



## Lisbon and Sintra, great sights and food!!

by Amaru & Suzanne, May 25th 2006

After spending 5 days in rainy London we needed some sun.....and we got it, in Portugal.... but before we start with this blog maybe we should clarify that I'm back at the helm....(yup James, it's me Amaru writing again...)

Anyways....since we seem to have booked all our flights early in the mornings it means that we have to get up really early every single time....and this time was no exception. Sue kindly offered to drive us to the airport on her way to work, and we really appreciated that (thanks again Sue =))) It's hard to find public transport at that time in the morning.

Of course the day that we leave London, is the day that the sun finally appears and the rain stops!! Figures...! We arrive in Portugal, the sun is shining and we get ready to get off the plane. We now discover that we are not walking into a terminal but into a bus that will take us to the terminal....ah well. After passing immigration, picking up our luggage and walked through customs we now wonder how we are to get into the city....before any such thoughts though we got some information about the rates on car hire that we would need in a few days time. All this done we headed out to catch the bus into the city.



**Rossio Square**  
One of Lisbon's great squares



**Praça do Comércio**  
Once the maritime entrance to Lisbon

Of course we were approached by taxi drivers offering to take us to the city for cheap cheap prices, they almost give you a puppy eye look when you let them know that you are not interested....luckily for us, the five weeks we spent in Asia has toughened us, nothing gets through us now (or so we would like to believe).

We got off the bus at Restauradores, pretty much just below the hill to the city area of Bairro Alto. Our plan was to try and catch one of the city's famous finiculars, and in this case it would have been the "Elevador da Gloria". But when we got there we saw a sign that said it would be out of service for 6 months (when those 6 months started.....who knows). So we ended up walking up the hill....with our heavy backpacks on!!

Once we reached our destination, Pensao Globo (which we had tried to book over the internet, over the phone only to be told to come over once we reached Lisbon, and if there wasn't anything available they would find us somewhere else), we were lucky and we got a room. The room was very sweet with our own bathroom and all the people working there were so lovely, friendly and helpful. We had been recommended this place by Paul and Lynda who had stayed here 7 months prior to our arrival (thx for the tip).

Now, both of us were starving by this stage, early morning and a "breakfast" on the plane is not a lot. So we walked for a bit around the neighbourhood, chose a place and got ready to eat. As a result of our vegetarian friends in London it had been a while since we last had some meat, so we ordered the mix grill for two..... didn't expect to get half a cow on our table. It was all really good though, everything, starting with the cheese and bread, lots and lots and lots of meat, red wine and of course the obligatory coffee after the meal (well, not for Suz obviously).



**Suz and I**  
Posing in front of "Arco da Victória"



**One of the funiculars of Lisbon**  
Couldn't be bothered waiting for them

We rolled out from the restaurant and just wandered the area of Bairro Alto for a while, it's a hilly, cobbled street area with lots of small restaurants and shops. We made our way to another funicular, this time the "Elevador da Bica", and not much seem to be going on with this one either so we walked on down the hill. When we're close to end of the hill we see the funicular coming down after us.....ah well, maybe next time.

We eventually made it to one of Lisbons main squares, the "Praça do Comércio". It's an impressive sight and we snapped off a few photos (just us and every other tourist.....so much for not trying to stick out). We then headed off in the direction of Arco da Victoria when a man approaches us and asks "hashish, marijuana??" and discreetly shows us the content of his hand where he has a hash cake stashed away (hashish ala handswheat....), after politely saying no we walked on for

about five minutes when we are approached by the next seller....hmmmm....observing them for a while it shows that they are not picky on who they ask. We see them walking up to men and woman, young and old and even parents with their young kids.

After our first of many offers we keep moving on and make it to the "Elevador de Santa Justa" for some spectacular views across the city. We don't stay too long though since it's windy and quite cold up there...enough for some nice photos!

Walking back to our area, the Bairro Alto, we walked by a small place that fit the descriptions given to us by Paul and Lynda. A bar named "Pavilhão Chinês", which must be one of the most original places we've ever visited. It has an enormous collection of....well, all sorts of crap, but it looks really good. The room we sat in had lots of small dolls and figurines, another room was full of all kinds of war helmets, another one hosted the pool tables and the best room was filled with GI Joes and model planes hanging from the roof. It was quite pricy compared to other bars but it was well worth the visit.



**We reach the bottom of the hill...**  
...and here comes the funicular...figures!



**The Bairro Alto**  
Home away from home, Pensão Globo.

By this time of the day both of us were getting tired and feeling cold. We thought about not having dinner but then decided to find a place and have something small to eat. Well, the place we found and the food we had wasn't much to write home about....

The next day we had a well deserved sleep in, had brunch and then made our way over to Belém (a different part of the city) by tram. Here we were first startled by the sights of the bridge, we almost thought we were in San Francisco, and then by the sight of a huge Jesus statue.....Did anyone say Rio? Well, once we settled down (yeah, it was really unsettling ;) ) we headed off to the "Monument to the Discoveries", which is a big monument on the harbour front in the shape of a caravel, honoring Portuguese discoveries. We decided not to enter the monument (we are not really all that big on museums and

such) and continued towards the next sight which was the "Torre de Belém".

This is a fortress in the water which was supposed to keep an eye out for invaders. This place we did decide to pay money to go and see (it wasn't a lot of money but still....), and it was well worth it. We played around on the first floor with the cannons first and then made our way to the top, along the way stopping at the guardtowers (or whatever they are) to rest our weary feet. From the top of the tower we could see our next destination....The "Mosteiro dos Jerónimos", this is a big cathedral that just by looking at it made Suz and I wonder how those who built it could keep the motivation day after day doing all those small carvings...(we would have ended up with a square building Soviet Union style if we would have built it).



**Meat Galore, and a good thing we were hungry with so much meat!**

All this sightseeing finally led us to the place we had been waiting to visit all day...."Pasteis de Belém", the original custard tart factory!!!

And they were better than we'd expected, warm, crispy and melt in your mouth delicious....YUM!! We ordered one each and thought that was the way to do it.....but later on we saw other couples (young and old) ordering them in by the half dozen....and to top it off, they were sprinkling them with powder sugar and cinnamon. We almost thought of getting some more, but we didn't want to pig out too much so we just left it at that....for now.



**Arco da Victória**  
As seen from the other side...

We caught the tram back to the centre (this time we actually paid for our tickets, we just didn't have change for them during our last trip and we kept worrying about controllers coming aboard) and started making our way towards the "Castelo de São Jorge", the castle overlooking Lisbon. We had to hike up the hills of the Alfama district to get there, along the way we were discussing weather or not tram nr 28 or 29 went up the hill.....since we couldn't decide on which we just walked it. Almost at the top we saw the damn tram.....(it was number 28 by the way).

The castle offered some amazing views over Lisbon, we strolled along it's walls for a while, taking photos of us and the city before making our way back to our neighbourhood Bairro Alto. That night we discovered that we had a restaurant at the end of the road from our Pension and decided to try it out. The food and service were both very good.

The next morning we got up early (well....early for us), had some brekkie and went in search of the train station to take us to Sintra for the day. We checked the map and walked around the area where the station is supposed to be, but without any luck. We ran into an Aussie bloke who was trying to find the same place and decided to join forces. After a few more turns in the neighbourhood without any luck we just descended into the subway and asked about the train station at the information desk. It turns out that the station was closed down due to repairs.....but she did tell us how to get to our destination. So we ended up getting the subway for about 5 stops and then we finally got on the train to Sintra.



**Up the Elevador de Santa Justa we go**  
to catch some magnificent views of Lisbon...



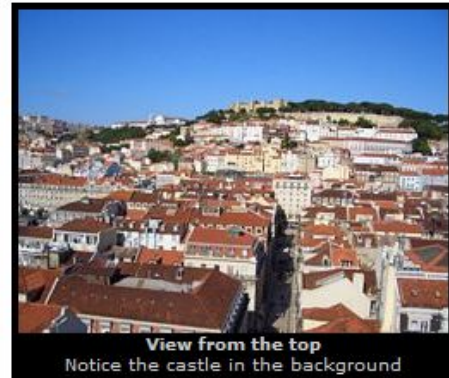
**Lisbon from Elevador de Santa Justa**  
Lisbon in all it's glory!

After around 40min on the train we reached Sintra, which has been declared by the UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. And it is easy to see why, coming in on the train we saw it's castle on the top of the mountain, directly above the village. My first thought was that I wanted to climb up there and explore it....haha, said Suz and looked at me. When she saw that I wasn't laughing she looked at me with one of those "are you crazy" stare!! Eventually we both settled on a "maybe".

In either case, we walked into the village and found a place to have a cold drink and to read in the book about the different sights. While reading we discovered that it isn't as far to the castle as we first thought and we started to make our way towards it. Along the way we saw a bus stop and found out that there was a bus going to the top....even better. The bus arrived, we jumped in and paid (got ripped off is more like it ) and the bus started it's ascend to the top.

The bus ride went on for ever and after every steep and tight turn we looked at each other and realized what a good choice we had made in catching the bus. We got to the top and just as we got off the bus ran into the Aussie guy from earlier. He was coming from the direction of "Palacio Nacional da Pena" (another sight in the mountain) and we stopped to have a quick chat with him. We asked him if he caught the bus or walked, his reply was: "I walked but now I can't feel my calf muscles"....

We left him as he painfully made his way over to the "Castelo dos Mouros" (the big castle that can be seen from the village) and we walked over to the other Palace. We didn't read or see anything that made us want to pay the admission price here so we went back to the castle, bought the ticket and went inside.



**View from the top**  
Notice the castle in the background



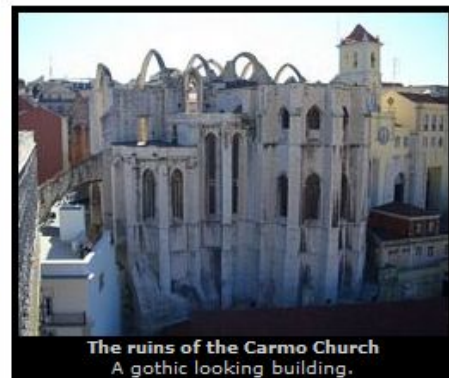
**Suz and I...**  
...posing again, the obligatory self-portrait!

How can we describe the castle?? Well, think of a combination of the Great Wall of China and a medieval castle. The castle wall is crawling over the mountain, looking directly down onto the village. It is by far the best castle either of us have ever experienced, we just sat up there admiring the view for ages. We were in such awe that when the time came to return to the village we ended up walking....

At least we chose a different route than the one the bus took, and since it's down hill we knew we'll eventually make it (one way or another)!

After the sight of the castle nothing else in Sintra can really keep your attention, your eyes keep looking up towards the mountain. So we just decided to have some lunch, just walk around for a while and then made our way back to Lisbon.... some five hours later!

Our last night in Lisbon (before we rented the car) and we were going to try out a restaurant we had been recommended, the problem was that there were two restaurants with very similar names, so we picked out the one closest to us. After waiting for a table for about 20min (this seems right, that's what they told us about the place, always busy) we finally got seated. The food was good but we both had an inkling that this couldn't be the place. First of all, it was too expensive and second and more importantly, the portions weren't as generous as we had heard. We actually found out that it was the other place all along but the confirming email came too late and our only night left in Lisbon would be a Monday night (after returning from our roadtrip) when it was closed.....typical!

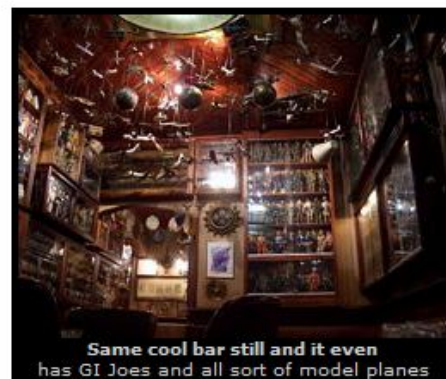


**The ruins of the Carmo Church**  
A gothic looking building.

The next morning we'll leave Lisbon to explore southern and middle Portugal by car.



**Pavilhão Chinês**  
The best bar we encountered in Lisbon



**Same cool bar still and it even**  
has GI Joes and all sort of model planes



**Monument to the Discoveries**  
Designed in the shape of a caravel



**Same monument still.....**  
We considered entering it but no...



**Golden Gate Bridge?!?**  
Nopes, but it could have fooled me though



**Torre de Belém**  
A fortress in the water.....different!



**Ready, Aim.....FIRE!!**  
That bridge is gonna get it now...



**Suzie inside the tower**  
Which of the big guns to play with...



**Happy, happy...until I found out that they**  
didn't provide cannon balls with ticket...



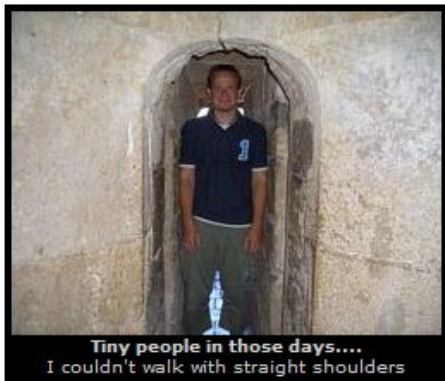
**The tower as seen from the battery room**  
Lots of stairs to reach the top



A resting place for the guards  
to chill.....it's true ;)



I didn't see that bird when I took this  
photo, since I had to lean out



Tiny people in those days....  
I couldn't walk with straight shoulders



Yup, still at the tower.  
we reached the top of the tower...



Suz and I posing.....again  
Well, we have to keep traditions up =)



Mosteiro dos Jerónimos  
An amazing looking building....



Pasteis de Belém  
Custard Tarts.....Mmmmmm



Suz and I  
The view from Castelo de São Jorge



**Castelo de São Jorge**  
One of many beautiful castles that we saw.



**King and Queen of the castle**  
Well.....we wish!



**Suz trying to navigate yet**  
another set of slippery cobbled stairs.



**Amaru**  
Looking handsome in the sun...



**Mmmm.....cheese, olives and wine!**  
Arrives before we got to even see the menu!



**Câmara Municipal**  
Many impressive buildings in Sintra.



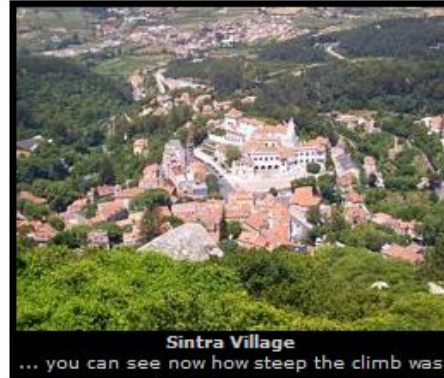
**Amaru struggling up the hill**  
Then we found out about the bus ride



**Inside the Castelo dos Mouros**  
Constructed in the 8th or 9th Century A.D



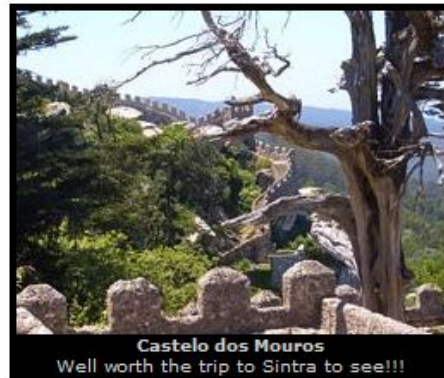
**Palácio Nacional da Pena**  
The view from the castle.



**Sintra Village**  
... you can see now how steep the climb was



**Suz in her castle...**  
"if only I could find a prince!"



**Castelo dos Mouros**  
Well worth the trip to Sintra to see!!!



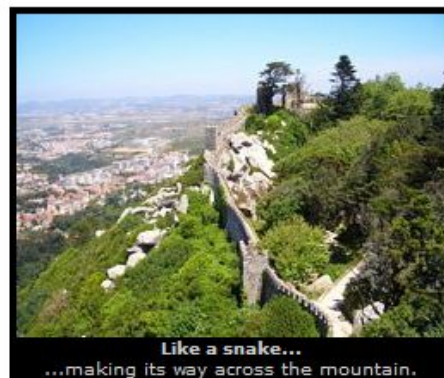
**Castelo dos Mouros**  
Amaru taking a break to enjoy the view...



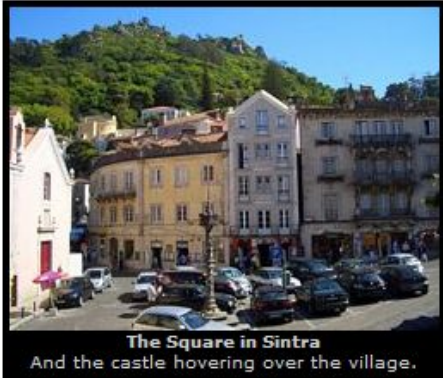
**Not a bad view....**  
Looking down onto the village below.



**The King of the Castle!**  
Suz was looking for a Prince, found a King!



**Like a snake...**  
...making its way across the mountain.



**The Square in Sintra**  
And the castle hovering over the village.



**First surprised to see that they were**  
serving Sangria, later shocked by the price!!

[Back to Top](#)