

Ref.3211



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Ref.6186



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Ref. 7037/2417



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Travel

Get active in the Algarve

WALKING boots, running shoes, tennis racquet and gym wear – and an obscene number of sport socks – meant that travelling light was always going to be out of the question.

Especially when my girl scout priority was to be prepared, not practical. After all I had entered unknown territory on signing up to one of the world's newest health retreats.

The least I could be was well equipped for an action-packed week away with purescapes, an active health retreat that involved circuit training, kayaking, surfing and hiking.

So, happy to conserve energy I let someone else handle the 20 kilo suitcase into my airy ensuite bedroom.

We were staying at a villa just outside the small fortress town of Silves (pronounced Silvsh) located just 25 minutes drive from Faro airport in the sunny Algarve region of Portugal.

The smartly converted farm sits majestically among 40 acres of citrus and avocado groves in the surrounding rolling hills.

Like the rest of the villa the guest room was decorated in the typical Mediterranean style with white-washed walls, tiled floors and minimal modern furnishings.

A generous built-in wardrobe instantly took care of my clothes mountain, while large French windows let in a welcoming mid-afternoon breeze and the gentle swishing sound of leafy branches from

WAKING up at dawn to exercise *before* breakfast takes a certain amount of discipline and a lot of encouragement. **Sophie Hazan** experiences first hand the friendliest fitness boot camp ever.

the near-by gardens.

Thankfully, battling a sudden downpour while boarding my plane back in the UK was now just a distant memory.

The sunshine and cloudless skies of Portugal had proved a healing formula. Tearing myself away from my newly-found oasis, I went to meet the rest of the guests and our hosts, discovering that this was to be an inter-Atlantic affair with Americans, Canadians and fellow Brits all making the team.

Health programme

Together we were some of the first to experience the health programme created following a chance meeting between Reza Niam, a Canadian fitness trainer, and Susana Vidal, a Portuguese biologist.

Reza had long dreamed of running a health retreat with good links to the UK – Portugal is just a short three hour flight away from Leeds, and is conveniently in the same time zone.

While Susana knew the length and breadth of the region having owned her own nature trek business.

They hand picked an elite team of health and fitness gurus with their own strengths and interests.

Kacie Baxter, a keen runner who doubled up as host; Adrian who spent years studying under martial arts masters; and expert nutritionist and holistic lifestyle coach Melissa Drews, a wizard at bringing the best out in people. They mapped out walks, location hunted and hired the homegrown talents of Maria Pereira, a masseuse so in touch with the senses we spent a lot of energy fighting to book in, and Nuno Jacob so influential in the world of yoga that he founded his own school practising SwāSthya Yōga in Faro, the region's capital.

It is not clear who discovered our chef but he was a culinary artist guaranteed to win over our stomachs at every meal with his creative dishes made from 100 per cent locally sourced and organic produce.

Monkfish in coconut oil served on red spinach; lemon and courgette soup; grass-fed beef with a quinoa (pronounced keen-wah), walnut and feta salad; and handmade honey-nut energy bars were





just a few favourites.

The latter were a perfect mid afternoon pick-me-up when out for the day. Most mornings we started early meaning which meant that the demanding high sweat workouts – usually circuit training – were over before the sun started to heat up.

But on first waking we all took part in Qigong (pronounced “chi kung”), which involved rhythmic routines of arm movement not unlike tai chi but with feet rooted to the spot.

Our efforts never went unrewarded with a leisurely luxury breakfast on the porch to refuel, and always time for a shower and change.

Most days we ventured straight out sightseeing en route to the next activity. We soon learned that the Algarve is much more than a popular tourist trap. From Cabo de Sainte Vicente (Europe’s most south-westerly point) to Ponta de Sagres is possibly southern Europe’s last remaining and most important piece of wild unspoiled coastline.

Part of it belongs to the Reserva Biogenetica de Sagres, a protected area filled with a wide biodiversity of different species and natural habitats, many of which are unique.

While kayaking to Faro Island, a secluded sandy narrow strip, we saw marine biologists studying rare sea grasses, breeding African birds and crucially few other people.

A coastal trek revealed the beauty of local flora and fauna, so different from the hillsides we had previously explored on foot where cork, almond, avocado and carob were farmed.

In contrast our visit to the western coast revealed beaches lined with dramatic jagged cliffs more typical of the volcanic areas of Phuket in Thailand, California in the US or Tasmania in Australia. Back at base, most afternoons were filled with a mix of leisure and activity time, whether that be a siesta, swim, tennis, massage or yoga. The intimate family atmosphere meant

BEAUTIFUL: The Algarve boasts unspoiled coastline



you could always let your hair down and please yourself.

Quite simply pureescapes is a self-indulgent luxury that instantly improves your well-being.

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sophie.hazan@ypn.co.uk

Travelfacts

- Sophie Hazan flew to Faro with Jet2 from Manchester, but flights are also available from Leeds and cost from £60.99 return including taxes.
- The flights depart Leeds Bradford Airport seven days a week. Visit www.jet2.com for more information.
- pureescapes costs from £1,795 per person including 7 nights accommodation, transfers, all organic meals and drinks, all group activities, unlimited one-on-one training and nutritional analysis with experts, yoga and Qigong and a one hour massage.
- For further information visit www.pureescapes.com or call 0207 644 6120

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