

Vintage Port

Lisbon serves up a tasty stew of history, culture, and fine food. It is also the gateway to charming nearby retreats by the sea and in the hills, as well as some surprisingly good golf. | *by* JEFF WALLACH





OPENING PAGES, LEFT, and ABOVE: Various views of Lisbon, from street level to high above the millenniums-old city.

PORTUGAL'S WARM, SOUTHERN ALGARVE REGION HAS BEEN UNDER SIEGE from European golfers (and even some intrepid Americans) for the last few decades. But it was the Moors and Visigoths of the Dark and Middle Ages who left an indelible mark on Lisbon, the nation's capital. This atmospheric ancient city—built on seven hills above the River Tagus (each with a castle, church, or stone lookout on top) and crisscrossed by aging trams huffing up the steepest streets—is a stimulating mix of worlds old and new, blending sleek Euro hipness with a Middle Eastern flair, all recently emerged from a sort of third-world torpor.

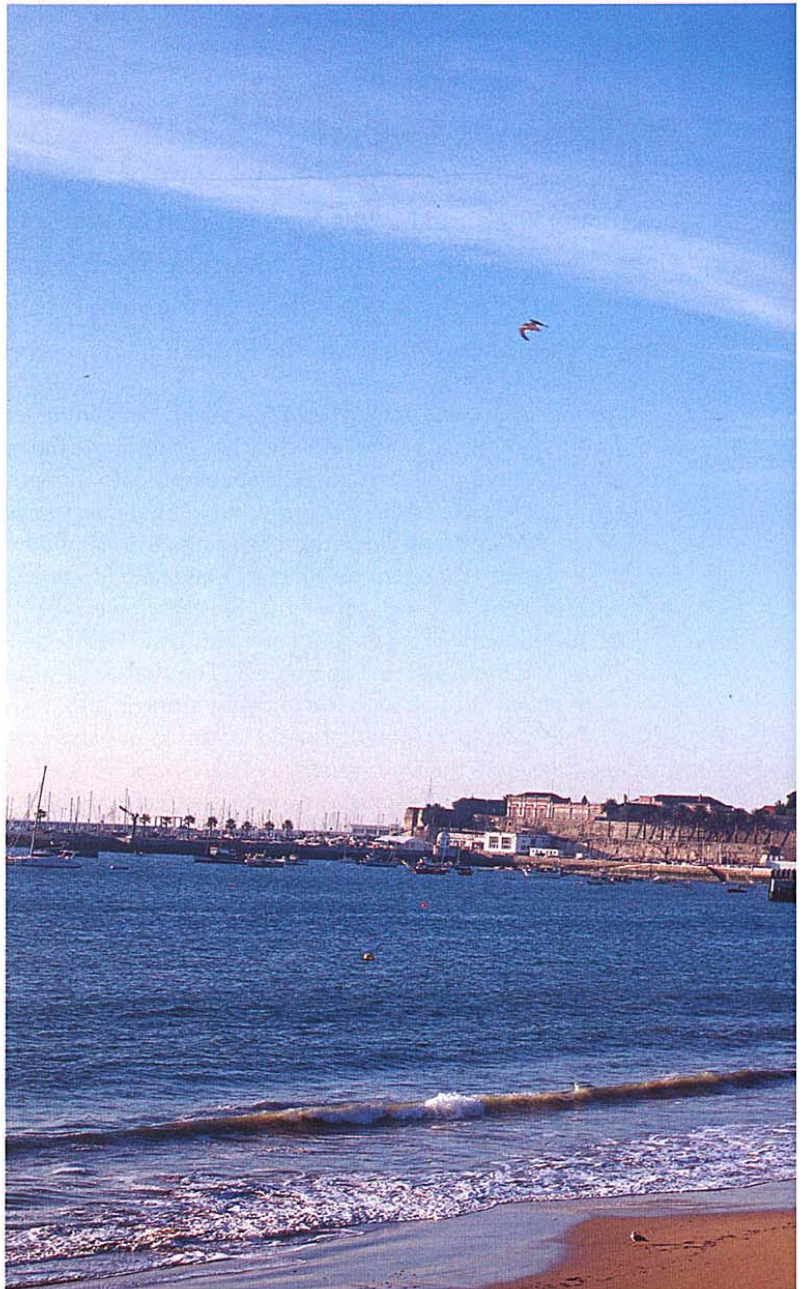
Picture ancient white-domed buildings freshly painted russet and cornsilk, the towers of medieval churches rising above them, and Armani-wearing businessmen disappearing into modern banks and government offices. Narrow, winding passageways of hand-laid white stone carve through distinctive neighborhoods full of pastry shops, textile boutiques, and fado (the keening national music) bars. Above the streets, flowers burst through the wrought-iron railings of pre-war (with "war" sometimes meaning the Crusades) apartments. The shelves of wine shops are heavy not just with port (tawny, vintage, and even white), the sweet, post-prandial national drink, but also fine shades of reds from the Douro and Dão valleys, and whites that are sometimes green—the crisp *vinho verdes*, perfect for washing down salty olives, cheese, fresh fish, and other local delicacies. The coffee is strong—served with hot milk or as espresso—and the shellfish legendary.

Lisbon is a city of high manners and honored hospitality.

Its main attractions are clustered in a busy few neighborhoods trailing down from the hilltop Castelo de São George, which was built by the Visigoths in the 5th century, overtaken by Moors and Christians, used as royal digs from the 14th to 16th centuries, and recently restored as a park with cafes and the best views of the city and river. Climb any number of towers or walk the leafy paths to the sound of a flute-playing busker whose cats sleep obliviously in the sun.

When you're ready to enter the fray below, stroll down from the castle along cobbled lanes into the tight, winding heart of the Alfama district, named for the hot springs that served this once upper-class neighborhood; many of the fine houses fell during the city's various earthquakes and the area became inhabited mostly by fishermen. The labyrinth of streets is full of dark groceries, fruit stands, and small cafes and seafood restaurants tucked amid the stone and flowers. One must-see location is the Sé Cathedral, built in 1150 after the city was recaptured from the Moors. The gothic structure is as much fortress as church, and as dark and atmospheric inside as the century in which it was built. The entire district, with its market stalls and taverns, *azulejos* (painted tiles), and other colorful glimpses beyond street level, nurtures a hunkering intimacy out of a Renaissance painting.

West of the Alfama and along the riverfront lies the more open and modern Baixa district. Following a major earthquake in 1755, this neighborhood was rebuilt in a grid of grand, tree-lined avenues named for the tradesmen—goldsmiths, shoemakers, clothiers—who worked there. Shops housed in Art Nouveau buildings along pedestrian corridors continue the traditions, but the jewelers and shoe stores now are interspersed with the occasional fast-food outlet, Internet cafe, and soccer shop. At the edge of Rossio Square, stop in A Ginjinha for a taste of the local cherry liquor—one euro per shot.



ABOVE: Seaside Estoril offered refuge to European royals during World War II. TOP RIGHT: Sintra has been the mountain retreat of Portuguese kings for 500 years. BOTTOM RIGHT: Hotel Albatroz, in Cascais.

To rise above Baixa, board the Elevador de Santa Justa, one of four such lifts citywide. This clanky wrought-iron conveyance built in 1902 by a disciple of Gustave Eiffel takes riders just about level with the ruins of an old convent, its gothic arches and flying buttresses all that remain of the 15th-century structure.

Another neighborhood worth visiting is the upscale Bairro Alto, full of designer boutiques but also boasting bookshops, print galleries, and well-lighted stores selling fine Portuguese crafts. Worthy souvenirs include *azulejos*, hand-painted ceramics, fisherman's sweaters, and embroidery from the island of Madeira.

After shopping (stores are open until 7 p.m., which leaves a few hours before the customary late dinner), enjoy the local Super Bock beer at the downstairs bar in the Hotel Bairro Alto before heading up the street to Casa Luso, a fado restaurant serving delicious local black pig. If sad music makes you thirsty, finish the evening in the festive Chinese Pavillion.

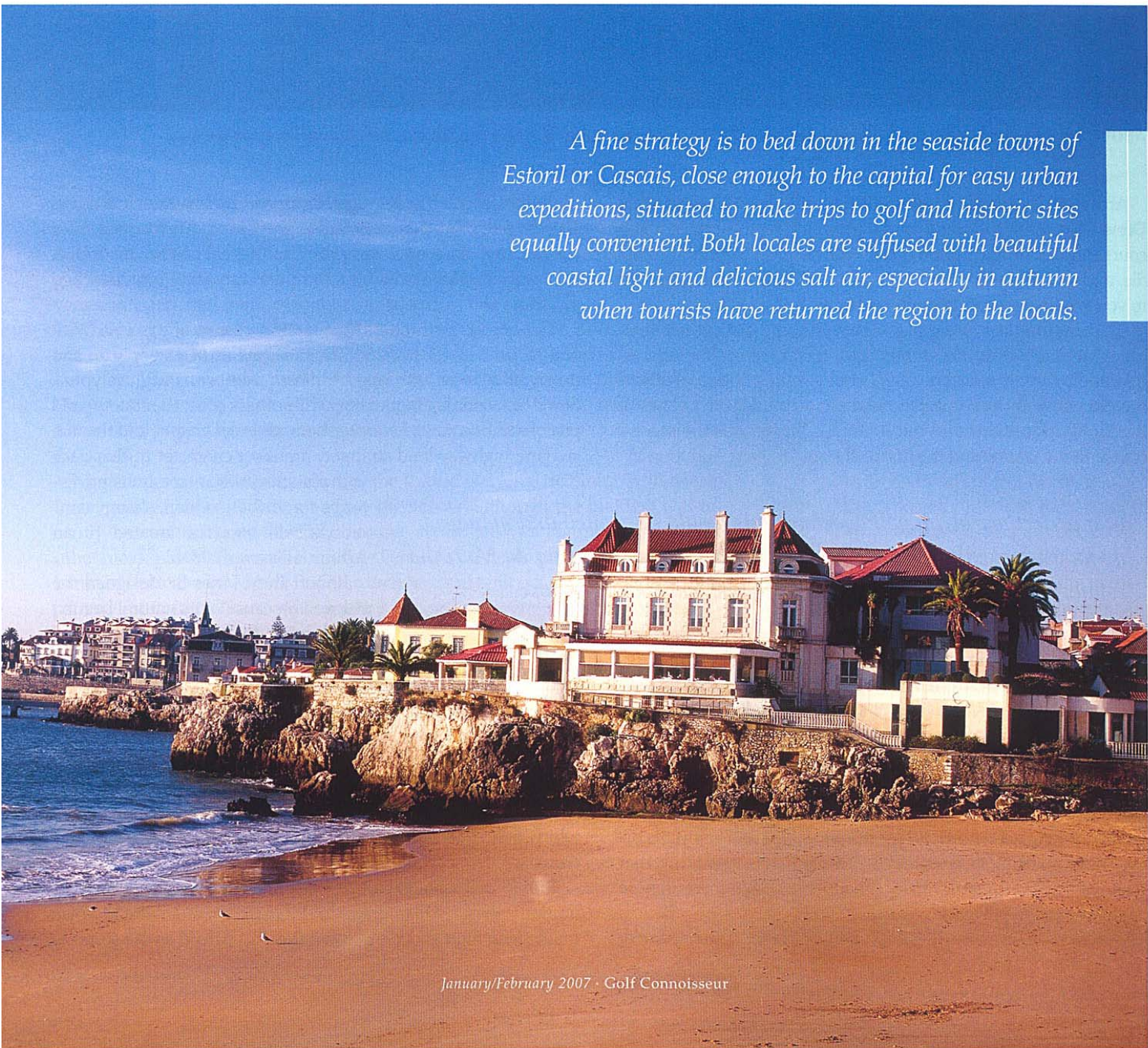
Along with a hundred more reasons to visit this often-bypassed city, a number of excellent golf courses lie within a few hours of Lisbon. Most are located in or near ancient villages sprawling westward toward the Atlantic—and the villages themselves invite lingering. A fine strategy is to bed down in the seaside towns of Estoril or Cascais, close enough to the capital for easy urban expeditions, situated to make trips to golf and historic sites equally convenient. Both locales are suffused with beautiful coastal light and delicious salt air, especially in autumn when tourists have returned the region to the locals.

Estoril has long been a favored destination for European royalty (especially those in exile), who built lavish estates during the past century and sought refuge here during World War II thanks to Portugal's neutrality. The town's grand casino was built in 1916 and was Ian Fleming's inspiration when he wrote *Casino Royale*.

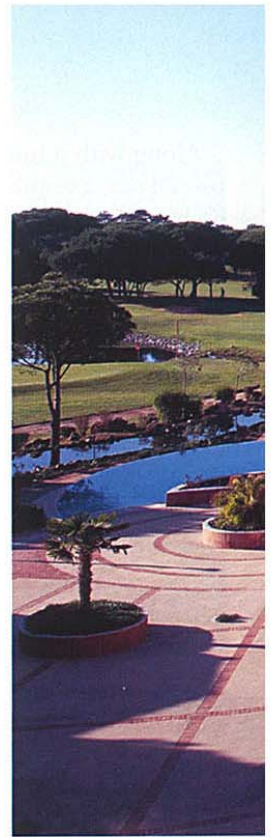
Neighboring Cascais is a fishing village that became a retreat

for nobility in the 19th century and retains both an aristocratic feel and an active fleet of fishing boats. Wake up early and take in the chaotic fish market. The Cascais lighthouse dates to the 16th century, when the Portuguese established a reputation as the best navigators in the world. A cluster of British pubs and tourist destinations have popped up near the beach and marina, but in many parts of the old town, and at certain times of day, the modern era ceases to exist.

In a perfect world, all golf developments would be created and managed by families like the Champalimauds, who built their Quinta da Marinha estate, outside Cascais, into one of the best golf sites in Europe. As environmentally responsible stewards of land that has been in the family for generations, the Champalimauds have slowly erected villas, an equestrian center, a sports and fitness complex, and the Oitavos Golf Course. A five-star hotel is to follow.



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ABOVE: Oitavos Golf Course, in Cascais. RIGHT: The Quinta da Marinha estate

Arthur Hills designed and built the golf course. His partner, Drew Rogers, who worked on the project, likes to say that a golf course should be like a good novel, with a strong beginning, middle, and end. His work here delivers exactly that, although it's up to you whether the ending proves comic, tragic, or heroic.

The continuous routing plays through three distinct topographies: achingly beautiful dunes land, forests of umbrella pines (planted by a previous generation of Champalimauds to stabilize the dunes), and open coastal transition areas. All offer views of the Sintra Mountains and the Atlantic. Oitavos was the second course in the world (and the first in Europe) to earn Audubon In-

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ternational's Gold Signature status, in part because no structures will ever mar the seascape. The holes deliver great variation and, at different moments, elicit nostalgia for Scotland's Turnberry, the Australian sand belt courses, and Oregon's Pacific Dunes.

True to Portugal's legendary hospitality, Quinta da Marinha features possibly the best clubhouse restaurant you'll ever encounter. Many golfers linger for hours amid the glass walls and weathered wood drinking wine from the family's vineyards and enjoying cuisine ranging from steak frites to garlicky clams in a broth that must be soaked up with crusty bread. Finish with a Portuguese pastry, a glass of port, and a Cohiba.

Down the road from Oitavos is the Estoril Golf Course, one of

the oldest courses in Portugal. Designed by MacKenzie Ross in 1945 (a few years before he redesigned Turnberry's famed Ailsa course), this old-school venue exudes the feel of a private British club with its slightly officious reception area, tiny understocked pro shop, and clubby bar.

The quirky, charming, though short course brings Prestwick and North Berwick to mind. The holes are routed steeply up and down hills lined with mature pines, mimosa, and eucalyptus. Some lack defining bunkering, while others boast the crater sand pits of a links course. Blind tee shots, pedestal greens, and the rare six-lane highway lend strangely amusing character to this track with distant views and no housing. Estoril's somewhat sodden, shaggy conditions will soon be treated to an Arthur Hills overhaul.

Robert Trent Jones Sr. designed the beloved (because of its natural beauty) and feared (due to its difficulty) Troia

Golf Championship Course about an hour south of Lisbon, wedged between the Atlantic Ocean and the Sado Estuary. When the Portuguese Open was held here in 1983, winner Sam Torrance was the only player to break par. The course features narrow, zigzagging fairways pinched by sand and pines, mined with hidden bunkers, and playing to small, vigorously defended greens. Troia is considered by many to be Portugal's toughest venue, which may explain why it is inexpensive and almost always uncrowded.

Fifteen miles northwest of Lisbon, Sintra cuddles along the northern slopes of high, craggy mountains. The ruins of a Moorish castle hang high above this town that has served as the summer



Where to Stay

For easy access to both Lisbon and its nearby golf and non-golf pleasures, stay in Cascais or Estoril. Here are three five-star hotel options.

Hotel Palácio, Estoril

Built in 1930 with luxurious “common” areas full of marble, crystal chandeliers, and trompe l’oeil, the Palácio (above) was a nest of intrigue during World War II: As a neutral country, Portugal attracted its share of spies from both sides. During the war, the bar was frequented by Ian Fleming, who was inspired by Estoril’s casino. Rooms offer views of the expansive pool garden or the Bay of Estoril. The garden wing offers 12 modern duplex suites. www.hotel-estoril-palacio.pt

Hotel Albatroz, Cascais

Sitting on cliffs above the bay and overlooking the marina, the Albatroz’s 60 rooms are spread among three houses, one of which was the Palace of the Dukes of Loule in the 19th century. A member of the Leading Small Hotels of the World, this intimate hostelry features hand-painted tiles in the bathrooms, soaking tubs, bedside carafes of port, and other lovely touches. Ask for a room in the Yellow House, with its own private pool. www.albatrozhotels.com

Hotel Cascais Miragem

Bold in design, style, and size, this modern hostelry stairsteps down a steep hillside. Intimate rooms with large balconies overlook the swimming pool and the bay. The sunlit breakfast buffet provides a perfect start to an active day. www.cascaismirage.com

residence of Portuguese kings for 500 years. The nobles built extravagant palaces and villas, some of which still stand and can be glimpsed through high gates on a brisk walk, or toured by those with more time. Even Lord Byron, who hated Portugal, wrote in his famous travel epic *Childe Harold*, “Lo! Cintra’s glorious Eden intervenes, in variegated maze of mount and glen.”

While cake is usually not enough reason to visit a distant land, consider the transatlantic flight simply to taste *travesseiro* (pillow cake), which was originally made by nuns and is now made and served only in the tiny Sintra cafe called Casa Piriquita. Heavy with sugar and moist dough, the cakes are like a comforting fire on a cool night. Sip an espresso, order another cake, and listen to the low din of local cafe gossip.

More important, at least to some, is the Palácio Nacional de Sintra, with its two huge, pointy chimneys dating back to the Moors (although the building was recently—meaning during the 15th century—renovated by a Portuguese king). The other major palace, Palácio Nacional de Pena, is a Disneyesque wonder, a romantic baronial castle designed by a Prussian architect and built out of the ruins of a 16th-century monastery. The rooms remain much as they were when the royal family left hurriedly during the 1910 revolution.

Close to Sintra, Belas Club de Campo anchors a vast resort. The course routes along a river and five lakes; holes sit in valleys between steep, forested hills, and several loop around a pristine nature preserve. The well-conditioned venue, partly lined by housing, offers views of the Carregueira Mountains.

Also nearby is the Penha Longa Hotel and Golf Resort, with 27 holes designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr. The Atlantico Course begins and ends in wooded pine valleys sprinkled with granite outcroppings; the middle holes traverse steep terrain and offer glimpses of mountains and the sea. Penha Longa’s holes are big, wide, and muscular, often departing from elevated tees and arriving at tiered greens. Two holes play alongside the stone ruins of Roman aqueducts.

Yet another place where the old and new cozy up together in Portugal. ☞