

Lisbon Vacation Travel Guide | Expedia
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The Portuguese capital Lisbon, lies on the Western Iberian Peninsula, where the Tagus River meets the Atlantic Ocean.

Settled almost 3000 years ago, the city predates Rome, Paris and London by centuries, and possesses an epic narrative to match.

From its early days as a Phoenician outpost to its expansion into a 16th century trading giant, from the Great Earthquake of 1755, to its glorious reconstruction, Lisbon has long been a city of shifting fortunes.

For much of the 20th century the city floundered, but the winds of fate have again shifted in Lisbon's favour.

No longer a place of faded glory, 21st century Lisbon is again a place of possibilities.

This is a city whose journey has forever been tied to the sea, so it's not surprising that many of her most important landmarks can be found along the waterfront.

Rising from the banks of the Tagus River, the fortified elegance of the Torre de Belem stands as a reminder of Portuguese prestige and power in days of old.

Just upriver, rises the Monument of The Discoveries, which celebrates the nation's most revered seafarers, such as Prince Henry The Navigator, Vasco da Gama, and Ferdinand Magellan.

Climb to the rooftop and look down upon the Mapa Mundi below, which charts the routes and discoveries of Portugal's intrepid mariners.

Nearby, continue your voyage into Lisbon's seafaring past at the Jeronimos Monastery.

Vasco da Gama spent his last night in prayer on this site, before departing on his epic voyage to the Orient in 1497.

The vast monastery that stands today was funded by the incredible wealth da Gamma's spice routes brought to the city.

This vast monastery complex is also home to the city's maritime museum, which preserves relics from Portugal's Golden Age of Sail.

In the early 1800s, Portugal's rulers forced the resident monks to vacate their beloved monastery.

Destitute, the monks sold a prized possession their secret egg tart recipe.

Five generations later, the neighbouring Belem Patisserie serves over twenty thousand pastel de nata to sweet-toothed devotees each day, and the recipe remains a guarded secret to this day.

Once you've stocked up on the world's finest pastel de nata, set sail to the newest horizons in creativity at The Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology.

Further upriver, the Portuguese love of the sea continues at the city's acclaimed Oceanario, where hundreds of species glide by in a celebration of the global ocean.

From here, climb aboard the cable car and glide upriver again, for birds-eye views of the city and the eleven-mile long, Ponte Vasco da Gama, the longest bridge in Europe.

The waterfront is also where you'll find the city's grand gateway, Praca do Comercio.

This great square in the centre of the Baixa District was once the home of the Royal Palace, until a fateful All-Saints Day in November 1755 when a natural disaster changed Lisbon, and Europe, forever.

At the Lisbon Story Centre, feel the devastating tremors of that six-minute earthquake, and the terror of the tsunami and five-day firestorm that followed.

The earthquake obliterated 85% of the city, but with calamity, came opportunity.

Within a year, the rebuilding of Lisbon was well underway.

Wide avenues replaced the medieval rabbit warrens of old, and a new style of elegant, earthquake-resistant architecture was born, Pombaline.

The earthquake also shook the city free from the religious dogma of old, and from its cracks came the fresh new shoots of The Enlightenment.

Pass beneath the triumphal arch crowned with the figures of Glory, Valor and Genius, a tribute to the city's swift reconstruction.

Then simply drift down Rua Augusta, and into another of Lisbon's great squares, the Rossio.

If Praca do Comercio is the city's gateway, the Rossio is its heart.

Since the middle ages, Lisbon's citizens have gathered here for bullfights and celebrations.

Today, it's the perfect place to relax by the cool of its fountains and on the waves of its patterned pavement.

Lisbon belongs to that club of great cities which are defined by seven hills, so wherever you roam, eventually you'll find yourself going up to take in the views.

Luckily, Lisboetas have come up with some innovative solutions to save their legs on hot summer days.

From the Lower Town, ride the Elevador de Santa Justa, to the Barrio Alto District.

Here you'll find the Convento do Carmo, whose unrestored arches bare testament to the devastation which befell the city in 1755.

Climb aboard Tram 28, which passes some of the city's most iconic sights.

Then from Portas do Sol, make the climb to Castelo de São Jorge.

From high on the battlements of this 11th century Moorish citadel the red tiled roofs of Lisbon spread out before you, stepping down to the lower town and the blue Tagus beyond.

You'll find trams rattling all over Lisbon, but the most beloved of all is Gloria, which runs between the Lower Town to Miradouro de São Pedro de Alcântara, the perfect place to watch the city light up at dusk with someone special.

Although the Great Earthquake reduced much of Lisbon to rubble and cinders, the ancient suburb of Alfama was spared.

Lose yourself amid the ancient cobblestones and steps, where cafes, bars and artisan shops have taken residence in the dockworkers homes of old.

Yet the area still retains its village atmosphere, especially during the midsummer festivals when over 50 street parties pop up all over the city.

The Alfama is home to the Romanesque Towers of Lisbon's Cathedral, whose walls date back to the second crusade when the city was liberated from the Moors.

If the stones of Alfama could sing, then surely it would be the bittersweet lament of the Fado.

At the Fado Museum, discover the traditional song of Portugal, which originated in the bars and laneways of the Alfama.

Then as the sun gets low, join locals in a fado bar and listen as professional and up-and-coming fadistas sing the heartrending stories of the working class and the sea.

Lisbon's walls may not sing, but the tiles which adorn them possess a music of their own.

First introduced by the Arabs, over the centuries the Portuguese have made the art of azulejo all their own.

Housed in a former convent, the National Azulejo Museum celebrates the evolution of Portugal's tile-craft across the centuries, from the biblical tales of old to the new frontiers of tile design.

You'll find azulejo at every turn in Lisbon, from the practical to the purely decorative, but to see the Sistine Chapel of tiles, head to the city's north, to Fronteira Palace.

Just to the east, at the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, you'll find another of the worlds' great collections.

The museum's six thousand art treasures and antiquities represent a lifetime of acquisition by the oil magnate Gulbenkian, Lisbon's love of creativity isn't just confined to her galleries; you'll find it amid urban renewal projects like the LX Factory, which has breathed new life into the city's fabric factories which fell silent long ago.

You'll find creativity on the communal tables of the Mercado da Ribeira, where some of the city's most innovative chefs and brewers reinterpret age-old traditions.

Lisbon has always been a city of discovery.

So when you're ready to explore a little further afield you'll find no end of adventure.

Less than 20 miles west of the city is Cascais, an ancient fishing village that was woken from its slumber when Lisbon's nobility discovered its golden bays in the late 1800s.

Another playground for Portugal's Monarchs was Sintra, the home of the Summer Palace.

A half hour drive to the northwest of Lisbon, Sintra is more than a weekend destination; it's a journey into a fairy tale.

Hans Christian Andersen fell under Sintra's spell, returning time and time again, calling it the most beautiful place in Portugal.

From Sintra it's just a short drive to the incredible coastline of the Sintra-Cascais Natural Park.

Spend a few days exploring some of Europe's most beautiful beaches, such as Praia das Macas, named after the apples which floated down river from nearby orchards and washed up upon its sands.

From here, venture southward and explore the remote beaches of Adraga and Ursa, where Atlantic waves have carved a dramatic coastline straight from Homer's Odyssey.

At Cape Roca, stand upon the cliff top, which until the 14th century was considered the end of the world.

Here, on the western-most point in mainland Europe, 400 feet above the pounding Atlantic, it's easy to understand how Lisbon's seafarers were drawn to see what lay over those far horizons.

Yet no matter what wonders they saw, what riches they found, they always yearned to return to their city, **Lisbon, the Queen of The Sea.**