

Burgau to Sagres

ALGARVE NEWS GOES WEST

The towns and villages along the western end of the Algarve coast have yet to feel the real impact of tourism. The western frontier of large-scale tourism now stands at Praia da Luz. But the area from Burgau to Sagres, and north to Aljezur, has its own quiet charm that attracts more and more visitors every year.

Burgau and Salema a few kilometres west of Luz off the Lagos-Sagres road, are small fishing villages, still virtually unspoiled. They have safe, sandy beaches with steep cliffs rising at either end. Roman coins have been found in the sand at both villages and over the years the fishermen have talked of seeing strange objects below the surface of the water — perhaps the remains of ancient settlements, now buried under the sea.

Going west from Burgau to Vila do Bispo the main road passes through a countryside of gentle hills and valleys. Crops of corn and grain are laid out in neat squares and rectangles on either side of the road. In the springtime the fields are covered with wildflowers of every conceivable colour.

Dirt tracks lead to a series of fine uncrowded beaches, some of them overlooked by the ruins of Roman and Moorish towers and fortresses.

Little villages — Budens, Figueira, Raposeira — appear suddenly; so small and self-contained that you seem to see



SAGRÉS — A STRANGE, WILD BEAUTY

them in their entirety, almost as if you were looking at them at great height.

The windmills of Vila do Bispo stand over the crossroads for Sagres and Aljezur. As you drive southwest from Vila do Bispo to Sagres and Cape St Vincent, the landscape becomes increa-

singly rugged and barren.

On a windy winter day it's easy to see why the western tip of the Algarve was once considered the end of the world. The waves crash against the cliffs, hundreds of feet below, sending wind-blown columns of spray high into the air. Sometimes

a sea-mist covers the whole peninsula, hanging low over the ground like a morning fog. Yet Sagres has a strange, wild beauty and an important place in Portuguese history.

In the 15th century Prince Henry (The Navigator) chose Sagres as the site for his own fortified village, "Vila do Infante", and established a school of navigation there. He gathered together geographers, astrologers, shipbuilders and navigators and began to develop a scientific approach to the conquest of the seas. Ships sailing under his banner discovered Madeira and the Azores and made the voyages which led to the colonization of Portugal's African possessions.

Prince Henry's settlement was sacked by Sir Francis Drake in 1587, but you can still see his great stone compass and a restoration of the chapel and the fortress walls.

Seven kilometres away is Cape St Vincent, the most south-westerly point in Europe. Its lighthouse and ancient chapel are open to visitors.

Clearly it is only a matter of time before the lightly populated, unspoiled area between Burgau and Sagres is developed for tourism. For the beaches are as beautiful, and the countryside as lovely, as anywhere in the Algarve. To those who complain that the Algarve's main resorts are becoming too busy and crowded, we say — "Go west".



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