



➔ 38° 47'45.8"N 9° 05'38.2"W

Day 2 | THROUGH THE TAGUS ESTUARY

Loures ➤ Vila Franca de Xira

The second day of the journey takes place in the municipalities of **Loures** and **Vila Franca de Xira**. This section takes place in the incomparable beauty of the **Tagus estuary**, which is characterised by its many *mouchões* or islets and the various tributaries and arms of the river which create a jagged river bank. The riverside landscape is mostly made up of tilled floodplains, where small villages and the natural eco-system of the varied traditional fauna and flora is maintained. The hillsides give the landscape a natural frame, with centuries-old olive trees, old rural villas, farms, churches, chapels and fountains interspersed among residential settlements. This leg features both exclusively pedestrian and mixed sections.

The route has two alternatives: a walk along successive **riverside walkways** along the banks of the Tagus or a **walk inland**



➤ 38°56'12" N 9°0'3" W

If you opt for the **riverside walkways**, cross the pedestrian bridge over the River Trancão and follow the riverbank on a route of around **28 kilometres**, taking approximately **7 hours**. These riverside walkways through the municipalities of Loures and Vila Franca de Xira are located in areas of great ecological and environmental importance (rush and reed beds and salt marshes). They allow you to observe the habitats and the unique landscape along the coastline of the Tagus estuary. There are cycle paths, covered areas and wooden platforms with benches for resting, which also make it possible to practise fishing. The **Loures Riverside Path** is around 6.1 kilometres long and runs through Sacavém, Bobadela, São João da Talha and Santa Iria da Azóia. This is followed by the **Tagus Estuary River Linear Park**, in the municipality of Vila Franca, which is around 20 kilometres long, and our second day ends at the Constantino Palha Garden in Vila Franca de Xira.

If you prefer to walk inland, this route is around **30 kilometres** long and takes approximately **7 hours**. Start at the **Sacavém Ceramics Museum**, which is dedicated to the study and musealisation of the old Sacavém Pottery Factory and the region's industrial heritage. Here you can stamp your Pilgrim's Credential.

➔ 38°56'14" N 9°0'1" W





SACAVÉM POTTERY FACTORY | The history of ceramics production in Portugal in the 19th century is deeply linked to the existence of the Sacavém Pottery Factory, created in 1850 by the industrial glassmaker Manuel Joaquim Afonso and installed in Quinta da Aranha next to the railway station. In 1863, it was sold to British industrialist John Stott Howorth, who had come to Portugal to install the railway lines. He became a naturalised Portuguese citizen and was awarded the title of Baron of Sacavém. The Royal Factory modernised its facilities and attracted craftsmen. It was one of the great centres for the production of utilitarian ceramics and tiles in Portugal, notably for the large panels at São Bento Station in Porto. It enjoyed a high profile with international commissions and remained in operation until 1983.

The **SACAVÉM MUSEUM** is today the facility that publicises this important cultural heritage. Set up by Loures Municipal Council and dedicated to industrial heritage, it is an example of contemporary museography. Honoured with an international award, it preserves collections of ceramics and a vast archive of documents, which are presented in its exhibition spaces. It has a very active documentation centre and educational services that serves visitors and schools.

Nearby is the **Main Church of Sacavém**, which is well worth a stop. It was part of the old convent complex dedicated to nuns of the order of Santa Clara, the **Convent of Nossa Senhora da Conceição dos Mártires e dos Milagres**. Admire the elegance and sobriety of its Mannerist architecture, including the 17th and 18th-century tile panels in the cloister.

As the Route continues it begins to include some mixed sections along roads and old footpaths, providing a riverside landscape of fertile floodplains rich in natural and built heritage.

The landscape is made up of the hillside slopes around the **Tagus** and **Trancão** rivers and the **Alpiatre** and **Caníços streams**, which feature centuries-old olive trees. The humid low-lying terrain around these waterways transitions between aquatic and terrestrial environments, featuring crop plantations and other plants typical of such humid environments.

The hillsides framing the scenery provide signs of ancient rural life. Along the way, walkers can observe the traditional centres of ancient villages and the remains of historical **18th-century rural villas**, with their characteristic trees, walls and gates.

Crossing the old bridge over the **Trancão River**, follow the signposted route (marked in detail on the map available online) and continue along the base of the hillside among the ash and tamarisk trees that line the dyke of the left bank of the Trancão. Around halfway up the left river bank, it is possible to see the **Quinta da Malvasia** and, beyond that, among the olive groves in the **village of Unhos**, the 17th-century tower of the **Igreja de São Silvestre (Saint Sylvester Church)**.

Continue along the **Trancão floodplain**, with the green slope always on your right.

Further on in **Granja de Alpiatre**, you can break up your journey by exploring some interesting cultural heritage sites. The first references to Granja, which came to belong to the Knights Templar and to the Order of Christ, appear in the 12th century, when the area was being repopulated.

Located along the fertile green banks of the **Alpriate stream** is the **Quinta do Brasileiro**, an agricultural and residential property remodelled and expanded over the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. The old **Quinta do Monteiro-Mor** can be reached along the characteristic boulevard. Here, despite the building's state of disrepair, contact with this 18th-century rural villa evokes the interconnectedness of the local settlement and the waterway. Also worth seeing in Granja is the elegant **Chapel of Saint Sebastian**, with its bell tower and 17th-century porch featuring a triple arcade along its façade.

The old village of **Alpriate** was historically dedicated to fishing and in the old town centre it is still possible to admire boats used to catch sole, sea bass and eel. Various facilities are available in the village, which is an ideal spot to take a break. Continue down to the dyke next to Vale da Figueira as signposted.

In the village centre of **Vialonga** (a place name derived from the long Roman road opened in the valley to give access to Olisipo, the Roman name for Lisbon), you can visit the **Chapel of Saint Eulália**, dating from the end of the 13th century and remodelled in the 18th century, and the 16th-century **main church**, dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption, with its interior covered with 17th-century woodwork and tiles from the 18th century that narrate the important stages of the Virgin's life.

Also recommended is a visit to **Verdelho do Ruivo** to see the **Chapel of St. Anthony** in **Quinta do Caldas**, which in the 16th century belonged to Brother Bartolomeu dos Mártires. With previous arrangements it is possible to visit several villas and properties of historical and cultural interest founded by religious orders and noble families that represent characteristic examples of rural architecture.

When leaving Vialonga, head in the direction of **Póvoa de Santa Iria**, crossing the bypass road and continuing along a road bordered by olive trees. Take the opportunity to visit the **Igreja Matriz de Nossa Senhora de Fátima** (Main Church of Our Lady of Fátima), designed by architect José Bastos and inaugurated in 1956. The **Quinta da Piedade** is also worth a visit, an

18th-century complex made up of a country residence, a church and chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Mercy, the Chapel of Senhor Morto and the Oratory of St. Jerome, where cultural facilities are located.

The Route continues, becoming mixed and fragmented in some sections as is typical of urban areas. Eventually moving again towards the **Tagus Estuary** after crossing parts of the parishes of Vialonga and Póvoa de Santa Iria, you arrive at **Forte da Casa** and the riverbank of the Tagus after crossing the railway line. The landscape becomes more aquatic in character and the presence of large *mouchões* (islets in the estuary) become more pronounced.



THE TAGUS ESTUARY is a wide aquatic territory that connects the river to the sea. As it approaches the river mouth, the Tagus widens into a system of tributaries and arms. This interaction of the river and the sea creates the largest wetland in Portugal and the largest estuary in Europe. It is divided into several areas, including the so-called Mar da Palha. Of high biological and economic value, it is a kind of “big sea” that is formed between the two banks. Its presence is felt in the history and everyday life of a significant part of the surrounding areas and of the communities of the Lisbon metropolitan area.

MOUCHÕES are islets in the middle of the estuary, occupied by endogenous vegetation, pastures and wet, sandy, clay and mixed soil. Thanks to the high level of irrigation and size, *mouchões* can form highly productive places for agricultural cultivation. They play a key role in balancing the fragile eco-system in which they are located. As such, their maintenance and protection are of critical importance.

It is also possible to observe beautiful examples of waterbirds on the *mouchões*, which offer an ideal place for birds to rest and feed during their migratory routes from Europe to West Africa. Species include Flamingos, Herons, Ducks, Pied Avocets, Sandpipers and Plovers, which feed on the tidal mud flats and rest in nearby habitats and vegetated areas.

Crossing the marshland area, the track continues to **Alverca do Ribatejo**. Across the railway line in Alverca is the **Air Museum**, which houses a number of aviation-related exhibits. Also noteworthy are the **Alverca and Forte da Casa salt pans**, located on the right bank of the Tagus Estuary, an area made up of salt pans and agricultural fields and classified as an important area for bird conservation. In the historical town centre, visitors can admire the **Main Church** dedicated to St. Peter, a church of Arabic origins and renovated in the 18th century; the **Church of the Child Shepherds** (the first temple dedicated to the child



shepherds of Fátima, Francisco and Jacinta, and featuring the second largest carillon in Europe); the **Church of Misericórdia**, built in the 17th century; and the 16th-century **Pillory** in front of the old **Municipal Chambers**.

The journey resumes along the **path between Alverca do Ribatejo and Vila Franca de Xira**, a distance of 7.5 km and covered in around 2 hours. The track follows the Tagus River and is used by many local walkers, cyclists and joggers, or as a picnic and rest stop. The river is also used for canoeing, sailing and sports fishing. We suggest a stop in **Alhandra** to visit the **Dr. Sousa Martins House Museum**, which exhibits the personal collection of this extraordinary and innovative Portuguese doctor who worked towards the international promotion of hygiene and preventive health measures, as well as a visit to the **Chapel of Our Lady of the Conception** or the **Igreja de Nossa Senhora da Guia** (Church of Our Lady of Guidance). In **Alhandra** you can take some time to rest. Alternatively, you can visit the imposing **Main Church** dedicated to St. John the Baptist, founded in 1558 by Cardinal Henrique. From **Alhandra**, the track continues along the **Riverside Walking Track**. The landscape is serene and clear. Before arriving at **Vila Franca de Xira**, past the railroad on your left you can see the **Quinta do Paraíso**, where Afonso de Albuquerque was born.

A good place for a rest during the walk is the **Fábrica das Palavras**, the modern municipal library where books are the focus for many varied activities. It is a place of inspiration and beauty, but also a great place to admire the surrounding landscape.

At the end of this second stage of walking, the city of **Vila Franca de Xira** is an ideal place of welcome. Here you will find the necessary facilities to spend the night and recover. Your point of arrival is the pleasant **Constantino Palha municipal garden**, named after this local entrepreneur and benefactor.

Within the city you find the 17th-century **Main Church** dedicated to St. Vincent. Also close by is the **Church of Misericórdia** and the **Museum of Sacred Art**, which holds a noteworthy collection. The nearby **Largo da Câmara** features several remarkable examples of Manueline architecture, such as the **Pillory** and the **Igreja de São Sebastião** (Church of Saint Sebastian), each framed by the **Municipal Chambers**.

If you have the time, you can finish the day by investigating local history and culture or, if you prefer to rest, can do so the next day before resuming your walk.

Vila Franca de Xira was founded in the context of the first attempt at colonisation of the region by French crusaders in the 12th century. Administered by the Order of Christ, it owes its name to the nationality of the crusaders (French or *franco*, in Portuguese) who helped the first kings of Portugal in the reconquest and settlement of the territory and to the predominant forest in those uncultivated lands, the *cira* or *Xira*. It developed into a great urban centre of the surrounding metropolitan area without losing its identity as a riverside city linked to the Tagus and associated activities.



BOATS OF THE TAGUS: THE RIVER ROUTE | The Tagus River is traversed by various types of boats and ships, including *cacilheiros*, ferries, sports boats and cruise ships. In the riverside villages on the banks of the estuary, however, some examples of traditional boats remain, such as the *Catraios*, *Canoas*, *Varinos*, *Traineiras* (used for catching sardines, seabream, Atlantic pollock and swordfish) and smaller boats for catching octopus and squid.

The ‘Liberdade’, one of the *varino*-style boats that transported goods along the river, has been transformed into part of the Municipal Museum of Vila Franca de Xira. 18 metres long, weighing 40 tons and featuring two sails, a high bow and a flat bottom, this boat returns to the river between the months of May and October, navigating the shoals to allow the public to discover the exceptional natural landscape of the Tagus Estuary Nature Reserve and explore the *mouchões* between Vila Franca de Xira and Valada do Ribatejo.

The **TAGUS ESTUARY NATURE RESERVE** | a classified and protected nature reserve that takes in municipalities on both the southern (Alcochete, Benavente) and northern river banks (Vila Franca de Xira).

The reserve is made up of estuarine waters, surrounding fields, small inlets, *mouchões*, marshes, salt pans and agricultural alluvial plains. It is home to several characteristic species such as sole, sea bass, brown shrimp, lamprey and eel. The noteworthy birdlife in the reserve includes a large number of wintering species and ospreys and flamingos are also abundant.

The **Municipal Museum**, organised in several thematic sections, and the **Museum of Neo-Realism**, installed in a contemporary building since 2007, are both worthy of a visit. The latter focuses on a theme of historical relevance to 20th-century Portuguese culture, society and the arts.



With a focus on literature and the visual arts, it holds an important body of documents and a remarkable collection of artworks.

In the riverside area, visitors can observe the traditional activities taking place in and around the waterfront. From the Vila Franca pier it is possible to access some of the *mouchões*.

Another place to visit is the **Railway Station** and the **Municipal Market**, whose architecture is highlighted by the artistic quality of its tile panels, which are distinguished by their theme and artistic quality. Designed by painter Jorge Colaço, the blue and white panels of the Railway Station evoke characteristically agricultural landscapes and scenes of the riverside wetlands. The panels of the Municipal Market, by Álvaro Pedro Gomes, also explore these themes.

TILES: ART AND HISTORY

Tiles are an important area of Portuguese artistic production. With their origins in Mediterranean ceramics and greatly influenced by the large production centres in the south of the Iberian Peninsula in the 15th century, tiles became a national medium of artistic expression from the 16th century onwards. During the 17th and 18th centuries, large sets of tiles (in the form of both illustrative panels and as decorative patterns) were used to line the sumptuous interiors of churches and palaces, creating truly baroque aesthetic environments.

Production expanded in the 19th and 20th centuries with the development of semi-industrial and industrial production, achieving technical and aesthetic qualities nation-wide in which relevant painters and ceramists such as Jorge Colaço, Jorge Barradas and Almada Negreiros were invited to participate.

Tiles became one of the main forms of public art, covering and beautifying urban façades and public buildings, both in the form of industrial patterned tiles and in the form of hand-painted illustrative panels composed in large thematic sets.

With time and interest to visit other places in the municipality, visitors can explore the ruins of the old **Farrobo Palace**, built in the 19th century by the 1st Count of Farrobo, a prominent cultural figure who created a small theatre in this building where many Italian opera companies have performed.

In the vicinity is the **village of Povos**, which was given a charter by King Sancho I in 1195, certifying the strategic importance of the town and its castle built atop the **Senhor da Boa Morte** hill. The **Manueline pillory** standing in front of the old **Municipal Chambers** in **Largo da Forca** reaffirms the dynamism of the town. Near the river, the **Quinta da Real Fábrica dos Atanados** was built in 1729 by João Mendes de Faria Barbosa,

one of the important tanneries that remained in operation until the 1940s. A devotional spirit is kept alive by the procession of the Lord of Good Death, which takes place annually on Thursday of the Ascension. The procession leaves the **Igreja da Nossa Senhora da Assunção** (Church of Our Lady of the Assumption) and advances towards the **Sanctuary on the top of the hill**. Nearby, visitors can explore the ruins of the **Palace of the Counts of Castanheira** and a **set of anthropomorphic** graves excavated in the rock.