

# One Week in Portugal: The Perfect Itinerary

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Portugal is a delightful country, featuring exquisite beauty and fun surprises at every turn. Despite its relatively compact size (especially compared to its next-door neighbor, Spain), Portugal is home to an abundance of intriguing ancient sites, historical landmarks, heavenly [beaches](#), picturesque mountains, stunning wine country, and more. It's tempting to remain in one region, as [there is plenty to see and do](#) in each destination, but the country is exceptionally tourist-friendly to those who wish to explore several areas.

Overall, when visiting, it's most convenient to [rent a car](#). The good news for drivers is that the highways in Portugal are well-paved and easy to navigate. Best of all, traffic jams are rare, unless you find yourself in the center of a busy area at rush hour.

If you have a week in Portugal, this itinerary will guide you from Southern points around Lisbon up to Porto in the North. Tip: Most of these destinations are day trips from the major cities, so you can avoid switching hotels daily.

## Day One: Lisbon



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Portugal's capital, Lisbon, is the country's largest city with an array of beautiful architecture and scenic vantage points situated around the town's distinctive neighborhoods. Surrounded by seven hills, the downtown area of Lisbon is an ideal area to explore on foot, as most streets are lined with restaurants, retail stores, and outdoor cafes. Begin your Lisbon exploration by strolling around (or take a famous city tram car) from the central plaza, Praça do Comércio uphill to the majestic [São Jorge Castle](#) in the quaint Alfama neighborhood, which is a worthwhile tourist attraction and offers exceptional city views from its grounds.

There's also plenty of shopping around this area, and you can purchase a variety of locally-made items, including sardines and other fish in colorful tins, cork products, Portuguese tiles, and of course, locally-produced wines. You don't need to venture far to see some of the most impressive attractions. There are several museums nearby the city center, including the [National Azulejos Museum](#), featuring exquisite and unique examples of classic Portuguese tiles and the expansive Calouste Gulbenkian art museum with thousands of paintings, sculptures, and artifacts.

After working up an appetite soaking in the sights, you'll want to enjoy some local cuisine. In recent years, Lisbon has become quite the foodie town, and there are many great places to experience traditional as well as modern fare. Award-winning chef José

Avillez heads up the Michelin-starred [Belcanto](#), but he also owns several other casual restaurants in town, each featuring diverse and clever concepts—so any of these are excellent choices for a memorable meal.

Although Lisbon is an extremely walkable city, if you're planning to explore on foot, be sure to wear sneakers or your flattest, most comfortable shoes, as the beautifully designed mosaic sidewalks here are often very steep and slippery.

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## Day Two: Setubal



Hugo Marques / EyeEm / Getty Images

Situated only about twenty minutes outside of Lisbon, the industrial port city of Setubal is a quick day trip from the city that features a historic fishing village. It's a noticeable slower pace than busy Lisbon, and it's fun to meander around the charming pedestrian shopping area that winds around the old town and the harbor.

When visiting, you'll feel like a local as you peruse the area's iconic fish and produce market, Mercado do Livramento, which is considered the best in the country. It's

legendary for its architecture as well as its fresh offerings (although it usually closes by 1 p.m.). While in the area, be sure to stop and admire the Convento de Jesus and the Museu de Setúbal, a church featuring Portuguese gothic architecture.

Most impressive, Setubal is situated on the Sadu Estuary, an unassuming locale that's known for its wild dolphins that reside in the surrounding waters. If you're a nature lover, you'll adore this fascinating pod of dolphins has been protected and studied for years, and most importantly, respected by the locals. In the afternoon, take [a boat ride to \(possibly\) see the dolphins](#). You'll notice that the tours follow strict rules and regulations, such as keeping a distance from the dolphins and not allowing too many visits per day. It's an exciting experience, as the guides are familiar with this family of dolphins and share knowledge of their habitat, health, and history.

If you have time, check out a local beach, or have a meal at one of the many restaurants along the harbor, as these local spots serve up fresh seafood dishes daily.

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## Day Three: Cascais



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Start your day by heading to the beach! This popular resort area is located about 30 minutes west of Lisbon and well-known for its gorgeous coastline and golden sand beaches. On summer weekends, it's best to arrive early, but it's a quick trip by car. (If you prefer not to drive, it's also a comfortable train ride or ferry from the center of Lisbon). Once you arrive, pick up a free (yes, free!) bicycle near the center of town to explore the area—look for the signs that point to “Bicas.” It's fun to pedal along the coastal pathway and admire the panoramic views along the ocean (and yes, you can rent a lock, too).

At Cascais, as there are many great spots for sunbathing, surfing, or just hanging out by the shore. Three beaches are protected and just steps from the city center (Praia da Conceição, Praia da Duquesa, and Praia da Poça), and all of these are ideal for swimming. In the heart of Cascais, visitors will find the main “boardwalk” with many shops, restaurants, and taverns. The area features narrow, winding pedestrian walkways, so if you prefer to stay out of the sun, you can spend hours meandering through the town.

But Cascais offers more than beaches. After a morning playing in the waves, visitors can explore the Museum Quarter that's home to an exceptional destination, the [Castro Guimarães art museum](#), which is situated on a sprawling estate encircled by fountains and colorful gardens. Also, the [Casa de Santa Maria](#) is not to be missed. This coastal villa is adjacent to a lighthouse and was constructed in the early 1900s as a summer home for royalty, and showcases classic painted Portuguese tiles.

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## Day Four: Evora



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Less than a two-hour drive from Lisbon and Cascais is the capital of Portugal's expansive Alentejo region, Evora, a charming medieval city that's home to many historical monuments, churches, and ancient artifacts. Located in the South-central part of the country, Evora is a walled city and a UNESCO World Heritage site, so there are plenty of intriguing tourist attractions to tour while you're here.

Start by taking in a few of the most enthralling sights in town, which are located within steps of each other, including the surprisingly intact Roman Temple of Diana. Across the street is the [Se Cathedral](#) with its asymmetrical towers and nearby is the gothic style church of St. Francis and its macabre yet fascinating "bone chapel" that's creative from thousands of human skeletons.

Afterward, enjoy a lighter activity, such as shopping. Although you might be tempted to try and see all the sights, be sure to take a break and browse some of the stores (keep in mind that most close in the early evening). The Alentejo region is known for its cork trees and cork products, so be sure to head to the quaint shops that offer these authentic handicrafts—and you can purchase everything from clothing, handbags, jewelry, and much more at reasonable prices. This region is also famous for its wines, so be sure to sip a varietal or two while enjoying dinner at one of the town's cozy cafes.

## Day Five: Fatima



Fabricio Rezende / Getty Images

Fatima, a centrally-located city in Portugal, is about a two-hour drive from Evora. Nearly everyone who visits this destination is here to see the Sanctuary of Fatima, a famous pilgrimage site that honors the place where the Blessed Mother allegedly appeared to three young shepherd children in the early 1800s. This controversial sighting (often called “Miracle of the Sun”) attracts religious visitors as well as tourists of all ages from around the globe.

You can spend an hour or the better part of the day here, as there several churches to visit, a fountain where you can obtain holy water to bring home, and the famous oak tree where there the apparition was first seen. The impressive neoclassical basilica is the central point of this massive complex, and it towers 200 feet above the town. For the casual visitor, Fatima is a fascinating spot to stroll around, even if you’re just interested in learning about the historical elements.

If you want to tour or attend mass, it’s best to plan in advance and be aware of the timing. Note: Keep in mind that Fatima was created to welcome big crowds. On particular festival anniversaries, Fatima gets mobbed by pilgrims—some who arrive on busses and others who walk from miles away—so plan your visit accordingly. It’s most popular on the 12th and 13th days of the month from May until October.

## Day Six: Coimbra



Valeria Schettino / Getty Images

On your way up to the northern part of the country, be sure to stop in Coimbra for the afternoon. Located about 90 minutes south of Porto, Coimbra is less than an hour from

Fatima and a charming town. A highlight is a visit to the University of Coimbra, the oldest in Portugal. A World Heritage and site, it is perched atop a hill in the middle of the city and encompasses many historical buildings and churches, as well as a massive botanic garden with a forest and bamboo plantation. If you visit during the school year, you'll find the area to be extremely busy – and students just about everywhere in town.

Harry Potter fans are fascinated by this ancient picturesque town because British author J.K. Rowling spent time here teaching English and was inspired by her surroundings.

The Hogwarts school uniform is a version of the university students' official outfits here—especially the formal black capes worn atop the clothing that gives them a slightly mystical look. And while you're touring the university, be sure to check out their exquisite library, Bibliotheca Joanina, which resembles the famous library where Harry Potter and friends spend time at Hogwarts. Featuring thousands of books stacked high



on polished wood bookshelves, this jaw-dropping structure is worth a visit, whether you're a bookworm or not.

For sure, Coimbra is a great destination to enjoy even if you're not an avid Potter enthusiast, as it's steeped in history and visitors can enjoy plenty of sites, architecture, stunning views, shopping—as well as great cafes and restaurants as well.

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## Day Seven: Porto



Francesco Riccardo Iacomino / Getty Images

If you thought Lisbon was hilly, wait until you stroll around the steep, undulating streets of Porto, the second-largest city in Portugal. With its dramatic scenery and jaw-dropping riverfront views, along with many narrow, winding streets, Porto is a dreamy destination that encourages visitors to explore.

Start your morning by enjoying breakfast, as you'll need the energy to hike around the city. Begin by walking over the Dom Luis bridge, an architectural landmark that spans the Duoro River. From this ideal vantage point, you'll have an exceptional view of the city and get an immediate lay of the land. A few not-to-miss attractions include the Clerigos bell tower that overlooks the city (and yes, you can climb the steps to the top);

the Crystal Palace gardens, a sprawling and peaceful oasis, and the spellbinding Church of Saint Francis, also referred to as the “golden” church. It features gothic architecture, and its interior ornate wood carvings are covered in brilliant gold.

If you prefer to stay outside, the beauty of Porto is that it’s home to many small parks and places to rest, so you can enjoy the sights by just meandering around and discovering its understated charms without going to the top tourist spots.

Of course, this is the area where Port wine is made, and you will see it everywhere. If you’re a wine lover, in the afternoon head over to the Vila Nova de Gaia area, grab a bite to eat and enjoy a tasting or two at the Port Houses along the river, such as Calem and Kopke, as they all offer tours and tastings. Most are open to the public, and you can sip and savor for hours, but if you have your heart set on particular Port wine, be sure to make a reservation in advance.

And you’re up for more Harry Potter experiences...Porto has plenty of them. One of the most noteworthy is Livraria Lello, the legendary gorgeous bookstore that is known to have influenced Rowling. Swing by in the afternoon, but if you visit, be sure to pack your patience. During high season, the line of enthusiastic fans stretches for blocks (be sure to purchase your ticket first before cueing up!), and visitors only get a few quick, crowded minutes inside.

For dinner with a view, choose an outdoor table at one of the many restaurants lining the Douro River, against the backdrop of the iconic Dom Luis bridge, which is especially stunning at night. It’s a festive area with plenty of pedestrian traffic—and the cafes serve up an array of local specialties—along with a generous pour of Port wine, of course!