
Discovering Lisbon

ABOUT



Photo: Turismo de Portugal

Discovering Lisbon

Lisbon is a city that makes you want to go exploring, to discover whatever might appear in every neighbourhood, on every street. It's a safe and friendly city, relatively small but with so much to see. It's an ideal place to spend a few days or as a starting point for touring the country. It's old. It's modern. It is, without doubt, always surprising.

You can choose a topic or a theme to explore it. The range is wide: Roman Lisbon, Manueline, Baroque or Romantic Lisbon, literary Lisbon, the Lisbon of Bohemian nightlife, the city of Fado. And there are also very different ways of exploring: by foot, by tram, by segway, by hop-on-hop-off bus, in a tuk tuk, seen from the river on a boat trip or from the other side, after crossing the Tagus on a cacilheiro ferry... the suggestions are endless.

However, there are some essential sites that simply cannot be missed, and are always on the list. Like the historic **Alfama** and **Castelo districts**, with one of the most fabulous views over the city and the river.

You must go from downtown towards **Belém**, the neighbourhood of the Discoveries, with the Belém Tower and the Jerónimos Monastery, both World Heritage. But also with the original Coach Museum and the modern Belém Cultural Centre. Oh, and don't forget to taste the delicious pastéis de nata (custard tarts)!

Leave **Chiado** and **Bairro Alto** for the late afternoon and the evening. These are guaranteed nightlife spots, as is Cais do Sodré, nearer the river.

The new part of the city cannot be forgotten either. Be it to visit some key museums such as the Calouste Gulbenkian, in the north, or continuing along the river, the National Tile Museum. Carry on to the **Parque das Nações** (Park of Nations), the port area which was completely rebuilt for Expo '98, the 1998 World's Fair. It is now an important recreational space with a new urban landscape.

Here we highlight the city's different neighbourhoods. Your visit plan will be more complete armed with "10 things to do and see in Lisbon" and the "Lisbon in a day" itinerary.

In addition to all the places to visit in the city throughout the year, Lisbon also hosts many other events that enliven the city and are announced in our [programme](#). One thing is sure: Lisbon is an unforgettable city!

BAIXA

You get to the downtown area by heading from Marquês de Pombal, the central reference point of Lisbon, down the grand Avenida da Liberdade, where the best shops and luxury hotels in the city are found.

Baixa is the heart of the city, and one of the busiest spots, somewhere you will find yourself passing very often. Here, new and old go together, with traditional shops mingling with new designers and major international brands.

The geometry of the streets and the elegant sobriety of the façades, with no apparent differentiation between the various social strata who lived here, is in contrast to the older neighbourhoods. This is a result of the enlightened and visionary spirit of the Marquis of Pombal, who took charge of rebuilding the city after the great earthquake of 1755.

In olden times, all the businesses and craftsmen were concentrated here, and this is reflected in the names of the streets: the jewellers in Rua do Ouro (gold) and Rua da Prata (silver), drapers in Rua dos Fanqueiros, saddlers in Rua dos Correeiros, and Rua dos Douradores. They intersect with the streets named after patron saints: Santa Justa, Nossa Senhora da Assunção, Vitória, São Nicolau and Nossa Senhora da Conceição. And since this was the place for commerce, it was also a prime spot to establish the major Portuguese banks.

There are two important squares at the northern end. In the square dedicated to King Pedro IV, better known as Rossio, there is the Neo Manueline façade of the railway station that serves the Sintra line, and the classical D. Maria I National Theatre. In the middle is the Suíça pastry shop, one of the oldest in the city, at the corner of a small street that links with Praça da Figueira. This is a commercial area, where you'll find a statue of King João I, and the Confeitaria Nacional, another famous pastry shop whose cakes you simply won't be able to resist. These squares are flanked by the hills on which you can see the Castle, on one side, and the Carmo Convent on the other. A snapshot here is irresistible, day or night.

No tour of Baixa is complete without going up in the Santa Justa elevator. This is a beautiful example of iron architecture, built in 1902 by Ponsard, a disciple of Eiffel. It is well worth the climb.

Rua Augusta is the main access route to the river. It is a pedestrianized shopping street, with cafes and restaurants. At the end, you can visit MUDE – the Museum of Design and Fashion in a former bank building. On the same street, in another former bank, the remains of the old Roman city can be seen, in the Rua dos Correeiros Archaeological Centre.

Passing under the Triumphal Arch, you will find yourself in one of the most beautiful squares, Praça do Comércio. The residence of the Kings of Portugal was here during the Age of the Discoveries and, on the right-hand side, in Ribeira das Naus, were the port warehouses and the beach where the ships were built. This is the great entrance hall to the city, where you can spend some quality time near the river, on a terrace or strolling along the riverside. In the Lisbon Story Centre, you can have a good introduction to the history of the city. Amongst the many trendy restaurants, the historic Martinho da Arcada, frequented by the great Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, is still there.

Nearby, on the left, you pass the Church of Conceição Velha. The portal is very similar to the main entrance of the Church of the Jerónimos Monastery. It was the same artist, Boytac, who designed them. Further ahead is the curious 16th century Casa dos Bicos. Inspired by the Italian façade of the Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara, it was built by the son of the Viceroy of India, Afonso de Albuquerque. The master-builder was the same as for the Belém Tower, Francisco de Arruda. It is currently the headquarters of the José Saramago Foundation, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature. See the olive tree that marks the spot where his ashes are deposited, according to his wishes.

ALFAMA

At the top of Lisbon, where you have the best view, is the Castle of São Jorge. It was on this hill that leads down to the river that it all began.

It was from the Castle that the first King of Portugal conquered Lisbon in 1147. It is also from here that you will conquer the city in your own way. The Alfama and Mouraria quarters spread out from the castle, with their white houses and labyrinthine streets, courtyards and alleyways. It was in the midst of these seafaring neighbourhoods that Fado was born, and therefore this is one of the best places to listen to it and enjoy it.

Notice the small tile panels on top of the houses. They are signs of popular devotion to the saints who helped protect the neighbourhood. You are in one of the main points where the Festival of Popular Saints is celebrated, which is particularly lively on the eve of 13th June, the birth date of Santo António (Saint Anthony), but there are events throughout the month.

Heading downhill from the Castle, you pass the Portas do Sol and Cerca Moura belvederes. It's good to stay on this terrace facing the river for a while, to look at the city. From here, you can follow the narrow streets and steps to reach the Fado Museum, further down the hill. Then just guess the way to the Romanesque Cathedral. Opposite, you can visit the Church of Santo António, where the house of this saint's family was formerly located.

From here you can hear a sound that is characteristic of Lisbon: the sizzle of rails. Tram no. 28 passes through the middle of Alfama towards Graça, which deserves a mention, with a note about Santa Apolónia.

Graça is one of the most popular neighbourhoods, with great viewpoints and terraces, such as, for example, the one close to the Graça Convent or the Senhora do Monte viewpoint. Again at the gates of Alfama, you will find the imposing Monastery of São Vicente de Fora, dedicated to the patron saint of Lisbon, and so proclaimed in 1173 by King Afonso Henriques. The Pantheon of the Braganças, the last dynasty in the Portuguese royal house, is here. In the cloisters, you will be challenged to discover the fables of La Fontaine in the tile friezes...

Continue down one side of the monastery to arrive at Campo de Santa Clara, home of the Feira da Ladra (flea market) every Tuesday and Saturday. After the iron structure of an old market and a pleasant garden, comes the Pantheon of Santa Engrácia. This is a monumental church in Baroque style, in the shape of a Greek cross (with four arms of the same size), which took over 400 years to be built, having earned it a popular saying: "older than the works of Santa Engrácia". It's worth seeing the interior, all marble, and climbing to the top of the dome. This is the National Pantheon, where figures of great importance in the history of Portugal are entombed, such as the fado singer Amália Rodrigues and the first President of the Republic, Manuel de Arriaga.

Further down is Santa Apolónia, known for being the railway station for international trains. On the riverfront, the empty warehouses have been revitalised and turned into restaurants and a nightclub, with a fantastic view. There is also a major port for cruise ships which dock here to discover the capital.

Returning to Graça, you can continue on foot to visit Mouraria, the quarter around the northern slope of the castle, or carry on to the end of the tram line. In this case, you will find yourself in a large square, Martim Moniz, quite close to the city centre, which is a multicultural area with a sizeable community of immigrants from India, China and Africa and Eastern European countries. It is a part of Lisbon where there is a healthy mix of customs and knowledge of other people, showing the hospitality of a cosmopolitan city and a very Portuguese trait.

CHIADO

From the city centre, you naturally end up walking to Chiado. This is one of the most seductive parts of the city, the centre of cultural life, as its theatres, literary cafes and old bookshops testify.

Originating in the 16th century, the elegant Chiado district was at its peak in the 19th century, and during the 20th century, when it was a meeting point for intellectuals and artists such as Fernando Pessoa and Almada Negreiros. Nowadays, it is still frequented by students of art and design. In one part of the São Francisco Convent, which houses the Faculty of Fine Arts, is the Chiado Museum, a reference point in the history of Portuguese contemporary art.

The district also has a great theatre tradition. The programmes of the São Carlos National Theatre, São Luiz Theatre and Trindade Theatre are important points of Lisbon's cultural life.

Amongst the Pombaline buildings, restored by such contemporary architects as Siza Vieira, you now find renowned restaurants, shops and other gems, like the Baroque churches of Mártires, Loreto and Encarnação. And Largo do Carmo, where the fascinating Convent in ruins, today the Archaeological Museum, remains in memory of the earthquake that destroyed Lisbon in 1755. The barracks where some of the events took place in the historic Carnation Revolution in April 1974, against the Salazar dictatorship, are in the former outbuildings of the convent.

There are numerous clothes shops, household goods stores, bookshops, florists, everything you need for a good

afternoon's shopping... and for a break, there's nothing like an ice cream or a good coffee. In the famous Brasileira, you can even enjoy the company of Fernando Pessoa.

Chiado will also lead you to one of the viewpoints, Santa Catarina, where you can enjoy looking out over the port of Lisbon, the statue of Christ the King and the 25 de Abril Bridge. En route, you will have passed the century old Bica Elevator, in a steep street where the sidewalks are narrow flights of steps.

If you continue climbing to Bairro Alto, you will find by day a popular neighbourhood with trendy, vintage and alternative shops. Independent dressmakers and young designers open their shops here alongside designers of international renown. Artists' studios and art galleries complete this urban landscape which, at night, becomes one of the most lively neighbourhoods in the city, with many bars and restaurants.

Crossing Bairro Alto, you arrive at another vantage point over the city, the São Pedro de Alcântara viewpoint. It's worth going on a few steps to enter the Jesuit Church of São Roque. Between the two, the Glória Elevator connects to the downtown area, in Avenida da Liberdade.

Time permitting, you can continue on to Rua da Escola Politécnica, where you will find the Príncipe Real Garden, the Natural History Museum and the Botanical Gardens. This street leads to Largo do Rato, and then further on to the small and pleasant Amoreiras Garden, where a museum dedicated to the contemporary artist couple Arpad Szenes and Maria Helena Vieira da Silva is located.

Very close by is the Baroque Estrela Basilica and the Garden, built at the height of the Romantic era.

PARQUE DAS NAÇÕES

It's worth setting a whole afternoon aside for visiting the Parque das Nações, in the eastern part of Lisbon. It is an area of modern architecture, excellent for walking, cycling or skateboarding and spending some quality cultural and leisure time.

This was an old run-down industrial area that stretched for more than five kilometres along the River Tagus, but was completely rebuilt to host the Lisbon Universal Exhibition of 1998 (Expo '98). Buildings and amenities of great quality were designed, that were integrated into the urban fabric of the city after the end of the event, thus creating the most modern area of the city.

Start your visit at Oriente Station. Designed by the renowned Spanish architect, Santiago Calatrava, the complex structure of vertical lines is reminiscent of Gothic arches. Continue to the Portugal Pavilion (Altice Arena), designed by Álvaro Siza Vieira in collaboration with Eduardo Souto de Moura, two of the most prominent Portuguese architects. Its structure is based on the idea of a sheet of paper sitting on two bricks, and went from drawing board to reality using an impressive construction in pre-stressed concrete in the form of a visor. Right next door is the Atlantic Pavilion, designed by Regino Cruz. While its outer appearance resembles a space ship or a marine animal, inside the wooden structure that supports the roof evokes a 16th century ship.

Another space you simply must visit is the Lisbon Oceanarium, one of the largest in Europe, designed by Peter Chermayeff. The various marine environments on the planet are recreated so accurately that they almost seem real, and they surround a gigantic central tank populated by the most diverse species.

Not far away is the Pavilhão do Conhecimento (Pavilion of Knowledge), designed by Carrilho da Graça and winner of the Grand Jury FAD Prize in Barcelona in 1999, and the Camões Theatre, by Manuel Salgado, current headquarters of the National Ballet Company and a great place to watch a show at the end of the day.

There are many green spaces within the Parque das Nações, such as Alameda dos Oceanos, the Water Gardens, the Garcia d'Orta Gardens, with flora from the territories discovered by the Portuguese in the great maritime age of the 15th and 16th centuries, and the Riverwalk. A cable car ride, one kilometre long, is a good way to get an idea of the whole area.

This vast urban art venue also provides access to a shopping centre and many bars, restaurants and terraces, always in close contact with the river. At one extreme, the Marina is a quiet harbour in the Tagus Estuary, catering for small

boats and yachts.

BELÉM

If you want to find out about the Lisbon of the Discoveries, an historical period that is of such great importance for Portugal, Belém is the place to go.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, Belém was a popular neighbourhood, a busy harbour from which the ships and caravels set out on their great Atlantic voyages. Ships, oars, sails and ropes were part of the day-to-day bustle and the sailors would pray for divine protection in a small chapel dedicated to Saint Mary, before heading off to faraway destinations.

Belém is still an important district today, but for other reasons. Several monuments, museums and a large landscaped area beside the river make it a very pleasant place for a stroll.

Two of Lisbon's most emblematic monuments are here, the Jerónimos Monastery, on the site of the former chapel of Santa Maria, and the Tower of Belém. These two jewels are worthy representatives of the Manueline style and are classified as World Heritage. You can see the ringed sphere of King Manuel I, who had them built, and a number of marine motifs, ropes, plants and even fantastic animals. The Monastery was built with 5% of the value of the spices brought back from the Orient. They included pepper, cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves, which are part of Portuguese cuisine.

The Jerónimos Monastery shares some buildings that were rebuilt in the 19th century with the National Archaeological Museum and the Maritime Museum. Its collection also places an emphasis on the Discoveries, displaying small replicas of ships and caravels. Next to it is the Calouste Gulbenkian Planetarium, where it is always fascinating to take a trip through space to discover the sky of our planet.

The modernity of the Belém Cultural Centre is in marked contrast to the other monuments around Praça do Império. It has terraces, a very attractive programme of events and the Berardo Collection Museum, with works by internationally renowned contemporary artists.

Down by the river is the Monument to the Discoveries, which you can climb for a better view of the huge compass inset into the pavement below. The monument is a tribute from 1940 to the great explorers of the Discoveries, portraying men such as Ferdinand Magellan and Vasco da Gama, led by Prince Henry the Navigator, who instigated that great Portuguese epic.

When the time comes for a break, head for the famous Pastéis de Belém pastry shop for the much sought-after custard tarts. The queue may be long, but the service is fast, and it will be worth it because they are indeed different from the custard tarts found in other pastry shops, even if they are just as good. The recipe has been saved for generations and is the secret of the house.

Belém is also known for another must-visit museum, the Museu Nacional dos Coches (National Coach Museum), whose collection is unique in the world, and whose highlights are three 18th century ceremonial carriages used in the Portuguese state mission to Pope Clement XI.

Note, too, some other points of interest such as the Tropical Botanical Gardens and further up, the National Ethnological Museum, the Church of Memória and the National Palace of Ajuda.

On the way to Belém, or when you return to the city centre, stop off for a visit to the National Museum of Ancient Art, where the major reference works of national art are exhibited, such as the Namban screens in which the Portuguese are portrayed when they arrived in Japan, and some ceramic pieces brought from Asia. But to discover more about these peoples who the Portuguese encountered, go to the Museum of the Orient. Both have beautiful views over the river.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Tourist information available at www.visitlisboa.com.

Lisboa Card – a card that provides access to public transport and gives discounts in monuments and other amenities for getting to know the city. Information and tourist offices at www.askmelisboa.com.

Tourist information on churches in the city of Lisbon, with suggestions on things to see and schedules of events and Masses: www.quovadislisboa.pt

GETTING HERE

Lisbon has a good network of public transport, by metro - www.metrolisboa.pt - and bus - www.carris.pt.

One of the city's attractions is the trams and elevators that connect the city centre to the higher neighbourhoods and viewpoints: Glória, Bica, Lavra and Santa Justa. Tram no. 28 runs through the city, the historic neighbourhoods and is mentioned in tour guides all over the world. Tram no. 15 goes from Praça da Figueira to Belém, along the river Tagus. Visit www.carris.pt for information.

Terreiro do Paço is linked to Barreiro by boat - www.transtejo.pt.

From Cais do Sodré, ferry-boats make the crossing to Cacilhas, Seixal and Montijo - www.transtejo.pt. This is also where trains to Cascais depart from - www.cp.pt.

You can also cross the river by train using the 25 de Abril Bridge, with the company Fertagus (www.fertagus.pt) or by bus www.tsuldotejo.pt.