

Jane Finn discovers a 60s vibe while searching for hidden gems on Portugal's Silver Coast

SILVER SURFER



WORDS BY JANE FINN
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I ease the car onto the Vasco da Gama Bridge, admiring the bluebird sky above that's mirrored in the cool, blue waters of the Tagus River below. It's November, and Portugal is enjoying "St. Martin's Summer". The sun is beaming, and my heart does a little skip as I leave the hustle and bustle of Lisbon behind, feeling like an explorer, embarking upon a quest to uncover the secrets of the largely undiscovered Silver Coast.

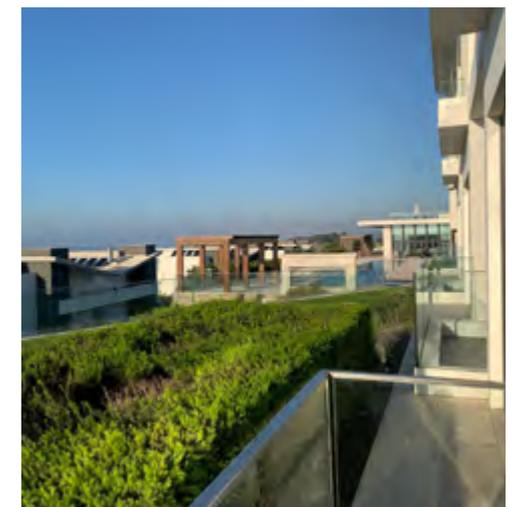
In a little over an hour, my husband Dave and I are checking into the luxurious, five-star Evolutée Hotel at the Royal Óbidos Spa and Golf Resort. Stepping onto the balcony, I can taste the tangy saltiness of the sea in the afternoon breeze as I catch a glimpse of the wild Atlantic Ocean in the distance. It's too late in the day to play a round, but there's plenty of time for a Mandalay massage before heading into town.

Óbidos is delightful during the day but even more enjoyable in the evening after the tour buses have departed. Driving west towards the ancient town, I can't help but be impressed →

Right: Feel the medieval magic of Óbidos
Far right: View from the balcony at the Evolutée Hotel



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by the well-preserved Moorish fortress that dominates the skyline. It feels like a place where time has stood still. As I step through the Porta da Vila gates, I’m immediately transported back to an era of intrigue where royalty reigned supreme. It was here that with the help of the Knights Templar, King Afonso I defeated the Moors to reclaim Portugal.

At first, the narrow main street lined with quaint shops, restaurants and cafés feels touristy, but as Ivo, our local guide, helps me navigate the maze of cobblestone paths, he weaves a tale of battles won, battles lost, triumph and tragedy, and I soon get a real sense of people and place. For more than eight centuries, Óbidos was known as the House of Queens, when a succession of kings would gift the village to his bride on their wedding day. Today, it remains the culturally diverse, historic heart of central Portugal.

LITERATURE FOR ALL

In 2015, Óbidos was declared a UNESCO Creative City of Literature, home to the annual international FOLIO festival and more than 14 unique and somewhat eclectic book shops. I pop into the lovely Igreja de São Tiago church where, as you might expect, there’s an air of reverence surrounding the tomes sold here. At the quirky Market Bookstore, I find wooden crates brimming with books among the organic fruits and vegetables, many of them quite old, perhaps even rare. My final stop is Espaço O and the Livaria De Adega, a wine cellar turned



Bruma Peretti

Above: Moorish castle above Óbidos

bookstore where I’m tempted to sample a local vintage while perusing the titles, but as darkness falls, I’m being drawn to investigate the castle looming overhead.

Making the trek to the top of the fortress is not for the faint of heart, but it’s worth the effort. I tread paths worn thin over the centuries by those who have walked the ramparts before me. Admittedly, I’m a little winded by the time we reach the battlements, but when I lean over the

edge, that’s when the magic happens. A sea of twinkling lights illuminates the historic quarter’s whitewashed houses, and it’s easy to imagine that nothing has changed in a thousand years.

Dinner is at The Literary Man, the biggest literary hotel in the world, but its story runs much deeper. The converted convent reflects the vision of Óbidos’s former mayor, Telmo Faria, who wanted to attract writers, artists, bibliophiles and tourists to the region to not →



John Kamenberg



Nabil Murshed

Far left: You’ll find food, wine and books at The Market Bookstore
Left: Aerial view of the old quarter
Right: Dining surrounded by books at The Literary Man



Below: Bask in the stunning sunsets seen along the Headlands' road
Right: Riding a monster wave at Nazaré



Luis Ascenso

only preserve its heritage but also stimulate the local economy. In addition to hotel guests, the public is welcome to enjoy a literary libation at the gin bar, or curl up on a big green, velvet settee and delve into the pages of any of the more than 65,000 books that fill the shelves. If I was travelling solo, I couldn't think of a better place to hang out with a book as my companion.

But Faria's vision extended beyond the literary world. He was also the impetus that brought world-class golf to the Silver Coast. Bom Sucesso, Campo Real Lisboa and the prestigious Marriott Praia del Rey and West Cliffs complex, one of Europe's Top 10 Golf Resorts, all lay within striking distance of the town. Dave plays them all; however, Royal Óbidos is my favourite. Why? Not because it is one of the

fairest layouts that suits me to a tee, or because they serve the best fish soup I've ever tasted, but because the second I enter the clubhouse, I feel the presence of Seve Ballester. Royal Óbidos was his final masterpiece, and every aspect of the club celebrates the spirit of a great golfer and family man who left this world too soon.

THE ALLURE OF THE SEA

I must have been a child of the sea in my past life, for wherever I go, the ocean beckons, and Portugal is no exception. While the country's western shores may be known as the Silver Coast, it serves up mile after mile of golden sand, intimate beaches, rugged rock formations and some of the most incredible water in the world.

I've heard rumours that this may be the week that the wind and tides come together in perfect harmony to create those record-breaking 30-metre (100-foot) waves that propelled Garrett McNamara to stardom and turned a sleepy little fishing village into a world-renowned surfing destination. So, we put away our clubs and head north to Nazaré for a walk on the wild side of the Atlantic.

As we approach Praia do Norte, the dirt track that leads to the dunes is crammed with vehicles, so we make our way on foot towards the action. Dune buggies, vans, buses, and trailers painted every colour of the rainbow are squeezed into the narrowest of spaces, creating a kaleidoscopic wall that surrounds the beach. As I round the bend, I swear I'm about to step onto the set of →

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“As I round the bend, I swear I’m about to step onto the set of a 1960s Beach Boys’ movie. There’s a definite bohemian vibe to this place”

a 1960s Beach Boys’ movie. There’s a definite bohemian vibe to this place, and while I’m not planning on catching a wave, I’m thrilled to be here watching these carefree spirits prep for the big challenge when it comes. Unfortunately, today is not the day, but I can still admire their prowess, determination, and sheer grit.

As the sun begins its descent, we take the funicular from the cliff top of Sitio to the much calmer, more serene Praia da Nazaré. As we stroll along the boardwalk to Pangei-by-the-Sea for dinner, I notice the line-up of historic, traditional fishing boats nestled on the sand, and I’m reminded of simpler times.

Our table is ready, and I settle in with a glass of Summertino to watch Chef Carlos prepare his signature dish, octopus served three ways. Everyone is mesmerised as he arranges the garnish. The meal is a work of art that pays homage to one of Portugal’s most revered ingredients, presented by a master chef with a flourish and a big grin.

SANCTUARY

The next day fog blankets the windswept cliffs in Santa Cruz. I’m disappointed that I can hear the thundering roar of the surf, but my view of the sea is shrouded. Suddenly, the sun pierces the day and reveals an expansive stretch of golden beach in all its glory. I’m now free to explore the tide pools and hidden coves before making my way to Noah Surf House.

I didn’t know what to expect, but it certainly isn’t the sense of peace and tranquility that envelops me as we head up to the second floor. Intuitively I know that this is no ordinary accommodation but a sanctuary where I can quiet my mind and feed my soul.

Tonight, we’re staying in one of the guest pods nestled on the hillside. As I open the door, I marvel at the attention to detail that has created this veritable oasis. The entire complex has been constructed using reclaimed and repurposed materials with a focus on sustainability. Natural elements combined with a minimalist décor reflect the beauty surrounding me when I pause long enough to appreciate it.

Heading to the communal kitchen and full-service restaurant, I’m suddenly aware that the path leads through a herb garden surrounded by rosemary hedges, and my appetite nudges up a notch. Judging from the smells wafting up →



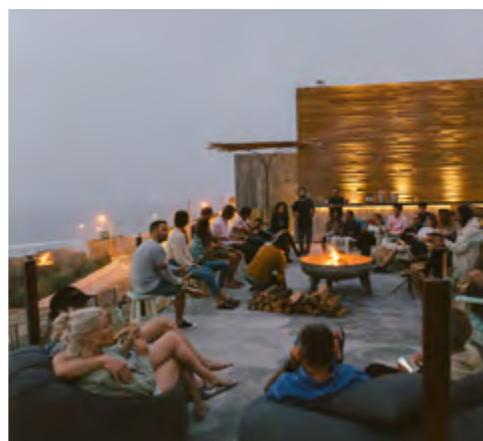
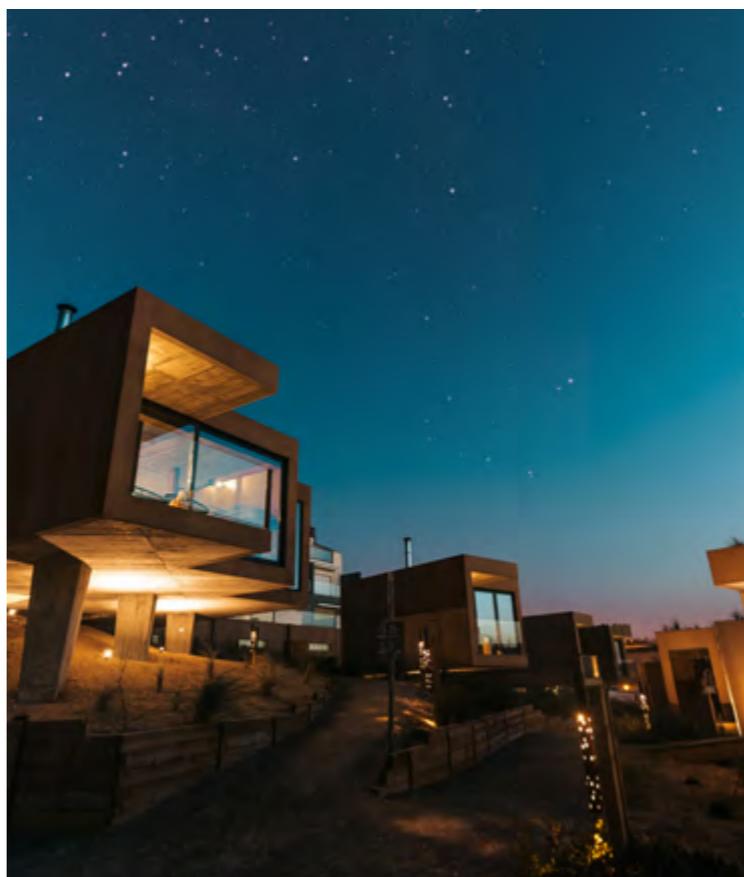
Top: Good vibrations surround this decked out minibus

Top left: Windswept cliffs, coves and caves, Santa Cruz

Bottom left: The infinity pool appears to blend with the sea
Left: Surf’s up. Grab a board, and let’s go!

“Marta, and her boyfriend Nuno, began holding weekly Get2gethers where guests, locals and staff mingle, make music, share laughter, exchange information and forge new friendships”

Right: Spend a night in a private pod perched above the beach
 Top middle: A Room with a View - Bungalow Mar at Noah Surf House
 Bottom middle: Guests and locals mingle at a Get2gether



from the open kitchen, I’m in no doubt that my hunger will soon be satisfied.

Tonight, it’s tapas for two. Five perfectly proportioned dishes, including creamy burrata cheese, topped with smoky tomatoes, delectable garlic prawns that announce their presence long before they reach the table and ceviche that is bright, spicy, and delightfully acidic. Our feast is accompanied by a rich, full-bodied glass of Quinta das cerejeira Grande Reserva 2014 – a vintage I had sampled earlier in the week at Quinta do Sanguinhal when I was there to learn

the Pereira da Fonseca family’s secrets for producing award-winning wines.

When Noah Surf House opened, one of the owners, Marta, and her boyfriend Nuno, began holding weekly Get2gethers where guests, locals and staff mingle, make music, share laughter, exchange information and forge new friendships. For now, these magical evenings are reduced to joining a few others around the fire pit to exchange the highlights of where we’ve been, what we’ve seen and who we’ve met. The perfect end to a perfect day!

I awaken to a gentle light that gradually fills the room and a view that declares this is where heaven and earth meet. I understand that This Place that Celebrates the Sea is more than Noah Surf House’s tagline – it’s a defining experience, a place where one can simply be.

Tomorrow, I leave the Silver Coast with hidden treasure, the knowledge that it’s the traveler’s willingness to connect with people, share dreams, and respect the environment that turns a vacation into an adventure.

Above top: The tasting room at Quinta do Sanguinhal
 Above bottom: A tempting feast for two

JOURNEY PLANNER

HOW TO GET THERE

TAP Air Portugal
 W: flytap.com

WHERE TO STAY

Evolutée Hotel & Spa
 T: + 351 262 965 220
 W: royalobidosgolf.com

Noah Surf House

T: + 351 261 932 355
 W: noahsurfhouseportugal.com

WHERE TO EAT

Restaurant of The Literary Man Hotel
 T: +351 262 959 214
 W: theliteraryman.pt

Pangeia-by-the-Sea

T: +351 917 934 726
 W: pangeiarestaurante.com

WHAT TO DO

Get local with a local
 Silver Coast Travelling
 T: +351 961 481 448
 W: silvercoasttravelling.com

Quinta do Sanguinhal

T: +351 262 609 190
 W: vinhos-sanguinhal.pt

Royal Óbidos Golf Course

T: +351 262 965 220
 W: royalobidos.com

The Marriott Praia-D’el-Rey Golf & Beach Resort

T: +351 262 905 005
 W: praia-del-rey.com

West Cliffs Ocean & Golf Resort

T: +351 2620249 880
 W: westcliffs.com