
Guarda

ABOUT



Set at 1,056 metres on the slopes of the Serra da Estrela, this is the highest city in Portugal. Given its strategic location, it has served as a battleground since pre-history and settled since pre-Roman times.

Recognising its importance as a key border defence position, king Sancho I founded the city of Guarda in 1199, bestowing a bishopdom and the Cathedral. With the castle built, the walls were strengthened by kings Afonso II and Afonso III. The remains, some now parts of houses, are most clearly noticeable in the Keep, the Tower of Ferreiros and the Gates of Erva and d'El Rei. The city of Guarda has strong royal connections: king Dinis stayed here after his marriage to Isabel of Aragon in Trancoso, Fernando came for its weather as he tried to rid himself of lung disease and Afonso V held court here in 1465.

In 1510, the city's charter was renewed by King Manuel I. Also in the 16th century, bishop Nuno de Noronha set about improving the ecclesiastical presence carrying out notable projects including the Seminary and the Episcopal Palace, now the Museum of Guarda.

In the 18th century, Guarda did gain a modest share of the period's royal ostentation with the rebuilding of the Church of São Vicente and the Church of Misericórdia. The beginning of the 19th century saw a period of transformation. After the Napoleonic wars had devastated the border regions, Guarda became district capital in 1835. In 1881, it would recover jurisdiction over the short-lived bishopdom of Pinhel and that of Castelo Branco, both established under the Marquês de Pombal. Improvements to means of communication and infrastructures helped in offsetting some of the problems caused by its remote location. While this did open the door to progress and development, it did not prove enough to fully overcome all regional difficulties.