

Lisbon's New Lease on Life

Anja Mutić strolls through the colorful streets of one of Portugal's most vibrant cities, taking in both the old and the new.



Alfama



Baixa

Just over a decade ago, Portugal's capital had the backwater feel of a second-rate European city. Then the 1998 World Expo came along, followed by the 2004 Euro soccer championships, and the two events kick-started a slew of urban renewal projects that perked up Lisbon's sleepy streetscapes. Business started booming and people poured into this poignantly beautiful city built on seven hills.

But the uptick didn't stick and after several "honeymoon" years, Lisbon plunged into a deep debt crisis on the wave of the global downturn. These days, while bailouts and budget cuts steal the local headlines, visitors to the city can witness a spate of recent openings and business incentives that make Lisbon one of Europe's most exciting capitals. So if you're in town on business, here's a rundown of some of the old favorites and notable newcomers on the scene.

Let's start with the lay of the land. The Baixa, or "lower town," showcases charming mosaic-paved streets, neoclassical architecture and the twin squares of Rossio and Praça da Figueira. Chiado, the city's upscale culture and shopping hub, hovers just above Baixa. North of the center extends the tree-lined Avenida da Liberdade, a grand boulevard that is home to elegant hotels, boutiques and restaurants. The historic waterfront district of Belém lies out west, while, to the east, Parque das Nações, the formerly decrepit industrial area by the Tagus River, showcases futuristic architecture and the award-winning transportation hub Gare do Oriente by Spanish "starchitect" Santiago Calatrava.

TODAY, FOOD KIOSKS SERVE GLOBALLY INSPIRED DISHES FROM THE EX-COLONIES, LIKE MOZAMBIQUE AND INDIA, AND ON SOME DAYS YOU CAN CATCH LIVE MUSIC SHOWS AND CULTURAL PERFORMANCES.

For a great distraction between client meetings, nothing beats the iconic ride on the rattling Tram 28 from Baixa up through the twisting streets of Alfama, a maze-like Moorish quarter that hugs one of Lisbon's hills. To take in stand-out views from Alfama's hilltop, get off at Castelo de São Jorge and stroll along the ramparts of this ancient fort, once the seat of Portugal's first king.

Back in Baixa, board Elevador de Santa Justa, a Gothic elevator that will whisk you to another hilltop, the chic Chiado. Before rushing off to the next meeting, make sure you get a *bica* (Portuguese for espresso) at Café a Brasileira, a legendary Art Nouveau café that's been drawing Lisbon writers and artists since the eighteenth century.

Don't miss an outing to Lisbon's newest attraction, Terreiro do Paço, Lisbon's grand riverfront square revamped and unveiled in mid-2012 after a €10 million investment. This buzzy meeting place now features a clutch of restaurants, bars and shops as well as the Lisbon Story Centre, a high-tech interactive exhibit that recreates the past of Portugal's capital through a 60-minute presentation of the major historical events that shaped it.

Another sign of new life in Lisbon's center is the market at Martim Moniz square, which sits in the middle of Mouraria, until recently a neglected and run-down melting pot. In the

summer of 2012, the area perked up when an intercultural fusion market opened on the square. Today, food kiosks serve globally inspired dishes from the ex-colonies, like Mozambique and India, and on some days you can catch live music shows and cultural performances.

For a lovely waterfront outing, follow the Tagus River out west to Belém, where you can climb Torre de Belém, a sixteenth-century riverside tower built during the Age of Discovery, and sample the famous custard cakes, *pastéis de belém*, which in 2012 celebrated 175 years of their sweet existence; the best place to try them is Antiga Confeitaria de Belém.

To mix up business with art, stop by Lisbon's top museum, Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, to the north of the center, an excellent private collection with a display of Egyptian, Greco-Roman, Mesopotamian and Far Eastern art; the museum's foundation also organizes free concerts and film screenings.

Lisbon's lodging scene is awash with newcomers, although the centrally located Four Seasons Hotel Ritz Lisbon remains the prime choice for business travelers. This landmark property gets top marks on many fronts: from the dotingly discreet service to spacious well-equipped rooms and suites, a stellar spa and the downright excellent Varanda Restaurant. Most importantly, the business services are superb—the multilingual concierge assists guests around

the clock and can arrange for anything from secretarial help to translation services.

Still, the brand-new Myriad by SANA Hotels, located in Torre Vasco da Gama, Lisbon's tallest building in Parque das Nações, is another fabulous choice for travelers looking to check out one of the newcomers. The Myriad's 186 contemporary rooms and suites have dazzling views of the Tagus, a couple of dining options and great business facilities—including three meeting rooms inside the tower and another seven function rooms inside Crystal Myriad Centre, linked to the hotel by an aerial covered bridge.

For a more intimate hideaway, choose the Heritage Avenida Liberdade Hotel, a 42-room retreat that overlooks leafy Avenida da Liberdade. Beautifully restored by Portuguese architect Miguel Cândia Martins, the eighteenth-century building showcases parquet floors, original *azulejos* (Portugal's highly decorative painted tiles) and wood paneling. Business facilities may be skimpy, but there's a delightful mezzanine library with a computer; a cozy lobby lounge filled with armchairs; and a staff that will go out of their way to cater to your business needs.

Of the many excellent dining options in Lisbon, here's a trio of standouts: Book a table at Belcanto in swank Chiado, where star chef José Avillez cooks up an innovative haute



Pastéis de Belém
and Bica



Torre de Belém

Belém



Traditional Portuguese Tiles



FOR A GREAT DISTRACTION BETWEEN CLIENT MEETINGS, NOTHING BEATS THE ICONIC RIDE ON THE RATTLING TRAM 28 FROM BAIXA UP THROUGH THE TWISTING STREETS OF ALFAMA, A MAZE-LIKE MOORISH QUARTER THAT HUGS ONE OF LISBON'S HILLS.

DETAILS

WHERE TO STAY:

- **Four Seasons Hotel Ritz Lisbon**
Rua Rodrigo da Fonseca 88, Lisbon 1099-039.
Tel.: +351 (21) 381-1400; fourseasons.com/lisbon
- **Myriad by SANA Hotels**
Cais das Naus, Lote 2.21.01, Parque das Nações,
Lisbon 1990-173. Tel.: +351 (21) 110-7600;
myriad.pt
- **Heritage Avenida Liberdade Hotel**
Avenida da Liberdade 28, Lisbon 1250.
Tel.: +351 (21) 340-4040; heritageaviliberdade.com

WHERE TO EAT:

- **Belcanto**
Largo de São Carlos 10, Lisbon 1200-410.
Tel.: +351 (21) 342-0607
- **100 Maneiras**
Rua do Teixeira 35; Lisbon 1200-459.
Tel.: +351 (91) 030-7575
- **Bistro 100 Maneiras**
9 Largo da Trindade, Lisbon 1200-466.
Tel.: +351 (91) 030-7575

CONCIERGE CORNER

A tip from the concierge desk of Four Seasons Hotel Ritz Lisbon:

For art and history lovers, we suggest starting your cultural promenade at the hotel. With over 600 unique pieces, it's one of the country's most important collections of mid-century Portuguese art. We can also arrange a private viewing of two special venues: **Fundação Ricardo Espírito Santo Silva**, inside the eighteenth-century Azurara Palace atop Alfama, houses a private foundation with a rare collection of gold and metalwork; tiles and carpets; and a shop selling traditionally crafted reproductions created on-site. **Palácio da Fronteira**, in northwest Lisbon, is a privately owned residence built in 1640, with striking *azulejos* (some of the city's finest); seventeenth- and eighteenth-century oil paintings; and gorgeous gardens with a terraced walk, a topiary garden and mesmerizing fountains.

Parque das Nações



cuisine storm that recently received the Michelin star of approval. Another talented Lisbon chef, the Bosnian-born Ljubomir Stanisic, helms two outstanding restaurants: the 100 Maneiras in Bairro Alto, where the nine-course tasting menu showcases a variety of seafood and market-fresh ingredients in a small, beautifully lit dining room and—a stone's throw away, in Chiado—the more playful Bistro 100 Maneiras, a buzzing two-floor space clad in white wood paneling, where you can sample modern Portuguese classics with French and Yugoslavian twists. The medley of flavors epitomizes modern-day Lisbon: the Old World melting pot with more than a few new tricks up its sleeve. Why not dip a spoon into the proverbial pot and enjoy the city's complex flavors yourself?