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## Popular Saints' Festivals

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### ABOUT



Photo: José Frade

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**June is the month of celebrations and festivities for the Popular Saints throughout the country on the nights of St. Anthony, St. John and St. Peter.**

The main ones are the **Festas de Lisboa, on 12 and 13 June**, St. Anthony's day, and in **Porto on the night of 23/24 June** when St. John is celebrated. These are enormously vivid celebrations, during which the people take to the streets eating, drinking and having fun in the old neighbourhoods, that are bedecked with arches, colourful balloons and the aroma of sweet basil.

In **Lisbon**, people from every neighbourhood parade down **Avenida da Liberdade**, filling this major road with colourful characters in costume, folk music, and throngs of spectators. But the crowds and liveliness also fill the narrow back streets, particularly in **Alfama**, but also **Graça, Bica, Mouraria and Madragoa**. In the mediaeval squares and alleyways, people eat cabbage soup and grilled sardines, singing and dancing the whole night long. Another highlight is the **procession of St. Anthony**, which leaves on the 13th from the church of S. António in Alfama, near the Cathedral, where the saint was born in around 1193.

The festivities are just as colourful and lively in **Porto**, in the more traditional neighbourhoods that include **Miragaia, Fontainhas, Ribeira, and Massarelos**. But Porto has other habits and customs: the old tradition was for revellers to beat each other on the head with a leek, but now they use plastic hammers; and besides the firework display at midnight on the River Douro in the centre of Porto, people also release colourful hot air balloons into the sky, making one of the most beautiful spectacles in these popular celebrations. For many, the night ends on the beach, to see the sun rise, and some still follow the tradition of taking an early morning dip in the sea.

**St. Peter** is celebrated on **29 June**, also with popular festivals in various parts of the country, such as **Sintra** and **Évora**, both on the World Heritage list. Évora, incidentally, has the distinction of celebrating two popular saints, since it has held the St. John Fair since the 16th century, one of the largest in southern Portugal, as well as celebrating the feast of St. Peter as a municipal holiday.

In all these festivals, there is also the tradition of jumping the bonfire and offering your girlfriend or boyfriend pots of aromatic basil, containing four-line verses often speaking of love, especially because these feasts are linked to the summer solstice and ancient fertility rites.

