



Portugal

This month, our attention turns to Portugal on the Iberian Peninsula in Southwestern Europe. It is the westernmost country of mainland Europe. To the west and south it is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and to the east and north by Spain. It also includes the Azores and Madeira Islands. Both the capital, Lisbon and the second largest city, Porto, are coastal cities.

National heroes are historical figures who contributed to Portugal's great empire in the 1500's and include Vasco da Gama, Pedro Alvares Cabral, and Infante D. Henrique. They have been replaced now by football players including legends Eusebio, Figo, Rui Costa and Vitor Baia, as well as other new ones who play in big European clubs.

In the workplace, business is formal and the use of titles is still used, especially at the outset of a business relationship. However, using titles in Portugal is very complicated and it's simpler to use the English Mr or Mrs + family name. If they are more progressive, they will probably tell you to call them by their first name.

Portuguese are productive and are willing to work overtime, (including weekends) to get an important job done. But expect to find small pauses during the day, for having a coffee, or a five-minute conversation with colleagues. Depending on the industry, longer lunch breaks are common with colleagues socialising together.

Portugal is a culture that respects age and position. Status is important, with a great respect for superiors. Executive remuneration, company cars and titles are important motivators. A new D&B study concludes that there are more women in top roles in Portugal's companies than before - a positive trend, albeit a slow one. Although men dominate the top jobs, the study found that women led 28.5% of Portugal's companies at the end of last year.

Open collaborative team-based activities where people are encouraged to share common goals and work effectively together are still relatively uncommon in Portugal. Generally, there is an unwillingness to directly challenge authority – although this is changing with the younger generation.

A good manager in Portugal has an authoritative approach and is concerned about the feelings and well-being of employees. Managers should be authoritative but never authoritarian. As Portugal is a strongly relationship-oriented business culture, it is important to show that, although one is in control you have a sincere and warm touch.

Decision-making mechanisms remain centralized and there is a hierarchy and procedure to follow before you are able to make a decision. Ideas can be expressed freely, but be careful when those ideas collide with someone else's competences. The best way is to present your idea to your supervisor, who will then pass it to his, and so on, until it reaches the top.

If there is a cultural dimension that defines Portugal very clearly, it is “Uncertainty Avoidance”. Portugal scores 99 on this dimension and thus has a very high preference for avoiding uncertainty. There is an emotional need for rules (even if the rules never seem to work) time is money, people have an inner urge to be busy and work hard, precision and punctuality are the norm, innovation may be resisted and security is an important element in individual motivation.

The Portuguese tend to be relatively direct in their communication style. They will tell you the truth and usually in a polite manner. Communication tends to be more on the formal side when in public and much less so in private. Many people tend to speak quite fast and somewhat loudly. This show of emotion is quite common and does not usually signify anger or displeasure. Generally, Portuguese dislike confrontation, so disputes are resolved through discourse, negotiation or avoidance altogether.

Finally, a good way to start a conversation is to talk about where you are from, Portuguese food and wine, music and what you are doing in Portugal (visiting, studying, working). Compliments on the beauty of the country/city, and questions about the Portuguese culture are a plus (Portuguese are proud of their culture and history). Note: Even on a first day in a new office, don’t rush in without taking some time to talk (and probably repeat this conversation) with several people. It won’t be wasted time.