

Algarve: the best things to do (beaches, caves, villages, excursions)



## Algarve: the best things to do (beaches, caves, villages, excursions)

By Floriane

Are you planning a holiday in southern Portugal and wondering **what to do in the Algarve**? Between wild lagoons, fishing villages, golden cliffs and sea caves, we've found the region **ultra varied** (and perfect for a road trip).

Here we share with you **our favorite activities**, those we've tested and with which agencies (or that we really recommend), and a few more ideas to complete your itinerary.

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## Explore the coast by boat: caves, cliffs and dolphins

Of course, **the No. 1 activity in the Algarve** is a **boat trip** to discover **caves, cliffs and sometimes even dolphins**.

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□ We were **pleasantly surprised** by the **quality of the excursions** on offer and above all by the **low prices**, which really allow you to indulge yourself without blowing the budget, we were able to take advantage of this to try out several.

**Just below, we share with you our favorite outings** (the ones we recommend with our eyes closed).

□ It's also a great activity to do with the whole family, as the kids are sure to love it!

### **Benagil: emblematic cave (and how to see it “without the hassle”)**

The **Benagil cave** is a must: arches, light falling from the “well”, turquoise water... it's like a postcard.

△ Important: access **may be highly restricted**, and **swimming is strongly discouraged** (and may be prohibited/sanctioned depending on current regulations and sea conditions).

If you had to book **just one sea outing**, this would be it.

Two recommended ways:

- **By boat:** the easiest way, small cruise boats depart from the main Algarve villages:
  - □ **The most complete outing:** [Book a 2.5-hour boat trip to see dolphins and geological formations](#) from Albufeira (28 km from Benagil) - *approx. €30*
  - **Fastest:** [Ticket to visit the Benagil cave and other emblematic caves from Armação de Pêra](#) (a village a few kilometers away) - *approx. €30*
- **in a supervised kayak/SUP** if conditions are right (more immersive experience), as we were able to get as close as possible and land on the beach inside the cave.

□ We recommend this 1-hour kayak trip, supervised in French by [Kayak Secret Algarve](#), departing from Benagil. The organization is top-notch and the price is around €25. In addition to the famous cave, you'll also explore other, much less-frequented cavities, which makes the experience all the more enjoyable.

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In a nutshell:

- Departure directly from the village of Benagil
- Small group (10 people maximum)
- English-speaking guide

Remember to book in advance, especially during school vacations.

[□ Book a kayak excursion to the Benagil cave \(led by an English-speaking guide\)](#)

□ If the slot is available, we **highly recommend the 8am one**. Yes, it stings a bit during the vacations... but you enjoy the grotto in an almost unreal calm, far from the crowds. By 10 a.m., the canoes and boats are pouring in: this is **one of the Algarve's most visited sites**.

When you book via [GetYourGuide](#), you benefit from free cancellation up to 24 hours before departure, so you can adapt to the weather once you're there.

[Read our complete guide to planning your boat trip to Benagil](#)

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## **Ponta da Piedade rock formation**

Once again, the best way to discover the Ponta da Piedade caves is clearly from the

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sea. The experience is totally different from the view from the heights... and far more impressive.

♥ If you'd like to take a second boat trip during your stay, we recommend the one offered by [Happy Time](#).

□ This is an outing on a small motorboat departing from Lagos, with a French-speaking guide. During the trip, the boat meandered between the rocks, passing under some natural arches to get as close as possible to the caves. The guide explained how the cliffs were formed, and showed us some surprising rock shapes (with a bit of imagination, we managed to find the shapes mentioned), elephants, cathedrals...

In a nutshell:

- Departure directly from Lagos
- Small group (10 people maximum)
- English-speaking guide

Remember to book in advance, especially during school vacations: places go fast, especially in summer.

□ [Info and booking for this 1.5-hour excursion departing from Lagos](#)  
(approx. €20)

Read our guide: [How to visit the Ponta da Piedade cliffs](#), which are also accessible via a short hike from the [fishing village of Lagos](#).

## Hiking on the most beautiful cliffs

### The 7 Suspended Valleys hike (Lagoa/Carvoeiro sector)

If you love cliffs and views, this **is the hike for** you. The trail skirts the coast with incredible panoramas, and you pass by the Benagil cave (go early or late in the day to avoid the crowds and heat).

**Key facts :**

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- ► **Starting point** : The official starting point is **Praia da Marinha** (next to the village of Benagil), one of Portugal's most beautiful beaches. Free parking available above the beach (can fill up quickly in summer).
- □ **End point**: The trail ends at **Praia de Vale Centeanes**, near Carvoeiro. You can then walk to the center of Carvoeiro (approx. 2 km more) or arrange a taxi/Uber back to the starting point.
- □ Distance Approx. **5.7 km one way**. Count **11 to 12 km round trip** if you return to the starting point.
- □ Duration: 2h30 to 3h one way (with photo breaks) - 4h to 5h round trip

For our part, with our daughter not yet 2 years old at the time, we opted for a shorter version. We only did a short section starting from **Praia da Marinha** (obviously via the Benagil cave) of **4 km return**.

Even over a short distance, the **panoramas are superb**: golden cliffs, wild coves, natural arches... You don't have to do the whole 12 km to take in the sights. Even this short stretch offers some of the trail's finest views, especially when travelling with the family.

[Link to the full route on All Trails](#)

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## **Ponta da Piedade on foot along the coastal path from the village of Lagos**

Another must-do hike is to the Ponta da Piedade formations, on foot from downtown Lagos. Parking is limited near the site, especially in summer, so we preferred to avoid the stress of parking.

We set off from the historic center and join the coastal path that begins in the vicinity of **Forte da Ponta da Bandeira**, on the seafront. Allow around **30 minutes of leisurely walking** to reach the first rock formations.

From the very first meters, the path skirts the cliffs, offering magnificent views of the coves below and the rocks sculpted by erosion. The light changes constantly, with the Atlantic hitting the ochre cliffs, and we often stop to admire the scenery. For the return journey, you can go back inside the village (the path is less pleasant but shorter).

[Link to itinerary on the All trails website](#)

## Enjoy the Algarve's finest sandy beaches

Of course, lounging on a beach is another activity to be enjoyed in the Algarve. Here are some of our favorite beaches and coves:

*Praia = beach in French*

- **Praia d'Armona** on the island of Armona in Olhao, fine sand and transparent water, less touristy beach located in the Ria Formosa nature reserve.
- **Praia da Falésia** : about 20 minutes away by car, this 6km-long beach is famous for its **red cliffs** and huge beach.
- **Praia dos Estudantes** in Lagos: our favorite, a small **beach tucked away** between cliffs, famous for its **rocky bridge** linking two walls and giving the place a lot of charm. Access is only possible **at low tide**, as you have to pass through a small tunnel under the cliff, which is filled with water at high tide.
- **Praia dos Salgados** and **Praia Grande de Pêra** in [Armação de Pera](#). Both beaches border the **Lagoa dos Salgados** nature reserve.
- **Praia dos Três Irmãos** in Alvor, with its rock formations and crystal-clear waters typical of the Algarve.

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It's also worth noting that the water remains very cool, even in midsummer. It's clearly colder than on our French coasts, and yet we live on [the Ile d'Oléron](#), so we're used to swimming in the Atlantic.

In the Algarve, the cold sea breeze makes itself felt. On the sand, in the sun, it's easy to get hot... but once you're in the water, the difference is immediate!

□ We really recommend packing a **short wetsuit**, especially if you're traveling with children. It allows you to enjoy the clear, translucent waters without shivering after five minutes. For the little ones, it's almost essential if you want to prolong the swim a little and avoid them coming out freezing. We hope you'll read our article before you leave + a few ideas for children's wetsuits we found at a garage sale.

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## **Discover the Ria Formosa nature reserve from Olhão**

The Ria Formosa nature reserve stretches for dozens of kilometers and the ecosystem is truly unique in the Algarve. It was the pleasant surprise of the trip, as this reserve in the west of the Algarve is a complete change from the rocky

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formations further east.

### **Lagoon cruise (Olhão / Faro)**

Once again, the ideal way to discover the reserve is by boat. It's the activity we 100% recommend if you're passing through Olhão:

We opted for a **small-group guided cruise departing from Olhão**, with the following program:

- navigation in the heart of the lagoon
- stops on several islands: Armona, Culatra and Farol
- explanations of local wildlife, traditional fishing and the life of the local people
- birdwatching (flamingos, egrets, herons...)

We recommend [Odyssey Traditional Boat Tours](#), ideal for a first discovery. The atmosphere is friendly, the explanations are clear, and you take your time to enjoy the experience without rushing.

Remember to book in advance: this is a very popular activity, especially in high season. Clearly, this is one of **the must-do activities [in Olhão](#)**.

☐ Book a 5-hour boat trip in the Ria Formosa Natural Park

[Read our complete guide to the Ria Formosa nature reserve](#)

## **Stroll through the villages: atmosphere, markets and white alleyways**

### **Olhão: the most authentic (in our opinion)**

Rough streets, cubic white houses, colored doors with azulejos... and above all **the markets** (ultra-fresh fish + fruit/vegetables in the two halls facing the sea).

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## **Alvor and Armação de Pera: for exploring natural areas**

Alvor and Armação de Pêra are perfect if you love wide open spaces.

In [Alvor](#), we love strolling on the wooden footbridges over the lagoon, in the heart of the **Ria de Alvor natural lagoon**. It's a peaceful spot, ideal for sunsets. The village center remains charming, with its narrow streets and traditional restaurants.

Armação de Pêra is famous for its long sandy beach. But head a little further west, and you'll discover magnificent coves lined with **golden cliffs**, much wilder + the **Lagoa dos Salgados** nature reserve.

## **Albufeira: for partying**

[Albufeira](#) is livelier, more of a "festive vacation", a little less suitable for families to sleep in, in our opinion:

- stroll through the old town
- sunset from the lookouts
- practical starting point for **Benagil + dolphin** outings at sea (great logistics)

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## Our 6 must-haves

1. Ponta da Piedade (Lagos): [□ See availability for this 1.5-hour excursion by small boat from Lagos.](#)
2. Benagil (boat or supervised kayak)
3. Rando des 7 Vallées Suspendues
4. Ria Formosa cruise: [□ Book a 3-hour boat trip in the Ria Formosa Natural Park](#)
5. An island by ferry (Armona / Culatra...)
6. A dolphin trip: [□ Book a 2.5-hour boat trip to see dolphins and geological formations](#) + *benagil from Albufeira.*

This guide is **completely independent**, based on our own experience. We visited the region by creating our own **itinerary** (after reading numerous sources) and selecting **our own activities**.

Feel free to leave us a **note** below to let us know if you are planning this trip, **ask** any questions or **share** on social networks ([our Instagram](#)) we will answer you with great pleasure!

Before you leave, **find all our articles to help you organize your trip:**

- [Where to sleep in the Algarve? our best addresses](#)

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- [Car rental in Faro, Algarve: our tips and advice](#)
- [Itinerary of our 10-day road trip in the Algarve](#)

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