



Castelo de São Jorge

Rio Tejo (River Tagus)

Cristo Rei statue

25 de Abril Bridge

# Lisbon calling

Go on a true adventure in the Portuguese capital. Discover its unexpected twists and turns, breathtaking views, delicious food and wine, plus experience the magic of fado music

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LEFT TO RIGHT: The alleys of Bairro Alto come alive at night; Inside a traditional fado house

Imagine a slow chug up a slope, filled with anticipation, then holding your breath as you take a stomach-dropping plunge down narrow streets and around tight corners. No, it's not a roller coaster ride, it's Lisbon's tram 28. The city's most famed tram route is renowned not only for the rickety vintage rolling stock that rumbles along it, but also for the hair-raising ride through the city's undulating landscape. To all this, you can add a sprinkling of chatty locals, the ringing of the tram bell, the opportunity to catch some sun through the window while checking out the views of the charming squares and streets that frame the shimmering river beyond. It makes one heck of a ride – all for the price of a *bica* (a Lisbon-style coffee).

Lisbon is built on seven hills and, viewed from above, the city appears as a dense, rolling carpet of irregular rooftops, winding streets, treetops and the occasional colossal monument. Depending on your location, the city looks different each time it's viewed. The highest monuments make great reference points: Castelo de São Jorge sits on the highest hill, the two bridges, Vasco da Gama to the east and 25 de Abril to the west, (sister bridge of San Francisco's Golden Gate), the tree-lined Avenida Liberdade, leading from the city centre, and the Cristo Rei statue that towers over the south bank. The Rio Tejo (River Tagus) is ever present below and the Atlantic is just around the corner. So whether you're sipping mojitos at one of the many cool terraces or rubbing

shoulders with VIPs at a rooftop club, the jaw-dropping vistas always steal the show.

While the views are stunning, the real fun begins down on the streets, where it's easy to get lost in the maze. Aside from the more organised and monumental parts of Lisbon, which were rebuilt after the devastating earthquake of 1755 that nearly destroyed the city, the undulating landscape means the city planning isn't very structured. It's more a collection of small *bairros* (neighbourhoods) based around the hills, with steep

"The real fun begins down on the streets"

staircases, tiny squares and labyrinthine alleyways; especially in Alfama, the city's oldest quarter, and an original Moorish settlement. Getting from A to B isn't always easy when there's a cliff in the way, but the funiculars come in handy for the steepest climbs. To help with orientation, public squares mark different neighbourhoods. The city's architecture combines a mish-mash of influences ranging from Moorish Manueline to baroque and art nouveau. "Lisbon is totally irregular," says Guta Moura Guedes, chair of ExperimentaDesign, the international architecture ►►



**Retro style**  
Enjoy Portuguese slow food at the Cantina at LX Factory. Inside the original canteen of an old print factory, all of its vintage furniture and fittings were salvaged entirely from the premises. The LX Factory is a real hotspot for Lisbon's up-and-coming creative talent and is also home to some of the city's coolest bars.



### Canny flavours

Lisbon is filled with delightful stores just waiting to be discovered. One of its most charming is the Conserveira de Lisboa, which specialises in tinned fish and remains almost unchanged since it opened in 1930. Everybody is keen to pay at the antique cash register, which still rings up Escudos. Another treat is an old perfume warehouse in chic Chiado, which is now home to the vintage Portuguese goods shop A Vida Portuguesa. Founder Catharina Portas started researching traditional Portuguese products like soap, stationery or canned goods, and their original packaging. Through this initiative, many are now being reproduced and sold in the store.



LEFT: Locals survey the street with their great view from the tram  
RIGHT: Teenagers hitch a free ride by hanging from tram steps

►► and design biennale held in Lisbon. “The city is a mixture of different layers: she’s charismatic and charming, there’s an atmosphere of pleasure here combined with a certain idea of fun, a strong connection to the past and a huge amount of creative energy. Each edition of ExperimentaDesign changes locations to feature different places in Lisbon and we’re still discovering incredible new places, hidden palaces or monasteries.”

The rambling streets, combined with the changing light and shadows create a dynamic that makes you feel like there are surprises waiting on every corner. Lisbon’s nickname is ‘The White City’, as the river acts as a huge mirror reflecting light back onto the white cobblestones, blue sky and light-coloured buildings.

“It’s a cosmopolitan meeting point for people from Africa, Asia and Europe”

Every day feels like a rejuvenating light therapy session – just don’t leave home without sunglasses.

The spectacular blue of the sky and water are complemented by the orange of rooftops and ripe fruit hanging in the trees – the fruit trees are said to be a remnant of the city’s Moorish past. Bright colours also enliven the whitewashed buildings, with coloured doors or window frames to entire surfaces painted in

cheerful hues. The ceramic tiles or *azulejos* that line the walls tell a patchwork of stories and include Moorish geometries and Flemish flowers. On apartment façades, lines of laundry flap in the breeze, and along with the changing shadows cast by criss-crossing overhead tram lines and patterned wrought-iron balconies, create a playful sense of movement.

Movement of another kind has also played a large part in Lisbon’s history. It has long been an important trading port, so it’s not surprising that multiculturalism existed here long before the term was even invented. People of all colours and races have called mainland Europe’s westernmost capital home for millennia. “Lisbon is the link between the Mediterranean and Atlantic”, says historian João Pimentel, who with his wife Carmo Gregório founded Fabula Urbis, a bookshop featuring works about Lisbon. He adds: “The name refers to the Eternal City, the frontier between south and north. It’s a cosmopolitan meeting point for people from Africa, Asia and Europe. It’s very rare that someone is actually from Lisbon. People come from all parts of Portugal and around the world.” Mixed with Portugal’s distant colonies, people’s roots originate from as far away as Angola, Brazil or India. “The city is also small enough to be able to make connections easily. People love to talk in Lisbon. They will always make time to talk,” laughs Pimentel, originally from The Azores.

Discovery is another important part of the culture, with many expeditions having departed from the port of Belém. During its maritime heyday, the Portuguese became the first to navigate using latitudes and to sail to India around Africa. While Belém might ►►



Fado music provides the soundtrack to Lisbon

►► hold the key to Portugal's discoveries, one secret here that will forever remain behind closed doors is the recipe for the famed Pastéis de Belém. Obsessed over by locals and tourists alike, this handmade delicacy from the bakery Antiga Confeitaria de Belém is the undisputed original custard tart; all others – *pasteis de nata* – are imitations. If the taste of the perfectly crunchy filo case filled with aromatic sweet custard and sprinkled with cinnamon isn't enough to be the stuff of legends, then the story behind them certainly is. Only three bakers know the recipe, which originated from the Hieronymite Monks of the Mosteiro dos Jerónimos. Since 1837, this recipe has been closely guarded (and trademarked). The bakers, who must sign a non-disclosure contract, work under extremely guarded conditions. Every day, the trio disappears into the Oficina do Segredo (Workshop of the Secret) to make the pastry and cream, which they wheel out into the bakery throughout the day. On average, 12,000 of these heavenly treats are snapped up daily; this goes up to as many as 20,000 on the weekend. As the tarts aren't available anywhere else, come rain, hail or shine, the bakery is always packed with devoted fans.

Another tradition that permeates the city is the melancholic music of fado. Meaning 'fate', fado provides the soundtrack to Lisbon, intrinsically tied with *saudade*, which describes a longing, yearning for something lost. "Fado is my therapy, my big love," says Sara Reis, a professional fadista born into a family of fado, "you have to feel fado." Accompanied by the guitar, fadistas sing poems,

which are often about doomed love or daily life in Lisbon. They are especially tied to their *bairro*, in particular the older neighbourhoods like Alfama and Bairro Alto, where the most authentic fado houses can be found. Fadistas take their art very seriously, and during performances silence is strictly enforced. At more local joints where they offer fado *vadio* (amateur), the mood is a little lighter. The singers who are also serving in the restaurant or bar might spontaneously join the chorus. So what does fado feel like as an audience member? It feels somewhat like stepping into

"We adore the beach - you can swim in your lunchtime"

the middle of a dramatic musical where the words might sound foreign but the sorrow is universal. Before you know it, you'll be swept up in the emotion and will be secretly (and quietly) tapping your feet under the table.

Part of Lisbon's charm is the feeling of having stepped back in time; old ladies sit chatting, tavern owners write up the menu of the day and the cobblestoned roads and paths keep the pace slow.

"It feels like time stopped a little in Lisbon," says historian João Pimentel. Guta Moura Guedes echoes this sentiment. "A friend of mine recently visited and said he felt like he'd stepped back 30 years. Lisbon grows slowly, so you feel like you're in a bit of a ►►

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: Riding the funicular saves the hard trek up or down the steep hills; Azulejos create a colourful patchwork on buildings; Locals are crazy about sardines. Here is an offering from Flores restaurant; Portugal's maritime explorers departed from Belém Tower, which is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site; One of the many beaches close to the city





LEFT TO RIGHT: **The Palácio da Pena viewed from the top of the Moorish Castle in Sintra; Pastry lovers flock to Belém to devour Pastéis de Belém, the original Portuguese custard tart**

►► sleepy city, which is actually really beautiful.” However, sitting by the riverside in the boutique hotel the Altis Belém, it feels very much like 2009. Surprisingly, hanging out at chic cafés by the water is a recent development. It is only in the last few years that the waterfront has started to be opened up to the public by the port authorities. The 1755 earthquake and its aftermath levelled much of the waterside and the rebuilding was always focused more inland, but after years of ignoring the river, Lisboaetas are starting to rekindle their love affair with the Tagus.

Alongside the gradual renovation of the city’s many abandoned buildings into restaurants, galleries and shops, there’s a tide of new energy. As much as older locals are nostalgic about the past, the younger generation are embracing the future. “We like to integrate other cultures, but also the past and future,” says event producer Nuno Mendes, sitting on the top floor of the LX Factory. “You could say we’re integrationists.” Mendes runs one of the many studios now occupying the former print factory and industrial surrounds of the west called Alcântara, which now boasts some of Lisbon’s coolest bars and is a hot spot for the city’s creative talent.

If it’s outdoor activity you are after, Lisbon has plenty to offer, all within a short drive of the city. There are beaches for swimming (Cascais and Estoril are renowned) and surfing (Guincho), wineries, forest, and countryside. “We adore the beach,” says André Resende, Mendes’ colleague. “This is a European capital, and you can be at the beach in 20 minutes to swim during your lunchtime!”

The magical Sintra, just under an hour to the north-west, makes a worthy day trip. As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Sintra became the first centre of European Romantic architecture in the 19th century. Following the example of Portuguese kings, visitors flock to this hillside village for its forests, views over the countryside and Atlantic from its castle and for the custard pastries from Piriquita.

Back in Lisbon, food and wine are also taken very seriously. Attempting to sample all 1,001 dishes that use the national ingredient *bacalhau* (salted cod) would take a lifetime. Plus there is impressive regional produce like cheeses, olive oils and divine Portuguese wine to savour. Renowned for its traditional grape varieties, there is enough wine here to fill any sommelier’s list – Portugal is the fifth largest producer of wine in the EU.

Even just walking down the street, the smell of grilled fish or freshly baked tarts is enough to lead anyone astray. In Bairro Alto, the tiny centre of nightlife in Lisbon, people pack the streets to drink, talk and dine until late every night of the week. It’s here that you can enjoy the background sounds of fado, a satisfying dinner of fresh fish and the sweet after-taste of home-made *ginjinha* (Lisbon’s favourite cherry liqueur). The city really has something to tempt everyone. The best thing to do while visiting is not to think too much and let Lisbon take you by the hand. All just for the fun of it... ◀◀

## Lisbon fact file

### GETTING THERE

KLM operates three direct flights per day to Lisbon Airport from Amsterdam Airport Schiphol.

### WHERE TO STAY

**Hotel Bairro Alto** makes the hot-list for its sexy designer interiors, fabulous central location and market-fresh Mediterranean/Portuguese restaurant Flores. Most of all, the terrace bar is the place to be seen in town. Praça Luís de Camões 2; +351 213 408288 [www.bairroaltohotel.com](http://www.bairroaltohotel.com)



Overlooking the leafy avenue, **Heritage Av Liberdade** is a stone’s throw from the city centre. It has elegant interiors inspired by Lisbon’s history, luxurious rooms with wrought-iron balconies and gorgeous antique-styled bathrooms. Also check out the other boutique hotels from Heritage Lisbon Hotels, all located in historic city buildings. Avenida da Liberdade 28; +351 213 404040 [www.heritage.pt](http://www.heritage.pt)

### BARS AND CAFES

Take your tastebuds on a Portuguese joyride at **Bairru’s Bodega**, a tavern in Bairro Alto featuring traditional wines and produce, and divine home-made *ginjinha* (cherry liqueur). Rua da Barocca 3; +351 213 469060 [www.bairrusbodega.com](http://www.bairrusbodega.com)

Hidden beneath vaulted cellars, the antique-chic **Fabulas** provides a respite from the business of Chiado, not to mention the heat of the day. Calçada Nova de São Francisco 14

Enjoy the huge open terrace and relax on deckchairs and loungers, while sipping mojitos and watching the sun go down at the cool **O’Terraço**. Calçada do Marquês de Tancos 3



Rub shoulders with the city’s VIPs at the **Silk Club**, while admiring breathtaking city views. Guests at some luxury hotels can get on the guest-list or be invited by a member. Rua da Misericórdia 14, level 16 [www.silk-club.com](http://www.silk-club.com)



### WHERE TO EAT

**Cantina at LX Factory** Portuguese slow food served in the original print factory canteen, which is furnished with vintage objects. Rua Rodrigues Faria 103; +351 213 628239

The café at the community house **Casa do Alentejo** serves delectable tapas in the surrounds of a magnificent Moorish palace/ex-casino. Rua Portas de Santo Antão 58; +351 213 405140 [www.casadoalentejo.pt](http://www.casadoalentejo.pt)

Choose from a whopping 250 Portuguese wines to accompany the local flavours at **Via Graça** while savouring the best panorama of Lisbon. Rua Damasceno Monteiro 9B; +351 218 870830 [www.restauranteviagra.com](http://www.restauranteviagra.com)

Gourmands will love Lisbon’s restaurant-of-the-moment **Eleven**, with its jaw-dropping views, contemporary interior and a Michelin star. Rua Marquês de Fronteira, Jardim Amália Rodrigues; +351 213 862 211 [www.restauranteeleven.com](http://www.restauranteeleven.com)

### SHOPPING

**A Vida Portuguesa** is a former perfume warehouse selling vintage goods. Rua Anchieta 11; +351 213 465073 [www.avidaportuguesa.com](http://www.avidaportuguesa.com)

**The Wrong Shop’s** souvenirs poke fun at traditions. You’ll find Santo António statues and pimped-up roosters. Calçada do Sacramento 25; +351 213 433197 [www.thewrongshop.com](http://www.thewrongshop.com)



### ALTERNATIVE TOURS

**Rent a local friend!** It’s like hanging out with a mate who knows all the best spots. They create tours/walks based on what you want to experience. [www.rentalocalfriend.com](http://www.rentalocalfriend.com)

To rest weary feet, zip around in a fun, self-guided **Red Tour** electric buggy. It provides handy local tips and it’s environmentally friendly. [www.redtourgps.com](http://www.redtourgps.com)

### FURTHER INFORMATION

[www.visitlisboa.com](http://www.visitlisboa.com)