



COMPARING

LISBON AND BARCELONA

By Ray Collins
Photographs by Ray Collins

I have a tradition every ten years I have a tradition every ten years when a big birthday comes along: Go away and distract myself from turning another decade older. And the older I get, the farther away the location. When I turned 30, I went to Chicago...40 Puerto Rico, 50 Hawaii—so now the next one...the Iberian Peninsula!

First stop: Lisbon, Portugal.

My prettier half Erin and I flew direct from Miami. We took off at 4pm and arrived around Midnight—at least on our watches. It was suddenly 5am, and the sun was starting to rise. Surreal. We got a 3-hour power nap and then began being tourists.

Our travel agent chose a hotel for us right in the middle of everything called the LX Boutique Hotel. It is near the riverfront, mass transit and plenty of shops & restaurants. We never needed a rental car. Each time we came back to the hotel I said, "This is an ideal location." We even had a nice sushi dinner one night in the lobby restaurant.

TRAVEL NOW

We didn't have much of an issue with the language barrier in Portugal. We were relieved how many people spoke English. I did watch a video on the flight that taught the basics. Ready? "Obrigado" means "thank you." If it is a female saying it, it is then "Obrigada." I think people like to think you're making an effort to use their language even if you walk around all day just saying "thank you."

We spent our first day riding the trolley around, getting our bearings. I had heard Lisbon was a lot like San Francisco—and it's really true: From the trolley, to all the hills, to the identical version of the Golden Gate Bridge! (Google it!)

Sunset along the Tagus River near our hotel reminded me of Mallory Square in Key West. Entertainers, drinks, and people taking pictures.

The next day we boarded a train to go due west to meet a childhood friend half an hour away in Cascais. We had a picturesque lunch looking out on the water. I had a chicken and rice dish—but Erin and Suzanne had fish, which freaked out Erin since the fish was staring back at her and hadn't been "de-boned." Suzanne was a pro, ignoring the sideways glance from her lunch--and pulling out the bones in one motion.

After lunch, Suzanne took us to the western-most point in Europe as well as one of the prettiest points in the town of Sintra. Very hilly and picturesque.

Back in Lisbon, we checked out the funky Principe Real district, the iconic St. George's castle up on the hill...and followed a friend's lead and had the best meal of our week at a place called "Lisboa A Noite." Five-star restaurant, great service and food—and not that expensive. My \$29 dollar filet entre would have cost \$49 back in the states.

We were glad to check Lisbon off our bucket list and head off for our next country.





Barcelona, Spain.

We took an hour-long shuttle flight to the site of the 1992 Summer Olympics--which really was a line of demarcation in that country's history. Many have said Barcelona has since become the happening place to be, and no longer under Madrid's shadow.

One interesting change from Lisbon--taxi are easier to get than an Uber. At the airport, there were no Ubers available, and we had to pay a few dollars more for a taxi. Get this--we got the taxi off the Uber app!

A friend of ours who moved from Sarasota to Barcelona told us where to stay and he was right on. The Hotel Lloret Ramblas was on Las Ramblas, a vibrant and busy tree-lined pedestrian mall in the heart of the city. We got lucky twice with our hotel locations. I'm a big fan of utilizing those "hop-on hop-off" tour buses in unfamiliar cities--and we hopped on one at our first opportunity. With so many different languages spoken there, the tour is pre-recorded and you choose your language of preference adjacent to the earphone jack at your seat.

The most iconic spot in Barcelona is the Sagrada Família--a massive church designed by Antoni Gaudi whose quirky Dr. Seuss-like architecture pops up around the city. The church is such a popular tourist draw, the tours were sold out the day we were there so we had to book an appointment the following day.

Bottom line--Barcelona and Lisbon have completely different vibes. The former more cosmopolitan and sophisticated but the latter quite charming and scenic. I liked them both a lot but being away for 10 chilly days made me like Florida even more.

It was nice to go--and just as nice to come home.

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