



The Old Cathedral in Coimbra

CITY GUIDE : COIMBRA

Coimbra is one of the most important urban centres in Portugal after Lisbon and Porto. It was the capital city of Portugal between the years 1139 to 1255 and has one of the oldest Universities in Europe.

The city is famous for its monuments, churches, libraries, museums and public parks and has a very lively nightlife.

The city lies approx 120 kilometers south of Porto and is well connected via the A1. The old town is located on a hill overlooking the river Mondego and the skyline is dominated by the great tower of the University.



A view of Coimbra from the river Mondego

There are two cathedrals (see picture, top right), some spectacular churches, and many ancient mansions with some of the best examples of Manueline architecture. The jewel in the crown could be the fabulous Baroque library "Biblioteca Joanina" in the grounds of the University.

The place exudes history and is the best possible centre for touring the area. Approx 16 km to the south you can find some of the best preserved Roman ruins at Conimbriga and to the west of the city is the castle at Montemor-o-Velho.

Its not all about history though because the modern day Coimbra boasts many upmarket shops, cafés and galleries that would not look out of place in some of the best cities in Europe.

There are a number of well tended public parks, the most famous of which is the Botanical Gardens, which is the fifth oldest Botanical Garden in the world.

As you would expect from a University town, the nightlife and café culture is very exciting with a myriad of small cafés and taverns dotted along the narrow cobbled streets of the old town. The speciality is the "Coimbra Fado" a kind of traditional Portuguese blues/jazz.



A smart shopping street in Coimbra

The city is within comfortable traveling distance to the "Silver Coast" and it only takes half an hour to reach the wonderful sandy beaches of the Atlantic. Figueira da Foz is the largest resort which still retains most of its Portuguese character.

Traveling east out of the city and along the river Mondego valley there is plenty to see. The town of Penacova perched on the mountainside and the spa town of Luso are well worth a visit.

To the north there is the popular "Mata Nacional do Buçaco", site of an ancient forest and the Palacio do Buçaco.