



Salvador Sobral's Eurovision win means Lisbon will host next year's extravaganza

Vision accomplished

LISBON

The cost of staging the next event might lead some (the Irish, for example) to believe that winning the *Eurovision Song Contest* can be a poisoned chalice, but Salvador Sobral's victory in the Ukraine this year - meaning that Lisbon will host the annual schlockfest in May 2018 - will certainly raise the sky-high profile of Portugal's capital even further.

Lisbon has been generating a huge amount of publicity in the international media over the past couple of years, as the rest of the world seems to be waking up to what the Portuguese have known for some time: that the city has an array of stunning natural and other settings, a rich and diverse cultural heritage, and a vibrant and inventive hospitality scene.

Newspaper travel sections, glossy magazines and lifestyle websites have been falling over themselves, focusing a large part of their 'top ten' or 'must-see' lists on Lisbon's trendy restaurants, cool bars, hip hotels and funky museums, with the result that one of Europe's oldest capitals has become a magnet for the young (or young at heart), a city that is as much about 'doing' as 'seeing.'

For the meetings and incentives market this is - literally - meat and drink, as delegates can discover the many, varied and often under-rated delights of Portuguese food and wine at gala dinners,

As destinations, Lisbon and the Algarve are hitting all the right notes. Paul Rouse sings their praises

special events, dine-arounds, tastings, cookery masterclasses and vineyard tours. From the Michelin-starred restaurants Belcanto, Alma, Loco, Feitoria, Eleven and LAB to *Time Out's* innovative Mercado da Ribeira food court, and from John Malkovich's Bica do Sapato to the subterranean speakeasy Red Frog, there are plenty of talking points.

As the economy picks up, historic buildings are being restored and run-down districts gentrified at a rapid

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rate, and whilst the city's geography might limit the size of many new hotel developments, boutique establishments (perfect for incentives and smaller meetings) are springing up all over.

Top-end hotel openings in 2017 have included Verride Palacio Santa Catarina (19 bedrooms), Eurostars Museum (91), Arsenal Suites (24) and Turim Boulevard (100), whilst properties due to debut in

2018 include Melia Lisboa (239), Palacio Azul (40) and Palacio Ludovice (66). New on the conference scene meanwhile are the ultra-modern Sud Lisboa Hall (seating 700) and the restored art deco Pavilhão Carlos Lopes (2,900), which will doubtless help Lisbon to maintain its Top 10 ICCA ranking, whilst the last quarter of this year alone will see international gatherings of specialists in the fields of diabetes, addiction, urology, eye surgery, cancer research and health food, not to mention the much-vaunted Web Summit.

Described as 'Davos for geeks', the four-day event is being billed as the largest technology conference in the world, and will welcome 60,000 delegates, 2,200 journalists and 1,000 speakers, including keynote addresses from Francois Hollande and Al Gore.

Lisbon really is becoming a city for all tastes. What, for instance, could be in sharper contrast to the gaudy costumes of *Eurovision* than the fact that in October 2018 it will also host the biennial conference of the International Naturist Federation? Naked ambition indeed.

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Buyer's eye



Two recent events co-ordinated by Lisbon-based Blue Sky DMC perfectly illustrate the versatility of the city, and its particular appeal for younger, more adventurous clients.

An 80-pax incentive in August for an expanding London/New York IT start-up company (where the oldest person is the CEO, aged 40) included off-site dinners, a beach party, sailing on the Tagus aboard the Edwardian schooner *Leão Holandês*, surfing and beach games at *Guincho*, a jeep safari and picnic in *Sintra*, a team-building cookery workshop with *Kiss the Cook* (pictured above) and mountain-biking with *Fly the Hills* from *Peninha* to *Cascais* marina.

Data management company *Rubrik* meanwhile brought 130 EMEA partners to Lisbon in September on the recommendation of *Eva Collin*, MD of the French incentive agency *L'AgenceC*.

"The client has previously used *Ibiza*, *Malaga* and *Barcelona* for similar events," explains *Collin*. "And were delighted with our choice of *Lisbon*, as it combines the best elements of a city and a beach destination in one location. It also offers sunshine, good service and value-for money, and if there is a downside, it's that it has become so popular that it is now booked up many months in advance! Courtesy of *Blue Sky*, we arranged a series of activities, with one of the highlights being a speedboat transfer from *Lisbon* to *Cascais* for an awards gala dinner at *Coconuts*, a superb outdoor lounge venue with fabulous ocean views. *Lisbon* more than exceeded all our expectations."



Vilamoura Marina

THE ALGARVE

Further south, tourism figures have also hit record levels, with the subsequent knock-on effect for the MICE market. After several years of barely seeing a trowel raised in anger, several new hotel projects are now on (or back on) the drawing board, including planned openings for *Pestana* (900 bedrooms) and *Longevity* (140) in *Alvor*, *W* (134) in *Albufeira*, *Royal Algarve* (182) in *Quinta do Lago* and *Viceroy* (147) in *Loulé*, whilst *Tivoli*, having recently upgraded its *Carvoeiro* property to five-star status, is also adding an additional conference centre to its flagship hotel in *Vilamoura* marina.

The region is also celebrating its past, witnessed by the recent sympathetic

restoration of the incentive-friendly *Vila Monte* in *Moncarapacho*, and *Casa Fuzetta* in *Olhão*, where *Tara Donovan*, the former CEO of *Jamie Oliver Media Group*, has created a stunning 12-bedroom VIP meeting venue from a traditional three-storey townhouse. Lovely jubbly. ■

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