



Europe of Traditions

I am very grateful for the opportunity to introduce to you an example in European Tourism I had the pleasure to be involved in over the last ten years. This is the group *Europe of Traditions* (Europa Traditionae Consortium). This group brings together United Kingdom (Wolsey Lodges), France (Château Accueil), Ireland (Hidden Ireland), the Netherlands (Erfgoed Logies) and Portugal (Solares de Portugal).

This group share a common foundation and philosophy that is:

“The best hospitality a guest can enjoy is at home of his or her host”.

I would like, as president of the Portuguese association “**TURIHAB - Solares de Portugal**” to present you my own Portuguese perspective of the origins, operation and future prospects of this association and of this style of high quality, culturally based rural tourism.

In the early 1980’s Portugal was a country undergoing rapid change, not only preparing for our successful entry into the European Community, but also recognising, perhaps, belatedly, the invaluable resources that we had for developing a quality accommodation product, a product located primarily in the attractive rural areas of our country.

Our essential premise was that we had many fine houses set in attractive landscapes where, at that time, there was little if any suitable tourist accommodation.

Even more importantly we believed that the natural hospitality of the owners of these houses and of all people living in these communities provided a human resource which matched and might even exceed the potential of individual houses.

Consequently with some help, initially from the Portuguese Government and subsequently from the European Union, a scheme was introduced which assisted owners of suitable properties to renovate and refurbish their houses and gardens and subsequently to make this: “with family” “*Turismo de Habitação*” style accommodation available to discerning visitors keen to experience the warmth hospitality and gastronomy of the “real” Portugal.

Many of our members are fortunate to live in properties, which have been in the same family for many generations so that not only the house but also the family represents a genuine and vibrant reflection of the regions patrimony. We have taken a great care to ensure that renovations were carried out sympathetically so that architectural, furnishing and decorative features were in keeping with the history and patrimony of these houses.

While improving the standard of accommodation was an essential pre-requisite, the creation of “associations” both to market this new and innovative product and, as importantly, to provide a central booking facility was equally vital.

Along with the owners we were able to create, in the small town of Ponte de Lima (Vale do Lima) in the Minho region of Portugal, one association **TURIHAB**. The members of this association worked together since 1983 to establish Turismo de Habitação as an identifiable accommodation type in Portugal offering hospitality to a wide range of international visitors as well as to many people in Portugal keen to enjoy a holiday in these surroundings.

Our members have individually and collectively worked to continually improve the nature of their offer by adding swimming pools, tennis courts, and riding stables to their properties.

Our experience in the 1980's led us to the view that in order to create further impact upon the international market; it was necessary to create a clear "brand" identity for our accommodation product.

With this in mind the members of **TURIHAB** successfully launched in 1992 "**Solares de Portugal**" to market this distinctive style of accommodation for all of Portugal. The name "Solares" is used in Portugal to describe spacious family houses, which is a good description of many of our properties. In addition we felt it expressed the warmth of Portugal and of the Portuguese people.

Over the last decade we inevitably became aware of like-minded groups of homeowners in other countries of the European Union. Initially we worked with associations from England, Ireland and France and more recently we have welcomed partners from the Netherlands and in 1996 we were able to inaugurate **Europa Traditionae Consortium – Europe of Traditions.**

The aims and objectives of the Consortium are: to offer a personal style of hospitality in homes of character; to preserve and help their customers to enjoy the heritage and culture of their country and their region, be this reflected in architecture, or food and wine, and:

- To promote an unique product – quality accommodation in private homes
- To improve marketing skills and brochure distribution
- To facilitate the exchange of ideas and networking
- To promote tourism to Europe, particularly from Japan, America and Australia
- To lobby on behalf of members in relation to EU legislation
- To work towards the conversation and development of the culture and heritage of member countries.

In all our actions we remember the richness of our natural and human resources in all our efforts and these were recognised in 1995 when *Turihab* was awarded the European Tourism and Environment prize and in 1998 the award of the British Airways Tourism and Environment Prize.

Not only do we in Portugal recognise the value of our culture and tradition we also value and work for collaboration and partnership. This has been recognised by the European Parliament that has felt appropriate to commend *Europe of Traditions* as an example of best practice of inter-country collaboration to the officers of the European Commission.

As a result we had approved in the European parliament recommendation to the European Commission as follows:

*“Calls on the Commission to organise, on the basis of respect for the principal of subsidiary, concerted action by the Member States to promote exchange of experts on the rehabilitation and restoration of the artistic heritage for tourist purposes, including the offer of training grants and encouragement of the creation of Transnational networks on the lines of that of **Europa Traditionae Consortium**”.*

We were be able to develop an *Ecos-Overture* programme, which comprises the development of rural soft tourism in these countries, through the creation of regional/national networks of castles, manors, farm and country houses, offering private quality accommodation. This will also help in preserving the cultural heritage in rural areas and creating a lasting employment. The networks thus created will become members of Europa Traditionae Consortium, *Roses of Germany* (Baviera-Germany); *Vendégváró Ódon Házak Egyesület* (Vas County – Hungary) and *Houses of Traditions* (Ljubljana – Slovenia)

On running we have the project “**Europe of Traditions, a transatlantic vision**” which involve associations in Brazil: PRESERVALE (Rio de Janeiro), AMETUR (Minas Gerais), ACETER (Ceará) and as an observer APETURR (Pernambuco). Encouraging the renovation and restauration of their heritage in order to incorporate with our network.

The idea is to promote and develop Europe overseas and be able to motivate and attract visitors to the roots, which inevitably are in Europe.

Our most recent initiative has been to act as a catalyst along with our partners for a programme designed to assist development in associated countries of the EU, Hungary and Slovenia.

We got approved the candidature at **INTERREG III C – SUD: “Europe of Traditions: a bridge for euroregions, EUROTRAD”** expanding the network to new countries: Austria (region Niederostereich – NÖ LAND and ECO-PLUS), Italy (region Friuli Venezia Giulia – Province of Udine and Region Veneto – Province of Belluno and Venezia) and Spain (region of Galiza – Xunta de Galizia) and to reinforce the existent associations in Hungary (Vas County) and Slovenia (Ljubljana).

We do believe we are creating the most important intervention in order to keep our heritage and patrimony alive.

Ladies and Gentlemen I am very grateful for the opportunity to present you a brief summary of *Europe of Traditions*. Thank you very much for your attention.

Francisco de Calheiros
Manager of Europe of Traditions

EUROPE OF TRADITION

Praça da República - 4990 - 062 Ponte de Lima - Portugal

Tel.: (+ 351 258) 741 672

Mobile: (+351) 96 9013213 : Fax: (+ 351 258) 741 444

info@turihab.pt;

www.europetraditions.com;

www.solaresdeportugal.pt;

www.center.pt

TURIHAB – Solares de Portugal

Praça da República – 4990-062 Ponte de Lima – PORTUGAL

Tel. +351 258741672 / 258742827 Fax. +351 258931320 / 258741444; Email: info@turihab.pt;

<http://www.solares-de-portugal.com> / <http://www.europetraditions.com>