

CABINS BY THE RIVER

Words by Liz Schäffer
Photographs by Holly Farrier

Solitude, architecture and the chance to go off grid - the ultimate Comporta hideaway.

On dunes within Reserva Natural do Estuário do Sado stand two cabins designed by architect Manuel Aires Mateus. Overlooking the bay, they are framed by paddy fields, walkways and coastal vegetation kept low by the wind, the greens slightly faded, a sun-bleached knoll. Known as Comporta Hideaway, the rough-hewn cabins are built from reclaimed timber that will change colour and weather over time. Connected by a wooden terrace and jetty, one cabin houses the living area, complete with a hidden kitchen, while the other is the sleeping space, an intimate delight with a canopied bed and outdoor shower. This Comporta abode is part of Off Grid Hideaways' collection, a range of remote, architecturally enthralling properties across the globe that focus on sustainability and escape.

I visited Comporta Hideaway in December, and while those who arrive in summer will experience Comporta at its most extravagant, there's something magical about travelling during the 'off season', when it feels as though you are seeing things as they were when this part of the world really was undiscovered. You can still ride horses on the beach, venture out in search of bottlenose dolphins, borrow the Comporta Hideaway bikes or kayak, or seek the Roman ruins of nearby Tróia, but with these unique cabins as my base, I chose to bask in their orbit and did little more than nest, wander and read.

And I'd come prepared to do just that, having secured supplies in the village of Comporta where buildings are painted blue and white and storks have built roosts upon nearly every chimney. Here there is no shortage of restaurants (and I've been told I must return

to eat at Cavalariça Comporta and A Escola, famed for its rabbit pie) but I had stopped for Mercearia Gomes alone - a store decorated with straw bags, soaps and sardine tins that sells wine, food and wares from across Portugal. I departed with all that was required for a feast beneath the stars.

As if my Off Grid experience wasn't rustically luxurious enough already, each morning the cabin-keeper, Deolinda, would arrive to prepare breakfast; an assortment of tropical fruit, cheese, bread and pastries. She spoke no English, and I had no Portuguese, but we somehow managed to chat using a strange combination of gestures and smiles, Deolinda miming that I should sleep well, eat up and admire the scenery.

Each time I glanced up from my book, the estuary had transformed itself, the pre-dawn gunmetal evolving into dazzling golds, the waterlogged paddy fields shifting from pink, to violet, to the most vivid sage. The tide ebbs and flows as you watch patterns form in the sand. A crumbling wooden boat lies upon the bank, a victim of time and the elements, while birds fill the sky above. There are around 200 species here, everything from fish eagles, to flamingos, to giant stalks who stand guard beside the muddy paths.

The route I meandered one afternoon led to the fishing community of Carrasqueira and its winding network of jetties and fishing huts, aged by the salt water and gales - a structure left over from another era. Seeing this, you understand the architecture of Comporta Hideaway, the significance of the shape and the materials used - a fishing hut re-imagined, heritage preserved.

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