



Loulé: Surfing on the Algarvian creativity!

Article and photos by Caroline Couret, Barcelona

If you have already heard about the Algarve Region in South Portugal, it's certainly thanks to its beaches, ranked among the best ones in the world! A due recognition for the 200-kilometre coastline, along which you can enjoy endless sandy beaches as well as small sheltered coves all year long, thanks to the Mediterranean-style micro-climate! Although it has turned into the place-to-be for most of the tourists worldwide looking for leisure in a paradisiacal landscape, tourism has not generated negative impact and it still offers awesome beaches surrounded by an unspoiled nature. The Ria Formosa Natural Park even hides a Desert Island!

Obviously, such a natural beauty had also attracted the most brilliant civilizations of the story of the humanity who let a varied sample of their outstanding heritage.

Although the first inhabitants appeared here in the Palaeolithic period, the region flourished with the Romans and the Moors, who were allowed to remain in quarters outside the city walls during the Christian reconquest

in the year 1249 AD.

A spirit of tolerance and generosity and a mosaic of cultures that compose the DNA of the city of Loulé, located at only few minutes from the coast. It is a city which proposes today the visitors to live unique experiences with its inhabitants. Thus it is not surprising that it was named Creative Friendly Destination by the Creative Tourism Network®, an international organization aimed to promote the destinations worldwide that invite the tourists to discover their culture by participating in creative activities with the locals.

As any southern town, Loulé will first dazzle you with its exceptional light, all year long! An extreme brightness that is reflected by the typical Portuguese pavements made of small flat pieces of various different stones, arranged to form a pattern or picture, like a mosaic. Or which is the same... walking on a work of art!

How not to feel inspired by such charming white houses, gardens, squares and corners?

But one thing is to feel inspired, and another one is having the means to express it!

This is precisely what the program LouléCriativo offers to the most demanding travellers: the possibility to explore its intangible heritage through authentic experiences to be lived with the locals! The success of this new tourist offer is to challenge the tourists with activities that enable them to experience the local culture, feeling themselves like a local!

"Sharing is caring!" Well, this is precisely what the tourists from all over the world, who participate in a wide array of creative activities with the population, are experiencing. No need to contemplate the Eiffel Tower; the creative tourists reject the 'Postcard Tourism'. At most, they prefer to create the postcard themselves, as part of the workshops proposed by LouléCriativo, but also by other destinations like Porto Alegre in Brazil.

What makes it so extraordinary? Precisely its ordinariness! The fact for the tourists is not to feel like tourists because they are not



proposed conventional tourism, but small – and beautiful – daily-life experiences that are connected to the local culture.

Whereas the postcard workshop in Loulé refers to the area's traditions and legends, a similar activity in Porto Alegre will introduce you to the techniques of the felt, characteristic of the Gaucha culture. In other words, it gives back to tourism the responsibility to maintain and revitalize the intangible heritage as well as to strengthen the cultural identities in a global context.

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But that doesn't mean that the creative tourism is an elitist way of travelling. Like Patricia, who also spent time on the beach as thousands of fellows; families, seniors, singles, are also discovering the creative tourism as a way of giving sense to their vacations. It is not new. All the creative tourists recognize themselves in Confucius' quotes:

"Tell me and I will forget, show me and I may remember, involve me and I will understand" – but it corresponds to a recent change in the system of values.

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Opposite page: Beach in Loulé

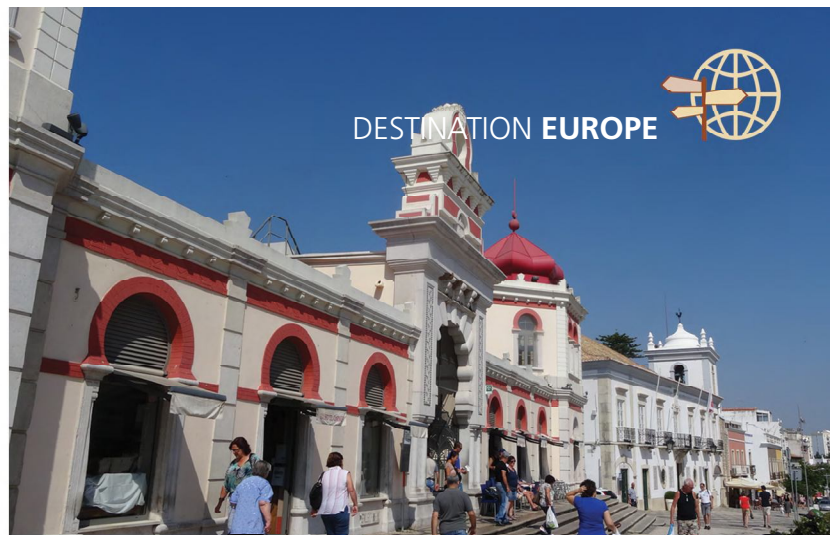
This page:

Various activities and workshops being organised for the creative tourists in Loulé



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That's why the local operators and destinations boards have to be reactive and creative themselves to attract this new demand.

The choice of activities in Loulé, in terms of types, durations, targets, etc., is unlimited and fits with the most singular demands. The tourists can even schedule a series of workshops going from contemporary jewellery to a ginger and orange jam workshop, passing through a session in which they will transform a cardboard into a typical Algarvian candelabrum!

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The Algarvian beaches are among the most beautiful ones in the world. But the sunset on the Ria Formosa lagoon or the Desert Island is a ‘must see’ for tourists; it has to be in focus, but in a much more artistic and creative approach!

About the Author



Caroline Couret, Barcelona, Spain is an expert in creative tourism. She has co-founded and currently manages the Creative Tourism Network and Barcelona Creative Tourism

program. She is a regular speaker in Tourism conferences and in universities around the world. She has also published articles about creative tourism in different languages. She is an expert for the European Union (EU) and member of the International Creative Tourism Associate (US). She organized the International Conference on Creative Tourism that was held in Barcelona in December 2010. Since 2001 she has been in charge of the international area of the Foundation Society and Culture from which she has been managing a wide range of projects, including the launching of the creative tourism programs, the coordination of European funds projects and the organization of festivals for the Barcelona City Council.