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48 HOURS IN BAIRRO ALTO, LISBON

Hong Kong-based photographer BELINDA BATH finds plenty for her lens to love in the Portuguese capital.



Exploring Central Lisbon's funky Bairro Alto neighbourhood was my favourite part of our recent trip to Portugal. It's a vibrant area in a city that is fast becoming a firm go-to destination.

Bairro Alto emerged as the result of urban expansion in the 16th century outside the walls of the historical centre. The quaint cobblestone-lined streets are filled with restaurants, bars and shops showcasing local designers and wares. An equally vibrant street-art scene adds to the beautiful hues of the city.



You can't help but be in awe of the coloured tiles (*azulejos*) that adorn all the old buildings – vibrant colours in shades of yellow, blue and green, and all with intricate designs. The tiles serve not only as a visual aesthetic but a functional one as well, working as insulation to keep the buildings cool in summer and warm in winter. It really is a visual feast.

Go out early to explore the streets, and come back in the afternoon for a well-earned siesta before the night kicks off. Here are just some of the highlights.



Heading down *Calçada do Combro*, you'll pass *Igreja de Santa Catarina*, also known as *Paulistas Church* – easily missed but absolutely worth venturing into. Originally part of a convent from 1647, the interior has the most magnificent baroque

decorations in gold. Continue onto *Rua do Poço dos Negros*, and you'll find *The Mill*, a wonderful place to have breakfast. Founded by Madeline and Paul, it's a Portuguese-Australian partnership serving the best coffee we found in Lisbon and beautiful fresh contemporary food with an Australian twist (even Vegemite on toast!). themill.pt/our-story



After you've whiled away a couple of hours in these streets and watched the famous No. 28 tram rattle past on the half hour, you can walk up to the tram stop and jump aboard to do the full circuit. It's a fun way to get your bearings and see this wonderful city. If you're lucky, you may even get a seat – push the window right down and watch the world go by. lisbon.net/tram



Lisbon is famous for its Portuguese tarts (*pastel de nata*), and finding a great version of these treats isn't hard. Head to Manteigaria in Rua do Loreto for some of the best. You can go inside and watch them rolling out the pastry and filling the shells. Be warned, you won't be able to stop at only one! Take your tarts and go and sit in the quaint city square, Praça Luís de Camões, just opposite; it features a large statue of the legendary poet from the 16th century.

“The balmy nights, outdoor seating and festive decorations make dining on the narrow cobblestoned streets so exciting”



Pop into Le Consulat, the former Brazilian Consulate, which combines luxury accommodation, art and creation all in one location. Head to their terrace for afternoon drinks overlooking Praça Luís de Camões. leconsulat.pt



If you're looking for some unique gifts, look no further than Claus Porto. This store's beautiful range of hand-crafted soaps and fine fragrances are all wrapped in stunning packaging illustrated with beautiful artwork. The candle range is particularly hard to go past. clausporto.com



There are so many wonderful *petiscos* bars and restaurants to explore in the Bairro Alto, with many of the restaurants spilling out onto the street. It's the balmy nights, outdoor seating and festive decorations down narrow cobblestoned streets that make the experience that much more exciting. For fabulous cocktails and rooftop views you must pop in to The Insólito. Housed in a quirky old building and decorated in vintage candelabras and old curios, it has one of the first lifts ever to be fitted in Lisbon (only room for two people at a time), which takes you up to the rooftop. The views overlooking Castelo de S. Jorge are spectacular, especially at dusk. theinsolito.pt



A fun way to get around Lisbon is by tuk-tuk, brightly coloured and often decorated in Portuguese tile motifs. They will take you wherever you want to go, or you can do a half-day tour and see the sights. Beware, though: the suspension isn't always great on the cobblestoned roads! tuk-tuk-lisboa.pt/en



Here are some other great links to the coolest spots and happening places in Lisbon:
lisbonlux.com
lisboacool.com/en



Belinda's Lisbon photos are available to purchase from her website, including beautifully designed montages like the one pictured here ("Portugal Tarts"). belindabathimages.com