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LISBON

10 Best Museums in Lisbon

10 PHOTOS

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All you ever wanted to know about fado, azulejos, and more.

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Lisbon's museums really let you dive into the cultural heritage of Portugal, whether you're at the Museu do Fado or the National Coach Museum (about a history of the horse-drawn carriage, not the bag slung over your shoulder). As a bonus, they are often set in historic buildings that are just as eye-popping as the pieces on display. Put these 10 museums at the top of your cultural to-do list. You'll want to spend a couple hours at each exploring their treasures.

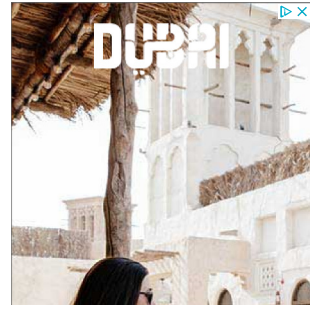


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ACTIVITY

National Azulejo Museum →

Azulejos, or glazed tiles, have long played a role in Portugal's cultural history. Just prowl around the streets of Lisbon and you'll see as much. This museum, housed on once-sacred grounds, delves into their rich legacy, wooing visitors by some 300 beautifully ornate patterns. Highlights include the blue, green, yellow, and white azulejo with an armillary sphere—the so called "heaven and earth machine," an astronomical instrument that appears on the Portuguese flag. There's also the must-see Our Lady of Life panel, rumored to have been made by painter Marçal de Matos in the late 16th century.



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Calouste Gulbenkian Museum →

Oil magnate and philanthropist Calouste Gulbenkian started amassing art at a young age, and his eclectic collection, now more than 6,000 pieces strong, spans ancient Egypt, Japan, and contemporary Portugal. The Founder's Collection has artifacts from Mesopotamia, the Far East, and 18th-century France. There are works by Ruben, Degas, and Rembrandt, along with sculptures, paintings, painted tiles, porcelain tableware, and illuminated parchments from the 16th and 17th centuries. The Modern Collection, by contrast, focuses on venerable Portuguese artists like Almada Negreiros and Vieira da Silva.

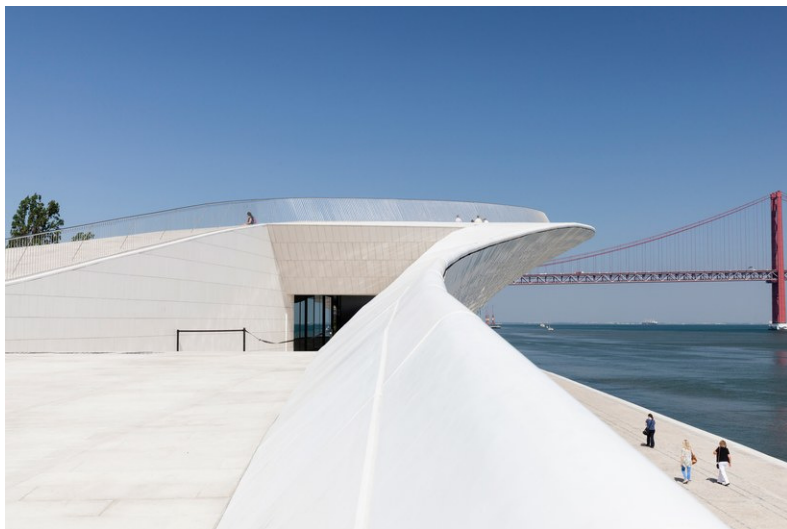


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MUDE (Museu do Design e da Moda) →

No word yet when MUDE will finally complete its renovation, but MUDE Outside, a series of pop-ups paying tribute to the intersection of design and culture, will keep us sated while we're waiting for the dramatic revamp of this fashion and design museum, set in an old bank. The museum pre-reno had more than 2,000 objects—a mix of clothing, accessories, footwear, furniture, and objects—that touch on themes like luxury and counterculture. Past exhibits featured Alexander McQueen, Balenciaga, and Jean-Paul Gaultier.



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Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology (MAAT) →

The main reason to visit the Museum of Art, Architecture, and Technology (MAAT)—a modern cross-cultural hub that brings together visual arts, urban affairs, technology, and science—is the setting. London-based firm AL_A's undulating building is covered in white ceramic tiles and capped with a rooftop terrace. A landscape park designed by Vladimir Djurovic links this slick structure to the early 20th-century Central Power Station, now an exhibition space. Together, the buildings create a powerful contrast of old and new.



José Frade/Courtesy Museu do Fado

ACTIVITY

Museu do Fado →

If you've been in Lisbon for a minute, you've probably heard fado music somewhere—in a restaurant or cafe, or a bar dedicated to the brooding tunes. It's one of Portugal's cultural legacies. Get to know the art form with an immersive experience at this Alfama museum: Photographs, posters, musical instruments, and other artifacts chart the rise of fado from its 19th-century roots to today. Look for José Malhoa's dreamy portrait *O Fado*, Constantino Fernandes' lively depiction of port life *O Marinheiro*, and an ode to the Portuguese guitar.



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National Museum of Ancient Art →

Treasures abound at the National Museum of Ancient Art, where paintings, sculptures, furniture, ceramics, textiles, gold, and silverware capture Portugal's riveting history from the Middle Ages through the 19th century. If you can make peace with the fact that you won't see the museum in its entirety, forge ahead with a visit. Do leave time for the *Panels of St. Vincent*, a 15th-century sextet of paintings by Nuno Gonçalves; the 16th-century ivory salt cellar that survived its journey from the West Coast of Africa to Portugal; and Albrecht Dürer's portrait of St. Jerome.



David Rato/Courtesy Museu Coleção Berardo

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Berardo Collection Museum →

Next to the Jeronimos Monastery, the Berardo Collection Museum is the showstopper of the Belém Cultural Center. The modern and contemporary artworks on display here all belong to José Manuel Rodrigues Berardo, a billionaire entrepreneur and philanthropist. There's only room to showcase 900 of Berardo's pieces—by more than 500 artists—and they range from Minimalism and Conceptualism to Cubism and Surrealism. Roy Lichtenstein, Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Francis Bacon, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Cindy Sherman, and Andy Warhol are all impressively represented.

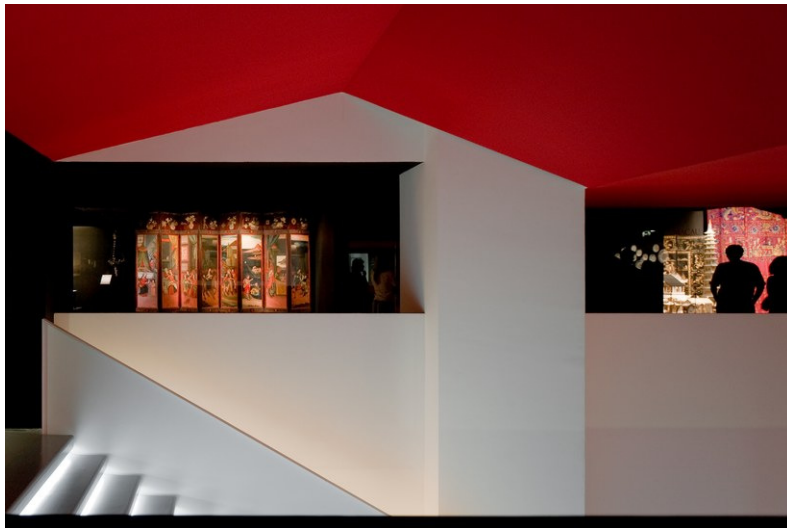


Courtesy Casa Museu Medeiros e Almeida

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Casa-Museu Medeiros e Almeida →

António de Medeiros e Almeida was a wealthy Portuguese entrepreneur who first made his fortune in automobiles and aviation. He then went on to fill the palatial home he shared with his wife with beautiful, historic objects, eventually leading to the creation of the Medeiros e Almeida Foundation in 1972. Set close to Avenida da Liberdade, the mansion features 27 galleries throughout two wings: the well-preserved old quarters where the couple once dwelled, and the newer, more gallery-like space built in the 1970s.



Fernando Guerra/Courtesy Museum of the Orient

ACTIVITY

Museum of the Orient →

Illuminating a dialogue between East and West, Museum of the Orient opened in 2008 as a project of the non-profit organization Fundação Oriente. Many of the featured works here address Portugal's influence on Asia, while some 13,000 pieces comprising the Kwok On Collection chronicle the performing arts in the region stretching from Turkey to Japan. There are also paintings, sculptures, Chinese ceramics, and artifacts from Timor; objects date from the Neolithic era through the beginning of the 20th century.



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National Coach Museum →

Horse-drawn coaches symbolize a lost, beautiful art form, but they get the limelight at the National Coach Museum in Belém. The historic collection, featuring examples from around the world, makes it one of Lisbon's most sought-after cultural sites. World, state, and promenade vehicles from the 16th to 19th centuries chronicle the evolution of coaches in the pre-automobile era. Peer at such fanciful creations as Queen Maria Francisca of Savoy-Nemour's circa-17th century ceremonial ride and the more modern 19th-century sedan chair, typically carried by footmen via leather straps.