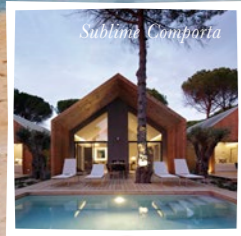
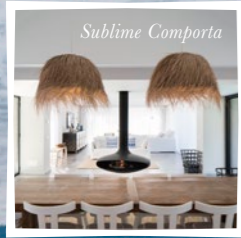


# IS THIS *the* COOLEST BEACH RETREAT *in* EUROPE?

We sent collage artists and photography duo Gus & Stella to Comporta, a quiet backwater turned chic beach hideaway in Portugal – and they loved it!



WORDS *by* SUSAN WARD DAVIES  
COLLAGES *by* GUS & STELLA

One hour south of Lisbon, Comporta is one of seven little villages in a beautiful area of cork and pine forests, impossibly green rice paddies and 12km of empty white beach. With just two streets and a few whitewashed houses, sleepy Comporta sits at the heel of the Tróia peninsula, a finger of land stretching north between the Atlantic Ocean and the Sado estuary on Portugal's west coast.

Come summer, this quiet, rice-farming backwater transforms into a chic coastal hideaway, as fashionable Lisbonites join a wealthy boho set that includes Madonna, Christian Louboutin, Dior president Sidney Toledano and Bethy Lagardère, Ungaro's muse, who all come for the low-key vibe.

How anywhere with beaches this good has managed to ward off package-holiday colonisation is a miracle. The area was part of Portugal's largest country estate, bought in the Fifties by the wealthy Espírito Santo family, who would invite their well-heeled friends (the Sarkozys, the Grimaldis...) for summer escapes. The family went bankrupt in 2014 and the land was taken over by the government. Since then, strict planning laws have kept big developers away, so any building work is of the stylish, eco variety – as seen in the enviable collection of modernist

Chef Tiago Santos heads up the hotel's restaurants, Com Brasa, Sem Porta and Food Circle, the last of which is a 12-seater circular space in the hotel's garden, where food is cooked over a central fire. Menus are mostly organic and locally sourced, and for a special treat, you can request a floating dinner on the neighbouring lagoon. Drive a few kilometres northeast and you'll find Carrasqueira, the world's only 'port' on stilts, which fashion folk will recognise from Louboutin's SS13 campaign. This network of wooden walkways stretching over the water are used by the fishermen to cross the Sado estuary's low-tide mud, and sunsets here are an Instagram must.

You can spend your days spotting bottle-nose dolphins cavorting in the estuary, horse-riding along the white sands and overspending on kaftans and Scandi-style homeware at Comporta's boutiques, most of which only pop up in the summer. Or you can just chill out to Brazilian beats, as we did, on the beach-front deck of the Comporta Café, and feast on sardines and rice with a glass or three of Herdade da Comporta rosé from the nearby vineyards (book in for a wine tasting).

Comporta has been compared to all the usual hippy-chic destinations: Formentera, Ibiza, Brazil's Búzios, an early Punta del Este,



*There's an enviable collection of modernist villas for rent tucked away behind the sand dunes and the rice fields.*

villas for rent, tucked away behind the dunes and rice fields. If you haven't scored one of these, check in to the Sublime Comporta, a 42-acre slice of stylish, rustic heaven, and one of only two luxury hotels in the area.

A 30-minute drive takes us from the nearby Tróia resort, where we are staying (all the rooms in Comporta were full), past the sand dunes and forests, until we spot Sublime Comporta's unassuming entrance: just a wooden gate with a hand-written sign. Inside, you'll find 81 rooms (lots of white and natural wood), spread across the main building, guest house and luxury two-to-five-bedroom cabanas, the design of which was inspired by the area's traditional rice barns. Rooms here are in great demand in July and August – but go in May or October and you might be lucky enough to score a bed.

even a touch of Sixties St Tropez – but none of those really nails it. But is it the coolest beach retreat in Europe? We think so.

## The BEACHES

**PRAIA DA COMPORTA** Wildly beautiful and easy to access from the village, the sands here can get busy at weekends. To beat the heat, we stopped at Comporta's *tabacaria*, where we found hats made of vintage denim among the international magazines like ELLE and *Monocle's The Escapist* – which tells you all you need to know about the clientele. **PRAIA DO CARVALHAL** We drove 15 minutes south to beautiful Praia do Carvalhal, stopping at beach bar and restaurant O Dinis, overlooking the Atlantic, for tasty clams, >

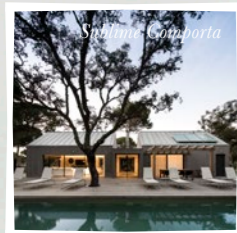




Stella collecting shells



Comporta houses



Sublime Comporta

freshly caught turbot and chilled Super Bock lager. The waves were too high and strong for swimming, but the surfers were loving it. **PRAIA DO PEGO** Just a three-minute drive or ten-minute walk from Carvalhal, here we sat on striped deckchairs shaded by straw umbrellas outside Restaurante Sal, watching the ocean and sipping Americanos as the sound of Miles Davis's *Sketches of Spain* wafted across the golden sands. Heaven.

### TO STAY

Most of the accommodation here consists of repurposed farmhouses, some done with a light touch in tune with the surroundings, others to a luxury standard. Rooms range from simple (around £45 a night), through [airbnb.co.uk](https://www.airbnb.co.uk) and [homeaway.co.uk](https://www.homeaway.co.uk), to high-design 'beach huts' like Cabanas No Rio ([cabanasnorio.com](https://www.cabanasnorio.com)) at Sitio Carrasqueira, designed by architect Manuel Aires Mateus (around £200 a night). **SUBLIME COMPORTA** This 81-room hideaway was the first (and, until recently, the only) luxury hotel in Comporta. *Doubles from around £270, B&B; [sublimecomporta.pt](https://www.sublimecomporta.pt)*

The waves were a little too high and strong for swimming but the surfers were loving it

**QUINTA DA COMPORTA** This boutique wellness resort opened after our trip, but you can expect 73 stylish rooms and pool villas in neutrals and natural materials. *Doubles from around £260, room only; [quintadacomporta.com](https://www.quintadacomporta.com)*  
**TROIA DESIGN HOTEL** We stayed at this ultra-modern hotel, which has stunning views and lies about 30 minutes' north of Comporta. It's a good bet if Comporta is booked up. *Doubles from £95, room only; [troiadesignhotel.com](https://www.troiadesignhotel.com)*

### EATING & DRINKING

**COMPORTA CAFE, COMPORTA** Hammocks, chilled vibes, fresh seafood right on the beach and DJs in summer. [comportacafe.com](https://www.comportacafe.com)  
**COLMO BAR, COMPORTA** Order a smoothie or freshly squeezed orange juice, sit outside and watch village life, and the stylish tourists, go by. [lavandacomporta.com](https://www.lavandacomporta.com) ▸

REAL BEAUTY  
 Explore the verdant cork forests (bottom) from Sublime Comporta (below)



Spend the days swimming with bottle nose dolphins in the Sado estuary



How to park, Comporta-style



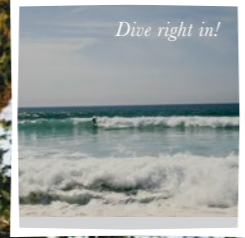
Sublime Comporta



The road into Comporta



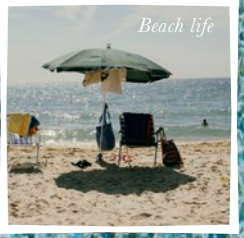
The ultimate vehicle



Dive right in!



Bar Sal at Praia do Pêgo



Beach life



Stella takes in the view



A classic Rolls-Royce

We had high hopes of Comporta - and we found a small paradise

GEARING UP Why not rent a vintage car to cruise around in? A soft-top is the ultimate touring vehicle

Photographs: Gus & Stella

EUCALYPTUS PASTELARIA, COMPORTA Delicious Portuguese pastries and salads served with a smile. Rua do Comércio 1 SABOR DO MAR, COMPORTA Tasty sardines, squid and local fresh fish, straight from the sea. Rua do Comércio 13 SAL RESTAURANT, PRAIA PREGO Relaxed beach-shack-style restaurant – its black rice and cuttlefish and fish soup are the stuff of legend. restaurantsal.pt O DINIS RESTAURANTE DOS PESCADORES, PRAIA DO CARVAHAL Another laid-back eaterie right on the beach, with sublime ocean views (obvs) and the freshest seafood.

### The SHOPS

MERCEARIA GOMES, COMPORTA This unexpected grocery-store-turned-fancy-deli, with handmade straw baskets hanging from the ceiling, is packed with local and international gourmet delicacies. Pick up soft, brioche-like bread, Portuguese cheeses, smoked fish, tomatoes and deliciously fat olives and have a picnic right outside in the shadow of a huge pine tree. Rua do Comércio 2 SUBLIME COMPORTA We loved Sublime Comporta's in-house shop for eco-friendly products, such as flip-flops from Asportuguesas (asportuguesas.shoes/) made from cork and recycled plastic, all-natural Amala skincare, the hotel's own olive oil, as well as brands such as Isabel Marant Étoile, Missoni Mare, DVF and Acqua di Parma. sublimecomporta.pt

### The ACTION

DOLPHIN-WATCHING with Sado Emotion boat tours, from around £32. sadoemotion.pt CAVALOS NA AREIA, TORRE Horse-ride through the dunes from £45 for 90 minutes. Kayaking and cycling can also be arranged. cavalosnaareia.com SURF CARVALHAL SURF SCHOOL has half hour surf lessons from £30. surfincomporta

### GETTING there

We took the long way from Lisbon – a 120km drive across the magnificent Vasco da Gama Bridge. However, if you prefer a scenic route via water, take the car ferry (atlanticferries.pt/en) from Setubal to Tróia and drive on to Comporta, stopping for grilled turbot with salad and homemade cornbread at a place called Tasca Da Avenida (Av. Luísa Tódi).