

Portugal

Special Report



Adjusting To Your New Life In Portugal
Top Tips From A Recently Arrived Expat



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Adjusting To Your New Life In Portugal

Top Tips From A Recently Arrived Expat

BY ALLISON BAXLEY

So you just made the big move to Portugal?

That's pretty darn exciting, but let's face it: It can also be pretty intimidating to settle in a new place.

Portugal might be a whole lot different than what you're used to, but fear not, my friend. →

I'm going to give you some insider tips on how to adjust to your new life, from learning the language to building a new support network to slowing down, and more.

Learning The Local Language

First things first: let's talk about learning Portuguese.

If you're coming from the States, you might be thinking, "Who's got time for that!" But trust me, it's worth the effort.

Learning Portuguese will show locals that you're making an effort to fit in, and that can go a long way toward integrating faster and feeling like a local yourself.

Plus, you don't want to be left in the dark when folks are gabbing away in their native tongue.

There are plenty of resources out there to help you get started, like apps, language exchange programs, and even good ol' textbooks.

To get started on understanding Portuguese, try joining a local conversation group where you can practice your skills in real-time with native speakers. You might even make some new friends along the way.

A Challenging Change Of Pace

Speaking of fitting in, let's talk about the culture.

Portugal is a pretty relaxed place, but there are still some things you'll want to keep in mind.

For starters, folks here tend to be more laid-back than your average American. That might mean that customer service is a bit slower or that most people don't rush around quite as much.

That's just part of the charm.

Another thing to keep in mind is that folks here value family and connections, so building relationships is key.

Whether you're at work or just hanging out at the local café, take the time to get to know folks.

Money Money Money Money... Money!

I know what you're thinking: "That all sounds great, but what about work?"

"What if I'm not ready to retire, but I don't have a remote job to bring with me?"

There are lots of opportunities to make a living in Portugal...

The tech sector is booming, with tons of start-ups and global companies choosing to set up shop in Portugal, and there are also plenty of jobs in tourism and hospitality.

And if you've got a passion for wine or agriculture, there are opportunities in those areas, too.

Finding a job can be challenging no matter where you are, so don't be afraid to put yourself out there and make some connections.

One thing to keep in mind, especially if you're coming from the States... salaries in Portugal are considerably lower. Like a lot lower.

So, while you may be able to find work, don't expect to be paid at the same level you were back home.

Many people choose to start a new business venture in Portugal. Some businesses are geared toward the expat and foreigner communities, but some are aimed at enhancing the local community or tapping into local talent and resources.

If you have an idea or you want to build something of your own in Portugal, the country offers ample opportunity, and its arms are open to new things.

Building Your Support Network

Let's talk about making some friends. Once again, relationships are key here.

Portugal might be a small country, but there's a whole lot of community spirit to go around.

If you're feeling isolated, look for meet-ups, expat groups in your area, or parents from your kid's school.

Chances are good that you'll find some like-minded folks who are down to grab a *bica* (coffee) and show you around town.

And don't forget to take advantage of all of the amazing food, music, and culture that Portugal has to offer. People here →



are so friendly, so don't be afraid to strike up a conversation.

Portuguese people take a little longer than expats to open up and let you into their lives, but if you put in the effort, they will appreciate it. And before you know it, you'll be eating Grandma's Sunday lunch.

All in all, adjusting to life in Portugal might take a bit of work, but it's doable. Just remember to take things slow, be patient, and keep an open mind.

Before you know it, you'll be living like a local and loving every minute of it.

Extended Meals

For those of us coming from a culture that values quick meals, the longer meal times in Portugal can take some getting used to.

In Portuguese culture, mealtimes are often long and leisurely affairs. Meals usually last at least an hour or two and can even stretch into three hours—or more.

This allows for plenty of time to catch up with family members or friends over delicious food. It's also common for people to linger over coffee after their meal has finished, not to mention the leisurely approach to customer service.



Don't be surprised if your waiter leaves for half an hour or more between checking in. This can dramatically extend the meal.

If you really need to have a quick meal, consider a café or *tasca* (typical Portuguese eatery) where the meals are not as extensive. You'll still need to mention (probably multiple times) to the server that you are in a bit of a hurry.

They still won't understand why and will still offer you that *bica* at the end of

the meal, as you're desperate to pay and get moving.

Late Mealtimes

One of the biggest cultural differences for those new to Portugal is how late meal times are.

While many cultures around the world sit down for dinner at 6 p.m. or earlier, in→



Portugal it's common for dinner to be served much later—sometimes as late as 10 p.m.

This can cause a bit of confusion for those who aren't used to it, but it's something that you get used to quickly.

You'll often see whole families, young and old, strolling out of a restaurant at 10 or 11 p.m.

I tried to get my kids used to later dinners and bedtimes, but needless to say, we just couldn't get them to adjust. Maybe in time. At least the dinner times are not as late as they are in Spain.

It's also worth noting that many restaurants will not take reservations before 7 p.m., so if you're in a group and planning on having dinner early, make sure to call ahead in order to make sure they'll be open, or consider a more casual restaurant that doesn't shut down completely between lunch and dinner.

Sesta Time

Sesta time is another cultural quirk that you may have heard about.

While this isn't universally practiced, it's common enough for some shops or businesses to close mid-afternoon for a

nap or lunch break, which might be from around 1 to 3 p.m.

Worker No-Shows

One of the biggest adjustments that you'll need to make when moving to Portugal is getting used to contracted workers like plumbers and electricians not showing up on time—or even at all.

This can be incredibly frustrating, especially if you're in a hurry or have an emergency situation.

It's important to remember that this isn't because Portuguese people are unreliable; it's just part of the culture here.

It can be incredibly frustrating, but once you find a reliable handyman or worker, you'll be sure to treat them well.

Cold Houses

Living in Portugal can be a challenge for those used to central air conditioning. Why?

Houses in the country (particularly older houses) are often poorly insulated and much colder inside than outside, especially during the cold winter months.



It's just the way houses were built in the past—to keep the heat out, not in.

Not only that, but many homes tend to be damper and more humid on the inside than outside, making it uncomfortable for those who don't have adequate heating or ventilation.

You'll definitely want to invest in a dehumidifier or two for the winter months. We actually run ours 24/7/365.

Sahara Sand Skies

The Sahara Desert is a vast expanse of sand that stretches across North Africa, and the dust from this desert can sometimes travel miles and miles through the air.

When this happens, there can be several days when the skies take on an eerie orange hue as a result of Saharan sand particles in the atmosphere.

This phenomenon is known as the Saharan Air Layer (SAL) and happens when strong winds blow African dust over Europe.

When these particles mix with moisture in the atmosphere, they create orange-tinted clouds that can last for several→



hours or even days, depending on how much dust is present.

Steep Hills And Slippery Tiles

Portugal is full of stunning landscapes and beautiful views, but one thing that stands out is the steep hills all over the country.

From Lisbon to Porto and beyond, Portugal has some of the most dramatic hills in Europe, with breath-taking vistas at every turn.

One of the best ways to get around in Lisbon and Porto is walking, and whether you're visiting or you choose to live there... get ready to climb.

On the other hand, all those *pasteis de nata* (Portuguese custard tarts) aren't going to walk themselves off.

In addition to the hills being steep, they're often tiled. The smooth and polished surfaces provide a unique aesthetic to many Portuguese streets, squares, and sidewalks... However, they can be hazardous if you're not careful.

Walking on them requires extra caution, as it can be easy to slip and fall due to their shiny texture.

The wetter climate in Portugal means that rain and moisture add an additional layer of danger for unsuspecting visitors who aren't used to walking on such slick surfaces.

With some practice and getting used to their environment, anyone can learn how

to walk safely on Portuguese tiles. Just remember: take it slow.

Don't forget to pack your sturdiest and stickiest shoes to tackle the steep and slippery hills.

Serious Sport

Sports are a big part of life in Portugal, and Portuguese people take training seriously, even at the junior level.

Children start to learn about sports at a young age and receive proper coaching that focuses on skill development and physical conditioning.

Training is often intense but also fun for children as they learn how to compete in individual or team events.

For example, I know of a junior volleyball club in Cascais, and even at the 13-year-old level, they practice four nights a week and compete in tournaments almost every weekend.

Not necessarily a bad thing; just be prepared to take it seriously.

WhatsApp Culture

A unique feature of Portuguese culture is how extensively they use the messaging app WhatsApp.

From business deals to family conversations, WhatsApp has become an integral part of daily life in Portugal.

In fact, it's estimated that over 90% of Portuguese people have a



WhatsApp account and actively use it for communication purposes.

This makes sense given its easy-to-use interface and ability to send messages quickly and securely across different platforms, such as iOS and Android devices.

With so many people using the app, it's no surprise that businesses have started to recognize its value by utilizing it for customer service inquiries or marketing campaigns.

It's even been reported that some banks are now encouraging customers to communicate with them via WhatsApp.

More often than not, if I'm looking for a service or help, one of my local friends recommends a WhatsApp number, not a website. →

Expat Communities

Living as an expat in Portugal is relatively easy for those looking to relocate.

The country has a large and welcoming expat community, with many areas having significant concentrations of foreign residents.

This means it's usually easy to find people who speak the same language and have similar interests, making the transition easier.

Portugal has a variety of social networks dedicated specifically towards helping new arrivals integrate into society, such as InterNations or ExpatsPortugal, which both offer online forums where you can ask questions or get advice from other expats living in the area.

All this makes it simpler than ever before for newcomers to quickly settle down in Portugal and start enjoying all that this beautiful country has to offer.



Understanding The Systems

Moving to Portugal can be an exciting and rewarding experience, but as with any new country, there are certain systems and procedures that must be navigated.

From exchanging your driver's license to filing taxes, it can often be difficult to understand the requirements of these systems in a foreign country.

Because of language barriers and your unfamiliarity with the local customs, you may find yourself feeling overwhelmed when trying to navigate them on your own.

Fortunately, there are resources available for expats who need help navigating Portugal's health care system or understanding their tax obligations.

With the right guidance and support from those who know the ins and outs of life in Portugal, you can make sure all your bases are covered without worrying about getting lost along the way.

Health Care System

It's important to understand the differences between the public and private health care systems in order to make sure you get the coverage you need.

In Portugal, both universal public health care and private insurance are available for residents.

Each system has its own advantages and drawbacks; understanding them will help you decide which option is best for you.

Both are fairly straightforward, but they can be intimidating if you haven't had to make an appointment or venture into one of the local hospitals looking for help.

A few good rules of thumb:

1. You'll need to apply for your SNS (public health number) in order to use the public system properly, and you can do this at your local *centro de saude* (health center).
2. New expats should have private health insurance for at least the first year. This private health insurance will allow you to access private hospitals and providers like the CUF network.

Drivers License

There are some administrative steps that need to be taken, including making sure you're legally allowed to drive.

If you plan on driving in Portugal, then it's important for you to understand the process of exchanging your driver's license after moving there.

This exchange is relatively straightforward and involves submitting the necessary documents and fees before being issued a Portuguese driver's license.

Knowing what documents are required and how much it will cost ahead of time can help make this process smoother for anyone relocating from another country and looking for legal ways to get around their new home.

Taxes

One of the biggest changes for Americans moving to Portugal is understanding how they will need to adjust their tax filing. →

As an American, you are still required to file taxes in the United States even if you are living abroad, and this can be a confusing process.

It's important to understand all the necessary requirements before embarking on your new life in Portugal so that you don't get caught off guard come tax season.

Driving In Portugal

Driving in Portugal can be a thrilling experience, though it's important to keep in mind that the country has its own unique road culture.

Portuguese drivers tend to be fast and aggressive, so it's important to stay alert and avoid distractions while on the road.

However, the well-maintained toll roads and highways make long-distance travel a breeze, and having a Via Verde toll tag can save time and hassle when passing through toll booths.

With practice and patience, driving in Portugal can become a comfortable part of your new life, offering the freedom to explore all that the country has to offer.

Expect a ton of roundabouts, tight parking spots, and manual cars to be the norm.

Helpful Apps

After moving to Portugal, there are certain apps that will come in handy when adjusting to your new life.

Here are some more apps that will help you a ton:

1. **WhatsApp**—the most popular messaging app in Portugal, making it easier to communicate with new friends and colleagues. You'll rarely find someone actually sending SMS messages.
2. **Bolt**—an equivalent to Uber. It works the same way and is usually cheaper.



3. **Drops**—a fun, gamified European Portuguese language-learning app. Similar to Duolingo with the caveat that it's European Portuguese whereas Duolingo is Brazilian Portuguese.
4. **DeepL**—a translation app better than the Brazilian Portuguese-based Google Translate.
5. **Estacionar**—it connects to your Via Verde and allows you to pay for parking

- from your phone, so you never need loose change to pay for parking.
6. **SNS 24**—a direct connection to your public health care profile. You can check your vaccination status, call the 24-hour hotline, and more.
7. **Glovo**—a food-delivery app similar to Seamless and Grubhub.
8. **Google Maps and Waze**—used to navigate the local streets and find →

your way around, but be careful, because what these apps consider roads are sometimes nothing more than a trail through the woods.

9. Citymapper—another app that can help you navigate the public transportation system.

10. Cooltour Lisbon—offers guided tours of the city’s most popular attractions.

Moving to Portugal is an exciting adventure that can bring many new opportunities.

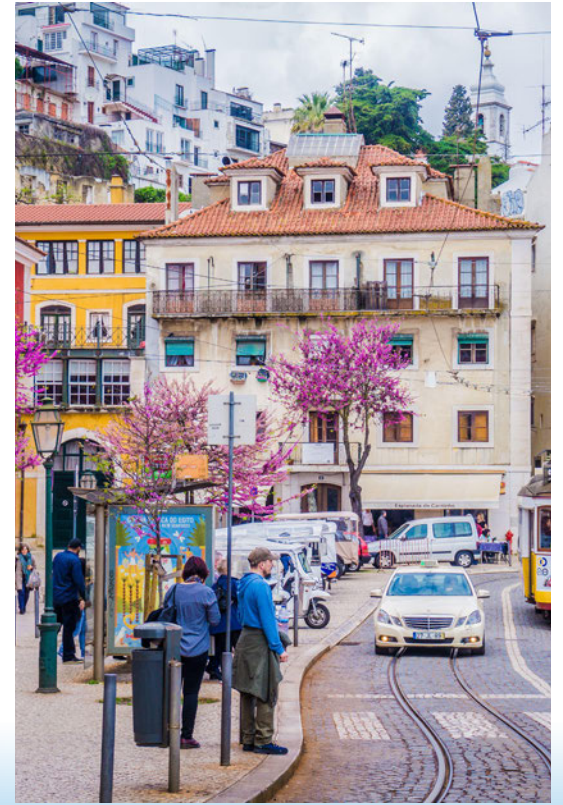
With the right approach, you’ll be able to quickly adjust and make it your home away from home.

Whether you choose to learn Portuguese or just enjoy the culture and food of this beautiful country, there are plenty of ways for expats like yourself to get settled in with ease.

Take advantage of all the resources available online so you can start living your best life in Portugal.

One of the most important things to do when settling in a new country is to learn as much as you can about the culture and language. Doing so will open up your world immensely, and you’ll thank yourself for putting in the effort.

Portugal has a rich history, a vibrant culture, and the potential to put its stamp on you, if you let it... and you should! ✨



About The Author

Allison Baxley is the creator of [Renovating Life](#), a blog with everything you need to know about moving to and living in Portugal. She moved from Brooklyn, New York, to Cascais in 2021 with her husband and two children. When she’s not writing for her blog, she enjoys discovering new corners of Portugal and planning her next European getaway.



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