



Why Go Now: Portugal



Courtesy Six Senses; Lisbon Tourism Board; Nuno Correia

Gone are the days when [Portugal](#) was the continent's unsung destination. Europe's coolest country—young, fun, energetic and vibrant—is emerging into the spotlight. With a rich, centuries-long history, extraordinary hospitality and an emerging sector of high-end hotels, restaurants and shops, Portugal—whose name seems to be on the tip of everyone's tongue—is just hitting its stride. Here are ten reasons why Portugal should be on your destination wish-list.

Contact [Indagare](#) for assistance planning a customized journey to Portugal.

1. The weather and variety of landscapes ensure that a visit to Portugal is sunny, interesting and active.

[Lisbon](#), with its steep hills, yellow trams and blue-and-white tiles, is a vibrant treat for the eyes. The wine country to the north is lush and serene. The coastlines are rugged and dramatic. [Porto](#) brims with soulful old-world charm. Outside the cities are

expansive olive orchards, farms and national parks ideal for hiking. Portugal contains a mix of terrains that offer panoramic vistas and accommodate myriad activities and excursions. Plus, thanks to its location on the southeastern edge of Europe, temperatures rarely drop much below 60° Fahrenheit, and the days are reliably sunny. Lisbon, in fact, has been named one of the top five sunniest cities on the continent.



Sintra, Portugal, Courtesy Sintra Tourism Board

2. Independent travelers can tour the country easily and pleasantly by car.

Portugal is compact, with no two destinations more than a half-day drive from each other. Taking to the road yourself allows you to turn off at will to visit little towns where life is lived much as it was decades or even centuries ago. Roman roads, bridges and aqueducts, as well as monasteries, convents, palaces and manor houses, are among the many antique engineering and architectural treasures you'll stumble upon while navigating the narrow roads. Some of our favorite stops between Lisbon and the Douro Valley include the charming villages of Óbidos, Tomar and Coimbra.



Lisbon, Portugal, Courtesy Lisbon Tourism Board

3. The country is safe, stable and accessible...

Portugal has fortunately escaped the attacks of recent years that have plagued other European destinations, including Paris, London, Brussels and Barcelona, and the country feels very safe when you're on the ground. Despite energetic and exciting cities like Lisbon and Porto, Portugal also offers travelers a pace that is relatively slow and peaceful. With the economy rebounding from the 2008 credit crisis, the country's residents—both natives and expats—are busily starting up and growing businesses, and a large part of the activity is in the tourism sector. The British have been spending long weekends in Portugal for decades, so most members of the hospitality industry speak fluent English. Today, the City of Seven Hills, as Lisbon is known, is an ideal weekend escape for U.S. East Coasters, as well, thanks to the quick, easy flights (New York to Lisbon direct takes six-and-a-half hours) and only a five-hour time difference.



Lisbon, Portugal, Courtesy Lisbon Tourism Board

4. ... as well as authentic and relatively untouristed.

Portugal offers somewhat less luxury than other European countries, but this is more than compensated for by the opportunity to experience a culture that hasn't been overly tailored to the tourist. Travelers who manage their expectations and are willing to accept sometimes-lackluster hotel amenities will find that the chance to discover a *fado* bar and listen, along with locals, to a singer performing traditional songs, at once heartbreaking, hopeful and nostalgic, outweighs the lack of high-thread-count sheets. Another bonus of the country's relatively nascent tourism (though Lisbon is growing increasingly crowded during peak months) is the few signs globalization. For example, in Lisbon, Europe's second-oldest city (after Athens), you'll be hard-pressed to find too many McDonald's or Starbucks outposts.



Courtesy A Vida Portuguesa in Lisbon, Portugal

5. Portugal is Western Europe's most reasonably priced country.

One of the Continent's least developed countries, Portugal has very low rents and minimum wages. Drinks (including glasses of very good Portuguese wine) rarely cost more than two or three euros, and dinner in the most formal restaurants never comes to more than fifty euros per person. Nightly rates at the [Six Senses Douro Valley](#), the country's most magnificent hotel, start at around 325 euros in the low season.



Prado in Lisbon, Portugal, Courtesy Rodrigo Cardoso

6. Young creatives (both native and expatriate) are thriving.

Chefs, designers, entrepreneurs and the like have been flocking to Lisbon and Porto, lured by the inexpensive rents; the [Golden Visa program](#) (which puts non-European citizens who make sizable investments in the country on a fast track to receiving permanent resident permits) and the fact that Lisbon is one of the world's hottest cities. Collaboration is endemic, so along with new restaurants, shops and ateliers, group endeavors by multiple artisans are popping up constantly. Some favorites include the trendy [LX Factory](#), a mix of shops and eateries, and the chic [Embaixada](#) concept store. Food halls with myriad bars and restaurants celebrate numerous chefs and cuisines. Three of the hottest spots are [Palacio Chiado](#), [Mercado da Ribeira](#) and **Bairro do Avillez** (*18 Rua Nova da Trindade*).

Shopping in Lisbon is great, with unique accessories and home goods made by local artisans, often using traditional methods, available at affordable prices. Chefs, too, tend toward traditional dishes like cod and grilled sardines but give them a twist all their own. A handful of the most successful big names set a high standard for the others, while their own restaurants are numerous enough to keep you deliciously sated during a week-long stay. Notable spots include Rui Paula's [DOP; Mini Bar](#) (*58 Rua Antonio Maria Cordoso*), [Belcanto](#) and [Cantinho do Avillez](#), all owned by Jose Avillez; and Kiko Martins's **O Talho** (*1B Rua Carlos Testa*) and [A Cevicheria](#). Lisbon's hottest newcomers

include [Prado](#), a chic, greenhouse-inspired space with farm-to-table fare, Local (*Rua de O Século 204*), serving creative cuisine using local ingredients, and Pesca (*Rua da Escola Politécnica 27*), offering excellent seafood in Principe Real.



LX Factory in Lisbon, Portugal, Courtesy Ricardo Junquera

7. The entire country is surprisingly family-friendly.

Kids will love Portugal's many castles and palaces, which are open to the public and beg to be explored. The Portuguese adore kids and bring their own everywhere, so even "nice" restaurants provide high chairs to enable little ones to eat with the adults. In short, all guests are generally made to feel welcome, whatever their age. Among the specifically family-friendly hotels is the [Martihal Chiado Family Suites](#), in Lisbon's Chiado neighborhood, which has kids' clubs for children of different ages, rooms with bunk beds and suites with kitchens and washing machines.



Courtesy Six Senses Douro Valley, Portugal

8. Six Senses Douro Valley is a world-class destination hotel.

When the celebrated Asian spa brand Six Senses announced it would be launching its first European property, many assumed the location would be the south of France, coastal Italy or even southern Spain. They were caught off-guard when, in 2015, the new property opened in a restored 19th-century manor house in the under-hyped north of Portugal. The choice of site is not so surprising, however, when you consider that the Douro Valley is one of the world's most beautiful wine countries and is blissfully devoid of tour buses and mass-market tastings. And guests at the [Six Senses Douro Valley](#) understand exactly why it has already been a huge success. Sitting on a hillside above the Douro River, the salmon-colored palace has an exterior that evokes tradition and interiors that are all about contemporary minimalism. The 57 guest rooms have beautiful views of the 19-acre property and surrounding countryside, including the river and adjacent vineyards.



Courtesy Six Senses Douro Valley, Portugal

9. The wine is fabulous.

Every traveler to Portugal knows (or soon learns) about port, the country's most famous drinkable export. Although the fortified wine is aged and bottled in the city of Porto, the grapes are grown and pressed in vineyards clinging to the hillsides of the Douro Valley (locals claim there isn't a single square foot of flat land in the entire region). Whether or not that's the reason, the red wine from here is hearty, robust and bold. Some excellent lighter wines are produced in **Alentejo**, a vast and underpopulated region to the east and south of Lisbon that seems to contain more olive orchards and cork trees than people. Its red Syrahs and Cabernet Sauvignons are extraordinary, while its famous and beloved *vinho verde*, made from young (green) grapes, is sometimes sparkling and always lovely on warm days. It might be your new favorite drink.



Courtesy Vinum Restaurant and Wine Bar, Porto, Portugal

10. Portugal's further-flung regions are up-and-coming.

Lying just a few hundred miles west of [Morocco](#), the Atlantic island of **Madeira** (famously the birthplace of soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo) is slightly smaller than Cape Cod and home to only 250,000 residents. With its mountainous terrain, rich biodiversity, year-round mild climate and laidback ambience, Madeira draws low-key, active travelers interested in hiking, wine tasting, market tours and other authentic experiences. The island is also known for its elaborate holiday celebrations in December and January, in addition to one of the world's largest displays of fireworks on New Year's Eve. Stay at the [Belmond Reid's Palace](#), where every room has a balcony overlooking the ocean.



São Miguel Island, the largest island in the Azores, Courtesy Angela Compagnone

Thrill-seekers and nature lovers are currently discovering the **Azores**, a Portuguese archipelago in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean that resembles something akin to the otherworldly landscapes of *Avatar*. With new direct flights from New York (the journey takes just five hours), the islands beckon with volcanic crater lakes, natural hot springs and black-sand beaches, as well as activities including scuba diving, kayaking, hiking, whale-watching, birding, surfing and more. And while five-star luxury isn't easy to find here, there are some lovely hotels, such as the contemporary-chic **Furnas Boutique Hotel**, urban **Azor** and minimalist **White Exclusive Suites & Villas**.

Contact Indagare for assistance planning a customized journey to Portugal, or learn more about Indagare's upcoming Insider Journey to Lisbon, co-hosted with Architectural Digest.

- Amelia Osborne Scott on April 26, 2019

