

Best Rural Retreat - Portugal

Casas da Cerca are noticeable for its unique services – earth houses. These are located in one of the most protected areas of the Southwest Alentejo and the Vicentine Coast Natural Park, 1,5km from the River Mira in a stroll of overwhelming beauty. The silence and the privacy as well as the simple pleasures that the country life may offer are what best define Casas da Cerca. Located in a deep stream of S. Nuno Farm, almost like in a woman's womb, perhaps the higher compliment given by those who visit us was “here we feel at home...but in a unique place!” or “at Casas da Cerca first you wonder and then you get under”.



CASAS da CERCA
CASAS DE CAMPO

Scenes from our imaginary world can be fulfilled or revived here, whether it's the bicycle rides and the picnics by the river, the bathe in the old water tanks, the tree house and the gathering with the horses, or the coziness by the fire place in winter coldest nights or a nap on the hammocks near the houses. You can also explore your artistic skills on the spot dedicated to painting. Furthermore, canoes are also at hand for adventurous types and the river is close by.

The story behind Casas da Cerca is intimately connected to the life course of the owner ,Graça Jalles, who learned from very young stage to follow her intuition. It all began in Macau in the South of China, where on a dreary day she pointed a map and –as destiny would have it- pointed on the West Coast of Alentejo and the Odemira region where she had never been before.

Facing the unknown, she guided herself by following her taste for nature and for the country life. So powerful was her passion that all the adversities that she imagined would come up would be worth the challenge. This was so valid that everything happened naturally with thoughtless decisions made many times, and the heart simply took advantage.

A lot of adversities she had to overcome on her own and even involved living 4 years without electricity and water using only a generator in a short period during the day. She was also able to overcome the scepticism in the eyes and the attitudes of people who did not share her vision that life is to be lived in all its splendor, and that prejudices are limitations to the imagination and that dreams do really come true.

Her first encounter with earth construction was something sublime. She would end up building her own house in earth which gave her an architectural award and one could foresee already the values upon which the Rural Tourism Casas da Cerca would be anchored, such as simplicity, authenticity, time, silence, all values at hand in the place. She also felt for the first time what is to “Be” in all its depth. Someone wrote one day that our first architectonic act is our own selves and in Alentejo there is space ‘to Be’.

The experience of living in an earth house with naked earth walls is a unique experience. Perhaps because we are born from the earth and in the earth we shall rest for evermore. With this, the circle is complete.

Through the years I came to acknowledge this experience in the eyes and faces of the people that visit me. The naked raw earth wall as a protective element in a house is something that transcends us and as any other form of art transports us to harmonious and perfect worlds that only vaguely we imagine exist.

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