

Portugal: A Travelog

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My daughter, Meera, and I just returned from a 10-day vacation in Portugal, and below are some of my thoughts.

When planning a European vacation, most people think of France, Germany, Italy, and Spain as destinations—Portugal is not thought of too often. Yet, Portugal, with a population of about 10 million attracts 31 million tourists per year. That's like the U.S., hosting almost a billion tourists per year! Many Portuguese also feel they are living in the shadow of its much larger neighbor—Spain—with a population of 47.6 million and 104.6 million tourists in 2022. So, Portugal is doing better in the population-to-tourists ratio.

We spent three days in Lisbon (pop: a little over 500,000), the Capitol and largest city in Portugal, three days in Saó Miguel Island, one of the Azores Islands, a day in Aviero ("Venice of Portugal"), and two days in Porto (pop: 238,000). One thing we noticed in every city we visited was, they are full of palaces and/or castles; every town or village has a beautiful, yet simple, church built a few centuries ago. Even though many churches may not have the spectacular frescoes or stained glass windows that one would find in France, Germany, or Spain, the ones in Portugal—many of them have been rebuilt following foreign conquests or natural disasters—have their own beauty with marble statues and tiles.

Lisbon and Environs

Both Lisbon and Porto reminded us of San Francisco with many hills, steep roads, and sidewalks with steps or long escalators to help pedestrians. The architecture of buildings, many of them rebuilt after the [Great Lisbon Earthquake](#) of 1755 of an estimated 7.7 or greater, is remarkable. The earthquake occurred on Saturday, November 1, [Feast of All Saints](#), at around 09:40 local time. The resulting Tsunami and hundreds of fires caused by burning candles in churches around the city cost an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 lives lost in a city with a population of 200,000. Praying in churches on a holy day and dying from natural disasters? These events reportedly led to the development of [theodicy](#), a vindication of God. Not to digress, burning and mass shootings in churches and the killing of innocent folks, especially children, in shopping malls and schools here in the U. S. have already led citizenry to theodicy.

Below are some pics from Lisbon.







[25 de Abril Bridge](#) (April 25 Bridge)¹ crosses the [Tagus River](#) Golden Gate Bridge look-alike in Lisbon with a Christ the Redeemer statue in the distant background, inspired by the one in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

¹ From its inauguration on August 6, 1966 up to 1974, the bridge was named **Salazar Bridge** (*Ponte Salazar*), after Portuguese Prime Minister [António de Oliveira Salazar](#), who ordered its construction. After the [Carnation Revolution](#), which overthrew the remnants of [Salazar's regime](#), the bridge was renamed for April 25, the date of the revolution.



Tomb of Vasco Da Gama, who died in Cochin (Kochi), India, in 1524.



Torre de Belém, often shown in the opening scenes of *Wheel of Fortune*.

Sintra

Another picturesque town (pop: 386,000) near Lisbon with many castles and palaces, most of them built in the 16th and 17th centuries. The architecture of these palaces is strongly influenced by the Moors, as evidenced by beautiful marble tiles and the exterior architecture, reminding one of the hundreds of Mughal-inspired structures in India, including the Taj Mahal.



Palacio Nacional de Sintra



Interior of the Palacio Nacional de Sintra



Palacio da Pena



Patio of the Palacio da Pena

Saó Miguel Island, Azores

We flew from Lisbon to Ponta Delgada (Straight Point) on the Saó Miguel Island of the Azores. This Island is one of the most beautiful ones that we've visited—full of lush and green hills, mountains, and livestock farms raising dairy cattle, sheep, and goats for milk and cheese. Also, home to the only pineapple farms and a tree plantation ('factory' as they call it) in Europe.



Pineapple Plantation



São Sebastião (San Sebastian)



Feteiras



Sete Cidades (Seven Cities)



Ginetes



Elephant-Trunk Rock Formation, Capelas



Indian Restaurant, São Sebastião



Jardin Publico da Courela, Hot Water Springs, Fumas



Povoação - Fumas, São Miguel



Tea Deflector, Gorreana Tea Plantation, Ribeira Grande – Maia



Gorreana Tea Plantation, Ribeira Grande – Maia



Samosa, anyone?



Castle, Obidos



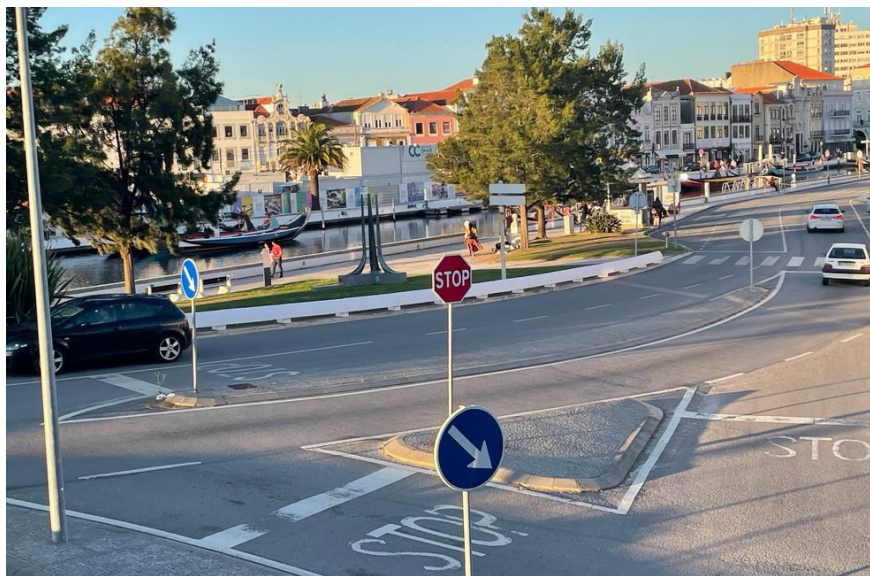
Leaving Obidos



Alcobaça Monastery



University of Coimbra, one of the oldest universities in Europe; founded in 1290.



Aviero, called Venice of Portugal because of its canals.



A store in Porto



The bookstore in Porto that inspired the Harry Potter series author J. K. Rowling.



Village of New Gaia, across the River Douro from Porto.



View from Taylor Winery, Lamego, Duoro Valley

Factoid

As most of us know, Portugal once colonized Goa, Daman, and Diu in India. On our boat trip, we met a couple, Sebastian and Maria D'Mello, from Goa, India. D'Mello, along with Cunha, D'Silva, D'Souza, Fonseca, and Ribeiro, is a common surname of Christians in India, thanks to their Portuguese heritage.

Sebastian told us that Goa-born Indians, once they move to Portugal, can get a permanent resident visa in Goa in two years and citizenship five years after that. That explains why we found quite a few Indians (and other South Asians) in Lisbon running mini-markets, Indian restaurants, etc.



On a boating trip in Pinhão.



Home of Ferdinand Magellan in Sabrosa, who was born on February 4, 1480.



Sign at a Porto Airport lounge.

Conclusions

Overall, this trip was fascinating and memorable. The fact that almost everyone we dealt with spoke English made it easier for us to get around. We were told English is the medium of instruction for all undergraduates in the country. Portugal has no reason to feel inferior vis-à-vis Spain. After all, Italian-born Columbus convinced Spain's Catholic Monarchs to sponsor his trip to India. However, he went the wrong way and found the New World and America. On the other hand, Vasco Da Gama went the right way and found India and established a highly profitable spice trade between Europe and India.