Shiny happy people

THE WORLD’S BEST FAMILY HOTELS
FROM HALF-TERM HOPS TO WINTER SUN - FROM GREECE TO THE MALDIVES

A FRESH LOOK AT
MAURITIUS
THE INSIDER RESTAURANTS, SHOPS, HOTELS AND BEACHES

WHAT’S COOKING IN JAPAN?
ZONING IN ON THE HOT PLATE
OF ALL FOOD TRENDS

MOST STYLISH PLACES
TO STAY IN ROME

CABIN FEVER
THE NEXT GENERATION
OF CHIC SHACKS

+ ERIC BANA
JOSEPH FIENNES
GAL GADOT

ISBON • SRI LANKA • CAMBODIA • INDIA • AUSTRALIA
This page, clockwise: courtyard at Hotel Valverde; A Cevicheria, statue at Pousada de Lisboa; lounge at Valverde; Palácio Belmonte café; the 16th-century Casa dos Bicos; wall art at Casa Independente; room at Valverde; toy plane at A Vida Portuguesa; chair at Valverde. Opposite, clockwise from top left: steps at Mercado da Ribeira; Mini Bar; Sutton Pasta Palace; designs at Embaixada; and fairground symbol; bikes at Casa Independente; detail at Valverde; The Independente lobby; Bica do Sapato restaurant.
EVEN FOR A CITY BUILT ON SEVEN HILLS, LISBON HAS HAD MORE THAN ITS FAIR SHARE OF UPS AND DOWNS. LATELY, THOUGH, IT'S BEEN NOTHING BUT SUNSHINE AND SEA BREEZES. NOW THE REST OF THE WORLD IS TURNING UP TO DISCOVER ONE OF EUROPE'S OLDEST AND MOST BEAUTIFUL CITIES AS IT RIDES A HIGH TIDE OF CREATIVITY AND OPTIMISM
LISBON: INTO THE LIGHT

WHERE TO STAY
Clever use of touchy-feely textiles, vintage and contemporary artworks and restored mid-20th-century furniture keeps things agreeably mixed up at Hotel Valverde (doubles from about £155). It’s dark, hushed and discreet yet smiling and unstuffy, with sunshine by the pool and terrace rather than on the roof, as is the more typical Lisbon way. Pousada de Lisboa (doubles from about £160) is an impressive conversion of a vast Pombaline pile on the Praça do Comércio. The Baixa location couldn’t be better, and the rooms closest to the square have epic views. Its sibling, Pestana Palace (doubles from about £170), is lusciousness itself – once slightly out of the way, it’s now convenient for the buzzing LX Market and Village Underground (see below). The Independent (doubles from about £65), between the sleepless Bairro Alto and the up-and-coming Príncipe Real, is great fun. Partly a hostel, it’s not going to be for everyone, but it’s witty and shabby-chic-endearing and the suites are excellent by any standards. The Bairro Alto Hotel (doubles from about £190) kick-started the Lisbon boutique-hotel scene. It’s 15 years old now but still going gangbusters. Ask for room 401 – not the biggest, but it has a weird kind of Lisbon feng shui that just makes it right. Palácio Belmonte (doubles from about £340), hard by the Castelo de São Jorge, is a one-off, a marvel. Its 11 gigantic suites are both homely and impossibly grand, several of them with staggering views. The nearby Santiago de Alfama (doubles from about £125) is the newest five-star hotel in the city, in the cobbled street where Christopher Columbus got married. Palácio Ramalhete (doubles from about £135), opposite the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, is the pick of the city’s many little converted palácios – immaculate, with an unexpected, lushly planted courtyard.

WHERE TO EAT
There are probably more top-notch restaurants in Lisbon today than there are ways to prepare salt cod. Chef José Avillez is the poster-boy – he looks a bit like Jesus, which is how foodies think of him. Two-Michelin-starred Belcanto is the headquarters of his constantly expanding culinary empire, but don’t hesitate to raid his Mini Bar either. Insólito, upstairs at The Independent, does traditional Portuguese with untraditional twists, and feats of mixology are performed at the bar beneath a dangerous tangle of chandeliers. A Fábrica de Santiago, at the Santiago de Alfama hotel, is lovely inside – lovelier still at a table in the street outside. A Cevicheria, in newly fashionable Príncipe Real, has a kitchen supervised by a giant octopus and punters queuing up round the block; and Tabik has Nuno Mendes’ vote as the Next Big Thing. Bica do Sapo changed the way people think about Lisbon’s previously unloved riverside. It’s still whip-smart, though its views across the water can disappear suddenly with the arrival of a multi-storey cruise liner. The Mercado da Ribeira, an historic market turned food hall, has pop-up-style outposts of several of the city’s most popular restaurants, and a cult following.

WHERE TO DRINK
Terraco BA at the Bairro Alto Hotel is the original and still among the best of the city’s gazillons of rooftop bars. Park, on top of a car park just around the corner, gives the now familiar formula an amusing tweak. O Borr O Mau e O Vila is a laid-back, unfussy cocktail joint in happening Cais do Sodré. It’s just as popular, if less visually arresting, than its next-door neighbour Pensa Amor, which despite being decorated with vintage pornography manages not (quite) to lose its aura of good clean fun. If you can find it, Casa Independente looks like an exceptionally hip thrift shop and is quiet and peaceful for a coffee in the afternoon, better for boozes and a boogaloos in the evening.

WHERE TO SHOP
A Vida Portuguesa is packed with retro knock-knacks in bright, spirit-lifting packaging. Possibly the only other place that outdoes it is the celebrated Conserveira de Lisboa, which exists solely to meet your tinned-sardine needs. Indeed, Lisbon has a number of shops that only sell one thing: Caza das Vellas Loreto has been making candles since 1789; Luvaria Ulisses stocks nothing but gloves; and Pelcor reveals how, ever since the advent of the screw-cap wine bottle, making stuff other than corks out of cork has become a big deal. By contrast, there is endless variety at the LX Factory, in the shadow of the Ponte 25 de Abril, packed with cafés, bars and shops. It faces stiff competition from the Village Underground, which is smaller but cooler and more seriously artsy, and, across town, from Embaixada, where Portuguese designs are displayed in a former palácio.

GETTING HERE
Original Travel (+44 20 3740 7598; originaltravel.co.uk) offers four nights in Lisbon from £560 per person, based on two sharing, staying at the Hotel Valverde, including flights and transfers.

Left, from top: hanging out at Casa Independente; retro packaging at A Vida Portuguesa; Casa Independente interior; café detail at Palácio Belmonte. Opposite, the Hotel Valverde restaurant.
YOU FIND NONE OF BERLIN'S ANGST, PARIS'S HAUTEUR OR ROME'S BRAGGADOCIO