

Tavira

Faro District · Portugal

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Tavira is a calm riverside town in the eastern Algarve. The Gilão river runs through its centre. White houses with tiled roofs, an old seven-arched bridge and a hilltop castle give it a small, historic feel. It has far more churches than a town of 26,000 people needs.

The Ria Formosa lagoon lies just south of town. Short boat rides lead to Ilha de Tavira, a long sandy barrier island with quiet beaches. Tavira suits travelers who want a walkable old town, good seafood and easy beach days without big resorts. It is quieter than the western Algarve and a good base for the east of the region.

When to visit

Late spring and early autumn are the best times for sightseeing and the beach. Summer is hot, dry and busy, and it is the main season for island boats and beach life. Winter is mild, but it brings more rain and some seasonal closures.

The main event is the Feira da Dieta Mediterrânica, held over four days in early September. The old town fills with food stalls, crafts and music, and many restaurants offer special menus. Book rooms early if you visit then.

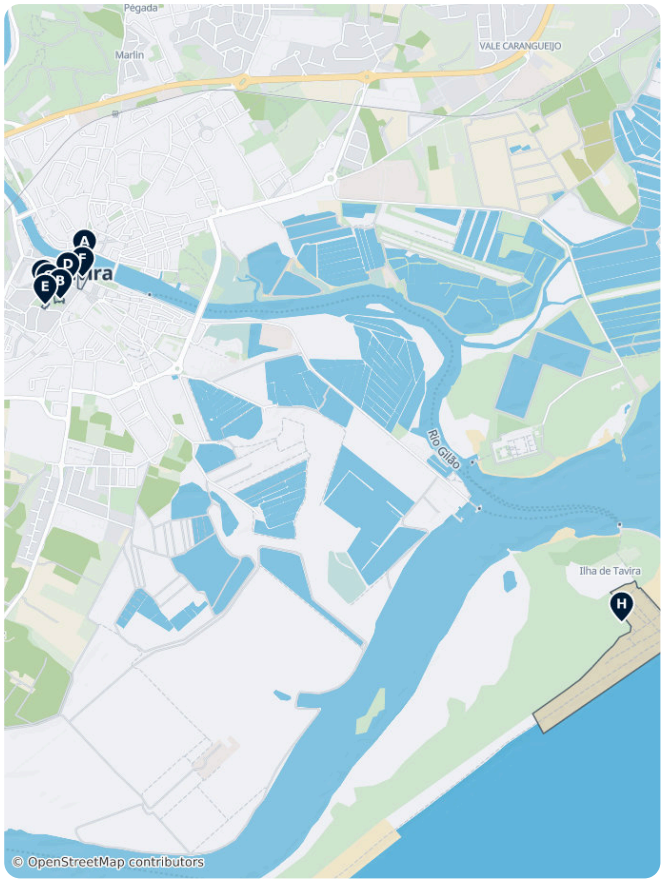
MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Great Great for wildlife watching	15° / 18° Feels like 12°	10° / 6°	Dry air
February	Great Great for wildlife watching	16° / 19° Feels like 13°	10° / 7°	Dry air
March	Great Great for wildlife watching	18° / 22° Feels like 15°	12° / 8°	Dry air
April	Great Great for sightseeing	20° / 25°	13° / 10°	Dry air
May	Great Great for sightseeing	23° / 28°	15° / 12°	20 sunny days · Dry air
June	Great Great for sightseeing	27° / 31°	19° / 15°	23 sunny days · UV 8 (Very high)
July	Great Great for the beach	29° / 33°	20° / 17°	29 sunny days · UV 9 (Very high)
August	Great Great for the beach	29° / 33°	21° / 18°	28 sunny days · UV 8 (Very high)
September	Great Great for sightseeing	26° / 30°	19° / 16°	21 sunny days
October	Great Great for sightseeing	23° / 27°	17° / 14°	
November	Great Great for wildlife watching	19° / 22°	13° / 9°	Dry air
December	Great Great for wildlife watching	16° / 19° Feels like 13°	11° / 7°	Dry air

Best months: April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November

Climate data: NASA POWER + Copernicus ERA5-Land and ERA5 · 1996–2025

Top sights

Most sights are in the compact old town on both banks of the Gilão. Allow a half day on foot, then add a beach day on the island.



- **A** Ponte Antiga sobre o Rio Gilão is the seven-arched bridge across the river and the town's best-known view. It is called Roman, but it is probably Moorish in origin. It is a good place to start a walk.
- **B** Castelo de Tavira stands on the highest ground in the old town. It has a small garden inside the walls. From the walls you can see the rooftops, the river and the sea.
- **C** Igreja de Santa Maria do Castelo is a 13th-century church beside the castle, on the site of a former mosque. It holds the tombs of *Paio Peres Correia* and his knights. The clock tower was rebuilt from a minaret.
- **D** Igreja da Misericórdia de Tavira is a Renaissance church from the 1540s, designed by *André Pilarte*. It has a gilded interior and tile panels.
- **E** Igreja de Santiago is a late 13th-century church near the castle. It was rebuilt after the 1755 earthquake.
- **F** Praça da República is the pedestrian square by the river. Cafés and terraces fill it, and it is the easiest place to sit and watch the town.
- **G** Câmara Obscura is a camera obscura in a former water tower. It projects a live view of the town onto a dark screen.
- **H** Praia da Ilha de Tavira is the main beach on Ilha de Tavira, a long strip of fine sand facing the open Atlantic. Ferries from Quatro Águas run all year, with extra boats from the town quay in summer.

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What to experience

- Island day: Take a boat to the island and walk along the beach away from the pier. The sand is long and the crowds thin out quickly. There is little shade, so bring water and sun protection.
- Barril and the anchor cemetery: At Praia do Barril, rows of rusting anchors mark the old tuna fishing station. Praia do Barril is reached by a footbridge and a short walk from the mainland.
- Octopus in Santa Luzia: This fishing village next to Tavira calls itself the octopus capital. It is a short bus or bike ride west. Seafood restaurants line the waterfront.
- Lagoon by kayak or paddleboard: Calm water and birdlife make the Ria Formosa a good place for a morning paddle. Local operators run guided trips.
- Sunset from the old town: The castle walls and the river bridge give two easy places to watch the evening light.

Day trips

Tavira is a good base for small trips in the east. Trains run along the coast. A car helps for villages without a station.



- A Olhão is about 25 minutes by train. It is a working fishing town with a waterfront market and ferries to more islands.
- Cacela Velha is about 12 km east, around 15 minutes by car. It is a tiny whitewashed village on a hill above the lagoon, with a fort, a church and a quiet beach below. Buses are slow, so a car or taxi works best.
- B Faro is about 35 to 40 minutes by train. The old town and the Ria Formosa islands make a relaxed half day.
- C Vila Real de Santo António is about 25 minutes by train, at the Spanish border. From its river terminal, a ferry of about 15 minutes crosses to Ayamonte in Spain. Spain is one hour ahead of Portugal.
- D Castro Marim is about 30 minutes by car. It has a hilltop castle and salt pans with good birdwatching.

Getting there

- By air: The nearest airport is Faro Airport (FAO), about 30 km west. A taxi or ride-hail takes about 30 to 40 minutes. By public transport, take bus 16 into Faro, then a train or bus on to Tavira. Allow 2 to 2.5 hours in total.
- By train: Regional trains from Faro take about 35 to 40 minutes. They also run east to Vila Real de Santo António. From Lisbon you change at Faro, and the journey takes about 4 hours. Book on Comboios de Portugal. The station is a 15-minute walk from the old town.
- By bus: The bus station is by the river, near the old bridge. Express coaches to Lisbon take about 4 to 5 hours. EVA buses link Tavira to Faro and other Algarve towns in about 1 hour.

Getting around

- On foot: The old town is small, and most sights are within a 10-minute walk. The castle area is on a gentle hill.
- Town buses: EVA runs local buses to Cabanas and to Quatro Águas, the main ferry pier. Buy tickets from the driver. Services are less frequent at weekends. See EVA Transportes.
- Boats: Ferries to Ilha de Tavira leave from Quatro Águas and, in summer, from the town quay. Queues for the last boat back can be long in summer, so check the final departure.
- Walking to the island: A footbridge at Pedras d'El Rei leads to Barril beach. A summer ferry also serves the island from Santa Luzia. From there, walk along the beach or take the small train in summer.
- Taxis: Taxis wait near the market and Praça da República.

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

High

The old town is small and mostly flat, and most sights are within a 10-minute walk.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Moderate

The flat streets suit a bike, but old-town lanes are narrow and cobbled.

Driving

- Is a car worth it?: Not for the town itself. It helps for Cacela Velha, Castro Marim and beaches away from the ferry piers.
- Parking: Parking in the old town is hard. Use the paid car parks on the edge of the centre and walk in. There is also a car park by the Quatro Águas ferry pier.
- Tolls: The A22 motorway along the Algarve has been toll-free since 1 January 2025. The N125 is a slower road without tolls.

Food & drink

The lagoon and the sea supply the local menu. Look for grilled fish, octopus, clams and cataplana, a seafood stew cooked in a copper pan. Tuna was the town's main trade for centuries, and it still appears on many menus. Algarve sweets are made with almonds, figs and eggs.

Eat along the river and around Praça da República, where terraces and small restaurants cluster. The Mercado Municipal de Tavira sells fresh fish and produce, and mornings are best. For the most local plates of octopus, take the short trip to Santa Luzia.

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

Tavira is a safe town for visitors. Petty theft is rare but possible in crowded places in summer, so keep bags closed.

The main risks are sun and water. The island beaches have little shade and few shops, so bring water. Atlantic swimming areas can have currents, so swim near the lifeguard flags. The lagoon side is calmer.

History

Tavira is one of the oldest places on the Algarve coast. A Phoenician settlement stood here in the 8th century BC. Under Muslim rule the town grew from the 11th century. The old bridge and the foundations of Igreja de Santa Maria do Castelo date from that time.

In 1242 *Paio Peres Correia*, master of the Order of Santiago, took Tavira for Portugal. A local tale says the attack followed the killing of seven of his knights during a truce. The castle and the churches of the old town show the town's shift from a Moorish to a Christian city.

Tuna fishing brought wealth for centuries but declined in the 20th century. The 1755 earthquake destroyed much of the Algarve, and many of Tavira's buildings are 18th-century rebuilds. About 37 churches remain, including Igreja da Misericórdia de Tavira.

Country facts

Quick practical facts for Portugal at a glance:

CURRENCY
EUR €

EMERGENCY
112

ELECTRICITY



Type C / Type F
230 V · 50 Hz

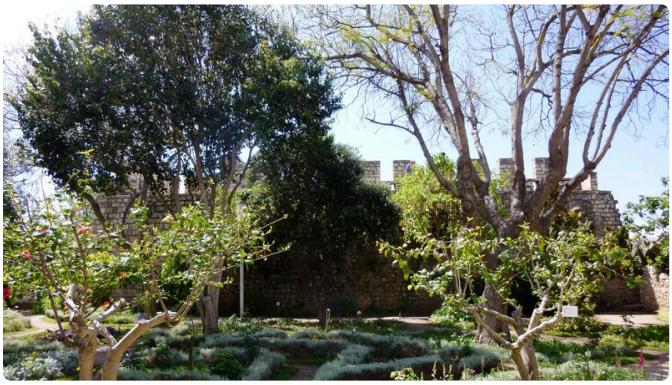
LANGUAGES
Portuguese

TAP WATER
Safe to drink

Tavira Essentials

Tavira's historical center is defined by its medieval castle and the Igreja de Santa Maria do Castelo, a National Monument built on a former mosque site. The Gilão River is crossed by the Ponte Antiga, a seven-arched bridge reconstructed in the 17th century. Religious landmarks include the Renaissance Igreja da Misericórdia and the 13th-century Igreja de Santiago. The town also features the Torre de Tavira's camera obscura and the Mercado Municipal, known for its selection of fresh regional seafood.





A Castle of Tavira

The Castle of Tavira is a medieval castle located in the parish of Santiago, Tavira municipality, Faro district of Portugal.

2 Calçada Dom Paio Peres Correia, Tavira 8800, Portugal
(37.12517, -7.65115)



B Ponte antiga sobre o Rio Gilão

A seven-arched stone bridge across the Gilão River. While often called the Roman Bridge, the current structure dates primarily to a 17th-century reconstruction of a medieval crossing.

1 Ponte Romana, Tavira 8800, Portugal
(37.12685, -7.64985)



C Igreja de Santa Maria do Castelo

Igreja de Santa Maria do Castelo is a church in Tavira, Portugal. It is classified as a National Monument.

29 Calçada dos Sete Cavaleiros, Tavira 8800, Portugal (37.12539, -7.65180)

Su	11:30–12:30



D Igreja da Misericórdia de Tavira

A 16th-century Renaissance church notable for its ornate carved portal and interior walls lined with 18th-century blue and white azulejo tiles illustrating the fourteen Works of Mercy.

8 Rua Damião Augusto de Brito Vasconcelos, Tavira 8800343, Portugal (37.12588, -7.65073)

Mo	09:00–12:00, 14:00–17:00
Tu–Sa	09:00–12:30, 14:00–17:30
Su	Closed



E Igreja de Santiago

A 13th-century church built on the site of a former mosque. It was significantly reconstructed following the 1755 earthquake and stands near the town's castle walls.

35 Rua Dom Paio Perês Correia, Tavira 8800407, Portugal (37.12493, -7.65195)



F Pousada Convento de Tavira

A heritage hotel housed in the 16th-century Convent of Nossa Senhora da Graça. The building features an original cloister and is situated within the historic hilltop district.

57 Rua Dom Paio Perês Correia, Tavira 8800, Portugal (37.12522, -7.65291)

G Torre de Tavira

A former water tower housing a camera obscura. It provides a real-time, 360-degree optical projection of Tavira's cityscape using a system of mirrors and lenses.

Calçada da Galeria, 8800-308 Tavira, Portugal
(37.12556, -7.65206)

H Jardim Público de Tavira

A riverside public park featuring a 19th-century wrought-iron bandstand. It offers shaded walking paths and views of the Gilão River near the historic center.

(37.12595, -7.64887)

I Mercado Municipal de Tavira

A large municipal market offering fresh local produce, regional specialties, and a significant selection of fish and seafood from the Atlantic coast.

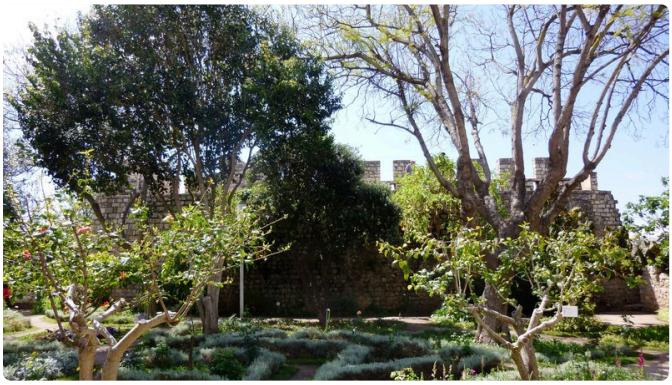
Avenida dos Descobrimentos, Tavira 8800, Portugal
(37.12273, -7.64392)

Mo–Sa	07:30–15:00

Historic Heritage of Tavira

Tavira's historic center preserves layers of history ranging from the Almohad period to the medieval era. This collection features the Castle of Tavira, a fortification with Moorish origins, and the 13th-century Igreja de Santa Maria do Castelo, a National Monument built atop a former mosque. Architectural highlights include the Roman-style bridge over the Gilão River and the 16th-century Convento de Nossa Senhora da Graça. These sites showcase the town's evolution through its religious monuments, defensive structures, and archaeological remains.





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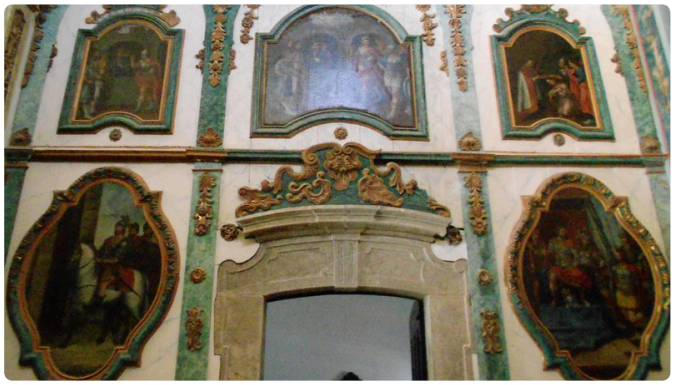
(37.12517, -7.65115)



B Ermida de São Sebastião

A Roman Catholic chapel located in the former parish of Santiago. The structure is a religious heritage site representative of local devotional architecture in Tavira.

20A Campo dos Mártires da Pátria, Tavira 8800, Portugal
(37.12238, -7.64705)



C Igreja de Santa Maria do Castelo

Igreja de Santa Maria do Castelo is a church in Tavira, Portugal. It is classified as a National Monument.

29 Calçada dos Sete Cavaleiros, Tavira 8800, Portugal (37.12539, -7.65180)

Su 11:30–12:30



D Ponte antiga sobre o Rio Gilão

Commonly referred to as the Roman Bridge, this structure spans the Gilão River in the parish of Santa Maria. While its current appearance dates largely to the 17th century, it stands on ancient foundations.

1 Ponte Romana, Tavira 8800, Portugal (37.12685, -7.64985)



E Pousada Convento de Tavira

Housed in the former 16th-century Convento de Nossa Senhora da Graça, this site preserves the original cloister and architectural elements of the Augustinian monastery.

57 Rua Dom Paio Perês Correia, Tavira 8800, Portugal (37.12522, -7.65291)

F Bairro Almóada do Convento da Graça

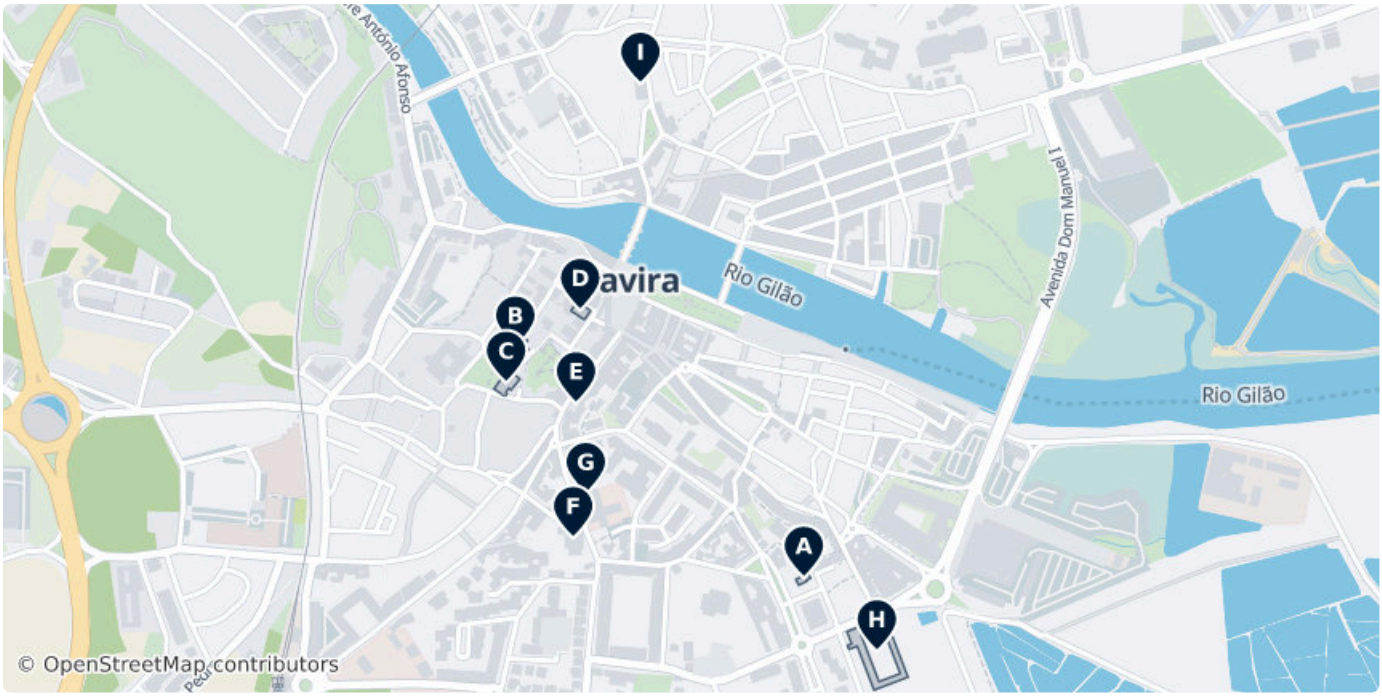
An archaeological site featuring the remains of a 12th-century Almohad neighborhood. Excavations revealed residential structures and urban layout from the Islamic period of Tavira.

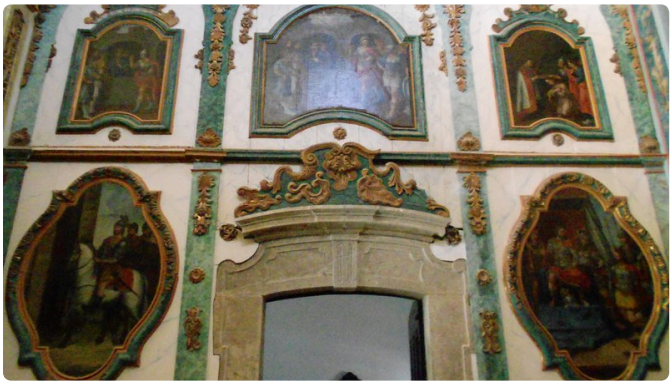
57 Rua Dom Paio Perês Correia, Tavira 8800, Portugal (37.12518, -7.65278)

museumunicipaldetavira.cm-tavira.pt/content/n%C3%BA...

Historic Churches of Tavira

Tavira's religious landscape is defined by its 13th-century foundations and 18th-century reconstructions following the Great Earthquake. This selection includes the Renaissance portal of the Igreja da Misericórdia, the Gothic and Manueline remnants of the São Francisco convent, and the Church of Santa Maria do Castelo, a National Monument. These sites showcase a variety of architectural styles, from large Cistercian monasteries to small parish chapels, many of which house significant collections of blue and white azulejo tiles and Baroque gilded altarpieces.





A Ermida de São Sebastião

A small chapel in the Santiago parish featuring traditional white-washed walls and regional architectural elements.

20A Campo dos Mártires da Pátria, Tavira 8800, Portugal
(37.12238, -7.64705)



B Igreja de Santa Maria do Castelo

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29 Calçada dos Sete Cavaleiros, Tavira 8800, Portugal
(37.12539, -7.65180)

Su	11:30–12:30



C Igreja de Santiago

Built on the site of a former mosque, this 13th-century church was reconstructed after the 1755 earthquake. It is historically associated with the military Order of Santiago.

35 Rua Dom Paio Perês Correia, Tavira 8800407, Portugal (37.12493, -7.65195)



D Igreja da Misericórdia de Tavira

A Renaissance church featuring an intricately carved 16th-century portal by André Pilarte. The interior is lined with 18th-century azulejo tiles depicting the fourteen Works of Mercy.

8 Rua Damião Augusto de Brito Vasconcelos, Tavira 8800343, Portugal (37.12588, -7.65073)

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Su	Closed



E Capela de Nossa Senhora da Consolação

A small chapel in the Santiago district featuring traditional regional architecture.

71 Rua da Liberdade, Tavira 8800, Portugal (37.12466, -7.65080)



F Igreja do antigo convento de São Francisco

Originally founded in 1250, this church displays a mix of Gothic and Manueline styles. It served as the place of worship for one of the Algarve's most prominent Franciscan convents.

2 Rua Poeta Isidoro Pires, Tavira 8800, Portugal (37.12290, -7.65085)



G Igreja do Hospital do Espírito Santo

Also known as the Church of São José, this religious building was historically part of the Holy Spirit Hospital.

25 Rua Tenente Couto, Tavira 8800, Portugal (37.12347, -7.65064)

I Igreja do Antigo Convento dos Eremitas de São Paulo

Also known as the Church of São Paulo, this 17th-century structure contains notable 18th-century gilded woodcarvings and traditional tilework.

12 Rua da Porta Nova, Tavira 8800330, Portugal (37.12885, -7.64974)

H Convento das Bernardas

Founded in 1509, this former Cistercian monastery features Manueline architectural elements. It was recently rehabilitated into a residential complex by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Eduardo Souto de Moura.

50 Rua Arquitecto Eduardo Souto Moura, Tavira 8800378, Portugal (37.12141, -7.64586)

DATA SOURCES

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