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Travel Portugal: A Land True To Its Past

By Frank Johnson

Perched on the western edge of the Iberian Peninsula, Portugal stands out among its neighbors as

one of the oldest and yet most traditional and conservative European civilizations. Visitors can view 22,000 year-old Paleolithic art on the rock faces of Vale do Côa, and human occupation of this region dates 500,000 years back in time! The Celts settled here around 750 B.C. and were followed by Romans, Visigoths, and Greeks among others. The Moors enjoyed their infamous occupation from the 8th to the 13th Century and left their culture and ornate, whitewashed architecture as an eclectic signature on the Iberian Peninsula.

Today, Portugal's homogenous culture and dedication to tradition is largely due to Salazar's oppressive rule during the mid-1900s. As a result, visitors can enjoy a more culturally authentic stay in Portugal than any other European nation.

The north-south axis of mainland Portugal creates regions of dynamic terrain and unique specialties. The popular Douro Valley stretches 125 miles along a winding river and is famous for the string of port wineries at its edges. Cruises are now offered along the entire length of the Valley, beginning in Porto. The resort town of Lagos in the southern Algarve region attracts sun-seekers and history buffs alike. Prepare to be swept away by this hidden gem encircled by 15th Century walls.

Travel Portugal in the Atlantic

Two groups of islands off the Atlantic Coastline belong to Portugal and are a perfect and serene escape from the mainland, offering centuries of Portuguese history all their own and a look into the region's natural beauty. The Azores Islands archipelago lies 907 miles from the coast and is a haven of turquoise lakes, rolling green hills and sandy beaches. Monasteries, cathedrals, forts and ruins dating back to the 15th Century, when Portuguese navigators encountered the outcropping, are sprinkled about the islands. To the South, the enticing subtropical climate of Madeira Island and the surrounding volcanic archipelago is a bastion for adventure-seekers, resort luxuries, Madeira wine and untouched 15th Century architecture standing dramatically on seaside cliffs. Both of these secluded retreats are easily accessible from major airports on mainland Portugal.

Tips to the Savvy Traveler

Nearly all of Portugal works on Siesta time and 97% of the country is Catholic, therefore also affecting commercial hours and holidays. Most shops, banks and pharmacies are closed between 1pm and 3pm (yes, even in major cities). Make special note that museums also close in the middle of the day between 12:30pm and 2pm. Almost everything except museums closes by 1pm on Saturdays, and plan on simply eating and resting on Sundays when nothing is open. To plan your trip wisely, check the hours of operation of attractions you'd like to see before planning your trip or booking your room!

Lastly, be aware when traveling by taxi. Fare is metered within urban limits, but once you leave these boundaries, you will be charged by the kilometer in addition to the price of the driver's return trip to the starting point. When taking a taxi after midnight, negotiate the price with the driver before getting in the car, especially if you've been indulging in Port!

For more information, visit

<http://www.cfares.com>

Travelling Beyond The Algarve Reveals The Real Portugal

By Mr Hanna

The Algarve is atypical sun and sand holiday destination attracting tens of thousands of Europeans every summer. Although the region has much to offer both the package holiday maker, independent traveller and, of course, golfer, many visitors to Portugal fail to get beyond the trappings of the holiday resorts and sample the real Portugal.

Outside of the Algarve, Portugal has a long and illustrious history. An independent nation since 1143, Portugal is one of the oldest nations in Europe and its location on the Atlantic coast of the Iberian Peninsula dictates a long history of sea faring and discovery. A vast monumental and cultural legacy has been left for modern visitors to enjoy. The tourist information site gives an interesting and informative overview of the cultural and historic attractions of the country as well as useful guides to the regions and cities of Portugal (

<http://www.portugal.org/tourism/index.html>

).

The capital city, Lisbon, is an ideal location for a short break and is rapidly gaining a reputation as such. A thriving and bustling mix of the old and new, Lisbon retains a respect for its historic past whilst offering the visitor the attractions and amenities that could be expected of a main European city. The city is dominated by the old port area - the departure point for explorers such as Magellan - and recent

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regeneration of the area is sympathetic and impressive. Lisbon comes to life at night as the locals descend on the pavement restaurants and bars creating a relaxed, sociable and informal atmosphere.

Further North and the impressive, World Heritage status city of Porto can be found. The city, of course, lends its' name to the world famous variety of wine but the city's baroque and Romanesque architecture leave a lasting and perhaps not as regrettable impression. Although the Algarve signs to mind when you mention beaches and Portugal, the coastal region of Minho, to the north of Porto have perhaps the most stunning beaches in the country. The area has some resorts, but these are quieter and smaller in scale to their southern counterparts and offer a quieter, perhaps more relaxed beach holiday than the Algarve.

Travelling to Portugal via, Lisbon, Porto or Faro is relatively easy from the UK with most operators offering direct flights from a range of UK airports. Internal flights are relatively inexpensive and the rail system is cheap and efficient. Portugal is a relatively small country and is negotiable by road for those looking to traverse wide areas. Car rental in Portugal is abundant - especially in Lisbon and Porto and most of the major car hire firms offer one way or return car hire in Portugal (

<http://www.easycar.com/car-hire/destination/Portugal.aspx/EN>

).

The Algarve is an ideal family holiday destination and has many charms but Portugal as a country has much more to offer for those willing to explore a little further.

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