



The choice of kings

Cascais was a minor fishing village, until King Luís I choose it as his royal summer retreat in the 1800s. Now, it's a cosmopolitan suburb of Lisbon and one of the richest municipalities in Portugal. Giselle Whiteaker explores the area.



“May I see your booking confirmation?” asks the well-groomed man at the reception at Hotel Quinta da Marinha on the fringe of Cascais in Portugal. He glances at the email and points out that we are one month early. Without batting an eyelash, he tells us not to worry as he swiftly amends the dates, upgrading my friend Katy and I to a suite room in the process. “Could we change our golf lesson booked for next month too?” I ask shamefacedly. “Certainly,” he says, only a small twitch of his mouth belying his mirth at my obvious organisational deficiency. Within moments we are ensconced in our spacious suite, golf lesson booked, ready to make the most of what this lovely area of Portugal has to offer. We start by nibbling on the *pastel de nata*, Portuguese custard tarts, left as a welcome, setting the bottle of port aside for later consumption.

Settled in, we freshen up for dinner. We have a reservation at the hotel’s Rocca restaurant, a homely yet chic space on the lower floor. The single flower on our table in the lovely dining space is so brightly coloured I have to touch it to make sure it’s real. After fierce negotiations, we decide to share all of our dishes: veal Carpaccio with Parmesan and capers, shrimps “Au Sautee” with garlic and olive oil, pink tuna steak with sweet potato mousseline and haricot, and tenderloin steak with garlic, coriander, potatoes and an egg on top. Much to our surprise, the chef, knowing our sharing plan, divides the portions for us, plating each separately, inadvertently turning the savoury segment of our meal into a four-course feast. Each dish is presented beautifully, the tuna in particular looking like a painting. We can’t possibly have dessert. Well, maybe just one. We settle on a shared dark chocolate bavois served with a tangy raspberry sorbet, which finishes us off in a spectacular fashion. “That was amazing,” says Katy. “I might never be hungry again.”

She’s wrong of course. We still manage a hearty breakfast the next morning on the agreement that we will skip lunch.

“You said you’re terrible golfers, but that means you’ve played before,” says Gary, the Australian golf pro tasked with teaching us the basics post-breakfast. We list our accomplishments: a few pitch and putt games, a couple of driving range sessions, and one prior serious lesson. Gary doesn’t look fazed; nor does he look impressed. Leading us to the practice green, he takes us through chipping and pitching, correcting our stances and grips. Before long we’re succeeding more than failing. Then it’s over to the driving range to practice longer shots. The finale is putting, culminating in a sudden death competition I narrowly win. We may not be quite ready for 18 holes, but we both walk away with a spring in our step and the desire to play the Quinta da Marinha Golf Course, designed by the legendary Robert Trent Jones, with its fantastic views over the Atlantic Ocean and the Sintra Mountains. >>



Top: One of the beaches in Cascais.

Left: Quinta da Marinha’s golf course.

We are dedicating the afternoon to Sintra, in the hills of the Sierra Mountains, with its fairytale landscape of misty forests, turreted palaces and castle ruins, and Unesco World Heritage-listed centre. The taxi winds its way up to our chosen starting place, the Palace of Pena, which sits within Pena Park a vast forested area, stretching over 200-plus hectares. It's the perfect time of year to visit, with no queues for entry, although the air is surprisingly fresh at this altitude, despite the sunny day.

"Let's start at the highest point," I suggest and we puff our way up to High Cross, marking the highest point in the Sintra Hills. From here we catch a glimpse of the palace's upper levels above the treeline. It's a colourful affair, comprising deep red and egg-yolk-yellow towers and turrets, an intriguing expression of 19th Century Romanticism.

We wander the pathways through the park, past water features, grottos and Camellia gardens, as we navigate our way back to the palace. It would be easy to spend an entire day in the park and still not discover everything.

Our tickets don't allow us into the palace itself, but we are free to roam the terrace, where the views over the mountains are spectacular. On a neighbouring hilltop we spot the Moorish Castle, which overlooks Sintra's historic centre like a protective sentinel.

Our next view of the castle is from the centre, where we alight from the bus that winds down the hill. The compact old town circles the 14th Century National Palace, with its iconic dual cone-shaped chimneys that Hans Christian Anderson once likened to giant champagne bottles. Ducking in and out of boutiques and artisan stores, we load up on gifts, fortifying ourselves with a shot of *ginja*, a Portuguese sour cherry liqueur, served in a chocolate cup.

Back at the hotel, we freshen up for dinner. We have booked a table at Furnas do Guincho, a local seafood restaurant with a sterling reputation. Perched on the rocky shore, crashing waves provide the soundtrack to another excellent meal.

"I think I might come back in summer," says Katy as we clink glasses of port back in our suite. "I'd like to play a round of golf and then sit by the pool." We glance towards the balcony, from where we have views of the outdoor swimming area and the golf course. Tomorrow we'll explore the coastal enclave of Cascais before catching the train to Lisbon, a mere 45 minutes away, for our return flight. "There's so much more to see and do," I muse. "I might come with you." ■

For more information about Hotel Quinta da Marinha and its golfing, dining and spa opportunities, see www.quintadamarinha.com.



Clockwise from left: The colourful Pena Palace; veal Carpaccio at Rocca restaurant; main square.

*Dreaming of views of the Portuguese coast?
These homes all have fantastic sea views.*



Carvoeiro, Portugal

This luxurious, two-storey, four-bedroom villa with breathtaking sea views is set in the tranquil Vale de Lapa, nestled between the two traditional fishing villages of Carvoeiro and Ferragudo. It is only a five-minute walk from the beach, and a short drive to golf courses, shops, restaurants, theme parks and the international school at Porches. The highlights of the property are the covered and uncovered terraces that overlook the heated pool and landscaped garden, all ideal for al fresco dining and summer entertaining.

Price: 995,000€

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Cascais, Portugal

This luxury villa is located in the heart of Cascais, known as the Riviera of Portugal, and has superb sea views. Despite the central location, it retains total seclusion and security. The villa houses a wealth of amenities, including a snooker room, home cinema, gymnasium, spa, bar and a meeting and conference room. It has recently been renovated from the ground up and finished to the highest standards.

Price: 15,000,000€

Fine & Country Cascais/Lisbon

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Estoril, Portugal

This luxurious house in the centre of Estoril has beautiful views across to the sea. A highlight is the living room facing the water, which has access to a grand terrace with an outdoor dining room. Additionally, there is an indoor dining room, a kitchen with breakfast area, a guest bedroom and five suites, including the master suite, with a veranda to a private garden. The property, which was architect designed in 1909, also has a gymnasium and spa, and is surrounded by a beautiful garden.

Price: 5,900,000€

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