

# CityBreak

## Let us show you our Lisbon

Forget guidebooks and organised tours - there are always friendly locals prepared to show you around for nothing



Joana and Miguel with Lisbon's skateboarders

The trouble with guidebooks is that they weren't written by you. It means that, no matter how much you might have in common with the editor, they are inevitably going to recommend somewhere you think stinks and miss places you might consider gems. But now we have the internet and everything has changed. There are up-to-the-minute tips in travel forums; everything is reviewed by real travellers who were in your hotel yesterday. And best of all, with a bit of searching, you can speak to locals directly and ask them for advice. It was my boyfriend's idea; he won't let me take the credit. We were off to Brussels last year and felt completely

adrift. Visions of crowded chocolate shops and bars full of Eurocrats haunted us. There was almost no advice online, so we decided to search for locals on MySpace and ask them. We picked people with similar tastes in music, books and films, and the results were fantastic. We got recommendations for shops, bars, restaurants, a weird club in an old train station, and plenty of invitations to meet up and be shown around. The trip was a roaring success. This was officially my new favourite way to travel.

For a recent trip to Lisbon to see the new Paula Rego museum we thought it would be fun to get in touch with some local artists for tips. I asked a friend, a comic book expert, if he knew anyone there. He gave me some names, I found their blogs and fired off my standard "help me have fun and maybe be cool" email. "I would love to show you around Lisbon!" wrote back Joana, an illustrator living in the city. We arranged to meet for lunch. Two other meetings were set up and that was that. I left for Lisbon armed with a list of strangers' mobile numbers.

I decided to shun hotels and stay in *Mi Casa En Lisboa* ([micasaenlisboa.com](http://micasaenlisboa.com), doubles €75-€95) which I found on [tripadvisor.com](http://tripadvisor.com). "It is not a hotel,"

### How to find a groovy guide

● **Decide what you are interested in. If it's music, seek out the blogs and websites of local bands. If it's artists, they are usually looking for work, so you can probably find email addresses on websites, or contact small galleries and ask for names of local artists.**  
● **Once you find a good blog, follow the links on their page to other people's sites.**

● **For more general tips, try MySpace. It's a pain to navigate, but once you manage to work the search engine (it uses the local spelling of city names), look for people with similar interests to you. Being able to see someone's homepage without necessarily becoming their friend is the main advantage of MySpace over Facebook.**

says its website, but the home of design journalist Maria Ulecia and her dog Lola, who share their house with guests. The place was stunning, perched on a hill in the Graça district overlooking the river Tagus and the tumbledown buildings and exquisite churches that cover the city. Inside, it was a symphony of vintage furniture, and Maria was always on hand to give good recommendations - including her local restaurant *Pitêu da Graça* (Largo da Graça, 95) and its delicious grilled sole.

The following day we hopped on tram 28 and went for a quick explore of the excellent *Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga* ([mnaa.imc-ip.pt](http://mnaa.imc-ip.pt)), recommended by everyone. Lisbon's ancient art museum is popular with the

younger crowd and I spotted at least 15 people in skinny jeans and oversized glasses with not a teacher in sight.

Then it was off to the *LX Factory* ([lxfactory.com](http://lxfactory.com)), which illustrator José Mendes had recommended. LX is a vast spread of warehouses which used to be a printing press, but in 2007 was turned into a sort of creative mini-city. It's now home to design companies, galleries and artists' studios. Visitors are free to roam, and we wandered into several offices. There is an impeccably cool-looking cafe called *Cantina* where I imagine it's appropriate to pose with a lofty tome, and a fantastic bookshop, *Ler Devagar*, which holds regular gigs and readings. LX also runs a twice-yearly open day for visitors (the next is on 23 October) where everyone gives out free drinks and plays music.

Back in the centre of town we met up with our first new friend, comic book artist Filipe Abranches. After showing us around his studio, he invited us to join him and his friends for their weekly knees-up in a local bar, *Palmeira* (Rua do Crucifixo, 69). It was the drinking den of my dreams; everyone huddled around big wooden tables shouting and gesticulating, 80-cent beers and a brazen flouting of the smoking ban. By 10pm we were drunk, arguing about cartoons and eating *pregos* (steaks in buns).

We eventually headed giddily up the hill to *Rua da Bica de Duarte Belo*, known simply as Bica. It's a street to the south of the Bairro Alto full of bars and cafes, and according to our new gang, the place to be seen on a night out - although, unless you enjoy a pheromone-fuelled crush, I think the best time to explore is early evening. We settled on *caiprinhas* in Bicaense

(*Rua da Bica*, 38-42), a hip bar with a grab-a-teddy machine converted into a slightly pretentious grab-a-scrumpled-up-drawing machine.

Several cocktails later, we were on the road again heading for a gallery opening. "It's in an old palace," André Lemos, another contact, had promised us. This looked unlikely from the outside - it was on a narrow side street flanked by non-descript residential buildings. But once we stepped into *Carpe Diem* (*Rua de O Século* 79, [carpediemartesquisa.com](http://carpediemartesquisa.com)) it opened up like the *Tardis*: the fabulous, decrepit 18th-century palace of the Marquis de Pombal, transformed into a makeshift gallery. We ran around exploring every room, every crumbling staircase and the overgrown walled garden, and didn't leave until about 2am. Then, despite our yawns, we were immediately dragged to one of Lisbon's most popular venues, *Ze dos Bois* (*Rua da Barroca* 59, [zedosbois.org](http://zedosbois.org)) to catch a late band. Fortunately it was closed, and as our friends dived into the throng of the Bairro Alto, we slunk home to bed.

The morning after, we plodded up the street to Lisbon's best flea market, *Feira da Ladra* (*Campo de Santa Clara*), before meeting our next guide, illustrator Joana Sobrinho. She must have noticed our pallid complexions, because she immediately whisked us down to the docks for lunch. *Deli Delux* (*Av. Infante D Henrique Armazém B Loja* 8, [delidelux.pt](http://delidelux.pt)) oozed cool - all granite floors, blackboards and poached eggs - and although it wasn't cheap, it was sleek and tasty. After we'd filled up, Joana took us on a tour of the city centre's design highlights. I picked up a can of feels in hilarious packaging from a traditional tinned seafood shop called *Conserva de Lisboa* (*Rua dos Bacalhóes* 34), and a lovely old-fashioned Portuguese soap from *A Vida Portuguesa* (*Rua Anchieta* 11) in the Chiado. We had a snoop round *Mude* ([mude.pt](http://mude.pt)), Lisbon's pocket-sized design museum before heading to *Praça da Figueira* to meet Joana's skater/artist/film maker friend, Miguel. At night, Miguel told us, the skaters do tricks on the base of the monument. We sat in the dregs of the September sun, watching the hip young things of Lisbon fall off their skateboards over and over again.

Our final destination of the trip was the *Electricity Museum* ([tinyurl.com/yenrmav](http://tinyurl.com/yenrmav)), situated on the banks of the Tagus in elegant Belém. Like so many industrial buildings in Lisbon, the former electricity factory has been transformed into a stunning arts venue. We were there for a live drawing performance by the comic book artist António Jorge Gonçalves. Before the show, António Jorge joined us in the bar and I told him I was amazed by how much was going on in Lisbon - it might be small, but it feels like it has a genuinely proactive and exciting arts scene. He agreed. "Ten years ago I could tell you exactly what was going on in the city on any given night," he said. "There's no way I could do that now." He's right. We just scratched the surface on our visit - and that was only partly because we are wimpish Brits with less stamina than the Portuguese. Lisbon's art scene is alive and well. Make some new friends online and go find it.

**Becky Barnicoat**  
TAP (0845 601 0932, [flytap.com](http://flytap.com)) flies from Heathrow and Gatwick to Lisbon from £104 rtn inc tax. For further information, see [visitportugal.com](http://visitportugal.com).

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What to do with the kids this weekend **Family**



Multi media... the Cantina cafe at the LX Factory