

# PORTUGUESE TOURISM: A BOOM DURING THE COMING CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS



From north to south of the country, including Madeira and the Azores, hotels are getting full, not only with Portuguese visitors, but also with foreign travelers who spend the holiday season in the country. The fact that prices are 15% to 20% higher does not curb this euphoria and Portuguese tourism is flourishing.

Without masks, distance restrictions or limits on the number of people in each group hotels in Portugal are getting full for Christmas or New Year's Eve, even though prices are higher due to inflation and war in Ukraine.

**"In hotels, a strong Christmas and New Year's Eve season is expected, in line with 2022 tourism figures, which indicate a sharp recovery,"** says Bernardo Trindade, president of the Portuguese Hotel Association (AHP).

Despite prices being 15% to 20% higher, the demand for hotels on these festive dates is felt throughout the country, including Madeira and the Azores, according to the association's president. "For Christmas suppers, the market is having a positive response at the 2019 level. We feel a liberating post-pandemic effect and people are noticing that everything is more expensive."

The highlight is "Madeira, which is doing quite well. Cities like Lisbon and Porto have also had encouraging signs and the Algarve is almost breaking the usual negative seasonality cycle in the second half of December."

Even with higher prices and all the uncertainties considering the seemingly endless war in Ukraine, many Portuguese families have returned to having traditional Christmas suppers in hotels, a trend that was growing before the pandemic. "More and more people are spending Christmas in hotels rather than at home, so as not to waste too much time in the kitchen preparing meals, and also to take advantage of a space that allows a different experience," says an official source from the Pestana group. "People consider that, at home, Christmas is more expensive, even when shopping at the supermarket."

Several hotels of the Pestana chain are 50% booked for Christmas and New Year. In some guesthouses in Portugal, levels are at 75%, including with groups of 30 people, and "in the next ten to fifteen days there will be many last-minute bookings".

Vila Galé already has hotels sold out for New Year's Eve in Braga, Serra da Estrela, Ericeira, Évora and Lagos, and there is still availability in hotels in the Algarve, Alentejo and Douro. There are "plenty of Portuguese, but also English, Spanish and other Europeans, as well as Brazilians and North Americans."

"Compared to pre-pandemic 2019 figures, there has been an increase in the occupancy rate at the chain of 4% for the last evening of the year and 11% for both nights. Compared to last year, the increase is 29%," says the head of Vila Galé. "More and more families are choosing to stay in hotels. It is more convenient from the point of view of accommodation or meals, something underlined by over 35% occupancy compared to 2021. If we compare it to the pre-pandemic period, this increase is

18%.”

The end of the year is particularly strong in Madeira. Porto Bay hotels are up to 90% booked, mainly by English, German or Scandinavian guests. In the Azores, the Bensaude group has Christmas and year-end bookings equal to or higher than in 2019 in several hotels, mainly by Portuguese, but also tourists from the USA, Canada, France and Italy. “We are in low season, the relative and average weight of revenue obtained, mainly at the end of the year, will be approximately 15% of the revenue in December and January,” says commercial director Pedro Salazar.

In Lisbon, the recently opened Hyatt hotel in Belém, with more than two hundred luxury rooms, has occupancies above 60% for Christmas and New Year’s Eve, and also with tourists from several points in Europe, the United States, or the Middle East. “Portugal is currently an extremely popular destination. We have room to do outdoor or indoor scenarios for “thematic parties,” says hotel director Hélder Martins.

**With twenty hotels in Portugal, Amazing Evolution says it is “surprised” at the holiday season bookings.** In many cases, they are above 80%, particularly smaller units filled by groups of friends. Prices per person on Christmas Eve or New Year’s Eve vary between 250 and 600 euros. Demand is strongest in the center of the country, in areas such as Torres Vedras or Ericeira, but also Alentejo, Algarve or Madeira. In the center of Lisbon, the highlight is the North American market, which is booming and will be very promising in 2023.

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