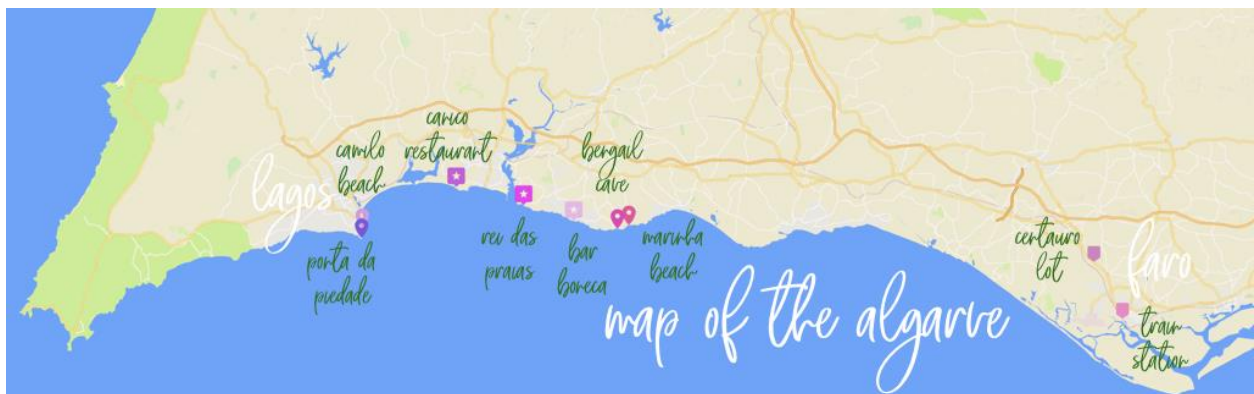


ALGARVE TRAVEL GUIDE – THE PERFECT PORTUGAL BEACH BREAK



I recently took a week-long trip to Portugal with 3 of my girlfriends, and the Algarve was my absolute favorite part of the whole trip!!! The beaches are serene and full of adventure (cave hopping and rock climbing galore), the views from the cliffs onto the beaches are so Gray Malin, you don't have anyone trying to sell you a parasailing trip or friendship bracelet, and it felt very local. When I was planning our trip there, it was *very* difficult for me to find useful information about logistics – where do I pick up my rental car, what beaches are the prettiest with that quintessential cove beach, high-cliff feel, can I get a kayak to benagil cave? So i now present my Algarve Travel Guide – the only one you will need to plan your best beach trip yet.



SHOULD I VISIT ALGARVE?

If you like beaches and/or the ocean, yes. The beaches in the Algarve were the least touristy, most beautiful beaches I have been to. It is very much an enjoy the beaches, enjoy the views, have lots of wine destination.

Check out **[My Complete Portugal Travel Guide](#)** if you need help deciding if you should go to Portugal or where to go in Portugal, and here's a **[Sintra Travel Guide](#)** and **[Lisbon Travel Guide](#)** for more Portugal beauty and inspiration.

WHEN SHOULD I VISIT ALGARVE?

Definitely during the hot summer months when you can actually lay on the beach. If you are not wanting to lay on the beach, you are probably not a beach person, and maybe the Algarve isn't worth it for you. May – October has temperatures at 70F or higher. July and August are the peak season. We went in July and the water was very cold. We did not find it to be too crowded, but we were also there Monday – Thursday. I can see the weekends being much busier if you are trying to find a spot for your towel on the beach.

HOW DO I GET TO ALGARVE?

You have 2 transportation options to get to the Algarve (most likely from Lisbon) – plane or train. We opted for the train because it was cheaper and less hassle. And when you factor in getting to the airport 2 hours early, the time was about even. The train is about 3.5 hours. The next option is training to Lagos or Faro (the only airport is in Faro). We chose Faro because there were more rental car options since it has an airport. Driving from Faro to Lagos is only 1 hour. You may choose Lagos if your accommodation is closer to there, especially if you are opting out of a rental car.

Book your flight to Portugal using Google Flights

Buy your train ticket **[here](#)**, but know you can't buy them until about a month before you go. The timetables might change slightly too. "From" will be Lisboa – Santa Apolonia which is in Alfama and probably closest to where you will be staying. "To" will be Faro (or Lagoa). You don't need to get to the train station any earlier than 15 minutes before, but leave some wiggle time to get there with an Uber. Trains from Lisboa – Santa Apolonia to Lisboa – Oriente run about every 15 minutes. We actually caught the one 15 minutes before our ticket's time and were happy to have that wiggle room. When you get to Lisboa – Santa Apolonia, just go up to the counter and ask the ticket guy what Platform to get on to get to Lisboa – Oriente. We couldn't really figure it out by looking at the timetables.

WHERE SHOULD I STAY IN ALGARVE?

If you want to go to the beautiful beaches of the Algarve, I recommend finding a place to stay close to these areas – in between Lagos and Faro. There are also lots of chic resorts in the hills of the Algarve, also called "central Algarve", if you want a romantic getaway, but my goal was to see the beaches so I wanted to be close to them. It was hard for me to find a hotel or resort in this area that looked super desirable, so we did an AirBnB in Caroveiro that worked fine for us. Make sure if you're staying in an AirBnB that it has parking if you have a rental car.

Use TripAdvisor if you want to stay in a hotel

Use AirBnB if you don't want to stay in a hotel

HOW DO I GET AROUND ALGARVE?

There are Ubers everywhere, but if you want the freedom to go to the beaches when you want, I would really recommend getting a rental car. The Algarve is huge. I found it really hard to find information beyond "you should get a rental car" so let me break it down.

I used this site (**www.vehicle-rent.com**) to find the cheapest deal and ended up going with Centauro. It's definitely a budget rental car company, but our car was brand new and very nice. I would definitely rent with them again if I went back. And I would rent directly through them and not through the broker site I used (take your pick). Secure your reservation way ahead of time because automatic cars are few and far between in Europe. Assuming you don't drive manual, go ahead and do this even if you are thinking about going to Algarve. You only have to put down a small deposit, and I think even that is refundable.

I had read that you need an International Drivers Permit, so I got one in the US. However, I'm not entirely sure if it was necessary. But I would get one anyways. To get one you just need two passport photos, \$20, and your driver's license. The application form, information about International Drivers Permits, and AAA branch office locator is at [this site](#). It only takes a few minutes so you can do it on your lunch break.

The roads were very easy to drive in Algarve. Just make sure you're planning on having an international phone plan for google maps and ideally a second person to help you navigate in the car. If all this sounds too much for you, just bank on using Ubers. Remember that you still need to have an international phone plan for this.

LOGISTICS OF GETTING YOUR CAR

This proved to be very confusing for me, and I couldn't find detailed information anywhere online. If you take a plane, this will be much easier. There is a rental car facility on site at the airport after you get your bags for most of the rental car companies, but NOT for Centauro (as we discovered 30 minutes later after taking a 20 minute Uber from the train station – it did not go so well). There is a little kiosk in the parking lot that you follow signs for "Area 4" to. From that kiosk there is a van that takes you way the heck outside the airport to the Centauro lot (I wish we had known this and gone straight there).

So basically, if you land at the airport, just go straight to that kiosk. If you land at the train station, take an Uber to the Centauro lot ("Centauro car hire Faro airport" on google maps – misleading title since it is NOT in the airport).

HOW MANY DAYS SHOULD I SPEND IN ALGARVE?

As many as you want. We spent 3 nights and 2 full days. I definitely could have stayed longer. But I love beaches. On our third day we probably would have done a hike along the coast all day or gone to a spa or something. And then could have spent 2 more days after that hitting the beaches. Your choice!! But I do always recommend at least 2 full days in any beach destination.

IS THERE A LANGUAGE BARRIER IN ALGARVE?

We had no issues calling restaurants, ordering, making reservations, buying waters at the beach, or anything of that nature. Everyone spoke a little English. Sometimes the Uber drivers didn't speak English, but they didn't really need to.

WHAT IS THERE TO DO IN ALGARVE?

There are 2 main typical "things to see" in The Algarve: Ponta da Piedade and Benagil Cave (pronounced "ben-uh-geel", like the word gel where the g sounds like a j but with 2 ees like kneel). There is a free way to see them and a guided tour way to see them.

PONTA DA PIEDADE

You can schedule a kayak tour in Lagos and do a guided kayak tour in and around the natural arches of Ponta da Piedade. You can also just view it from above by driving there and walking around.

[Side note: if you drive there, there will be plenty of parking. We kind of freaked out on the way there and parked in the first spot we found and then walked 15 minutes there and passed 500 spots. So go ahead and drive ALL the way to Ponta da Piedade for a spot.]

When we got there, we took the staircase all the way down to the water to see if there was a place to rent kayaks. What we found was a grumpy lifeguard who said "only if you are very stupid" or something like that. We never did find out if that was an option or where we could rent them from, so we just oohed and aaahed from the cliffs not wanting to commit to 3 hours in a group tour when we only had 2 days there. The boats left from Lagos dragging all the kayaks behind them, and then it looked like the tourists would then get in the kayaks when they got close to Ponta da Piedade. So your choice on if you want to look into that!



BENAGIL CAVE

This place is so unique!!! I was dying to see it. There are actually 3 options to see the caves, but that might change. The cheap but potentially dangerous option is to go to Benagil Beach and try to swim into the caves. I was too nervous to do this because I'm not a very good swimmer, but also because there are only 2 small entrances and boats everywhere!! The second option is to do a guided tour. The guided tour is about \$20-\$30 per person in a boat – it looks like they just zip into the cave and let you take a picture and then zip out. But you don't get to actually get out and walk around the sand. But you do get to see it.

The third option is to rent kayaks, but this one is a little sketchy. I was getting very limited information online about renting kayaks, but decided to go for it.

I opted to drive to the neighboring beach that I was wanting to spend the day on called Marinha Beach. We got there around 11 AM and asked a lifeguard right at the bottom of the stairs if there was a place to rent kayaks. Basically it ended up being a little sketchy. They told us that if anyone stopped us on the water to tell them that it was our friends' kayaks. Apparently the boat tour companies were trying to get a monopoly on the business and helped put some law in place where you can't carry out "tourist" activities on Marinha Beach or something like that. We paid \$20 for each 2 person kayak for 1 hour. Throughout the day it looks like they got fully booked up, so to have a chance to rent them I would go early. I think they start at 12. There might be more options to rent kayaks on Benagil Beach – I'm not sure.

We loved kayaking around though and got to spend lots of time inside the cave. The kayaks also had dry bags to put phones and keys in.



BEST BEACHES IN ALGARVE (ALSO KNOWN AS PRAIAS IN PORTUGUESE)

The next most obvious activity is hanging out on the beaches. We ended up going to 2 one day and 2 the next, and definitely had a favorite and second favorite. For some background, I am obsessed with cove beaches. They are so unique to me compared to the US. So I gravitate towards the high cliffs, rocks all around, steps down to the beach beaches. Our 2 favorites were Camilo Beach (#1) and Marinha Beach.

We also went to Praia da Dona Ana because it was close to Camilo Beach and Praia do Caroveiro because it was close to our AirBnB. They were very nice but just not as covey.

We had read about plenty of other beaches, most notably Praia da Rocha. I didn't actually go there, but I got the vibes from reading about it that it's just a large commercial beach. Not much "Mediterranean charm". So we opted out.

CAMILO BEACH

Camilo Beach is the next Beach over from Ponta da Piedade so you can definitely combine the two. There is plenty of parking along the street. At the top of the stairs there is a restaurant and a small snack bar for water and beer and drinks. At the bottom of the stairs there is a very small bar for beer and water. Cash only. The beach is bring your own towel / bring your own umbrella. And a cooler of sandwiches and snacks and water is not such a bad idea. You will see lots of topless women! Be warned. If you look left, you will see another beach nearby that looks larger – that is Praia Dona Ana. We went over there for a little but enjoyed it a lot less than Camilo – it is much larger and doesn't have the same character.



MARINHA BEACH

Marinha Beach is close to Benagil Cave so you can combine the two. It is larger than Camilo Beach. At the top of the stairs there are lots of little trucks and trolleys selling ice cream cones, water, and beer. Cash only. There was also a little shopping vendor with some sarongs, Turkish towels, and woven bags. Also cash only. If you are facing the water and look right, there is a path you can take along the coastline that gives you some really pretty views and pretty pictures of Marinha Beach from above. If you are looking at the water and turn left, that is where the stairs are to go down to the beach. Down on the beach there is a small restaurant with restrooms but the lines were always long for all of these things. If you walk along the beach to the right, there are plenty of places to plop yourselves down. Bring your own towel/

cooler/ umbrella. If you keep walking along the coast, there are fun rocky areas that you can climb through that lead to beautiful caves that you can look out from.



HIKE

We didn't end up having the time or energy to do this hike, but there's supposed to be a great hike along the coasts called Algar Seco. Check it out.

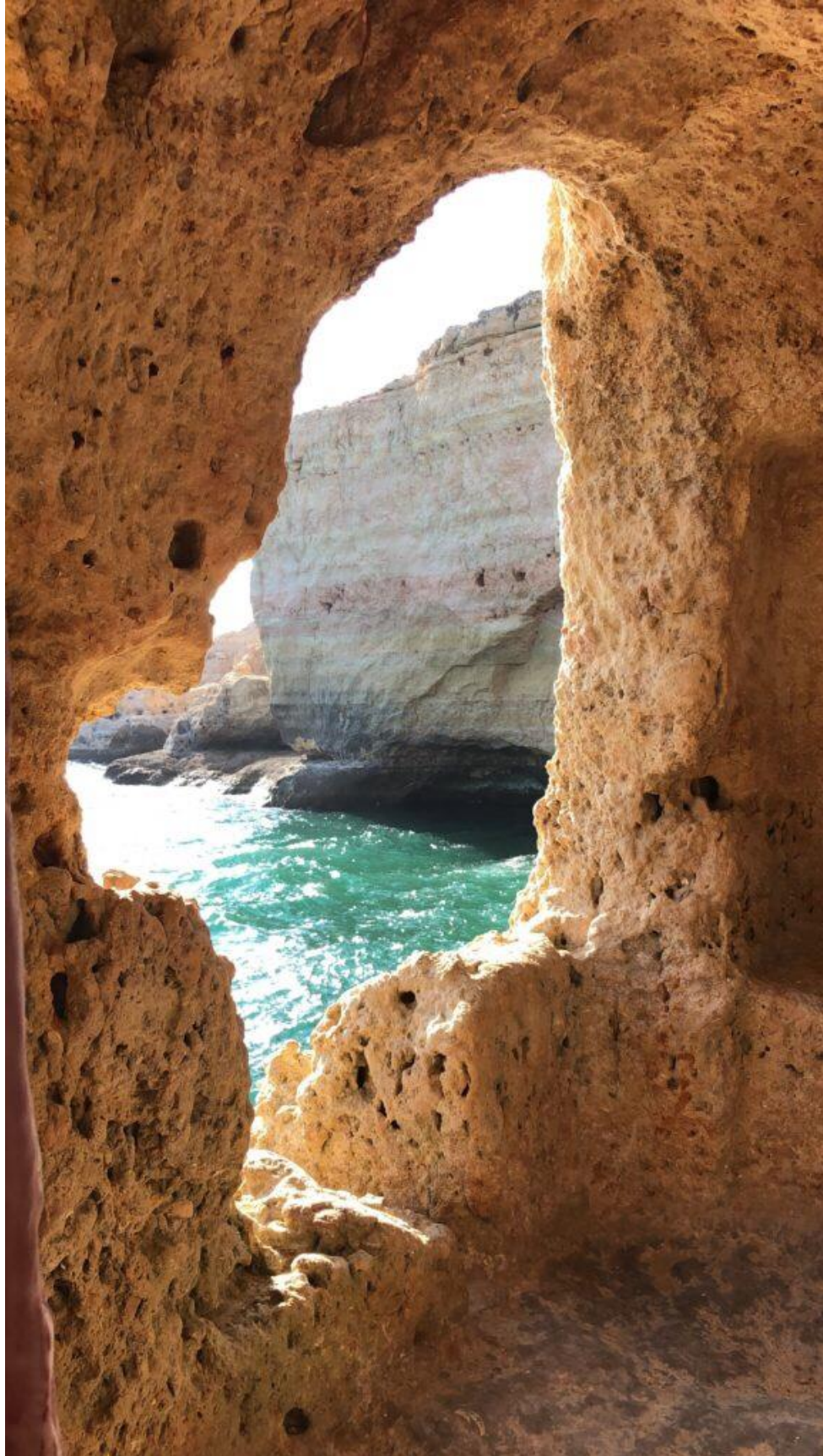
EXPLORING THE TOWNS

The town we stayed in was pretty touristy, but still fun to bop around getting ice cream and popping into souvenir shops. Lagos and Faro are much larger. So feel free to explore! There are lots of little towns along the Algarve coastline.

BONECA BAR AREA

My friend found this bar that we last minute decided to go to one evening before dinner and OMG I WAS OBSESSED. It's built into a cliff overlooking the water. The views are just incredible. We had a bottle of wine and a snack. You can either drive here and park in a lot or walk up the steep hill in Caroveiro. Just past the bar you'll see a sign carved into the rock that says "Oboneca". It ended up being these 2 gorgeous natural windows out to the water. The lighting was amazing so we all stopped to take solo shots haha. Also nearby the bar there were some people jumping off a cliff into the water. If that's your cup of tea, you should check that out too!







WHERE DO I EAT IN ALGARVE?

Our favorite restaurant experience hands down was **Canico**. It was so extra. There was a disco ball. It's on a private beach. There's a movie of fish swimming around projected onto the cliff. You'll love it. Do not follow google maps' directions either. It's inside a resort it looked like, so when google maps tells you to go down that dirt path, don't. Just keep driving until you see signs for Canico. Make a reservation too!! Ahead of time. We also ate at **Rei das Praias** which was another fun restaurant on a private beach. But it wasn't as fun as Canico and was also more expensive. We made a reservation ahead of time for here as well. There are plenty other places to eat in the Algarve, but these were the best with beach views.



IS THERE A PLACE TO GO OUT IN ALGARVE?

We didn't quite figure this one out. At Rei das Praias there were theme nights every Friday, and we heard there was the same at Canico. Since we were there Monday – Thursday, we missed out on these. I had read that Albufeira is a big nightlife area for the Algarve as is NoSolo Agua Beach Club on Praia da Rocha. We just never had it in us.

WHAT SHOULD I PACK FOR ALGARVE?

Beachwear, duh!!!

We did notice that at the beach, no one was wearing the “trendy” swimsuit brands or designs. We only saw one high waisted bikini, and we actually ended up ditching our cute one pieces for bikinis after noticing that nobody was wearing one pieces! So don't worry about wearing your latest designer digs and just pack things that give you good tan lines.

At the two restaurants we went to, people were dressed nice. Think linens and cute earrings and general cute resort wear. This isn't really the place for your midriff bearing coord set.

In the town we were staying in, all the restaurants were casual as were the people. Think chino shorts and a tank top. You do you, but don't go over the top.

I would advise against heels as the streets are all cobblestone and it is difficult to walk in them. But once again, you do you.

Bring a small towel for the beach if you have one – or check with your Airbnb host to see if they are provided. I always bring a scarf/sarong as well.

HOW MUCH I SPENT IN ALGARVE

Round trip Train – \$50

AirBnB (3 nights) – \$185 / person

Transportation (rental car + Uber) – \$55

Food – \$200

Renting Kayaks – \$10

Shopping – \$30

TOTAL – \$530

MY PERFECT ALGARVE ITINERARY

DAY 1

Train to Faro. Pick up rental car. Drive to accommodation. If you are in the hills and it's dinner time, go have a nice dinner with a sunset somewhere. On the flip side if you are staying near the coast and it's dinner time, go have a boozy dinner with a view of the sea. If you still have daylight, put on your bikini and drive to the nearest beach. Pack a book and a bottle of wine. Stay, read, drink until the tide kicks you out.

DAY 2

Pack a lunch. Drive to Marinha Beach before 11:30 AM. Leave your stuff in the car. Attempt to rent kayaks. Kayak to Benagil Cave. Relax on Marinha Beach the rest of the day. Dinner near your accommodation or at Rei das Praias. Make sure and get there for the sunset.

DAY 3

Optional Algar Seco hike. Pack a lunch. Drive to Ponta da Piedade. Walk around. Take some pictures. Walk down the stairs (the best pictures are from the stairs). Walk to Camilo Beach. Relax on Camilo Beach the rest of the day. Around 5, head to Boneca Bar. Dinner at Canico.

DAY 4

We had a late train so meandered our way slowly back to Faro from Caroveiro. If you have this luxury, stop at Porches Pottery which is a beautiful pottery shop with a cute café attached. We had lunch in Almancil at The Cheeky Pup – it seemed like a pretty wealthy resort area. We also read about the Church of Sao Lourenco outside of Faro being pretty, but we ran out of time.