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From Times Online

April 3, 2009

## The bloggers' travel guide to...Lisbon

Ginny McGrath goes digital to find the city's best blogs and forums on the hottest places to eat, drink, shop and hang out

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Alice Moura of rentallocalfriend.com offers alternative city tours of Lisbon

IMAGE: 1 of 3

Ginny McGrath

**Interactive Google map: the best of the bloggers' guides to Lisbon**

**Where to shop**

1. A Vida Portuguesa, 11 Rua Anchieta, off Rua Garrett; [www.avidaportuguesa.com](http://www.avidaportuguesa.com); open Mon-Sat 10am-8pm - recommended by [www.spottedbylocals.com](http://www.spottedbylocals.com) and Dopplr

**What they say:** "the kind of store that mesmerizes every visitor"

**Spotted by Locals**

**The best travel guides on the web**

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Tacky souvenirs abound in Lisbon's Chiado district, but if you want to take home something other than a lurid wooden cockeral to remember your stay, this gorgeous vintage shop is worth a visit. Another blog goldmine, I would never have wandered down this quiet street without the advice of [spottedbylocals.com](http://spottedbylocals.com). Boxed pencils, wooden toys, retro posters, cooking pots... imagine a Portuguese household in the 1950s - this shop sells everything you'd find in its cupboards.



2. Casa das Velas do Loreto, Rua de Loreto 52-55 - recommended by

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2. Casa das Velas do Loreto, Rua do Loreto 53-55 - recommended by [www.golisbon.com](http://www.golisbon.com)

**What they say:** "an atmospheric old shop"

Another artisanal shop that's tiny and purported to have been going since the 18th century. Peer beyond the counter as you wait for the old lady and her dog to wander over and you'll see shelf-upon-shelf of handmade candles from €3. There's no smelly/floating/arty varieties here - just simple cream candles and some religious ones. Your purchase (and I defy you not to make one just for the urge to do your bit to keep this place alive), is wrapped in brown paper - a perfect gift if it comes with the accompanying story.

3. Conserveira de Lisboa, 34 Rua dos Bacalhoeiros; tel. 21 886 40 09 - recommended by the woman from the [Lisbon Tourist Office](#), but strangely absent from any of the blogs I read and my guidebook

**What they say:** "you must go to our tinned fish shop"

No, it didn't sound tempting to me either, but this is a gem. Tins of sardines, tuna and more besides are hand-wrapped in colourful, retro paper adorned with 50s housewives and plates of plastic-looking food. The shop is manned by a group of Lisbon ladies of a certain generation, who climb onto ladders to reach the tins you order, then gift wrap them in brown paper and string - the only time when a tin of fish will make a good gift. Tins cost from €1.69 each.

4. A Outra Face da Lua, Rua da Assunção 22; tel. 21 886 34 30; [www.aoutrafacedalua.com](http://www.aoutrafacedalua.com); open Mon-Sat 10am-8pm - recommended by [www.thelisbonconnection.com](http://www.thelisbonconnection.com) and my [Frommers](#) day-by-day guidebook

## Page 1 of 5

[Next Page](#)

**What they say:** "an exclusive selection of vintage clothing and accessories"

This vintage clothes shop and cafe will convert even the most ardent anti-secondhand shopper. Men's and women's clothes and accessories are neatly laid out in size order, plus there's clothes made from recycled material and three changing rooms to try them on.

5. Casa Pereira, 38 Rua Garrett - recommended by [WAYN](#) and countless guidebooks and blogs.

**What they say:** "you will find the charm of a typical Portuguese grocery store here"

If you're planning to take Portuguese coffee, port or wine home, come for a browse in this Lisbon institution. It's one of the city's many old-fashioned shops where time hasn't moved on for decades - meticulously stacked goods adorn floor to ceiling shelves behind a polished wooden counter and between you and them, a man in a suit with a twinkle in his eye that suggest the pomposity is just for show.

### *Blog flops: shopping*

6. Nos Por Ca, Rua da Madalena 76, tel. 21 886 26 31; open Mon-Sat 10:30am-1.30pm, 3pm-5pm - recommended by [www.spottedbylocals.com](http://www.spottedbylocals.com)

**What they say:** "Just when you thought your Lisbon shopping excursion would be limited to the kitschy and repetitive items sold in Baixa, there is hope yet"

Either this place was on its last legs when I visited, or some big spender had just cleaned them out, because it looked nothing like the picture on [www.spottedbylocals.com](http://www.spottedbylocals.com) - there was a just a few bare shelves with the odd sorry-looking cockeral and blackbird (two emblems of the city) and a sulky woman sitting at a desk at the far end, who made me feel like I'd just wandered into her living room uninvited.

### **Where to eat and drink**

7. Fabulas, Calçada Nova de Sao Francisco, tel. 21 347 63 21; <http://salubaf.blogspot.com>; open 10am-midnight, closed Sundays. Find it down a narrow passage off Rua Garrett - look for the Omlet design shop sign - recommended by [www.golisbon.com](http://www.golisbon.com) and [Dopplr](#) and [Saidos da Concha](#).

**What they say:** "It's the creation of a Polish-Portuguese couple, using old furnishings to create a cosy ambience where you'll want to stay for hours"

## Page 2 of 5

[Previous Page](#) [Next Page](#)

This cafe/bar/art gallery/internet cafe is not somewhere I'd have stumbled on, so thanks to golisbon.com for finding my favourite lunch spot. Friendly service, delicious healthy food and a laid back crowd of young Lisboetas made it stand out. I ate chicken couscous with salad (€7) and a beer (€1.50) under a shaded pergola in the square overlooked by the cafe (thanks for golisbon for suggesting the chocolate cake - possibly the best in the world!).

Even if I had found this quiet gravelled courtyard without the blog, I'd have been stopped in my tracks by the aroma of freshly made pizza from the larger cafe next door and wouldn't have found Fabulas.

**8.** Cafe No Chiado, Largo do Picadeiro 10; tel. 21 346 05 01; [www.cafenochiado.com](http://www.cafenochiado.com); open Mon-Sat 10am-2am - recommended by [www.spottedbylocals.com](http://www.spottedbylocals.com)

**What they say:** "Come here to have a cup of coffee or lunch, read a book on the terrace or just to enjoy the setting".

This one took some hunting, but it was worth the effort. You wouldn't guess that the hectic Rua Garrett was a few minute's walk away when you're sipping a glass of wine under the trees overlooking the square. The website doesn't do this place justice - the food is mid-priced - €2-€20 a plate, with plenty of lighter and traditional Portuguese dishes. The cafe supports the local theatres and the walls are covered in the work of local poets, painters and photography.

**9.** Royale Cafe, 29 Largo Rafael Bordalo Pinheiro; [www.royalecafe.com](http://www.royalecafe.com); tel. 21 346 91 25; open Mon-Sat 10am-midnight and Sun 10am-8pm - recommended by [www.golisbon.com](http://www.golisbon.com)

**What they say:** "A modern café in a simple yet refined space that includes an inviting courtyard"

If Cafe No Chiado was elusive, then Royale Cafe was verging on a figment of my imagination - but I persisted, and was rewarded. It's an elegant cafe that lights up at night and offers tasty reasonably priced dishes (€3-€15, wine by the glass €2.20). During the day the sandwiches and soups make the perfect lunch, best enjoyed in the cafe's peaceful courtyard.

**10.** Cafe Restaurant Martinho da Arcada, 3 Praca do Comercio; tel. 218 879 259; open Mon-Sat 8am-10pm - recommended by [www.thelisbonconnection.com](http://www.thelisbonconnection.com) and the woman from the [Lisbon Tourist Office](#)

**What they say:** "Situated downtown, this cafe was once the ideal setting for the so called 'tertúlia's' (café talks)".

This 220-year old cafe is in a prime spot - or will be when work has finished on the beautiful Praca do Comercio. Sit at the tables under the arches but don't forget to take a

look inside, where the favourite tables of some of Lisbon's literary greats have been preserved - the poet Fernando Pessoa and the nobel-winning writer Jose Saramago. So treasured is this cafe that it is a national monument. The food isn't bad either - try the clams with garlic, beef steak with coffee sauce or cod stew with rice.

### *Blog flops: eating*

11. Clube de Fado, 94 Rua S. Joao de Praca; [www.clube-de-fado.com](http://www.clube-de-fado.com) - recommended by [Dopplr](#) and my Frommers guide.

## Page 3 of 5

[Previous Page](#) [Next Page](#)

**What they say:** "This is a nice restaurant in the Alfama area"

There's nothing wrong with this place, with reasonable food and nightly entertainment, but you'll find a lot of tourists in here, some in large groups, and you won't get good value for money (around E24 for a main course). You'd be much better off trying Marquês da Sé, a smaller fado restaurant in Castelo that's recommended by [www.spottedbylocals.com](http://www.spottedbylocals.com).

### **What to see and do**

12. [Rentallocalfriend.com](http://rentallocalfriend.com); €45 for a half-day, €70 for a full day - recommended by [wikitravel.org/en/Lisbon](http://wikitravel.org/en/Lisbon)

**What they say:** "get someone to take you around the city on a local spirit walk"

This was my greatest blogger recommendation - a half-day guided tour with Aice Moura, a Lisboeta who started offering tours when she got deluged with requests from tourists inspired by her London blog. She's now returned home and set up the Lisbon service (with offshoots in Sao Paulo and Paris among other destinations).

The booking form asks you for words to describe yourself and your hobbies - it's a tour catered to you, with no waving umbrellas. OK, so some of the history may have been a bit shaky, but what you get from this tour is a chance to spend an afternoon with a local, get some great tips and see the city from their perspective.

13. Santa Justa Elevator, Rua de Santa Justa; open Mon-Sat 7am-11pm (9pm in winter), Sun 9am-11pm; €1.30- recommended: OK, so this is included in every guidebook to Lisbon, but it was the endorsement of blogs like [www.golisbon.com](http://www.golisbon.com) and the reviews on [Tripadvisor](http://Tripadvisor) that persuaded me it was worthwhile.

The elaborate ironwork structure looks like the brainchild of Willie Wonka and Baron Munchausen, and takes you from the shopping streets of Lisbon's lower district, Chiado, to Bairro Alto, a maze of narrow streets and gold mine of cafes and shops. Why go? There's the view for one (although there are a number of contenders for best view of Lisbon - see below), the leg work it saves you climbing the hill, and the fact that you're

delivered at the feet of the ruins of Carmo Convent, a stunning structure that now houses archaeological exhibits.

Give the overpriced cafe at the top a miss (Cafe No Chiado, above, is a better bet) but check out the ruins behind the . It's free with the [Lisboa Card](#), which costs €15 for one day and includes free admission to 26 other attractions and museums and free buses, trams and funiculars. You can buy it at the airport and the tourist office - worth an investment if you're pounding the tourist trail in one day.

**14.** The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 45A Avenida de Berna; tel. 21 782 30 00; [www.gulbenkian.pt](http://www.gulbenkian.pt); open Tues-Sun 10am-5.45pm; from €3 - recommended by [www.spottedbylocals.com](http://www.spottedbylocals.com) and my taxi driver

**What they say:** "superb contemporary art collection that contains pieces of some the most interesting contemporary Portuguese artists"

## Page 4 of 5

[Previous Page](#) [Next Page](#)

Lush gardens do much to hide the stark concrete exterior of this arts and cultural centre, but it's what goes on inside that counts - fascinating temporary exhibitions, music performances and a cracking cafe and shop. You can also laze among the sculptures in the gardens, and it's a great place to meet young Lisboetas.

*Blog flops: what not to see*

**15.** Feira da Ladra or flea market, Campo de Santa Clara (Saturday and Tuesday mornings) - recommended by one-off [Lisbon blog](#) written by André Ribeirinho, a self-titled Libson entrepreneur and my Frommers guide.

André's blog guide is a good basis for the first-timer in Lisbon, but his recommendation for the flea market is a stinker - "it's not that special compared to some of Europe's flee [sic] markets..." he says. I found a load of junk - and that's coming from someone who loves a good rummage at a car boot sale.





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Visiting the market did take me to Alfama though - for which I thank André - a gorgeous old district, rightly described by him as somewhere you can lose a day in its cobbled streets and cafes (take Tram 28 to get there - a tourist trap, but great fun).

### **Tips for using bloggers as your city guide**

- 1.** Cross reference all the bloggers tips you get using Google so that you can weed out recommendations that might be ill conceived or deliberately misleading.
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- 3.** Get a good city map and mark up all of your recommendations before you start - many blogs don't feature full addresses so you might need to double check.
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## Page 5 of 5

[Previous Page](#)

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## Page 5 of 5

### [Previous Page](#)

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**Page 5 of 5**

[Previous Page](#)