

BOLD

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REGAL IN SINTRA



SKIP THE COOKIE-CUTTER ITINERARIES. HERE, TWO DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO TWO OF PORTUGAL'S MOST FAMOUS REGIONS

BY RUTH J. KATZ

TIVOLI PALÁCIO DE SETEAIS

Arguably, the most popular day-trip destination from Lisbon, the town of Sintra represents one of Europe's most splendid examples of whimsical and colourful Romantic architecture. Situated within the bucolic Parque de Sintra-Cascais, the landscape offers dense, forested mountains that give way to the rugged coastline; its hills are navigated by car along slender, coiled (sometimes heart-in-your-throat) roadways.

A relatively small town, Sintra has more than its share of historic sites, monuments and palaces—from picture-perfect, opulent mansions to castles in near ruins. Not to mention, there is outstanding fine dining (think wonderfully fresh seafood) and shopping; while in the liquor emporia, look for white port, not found too often on this side of the Atlantic, and the even more rare—and new-to-the-marketplace—the splendidly rich rosé port.

One palace not only worth visiting (the lush grounds are open to the public), but also worth staying in, is the Palácio de Seteais, a splendid estate that has been painstakingly restored to its former magnificence and stateliness. In fact, there is so much history to this palace that the Minor Hotel Group, the parent company of this Tivoli hotel, has a historian available to share the story and secrets of the palace. The opulent and ornate public spaces are dotted with frescoes, tapestries, sumptuous patterned carpets, prized antique furnishings and even a treasured piano, built more than 100 years ago by the renowned German master, Steingraeber & Söhne. It was constructed with gilt and inlays and owns pride of place in one of the imposing drawing rooms.

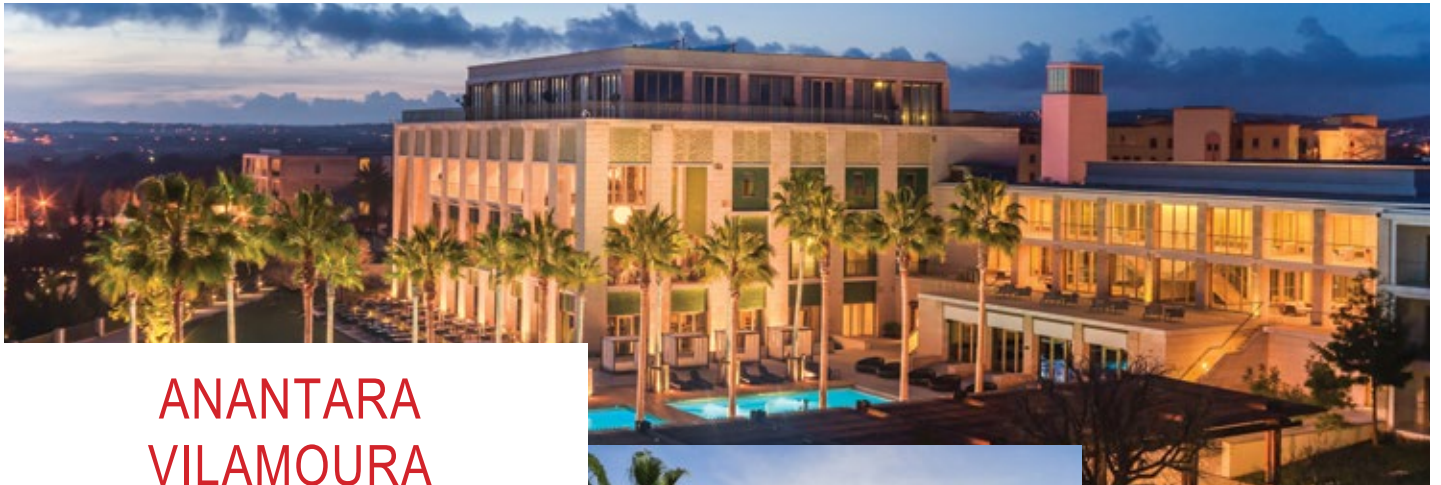
You can feel like an 18th-century monarch yourself, by scheduling one of the hotel's Dining by Design meals in a grand galleria, where you will be waited on by period-costumed service staff, as a musician plies a harp. (There is even harp music at breakfast!)

But there are two other places that are musts. Palácio da Pena is an example of Romantic architecture unrivaled in these environs; it looks as if Disney had decided to construct a few Magic Castles and cobble them together, painting them terra cotta, mustard and blush. Completed in the mid-19th century, the palace boasts a rich history and features eclectic suites and rooms, including highly Moorish décor and a surprisingly advanced cooking chamber.

The other must-see is the Gothic-style National Palace, the best-preserved medieval Royal Palace in Portugal. It has been inhabited nearly continuously from the early 15th century to the late 19th century. tivolihotels.com



RUGGED IN THE ALGARVE



ANANTARA VILAMOURA

It's no wonder the Algarve is referred to as the Portuguese Riviera. With inviting, sandy beaches, majestic cliffs, arid, desert-like interior terrain, centuries of history, challenging golf courses and hearty and hearty cuisine (bountiful seafood reigns), the local population of nearly half a million grows to 1.5 million in season.

Settle in at the Anantara Vilamoura Hotel, a lush, sprawling, modern complex, awash with gorgeous tropical fauna and flora, adjacent to the verdant Arnold Palmer-designed Dom Pedro golf course, where the Portuguese Open is staged. There is something for everyone: hot-air balloon rides that sail over orange groves and fields of cork trees (more plentiful here than just about anywhere in the world); tennis; biking; bird-watching; boating (this is home to Portugal's largest marina and also of the Ria Formosa, snaking its way to the sea); wine-tastings, where you can savour some of Portugal's unique grapes; and the hotel's signature Spice Spoons Cooking Classes. For the classes, your chef-guide will start out at the renowned Mercado Loulé, established more than 100 years ago, to purchase supplies that include fish, spices, oils, chocolates, marzipan, herbed salts and mouth-watering baked goods.

Take a Jeep expedition into the arid Algarve interior, where the dusty terrain is punctuated with fig, carob, kumquat, banana and lemon trees. Explore the wetlands of the Ria Formosa Natural Park via boat, and find fascinating and unique ecosystems among the nearby islets, where local fishermen harvest oysters, clams, shrimp, barnacles and fish. There are also three lighthouses in the area and you'll likely spot myriads of exotic island creatures as they clamber around, on the way to the "forgotten" village island of Hangares (named for the airplane hangars that once serviced troops of the former residents, Portuguese Naval Aviation teams).

Back at the hotel, satiate yourself on fresh seafood at Ria Restaurant, a traditional marisqueira, with its mountains of freshly-caught offerings. The hotel's fine dining restaurant, Emo, atop the building, features not only majestic views, but also delicious, contemporary fare with a distinctly Portuguese flavour. The hotel's award-winning spa is a veritable oasis, offering centuries-old Mediterranean therapies, timeless Turkish hammam rituals and exotic Asian treatments. vilamoura.anantara.com

