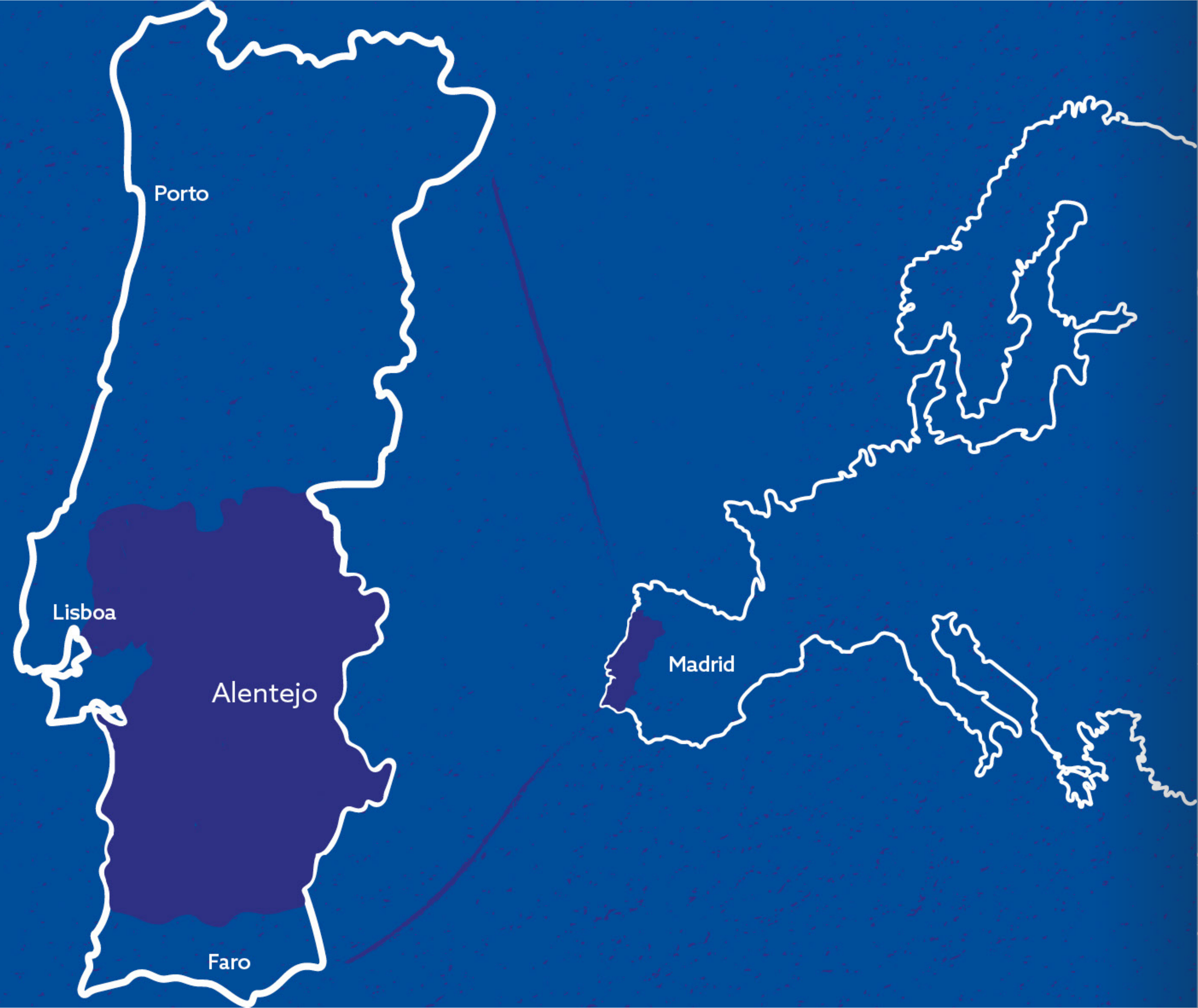


ALENTEJO

COME ALIVE

 visit Alentejo
Portugal

NATURE
WATER
LAND
AIR



ALENTEJO

COME ALIVE





The Alentejo offers the best in outdoor activities and the most stunning natural surroundings in which to enjoy them. The two are inextricably intertwined here.

Be as active as you like. Immerse yourself in nature. This is an open-air playground in an unspoilt landscape of vines, cork oaks and olive trees, wild flower meadows and swaying sunflowers. This is an epic countryside of open plains, wild

mountains, stunning beaches, vast lakes and tranquil farmlands; a diverse range of habitats for a unique variety of wildlife.

Sparsely populated, the Alentejo environment is preserved just as it always has been. Explore it for yourself on land, water and in the air: each day, each activity brings a different experience.

Come alive in the Alentejo.





ALENTEJO 





THE COAST

BESIDE THE SEASIDE


From the river Sado to Zambujeira do Mar, the Alentejo coastline is magnificent, with dozens of fabulous beaches and clear pristine sands.

At their southernmost, they are wide and wild, part of the last unspoilt coast in Europe.

Here the shore is almost designed for long walks along the sand, scrambling over rocks, poking about in rock pools and enjoying the ozone-heavy air.

Moving up from the windswept beauty of the Costa Alentejana with its cliffs, pounding Atlantic waves and beach-shack bars, the coast breaks out into sheltered coves and secluded bays. Porto Covo was once a little fishing village and though tourists come for the fine sandy beaches it retains its old charm.





A section of the Fisherman's Trail walking route begins here and is a great way to see some of the seabirds that nest on the cliffs and the wildflowers that take up residence in the dunes and cling to the craggy cliffs. Nature fights hard to make a life here but the simple beauty is impossible to ignore.

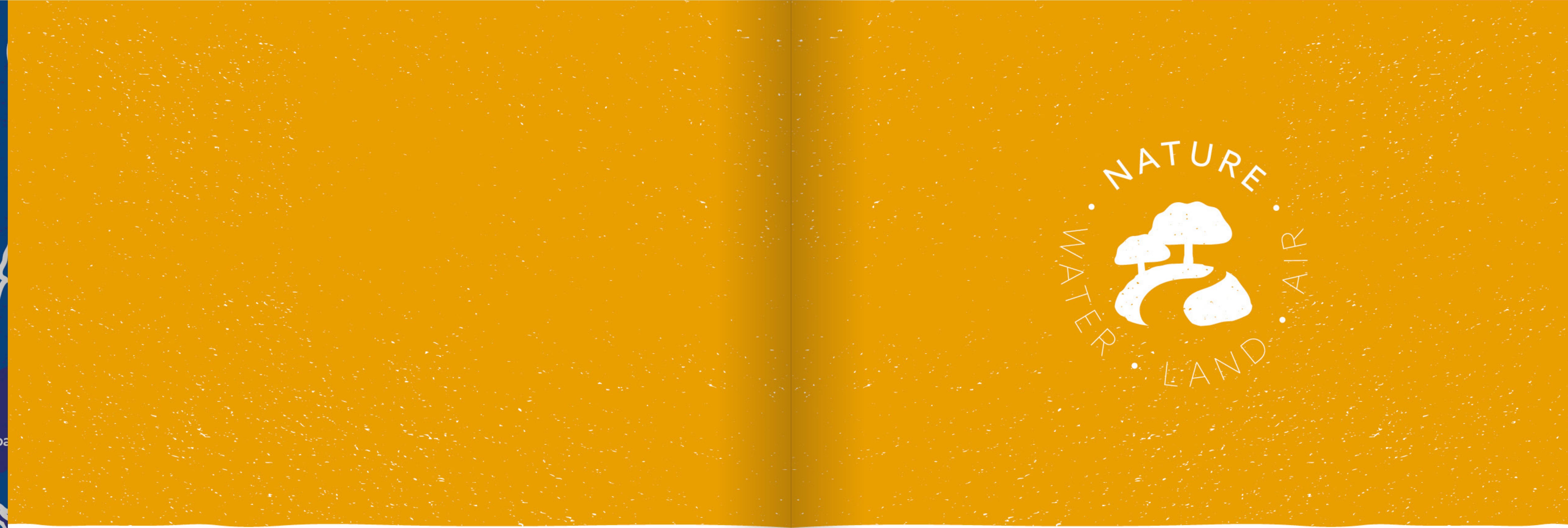
From Sines to Troia lies an endless ribbon of pure sand, culminating in a long peninsula at the mouth of the Sado river. With white sugar-fine sands, pine forests and crystal waters there is a high-end resort feel with a glossy glitz quite different to the southern coastline.

“
INSIDER'S TIP

There's a heady fragrance as you brush past wild rosemary, coastal herbs and lavender. But around Almogrove look out for *Plantago almogravensis* – clusters of yellow flowers which are among the world's rarest.

”





ALENTEJO



THE RIVERS AND RESERVOIRS *THE TRANQUILITY OF THE INTERIOR*

After the exhilarating waves of the Atlantic, the slow-moving waters of the rivers and lakes offer respite and a peaceful haven for wildlife and unique ecosystems.

In many places beaches have been created on the placid lakes and vast dams, such as Maranhão, near Avis. Here, the calm, shimmering waters are warm and safe, popular with families in particular.

In Mértola, Tapada Grande is something of an oasis in the summer months, set on a tranquil lagoon with small islands and surrounded by eucalyptus trees. There is a lifeguard in high season and there are excellent walks and canoe excursions here.

On the shores of Lake Alqueva, the Mourão beach spans over 300 metres with lifeguards, a floating pool for children and a diving tower.



On the opposite shore of Lake Alqueva, beneath the hilltop village of Monsaraz, is a lake beach with golden sands, a bar, showers and invitingly tranquil waters. You can even hire pedalos and canoes. With shade provided by parasols and olive trees, it's absolutely perfect for a refreshing dip after a morning exploring ancient Monsaraz.

The Alentejo's rivers are often picturesque with pleasant walks along the banks. None more so than the Mira river, which flows from the Santa Clara dam. It meanders through bucolic countryside, past weeping willows in whose shade terrapins and small birds take refuge.

“
INSIDER'S TIP

Visit the lakeside beach at Amieira also on the shores of Lake Alqueva. Offering a floating pool for children, bar, lifeguards and a grassy area with parasols for relaxing in comfort.

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ALENTEJ 

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A photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sky is a gradient of orange and red. In the foreground, several people are silhouetted against the water, appearing to be swimming or surfing. A small bird is visible in the upper right corner of the sky.



WATERSPORTS

MESSING ABOUT ON THE WATER

The lakes and reservoirs, with mirror-smooth waters, are perfect for various watersports. Take a canoe or kayak and gently paddle around the little tributaries and inlets – there's an amazing variety of wildlife to see on the shorelines. Paddle boarding is also fun to try, especially when the waters are this calm, and many lakes will have hire stations.

There's plenty of fantastic waterskiing on offer too. On the Alqueva, Maranhão and Montargil reservoirs there are ski schools with lessons for all levels. If you are going to try waterskiing, this is the place to do it!

Head to places like Montargil, Caia, Odivelas, Divor, Vale de Gaio and Santa Clara for a range of activities. These lakes offer fabulous watersports in a tranquil setting, or simply picturesque spots to sit and contemplate the surrounding unspoilt landscape.

There's great sailing on the reservoirs and lakes but also on the coast. The beaches south of Setúbal offer great windsurfing, especially along the Troia peninsula around Comporta, and at the mouth of the Sado estuary.

Further south, São Torpes is a magnet for serious windsurfers and kitesurfers in search of strong winds and challenging waves. Vila Nova de Milfontes is all about the beach, with great windsurfing and kayaking.

“
INSIDER'S TIP

For a dose of outdoor fun with a semi-educational dimension, take a canoe excursion with a small group and local guide along one of the rivers. Around Odemira you can learn all about the vibrant birdlife and the terrapins as you paddle.

”



ALENTEJ 

SURFING

HANG TEN ALL DAY

Much of the Alentejo coast, especially the southern stretch, is undeveloped, untamed and unashamedly brilliant for serious surfers. The thumping surf and exhilarating spray are the key, with the waves at their best from autumn through to spring (though you can surf all year round).

The most serious surfers prize the unique eco-system of the surfing community: the dusty lanes, surf camps, camaraderie and secret coves with an extraordinary variety of waves. The more casual surfer will enjoy the steady, but not over-powering, surf of the beaches closer to Comporta.

The beach at São Torpes is considered one of the region's finest for surfing *connoisseurs*. So much so that it has a year-round surf school and attracts international competitions. Vila Nova de Milfontes is another leading surf hotspot, with a range of surf camps and surf schools, not to mention accommodation tailored to the needs of the surfing fraternity. Further north are Porto Covo, Malhão and Aivados, all with excellent surfing.

Around Almogrove is a stretch considered one of the most wild and beautiful in the Southwest. The surfing and bodyboarding conditions are world-class and the scenery is spectacular: small, deserted beaches pounded by surf, rocky coves and cliffs running down to Cabo Sardão, the only place on earth where white storks nest in the coastal cliffs.

*“**INSIDER'S TIP**”*

If you fancy trying surfing for the first time, find a guide or school with a local instructor who will take you to the best spots and provide all the gear you need.

”





ALENTEJ 



BOATS & CRUISES

TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Take a boat and potter about for an afternoon on the placid waters of Lake Alqueva – it's very straightforward, no licence or any experience required. Or simply take a boat trip for a couple of hours and get a feel for this magically tranquil place.

It's Europe's largest reservoir with 250 km² of clear, blue waters. There are many villages on the shores and surrounds of the lake, each with its own identity and history. Stop off at Campinho, a great spot for a nature hike and picnic on the lake shore.

Why not take a live-aboard boat for a few days and explore the countless inlets and bays, pausing to swim, kayak or simply enjoy the peacefulness. Go at your own pace and in any direction on this vast watery playground, and feel the stresses of everyday life slip away.

Fully equipped and with all the home comforts, these boats are ideal for pottering around the lake, stopping off at various points to explore villages like Granja or Marmelar, or take a bike ride.

Boats are available in various sizes, even self-contained 'floating houses' which are moored on the lake in total privacy and tranquillity. Swim, canoe and fish without having to navigate, and simply enjoy the solitude and the unbelievably clear night sky from the middle of the lake.

“
INSIDER'S TIP

Take a dolphin-watching cruise on the Sado estuary, where the rare river dolphins might greet you and put on a show. You might also see the flamboyant flamingos.

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**ALEN
TEJO**

COME ALIVE



LAND



ALENTEJO 



FLORA AND FAUNA

WILDLIFE AND NATURE

The Alentejo is a region of immense natural beauty. It's a place of contrasting habitats and a diverse wildlife. With low-intensity agriculture and a natural rhythm to the seasons, there is always a timeless feel here.

Spring sees the meadows bursting into life in a riot of colourful wild flowers. The ungainly storks make their untidy nests on any available telegraph pole and the butterflies begin to flit. It's a great time to visit.

Vast areas are officially protected as nature parks and reserves, and here some of the most precious flora and fauna can be found, safe from the crowds and industry's pollution.





The plains around Castro Verde are nature at its most starkly beautiful. To the east, the Nature Park of Vale do Guadiana is home to one of Europe's most diverse ranges of birds and mammals, including the rare Iberian lynx.

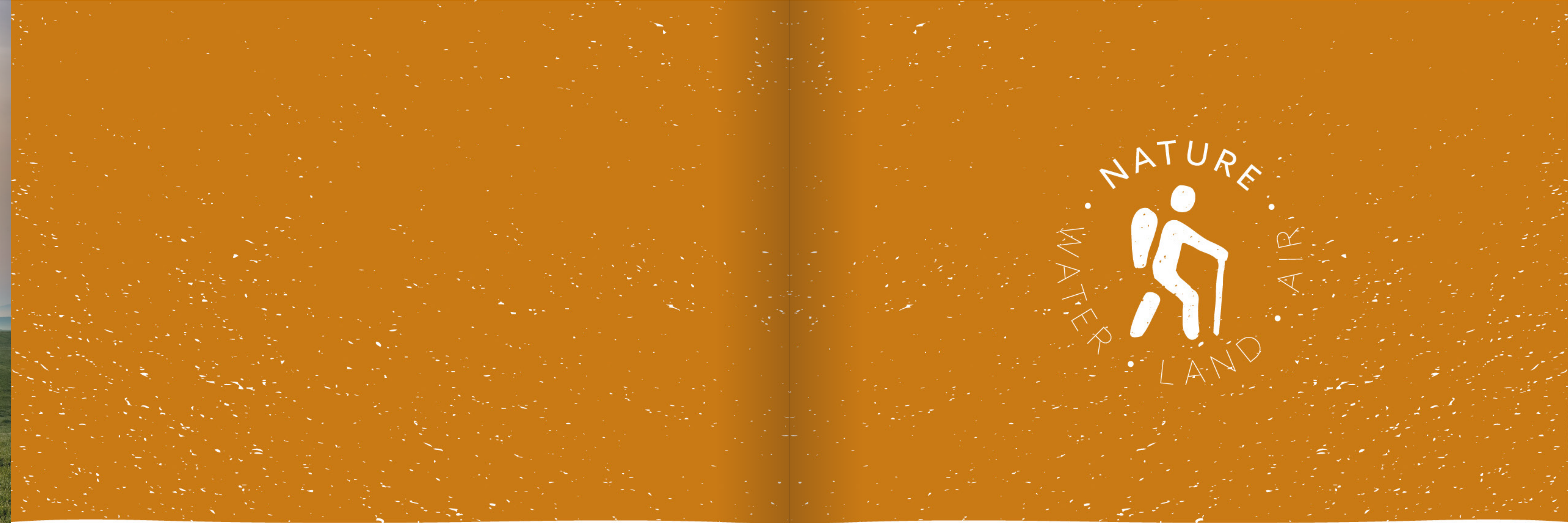
The Sado Estuary Reserve is an important natural haven for countless birdlife as well as tree frogs, terrapin, otters and, most famously, the bottlenose river dolphins. To the north lies the Serra de São Mamede Nature Park, wrapped around the 9th-century hilltop town of Marvão, and known as the 'Eagles's Nest' for its panoramic views.

“
INSIDER'S TIP

For a region with so little rainfall, the wetlands are a vital part of the Alentejo eco-system: the Tejo estuary, the lagoons of Santo André and Sancha and the Paul do Boquilobo Nature Reserve are key habitats for a wealth of wildlife.

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LAND

ALENTEJO




WALKING

TAKING IT IN YOUR STRIDE

With its undulating terrain, rich variety of landscapes and natural, ever-changing habitats, the Alentejo is a walker's paradise. There's a wealth of wonderful walking trails linking hilltop villages with olive groves, cork forests and nature reserves, and an unending supply of awe-inspiring views.

Follow the marked paths along river banks, through flower meadows and over mountain ranges, travelling at your own pace and getting to know the real Alentejo. Wherever you go, you'll encounter some of the region's finest nature and wildlife along the way.





The Rota Vicentina is one of Europe's most spectacular networks of marked trails. It comprises the Trilho dos Pescadores (Fisherman's Trail), which runs 226,5 km along the finest stretches of the coast south from São Torpes. The virgin beaches attract turtles, egrets and Europe's only marine stork colony. The other strand of the Rota Vicentina is the Caminho Histórico (Historical Way), based on ancient pilgrim routes and longer at 263 km. It starts in Santiago do Cacém.

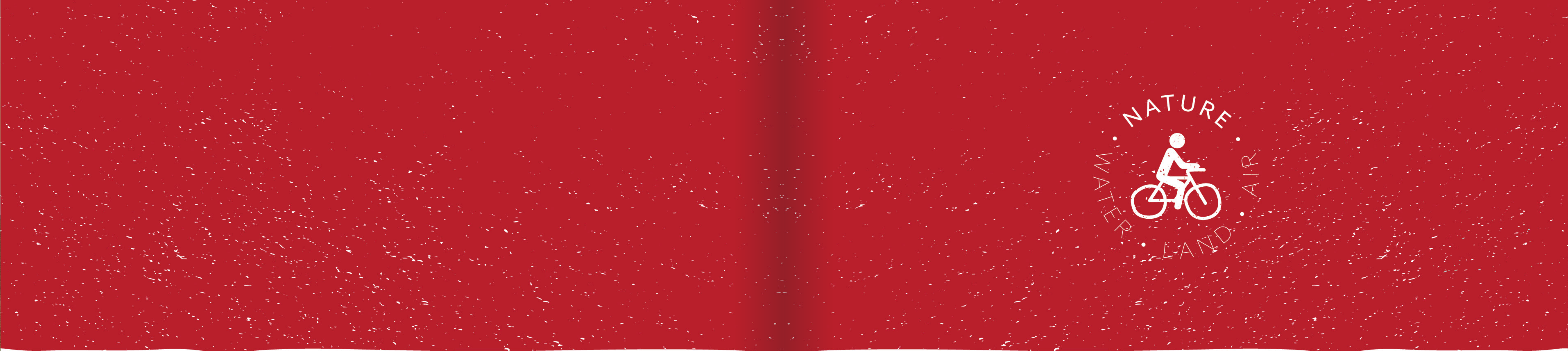
The Transalentejo Alqueva is a set of eleven walking trails around the Alqueva lake and the Guadiana river, each with its own unique theme (cork forests, hermits, fortresses and so on). To the north, there are superb wild-walking routes around São Mamede and the river Tagus.

“
INSIDER'S TIP

If time is limited, or you perhaps just don't have the energy, try one of the Rota Vicentina's shorter, circular routes. They start and end in the same place, so they can be as short as a couple of hours.

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ALENTEJ 



CYCLING *ON YOUR BIKE*

Discover a variety of routes through different, ever-changing terrain: along coastal cliffs, through ancient woods and lush valleys. The Alentejo is not flat, but the routes are generally easy-going and you'll see more birds than people. It's a great way to experience the dramatic landscape and to witness some of Europe's most diverse wildlife.

The Alentejo has some of the quietest roads in Europe, and off-road you'll have the landscape to yourself. Bikes are often available from hotels which can also provide suggested local itineraries – ideal for that spontaneous bike ride around the sleepy country lanes.

More serious cyclists prefer to bring their own equipment and plan suitable itineraries. Cycling groups come here for the thrilling itineraries, suitable for all levels and abilities, and for the warm welcome they receive from hotels well used to the needs of cyclists.

More challenging mountain bike trails can be found to the north, in the Serra de São Mamede Nature Park. This is the highest point in the Alentejo, and off-road enthusiasts rate the terrain highly: steep ravines, cliffs, ancient forest, with remarkable prehistoric paintings and a bewildering variety of flora and fauna along the way, including wild boar.

“
INSIDER'S TIP

For serious off-road mountain biking, start near the village of Galegos, in Portagem, and head in to the park – stay in one of the accommodations available nearby to get the most from the trail.

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ALENTEJ 

BIRD WATCHING

BEAUTY REWARDS PATIENCE

The sheer variety of habitats across the Alentejo ensures a constant spectacle for bird lovers. With a sparse human population and little use of pesticides to control insects, the whole region is a tranquil buffet table for birds, including flagship species like the Montagu's harrier, Scops owl, black-winged kite and azure-winged magpie.

From the lush valleys and the high crags to the marshy wetlands, silent estuaries and open plains, it's always show time. Birds can be seen all year round, but spring is the best time: the great migration is something to behold.

Huge flocks of lapwings and golden plovers over-winter here inland, and massive numbers of waterfowl descend on the coastal salt pans and rice paddies.

Popular ornithological destinations include the protected Castro Verde Biosphere Reserve, home to the great bustard, Europe's largest flying bird. Large numbers of raptors (including the huge black vulture) patrol the vast open landscape, which is smothered in wildflowers in spring. To the east, the Vale do Guadiana Nature Park around Mértola is hot and dry, providing refuge for rare golden eagles and eagle owls.

On the Sado estuary it's possible to see over 250 species all year round, including marsh harrier, grebe, spoonbill and teal, as well as crowd pleasers like flamingos, eagles and white storks. And the lagoons of Santo André and Sancha are highly regarded reserves, with stunning birdlife amid spectacular wetland surroundings.

“
INSIDER'S TIP

Raptor fans head to the remote Nature Park of Serra de São Mamede, home to Bonelli's eagles, griffon vultures, black kites and eagle owls.

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GET OUT THERE!
COME ALIVE IN THE ALENTEJO

In all corners of the Alentejo there is plenty to do, no matter how active (or inactive!) you feel. The important thing is to get out there and re-energise.

The magnificent Lusitano thoroughbred horses are a regional icon. Stay in a *herdade* with stables, and take an unforgettable ride through the fields in the early morning as the sun gets up. There are many equestrian centres and riding schools with horses suitable for all levels. Some even offer rides in traditional charretes or carriages.

On the Alentejo's golf courses, the Atlantic breeze, the lush greens and the enticing gastronomy all combine to create a superb setting for a memorable day's sport. More energetically, go climbing in the craggy hills of the Serra de São Mamede. You can even take a go-kart around the track in Évora, once you've had your fill of UNESCO heritage sights.

And there's always time for some great fishing. The huge inland reservoirs ensure rich fishing grounds for barbel, carp, pike and bass. Popular spots include Santa Clara, Fonte de Serne and Ponte de Sor's reservoirs, the Maranhão and Montargil. The pretty Raia river has a designated zone of almost 10 km purely for anglers. There's space allocated here 165 rods. Alternatively try sea fishing from shore or boat, or go for big game out in the Atlantic.

“
INSIDER'S TIP

Take a 4x4 off-road Jeep tour through the cork forests and learn about cork production and the biodiversity of the region – it's fascinating how versatile and sustainable cork is.

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ALEN
TEJO

COME ALIVE





ALENTEJO



BALLOONING

UP, UP AND AWAY

Without doubt the most amazing views of the Alentejo are from the sky. Floating silently in the blue sky, suspended in the barely moving air as you drift across the endless plains is a very special experience.

The peacefulness and tranquillity of the region is accentuated, and the tapestry of colours unfurls beneath you; the carpets of wild flowers in spring, the vibrant greens and rich ochres will stay with you forever.

Flights are offered by a number of operators (in a few cases from individual properties or *herdades*) and are typically around one hour in duration. They usually finish with a traditional glass of fizz to toast the experience.





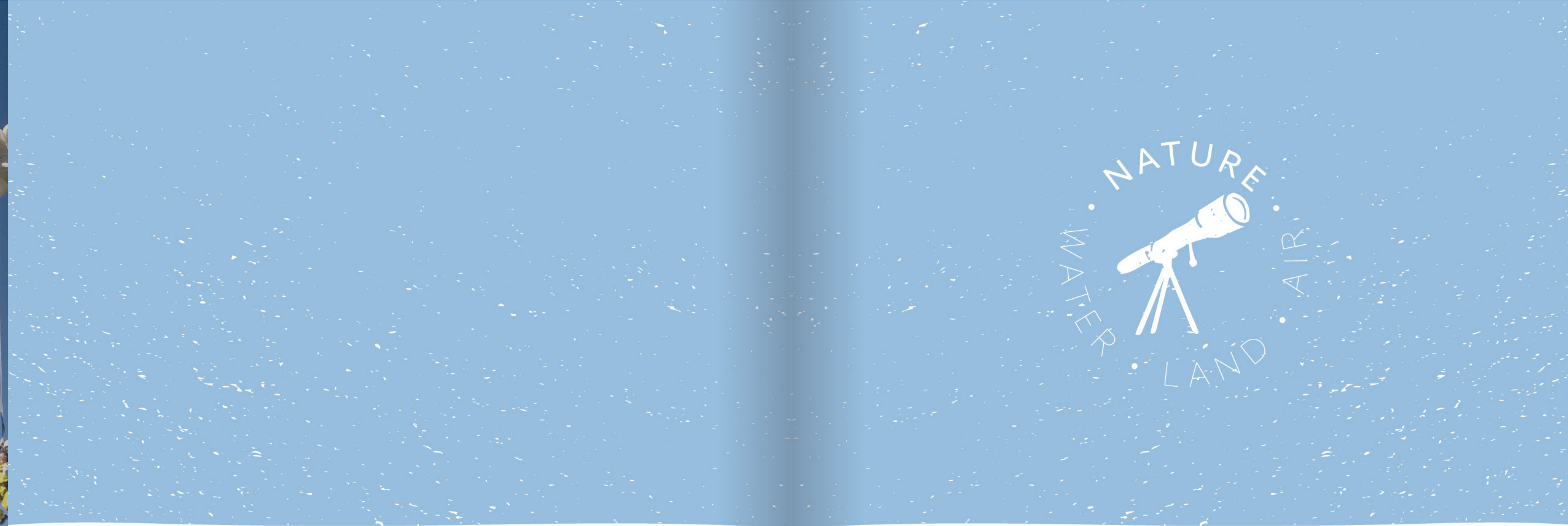
With very low rainfall, the Alentejo skies are generally cloud-free, ensuring clear blue skies and endless horizons. This is one of the few places in Europe where it is possible to fly all year round. So what are you waiting for? A good place to start is in Cabeço de Vide, where you can hop in a balloon and fly to Évora in time for breakfast!

INSIDER'S TIP

Wherever you decide to take your hot air balloon trip, try to get an early morning start so you can see the sunrise. Witness people starting their day, usually oblivious to the balloon passing by overhead, and watch the countryside changing as you float past and the sun climbs higher in the sky.

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ALENTEJO 



AIR



DARK SKY ALQUEVA
MYSTERIES OF THE UNIVERSE

Near Monsaraz you can find Dark Sky Alqueva, the first place in the world to be certified by UNESCO as a Starlight Tourism Destination, in 2011. Few places in the world have such spectacular, unpolluted night skies and here they stretch over 10,000 square kilometres around the vast lake.

With so little cloud cover, low industrialisation and a sparse population (so no light pollution and low traffic emissions), it's no surprise that the skies should be so clear.

As a result, the Alqueva district, in the middle of the Alentejo, is like a dark, velvet cloak speckled with a billion stars. Major constellations like Ursa Major are clearly visible, as well as far-flung galaxies, star clusters and nebulas.



The surrounding municipalities are so keen to preserve the magic of the dark skies that they collaborate to reduce public lighting. And many hotels have telescopes and binoculars on hand so you can take the chance to gaze up to the heavens, perhaps with a drink on the terrace after dinner.

“
INSIDER'S TIP

The official Dark Sky Observatory is in Cumeada, near Reguengos de Monsaraz. Informative guides bring the skies to life and explain the dazzling mysteries up above you. Cutting-edge telescopes allow you to see the craters of the Moon, the mysterious planets and out into deep space to the galaxies and stars beyond.

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ALENTEJ 



ADRENALINE JUNKIES

WHY NOT?

The Alentejo may be the epitome of a tranquil, restful oasis of calm. But sometimes you just want to throw yourself out of a plane from 5,000 metres.

Of course, having seen the sights up close and personal at ground level it makes sense to want to see them from a different perspective. And to get a feel for the epic nature of this dramatic landscape.

Parachuting is a good way to start, ideally with someone with you able to take photos of your unforgettable moment. This is certainly a photo you will be showing friends and colleagues back at home.

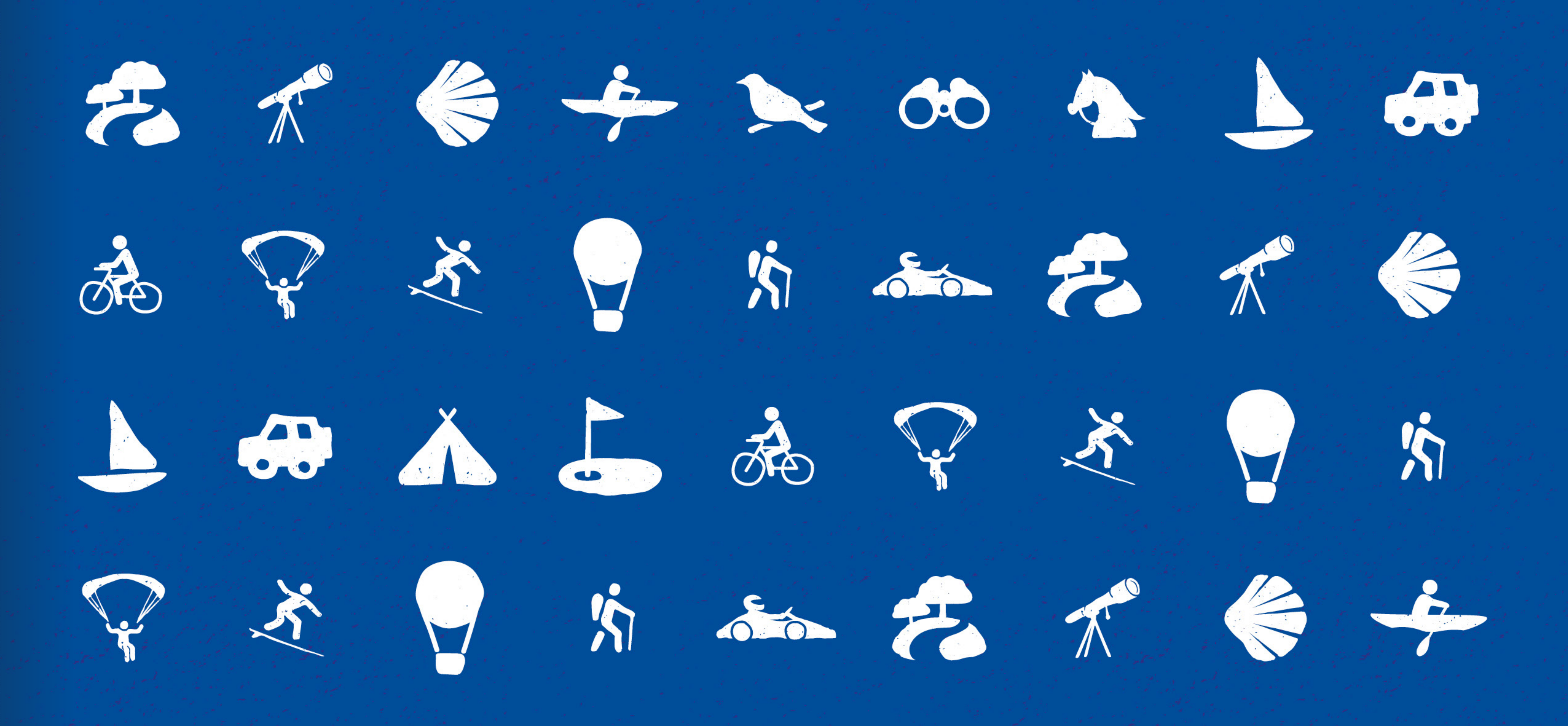
Évora is a destination for adrenaline junkies on the look out for a unique experience. It's also popular with those who would not consider themselves adventure sport fans but who just think 'what the heck'. Either way, jumping out of a plane above the ancient city requires a certain kind of outlook on life.

Alternative options might include jumping in Ferreira do Alentejo, or paragliding in Mértola's Serra de Alcaria Ruiva, south of Beja, if you have your own gear. Once in the air, there are sublime views east towards the Guadiana river and the Vale do Guadiana Nature Park.

“
INSIDER'S TIP

A tandem skydive, strapped to an experienced instructor, is the most popular option and the easiest way to start when time is short. All you need do is focus on the incredible views and the inevitable adrenaline rush.

”





Turismo do Alentejo, ERT
Praça da República, n.º 12 – 1.º
Apartado 335
7800-427 Beja, Portugal
Tel.: +351 284 313 540
geral@turismodoalentejo-ert.pt

**Agência Regional de Promoção Turística
do Alentejo/Alentejo Promotion Office**
Rua Manuel Batista Reis, n.º 6, R/C
7570-284 Grândola, Portugal
Tel.: +351 269 498 680
info@turismodoalentejo.pt

Turismo de Portugal
Edifício-sede: Rua Ivone Silva, Lt. 6
1050-124 Lisboa, Portugal
Tel.: +351 211 140 200
info@turismodeportugal.pt



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