

LAKE TO LATITUDE

PORTUGAL, SPAIN & A EUROPEAN FINALE

Jenn & Brendin's Europe Adventure

Porto • Douro Valley • Lisbon • Sintra • Madrid • Amsterdam • Paris



Porto, Portugal — the journey begins above the Douro.

The current uploaded ZIP contains seven Koh Lanta images rather than Europe photographs. Those unrelated images are intentionally not used in this edition.

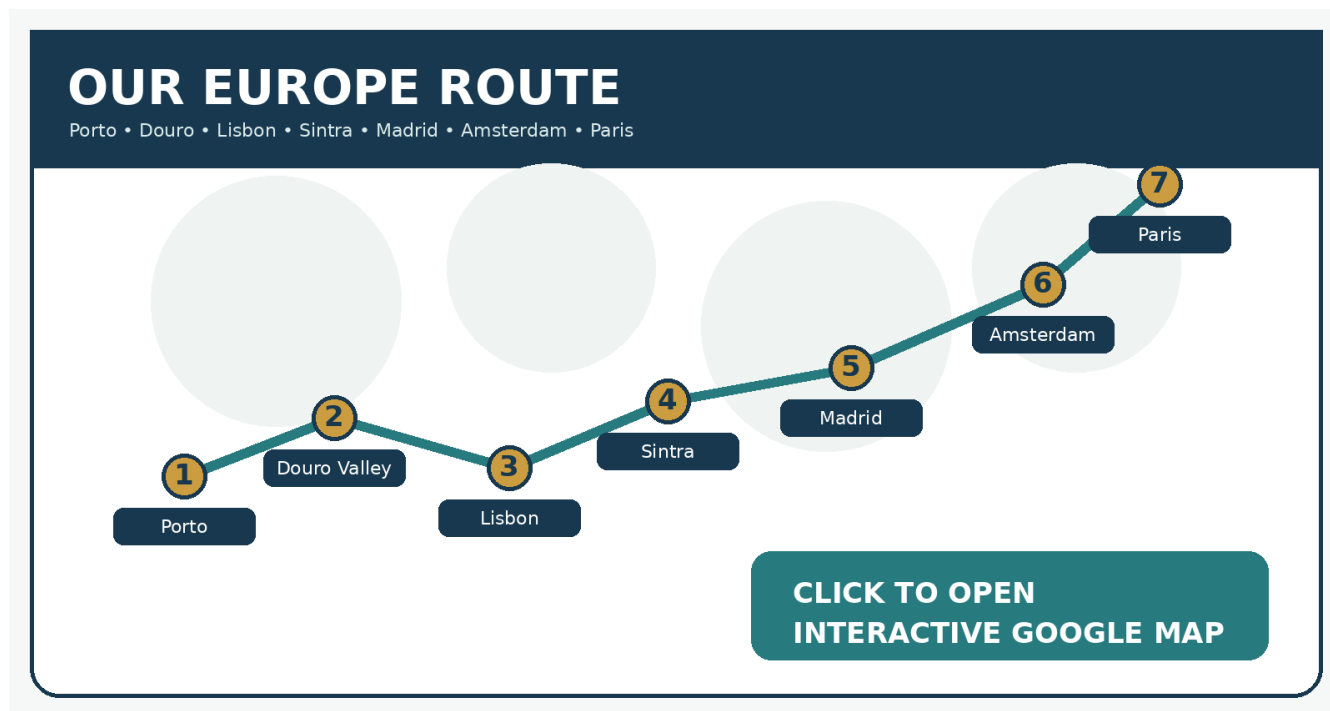
THE STORY BEHIND THE JOURNEY

This was not a trip built around one city or one kind of experience. It moved from the tiled streets and riverfront energy of Porto to the vineyard terraces of the Douro, then south to Lisbon for history, food and New Year's Eve. From there, the journey crossed into Spain for several days in Madrid before ending with an unexpected European bookend in Amsterdam and Paris.

The strength of this itinerary is contrast. Porto gives you a compact historic centre and a gateway to wine country. Lisbon adds neighborhoods, viewpoints, monuments and a major celebration. Sintra changes the scenery completely, while Madrid turns the trip toward grand museums, royal history and big-city culture. The final Amsterdam stop is brief and unconventional, but that is part of what makes the journey memorable.

TRIP AT A GLANCE

THE ROUTE



[CLICK THE MAP TO OPEN THE FULL INTERACTIVE GOOGLE MAP](#)

YVR → Paris → Porto → Douro Valley → Lisbon → Sintra → Madrid → Amsterdam → Paris → YVR

[Open the interactive Google Maps route in your browser](#)

The graphic is an editorial route overview. The Google Maps link is the interactive route.

THE ROUTE WE TOOK

YVR → Paris → Porto → Douro Valley → Lisbon → Sintra → Madrid → Amsterdam → Paris → YVR

The itinerary deliberately uses a small number of bases. Porto is the northern anchor, Lisbon the Portuguese centrepiece, and Madrid the Spanish base. That keeps hotel changes manageable while still allowing major day trips and a final one-night European detour.

PORTO • THE GRANITE CITY ON THE DOURO

Where we stayed: Moon & Sun Porto.

Our first full destination was Porto, reached after flying from Paris on December 27. The itinerary immediately leaned into the city's historic core: Clérigos Tower, the Portuguese Centre of Photography, Porto Cathedral, Church of São Francisco, Palácio da Bolsa, Cais da Ribeira and the Dom Luís Bridge.

That is a strong first-day strategy because Porto rewards walking. The historic centre compresses major landmarks into a relatively small area, with steep streets, tiled façades, river views and viewpoints appearing almost constantly.

Our recommendation: do not treat Porto as simply a stop before the Douro. Walk the riverfront, cross the bridge, look back toward Ribeira, and leave room for a long Portuguese meal.



Porto in three frames: the Douro waterfront, historic wine cellars and a tasting-room experience.

PORTO FOOD • WHAT TO EAT

Porto is a city where food is part of the experience rather than an afterthought. A first-timer should look for francesinha, fresh fish and seafood, cod dishes and local pastries.

Lake to Latitude food strategy: • Try one classic Porto specialty rather than spending every meal chasing tourist-famous restaurants. • Pair dinner with Portuguese wine or a local beer. • Save room for a pastry and coffee during a walking day. • If crossing to Vila Nova de Gaia, combine the river view with a Port tasting.

DOURO VALLEY • OUR WINE-COUNTRY DAY

December 28 was one of the trip's defining experiences: a full-day guided Douro Valley wine tour with winery visits, tastings, a traditional Portuguese lunch and a river cruise.

This is exactly the kind of excursion that makes sense as a guided day trip from Porto. The Douro landscape is not just scenic countryside; it is a historic wine landscape shaped by terraces, vineyards and the river.

What made the itinerary work: the tour combined scenery, wine education, food and transportation in one day. That removes the stress of navigating winding valley roads while still giving you the experience of the region.

Lake to Latitude recommendation: if wine is a priority, keep the Douro as a full-day commitment. Do not reduce it to a quick photo stop.



Douro Valley: vineyard country, Port-wine heritage and a full day of tasting and scenery.

PORTO • DAY TWO AND THE CULTURAL SIDE

The second Porto day followed a self-guided city itinerary and shifted toward art and culture: Serralves Art Museum, Jardim do Palácio de Cristal, Soares dos Reis National Museum, Carmo Church and Livraria Lello.

This is a smart contrast to the first day's architectural circuit. Serralves brings modern art and green space into the trip, while Carmo and Lello return you to Porto's historic and literary personality.

LISBON • THE CITY THAT CHANGES PACE

On December 30, we took the morning train from Porto to Lisbon and checked into behotelisboa. The afternoon itinerary focused on Castelo de São Jorge, Alfama, Miradouro de São Pedro de Alcântara, Museu São Roque and Sacred Art Museum, Bairro Alto and the Arco Triunfal da Rua Augusta.

Lisbon works best when you accept that the city is built vertically. Hills, stairways, viewpoints and neighborhood changes are part of the experience.

Recommendation: build each Lisbon day around a neighborhood or corridor instead of zig-zagging across the city.



Lisbon: viewpoints, classic yellow trams and the colourful rhythm of the city.

LISBON • BELÉM & THE AGE OF DISCOVERIES

December 31 brought Jerónimos Monastery, Centro Cultural de Belém, Padrão dos Descobrimentos, Belém Tower and the Aquário Vasco da Gama before the big event of the trip: New Year's Eve in the main square with a street celebration.

Belém is a natural half-day block. Jerónimos and Belém Tower anchor the district's maritime-history story.

And then there was New Year's Eve. Instead of treating the holiday as something separate from the itinerary, the trip built the celebration directly into the Lisbon stay. That is exactly how a good long trip should work: sightseeing during the day, then a completely different version of the city after dark.

LISBON • FOOD & THE NEW YEAR

Lisbon is one of the easiest cities on this itinerary to build a food-focused day around. Bacalhau, grilled fish, seafood, petiscos, bifanas, pastries and wine all deserve space in the plan.

One essential Belém stop is Pastéis de Belém, whose history is tied to the nearby Jerónimos monastery and whose traditional recipe dates to the 19th century.

Lake to Latitude recommendation: make food part of the route. Instead of choosing a restaurant far from your sightseeing, build lunch and snack stops into the neighborhood you're exploring.

JANUARY 1 • RECOVERY DAY

January 1 was intentionally lighter: recovery time plus a half-day Lisbon Story Centre visit.

That is one of the smartest pacing decisions in the itinerary. After a major New Year's celebration, forcing another full sightseeing marathon would make the trip feel like work. A recovery day protects the energy needed for the final Portuguese day trip and the move into Spain.

SINTRA • THE FAIRYTALE DAY TRIP

January 2 was the major Lisbon excursion: a guided small-group day trip to Sintra, Quinta da Regaleira and Pena Palace.

The itinerary is strong because it pairs two very different experiences. Regaleira is about gardens, grottoes, lakes and the mysterious landscape; Pena Palace is the colorful Romantic-era showpiece.

The biggest mistake would be trying to see everything in Sintra in one rushed day. One day is enough for a focused highlights tour, not the entire region.

Lake to Latitude recommendation: a guided tour is particularly useful here because logistics, timed entries, hills and crowds can otherwise consume the day.



Sintra: the village streets, Quinta da Regaleira and its famous Initiation Well.

SINTRA • WHAT TO EAT

Sintra has its own food identity. The two specialties worth seeking out are queijadas and travesseiros.

Think of them as part of the destination rather than simply dessert: a coffee and pastry stop helps break up a long day of walking through palace grounds.

MADRID • A CHANGE OF SCALE

January 3 began with a flight from Lisbon to Madrid and a check-in at Hotel Sardinero Madrid. The first half-day focused on the Royal Basilica of San Francisco el Grande, Almudena Cathedral, Royal Palace, Monasterio de la Encarnación and Plaza Mayor.

Madrid immediately changes the rhythm of the trip. Porto and Lisbon are defined by hills, riverfronts and compact historic streets. Madrid feels broader, grander and more museum-driven.

MADRID • THE GREAT MUSEUM DAY

January 4 was the major culture day: Palacio de Comunicaciones, Puerta de Alcalá, Museo Thyssen, Museo Nacional del Prado and Parque del Retiro.

This is one of the strongest single-day combinations in the itinerary because the Prado, Thyssen and Retiro sit within Madrid's broader Paseo del Prado / Landscape of Light cultural area.

Recommendation: do not attempt to 'finish' the Prado. Pick a manageable list of highlights, then get outside and walk the boulevard and Retiro.



Madrid: the Royal Palace, the Prado and the grand scale of the Spanish capital.

MADRID • ROYAL HISTORY, MARKETS & LOCAL RHYTHM

January 5 broadened the Madrid experience with the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Museo del Ferrocarril, El Rastro and Iglesia de San Isidro.

That mix is important. It prevents Madrid from becoming a museum-only destination. El Rastro adds street life and browsing, while the railway museum and San Isidro academy give the day a different cultural texture.

For travelers building their own Madrid itinerary, the city is especially good when you alternate major institutions with neighborhoods, markets, parks and long meals.

JANUARY 6 • MADRID TO AMSTERDAM

January 6 was intentionally flexible: a half-day city adventure followed by the flight to Amsterdam.

After arriving in Amsterdam, the plan was deliberately unconventional: luggage in an airport locker, train into the city, explore from roughly 9 p.m. to 3 a.m., then return to the airport for the early flight.

For a future version of this trip, I would treat Amsterdam as a bonus rather than a destination requiring a checklist. With such limited time, the value is in experiencing the atmosphere of the city at night rather than trying to 'see Amsterdam' in a few hours.

JANUARY 7 • PARIS & HOME

The final morning involved an early Amsterdam-to-Paris flight followed by the Paris-to-Vancouver flight. Paris was therefore a transit point rather than a sightseeing stop.

That distinction matters when publishing the route: Paris belongs on the overall travel map, but it should not be presented as a destination you toured.

WHAT MADE THIS ITINERARY WORK

1. Three-night Porto base: enough time for the city plus a full Douro day. 2. Four-night Lisbon base: enough time for the city, New Year's Eve and Sintra. 3. Three-night Madrid base: enough time for royal history, major museums and neighborhoods. 4. Guided day trips where logistics matter most: Douro and Sintra. 5. A recovery day after New Year's Eve. 6. A flexible final Madrid day before the flight to Amsterdam.

WHAT WE WOULD RECOMMEND TO OTHER TRAVELLERS

Best wine experience: Douro Valley. Best historic-city walk: Porto's Ribeira and upper historic centre. Best Lisbon day trip: Sintra. Best celebration: New Year's Eve in Lisbon. Best museum pairing: Prado + Thyssen. Best green-space break: Retiro. Best food-city strategy: Lisbon and Porto both reward neighborhood-based eating. Best logistical choice: use guided tours for Douro and Sintra rather than trying to self-drive both on a tight schedule.

PACKING & PRACTICAL NOTES

This is a winter Europe itinerary, so the packing list should prioritize layers, a waterproof outer layer, comfortable walking shoes and a compact day bag. Porto, Lisbon and Madrid all involve substantial walking, and Sintra adds hills and uneven paths.

Build in weather flexibility. The itinerary has outdoor viewpoints, gardens and walking-heavy days, but enough museums and indoor attractions to rebalance a day when conditions change.

THE LAKE TO LATITUDE TAKEAWAY

The best part of this journey is the progression. Porto begins with atmosphere and architecture. The Douro adds landscape, food and wine. Lisbon brings neighborhoods, history and one unforgettable New Year's celebration. Sintra changes the scenery again. Madrid finishes the main trip with art, royal history and city energy. Then Amsterdam and Paris turn the journey home into one last European chapter.

It is not the shortest possible route through Portugal and Spain—and that is exactly why it works as a Lake to Latitude story. It is a trip built around experiences rather than simply collecting destinations.

PHOTO EDITORIAL — THE PERSONAL PHOTOGRAPHS

The new Europe photo ZIP has now been matched to the itinerary and the strongest personal photographs are integrated throughout the story.

PORTO — skyline, Ribeira, Dom Luís Bridge, Clérigos, Cathedral, São Francisco, Palácio da Bolsa, streets, food and hotel.

DOURO — vineyards, river, wineries, tastings, lunch, cruise and viewpoints.

LISBON — Alfama, Castelo de São Jorge, viewpoints, Belém, Jerónimos, Belém Tower, New Year's Eve and couple photos.

SINTRA — Quinta da Regaleira, Pena Palace, gardens, town and couple photos.

MADRID — Royal Palace, Almudena, Plaza Mayor, Prado, Thyssen, Retiro, Cibeles, El Rastro, San Isidro and couple photos.

AMSTERDAM — any city/night photographs from the brief stop.

PARIS — only if you want a transit/city image included; it will not be portrayed as sightseeing.

Photo note: several additional camera-roll images appear to show places such as Toledo and Segovia that are not listed in the supplied itinerary. They were deliberately held out of the main route.

RESEARCH SOURCES

Visit Portugal — Porto: <https://www.visitportugal.com/en/NR/exeres/026893C2-A486-4211-9FF3-CD145E9163BA>

Visit Portugal — Douro Valley: <https://www.visitportugal.com/en/destinos/porto-e-norte/73746>

Visit Portugal — Sintra: <https://www.visitportugal.com/en/destinos/lisboa-regiao/73779>

Visit Lisboa — Lisbon: <https://www.visitlisboa.com/en/p/why-lisbon>

Visit Lisboa — Pastéis de Belém: <https://www.visitlisboa.com/en/places/pasteis-de-belem>

Tourism Madrid — Madrid: <https://www.esmadrid.com/en/destination/madrid>

Tourism Madrid — Paseo del Prado: <https://www.esmadrid.com/en/tourist-information/paseo-prado>

Tourism Madrid — Royal Palace: <https://www.esmadrid.com/en/tourist-information/royal-palace>

Publishing note: affiliate links are intentionally omitted, and no costs are invented where the itinerary does not supply them.