



Living in PORTUGAL

Anne de Stoop
Photography by Jérôme Darblay
with Caroline Champenois

Preface by Mario Soares



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Flammarion
Paris - New York



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"Visitor's Guide" updated by Claire Baudoin,
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*For Othon, Anne Françoise and Martine
Anne de Stoop*

*In Memory of Agua de Peixes
Jérôme Darblay*

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VISITOR'S GUIDE



PREFACE

by Mário Soares

It is perhaps impossible to define the Portuguese art of living, a nuanced art that is beyond words, as this "Angel of Silence" seems to suggest. The elegance and delicacy of this symbol belong to the Portuguese people as a whole. Probably painted at the end of the eighteenth century, it is to be found in the chapel of the Santos Palace, also known as the Abrantes Palace, which houses the French embassy in Lisbon.

This book is one in a collection intended to introduce the reader to the customs, traditions, cultural and natural riches, and lifestyles of various countries. As such it is a fine traveler's guide to Portugal, providing an excellent itinerary for anyone wanting to get to know the country better.

From Portugal's natural heritage and landscapes to its architecture and history; from gastronomy to the popular arts; from music to painting and, above all, literature—even though not exhaustive—this book indicates for each region and each town all of the most significant aspects and things most worth seeing.

While it has many of the characteristics of a tourist guide, the book actually goes further. Its careful cultural references, with quotations from writers and artists, and the information it contains make it a brief but useful introduction for all who would like to know about Portugal or are planning a visit.

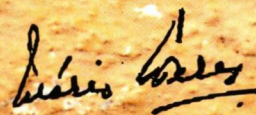
Portugal is a country with a long history and a rich and original culture open to many influences. Notwithstanding its great diversity of people and landscapes, it succeeds in maintaining a remarkable degree of national identity.

It is a European country, but it stands both on the shores of the Atlantic, which softens its climate, and at the mouth of the Mediterranean, which marks its character. In the fifteenth century Portugal launched into the maritime adventures of the Age of Discoveries, giving Europe a gateway onto the world. Layered as it is with diverse influences, and having integrated a variety of cultures and customs, Portugal—one of the oldest states in Europe, with borders that have remained unaltered since the

thirteenth century—has managed to preserve its own very particular identity over the ages. It was the first European country to build a vast empire—which went from Malaysia and India to the coasts of Africa and Latin America, taking in Brazil as well as a number of Atlantic islands—and the last to abandon it. This adventure, which has spanned six centuries, has given us a common language spoken by almost two hundred million people, and an original intermixing of cultures marked by a great sense of universalist humanism and fraternity, regardless of race or religion.

Today Portugal is a country open to modernity, democracy, and a respect for human rights. It emerged from a long dictatorship with the peaceful and bloodless "Carnation Revolution" of 25 April 1974. Portugal joined the European Community in 1985, resuming an old tradition of democracy that dates from the very origins of the nation in 1140. It has embraced the values of peace and solidarity, in the belief that a better understanding between peoples and an exchange of cultures are irreplaceable factors for human enrichment and mutual respect with a tolerance for that which is different.

The collection to which this book belongs is conceived in a similar spirit of openness, to develop better understandings of things that are foreign to us. For this reason I am pleased to write these words of introduction, and to convey my best wishes to author and publisher alike.



Presidência da Republica,
Palacio de Belém, Lisbon, July 1994



A COUNTRY WITH A GENTLE WAY OF LIFE

"All that must be white is pure white," remarked Jean Giraudoux in his book entitled *Portugal*. In the immense Alentejo plain, villages rise up like mirages. The dazzling white of the walls contrasts with the gray schist of paving slabs which, in their rough simplicity, recall all of the violence of the local terrain. Here whitewashed houses look like sculptures made of earth, lime, and light (left, at Monsaraz).

To attempt to present Portugal in just a few lines is surely a rash undertaking. How can judgment be passed on a country that you love, a country that so excels in making life an art? Should its mystery be left intact, or all of its wonders shouted from the housetops?

Simply the sound of spoken Portuguese fills you with a desire to be there. The slightly melancholic accent, the surprising intonations, the mystery of the phonetics, and the abundant richness and musicality of this language of poets are a delightful invitation to travel.

You very quickly discover that this country is profoundly different from its neighbor. "Spain and Portugal live on the same peninsula, but back to back rather than face to face," Michel Déon stressed. Portugal has, for a very long time, been a world unto itself. Established as a nation almost eight hundred years ago, it is the oldest European country still within its original borders. It was also the first nation of Europe to have a single unified language. This long history is one of the keys to understanding a country that became conscious of its unique character very early on.

With its back to Spain, and its long front bordered by the Atlantic, Portugal has always faced outward. "It is easy to understand how, from the heart of the huge Alentejan plain, there emerged a faith and hope in a national destiny which had the world as its stage," noted the writer Miguel Torga. "It was necessary to part from these successive waves of earth without shipwrecks and without chasms in order to be able to go confidently towards the sea."

All of Portugal's history thus becomes a homage to the Age of Discoveries, an adventure beginning in the fifteenth century that so profoundly shaped the country. Portuguese sailors were forever heading off into the unknown—first timidly down as far as Morocco, then moving from inlet to inlet round to the Cape of Good Hope, and finally all the way to Japan and Brazil.

According to Fernando Pessoa, all Portuguese carry within them a certain nostalgia for the grandeur of the past. This bittersweet melancholy, a part of everyday life, is known as *saudade*—"a pain that you enjoy, a pleasure from which you suffer," in the words of the poet Francisco Manuel de Mello. It can also be defined as a longing for a happiness that is never satisfied, mingled with a certain nostalgia for the future.

Getting to know Portugal means going from one surprise to another. In winter a white mantle covers the ground: a coating of snow on the Serra da Estrêla, a carpet of almond blossoms in the Algarve—this country loves contrasts. In the north, a verdant land drenched with rain, the sun pierces light mists that come in from the ocean. The atmosphere is often bathed in a poetic pearl-gray light. Here the Atlantic ocean is never far away.

"I have sometimes thought that Portugal could be called Atlantis," remarked the writer A. T'Serstevens. "Its climate, its vegetation, its coastal life and even its agriculture, its history, discoveries, and conquests, its very own Manueline architecture, a large part of its literature, race, character, and language can be summed up in one single word: Atlantic."

However, in the province of Alentejo—*Além Tejo*: “beyond the Tagus”—the cool, temperate climate of the seacoast seems a long way away. Here harsh cold winters follow the burning heat of summer. This is no longer the Atlantic, but already the Orient. To see this you need only travel to the Algarve, a region permanently bathed in sunshine, where the blue sky, the clear air, and a fabulous light make it an immensely attractive region.

The houses, with their brilliant white walls, seem to spring from the atmosphere that surrounds them. In this part of the country everything is colorful, even the sun-drenched white of façades. The corners of houses, plinths, cornices, and window frames are often edged with ochre, bordered in blue, painted in green, or highlighted in red. By the use of contrasting effects, color accentuates or corrects the shapes of buildings, becoming an integral part of the structure itself. Color adorns entire walls in seaside towns, particularly yellow ochres, but also pinks, reds, and pale greens. It can even be found on the granite houses of the north, made iridescent by verdant lichen, turned golden by the sun, washed out by the rain, or set off by traditional two-toned window frames.

However, the most characteristic aspect of the use of color in Portugal are azulejos, the amazing faience tiles. With its azulejos this land of poets has taught the world to make dreams of their everyday life. For more than five hundred years, under the combined influence of the Moors and that of their Spanish neighbors, the Portuguese have been reinventing this décor, which now transforms the interiors of religious buildings and of houses, decorates gardens and patios, and takes over façades. For Paul Morand, “these azulejos find a place for themselves everywhere—in the private chapels of palaces . . . in aristocratic antechambers, as a faint pink extension of salon lamps; or in gardens on the backs of benches, and under the waters of basins . . . They give life to the austerity of trimmed hedges, make the green of lawns sing out, spread their rare colors with a boldness that some-

times borders on licentiousness.” And they always succeed in captivating, in casting a spell, whether they are telling a story in the Western narrative tradition or whether they are composing artful geometric patterns, a song that is almost an incantation in the image of the Orient.

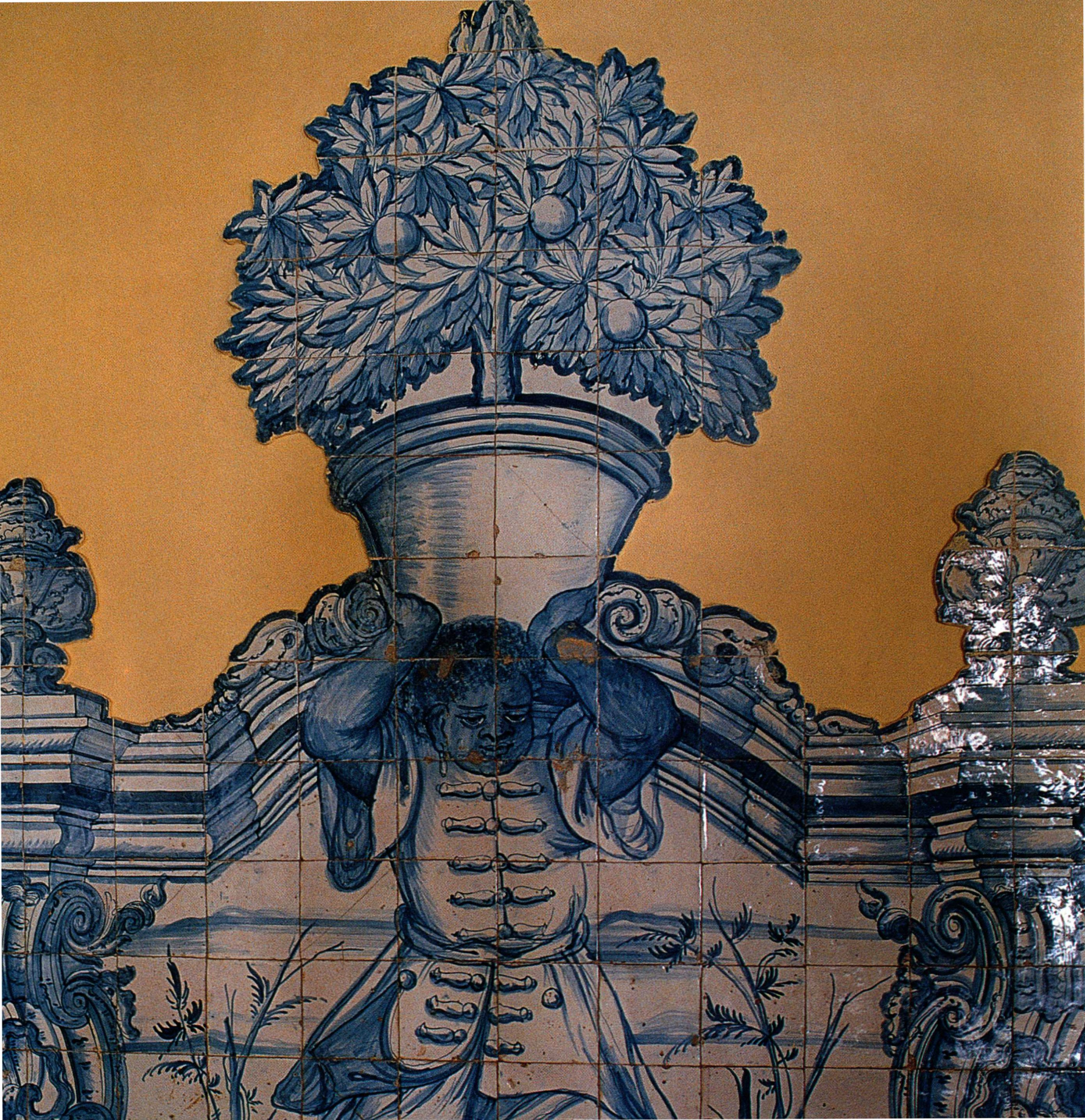
The Occident ceaselessly turned towards the Orient—this is definitely one of Portugal’s greatest appeals. Ancient Rome already had a presence here, at the remarkable site of Conimbriga. Later, in the Middle Ages, there was a flowering of Romanesque and Gothic abbeys, which were the pride of Christianity. Then, over the centuries, the architecture evolved, enriched by elements deriving from the Italian Renaissance, from baroque, rococo, and a nationalist eclecticism. Prestigious monuments can be discovered everywhere. The churches and monasteries of Alcobaça, Batalha, Tomar, Évora, of São Roque and Graça in Lisbon, the palaces of Vila Viçosa, Queluz and Mafra, and the Bom Jesus staircase near Braga.

The Portuguese temperament is fundamentally baroque, just as the French spirit is notably classical. Lusitanian architecture has a specificity shared with the Portuguese language: a freedom of form and a profusion of ornament favoring sensibility and imagination. This constant tendency towards baroque expression came to full fruition at the end of the fifteenth century with Manueline art, conceived within the aura of wealth and glory that prevailed under the reign of Dom Manuel. At the monastery of the Hieronymites at Belém, and at those of Batalha and Tomar, the imagination of the artists as applied to late-Gothic structures seems to be heightened by the discoveries that were being made across the world at that time.

Also typically baroque was the profusion of *talha dourada* in the eighteenth century. This carved wood, gilded with the gold that was flooding in from Brazil, invaded retables and sometimes even whole churches with an incredible ardor—notably the church of São Francisco in Oporto. Soon, particularly in the north of the country, the façades

The resplendent costumes of Minho are among the most beautiful in Portugal. Brightly colored vests, skirts, and embroidered wool aprons are worn with blouses and white stockings. They can be seen in the succession of religious festivals and pilgrimages that take place from spring through late autumn, of which the best known is that of Our Lady of the Agony at Viana do Castelo. Processions follow one after the other with a festive Minhoto freedom. The shooting of fireworks and rockets called *foguete*s is accompanied by folk-dancing (right, a festival near Ponte de Lima).





According to Paul Morand: "Portugal is the kingdom of glazed clay, faïence having been for its former Arab masters what porcelain was to Cathay. Whereas in Andalusia azulejos are sober, in Portugal they are bold with brash mauves, strident yellows, scenes from legends, portraits, sea battles, poems, and landscapes. Thanks to azulejos Lusitanian history can be read in the open air." These characteristic faïence tiles are part of the Portuguese landscape. Particular care is taken with the borders of tiled panels (left, the Casa Anadia, near Mangualde).

also began to take on curves, and stonework was transformed into vigorous vegetal forms driven by a rococo dynamic. In the nineteenth century the "revivalist" style gave new life to this dynamic. This tendency towards the baroque—the *barocco*, a word created by the Portuguese, meaning "irregular pearl"—finds particular expression in the art of landscape gardening. In the south, where the climate is milder, walled gardens act as an extension of houses, and hide behind high walls. Through their artifice the azulejos of gardens often outdo Nature and colorfully dress up decorative arches and benches. The gardens of the north are more open to nature, less secret and more monumental, with granite statues, large fountains, and vegetal sculptures in the form of arcades, bowers, benches, birds, and serpents created from camellias and box.

These gardens are always in the image of some original Eden, a paradise that this profoundly religious people continually dreams of. As evidence of this you have only to travel the country's roads and watch pilgrims making their way to Fatima, the sanctuary that for many represents the mystical heart of Portugal. Here the sense of the spiritual is expressed by a religion that has managed to stay close to the people and each gesture is laden with symbolism. Here we find the *romaria* pilgrimages, processions, and *alminhas*—small folk shrines located by the sides of roads. And then there are also rosaries seen hanging in taxis, and the name *Maria*, in homage to the Virgin, which is found everywhere—on ceramics, boats, trucks, bread loaves, and even rice puddings, where it is delicately traced with cinnamon powder.

This faith is a crucial element in understanding the temperament of the Portuguese, built on immediate fraternity and openness. Here you feel that it is never a problem to be different. Could this be the secret of the Portuguese art of living?

When you put this kind of question to the Portuguese, they are amused. They tell you that this art is impossible to define, given that the Portuguese temperament is such a complex thing.

The way of living in a country with such a long-standing history and culture could perhaps best be defined as a way of living in society. The Portuguese are exquisitely polite, and many countless nuances are to be found in the *tratamento*. There are multiple ways of addressing other people in everyday speech, but it is most often and quite naturally done in the third person—a royal pleasure that makes a change from the tedious dictatorship of excessive familiarity.

In Portugal making guests feel welcome is a national tradition. Here hospitality is always marked by infinite charm. In fact this nation, driven by necessity towards foreign lands, has always had an astonishing ability to adapt. This fascination with other countries, and the ability to learn languages, make it an extraordinarily hospitable country. Already in the sixteenth century the traveler-poet Camões sang the praises of the immensity of a Portugal enlarged by dialogue with other civilizations, making his country the founding terrain of today's universalism.

An enjoyment of social life explains the Portuguese fondness for coming together at meals. Gastronomic pleasures are enhanced by this everyday ritual of sharing life's ups and downs with family or friends. Portugal's farmers and sailors are experts at supplying the best produce of land and sea, and certain dishes even mix meat with shellfish, in a highly symbolic synthesis.

Life in Portugal has many facets. The aim of this book is to present the pleasures and delights of everyday life, rather than a resumé of the country's history and its principal monuments. Let us discover these charms by traveling the country from north to south—leaving out Madeira and the Azores, which are a world unto themselves. Our journey invites us to contemplate landscapes shaped by light and color, to stroll in extraordinarily diverse towns and villages, to dream in gardens, to savor delicious foods and wines, to discover local arts and crafts, while being privileged guests in palaces, *quintas*, manor houses, and *montes* that illustrate this special lifestyle so well.