

A Portuguese Language Learning Journey

... So Far!

By Maggie Williams

Our Move to Portugal

Move to Portugal he said, “sun, sea and an easy life”—I should have known then that my Portuguese fiancé was only selling the good parts! There have certainly been some challenges, and some adjustments, but I wouldn’t leave now just as I am finally learning the Portuguese language and truly enjoying so much more that Portugal has to offer!

We moved to Portugal 3½ years ago with our young son. My fiancé is Portuguese so I had expected everything to be straight forward, but with him going to work I was soon on my own navigating the various systems and paperwork needed. Residency, health care, creche and of course the dreaded driving licence exchange! We lived in a rural village and even ordering a coffee was a challenge, with me often holding out a handful of coins when they told me the cost. I quickly realised I was going to need to start learning Portuguese if I was going to get anywhere!

Now, with Portuguese family you might think it would be easy, but I arrived knowing four words (from when we had been on holidays)—“sim, não, cerveja and café” had got me all I needed when combined with a smile. I would listen to my Portuguese family talking and pick out the odd word that sounded like English, but honestly it was all a mystery.

The decision to start Portuguese language lessons

I found a lovely local group learning Portuguese, it was wonderful to make some English-speaking friends, and I enjoyed the classes. Our teacher was English, and she was able to explain everything in a way I could understand. It gave me a great basis, though, looking back I now realise I also picked up some bad habits, mainly around pronunciation, not recognising certain sounds and the emphasis I put on the different parts of the word. Needless to say, I spoke Portuguese like a Brit!

I then decided to start private language classes (face to face) with a native Portuguese teacher, and they worked hard to develop what I already knew, as well as bringing a rich cultural element to the classes. They taught me about Portuguese legends, the city I had moved to, traditions and such. The main thing they did was encourage me to speak, speak, speak. The more I spoke in Portuguese the more I gained confidence to say what I “knew”, and also experiment with what I didn’t. It always amazes me how much can be said with a few words (often in the wrong order) and some hand gestures. My increasing level of Portuguese allowed me to navigate my day-to-day living. I knew from talking to my friends that the fact that I tried to speak Portuguese nearly always meant the person I was talking

to was more receptive and more understanding, be that a parent at school, at the local garage, or when conducting more official business.

From face-to-face lessons to online

Due to circumstances (a second baby mainly), I had to stop my lessons, and by the time I was ready to start COVID-19 was here, so face-to-face classes simply weren’t an option. I restarted with [BiCortex Languages](#), having online language classes again on a 1:1 basis. I was able to tell them my schedule, my learning goals and the style of teacher I wanted. I completed a quick and easy [placement test](#) which allowed them to assess my level. I started with my new tutor, and they quickly got to understand what I was looking for and areas to focus on. Day-to-day speaking in Portuguese had given me a good general understanding of context and plenty of vocabulary, but my weakness was (or perhaps still is) all of the small joining words, not to mention my pronunciation!

My lessons are varied, with reading, writing, listening and speaking exercises allowing me to practice all the disciplines. Classes are on an easy-to-use interactive platform, a virtual classroom where both myself and the teacher can write/interact on the whiteboard, watch video clips, review text—the great thing is that I can download the notes at the end of each class. I have a 45-minute class twice a week, which means I keep the continuity going because as a busy mum homework doesn’t always get done. BiCortex Languages also offer [group classes](#), both formal and conversational, so over the summer months I hope to pause my 1:1 classes and explore a different learning environment again.

If you move, learn the language!

Learning Portuguese was always going to be hard, but I am grateful for my journey so far. Trying online language lessons was a little scary, but with BiCortex Languages the commitment-free first class meant I was able to try the first lesson with confidence. I can feel myself improving, and it’s great to get the feedback from friends and family that they can see – or rather hear – the difference. There is still a long way for me to go, but regular classes in a comfortable, easy environment making learning a pleasure rather than a chore.



Maggie relocated to Portugal from the UK in late 2017 for a better quality of life for her family.

