

stretches of sand. Here, in protected coves, the water is clear, and the forest bumps up against the beach: Portinho da Arrábida with its calm bay and Figueirinha with its gold sand are two favorites among beachgoers. Guidebooks barely mention this majestic region (score another one for Isabel and her insights). Accommodations here, in the town of Sesimbra and the port city of Setúbal, are scarce, and those who want to dip their toes in the Arrábida surf should consider a day trip from Lisbon rather than an overnight stay in the area.

FAIRY-TALE ENDING

For our final night in Lisbon, we're looking for a different perspective on the city, so we check in to the Lapa Palace. Green parakeets swoop through the hotel's tropical gardens, over the pool and the three-story fountain that cascades down the outside of the palace. (The gardens were designed by none other than Francisco Caldeira Cabral.) Set amid embassies and dignitaries' homes in the quiet Lapa district, the hotel – refined, intimate, and gracious – embodies old Lisbon.

Our room, on the other hand, embodies my idea of a place I'd like to stay indefinitely. Yes, it is located in the Palace wing of the hotel, part of the original 1883 home of the Count of Valençães, with a spectacular view of the city, river, and the Golden Gate-esque 25th of April Bridge. It is stocked with *pastéis de nata*, chocolate truffles, fresh fruit, and a decanter of complimentary port; the bathroom has an ornate blue-and-white azulejo tile mural of lords and ladies; and the pillow menu lists seven options. But it's the tower that makes me want to cancel our return flight and hole up playing prince and princess. *Our* tower, actually. The private outdoor lookout hewn from limestone is as perfectly positioned for ogling Lisbon today as it was when the count and his family resided here.

It's a fitting place to wind up a trip that has revealed to us the benefits of putting ourselves in the hands of locals, and we turn the rest of our stay over to Lapa Palace indulgences. We



Winding down on a drive through Arrábida Natural Park.

loungue by the pool writing postcards, then order room service for lunch. We manage to leave for a few hours in the afternoon for one last espresso at Café a Brasileira in Chiado and to stock up on souvenirs at two other Chiado institutions: fine linens at Paris em Lisboa and glass goblets at Vista Alegre. But the tower lures us back, and we spend a mellow evening dining in the hotel bar amid a gaggle of cruisers preparing for their sailing the following morning.

I wake up early on our last day and go out to the tower. The city is hushed and misty. A pallid sun reaches through the fog, and Lisbon glows – what else? – dreamy pink. VI

INSIDER'S TIPS

PORTUGAL POINTERS

VETERAN GUIDE ISABEL LAGE DISHES ON THE BEST OF THE LISBON AREA.

Why visit Portugal? It's still the unknown pearl of Europe, a combination of tradition and modernity with friendly, easygoing people who are quite fluent in English.

When in Lisbon, don't miss: The **Belém** area (home to the Jerónimos Monastery), the **Gulbenkian Museum** (classical and European art), and the **Azulejo Museum** (showcasing Portugal's famed painted tiles).

Top Lisbon restaurants: **Gambrinus** (Rua das Portas de Santo Antão 23, 351-21/342-1466) for classic seafood and the best crêpes suzette in the world, **A Travessa** (12 Travessa do Convento das Bernardas, 351-21/390-2034) for excellent Portuguese cuisine in a former convent, **Alcântara Café** (Rua Maria Luisa Holstein 15, 351-21/363-7176) for trendy cuisine in a revamped warehouse.

Souvenirs: Linens from **Madeira House** (Rua Augusta 131-133, Lisbon; 351-21/342-6813) and **Bazar Central** (Praça da República 37, Sintra; 351-21/924-8245), jewelry from **Sarmiento** (Rua Aurea 251, Lisbon; 351-21/342-6774), and ceramics and textile art from **Teresa Pavão** (by appointment only, Rua S. João da Praça 120, Lisbon; 351-91/963-7895).

Local dishes to try: Shellfish rice; *bacalhau* (cod) à brás (with onions, potatoes, and eggs), *lagareiro*-style (served with olive oil and garlic over smashed red potatoes with grilled onions and peppers), or one of the other thousands of preparations; and desserts such as *pastel de nata* in Lisbon and *travesseiro* in Sintra.

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