

# Portugal

## *Special Report*



**Praia Da Luz:  
The Beach Of Light**



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## *Special Report*

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# *Praia Da Luz*

## The Beach Of Light

BY ALYSON SHELDRAKE



Most folks don't travel much further west than Lagos when they visit the Algarve, which is a shame... Some of the most spectacular beaches and prettiest towns are nestled along the furthest southwest and western Algarve coastlines.

This month we are focusing on the welcoming and beautiful town of Praia da Luz, known for its excellent beachfront.→

Luz wraps itself around a picturesque sandy bay and was originally a small fishing village. It's located in the western Algarve, one hour west of Faro airport. Sandwiched between the towns of Lagos (6 kms) and Burgau (5 kms), it's ideally situated for exploring the region's best sights.

## A Bit Of Background

During the Middle Ages, the village of Luz was known as Nossa Senhora da Luz ("Our Lady of Light"). It's believed that the name "Praia da Luz" (Beach of Light) was first introduced because of the fishermen's lights in the bay at night. The use of the name was first recorded in 1928, and the phrase stuck.

More recently, Luz has gained town status and should officially be known as Vila da Luz.

The Parish of Luz was formally constituted in 1673. Dating back as far as the 13th century, it was connected with the sardine fishing industry.

In the 19th century, the canning industry became an important part of the village and surrounding areas. Three factories conserved fish in olive oil, preceding the eventual salting of sardines in the same way. These factories supported 100 workers, with the majority (60) of them being women.

Luz was also a major producer of figs, which were exported to the fine sweets industry. Wheat and barley were cultivated in many of the surrounding areas.

Today, tourism has replaced fishing and figs, but this transformation has not lessened Luz's charm...

## What Makes It Tick?

Luz's wow factor is the large sandy beach with its calm sea. Although—be warned—that water may look inviting, but it will probably be exhilaratingly cold. The main beach sits comfortably between the towering Rocha Negra headland on the



east and the rocky coastline close to the Fortaleza da Luz.

The Rocha Negra, as the name suggests, is a magnificent section of black rock. Allegedly created 150 million years ago and formed by hot volcanic lava cascading over the sandstone cliffs, it's an impressive piece of geography.

You can also hike along the top of the cliffs and enjoy the magnificent,

far-reaching views. The route is described as a challenging hiking trail, so wear something suitable on your feet.

A short walk beside the palm tree-lined promenade, which you could easily do in flip-flops, will take you to Prainha da Luz beach next to the fort. This is a small beach surrounded by rocks, favored by people looking for peace and quiet.→

The promenade walk itself is lovely, with patterns swirling in the design of the *calçadas* or pavement stones. The path overlooks the beach and is backed by shops, cafés, bars, and restaurants.

This is the perfect place to watch the world go by, also great for picking up gifts and knick-knacks or enjoying a cool drink in the sunshine.

Look out for the ruins of the Roman baths dating from the 3rd to 5th century behind the wall that runs alongside the promenade. There is a small sign and a door in the wall, which is easy to miss as you walk along...

Here you the remnants of a small Roman Aquaduct can be seen halfway down the Rua do Poco, set in a small landscaped garden.

If you're a fan of history, an interesting trail to follow in the Algarve is the Umayyad Route, which follows the path the Arabs traveled throughout the Iberian Peninsula and Europe, starting in the 8th century through to the 13th.

The promenade also leads to the impressive Fortaleza da Luz or Castelo da Senhora da Luz. The fortress or castle dates back to around 1640. This was another fort created to defend the region against pirates and invasions. The fort originally had 5-meter-tall walls, so they must have been expecting trouble.

Today, it's a far more genteel place, with a restaurant and bar and live music on Sunday afternoons. I have friends that are members of a local jazz band that performs there, and it's lovely to walk past and hear their music wafting out from inside the gardens.

Almost opposite the fort is the medieval Church of Nossa Senhora da Luz (Our Lady of Light), built around 1521. It's rather unlucky; it was damaged in the 1755 earthquake and restored in 1874, the work funded by local contributions.

It was then battered again by ferocious storms in 1941 and an earthquake in 1969, requiring it to be renovated again.

## How To Get Here And Around

You need a car to get to Praia da Luz. From Faro Airport, the main airport that serves the region, you can catch a train or bus to most of the main resorts in the region. The train service is basic and slow and only stretches as far as Lagos. Praia da Luz is a further 7.5 kms west.

## Expats And Activities

Praia da Luz has a year-round international community living in the town and local area. There are tennis clubs,

various golf courses a short drive away, cycling and walking routes, dance groups, local centers to enjoy yoga and tai chi, plus great local areas for birdwatching and hiking.

From Praia da Luz there are walking trails to Porto de Mós beach (3 kms along the cliff path) and towards Sagres (Burgau is around 5 kms away). There are bus links back to Luz from both locations. These are great walks up along the cliffs.

For those who prefer less energetic activities, there is a local choir and amateur dramatic groups nearby.

The Boavista Golf Course is an 18-hole, par 71 championship course with some challenging holes. The golf course provides nice views over the Atlantic Ocean and is surrounded by pine, fig, palm, and olive trees. The Golf Santo Antonio is another 18-hole course set within the Parque da Floresta resort.

You could also consider volunteering. There are several pet-rescue centers that always need dog-walkers. Having a dog that needs a nice long walk every day is an excellent way to meet people, especially locals. The Associação Bamboo is a local animal rescue charity for dogs and donkeys just to the west of Praia da Luz.

Madrugada Portugal offers support to people in the Algarve who are affected by a life-limiting illness. Their →



Madrugada Centre in Praia da Luz helps people through counseling, therapeutic and creative activities, complementary therapies, advice, and education. They are always looking for volunteers to support their work and help with fundraising. They also have a charity shop in town, staffed by volunteers.

John Hough, featured in our Expat Interview this month, is the current president of the Madrugada Portugal. He became involved after his partner was diagnosed with a rare type of diffused brain tumor, which was inoperable.

Following radiotherapy and chemotherapy treatment, they returned to the Algarve to allow him to recuperate. John explains where the links to the charity began...

"To keep my mind from wandering too often to negative thoughts, I had volunteered to join the Management Board at Madrugada. I was so impressed by what the charity had achieved in a few short years, I felt it important to give something back for all the support they provide.

"When it was founded in 2010, there was little or no end-of-life palliative care for patients in the Algarve. The purpose of the charity is to give patients the choice about where and how they would like to spend their final days.

"Madrugada provides free end-of-life care in the home, with all the equipment, nursing, and emotional support the patient and their loved ones might need at an incredibly difficult time.



"Effectively, this 'hospice-at-home' initiative replaces the need for hugely expensive to run care homes. It also assures patients that their wishes at the end of their life will be respected and that they can pass on with dignity, surrounded by those most important to them.

"If I thought we had faced many obstacles and challenges in our Portuguese journey, the stories and the reality for many of Madrugada's patients was extremely sobering.

"What I found very uplifting was the positivity people demonstrated despite their illnesses and debilitating conditions. The charity provides art classes, counselling, and other complementary

therapies at its support center in Luz for anyone who wants a break from home and too much time spent looking at the four walls.

"These very simple and ordinary activities make a difference to many patients who appreciate the support and company of others while having the opportunity to focus on something other than their illness. →

"Madrugada is fortunate to have a great team of volunteers who provide support to run its charity shops, fundraising events, and craft fairs, along with help for the clinical team to deliver and collect care equipment to and from patients as the need arises." →



## The Ancient Fishing Town Revival

A new initiative called the Luz—Light of the Ocean aims to shine the spotlight back out to sea and onto the fishermen and the history of the town again. The vision of the newly formed group is to open a cultural center in Praia da Luz that will host exhibitions, events, performances, music, and art of anything related to the sea.

Their launch party in April included a smorgasbord of the local fishermen's history: tales, testimonials, interviews, visual impressions from the past, contemporary art, music and songs, and a selection of gourmet tapas.

The project is spearheaded by German journalist Monika Hoegen, who has teamed up with anthropologist Tiago Goncalves. Monika arrived in the area in 2021, and Tiago is originally from Lisbon but used to vacation in Praia da Luz every year.

Together, they want to bring the focus of the area back to the sea and the fishermen that are so much part of the traditional landscape...

The beach is one of the biggest attractions of this town, with its wide sandy outlook, perfect for walking, sunbathing or building sandcastles, complete with new wooden boardwalks to increase accessibility.

This is a popular beach and town for families. The sea is calm and shallow, and gets deeper slowly with a gentle

pitch, which makes this beach perfect for families with small children.

The beach can be busy in the height of summer, but a short walk along the beach towards the Rocha Negra, and you can have the beach pretty much to yourself.

The average seawater temperature in summer is a rather fresh 68°F to 72°F (20°C to 22°C). The beach has an EEC Blue Flag, lifeguards in the summer, sunshade rental, small craft rentals, showers, and easy parking nearby.

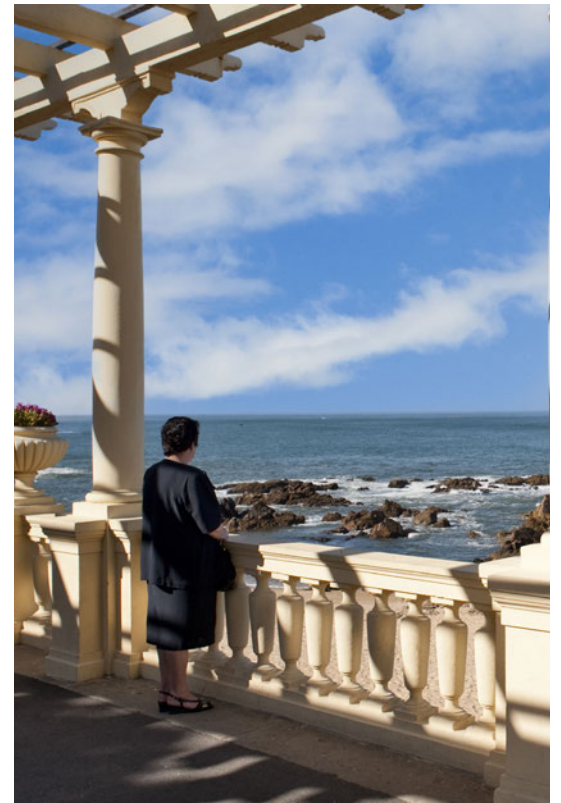
There are several water sports available on the beach offered by the Beach Hut Watersports company. You can try sailing, windsurfing, jet skiing, kayaking, stand-up paddle boarding, or water skiing.

Lovers of spa treatments will be spoilt for choice in and around Praia da Luz. Try the exclusive Estrela Health & Beauty Spa for Elemis treatments. They have an indoor pool, jacuzzi, and sauna, as well as a fully equipped gym.

## Cost Of Living

There are several small supermarkets (including a Spar, a low-cost grocery store) in Praia da Luz plus a main supermarket, Baptista, close to the church. There is also a shop selling natural products (Harmony Earth, close to Baptista) for any alternative products you might want.

For bigger shopping expeditions, Lagos is a short drive away where you'll find several large supermarkets and a host of smaller shops and a daily market in the



renovated fish market selling fresh fish, fruit, vegetables, dried fruit, and preserves.

## Housing Market

The property market in Praia da Luz is buoyant and competitive. You can find an exclusive three-bedroom villa located a few steps from the beach for around 725,000 euros or a luxury villa with a sea view for 2.6 million euros.

Two-bedroom apartments with sea views start from around 500,000 euros, with one-bedroom apartments from 250,000 euros. →

## Algarve Monthly Budget

Go here for my full breakdown of the cost of living in the Algarve.

[VIEW BUDGET](#)



You may be lucky and find a winter rental in Praia da Luz, a one-bedroom apartment with sea view would be around 800 euros a month; a two-bedroom apartment, about 1,500 euros a month.

It's hard to find long-term rentals in an area that is so popular with vacationers.

## Eating Out

One thing you will not be short of in Praia da Luz is somewhere to eat and drink. There is a wide selection of bars, restaurants, and cafés offering a choice of cuisines, especially along the main promenade and seafront.

In the summer, artists sometimes display their work along the pavement, and the atmosphere is relaxed.

Eating out is an inexpensive indulgence here. You can expect the following general prices:

- A main course at a traditional Portuguese restaurant: 8 and 13 euros.
- A *prato do dia* (dish of the day) lunchtime option at a traditional Portuguese restaurant: 8 to 10 euros (includes a small starter, a main course, dessert, one drink, and a coffee).
- A small plate at a café:
  - A *bifana* (pork sandwich): 2.50 euros.
  - A bowl of soup: 1.50 euros.
  - A slice of cake: 1 euro.
  - An espresso: 50 cents to 1.25 euros.
- Alcohol:
  - A beer (imperial): 1 to 1.50 euros (more in the touristy resorts).
  - A glass of wine: 2 to 2.50 euros.

One highly recommended local restaurant is A Fábrica. This Portuguese restaurant has great food and a fantastic location. It is located right near the beach and definitely worth a visit.

Restaurant Alloro is also worth a mention. It serves Italian food and delicious pizza, with an excellent wine menu. The Fortaleza restaurant has a magnificent

setting with an exceptional French chef, Ussef Bling.

Open seven days a week for dinner, they're also famous for their four-course Sunday lunch with live jazz.

For traditional Portuguese fare just outside of town head to Burgau and the Restaurante Ancora. Alternatively, just outside the village is Spice Cottage, which is an excellent Indian restaurant.

## Learning The Language

The Centro de Linguas de Lagos language school in nearby Lagos offers different levels of courses from beginners upwards and their courses are recognized by the Ministry of Education.

Their website explains that foreign students who study Portuguese can be divided into two distinct groups:

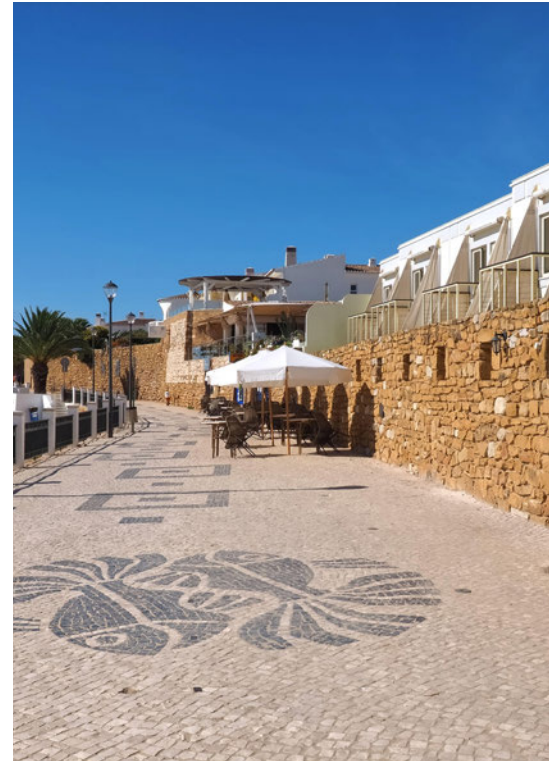
1. Those who live in Portugal (full-time or part-time) and want to learn Portuguese to integrate fully into the community,
2. Business people who need specialized courses relating to their professions.

Except in the case of beginners, all students are interviewed to assess their level of learning and understanding. Students can choose to have private lessons or study in a group (four to eight students).

Their most popular group course is the 30-lesson one for beginners. Their aim is to have students speaking Portuguese as quickly as possible.

To get Portuguese nationality or citizenship, you need to meet a certain language proficiency requirement. Currently, you'll need to be A2 level or higher in Portuguese.

The Centro supports students preparing for the official Portuguese-as-a-foreign-language exam that are organized and officiated by the Centro de Avaliação de Português Língua Estrangeira (CAPLE) through their private tutorial program.



## Health Care

Praia da Luz has Luz Doc International Medical Service situated in the town. This is a long-established international medical center offering a range of health services and medical services, including 24-hour medical assistance and home visits.

Lagos, Portimão, and Faro all have state hospitals, which also cover all emergencies. There is also a private hospital in Lagos, too.

## Local Arts And Crafts

In March 2020, three best friends in Luz got together and created their own artisan gin. Jodi Weijdom and João Caetano are local to the area, and they joined forces with Carl Wilson, who is a bartender and loved holidaying in Luz so much, he moved there to live in 2008.

The trio set to work in Carl's father's garage, testing and trialing recipes to find the perfect gin to reflect the local area. They eventually settled on five main ingredients to create the perfect spirit: juniper berries, coriander seeds, angelica →

root, cassia bark, and orris root, and decided that the gin would be produced in a traditional Portuguese-made copper still.

Alma Gin was born and the first bottles were ready to sell in December 2021. The team has big plans for the future and hope to be an international brand by 2032. Alma Gin retails between 28 and 30 euros a bottle and can be found in Baptista and Sunny Bubbles in Luz. Or you can sample it at Jodi's Mum's restaurant, A Fábrica.

Liza Walker lives and works in Praia da Luz, and she is fascinated by the play of light on glass. Her artisan business, The Glass House, creates stunning and unique pieces of art.

Taking inspiration from nature and the wide-open spaces and huge skies of the western Algarve, Liza works with the Tiffany-devised method of cut, grind,

copper foil, and solder to create stained glass art and craft.

She has an online shop, is regularly exhibiting and selling at local craft fairs, and is available for commissions, too. Liza hosts regular classes and courses in stained glass work.

The Luz Cultura art project brings together art, music, and creative souls under one roof in Praia da Luz. The venue hosts music lessons, a choir, art workshops, keep fit and dance classes, and a summer school for children.

They even have Portuguese language classes and music sessions for babies and toddlers (and their parents). The venue regularly hosts art exhibitions by local artists.

Sandie Croft is another local artist inspired by the light and beautiful

surroundings of her hometown of Praia da Luz. As she explains on her website, "The beautiful scenery, strong bright sunlight, and wonderful colors around me are a constant source of inspiration... I have exhibited in the Algarve and the U.K. and teach watercolor painting to groups or give one-on-one tuition."

Sandie works in watercolors and acrylics, painting a variety of portraits, seascapes, landscapes, pets, flowers, and miniatures.

## Could The Praia Da Luz Be For You?

Praia da Luz, with its charming history, laid-back way of life, great restaurants, and beautiful beach, might be the perfect location for you. ✨



## About The Author

Alyson is an accomplished professional artist and best-selling author, working alongside her husband, Dave, a professional photographer. They moved to live full time in the Algarve in 2011, having previously holidayed there for many years.

She has written three books in her "Algarve Dream Series" that are full of useful advice, enjoyable adventures, and hilarious accounts of their Algarve life in the sun. Her latest book, "Kat The Dog: The Remarkable Tale Of A Rescued Spanish Water Dog," is now on sale and already a best-seller in the U.K. and United States.



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