Palaces of Lapa & Madragoa

Self-guided walking tour · 9 stops · about 3.2 km · 1 h 30 walking (half a day with the museum). Voice-note scripts and Google Maps links. Tap any blue link on your phone to open walking directions.

Route at a glance

1. Palácio Almada-Carvalhais
2. Palace on Rua da Esperança (1721)
3. Palácio de Santos (French Embassy)
4. Palácio Alvor (Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga)
5. Palacete Porto Covo (former British Embassy)
6. Palacete dos Condes de Monte Real
7. Palacete do Visconde de Sacavém
8. Palacete da Lapa (former German and US embassies)
9. Palácio das Necessidades & Tapada

Start: Largo do Conde Barão (Santos station, or tram 25). Finish: Palácio das Necessidades and the Tapada gardens. Most palaces are private and seen from outside only.

1. Palácio Almada-Carvalhais

Walking directions (Google Maps) · Show on map

Welcome to Largo do Conde Barão, the start of our walk through the palaces of Madragoa and Lapa. The long building in front of you is the Palácio Almada-Carvalhais, one of the oldest noble houses in Lisbon and a National Monument. It was built around 1545 by Rui Fernandes de Almada, a banker who had served as the Portuguese king's agent in Flanders. In Antwerp he befriended Albrecht Dürer, who painted a Saint Jerome for him as a gift. Hold on to that name: we will meet the painting again later. Look for the sixteenth-century stone tower at the western end, with a vaulted tunnel beneath it that once led into a Renaissance courtyard. Across the square stands the Palácio do Conde-Barão de Alvito. Its noble owners left after the earthquake of 1755, but the square still carries their name. Now walk west along Rua da Esperança.

Tip: Look for the 16th-century stone tower at the western end of the facade and the vaulted passage beneath it.

Practical: Seen from outside. Start here: Santos station (Cascais line, one stop from Cais do Sodré) or tram 25, stop Conde Barão – Av. 24 de Julho.

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2. Palace on Rua da Esperança (1721)

Getting here: West along Rua da Esperança

Walking directions (Google Maps) · Show on map

This plain, elegant building on the corner is easy to walk past, so look up. Carved into the stone corner is the year it was built: 1721. The noble floor is the top one, with pairs of balconies and wrought-iron railings, a calm, horizontal style typical of Lisbon before the great earthquake. Down at street level, shops moved in from the late nineteenth century. One door led to a grocery, and the main door opened onto a restaurant that was once famous across the city for its snails: the Casa dos Caracóis da Esperança. Upstairs, for much of the twentieth century, there was a school run by A Voz do Operário, a workers' society, for the children of its members. Some rooms still keep their old ceilings and blue-and-white tiles. Madragoa was always like this: noble houses and working lives side by side. Continue to the large palace at the top of Rua de Santos-o-Velho.

Tip: Find the date 1721 carved into the stone corner, then look up at the paired balconies of the noble floor.

Practical: Seen from outside. Madragoa's narrow streets around here are worth a short detour.

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3. Palácio de Santos (French Embassy)

Getting here: A short climb to the top of Rua de Santos-o-Velho

Walking directions (Google Maps) · Show on map

Behind this eighteenth-century facade hides a story that goes back to the twelfth century. The site began as a convent of the knights of the Military Order of Santiago, and later of the noble ladies known as the Comendadeiras de Santos. From 1501 until the reign of King Sebastião it served as a royal palace, a riverside residence for the court. In 1629 it was sold to an ancestor of the Marquesses of Abrantes, which is why it is also called the Palácio Abrantes. At the start of the twentieth century it became the French Embassy, and it still is today, so the gardens and rooms are private. Take a

moment to imagine the view the kings once had: before landfill and the riverside avenue, the Tagus came much closer to these walls. From here, walk west towards Rua das Janelas Verdes, the street of the green windows.

Tip: Walk round to Calçada Marquês de Abrantes for a better look at the long facade.

Practical: Private embassy, not open to visitors.

4. Palácio Alvor (Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga)

Getting here: West along Rua das Janelas Verdes

Walking directions (Google Maps) · Show on map

This is the Palácio Alvor, built in the seventeenth century by Francisco de Távora, first Count of Alvor, and one of the finest Baroque town palaces in Lisbon. Look at the two portals: the coat of arms above them belongs to the Carvalho family, who replaced the original arms of the Távoras. Since 1884 the palace has housed the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Portugal's national gallery, with more than forty thousand works from the Middle Ages to the early nineteenth century. Among them: Bosch's Temptations of Saint Anthony, the São Vicente panels of Nuno Gonçalves, and the Saint Jerome that Dürer gave to Rui Fernandes de Almada, whose palace we saw at the start. It stayed in his family until 1880. Next door, the seventeenth-century Palácio Óbidos-Sabugal has been the headquarters of the Portuguese Red Cross since 1919. Step into the garden beside the museum for one of the best river views in Lisbon.

Tip: Even if you skip the museum, step into the garden beside it for a wide view over the river and the docks.

Practical: The museum reopened partly on 21 November 2026 after renovation, with free entry until 1 December 2026; normal ticket prices apply afterwards. Usually open Tue–Sun 10:00–18:00, closed Mondays. Allow 1.5–2 hours inside.

5. Palacete Porto Covo (former British Embassy)

Getting here: Uphill along Rua de São Domingos à Lapa (steep)

Walking directions (Google Maps) · Show on map

We are now climbing into Lapa, the embassy quarter. This palace was built between 1770 and 1790 for Jacinto Fernandes Bandeira, a royal councillor who became the first Baron of Porto Covo. Its calm, symmetrical facade is typical of the Pombaline style that followed the earthquake. The family kept it until 1937, when the palace and everything inside it were sold at auction. The building and gardens were bought by the British state, and from 1941 to 1995 this was the British Embassy. Look up at the triangular pediment: the coat of arms there is British. It replaced the original arms of the Porto Covo family, a small sign of how this house changed hands. Lapa is full of such stories, which is why so many embassies and ambassadors' residences are still here. Continue uphill along Rua de São Domingos.

Tip: The coat of arms in the triangular pediment is British: it replaced the Porto Covo family's own arms.

Practical: Seen from outside.

6. Palacete dos Condes de Monte Real

Getting here: Continue up Rua de São Domingos to the corner of Rua de Buenos Aires

Walking directions (Google Maps) · Show on map

Here, at the corner with Rua de Buenos Aires, stands a much younger palace. It was built from 1900 by Artur Porto de Melo e Faro, Count of Monte Real, as a home for himself and his wife, Laura. The architect, José Luís Monteiro, gave it a romantic mix of neo-Baroque and neo-Rococo. Walk around it and you will notice something unusual for a private house: a chapel of its own, complete with a bell tower, at one end of the L-shaped building. Inside, a monumental staircase is the showpiece, along with tiles from different centuries, carved woodwork and delicate floral paintings on the ceilings. It shows how Lisbon's wealthy families still built like aristocrats at the turn of the twentieth century. Our next palace is just around the corner, on Rua do Sacramento à Lapa. Keep an eye out for colourful tiles.

Tip: Walk along Travessa do Norte to see the chapel and its little bell tower at one end of the building.

Practical: Seen from outside.

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7. Palacete do Visconde de Sacavém

Getting here: Round the corner into Rua do Sacramento à Lapa

Walking directions (Google Maps) · Show on map

You can't miss this one. The Palacete do Visconde de Sacavém was built between 1897 and 1900, designed by the architect Faria Blanc, and it is covered in some of the most exuberant ceramic decoration in Lisbon. Blue-and-white tiles are combined with colourful pieces in relief: flowers, fruit and ornaments that seem to burst out of the wall around the windows. Some say the Viscount designed the ceramics himself, in the spirit of Rafael Bordalo Pinheiro's school; the tiles came from the Campolide factory. Take your time with the details around the balcony window on the noble floor. A few doors along, the Palacete do Conde de Agrolongo, built in 1909, won an honourable mention in the Valmor Prize, Lisbon's architecture award. Look for its square tower with a lookout at the top. Now follow Rua do Sacramento à Lapa to the end, towards Rua do Pau de Bandeira.

Tip: The best ceramic details are around the central balcony window on the noble floor.

Practical: Private building, seen from outside. A favourite photo stop.

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8. Palacete da Lapa (former German and US embassies)

Getting here: To the end of Rua do Sacramento à Lapa, then Rua do Pau de Bandeira

Walking directions (Google Maps) · Show on map

This eclectic palace was built in the second half of the nineteenth century by the first Count of Olivais. Notice the projecting central section crowned by a balustrade and pinnacles, and the entrance set in a three-lobed arch at the top of a small flight of steps. The family kept it for less than a century. From 1926 it housed embassies: first Germany's, until 1945, which means that during the Second World War, when neutral Lisbon was full of refugees and spies, this was the German embassy. Later, from the 1950s until 1983, it was the embassy of the United States. Even the trees in the garden

are protected as part of its listing. From here, walk west for about ten minutes, past Avenida Infante Santo, to Largo das Necessidades, where our last and grandest palace is waiting.

Tip: Look for the entrance set in a three-lobed arch at the top of a small flight of steps.

Practical: Seen from outside.

9. Palácio das Necessidades & Tapada

Getting here: West across Avenida Infante Santo to Largo das Necessidades (about 10 minutes)

Walking directions (Google Maps) · Show on map

Welcome to the Palácio das Necessidades, the end of our walk. In 1742 King João V bought this land to build a church to Our Lady of the Necessities, and between 1743 and 1750 a church, a convent for the Oratorian fathers and a royal palace rose here together. The palace survived the 1755 earthquake with little damage and was a royal residence for more than a century. It was here that the monarchy ended: during the revolution of October 1910 the palace came under fire, and the young King Manuel II left for exile. Since the twentieth century it has housed Portugal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In front of you is the monumental fountain of 1748. Behind the palace, the Tapada das Necessidades, ten hectares of royal gardens, is open to the public and free. It is the perfect place to rest. Thank you for walking with us through the palaces of Lapa and Madragoa.

Tip: Rest in the Tapada gardens; then walk downhill to Alcântara for LX Factory, tram 15E or the train.

Practical: Palace not open (ministry). Tapada das Necessidades: free; winter hours 8:00–18:00 at the south gate on Largo das Necessidades (8:00–17:45 at the north gate), longer in summer. The toilets near the south gate were reported closed in November 2026.

Map locations

Coordinates (latitude, longitude) for each stop:

1. Palácio Almada-Carvalhais: 38.709077, -9.151218 · open in Google Maps
2. Palace on Rua da Esperança (1721): 38.708138, -9.15523 · open in Google Maps
3. Palácio de Santos (French Embassy): 38.707069, -9.156493 · open in Google Maps
4. Palácio Alvor (Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga): 38.704757, -9.161526 · open in Google Maps
5. Palacete Porto Covo (former British Embassy): 38.707536, -9.161615 · open in Google Maps
6. Palacete dos Condes de Monte Real: 38.709742, -9.162369 · open in Google Maps
7. Palacete do Visconde de Sacavém: 38.708462, -9.163044 · open in Google Maps
8. Palacete da Lapa (former German and US embassies): 38.70699, -9.164885 · open in Google Maps
9. Palácio das Necessidades & Tapada: 38.706747, -9.170647 · open in Google Maps

Opening hours and prices change: check before you go. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.