

algarve,
europe's
most famous
secret

loulé

municipality

2013 . 3rd Edition

loulé

The cosmopolitan lifestyle of the major tourist centres; a long ribbon of fine, golden sand tucked between the blue of the sea and the bold ochres of the cliffs; the splendour of tiles in a chapel that is itself a work of art; the changing greens of the orchards and the woods of the hills; an endless variety of decorated chimneys, artistically wrought in a filigree of whitewashed stone; wide open spaces where it is possible to rediscover the meaning of solitude and listen to the silence of nature: with all this and more, Loulé municipality is a place of sunshine and colour, fun and excitement.

THE HISTORY OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF LOULÉ

As is the case across most of the Algarve, the human presence in the area can be dated back to the Palaeolithic period from artefacts found on the surface. There is, however, a more varied and more significant archaeological record of the Neolithic period (4,000 to 1,500 B.C.). From the Chalcolithic to the time of the Roman occupation, mining operations, such as those in the Alte area, were the chief reason for the establishment of settlements in the interior.

Under the Romans there were several fishing and fish salting centres dotted along the coast, the best documented of which is the "villa" at Cerro da Vila in Vilamoura. It is clear from archaeological finds that the Romans also settled on the site where Loulé castle now stands.

Although the Visigoths left no trace of their time in the region, the same is not true of the Moors (8th to 13th centuries), for whom Loulé was an urban centre of some importance.

The Christian reconquest, in 1249, and the policy pursued throughout the Algarve of allowing the Moors to remain in quarters outside the city walls - known as Mourarias - made it possible for Loulé to continue to develop. With the establishment of a fair, in 1291, Loulé became one of the major focal points for trade in the Algarve in medieval times.

Being inland, Loulé did not benefit directly from the voyages of exploration known as the Discoveries (15th and 16th centuries) and so did not share in the spurt of growth enjoyed by other towns along the coast, such as Lagos, Faro and Tavira. Agricultural products, above all dried fruits like almonds and figs, and crafts have been essential to the local economy for centuries. An attempt at the end of the 18th century to breed silk worms and make silk in Loulé (at the Quinta do Rosal, which still stands), failed after only a few years. Equally ill-starred was the production of jute and linen sacking using hand looms: although it flourished in the first decades of the 20th century, by the mid-1970s it had died out.

Loulé, the main centre of the biggest municipality in the Algarve, is today a growing city with a modern, dynamic and diversified economy which counts tourism among its principal activities.

VISITING LOULÉ

The evocative battlements of a medieval castle; a maze of narrow, white streets where craftsmen carry on age-old traditions; the vertical lines of the minaret of an old mosque; the broad horizons of a revered sanctuary set high on a hill: just a few facets of Loulé, a town of charming contrasts.



CASTLE

Located on the spur of a hill which was once the site of the town, it used to boast a series of defensive walls approximately 940 metres in perimeter. It possibly predates the Christian reconquest (13th century).

Three towers, a turret and a stretch of ramparts with a walk way along the top define the defensive structure. Inside lies the "alcaidaria" - where the commander of the castle lived - which was possibly built in the 14th century and was rebuilt in the 18th century. The "alcaidaria" was visited by King Pedro I in 1359, King Afonso V in 1458, after the conquest of the North African garrison of Alcácer Ceguer, and King Sebastian in 1573. In the courtyard of the castle there is a well, some medieval blocks and the arch of the old gateway leading to the town.



Castle - LC

DEFENSIVE WALLS

All that remains of Loulé's medieval walls are two towers and a few stretches of wall between the houses.

CHURCH OF MISERICÓRDIA

This is a 16th century building with a radiate Manueline entrance, with carved ropes, finished off by two pinnacles. In front of the doorway stands a cross from the same period, with statues of Christ and Our Lady. The carved altarpiece in the chancel is a simple piece of 18th century work but it contains two 16th century statues, one of which is of alabaster and came originally from the Graça Monastery.

CHAPEL OF NOSSA SENHORA DA CONCEIÇÃO (OUR LADY OF THE CONCEPTION)

This unassuming church dates from the second half of the 17th century and was built on the site of a 16th century oratory, backing on to one of the gates in the city walls. Inside it has fine tile decoration depicting scenes from the life of the Virgin and a richly decorated carved and gilded altarpiece. On the ceiling there is a panel depicting the Virgin by the Algarve painter Rasquinho (19th century). The statues to be seen are also good examples of the religious sculpture of the period.

MAIN CHURCH OF SÃO CLEMENTE (ST CLEMENT)

Probably built on the site of the old mosque, this building dates from the third quarter of the 13th century and specialists say it reflects the southern Gothic style of architecture. It has undergone a number of alterations, above all in the 16th and 18th centuries. It has an ogival entrance archway surmounted by a gable and a circular window. The side entrance is Gothic. The bell tower began life as a Moorish minaret, from which the Moslem faithful were summoned to prayer, and displays late Baroque ornamentation. An ancient pillar of unknown origin is set into the wall inside the tower, next to the door. The interior consists of three naves, with ogival arches supported by capitals. The latter are decorated with carved foliage which suggests that they are perhaps the work of Moorish craftsmen. The columns are of varying heights and appear to have been built using materials from earlier Roman or Moorish structures. The high altar has a carved and gilded 18th century altarpiece and statues from the same period. Three of the side chapels merit special reference. First of all, the Chapel of Nossa Senhora da Consolacão (Our Lady of Consolation) which has an arch and ceiling consisting of Manueline vaults (16th century) covered with narrative tiles, and a carved 18th century altarpiece. Then the Chapel of São Brás (St. Brás), which has a 16th century arch, an 18th century carved polychrome altarpiece and a fine statue of the patron saint dating from the 16th century. Lastly, the Capela das Almas (Chapel of Souls), which dates back to the late 16th century, which in addition to an attractive carved altarpiece (18th century) has walls decorated with very rare 17th century polychrome tiles, probably of Spanish manufacture. The church also boasts several other carved and gilded 18th century altarpieces and a fine collection of 17th and 18th century statues, including a São Crispim (St. Crispin) that once belonged to the Brotherhood of Cobblers, a trade traditionally practised by those of Moorish descent, a Nossa Senhora da Graça (Our Lady of Grace) and a Nossa Senhora do Carmo (Our Lady of Carmel). The sacristy contains vestments and a number of interesting pieces of jewellery from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. An interesting marble table occupies a central position.

CHURCH OF THE ORDEM TERCEIRA DE SÃO FRANCISCO (THIRD ORDER OF ST. FRANCIS)

The exterior of the church is of little architectural interest. An interesting feature of the fine carved and gilded altarpiece on the main altar (18th century) is the highly decorative tabernacle in the form of a pelican.

MONASTERY OF ESPÍRITO SANTO (HOLY SPIRIT)

Built in the 17th/18th centuries, the structure suffered major damage in the earthquake of 1755. Expropriated in the 19th century, it has recently been turned into a cultural venue containing the Municipal Art Gallery.



Monastery of Espírito Santo - LC

MUNICIPAL MUSEUM

The museum is housed in the former commander's residence in the castle. Its collection includes the industrial archaeology of the municipality. The commander's residence is also home to the Municipal Historical Archive and a traditional Algarve kitchen.

CHAPEL OF NOSSA SENHORA DA PIEDADE - MÃE SOBERANA (OUR LADY OF PIETY-SOVEREIGN MOTHER)

Situated on a small hill, this church affords magnificent views of the city, the surrounding countryside and the sea. The current structure is 18th century and was built on the site of an older building. The architecture is simple. The main altar has a carved 18th century altarpiece, while the statue of the patron saint, who wears a dramatic expression on her face, is from the 17th century. On one of the walls is a cross, made of tiles painted with figures, which dates back to the 18th century. The centuries-old cult of the Sovereign Mother, which is strong in Loulé and across a great swathe of the Algarve, reaches its high point each year on the second Sunday after Easter, when a group of men carry her effigy at a run up to the steep path leading to the chapel.



Sovereign Mother - LC

MONASTERY OF GRAÇA (GRACE)

All that remains of the original monastery is the Gothic doorway to the church, which has capitals decorated with plant motifs. The damaged gable bears a symbolic star consisting of two crossed triangles that has yet to be deciphered.

MONASTERY OF STO. ANTÓNIO (ST ANTHONY)

Located on the way out of the city towards Boliqueime, part of the monastery has been restored. It opens occasionally for exhibitions.

MUSEUM OF DRIED FRUITS

The museum has old machines used for cracking almonds, for grinding carob and other objects related to this activity.

LOULÉ'S SALT MINES

Running beneath Loulé at depths of between 230 and 270 metres are several kilometres of galleries where rock salt of great purity (90% pure) is mined. An interesting facet of Loulé's economy that, for the time being, is not a tourist attraction.

HISTORICAL CENTRE

The irregular quadrilateral bounded by the medieval city walls retains much of the atmosphere of days gone by. A walk through its narrow, twisting streets is full of delightful surprises: here a pretty old house, there an unexpected courtyard, further on a chapel by an old gateway.

It is also worth looking around the part of the city that surrounds the old walls. This is where craftsmen are to be found carrying on the age-old traditions, in workshops scattered among such enchanting spots as the Rua dos Arcos or the "Bica Velha" fountain, where the townswomen and water-carriers would come to draw water in days gone by.

A visit to Loulé does not end there however. A trip to the market, built in the Moorish style fashionable at the beginning of the 20th century, with its colourful sights and bustling ambience, is a must. And don't forget the Praça da República and other streets where the rich bourgeoisie showed off their wealth in the whimsical architecture of the homes they had built for them.

getting to know loulé municipality

QUERENÇA

Savour the atmosphere of a traditional Algarve village of white houses and small gardens.

MAIN CHURCH 18

With its origins in the 16th century, this church underwent subsequent alterations. The façade has a simply decorated Manueline doorway (16th century), and the side entrance is from the same period. The main and side chapels have carved and gilded altarpieces (18th century). Among the statues to be seen, a 16th century Virgin and Child and a 17th century Nossa Senhora da Assunção (Our Lady of the Assumption) deserve particular mention. In the square in front of the church stands an interesting cross mounted on a limestone boulder.

FORTE BENÊMOLA CLASSIFIED SITE

A river runs through this peaceful stretch of countryside. On its banks grow a number of plant and tree species seldom found in the Algarve: willow, ash and lily of the valley trees, as well as oleander, poplar and tamarisks. The slopes of the valley are covered with vegetation typical of the Barrocal (the intermediate zone between the coast and the hills of the interior), including rosemary, lavender, thyme, cistus, wild olive, cork oak and carob. The local fauna includes otters, a wide variety of birds and a few colonies of bats. There are nature trails for walkers. Within the park are a number of caves containing archaeological remains. On the approach road is the Cerro dos Negros viewpoint, which looks out over a broad sweep of coastline and ocean.



Fonte Benémola - LC

SALIR

The white houses of the village are scattered higgledy-piggledy on the hillside around the ruins of the castle. Its narrow streets still retain a mix of bright flowerpots, whitewashed walls and peace and quiet.

MAIN CHURCH 20

Although of little architectural interest, this church does contain one small treasure: an illuminated papal bull on parchment dated 1550. It also boasts carved and gilded 18th century altarpieces and statues from the 17th and 18th centuries.

CASTLE 21

The fact that it does not have an "alcáçova" (citadel) suggests that the castle was built in the 12th/13th centuries to defend the peasants who worked in the fields from Christian attack. Captured by the Knights of the Order of Santiago (St. James) after the fall of Tavira, it was here that the master of the order, D. Paio Peres Correia, awaited the arrival of the army of King Afonso III before going on to seize Faro (1249-1250).

Its walls are built of "taipa" and are one of only a few surviving examples of Moorish fortifications in Portugal. Archaeological excavations have uncovered a Moorish residential area and confirm that part of Salir is built on the site of the old fortification.

The castle is an excellent vantage point. To the north it looks out over the vast ranges of the Serra, while seaward the view is of more gentle, verdant hills.

“TAIPA” AS A BUILDING MATERIAL

A building method dating from pre-historic times, “taipa” was used by the Moors to build fortifications, like Salir castle, and houses. “Taipa” houses were still being built in the region until only a few decades ago.

Among other advantages, “taipa” is cheap and provides excellent insulation. Consisting of a mixture of sand, gravel and clay - to which lime was added to make it stronger when the structure in question was for military purposes - “taipa” was poured into moulds and then beaten down vigorously with mallets. Once each layer was dry the operation was repeated until the desired height was reached.

ROCHA DA PENA CLASSIFIED SITE

A limestone massif with steeply scarped sides, Rocha da Pena rises to a height of 479 metres. There is a panoramic view from its summit which includes the sea. The fascination of Rocha da Pena lies chiefly in its natural and archaeological heritage, however. Its caves and the double wall of stone that marks the course of ancient defences indicate human settlement from the Neolithic period to the time of the Moorish occupation. In addition to some endemic Portuguese species, the vegetation includes strawberry trees, rosemary, lavender, mastic trees, juniper, cistus, a few wild orchids and Portuguese oak, among other species.

There is also a range of important animal species including colonies of Bonelli’s eagles and eagle owls, among other birds, bats and small carnivores such as genets, foxes and mongooses.

Also of interest at Rocha da Pena are two old windmills and the picturesque village of Penina, where there is a house with an attractive chimney built in 1821. There are nature trails for visitors.

ALTE

Some consider Alte, which has existed since the period of the Roman occupation, to be the village most typical of the Algarve. With their whitewashed houses, windows and parapets picked out in colour, ornate chimneys and pervasive air of tranquillity, the streets of Alte’s historic centre have retained much of their original charm. The area around the church is a delightful snapshot of the real Algarve.

MAIN CHURCH 24

Built in the 13th century by the wife of the second lord of Alte to give thanks for his safe return from the eighth crusade to the Holy Land, the church has been modified on a number of occasions since, above all in the 16th and 18th centuries. The interior consists of three naves, with short, squat columns dressed with brick to bear the weight of the structure. The chancel has a Manueline triumphal arch that is partially hidden by wooden mouldings. The vaulted ceiling is painted and has decorated keystones. The walls and vaults are clad in 18th century tiles.

The chapel of São Sebastião (St. Sebastian) contains some notable polychrome tiles made in Seville, which date from the end of the 16th century. The carved altarpieces in the chapels of Nossa Senhora do Rosário (Our Lady of the Rosary) and São Francisco (St. Francis), which display the coat of arms of the Counts of Alte, are good examples of 18th century art. Among the statues in the church and the sacristy, three in particular merit particular mention: a 17th century Santa Teresa (St. Theresa), a Nossa Senhora do Rosário (Our Lady of the Rosary) and a Santa Margarida (St. Margaret) full of movement and life, from the 18th century. The two fonts are in the Manueline style (16th century).

CHAPEL OF SÃO LUÍS (ST. LOUIS) 23

Built at the beginning of the 15th century, it was subsequently altered until it attained its current appearance, that of a country church in the style of the 18th century. The interior is plain, but there are four paintings in the popular idiom depicting the life of the saint (18th century).

FONTE PEQUENA AND FONTE GRANDE

For centuries these two springs were a meeting place for the women of the village who would fill their water pitchers and do their washing. Tables and stone benches have now been installed, in the cool shade of the overarching trees, making this an ideal spot for having a picnic or just relaxing.

RIBEIRA DE ALTE AND ITS MILLS

The waters of Fonte Pequena and Fonte Grande, which are the source of the Alte river, once turned the wheels of the village’s nine mills. Some of these have since disappeared, fallen into ruins or been adapted to perform other functions. The Moinho da Abóboda mill, which is known to date back at least as far as the 13th century, can still be seen, as can the 17th century works to divert the river and the channel that brought the water to the mills. There is also a small waterfall on the Alte river, 24 metres high, known as Queda do Vigário (Vicar’s Falls).

ATTRACTIONS AROUND ALTE

If Alte is the most typical Algarve village, the area around it also has attractions that justify a visit. The Águas Frias mill, on the Arade river, which is still used to mill flour; the Malha Ferro rural mini-museum which houses a small collection of agricultural implements and traditional domestic objects; the chimneys of Monte Brito and Esteval dos Mouros with their intricate lacework decoration; the viewpoint at Rocha de Soidos, undercut by a gaping cave; the abandoned village of Rocha Amarela, forgotten amidst hills; the copper mines of Atalaia, Cascalheira, Sarradas and Cerca da Mina which were worked in prehistoric times; and the many old windmills that are still to be seen on the horizon, dotting the hill tops.



ALMANCIL

The chapel and the area that surrounds it, which includes an art gallery housed in carefully restored old buildings, retain much of the character and charm of the Algarve of centuries past.

CHAPEL OF SÃO LOURENÇO DOS MATOS (ST. LAWRENCE) 16

The occurrence of a miracle in 1722 when the locals were searching for water prompted the construction of this chapel. The architecture is Baroque, with an elegant cupola and tiled panels set over the main entrance and at the rear of the chancel.

The tiles on the walls, vaults and cupola were made in Lisbon in 1730 and recount the life of São Lourenço (St. Lawrence). Together they form one of the most outstanding decorative ensembles in Portugal and earn the chapel a unique place in art history. Particularly worthy of note is the harmonious way the tiles fit in with the carved and gilded altarpiece on the main altar and the decorative detail on the triumphal arch and at the base of the cupola.

There is a good collection of 17th and 18th century statues in the church, the sacristy, which also houses a fine chest with carved decoration, and the adjoining room. Nearby, in São João da Venda, the old church retains a number of Manueline features (16th century) in its denticulate exterior and the vaulting over the main altar, as well as an altarpiece with paintings from the end of the same century.

BARRANCO DO VELHO

A beautiful church, (19) built in 1944 in the Algarvean rustic style, looks out from the top of a hill and is a pleasant place to visit. The churchyard is one of the most marvellous viewing points in the Algarve and from it can be seen an endless vista of hills covered with cork oaks, stretching away almost as far as Loulé, Salir and Alte.

In the nearby ranges of hills are to be found picturesque thatched stone houses, round in shape, that are used as barns these days but which recall the dwellings of the peoples who lived in the region in prehistoric times.



AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOUR

For those with an interest in prehistoric civilisation, there are several sites dating back to the Megalithic period that merit a visit: the dolmen at Cerro das Pedras and the fallen menhir at Alagoas, which is made of limestone that must have been brought a considerable distance, both of which are in the vicinity of Salir; and the dolmens at Beringel and Pedra do Alagar (Ameixial). The mosaics visible in some of its apartments and the structure of its baths make the rural "villa" at Cerro da Vila (3rd century) the region's most eloquent testimony to the period of Roman occupation. The site was inhabited from the 1st to the 11th centuries, during the period of Moorish rule. Other Roman structures include the bridge at Tor, over the pretty Algibre river, which has five arches and sturdy piers, the bridge at Barão, over the Quarteira river, which has only four arches, and, near Loulé, the Alamos bridge, which is a more modest affair, with just two arches. Near the coast, the remains of tanks used to salt fish at the Loulé Velho archaeological site provide further confirmation of the busy fishing and fish preserving industry that existed for centuries in the Algarve under the Romans.



FROM THE SANDY SHORELINE TO THE CALDEIRÃO HILLS

First come the long beaches strewn with the tanned bodies of dedicated sun worshippers. Behind them are fields that are almost flat, shaded by pines and fruit trees. Then the landscape rises into the gently rolling hills of the Barrocal, covered with fig, almond and carob trees, and lush vegetable gardens. This is the place to take in the charm of houses with their colourful parapets in villages like Boliqueime, with its white church standing at the top of a hill, or the banks of the Algibre river, spattered with the pale pink of oleander flowers. The hills of the Serra do Caldeirão are not high - the maximum altitude is about 600 metres - but they nonetheless dominate the area occupied by Loulé municipality, each hilltop opening up new horizons, fresh vistas appearing around every corner. Hidden away on their slopes and in their valleys are small picturesque hamlets and, here and there, the fields where oranges, figs, almonds, maize and beans are grown. For the most part, however, cork oaks, strawberry trees, cistus bushes, heather and lavender predominate, lending their perfume to the pure country air.

The wide open spaces of the Serra are also home to birds of prey, song birds, foxes, wild boars and rabbits, which provide another reason to explore the wild natural beauty of this area, a side of the Algarve that is frequently overlooked.

THE PLEASURES OF SUN AND SEA

Thanks to its golden sands and sunny climate the whole of the coast has become a major centre for beach holidays and includes some of the best tourist facilities in the Algarve.

Quinta do Lago

This is a long beach with pedestrian access by way of a bridge over the Ria Formosa. It is the site of a top level international holiday resort.



Garrão

Long beach edged with brightly colour cliffs. Facilities for tourists.

Vale do Lobo

A beach that owes its unique beauty to its ochre and ruby cliffs. It is surrounded by a high quality tourist complex.



Quarteira

Once a simple fishing village, Quarteira has become a cosmopolitan tourist centre. Its past identity can be glimpsed in a 17th century church and a few houses decorated with coloured parapets.



Vilamoura

Vilamoura's attractive beach is complemented by a tourist development that ranks among the biggest and most prestigious in Europe.



FROM COPPERWARE TO COLOURFUL HORSE TACK

Many of the craft traditions of the Algarve are kept alive in Loulé where it is still possible to find objects made of copper, iron, wood and brass using techniques forgotten by all but a few, pottery and earthenware, rags and sackcloth. Crafts are to be found more or less everywhere in Loulé municipality.

In many villages the women still plait the leaves of dwarf palms to make hats, baskets, mats and other useful items. In Almancil and Quatro Estradas there are potteries which make brightly glazed earthenware vessels and utensils to designs both old and modern. The old wooden looms are still used to weave colourful blankets. "Esparto", a kind of coarse grass that once occupied the labour of hundreds of women, is still made into mats, baskets and ornaments in Sarradas and Salir, and is exhibited in the Casa da Memória in Alte, which includes a ceramics workshop as well as a small museum.

In Torre they make wooden toys, and in Cerro seamstresses make costumes inspired by those of yesteryear.



FLAVOURS OF THE SEA AND THE SERRA

Fresh fish is among the culinary attractions of Quarteira, a place of fishermen. Grilled sardines and other types of fish are justly renowned. The maritime influence is equally evident in such traditional recipes as baby horse-mackerel in a tomato sauce, squid served in their ink, bread soup with "conquilhas" clams, cream of shrimp soup and rice with octopus.

In Loulé, on the other hand, it is the produce of the interior that pervades the local cooking, with dozens of recipes involving variations on peas, chick peas, maize and beans of various kinds. Special occasions are an excuse for more extravagant dishes: hare in white wine, "galinha cerejada" (Loulé style chicken, fried until golden after having been boiled) or fried pork flavoured

with garlic, bay leaves, pepper, cloves, paprika and lemon. The area has its fair share of local cakes and puddings too, many of which involve substantial quantities of eggs, sugar and almonds. In Boliqueime "folar" and "mexericos" are the specialties to ask for, while Alte does a nice line in "cavacas" and "esquecidos". From the hills of the "serra" comes delicious honey tasting of woodland flowers, goats cheese and brandy distilled from the fruit of the strawberry trees that grow wild amid the scrub on the slopes. Last but not least there is the production of liqueurs, sweets and jams made from a variety of local products ranging from fruits to aromatic herbs which come from Querença and Benafim.



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Data sheet

Edition and Copyright: Região de Turismo do Algarve

Cartography: IGeoE

Translation: Inpokulis

Printing: Gráfica Comercial

Photography: Hélio Ramos (HR), Luís da Cruz (LC), Miguel Veterano (MV), Vasco Célio (VC)

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