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most famous
secret

monchique

municipality

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monchique

"Green, how I love you green". The poet could have been writing of the wooded slopes of Monchique, for after the heat of the Algarve's beaches it is the coolness of the hills that is most striking. These are landscapes that are perfect for contemplation, for discovering horizons that end only in the sea, for healthy walks along footpaths and beside crystalline rivers in the midst of rugged hills. The presence of man is evident in the white houses dotted over the landscape, and the terraces cut into the slopes and planted with fruit trees and vegetable plots. The many charms of Monchique extend an invitation to visit the municipality at length.

HISTORY OF MONCHIQUE MUNICIPALITY

The municipality of Monchique enters the annals of history with the arrival at Caldas de Monchique of Roman settlers drawn by the curative powers of the local waters. The population grew slowly over the years and by the 16th century Monchique was big enough to justify a visit from King Sebastian (1554 - 1578) whose intention was to grant it the status of a town.

Monchique's prosperity was founded on weaving wool and linen to make the sturdy fabrics worn in times gone by, and on other activities connected with the wood of the local chestnut trees. It earned its civic charter in 1773.

Today, Monchique is an elegant town full of craftspeople, and with a diversified economy oriented towards tourism and locally made products, which bear witness to the cultural richness of the hills of the "serra".

VISITING MONCHIQUE

Monchique is best visited on foot. A walk through the steep streets of the town centre is rewarded with views of magnificent hills, glimpsed between houses, and moments of sunlit calm in unsuspected corners. It leaves a memory of a hill town with a history and character all of its own, and instils a strong desire to return.



Monchique - LC

MAIN CHURCH OF NOSSA SENHORA DAS DORES

Built in the 15th/16th centuries, the church is notable for its fine Manueline doorway with twisted columns ending in pinnacles. The side doorways, which are plainer, date from the same period. The interior is made up of three naves. The capitals of the columns are fashioned in the shape of twisted ropes, repeating the decorative theme of the main entrance. In the chancel is a carved and gilded altarpiece (18th century) that is quite distinctive in design: on the arch are two angels holding up the sun and the moon, while an interesting pair of atlantes support the ensemble as a whole. There is an interesting tabernacle in the form of a small temple. The statue of Nossa Senhora da Conceição (Our Lady of the Conception) (18th century) is attributed to the sculptor Machado de Castro. The Capela do Santíssimo (Chapel of the Most Holy) contains a small collection of 17th century tiles. Those on the Manueline vault include four panels depicting suffering souls in purgatory and the ones on the walls show St. Francis saving souls and St. Michael killing the devil. The waxed, chestnut-wood altarpiece (18th century) in the chapel of Nossa Senhora do Carmo (Our Lady of Carmel) possibly came from the now-defunct Franciscan monastery. It is convex in shape, which is unusual in the Algarve. In addition to an interesting collection of statues, the church also houses a number of ceremonial objects which once belonged to the monastery of Nossa Senhora do Desterro (Our Lady of Exile) (17th century), and some fine vestments.



Main church - LC

CHURCH OF SÃO SEBASTIÃO (ST SEBASTIAN)

Modest-looking from the outside, this church contains a statue of Nossa Senhora do Desterro (Our Lady of Exile) imbued with sorrow. An accomplished work of 17th century sculpture, it came from the former Franciscan monastery. The baldaquin and the whimsical columns incorporated in the altarpiece possibly share the same origin.

MISERICÓRDIA CHURCH

The carvings on the altar, pulpit and baldaquin in this church are its chief artistic attractions, together with two large 18th century canvases and the panels carried in religious processions. There is an interesting raised tribune, decorated with polychrome marble, and a statue of St. Francis (17th century).

CHAPEL OF SENHOR DOS PASSOS (LORD OF THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS)

This small church or chapel, in an unassuming architectural style, houses a statue of Lord Jesus of the Stations of the Cross, the most venerated after that of Nossa Senhora da Conceição.

NOSSA SENHORA DO DESTERRO (OUR LADY OF EXILE) MONASTERY

Founded in 1631 by Pêro da Silva, who was to become the viceroy of India, this Franciscan monastery was severely damaged by the 1755 earthquake. At present, the ruins of the monastery of Nossa Senhora do Desterro retain their charm, standing in a very pleasant spot from where there is a magnificent view over Monchique and the surrounding hills. In the old monastery garden there is an imposing magnolia tree, a very old specimen which is classified as being of public interest and is thought to have been brought from India by the founder of the monastery.



Monastery - LC

HISTORICAL CENTRE

The houses of Monchique display many of the traditional features of Algarvean architecture - white walls, carved stonework, bands of colour around the doors and windows - but their "saia" (literally "skirt") chimneys are quite distinct from those found on the coast. The narrow streets that wind up the steep hillside, revealing fresh views of verdant hills at every turn, lend the town a certain exotic quality to which camellias, hydrangeas and fruit trees add a fragrant suggestion of gardens and orchards: good reason to linger here and discover a facet of the Algarve unlike any other.

To appreciate fully how pretty Monchique is, head for the Largo de São Sebastião, and from the viewing point there, gaze out over the white houses that look as if they are perched on steps carved into the hillside, amid a fairy tale setting of bright flowers and cool, green trees.

TOWN PARK

This is a special part of the town of Monchique and covers the area surrounding the sports complex of the municipal swimming pools, providing an excellent leisure area; a green space right in the middle of the town which runs alongside a small river in a valley, which is full of typically riverine vegetation. It provides visitors with the opportunity to go for a magnificent walk or to have a nice picnic and an excellent summer's afternoon. In this park there is another very old tree that is classified as being of public interest: a spectacular araucaria, which reaches a height of 34 metres.

GALLERY OF SANTO ANTÓNIO

Located in the centre of the town of Monchique, this is a building that dates back to the 18th century and is thought to have been a chapel until the middle of the 19th century, when it lost its religious function.

At present, the building is owned by the Municipal Council, and has been completely restored and turned into a cultural space intended for holding temporary exhibitions and small concerts.



getting to know monchique municipality

CALDAS DE MONCHIQUE 🏊

Close to the blue sky and the green hills of the "serra" lies Caldas de Monchique, with its impressive collection of restored buildings and the only thermal spa in the Algarve. History tells us that the Romans bathed in Monchique, benefiting from the excellent waters from the thermal springs. The sodic waters of Caldas de Monchique are rich in fluoride and bicarbonate, and are particularly suitable for the treatment of respiratory and muscular-skeletal conditions; in the field of beauty treatments they contain great powers of hydration.

A square shaded by trees and flanked by attractive buildings dating from the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries epitomises the calm and relaxing atmosphere of Caldas de Monchique. It is well worth visiting the little glazed pavilion where the bubbling spring water gushes out, and the chapel of Santa Teresa (St. Theresa), which contains a series of 18th century tiled panels telling the story of the saint's life.

The biggest attraction of Caldas de Monchique, however, is the extensive wooded park that rises up the hillside. Dappled patterns of light and shade, the gentle murmur of the river and trees that are hundreds of years old make the perfect backdrop for a gentle stroll or a picnic at the stone tables provided.



ALFERCE

This charming village is made up of houses built in the style typical of the Algarve countryside. The medieval origins of the village church are evident in its ogival porch, its triumphal arch and the ribbed vault in its chancel. Nearby, on Cerro do Castelo (7), stand the ruins of a fortification with concentric walls that was probably built by the Romans.



MARMELETE

The white of the low houses typical of the Algarve “serra” combines with many other colours including warm ochres. The country chapel of Santo António (St. Anthony) (9) stands on a small elevation and there is a viewing point affording fine views of the surrounding countryside.

A TOUR IN THE MONCHIQUE HILLS

Take the road up to Monchique and at almost every turn you encounter a stunning panorama of sea and mountains. For the broadest vistas, continue as far as Fóia, which at 902 metres is the highest point in the Algarve. From there the view stretches away on one side as far as Cape St. Vincent (and north to the Serra da Arrábida, near Lisbon), and on the other to Faro and a vast semi-circle of hills. Picota is 774 metres high, but steeper, and has wide and perhaps even more beautiful views that take in a long sweep of the Algarve and the sea. Such viewpoints make a good starting point for exploring this region of steep massifs cut through by valleys and ravines, of rivers and springs where all year round the sound of the cold water bubbling over the stones can be heard.

There are many routes to choose from. The road to Marmeleite traverses a landscape of terraced slopes, fertile valleys and orchards, passing by the gigantic scar of the “foiaíto” quarries at Nave. The narrow tracks that wind into the Serra lead you to places like Romeiras, submerged in this sea of mountains, or surprise you with the sudden appearance of lakes like the one formed by the dam at Bravura. Serious fans of mountains, forests, magnificent scenery and splendid isolation will venture as far as Chirão, Chã de Casinha and Taipa. Possibly one of the most spectacular routes is the one that drops from Alferce to Fomalhas and Monchicão, crossing a landscape of hills, their tops lending a greyish hue to the horizon, the green of millions of trees covering valleys and slopes, and opening up vast panoramas.



The road that leads to Sabóia and the Alentejo passes through some of the most beautiful countryside in the Algarve, a region blessed with leafy woods and groves of fruit trees watered by fast-flowing streams. It is worth taking the turn off to Barranco dos Pisões where a recently restored water-mill can be found and a picnic site with the Ribeira de Seixe on one side, where the freshness of the running water, the tops of the green trees, a spring and an enormous plane tree combine to create an excellent spot for resting and taking in the natural surroundings.



TREES, FLOWERS AND BIRDS

The temperature and rainfall of the Monchique hills are those of a subtropical maritime mountain type climate. The serra is like a marvellous botanical garden, with more than a thousand plant species, for many of which it constitutes the southwest European limit.

Despite forest fires and plantations of pine and eucalyptus, areas of differing sizes of oak, cork oak, chestnut and strawberry tree still persist, along with hundreds of types of colourful wild flowers, turning the hills into a paradise for amateur botanists. There is plenty for birdwatchers to see too. Among the dozens of species to be found are grey herons, goshawks, buzzards, golden and short-toed eagles, moorhens, woodpigeons, doves, cuckoos, owls, kingfishers, nightingales, wrens and tits.



A ROCK CALLED “FOIAÍTO”

Many millennia ago, a mass of rock erupted through the schists of which all the hills of the Algarve are made, giving birth to the broken relief that lends the Serra de Monchique its charm. The igneous rocks of which the serra is formed are known collectively as syenites. One of them, because of its specific qualities, has been named “Foiaíto” and is thus forever associated with Fóia, one of the places where it has been found. The other, larger outcrop is Cerro da Picota.



FLAVOURS OF THE SERRA DE MONCHIQUE

Dishes made with rice and beans or chestnuts are not to be missed, nor are “papas moiras” made with maize flour, beans with meat and the “assadura” made with grilled pork. Equally tempting are the many home-made sausages, including “farinheiras”, “morcelas”, “chouriças” and “molhos”. Another local delicacy is the “presunto” (ham) cured using centuries-old methods, with its dark meat and unforgettable flavour.

Honey is an ingredient common to nearly all the cakes and desserts of the Monchique region, such as “bolo de tacho” and honey pudding. Monchique honey has a well-established reputation because of the many fragrances of the forest flowers: it has been produced and sold since the 16th century, and is today a certified product.

At the end of a meal nothing goes down like a glass of “medronho”, the heady spirit made in copper stills from the fruits of the strawberry tree, or of “melosa”, a mixture of brandy and honey.



Medronho fruit - TA



Traditional gastronomy - TA



A LAND OF CRAFTS

Handicrafts in Monchique are based on a wide range of activities which have stood the test of time and continue to develop in a traditional way.

The knowhow is passed from generation to generation, and reflects a way of life as well as being an important aspect of the identity of the town.

Wicker baskets, the making of wooden spoons, knives and other kitchenware, “scissor” chairs, ceramics, pottery, and weaving are some examples of this diversity, connected as much to specific economic activities as to popular art.



“Scissor” chairs - LC

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