

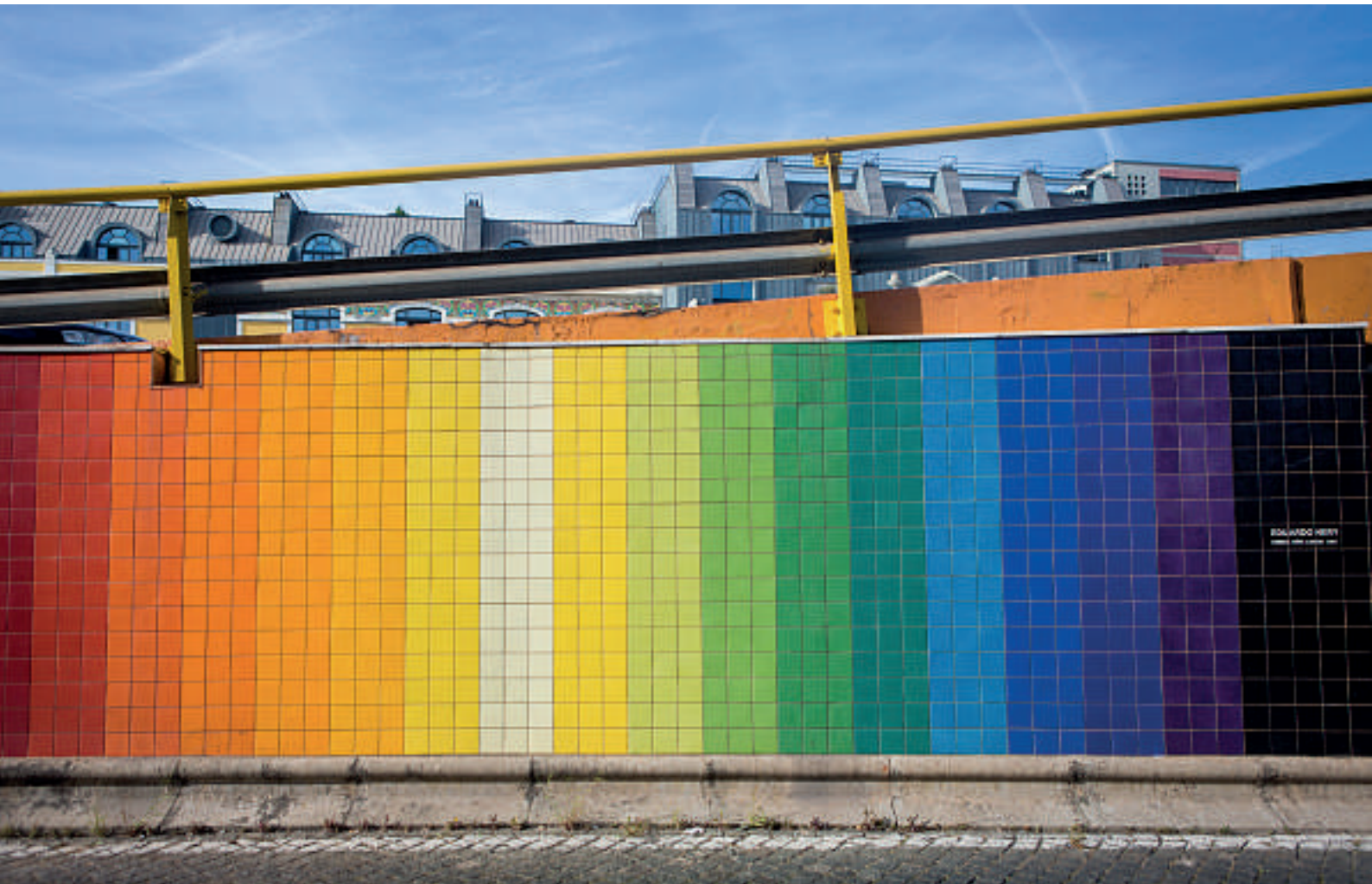


THE NEW BOHEMIAN

Lisbon has been quietly ascending the world's hip-lists for a while now - but how is it faring in these fickle times?

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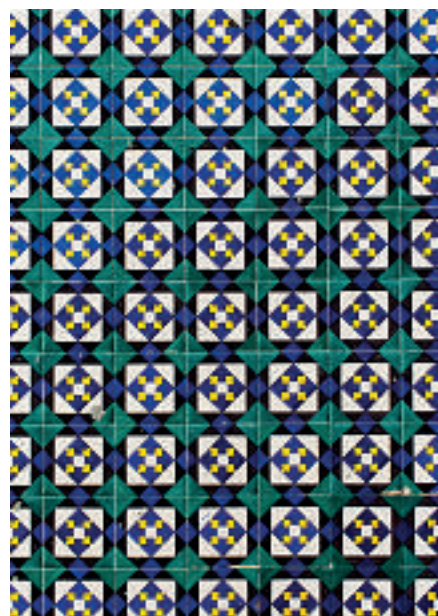
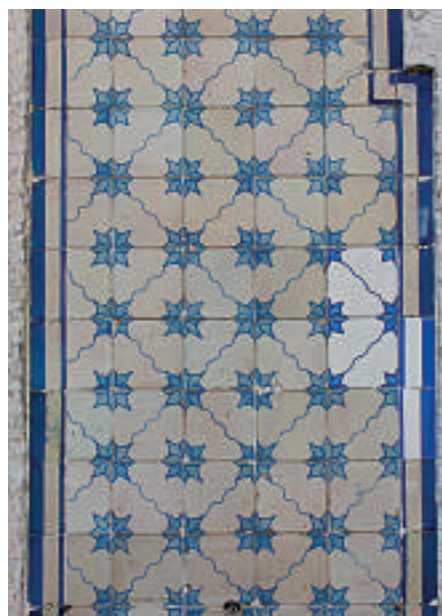


Opening pages, nighttime at the LX Factory and, by day, Max Janice and Nicole Krol. Top, somewhere, over the rainbow ... and, above, Ivete Secretes of Crew Hassan.

The phrase one hears most often repeated in relation to Lisbon is that it's the "new Berlin". It's shorthand that perfectly captures an image of a young and open-minded city with a vibrant nightlife and a slightly gritty underbelly. And as much as one would want to deny the epithet – and the potential woes the comparison brings with it – it's undeniable that Lisbon feels like the place to be right now.

Where other European cities might have become increasingly exclusionary and expensive, Lisbon feels like it has bucked the trend. Even while it undergoes a transformation that sees it at the top of every travel must-see list of 2017 – and on the receiving end of an increasing amount of investment from tech startups – Lisbon continues to be a place profoundly self-aware and connected to its own history as well as forward-thinking. From every restaurant owner to graphic designer, the question of what kind of city Lisbon wants to become has been studied and pored over.

A visit to the **MAAT** (*maat.pt*) in early April – the splendid wave-like museum of art, architecture and technology – revealed an exhibition entitled *Utopia/Dystopia*, whose central concern is the question of how a contemporary city should be. How do ✈





✈ we differentiate between utopias and dystopias?

What does a contemporary urban utopia look like? Lisbon could have the answer.

Situated facing the Tagus River on what are termed the “seven hills” of Lisbon is a city that celebrates its proximity to the sea at every opportunity. Among its many historical identities is the great nation of navigators and explorers, from Vasco de Gama to the semi-loathed (because he worked for the Spanish) Ferdinand Magellan. Every insignificant bend in the road or negligible laneway seems purposely designed to give you a view that stops you dead in your tracks. In spirit and appearance it feels like a combination of Vienna (see page 62) and Istanbul, its working port and docklands offsetting the Pombaline and Manueline architecture everywhere, a visual contrast symbolic of its identity caught between the past and the future, between grandeur and grime.

Fanning out from the central imposing square on the sea, **Praça do Comercio** (a carpark until the 1990s), Lisbon is a mass of white limestone and blue *azulejo* tiled facades that reflect its plentiful sunlight, making it literally shine for the 220 days of sun it experiences yearly. The city is taken-in best from its many, many viewpoints, its *miradouros*, which offer dazzling panoramas of the city sprawl as it stretches

past the Ponte 25 Abril and out to sea. Among the best views; those of, and from, the **Castelo de São Jorge** (castelodesaojorge.pt/en), which is visible from everywhere hovering above the city; the **Miradouro de Graça** in the characterful neighbourhood of Graça and the locals’ pungent favourite, **Santa Catarina**.

With a smallish population of almost two and a half million inhabitants, the city feels incredibly manageable, as though it will open up to you even in the space of a short visit. Everyone’s near-perfect English helps in that regard, as does its excellent public transport system, its beers priced from as low as 60c, and its plentiful and beautiful public parks and squares.

But what has really transformed Lisbon into an urban sanctuary is its unique brand of civic-mindedness. Years of isolation under the Salazar regime followed by a period of austerity since 2008 have led to the city knowing its fair share of hardship.

Opposite, Lisbon’s tiles are pretty as a picture. Top left, the undulating MAAK, an exhibition centre with fine views across the Tagus, and, above left, vintage trams squeeze their way through Lisbon’s narrow – and often super-steep – streets. Above right, a lofty LX Factory mural.



Clockwise from left and top left, social life at the LX Factory; streetside mirth from Naush Kanji, who's a long way from home - Santa Catarina, Brazil, where he owns the Verride Hotel. Next page, rooftop ambience at LX Factory.

But rather than adapting via a mercenary selling-out, Lisbon has survived through a remarkable fusion of resourcefulness and dynamism.

Rent caps and controls prevent old shops in its historic **Baixa** neighbourhood from being taken over by high-street brands. The iconic old trams that crisscross from Belém to **Alfama** are used by locals and haven't been transformed into a tourist gimmick. In historically deprived neighbourhoods such as **Intendente** and **Anjos**, a combination of tax incentives and rent subsidies implemented in order to revitalise the areas has contributed to a flourish of *associações cultural* (cultural associations). They offer members a space to hang out, eat a good meal on a donation basis and attend gigs at a reduced rate. Making use of unusual buildings for parties is far from discouraged: one nightclub, **Ministerium** (*ministerium.pt*), is situated right next to government ministries, while **Village Underground** (*vulisboa.com*) is at the back of the city-owned tram depot.

The benefits of this type of civic-mindedness are felt by Lisboetas mainly, but it's central to the allure Lisbon has for visitors and why it has become the newest bohemian capital of Europe. It fosters an environment where not having money and living well are not mutually exclusive. In spite of fears that, like

Berlin, it will pay a price for its newfound popularity, there's reason to believe that Lisbon is progressive enough to take a stand and resist disastrous change.

The Portuguese word *saudade* has no direct equivalent in English, but it describes a particular quality of melancholic nostalgia that guidebooks and tours claim is characteristic of Lisbon. For the city's great poet, Fernando Pessoa, to contemplate the past too intently was "to be today's living corpse of what yesterday was lived".

To me Lisbon exists in a contemplation of horizons – the sea, the city, the future. Somewhere in between its nostalgia-filled reverence and enterprising soul, exists a city that has captured the mood of the moment and has got as close as it gets, for me at least, to a modern-day utopia. 🍀

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LISBON ESSENTIALS

SLEEP

LOCATION, LOCATION Hotel **Alma Lusa** is ideal for exploring. In the heart of Chiado, just behind the busy Praça do Comercio, it's tucked away in the surprisingly peaceful Praça do Município. Part of a stunning row of buildings, Alma Lusa is decorated with a demure style and occasional rustic flare. Beautiful views onto the square. Rooms from €190. (Praça do Município 21, +351 21 269 7440; almalusahotels.com)

SEASIDE Situated in Belém, the Tagus-facing neighbourhood that hosts many of Lisbon's greatest attractions, the **Altis Belém Hotel & Spa** allows you to appreciate truly the importance of the sea in Lisbon life. Overlooking the marina, the hotel is perfect for an indulgent break all about well-being and kicking back. The sea views are exceptional. (Doca do Bom Sucesso, Belem, +351 21 040 0200; designhotels.com)

PALATIAL In Lisbon, you stumble upon secret gardens and palaces continually as you climb up steep paths or gaze from hilltops. **Torel Palace** is just such a place, satisfying the desire to live in a half-hidden mansion surrounded by lush gardens in the middle of central Lisbon. Beautifully restored and filled to the brim with antiques, this is a palatial hiding-place. Rooms from €199. (Rua Câmara Pestana 23, +351 21 829 0810; torelpalace.com)

EAT

LIKE A LOCAL Situated near the Miradouro, the **Botequim da Graça** was owned by famous poet Natalia Correia and was known as an artist hang-out in the 1970s. It has retained its intimate tavern-like atmosphere and serves up excellent *folhadas* and occasional poetry nights. Good for veggies, bad if you don't like smoky environments. (Largo Graça 79, +351 21 888 8511)

UNUSUAL The **Chines Clandestino** is a restaurant off Rossio Square, its entrance identifiable by its Chinese decorations. Take a seat at what is essentially the family's kitchen table and allow the oddness to wash over you. It has got a legendary reputation for serving up "genuinely Chinese" dishes depending on what and how you order. A great example of Lisbon's many diverse cuisines. (2nd Floor, Rua do Benfornoso 59)

CLASSIC Hands down the most authentic of the city's fish restaurants, queues gather round the block outside **Cervejaria Ramiro** every evening. Spreading over three floors across from the increasingly happening Intendente Square, the fish restaurant does unbelievably delicious seafood in an atmosphere of chaos and spectacle. Queue moves fast enough. (Avenida Almirante Reis 1, +351 21 885 1024)

SMART TIPS

ROOFTOP BARS Lisboetas love a good view with a drink. **Park** in Bairro Alto is an upscale-ish bar at the top of a parking lot with a view of Lisbon like nowhere else.

The **Rio Maravilha** (riomaravilha.pt) in LX Factory – a group of warehouses and buildings restored and turned into restaurants, shops, cafés, design studios and offices – is positioned under the Ponte 25 Abril with an interesting view of the boats and city beyond.

Le Chat (lechatlisboa.com) is an elegant bar in arguably Lisbon's nicest neighbourhood, Santos, in a glass cube with a great view on the docks.

SMART FLIERS

✓ **AERLINGUS** flies from Dublin to **LISBON** ten times per week.

