



Cultural Profile Resource: Portuguese

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Portuguese Culture Profile

Introduction

This profile of the Portuguese cultural community is just one of the many projects undertaken by Quality Aging.

This project aims to provide relevant information for community groups and residential aged care providers to implement “best practice” strategies of care for the older individuals from diverse backgrounds.

This project is about ensuring the needs of older persons from a Portuguese cultural background are met.

Population trends within Australia are increasingly characterized by a diversity of people, languages and culture. Together with this trend is an aging population, also with a rich diversity of languages and cultures.

Not surprisingly then, that residential aged care providers are faced with growing demands for culturally responsive facilities and care.

This profile aims to create a tool to provide aged care providers with

- An awareness of the cultural and linguistically diverse needs of older persons from a Portuguese background.
- It also strives to enable the professional capability and progress of staff in the provision of culturally inclusive care; and
- The organisation’s compliance with the Residential Care Standards and National Care Standards as they pertain to the issue of cultural and linguistic needs.

The profile provides beneficial information about a variety of subjects and resources.

This is a guide only and is not intended to replace one stereotype of this culture with another; it is only intended to provide some insight into the culture. Nor does it reduce the importance of you establishing the individual cultural needs of each person as part of your care planning process.

In an effort to continue to provide you with updated information of this profile and improve its contents, we encourage readers to provide feedback by contacting Quality Aging at enquiries@qualityaging.com.au



Background

Portugal lies along the Atlantic coast of the Iberian Peninsula in south Western Europe. It shares a border with Spain in the east and north, while the Atlantic dominates the coastline in the west and south. Occupying about 16 percent of the Iberian Peninsula, Portugal (including Madeira and the Azores) has a population of over 10 million people.

Despite its relatively small size, the country boasts a great diversity of geographical features, from golden plains to mountainous zones.

As a member of the European Union and NATO, Portugal plays a greater role in both European and world affairs than its size would suggest.

Total area: 92,090 sq. km (including Madeira and Azores archipelagos)

Land: 91,470 sq. km

Water: 620 sq. km

Land use: 17 percent arable land; 8 percent permanent crops; 75 percent other.

Weather: Maritime temperate; cold and rainy on the north coast, warm and dry on the south coast.





Daily Life and Social Customs

Greetings

Firm handshake appropriate greeting for anyone. Some people like lighter handshakes. Friends often hug. Among relatives and friends - and sometimes new acquaintances- men and women give other women beikinhos (little kisses) on each cheek, beginning with the right.

Touching is a common part of greeting, because to shows friendship. Greeting strangers passing in the street is done in small cities.

Gestures

It is impolite to point directly at a person with your index finger.

To beckon, one waves all fingers with palm facing up. Pinching the earlobe and shaking it gently while raising the eyebrows means something (a meal, for instance) is really good.

Pulling down the skin just below the eye with the index finger can mean "You are perceptive" or "You are kidding me."

Spreading the fingers, palm down, and rocking the hand means "more or less." Rubbing the thumb against the first two fingers with the palm facing up signifies money.

Touching the tips of all the fingers to the tip of the thumb with the palm facing up signifies fear or cowardice.

Making a "V" sign or "rabbit ears" with the arm raised means "victory" however, doing it behind someone's head constitutes a serious insult because it connotes a lack of morals.

Attire

The Portuguese dress conservatively. Women usually wear dresses, and men's clothing is based primarily around a jacket and tie.

Business etiquette dictates suits and ties or sports jackets and ties for men. Women wear dresses, skirts and jackets or trouser suits.

As out-dated as it seems, people are fashion conscious and believe that clothes indicate social standing and success. For this very reason, they take great pride in wearing quality fabrics and clothes and will invest their money in buying the best they can afford.



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Taboos

The Portuguese will be quick to let you know if you have introduced a taboo subject. Topics that are better avoided include, colonial wars or the fate of their victims. Other controversial topics such as religion, racism, discrimination or abortion are also best avoided.

It is advisable not to ask certain personal questions, for instance, about a person's background, age, relationships, appearance or weight, or about their earnings and occupation. Behaviours that should be avoided are making overly exaggerated gestures and spitting in public.

As the Portuguese generally dislike confrontation, it is advisable to ensure that your behaviour cannot be interpreted as critical or ridiculing of this proud people.

As a golden rule, it is most appropriate to go for an atmosphere of mutual respect.

The above customs are from a time in which the older generation lived and were raised. They may not be evident in the younger generations, nor do they necessarily apply to every Portuguese -born aged person.

It is important YOU check on whether adherence to these, or other customs unique to their region of origin, is to be used with that Portuguese -born person.

Cultural Stereotype

The older generation are mostly traditional and conservative.

Changes and innovations only accepted after careful consideration. Hospitality, honesty, kindness, and being a good person are highly valued qualities.

Admire others achievements other than your own. Portuguese are proud of the cultural heritage and national identity.

They are open and friendly to visitors from other nations. They think the friendships should be strong and last forever/ life time.

The people and relationships are more important than time and being late is often acceptable.

It should be remembered this is just one view and does not apply to every Portuguese-born person. This reality means YOU should establish each Portuguese - born person's preferences.

Having established this person's preferences be careful not to replace one cultural stereotype with another related to what should be considered stereo-typically 'Portuguese'.



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Family

Life in Portugal revolves around the family and even in the 21st century, some traditions and ways of life remain unchanged, especially in rural areas.

The family is the foundation of the social structure. Individuals derive a social network and assistance from the family.

For the Portuguese, family loyalty comes before other social relationships, even business.

Attitudes to Residential Care

Traditionally in Portugal the younger generation are expected to take care of elderly parents at home. However due to the amount of women now in the workforce this has been difficult. The attitudes of placing elderly parents into residential care is now changing, though still an expensive exercise it is now more readily accepted.

In Australia, the Portuguese-born population generally accepts placing elderly parents in nursing homes and other aged care facilities.

Personal Hygiene

The routines and preferences surrounding the following personal hygiene activities greatly impact on the person's sense of self, pride, dignity and confidence.

Bathing

Some Portuguese-born persons want a shower weekly, whereas others can prefer a shower daily.

It is advisable to confirm with your client what their preferences are.

Dress

Modern Portuguese society is quite fashionable, although the Portuguese are particularly known very traditional and conservative.

The young people are commonly seen in modern outfits like jeans and T-shirts but still the Portuguese keenly concentrate on their appearances. They are truly fabric conscious and try to choose the best clothing for their use.

As far as the traditional dresses are concerned, there are some particular places in the country where the locals still prefer to dress up in their traditional outfits.



Leisure and Recreation

Despite certain affinities with the neighbouring Spaniards, the Portuguese have their own distinctive way of life. Lifestyles have altered radically as rural populations have declined and cities and their suburbs have expanded. Urban centres provide a range of entertainment, and fairs and markets are highlights of social gatherings.

A long tradition of dancing and singing continues among the Portuguese. Nearly every village has its own *terreiro*, or dance floor, usually constructed of concrete, though in some places it is still made of beaten earth.

Each region has its own style of dances and songs; most traditional songs are of a slower rhythm than those in Spain.

Small accordions and *gaitas*, or bagpipes, are among a considerable range of instruments that accompany dances, and Portuguese guitars (and sometimes violas) accompany the *fado*, a song form that epitomizes *saudade*—the yearning, romantic aspect of the Portuguese character.

Regional dances, which include the *vira*, *chula*, *corridinho*, *tirana*, and *fandango*, often reflect the courting and matrimonial traditions of the area. Much has been done to preserve these and other folk expressions.

Bullfighting is a popular sport in Portugal and varies markedly from its Spanish counterpart. The Portuguese bullfighter, usually dressed in an 18th-century-style coat and tricornered hat, rides a horse and does not seek to kill the bull, the horns of which may be sheathed to protect the horse. The bullfighter is followed by young men called *forcados*, who confront the bull bare-handed.

Football (soccer), the most popular national sport, evokes intense emotion. The national team is among the world's finest, though it has often had disappointing results in the World Cup tournament.

Portugal's long seacoast and mild climate make beach going a popular pastime, particularly in the Algarve.

The country is also well known throughout the world for its many championship-level golf courses, especially in the south.

In the 1990s Portuguese entrepreneurs began promoting Portugal as an ocean sports destination, drawing on a strong local tradition of sailing and surfboarding. As a result of this effort, the country has become a centre for scuba diving, with a number of attractive sites, including a dive over the wreckage of a British steamship that sank in 1847.

However, YOU need to check with each individual his or her preferences in regard to the above.



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Religion

More than ninth-tenths of Portugal's citizens are Roman Catholic. Regular attendance at mass, however, has declined in the cities and larger towns, particularly in the south.

Less than 2 percent of the population is Protestant, with Anglicans and Methodists the oldest and largest denominations. In the late 20th century, fundamentalist and Evangelical churches grew in popularity, though the number of their adherents remained quite small.

The Jewish population of Portugal is also tiny, as Jews were forced to convert or emigrate during the Inquisition in the late 15th century.

Equally, just because a person when young did not practice or observe their religion doesn't mean as the person ages he/she might now wish to practice.

You need to establish each person's religious preference and link them into a local minister of that religion.

Important cultural and religious days can be found in the [Multi-Cultural Events Calendar](#)

Food and Diet

Food in Daily Life. The cuisine varies by region. The north is known for caldo verde, a kale and potato soup generally flavoured with a slice of chorizo (spicy sausage). Also important are grilled sardines. The traditional bread, especially in the northwest, is broa, a grainy corn bread with a thick crust. In Minho, the traditional wine is vinho verde, a young wine made from grapes that grow on arbors that often serve as property markers. In the northeastern region of Trás-os-Montes, fresh and cured pork, is used in a number of dishes. A stew of mixed meats and vegetables called cozida à portuguesa originated in this region and has become a national dish. In central Portugal, cheeses are more common because of pasturing in the Serra da Estrela and fish (including octopus, squid, and eel) is abundant. In the south, the most popular soup is a form of gazpacho with bread and smoked pork. A pork and clam stew cooked in a cataplana (a tightly sealed steamer) is the regional dish of the Alentejo. Olive oil (azeite) is used throughout the country.

Bacalhau (salt cod) has been a national dish since the fifteenth century, when the Portuguese began fishing off the coast of Newfoundland. Pastéis de bacalhau (codfish croquettes) are a popular appetizer. An important seasoning is cumin; equally important is piri-piri, a hot red chili often used to season barbecued chicken. Cinnamon is a common flavouring for desserts, such as the traditional rice pudding (arroz doce).

Port, a fortified wine produced in the region of the upper Douro River, is a major export. In rural households on ceremonial occasions, port is offered to celebrated guests, including the parish priest.

The noon meal (o almoço) is served at about twelve thirty, and dinner (o jantar) at 8 P.M. Breakfast (o pequeno almoço) is Continental style. In rural regions, it was traditional for men to stop at the local café before heading to the fields to have their pinga (a shot of stiff brandy) to matar o bicho (kill the beast).



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Food Customs at Ceremonial Occasions. One of the most important ceremonies in rural households is the annual killing and preserving of the pig. This event occurs in late December or January and usually takes two days, since it involves making sausage, smoking ham (presunto), and salting several other parts of the pigs, including the belly (toucinho). The noon meal on the first day is called sarrabulho and consists of rice, innards, and the blood of the pig.

The traditional family meal on Christmas Eve is bacalhau with molho verde (a green sauce made with virgin olive oil), cabbage (couve), and boiled potatoes. On Twelfth Night, a bolo rei (kings' bread) is served, often with a lucky coin in it. On the occasion of the village festa, some families roast a goat (cabrito).

Coffeehouses are places to meet friends, talk business, and study. Various styles of coffee are served, each with a special label.

Health

Attitudes to issues with Aging

Traditionally in Portugal the younger generation are expected to take care of elderly parents at home.

However, in Australia, the Portuguese-born population generally accepts placing elderly parents in nursing homes and other aged care facilities.

Attitudes to Illness and Pain

Portuguese-born people tend to openly discuss their physical ailments and health conditions.

- For some elderly Portuguese people there is a fear of admitting their illness and pain in case the doctor suggests residential care or support.
- For many families it is preferable to share a serious diagnosis such as a terminal illness with loved ones, as opposed to the loved ones being told by a doctor.

Perceptions of Health Professionals

Traditionally, doctors and general practitioners are well respected and given great authority.

Many rely on their doctors for information, assistance and referrals. Most Portuguese will follow the advice of doctors and comply with medical treatments. Some problems can occur with elderly Portuguese people over medicating or not complying with long term use of their medications.

This may mean YOU shouldn't perceive a Portuguese person who questions a doctor or health professional as being difficult. Nor should you consider the person as 'being difficult' should he/she want a second opinion or to access complementary medicines of some type.



Death and Dying

Death is a fundamental part of village life. Church bells toll to send the message that a neighbor (vizinho) has passed away.

In some areas, the gates and doors of the dead person's house are opened to allow anyone to enter and relatives begin to wail around a body prepared for viewing.

Burial is in local cemeteries, and family graves are well tended. Each village has several burial societies (confrarias).

All Saints Day is an occasion for reverence for those who have departed.

Mourning is signified by the wearing of black; a widow generally will wear black for the rest of her life, while other kin remain in mourning for varying lengths of time.

Portugal has various cults of death. Such beliefs are not confined to rural areas; in the cities there is a network of spirit mediums who claim to contact the dead.

Language

Portuguese is the eighth most spoken language and the third most spoken European language in the world (after English and Spanish) and, together with Spanish, French, Italian and Romanian, comprise the five modern Romance languages.

While the Portuguese language has its roots firmly in Europe, most of the world's 210+ million Portuguese speaking people live elsewhere. It is the 6th most spoken language in the world.

Because there are some similarities between Spanish and Portuguese, and both are a product of the Iberian Peninsula, many erroneously believe that Portuguese is merely a dialect of Spanish. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Spoken in: Angola, Andorra, Brazil, Cape Verde, East Timor, Guinea Bissau, Luxembourg, Macau (China), Mozambique, Namibia, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe and other countries.

It is the mother tongue of about 200 million people, chiefly in Portugal and the Portuguese islands in the Atlantic (11 million speakers); in Brazil (184 million speakers); and in Portugal's former overseas provinces in Africa and Asia (about 5 million speakers).

Official language of: Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, East Timor, Guinea Bissau, Macau, Mozambique, Portugal and São Tomé and Príncipe

Historically, Portuguese, which developed from the Vulgar Latin, brought to the Iberian Peninsula by its Roman conquerors, could be distinguished from the parent tongue before the 11th cent. The Portuguese spoken in Lisbon and Coimbra gave rise to the Standard Portuguese of today.



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Although the greater part of the Portuguese vocabulary comes from Latin, a number of words have also been absorbed from Arabic, French, and Italian, and also from some of the indigenous South American and African languages.

Member of the Romance group of the Italic subfamily of the Indo-European family of languages.

YOU need to be aware that just because they could once speak English, does not mean

- a) They necessarily spoke it fluently or extensively OR
- b) They have retained these skills as he/she aged OR
- c) That it is their preferred language.

Speaking English can be tiring to the elderly – as they are engaging in a translation-type of process.

Many elderly people revert back to their native language as they aged.

Cue Cards

Quality Aging has cue cards that you may find useful and assist you in communicating with a person that speaks a language other than English.



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Disclaimer

The information herein is a synthesis of information from a range of sources believed to be reliable. Quality Aging gives no warranty that the said base sources are correct, and accepts no responsibility for any resultant errors contained herein or for decisions and actions taken as a result and any damage from these decisions or actions.

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