

Countries Of The World: Portugal

By National Geographic Kids, adapted by *Newsela* staff
04/17/2018

Link: <https://newsela.com/read/elem-country-portugal/id/40398/>

Portugal is the westernmost point of Europe. It lies on the west coast of the Iberian Peninsula. The long Atlantic coastline is popular with visitors and locals alike. Surfers are drawn to the strong surf in the west, and the warm, sandy beaches in the south are a haven for tourists.

Most people live along the coast, with a third of the population living in the large metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto.

Nature

Most of Portugal was once covered by forests. Today, only a quarter of the country remains forested. While some native species such as the cork tree are still common, many plants are foreign species and were introduced by humans.

Farming and hunting have reduced the numbers of wild animals living in Portugal. The common animals are boars, wild goats, fallow deer, foxes and Iberian hares. The Iberian lynx is the most endangered cat species in the world. Portugal and Spain are working together to create open space to allow the remaining few hundred lynxes to roam freely.

The coastline is a rich habitat for crabs, clams and oysters. Tuna, bonito and sardines are a common catch for Portuguese fishermen.

Many migratory birds stop in Portugal while on their journey to and from central Europe to Africa and beyond.

People And Culture

Portuguese cities still retain their historic character and many of the old buildings remain intact. Lisbon hasn't changed much since the late 18th century. The natural environment is well preserved and there is no serious pollution.

The art of tile painting and glazing, known as azulejos, is one of the most popular art forms in Portugal. The technique was first introduced by the Moors and was adopted by the king in the 1500s. Use of the blue-and-white tiles spread across the country and the art form is practiced by artisans today.

Eight out of ten Portuguese people are Roman Catholic. Saints' days and religious festivals are very popular events. Although the country has been modernized thanks to the money it receives from richer European countries, the people are still quite poor compared to those in other countries.

Government And Economy

Portugal is a democratic republic and has been a member of the European Union since 1986. The country went through several forms of government in its history. In 1143, Portugal became a separate kingdom from the rest of Iberia and was ruled by a king until 1910 when the country became a republic.

From 1910 to 1926, Portugal had 44 governments, 20 military takeovers and 12 presidents. The country was ruled by a dictator, Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, until his death in 1970. The Portuguese people didn't want another dictator and took to the street in a mass movement. It was called the Carnation Revolution because the rebels wore red carnations. The country became democratic in 1976. Portugal adopted the Euro as its currency in 1999.

History

The Moors, Muslim people from North Africa, settled in the Iberian Peninsula in 711. The Moors were pushed out of Iberia by Christian armies, and by the 9th century, northern Portugal was under Christian rule.

Portugal is one of the oldest nations in the world. Established in the 12th century, Portugal presided over a vast empire that had its roots in the seafaring explorations of the 1400s. From 1487 to 1488, Bartolomeu Dias became the first European to round Africa's Cape of Good Hope. Ferdinand Magellan led the first voyage around the world between 1519 and 1522.

In the 1970s, Portugal broke up its immense overseas empire and gave independence to Angola, Mozambique and other colonies. Portugal includes the Azores and the Madeira Islands. Macau, the nation's last possession, reverted to China in 1999.