



Lisbon & Around

POP 580,000

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Why Go?

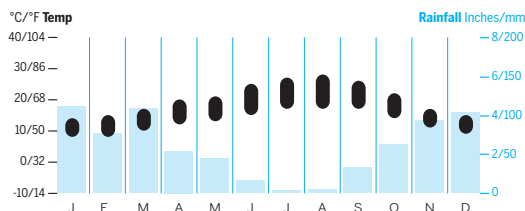
Spread across steep hillsides that overlook the Rio Tejo, Lisbon has captivated visitors for centuries. Windswept vistas reveal the city in all its beauty: Roman and Moorish ruins, white-domed cathedrals, grand plazas lined with sun-drenched cafes. The real delight of discovery though, is delving into the narrow cobblestone lanes.

As yellow trams clatter through tree-lined streets, *lis-boêtas* stroll through lamplit old quarters, much as they've done for centuries. Gossip is exchanged over fresh bread and wine at tiny patio restaurants as fado singers perform in the background. In other parts of town, Lisbon reveals her youthful alter ego at stylish dining rooms and lounges, late-night street parties, riverside nightspots and boutiques selling all things classic and cutting-edge.

Just outside Lisbon, there's more – enchanting woodlands, gorgeous beaches and seaside villages – all ripe for discovery.

When to Go?

Lisbon



May

After the winter rains, late spring is lovely with sunny days and flowers in bloom.

June

Early summer brings festivals and warm weather, with perfect beach days in late June.

September

Lisbon is pure magic, with cooler days and nights and a lack of summer crowds.

History

Imperial riches, fires, plague, Europe's worst recorded earthquake, revolutions, coups and a dictatorship – Lisbon has certainly had its ups and downs.

It's said that Ulysses was here first, but the Phoenicians definitely settled here 3000 years ago, calling the city *Alis Ubbo* (Delightful Shore). Others soon recognised its qualities: the Greeks, the Carthaginians and then, in 205 BC, the Romans, who stayed until the 5th century AD. After some tribal chaos, the city was taken over by North African Moors in 714. They fortified the city they called *Lissabona* and fended off the Christians for 400 years.

But in 1147, after a four-month siege, Christian fighters (mainly British crusader hooligan-pillagers) under Dom Afonso Henriques captured the city. In 1255, Afonso III moved his capital here from Coimbra, which proved far more strategic given the city's excellent port and central position.

In the 15th and 16th centuries Lisbon boomed as the opulent centre of a vast empire after Vasco da Gama found a sea route to India. The party raged on into the 1800s, when gold was discovered in Brazil. Merchants flocked to the city, trading in gold, spices, silks and jewels. Frenzied, extravagant architecture held up a mirror to the era, with Manueline works such as Belém's *Mosteiro dos Jerónimos*.

But at 9.40am on All Saints' Day, 1 November 1755, everything changed. Three major earthquakes hit, as residents celebrated Mass. The tremors brought an even more devastating fire and tsunami. Some estimate that as many as 90,000 of Lisbon's 270,000 inhabitants died. Much of the city was ruined, never to regain its former status. Dom João I's chief minister, the formidable Marquês de Pombal, immediately began rebuilding in a simple, cheap, earthquake-proof style that created today's formal grid.

Two bloodless coups (in 1926 and 1974) rocked the city. In 1974 and 1975 there was a massive influx of refugees from the former African colonies, changing the demographic of the city and culturally, if not financially, adding to its richness.

After Portugal joined the European Community (EC) in 1986, massive funding fuelled redevelopment, which was a welcome boost after a 1988 fire in Chiado. Streets became cleaner and investment im-

proved facilities. Lisbon has spent recent years dashing in and out of the limelight as 1994 European City of Culture, and host of Expo '98 and the 2004 European Football Championships. Major development projects throughout the city have continued recently, from the reopening of the restored Campo Pequeno bullring to ongoing work on the metro and, most importantly, much needed building rehab in the Alfama.

Sights

At the riverfront is the grand *Praça do Comércio*. Behind it march the pedestrian-filled streets of Baixa (lower) district, up to *Praça da Figueira* and *Praça Dom Pedro IV* (aka *Rossio*). From Baixa it's a steep climb west, through swanky shopping district Chiado, into the narrow streets of nightlife-haven *Bairro Alto*. Eastwards from the Baixa it's another climb to *Castelo de São Jorge* and the Moorish, labyrinthine *Alfama* district around it. The World Heritage Sites of *Belém* lie further west along the river – an easy tram ride from *Praça do Comércio*.

BAIXA & ROSSIO

After the devastating earthquake of 1755, the Baixa was reborn as a grid – the world's first ever – as envisioned by the Marquês de Pombal. Wide commercial streets were laid, with grand plazas, fountains and a triumphal arch evoking the glory of Portuguese royalty. Today the main drag, pedestrianised *Rua Augusta*, buzzes with bag-toting shoppers, camera-wielding tourists and shrill-voiced buskers. For a taste of the trades that once flourished here, stroll down streets named after *sapateiros* (shoemakers), *correeiros* (saddlers), *douradores* (gilders), *fanqueiros* (cutlers) and even *balchoeiros* (cod-fishing vessels).

Praça do Comércio

PLAZA

With its grand 18th-century arcades, lemon-meringue facades and mosaic cobbles, the riverfront *Praça do Comércio* (Map p54) is a square to out-pomp them all. Everyone arriving by boat used to disembark here, and it still feels like the gateway to Lisbon, thronging with activity and rattling trams. At its centre rises the dashing equestrian **statue of Dom José I**, hinting at the square's royal roots as the pre-earthquake site of *Palácio da Ribeira*. In 1908 the square witnessed the fall of the monarchy, when anarchists assassinated Dom Carlos I and his son. The biggest