

Europe's Best-Kept Secret



Charming streetscapes, a sophisticated culinary scene, wonderful warm people (who all seem to speak English!) and a burgeoning Pilates industry: Consider putting Portugal on your bucket list.

by Anne Marie O'Connor



GETTING AROUND

Lisbon's Metro subway system is inexpensive and easy to use (and the fastest way to get from neighborhood to neighborhood). Trams—number 28 is especially useful for seeing the area most popular with tourists—run throughout the city. Taxis are everywhere and are inexpensive (rarely will they cost more than \$8 or \$10), but the best way to explore the city is by foot. Cardio, check!

OPPOSITE PAGE: ROSSIO SQUARE IN OLD DOWNTOWN LISBON, PORTUGAL.

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: A TRADITIONAL YELLOW TRAM TO DOWNTOWN LISBON; PORTUGUESE POTTERY FOR SALE AT A VIDA PORTUGUESE.

MADE IN PORTUGAL

In an era when globalization means being able to find everything everywhere, Portugal has many home-grown products that make shopping especially pleasurable (and the prices are generally quite reasonable).

-Luvaria Ulisses is a telephone booth-sized store that sells a spectacular array of gloves, most around \$70 (Rua do Carmo 87-A).

-Casa das Velas do Loreto is a family-run shop that offers a mind-boggling assortment of candles—prices from around \$10 (Rua do Loreto 53-55).

-Manuel Tavares has gourmet Portuguese food and wines, including sausages, ham, cheeses, chocolates and candies, olive oil, canned sardines and port (Rua da Betesga 1 A).

-A Vida Portuguesa is dedicated to sourcing products made in Portugal, including soaps, crafts, toys and home goods at extremely reasonable prices. There are two locations: a small one in Chiado at Rua Anchieta 11 and a larger one at Largo do Intendente Pina Manique 23.



In Portugal, you don't need to go to a museum or a church or a park to see a treasure or glimpse a spectacular sight. Just look up: You'll spot Moorish, gothic and baroque buildings silhouetted against a jumble of red-tiled roofs. Or look down to see a vintage cable car chugging up a narrow street or a grandma hanging laundry out the window of a pastel-colored building.

Portugal was hit hard in the global recession of 2008, but for travelers, this means it's one of the best bargains in Western Europe, with prices of hotels and meals up to 30 percent less than in London or Paris. (For example, the five-star Ritz Four Seasons in Lisbon is \$603 compared to \$1,644 for a similar room in Paris.)

And whether your Portuguese is rusty or completely non-existent, don't worry: Almost everyone here speaks fluent English.

With its creative, Mediterranean-style cuisine, endless beautiful places to walk (including lots of hills) and some world-class Pilates studios, it's also an incredibly health-minded destination.

LISBON: A CITY OF NEIGHBORHOODS

Portugal's capital is a city of distinct quarters, each with its own individual vibe. You'll want to spend at least half a day exploring each one.

ALFAMA, THE MEDIEVAL QUARTER

Situated on a hill topped by a fortified castle, this is the oldest section of Lisbon. (It was the only part not destroyed in the 1755 earthquake.) It is a labyrinth of winding cobblestone

lanes and alleys—you'll almost always either be walking uphill or downhill. Long a working-class neighborhood, it is quickly gentrifying as young Portuguese—and visitors from around the world—rediscover the pleasures of city life.

To see:

Castelo de São Jorge (Castle of St. George)

This hilltop citadel has been home to Romans, Moors and many Portuguese kings. Roam the gardens planted with olive and cork trees (and home to some inimitable peacocks), then climb the fort's walls and towers for incredible views of the city (Rua de Santa Cruz do Castelo).

Sé Cathedral

Built in 1150, this Romanesque cathedral has had numerous makeovers over the centuries, but retains its majestic aura (Largo da Sé).

Museu Nacional do Azulejo (The National Tile Museum)

No craft is more synonymous with Portuguese cultural history than ceramic tile, and this museum has stunning examples that date from the 1500s to the present (Rua da Madre de Deus, nº 4; www.museudoazulejo.pt).

URBAN CHIC: CHAI DO, BAIXA AND BAIRRO ALTO

These three adjacent neighborhoods are the most popular with tourists, thanks to the many plazas and pedestrian-only streets that lend themselves to window-shopping and people-watching. Chiado and Baixa, home to numerous chic restaurants and shops (both chains and one-of-a-kind boutiques), are busiest during the day; at night,



WHERE TO STAY IN LISBON

Memmo Alfama

Modern-design fans will be enchanted with this gem of a hotel, located down a tiny lane just up the block from the Cathedral. Architects combined three centuries-old buildings—including a bakery whose room-size ovens are now mini lounges—into one hotel. Enjoy a glass of wine and some of the best views of the city from the ultra-chic terrace. Bonus: The super-helpful staff will help you make the most out of your time in Lisbon. Rooms start at \$247 (Travessa Merceiras 27; www.memmoalfama.com).

Four Seasons Hotel Ritz Lisbon

Situated on one of the Lisbon's seven hills in the Marques de Pombal district, each of these beautifully appointed rooms has a terrace to enjoy the panoramic views. The hotel has a full-service restaurant and spa, plus a rooftop fitness center with a Pilates studio and an outdoor running track. The Portuguese Retreat" body scrub and massage, which uses classic Portuguese ingredients like lemon and almond, is the perfect way to bring your stress levels to an all-time low (\$295). Standard rooms are around \$493 in low season and \$603 in high season, from May through October (Rua Rodrigo da Fonseca 88; www.fourseasons.com/lisbon).

Bairro Alto Hotel

The two best things about this luxury boutique hotel: its central location in Chiado and its friendly, incredibly helpful staff. Have a drink on the terrace while enjoying panoramic views of the city. Rooms, from \$324 (Praça Luís de Camões 2; www.bairroaltohotel.com).

WHERE TO STAY IN PORTO

The Yeatman

The five-star hotel sits at the top of a hill in Vila Nova de Gaia and offers spectacular views of the city from its many terraces and the indoor and outdoor pools. It has a full-service spa and a Michelin-starred restaurant. Rooms from \$350 (Rua do Choupelo, Vila Nova de Gaia; www.the-yeatman-hotel.com).

Hotel Teatro Porto

Located in a 1859 theater, this hotel in the center of the city is every bit as dramatic and glamorous as the original location. Rooms start at \$170 (Rua Sá da Bandeira 84; www.hotelteatro.pt).

head to Bairro Alto, where dozens of small restaurants, bars and clubs line the tiny cobbled lanes.

To see:

Pedestrian streets: Rua Garret, Rua do Carmo, Rua Augusta. These run together and are lined with interesting stores.

MUDE

This museum showcases the best of Portuguese design (Rua Augusta 24).

PARISIAN GRANDEUR: MARQUES DE POMBAL

The district, anchored by the wide, tree-lined Avenida de Liberdade (Lisbon's version of Champs-Élysées), is home to posh hotels and upscale international shopping (Louis Vuitton, Burberry).

To see:

Take a walk or run in Eduardo VII Park, with its stunning geometric hedges, sculpture garden and sweeping views of the water.



PORTO

Porto, Portugal's second largest city, a Unesco World Heritage site, is situated on the Douro River and has been a destination ever since the Romans established a trading post here 2,000 years ago.

THE RIVERFRONT

To see:

Start your tour at the distinctive **Dona Maria** bridge, designed by Gustave Eiffel of Paris Tower fame (the cast-iron latticework will look very familiar). Walk along the busy riverfront **Ribeira**

section, home to dozens of small restaurants and cafés; stop for a meal, a coffee, a glass of wine or a little entertainment courtesy of the passersby. Then, head uphill on one of the lanes that thread between centuries-old buildings, home to a lively residential neighborhood and many interesting shops.

THE UPPER TOWN

The grand Romanesque cathedral of Porto, known as the Sé (meaning seat, as in seat of the bishop), was built in the 12th Century (Terreiro da Sé).

To see:

Just up the street is **São Bento Railway Station** with its tiled walls by artist Jorge Colaço, depicting scenes of rural life and the history of Portugal (Praça Almeida Garrett).

Head toward the **Torre dos Clerigos**, a Baroque church whose tower can be spotted from almost anywhere in the town. For an unrivaled view of Porto, climb to the top of the tower (Rua Senhor Filipe de Nery).

Hop on the Metro at São Bento and head to the **Casa da Música**: What the Guggenheim is to Bilbao, architect Rem Koolhaas' masterpiece music venue is to Porto. Tours in English are daily at 4:30, or come at night to hear a concert or dance at one of the monthly DJ parties (Avenida da Boavista 604).

VILA NOVA DE GAIA

On the south side of the Douro River is Vila Nova De Gaia, the neighborhood where the port wine "lodges" (warehouses) are located. As it has been for centuries, port is aged in giant barrels and then prepared for bottling and shipping in these large buildings.



OPPOSITE PAGE: THE VIEW FROM MEMMO ALFAMA HOTEL IN LISBON.

THIS PAGE: THE VIEW FROM THE YEATMAN HOTEL IN PORTO.

To see:

Most of the lodges offer tours. Taylor's Port Lodge, which is run by an English family, is one of the oldest and charges \$8 per person (Rua do Choupelo 250; www.taylor.pt/en).

PILATES IN PORTUGAL

After climbing up all those hills—and eating all that delicious food—a Pilates session is a must. Though Pilates wasn't widely known here until recently, the Portuguese have quickly become huge fans of the method. In both Lisbon and Porto, there are beautiful well-equipped studios with well-trained teachers who are happy to offer private sessions to visitors.

IN LISBON



Estudio Pilates Filipa Mayer

Filipa Mayer was the first person to open a Pilates studio in Portugal, in 1996. A former dancer, she studied with Alan Herdman and is certified by Polestar Pilates. She is the Polestar licensee to Portugal and runs their teacher-training program here. Her sun-filled studio on a quiet street in the Estrela district now employs seven teachers. Privates: \$78 (Travessa de São Plácido 50-A, +351 21 397 5991; www.estudiopilates.net).

Bells and Springs

This three-year-old studio in a beautifully renovated 19th Century building is co-owned by Nuno Gonçalo Gusmão, who studied with Inelia Garcia, a Brazilian-based protégée of Romana Kryzanowska, and with Sari Mejia Santo and Kryzanowska herself. (Gusmão trained his partner, Tiago Duque.) Privates: \$82 (Largo Vitorino Damásio; +351 21 096 7266).



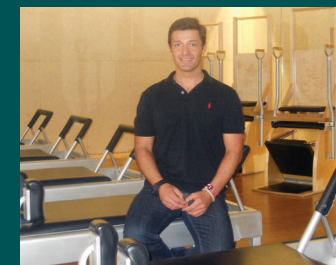
Ritz Four Seasons Pilates studio

This studio atop the Lisbon Ritz Four Seasons offers stunning panoramic views of the city. Instructor Thais Caniceiro studied with Inelia Garcia, Romana Kryzanowska and Sari Mejia Santo. Privates: \$95 (Rua Rodrigo da Fonseca 88; +351 21 381 1400; www.fourseasons.com/lisbon).

IN PORTO

Wabi Sabi Pilates

Owner Pedro Pereira de Ferreira is one of the founders of the Authentic Pilates Union. He is a classical teacher who originally trained with Michael King; he also has full accreditation from the Pilates Institute and Peak Pilates and has studied with Kryzanowska and Kathryn Ross-Nash. He also has an art and design background; it's worth a visit just to see his beautifully designed studio. Privates \$82 (Rua da Alegria 1910, Praceta Privada 18, +351 916 000 054; www.wabisabistudio.org).



Ahimsa Estúdio de Pilates & Yoga

Polestar-certified Maria João Pires has a decade of teaching experience and opened her studio in 2005. She is a Polestar mentor in training. Her light-filled studio has an intimate ambiance that reflect Pires' friendly personality. Privates, \$62 (Rua Hintze Ribeiro 585, Leça da Palmeira, 351 960 045 563; www.ahimsaestudio.com/pt).

All prices are calculated at \$1.37 to €1.