

you can never get enough of a good thing...

# Golden corner of Europe an annual hit



▼ Meander around historic old towns.



It provides plush standalone apartments for families, as well as cheaper hotel rooms in the main building.

My youngsters can't get enough of the massive kids club, while we also make use of their private beach and daddy sneaks in a round of golf.

For the second half of our week we head east of Faro, which is less touristy and ideal for those looking for somewhere quieter, or repeat visitors in search of

something a little different. Just a few miles east of Faro we relax in Olhao. It's a working fishing town with a glorious market designed by a certain Gustave Eiffel. Yes, that Gustave Eiffel!

We feast on boat-fresh, good value seafood (the girls love choosing their own fish) and take a boat trip from the waterfront out into the massive Rio Formosa National Park.

Over the next few days we follow the sinewy national park all the way east to the Spanish border.

Its brackish waters and inlets are home to a colourful array of wildlife and a string of eye-catching starched white beaches.

Our favourite is Praia do Barril, which you reach on a cute wee train.

There are no hotels or roads on this sand island, just mile upon mile of unspoilt beach.

We also explore the east's necklace of sleepy historic towns and villages.

Our favourite is Tavira, a whitewashed, cobbled gem sprinkled with churches.

The Gilao River charmingly cuts right through the town.

We find a great mix of facilities for tourists and cafes and restaurants that keep the locals happy too.

I normally opt for a villa with a pool for exploring the Algarve's east.

For the last three years we have gone with Vintage Travel, a tried and trusted UK company with a great selection.

We choose Casa Idalina (from just £475 per week), which has a large heated pool and sleeps up to eight just 20 minutes drive from Faro airport.

A highlight is swimming under the stars on our last night.

Whether you head west or east when you arrive in the Algarve there is a holiday experience in this warm corner of Europe for everyone.

Whatever you do you will find the same great value, superb food and drink and world-class beaches of a blissful corner of Europe that draws my well-travelled family south every year.

# 10

## hidden gems to track down



### SAGARES

Worth the trip west to a historic town where Portuguese explorers set sail on epic journeys.

### BURGAU

Sleepy wee village with plenty of character. Bright fishing boats are still hauled up on the wide beach.

### SILVES

Head inland to the old capital of the Algarve, ideally on a boat ride upriver from Portimao. Explore the old streets and enjoy sweeping views of the rolling countryside.

### CACELA VELHA

Even some Portuguese visitors have never heard of this relaxed, remote little beach hideaway. Ramble around the pretty old town.

### ALCOUTIM

You won't hear many foreign voices, bar visitors from Spain just across the river. The whitewashed buildings shine brightly in the Algarve sun – perfect for your holiday snaps – and there's a sprinkling of cafes.

### MONCHIQUE

An old spa resort high in the mountains. Enjoy the cooler climes, the views back towards the coast, and the local firewater, Medronho.

### VILA REAL DE SANTO ANTONIO

A scenic train route leads to this historic border town, which is literally the end of the line. Spaniards come here to pick up excellent quality fabrics.

### SANTA LUZIA

This becalmed wee waterfront village is famous for its octopus fishermen. It's the best place in Portugal for fresh octopus in the local restaurants.

### SALEMA

If you like your resorts low-key, then this western Algarve charmer is the place for you. Development is on a much smaller scale than in the likes of Vilamoura or Albufeira.

### LOULE

This inland town is famous for its massive gypsy fleamarket on Saturdays and its regular markets, which are housed in and around the striking historic market building.

## FACT BOX

EasyJet ([easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com)) fly from Glasgow to Faro with returns from £68.98. Lonely Planet's Portugal guide includes a good section on the Algarve. For tourist info, try [visitalgarve.pt](http://visitalgarve.pt) Vintage Travel ([vintagetravel.co.uk](http://vintagetravel.co.uk)) Pine Cliffs ([pinecliffshotel.com](http://pinecliffshotel.com))