

## Information about Faro

25 fabulous things to do in Faro, Portugal: the Algarve's capital



Here are some favourite things to do in Faro, Portugal, the capital of the Algarve. Get of tips on how best to spend your time in this underrated and colourful city. Faro definitely has its own charms and shouldn't be missed. This decent-sized city has a pretty old town full of cobbled streets and fragrant orange trees. It's got chic tiled boulevards lined with nice independent shops.

Things to do in Faro, Portugal

1. See the bone chapel at the beautiful Igreja do Carmo



The bone chapel at the Igreja do Carmo ([Google Maps link](#)) is one of the most interesting things to do in Faro. Although there are a few places around Europe where you can see chapels made of bones like this, it's still an unusual experience and not to be missed while you're in Faro, even if you find it a bit macabre and creepy.

The bone chapel is a small building around the back of the Igreja do Carmo, the main church, which dates to 1719. This is known for being one of the most picturesque churches in the Algarve: a Baroque-style building with an impressively tiled square leading up to it. Its interior is full of lovely golden gilded altars and ornate woodwork. The church was badly damaged in Faro's 1755 earthquake and had to be reconstructed. Apparently, the repairs took over 100 years!

Anyway, to get to the bone chapel, you have to walk through a colourful little garden, accessed via a door at the side of the altar. There may be a small queue of people waiting to duck inside. It is recommended to wait, until it's empty, if you have time, so you can appreciate the full extent of the bones and skulls of over 1,200 monks without people in the way. The bones are all displayed in geometric patterns covering the walls and ceiling. The idea is to remind people of how short life is, it's very striking.

For just 2€ to get in, this is a bargain and something very memorable to see while in Faro.



## 2. Find the entrances to the old town

Faro's old town is the most attractive part of the city, full of orange trees, cobbled streets and whitewashed buildings. It's encircled by thick stone walls. For many years, most of the inhabitants lived within the walls to protect them from sea raiders. You can only enter through a few gates and entrances, the nicest of which I think is this one ([Google](#)

[Maps link](#)) as it frames the alluring inside with a bit of a tunnel effect, leading to the colourful buildings inside.

Before you go through, don't miss the panels of traditional Portuguese blue-and-white tiles (*azulejos*) on stands in front of the entrance. They depict the story of how King Alfonso III booted the Moors out of Faro in 1249 and liberated the city. There's also a statue of this guy as you enter the old town here.

Look out for the seal painted on the wall to the left of this entrance. He represents Faro's seafaring history and adds a little something modern to the otherwise historic entrance.

3. True Food – one of the best things to do in Faro for vegan foodies – also worth just to have a look.



[True Food](#) is an excellent vegan café in Faro. It markets itself as lactose-free and gluten-free. This pretty little café is on a quiet backstreet and you'd only know it was there if you were seeking it out ([Google Maps link](#)). If the weather is nice, sit outside and enjoy the pretty pastel-coloured buildings on the street.

4. Browse the shops on tiled streets with canopies overhead



If you've been anywhere in Portugal, you'll be familiar with its tiled streets. Watch out when it's raining. They become slippery. Faro has some exceptional ones, including some lovely fish patterns. But you should also look up...

Overhead, the main shopping streets in Faro have big white canopies hung like the sails of a ship, creating some very welcome shade in the summer heat. It makes for a very chic shopping experience, especially on the lovely [Rua de Santo Antonio](#).

There are a few nice independent shops dotted around Faro's centre. Of course, you also get a few of the usual chains too, namely Vilanova (accessories), Mango and Parfois. Most of the usual shops are outside of the centre at the Forum Algarve, which is a good 20-minute waddle from the centre ([Google Maps link](#)). I'd only bother going there if you desperately need something as it's all the generic chains you get in every country.

#### 5. Stroll through the old town



The old town is definitely the prettiest bit of Faro with its orange trees, cobbled streets, and lively squares full of cafés. But it's also really interesting and full of history.

Like many Portuguese towns, Faro's got a real mixture of architecture as it's been influenced by everyone who's ever occupied it. Although the Moors can take credit for its impressive city walls, there's also been input from the Phoenicians, Romans, Visigoths and Byzantines. Soak up all this history as you stroll around the old town. The biggest square is Largo da Sé, where the town hall and cathedral are. I love the rows of orange trees.

If you're a history buff or you just want to get your bearings in Faro, you can do a [free walking tour](#) with a local guide who can tell you all about the city's past and the

significance of its various buildings. If you don't fancy that though, it's easy enough to walk around and enjoy the old town at your own pace.

6. Spot the storks and their huge nests on top of buildings – one of the best free things to do in Faro



Something interesting about Portugal is how many storks it has just casually nesting in the most unlikely places.

Arco da Vila is an ornate monumental archway that leads into the old town, built in the neoclassical style of Italian architecture. Its crowning glory is an ornate bell tower and a statue of the patron saint of Faro, St. Thomas Aquinas. Just kidding. Its crowning glory is a set of GINORMOUS stork nests, complete with storks flapping about.

The storks you see in the Algarve are White Storks and they're absolutely huge, hence the whopping nests. If you visit in April and May, you'll likely spot some sitting on their nests or swooping about Faro looking for food. In May and June, you might even catch a glimpse of their chicks.

Another good spot to see them in Faro is in the [middle of a small roundabout](#), nesting on a street lamp. As you do.

If you've never seen a stork in real life, be prepared for the sky to darken as they fly over you like a small aircraft. Their wingspan is up to 215cm (thanks, Wikipedia). And they make a very distinct clattering noise, which sounds like machinery starting up. Something has to power that wingspan I suppose.

## 7. Try some delicious Portuguese wines at Bago Wine Bar



The [Bago Wine Bar](#) interior is simple and chic, much more modern than most Algarve bars; it wouldn't feel out of place in [Lisbon](#) or Paris. There are hundreds of bottles of wines lining the shelves, many of them from the Algarve but also from all over Portugal. They have some delicious local wines, including a rosé that has to be the best I've ever had. Bago's owner is friendly and chatty, as well as being very knowledgeable about wine. If you tell him what you like, he'll pour you a glass that will probably be spot on.

Bago also does tapas and you can sit outside to enjoy your wine and nibbles. There's a shady spot they have on the opposite side of the road by the city walls. It's a really lovely and memorable experience.

## 8. Pick up some souvenirs in Sardinha de Papel



[Sardinha de Papel](#) is a really nice little gift shop in the centre of town. In an ocean of tacky giftshops selling horrible plastic tat for tourists, this is a tasteful gem. It stocks some lovely ceramics, handmade jewellery with *azulejo* designs on them, artsy tote bags and stuff like that. Definitely worth popping in for a browse.

#### 9. Stroll around the marina and harbour



One of the first things to do in Faro when you arrive is to walk the length of the palm-tree-lined marina. The place is always bustling with both tourists and locals, and there are plenty of stalls you can stop at for a drink. There are also always boats to watch coming and going and sometimes there'll be a market on, too. A walk along here gives you a good feel for the place. Note that the water in Faro is part of the Ria Formosa lagoon, not the sea. But it's just as beautifully turquoise.

#### 10. See the street art dotted around town



While it's not a full-on street art explosion like [Porto](#), there are still a few bits of street art dotted around Faro. Keep an eye out while you're exploring.

This piece in the old town is the most prominent and you'll naturally walk past it while doing a circuit of the area. It's by Porto-based artist [Daniel Eime](#).

12. Pop into the (free) Maritime Museum – one of the best things to do in Faro on a rainy day



While you're walking around Faro's marina, it's worth calling in at the Maritime Museum ([Google Maps link](#)). It's up on the first floor in the port authority building and isn't that obvious from the outside. The museum goes through all the marine species in the area, such as sardine, tuna and squid. There are also some model ships and fishing equipment, and a feature on the 'Age of Discovery' and Portugal's seafaring history.

It's only small but it gives you an idea of how life in the Algarve revolved around the fishing industry, shipbuilding and navigation before it became a tourist destination. And it's free to get in, so definitely worth a mooch round; it should only take 15 minutes maximum. However, this is one of the few indoor things to do in Faro if you're unlucky enough to get a rainy or cold day there, so it's worth adding to your itinerary.

12. See Faro's answer to Copenhagen's Little Mermaid statue



Most of you are familiar with the Little Mermaid statue in [Copenhagen](#), and how every visitor is always disappointed by how small it is. Well, Faro sort of has its own version – and she’s bigger. Admittedly, she’s not a mermaid (note the legs!) but she’s a fishy character for sure. You couldn’t possibly be disappointed by anyone who has a shell for a head, could you

At high tide, she’s submerged in water but when the tide is out, you can sit next to her for a photo.

The sculpture is made of copper and was designed by a local artist called José Luís Costa, and made by him and two others (Miró da Silva and Pascal Radar).

You can find her on the steps near the ‘I heart Faro’ sign in the middle of the marina.

13. Visit the cathedral and climb to the top for views



The Cathedral of Santa Maria is in the heart of the old town, set in a large, orange-tree-lined square (sadly often turned into a carpark, which ruins the prettiness). It’s 3.50€ to get into the cathedral.

Santa Maria has a stone bell tower you can haul yourself up, involving not very many stairs at all TBH, considering the reward at the end is an excellent view over Faro and out to the lagoon. Watch out if you’re up there on the hour, though, because the bell is LOUD.

Oh and don’t miss the cathedral’s courtyard, where you’ll find a tiny and less impressive version of the main bone chapel (see #1 in this list). The cathedral’s rooftop views across Faro and the lagoon



See the photo in case you need to be convinced. Note the cars parked in front of the lovely orange trees, ruining the aesthetic.

#### 14. Enjoy all the beautiful architecture



Faro isn't known for its beautiful old buildings in the way that perhaps [Lisbon](#) and [Porto](#) are, but this is unfair. It has plenty of spectacular buildings set in charming cobbled squares full of orange trees.

A favourite is this blue beauty, Palácio Belmarço (Belmarço Palace). It's just round the corner from Bago Wine Bar and opposite the Brazilian consulate ([Google Maps link](#)). Unfortunately, it's currently used as offices so you can't go inside, but the bench just

outside it is a good place to sit and bask in the sun, watching the families of storks building their nests on top of the palace's roof.

#### 15. Drink some craft beer at Grains 864



[Grains 864](#) is one of the very few craft beer bars in Faro. So if you want to avoid the ubiquitous Sagres and Superbock and see out some hoppy IPAs instead, make a beeline for it. It has a wide range of bottled craft beer, some local and some international. There's always one Portuguese craft beer on tap, too.

The bar is located in one of the nicest places in Faro, down a whitewashed and cobbled passageway that's lit in the evenings by fairy lights. As the art gallery (see #17 of this list) is just behind it, you'll see arty locals stopping here for a pint after work and it always has a buzzy atmosphere.

#### 16. See the tiles in the Paço Episcopal



This is a bit of an odd one but I wanted to include it. Bear with ...

The small Paço Episcopal de Faro (Bishop's Palace: [Google Maps link](#)) is behind the orange trees in the old town's main square. You would assume it was offices or something from the outside. There's no big sign or anything to beckon tourists in. It also seems to have been closed on and off in recent years. But the last three times I've been to Faro, it's been open. So I think I can safely say it's visitable! You do have to pay to get in (2€).

The palace dates back to 1585, although it's been destroyed and rebuilt since. It was used as a training centre for priests and now it hosts an exhibition of religious art, namely paintings of bishops. This may sound painful. Even if you're into your bishops through the ages, there are only two rooms inside and it'd probably take 10 minutes maximum to complete.

But you should 100% go in to see the breathtaking *azulejo* tiles going up the staircase. These are worth the entrance fee alone. When I visited, everyone was oohing and ahing at them and paying minimal attention to the exhibition further inside. They should turn the palace into a small museum of tiles or a gallery for local tile artists. Those beauties would draw people in from all over.

17. Buy a print from the Gama Rama art gallery – one of the best things to do in Faro to support local artists



[Gama Rama](#) is an absolute find.

The gallery and shop are up a tiled staircase behind a big, ornate green door. It's a light and airy space inside, perfect for showcasing all the incredible art. Look at that beautiful wooden floor. Perfect for some unique souvenirs to take home.

18. Have a photo with the big Faro sign



Who doesn't love posing with some giant letters spelling out the name of the city or town they're in?

You'll find Faro's sign in the marina, complete with a small queue of tourists waiting their turn. I was on my own the last time I visited and didn't think anyone in the queue looked like they could take a good photo of me and/or be trusted with my camera, so this is something I need to rectify next time...

20. Enjoy the view of the marina from a rooftop bar – one of the best things to do in Faro on a clear day

Wherever you go, always try to find the best view. If said view is from a bar, even better.

Faro's best view on a clear day is either from the cathedral (a distinct lack of drinks there) or from the [Eva Senses hotel](#) bar (a perfect Aperol Spritz available). The choice is yours.

Although it's a hotel rooftop bar, it's open to the public so you don't need to be a resident to enjoy the view. From the bar, you can see right across the marina and the city. Perfect for spying on people. The light is best in the early evening so it's ideal for an aperitif.

I should also add that the neighbouring [Hotel Faro](#) also has a rooftop bar, but I've not tried that one as it looks like it faces out towards the lagoon rather than having a view of both the water and the city, which is what I like. There's also LAB Terrace bar for a nice but much lower down rooftop view (see #22 of this list). And there's O Castelo, a rooftop bar in the old town. That is very popular with tourists but not really my cup of tea so I'm not writing about it here.

## 21. Visit the municipal museum



[Faro's municipal museum](#) is located in the very grand 16th-century Nossa Senhora Assunção convent. It's 2€ to get in, another nominal fee.

The bulk of the museum's collection is from the Roman period, so expect lots of bits of pillars and urns. The best bit is the large tiled mosaic of Oceanus, the god of the sea. Very maritime-themed, in true Faro style, and its sheer size is impressive. You can walk all around it to take it in. The municipal museum also has changing exhibitions, sometimes from local contemporary artists.

If you're looking for things to do in Faro on a rainy or overcast day, the museum would while away a good 30 minutes. You can also be outside but very sheltered from rain/wind/sun walking around the convent's courtyard, framed by pillars. Every time I've visited, the garden there has been pretty much non-existent, but maybe in summer it's more colourful.

Also note that on certain days the museum has traditional fado singers performing in one of its rooms. If you've not heard it yet or you like it, do check the times on their website and see a performance. You have to give fado a go while in Portugal – that's the rule.

## 21. Drink a cocktail at LAB Terrace



[LAB Terrace](#) is a really good spot for cocktails in Faro. It's a(nother) rooftop bar with a view over the lagoon although from a much lower vantage point than the hotel bar (mentioned in #20 of this list of things to do in Faro).

LAB Terrace's unusual name is because it's [on top of Faro's science museum](#), which is mostly aimed at children. Anyway, they're sort of a science LAB because of that, so perhaps this is why they're good at mixing cocktails.