

CROSSBILL GUIDES

Southern Portugal

FROM LISBON TO THE ALGARVE

Crossbill Guides: Southern Portugal – From Lisbon to the Algarve
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CROSSBILL GUIDES FOUNDATION

This guidebook is a product of the non-profit foundation Crossbill Guides. By publishing these books we want to introduce more people to the joys of Europe's beautiful natural heritage and to increase the understanding of the ecological values that underlie conservation efforts. Most of this heritage is protected for ecological reasons and we want to provide insight into these reasons to the public at large. By doing so we hope that more people support the ideas behind nature conservation.

For more information about us and our guides you can visit our website at:

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Highlights of Southern Portugal

1 Go birdwatching in the Alentejo, where steppe birds like bustards and sandgrouse share their home with the hoopoes, bee-eaters, shrikes and azure-winged magpies of the montado.



2 Go hiking along the shore of the Algarve with its beautiful, honey-coloured cliffs.

3 Explore the bays of Sado and Tejo, where thousands of shorebirds congregate and where you can combine field trips with sightseeing in historic Lisbon and Setúbal.



4 Go hiking in the lovely hills of the Serra da Arrábida or the Algarve, where orchids flower in profusion and butterflies are in abundance.



5 Climb the ‘balcony of the Algarve’, the Serra de Monchique, with its remnants of old cork oak forests.



6 Enjoy Cabo São Vicente and the Costa Vicentina, where the dune and cliff-top flora is rich in endemic wildflowers.



7 Cruise along the hidden inland rivers – little known and little visited, but with a good number of rare dragonflies, butterflies and wildflowers.

8 Visit the Cabos São Vicente and Espichel to watch seabirds like Gannets, terns, skuas, shearwaters, etc. passing offshore. Better still, get closer by adding a whale watching boat trip to your itinerary.





boat trip or
ferry crossing



car route



bicycle route



walking route



beautiful
scenery



interesting
history



interesting
geology

About this guide

This guide is meant for all those who enjoy being in and learning about nature, whether you already know all about it or not. It is set up a little differently from most guides. We focus on explaining the natural and ecological features of an area rather than merely describing the site. We choose this approach because the nature of an area is more interesting, enjoyable and valuable when seen in the context of its complex relationships. The interplay of different species with each other and with their environment is simply mind-blowing. The clever tricks and gimmicks that are put to use to beat life's challenges are as fascinating as they are countless.

Take our namesake the Crossbill: at first glance it's just a big finch with an awkward bill. But there is more to the Crossbill than meets the eye. This bill is beautifully adapted for life in coniferous forests. It is used like a scissor to cut open pinecones and eat the seeds that are unobtainable for other birds. In the Scandinavian countries where pine and spruce take up the greater part of the forests, several Crossbill species have each managed to answer two of life's most pressing questions: how to get food and how to avoid direct competition. By evolving crossed bills, each differing subtly, they have secured a monopoly of the seeds produced by cones of varying sizes. So complex is this relationship that scientists are still debating exactly how many different species of Crossbill actually exist. Now this should heighten the appreciation of what at first glance was merely a plumb red bird with a beak that doesn't seem to fit properly. Once its interrelationships are seen, nature comes alive, wherever you are.

To some, impressed by the "virtual" familiarity that television has granted to the wilderness of the Amazon, the vastness of the Serengeti or the sublimity of Yellowstone, European nature may seem a puny surrogate, good merely for the casual stroll. In short, the argument seems to be that if you haven't seen some impressive predator, be it a Jaguar, Lion or Grizzly Bear, then you haven't seen the "real thing". Nonsense, of course.

But where to go? And how? What is there to see? That is where this guide comes in. We describe the how, the why, the when, the where and the how come of Europe's most beautiful areas. In clear and accessible language, we explain the nature of southern Portugal and refer extensively to routes where the area's features can be observed best. We try to make southern Portugal come alive. We hope that we succeed.

How to use this guide

This guidebook contains a descriptive and a practical section.

The descriptive part comes first and gives you insight into the most striking and interesting natural features of the area. It provides an understanding of what you will see when you go out exploring. The descriptive part consists of a landscape section (marked with a red bar), describing the habitats, the history and the landscape in general, and of a flora and fauna section (marked with a green bar), which discusses the plants and animals that occur in the region.

The second part offers the practical information (marked with a purple bar). A series of routes (walks) is carefully selected to give you a good flavour of all the habitats, flora and fauna that southern Portugal has to offer. At the start of each route description, a number of icons give a quick overview of the characteristics of each route. These icons are explained in the margin of this page. The final part of the book (marked with blue squares) provides some basic tourist information and some tips on finding plants, birds and other animals.

There is no need to read the book from cover to cover. Instead, each small chapter stands on its own and refers to the routes most suitable for viewing the particular features described in it. Conversely, descriptions of each route refer to the chapters that explain more in depth the most typical features that can be seen along the way.

We have tried to keep the number of technical terms to a minimum. If using one is unavoidable, we explain it in the glossary at the end of the guide. There we have also included a list of all the mentioned plant and animal species, with their scientific names and translations into German and Dutch.

Some species names have an asterisk (*) following them. This indicates that there is no official English name for this species and that we have taken the liberty of coining one. For the sake of readability we have decided to translate the scientific name, or, when this made no sense, we gave a name that best describes the species' appearance or distribution. Please note that we do not want to claim these as the official names. We merely want to make the text easier to follow for those not familiar with scientific names. When a new vernacular name was invented, we've also added the scientific name.

An overview of the area described in this book is given on the map on page 12. For your convenience we have also turned the inner side of the back flap into a map of the area indicating all the described routes. Descriptions in the explanatory text refer to these routes.



interesting
flora



interesting
invertebrate
life



interesting
reptile and
amphibian life



interesting
mammals



interesting
birdlife



site for
snorkelling



interesting for
whales and
dolphins



visualising
the ecological
contexts
described in
this guide

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