Portugal: Communications & Media

Country Overview & Packing Guidelines

Spring 2027

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

GENERAL INFORMATION

Portugal officially became a kingdom in 1139. Its borders have barely changed since 1297 when the Portuguese and Spanish signed a treaty handing over the Algarve to Portugal. The first king, Afonso I, came to power in 1143 and Portugal remained a kingdom for the next 800 years until 1910 when it became a republic.

Portugal, officially the Portuguese Republic (República Portuguesa) lies along the Atlantic coast of the Iberian Peninsula in southwestern Europe. Once continental Europe's greatest power, Portugal shares many common features — geographic and cultural — with the countries of both northern Europe and the Mediterranean. Portugal includes the Atlantic archipelagos of the Azores and Madeira, both autonomous regions with their own regional governments. In the twentieth century, under the regime of the dictator Salazar, many Portuguese citizens emigrated to other European countries, the US, Canada, Brazil, among other countries in search of a better life.

The "Revolução dos Cravos" (Carnation Revolution) in 1974 saw the return of democracy to the country and independence granted to almost all of Portugal´s overseas territories. As a legacy of Portugal´s colonial empire, the Portuguese language is spoken in nine other countries: Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, East Timor, Equatorial Guinea, Macau, Cape Verde, and São Tomé and Príncipe.

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As tourism is a major source of revenue in Portugal, it is very important for the Portuguese to be able to speak at least one other language. English is widely spoken in Portugal, especially in urban areas. For the most part, there are English translations on major street signs and tourist destinations.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Portugal enjoys a temperate climate influenced by the Atlantic Ocean, with variations between the north and south. Summers are warm and sunny, while winters are mild, with autumn and spring being generally pleasant, though occasionally windy and rainy. Winter lasts from late November to February, and summer extends from May to September. The country's highest peak is Mount Pico in the Azores, an iconic volcano, while on the mainland, the Serra da Estrela attracts winter sports enthusiasts.

Lisbon, Portugal:

AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
57/46	61/48	64/50	66/54	70/55
AUG	**SEPT**	**OCT**	**NOV**	**DEC**
82/64	79/63	72/59	61/54	59/50

Portugal's geography is diverse, with the north being mountainous and fertile, ideal for farming and vineyards, while the south is warmer and drier, dominated by rolling plains. The southern Algarve region is known for its sunny climate, coastal towns, and tourism, while the Ria Formosa, a nature reserve on the south coast, is home to migratory birds. Portugal also boasts the 3rd largest exclusive economic zone in the EU, covering 1,727,408 km² of marine resources.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

The Portuguese are known for being hard-working, curious, and deeply connected to the concept of "saudade," an untranslatable term that reflects a sense of longing, sadness, and incompleteness. This sentiment is ingrained in their culture, often expressed through the melancholic and romantic soul of the nation, and most notably through Fado music.

Along with their emotional depth, the Portuguese are warm and friendly, placing great value on family, friends, and the joy of sharing meals. Hosting is a cherished activity, where guests are made to feel at home, often with gifts exchanged as part of the tradition.

In everyday life, soccer ("futebol") is a unifying passion, with fans loyally supporting teams like FC Porto, Benfica, and Sporting. Portuguese society values appearances and respects hierarchy, with a strong sense of politeness and formality, especially in professional settings. Initial greetings are reserved but polite, and as relationships develop, interactions become more personal, reflecting the importance of connection and affection in Portuguese culture.

LOCAL DIET

Participating in the local food culture is a central aspect of daily life in country. Lisbon, as well as other major Portuguese cities, offers a wide variety of restaurants representing different world cuisines. Restaurants are generally increasingly aware of food allergies and dietary needs. However, students are strongly encouraged to always communicate any allergies or restrictions clearly when ordering and to research restaurants in advance whenever possible. While familiar food options are available, students are also encouraged to explore Portuguese cuisine as part of their cultural immersion experience.

There are usually three meals a day. In the morning, between 7:30 am and 10:00 am, a light breakfast, usually consisting of a drink (coffee with milk "meia de leite", an expresso, or juice) and toast or a sandwich, which is often consumed in the neighborhood café or patisserie. The main meals are lunch, between 12:00 and 14:00, during the week normally in a restaurant close to the workplace, and dinner between 19:00 and 21:00. For most people, they have full meals both at lunchtime and dinnertime, which may include soup, a main course and dessert (sweet or fruit). Between the two meals, it is common to have a snack mid-afternoon (around 16:30-17:00), such as a drink and sandwich or a pastry (e.g., Pastéis de Nata). Portuguese diet is Mediterranean with main dishes typically including a rice or potato with a meat or seafood, and vegetables. While Lisbon offers a growing number of vegetarian restaurants, traditional Portuguese cuisine heavily features non-vegetarian dishes, with meat and seafood being staples in most meals.

Note: if you have special dietary needs, including allergies, please inform the office of Student Health, Safety & Wellbeing prior to the start of your program (studenthealth@sit.edu). We will advise you on realistic expectations about avoiding or incorporating certain foods within the program context.

MEAL PLANNING

Students are responsible for the majority of their meals and should plan accordingly. Meal planning becomes an exciting way to explore local markets, try new ingredients, and even cook with fellow students.

Please remember to budget at least **$2,860** for your meals not provided during the semester. For a breakdown of your program's estimated out-of-pocket expenses, please see the table in the **Money** section of this document.

The estimated cost for meals not provided during the program is based on the cost of modestly eating out or buying groceries to prepare your own meals, when cooking facilities are available. If you plan on eating out regularly, you should budget more money. Exploring local food is one of the highlights of living abroad, so give yourself room to savor the experience.

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

Maintaining good health is essential to having a successful study abroad experience.

SIT recommends you do research prior to departure about the health, safety, and security specifics of the country(ies) you plan to visit. Consult the **U.S. Department of State website** and search their **Countries and Areas Archive** for international travel information and current travel advisories for each country. Search the **Center for Disease Control Traveler's Health page** to see travel health notices and vaccine requirements and recommendations for any country(ies) you plan to visit.

SIT recommends doing research ahead of time to stay up to date on It will be critical that you educate yourself about the potential health and safety hazards that may exist in your areas of travel and make informed decisions about what preventative measures to take prior to departure. You should also reference the Health, Access, and Identity information on the **program's webpage**.

If you have any questions, please reach out to the **Student Health, Safety, & Wellbeing Team**. Students are thoroughly briefed on safety considerations during in-country orientation and are updated throughout the semester if and when circumstances change. For information regarding safety and security, emergency communications, SIT policies, health and personal property insurance, and general program tips, please read the Safety, Security, and Health document and Student Handbook on your program's predeparture page.

HOUSING

Students will stay in shared apartments or in a student villa, where they might be sharing rooms. There will be cleaning and bed linen washing, kitchen for cooking meals, washing machine in unit and Wi-Fi. During excursions, all students will be housed in shared guesthouses, field stations, lodges, or small hotels/hostels.

TRANSPORTATION

The main means of transportation in Lisbon are tram, train, bus, and subway. While in Lisbon, you will be provided with a monthly transport pass, the “Navegante Metropolitano”, which will allow you to travel through the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (AML), including Mafra, Sintra, Setúbal and Sesimbra.

To get to the university you can use the subway or the bus. The residence will be about 30 minutes commute to Autónoma University using the subway, depending on the time of the day.

COMMUNICATION

While you may want to be in regular communication with friends and family from home during the term abroad, please bear in mind that different time zones, unreliable phone lines, and changing program activities can complicate communication.

It’s important to be clear with family and friends about your availability during the term. Many students recommend making an appointment to call home or to receive a call. You should also consider the impact of constant communication with friends and family at home on your cultural immersion.

Visit our Contact & Communication page for practices on program communication, emergency communication, and home institution communication.

PHONES AND INTERNET

Cell Phone Policy

As part of SIT’s commitment to student safety and security, all students are required to have a working cell phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls, including a data plan so that your phone is operational when you are away from wi-fi. If needed, during orientation SIT staff can assist students in purchasing a local SIM card and acquiring minutes for calls and texting. Failure to maintain a working phone capable of making and receiving calls/texts will be considered a conduct violation and a breach of our student code.

There are several cell phone companies in Portugal: NOS, MEO and Vodafone. They all offer a rechargeable card system that means that students won't need to have a contract. You can find many stores of these companies in Lisbon where you can get information about offers and prices.

The university campus, the student housing and the SIT Portugal office offer you free wireless Internet connection. Besides, you can also find multiple Wi-Fi areas both in Lisbon and in the other locations planned for the program.

MAILINGS

Unlike receiving a package here in the US, receiving a package at your program site is usually **expensive** and **problematic**. Customs agents must inspect all packages and you, as the recipient, are responsible for duty and storage fees. In addition, there are cases of items being lost in the mail or taking so long to reach the recipient that the recipient is nearly back in the US by the time the items are received. For these reasons, sending packages should be done only for emergency situations. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged. Mailing prescription medication abroad is illegal.

For this program, **DHL, FedEx, and UPS services are available in country**. Despite cheaper prices, reliance on the US Postal Service is not advised due to delays and unreliability. When given the option, it's always a good idea to send packages certified and with a tracking number that allows the sender to track the package

The program staff can provide you with advice and the best address to send packages if needed.

MONEY

In Portugal and most parts of Europe students can access funds and pay in most stores from their US bank accounts using their VISA or MasterCard debit cards. Any debit card that is linked to the PLUS or CIRRUS networks should also work at ATMs in country, take under consideration though that you will be charged for every withdrawal. Credit cards (VISA, MasterCard) will also work as well. American Express and Discover are not as commonly accepted. ATMs are very easily accessible throughout Portugal. Traveler's checks are not recommended or useful. In case of an emergency, it is possible to get cash advances on major credit cards in Portuguese banks.

Check current exchange rates: http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/

If using a debit and/or credit card, you should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans. If you don't inform these companies that you will be away, they will often assume the card has been lost or stolen and will put an immediate hold on the card. You should also check on costs of withdrawal, as these costs vary and can sometimes be very expensive. Renewing and receiving reissued credit and debit cards while on the program will be an expensive and highly inconvenient process. Before you leave for your program, please check the expiration dates on your cards to ensure that they will not expire while you are abroad. It is also very important that you make photocopies of all your debit/credit card information and leave them with someone you trust in case your card(s) is/are lost or stolen.

We suggest that you **budget between US$1,650 to $2,000** for out-of-pocket costs not covered by the Tuition and Housing Fees. To determine where you might fall in this range, please examine your spending habits during a typical semester at your home school and consider any exceptional expenditures you may have on the program. Please carefully consider your personal spending habits when creating your out-of-pocket expense budget. Some items to consider are textbooks, interpretation services, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts.

Remember that you don't need this in cash, however, for some restaurants, smaller establishments, and market stalls they do not take cards so you will need to carry some cash ($ 11.93 (€10) to $23.87 (€20) is a sensible amount).

Use the average estimates below as a guide to help you plan for out-of-pocket expenses.

Personal spending *(From past students' suggestions)*	$1,400 – $1,600
Meals not provided	$2,860
Books, printing, supplies	$50
Up-front medical costs *(you will get reimbursed for these expenses)*	$500
Visa *(subject to change and costs may vary)*	$110
Potential ISP travel expenses	$50 – $200
Estimated Total	**$4,970 – 5,320**

Please note that up-front medical costs can vary widely. Though you are completely covered by SIT's travel insurance Blue Cross Blue Shield, which you can read more about on our Participant Insurance page, you still may need to pay up-front for medical care and then file for reimbursement.

VISITORS AND FREE TIME

SIT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors to students during the term, due to the rigorous nature of the program and the disruption that such visits cause in program flow and group dynamics. Students should be sure that relatives and friends are aware of this policy and that visits are scheduled for dates after the formal conclusion of the program. Students will not be excused from program components to attend to visitors. See the Attendance and Participation Policy. If a visitor does come while a program is in progress, they must plan their own independent accommodations.

INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

Please read our full Independent Travel policy for our definition, guidelines and how to access our independent travel notification form. Please note that independent travel is only allowed during program free time and students will not be excused from program activities to travel. SIT is not responsible for any costs of student independent travel including logistics, preparations, cancelation fees, change fees, and any other costs associated with independent travel. We highly recommend you wait to book any independent travel until AFTER arriving on program and receiving the final academic schedule from your program.

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes and field-based learning assignments, even during the ISP. Free time for pursuing an independent interest or hobby during the program will be limited. Your admissions counselor can advise you about particular interests you may have. For example, if you must keep in shape for your next athletic season, or if you play a musical instrument and want to know whether to bring it, we can help you to understand your schedule and any concerns or limitations that may exist.

CODE OF CONDUCT AND POLICIES

SIT maintains a Code of Conduct and clear institutional policies regarding student behavior through a commitment to mutual learning and respect for others. Visit the policy page for detailed policies around academic integrity, alcohol and drug use, anti-harassment and non-discrimination, attendance and participation, credit hours, equal education opportunities, grading, housing, independent travel, prohibited activities, religious holiday observance, sexual harassment and misconduct, and withdrawal among others.

PACKING GUIDELINES

LUGGAGE

Please pack lightly and include only necessary items. You should be able to carry all your luggage significant distances on your own. Try to minimize both the number of bags and weight of your bag(s) since you will likely be acquiring more belongings while abroad. We recommend a small daypack, which will also be useful for short excursions when on the program.

If carrying prescription medications, you should carry a letter from your doctor to prevent any concerns at customs or in transit. (Please see the "General Health Tips" section in the Safety, Security, and Health pre-departure document.)

Please check the current requirements of the Transportation Security Administration (http://www.tsa.gov) as well as those of the airline on which you are flying for domestic and international baggage restrictions.

CLOTHING GUIDELINES

While informal dress is acceptable and common in most settings, it is essential to keep a neat, clean appearance. It is very important to have at least one set of clothes for semi-formal occasions and one set of clothes that can get dirty during excursions. You will experience seasonal changes during the semester so be sure to pack accordingly, for hot, cold, or rainy and windy days. It is advisable to bring clothes that can be used for both seasons. Not all housing and universities have central heating, so layers are recommended especially during the winter.

COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is recommended that you bring a laptop computer. If you bring a laptop, the computer will be your personal property and responsibility. It is recommended that you insure your computer, smartphone, or other valuables for full coverage in the event of loss or theft (SIT insurance does not cover personal property).

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage and electrical adapters: http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

Many imported (North American) brands of toiletries, medicines, vitamins, etc., can be bought in Portugal although local or European made brands can be a more affordable as a substitute. For American products you can find three specific stores (please check the following website https://www.timeout.pt/lisboa/pt/compras/mercearias-para-comprar-produtos-americanos-em-lisboa). There are local as well as American brand tampons and cups available.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or ask an alumni contact:

https://studyabroad.sit.edu/admissions-aid/application-process/contact-a-former-student/.

Don’t miss the Packing List on the next page!

SUGGESTED PACKING LIST

These packing guidelines are based on suggestions from past students and your Academic Coordinator.

GENERAL

- 1 nice outfit suitable for a social event
- Lightweight clothes including pants, long-sleeved shirts, light T-shirts
- Underwear and socks (10-day supply)
- Warm pajamas or nightgown
- Slippers or flip flops (for use inside house - flip flops not recommended for use outdoors because of the cobble stone sidewalks and roads)
- 1 pair comfortable sneakers
- 1 pair of boots or other warmer shoes
- 1 pair of sandals
- 1 pair nice shoes
- Rain gear (waterproof jacket, poncho, or umbrella)
- 2–4 pairs pants or jeans
- 1 skirt and/or dress
- 5–6 mixed long and short-sleeved t-shirts
- 2–3 blouses or button-down shirts
- Sweater
- Jacket or fleece
- Scarf
- Bathing suit (optional)
- Workout clothes (optional)

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa
- 2 passport photos
- Any relevant vaccine records/documents

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- Adequate supply of any medications you use regularly
- Small first aid kit (most supplies can be bought here)
- Extra eyeglasses and/or contact lenses
- Sunscreen (at least SPF 30)
- Sunglasses
- Wide-brimmed hat or baseball cap (for sun protection)
- Insect Repellent

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Medium-sized day pack (to pack clothes for 3–4 days for excursions)
- Small, quick-drying towel
- Flashlight
- Portuguese/English dictionary
- Reusable water bottle
- Small luggage lock
- Laptop computer *(please insure it)*
- Students are also encouraged to bring a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector