

# Tourism Concepts And Rural Tourism In Portugal

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## Summary

**Objective:** To systematize literature on tourism and tourism in rural areas in Portugal.

**Methodology:** Review of literature on tourism and tourism in rural areas in Portugal that leads us to the respective concepts.

**Results:** Tourism in Portugal could reach approximately 39.5 billion euros in 2024, which will represent around 17.4% of the Gross Domestic Product. Rural and nature tourism in Portugal is a practice that values the well-being of visitors and promotes environmental conservation.

**Conclusions:** Tourism in Portugal follows a trend of growth and massification and tourism in rural areas seeks to be an alternative to the aforementioned massification.

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## I. Introduction

Tourism in Portugal has become widespread and other forms of tourism have become an alternative for those looking to escape the aforementioned massification.

In order to understand the concepts included in the aforementioned, a literature review and a database analysis on tourism in Portugal were carried out.

The literature review and the databases cited led us to the following sequence: Tourism and Emerging Trends; Tourism in Portugal; Tourist Products; Ecotourism and Nature Tourism; Tourism in Rural Areas in Portugal.

## II. Methodology

Based on the assumption that tourism in Portugal has been focusing on the tourist offer in large cities, where there has been a trend towards massification, and that there are more and more tourists looking for rest in their vacations, we seek systematize literature that takes us to the concept of tourism in rural areas in Portugal today, understanding it as a pressing need to create this type of tourist offer.

The content of scientific articles and databases on tourism in Portugal was systematized in order to understand the evolution of the topic and extract a summary of the conclusions of the aforementioned articles.

## III. Review Of Literature On Tourism And Rural Tourism In Portugal

Scientific articles were analyzed that led us to the following sequence: Tourism and Emerging Trends; Tourism in Portugal; Tourist Product; Ecotourism and Nature Tourism; Tourism in Rural Areas in Portugal.

### 1. Tourism and Emerging Trends

The tourism sector is going through a phase of major change and disruption, with changes in source markets and tourist destinations, increased demand for experiential and luxury travel, and the implementation of innovative business strategies. These factors are significantly transforming the industry landscape. According to Tufft et al. (2024), in this transformation scenario, actors must focus on several critical areas.

Firstly, it is important not to neglect opportunities in domestic tourism, as this continues to represent the majority of spending in the sector, while intra-regional tourism has also seen considerable growth.

Additionally, consumers are increasingly prioritizing travel, but are looking to do so on their own terms. In this sense, personalization of travel experiences has become crucial. According to Tufft et al. (2024) say, players that can apply market segmentation and hypothesis-driven testing to fine-tune their value propositions

will be at an advantage. On the other hand, those who do not adapt their offerings to customer preferences risk being left behind.

Another relevant aspect is the evolution of the concept of luxury in travel, where demand for luxury tourism and hospitality is growing faster than in other segments, especially in Asia. Tufft et al. (2024) emphasize that luxury travelers do not form a homogeneous group, so segmentation based on age, nationality and income level can reveal a diversity of behaviors and preferences.

As tourism continues to grow, destinations need to prepare to manage the increase in visitors and the challenges it brings. According to Tufft et al. (2024), it is essential that interested parties develop and invest in strategies to cope up with increasing number of tourists, including improvements in infrastructure, the development of human resources appropriate to the sector and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage.

The harm caused by the aforementioned increase in visitors can be has been met through alternative tourism offers. These include Rural Tourism, which according to Martendal & Tomio (2015) is a set of activities linked to rural resources. The resources mentioned include: the landscape; nature; the lifestyle; the local culture; wine production, among others.

After describing the emerging trends in international tourism, it is worth analyzing the same trends, but now in Portugal.

## **2. Tourism in Portugal**

According to the WTTC (2024), tourism will be a key driver for Portugal's economic recovery, with the prospect of surpassing pre-pandemic levels in 2024, with an estimated growth of 4.8% compared to 2019 levels. The latest WTTC Impact Report (EIR) projects that tourism's total contribution to GDP could reach approximately 39.5 billion euro later this year, representing 17.4% of the total economy. Furthermore, employment in the sector is also expected to surpass 2019 levels, creating 3,200 new jobs (WWTC, 2024)-

According to the Tourism Strategy 2027, tourism in Portugal is a crucial economic activity for the country's economic and social development, playing an important role in creating jobs and increasing exports (Tourism Strategy, 2027). In 2021, according to INE, the tourism sector contributed 16.8 billion euro to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP), representing 8% of total GDP, which reflects an increase of 1.4 percentage points compared to 2020, highlighting the relevance of this sector for the national economy (INE, 2021).

According to the most recent data released by WTTC (2024), the GDP associated with tourism in Portugal is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 3.4% in the next decade, exceeding the growth rate of the national economy by three times, which is 1.1%. The sector is estimated to reach more than 50 billion euros by 2032, representing 20.2% of the total economy (WTTC, 2022). Furthermore, around 193,000 jobs are expected to be created in the tourism sector in Portugal over the next 10 years, with an annual average of 19,000 new jobs, reaching a total of 1.1 million employees in the sector by 2032 (WWTC, 2024).

These WTTC (2024) predictions are supported by recent estimates released by TravelBI, INE and Banco de Portugal, highlighting a constant growth in tourism in Portugal. In December 2022, Portuguese Tourism data recorded 1.609,3 thousand guests and 3.709,1 thousand overnight stays, representing a significant increase of 44.2% in the number of guests and 44.6% in overnight stays, compared to the same period of the previous year. This growth was particularly notable due to the context of the sector's recovery after the pandemic (WWTC, 2024).

In the domestic tourism segment, 1.423,5 thousand overnight stays were recorded, translating into an increase of 2.3% compared to December 2021. On the other hand, international tourism showed even more expressive signs of recovery, with around 2.285,6 thousand overnight stays by non-resident tourists, an impressive increase of 57.1% (Turismo de Portugal, 2022). These data highlight the growing preference for Portugal as a tourist destination, both by residents and non-residents.

In 2022, the United Kingdom remained the main tourist source market, corresponding to 19.3% of non-resident overnight stays, followed by Germany, Spain and France. In total overnight stays, Spain led, representing 15% of the total, followed by the United Kingdom. Furthermore, notable growth was observed in the North American, Czech and Polish markets, which reflects a diversification of tourism demand (Turismo de Portugal, 2022).

Fast forward to the most recent data from 2023, and the sector continues to show robust growth. According to the latest statistics from INE and TravelBI, overnight stays in 2023 reached a total of 77,179 million, which corresponds to an increase of 10.7% compared to the previous year. This growth was driven by a 1.9% increase in resident nights and an impressive 15.1% increase in non-resident nights. Compared to the pre-pandemic period of 2019, there is a global growth of 10%, highlighting a 10.5% increase in overnight stays for residents and 9.8% for non-residents (INE, 2023).

In relation to the source markets of 2023 (TravelBI, 2023), the United Kingdom continues to lead, now with 15.3% of tourist revenues. France, Germany and Spain also maintain a relevant role, with shares of 12.4%,

11.2% and 11%, respectively. Another highlight is the North American market, which registered a share of 9.8%, indicating a growing interest from tourists from the United States (TravelBI, 2023). Spain remains the main market in terms of total overnight stays, contributing 15% of the total, reaffirming its importance for tourism in Portugal.

The financial indicators of the tourism sector in 2023 reinforce this positive trend. The sector's total revenues reached 5.676,4 million euro, an increase of 13.2% compared to the same period in 2022. Of this amount, accommodation revenues totaled 4.370,9 million euro, representing a growth of 14.8%. When compared to 2019 levels, total earnings grew 32.1%, while lodging saw an increase of 35.3% (INE, 2023). These numbers reflect not only the post-pandemic recovery, but also a strengthening and expansion of the sector, consolidating Portugal as a tourist destination of excellence (TravelBI, 2023).

Tourism in Portugal has had a very positive performance, but it presents massification aspects that need to be addressed. To achieve this, it will be necessary to study sustainable alternatives that will lead us to diversify the supply of tourism products. We will begin this study by trying to understand what is meant by a tourist product.

### **3. Tourist Product**

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2019), the tourist product is a set of goods and services that satisfy the needs of tourists, including accommodation, food, transport, leisure activities, culture, entertainment, and other facilities and infrastructures that enable the tourist experience (WTO, 2019). A well-structured tourism product is diverse, as it must integrate tangible elements (infrastructure and facilities) and intangible elements (services, hospitality and experiences) that, together, form the tourist offer of a destination.

Developing an effective tourism product requires an integrated approach that combines tangible and intangible elements. To structure a tourism product model, it is essential to consider the tourist's needs and expectations, the diversity of the destination's offer and changes in the global tourism market (Kotler, 2012; Cooper, 2020).

As pointed out by Cooper (2020), a tourism product must include different components that, together, form a coherent offer. These components can be categorized into five main elements:

**Natural and Cultural Resources:** These include attractions such as natural parks, architectural heritage, museums, cultural events and local traditions (Urry, 1990). These elements are the basis of the destination's authenticity and form the core of the tourist experience.

**Accommodation and Hospitality Services:** These include hotels, local accommodation, resorts and other forms of stay. Hospitality and the quality of service provided are fundamental to creating a positive experience for tourists (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

**Gastronomy and Local Products:** Var & Gunn (2002) highlight the importance of gastronomy as an integral part of the tourist product, contributing to the appreciation of local culture and the creation of a unique experience.

**Transport and Accessibility:** Ease of access to the destination is a key factor, including transport infrastructure such as airports, highways and public transport, as well as local mobility services such as taxis, buses and bicycles (Cooper, 2020).

**Complementary Activities and Services:** According to Cooper (2020), complementary activities and services, such as guided tours, ecological trails, sporting and cultural activities, are essential components of the tourism product. These elements help to diversify the destination's offering, encouraging tourists to extend their stay and explore the region in more depth. The variety and quality of complementary activities directly influence the tourist's satisfaction and overall experience, being a fundamental part in the development of a complete and competitive tourist product.

**Consumer Perspective:** The importance of experience in the consumer's view is crucial for creating a successful tourism product. One must understand the tourist's perspective and their search for unique experiences. Urry (1990) highlights that the tourist's "gaze" is oriented towards authentic experiences, which are based on perceptions and interaction with the natural and cultural environment of the destination. Thus, the tourism product must be designed in such a way as to provide memorable experiences and satisfy the tourist's expectations.

**The Tourism Product Life Cycle:** Butler (1980) introduces the notion that the tourism product goes through different stages throughout its life cycle: exploration, development, consolidation, stagnation and decline or rejuvenation. This model indicates that it is necessary to innovate and adapt the offer over time to keep the tourism product attractive and competitive. Strategic management that includes investments in infrastructure, promotion of new attractions and revitalization of existing products is essential for the rejuvenation of the destination.

**Integration and Strategic Planning:** The structuring of the tourism product must be seen as a dynamic and integrated process, which requires strategic planning and collaboration between stakeholders from a sustainability perspective. Gunn (2002) emphasizes that the success of the tourism product depends on how the different elements are organized and structured to offer a coherent experience. The creation of itineraries, themed itineraries, and the promotion of cultural and natural activities are examples of strategies that can be implemented to optimize the product.

**Innovation and Technology:** Castells (2010) highlights the importance of innovation and technology in the development of tourism products. Integrating digital tools such as online booking platforms, mobile apps for tour guides and digital marketing can improve the visitor experience and facilitate communication with the destination. Furthermore, the use of social networks and visitor feedback allows for continuous adjustment and improvement of the tourist offer.

Having characterized the tourist product, it is now important to understand the main concepts linked to ecotourism and nature tourism.

#### **4. Ecotourism and Nature Tourism**

Nature tourism is a form of tourism deeply linked to the natural environment, where the main motivation of visitors is the observation, experimentation and appreciation of biodiversity and local culture in a responsible way (United Nations et al., 2009). This modality arises in response to changes in society, promoting a relationship of mutual respect between humans and nature, while encouraging the conservation of natural resources, essential for promoting the health and well-being of visitors (Mowforth & Munt, 2016).

The concept of ecotourism evolved from the need to create more sustainable and responsible tourism practices, with the aim of preserving natural habitats that are often under threat due to conventional tourism activities (Forje et al., 2021). According to Khanra et al. (2021), the success of ecotourism depends on three main components: adequate planning, active participation of the local community and sustainability of operations. These practices are fundamental to ensuring a tourist experience that respects the environment and contributes to the physical and mental health of tourists, through a harmonious interaction with nature.

Environmental sustainability is one of the fundamental pillars of nature tourism, reflected in all phases of projects, from territory management to infrastructure design, including the choice of equipment, products and services offered. The objective is to provide an environment that promotes authentic experiences in direct contact with nature, using resources that respect the environment and, preferably, coming from the local community. This not only ensures the sustainability of tourist activities, but also promotes the well-being and health of visitors (United Nations et al., 2009).

In this way, nature tourism combines leisure with environmental awareness and community involvement, creating an enriching experience that values environmental conservation and the well-being of travelers. The integration of sustainable practices and the involvement of local communities reinforce the importance of this type of tourism as a strategy to diversify the tourist offer, while transmitting essential values of environmental preservation and health promotion (Mowforth & Munt, 2016).

Ecotourism and nature tourism are the best gateway to the study of tourism in rural areas in Portugal.

#### **5. Tourism in Rural Areas in Portugal**

Rural tourism in Portugal has been growing significantly in recent years, especially with the increase in interest from younger generations. In the study by Runa (2021), the importance of this segment for the Portuguese tourism sector is analyzed, with particular emphasis on the preferences of Generations Y and Z. These generations value authenticity, tranquility and direct contact with nature, factors that are provided by rural tourism, making it an attractive choice for these age groups. The Covid-19 pandemic further reinforced this trend, with the demand for rural destinations increasing, as tourists sought more isolated locations, far from large urban centers.

Runa (2021) also highlights the positive impact of rural tourism on the economic development of rural areas, through the promotion of authentic local products and experiences. Sustainability emerges as one of the essential pillars of this type of tourism, being seen as a strategy to guarantee the sector's growth in a balanced and responsible way, ensuring the preservation of natural and cultural resources in rural areas. The author concludes that rural tourism has the potential to continue growing, especially if it is well adapted to the expectations of younger generations, who are increasingly seeking personalized and authentic experiences.

Rural Tourism is defined by Martendal & Tomio (2015) as a set of activities linked to rural resources, including not only landscape and nature, but also lifestyle and local culture, and activities such as wine production. This type of tourism seeks to promote and preserve rural heritage, covering tangible elements, such as landscapes and traditional buildings, as well as intangible elements, such as knowledge and traditions transmitted from generation to generation.

According to Simón et al (2011), rural tourism is characterized by offering integrated leisure experiences, with the main motivation of providing rest, appreciation of the landscape and immersion in traditional culture, distinguishing itself from the massification of urban destinations. This form of tourism is enriched by the direct relationship with rural life, allowing visitors to experience typical rural activities and engage with local communities, which has particular relevance for promoting physical and mental well-being.

It is crucial to highlight that the boundaries between rural and urban environments are sometimes poorly defined. As Martendal & Tomio (2015) point out, there are regions where the rural characteristics of rural tourism intertwine with elements of modern life, resulting in a culturally diverse landscape. This phenomenon is observed in several areas where rural tourism coexists with contemporary aspects, valuing cultural heritage in an integrated way.

The growth of rural tourism has been significant globally, playing a vital role in the economic development of several regions. Iannucci et al. (2022) highlight that, in addition to generating employment and income opportunities for local communities, rural tourism promotes the appreciation and preservation of customs and traditions, contributing to the cultural identity and pride of populations. The preservation of cultural heritage (such as historical monuments) and local traditions (cultural practices and festivities) is essential for the authenticity of Tourism in Rural Spaces and for the promotion of well-being, as it provides an environment conducive to relaxation, and reconnection with traditions.

With regard to the management of Rural Tourism, sustainability is a growing priority. Costa & Galina (2016) emphasize the need to ensure that tourist activities are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. This implies the adoption of practices that respect the environment and the active participation of local communities in the management of natural resources, crucial aspects for maintaining the quality of life and well-being of residents and visitors.

In the Portuguese context, tourism in rural areas has a long tradition, beginning with accommodation tourism in the 1970s (Antunes & Águas, 2017). Since then, the country has developed a diversified offer in this segment, with regions such as Douro and Tâmega standing out for the authenticity and richness of the experiences provided to visitors. It is important to note that rural tourism in Portugal goes beyond simply offering accommodation and restaurants; The quality of this tourism is also evaluated by the authenticity of products and services, the efficiency of management and respect for Tourism in Rural Areas and natural resources ((Antunes & Águas, 2017; Durán et al., 2012). This focus on well-being is a differentiator, which attracts visitors looking for genuine and calming experiences (Durán et al., 2012).

Exploring tourism in rural areas allows a deeper understanding of the relationship between humans and the natural environment, emphasizing the importance of preservation and responsible use of natural resources. In this context, ecotourism or nature tourism emerges as a logical extension of tourism in rural areas, promoting immersive experiences in nature and reinforcing environmental education. By linking tourism in rural areas to the principles of ecotourism, it is possible to encourage more conscious and responsible tourism, which not only enriches the experience of visitors, but also contributes to the preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity. In this way, rural and nature tourism in Portugal becomes a practice that values the well-being of visitors while promoting environmental conservation (Antunes & Águas, 2017; Martendal & Tomio, 2015).

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The literature analyzed demonstrates the growing importance of tourism in rural areas for the Brazilian economy and for the sustainable development of the regions. The appreciation of natural and cultural heritage and the promotion of authentic and relaxing experiences have driven the growth of this segment.

The results presented show that tourism in rural areas is not limited to offering accommodation and food, but rather to providing unique experiences that connect tourists to nature, culture and local traditions. Environmental and social sustainability is a fundamental pillar for the growth of this sector, which is only possible through responsible practices and the active participation of communities.

The aforementioned growth of tourism in rural areas in Portugal depends on several factors, such as the qualification of human resources, the improvement of infrastructure, the promotion of local products and the creation of collaboration networks between the different agents involved. It is essential that private initiatives in this sector are based on sustainable development, ensuring the preservation of natural resources and improving the quality of life of local and/or rural populations.

The future, tourism in rural areas in Portugal presents enormous potential for growth, with opportunities for the creation of new products and services, the diversification of the offer and the consolidation of its image as a destination of excellence. Digitization, personalization of experiences and the growing concern for tourists' well-being and relaxation are trends that will tend to continue in the future of this sector.

From the aforementioned, it can be concluded that tourism in rural areas in Portugal represents a unique opportunity for the economic and social development of the country, promoting the appreciation of natural and cultural heritage, the creation of jobs and the improvement of the quality of life of rural populations. . However,

it is essential that this growth is accompanied by responsible and sustainable management that ensures that the benefits of this sector can be shared with local populations.

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