

# DAY TRIP THROUGH PORTUGAL'S WESTERN ALGARVE



Silves Cathedral

by Ted Cookson



Chapel at Sagres



Sagres wind compass



Fisherman at Cape Vincent

**F**aro Airport, 6 km (4 miles) west of central Faro, is the gateway to Portugal's Algarve region for most international travelers. In fact, most visitors proceed directly to their resort accommodations east or west of Faro by rental car, completely bypassing the city of Faro, which is the

most populated town in the Algarve and its capital.

Many holiday villages are clustered around quaint Albufeira, which is situated near excellent beaches northwest of Faro. Albufeira is one of the Algarve's largest and most popular resort destinations.

An excellent day trip through

the western part of the Algarve can be made by car using Albufeira as a base. The circuit includes the Moorish capital of Silves, the historic Sagres where Prince Henry the Navigator once dwelled, nearby Cape Vincent, and the small port of Lagos founded by the Phoenicians.

Silves, situated in the hills 18 km (11 miles) northeast of the port of Portimao, was the grand home of the Moorish kings who ruled the province of Al-Gharb which, incidentally, means "the West" in Arabic. Silves' picturesque medieval Moorish castle is the largest in the Algarve. Today a



Lagos harbor



Lighthouse and cliffs



Author with Crusader statue

gigantic Crusader statue standing just outside the castle serves to remind that this fortress was sacked by Crusaders in 1189. Wonderful views of the surrounding countryside can be had from the walls of the castle, which still dominates Silves today. The town also boasts a Gothic cathedral built on the site of an old mosque. The streets of Silves are still laid out just as they were in the medieval medina.

It was at Sagres in the fifteenth century that Prince Henry the Navigator established his navigation school at which Magellan, Cabral and da Gama all studied. Today Prince Henry's fortaleza is the principal tourist site at Sagres. A fifteenth-century stone wind compass 43 meters (140 feet) in diameter dominates the entrance to the fortress, and there are spectacular sea views over the tall cliffs from the long



Silves castle walls

walkway along the ancient walls. Interestingly, within the fortress, the altar of the sixteenth-century Church of Our Lady of Grace depicts Saint Vincent holding a ship. Cape Vincent, Portugal's westernmost promontory, has been inhabited since the Neolithic era. In Classical times the cape was thought to be sacred. After the remains of Saint Vincent were brought there following the Arab invasion, Cape Vincent drew pilgrims for centuries. Today this spectacular but windy western promontory sports only a lighthouse, a tiny tourist market, and few

fishermen trying their luck. En route back to Albufeira is the fishing town of Lagos whose natural harbour attracted the Phoenicians. Later the Moors settled in Lagos until the town was retaken by Christian forces in 1241. Prince Henry used Lagos as a base for his African trade. In fact, Europe's first slave market was in Lagos. Today the town is known mainly for its nearby cliffs, coves and beautiful beaches and for the convenient motorway which now connects it with Lisbon, Faro and even with Spain.



Cape Vincent tourist market

**ABOUT TED COOKSON:** Egypt's most widely-traveled travel agent, Ted has been to every country in the world! He has also visited 307 of the 317 destinations on the list of the Travelers' Century Club (visit [www.eptours.com](http://www.eptours.com) and refer to World Travel Club). A travel agent in Cairo since 1986, Ted manages EGYPT PANORAMA TOURS, a full-service travel agency, at 4 Road 79 (between Roads 9 and 10, near the "El Maadi" metro station) in Maadi. Contact Egypt Panorama Tours (open 7 days a week 9 AM-5 PM) at: Tels. 2359-0200, 2358-5880, 2359-1301. Fax 2359-1199. E-mail: [ept@link.net](mailto:ept@link.net). Web site: [www.eptours.com](http://www.eptours.com). The password for residents is eptcool. Both text and PDF versions of all of Ted's travel articles published since 2002 are archived online at [www.eptours.com](http://www.eptours.com) under "Ted's International Travel Articles." Some of the archived articles also contain video clips!