

# The Jewish Heritage in Portugal

For  
the independent  
traveller



Festa dos Tabuleiros,  
Tomar, Costa de Prata  
Photo António Sacchetti



## 8 DAYS

DEPARTURES ANY DAY

### DAY 1 – USA/LISBON

Depart the USA on your overnight flight to Lisbon. Dinner and breakfast served aloft.

**DAY 2** – Welcome and transfer from the airport to the hotel. Rest of the day free. Optional dinner at a typical restaurant. Where you can hear the nostalgic Portuguese song, the Fado.

**DAY 3 – Lisbon** – a morning sightseeing **tour of Lisbon: The Synagogue of Lisbon** (1813) for a reception and a short talk by the Rabbi on the Jewish community in Portugal. Then a visit to **St. Jorge Castle**, one of Lisbon's most notable and important monuments, where the restoration work as given its old medieval appearance once more. The finest view over Lisbon can be enjoyed from here. This will be followed by a walk around **Alfama**, Lisbon oldest quarter and an authentic 16th century ghetto where the **Jewish quarter** was situated. Free time for lunch. In the afternoon, a visit to the **Caloust Gulbenkian Museum**, where you can see one of the most important artistic collections in the world, with pieces from Classical Antiquity to the 20th century. Proceed to Belém visit the **Royal Coach Museum**, one of the best of its kind in Europe: **Monastery of the Hieronymites**, a master piece of the Gothic/Manueline architecture and **Belém Tower**, an original charming gem of Manueline style. Overnight at the Hotel.

**DAY 4 – Lisbon/Santarém/Tomar** – morning

**P**receding the Moors, the Goths and Romans in the Peninsula, the Jews claim that their forefathers settled in Iberia in biblical times, the first of their stock being brought from Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar or even before, at the time of Solomon when Spain was a vassal of that great King. But it is certain that their incoming goes back a long way. It may even be supposed that the first of the Jews came in the fleets of their Phoenician neighbours and that after the Roman conquest of Jerusalem many of them came to join their brethren that lived and prospered in Iberia.

The most brilliant period of the Iberian Jews, both materially and intellectually, was during the Saracen domination. Being the great merchants (as they were in the previous warlike society), they continued to accumulate great wealth.

They reached the highest spheres of influence in the courts of the Muslim sovereigns and occupied important positions, including that of chief counselor. This contact with the cultured civilization of the Saracens refined their customs and language. They learned the sciences and poetry, but it was as astronomers and doctors that they emulated their teachers. They gave their poetry a religious character, which was the reason for the existence of their nationality. In the 16th-century after intense diplomatic pressure on the pope to impose the unity of the Christian faith, the Jews and the Muslims were forced to leave the Peninsula. Some Jews became New Christians and continued to have an important role in the commerce of the Iberian Kingdoms.

By the hand of Sousa Mendes, the Portuguese Consul in France, Portugal was one of the countries that welcomed the greatest number of Jews during the 2nd World War. Hundreds of them still live here, mainly in Lisbon, Oporto and the Algarve, in perfect harmony with their neighbours.

departure for **Santarém**, through the fertile plains of Ribatejo. This region, which is flooded every Winter and Spring, is rich in wheat, vines and pasture land, where cattle and the fighting bulls are raised. In the 15th century, Santarém had a **Jewish community** of about 1600 people (400 houses), which had a **Synagogue**, a brotherhood and an inn. The **Jewish quarter** was situated behind Rua João de Alporão and near two Christian Churches: São João de Alporão and Santo Indefonso. Proceed to **Tomar** for a tour of the town: the **Synagogue**, of oriental influence, square, dating from the middle of the 15th century and which houses a **Luso-Hebrew Museum**; the **Jewish street** with its 14th century house of the guard; the **Convent of Christ of the Knights Templar**, the largest in Portugal and a veritable museum of Portuguese architecture from the 12th to the 17th century. Dinner and overnight stay at the Hotel Templários \*\*\*\*.

**DAY 5 – Tomar/Castelo Branco/Belmonte** – departure after breakfast to **Castelo Branco** for a visit to the magnificent garden of the **Bishop's Palace** with a great profusion of flowers-bed, water games and statues. Arrival in the afternoon at **Belmonte** for a visit of this medieval village, birthplace of Álvares Cabral, discoverer of Brazil. In Belmonte exists an important crypto-jewish community dating back the 16th century, formally converted to the Christianity which still practices fervently the Jewish religion although they haven't synagogue. Overnight at hotel in Belmonte or Covilhã.

**DAY 6 – Belmonte/Castelo de Vide** – morning departure via Castelo Branco to **Castelo de Vide**. Arrival at midday and time for lunch.

Afternoon walk around the town to the main points of interest, the **Gothic-Jewish quarter**, which is still in an excellent state of preservation, maybe the best preserved in the country; then on to **Marvão** a little fortified well preserved medieval town perched on top of a mountain which affords one of the best views in Portugal. Return to Castelo de Vide for dinner and overnight at Hotel Sol e Serra.

**DAY 7 – Castelo de Vide/Évora/Lisboa** – breakfast and departure via **Portalegre** and **Estremoz** to **Évora**, fascinating museum town that was considered Patrimony of Mankind by UNESCO. In the afternoon a tour of Évora: The **Jewish quarter**, which still preserves an almost medieval appearance with its narrow streets and simple houses and which was second only to Lisbon in importance in the 15th century; the **Regional Museum**, where besides an important collection of 16th century paintings, an old Hebrew-inscribed tombstone can be seen, as well as a cornerstone from the 14th century Synagogue and a coffer of the inquisition where the incriminations against the Jews were kept. It had 3 keys, each one kept a different inquisitor. The **Jewish quarter** occupied 1,2 hectares, which was about 1,1% of the area of the city. You can also visit the 2nd century **Roman Temple**. You will then drive to Lisbon for overnight.

**DAY 8 – LISBON** – Transfer from hotel to Portela International Airport.

*Note: This programme can be combined with an extension to Spain, covering the highlights of Jewish culture such as: Toledo, Córdoba, Granada, Seville and Salamanca.*