United Kingdom to Portugal

People in Portugal are warm and courteous, a little reserved at first, and more formal in how they address each other. Life runs later and at a gentler pace.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT

Greetings: Women, and men greeting women, give two kisses on the cheek (beijinhos). Men shake hands with each other.

Forms of address: People often say "o senhor" / "a senhora" instead of "you", and use titles like "Doutor" for anyone with a degree.

Mealtimes: Lunch (around 1 pm) can be long; dinner is around 8–9 pm. Coffee follows every meal.

Time: Social plans are relaxed, and 15–30 minutes late is common. Official appointments can involve patience and waiting.

Coffee: "Um café" is a small espresso, drunk standing at the counter in a minute. A milky coffee is "um galão" or "uma meia de leite".

Bread and starters: Bread, olives and cheese put on the table aren't free. Send them back if you don't want them, or they'll be on the bill.

Shops and hours: Small shops may close for lunch, and some close on Sunday. Big supermarkets and shopping centres open every day.

Family: Family comes first, and Sunday lunch with parents and grandparents is a fixture. Adult children often live at home for longer.

Modesty: People rarely boast, and they may play down their own country. Don't agree too quickly when they criticise it.

Gendered endings: Endings follow the speaker: a woman says "Obrigada" and "Estou cansada", a man "Obrigado" and "Estou cansado".

TIPS

- Use "o senhor" / "a senhora" with older people and in shops.
- Offer two light cheek kisses when someone leans in.
- Order "um café" (an espresso) after lunch, like everyone else.
- Bring patience to queues and paperwork.
- Say "bom dia" when you walk into a shop or a lift.
- Send back the starters you don't want; they aren't free.
- Book dinner for 8 pm or later if you want a lively room.
- Ask about local food; people love to recommend a dish.

These are general tendencies, not rules: every person, family and region is different. When in doubt, watch what others do, and ask. People are usually glad you did.