

Pastel-coloured palaces, beach-bright design hotels, family-friendly farmhouses - and from under £100 a night. Kevin Gould finds Portugal's best-value stays

# Portugal sun for less than a ton

## Cities

### 1 Gorgeous townhouse Lisbon

**Casa Das Merceiras** is two apartments in an 18th-century Alfama townhouse, beautifully restored by owner Teresa Albarran. Here you sleep under glorious brick cathedral vaulted roofs and stroll the few minutes down to Rossio, one of the city's main squares. Breakfast is delivered each morning; there's daily housekeeping. The Clube de Fado restaurant/bar and Roman Theatre museum are on the doorstep.

● Apartment for two from €80 B&B, +351 919 618 141, [casadasmerceiras.com](http://casadasmerceiras.com)

### 2 Designer pad Lisbon

"Design" in the title of a hotel usually gives me the willies, but the cool **Internacional Design Hotel** is just about the right side of chilly - apart, that is, from the Lego bread baskets ... It's tremendous value considering the downtown location and upscale amenities on offer, and the hotel's Bastardo restaurant and bar is a bona fide local hip hangout.

● Doubles from €125 B&B, +351 213 240 990, [idesignhotel.com](http://idesignhotel.com)

### 3 Historic mansion Viana do Castelo

In the heart of this charming old town - once Portugal's second city, near the border with Spain - **Casa Melo Alvim** is an early 16th-century mansion restored with delicacy - and entirely without frou-frou - in stone and clean wood. As well as 20 bedrooms there are a couple of loft-style apartments. Breakfast only, but there's a small late bar. The train station is a bit of a step away, the cathedral a short walk and Viana's beaches are five minutes by water taxi.

● Doubles from €84 B&B, +351 258 808 200, [melodalvimhouse.com](http://melodalvimhouse.com)

### 4 Pauper's castle Porto

Two metro stops from Porto's centre, **Castelo Santa Catarina** is a crenellated Gothic palace set in its own mature gardens. What it lacks in polish and elan, it more than makes up for with bags of sincere and eccentric charm. Stay in the castle rooms to experience the full *castelo* effect. Owner João Brás offers a wealth of local tips that steer



you far away from the downtown tourist crowds.  
● Doubles from €54 B&B, +351 225 095 599, [castelosantacatarina.com.pt](http://castelosantacatarina.com.pt)

### 5 Wit and warmth Porto

The **Miss O'po** guesthouse comprises three studios and two two-bed apartments, all done in concrete and steel, and with wit and warmth. Each room has a fine sound system, too. Downstairs is one of Porto's coolest restaurants, plus a small exhibition and performance space. Co-owner Ana Luandina publishes the Concrete Observer for her guests, a pamphlet of useful and unusual Porto ephemera.

● Doubles from €75, +351 932 925 500, [missopo.com](http://missopo.com)

### 6 Royal gardens Coimbra

Once the love nest of Inês de Castro - the 14th-century Portuguese queen who was crowned after her death - and later rebuilt in 18th century, former palace **Quinta das Lágrimas** is now a small luxury hotel with 12 hectares of private botanical gardens in this fine university city. The Pedro e Inês restaurant has fine dining pretensions but casual prices plus a 600 bin wine list, with many bottles from the neighbouring Dão and Bairrada denominations.

● Doubles from €89 B&B, +351 239 802 380, [quintadaslgrimas.pt](http://quintadaslgrimas.pt)

### 7 For bookworms and foodies Óbidos

Books, books and more books! They line every wall and are all yours to read at **The Literary Man**. Cosy up with one in front of the fire, retire to your eco-chic ex-nun's cell, have a massage, eat seriously good local ingredients grilled over a Japanese kamado. And if all this isn't enough, Óbidos (60 miles north of Lisbon) is Portugal's chocolate capital.

● Doubles from €85 B&B, +351 26 295 9214, [theliteraryman.pt](http://theliteraryman.pt)

### 8 Family-friendly Colares

**Hotel Arribas** is bang on the beach and has a huge sea-water pool. There's a cheery terrace restaurant (average meal price €15pp including wine), a poolside coffee shop and a pleasing pastel colour scheme throughout. Honest, clean, friendly, very affordable

▲ Chic and cheerful ... (clockwise from above), **Hotel Arribas**; **Solar Egas Moniz**; **Herdade do Touril**; **Miss O'po**

and uncomplicated, this place is great for a family beach holiday and within 20 minutes of the Disney-esque fantasy palaces and museums at Sintra (by tram and bus). Lisbon is 40 minutes from Sintra by train (€2.15 one way).  
● Doubles from €50 B&B, +351 219 289 050, [arribashotel.com](http://arribashotel.com)

### 9 Sea and the city Estoril

Estoril is a smart beach resort 28 minutes by train from Lisbon. Famous for its casino, its wide, clean beaches make a sand-and-city break easily achievable. **Hotel Londres** is newly refurbished in beach-bright colours and remains absurdly good value. There's a pool and gardens and it's only a four-minute saunter to the beach and metro stop. Breakfasts only, but mere moments to local restaurants - Di Casa is an excellent, reasonable Italian.

● Doubles from €34 B&B, +351 214 648 300, [hotellondres.com](http://hotellondres.com)

### ▼ Manor house

**Quinta da Conceição** is a newly restored 1715 manor house in the countryside near Azeitão, with seven rooms, large gardens and a swimming pool. Doubles from €95 a night, [quintadaconceicao.pt](http://quintadaconceicao.pt)



### ▼ Design hotel

**Hotel Minho**, a modern design hotel in Vila Nova de Cerveira, northern Portugal, has four nights B&B and use of the spa for €300 for two, plus kids under 12 stay free. 11 Jul-11 Sep, [hotelminho.com](http://hotelminho.com)



style. There are seven rooms and apartments, all furnished in the classic north Portuguese fashion - think lots of dark polished wood. There's a private chapel, a swimming pool in the old well-fed cistern, and breakfasts featuring home-baked cakes. It's a 30-minute saunter to gracious, riverside Ponte de Lima, reputedly Portugal's oldest village.  
● Doubles from €75 B&B, +351 963 807 180, [casadepomarchao.com](http://casadepomarchao.com)

### 15 Vineyard manor Viana do Castelo

**Bouça d'Arques** is a 300-year-old manor house surrounded by vineyards that's been enlarged with a few bold, tasteful architectural additions in iron, glass and concrete. On the estate there are seven sweet letting houses, all but one with private terraces. There's a chlorine-free eco-pool, and breakfasts (with very beautiful homemade jams, local cheeses and farm-cured meats) are delivered to your house. Bouça d'Arques is close to Viana do Castelo, and on the edge of a magical small forest. The beaches of Afife, Carreço and Páço are 15 minutes' drive away.  
● Doubles from €80 B&B, +351 968 044 992, [boucदारques.com](http://boucदारques.com)

### 16 Douro gem Amarante

A crenellated, isolated mini-manor house full of atmosphere and antiques, **Casa Levada** is now run as a B&B by Maria and Luis Mota, he the grandson of poet Teixeira de Pascoaes, who used to summer here. They're a charming couple who often join guests for meals and conversation (dinner supplement €20 including wine). Forty miles inland from Porto, the hotel features massive stone lintels, wooden shutters, polished wood floors and painted and panelled wood ceilings. It's toasty warm thanks to a roaring fire in winter, and naturally cool throughout in summer. This is a great base from which to explore the Douro.  
● Doubles from €75 B&B, +351 226 181 516, [casalevada.com](http://casalevada.com)

### 17 Wine tasting Penafiel

**The Solar Egas Moniz** calls itself a "charming hotel". Charming hotel? Yes, actually. Chic but not twee, the hotel is 30 minutes from Porto, close to the

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## Rural

### 13 Go wild Montesinho

This forested Trás-os-Montes hamlet is in excellent wild walking, biking and birdwatching country, a few miles from the northern Spanish border. Sally Godward and Robert van der Vliet converted their sturdy house, **A Lagosta Perdida**, into a welcoming B&B that serves the breakfasts of champions and convivial three-course country dinners (€15 including wine and coffee). The hotel's name means 'The Lost Lobster'. There are no lobsters in Montesinho, or anywhere near it.  
● Doubles from €95, +351 273 919 031, [lagostaperdida.com](http://lagostaperdida.com)

### 14 Old Portugal Ponte de Lima

**Casa De Pomarchão** is a 15th-century baronial home that was enlarged in 1775 in the curly, knobly Pombaline

has 144 rooms for beach lovers, surfers, divers, trail runners, yogis and spotters. Surf schools and cycle hire on hand.  
● Doubles from €72 B&B, +351 282 624 212, [memmohotels.com](http://memmohotels.com)

### 12 Seaside riad Olhão

A leading (if reclusive) Portuguese architect and his family run **Convento**, a very sexy riad-style, nine-bedroom ex-convent house hidden in the medina of this charming, salty fishing town. After the most beautiful breakfast the eastern Algarve can offer, ferries and water taxis are ready to take you to the glorious island beaches of Culatra and Armona. There's a rooftop pool, two shady terraces, a library, and dreamy, airy bedrooms in angelic white with bathrooms fitted out in local marble.  
● On Facebook  
● Doubles from €100 B&B, +351 912 463 233, [conventoolhao.com](http://conventoolhao.com)

### 10 Top surf, empty beaches Zambujeiro

The Costa Vicentina, in south-west Portugal, has some of Europe's best surf, its emptiest beaches and finest walking. **Herdade do Touril** is a 365-hectare farm two minutes' drive from the usually empty Praia de Tonel and is 4km from sleepy, surfy Zambujeira. There's a mixture of farmhouse-style double and family rooms (these with kitchenettes) and small houses. All have private terraces.  
● Doubles from €60 B&B, +351 283 950 080, [herdadedotouril.pt](http://herdadedotouril.pt)

### 11 Great sunsets Sagres

**Memmo Baleeira** was built in the 1960s in an inspiring location above a fishing harbour and close to Cabo de São Vicente, mainland Europe's most southwesterly point where hundreds gather each evening to watch the spectacular sunsets. The white hotel

## Readers' tips

The best of Lisbon

★ **Winning tip**  
**City of Spies walking tour**  
During the second world war, neutral Lisbon was a hotbed of espionage. The City of Spies guided tour explores that past, bringing colourful characters, including the real James Bond, to life. Josephine Baker smuggled messages for the Allies in her bra from the Teatro Politeama. The Avenida Palace Hotel had a concealed door into Rossio railway station, so that agents could avoid secret police at its main entrance. We were fascinated.  
● €20pp, [lisbonwalker.com](http://lisbonwalker.com)

Moiraash  
**Poignant, haunting museum**  
For a unique insight into modern Portugal, visit the **Museu do Aljube** (Museum of Resistance and Liberation), close to the imposing Sé cathedral. In a former prison, the exhibits trace the period of the Salazar dictatorship in both Portugal and its colonies. At the end, head to the

**Sunset drinks in a car park**  
Park Bar is a rooftop bar in a car park in the Bairro Alto. There is no signposting to the bar so we resorted to sign language with the attendant to be sure we were in the right place. The dingy stairwell opens on to a decked garden terrace with a chilled-out vibe, comfy seats, a great wine list and a view to die for. Perfect for a sundowner or three.  
● On Facebook  
● DanielleM

**On the tinnies ... the Sol e Pesca bar**  
delightful cafe on the top floor, with excellent views of the city and harbour.  
● [museudoaljube.pt](http://museudoaljube.pt)  
● donaghadee

★ **Loo's a Winner**  
I can't verify the designers' claim that this is "the sexiest WC on Earth", but the public loos on Terreiro do Paço



square are certainly like no other I've encountered. Once I'd paid my 50 cents, I could choose the colour of loo paper I wanted from a rainbow selection in the "foyer". The giant communal wash basin is bright yellow and toilet-roll shaped. There's even a shop, selling ... you've guessed. Open 10 am to 8pm.  
● [myrenova.com](http://myrenova.com)  
● rja123

● **Sol e Pesca**  
This small bar, in a former fishing tackle shop, has kept all the fishing paraphernalia and stocked up on tins of fish. The menu is limited: the aforementioned tins of fish, or dried slices of tuna - a real revelation. In the west and below the Bairro Alto, it is well worth searching out.  
● [solepesca.com](http://solepesca.com)  
● Mark Camp

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grandly be-churched town of Penafiel. Egas Moniz was tutor to Portugal's first king, and the hotel runs tutored wine tastings in the wonderful *enoteca* where substantial *petiscos* (snacks) like *bacalhão* gratin are served to soak up the glasses you forget to spit. The emphasis is on wellbeing and wine – for many of us, the same thing.

● **Doubles from €99**, + 351 962 168 254, [solaregasmoniz.com](http://solaregasmoniz.com)

**18 Hilltop hamlet**  
**Castelo Rodrigo**

Ana Berliner and António Monteiro were Lisbon biologists who fell in love with this lonely historic hilltop village deep in the Parque Arqueológico do Vale do Côa, near where the Douro reaches the Spanish border. At **Casa da Cisterna** they've created 11 sweet rooms from two village houses and turned the ancient cistern that once supplied the village's water into a swimming pool with panoramic country views. They'll gladly show you their project to protect the endangered Miranda donkey or will pack you a huge picnic to accompany you to the park's extraordinary cave paintings.

● **Doubles from €65 B&B**, +351 271 313 515, [wonderful.land/cisterna](http://wonderful.land/cisterna)

**19 High life Serra da Estrela**

The Serra da Estrela is the only part of Portugal high enough (up to 2,000 metres) to regularly receive snow and **Casa das Penhas Douradas**, a modern chalet-style hotel speaks to those who love mountains and clean air, walking trails and spa treatments. They take their food seriously here, and offer cooking courses, cheffy (in a good way) dinners – star chef Luis Baena is the consultant – and gourmet picnics. The



▲ **Nesting place ... Quinta do Barranco da Estrada is owned by leading birdwatching guide Frank McClintock**

same family owns the Burel historical woollen felt factory close by in the beautiful stone village of Manteigas.  
● **Doubles from €110 B&B**, +351 275 981 045, [casadaspenhasdouradas.pt](http://casadaspenhasdouradas.pt)

**20 Wine and wildlife Alentejo**

On the award-winning wine estate of **Herdade de Sobroso**, deep in the southern countryside of the Beja district, there are six simple rooms in the farmhouse and four family-friendly apartments in the annexe. Decor is classy and serene – like the wines produced here. There's a pool, a small lake with canoes, and nearby, lake Alqueva is Portugal's largest with 1,100km of shore to explore. Chef Josefa is renowned for her wild duck rice (lunches and dinners, €26).

● **Doubles from €125 B&B**, +351 961 732 958, [herdadadosobroso.pt](http://herdadadosobroso.pt)

**21 Birdlife and watersports Alentejo**

Nature expert Frank McClintock came here in 1987, fell in love with the place and its peace, and built **Quinta do Barranco da Estrada**, a charming nine-room hideout, 45 miles north of Portimão. He's a leading birdwatching guide but this is also a wonderful place for non-twitchers. Borrow canoes, a dinghy or stand-up paddleboards from the floating jetty, or hang out in the sauna or the gardens. Lunch is €15, dinner €22.50 plus drinks.

● **Doubles from €100 B&B**, +351 283 933 065, [paradise-in-portugal.com](http://paradise-in-portugal.com)

**22 Agriturismo Monchique**

New in 2015, **Vinha do Gaiao** is an organic agriturismo on the southern slopes of the Serra de Monchique,



▲ **Class acts ... the Gothic charm of Castelo Santa Catarina (top), and former baronial residence Casa de Pomarchão**

within easy striking distance of the western Algarve's beaches and sights. Six chic doubles, all but one with room for an extra bed, are tacked onto an old farmstead. Design is sensitive, modern and minimal, and most rooms have distant sea views. The quinta runs courses in pastry baking, organic farming and *macramé* (making clothes using knotting instead of knitting).  
● **Doubles from €75 B&B**, +351 282 912 600, [vinhadogaio.com](http://vinhadogaio.com)

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