

Portugal

Special Report



**Lisbon: An Old Soul In A Sea
Of Potential**



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Lisbon

An Old Soul In A Sea Of Potential

BY CÁTIA LIMA



Lisbon is a city of contrasts: urban sophistication blended with sleepy town life, historical districts mixed with modern architecture, a never-ending dance between old and new with deep blue skies watching over everything.

Much like an old dame, Lisbon has her share of scars and stories to tell but still boasts her unique beauty...

The capital of Portugal has won over the hearts of many, especially in recent years. But this city is much more than melancholy Fado and social media-worthy scenarios.→

One of the positives of living in Lisbon is the easy access to all sorts of leisure facilities, from museums and art galleries to sports, volunteer groups, libraries, and bookshops. In terms of restaurants, clubs, and nightlife in general, there's also plenty to choose from.

Lisbon is ever changing and ever growing. But is it the right fit for you?

Past And Future

Lisbon's early history and evolution of its name go hand in hand.

There are no certainties on the origin of the name Lisboa, but it probably derives from the Phoenician *allis ubbo*, meaning "safe harbor." Before the Phoenicians arrived, the people living in the area called the river Tagus *Lisso* or *Lucio*.

The Greeks called Lisbon Olissipo because of Ulysses: according to legend, he founded the city when he ended up on the shores of the then Ophiussa (meaning land of serpents) and escaped its beautiful sorceress queen.

The Romans called it Olissipona and, later, the Moors renamed it Al-Lishbuna, which over the centuries became Lisboa.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, during the Discoveries, Lisbon experienced enormous growth... But the 18th century brought with it a catastrophic event that

changed the face of the city. In 1755 an earthquake, followed by fires and a tsunami, destroyed the vast majority of Lisbon and affected the surrounding area as well.

Fast forward to 1908 and Lisbon witnessed the assassination of King Carlos and his heir in the Praça do Comércio. Two years later, on Oct. 5, 1910, a coup put an end to the monarchy and Lisbon was the stage for the proclamation of the Portuguese Republic.

After years of unstable government, a right-wing regime began, which ruled the country from 1926 until 1974. In Lisbon, on April 25 of that same year, members of the Armed Forces launched a coup (known as the Carnation Revolution), which overthrew the regime.

In recent years, Lisbon has enjoyed extra international attention for hosting the 1998 World Exhibition (which led to the creation of a whole new neighborhood called Parque das Nações) and the 2004 European Football Championship.

Right now, it's hard to tell the exact direction the city is taking. Although COVID-19 affected many businesses and events, most of the restrictions put into practice have been lifted (at the time of writing this article).

All things point to a return to normality to some extent at least, but it's still early to say Lisbon has already gone back to

its pre-COVID vibe. Everyone's priority right now is getting their businesses to bounce back.

For the Lisbon City Hall, one of the biggest focuses will be on making the city greener over the coming years. This means more roads closed to traffic, 17 kms of new bike lanes (added to the existing ones), and continuing work on the new Parque Urbano Gonçalo Ribeiro Telles, a green area that will connect to the iconic Gulbenkian gardens. New buses and trams as well as health care units are also in the works.

The Basics

Lisbon enjoys an average of 2,900 to 3,300 hours of sunshine every year. Winters are cool and rainy, with temperatures usually ranging from 8 to 15°C.

Opinions differ among non-Portuguese on how cold Lisbon is: some say it's not truly cold, while others claim it's the kind of cold that gets into your bones. It's humid here because of the proximity to the river.

Summers are warm and dry, with temperatures typically ranging from 16 to 18°C at night and 26 to 29°C in the daytime. In July and August, the warmest months, you can expect temperatures in downtown Lisbon to go above 35°C. Spring and fall are pleasant, and there's →



a chance you'll enjoy mild temperatures until mid-November.

Lisbon brags about its unique blue skies but it does have rain: an annual average of 1,110 millimeters spread out between October and April.

In general, the air quality is satisfactory, but areas with more traffic will fare worse compared to quieter ones.

Lisbon is in a seismic area. The last earthquake was in 1969 and reached an 8 on the Richter scale. On the one hand, earthquakes are an undeniable fact and something most people are aware of, but on the other, they're not the kind of thing people worry about every day.

Modern buildings are built with earthquakes in mind, and the downtown area rebuilt right after the 1755 earthquake used construction methods that allow the buildings to sort of wave and not crumble straight away.

The Lisbon airport has bus stops connecting to several parts of the city and a direct link to the metro. Gare do Oriente, one of the main train stations in Lisbon, is the easiest to reach by metro from the airport and takes you to both suburban and regional destinations.

Other main train stations include Rossio and Cais do Sodré, which take passengers to Sintra and Cascais, both in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area. The Santa Apolónia train station connects to other regions in the country. The train is a popular option among commuters, many of which also come from the south margin of the Tagus River.

Generally speaking, the closer you are to the Baixa, the downtown part of the city, the easier it will be to move around using either the bus or the metro. If you're within the city, the metro is the fastest option. The bus and train may also be valuable choices, depending on your specific location. Taxis and services like Uber are available too.

If you plan on leaving Lisbon frequently to explore the surrounding areas, having a car will make it easier for you.



The Praça do Comércio was built after the 1755 earthquake.
This is where the royal palace used to be...

One of the downsides of living in Lisbon is the traffic, although it is better than it was a few years ago. The parts of the city with the most office buildings (like Saldanha and Parque das Nações, for example) are the most affected. Parking can be problematic in some parts of the city, especially the older, typical neighborhoods and touristy areas.

Lisbon does not rank highly as a bike-friendly city. There has been an increase in bike users over recent years, but maybe because Lisbon has several small hills or because many commuters use the train, you won't see a lot of people riding bikes.

Roads are decent, although even the people who live in Lisbon joke there's always work going on somewhere. In the →

older neighborhoods, expect some streets to be closed to traffic. Road drainage is sometimes not great—you'll notice it in the autumn/early winter if there's unexpected heavy rain.

All infrastructure in the city works well. Tap water (a common concern for expats from the United States and Canada) is safe to drink, even in public fountains. In some areas, especially in old buildings, tap water may taste a bit off, but there's no problem with it. Because of this, some people filter their tap water for drinking.

On rare occasions you may find a sign near the tap in a public restroom, for example, saying "Água não potável" (non-drinkable water) or "Água de qualidade não controlada" (unmonitored water quality).

Water all over the country is usually hard, not just in Lisbon. You may need to pay attention to your skin and appliances, like the dishwasher. It's nothing drastic, only an aspect to be aware of.

"Do You Speak English?"

While it's unrealistic to expect everyone to understand and speak flawless English (think of all the different accents, for example), most people in Lisbon do speak some English. Those under 50 have a better understanding of the language than the older generations. Many civil servants, however, belong to the second group.

Pro tip: don't assume someone is Portuguese and therefore speaks and understands a minimum of English simply because they work in a shop or a restaurant in Lisbon. The safest option, in cases like this, is to simply ask, "Do you speak English?". When in doubt, try to keep your vocabulary as simple as possible. It will save you headaches and misunderstandings.

Learning Portuguese may seem like an impossible task, but the truth is if you're living in a city, you may get away with learning only the basics. There are



many options, online or not, in universities and language schools. There is also the PPT Program – Portuguese for All, which allows foreign citizens to learn Portuguese at no cost. For official information on Portuguese lessons, I recommend checking the Instituto Camões website. Instituto Camões is the official entity regulating Portuguese language learning and examinations.

For families with children who are looking to be near everything, Lisbon is an amazing option. The Portuguese are family-oriented and, even in the cities, it's common to see three generations going out together for a meal or enjoying quality time in a public garden, for example. If you're looking for international schools, Lisbon has several options, with many more in the municipalities around the city. →

Expat Community

Although Lisbon is home to people from many different cultures, those from English-speaking countries are not the majority in the city itself. Within the Lisbon district (which includes the city and several municipalities around it) Cascais and Estoril followed by Sintra and Oeiras have bigger expat numbers.

Online expat groups sometimes organize meetups. The pandemic has affected these types of events, although most restrictions have been lifted, things are not fully back to normal. Instead, people use Facebook groups to connect to other expats and then organize small meetups.

Concerning faith, although most churches in Lisbon are Catholic, there are a few Protestant ones, like Saint George's Church and Saint Andrew's Church. Lisbon is also home to the Radha Krishna Temple, the Shaare Tikvah Synagogue, and the Central Mosque of Lisbon.

Everyday Life

The three supermarket chains you're most likely to come across in Lisbon are Pingo Doce, Minipreço, and Continente Bom Dia. All carry their own brands for



many products and these are usually cheaper than branded ones.

Pingo Doce and Minipreço are the most common in the city and surrounding suburban areas, with Minipreço being the cheapest of the three. Continente Bom Dia is a smaller version of the Continente hypermarkets you usually find in the suburbs.

For gourmet and high-end grocery products along with everyday items, make sure to check out Supercor.

Small gourmet shops will often have gem products, and the little neighborhood bakeries are still quite popular. For spices and Asian grocery products in general (including some fresh produce) browse through the little shops in the Martim Moniz and Mouraria neighborhoods.

Organic food supply has been increasing over the last few years in supermarkets, local markets, and online. Many people choose to order their organic produce through the internet (often →



straight from the farmer) and have it delivered to their doorstep.

Gluten-free products have also been in higher demand and some items, like gluten-free bread, can be found in supermarkets, although usually only in the bigger stores.

There are several markets in Lisbon offering local produce, as well as fresh fish and seafood. In most markets, you can also buy meat, flowers, dried fruits, nuts, and Portuguese-style biscuits.

The most famous Lisbon market is Mercado da Ribeira, but other neighborhoods also have wonderful markets, like Campo de Ourique, Príncipe Real, Alvalade, Arroios, Saldanha, and Benfica.

In a city like Lisbon, with all the different choices, it's difficult to give an average weekly budget for shopping, but I'd say 50 euros will cover it.

If you want to hire a cleaner, the best option is to ask around for people who are available and trustworthy. Small local shops and neighbors are good options to try this.

In the Lisbon area, the hourly price for a cleaner starts at 7 euros, with the final price depending on how physically demanding the work is going to be. Values are discussed and agreed upon between both sides. Some companies provide this kind of service, with prices starting in the 7 to 8 euro range.

Live-in maids are not common in Lisbon (unless you're among the super-rich). It's more common to hire help for set days per week or help with a particular situation (small children or bedridden people, for example).

If you're looking to have a live-in maid every day of the week with two days off, the least anyone would expect to be paid the national minimum wage, which is 705 euros per month.

[Go here for my full breakdown on the cost of living in Lisbon.](#)

Like I always say, "Portugal is not only sun, sea, and sand." It's also bureaucracy and paperwork. I'm sorry, there's no other way to put this. Yes, for things like buying



a house, it takes a ton of bureaucracy. Even the Portuguese joke about this, saying there's always a paper (meaning, document) missing.

Depending on what you need to do, bureaucracy-wise, you may want to hire a lawyer or a solicitor to help. For simpler cases, if you only struggle with the language, your wisest option would

be to take a Portuguese friend or helpful neighbor along with you and buy them lunch afterward.

Pro tip: be sure to ask all the questions you need answers to. Bear in mind most people will speak some degree of English (the younger generations better than their parents and grandparents), but be realistic about your expectations. →

Disabled Access

Lisbon is not an easy place if you have limited mobility, although it does depend a bit on where you live and your daily routine. The old neighborhoods are the most complicated: the sidewalks are too narrow for wheelchairs and the older buildings only have stairs.

In the busier districts, parking tends to be chaotic, and you'll see cars using up at least a part of the sidewalk space. Your life will be a lot easier if you choose a modern building with elevators and parking spaces or a garage.

Lisbon has several small hills, which means walking up or down some streets can be difficult—this affects the older districts in particular.

If you're disabled but drive (or if you live with someone who drives you around) then you can get a *dístico de deficiente*. This is a blue piece of paper, which you will

need to put in a visible place inside the car, stating the owner has a disability or car usually transports a disabled person. This allows you to park in designated places all over the country.

Out And About

You'll find small gardens spread around the city: some are a remnant of late 19th century-style public gardens (like Jardim da Estrela), while others have a more modern approach (like Jardim do Campo Grande).

The iconic Gulbenkian Garden, covering an area of around 22 acres (9,000 square meters), is one of the most beloved in the city. Many of these gardens will have a playground and at least one small café with seats outside.

Monsanto Forest Park, on the city's limits, is an area of around 10 square kms (4 square miles) and known as Lisbon's

lung. It has playgrounds, picnic areas, trails, sports facilities, and beautiful views of the city and the river's estuary, among other things.

If you can't live too far away from the ocean, you'll be glad to know you have several beaches to the south and west of Lisbon.

The city hosts many events throughout the year but the quintessential Lisbon festival is Saint Anthony's on June 12 and 13. That's when the streets in the old neighborhoods are at their most colorful with decorations, music, and food.

Although this is a religious festival in its origin, it also has a mundane side to it. On the 12th people fill the streets with music playing, dancing, and singing. Expect Portuguese summer classics like sangria, grilled sardines, and *bifanas*. The 13th is for religious celebrations, including the famous "marriages of St Anthony" (and also for curing hangovers from the night before). →



Pets

How you bring over your pet by air will depend on whether the airline you choose allows animal transport. If it does, you will have to supply a cage and enough food for the duration of the travel.

If it doesn't, you need to choose an airline pet carrier service. They have trained staff to take care of your pet, as well as transport crates. In either case, make sure you don't forget the pet passport. Cats and dogs must have a tracking chip and vaccination against rabies.

Regularly check the European Commission page for the details and the most updated information on pet travel legislation to countries in the European Union. Even if the vet you work with is used to having pets flying to other countries, it's useful to double check for any recent changes.

Lisbon has plenty of pet owners and, in general, there's no problem having pets in rented properties. Many pet owners walk their dogs in the neighborhood during the week and on weekends take them for a longer time outside. Monsanto Forest Park and the green areas in Sintra are common destinations.

If you'd like to join in the efforts of rescue centers, ask around as there's probably one in your area.



Health Care

Lisbon has several hospitals, as well as clinics and health care centers (*centros de saúde*): hospitals can be public or private, clinics are private, and health care centers are public.

Each public hospital serves an area of the city and its inhabitants. Hospitals that serve one specific type of patient, like the Lisbon pediatric hospital (Hospital Dona Estefânia), or illness, like the oncology hospital (Instituto Português de Oncologia de Lisboa) are an exception.

These serve people from the entire Lisbon district, which includes areas like Cascais and Sintra.

For public health services you either pay nothing, or a fee called *taxa moderadora* may apply. In the case of an appointment with a general practitioner, the fee is 4.50 euros.

In some cases, no payment is required. For example, if you call the public health number (Saúde 24) and they consider you to be in need of urgent care, you'll be exempt

from paying a *taxa moderadora*. Cancer patients are also exempt from paying for several things, like doctor appointments. Blood donors and transplant patients are exempt from this fee as well.

Getting an appointment in the public sector can take months, especially in the cities. Many people use both the public and the private health sectors.

There are plenty of health insurance options right now: some charge less than 5 euros a month and some don't cost →

anything at all to the users because they're paid for by the company employing them.

The type of insurance you have will determine how much you pay for appointments, procedures, and exams. For a dental checkup or cleaning, the price without insurance is around 60 euros (at MD Clínica). For a visit to the GP, it will be about 95 euros (at Joaquim Chaves Saúde). With insurance, these values can be as low as a third of the original, on average.

I can give my own example of using both health care sectors. For the past three years, my 5-year-old daughter has been going for regular checkups with a neurologist in the Lisbon pediatric hospital, which belongs to the public sector. All the appointments, exams, and physiotherapy sessions there were completely free.

Recently she had an ear, nose, and throat appointment in a private hospital. The appointment included a small procedure and the whole thing cost only 14,50 euros with insurance.

Doctors and staff in private health care are more likely to speak and understand better English, but keep in mind many doctors work for both the public and the private sectors.

Crime

Portugal is among the safest countries in the world, with low crime rates. In Lisbon, the most common kind of crime is pickpocketing, which is normal in any city with thousands of tourists.

Avoid showing off expensive technology or leaving it unattended. This applies to when you're walking on the street, sitting outside in a café or restaurant, or when using a rented car. At night, regardless of your gender, avoid walking alone if you're in an area with few people.

In general, you can avoid being an easy target with a few simple precautions. I've lived in Lisbon and the suburbs all my



life and have never had any problems with crime, not even pickpockets. Crime exists, but most people simply take basic personal safety measures.

Road accidents are a real concern and have been for years. Rush hour can get complicated with reckless driving and everyone in a hurry. There's also an ongoing feud between cars, motorcycles, and bikes.

Property And Rental Markets

Compared to other European capitals, the price per square meter in Lisbon is quite appealing. The value depends on the neighborhoods, but in 2021, the average price in the city was 4,700 euros per square meter. →

In terms of high-end property, last year the average price in Avenida da Liberdade was 7,500 euros per square meter. In Parque das Nações (in the new part of the city) it was 3,000 euros per square meter.

For renovated properties, the average price per square meter went from 6,500 euros in the neighborhood of Santo António to 3,600 euros in Anjos and Penha de França.

The most upscale areas are Estrela and Lapa, Restelo and Belém, Chiado, Príncipe Real, and the first section of Parque das Nações. In these areas, price per square meter ranges between 4,000 euros and 7,000 euros, although it can sometimes go up to 9,000 euros.

Areas like Graça, Campo de Santana, and Intendente have plenty of potential, with prices going from 3,000 euros per square meter to 4,500 euros per square meter. Alfama, Alcântara, Saldanha, Campo de Ourique, Campolide, and Avenidas Novas are districts somewhere between the two. Prices here range from 3,000 euros per square meter to 5,750 euros per square meter.

In the rental market, there are plenty of positive signs, too. The rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Campo de Ourique or Alvalade, for example, is between 1,500 to 2,000 euros.

The prediction is that demand will continue to be on the rise for both the

rental and property markets, with prices expected to go up.

You'll need to sign a tenancy agreement (*contrato de arrendamento*) to rent a property, which implies you'll need to have a Portuguese fiscal number (Número de Identificação Fiscal, which shows up everywhere as NIF).

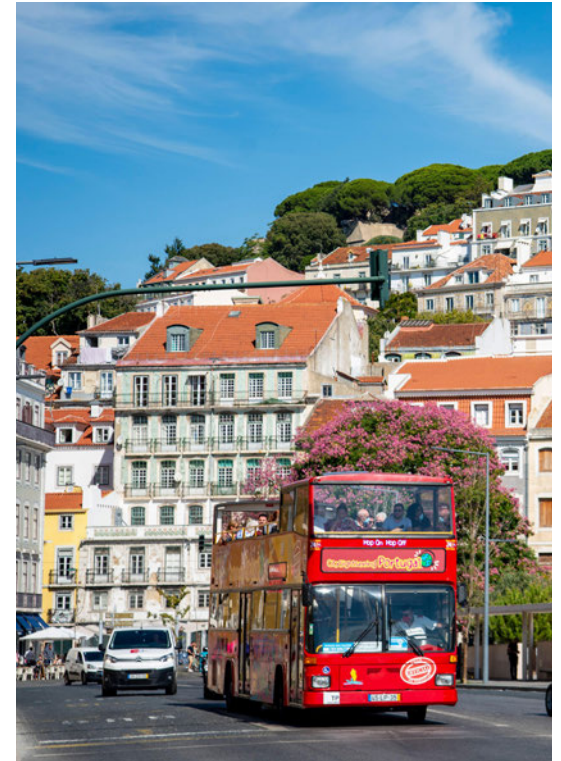
The contract should include aspects like the length of the lease, how much rent is, details about the property, how much notice you must give before moving out, and which conditions apply for breaking the rental contract. The duration and expiry date must be clear in the document in the case of a fixed-term contract. Landlords do not ask for references.

Among the most well-known agencies for both buying and renting you'll find RE/MAX, ERA, Century 21, and Engel & Völkers.

Work And Business

Right now, there's an increase in self-employment and remote work in Lisbon. If you don't speak Portuguese and have no experience working in the country, it's difficult to get into the job market as an employee, but it may be easier to have your own business. This will depend on how much you need to use Portuguese.

To begin working in Portugal, you need first to be a resident in the country, have



a tax number (Número de Identificação Fiscal, aka, NIF), and a Social Security number (Número de Identificação da Segurança Social, aka, NISS).

Check the Portuguese government's website covering topics like legal obligations and commercial register. No matter your line of work, you must also know about the Portuguese tax system.

Most government websites have the English language option (usually found at the top of the page), but there are exceptions. →



Restaurants And Food Celebrities

Restaurants in Lisbon range from fine dining to small, dark places only locals know of. Don't be too quick in ditching the latter, though, as they're often an opportunity to try dishes closer to what a Portuguese grandmother would cook.

What can you expect? The typical Portuguese restaurant dish comes with protein, a side of rice or potatoes, and maybe a little salad. The main course will be low on vegetables, but the Portuguese usually have a vegetable soup as a starter.

In most restaurants, the vegetarian options revolve around omelets or pasta with sauteed vegetables. There are exclusively vegetarian and vegan restaurants. In more modern places there are gluten-free options, too.

Famous local foods include *pastel de nata*, the pastry with celebrity status. Why not do like the Portuguese and enjoy it along with an espresso?

Bifanas are also a local classic. Thin slices of pork are marinated and slowly cooked, served in a *papo seco*, a type of roll.

If you like fish, you can try grilled sardines, a beloved Lisbon food (although it's all over the country). *Bacalhau*, salted cod, is a traditional dish with literally hundreds of variants, which the Portuguese love.

LGBTQ

Lisbon is one of the most LGBTQ-friendly cities in Europe and the world. Legislation passed in recent years backs this up, including the lawful recognition of same-sex marriage (in 2010), the Law of Gender Identity (in 2011), and the right to adoption by same-sex couples (in 2016).

There is no intolerance towards the LGBTQ community, although I cannot guarantee there won't be any intolerance whatsoever. Any intolerance you may come across is more likely to come from the 50-plus generations.

Besides LGBTQ-friendly bars and clubs, Lisbon hosts several events, like Queer Lisboa - Lisbon Gay & Lesbian Film Festival and the Arraial Lisbon Pride, an outdoor celebration that takes place every year in Terreiro do Paço, attracting thousands of people.

Is Lisbon The Right Place For You?

Like many European cities, Lisbon mixes old and new, with one foot in tradition and the other in self-renewal.

Here you have all the services and cultural life in a city with a very unique personality. While it's true Lisbon has its



problems (don't we all?), it's also true it still has a lot of potential for growth—and the property market proves it.

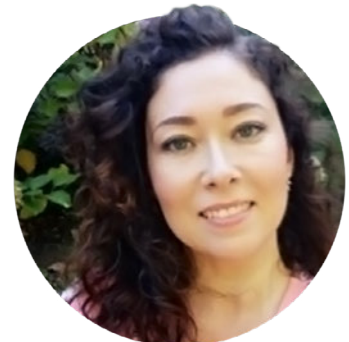
If you like this combo of characteristics and the feeling of being less than one hour from history-rich towns and beaches, then consider Lisbon. If you picture yourself enjoying a coffee and a *pastel de nata* while sitting in the sun, Lisbon really is the place for you. ✨

About The Author

Cátia Lima is a blogger and ghostwriter forever in love with Portugal. Back in 2013, she grew tired of tourists talking only about Lisbon, Porto, and the Algarve. That motivated her to start a blog, [Beyond Lisbon](#).

Later, a fellow blogger invited her to work as a ghostwriter and thus started a new chapter in her life. Since then, Cátia's writing background, along with her experience as an assistant editor, have come together to help her ghostwrite for blogs, websites, and social media.

When Cátia's not writing or photographing, you'll find her curating her meme collection. Check out her blog for an insider's look into Portuguese culture.



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