



PORTUGAL

TOP SIGHTS, AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

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Welcome to Portugal

Medieval castles and cobblestone villages, captivating cities and golden beaches, brooding mountains and super-heated plains: the Portugal experience can be many things. A turbulent history, great seafood and idyllic scenery are just the beginning...

Celts, Romans, Visigoths, Moors and Christians all left their mark on the Iberian nation. Portugal is the sort of place where you can literally see the layers of history piled up on top of one another. A great way to experience the country is to base an itinerary on visiting Portugal's wonderfully preserved medieval town centres and hilltop castles.

Freshly baked bread, olives, cheese, red wine or crisp *vinho verde*, chargrilled fish, *cataplana* (seafood stew), smoked meats – the Portuguese have perfected the art of cooking simple, delicious meals and dining is definitely one of the top reasons you might want to visit some parts of the country. Food and drink play a big part in the nation's festival calendar, meaning you can drink, dance and feast your way through all-night revelries across the land.

Outside the cities, Portugal's beauty unfolds in all its startling variety. You can go hiking amid the pristine scenery and historic villages of the little-explored Beiras or enjoy a piece of the 800km of coast, the best beaches lining the laid-back Algarve. 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.

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Évora***Queen of the Alentejo***

One of Portugal's most beautifully preserved medieval towns, Évora (p151) is an enchanting place to spend several days delving into the Portuguese past. Within the chunky, 14th-century stone walls built to protect the town from invaders, Évora's narrow, winding lanes lead to striking architectural works: an elaborate medieval cathedral (pictured) and cloisters, Roman ruins and a picturesque town square. Historic and aesthetic virtues aside, Évora is also a lively university town, and its many attractive restaurants serve up excellent, hearty Alentejan cuisine.



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Rio Douro Valley***Breathtaking valley wine route***

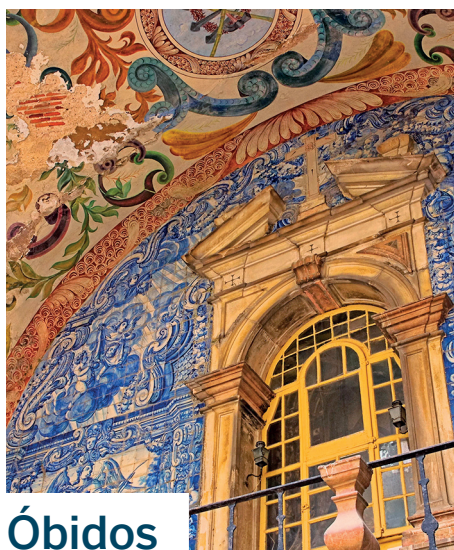
The exquisite Alto Douro wine country (p165) is the oldest demarcated wine region on earth. Its steeply terraced hills, stitched together with craggy vines that have produced luscious wines for centuries, loom either side of the Rio Douro. Whether you get here by driving the impossibly scenic back roads, or by train or boat from Porto, take the time to hike, cruise and taste. Countless vintners receive guests for tours, tastings and overnight stays, and if you find one that's still family owned, you may sample something very old and very special.



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Óbidos

An enchanting walled town

Wandering through the tangle of ancient streets of Óbidos (p229) is enchanting any time of year, but come during one of its festivals and you'll be in for a special treat. Whether attending a jousting match or climbing the castle walls at the medieval fair (pictured), or delving into the written world at Fólío – Portugal's newest international literature festival – you couldn't ask for a better backdrop.



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Plan Your Trip

Need to Know



When to Go



Warm to hot summers,
mild winters



High Season (Jul & Aug)

- Expect big crowds in the Algarve and coastal resort areas.
- Sweltering temperatures are commonplace.
- Warmer ocean temperatures.

Shoulder Season (Apr–Jun & Sep–Nov)

- Wild flowers and mild days are ideal for hikes.
- Lively festivals take place in June.
- Crowds and prices are average.

Low Season (Dec–Mar)

- Shorter, rainier days with freezing temperatures at higher elevations.
- Lower prices, fewer crowds.
- Frigid ocean temperatures.

Currency

Euro (€)

Language

Portuguese

Visas

Generally not required for stays of up to 90 days; some nationalities will need a Schengen visa.

Money

ATMs widely available, except in the smallest villages. Credit cards accepted in mid-range and high-end establishments.

Mobile Phones

Local SIM cards can be used in unlocked European, Australian and quad-band US mobiles.

Time

Portugal, like Britain, is on GMT/UTC in winter and GMT/UTC plus one hour in summer. This puts it an hour earlier than Spain year-round. Clocks are set forward by an hour on the last Sunday in March and back on the last Sunday in October.