

TODAY'S NEWS

By Anne Greeno

Portugal

Wendy Dunham of Wendy Dunham Travel, Frank Cameron of Seaside 105.9 FM and Trafalgar once again hosted another great tour in Europe, this time in Portugal. Our 12 day tour took us to many great towns and cities, with visits to many important historic buildings and landmarks. Follow along on our journey through this amazing country.



Vacation Highlights

Portugal is a country steeped in history. Our group visited many cathedrals and fortresses that date back to the 10th century, including a Templar stronghold in Tomar. Portugal is also well known for its fishing exports as well as port and winemaking. Our group travelled around Portugal enjoying all it had to offer.

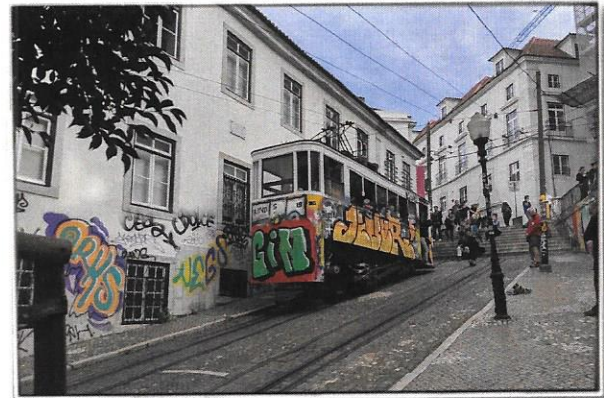
Lisbon

Getting Acquainted With Lisbon

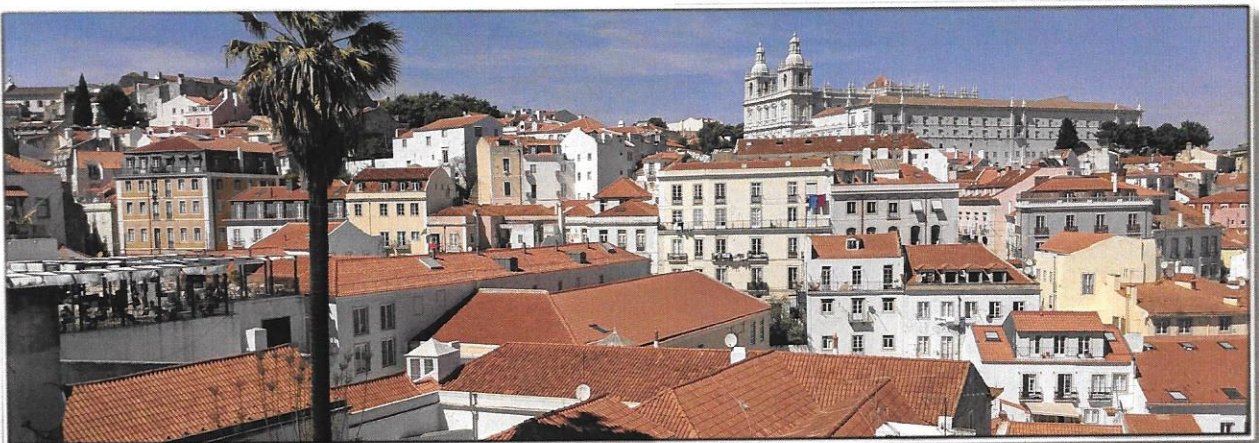
The group had free time before the official city tour started so a few of us gals went exploring. We ventured onto the subway and made our way to the old part of Lisbon. Look what we found!



Lisbon's fun side includes taking rides on the city's cable cars. The famous #28 travels up and down the old city's steep streets, while the Elevador da Glória funicular, dating back to 1885, goes up and down one road only, the Calçada da Glória.



Lisbon is a city built on hills. It has seven main boroughs, including the Alfama district in the old section of the city. The city was devastated by an earthquake in 1755 and many of its historic buildings were left in rubble. We explored this area on foot to truly feel the energy of history and culture come together. The views from this district were amazing!



Lisbon

Our Tour Begins

The group met up with a Local Specialist that toured us around various districts in the city. She provided excellent information on the many historical sites we visited.

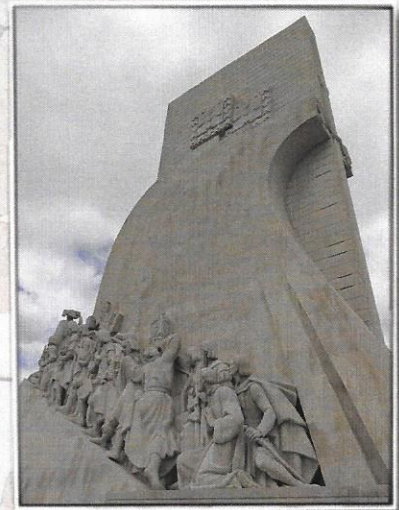
Lisbon is now the capital of Portugal after Afonso III moved it from Coimbra in 1256. The city has a very long history and was always considered a strategic central position with an excellent port for defense, trade and maritime exploration.

Monument to the Discoveries

Originally built in 1940, and then re-created in 1960, the Monument to the Discoveries recognizes many early explorers, including Henry the Navigator, King Afonso V, Vasco da Gama, Pedro Álvares Cabral and Ferdinand Magellan. It also pays tribute to navigators, writers, missionaries, a mathematician and a cartographer.

In front of the monument is the beautiful Compass Rose, spanning 50 meters across. Inside the Rose is a map of the world that charts Portuguese explorations. The most important dates in the history of the discoveries are marked where ships carrying Portuguese explorers first set foot on land.

Did you know the Portuguese were the first to cross the Cape of Good Hope?



Belém Tower

Built in the early 1500's, the Belém Tower is a fortress located on the north bank of the Tagus River. It was built to supplement the area's existing, but lacking, fortifications. The fortress was named the Castle of St. Vincent (Castelo de São Vicente de Belém), in honour of the patron saint of Lisbon. In 1983 it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Lisbon

Jeronimos Monastery

The Jeronimos (Hieronymites) Monastery was built in the 14th and 15th centuries and commemorates the return of Vasco da Gama from his exploration to India. Inside is the Church of Santa Maria with its temple being a single nave held up by six columns. The church houses the tombs of Kings Manuel and John III, as well as Vasco da Gama and Luís de Camões, an important Portuguese poet and writer.

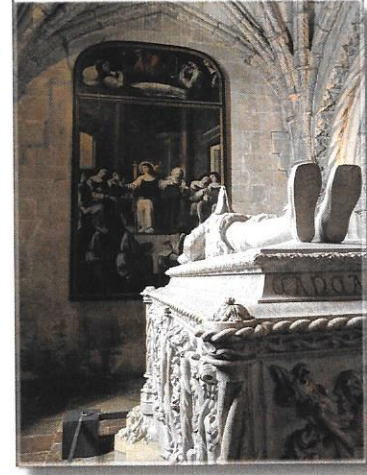
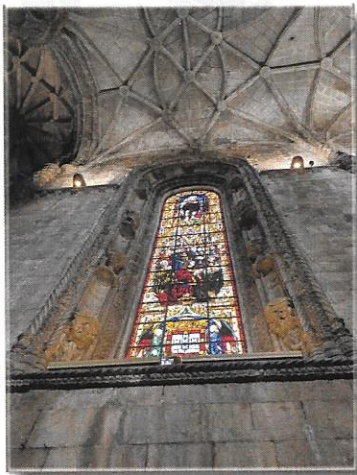
The Jeronimos Monastery became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983.



Attached to the church is a cloistered monastery, inhabited by monks of the Hieronymite order. The 20th century poet, Fernando Pessoa is buried in one of the arcades of the cloister.

The monastery was built to reflect the glory of the Portuguese Age of Discovery. In 1850, an archeological museum and a maritime museum were added.

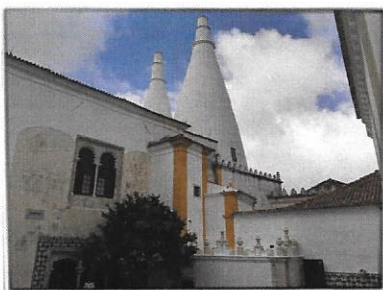
Interesting fact: construction was funded by a 5% tax on certain spices from the East.



Cascais and Sintra

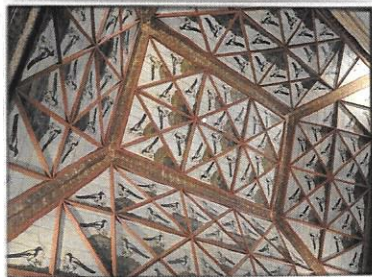


Cascais was once a popular vacation destination for the Portuguese nobility but is now a wonderful place for us regular vacationers. Arlene, Alicia and I found a great outdoor patio restaurant and enjoyed peri peri chicken dinners, a local specialty.



National Palace of Sintra

A UNESCO World Heritage site since 1995, the National Palace of Sintra is a former medieval royal residence of the Islamic Moorish Taifa of Lisbon, rulers of the region from the 15th to 19th centuries.



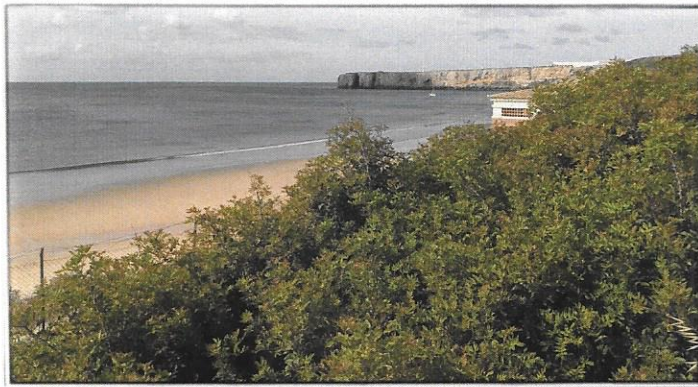
The Magpie room was very interesting. King John I was caught kissing a lady-in-waiting. To stop the gossip, he had the room decorated with 136 magpies, the same number of women at the court.



Algarve Region

Early in the morning we left the city of Lisbon and headed out on a road trip. We crossed the Tagus River and travelled south to the Serra da Arrabida Mountains, then crossed into the Alentejo region before stopping in the Algarve region.

Many tourists spend the winters in Portugal. In seeing the **beaches**, we now know why. They are beautiful!



One of the nice things about travelling with Trafalgar is being able to experience being with the locals and enjoying their day-to-day activities. On our way south, we stopped in **Setubal** and visited their **market**. Portugal is known for their farming and fishing and the market certainly showed us the variety of produce and seafood they have. Bakery goods were also available, along with liqueurs and cheeses.



Solar Do Monte Negro



The afternoon was spent visiting the wonderful **Solar Do Monte Negro stud ranch** where our hosts, Tiago and Vera Brito Paes, introduced us to their Lusitano horses. The ranch has raised and trained this specific breed for many generations.



All of the ranch's horses stay outside for most of the year. They come into the ring to train for about two weeks and are then released back to the farm's expansive acreage.

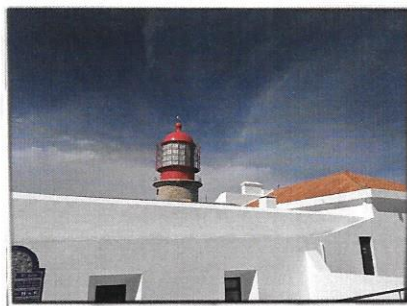
Vera hosted a **Trafalgar Be My Guest Lunch** and treated us to traditional Portuguese dishes. All of the recipes she used were handed down through both her and Tiago's families.

Interesting fact: the older the horse gets, the lighter its coat becomes.



Cape St. Vincent, Lagos and Almancil

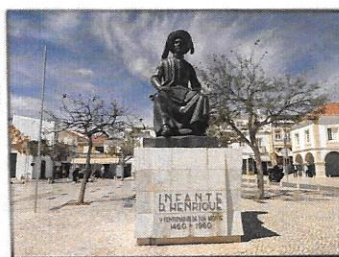
Today's adventures took us to the cliff sides of **Sagras Point**, the most southwestern point in Portugal. We visited **Cape St. Vincent**, a very craggy jut of land known for its many seafaring tragedies. Today, ships are guided by one of Europe's most powerful lighthouses. It has two 1,000 watt lamps that can be seen 60 kilometres away.



Cape St. Vincent is named after a 4th century Iberian, Deacon St. Vincent. His body was brought ashore here and a shrine erected over his grave. Ravens guarded the grave until St. Vincent's body was exhumed in 1173 and brought to Lisbon. To continue protecting the Saint, ravens accompanied the body to Lisbon. This transfer is depicted on Lisbon's coat of arms.



Our next stop was at the town of **Lagos**. Its location on the Atlantic Ocean made it an important town during the Portuguese Age of Discovery. Henry the Navigator lived in the town, evident by the large statue of him in the town square. Lagos was at one time the centre of the European slave trade.

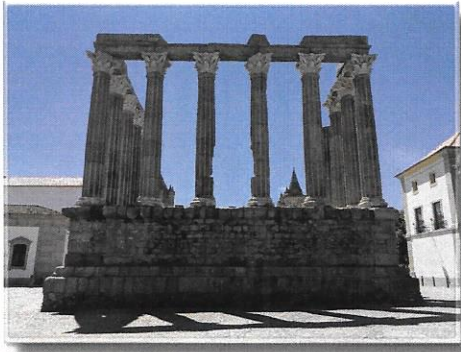
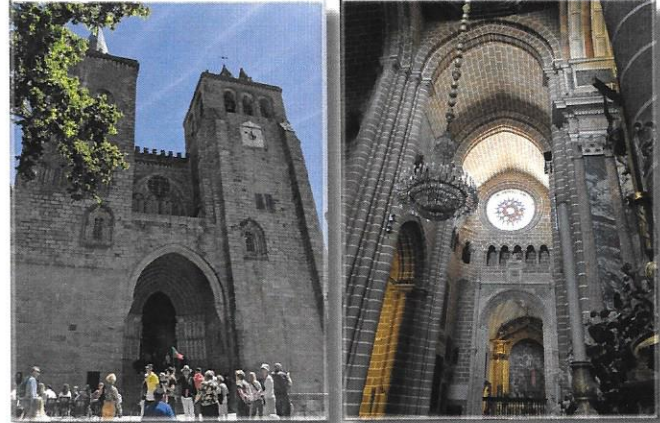


Our last stop of the day was the town of **Almancil** to visit the **Church of São Lourenço**. Saint Lawrence was one of the seven deacons of Rome martyred in the persecution of the Christians in 258 under Pope Sixtus II. The interior is totally decorated in 17th century azulejo tiles. The tiles portray scenes from the life of Saint Lawrence.

Évora

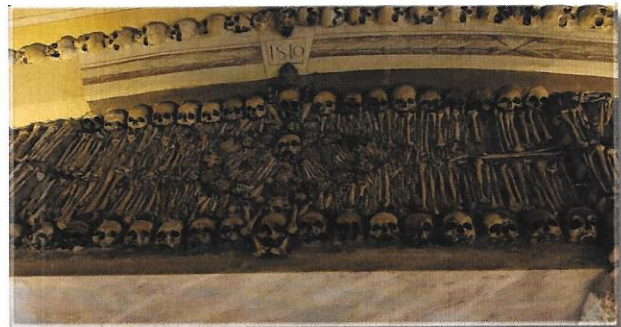
We left the Algarve region and headed north to the ancient Alentejo city of **Évora** whose old town centre is now a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The old town centre is home to the **Cathedral of Évora, Igreja de Sao Francisco**, the city's most important monument. Its styles include Romanesque, Manueline, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque. Having multiple styles makes it extremely pretty inside. Construction started in 1184 but wasn't completed until 1746.

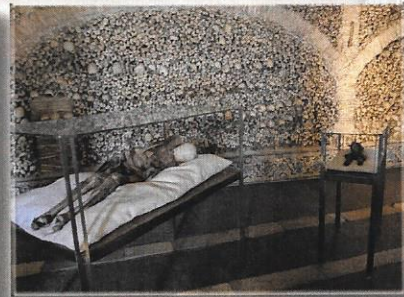


The Roman temple ruins dedicated to Emperor Augustus are located in the main square of the old town centre. They were erected around the 1st century in honour of Augustus, a mortal venerated as a god during and after his rule. The majority of the original temple was destroyed in the 5th century.

We visited the **Chapel of Bones, Capela dos Ossos**. A bit on the creepy side, but definitely interesting to see. Franciscan monks built it as a reminder of life's ephemeral nature. Five thousand skeletons were dug up from local cemeteries and were used to make the ceilings and support columns. Skulls were used on the arches, while arm and leg bones were stacked to fill in the walls.



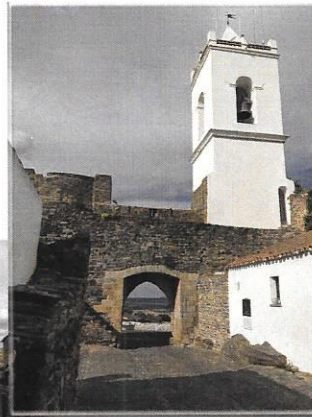
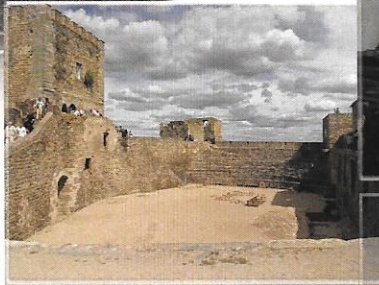
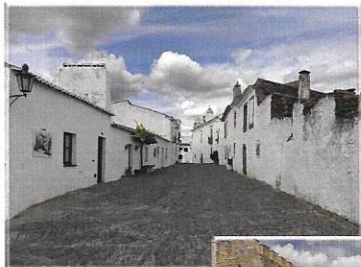
Above the entrance is the inscription "*We bones that are here, for your bones we wait*".



Monsaraz



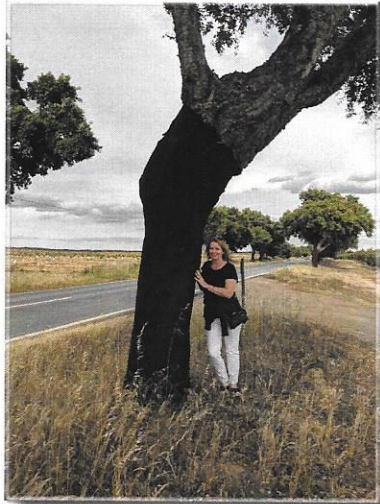
Located in the county of Evora is the hilltop medieval village of **Monsaraz**. It dates back to pre-8th century and, up until 1232, was mostly occupied by Moors and Arabs under the Islam domain. In 1232, Sancho II reconquered the town and gave it to the Order of the Temple. This was the first of two **Knights Templar** fortifications we would visit on our journey around Portugal.



The town within the fortification walls was built to be self sufficient. Many of the original structures have been maintained and are still being used. The Church of Misericordia has regular masses, while some buildings have been converted to tourist accommodations, shops and restaurants.

The castle is quite impressive, as well as its adjoining arena. One can imagine the many spartan-type shows that were held here. It's always impressive to get a look back in time.

Trafalgar Hidden Treasurers



Cork

49.6% of the world's production of cork comes from cork trees grown in Portugal. Cork is considered a sustainable product because only the bark of the tree is used. Once the tree reaches 25 years old, the bark is harvested, and it can be harvested again every nine years.

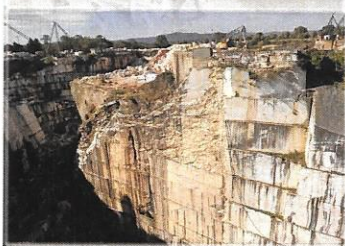
Wine stoppers are the most popular items made from cork, however, other items have gained in popularity, including construction material, musical instruments, clothing, purses, baseballs, and even heat shields used in various space programs.

Marble

Portugal is also known for its marble. Our Coach Driver and Tour Director surprised us with a stop at a very large marble quarry near Vila Viçosa that in the Estremoz region. About 85% of Portugal's marble comes from this region. Portugal is the second largest exporter of marble in the world (the first is Italy). Marble comes naturally in white, cream, pink, grey or black and streaks with any combination of these colours.



The town next to the quarry had a lot of items made of marble, such as sidewalks, fences, porches and driveways. And here in Canada we pay an arm and a leg for it!



One of the workmen on site motioned it was okay to take small pieces of pretty marble from the pile. What a treat to bring home a piece big enough to use as an hors d'oeuvres server.

Castelo de Vide and Viseu



In the middle ages, most towns had a castle. **Castelo de Vide** was no exception. This castle was quite small in comparison to others we saw on our journey, but it made up for it in its views overlooking olive groves and hills. The castle was a “weak” fortification and the town’s population grew only because those who conquered the lands stayed because of the fertile soil and good southerly exposure and gentle slopes that allowed for bountiful crops.



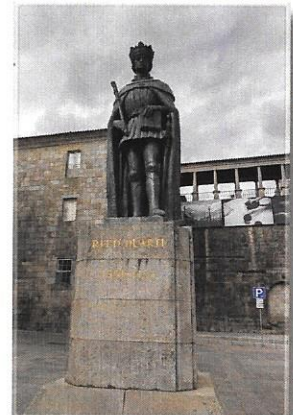
Castelo de Vide has always been known as a spa town because of springs that flow from the neighbouring mountains. These springs still feed the town square’s fountain today.

Castelo de Vide is also known for having the most gothic style doorways in Portugal. As you walk along the cobble stoned streets, you will notice many of them.



Afonso Henriques, the first King of Portugal, is reputed to have been born in **Viseu**. There is a large monument dedicated to him at the top of the town near the Cathedral of Viseu and the Church of Mercy.

The old section of Viseu was a great area to roam. There were many small restaurants and outdoor patios to enjoy. Sitting on an outdoor terrace with a glass of vino was a great way to end a very busy day.



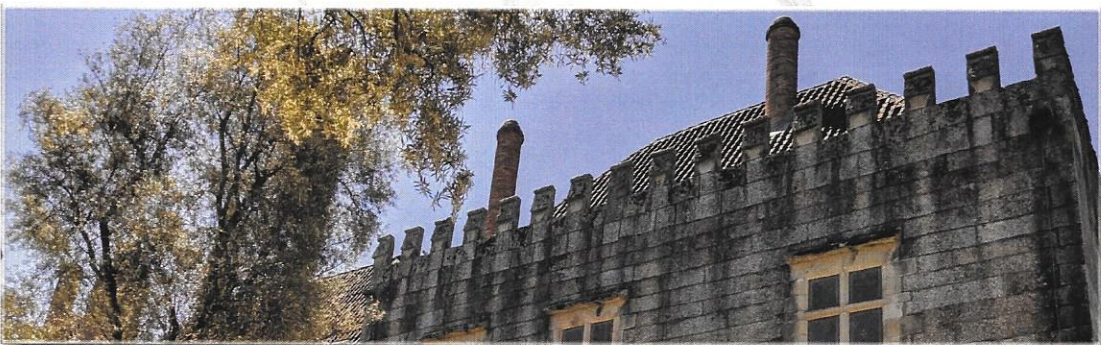
Douro Valley, Mateus and Guimaraes



The Douro Valley is just about the prettiest place on earth! This is Portugal's most popular wine region. Part of the valley called the Douro *vinhateiro* has been designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. What a place!



Built in the 18th century, the Casa de Mateus is famous for its depiction on bottles of Mateus rose wines. There is a reflection pond in the front and pretty gardens in the back. The Mateus area has many wineries and many produce award winning wines.



Guimaraes is a town that also claims the birthplace of Afonso Henriques, the first King of Portugal. The historic centre of Guimaraes is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Porto

Stock Exchange Palace

Built in 1842, the Stock Exchange Palace was built for the city's Commercial Association. The central courtyard has a large metallic, octagonal dome with glass panels. The lower part of the dome has the coats-of-arms of Portugal and the countries with which Portugal had commercial relations in the 19th century. Once through the courtyard, you enter the majestic Arabian Hall, inspired by Spain's Alhambra.



The Stock Exchange Palace is part of Porto's historic area. This area has been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



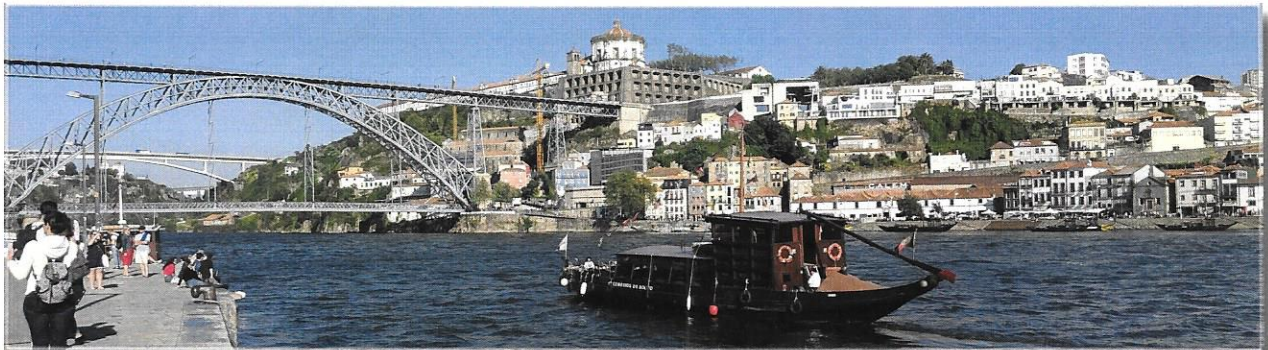
Port Wine

Portugal's most famous export is port wine. Port houses on the Vila Nova de Gaia side of the Douro River are responsible for its distilling, packaging and shipping. All of the grapes used in Porto's port production come from vineyards in the Douro Valley.

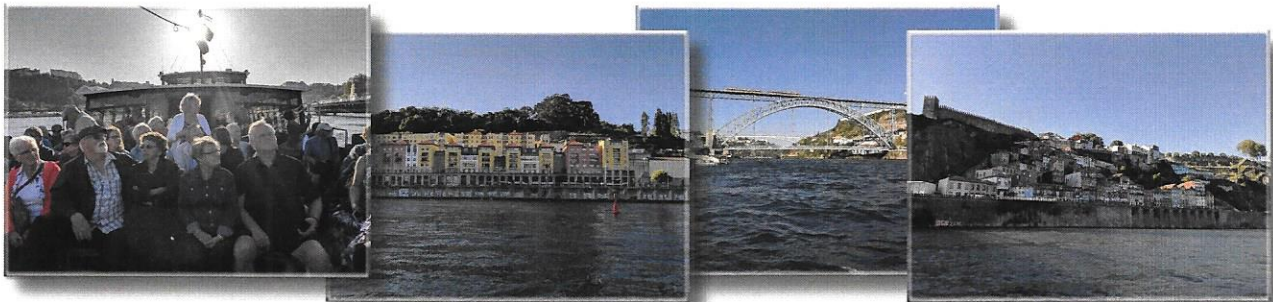
We toured Ferreira Cellars, one of the area's oldest port houses. It has an amazing history dating back to 1751, but is most notable for a lady who brought leadership and innovative processes to the area, Dona Antónia Adelaide Ferreira. She also learned about techniques that would eventually eliminate phylloxera, a disease that destroyed much of Europe's grapes, including her own.



Porto



We spent a beautiful evening touring the Douro River by boat. There are six bridges that span the river and we travelled under each one. Once we reached the Atlantic Ocean, we turned around. We saw much of the historic area on the north of the river, as well as many original and converted port wine warehouses on the south side of Vila Nova de Gaia.

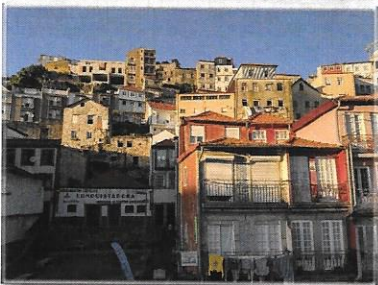


The Ribeira area is within the historic area and is popular for its many restaurants and bars. Located on the north riverbank, it is a great place to see the city's many terraced houses.

Our group was treated to an authentic Portuguese meal in Ribeira. We had many choices and the pork dinner did not disappoint. It was a great way to end a perfect day.



Porto



We had free time in Porto so three of us spent hours roaming the historic district.

We saw the **Torre dos Clergies**, a 250 year old church tower. In the 19th century, it provided telegraph and clock services to the city. The tower's height allowed for weekly flag communications between the city and the Royal Mail vessel from England. When two flags were up, it meant the ship would arrive within two days.

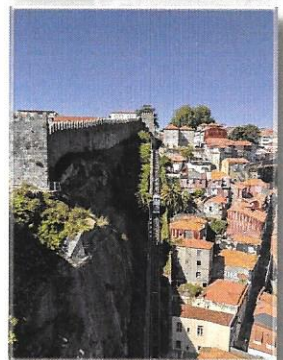
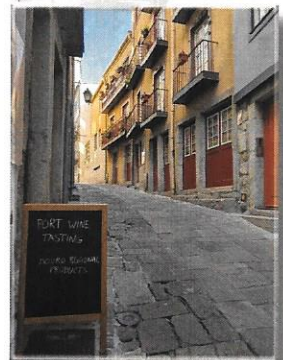
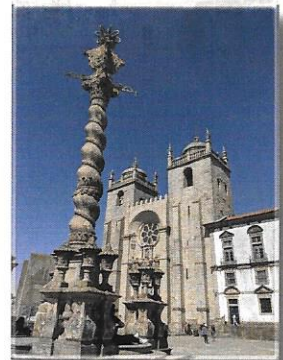
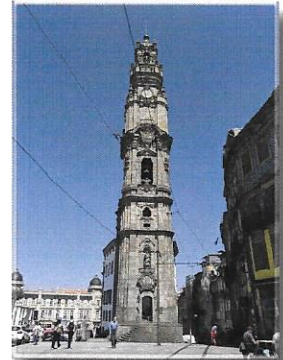
We also visited the **Porto Cathedral**. Musicians played in the square, giving the place a very peaceful feeling. Not so peaceful though is the column in the square that was once used to hang the criminals of Porto.

The streets are cobble stone and each one seemed to lead to an interesting mix of shops, businesses and homes.

We walked across the pedestrian/tram bridge, the **Ponte de D. Luis I**. We had perfect weather so the views of the Douro River were spectacular.

We found a funicular that leads to the **Fernandina Walls**. Back in 1336, walls started going up that would create an urbanist style neighbourhood. The view from the Ponte de D. Luis I bridge shows many of the walls still standing today.

One could spend many days roaming both the historic district and the port house district across the river. There are many churches and museums to explore, all offering centuries of interesting history.



Coimbra



Our next stop was the town of Coimbra, which was once the capital of Portugal until the 13th century.

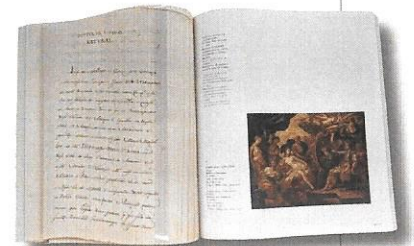
The town is home to the oldest academic institution in Portugal, the **University of Coimbra**. In 2013, the university was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The university was founded in Lisbon in 1290 by King Denis. However, between 1308 and 1537, its location bounced back and forth several times between Lisbon and Coimbra, finally settling for good in Coimbra in 1537.

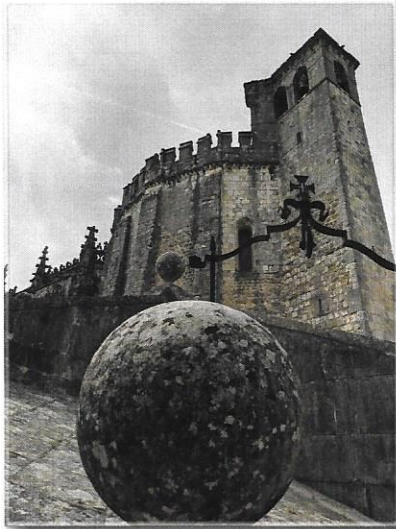
There are eight faculties taught at the university. They include Letters, Law, Medicine, Sciences and Technology, Pharmacy, Economics, Psychology & Education Sciences and Sports Sciences and Physical Education. 25,000 students attend annually.

The university's library, Biblioteca Geral da Universidade de Coimbra, has two buildings: the Biblioteca Joanina houses books from before 1800; and the Edificio Nova with over 1,000,000 books across every field of study.

Books from pre-1800 are very delicate and pictures were not permitted. Completely understandable.



It's Templar Day!

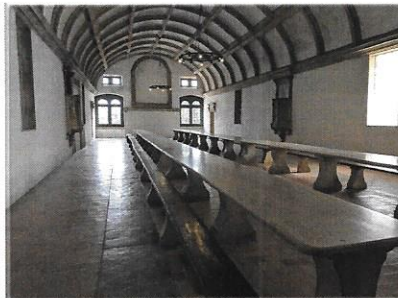


Today we journeyed to the city of **Tomar** and visited a Templar stronghold of the 12th century, the **Convent of Christ**. The convent and castle are now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The convent has a history dating back to 1118. It was founded by Gualdim Pais, Grand Master of the **Order of Poor Knights of the Temple**. It became the seat of the Templars in the 13th century and was used as a defense system against the Moors.

The **Castle of Tomar** was built in 1160. A new castle feature introduced by the Templars was the Keep, a central tower of residential and defensive functions.

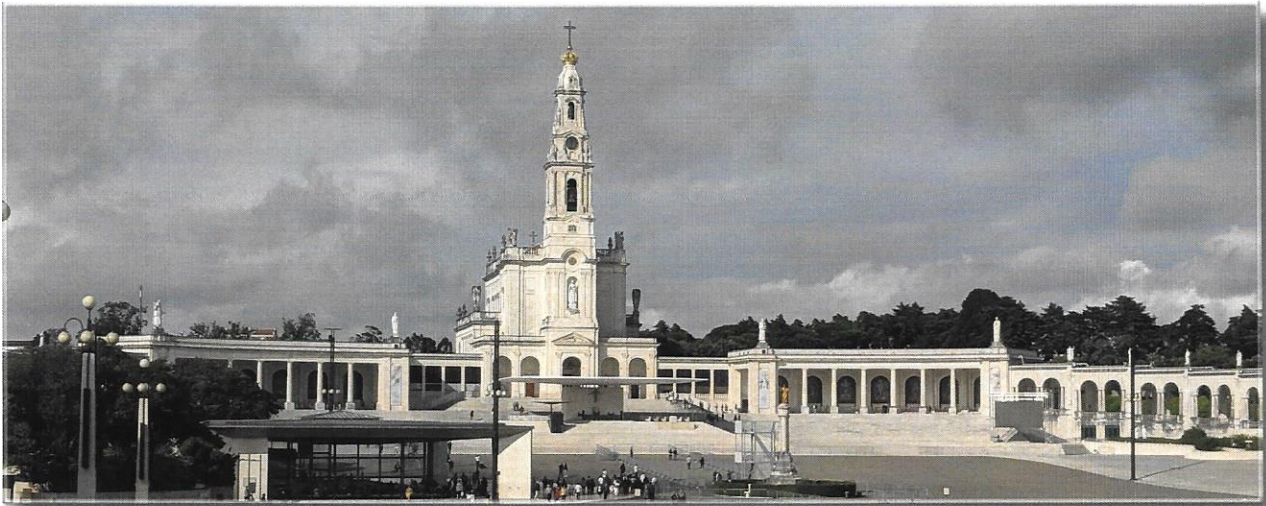
The Templar Order was dissolved on March 14, 1319 and the convent was renamed the **Order of Christ**.



Every three years Tomar hosts the **Festa Templária**, the Knights Templar Festival. The festival's aim is to re-create the history of the region. The town is decorated in medieval style, complete with period style markets and food. Hundreds of local people dress as Knights Templars and are led by mounted Knights on horseback through a torch-lit parade that starts at the Knights Templar church of Santa Maria do Olival, goes through the city centre, then ends at the Convent of Christ.



Fatima

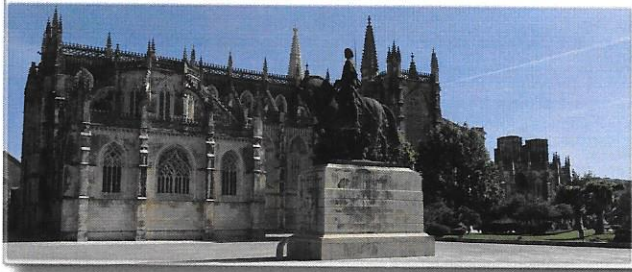


The town of Fatima is home to the **Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima**, a group of Catholic religious buildings. The Sanctuary is the title of the Blessed Virgin Mary based on apparitions reported in 1917 by three shepherd children at the Cova da Iria in Fatima. The three children were Lúcia dos Santos and her cousins Francisco and Jacinta Marto. All three children died very young and all are buried in the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary.

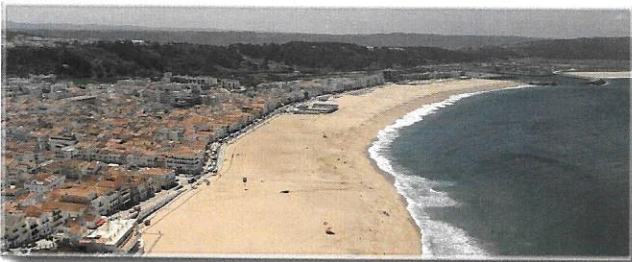
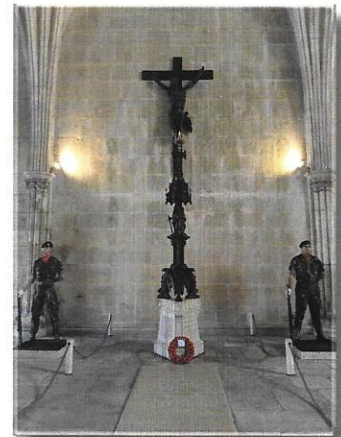
The three children are said to have seen their first apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary on June 13, then again July 13, September 13 and October 13. Today, many hundreds of thousands Roman Catholic pilgrims travel to Fatima on these dates to celebrate the apparitions. So many people attend that the Basilica of the Holy Trinity had to be built on the other end of the square to accommodate the large number of pilgrims in attendance.



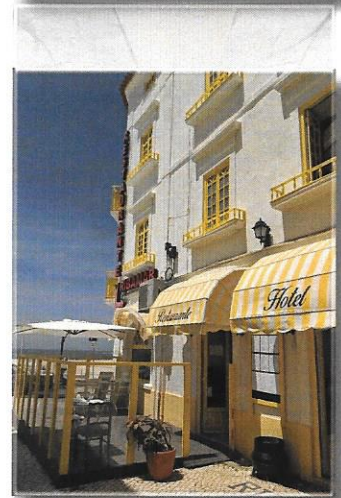
Batalha, Nazare and Obidos



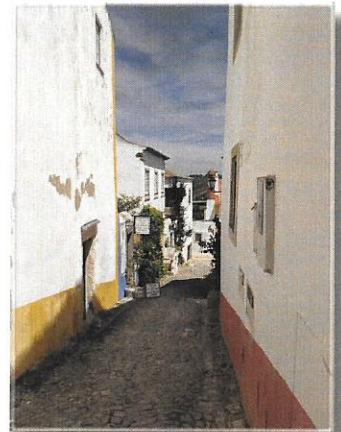
The **Batalha Monastery**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, was built in 1385 and contains the joint tomb of King John I and his wife Philippa of Lancaster. The Portuguese military designated the Chapterhouse section as the tomb of two unknown soldiers killed in World War I.



We stopped at the seaside village of **Nazare** for lunch. The weather was perfect for sitting outside on the terrace overlooking the beach. Nazare is known as a surfing destination because of its very high breaking waves, formed due to the presence of the underwater Nazare Canyon.



Our last stop before arriving back in Lisbon was the medieval walled city of **Obidos**. The streets are a maze of white-washed buildings and narrow streets leading to a hill top fortification. Obidos is known for its Ginja, a liqueur made from ginja berries found in the region.



Farewell to Portugal



We all enjoyed an amazing journey through Portugal. Each town or city we visited had a tale to tell, each contributing to the cultural and historic values of the country. From the hilly, cobble stoned streets of Lisbon, to the Lusitano horses at the Solar Do Monte Negro stud ranch, to the beautiful city of Porto, to the liqueur tasting in Obidos, and all activities in between, what an astonishing experience.

We visited ten UNESCO World Heritage Sites that received the coveted designation because of their beauty or history. Our Trafalgar guide, Tania Csomos, was well versed in Portugal's history and provided us with information to truly appreciate this wonderful country.

Thank you Wendy, Frank, Tania and Trafalgar for the trip of a lifetime!

