

Do You Really Need a Golden Visa?

Complete Guide to Alternatives

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Introduction: The Myth of the Only Path

Since the abolition of real estate investments in 2023, Portugal's Golden Visa has become synonymous with investment funds and a minimum threshold of €500,000. Many potential immigrants perceive this program as the only path to European residency through Portugal.

This is a misconception. Portugal offers at least five different residence permit programs, each designed for a specific applicant profile. The Golden Visa is just one of them—and not always the most accessible or optimal choice.

The purpose of this guide is to help you understand whether you truly need a Golden Visa, or whether a more suitable alternative exists. Choosing the right program can save you hundreds of thousands of euros and significantly simplify your immigration process.

The Main Advantage of the Golden Visa

Before exploring alternatives, it's important to understand what makes the Golden Visa unique. This program has two fundamental differences from all other types of Portuguese residence permits.

The first advantage is minimal presence requirements. Golden Visa holders are required to spend an average of just 7 days per year in Portugal. This is the only program with such lenient requirements. All other residence permit types assume you will actually live in Portugal most of the time.

The second advantage is no mandatory tax residency. Since the Golden Visa doesn't require permanent residence, you can remain a tax resident of another country. This is critically important for those who run businesses or hold assets in other jurisdictions and don't want to change their tax status.

If you plan to use Portuguese residency as a “Plan B”—a backup option in case of instability—while continuing to live and work in another country, the Golden Visa remains the only suitable solution.

However, if you're ready to actually relocate to Portugal and become a tax resident, the Golden Visa may be an excessive and unjustifiably expensive solution.

Presence Requirements: What the Law Says

There's a lot of confusion around residence requirements. Different sources cite different timeframes, often incorrectly. Here's how it actually works.

For all residence permit programs except the Golden Visa, a single rule applies: the holder may be absent from Portugal for no more than 8 months during the validity period of the residence card. The card is issued for 2 or 3 years depending on the program and stage.

This means that during a two-year card validity period, you can spend a maximum of 8 months total outside Portugal. The same rule applies to three-year cards—the same 8 months maximum absence.

***Important:** The permitted absence period may be extended upon presentation of valid reasons—medical, family, or professional circumstances. Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.*

For the Golden Visa, requirements are fundamentally different: minimum presence is an average of 7 days per year, with no restrictions on maximum absence.

Practical conclusion: if you can and are willing to live in Portugal for the required time (at least 16 months out of 24), you don't necessarily need to pay for a Golden Visa.

Comparative Table of Residence Programs

Criterion	Golden Visa	D7 (Passive Income)	D8 (Digital Nomad)	D2 (Entrepreneur)
Passive income	Not required	Required	Not applicable	Not applicable
Active income (work)	Not required	Not applicable	Required	Not applicable
Business in PT	Not required	Not required	Not required	Required
Minimum income/investment	€500,000	€920/mo (€11,040/yr)	€3,680/mo (€44,160/yr)	€920/mo + business
Max. absence from PT	Unlimited	8 mo. per 2-3 years	8 mo. per 2-3 years	8 mo. per 2-3 years
Tax residency	Not mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Path to citizenship	5 years*	5 years*	5 years*	5 years*
Fees over 5 years	€15,000–20,000	€1,500–2,000	€1,500–2,000	€1,500–2,000

Note on minimum income: €920 is Portugal's minimum wage as of 2026. Income requirements for D7 and D2 are tied to this figure. For D8 (Digital Nomad), income of 4 minimum wages is required.

Important information about naturalization timeline: *As of February 2026, a bill to increase the naturalization period from 5 to 10 years is in its second reading in the Portuguese parliament. This provision may change in the near future and will apply to ALL residence permit programs, including the Golden Visa.*

The Cost Difference: Why It Matters

Beyond initial investments, there's a significant difference in administrative costs throughout the path to citizenship. Government fees for obtaining and renewing a Golden Visa are approximately 10 times higher than for other residence programs.

Program	Initial application	Renewals (over 5 years)	Total over 5 years
Golden Visa	€6,000	~€5,400 (2 renewals)	€11,400+
D7 Visa	€200	~€600 (2 renewals)	€800
D8 Visa	€200	~€600 (2 renewals)	€800
D2 Visa	€200	~€600 (2 renewals)	€800

The table shows government fees only, excluding legal services and related expenses.

When planning a budget for 5–10 years (until citizenship), this difference becomes substantial. If you're planning to live in Portugal anyway, overpaying for a Golden Visa makes no practical sense.

Which Program Suits You

Golden Visa is your choice if:

You don't plan to permanently live in Portugal and view residency as a "Plan B"—insurance against instability in your current country of residence. Your business, work, or family circumstances require presence in other countries most of the year. You want to maintain tax residency in another jurisdiction and aren't ready to become a Portuguese tax resident. You have the ability to invest €500,000 or more in qualified investment funds.

D7 Visa (Passive Income) is your choice if:

You're a retiree with a confirmed pension of at least €920 per month. You have stable passive income—rental income, dividends, interest on deposits or investments. You've

achieved financial independence (FIRE movement) and live on savings and investment income. You're ready to live in Portugal most of the time and become a tax resident.

D8 Visa (Digital Nomad) is your choice if:

You work remotely for a company registered outside Portugal. Your confirmed income from remote work is at least €3,680 per month (4 minimum wages). You're a freelancer with regular clients abroad. You're ready to relocate to Portugal and work from there.

D2 Visa (Entrepreneur) is your choice if:

You plan to start and run a business directly in Portugal. You have a specific business idea and readiness for active entrepreneurial activity. You're ready to register a company in Portugal and pay taxes as an entrepreneur.

Tax Considerations: What You Need to Know

Your choice of residence program directly affects your tax status. This is one of the key factors in making your decision.

The 183-day rule. If you spend more than 183 days per year in Portugal, you automatically become a tax resident of the country. This means an obligation to declare and potentially pay taxes on worldwide income.

The Golden Visa exception. Thanks to minimal presence requirements (7 days per year), Golden Visa holders can avoid Portuguese tax residency. This allows maintaining tax status in another country with a more favorable regime.

NHR 2.0 (IFICI) regime. For those who do become Portuguese tax residents, a special tax regime is available: a flat 20% rate on income from qualified activities in Portugal and exemption from taxes on foreign income for 10 years. The regime is available to highly qualified professionals and new residents.

Path to Citizenship: The Same for Everyone

Regardless of the residence program chosen, the path to Portuguese citizenship is the same for everyone. The Golden Visa provides no advantages in the naturalization process—only flexibility in residence during the permit stage.

Current requirements for citizenship:

- 5 years of legal residence as a resident
- Basic knowledge of Portuguese (A2 level)
- No criminal record
- Demonstration of ties to the country (housing, work, social connections)

All residence programs—Golden Visa, D7, D8, D2—lead to the same result over the same timeframe. The difference is only in cost and requirements during the obtaining and maintaining of residence status.

Decision Checklist

Answer four key questions:

1. Do you plan to actually live in Portugal?

- Yes, ready to relocate → consider D7, D8, or D2
- No, only need a “Plan B” → Golden Visa

2. What is your main source of income?

- Passive (pension, rent, dividends) → D7
- Active (remote work, freelance) → D8
- Own business → D2
- No regular income, have capital → Golden Visa

3. Are you willing to become a Portuguese tax resident?

- Yes, that’s acceptable → D7, D8, D2
- No, want to keep current status → Golden Visa

4. What is your budget?

- Can invest €500,000+ → Golden Visa is possible
 - Income €920–4,000/month → D7, D8, D2
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Conclusion: Make an Informed Choice

The Golden Visa is an excellent tool for a specific category of people: those who need European residency without the obligation to actually live in Europe. For everyone else, more accessible and practical alternatives exist.

If after reading this guide you've determined that the Golden Visa is exactly what you need, we're ready to help with selecting an investment fund and supporting the entire process. Explore our catalog of qualified funds or schedule a consultation.

If you've realized that an alternative program—D7, D8, or D2—suits you better, we're also ready to help. Noble Assets supports all immigration programs to Portugal. Over the years, we've helped thousands of clients successfully relocate to Portugal through various programs.

Contact us for a free consultation on choosing the optimal immigration program.

Noble Assets Office: Largo Machado de Assis, Lote 2, Porta E, 1700-116 Lisboa
Company: Okno LDA We welcome clients in person at our Lisbon office.

Email: info@noble-assets.pt Telegram: @noble_assets