Hiking Portugal's Fisherman's Trail



Alentejo & Algarve, Portugal
October 21-30, 2025

Features

- Eight nights in the field at village hotels and inns
- Luggage transfer—daily gear shuttle means hiking with daypacks!
- Seven robust walking days
- One layover day, with an optional 10-mile exploration of Odeceixe and surroundings
- One night (paired lodging) on each end in a charming Lisbon hotel
- Approximately 75-mile, trailed route to Europe's most southwestern tip!
- Stunning scenery along Portugal's southwest coast
- Optional pre-trip day activities in historic Lisbon
- A guided walking tour of Lisbon before driving to the trailhead
- Cultural interaction throughout with a few lighthouses, castles and a fortress, too!

Cost: $3,695 Pre and post-trip lodging included
Minimum Age: 18

Max group size: 10 Participants
2 NOLS Instructors

Trip Description

Join a small group of NOLS grads, friends, families and instructors for a week of spectacular autumn hiking along southwest Portugal's dramatic coast as we walk between small villages.

Portugal's Fisherman's Trail stretches over 225 kilometers from Sao Torpes' western-facing beaches to Lagos along the south coast. The trail's name is no coincidence, it stitches together informal fishing trails, beach and surf access, Roman roads, country lanes, 4WD paths and farm tracks. The trail through Southwest Alentejo and Vicentine Coast Natural Park is continually expanding, with new legs added in the spring of 2019—it's now recognized as one of Europe's great trails.

The coast is striking—dramatic cliffs, sea stacks, pounding surf and seemingly endless golden beaches are around every corner. The area's chilly seas are renowned for their breakers; surfers travel from across the globe to challenge the Algarve's epic waves. The well-marked, sandy trail mostly traverses cliffs and ridges above the beach, but occasional side drainages cut across the grain to provide short ups and downs. Shrubs, small pine forests, bamboo, cork trees, verbena, and astonishingly-colored Ice Plants frame the trail. Although daily hikes average about eleven miles, elevation changes are slight. Sun, breezes and sand are trail staples.

If you are able to arrive in Lisbon a night early, our instructors can suggest a variety of optional, loosely organized and self-guided sightseeing activities in and around Lisbon. It's a beautiful, fascinating city, with a rich history and countless historical sites. We will meet at the hotel on the first evening to sample a few Portuguese wines and cheeses and for a trip overview before we begin in earnest the next morning.

This trip will re-acquaint you with NOLS backpacking techniques in a convivial, relaxing and visually stunning location. Instruction is geared to your interests, with optional side explorations, Portuguese "word(s) of the day," time for journal writing, photography, and more. Of course, non-alumni friends and family are also invited—this is a great way to introduce NOLS to your sidekicks.

The first morning we will pack up, store any excess luggage and meet Lisbon resident Tiago Neiva for a walking tour of Lisbon's oldest neighborhoods. Tiago will focus on the city's rich history and architecture. After the tour and lunch, we'll return to our hotel, where we'll catch a ride to Porto Covo, the starting point for our hike.

The route offers a robust level of hiking—the average hiking day is about 11 miles with minor changes in elevation. For those that want more, there will be options to do additional day explorations. During the days we will occasionally walk through tiny, sleepy villages where we can stop for a coffee, beverage or snack.

You will spend seven days and eight nights along the trail in small, quiet villages. This is a common way for Europeans to go on extended "walks," and it gives us the chance to savor Portuguese cuisine and culture while mixing with a few other, mostly European, travelers.

Sleeping and dining (dinner and breakfasts) in the villages allows us to considerably lighten our packs for our daily coastal hikes among the stunning cliffs, sandy beaches, and country lanes of southwest Portugal. To lighten our packs even further, each participant can have one piece of luggage transported between destinations. On our hikes, we'll only carry a light daypack, including lunch, raingear, extra layers, and plenty of water. Although packs are light, the hikes are long so training for this trip is important to your enjoyment. Folks who are in better condition can spend more time looking around and enjoying vistas.

Our hikes connect rural communities, hamlets and surf towns—we'll lodge in villages with 300 to 5,000 permanent residents. We'll spend eight nights and seven days along the trail, probably hopscotching a handful of other, mostly European, hikers and joining in the community that long distance trails foster. On our last hiking day, we hike around the most south-westerly point of Europe, known to early explorers as the *Finis Terrae*, or the End of the World.

The trip is a point to point hike; we are picked up at the end by our shuttle for the drive back to Lisbon. That evening, we'll enjoy a group closing dinner at a traditional Portuguese restaurant. Some folks will travel home the next day while others might stay in Portugal or head off on other adventures.

Southwest Portugal--About the Alentejo and the Algarve
Our hiking days are divided among two Portuguese regions—the Alentejo (about the size of Maryland) and the Algarve (about the size of Rhode Island). Agriculture, fishing, and especially tourism, are the area's big financial drivers.

Inhabited since the Paleolithic period, this area of Portugal has been developed by successions of invaders—the Phoenicians, Romans, Visegoths, Moors and Spanish all left their stamp on the

people and landscape. In the 1400s, the Portuguese Empire launched their global conquest and refined naval navigation from cities in this region.

Portugal is small in population (~10M), but large in heart. An enthusiastic democracy since its bloodless “Carnation Revolution” in 1974, the Portuguese people, especially in the south, have embraced tourism and readily share their cuisine, music, incredible beaches, and culture with travelers. Portugal joined the EU in 1986, and peak tourist season is June-August.

Coastal trails and towns in the Alentejo and Algarve are defined by the sea. The ocean in October is cool, perhaps 66ºF, so breezes and wind off the water can be invigorating when you’re not actively hiking. October highs are in the mid-60s with lows around 57º The area gets ~2 inches of rain in October, the 5th rainiest month of the year. The entire region gets about 20” of rain per year, so it’s on the dry side akin to the Dakotas in the US.

NOLS Staff
Our staff are NOLS professionals and certified accordingly. This means they maintain certifications in wilderness medicine and are trained to NOLS’ high standards in risk management. They are senior staff at NOLS who have spent years working and teaching in backcountry environments all over the world. Additionally, our staff specialize in bringing together groups of strangers and building the group culture and camaraderie that makes NOLS trips great.

A Day in the Life
In the mornings, generally about 8 a.m., the group gathers in a common area or dining room for breakfast. The team then returns to their rooms to change into hiking clothes (shorts or hiking pants and t-shirt) and finish packing up. Folks gather outside with packs for a review of the day and maps. The team hikes as a loose group along the trail, stopping for water and snack breaks as needed. Hikes vary, but are generally ~5 hours on the trail.

We arrive at our lodging where instructors will organize rooms. People re-group for additional optional hikes, or change from hiking clothes into comfortable, country travel wear for lounging around the lodging or small towns. Dress is not formal, so warmish casual clothes like hiking pants, fishing shirts and light pile jackets are common and appropriate around the common areas and in the small villages.

Our group dinners usually happen at a set time from a multi-course menu at a nearby restaurant. Various meats and fish are common options, with vegetables, breads, and a dessert selection. Meals (which are quite excellent) are included in the trip tuition, but alcohol is not. Participants often pair up to buy a bottle of wine, or folks order beer or spirits from the bar. Please let us know if you have dietary restrictions.

After dinner, groups often come together for parlor games and socializing. Most participants head to bed by around 10 p.m.

Difficulty Scale

This trip is rated 3 out of 5 on our difficulty scale.



We use a difficulty scale to help participants evaluate if a trip is right for them. It considers probable weather conditions, physicality of activities, and food and accommodations. You don't need to be a honed athlete, but pre-trip work to improve your strength, flexibility and endurance, is highly encouraged to improve your enjoyment of the place. If you have specific questions regarding physical preparation and your readiness please reach out to the Alumni Trips Department.

Food on the trip
There will be plenty of food provided on the trip for everyone. We are happy to ensure that folks who have reasonable dietary needs and/or preferences are well taken care of throughout the entire trip. Listing those needs on your registration paperwork is critical for our success here.

If you would like to bring your own snacks along, that is highly encouraged. We all have treats that we enjoy and bringing something special is a great way to keep motivation high and not have to rely on the group's schedule for your munchies.

Curriculum
This trip focuses on many traditional NOLS activities, including map reading, hiking and group travel. The instructors will present information necessary for the group to comfortably travel and can present optional topics desired by the participants– including natural history, leadership topics and relevant local human history. Formal "classes" are few and mostly optional. Anticipate a required base level of group management and cohesion— this is a traveling expedition.

Expectations of Participants
The alumni trip atmosphere is more relaxed than a typical NOLS expedition. However, it's not a full-service vacation or guided experience. You'll have to participate, carry your load, and help out as needed. These expeditions are fun, but they still require self-reliance, self awareness, risk management and sound decision making as we trek through remote areas where evacuation to modern medical facilities can take days.

All participants need to complete and submit application materials, including a medical history form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status. Your forthright and timely completion and submission of the forms sets you and your trip up for success in the outdoors.

Alumni trips allow electronics and alcohol (for those of legal age in the country of the trip). Many participants find that these luxuries can add to the course experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of Alumni trips.

Trip Itinerary

Oct 19	Depending on connections and possible pre-trip plans, many participants will depart the U.S. on this day.	
Oct 20	We urge you to arrive in Lisbon on this day, allowing for jet lag recovery, possible baggage snafus and some optional activities on the next day.	Lodging on your own, we like Hotel Convento do Salvador.
Oct 21	For those in Lisbon, we'll loosely organize optional self-guided activities— including a visit to Belém Tower and the Jeronimos Monastery, one of the best examples of Manueline architecture to survive the 1755 Earthquake. **Our pre-trip group orientation occurs at 5 p.m.** at the hotel. During the orientation, we'll sample a few Portuguese wines and cheeses.	Lodging provided by NOLS at the Hotel Convento do Salvador (we'll double up same gender pairs). Dinner on your own.
Oct 22	Pack up. Store any luggage you're not taking on the hike. At 9 a.m., we'll meet in the hotel lobby and set off on a 3-hour guided walking tour of historic Lisbon. At 2 p.m., we'll meet our shuttle for the 2-hour drive to Porto Covo, a picturesque village where we'll begin our hike the next day.	Lodging in Porto Covo
Oct 23	Hike Porto Covo to Vila Nova de Milfontes, ~12.5 miles. ↑200M ↓180M	Lodging in Milfontes
Oct 24	Hike Vila Nova de Milfontes to Almograve, ~9.5 miles. ↑150M ↓130M	Lodging in Almograve
Oct 25	Hike Almograve to Zambujeira do Mar, ~13.7 miles. ↑200M ↓200M	Lodging in Zambujeira do Mar
Oct 26	Hike Zambujeira do Mar to Odeceixe, ~11 miles. ↑300M ↓300M	Lodging in Odeceixe
Oct 27	Layover Day! We'll have an optional circuit hike from Odeceixe along country lanes and then looping back along the coast to the mouth of the River Seixe, ~10 miles. Alternatively, people can choose to rest, explore the village, walk ~1.5 miles to Odeceixe beach, etc.	Lodging in Odeceixe
Oct 28	This day starts with a taxi ride. We'll drive about 23 miles from Odeceixe (to bypass some inland trail walking) to Carrapateira, where we'll get back on the trail. Along the trail, we'll check out ruins of a 12th century Islamic Fishing Village, Ponte do Castelo. Hike to Vila do Bispo. ~10 miles. ↑500M ↓420M	Lodging in Vila do Bispo

Oct 29	Hike Vila do Bispo to Sagres Along the way we'll tour the São Vicente Lighthouse. ~12.7 miles. ↑150M ↓200M	Lodging in Sagres
Oct 30	After breakfast, we'll have the option to check out the Cape Sagres Fortress, where Prince Henry the Navigator established a school for navigators in 1420. Our shuttle will pick us up late in the morning to drive back to Lisbon.	Lodging provided by NOLS at the Hotel Convento do Salvador. Group dinner by NOLS.
Oct 31	Depart Lisbon.	Breakfast included.
	**A note on hiking mileage: generally, the distances listed are the maximum daily treks. Occasionally, public bus shuttles, bad weather, or ferries may change a given day's walking plan.	

Trip Logistics

Getting to Lisbon

The trip starts and ends in the historic Alfama neighborhood of Lisbon (city pop ~3M including the surrounding area). Many flights from the U.S. leave in the early evening and arrive early morning the next day in Europe.

Lisbon's hilly Alfama neighborhood is renowned for its old-world character (one of the few areas to escape destruction in the epic 1755 earthquake)—narrow winding streets, beckoning stone stairways, obscure alleys, tiny Fado restaurants and colorful characters. For centuries, Alfama, Lisbon's oldest neighborhood, has been the home to the city's immigrants—from wealthy muslims in the 700s, to fishermen and sailors, to the creators of Fado music, to ne'er-do-wells in the 1980s, today the neighborhood has a vibrant, welcoming pulse.

The easiest way to reach our group hotel in the Alfama is to take a taxi or uber/lyft. The latter options will drop you about a block from the hotel since vehicle access into the Alfama's core is restricted. Depending on traffic, it's probably about a 30-minute ride from the airport and will cost ~20€. English is commonly, though not universally, spoken in Lisbon and along the coast, especially by young people in the tourist business.

Depending on where you first land in Europe, you may either clear customs in that city or in your final destination. U.S. citizens do not need a visa to vacation in Portugal, but passport control will stamp your passport. Check your passport: make sure you have **six months or more of validity**, or you may be denied flight boarding!

Lodging

During the hiking portion of our trip, we'll stay in small hotels, inns, or guest houses where accommodations are comfortable, but not overly fancy. Wifi is often available, but the speed and quality varies. The same can be said for cell service. We're planning for paired, single-gender rooms,

so let us know if you're pals or a couple. We're using remote lodging that is comfortable, but not infinitely flexible. Anticipate that there will be some shuffling upon check-in as your instructors finalize bed and room configurations. Your flexibility and good humor with this system is appreciated.

Well-made breakfasts are usually part of the lodging package. Some lodging will provide group dinners, or we will venture out as a group with NOLS supplying the meal.

The trip tuition includes lodging in Lisbon at the **Hotel Convento do Salvador** on the first and last nights. If you come early or wish to stay longer, Lisbon has many lodging options all over the city.

Storage of Personal Belongings & Luggage Shuttle

You will be able to store luggage and travel clothes at our Lisbon hotel before we head out on the trip. These items will be kept in a secure area and available again when we get back to the hotel. It's useful to consolidate your stored luggage into a single duffle or wheeled bag.

This trip is unique at NOLS: we will use a daily luggage transfer service to move our gear from lodging to lodging on the trail. Practically, this means you'll be able to hike with a daypack of layers, water and group lunch. Please organize your personal gear for daily transfer into a small duffle or case that weighs under 30 pounds.

Currency

You'll need cash Euros for miscellaneous purchases (souvenirs, postcards, bar tabs etc.) throughout the trip. Money change kiosks are handy in most airports, and ATMs (cash points) are commonly available. US credit cards work in most locations, but it's a good idea to give your credit card company a heads up that you're traveling internationally. About 100 Euros will be plenty of cash for the field portion of the trip for incidental purchases. It is difficult to predict if our rural lodging will consistently take credit cards for incidental purchases.

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is worth exploring in case unforeseen events cause you to change your plans or if NOLS has to cancel a trip for any reason. Check with your personal insurance carrier and credit card to understand what you already might have or check out cat70.com for a wide variety of options.

Carbon Footprint and Offset

Current estimates are that the Travel Industry accounts for ~8% of global emissions. This percentage includes everything from transportation to accommodation and shopping. NOLS recognizes that our business contributes to this problem but we do not have a comprehensive strategy at this point.

If you would like to offset part or all of the carbon emissions related to your Alumni trip, we recommend South Pole. Their calculator can help easily calculate your footprint and choose a project to contribute to. Here is a link to their calculator.

Tipping

While tipping is common in the outdoor guiding culture, your NOLS Instructors are not driven to excellence by tips but rather a love for taking people outdoors. You are welcome to tip the Instructors

if you choose, but many instructors are honored by a donation in their name to the NOLS Annual Fund which supports scholarships for future NOLS students.

Immunizations / Vaccinations / Travel medications

International travel poses special health considerations. NOLS strongly advises that all participants traveling to international locations carefully consider what vaccinations or inoculations are required, recommended, or suggested for their specific travel itinerary. Consulting with a physician, travel medicine specialist, or other healthcare professional is strongly advised.

Visa / Passport - Attention International European travelers - Must read… Action Required

If your travels have you **entering or transiting (passing through or laying over in) the UK**, you will need to apply for and have an approved Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) to continue to your destination.

This article explains that starting Jan 8, 2025, US and Canadian citizens will need to apply for the ETA to enter the UK.

Here's the link for how to apply.

As well, for NOLS International Alumni trips, your **passport must be valid for a minimum of 6 months post trip**. For example, if your trip in Europe concludes on July 30, 2025, your passport must be valid through January 30, 2026.

At some point in the future (July 2025?) Europe (EU) will be requiring a travel authorization for most countries that are visa-exempt. This includes USA citizens. Once this system goes into effect, you will need to apply using this new system before traveling and pay a small fee for the authorization.

You can read about this new program, check your requirements, and view the most up to date expected implementation date here.

Electricity Stuff

There will be electricity available at our lodging each night. You will need a Type F adapter to plug your things into the lodging sockets.

Trip Registration

The best way to register is through the trip information page on the nols.edu website. A non-refundable deposit secures your spot on the trip. If any issues arise, please call the NOLS Alumni Department at (800) 332-4280. Your enrollment is complete with receipt of your full tuition and your completed application forms; these are **due 60 days before the start of your trip.**

All participants are required to submit registration materials, including a medical form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status while also providing NOLS information about things like your dietary needs.

NOLS is not responsible for additional costs incurred by late arrivals or evacuations. Those expenses are the responsibility of trip participants and we recommend purchasing travel insurance to mitigate the impact of unforeseen circumstances.

Do not book travel greater than 60 days before the start of the trip unless you have confirmed with NOLS that the trip will run. On rare occasions, we do cancel trips due to low enrollment.

Cancellation and Transfer Policy

For your reference, here is the Alumni Trips Cancellation and Transfer Policy. When enrolling on a trip, you will need to agree to this policy.

Suggested Readings

The First Global Village. Martin Page. 2006. 277 pages.
The History of Portugal. James Anderson. 2000. 248 pages.
Portugal: A Companion History. Jose Hermano Saraiva. 180 pages.
The Last Day: Wrath, Ruin, and Reason in the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755. Nicholas Shrady. 2009. 228 pages.
Conquerors: How Portugal Forged the First Global Empire. Roger Crowley. 2015. 400 pages.

Suggestions for extra time in Lisbon:

There are plenty of good museums in the city, none of those are included on this list. These are brief descriptions, so please consult the internet, a guidebook and your preferred navigation app for more information!

1. Walk or hop on a bus to Belém, now considered a Lisbon suburb (~ 5 miles from the hotel, along a pleasant and scenic river walk). Once there, you can visit the Belém Tower and the Jerónimos Monastery. You can also pop in the Pasteis de Belém, where the famous Pastel de Nata was first concocted, for a tasty treat!
2. Take a train to the beach. A beautiful nearby beach is in Carcavelos. To get there, walk about a mile along the river from our hotel to the Cais do Sodre station and then take a train toward CasCais; they depart about every 20 min. The ride to Carcavelos is about 25 minutes.
3. Visit the Castelo de São Jorge, right in our Alfama neighborhood! Purchase and download tickets online in advance.
4. Take a train to Sintra from the Rossio station, which is less than a mile from our hotel and worth seeing in itself. The train ride is about 40 minutes, and once you arrive in Sintra, you can

choose to visit a 1200-year-old Moorish Castle, the fabulous and fanciful Pena Palace, and the eclectic Palace of Monserrate. If you make a day of it, you can see all three!

5. Walk up to nearby miradouros (viewpoints), Miradouro da Senhora do Monte and Miradouro da Graça, for a fabulous view of Lisbon, the river, and the communities on the other side.
6. Visit the Carmo Convent and attached archaeological museum as a pleasant downtown walk and a striking bit of circa 1389 architecture.
7. Explore the National Museum of Ancient Art where centuries of ceramics, paintings, furniture, drawings, silverware and more are on display.

Equipment

Group Gear provided by NOLS		
Maps	Water treatment	First Aid Kits
Trail food	Satellite/Cell phone	

Upper Body Clothing	
Equipment	**Notes**
Base layer (mid-weight synthetic) (1)	Mid-weight underwear top made of wool, synthetic, or Capilene®.
Insulating jacket (fleece, wool or synthetic puffy)	Warm layer to wear in chilly weather or when we are done hiking for the day.
Wind shirt - optional	A lightweight, breathable, durable nylon wind shell, in either pullover or parka style.
Rain jacket	A sturdy, roomy waterproof jacket with a hood. Coated nylon and waterproof breathable fabrics such as Gore-Tex® are acceptable.
Hiking shirt (1-2)	A lightweight synthetic or merino wool t-shirt and/or a long-sleeved, synthetic “fishing shirt” or sun shirt to protect you from the intense sun while hiking.
Sports bra or tank (1-2)	Synthetic sports bra or a synthetic sports tank are recommended.
Town shirt/top (1)	Lightweight items for town. These do not need to be fancy, but presentable for dinner out in town.
Gloves/mittens	Wool or fleece gloves or mittens for windy/rainy days.
Warm hat	Wool or synthetic beanie for rainy days or cool nights.
Sun hat	Baseball cap or sun hat.
Lower Body Clothing	

Base layer (mid-weight synthetic) (1)	Mid-weight bottoms of high performance polyester, synthetic, or Capilene®. Cotton and cotton blends are not acceptable.
Hiking pants/shorts	Breathable nylon pants or shorts, roomy enough to fit over all lower body layers .
Wind Pants - Optional	A lightweight, breathable, durable nylon wind shell.
Rain pant	A sturdy, waterproof pant. Coated nylon and breathable fabrics such as Gore-Tex® are acceptable.
Underwear (2-4 pairs)	Wear what's comfortable; cotton, silk, or synthetics are fine.
Town pants/dress (1)	Lightweight items for town. These do not need to be fancy, but presentable for dinner out in town.
Footwear	
Equipment	**Notes**
Medium or lightweight hiking boot/shoe	You will need a sturdy pair of shoes for hiking. Some people prefer a sturdy hiking shoe vs a boot. Bring something you are used to.
Town shoe	A comfortable pair of sneakers or street shoes to wear around the hotels and wandering the village.
Socks (2-4 pairs)	½-crew to crew length wool socks. Cotton socks are not advised.
Gaiters	Short gaiters are great to keep the rocks and sand out.
Miscellaneous Personal Gear	
Smallish sized backpack (20-30L)	Big enough to fit all your personal gear, water and lunch for each day.
Plastic compactor bags (1-2)	Heavy mil thickness to waterproof your backpack while hiking. We use the ~33 gallon size as pack liners.
Misc. plastic or dry bags	Bring a handful of assorted plastic or dry bags to thoroughly waterproof your gear inside your pack. Cameras, phones and passports warrant extra attention.
Water bottles/bladder	Total carrying capacity of at least 2 Liters.
Lip balm (1-2)	SPF 15 or greater.
Sunscreen	SPF 30 or greater.
Sunglasses	Good-quality sunglasses with 100-percent UV protection; lenses should be dark.
Headlamp	If something goes awry on the trail late in the day.
Toiletries	Toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, brush, skin lotion, tampons, etc.
Optional Personal Items	
Book or e-reader	Bring something fun to read.

Camera	We would love to see your photos post-trip!
Trekking poles	Many people find two hiking poles very useful.
Earplugs and facemask	Many folks find these help them sleep.
Pack cover	This can help keep your pack drier on a rainy hiking day.
Umbrella	Great secondary option for the rain.
Swimsuit	Typically, folks don’t do much full-on “swimming,” but a suit may be occasionally useful.
Instant coffee	Sometimes dedicated coffee drinkers want a cup before breakfast is available. Small instant coffee packets are handy when a kettle is available.