# Country life, the Portuguese way



The only time I can remember regretting not being romantically involved with anyone was as I wandered through the wildflowers towards the olive tree and the monolithic obelisk where a picnic basket and wine had been left in the shade of that olive with views across the Portuguese countryside laid out in front of me. Now, *this* is romance. This would be the spot to propose… marriage or anything really.

But then the whole of São Lourenço do Barrocal, in the shadow of the medieval village of Monsaraz, is geared towards romance, even if it is a firm favourite with families, even extended families who seem to make this place somewhere to regroup and reaffirm links.

Set in the countryside a couple of hours – we even took an Uber! – from Lisbon, across that long, long bridge and through a landscape that would give the Cotswolds or Tuscany a run for their money, São Lourenço do Barrocal is a former farming village that has been re-imagined as a country bolt-hole, somewhere to enjoy the peace and quiet, enjoy the food, enjoy the company, enjoy the horse-riding. Somewhere to just enjoy. Having been in the same family for 200 years or so, the place seeps out in all directions from the reception/bar area, with squashy sofas to sip cocktails in, along past the spa made from the cell-like rooms the single male workers would be allocated back in the farming days to cottages that have been repurposed as gorgeous guest rooms.

We don’t know what we did to deserve it, but we’ve been given a huge stone-floored cottage with a kitchen and an outdoor terrace with a table big enough for ten overlooking the little stone walls that used to be sheep pens. Everything is arches and terracotta and beautiful traditional materials with plants growing anywhere they can get a foothold. Mind you, the authenticity certainly doesn’t mean you don’t get an amazing shower, because you absolutely do.

And walk across that amazingly green bit of grass out the back, where people actually lay out and read their books like they were children on a summer holiday, and you’ll be at the pools: one smaller one for children to muck around in and, further down, a bigger, even more beautiful one (with a handy bar and waiter service hard by) overlooking more fields with a four-metre monolithic rock half in and half out of it. This is where you lay out on sun-loungers and meet gay architects who fly in from Boston every year and who are jealous of your room, which they wanted.

In the evening, chairs come out onto the cobbled street dividing the bar and the restaurant so people can watch the sun go down and then slink into the restaurant, a large rustic affair with plenty of seating outside, with food so fresh it can only have come from the estate itself. And those cocktails get so sociable, you might find yourself having dinner with two people who just started commenting on the sunset and who seem so right up your street that you’re still having a great time when the coffees arrive.

The interior of the restaurant is done out in colours Farrow & Ball have built a company on trying to replicate and is lined with curios – from rows of keys to pairs of gloves – giving the whole place a very lived-in, very loved-in atmosphere with low lighting and the sound of people actually relaxing and having a laugh rather than being on best behaviour.

So, what do people do when they’re not eating, drinking, being massaged, having romantic picnics under olive trees, making new friends by the pool, riding horses or visiting that Medieval village on the hill? Wine tasting, hot-air balloon rides, flower arrangement workshops, boat tours of the nearby Lake Alqueva, stargazing (it’s an amazing spot for that with practically zero light pollution), biking, hiking, pottery… You go straight ahead. We’re just going to finish this wine under the olive tree.<barrocal.pt>

## Bibliography

1. <https://barrocal.pt/all-activities> - This page provides a comprehensive list of activities available at São Lourenço do Barrocal, including wine tastings, horse riding, and stargazing, aligning with the article's mention of various activities offered at the estate.
2. <https://www.foratravel.com/hotels/sao-lourenco-do-barrocal-1> - This source details the amenities at São Lourenço do Barrocal, such as the farm-to-table restaurant, spa, and outdoor pool, supporting the article's descriptions of the estate's facilities.
3. <https://www.welcomebeyond.com/property/sao-lourenco-do-barrocal/> - This page highlights the estate's offerings, including wine tastings, horseback riding, and pottery workshops, corroborating the article's mention of these activities.
4. <https://www.audleytravel.com/us/portugal/accommodation/sao-lourenco-do-barrocal> - This source provides information about the estate's accommodations, including cottages with fully equipped kitchens and outdoor terraces, supporting the article's description of the guest rooms.
5. <https://www.welcomebeyond.com/property/sao-lourenco-do-barrocal/> - This page mentions the estate's location near the medieval village of Monsaraz, aligning with the article's reference to the estate's proximity to the village.