

VISIT GUIDE 2026

the Belém Tower

Lisbon · From 15€

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History & experience

ORIGIN & HISTORY

Guardian of the Great Seas

GOOGLE 4.5 ★★★★☆ 118 928 reviews

TIQETS 3.8 ★★★★☆ 2 522 reviews

Built between **1514 and 1519**, the Belém Tower was designed by military architect Francisco de Arruda to protect the mouth of the Tagus River. During the Age of Discoveries, this fortress served as the official departure point for caravels heading to the Indies and Asia, marking the beginning of a glorious era in Portuguese maritime history.

The architecture reflects a unique synthesis: the **Manueline** style is blended with Moorish influences visible in the turrets and arched balconies. The hexagonal structure of the bastion housed cannons and port captains, while the main tower, four stories high, dominated the river with unquestionable strategic authority.

Over the centuries, the tower experienced various fates. After 1580, it was converted into a military prison where the underground cells were regularly flooded by the Tagus floods. This dark period contrasts with its initial function as a symbol of naval power and royal protection under Manuel I.

Classified as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1983 jointly with the Jerónimos Monastery, the Belém Tower remains today a national emblem. Nineteenth-century restorations preserved its essence while adding neo-Manueline decorative elements, ensuring that this sixteenth-century jewel continues to dazzle visitors.

THE EXPERIENCE

As soon as you approach the water, the white silhouette of the tower stands out against the blue sky, creating an atmosphere steeped in history. The sea air brings an immediate freshness that prepares the body for the physical effort of the climb. The relative silence around the monument invites peaceful contemplation before entering its ancient walls.

Inside, the space abruptly narrows. The narrow and dark spiral staircase forces the visitor to slow down, testing their legs but rewarding each step with a gradual ascent toward the light. It is an intense sensory experience where physical effort leads directly to the final visual revelation.



PREPARE YOUR VISIT

Practical information

ADDRESS

Freguesia de Santa Maria de Belém · Tram: line 15 (Belém stop) or line 28. Bus: lines 720, 728, 750.

OPENING HOURS

Closed on Mondays. Hours vary by season; check the official website before your visit for the exact time slot.

PRICES

Free child entry depending on age (check variants)

VISIT DURATION

Allow 30 to 45 minutes to climb the spiral staircase and enjoy the panoramic terrace overlooking the Tagus. Access is limited to 120 people at a time.

PHOTOS

Photography allowed without flash. The white facades offer the best angles in the late afternoon when the light is golden.

AUDIENCE

Ideal for history enthusiasts and couples. Note: the narrowness of the stairs makes it not recommended for very young children or people with reduced mobility.

HOW TO GET THERE

Access & transport

Metro

: Lg. Princesa — 5 min à pied

Lisbon-Santa Apolónia Station (26 min) · Lisbon Oriente Station (38 min)

Bus

: Princesa Square — 5 min à pied

Lisbon Santa Apolónia Station (42 min) · Lisbon Oriente Station (61 min)

Car

Lisbon Santa Apolónia Station (31 min) · Lisbon Oriente Station (47 min)

Bike

Lisbon Santa Apolónia Station (41 min) · Lisbon Oriente Station (63 min)

LOCALISATION

Où se trouve the Belém Tower ?



📍 Av. Brasília — 1400-038 Lisbon

🌐 38°41.495′ N, 9°12.959′ O



ORGANIZATION

Structure and Levels of the Tower

Level 0 (Ground Floor)

This level houses the vaulted casemate, a former artillery room. One can admire the openings designed for cannons and the thick walls measuring 3.5 meters. The space is low and dark, evoking the bastion's original defensive function.

Intermediate Levels

The spiral staircase leads through several floors where the sculptural details of the Manueline style can be discovered. These intermediate levels offer successive glimpses of the river through the narrow windows, preparing the visitor for the final view.

Upper Terrace

The highest point of the visit offers a 360-degree panorama over the Tagus River and the city of Lisbon. The terrace is exposed to the elements but allows you to fully appreciate the natural light on the white facades and exterior architectural details.

ACCESSIBILITY

♿ **Disabled Access**

Access is limited due to the absence of an elevator and the narrowness of the spiral staircase.

👨‍👩‍👧 **Families**

Recommended for children over 6 years old who can manage narrow steps.

🎧 **Audio guide**

Portuguese, English, French, Spanish



Must-sees

SELECTION

Unmissable Architectural Treasures

01 FRANCISCO DE ARRUDA North Facade

Armillary Sphere

Adorning the facades, this armillary sphere is the personal emblem of King Manuel I. It symbolizes the Age of Discoveries and Portuguese cosmographic mastery. Each sculpted detail recalls the astronomical precision of the era.

> 💡 This symbol was so important that it still appears today on the coat of arms of many institutions linked to maritime discoveries.

02 INCONNU (STYLE MANUELIN) Bastion Corners

Moorish Watchtowers

These small conical turrets bear witness to the influence of Moorish art on Portuguese architecture. Their fluted domes contrast with the military rigor of the bastion. They add a touch of lightness and elegance to the fortress.

> 💡 It is believed that Diogo de Boitaca, the first architect of the neighboring monastery, contributed to their refined decoration.

03 Hexagonal Bastion

Vaulted Casemate

This underground chamber once housed the defense cannons. Its massive walls and strategic openings illustrate the military power of the tower. The atmosphere there is heavy, evoking centuries of past conflicts.

> 💡 The roof open at the center facilitated the dispersion of smoke generated by the shots, a crucial technical detail for the effectiveness of the artillery.

04 SCULPTEURS MANUELINS Crenellations

Cross of the Order of Christ

Present on the shields and crenellations, these crosses recall Manuel I's membership in this military order. They highlight the close link between Christian faith and maritime conquests. The sculpture is remarkably fine despite exposure to the elements.

> 💡 Some of these ornaments date from the 19th-century restoration, added to reinforce the building's historical identity.

05

Panoramic Terrace

View over the Tagus

From the summit, the river stretches to the horizon, offering an unbeatable perspective of Lisbon. It is here that one understands the tower's defensive strategy, overlooking access to the port. The golden evening light particularly illuminates the waters well.

> 💡 Many visitors consider this view more impressive than that offered by some better-known urban monuments.

06

Interior

Spiral Staircase

The ascent itself is an architectural experience. The irregular steps and the narrowness of the passage force a slow and attentive progression. One must watch their step due to the age of the structure.

> 💡 A traffic light system regulates the flow of visitors to avoid bottlenecks in this highly constrained space.

07

ARTISANS MANUELINS Exterior Decorations

Sculpted Rhinoceros

Among the many exotic sculptures, the Indian rhinoceros embodies the fascination with new lands. These animal motifs tell the stories reported by explorers. They add a narrative and poetic dimension to the fortress.

> 💡 These often imaginary or poorly described animals bear witness to the insatiable curiosity of Europeans towards the unknown world.

08

Facades

Curved Balconies

The balconies feature elegant arches inspired by Islamic architecture. They break the rigidity of the white stone and add visual softness. Their strategic position also allowed for effective surveillance of the river.

> 💡 The combination of these curved forms with the straight lines of the bastion creates a unique visual harmony, characteristic of the Manueline style.

TIPS

Optimizing Your Historical Visit

TIMING

Aim for late afternoon (after 4 PM) to enjoy the golden light on the white façades and avoid the midday peak crowds.

TICKET

Online timed booking is essential. Without it, you may have to wait a long time at the entrance, as the indoor capacity is strictly limited to 120 people.

TOUR

Always combine your visit to the Tower with that of the Jerónimos Monastery. Located in close proximity, they form a coherent and enriching historical ensemble.

PHOTO

Photograph the facades from the opposite bank or from the upper terrace at the end of the day. The cast shadows then accentuate the details of the turrets and sculptures.

BREAK

After the physical effort of the climb, head to Pastéis de Belém to enjoy a warm pastel de nata. It is the traditional reward for visitors to the tower.

CHILDREN

The staircase is narrow and the steps are uneven. It is not recommended for very young children or people with reduced mobility. Make sure to hold the hand firmly of children over 6 years old.

AUDIOGUIDE

The audioguide is available in French and is worth the cost to understand the complex historical and architectural context of the Manueline style. It is recommended to listen during the ascent to maximize immersion.

COMFORT

Wear comfortable, closed-toe shoes. There is no cloakroom, so avoid large backpacks that could get in the way on the narrow spiral staircase.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

FAQ

Do I really need to book in advance?

Yes, timed online booking is essential to guarantee your entry. Indoor capacity is limited to 120 people at a time, which creates queues even with tickets bought on site. We recommend booking as soon as your dates are se

How far in advance can I cancel?

This ticket is neither cancellable nor refundable once the booking is confirmed. Carefully check the date, time slot, and number of participants before paying, as no changes are possible afterwards.

Is there a current promotion?

Bundle offers often exist for the Belém Tour + Jerónimos Monastery pass. Regularly check our dedicated promotions page to benefit from reduced rates. Individual tickets remain available at standard prices year-round.

Can I buy the ticket on site?

It is possible but risky, especially in high season or on weekends. The traffic light regulation system in the staircase causes significant waits if the quota of 120 people is reached. Online booking remains the only saf

How long does the visit take?

Allow approximately 30 to 45 minutes for the complete visit. This includes climbing the spiral staircase, exploring the floors, and time spent on the terrace. Allow more time if you wish to take many photos.

DID YOU KNOW?

Anecdotes & curiosities

Floodable Prison

After 1580, the tower served as a military prison. Its underground cells were regularly flooded by the Tagus River's floods, making detention particularly arduous for prisoners. This obscure aspect of the monument's history is rarely mentioned but explains the robustness of its foundations.

Neo-Manueline Restoration

Under Ferdinand II in the 1840s, the tower underwent a major restoration. Neo-Manueline decorative elements were added, modernizing certain aspects while preserving the original essence. This intervention helped safeguard the monument against the degradation of time.

Astronomical Symbol

The armillary sphere, the emblem of Manuel I, adorns the facades as a permanent reminder of the Age of Discovery. This astronomical and cosmographical symbol reflects the worldview carried by Portuguese navigators, who sought to map the unknown.

Maritime Origin

Before the tower was built, the Belém shoreline was protected by a ship called the Grande Nau. The tower was built to replace this floating protection with a fixed and permanent structure, permanently anchoring the port's defense on land.

AROUND THE MUSEUM

The Belém district is a hub of culture and gastronomy. Right next door, the **Monastery of the Hieronymites** offers a full immersion in Manueline art, essential for understanding the context of the tower. To recharge your batteries after the physical effort of the climb, head to the famous **Pastéis de Belém**, whose warm pastéis de nata are a local institution. You can also extend your day at the Caravels Museum or stroll through the Belém Gardens, a peaceful green space along the river, ideal for a relaxing break before heading back to the city center.



The Belém Tower is not just a monument; it is a gateway to Portugal's maritime past. As you climb its steps, you are not merely visiting a place—you feel the weight of history and the grandeur of an age of discovery. This moment of solitude at the top, facing the infinite Tagus River, will remain etched in your memory as an unforgettable souvenir of Lisbon.