

The Best of Portugal

Centuries ago, Portugal was a pioneer of worldwide exploration. Until recently, however, it was never as successful in attracting visitors to its own shores. Outside of greater Lisbon, the Algarve, and the island of Madeira, Portugal remained unknown and undiscovered by the mainstream visitor for many decades.

Today's travelers are beginning to realize that Portugal has been unjustly overlooked. It offers sandy beaches, art treasures, flavorful cuisine, a unique form of architecture (Manueline), charming handicrafts, a mild climate, moderate hotel rates, and polite and friendly people. Only 2 million annual visitors came to Portugal in the late 1970s. The number swelled to 20 million in the mid-1990s, and an explosion of hotel and resort building has kept pace. Today Portugal attracts some 22 million visitors annually.

Despite its small size—225km (140 miles) wide and 612km (380 miles) long—Portugal is one of the most rewarding travel destinations in Europe. Exploring its towns, cities, villages, and countryside will likely take longer than expected because there is so much richness and variety along the way.

The people, whose warmth is legendary, inhabit a land of extraordinary variety. You'll see almond trees in the African-looking Algarve; cork forests and fields of golden wheat in Alentejo; ranches in Ribatejo; narrow, winding streets in the Alfama in Lisbon; ox-drawn carts crossing the plains of Minho; and vineyards in the Douro. Azaleas, rhododendrons, and canna grow for miles on end; the sound of fado music drifts out of small cafes; windmills clack in the Atlantic breezes; sardine boats bob in the bays; and gleaming whitewashed houses glisten in the sun. And the sea is never far away.

The following list is merely a jumping-off point for the discoveries, like those by the mariners of old, that you'll eventually make on your own in Portugal.

1 FROMMER'S FAVORITE PORTUGAL EXPERIENCES

- **Hiking in the Algarve:** Portugal's incredible physical beauty makes it a spectacular place for outdoor activities. In the southern Algarve region's low-lying lagoons and rocky highlands, the panoramas extend for miles over the nearby ocean. Especially rewarding is trekking through the territory near Sagres, which has retained its mystical hold on journeyers since it was known as the end of the world. Other worthwhile hikes include the footpaths around the villages of Silves and Monchique, where eroded river valleys have changed little since the Moorish occupation. See chapter 10.
- **Pousada-Hopping:** After World War II, the Portuguese government recognized that the patrimony of its great past was desperately in need of renovation. It transformed dozens of monasteries, palaces, and convents into hotels, honoring the historical authenticity of their architectural cores. Today's travelers can intimately experience some of Portugal's greatest architecture by

staying in a *pousada*, part of a chain of state-owned and -operated hotels. The rooms are often far from opulent, and the government-appointed staffs will probably be more bureaucratic than you'd like. Nonetheless, *pousada*-hopping rewards with insights into the Portugal of long ago.

- **Playing Golf by the Sea:** British merchants trading in Portugal's excellent wines imported the sport of golf around 1890. Until the 1960s, it remained a diversion only for the very wealthy. Then an explosion of interest from abroad led to the creation of at least 30 major courses. Many courses lie near Estoril and in the southern Algarve. The combination of great weather, verdant fairways, and azure seas and skies is almost addictive (as if golf fanatics needed additional motivation).

- **Swooning to Fado:** After soccer, *fado* (which translates as "fate") music is the national obsession. A lyrical homage to the bruised or broken heart, *fado* assumes forms that are as old as the troubadours. Its four-line stanzas of unrhymed verse, performed by such legendary stars as Amália Rodriguez, capture the nation's collective unconscious. Hearing the lament of the *fadistas* (*fado* singers) in clubs is the best way to appreciate the melancholy dignity of Iberia's western edge.

- **Finding a Solitary Beach:** Portugal has long been famous for the glamour and style of the beaches near Estoril, Cascais, Setúbal, and Sesimbra. More recently, the Algarve, with its 200km (124 miles) of tawny sands, gorgeous blue-green waters, and rocky coves, has captivated the imagination of northern Europeans. While the most famous beaches are likely to be very crowded, you can find solitude on the sands if you stop beside lonely expanses of any coastal road in northern Portugal.

- **Fishing in Rich Coastal Waters:** Portugal's position on the Atlantic, its (largely) unpolluted waters, and its flowing rivers encourage concentrations of fish. You won't be the first to plumb these waters—Portugal fed itself for hundreds of generations using nets and lines, and its maritime and fishing traditions are among the most entrenched in Europe. The mild weather allows fishing year-round for more than 200 species, including varieties not seen anywhere else (such as the 2m-long/6-ft. scabbard). The country's rivers and lakes produce three species of trout, as well as black bass and salmon; the cold Atlantic abounds in sea bass, shark, tope, grouper, skate, and swordfish.

- **Trekking to the End of the World:** For medieval Europeans, the southwestern tip of Portugal represented the final frontier of human security and power. Beyond that point, the oceans were dark and fearful, filled with demons waiting to devour the bodies and souls of mariners foolhardy enough to sail upon them. Adding Sagres and its peninsula to the Portuguese nation cost thousands of lives in battle against the Moors, and getting there required weeks of travel over rocky deserts. Making a pilgrimage to this outpost is one of the loneliest and most majestic experiences in Portugal. Come here to pay your respects to the navigators who embarked from Sagres on journeys to death or glory. Half a millennium later, the excitement of those long-ago voyages still permeates this lonely corner. See chapter 10.

- **Losing It at a Spa:** Compared to the sybaritic luxury of spas in Germany and France, Portuguese spas are underaccessorized, and by California's frenetic standards, they're positively sleepy. Still, central and northern Portugal share about half a dozen spas whose sulfur-rich

waters have been considered therapeutic since the days of the ancient Romans. Luso, Monte Real, and Cúria are the country's most famous spas, followed closely by Caldas do Gerês, Vimeiro, and São Pedro do Sul. Don't expect the latest in choreographed aerobics and spinning classes; instead, sink into communion with nature, rid your body of the toxins of urban life, and retire early every night for recuperative sleep.

- **Tasting & Touring in Port Wine Country:** Across the Rio Douro from the heart of the northern city of Porto lies Vila Nova de Gaia, the headquarters

of the port-wine trade since the 1600s. From vineyards along the Douro, wine is transported to "lodges" (warehouses), where it is matured, bottled, and eventually shipped around the world. More than 25 companies, including such well-known names as Sandeman, maintain port-wine lodges here. Each offers free guided tours, always ending with a tasting of one or two of the house wines. The tourist office in Porto will provide you with a map if you'd like to drive along the Douro to see the vineyards. See chapter 13.

2 THE BEST TOWNS TO VISIT

- **Sintra:** Since the Moorish occupation, Portuguese kings and nobles have recognized this town's irresistible charm. You'll find a denser concentration of beautiful villas and gardens here than anywhere else in Portugal. At least five major palaces and convents are tucked amid the lush vegetation. See chapter 7.
- **Óbidos:** This town is the most perfectly preserved 13th-century village in central Portugal. Its historical authenticity is the primary concern of the population of more than 5,000. For 600 years, Óbidos was the personal property of Portuguese queens, a symbolic love offering from their adoring husbands. Óbidos has always breathed romance. See chapter 9.
- **Nazaré:** This folkloric fishing village in central Portugal produces wonderful handicrafts. The town has a strong sense of traditional culture that's distinctly different from that of nearby communities. See chapter 9.
- **Fátima:** In 1913, an apparition of the Virgin Mary appeared to three shepherd children from Fátima, who were called upon to spread a message of peace. Their story was at first discounted and then embraced by a church hierarchy under assault by the ravages of World War I. Later, 70,000 people who were assembled on the site claimed to witness miracles. Today Fátima is the most-visited pilgrimage site in Iberia, home to dozens of imposing churches and monuments. See chapter 9.
- **Évora:** This is one of the country's most perfectly preserved architectural gems. A well-preserved ancient Roman temple rises across the street from convents and monasteries that flourished when the kings of Portugal used this town as their capital in the 12th century. These buildings combine with remnants of the Moorish occupation to form one of the most alluring, if not largest, architectural medleys in Europe. See chapter 11.
- **Tomar:** Beginning in the 12th century, the Knights Templar and later the Knights of Christ (two warlike and semimonastic sects) designated Tomar as their Portuguese headquarters. They lavished the town with adornments over the centuries until it looked, as it does today, like a living monument to

the architecture of medieval Portugal. See chapter 11.

- **Coimbra:** The country's academic center, this town boasts a university with roots in the Middle Ages, a rich historic core, and a tradition of troubadour-style singing that's one of the most vital in Iberia. See chapter 12.
- **Porto:** The second city of Portugal, Porto has rich associations with the port-wine trade. Entrepreneurs who returned home after making their fortunes in Brazil built some of the town's most imposing villas here in the late 19th century. But as Portugal's economic center, Porto has also moved into the 21st century, with new office buildings, modern apartment complexes, fashionable shops and restaurants in its commercial heart, and such stunning developments as the Fundação Serralves, a National Museum of Modern Art, set in a 44-acre park in the western part of the city. See chapter 13.
- **Guimarães:** The birthplace of the country's first king, Afonso Henriques, and the core from which the country expanded, Guimarães is the cradle of Portugal. Its medieval section is one of the most authentic anywhere. The town was also the birthplace of Gil Vicente (1465–1537), a playwright referred to as the Shakespeare of Portugal. See chapter 14.
- **Viana do Castelo:** This northern town with strong folkloric traditions is noted for pottery, women's regional dresses, abundant rainfall, and a collection of

distinctive and dignified public buildings. Its heyday was in the 1500s, when fleets departed from here to fish for cod as far away as Newfoundland. Profits from their activities helped pay for the town's handsome collection of Manueline buildings. See chapter 14.

- **Guincho:** On the Estoril Coast, 9km (5½ miles) northwest of Cascais, this is the westernmost point in continental Europe. It's a dramatic, spectacular site where waves crash against three sides of a restored 17th-century fortress (now the Hotel do Guincho, one of the most unusual, luxurious hotels in Europe). Balconies—best shared with a loved one—overlook the panoramic scene, with beaches on both sides. The crashing surf makes good background music for a torrid affair straight out of a romance novel. See chapter 7.
- **Serra de Arrábida:** This whale-shaped ridge never exceeds 1,525m (5,000 ft.) in height. The masses of wildflowers that flank its sides are among the most colorful and varied in Iberia. The Serra lies between Sesimbra and Setúbal, across the estuary of the Tagus from Lisbon. En route from Lisbon, you'll find crowded and secluded beaches, a medieval Capuchin monastery (the Convento Novo), and a smattering of good restaurants. The town of Sesimbra, with its historic, sleepy main square and ruined fortresses, offers bars, restaurants, and insight into the Iberia of a bygone era. See chapter 8.

3 THE BEST BEACHES

- **Costa do Sol:** Sometimes called the Estoril Coast, this stretch of seafloor extends 32km (20 miles) west of Lisbon. Its two major resorts are Estoril and Cascais. Once the playground of the wintering wealthy, the area now

attracts throngs of tourists, mainly from northern Europe. See chapter 7.

- **The Algarve:** This region at the southern tip of Portugal gained its place on world tourist maps because of its string of beautiful, clean, sandy beaches.

Lovely coves, caves, and grottos—some accessible only by boat—add to the region's allure. Albufeira and Praia da Rocha are set against a backdrop of towering rock formations; the best cove beach is at Lagos, a former Moorish town with a deepwater harbor and wide bay. See chapter 10.

- **The Beiras:** In central Portugal, north of Lisbon, some of the finest beaches in Europe open onto the Atlantic. Like gems in a necklace, good, sandy beaches stretch from Praia de Leirosa north to Praia de Espinho. The surf can be heavy and the undertow strong. Major resorts include Figueira da Foz and nearby Buarcos. The beaches between Praia de

Mira and Costa Nova are more secluded. See chapter 12.

- **Costa Verde:** As the northern coastline approaches Galicia in Spain, the Atlantic waters grow colder, and even in summer they're likely to be windswept. But on certain days they're among the most dramatic in Europe. We like the wide, sandy beach at Ponte de Lima, but there are many others. Notable destinations are the resort of Espinho, south of Porto, and other beach meccas, including Póvoa do Varzim and Ofir, which have some of the best hotels, restaurants, and watersports equipment in the country. See chapter 13.

4 THE BEST HOTELS

- **Pestana Palace** (Lisbon; ☎ 21/361-56-00; www.pestana.com): One of the grandest hotels to open in Portugal in years, this hotel lies in an upscale residential section 5km (3 miles) from the historic center. It was carved out of a villa built in 1907. It's a stunning example of the Romantic Revival architectural style. See p. 102.
- **Four Seasons Hotel Ritz Lisbon** (Lisbon; ☎ 800/819-5053 in the U.S., or 21/381-14-00; www.fourseasons.com): Built in the 1950s and host to a roster that reads like a who's who of international glamour, the Ritz is one of Portugal's legendary hotels. Everywhere in the hotel, you'll get the impression that a swanky reception is about to begin. See p. 90.
- **York House Hotel** (Lisbon; ☎ 21/396-24-35; www.yorkhouselisboa.com): A former 17th-century convent and private home, York House is the place to stay in Lisbon. It abounds with climbing vines, antiques, four-poster beds, and Oriental carpeting—fittings and

furnishings that maintain the building's historical character without flattening your wallet. See p. 97.

- **Albatroz** (Cascais; ☎ 21/484-73-80; www.albatrozhotels.com): In a garden overlooking the Atlantic, this inn was originally built as the summer residence of the dukes of Loulé. Since its transformation into a stylish hotel, its aristocratic elegance has drawn guests from throughout Europe. Service is impeccable. See p. 169.
- **Palácio Estoril** (Estoril; ☎ 21/464-80-00; www.palacioestorilhotel.com): The Palácio enjoyed its heyday during the 1950s and 1960s, when every deposed monarch of Europe seemed to disappear into the Art Deco hotel's sumptuous suites. The result: the curious survival in Estoril of the royal ambience of a Europe gone by. Today "the Palace" maintains a staff whose old-timers are among the best in Europe at offering royal treatment to guests. See p. 163.
- **Tivoli Palácio de Seteais** (Sintra; ☎ 21/923-32-00; www.tivolihotels.com):

One of the most elegant hotels in Portugal bears one of the country's most ironic names. In 1807, a treaty ending the Napoleonic campaign in Portugal was signed here, with terms so humiliating to the Portuguese that they labeled the building the Palace of the Seven Sighs. Any sighing you're likely to do today will be from pleasure—at the setting, the lavish gardens, and the reminders of an old-world way of life. See p. 186.

- **Dona Filipa & San Lorenzo Golf Resort** (Almancil; ☎ 28/935-72-00; www.lemeridien.com): Rising above the sea, this hotel is comfortable, modern, well designed, and sophisticated, but the most stunning feature is the 180 hectares (445 acres) surrounding it. Part of the land is devoted to a superb golf course. Don't let the severe exterior fool you—the inside is richly appointed with Chinese and Portuguese accessories, many of them antique. See p. 259.
- **Monte do Casal** (Estói; ☎ 28/999-15-03; www.montedocasal.pt): An 18th-century country house on the Algarve converted into one of the most charming and tranquil places along the coast, Monte do Casal is set on 3 hectares (7½ acres) of flowering trees. It offers a chance to escape from the curse of the high-rise sea resort hotels and into an inn of style that captures some of the spirit of the region itself. See p. 268.
- **Bussaco Palace Hotel** (Buçaco; ☎ 23/193-79-70; www.almeidahotels.com): This palace, built between 1888 and 1907 as a sylvan refuge for the royal family, saw tragedy early. A year after its completion, the king and his oldest son were assassinated, leaving Queen Amélia to grieve within its *azulejo*-sheathed walls. In 1910, the palace's enterprising Swiss chef persuaded the government to allow him to transform the place into an upscale hotel. Bittersweet memories of its royal past still seem to linger within the thick walls. See p. 308.
- **HF Ipanema Park** (Porto; ☎ 22/532-21-00; www.ipanemaparkhotel.pt): One of the leading government-rated five-star hotels in the north of Portugal offers 15 floors of grand comfort with the largest roster of facilities in the city, including an outdoor pool with a panoramic view on the 15th floor. This bastion of good taste and luxury is as popular with tourists as it is with its business clients. See p. 334.
- **Hotel Infante Sagres** (Porto; ☎ 22/339-85-00; www.hotelinfantesagres.pt): A textile magnate built this hotel in 1951 in the style of a Portuguese manor house. Its elegant detailing makes it appear much older than it is. It's the most nostalgic, elegant, and ornate hotel in Porto. The managers began their careers here as teenage bellboys, and the staff members take obvious pride in their hotel. See p. 334.
- **Reid's Palace** (Funchal; ☎ 800/223-6800 in the U.S., or 29/171-71-71; www.reidspalace.com): For more than a century (it was founded in 1891 and enlarged in 1968), Reid's has fulfilled the colonial fantasies of every British imperialist abroad. Set on a rocky promontory, it serves tea promptly at 4pm, contains English antiques that the Portuguese staff waxes once a week, and plays chimes to announce the beginning of the dinner service. It also features terraced gardens spilling down to the sea and a very correct clientele that once included Winston Churchill. See p. 388.
- **Praia D'El Rey Marriott Golf & Beach Resort** (Amoreira; ☎ 26/290-51-00; www.marriott.com/lisdr): Devotees of modern luxury should head to one of the most spectacular resorts north of Lisbon, 16km (10 miles) west of the romantic walled city of Óbidos.

It opens onto a sandy beach and boasts an 18-hole golf course on 243 hectares (600 acres) of oceanfront property. Its

facilities include a spa, health club, tennis courts, and a choice of three first-class restaurants. See p. 211.

5 THE BEST POUSADAS

- **Pousada de Setúbal, São Filipe** (Setúbal; ☎ 26/555-00-70; www.pousadas.pt): During the 1500s, this structure served as a defensive link in a chain of fortresses surrounding Lisbon. Today it boasts antique *azulejos* (glazed earthenware tiles), panoramic views of the town, and a keen sense of Portuguese history. The rooms are simple (some might say monastic) but comfortable and tidy. See p. 204.
- **Pousada de Óbidos, Castelo de Óbidos** (Óbidos; ☎ 26/295-50-80; www.pousadas.pt): This pousada lies in a wing of the castle that protects one of the most perfectly preserved medieval towns in Portugal. In 1285, King Dinis offered the castle—along with the entire village—to his beloved Queen Isabel. Inside, the medieval aesthetic coexists with improved plumbing, electricity, and unobtrusive contemporary comforts. See p. 211.
- **Pousada de Elvas, Santa Luzia** (Elvas; ☎ 26/863-74-70; www.pousadas.pt): This pousada opened in 1942 during the most horrible days of World War II, near the strategic border crossing between neutral Portugal and fascist Spain. Vaguely Moorish in design, with two low-slung stories, it was most recently renovated in 1992. It offers comfortable, colorful lodgings. See p. 281.
- **Pousada de Estremoz, Rainha Santa Isabel** (Estremoz; ☎ 26/833-20-75; www.pousadas.pt): Housed in a structure built during the Middle Ages, the Santa Isabel is the most lavish pousada in Portugal. Reproductions of 17th-century antiques, about .5 hectares (1¼ acres) of gleaming marble, and elaborately detailed tapestries create one of the most authentic old-fashioned decors in the region. Guests have included Vasco da Gama, who was received here by Dom Manuel before the explorer's departure for India. See p. 279.
- **Pousada de Évora, Lóios** (Évora; ☎ 26/673-00-70; www.pousadas.pt): This pousada was conceived as a monastery and rebuilt in 1485 adjacent to the town's ancient Roman temple. The purity of its design and the absence of exterior encroachments from the modern world contribute to one of the most aesthetically thrilling experiences in Portugal. Inside there are no traces left of its original austerity—everything is luxurious and comfortable. See p. 285.

6 THE BEST RESTAURANTS

- **Clara Restaurante** (Lisbon; ☎ 21/885-30-53; www.lisboa-clara.pt): This elegant citadel, with a refined dining room playing soft piano music and serving a remarkable Portuguese and international cuisine, is a favorite among serious palates. The chefs take special care with all their ingredients, and we sing their praises year after year for their impeccable offerings. See p. 106.
- **Gambrinus** (Lisbon; ☎ 21/342-14-66; www.gambrinuslisboa.com): It isn't as upscale as some of its competitors or the preferred rendezvous of the

country's most distinguished aristocrats. Nonetheless, this is one of the hippest, best-managed seafood restaurants in Lisbon; the stand-up bar proffers an astonishing array of shellfish. Enjoy a glass of dry white port accompanied by some of the most exotic seafood in the Atlantic. See p. 106.

- **Casa da Comida** (Lisbon; ☎ 21/388-53-76): This restaurant is probably at its best on foggy evenings, when roaring fireplaces remove the damp chill from the air. Don't let the prosaic name fool you—some visitors prefer its Portuguese-French cuisine over the food at any other restaurant in Lisbon. Portions are ample, and the ambience is bracing and healthful. See p. 104.
- **Cozinha Velha** (Queluz; ☎ 21/435-02-32): During the 1700s, food for the monarchy's most lavish banquets was prepared here (the name means "old kitchen"). Today the high-ceilinged kitchens serve an unusual restaurant, whose cuisine reflects the old days of Portuguese royalty. Dishes include *cataplana*, a savory fish stew with clams, shrimp, and monkfish. Equally outstanding is soufflélike *bacalhau espirotual* (codfish), which takes 45 minutes to prepare and should be ordered when you make your reservation. The restaurant is celebrated for its desserts, many of which are based on ancient convent recipes. See p. 179.
- **Porto de Santa Maria** (Guincho; ☎ 21/487-10-36 or 21/487-02-40; www.portosantamaria.com): The understated beige-and-white decor highlights the restaurant's bubbling aquarium and sea view. The menu lists nearly every conceivable kind of shellfish, served in

the freshest possible combinations in a justifiably popular dining room. See p. 178.

- **Four Seasons** (in the Palácio Estoril, Estoril; ☎ 21/464-80-00): This tranquil restaurant, with its rich colors and artful accents, has been a fixture in Estoril since the days when deposed European monarchs assembled here with their entourages. High glamour, old-world service, and impeccably prepared international cuisine are this place's hallmarks. See p. 165.
- **Casa Velha Restaurante** (Quinta do Lago, near Almancil; ☎ 28/939-49-83; www.restaurante-casavelha.com): On a rocky hilltop above the modern resort of Quinta do Lago (with which it is not associated), this restaurant occupies a century-old farmhouse, with kitchens modernized for the preparation of gourmet food. The sophisticated cuisine includes preparations of upscale French and Portuguese recipes. See p. 260.
- **Churrascão do Mar** (Porto; ☎ 22/609-63-82): Porto's most elegant restaurant, serving Brazilian cuisine, is housed in a 19th-century antique manor restored to its Belle Epoque glory. The town's finest chefs turn out a savory cuisine specializing in grilled seafood. See p. 339.
- **Don Tonho** (Porto; ☎ 22/200-43-07): Visiting celebrities are usually directed to this citadel of fine cuisine (both European and Portuguese) in the eastern end of this port city. The setting perfectly suits the bracing cuisine that often features freshly caught fish from the Atlantic. The prices are also surprisingly affordable for such deluxe dishes. See p. 340.

7 THE BEST PALACES & CASTLES

- **Castelo de São Jorge** (the Alfama, Lisbon; ☎ 21/880-06-20; www.castelo-saorge.egeac.pt): This hilltop has long

been valued as a fortification to protect settlements along the Tagus. Today the bulky castle crowns one of the most

densely populated medieval neighborhoods of Lisbon, the Alfama. It encompasses a nostalgic collection of thick stone walls, medieval battlements, Catholic and feudal iconography, verdant landscaping, and sweeping views of one of Europe's greatest harbors. See p. 124.

- **Palácio Nacional de Queluz** (near Lisbon; © 21/434-38-60; www.ippar.pt/monumentos/palacio_queluz.html): Designed for the presentation of music and royal receptions in the 1700s, this castle was modeled as a more intimate version of Versailles. It's a symmetrical building ringed with gardens, fountains, and sculptures of mythical heroes and maidens. Although gilt, crystal, and frescoes fill its interior, most Portuguese are proudest of the *azulejos* room, where hand-painted blue-and-white tiles depict day-to-day life in the Portuguese colonies of Macao and Brazil. See p. 180.
- **Palácio Nacional de Pena** (Sintra; © 21/910-53-40; www.parquesdesintra.pt): Only a cosmopolitan 19th-century courtier could have produced this eclectic, expensive mélange of architectural styles. Set in a 200-hectare (495-acre) walled park, it was commissioned by the German-born consort of the Portuguese queen; it reminds some visitors of the Bavarian castles of Mad King Ludwig. Appointed with heavy furnishings and rich ornamentation, it's

a symbol of the Portuguese monarchs in their most aesthetically decadent stages. See p. 184.

- **Castelo dos Mouros** (Sintra; © 21/923-73-00; www.parquesdesintra.pt): In the 19th century, the monarchs ordered that this castle, evocative of the Moorish occupation of Portugal, remain as a ruined ornament to embellish their sprawling parks and gardens. Set near the much larger, much more ornate Pena palace (see above), the squat, thick-walled fortress was begun around A.D. 750 by the Moors and captured with the help of Scandinavian Crusaders in 1147. It retains its jagged battlements, a quartet of eroded towers, and a ruined Romanesque chapel erected by the Portuguese as a symbol of their domination of former Moorish territories. See p. 182.
- **Bussaco Palace Hotel** (Buçaco; © 23/193-79-70; www.almeidahotels.com): Of all the buildings in this list, the Palace of Buçaco is the most important national icon. Completed in 1907, it's also the only one that operates as a hotel, allowing visitors to sleep within the walls of a former royal palace. Constructed from marble, bronze, stained glass, and exotic hardwoods, and inspired by the greatest buildings in the empire, it represents more poignantly than any other Portuguese palace the final days of the doomed aristocracy. See p. 308.

8 THE BEST MUSEUMS

- **Museu da Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian** (Lisbon; © 21/782-30-00; www.museu.gulbenkian.pt): Its namesake was an Armenian oil czar, Calouste Gulbenkian (1869–1955), whose fortune derived from a 5% royalty on most of the oil pumped out of Iraq. His eclectic collections of Asian

and European sculpture, paintings, antique coins, carpets, and furniture are on display in a modern compound in a lush garden. See p. 130.

- **Museu Nacional dos Coches** (Lisbon; © 21/361-08-50): Founded by Queen Amélia in 1904, when the horse-drawn buggy was becoming obsolete, this

museum is located on the premises of the riding school of the Palácio do Belém (the official home of the Portuguese president). It contains dozens of magnificent state carriages, some decorated with depictions of Portugal's maritime discoveries. See p. 129.

- **Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga** (Lisbon; ☎ 21/391-28-00; www.mnarteantiga-ipmuseus.pt): In the 1830s, the power of many of Portugal's fabulously wealthy monasteries was violently curbed. Many of the monasteries' art treasures, including the country's best collection of Portuguese primitives,

as well as gold and silver plates crafted from raw materials mined in India, are displayed at the 17th-century palace of the counts of Alvor. See p. 132.

- **Museu de Marinha** (Lisbon; ☎ 21/362-00-19; <http://museu.marinha.pt>): The most important maritime museum in the world—a rich tribute to Portugal's Age of Exploration—is in the west wing of the Jerónimos Monastery. The thousands of displays include royal galleons dripping with gilt and ringed with depictions of saltwater dragons and sea serpents. See p. 128.

9 THE BEST CHURCHES & ABBEYS

- **Mosteiro dos Jerónimos** (Belém; ☎ 21/362-00-34; www.mosteirojeronimos.pt): More than any other ecclesiastical building in Portugal, this complex represents the wealth that poured into Lisbon from the colonies during the Age of Discovery. Begun in 1502 in Belém, the seaport near the gates of Lisbon, it's the world's most distinctive Manueline church. Richly ornate and unlike any other building in Europe, it has, among other features, columns carved in patterns inspired by the rigging of Portuguese caravels laden with riches from Brazil and India. See p. 126.
- **Palácio Nacional de Mafra** (Mafra; ☎ 26/181-75-50; www.ippar.pt): This convent was originally intended to house only about a dozen monks, but after the king of Portugal was blessed with an heir, he became obsessed with its architecture and vastly augmented its scale. Construction began in 1717, and funding came from gold imported from Portuguese settlements in Brazil. Some 50,000 laborers toiled more than 13 years to complete the convent. Today the buildings alone cover 4 hectares

(9 acres) and include a royal palace as well as accommodations for 300 monks. A park whose outer wall measures 19km (12 miles) surrounds the complex. See p. 192.

- **Mosteiro de Santa Maria** (Alcobaça; ☎ 26/250-51-20): More closely associated with the Portuguese wars against the Moors than almost any other site in Iberia, this monastery was a gift from the first Portuguese king (Afonso Henriques) to the Cistercians in 1153. As part of one of the most dramatic land-improvement projects in Portuguese history, a community of ascetic monks cleared the surrounding forests, planted crops, dug irrigation ditches, and built a soaring church (completed in 1253) that critics cite as one of the purest and most artfully simple in Europe. See p. 215.
- **Mosteiro de Santa Maria da Vitória** (Batalha; ☎ 24/476-54-97): In 1385, the Castilian Spaniards and the Portuguese, led by a youth who had been crowned king only a week before, fought one of the most crucial battles in Iberian history. The outcome ensured

Portugal's independence for another 200 years. It was celebrated with the construction of the monastery at Batalha, whose style is a triumph of the Manueline and Flamboyant Gothic styles. See p. 222.

- **Convento da Ordem de Cristo** (Tomar; © 24/931-34-81; www.ippar.pt/monumentos/conjunto_cristo.html): Built in 1160 along the most hotly contested Muslim-Christian border in

Iberia, this convent was originally intended as a monastic fortress. Successful building programs lasted half a millennium, ultimately creating a museum of diverse architectural styles. Some of the interior windows, adorned with stone carvings of ropes, coral, frigate masts, seaweed, cables, and cork trees, are the most splendid examples of Manueline decoration in the world. See p. 272.

10 THE BEST SHOPPING

Here's a list of some of the more enchanting artifacts and handicrafts produced in Portugal:

- **Arraiolos Carpets:** The Moorish traditions that once prevailed in the town of Arraiolos, where the carpets are still manufactured, inspired their intricate stitching. Teams of embroiderers and weavers work for many days, using pure wool in combinations of petit point with more widely spaced ponto largo cross-stitches. The resulting depictions of garlands of fruit and flowers (a loose interpretation of French Aubusson carpets) and animals scampering around idealized gardens (a theme vaguely inspired by carpets from Persia and Turkey) are some of the most charming items for sale in Portugal. The size of the piece and the intricacy of the design determine the price, which is often less than half what you'd pay in North America. If you can't make it to Arraiolos, you'll find the carpets for sale at outlets in Lisbon.
- **Ceramics & Tiles:** Early in Portugal's history, builders learned to compensate for the lack of lumber by perfecting the arts of masonry, stuccoing, and ceramics. All were used to construct the country's sturdy, termite-proof buildings.

After the ouster of the Moors, their aesthetic endured in the designs painted on tiles and ceramic plates, vessels, and jugs. Later, styles from Holland, England, and China combined to influence a rich tradition of pottery-making. The most prevalent of these appear as the blue-and-white *azulejos* (tiles), each with an individual design, which adorn thousands of indoor and outdoor walls throughout the country. Equally charming are the thousands of plates, wine and water jugs, and vases adorned with sylvan landscapes populated with mythical creatures. New and (to a lesser extent) antique samples of any of these items can be acquired at outlets throughout Portugal.

- **Jewelry:** In Portugal, any piece of jewelry advertised as "gold" must contain at least 19.2 karats. This purity allows thousands of jewelers to spin the shining stuff into delicate filigree work with astounding detail. Whether you opt for a simple brooch or for a depiction in gold or filigreed silver of an 18th-century caravel in full four-masted sail, Portugal produces jewelry worthy of an infanta's dowry at prices more reasonable than you might expect. The country abounds in jewelry stores.

- **Handicrafts:** For centuries, the design and fabrication of lace, rugs, hand-knit clothing, woodcarvings, and embroidered linens have evolved in homes and workshops throughout Portugal. Although some of the cruder objects available for sale are a bit clunky, the best can be called art. From the north to the south, store after store offers regional handicrafts.
- **Leather Goods:** Iberia has always been a land of animal husbandry, bullfighting, and cattle breeding, and the Portuguese leather-making industry is known throughout the world. Its products include jackets, shoes, pocketbooks, and wallets, all of which sell for prices much more reasonable than those outside Portugal. The best stores are concentrated in Lisbon.

11 THE BEST OFFBEAT TRIPS

- **Horseback Riding Along the Coast:** Seeing this beautiful country from the back of a well-trained, even-tempered Lusitano is a rewarding experience, but some of the best opportunities can be had along the Atlantic Ocean beach. Some of the best tours are available through the American company Equitour. In addition to beach riding, the company offers trekking through olive groves, vineyards, pine forests, and lagoons. For more details, see chapter 3.
- **Appreciating Manueline Architecture:** Manuelino—as it's known in Portuguese—marked a dramatic artistic shift from the late Gothic style prevalent during the reign of King Dom Manuel. It mixes Christian motifs with shells, ropes, and strange aquatic shapes and is usually crowned with heraldic or religious symbols. The best example is the grand Mosteiro dos Jerónimos (Jerónimos Monastery) in Belém, outside Lisbon, dating from the 16th century (see chapter 6). Another towering example is the mysterious and astrologic visions of the famous window of the Convento da Ordem de Cristo (Convent of Christ) in Tomar, the bastion of the Knights Templar in days gone by. See p. 272.
- **Visiting the Lost Continent of Atlantis:** One of the most offbeat travel experiences in Europe is a trip to the Azores. Mythologists believe the remote Portuguese islands in the mid-Atlantic are the only remnants of the lost continent of Atlantis. For hundreds of years they were considered the end of the earth, the outer limits of the European sphere of influence, beyond which ships could not go. Even today they're a verdant but lonely archipelago where the winds of the ocean meet, cyclones call on each other, and urbanites can lose themselves in fog-bound contact with the sea. See p. 410 for info.
- **Paying a Call on Berlenga Island:** Berlenga is a granite island 11km (7 miles) west of the Portuguese coastline. The island has always been the first line of defense against invaders from the sea. In 1666, 28 Portuguese tried to withstand 1,500 Spaniards who bombarded the site from 15 ships. A medieval fortress demolished in the battle was rebuilt several decades later and today houses a no-frills hostel. The entire island and the rocky, uninhabited archipelago that surrounds it are a designated nature reserve whose flora and fauna—both above and below the surface of the sea—are protected from development and destruction. Boat transport departs from the Peniche Peninsula, about 92km (57 miles) north of Lisbon. See chapter 9.

- **Heading “Beyond the Mountains”:**

The northernmost district of Trás-os-Montes is a wild, rugged land whose name means “beyond the mountains.” Exploring this region provides a glimpse into a Portugal infrequently seen by outsiders. Most of the population lives in deep valleys, often in traditional houses built of shale or granite, and speaks a dialect of Galician similar to that spoken just across the border in

northwestern Spain. Much of the plateau is arid and rocky, but swift rivers and streams provide water for irrigation, and thermal springs have bubbled out of the earth since at least Roman times. You can drive through these savage landscapes, but don’t expect superhighways. What you’ll find are ruins of pre-Roman fortresses, dolmens, and cromlechs erected by prehistoric Celts, and decaying old churches. See chapter 14.