



➔ 39°3'31" N 8°51'16" W

Day 4 | THROUGH THE LEZÍRIA

Azambuja » Santarém

The distance between **Azambuja** and **Santarém** is around **33 km** and can be covered in approximately **8 hours**.

The Route continues into the heart of the **Lezíria do Tejo**, a territory predominantly made up of irrigated plains fostering fertile agricultural land. This floodplain landscape is often compartmentalised by native hedge species.

Lined with leafy ash trees overshadowing the banks, many pleasant river beaches emerge along the banks of the river. Cyclical flooding alters the banks of the river and its tributaries, giving rise to the construction of the dykes that characterise many local villages, such as **Valada do Ribatejo**, **Reguengo do Alviela** and **Porto de Muge**.

Some of the most impressive landscapes of the entire route appear in these sections over the dykes. In the final section of the day's walk, **Santarém**, with its strong urban presence on the river, gives expression to the ancestral memory of navigation of the Tagus and retains a rich cultural heritage that spans many centuries.

LEZÍRIA | A wetland landscape characterised by **floodplains on the banks of the Tagus River** and its main tributaries. Water here is that which shapes the surrounding landscape. The landscape is marked by rivers, streams and channels that irrigate the land and create ideal conditions for agriculture and fishing.

The same floods that limit the use of some of the land are also what makes it so agriculturally productive. Cereals such as wheat and barley, grapes and corn predominate, though sunflower and melon are important crops that grow well in local conditions. Once dominant, the rice crop is undergoing a revival. The whole landscape forms a very special *habitat*, where the local way of life is deeply connected to the surrounding natural conditions.

We propose that you take your day's walk in three sections, with stops in between.

The **first section**, between **Azambuja Train Station** and **Quinta do Alqueidão**, covers a distance of 6.5 km or 1 hour.

Leaving **Azambuja** through the pedestrian way over the railway line next to the station, head towards **Vala da Azambuja** along the road side densely wooded with poplars and eucalyptus.

The channels of the Tagus water system were created to better manage a territory dominated by the cyclical floods that inundate the agricultural fields and some of villages that are more exposed to the rich sediment of the Tagus, establishing a territorial transition between the coast and the interior. The deep and fertile alluvial plains are among the most highly productive irrigated Mediterranean agricultural zones.

Moving from south to north, the track reveals a man-made landscape with several settlements and where Mediterranean crops such as olives, wheat and grapes prevail alongside a corridor of forest made up of pine and eucalyptus trees.

The area hosts a wide range of fauna, including the Iberian green frog, the Algerian psammodromus, the Montpellier snake, the Little owl, the Common buzzard, the Goldfinch, the European serin, the Zitting cisticola, the Carrion crow, the Barn swallow, the Great tit, the Common blackbird, the Algerian mouse, the Greater white-toothed shrew and Rabbits.

Rarer species include the Bosca's newt, the Reed warbler, the Common skylark, the Tawny pipit, the Grey wagtail, the White-winged black tit, Otters and Bats (in caves and caverns), while the rarest are the Short-toed snake eagle, the Booted Eagle and the Red-billed chough.

With the **channel** to the west and the grape fields to the east, continue between the reeds along a dirt track, where fragments of the old cobblestones remain, until reaching the **Azambuja Airfield**. Continue along the tarmac road and then along a rural road to **Quinta do Alqueidão**, enjoying the landscape of reeds, orchards,

vineyards and cultivated fields that are especially beautiful in spring.

If you want to visit the **Casa Branca river beach**, take a detour to your right and head south.

Crossing the **Channel** brings visitors to an exceptional piece of infrastructure of great historical and landscape value.

THE ROYAL CHANNEL is an important work of **hydraulic engineering from the 18th century**. The channel is an open waterway on the Tagus River to control field irrigation, enable the movement of people and encourage trade through shipping.

The project was initiated in 1748 during the reign of King João V with the aim of creating a network of canals along the 26 km between Azambuja and Santarém. Promoted by the Marquis of Pombal, the project was continued during the reigns of King José and his daughter, Queen Maria I, forming part of the Portuguese transport network strategy.

Ideal conditions for navigation were created along 17 km between the municipalities of Azambuja, Carregado and Santarém. In the 19th century, the Azambuja Channels Company was created, an entity responsible for the maintenance of the channel and for the creation of support infrastructure.



After a stop to rest and enjoy the landscape, start the day's **second section**, which covers the next 5.5 km. This section runs between **Quinta do Alqueidão** and **Valada** and lasts around an hour, with the possibility of stopping at **Reguengo**.

From **Quinta do Alqueidão**, continue towards the **Tagus dyke** along a tarmac road. In little more than 1 km, you will reach the dyke, where you should turn left. The road is partially shaded by ashes, poplars and willows growing alongside it and on the nearby slopes. When arriving at **Reguengo**, before entering the village, it is possible to turn right and go to **Palhota**, at a distance of around 1 km.

Palhota is an old *avieiros* fishing village, renowned for its unique wooden houses painted in strong colours and built on stilts to withstand the flood cycles of the Tagus River. Writer Alves Redol (1911-1969) lived in this village.

The **AVIEIROS** are fishermen from Vieira de Leiria, Leiria and Ílhavo who migrated to the banks of the Tagus, settling there in characteristic villages of wooden houses next to staked wharves on the river. These communities brought techniques and customs that formed a unique way of life and cultural expression.

Key aspects of local culture include characteristic boats, fishing techniques, stilted houses and wharves and a delicious culinary culture centred on fish from the river. The writer Alves Redol celebrated the experiences of this cultural heritage in his novel "Avieiros", a key work of Neo-Realist aesthetics.

Although the avieiran communities have disappeared, much of its local colour and memories have been maintained for ongoing appreciation.



➔ 39°3'36" N 8°47'54" W

Returning to the track, you can take a break in the village of **Reguengo**. Cross the cobbled dyke, with the **Tagus River** to the east and the **Lezíria** to the horizon, pass the **Quinta da Mota de Frade** and enter **Valada**, an important agricultural parish in Cartaxo, specialising in the cultivation of grapes, sunflowers, corn and melons. The village features the **Main Church** dedicated to Our Lady of Ó, originally built in 1211 and rebuilt in 1528.



➔ 39°3'46" N 8°49'26" W



➔ 39°4'54" N 8°45'28" W

Here, very close to the river, walkers can take a break in the wooded area equipped with a picnic park and a river beach, which is both a local meeting place and a wonderful viewpoint to observe the Tagus River. When ready to continue, the **third leg** of this third day of walking runs between Valada and Santarém, a distance of 18 km and covered in approximately 4 hours.

There are many opportunities for small breaks throughout this last phase of the day's journey. At **Porto de Muge** it is possible to cross the Tagus River over the Rainha Dona Amélia Bridge, a remarkable work of engineering and art opened to trains on 14 January 1904 by King Carlos I. It is currently used by road traffic and pedestrians. If you decide to make this short round trip, pay attention to safety.

Marvel at the landscape of the Tagus River from the bridge deck. Crossing the bridge, you reach **Muge**, a village located on the left bank of the stream with the same name (a tributary of the Tagus), which was part of the Alcobaça Monastery until the beginning of the 14th century, when it was delivered to the Crown. In 1648, the dukes of Cadaval became its donees, building the

palace and the farm. Visit the **Palace of the Dukes of Cadaval**, which retains its original façade and is flanked by two raised bodies with arches and porch. The house is organised around a patio which features the Chapel of Our Lady of Glory, built in the 18th century.

In front of the palace there remains a **bridge of Roman origin with a medieval arch**. It is worth visiting the **Main Church of Our Lady of the Conception**, which was built in 1297 by Afonso Pais, parish priest of Salvaterra. The temple was renovated in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Return to **Porto de Muge**. Go over the dyke and glimpse old rural manors: **Quinta das Palmeiras** (including the avenue that gave it its name); **Quinta do Pedroso**; and **Quinta das Varandas**, painted white and blue.

Continue down the dyke for around 1.5 km after passing the **Quinta do Malpique**, making a small detour to the left and then after 300 metres turn right, following a rural dirt road parallel to the Tagus. This road crosses small properties and approaches **Caneiras**, in the municipality of Santarém. This is another village on the Tagus retaining **avieiran heritage**.



➔ 39°7'5" N 8°44'1" W

Through vineyards, the Route begins to move us away from the river and its dyke and follows part of the National Highway. You enter the town of **Santarém** through the old riverside town of **Marvila** and its **main street** of the same name. Notable monuments in the town include the **Church of Marvila** and **Chafariz das Figueiras** fountain.

The upper part of the city is reached by climbing the steep **Junqueira pathway**. The track ends at **Praça Sá da Bandeira**, next to the **Cathedral** and the **Igreja de Nossa Senhora da Piedade** (Church of Our Lady of Mercy).

The city of **Santarém**, the region's great urban centre, stands over the Tagus River with an extensive panorama of the surrounding landscape. Its ancestry can be noted in its rich historical and cultural heritage, which provides evidence of its Roman and Arab occupation. A place of residence for the itinerant medieval court, the town prospered over the centuries and was given city status in 1868.

SANTARÉM | its topographic features have conditioned its urban development. The city is located in a flat area overlooking the river, with an average height of 103 metres. The city also includes two riverside centres (Ribeira de Santarém and Alfange), built at an average height of 8 metres on the right bank of the Tagus River.

Santarém is notable for the quantity and quality of its classified heritage. A systematic process to classify its built civil and industrial historical heritage began in 1910. Classification processes were implemented to include tangible and intangible historical heritage and include examples such as the doors of the fortress, Manueline and Renaissance windows, Gothic churches and convents, Renaissance religious and civil buildings, Mannerist and Baroque buildings and contemporary facilities such as the Municipal Market.

On your day of arrival, weather permitting, or the next day in the morning, enjoy a walk through the streets of the city, observing the **fortress** and its walls. At the **Portas do Sol** gardens you can see the vast territory of the south bank of the Tagus River. It is worth visiting the **Fundação Passos Canavarro** house museum located nearby, which houses an excellent art and history museum and preserves the bedroom of the romantic 19th-century writer Almeida Garrett.

Gothic monuments form part of the city's cultural memory, especially the **Church of São João de Alporão**, the **Graça Church** (where the Tomb of Pedro Álvares Cabral, discoverer of Brazil, is located), the **Convent of São Francisco** founded in 1242 to house a mendicant religious order, and the **Convent of Santa Clara**.

Be sure to visit the **Cathedral** (the old church of the Company of Jesus), dedicated to Our Lady of the Conception, with its imposing 17th-century façade.



The single-nave interior of the temple includes eight side chapels, where Baroque works of art reinforce the aesthetic of the carvings and painted ceiling and the remarkable fidelity in the iconography relating to the ascension of Our Lady. Next door is the **Diocesan Museum**, which was awarded the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage/Europa Nostra Awards in 2016.



➔ 39°14'13" N 8°41'7" W