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01. HIGH MOUNTAINS AND A WILD COASTLINE, LIVELY CITIES AND ENCHANTED VILLAGES
THE REGION OF CENTRO DE PORTUGAL

Portugal’s golden central region is situated between the green North and the Lisbon area. **CENTRO DE PORTUGAL** lures with one of the most diverse landscapes in the country. To the west you will find on the Atlantic long, white sandy beaches and to the East the region that extends to the border with Spain.

There are three sub-regions: Beira Litoral, the coastal area; Beira Alta, the wooded, mountainous interior and south of it Beira Baixa, the land between Estrela mountains and the Spanish border. The Centro de Portugal was and still is in many ways the spiritual and cultural centre of the country.

This is due primarily to **COIMBRA**, one of the largest cities in Portugal and former residence of the first Portuguese Kings. The city of Mondego River has experienced dramatic changes throughout the centuries. As Lisbon and Porto, Coimbra is a city of belvederes. But the highest point is not a castle as in Lisbon, but the University, which is one of the oldest in the world and continues to be one of the most important universities in Portugal.

UNESCO has included the University quarter of Coimbra in the World Heritage list. But Coimbra is not alone representing Centro de Portugal. The imposing monasteries of Alcobaça, Batalha and Tomar are also a part of this list. Do not forget that the cave engravings, discovered in Côa Valley are also a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The Roman Conímbriga, to which Coimbra owes its name, is located 15 km south of the Rio Mondego and with 130,000 square meters it is Portugal’s largest field of ruins from Roman times. Because of its many outdoor mosaics and the remains of Roman baths, it is often compared with the Italian Pompeii.

Those who are looking for diversity, pleasure and leisure just need to visit the nearby seaside resorts and to get to the sandy beaches of the coast. Figueira da Foz, whose name derives from a sacred fig tree at the mouth of the Rio Mondego, offers a great fishing tradition, as well as the entertainment of a large seaside resort.

**AVEIRO** provides very different impressions: canals like in Venice or Amsterdam, shimmering salt lakes on the edge of the lagoon and the 45-km long “ría” (drowned river valley) and near the colourful striped fisherman’s cottages of iconic Costa Nova beach.

In the centre of the region, you will find the city of **VISEU** that became a must-see spot for tourism, mainly because of Grão Vasco Museum, housed in the former Bishop’s Palace. Grão Vasco, one of the greatest Portuguese painters of all times, was born in 1501 in Viseu.

The forest of Buçaco is a fascinating landscape, ideal for nature lovers. This magnificent forest has a breathtaking palace hotel in the middle and about 400 native and 300 exotic trees and plant species. Among these you will find African, Indian and Mexican cedar, imposing cypress trees, sycamores and mimosas.
01. HIGH MOUNTAINS AND A WILD COASTLINE, LIVELY CITIES AND ENCHANTED VILLAGES
THE REGION OF CENTRO DE PORTUGAL

Open-air lovers can also find other magnificent parks and gardens, which are truly appealing. In the Gardens of Quinta das Lágrimas you will come across palm trees, Judas trees, cedar trees, cypresses, as well as a beautiful yet tragical love story, involving the throne heir Dom Pedro, who could not spouse his Spanish court lady Inês de Castro. Legend has it that her tears continue to pour out of the spring, watering all the exotic plants of the garden. The Botanical Garden of the University of Coimbra is also worth-visiting.

The garden of the Bishop’s Palace in CASTELO BRANCO is a beautiful example of a Baroque garden with artistic hedges and bushes, ornamented fountains, water springs and a lake.

In Buddha Eden Garden of the estate Quinta dos Loridos, we have a feeling of being in Asia. This is Europe’s largest Asian garden, where we can contemplate Buddhas and Pagodes, terracota warriors and rock dragons. A garden tour leads the visitor to the most beautiful gardens of the region.

Centro de Portugal is the ideal place for individual travellers who are fond of nature. For instance, the landscape of Lousã Mountain and its walking trails. If you are lucky enough you will see rare plants and animals, already extinct elsewhere. Also worth highlighting are the traditional Schist Villages, which have been carefully renovated with the help of EU funds. The Schist Villages represent sustainable tourism awareness.

There are also 12 HISTORICAL VILLAGES located in the mountainous areas of Centro de Portugal. These almost deserted settlements have been renewed and were brought back to life for cultural and tourism purposes. Anyone who has spent a night in one of these magnificent Historical Villages will never forget the unrivalled peace and quiet they provide.

Romantic travellers cannot possibly miss the Castle of Almourol, placed right in the middle of Tejo River on a very small island. The castle was probably built by the Romans and in the Reconquest wars of the 12th century it was part of the defensive line over the Zêzere River from TOMAR to Cardiga.

Nature enthusiasts are drawn to the TEJO INTERNACIONAL NATURAL PARK. This is one of the least populated regions of Portugal near the border with Spain. It is quite remarkable the great variety of rare bird species that you can see throughout the year in this region. Tejo Internacional is especially beautiful in spring time when the storks nest and the landscape is covered by a veil of white flowers.

SERRA DA ESTRELA, the Mountain area, is literally the highest attraction. In Summer time, Portugal’s highest peak offers peaceful mountain lakes, rushing waterfalls and enchanted villages, inhabited by people who largely live of the sheep flocks. In winter time tourists pour in to the only skiing area in the country.
02. THE MOST PRECIOUS TREASURES
UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES IN CENTRO DE PORTUGAL

The region of Centro de Portugal has a lot of sites that because of its uniqueness, authenticity and integrity have universal importance and therefore they were included in the UNESCO World Heritage list:

THE MONASTERY OF BATALHA
The Dominican Monastery of Batalha was built to celebrate the victory of the Portuguese over the kingdom of Castille in the Battle of Aljubarrota in 1385. Construction works lasted around 150 years. This sacred building is a representative of the typical Portuguese Gothic style, deeply influenced by Maneline art. (World Heritage since 1983).

THE MONASTERY OF ALCÔBACHÁ
The unique Cistercian Monastery of Alcobaça, dedicated to the Holy Maria of Alcobaça, is one of the largest monastery complexes in Portugal. It was founded in the 12th century by King D. Afonso I. The Monastery of Alcobaça is considered a masterpiece of Gothic Cistercian art in Portugal. Particularly impressive is not only the outstanding monastery church, but also the 18M-high kitchen, where entire oxen can be baked. (World Heritage since 1989).

THE KNIGHTS’ TEMPLAR CONVENT OF TOMAR
The Convent of Christ of Tomar was built in 1162 by the Knights’ Templar Order to commemorate the victory over the Moorish conquerors. The convent church is particularly striking, consisting of two parts: a Byzantine-inspired roundabout, built upon a 16-angle plant, as well as the later Christ church with an octagonal dome over the altar. (World Heritage since 1983). Every 4 years (the last edition was in 2015) takes place the Tray Feast – “Festa dos Tabuleiros”. This festivity dates back to the 12th century, when the Queen Santa Isabel founded the Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit, sharing bread, meat and wine among the needy. From the 17th century onwards it continued to be celebrated in the same way. During the processions the ladies carry heavy trays decorated with bread on their heads along the beautifully decorated streets.

CÔA VALLEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK
In the end of the 80’s thousands of petroglyphs were found in the margins of Côa River, dating back to 25.000 year ago. The image and graphic representations engraved in the schist rocks show aurochs, horses, deer, Capricorns, but also goats and fish, over a length of 17 km. It is an open-air gallery with Paleolithic representations that could only be seen in protected caves. Some representations show different techniques of specific eras: some representation of animals are drawn in a dotted line, which were sculpted with another rock in the schist. This “drawing technique” obeyed the carved drawings, resulting in a straight line. But the Stone Age man even tried to depict motion through multiple drawing of body parts: some horses have multiple heads and tails, imitating a certain movement. If you don’t have enough time for a thorough visit of the engravings, we suggest an interesting visit to the Côa Museum. (UNESCO World Heritage since 1998).

If you want to stay longer in this amazing region, you can follow the Grand Route of Côa Valley.
02. THE MOST PRECIOUS TREASURES
UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES IN CENTRO DE PORTUGAL

The most appropriate trail for bikers, trekkers and horse riders starts in the spring of Côa River and ends in the estuary of Douro River along 200 km.

THE UNIVERSITY OF COIMBRA
Parts of the old university city of Coimbra also belong since 2013 to the UNESCO World Heritage list. The next chapter is totally devoted to Coimbra.
03. TIMELESS BEAUTY
UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE CITY COIMBRA

On the meeting that took place on June 22nd 2013 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation – UNESCO included the University of Coimbra in the World Heritage list, along with the surrounding buildings and the street Rua da Sofia with its countless student bars and the “repúblicas” - students’ residencies - and several academic traditions.

The University of Coimbra was founded in the 13th century by King D. Dinis. It is the oldest Alma Mater in Portugal and one of the oldest in Europe. The university sets the tone of the city, beautifully placed by the Mondego River. The greatest highlights of the University quarter include the breathtaking Joanine Library, lavishly decorated in gold, named after the King D. João V, containing the most precious books; the altar as well as the artistic ceiling of the St. Michael’s University Chapel and other impressive gates. The tower of the University and its clock are also astonishing.

A destination for culture lovers? By all means, but not exclusively. Apart from magnificent churches and the gardens of Quinta das Lágrimas, where the tears of the unfortunate Inês de Castro, brutally assassinate, continue to pour, the biggest city of the region has more to offer. If you come from the riverside area to the uptown, you will see how young Coimbra is, thanks to its student: lively bars, restaurants and clubs and the trendy Quebra Costas with its original shops and a picturesque flea market.

It is also because of the several students, their traditions and feasts in Coimbra that the fado keeps being young. The greatest highlight of the academic year is the “Queima das Fitas”, the burning of the ribbons, when degree holder celebrate their degree, wearing a special suit and drinking lots of beer and wine.

There are certainly many persons who will travel to Coimbra for business purposes. In the end of 2016 a new congress centre will open its doors, housed in the former 17th century São Francisco Convent. It will have a capacity up to 1150 persons, as well as smaller meeting rooms for 80 to 120 guests. The reconstruction work of this huge area was led by the Portuguese architect João Luís Carrilho da Graça and it will also include a big contemporary art centre, a café, where concerts will be held, and a restaurant.

If you’re in Coimbra, you can’t miss the greatest icon of its surrounding area: Conímbriga (approximately 15 km away), a former Roman city. The involving green mountains around the town of Lousã is ideal for walking and trekking and we also suggest a visit to the slate villages, awaken from their sleeping beauty sleep with great dedication.
04. A LIVING HISTORY, AN EXCITING PRESENT AND A PROMISING FUTURE
OTHER APPEALING CITIES OF CENTRO DE PORTUGAL

AVEIRO

Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius apparently knew how to appreciate beauty. A long time ago he was the founder of a settlement, which is now one of the most attractive coastal cities of Portugal. Numerous channels and bridges characterize this lively city located at the mouth of Vouga river. The Ria, a lagoon-shaped bay, is the landmark of the city and the best way to discover it is on board of a typical “moliceiro” boat. Used in the past for transporting seaweed, the so-called “moliço”, a natural fertiliser which gave name to the boats “moliceiros”, nowadays they are only employed for tourism purposes. Those who prefer the charming maze of small streets and alleys can borrow one of the “Bugas”, Aveiro free bikes. The city centre is very easy to reach on foot, as well as the pleasant restaurants of Praça do Peixe, where you can taste the most delicious fish specialties. Pay a visit to Mercado Negro, a trendy underground cultural association where you can learn tango for free on Thursday nights!

The surrounding area is full of charms. If you want to go for a swim, you must go to the beaches of Barra or Costa Nova, famous for its picturesque striped houses. The Natural Reserve of São Jacinto Dunes is also an enchanting natural landscape.

CALDAS DA RAINHA

The friendly city of Caldas da Rainha, located in the south of the region, is the place to go for architecture lovers. There are plenty of beautiful art nouveau houses, built in the beginning of the 20th century, which can be discovered on a pleasant city tour. The name of the city (translation: the fountains of the Queen) indicates the existence of the thermal stations dating back to the 15th century. The city of Caldas da Rainha has always been a centre of ceramics production. The Bordallo Pinheiro Ceramics Museum presents an exciting collection of modern and classic design pieces (see chapter 16).

CASTELO BRANCO

The city of Castelo Branco has many cultural treasures from the past, but it is also a city bursting with life. The city centre is quite easy to explore on foot. The Old Town Hall and the square Praça de Camões are truly a feast for the eyes. The city has a remarkable Medieval flair and also worth highlighting is the beautiful Baroque garden with its bubbling fountains and accurately trimmed hedges. In Francisco Tavares Proença Júnior Museum has a rich collection of the famous linen embroideries of Castelo Branco, inspired by the East and absolutely unique in the country!

COIMBRA

Certainly the most famous city in the region of Centro de Portugal, Coimbra is one of the oldest university cities in Europe, picturesquely located by the Mondego River. The University and its surrounding area were declared UNESCO World Heritage Site in June 2013. The ornate Baroque Library of the University of Coimbra, whose books are preserved by diligent bats throughout the night, has priceless books, such as the first Hebrew Bible, and a breathtaking ambiance. Along with the beautiful churches and monuments, you must also visit the luxuriant gardens of Quinta das Lágrimas, the stage of the timeless tragic love of Pedro and Inês. This was the place
where the beautiful Inês de Castro was murdered in 1340, but she was declared posthumous queen by his devoted lover King D. Pedro I. But Coimbra is also a young city bursting with life and students. As we go all the way up to the University, we will find lively bars, great restaurants and trendy shops. The thrilling Quebra-Costas quarter organises flea markets and many interesting cultural activities. Last but not the least, the beautiful fado of Coimbra that continues to be sung in many fado houses, evoking the university life and the nostalgia of days gone by. In the surroundings of Coimbra, you cannot miss the Roman settlement of Conímbriga (approximately 15 km away), the lavish green mountains of Lousã or the charming Schist Villages.

GUARDA
Portugal’s highest city is more than just the perfect starting point for exploring the mountain region of Serra da Estrela. Located at an altitude over 1,000 meters in the northwest of the impressive mountains, this city has a rich historical legacy. Due to its strategic location, it was always hard-fought between the Lusitanians, the Romans and later the Portuguese Kings. Enjoy a stroll through the city and marvel at the remains of the medieval city walls. The 12th century imposing granite Cathedral is truly a mix of architectural styles, for the well-trained eye will recognise Romanesque, Gothic and Manueline influences.

NAZARÉ
Long ago, the best-known “fishing village” Portugal has become a bustling tourism town. From the historic center Sitio lying on a hill, you have a beautiful view of the wide sandy beach which stretches along a wide bay below. A funicular railway connects the old town center with its modern quarter by the sea. Local fishermen no longer need to use oxen to draw their boots out of the water. Nowadays they go to a modern port. The close connection of the population of Nazaré with the sea shows up to now clearly in the local arts and crafts, belonging to the nets, buoys, baskets and the traditional seven skirts dolls, the typical costume of Nazaré, as well as in the cuisine, for fish and seafood are the main specialities. And do not forget: Nazaré has in recent years evolved into a hotspot of the global surf scene (see chapter 10).

ÓBIDOS
Óbidos is a pretty town with whitewashed houses around which bougainvilleas and other flowering plants squirm. The village is located within a powerful medieval walls and crowned by the Moorish castle that was once built by Dom Dinis again and now houses a pousada. In the winding streets the visitor feels transported back almost to the Middle Ages. And yet Óbidos is not a well-preserved open-air museum, but it is full of life. During Holy Week, the Stations of the Cross are re-enacted. In March the town attracts sweet-tooths from all over the globe with the International Chocolate Festival. In October the town organises the Classical Music Festival and by Christmas time there is a pleasant Christmas market where you can buy plenty of beautiful gifts or get into the ice rink. But most of all the literary life in Óbidos has become increasingly important. The project “Óbidos – literary town” has become the promotion of the culture of reading and writing by organizing festivals, presentations, readings, etc.,
and is carried out by both official (eg museums) and private organizations (eg., bookstores, art galleries and shops).

**PENICHE**

The bustling town of fish – it is one of the most important hubs for sardines - located on a flat, rocky peninsula, which is washed by sea on three sides. It is always fun to watch the fishing boats as they fully loaded into the port. The regional gastronomy benefits from the rich fishing and has specialized in the preparation of delicacies from the sea. The fortress of the town has an eventful history: once it was built as a bulwark against attacks from the sea. At the time of the Salazar dictatorship, it served as a prison for political prisoners (a group of them succeeded in 1960, a spectacular escape). Today the thick walls house a museum on the resistance against fascism.

Peniche is the largest center for lace-making in Portugal. This art that requires a lot of patience and skill will be presented at international competitions and exhibitions, and is part of the artistic heritage that should be preserved. At the same time the city starting point for trips to the offshore islands Berlengas (see Chapter 10) and has - like Nazaré - become a popular meeting place for the international surfing scene (see Chapter 10).

**VISEU**

The city of Viseu is located in a high plateau overlooking the mountains and the rivers and has really a distinctive charm of its own. Viseu has been considered more than once the best city to live in Portugal, offering the best quality of life to its inhabitants.

In Viseu all the ways lead to the 12th century Cathedral that has deeply changed along the centuries. The Cathedrals square of Viseu is regarded as one of the most striking ones in the country. Visit the fantastic Grão Vasco Museum, devoted to one of the best Portuguese painters of all times, and the dazzling 18th century Misericórdia Church.

The real name of Grão Vasco, who gave name to the museum, was actually Vasco Fernandes. He was the first European painter to depict the Brazilian native.

Viseu is also a city that foodies love, since it has several value-for-money restaurants, where you can taste the marvellous specialities of regional gastronomy. This is a region of Dão wines and superb wine tourism locations like Paço dos Cunhas de Santar, a prestigious spot for wine and gastronomy aficionados.

Golf lovers can find a challenging 27-hole golf course in the surroundings of the city, only 14 km away. (see chapter 13)
Most probably this small city with 10,000 inhabitants and around 130 km north from Lisbon would not be known if it wasn’t for the miracle that took place on May 13th in Fátima and that continues to be a mystery for religious researchers.

THE MIRACLE OF FÁTIMA

By that time, the three shepherd children Lúcia dos Santos, Jacinta and Francisco Marco, who were herding their sheep, saw a white lady coming out from behind a stone and presenting herself as Mary, Mother of God. She told the children that she would appear every 13th day of each month at the same location. Although the children had agreed among themselves not to tell anybody about the appearance, the news spread and every month there were more and more spectators gathering around to see the Virgin Mary. On October 13, finally, a sun miracle is said to have occurred in form of a wheel of fire turning before the eyes of 70,000 visitors. Then the “Lady of the Rosary” wished for the construction of a chapel.

During the third apparition, on July 13th 1919 Mary disclosed the “Three Secrets of Fatima” to the children. The first: Two of the three children would die soon. The second: The world would face terrible things, if the Russian Empire would not convert to Catholicism. But the third prophecy was kept sealed at the Vatican until 2000, when it was opened by the Pope. It predicted the assassination attempt (1981) by Ali Agca to the Pope John Paul II.

The phenomena of Fátima, initially rejected by the Catholic Church but honoured by the people, was considered a miracle in 1930 by the Bishop of Leiria. Meanwhile, the Vatican declared two of the children shepherds blessed. Lúcia, the last eyewitness died in 2005 as a cloistered nun in a convent in Coimbra.

FÁTIMA: PILGRIMAGE DESTINATION

Due to the historical events, Fátima is now one of the most important Catholic pilgrimage sites, compared to the French sanctuary of Lourdes.

The elderly, the sick and other faithful Marian devotees flock every year in millions to the small town of Fátima situated in a gently rolling landscape. From May to September, the pilgrims go on foot or even on their knees to the sanctuary, by the evening of the 12th. The statue of “Our Lady of Fatima” is carried through the ranks during a procession near the Chapel of Apparitions. The highlight is the large open-air Mass on the 13th calendar day in front of the basilica dedicated in 1953 - the “Altar of the World”. The sick are blessed; there are many reports of miraculous healings. Sometimes a half million people pour on the square.

ATTRACTIONS IN FATIMA

The Apparition Chapel was built by the people at the place of Marian apparition without official permission. In the chapel originally stood the famous statue of the Virgin of Fatima, that in 1946 was provided with an elaborate crown. From the legendary Stone Oak there is nothing more to see today - it was dismembered over time by pilgrims and taken as souvenirs.

The 750 meters long and 250 meters wide pilgrimage place extends between the basilica, which
05. THE ALTAR OF THE WORLD
WORLD PILGRIMAGE SITE OF FÁTIMA

once served as the central place of worship, and the Church of the Holy Trinity, designed by a Greek architect designed and inaugurated in 2007, which holds only 9,000 visitors. At the center of the square, which in turn holds around 200,000 people, there is a large statue of the Sacred Heart, which was built over a spring with supposedly healing waters.

The new Holy Trinity Church is the largest church building in the 21st century and the fourth-largest Catholic church worldwide. The Rotunda has a diameter of about 130 m. Since the ceiling of the interior is not supported by columns, one has from every seat an uninterrupted view of the altar. There are 13 portals. This unusual figure is taken from the symbolism that the main portal is dedicated to each of the 12 apostles of Jesus Christ.

The actual crossroads of Fátima leads from Reguengo do Fetal at 12 km to the large cross on the pilgrim place.

The Museum of Sacred Art and comparative ethnology and relics of the Blessed, former shepherd children are to be seen in addition to general religious paintings and objets d’art. The Museu Vida de Christo depicts 33 key scenes from the life of Jesus Christ through 211 wax figures.

2017: 100 YEARS OF FÁTIMA
In May 2017 the apparitions of Fátima celebrate their 100th anniversary. A jubilee that will be intensely celebrated by pilgrims from all over the world.
06. IMPRESSIVE ARCHITECTURE, VALUABLE HANDCRAFT AND A FASCINATING NATURE
THE RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE OF CENTRO DE PORTUGAL

THE CULTURAL TREASURES OF COIMBRA

The traditional city by the river Rio Mondego is one of the most beautiful cities in Portugal and awaits you with a huge variety of sightseeing. No wonder, since the Celts, Romans and Moors have left their mark here. In the 12th century Coimbra was the temporary capital of the Portuguese Kingdom.

The old university sits proudly on the top of one of city’s hills. It is the oldest (and also the most respected) university in Portugal. You can not miss the imposing clock tower built in 1733 or the 16th century University chapel. The University Library is absolutely breathtaking. As you enter this Baroque-style Library, considered one of the most beautiful in the world, you will marvel at the bookshelves of fine wood containing around 250,000 books dating back to Classical Antiquity to the present day. The three interconnected reading rooms are lavishly decorated with gold and the floor is made of marble.

The entire University complex was included in the UNESCO World Heritage list in the summer of 2013.

The Old Cathedral located not far from the University is a monumental building in Romanesque Style with pinnacles and pillars and marble decoration in the North portal. A magnificent altar with Gothic canopies, two beautiful side chapels and the Romanesque Gothic cloister characterize the interior. The monumental serenade marking the beginning of the yearly “Queima das Fitas” (Burning of the Ribbons, the traditional students’ feast that takes place every year in May) is sung in front of the monumental staircase of the Old Cathedral. Baroque and Renaissance elements can be seen in the 17th century New Cathedral, located on the university campus.

National Museum Machado de Castro, which is also situated on the University Hill, was named after the Portuguese sculptor Machado de Castro. Here you can see a very large and interesting collection of paintings, ceramics and gold jewellery. The Roman crypt, porticus is absolutely outstanding and the museum building was beautifully renovated by prestigious Portuguese architect Gonçalo Byrne. Inside the museum you will see a chapel, as well as many other interesting surprises. In 2013, Machado de Castro National Museum was awarded the Portuguese Museum of the Year, ex-aequo with the Air Museum in Sintra.

Beautiful examples of Manueline style architecture and ornate tile images can be found in the magnificent church Igreja de Santa Cruz. This originally Romanesque Augustinian monastery dates back to 1131. The graves of the first Portuguese Kings lie in the main chapel, whereas in the refectory hangs a famous painting of Grão Vasco. Next to the church you will find Coimbra’s most popular café: Café Santa Cruz, where you can taste the delicious sweet pastries named “crúzios”.

Also interesting are the remains of the Monastery of Santa Clara-a-Velha. The former 13th century monastery was completely submerged in the 18th century during the Mondego floods. It was drained and renovated with a lot of effort and it took several years to bring this land-
mark back to life. Santa Clara-a-Velha was awarded the Europa Nostra Award for restoration, in recognition of the outstanding work carried by archaeologists. Meanwhile, the cloister and the monastery can now be visited.

Conímbriga is a Roman settlement located 15 km away from Coimbra. It was built in the 2nd century BC and destroyed some 100 years later by the Suevi. Worth seeing are the well-preserved mosaics of several villas and the partially reconstructed water games.

JEWISH HERITAGE

In many places of Centro de Portugal the Jewish culture is still very present. In the Historical Village Belmonte, Guarda, and Castelo Branco, as well as in many smaller villages of the inland Jewish traditions have been preserved since the Middle Ages. This includes not only worship, but also the Festival of Jewish Culture that takes place in Guarda or the production of kosher products such as kosher wine, cheese or olive oil.

The Historical Village Belmonte, situated on the edge of Serra da Estrela, was already in the 13th century a well-established Jewish community and the village was very prosperous. In the end of the 15th century Jews were subjected to intense persecution. In 1917 a Polish engineer brought the community back from secrecy and in 1989 the Jewish community of Belmonte was officially re-founded. In 1997 the new synagogue opened its doors.

A very interesting Jewish Museum takes visitors into the time when the Jews could practice their faith but in secrecy. A black chalkboard lists all the persons who have lost their lives during the period of the persecutions. Even in the medieval streets of Penamacor near the border with Spain you will find many Jewish symbols. Mostly in 1492 this village was a famous hideaway for Jews, expelled from Spain by the Catholic Queen.

The Historical Village Trancoso has also a deep-rooted Jewish heritage. Located west from Guarda, the Jewish quarter of Trancoso is full of symbols such as word written in Hebraic, Jewish stars and crosses engraved on doorposts. The Jewish Culture Interpretation Centre, which opened its doors in 2012, is nowadays a very important spot for Jewish citizens in Trancoso. In Guarda the old Jewish quarter – “Judiaria” – leads directly to the Cathedral Square, the most central one in the city. As we walk along the narrow streets of the “Judiaria” with its tiny houses, we can feel a certain Middle Age flair.

In Tomar there is a Middle-Age Jewish temple with a constantly changing history: it was a synagogue, a school, but also a prison. The building has a square plan, whereas the capital is decorated with geometrical and floral motives and the 12 corbels represent the 12 Tribes of Israel. Nowadays the Synagogue of Tomar houses the Portuguese Jewish Museum Abraão Zacuto, presenting tombstones from different regions of Portugal, religious utensils and old coins.
GRÃO VASCO IN VISEU

His real name was Vasco Fernandes, but this famous Portuguese painter became famous under his artistic name Grão Vasco (1480-1543). He was the first painter in the history of European painting to depict the Brazilian native. Grão Vasco has founded a painting school in Viseu, deeply influenced by Flemish, Italian and German art. Many of his paintings were created in the former cloister school, next to the Cathedral of Viseu. Worth-highlighting is the 14-stage cycle depicting the life of Christ or his greatest masterpiece revealing a great maturity and all his genius. Apart from the paintings of the most famous son of the city, visitors can also see Baroque sacred art, ceramics, jewellery, furniture and 20th Portuguese art.

A CHURCH TOUR IN GUARDA

The historical centre of Portugal’s highest city is dominated by the imposing 8-tower Cathedral. The massive 52 meters long, 16 meters wide and 20 meters high granite Cathedral is so light and airy in the inside, which is probably due to the impressive height and the beautiful wood panelling. The Cathedral began to be built in 1390, but it was not until 1540 that it was completed. The dominant architectural style is Gothic, but the western portal is Manueline and the windows in the doors Romanic. A funny detail can be seen in the eastern wall of the Cathedral: the representation of a bare buttock pointing out to Spain… The must-see Museum of Guard is housed in the former 17th century Bishop’s Palace, containing archaeological findings of the Roman era, sacred art, old weapons and information on the region.

THE EMBROIDERY OF CASTELO BRANCO

In Castelo Branco there is a very special form of crafts: artistic embroideries made with silk threads on linen fabric. There are plenty of stitches used in the embroideries of Castelo Branco, but the most popular one is the “knot stitch” aka “Castelo Branco stitch”. Most of the bed-spreads are decorated in powerful vibrant colours, but we can also find some monochromatic works. Along with simple popular embroideries there are also more complex motives, similar to Eastern ornaments, often depicting local fauna and flora. Even though the embroideries of Castelo Branco exist since the 17th century, it was not until the 30’s of the 20th century that they became very popular. In 1976 the School and Workshop of Regional Embroideries opened its doors in Francisco Tavares Proença Júnior Museum, devoted to the preservation, production, restoration and promotion of these unique embroideries.

ART NOUVEAU IN AVEIRO

The art movement of Art Nouveau has also left its marks in Portugal, namely in Aveiro, where you can find absolutely beautiful examples along the canals of the city. Therefore Aveiro has a whole Museum devoted to this remarkable architectural and design style, which flourished especially in the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. The Museum of Art Nouveau is housed in Casa Major Pessoa, a beautifully decorated house with an artistic stone façade, which is one of the most dazzling examples of Art Nouveau in the city. The wonderful tiles with typical art nouveau motives are also a must-see. Apart from temporary and permanent exhibitions, there is a map pointing out the Art Nouveau buildings of the city. Inside the
museum there is a charming tea house, where you can taste the most delicious cakes, as well as a diversified tea assortment. Along with Budapest, Helsinki and Havana, Aveiro is a member of the international Art Nouveau Network.

THE RIA OF AVEIRO AND THE “MOLICEIROS” BOATS

The lagoon used to be an important food source for the inhabitants of the city. Sardines, sticklebacks, eels and many other fish lived in the lagoon, separated from the open sea by the dunes, and were caught by fishermen. The seaweed – “moliço”, giving name to the typical boats “moliceiros” – was very abundant and it was employed as a very good natural land fertiliser. Nowadays, a few salt ponds have remained by the ria, producing coarse salt and gourmet “fleur de sel”. The colourful boats known as “moliceiros” are used today only for tourism purposes. They provide pleasant boat tours across the lagoon and the charming city canals. A regatta takes place every year in the summer.
07. WHERE THE STREET BECOMES A GALLERY
STREET ART IN CENTRO DE PORTUGAL

While in Central Europe graffiti artists are being legally prosecuted for property damage, some cities in Portugal are taking it to a whole new level. In Centro de Portugal several internationally recognised street artists were invited to fill the walls of abandoned buildings or boring façades with interesting motives. A pure and wild form of expression, ephemeral and unexpected, but always exciting. The main urban art centres are Aveiro, Covilhã and Viseu.

AVEIRO
The artist Alexandre Farto, born in Lisbon in 1987, became known in Europe as VHILS. He has developed his own image language that goes way beyond the graffiti art. It is called “scratching the surface” and the artist takes it quite literally: he creates his motives on huge façades by using drills, acid and even explosives. One of his most beautiful faces can be seen in a wall of Aveiro, in front of the tile-covered train station. VHILS has engaged in urban art projects all over the globe. He was invited by the Irish band U2 to produce one of their videos. VHILS, along with his mate Bordallo II, is one of the most prestigious 25 street artists in the world. The artist, specialised in animal motives, created a three-dimensional bird for the Estarreja Birdwatching Fair. Estarreja is located north from Aveiro.

COVILHÃ
Wool is the name of the Urban Art Festival that regularly takes place in the city of Covilhã (a traditional wool-producing centre – see chapter 16). The goal: the festival must become a reference event of street art in the country, while putting the focus on the wool tradition of the region. The first edition of the Wool Festival had the signature of the artist group ARM Collective with RAM (Miguel Caeiro Sintra) and SEA (Gonçalo Ribeiro Seixal), who have created huge-dimensional wall portraits in different spots of the city. VHILS also took part in this festival. Among the artists who have intervened in the city it is worth highlighting Btoy (Andrea Michaelsson) from Barcelona, inspired by old alienated photos or the Spanish Kram who has shaped the walls with his funny animal-resembling characters.

VISEU
Also in Viseu, a city known for its rich cultural heritage, creative artists have given a new life on old building façades. Since the city is also the centre o Dão wine production, the creative motto was wine. A visit to the city will show you how good the outcome was!
No visitor has so far complained about feeling bored in Centro de Portugal! Surely, you can always spend some peaceful lazy days on the beautiful beaches of the Atlantic coast or do some restaurant hopping, but you would be missing a lot!

For instance, a day of hiking. The enchanted Lousã Mountain near Coimbra is a wonderful place that will seduce you with its pristine nature. As the forest goes deeper, there are wild boars, badgers and foxes. Near the villages you can see beautiful fruit meadows where horses, donkeys and goats graze. Visit the enchanting Schist Villages of Lousã Mountain, rebuilt in traditional style and pay a visit to the Biological Park of Lousã Mountain!

Many of the paths around Lousã are perfect for mountain bikers. But biking lovers can also choose a 437 km long tour across the romantic Historical Villages or Caramulo Mountain near Viseu.

Some hotels of Centro de Portugal have come together under the label “Bikotels”, fitting the needs of bikers who are travelling across the region. All partners offer secure parking for bike, Laundry service overnight, small workshops and washing facilities for bikes, maps and menus, especially designed for bikers. Some houses even offer additional services such as: special massage treatments, accessories shops, and Bicycle and GPS equipment rentals. More info at: www.bikotels.com

If you’re more into trekking, you cannot miss the magnificent Tejo Internacional Natural Park. This is a true paradise for birdwatchers from all over the globe and the place where you can see the most amazing bird species, such as: the Black Stork, the Griffon Vulture or the Snake Eagle. These species can be observed in the wild with a bit of luck, of course!

Golfers can practice either in 9-hole Curia Golf course or in 27-hole golf course Montebelo Golfe near Viseu (14 km away), the later offering three different tracks in a spectacular natural landscape of pine and oak trees.

Mondego River and some of its tributary rivers offer the perfect conditions for canoeing and kayaking trips, as well as for amazing rafting adventures. Or you can try the waves of the Atlantic and do some sailing, windsurfing, kitesurfing and surfing.

But let’s go back to hiking. The Mountain Serra da Estrela is a good spot for hiking and trekking in Summer time, whereas in Winter this is mostly a ski region. This can also be the ideal place for paragliding, since the view is absolutely breath-taking. But this is a challenging sport both for beginners and advanced practitioners.

Active tourists are not alone in the region. Several local active tourism agencies specialized in this area will certainly provide an enormous help.
09. GREENS WITH AN UNSPOILT NATURE AND HIGH-LEVEL SPORT
GOLF IN CENTRO DE PORTUGAL

ROYAL ÓBIDOS GOLF
It was the last major work of the legendary world-class player and golf course architect Severiano Ballesteros: the Royal Óbidos Spa & Golf Resort opened in early 2012 near Óbidos, which has set new standards in the region. The challenging greens are equipped with a lightning fast turf, and the view is spectacular: on six of the 18 holes you look at the Óbidos Lagoon, whereas from the other 12 the view goes far beyond the nearby Atlantic Ocean. No wonder that this little gem was already recorded in 2014 by the prestigious magazine “Golf World” in the list of the 100 best places in Europe. In 2015 the resort was awarded the prize „2016 European Gold Resort of the Year“ by the International Association of Golf Tour Operators (IAGTO). Particularly pleasing: the par 72 course blends harmoniously into the green landscape. A Golf Academy, a well-stocked pro shop and a tastefully furnished clubhouse with restaurant and bar, as well as a 5-star hotel Evolutee, where in its restaurants guests are spoiled with steaks of Kobe beef and sushi (see Chapter 8).
www.royalobidos.com

BOM SUCESSO GOLF
The world-famous British golf course designer Donald Steel designed the young 18-hole course, which is also located near Óbidos on a 60 hectares lovely green area. The players move around between olive and pine trees offering a great view over the Óbidos Lagoon. Ponds and tricky bunkers make the par-72 course a real challenge for experienced players. The elegant clubhouse has an elegant design and here you can find a Golf Academy. Players can also reach the Royal Óbidos Square through a shuttle service.
www.bomsucessogolf.net

MONTEBELO GOLF
The friends of Pitch & Putt will find another place not far from Viseu in the country’s inland: golf course Montebelo offers three challenging 8-hole tracks under the pines and oaks with amazing views over the mountains of Serra da Estrela and Caramulo. Montebelo Golf course, opened in 1997, is the annual venue for various high-profile tournaments. Those who want to improve their handicap have at their disposal a Golf Academy with highly trained coaches who offer group and individual courses. Energy wasted on golf playing can be replaced at the bar or in the furnished restaurant with capacity for 180 guests that serves the best local cuisine.
www.golfemontebelo.pt
10. THE PERFECT WAVE(S)
SURFING IN CENTRO DE PORTUGAL

On November 1st 2011 History was made. Off the coast of Nazaré Hawaiian GARRETT MCNAMARA surfed a 23.77 meter high wave! This 44-years-old surfer set not only a new world record, earning him a place in the Guinness Book of World Records, but also drew the attention of the global surfing community to the coast of the Centro de Portugal.

The unusual height of the wave of Nazaré has several causes. Off the coast there is the Nazaré Canyon, a 230-kilometer-long marine canyon with a depth of up to 5000 meters. The end of this underwater canyons is located just off the coast of Nazaré, resulting in large differences in the depth of water in a confined space. In addition, in appropriate conditions, a water flow along the beach to the ledge is directed into the sea, thus resulting in a further increase in the shaft. In case of their swell, the waves can then break with more than 20 meters high.

For many years, “THE WAVE OF NAZARÉ” was considered among top surfers an insiders’ tip. Of course, one must have the know-how to play with such tsunami-like waves. The 20 meters-high waves can be seen only a few days. On the “normal” days, Nazaré is a great surfing spot, as well as Peniche, where surfers from around the world look for the thrill of the waves and meet in the evening for hilarious parties.

Only seven popular surf spots can be found here. Especially on the SUPERTUBOS BEACH, where tubular waves arise, inside which the best of the best well in international competitions to show off their skills in international competitions.

And yet Peniche is not just a meeting place for Surf pros, but a popular place for beginners and advanced learners. Popular here is the combination of accommodation and surf school - such as the Surfer’s Lodge Peniche Surf Camp, where one can hire equipment, attend surf lessons and celebrate in the evening.

In the surf circles of California and Australia, Figueira da Foz is almost more of an insiders’ tip. In fact, here you will find perfect conditions, especially on BUARCOS BEACH, whose waves are among Europe’s largest waves.
Visitors who are travelling to Centro de Portugal are driven by the cultural landmarks and true natural paradises like the ones in the Mountains of Lousã and Serra da Estrela. But one must not forget the amazing Atlantic coastline of Centro de Portugal. This is a far-reaching coast from Figueira da Foz in the south to Ovar in the North. Most of the beaches have beautiful dunes and right next to them magnificent pine tree forests.

The beach pleasure with endless well-kept sand pits begins south of Peniche with the popular beach Praia do Molhe Leste, located in its surroundings. It is a legendary beach, famous among surfers because of its tubular waves at Supertubos beach (see chapter 9). Directly north of the town you will find a long bay of Praia do Baleal along with a long sandy beach, which extends to the Óbidos Lagoon.

A special treat for nature lovers is located in front of Peniche: the Berlengas Islands. These rocky islands, once inhabited by monks, have few inhabitants. From May to September, you can travel by boat from Peniche to the Berlengas Archipelago. There are only a few beaches, but an enormous variety of birds and fish along the rocky coast. In 2011 UNESCO has thus declared the Berlengas Archipelago a Biosphere Reserve.

A long, bright sand band lines the coast almost continuously from Figueira da Foz in the south to Ovar, where the Centro region finally merges into the North. In most of these beaches there are beautiful sand dunes, and just behind are often pretty pine forests.

As we travel from south to north, Figueria da Foz is the first stop. The once fishermen’s town on the estuary of Mondego river has developed into a classy bathing city with a lively city life, modern buildings and imposing villas dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries. The city beach offers plenty of space for sea bathing lovers, for it is 500 meters wide!

Either north or south from the centre, there are several alternative beaches. All of them have facilities like showers, toilets, restaurants and parking lots. Highly tanned surfers love Costa de Lavos beach or Leirosa beach in the south. Those who prefer to be alone go to Buarcos beach, north from Figueira da Foz.

In the protected beach of Tocha near Cantanhede you will see wooden houses, where fishermen in the past used as warehouses to keep their tools. But nowadays they became simple yet comfy holiday houses.

The small coastal road heading north leads to Mira, where you can see the Blue Flag waving over the fine sandy beach. Water quality and service (as well as in several beaches of Centro de Portugal) are really top. Travellers who are interested in traditional fishermen’s crafts will find information on their daily rough lives in a small Ethnology Museum, housed in a typical fishermen’s house known as “palheiros”. The ones who want to avoid the open ocean, mostly because of the hot tan, can sail or row behind the dunes in Barrinha lagoon.
In the beaches of Vagos we can watch the fishermen working today. But the fishing nets are no longer pulled by oxen to the sea as they were in the past, but by modern tractors.

**COSTA NOVA** is located on a far-reaching sand bank that separates Aveiro lagoon from the open ocean. This beach is really a feast for the eyes, due to its magnificent colourful striped houses, absolutely unique in the country. The dune beach is also a good surf spot. Under the imposing Lighthouse of Aveiro, the highest in Portugal and the second-highest in the Iberian Peninsula, you will find Barra beach, ideal for bathing, surfing and sailing. In summer time this beach is a very lively spot with its bars and restaurants bursting with life. The protected natural area of São Jacinto Dunes is much quieter. The beach of São Jacinto stretches further north across Torreira to Furadouro in the north end of the lagoon, offering the ideal conditions for beach runners, surfers, body surfers and sun-hungry swimmers.

At night they show the way to the fishermen, while during the day they delight the visitor’s eye: the lighthouses in the Centro de Portugal are truly popular destinations per se. They can be seen (from south to north) in Berlengas Islands right in front of Peniche, in São Pedro de Moel, in Figueira da Foz and in Barra beach near Aveiro.
The landscape of Centro de Portugal is as diversified as the cuisine of the region.

Not surprisingly, fish and seafood play a major role in the coastline. There are many variations to codfish, but fresh fish and exquisite seafood can be found in any restaurant. In the region of Aveiro the fish varieties from the lagoon, the “ria”, are a very common. The eel stew is absolutely a must in every menu. Even in the inland you can find fish specialities, such as lamprey rice.

From the deep forests come hares, cooked with vinegar in the surroundings of Coimbra; partridges and pheasants. The “chanfana” – goat meat stewed for a long time in wine – and the suckling pig are very popular specialities in the surroundings of Coimbra. The restaurants that have specialised in suckling pig from Bairrada offer almost exclusively this famous dish.

The “chouriço” is produced from the pig meat and it is a very strong sausage, normally used as a flavour provider in boiled specialities.

The strong-flavoured mountain cheese Serra da Estrela is absolutely mythical. As everywhere in Portugal a meal without a traditional granny-style dessert in Centro de Portugal is totally unthinkable.

The mythical ovos-moles (soft eggs) that are sold in every patisserie in Aveiro are truly a gastronomic landmark. Ovar sponge cake, filled with “ovos-moles”, is also a one-of-a-kind sweet speciality.

In between or as part of a meal, we recommend the fruits that grow in the Centro de Portugal. Especially tasty are the little green wild apples from Esmolve cultivated since the 18th century. Also around Alcobaça there are excellent mature apples and pears. In Fundão you will see amazing red ripe cherries. Every year in the month of June a gastronomic festival is organised wholly devoted to the cherry taking place in the nearby village of Alcongosta.

Wine lovers find in Centro de Portugal Three important wine regions.

Vine plantation in Dão wine region dates back to pre-Christian times. Dão wines, named after the river, with DOC designation are among the best wines in the country. In the fertile highlands of Dão in a granite landscape the powerful almost meaty red wines are produced, as well as the white wines with considerable storage potential.

The DOC Bairrada region – which borders with Serra do Caramulo and Serra do Buçaco in the east; river Vouga in the north and Mondego in the south – used to produce until the 80’s of the last century wines for the masses. But the situation has changed, mostly because of the engagement of prestigious Bairrada wine producer Luís Pato, who was the first to make extraordinary wines out of the Baga vine variety, the most important of this wine region.
12. DELICACIES FROM THE SEA, THE FORESTS AND THE VINEYARDS
CENTRO DE PORTUGAL, A DESTINATION FOR FOODIES

Bairrada wines are usually made with Bical vine variety, giving the wines tropical fruit aromas as well as a stabile sparkle.
The region of Bairrada is famous for producing outstanding red and white sparkling wines. But the red “Espumante” is quite surprising with its intensive fruity flavour, crispy acidity and strong tannins.

The wine region Beira Interior is becoming a very interesting wine region. These wines are made in the surroundings of Castelo Branco, and the DOC designation was recognised in 2005. A lot of money was invested in modern cellar techniques, which foresees a growing wine quality.

It grows in all wine regions of the Centro de Portugal, the number of companies that have deliberately set to intimate wine tastings visitors and not only, but for example, offers and restaurants offering excellent local cuisine, wine bars and places to stay. Good examples of wine and tourism are about the property Paço dos Cunhas de Santar and architecturally exciting Quinta de Lemos in the Dão region, which even a conference room is Quinta de Encontro in the Bairrada region in which guests and also also architecturally remarkable Adega Mãe near Torres Vedras.
In all wine regions of the Centro de Portugal there is a growing the number of companies that have created amazing wine locations, where you can taste wine, have a fabulous meal in the restaurants and wine bars and stay accommodated. Good examples of such wine tourism locations are Paço dos Cunhas de Santar; the architecturally exciting Quinta de Lemos in the Dão region; Quinta de Encontro in the Bairrada region and the architecturally remarkable Adega Mãe near Torres Vedras.
13. HEALING WATERS AND WELLNESS
THERMAL BATHS AND SPAS IN CENTRO DE PORTUGAL

Even the Romans knew the value of the healing power of the warm springs of this region. During archaeological excavations in Conímbriga, outstanding mosaique floors were found, as well as vestiges of bathing complexes that were certainly set into motion by the hot thermal waters. Nowadays most of the thermal stations in Centro de Portugal are a fascinating mix of traditional architecture, nostalgic charm, state-of-the-art medicine techniques, and highly comfortable bathing facilities.

Here is an overview of the most popular thermal stations of the region:

**THERMAL COMPLEX OF MONTE REAL**
The hot springs of Monte Real were already in use during the Roman period. This modern thermal complex has sulphurous sulphate waters that are used in several shower approaches, breathing therapy and drinking cures, as well as in bathing.
In the modern spa area there are plenty of massages at your disposal, as well as sauna, whirlpool and many other beauty treatments.
The connected and newly refurbished Palace Hotel has a beautiful classic façade, but inside a brand new design and the latest technology.
[www.termasdemontereal.pt](http://www.termasdemontereal.pt)

**TERMAS DA CURIA**
The traditional thermal stations of Curia, located at the heart of Bairrada wine region are very popular because of their involving natural setting. The thermal stations are placed in the middle of a huge park in front of a 1000 meter long lake.
Its waters have big amounts of sulphur, hydrogen and magnesium.
Doctors recommend these waters for rheumatism, muscle disorders, metabolic disorders, and kidney and Urinary tract diseases.
In terms of accommodation, you have a lot of grand hotels at your disposal with several wellness programmes. These hotels have that 20’s typical charm provided by the art nouveau architecture.

**TERMAS DO LUSO**
White walls and fabrics along with noble marble give Luso thermal stations a refined elegance.
In the classical thermal area, there are drinking cures, as well as several baths and showers, guided by qualified doctors. The healing water is recommended for treating kidney and bladder disorders, as well as urinary tract diseases. In the 1200 square meter area guests can enjoy several baths, massages and other services.
[www.maloclinicspa.com/termasdeluso](http://www.maloclinicspa.com/termasdeluso)
**13. HEALING WATERS AND WELLNESS**  
**THERMAL BATHS AND SPAS IN CENTRO DE PORTUGAL**

**TERMAS DAS CALDAS DA FELGUEIRA**  
The thermal complex of Caldas da Felgueira opened its doors in the end of the 18th century. It is located at the heart of a mesmerising mountain landscape, only 20 km away from Viseu and Seia. The warm sulphurous water is appropriate for medical treatments. Special showers or nose sprayings are also very good to relax, helping the treatment of respiratory or rheumatic diseases. The spa zone has a beautiful steam bath, different massages, anti-stress programmes and a great repertoire of wellness treatments such as anti-aging, skin treatment after giving birth and acne therapy. Grande Hotel das Caldas da Felgueira is the name of the hotel that belongs to the thermal complex.  
www.grandehoteldafelgueira.pt

**TERMAS DE SÃO PEDRO DO SUL**  
The thermal stations of São Pedro do Sul near Viseu have been used uninterruptedly for 2 thousand years. It is the only certified thermal complex in Portugal, due to the quality of its waters and the highest environment protection standards. Thermal water springs with 68.7 degrees on the surface, containing a lot of bicarbonate, carbonate, fluor, sulphur and natrium. It is mostly recommended for cure treatments in big tubs. Hydromassage, nose spraying and other special treatments are also available. Especially persons with muscle and skeleton problems will find relief here. In the spa area you can make skin beauty treatments with wine or chocolate. The attached museum tells the story of these thermal stations.  
www.termas-spsul.com

**TERMAS DE MONFORTINHO**  
The thermal stations of Monfortinho are situated at a high plateau overlooking a paradise-like landscape. The fascinating Historical Villages and Tejo Internacional Natural Park are only a few minutes away. The highly salty thermal water is indicated for the treatment of skin diseases, liver and bladder disorders, the therapy of digestive tract diseases, as well as asthma and rheumatics. Guests in search of beauty treatment can delight themselves with a chocolate-based therapy.  
www.monfortur.pt

**H2OTEL AND TERMAS DE UNHAIS DA SERRA**  
Also the region of Serra da Estrela has thermal stations. H2otel Congress & Medical Spa has the Wellness and Spa paradise “Aqualudic”, the greatest leisure bath in Portugal with big indoor and (heated) outdoor pools, saunas, steam baths with waterfalls and relaxing areas, along with a great massage zone, offering a huge range of wellness treatments, recommended medical usages, under doctor supervision.  
www.h2otel.com.pt
13. HEALING WATERS AND WELLNESS
THERMAL BATHS AND SPAS IN CENTRO DE PORTUGAL

TERMAS DO CRÓ
Termas do Cró were already working in the Roman era. The thermal water contains sulphur, bicarbonate and natrium, recommended for the treatment of rheumatic disorders as well as problems of the locomotor system, respiratory system and skin. Since 2011 these thermal station turned into a highly modern spa and wellness centre. Nowadays a comfortable spa hotel is being built.
www.termasdocro.com

TERMAS DA LONGROIVA
The quiet pleasant thermal station is famous for its therapeutic properties, providing health and well-being. Longroiva is the ideal place to relax in a marvellous natural landscape, especially in February, when the almond trees begin to blossom.
The small and absolutely relaxing complex and its thermal water containing sulphur, bicarbonate and natrium are especially recommended for diseases of the locomotor and respiratory systems.
www.termasdelongroiva.com
The variety of hotels and other accommodation in Centro de Portugal is as diversified as the landscape. From luxurious 5-star hotels to cosy land hotels, where you can totally unplug from the world for a few days of relax; from traditional pleasant hotels to super modern design temples. Hotel Quinta das Lágrimas in Coimbra is the perfect mix of the highest comfort, a magnificent green setting, a sparkling history and a restaurant worthy of a king.

The travellers who are particularly fond of art nouveau should not miss the renovated 4-star hotel Curia Palace, located in the thermal region of Curia.

A very noble house is the 5-star hotel Casa da Ínsua, a Baroque palace, beautifully renovated, with lavish artistic gardens. Here you will enjoy the highest comfort, an excellent cuisine and extraordinary Dão wines, produced in the house.

If you are fond of water, you will love Hotel Moliceiro in Aveiro. From the elegantly decorated rooms you will have a superb view over the lagoon, known as the “ria”. You can also have breakfast on board of an historical “moliceiro” boat (on request service).

Following an overview of the latest interesting hotel openings:

**MONTEBELO VISTA ALEGRE ÎLHAVO HOTEL**
This luxury 5-star hotel is located at the complex of the legendary porcelain factory in Ílhavo, combining a modern architecture with the classical glamour of the old Vista Alegre Palace. It has 83 rooms, including 6 suites, a restaurant with 142 seats, modern meeting and conference rooms, an indoor and an outdoor pool, as well as a comfortable SPA. With the opening of the hotel, the museum and the theatre were converted in a cultural centre around the porcelain theme.

[www.hotelmontebelovistaalegre.pt](http://www.hotelmontebelovistaalegre.pt)

**BELMONTE MONTE SINAI HOTEL**
The new hotel (3 stars) in the centre of Belmonte is the first Hotel in Portugal that is totally devoted to Jewish guests. The 27 rooms (including 2 family apartments) are decorated in warm colours. The restaurant offers kosher specialities.

[www.belmontesinaihotel.com](http://www.belmontesinaihotel.com)

**UNIVERSAL BOUTIQUE HOTEL**
This new 4 star-hotel is located in the elegant quarter of Figueira da Foz, only a few meters from the beach and the busy casino. The hotel has 29 theme rooms. The breakfast buffet is superb and the service is friendly.

[www.universalboutiquehotel.pt](http://www.universalboutiquehotel.pt)

**COLMEAL COUNTRYSIDE HOTEL (COUNTRY HOTEL)**
From the 17 non-smoking rooms of this country hotel (4 stars) we get an amazing view over the never-ending unspoilt nature in the surroundings of the Historical Village Castelo Rodrigo. The hotel is the ideal starting point for walking trails, but above all for visiting the pre-historic open-air engravings of Côa Valley. Guests can relax later by the pool or in the spa. The restau-
THE LITERARY MAN (THEME HOTEL)
Located in the literary town of Óbidos, this new 4-star hotel, housed in a former convent, is the ideal destination for book lovers: the big library is filled with books from all over the world and some of them are for sale. In the rooms we find traditional charm hand in hand with modern comfort. In the restaurant – among books – you can taste the best of the region and the “Literary Gin Bar” offers a selection of 30 different gin varieties.
www.theliteraryman.pt

EVOLUTEÉ ROYAL ÓBIDOS HOTEL & SPA (GOLF HOTEL)
International designers like Philippe Starck set the tone for the luxurious indoor décor of the 5-star Hotel, located next to the Royal Óbidos Resort. Guests have at their disposal 36 rooms and 3 suites with a view over the golf course and Óbidos Lagoon. In the Elemental Spa biological products of the region are used, such as cherries, apples, pears and wine. The 6 conference rooms have capacity up to 315 guests. The restaurant serves kobe meat steaks and sushi.
www.evoluteehotel.com

CASA DAS PENHAS DOURADAS DESIGN HOTEL E SPA
Casa das Penhas Douradas, located in Serra da Estrela Natural Park, is an elegant 4-star design hotel, equipped with several design pieces in Scandinavian style. In the restaurant of the hotel, you can taste a delightful gourmet cuisine based on seasonal regional products. On cold days it feels good to enjoy the heated indoor pool with a fantastic view over the surrounding natural landscape, the sauna and a great variety of massage treatments.
www.casadaspenhasdouradas.pt

FURADOURO BOUTIQUE HOTEL BEACH & SPA
Simple lines, a lot of sunlight and a modern design define this chic 4-star beach hotel, located near Ovar. An exquisite cuisine and the best wines in the restaurant, a beautiful spa with pool and massage, a very familiar-like service and a perfect location in front of the ocean make this hotel a memorable place to stay!
www.furadourohotel.com

COOKING AND NATURE – EMOTIONAL HOTEL
This hotel is devoted to emotions and each of its carefully decorated room has a specific theme, arousing a different emotion. Cooking and Nature – Emotional Hotel is placed at the heart of a beautiful mountain region of Serra d’Aire and Candeeiros. This hotel has also a very special characteristic: if you wish to have dinner in the hotel, you will be preparing it under the witty supervision of the friendly hotel staff! Even the least gifted person in terms of cuisine, will turn into a promising Chef! The hotel has also a well-organised network of walking and biking trails in the surrounding region. Massages are also available.
www.cookinghotel.com
14. COMFORT IN HARMONY WITH LANDSCAPE AND NATURE
ACCOMMODATION IN CENTRO DE PORTUGAL

AREIAS DO SEIXO CHARM HOTEL & RESIDENCES
A magical place in a magical setting, Areias do Seixo Charm Hotel & Residences is a natural haven less than one hour from Lisbon. This is a special place where pine trees, dunes and sea murmur their secrets. Experience originality, sublime comfort and an unerringly sense of style that seamlessly blends in with the natural surroundings of the land, the sea and the shore. Each room tells its own intriguing story. The restaurant transports you to a place where aroma, taste and colour come together, using raw materials sourced from a bountiful Mother Nature. Concealed behind the enigmatic wooden doors that lead into the hotel SPA, a world of unique sensations awaits you. Leave the daily grind and the stresses of life behind you. Let yourself be transported back to an almost forgotten time when “to feel” was activity enough.
www.areiasdoseixo.com

H2OTEL CONGRESS & MEDICAL SPA
It is not only about sleeping in highly comfortable and elegantly decorated rooms in 4-star H2otel Congress & Medical Spa. It’s about having fun and also enjoying some unique moments of pure relax. The hotel has the Aqualudic complex, a wellness and spa paradise, regarded as the greatest leisure bath in Portugal. Meeting and banquet room are also available for business events.
www.h2otel.com.pt

CASAS DO CÔRO (LAND HOTEL)
The amazing Casas do Côro are situated in the Historical Village Marialva. These beautiful stone houses are equipped with several rooms, cuisine and modern technique. Throughout the year, these traditional houses were converted in comfy contemporary houses. The restaurant “Casão do Largo” serves regional dishes. The most recent facility is a luxurious SPA, where guests have several relaxing programmes at their disposal.
www.casasdocoro.pt

CASA DOS POÇOS (LAND HOTEL)
Casa dos Poços is located in the mountain area near the border with Spain. The house can be the starting point for bike tours in the surrounding natural landscape that will surely fascinate you. Each one of the 10 rooms is differently decorated. If you want to relax try the heated outdoor pool, the sauna, the steam bath, the whirlpool or the game room.
www.casadospocos.net

CASA DA CISTERNA (LAND HOTEL)
At the heart of the Historical Village Castelo Rodrigo, two biologists have created a welcoming house that offers its guests all the comfort and an excellent service. The swimming pool enjoys the perfect location, overlooking the amazing involving natural scenery. The opulent breakfast consists almost exclusively of regional products.
www.wonderfulland.com/cisterna
14. COMFORT IN HARMONY WITH LANDSCAPE AND NATURE
ACCOMMODATION IN CENTRO DE PORTUGAL

VILLA PEDRA (LAND HOTEL)
Located on the slope of Sicó Mountain in the south of Centro de Portugal, the houses that were one in ruins were given a new life. Charming houses of different dimensions were born, fully equipped with modern technique, central heating and several rooms. Each villa has a private garden and there is a big swimming pool available. A restaurant has recently opened its doors. Fresh bread is put every morning at the guests’ door, just like in the old days!
www.villapedra.com

FAIA BRAVA STAR CAMP
A new sort of accommodation for nature lovers: at the heart of Faia Brava Natural Reserve and not far from Côa Valley guests sleep in a mix of house and tent. The houses offer comfortable beds and well equipped bathrooms, but opened to the nature. Instead of a TV screen you can watch the starry sky above you!
www.starcamp-portugal.com
When you think of Portuguese cuisine, the first thing that will come to your mind will be “bacalhau”, cod fish in a salty and dry version. Experts say that there are 365 different ways to cook it, that is to say, for each day of the year. Or are there 1000 ways to cook this “faithful friend”, as some say? We do know that the history of “bacalhau” is deeply related to the golden history of Portuguese discoveries and their proud sailors. There is a route dedicated to codfish that will lead you on an exciting journey of memory, courage and delicious flavours.

The first ones to dry and salt the cod were the Norwegians and the Icelanders. But the first companies that applied these preservation methods appeared as early as the 15th century in Portugal. For the long-lasting voyages of the past centuries, “bacalhau” was just perfect, because it preserved all its proteins and nutrients.

The history of the city of Ílhavo, located 8 km away from Aveiro, is deeply intertwined with codfish. From here departed the boats to the best codfish fishing spots of the Newfound Land. Therefore, the codfish is a sort of symbol of the city. Every year in August the municipality organises the Codfish Festival. During this festival, visitors can taste codfish in a variety of ways and watch concerts and exhibitions.

Ílhavo Maritime Museum is dedicated to the history of codfish fishing in the Newfoundland and Greenland, but also the history of fishing in the Ria de Aveiro. Nautical instruments and tools used in the codfish fishing are also part of the exhibition, as well as miniatures of typical fishing boats.

The codfish fishing vessel Santo André, which has been built in 1948 in Holland, also belongs to the exhibition. In the museum library visitors will find a great array of books on codfish fishing. The breathtaking architecture of the building, designed by star Portuguese architects Nuno and José Mateus, is an enough excuse to pay a visit to this interesting museu. In 2003 the building was nominated to the Mies van der Rohe Prize. Since January 2013, the Museum has another attraction: the first codfish aquarium of the country. Here visitors have the chance to watch this species in their natural habitat.

Another spot of the codfish route is the four-mast gaff Navio Santa Maia Manuela that belonged to the mythical Portuguese White Fleet. This ship, built in 1937 in Lisbon’s União Fabril, was employed in the codfish fishing for many decades. Rescued from destruction by the codfish selling company Pascoal & Filhos, it was carefully restored until 2008 in partnership with the University of Aveiro, owning an unrivalled sparkle nowadays.

Visitors who have learned so much about the “bacalhau” will surely love to taste it in the most surprising ways! We suggest the unpretentious restaurant Bela Ria, located near Ílhavo in Gañanha de Aquém. In this restaurant you can taste the most diversified codfish variations and you will quickly realise the reason why “bacalhau” is the all-mighty king of every table in Portugal! www.museumaritimo.cm-ilhavo.pt
16. WHERE A LONG TRADITION MEETS THE MODERN WOOL INDUSTRY IN CENTRO DE PORTUGAL

Serra da Estrela is the highest peak of the Portuguese mainland. This impressive ca. 2000-meters high mountain is the only ski area in Portugal. But its pristine natural landscape is even more fascinating, covered by gorse and heather and timeless granite valleys. But life has not been easy for people who live here. The slopes are too steep and the soils too sparse for the cultivation of crops. That is why Serra da Estrela is for centuries the home of goat and sheep shepherds. They live from the products generated by this activity. The kid and lamb meat is highly appreciated in this region. And of course, the creamy sheep cheese (Queijo da Serra), a very popular delicacy in the country.

Wool plays a very important role and this industry has developed in the small towns on the slopes of Serra da Estrela. Mountain wool has a particularly good quality, because the sheep only eat natural meadows and the usage of artificial fertilisers is totally forbidden. But if you’re thinking that the concept “wool goods” applies to some traditional or somehow rustic sweater is completely wrong! Wool production in Serra da Estrela is totally aware of contemporary fashion trends, combining a modern design with a traditional fabric. Wool of Serra da Estrela is used for producing warm blankets, coats, socks and sweaters, but also for wall coverings. “Burel” is the name of an especially thick and durable fabric, which is being used in the production of manufactured home textiles, rugs, clothing and accessories in powerful colours by the company Burel Manteigas. This fabric is now the raw material of creative Portuguese designers who are reinventing tradition and creating absolutely remarkable pieces.

If you’re interested in the wool-based economy and in its history, you should visit the Wool Museum in Covilhã. This museum was founded by Marquis de Pombal in 1764 and it depicts the story of wool production in Covilhã along the centuries from home-based production to the formation of the first manufactures and highly industrialised modern production.

www.burelfactory.com
www.museu.ubi.pt
17. BEST QUALITY BEYOND THE MAINSTREAM
PRODUCTS FROM CENTRO DE PORTUGAL

VISTA ALEGRE

When in 1824 the business man José Ferreira Pinto Basto founded a porcelain factory in Ílhavo, he would never imagine that this would be the cornerstone of a worldwide popular and prestigious label.

Today Vista Alegre is one of the most renowned porcelain producers in the world. The porcelain of Vista Alegre is sent to the Spanish, Belgian and British Royal Houses or even in to the White House in Washington. Design pieces of the new collections can be found in many famous museums, such as the MOMA in New York.

Apart from the Portuguese market - there is a huge Vista Alegre shop in the shopping quarter Chiado in Lisbon, but also several outlet shops – the porcelain series of Vista Alegre are also highly appreciated in Spain, France, USA, Germany and in Brazil.

Through the fusion with the prestigious crystal producing company Atlantis in 2001 the product palette has grown a lot. The group Visabeira became the main stockholder of Vista Alegre in 2009.

www.vistaalegreatlantis.com

BUREL FACTORY

Wall coverings and curtains, bedspreads and cushion covers, bags and cushions, carpets and furniture upholstery: Burel is a high quality wool fabric made from sheep hair in the Serra da Estrela, Portugal’s highest mountain range. But Burel is not easy wool, but a very special substance, for which the raw material from the back of the sheep is woven on old machines to a very dense texture.

Normally a first substance is manufactured and then designed into something new. The products of Burel it is exactly the opposite: first, the product is developed, then the material required for this purpose is produced with fine wrinkles, ornate rosettes and three-dimensional tangles.

The company Burel has given a new life to ancient crafts, combining it with top modern design. Well-known Portuguese architects, design artists and fashion designers have designed amazing burel collections. One of them is the still young fashion designer Miguel Gigante, who creates not only rustic and elegant carpets with burel, but also trendy women’s wear.

www.burelfactory.com
www.atelierdeburel.blogspot.pt

PENHAS DOURADAS FOOD

Not only high-class cheese is produced in Serra da Estrela, but many other mostly unknown gourmet products. The company Penhas Douradas Food (PDF) has set itself the goal of making the culinary treasures of the region to a wider audience and also to create new jobs in the mountain region.

PDF processed traditional herbs and fruits according to traditional recipes, turning them into new, sometimes quite surprising creations. The product palette includes delicious specialties such as: pesto, crackers and chutneys, as well as sweet biscuits, jams, honey and fruit and herbal jellies.
17. BEST QUALITY BEYOND THE MAINSTREAM
PRODUCTS FROM CENTRO DE PORTUGAL

The culinary specialities not only taste wonderfully, but they are also packed in a very modern way. They are sold in its own shop in Lisbon, but also in selected hotels in Portugal and various gourmet shops.
www.penhasdouradasfood.com

COMUR – CONSERVAS DA MURTOSA
This company was founded in 1942 in the surroundings of Aveiro and it basically exported marinated eels. But the “eel factory”, as it is known among locals, turned into a thriving preserved food company that sells several handmade delicacies of fish and seafood.
www.comur.com

SABORES DA GARDUNHA
This company based in Alcongosta produces delicious jams, jellies and sweets from cherries, peaches, apples and other top-quality fruit varieties that grow in this region.
www.saboresdagardunha.com

BEIRALACTE – LACTICÍNIOS ARTESANAIS DA BEIRA BAIXA LDA.
This company with headquarters in Alcaria is led by several families that produce cheese according to traditional methods for generations, in a mix of traditional know-how and modern production conditions. The most important product is the yellow cheese Queijo Amarelo da Beira Baixa, a semi-solid yellowish cheese that has a flat cylinder shape and an intense and slightly sour taste.
www.beiralacte.com

SALSICHRARIA DA GARDUNHA
The label „Sausage and Ham of Fundão“enjoys great popularity for more than 50 years. The butchery in the quiet village of Valverde has always been known for its excellent traditional sausages. In 1992, the family company changed its name to “Salsicharia da Gardunha”. A team of young professionals, crazy about quality, leads the company today, producing “chourizo”, blood sausages, ham and other delicious regional specialities.
www.salsichariadagardunha.com
18. FACTS AND FIGURES
CENTRO DE PORTUGAL AT A GLANCE

TOTAL AREA: around 28.405 km²
POPULATION: ca. 2,3 millions
TIME ZONE: GMT
CURRENCY: Euro. Payment with credit card is very common. There is a widespread net of automatic cash machines throughout the region.
PHONE CODE: +351
BORDERS: Centro de Portugal borders with the North region in the north; with Spain in the East; with Lisbon and Alentejo in the South and with the Atlantic Ocean in the west.
MORE IMPORTANT CITIES: Coimbra, Aveiro, Viseu, Leiria, Guarda and Castelo Branco.
Highest spot: Torre (1993 Meter) in Serra da Estrela (Star Mountain). The only ski area in the country can be found in the surroundings.
LONGEST RIVER: 250 km-long Mondego river. This river is born in Serra da Estrela, crossing Figueira da Foz to the Atlantic Ocean.
TRAVEL WEATHER: Depending on the season, travellers must count on different weather conditions. Near the coastline, summers are hot, but not too hot thanks to the cooling influence of the Atlantic Ocean. In opposition, thermometers can reach up to 40 degrees Celsius in the interior. In Winter mild temperatures are very common in the coastline, whereas in the mountain region and near the Spanish border temperatures are lower. Snow is very common in Serra da Estrela.
TRAVEL CLOTHING: In summer cotton clothing is recommended, sun protection and sunglasses, but also rain protection. For tours in the mountains you must carry a strong wind protection coat, even in summer time and a light sweater. In Winter one must dress adequately with warm clothes.
ELECTRICITY: 220 Volts
HEALTH: For a trip to Portugal no special vaccinations are required. You will find hospitals and doctors in all larger towns, most of whom speak English.
LANGUAGE: The official language is Portuguese. In the tourism regions of Centro de Portugal many people speak English.

GETTING THERE
BY PLANE: Either to the International Lisbon Airport (Distance to Coimbra ca. 200km/2 hours) or to Porto Airport (Distance to Coimbra ca. 135 km/2 hours). Travellers must carry their valid identity card or passport.
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