Dolphin-watching Tourism in the South of Portugal

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My summer placement at the University of York took me to Portugal. I was located in the Algarve region in Albufeira. I was based with AIMM Portugal, an organisation composed of researchers with various interests with the goal to provide high-quality marine data not only for Portugal, but globally. My area of interest lies with cetaceans and this research organisation had a pre-existing arrangement with three tour companies, Algarexperience, Dreamwave and Dolphin’s driven. AIMM researchers are able to go on their tour trips to collect data when paying tourists are not present, and in return we provide information for tourists where requested and generally assist with the tours where required. These companies conduct tours which typically last about 2 hours, the first hour dedicated to Albufeira’s amazing, unique coastline and the second hour spent looking for and – hopefully – viewing dolphins. The two most frequently sighted species are bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) and the common short-beaked dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*). Harbour porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) are also sometimes sighted, although these are much shyer of boats and typically are only sighted briefly. There were some really amazing sightings during my research period, and my final sighting included a pod of about 1000 common dolphins!
My project was looking at the impact of the high-intensity dolphin-watching tourism in this region on bottlenose dolphins (as they were by far the most frequently sighted during my research period) and it showed clearly that the levels of tourism in Algarve waters is having a deleterious effect on the bottlenose dolphin population, and likely other cetacean species.

Whilst the research was intense, on days off it is possible to travel in the area – I would highly recommend travelling to the beautiful Monchique area if possible. The other researchers were extremely warm and friendly, and I can honestly say I had an amazing time and made some great friends.