

DEMOGRAPHIA



LISBON: LEAPING FROM THE PAST TO THE FUTURE

FAST FACTS		Similar To
Metropolitan (Labor Market) Population	2,500,000	Curitiba, San Juan, Nanjing, Minneapolis-St. Paul
Urbanized Area* Population	2,250,000	
Urbanized Land Area: Square Miles	215	Delhi, Shanghai, Auckland, Albuquerque
Urbanized Land Area: Square Kilometers	560	
Population per Square Mile	10,500	Johannesburg-Soweto, Buenos Aires, Sapporo
Population per Square Kilometer	4,400	
Largest urbanized area in Portugal		
*Continuously built up area		

21 December 2003

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Lisbon is capital of one of Europe's historic empires. At one time or another, the sun never set on the Portuguese empire, though the light got a bit darker than on the British flag. Less than a decade ago, Portugal still was sovereign over Macau, in China, and within the past 50 years was sovereign over portions of India and Africa.

Portugal also shares a quirk of language with Great Britain. Far more native speakers of their respective languages live outside rather than inside what might be called (or at least once was called) the "mother" country. Indeed, Brazil has more than 15 times as many speakers of Portuguese as Portugal itself. By contrast, most of the world's leading imperial powers never saw their languages adopted so broadly, such as France, the Netherlands, Germany or Russia.

But there is plenty to see in Portugal, and specifically in Lisbon. I entered the city in a car rented two days before at Gare du Nord in Paris, with a brief overnight stay in Madrid. This is the best route for entering the city --- over the Tagus River suspension bridge, opened in 1966. This is not the longest suspension bridge in the world --- it is about one-fourth shorter than the Golden Gate and one-half that of the Akashi Kalkyo in Kobe. But from opposite Lisbon, it rivals or exceeds the view toward San Francisco over the Golden Gate.

The bridge starts much higher on the south shore and crosses the north, Lisbon shore at high elevation. One of the most striking sights is a long aqueduct that passes over the motorway leading from the bridge through the northern part of the city. Despite its prominence, reaching the aqueduct can be difficult with Lisbon's one way, seemingly orderless and narrow streets, it can be difficult to reach. But reach it I did.

From the aqueduct it is a gentle downhill drive through most intense urbanization in Europe. The city of Lisbon itself has 557,000 people and a population density of 17,000. This is

approximately one-third the density of Paris, but more than will generally be found in other European central cities. But, like virtually every other major high-income world city that has not expanded its boundaries except for Vancouver, more people used to live here. In 1961, the population was nearly 50 percent higher (818,000).

In the core are the kind of tasteful, old buildings typical of historical cities. There is also a trolley system that uses some of the smallest vehicles in the world. These trolleys are much more in place in the scale of Lisbon, than the ones been exported to operate on the sidewalks outside Detroit's Renaissance Center. And a lot more people use them.

Portugal's slow population growth rate has not kept Lisbon's suburbs from prospering. To the west is Oeiras, with a large automobile-oriented shopping center next to the motorway and a suburban office center. Further to the west are fast growing Caiscas and Sintra. Sintra all by itself added about as many people as the city of Lisbon lost in the last census period --- adding nearly one-half to its population. Growth of this magnitude is normally reserved for exurban North American areas.

To the north are Loures, Santa Iria de Azoila and other suburbs, north of the international airport. Here will be found the strip malls, the automobile dealerships and the other commercial developments so typical of late 20th century urban areas in the high-income world. From the northern suburbs, the A-12 proceeds across the wide bay on a bridge approximately five miles long.

The suburbs are served by an effective network of motorways, both free and toll. These roadways serve the new housing developments that are found across the landscape beyond the urbanized area. Like other urban areas around the world, Lisbon is in the process of literally bursting beyond its developed borders as people express a preference for combining a less urban daily living style with easy access to a major urban area. The prosperity here, like that of neighboring Spain, is comparatively new and has been intensified by European integration. Lisbon is an attractive combination of the past and the future.



PICTURES

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Central City Neighborhood

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By Wendell Cox

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