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# aljezur

municipality

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# aljezur

The boundaries of Aljezur municipality describe a broad rectangle delimited by the sea and the hills, and its landscapes reflect this dual influence. While the coast is marked by high cliffs beneath which huddle sandy coves and pristine dunes, the hinterland is a place of rolling hills, covered with vegetation, that recede, row upon row, as far as the eye can see. Between the two extends a broad strip of fertile fields and valleys, where the traditional crops of vegetables, sweet potatoes and peanuts are still grown. Time spent in Aljezur municipality is thus an opportunity to rediscover peace and tranquillity, to experience a silence broken only by the singing of birds or the crash of waves on the rocks, and to savour the beauty of verdant fields, gentle slopes swathed in wild flowers and majestic cliffs with the pounding sea as backdrop.

## **HISTORY OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF ALJEZUR**

The municipality of Aljezur is located on the west coast of the Algarve and it covers an area of 32,065 hectares.

Archaeological sites confirm the presence of humans in the area since prehistoric times, dating back to the Epipalaeolithic period (11,000 B.C.). Later, artefacts appear from around 7,000 B.C. (the so-called "mirense" period), and the Neolithic/Calcolithic periods (6,000 / 3,000 B.C.) up to the Bronze Age. The Romans too left traces of their time in this area.

The Arab presence lasted for five centuries and there are a number of places which prove how important Aljezur was during this period, which ended with its conquest by the Christians in 1249. Years later, on 12th November 1280, Aljezur received its first charter as a town during the reign of King Dinis, which was modified by the charter given by King Manuel I on 1st June 1504.

For hundreds of years agriculture was the region's main economic activity and its produce was at one stage shipped to market via the port on the Aljezur river. When silting made use of the river impracticable, the road running down from the north to Lagos was used. The 1755 earthquake caused a great deal of damage to the town and led to the construction of a new settlement across from Aljezur, called Igreja Nova. This was built on the initiative of D. Francisco Gomes de Avelar, Bishop of the Algarve, as a means of encouraging the population not to leave the town and move elsewhere.

Today, this is the main area of expansion in the town, where there are new suburbs and public services.

Aljezur, after remaining largely untouched by the 19th and 20th centuries, is now sharing in the social and economic renewal of the Algarve.

## **VISITING ALJEZUR**

At the top of the hill, the castle ramparts, symbol of the long struggle between Christians and Moors; on the hills flanking the castle mound, known as "Degoladouro" and "Cabeças", strange place names recalling the taking of the town from the Moors; and a cascade of white houses that almost tumble down the hillside towards the river: facets of the venerable town of Aljezur, which found a route to growth and a future on the hill on the other side of the river.





Aljezur - LC

## CASTLE

Erected on a hill overlooking the river that has been inhabited by people since the Iron Age (between 800 and 450 B.C.), the castle ensured control of the river port, which has been silted up for a long time and provided a link with the sea, and defended the population from enemy attack.

Built during the period of Arab rule (10<sup>th</sup> century) and taken from the Arabs in 1249 by D. Paio Peres Correia, Master of the Order of Santiago (St James), during the reign of D. Afonso III, it consists of a wide courtyard surrounded by high ramparts reinforced by two towers, one round and the other square. It was badly damaged by the earthquake of 1755. Inside there is a cube-shaped cistern covered by a vault. Its walls afford panoramic views of the surrounding countryside.



Castle - LC

## MAIN CHURCH

Built at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this church served as the nucleus of the Igreja Nova quarter. Its interior is composed of three naves, with an imposing main altar. It boasts a fine 18<sup>th</sup> century statue of Nossa Senhora da Alva (Our Lady of Dawn), the patron saint of Aljezur, flanked by two 17<sup>th</sup> century statues, probably taken from the former main church, which was destroyed in 1755. The side chapels contain 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century altarpieces taken from the former monastery of Nossa Senhora do Desterro (Our Lady of Exile) in Monchique. There is a baptismal font in the Manueline style (16<sup>th</sup> century). In the sacristy are crucifixes dating from the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Among items in the church's treasures are a Eucharist box encrusted with mother-of-pearl, and a Gothic chalice, housed in a 17<sup>th</sup> century ostensorium.



Main Church - VC

## MISERICÓRDIA CHURCH

This church was rebuilt in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and then again after the earthquake of 1755. It has recently undergone extensive restoration work inside and out. The main doorway is in the Renaissance style. It has a plain interior, with interesting flags and a fraternity table.

## MUNICIPAL MUSEUM

Located in the building that was once home to the town council, this museum has two parts (archaeology and ethnography) and a small art gallery for temporary exhibitions. Archaeological finds trace the history of human settlement in Aljezur municipality from the Epipalaeolithic period (11,000 B.C.), through the "mirense" period (7,000 B.C.) and the Neolithic/Calcolithic periods up to the Bronze Age and the Moorish occupation. Adjoining the museum is the Aljezur Municipal Gallery, which hosts temporary art exhibitions. The important ethnographic part of the museum houses a traditional bedroom and kitchen, as well as a number of agricultural implements and commonly used tools connected with rural life.

## MUSEUM OF RELIGIOUS ART

The museum adjoins the Misericórdia Church and belongs to the Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Aljezur; its patron was the illustrious Aljezur citizen Monsenhor Cónego Manuel Francisco Pardal (1896 - 1979). There is an important collection from different periods in seven display cabinets, according to the liturgical seasons of the Catholic Church: Advent, Christmas, Ordinary Time, Lent and Holy Week, Pentecost and Ordinary Time.

## ANTONIANO MUSEUM

On the site where a chapel was built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in honour of Santo António of Lisbon, there is at present a thematic museum dedicated to the saint. It contains a huge collection about Portugal's Matchmaker Saint.

## JOSÉ CERCAS MUSEUM

Dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the house of the illustrious Aljezur painter José Cercas was bequeathed by him to the municipality of Aljezur, with the aim of setting a museum up there in his honour. Pictures and drawings by the painter and other Portuguese artists, furniture, religious art and porcelain are included in the collection. There is also an area used by the artist as his painting studio.

## HISTORICAL CENTRE

In the streets that wind down the slope from the top of the hill crowned by the castle are houses typical of the rural architecture of the Algarve, with parapets and colourful borders painted around windows setting off the white façades. At the base of the hill is the Fonte das Mentiras (literally the Fountain of Lies), which is associated with the legend of a beautiful Moorish woman in love with a Christian knight, and the conquest of the castle. In the historical centre of Aljezur, visitors can follow the historical and cultural tour which comprises a number of museums and monuments, including the castle.

# getting to know aljezur municipality

## **BORDEIRA**

Bordeira is a village surrounded by hills and farmland. Some of its streets retain the charm of houses in the traditional style and there are ruins of an old country manor house.

It is well worth visiting the main church, which dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It has beautiful Baroque carving on the high altar and the side altars, and the triumphal arch and the altarpiece on the main altar deserve special attention, with statues of Nossa Senhora da Encarnação (Our Lady of the Incarnation) (18<sup>th</sup> century), São Francisco (St. Francis), Santo António (St. Anthony) and São Luís (St. Louis) (17<sup>th</sup> century) and a São Sebastião (St. Sebastian) (probably 16<sup>th</sup> century). There are also side altarpieces (18<sup>th</sup> century). To one side of the church's main entrance there is a Manueline doorway (16<sup>th</sup> century) of unknown provenance but of great beauty.

## **CARRAPATEIRA**

The only monuments in this village which overlooks the sea are a defensive fortress built to ward off raiding Berber and Algerian corsairs (17<sup>th</sup> century) and a church dedicated to Nossa Senhora da Conceição (Our Lady of the Conception). In the church, which has Manueline doorways (16<sup>th</sup> century), there is a carved altarpiece on the high altar with 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century statues. Also to be seen are a statue of Nossa Senhora do Rosário (Our Lady of the Rosary) (15<sup>th</sup> century?) and two panels depicting Santo António (St. Anthony) and São Pedro (St. Peter), probably from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The baptismal font is in the Manueline style (16<sup>th</sup> century).

Near the village at the top of a steep cliff, there are the ruins of a seasonal settlement used by Muslim fishermen (12<sup>th</sup> century).

## **ODECEIXE**

Seen from a distance Odeceixe is a charming jumble of houses scattered over hills with the sea in the background. The Seixe river, on which the town stands, winds through the fertile plain and empties on to the beach. In one of its streets there is an interesting Wine Cellar Museum, which reconstructs the atmosphere of a traditional winery and cellar. The main church in honour of Nossa Senhora da Piedade (Our Lady of Piety) (17<sup>th</sup> century) has some fine statues from the same period. There is an interesting seven-sided font in the Manueline style (16<sup>th</sup> century) and a triumphal arch in stone from the same period. The restored windmill is in full operation and is now a tourist attraction.



## **ROGIL**

A picturesque village. Located on a windy moor, the Arregata windmill shows how, for centuries, the wind was harnessed to mill cereals.

## **AGRICULTURE**

The Algarve's pleasant climate is well suited for the cultivation of exotic species. This is shown by the large, tasty peanuts dug from the fields in Rogil and other villages in Aljezur municipality. For the delectation of food lovers, it is mainly in Rogil and the fields of Aljezur that the best sweet potatoes in the country are grown. In line with its reputation, it is no surprise that Aljezur is the setting for the Festival of Sweet Potatoes around October, an event that has already established itself as a landmark in the Algarve region.

## **THE PLEASURES OF SUN AND SEA**

The sea has carved tall cliffs from the schist and greywacke hills along the coast where birds nest and wild flowers grow. Here and there, in bays that face the sun and the ocean, are long beaches of dark sand, along the almost 40 kilometres of magnificent, well-preserved coastline.

## **Odeceixe and Adegas**

Odeceixe has a long beach, cut in two by the mouth of the Seixe creek. The resort is calm and family-oriented with facilities for visitors. There are impressive views of the sea from the Miradouro da Ponta Branca. To the south of the Odeceixe beach there is a small cove, locally known as the "Praia das Adegas", which is accessible at low tide or along the path recently constructed through the cliff, and which is classified as an official naturist beach.



## **Amoreira**

Amoreira beach lies at the mouth of the Aljezur river. It is a big beach with long stretches of sand, where it is possible to enjoy bathing in the sea and the river. There is a wide area of dunes, known by the locals as "medos".





### Bordeira

Bordeira beach is located at the mouth of the Carrapateira river, and is surrounded by big dunes and magnificent scenery. It is a big beach, somewhat windy, but very inviting for leisure activities. Nearby there is the rock formation of "Pontal da Carrapateira", with its high cliffs and coves.

### Amado

A large beach located to the south of the village of Carrapateira, a paradise for lovers of surfing and bodyboarding, surrounded by high cliffs. Close to Amado, you can see the "Pedra do Cavaleiro" (Knight's Rock) in the middle of the sea.

### Monte Clérigo

A spacious family beach, with good access and support facilities, surrounded by an interesting area of dunes.



### Vale dos Homens and Carreagem

Quiet beaches which are little frequented and have a wild beauty.

### Arrifana

A small, inviting bay with a considerable expanse of sand sheltered by high cliffs. There are support facilities and a picturesque fishing harbour. At the Ponta da Arrifana, there is a fine natural viewing point over the Costa Vicentina which has magnificent panoramic views and from where it is possible to see an interesting rock formation in the sea off the beach, known as the "Pedra da Agulha", the "Needle Rock". Also on the Ponta da Arrifana there are the remains of an old fortress (17<sup>th</sup> century) which was built to defend the equipment used for tuna fishing.



### Canal and Vale Figueira

Large beaches of great natural beauty that see few visitors.





## ANGLING, SURFING, WALKING AND MOUNTAIN BIKING - TYPICAL SPORTS IN ALJEZUR

The whole of the coast of Aljezur municipality is a paradise for sports anglers who dream of landing big fish. The waters here teem with different kinds of bream, croaker, conger, sea bass and many other species of fish, all waiting to provide subject matter for tall tales told at nightfall, among friends, over a glass or two of local wine.

Bata dos Tiros, Samouqueira, Esteveira, Vale dos Homens, Carriagem, Pipa, Fonte Santa, Atalaia, Canal, Vale Figueiras, Bordeira, Pontal and Amado are among the most famous fishing grounds.

The perfectly-formed waves that break off Aljezur's beaches are ideal for surfers and bodyboarders alike.

For nature lovers too, this is an excellent place for mountain biking and walking, two activities which enable visitors to explore the diversity and charm of this part of the world.



## FOOD AND WINE

With the sea so close at hand, there is no shortage of fresh fish, to be enjoyed grilled over an open fire or cooked in tasty stews called "caldeiradas". Seafood of various kinds can also be eaten. One interesting local speciality is "perceves", a kind of barnacle which live attached to the rocks along the shoreline. Sweet potato, grown in the fertile valleys where water is plentiful, is a recurring ingredient in the typical dishes and cakes of the region, which can be accompanied by the full-bodied wine grown on the terraced slopes, or by "aguardente de medronho", the brandy made from the fruit of the strawberry tree distilled in copper stills in the hills of the interior.



## THE ART OF THE PEOPLE

The municipality of Aljezur is home to craftsmen and women who still make typical basketware and pretty wooden spoons reminiscent of rural life in days gone by. People also remember the tradition of basketwork chairs, once found in every home.

The women of Aljezur continue to make lace bedspreads and doilies, as well as bags, blankets and rag rugs, to age-old patterns. Pottery is a craft that is enjoying a strong revival and some local ceramicists produce work of a very high standard. Items are also made of plaster, reproducing lights created in the style of Algarve chimneys, with a marked Arab influence, which are used both inside and outside houses.



## ARCHAEOLOGY

In different parts of the municipality of Aljezur, there are archaeological sites of great historical interest.

Especially noteworthy is the Ribat of Arrifana (12<sup>th</sup> century monastery-fortress) on the Ponta da Atalaia where it is said that the Arab prince Ibn Casi lived in meditation on Allah. This is a wonderful viewing point over the Costa Vicentina, from where imposing cliffs and isolated beaches can be seen.

Further south at Carrapateira, the discovery of the archaeological site of Ponta do Castelo has revealed the existence of a Muslim fishing settlement (12<sup>th</sup> century).

Near the town of Aljezur, as you head inland, is the Bronze Age necropolis of Corte Cobreira (1,800 B.C.)



# aljezur



Windmill - VC



Aljezur - LC

## Data sheet

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