



# CASTLE OF MARVÃO

Monumento Nacional



## Map and Guide



Although there may have been previous occupations, the history of Marvão as we know it today, commenced at the end of the ninth century with Ibn Maruán, who during his rebellion against the Emirate of Córdoba took refuge in this area. Taking full advantage of the exceptional features of the location,

he commenced the construction of a castle, which has continued to be developed and modified throughout the subsequent 1000 years.

Marvão was an important military fort during the Reconquista. After being taken from the Muslims by King Dom Afonso Henriques it became part of the new kingdom of Portugal in the second half of the twelfth century. Marvão continued to be an important strategic location. It became an essential stronghold for border control and as a settlement, receiving its first charter from King Dom Sancho II, in 1226.



After the Christian Reconquista, Marvão continued to be important. Mainly as protection against the constant threat of invasion from Spain. To ensure the protection of the country and its people, in the early fourteenth century King Dom Dinis ordered the construction of a fortification around the village and further reinforcements to his castle.

The castle of Marvão played an important military role in several conflicts including: The War of Restoration (1640-1668), The War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1715), The Fantastic War (1762-1763), The War of the Oranges (1801), The Peninsular Wars/ French Invasions (1807-1811), The Civil War (1832-1834) and after the Rebellion of Maria da Fonte and Patuleia (1846-1847).

[Historical synthesis]



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## Welcome to the castle of Marvão!

Begin your visit entering the **cistern**, next to the main entrance of the Castle **1**. This is one of the largest cisterns within Portuguese castles. It has a height of 10 meters and is 46 meters long. This structure was built to gather sufficient rain water to last 6 months. Essential if the village suffered a long siege, as there was no other natural water source on the peak of the mountain, almost 900m above sea level.



Return to the entrance of the cistern, and continue along the main path, walk through the second entrance of the first enclosure. Turn right and in front of the imposing flag tower, you can see another entrance to the cistern. On the right go through the entrance of the wall, and you will find a yard, “**the ball game**” **2**, which covers the cistern and was formerly a place of amusement and recreation.

Be sure to climb the wall and observe the village from there.

Back on the main path, enter the first enclosure of the castle **3**, which includes the oldest structures, built before the fourteenth century. Here you can see several interesting constructions. The **Guard House** on your left, and the **oven** on your right, both now have new functions.

Walk through the courtyard, the old “**Albacar**” **4** or **parade ground**, and enjoy the magnificent view while you walk. Climb the walls and walk along the castle ramparts, climb the towers (the **flag tower** **5** is a must), and imagine that this castle and the security of an entire country depends on its watchful eye over the horizon!



Follow the main path towards the next enclosure dominated by the majestic castle keep. Notice how the entrance forms an “elbow” shape. Its purpose was to win time and confuse attackers. When you pass through the second door, you will enter a more sheltered enclosure, surrounded by high walls and includes the **powder magazines** **6** used for storing explosives and armoury.

Proceed through a narrow passageway between the buildings and pass through the old **Traitor's Gate** of the castle **7**. Here you will find an area of fortifications, built after the seventeenth century, which permitted the use and maneuver of heavier artillery such as cannons. From this position on the right you will have a splendid view over part of the village, and also of Spain (the closest town is Valencia de Alcántara, further is Cáceres, also Alburquerque among other places). Further into Portugal you can see the Estrela Mountain “Serra da Estrela” (notice Castelo Branco in the same direction) and the Lousã Mountain “Serra da Lousã”. The view from the left fortification is dominated by the São Mamede Mountain “Serra de São Mamede” and the valleys of Aramenha and Escusa, which extends to Castelo de Vide. Between these two fortifications there is another Traitor's Gate, designed to enable castle evacuation in the case of invasion. However, given its location this fortress was almost impenetrable!

Return to the main courtyard, and you can access the **Keep** **8** utilising the metal steps adjacent to the wall. This is the highest tower of the castle and also the most impenetrable. It was probably rebuilt by the Christians after the *Reconquista*. It has only one room, no windows, and narrow vertical loopholes (arrowslits). The entrance to the tower is made via a wooden bridge, which could be raised in order to isolate the tower to better defend it. The climb is hard and steep but at the top, you get a fantastic panoramic view. José Saramago said in his book “Journey to Portugal”, “from Marvão one can see the World”. So it is worth the climb. Visit!

