

# Coimbra

## Coimbra and Surrounding Areas:

Coimbra is at the heart of central Portugal and is a thriving city with all the amenities you would expect of a modern day location but with an exceptional amount of historic buildings and places of interest and a very active night life.

Coimbra is famous for being the oldest seat of learning in Portugal with a University founded on the 13th of August in 1290 by King Dinis. This makes it one of the oldest in the world. Six of Portugal's Kings were born here and in 1139 until 1256 it was the chosen capital of the country. The original name in the Roman period was Aeminium, and it later developed under the influence of the greater nearby town of Conimbriga.

This latter place is now a large archaeological site of great interest with a museum to display the findings from the diggings. At first sight the town appears more devoted to commerce than learning but the skyline above the lower part of the city suggest its real purpose.

Not far south of Coimbra is the much smaller town of Condeixa-a-Nova with its 17th to 19th Century palaces and manor homes. Notably, nearby this town are the Roman ruins of Conimbriga, and these are the largest unearthed archaeological find of its kind in Portugal. The town was first in active use around 2.000BC and later, the time of Emperor Augustus (25BC) the settlement really grew and flourished. This area has many interesting aspects for visitors including the Grutas da Lapinha.

## Conimbriga

The ancient city of Conimbriga can easily be reached by a short drive or bus ride from Coimbra.

It is the largest Roman settlement in Portugal and is well worth visiting on any tour of the country's central and northern regions. Like many archaeological sites, Conimbriga was built in layers. Some of the earliest layers date back to the first Iron Age in the 9th Century B.C. The Romans arrived in the 2nd Century A.D., conquering the Celtic inhabitants and establishing a city that grew, flourished, and then fell victim to barbarian invasions until Conimbriga's residents fled to nearby Coimbra in 468.

## The Conimbriga Museum

Created in 1962 the Museu de Conimbriga is exclusively dedicated

to the archaeological site where it is located. Its collections are diversified and they illustrate the historical evolution of the site, from the end of the second millennium B.C. and the VI century of the Christian era.

The objects exposed were found during the excavations that, with great interruptions, took place since 1898 and are distributed by thirty one different themes that illustrate the vitality of this city.

## Montemor-o-Velho

Lying to the west of Coimbra is the fortified town of Montemor-o-Velho.

This attractive and historic town rises out of fields of rice and maize, crowned by the crenellated 14th-century castle (previously a Moorish stronghold), one of the largest and finest of Portugal. Nobody has managed to ascertain its age with opinions differing between 4.000 and 2.400 years old and an important stronghold over the Mondego valley.

## Figueira da Foz

Beyond this town on the coast is Figueira da Foz a popular holiday resort town with a 16th Century fort. To the northeast is the small charming town of Santa Comba Dão that dates from the 10th Century.

It is known more for its birthplace of both Alves Mateus and Oliveira Salazar, the first being a renown preacher and the second the 20th Century ruler of Portugal.

The area is mainly residential and contains typical examples of homes through the ages besides a 15th Century church.

It is worth admiring the three shrines which form the Santuário da Nossa Senhora da Piedade (Sanctuary of Our Lady of Piety), near the Castle of Arouce, all surrounded by hills, olive groves and dense vegetation.

To the east of Coimbra are the towns of Lousã and Góis, both of which are worth visiting to see the architectural buildings and feel the serenity that the towns emit, something which is in complete contrast to their turbulent histories that are recorded in the history books.

## Lousã and Góis

Lousã is a charming town due to the beauty of the landscape in which the plains join the mountainous ridge, and to its magnificent 18th-century houses (such as the Palácio dos Salazares).

## Góis

The nearby town of Góis, more than eight centuries old, lies in a narrow and deep valley, between the mountains of Carvalhal and of Rabadão, at about 40 kilometres (25 miles) from Coimbra.

Besides the Renaissance mother church of Santa Maria Maior, it is worth admiring the Manueline Bridge with its three arches, the Castle, and the panels on the ceiling of the Paços do Concelho, representing fantasy and biblical figures; in the environs, various chapels offer dazzling views, such as the chapel of Santo António das Neves, in the middle of the Serra da Lousã and which is still within the county's limits.

## Penacova

To the north is first the town of Penacova that dates back to about 1105, and then there is the Parque do Buçaco, a monastic centre from the 6th Century. A residential retreat commissioned by Dom Carlos in 1889 it was converted this century into a luxury hotel.

Close by again to the north are the Spa towns of Luso and Curia that both provide hotels and sports activities for their guests.