

# Vis a Vis

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## In Portugal, Did You Know ...?

- Lisbon has the longest bridge in Europe measuring 11 kilometers in length.
- James Bond was "born" in a casino in Estoril.
- Portugal grows cork trees, providing corks for wine bottles around the world.
- Portugal was once the richest country in Europe.
- The origin of the Japanese word for thank you, "origato", comes from the Portuguese "obrigato".
- Port wine was first made in the Upper Douro River valley two thousand years ago. It was originally a table wine and did not become a dessert wine until 1820.

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## Portugal: A European Treasure

*Everyone has heard of Portugal, yet it is not the most popular of vacation get-aways. I recently flew to Lisbon to visit some friends not knowing what to expect from this unfamiliar country. Who are the Portuguese, and what is their country about?*

Portugal is a small country that neighbors the lower western part of Spain. It typically boasts mild temperatures during the winters, and warm, sunny weather in summer, allowing for ample beach weather along its coasts. Cool, damp temperatures on a hillside can be very deceiving, as it may be very warm and pleasant on the beach below.

I was impressed by the coastal city of Lisbon and the areas surrounding it. The pastel colored homes decorate the hillsides around the city. Pale yellow, blue, pink, and green walls contrast against vivid blue skies and lush green fauna. From the hillsides, the view of the sea looks like a monochrome painting in various shades of turquoise blue. Colorful ships dot the water and a group of windsurfers resemble colorful butterflies on the vibrant ocean water.

Our first stop was Cascais, a popular city near Lisbon. We drank a well-deserved coffee after our long indirect flight from the US. The espresso-style coffee, known as a "bica", was delicious and a great start to the day. From

there, a visit to the historical city of Sintra and a walk through narrow pedestrian cobblestone streets brought us to colorful shops displaying hand painted ceramics – tiles, plates, olive dishes, etc. Prices were reasonable enough to be tempting, so that the weight of the purchases became more of an issue than their cost. The Portuguese make a big effort to speak English, especially in tourist areas, but show their appreciation when you attempt to say a few words in their language.

A local *pasteria* gave us a haven for a quick bite. We ate our first "tosti" – the Portuguese version of a grilled cheese sandwich. The bread was delicious... wholesome, healthy, and full of flavor. Tostis quickly became a lunch favorite.

Over the course of the week, I sampled Portuguese specialty dishes and wines. Never disappointed in either, I quickly realized a pattern in the cooking preparations. Everything must be fresh – seafood, vegetables, fruit – everything. You will rarely find sauces on the fish or dressings on the salads, since these are viewed as

an indication that the food is less than perfectly fresh. The exception to this is "Bacalau". This salt cod is preserved for long periods of time and can be ordered at local restaurants and bought at grocery stores.

I found the people of Portugal to be very hospitable and friendly. Expatriates feel

*(Continued on page 2)*



## Portugal: Suggested Reading

Finding a book to help best describe Portugal is a challenging task. Although travel books are available, they tend to be more factual than personal in their expression.

An interesting alternative is to read a cookbook that concentrates on the country you wish to learn about.

Jean Anderson, author of "The Food of Portugal" has traveled to Portugal more than 75 times over the past 30 years. She has fallen in love with the people, landscape, and food, and calls this beautiful country her second home. Anderson describes some of her experiences with the Portu-



guese people... how she was taken in and fed by a stranger when she was cold and lost, or the time she helped gather grapes for the Port wine harvest. Her enthusiasm for this remarkable country is contagious and makes you want to experience it for yourself.

A highlight of this book is a chapter devoted to *The Language of Portuguese Food, Drink and Dining*, which serves as a guide to food and ingredient descriptions. Full of delightful recipes, beautiful photographs, and cultural information, this book is a wonderful companion for anyone traveling or moving to Portugal.

- Lorraine Gachelin

### The Music of Portugal

*The most popular music is Fado. This can be referred to as the Portuguese blues. Many bars and cafes have fado singers, although some are more authentic than others. Older fado music is slowly dying out as more modern and younger singers are taking stage. Mixed feelings accompany this transition. Fado music, whether young or old, has a sadness to it that can leave you feeling very melancholy.*

## European Treasure... *(Continued from page 1)*

that although warm, the Portuguese are very private, making it rather difficult to make friends. The Portuguese culture is very family oriented, and once you are accepted, you are part of their "family" for life. As in many Latin cultures, greater priority is placed on relationships than on being disciplined. Time runs slower, and rules and regulations are not easily enforced.

Within Portugal, the principle vacation spot is in the Algarve. This area is located in the southern part of the country, about 2½ hours from Lisbon. Porto, another popular destination farther north along the coast, is known for its Port wines. Different regions of the country offer their own wines and specialties. Inland, the landscape is very diverse - everything from rugged, dry terrain to lush green hills and countryside.

Portugal is a European gem. It has not yet been overrun by tourists, offers a rich culture and history, and is quaint and full of charm. You will leave this country with the desire to return again soon to learn and discover more.

- Lorraine Gachelin



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