

## Days of pomp and splendour

**Take a three-day tour of the main cities in central Portugal and admire all the extraordinary details of the 17th and 18th-century arts.**

Begin this trip in Coimbra by visiting the Museu Nacional de Machado de Castro, which houses the oldest remains of the Roman city of Aeminium. Note the baroque rarities such as the Pietá, a superb example of 17th-century Portuguese sculpture, or the Sacramento Monstrance, a remarkable example of the goldsmith's art in the 18th century.

Continue from here to the University and admire the breathtaking Biblioteca Joanina, one of the most beautiful libraries in Europe. With its imposing façade, replicated on the inside with triumphal arches decorated with gilded woodcarving, its shelves bear the accumulated knowledge of 300,000 volumes of inestimable value, published between the 16th and 18th centuries. Next to this is the surprising Capela de São Miguel with its monumental baroque organ and its walls lined with tile panels.

Next, move on to the Vista Alegre Museum, close to Ílhavo, where you can see a curious oratory in the shape of a boat. Close by, in the Capela de Nossa Senhora da Penha de França, you can admire the marble tomb of the Bishop Dom Manuel de Moura. In Aveiro, the final stop for this first day, make sure to visit the Convento de Jesus, whose chancel contains a remarkable example of gilded woodcarving, so perfect that it gives the impression of being a piece made by a goldsmith.

If you have some time left before stopping to rest for the day, you can always take a brief trip to Arouca. Visit the monastery, the hub of activity in this region for many centuries, where you can admire the church's 18th-century organ and the remarkable choir stalls. Spend some time getting to know the Sacred Art Museum housed here, and, amongst so many exuberant pieces, note the delicate limestone sculpture of St. Gertrude.

The first stop on your second day is the city of Viseu, which is worth taking some time to explore on foot. You will certainly notice the many manor houses here, as well as the homes bearing the coats of arms of their owners from the 17th and 18th centuries. Make sure to visit the cathedral with its remarkable altarpieces from the time of Dom João V, as well as the two beautiful baroque churches of Igreja do Carmo and Igreja dos Terceiros de São Francisco.

Continue on to Guarda and cool yourself down at the Chafariz de Santo André, a fountain that stands as a fine example of the baroque style in civil architecture. And then head on to Almeida. This historical village is a fortress that was built in the 17th century, completely surrounded by walls in the shape of a regular polygon. Walk along the top of the fortifications, exploring the ramparts and casemates, and, as the day draws to an end, rest for a while as you imagine the battles fought here in order to defend Portugal's independence.

For your third day, we suggest an itinerary that will take you through other historic villages, such as Castelo Mendo, Belmonte, Sortelha and Castelo Novo. At this last one, note the fountain in the typical style of the reign of Dom João V built into the façade of the former town hall, which is considered to be the village's most distinctive feature. Continue on to Castelo Branco, whose main attraction is the baroque Episcopal Palace and its gardens. Round off your trip with a walk through this green space, with its harmonious combination of lakes, fountains, flower beds and staircases decorated with statues of the kings of Portugal.



### Points of interest along the Itinerary

- Museu Nacional de Machado de Castro
- Biblioteca Joanina
- Capela de São Miguel - Coimbra
- Capela de Nossa Senhora da Penha de França
- Convento de Jesus em Aveiro
- Museu de Arte Sacra de Arouca
- Sé Catedral de Viseu
- Muralhas da Praça de Almeida
- Castelo Novo
- Jardim do Paço Episcopal



## Points of interest along the Itinerary

### Museu Nacional de Machado de Castro

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### Capela de Nossa Senhora da Penha de França

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### Museu de Arte Sacra de Arouca

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### Sé Catedral de Viseu

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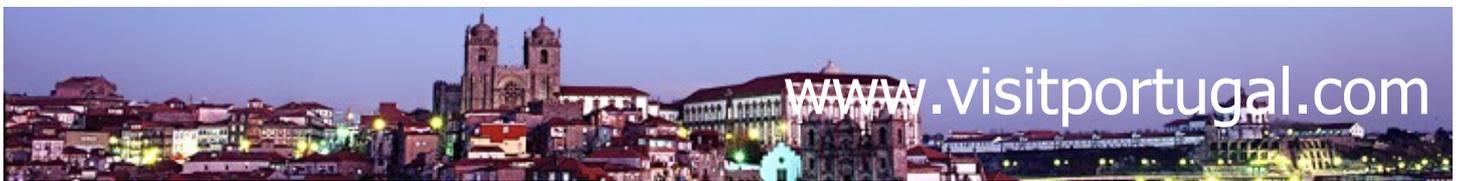
### Muralhas da Praça de Almeida

Almeida



## Jardim do Paço Episcopal

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## Suggestions

### Baroque Coimbra

Home to Portugal's oldest university, and one of the oldest in Europe, Coimbra still preserves its age-old academic traditions in the black gowns worn by the students.

Standing on the hill overlooking the city is the university with its famous library known as the Biblioteca Joanina. Commissioned by the King Dom João V (1706-50), it shows just how much importance that royalty gave to knowledge. Next to the library is the Capela de São Miguel, with its impressive baroque organ, which is also well worth a visit.

But the works commissioned by Dom João V also enriched other monuments that should not be missed, such as the Sé Nova (the so-called 'new cathedral'), the Igreja de Santa Cruz (the church where you will find the tomb of the first king of Portugal, Dom Afonso Henriques) and the Convento de Santa Clara-a-Nova.

As the day draws to a close, we suggest that you visit the bar called 'àCapella' which is housed in an old 14th-century chapel. Take a seat and listen to people singing the Fado of Coimbra, while enjoying a view of the night-life in downtown Coimbra.

### Visit Aveiro

Aveiro is on an estuary between the land and sea. The city is a maze of canals where the coloured prows of the moliceiros (seaweed boats) glide along.

For your first encounter of the city and its estuary, take a trip in one of these slender boats, a masterpiece of design. Sail through the canals that run the length of this unique landscape, and see the light reflected in hundreds of white cones of crystallised salt on the shore.

The blue tiled panels that line the railway station explain the history and customs of this region. As does the city's museum, housed in a former convent where the Infanta Dona Joana sheltered, daughter of King Afonso V. Here you can take a "Journey through the baroque" that includes the Infanta Dona Joana's tomb. Made of tiny pieces of multicoloured inlaid marble, it is one of the most beautiful examples in Portugal.

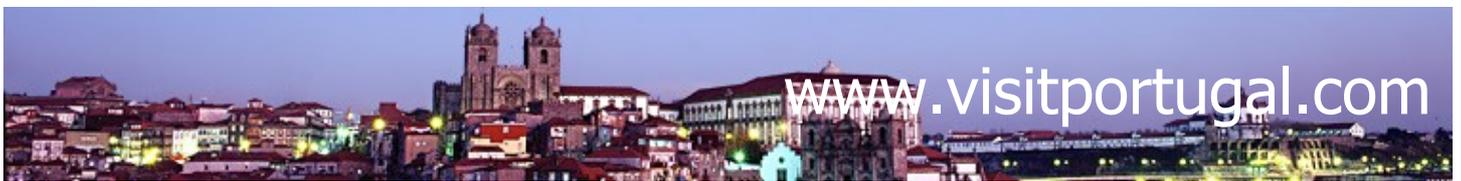
On the Central Canal you'll see a row of buildings in the Arte Nova style. In one of these it's recommended that you sample the delicious "ovos moles" a speciality egg-based dessert made in Aveiro. You'll enjoy seeing the busy fish market too, plus the Senhor das Barrocas chapel in all its baroque grandeur, and the beautiful doorway of the Church of the Misericórdia. A trip on the lake in the romantic Infante Dom Pedro Park is another great city attraction.

And to see some contemporary Portuguese architecture, visit the surprising collection of buildings that make up the campus of the University of Aveiro.

### Visit Viseu

Portugal's oldest hero, Viriato, a Lusitanian chieftain, drove the Roman legions from the mountains that surround Viseu. This is commemorated in a statue in the Cava de Viriato (Viriato's ditch), an archaeological site outside the town.

The hub of Viseu is around the cathedral square where there are several things of interest. Start with the cathedral's original vaulted ceiling, secured by stone ropes and knots. You can see paintings by the famous artist Vasco Fernandes (known as Grão Vasco) in the museum named after him. The



nearby Church of the Misericórdia is famous for the rocaille style façade and its beautiful cloisters. Ironically, the town is full of art relating to the Portuguese Discoveries, even though it's so far from the sea.

Wander through the streets where Prince Henry the Navigator lived, who was also the Duke of Viséu. In Rua Escura, Gothic gargoyles peer out from 16th Century houses. Walk along the twisting Rua Direita, now a busy commercial street.

The Quatro Esquinas (Four Corners) is a crossroads leading to some interesting sites in the city. You can see the house where King Duarte was born, brother of Prince Henry the Navigator. Further on is the Porta do Soar, a gateway in the ancient city wall. From here, another street opens out into the city's "sitting room." This is the main square known as the Praça do Rossio, where you can sit and relax under shady lime trees.

The mountain air, fine wines of the region and its famous cuisine will make your visit to the city of Viséu a memorable one.

## Almeida

Almeida today is a quiet town near the Portuguese-Spanish border, surrounded by charming countryside, where you breathe the clean air of the plateau.

But from 1296 when king D. Dinis took it by force, and up until the 19th century, this peaceful historical village was a fort that suffered prolonged sieges. Its walls and bulwarks make it one of the most interesting fortresses in the world, where it is possible to observe the 'hexagon' technique of King Louis XIV of France's military engineer, Vauban.

Each angle of the polygon forms a lance-shaped bulwark, and amongst these stand other smaller ones, the ravelins. According to 17th and 18th century war tactics, this star-shaped configuration made it possible to use crossfire. At certain points you will be able to see a good deal of the irregular 12-pointed structure.

In 1810, the French general Massena laid siege to Almeida, which resisted valiantly for 17 days. It only capitulated because the munitions store blew up (due to the carelessness of one soldier), killing five hundred men from the garrison and destroying the original medieval castle. The terms of surrender were signed in the guardroom at the São Francisco gates, where the tourist office now is.

Even if you are not a specialist in military history, you should not miss the original walk round the 2,500 metres of the bulwark parapets, following in the footsteps of the soldiers who used to patrol this magnificent monument.

## Villages of Centro de Portugal

Take a tour of the historical villages of Centro de Portugal and see the numerous castles and fortifications, that look out towards the horizon.

Start off at Linhares, considered to be the home of paragliding in Portugal. Situated in the Serra da Estrela, with the highest mountain in mainland Portugal (1,993 metres), the beautiful landscape spreads into the distance and disappears from sight.

Next, head on to Almeida, stopping at the Solar do Queijo, in Celorico da Beira, to taste (and retaste) the famous goat's cheese known as Queijo da Serra. In the village of Almeida, you will discover one of Portugal's most interesting fortresses.

Further south is the medieval town of Belmonte. The discoverer of Brazil, Pedro Álvares Cabral, was born here in 1500. The town has successfully preserved many of its Jewish traits, and is also home to the Pousada de Belmonte, an old monastery that has been newly restored, where you can enjoy the delicious local cuisine.

Carry on to Sortelha, a village which is ringed by 12th-century walls and which seems to rise naturally out of the granite rocks on which it was built.



## Useful contacts

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