

Editor's Choice From This Month's Issue

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From a museum housing Islamic artifacts to its seven-arched Roman Bridge, Tavira has a smorgasbord of delights. ©Julia Chan/iStock

BONUS CONTENT

By David Gibb [February 2022](#)

Iberian Dreams Come True in Spain and Portugal's Deep South

Tavira—Portugal's Romantic, Mysterious Beach Town

Just like Lagos, Tavira captured our hearts almost as soon as we climbed off the train.

On our first evening, we took a long, moonlit stroll to the Roman Bridge, a seven-arched structure crossing the River Gilao, which was built in 1667 on an existing foundation that linked Faro and Castro Marim during the days of the Roman Empire.

Muted light from historic streetlamps spilling onto the cobblestones... Streetside cafés with vintage awnings... Coffee-, rose-, and mustard-colored buildings lining the bridge... We felt like stars in a romantic scene from 1930s Paris.

Apparently, that romantic feeling has been shared by many others. If you look closely, you'll find "love locks" (padlocks placed by couples to symbolize their everlasting love) fixed along the green, wrought-iron railings of the bridge.

"Strange and Mysterious Occurrences"

For history buffs like myself, Tavira has a smorgasbord of delights. The Nucelo Islamico museum showcases a bounty of Islamic artifacts found around Tavira (dating from Portugal's occupation by the Moors). Stroll a few minutes up Rua da Liberdade and climb the cobblestone steps leading under the stone archway known as Porta de Dom Manuel (a surviving section of the city's old wall, built in 1520) to visit the town's Renaissance church, Igreja da Misericordia. Built between 1541 and 1551, it features motifs on its main portal that were inspired by Italian engravings of the time.

Take a few more steps along the cobblestones and you'll reach Tavira's castle ruins, which may date back as far as the Neolithic period. It's free to explore.

Most intriguing of all is the Ruinas Fenicias de Tavira, an archeological site where explorers have uncovered a Phoenician wall dating back to 800 BC, a

Turdetanian (an ancient Iberian civilization that predated the Roman era) ox-hide altar dating to 400 BC, a 12th-century Islamic foundation, and a 17th-century Portuguese manor.

An undated and time-weathered sign states that there were plans to build a museum on this site, dedicated to the Phoenician and Turdetanian periods. Decaying wooden platforms, walkways, and ladders descending into excavated pits suggest, however, that this project was abandoned in a hurry. Locals confided to me that the excavation had been discontinued some time ago after “strange and mysterious occurrences.” Nobody was brave enough to elaborate.

Across the Border to the Flamenco Halls of Sevilla, Spain

Strolling to our Airbnb rental in Old Town Sevilla (a quaint apartment overlooking a bright courtyard peppered with wildflowers), Beverly and I happened upon a seemingly random, lively flamenco street dancing

performance. As the woman’s long cherry-red dress with ruffled skirt, sleeves, and matching ponytail ribbon, swayed to the beat of her passionate, percussive foot stomps and sexy hip tosses, the crowd cheered and applauded.

Hypnotized by her expressive energy, we later asked our local host, Juan, to recommend a place where we could enjoy some more flamenco, away from the tourist traps.

Juan suggested an off-the-beaten-path flamenco bar, La Carboneria, popular with locals and far from the Vegas-style shows promoted to tourists. Hidden down a maze of narrow, cobblestoned streets, it felt as though we were following a treasure map along a secretive path.

The rustic, saloon-type bar, with thick, wooden beams, and chairs and benches to match, is housed in an old coal warehouse (hence its name, which

benches to match, is housed in an old coal warehouse (hence its name, which translates as “coalyard”). A large green chalkboard, reminiscent of classrooms of yesteryear, stretching behind the full length of its long, scarred, mahogany bar, provided the drink list. Tapas were also available at a smaller bar at the other side of the restaurant, for those who cared enough to navigate through the crowded, narrowly spaced, and wobbly tables to reach it.

I stuck with my beer, and saved tapas for another day.

Beverley and I stayed for two of the night’s three flamenco performances. Each of them was preceded by a rendition of classic Spanish songs by a bass-voice male singer, making me feel as though I was an extra in an old spaghetti western—and that someone could start breaking chairs over heads at any moment.

The beautiful and colorful flamenco performers were amongst the most passionate dancers I’ve ever seen. Their performances at times seemed

wrought with anger and hostility, but their passion was no less compelling because of it.

A true treasure to behold...if you can find the place!

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