

DESTINATION ♦ EUROPE

Portugal's two biggest cities have a rivalry to match Sydney versus Melbourne with passionate locals who glow with pride about their hometown, and tell you not to bother with the other.

So, is it better in the north? Or do they have it all in the south? If you're tossing up which city to include in your 2018 European travels, here's your form guide.

PORTO

Grittier, cloudier, and teeming with street art, Portugal's second-largest city has long been overlooked but now it's nipping at the heels of its more-famous southern sister as travellers discover its affordable, down-to-earth charms.

"People from Lisbon are always in a hurry ... In Porto we like to take our time and we love to eat," says Virginia Franca, manager of independent gallery and co-working space CRU.

Known as the holy grail for port wine aficionados, Porto might have roots as a sailing port but its modern-day vibe is an unpretentious blend of history, tile-cloaked beauty and a love of the good life.

HISTORY LESSON

Portus Cale (or Port of Cale) as it was once known, lays claim as one of Europe's oldest cities and is even believed to have given Portugal its name. UNESCO deemed the terraced maze of the Ribeira district World Heritage List-worthy in 1996 and ever since, the neglected, rough-around-the-edges city heart has been beating with renewed vigour.

You can't learn about Portuguese history without learning about Prince Henry the Navigator, the grandfather of the "Age of Discoveries". Wander into the 14th-century Casa do Infante, believed to be where the prince was born in 1394, and as well as seeing Roman mosaics uncovered in excavations in 2002, the customs house-turned museum serves as HQ for the Porto Historical Archive.

At the Museum of Transport and Communications (www.amtc.pt/), you can gander at the official vehicles of Portugal's presidents from the declaration of the republic in 1912 to the present day.

EAT AND DRINK

When its residents are affectionately called *tripelros* (or *tripe-eaters*), it's a good indication Porto's local eats will be on the meatier side. Get on board and try a *Franceschina*, an artery-clogging version of France's *croque monsieur*. It's a good idea to share the towering layer-cake of meat and cheese, smothered in a beer sauce.

The south may claim *pastel de nata* but one sugary-sweet pastry found only here, at *Confeitaria Moura* (confeitariamoura.pt), is delicately



crispy *jesuita* – the recipe kept secret by the fifth-generation family who own it.

Of course, this is the best place to taste-test port, the product of UNESCO-listed, 2000-year-old winemaking techniques from nearby Douro Valley. Head to the wine caves at Gala where replica rabelo boats sway on the Douro, just where they would have unloaded their barrels of liquid gold in the 18th century.

CULTURE TRIP

When Porto was named the European Capital of Culture back in 2001, it started to change the face of the city – a place even locals didn't like to visit at night. Now downtown teems with museums, galleries and theatres. Further out, you'll find the meteor-shaped Casa da Musica

(casadamusica.com) and pop-pink Serralves (serralves.pt), which houses one of Europe's best contemporary art museums.

Rua Miguel Bombarda is the street to trawl to discover promising local talent in its galleries. But it's the blank canvas of the city's abandoned building facades that has really allowed urban art to flourish; walls smothered in street art on a grander scale. Look out for local favourites Hazul and Costah as you wander.

LISBON

In comparison to Porto, Lisbon is a spring chicken. The city was completely rebuilt in a wide-boulevard, grid style after being flattened by the mother of all earthquakes in 1755.

The historic Alfama district, which

SAMPLE GINJA FROM THE OLD LADIES SITTING WITH THEIR PLASTIC SHOT GLASSES IN ALFAMA

managed to escape serious damage in the quake, is experiencing the curse of its own historic beauty. Residents are being squeezed out as Airbnb moves in and throngs of tour groups pound its cobblestone streets.

But if you're not one for moody

weather, Lisbon's status as one of Europe's sunniest capitals may just seal the deal. Many fall for the city's magical afternoon glow as light shimmies and bounces off the pastel facades, and sunsets paint the sky candy floss pink.

HISTORY LESSON

Head to the Lisboa Story Centre (lisboastorycentre.pt) for a sensory, video-assisted express pass through Lisbon's history, from first sailings to the New World to a recreation of the 1755 earthquake and an eagle-eyed look at the city architecture of today.

When history is as delicious as this, you need to sample *Pastéis de Belém* in the birthplace of the iconic custard tart in Belém (pastelsdebelem.pt/en), where they've been making them since 1837. Take time to ogle the



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sprawling Jerónimos Monastery and Belém Tower while you're there.

EAT AND DRINK

You've already made the pilgrimage to Belém, so what's left? In short, everything. Get acquainted with the city's favourite food and beverage names at the bustling Time Out Market within the old Mercado de Ribeira (timeoutmarket.com).

With a long list of Michelin-starred restaurants and innovative chefs, you'll never be left wanting for a good meal in Lisbon but for a sleeves-rolled-up, locals experience (even with all the other tourists), it's worth grabbing a number and waiting for a table outside Cervejaria Ramiro (cervejariaramiro.pt). Devour freshly grilled giant tiger prawns, lobster and goose barnacles and wash it all down with a Sagres beer (not Super Bock, you're in Lisbon now).

While you'll still find port on menus everywhere in Lisbon, the south's most typical tipple is ginja – a syrupy, sour cherry liqueur. Sample it from the old ladies sitting with their plastic shot glasses in Alfama or try some of the nouveau blends at Casa da Ginja, inside the Time Out Market.

CULTURE TRIP

Strains of Fado, the traditional musical genre with roots firmly in Lisbon, spill from doorways and skitter across the cobblestones in Alfama on any given night as shawl-cloaked singers entice you to pop inside for the performance. At once mournful and full of passion, the reverberation of voice and guitar will leave you long after the set is over.

A trip to the Oceanário de Lisboa (oceanario.pt), named Best Aquarium

In the World by TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice 2017, hints at Lisbon's more modern cultural direction. Set on the waterfront in the futuristic Parque das Nações, which was built for the 1998 World Expo, this is also the site of the world's largest tech conference, Web Summit (websummit.com), a boon for Lisbon's booming start-up set.

THE WRITER TRAVELLED AT HER OWN EXPENSE

Many fall for Lisbon's magical glow; in Porto see the meteor-shaped Casa da Musica and travel to the nearby Douro Valley to taste-test port.

PICTURES: ISTOCK

ESCAPE ROUTE

PORTUGAL

GETTING THERE

Fly one-stop to Lisbon with Emirates. emirates.com. Cheap direct flights from the UK and many European cities to Porto can be found with Ryanair. ryanair.com. Internal flights are offered by Ryanair or TAP Air Portugal, or it's a three-hour drive between the two cities. River cruises are a popular way to see the Douro Valley.

STAYING THERE

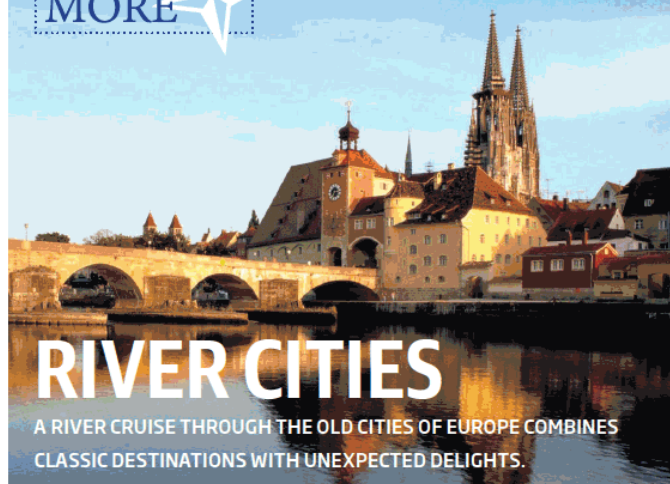
Rosa et al Townhouse is a beautiful guesthouse in Porto's arts district, with rooms starting at \$182 a night. rosaetal.pt. Perched on the crest of one of Lisbon's seven hills, rooms at Santa Clara 1728 start at \$413 a night. santaclara1728.com.

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RIVER CITIES

A RIVER CRUISE THROUGH THE OLD CITIES OF EUROPE COMBINES CLASSIC DESTINATIONS WITH UNEXPECTED DELIGHTS.

Europe remains one of the most romantic destinations in the world. The names of the cities such as Amsterdam, Vienna and Budapest conjure up images of cobble streets, grand cathedrals, classic art and intimate restaurants.

We asked TravelMarvel's European Product Manager, Rochelle Jonson-Deak (right), about her favourite experiences and locations. As she says, a European river cruise includes more than just the major attractions. "As well as all the 'must see' sights," she says, "Expect to meet lovely people, make new friends, see unique and ornate architecture, and still have plenty of time to explore."



Pictured from top: The Regensburg Cathedral by the Danube; Rochelle Jonson-Deak; the Hungarian parliament in Budapest.

FAVOURITE PLACES I love Vienna's grandeur, opulence and architecture, the buzz of the city and the Rathausplatz Christmas market. I also adore the "chocolate box" village of Miltenberg; the alleyways and shopping in Regensburg; the quirkiness of Amsterdam and the city of Budapest as it lights up against the night sky.

HIDDEN GEMS There are a number of hidden gems and secret locations which can be found around every corner. Many of them you simply stumble across when exploring on foot. There are lovely antique stores, bustling markets, rooftop bars, unique street performances and amazing treats to sample. Other lovely and unexpected surprises include seeing cherries growing on the river banks, the vineyards and castles throughout the Rhine Valley, or in winter, watching the snow softly falling around the ship like inside a snow globe.

WHY A RIVER CRUISE? Being on a river cruise ship makes the entire experience a more memorable one simply because there is more time to enjoy and appreciate the special moments, places and people. The ease of getting from place to place without having to pack and unpack, without having to hustle or board a flight, coach or train, makes the journey that much more enjoyable. Together with our wonderful Cruise Director and our delicious food, it really is a relaxing way to travel.



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