
This is an account of my two visits to the Lisbon Expo 98. You might find it long - sorry, I could not reduce further than this. This report is dedicated to those planning to visit the Expo 98. You will find information about how to plan your visit. This is a detailed description about the Event of the Year but I have to say that no text or photographs or even videos can replace a visit to the event.

1998 is the International Year of the Oceans, and commemorates the five hundred anniversary of the historic discovery of the sea route from Europe to India by the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama. The Oceans represent an irreplaceable heritage for humanity, as a source of life. They are a vital and indispensable element to a sustainable development and for the defence of the ecological balances, which are essential to the planet. The aim of the Independent World Commission on the Oceans, headed by Dr. Mario Soares, is to make the public aware of the importance of the Oceans, learning to see them in a lucid and creative manner, within their diversity, as a space of well-being and harmonious relationships between different peoples and cultures.

At the same time, this is the year of Portugal. A year in which every Portuguese national has a greater pride in being Portuguese.

Hospitality and warmth is an art in which the Portuguese are considered one of the greatest masters. The Lisbon Expo 98 is dedicated to "The Oceans, a Heritage for the Future". It faces the challenge of preserving the planet and offers a sense of hope. In the welcoming words of the Portuguese Prime Minister, Antonio Guterres, "Expo 98 is thus also a universal invitation to join efforts, knowledge and experiences, which are fundamental for the protection and economic exploitation of the oceans. Expo 98 is a magnificent vessel anchored in the Tagus, which generously invites you to discover the wonders of the oceans, of land, urban and rural areas, and specific and technological highways of the future. With Expo 98 an entire country join in an ancestral spirit of discovery and sharing, opening to the world, the worlds here present. A country which offers itself as a privileged platform for the dialogue between peoples and cultures. A country which for the protection of the Oceans appeals to a universal culture of co-operation, solidarity and tolerance. This country is Portugal. And this exposition - Expo 98 - is the world in Portugal."

But what exactly are the World Expositions? According to Ole Philipson, President of the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE), " ... the first World Exposition was the 1851 Crystal Palace in London. It was followed by a long series of mostly very large expositions and all of them constituted milestones in the industrial and cultural development of our world. These great expositions contributed decisively to the opening up of international exchange, both of ideas and of goods. So many factors have worked for Expo 98: the theme, its location on the shores of the River Tagus, the beauty of the host city of Lisbon and the friendly and welcoming population of Portugal. A record smashing number of countries have wished to participate and all have come with
the best from their own countries. The number of countries and international organisations present in the last World Exposition of this millennium have made it the most participated of all expositions by far, the most international ever, which is for the Portuguese, a sense of immense satisfaction.”

Well, lets now start from the beginning. I have been in Lisbon twice in the past 2 months for short periods of time and I visited the Expo 98 both times. The first time was in June and I had the pleasure of visiting it with my cousin Boogie Viegas, my mother and my sister. The second time was at the end of July with my fiancee Bernadette Pereira.

Unfortunately, there is still a lot of extensive construction work being done in Lisbon. Some things were not completed before the Expo 98 but are running fast to completion. I could not recognise many of the new areas, starting with the recent expansion of the Lisbon Airport. Everything is now so much different from the Lisbon of my childhood. Today, Lisbon is a new and modern city. From night to day, Lisbon transformed itself in something simply unbelievable. Arriving in Lisbon by plane, one notices superb new accesses to the Expo 98 Area. Great wide new motorways link almost any point of Lisbon to any other point - amazing, really. Public transport and rail tracks have also improved tremendously. The new underground stations leading to Expo 98 are truly impressive. I guess those are the advantages of a young, recently expanded and small underground network. The new line is called “Oriente” and its underground stations are beautifully decorated with lovely paintings, statues, quotes, symbols, etc. There is usually classical or very relaxing music playing. It made me feel that I was in a sort of museum rather than in an underground station. Or maybe these should be the Underground Stations of the Future! This must definitely contribute to reduce people's stress... Imagine travelling everyday to work through small versions of "museums" and listening to very pleasant relaxing music. Terrific! A very small underground network compared with Paris or London, but big enough to serve people from Lisbon with excellent services, high quality and standards. It really gives one pleasure to travel in it. The trains are new and comfortable. The old stations in the other lines are being re-decorated as well, in line with the new underground stations.

One can also reach the Expo 98 by car, buses, trains and boats/ferries. A large station - Oriente Station - was built where the main collective passenger transport systems converge: trains, underground, urban buses, suburban, express buses, coaches and shuttles linking it to Lisbon International Airport. A new bridge named Bridge Vasco da Gama was built over the River Tagus linking Lisbon to Montijo and to the motorways to the South of Portugal. It is currently the longest suspension bridge in Europe with a length of 17 Km. A new and impressive Shopping Centre named "Colombo" is the largest shopping area in the Iberian Peninsula, excellent and worthy to visit, located in front of Sport Lisboa e Benfica Football Stadium (also the 3rd largest of the world with capacity for 120,000 people). Colombo Shopping Centre is great for shopping and one can easily spend the day there - restaurants are plentiful inside. Prices in Lisbon are still cheap compared to other European capitals. The capital of Ulysses, the quay of Europe, the gateway to the Atlantic, literally everything in Lisbon is extremely attractive today. Seen from the belvederes of its hills, it seems to be resting on the Tagus, which more than a River, appears to the visitor a sea and is an invitation to point towards the Oceans and the infinite. No wonder Lisbon's Navigators of the 15th and 16th centuries were strongly motivated in discovering new worlds. That's the motivation one can still get today. A strong motivation to move ahead,
to improve, to win.

If you have the chance, visit the Castelo de São Jorge in Lisbon, Castelo dos Mouros in Sintra (very far, high and difficult to climb but what a view !...), Cabo da Roca (the most western point of Continental Europe), Boca do Inferno in Cascais, Torre de Belem, Monumento dos Descobrimentos and Mosteiro dos Jerónimos, from the place where Vasco da Gama and his fleet left to discover new worlds (Restelo - Belem). While there, do not miss the famous Pasteis de Belem, fresh right from the factory. Take the ferry from Terreiro do Paço in Lisbon and travel to Barreiro during sunset (it is a cheap crossing over the Tagus River, an unforgettable and enjoyable experience). By all means, do not stay in your hotel room. Transport in Lisbon is still fairly cheap for tourists. No possible comparison with the prices in London or Paris. Nightlife is superb as well. Lisbon and Madrid are constantly elected number one nightlife cities of the world. Visit the Docas de Alcantara area and Avenida 24 de Julho pubs, bars and discos. You will not regret going there.

When I reached the Expo 98 area, (BTW, the temperature in Lisbon had reached almost 35 degrees centigrade those days!), my expectations were surpassed by far. It was much better than I thought. I had seen some photos and videos of it, but no photographs and no videos can manage to express with justice what the Expo 98 really is. One has to go there and witness it personally. So many things to see, so many things to appreciate, never enough time though. The biggest attraction in Europe and event of the year, the Expo 98 high-tech themed and international pavilions are definitely something not to miss this summer !

The three chosen International Languages of Expo 98 are English, Spanish and Portuguese - something that the French didn't like at all when they got to know about it. The truth is that the choices are perfectly justified. English is the second Language of the world spoken by 322 millions, after Chinese-Mandarin spoken by 885 millions; Spanish is the third language of the world spoken by 266 millions; and Portuguese is the sixth language of the world spoken by 170 millions. French occupies number 13 in the world languages, spoken by 72 millions only. Bengali occupies number 4, spoken by 189 millions and Hindi number 5 spoken by 182 millions. Therefore, the three European Languages spoken most in the world are English, Spanish and Portuguese. (Source http://www.sil.org/ethnologue/top100.html).

Expo 98 is open every day from 9.00 A.M. to 3.00 A.M. the following day. Unfortunately, the thematic pavilions close by 8.00 P.M. sharp without exception. Some long queues start closing at about 7.00 P.M. according to the length of the queue, so that nobody can join the queue after that. There are different kinds of nightlife attractions that include theatrical, musical, folklore, live shows, road recreations and entertainment, a multimedia exhibit (consisting of sounds, projected images, fire and laser effects culminated by fireworks) event "NOT TO MISS" every day at 11.45 P.M. called Acqua Matrix, behind the Portuguese Pavilion facing the river. From 0.05 A.M. the music comes back to the stages for all night-time fans. Fado, Jazz, Rock, African and Latin rhythms echo once again throughout the Expo 98 area. On the northern side, in the Sony Plaza, dancing fills the site with joy. There is a huge Sony screen, which is used to transmit the images of
the events and was used also to transmit the football games of the World Cup.


The Knowledge of the Seas Pavilion was designed to illustrate the evolution of the process of discovery of the Seas: how man learned to sail them, was able to explore their surface and how they started to adventure into the depths.

The Oceans Pavilion is one of the emblems of the Expo 98. Seen from afar, the building immediately draws attention to itself with its cut trim forms from the main body where the vertical elements are suggestive of cranes or masts. The interior is the largest Oceanarium of Europe, the second largest of the world, which attempts to recreate the global ocean. The Oceanarium incorporates three main ideas:

1. The Ocean as a single continuous body of water, forming the main theme of linking the peoples of the world.

2. Limitless Life, shown here as the exploration and celebration of the enormous diversity of life-forms, from microscopic organisms to large marine mammals.

3. Mankind's capacity to understand the ocean environment and our responsibility in its defence and conservation.

These concepts are the main messages transmitted by the Oceanarium: a new vision of life on Earth through the Oceans and a firm commitment to ensuring their future by means of a new relationship between Mankind and the environment. In the centre of the building, which has two floors, is the largest tank. Four smaller tanks start from the corners of the central aquarium, representing selected coastal habitats, with typical biological species from four regions of the globe. Together these five exhibition areas convey the idea of a single ocean - The Global Ocean - although it interacts with the diversity of the different seas. The central tank can be seen from the two floors and from any side, through four large curved panels. These windows provide a 180 degrees angle of vision into the aquarium, making visitors feel they are actually inside it! In total there are 20,000 examples of two hundred different species, from very small, beautiful coloured fishes to medium size sharks, giving life to the most modern Oceanarium in Europe. No description can describe the sensation of being really there. Believe me.

The Pavilion of the Future illustrates the importance of the Oceans for the survival of Mankind. The Pavilion is divided into five sectors: 'The Atlas Room', 'The Threatened Ocean', 'The Ocean Observatory', 'A Walk into the Deep Blue', and 'Towards the Future'. The thematic contents of this pavilion intend to bring about a change in individual and collective attitudes and behaviour towards the oceans. Multimedia special effects are used to explain in a clear and accessible way what contemporary science can tell us about the oceans.

The Portuguese Pavilion (there are long queues at all times but by all
means do not miss this!) occupies a dominant position on the site. In the interior, a vast exhibition shows the Portuguese contribution to the conquest of the Oceans, framing this effort in an universal perspective, that of the relationship of man with the sea at all times. The first nucleus of the exhibition is entitled 'Myths, Dreams and Realities', showing how the Portuguese starting from the Mediterranean culture, developed new paths through the oceans. The highlight of this first nucleus is an excellent Computer Animated Film "The Voyage", a recreation of the Portuguese Discoveries and a real must for Computer Animation enthusiasts like me...

The second nucleus is entitled 'The Builders of the Oceans' and displays the pieces chosen from an archaeological research campaign carried out in the Tagus River. The third and last nucleus is an Aquarama, destined to give the visitor the illusion of diving with the archaeologists into the depths of the Tagus River, and sharing in the experience of discovering this inexhaustible archive, the Ocean, property of Mankind. Definitely worth seeing, despite the long queues.

The Utopia Pavilion recreates myths and legends related to the sea. It is an oval pavilion that reminds me of a huge mushroom, with a giant interior with capacity for 12,000 people seating. The theme is based on the myth of creation and presents a burlesque variation on the origins of Mankind, the gods and the Oceans. The narrative gives rise to a journey on which visitors experience a series of different odysseys and will be surrounded by a huge stage set in which sophisticated light, sound and moving image technology (wind and giant balloons) is used together with more conventional theatrical devices. The show includes the most sophisticated known special effects, which are having their world premiere. Do not miss it too. There are 4 daily shows at 12.00 PM, 3.00 PM, 6.00 PM and 9.00 PM.

The Virtual Reality Pavilion and its state-of-the-art Technology is sponsored by Portugal Telecom. In this pavilion, visitors may learn of a millennium civilisation as ancient as the mythical Atlantis, by descending to a virtual Oceanica, the scene of an unforgettable voyage to the bottom of the ocean recreated by elaborated computer systems. Immersed in a virtual sea, the visitors will descend to the depths of the Ocean to visit the ruins of an ancient city just discovered by the archaeologists. This adventure is staged by using the most advanced and innovative technologies of virtual reality: mighty Silicon Graphics ONYX 2 Infinite Reality, Stereoscopic helmets, huge 180 degrees screens, motion platforms or chairs synchronised with the images and input device for the users. The idea is to create such a strong illusion that the visitors forget that they are surrounded by images of synthesis and are immersed into another dimension. Unfortunately, there is an entry fee for this pavilion and the timetable is from 10.00 AM to 12.00 AM. The queues are long but do not miss this too. If you are not yet a computer "lover", you will definitely start being one! The other pavilions represent the contribution of the several countries present. There are two areas dedicated to these International pavilions: The South International Area and The North International Area. Inside these huge complexes totalling an area of 80,000 square meters, there are modules occupied by the participating countries according to the dimension requirements of their respective representations. Near the Oriente Station there is yet another building which houses the International Organisations such as the United Nations, The Council of Europe, the International Red Cross, etc.
In my two visiting days, I toured as many international pavilions as I could but I should say that I didn’t have time to visit all of them. By the end of the day, the visitor is usually exhausted. The high temperature and hot sun do not help at all and standing in long queues is the worst thing. Food and drinks are widely available inside the area but at expensive prices compared to outside the Expo area. There are a lot of places where it is possible to rest and to refresh, but there is always considerable pressure not to waste time, which contributes to total exhaustion after some hours. So many things to see and not enough time. If you are going to spend more than 1 day visiting (I recommend 3 days), then don’t do it in consecutive days.

Have a break and enjoy the beauties of the city of Lisbon as well.

If you are interested in tourism and Portuguese history, do not miss any of the Portuguese pavilions in the Expo 98: Azores islands, Madeira islands, Non-Autonomous Territory of East Timor, ICEP-Portuguese Trade and Tourism Office, Territory of Macau, Portuguese communities, Territory and ViníPortugal. The Azores and Madeira pavilions provide lovely multimedia shows of the islands, with multiple projections. The visitor will step in a quadrangular magical space surrounded by moving images, light, the soundtrack and special effects. One can also purchase the much appreciated hand made articles from these islands, which are world famous.

The East Timor Non-Autonomous Territory Pavilion exhibits ethnographic, historic and cartographic material, illustrating the cultural identity of the island. The visit starts with the projection of a film about the tale of the formation of the island from an old crocodile which went to hunt on dry land and lost its strength, transforming itself to the island. I also learned that East Timor is also known as the land of the Rising Sun. After the film, the visitor is given an opportunity to find out about the history of East Timor, the Portuguese colonial domination and the Indonesian current invasion of the territory. In 1974, a democratic Portugal acknowledged the principle of self-determination for all people under its colonial administration, including East Timor. However, on the 7th December 1975, the Indonesian forces invaded the territory. On the 22nd December 1975, the UN condemned Indonesia and demanded the retreat of its forces but President Suharto didn’t move his army from the island. On the 30th June 1995, the UN International Court of Justice announced that the People of East Timor had the right to self-determination. East Timorese present in their pavilion the photographs of their people who are constantly fighting for self-determination at the cost of 2/3 of the population killed since 1975 for the cause of freedom. They are very proud too of their two Nobel Peace Prizes recently awarded to RC Bishop D. Ximenes Belo and Mr. Ramos Horta, representative of the Timorese Resistance.

The ICEP pavilion represents the promotion of the Portuguese economy throughout the world, as far as investment, trade and tourism are concerned. Do not miss it if you want to collect information about Portugal as a tourist destination.

The Macau pavilion provides a true cultural entertainment, seeking to recreate everyday scenes from Macau, allowing visitors to undertake an imaginary trip to the orient. Macau has been under Portuguese Administration for more than 450 years and will become the Macau
The ViniPortugal pavilion describes some of the best Portuguese wines that have won international prestige over the last decades. Wine-tasting, contests, the description of the wine cycle and the presentation of the various wine growing regions are the main attractions of this pavilion.

The Pavilion of the Portuguese Communities tells about the presence of the Portuguese in foreign lands through the history of their emigration and of their achievements in the host countries. They are close to five million, which means that one of every three Portuguese lives outside of the country. The core of this pavilion occupies the hull of the ship D. Fernando e Gloria, last "Nau" (vessel) of the India Route, constructed in the shipyards of Damao, in 1845. Anchored in the middle of the Olivais Dock, the frigate is a privileged site, standing out amongst all the other vessels participating in the nautical exhibition and attracting the attention of Ocean lovers and the art of navigating. The ship, which is one of the last four frigates with sails in the world and the eighth oldest war vessel on this planet, took part in military missions between 1843 and 1938. It sailed the equivalent of five times round the world and went as far as navigating three months and a half without making a stop, carrying more than 600 people without difficulty.

The Garcia de Orta gardens are part of an extension of the Riverside Walk leading to the area of the restaurants and the North International Area. There are six trips in a row, each being 25 meters wide, in which the plants chosen recreate the vegetation of the different places travelled to by the Portuguese during their ocean voyages: Macau, Goa, Timor, Mozambique, Angola, Sao Tome e Principe, Cape Verde, Madeira, Azores, and Brazil. The Goa's plot has a marble tank in the centre, which receives water from a pipe running, through the garden. A portal constructed from a base of wood allows for the appreciation of the whole garden highlighting the orange trees brought from China by the Portuguese, which were acclimatised in Goa before coming to Europe.

I also visited several other pavilions. Extremely interesting were: China, India, Pakistan, United States, Japan, Mexico, Brazil and Canada. Unfortunately, I didn't have time to visit any of the European ones. Two days were not enough. Three days might be enough to see everything as long as one plans things in advance and do not waste much time with non-important things. If you speak Hindi and you want to do some shopping in the Indian and Pakistani pavilions, you can get about 50% or more discount (unofficially, of course)! That's what my fiancee Bernadette did and we ended up buying half of the Pakistani pavilion... and even exchanging our London telephone numbers with the guys in the Indian and Pakistani pavilions, believe it or not :). The Indian Pavilion describes the Indian Oceanographic technology with very interesting graphics and maps. A poor representation was given to Goa section, a lot more could have been done but then again, it might have been outside of the theme of the exposition - certainly a point for discussion. But leaving a facade of a typical Goan home - the balcony - and nothing else is almost the same as not doing anything.

Goa has a lot more to present and something better should have been
done. But both Indian and Pakistani pavilions have several stalls inside selling Indian and Pakistani handicrafts. The visitors went literally crazy about it and the items were being sold fast and well.

To conclude this long report, it was a great experience. It made me really proud of my Portuguese Citizenship. You should not miss Expo 98 if you have a chance to visit it. The Exposition will last until end of September 1998. This article and loads of Expo 98 excellent photos are available from http://www.geocities.com/CollegePark/Union/8537/portugal/expo98.htm

Sources:

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