

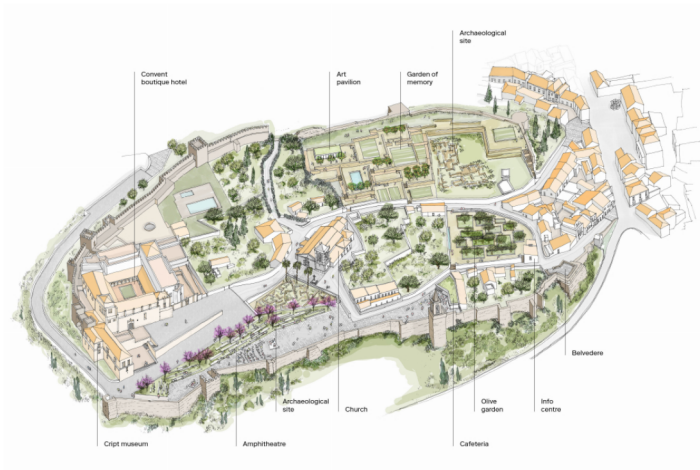
OPEN-AIR MUSEUM OF THE ALCÁCER CASTLE
ALCÁCER DO SAL, PORTUGAL
2010

The Castle of Alcacer do Sal is an amazing archaeological site that encapsulates the small city's 5000 years of history, above and below its soil. PROMONTORIO won the public competition for the renovation and preservation of the castle site and its historical surroundings.

The key feature is the "Garden of Memory": a pedagogic space that illustrates visitors the different periods and civilizations in the history of the fortress (e.g. Celts, Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs and Christians). Built in rammed earth, with low walls of pounded "Taipa" in order to have the shallowest foundation, this walled garden is conceived in the Mediterranean tradition of the hortus conclusus, creating cascading terraces with different trees (e.g. olive, cypress, orange, lemon, mandarin and palm trees), aromatic flowers and shrubs (e.g. lavender, rosemary, lavender, jasmine, sandalwood, rose, citronella and pennyroyal).

The toponymy of the various courts is evocative of various occupants of the castle, from the Phoenician Keition and the Celtic Bevipo, to the Roman Salatia, the Arab Khalifs and Taifas, passing on to the Christianity by the Order of Saint James (Santiago). In these terraces, the representation of each period is made by the use of different materials, colours, patterns and textures in walls and pavements, as well as in the selection of the predominant botanic species in each civilization. In addition, large-scale archaeological findings (mostly Roman sculpture and stone work) will be exhibited in specific locations. Finally, a small wooden pavilion for temporary exhibitions crowns the whole site at the end of the pathway.

The adjacent "Garden of Olives", follows the tradition of Islamic Riyadh: the interior garden (or al-Munya) is a place that invites contemplation and meditation, involved by a sensorial combination of the scents of flowers and herbs enraptured by the sound of water in fountains and ponds with aquatic plants. This garden is mainly constituted by an exceptionally dense and centenary olive grove. A set of rectangular plots, with small paths between them, made of solid clay brick curbs, reorder this grove, in an atmosphere of darkness and silence. Bounded all round by a thick and whitewashed wall this garden reinforces the Mudejar tradition of intimate exterior spaces. Crowning the south wall a teahouse and an amphitheatre provides the setting for a belvedere of the city.



Location: Alcácer do Sal (Alentejo), Portugal

Developer: Municipality of Alcácer

Programme: Renovation and preservation of the historical surroundings of the castle, including archaeological garden, exhibition centre, patio-garden, multimedia amphitheatre, information office, restaurant and café

Site area: 23,500 sq. m

Construction cost: EUR 2,2M

Project status: 2010 (public competition, 1st-prize)