

algarve,
europe's
most famous
secret

castro marim

municipality

2013 . 3rd Edition

castro marim

The elegant outline of flamingos, the gold of soft sand, the turquoise blue of warm waters; vast ranges of hills covered in a bright carpet of wild flowers; the tranquil countryside along the banks of the Guadiana, lush with orchards and vegetable gardens: these are just a few facets of a municipality that stretches from the sea to the hinterland, with a river as its boundary.

HISTORY OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF CASTRO MARIM

The remains of the first settlements in the area date from the Neolithic period (approximately 5000 years B.C.); these persisted into the Age of Metals, possibly by way of a fort situated on the hill where the castle now stands. During this period Castro Marim was closer to the sea than it is now. According to geological research it consisted of an island surrounded by shallow waters.

For thousands of years Castro Marim was a port that offered shelter to the ships that sailed up the Guadiana river to collect the metals - above all copper - extracted from the mines in Alcoutim and Mértola. There is documentary evidence of the Phoenician and Roman presence in the area of the town which, during the time of the Moorish occupation, possessed a defensive structure that occupied what was originally the core of the present castle.

In addition to the river routes on which Castro Marim's prosperity was founded, the town was also connected to Lisbon by a Roman road that ran parallel to the Guadiana river and passed through Alcoutim, Mértola and Beja.

The Christian reconquest in 1242 was followed, in the second half of the 13th century, by a policy of repopulation and reinforcing local defences in view of the town's strategic position on the border with the kingdom of Castile and attacks by Moorish raiders, from North Africa. This explains why the king D. Dinis (1261-1325) made Castro Marim the headquarters of the Order of Christ, which had been established in 1319 to replace the order of the Knights Templar. Years later, however, the Order of Christ was transferred to Tomar, and this marked the beginning of a period of waning fortunes for the town and its surrounding area, which saw its population decline. To reverse this pattern, in 1421 the king D. João I granted Castro Marim the privilege of being a "sanctuary for fugitives" - a place of shelter for refugees and wanted men with the aim of attracting new lifeblood. The town retained this privilege almost until the end of the 18th century. Cut off from the sea, with an economy based for centuries on fishing, salt production, agriculture and boat-building, the municipality of Castro Marim entered a long period of stagnation, relieved only by the growing dynamism of recent decades.

VISITING CASTRO MARIM

On the top of one hill stands a castle, on the other a star-shaped fort. Between the two, the houses of Castro Marim are spread, with their colourful parapets, their flat roofs and their ornate chimneys sculpted into lace-like patterns. All around, the dark brown of the schist, set off by the cool blue of the river and, on the horizon, the sea.



Flamingos - VC

MAIN CHURCH

The building dates from the 18th and 19th centuries and was originally a chapel. The church suffered considerable damage in a fire in 1960. The church's most striking feature is its elegant dome, surmounted by a false lantern. The chancel and the side chapels are worth a visit for the statues of the Arcanjo São Gabriel (archangel Gabriel) (15th century), which retains traces of polychrome decoration, of Nossa Senhora da Encarnação e dos Mártires (Our Lady of the Incarnation and of the Martyrs) (16th century) and a finely proportioned Santa Luzia (St. Luzia) (18th century).



Main Church- LC

MISERICÓRDIA CHURCH

Modest from the outside, this church houses an altarpiece on the main altar with seven wooden panels dating from the 17th century and a collection of 18th century.

CHAPEL OF SANTO ANTÓNIO (ST. ANTHONY)

Occupying an airy spot high on a hill, this building contains an altarpiece consisting of seven panels depicting the miracles of the saint.



Chapel of St. Anthony - LC

CASTLE

The fortified wall that surrounded the medieval town on top of the hill had its origins in the 13th and 14th centuries. At the time of the Wars of the Restoration (1640-1668) the castle was adapted in accordance with the latest techniques of warfare, including the introduction of artillery. The old castle stands in a wide open yard: square-shaped with circular towers at its corners and two gates, it is possibly Moorish in origin (10th to 13th centuries). The main gate bears an interesting design in relief, in the shape of a key, as well as marks typical of medieval stonemasons. The ramparts still enclose the former Misericórdia Church, which has a Renaissance doorway and, inside, two 17th century tombs and the ruins of buildings destroyed by the earthquake of 1755. These include the main church (14th century), which was dedicated to S. Tiago (St. James), and the Alcaldes' (Governors) Palace. The castle affords an unrivalled view of the Guadiana river, the town and its saltpans, as well as the surrounding hills and, stretching away to the horizon, the sea.



Castle - VC

FORT OF SÃO SEBASTIÃO (ST. SEBASTIAN)

This defensive structure was built in the 17th century and was part of a set of ramparts that surrounded the town, some parts of which are still visible between the houses.



Fort - LC

HISTORICAL CENTRE

Linking the church, the castle and the fort, the streets of Castro Marim are lined with houses whose simplicity is typical of the architecture of the Algarve. White predominates, broken here and there by ochres and luminous blues. The parapets on the houses reflect a taste for geometrical patterns and floral motifs.

SALT AND SALTPANS

Seen from a distance, the saltpans look like mirrors reflecting the sun and the piles of salt stand like white pyramids silhouetted against the blue of the sky. The edge of Castro Marim nearest to the Guadiana is covered with saltpans and their presence is centuries old. A visit to the saltpans provides an opportunity to see how, through evaporation, the crystals form in the water where the salt is increasingly concentrated.



Salt-pans - VC

getting to know
castro marim municipality

THE VASTNESSES OF THE "SERRA" (UPLANDS)

Looking out from Castro Marim castle you can see the sea on one side and on the other the rounded shapes of hills stretching away to the horizon. These are the uplands of the interior and they issue a silent challenge to everyone who is at home in wide, open spaces, who takes pleasure in plants or bird-watching or likes to walk or cycle, who appreciates the bounty of the natural world.

The roads that lead into the hills are punctuated by tiny hamlets of low, white houses, surrounded by fields of crops, the cool expanse of the lakes formed by the Beliche and Odeleite dams, and the silhouettes of ancient windmills perched on the hill tops. Then there is the Guadiana river, winding its way between remote hills, on whose banks stands the picturesque village of Almada de Ouro, which takes its name from the gold that was once mined there. Situated amidst hills, with a murmuring river for company, Odeleite is a tiny oasis of green in a landscape dominated by the dusty browns of the local schist. Within the white walls of its church are some fine statues dating from the 16th and 17th centuries.



Serra (Uplands) - LC

THE PLEASURES OF SUN AND SEA

Praia Verde, Cabeço and Alagoa

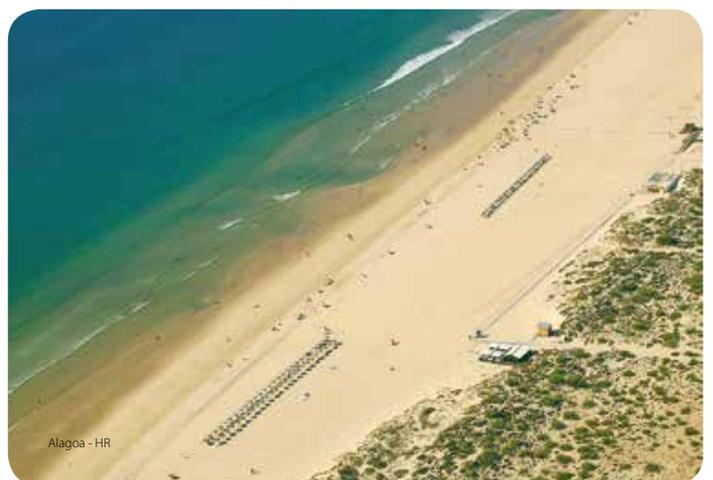
Joined by a long, broad strip of sand surrounded by the green of pinewoods, the three beaches are equipped with support facilities.



Praia Verde - HR



Cabeço - HR



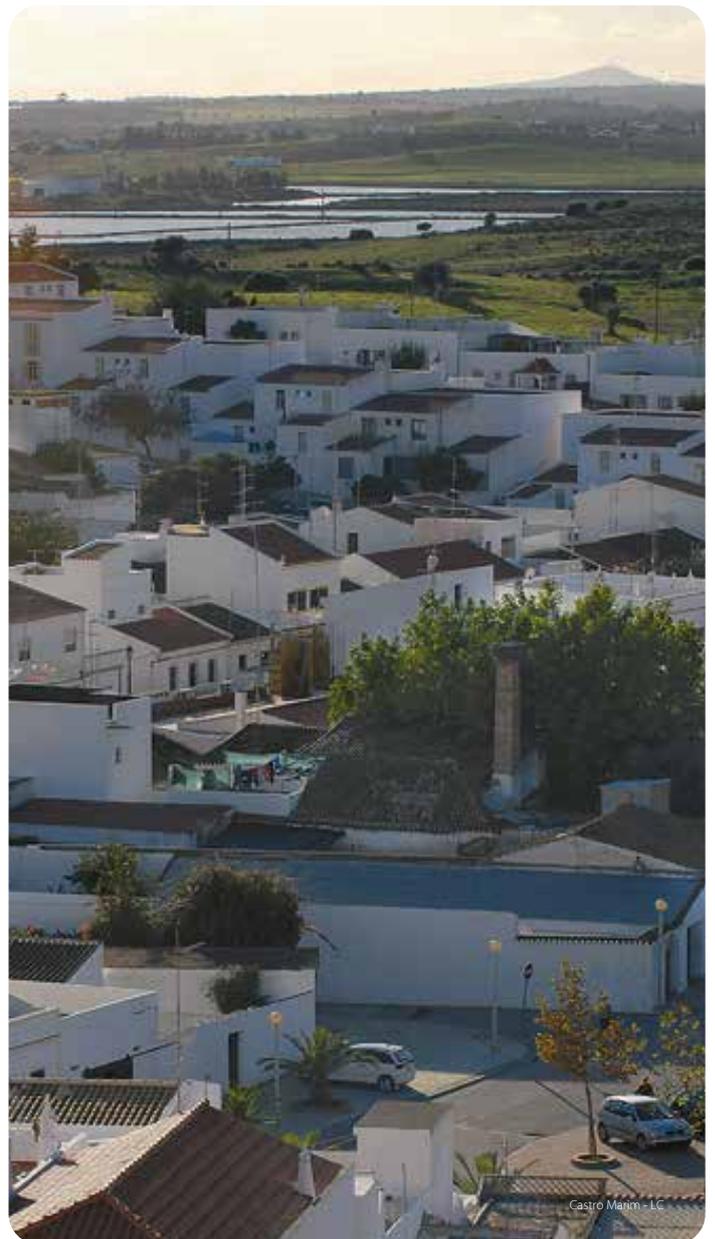
Alagoa - HR

TREASURES OF CRAFTSMANSHIP

The villages dotted across the hills, and Castro Marim itself, continue old traditions of craft work that preserve the memory of life in the Algarve, making little treasures that are all the more precious because they represent the real art of the people.

In Castro Marim the womenfolk sit at round cushions to which a design is pinned, their hands moving skilfully to weave a fine thread between the pins to make the most delicate bobbin lace. Another tradition preserved by the women of the Algarve, in this case in Vale das Zorras and Junqueira, is the production of traditional brooms and brushes using leaves from the small palm trees that grow wild on the hills.

For their part, the menfolk take fine strips of the reeds that grow on the banks of the Guadiana and other rivers of the region to make baskets that are strong but light. Odeleite, in particular, is known for its basket ware, but the craftsmen of Furnazinhas, Funchosa, Alta Mor, Corte Pequena, Vale do Pereiro and Tenêncio are also highly skilled in this domain.



THE DELIGHTS OF LOCAL COOKING

Castro Marim's cuisine is as varied as its landscape. From the sea come fresh golden bream, sea bass and other fish for grilling, and delicious prawns. From the river come freshwater species, such as different varieties of mullet that are cooked to traditional recipes. The salt marsh is rich in crabs, and the hills offer succulent dishes made with pork, broad beans and peas, as well as refreshing "gaspacho" soup for the hot days of summer.

As far as desserts and pastries are concerned, the highlight is the "bolo de massa" from Azinhal, a cake flavoured with cinnamon and aniseed, and "filhós", a typical Algarvean treat.



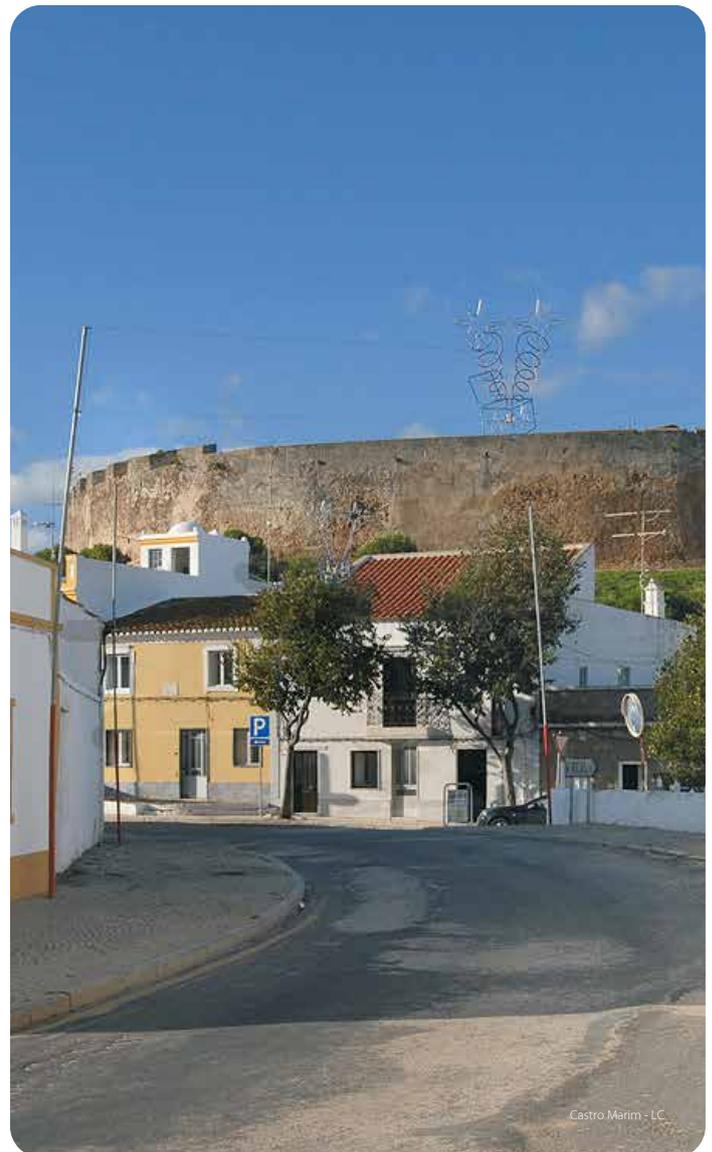
Marshland-LC



Beliche-VC



Golf-TA



Castro Marim-LC



castro marim

Data sheet

Edition and Copyright: Região de Turismo do Algarve

Cartography: IGeoE

Translation: Inpokulis

Printing: Gráfica Comercial

Photography: Hélio Ramos (HR), Luís da Cruz (LC), Miguel Veterano (MV), Vasco Célio (VC)

www.visitalgarve.pt

