

Évora's Environs

A 175 B3-B4, C4

Escoural Grotto

A 175 B3
T 266 857 000
C Closed Mon.–Tues.

S (Tours Wed.–Sat. 2:30 p.m., & Sat. 10:30 a.m.)

Évora's Environs

Évora's surroundings offer a fascinating range of sights, from incredible megaliths studding the hills to the delightful towns of Montemor-o-Novo and Évoramonte.

Megaliths Tour: The entire north of the Alentejo region is peppered with Neolithic structures dating from between 4000 and 2000 a.c. The megaliths are open-air and access is not restricted.

EXPERIENCE: Évora's Megaliths by Bike

To experience firsthand the mysteries of prehistoric Alentejo, you need to get up close to its Neolithic megaliths and soak up the surrounding atmosphere. One of the best ways to visit the stones is by bike, quietly pedaling and soaking up the atmosphere. **Bikeiberia** (*Largo Corpo Santo 5, Lisbon, tel 969 630 369 or 213 470 347, www.bikeiberia.com*) offers a guided, daylong tour (€85), described as moderately challenging, it follows a 27-mile (45 km) loop out of Évora and takes four to six hours. An experienced guide leads the tour on back roads through olive groves and cork oaks to the area's best dolmens and menhirs.

Montemor-o-Novo

A 175 B4

Visitor Information

T Largo Calouste Gulbenkian
T 266 898 103
 www.cm-montemor-novo.pt

If you are short of time, limit yourself to the **Cromlech of Almendres**. Ten miles (15 km) west of Évora, the cromlech stands on a hillside of cork oaks just beyond the village of Guadalupe. Ninety-five menhirs (vertical stones) form an oval that aligns with the equinoxes. If you are there alone, it is an extremely

powerful sight, made more so with the view of Évora on the plain below. A lone 8-foot-tall (2.5 m) menhir is signposted on the way up to the cromlech, hidden behind grain bins.

The **Dolmen of Zambujeiro**, near the village of Valverde, measures almost 20 feet (6 m) long, making the prehistoric monument the largest in Iberia. A last sight on this trail is the unusual dolmen-chapel at **São Brissos**.

If you're interested in even older history, visit the caves at **Escoural Grotto**, a few miles west of the Zambujeiro dolmen. The cave paintings of animals are thought to date from 18,000 to 13,000 a.c.

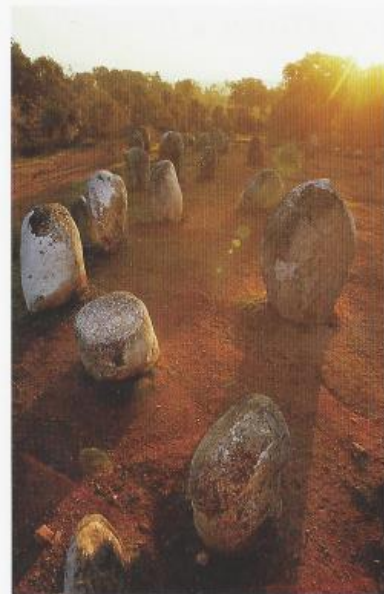
Montemor-o-Novo: The town of Montemor-o-Novo lies a short distance northwest of the megaliths, yet tourists often mistakenly bypass the town. The presence of Moorish kings, Christian knights, and Portuguese royalty is undeniable. The decisions to go on the voyages of discovery to India and to build the University of Coimbra were made in the palace, the ruins of which are visible on the southern edge of the **citadel** that crowns the hill. From the 13th through the 15th centuries, Montemor wielded enormous economic and religious sway, but from the 16th century on, the population moved downhill to create the "new" town.

Inside the landscaped citadel with its fabulous 360-degree views, much needed restoration

work now been completed. The 16th-century Dominican **Convento da Saudação** at the entrance serves as a residential workshop for performing artists.

A few worthwhile sights in the town below include the **Igreja Matriz** (*Largo São João de Deus, closed Mon.*) and the adjoining 17th-century convent were built on the birthplace of St. John of God (1495–1550), a Franciscan who founded the Order of Brothers Hospitallers; his statue stands outside. An annex of the convent, the **Galeria Municipal** (*Terreiro de São João de Deus, closed Sun.*) stages interesting exhibitions by young artists, as does a gallery in the **Convento de São Domingos** (*Largo Prof. Dr. Banha de Andrade, tel 266 890 235*).

Évoramonte: Some 19 miles (30 km) northeast of Évora, Évoramonte is really a castle with a village attached as an afterthought. Towering above the plains, the castle's three floors and four corner towers are seemingly held together with stone knots on each facade—odd, but typical of the House of Bragança, whose motto *Despois vós, nós* (After you, us) played with the second meaning of *nós*: "knots." Built in 1531 after an earthquake devastated the original fortifications of Dom Dinis I, and based on a design by Diogo de Arruda, the new castle imitated the French chateau of Chambord. Its Renaissance style contains a superb, empty



Ninety-five menhirs form the magical Cromlech of Almendres, a site once probably used for ritual prayers and meetings.

interior of rib vaulting and sturdy columns topped by carved capitals. A tight spiral staircase linking the floors eventually brings you to a roof terrace once used for shooting practice. Today it is yet another of Portugal's perfect lookout points.

The main street beside the castle runs along the walled ridge to end at the 16th-century church of **Santa Maria**, whose impressive interior is only open during services. Have a look, too, at the local handicrafts displayed and sold at the tourist office. ■

Évoramonte

A 175 C4

Visitor Information

T Rua de Santa Maria
T 268 959 227
C Closed Mon.–Tues.

Castelo de Évoramonte

T 268 950 025
C Closed Mon.–Tues. a.m. & lunch
S \$