

PORTUGAL

Autumn is our favourite time to visit Europe. Being somewhat 'crowd averse', travelling in the height of the European summer holds little attraction for us. September provides gorgeous weather and less tourists which leads to more available accommodation and uncrowded dining.

It is quite a few years since we have visited Portugal and we've returned at the invitation of the Porto Half Marathon organisers. Having done Champagne flights earlier in the year, we were quite keen to try a few 'Port flights' so when the opportunity came knocking, we were in.

MONDAY – DAY 1

We arrive in Portugal around 2pm. Followed by the longest bus ride in history to the terminal and the most distance ever experienced to get to the luggage delivery. Another longest was the taxi queue - worse than a Disney ride.

We finally get a taxi and away we go. An uninspiring journey gets us to our accommodation at **Casa Balthazar** - a beautiful, white, old (1829) residence that now operates as a guest house.

We are warmly welcomed and shown to our room. Wow! We walk into a lovely sitting/lounge room with an old style writing desk, comfy leather lounge and TV. Next room is the bedroom with a king bed and two leather chairs next to the French doors which open onto a view of the courtyard and pool. The next room houses a small kitchenette and wardrobe. The final room is the huge bathroom with oversize bath and shower. It is absolutely gorgeous. About €240pn.



We unpack and go out for a walk into town which is reasonably close, down many steps and into Rosario Square.



We locate **Moma**, which we saw on Rick Stein's Weekends Away the night before we flew out from Australia, and make a 6pm booking. We traipse, very slowly, around the streets and make an extra long visit to a wine shop where they have stools we take advantage of. No wine, just sitting.

The waterfront is a hive of activity both with humans and birds. It is a gorgeous afternoon and people are out taking advantage of the pleasant weather.



Finally it's 6pm and we return to Moma. Our host is Paulo Lopes – cheery, welcoming and keen to make our evening enjoyable. We have a lovely aperitif of port to settle into the evening. I order fried prawns for entree and Dave the clams. The six large prawns are cooked to perfection and come with a piri piri mayo.... scrumptious. Dave's clams are good but pale in comparison to the prawns.



We both have the sardines cooked over the coals for main (recommended by Rick) and they are delish - three big, fat sardines per serving. Paulo then brings us another fish each... plenty of food!

We enjoy a Ruby port post dinner. Cheers!



TUESDAY – DAY 2

We enjoy a fabulous breakfast - fresh fruit, croissants and rolls, cheese and ham - in the garden. There is just us and one other couple. The morning is a bit cool but pleasant.



We walk back down to **Figueira Place** to catch the tram to **Belem**. Another recommendation, both by Rick and somewhere else I read, is **Pasteis de Belem** - they make pasteis de belem (egg tart) to the same recipe they acquired from the neighbouring Jeronimos Monastery way back in 1837. It is easy to find as there is a long queue into the cafe. €1.50 each.

We join in and soon realise this is a well oiled machine. Order and pay, get in the next queue to collect. They have a 400 seat cafe also.



We cross the road to get photos and enjoy our tarts. They are small, still warm from the oven and to die for! The pastry is flaky and the filling light and delicious. Another excellent recommendation.

We wander through the park and along the waterfront, down past the beautiful **Monument of the Discoveries** and to the **Belem Tower**.



We meet up with friends for lunch at **Doca do Bom Sucesso**, a lovely restaurant set adjacent to the boat harbour.

I order the prawn and lobster curry and Dave the sashimi tuna lightly cooked. Dave gets the prize for the best dish but my curry is really enjoyable. I have a Tiramisu for dessert and Dave has the apple pie, which is thinly sliced apples on a thin layer of pastry. My Tiramisu is as light as a feather but very rich. One of the best I've had. We have a wonderful few hours together before going our separate ways. We walk back along the waterfront and through the park.



We came across a lady this morning with lovely hand drawn prints of Lisbon and we return to buy one.



There is a parade of horses coming down the road and they make a formation outside the monastery. Two black cars pull up, they get out, stand for a few minutes and take off again. The horses also leave. Lovely presentation for goodness knows what reason.



The traffic has been held for the parade so we figure we'll sit for a while and let the backlog clear. We find a cafe just off the Main Street where we sit in the shade and watch the world go by.

We wander up to the tram stop and wait.... and wait..... and wait. No trams. Eventually a bus comes along and pulls up.... dozens (including us) pile on, many miss out, and we are off homeward bound.



We arrive back at **Figueira Place** and have a short walk home. Once back we sit and relax in our window chairs. I am constantly amazed at how quiet things can be in the middle of a bustling city.

We decide later that we don't need any food so just shower and continue to read.

What a great day!



WEDNESDAY – DAY 3

Another delightful brekkie in the garden.

Today we are off to **Cascais**. We trek on down to Cais de Sodre (train station). Seeing as we're here we purchase tickets for the 12pm train to Porto on Friday. Why queue twice. The service guy is really pleasant and helpful and we're done in no time. Off to platform 2 and onto the yellow rattler. The trains here are ordinary and covered in graffiti, as is most of Lisbon. It's a shame really as it very much detracts from an otherwise beautiful city. On a more positive note, the train pulls out dead on schedule at 11am.



The 10min trip takes close to 40min but the end result is well worth it. We step out of the station into a gorgeous town centre. There is a tourist info pop up across the road so we grab a map and some hints about the town.

Another block and the street opens up onto the prettiest beach in a cove surrounded by rocks. There are plenty of people about. There is a cafe on our level with views of the beach.



We meander along the coastline. Before too long the path leads to another beach, adjacent which sits the **Villa Cascai** hotel. It's perfectly located and I make a note that we must come back and stay there.



We wander in and have a chat with the guy on the desk. The lobby is very old world and we notice a lot of sporting memorabilia on the walls, particularly of the F1 type. There is also a lovely blue pool table in the front room - more brownie points.

We continue walking around the waters' edge, to the marina. The town is planted with flowers and the gardens are all well manicured.



We double back and this time walk through the town centre which is equally interesting. We continue through Cascai and find a restaurant on yet another beach, **Capricciosa Pizza Artesani**.

We take a table on the verandah and share a Capricciosa pizza and salad of tomato and mozzarella. Perfect.



We decide to walk to the next train station, along the beach. Beach after beach, each one a bit quieter than the previous one, the further from Cascais that we get.



We jump the train back to Lisbon after an enjoyable day. Back home we settle in our chairs beside our open doors and read.

We have booked dinner at **Duque** - a small restaurant with cosy tables and a great atmosphere. We both order the Braised Tuna with sweet potato and caramelised onion and Iberian Pork Cheek, slow cooked, with garlic and coriander rice. Wow! Exceptional meal. We have a local red house wine which is also good. Finished off with a 10yo Tawny.



The waiter is a nice guy who lived for a while in Perth. Surfer dude from Brazil originally.

THURSDAY – DAY 4

We wander off to the **Mercado Di Ribeira** – it is really quiet as we wander around the F&V and then the seafood options.

Next door is the Time Out Market which is the dining area. The edge is surrounded by various food options with tables crammed in the middle. It is reasonably quiet at 11am. We decide we will go off for a tram ride then come back for lunch.



We traipse off to find the #28 tram which meanders through the hills of Lisbon. We wait for about half an hour - nothing. We see a #28 tram come the other direction and decide to jump on. Good move and we enjoy a great trip up through the streets of Lisbon, from down in the city up the hills to the lookout. It is such a great city with street after interesting street to be explored.



We get to the end of this segment and it's "all out". We walk a bit and find ourselves at Placa Figueira within a few minutes. We try another tram and end up back where we just came from. Back to Figueira where we get on the #18 to Belem as we know it goes past the markets.

Back there in no time. Things have certainly become busy since we left a few hours ago!

We manage to nab a couple of chairs. I spied fried prawns in olive oil and garlic with spicy sauce earlier and am happy with this choice. Along with a glass of sangria to wash it down. Great choice and we sit for a while, taking in the busy atmosphere of the place.

Dave has spotted a port pop up over my shoulder and we decide to have a look. They have a sample platter which sounds fun and we order the four sample option.

We have a Taylor's Chip Dry (white), Select Reserve Ruby, Late Bottle Vintage and 10yo Tawny. Luckily, we turn around and there are two seats behind us, so we grab them. A lady comes along with a cheese platter which looks sensational. We strike up a conversation - she is from the Netherlands. She shares some cheese, we share some port. All a lot of fun.



We eventually leave and walk up the hill towards home. We decide we'll see if we can get lucky with the #28 in the other direction and do. We enjoy another great tram ride which happens to go though our local square so we jump off on the return.





As we head towards home, we happen upon a free tour so we stop to listen. They are moving our way so we tag along. The guide is really interesting and we stay for his next stop before parting ways.

We booked again for Duque tonight as it was so good last night and so close, just at the end of the street.

I opt for Confit Duck Leg in port wine, herbs and olive oil, with garlic and Portuguese sausage rice. Dave - Veal steak with veges. And a beer. They have eclectic music to go with the decorations in the restaurant with a lot of 60s and 70s music.

FRIDAY – DAY 5

It is raining so we take brekkie inside, looking out onto the garden.

We pack and grab a taxi at 11am to catch our 12 noon train to Porto, which is a 3hr trip, some parts of which are interesting and some not so. Getting closer to Porto we begin to see some vineyards. The river crossing just prior to arrival is quite stunning.

We are met at the station and driven to the Crowne Plaza, our home for the next 4nts. We are welcomed at the hotel with a glass of port - appropriate. We have a lovely room - 717 - which is quite spacious for a hotel room with a nice bathroom as well.



We receive a message from our host, that we will meet in the lobby for dinner at 8:30pm. We make our way down to the bar around 7:30. We have been watching the Laver Cup in the room and ask bar guy if we can continue to watch it in the bar. After a quick assessment of the other three people in the bar, none of whom are watching the fashion show on tv, he turns it over for us.

We have a beer and watch the doubles. We meet up with our Porto friends and have a group table in the restaurant. I have the Salmon with cauliflower purée and it is delish. We enjoy a lovely evening.

SATURDAY – DAY 6

We have brekkie and meet for a 10:30 departure to the expo, which is in a shopping centre.

It is quite well set up - bib collection only with T-shirt collection up another level. The local running events bring 100,000 people into the shopping centre, so it is a very beneficial relationship for the centre, who are now a sponsor.

We leave at 12:30 and do a bit of a course tour. Porto is a beautiful city and our driver points out places of interest for us to visit.

Back at the hotel Dave grabs a broly and his bag and we take the 201 into town. The bus stop is conveniently across the road from the hotel, which is handy as the rain is still coming down.

We alight in the old town and make our way down the rather steep hill. The rain belts down. Not too far down the street and we come across a port and chocolate house, Chocolateria Ecuador. Perfect and out of the rain. We go in and there is an overwhelming smell of chocolate. They have a port and chocolate truffle pairing so we both have a port wine truffle with port.



The port is smooth. The truffle is smooth too but really, really rich. Dave loves it, I feel my toes curling. But it is a lot of fun and we stay a while....particularly as when we go to leave it is teaming rain.

We eventually move out and make our way down the hill, towards the river. The rain is diagonal and our bottom halves are getting wet.

I have a recommendation for **Portologia**, from an English girl I met at the Marathon du Medoc (a couple of weeks ago) and thankfully it is only a few blocks away. The place is full but we say we'll wait..... anything to get out of the rain.

They quickly pull a table from a couple who are occupying two of them and we are seated. The establishment specialises in smaller producers and the walls are covered with port.

We have three menus - one for wine by the glass, one for tastings and one for tapas food. We select a tasting of six ports, €25 and a small cheese and charcuterie platter.

The six glasses are elaborately laid out in front of us with six bottles lined up behind. Domenic comes and pours each one, providing an in depth description of each. Apart from a slight digression to get the phone number of a client, after which he turns to us and says "she's beautiful isn't she" and "I have the BEST job." Back to the ports



We enjoy a leisurely tasting and the cheeses match the various ports. This is a cosy place with great atmosphere.

We finally drag ourselves away and it is still raining but vertically now. We trudge uphill, back to the bus stop and head home. More Laver Cup on our return.

SUNDAY – DAY 7

Race day. We are on the elite athlete bus at 7:15 and go to the start line. It is well set up and the runners are bussed in from various parts of the city.

We then go by car to the finish line. Again, it is brilliantly set up and very well organised. The rain is gone and the running conditions are good.



The winner comes in a tad over 1:03. The awards ceremony is very well organised and Dave is part of the presenting team. Great morning.

Back on the bus to the hotel around lunch time.

We get a taxi to **Graham's Port Lodge** which has a stunning position on the hill, overlooking the river and city. We take up position on stools with a view. The service is slow but we get there eventually. I have 20yr Tawny and Dave a Ruby port, with a cheese platter. Fabulous afternoon and we enjoy a second Ruby.



As we depart we find the open kitchen and watch the chef cook a brontosaurus size rib eye over the coals. He throws an handful of coarse salt on one side, then turns the meat and dumps another fistful of salt on the other side. It looks amazing. We decide we may come for lunch tomorrow!



We wander off down towards the city – it is a gorgeous, sunny afternoon and there are people everywhere. We take the cable car and walk across the bridge and onto the **Porto Cathedral**. It is indeed a beautiful city and we see an alternative view of it today.





A further walk up and we catch the bus home. It is nearing 6pm by the time we get back.

Our host has offered to take us to the local football match where he has a private box. We have a great time and the atmosphere is like nothing we have experienced before. 45,000 fans who know how to make a ruckus. At our end of the field is a dedicated group of fans who chant throughout the whole game... never stop.... neither do their drums. It is a spectacular night.... football in Portugal, what an honour!



MONDAY – DAY 8

We have a 2:30 reservation at **Vinim**, the restaurant at **Graham's Lodge**. We are early and take a seat outside. We are offered a complimentary aperitif (that later appears on our bill) of white port and tonic. Quite refreshing.

We are shown to our table - the dining room has a spectacular view over Gaia and the Old City and is quite charming.



Our waiter guides us with regards to entrees and we enjoy Tuna Tartare and a local sausage, along with a Vino Verde which matches well.

Having watched the meat cook over the coals yesterday we order it for main - it comes with a side of potatoes in salt and Rosemary (one of my favourites at home). Matches with a local red it is a fabulous meal.





We decide we will have dessert with a port - Dave orders the apple pie and I have poached pear, matched with a 20yo Tawny. The port comes but it is a long wait for the desserts.

Meanwhile the staff decide to redecorate the dining room, dragging tables and chairs all over the place, then moving them again. It sounds like a train station and eventually there's nothing to do but laugh as we watch chairs put into place, then moved, then put back. At this stage we are the only remaining guests in the dining room and they clearly don't give a toss about our comfort level.

We have enjoyed a pleasant and fabulous long lunch. The bill is €135. The aperitifs are on the bill but none of the port - must have been a discount for the noise! We wander off into town and have a free sample of port courtesy of our cable car tickets yesterday. It is barely a sip.



Onto **Calems** port house and take a table in the sun. It is a stunning afternoon and this is the place to be, down on the river, in the midst of the town. The sun drops.



We walk across the lower bridge and up through the Old Town. Our final stop for the day is **Vinofino Wine House** - another port and a cheese plate which we can't get through.



We waddle off to the bus stop and take the 9pm home. Lucky as this is the last bus of the day!

TUESDAY – DAY 9

We are collected just after 5:30am and we're at the airport 15mins later. Check in. Go to the lounge. Upgrade to Business at the gate. Which means nothing really apart from a seat in row 1.

Our flight out of Lisbon is delayed a bit and it's a fiasco getting to the plane but we are off and headed for Berlin.

Portugal has been fantastic - a great country with excellent food and appalling service on many occasions. We will be back - it's been 15 years or so since our last visit and it's too long.