

# The Traditions & Culture Of The Rural Portuguese People

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29<sup>th</sup> September 2021

As immigrants to this wonderful host country, we owe it to both ourselves & the Portuguese people to understand, accept & integrate into their culture as much as possible but that often isn't as easy as it sounds because from our perspective of looking in from the outside a lot of what we see, we simply don't understand & this info piece is aimed at giving you at least a basic understanding of what's right in front of you but don't know what your looking at.

Before you even consider moving to rural Portugal you need to ask yourself if YOU can fit into the culture & all it entails as it's not too everyone's taste & it certainly won't change to suit you & you need to accept it warts & all. So if you feel you can't live with the noise of weekend hunters for (at least) part of the year, barking dogs, crowing cockerels, squabbling geese & having snakes (see 'Snakes In Portugal' in the files) in their natural environment then you'll never be happy living in such any rural area which means that you need to move to a very different environment.

I rather suspect I'll be rewriting this piece on a regular basis as I learn more from my Portuguese friends, remember aspects I've previously not thought to mention & sincerely hope that any & all Portuguese readers will put me straight where I've gone wrong & give their advice on those (many) things I've missed.

So let's go with a brief explanation of some but not all of those things & hopefully in alphabetical order.

## **Bacalhau (& other fish)**

Bacalhau is dried, salted cod & Portugal have been great consumers of it for centuries & I assume the original habit came largely from the early sea going Portuguese explorers & they still love the stuff & you'd be hard pushed to find any restaurant in Portugal that doesn't have it on the menu on a daily basis. You can also expect all kinds of other fish to feature on most restaurant menus & most private households on a very regular basis.

The secret of good bacalhau & other salted fish is to soak it (skin side up) sufficiently & for long enough & you'll find a number of good bacalhau & other recipes in the Recipes info piece in the files section of this group.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bacalhau>

## **Bee keeping**

Bees are big business in a small way in Portugal & not only do the majority of farm supply shops & farmer's co-operatives sell hives & other bee related kit, so do some of the local Camaras & it's not unusual to see entire shops dedicated to all things bee & honey related & hives (in theory at least) are supposed to be registered with GIPS which is part of the GNR aka Guarda Nacional Republicana who most of us would think of as the Police Force but they're much more than that.

Under Portuguese law, hives have to be at least 50 metres from any public road or human habitation & home made honey is for sale in most if not all local markets.

The links below might be of interest.

<https://www.asrolhas.com/en/beekeeping-in-portugal/>

<http://sbee.pt/meet-the-different-types-of-honey-produced-in-portugal/?lang=en>

<https://www.gnr.pt/#>

## **Chouriço**

Chouriço aka Cherizo is a Portuguese traditional sausage & is similarish to the Spanish version of the same thing & a variety of meats, herbs & spices & seemingly there are endless recipes for such. Most common meat used is pork & as with most types of sausage from anywhere in the world the small offcuts of meat & less that great cuts of meat are used. Peak season in many parts of Portugal are the colder months especially December & January & I guess this is largely due to the colder weather meaning the meat doesn't go off as quickly.

Chouriço comes in both smoked & unsmoked versions & both are very commonly seen in a lot of Portuguese cuisine & they even have a specially designed dish to cook them. More on both the dish used & the umpteen ways to cook & serve them can be found in the Recipes info piece which is also in the files section.

The links below might be of interest:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29JX0shgBbk>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qh\\_ILeoJHUY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qh_ILeoJHUY)

## **Cork**

Cork oaks are extremely slow growing, long lived trees & are not only highly protected but also all locations are (allegedly) mapped by the authorities & the cork is harvested every +/- 9 years or so by skilled, licenced cork cutters who after harvesting, will spray paint the year of harvest onto the orange newly stripped tree & the cork is used for not only corks in bottles but also umpteen other things from 'cork leather' to extremely fire resistant insulation.

The websites etc below will tell you the details:

<https://www.apcor.pt/en/cork/processing/cork-harvesting/>

<https://www.cycling-centuries.com/everything-you-want-to-know-about-cork>

<https://saomarcosdaserra.com/cork.php>

<https://www.amorim.com/en/why-cork/myths-and-facts/The-Cork-Oak-is-Portugals-National-Tree/110/433/>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5s\\_g-Sdq08](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5s_g-Sdq08)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqRhuNGKI9E&t=132s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oISrpCbM7ok&t=111s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JewMikbKOI0>

## **Festas/festivals**

The Portuguese people LOVE a party & will celebrate anything from sardines to cakes to bread to historical and/or religious events & festas often go on for several days & well into the early morning of the next day & they happen in all sorts of locations from small, rural villages to big cities & often involve parades, bands, music festivals & LOTS of wining & dining.

The Knights Templar city of Tomar is a good example of really good festas & the 4 yearly 'Festival Of The Trays' attracts visitors from all around the world & the highlight of that is the Medieval Feast that takes place in the Tomar Convento itself & this is a must do for your bucket list not for the food which is indeed 'Medieval' but rather for the fabulous entertainment that happens during the feast.

[http://www.conventocristo.gov.pt/en/index.php?s=white&pid=235&identificad or=ct151\\_pt](http://www.conventocristo.gov.pt/en/index.php?s=white&pid=235&identificad or=ct151_pt)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0eU8NnOKfB0>

## Hunting

I know this subject will put a few noses out of joint so if you don't approve of the subject then I suggest you scroll past this section.

Whilst many/most of us immigrants would simply pay a visit to the supermarket if our home grown crops were eaten by the wildlife, those people aren't so lucky & I don't blame them in the least for protecting their crops and/or livestock & it cannot be denied that the game birds, venison & especially the javali/wild boar make very good eating indeed!

Hunting is part of traditional Portuguese culture & whilst you may not agree with it, most hunting happens for good reason & largely with very sound conservation policies & it's not unusual for hunting leases here in Portugal to include a clause that states a percentage of the animals taken or parts thereof to be left on the hill to feed vultures & other scavengers.

Hunting takes place in various formats from driven, walked up & blind shooting for birds & small ground game such as rabbits to montaria/driven shooting for deer & wild boar to deer & javali stalking on foot & as javali are considered pests they may also be taken 3 nights each side of the full moon.

Deer, wild boar & other animals & some birds can do immense damage to crops in a very short time & many of the rural Portuguese population live on or near the breadline & they rely on their home grown vegetables & home produce immensely.

If you do want to get involved in the hunting scene here, don't expect it to be easy as the hunting & licencing bureaucratic processes are extremely strict & very carefully controlled.

The first step is to write a hunter's exam on species identification, seasons & game laws etc & then you have to attend an 8 hour firearms & firearms handling training course at your local PSP HQ & then on a later day, re-attend the PSP HQ to write an exam & then it's off to the rifle range to prove your practical firearms skills & assuming you pass all of that you can then apply for your hunter's licence & firearms permit & only then can you purchase a weapon & ammunition & all of that training, exams & testing are done in Portuguese despite the law having allowance for translators.

But don't for a moment think you can now go hunting as before you buy the weapon, let alone take it anywhere, you have to buy a personal hunter's liability insurance policy that (IIRC) covers you for €500k & if you want to target shoot as opposed to hunt then the only bit you dodge is the hunter's exam at the start of the process mentioned here.

Even after going through all of that super complicated process, you still need to complete yet another training course & exam before you can legally handle a carcass of deer or Javali/wild boar & where Montarias (driven hunts) are concerned, veterinary inspectors are required to examine every carcass or

every deer or javali/wild boar to check it's safe for human consumption.

I should add that there is an awful lot of misinformation in the immigrant community about hunting related issues from where & when a weapon may/may not be discharged & also where & when hunters may enter land not owned or leased to them but in short, a weapon may not usually be discharged within 100 metres of a road & 250 metres of a structure or dwelling. However, there may be exceptions in some cases such as is the structure or dwelling legal or not so don't look for any easy, pat answers on that.

Another popular misconception amongst immigrants is that hunters can go anywhere they choose & this is also incorrect & the landowner can for example register his land as non hunting & post signs to that effect.

As I'm not a lawyer & don't have time to research such an incredibly complicated subject such as hunting, firearms & land trespass I suggest you consult the website below & research ALL of those subjects thoroughly for yourself and/or consult a lawyer to give you absolute clarity on what is an incredibly complicated & convoluted range of subjects.

<https://dre.pt/>

<https://www.cncp.pt/>

If you want to know if any particular area or location is a hunting area or near a hunting area then go to the link below & then click on 'Zonas de caça' and expand the map. Under Zonas de caça drop-down menu, it will give you the colour codes for the various types of hunting zone on the map. Then just put the property location in the search box over the map. The map will expand and show the hunting zone(s) location in the area.

<https://sig.icnf.pt/portal/home/webmap/viewer.html...>

If you have questions about things such as how close can hunters shoot next to a house or similar then the FAQ link below will give you a start but I notice it doesn't easily translate so you might have to copy & paste it into a translator program.

[ICNF - Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas](#)

As the subject of air rifles regularly comes up on the groups it should be noted that whilst 4.5 mm aka .177 & 5.5 mm aka .22 air rifles are both legal in Portugal larger calibres of air weapon are not & all are limited to a maximum of 24 Joules of muzzle energy which translates to 24 foot pounds in old money. However, it should be noted such weapons are restricted in uses such as hunting even for small game but this should not be confused with pest control such as shooting rats etc.

It should also be noted that whilst sound moderators are now legal for use in fullbore rifles their use is not mentioned either way where air weapons are

concerned which might perhaps suggest a slightly grey area where they are concerned.

## **Kindness**

The rural Portuguese people (especially) are often not exactly rich (to say the least) but are almost invariably filled with kindness & generosity of spirit so don't be in the least surprised to find gifts of home produce such as olive oil, wine & surplus home grown veggies left at your doorstep or presented to you by your neighbours who expect nothing in return. However, you can of course return the kindness if you can & my way of doing that is to give eggs from my ducks & geese & I sometimes have other friends give me gifts of venison or javali meat which I usually share with my neighbours & I try to do it 'Portuguese style' as in simply leaving it at their doorstep & walking away.

So what else can we do to return the kindness of the Portuguese people I hear you ask? - I guess the best things we can do to return the favour is to do our very best to integrate into THEIR culture & society by first learning the language as best we can (yes, I well know it's not easy but do your best) & understanding & fitting into their culture & traditions & by doing that, I guarantee that you'll earn their respect as well as their kindness & generosity.

## **Livestock**

A great many of the rural population will keep small livestock such as chickens, waterfowl, goats, sheep & (less commonly) cattle & the vast majority are kept for food. In the case of my village there are considerably more goats & sheep than people in the village.

I personally keep goats, geese & ducks but in my case, these are kept strictly as pets & all have a home for life but in exchange, their job is to eat the grass & bushes in my fields as my pet hate is strimming & lawn mowing.

We do however, eat the eggs or (more commonly) give them away to neighbours & friends. We have kept chickens in the past & chooks are much more common than waterfowl as they give more eggs but I'd never choose to keep them again as if they free range they will pick up mites & once those mites get into the chicken house, they're the devil to get rid of & I've known people burn their chicken houses as it's the only way to get rid of the mites. Waterfowl however, don't pick up mites & are much longer lived.

## **Medronho**

Medronho is a commonly grown fruit in Portugal & sometimes referred to as the 'strawberry tree' & whilst medronho fruit can be eaten it's very commonly used as a flavouring to aguardente or to make a fruit brandy with or without any aguardente added.

A good one can be an absolute delight on the tongue & harvest time is around November & neither fruit or medronho brandy are often seen for sale in large

outlets as almost all fruit are picked by individual home producers & the vast majority of fruit brandy is home produced. It is possible however to order a glass of medronho brandy at many small family run bars, restaurants & cafes.

This might be a good time for me to mention that whilst home distilling is technically illegal in Portugal that ban is rarely, if ever enforced & a great many homes have a small still tucked away somewhere & I have even seen a range of sizes of stills openly sold in local markets.

The links below might be of interest:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medronho>

<http://casadomedronho.com/en/stages-of-the-medronho/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TaI1Stth1fw>

## **Olives & olive oil**

Olive harvest time is an immense family affair where anyone & everyone in the family all come together & pile in as a team.

Us immigrants go to all kinds of lengths & troubles to find an easy way to harvest olives & we really do make hard work of it but the truth is the Portuguese people have really got this sussed so just do as they do which is to spread large pieces of shade cloth around the foot of the tree & then either go the traditional way of ladders & hand rakes & comb the hell out of each branch or go the more high tech route & stay on the ground & use a powered shaker rake to harvest the olives & in either case, it's damned hard work & at this point, you'll have a LOT of leaves & twigs etc in amongst the olives, but don't be put off. Rather just bag it all up, prune the hell out of the tree & move onto the next one.

When you've finished harvesting & pruning then your next step is to separate the wheat from the chaff or in this case, the olives from the leaves, twigs & other bits you don't want & whilst I've seen several powered machines that do this, the old way that's still popular is to make a home made chute rather like a laddered cooling tray set at an angle & slowly pour the olives onto the top of the chute & let gravity do the rest so the olives roll all the way down & into a bucket & the stuff you don't want falls through the holes & onto the ground. (This same piece of kit can incidentally also be used on grapes).

Then you need to decide whether you want table olives or olive oil & in the case of the former, the most important thing to remember is NEVER to get anything metallic even near the olives & whilst Google & youtube will show you umpteen complicated ways to prepare the table olives, several of my friends simply fill 5 litre plastic water bottles with olives, fill to the brim with heavily salted water which is changed about once a week for several months at which point they're very good & it's not uncommon for people to also add a few

cloves of garlic & handfuls of chopped herbs.

If you prefer to go the olive oil route then most villages have some kind of co-operative where they take your olives, process them into oil & keep a small percentage for their own sale/profit which means you get the oil from your own olives but better if possible to book your slot to save waiting around for longer than necessary..... And believe me, that oil from your own olives is MUCH better than anything you can ever buy & if a friend or neighbour gives you a bottle of their own olive oil, they're doing you a huge kindness so be sure to show your genuine appreciation!

If you want to learn how to harvest your own olives or grapes & prune accordingly just speak to your neighbours who I have no doubt will be delighted to have you join them & learn by experience.

The links below might be of interest & that last link is the best of all & explains why olive oil is the price it is.

<https://pellenc.com/agri/produits/olivion-shaker-rake/?lang=en>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WO8lpHepLWQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJCenHbZwjA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bG83mSxetAo>

## **Pine resin harvest**

I'll bet London to brick this one takes you by surprise but believe it not, pine resin has been harvested here since the pines were here & the resin is sold for all kinds of uses from adhesives to varnishes to food glazing additives to perfume manufacture & many/most older Portuguese country houses will have a small collection of the small terracotta pots & other related paraphernalia tucked away in an outbuilding or adegas.

Further detail here:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resin>

<http://treeservicefishers.com/blog/common-uses-for-pine-resin/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFzlOP2u2WI>

## **Local history**

I for one found it incredibly difficult to find out much about history of my local area when we first came here & then it struck me I'd been looking in the wrong places so used the good old Facebook search box & simply entered the names



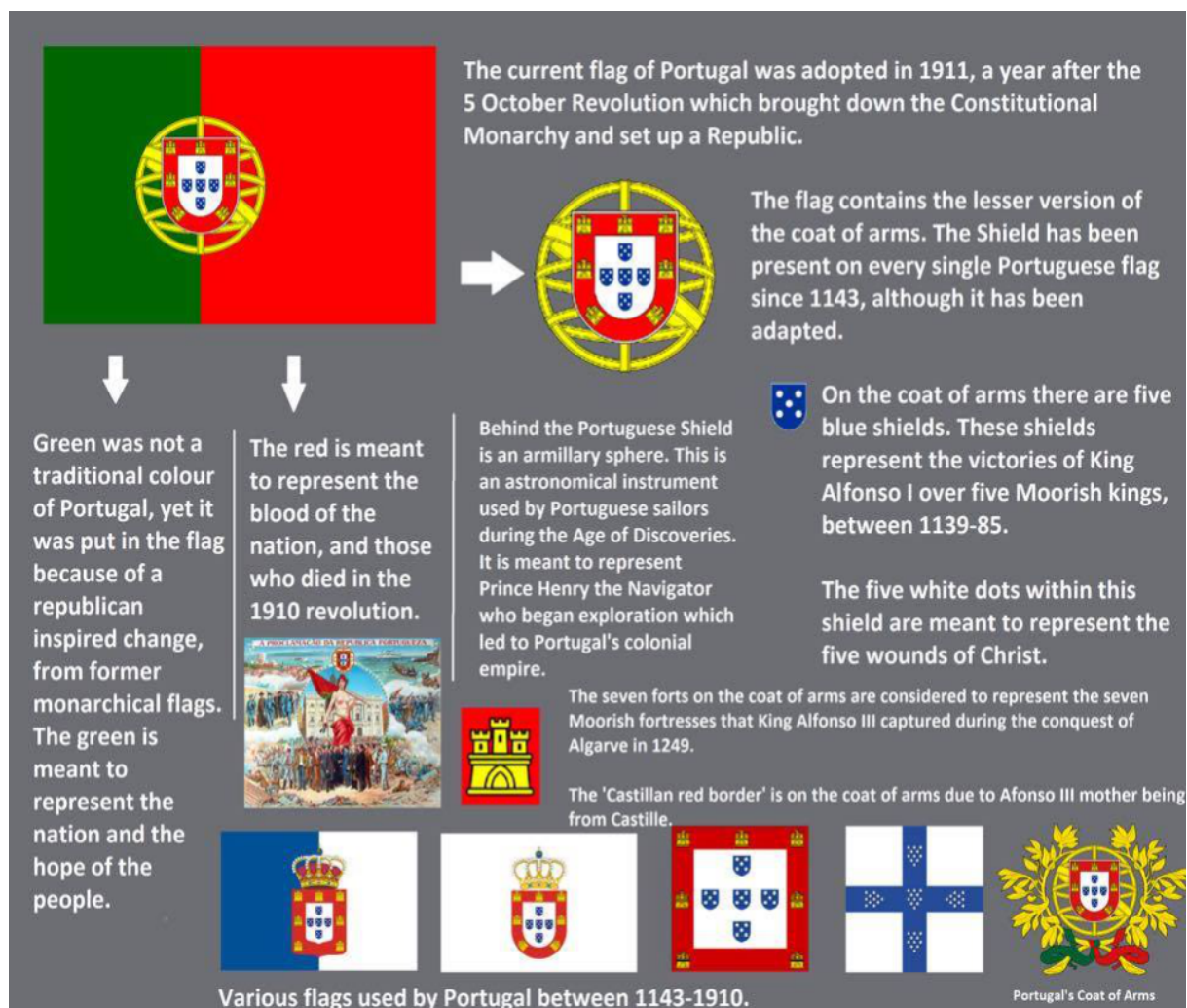
of my local towns & up popped a treasure trove of local historical groups complete with old photographs, movies & newspaper articles, all of which fascinated me although I have to say, it came as a bit of a shock to realise the degree of depopulation that has occurred in recent(ish decades!

I have added links to my local historical groups below as examples of what you should be looking for.

## National anthem

It might be remiss of us not at least to be aware of the National anthem which is called 'A Portuguesa' & the links below will give you further info + music & words etc.

## Flag



The current flag of Portugal was adopted in 1911, a year after the 5 October Revolution which brought down the Constitutional Monarchy and set up a Republic.

The flag contains the lesser version of the coat of arms. The Shield has been present on every single Portuguese flag since 1143, although it has been adapted.

Green was not a traditional colour of Portugal, yet it was put in the flag because of a republican inspired change, from former monarchical flags. The green is meant to represent the nation and the hope of the people.

The red is meant to represent the blood of the nation, and those who died in the 1910 revolution.

Behind the Portuguese Shield is an armillary sphere. This is an astronomical instrument used by Portuguese sailors during the Age of Discoveries. It is meant to represent Prince Henry the Navigator who began exploration which led to Portugal's colonial empire.

On the coat of arms there are five blue shields. These shields represent the victories of King Alfonso I over five Moorish kings, between 1139-85.

The five white dots within this shield are meant to represent the five wounds of Christ.

The seven forts on the coat of arms are considered to represent the seven Moorish fortresses that King Alfonso III captured during the conquest of Algarve in 1249.

The 'Castilian red border' is on the coat of arms due to Afonso III mother being from Castille.

Various flags used by Portugal between 1143-1910.

Portugal's Coat of Arms

The links below might be of interest.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8g7G2ZzeAA&t=338s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KU4AsthQck>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kB0mZcZqRhg>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkSQ6\\_XhvjQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkSQ6_XhvjQ)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Portuguesa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Portuguesa)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkSQ6\\_XhvjQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkSQ6_XhvjQ)

[https://www.facebook.com/groups/FigueiroAntigo/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/groups/FigueiroAntigo/?ref=br_rs)

[https://www.facebook.com/memoriasdefigueiro/?ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/memoriasdefigueiro/?ref=br_rs)

## **Wine**

I have a really charming but elderly neighbour who in the summer sits outside in the sunshine & any time I walked past with the dog would call me in & welcome me with some of his wine but in a brim full, half pint tin mug & there we'd sit shooting the breeze..... & if I looked away, he'd fill it again.... & again & I've lost count of the times I staggered home three sheets to the wind. My dear missus (bless her) used to roll her eyes & simply say, "oh, you've been Sebastianed again" & burst out laughing!

Many, most rural properties in Portugal will have grape vines growing somewhere & an adega dedicated to the art of wine making & our own home had vines growing all over the place when we bought it, it also has an adega complete with baths, presses & over 600 bottles of wine. (hic).

Whilst Portuguese wine is well known the best of it is (IMO) the ones made by the locals for their own consumption & for family & friends & these often come in the humble but very practical 5 litre water bottles but need to be drunk within a year or two of bottling & once opened, drunk within a week or so as they contain no artificial preservatives & the reds of my area are similar to a cross between a South African Merlot & a Cab Sav..... but perhaps marginally stronger. As with the olive harvest, the wine harvest & making is often a massive family affair.

Once the wine is made, the remaining detritus isn't thrown away but is in typical Portuguese fashion not wasted & is then distilled into aguradiante which is the Portuguese equivalent of white lightning or potcheen & is also liquid dynamite & often flavoured with various fruits, coffee beans and/or cut with brandy & water & can be anything from fabulous to almost lethal.

If you want to learn how to harvest your own olives or grapes & prune accordingly just speak to your neighbours who I have no doubt will be delighted to have you join them & learn by experience.