

Pack Lightly

COAST, CITY, AND TWO ISLANDS APART

Portugal

Why the Azores and Madeira are a different trip, which Algarve town actually has surf, and what a day in Lisbon really costs.

p. 18 The Azores and Madeira: why they are a separate trip, booked separately

p. 26 Lisbon vs Porto vs the Algarve: which base, for how long

p. 30 What a day in Lisbon really costs, printed as a till receipt

44 PAGES EUR PRICES SCHENGEN 90/180 EDITION 2026.08

photo: Wikimedia Commons

Start here

the shape of a Portugal trip, what it costs, what to sort first



TRAM 28, ALFAMA, LISBON

Portugal splits into trips that rarely fit together in one visit: the Lisbon-Porto city and wine axis on the mainland, the Algarve's coast and surf towns further south, and the Azores and Madeira, two volcanic island groups out in the Atlantic that are genuinely separate journeys, not day-trip extensions. Most first visits pick mainland Portugal and treat the islands as a future trip, and this guide is built around that split rather than pretending all four fit into ten days.

The shape of a trip

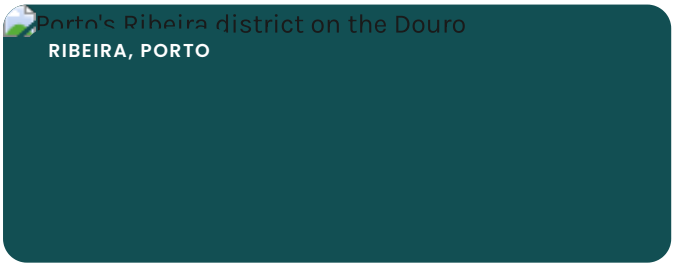
Most first trips run Lisbon to Porto over 7 to 10 days, with the Algarve or Sintra as a coastal add-on. The Azores and Madeira are their own trip, page 19 covers why.

What a day costs

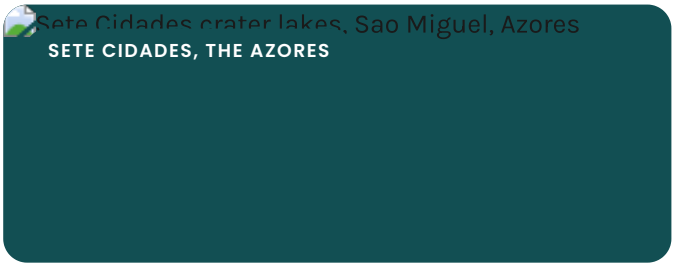
Budget travel runs about 50 EUR a day, mid-range around 95, captured August 2026. The full breakdown, hostel to pastel de nata, is on page 31.

Sort before you fly

Portugal is Schengen: most passports enter visa-free for 90 days in any 180. ETIAS pre-authorization starts applying from late 2026, page 33 covers what changes.



RIBEIRA, PORTO



SETE CIDADES, THE AZORES

HOW THE LINKS WORK

Some booking links earn Pack Lightly a commission, at no extra cost to you. Full disclosure is on the last page.

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QUICK JUMPS

Why the Azores and Madeira are a separate trip 18

Lisbon vs Porto vs the Algarve, compared 26

What a day really costs 30

Your trip on one page

10 days · 50 to 95 EUR/day · best Apr to Jun, Sep to Oct

If you read nothing else, this page is the trip. The classic first-timer route runs Lisbon to Porto over 7 to 10 days, with Sintra as a day trip and the Algarve as a coastal extension if time allows. Budget from the bars below, not from a Chiado tourist-menu board. Book the Porto-Lisbon train and your first two nights right before you fly; everything else is easier to arrange once you land.

THE ROUTE

Lisbon — day 1-4
1h day trip
Sintra — day trip
3h train
Porto — day 5-7
fly or 6h train
Algarve (Lagos) — day 8-10

BUDGET PER DAY

Backpacker	50 EUR
Standard	95 EUR
Comfort	190 EUR

BOOK FIRST

01	International flights, 6 to 8 weeks out	Skyscanner
02	First two Lisbon nights, 3 to 4 weeks out	Stay22
03	Lisbon-Porto train seat, 2 weeks out in peak season	Omio

BEST MONTHS

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

best: warm, walkable, before or after peak

shoulder: mild, quieter, some rain

peak heat and crowds, Algarve fills fastest

Portugal at a glance

scores 0-100 · pack-lightly country-comparison data

SCORECARD

Tourist infrastructure	85
Safety	90
Budget friendly	70
Nature	75
Food and drinks	85
Culture	85

Budget travel	50 EUR/day
Mid-range	95 EUR/day
Luxury	190 EUR/day

CULTURE COAST FOOD

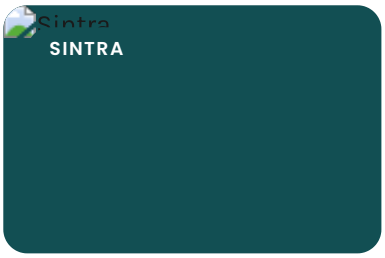
source: country-comparison tool, 2026-08

SIX FRAMES OF THE TRIP













01

The country

What Portugal is, what it is not, who goes, and the geography split most itineraries get wrong.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Mainland, Algarve, and two Atlantic islands 07

What Portugal is

10.3M people · 4 geographies · Schengen 90/180

A parliamentary republic of 10.3 million people on the westernmost edge of mainland Europe, split into four geographies that rarely fit into one trip. Lisbon, the capital, sits on the Tagus estuary and anchors the mainland's north-south axis; Porto, two and a half hours north by train, anchors the Douro wine country and a colder, less crowded version of Portuguese city life. The Algarve, the southern coast, runs a separate summer-holiday economy built on beaches and golf. The Azores and Madeira, two volcanic archipelagos in the Atlantic, sit hours from the mainland by air and run on entirely different logistics, budgets, and seasons.

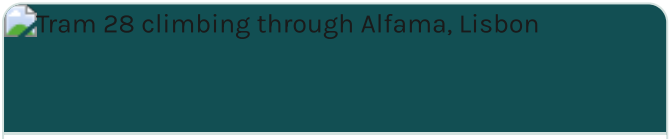
CAPITAL
Lisbon
Tagus estuary, Atlantic coast

POPULATION
10.3M
Portuguese, EU member

CURRENCY
EUR
card-friendly, cash still useful

BEST MONTHS
Apr-Jun, Sep-Oct
warm, walkable, fewer crowds

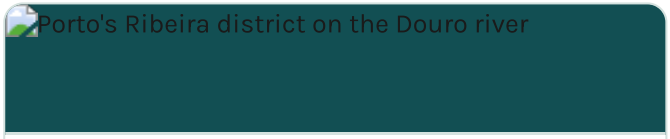
FOUR GEOGRAPHIES, FOUR TRIPS


Tram 28 climbing through Alfama, Lisbon

Lisbon and the coast nearby

capital · Sintra and Cascais day trips · warm year-round base

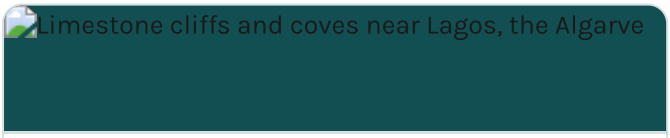
Where almost every trip starts. Steep, tiled hillside neighborhoods, a working tram system, and Sintra's palaces less than an hour away.


Porto's Ribeira district on the Douro river

Porto and the Douro Valley

port wine country · cooler, greyer · 2.5h from Lisbon by train

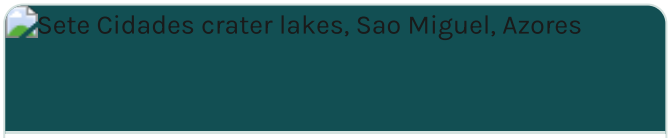
A working river city with port wine cellars across the Douro in Vila Nova de Gaia, and vineyard valleys a day trip inland.


Limestone cliffs and coves near Lagos, the Algarve

The Algarve

coast and surf towns · packed Jul-Aug · quieter shoulder season

Limestone cliffs, hidden coves, and genuine surf towns west of the resort strip. Which town has surf and which has crowds is on page 12.


Sete Cidades crater lakes, Sao Miguel, Azores

The Azores and Madeira

volcanic islands · own flights, own season · a separate trip

Two unconnected archipelagos, both reachable only by air, both genuinely different trips from mainland Portugal. Full detail on page 19.

WHO THIS GUIDE IS WRITTEN FOR

First-time Iberia
7 to 10 days, mid-range, the Lisbon to Porto loop.

Surfer or beach traveler
The Algarve's western towns, Ericeira, shoulder-season swell.

Wine and food traveler
Porto and the Douro Valley first, Lisbon's food scene second.

Island-only traveler
Skips the mainland entirely for the Azores or Madeira, booked as its own trip.

02

Where to go

Lisbon, Sintra, Porto, the Douro Valley, and the Algarve's real surf towns: pick a combination before your dates decide it for you.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Lisbon	09
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The Douro Valley	12
The Algarve: which town has surf	13
Coimbra and the center	14
Ericeira and the west coast	15
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Lisbon

gateway city · 3 nights minimum · warm year-round base



Lisbon is built on seven hills, which means every neighborhood worth walking involves a climb, and the yellow Tram 28 exists specifically to save your legs through Alfama's narrow lanes. The city runs warmer and sunnier than Porto year-round, which makes it the natural base for a first trip regardless of season. Baixa's grid streets sit flat between two hills, Bairro Alto wakes up at night, and Alfama holds the oldest, least-renovated version of the city.

Three nights covers the highlights properly; four lets you add a full day in Belem for the monasteries and the original pastel de nata bakery without rushing the rest.

Book Belem Tower and Jeronimos Monastery timed tickets online. Both sell out same-day slots by mid-morning in peak season.

A Viva Viagem card covers trams, the metro, and funiculars; buy it at any kiosk and load it as you go rather than a fixed-day pass.

Alfama

The oldest district, steep lanes, fado houses at night, best explored on foot before 10am.

Belem

Jeronimos Monastery, Belem Tower, and Pasteis de Belem, the bakery the pastel de nata is named for.

Miradouro da Senhora do Monte

The best free viewpoint over the city and the castle, quiet enough for an actual sunset.

Time Out Market

A curated food hall pulling from the city's best kitchens under one roof, busy but genuinely good.

GO DEEPER

The full Portugal best-places ranking and the base comparison on page 27 cover the rest of the city in more depth than fits here.

Sintra

day trip or 1 night · palaces in the hills · book the train early



PENA PALACE, SINTRA

Take the first train out, around 7am, to reach Pena Palace before the tour buses. By 11am the queue for the palace interior can run over an hour.

Book Pena Palace and Quinta da Regaleira timed entry online the night before; walk-up tickets mean a second queue on top of the bus queue.

Sintra sits in a cooler, forested microclimate 40 minutes from Lisbon by train, and the hills above town are dotted with 19th-century royal retreats built when the aristocracy wanted an escape from the capital's heat. Pena Palace, painted in yellow and red, is the postcard shot; Quinta da Regaleira, with its symbolic initiation well, is the one that photographs better on a grey day.

A day trip covers one or two palaces properly; trying to fit all four (Pena, Regaleira, Moorish Castle, Monserrate) into a single day means rushing every one of them. The train from Lisbon's Rossio station runs frequently and needs no advance booking, but the hop-on bus up the hill from Sintra station fills fast by mid-morning.

Pena Palace

A Romanticist palace in bold color, the most-photographed building in Portugal, worth the early alarm.

Quinta da Regaleira

Gothic gardens and an inverted spiral well built for masonic initiation rites; genuinely atmospheric.

Moorish Castle

8th-century ramparts along the ridge line, the best panoramic view over the town and the coast.

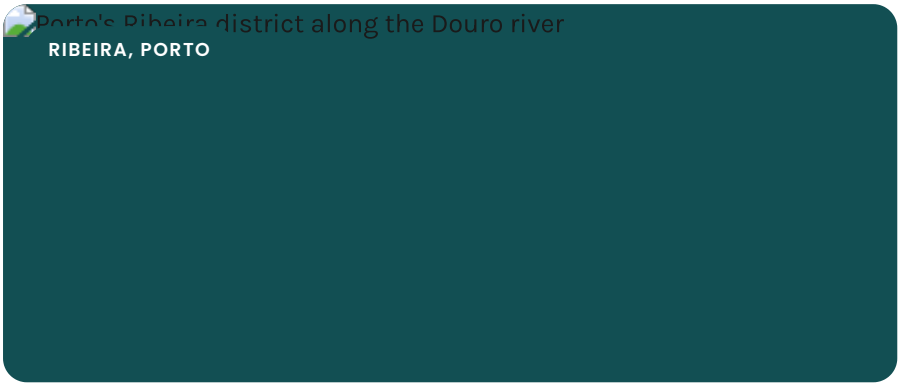
Cabo da Roca

Continental Europe's westernmost point, a short bus ride from Sintra, dramatic Atlantic cliffs.

READ ON Religious and ceremonial site access sits in the religious landmarks guide.

Porto

2.5h from Lisbon · 2-3 nights · port wine, cooler air



Porto's Ribeira district along the Douro river

Livraria Lello now charges a timed-entry ticket, redeemable against a book purchase. Book online; the walk-up queue regularly runs over an hour.

Pack a real jacket even in summer. Porto's Atlantic-facing position keeps evenings noticeably cooler than Lisbon or the Algarve.

Porto runs colder and greyer than Lisbon most of the year, and it wears that reputation without apology. The Ribeira waterfront, a UNESCO-listed tangle of narrow buildings stacked above the Douro, faces Vila Nova de Gaia across the river, where the port wine houses (Sandeman, Graham's, Taylor's) hold their cellars and tastings. The city's Livraria Lello, an ornate wooden-staircase bookshop, draws long queues on the strength of a rumored Harry Potter connection that predates the books.

Two nights covers Ribeira and a cellar tour; three lets you add a Douro Valley day trip without a rushed morning train.

Ribeira

The waterfront district, colorful stacked houses, and the Dom Luis I bridge overhead.

Vila Nova de Gaia cellars

Cross the bridge for port wine tastings; Graham's and Taylor's both offer river-view terraces.

Livraria Lello

A neo-Gothic bookshop with a red spiral staircase; book the timed ticket, skip the myth-chasing.

Sao Bento Station

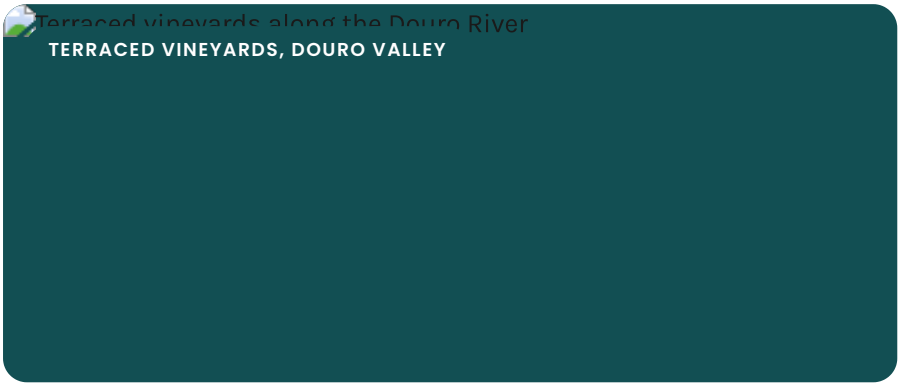
A working train station with 20,000 hand-painted azulejo tiles covering the entrance hall, free to view.

GO DEEPER

The Douro Valley day trip is covered in full on the next page; national park access nearby sits in the national parks guide.

The Douro Valley

1.5-2h from Porto · day trip or overnight · terraced vineyards



TERRACED VINEYARDS, DOURO VALLEY

The train's right-hand side (facing forward, leaving Porto) has the better river views for most of the route.

The Douro is one of the oldest demarcated wine regions on earth, its steep river-carved terraces planted with grapes since Roman times and formally regulated since 1756. A scenic train from Porto's Sao Bento station follows the river most of the way, and a river cruise or a quinta (wine estate) tour fills out the rest of the day. Pinhao, the small town at the valley's heart, is surrounded by some of the most photographed terracing in the region.

A day trip from Porto is the common approach: train in, boat or quinta tour, train back. An overnight at a quinta adds a proper tasting dinner and a sunrise over the terraces that the day-trip crowd never sees.

Pinhao

The valley's small hub town, its train station covered in wine-harvest azulejo tiles.

Quinta tastings

Family-run wine estates offering tastings, some with terrace lunches overlooking the vines.

River cruise

A one to two hour boat trip past the steepest terraces, often bundled with a quinta visit.

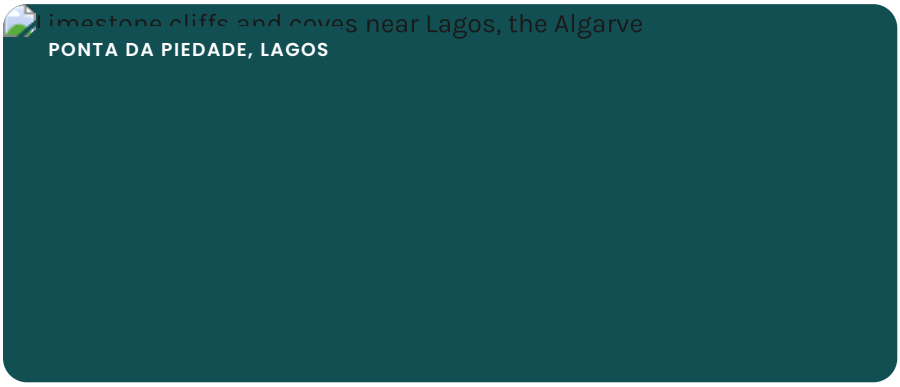
Sao Joao de Pesqueira viewpoint

A quieter overlook above the terraces, a short drive past the main tour-bus stops.

WORTH A READ The full national parks and landscape guide covers the wider Douro region in more depth than fits here.

The Algarve: which town has surf

Lagos vs Albufeira vs Sagres · pick by what you actually want



PONTA DA PIEDADE, LAGOS

The Algarve is not one coast; it is a resort strip (Albufeira, Vilamoura) and a surf coast (Lagos westward to Sagres) that get lumped together in most marketing. Albufeira delivers the packaged nightlife-and-beach-club version of the coast; Lagos keeps a walkable old town alongside genuine surf beaches at Praia do Camilo and Praia Dona Ana; Sagres, at the southwestern tip, is the serious surf town, wilder and windier, with fewer tourist trappings.

Ponta da Piedade's sea-cave cliffs near Lagos are the single most photographed stretch of the coast, and a kayak or small-boat tour there is worth booking ahead in peak season.

Sagres has the most consistent swell and wind in the Algarve, a genuine surf town rather than a resort with a surf shop.

July and August book out months ahead across the whole coast. May, June, September, and October keep the weather and lose the crowds.

Lagos

A walkable old town, surf beaches at the edge, the practical middle ground of the coast.

Sagres

The wilder southwestern tip: reliable surf, fewer resorts, a genuine end-of-the-road feel.

Albufeira

The resort-and-nightlife strip; go here for beach clubs, not for a quiet cove.

Ponta da Piedade

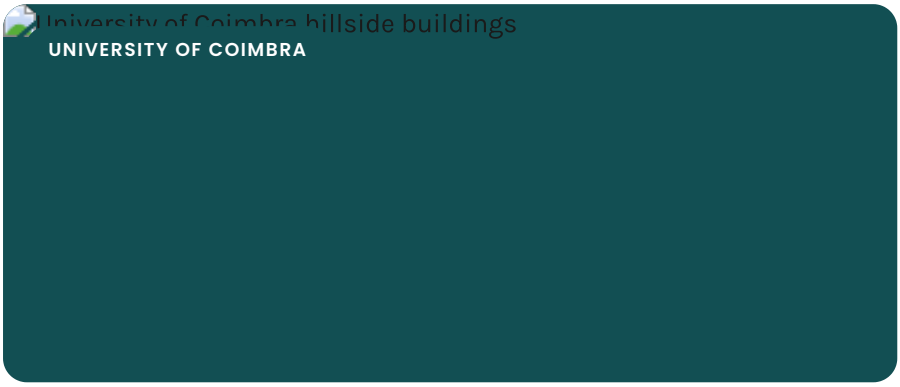
Sea-cave cliffs near Lagos, best seen by kayak or small boat; book ahead in peak season.

GO DEEPER

The full coast breakdown, beach by beach, is in the beaches guide.

Coimbra and the center

2h from Lisbon or Porto · 1-2 nights · university town, hilltop castles



Joanina Library entry is capped and timed. Book online, and note bags larger than a small daypack are not allowed inside.

Coimbra sits roughly halfway between Lisbon and Porto, built around one of Europe's oldest universities, founded in 1290. The Joanina Library, with gilded baroque shelving and a resident colony of bats that eat the paper-damaging insects at night, is the single-image reason most visitors stop here. The old town spills down a hillside to the Mondego River, with fado sung in a distinct, more melancholic Coimbra style than Lisbon's.

A single night covers the university and old town; two lets you add a day trip to Batalha or Tomar's fortified convents without rushing.

Joanina Library

Baroque gilded shelving, three floors of rare books, and a genuine working bat colony after hours.

Old Cathedral (Se Velha)

A fortress-like Romanesque cathedral from the 12th century, one of Portugal's best-preserved.

Batalha Monastery

Gothic and Manueline masterwork, a common half-day trip from Coimbra.

Mondego riverside

A flat, easy walk below the old town, best at golden hour with the hillside lit up.

READ ON Religious and monastery access rules sit in the religious landmarks guide.

Ericeira and the west coast

45min from Lisbon · World Surfing Reserve · day trip or 2-night base



Autumn (Sep-Nov) brings the biggest, most consistent swell; summer is smaller and better suited to beginner lessons.

Ericeira holds Europe's first World Surfing Reserve designation, a protected stretch of coastline with consistent, high-quality breaks within a short walk of each other. It sits close enough to Lisbon for a day trip but rewards staying two nights: the town itself is whitewashed and low-key, without the resort infrastructure of the Algarve, and the surf schools here cater as much to complete beginners as to experienced surfers chasing the reef breaks.

Ribeira d'Ilhas hosts World Tour surf events and is the area's signature wave; Foz do Lizandro is the gentler, sandier option for first-timers.

Ribeira d'Ilhas

The reserve's signature reef break, a World Tour venue; best for intermediate to advanced surfers.

Foz do Lizandro

A sandy beach break at a river mouth, the area's go-to spot for beginner lessons.

Ericeira old town

Whitewashed streets above the cliffs, low-key by design, no resort towers on the skyline.

Cabo da Roca detour

Continental Europe's westernmost point sits a short drive south, easily combined with a Sintra day.

GO DEEPER

The full west-coast beach breakdown sits in the beaches guide.

Off the beaten path

Alentejo, Peneda-Geres · for a second or third trip



THE ALENTEJO PLAINS, NEAR EVORA

Both regions are best reached by rental car; public transport connections are limited outside the main towns.

The Alentejo, Portugal's largest and least-visited region, holds rolling wheat plains, cork oak forests, and Evora, a walled Roman-then-Moorish city with a genuinely unsettling Chapel of Bones built from the remains of 5,000 monks. It sees a fraction of the Algarve's tourist traffic despite being closer to Lisbon than Porto is.

Peneda-Geres National Park, in the far north near the Spanish border, is Portugal's only national park (the rest are classified as nature parks) and holds granite peaks, wild horses, and waterfalls that draw almost no international visitors compared to the coast.

Evora

A walled UNESCO city with Roman ruins, a Gothic cathedral, and the unsettling Chapel of Bones.

Monsaraz

A tiny walled hilltop village overlooking Europe's largest artificial lake, largely untouched by tourism.

Peneda-Geres National Park

Portugal's only national park; granite peaks, wild garrano horses, waterfalls, and empty hiking trails.

Arrabida Natural Park

A short drive south of Lisbon: turquoise water and a forested limestone coastline, quiet on weekdays.

GO DEEPER

The full remote-region rundown sits in the off-the-beaten-path guide.

03

The Azores and Madeira, apart

Two volcanic archipelagos that most itineraries either skip entirely or wrongly bolt onto a mainland trip. Why that second approach does not work, and how to plan either island properly.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Why the Azores and Madeira are a separate trip 18

Sao Miguel, the Azores 19

Madeira 20

Why the Azores and Madeira are a separate trip

not a mainland add-on · different flights, different season, different budget

Both archipelagos show up constantly in "Portugal itinerary" searches bolted onto a Lisbon-Porto trip, and that framing sets travelers up to either cut the mainland short or shortchange the islands. Neither island group connects to the mainland by train or ferry; both require a separate flight, usually 1.5 to 2.5 hours from Lisbon, and both run their own weather patterns independent of what the mainland forecast says. Treating either as a bonus day trip means arriving tired, seeing a fraction of what the island offers, and leaving having spent real money on a rushed version of a trip that deserved its own week.

	FROM LISBON	BEST SEASON	MINIMUM STAY
The Azores (Sao Miguel)	2h15 flight	Jun-Sep, mild but wetter in winter	4-5 nights for one island properly
Madeira	1h35 flight	Year-round mild, driest Apr-Sep	4-5 nights, levada hiking needs time

source: Pack Lightly Portugal cluster, flight and climate data, 2026-08

A "Portugal in 10 days" itinerary that includes both the mainland and an island trip almost always shortchanges one or the other. Pick one for this trip; the other becomes the reason to come back.

Domestic flights to either island run through Lisbon or Porto and book up in July-August. If an island is on the itinerary, book that leg alongside the international flight, not after.

THE AZORES
9 islands
Sao Miguel is the largest and most visited

MADEIRA
1 main island
plus Porto Santo, a short ferry away

FLIGHT FROM MAINLAND
1h35-2h15
no train or ferry option to either

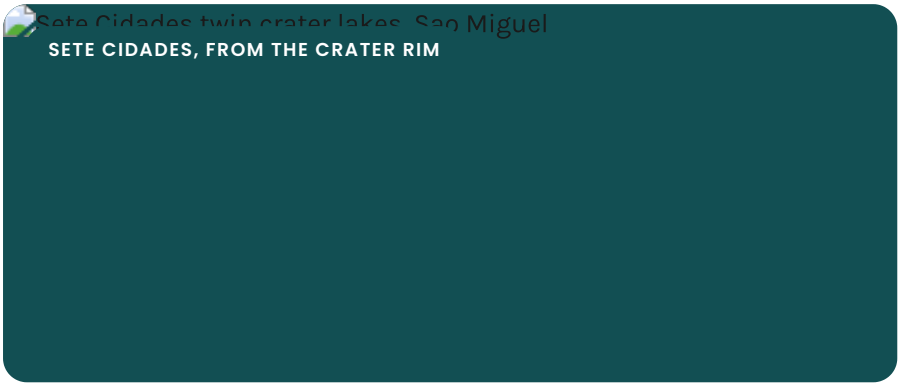
PEAK SEASON
Jun-Sep
book flights and cars well ahead

GO DEEPER

The full Portugal islands guide covers both archipelagos island by island, beyond the two most-visited here.

Sao Miguel, the Azores

2h15 from Lisbon · 4-5 nights · crater lakes and hot springs


SETE CIDADES, FROM THE CRATER RIM

Weather changes fast and locally on a volcanic island; a viewpoint clear in the morning can be fogged in by noon. Build flexibility into any single-day plan.

Rental cars book out fast in summer; reserve alongside flights, not once you land.

Sao Miguel, the largest and most-visited of the nine Azorean islands, packs volcanic crater lakes, natural hot springs, and green dairy-farm hills into a landmass smaller than most of the world's mid-size cities. Sete Cidades holds twin crater lakes, one blue and one green by local legend, viewable from a rim-top viewpoint that ranks among the most photographed spots in the archipelago. Furnas, on the island's east side, combines a geothermal valley with cozido, a stew traditionally slow-cooked underground using the volcanic heat.

Ponta Delgada, the main town, is a functional base rather than a destination in itself; most of the island's highlights sit a rental car's drive away, and a car is close to essential here, not optional.

Sete Cidades

Twin crater lakes inside a dormant volcano, the island's signature viewpoint.

Furnas

Geothermal valley, bubbling mud pools, and cozido stew cooked underground in volcanic heat.

Poca da Dona Beija

Iron-rich, naturally warm thermal pools set in a garden, a relaxed alternative to Furnas' wilder springs.

Lagoa do Fogo

A crater lake reachable by a moderate hike, often wrapped in cloud, dramatic when it clears.

READ ON Whale-watching and diving conditions around the Azores sit in the diving guide.

Madeira

1h35 from Lisbon · 4-5 nights · levada hikes, year-round mild



A LEVADA TRAIL, MADEIRA

Madeira runs mild year-round, which makes it Portugal's most consistent warm-weather island escape even in the depths of a mainland winter. The island's defining feature is its network of levadas, centuries-old irrigation channels with maintenance paths running alongside them, now repurposed as some of the most scenic and well-marked hiking trails in Europe. Funchal, the capital, sits on a steep amphitheater of hillside above the harbor, connected to Monte above town by a cable car with sweeping coastal views.

Unlike Sao Miguel, a car is optional here; a solid network of hiking trails, buses, and organized levada tours means a car-free week is genuinely workable, though a rental opens up the more remote north-coast villages.

Levada paths run alongside real drops in places, with minimal railing. Sturdy shoes and a head for exposed edges matter more than fitness level.

Funchal's cable car to Monte sells out its morning slots in peak season; the toboggan ride back down (wicker sled, two runners) is a genuine local tradition, not a tourist gimmick.

Levada das 25 Fontes

A well-known, moderate levada walk ending at a waterfall-fed pool; book a guided version to skip transport logistics.

Funchal to Monte cable car

A 15-minute ride over red-roofed hillside town to the Monte gardens and church above.

Cabo Girao skywalk

A glass-floor platform over one of Europe's highest sea cliffs, roughly 580 metres straight down.

Porto Moniz natural pools

Volcanic rock pools filled by the Atlantic on the island's rugged north coast.

READ ON The full national parks and landscape guide covers Madeira's Laurisilva forest, a UNESCO World Heritage site, in more depth.

04

Stay and go deeper

Where to sleep in each region, and the tours worth paying a guide for rather than figuring out alone.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Lisbon and Porto 22

The Algarve and Ericeira 23

Where to stay: Lisbon and Porto

prices per night, double room · book the first two nights, decide the rest there

Book only your first two Lisbon nights ahead, then decide on the ground; the same applies for Porto. Both cities have deep enough inventory that walk-in-adjacent bookings a few days out rarely cost more than booking months ahead, outside the July-August peak.

Lisbon

hostel **22 EUR** mid **65 EUR** comfort **160 EUR**

Baixa or Chiado for flat, central walkability, Alfama for atmosphere at the cost of hills. Check what a room near Chiado costs before you commit; dorm beds run through Hostelworld.

Porto

hostel **18 EUR** mid **55 EUR** comfort **130 EUR**

Ribeira for the river view and walkability, Vila Nova de Gaia across the bridge for cheaper rates with the same view in reverse. Compare riverside options in Porto before locking in your dates.

Stays across both cities, filtered to what is actually bookable tonight. **Find Stays**

TOURS WORTH PAYING FOR

SAMPLE DATA, PENDING LIVE VIATOR SYNC

Sintra and Cascais full-day tour from Lisbon

from 65 USD
4.8 (rated)
9 hours

Lisbon food and wine tasting tour

from 48 USD
4.9 (rated)
3.5 hours

Douro Valley wine tasting day trip from Porto

from 85 USD
4.8 (rated)
9 hours

Tour selection pending live Viator sync for this edition; prices are representative, final listing captured before print. Tap a card to book.

Where to stay: the Algarve and Ericeira

prices per night, double room

Lagos (Algarve)

hostel **24 EUR** mid **70 EUR** comfort **170 EUR**

Base in the old town for walkability to Ponta da Piedade and the surf beaches. Compare old-town stays in Lagos, or check dorm rates through Hostelworld.

Ericeira

hostel **26 EUR** mid **75 EUR** comfort **160 EUR**

Many surf hostels bundle board rental and lessons into the room rate; check what is included before comparing prices directly. See what a room near the break costs tonight.

TOURS WORTH PAYING FOR

SAMPLE DATA, PENDING LIVE VIATOR SYNC

Ponta da Piedade caves kayak or boat tour

from 30 USD

4.8 (rated)

2 hours

Ericeira beginner surf lesson

from 45 USD

4.9 (rated)

2 hours

Sagres coasteering and cliff jumping

from 55 USD

4.7 (rated)

3 hours

Tour selection pending live Viator sync for this edition; prices are representative, final listing captured before print. Tap a card to book.

05

Routes and itineraries

Eight paths by persona and budget, Lisbon vs Porto vs the Algarve compared, and a 10-day mainland route worked out day by day.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Pick your trip 25

Lisbon vs Porto vs the Algarve 27

The 10-day route, day by day 27

Pick your trip

three dimensions, eight paths · find yours, jump to the matching itinerary

Who you travel with, how long you have, and what you spend per night decide the route before any list of sights does. Find your row below; the 10-day route on the next spread covers path two in full.

SOLO · 5D · BACKPACKER

Lisbon and Sintra only

EUR 300 · hostels

- Lisbon 4n: neighborhoods, Belem
- Sintra day trip

SOLO · 10D · BACKPACKER

Lisbon, Sintra, Porto, Algarve

EUR 650 · hostels and trains

- Lisbon 4 · Sintra day trip
- Porto 3
- Lagos 3: coast finish

COUPLE · 10D · MID

Lisbon, Porto, Douro Valley, Algarve

EUR 2,600 for 2 · 3-star hotels

- Lisbon 3: Sintra day
- Porto 3, Douro day trip
- Lagos 4

COUPLE · 7D · COMFORT

Lisbon and the Algarve, boutique

EUR 3,400 for 2 · boutique hotels

- Lisbon 3: boutique hotel
- Lagos 4: sea-view stay

FAMILY · 10D · MID

Lisbon, Sintra, Algarve beaches

EUR 4,200 · family of 4

- Lisbon 4: easy pace
- Sintra day trip
- Albufeira 5: beach resort

FAMILY · 6D · COMFORT

Lisbon only, no long transfers

EUR 2,800 · family of 4

- Lisbon 5: pool hotel
- Sintra and Cascais day trips

SURFER · 8D · MID

Ericeira and the Algarve coast

EUR 1,100 · surf hostels

- Ericeira 4: lessons, breaks
- Sagres 4: reef breaks

RETIREE · 14D · COMFORT

Lisbon, Porto, Douro, no rushing

EUR 6,800 per couple

- Lisbon 5: 5-star, private guide
- Porto 4, Douro overnight
- Coimbra 3: slower pace

WORTH A READ

Full day-by-day versions online: the 7-day route and the 14-day route.

Lisbon vs Porto vs the Algarve: which base, for how long

three genuinely different trips wearing the same country's name

New visitors often ask which city to prioritize as if Lisbon and Porto were interchangeable stops on the same trip. They are not: each rewards a different traveler and a different pace, and the Algarve is a third, entirely separate register again.

BASE	BEST FOR	WEATHER	MINIMUM STAY
Lisbon	First-timers, food-focused travelers, city walking	Warm, sunny most of the year	3-4 nights, plus a Sintra day trip
Porto	Wine travelers, cooler-climate preference, a slower pace	Cooler, greyer, more rain	2-3 nights, plus a Douro day trip
The Algarve	Beach and surf travelers, relaxed pace, families	Hot and dry Jun-Sep, mild otherwise	3-4 nights minimum to be worth the trip out

route data: Pack Lightly Portugal cluster, 2026-08

A trip under 7 days is genuinely better spent picking one base and doing it properly than splitting three nights each across Lisbon, Porto, and the Algarve.

Lisbon to Porto runs a fast, comfortable 2.5-hour train; the Algarve from either city needs a flight or a 3+ hour train, worth weighing before adding it to a short trip.

05

GO DEEPER

Full city detail sits in the best-places guide; the wider coast breakdown is in the beaches guide.

The 10-day route, day by day

the path two route from page 25, worked out in full

This is the route most first-time visitors end up on: the Lisbon-Porto axis, a Sintra day trip, and the Algarve as a coastal finish without a rushed goodbye to any of them.



DAY 1-3

Lisbon

- Arrive, Baixa/Alfama
- Belem, Time Out Market

DAY 4

Sintra day trip

- Train from Rossio, early
- Pena Palace, Regaleira

DAY 5-6

Porto

- Train from Lisbon (2.5h)
- Ribeira, port wine cellars

DAY 7

Douro Valley

- Day trip by train
- Quinta tasting, river views

DAY 8-9

Lagos, the Algarve

- Fly Porto to Faro, transfer
- Ponta da Piedade, old town

DAY 10

Fly home

- Fly Faro or via Lisbon to connect

EXTENDING

Add an island

- Fly Lisbon to Sao Miguel or Madeira
- 4-5 nights, its own trip

EXTENDING OR CONNECTING

Add Ericeira as a day trip or overnight from Lisbon before heading north; add Spain (Seville or Madrid) overland from the Algarve or Lisbon for a connection trip.

06

When to go, what it costs

A 12-month weather and crowd calendar, what things really cost versus what gets quoted, and a day printed as a till receipt.

IN THIS CHAPTER

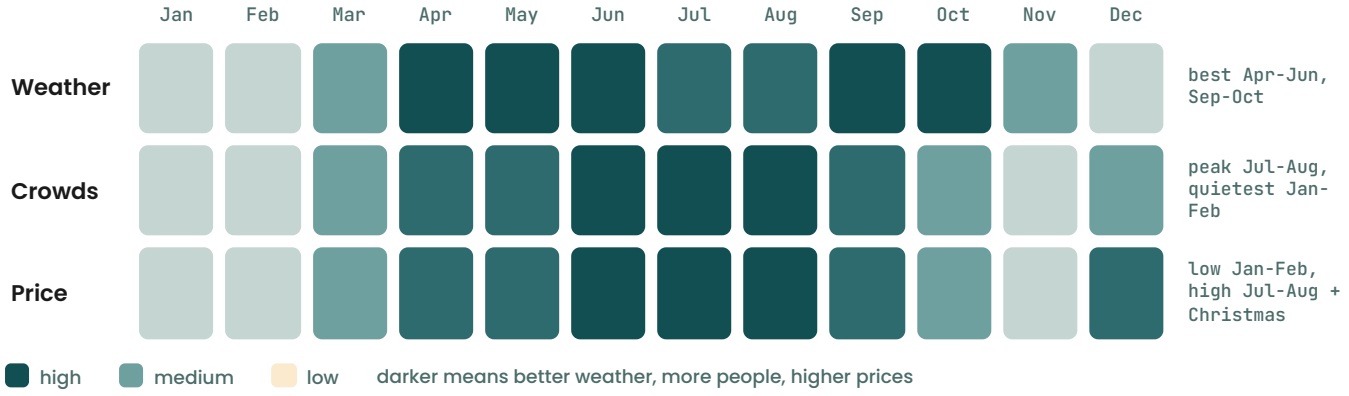
Weather, crowds, price 29

What a day really costs 31

Weather, crowds, price

12-month calendar · Lisbon and mainland-weighted

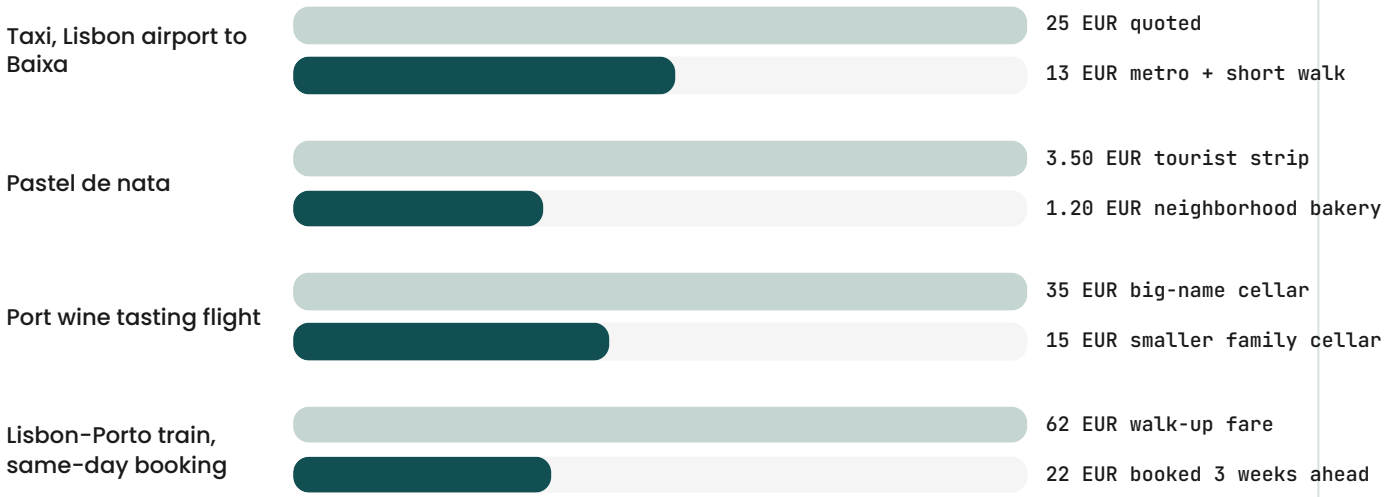
Portugal's calendar rewards the shoulder seasons more than most of Southern Europe: April through June and September through October keep warm, walkable days without July and August's crowds and heat, which hit the Algarve especially hard. Lisbon and the mainland stay mild through winter; Porto runs greyer and wetter year-round, and the Azores and Madeira follow their own patterns entirely, covered on page 18.



source: best-travel-time dataset · captured 2026-08-16

WHAT THINGS COST: QUOTED VS PAID

SAMPLE DATA



pack-lightly.com

What a day costs

three travel styles · printed the way the day spends it

Daily budgets hide in averages, so here is the day itemized instead: a bed, three meals, getting around, one thing worth doing, and a glass of vinho verde at the end. Three real versions of the same Tuesday in Lisbon.

A DAY IN PORTUGAL

* backpacker *

hostel dorm bed	22.00
coffee + pastel de nata	2.50
bifana sandwich lunch	5.00
caldo verde + bread dinner	7.00
Viva Viagem card, day's rides	4.00
Sao Jorge Castle entry	10.00
ginjinha, twice	2.00
water + snacks	2.50
TOTAL / DAY	**~50 EUR**

budget-calculator data · 2026-08-16

A DAY IN PORTUGAL

* standard *

3-star hotel double, half	50.00
hotel breakfast, included	incl.
cafe lunch	14.00
dinner with vinho verde	26.00
taxis, half day	10.00
Belem Tower + monastery	12.00
guided Alfama walk, split	18.00
TOTAL / DAY	**~95 EUR**

budget-calculator data · 2026-08-16

A DAY IN PORTUGAL

* comfort *

5-star hotel suite, half	110.00
hotel breakfast	incl.
restaurant lunch	32.00
tasting menu dinner	75.00
private driver, half day	45.00
private guide, split	incl. above
rooftop port wine tasting	28.00
TOTAL / DAY	**~190 EUR**

budget-calculator data · 2026-08-16

07

Practical

Visa, money, transport, eSIM, health, packing. The boring parts you only read once. Done right, you never think about them again.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Book in this order 32

Money and transport 33

Bed, bag, signal 34

Health basics 35

Book in this order

four things before you fly · Schengen entry is a check, not an application

Portugal rewards booking trains and your first nights ahead and leaving the rest loose. Most non-EU nationalities enter visa-free under the Schengen 90/180 rule, so the entry step is a quick check, not an application, though ETIAS pre-authorization starts applying from late 2026 for visa-exempt travelers. Four things genuinely reward locking in early, in this order.

8 wk before

International flights

Fares to Lisbon bottom out roughly six to eight weeks ahead for the April-June and September-October windows. Direct routes from most of Europe run under 3 hours.

Compare fares on Skyscanner

4 wk before

Insurance + ETIAS check

Buy travel insurance before finalizing plans, especially if a levada hike or surf lesson is on the itinerary. Confirm your entry rule: Schengen 90/180 covers most nationalities, but check whether ETIAS applies to yours before flying.

Check entry rules per passport

3 wk before

Lisbon–Porto train + first nights

Book the fast train between Lisbon and Porto for a meaningful discount over walk-up fares, and your first two Lisbon nights. Everything else can wait until you land.

Book trains on Omio

1 wk before

eSIM

Install before departure, activate on the plane. EU roaming means many home plans already cover Portugal; check before paying for a separate eSIM.

Set up a Saily eSIM

Passport rule: three months validity beyond your planned departure from Schengen, standard for the zone. Check it now if it is close.

If planning to add another Schengen country before or after Portugal, the 90/180 day count applies across the whole zone, not per country.

07

Money and transport

card-friendly · fast trains between cities, a car for the Azores

Card and card, mostly. Portugal is one of the more card-friendly countries in Southern Europe, with contactless accepted almost everywhere in cities; small cafes, markets, and rural guesthouses still favor cash. The Multibanco ATM network is reliable and widely trusted; avoid the standalone Euronet-branded machines near tourist zones, which charge steep conversion fees.

ITEM	BACKPACKER	MID	COMFORT
Hostel dorm / hotel double	EUR 22	EUR 65	EUR 160
Street meal / restaurant	EUR 5	EUR 26	EUR 60
Coffee, cafe	EUR 0.80	EUR 2	EUR 4
Glass of vinho verde or port	EUR 2	EUR 5	EUR 10
Taxi, short hop	EUR 5	EUR 9	EUR 18

verified 2026-08-16 · per-category numbers in the budget guide

TRANSPORT: WHAT BEATS WHAT

Portugal's train network covers the Lisbon-Porto-Braga axis well: fast, comfortable, and worth booking a few weeks ahead for the meaningful discount over walk-up fares. The Algarve connects from either city by a direct train (longer) or a short domestic flight. Within cities, metro and tram cover Lisbon and Porto's centers; buses fill the gaps. The Azores and Madeira are a different story: Sao Miguel effectively needs a rental car to see beyond Ponta Delgada, while Madeira manages with a mix of buses, guided levada tours, and an optional car for the remote north coast.

Book long-distance trains (Alfa Pendular, the fastest class) online in advance; prices rise close to departure the same way flights do.

Ride-hailing apps operate normally in Lisbon and Porto and are often cheaper and more reliable than street taxis.

THE FULL PICTURE

Full itinerary transport options sit in the 7-day itinerary and 14-day itinerary.

Bed, bag, signal

hotels and guesthouses · packing for coast and hills · eSIM, the three solved problems

BED

For mid-range and above, Stay22 wins on free-cancellation policy and inventory depth across hotels and guesthouses alike. For dorms and social hostels, Hostelworld has the deeper review pool, especially in Lisbon and Ericeira's surf-hostel scene. For a quinta stay in the Douro, book directly through the estate where possible; a modest saving is common.

BAG: THE 10-DAY CARRY-ON LIST

- [ ] Layers: light tops for Lisbon and the Algarve, a real jacket for Porto evenings
- [ ] Comfortable, broken-in walking shoes: cobblestones in every historic center punish new soles
- [ ] Starter med-kit: loperamide, paracetamol, plasters for cobblestone blisters
- [ ] SPF 50, sunglasses, a light rain layer for shoulder-season showers
- [ ] Type C/F plug adapter
- [ ] 10,000 mAh power bank for a full day of Sintra or Douro touring
- [ ] Two payment cards in separate pockets
- [ ] Passport copies in three places: phone, print, email
- [ ] A daypack that fits under airline seats for domestic hops to the islands
- [ ] Swimwear packed accessible, even outside beach-focused legs

Signal. EU roaming already covers many home plans in Portugal; check before buying a separate eSIM. If needed, buy the day before you fly and activate on the plane. A 5 GB plan covers a week; 10 GB covers ten days including island hops.

Set up a Saily eSIM

07

GO DEEPER The full 7-day and 14-day route breakdowns, including packing notes per stop, live in the 14-day itinerary.

Health basics

no required vaccines for most travelers · sun and surf are the real risks

Portugal requires no mandatory vaccinations for travelers arriving from the EU, UK, US, or Canada; routine vaccines are the standard travel-clinic recommendation, not a legal entry requirement. EU citizens can use a valid EHIC or GHIC card for state healthcare; non-EU visitors should confirm travel insurance covers medical costs, since state healthcare is not free for non-residents. The two genuine everyday risks are sunburn along the coast and surf-related injury for beginners in unfamiliar breaks.

PRACTICAL BASICS

- [ ] Tap water is safe to drink throughout mainland Portugal and the islands
- [ ] Sun: reapply SPF every two hours on the coast, even on overcast Algarve days
- [ ] Surf: take a lesson before attempting a reef break alone; local surf schools know the current patterns
- [ ] Pharmacies (farmacias, marked with a green cross) are common and well stocked, staff often speak English
- [ ] Travel insurance with activity cover matters most for levada hiking, surfing, and coasteering

MORE ON THE SITE

The off-the-beaten-path guide covers remote-region health basics (limited pharmacy access) for Peneda-Geres and the interior Alentejo.

08

Safe and smart

The scams that have not changed in years, the etiquette that matters, and the language minimum that changes how locals respond.

IN THIS CHAPTER

The scams that still work 37

Etiquette: the short list 38

Emergency numbers + phrases 39

The scams that still work

constant in Lisbon tourist zones, absent outside them

Portugal is one of the safer countries in Europe, and violent crime against tourists is genuinely rare. What is constant is a small set of low-level scams and overcharges concentrated in Lisbon's most touristed districts, especially around trams and the airport. Knowing three of them protects most of the money tourists actually lose.

SCAM 01

Pickpockets on Tram 28

The historic tram's popularity and cramped standing room make it a known pickpocket target, especially at peak boarding times in Alfama.

The fix: keep bags zipped and in front of you, or take a quieter Uber/taxi and save the tram for an off-peak ride.

SCAM 02

The "closed for renovation" pitch

A stranger claims a nearby attraction is closed and offers to guide you to a "better" alternative, usually a shop or restaurant paying for referrals.

The fix: check opening hours yourself before believing an unsolicited claim; decline politely and keep walking.

SCAM 03

The unsolicited restaurant "extras"

Bread, olives, or cheese are placed on the table without being ordered, then charged as a couvert fee that surprises the bill at the end.

The fix: this is legal and common in Portugal, not technically a scam, but it is optional; simply ask the server to remove anything you did not want.

BONUS

The "meter broken" taxi at the airport

At Lisbon or Porto's airport: a driver quotes a flat fare well above the metered rate, sometimes claiming a fixed "tourist price".

The fix: use the official taxi rank or a ride-hailing app; both charge fair, transparent rates before you get in.

MORE ON THE SITE

Base comparisons are covered in full on page 26; the broader etiquette rundown continues on the next page.

Etiquette: the short list

first four are load-bearing · last four save you money and awkwardness

Eight things that matter. The first four cause real offense if ignored; the last four mostly smooth the day. Everything else is atmosphere.

DO

Greet with a light double-cheek kiss or a handshake

Cheek kisses (right first) are common in social settings; a handshake is always a safe default in business or formal contexts.

DO NOT

Rush a meal or ask for the bill quickly

Portuguese dining runs unhurried; the bill is brought only when asked, never assume it is coming automatically.

DO

Dress modestly in churches and monasteries

Shoulders and knees covered is expected at religious sites, including Batalha and Jeronimos.

DO NOT

Compare Portugal to Spain out loud

A recurring irritation; Portuguese identity and language are distinct, and the comparison reads as dismissive.

DO

Attempt Portuguese greetings, not Spanish

"Obrigado/obrigada" (thank you, gendered to the speaker) rather than Spanish "gracias" is genuinely appreciated.

DO NOT

Skip the couvert without asking first

Sending back unwanted bread or olives is fine and normal; silently refusing to pay after eating them is not.

DO

Tip modestly, it is appreciated but not obligatory

Rounding up or leaving 5-10 percent at restaurants is standard; service is not automatically added to the bill.

DO NOT

Book an unlicensed surf instructor

Ericeira and the Algarve both have certified surf schools; an unlicensed instructor is a real safety risk in unfamiliar breaks.

The unhurried pace at meals extends to most service interactions. Portuguese hospitality reads as warm but never rushed; matching that pace goes a long way.

Fado performances in Alfama or Coimbra typically ask for quiet during the singing itself; conversation is fine between sets.

08

KEEP READING Access rules for monasteries and churches sit in the religious landmarks guide.

Emergency numbers and eight phrases

save the numbers now · the phrases change how locals respond

POLICE / AMBULANCE / FIRE
112
EU-wide emergency number

TOURIST POLICE (LISBON)
+351 21 342 1634
Portuguese and English

NON-EMERGENCY POLICE (PSP)
+351 21 765 4242
Lisbon municipal

SNS24 (HEALTH LINE)
808 24 24 24
nationwide health advice

US EMBASSY LISBON
+351 21 727 3300
citizen services

HOSPITAL DA LUZ, LISBON
+351 21 710 4400
private, English-speaking staff

EIGHT PHRASES THAT CHANGE HOW LOCALS RESPOND

ENGLISH	PORTUGUESE	NOTES
Hello	ola	works everywhere, all times of day
Thank you	obrigado / obrigada	gendered to the speaker, not the listener
Yes / No	sim / nao	universal
How much?	quanto custa?	useful in markets, prices are mostly fixed elsewhere
The bill, please	a conta, por favor	it will not appear unasked
Where is the bathroom?	onde e a casa de banho?	most cafes will let you use theirs
Sorry / excuse me	desculpe	universal apology or attention-getter
Help!	socorro!	emergencies only

Save your hotel's address and the nearest clinic in your phone before a levada hike or a day trip out of the cities.

English is widely spoken in Lisbon, Porto, and tourist zones; a Portuguese greeting attempt still goes further than defaulting straight to English.

09

Tools and reference

The live tools this guide was built from, the cut-out cards for your wallet, and the sources behind every number.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Take the live tools with you 41

Print cards: cut, fold, take 42

Sources and methodology 43

A note on the links 44

Take the live tools with you

scan to open · data updates after this PDF was printed

This guide is a snapshot; the tools behind it keep updating. Scan a code or type the short URL. Each one is preloaded with the same Portugal data this guide was built from.



Trip Budget Calculator

Portugal: 50 EUR/day backpacker, 190 EUR/day comfort.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/budget-calculator/



Country Map

Every stop in this guide mapped, from Lisbon to Sao Miguel.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/country-map/



Best Time to Travel

Best: Apr-Jun, Sep-Oct. Month-by-month weather for 140+ countries.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/best-travel-time-worldmap/



Visa Checker

Schengen 90/180: most non-EU passports enter visa-free.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/visa-checker/

Print cards: cut, fold, take

print at 100% scale · credit-card size, 85 x 54 mm

Print this page on A4 or US Letter at 100 percent (no fit-to-page), cut along the dashed lines, and the two cards live in your wallet for the trip. The form fields are interactive in Acrobat and iOS Preview if you would rather type than write.

PORTUGUESE · ESSENTIALS

Hello	ola
Thank you	obrigado/a
Yes / No	sim / nao
How much?	quanto custa?
The bill, please	a conta, por favor
Where is bathroom?	onde e a casa de banho?
Help!	socorro!
Sorry	desculpe

pack-lightly.com

EMERGENCY · PORTUGAL

Police / Ambulance / Fire	112
SNS24 (health line)	808 24 24 24
Tourist Police (Lisbon)	+351 21 342 1634
US Embassy Lisbon	+351 21 727 3300

My hotel: _____

Address: _____

Insurance #: _____

Left card front, right card back: print double-sided on the short edge and they fold into one.

Lost the guide, kept the card? The QR opens the live Portugal hub with every page this guide links to, plus updates published after this edition went to print.

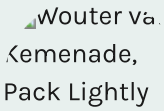
pack-lightly.com/portugal/

Photograph both cards before you cut. A phone copy of the emergency card still works when the wallet is back at the hotel.

Ask your hotel to write the name and address on the back. Taxi drivers and pharmacy staff read it in one glance.

Sources and methodology

every number traces to a dated source



WRITTEN BY

Wouter van Kemenade

Founder of Pack Lightly. Performance-marketing background, data-led travel writing. Every number in this guide is verified against a source listed below; if a price moves more than 15 percent, the next edition flags it.

SOURCES USED IN THIS EDITION

1. Hotel and hostel pricing: Stay22 and Hostelworld snapshot 2026-08-16, Lisbon and Porto city centers.
2. Currency: EUR, no conversion needed for eurozone travelers.
3. Visa policy: EU Schengen and ETIAS portal, retrieved 2026-08-16.
4. Travel advisories: FCDO and US State Department, last update 2026-07.
5. Climate: best-travel-time dataset, 10-year averages, captured 2026-08-16.
6. Train fares: Comboios de Portugal (CP) and Omio, captured 2026-08.
7. Pack Lightly Portugal cluster pages, retrieved 2026-08-16: hub · best places · islands · off the beaten path

Methodology. Pack Lightly's country scores aggregate eleven dimensions into the 0-100 scorecard on page 5, re-scored every six months. Budget figures come from the live budget-calculator dataset, climate verdicts from the best-travel-time dataset, both stamped with their capture date where they appear.

What changed in edition 2026.08: first release on the v2 design standard. Next planned update: February 2027. Not covered here: cruise stopovers, group coach tours, medical tourism. Viator tour data pending live sync for this edition; representative pricing shown, final listing updates before print.

Photo credits. Every photograph is sourced from Wikimedia Commons under a Creative Commons or public-domain license. The full per-image list, with each photographer and license, is on the next page. The cover shows Alfama, Lisbon, at sunset.

Image credits and a note on the links

every photo credited · why this guide is free

All location photographs come from Wikimedia Commons, reused under Creative Commons or public-domain licenses. Image credits for this edition are pending: run pl-image-resolver to source photos, then build-image-credits.mjs --country=portugal to populate a dedicated credits list here (this combined page will split into its own image-credits page once photos are sourced, per the page-numbering protocol).

This guide is free because some of the booking links inside it are affiliate links. When a reader books a stay, a flight, a tour, or an eSIM through one of those links, the merchant pays Pack Lightly. The reader pays the same price either way.

The pick comes before the partner. A stay area or a transport option is chosen for the trip it makes, and where a partner link exists for it that link is used; where none does, the plain link still points there. A scam pattern is still called out plainly, and a cheaper option that beats the famous one keeps the slot. The commission funds the guide, it does not choose for it.

Questions, corrections, or a place you tested that belongs in the next edition: write to hello@pack-lightly.com.

Partners linked in this edition: Skyscanner · Stay22 · Hostelworld · Omio · GetYourGuide · Saily

Links can outlive a print run. If one stops working, the live version of every page in this guide sits under pack-lightly.com/portugal.

This file is versioned; the edition is on the cover. The next planned update lands February 2027 and replaces this file at the same download.

09