

Serra da Estrela Nature Park

Portugal

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Serra da Estrela is the largest protected natural area in Portugal. It covers about 890 km² of granite plateaus, glacial valleys, mountain lakes and small stone villages. The park was created in 1976. It is also a UNESCO Global Geopark.

The range holds the highest point of mainland Portugal, at about 1,990 m. The Mondego, Zêzere and Alva rivers all rise here. The area suits walkers, drivers who like mountain scenery, and families who come for snow in winter. It is also the home of Serra da Estrela cheese and of the Estrela Mountain Dog, a livestock guardian breed.

Most visitors stay in Manteigas, Seia, Gouveia or Covilhã, or in the smaller villages on the mountain. The park is large and public transport is limited, so plan around a car.

When to visit

Late spring, summer and early autumn are the best seasons for walking and for driving the high roads. Summer days are dry and sunny. Nights on the plateau stay cool, so bring a warm layer.

Autumn and winter are the wettest months. Snow can fall from October to April, mostly from December to February, but it is irregular. Snow closes the roads to Torre from time to time, and it is a main reason for a winter visit. Summer brings a high risk of wildfire.

The climate data below is for a mid-mountain point. Valley towns are warmer, and the Torre plateau is colder and wetter.

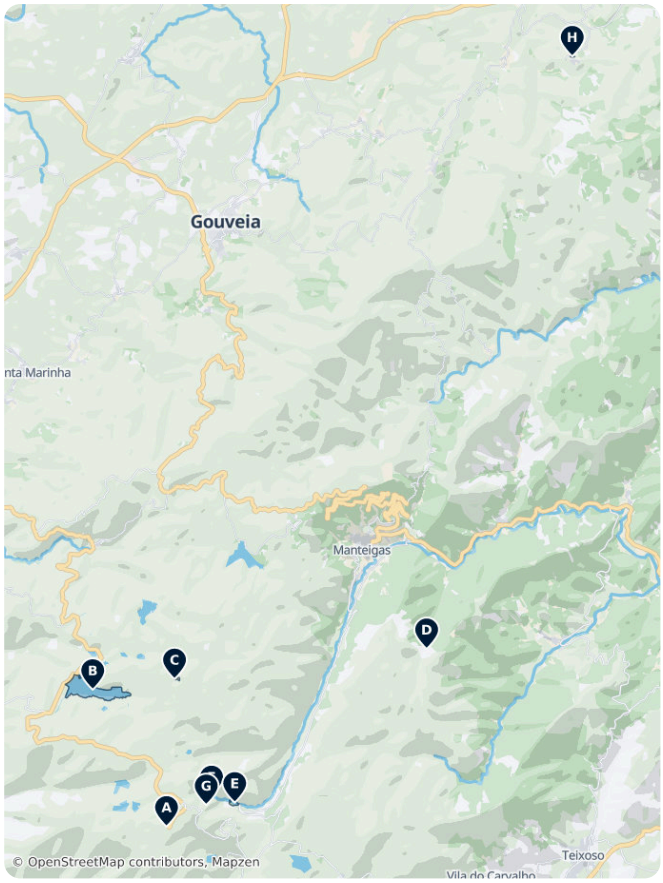
MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Good Good for skiing	6° / 11° Feels like 2°	-2° / -7°	13 rainy days · Dry air
February	Fair Fair for skiing	8° / 14° Feels like 4°	-1° / -7°	Dry air
March	Fair Fair for skiing	11° / 18° Feels like 6°	0° / -5°	12 rainy days · Dry air
April	Good Good for hiking	14° / 21° Feels like 9°	3° / -2°	13 rainy days · Dry air
May	Good Good for hiking	18° / 25° Feels like 14°	5° / 0°	Dry air
June	Great Great for sightseeing	23° / 29°	8° / 4°	Dry air
July	Great Great for sightseeing	27° / 32°	10° / 6°	27 sunny days · Dry air · UV 9 (Very high)
August	Great Great for sightseeing	27° / 33° Feels like 24°	11° / 7°	26 sunny days · Dry air
September	Great Great for sightseeing	23° / 30° Feels like 20°	9° / 5°	Dry air
October	Good Good for hiking	17° / 25° Feels like 13°	6° / 1°	13 rainy days · Dry air
November	Poor Poor for hiking	10° / 16° Feels like 6°	1° / -4°	13 rainy days · Dry air
December	Fair Fair for skiing	7° / 11° Feels like 2°	-1° / -6°	13 rainy days · Dry air

Best months: June, July, August, September

Climate data: NASA POWER (MERRA-2) · 1996–2025

Top sights

- A Torre is the highest point of mainland Portugal. It is a broad plateau, not a sharp peak, and a paved road reaches the top. There is a café and there are souvenir stalls. Bring a jacket in any season.
- B Lagoa Comprida is a lake beside the road up to Torre. It is a good place to stop for the view, and it is one of the sites of the Estrela Geopark.
- C Covão dos Conchos is a mountain reservoir with a moss-covered, bell-shaped spillway. The spillway dates from 1955.
- D Poço do Inferno is a waterfall of about 10 m near Manteigas. It falls into a small pool and is a geosite of the Estrela Geopark.
- E Covão d'Ametade is a quiet stop in the upper Zêzere glacial valley. Walking trails start here, and there are no shops.
- F Nascente do Zêzere marks the source of the Zêzere river, one of the three rivers that rise in the range.
- G Cântaro Magro is a rocky peak of 1,928 m. It stood above the ice in the last glaciation and is one of the geopark sites.
- H Castelo de Linhares stands in Linhares da Beira, a quiet medieval granite village on the northern side of the mountains.



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What to experience

- Play in the snow: when snow falls, many visitors drive up to Torre. A small ski area near the summit has a few lifts and snow cannons. Snow cover is irregular, so check the conditions first.
- Walk a glacial valley: the Zêzere valley runs from near Manteigas toward Torre, and the Loriga valley makes a half-day loop. Both have little shade and no services. Carry water, food and layers.
- Swim in a river beach: in summer, the river beach at Praia Fluvial de Loriga is a cool place to rest after a walk.
- Drive the high road: the road to Torre passes lakes and viewpoints, including Lagoa Comprida. Stop at the viewpoints and bring a jacket.

Day trips

Most trips here are within the mountains, so these are the two main towns outside them.

- A Guarda: about 40 minutes by car from Manteigas. At 1,056 m, it is the highest city in continental Portugal. Visit its Gothic and Manueline cathedral and the old Jewish quarter.
- B Coimbra: about 2 hours by car from Manteigas. It is a long day trip, best combined with a stop on the way to or from the mountains. It is a famous university city.



Where to explore

- Towns near the mountains: Guarda is the closest large destination, on the north-east side.
- University city: Coimbra lies to the west.
- Another mountain park: Peneda-Gerês is far to the north.

Getting there

- By air: the main airports are Porto (OPO) and Lisbon (LIS). There is no airport in the mountains. Rent a car at the airport. The drive is about 2.5 hours from Porto and 3 hours from Lisbon.
- By train: CP runs trains to Covilhã on the Beira Baixa line. From Lisbon, the trip takes about 4 hours. Guarda is on the Beira Alta line. A taxi or local bus is needed for the last stretch into the park. Book at CP Comboios de Portugal.
- By bus: long-distance coaches go to Covilhã, Seia and Gouveia from Lisbon and Porto. There is a direct coach from Porto to Covilhã of about 3.5 hours. From these towns, use a taxi or local bus.
- By car: the A23 and A25 motorways have had no tolls since January 2025. Check for tolls on other motorways on your route.

Getting around

- Car: this is the most practical way to see the park. Distances are short but the roads are steep and winding, so journeys are slow.
- Public transport: there are few buses inside the park, and most sights are not connected. Covilhã has better public transport than the mountain villages.
- Taxis: they operate from Covilhã, Seia and Gouveia. Book ahead, especially for the return trip.
- Walking and cycling: the glacial valleys have marked trails. Cycling suits experienced riders, and e-bikes help on the climbs.
- Good bases: Manteigas is the best base for walkers. Seia and Gouveia are bigger towns with more shops.

Driving

- Is a car worth it? Yes. A car gives the most freedom, since public transport inside the park is limited.
- Mountain roads: the roads are steep, winding and often narrow. Drive slowly, and avoid the high roads after dark.
- Snow: snow closes the roads to Torre from time to time, and they can close without warning. Check conditions before you go up.
- Tolls: the A23 and A25 have had no tolls since January 2025.

Food & drink

Serra da Estrela cheese is the local specialty. It is made from raw sheep's milk and protected by a PDO label. It is mostly made from November to March. Young cheese is very soft, almost liquid, and older cheese is firmer. Look for it with bread in the towns and small shops. Requeijão, a fresh whey cheese, is also sold with the same label.

The mountain towns are also known for smoked meats, called fumeiro, such as chouriço and presunto. For a meal, go to the restaurants in Manteigas, Seia and Gouveia. For bread, see Museu do Pão in Seia.

What to eat & drink

LUNCH

Caldo Verde
A simple, comforting soup of shredded kale, potato, and slices of chourico sausage.

Francesinha
A hearty Porto specialty: a meat-stuffed sandwich covered in melted cheese and a spiced tomato-beer sauce.

DINNER

Bacalhau
Salt cod, Portugal's national dish, said to be prepared in hundreds of different ways across the country.

Sardinhas Assadas
Charcoal-grilled sardines, especially popular in summer street festivals and along the coast.

Arroz de Marisco
A rich, soupy seafood rice, similar to paella but wetter, packed with shellfish.

SWEETS & DESSERTS

Pastel de Nata
A small custard tart in flaky pastry, best eaten warm with cinnamon and sugar.

DRINKS

Vinho Verde
A young, light, slightly sparkling white wine from northern Portugal, meant to be drunk within a year of harvest.

Port Wine · Vinho do Porto
A fortified wine from the Douro Valley, aged in cellars around Porto, ranging from sweet ruby to complex aged tawny styles.

Ginjinha · Ginãa
A sweet liqueur made from sour cherries, traditionally served in a small cup, sometimes with a cherry at the bottom.

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Safety & health

The area is safe for visitors. The main risks come from the mountain weather.

- Weather: temperatures change fast between day and night, and snow can arrive quickly at height. Bring layers and check the forecast from IPMA, the national weather service.
- Walking: many trails are exposed, with little shade. Some valleys have no shops or toilets. Carry water and food, and do not start long walks late in the day.
- Wildfire: summers are hot and dry. Wildfire is a real risk, and a large fire burned about 24,000 hectares here in August 2022. Follow local fire restrictions and do not light fires.
- Emergencies: call 112.

History

People have used these mountains for grazing since the Neolithic period. Shepherds moved flocks to the high pastures in spring and summer, and to the valleys in winter. This old way of life still shapes local food, especially the cheese.

The last ice age carved the valleys you see today. The U-shaped Zêzere and Loriga valleys, and rock peaks such as Cântaro Magro, show the work of the glaciers.

In the 20th century, dams changed the plateau. Covão dos Conchos is one example, and dates from 1955. The park was created in 1976. In August 2022, a fire burned about 24,000 hectares across two districts, the biggest fire here in 47 years.

Country facts

Quick practical facts for Portugal at a glance:

CURRENCY
EUR €

EMERGENCY
112

ELECTRICITY



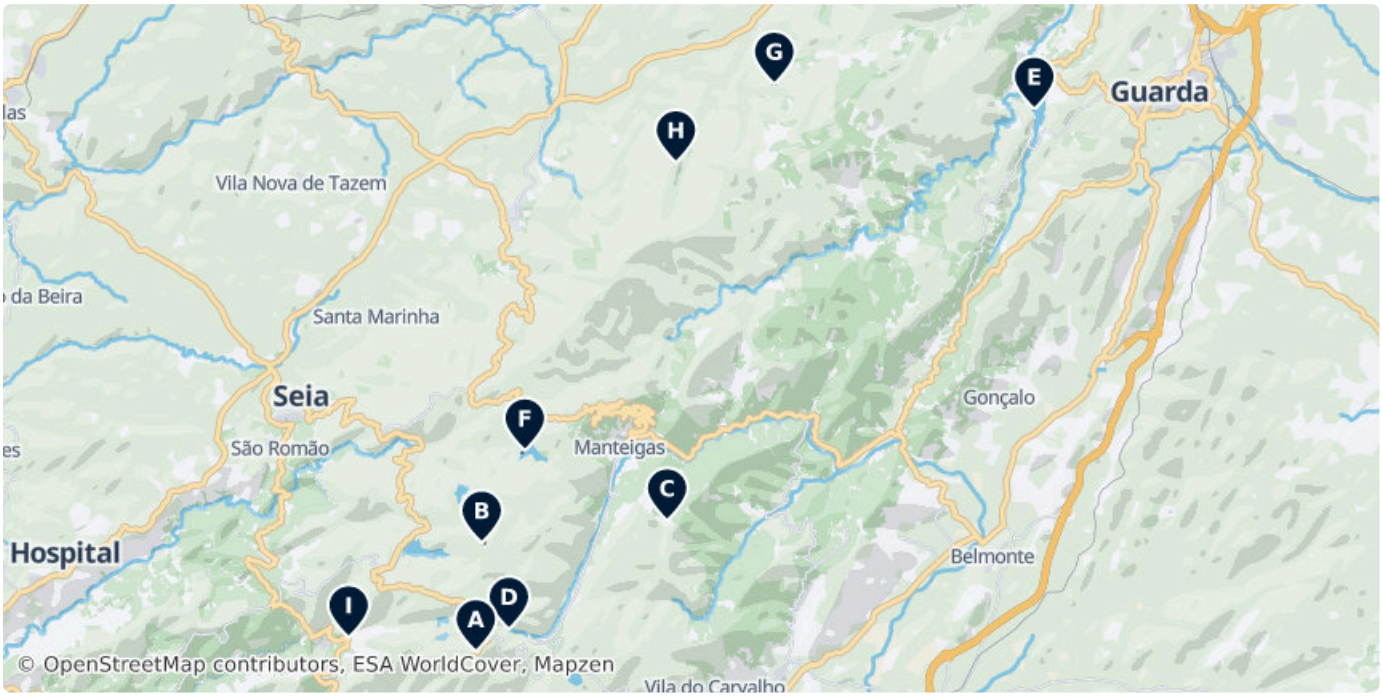
Type C / Type F
230 V · 50 Hz

LANGUAGES
Portuguese

TAP WATER
Safe to drink

Serra da Estrela Nature Park: The Absolute Essentials

Serra da Estrela Nature Park encompasses mainland Portugal's highest elevations and unique glacial landscapes. The Zêzere glacial valley stretches from the Torre peak, while the Covão dos Conchos features a distinctive circular spillway within a mountain lagoon. Medieval heritage is preserved in the stone fortifications of Linhares and Folgosinho. Natural features include the Poço do Inferno waterfall and the crystal-clear glacial waters of Loriga river beach. The park also contains several hydroelectric dams, such as Caldeirão and Vale do Rossim, which have shaped the high-altitude terrain.





A Torre

Torre is the highest point of mainland Portugal, and the second-highest of the country overall.

(Unnamed Road), 6270, Portugal (40.32182, -7.61382)



B Covão dos Conchos

An artificial bell-mouth spillway built in 1955. It diverts water from Ribeira das Naves to Lagoa Comprida through a 1,519-meter-long tunnel, creating the illusion of a natural hole in the lagoon.

6270, Portugal (40.36392, -7.61086)



C Cascata Poço do Inferno

A 10-meter-high waterfall located in the Ribeira de Leandres at an altitude of 1,080 meters. The cascade flows over a geological barrier of resistant quartzitic rock within a narrow, forested valley.

(Unnamed Road), 6260, Portugal (40.37255, -7.51652)



D Zêzere River

The Zêzere is a river in Portugal, tributary to the Tagus. It rises in the Serra da Estrela, near the Torre, the highest point of...

6260, Portugal (40.33052, -7.59698)

E Barragem do Caldeirão

A concrete arch dam on the Caldeirão stream near the city of Guarda. Completed in 1993, it provides the regional water supply and is surrounded by distinctive granite rock formations.

(Unnamed Road), 6300, Portugal (40.53170, -7.32986)

F Barragem de Vale do Rossim

Situated at an altitude of 1,437 meters, this dam stouts the Ribeira da Fervença. It forms a high-mountain reservoir used for seasonal recreation and is surrounded by large granite outcrops.

6290, Portugal (40.39962, -7.58896)



G Castle of Linhares

The Castle of Linhares is a medieval castle in the civil parish of Linhares, municipality of Celorico da Beira, in the Portuguese district...

Rua dos Penedos, Linhares 6360, Portugal (40.54138, -7.46206)



H Castelo de Folgosinho

A small medieval fortification built on a quartz ridge at 933 meters. The site features reconstructed circular walls and towers offering panoramic views of the surrounding Mondego valley.

7 Rua do Castelo, Folgosinho 6290521, Portugal (40.51105, -7.51210)



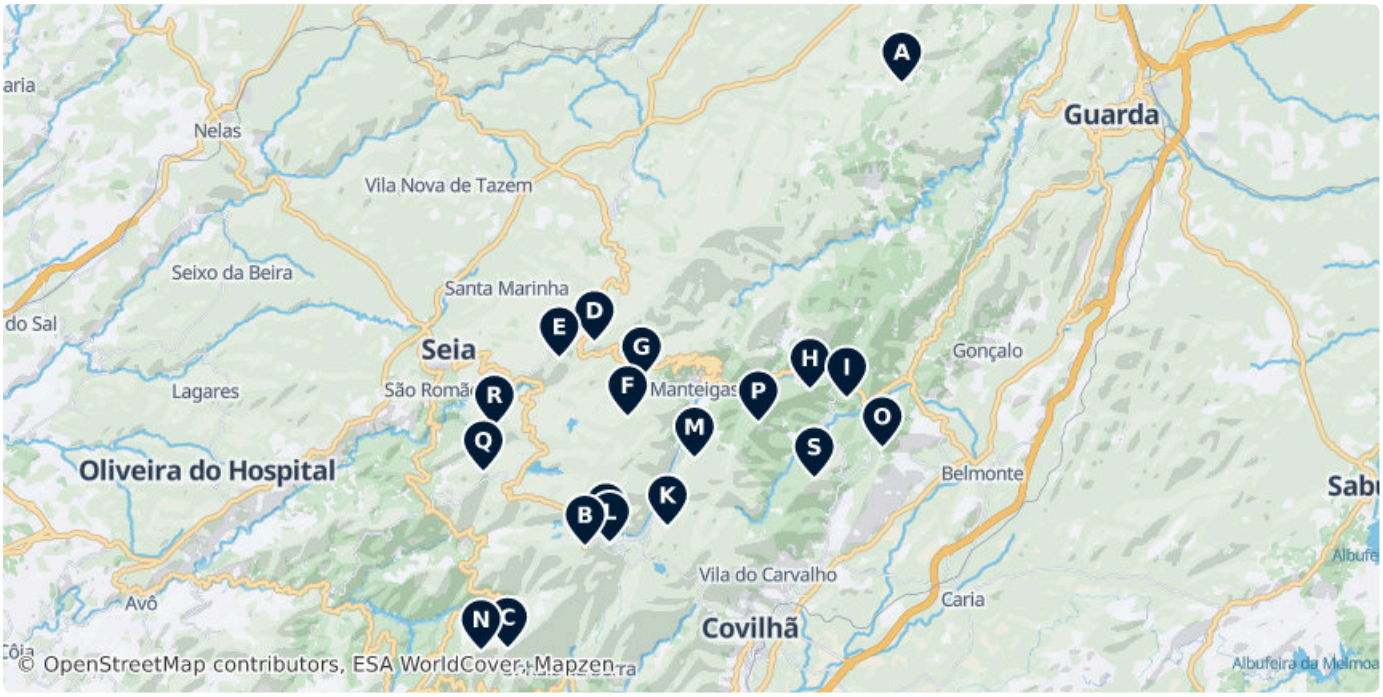
1 Praia Fluvial de Loriga

A river beach located in a glacial valley, featuring a series of terraced natural pools fed by the Ribeira de Loriga. It is the only river beach in Portugal located within a glacial cirque.

N231, 6270, Portugal (40.32721, -7.67847)

Majestic Mountain Peaks

Serra da Estrela contains mainland Portugal's highest elevations, characterized by dramatic granite landscapes and glacial legacies. This list features key summits including the iconic Cântaro Magro and Cântaro Raso, which overlook the Zêzere glacial valley. Many peaks, such as Penhas Douradas and Poios Brancos, offer access to a network of high-altitude hiking trails. These landmarks showcase the region's unique geomorphology, from jagged rock formations to expansive plateaus that reach nearly 2,000 meters above sea level.



A Penha de Prados

Granite summit and natural viewpoint overlooking the Mondego Valley.

6360, Portugal (40.55387, -7.40415)

B Estrela

The highest mountain range in mainland Portugal, reaching 1,993 meters at its summit, Torre.

Torre - Serra da Estrela, 6270, Portugal (40.32188, -7.61293)

valentim.org/cume/16223

C Alto das Portelinhas

High-altitude point located in the central massif near the Loriga glacial valley.

6215, Portugal (40.27060, -7.66386)

valentim.org/cume/16508

D Fraga da Varanda

Granite rock formation offering views over the Manteigas valley and the Zêzere River.

6290, Portugal (40.42438, -7.60665)

valentim.org/cume/17046

E Santo Estevão

Mountain peak situated in the northern ridges of the Serra da Estrela Natural Park.

6270, Portugal (40.41627, -7.62983)

valentim.org/cume/16373

F Fragão das Penhas Douradas

Granite outcrop at 1,473 meters providing a panoramic vista of the village of Manteigas.

6270, Portugal (40.38679, -7.58470)

valentim.org/cume/17464

G Corgo das Mós

High point located in the northern sector of the mountain range.

6290, Portugal (40.40631, -7.57567)

valentim.org/cume/16754

H Azinheira

Peak situated in the eastern section of the range near the village of Valhelhas.

6200, Portugal (40.40053, -7.46475)

valentim.org/cume/16625

I Contenda

Mountain peak on the eastern slopes of the Serra da Estrela range.

6260, Portugal (40.39614, -7.44045)

valentim.org/cume/16645

J Cântaro Magro

Jagged granite peak rising to 1,928 meters, forming part of the Zêzere glacial valley landscape.

6260, Portugal (40.32800, -7.59897)

valentim.org/cume/16730

K Poios Brancos

Elevation of 1,704 meters characterized by large granite boulder formations.

6260, Portugal (40.33184, -7.55860)

valentim.org/cume/16406

L Cântaro Raso

Rounded granite summit reaching 1,916 meters near the headwaters of the Zêzere River.

6215, Portugal (40.32347, -7.59666)

valentim.org/cume/16864

M Sítio das Pessoltas

High-altitude site located on the central plateau of the mountain range.

(Unnamed Road), 6260, Portugal (40.36610, -7.54073)

valentim.org/cume/16587

N Fojo

Peak located in the southwestern sector of the range, overlooking the Loriga valley.

6215, Portugal (40.26940, -7.68136)

valentim.org/cume/16515

O Mata da Atalaia

High point offering views of the eastern plains and the Zêzere river valley.

6200, Portugal (40.37134, -7.41707)

valentim.org/cume/16269

P Cabeço do Moreira

Summit situated in the central-eastern region of the natural park.

6200, Portugal (40.38416, -7.49876)

valentim.org/cume/16350

Q São Bento

Mountain peak near Loriga, known for its views of the surrounding glacial landscape.

6270, Portugal (40.35926, -7.67980)

valentim.org/cume/16380

R Coitada

Granite peak located in the northern section of the central mountain massif.

6270, Portugal (40.38207, -7.67254)

valentim.org/cume/16462

S Curgeira

Mountain peak situated on the eastern boundary of the natural park.

(Unnamed Road), 6200, Portugal (40.35606, -7.46186)

valentim.org/cume/16309

Historical and Archaeological Sites

This collection spans the diverse history of the Serra da Estrela region, from prehistoric megaliths like Orca do Tanque to the Roman and medieval paving of Calçada dos Galhardos. Explore the defensive architecture of the Castles of Linhares and Folgosinho, and discover early medieval life through numerous rock-cut anthropomorphic necropolises. The list also highlights the social history of the region, including the medieval forum of Linhares and the Manueline pillory in Melo.





A Castle of Linhares

The Castle of Linhares is a medieval castle in the civil parish of Linhares, municipality of Celorico da Beira, in the Portuguese district...

Rua dos Penedos, Linhares 6360, Portugal
(40.54138, -7.46206)



B Castelo de Folgosinho

Small medieval fortification situated on a quartz ridge, offering panoramic views over the Mondego valley.

7 Rua do Castelo, Folgosinho 6290521, Portugal
(40.51105, -7.51210)

C Casa da Fortaleza

Historic stone residence located within the medieval village of Linhares da Beira.

(40.54050, -7.46365)

D Fórum

Medieval outdoor assembly site featuring a stone table where the local council once held administrative meetings.

(40.53998, -7.46241)

E Casa do Judeu

Historic house in Linhares with architectural details indicating the presence of the town's former Jewish community.

(40.53961, -7.46164)



F Pelourinho de Melo

16th-century Manueline stone pillory symbolizing the town's historical administrative and judicial independence.

(Unnamed Road), Melo 6290, Portugal (40.52025, -7.53517)

G Necrópole do Casal das Pias

Early medieval burial site consisting of anthropomorphic graves carved directly into the granite bedrock.

6290, Portugal (40.48503, -7.47536)

arqueologia.igespar.pt/index.php

H Necrópole da Tapada dos Mouros

Archaeological site featuring rock-cut tombs dating back to the medieval period.

6300, Portugal (40.48988, -7.36741)

arqueologia.patrimoniocultural.pt/index.php

I Necrópole da Tapada do Anjo

Medieval necropolis with anthropomorphic graves hollowed out of the natural rock surfaces.

(Unnamed Road), 6370, Portugal (40.56603, -7.50606)

arqueologia.igespar.pt/index.php

J Moinho do Bujo

Traditional stone water mill used for grinding grain, reflecting the region's rural industrial heritage.

(40.50867, -7.37204)

K Orca do Tanque

Prehistoric megalithic monument consisting of a dolmen burial chamber.

6285, Portugal (40.28277, -7.71161)

L Paço de Melo

Ruins of a 14th-century manor house showcasing Gothic architectural remains of the Lords of Melo.

Avenida Brigadeiro Beja Neves, Melo 6290121, Portugal (40.51816, -7.53474)

M Calçada dos Galhardos

Ancient paved road of Roman or medieval origin used for transit through the mountain landscape.

6290, Portugal (40.49975, -7.51758)

N Igreja da Misericórdia

16th-century church featuring a simple Renaissance facade, belonging to the local Misericórdia brotherhood.

(40.54033, -7.46351)

O Castro de Baixo

Archaeological remains of a fortified proto-historic hillfort settlement.

6290, Portugal (40.44406, -7.61478)

P Prazo

Archaeological site containing remains of Roman occupation and subsequent medieval structures.

(40.55791, -7.36982)

Q Fábrica abandonada

(40.53492, -7.34499)

R Barragem do Pateiro

(40.52573, -7.34949)

S Sepulturas antropomórficas de la Ermida de Nossa Senhora de Soito

Group of medieval anthropomorphic tombs carved into the rock near the Ermida de Nossa Senhora de Soito.

(40.47642, -7.36546)

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