



A dream of a day in Sintra

Spend a romantic day very close to Lisbon.

Take the IC19 road to Queluz, to visit one of the most elegant and sumptuous Portuguese palaces. At the Palácio Nacional, even the most absent of hearts will be pleasantly surprised by the “rocaille” decoration, with its brilliant mirrors and its exuberant carved and gilded woodwork. Make sure to see the Throne Room, as well as the decorative arts museum, with its collections belonging to the royal family.

In the gardens, let your imagination run riot as you sense all of the palace’s old and noble atmosphere, taking a relaxing boat ride on a canal lined with the decorative tiles known as azulejos. Before you leave, spend some time in the chapel admiring the altarpiece of the Immaculate Conception, for the Virgin Mary is the patron saint of Portugal.

Continue along the road to Sintra. Starting from the town’s historic centre, you can surprise your loved one with a ride in a horse-drawn carriage. This is one of the best ways to discover this extremely beautiful and romantic town. Choose from one of the various routes, offering you different views over the town and its surrounding countryside. As you ride through the narrow streets of houses seemingly perched on the hillside and along the roads that follow the contours of the mountains, let yourself settle gently into the rhythm set by the horses’ hooves. Let time stop as you share this idyllic moment with your partner and leave your thoughts floating somewhere between the deep heavenly blue of the sky and the magical green aura of the mountains.

Walk through the gates into the peaceful botanical refuge of the verdant Parque da Pena, and climb up to the palace that Richard Strauss once referred to as the “Castle of the Holy Grail”. From the battlements, let your gaze feast on the stunning view all the way to the horizon. A symphony of greens stretches out in front of you and invites you to sample the delights of traditional Portuguese cuisine in the palace restaurant.

After toasting to each other’s love, make your way back down to the historic centre and visit the Palácio da Vila, with its unmistakable conical chimneys, set against the landscape of small palaces and old houses. Stop for tea in the tea-room of the bakery where the Queijadas da Sapa are made. These cakes are a particular local speciality, and together with the setting they make the perfect end to a day spent in a town of idyllic dreams.



Points of interest along the Itinerary

- Palácio Nacional de Sintra
- Palácio Nacional da Pena
- Parque da Pena
- Palácio e Parque de Monserrate
- Sintra Museu de Arte Moderna - Coleção Berardo
- Palácio e Quinta da Regaleira



Points of interest along the Itinerary

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Suggestions

The land of Azulejos

They first appeared in the more aristocratic houses, such as the Palácio de Queluz and the Palácio Fronteira in Lisbon, where they formed an authentic record of the courtly customs of the period. The façades of the Capela (chapel) das Almas and the church of Santo Ildefonso, in Porto, are remarkable for being completely covered with blue and white tiles, showing how the saints too went out into the street.

After the great earthquake of 1755, it was important to have them to protect houses. São Marçal put out fires, São Francisco de Bórgia prevented earthquakes, Santa Bárbara calmed storms and N. Srª da Conceição, patron saint of Portugal, protected against all evils. Seek them out in the historical districts, such as the Alfama in Lisbon.

Mass-produced, weather-resistant and easy to apply, azulejos were used to cover façades totally with patterns and colours. The more innovative even used them to advertise what they sold inside their shops.

They are easy to find in any Portuguese city or town. If you travel by train, notice the azulejo-panelled stations, authentic art galleries that portray the local customs. Visit São Bento station in Porto, where there are twenty thousand azulejos that tell stories of the railways and famous episodes in Portuguese history.

The azulejo is such a versatile support that it is still used by more modern artists in public spaces. Maria Keil, in the route along the Lisbon aqueduct, and Júlio Resende, in the continuation of the D. Luís bridge in Porto, are two artists who have used them to bring fresh life to large spaces at city entrances.

Queluz Palace

Queluz Palace, with its gardens, statues and fountains, is reminiscent of Versailles. It is home to a valuable collection of decorative art, including Portuguese furniture, Arraiolos carpets, royal portraits, Chinese and European porcelain and jewellery.

The rooms have an intimate feel, and are decorated with gilded woodcarvings and paintings, finely illustrating the evolution in taste from the second half of the 18th century to the first quarter of the 19th century, passing from the rococo to the neoclassical style.

The Palace is part of a much larger estate that includes French-style geometric gardens, annexes to the old kitchen that have been converted into the renowned Cozinha Velha restaurant, and the Royal Guard's barracks, which have been converted into the Pousada de Queluz.

These days, the palace is host to frequent concerts and regularly welcomes heads of state, government officials and diplomats.

And at the open-air riding school, between April and October, visitors can see a performance by the Portuguese School of Equestrian Art.

Sintra for couples

Return to the 19th century and travel by carriage through the gardens of Monserrate, where exotic plants cohabit with the local flora, thus constituting an important botanical museum.

Looking like a real opera stage, the Regaleira estate is a magical and sacred place that you have to get to know. Climb to the Pena Palace, situated on one of the summits of the Sintra mountain, and there you can feel like a real nobleman.

Walking through the Sintra mountain allows you to experience nature again in a unique setting of serenity and beauty, in which the density of the greens of the trees makes it the ideal place for those who intend living moments of true romance.



At teatime, enjoy the wonderful pastries of Piriquita.

Sleep well at Lawrence's Hotel - the oldest hotel on the Iberian Peninsula - which was a source of inspiration for writers and poets like Lord Byron and Eça de Queiroz. It was recently restored and became one of the best hotels of charm in the world.

The following day, go to Cabo da Roca - Continental Europe's most westerly point - let yourself be rocked by the music of the waves hitting the cliffs and have lunch at one of the romantic restaurants by the sea; try the famous Colares wine with your lunch.

Sintra palaces

Start the day by listening to the trotting rhythm of horse-pulled carriages at the Volta do Duche. Then walk among the centuries-old gardens of the Quinta da Regaleira with its symbols and practices of initiation ceremonies.

Afterwards, relax and find a seat on the Café Paris' esplanade. Have a coffee and treat yourself to a queijada de Sintra cake. Or check out the Piriquita pastry shop and savour one of its famous travesseiros cakes.

The Palácio de Sintra's two conical chimneys can be seen from afar. Built at the end of the 14th century, it has been used throughout the history of Portugal by kings as a summer residence. It is also home to Europe's largest collection of 15th century tiles.

If you come to Sintra, you must visit the most romantic palace in all of Portugal, Palácio da Pena, which was built on the orders by King D. Fernando II. And take a deep breath in the Parque da Pena as you admire what is now a World Heritage site.

Meanwhile, during July and August, classical music and dance events take place on stages at the Palaces of Sintra and Pena and the Centro Cultural Olga de Cadaval (Olga de Cadaval Cultural Centre).

The Sintra coast

The Sintra coast, only half an hour from Lisbon by car, is the ideal place for love birds. Set amid great natural beauty and sheltered by rocky coves, this area is home to some amazing beaches. Praia da Ursa, Praia das Azenhas do Mar and Praia do Magoito are three of the best.

Take a ride on the tram that links Sintra to Praia das Maçãs. Stop for lunch in the restaurant at Praia da Adraga, where you can sample the freshest seafood imaginable. In the evening spend some time discovering the small towns and fishing villages in the surrounding area, strolling along their narrow streets and meeting the locals.

Take advantage of the fact that you're close to Sintra, the quintessential romantic destination, to enjoy a romantic ride through the town's historic centre in a horse-drawn carriage, or walk through the stunning gardens of Monserrate and the park of Palácio da Pena.

Sintra sweets

Where the historical and cultural heritage form a perfect match to the leafy greenery of the hills, a particular beauty that has gained Sintra World Heritage status. Thus, it is a major stop on national tourist itineraries with its traditional pastries in equal demand. Piriquita, in the town centre, makes its own delicious 'travesseiros', puff pastry filled with egg and almond. And the 'queijadas de Sintra', made from fresh cheese, egg and cinnamon, began life at the Queijadas da Sapa Bakery by the town entrance, even if they are now produced elsewhere.

And in the vicinity of Sintra, there are other cakes with equal fame and tradition, the delicious 'fofos de Belas', for example.

And before these rich sweets, ideal for desserts, the region has another speciality worth consideration, Negrais suckling pig, tender but with crackling skin.



And match that delicacy to one of the finest red wines of Portugal, Colares, still grown here even while vineyards are under threat from urban expansion. And the region's coastline ensures it gets a ready supply of excellent fish and shellfish. A grilled fish becomes the best of fare when served with a bottle of chilled white wine in the terrace sunshine, with the sea beyond.



Useful contacts

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