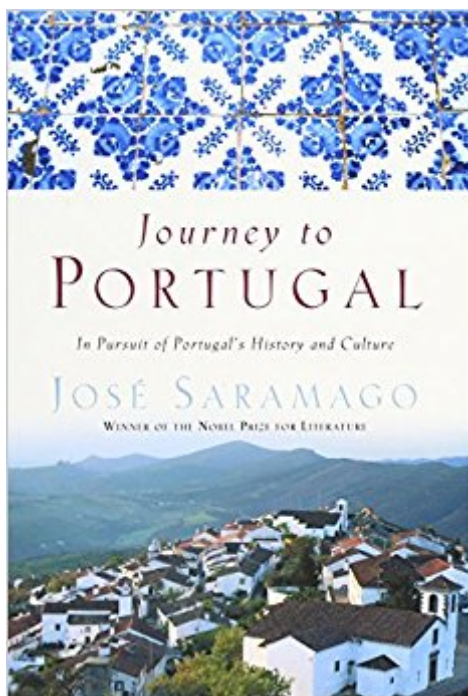


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# Journey To Portugal: In Pursuit Of Portugal's History And Culture



## Synopsis

When Jos f Saramago decided to write a book about Portugal, his only desire was that it be unlike all other books on the subject, and in this he has certainly succeeded. Recording the events and observations of a journey across the length and breadth of the country he loves dearly, Saramago brings Portugal to life as only a writer of his brilliance can. Forfeiting the usual sources such as tourist guides and road maps, he scours the country with the eyes and ears of an observer fascinated by the ancient myths and history of his people. Whether it be an inaccessible medieval fortress set on a cliff, a wayside chapel thick with cobwebs, or a grand mansion in the city, the extraordinary places of this land come alive. Always meticulously attentive to those elements of ancient Portugal that persist today, he examines the country in its current period of rapid transition and growth. *Journey to Portugal* is an ode to a country and its rich traditions.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In 1979, 19 years before he won the Nobel Prize for literature, Portuguese novelist Saramago (*Blindness*) journeyed across his homeland, hoping "to write a book on Portugal that [would be] capable of offering a fresh way of looking, a new way of feeling" about the country's history and culture. Out of that personal quest comes this monumental work, a literary hybrid that intermingles an intimate portrait of a nation with aspects of a novel, travel log and guide book. From the outset, a deep sense of Portuguese and European history pervades Saramago's descriptions, which evince a longing for the past whose fragments lie in every crevice, niche and portico. For example, upon seeing "traces of ancient anti-Spanish rancor in the form of obscene graffiti scored into good

15th-century stone" in Miranda do Douro, he recalls a 17th-century siege that took place in the small town. Later on in his trip, standing in the ruins of a church, he muses, "[T]he day before yesterday the Romans were here; yesterday it was the turn of the monks of Sao Cucufate; today it's the traveler." Saramago's absolute attachment to his homeland filters through every paragraph, impelling him to create a new vision of the country: a vision that aims to meld Portugal's past to its present and future. The reader may find the author's use of the third person when speaking of himself rather tedious, and some drawn-out sections waffle in personal, almost mystical, reflections. But it is difficult to resist being enchanted by the witty, at times sarcastic reveries of a man in search of his land, its history and himself. 6 maps, b&w photos. (Mar.)Forecast: Saramago's name will attract some readers to a book that, without it, will appeal to only a limited niche market.Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

For many Americans, Portugal is a distant relative of Spain, a country whose glory has vanished since the days of Henry the Navigator and his discoveries in the New World. Saramago, winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize for Literature, writes to dispel this notion. The author originally wrote this book to show his compatriots his deep love for the history, traditions, and countryside of his native land, and his passion for his subject shines through on every page. The many black-and-white photographs will familiarize the reader with some of the more obscure locations discussed here. Unfortunately, Saramago's use of the third-person narrative throughout the text gives it a stilted, artificial tone that distracts from the information presented. Further, Saramago is so deeply involved in his topic that he can be obscure to readers unfamiliar with the details of Portuguese history and culture. Some notes are available, and the maps and index are excellent. Recommended for larger travel collections where introductory travel guides to Portugal are already available.-DOlga B. Wise Compaq Computer Corp. Austin, TX Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I eventually struggled through to the end of "Journey to Portugal", more as a duty than a pleasure. After the first third, the sameness of the descriptions of churches, buildings and art works became a bit boring.Sarmago certainly writes with insights that would resonate with readers who are familiar with the history, culture and art works of Portugal. I am not, so many of Saramago's allusions and comments on the churches and buildings he saw were opaque to me.Having read (and reviewed) "Seeing", "Blindness" and "The Cave" by Saramago, I was a little disappointed at first with "Journey

to Portugal". However, my disappointment was relieved by beautiful passages sprinkled through the text. Saramago was born in Portugal and won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1998. "Journey to Portugal" is nominally a travel book, but of a special kind: it describes spiritual as well as spatial journeys. The book is written in the third person, with Saramago referring to himself throughout as "the traveller". Reflective travellers will understand when Saramago says "...when the street descends once more to the old cathedral so does the rain; it overflows the gutters and, as one idea follows another, the traveller remembers how the waters of the Minho ran down the hard shoulders beside the street, how small the world is, all its memories jumbled together in the minimal space inside the traveller's head." He also gives beautiful little word pictures of the lives and people he encountered on his journey. These are the real gems in this book, and why it is worth reading. In one especially memorable story ("The Man Who Could Not Forget") Saramago gets into conversation with the waiter at dinner about his travel plans and learns that the waiter was born in Cidadelhe, one of the small, remote villages Saramago plans to visit. Many years ago, when the waiter was a child, his sick young sister died on the way to get medical help, because none was available in their impoverished village. The waiter has never forgotten this family tragedy. His emotions are still raw as he talks to Saramago, who asks the waiter to come with him to the village and show him where he lived. Saramago concludes thus: "The traveller returns to his room. He spreads out his big map on the bed and looks for Pinhel. There it is, and the road which heads off into the hills. At some point in this space a seven-year-old girl died; then the traveller finds Cidadelhe, on the heights, between the Rivers Coa and Massueime, it really is at the ends of the earth, the end of life. If there is no one to remember." The book resonated with me for another reason. To quote Saramago: "The traveller preferred to admire the late afternoon gazing down towards the River Torto . . . and then spent a long while leaning back against a wall . . . because from behind it there wafted the most exquisite perfume of flowers . . ." Far too often in our travels we are driven onwards by an inexorable schedule that allows little time to stop and actually enjoy moments such as Saramago describes.

A great description of author's travels through Portugal and his viewing of art in museums and churches. Unfortunately, the figures are not included in the eBook.

The translation leaves a lot to be desired. Extremely heavy on the landscape descriptions and lacking with historical background.

I love travelogues and this one is no exception. I'm planning a trip to Portugal and wanted to read

this before going. Saramago is a bit difficult to read at times but his wit and insight bring a warmth to the book that can sometimes be missing. I'm already planning on reading it again.

What can I say- in this book Nobel Prize-winning Jose Saramago reflects on Portugal as his journey through his beautiful homeland leads him to its heart and soul. It is not a travel log, per se, but as you read it you are drawn to visit the places and follow the trail that he describes.

The best book to understand this small country of 10 million people with its outsized impact in shaping the world.

Very nice copy, delivered on time, Thank-you very much!

This book was not the travel companion I wanted.

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