



Surf's up in Portugal

SEA YOU THERE — Ericeira caters for all levels of surfers and (below) the small fishing village is a delight to visit

Just 22 miles from Lisbon, Ericeira is a surfer's paradise *By Yvonne Gordon*

Thud. I landed on the sand like a pile of wet laundry fired from the open door of a washing machine on spin cycle. I had just been ejected from a wave I was trying to surf on, and deposited straight onto the beach. I was surfing in Portugal, where the waves are fast, hard and break near the shore.

There wasn't a lot of time between dropping into a wave and hitting the beach to get standing up on the board.

However, things weren't all bad.

Ericeira, 22 miles north of Lisbon, has such a selection of beaches and different types of surf breaks, it's one of the best surfing spots in the world.

The temperature was around 25°C, there wasn't a cloud in the sky, the water was warm, and just yards from the shore was a boardwalk full of funky café bars for post-surf refreshments. For a surfer used to northwest Ireland, it makes a change from changing in a freezing car park in Bundoran and clinging to a bowl of chowder afterwards to warm up.

I was taking an intermediate surf lesson with the local NaOnda surf school and João, the instructor, talked me through my pop-up, telling me to make sure to get my back foot up first.

"I'm going to be a pain in the ass," he told me at the beginning of the lesson, and at first he was, watching my every move and calling me over for feedback, telling me how to tweak things to get up onto waves quicker.

The waves were tough, and sometimes I felt I was spending more time under them than on them. However it soon got easier and more fun.

My popups got faster and I was spending more time above the board than underneath it, and surfing for longer.

After a couple of hours of exhilarating

surfing, I was ready to fall into the hammock outside our wooden chalet at Helios in Foz do Lizandro.

Just steps from the beach, it looks out over a tranquil valley and from my perch in the sun, I could hear dogs barking and the laughs of kids playing in the distance, with the roar of the sea and breaking waves in the background.

Much revived, in the early evening, we explored Ericeira, a small fishing village with long, thin streets of pretty white houses with red roofs.

Doorways and shutter-boxes are painted sea blue and many of the houses have traditional tiles on their facades.

At the seafont, there's a long wall with a view down over Fisherman's Beach and some elderly locals had gathered for an evening chat in the sun.

There are small shops around the square and lots of restaurants in the adjacent pedestrianised streets. Surfing is a big theme here — Ericeira is one of only four World Surf Reserves — so there are plenty of surf shops.

We popped into a bakery for a Pastéis de Belém — one of the famous custard tarts which had been recommended.

It didn't disappoint — so much so, I was tempted to skip dinner and just fill up on these. But after a while exploring, we chose to eat at Tik Tak restaurant, at an

outside table in the quiet street.

Pedro, the owner, brought out a few pieces of fish, the catch of the day, for us to choose from. We chose seabass and grouper and it arrived with sautéed potatoes and vegetables.

The next morning we had scheduled a yoga class at our accommodation and the instructor, Mofalda, worked us through a special programme which eased sore surfing muscles and loosened up joints.

After lunch, it was time for another surf lesson. The tide was further out, the waves were easier and a group of expert surfers further out on the waves provided inspiration for improvement.

This was my first time surfing outside Ireland and as well as enjoying some exciting surf conditions — Ericeira caters for surfers of all levels — it was great to be able to relax in the sun after surfing, eat delicious

seafood and explore an old Portuguese fishing village. I'll definitely be popping up on the waves here again.

● **A week at Helios Ericeira beach houses and five surf lessons starts from €203 per person (up to May) and €369pp in high season (July/August). For information and to book, call 01 482 2828 or see www.surfholidays.com. Aer Lingus flights from Dublin to Lisbon start at €59.99 each way, see www.aerlingus.com.**

