

# Thick smoke clouds southern Portugal beaches as fires rage

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Ferocious fires have blazed for a week in southern Portugal stoked by sweltering temperatures and strong winds, despite the efforts of hundreds of firefighters and soldiers

Smoke from raging wildfires billowed above popular tourist beaches in Portugal's Algarve Thursday after authorities ordered a fresh wave of

urgent evacuations as the flames drew closer to a historic town in the region.

Ferocious fires have blazed for a week in southern Portugal stoked by sweltering temperatures and strong winds, injuring dozens and leaving a blackened trail of seared forest, charred homes and incinerated cars, despite the efforts of hundreds of firefighters and soldiers.

Fire crews and police conducted an urgent evacuation overnight of homes around the ancient town of Silves, as the [fire](#) continued to spread across one of Europe's top tourism destinations.

Aircraft scooped water from the sea to drop onto the creeping blaze Thursday, as firefighters continued their struggle to douse the flames, which have already consumed some 21,000 hectares (52,000 acres) of forest.

Smoke from the fires blackened the skies above the beaches of the Algarve.

"The sky is full of a sort of black mist, made of ash and soot," Tony Sanders, a 73-year-old Briton who runs a small bed and breakfast in the resort town of Carvoeiro, told AFP.

With winds forecast to reach up to 50 km/hr (30 mph) "there is a risk of reactivation in the afternoon along a perimeter that now exceeds 100 km", said national civil protection agency spokeswoman Patricia Gaspar.



The affected zone is planted with pines and highly-flammable eucalyptus trees and scored by difficult to reach valleys and ravines

### **Hundreds evacuated**

A Europe-wide heatwave sent the mercury above 45 degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit) in some areas of Portugal at the weekend, intensifying wildfires that began on Friday.

The fires have left 36 people injured, one seriously, with 19 of those hurt firefighters, according to Gaspar.

Hundreds of residents and tourists have been evacuated from around

Monchique, a popular spa town of 6,000 people, some 160 kilometres from Lisbon.

Prime Minister Antonio Costa on Wednesday warned the blaze would continue rage "during the coming days".



Aircraft have scooped water from swimming pools and the sea to drop onto the creeping blaze, as firefighters struggle to douse the flames

On Thursday, more than a thousand firefighters and soldiers were battling in the affected zone, which is planted with pines and highly-flammable eucalyptus trees and scored by difficult to reach valleys and ravines.

The difficulty in bringing the fires under control has raised doubt on the effectiveness of measures taken by the Portuguese authorities to avoid a repetition of fires that killed at least 114 people last year.

Firefighters have criticised the lack of coordination, while Costa has drawn flak on social media for remaining on holiday as the flames raged.

The spreading blaze has even necessitated the evacuation of some 29 endangered Iberian lynx to Spain from the national reproductive centre, according to a statement from the country's conservation institute.

In Spain, where more than 700 firefighters continued to battle wildfires in the province of Valencia, authorities said they were hopeful of bringing the blazes under control.



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"We can start to talk about stabilising the fires," said Valencia regional president Ximo Puig, adding that while the temperature was not expected to drop very much, there were hopes of an imminent rain storm.

He said it had been established that the fires were started by lightning during an electric storm on Monday.

A sizzling heatwave across Spain has left 10 people dead in a week.

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