

# Understand Portugal

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That nostalgic, difficult-to-translate melancholy has shaped Portuguese film, music and literature, and even the national identity, in profound ways.

# Portugal Today

The Portuguese have been through some tough times. Cuts to pensions and social programs, privatisation of government industries – all were part of the austerity package imposed by a conservative government and the EU powers holding the purse strings. Change, however, is on the horizon, as a new left-wing government takes the reins. Economic challenges aside, one of Portugal's biggest slow-brewing crises is its shrinking population. On a sunnier note, Portugal has become an EU leader in the realm of renewable energy.

## Best on Film

**A Lisbon Story** (1994) Wim Wenders' love letter to Lisbon.

**Letters from Fontainhas** (1997–2006) Pedro Costa's art-house trilogy set in Lisbon.

**Capitães de Abril** (Captains of April; 2000) Overview of the 1974 Revolution of the Carnations.

## Best in Print

**O Manual dos Inquisidores** (The Inquisitor's Manual; António Lobo Antunes, 1996) Story about life under the Salazar dictatorship.

**Memorial do Convento** (Baltasar and Blimunda; José Saramago, 1982) Darkly comic 18th-century love story.

**Livro do Desassossego** (The Book of Disquiet; Fernando Pessoa, 1982) Literary masterpiece by Portugal's greatest poet.

## Best Albums

**Moura** (2015) Latest album by fado superstar Ana Moura.

**Art of Amália** (1998) Compilation by one of fado's greats, Amália Rodrigues.

**Best of Rui Veloso** (2000) Portugal's legendary rock-balladeer.

## A New Way Forward

After four years of austerity measures under Prime Minister Pedro Passos Coelho, Portugal was ready to turn the page. And it did so in rather dramatic fashion. Following an inconclusive election in 2015, Coelho's conservative government failed to gain an overall majority in parliament. Seizing an opportunity, Socialist Party leader António Costa formed an anti-austerity coalition with two other left-wing parties and voted down the new centre-right government in an extraordinary parliamentary move. Kicked to the curb after just 11 days in power, the centre-right administration would go down as the shortest in Portugal's history.

The rise of António Costa, a former mayor of Lisbon and the son of a communist poet from Goa, suggests a new era in Portuguese politics. In fact, the mere existence of a left-wing coalition is something unusual – unseen since the arrival of democracy at the end of the military dictatorship in the 1970s. The challenges, however, are substantial: unemployment stands at 12% (though markedly down from an all-time high of 17.5% in early 2013). And although the economy showed signs of life (growing 0.9% in 2014, then 1.5% in 2015), it appeared to have stalled in early 2016. And pressure was mounting from the EU for Portugal to rein in its budget deficit.

Most Portuguese, however, have clearly tired of receiving ultimatums from Brussels. In exchange for an €78-billion loan package from 'the Troika' – the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission – Portugal went through a draconian period of belt tightening. The conservative government raised taxes, cut wages and pensions, and clipped spending on social welfare. Critics of the measures say that the cuts only drove more people into poverty, caused further erosion of the middle class and sent