

PORTUGAL

'Land of Discovery'

8 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Lisbon

Today we arrive in Lisbon.

The capital of Portugal since its conquest from the Moors in 1147, Lisbon is a legendary city with over 20 centuries of history. This was the centre of Europe's first and largest overseas empire and, as a result, the city still has a feeling of colonial elegance.

Overnight in Lisbon.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Lisbon: City Tour

Today we explore Lisbon, Portugal's hilly capital. Lisbon is Europe's second-oldest capital (after Athens), once home to the world's greatest explorers like Vasco da Gama, Magellan and Prince Henry the Navigator, becoming the first true world city, the capital of an empire spreading over all continents, from South America to Asia.

This city is truly an enticing tangle of past and present, funky and old-fashioned, restored and revitalized. For many this is one of Europe's most enjoyable cities. We will explore many of Lisbon's most colourful neighbourhoods on foot. Bairro Alto and Chiado are picturesque working class quarters dating from the 16th century that have traditionally been the city's bohemian haunt of artists and writers. A stroll through the Moorish Alfama district takes us through a tangle of medieval streets topped by São Jorge Castle. Baixa is Lisbon's historic downtown (lower town), gridded with streets and dotted with major squares.

You will have some free time this afternoon for independent exploration. If you'd like to explore Belem and Jeronimos Monastery, please consult with your Tour Leader on to best accomplish this optional activity, noting that we do not include it with our formal group program due to long waits and crowding. Should authorities introduce changes to reduce congestion, this site may be reintroduced on a TBA basis.

Overnight in Lisbon.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Lisbon - Obidos - Nazare - Fatima - Leiria

Today we travel by road northward to Obidos, a medieval symbol of narrow streets surrounded by walls. Obidos is known for its typical white houses with blue trim, flowered windows, narrow streets and steps paved with beautiful stone. On arrival in Obidos we embark on a walking tour, passing through the 18th century entry arch covered in glazed tiles (azulejos). Small bright white houses lining narrow cobblestone streets, flower pots on window-sills, Gothic and Renaissance churches -- especially the beautiful Church of Santa Maria -- reminds of the importance of Obidos's past.

We continue to Nazare, the most famous fishing town in Portugal. En route we can detour to Batalha for a photo stop at its famous monastery before enjoying the brightly coloured rowing-boats moored on the beach bathed by the Atlantic Ocean. A superb view is enjoyed from the "Sitio" for where you may observe women still wearing the traditional seven-skirted costumes near the Nossa Virgem de Nazare Basilica, an important pilgrimage centre.

Our final stop is nearby Fatima, the well-known Roman Catholic Marian shrine. We visit the Basilica and the Chapel of Apparitions that marks the spot where the three shepherd children had visions in 1917. We continue to Leiria, a charming town with small homes over archways and behind graceful arcades.

Overnight in Leiria.

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Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Leiria - Coimbra - Bussaco - Viseu

This morning we travel to the university town of Coimbra, home to a long, rich history, culture and centuries-old architecture. And, of course, a world-renowned university, the oldest in Portugal and one of the oldest in Europe. This was Portugal's medieval capital for more than a century; its steeply-stacked historic centre dates to Moorish times and is wonderfully atmospheric, with its dark cobbled lanes and monumental cathedral.

We visit the 12th century Se Velho Cathedral and 13th-century university with its magnificent library, Manueline doors and chapel. We also visit the Alameda Gate, the Cathedral, Santa Cruz Church, and the Machado de Castro Museum, mostly to see the Roman Tunnels on which the museum is built.

After a break for lunch and some free time, we continue to the nearby small town of Bussaco, known for its collection of national and imported trees -- over 400 native species of plants and 300 varieties brought home by Portuguese explorers from such far flung places as Mexico, Japan and Africa. The Portuguese royal family liked Bussaco forest so much they had a summer palace and hunting lodge built in the centre of the woods, now a posh hotel (which may or may not be open to non-residents). This was also the site of the 1810 Battle of Buçaco, where Napoleon's troops were defeated, marking the turning point in his attempted invasion of Portugal; the Duke of Wellington slept in the convent during the conflict.

After about an hour to stroll and perhaps enjoy a coffee or an ice cream, we'll depart Bussaco for Viseu.

Overnight in Viseu.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Viseu - the Douro Valley - Porto

This morning we'll walk through Viseu's historical zone. The city's name goes back to the end of the Roman Empire and the early Middle Ages, and is derived from the Roman term "viso," meaning "good view." Indeed, original settlement was located at its highest point. Of the various monuments we encounter on our stroll, the three highlights are the Cathedral, the Misericórdia Church, and the Synagogue.

We then continue on a picturesque drive through a landscape speckled with granite houses with wooden or wrought-iron balconies, before entering the Port Wine region, the Douro Valley, a UNESCO protected site. This was, in fact, the world's first demarcated wine region, established in 1756. Evidence of the port industry can be seen along the valley with all the famous company names -- Cockburns, Taylors, Sandeman and others -- appearing on large placards on the hillsides.

En route we will stop for a cellar tour, tasting, and lunch (included today).

We will also stop in Amarante to visit the local market before continuing to Porto (dinner on your own this evening).

Overnight in Porto.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 6 Porto: City Tour

Today will be spent exploring Porto (Oporto), the '2nd city' of Portugal.

Located along the Douro river estuary in northern Portugal, Porto is one of the oldest European centers, and the atmospheric ancient port is steeped in history and tradition. With 2,000 years of history, the settlement of the city dates back to when it was an outpost of the Roman Empire. During the Roman era the city gained prominence as a commercial port, primarily for trade between Lisbon and Braga. Today the western part of the city limits extend right to the coastline of the Atlantic Ocean.

The city was built along the hillsides overlooking the mouth of the Douro River, and has an outstanding urban landscape. The continuous growth of the city has always been linked to the sea (the Romans gave it the name Portus, or port), and can be seen in the many and varied monuments. Porto is rich with well-preserved treasures, including monuments in the Romanesque, Gothic, Baroque and Neo-classical style. The historical center of Porto preserves a strong identity forged over many centuries, and in 1996 UNESCO included it on its World Heritage list. Strategically close to the Atlantic coast, at a natural intersection of the routes travelled by people from both north and south, the city has always played an important role in international trade.

We will wander through Porto's lively city center, and see the Old Quarter, the modern districts, and the low section that fronts the River Douro. Our walking tour of Porto's riverfront Ribeira district will include the lavish rooms of its neoclassical Stock Exchange Palace, the exquisitely gilded Church of Santa Clara (closed for renovation - outside only), the Cathedral and the São Bento Train Station. The alluring district of Ribeira is a crumbling but fascinating place made up of medieval streets and alleyways, including the riverfront square ("Praça da Ribeira"). During our time here we will see the Church of Sao Francisco which dates to the 13th century. Along with being the second-largest Portuguese city after Lisbon, Porto is also one of the most prominent urban areas in Southern Europe.

This afternoon we will leisurely cruise along the Douro River.

Overnight in Porto.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Porto: Braga & Guimaraes

Today we visit Braga, a city famous for its churches, last count surpassing 300! As the religious centre of Portugal, Braga boasts the highest number of churches per capita in Christendom. The strategic location has always made it ripe for occupation and development. The Goidelic Celts, also known as the Bracari, are believed to have founded the city and given it a name several thousand years ago. The Romans occupied it in 250 BC and made it the hub of five major roads, all leading to Rome. The Suevians overran the city in AD 409 but were replaced in 485 by Visigoth invaders, who, in turn, were vanquished in 711 by a Moorish army. For more than three centuries, the Christians and the Moors jostled over Braga, until the Muslims were finally expelled at the end of the 11th century.

Our time in Braga includes the area's star attraction, the Santuário do Bom Jesus do Monte (a World Heritage Site), a spectacularly-situated church built in 1784 by Carlos Amarante, who gave it an Italian-inspired neo-classical design that integrates harmoniously the landscape of northern Portugal. The stairway leading to the top contains 17 landings adorned with symbolic fountains, allegoric statues and other Baroque style decoration. Looking upwards, there are the ornate granite fountains on the various landings and the white, chalice-shaped outline on which the church itself "sits". Our trip to the top is interesting unto itself, as the funicular we ride was the first to be built on the Iberian Peninsula. Indeed, it is the oldest funicular in the world powered by water counterbalancing.

In the old quarter of Braga, you'll have a chance to admire the ornate Renaissance and Manueline palaces, baroque churches, and narrow medieval streets.

After a break for lunch we proceed to Guimaraes, birthplace of Portugal's first king and for 2012, European Capital of Culture. In this charming town (a UNESCO site) we offer a walking tour of the old mediaeval quarter. We begin in the Largo da Oliveira, with its varying styles of architecture. As we walk through the Old Quarter, notice the window boxes with fresh, colourful spring flowers. On our walk you will see workshops, bakeries, stores, and the like operating like time has never passed.

Overnight in Porto.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Departure

Departure from Porto.

BOA VIAGEM!!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast