

The Guardian



The best places to surf, stay and eat on Portugal's coast

Catch great waves, then kick back at a beach bar or restaurant before bedding down for the night - all tried and tested by Veerle Helsen, author of the book *Surf & Stay*

Veerle Helsen

Tue 31 Jul 2018 06.30 BST

Veerle Helsen spent six months touring the coasts of north-west Spain and Portugal in her campervan and with a surfboard. Her book *Surf & Stay* documents the trip in photos: the places to stay, eat at and visit, as well as the beaches. In this extract we've focused on the Portuguese coast, picking guesthouses, restaurants and cafes that capture the stylish but laid-back feel of the local surfing community.

. We've avoided Lisbon and much of the Alentejo, which we have already covered.

SOUTHERN ALGARVE **Stay: Casa Mãe, Lagos**



The main draw of Lagos may be its beaches but its pretty, historic centre means there's more to it than your average beach town, and when the summer crowds have gone, it's a great base for catching some out-of-season rays. Casa Mãe's rooms are spread over three buildings, a 19th-century estate house, three cabañas and - the most affordable option - a modern building. Rooms are decorated with the works of local designers: on the walls hang carpets by textile label Gur, which gives old weaving techniques a modern twist. The hotel aims to make the most of the area and local skills, laying on courses including cooking and ceramics, plus yoga sessions. It also organises surfing, SUP, bike rides and rock climbing. The hotel is open year-round, and the restaurant, open to non-guests, makes the most of oysters from the nearby Ria Formosa.

.Doubles from €95 B&B, casa-mae.com

Surf: Chicks on Waves surf school, Burgau



Chicks on Waves's One Life Lodge. Photograph: Veerle Helsen

Belgian-born Katrien Kegels organises women-only surf weeks called Chicks on Waves. Accommodation is at the beautifully furnished One Life Lodge (open to men and non-surfers too; doubles from €85 B&B) that looks over Praia do Burgau. Kegels thinks surfing is a female sport: "The waves, the fluid lines, the poetry of the sea. We dance on the water and we're out to have fun. Men want to prove themselves. Sometimes they break up the waves with their tricks, whereas women go with the flow of the sea."

.chicksonwaves.com

Eat O Lourenço, Salema

This is a simple but delicious seafood restaurant in the fishing village of Salema. Order the *prato do dia* (dish of the day) and tuck in for less than €7. There's no sea view but it's an unpretentious place where the swordfish steals the show. I was only going to make a pit stop but ended up staying for three days.

.[Rua 28 de Janeiro 11, +351 282 698 622, on Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/olourenco)

Drink The Garden, Lagos

At this fashionable jungle-themed rooftop bar in central Lagos, the food isn't memorable but the exotic atmosphere is pure holiday vibe.

. [Rua Lançarote de Freitas 48, Lagos, on Facebook](#)

ALENTEJO AND WESTERN ALGARVE

Stay: Aldeia da Pedralva



Around 10 years ago, the village of Pedralva was almost deserted: just nine people lived there. Since then, Lisbonite António Ferreira has brought it back to life after buying up a few houses to turn into his own holiday home. He fell in love with the area and ended up buying 30 ruins for renovation. There's intentionally no wifi but there is a great pizza restaurant. And the nine locals? They stuck around.

. [aldeiadapedralva.com](#)

Surf: Surf milfontes, Vila Nova de Milfontes



There aren't as many surf schools in Alentejo as in the Algarve, but the level is higher. The instructors at Surf milfontes have a passion for the sport and for the ocean, and on the website is a comprehensive guide to all the surf spots in the area.

. [surfmilfontes.com](#)

Eat: Restaurant Choupana, Praia do Farol, Vila Nova de Milfontes



Photograph: Karo Krassel

With a bit of imagination, you could say that this beach restaurant on stilts looks like the cabins that Le Corbusier built in the south of France. Tall windows look out on Praia do Farol, where rocks form hundreds of islands only visible at mid-tide.

. *On Facebook*

Drink: Sítio do Forno, Praia do Amado



Photograph: Veerle Helsen

No matter whether you drive, cycle or walk along the spectacular road from Praia da Bordeira to Amado, you're in for a treat. The coastline is panoramic, savage and wild, and the hiking trails almost take you into the sea. Once at the beach, you'll find a coffee truck that's been run by the same guy, Acildo, for 25 years. Or stop for a drink and a small serving of sardinhas at Sítio do Forno. The plastic chairs and parasols may not sound inviting but the view is priceless. This is the best-known and most popular campervan spot in the Algarve.

ERICEIRA AND PENICHE

Stay: Magic Quiver, Ericeira



Petrina and Mario have been running Magic Quiver, a surf shop in Ericeira, for several years. They also rent out surf shacks and beach cabins across the resort. The exotic interior of the shop reflects their former life in Kuala Lumpur, and the furniture, wooden lamps and macramé wall hangings are almost all the work of Petrina and local designers. Their lodge offers a rare service: you can hire or test boards by Portuguese and international shapers. This is only for advanced surfers, but looking at all those goodies in candy colours gets you dreaming.

. 15A Rua 5 de Outubro, doubles at the surf lodge from €56 a night, magicquiver.com

Stay: Olá Onda, Ericeira



Loosely translated, the name means hello wave! This B&B is operated by Dutch surfer couple Jasper and Darcie. Darcie's mother is Portuguese, so it was an easy choice when they were looking for somewhere to set up a guesthouse. They bought a traditional villa, added green shutters and spruced up the decor. Olá Onda is built on a hill of vines, from which you can take in the sights and sounds of the sea. Its website features an excellent guide to the area's surf spots.

. Doubles from €80 B&B, ola-onda-ericeira.com

Stay: Roots Ericeira Guesthouse & Ondina

Fred and Marta brought out the port on my first evening in their B&B, even though I arrived after midnight. The next night, they took me and some friends to Bar Zinho, where we danced to a local band until the early hours. This B&B is homely rather than fancy. Fred is a former Belgian snowboarding champion who fell in love with a Portuguese woman. She knows the village and the village knows her. In the summer of 2017 they opened a second guesthouse, Ondina. The name combines two loves: Dina (Marta's late mother) and onda (wave). Fred surfs as well - to spot him in the sea, just look out for a shock of white hair.

. Doubles from €46, rootsguesthouseericeira.com; dorm beds from €22, suite from €60, ondinaguesthouse.com

Surf: Oscar Schenk



Oscar Schenk gives a surf lesson. Photograph: Damian Davila

I was sitting on a bench in Ericeira when Oscar Schenk's dog came up to me with his tail wagging. A chat and three surf lessons later, I knew that Oscar was the best longboard coach in Ericeira, or anywhere else for that matter. His dog, Meneer Janssen, is a surfer too - and has his own profile on social media.

. *One-day lesson from €85pp, hotzonesurf.com*

Eat: Tasca da Boa Viagem, Ericeira



Your rarely see Portuguese meat in coastal restaurants, so the selection at Tasca da Boa Viagem is a treat. The menu even specifies the breeds, including the northern barossã and the mirandesa cattle, which were used long ago to pull fishing boats out of the water. Pay by the gram and choose the meat (or fish - they have that too) from the refrigerated display case. Then turn around to see the windows coloured blue by the sea in the background.

. *Rua Capitão João Lopes 4, tascadaboaviagem.com*

Drink: Sol é Vida, Atouguia da Baleia, near Peniche



At Praia da Consolação, this snack bar stands on the rocks in the sea, trying its best not to fall off. Visit Sol é Vida (open April to October) at high tide, when the waves crash against the windows. You can't get any closer to the sea while drinking an aperitif.

. *Praia da Consolação, hotelneptuno.pt*

CENTRAL

Stay: Casa Azul, Nazaré



There's a monster in the sea at Nazaré. A wave called Big Mama, behind the legendary lighthouse at Praia do Norte, can reach heights of more than 30 metres. Nazaré is the only place in Portugal to hold big-wave competitions. Just off the coast, a long, deep underwater trench plays its part, influencing the waves as the water collides against it. Want to see the spectacle yourself? Nazaré doesn't always work - not even most of the time, in fact. Come in winter if you're looking for monster swells. For views of those waves, stay at Casa Azul apartments, furnished by Mariana, a Lisboan who provides a surf-and-city vibe. Her husband, a surfer named João, will gladly give you the lowdown on the nearby waves.

. From €58 a night (sleeps 4), [airbnb.com](#)

Surf: Surfer's Camp

Owner Rui Enes has been living by the beach for as long as he can remember. Before he started the camp, he worked in several schools in Portugal and in Brazil and Mexico. Finding a good surf school as an adult is not always easy. Rui and his team will make you feel welcome no matter your age. He's a salty soul, and before you know it, you'll be sharing sea stories.

. [Praia De Esmoriz, Rua Senhor dos Aflitos 433, surferscamp.com](#)

Eat: SWELLcafé, Figueira da Foz



Grab breakfast or lunch at this bar in the port of Figueira da Foz, where there are no apartment blocks or hotels to spoil the view. Enjoy the quirky atmosphere and the scent of the Atlantic as you wash your (veggie) burger down with a delicious smoothie.

. [Rua Cabedelo 1, on Facebook](#)

Drink: Costa Nova Beach Club

At the entrance of Costa Nova Beach Club a sign reminds you of something Very Important: don't forget to build a sandcastle. Everything in this bar is sea-proof: there are hammocks, old-fashioned beach chairs and tables where children can make pictures with shells or stones. The bar serves cocktails, fresh lemonades, small dishes and homemade *batatas fritas*. Only open during summer.

. [Praia da Costa Nova, on Facebook](#)

PORTO AND NORTHERN PORTUGAL

Stay: Mar Dentro Surf Farm B&B, Carvalhos



Photograph: João Sousa

A 15-minute drive from Porto, but a world away, José and Joana's Surf Farm lies next to a forest. The three bedrooms, built around a lush courtyard, have been renovated by the couple in Portuguese surf-chic style, and there's a caravan for hire close to the forest. Boards and old surf posters adorn the walls, mixing with the antique furniture. José, who has a collection of boards and wetsuits in his garden house, takes guests hunting for waves. If you're lucky, Joana will light the barbecue in the meantime and get cooking.

. From €40 a room with access to kitchen, mardentro.com

Surf: Salty Waters



You can find surf instructors anywhere, but the good ones stand out. My paddling technique suddenly improved after one lesson from Pedro Santos. And this is a man with big plans: he is aiming to introduce Wavegarden (the artificial wave system developed in Spain and used at Surf Snowdonia) to Portugal in 2019.

. Group lessons from €20, private lessons from €50 (1hr 30 mins), saltywaters.pt

Eat: Salta o Muro, Matosinhos

Rua Heróis de França in Matosinhos is lined with family restaurants. They all have no-nonsense interiors with fluorescent lighting, and there's only one thing on the menu: fish. Ask the locals which is the best place to eat and they all say the same: "The food in all the restaurants is good - but Salta o Muro's is the best." That's because Moreira and his wife Dona have been cooking here for 30 years, since the days when fish was brought by boat to the wall behind the restaurant (hence the name: "jump over the wall").

. Rua Heróis de França 386, Matosinhos, saltaomuro.pt

Eat: Tasca do Necas, Santa Marta de Portuzelo

The owner doesn't speak a word of English, which doesn't matter because few tourists come here. The red wine is served from a carafe into tiny cups and the menu revels in soups and

homemade sausage. Construction workers drink pints at the bar and families come for the house speciality: *petisco de moelas* (poultry gizzards).

. *Santa Marta 151, Santa Marta de Portuzelo, on Facebook*

Drink: Ibar, Porto



You would walk straight past Ibar, by Praia do Aquário, on the Atlantic coast south of Matosinhos, if you didn't know it was there. Look out for a terrace with red parasols and white lounge chairs tucked between rocks. Don't expect innovative cocktails or waiters in trendy outfits, because you won't find them. But the sea view is priceless: Ibar literally sits on the edge of the ocean.

. *Av. de Montevideu 516, Praia do Aquário, on Facebook*

This article contains affiliate links, which means we may earn a small commission if a reader clicks through and makes a purchase. All our journalism is independent and is in no way influenced by any advertiser or commercial initiative. By clicking on an affiliate link, you accept that third-party cookies will be set. More information.

More people in Portugal...

... like you, are reading and supporting The Guardian's independent, investigative journalism than ever before. And unlike many new organisations, we have chosen an approach that allows us to keep our journalism accessible to all, regardless of where they live or what they can afford. But we need your ongoing support to keep working as we do.

The Guardian will engage with the most critical issues of our time - from the escalating climate catastrophe to widespread inequality to the influence of big tech on our lives. At a time when factual information is a necessity, we believe that each of us, around the world, deserves access to accurate reporting with integrity at its heart.

Our editorial independence means we set our own agenda and voice our own opinions. Guardian journalism is free from commercial and political bias and not influenced by billionaire owners or shareholders. This means we can give a voice to those less heard, explore where others turn away, and rigorously challenge those in power.

We need your support to keep delivering quality journalism, to maintain our openness and to protect our precious independence. Every reader contribution, big or small, is so valuable.

Support The Guardian from as little as €1 - and it only takes a minute. Thank you.

Support The Guardian



Topics

- Portugal holidays
- Surfing holidays
- Water sports holidays
- Food and drink
- Beach holidays
- Europe holidays
- Food
- features