



ALENTEJO TRIVIA

A BIT OF HISTORY AND A FEW FUN FACTS

WHAT AND WHERE

The Tejo River cuts across Portugal, flowing roughly east to west, into the Atlantic at Lisbon. North of the river lies the Tejo DOC, formerly known until 2009 as Ribatejo (*Above the Tejo*). South of the river lies the separate Alentejo (pronounced *ah-len-TAY-zhoo* and meaning *Beyond the Tejo*) DOC



A “CLIFF NOTES” HISTORY

- The Alentejo was part of a Roman province called Lusitania
- Wines were – and some still are -- made and stored in amphorae. The Alentejo is the only part of Portugal where this Roman technique is still practiced. Clay pots (*talhas de barro*) can be as large as seven-feet in height, hold up to 520 gallons of wine and weigh a ton (literally!)
- A prolonged Arab occupation c. 711–1249 put a damper on wine production, with vineyards uprooted and replanted to wheat
- After expelling the Arab settlers, Portugal’s royal authorities ordered farmers to plant vines and, after three to five years, donate a portion of their wine
- By the 15th century the area’s wines were prized. Estates included Quinta do Carmo, founded in the 1400s and still making outstanding wines to this day
- Protectionism by the Douro region, starting in 1756, ended the good times for the Alentejo, with farmers legally required uproot vines
- The late 19th century saw a revival, with local wines, including a white, winning a Grand Medal of Honor at the 1888 Berlin Exhibition, and the establishment of Alentejo’s first co-op a few years later
- Phylloxera, wars and economic depression followed, until the 1970s revival, with the DOCs coming into the fore in the 1980s



THE NUMBERS IN CONTEXT

- Alentejo is about the same size as Massachusetts
- At 51,000 acres, its vineyard plantings are slightly more than Napa's 45,000 acres and about the same as Washington State
- The Alentejo enjoys over 3,000 hours of sunshine annually, similar to San Diego and well above Portugal's national average - already the highest in Europe
- The Portuguese love Alentejo, source of one of every two bottles of still wine consumed in Portugal
- Alentejo wines are gaining ground -- production has quadrupled since the mid-1990s

CULTURAL TRIVIA

- The Alentejo capital Évora features some of the finest examples of a 16th century Portuguese architecture, a fantastical blend of flamboyant gothic and nautical themes. An homage to Portugal's famed maritime history that brought the country boundless wealth, Évora's "Manueline" buildings appear encrusted with coral and carved barnacles, and are decorated with stone ropes, anchors, navigational instruments and other nautical symbols
- The Alentejo accounts for over one-third of the world's cork forests. Natural, renewable, reusable and recyclable, cork bark is carefully harvested by hand just once every nine years
- The Portuguese eat more seafood than any other European, barring the Icelanders!
- Thanks to a lack of light pollution, the Alentejo boasts Europe's first Starlight Tourist Destination – the Dark Sky Alqueva Reserve



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