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WIND DOWN

AT THE EDGE OF THE EARTH

It's a rookie error to overlook Portugal when planning a European holiday. The southern Algarve coast boasts food, wine, sunshine and views to rival the world's best, writes **KATE ALLMAN**.

There's something about a warm sun lingering on the horizon, painting the sky with hues of teal, orange and peach, that whets an appetite for cocktails. Let's call it the science of the sundowner. My theory is that human thirst for refreshing beverages goes up in direct proportion to the sun going down on a beach vista. Sure, the evidence is mostly anecdotal. But I'm close to proving the phenomenon exists at Sky Bar on Portugal's sun-kissed Algarve coast.

The chic lounge-come-nightclub, perched on the roof of the five-star Tivoli Carvoeiro hotel, flaunts views over one of the most stunning regions of Europe. Dramatic limestone cliffs jut out over a cobalt ocean, with powdery beach coves speckled along the base. For Australians: it's like someone has scooped up a section of the Great Ocean Road and plonked it in Portugal.

Few – if any – hotels in the Algarve are built so close to the eroding limestone cliffs. But the original Tivoli Carvoeiro was built 28 years ago, before laws protecting the receding coastline prevented such audacious architecture. It's why Sky Bar can quite accurately claim the “best sunset view in the Algarve”.

Sky Bar opened in 2017, after international luxury group Minor Hotels bought the previous hotel property and gave it a costly facelift (in the realm of 11 million euros) to earn a five-star rating. The updates included installing balconies with floor-to-ceiling glass windows, shifting reception up three floors and hoisting the bar to the roof. The result is a jaw-dropping view for guests checking in, and daily sunset panoramas from the new drinking hole “in the sky”.

Marketing manager Rui Freitas chuckles as he reveals many guests ask whether the views through the huge glass windows at reception are real – or simply high-resolution digital projections. Up on the rooftop, I'm beginning to question the illusion myself. I watch the sky turn orange, then red, then deep purple. Like clockwork, I'm beginning to feel quite thirsty.

The Algarve boasts an average 300 days of sunshine every year, so there is rarely a curtain to obscure this nightly show. And while sunset is the main event during a holiday at Tivoli Carvoeiro, the pre-show entertainment can be just as good.

Snorkelling, fishing, paddleboarding, fishing, jet boat tours, golf and wine-tasting are all on offer in the Algarve and can be organised through the hotel concierge. Most set off from the

nearby marina in Carvoeiro, a 10-minute stroll from the hotel. Closer to home, a small sandy cove appears at low tide in front of the hotel pool. Hotel staff warn against swimming under the eroding cliffs for safety reasons, but the brave can clamber down the rickety stairway to check it out. The *Seven Vales Suspenos* (Seven Hanging Valleys Walk) at the top of the cliff line offers spectacular photo opportunities as our genial guide, Fabio, provides funny and knowledgeable commentary on the local ecosystem. Of course, there's also a 24-hour gym in the hotel, plus steam room, sauna and spa, if you're itching for more exercise.

The south coast of Portugal is protected from ocean swells, but surfers can find waves in the western corner of the Algarve, about an hour from Carvoeiro. Drive far enough and you'll reach the “end of the earth” – where the cliffs culminate on the wind-scoured village of Sagres. European explorers avoided sailing beyond this point up until the 15th century, lest they fall off the edge of a map.

The Algarve brims with food and wine to rival better-known culinary regions of Europe, like Tuscany or Provence. Three restaurants and two bars at Tivoli Carvoeiro champion this produce. A standout meal is the inimitable turbot (a large flat fish with delicate, white flesh) at “The One” restaurant. It comes roasted whole, in its skin, alongside a rainbow of vegetables. A waiter peels back the steaming skin to fillet portions directly to my plate, offering nothing but a crack of salt and a light lemon vinaigrette as dressing. Simplicity at its finest.

All this eating and exercise requires rehydration. It's how I find myself back at Sky Bar, flopped on a lounge, becoming increasingly parched as the sun melts into the Atlantic.

Fortunately, bartender Rafael Silva is a veritable scholar in the science of sundowners. He approaches his work like an alchemist, devising a cure for pre-holiday stress (he's even invented a drink dubbed “penicillin” with whiskey, lemon and ginger). When I ask for a menu, Rafael confidently exclaims, “I am the menu!”

In that case, I'll declare my preferences (gin, lemon, ice) and see what the alchemist prescribes. He meets the brief with a summery concoction the colour of our hovering peach sky. He expertly juggles it in a cocktail shaker before pouring it over ice and finishing with a lemon rind.

One day, I muse, I'll pen my theory for Rafael and his peers to review. For now, I'll continue the research. **LSJ**



GET THERE
Fly to Faro airport and take a 45-minute taxi ride to Tivoli Carvoeiro for about 60 euros (AU\$95). Pre-booked hire cars cost from AU\$50 per day and are useful for exploring the Algarve.

STAY THERE
Rooms at Tivoli Carvoeiro start from 116 euros per night (about AU\$200) when you book in advance, including buffet breakfast.

