

Portugal's Algarve attracts year-round vacationers

By VINCE EGAN
Thomson News Service

Centuries ago - even millennia ago - Portugal's southern coastal region was enticing outsiders. The Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Carthaginians, the Goths, the Moors - they all came, saw and conquered this southernmost coast of western Europe before moving on.

Nowadays, the province called the Algarve attracts a year-round, non-stop invasion of pleasure-seeking vacationers and sojourners.

These invaders come mainly from the north - from Britain, West Germany and the Netherlands - to find affordable sunshine and seascapes.

Canadians aren't a major presence in the Algarve so far, but their numbers are rising rapidly. (This must be one of the only tourist areas of Europe where we out-number the Americans).

What lures northerners is a combination of attractions: The weather is generally pleasant (averaging 3,300 hours of sunshine annually) because of warm breezes from Africa as well as mountain ranges that protect the Algarve coast from northern winds. The area has a rich history, the result of its centuries of occupation by outside forces. The area's hotels are plentiful and reasonably priced.

PRICE THE KEY

But other regions of Europe can boast of a clement climate, of a colorful past, of creature comforts galore. The secret of the Algarve's success must surely be its price structure.

Frequent visitors may complain, and do, that prices in the region

have been rising too fast for comfort - but in Europe that's the case virtually everywhere a traveller might go.

As thousands of Canadians (many of them retired) have discovered, a winter holiday in the south of Portugal can be had for a manageable price. As little as \$15 a day per person will get a fairly modest apartment, and about \$40 daily is the going rate in some coastal towns for a good, fully equipped apartment near the beaches.

Holiday prices are almost sure to be considerably lower than comparable accommodations in such popular "snowbird" destinations as the southern U.S. and the Caribbean. Hence the growing movement towards the Algarve among Canadians who seek, typically, a respite of a month or two from our winter weather.

For shorter stays, the daily rate is naturally higher at the best hotels. But such five-star establishments as Quinta do Lago and the ocean-front Hotel Algarve - where, according to Director-General Antonio Sancho, Pierre and Margaret Trudeau honeymooned - offer good value by any international standard.

GIVE AND TAKE

There are compromises to be made, of course, where bargains are concerned.

While there are some scenic areas - for example, the wide, white beaches near Portimao, with their strange rock formations and grottoes - the scenery on the whole can hardly be compared to, say, that of the pricey French Riviera.

Nor are men's works necessarily a thing of beauty. Expansion and construction have been rapid and, until recently, controlled poorly if at all. The result is that too many high-rise apartments are clustered together in certain areas of the Algarve coast. On the other hand, if it were not for all those recently built apartment blocks, the cost of a lengthy sojourn would not be nearly as low as it is - another compromise.

As well as apartment and hotel construction, a boom in road-building is under way - understandable enough in an area that is becoming so popular with visitors, but an obstacle nevertheless.

The provincial governor of the Algarve, Joaquim Cabrita Neto, readily concedes that over-development has been taking place in certain districts, but points out that steps have finally been taken to control the pace of investment (most of it foreign) in tourist-related development at several locations.

Among the problems he cites are shortages of water and of labor, and the urgency to expand the road system, schools and hospitals.

(The Algarve's permanent population is about 350,000, but the number exceeds one million at the peak summer holiday periods.)

AIRLINKS

Access to Portugal and the Algarve has become significantly easier for Canadians within the past six months or so. Air Canada, rapidly expanding its network of European destinations, added the Portuguese capital of Lisbon in October with three departures weekly from Toronto and Montreal. It's a half-hour hop by domestic carrier from the capital to the Algarve.

Air Portugal (TAP), which was already flying from the two Canadian cities to Lisbon, launched a weekly non-stop service to Faro on the Algarve, in mid-February.

The state-owned Portuguese airline and Air Canada both offer a wide selection of options for their passengers - coach tours, apartments, pousadas (country inns), bargain-priced car rentals and the like. As well, both provide connecting flights to Portugal's neighbor, Spain.

Canadian travellers should be aware that gasoline is expensive in Portugal, that streets and

highways are heavily used and not always up to present-day Canadian standards, and that many Portuguese drivers rely more on the use of the horn than the brake.

TRAVEL NOTEBOOK

Here are notes on news of current interest to travellers:

-Air Canada this week launched a twice-weekly service from Montreal to Nice, on the French Riviera, with an intermediate stop in London. Departures are Fridays and Mondays (Fridays and Sundays from April 23), with a third departure on Tuesdays between June 20 and Sept. 5. Touram, the airline's subsidiary, offers "packages" that include a choice of accommodation in Nice, Cannes, Monte Carlo and Corsica, as well as London show tours of three or four days with a Nice extension.

-Canadian funds will be accepted at par at the Wauwinet, a de luxe beachfront inn on Nantucket island, Mass., between April 20 and Oct. 29, with the exception of the last weekend in May and all weekends from June 15 to Labor Day. Daily room rates start at \$195 in spring and fall, and \$250 at the summer peak.

Mythic legend

The Real Life Aptitude Test notes that Lucretia Borgia, daughter of Pope Alexander VI, was a legend before her death in 1519. She married three times for political reasons and was rumored to be a murderess and meddler in state affairs. In reality this rich and powerful woman gave much of her time to charity work with children.

True friends

The Real Life Aptitude Test cites Butch Cassidy's friendship with the Sundance Kid as an example of platonic friendship. As leader of the Wild Bunch, a gang of outlaws at the turn of the century, Cassidy's one close friend was Henry Longabough, or the Sundance Kid. These men were loyal to each other until the bitter end when they were shot by Bolivian soldiers in 1902.

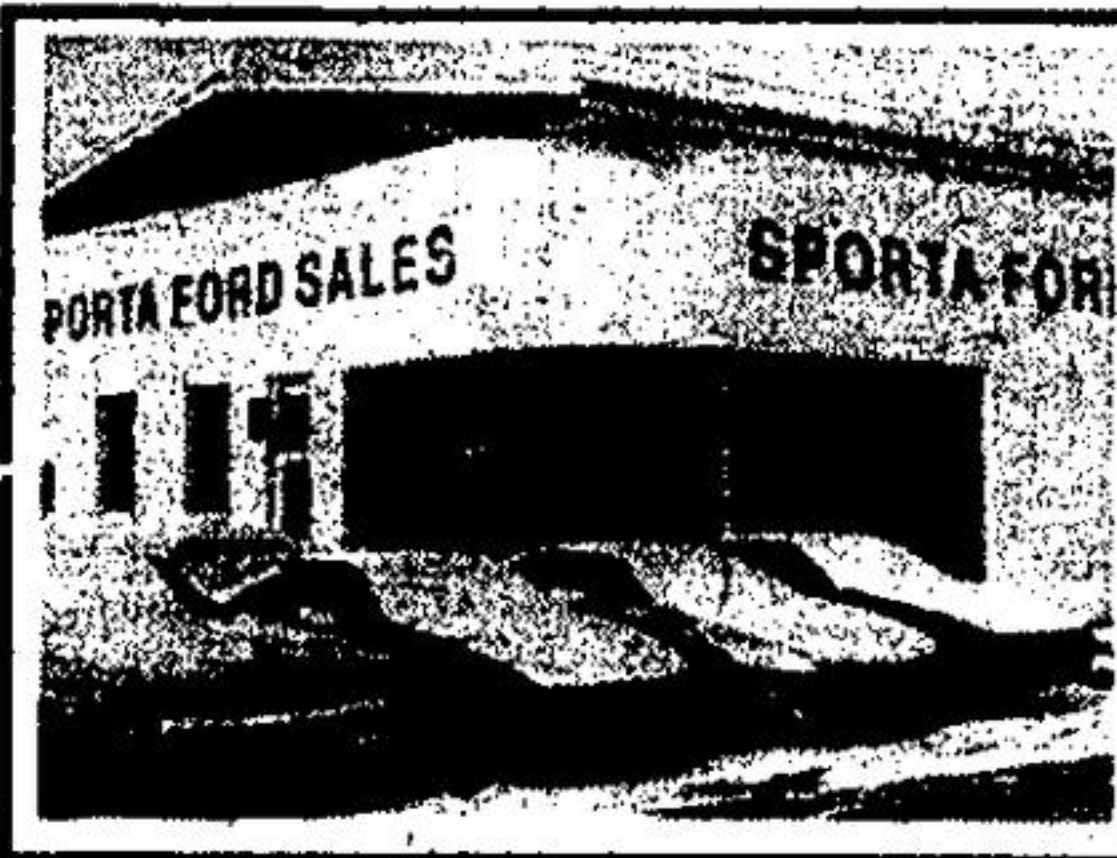
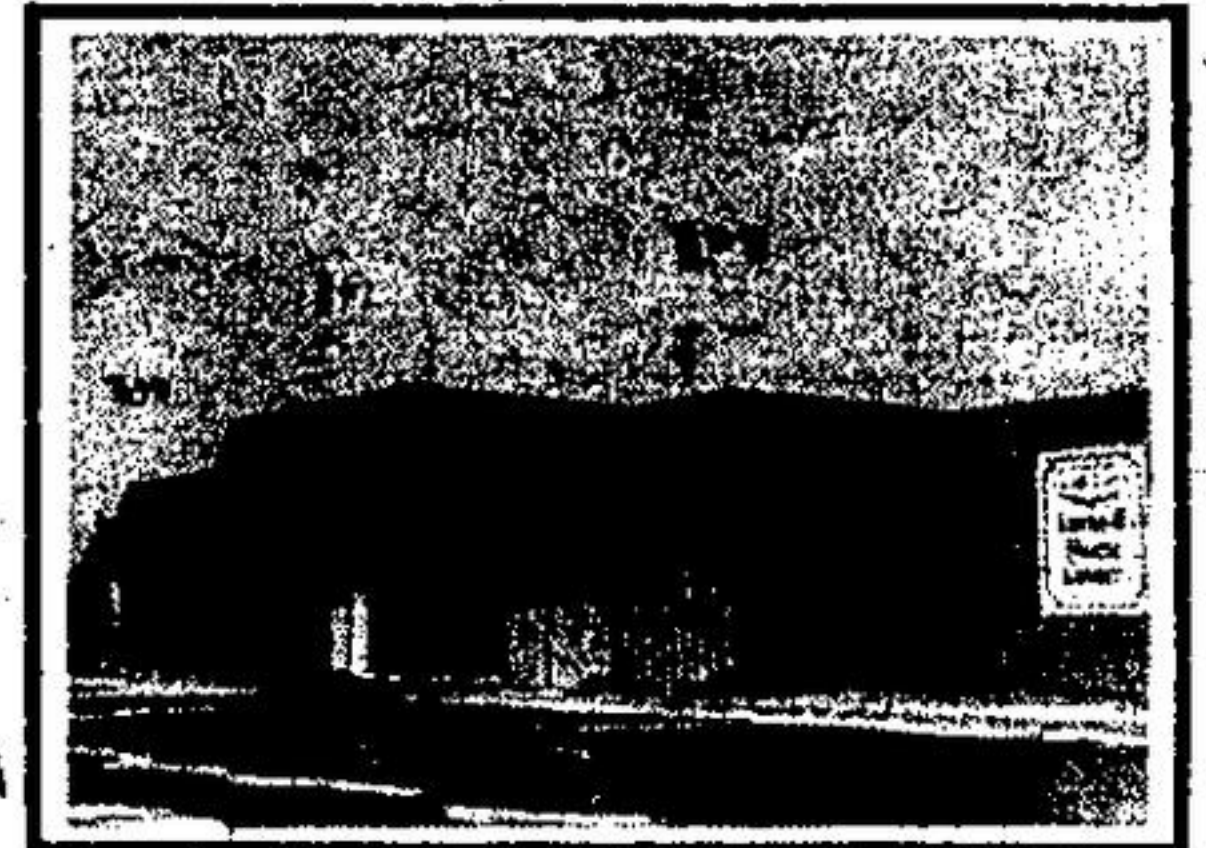
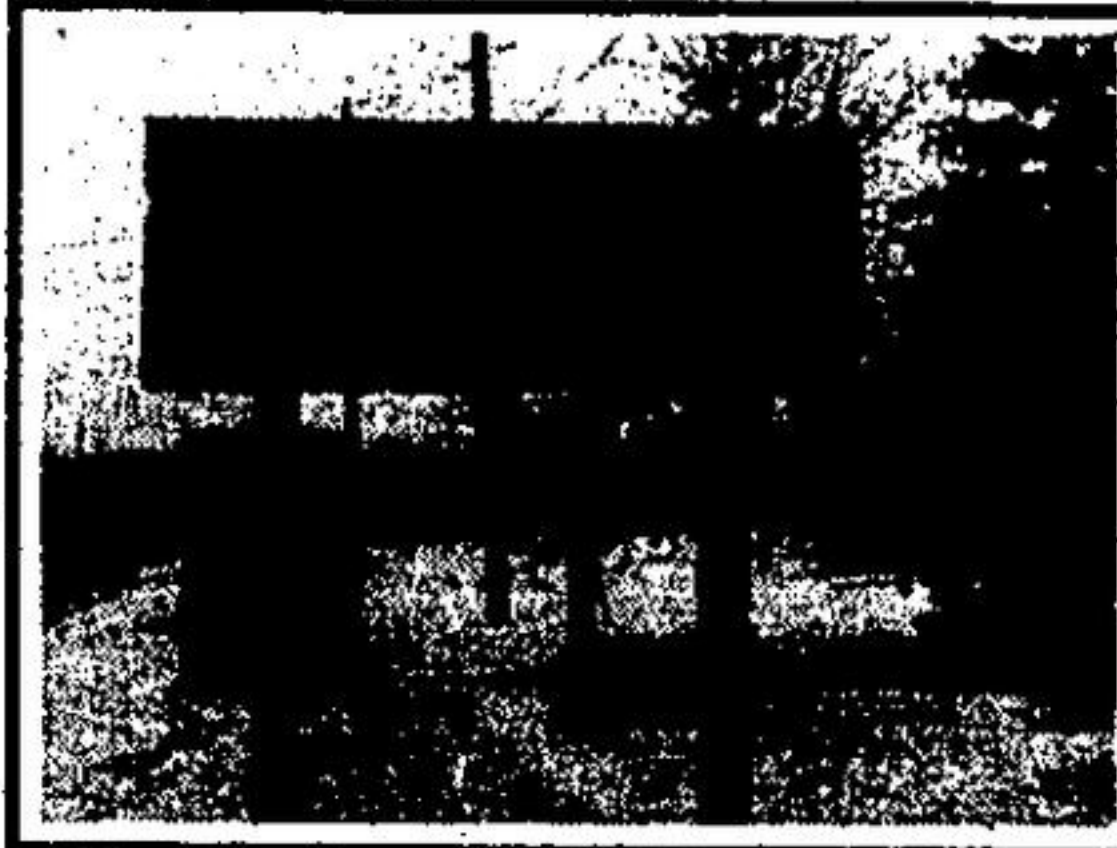
Life savings

In 1986 legislation moved daylight savings time up three weeks to the first Sunday in April, notes The World Almanac. The U.S. Department of Transportation estimated the earlier date would save more than \$28 million in traffic accident costs and prevent more than 1,200 injuries and 20 deaths.

Name origin

Utah got its name from a Navajo word meaning upper or higher up as applied to a Shoshone tribe called Ute. The Spanish form of the word is Yutta and the English, Uta or Utah. Congress rejected the name "Deseret," meaning land of honeybees from the Book of Mormon.

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