

Off-peak Algarve

Portugal's holiday hotspot has plenty to tempt clients during the shoulder seasons, finds **Bridget McGrouther**

Portugal's Algarve is famous for its 300 days of sunshine a year and 100-plus beaches. But, as I discovered on a recent shoulder-season trip, there is plenty to see and do beyond its sandy shores and signature limestone cliffs.

Steer clients towards the Algarve's lesser-known spots or seek out more-adventurous activities that are easy to reach from the main resorts, and they'll find plenty more reasons to return than just the summer weather.

ACTIVE ALGARVE

Sailing, watersports and wildlife-watching are all popular pastimes, and there's no shortage of local operators to take clients on to the water. AlgarExperience sets sail from the resorts of Albufeira, Portimão, Lagos and Vilamoura with a thrilling choice of excursions on boats, catamarans and ribs. Dolphin-spotting is top of the list, with excursions featuring a fun commentary offering information on the bays, caves, rock ➤

PICTURE: Bruno Carlix

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OF THE
BEST**ALGARVE EATS****Pastel de nata**

These custard-filled puff pastries are a staple Portuguese sweet treat and are widely available across the Algarve, from bakeries to breakfast buffets.

Cataplana

This rich stew is slowly simmered in a traditional clam-shaped, copper cooking pot – locking in the flavours of fish, sweet pepper and white wine.

Piri piri chicken

Forget Nando's – this spicy dish was said to be conjured up in Guia village in 1964, using piri-iri chillis, oil, garlic and seasoning.

Torta de laranja

An orange-flavoured sponge dessert made with egg, flour and lots of juicy citrus fruit, shaped to resemble a Swiss roll.

Seafood

Oysters, clams and many species of fish thrive in the estuaries of the Ria Formosa and Alvor – a drizzle of oil and lemon or a sprinkle of herbs and salt will elevate any meal.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Pousada Palacio de Estoi; yoga session, Viceroy at Ombria Algarve; Culatra Island PICTURES: Letizia Cigliutti; AIA

**top tip**

Learn more about selling the Algarve by taking a free agent training course with OTT onlinetraveltraining.com

formations, wildlife and celebrity homes you pass; tickets can include an open bar and beach barbecue.

Those who prefer keeping their feet on solid ground might enjoy walking the Seven Hanging Valleys Trail, which hugs the coastline for four miles from Praia da Marinha to Carvoeiro, with vertigo-inducing viewpoints ideal for selfies (just don't get too close to the edge). It's best to hike the sun-baked path out of peak season, when temperatures are cooler, but clients can dip in to plenty of quiet bays to admire dramatic scenery without walking the whole route.

Inland, off-road adventures await in the Monchique mountains. During a 4x4 tour with local provider Geographic Algarve (which works with UK agents), I was blown away by panoramic views on the steep, cliff-edge climb, steadying any nerves with the odd nip of local firewater Medronho brandy and honey-sweetened Melosa liqueur. Lunch, featuring a host of Algarve specialities, is also included at a mountain restaurant.

FOODIE FAVOURITES

It would be hard to beat that meal in the mountains – except with lunch and a wine tasting under a 2,000-year-old olive tree at Morgado do Quintão, a family-run estate dating from the early 19th century. After an inspiring tour of the vineyard, we sat at picnic tables to relish three of the vineyard's wines, accompanied by generous sharing platters of local specialities.

“ I steadied my nerves on the steep, cliff-edge climb with the odd nip of Medronho brandy, the local firewater

The port of Olhão was once known for its canning factories and fishing industry. Foodie operator Portugal4U offers Seafood from the Island guided tours from €135, starting at the vibrant Olhão Market, where fresh seafood, bunches of aromatic herbs and locally made jams abound. Clients then sail through the Ria Formosa Natural Park to Culatra Island to meet sustainability ambassador Silvia Padinha, who helps keep oyster harvesting alive for local fishermen.

WHERE TO STAY

Tavira is a laid-back town with sleepy streets and squares, where craftsmen still sell their traditional wares of lace and pottery. Boutique hotel Palacio de Tavira opened last year behind the facade of an old mansion house. Step inside for an award-winning restaurant, or check in to its beautifully designed rooms with rooftop plunge pools, outdoor showers and minibars filled with locally made treats.

In the rolling citrus groves outside Faro, pretty-in-pink Pousada Palacio de Estoi is a gem of a hotel set in a former palace, with ornate rococo lounges, formal gardens, bedrooms with terraces in a contemporary wing and a rooftop pool looking out across lush countryside. Only a 30-minute transfer from Faro airport, it provides peace and tranquillity – and would be the ideal location for an intimate wedding or honeymoon.

Half an hour from Vilamoura, the five-star Viceroy at Ombria Algarve is situated in the Barrocal plain, between the Mediterranean and mountains, and has been designed to mirror a hilltop village. More than 140 rooms are built around a praça (main square), with four swimming pools, six restaurants and a kids' club to discover. The four-storey spa with infinity pool, hairdresser, beauty salon and extensive treatment menu means clients can enjoy plenty of rest and relaxation.

For something more interactive, out-of-the-ordinary activities offered by the hotel include being a shepherd for a day, beekeeping, pottery making and a horse-riding trip with a picnic lunch. The nearby town of Loulé is home to a lively market, as well as a castle and cathedral. Rest assured, beach shuttles are also provided for those who still crave sun, sea and sand – but clients who come here will realise there's much more to the Algarve than its coast. **TW**



SPORTING CHANCE

The Algarve is becoming an increasingly popular destination for sports fans. The **Formula One Portuguese Grand Prix** returns to Portimão's Algarve International Circuit (pictured) in 2027 after a six-year hiatus, while the **MotoGP Portuguese Grand Prix** takes place there this November.

Golf lovers can enjoy a new PGA Tour Champions Circuit event, the **Portugal Invitational**, at the Els Club Vilamoura from July 31 to August 2. Vilamoura will also host the inaugural **Algarve Marathon** on December 6.

The region is home to multiple **walking festivals** in spring, while each Sunday, there are free guided walks along the Via Algarviana (dates and distances at vialgarviana.org).

For details and trade resources, go to visitalgarve.pt/en

BOOK IT

Sunvil offers four nights' B&B at Pousada Palacio de Estoi from £1,142 per person, based on two sharing. The price includes 23kg luggage, transfers and flights from Gatwick on September 23. sunvil.co.uk

A seven-night stay at Palacio de Tavira with **easyJet holidays** starts at £1,328 per person. The price, which is based on two sharing, includes breakfast, 23kg luggage, transfers and flights from Liverpool on April 5. easyjet.com/holidays

Kuoni offers seven nights' B&B at Viceroy at Ombria Algarve from £1,199 per person, based on two sharing. The price includes flights from Gatwick on November 3 and transfers. kuoni.co.uk

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