

Sunseekers

THIS YEAR THE BUZZ IS ALL ABOUT PORTUGAL AND ITS NEW DELUXE HOTSPOTS. WE SENT TWO LUCKY MAMAS TO CHECK THEM OUT

Why go?

With its 300 days a year of sunshine, 850km of beaches and a capital city voted one of the world's top ten by Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2017 (lonelyplanet.com), now is the time to visit Portugal. From the sandy Algarve in the south, through the cultural capital region of Lisbon in the middle, and up to the mountainous port wine country in the north, family-friendly Portugal is perfect for travelling with tots in tow. Whether you're city adventurers or beach bums, it offers a sun-drenched holiday for everyone. If you're a first-timer to Portugal, can we suggest Lisbon for starters? Fancy a seaside holiday? Club Med has just revamped one of its family-fantastic hotels in the Algarve. Want to take to life on the water? We've got a child-friendly idea for that too... Welcome to Portugal – you're going to love it.

BEST FOR...

CULTURE VULTURES

Writer Kath Kay visited the very swish Martinhal Lisbon Chiado Family Suites with her son Harvey, 23 months.

The under-the-radar capital of Lisbon is pretty as a postcard, built over seven hills on the banks of the river Tagus. And it's experiencing a huge renaissance at the moment, with museums, galleries and restaurants popping up all over the place.

Kids will love the iconic yellow tram number 28, which trundles around the city's key sites. Graffiti-adorned *ascensores* (funicular railways that are necessary to help little legs, and bigger ones too, get up those hills) rumble up steep streets en route to viewpoints where you can take stock with an ice cream. Lisbon has plenty

of café-lined squares, parks and gardens for tots to explore, while the Oceanário (oceanario.pt), a short metro ride out of town, is one of the world's largest and most impressive aquariums.

Bringing its family-friendly expertise to Lisbon's vibrant city centre, Martinhal Lisbon Chiado Family Suites opened last year in the buzzy, high-end district of Chiado. The 37 studios and apartments are set over five floors of a restored 18th-century building. On the ground floor the M Bar, a cosy family café, serves breakfast, snacks and light bites. Everything has been designed with families in mind, from the round-edged furniture (no nasty bumps) and low, easy-to-clamber-on sofas, to pull-down bunks that save space. Fully equipped kitchens make self-catering a dream, and in-room dining can be provided by the M Bar and the many local

restaurants. Style hasn't been sacrificed for all this impressive practicality. The sophisticated interiors feature subtle lighting, fun colour schemes and bespoke Portuguese art.

Every baby-related essential can be ordered ahead, leaving room in your case for plenty of shopping. Also, catering for children from six months to early teens, there are big, bright play areas at the kids' club, with a climbing wall, cinema and giant tent for light shows too. A pyjama club runs until 11.30pm, where kids over the age of three can be watched over or entertained if you fancy hitting the tiles.

Rates start from £173 per night in a studio apartment on a self-catering basis; breakfast costs from £13 per adult and £6.50 per child (three to 12 years); martinhal.com

Lisbon's pretty Alfama district has had a facelift

WELL-LOCATED RENTALS



ROOM WITH A VIEW

The five-bedroom River House in the Algarve has 360° panoramic views of the Funcho Dam, lots of baby equipment and an infinity pool with shaded deck. From £1,800 per week; figsonthefuncho.com



BEACH BOLTHOLE

Guests at the Pine Cliffs Apartment in the Algarve can use the facilities at the five-star resort next door. Both have access to a beautiful blue-flag beach. From £450 per week; great holidaylocations.com



CAPITAL GAIN

The five-bedroom Lisbon Glow Apartment is one of the top picks for families, with its light and spacious rooms, and all the main sights are within walking distance. From £599 per week; booking.com

Kids are in the driving seat at the Martinhal's M bar and creche...



...and cosy in those bunks!



Love the style: from the iconic Belém Tower to the tiled street signs



The best way to roll down a hill, post-ice cream...



Going up, up, up on the Lisbon funicular



Turquoise
waters, golden
sands... what's
not to love?

BEST FOR...

BEACH BABES

Gurgle associate editor Ali Horsfall visited the spruced-up Club Med Da Balaia. The Algarve coast has long been favoured by families for its sandy coves and perfect beach-play weather from April through to October. And here you'll find Club Med Da Balaia, perched on the red cliffs between Albufeira and Vilamoura. The 389-room resort, split into three hotel buildings, offers all you'd expect from the French pioneers of the all-inclusive holiday. If you're not convinced it's your thing, you'll quickly be converted. Why? Because for parents, they make it *so damn easy*.

The newly renovated family rooms in the hotel's Fado building are more than spacious enough for your little brood, and you'll find all the necessary baby kit – from changing mat to bottle warmer – is in your room waiting for you when you arrive. The all-you-can-eat buffets are something else – tasty and offering a huge choice for both you and the fussiest of eaters. There's even a dedicated baby corner with purées, mini menus and a food prep area.

The hotel's high-energy entertainment can't be sniffed at either. With a little one to entertain all day, you'll appreciate the well-run Baby Club (four to 23 months) and Petit Club (two to three years). They both focus on structured early learning activities with plenty of outdoor games and creative play in a calm and safe area, which has its own playground and little pool too. If you need it, there's also an evening pyjama club and babysitting service. The children's clubs for four- to 17-year-olds

are free. If you manage to steal an hour for yourself (and I promise you will!), there's plenty for you to do, with activities ranging from Pilates to archery or trapeze school.

If all that sounds too exhausting for a relaxing holiday, then you could always sneak off to the spa, or to the new adults-only relaxation area – where you'll find a freshwater pool, bar and a stunning ocean view from the loungers. Bliss. A two-minute walk through the hotel's lush gardens and down the cliff path and you're on Praia Maria Luisa – a stretch of golden sand that offers a change of pace and quality bucket-and-spade time with the tots – because you came for that too, right?

A seven-night all-inclusive stay starts from £719 per adult, excluding flights; there's a 45-minute transfer time from Faro airport; clubmed.co.uk



Check out the sophisticated kids' clubs

And relax...



A pool made for whiling away a lazy afternoon

THE NITTY GRITTY

The main scheduled airlines that fly to Portugal are TAP (flytap.com) and British Airways (ba.com). TAP flies from London to Lisbon and Porto, while BA serves Lisbon and Faro. Flight times are two to two and half hours.

Visit in the springtime when almond-tree groves are covered in pink blossom. Autumn is also good, for warm temperatures and fewer crowds than in summer.

June is the busiest month in Lisbon, as the city celebrates its patron saint, Santo Antonio. Best avoided if you don't fancy picking your way through peak festival season with little ones.

COMPILED BY CATHERINE HUDSON; PHOTOS: ALAMY, ISTOCK BY GETTY

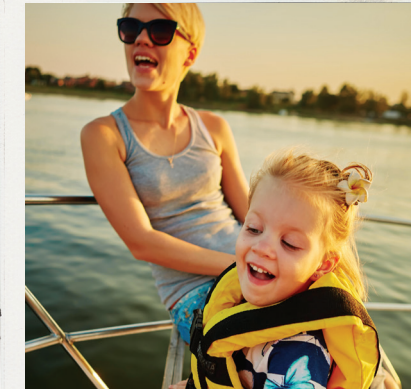
BEST FOR...



LITTLE SAILORS

Is there such a thing as a family-friendly self-drive boat? Ali Horsfall thinks so. Who says you can't have out-of-the-ordinary jaunts with the little ones? Adventures just need to be safe, easy and well-organised. At the Amieira Marina in the heart of the Alentejo region (between Lisbon and the Algarve) you can experience a slice of boat life on a fully equipped houseboat on the scenic Lake Alqueva – Portugal's largest man-made lake. You get a 'how to drive a boat' tutorial at the marina and then, armed with lifejackets for the tots and an idiot's guide to your vessel – outlining everything from switching on the stove to the right way to pass another boat – you're good to go off on your floating family holiday. Just watch as mum or dad switches straight into skipper mode.

The banks of the 93km long lake are, comfortably, always in sight while you coast along on the calm waters (the boat's maximum speed is 10km per hour) and you can plot your stops at the nine historic villages around the lake with an on-board GPS map system designed for the nautically challenged – you simply



All aboard

steer along the line. Moor up at the village quays for an on-board BBQ, then have a splash in the water before going to sleep under the vast starry skies.

You can order cooked meals from the Marina's restaurant to take with you – the traditional dishes and local cheeses are a must-try (plus there's a children's menu), do a supermarket shop or eat at authentic Portuguese restaurants as you explore the ancient shoreside villages. The hilltop settlement of Monsaraz, with its mediaeval castle and narrow streets of whitewashed cottages, charming restaurants and artisan shops, is well worth a visit.

Amieira Marina's fleet of boats sleeps from two to 12; boating licences are not required; from £1,120 per week; the transfer time from Faro or Lisbon airports is two hours; amieiramarina.com



Visit the pretty village of Monsaraz



Drift away from it all at the Amieira Marina



DREAM LUGGAGE



Kindle Fire Kids Edition, £99.99, amazon.co.uk



The lightweight Nano travel stroller, £249, mountainbuggy.com



Lindam nursery night light, £8, jojomamanbebe.co.uk



Kids' rucksack, £10, mothercare.com



Baby Carrier One, £134.99, babybjorn.co.uk



Traveller travel cot, £159, philandteds.com