

## AITO ANNOUNCES ITS CONFERENCE DESTINATION FOR 2017 – A LITTLE-KNOWN GEM, JUST A 2-HOUR FLIGHT FROM LONDON...



Left canoeing – right hilltop village and medieval castle

25<sup>th</sup> May, 2017:

**The Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO, [www.aito.com](http://www.aito.com)) is going short-haul for its November 2017 conference (from Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> to Sunday, 26<sup>th</sup> November).**

**Says AITO Chairman, Derek Moore:** “Considering our chosen destination is so close to home, it’s surprising that it’s so little-known within the UK travel industry – and thus by our customers. It’s a speedy 2-hour hop from London, and just 40 minutes more from Manchester. It can reach 50 C in the peak summer months, but boasts blue skies and sunshine nearly all year round; we anticipate mild temperatures of around 17 C at the end of November.

“It offers superb food and wine, interesting cultural sites ranging across 7,000 years of history - from prehistoric times through Roman and Moorish occupation, plus the Knights Templar, with plenty of medieval fortified castles and hill-top churches to explore - plus many diverse activities. Choose from Dark Sky watching to river and lake canoeing and windsurfing, from horse riding, cycling and walking its rural and coastal pathways, complete with ancient cork oak forests and white-sand beaches, to hot air ballooning, birdwatching and wine tasting. It’s the perfect AITO destination.

**“We’re delighted to have been invited by the Portuguese National Tourist Office and the Alentejo Tourism Promotion Board to the delightful Alentejo region, in mainland Portugal.** We’ll be staying in the UNESCO World Heritage city of Evora, a medieval walled gem of a place with ancient cobbled streets, excellent wineries, a spooky Chapel of the Bones, restaurants and cafés galore. It’s my guess that a lot of AITO delegates will be keen to stay on after the conference to explore more of this beautiful region which takes up one-third of Portugal’s land mass, produces 46% of the country’s wine and yet houses just 6% of its population.”

**Says Antonio Padeira, Director of the Portuguese National Tourist Office in London:** “Our country and our airline, TAP Air Portugal, are delighted to welcome AITO’s conference to Portugal again; after Porto, Estoril and Funchal, now Evora - the beautiful capital of the Alentejo Region, and just an hour south-east of Lisbon - will host this important and prestigious event for the UK’s specialist operators and independent travel agents. We wish AITO a fruitful conference and an extremely pleasant visit to our sunny heartland.”

**Gemma Antrobus, Chair of AITO Specialist Travel Agents,** says that she and the AITO Agents’ Panel are thrilled that the Alentejo has been selected for this year’s conference. “Dubbed the Provence or Tuscany of Portugal, with a coastline like the Algarve 40 years ago, this destination will doubtless become a top seller for AITO Agents’ discerning clients; Evora is a must-see for everyone looking for something special for their clients.”

The main conference location will be the **Hotel Vila Gale Evora**, newly built, with good conference facilities and located just a five-minute walk from the historic centre of Evora. There’s also the opportunity to stay at the **Pousada dos Loios** in the heart of the old city, adjacent to the Roman temple, if preferred.

**Conference sessions will be held all day Friday 24<sup>th</sup> and Saturday morning 25<sup>th</sup> November**, followed by a choice of tours on Saturday afternoon – either Evora on foot or a visit to the hill-top village of Monsaraz, overlooking Lake Alqueva, and Vila Viçosa, famous as home of the Dukes of Braganza. Catherine of Braganza became Queen of England, Scotland and Ireland for 23 years from 1662, when she was married to King Charles II. She introduced the custom of drinking tea to the British court; it was already popular amongst the Portuguese nobility, having been imported by the famous Portuguese explorers, along with many exotic spices which influence Portuguese cuisine to this day.

**Full booking information will be sent to AITO members and affiliates in the next fortnight; Chairman Derek Moore expects the 2017 AITO conference to be a sell-out.**

**Ends**

**Note to Editors:** TAP Air Portugal will offer conference delegates flights from Heathrow, Gatwick and Manchester.

**Press:** for further information on AITO ([www.aito.com](http://www.aito.com)) and its 2017 conference, please contact Becky Milne or Sue Ockwell at Travel PR on 020 8891 4440 or email [r.milne@travelpr.co.uk](mailto:r.milne@travelpr.co.uk) or [s.ockwell@travelpr.co.uk](mailto:s.ockwell@travelpr.co.uk).