

Postcard from Portugal

Returning to the country of her youth with her family in tow, **India Hicks** shares scenes from a holiday and gets a peek at Christian Louboutin's hotly anticipated hotel, coming soon to the Alentejo.



SPENT MANY SUMMERS in Portugal, in the Algarve, in a house my father built, during my teenage and twentysomething years. I returned this summer with my own teenagers and twentysomethings to that house, which was magnificently perched on a hill that my father had the imagination to build up, ensuring Villa Verde would forever command a view of the Atlantic. My father had been commissioned to design a house from the ground up—interiors, exteriors, gardens, guest house—every detail was David Hicks to the limit. The clients became close friends of my parents, and whilst the friendship lasted, the raw landscape surrounding the house did not. Gone were the years of tying string to trees to find your way out of the forests. In its place are groomed golf courses, gym memberships, nightclubs and polished Range Rovers.

To contrast the Vale de Lobos and Quinta do Lago, I took my children north to the Alentejo to stay with my friend Christian Louboutin. (We met when I was 18, and he promised to teach me French if I taught him English. He now speaks fluent *français*, and my French is hopeless.) Christian had discovered a remote stretch of land with a few farmhouses close to a beach village. After some years of getting to know the Portuguese way of life, Christian is now launching a small, opulent hotel bursting with originality. “Zis,” he said, pushing open an intricately carved door, “will be *zee* Kinky English Room. *Zee* guests can do naughty zings in *zee* outdoor marble tub.” The hotel will be his love letter to Portugal—traditional craftsmanship, luxurious materials and a large lick of eclectic humor—as beguiling and cultish as his red-soled shoes.

A little further down the road, we explored Comporta, already on the map, with celebrity sightings, chic shopping and oat-milk lattes. We surfed at sunset and rode horses over the dunes—spotting only a very tanned naked man, who was almost as much a part of the wildlife as the pod of dolphins the guide said they often spot in the sea.

Going against the weekend traffic, we drove into Lisbon. We took a tuk-tuk tour, weaving in and out of its charming cobblestoned streets, around castles, down to the river and back up to the cathedral to light a candle, and wonder at the construction, dating back to the 1100s. We stayed in the Tivoli on the Avenida Liberdade. Although it's been here since 1933, the hotel has a smooth 1970s vibe. You almost expect to see Sean Connery by the pool or ordering a martini at the sky bar on the roof, overlooking this twinkling, welcoming, resolutely Portuguese city.

For more on Portugal, see p. 32.

Comporta

"Comporta has an array of colorful shopping. Here I am at the **Casa Da Culture** (fundacaohdc.pt; below), with a Hester Bly sarong from the collection we have just collaborated on—and feeling quite at home. My heart skipped a beat when I wandered into **The Life Juice** (thelifejuice.com; below, center), whose owner Isabel Costa stocks mainly Portuguese brands, including Earl Grey tea from Lisbon and poured candles from Algarve. I invested in a fedora, handmade from 100 percent natural and biodegradable wool from Portugal by artisans."



Melides life: Hitting the beach. Right: India's sons with fashion designer Christian Louboutin.





Melides

"In the teeny center of Melides, bookending the town bar, are two shops to pop into: **Vida Dura** (vidadura.pt; below), owned by Rui Freitas, Christian Louboutin's partner, who dresses in chic patterned pajamas and sells Portuguese pottery (a collection of which is now being shipped to my shop on Harbour Island) and fresh flowers. On the other corner, beneath the trailing bougainvillea, is **Noemina Melides** (@noeminamelides), which carries enchanting children's clothes and cashmere scarves collected by owner Noemi Marone Cinzano on her travels to India. I invested in bright orange and yellow water jugs, which will serve as a happy memory of Melides. Much to the relief of my family they are not actually porcelain. Although by now they should not be surprised by the things that end up in my suitcases."

FAVORITE FINDS: LISBON

"Many local friends recommended we take a **tuk-tuk tour** of Lisbon. We were highly suspicious, but they were right—it was a fast and fabulous way to get to know this beautiful city, especially since it's small and built on seven hills. You see sights and historic buildings and views (from wonderful *miradouros*, the Portuguese name for viewpoints) in a short trip—although our guide was much more interested in learning that Dr. Pepper was not a hot sauce, than she was in telling us the date of the cathedral."

"Have lunch and wander the streets of Príncipe Real. During the day, we visited **Embaixada**, a handsome building overflowing with Portuguese brands—from skimpy bikinis to men's sweaters—and **A Cevicheria** for Peruvian fusion."

"**JNcQuoi Avenida** in Avenida Liberdade is a sophisticated, chic space serving great food and with a trendy cocktail bar downstairs for pre- or after-dinner drinks. If it's warm and sunny (which can be at any time of year but mainly spring and summer), the restaurant has a lovely terrace at the front so you can also watch the street life of the Avenida while you eat."

"**JNcQuoi Asia** is another impressively designed and eclectic space, a little further down the Avenida, that serves the best pan-Asian food in this amazing setting. The outdoor terrace garden in the exterior is as exotic as the interior—every detail is a feast for your eyes."

"**Sky Bar** on top of the Tivoli hotel has a memorable sky-high rooftop view, well worth the sky-high price of drinks, a fabulous start to an evening or a place to wander into mid-afternoon." ■

