



AFAR

TRAVEL INSPIRATION FOOD + DRINK

By Kristin Braswell • August 18, 2022

A City to Sea Adventure Through Portugal, With a Side of Wine and Afrobeats

One writer's journey through coastal towns and bustling cities—with music and food as the perfect pairing.



The Afro Nation Festival takes place on Praia da Rocha beach in Portugal's Algarve region. Photo by Diogo Pereira

It reminds me so much of home. It's a thought I had on multiple occasions when I traveled to Portugal back in 2019. Lisbon's proximity to the coast and its bustling city center full of steep hills felt very much like San Francisco. Even the city's 25 de Abril Bridge was designed by the same architect who constructed the Golden Gate Bridge. To the north of Lisbon, Porto's alfresco restaurants that border the Douro River sparked a memory of a trip I took to California's Central Coast, where seafood and water views are also a welcome way to spend an afternoon.

While these parallels caught my eye, Portugal's cities—from coastal towns near appealing beaches in the southern Algarve region to terraced vineyards that unfold on cliff sides in the north's Douro Valley—still stand as singular experiences with new corners to uncover again and again. Recently, I made a return to Portugal, beginning in the Algarve, then continuing on to two cities that I can never get enough of: Lisbon and Porto. Here's how I mapped out a coastal, city, and wine adventure that I won't soon forget.

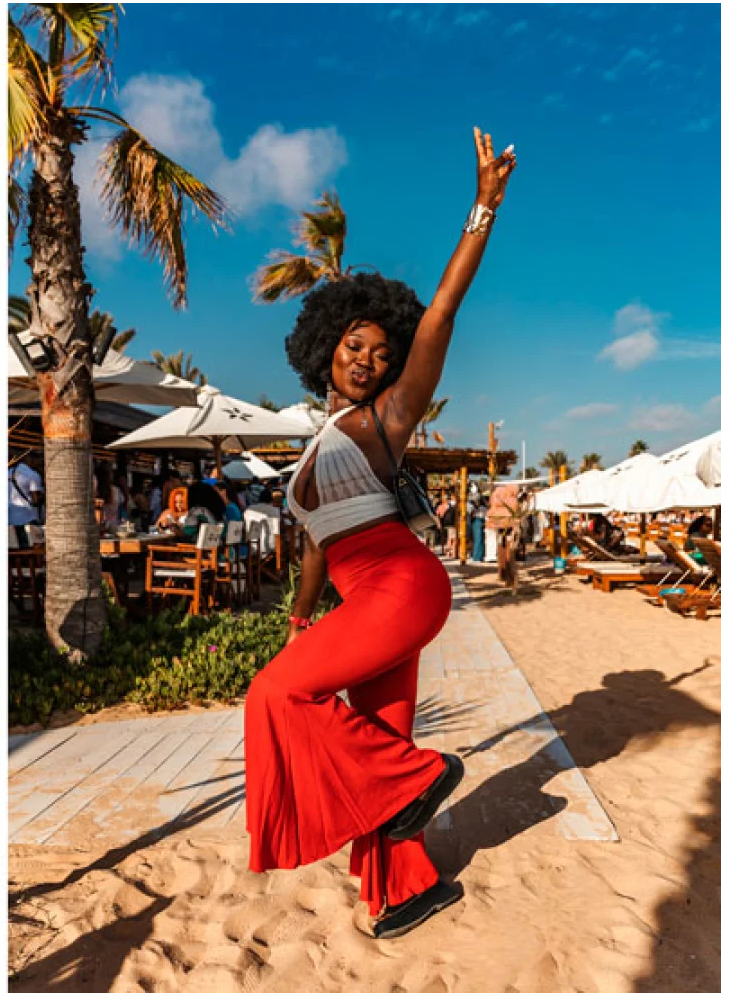
Catching waves and beats in the Algarve

I first visited Portugal's southernmost region, called the Algarve, as a study abroad student visiting for the weekend from nearby Spain. It was a whirlwind introduction consisting mostly of bar hopping and karaoke, so I was excited to return this time, with a bit more maturity and curiosity under my belt. A 2.5-hour drive from Lisbon's Humberto Delgado Airport led to Porches, a coastal town with a population of 2,000 people. Porches is close to a number of beaches, cafés, and a skilled artisan community that creates the region's famous decorative handmade tile pieces at [Porches Pottery](#).

I checked into the 170-room [Vila Vita Parc](#), perched on a clifftop overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. The property is set on 54 tropical acres and features six bars and 11 restaurants (including a farm- and sea-to-table restaurant, Ocean, with two Michelin stars), three swimming pools, a [spa](#) with 14 treatment rooms, a new multi-sports field, a pitch and putt, driving range, and indoor gym. Vila Vita also has five newly launched villas called the Masterpiece Collection that offer ultimate privacy, a butler service, private pool, and views that overlook a sapphire-colored ocean. I am often put off by large resorts that feel like cities unto themselves, but Vila Vita manages to remain a large oasis with personalized service and authenticity to its surroundings, from its whitewashed Moorish architecture to rows of lounge chairs on a hillside that serve only to put the surrounding ocean and fauna on full display.

Book Now: [Vila Vita Parc](#)

After a poolside lunch of garlic- and wine-soaked mussels that never disappoint in Portugal, I headed down a series of wooden steps between two cliffs that landed me at the resort's secluded golden-sand beach for a few hours. In the evening, at Adega restaurant, comfort foods from the region, including a rustic soup full of spicy sausage and vegetables, completed a delicious first night in Porches. The next day, a 10-minute cab ride revealed one of the most beautiful beaches I've ever seen: Praia da Marinha. From above, golden rock formations jutted out from bronze-colored sand and a turquoise sea. Topless sunbathers, families, and couples carved out their spot on the sand before inevitably taking a picture near one of the massive rock formations. It was an afternoon of ease and awe and a great ending to my quick stop in Porches.



Three stages provide the best of afrobeats, hip-hop, dancehall, and more at Afro Nation. Photos by Diogo Pereira

My next stop was in another coastal town with a lot more movement, in part because the largest Afrobeats festival in the world made its way to its shores. For three days, [Afro Nation](#) took over the expansive Praia de Rocha beach in Portimão, with two stages and travelers from around the world who dug their feet into the sand and raised their hands to the sounds of Burna Boy, WizKid, Megan Thee Stallion, Rema, Beanie Man, and more. It was the best music festival I've been to, in part because I got to see my favorite artists up close, but also because of the setting. Yes, the music was impressive, but so was the sherbert-tinted skyline above and ocean in the distance.

As luck would have it, only a few rooms remained at [Bela Vista Resort](#), steps away from the festival. The five-star Relais & Châteaux property is a haven behind a gate on a busy street filled with bars, restaurants, and foot traffic. Thirty rooms and suites are spread across the grounds, including a three-story villa built in the 20th century. Splashes of blue and yellow alongside decorative nautical objects complement sea-facing property. A wooden painted ceiling at the light-filled bar and a staircase surrounded by stained glass windows suggested a visit to an intimate mansion more than a hotel. The gourmet restaurant Vista—helmed by chef João Olivei—earned a Michelin star in 2017 for its inventive takes on seafood and fresh produce from the region. Outside the main villa, a large pool flanked by palm trees and white cabanas is an added bonus to such an intimate property. Though the party from Afro Nation spilled into the streets well into the early morning, at Bela Vista, I still felt a world away.

Book Now: [Bela Vista Resort](#)

A riverside retreat, with lots of wine

In desperate need of coffee and a full night's rest after the festival, I braved my way to the nearby town of Faro to board TAP Portugal's one-hour flight to Porto, in the northern part of the country. The city is near one of the country's best wine regions—the Douro Valley—as well as port cellars and alfresco dining with seafood restaurants I am still dreaming of today.

The day in Porto began with a check-in to another hilltop stunner: [the Yeatman Hotel](#). Even if you aren't staying, the views alone are worth the visit. The room terraces, pool, and multilayered balconies reveal unobstructed views of the historic city center in all its glory, right across the Douro River. Pastel buildings with crumbling facades, tables lining a cobblestone promenade, and steep hills that lead to side streets dotted with boutique shops and tapas bars become even more illuminated as the sun sets. The Yeatman sits on 3.5 acres, with three restaurants, a spacious spa, and events like [wine dinner Thursdays](#), which feature a particular wine region or style for guests and visitors to enjoy. Each accommodation at the 109-room property is named after a Portuguese wine producer.

Book Now: [The Yeatman Hotel](#)

Right below the Yeatman sits [WOW, The New Cultural District](#), which features seven interactive museum experiences, and 12 restaurants, bars, and cafés created from old port wine cellars. First opened in 2020, it's a good place to visit to learn more about the history of port, wine, and even the textile industry in Portugal.

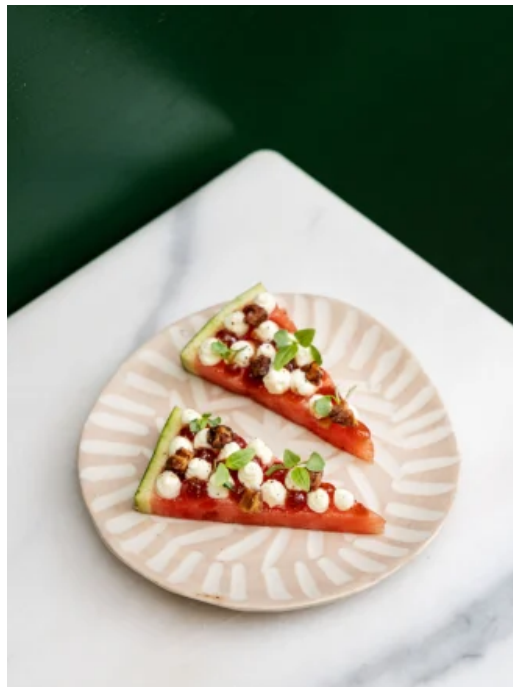
Across the river in the heart of Porto, I found my way to [Wine Quay Bar](#), a family-owned spot I discovered back in 2019 and couldn't wait to return to, particularly for a glass of berry-forward baga wine from Portugal's Bairrada wine region. At night on its terrace, building lights twinkle against the river. For meals, a recommendation from a resident required a 20-minute cab ride outside of Porto to the seaside town of Matosinhos.

I will always travel for food, and once again, I was not disappointed. Marisqueira Antiga displays every crustacean and fish imaginable, but I settled on a rockfish, similar to a sea bass but thicker with a crispy skin that reminded me of well-seasoned fried chicken. For my last dinner, I visited [Cantinho do Avillez](#), helmed by acclaimed Portuguese chef José Avillez. In a corner of the busy bistro, I unashamedly devoured a tender duck confit swimming in a red curry sauce with Chinese aubergine.

A final farewell to Lisbon

It was time to end the trip in a city I often say I'd like to one day call home. Lisbon doesn't feel grandiose like parts of Paris or overwhelming like parts of London. And perhaps it's unfair to compare European capitals at all, but it's Lisbon's "*come as you are and so will I*" energy that has always drawn me closer to it. I checked into [AlmaLusa](#) in Baixa Chiado, which is walking distance from most of the city's major sites, including the Tagus River, bars, and museums. Formerly a grocery store, the hotel opened in 2016 and still maintains intricate tile work from the 18th century. There are only 28 rooms and suites; a restaurant and terrace on the first floor are an attractive place for breakfast and remote working. Outside, a terrace on the Praça do Município has a small bar for an afternoon cocktail and some good old-fashioned people watching.

Book Now: [AlmaLusa](#)



Seasonally fresh dishes reign supreme at Lisbon's BouBou's restaurant, Courtesy of Bou Bou's

My Lisbon afternoons were spent pumping up the city's infamous steep hills, with rewards of its *miradouros* (viewpoints) from neighborhoods including Alfama and Principe Real. In the heart of the city at Rossio Square, Santa Justa elevator overlooks the entire downtown area all the way to the Tagus River. For lunch, I headed to the recently opened restaurant [Oficio](#) where delicious tapas reign supreme: a sausage croquette with a quail egg in its center; fire-cooked skate with herb sauce; and my favorite creamy Algarve crab dip served in the shell. Across the street from

Oficio, I headed to another shared plates extravaganza later that day, [Páteo](#). A simple yet well-seasoned chicken piri piri and glass of rosé kicked off the afternoon in the spacious gastronomic [Bairro do Avillez](#) complex that also houses chef José Avillez's Mini Bar and Taberna restaurants.

Upstairs in the [Bairro Alto Hotel](#), dinner is served in a nautical-themed restaurant called [Bahr](#). An outside patio offers panoramic views of the Tagus River and famous 25 de Abril bridge; inside, chef Bruno Rocha serves up dishes like spiced samosa rolls, wild turbot with grilled kale and chorizo, and, for dessert, a refreshing apple granita.

For my last night in Lisbon, I visited [BouBou's](#), a restaurant in Principe Real that quickly became the best dining experience I've had all year. Louise Bourrat, who recently won Top Chef France 2022, and her team practice masterful care with the food laid on the counters of the open air kitchen. Rows of freshly picked herbs, chilled oysters, tender bites of hamachi, and sliced watermelon come to life under her guidance. Bourrat's approach is surgical with her attention to detail. I watched her place edible flowers on a sliced eggplant for nearly 10 minutes, her attention never swaying. She is an artist, sometimes flustered, sometimes cautiously hopeful that her creations will come out precisely as she has imagined them. And they do. I reveled in each bite of a sweet potato ceviche with coconut, pomegranate, and kaffir lime and a spicy and sour vegan taco that included kimchi rice, glazed seitan, and wasabi.

A nightcap at a nearby bar called [Social B](#) was the sweet finale to this whirlwind trip of food, wine, and scenery. As luck would have it, the bartender was also a fan of Burna Boy, the same Afrobeats artist who kicked off my trip in Portimão at the Afro Nation festival. To end the trip with those same sweet melodies again among strangers was a full circle moment indeed.

Kristin Braswell

Kristin is a travel journalist and founder of [Crush Global Travel](#). She has penned pieces for *Vogue*, *CNN*, *USA Today*, *Essence*, *NPR*, *Architectural Digest*, *Ebony*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, among others. Her perfect day includes soca music, rum, and the ocean.