

Parque natural de la Serra da Estrela



The Serra da Estrela Natural Park is the largest protected area in Portugal, located in the central mountainous massif, in a high plateau that inclines towards the North-East, cut across by rivers and streams that have their source here such as the Mondego and Zêzere.

The landscape is marked by rocky outcrops, boulders and crags, several of which resemble human forms that have given rise to popular names such as "head of the old woman " and the "Pitchers" (fat, thin and flat), that may be admired as visitors hike along the many existing pedestrian trails.

Given that this is the highest peak in mainland Portugal, it is also one of the zones with the highest levels of precipitation, with abundant snow in the winter, enabling winter sports to be practised.

The "ice crystal" was the symbol chosen by the Natural Park, in allusion to its climactic characteristics and the glacial origin of this mountain range, as can be seen in the valleys of Zêzere and Unhais, large gaping holes in the mountain side and around 25 natural lagoons.

Extensive flocks of sheep can be found here in the pasture land, tended by the Serra da Estrela dogs - a breed of stocky dogs that are highly resistant to low temperatures. Sheep's milk is used to produce the region's most characteristic product -- the renowned Queijo da Serra cheese, that is produced on an artisanal basis following ancestral techniques that use cardosins as a curdling agent. Make sure you try some of this yellow buttery cheese, between two slices of regional bread. If you want to take some with you, you'll find it on sale at any time of the year, although the most varied offer is in the market fairs held in various parts of the region in the months of February and March.

Declared

Category: Natural Park

Area: 88 ha.

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