



The Beiras

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Best Places to Stay

- » Casa Pombal Guesthouse (p306)
- » Aveiro Rossio Hostel (p321)
- » Quinta dos Três Rios (p345)
- » Quinta das Cegonhas (p335)

Best Places to Eat

- » Batel (p322)
- » O Albertino (p337)
- » O Hilário (p346)
- » Restaurante Área Benta (p353)

Why Go?

Three worlds rolled into one, the Beiras offer as much diversity as any region in Portugal.

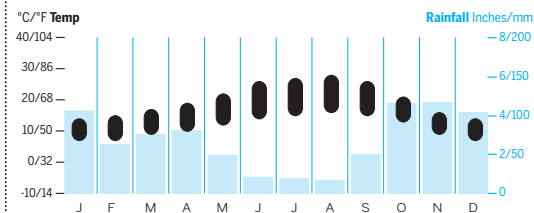
Along the Atlantic, the Beira Litoral (Coastal Beira) lures surfers and sun-seekers with scores of sandy beaches. Here, the Beiras' top two tourist destinations – the sophisticated university town of Coimbra and the brash casino-party town of Figueira da Foz – arm-wrestle for visitors' attention.

Move inland to the Beira Alta (Upper Beira) and the mood shifts entirely. Stoic stone villages cling to the slopes of Portugal's highest mountains – the Serra da Estrela – casting their gaze down at the fertile wine country of the Dão valley.

East of the mountains, in the hypnotically beautiful Beira Baixa (Lower Beira), vast expanses of olive and cork oak forest spread across a hotter, lonelier landscape. Here, surveying the borderlands from the ramparts of nearly abandoned medieval fortress-towns, you feel centuries away from the coast you just left behind.

When to Go

Coimbra



Early May

Queima das Fitas fills Coimbra's streets with students in dashing black capes.

June

Before summer crowds descend, Beiras beaches are warm enough for a swim.

July

Clear mountain air and low-season prices coalesce in the Serra da Estrela.

Coimbra

POP 101,000

The medieval capital of Portugal for over a hundred years, and site of the country's

greatest university for the past five centuries, Coimbra wears its weighty importance in Portuguese history with gritty dignity. Its historic core straggles down a hillside on the east bank of the Rio Mondego, a multicoloured collage of buildings spanning nearly a millennium, from the Moor-



Beiras Highlights

- 1 Hike alongside the glistening Rio Zêzere outside **Manteigas** (p336), past shepherds' huts and soaring peaks
- 2 Admire the art nouveau facades lining the canals of **Aveiro** (p319), then hit the streets for some of the Beiras' most animated nightlife
- 3 Switchback your way up terraced slopes to

Piódão (p324), the most picturesque of the Beiras' stone villages

- 4 Conjure up a vanished civilisation at the Roman ruins of **Conimbriga** (p311)
- 5 Sip fine Dão wine in the flowery civic gardens of **Viseu** (p342)
- 6 Savour the golden light in the cork oak forest as you climb from ancient **Idanha-**

a-Velha to the craggy cliff-top castle at **Monsanto** (p327)

- 7 Listen for the first notes of the *serenata*, a midnight fado performance staged annually by students in **Coimbra** (p303)
- 8 Catch a wave, a casino show or a few rays at the poolside bar in **Figueira da Foz** (p314)