

## THE VIA ALGARVIANA IN PORTUGAL (GR13)

Almargem, Associação de Defesa do Património Cultural e Ambiental do Algarve, is a non-profit association whose main objectives are: 'the study and dissemination of the natural, historical and cultural heritage of the Algarve and the promotion of activities aimed at integrated and environmentally friendly local development'. Quite a mouthful, but what it is trying to focus on above all is the preservation and enhancement of the original Algarve, in Portugal.

Photo and text Hans Plas, [www.oranginas.nl](http://www.oranginas.nl)

Since 2008, this association has been busy co-designing and maintaining the Via Algarviana (GR13), a signposted long-distance hiking trail between Alcoutim (on the Guadiana: the border river with Spain) and the Cabo São Vicente (on the Atlantic coast). The route runs from east to west, is a total of 300 km long and divided into 14 stages. The association can help you find lodging. It provides addresses of organizations with whom you can book accommodation. For example at the Algarvers' home.



On the coast of the Algarve, things have already changed. Here in the inlands of the Algarve you will be surprised by the originality of the landscape and the culture of its inhabitants. And we would like to keep it that way, or strengthen it. You can financially support Almargem in this useful work.

The route goes over the hills and mountains of the Serra do Caldeirão (up to 600 m) and the Serra do Monchique (up to 905m, a volcanic mountain range) to the Cabo de São Vicente National Park. The signage is in red and white colors. An information brochure can be downloaded from the route's official website. Note that it is 232 pages long, but provides fairly detailed overview maps of the

route. The trail has a wide variety of landscapes: the hills and mountains already mentioned, "sandy" arid plains, (river) valleys with fields of olive trees, almond trees or citrus fruits. And of course the forests of eucalyptus trees, for which the owner does not get the hands of everyone. After all, it is a species of tree imported from Australia, which provides rapid growth, a lot of wood in little time and, therefore, a lot of money quickly. At the same time, it is also a rapid biodiversity destroyer. In addition, in many places there are the piled-up harvests of cork oaks. Fascinating to see!



There are several streams on the route that are easy to cross under normal conditions. Has it rained - and the showers here can be fierce - ask the locals if a normal and thus safe crossing is still possible. In no time at all, babbling brooks can turn into roaring monsters and the "stepping stones" are hidden from view. It is also possible that a fog rises, obstructing visibility. You hear a buzzing sound before you, which gets stronger and stronger and stronger. You become enchanted. Bees? An unknown musical instrument? Seductive and alluring Sirens?

Chances are you are heading straight for a singing mill. They are still there. Also fascinating. Both the mill and the enchantment.

The route passes several villages and towns, many of which are colored in blue and white. You walk along paths and trails, country roads, old connecting roads, sometimes a bit of asphalt and cobblestone roads. Also you can walk a whole day without encountering "anything or anyone". In a number of villages live only a few older people. They often tell the most wonderful stories about their former work. In Deutschland, "*im Bau*", for example. Or about anything else. A chat. A drink. *Todo o tempo do mundo*. The climbs along the way are minor, except on the route to Monchique where there is a tough 900m mountain to climb: the Foia (905m). With great views!



A special town is Silves, which lies on the Arade River. The medieval town is dominated by a Moorish fortress. Its towers and walls are built on a hill of the Serra de Monchique. The views from the fortress are impressive. The outside is beautiful, the inside is not: it has largely disappeared. Halfway through the thirteenth century, Arab rule came to an end.

The Via Algarviana ends at the Cabo São Vicente, almost the westernmost tip of Europe, in the National Park of the Costa Vicentina. With either an explosion of flowers in spring or a tundra-like hue in the rest of the season. A flat area with enormous birdlife. Bird watching? Here is the place to be!

Where the Via Algarviana ends, [the Rota Vicentina](#) begins. You can continue for hundreds of kilometers: To the north, in this case. *Um belo caminho costeiro.*

- Starting point: Alcoutim, on the border river with Spain; Difficulty: Medium; the climb in the Serra do Monchique to Foia is tough;
- From the central bus station in Pharaoh there is a bus to Vila Real de Santo Antonio and from there the bus to Alcoutim;
- The Via Algarviana is also a popular cycling route, but as a hiker you will have little or no impact from this.
- Given the possible summer temperatures, we recommend walking the route in spring and/or autumn.

Thanks to Almargem and contributors to the Via Algarviana website for news of the latest developments and provision of several digital photos. Much better than my paper photos



**View from Foia**



After rain ( here with help....stepping stones)



A village in Algarve



village entrance