



# PROUD *in* PORTUGAL

A family embarks on a cross-country journey in this European country loved for its waves and many wonders

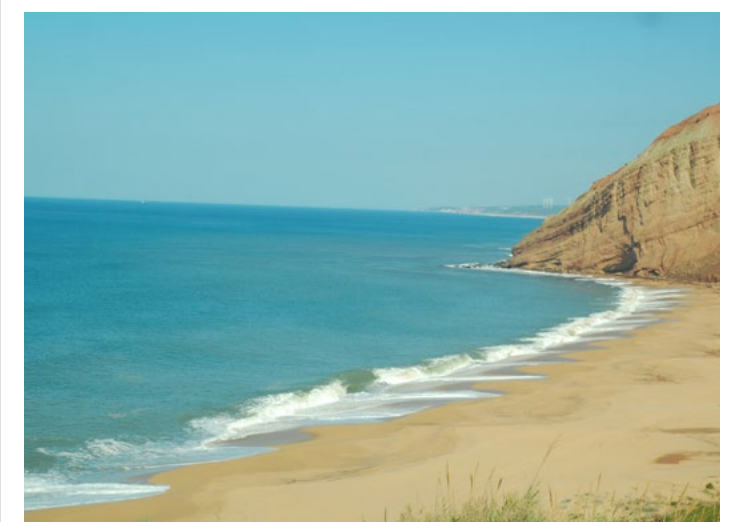
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**W**e had been living in Portugal for half a year before we decided to explore further than the closest city of Porto. Why did it take us so long? It wasn't that we weren't curious,

we were enamored even. But living in a new country allowed us the pleasure of taking our time. To let the land and its language and more so, its people, get under our skin. There was no maddening rush to see everything at once, until we decided it's time.

The plan was simple, to take a few belongings and our surf gear, then drive from the north in Porto and head south. We wanted to go far and explore as much places as we could. We were lured by the promise of surf in this country that's blessed with coastline after coastline of waves. We were pulled into the direction of the little towns, the nooks and crannies that speak of many stories from history books, from the poet's lips, from the melancholic sound of Fado that echoes everywhere. Even the salty taste of cod and the

sweet aroma of pastel de nata, that golden egg custard, were calling out to us.

My husband is half Portuguese and he has spent many magical summers in this country of his father's birth. He wanted to share this experience with me and our daughter. He wanted us to be amazed, like he was, as he discovered his roots. He wanted us to be proud of this country that we were already beginning to call home. But as he also considered himself an outsider, he was also discovering this place, wide-eyed and curious, as we were.

#### PORTO, CITY OF CONTRASTS

We crossed the Dom Luis I Bridge that spans the Douro River. We could see pastel colored houses, the wine valley in the distance and the countless wine cellars. We walked around town, a mix of luxurious buildings and dilapidated houses. This was a city of contrasts, shabby, proud and colorful at the same time. We inspected the detailed blue and white azulejos of the Carmo Church. I learned that azulejo is a glazed tile and is widely used in Portugal to cover and decorate walls, fountains, pavements, ceilings, vaults, baths or fireplaces. I loved the old ones which are often painstakingly hand painted. We couldn't resist stopping by Livraria

Lello & Irmão which is one of the oldest bookstores in Portugal and one of the most beautiful in the world. Interesting features are its opulent, carved wooden staircase and stained glass ceiling. We walked around and found a fantastic viewpoint from the Cathedral Square and admired the river, bridges and colorful buildings. We gushed in between mouthfuls of Francesinha sandwich, a popular snack in Porto. It's made with bread, local ham, smoked sausage or roast meat and covered with melted cheese and hot thick tomato sauce.

#### WATERWAYS OF AVEIRO

We spent most of the day in Porto and drove to the nearby town of Aveiro for a short promenade. This city is hailed as the Venice of Portugal with its waterways and colorful boats. We explored the main tourist area on foot and sampled some ovos moles which are sweets made from eggs and sugar. I adored all the beautiful shapes that these delicate sweet-eggs came in: wooden barrels, starfish and shells.

#### THE BIGGEST WAVE IN NAZARE

We stopped for the night at Nazare and although we couldn't see it yet, the ocean lulled us to sleep. This used to be a sleepy fishing village until 2011 when Garrett McNamara, a famous surfer from Hawaii, surfed the biggest wave in the world here. It was like paying homage to a significant event that changed the world of surfing forever.





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**“I could get lost in this place and enjoy myself immensely.”**

I felt like I already had my fair share of waves, so I simply walked around town by myself and took some photos. There were seaside restaurants serving the freshest seafood. There were art galleries and souvenir shops. I could get lost in this place and enjoy myself immensely.

#### DREAMS COME TRUE IN LISBON

One week seemed too brief to explore Portugal. We decided to make Lisbon our final stop, and it certainly was the icing on the cake. What made Lisbon so extraordinary for us was that it was the only beautiful city with a rich heritage that had surf spots. One of its most famous breaks is Carcavelos, where you can surf a wave right next to the Fort of São Julião da Barra.

In Lisbon, we decided to walk around the city aimlessly to see old streets, pastel colored buildings and street art. At first, we tried to explore on our own, just going where our feet would lead us. We took the famous Tram 28 which is the longest route in Lisbon and the best way to explore. The tram dropped us off at the nondescript Campo de Ourique

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station. While we deliberately got lost in some forgotten cobblestone street, I saw the image of my favorite Portuguese writer at the Fundação, José Saramago. My husband had been so tired from the walk while carrying our baby daughter that he casually rested his tired shoulder on an olive tree in front of the building. I eavesdropped on a tour group and later learned that it was on this very tree that Saramago's ashes were buried.

The tour guide was so engaging that we decided to join it. We followed him through the maze of the city's streets and were delighted to discover little pieces of history, street art, and artisanal shops. He showed us murals, street art that told stories of this city and its people. Stories of how Fado began in dimly lit bars, of how the saint São Cristóvão carried the Christ Child on his back, of the old widows in black who grieved for their lost husbands.

#### A FINE FAREWELL

Our tour ended in Alfama, with nouveau art this time, at the gallery of a famous artist who drew only in wine and coffee instead of paint. We celebrated the end of the day with a dose of Fado and a shot of the ubiquitous ginjinha, this time bottled by a laughing old Portuguese woman from her kitchen and served from her window. We clinked our cups “Saúde!” to this amazing city and for finding ourselves here. At the end of the week, we decided to go home. The open arms of The Christ the King statue bade us farewell, the same arms that would welcome us back in the near future. Our journey from the north in Porto to the south in Lisbon through coastal roads took us seven days. But the drive back home on the highway would take a mere five hours.

I understood the meaning of the Portuguese word saudade which cannot be easily translated but evokes a feeling of nostalgia, a longing for something or someone that we love. Moreover, it often carries a repressed knowledge that the object of longing might never return. But I know in my heart that I will return. Até logo Portugal!

#### ART IN OBIDOS

We decided to stop at the fortified city of Obidos which, dubbed as the “town of the queens” after King Afonso II gave the title of this village to Queen Urraca. It is known in the region for its art: the whitewashed houses and handmade wares that can be bought here.

My husband grabbed my hand and took me into one of the shops. He told me I should try the local drink. I was handed a little cup, no bigger than my thumb, completely made of chocolate. Inside was a syrupy, dark concoction. He made me drink it in one go and I could feel the sour mingling with sweet before the heat went down my throat. Then I ate the chocolate cup itself. It was my first taste of ginjinha, a liquor made from Morello cherries which the Portuguese have been drinking since the 17th-century.

#### SURF TUBES IN PENICHE

We had been traveling for three days and we still haven't gotten our surfboards wet. By the time we arrived in Peniche, we couldn't wait to surf some good waves. This is what this town is known for anyway - the famous Supertubos, waves forming fast and powerful tubes,

considered among the best in Europe and most recently, the destination for the World Championship Tour of the World Surf League.

I didn't surf Supertubos, but my husband did. Instead, I found a perfect left hand swell, small but well shaped, near the island of Baleal. We were lucky to catch waves since we arrived at the end of summer when most tourists have already left.

#### CHILL TOWN OF ERICEIRA

When the Portuguese talk about surfing, a favorite place often comes up: Ericeira. They utter this word so softly as if they are still remembering that last perfect wave and they couldn't believe it happened. This seaside community on the west coast of Portugal is famous for being chosen as one of the World Surfing Reserves. We got the best view from the top of the cliff overlooking the waves at the Chill in Ericeira Surf House. And it got even better as we saw one of the most perfect sunsets right from our bedroom. We almost didn't make it outside the door but the waves were calling.