

## PORTUGAL

Portugal has had human population from historic times. There were the Neanderthals, the Homo Sapiens, the Moors, the Celts, the Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Germanic, the Jew traders – all left their indelible mark on this land. In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century Portugal ushered in the “Age of Discovery” in Europe as it built its immense empire stretching from South America, through Asia, Africa and Oceania. Two centuries later the French, Dutch and English took over the mantle. 1755 saw a massive earthquake destroy its capital – Lisbon. Thus Portugal of today is quite diverse in its food, architecture, culture, art, society and religion.

### Culture

Portugal naturally has a rich cultural heritage because of its past and it is evident in the existent medieval castles, churches, mosques and buildings. Some of the imprints of the past have become UNESCO World Heritage Sites – fifteen in all.

**Azulejo**, a derivative from Arabic, is a type of painting with tin glaze on ceramic tiles. These not only functioned as artwork in churches, schools, etc but actually controlled temperatures. **Igreja Matriz de Cambra** in Vouzela has checkered azulejo on its outside facade. The **Queluz Palace** and the **Church of Nossa Senhora da Nazare** in Nazare are other azulejo architectural wonders.

Portuguese dance forms are many – among them are the **Circle dance**, the **Fandango**, **Corridinho** of the Estremadura and Algarve regions, the **Chamarita** in Azores.

### Top must-see in Portugal

- **Sao Jorge Castle** is located on a hilltop above Lisbon. Made of granite and reinforced concrete, this Moorish castle once a royal residence is a palatial ruin with an archaeological museum.
- **Douro River** does not exactly figure in a tourist map, but a cruise down this river reveals the old warehouses where the wine used to be stored in the olden days. It runs from the Iberian Peninsula meanders its way through south-central Spain, Portugal and then to the Porto River.
- **Jeronimos Monastery** is located near Belem parish in Lisbon municipality. It is of the Order of Saint Jerome and is one of the World Heritage Sites. Vasco da Gama lies in eternal peace on these grounds.
- **Dom Luis 1 Bridge** is over the River Douro connecting the two cities of Vila Nova de Gaia and Porto. This double-decked metal icon of Porto is in arch shape and was the longest bridge in the world in 1886.
- **Lisbon Oceanarium**, in Parque das Nacoes, Lisbon, is an indoor aquarium. It boasts of an underwater Japanese garden/forest designed by Takashi Amano.
- **Biblioteca Joanina** is an ornate, stunning Baroque library built in 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is located in the University of Coimbra.
- **Quinta da Regaleira** is another World Heritage Site of Portugal, located in the center of Sintra, a historic place. The five-floors royal residence is ornately Gothic and its main secret lies in its back gardens. Ancient secret orders are represented in their unique styles, hidden symbolism and secret tunnels.
- **Lisbon Zoo** or **Jardim Zoologico de Lisboa** was founded in 1884 by Dr. Van der Lan. The zoo spreads across 16 hectares of land and has 300 species of animals, birds, reptiles, numbering to 2000. There are secluded botanical gardens inside the grounds for private picnics; has Dolphin Shows and Sea Lion Shows, Snake and Lizard Shows, Pelican Feeding with accompanying educational talks. You can also go around the zoo in the cable car or the train.

### How to Get to Portugal

There are direct flights to Portugal from UK and all European countries to Lisbon airport, Flores Island airport and Terceira Lajes airport. There are even direct flights from North America. People from non-European countries may find it cheaper to fly via London. It makes sense to visit France and Spain on the way to Portugal.

### Best Time to Visit Portugal

Summertime the temperature is close to 30 degrees Celsius, either way, all over Portugal. Sightseeing, hiking, visiting archaeological monuments is best done in October or May; it usually rains in the winter months between November and March. However, central Portugal is quite endearing during the winter and

the south is pretty mild all year round. The north on the other hand can be chilly cold during winter with regular snowfall inland.

Springtime (February) presents Portugal at its best with colorful flowers and fruits draping the hillsides and the countrysides. Autumn is nice too, because in October the crowds thin out, it is warm not hot and the sea is just the right temperature for a swim.

### **Travel tips**

- Everywhere in Portugal there are cobblestone pathways, so best to carry and wear only flats or hiking boots.
- People of Portugal love children, even in the nicest restaurants.
- Abundance of honest kindness is what you get in Portugal, even from the downtrodden. So be prepared to be blessed, hugged, given sudden treats from the most unexpected and be greeted with an open smile.
- Tipping is okay in Portugal, so you can tip about 5 percent of the bill and if paying by card, ask before sitting down to eat.
- Sundays are quiet days in Portugal, shops and most restaurants are closed. Museums are closed on Mondays.