

# The secrets and charms of the Ria Formosa

## ROUTE

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Route covering approximately 22 km



## The secrets and charms of the Ria Formosa

### (Ilha de Tavira, Santa Luzia and Luz de Tavira)

Start this tour at the **1 Praça da República** with the public garden (Jardim do Coreto) to your left. Go forward for around 600m until you reach the junction and carry on to **2 Quatro-Aguas**. Along the way, take the opportunity to admire the **3 salt pans**. When you arrive at Quatro-Aguas, take the boat across the Ria Formosa to **4 Ilha de Tavira Beach** (Tavira Island, Medo das Cascas Beach) with its campsite, bars, restaurants and other establishments. Return by the same route. After walking under the Ponte dos Descobrimentos bridge, turn left onto Rua das Salinas, head past the Hotel Vila Galé Tavira, and take the second exit at the roundabout. Carry on to another roundabout, taking the first exit towards Santa Luzia. Follow the signs, and turn left after you pass the military barracks. Take the EM 515 road to Santa Luzia, which is around 2km away. When you arrive at the entrance to the town, turn at the sign for the Ribeirinha (waterfront) zone. Park the car and take the opportunity to enjoy a stroll through the town; the first records relating to constructions built here by fishermen date from 1577. The chapel is dedicated to the parish's patron saint, St. Lucy, a Sicilian martyr and protector of people with eye problems. In Santa Luzia, known as the 'octopus capital', watch the boats arrive at the pier and cuttlefish) and other fish and seafood. Observe life in this fishing town and the types of fishing that are as much a part of the town as tourism and the people's hospitality. Stop at

Salt pans (right)



Pier where the boats leave to Tavira Island

Coves (octopus traps)





Main Church of Santa Luzia

one of the restaurants and savour a traditional octopus dish. At only 850 hectares, Santa Luzia is the smallest civil parish in the municipality of Tavira. In Largo da Igreja (Church Square), admire the modern **6 Main Church of Santa Luzia**, a project by the Algarve architect Manuel Gomes da Costa dating from 1956 to 1958, which replaced the old sixteenth-century hermitage.

If you like, take the boat at Santa Luzia and visit **7 Terra Estreita Beach**, a large sandy beach opposite the town, in the heart of the Ria Formosa Nature Park. In the car again, follow the waterfront avenue towards Pedras D’El Rei and discover **8 Barril Beach**, which can be accessed on foot or by the tourist complex’s mini-train.

Take a look at the imposing “anchor cemetery” and the remains of the old tuna trap dating from 1842, converted into a shopping area. Before heading to Luz de Tavira, pass by the reception of the Pedras D’El Rei Complex, take the second street on the left (Rua Jorge Amado) and, around 25 metres farther ahead on the left, you will find a 2000-year-old **9 olive-tree**. With a treetop soaring to a height of 7.7 metres and a diameter greater than 11.80 metres, it was classified as an item of public interest in 1984. After admiring the tree, return to the main road CM1347, turn left and continue for around 800 metres. When you arrive at E.R. 125 road, turn left towards Faro.

2000-year-old olive-tree (left)

Around one kilometre farther on, you will find the town of Luz de Tavira. Observe the typical houses in the town centre, with decorative borders made from mortar on the upper part of the façades and typical chimneys, which are very pronounced or sculpted. As you leave, visit the **10 Main Church of Nossa Senhora da Luz** (Our Lady of Light) at the Largo da República square. Inside, it is a typical



Anchor cemetery of Barril Beach



Manueline side door of the Main Church of Nossa Senhora da Luz (right)



Aires Tower

hall church dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, with three naves all at the same height. The chancel houses a noteworthy seventeenth-century mannerist altarpiece. The exterior features a mannerist façade and a Manueline side gate, with intercolumniations and columns with sculpted vine leaves and bunches of grapes.

Head back towards Faro and, around 550 metres farther ahead on the left, you will see the sign for **11 Torre de Aires (Aires Tower)**. Carry on down a narrow road for around 1.5 km until you get to the tower. Visit this circular brick monument of mediaeval or possibly Arab origin, which was part of the region's defensive system along with Tavira Castle and other towers. A few kilometres away are remains of the old Roman city of Balsa (1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> century), which unfortunately cannot be visited. Unexplored, it is perhaps one of the most important Roman settlements on the Iberian Peninsula. Carry on down the road along the Ria Formosa, admiring the countryside as you go. Pass the place known as Pinheiro and when you arrive at the E.R. 125 carry on towards Faro. Pass Livramento and, around 370 metres after the traffic lights, turn left towards Arroeteia. Continue down this narrow road until you reach the sign for the **12 Chapel of Nossa Senhora do Livramento** (Our Lady of Deliverance). Carry on in that direction and, when you get to the end of the road, turn right and then immediately left again. Around 70 metres down the road, you will find the chapel. Dated from 1708, it is a church with a simple portico, finished with a curved pediment flanked by two bell towers. Inside, it has a baroque altar, built with Algarve marble.

Return to Tavira on the E.R. 125, head towards





Vila Real de Santo António, pass through four roundabouts and, on the last one, take the first exit towards Tavira. Then continue to another roundabout and shopping centre (right-hand side) and head to the Ria Formosa Nature Park/Forte do Rato (third exit). Along this route you can see the salt pans, which are often visited by flamingos and other species in spring. Carry on towards the Hotel Albacora, the former Arraial Ferreira Neto, designed by the engineer Sena Lino in 1943; at the **13 Tuna Fishing Museum** here you can learn about the capture of tuna, and the life of the fishermen and their families in the village. Returning on the same route, you will find **14 Rato Fort** on your right, which was ordered to be built from scratch in the reign of King Sebastião for the purpose of protecting the entrance to the harbour and, simultaneously, the city of Tavira. When you get back to the roundabout where you turned off, take the exit towards the centre of Tavira (Municipal Market), and then at the next roundabout take the exit for the municipal market and immediately turn left onto the Ponte dos Descobrimentos bridge. On the left you will see the **15 Municipal market**, a space where you can buy local products.

Tuna-fishing Museum  
(former Arraial  
Ferreira Neto)



**Tuna Fishing Museum**  
 Hotel Vila Galé  
 Albacora  
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 Contact the hotel



Rato Fort

Municipal Market  
(left)