

## **Interview with Filipa Vargues @People of Faro**

*Nature is where Filipa feels best, and her professional career follows this direction as well. She is a science communicator at Centro Ciência Viva do Algarve, where she carries out field research, teaching activities, and sustainability actions.*

### **1. For those who don't know you, how would you define yourself? Who is Filipa?**

Filipa is a 31-year-old girl that lives in the countryside of the city (Estoi, Arjona), in the middle of nature, but who also loves the city itself. I like to spend time with my beloved family and my pets. I like to live, to smile, to enjoy life.

### **2. What were you dreaming of becoming when you were a kid?**

I wanted to be a veterinary. I cared about terrestrial animals, but then I also became interested in the sea animals. Then, when choosing the university degree, I discovered the Marine Sciences, and I said to myself – this is the one for me, because I like Ria Formosa, the sea, and with Marine Sciences I was able to study other parts of the marine life.

### **3. Can you tell us more about your field of study and the activities you carry out?**

I started at university, with my first degree, and that's when I discovered the scientific side of investigation. I've done some work in the laboratory. Normally, I worked in the laboratory or on the field. For example, I used to go in the middle of Ria Formosa to collect samples from the sediments or water. In time, I realized I like more to be out there, on the field, rather than in the laboratory.

I completed a Master's in Marine and Coastal Systems, which is the continuation of my Bachelor's. Then, I started to help other researchers and teachers in their work, in laboratory, in sample collecting or on the boats. I was a skipper for some time. In 2017, I also completed a Master's with a thesis on water quality. I took some water samples from Ria Formosa and based on this, we were able to clean the water from Ibuprofen and

Amoxicillin. Besides, I did some volunteering at the university, mostly in the laboratory. Then, I took a year off, and after that, I started to work at Centro Ciência Viva do Algarve. I've been working there for 4 years.

I'm a Science Communicator at CCVAlg, but I do a lot of other things as well. I work directly with people, the ones that come to visit the exhibitions, aquarium, touch pool. I do guided tours and carry out activities for kids that come with their class to visit the center. What I do is to simplify science for them so that they can learn and have fun at the same time. Sometimes, I even go to the schools for that.

I also take care of our greenhouse, where we produce microalgae. There's also a plastic recycling station that we use to transform plastic into other things. Now, we're working on making pots for the plants. For example, we shred the plastic lids and mould them into other things. It's like giving a new life to plastic. Sometimes, I also help with the maintenance work for the aquariums.

A few years ago, I used to say I don't want to be a teacher, and talk to people, but that's basically what I'm doing right now. Sometimes, after working with many kids on one day, I'm very tired, but happy to pass on knowledge and feel that I've made a difference. I don't go to a class thinking that they have to listen to me and not talk to each other. At the beginning, this was my approach. Now, I don't think like that. If they want to speak, they can do it. A lot of time they actually talk about what we are doing.

#### **4. How would you describe the work that CCVAlg does?**

We pass on knowledge about science and sustainability to other people in words that they can understand. CCVAlg is a space that people can go to and see other things and understand about these topics. Most of the work that we do is related to sustainability and about how to preserve our environment. We do a lot of work around equity, inclusion, as well.

**5. What would you say it's the importance of Ria Formosa and the ocean to the work you and your colleagues are carrying out?**

We talk a lot about the Ria Formosa, especially because the center is built on the limit between the city and Ria Formosa. From there, we can see a lot of things, such as the migrating birds, the tides, the crabs, a lot of things that if we hadn't had Ria Formosa as our neighbor, it would have been much harder to explain certain things to people that come at the center.

**6. What was your greatest personal discovery since you've started to study the sea world?**

The fact that I like to do what I'm doing, and that I can make a difference and I feel really happy about it.

**7. Why should we care about sea life?**

The sea life is a very important part of our planet, no matter if it is here, in Portugal, or in other parts of the world. 50% of the oxygen that we breathe comes from the marine algae and grass. We should protect Ria Formosa in the same way that we protect our forests. We shouldn't pollute it; we are always talking about microplastics – it's the most talked topic. It's bad for the animals, but for us, humans, as well – we can have microplastic inside ourselves without being aware of it.

**8. How can we protect our environment and have a more sustainable lifestyle?**

The first thing is not to drop litter on the street, and to put it in the trash bins or recycle it. Then, we should make conscious purchases. It's always good to choose local products, because they involve less costs.

Lastly, it's important to enjoy nature, because most of the people don't pay attention to it. Maybe we pass by nature spots every day, but we don't really look at them because we think that they're always going to be there. When we go to other countries, we take pictures of everything, and often neglect what's right next to us.

Another important thing is to love yourself. When you're good with yourself, you have no reason to take your frustrations and anger out on the environment.

**9. What difference can ordinary people's actions make on the environmental issues?**

Normally, we say that one person cannot make a difference. But if you can influence other people to do the same in a positive way, you can generate a net that makes a good thing for the environment. It's about the power of example.

I have a friend who used to go with his own bag at the supermarket to buy ham and cheese and the attendant told him that he's not allowed to use other packaging than the one intended for it. Then, another time, the attendant agreed to use his plastic bag. We need baby steps. I think the best is to change one thing at a time.

Of course, the industries have more power to change things than us. Even if they change a small thing, it's more than what we, as ordinary people, can do.

**10. What is the place in Faro you are most connected to? Why?**

I like Ria Formosa a lot, but I also like the countryside, and to spend time in nature, to observe the streams, fish, turtles, tortoises. I like to feel the fresh air, to hear the birds and the trees.

**11. What is the first thing on your mind when you think about Faro?**

Nature. Ria Formosa. People. Old Town.

**12. What would be the soundtrack of your life story?**

The sound of birds and trees.