

Welcome to Portugal

“Portugal offers the most stunning locations for surfing and is only a stone’s throw away from other great European destinations so make the most of your time in a country with a surprising amount to offer!”

Portugal’s abundant seafood and stunning beaches compliment the lush vineyards and green interior perfectly to create a unique culture with an ever popular cafe and bar scene alongside historic monuments and festivals. The surfing scene in Portugal is growing more and more popular with tourists coming from all over the world, not just Europe, to discover why it is so well-liked, not just in the summer months, but also throughout the winter.

Know your History

Portugal's name derives from the Roman name Portus Cale. Cale was the name of an early settlement located at the mouth of the Douro River, which flows into the Atlantic Ocean in the north of what is now Portugal.

15th Century

During the 15th and 16th centuries, Portugal was a leading European power, ranking with England, France and Spain in terms of economic, political, and cultural influence. July 25th, 1415 marked the beginning of the Portuguese Empire, when the Portuguese Armada departed to the rich Islamic trade centre of Ceuta in North Africa. Between 1427 and 1431, most of the Azorean islands were discovered and these uninhabited islands were colonized by the Portuguese in 1445. The Portuguese ruled a vast empire with many millions of inhabitants in the Americas, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. From 1514, the Portuguese had reached China and Japan.

On August 4, 1578, while fighting in Morocco, young King Sebastian died in battle without an heir and his body was not found. His death led to a dynastic crisis. The late king's elderly granduncle, Cardinal Henry, became king. Henry I died a mere two years later on January 31st, 1580 igniting fears about its independence. Following Henry's death Spain invaded Portugal and the Spanish king became Philip I of Portugal in 1580. The Spanish and Portuguese Empires came under a single rule.

The first Spanish kings, maintained Portugal's status, and gave excellent positions to Portuguese nobles in the Spanish courts. Portugal maintained an independent law, currency and government. It was even proposed to move the Spanish capital to Lisbon. Later, Philip IV tried to make Portugal a Spanish province, and Portuguese nobles lost power. During this time the Portuguese emigrated in large numbers to Brazil and by 1709, John V prohibited emigration, since Portugal had lost a sizable fraction of its population.

Earthquake

On the 1st November 1755, disaster fell upon Portugal, when Lisbon was struck by a violent earthquake with an estimated Richter scale magnitude of 9. The city was raised to the ground by the earthquake and had subsequent tsunami and ensuing fires. Despite the catastrophe, Lisbon suffered no epidemics and within less than one year was already being rebuilt. The new downtown of Lisbon was designed to resist subsequent earthquakes. Architectural models were built for tests, and the effects of an earthquake were simulated by marching troops around the models. The buildings and big squares of the Pombaline Downtown of Lisbon still remain as one of Lisbon's tourist attractions: They represent the world's first quake-proof buildings.

19th-20th Century

In 1890 the British government made an ultimatum to Portugal delivered on 11th January 1890,

forcing the retreat of Portuguese military forces in the land between the Portuguese colonies of Mozambique and Angola (most of present-day Zimbabwe and Zambia). The area had been claimed by Portugal, but this clashed with British aspirations to create a railroad link between Cairo and Cape Town, thereby linking its colonies from the north of Africa to the very south. This diplomatic clash led to several waves of protest prompted the downfall of the Portuguese government. The 1890 British Ultimatum was considered by Portuguese historians and politics at that time, the most outrageous and infamous action of the British against her oldest ally.

In October 1910, the Portuguese Republican Party carried out a Revolution, which later turned into a dictatorship. There are many gaps in our knowledge about the political history at this time but Catholic churches were plundered, convents were attacked and on the 10th October, 5 days after inauguration of the Republic, the new government decreed that all convents, monasteries and all religious orders were to be suppressed. All religions were expelled and their goods confiscated. The Jesuits were forced to forfeit their Portuguese citizenship.

Not too long after the revolution and dictatorship began, a move was made to abolish traditional political parties and to alter the existing mode of national representation in parliament through the creation of a corporative Senate, the founding of a single-party (the National Republican Party). The state carved out an economically interventionist role for itself while, at the same time, repressing working-class movements and leftist republicans. It also attempted to restore public order and to overcome some of the rifts of the recent past, making the republic more acceptable to monarchists and Catholics.

28th May 1926 coup d'état

Political chaos, several strikes, harsh relations with the Church, and considerable economic problems aggravated by a disastrous military intervention in the First World War led to the military coup d'état of 28th May 1926. This was a military action that put an end to the unstable Portuguese First Republic and initiated the National Dictatorship, later refashioned into the Estado Novo, an authoritarian dictatorship that would last until the Carnation Revolution in 1974. The revolution started in Braga, commanded by General Manuel Gomes da Costa, and followed immediately in Porto, Lisbon, Évora, Coimbra and Santarém. The revolution triumphed when General Gomes da Costa marched on Lisbon along with 15,000 men, being acclaimed by the people of the city.

The "Carnation Revolution" of 1974, an effectively bloodless left-wing military coup, installed the "Third Republic". Broad democratic reforms were implemented. In 1975, Portugal granted independence to its Overseas Provinces in Africa leading to nearly 1 million refugees leaving the former colonies as a consequence of the resulting civil wars that ensued.

End of an Empire

With the 1975–76 independence of its colonies, the 560-year-old Portuguese Empire effectively ended. Simultaneously 15 years of war effort also came to an end; many Portuguese returned from the colonies supplementing Portugal's 9.8million population with 580,000 additional citizens in 1981. This opened new paths for the country's future just as others closed. In 1986, Portugal entered the European Economic Community and left the European Free Trade Association which had been founded by Portugal and its partners in 1960. The country joined the Euro in 1999.

Money Talks

The Financial Crisis of 2008 is still affecting the Portuguese economy severely, causing a wide range of domestic problems although a financial bailout from the European Union of €80bn will hopefully help stabilise the economy. The current GDP growth currently stands at -3%. Most of the import-export exchange with Portugal comes from within Europe, including Spain, Germany, France, Italy and the UK and the main exports include agricultural products, food products, oil products and leather. The main industries of Portugal are textiles, footwear, wine, cork, paper, porcelain and ceramics and tourism.

ATM machines are widespread in Portugal but withdrawals may have a small surplus charge although this is likely to be similar to traveller's cheque commission rates. Credit and debit cards (MasterCard and Visa) are accepted for cash withdrawal at most banks but rarely for general payments. However a credit card will come in useful in the event of an emergency. The national currency is the Euro.

Get Culture Savvy

The Portuguese participate in a huge variety of cultural activities, many revolving around folklore and musical groups. Local festivals are very popular during the summer season across the whole country. As the most popular sport, football events involving major Portuguese teams are always widely followed with great passion. There are a number of bullrings in Portugal, although the craze for bullfighting varies from region to region.

Architecture

Portugal's architecture can boast of ruins of villas and forts from the Roman occupation, as well as scores of medieval castles and some of the most advanced trends in structural design. Some of the most spectacular buildings include the Tower of the Clerics, the Baroque Library, and the Palace and Port of Ash Solar de Mateus in Vila Real.

Arts

Portugal's arts have been enriched by foreign influences, including Flemish, French and Italian and voyages discovering new countries opened up the country to Oriental inspiration. Folk dancing is a tradition that changes in form across the various regions of Portugal, and apparel was used to distinguish between the classes. Portugal has a rich folklore tradition of mythical beings preserved in literature and song.

During the summer, in the month of June, pagan festivities are dedicated to three saints known as Santos Populares and take place all over Portugal. They are possibly related to Roman or local deities from the time before Christianity spread in the region. The three saints are Saint Anthony, Saint John and Saint Peter. Common fare in these festivities is wine, and traditional bread along with sardines. During the festivities are many weddings, traditional street dances and fireworks.

Customs

The family is the foundation of social culture in Portugal, with even extended family remaining close. Loyalty to family comes above all other relationships and events. Personal greetings are quite gracious with hugs and kisses on each cheek being most appropriate. Traditional regional costumes are slowly being eradicated from every day wear but can still be seen at festivals, national holidays and family events such as weddings. Women would dress in extremely colourful dresses, with head scarves and long gold necklaces.

Sport

Football is of course the most popular sport in Portugal with the world famous F.C Porto and S.L Benfica having millions of supporters worldwide. In May 2006, the Portuguese national team was ranked 7th out of 205 countries by FIFA. Portugal is home to many world famous sporting events such as the tennis championship, the Portugal Open, and the Algarve Open (golf). Popular tourist activities in the north of the country include horse riding, cycling, walking and surfing, whilst in the south activities include kite surfing, paragliding, yoga and bird watching.

Music

Portuguese musical traditions reflect the diverse historical and cultural development with influences from outside Europe including sub-Saharan Africa and Brazil. Fado is one music genre with its

cultural origins dating back to early 19th Century Lisbon. It is a form of music characterized by mournful tunes and lyrics, often about the sea or the life of the poor. Fado is probably the oldest urban folk music in the world and represents the heart of the Portuguese soul. It is said that a Fado performance is not successful if an audience is not moved to tears. The music scene in Portugal is expanding with hip hop dance and rock becoming more popular. Regional folk music still inspires many artists today but is being updated and modernised in many cases.

Food

Each region of Portugal has its own traditional dishes, including various kinds of meat, seafood, fresh fish, dried and salted cod, and the famous Cozido à Portuguesa (a Portuguese stew). Goat is a very common source of meat in many dishes due to the ease of keeping these animals. Lisbon is famous for its café culture and even more so for its famous custard tarts which are proving extremely popular with locals and tourists alike. Portugal is known for the high quality of wine it produces and the abundance of varieties. The wide array of grapes is complimented by the differences in soil and climate to produce distinctive wines from the Northern regions to the Algarve and the Azores.

Religion

Since the 16th Century, Roman Catholicism has become the dominant religion in Portugal, though it is no longer a state religion. Most Portuguese identify themselves as Roman Catholic, and many believe in a God, though not all practice it.

Holidays

January 1st: Ano Novo, traditional end of the holiday season.

Carnaval: ancient festival declaring the end of winter, 40days prior to Easter.

Páscoa: Easter, huge family gatherings with importance focussed on the godparents.

April 25th: Freedom Day, marks the end of the dictatorial regime in 1974

May 1st: Labour Day

June 10th: Portugal Day, marks the date of the death Camões who wrote the Portuguese epic The Lusiads.

August 15th: Assumption Day

November 1st: All Saints' Day

December 25: Natal, Christmas day, similar across Europe.

Learn the Lingo

Learning the language of a foreign country will help you to settle into the culture more easily and help you to make friends and find your way around. If you know Spanish, Italian or French, you'll notice some similarities with Portuguese. For example, each tense has six different endings. Some sounds can be harder to pronounce, but generally, pronunciation mistakes won't change what you actually mean!

Here are just a few useful words you might like to try when you are out there:

English	Portuguese	English	Portuguese
Hello	Olá	0	Zero
Goodbye	Adeus	1	Um/uma
Please	Obrigado/Obrigada	2	Dois/duas
You're welcome	De nada	3	Três

Yes	Sim	4	Quarto
No	Não	5	Cinco
How are you?	Como vai?	6	Seis
Do you speak English?	Fala ingles?	7	Sete
I need help please	Preciso de ajuda, por favour	8	Oito
I'm sorry	Perdão	9	Nove
My names is...	Meu nome é...	10	Dez
I don't understand	Não compreendo	20	Vinte

Lay of the Land

Portugal is located in South-West Europe, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean, and despite its small size, has a wide variety of landforms, climatic differences and biodiversity. Portugal's long coastline of 837km has given it an "Atlantic vocation" and propelled its historic ventures of global exploration and colonization.

Northern Portugal is a mountainous, rainy region, characterized by many small farms and vineyards. This area is particularly fertile despite it's rocky appearance and is the home of the wine and olive oil production of the country.

Central Portugal, between the Rio Douro in the north and the Tagus River, including the capital city of Lisbon, is less homogeneous. The central coastal region consists of dunes and pine forests, and many residents of the area earn their livelihood from fishing. The central eastern areas, known as the Beira, consist of mainly small and medium-sized farms, with some mining and light industry.

Rolling plains in the warmer southern regions are dominated by extensive estates with large-scale agriculture and grazing, while the extreme south of Portugal, known as the Algarve is a dry region of small scale grazing, fishing towns and is home to the Portuguese cork industry.

Lisbon sits in a vast estuary on the River Tagus, which is consequently the country's longest river, has the largest drainage basin, and is the most important economically. The Tagus estuary is the best natural port on the European continent and able to handle large ocean-going vessels.

What's the Weather like?

Portugal has a warm Mediterranean climate in the south which features mild, wet winters and hot, dry summers. The northern region benefits from the Atlantic cyclones leading to more fertile land with temperatures ranging from 10°C to 21°C, while the South and East are dominated by the subtropical anticyclone that allows temperatures to rise up to 40°C during the summer. Coastal regions such as the Algarve have a maritime climate where the winters are milder compared to inland, closer to Spain, and there are highs of 27°C in the summer months with over 12hours of sunshine a day. Lisbon and the surrounding area have the usual hot summers but the winters can be a bit damp.

Biodiversity

Even though Portugal is a relatively small nation, its borders hold one national park, twelve natural parks, nine natural reserves, and seven protected landscapes. Portugal is ranked among the warmest of the European countries with annual average temperatures ranging from the mid-50s (F) in the mountainous regions, up into the mid-60s (F) in the southern low lying areas. Because of the wide range of temperatures and the large number of protected areas, the native animal life is very abundant. Species include Mongoose, Civet, Iberian Wolf and Spanish Ibex. In addition to the mammalian population, Portugal is also home to over six hundred species of birds with new species being discovered every few years. Many migratory birds also congregate in Portugal because of its close proximity to Africa.

Forests across Portugal have a very Mediterranean feel with species such as the Cork Oak, Laurel and Olive trees dominating around the Mondego River area. The Eucalyptus tree was introduced in the 1950s and is now widespread throughout the country.

Portugal is also home to the infamous Man-of-War Jellyfish who float in large swarms around the warm waters just off the coast. The sting can be very painful but rarely deadly. Another interesting aspect to the animal life native to Portugal is the island populations that have evolved into unique species after years of restricted breeding and many species of birds, reptiles, bats, insects, snails and slugs, are completely and totally unique to the nation of Portugal.

Good Books

Guidebooks:

- Portugal. St Louis et al. Lonely Planet Publications 2001. ISBN 9781741796001
- The Rough Guide to Portugal. John Fisher. Rough Guides 2010. ISBN-10 1848364342

Fiction / Travel Writing:

- Night Train to Lisbon by Pascal Mercier 2007, Atlantic Books. ISBN 0802118585
- Pereira Maintains by Antonio Tabucchi 2010, Canongate Books. ISBN-10: 1847675719
- The Book of Disquiet by Fernando Pessoa 2002, Penguin Modern Classics. ISBN-10 0141183047

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