



➔ 39°1'16" N 8°57'1" W

## Day 3 | CREEKS AND LARGE VALLEYS

### Vila Franca de Xira » Azambuja

The distance between **Vila Franca de Xira** and **Azambuja** is around **19 km** and can be covered in approximately **4 hours and 30 minutes**.

The track is framed to the east by the characteristic landscape of the **Lezíria do Tejo** furrowed by creeks and large valleys of ashes and reeds. To the west lie mountains with pine trees and cork oaks.

Walkers are enveloped in nature and landscape throughout this stage. The track also travels through part of Vala do Carregado and Vala Real da Azambuja, noteworthy for their proximity to the water. The historical urban landscape also invites contemplation, especially the areas around the old farms and the cultural heritage of villages and towns such as Vila Nova da Rainha and Azambuja, which feature many interesting churches and cultural facilities.

This part of the track allows walkers to discover the surrounds of the northern bank of the Tagus, framed by the mountains to the west. Irrigated crops predominate in the fields furrowed by valleys. After the harvest, cattle descend from the slopes to take advantage of the stubble. The **Tagus dyke** is lined with ash trees, reeds and yellow water lilies, while the surrounding slopes and hills feature maritime and stone pines.





➔ 38°57'40" N 8°58'47" W

You can progress along your hike at a moderate pace, making the stops for contemplation that the track deserves. The track is easy, but requires some attention and a sense of direction. For this reason, we once again recommend a detailed map, which is easily acquired. We suggest a walk divided into three sections, with stops between each section.

To leave the city of **Vila Franca de Xira**, go to the **Municipal Gardens** (Jardim Constantino Palha). At a moderate pace, the first section extends between this garden and Vala do Carregado for a distance of 6 km, around 1 hour.

Leaving the **Municipal Gardens of Vila Franca de Xira**, head towards and then under the **Marechal Carmona bridge** in the direction of **Castanheira do Ribatejo** and **Carregado**, where the track presents a variety of natural landscapes and the urban periphery.

At your destination of **Vala do Carregado**, you will find suitable resting places and small cafés. Walkers can spend some time exploring Vala do Carregado and learning how it fits into the Tagus River system and other riverside towns.

From **Vala do Carregado**, walkers can start the second part of their journey with a 4 km walk of around 1 hour to **Vila Nova da Rainha**. The Route is very shaded and follows the **channel**.

A short detour allows a visit to explore some of the cultural heritage of **Carregado**. This is one of the calmer days of the journey, which allows walkers to choose their own pace. Near the **Carregado Thermoelectric Power** Plant and its imposing smokestacks, we suggest you take a detour to **Carregado** to explore its important palaeontological and archaeological heritage. There, we propose a visit to **Quinta da Condessa**, founded at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century under the name of Prazo do Mestre or Quinta do Carregado. It was founded by the Countess of Lousã Mariana Joaquina de Basto Barém (daughter of Luís António de Basto Barém, alcaide of the town of Linhares, who established an estate here in 1715). On the grounds of the Quinta is the **Chapel of St. Sebastian**, built by Manuel Correia de Meneses Barém and his wife Joana de Távora in 1669. In 1877, the Quinta was acquired by the Pinto Barreiros family and became an important cattle farm.

In the village of **Carregado** next to the National Highway (Estrada Nacional), you can also visit the **Quinta de Santo António**, built at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Vaz Monteiro family, who began raising cattle there in 1848.

Classified municipal heritage also includes the **Quinta do Campo**, which belongs to the Marquis of Castelo Melhor and the Viscount of Varzea. Visitors can also enter the **Igreja Paroquial de Nossa Senhora de Fátima** (Parish Church of Our Lady of Fátima), inaugurated in 1956 after the dissolution of the parish of Nossa Senhora da Assunção de Cadafais, becoming the new local centre of Christian faith.



Heading back to the Thermolectric Plant, continue straight ahead along the left side of the tarmac road. The traffic requires walkers pay extra care in this area. This road leads all the way to **Vila Nova da Rainha**.

The historical record of **Vila Nova da Rainha** stretches back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In 1375, King Fernando spent some time here and issued the residents a charter granting them jurisdiction and official town status. This good fortune would continue with the marriage of Nuno Álvares Pereira and Dona Leonor de Alvim in that same year in the **Igreja de Santa Marta** (Saint Martha Church), currently the main church. With its façade topped by a cross and framed by a lateral tower, the temple stands on a small hill. In 1916, the first Military Aeronautics School was founded in Vila Nova da Rainha.

**THE PORT OF VILA NOVA DA RAINHA** played an important role in the movement of people and goods and contributed significantly to the development of the urban centre itself. During the Middle Ages but especially from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, it established itself as a distribution centre for the movement of people and goods, with growing regional and national importance.

People and goods from various parts of the country and especially the capital arrived and departed from the local river wharf, filling the Tagus and its tributaries and canals with characteristic leisure and transport boats. Local residents, pilgrims and travellers in particular would disembark here to continue by road their journeys to cities and towns in the western region, especially to the important town of Caldas da Rainha, founded in 1511 following the construction of its Thermal Hospital in 1485 by Queen Eleonor.

The port formed part of the itinerary of the **Royal Highway**, an important transport hub in the national road system implemented from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century to facilitate the transport of the court throughout the national territory. Characteristic signage and indications of distances still survive from this road system.

After a break, leave **Vila Nova da Rainha** and head for the town of **Azambuja**. The distance of 7 km will take around 1 hour and 30 minutes to cover. You should leave **Vila Nova da Rainha** by the National Highway heading north towards **Azambuja**. Though traffic on the road can be heavy, there is plenty of space for walkers to advance safely on the left side.

After a little more than 1 km, you will find **Quinta das Cabanas da Rainha**, a private property that stands out for the tile coverings dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries which decorate the interiors of the house.



➔ 39°1'40" N 8°56'35" W

Continuing your journey, you will arrive at **Azambuja**, whose history dates back to the period of the formation of the kingdom of Portugal and the reconquest and organisation of the territory. The town was originally known as *Oleastrum* during Roman Empire and became *Azz-Abuja* during the Muslim period. Reconquered from the Moors by King Afonso Henriques, it was donated in 1200 by King Sancho I to the Crusader Childe Rolim, son of the Count of Chester, for his help during the siege of Lisbon.

A visit to some of the monuments is well justified. A good place to start is the **Main Church**, whose origins date back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a time when the village was known as a 'vila franca', a town which benefited from tax exemptions. Dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption, this 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century building houses tile panels and baroque carvings. Next to the church in **Praça do Município** is the **Manueline Pillory**, marking the concession of a foral charter to the town by King Manuel I in 1513.



➔ 39°4'10" N 8°52'7" W





► 39°4'9" N 8°52'6" W

The **Misericórdia** building originally housed the town's first hospital, founded in 1304 by Pedro Estevães do Sobral and his wife, Esteva Fernandes. The hospital was eventually handed over to the Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit, who added a chapel for religious services. In 1552, the Brothers decided to establish the Brotherhood of Mercy, dedicating hospital buildings to health and care.

In the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the temple was rebuilt, highlighting the simplicity of the classic lines of its façades. The interior features several artistic elements of great erudition, including tiles, gilded carvings and the altarpiece painting on wood. The latter include the "**Jesse Tree**" on the altar of Our Lady of the Rosary, executed in 1595 by Simão Rodrigues, and the oil painting "**Calvary**" on the altar of Senhor Jesus das Chagas, attributed to André Reinoso from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

At the end of this walk, you can rest overnight in this village, which offers all facilities required. Thus reinvigorated to continue, visitors may also be motivated to return one day to discover the **municipality of Azambuja** and the important civil and religious heritage scattered throughout its parishes. Certainly worth the effort is a long and attentive visit to **Pina Manique**, a **monumental complex** of Pombaline architecture and urban design associated with the ideals of the Enlightenment.

