

A Trip to Templar Portugal

By
Sir Knight Thomas Cordas

This article is about a visit to several brilliant Knight Templar sites in Tomar, Portugal. In this one small city, we visited four stunning points of interest to any Mason. They are the 12th century Templar fortification close to the river Nabao, the Church located in the fortress, an ancient aqueduct near the fortress, and the restored Church of Sao Joao Baptista (St. John the Baptist) right in the middle of Tomar. For those unfamiliar with Portugal, it is almost identical in size and shape to the state of Indiana. Tomar is located in central Portugal about a one and one half hour drive northeast of Lisbon. The main and secondary highways are as good as any in the United States. If you travel by rental car, there is no special drivers permit required; a United States drivers license is all you'll need. Brush up on European road signage if you're driving.

It was late March of 2010 when my wife and I visited. This worked out particularly well because the weather at that time of year is mild with lots of sunshine, daytime temperatures in the mid 60s, and average humidity. Also, this is before the travel season gets underway in Europe which is typically very crowded, hot, humid, and generally uncomfortable for touring. I am in my early fifties and have been fortunate



Tomar Town Hall



Aqueduct

to have traveled throughout much of Europe. If possible, I recommend traveling just prior to or just after the peak summer season.

Our mode of travel was by rental car. The reason for our trip was to visit central and coastal southern Spain, because we had never been there before. My wife had done extensive research for this trip and found the cost of flying to Lisbon was far cheaper than to Madrid when including the cost of the rental car. This led to more research about what we could do in Portugal. That's when she found the Templar fortification in Tomar, and the trip was on!

After the long flight, we did not want to travel too far. Our first day was spent touring

Lisbon and staying nearby for the night. From there we made our way into Tomar by early evening. Locals recommended that we stay at the Hotel dos Templarios. This is a beautiful modern four star hotel with tasteful Templar themes. Dining in any of the local eateries throughout Portugal is first rate. Portugal being an Atlantic coast country has great seafood; and the beef, chicken, pork, and lamb are equally wonderful,



Sintra Castle

the best in all of Europe. Most of the restaurants cook food over wood. I don't know the species of wood they're using, but it makes the food taste like nothing else I've had.

The next morning we set out to tour the Templar fortress and after about ten minutes of driving, promptly got lost in the countryside. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise, because when we rounded the next bend, we came upon a huge ancient intact aqueduct. It was the water supply to the fortress. This marvel wasn't on our list of things to see nor was it in any tour books we had come across. It is not commercialized in any way. It is completely unattended and without any access barriers. We parked nearby and walked right onto the top of it. At each end we visited, there is a small stone hut-like building-structure. In the center of this structure there is a place where the water pools from the duct to allow one to pail out water for drinking or other uses, and at the opposite side of the pool the duct continues on.

We eventually found the Templar fortification. Admission was about eight dollars. As we know, the ancient craft was composed of operative Masons, and after about two hours of exploring this site, it became very clear why the craftsmen carried the title "Master Mason." As an example, there is a two story spiral staircase made of stone. It has a curved stone handrail along its entire length. My wife made the observation that the handrail was made with much detail. The height of the rail from the staircase was ideal; the rail was engraved to the shape of the hand where recesses were

knight templar



Fortress courtyard with spiral staircase.



Church square with black and white mosaic tiles.

made for the thumb, palm, inner knuckles, fingers and finger tips so that the slightest sensation of stumbling could be countered instantly by applying a slight gripping pressure to the rail with the hand. The feel of the hand-rail simply inspired confidence when walking on the spiral stair treads. Also, inside the fortress is a circular shaped church with amazing restored frescoes and carved statues.

In the center of Tomar within walking distance of the hotel, is the Praca da Republica square. At the square is the Church of Sao Joao Baptista. Notable in the church and the square are black and white mosaic tiles which we first learned about as entered apprentices. Opposite the church



Church in the fortress. Note the frescoes in foreground.



Templar Hotel. Note the cross on the rooftop.

is the 17th century town hall. At night, the square and the cobblestone streets are lit, making this a great place to take a stroll after dinner.

Portugal in general is not a tourist hotspot for Americans or Canadians, and that in itself makes the country all the more interesting. This article only covers one city and four sites. Although Portugal is a small country, there are many fascinating historic sites to see, such as the castle at Sintra, Portugal. Another must see is the castle at Segovia, Spain. As we have found, internet and other searches surely will yield more to explore.



Templar Church Detail

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A promotional poster for the Western States Easter Observance. The top section has a light blue background with the text "Grand Encampment of Knights Templar USA Presents the Fourth Annual" in a curved font. Below this is a circular logo with a cross and the text "GRAND ENCAMPMENT OF KNIGHTS TEMPLAR USA EASTER OBSERVANCE". Two blue butterflies are on either side of the logo. The middle section has a dark blue background with the text "Western States Easter Observance" and "April 18th - April 20th, 2014". The bottom section has a white background with a photograph of a beach scene. The text "He is Risen Indeed!" is written in a cursive font over the beach. At the bottom, it says "For More Information and to Register: <http://www.wseo.biz>".