

ALGARVE INSPECTION VISIT 26-28 SEPTEMBER

In August 2011 Easyjet announced a series of flights from Southend Airport to some of the main Holiday resorts in Europe. This will prove to be a great opportunity for our local clients to try for the first time or revisit Majorca, The Costa Del Sol, The Costa Blanca, Ibiza, Barcelona and The Algarve. With a short flying time of 2 hours 40 minutes the Algarve is a great location for short breaks and longer, especially from Southend Airport. With this in mind Westway Travel made the Algarve our first port of call on a collection of Inspection visits around Europe.

We travelled to Faro with Easyjet which worked well, the flights were on time and although Easyjet do not allocate seat numbers it is possible to pay for speedy boarding in order to ensure that you can sit together.

Faro Airport is a modern easy to negotiate airport and it was quick and easy to pick up a hire car and get on our way.

The main motorway route from the Airport is the A22 which is well signposted and as long as you check the junction you need to exit it is simple to drive from the airport. Alternatively, for a more relaxing experience book a private transfer from the Airport and have the car delivered to the Hotel the next morning.

The last time I visited the Algarve was about fifteen years ago and I wondered if there would have been a lot of development and building. I must say I was pleasantly surprised that much of the coast was relatively unchanged, with the exception of Albufeira which is the most built up and commercialised resort on this coast.



The first thing to say is that the beaches along the Algarve are some of the best in Europe. .

The weather was very good at the end of September with temperatures of about 28 degrees. Although weather cannot be guaranteed I would not hesitate to recommend The Algarve for a late summer holiday, the crowds have left and the beaches are virtually empty.

A lot of Hotels close from November to March because the weather is not good enough all year round, although for golfers late and early season has a nice climate.

During our stay we visited a lot of resort areas and here are our thoughts on some of the Major resorts and hotels/apartments we recommend:

VILAMOURA



Vilamoura is a purpose built resort about 40 minutes from Faro Airport. It has five or six golf courses and a superb beach that was not crowded at this time of year. Although, I think that it would be much busier in the high season.

The Marina is very nice with many chic restaurants and bars, very clean and safe. The restaurants are good quality and international. Parking in this area is difficult and taxis are expensive. If you like a cosmopolitan resort you will like Vilamoura.

I would recommend staying in a hotel within walking distance of the beach and marina if you like to venture out, or stay in a Hotel that offers a shuttle service.

There is an excellent water park just outside Vilamoura, Aqua show Park.

The Tivoli Victoria

This Hotel is in a quiet area about 3km from the marina. It looks over the Victoria golf course. This Hotel is ideal for those wanting primarily to play golf. It is too far out to walk to any restaurants and driving is not that practical because parking is difficult. To drive to other golf courses and other resorts along the coast is easy. The Hotel has 2 restaurants and the food was very good.

The rooms are very comfortable and it has a very nice spa so would be ideal for couples where one plays golf and the other likes to enjoy a few treatments.



Within the grounds there are two and three bedroom apartments called the residences which would accommodate families, there is a children's pool and playroom but I would say not older children as they may a little bored.

Hilton Vilamoura As Cascatas Golf Resort & Spa



A modern contemporary hotel, large bedrooms, typically Hilton style but with more character, this was a more family friendly hotel, but would suit couples as well, it has a nice atmosphere, great reception area, with restaurants leading off of it and I liked it. It has good sized Indoor and outdoor pools and tea and coffee facilities in the rooms. There is also internet access in the rooms but at a charge. It is next to a golf club and has a lovely big spa as well. There is a free shuttle service to the Hotel's own beach club (As Cascatas), which is directly on the Falesia Beach. It is very well equipped with sun beds, umbrellas and towels provided free of charge and you can purchase refreshments and charge to your room.

This property would be suitable for families if they don't mind eating in the Hotel or driving or taking a taxi to the marina. As long as they are aware the Hotel is situated away from the beach. For children it offers Paradise Island Kids Club (at a charge) which is a large area, and also baby sitting is available there also at a charge. All of the room categories are very nice and there are also one or two bedroom apartments

The Pinhal golf course is nearby and the Hotel also has a simulator and a resident professional offering tuition. It also has tennis courts.

The Spa is very nice so again couples would enjoy this Hotel.

The Lake Spa Resort

This Hotel is in the centre of Vilamoura within 5 minutes walk of the beach and the marina. The Hotel is set around a private lake and has beautiful gardens. It is a huge hotel, Moorish in style and rather grand. Our first impressions were that it was a little impersonal but after staying there and getting the feel of the hotel we really liked it. It has a nice reception and bar, stairs down to the pool area with its own man made beach. Fabulous spot within walking distance to the Marina where there were plenty of restaurants and a pleasant walk to the beach. Overall this property seemed to tick all the boxes, we only had breakfast there, but they do have 3 restaurants.



There are three lovely outdoor pools one with a small sandy beach.

The Hotel has a children's club and can guarantee interconnecting rooms.

The Hotel also has a very nice spa.

I would definitely recommend this Hotel for its location, ambience and facilities. The rooms are very comfortable, the staff are friendly and the décor is modern but has character. The price of this Hotel is very similar to the Hilton and for those preferring easy access to the marina I would choose The Lake resort.

For clients who like to stay directly in the marina and have a slightly lower budget I would suggest **The Tivoli Marina Vilamoura**, a modern 5* property with full facilities and good views. Take a look at the website for more information <http://tivolihotels.com> or look at what other guests say on http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Hotel_Review-g227947-d259498-Reviews-Tivoli_Marina_Vilamoura-Vilamoura_Algarve.html

Vila Gale Ampalius is a standard 4* Hotel in a very good location within the marina. The cost of this Hotel is midrange and for anyone who likes to stay in the marina it's a good choice. Website link is <http://www.vilagale.pt/pages/hoteis/?hotel=1> or again previous guest information can be found on http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Hotel_Review-g227947-d274299-Reviews-Vila_Gale_Ampalius-Vilamoura_Algarve.html

CARVOEIRO

The resort is still based around a fishing village with everything centred on the town square. It is one of the few resorts to have retained its charm with its narrow winding streets rising steeply up from the centre. A few small fishing boats can still be seen on the beach.

Colina Da Lapa <http://www.colinadalapa.co.uk/>

The property is an amenable and well spread out self catering establishment whereby the accommodation and communal areas are set well back from the road in a peaceful and fairly relaxing setting.

The remote location suggests that a hire car is an advantage, especially if carrying groceries back from the supermarket.

A cheerful and pleasing atmosphere prevails across the property although the restaurant, located near the pool, is somewhat functional looking when considering the quality feel of the accommodation buildings.

Exterior

A well landscaped complex of off white coloured 2 and 3-storey villa style apartment buildings, on a sloping site with neatly arranged terraces and balconies, many of which overlook the pool area.

PRAIA DA LUZ

Measuring roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ ml by $\frac{1}{2}$ ml, this is a typical Portuguese fishing village with steep, cobbled streets and a predominantly peaceful, low-key atmosphere, although the main access road can get quite busy. Tourism has been promoted with care, blending the new with the old and allowing the resort to retain much of its original character.

Luz Ocean Club

The property is an enormous and expansive tastefully landscaped collection of well maintained apartment and villa like buildings that stretch across most of the centre of the resort. The grounds have immense security with locked gates, established hedges and welcome privacy to the pool areas.

The resort attracts families from across Europe, including many British guests who prefer a well respected self catering establishment with a 24 hour reception and a choice of pools with accompanying eateries/bars.

Exterior

A rambling array of apartments and villa buildings which have been designed in four village like complexes with their own pools, apart from the Waterfront area which has direct access to the beach.

All units have a wide balcony or terrace and there are security gates to all areas. Thick hedges and shrubs add interest and privacy. There are many steps connecting some of the accommodation units

ALVOR

Alvor is a traditional Portuguese fishing village with a fantastic beach and numerous restaurants and bars. For clients that like to eat out and experience local life I would recommend this resort.

The Pestana Dom Joao II

We visited this Hotel without an appointment and the staff couldn't have been more welcoming. This is a good 4* Hotel in a very good location within walking distance of the beach and restaurants.

The rooms were very nice and the pool area was lovely, the spa was also surprisingly good for a Hotel of this standard.

There are also apartments available in The Residence and villas for larger parties.

I would certainly recommend this Hotel for its location and for clients looking for a midrange Hotel this is a good option.

A three course buffet dinner was EUR23.00, but A La Carte was also available.

There are two other Pestana Hotels in Alvor including **The Pestana Alvor Praia** which is classified 5*.

There are numerous Pestana Hotels in the Algarve, mostly 4* and I would not hesitate to book them.

<http://www.pestana.com/en/hotels/algarve/pages/home.aspx>

Praia Da Falesia

Praia da Falesia can be best described as a quiet resort with busier neighbours, holiday nightlife is a modest affair: most likely a relaxed evening in one of the local bars or restaurants but the main reason for coming here is the beach.

Praia da Falesia beach offers one of the longest stretches of golden sand beach in Portugal and is overlooked by pine trees decorating the cliff tops. Over 8 km long, protected by a natural wall of red cliffs 30 m. high. This is the place to go for relaxing strolls. The sheer size of Praia da Falesia beach guarantees plenty of space for everyone. Sun beds and sunshades are available.

It is probably our favourite spot on the Algarve and the home of our favourite hotel on the Algarve, the Sheraton Algarve.

The Sheraton Algarve

This is a renowned Hotel in Praia Da Falesia, it is a very established true 5* resort. Praia Da Falesia is a wonderful beach location about 10 minutes drive outside of Villamoura.



For clients that have the budget to stay here it is to be recommended, it has every facility including eight restaurants in high season and probably three to four in low season.

The gardens and pool areas are beautifully kept and there is a vast amount of space so it probably never feels crowded.

There is a 9 hole golf course and a golf academy offering instruction to adults and children. The Porto Pirata children's club has always had a very good reputation and it deserves it, bookings are required.

There is a range of accommodation to suit everyone from Hotel rooms and suites to apartments and townhouses. Families can be very well accommodated and can self cater if preferred, the townhouses are 4* accommodation within a 5* resort.



The resort is large and situated on a cliff. There is a lift down to the beach and then approximately 200m walk. Clients should be made aware that the apartments and townhouses are a fair distance from the beach lift, although there is a land train running around the resort. Car hire is recommended and it is possible to drive within the resort to save walking to the beach or restaurants. Also, aside from the Hotel restaurants there are no bars or restaurants within walking distance.

I would say the emphasis for this Hotel is that it is a resort rather than a Hotel within a resort and it would be perfectly possible to stay there without venturing anywhere else.

Other Hotels in this area but more reasonably priced would be **Porto Bay Falesia**, this is a 4* property in the same location, it gets very good reviews and has access to the same wonderful beach.

<http://www.portobay.com/HotelSpecialOffers.aspx?areaId=300> or

http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Hotel_Review-g189112-d625806-Reviews-Porto_Bay_Falesia-Albufeira

There are also two Riu Hotels in Olhos D'Agua which is on the same stretch of beach,

The **Riu Palace**.

http://www.riu.com/en/Paises/portugal/algarve/hotel-riu-palace-algarve/index.jsp?src=gbr_UK_ppc_Riu_UK_Hoteles_Europa_googleadwords_Riu_UK_Palace_Algarve&gclid=CMTzkfqr1qsCFYIMfAodw2BZPg and guest information on http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Hotel_Review-g189112-d572475-Reviews-Riu_Palace_Algarve-Albufeira_Algarve.html

Riu Guarana. We didn't get the chance to see these Hotels but again the reviews are good and they can be sold for location.

http://www.riu.com/en/Paises/portugal/algarve/clubhotel-riu-guarana/index.jsp?src=gbr_UK_ppc_Riu_UK_Hoteles_Europa_googleadwords_Riu_UK_Riu_Guarana&gclid=CJjdr7ys1qsCFYUKfAodLVMIQw

http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Hotel_Review-g1190872-d1081276-Reviews-ClubHotel_Riu_Guarana-Olhos_de_Agua_Algarve.html

Riu Guarana is an all inclusive property for those people that like this option.

QUINTA DO LAGO and VALE DO LOBO

Although not the same place we would say they could be linked together as they provide an exclusive market for exclusive house owners. Many of our clients' rent houses here or enjoy one of the four championship golf courses on the Quinta Do Lago Estate. It also has tennis and horse riding. It is very well kept and has access to a lovely beach across the Ria Formosa.

Obviously anyone wanting good golf facilities would enjoy staying here but it is very Hotel based with very few other eating options. It is a Purpose built upmarket resort with good sporting facilities, quality accommodation and a lovely beach.

Monte Da Quinta Suites

This accommodation comprises one, two or three bedroom suites in the main building. The suites are very well equipped, spacious and modern. However, the property has the feel of a condominium or residential building rather than a Hotel.

The pool is nice nice and there is a kid's club and a very nice spa.

This accommodation has the space for families and for those that like to play golf or like access to sporting facilities it is very good.

The beach is about five minutes drive away. There are very few restaurants apart from within the Hotels.

The property also has available townhouses and villas. These are all privately owned and the internal décor may vary. These properties have a completely different feel to the Hotel and they are beautiful, especially the villas. They look like residential houses in avenues and for any large parties wishing to stay in the Quinta Do Lago area I would thoroughly recommend them.

Quinto Do Lago Hotel

This Hotel is a member of the "Leading Hotels of the World". It has a superb location beside the estuary of the Ria Formosa and within easy walking distance of the beach.

Lovely hotel, warm reception with nice décor, flowers etc. Rooms overlooking the lagoon and sea side had the most spectacular views, really beautiful. However these rooms do carry a supplement, the garden view rooms were nice as well.

First impressions you get the feel of perhaps an older clientele as the hotel feels "cosy" but in fact we have sent families here before (who are golfers) and they enjoyed the hotel very much. They also said really nice restaurants close by, but would have to drive. In school holidays they do have a kids club. They have an 80% repeat client base so that speaks volumes. I thought the hotel was well spread out, restaurants looked really nice as well, the type of hotel where you felt like you were going out for a meal rather than just eating in the hotel. The hotel bar looked inviting and overlooked the lagoon. The beach was accessible but a good 10 minute walk on a draw bridge and a very nice restaurant on the beach.



h.

The rooms and public areas are all very tastefully furnished and the whole property feels very intimate.

There are two beautiful restaurants; the spa is very well equipped with a good size gym, saunas, steam bath and Jacuzzi.

We loved The Quinta Da Lago Hotel although it is expensive.

For clients looking for a more economical property within The Quinta Do Lago Estate there is an apartment complex called **Victory Village**. We saw the location of this property and it is ideal, we didn't get the opportunity to go inside. I have booked this in the past but had heard it was getting a little tired, however recent reviews are good.

http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Hotel_Review-g1190869-d1191125-Reviews-Quinta_do_Lago_Victory_Village_Club_59-Quinta_do_Lago_Algarve.html

Sagres

Sagres is still relatively untouched by tourism and is an attractive town of mainly low rise houses, lining the quiet streets. It is the furthest resort west about an hour and a half from the airport.

Because of its location people often expect a wind-swept barren landscape, but Sagres is a truly tranquil town with beautiful beaches, a picturesque harbour at Baleeira, a very pretty square, Praça da República, and stunning views. It is very popular in summer with visitors, but all year round with fishermen and surfers because of the western Atlantic waters creating such good waves for surfing. It has a small choice of accommodation but it is now home to one of the most popular new upmarket family resorts on the Algarve.

Martinhal Beach Resort

This resort is isolated and very family orientated. However, the village of Sagres is about fifteen minutes drive away and has a selection of restaurants and shops.

The accommodation comprises 38 rooms in blocks of four; they look like wooden cubes but are very well equipped and art deco in style. We were told that they are converting some of the top level rooms to be interconnecting for next year which will be good for those families not wanting to pay for the houses. They have a choice of over 132 houses with two or three bedrooms. They also have villas.

All of the accommodation is of a very high quality and very spacious. The kitchens in the houses are every facility and it would be possible to self cater.

The resort has an emphasis on the environment and the building and gardens use local materials.



There are many facilities on offer here including several pools, tennis courts, gym, spa, children's club and cinema. The Hotel also has hire facilities for baby equipment, i.e.; pushchairs, highchairs, stair gates etc which makes it attractive to families with small children.

The complex is very eco friendly, all local stone and almost rugged gardens (some of which looked unkempt but I think this is how it is supposed to look). In my opinion the ocean view houses and hotel have fabulous views and are surrounded by gorgeous ferns. The accommodation itself is very retro, and I can certainly see the appeal for families, and the demand is high as in the winter they are in fact making some of the rooms interconnecting in the hotel.

The hotel is geared up for families, lots of facilities on offer, it is particularly good for windsurfing in this area, but not much around if you wanted to venture outside of the property. Whilst waiting to be shown the property I did have a look in the client book, and most people spoke very highly of the property but quite a few moans about the food.... "Being expensive and not great" We have had clients stay here and they really enjoyed it. This property has only been open a year and already taking repeat customers.

ALVOR

Alvor is a traditional Portuguese fishing village with a fantastic beach and numerous restaurants and bars. For clients that like to eat out and experience local life I would recommend this resort.

The Pestana Dom Joao II

We visited this Hotel without an appointment and the staff couldn't have been more welcoming. This is a good 4* Hotel in a very good location within walking distance of the beach and restaurants.

The rooms were very nice and the pool area was lovely, the spa was also surprisingly good for a Hotel of this standard.

There are also apartments available in The Residence and villas for larger parties.

I would certainly recommend this Hotel for its location and for clients looking for a midrange Hotel this is a good option.

A three course buffet dinner was EUR23.00, but A La Carte was also available.

There are two other Pestana Hotels in Alvor including **The Pestana Alvor Praia** which is classified 5*.

There are numerous Pestana Hotels in the Algarve, mostly 4* and I would not hesitate to book them.

<http://www.pestana.com/en/hotels/algarve/pages/home.aspx>