

DREAM DESTINATIONS: PORTUGAL

DISCOVER THE BEST WAY TO EXPLORE THE IBERIAN PENINSULA'S *OTHER* GREAT CYCLING PLAYGROUND...

France has the Tour, Italy has the Giro and Spain the Vuelta, but did you know that Portugal's Volta a Portugal was first raced in 1927, making it seven years older than Spain's grand tour? Well, if you didn't you do now and it'll give you some idea of just how rich Portugal's cycling heritage is. And one company that knows all about that is Phoinix Cycling which is dedicated to proudly showing British riders Portugal's delights via a host of truly diverse packages.

Book their Inner Land tour, for

example, and you'll find yourself wheeling on mostly flat roads through the Alentejo region, a wonderland of cork plantations, wheat fields and vineyards that's peppered with ancient villages where you'll be able to test your riding chops on the local pave.

By contrast Phoinix's Coastal Package allows you to explore the Serra da Arrábida region. Although just 30 minutes drive from Lisbon, this wild national park is virtually unknown to tourists. Here you'll get to ride wonderfully empty



roads that'll frequently treat you to stunning coastal views, and even glimpses of Roman castles.

If it's serious climbing that you're after, then Phoinix's Highland Package has plenty of that. This explores the Serra de Estrela mountain range towards the north of the country where Portugal's highest peak tickles the sky at 6,539ft and marks the spot where the Torre stage of the Volta a Portugal ends each year.

The company can also help you to sample some of Portugal's best loved cycling events, too, such as the Troia-Sagres, a ride that takes place every December between the northern point of the Peninsular de



Troia not far from Lisbon to the Cape of Sagres in the Algarve, 200kms to its south. It's not a race, in fact it's not even an official event, just a very Portuguese take on endurance riding. Should you prefer something a little more organised, however, the company can also arrange for you to ride in events such as the Granfondo da Arrábida. This superb sportive takes place every March, around the same time as the Classica da Arrábida race, meaning that if you take Phoinix up on their four-day package you'll have time to watch how the pros negotiate the very roads this sportive tackles.

Phoinix also tip a cycling cap to Portugal's great cycling past with

THE ALENTEJO REGION IS A WONDERLAND OF CORK PLANTATIONS, WHEAT FIELDS, VINEYARDS, AND ANCIENT VILLAGES...

their Distinguished Gentlemen's Riders Weekends which are open to anyone with a classic steel racing bike who fancies riding like the hardmen of yesteryear on gravel surfaces and white roads.

As this suggests, Phoinix's guided rides aren't the most conventional and are definitely designed to test you as a rider. And while the luxury hotel accommodation they offer is easily described as comfortable, the riding often isn't. Not that you're

required to ride every day if you don't feel up to it, or even complete a ride, as there are dedicated vans to give stragglers a lift back or even a lift out to a group if a rider's slept in.

You can also expect massages, full board and airport transfers, plus lectures and workshops on everything from racing techniques to maintenance as part of their exclusive deals. See phoinix.pt for more, including bespoke packages, and to enquire about prices. 🚲