

Portugal has entrusted to Vilau with the development of the most modern digital tourist information centre in the world, located in a Templar monastery.

The Portuguese government will earmark 7.5 million euros to renovating its four Templar monasteries: Alcoçaba, Batalha, Jerónimos and Cristo, which have been declared world heritage sites by Unesco. The development of this project will drastically change the way we view and experience historical tourism, since visitors will be able to interact with the past through a virtual reality programme, witnessing specific historical episodes and meeting historical figures as if they were real.



Tradition and innovation. Two key concepts which the Portuguese Government hopes to turn into the cornerstones of its tourism sector. Consequently, as part of a project to expand the country's brand image throughout the world, it plans to earmark 7.5 million euros to renovating four monasteries which have been declared world heritage sites by Unesco: Alcoçaba, Batalha, Jerónimos and Cristo, and to creating a major tourist route in keeping with the latest developments in commercial marketing. The Spanish company Vilau has been charged with developing a project which aims to offer a completely new tourist experience, in which visitors interact with the environment instead of remaining mere passive subjects.

To this end, a digital content visitor's centre, the only one of its kind in the world, will be built in the Cristo Templar Monastery in the city of Tomar, near Lisbon. The centre will combine film technology with virtual reality in order to create something completely new and highly attractive. Once finished, the centre will enable visitors to experience a new way of learning about history, in which they virtually travel back in time to witness specific events and episodes and hear about what happened from the key figures themselves.

Although the project is still at the definition stage (expected to last around six months), the pillars upon which it will eventually be based have already begun to be established. "It is vital to engage visitors by guiding them through history in an attractive, amenable way, mixing exhibitory resources with the very latest communications technology" says Fernando Aguirre, director of development at Vilau.

The Cristo Monastery, founded in 1162 by the Grand Master Don Gualdim Pais, is currently a cultural, tourist and religious centre which contains a broad mix of Romanesque, gothic, mannerist and baroque elements. Its historical importance and great beauty have turned it into a symbol for the Portuguese, as well as a major tourist attraction visited by four million people every year. In 1983 it was declared a world heritage site by Unesco.

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