

KIRKER - MADEIRA & LISBON

By Beccy

19th September 2012

The alarm going off in the middle of the night was the start of my educational to Madeira and Lisbon with Kirker Holidays, I met up with the rest of the group at the Air Portugal check in desk at 04:30 for our 06:15 departure to Funchal.

On arrival at Funchal we transferred to the Quinta Jardim do Lago for our first site inspection followed by lunch. This former charming family home built in the 18th century has 31 double rooms, 4 junior suites and 5 suites all south facing to the gardens and sea. The gardens are unique in their variety of rare species contained in 2.5 hectares and for the last 45 years has been home to Columbus, a giant tortoise. This hotel grows its own fruit and veg to supply the kitchen with fresh ingredients. The hotel offers a variety of relaxing areas; breakfast room with veranda, main restaurant and lounge/bar. There is a courtesy minibus operates 4 times a day into Funchal, 1.5 km away.

From here we embarked on our city tour. First we visited the old town market with its wonderful collection of smells and colours from the spices, fruit and veg, flowers, linens etc. Next came the Madeira wine lodge of Blandys to learn the process of making Madeira wine and of course the obligatory tasting!

Then it was up in the cable car to Monte, which gave spectacular views over Funchal before descending back down in the traditional wicker toboggans – great fun.



We then transferred to Reid's hotel, our home for the two nights. Reids has a wonderful cliffside setting with gardens, 2 swimming pools, and sea level sun terrace with diving platforms. The rooms are spacious with plenty of wardrobe space. Robes and slippers are provided and soft drinks from the minibar are complimentary. Pool towels are provided and the pools are open from 7am with a lifeguard on duty at sea level from 7am to 6pm. The Italian restaurant – Villa Cipriani offers alfresco dining on the terrace looking out to sea. Afternoon tea at Reids is legendary and can be booked as an excursion for cruise passengers and non-residents, the cost currently is 53 euros per person.

20th September 2012



Up, ready and excited for our dolphin and whale watching boat trip! After a briefing we set off full of anticipation as to what we might see if anything, the sea was calm and we were lucky enough to see both dolphins and pilot whales during our 2 hour trip. Once back on terra ferma we headed to Santana on the north coast for our site inspection of the Quinta do Furo. This Quinta has a truly magnificent setting amongst rolling vineyards with spectacular views of the dramatic coastline. There are 45 bedrooms, 4 junior suites, 2 2bedroomed cottages, gym, and pool with detachable roof, lounge with open fireplace, and an ideally based hotel for

walking in this area. From here we set out on a Levada walk (levadas are irrigation canals that cover Madeira bringing a constant supply of water down from the highland forests). These levada walks range in length and degree of difficulty and are a lovely way to see the nature and scenery of Madeira. Once our walk was finished we jumped into land rovers for a jeep safari through the narrow, winding hill roads, before heading back to Reids with just enough time for a dip in the ocean, Finally a typical Madeira dinner at a local restaurant for our last evening on this diverse and dramatic island.

21st September 2012

After breakfast we headed for the airport for our flight to Lisbon, the transfer time from the airport to downtown Lisbon is only about 20 minutes, so it wasn't long before we were seated in a local restaurant for lunch, after which we embarked on a guided tour of Lisbon visiting Sao Jorge castle, Praca do Comercio, St Jeronimos Monastery (a world heritage monument), and the Belem area to visit the Pasteis de Belem – famous for its custard tarts. Over 10,000 are made a day and of course it would have been rude not to sample them, yum!

The central part of Lisbon is small with most



of the main sights within walking distance of each other making it an ideal city break destination right on the river Tagus.

The evening was spent with site inspections at the Tivoli Jardim (4*) a hotel of contemporary style with a great location for exploring the city, then onto its sister hotel the Tivoli Lisboa (5*) situated close to the botanical gardens. This hotel is of modern design, the rooftop terrace grill is a great place to eat whilst listening to music and enjoying the superb views of the castle, river, and

old town, and has the added benefit of a heated outdoor pool with gardens and sun terraces. Our base for the 2 nights in Lisbon was The Ritz Four Seasons. This famous hotel was built in 1959 and is situated on one of Lisbon's seven hills with views over Eduardo VII Park, St Georges castle and the old town a 20-minute walk away. This hotel has 284 spacious rooms each with luxurious marble bathroom, elegant public rooms, spa, heated indoor pool, and rooftop gym.

22nd September 2012

This morning we were off to the stunning medieval town of Sintra. Sintra is perched on a hilltop between Lisbon and the Atlantic coast and is made up of ancient narrow streets, an 8th century castle, a Franciscan monastery, and the Pena National Palace designated as a cultural landscape world heritage site by UNESCO. Pena Palace is a spectacular Moorish palace with wonderful views over the parkland and Sintra; unfortunately the palace was shrouded in fog during our visit so we were not able to enjoy the views.

We left Sintra and headed for the coastal town of Cascais. Fifteen miles from Lisbon, Cascais stands in a sheltered bay at the mouth of the river Tagus, the vibrant atmosphere and two excellent beaches makes it a superb resort to twin with Lisbon.

We had a site inspection of the Albatroz hotel, which is set on the headland between the two beaches. Two new buildings each with very different styles have been added to create a hotel of great charm and style, with the atmosphere of a luxurious private home, this was followed by a delightful lunch. From here we headed back to Lisbon passing by Cabo da Roca and Guincho beach. Our last destination was Lisbon Aquarium, created when the city hosted EXPO. It was a lovely climax to the day; I could have spent hours watching this underwater world go by. Normally I am limited to the air in my tank for this experience and it came without the bother of getting into my wetsuit and scuba diving gear!



Our final morning in Lisbon was spent at leisure before heading to the airport for our flight home, which went technical, but that's another story!

Many thanks to Kirker for this wonderful experience.