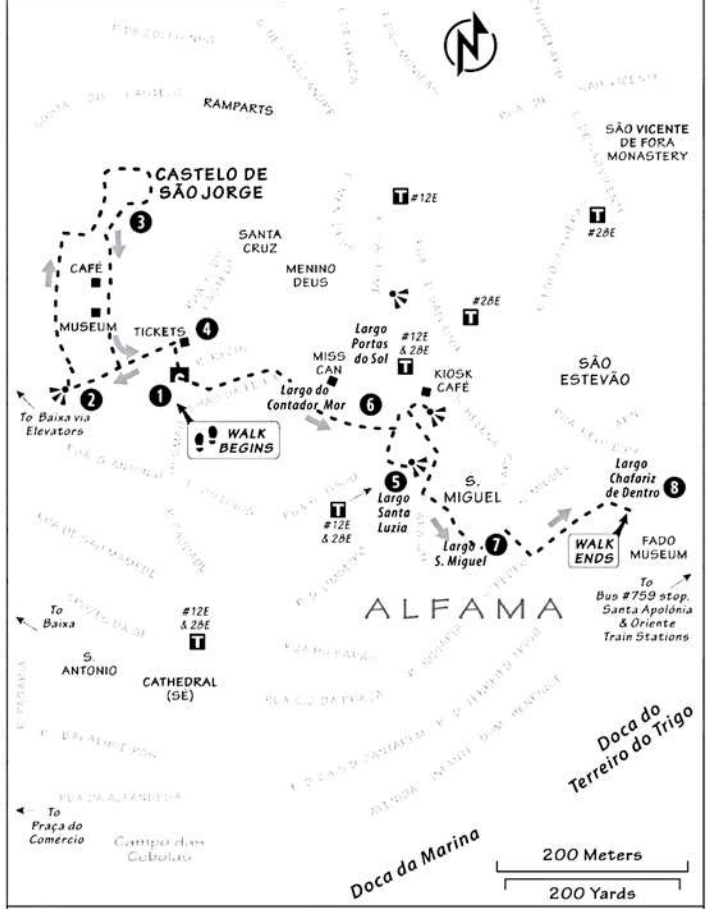


# Alfama Stroll



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## ALFAMA STROLL AND THE CASTLE

On this ▲▲▲ walk, you'll explore the Alfama, the colorful sailors' quarter that dates to the age of Visigoth occupation, from the sixth to eighth centuries AD. This was a bustling district during the Moorish period, and eventually became the home of Lisbon's fishermen and mariners (and of the poet Luís de Camões, who wrote, "Our lips meet easily, high across the narrow street"). The Alfama's tangled street plan, one of the few features of Lisbon to survive the 1755 earthquake, helps make the neighborhood a cobbled playground of Old World color. While much of the Alfama's grittiness has been cleaned up in recent years, it remains one of Europe's more photogenic neighborhoods.

**When to Go:** The best times to visit are during the busy midmorning market, or in the cooler late afternoon or early evening, when the streets teem with residents.

**Getting There:** This walk begins at the highest point in town, São Jorge Castle. Get to the castle gate by **taxi**; by **minibus #737** from Praça da Figueira; or by two free **elevator rides** up from the Baixa and then a short uphill walk. To find the elevators, head to Rua dos Fanqueiros and go through the easy-to-miss door at #178 (for location, see the map on here; you'll see faint, white lettering spelling out *elevador castelo* on the red rooftop—illuminated at night). Ride the elevator to the top floor and exit, angling left across the street and through the little square. Then head up Largo Chão do Loureiro, where you'll see the second elevator (*elevador castelo*; handy supermarket at bottom, view café and fine

panoramic terrace at top). When exiting the second elevator, simply follow brown *Castelo de S. Jorge* signs up to the castle (right, then hooking left; about 8 minutes uphill).

### ① São Jorge Castle Gate and Fortified Castle Town

The formidable gate to the castle is part of a fortification that, these days, surrounds three things: the view terrace, the small town that stood within the walls, and the castle itself. The ticket office and the turnstile are situated so that those without a ticket are kept away from the view terrace and castle proper (castle entry-€8.50, daily 9:00-21:00, Nov-Feb until 18:00).

playing, bright plastic flowers strung across the squares, and all the grilled sardines (*sardinhas grelhadas*) you can eat. The rustic paintings of festive characters (with hints of Moorish style) remind locals of past parties, and strings and wires overhead await future festival dates when the neighborhood will again be festooned with colorful streamers.

While there are plenty of traditional festivals here, the most action on the Alfama calendar is the insane, annual mountain-bike street race from the castle to the sea (which you can see hurtle by in two minutes on YouTube; search “Lisboa downtown race”).

Continue exploring downhill from here. Just below the square you’ll see A Baiuca, a recommended amateur fado restaurant. Then, a few steps farther downhill, you’ll hit the cobbled pedestrian lane, **Rua São Pedro**. This darkest of the Alfama’s streets, in nearly perpetual shade, was the logical choice for the neighborhood’s fish market. Modern hygiene requirements (which forbid outdoor stalls) killed the market, but it’s still a characteristic lane to explore.

- *Turn left and follow Rua São Pedro out of the Alfama to the square called Largo do Chafariz de Dentro and, across the street, the...*

## 8 Fado Museum

This ▲ museum tells the story of fado in English—with a great chance to hear these wailing fisherwomen’s blues. Three levels of wall murals show three generations of local fado stars, and the audioguide lets you listen to the Billie Holidays of Portugal (€5, includes audioguide, Tue-Sun 11:00-17:00, closed Mon, Largo do Chafariz de Dentro, +351 218 823 470, [www.museudofado.pt](http://www.museudofado.pt)).

- *This walk is over. To get back downtown (or to Praça do Comércio, where the next walk starts), walk a block to the main waterfront drag and cruise-ship harbor (facing the museum, go left around it) where busy Avenida Infante Dom Henrique leads back to Praça do Comércio (to the right). While it’s a 15-minute*

*walk or quick taxi ride to Praça do Comércio, just to the left is a bus stop; hop on any bus for two stops, and you’re there in moments. (Also, bus #759 goes on to Praça dos Restauradores.)*

If money is tight, the castle and view are skippable—the castle is just stark, rebuilt ruins from the Salazar era, and while the hill-capping park has a commanding view, there are other fine views coming up...just jump ahead to stop #4 on this walk.

- *If you decide to go in, follow the cobbles uphill past the first lanes of old Lisbon to the yellow ticket office, and then into the...*

## 2 Miradouro de São Jorge (Viewpoint)

Enjoy the grand view. The Rio Tejo is one of five main rivers in Portugal, four of which come from Spain. (Only the Mondego River, which passes through Coimbra, originates inside Portuguese territory, in the Serra de Estrela.) While Portugal and Spain generally have very good relations, a major sore point is the control of all this water. From here, you have a good view of the Golden Gate-like 25th of April Bridge, which leads south to the Cristo Rei statue. Past the bridge, on a clear day, you can barely see the Monument to the Discoveries and the Belém Tower (under and past the bridge on north side).



Look up at the statue marking the center of this terrace. **Afonso Henriques**, a warlord with a strong personal army, was the founder of Portugal. In 1147, he besieged this former Moorish castle until the hungry, thirsty residents gave in. Every Portuguese schoolkid knows the story of this man—a Reconquista hero and their country's first king.

Stroll inland along the **ramparts** for a more extensive view of Pombal's Lisbon, described in a circa 1963, tiled panorama-chart (which lacks the big 25th of April Bridge—it was built in 1969). From Praça do Comércio on the water, the grid streets of the Baixa lead up to the tree-lined Avenida da Liberdade and the big Edward VII Park, on the far right. Locate city landmarks, such as the Elevador de Santa Justa (the Eiffel-style elevator in front of the ruined Convento do Carmo) and the sloping white roof of Rossio station.

• *Continue walking along the viewpoint, passing several old cannons. Just after going under the second arch (just before the café terrace), take a right into the mostly ruined courtyard of...*

### ③ São Jorge Castle (Castelo de São Jorge)

While the first settlements here go back to the 7th century BC, this castle dates to the 11th century when Moors built it to house their army and provide a safe haven for their elites in times of siege. After Afonso Henriques took the castle in 1147, Portugal's royalty lived here for several centuries. The sloping walls—typical of castles from this period—were designed to withstand 14th-century cannonballs. In the 16th century, the kings moved to their palace on Praça do Comércio, and the castle became a military garrison. Despite suffering major damage in the 1755 earthquake, the castle later served another stint as a military garrison. In the 20th century, it became a national monument.

The strolling **peacocks** remind visitors that exotic birds like these came to Lisbon originally as trophies of the great 16th-century voyages and discoveries. (Today the jaded birds ignore the

residents are under the watchful eye of real estate developers. Many long-term residents have been evicted due to landlords claiming “necessary reforms,” only to sell the entire building for development as tourist housing. In just one generation, the Alfama is feeling the pressure of gentrification.



Traditionally the neighborhood here was tightly knit, with families routinely sitting down to communal dinners in the streets. Feuds, friendships, and gossip were all intense. Historically, when a woman's husband died, she would wear black for the rest of her life—a tradition that's just about gone.

The Alfama hosts Lisbon's most popular outdoor party dedicated to St. Anthony (whose feast day is June 13, but the party goes on all month). Imagine tables set up everywhere, bands

each other in their romantic shabbiness, and the air drips with laundry and the smell of clams. Get lost. Poke aimlessly, peek through windows, buy a fish. Locals hang plastic water bags from windows in the summer to keep away the flies. Favorite saints decorate doors to protect families. St. Peter, protector of fishermen, is big in the Alfama. Churches are generally closed, since they share a priest. As children have very little usable land for a good soccer game, this square doubles as the neighborhood playground.



The tiny balconies were limited to “one-and-a-half hands” in width. A strictly enforced health initiative was designed to keep the town open and well-ventilated. If you see carpets hanging out to dry, it means a laundry is nearby. Because few homes have their own, every neighborhood has a public laundry and bathroom. Until recently, in the early morning hours, the streets were busy with residents in pajamas, heading for these public baths. Today, many younger people are choosing to live elsewhere, lured by modern conveniences unavailable here, and old flats with older

tourists and cry as if to remember some long-forgotten castle captives.)



Bear left to find the **inner castle**—the boxy, crenelated fort in the middle. There’s little to see inside the empty shell, but it’s fun to climb up the steep stone steps to scramble around the top of the ramparts and towers, with ever-changing views of Lisbon, the Alfama, and the castle itself. (Up top, you’ll also find a thrillingly low-tech camera obscura, which is demonstrated twice hourly—times and languages posted.)

As you explore the castle’s inner sanctum, imagine it lined with simple wooden huts. The imposing part of the castle is the exterior. The builders’ strategy was to focus on making the castle appear so formidable that its very existence was enough to discourage any attack. If you know where to look, you can still see stones laid by ancient Romans, Visigoths, and Moors. The Portuguese made the most substantial contribution, with a wall reaching all the way to the river to withstand anticipated Spanish attacks.



When finished, head back out the inner castle gate, and continue straight ahead toward the castle's entrance. On your right, you'll pass the café, then the humble **museum**. This houses archaeological finds from the 7th century BC to the 18th century, with emphasis on the Moorish period in the 11th and 12th centuries. You'll also see 18th-century tiles from an age when Portugal was flush with money from the gold, diamonds, and sugarcane of its colony Brazil. While simple, the museum has nice displays and descriptions.

- *Leave the castle. Across the ramp from the castle entrance is a tidy little castle district, worth a wander for its peaceful lanes and a chance to enjoy the Manueline architecture.*

#### 4 Castle Town

Just outside the castle turnstile is the tiny neighborhood within the castle walls built to give Moorish elites refuge from sieges and, later, for Portuguese nobles to live close to their king. While it's partly taken over by cute shops and cafés, if you wander up Rua de Santa Cruz do Castelo (to the left as you exit the castle) and stroll into its back lanes, you can enjoy a peaceful bit of Portugal's past. (Make a big clockwise loop back to where you entered—you can't get lost, as it's within the walls and there's only one way in or out.) Most of the houses date from the Middle Ages. Poking around, go on a cultural scavenger hunt. Look for: 1) clever, space-efficient, triangular contraptions for drying clothes (hint: see the glass bottle bottoms in the wall used to prop the sticks out when in use); 2) Benfica soccer team flag (that's the team favored by Lisbon's working class—a hint that the upper class no longer chooses to live here); 3) short doors that were tall enough for people back when these houses were built; and 4) noble family crests over doors—dating to when important families wanted to be close to the king.



The massive eighth-century **fortified wall** (on the right of the staircase) once marked the boundary of Moorish Lisbon. Consider that the great stones on your right were stacked here over a thousand years ago. At the bottom of the wall, continue downhill, then turn left at the railing...and go down more stairs.

- *Explore downhill from here. The main thoroughfare, a concrete stepped lane called **Escadinhas de São Miguel**, funnels you to the Alfama's main square.*

#### 7 Heart of the Alfama

This square, **Largo de São Miguel**, is the best place to observe a slice of Alfama life. When city leaders rebuilt the rest of Lisbon after the 1755 quake, this neighborhood was left out and consequently retains its tangled medieval streets.

If you've got the time, **explore the Alfama** from this central square. Its urban-jungle roads are squeezed into confusing alleys—the labyrinthine street plan was designed to frustrate invaders. What was defensive then is atmospheric now. Bent houses comfort

system, on leather straps. The grand stairway leads upstairs past 18th-century glazed tiles (Chinese-style blue-and-white was in vogue) into a world of colonial riches. Portuguese aristocrats had a special taste for “Indo-Portuguese” decorative arts: objects of exotic woods such as teak or rosewood, and inlaid with shell or ivory, made along the sea routes of the age.



From here, it's downhill all the way. From Largo das Portas do Sol (the plaza with the statue of local patron St. Vincent, near the kiosk café on the terrace), go down the loooong **stairs** (Rua Norberto de Araújo, between the church and the catwalk). A few steps down on the left, under the big arch, notice the public WCs and the fun, vivid **cartoon mural** illustrating Lisbon's history (if you know the key dates, you can enjoy it even without understanding Portuguese).

When you're ready to leave, make your way back to where you started, and head down the ramp to return to the real world. On your way out, just before exiting the lower gate, notice the little statue in the niche on your right. This is the castle's namesake: **St. George** (São Jorge; pronounced "sow ZHOR-zh") hailed from Turkey and was known for fighting valiantly (he's often portrayed slaying a dragon). When the Christian noble Afonso Henriques called for help to eliminate the Moors from his newly founded country of Portugal, the Crusaders who helped him prayed to St. George...and won.

• *Exit the castle complex grounds through the large archway, follow the castle wall, then turn right down the second street, Travessa do Chão da Feira. Follow this striped lane downhill through **Largo do Contador Mor**. This small, car-clogged square*

has a Parisian ambience, some touristy outdoor restaurants serving grilled sardines, and the inviting little **Miss Can** shop and eatery—where traditional Portuguese canned fish gets a modern twist (for ideas on lunching here, see here).

Exit the square at the bottom, continue downhill 50 yards farther, pass the trolley tracks, and jog right around the little church to reach a superb Alfama viewpoint at...

### 5 Largo Santa Luzia

From this square (with a stop for trolleys #12E and #28E), admire the panoramic view from the small terrace, **Miradouro de Santa Luzia**, where old-timers play cards and Romeos strum their guitars amid lots of tiles.

In the distance to the left, the **Vasco da Gama Bridge** (opened in 1998) connects Lisbon with new, modern bedroom communities south of the river.



At your feet sprawls the Alfama neighborhood. We'll head that way soon, to explore its twisty lanes. Where the Alfama hits the

river, notice the recently built embankment. It reclaimed 100 yards of land from the river to make a modern port, used these days to accommodate Lisbon's growing cruise ship industry.

On the wall of the church behind you, notice two 18th-century **tile panels**. The one on the left shows the preearthquake Praça do Comércio, with the royal palace (on the left). It was completely destroyed in the 1755 quake. The other tile (10 steps away, to the right) depicts the reconquest of Lisbon from the Moors by Afonso Henriques. You can see the Portuguese hero, Martim Moniz, who let himself be crushed in the castle door to hold it open for his comrades. Notice the panicky Moors inside realizing that their castle is about to be breached by invading Crusaders. It was a bad day for the Moors. (A stairway here leads up to a tiny view terrace with a café.)

For an even better city view, hike back around the church and walk out to the seaside end of the **Miradouro das Portas do Sol** catwalk. The huge, frilly building dominating the ridge on the far left is the Monastery of São Vicente, constructed around 1600 by the Spanish king Philip II, who left his mark here with this tribute to St. Vincent. A few steps away, next to a statue of St. Vincent, is a kiosk café where you can enjoy perhaps the most scenic cup of coffee in town.

• *Across the street from the café, you'll find the...*

### 6 Museum and School of Portuguese Decorative Arts

The Museum and School of Portuguese Decorative Arts (Museu Escola de Artes Decorativas Portuguesas) offers a stroll through a richly decorated, aristocratic household. The palace, filled with 15th- to 18th-century fine art, offers the best chance for visitors to experience what a noble home looked like during Lisbon's glory days (€4, Wed-Mon 10:00-17:00, closed Tue, Largo das Portas do Sol 2, +351 218 814 640, [www.fress.pt](http://www.fress.pt)). Inside, a coach on the ground level is "Berlin style," with a state-of-the-art suspension