

algarve,
europe's
most famous
secret

tavira

municipality

2013 . 3rd Edition

tavira

Beautiful empty beaches with sands that seem to go on forever. Fields of orange trees, heavy with the scent of blossom. Then hills of fig and almond trees and houses with dazzling whitewashed walls and distinctive chimneys decorated to resemble the fine tracery of lace. And last of all, the great open spaces of the hills, where eagles soar, birds sing and flowers bloom. This is just a hint of the charms of Tavira and its municipality, an invitation to come and find out more.

THE HISTORY OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF TAVIRA

The existence of hill forts and megalithic monuments dates the human presence in Tavira municipality to the Neolithic period (4,000 to 1,500 B.C.). In the Chalcolithic and subsequent periods, this presence was associated with the mining operations that flourished in the northeast of the Algarve and with trading links with the Mediterranean.

It was on the coast, however, that the largest settlement grew up after the Roman conquest (1st century B.C.), thanks to the economic importance of fishing and the fish-salting industry. The major town of Balsa, situated near to Tavira and connected by road to Ossonoba (Faro) and Baesuris (Castro Marim), dates from this period.

Under Moorish rule (8th to 13th centuries), the strategic importance of Tavira's castle and port made it one of the main towns in the Algarve. It was the Knights of the Order of Sant'Iago (St. James) who occupied Tavira in 1242, continuing the Christian reconquest that began with the taking of neighbouring Cacela.

The conquest first of Ceuta (1415) and then other towns in North Africa had a decisive influence on Tavira's fortunes in the 15th and 16th centuries, as it became the chief port providing support for the Portuguese garrisons overseas. During this period the town received a number of royal visits and in 1520 it was elevated to the status of city.

An outbreak of plague in 1645/46, the gradual silting up of the channel to the sea, which eventually prevented vessels entering the harbour, and the damage done by the earthquake of 1755 were all factors in a decline which left Tavira with only a fraction of its former economic importance by the end of the 18th century.

Tuna fishing - for which Tavira was the Algarve's main centre - and the canning industry breathed fresh life into the city from the last decades of the 19th to the middle of the 20th century. Today Tavira is a growing city, its renewed prosperity founded on tourism and fishing.

VISITING TAVIRA

The castle and the bell-towers of a multitude of churches; the river like a mirror reflecting houses and gardens; the distinctive outline of roofs in the local "tesoura" (scissor) style; broad vistas of sea and sand: these are among the charms of Tavira, a city of art and history and an essential port of call on any cultural tour of the Algarve.



THE CASTLE

Along with the ramparts that surrounded the city, sections of the walls which still stand between the houses, and the Porta da Misericórdia (Misericórdia Gate), the castle was part of the city's defensive system. The original Moorish fortification was rebuilt by King Dinis (1261-1325). From the top of its towers there is a vast panoramic view over Tavira, the surrounding countryside and the sea.

CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA DO CASTELO

Probably built on the site of the old mosque, this church dates from the 13th century. It has undergone alterations subsequently, some of them as a consequence of the earthquake of 1755. It has a Gothic doorway, with capitals decorated with plant motifs. Outside there are other Gothic features to be seen: an ogival window, a small rose window and corbels and gargoyles on the apse. The clocktower also dates from the original building, though it displays subsequent decorative additions. The interior consists of three vaulted naves. On the left-hand wall of the chancel is the tomb of the seven Knights of the Order of Sant'Iago (St. James) killed in a Moorish ambush, an episode which prompted the conquest of the city. On the pulpit there is a beautiful statue of Nossa Senhora (18th century). The walls of the Capela do Santíssimo (Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament) are decorated with tiles depicting holy stories (18th century). The Capelas das Almas (Chapels of Souls) have a carved altarpiece, the central section of which contains religious iconography depicted in high relief (early 18th century). The Chapel of the Senhor dos Passos has tiled walls (17th century) and a carved altarpiece (18th century). In the sacristy there are 18th century tiles decorated with baskets of fruit and vases of flowers. Among the church treasures, which include objects wrought of precious metals from the 16th and 18th centuries and vestments, a delightful missal lectern of Japanese origin ("namban" art) dating from the 16th/17th centuries deserves special mention.



Church of Sta. Maria do Castelo - TA



Tomb - TA

A MYSTERIOUS TOMB

A plaque in the chancel indicates the site of the tomb of D. Paio Peres Correia, the valiant master of the Order of Sant'Iago (St. James) who played a decisive role in the Christian reconquest of the Algarve and part of the south of Spain. Strangely enough, the Spanish monastery of Santa María de Tentúdia (Saint Mary of Tentúdia) also has a tomb which is said to be that of D. Paio Peres Correia. Nobody knows for sure where the old knight's mortal remains are really to be found.

CHURCH OF MISERICÓRDIA

This is deservedly regarded as the finest Renaissance (16th century) building in the Algarve. It has a doorway of great beauty crowned by a statue of Nossa Senhora da Misericórdia (Our Lady of Mercy) under a canopy whose curtains are held back by two angels. On either side are the arms of Portugal and Tavira and two high reliefs depicting São Pedro (St. Peter) and São Paulo (St. Paul). The interior is composed of three naves, with Renaissance-style capitals decorated with grotesques. In the chancel there is a spectacularly carved and gilded altarpiece and statues of Nossa Senhora da Visitação (Our Lady of the Visitation) and Santa Isabel (St. Elizabeth) (18th century). On one of the side altars there is a fine carved altarpiece surrounding a circular painting of Nossa Senhora da Conceição (Our Lady of the Conception) (18th century). The tiles on the walls date from the same period. They depict the Works of Mercy and have captions describing the scenes they illustrate. In the sacristy there is a statue of the Crucifixion which may date from the 16th century. There is a small cloister adjoining.



Church of Misericórdia - LC

CHURCH OF SANT'IAGO (ST. JAMES)

Tradition has it that this church was built on the site of the town's lesser mosque. Begun in the 18th century, it has undergone successive alterations. Though architecturally modest, it is home to a valuable collection of statues and paintings, some of them from monasteries that have closed down. Among the statues, special mention is due to the ones of Nossa Senhora da Conceição (Our Lady of the Conception) (18th century) in the chancel, Nossa Senhora a Franca (Our Lady the Candid) (possibly 16th century) and the Holy Family (18th century) in side chapels. In the sacristy there is an interesting statue of the Virgin (15th century?) and others, dating from the 17th and 18th centuries.

CHURCH OF SÃO PAULO (ST. PAUL)

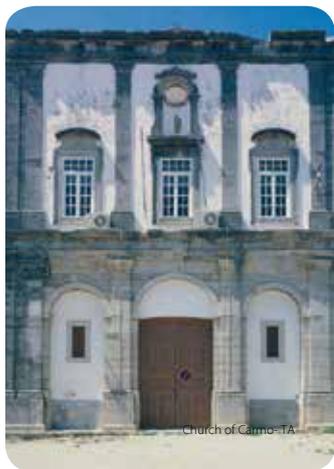
Built at the beginning of the 17th century, it was part of a former monastery. The façade has a porch. A statue of Nossa Senhora da Ajuda (Our Lady of Help) (17th century) stands in a niche. The interior consists of a single nave. The main altar has a carved altarpiece (17th and 18th centuries) with a statue of Nossa Senhora da Ajuda (Our Lady of Help) (18th century). The side altars of Nossa Senhora do Carmo (Our Lady of Carmel) and Nossa Senhora do Rosário (Our Lady of the Rosary) and the two side “altares das Almas” (altars of Souls) also have carved, unglazed altarpieces dating from the 18th century. The side altarpiece on the gospel side is decorated with a polychrome bas relief depicting the Last Supper (17th century). The church houses a fine collection of 17th and 18th century statues, most notable among which is one in the transept of Our Lady, of Flemish origin (15th century). The floor in the transept is unique in Portugal: it is made up of red tiles and lozenges painted with figures, of Spanish origin (17th century). Also on the main altarpiece there are two 16th century panels showing the adoration of the Infant Jesus, and statues from the 17th and 18th centuries.

CHURCH OF SÃO JOSÉ DO HOSPITAL (ST. JOSEPH OF THE HOSPITAL)

This church is octagonal in plan, and was rebuilt between 1752 and 1768. It has a doorway in the “rocaille” style and a main altar with “trompe l’oeil” paintings. There are statues of São Vicente Ferrer (St. Vincent Ferrer), Nossa Senhora do Carmo (Our Lady of Carmel) and Santa Teresa (St. Theresa) which are good examples of 18th century sculpture. Adjoining the church is part of a late medieval chapel of the original church (15th century) with a ribbed vault and a delicate rose window.

CHURCH OF CARMO (CARMEL)

Built in the second half of the 18th century. In the chancel, there is a large carved and gilded altarpiece, which, along with the side altarpieces, paintings, statues, choir stall, organ and holy treasure, constitutes a fine example of Baroque art in the Algarve.



HISTORICAL CENTRE

In the 16th century, Tavira was the most populous city in the Algarve and a port of great strategic importance. The events of that period have left an enduring mark on the layout and appearance of the city. Vestiges of that glorious past are still to be seen in some streets, such as the Rua dos Pelames, where 16th century houses gaze at their reflections in the waters of the Gilão, or the corner house on Rua Nova da Avenida, with its fine Renaissance window. It is also visible in the delicate double window on Travessa de D. Brites, in the doorways of Calçada da Corujeira and Rua de São Brás, in the magnificent doorway of what was the Monastery of Bernardas. But it is the Renaissance medallions of the Lady and the Knight on the façade of a building on Rua José Pires Padrinha that evoke better than anything else those far-off days of pageantry, elegance and courtly love. After Renaissance Tavira it is time to get to know the city of the Baroque period, a Tavira to be found in the many noble houses hidden away down narrow streets or standing proudly on the banks of the river, with their distinctive triangular roofs sloping to a point - known as “tesoura” (scissor) roofs - and their finely-carved stonework Tavira also owes its appeal to the river and its reflections, to the changing nuances of the light and the special atmosphere of a town built on the water’s edge. The ancient bridge which has for centuries joined the two halves of the city is the perfect place to stand and watch the river flow by. Tavira’s streets have another secret waiting to be discovered in the latticed doors, made of finely interwoven lengths of wood, which evoke the Moorish legacy that persists in Algarvean culture to this day.

CHURCH OF SÃO FRANCISCO (ST. FRANCIS)

Medieval in origin, this church, which was once part of a monastery, underwent a major transformation in the 19th century on account of collapse and fire. All that remains of the original Gothic structure is the sacristy, with its large window and vault, and two chapels from the original cloister. It has a highly decorative Baroque bell-tower (18th century). In addition to a number of 18th century statues and four large canvases by an Algarvean artist of the same period, the church is notable for a statue of Santa Ana (St. Anne) offering a piece of fruit to the Infant Jesus seated in the Virgin’s lap, which possibly dates from the 15th century. The carved and gilded Baroque altarpiece and the twelve niches in the Sanctuary - nowadays a side chapel - were part of the original church. In the Casa da Irmandade (House of the Brotherhood) - the old gatehouse to the monastery - there is a dado of patterned tiles (17th century).

CHURCH OF SANTO ANTÓNIO (ST. ANTHONY)

This belonged to a small monastery, of which the cloister still remains (17th century). Its most significant works of art are a series of almost life-size pictures depicting events from the life of the saint (17th century).

CHAPEL OF SÃO SEBASTIÃO (ST. SEBASTIAN)

This structure is of architectural interest because of the cubic shape of the chancel, covered by a semi-spherical calotte, and the longer, lower body of the church (18th century). The “trompe l’oeil” paintings on the walls and the canvases depicting scenes from the lives of Jesus, Our Lady and São Sebastião (18th century) have led to this chapel being made into a Museum of Paintings. Also of interest are the carvings and statuary (18th century). In the sacristy there is a dado of 17th century tiles.

CHAPEL OF NOSSA SENHORA DA CONSOLAÇÃO (OUR LADY OF THE CONSOLATION)

Polychrome tiles dating from the 17th century, an altarpiece with paintings (17th century) on the main altar and a harmonious statue of the patron saint are the main points of interest in this simple chapel.

CHAPEL OF SANTA ANA (ST. ANNE)

Already in existence in the 16th century, this chapel was rebuilt in the 18th century. It boasts a fine collection of works of art, including carved altars, statues, a panel depicting Christ after the descent from the Cross (17th century) and a font supported by a twisted Gothic column.



CHAPEL OF NOSSA SENHORA DO LIVRAMENTO (OUR LADY OF LIBERATION)

The façade is decorated with blue tiles from the 18th century. The interior contains a small treasure of Baroque decoration (18th century) in the gilded carving of the chancel, triumphal arch and chancel chapels. There are also a number of statues from the same period.

CHAPEL OF SÃO PEDRO GONÇALVES TELMO (OU DAS ONDAS) (ST. ELMO OR OF THE WAVES)

This belonged to the Compromisso Marítimo (Maritime Agreement), a mutual association for sailors and fishermen. It has its origins in a 16th century building. It is built on a trapezoid plan and boasts a carved and gilded altarpiece, paintings on the ceiling and altar panels and 18th century statues. However, the small, but elegant statue of Nossa Senhora das Ondas (Our Lady of the Waves) and the tiles in the sacristy date from the 17th century. A side wall bears the arms of King Manuel, the Marquises of Vila Real and the Counts of Alcoutim (16th century).

LAGAR MUSEU (CASA DAS ARTES) (OLIVE PRESS MUSEUM - HOUSE OF THE ARTS)

This was formerly the home of an agricultural landowner, and its façade includes balconies facing the river. The Olive Press Museum offers an insight into the ancient techniques used to extract oil from the olives harvested in the fields around Tavira. It includes an exhibition hall and an engraving workshop.

FORTE DO RATO

Built in the 16th century at the mouth of the Gilão River, this fort defended the entrance to the harbour. It was redesigned during the War of the Restoration (1640-1668).

CHAPEL OF CALVÁRIO (CALVARY)

The rural origins of this building are apparent in its simple architecture, in the stonework highlighted with lines of colour, and in the bull's-eye window over the doorway. The interior walls are painted with "trompe l'oeil" decoration; there is also a statue of the Crucifixion (18th century) and a tombstone.

PALÁCIO DA GALERIA

This building probably dates back to the 16th century. The palace was remodelled in the middle of the 18th century. This is one of the most notable examples of civil architecture in Tavira and its special features are the Baroque stonework of the doorway and the windows on the upper floor. It was restored to be used for cultural and artistic events. It is planned to be the future Museum of the City and Centre of Contemporary Art.

TORRE DE TAVIRA (CÂMARA OBSCURA)

TAVIRA TOWER (DARK CHAMBER)

Here you can go on a journey to see live 360° images of the city, projected by means of a system of lenses and mirrors at the top of the old water tower.

getting to know tavira municipality

LUZ

The houses in Luz de Tavira have the traditional "platibandas" - parapets painted with geometrical or floral motifs - many of which are masterpieces of mortar work. The influence of the Art Nouveau decorative style, popular at the beginning of the century, is apparent in the ornate chimneys rising from the roofs.

MAIN CHURCH 25

Built in the 16th century, much of the original structure has survived to the present day. The imposing Renaissance doorway takes up a large part of the main façade. The roofs of the three naves are hidden by an original and highly decorative ensemble made up of one dynamic semi-circular pediment, framed by two triangular ones. A statue of Nossa Senhora da Luz (Our Lady of Light) stands in a niche. There is a very ornate side doorway in the Manueline style, with columns carved in the shape of twisted ropes, a typically nautical motif. On the walls of the church there are four stone rosettes, interpreted as symbols of the sun, moon and stars.

The three naves of the interior are spanned by cross-ribbed vaults. In the chancel, there is a mannerist altarpiece from the second half of the 16th century, although some of the paintings date from the 17th century. The steps and floor are decorated with 16th century tiles from Seville. Among the statues to be seen, some of which date from the 17th and 18th centuries, pride of place goes to that of the church's patron saint (16th century), which is kept in the sacristy.

A short distance away stands the Chapel of Nossa Senhora do Livramento (Our Lady of Liberation) (18th century), the exterior of which is plain and rather unusual. Its altar is in the Baroque style and is fashioned wholly out of marble of various colours quarried in the Algarve.

CONCEIÇÃO

MAIN CHURCH 27

The church's Gothic origins are evident from the fine main doorway, which boasts five re-entrant columns. It has undergone a number of modifications since it was first built.

The chancel has a Gothic vault and a triumphal arch in the Renaissance style (16th century). There are statues from the 17th and 18th centuries. Among the items in the church's holy treasure is a 17th century silver monstrance.

SANTA CATARINA DA FONTE DO BISPO

Surrounded by flourishing groves of almond and orange trees, this is a village typical of the Algarve's intermediate rural area, known as the "Barrocal", with its limestone soils.

MAIN CHURCH 28

The church is in the Renaissance style (16th century) and has a decorated doorway. The interior is made up of three naves and has columns with Ionic capitals.

The chancel is spanned by a decorated vault and has, to one side, a Manueline doorway (16th century). Among the statues to be seen, there is a 16th century Nossa Senhora da Graça (Our Lady of the Grace) which is particularly deserving of mention. The Adoration of the Shepherds is depicted on a panel.



FROM THE BEACHES TO THE HILLS

The blue of the sea gives way to the pale gold of sand, the calm waters of the Ria Formosa, the lush green of flat fields where the old scoop wheels that used to draw water up from the depths of the wells are still to be seen. In the background loom the rounded forms of the hill ranges of the interior. Between them and the coastal plain are gentle slopes covered with fig, almond, olive and carob trees, typical of the limestone soils of the "Barrocal". Before heading into the "Barrocal" and on towards the hilltops in the far distance, it is worth visiting the Torre de Aires to take in the panoramic views afforded by this former coastal watchtower. Take the time to visit the triangle of land delimited by the shore and the pretty village of Santo Estevão, with its white houses, interesting chimneys, bell-tower and church, the last of which is home to a number of 17th and 18th century statues. All around, refreshed by the water, are fields of orange, loquat and other fruit trees, flourishing vegetable gardens and bright flowers. It is a place for quiet walks through an idyllic landscape, an opportunity to savour a few moments of tranquillity. Further north, the land is used for dryland farming. Birds sing among the branches of the trees. There are alluring spots along the banks of the Asseca creek, as well as a small waterfall at Moinhos da Rocha. The soils here are deep red, and the underlying limestone breaks the surface in places like a giant's bones. This is the "Barrocal", a transitional Algarve linking the sea with the hills. It is home to the dwarf palm, which grows wild on its slopes and has been used for thousands of years to make useful implements ranging from brooms to baskets. Now the traveller reaches the hills. These are at their most beautiful, their most authentic, when seen on foot or from the lanes that link tiny hamlets of no more than a dozen or so houses with evocative names like Casa Queimada, Ríbeira das Umbrias and Catraia. Cachopo, a large village in the hills, stands on the peak of a hill, proud of its whitewashed church, perched at the top of a flight of steps, and of its past. In days gone by it was a resort popular with visitors who came for its healthy air and for the curative powers of the iron-rich waters that bubble from a nearby spring. Nearby, in the village of Mealha, stands the Pedras Altas (High Stones) dolmen and, a little further on, in Alcarias Pedro Guerreiro, are the dolmens of Masmora and Castelhana.



The "Serra" - VC

THE PLEASURES OF SUN AND SEA

Ilha de Tavira

Part of the Ria Formosa Natural Park, this is regarded as one of the most beautiful beaches in the eastern Algarve. There is a huge beach with white sand, and you can get there on one of the regular crossings on small boats which leave from 4 Águas, and also from the city centre during the summer. There are beach facilities and a camp site.



Tavira Island - HR

Cabanas

This quiet, isolated beach is separated from the mainland by a branch of the Ria Formosa, and you can get to it by boat. There are beach facilities. On the shore of the Ria, there is the old Fort of São João da Barra, a polygonal building dating from the 17th/18th centuries, now privately owned.



Cabanas - HR

Praia da Terra Estreita (Santa Luzia)

This large beach is located in front of the little village of Santa Luzia. The crossing is done by small boats, especially during the summer.

Barril

This is one of the best known beaches in the municipality, and it is located in front of the Pedras d'El Rei tourist village. It is a very big beach and you can get there on foot or on the tourist train. On the same beach, there is the old "Armação de Atum", buildings used by the tuna fishermen dating back to 1842. The buildings are in very good condition and have been converted into an area of shops and restaurants. Near the same place there is the famous "Cemitério das Âncoras" (Anchor Cemetery), the hallmark of this beach.



Barril - HR

The official naturist zone

This is part of the Ria Formosa Natural Park and it is located 1500 metres from the last beach concession, next to the Barril train terminus and in the direction of the "Praia do Homem Nu".



Homem Nu - HR





Municipal Museum - LC

TRADITIONAL CRAFTS

The persistence of techniques handed down from generation to generation is a sign of the vitality of popular culture. The collars worn by mules, which are used in the hills to till the fields and pull painted carts, are still decorated by the saddlemakers of Tavira and Cachopo with brightly coloured woollen threads. The women of Cachopo dye wool and cotton threads with dyes extracted from plants and weave them into colourful blankets on wooden looms. Cachopo also produces knitted garments decorated with embroidery inspired by the wild flowers found in the fields. In Tavira there are blacksmiths who produce artistic wrought ironwork and there is a strong tradition of lace making among the female population. Conceição is home to potters, who make "covos" - earthenware traps used in fishing - and other useful vessels as well as producing hand-made ceramic tiles.

GOOD FOOD AND FINE WINE

Fresh fish, grilled on an open fire, is an obvious choice in Tavira and the fishing villages of the coast. So are lobster, shrimp, clams and other types of shellfish harvested from the sea or the Ria Formosa.

Anyone who enjoys sampling regional cooking should try the tasty local "conquilhas" soup, made with a kind of clam; sea food "açorda", a kind of thick bread soup made with razor clams, cockles, prawns and clams; tuna in a tomato and onion sauce; bean stew with razor clams; or the distinctive clams with "xerém" which is made from maize flour.

Santa Luzia is renowned for its octopus risotto. Equally highly reputed is the recipe for baked lamb from the "serra", seasoned with fragrant bay leaves.

The range of sweets on offer is vast, from the Tavira "folhado" to "Dons Rodrigues", "cariços" and meringues, all baked to traditional recipes.

The red wines of Tavira taste of the hot sun that ripens the grapes and makes them rich in sugar.



Typical Tavira roofs - VC

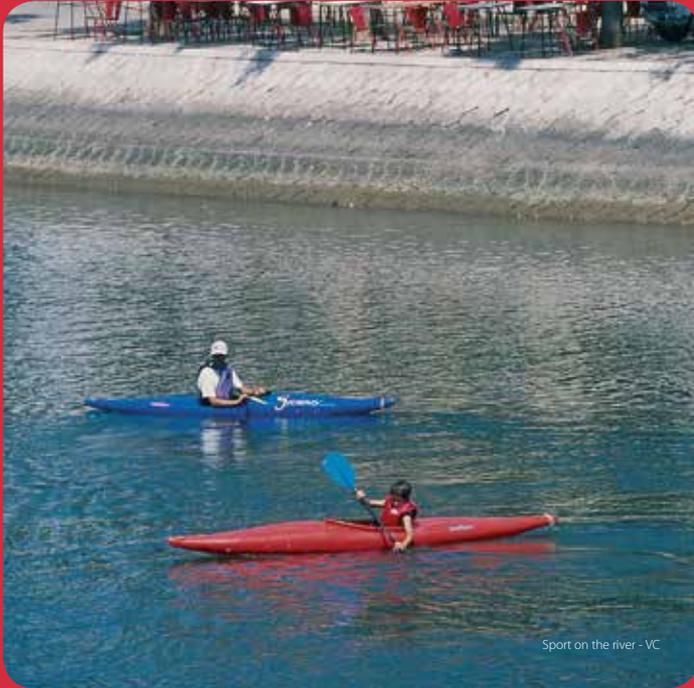


Octopus from Santa Luzia - LC



Golf course - TA

tavira



Sport on the river - VC



Roman bridge - LC

Data sheet

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