

# Back to nature

Portugal's rustic cottages and rural stays are ideal for a secluded spring break, finds **Sasha Wood**

**r**ural retreats and self-contained stays have skyrocketed in popularity during the pandemic, as people seek more space on holiday. From watermills to wineries, fincas to farmhouses, places to stay that capture the Mediterranean rural idyll are plentiful in Portugal.

Following the country's inclusion on the green list last spring, James Villas Holidays saw a spike in demand for Portuguese villas with a 69% increase in sales compared with the same period pre-pandemic in 2019.

Kirker Holidays believes Portugal's popularity is set to endure in 2022 too. Marketing manager Patrick Millar says: "It remains a popular option for spring, as it promises warm weather in the shoulder seasons and has been relatively consistent in terms of encouraging travellers from the UK during the more open periods of the pandemic."

According to Chris Etheridge, business development manager

at CV Villas, Portugal is selling very well. "Our sales are up 35% for spring bookings for 2022 departures," he says, comparing the data with 2019 levels.

The holiday villas specialist has seen an uptick in bookings for private stays. "Villas offer space and freedom," says Etheridge. "And we're seeing an even bigger interest in properties that are a little farther away. Our 'Secluded Villas' collection, which we introduced during the pandemic, is proving extremely popular."

While the Algarve has long been a Brit beach holiday staple, other regions in Portugal, such as the peaceful Alentejo and Douro Valley, are becoming more sought-after. Sunvil's sales and marketing manager, Rachel Jelley, says: "The Alentejo, with its open space, outdoor pursuits and lack of crowds, remains a firm favourite with Sunvil clients, and bookings are strong for this year."

Here, operators suggest their pick of rural properties across a range of different holidays. ➤

Quinta Nova luxury  
Winery House in  
the Douro Valley

PHOTO: FRANCISCA NOGUEIRA



# DESTINATIONS

## SPAIN & PORTUGAL | RURAL STAYS

### BEST OF THE REST

**Kirker Holidays** launches its first specialist wine tour to the Douro Valley this May with an expert guide and exclusive private tastings. It also offers short-break packages to the super-luxurious Six Senses Douro Valley.  
[kirkerholidays.com](http://kirkerholidays.com)

**Sunvil** offers breaks at The Place at Evoramonte in Alentejo, which ticks all the boxes for a boutique retreat.  
[sunvil.co.uk](http://sunvil.co.uk)

For bigger groups, **Oliver's Travels** recommends the five-bedroom Casa Carvalho heritage farmhouse in Minho.  
[oliverstravels.com](http://oliverstravels.com)

### WINE COUNTRY

**Where:** Quinta Nova Luxury Winery House, Douro Valley  
**Tell me more:** Famed for its wine production, northern Portugal's Douro Valley is a prime spot for a rustic spring break sampling delicious local produce amid sun-drenched vineyards and rolling hills. According to Kirker Holidays marketing manager Patrick Millar, "The Douro and the city of Porto are very popular with clients, who enjoy the combination of culture, food and wine – table wines as well as fortified wine – and the new World of Wine museum is a big draw." The operator offers short breaks as well as longer tours, and clients seeking space and seclusion will love Quinta Nova Luxury Winery House on the River Douro's quieter north side. One of the region's most scenic wineries, it has a 250-year heritage and just 11 rooms, as well as a renowned restaurant, Conceitos, serving perfect pairings of wine and seasonal produce. Guests are treated to complimentary wine tasting and winery tours, and there's



a swimming pool to cool off in after days spent exploring the local cycling and walking trails.  
**Book it:** Kirker Holidays offers three-night breaks at Quinta Nova Luxury Winery House from £586.  
[kirkerholidays.com](http://kirkerholidays.com)

### RIVERSIDE ROMANCE

**Where:** Villa Estora, Minho, northern Portugal  
**Tell me more:** Enveloped by the rugged Costa Verde or 'Green Coast' in the far north of the country, Minho is Portugal's best-kept secret, a verdant enclave crisscrossed by lush river valleys and terraced vineyards. Oliver's Travels co-founder Oliver Bell says lesser-known regions such as Minho currently account for 10% of the operator's bookings, but are slowly growing in popularity as awareness improves. Perfect for a romantic rural retreat or a digital detox, Villa Estora is a charming old watermill on the river with smart period interiors and room for two. There's no W-Fi, so it's an ideal property for clients who wish to switch off, take a tech break and immerse

themselves in the local nature.

**Book it:** Oliver's Travels offers seven nights at Villa Estora from £718 this April.  
[oliverstravels.com](http://oliverstravels.com)

### BEACH RETREAT

**Where:** Beach Cottage, Ferragudo, the Algarve  
**Tell me more:** This is a little slice of the Algarve away from the busy hotels and resorts. Beach Cottage is blessed with a secluded setting on low cliffs above the large golden sweep of Praia Grande beach near Ferragudo. The converted keeper's cottage has decor that sings sea shanty chic – all bleached wood and bright accents, with artefacts such as wooden oars and seashells. There's room for six people, with three double bedrooms and bathrooms, a gorgeous breakfast terrace and a pool with ocean views. It's the ideal recommendation for clients who want a peaceful spot on this ever-popular coastline.  
**Book it:** Seven nights at Beach Cottage costs from £3,219 this spring with CV Villas.  
[cvtillas.com](http://cvtillas.com)

### CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:

Six Senses Douro Valley; Quinta Nova; Villa Estora; Beach Cottage

PICTURES: Kirker Holidays; Birch Photography; Oliver's Travels



### HAPPY FORTS

**Where:** Pousada Castelo de Estremoz, Alentejo  
**Tell me more:** Covering almost a third of Portugal's land mass but home to just 6% of the population, the Alentejo region is ideal for a socially distanced break. Spring is an especially bewitching time to visit, with glorious flowers gracing sun-dappled meadows, gardens and roadsides, plus peaceful beaches and lakes to pootle around. It's the season when the storks nest too and visitors can see ungainly chicks in huge messy nests atop chimneys, church towers, trees and telegraph poles. Sunvil offers stays in lofty castles once built for royalty. Pousada Castelo de Estremoz is an enchanting option overlooking the historic little town of Estremoz and the green-and-gold plains of the Alentejo, which can be combined with a stay at another castle-hotel, Pousada Castelo de Alcacer do Sal, above a lush valley.  
**Book it:** Sunvil offers a 'Four nights in an Alentejo Castle' package from £559 based on two people sharing.  
[sunvil.co.uk](http://sunvil.co.uk) **TW**