

algarve,
europe's
most famous
secret

ohãõ

municipality

2013 . 3rd Edition

olhão

The islands and the long stretches of beach that are an ideal spot for swimming and sunbathing; the tranquil waters of the Ria Formosa, a paradise for nature lovers; and in the background, the countryside dotted with white houses: these are the attractions of Olhão and its municipality, a great place for a holiday full of sun, life and a whole host of charms.

THE HISTORY OF THE MUNICIPALITY

Archaeological finds testify to a human presence in the area of Olhão municipality since the Neolithic period. The most important remains date from the Chalcolithic period (2,000 to 1,500 BC); the limestone idols with carved eyes discovered in Moncarapacho are of particular archaeological interest. Traces of the Roman occupation have survived throughout the municipality, including remains along the coast associated with fishing and fish salting. Marim, next to the Ria, was a major "villa" and its huge burial ground was used again during the period of Visigothic rule (5th to 8th centuries).

It was the abundance of fish that first attracted fishermen to the spot where the town of Olhão now stands. Living in humble cabins built of wood, reeds and straw, they used an age-old device known as a "xâvega" which consisted of trawling a sack-shaped net back to the shore. The first document to refer to Olhão dates back to 1378, when the settlement would have been home to a few dozen inhabitants at most.

For centuries, their cabins were the only structures on the beach. The population gradually increased and in 1679 it was sufficiently important to justify building the fortress of São Lourenço (St. Lawrence) to defend the town against pirates from North Africa. The first stone building was the church of Nossa Senhora do Rosário (Our Lady of the Rosary), on which work began in 1698. In 1715 it opened to the public, and authorisation for the first masonry dwelling was granted through a licence from the queen D. Maria Ana of Austria.

The 19th century was decisive for Olhão's expansion: it became a town in 1808, as a token of the gratitude of the king D. João VI (1767-1826) for the struggle waged against the troops of Napoleon and for the heroic voyage of the boat Bom Sucesso, which carried the good news to the Portuguese court in Brazil, where it had fled following the invasion of Portugal by the armies of General Soult; the trade networks established by Olhão's mariners were extended as far as the Mediterranean; and lastly because of the rise of fish canning industry. Present-day Olhão is an active, dynamic city; fishing continues to be one of the mainstays of its economy..

VISITING OLHÃO

The fishermen's quarter of old Olhão is a warren of narrow, twisting streets where it is easy to become disoriented, a succession of square-sided white houses whose windows and parapets are edged with bands of grey and blue. Close by are moored the brightly coloured boats after their return from work at sea. The morning bustle of the market by the water's edge and the outdoor terraces where you can while away the time create a fascinating kaleidoscope of sensations for people strolling through the city, something not easily forgotten.



Olhão - LC

MAIN CHURCH

The first stone building to be erected in Olhão, the church was paid for with contributions from the fishermen (1698-1715?).

It has a majestic Baroque façade, including a pediment decorated with scrolls and, in the centre, a shield flanked by angels. A cradle vault spans its spacious interior. The main feature of the chancel is a carved and gilded altarpiece and triumphal arch (18th century). Its ceiling is decorated with a fresco and it contains a statue of Nossa Senhora do Rosário (Our Lady of the Rosary) (17th century). There are side altars, also with carved altarpieces. Among the statues to be seen, the most interesting are a Crucifixion and a Santo Apóstolo (Holy Apostle) (18th century). The church's holy treasure consists of vestments and pieces of jewellery. There is also a collection of 17th and 18th century statues in a separate storeroom. At the back of the church is the chapel of Nossa Senhora dos Aflitos (Our Lady of the Afflicted), who is especially revered by those connected with the sea.



Compromisso Marítimo - LC



Main church - LC

CHAPEL OF NOSSA SENHORA DA SOLEDADE (OUR LADY OF SOLITUDE)

This is the original church of the fishing village (17th century), built in a rural architectural style. The altarpieces date from the 19th century and there is a statue of Santa Luzia (Saint Luzia) (18th century). At the entrance, a slab covers an old well used to wash the chapel.

COMPROMISSO MARÍTIMO (MARITIME AGREEMENT)

A fishermen's mutual society founded in the 18th century, this building has an interesting façade marked by two pyramidal "tesoura" (scissor) roofs with a doorway crowned by a niche containing a statue of Nossa Senhora do Rosário. The city's museum is located in this building and provides visitors with a brief history of Olhão.

THE FISHING HARBOUR 🇵🇹

Olhão's fishing port is a must for anyone who likes to watch fishermen going about their work, to share in the excitement of the sardine fleet returning with its shimmering catch or just to gaze at the colours of the brightly painted boats, a place where earthenware pots called "covos" used to catch octopus are stacked alongside lobster pots and other fishing equipment: a fascinating wealth of sights and sounds.



Fishing - TA



Market - VC

HISTORICAL CENTRE

To discover the hidden charm of Olhão you have to go up to the top of the main church tower or some other vantage point. Only then can you see the hundreds of roof terraces - the "açoteias" -, typical of the Algarve, which create a unique urban panorama, as if a multitude of cubes had been scattered across a flat surface, their regular shapes echoing and repeating each other in three dimensions. Back at ground level it is well worth wandering through the maze-like streets of the fishermen's quarter, which stands between the quay on the Ria Formosa and the heart of the city with the main church as the principal landmark; here much of the picturesque quality of the small white houses has been retained, with their parapets decorated with geometric motifs.

The streets that border the Avenida da República, itself a symbol of the urban development that took place at the turn of the century, show the city of industrialists and seafarers who grew rich from the fish canning business and trade; houses decorated with balconies, tiles, carved stonework and wrought iron can also be seen there. Any tour of Olhão should end among the refreshing gardens and terraces to be found along the long quayside. But first, take a few minutes and plunge into the colourful mêlée of the market, where the stalls sell fish straight from the sea and fresh vegetables and sweet fruit from the farms of the interior.

getting to know olhão municipality

FUSETA

This is a fishing village, which still retains some of the old fishermen's cottages, with their distinctive cubic outlines, flat roof terraces and the balloon-shaped chimneys typical of this part of the Algarve.

MAIN CHURCH 05

The main church houses some fine 18th century statues. Its churchyard offers a fine vantage point from which to look out at the town, the Ria and the sea.

A look around the bright bustling fishing port and boatyard is indispensable. Further on lie salt pans, like vast rectangular mirrors reflecting the sky, the ruins of the watchtowers at Torre de Bias, Cumeada and Alfanxia, parallel to the Ria Formosa and the sea, and the springs of Olheiros, which are reputed to have medicinal properties.

QUELFES

Green fig trees and vines surround this village, where white-walled houses with decorated chimneys are still to be found in the streets around the church.

MAIN CHURCH 06

The parish church of Quelfes was built over the original chapel, and the side doorway shows clear Gothic influence. The main entrance, which is in the Renaissance style (16th century), is very plain.

The interior is spacious and consists of three naves. In the chancel there is an arch reflecting the transition from the Manueline period to the Renaissance, decorated with bunches of grapes and vine leaves and a ribbed vault with rosettes (16th century). There are a number of 18th century statues.

Nearby stands a bridge of Roman origin that has been rebuilt on a number of occasions. In 1808, Napoleonic forces were defeated here in a skirmish that was the starting point for an uprising throughout the Algarve against the French presence.

MONCARAPACHO

This is a village typical of the "Barrocal"- the intermediate zone of the Algarve between the coast and the hills of the interior, a place of orchards and vegetable gardens, with fig, almond and pomegranate trees. Its typical streets have some examples of the bourgeois architecture of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

MAIN CHURCH 07

The Roman-Gothic elements visible on the cornerstones at the rear of the church and the ribs on some vaults point to the medieval origins of this building. Its main doorway is considered to be one of the finest works of Renaissance art in the Algarve (16th century).

The main doorway is dominated by a group of sculpted figures representing the Annunciation and by statues of the apostles St. Peter and St. Paul. Inside, the paintings in the three chapels - Capelas das Almas (Souls), do Calvário (Calvary) and Santo António (St. Anthony) - and the collection of 17th and 18th century statues, including figures of Nossa Senhora do Rosário (Our Lady of the Rosary) and the Senhor da Paciência (Lord of Patience) deserve special mention.

MISERICÓRDIA (MERCY) CHURCH 08

Though this church is of relatively little architectural interest, the altarpiece on the main altar is notable for six paintings in the mannerist style (end of the 16th century) depicting scenes from the life of Christ.

CHAPEL OF THE ESPÍRITO SANTO (HOLY SPIRIT) 09

In the 17th and 18th centuries this was a place of pilgrimage for Christians from all over the Algarve and it retains a number of valuable works of art from that period. It is an 18th century Baroque building of great simplicity. The interior is decorated with "tapete" (carpet) style polychrome tiles (17th century). Paintings from the same century depict scenes from the Nativity and a Sacred Heart. The altar is carved and gilded, with 18th century statues. There is a fine grille made of lignum vitæ (17th century):

PARISH MUSEUM 09

Adjoining the Chapel of the Espírito Santo (Holy Spirit), in addition to a collection of interesting local archaeological and ethnographic exhibits, this museum contains a fine collection of religious statuary from the 16th to 18th centuries.

Its main attraction is, however, an 18th century Neapolitan nativity scene. Consisting of 45 pieces in all, it depicts the adoration of the Infant Jesus. The figures, which have terracotta heads and wooden legs and arms, are dressed in the sumptuous costumes of the period, threaded with silver and gold.

There are a number of small chapels in the vicinity of Moncarapacho - Pé da Cruz (Foot of the Cross), São Francisco (St. Francis), Nossa Senhora do Carmo (Our Lady of Carmel) and others - which are typical of the local rural architecture and in some cases fine viewpoints from which to admire the surrounding countryside. But of all such places, the Chapel of São Miguel (St. Michael), which stands about 5 kilometres away from Moncarapacho on a hill that is also named after the saint (411m), is undoubtedly the one that offers one of the most beautiful views of the Algarve, a sweeping panorama that takes in coastline and hills alike.

Another natural viewpoint not far from Moncarapacho is the hill at Cerro da Cabeça. In addition to its position high above the coast, this hill has the curious feature of being riddled with caves accessible only to cavers.



Cerro de S. Miguel - LC

THE PLEASURES OF SUN AND SEA

Fuseta

The beauty of Fuseta's beaches stretches for miles. There are facilities for sailing and motorised water sports. In the summer, regular boat connections run from Fuseta town.



Armona

This small fishing hamlet has a long beach offering plenty of peace and quiet. A ferry provides regular connections with Olhão.



TRIPS ALONG THE RIA FORMOSA

There are regular boat connections to the islands of Armona, Culatra and Farol which provide an opportunity to take a trip along the Ria and visit its attractive beaches.



WATER SPORTS

The huge Ria Formosa lagoon offers ideal conditions for sailing, windsurfing, canoeing and motorised water sports.

Divers are drawn to the beach of Culatra by the clear waters, where visibility can be as good as 15 metres, and the abundance of fish.

The various anchorages provided by the two access channels to the Ria offer shelter for yachts.

All these factors make the Olhão coast one of the Algarve's main centres for water sports.

TRADITIONAL CRAFTS

The brightly coloured “sapatos de ourelo”, slippers made of cloth that were once worn by fishermen and farmers, are still produced in Olhão. The local craftsmen also make tiles, wooden ornaments, bags, belts and other leather articles, while Moncarapacho carries on a tradition of wrought iron work.



Pottery - TA



Shellfish - MV

FISHERMEN'S FOOD

The cuisine of Olhão and the nearby coast tastes of the sea: you can enjoy grilled fresh fish, a range of shellfish and succulent clams, which add their flavour to the special Algarve “cataplana” (a delicious mix of tomatoes, onions, fish, clams and sausage cooked in a lidded copper pan). The recipes of the local fishermen are straightforward to prepare and also deserve the attention of lovers of good food. The list is long and includes stewed conger, cuttlefish with broad beans, boiled hake and stone bass, steamed squid, stewed cockles, razor clams with rice and “xarém”, made from maize flour, served with “conquilhas” clams. Further inland the cuisine is slanted more towards the local farm produce: dishes like beans with rice and chestnuts, chickpeas with pasta and peas with eggs, prepared with bacon, sausage and pork. Desserts here are very tempting: “bolachas bêbedas” (‘drunken’ biscuits), made with brandy, stuffed figs, fig cake, sweet pies and orange and almond cake are all delicious ways to end a meal.



Fishing Boat - TA



Olhão (Blackmouth catshark) - LC



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Data sheet

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