and is fully certified organic with olive trees and herbs as well. They made their first talha wine, in fact all their first wines, in 2012. But, Cardoso observes, there's no hurry – it's all about “slow food, slow wine, everything is slow in Alentejo, it's perfect.”



Slow food and slow wine in Alentejo

We drove on to **Torre de Palma Wine Hotel**, a design hotel tucked away in another pretty pocket of the idyllic Alentejo. Part luxury hotel, part 14th century vineyard, part spa, and award-winning restaurant, it makes a good base for which to explore nearby Estremoz.



Delicious extra virgin Galega olive oil at Amor é Cego

One of the highlights of our time there was a trip to a nearby organic olive oil farm not far from Estremoz. We spent a lazy afternoon in the shade of an ancient olive tree, with Amor é Cego's super charming owners, João and Liliana, and learnt all about the history of their estate, the Galega olive tree

Over multiple courses of delicious local food, served with their olive oil, we swapped stories and laughs of life and travels. Unlike many of the other big commercial operators in the region, Amor é Cego is a story of a small, boutique producer, totally in love with their old olive grove that has existed for more than three generations. The passion and dedication of João and Liliana at Amor é Cego is inspiring - a visit here is a must.

Experiences like these are just the norm in the Alentejo. Kind, warm, generous, hospitable people living a simple life, working hard, and following their passions.

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