

Dealing With The Climate & Mould Issues In Portugal

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It is often claimed that Portugal suffers from particularly bad mould problems but that claim is entirely unfounded as the rules of physics apply as much here as they do anywhere else in the world & the real culprit is nothing more than lack of understanding of the insulation & temperature control issues.

It's not particularly unusual for some people researching migration to Portugal to ask questions about a Mediterranean climate but Portugal has an Atlantic coastline & consequently has an Atlantic style winter albeit a relatively moderate one in the South (at least) but don't expect a Mediterranean climate here as you won't find one.

Portugal's climate varies immensely by area, season & year. We live in the central part of Portugal & have had Christmas days when it was hot enough to light the braai/BBQ & others when we've had the central heating on all day & we fairly regularly have summer highs of 40C or slightly more but in our (inland) area the summers have low to very low humidity which makes the high temperatures relatively easy to live with but it's undeniable that those summer highs mean a high fire risk season when fires (often including braais/BBQs) are forbidden so be sure to read the info pieces 'Wildfires in Portugal' & 'Bombeiros' both of which are in the files section of this group.

Summer highs in many parts of Portugal can exceed 40C & winter lows can bring morning frosts & even snow to a few areas & winters can often be very wet & often wetter still in the northern areas.

Whilst coastal areas tend to have fewer extremes of heat, cold & rain than the interior areas experience the coastal ones can often have higher humidity (throughout the year) than interior areas simply because they're closer to the ocean.

These factors combined with the fact that local building methods especially in older structures often lack insulation & the simple rules of physics (as in heat lost equals heat gained) tell us that no matter how much heat or cold you generate, it'll be lost if it escapes from the area you're trying to heat or cool so one of the first things you might need to do when moving into your new home is improve the insulation of the structure & there are various options such as the blue foam insulation sheets, fibre glass rolls & the more modern materials that look like army blanket material covered on one side with a silver coloured membrane that are all relatively inexpensive & readily available from builder's merchants.

Another option is external cladding which is called capote or capoto & consists of a fire resistant material similar to polystyrene & covered over with a render which is available in a number of colours. This option is especially worth considering if your property is in need of painting on the outside as painting

costs are high & the saving of not doing that can be offset against the capote costs so check the pricing before you go & spend all that money on paint alone.

Now we've addressed the issue on the walls, we must also consider windows & doors & the most popular options are aluminium or UPVC double glazing units & companies in that business will usually tell you that whatever option they sell is the best option but having used aluminium in one part of our renovation & UPVC in the other part, my opinion is that UPVC is the better option by a country mile & even better with hinged blinds on the outside & an additional benefit of those blinds is that they shield the UPVC from the worst of the ultra violet light that can sometimes affect UPVC.

Also note that all buildings require a degree of free air flow movement so either open an occasional window or have some kind of adjustable air vents to allow that to happen.

Now we move onto heating & in turn the oh so common mould issues & these two factors are very interrelated.

Some heating methods create significantly more moisture than others where central heating through boilers & radiators and electric heaters such as oil filled electric radiators produce the least moisture the gas heaters, reverse air conditioning & some log burners produce the most moisture & high moisture content in the air creates the perfect environment for mould growth. Also be aware that any heating that involves any kind of flame such as gas burner in any living space also greatly increases CO (carbon monoxide) poisoning risks so if you go any of those options be VERY sure to have CO alarms in each & every room that has or might have such a heating source in it. They call CO the 'silent killer' for very good reason.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon_monoxide_poisoning

If using wood burners be sure to only burn properly seasoned/dry firewood & that means seasoned for some months at least & especially avoid burning unseasoned eucalyptus or olive wood as they will cause a build up of a tar like substance in the flue which is horrendous to get rid of & a fire danger if you don't get rid of it & you also need to be sure to have your chimney swept at least once a year.

Wood pellet burners & boilers are a very good & convenient option & easy to maintain with pellets available from all kinds of shops & whilst relatively expensive to buy initially, the running costs are relatively low but be sure to do your calculations carefully as such boilers aren't cheap & if you buy one with insufficient power output, you'll regret it for ever more.

If you do have an ongoing mould/humidity problem then you can buy dehumidifier machines & many reverse air conditioning units also have a dehumidifier function & existing mould can often be eradicated with

applications of specialist chemicals, bleach or white vinegar which (incidentally) isn't (apparently) the same as white wine vinegar.

Now we move onto cooling in the summer highs & the real answer to that is shade which is why you see so many properties have roller shutters on the outside of the windows & an even better option is shade + good air conditioning units.

Air con units aren't particularly expensive in Portugal, but you need to do your size/BTU calculations carefully as an underpowered unit will never work well so aim to go higher than required output rather than too low. Also look carefully at the energy rating of that particular unit & try to site your units as well as possible so that one unit can also serve the next room if the door is opened etc.

When looking for properties to buy, you need to be sure to check the energy rating of the particular property but equally view them with a degree of scepticism & I'd recommend you also do your own research or have the property surveyed & you will find surveyors listed under H for House & S for Surveyors in the trade & business directory in the files section of the group & bear in mind that an A rating is the highest & best rating whilst F is the lowest & worst energy rating.

Now we can move onto dealing with the person & outside environment & I suggest light clothes & wide brimmed hat in summer & sun block if needed & never underestimate the ferocious UV threat here as it can really bite you if you're not careful & it is also that ferocious UV that causes so many older cars to have severe damage to the paintwork.

In winter, try to dress in multiple layers & wool jumpers are an absolute boon & the traditional wool fishing jumpers such as are sold at Nazare & similar areas are a simply fabulous buy at about 35€ a pop. They're heavy but magnificently warm & hard wearing. I also find moleskin (brushed cotton) jeans are far warmer than denim jeans.

I keep a few goats, ducks & geese as a hobby & to save me spending half my life strapped to a strimmer & this means that I'm often outside in all weathers & the absolute key to being outside in heavy rain is a three quarter length waxed cotton riding jacket (€50 from amazon.es) & a good pair of welly boots & my only regret to buying one is it took me so long to realising what that simple solution was.