

On the Manueline trail



There is a feature at the top of the church, as you face east, that despite being especially attractive, often goes unnoticed: a rounded window, also Manueline in style, with an animal-shaped gargoyle on either side.

↑ **If you're still feeling energetic on your return to Portimão, there are still other signs of Manueline heritage for you to discover.**

If the fancy takes you, plunge into the historical part of the city and see if you can find:

The Manueline door at no. 106 Rua Santa Isabel, an example of 16th century civil architecture. The Manueline door of the present-day civil parish council

office at the Jesuit College, which may have been recovered from another building when the college was being built, since its style is different to that of the rest of building.

Finally, and if you're not only curious but also adventurous, there's a rather interesting Manueline portico among the ruins of the church at the São Francisco Convent.

Portimão cultural outing

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cultural outing

**“Anyone seeking to go beyond Bojador
Has to travel beyond pain.
God gave danger and the abyss to the sea,
But also mirrored heaven in it.”**

*Mar Português (Portuguese Sea),
Fernando Pessoa in Mensagem (Message)*

Mexilhoeira Grande Main Church (Igreja Matriz de Mexilhoeira Grande) Historical Setting

As you leave Portimão, your first stop should be at the Mexilhoeira Grande Church, also known as the Church of Nossa Senhora da Assunção (Our Lady of the Assumption).

Pause in the courtyard and feel the tranquillity, so typical of rural settings, wash over you. Let yourself drift back in time to the days when the area was full of ponds that blended beautifully with the blue of the Atlantic in the background.

When churches were built, a conscious effort was made to make them fit in with their natural surroundings, for the very reason that God is perfection. Since nature is the work of the Creator, it makes perfect sense that one should seek a harmony that encompasses the ideal conditions for reflection and prayer.

The Manueline Style is visible at the door to bell tower (*Porta Sineira*) and the side door (*Porta Lateral*) to the church.

In the early 14th century, D. Francisco Castelo Branco, an important gentleman from Portimão, ordered a church to be built that would not be finished until 1534. He not only employed builders from Lagos and Silves but also retained the services of one of his personal friends, a builder from Vila Franca de Xira. These skilled craftsmen brought two different architectural styles to the church: the first, harking back to the past, to the days of D. Manuel and the Manueline Style that prevailed at the time; and the second, more contemporary, with connections to the old classics, or, to be more precise, to the Renaissance Style. Signs of both styles can be seen in the church.

The bell tower door is simpler. There are small columns on either side set on ornate bases and ending in floral decoration and tracery.

The side door, however, as part of the main body of the church, is more elaborate. The columns have two capitals with floral motifs, set on an octagonal base. The upper part of the door is very unusual, since it has a sharp geometric figure as opposed to the more usual rounded top.

The armillary spheres stamped on the stone symbolise the world. As Camões said, D. Manuel wanted to give “new worlds to the world”.

From Mexilhoeira Grande head to the Igreja Matriz (Main Church) in Alvor also known as the Igreja do Divino Salvador (Church of the Divine Saviour)

The *Igreja Matriz* in Alvor is the most famous church in the town, a hallmark of Manueline architecture in the Algarve. The main door faces west with the Old Town opposite. Rich in details, this truly fine example of Manueline architecture, takes us on a fantastic journey back in time to the era of the Discoveries. Indeed, the builders excelled themselves here, since this is the finest piece of work in the entire



Algarve, sculpted from the local sandstone, and with delicately crafted flower and animal motifs, war scenes and religious symbols between the columns.



Here, the stonemason, rather naively at times, has whimsically used his imagination to the full in a space divided into niches.

There is another Manueline door on the southern façade. Set on octagonal bases, the columns and capitals are simpler and form an exterior framework that encloses exotic figures intertwined with ropes.

The door lintel is lobed and ends in a pine cone. Two appendages,

shaped like pomegranates, the symbol of happiness, fertility and joy, hang down from the gargoyles on the archway.



Igreja Matriz de Alvor Historical Setting

At that time Alvor was governed by Alcaide Álvaro de Ataíde, in whose home King D. João II stayed when he was undergoing treatment for ascites at the spa in Monchique. While he was in Alvor, and prior to his death in October 1495, D. João nominated his brother-in-law D. Manuel as his successor and future king of Portugal. At the end of the same year, D. Manuel decided to grant Alvor its town charter, making

several donations and ordering the Igreja Matriz to be built. To put the era into context in economic, cultural and social terms, it is worth remembering that this was the height of the Discoveries period, a time of innovation, during which the coffers of the state overflowed with riches from newly-discovered lands. This obviously reflected on the magnificence of the church, which is considered by many to be the most complete Manueline monument in the Algarve.