

The funding we received from Tutorials Plus and the Picot Prize helped finance a trip to Lisbon, the capital city of Portugal, during September 2022. The purpose of our visit was to improve our language skills and to experience Portuguese culture at first-hand, bringing our studies at Oxford into a 'real world' context.



We attended a Portuguese language course run by The Institute of Portuguese Language and Culture (IPLC). The classes were held from 8am to noon, 5 days a week in the Faculdade de Letras, Universidade de Lisboa (School of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon). After classes, we had homework to complete on most days. Our teachers covered a lot of grammar and new vocabulary, and we were given many listening exercises and speaking activities which encouraged us to engage in conversation with the other students. The opportunity to hear and speak European Portuguese was especially useful. Both of our teachers were from Porto, Portugal's second city which is in the north of the country, and so we were exposed to the northern dialect and we also learnt some local slang. For example, in Porto, if you want to order a coffee you should ask for a 'cimbolino', or, in Lisbon it's a 'bica'. Life in Portugal, however, revolves around coffee drinking and 'café' is understood everywhere! Beer names also vary from place to place. In Lisbon most people order an 'imperial', but no one will serve you a fresh beer in Porto if you don't call it 'fino'. At the end of the four-week course we sat exams (two written and one speaking); the marks were combined with a score for attendance, and effort/performance in class and homework tasks to give each student an overall grade. Happily, we both passed which made up for the early mornings which were often painful!



We rented an Airbnb in an apartment block in Arroios, a residential district in central Lisbon, sharing with four other students who study with us in Oxford. We enjoyed the culture of apartment living that is commonplace in Europe. We were also fortunate as the cleaner was Brazilian, which gave us the opportunity to practise speaking the Brazilian strand of the language too. For our daily commute into university, and to travel within Lisbon, we used the Metropolitano de Lisboa (Lisbon Metro). There were two Metro stations very close to our apartment and the system was very easy to use, clean and efficient. We used the overground trains to explore outside of the city during our free afternoons and especially at weekends.



We travelled to Cascais a few times; a fishing village transformed by royalty into a stylish and chic resort where we found beautiful beaches, massive jellyfish and enjoyed great food and wine. We also visited Sintra, a charming town with many historical buildings nestled within pine covered hills. The entire area is classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Here we went inside the Palácio Nacional da Pena (Pena Palace), an extravagant palace from the Romantic period. It sits atop the hills with fantastic views over the region and is described as the 'jewel in the crown' of Sintra. Originally built to serve as a summer residence for the Portuguese royal family, the interior of the palace has been restored to reflect the décor in 1910 when the Portuguese nobility fled to Brazil to escape the revolution. With its brightly coloured walls and turrets, the flamboyant palace looks like something straight out of a fairy tale.

While in Sintra we also explored the ancient ruins of Castelo dos Mouros (The Castle of the Moors). The once mighty fortress was built in the 8/9th century during the Moorish (Muslim) occupation. It was constructed on a rocky outcrop in the hills of Sintra to provide a strategic view to defend the

entire region. In 1147 the Christian Crusaders stormed the castle as part of the successful Reconquista (Reconquest) of Portugal from the Moors. Under Christian rule, the castle was abandoned and left to become a ruin. Walking around the remains of the barbican, keep and walls vividly brought the history of the Moorish occupation to life. Cassie especially enjoyed this visit, as she is interested in medieval history and plans to study relations between Christians and Moors in the Iberian Peninsula for her extended research project during fourth year.



In Sintra we also wandered around the grounds of Quinta da Regaleira; a lavish, gothic-style mansion. The gardens are magnificent and truly magical, full of intrigue and mystical symbolism. We found underground passages and caves, and we descended a spiral staircase to the base of a deep and gloomy initiation well. The circular floor of the well is decorated with tiles laid in the pattern of a compass and Templar cross. Within the grounds there is also a small chapel as well as many water features, including an artificial lake with an attractive waterfall, ornate stone bridge, cute stepping stones and vivid green water! The gardens are not only stunning, but also atmospheric and great fun. Overall, this was probably the group's favourite attraction in Sintra.

Within the city itself we spent a lot of time in the historic districts of Alfama and Bairro Alto, which are incredibly picturesque neighbourhoods and full of character. There are many eye-catching buildings with pretty pastel exteriors, attractive terracotta roofs, decorative azulejo (ceramic tilework) and elaborate wrought iron balconies; as well as beautiful churches, quaint praças (squares) and an eclectic mix of street art. As you climb the maze of narrow cobbled streets there are also amazing miradora (viewpoints) over the city. Both districts are associated with traditional fado music, originally sung by sailors' wives awaiting the return of their loved ones from sea, and there are many Casa de Fado (Fado Houses) where you can taste traditional Portuguese food and hear live music. Alfama is the oldest district in Lisbon, it was once a poorer area but is now a trendy district with lots of cool cafes and independent shops. Bairro Alto is the nightlife district packed with tascas (cheap eateries), clubs and ginjinha bars - ginjinha is a sweet cherry liqueur that originated in Lisbon - which attract locals and tourists alike. The Elevador da Glória, a vintage funicular railway line, links the Bairro Alto district with Baixa; the grand, commercial centre of Lisbon.



On one visit to Praça dom Pedro IV, the main central square, we chanced upon a rally for Brazilian presidential candidate Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula) which was really fascinating to watch. The Brazilians living in Lisbon had come together to show their support for Lula and to condemn the current president Jair Bolsanaro, while lots of passers-by made clear their support for Bolsonaro. It became very clear just how contentious the upcoming election was, as the police were monitoring the situation and had to prevent fighting between supporters of the two candidates. For us it was another opportunity to hear some Brazilian Portuguese, and we also gained a better appreciation of politics in Brazil and the depth of feeling towards the politicians.

In central Lisbon we also explored the Chiado district, which was once the hub of the city's intellectual life. Now it is a sophisticated district of theatres, bookshops and old-style cafes. It is home to Livraria Bertrand (Bertrand Bookshop), the oldest operating bookstore in the world. The store has an impressive selection of books for sale, in many languages, and some students in the class bought some slightly overpriced books from here. In the basement café there is a large mural comprising portraits and famous quotes from Fernando Pessoa and his main heteronyms; imaginary

characters he created so he could write in different styles. Pessoa is a celebrated Portuguese poet, writer, critic, translator, publisher and philosopher and is described as one of the most significant literary figures of the 20th century. Most of the group were already familiar with at least some of his work, and it is possible to choose this Modernist writer for the 'Prescribed Authors' paper in Final Honour School at Oxford.

A short walk from Bertrand is 'A Brasileira', one of the oldest and most famous cafes in Lisbon. Pessoa used to come here for his regular morning coffee and to write. On the pavement outside the café is a larger-than-life bronze statue, which was unveiled to mark the centenary of the poet's birth. Pessoa is seated on a chair and there is an empty chair alongside for people to sit down and have their photographs taken – an opportunity not to be missed!



Nearby, in a small square that separates Chiado from Bairro Alto, we also saw the imposing statue of the 16th century poet Luis de Camões, considered Portugal's greatest lyrical poet. In one hand Camões clutches to his chest his epic poem 'Os Lusíadas' (The Lusíads), the national poem of Portugal. In this, his greatest work, Camões describes the discovery of a sea route to India by Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama. He captures the mood of the time; the sense of heroism and daring of the Portuguese during its period of expansion and discovery of the world (the so-called 'Age of Discovery'). The monument is a nation's tribute to a major figure of the Portuguese Renaissance, and it was especially interesting for us to see as the Portuguese Department in Oxford is named the Instituto Camões Centre.

We also luckily timed our visit to Lisbon with Feira do Livro de Lisboa (Lisbon Book Fair) 2022. The open-air event has been held annually since the 1930s and takes place in Parque Eduardo VII (Edward VII Park), the largest park in the city. This year Ukraine was chosen as the guest of honour, with a stand dedicated to the country. It was very impressive with endless rows of book and magazine stalls as far as the eye could see, and there were also talks given by authors and book signings for new releases.



Other landmarks and monuments that we visited in Lisbon included the Castelo de São Jorge (St George's Castle), which is located on the summit of the highest hill in Lisbon with expansive views over the city. The castle is an impressive sight by day and at night when it is illuminated. It was interesting to learn that Queen Dowager Leonor, the patron of Gil Vicente - one of the authors that we studied in first year - had lived in this castle. Vicente is considered 'Father of Portuguese drama' and he wrote, directed and performed in dramas for the Portuguese court of the kings Manuel I and John III. It was Queen Dowager Leonor, the sister of Manuel I, who was first to notice Vicente's talents and subsequently commissioned him to write his first theatrical work.

We also visited the Padrão dos Descobrimentos (Discoveries Monument) on the northern bank of the Rio Tejo (River Tagus) estuary. The monument represents the bow of a caravel, a small sailing ship developed by the Portuguese for their ocean voyages during the Age of Discovery (a very prosperous period of nautical exploration which marked the arrival of Portugal as a world power). Standing on the bow are more than 30 statues of historical figures who played a big part in building Portugal's vast overseas empire during this period. The figures include Vasco da Gama (discoverer of the sea route to India), Pedro





Alvares Cabral (regarded as the European discoverer of Brazil) and Ferdinand Magellan (credited with masterminding the first expedition to circumnavigate the globe) led by the Infante Dom Henrique (Henry the Navigator) - whose expeditions began the process of European colonization. Just in front of the monument is a giant marble map of the world, the Mappa Mundi. Close by on the waterfront we also saw the Torre de Belém (Belem Tower), from where many of the explorers' ships departed for their voyages. The fortified tower was originally built both as a gateway to the city of Lisbon and as a defence against possible invasions and attacks from the Tagus. It is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the icon of a country shaped by its proximity to the ocean and its maritime discoveries of New Worlds. The landmarks are striking but also a reminder of Portugal's dark colonial past and its links to the Atlantic slave trade.

In summary, we both loved our time in Lisbon and it hugely enriched our learning. Our language skills improved, especially our confidence in speaking, and we really got to know the city well. During our stay we drank an excessive amount of café and ate far too many pastéis de nata (Portuguese custard tarts), so we feel that we earned the title of temporary Lisboetas! Back in Oxford the experience is now helping us to make a more informed decision about where to spend our third year abroad, in Portugal or Brazil, as we need to choose either European or Brazilian Portuguese for Final Honours School.

We highly recommend that any future students taking Portuguese enrol on the IPLC language course and spend some time discovering the 'real' Lisbon. We are extremely grateful to Pembroke College for their financial support, which helped make our trip possible.

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