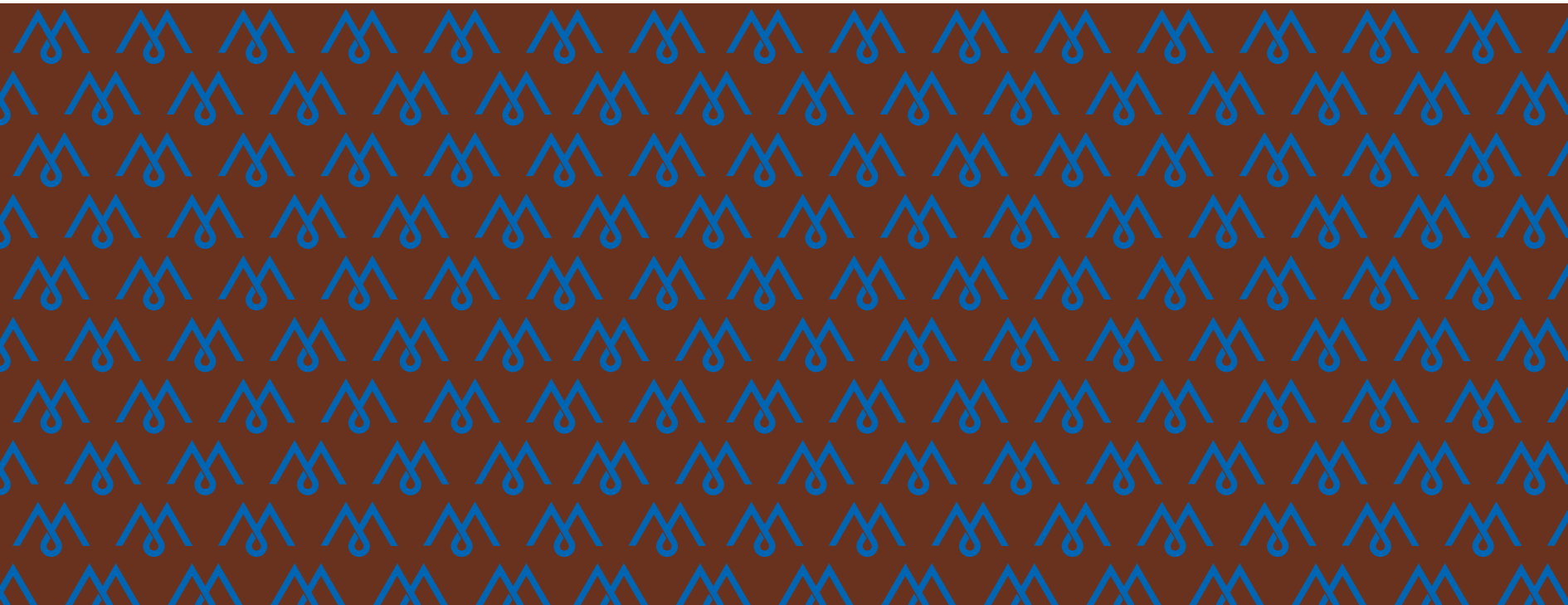




THE  EDITERRANEAN DIET

A SHARED CIVILIZATION HERITAGE



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## AN ANCIENT CULTURAL HERITAGE



The Mediterranean is more than an inland sea connecting three continents - it is the cradle of civilizations that have influenced the history of mankind over the last millennia.

The Mediterranean is a way of seeing, thinking and acting, a model of community life.

An interdependent cultural model shaped Mediterranean societies; transformed natural landscapes in farmed land, vineyards and olive groves, orchards and fig trees; developed new technologies for producing, processing and transporting; fostered trade and navigation;

founded towns and cities, creating new forms of social and political organisation; built sacred spaces and erected the three great monotheistic religions.

New forms of community life structured mental and social systems, giving rise to symbolic, ritualistic and artistic expressions marked by astral, biological and agricultural cycles that are still very present in popular festivities throughout the Mediterranean cultural space.



Mediterranean people attributed sacred, congregating values to certain foods, such as cereals and bread (the term companion comes from the Latin *cum panis*), oil and wine, among others. These elements are present in ritual practices, such as the use of bread and wine in the Eucharist or of olive oil as a source of light and heat, and as an ointment in baptism, confirmation and extreme unction ceremonies. The Iberian Peninsula, located between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, was the site of a confluence of civilizations that changed history.



Mediterranean elements are present in basic features of climate, geography, economy, culture and everyday life of the Portuguese people. Portugal went through processes of assimilation and acculturation, with integration and exclusion, such as the Romanization, the Arabization and the Christianization, which over the past eight centuries established the profile and specific features of a multifaceted and globalizing Portuguese culture.

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"PEOPLE ATTRIBUTED SACRED,  
CONGREGATING VALUES  
TO CERTAIN FOODS"  
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Differences are clear between North and South (taking the Mondego River as a reference), in terms of land morphology and climate, farming systems and division of property, as well as of the contrast between Douro's terraced vineyards and Alentejo's oak plantations, between granite houses in the North and clay walls in Alentejo and Algarve. They are also evident in linguistic expressions and ways of speaking, in festivities and other collective celebrations, in oral traditions and processions, and also in the development of specific cooking methods

where knowledge passed on from generation to generation was enriched with knowledge and products acquired through trading during the Portuguese discoveries. An extensive coastline with several port and estuarine cities and fishing communities in permanent contact with the ocean brought to the Portuguese table a huge variety of seafood. It also gave rise to a multitude of patron saints, nautical festivities, blessing of the nets and sacred baths, maritime promises and *ex-votos*.

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The diversity and richness of Portuguese cuisine, combining subsistence foods of peasants and fishermen, monastic and aristocratic traditions, and mixing elements from other geographical origins, are revealed around the table by bringing together family and friends. Within each community, the Mediterranean diet is promoted by associations, fraternities, festival committees and other local organisations.

There are numerous examples of relationship and similarity to other Mediterranean cooking traditions, such as the consistent presence of soups, stews and casseroles, bread, salads, seasoning with herbs, dried fruit and nuts and wine with meals.

The persistence of community cultures implies the recognition and preservation of the specificities of the Portuguese Mediterranean Diet, a decisive factor for the customised presence of a centuries-old nation in an increasingly competitive, globalised and homogenising world.

“THE DIVERSITY AND RICHNESS  
OF PORTUGUESE CUISINE  
BRINGS TOGETHER FAMILY  
AND FRIENDS”





## THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET PATTERN AND HUMAN HEALTH



The Mediterranean diet pattern, which for convenience sake is designated by Mediterranean Diet, has been extensively studied over the past 50 years. Scientists have monitored populations with higher consumption of crop products (namely vegetables, fruit, quality bread and unrefined cereals, legumes, dried fruit and nuts, and olive oil) and analysed their health status.

The results of many studies suggest that this daily diet pattern is associated with overall increased longevity and the protection against diseases such as cancer, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, obesity and neurodegenerative diseases like Parkinson's disease or Alzheimer's. The Mediterranean Diet is therefore considered one of the healthiest in the world, as shown by the fact that Southern Europeans, including the Portuguese, have the lowest rate of heart disease mortality.

Its extraordinary value was first highlighted by the American expert in human nutrition, Ancel Keys, who in a study conducted in several countries noted a close relationship between fat consumption and the incidence of coronary heart disease: the risk of contracting the disease increased with the consumption of fat. The exception was the people of the Mediterranean basin who, despite a high intake of fat, suffered from relatively few heart attacks. This exception was due to the fact that the type of fat consumed in the Mediterranean is mostly unsaturated fat (olive oil).





“BLEND TOGETHER GOOD HEALTH  
AND GREAT TASTE AT TABLE”

The exact mechanisms leading to greater longevity and protection against disease by people who follow the Mediterranean diet are still unknown. But we do know that foods, and more specifically fruits and vegetables, contain dozens of chemicals not yet well-studied, but with the potential ability to protect human cells against external aggressions, namely oxidation. Moreover, these nutrients interact with each other, thus enhancing their protective role – it is quite different to eat soup at the beginning of a meal (the good Mediterranean way) or between meals, for instance.



Scientific research continues and soon it should be able to confirm the exact mechanisms that lead to these foods conferring protection against disease. Fortunately, the Portuguese food tradition already integrates many of these products, including vegetables, olive oil, beans, chick peas and herbs, in soups, casseroles, stews and chowders, and this facilitates their use in our daily life. This way we are able to blend together good health and great taste at table.

It is clear that some of the benefits attributed to this diet are also due to other factors, namely cultural features, such as more reduced use of the car and more people walking on a daily basis, which implies greater physical activity, as well as the more relaxed and affective social atmosphere that characterises the life of Mediterranean peoples. Consequently, rather than talking about Mediterranean diet, we should talk instead of Mediterranean culture.







## A FOOD LANDSCAPE

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Although it does not have direct borders with the Mediterranean, Portugal is “Mediterranean by nature, Atlantic by location”, in the words of Pequito Rebelo (A Terra Portuguesa – The Portuguese Land). This is quite evident in its mild climate - hot and dry in summer, rainy and cold in winter. This Mediterranean nature, together with its Atlantic location is at the root of the Portuguese diet, mainly characterised by the consumption of Mediterranean products (wheat, wine, olive oil, vegetables and legumes) supplemented with seafood.

The Discoveries enriched our agricultural heritage with a range of products from overseas (i.e. tomatoes, peppers, potatoes, cucumber, watermelon and beans), which became staple foods from the north to the south of the country. Thus, the very significant area occupied with Mediterranean crops should not be a surprise: it accounts for over 40% of the total Utilized Agricultural Area (UAA) in Portugal, the remaining area consisting mainly of permanent grassland.

A brief analysis of foreign agri-food and fisheries trade reveals that:  
-Mediterranean products represent 36% of the sector imports, especially fish and shellfish (15.4%), cereals (9.4%) and fruits (5.4%); 41% of the sector exports, especially wine (13.6%), fruits (6%) and olive oil (4.1%). These indicators show a clear predominance of Mediterranean products in the sector economy, in land use, in foreign trade for agri-food products and, consequently, in the diet.



## A GASTRONOMIC EXPERIENCE

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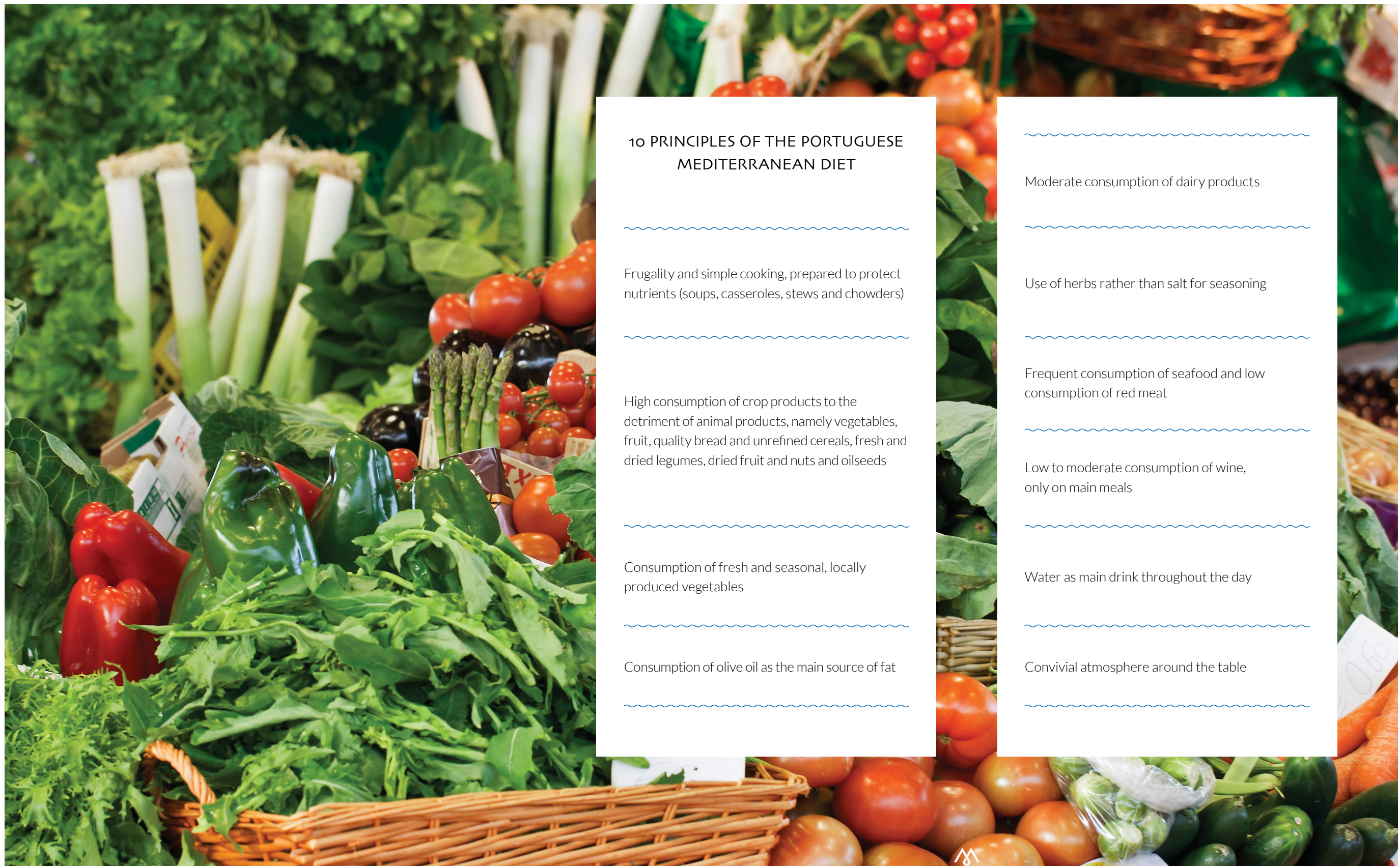
We often hear the tourists who visit us appreciate our hospitality, our relaxed way of living, our climate, landscapes, gastronomy and wines. They seem moved when talking about all this as if they had been touched by their stay in Portugal. They praise a people and its way of life and, without knowing it, they are commending the Portuguese Mediterranean Diet. Climate and landscape are the cradle of vegetables, fruits and cereals, olives and grapes. Traditions and practices are passed on from generation to generation, preserving flavours and aromas, so that a great variety

of bread, olive oil and wine, soups, casseroles, stews and chowders may be savoured at Portugal's table. They sublimate aromas and herbs, producing simple delicacies that truly reveal the soul of a people. Portuguese cuisine is not a diet, it is a way of life that invites people to get together at table to enjoy the open air, to take time off, to appreciate fresh water. Portuguese cooking is local, close to the people. That is the reason why similar recipes have subtle differences.

And today, these practices have new players. In any small restaurant of any village, town or big city, chefs are going back to their origins, presenting ancient flavours with new looks and scents, while valuing each ingredient with unprecedented wisdom. The experience is completed with quality service, open arms and a wide smile.

And so, that is the Portuguese Mediterranean Diet, the well-being diet!





10 PRINCIPLES OF THE PORTUGUESE  
MEDITERRANEAN DIET

Frugality and simple cooking, prepared to protect nutrients (soups, casseroles, stews and chowders)

High consumption of crop products to the detriment of animal products, namely vegetables, fruit, quality bread and unrefined cereals, fresh and dried legumes, dried fruit and nuts and oilseeds

Consumption of fresh and seasonal, locally produced vegetables

Consumption of olive oil as the main source of fat

Moderate consumption of dairy products

Use of herbs rather than salt for seasoning

Frequent consumption of seafood and low consumption of red meat

Low to moderate consumption of wine, only on main meals

Water as main drink throughout the day

Convivial atmosphere around the table

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This booklet was planned and designed by the national committee responsible for the nomination of the Mediterranean Diet for UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, which includes: the Cabinet of the Minister of Agriculture and Sea, the National Institute of Agricultural and Veterinary Research (INIAV - Coordinator), the Office of Planning and Policy of the Ministry of Agriculture and Sea (GPP), the Regional Coordination and Development Committee of the Algarve (CCDR-A), the Regional Directorate of Agriculture and Fisheries of the Algarve (DRAP-A), the Directorate General of Health, the Directorate General of Cultural Heritage, the Turismo de Portugal (Tourism of Portugal), the National Commission for UNESCO, the Municipality of Tavira, the Institute for the Study of Traditional Literature (Universidade Nova de Lisboa), the Portuguese Cardiology Foundation, the Nutrition Association (Ordem dos Nutricionistas), the "Women in Red" Movement and Weber Shandwick|Documentos e Eventos.

Tavira is the flagship community that represents Portugal in the nomination procedure.

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