

AGAINST  
HER BETTER  
JUDGEMENT,  
OUR WRITER  
TAKES HER  
TEENAGE BEACH  
BOY AWAY TO  
THE ALGARVE TO  
LEARN TO SURF.  
BUT WILL THEY  
HAVE A SWELL  
TIME? READ ON...

WORDS MARIE-NOELLE BAUER

Like most people, I have an endless slew of shudder-inducing teenage memories, yet one particularly haunts me: an ill-advised family trip from our house in eastern France to Lisbon. A trip that my father – whom my mother lovingly nicknamed “El Cheapo” because of his mean streak – insisted we take in a non-air-conditioned car during a sweltering summer with record-breaking high temperatures. By the time we limped into the Portuguese capital, my brain had melted into such mush that all my memories of the city are a hot, resentful blur. So, there’s some irony in the fact that I’m returning to Portugal for the first time 20 years later, now cast in the role of the annoying parent, my 15-year-old son David in tow. >





Luckily for David, I don't know how to drive, so we're flying. And our destination isn't Lisbon, but the wet and wild Algarve region, where we're having a mother-son surfing getaway. The closest my self-declared nerd of a son has gotten to "catching a wave" is reading the adventures of the Silver Surfer, among his pile of comic books. His heart is currently set on becoming a stand-up comedian – one with a rather twisted sense of humour, if the way he ribs me when I'm struck with a mysterious (age-related, he says) shoulder pain days before our adventure is anything to go by. As our flight takes off, he adds insult to injury by burying his big, bushy head right into the sore spot and falling asleep, while I cross my fingers this Portugal trip won't prove a disastrous sequel to the previous one.

The hill-top Hotel Tivoli Carvoeiro (book through [Jet2holidays.com](http://Jet2holidays.com)) in the



Once we've slipped into our wetsuits, we head westwards to the rather funky Marina de Portimao later that day.

*"There was a time when the only people who used to surf here were stoners. Now it's the opposite. It's all health nuts and kids"*

pretty ex-fishing village of Carvoeiro, offers all sorts of ways for guests to exhaust themselves, with first-class golf, tennis, volleyball and football facilities, as well as a fully equipped diving centre where you can take both basic and advanced PADI courses. Instead, we have a nap by the pool before heading out to attempt the challenge that drew us here: learning to surf – from scratch.

David looks sleek and athletic – like one of the superheroes in his comic books. Unfortunately, I'm in too much pain to hit the water. But that doesn't stop me from going into shameless (and embarrassing, if David had noticed) flirt mode as the Playsurf ([playsurf.com.pt](http://playsurf.com.pt)) school owner, an amber-eyed Adonis called Bruno, explains how the surf scene has evolved in this beachside town. >



THE HOTEL TIVOLI CARVOEIRO (TOP) OFFERS DIVING (MIDDLE), BUT DAVID AND MARIE-NOELLE (ABOVE) ARE HERE TO SURF



## SURF ALGARVE



WITH SUNSHINE AND PLENTY OF WAVES, THE ALGARVE IS A SURFER'S PARADISE. DAVID (BOTTOM LEFT) LEARNS THE BASICS



"There was a time when the only people who used to surf here were stoners. Now it's the opposite. It's all health nuts and kids," he says, pointing to a snap of his daughter, who started surfing aged five.

Playsurf appears to be one of the smaller outfits here, which means David gets a one-on-one tutorial with his 18-year-old teacher, Gabriel. I happily lay on the Portimao beach,

called Praia da Rocha, watching them go through their stretching exercises before getting down to business in the water. The crowd around me is young and laid-back. Even the waves seem chilled and unthreatening. In the distance I see Gabriel coaxing David through several wobbly attempts to pop up on his board. I get distracted by my book, but when I look up, I see David finally standing up on his board and steering it like a pro. I'm proud, and so is he, smiling broadly as he joins me: "What a rush! It was repetitive but so much fun!" Stinking of seawater, he falls asleep in his hotel bed immediately upon our return, like a robot whose batteries have suddenly petered out.

Come morning he's recharged – albeit aching. After ploughing through the hotel's breakfast buffet, it's back to the beach. My shoulder's still being uncooperative so I bunk off again, but David's in fine



company, sharing Gabriel with three other wannabes: two teens and a seven-year-old called Matthew who reminds me of an over-enthusiastic puppy. When he emerges from the water two hours later, David's smile is slightly less wide than the previous day when he'd enjoyed beginner's luck. But never mind, there's another session to go tomorrow.

We while away a gorgeously bright afternoon sampling some of Algarve's famous seafood in a snack shack on the beach – including the biggest seabass you've ever seen, and a small school of grilled sardines. This before winding back to Carvoeiro where we drop by Gelados & Companhia ([geladosecompanhia.com](http://geladosecompanhia.com)), an ice-cream shop heartily recommended by our lovely taxi driver Paulo. David picks a gruesome combination of homemade >

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## SURF ALGARVE



DAVID EMERGES FROM THE SURF (LEFT). LOCAL DELICACIES, SUCH AS THIS SMALL SCHOOL OF SARDINES (BELOW)



lemon sorbet and chocolate cream, while I opt for mint-chocolate chip, and we explore the dramatic cliffs surrounding the hotel until sleepiness claims him once more.

The next day I finally squeeze into my wetsuit. And you know what? I look hot. Where's Bruno when you need him? I follow David and puppy dog Matthew to the beach where Gabriel painstakingly

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out pathetically.  
I laugh it off*

talks me through the steps to climbing atop my board – which all promptly fall out of my head when I slip into the water. For wave after wave, I just keep wiping out pathetically. I laugh it off before settling on body boarding for the rest of the afternoon. Matthew gives me pitying looks, but the family's honour is safe thanks to David, who owns the waves, riding them with enviable ease. "That was awesome! It's the first time I've ever been better at something than you!" he crows as we head home. "Erm, what exactly am I better at than you?" I ask, genuinely curious. He pauses to think: "Figuring who the bad guys are when we watch TV shows?" Looking at his big goofy grin and newly confident swagger, I declare the Portuguese holiday curse officially over. ▀



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## Surf bored?

Don't fancy catching any more waves? There are plenty of other ways to make the best of the Algarve's gorgeous scenery



### HIT THE GREENS

With 39 courses stretching along its Atlantic coastline, the Algarve is one of Europe's most popular golfing spots. Head to **Quinta da Ria** and **Quinta de Cima** ([quintadaria.com](http://quintadaria.com)), sister courses that sit alongside the Ria Formosa Natural Park east of Faro, for incredible views and wildlife.



### BEST FOOT FORWARD

Whether you're an ambitious hiker or you prefer a gentle stroll, the **Rota Vicentina** ([rotavicentina.com](http://rotavicentina.com)) takes in some of the most dramatic vistas around. The southernmost section, from Vila do Bispo to Cabo de Sao Vicente, is 14km long and includes the incredible Torre de Aspa.



### GO UNDERGROUND

Want to try caving? There are more than 100 in **Cerro da Cabeça** alone. Whether you're a first-timer or a seasoned pro, it's best to explore with local experts, so visit the Centro de Estudos Subterrâneos in Lagos to plan your trip.

