

SILVES CASTLE

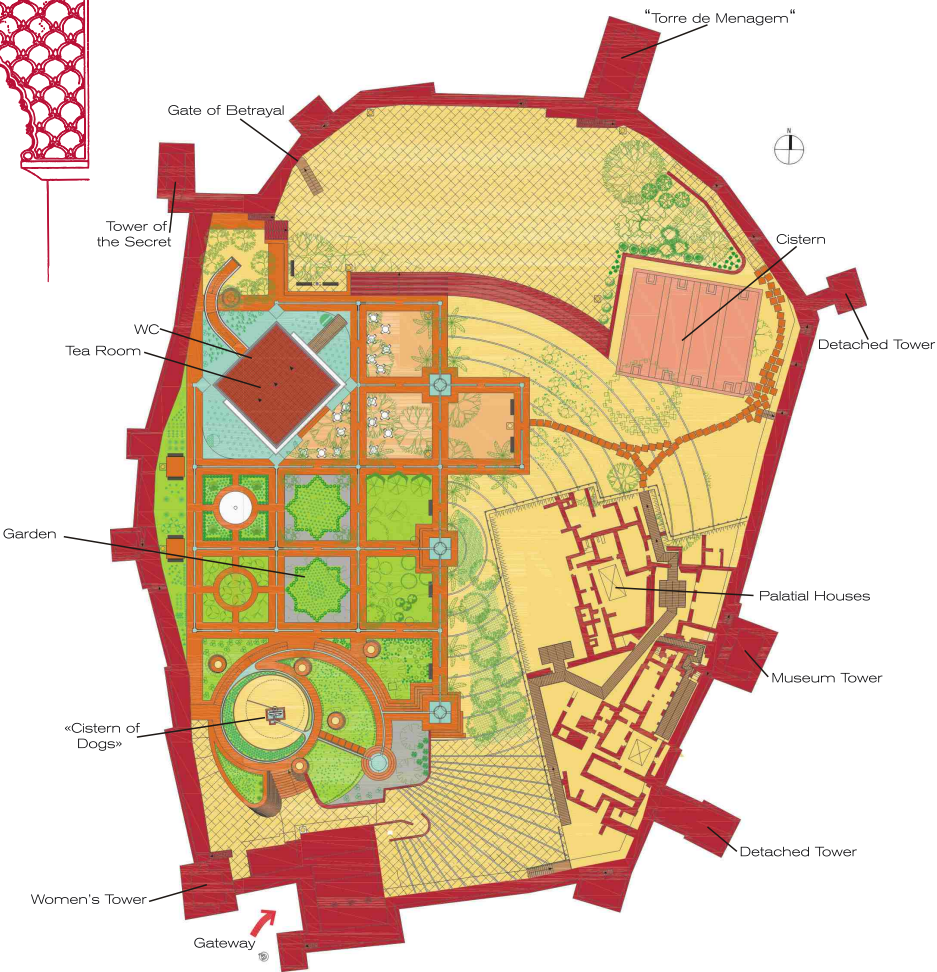
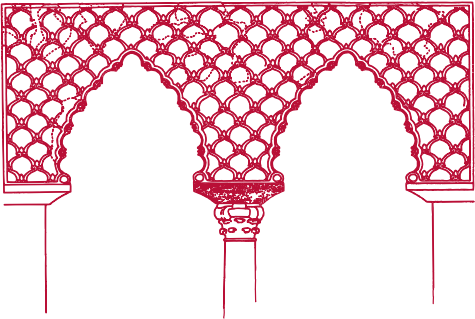
The first reference to the Castle appears in the 10th century with the historian and geographer al-Razi, who refers to Silves as having a castle and being the best town in the Algarve. The layout of Silves Castle at that time must have been different to what we see today. Nowadays, the Castle has ten towers, but only the square one to the left of the entrance displays the characteristics of the earliest period. The remaining towers would have been built during later alterations; and at least the second of the albarrã or detached towers (which are linked by an arch to the walls) on the eastern side, may well have been built during the Christian period.

The polygonal wall is adapted to the topography of the site and encloses an area of some 12,000m²; it is a robust wall made of taipa (mud mixed with lime and stones) clad in red sandstone from the region. The walls are flanked by eight of the above towers and in the eastern sector by two detached towers. Entry to the inside is gained through a double gateway with an atrium, flanked by two towers for protection. On the northern side, another gate can be seen in the wall which allows direct access to the outside, commonly known as the “Gate of Betrayal”. The whole defensive system is linked to the walls of the medina by two of the towers mentioned already, one in the northwest and the second in the southeast.

This was the residence of the governors, of their military contingents and administrative staff. The remains of palatial residences which can be seen on the inside provide the physical evidence of this.

As in other castles, it was crucial to have a large cistern and grain stores in order to be able to withstand restrictions during periods of siege.

Classified as a National Monument in 1910, the Castle underwent a programme of restoration work in the 1940s, carried out by the Directorate-General of National Monuments, at which time the walls were consolidated, some stretches were demolished and rebuilt, including a large tower which was on the verge of collapsing. The **torre de menagem** (keep) was rebuilt and the battlements were re-established, with the walkway being provided with access stairways. A recent programme upgrading the inside of the castle as part of the “Polis” Programme was completed in 2009.



Palatial Houses

Built of **taipa** with foundations of dressed sandstone blocks, these archaeological structures represent palatial houses located in the southeast quadrant of the castle, parallel to the wall, and they occupied an area of some 320m².

In the residential area, the walls were rendered with lime and sand mortar, and were whitewashed; in some places they had stuccowork decorated with reliefs, incisions and polychrome features. The system of construction shows parallels with other buildings erected in the Almohad period in Al-Andalus. This would have been a two-storey building with a central patio (flanked on one of the sides by a portico), from which there was access to the upper floor and which led to the different rooms: lounge, kitchen, garden and bathing complex on the southern side, and toilet facilities on the northern side.

“Cisterna dos Cães” | “Cistern of Dogs”

The “cistern of dogs” is almost completely dug into the rocky substrate; it is rectangular in section to a depth of about 15m and then is almost circular in section up to a depth of about 40m.

In 1889, among the rubble removed from the inside, the eminent Algarve archaeologist Estácio da Veiga found Roman pottery, some hammerstones and numerous alcatruz fragments, the clay pots from the apparatus used to raise water from the cistern; this was in addition to two stone axes and other stone artefacts. This leads us to hypothesise that there may have been a functioning water-wheel during the period of Muslim rule. The cuts that the eminent Algarve archaeologist made into the rock led him to conclude that this was a mine from which an unknown mineral had been extracted since the Neolithic period, an activity that would have continued throughout the Roman period, and which “the Moors used for supplying themselves with water”. Apart from such evidence, archaeology has not contributed further information; but, because it is likely that the other cistern was only built during the Almohad period – the final phase of the Muslim occupation – this cistern was probably responsible for supplying water to the people resident in the castle until that time.

Popular tradition has it that from the inside you could get to the Rio Arade, and from there to Estômbar through underground passages, something that has never been confirmed.

Its unusual name appears to be linked to the fact that stray dogs in the city were thrown into it in the middle of the last century.





OPEN DAILY
(except Christmas Day and New Year's Day)

TIMETABLE
Winter 9:00 am to 5:30 pm
(last entrance 5:00 pm)
Summer 9:00 am to 7:00 pm

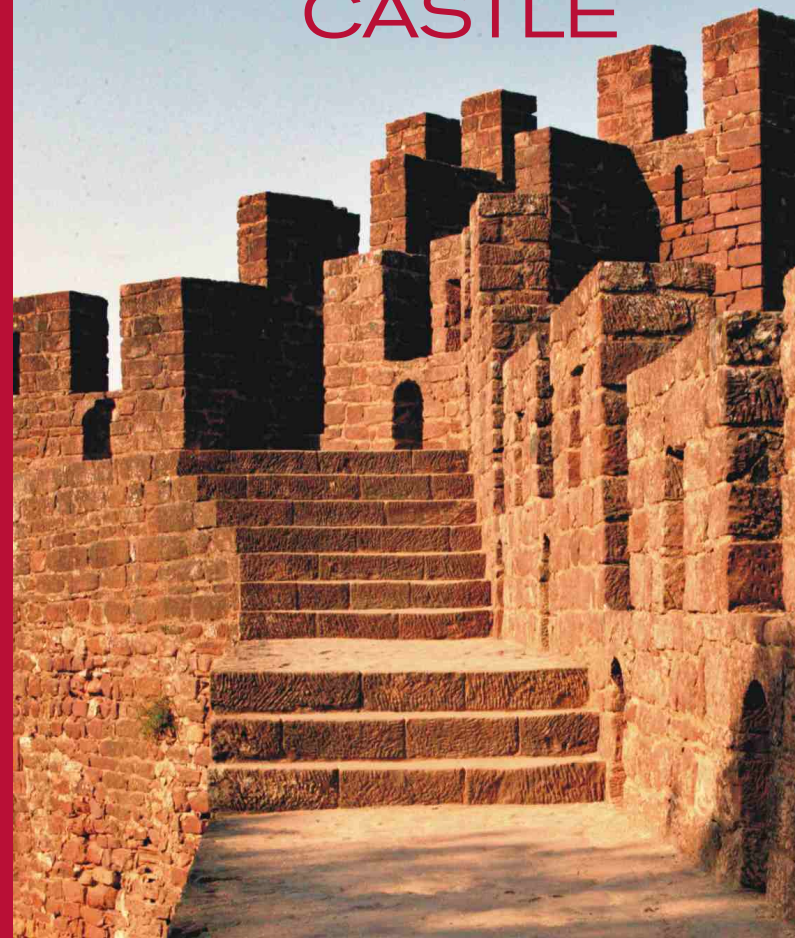
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Latitude: 37°11'26.78"N
Longitude: 8°26'16.89"W



SILVES CASTLE



The Aljibe

The cisterns were a key part of the castle infrastructure as they made it possible to continue supplying people with water during periods of siege.

The great aljibe (cistern) of Silves Castle, which supplied the city with water until the 1990s, is thought to date from the Almohad period and was probably built after the city was taken by the Christians in 1189. Given that it has an estimated capacity of 1,300,000 litres, which means it can supply approximately 1,200 people for almost a year, if it had existed during the forty day siege, Muslim power would not have collapsed because of thirst. This tank is excavated from the rocky substrate and access to the inside is gained down a stairway on the eastern side. Approximately 20m in length, 16m in width and 7m high, it is covered at what is nowadays ground level by four barrel vaults seated on twelve columns, of which six are positioned against the walls.

The cistern is linked to the famous "Legend of the Enchanted Moorish Maiden", which tells of a Moorish maiden appearing at midnight on the nights of S. João (St John), sailing over its water in a silver boat with golden oars and singing songs of her people, as she waits for a prince who would say the magic words to end her enchantment.

