

Welcome to Portugal

Medieval castles, cobblestone villages, captivating cities and golden beaches: the Portugal experience can be many things. History, great food and idyllic scenery are just the beginning...

Ghosts of the Past

Celts, Romans, Visigoths, Moors and Christians all left their mark on the Iberian nation. Here, you can gaze upon 20,000-year-old stone carvings in the Vila Nova de Foz Côa, watch the sunset over mysterious megaliths outside Évora or lose yourself in the elaborate corridors of Unesco World Heritage sites in Tomar, Belém, Alcobaça or Batalha. You can pack an itinerary visiting palaces set above mist-covered woodlands, craggy clifftop castles and stunningly preserved medieval town centres.

The Portuguese Table

Freshly baked bread, olives, cheese, red wine or crisp *vinho verde* (sparkling wine), *cataplana* (seafood stew), smoked meats – the Portuguese have perfected the art of cooking simple, delicious meals. Sitting down to table means experiencing the richness of Portugal's bountiful coastline and fertile countryside. Of course, you don't have to sit, you can take your piping-hot *pastel de nata* (custard tart) standing up at an 1837 patisserie in Belém, or wander through scenic vineyards sipping the velvety ports of the Douro valley. You can shop the produce-filled markets, or book a table in one of the country's top dining rooms.

Cinematic Scenery

Outside the cities, Portugal's beauty unfolds in all its startling variety. You can go hiking amid the granite peaks of Parque Nacional da Peneda-Gerês or take in the pristine scenery and historic villages of the little-explored Beiras. More than 800km of coast offers a multitude of places to soak up the splendour. Gaze out over dramatic end-of-the-world cliffs, surf stellar breaks off dune-covered beaches or laze peacefully on sandy islands fronting calm blue seas. You'll find dolphin-watching in the lush Sado estuary, boating and kayaking along the meandering Rio Guadiana and memorable walks and bike rides all across the country.

Rhythms of Portugal

Festivals pack Portugal's calendar. Drink, dance and feast your way through such all-night revelries as Lisbon's Festa de Santo António or Porto's Festa de São João. There are kick-up-your-heels country fairs in the hinterlands, and rock- and world-music fests all along the coast. Any time of year is right to hear the mournful music of fado in the Alfama, join the dance party in Bairro Alto or hit the bars in Porto, Coimbra and Lagos.



Why I Love Portugal

By Regis St Louis, Coordinating Author

I'm enamoured by the scenery, the traditions of village life and Portugal's outstanding, affordable seafood – especially *percebes* (goose barnacles) or whatever is the fresh catch of the day, grilled to perfection. I love taking in the stunning views along the coast (from the hidden beaches in Parque Natural da Arrábida to the windswept cliffs dotting the southwest shores), going for mountain treks in the Serra da Estrela (where I often bump into a shepherd or two along the way), and wandering through the pretty towns of the Minho (especially on a market day). Portugal is full of surprises, and I never tire of exploring this small but endlessly fascinating country.

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