Portugal

Autumn Birding in the Algarve

This fabulous photograph of a Great Shearwater was taken from the boat trip on our October 2013 tour to the Algarve © Robin Chittenden/www.robinchittenden.co.uk

2014 Saturday 27th September - Saturday 4th October

LEADERS João Jara as principal guide

An 8-day autumn birdwatching tour to the Algarve, in southern Portugal. Visits to the key coastal sites, including the Lagoa dos Salgados and Cape St Vincent, plus a pelagic boat trip for seabirds and a day trip to the Alentejo steppe. With migrants on the move, highlights from recent tours include European Storm Petrel, Balearic, Sooty, Great and Cory’s Shearwaters, Great and Little Bustards, Purple Swamphen, Spanish Imperial Eagle, Azure-winged Magpie, Bluethroat and even Rose-coloured Starling!

- Best of the Algarve in autumn
- Purple Swamphen, Audouin’s Gull, Hoopoe, Azure-winged Magpie, Bluethroat
- Pelagic boat trip off Sagres in search of shearwaters, petrels and other seabirds
- Cape St. Vincent for Blue Rock Thrush, migrant raptors and passerines
- The rolling Alentejo grasslands: Black-winged Kite, both bustards, White Stork
- Past tour “finds” include Rüppell’s Griffon, Spotted Crake and Rose-coloured Starling!
- Two-tailed Pasha and Monarch among possible autumn butterflies
- Two very comfortable 4-star hotels at Sagres and Tavira, in coastal Algarve
- 15th year for this autumn migration tour
- Expertly led by ‘our man in Portugal’, João Jara
Tour Overview

Lying at the far south-western tip of mainland Europe, and within striking distance of the African coast, the beckoning cliffs and littoral wetlands of Portugal’s beautiful Algarve region are a natural focus for birds migrating between the two continents. The area is at its best for birding in early October, with seabirds moving off the coast, and waterfowl, waders, birds of prey and passerines following the Atlantic shore south to Cape Trafalgar, before ‘turning the corner’ and heading east along the coast of the Algarve as they funnel towards the Strait of Gibraltar - the shortest sea crossing between the two great continents.

Our tour begins with a flight to Faro, from where it’s an easy drive east to Tavira and our hotel for the first four nights - an excellent four-star property, right at the heart of the Ria Formosa Natural Park. From here, we’ll explore the very best of the Algarve’s wetland reserves, including the threatened Lagoa dos Salgados, Quinto do Lago, the saltplains at Castro Marim and the protected barrier islands and inlets of the Ria Formosa itself. Greater Flamingo, Little Bittern, Audouin’s and Slender -billed Gulls, Bluethroat and the tiny Common Waxbill are regularly present around the coast in autumn, alongside Little and Cattle Egrets, Black-winged Stilt, Kentish Plover and a host of other wetland birds.

The prime wetland sites lie within easy distance of our well-chosen base at Tavira. But during our stay in the east we will also enjoy one longer day out, travelling inland to Mértola, to sample the very different birdlife of Portugal’s fabulous Alentejo region. As the westernmost extension of Spain’s more famous grasslands of Extremadura, the Alentejo’s rolling steppe is home to many Iberian specialities, including Great and Little Bustards, Calandra and Thekla Larks, and Black-winged Kite.

For the second part of our holiday we head west, right across the Algarve, to another excellent hotel - this time overlooking the harbour at Sagres, at the extreme south-western corner of mainland Europe. In autumn, the magnificent sea-cliffs of Cape St. Vincent are a magnet to migrants - and virtually on our doorstep here! Blue Rock Thrush and Red-billed Chough are resident, and our previous October visits have turned up trumps with everything from Black Stork and Booted Eagle to Turtle Dove and Tawny Pipit. Our last tour even found a Rose-coloured Starling amongst a flock of resident Spotless Starlings!

One special highlight of our most recent tours has been a pelagic boat trip out from Sagres. Our last trip produced excellent views of Cory’s, Great, Balearic and Sooty Shearwaters, along with European Storm-petrel, plunge-diving Gannets, and the bruising Great Skua. We will hope to be as lucky again this year!

The appealing winter climate has long made the Algarve a popular destination with holidaymakers and retirees from Britain. But this is a trip that will take you behind the more familiar tourist façade, to a land where the likes of White Stork, Purple Swamphen and Azure-winged Magpie offer the prospect of a truly memorable birdwatching holiday.

Limosa has been operating bird tours to southern Portugal since 1996 and this year's trip will be our 15th visit to the region. Our guide João Jara was born in Lisbon and has more than 30 years experience birding across his native Portugal. Join us for another wonderful week of autumn birding along Portugal’s sunny south coast!

Outline Itinerary

Day 1: Fly London-Faro. Transfer east to Tavira (4 nts)
Days 2-4: Wetlands of the eastern Algarve, plus the Alentejo steppe
Days 5-7: Monchique, Cape St. Vincent and pelagic boat trip. Sagres (3 nts)
Day 8: Return to Faro, fly London

2 • Any questions? Please call: +44 (0) 1692 580623 | 580624 • Or see: www.limosaholidays.co.uk
Daily Itinerary

Day 1
TO FARO & TAVIRA
We fly from London Gatwick to Faro and transfer east (a journey of around 45 minutes) to our first hotel, adjacent to the coast at Tavira. Situated right at the heart of the Ria Formosa Natural Park in Portugal’s popular eastern Algarve region, the comfortable four-star Vila Gale Albacora Hotel will be our base for the first four nights of the holiday. Depending upon flight schedules, there may be time to enjoy our first Portuguese birding close by the hotel this afternoon. Night Tavira.

Days 2 - 4
ALGARVE WETLANDS & ALENTEJO STEPPE
The Algarve’s varied landscape and appealing climate give added zest to a week of first-class autumn birding, one that has a definite ‘Mediterranean’ flavour - although here we are of course on Europe’s Atlantic shore!

Over these three days we will explore the Algarve’s premier coastal wetlands, ranging from the bird-rich Lagoa dos Salgados and Quinto do Lago in the west, to the islands and inlets of the Ria Formosa, and the salt pans at Castro Marim in the east. Spotless Starlings and Serins frequent the villages and gardens, and Cattle Egrets are a common sight in the fields. Little Egrets and Purple Swamphens stalk the reedbeds at favoured coastal wetlands, and an October visit may well produce something scarcer, such as Little Bittern, Squacco Heron, Ferruginous Duck, Red-crested Pochard or Caspian Tern. Over the years, our groups’ more unusual ‘finds’ here have included Glossy Ibis, Spotted Crane and Pectoral Sandpiper.

Stretching for more than 50kms along the coast (from Tavira in the east to Ancao in the west), the Ria Formosa is a terrific spot for birds in autumn. This linear natural park safeguards almost the entire Formosa estuary and comprises a narrow strip of land separated from the sea by a barrier of protective sand dunes, behind which lies a labyrinth of lagoons and sandy islands, mudflats, marshes and canals. Greater Flamingo, Black-winged Stilt and Kentish Plover find a home here, along with Yellow-legged, Audouin’s and Slender-billed Gulls. Belts of fringing scrub and pine harbour Azure-winged Magpies and Sardinian Warblers, and more or less any patch of coastal scrub might conceal passage migrants such as Whinchat, Redstart and Pied Flycatcher. We have often been lucky to find the secretive Bluethroat, too.

To the north of the Algarve, the undulating steppe grasslands of Portugal’s Alentejo region represent the westernmost extension of Spain’s Extremadura province. This sparsely populated plain is a major stronghold for Great and Little Bustards, although the post-breeding flocks of both species can be quite tricky to find amidst the seemingly endless fields! White Storks breed in big numbers in the peaceful Alentejo - in places, it seems just about everywhere on the roadside telegraph pole is adorned with a nest - and Southern Grey Shrikes perch boldly on roadside wires. We’ll listen out for the telltale ‘chuckling’ of Black-bellied Sandgrouse as they scud rapidly over the autumnal grasslands, and it is here that we have our best chances of finding Calandra and Thekla Larks, Lesser Kestrel and the scarce Black-winged Kite.

East of Tavira, the saline marshes and salt pans at Castro Marim - just this side of the river that forms the border with Spain - are an excellent spot to look for Greater Flamingo, Spoonbill and Stone-curlew. The impressive Caspian Tern and skulking Spectacled Warbler occur, and an autumn visit adds the prospect of Osprey, Marsh Harrier and other birds of prey, drifting east across the Rio Guadiana into Spain before following the coast south to cross the Strait of Gibraltar into North Africa. Three nights Tavira.

Days 5 - 7
MONCHIQUE, CAPE ST VINCENT & SAGRES PELAGIC BOAT TRIP
Having explored the Algarve’s principal wetland sites, we leave Tavira today and journey west along the coast to our second hotel, at Sagres. We spend three nights here, staying at the stylish Memmo Baleeira,
a contemporary four-star hotel overlooking Sagres harbour and with magnificent ocean views. In autumn, the cliffs of nearby Cape St Vincent (just 10 minutes drive from our hotel) are a major migration hotspot. Along the way, we may take a little detour off the coastal highway, up into the hills inland of the coast.

The wooded hillsides around the upland village of Monchique hold Dartford Warbler, Black Redstart, Crested Tit, Firecrest and Short-toed Treecreeper. Cirl Buntings also breed on the sunnier, south-facing slopes and, higher still, we will check a couple of likely haunts for Rock Bunting, a scarce and localized bird in these parts. At this time of year, there’s always the chance we could encounter the odd pocket of migrants, too: Ring Ouzel, Redstart, Spotted Flycatcher and Garden Warbler are among species we’ve seen here before. If time allows, we will continue up to the summit of Foia - which at 998m (3250 ft) is the highest point in the Algarve - to savour the panoramic views from the top back down to the coast.

The port of Sagres sits right outside our hotel. During the 15th century, Henry the Navigator chose this as the location of his famous school of navigation, which produced such nautical alumni as Ferdinand Magellan and Vasco da Gama, legendary explorers whose impact on the world is still felt today. Although we won’t be embarking on such great voyages of discovery ourselves, if conditions are suitable, we will be able to enjoy a pelagic boat trip one morning in search of seabirds off the spectacular coast.

In autumn, good numbers of shearwaters congregate out to sea beyond the cliffs - and, with any luck, it won’t be long before we spot our first Cory’s Shearwater beside the boat! The presence of trawlers can attract crowds of Gannets and Yellow-legged Gulls, which in turn lure passing Great Skuas. Our last October group also encountered no fewer than 35 Great Shearwaters, four Balearics and a single Sooty Shearwater, eight European Storm Petrels and a Pomarine Skua. While on our 2010 tour, the discovery of a lone Scopoli’s Shearwater (the Mediterranean subspecies of Cory’s Shearwater) was the first record for Portugal! Though we can’t guarantee that we’ll be as lucky again, the chances of seeing exciting seabirds close up are good. In 2011, a pod of 100 Common Dolphins raced alongside our boat and it was thrilling to see them jumping in the air as they ploughed their way through the crystal clear blue water.

Sitting at the extreme southwest tip of Europe, a visit to Cape St Vincent is a ‘must’ in autumn. Blue Rock Thrush, Black Redstart and Red-billed Chough are resident on the rugged sea-cliffs, with Cory’s and Balearic Shearwaters possible offshore. Early October sees peak numbers of birds of prey moving through southwest Portugal and the Cape acts as a focal point. Over the years, our tours have encountered as many as fourteen different species of raptor here, including Black Kite, Egyptian Vulture, Eurasian Griffon, Hobby, and Short-toed, Booted and Bonelli’s Eagles. If conditions are right, falls of passerine migrants can bring warblers, wheatears and chats, too. Like any European headland worth its salt, an autumn visit is enhanced by the prospect of stumbling across the unexpected. Each year will be different of course, but varied highlights from our past trips here have included Rüppell’s Griffon Vulture, Red-footed and Eleonora’s Falcons, a melanistic Montagu’s Harrier, Little Bustard, Black Stork, Hoopoe, Wryneck, Short-toed Lark, Tawny Pipit, Spectacled Warbler, Iberian Chiffchaff and a juvenile Rose-coloured Starling!

Although primarily a birdwatching tour, this holiday has much to offer those with a more general wildlife interest. Iberian Hare, Large Psammomimus, Iberian Marsh Frog and Moorish Gecko, along with several species of Praying Mantis and late-flying dragonflies and butterflies are among the many other fascinating creatures seen by our groups. On more than one occasion, we have even been lucky to find the exquisite Two-tailed Pasha and migrant Monarch butterfly. Three nights Sagres

Day 8
TO FARO & LONDON
If flight schedules permit, we will enjoy some final birding in the Algarve today as we make our way back to Faro for farewells and our return flight to London.
Trip Information

Group Size 12 participants & 2 leaders

Birds 140-170 species

Accommodation Our hotels at Tavira and Sagres are both very comfortable 4-star properties with swimming pools. All rooms are en suite.

Meals All main meals are included in the tour price. Breakfast and evening meals will be taken at our hotel. Lunches will usually be picnics but we sometimes eat at a local cafe.

Walking Easy. Short walks. Comfy walking shoes recommended.

Weather The Algarve enjoys a ‘Mediterranean-type’ climate, tempered by the Atlantic. Typically warm and sunny in late September and early October, with daytime temperatures ranging from 14-23C (57-73F), and averaging 19C (66F). It can sometimes be misty first thing, and occasionally cool and windy, especially at the coast. Occasional showers possible but these rarely last for long at this time of the year.

Flights Direct from London Gatwick to Faro (southern Portugal) with British Airways, Easyjet, Monarch or similar. Faro is a popular tourist destination and it may also be possible to arrange flights from UK regional airports - please ask for a quote at time of booking.

Ground Transport By minibus.

Boat Trip We will take either a morning or afternoon pelagic boat trip off Sagres to look for shearwaters, petrels and other seabirds. The boat trip usually lasts 2-4 hours. Please note that trip is subject to availability of the local operator, and is also weather permitting.

Photos Chances of some good opportunistic bird photography on this tour, including possible seabirds and cetaceans from the boat.

Tour Cost

2014 (8 days): £1695 (inc flights from London)
Land only cost: £1565
Deposit: £300
Single Supp: £195

Cost includes
Return flights London Gatwick-Faro, all accommodation, main meals, minibus transport, seabird pelagic boat trip off Sagres, incidental tips, airport taxes, map, bird checklist & services of the leader/s.

Cost excludes
Insurance, drinks & other items of a personal nature.
About Your Guides

João Jara  João was born in Lisbon and studied biology at the Faculdade de Ciências de Lisboa, from where he developed his professional career in the pharmaceutical industry as senior manager and director of various multinational companies. With more than 30 years field experience, he knows Portugal and its birds intimately, and was a member of the board of SPEA (Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves – Birdlife in Portugal). He was a voting member of the Portuguese Rarities Committee from 2005 until 2011, and chairman of the PRC from 2007 until 2011. João has led many field tours in Portugal and abroad, as well as bird identification courses for SPEA and for his own birding tours company, Birds & Nature Tours Portugal, which he launched in 2008. Besides birds, he has a special interest in amphibians, reptiles and fish. João is fluent in English, French and Spanish. He led his first tour for Limosa in 2010, and in 2014 joins us to guide our spring and autumn trips to Portugal, as well as to Madeira in summer.

A second Limosa guide (tba) will be added as tour size warrants.

What You Say

“Robin was excellent as a guide and travelling companion. Good pelagic trip, with a memorable encounter with 100+ Common Dolphins as well as a good mix of seabirds.”

Trevor Macklin, Portugal Algarve tour

“Could not fault Robin. Great Bustard right next to the vehicle, and the boat trip with Common Dolphins and Great Shearwaters were superb.”

Liz Taylor, Portugal Algarve tour

"It’s always a joy to travel with John Muddeman - now you have another excellent leader in Robin Chittenden!"

Denise Boaden, Portugal Algarve tour

"Both guides absolutely first class and also good company. Very knowledgeable about flora and fauna, as well as birds."

Sue Twyford, Portugal Algarve tour

Limosa Loyalty Discount

We are proud of the number of loyal customers who travel regularly with us. As our way of saying ‘thank you’, we offer a Frequent Travel Discount. Under the scheme, everyone who takes four trips with us is entitled to claim a 5% discount on their fifth trip*. Alternatively, you can opt to save your discounts up and carry them forward to claim a 10% discount on your 10th trip. The choice is yours, but please remember to request your discount at time of booking!

* Please note: This offer applies to the basic tour cost only and excludes certain commission-based trips, extras such as additional flights, private extensions and cancellations. Discounts cannot be given in lieu of tour deposits or off the cost of single room supplements.
How to Book
You can make a booking by one of three easy methods, but if you experience any problems, please feel free to contact the office. Be sure to read our Booking Conditions and General Information found at the back of our current brochure or on our website - www.limosaholidays.co.uk/booking-conditions/

Book Online: You can book swiftly and securely online via our website: www.limosaholidays.co.uk/booking/

Book by Post: Our brochures contain a Booking Form, but you can also download a copy from our website - www.limosaholidays.co.uk/booking/. Please complete both sides of the form, remembering to sign and date the section at the bottom of the second page. Send this to us, together with the appropriate Booking Deposit (see below).

Telephone bookings: Telephone bookings will be accepted on a provisional basis to allow time for your Booking Form and deposit to reach us by mail. We will hold provisional reservations for up to 14 days pending receipt of booking form, after which time any unconfirmed space will be released.

Payments
Deposits: The amount of deposit per person is shown above. We accept payment by cheque (drawn on a UK bank in GB Pounds Sterling), by BACS or internet banking (please ask us for our bank details), and by debit card. We also accept most major credit cards (not AmEx).

Final Balance: Full payment of the balance is due not later than 12 weeks prior to departure (occasionally longer in the case of some tours such as cruises or those involving rail travel). We will send you an invoice at about this time indicating the balance. We accept payment for final balances by cheque or debit card. Payment of the balance can also be by credit card with a 2% commission charge for the latter (see below). Please ask for our bank details if you prefer to transfer your payment direct to our bank account.

Card Charges: Due to escalating credit card charges we are unable to absorb the cost of these. We will not charge for payment of the initial booking deposit (amount as indicated in the Tour Cost section, above), but will make a 2% commission charge on any balances or subsequent payments (e.g. interim flight deposits) paid by credit card. We do not charge commission on payments made by debit card or by cheque or direct to bank.

Late Bookings: In order for us to guarantee your airline seats, hotels etc., full payment is required at time of booking for all late bookings (i.e. bookings made within 12 weeks of departure).

When to Book
This is one of the most Frequently Asked Questions - the short answer is as early as possible! Accommodation and flights are much more easily secured well in advance and there is nothing more frustrating than to know that on paper space is still available on the tour but that hotels and/or flights are full. To encourage early booking therefore, we are pleased to offer an Early Booking Discount - see our current brochure or website for details.

Our tours are limited to small group sizes, so they can fill up quickly - sometimes even before our new brochure comes out! It's not unusual to find trips are fully booked around four to six months in advance. Single rooms in particular can often be in short supply and among the first to go, so do try to plan well ahead if you definitely require one of these.
Last-minute bookings: We inevitably receive a few unexpected late cancellations over the course of a season so it is always worth enquiring about vacancies on any tour - even for those departing in just a few weeks time!

Other Things You Need To Know

Passports & Visas
All participants must be in possession of a valid passport. For UK passport holders, for stays of up to three months, your passport must be valid for the proposed duration of your stay.

Although no additional period of validity beyond this is required, when travelling anywhere overseas we always recommend that your passport has a minimum of 6 months left to run after your intended date of return home in case of unforeseen delay.

• VISA NOT REQUIRED by UK passport holders to enter Portugal. Holders of non-UK passports should contact their nearest Portuguese embassy or consulate to enquire whether or not they require a visa. If a visa is required, you will need to apply locally. If the embassy or consulate requires you to provide a letter confirming that you are booked on an all-inclusive tour, please contact our office and we will be happy to provide one.

Health & Vaccinations
Compulsory vaccinations: None. Recommended vaccinations: For travel everywhere (even within the UK), we recommend you check you are up-to-date with protection against tetanus, polio and hepatitis A.

The above information, together with that contained within our Travel Information sheets (sent to everyone who books), outlines health requirements for this tour. Please note that these details are given for guidance only - and are only for certain diseases - and you must consult your doctor in good time prior to travel as to what immunisations (if any) are needed for your chosen holiday.

For full and up-to-date health information we urge everyone to consult The National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC) website www.nathnac.org/travel/ prior to booking any overseas holiday. NaTHNaC is funded by the UK Government’s Health Protection Agency and provides health information for both health professionals and travellers, with information compiled by its own clinical and scientific team. You can search for your individual country requirements, which are updated regularly.

Your Safety & Travel Advice
An unavoidable aspect of travelling abroad nowadays is the threat it may pose to your safety and security. The UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) encourages British nationals to be better prepared for their overseas trips with a view to avoiding common travelling traumas, risks and dangers. In order for you to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination it is strongly recommended that you refer to the relevant FCO Travel Advice - www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice - both prior to booking and regularly before you travel.

It is standard Limosa policy for our office to send a copy of the relevant FCO Travel Advice about the tour to all participants along with their Final Letter (2-4 weeks prior to the trip).
Further useful information on visas, health, etc., can be found at the World Travel Guide website: www.worldtravelguide.net/destinations

‘Know Before You Go’ - staying safe and healthy abroad - is a travel safety campaign run by the FCO, and another useful resource. Go to: www.gov.uk/knowbeforeyougo

Travel Insurance
Good travel insurance is essential before setting off on any overseas trip. In common with all responsible tour operators, it is a condition of booking that all clients are fully and adequately insured before travelling overseas with us.

Your travel insurance should cover against cancellation, curtailment, missed departure, delay, personal accident, death, loss of baggage and valuables (see note below), personal liability and legal expenses. Most importantly, your insurance must cover you fully in respect of medical care and repatriation should you become too ill to continue with the tour, including the cost of emergency evacuation by helicopter or air ambulance should this be necessary. Note that passenger liability insurance covering the transportation that we hire, particularly in Third World countries, may be inadequate; it is therefore important that your insurance cover includes sufficient provision for your dependents in the event of an accident.

We recommend that you obtain travel insurance as soon as possible after booking your holiday to ensure you are protected right from the word go in the event of unexpected cancellation prior to departure due to accident or illness. You must inform your insurers of any pre-existing medical conditions (including those of persons not necessarily travelling but upon whom your holiday may depend) that may require treatment during a period of overseas travel or might cause you to cancel the trip.

Once you have arranged your insurance, please be sure to send us the following essential details: name and contact details of your insurance provider, your policy number, expiry date and your insurers 24hr Emergency Assistance number.

Important Things to Note!
Be aware that Travel Insurance does not normally provide sufficient cover for valuable optical equipment, which is often best protected under your own household insurance policy. If in doubt ask your insurers for advice prior to travel.

Most travel insurance policies limit the amount of cover, typically up to a maximum tour cost of £5000 per person. If the tour you are booking exceeds this amount, additional cover can usually be provided upon payment of additional premium. We recommend all travellers check their individual policy limit to ensure the full cost of their holiday is covered.

Arranging Your Insurance: due to UK Government legislation, under Financial Services Authority (FSA) regulations, we are not allowed to offer or recommend travel related insurance to customers. Premiums can vary widely according to your age, needs, health, choice of destination and other factors, while many people nowadays have Annual Travel Insurance cover. For these reasons, we leave you free to shop around and pick your own policy, one best suited to your own individual needs.
General Information

www.limosaholidays.co.uk
Our website gives easy access to detailed tour itineraries (Tour Info Packs), trip reports, trip photos and the latest Limosa News.

Special Diets & Other Requests
We pass on all such requests to the airlines, hotels and other suppliers, and do our best to ensure (but of course cannot guarantee) that your needs will be met. Please be sure to tell us about these (in as much detail as possible) at the time of booking, to allow good time to make the necessary arrangements.

Smoking
Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. For the enjoyment and comfort of all, we ask that smokers refrain from smoking in proximity to the group and respect our NO SMOKING policy in the vehicle, at meal times and when watching wildlife.

Any Questions?
If you have any questions at any time, you’ll find our office staff friendly, efficient, approachable - and just a phone call away, eager to assist you in every way. Our office is open 09.00-17.00 hrs Mon-Fri, and can also be reached by fax and email. In the event we are unable to take your call, please leave a message on our answerphone (24 hrs) and our office will contact you as soon as we can.

Thank you for your interest in our tours. We do hope that you will be able to join us - and we look forward to hearing from you again!

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