



At Casas Na Areia, Comporta, Portugal. Bikini, £340, **Roksanda Ilincic** at [www.matchesfashion.com](http://www.matchesfashion.com). Miranda wedges, £595, **Charlotte Olympia** (+44 20 7499 0145). Earrings, £122, **Maria Black** at [www.net-a-porter.com](http://www.net-a-porter.com). Enamel bangle, £550; Brandebourg bangle, £620; Clic Clac H cuff, £455, all **Hermès** ([www.hermes.com](http://www.hermes.com)). Watch, £35, **O Clock** ([www.fullspotmarket.co.uk](http://www.fullspotmarket.co.uk)). Headphones, £130, **Marley** ([www.superfi.co.uk](http://www.superfi.co.uk)). Beach towel, £65, **Damien Hirst**; Chiclet bowl, £165, **Alexandra Von Furstenberg** both at [www.conran.shop.co.uk](http://www.conran.shop.co.uk). Opposite, at Gervásio café. Plissé body, £1,195, **Burberry Prorsum** ([www.burberry.com](http://www.burberry.com)). Sunglasses, £277, **Oliver Peoples** at Adam Simmonds (+44 20 7813 1234). Sweater, £95, **Adidas by Stella McCartney** ([www.adidas.com](http://www.adidas.com)). B.zero1 ring with pavé diamonds £5,900; B.zero1 ring with green marble, £940, both **Bulgari** ([www.bulgari.com](http://www.bulgari.com))

# PLAY IT COOL

A SUMMER SCENE IS RAMPING UP ON PORTUGAL'S WEST COAST, AS ARTISTS, A-LISTERS AND SURFERS REVEL IN THE BEACH-SHACK VIBE. BY ISSY VON SIMSON. STYLED BY FIONA LINTOTT. PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHLOE MALLET





LUNCH IS A LONG, LAID-BACK AFFAIR, KICKING OFF WITH A JUG OF SANGRIA, FIZZING AND BRIGHT WITH STRAWBERRIES

In Sal, Praia do Pego. Wool hat, £580, **Chanel** (+44 20 7493 5040). Cashmere jumper, £275, **Chinti and Parker** (www.chintiandparker.com). Suede shorts, £350, **Zoë Jordan** (www.zoe-jordan.com). Trainers, £528; suede bag, £880, both **Pierre Hardy** (www.pierrehardy.com). Clear bracelet, £64; small gold cuff, £44; large gold cuff, £47, all **Kabiri** (www.kabiri.co.uk). Etrivière 4 Tours leather bracelet, £670, **Hermès** (www.hermes.com). Watch, £35, **O Glock** (www.fullspotmarket.co.uk). Opposite, in Casas Na Areia. 2-in-1 minidress (worn as top), POA, **Louis Vuitton** (www.louisvuitton.com). Bikini bottoms (part of set), £185, **Mulberry** (www.mulberry.com). Earrings, £220, **Maria Black** at www.net-a-porter.com. Roller skates, £60, **SFR** (www.skates.co.uk). Cashmere socks, £79, **Brora** (www.brora.co.uk). Mary clutch (on counter), £1,692, **Dolce & Gabbana** (www.dolcegabbana.it). Neon trays, from £250, **Alexandra Von Furstenberg** at www.conranshop.co.uk

SOME PEOPLE WILL want to say Comporta in the same breath as Ibiza, but, really, they're missing the point altogether. Comporta is not Ibiza. It is not St Tropez 30 years ago. It is not Montauk or Tarifa, Oualidia or Trancoso. On the global list of languid beach hotspots, the closest, most relevant where-shall-we-compare-it-to is José Ignacio in Uruguay, for that bleached-wood, barefoot, blustery kind of vibe, but, actually, it's not that similar. Comporta strikes out on its own path. It is unlike anywhere you have been before.

The name Comporta, roughly translated, means a gate that holds back water, a lock. Which makes sense when you see how many canals there are. This is rice-paddy land. Great, stripey fields of rice, the biggest in Portugal, stretch all the way down the coast, sheltered from the stiff Atlantic breezes by sand dunes. They are kept green and bounteous by a crisscross of irrigation canals. In the heat of summer, when the rest of the country (bar the Algarve golf courses) is dusty and dry, this area still thrums with life.

Rice farmers have been here since the beginning of time, as have the fishermen and salt makers. They have shaped the look of the landscape, dotted with cork oaks, covered with glowing red poppies and yellow carpets of wildflowers, and conserved the unique architecture – small, low-built, thatched cabanas, hooped with tightly packed grasses from the riverbanks and beams of wood from the pine forests.

Sandy fields bulge with organic courgettes and broccoli and pumpkins as sweet as pudding. In high summer, makeshift stalls pepper the side of the road, piled with watermelons, artichokes, tomatoes that taste of sunshine. Knobbly lemons the size of grapefruit hang heavy from the trees. The ground pours forth flowers and vegetables and fruit. It's hard to think of anywhere else so fertile, so abundant. Here is a rustic, fuss-free way of life. And it seems unperturbed by the nascent fair-weather visitors.

Comporta is a village on the west coast, about an hour's drive from Lisbon. But when people talk about Comporta, what they really mean is the region around it. The Herdade da Comporta is a swoop of coast between the Sado Estuary and the sea, 12,500 hectares comprising seven hamlets: Pego, Carvalhal, Brejos, Torre, Possanco, Carrasqueira and Comporta, too. The area is well looked after, not only because much of it is a highly protected nature reserve (look out for huge nesting




storks and flamingoes in the river), but because it is owned and managed by the Espírito Santo, the country's leading banking group. These two factors have kept this slice of the Alentejo astonishingly preserved and pristine. From Easter onwards, people descend from the rest of Europe in quiet droves to stay in the traditional but vamped-up, candy-striped village huts. The smartest families have rooted themselves in Brejos, where the Espírito Santo clan has a cluster of houses. Interior designer Vera Iachia is part of that dynasty and her collection of cabanas, with their polished-concrete floors, wood beams and cushioned day-beds, has set the tone. There are no gates, no tarmac, no high walls. Instead, sandy tracks lead from one unassuming cottage to the next. Their

neighbours are savvy, connected Lisboans, Parisians, Brazilians. French designer Jacques Grange, German artist Anselm Kiefer and model Farida Khelfa (Schiaparelli's new muse) all have houses here. Kiefer has two. The Casiraghis drop by in July and August to stay with Charlotte's godmother, Albina du Boisrouvray, and Sarkozy and Carla have been spotted further down the coast near Muda. Everyone pootles around in beat-up golf buggies or Mini Mokes, or on sit-up-and-beg bicycles.

The only way to really get under the skin here is to rent a villa. Founder of interiors store Homes in Heaven, Miguel Pires de Lima, has a spectacular party house, **Possanco** (+351 917 542 402; from about £420 per night), made up of thatched cabanas centred around a sunny



A woman with blonde hair is leaning back against the open back of a yellow vehicle, possibly a Land Rover. She is wearing a bright red long-sleeved top and dark trousers with a small white floral pattern. Her right arm is raised behind her head, and she is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The vehicle has a black leather seat and a silver metal frame. In the background, a vast field of yellow wildflowers stretches to the horizon under a clear blue sky. A large, dark, rounded tree is visible in the distance on the left. The overall scene is bright and sunny, suggesting a warm day in a rural or coastal setting.

THE LANDSCAPE IS DOTTED  
WITH OAKS, AND COVERED IN  
RED POPPIES AND YELLOW  
CARPETS OF WILDFLOWERS

Cashmere jumper, £425, **Stella McCartney**  
([www.stellamccartney.com](http://www.stellamccartney.com)). Cargo trousers,  
£450, **Mulberry** ([www.mulberry.com](http://www.mulberry.com)). Trainers,  
£528, **Pierre Hardy** ([www.pierrehardy.com](http://www.pierrehardy.com)).  
Etrivière 4 Tours leather bracelet, £670, **Hermès**  
([www.hermes.com](http://www.hermes.com)). Watch, £35, **O Clock**  
([www.fullspotmarket.co.uk](http://www.fullspotmarket.co.uk))





On Praia da Comporta. Bikini bottoms, £95; top, £220, both **Hermès** (www.hermes.com). Square-knit cardigan, £1,700, **Fendi** (+44 20 7838 6288). Flyknit Lunar 1+ trainers, £140, **Nike** (www.nikestore.com). Gold cuff, £44, **Kabiri** (www.kabiri.co.uk). Clic H bangle, £700, **Hermès** (as before). Watch, £35, **O Clock** (www.fullspotmarket.co.uk). Mexicana hammock, £125, at www.theconranshop.co.uk. Opposite, at Comporta Café. Shirt, £168, **MiH** (www.mih-jeans.com). Bikini top (part of set), £170, **Tatjana Anika** (www.tatjana-anika.com). Shorts, £54, **Adidas by Stella McCartney** (www.adidas.com). Trainers, £528, **Pierre Hardy** (www.pierrehardy.com). Rocabar towel (on ledge), £325, **Hermès** (as before).

deck. **Comporta Concierge** (www.comportaconcierge.com) looks after two whitewashed charmers near Carrasqueira: one-bed **Casa do Guisado** (about £1,010 per week) and the much larger **Casa da Silvandira** (about £3,370 per week). Nearer the river, there's the often photographed **Casas Na Areia** (www.casasnaareia.com; from about £425 per night), owned by TAP pilot João Rodrigues. He enlisted architect Manuel Aires Mateus, shortlisted for the Mies van der Rohe Award, to breathe life into four traditional masonry buildings. The result is a thing of beauty: a clever mix of the old and the new, with muslin drapes, a deep Gervasoni sofa, anglepoise lights craning over the beds and tree stumps as side tables. Huge glass doors open onto a little slice of nature reserve. A pool, slim, sleek and narrow, with pale, pale water, is framed by thick-mattressed, charcoal-coloured sunbeds. The sitting room has a floor of sand. In the summer, the mini indoor dunes are perfectly cool underfoot.

**S**TILL FEW AND FAR between are the highly designed modern numbers so prevalent elsewhere in Europe. The Herdade da Comporta has rigorous planning restrictions on what can and can't be built within its jurisdiction. In Muda, about 10km south of Comporta village, the constraints are relaxed and the architects have run with it. Enormous villa **3 Bicas** (www.3bicashouse.com; about £6,830 per week) makes the punchiest statement – about as far removed from a simple fishermen's hut as possible, with towering glass walls, sharp edges and Eames furniture. British company **The Villa Book** (www.thevillabook.com) also has a trio of state-of-the-art houses to rent. The two properties just outside Muda, **Modern Villa** (from £6,930 per week) and **Design Villa** (from £3,710 per week), are owned by a pair of Portuguese brothers and connected by a winding path. They are brilliant for families, with masses of crashing-about space, clipped, green lawns, large pools and light-filled rooms. Then there's the **Beach Villa** (from £2,660 per week), all slatted wood and smooth stone, a curving deck and panoramic rooftop pool. It's cool and current and slightly show-offy – floor-to-ceiling windows and look-at-me furniture – and a two-minute walk through the lavender and rosemary-scented pine woods to Pego beach.

Days here are unhurried. It's an easy, breezy existence. The focus is the beach. And what a beach: 12km of uninterrupted sand




the colour of a *pastel de nata*, a deep, mellow yellow, fine and powdery as icing sugar. There is a handful of restaurants along this glorious stretch, wooden creations on stilts, clinging to the top of the dunes. At Praia da Comporta, **Comporta Café** (www.comportacafe.com) and **Restaurante Ilha do Arroz** (www.restauranteilhadoarroz.com) stand guard. Lunch at Ilha do Arroz, under a cherry-red parasol, is a long, laid-back affair, starting at two or three o'clock and kicking off with an iced jug of white sangria, fizzing and bright with espumante and sweet strawberries. Local cheeses are followed by calamari, tomato-and-sweet-onion salad, clams in garlicky parsley and white wine, steaming pots of coriander-scented rice (predictably, there is a lot of rice on the menu) to mop up *cataplana* stews. Praia do Pego has the funkier lunchtime pitstop, **Sal** (+351 265 490 129), with a cool bar and an even cooler boutique. At Carvalhal beach, there's the unassuming **O Dinis Bar do Pescadores** (+351 967 977 193). Owned by a fisherman, it's the best spot for

catch-of-the-day, grilled, with a squeeze of lemon. The fish here (especially the sea bass), not just in these restaurants but here in Portugal, is outrageously good – something to do with the chilly depths of the Atlantic. It can be a little choppy, but you can see why surfers, windsurfers and kitesurfers flock here at the beginning and end of the season.

In the afternoon kids gather at **Gervásio** (+351 265 497 111) in Brejos, a café with a football table that is the social hub for anyone under 16. Grown-ups crash out for a siesta. Or dip into one of the boutiques on Comporta's Largo de São João such as **Loja do Museu do Arroz**, **Lavanda** and **Coté Sud** for Lenny bikinis, beach tunics and Madeline Weinrib ikat cushions. But when dusk is imminent, everyone dashes home. This is the witching hour, when the mosquitos come out. For 30 minutes either side of sunset, they rise from the paddy fields in a humming cloud. But if this sounds like a dealbreaker, it isn't. All the houses have insect screens and are stocked with huge vats of citronella. Later at night, there's





THERE ARE NO GATES,  
NO TARMAC, NO HIGH WALLS.  
INSTEAD, SANDY TRACKS  
LEAD FROM ONE COTTAGE  
TO THE NEXT

Beadnell jacket, £220, **Barbour** (www.barbour.com). Silk shirt, £767, **Alberta Ferretti** (www.albertaferretti.com). Crepe shorts, £255, **Zoë Jordan** (www.zoe-jordan.com). Trainers, £528, **Pierre Hardy** (www.pierrehardy.com). Watch, £35, **O Clock** (www.fullspotmarket.co.uk). Hair and make-up, **Francis Prescott** at One Represents using St Tropez and Chanel summer collection. Nails, Azuré Chanel. Model, **Tanya Ruban** at Models 1. DJ, **Marek Puc**. With thanks to João Rodrigues. The team stayed at **Casas Na Areia** (www.casasnaareia.com)

a better kind of buzz, and phenomenal seafood, at **Dona Bia** (+351 265 497 557) or in Comporta village at **Museu do Arroz** (+351 265 497 555), sister restaurant to the one on the beach, owned by Isabel and Tó Zé Carvalho. These two are Comporta old hands. Some even say that Isabelinha, as she's known, kicked off the scene here 20 years ago, bringing down movers and shakers from Lisbon for the weekend. The restaurant stays open late, as late as she deems fit. When Mario Testino and Patrick Cox were here, it stayed open all night.

Standing tall against the low impact architecture, the Museu do Arroz (a 1950s rice mill) is hard to miss. British artist Jason Martin rents the atelier next door, a double-height workshop filled with his inimitable pieces. In the middle is a cubic sculpture of cork bark, compressed in layers, painted the rich, deep, cobalt Comporta blue, the same colour that you will see, over and over again, on shutters and doors and window frames. Martin, who moved here a few years ago, has big plans for his Arcadia project, south of Muda and where Christian Louboutin is his neighbour. He has a vineyard and hopes to produce the first bottles by 2015. There are olive groves, an art studio and a sculptural garden. It's a grand design that will be, in his words, Barbara Hepworth-esque in its set-up. Martin is here because he thinks this is the last Wild West of Europe. He may very well be right. But perhaps not for long.

New places to stay such as Gonçalo Pessoa's **Country House & Spa** (www.sublimecomporta.pt), a 14-bedroom guesthouse opening in late July near Carvalhal, and João Rodrigues's planned small hotel in Comporta village are the start of a new wave. But AmanResorts have landed too. Adrian Zecha came here in 2008 with an Espírito Santo chairman and was smitten. Work on **Amanduna**, the group's first hotel on the Iberian Peninsula, started in April, but everyone is fantastically tight-lipped about its development. The 40-room/36-villa property is taking shape deep in the forests just south of Carvalhal, with plans for it to be up and running for the 2015 summer season. The idea is that the hotel will position Comporta exactly where it needs to be. Though many would argue that this little Portuguese hideaway is very much in the right place already. 7

#### GETTING THERE

**British Airways** (www.britishairways.com) flies from Heathrow to Lisbon. Comporta is a one-hour drive away.