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são brás de alportel

municipality

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são brás de alportel

The rounded forms of hills covered with cistus bushes, cork oaks and strawberry trees; gentle landscapes like watercolours, white houses scattered among verdant fields and orchards; reflections in the slowly moving surface of a river; the play of light and shade on an old whitewashed wall: in such simple things lies the beauty of São Brás de Alportel and its municipality, each an invitation to come and relax, and enjoy the peace and quiet.

HISTORY OF THE MUNICIPALITY

The area that is now the municipality of São Brás de Alportel, in common with the Algarve as a whole, was inhabited in prehistoric times, and during the Roman and medieval Islamic periods. It was the birthplace of the Moorish poet Ibne Ammar in the 13th century, and by the 16th century, when it was made the parish seat, São Brás de Alportel was a small village with a simple chapel located next to the old road known as the "Calçadinha". From the 17th century onwards it was the summer residence of the bishops of the Algarve, who were drawn to it by its agreeable climate, and in the 19th century it saw a spurt of growth as it was on the crossroads of the routes linking Loulé to Tavira and Faro to Almodôvar.

The area's extensive plantations of cork oak provided a springboard for commercial and industrial development and for years São Brás de Alportel was the main cork producing centre in Portugal and the world. Its increasing population and economic importance led to the creation of the municipality in 1914.

The gradual transfer of the cork processing industry to the centre and north of Portugal has prompted the municipality to diversify its sources of economic prosperity in recent decades.

VISITING SÃO BRÁS DE ALPORTEL

The unhurried lifestyle of the friendly local population; streets of white houses whose ranks are broken only by the lofty outline of the church and its bell tower; the ring of hills around the town that look out on the sea and the mountains: such are the simple charms of São Brás de Alportel, a typical Algarve town.



São Brás de Alportel - LC

MAIN CHURCH

Built on the site of a church that probably dates back to the 15th century, the current structure was rebuilt after the earthquake of 1755. It was extended considerably in the 19th century.

Under the ornate, late Baroque pediment stands the imposing doorway with a large pedimented window. The chapel of Senhor dos Passos (Lord of the Stations of the Cross) contains gilded carvings in the style of the second half of the 18th century and there are paintings from the 17th century depicting saints. Among the statues to be seen, those of the Arcanjo São Miguel (Archangel Michael), São Libório, (St. Liborius) and Santa Eufémia (St. Euphemia) dating from the 18th century are worth mentioning. The statues in the sacristy are from the same period. In the baptistery there is a neo-classical altarpiece in marble. The churchyard is a good vantage point to admire the surrounding countryside and the sea.



Main Church - VC

FORMER EPISCOPAL PALACE

Built in the 16th/17th centuries for the bishops of the Algarve as a place of refuge from the summer heat, this building underwent several modifications in the 19th and 20th centuries which have altered its structure. What remains of the original palace today is part of the main building and, almost opposite it, a Baroque vaulted fountain with eight spouts in the garden.



Episcopal Palace - LC

“CALÇADINHA”

The “Calçadinha” cobbled street of S. Brás de Alportel is the archaeological symbol of the municipality. It is 1480 metres long and runs through a small valley to the south, above which there is a higher area where the Main Church stands today.

At present, two stretches of the road have been preserved, labelled A and B, which are separated by a stretch of a few metres that was once paved. The two stretches that have been uncovered differ from each other structurally. In stretch A, which is about 100 metres long, paving can be seen which is the result of 19th century restoration, probably ordered by the bishop D. Francisco Gomes do Avelar. From a technical point of view, the paving is geometrical in design, consisting of small and medium-sized stones and a central axis edged with vertically laid stones, from which lines extend at right angles creating squares which are divided diagonally into right-angled triangles. In stretch B, which is about 550 metres long, paving can be seen that is probably Roman in origin. From a technical point of view, the paving consists of medium and large stones, with a slight camber in the upper layer of stones edged with vertically laid stones and a width of about 8 feet (2.5 metres), which complied with the legal norms of the time.



Calçadinha - hz - LC

ANTÓNIO BENTES CULTURAL CENTRE / ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM OF ALGARVE COSTUME

Located in what was once the home of a former muleteer who grew wealthy from the cork industry, this building is a good example of bourgeois architecture at the end of the 19th century.

In addition to an exhibition of the typical Algarvean costume worn in the 19th/20th centuries, there is also a collection of popular religious sculpture. The old farm buildings contain about twenty old vehicles once used in the Algarve, ranging from carriages and buggies that were the favourite means of transport of the rich to mule carts and ox-drawn wagons used by farmers and farm labourers. The museum also includes an exhibition of agricultural implements and tack, and an area dedicated to cork and the cork industry.



HISTORICAL CENTRE

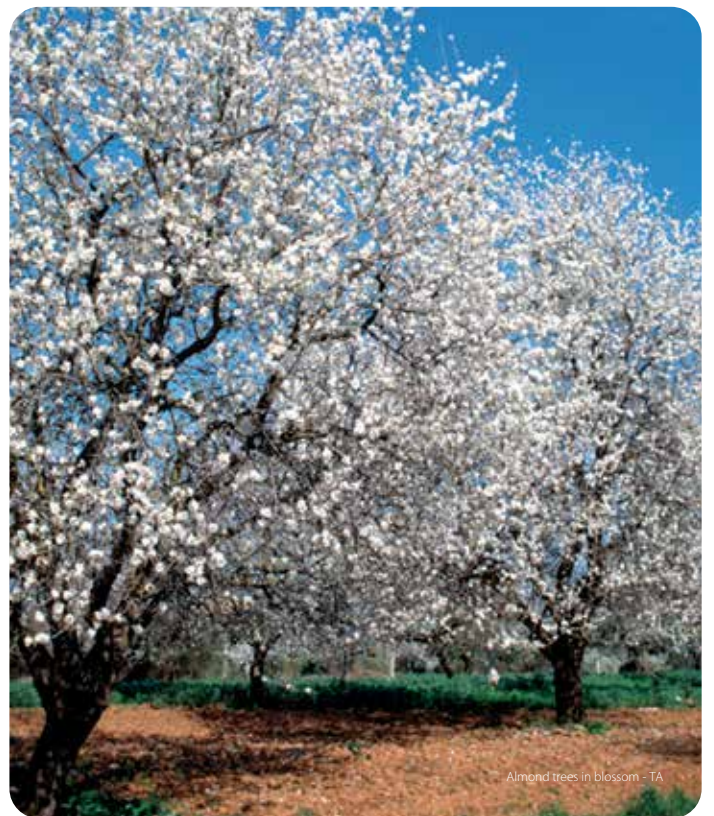
Low, white houses in the popular architectural style stand alongside more substantial buildings, their façades decorated with tiles, ornate stonework and cast-iron verandas, whose opulence harks back to São Brás de Alportel's prosperity in the years when the cork industry was booming. And so a walk through the streets of São Brás de Alportel thus becomes a tour through the development of the town, while such details as the Baroque mortar decoration of the Passo da Paixão (Station of the Cross) near the Episcopal Palace and the pretty flower pots in the windows add a peculiarly Algarvean flavour.



getting to know the são brás de alportel area

A TOUR OF THE BARROCAL

Villages nestling between hills; walls of whitewashed stone flashing in the sun; the lush foliage of almond, fig, carob and pomegranate trees; the bright colours of windows and doors standing out from plain façades: from Mesquita, with its typical water mill, through the picturesque villages of Desbarato, Mealhas, Gralheira, Corotelo (which was once known as the Sintra of the Barrocal), S. Romão with its pretty churchyard, and Vilarinhos, where you can relax next to the old water springs, this route offers a fascinating insight into the Barrocal, the intermediate area that lies between the coast and the hills of the interior. The points of geological interest in Mesquita and Funchais, the beautiful panoramic views from Castanhas and Alto da Arroiteia and the many springs and wells which decorate the municipality and which have recently been restored and given back their beauty and poetry, are essential places to visit. The different walks and mountain bike trails that have been created and signposted by the municipality will enable you to discover the history of the area and the beauty of the natural surroundings step by step.



UP INTO THE HILLS

Vast open spaces, pure air, fresh vistas around every corner, then hamlets of just four or five houses perched on a hilltop; a feeling that time has stopped, a sense of penetrating the secret heart of the Algarve: these are some of the attractions of a tour that should start in the pretty village of Alportel, with its church, the Alportel Park and the new museum, and will take you through the picturesque villages of Cova da Muda, Javali, Parisés – where you can rest in the Parque da Serra and continue to Cabeça do Velho to enjoy the view which stretches away to the sea - Cerro da Ursa, Lajes and Monte dos Capitães. Hidden away in the Serra do Caldeirão is the pretty Parque da Fonte Férrea, where the iron-rich water can be tried, which has been well known for its special qualities for centuries. The freshness of the stream which flows between the strawberry trees and the rocky slopes, the cork oaks and the eucalyptus trees make this area an excellent spot for picnics, for relaxing and enjoying the natural environment.

PANORAMAS AND CHAPELS

In the area around São Brás de Alportel, the viewpoint beside the Pousada (a high-quality, state-run hotel), which commands dazzling views of hills descending to the sea, is well worth a visit, as are the two small chapels of São Romão (Saint Roman) (which date back to the 16th century) and Alportel. A few kilometres to the north of São Brás de Alportel, situated 330 metres above sea level, the Castanhas viewpoint commands a fine view over the town and the sea. At an altitude of 360 metres, the fine scenery of the Algarve interior can be enjoyed from the Alto da Arroteia viewpoint. In the middle of the Serra do Caldeirão at an altitude of 464 metres, the Alto da Ameixeira viewpoint, to the north of Covada- Muda, is the best place to enjoy the scenery. There is a picnic area where you appreciate the setting and find out more about the geology, flora and fauna of the region from information panels.



Chapel of S. Romão - VC

A LAND OF CORK

In amongst the abundant natural heritage of the municipality can be found one of the most important species of tree in the country – the cork oak. In the heart of the ancient Serra de Mú, which in spring is filled with myriad colours, grows the best cork in the world, and history tells us that it was the people of São Brás and Silves who pioneered the trade and processing of this marvellous natural product. The cork industry, which made a key contribution to the founding of the municipality at the beginning of the 20th century, is still today the quintessential industry of the municipality, and it is currently enjoying a renewed period of growth in connection with fashion and tourism.



Cork - VC

TRADITIONAL CRAFTS

Many of the region's traditional arts and crafts still thrive in São Brás de Alportel. Evidence of this are the items made of esparto grass at Desbarato, the tiles made in Vale das Mealhas, the basketwork chairs of Alportel, the brooms, mats and baskets made from palm leaves in Soalheira, the esparto grass work in S. Romão and wooden toys. The mill in Bengado, an example of the traditional "moinho de cabresto", has recently been restored and it is turning once again; using the wind and millstones it is currently milling excellent wheat and maize flour, something that is much appreciated by those who love authentic produce.



Bengado Mill - LC

CULTURAL TRADITIONS

Rich in cultural events, São Brás de Alportel has over the centuries maintained a wealth of living history and traditions.

The costumes of Carnival, the “Maios” dolls, the festivals of the Popular Saints, folk music, the traditions of festive singing and the harmonies of the accordion, which continues to enchant generation after generation, are just some of the cultural traditions which continue year after year.

Hallelujah Festival / Festival of the Flower Torches

Unique in the country, the Procession of Flower Torches is an unusual manifestation of popular culture. An expression of faith, on Easter Sunday the ground is covered in flowers and torches are lifted up high to a refrain in honour of the resurrected Christ. The town is bedecked with flowers, the balconies draped with pretty bedspreads. The day is one of festivity and in the afternoon, the churchyard is filled with sounds and flavours, with popular music and the almonds of São Brás.



COOKING THAT TASTES OF THE HILLS

Tasty stews, “gaspacho” soups, dishes with chick peas and chicken, “papas de milho” made from maize meal, and eggs with tomato are just some of the typical dishes of the local cuisine that is rich in flavour and tradition. In the hunting season the rich, game flavours of wild rabbit in wine are not to be missed. The typical sweet dishes of São Brás de Alportel are very tempting. Made with honey and dried fruits such as almonds, figs and carob, they are a real treat. The best known are the “amêndoas tenras” (soft almonds) of São Brás, prepared in the traditional way in a copper pan. Also much appreciated is the spirit slowly distilled from the fruit of the strawberry trees that grow in the hills, and excellent liqueurs made from wild herbs.



são brás de alportel



Data sheet

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