

Sustainable Travel

& Tourism

"Portugal's major national park is Peneda-Gerês, in the Minho district, north of the city of Braga, close to the Spanish border.

But the little country has many specially protected areas, which are nature reserves. Most of these are in the mountainous regions, including Montesinho, near Bragança; Alvão, near Vile Real Amarante; and Serra dos Candeeiros, near Fátima.

In recent years, the government has also declared some of Portugal's coastal areas as protected landscapes, rescuing them from developers. These areas include the resorts of Esposende; Sintra-Cascais; and southeast Alentejo, near Cabo de São Vicente.

If you'd like to find lodging in Portugal's protected areas, check out Turismo da Natureza em Portugal at Av. Eng. Arantes e Oliveira #13, 4B, 1900-221 Lisboa (www.ikat.fc.ul.pt).

Solares are family homes as opposed to hotels, and each of them offers a holiday experience with a personal touch. However, within this category the accommodations are wide ranging, from elegant country houses to rustic cottages, even farmhouses, each with an individual character. Some of the TURIHAB homes have hosted visitors since the 16th and 17th centuries.

Hosts will arrange a series of leisure activities such as fishing, hunting, golf, swimming, hiking, tennis, horseback riding, cycling, and wine-tasting.

For a list of eco-friendly accommodations, scattered throughout the country, search www.itsagreengreenworld.com. Various homesteads, quintas, and villas scattered throughout the country accept guests, ranging from the Algarve north to the Minho. Perhaps you'll book into a yoga retreat or else a quinta on the slopes of the Caramulo mountain range in central Portugal.

Another good site to peruse for ecotourism is <http://ecoclub.com>, listing members and activities that center around ecotourism. For example, you might hook up with "Nature Meetings" on the island of Madeira, the first company on that island to provide in-depth walking experiences. You might also link yourself to an eco-friendly yurt holiday in the mountains of Portugal near the ancient university town of Coimbra, or else an ecological estate in the famous Serra da Estrela Nature Park, where you can stay on the banks of the River Mondego at a large granite-built farmhouse with a private pool."

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NEWS

Ecotourism in Portugal may have been slow in coming, but it is beginning to take hold in this beautiful land. Many places are overbuilt, especially along the seacoast. But other areas, especially in the interior, are being preserved and set aside for future generations to enjoy.



Important Refs.

- Responsible Travel (www.responsibletravel.com) contains a great source of sustainable travel ideas run by a spokesperson for responsible tourism in the travel industry.
- Sustainable Travel International(www.sustainabletravelinternational.org) promotes responsible tourism practices and issues an annual Green Gear & Gift Guide.
- You can find eco-friendly travel tips, statistics, and touring companies and associations -- listed by destination under "Travel Choice" -- at the TIES website, www.ecotourism.org.

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- Also check out Conservation International (www.conservation.org) -- which, with National Geographic Traveler, annually presents World Legacy Awards (www.nationalgeographic.com) to those travel tour operators, businesses, organizations, and places that have made a significant contribution to sustainable tourism.
- Ecotravel.com is part online magazine and part ecodirectory that lets you search for touring companies in several categories (water-based, land-based, spiritually oriented, and so on).
- In the U.K., Tourism Concern (www.tourismconcern.org.uk) works to reduce social and environmental problems connected to tourism and find ways of improving tourism so that local benefits are increased.
- The Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA; www.abta.com) acts as a focal point for the U.K. travel industry and is one of the leading groups spearheading responsible tourism to Portugal.
- The Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO; www.aito.co.uk) is a group of specialist operators leading the field in making Portuguese holidays sustainable.

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