

MANCA 2017

CULATRA: MAGICAL FISHERS' ISLAND AND LAGOON ON THE ALGARVE SAILING ROUTE

Culatra Island is a small traditional fishing village formed by sand dunes it protect the entrances to Faro and Olhao both a few miles upstream on the extensive tidal estuaries. It is a wonderful place to anchor and enjoy the great sunrises and sunsets, the swimming and the great local food in the cafes.

The slow pace of the small island, (about 6km long by 2-3km wide) is a major attraction as are the absence of roads and vehicles. The beaches and tidal lagoons offer great swimming. Fresh fish is a bonus in the handful of cafes. If you make one of the local bars on a Sunday you will see many of the local fishers enjoying multiple swigs of Sagres beers. Fresh oysters in season are a great bargain.

The first visit by Manca was tricky. You must time the entrance so that the rip is not running against a big sea and you must arrive on the end of the rising tide. The channel is marked but you must be careful. About a half mile from the little marina (too shallow for Manca) we found a 5 metre hole which gave us about 8.5 metres a full tide. There seemed to be more weed than mud but we did hold well during some stiff breezes.

The lagoon is wide open to the winds, with no geographical protection. So I would not like it there in bad weather. I do hear stories of yachts that anchor there for months and some year round. I see some yachts that are clearly live-a-board. Bilge boats enjoy the sand flats. With tide book at hand I shall always return to this wonderful island retreat on the beautiful Algarve cruising grounds.



The drying sands and tidal pools make an easy place for the bilge keel yachts to rest and anchor. The 3-4 metre tidal range brings rich life of fish and shell fish. A couple of sailors have climbed down from their yacht to dig for clams.

A pair of white storks looking for lunch in the tidal lagoon





Fisher with a scoop net and stork behind.

Sunrise looking to the East: of course!
Anchor lights still shining in the golden glow.



Culatra fisher returns with shellfish from the lagoon. There are also oyster farms in the lagoon.

The wonderful summer life on Culatra. Tourists return via the Olhao ferry; an islander returns with shopping cart from Olhao. There are no roads or cars. There are just a few tractors to deliver the heavy stuff.



Culatra Island has about 300 homes. Some have made a big effort to grow flowers in the sand dunes. The anchor, of course, is a great artifact from ancient sailing days.

The lagoon is wide and shallow, there are a few spots deep enough for Manca at low tide. Here she is viewed from Ilha de Barreta. Culatra is just visible on the right. The sand dunes in the foreground are part of a nature reserve and a rookery for gulls and sea birds.





An aerial photo copied from the walls of one of the great little pubs on the island. Not much has changed. The village has not sprawled at all. The hamlet is situated on the lee side of the Atlantic Ocean so the harbour is safe from East, South and West storms. North storms would only produce small waves across the lagoon.

The Culatra Community Centre. It is one of the newest buildings and you can see they take great pride and care of the facility.



The island is a nature reserve with many small plants and flowers living in the salty sandy lagoons and sand dunes. The locals have been careful to protect the flora. The old building in the distance, I was told, was a "hospital". But judging by the size my guess is that it was quarantine for ships arriving at Portugal.

The plants in the middle will be partly covered when the high tide returns.



On the south side of Culatra you can enjoy a beautiful, soft, creamy beach. The Cabo de Santa Maria 49 meters Lighthouse marks the entrance to two channels to: Faro and Olhao.

The Atlantic beach is very safe for swimming with shallow ponds and warm sea. If the wind is from south or east the surf is dangerous.





The islanders take great care of the beaches. What a great idea. I would love to see this on all beaches.

Beautiful tidal streams from the lagoon.



Aloe Vera plant bent to the wind over the village church.

Oyster farmers in the lagoon.



Manca on anchor in the lagoon with Olhao. It is a very busy fishing port. You can see the blue fish boat going up the canal. Also in mid distance a handful of clam diggers.

The little harbour at Ponte Cais is very busy with small fish boats. Many fishers still use the traditional method of just pulling up to the beach. The outer dock is cluttered, in the summer with dozens of rubber duckies from the 80+ yachts anchored out





One of the many trawlers operating from Olhao

The lagoon is perfect for the cats with shallow draft. With Manca, we must be very careful to arrive at high tide and find a deep hole.



Sun rise on a calm morning.

Ricardo tends his nets in the lagoon. The two new Hondas suggest he is doing OK. They get a fair price and the tourists get well fed. You can get a grilled whole golden bream for about 11 Euros at the local cafes and pubs on the island.



It is a lovely walk over the sand dunes from the Culatra village to the Atlantic beach. It is good to see the dunes protected by the board walk; which also makes for easy going.

The shoals and lagoon streams at low tide. When the water returns it makes very warm water for swimming.





Tractor driver exudes the slow pace of island life. There is no hurry-up here!

Heavy stuff is delivered to the island by boat and then off-loaded to the few tractors helping the islanders.



A traditional work boat now takes tourist from Olhao to the Culatra dock. The lanteen rig reminds me of my felucca rides on the Nile in Egypt.

The sunsets on the lagoon with Faro in the distance. This July there had been extensive wild fires to the north.



Some of the tractors have taken up retirement as have many of the locals.

Many of the fishers still use the traditional practice of beaching their boats and offloading the catch.

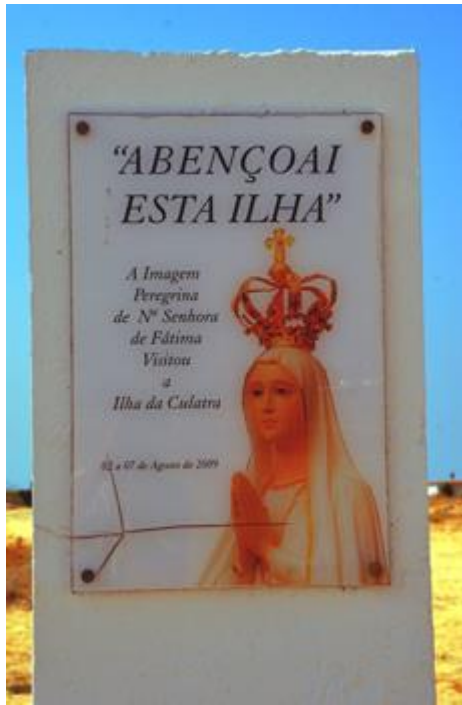




Many of these are local families from Faro and Olhao who come to enjoy the magical island.

A traditional small fish boat; venerated beside the Culatra Chapel.





A plaque honors a visit by Senhora de Fatima in 2009. I am sure she would have blessed the fishers and their fleet.