



I don't think there are many better places to be in the European summer than the sun-drenched shores of Portugal. Here, the days are long, there's always plenty to see and do and the friendly, chilled out locals make any length of stay a pleasure. Portugal has it all – sophisticated cities, lovely golden-sand beaches, superb wine country and impressive hiking in its mountain regions.

How affordable is Portugal?

One of the best things about this welcoming nation is its affordability. A glass of the local beer (*Super Bock*) won't cost you much more than a dollar and a decent three-course dinner (with wine, of course) can be had for \$15-20 if you eat where the locals eat and avoid the touristy restaurants.



A beautiful stretch of beach in Carvoeira, Portugal.

How do you find a place to stay during peak season in Portugal

There are some brilliant hostels, guest houses and Airbnbs in every part of the country too, so finding accommodation is a simple matter of planning ahead.

If you're intending a longer-term visit, apartments in some of the most stunning parts of Portugal can be rented for a few hundred dollars a month. Even in the peak season (July-August), you can normally find a place to stay.

Which is cheaper – Portugal or Spain?

Many people believe Spain is the cheapest place to travel around in Western Europe. But, having spent a lot of time in this part of the world, I'd say most parts of Portugal work out around 10-15% cheaper for everyday expenses compared to Spain. I've had some great lunches for less than \$5.00 (including a drink) here.

If you want to cater for yourself, you'll save heaps by hitting the local farmers' markets, where \$15 will buy you as many seasonal fruits and veggies as you can carry.



The view of the Douro River in Porto.

First, find your favourite city...

Even if you're 'not really a city person', you'll love the city life here. In cosmopolitan Lisbon, jump on a tram in the late afternoon and glide through history-rich streets until you find that perfect restaurant overlooking the bay.

Visit the extraordinary castles and forested parks of Sintra, where there seem to be brilliant views from every vantage point.

At Cascais, stroll along the esplanade and enjoy the family-friendly beaches, where sunbathers from all over the world share the sand with Portuguese kids building massive



sandcastles.



I'd recommend walking around and taking in the sights of your chosen city.

My favourite city - Porto

If I had to pick a favourite Portuguese city, it would probably be Porto. Situated at the mouth of the Douro River, its charms include a wealth of ancient churches, museums, palaces, cathedrals and fortresses to explore. A boat cruise up the river on a wine-tasting tour is a must-do in Porto.

But some of this city's simplest pleasures are free, like strolling through the hills and across the picturesque river bridges on your way to a riverside tapas bar. It's an ideal base for day trips too. I can recommend checking out the pretty towns of Guimaraes and Braga as well as a train trip through the lushness of the Douro Valley on the way to Pinhao.

If you've never eaten octopus before, now's your chance. It's a specialty in this part of Portugal and is truly delicious. You should definitely try the Iberian Pork and a tasty fish called *dourada* while you're here as well.



The picturesque riverside boats in Porto.

Where are the best beaches?

Portugal boasts around 800 kilometres of coastline, with some of the nicest being found along the southern coast in the Algarve region. Hugging the Atlantic, this country is a sun-worshiper's paradise with heaps of dazzling, blue-sky days. You can also always find your own relaxing stretch of sand as there's loads of room.

How do Portuguese beaches compare to the rest of Europe?

If you've been to other parts of Europe, you may have found some of the beaches there a bit disappointing (especially compared to Australia), with pebbly, crowded and less than inviting shores. But Portugal will definitely restore your faith in the laid-back beach lifestyle.

My stay in the small Algarve town of Carvoeira

I stayed in a small Algarve town called Carvoeira, which has a lovely beach in the heart of town as well as some more private spots within walking distance.

One of the best ways to explore this spectacular stretch of coast is to hop on a boat tour from Carvoeira. These take you right along the base of the cliffs to investigate some of Portugal's most picturesque sea caves.



Take a boat tour to explore some of the incredible sea caves Carvoeira has to offer.

One thing that surprised me about the beaches in Portugal was how refreshing the water was. In June when the temperature was in the low 30s, I found a dip in the ocean to be bliss.



This entire section of coast is an intriguing mixture of sandy beaches, rocky headlands, scenic sea caves and a smattering of cheap but excellent cliff-top cafes. Further north, you'll find quality swimming beaches at Baleal (an hour's drive north of Lisbon) and Praia de Adraga, further up the coast.

If you like your beaches quiet, and free from cafes and other man-made distractions, head to Praia Forte do Paco. Here you'll find 800 metres of luscious sand dunes, warm, shallow rock pools and an 18th-century fort close by.



Despite the warm weather, the water is very refreshing.

Outdoor activities to do in Portugal:

Portugal has more adrenaline-pumping activities going on than you'll ever be able to fit into a single trip. With world-famous surf breaks, kayak-worthy rivers and mountainous grandeur, you'll find plenty to keep you occupied in the great outdoors. Here's just a small sampling of what you can get up to:

1. Bungee jumping at the Albufeira Marina

This one's a classic. You ride 40 metres up in the air in a crane and then bungee jump off a platform, dunking your head in the cool waters of the Atlantic before bouncing back up again.

2. Horse riding in the Costa Azul

This is a unique way to experience a gorgeous part of Portugal – gallop along white-sand beaches and through forested hills dotted with cork trees. Local stables (such as Cabalos na Areia) can fix you up with horse treks lasting a couple of hours or much longer – they even offer week-long riding excursions.



Horse riding in Lisbon Costa Azul. Image by Cabalos na Areia

3. Mountain biking in the Lousa Mountains

Near the inland city of Coimbra, you'll find the enchanting Lousa mountains. There are bike trails that wind through a mixture of rocky terrain, shady forest, river crossings and sand patches, where the creeks are ideal for cooling off after a hard ride.

Over two dozen villages are scattered throughout these hills, so you can stop for a quick bite and a rest along the way. There are popular abseiling and rock climbing spots here too.

4. Surfing safari at Ericeira

Portugal has some of the best surfing waves on the planet. So, if you can find a rental car big enough to store your board, you'll be in heaven. The right-hand barrel at Ericeira is world famous, but there are plenty of lesser-known gems to discover too.

If you're a beginner surfer, try Guincho Beach at Cascais or Amado on the Costa Vicentina.



Surfers in Amado beach. Image by Portugal visto do Ceu

5. Kayaking in Douro River National Park

The upper Douro is home to some amazing scenery and plentiful wildlife. This includes wild boar and – if you're *really* lucky to see them – some of the rare wolves left in the country. You can paddle the Tras-os-Montes area on your own or with a guided tour. Either way, it's a pleasant way to experience the wild side of Portugal. For more on getting started with kayaking, check out this guide [here](#).

6. Hiking in the Serra da Estrela

The 'Mountain of the Stars' National Park features some of the finest mountain scenery in Portugal with deep ravines, granite peaks and glacial valleys. This is the perfect place to be on hot summer days – as it's several degrees cooler than on the coast. For more tips on how to keep your cool when hiking in the heat, check out this guide [here](#).

There are plenty of [easy hikes](#) but if you want the ultimate challenge, try getting up to the top of Mount Torre at nearly 2000 metres. Some tracks in this park aren't as well-marked as others, so if in doubt, take a local guide.

When you've worn yourself out [hiking](#), make sure you visit the 13th-Century castle in the charming historical village of Linhares.



If you feel like some fresh air, go for a hike in the Mountain of the Stars National Park.

Here are some expert tips to make your stay in Portugal even better:

Do they speak English in Portugal?

Portugal may be a cheap [travel destination](#), but it's also an extremely civilised place with excellent infrastructure that's very visitor-friendly. English is widely spoken, especially in coastal areas and the people are genuinely friendly and helpful to visitors.

Is the Wi-Fi good there?

I was amazed at how good the Wi-Fi was wherever I went in Portugal, in fact, I never had a problem with it.

Tips for dining out on a budget in Portugal

If you're on a budget, bakeries and local lunch cafes are your friend. Avoid dining in any cities. Central Plaza is where all the tourists eat, so the prices are naturally higher. Wander a few blocks away instead and find a quiet side street with more affordable fare.



Do your shopping at the local markets rather than the chain supermarkets. The prices will be cheaper and the food fresher. Seasonal produce can be incredibly cheap if you know where to shop.

When you're at a café and the waiter brings olives and bread to your table, just say no. These aren't free and if you nibble on them, they 'll be added to your bill, even though you never ordered them.

The best option for accommodation on a budget

Renting an Airbnb room is one of the cheapest ways to get good accommodation in Portugal. It's also a terrific way to interact with the locals too. A shared room can often be found for less than \$20 AUD per night, even in summer. Staying at a Pensão (family-owned inn) is another way to save some bucks.



Airbnb's are an affordable accommodation choice when visiting Portugal. Image by Airbnb.

What's the best day to do tourist activities?

Hit the museums on a Sunday. Many of the country's museums are free on Sundays, so this is the day to fit in your museum-hopping.

Don't forget the islands

Don't forget about Portugal's beautiful islands. The Azores and the sun-soaked island of Madeira offer a whole other side of Portugal that many visitors never bother to experience. Make sure you get out there and check out island life for yourself. The pace is slower, the breezes sweeter and the water is just fine!

Getting around Portugal on local transport

Buses and trains between cities are comfortable and inexpensive here. You'll also find a fair few bicycle hire centres in the more bike-worthy cities. The most expensive way to get around is by taxi, so avoid them when you can. Instead, buy a city metro ticket for about \$3.00 AUD instead.

I found most cities and towns throughout Portugal exceptionally walkable. Just make sure you've got a good grip on your shoes – cobblestone streets can sometimes be a bit slippery after it rains.

So that's all the tips and advice I have about visiting Portugal. Hopefully, this has inspired you to book your next holiday on their sandy, sun-drenched shores.

Are you planning a European adventure soon to escape the cold?