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Walking in Portugal

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Wind and water erosion shapes the local stone. Photo by Stuart Forster.



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Walkers have begun to discover Portugal's attractions in recent years. If you're keen to explore the Portuguese countryside, one of the easiest ways to do so is by joining up with a walking group for a day out.

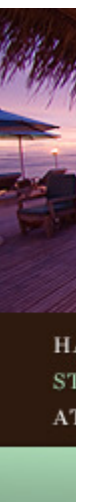
The look of the Portuguese landscape varies markedly from season to season and has much to offer dedicated trekkers. Walkers keen to undertake a day out within an hour's drive from Lisbon can also choose between a number of rugged coastal walks, heritage trails through historic cities such as Sintra, and undulating routes that take in hills and vineyards.

Rather than heading out alone, to walk trails which follow public footpaths, Portuguese people often join organised walks, whose routes have been scouted by organisers in the days preceding the event. Travellers visiting



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Portugal can also join up with walking groups, taking advantage of the local knowledge provided by experienced guides.

There's a reason why doing so makes sense. I've found it difficult to get hold of reliable Portuguese maps suitable for planning walks; maps with a level of detail comparable to the Ordnance Survey maps which are available in the United Kingdom. Also, when I tried to follow marked trails in the Serra da Estrela, around the town of Manteigas, which has an altitude of 700m above sea level, the markings simply disappeared. They might have been removed by people or were worn away by the extremes of mountain weather; snow is common in winter in that part of Portugal. I had to end what was proving to be an enjoyable and scenic walk, as, despite my best efforts, I simply couldn't pick up the lost trail.

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Walking in Portugal

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Portugal's Atlantic Coast close to Sesimbra, seen on the Medos do Penedo circular walk. Photo by Stuart Forster.



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[Page 1](#)

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Keen to avoid any subsequent anti-climatic ends to a day's walking, I decided to see what it would be like to join one of the organised group walks, in countryside close to Sesimbra, just a 45 minute drive south of Lisbon. I joined up with a walk organised by SAL, an outdoor activity company that was founded in 1996. Every weekend SAL organises two guided walks on Saturdays, lasting half a day, and two on Sundays, lasting until 3 or 4pm. The walks begin 10am and summaries of all of SAL's planned walks are listed on the company's [website](#), along with information about the meeting points and difficulty levels of the route.

The *Medos do Penedo* circular walk covered 15km over five-and-a-half hours. The name of the walk translates, roughly, into English as 'fears of the cliff' but the scenery was more awe inspiring than scary, though we did get fairly close



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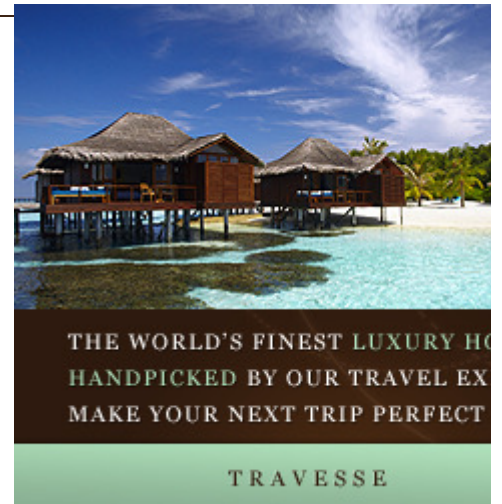
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the edge a couple of times. At a handful of points along the route we paused to listen to our guides provide geological insights as to how the Atlantic coastline was formed, to learn about the medicinal qualities of plants found along the route, to view fossilised shells and to hear a brief history of the aqueduct that runs towards the sanctuary at *Cabo de Espichel* (Cape Espichel). My Portuguese is far from fluent and, fortunately for me, the guides were happy to provide explanations in English. Learning a little bit about what I was seeing along the way added value to the experience and contributed to an enjoyable day out.

Walks such as this one are ideal for travellers and short term visitors to Portugal. Joining the walk cost €8, there was no need for me to take out a membership. A number of other groups and companies also organise walks in the Portuguese countryside.

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