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The 30 best holidays in Portugal



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From cool new hotels in Lisbon and wine tasting in the Douro to the top beach stays in the Algarve — our pick of the trips

Chic hotels

1. Hot springs in the Azores

A boutique hotel among natural hot springs and tropical gardens on a volcanic island in the farthest reaches of Europe is surely the perfect place to hole up à *deux*. Furnas Boutique Hotel and Spa on Sao Miguel has a rustic restaurant, indoor thermal pool, sauna, hammam and spa on-site, with a natural thermal pool half a mile away. Rooms are simple but stylish, with plenty of glass. You'll need a car; there's plenty of great hiking near by and it's four miles (7km) to the nearest beach.

Details: Seven nights' B&B is from £883, including flights from Gatwick and car hire (020 8758 4722, sunvil.co.uk/portugal)

2. Spa hotel in the Douro

The opulent Asia-based Six Senses brand opened its first European hotel last year, in a renovated 19th-century manor house in the Douro Valley. Local winemakers show off their wines here, in the resort's wine boutique and Quinta Bar, and local grapes are used

in the spa treatments. Even the entry level Quinta Superior rooms are spacious, with a separate sitting area, although it's worth splashing out on one of the Quinta River rooms with a balcony overlooking the river.

Details: Rooms are from €285 a night B&B (00 351 254 660 600, <u>sixsenses.com</u>). Fly to Porto

3. Secret escape on the Algarve

The fishing village of Olhao is unknown to most holidaymakers on the Algarve. Here you'll find cobbled streets and simple restaurants, serving grilled sardines and wine by the *jarro* (jug). You'll also find the Convento – if you look hard enough. Tucked away between a fishmonger's and a local restaurant, it has a riad-style feel and a rooftop terrace with pool. The nine rooms are arranged around a courtyard and are a masterclass in how best to use a white drape. It's just a short taxi-boat ride to the beautiful sandy beaches of the Ria Formosa lagoon too.

Details: Rooms cost from €100 a night, B&B (0117 946 7072, <u>i-escape.com/convento</u>)

4. Bed down in a castle

If you want to take in Portugal's history, why not sleep in it? This tour of the country's best *pousadas* means bedding down in castles and historic buildings as you wend your way north from Lisbon. You'll also get to wander the marble streets of Estremoz, visit the hilltop old town of Coimbra, explore the medieval castle at Guimaraes and, of course, top it all off with a port tasting at a wine lodge in Porto.

Details: Eight days' half-board is from £1,099pp, including flights, transfers and entry fees (0800 9875110, $\underline{\text{travelsphere.co.uk}}$)

5. Adult-only Algarve

The Algarve is on the doorstep of the Fazenda Nova Country House, but you can easily forget that once you're settled in and lounging under the olive trees by the saltwater pool. You can also book an in-room spa treatment or private yoga session or read the entire back catalogue of *The Face* — founded by the owner Hallie Robinson's father, Nick Logan, in 1980 — in the library. This is an adults-only escape (apart from a few weeks in the summer school holidays) and there's a stylish restaurant and an open-all-hours honesty bar with local wines.

Details: Rooms cost from £167 B&B a night (0330 1003180, <u>mrandmrssmith.com</u>). Fly to Faro

6. Mountain hideaway near Porto

There's no shortage of hideaways on the slopes of Portugal's highest mountains but few are as stylish as Casas da Lapa, which dates from 1812 and is all rough stone and smooth whitewash, updated with contemporary furniture and local artwork. On the northwest slope of Serra da Estrela, it makes a great base for hiking limestone peaks, standing beneath thundering waterfalls and wild swimming in crystal clear rivers — so its sauna and steam bath are sure to be appreciated. There's also a sunny pool terrace and a restaurant.

Details: Rooms cost from €90 a night B&B (00 351 935 550 500, <u>casasdalapa.com</u>). Fly to Porto

7. Hot hotel in Albufeira

Even in April the average high in Albufeira is 19C (66F), with eight hours of daily sunshine. Hop on a flight to Faro and onwards to Vila Joya, only 30 minutes' drive away. All but one of the 20 rooms at this hotel face out over the golden sands and on to the

Atlantic, and there's a two Michelin star restaurant and world-class spa, complete with outdoor hot tub.

Details: Rooms cost from €210 B&B a night (00 351 289 591 795, vilajoya.com). Fly to Faro

Best for families

8. Family fun in Albufeira

From July the Pine Cliffs Resort, right in the middle of the Algarve, will have even more to offer. The resort hotel reopens at the end of June after a massive two-year renovation. At the same time the new luxury family Ocean Suites will open, with 76 two and three-bedroom suites with self-catering facilities, floor-to-ceiling windows to make the most of the clifftop views, and a spa and restaurant. That's in addition to the resort's private beach, multiple swimming pools, golf course, tennis academy and numerous restaurants. **Details:** Ocean Suites cost from €250 a night B&B (pinecliffs.com). For travel before July, Sovereign (01293 765 003, sovereign.com) has seven nights in a two-bedroom townhouse, self-catering, from £2,789 for a family of four, including flights to Faro leaving on April 1

9. Lisbon pyjama party

A truly family-focused city centre hotel is rare indeed, and a stay at this new Lisbon address for the Martinhal — which established its family-friendly credentials on the Algarve — may just ruin you for other urban hotels. The Martinhal Chiado has plenty of space in its apartments, with kitchen and laundry, while the family concierge service means you can book safety gates, baby baths and potties in advance. The kids' club even becomes a pyjama club in the evenings, leaving you free to explore Lisbon as a couple — and you're located in one of the most elegant parts of the historic centre here too. It opens at the end of May.

Details: Seven nights in a one-bedroom apartment cost from £1,587 for a family of four self-catering (01444 872200, designholidays.co.uk).

10. Child-friendly Cascais

Half an hour from Lisbon is the lovely beach resort of Cascais, and the setting for the Martinhal's second new hotel this year. The Martinahl Cascais, which opens on March 18, will have 84 rooms and private villas, with three outdoor pools, a spa, a restaurant and a family bistro. Children are taken seriously here, with a baby concierge and a clubhouse for those aged six months to their early teens, as well as a variety of playgrounds. The babysitting service means parents can take a night or two off too. The hotel is two minutes from Cascais beach for great surfing and is set between two championship golf courses. There is horse riding and tennis near by.

Details: Introductory rates start at €186 a night for five nights' B&B (martinhal.com/cascais/en)

11. New look luxury resort in the Algarve

A renovation overseen by David Archer (known for his work on Chiltern Firehouse) will ensure the luxury Vila Vita Parc resort stays ahead of the pack when it's completed in May. A secluded beach, a clifftop tropical garden, endless ocean views and a two Michelin star restaurant overlooking the Atlantic are complemented by three children's swimming pools, a kids' club and family suites.

Details: Seven nights' B&B costs from £1,179 an adult and £196 for the first child sharing a room, including flights from Gatwick (0800 0087299, classic-collection.co.uk)

12. Active in the Alentejo

Throw the children off a bridge, into the Mira River and out into the Atlantic on Exodus's new active family trip. Based in Vila Nova de Milfontes in the Costa Vicentina Natural Park, it offers plenty of activity, from a Jeep tour and orienteering by kayak to cycling, abseiling and, of course, surfing. The hotel is a short walk from the beach and has an outdoor pool and tennis court.

Details: Eight days' B&B costs from £1,029 an adult (£926 a child), including flights (0845 8639601, $\underline{\text{exodus.co.uk}}$)

13. Algarve get-together

Big family? Book Casa Majeur in the Algarve's interior and you can accommodate up to 14. This seven-bedroom villa has a private 12-metre pool, games room with table football and pool table, tennis court and piano room. For younger children there's a separate shallow children's pool too. You need to hire a car because it's eight miles from the nearest beach but all the attractions of the Algarve are within about half an hour's drive. **Details:** Seven nights cost from £2,865, for up to 14 people (01789 595435, villaselect.com). Fly to Faro

14. Swim with water dogs on the Algarve

The five-star palace Conrad Algarve has launched a series of new "Algarvian enrichment" activities for 2016, with plenty for the children. Take them swimming with Portuguese water dogs (dogs with webbed feet that have traditionally helped local fishermen) for €65pp. Or head off on a fishing adventure through the marshes and salt pans of the Ria Formosa lagoon in a traditional fishing boat (€200 for four). There are bike tours, Jeep safaris and watersports too, as well as a sleek spa.

Details: Seven nights' B&B starts from £789pp B&B, including flights. Connecting rooms are available (01244 355527,itcluxurytravel.co.uk)

15. Villa in Comporta

The dunes at Comporta have long been an A-list hideaway, and this new house gives them — and you — somewhere appropriately chic to hole up. In the hills above the village of Melides, Les Terrasses de Comporta has views through the pine, olive and orange trees towards to sea and there are three standalone bungalows alongside the main house, making it an ideal base for groups of friends or two families travelling together. There's a very stylish outdoor pool and lounge area and the beach is a tenminute drive away.

Details: One week's self-catering costs from €6,000, for up to eight people (020 7043 2188, <u>avenueproperty.com</u>). Fly to Lisbon

Best for activities

16. Cycle the Coastal Way

With this cycling pilgrimage you can combine two countries in one holiday, crossing from northern Portugal in to Galicia on day four and reaching Santiago de Compostela on day seven. After leaving the vibrant and port-sozzled city of Porto, your route passes sandy beach after sandy beach as it winds between the fishing villages of Portugal's wild Atlantic coast. Accommodation is in traditional family-run hotels and the cycling is suitable for anyone who can change a bike tyre.

Details: Seven nights' half-board starts from £653pp, including luggage transfers, with a 10 per cent reduction if you book at least two months in advance (020 3468 1516, caminoways.com). Fly to Porto and back from Santiago de Compostela

17. Walking in Sagres

This self-guided walking holiday explores the Sagres Peninsula, all golden beaches, towering cliffs and flower-stocked meadows. You'll be following the Rota Vicentina and Fishermen's Trail — and spotting plenty of birdlife — as you look out from Cabo de Sao Vicente lighthouse, mainland Europe's most southwesterly point. The itinerary starts and finishes in Sagres and takes in plenty of fishing villages, so there are numerous opportunities to refuel with fresh seafood.

Details: Six nights' B&B costs from £959, including three evening meals, luggage transfer, detailed route notes and BA flights (01606 822675, <u>headwater.com</u>)

18. Surfing near Lisbon

The Surfers Lodge Peniche feels more like a home than a hotel — all communal sofas and squishy cushions. Rooms are chic, with whitewashed wooden walls and warm fabrics; some have bunk beds, hostel-style. Peniche is Portugal's surfing hotspot, and there are daily lessons here, with post-lesson video playback so you can see every plunging fall in detail. There's also diving, stand-up paddle boarding and yoga, plus a roof terrace with hot tub and pool.

Details: Doubles cost from €143 a night; surf lessons are €50 for 90 minutes, including all equipment (<u>surferslodgepeniche.com</u>). Fly to Lisbon

19. Alentejo by foot

Inntravel's self-drive cultural journey through Portugal's southwest is new for 2016. Fly to Lisbon for a self-guided walking tour before hitting the smugglers' trails that wind between the hilltop towns along the border with Spain. Highlights in the Alentejo include the Moorish alleys and Roman temple of Evora, the perfectly preserved medieval village of Monsaraz and the vast man-made Grande Lago lake — plus some of Portugal's best red wines. The tour ends on the wild Atlantic coast in the Costa Vicentina Natural Park. **Details:** Eleven nights' B&B starts from £995pp, including two dinners, nine days' car hire, detailed route notes and maps (01653 617000, <u>inntravel.co.uk</u>). Fly to Lisbon, and back from Faro

20. Horse riding along the coast

The beaches of the Estoril coast could have been made for horse riding, their wide smooth sands practically begging you to saddle up. This horse-riding package at The Oitavos is great for beginners who want to have a go at cantering along the sands, with a two-hour lesson taking you out to Guincho Beach. You'll return to the hotel for a spell in the spa — sure to soothe those muscles you didn't know you had.

Details: Two nights' B&B starts from €570, including horse riding and spa treatment; extra lessons are €35 an hour (020 3397 8891, health and fitness travel.com). Fly to Lisbon

21. Madeira walking tour

On an island of peaks and valleys, irrigation channels were once vital — and the spaghetti-like paths cut to maintain these range across Madeira from its lush interior to its rugged coast. Macs Adventure's seven-day self-guided walking holiday takes full advantage of these routes into the subtropical island's heart and takes you past orchids, magnolias and azaleas, as well as plenty of birds of paradise. Stay in small hotels and guesthouses.

Details: Seven nights' B&B starts from £575, including four dinners, all transfers and route notes (0141 5304013, macsadventure.com). Fly to Funchal

Best for special interest

22. Whales in the Azores

July and August are the height of whale-watching season in the Azores (although they can be seen from April to October) and this whale and dolphin-spotting holiday based on the small volcanic island of Faial takes you out in search of sperm and short-finned whales, as well as common, bottlenose, Atlantic spotted and Risso's dolphins. You can also visit Faial's dramatic caldeira and Capelinhos, the site of the Azores' most recent volcanic eruption, in 1957.

Details: Seven nights' B&B costs from £1,235pp, including flights, transfers, three half-day whale-watching excursions and a full-day private taxi tour of the neighbouring island of Pico (020 8758 4722,sunvil.co.uk/portugal)

23. Boating in Amieira

Mess about in boats on one of Europe's largest man-made lakes, Grande Lago, with Waterways Holidays' new boating holiday based in Amieira. Moor at a remote islet for a barbecue, swim in warm clear waters and cycle around the lake's thickly wooded shores. Boats have a saloon with a table that converts into a bed, a separate cabin with a permanent double bed, a shower room with a flushing toilet and a kitchenette, plus a swimming ladder and two sun terraces.

Details: A week's hire starts at £1,074 for up to four people (01252 339023, <u>waterwaysholidays.com</u>). Fly to Lisbon

24. Get fit in Madeira

With more than ten fitness classes a day, there's no excuse for just lounging in the sun at Hotel Galosol — although there is a lovely clifftop pool with sea views for doing just that too. All classes, from Pilates and yoga to Spinning and Zumba, are included, as are mountain biking, horse riding and sea kayaking. Rooms are airy and modern, with balconies, and there's access to the sea from the rocks below.

Details: Seven nights' B&B costs from £595pp, including flights, transfers and fitness classes (020 8968 0501,thehealthyholidaycompany.co.uk). Fly to Funchal

25. Douro wine tour

Follow the famous Douro grapes from the valley to the coast with a twin-centre break at two of the region's leading hotels. Start at the riverside Vintage House Hotel in Pinhao, reopening this March after a refurbishment of the old port storage warehouse. All rooms have balconies overlooking the river and there are boat and bike tours of the surrounding vineyards and an introduction to some of Portugal's best wines at the hotel's wine school. From here it's a one-and-a-half-hour drive to Porto and the Yeatman Hotel, where you can visit the wine cellars and indulge in some wine-based therapy in the spa.

Details: Four nights' B&B starts from €850, with two nights at each hotel (vintagehousehotel.com, the-yeatman-hotel.com). Fly to Porto

Best on a budget

26. Budget Alentejo

With its sunny terraces, communal lounge and bright doubles, the homely 17th-century Casa do Adro in the historic heart of Vila Nova de Milfontes is a great budget base for exploring the Alentejo coast. You're practically in the town's churchyard here, and it's a short walk to the main town beach and quieter Furnas. First-floor rooms have balconies and there's a communal kitchen with complimentary coffee and fruit.

Details: Rooms cost from €80 a night B&B (<u>casadoadro.com.pt</u>). Fly to Lisbon or Faro

27. Affordable eco adventure

For an active break at an affordable price, the wooden bungalows at the Zmar Eco Campo resort campsite in the Alentejo are hard to beat. The site is between the Mira River and the Atlantic coast and has a water park with outdoor and indoor pools, a spa, an adventure playground, a petting farm and a kids' club. Bungalows have kitchenettes, a living room and a porch and it's a ten-minute drive to the coast.

Details: One-bedroom lodges cost from £43 B&B a night. Two-bedroom lodges sleep six and cost from £100 B&B per night (pitchup.com). Fly to Lisbon or Faro

28. Lodges in the Minho

You're sure to sleep well at the Lavender Lodge, surrounded by lavender fields high up in the mountains of the Minho. The lodges are canvas and wood, with a king-size canopy bed handcrafted by the owners from local materials. The shower and toilet are in a separate private lodge further up through the fields. Days start on the breakfast terrace, where you can pick your own oranges, or perhaps with a dip in the spring-fed pool, before touring sleepy villages or the country's only national park, Peneda-Geres. **Details:** Lodges cost from £60 B&B a night, for two adults and two children (0117 2047830, canopyandstars.co.uk). Fly to Porto

29. Glamping in Peneda-Geres

With the River Lima burbling around it and the shade of plenty of oak and pine trees, Lima Escape is exactly that — and it's in the Peneda-Geres national park. That means plenty of hiking, biking and birds, including some species not seen elsewhere in Portugal. All this is accessible on even the most slender budget, with a range of glamping options including tepees and bell tents starting from €50. Two Jeeps provide tours (from €45 for up to five people) and there's hearty food in the restaurant.

Details: Tepees cost €50 a night and bell tents €60 a night for two people, including breakfast (00 351 258 588 361, lima-escape.pt/en). Fly to Porto

30. Short break in a Lisbon palace

If you're looking for a great place to stay that won't break the bank, Santiago de Alfama, a converted 15th-century palace, is the place for you. Thanks to its location high up the slopes of ancient Alfama, many of the 19 rooms and suites have stonking city views, and there's plenty of historic charm too, from the original wooden floors to the unearthed Roman ruins proudly displayed beneath glass floors. Historic Tram 28 rattles past just a few hundreds metres away and runs to the city centre.

Details: Rooms cost from £129 a night, room-only (0117 9467072, <u>i-escape.com/santiago-de-alfama</u>)

Need to know Getting there

TAP flies from Heathrow, Gatwick and Manchester to Lisbon from £125 return. It also has returns from Gatwick to Porto from £121 (flytap.com). Ryanair flies from Edinburgh, Gatwick and Stansted to Faro from about £23 one way. It also flies from Stansted to Porto from about £86 return (ryanair.com). Easyjet flies to Faro from Belfast, Bristol, Glasgow, Liverpool, Luton, Gatwick, Southend and Newcastle from about £32 one way (easyjet.com). It also flies from Bristol, Luton, Gatwick and Manchester to Porto from £29 one way - and to Lisbon from £31 one way from Gatwick, Luton, Liverpool, Edinburgh and Bristol. Monarch flies from Gatwick to Faro from about £129 return

($\underline{\text{monarch.co.uk}}$). British Airways flies to Faro from about £102 return, from Gatwick to Porto from about £71 return, and from Heathrow to Lisbon from about £115 ($\underline{\text{ba.com}}$).

Further information

Visit Portugal (visitportugal.com)