

# LOUSÃ MOUNTAIN



## CENTRAL PORTUGAL

### Schist Villages

There are 27 Schist Villages spread over 16 municipalities, located in central Portugal, between Castelo Branco and Coimbra. It's a territory where you will essentially find schist mountains. There are 12 villages in the **Lousã Mountain**, 5 in the **Açor Mountain**, 6 along the river **Zêzere** and 4 villages along the **Tejo-Ocreza** rivers. Come and discover a new world, places where you will feel like walking, photographing, breathing the clean mountain, diving into the river beaches and enjoy peaceful sleep. We present some of them.



## LOUSÃ | TALASNAL | GONDRAMAZ

Depart from Lisbon or Oporto and travel to Lousã, making sure you arrive between 11am and 12 noon. From here, take a short drive to Talasnal, the largest and probably best preserved Schist Village in the Lousã mountain range. We suggest lunch at "Ti Lena's" restaurant, where you will find a family atmosphere and delicious traditional food.

Then, the journey continues to Gondramaz, a nature's work of art, embedded in the mountainside, where true works of art can be found in carved stones or engraved on the houses' façades. Even the ground you walk on is an example of the finest art of stone which has been carved by hand. Overnight accommodation. If not possible, return to Palácio da Lousã Boutique Hotel.

## CABRIL DO CEIRA | GÓIS | AIGRA NOVA | AIGRA VELHA | PENA | CERDEIRA

In the morning, departure for a visit to the fantastic Garganta do Cabril do Ceira, which is a gorge in the municipality Serpins. If it is hot, you are welcome to go for a swim in its riverside beach. Continue to the village of Góis and its imposing Royal Bridge. For lunch, we suggest the restaurants "Álvaro's" or "O Silvério". Then you will find a group of four villages - Comareira (the smallest and most genuine) Aigra Nova, Aigra Velha and Pena - along a mythical road, embedded in a magnificent scenery, which connects them all. The friendliness of the people is as contagious as the serene landscape. Continue to Cerdeira, a magical place. The dominant tone of the schist overlaps the green of the slopes, the blue of the sky or the white of the clouds. A fantastic and deeply romantic world which is full of surprises. Overnight stay at "Cerdeira Home for Creativity".

## CANDAL | ALTO DO TREVIM | RIBEIRA DAS QUELHAS | COENTRAL GRANDE | CASAL S. SIMÃO

Take a short 4 kilometres drive to the most visited and one of the most developed villages of Candal. Candal and its stream form an amphitheatre nestled in the Lousã Mountains. Climbing its steep streets and reaching the viewpoint is a must. Then, carry on walking until you reach the highest point of Lousã Mountain: 1205 metres high, the Alto do Trevim. And here you will also find the most famous swing in Portugal: sit down, breathe, swing like a child and take in the unique landscape at your feet. Head to the village of Coentral, to discover one of the greatest wonders of the Lousã Mountain: the Quelhas Creek with its waterfalls and lakes. The journey continues to Casal de São Simão, a small village in the municipality of Figueiró dos Vinhos. This village practically has only one street, mainly built out of quartzite. If you feel comfortable enough to do it, try a 2 kms route through the fantastic Fragas de São Simão Footpaths, connecting the Schist Village to the high viewpoint. And don't forget to swing by the stunning Fragas de São Simão Riverside Beach. Take a swim in the crystal-clear waters before heading for lunch at the Varanda do Casal restaurant, in Casal de São Simão. After your meal, have a safe trip home.



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# AÇOR MOUNTAIN



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## ALDEIA DAS DEZ | VILA COVA DA ALVA | BENFEITA | FAJÃO | SOBRAL DE SÃO MIGUEL

Departure from Oliveira do Hospital towards Aldeia dos Dez, a charming village, shaped like a belvedere. Here, every single house street is like a viewpoint of the mountain landscapes. Enjoy the landscape while savouring a “medronho” liqueur. Built predominantly in granite, Aldeia das Dez has an impressive heritage, especially the Igreja Martiz (Main Church), with its interior sumptuously decorated in magnificent golden carvings. Continue to Vila Cova da Alva, a stunning village, where you can find Manueline windows and the largest collection of public, religious and civil buildings and spaces, such as the Manor of the Counts of Guarda, the Osório Cabrais building or even the Quinhentista Street. Next is the village of Benfeita, spreading its peaceful message across the world with its Tower of Peace.

The Tower of Peace, of schist masonry, celebrates the end of World War II in 1945, with 1620 strokes every 7th of May. Time for lunch. We suggest “chanfana”, a traditional dish of the region, made with goat, at the restaurant “O Pascoal”. After the meal, we will head for Aldeia de Fajão, nestled in a picturesque mountain niche and perched near the River Ceira spring, which flows into the Mondego river. The freshness of the water is the main feature in this village. Fajão, with its quartzite boulders which remind you of castles, is a village of tales and a breeding ground for culture. The main attractions are the community oven, the public washing-house, the old primary school, dating back to the years of the “Estado Novo” (when Salazar was in power) and the churchyard, where fresh water flows from the Old Fountain, available to all of those who want a drink of cool spring water. Continue the trip to Sobral de São Miguel, the heart of the schist. This village is perhaps one of the largest clusters of schist buildings in Portugal. It is from here that schist is sent to all over the world. The various shades of this rock, also used in the paving of the narrow, winding streets, blend perfectly into the colours of the natural landscape, making them difficult to make out. But it is worth a try. The trip ends in Covilhã, at the Hotel Luna dos Carqueijais.



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# TEJO-OCREZA



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## ÁGUA FORMOSA | FIGUEIRA | SARZEDAS | MARTIM BRANCO

Arrival at a fresh water spring, right in the centre of Portugal: Água Formosa, or the village of Formosura, 28 Kms north of Abrantes, near the country's Geodesic Centre. Its name is due to the fact that there really is the Água Formosa spring, on the left bank of the Ribeira da Galega, about 200 metres from the village centre, with a flat paved footpath, which allows us a comfortable access to the place. You must also not miss a visit to the Lagar da Ferrugenta, an olive oil press that takes advantage of the energy of the water of the Ribeira da Galega, the same stream that runs through the village. Time for lunch. We suggest a trip to Vila de Rei, to the restaurant "A Tasquinha da Vila".

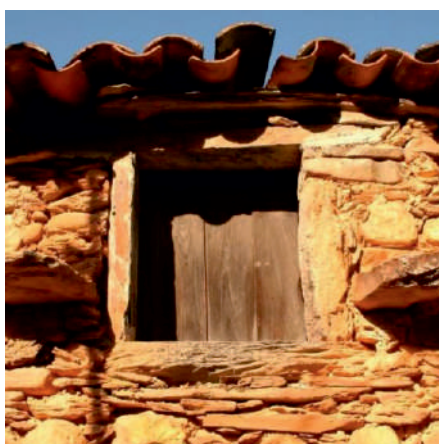
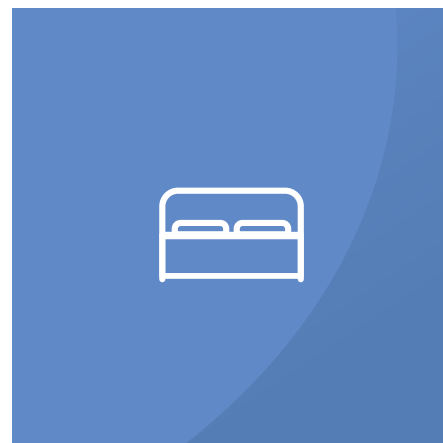
Next village is Figueira, a schist village with a huge and undeniable rural charm. Vegetable gardens, backyards, farming tool sheds, corrals and chicken coops are just around the corner. A must-see in the village: the community oven, which still has the warm scent of freshly baked bread. The Balau family house is the most remarkable building in the village (dating back to the 19th century), but is not open to visitors. Carry on to Sarzedas, a village on the moorland, the only one to have had a noble title awarded by Philip III in 1630, because of the Count of Sarzedas who lived in this village.

Visit the pillory, a Manueline monument in granite masonry, and the bell tower that serves as a viewpoint over the village and the surrounding moorland. Have a drink of tasty and healthy water at the Fonte da Vila or Fonte dos Namorados, as it is also known. Finally, you reach Martim Branco, the small village of modest houses that seems to have been forgotten by time. And it has remained so for many years, sitting among the schist and quartz cliffs, until its awakening a few years ago! The most important elements of the village are the Alameda stream which makes the birds sing and the community ovens. Just try the warm bread and you'll understand why. The House of Arts and Crafts is in the two-storey building which was the most distinctive of the village and now has an area for exhibitions, a wood-burning oven and houses the Aldeias do Xisto shop, with a bar and terrace service. For those who are still strong enough and enjoy hiking for 5 to 6 hours, you can take the fantastic Caminho do Xisto hiking track between rocks and waterfalls, or the circular path of Rota dos Moinhos. The trip ends in Castelo Branco. Accommodation at the Hotel Melia.



# TEJO-OCREZA

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# ZÊZERE



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## PEDRÓGÃO PEQUENO | MOSTEIRO | ÁLVARO | JANEIRO DE BAIXO | JANEIRO DE CIMA | BARROCA

Our journey begins in Pedrógão Pequeno, the jewel of Beira Baixa, a white granite village in the sea of brown schist that surrounds it. Along the left bank of the river Zêzere, on the edge of the IC8 and a few kilometres from the Cabril Dam, you can find sites of an immense historical heritage: the Filipian Bridge, today a national monument, the Roman road, the old Misericórdia Hospital and some private buildings dating back from the 15th to the 18th centuries. Then comes Mosteiro, a true beachside village, as it is located at the bottom of a valley and enjoys the privilege of having a riverside beach within the village. Everything in this village has revolved around water, ever since the beginning of times. You must visit the windmills, the "levadas" (water channels), the mills and the irrigation ponds. Carry on to Álvaro, a village of immense faith, with a remarkable religious heritage, as it belonged to the Order of Malta. Although the predominant construction material is schist, the overwhelming majority of the building façades are plastered and painted white. In order to get to know this village, you have to do the "circuit of the chapels", whose interiors keep an enormous collection of sacred religious art, such as an image of Senhor dos Passos, a Renaissance Sacramentum or even a dead Christ with the Holy Women and St. John Evangelist. The next village is Janeiro de Baixo, which is embraced by the Zêzere River and surrounded by a harmonious set of mountains, cliffs and valleys, reservoirs, rivers and streams. Here the river found a hard, rocky obstacle to go around on its course. The village was built on this huge ledge on the right bank of the river Zêzere. It is the village of the five parks: playground, sports park, leisure park, riverside park, camping site. Carry on to Janeiro de Cima, on the left bank of the Zêzere, an almost flat area, surrounded by a vast area of agricultural land. Here you shout "Ó da barca!" to call out the barge to cross the river. This was how the people and commerce of the two banks used to be united, and today it is still possible to do so on a walk upstream. The schist architecture presents a unique feature: it includes white rolled pebbles from the Zêzere riverbed.

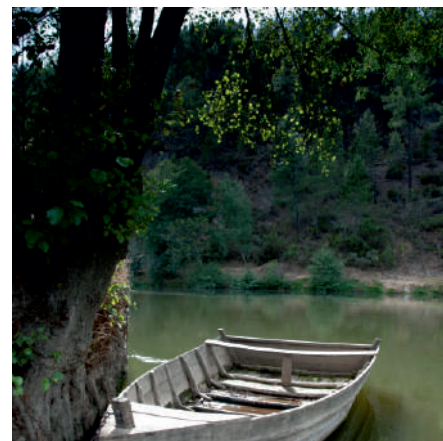
Visiting Casa das Tecedeiras is an absolute must. It is a place where the tradition of linen is reinvented with modern design pieces. The artists of the Casa das Tecedeiras are all local inhabitants of the villages, who have benefited from years of training in textile design. The last village is Barroca do Zêzere, which is the headquarters of the Aldeias de Xisto and its shops network. In Barroca, you can still feel a rural atmosphere. The surrounding landscape is framed by the pine forest and by the water mirror formed by the river.

In the village, you can find the traditional pebble paving stones, but by to the river you find the ancient medieval cobblestones. Pay a visit to the Casa Grande also called Edifício Senhorial da Família Fabião, which was built in 1783. Don't miss out on a visit to the 18th century private chapel, with its baroque façade, which is set on a row of houses. Go across the footbridge to the other bank and discover the rock engravings left there by our ancestors thousands of years ago. The journey ends at the hotel in Fundão, which will be your accommodation.



# ZÊZERE

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