

It is often claimed that the Algarve was "discovered" by the British. But this is not true. Way back before the turn of the century, wealthy Portuguese from Lisbon were building villas at Praia da Rocha. Because of its superb sandy beach and dramatic rock formations, Praia da Rocha became the Algarve's first resort.

Of course, it wasn't so easy to reach in those far-off days. Travel by train was slow and arduous, and there were no highways from Lisbon to the Algarve. Faro airport had not been dreamed of, but during the 30's and 40's the Portuguese flew down in rickety seaplanes which landed at the mouth of the river.

The villas they built were large and impressive. One of these, a magnificent Victorian mansion, became the Hotel Bela Vista. For many years this was the only hotel available for the adventurous traveller who, somehow, managed to reach this glorious shore.

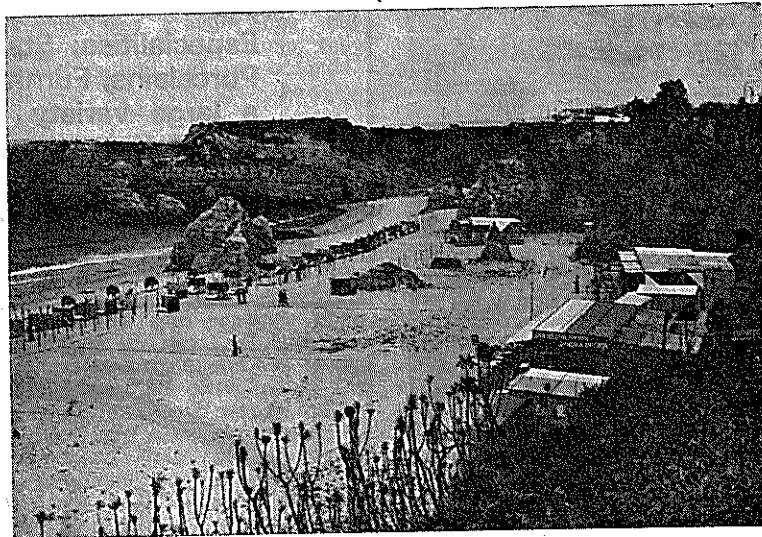
Now, of course, Praia da Rocha is well served by hotels, most notably by the Hotel Algarve which is said to rank among the best resort hotels in the world.

A little-known fact is that the Algarve's first golf course was not Henry Cotton's Penina but a 9-hole course in front of the Hotel Rocha. This eventually disappeared when the cliff tumbled down.

Cliff falls are not uncommon at Praia da Rocha. Five years ago, a large rock fell on top of a local fisherman, João. It was impossible to get a crane to the site to raise the rock, and it was blasted with dynamite and the body retrieved. During those three days, thousands of local people travelled to Praia da Rocha

ALGARVE NEWS TAKES A LOOK AT

Praia da Rocha



especially to view poor João. They stood for hours gazing at the only part of him that was visible — his feet.

In the days when one could live well in the Algarve on £50 a month, and a full-time maid received 100 escudos a week, many British came to live in Praia da Rocha. Among them were three Air Vice-Marshals and a number of retired officials from the Colonies.

And there was a smattering of

genuine eccentrics.

One English gentleman used to preach on the beach. And an English lady, in her will, left money to one of Praia da Rocha's best known inhabitants — a greyhound called Charlie. When he wasn't whooping it up on the beach, Charlie the Greyhound is said to have slept very comfortably indeed in Dorothy and Royston Boulter's residencia, the Penguin.

A few years ago, the dredging

company of Hermeneous Wouter Kalis, a Dutchman who lives in Albufeira, was engaged to deepen the mouth of the river. Day and night for six months huge dredgers sucked up sand from the river bottom and deposited it on the beach. As a result, the area of beach is now much bigger than it was, and some of the spectacular rock formations have been covered by sand. Too, because it is now higher, the beach is no longer washed twice a day by the Atlantic. However, the beach — and, indeed, all of Praia da Rocha — is kept unusually clean and neat.

There is invariably a "Sunday afternoon" feeling about Praia da Rocha, even in mid-week in the middle of August. Perhaps this is because the town exists on two levels: the streets along the top of the cliff remain almost deserted while the holiday makers remain out of sight on the vast sandy beach below.

If Charlie the Greyhound were alive to walk the streets of Praia da Rocha today, he'd find many new sights and smells...

One thing's for sure — he wouldn't go hungry. In summertime, restaurants all along the beach feature fresh fish and grilled chicken. But there are a number of excellent restaurants within the town itself, some open year around, which serve a wide range of Portuguese and international food.

For Portuguese food with an African assent, try Restaurante "Safari". The owner, Sr Coutinho, is a retornado from Angola and does the cooking himself. "Safari" specializes in shellfish, but the meat, fish and chicken dishes are also very good. The service



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