Tour Code
PS2

ADVENTURESABROAD

PORTUGAL & NORTHERN SPAIN

16 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Lisbon

Welcome to Lisbon, where Atlantic breezes carry whispers of maritime empires across cobblestone squares.

Portugal's legendary capital has beckoned explorers for over eight centuries, and today we join that grand tradition of discovery. Since wresting control from the Moors in 1147, Lisbon has woven itself into the fabric of world history as Europe's first truly global city. From these very hills, Vasco da Gama charted routes to India, while Magellan dreamed of circumnavigating the globe. The colonial elegance that still graces the city's architecture speaks to an era when Portuguese caravels connected continents from Brazil to Macau.

This evening, we gather fellow travellers for our first dinner together, sharing anticipation for the journey ahead through Iberia's most captivating landscapes and storied cities.

Overnight in Lisbon.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Lisbon: City Tour

Lisbon unfolds before us like a living museum of maritime ambition, where Europe's second-oldest capital reveals its secrets through winding neighbourhoods and panoramic viewpoints.

We begin our exploration in the bohemian quarters of Bairro Alto and Chiado, where 16th-century working-class districts have evolved into artistic havens. Writers and painters have found inspiration here for generations, their legacy echoing through narrow streets lined with traditional Portuguese tiles.

Next, we navigate the medieval labyrinth of Alfama, Lisbon's Moorish heart, where laundry-draped balconies overlook ancient alleyways climbing toward São Jorge Castle. The fortress crowning this district offers commanding views over terracotta rooftops stretching to the Tagus River.

We then descend to Baixa, the methodically planned "lower town" rebuilt after the devastating 1755 earthquake. This geometric grid of streets and grand squares represents Enlightenment urban planning at its finest, creating Lisbon's commercial heartbeat.

This afternoon brings free time for personal discoveries. While we don't include Belém and Jerónimos Monastery in our formal programme due to overwhelming crowds, your Tour Leader can advise on optimal visiting strategies should you wish to explore this UNESCO site independently.

Overnight in Lisbon.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Lisbon - Obidos - Nazare - Fatima - Leiria

We venture northward through Portugal's heartland, where medieval fortifications and fishing traditions create an authentic tapestry of Portuguese culture.

Our first discovery awaits in Óbidos, a perfectly preserved medieval town encircled by 14th-century walls. We pass through the remarkable 18th-century gatehouse adorned with traditional azulejo tiles, entering a world where narrow cobblestone streets wind between brilliant white houses trimmed in cheerful blue. Gothic and Renaissance churches, particularly the beautiful Igreja de Santa Maria, remind us of Óbidos's historical significance as a royal wedding gift from King Dinis to Queen Isabel.

We then proceed to Nazaré, Portugal's most celebrated fishing village, where Atlantic waves have shaped both landscape and livelihood for

centuries. En route, we pause at Batalha for photographs of its magnificent monastery before witnessing Nazaré's iconic scene: brightly painted boats drawn up on sandy beaches. From the clifftop neighbourhood of Sítio, panoramic views reveal why this location became legendary among Portugal's fishing communities. Traditional seven-skirted costumes still grace local women near the Nossa Senhora de Nazaré Basilica, an important pilgrimage destination.

Our final stop brings us to Fátima, the renowned Catholic shrine where three shepherd children experienced visions in 1917. We visit the Basilica and Chapel of Apparitions marking this sacred site before continuing to charming Leiria.

Overnight in Leiria.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Leiria - Coimbra - Bussaco - Viseu

Portugal's intellectual heritage beckons as we journey to Coimbra, where university spires have crowned hillsides since medieval times. Coimbra served as Portugal's capital for over a century, and its steeply terraced historic centre, dating to Moorish occupation, retains wonderfully atmospheric cobbled lanes overlooked by the monumental cathedral. This UNESCO World Heritage city houses continental Europe's oldest university, founded in 1290, making it older than Cambridge or the Sorbonne.

We explore the magnificent 12th-century Sé Velha Cathedral, its Romanesque solidity contrasting with the ornate Manueline doorways of the 13th-century university. The baroque library, with its gilt shelving and frescoed ceiling, represents one of Europe's most beautiful academic repositories. We also visit the Alameda Gate and Santa Cruz Church, plus the Machado de Castro Museum to witness the remarkable Roman tunnels upon which the building stands.

After a break for lunch and free time, we continue to Buçaco, renowned for its extraordinary botanical collection of over 400 native species plus 300 varieties brought by Portuguese explorers from Mexico, Japan, and Africa. The royal family cherished this forest retreat so deeply they constructed a summer palace and hunting lodge, now an elegant hotel. Here, in 1810, Wellington's forces defeated Napoleon's troops at the Battle of Buçaco, marking the turning point in the French invasion attempt.

Overnight in Viseu.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Viseu - the Douro Valley - Porto

Viseu's ancient streets reveal why Romans chose this elevated position, its name deriving from "viso," meaning "good view." We stroll through the historical centre, discovering the Cathedral, Misericórdia Church, and remarkable Synagogue that speak to centuries of cultural diversity.

We then embark on a picturesque drive through landscapes dotted with traditional granite houses adorned with wooden balconies, entering the legendary Douro Valley. This UNESCO World Heritage site represents the world's first demarcated wine region, established in 1756 when Portuguese authorities recognised the unique terroir producing exceptional port wine.

Steep terraced hillsides, carved by generations of vintners, create amphitheatres of vines stretching along the meandering river. Famous company names—Cockburn's, Taylor's, Sandeman—announce their presence on weathered placards, testament to centuries of Anglo-Portuguese wine trade.

En route, we stop for a cellar tour, tasting, and included lunch at a traditional quinta, learning how schist soil and microclimate combine to create port's distinctive character. We also visit Amarante's bustling market, where local specialties reflect the region's agricultural abundance.

Arriving in Porto this evening, dinner remains at your leisure, allowing flexibility to explore this atmospheric riverside city independently.

Overnight in Porto.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 6 Porto: Braga & Guimaraes

Braga beckons with its extraordinary concentration of religious architecture—over 300 churches earning it recognition as Portugal's spiritual capital and Christendom's highest church-per-capita ratio.

Founded by Goidelic Celts called the Bracari several millennia ago, Braga's strategic location attracted successive occupations. Romans arrived in 250 BC, making it the hub of five major roads leading to Rome. Suevians conquered it in 409 AD, replaced by Visigoths in 485, who yielded to Moorish armies in 711. For three centuries, Christians and Muslims contested control until the 11th century Christian reconquest.

Our exploration centres on Santuário do Bom Jesus do Monte, a UNESCO World Heritage Site featuring a spectacularly situated church built in 1784. Carlos Amarante's Italian-inspired neoclassical design integrates harmoniously with northern Portugal's landscape. The remarkable stairway contains 17 landings adorned with symbolic fountains and allegorical statues in full Baroque splendour.

We ascend via the funicular—the first built on the Iberian Peninsula and the world's oldest water-counterbalanced system. From the summit, panoramic views encompass the ornate granite fountains cascading down the hillside and the gleaming white church crowning this pilgrimage site.

In Braga's medieval quarter, Renaissance and Manueline palaces neighbour baroque churches along narrow streets that have witnessed centuries of faith and commerce.

After a break for lunch, we proceed to Guimarães, birthplace of Portugal's first king and 2012 European Capital of Culture. In this UNESCO-listed medieval quarter, we begin at Largo da Oliveira, admiring varied architectural styles. Window boxes burst with colourful flowers as we pass workshops, bakeries, and stores operating unchanged by time's passage.

Overnight in Porto.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Porto: City Tour

Porto reveals itself as a masterpiece of urban evolution, where 2,000 years of continuous habitation have created one of Europe's most atmospheric cities.

The Romans established Portus Cale at this strategic river mouth, giving Portugal its name. During Roman times, the settlement gained prominence facilitating trade between Lisbon and Braga, eventually becoming the launching point for Portugal's Age of Discovery.

Built along hillsides overlooking the Douro's mouth, Porto displays an outstanding urban landscape reflecting centuries of prosperity linked to Atlantic commerce. The UNESCO World Heritage historic centre preserves treasures spanning Romanesque, Gothic, Baroque, and Neo-classical periods, creating Portugal's most architecturally rich cityscape after Lisbon.

Our walking tour includes the opulent Stock Exchange Palace with its lavish neoclassical interiors, the Cathedral commanding views over terracotta rooftops, and São Bento Station famous for its spectacular azulejo tile panels depicting Portuguese history. The medieval Ribeira district enchants with its labyrinthine streets and riverside Praça da Ribeira, where we visit the 13th-century Igreja de São Francisco. Unfortunately, the exquisitely gilded Igreja de Santa Clara remains closed for restoration, viewable only from outside.

This afternoon, we leisurely cruise the Douro River, witnessing Porto's remarkable skyline from the water.

Overnight in Porto.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Porto, Portugal - Santiago de Compostela, Spain

Crossing into Spain, we discover Santiago de Compostela, where golden granite creates one of Iberia's most beautiful cities.

Built entirely from local golden stone, Santiago appears almost magical in certain lights, its medieval streets declared a national monument in

their entirety. The city remains remarkably integrated, enhanced by comprehensive pedestrianisation that preserves its contemplative atmosphere. Buildings, squares, arcades, and statues hewn from identical granite blocks blend imperceptibly, often making ground level indistinguishable from raised terraces.

En route, we pause in Baiona, among Galicia's most important coastal towns due to its harbour and fishing fleet. This port gained eternal fame when Columbus's caravel Pinta landed here first in Europe after the "discovery" of America. Time allows for coffee, Spanish tapas, and local shopping while absorbing this historic moment's significance.

Depending on our arrival time, we may begin Santiago's exploration after checking into our hotel, setting the stage for tomorrow's comprehensive discoveries.

Santiago's granite streets have welcomed pilgrims for over a millennium, and tonight we join that tradition, resting in preparation for encountering one of Christianity's most sacred destinations.

Overnight in Santiago de Compostela.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Santiago de Compostela: City Tour

Santiago has drawn pilgrims for over a thousand years, and we begin where their walk ends, in Obradoiro Square, named for the stonemasons' workshops that built the cathedral. The Archbishop's residence preserves 12th-century chambers, the neoclassical Town Hall (formerly Raxoy Palace) faces the cathedral, and San Jeronimo College, a 17th-century building, is entered through a Romanesque portal from an earlier site.

Statues of St James throughout the cathedral show him as a pilgrim, with staff, broad-brimmed hat and scallop shell, symbols recognized across Christian Europe. We tour the Cathedral Museum and Cloister, where sacred art unfolds over the centuries, then stop at the Platerias Gate, the cathedral's only surviving Romanesque facade, whose sculptures narrate biblical stories in stone.

The highlight is a guided walk across the cathedral roofs. We enter through Gelmirez Palace beside the cathedral, climb past the gallery above the Gloria doorway and step out onto the rooftops. From there the historic centre spreads below us, and the care that went into planning the city becomes easy to see.

Overnight in Santiago de Compostela.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Santiago de Compostela - Leon

We travel by road to Leon, where Roman foundations support Gothic magnificence. The city began as a Roman military camp and became the capital of a medieval Christian kingdom, and we start at San Isidoro Collegiate Church, a Romanesque masterpiece and the final resting place of 23 kings and queens.

The 13th-century cathedral is Gothic in the French manner, its walls opened to more than 100 stained-glass panels that fill the interior with jewel-toned light.

Walking on through the old quarter, we pass stretches of medieval wall and remnants of the original Roman fortifications, then reach Casa de Botines, a neo-Gothic building by Antoni Gaudi that shows his imagination at work beyond Barcelona. Leon's place on the pilgrim routes to Santiago brought the prosperity behind these monuments.

Overnight in Leon.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Leon - Cave of Altamira - Bilbao

We leave Leon and drive north to Altamira, where painters were at work well over 14,000 years ago. Discovered in the 1870s, the cave's nearly perfect paintings of wild animals and human handprints stand among the finest Paleolithic art known, made when ice still covered much of Europe.

The original cave is closed to preserve the paintings, so we visit the museum and its precise replica. Up close, the bison, horses and boar show how the artists used natural pigments and the cave's own contours to give their animals volume.

Continuing into Basque country, we reach Bilbao, tucked among the green coastal mountains of Euskadi. Locals call it Bilbo in Basque and affectionately botxo, the hole, for the valleys that shelter it. Fishing hamlets huddled here for protection from Norman raiders and Atlantic pirates, and the industrial port that grew from them has reinvented itself as a cultural destination without losing its fierce Basque independence.

Overnight in Bilbao.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Bilbao: The Guggenheim

Medieval Bilbao opens the morning, its cobbled Old Town streets and intimate squares tracing the city's path from fishing village to industrial powerhouse to cultural destination.

Then comes the Guggenheim. Frank Gehry's titanium-clad museum covers 31,329 sq m/349,000 sq ft, and its curves and angles shift with every viewpoint, so the building reads as sculpture before we step inside. Its atrium rises 50 m/165 ft, and the galleries hold 20th-century American and European art by artists such as Kandinsky, Mondrian, Picasso, Pollock and Serra, in rotating exhibitions.

The museum gave its name to the Bilbao Effect, the idea that a single building can revive a city's economy and civic pride.

The afternoon is ours to shape. We can stay on at the Guggenheim, visit the Basque Museum or the Fine Arts Museum, take a guided boat tour along the Nervion estuary to see the city's industrial heritage, or join the bus excursion to San Sebastian, about 1 hr 20 min each way. Our Tour Leader helps us plan.

Overnight in Bilbao.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Bilbao - Fly to Barcelona: City Tour

We fly from Bilbao to Barcelona and meet our local guide for a panoramic introduction to the city, where Catalan culture and architectural invention meet. We pass Plaza Espana, ringed by grand buildings and fountains, and the 1992 Olympic sites, a moment when Barcelona showed itself to the world and set off the renewal still under way.

From the Montjuic viewpoint the skyline, the Mediterranean and Gaudi's Sagrada Familia, rising like a stone forest above the city grid, lie spread out before us. We continue along Gran Via, one of the city's busiest thoroughfares, lined with shops, restaurants and historic buildings.

The tour ends at Park Guell, Gaudi's UNESCO World Heritage site, where mosaic pathways, undulating benches and the famous ceramic lizard turn public space into something between garden and fantasy. It is a first look at a city where medieval foundations carry modernist invention.

Overnight in Barcelona.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Barcelona: City Tour

We begin in the Barrio Gotico, where Roman foundations carry one of Europe's best-preserved medieval quarters. Narrow, winding streets lead to Barcelona Cathedral and the Royal Palace, and the weathered stone and shadowed alleys keep the Middle Ages close.

We then transfer to the Sagrada Familia, Gaudi's masterpiece and Barcelona's best-known landmark, for a guided tour. Its spires twist upward like living growth, and stained glass casts rainbow patterns across forest-like columns inspired by the geometry of nature. Begun in 1882, the basilica is still being completed by contemporary craftspeople committed to Gaudi's vision.

The afternoon is free. You might choose to visit the Museu Picasso, with the formative works of Spain's most celebrated modern artist, the National Art Museum of Catalonia for Catalan art from medieval to contemporary, the Joan Miro Foundation or Parc de la Ciutadella, or simply stroll La Rambla with its shops, cafes and street performers.

Overnight in Barcelona.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Barcelona: Montserrat & Leisure Time

Montserrat rises from Catalonia's horizon, its jagged silhouette explaining the name, "serrated mountain". Pilgrims have climbed among its stairs, caves, chapels and hermitages for over a thousand years. We drive through Montserrat Natural Park to the Sanctuary, 725 m/2,380 ft above sea level, where on clear days the Pyrenees form the backdrop.

In the Royal Basilica we visit the Chapel of Our Lady of Montserrat, home of La Moreneta, the Black Virgin. This 12th-century Romanesque wooden statue is Catalonia's patron saint and draws devotees from across the Catholic world. An audiovisual exhibition, Montserrat Portes Endins (Montserrat from Within), sets the sanctuary in its history.

We also taste four locally produced liqueurs, a flavour of Benedictine monastery craftsmanship. Back in Barcelona the rest of the day is ours for museums, neighbourhood strolls or Mediterranean cafe life.

Overnight in Barcelona.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Departure

Departure from Barcelona.

BUEN VIAJE!