

Opinion

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Discovering Portugal

FOR CENTURIES, Portugal has been famous for producing the best sailors in the world. Among them was Ferdinand Magellan who sailed under the Spanish flag and reached our islands.

It was not a “discovery” as written in our old school history books. According to the iconic historian-essayist Carmen Guerrero Nakpil, we had a flourishing civilization with kings who ruled their respective communities or “kinglets.”

Portugal is one of Europe’s picturesque countries. Pilar Sancho Laguens, anthropologist and world traveller, is a Spaniard who currently lives in Lisbon (for the past two and a half years) and Barcelona (her permanent home). At a recent encounter, she shared her delightful impressions.

“Portugal is a small country that is full of history and culture that is fantastic to discover and enjoy. It has a wonderful climate all year long with lots of sunshine which gives its principal cities a wonderful light... especially Lisbon with its bright blue skies, she enthused.

“The light turns the beautiful buildings into light shades of pink and blue.

“The people are quiet and respectful. The food is excellent -- both seafood and meat. It is probably one of the best countries for olive oil and fresh fish.”

Among the delicious dishes are the big, grilled sardines, the famous *bacalao a bras* and the custard pastry -- *pasteles de Belem*.

“The architecture is very original with extraordinary rich materials such as stone, Majolica tiles forming figures and landscapes.” She described the “very personal way of building sidewalks with the *Calçada Portuguesa* or Portuguese mosaic made with small pieces of tone forming a design -- sometimes in different colors.” In particular, she likes the “Manuelino” design.

“The Jeronimos Convent in Belem is the most beautiful building in Portugal, built at the beginning of the 16th Century. The Tower of Belem combines Arab, Renaissance and Gothic elements.”

“Lisbon is a city with hills and one should explore around the neighborhoods of Baixa, Chiado and Barrio Alto. Others worth visiting are Rato, Alfama and Campo de Ourique. The cathedral, churches and basilicas are impressive. Each one has its own character with the finest artworks on the ceilings and walls.

“The Calouste Gulbenkian Museum is a jewel because of it covers a long history of art.”

**Beyond
Brushstrokes
Marivic Rufino**



One explores the museum to admire artworks and sculpture of different periods and origin: Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Islamic, Chinese, Classical, Renaissance and Impressionist.

The Louis XV and Louis XVI furniture and the clocks are exquisite. There is a separate section for the Art Nouveau collection delicate glass and jewelry.

The Gulbenkian, which opened in 1969, is set in the verdant Parque de Santa Gertrudes. It has a separate contemporary art center. Considered a landmark in museum architecture, the structure has many openings to the exterior. It offers visitors a continuous dialogue between Nature and Art. On a breezy Sunday, the gardens have many families having picnics.

Ms. Sancho noted the other places to see.

"The National Museum of Arte Antiga has extraordinary national and international paintings, furniture and Japanese screens.

"The Cathedral Orse (Romanesque style) was built in 1147 over the ruins of the principal city mosque. There has been severe damage due to earthquakes and the building was renovated several time. It is considered a very important archaeological site.

"Other beautiful churches are San Roque church in Barrio Alto with its own museum and Santo Domingos in Baixa.

"Sintra, a lovely town on the hills close to Lisbon, has a romantic beauty and special micro-climate. It was chosen as the summer capital by the royal family and by many upper class people after the 18th-19th century.

"Cascais and Estoril became famous since the beginning of the 20th century because many royal families who have been thrown out of their countries (Italy, Spain and Romania) lived there. During the World Wars, Portugal was neutral. The area became an important place for espionage," she revealed.

"Obidos is a walled town with a castle built in the 14th century.

"Porto, Portugal's second city, is located in the north. It is commercial and well known for its Port wine and beautiful architecture.

"The Algarve, developed in the last 30 years, is in the southern part of the country. It is wonderful for holidays with great food, lovely golf courses and beaches," she remarked.

The journey includes a visit to the Fatima Shrine that is well known among Catholic pilgrims and Marian devotees. It is the site of Our Lady's apparitions and the miracle of the dancing sun in 1917.

Cabo da Roca, on the breath taking windswept cliffs overlooking the Atlantic, is the extreme western point of the European continent. At the other side of the ocean is the new world.

At the edge of the bluff, one admires the marvelous panorama of cobalt blue sky over the ultramarine sea with rolling waves crashing against the rocks. The seagulls sail high above and swoop down to the boats tossing on the water. A lighthouse on top of the hill overlooks the seascape. One can almost see forever beyond the horizon.

Discovering Portugal is a serendipitous, cultural and spiritual experience.

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