

ALENTEJO



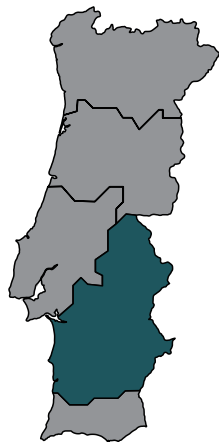
The word "Alentejo" literally means "beyond the Tejo" and refers to the land on the other side of the river (from the point of view of those travelling down from the north). It is the largest region in Portugal and the least densely populated. A predominantly agricultural district, it has huge areas of dry, arable land where cereals ripen in the sun. There are also some medium-sized cities, such as Portalegre, Beja and Évora.

In general the area consists of vast, gently undulating and geologically old plains, relieved by the occasional house or ruin standing on top of a hill and sparse vegetation in the form of cork oak or olive plantations, in a landscape that resembles a savannah. The main produce from the Alentejo plantations is cork and olives.

It is usually very hot in summer. There are no major rivers, apart from the Sado, which has its source in the Algarve and reaches the sea at Setúbal in a very beautiful estuary, and the Guadiana, which flows along the Spanish border and across part of this region. The largest dam in mainland Europe has been built on a stretch of this river that runs through the heart of the Alentejo.

In the east, the region borders on Spain, and there is almost no difference between its landscape and that of Spanish Estremadura. In the south, it extends as far as the Algarve, and in the north, to the Ribatejo. The west consists of a lengthy and much cooler coastline, with some of the most beautiful scenery and beaches in Europe, lined with cliffs and endless sands.

It is also the best region for observing the night skies. Countless constellations can be seen in the heavens and you do not have to wait long to catch sight of a meteor with its tail blazing through the sky. In Portugal, it is the custom to make a wish when you see a falling star.



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1 - Through the narrow streets of Évora.

2 - Zambujeira do Mar beach.

3 - Mértola and its castle.

Photo by José Manuel.

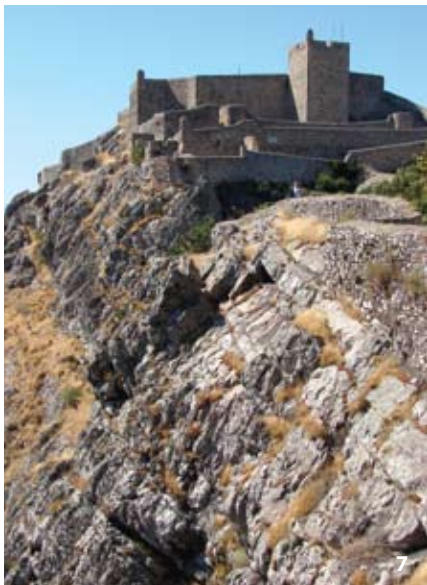
4 - Roman Temple, Évora.



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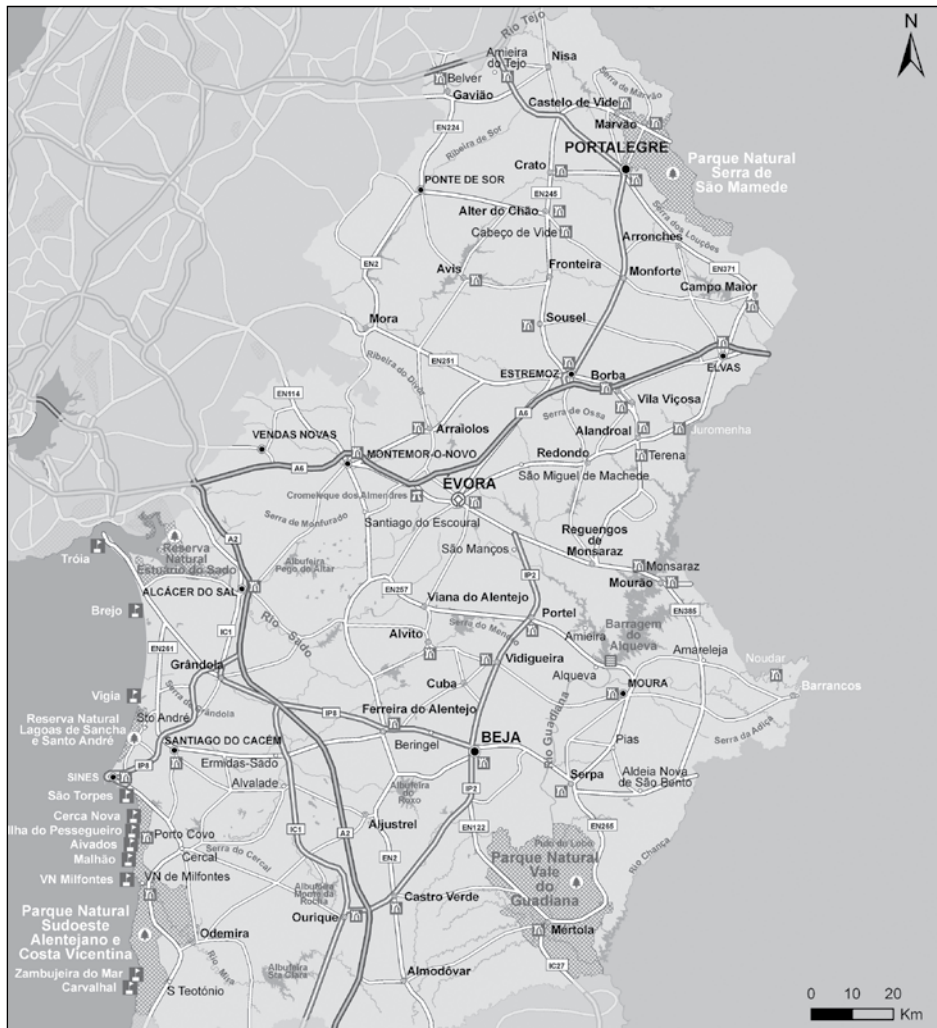
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- 5 - Olives from the Alentejo.
- 6 - Pile of cork oak bark.
- 7 - Marvão Castle.
- 8 - The plains of Alentejo.
- 9 - Wine and cheese from Alentejo.
- 10 - Flying in a balloon over Alqueva dam.
Photo by John Copland.
- 11 - View from Monsaraz village.
Photo by José Manuel.
- 12 - Évora University.
- 12 - Door in the Jewish quarter of Castelo de Vide.
Photo by José Manuel.

ALENTEJO



ALTER DO CHÃO

The origins of Alter do Chão date back to Roman times, when the town was called Abelterium. Nowadays the name is closely associated with the Coudelaria de Alter stud farm where Lusitanian horses are bred.

WHAT TO SEE

Alter do Chão Castle. Built in 1359 by order of the king, Pedro I, the castle has five towers, a Gothic doorway and a keep standing 44 m high. It is situated in the centre of the town.

Coudelaria Alter Real (Alter Real stud farm). Founded by King João V in order to breed horses for the royal stables, the Alter Real stud farm is nowadays an important centre for the development of the Lusitanian breed. It contains a famous research centre which includes a Molecular Genetics Laboratory, a Breeding and Obstetrics Unit and a Training and Testing Unit. The University of Évora contributes towards research and development at this important centre through its Hospital Hípiátrico.

WHAT TO DO

Guided tours of the stud farm. ☎ 245 610 060/074. Tapada do Arneiro. The guided tours, which last 1h 30m, begin at the Reception and Interpretative Centre with a brief explanation of the activities that take place at the Alter Real stud farm. This is followed by a visit to the Breeding Unit, Falconry Unit, João VI terrace, Coach House and Exhibition Gallery 🕒 Weekdays: 10 am, 11.30 am, 2 pm, 3.30 pm; Saturdays and Sundays: 11 am and 3 pm. Closed on Mondays. 👤 Young people aged 12-18: €1.20; adults: €3.80; senior citizens: €2.50.

Falconry – Flying display. 🕒 Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays (included in visit to the stud farm).

Horse riding in ring. ☎ 245 610 074/60. 🕒 Weekends and public holidays: 2.30 pm – 5.30 pm. Must be booked in advance. 🕒 1h €25.

Carriage rides in the stud farm. ☎ 245 610 074/60. 🕒 Weekends and public holidays: 2.30 pm – 5.30 pm. Must be booked in advance. 🕒 30 min €25.

WHERE TO EAT

🍷 **Páteo Real.** ☎ 245 612 301. Avenida Doutor João Pestana, 37. 🕒 Closed on Tuesdays. Located in the historic centre of the town, this is a quiet and friendly restaurant, specialising in Alentejo cuisine.

🍷 **Crinas.** ☎ 245 613 044. Ferragial da Quinta, Alter do Chão. 🕒 Closed for lunch on Fridays. Visitors always love the Alentejo dishes. You can go horse riding or go for a carriage ride before or after your meal.

🍷 **Restaurante do Hotel Rural da Lameira.** ☎ 245 697 495. Herdade da Lameira, Cunheira, Alter do Chão. Sophisticated service; offers Alentejo and international cuisine. The specialities are medallions with honey and coriander and chapiado de novilho (a beef dish).

TOURIST OFFICE

☎ 245 610 004. Palácio do Álamo, Largo Barreto Caldeira. 🕒 10 am – 12.30 pm and 2 pm – 6.30 pm.

ARRAIOLOS

Since time immemorial skilful hands have stitched the famous Arraiolos rugs that have made this area of the Alentejo famous. However, there are other interesting things in this town that are also worth exploring.

WHAT TO SEE

Castle. Standing tall above the houses, this fortress dates back to the reign of King Dinis. It has a Manueline clock tower and two gateways.

WHERE TO EAT

🍷 **A Arca de Noé.** ☎ 266 499 427. Rua Santo Condestável, 25. 🕒 Closed on Tuesdays. Simple, friendly atmosphere, serves good food, specialising in Alentejo dishes.

🍷 **A Moagem.** ☎ 266 499 646. Rua da Fábrica 2, Arraiolos. 🕒 Closed for dinner on Sundays. This restaurant is located on the site of an old mill and specialises in traditional Alentejo cuisine. The wine list features regional wines.

🍷 **O Alpendre.** ☎ 266 419 024. Bairro Serpa Pinto, 22. 🕒 Closed on Mondays. Traditional Alentejo décor, friendly service and welcoming atmosphere; offers good regional cuisine. Specialities include pork and lamb dishes.

WHAT/WHERE TO BUY

Arraiolos rugs. These rugs are stitched in wool on a canvas of jute, cotton or linen. The stitch nowadays known as the Arraiolos stitch was also known in some countries as the oblique cross stitch, short cross stitch, long arm cross stitch or Slav stitch. The rugs have been made since ancient times by generations of needlewomen. It is believed that this art originated with the expulsion of Moorish families from the Moorish Quarter in Lisbon on the orders of King Manuel I. Having settled in the region under the guise of newly-converted Christians, the families began to produce hand-

stitched items that eventually led to the creation of the famous rugs.

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

June. O Tapete está na Rua ("Rugs in the Streets"). At the beginning of June, Arraiolos rugs are taken from inside the houses and hung from the balconies and windows of this Alentejo town. This display is the pretext for a cultural event that includes various exhibitions and entertainments.

TOURIST OFFICE

☎ 266 490 254. Praça Lima e Brito. 🕒 Weekdays: 9 am - 12.30 pm and 2 pm - 6 pm. Weekends: contact the staff at Igreja da Misericórdia.

BARRAGEM DE ALQUEVA

The largest dam in Portugal and the largest artificial lake in Europe was built on the River Guadiana, near the border with Spain. After it had been built it introduced different characteristics into the traditionally dry and arid Alentejo landscape and nowadays many of the nearby villages lie on the banks of this tranquil lake. Designed to create an irrigation zone for the Alentejo, the enormous 250 km² lake is now also an important tourist area.

WHAT TO DO

Boat trips on the dam. ☎ 266 734 448. Amieira. 🌐 www.gescruzeiros.com. 🕒 Advisable to book in advance; check the weekday and weekend timetables. 💰 Prices from €9 for the small boats and €15 for the large boat. The company Gescruzeiros organises boat trips on the dam from the Monsaraz and Amieira Marina quays. Three different sized boats are available (seating a maximum of 25 or 120 people), offering different routes.

Hire a house boat. ☎ 266 734 448. 🌐 www.amieiramarina.com. 🧑‍👤 2 to 12 people; € 631 for two nights on the smallest boat. For even more fun with family and friends, there is nothing to beat hiring a house boat, which enables you to explore the calm waters of the dam independently and in comfort. You can sleep overnight on these boats, cook meals and enjoy a few days in the company of your family and friends

WHERE TO EAT

There is a lively restaurant in Amieira that does full justice to traditional Alentejo cuisine. Especially

worth a visit for the esplanade overlooking a stretch of the dam.

TOURIST OFFICE

Next to the Alqueva Dam, in Mira Lagos. 🕒 Winter: 10 am - 6 pm; Summer: 10 am - 8 pm.

BEJA

Beja, the former Pax Julia, is the capital of the Lower Alentejo district, a region of golden plains and gentle hills in the heart of the Alentejo, with its vast flatlands and endless horizons.

WHAT TO SEE

Castle. From the imposing castle keep, which stands 40 m high, you can enjoy a view of the vast Alentejo landscape and the surrounding plains and meadows.

Sé Catedral (Cathedral). Inside this Mannerist monument you can admire the carved gilt altarpiece in the chancel, the polychrome altars of the side chapels and a beautiful 18th. century decorative tile panel in the Nossa Senhora da Conceição chapel.

Convento de Nossa Senhora da Conceição (Nossa Senhora da Conceição convent). ☎ 9.30 am - 12.30 pm and 2 pm - 5.15 pm. Closed on Mondays and public holidays. This convent is closely linked to the story of Sister Mariana Alcoforado, who is buried there. The original nucleus includes the church, decorated in 17th. and 18th. century carved gilt work, the cloister, which has four galleries, and the Chapter House, which is panelled with Arab-Hispanic tiles decorated with geometric and plant motifs.

THE FORBIDDEN LOVE LETTERS

In the Convent of Nossa Senhora da Conceição a symbolic window, the Janela de Mértola, bears witness to the great love suffered by Mariana Alcoforado, a nun in the Order of St. Clare. It was from this window that she often saw the French officer Noel Bouton, Count of Chamilly, passing by during the time he spent in Beja with his troops in 1666 supporting the Portuguese during the Wars of the Restoration. Her unrequited love inspired five love letters that were published in France in 1669 as "*Lettres Portugaises*".

WHERE TO EAT

🍷 **Alentejano.** ☎ 284 323 849. Largo dos Duques de Beja 6. 🕒 Closed on Fridays. One of the oldest restaurants in the city, which has won an award for its Açorda à Alentejana com Todos (Alentejo bread stew).

🍷🍷 **Dom Dinis.** ☎ 284 325 937. Rua Dom Dinis, 11. 🕒 Closed on Wednesdays. Restaurant with a rustic atmosphere specialising in grills, the favourites being kebabs and veal cutlets.

🍷🍷🍷 **Os Infantes.** ☎ 284 322 789. Rua dos Infantes, 14. Good atmosphere and attractive décor. Specialities include Borrego (lamb) and Lebre (hare) dishes.

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

April. Ovibeja. Important Alentejo agricultural fair. For more than a week, the Lower Alentejo district is enlivened by sheep-breeding contests, equestrian events, sports competitions and shows held in various enclosures in the municipality.

TOURIST OFFICE

☎ 284 311 913. R. Capitão João Francisco de Sousa, 25. 🕒 10 am - 1 pm and 2 pm - 6 pm.

CASTELO DE VIDE

As its name suggests, this was the site of a castle first before it became a settlement. It has small and medium-sized houses and many manor houses, chapels and churches. Castelo de Vide was always in the front line during the various wars with Castille and later, at the time of the French Invasions, and has been razed several times.

WHAT TO SEE

Castle. The castle stands on the northern side of the town, overlooking the Alentejo plains. It was rebuilt during the reign of King Dinis (14 th. century) and significantly renovated in the reign of King João V (18 th. century). It has an irregular pentagonal shape and one of its most interesting features is the main room of the polygonal keep, whose roof is supported by plain ogival arches rising straight from the floor, giving it a remarkable sense of plastic strength. In the oldest part of the town inside the city walls, which was the old medieval town area, there are many narrow, picturesque streets lined with houses that have striking stone doorways.

Judaria (Jewish Quarter). In medieval times cultural segregation was practiced in Portugal and so it was not unusual to find Jewish neighbourhoods (and neighbourhoods of Moors who had remained in Portugal). These were often relegated to the less desirable or more makeshift areas, obliging the inhabitants to find remarkable, spontaneous urban solutions. Here the white houses were grouped together beside the city walls, then spread slowly down the slopes in an ingeniously organic arrangement. It is well worth exploring the lanes or climbing up or down the steps to this neighbourhood.

Igreja de Nossa Senhora da Devesa (Nossa Senhora da Devesa church). This 18th. century building has a lavish facade flanked by two bell towers. The doorway has fluted Corinthian columns supporting a pediment in two sections. The interior has only one nave with a stone high altar.

Praça D. Pedro V (D. Pedro V square). This pleasant, wide and well-proportioned area is lined with mansions, the Town Hall and the imposing Santa Maria church, in addition to restaurants and shops, and has a statue of King Pedro in the centre.

Town Hall. A rectangular 17th. century building whose side façades have wrought iron balconies. The upper floor is reached by a splendid and skilfully designed stairway and the overall outlines of this sturdy building are typically Baroque.

Decorative tiles at the railway station. Alentejo railway stations can make you feel as if you are miles away from the rest of the world. The tracks evaporate into a haze on the horizon and there are only one or two trains a day. Of course, this will give you plenty of time to admire the fine tile panels at this particular station.

WHAT TO DO

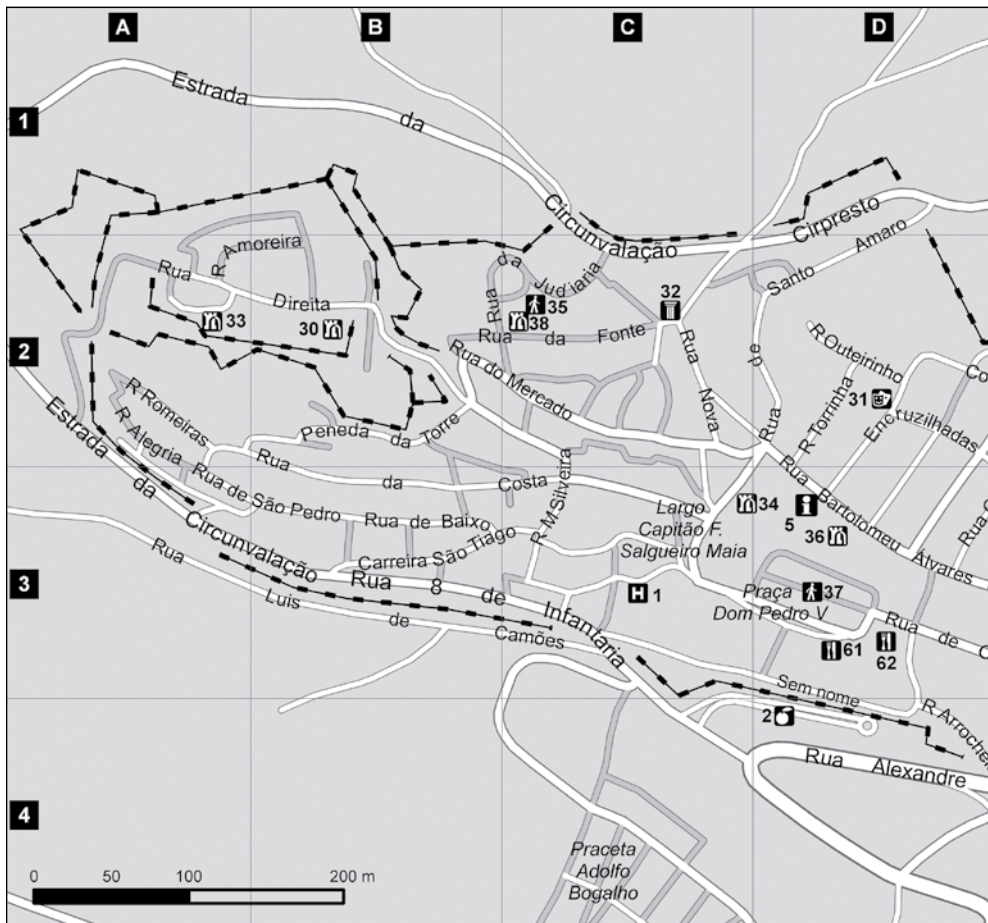
Walk to the Senhora da Penha chapel. Standing 704 m above sea level and 2 km from the town, the Nossa Senhora da Penha chapel is a very special place that offers a magnificent view of the white houses of Castelo de Vide. Built amongst sloping rocks, it dates from the end of the 16th. century. It has a domed roof and is decorated with multicoloured 17th. century tiles.

WHERE TO EAT

🍷 **O Alentejano.** ☎ 245 901 355. Largo Mártires da República. 🕒 Closed on Mondays. Small, friendly restaurant, decorated with photographs of the area and regional motifs.

🍷 **Restaurante D. Pedro V.** ☎ 245 901 236. Praça Dom Pedro V. 🕒 Closed on Mondays. Serves good regional dishes. Stylishly decorated, eighteenth century architecture.

CASTELO DE VIDE



INFORMATION

- 1 - Centro de Saúde de Castelo de Vide C3
- 2 - Friday Market D4
- 3 - Police Station E3
- 4 - Post Office E3
- 5 - Tourist Office D3

WHAT TO SEE/DO

- 30 - Castelo B2
- 31 - Centro Municipal da Cultura D2
- 32 - Fonte da Vila C2
- 33 - Igreja de Nossa Senhora da Alegria A2
- 34 - Igreja Matriz de Santa Maria da Devesa C3
- 35 - Judiaria C2
- 36 - Antigos Paços do Concelho D3

- 37 - Praça Dom Pedro V D3
- 38 - Sinagoga de Castelo de Vide C2

WHERE TO EAT

- 60 - Casa do Parque F3
- 61 - Dom Pedro V D3
- 62 - Marino's D2
- 63 - O Alentejano E3

☎ **Marino's.** ☎ 245 901 408. Praça Dom Pedro V. ⌚ Closed on Sundays. Italian restaurant that also serves regional dishes.

☎ **Casa do Parque.** ☎ 245 901 250. Av da Aramenha, 37. ⌚ Closed on Tuesdays. Generous starters and traditional Alentejo dishes such as Migas alentejanas com carne de alguidar (Alentejo stew in breadcrumbs), Perna de Borrego com sabor a hortelã (leg of lamb with mint), Arroz

de lebre (hare risotto) and Veado estufado com castanhas (venison with chestnut stuffing).

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Easter. In Castelo de Vide, Easter is one of the most important events and is particularly interesting due



in a way that is reminiscent of the Jewish Festival of the Great Pardon known as Yom Kippur. At the end of the Mass, the Thanksgiving Procession begins in the Parish Church and continues through the main streets, accompanied by a brass band and the chimes of the church bells. Rattles and bells also accompany the ceremony and parade. The celebrations continue until Easter Sunday. Easter Monday is a local holiday in Castelo de Vide, when the Festival of Nossa Senhora da Luz takes place.

TOURIST OFFICE

☎ 245 901 361. R. Bartolomeu da Santa. ⌚ Winter: 9 am - 12.30 pm and 2 pm - 5.30 pm; Summer: 9 am - 7 pm.

ESTREMOZ

Founded in 1258 by King Afonso III and also the residence of King Dinis for lengthy periods of time. Various political assemblies met here in the Middle Ages, including the courts of King João I.

WHAT TO SEE

Castle and fortifications. A superb example of a 12th-century medieval fortress, with an imposing keep. The fortifications date from the Restoration and the wars with Castille in the 17th. century and are designed in the typical style of the period to provide low, broad walls with bulwarks and buttresses for artillery. Climb up to the walled area of the castle and relax, enjoying the view of the infinite Alentejo horizon.

Largo do Rossio (Rossiosquare). A spacious, tree-lined area flanked by houses and monuments that overlook the peaceful rectangular Alentejo terrace. The historic and social centre of the city.

Convento de S. Francisco (S. Francisco convent). Founded in the 13th. century; includes a Gothic church with three naves.

Igreja de Santa Maria (Santa Maria church). The interior of this Renaissance building has three naves with Ionic columns. It also contains Mannerist and Baroque altarpieces and a 16th. century painting.

Professor Joaquim Vermelho Municipal Museum. ☎ 268 333 608. Largo D. Dinis. ⌚ 9 am - 12.30 pm and 2 pm - 5.30 pm. Closed on Mondays. This museum houses an interesting collection of folk-art clay figurines, expressions of the naive and sacred-profaner popular imagination. It is situated next to the Pousada (Inn), inside the castle.

to the way in which Jewish rituals have merged with Catholic celebrations. On Good Friday there is a Mass for the Last Supper with a Solemn Offering of Wine, Wax and Wheat to be used in the celebration of Holy Masses during the year. Good Friday is the day when the Passion of Christ is celebrated, followed the next morning on Easter Saturday by the customary Blessing of the Lambs, when shepherds gather in the town centre with their flocks for them to be blessed, then sold. The animals which have been bought are slaughtered on the same day, according to Jewish practices. At night an interesting ritual also takes place as people leave the church: individuals approach each other and secretly ask for their pardon

