



edited by Moira Hammon, email chictravel@thestar.ie

Home or abroad, our weekly travel page has all the best deals and ideas you need for getting away

Pack up and go...



Lovely Lisbon

is full of charm

HISTORIC — The city skyline seen from across the River Tagus

The shaky tram rattles noisily and slowly up the hill, then takes us down another hill, through the centre and back up to Barrio Alto, writes **YVONNE GORDON**. Along the way, we pass through Lisbon's historic centre and along back streets with rundown and crumbling buildings, the tram's bell ringing brightly as we wind around corners and bends.

With its old-fashioned wooden interior and its route through the historic areas of the city, the No 28 tram is one of the highlights of a visit to the Portuguese capital.

The one-carriage tram goes from one side of the city to the other, passing up and down the hills (the city is built on seven hills) and through the old parts of the city on the way.

We started with a morning walk in the Alfama area, the old Moorish neighbourhood, with its labyrinth of irregular streets and alleyways, filled with buildings all nearly piled on top of each other.

This is the home of Fado music and the legendary Fado clubs.

The area has elevated views over the historic centre of the city and the River Tagus, and the highest point is the Castle of São Jorge, which was built in the 10th century.

With its thick walls and ten towers, the hilltop fortress can be seen for miles around the city and it is also open to the public.

The tram goes down to Praça do Comércio, a large open square on the waterfront at the River Tagus, which is lined with small shops and restaurants with outdoor terraces — it's a great place to stop for a coffee or sunset drink.

The Praça is adjacent to the pedestrianised shopping area of Baixa (the lower town). Spend a few hours wandering around this area and you'll come across lots of old-style shops with retro weighing scales and cash registers, selling everything from coffee and tea by the weight, to sweets, chocolate and tobacco.

There are also plenty of clothes shops in the area and cafés where you can enjoy a pastel de Belém or pastel de nata — the traditional custard tart which Lisbonites love to have with their coffee.

A few minutes' walk — or take the Santa Justa lift up — the Chiado area is a lively district with shops, restaurants and theatres.

Nearby here, for nightlife, Barrio Alto is an experience, especially at weekends.

'Barrio' means neighbourhood and 'alto' means high — the name refers to the area's elevated position in the city and it can be reached on foot by funicular.

There's a selection of restaurants in the area, but it's the pubs and clubs that really take off around midnight, when crowds gather all along the tiny cobbled streets and alleyways (don't wear heels!) and move from bar to bar. It can be touristy and crowded but the atmosphere is buzzing.

Another great nightlife area is the Docas (docks) area near the river, which has restaurants and clubs.

Lisbon is easy to navigate — as well as trams and buses, the best way to get around is by Metro. You buy a rechargeable card for 50c at the metro station and then add as many trips as you like. Or a Lisbon Card (from €18.50 for 24 hours) gives you free entrance to museums and tours, as well as free transport on the city's buses and trams.

Lisbon is ideal for a city break, there is lots to see and do and it's small enough to get familiar with in just a couple of days.

We stayed at the Art Deco boutique hotel Hotel Britania, just off Avenida da Liberdade. It's designed in the style of 1940s glamour and has a relaxed charm, perfect after a day of sightseeing or a night on the town.

● Double rooms at Hotel Britania start at €125 per room, see www.hotel-britania.com. For information on Lisbon, see www.visitlisboa.com. Aer Lingus flights from Dublin to Lisbon start from €59.99 each way including taxes and charges, see www.aerlingus.com.



SCENIC ROUTE — The No 28 tram crosses the city

Take the tour of a lifetime in Japan

■ A trip to the Land of the Rising Sun is truly the opportunity of a lifetime — and we've come across a fantastic guided tour to Japan, departing Dublin on September 10, so you should start saving now!

This fascinating country, with its unique blend of high-tech modernity and ancient traditions, geishas and tea ceremonies, is a must-see on any traveller's list.

Explore the bustling metropolis of Tokyo and its Imperial Palace, visit majestic sacred temples and shrines and be inspired by the scenery at iconic Mt Fuji. You will enjoy a thrilling ride on the super fast 'Bullet train' before spending time in historic Kyoto, and learn more about the terrifying events that took place in Hiroshima. Marvel at the cuisine in a top Sushi restaurant and sample other Japanese delicacies. This incredible tour is sure to leave lasting memories.

The 11-night trip costs €3,429 including flights and taxes. Call 01 637 1600 or log onto www.traveldepartment.ie/itinerary-details/highlights-of-japan/930.



HIGHLIGHT — See the Imperial Palace, Tokyo

ROADS OF EUROPE

● Do you love the idea of touring Europe without the hassle of planning your itinerary? Then choose a travel firm that will look after you every step of the way. Insight Vacations' 2014 Europe programme is now on sale and if you book and pay by February 12, you can save up to 10 per cent. Country Roads of Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, a 10-night trip, tours some idyllic landscapes. Soak up the views over the Petrusse ravine from the Pont Adolphe before a guided walk through the old town of Luxembourg to see the cathedral and palace of the Grand Duke.

In Antwerp, marvel at the 16th century Guild House while in Bruges, stroll through the canals before an evening of fine dining.

All Insight Vacations holidays include:
— Flights ex Dublin, transfers, taxes and one piece of checked luggage
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— A welcome reception with drinks and a welcome dinner
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All this for just €2,199pps with early payment discount for the Country Roads of Belgium, Luxembourg & the Netherlands tour, departing April 19.

Visit www.insightvacations.com, or call 01 775 3803.



MARVEL — Antwerp

A FERRY NICE SHIP

■ Ferry passengers take note — the Stena Adventurer on Stena Line's Dublin Port to Holyhead route has completed an extensive refurbishment. Stena Shopping is bigger and better than before with even more products and great value deals to choose from, with up to 40 per cent savings compared to the high street.

The Stena Plus lounge also has additional capacity with more seating for extra comfort, while deck seven has been transformed to offer a new area for passengers to eat, drink and relax with a Metropolitan Bar & Grill restaurant, a new comfortable seating area, movie lounge and children's play area.

For more information, go to www.stenaline.ie, call 01 204 7777 or visit your local Stena Line office or travel agent.



Go...with Kathryn Thomas
The RTE star is our celeb travel writer — don't miss her expert advice here every week

QUESTION: DEAR KATHRYN
Can you please tell me where would be a nice safe place to go on holiday for me? I am a single man and I have never been away from Ireland. I haven't had a holiday in 25 years and that is the truth.
Thanks,
Dennis, Clare

KATHRYN REPLIES: Wow, that's along time to go without a holiday. You deserve to have some fun and here's how to do it. A wonderfully relaxed way to visit somewhere on your own is to join People Alone Travelling Together (otherwise known as the PATT club). It is based in Donegal and organises trips within Ireland and abroad (their most recent one was Christmas in Tenerife for singletons). Call 074 911 9955 between 10am and 5pm or log onto www.thepattclub.ie — their 2014 tours will be announced soon.

Friendship Travel is a Belfast-based singles specialist that has had tens of thousands of happy customers over the years. Their tours are a mix of ages, typically between 25 and 65, though there is no upper age limit.

Friendship says that first-timers often book a city break in the UK or Europe to 'test the water' but it organises a wide range of holidays including cruises, ski breaks and beach resorts. Call 048 9446 2211 or log onto www.singles-holidays.ie

Now go and pack a suitcase and enjoy yourself!

Tweet Kathryn Thomas @gokathrynthomas/
email chictravel@thestar.ie/write to her c/o of Chic, The Star, Independent House, 27-32 Talbot Street, Dublin 1