Surfing

ABOUT

Photo: João Barbosa

Surfing

Stretching for more than 850km, the Portuguese coast is a gigantic surfing beach. No other coastal strip in the world can offer such a great number of spots in such a short distance, so in Portugal you can always rely on the waves.

Tempered by tailwinds and a lot of sun all year round, these perfect waves, even magical at times, provide a unique experience for practitioners of various sports. Surfing, bodyboarding, windsurfing, kitesurfing and paddlesurfing are just some of the sports for enjoying the Atlantic waves which take the adrenalin levels beyond anything imaginable.

From the giant waves of Praia do Norte, in Nazaré, sought after by the most daring, to the steady, perfect waves of Carcavelos, Ericeira and Peniche, there are many choice spots for surfers. And they're not only around Lisbon. The variety is huge, both in the north, at Figueira da Foz, Espinho and Viana do Castelo, and in the south, on the Alentejo coast and the Sagres area, and even in the Azores and Madeira.

As for bodyboarders, they have in Praia Grande, Sintra, a benchmark not to be missed. This spot is part of every itinerary and hosts an annual event in the world bodyboarding tournament; however, the northern coast and the western Algarve coast have also become popular with bodyboarders.

Guincho is the Portuguese Mecca for windsurfing and has already welcomed the world's best windsurfers. The wind and the waves guarantee a good show for those on the beach and the pleasure of those in the water. But kitesurfing has also been gathering a growing following, not only here but on other beaches as well, such as Carcavelos, Costa da Caparica and further north in the Aveiro and Viana do Castelo areas.

But there are many other activities to enable you to make the most of the conditions offered by the sea, the rivers and the lakes. From paddlesurfing in the open sea or in the calmer waters of sheltered coves and lagoons, to water skiing and parasailing, there's a wide range of options for having a good time. You'll be really spoilt for choice...

SURFING AND BODYBOARDING

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Ribeira de Ilhas and Super Tubos are the names of two excellent surfing beaches known all over the world, amongst many along the coast between Ericeira and Peniche. But from one end of the country to the other, including the islands of the Azores and Madeira, there are more, many more...
Ericeira has been classified as a world surfing reserve by the American organisation Save the Waves Coalition for being one of the rare places in the world that has a high density of outstanding surf breaks. This classification covers a 4km stretch which includes seven world-class breaks: Pedras Brancas, Reef, Ribeira de Ilhas, Cave, Crazy Left, Coxos and São Lourenço. But the reserve is part of a larger sea front of about 11km that has other waves with different characteristics, where surfing and bodyboarding with various degrees of difficulty and levels of demand are possible, in the most diverse weather conditions.

Further north, near Peniche, Praia do Medão is another benchmark for its great tubular waves which have given it the name Supertubos beach. Popular with surfers from all over the world, it stages an WSL - World Surf League Tour event in October. The other beaches in the Peniche area also offer perfect waves every day, and not just for the more experienced surfers since there are many schools teaching all the techniques to beginners.

The giant waves at Praia do Norte, however, known as the Nazaré canyon, are only for the most intrepid. These waves, which can reach up to 30 metres, broke the world record for the highest wave in 2011 and have been surfed by professionals such as Garrett McNamara, who use the tow-in system, i.e. they're towed into its peak by a jet ski, and then slide down on the board.

On the outskirts of Lisbon, with direct access by train, you will also find good conditions for surfing and bodyboarding on the Santo Amaro de Oeiras, Carcavelos and São Pedro do Estoril beaches. Further afield, in the heart of the Natural Park, Guincho offers quite consistent waves, such as at Praia Grande, in Sintra, which is particularly appreciated for bodyboarding, with an event in the sport's world championship being held here.

In the Centro region, Praia de Buarcos, close to Figueira da Foz, stands out for what is considered the longest waves in Europe, which can reach 200 metres, and in the Aveiro area, near Ílhavo, Praia da Barra is accessible to all kinds of practitioners. Further north, Espinho is known for its mythical wave, the "Casino Right-hander", but Matosinhos, quite close to Porto, and Viana do Castelo, especially Praia da Arda in Afife, further up, also deserve a mention.

South of Lisbon, in Costa da Caparica, Cova do Vapor and Praia do CDS are names to remember. Near Sines, other references include São Torpes and Praia dos Aivados, where you can really enjoy contact with nature. And on the west coast of the Algarve, Arrifana, Bordeira, Amado, Cordoama and Castelejo beaches are very popular. The south-facing coast, with its calmer waters, also offers good easterly swells, mainly in the Tavira and Faro islands.

Right in the Atlantic, the Island of Madeira offers memorable waves, such as in Jardim do Mar and Paul do Mar. The Azores archipelago, known for having all four seasons in the course of the same day, has some truly magical spots. Particularly in September and October, good spots are to be found on the Island of São Miguel, both on the north coast, on the Areal de Santa Bárbara and Monte Verde beaches, which host a WQS event, and the south-facing Praia do Pópulo. But you will also find good conditions on Praia Formosa, on the Island of Santa Maria, in the area of Praia da Vitória, on the Island of Terceira, and in the fajãs on the Island of São Jorge, especially Fajã da Caldeira de Santo Cristo, which is regarded as a mythical spot.

Portugal is, in fact, a country of great waves; there's nothing like trying!

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WINDSURFING AND KITESURFING

Gliding along on the water, blown by the wind, guarantees a lot of fun and some really relaxing moments. But for an extra shot of adrenalin, there’s nothing like the Atlantic waves which bathe the Portuguese coast.

With the right waves and a northerly wind between March and October, Guincho is considered by many experts to be the best place for windsurfing in Portugal. In July and August, conditions are at their best, and national and international windsurfing competitions are held here. Kitesurfing is more recent though; it attracts many followers here, as does Praia de Carcavelos, also on the Cascais coastline, but closer to Lisbon, which offers good conditions for both sports.

The offer of good spots, however, for lovers of kitesurfing and windsurfing does not stop here… Also close to Lisbon, but on the opposite bank of the Tagus, the Costa da Caparica beaches are very popular, especially São João and Fonte da Telha, alongside Lagoa de Albufeira and Sesimbra, further to the south. In the Algarve, near Sagres, Tonel and Martinhal beaches stand out, as does Praia da Rocha, albeit only in winter. North of Lisbon, there are other unmissable places: Praia do Baleal, near Peniche; Lagoa de Óbidos, Costa Nova and Murtosa, near Aveiro; Matosinhos, near Porto; and Ofir and Esposende, Praia do Cabedelo, in Viana do Castelo, and Moledo do Minho.

In Madeira, you can go windsurfing all year round. Funchal, Porto da Cruz, Achadas da Cruz, Caniço, Caniçal, Paul do Mar and Porto Santo are some of the best spots. For kitesurfing, the bay of Funchal, Praia Formosa and Porto Santo are particularly recommended. In the Azores, you will also find good spots at Praia de Água d’Alto and Monte Verde, on São Miguel, on the Island of Terceira, near Praia da Vitória, and on the Island of Faial.

The list of places for those who like it a little less wavy or are just beginning is endless. For instance, the Troia beaches and nearly all of the Algarve coast offer many spots with excellent conditions where you can find places to hire equipment and schools to learn. And inland, from north to south, the lakes and dam reservoirs also provide good conditions. In the Azores, you can even kitesurf or windsurf in the craters of ancient volcanoes. Truly radical!

OTHER SPORTS

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From traditional sports to new ones from distant places or dreamt up by their practitioners, there are many other ways of enjoying the Atlantic waves.

One of the most recent activities, but already with a large following, is paddlesurfing. And since it can be done on any stretch of water, however shallow, the spots at which you can go paddlesurfing are scattered all over the country, and include the sea, rivers, lakes, lagoons and reservoirs. Very close to Lisbon, in Oeiras, and the Paredes and Pescadores beaches in Cascais, you will often see paddleboarders standing on boards, paddling. Other popular places are Lagoa de Óbidos, Figueira da Foz, the Viana do Castelo area and the Island of Madeira. Not to forget the Algarve, where the beach at Faro has already hosted paddleboard events.

And gliding across the water aided by a motor can be even more thrilling at speed. Besides jet skiing, which is very popular on most Portuguese beaches and reservoirs, water skiing is also practised along the whole coast, but particularly in the sea in the Azores and Madeira islands and in dams: from the great Alqueva lake in Alentejo to the dams of Northern Portugal, the choice is unlimited.

In the Algarve you will find yet another version: parasailing, a real adrenalin booster as you parachute your way down towed by a boat. There are many activities to be had in amongst the wind and the waves that guarantee sheer enjoyment.

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