

#TRAVEL

# From Lisbon to Porto: A TALE OF ADVENTURE IN PORTUGAL



Life is all about grabbing an opportunity when one presents itself and that's exactly what I did, when I found an email in my inbox, one fateful day, inviting me for a 4-day work meeting, across several continents, to Europe. It was one of my favourite, yet least explored destinations in the world — Portugal — and this time, I knew I wanted to capitalise.

Taking four additional days around my meeting, I decided to break my stay into a few different parts of Portugal — Lisbon, Sintra, Cascais, and Porto. After looking at several hostels, I decided to splurge a little and book myself into a small hotel with a private bathroom. As I had booked some tours, I decided to stay close to my pick-up point and that is how Pensao Estacao Central, right across the famous Rossio Square became my home for two nights.

My first trip was to Sintra, a town in the Greater Lisbon region of Portugal, located on the Portuguese Riviera. I had found a relatively cheap guided tour from the Get Your Guide app suggested by a friend that covered all the destinations I wanted to see and I was up at the crack of dawn to grab a breakfast sandwich and get going.

The guides were fun-loving people who made us laugh until our bellies hurt and were ready with passes that allowed us to skip the long tourist lines outside the attractions.

Sintra was beautiful with its castles and the famous Regaleira Well which represents Dante's Nine Rings of Hell. Every bit was an adventure, especially considering the rains from the previous nights, the steep stairs down the well were not for the faint-hearted.

Sitting high atop a hill, with gorgeous panoramic views of the whole city, Pena Palace, a monastery-turned-palace gifted by one of the kings of Portugal to his beloved wife, is a colourful fort-like castle straight out of a fairy tale.

Just twenty-five minutes from there, the fisherman's town of Cascais boasted freshly caught fish, white sands and blue water. With many beaches and more seagulls than one can imagine, the place is a surfing heaven and home to stars such as Scarlett Johansson. Calm and touristy at the same time, the vibe of the place is hard to describe in so many words.

Packing a cosy dinner with a friend along the lanes of Rossio Square, I turned in early as I had booked a train to Porto, early the next day on the Rail Ninja app. An uneventful, three-hour train ride took me into the city that would soon become my favourite memory of Portugal.

I had an itinerary and at the very top of it was Livraria Lello, the famous library where J K Rowling had found inspiration for Harry Potter. Perusing the gilded and bound classics and going up the iconic red staircase was no less than a dream come true for an avid Potterhead.

A short tuk-tuk ride took me into Villa De Gaia and then I hopped off to explore on foot. The weather was breezy, the streets were lined with souvenir shops, and on the horizon was the stately Dom Luis.

Crossing the bridge on foot was an experience thanks to the views it offered.



Orange-topped homes, street cafes on the shores below and the tram lines on the bridge made it a most joyful ten-minute walk. As soon as I got off the bridge, I saw the cable cars that would take me across Villa De Gaia and into a delightful street market. Making a mental note to come back, I walked to a nearby café where I ordered a huge turkey sandwich and cod cakes for lunch, finishing off with plump strawberries that I found at a discount.

The cable car ride was all of three minutes but what lay ahead made me wish I had a whole day to spare. Quaint little souvenir shops, selling everything under the sun, lined the streets as far as the eye

could see. I found deliciously warm churros that I savoured along the coast of the Douro River, blessed to be experiencing such serenity.

My evening in Porto was an expensive, but extremely relaxing and luxurious cruise on the Douro. Complete with pillows and blankets on the deck and a salty, cold breeze on my face, the sunset on the water was a sight to behold and I was glad I had decided to treat myself, albeit impulsively, to this cruise.

Back in Lisbon the next day, I took a day pass at a nearby metro and made my way to Eduardo VII Park. A tranquil walk along the greenery refreshed me and I took a short bus ride along the Ponte 25 de Abril, the iconic bridge, identical to the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco to the LX Factory Street Market. My destination was the Livraria Ler Devagar, a huge library that was also home to some priceless, classic vinyl records.

An impulsive book buy, a short walk and a tram ride later, I was exactly where I wanted to be, to catch my very last sunset in Lisbon — the city gate by the Tagus. An expansive area full of imposing structures, beautiful views and expensive diners, the place was the perfect way to end the day. As night fell, the Lisbon sky turned pink, orange, and then a brilliant, regal blue. As the sun set on my holiday too, I knew this was the memory that I would remember this trip by forever — the flowing river, an open sky, and a kaleidoscope of colours.

**By Munira Fidai**  
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