

Southern Portugal: Fabulous Birding & Culture with Naturalist Journeys



October 12 – 24, 2022

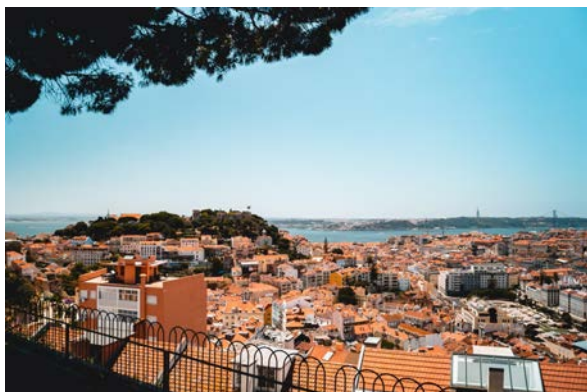
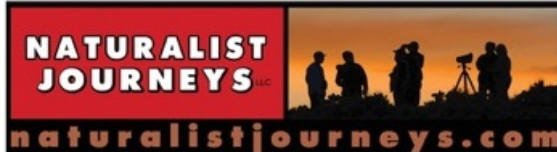
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Join Naturalist Journeys on this fun Portugal birding tour—one that includes some fun cultural and historical time blended in. A real plus is that Portugal offers a fantastic diversity of habitats replete with birds in a relatively small geographic area; we visit several species-rich areas without having to travel long distances. Portugal hosts many of the most sought-after specialties of the Iberian Peninsula, such as Great Bustard, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Azure-winged Magpie, Great-spotted Cuckoo, and Booted Eagle, as well as iconic European species such as Eurasian Hoopoe and Common Kingfisher. All seen while traveling in picturesque rural areas also prized for scenery and history.

With expert local guides and Naturalist Journey's Steve Shunk, discover three fabulous regions of the country that include extensive wetlands around Lisbon, the expansive steppes of Alentejo to the east, and then south to the coastal Algarve regions.

Europe's fall migration extends from August into early November, and our timing on this Portugal birding tour is perfect for arriving shorebirds and raptors. We will search for Palearctic shorebirds such as Pied Avocet, Northern Lapwing, Common Ringed Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, and Curlew Sandpiper; and just a few of the raptors we might encounter include European Honey-Buzzard, Short-toed Snake-Eagle, and Montagu's Harrier.

By October, temperatures in the arid Alentejo are cooling down to delightful, and every day brings overwintering species from northern latitudes. Coastal and sea birding from the Algarve is exceptional, with few birders and crowds. The country's rich cultural heritage is on display throughout the tour with visits planned to some of the most interesting historical and cultural sites of Portugal.

Tour Highlights

- Enjoy charming accommodations in Lisbon; city fun, and within a half hour's drive we explore two remarkable wetland areas
- Find Great Bustard, Common Crane, Stone Curlew, and Black-bellied Sandgrouse in the Alentejo
- Explore the bluffs and hills of the Guadiana Valley Natural Park, noted for Iberian Imperial, Golden, and Bonelli's Eagles
- Sample Portugal's many culinary delights and great wines, including a fun wine-tasting event held amid grapevines and olive groves
- Discover the Algarve, a region rich in protected wetland areas situated on a major flyway for migrants from Africa—fabulous for waders and passerines
- Stand on Europe's southwestern corner, Cape St. Vincent, as raptors in migration pass overhead;
- Take a pelagic trip off Sagres to see a wide range of seabirds
- Marvel at the colors of Eurasian Hoopoe, Common Kingfisher, and European Bee-eater
- Walk through old Cork Oak forests
- Blend birding and culture with a chance to walk through historic plazas and squares en route to an array of castles, cathedrals, museums, Roman ruins, and promenades;
- Experience Portugal's rich cultural heritage at top historical and cultural sites in Évora, Mértola, Sagres and Lisbon.

Tour Summary

13-Day / 12-Night Portugal Birding & Nature Tour
\$5790, from Lisbon
Airport is Lisbon Portela Airport (LIS)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Wed., Oct. 12 Arrivals in Lisbon!

Welcome to Lisbon, Portugal. Today we meet you at either the Lisbon Airport or if you've arrived early, your Lisbon hotel, for travel to our lodgings in Alcochete (about ten miles from the airport). You may recognize the name of this small city for its association with Europe's second longest bridge, the Vasco da Gama Bridge, which spans the Tagus River with its impressive cable-stay construction. It is a charming location and gives us close access to the Tagus Estuary.

Accommodations in Alcochete (D)

Thurs., Oct. 13 & Fri., Oct. 14 Two Days Birding & Exploring Lisbon

Portugal offers a fantastic diversity of habitats—and consequently birds—in a relatively small area. It is hard to imagine how many species we find with ease at the Tagus Estuary and the Sado Estuary Nature Reserves—both within a half-hour drive of Lisbon city center and the international airport.

Our time in the Lisbon area will let you experience a variety of habitats within the Tagus Estuary Nature Reserve, including the inter-tidal mudflats and salt marshes of Hortas, the salt pans of Atalaya, Ribeira das Enguias, and Samouco, and the Barroca d'Alva rice fields and pastures. Other interesting sites and habitats in the Tagus Reserve include the open fields, reed beds, lagoons, inter-tidal mudflats and salt marshes of the Ponta da Erva area.

We also have some fun as we explore—enjoy a wine tasting at Companhia das Lezírias, as well as a birding visit to the cork oak woodlands of Pancas, still in the Tagus estuary. Finally, we explore the Sado Estuary Nature Reserve, namely the salt pans, inter-tidal mudflats and salt marshes of Mitrena, Mourisca, and Zambujal.

The protected wetland areas between the Tagus and Sado estuaries may reveal to us: Greater Flamingo, White Stork, Eurasian Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Squacco and Purple Herons, Booted Eagle, Black-winged Kite, Little Bustard, Collared Pratincole, Pallid Swift, Bluethroat, Dartford, Savi's and Melodious Warblers, Iberian Chiffchaff, Iberian Grey and Woodchat Shrikes, Spotless Starling, Rock Sparrow, European Serin, Cirl Bunting, and an excellent selection of ducks, waders, gulls and terns.

Accommodations in Alcochete, across the Tagus River from Lisbon (B,L,D)

Sat., Oct. 15—Tues., Oct. 18 Four Days of Exploring the Alentejo in Detail

Leaving the Lisbon-area wetlands the morning, we continue our mix of activities to highlight birding, history and culture. We first head toward Mértola, in the Alentejo region, visiting the city of Évora, a UNESCO World Heritage site prized for its whitewashed houses, Gothic Cathedral dating to the 12th century, and other Gothic and Baroque churches including the unique Chapel of the Bones.

Along our route today, is a famous site, the Almendres Cromlech which contains several megalithic menhirs (standing stone structures) dating back to the 6th millennium BC. This complex has over 95 granite monoliths with a path winding through Association of these structures with others in the area suggest an astronomical function to the structures in alignments for the winter solstice.

Then it's on to the great Castro Verde rolling plains and the bluffs and hills of the Guadiana Valley Natural Park, including Mértola, Mina de São Domingos, and Alcaria Ruiva. The expansive plains and hilly terrains of these regions support Great Bustard, Common Crane, Red Kite, Montagu's Harrier, Lesser Kestrel, Stone Curlew, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Great Spotted Cuckoo, European Roller, Calandra Lark, Tawny Pipit, Rufous Bush Robin, and many more birds.

The bluffs and hills of the Guadiana Valley Natural Park host species such as: Black Stork, Iberian Imperial, Golden and Bonelli's Eagles, Eurasian Black and Griffon Vultures, Turtle Dove, Eurasian Eagle Owl, White-rumped Swift, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Eurasian Crag Martin, Red-rumped Swallow, Black-eared Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush, Golden Oriole, Spanish Sparrow, Hawfinch and Rock Bunting.

Based in the town of Mértola, we can enjoy time to visit the main museums, additional archaeological sites, and specialty shops. It is here that we experience some of the best local foods and wines of our journey. It's a luxury to have four nights—unpack and settle in!

Here we are near the Spanish border on the confluence of the Guadiana and Oeiras Rivers. The town grew from its start as a fortified medieval village surrounding an impressive castle on its central hilltop. This is an ancient port city again with influence of early Phoenicians, then Romans, Moors and Christians during the Reconquest of Portugal. The whole town feels like a living museum of successive civilizations built upon each other.

Accommodations for four nights in Mértola (B,L,D, all days)

Wed., Oct. 19 – Fri., Oct. 21 On to the Scenic Southern Coastal Region

With just a short 45-minute drive to Tavira, we reach the coastal region of Algarve, a region rich in protected wetland areas and situated on a major fly-way for migrants from Africa, and notable in particular for waders and passerines. We are here at a key time in the migration period, and this area—including Salgados lagoon—offers abundant opportunities to observe migrating birds. Birding stops here will include the complex network of canals, saline flats and salt pans of the Castro Marim Nature Reserve and the Tavira area of Ria Formosa Natural Park. Other habitats of Ria Formosa including dunes, open water, inter-tidal mudflats, salt marshes, salt pans, reed beds, lagoons and pine in the regions of Olhão, Quinta do Lago, and Ludo.

During our time here, we also visit the Sagres and Cape St. Vincent areas, Cape St. Vincent being a natural bottleneck for migration and a splendid place to search for the endangered Balearic Shearwater as well as a few other species. A tour highlight experience is a pelagic trip off Sagres. Just a few miles offshore, we start to understand why the Algarve is considered such a crossroads, with birds moving along the coast west to east (Atlantic to Mediterranean) and north to south (Europe to Africa). Some of the species we may find during the boat trip include: a variety of shearwaters (Great Cory's, Scopoli's, Sooty, Manx and Balearic), smaller Wilson's, Leach's and European storm-petrels (Wilson's, Leach's and European Storm Petrels) and predatory skuas—all three being possible (Pomarine, Arctic and Great). We keep our eye open for rarities such as Audouin's Gull amid the more regularly seen and sometimes numerous Northern Gannet, Kittiwake and Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Ria Formosa Park and Castro Marim, with their intricate maze of inlets and lagoons, are unique birding sites in Portugal for finding rare and highly localized species such as Audouin's and Slender-billed Gulls and Lesser Short-toed Lark. These are also excellent spots for getting close views of scarce species like Little Bittern and Purple Swamphen. Common bird species in the Algarve include Little Owl, Red-necked Nightjar, Eurasian Hoopoe, Common Kingfisher, European Bee-eater, Sardinian and Spectacled Warblers, and Iberian Magpie.

Tavira, our base for three nights, dates back to the Bronze Age. Today it is a comfortable, small city astride the Gilão River at its junction with the Atlantic Ocean, Tavira is a delightful base from which to explore. It holds Roman Moorish and Christian influences. In its center, a medieval castle affords us great city views of old and new, whitewashed walls, tile roofs—all with the Atlantic Ocean behind. Across from it, Tavira Island has a long, sandy beach, plus salt pans that attract flamingos, spoonbills and other wading birds.

Accommodations for three nights in Tavira (B,L,D, all days)

Sat., Oct. 22 Return to Lisbon | Estuary and Ricefield Birding

Finally, we will return to Lisbon, using the travel day to explore inter-tidal mudflats, salt marshes and rice fields of Comporta and Carrasqueira, part of the Sado Estuary Nature Reserve.

Accommodations in Lisbon (B,L,D)

Sun., Oct. 23 Highlights and Historical Sites of Lisbon

We cap off our trip with a fascinating day in the city of Lisbon, with time to experience the main squares and avenues, downtown Baixa, some of the hilltop districts, the Castle of São Jorge, the cathedral, and, in Belém, the historic seafaring area from which the Portuguese caravels departed to explore the world. We will also see the Monument to the Discoveries and two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the beautiful Tower of Belém and the Gothic-era Jerónimos Monastery.

Enjoy a great final dinner with time to recount our birding and cultural highlights of the journey.

Accommodations in Lisbon (B,L,D)

Mon., Oct. 24 Departures

Plan to leave at your convenience today but remember, for international flights, it is recommended that you be at the airport three hours prior to your flight. (B)

Tour Details

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the Journey is \$5790 DBL / \$6390 SGL, based on double occupancy, per person. Price includes airport transfers, 12 nights' accommodations, all meals as noted in the itinerary, professional guide services, park and preserve entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses.

Cost of the journey does not include airfare from your home to Lisbon, Portugal or items of a personal nature, such as drinks from the bar, telephone, and local guide gratuities (at your discretion, we will give some guidelines).

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive in Lisbon at your leisure on October 12. Please note that flights will usually depart from the United States on October 11. Please plan departures from Lisbon at your leisure on October 24.

The tours start and end in Lisbon. If you need accommodation for the nights before and/or after the tour, we are happy to help. We suggest you discuss your flight details with us before booking your flights.

Photo Credits

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