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**Why an Algarve Vacation?**

**By Jennifer Dodds**

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If a vacation, as defined by a dictionary is: 'leisure time away from work devoted to rest or pleasure', then one taken in Algarve must be the epitome of that term.

The southern-most region of Portugal, Algarve is a holiday-maker's dream. Wonderful year-round weather, great beaches, fabulous scenery and – best of all – the local people!

Algarveans are a tolerant, laid-back lot, who have seen much change in the several decades since their region started to become a tourist magnet. Some of the age-old ways of life (such as small-scale fishing) continue undisturbed by the leisure-seeking visitors who are drawn to this lovely area.

Most who sample the attractions of Algarve become converted enthusiasts. If you love warm places, sand and sea and generally relaxed holidays, then Algarve is your dream destination.

It's a compact area, only some 90 miles by 30 miles at its furthest extremities – but it's home to over 100 miles of gorgeous sandy beaches.

While, for those who don't mind leaving the coast behind for a while, the region is steeped in history, and has much to delight the visitor's eye. Much of the Algarve's heritage has been preserved, especially in the profusion of Moorish-influenced architecture on show. And the contrasts, between coast and mountains, sand and greenery, modernity and history, offer visitors many choices of how to spend an Algarve vacation.

The region's ancient past is positively celebrated, and most sizeable towns boast a local museum that shows relics from Roman times – and even earlier.

Algarveans are proud of their distinct culture and some of the diversion on offer to the holiday-maker is even free (concerts and gallery admissions spring to mind from my last visit). Whatever the month of

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year, there's usually a Saint's day that gives rise to a colourful festival, in which the locals take a whole-hearted part.

Public transport within the region is efficient and cheap, which serves to keep the tourist dollars and Euros circulating, while allowing holiday-makers to sample more than just the tourist areas.

Even a tour of either the western or eastern halves of Algarve can be undertaken within a single day (though it helps to have your itinerary sorted before you set out). And a meal at an inland restaurant during the return journey to your holiday accommodation will likely prove cheaper than one taken in the tourist-populated coastal areas (a bonus for the more adventurous tourist!).

Am I keen to get back there soon? You bet!

Which leads me to a rather obvious question: why am I sitting here writing this, instead of making a booking with my friendly local travel agent?

Jennifer Dodds is the owner of

, her enthusiast website, where she shares

everything she loves (and is still discovering) about her favourite vacation spot. She publishes a monthly newsletter, Algarve Beach Life News to update subscribers about what's new on the site.

## **Five "Must Visit" Places In The Algarve**

### **By Islands In The Sun**

Why is the Algarve such a popular destination? Yes, it's because you can get cheap flights from most UK airports and Yes it's because the weather is good pretty much all year round. Oh, and Yes, it's because it has a huge number of golf courses. But the next time you go to the Algarve, have a day away from the beach and take in some of the Algarve's more traditional attractions.

#### Lagos

Portugal has an impressive history, and this is reflected in the surviving buildings in the marina town of Lagos. Take a break from the sun by visiting the cool, historic churches of Santa Maria of Misericórdia, Santo António and São Sebastião and then relax at the marina - a great day out.

#### Loulé

Many of Loulé's most impressive buildings were destroyed in the Algarve's great earthquake of 1755, but sections of the castle, dating back to the 12th century, remain. Loulé is inland from the Algarve coast, so it's a great opportunity to take a short drive inland - particularly on Market Day, when the

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town is busy and full of life.

### Faro

Most tourists fly into Faro and drive straight out to their holiday destination. Few bother to come back during their stay and take a look at the historic buildings and fascinating museums in the town. As the Algarve's capital, there's a lot to see within its medieval walls, including the Roman–Gothic cathedral and the Infante Dom Henrique Museum. Get to Faro before your flight home to catch it at its best.

### Sagres

Sagres is the most south–westerly point of Europe and is commonly known as "the end of the world" by locals. It's best to visit Sagres when the weather is good, but walking out to the rocks jutting into the Atlantic on a rainy, blustery day really makes you feel at one with the elements, and it's worth the drive along the Algarve coast to get there.

### Silves

Set slightly inland from the popular coastal destinations, Silves is a beautiful historic town, with Phoenician, Roman and Moorish influences making it a great day out. It boasts what is probably the most intact castle in the area, and its cathedral was built on the site of a Moorish Mosque. Narrow streets and hidden cafes make Silves a real "must visit" destination.

Islands in the Sun specialises in holiday accommodation. Visit their website to find out about

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