

EUROPE, A COMMON HERITAGE

Title: Solares de Portugal na Europa das Tradições

Ponte de Lima, January 2000

Solares de Portugal

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EUROPA, UM PATRIMÓNIO COMUM

1 - TITLE:

Solares de Portugal na Europa das Tradições

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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 of the people living in these communities

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provided us with a human resource which matched and may even exceed the potential of the 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 represent a genuine and vibrant reflection of the regions patrimony. We have taken 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 the houses.

While improving the standard of accommodation was an essential prerequisite, 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 such association *TURIHAB*. The members of this association worked together from 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 the many people in Portugal keen to enjoy a holiday in these surroundings.

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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.

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.

Our experience in the 1980's led us to the view that in order to make 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.

3 – OBJECTIVES:

Over the last decade we inevitably became aware of like minded groups of home owners in other countries of the European Union which comprises over 590 houses. Initially we worked with associations from England, Ireland, and France and more recently we have welcomed partners from the Netherlands and in 1996 with the support of the CCRN - Regional Coordinating Committee of Northern Portugal we were able to inaugurate **Europa Traditionae Consortium – Europe of Traditions.**

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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.

Not only do we in Portugal recognise the value of our culture and tradition we also value and work for collaboration and partnership with like minded people in other countries. This has been recognised by the European Parliament has felt it 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 principle of subsidiarity, 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*)”.

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 will be able to develop a

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programme which comprise the development of rural soft tourism in this 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.

4. DESCRIPTION:

II EUROPA FORUM with the participation of all effective members (United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Netherlands and Portugal) and observers (Slovenia, Hungary and Bavaria)

European Network consolidation of *Solares de Portugal* and the head office organisation Europa Traditionae Consortium

Edition of a **Common brochure**.

5. CALENDAR

Organisation of the II EUROPA FORUM in 17 of June 2000, with the presence of all partners involved

Presentation of the restoration project of Europa Traditionae Consortium head office.

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