

Show box



"This is what you need to know about Monsaraz," the website calls out to me enthusiastically. From one of the hits that rolls across the screen to treat the reader to a cheering intro.

Monsaraz in the far east of Portugal is a beautiful town where time seems to stand still.

Deception

Not a word was said wrong, I agree in my imagination, at the start of a virtual exploration through this apparently deserted, car-free hamlet. "*As if it has been dreaming for centuries,*" reports another internet forum. I continue to fantasize about the silence, it feels like a warm blanket, almost taken for granted. Dead silence says more than a thousand words. Special and therefore alert and receptive to impressions that stimulate my consciousness.

Silence without any commotion around is changing your observation skills. More aware of where you walk around while all your senses are sharp and, humanly speaking, you hear, see, feel, smell or taste better than usual. "*The greatest revelation is silence,*" according to the Chinese philosopher Lao-Tse (circa 600 BC). Just dream on, I say to myself afterwards. Like being punched in the face. Pffff... it's a bustle arriving here.



Tourist swarm

Cars and buses packed with people, vehicles full of hurried, curious visitors. A crowd looking for a parking space. It's Sunday today, Marion says; the explanation for this traffic jam. A poignant difference compared to the silence I imagined. In my boundless naivete, evoked by an unreal image in my bewildered brain. Far away from that caravan of noisy chattering Spaniards.

Rows behind each other, they squeeze through the narrow city gate to admire the village square. Oops, an unexpectedly confrontational collision with harsh reality. Taking group photos and selfies, they leave their mark on this place. Too bad, too bad that *Rua Direita* in this white village is being overrun by a real tidal wave of curious people.

Nothing has changed in the street scene for centuries. Monsaraz is a medieval idyll, consisting of exactly two streets. Steep and with smooth, bumpy boulders, so be careful. *Turismo* also provides a map, in case you might unexpectedly get lost.

The main street leads directly to the thirteenth century castle, which sits on top of the 350 meter high hill. The view of the white church of Monsaraz, *Matriz de Nossa Senhora da Lagoa*, is lost behind a wall of photographing interested parties.



Sensation

Lucky that the hungry, thirsty crowd naturally dissolves into bodegas, restaurants, wine shops and terraces, after which a relative silence returns. Modern man is infatuated with visions of the future. Visions, making plans, coming up with new strategies and tactics.

Without looking back, without making time to enjoy the moment in the here and now. To escape this crazy hurried world that changes at the speed of light. Completely agree that the views of the scenic beauty all around from the high city walls are phenomenal.

Unfortunately, in the two main streets of the village you hardly see a single tree, shrub or even a leaf of greenery. Well, luckily a few glimmers here and there later on. Away from the hustle and bustle, back to the mystical atmosphere where the silence absorbs us into a peaceful world of make believe.

A great pleasure to experience. Happiness is an elusive feeling that only overtakes you for a short time and unfortunately often disappears quickly. Living in the everyday that consists of later's, instead of now's. Knowing that after every future there is always a new now to experience a unique feeling of happiness again.



Downer

Like an eagle's nest this village is elevated above a sea of green terraces. Immortalized in a true-to-life aerial photo I came across. The immense *Lago de Alqueva* reservoir reflects in the background. With a sparkle that you cannot ignore, because the eye is naturally drawn to it. As soon as your gaze shifts to the distance behind the high, old city walls.

Looking over *Ermida de São Bento*, the lowlands extend to the horizon. An overwhelming view of austere beauty at 350 meters above sea level. Historical *Monsaraz* could have provided a strong story to tell. The enthusiasm of the travel bloggers created unrealistic expectations. They disappeared in a hurry on this Sunday afternoon. Shrank to an unrealistic fantasy image presented as if in a fairytale show box.