

Portugal crowning jewels tell lasting tales

Castles, fortresses breathe life into country's history

Castles are beautiful structures – edifices that tell a story that only your sight can comprehend. They're as massive as they are stunning.

Castles can be good neighbors, particularly between a pair of rivaling countries like Portugal and Spain. Dozens of palaces and ancient walls wrap around towns and villages across the former and served as protection against the latter.

They represent a previous era and continue to stand strong. Portugal is blessed with many of the finest castles in Europe.

The historic city of Tomar is located 85 miles northeast of Lisbon. Rose-scented streets complement remarkable gardens and swaths of whitewashed houses. The Templar Knights and ominous Templar Castle called this town home during the Middle Ages. Portuguese mariners sailed their caravels deep into uncharted waters in search of trade routes to Asia and South America in the 15th century. Henry the Navigator – a famous grand master of the Order – planned epic adventures, known as the Discoveries, from the hilltop lair.

Medieval Almourol Castle rises above a granite promontory on an islet in the Tagus River 12 miles south from Tomar.



CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT – Templar Castle sits on a hillside in the Portugal town of Tomar. *Image: Rodrigo Schmitt. Adobe Stock.*

Gualdim Pais constructed the mystical Master of the Order of the Knights Templar in 1171. The crenelated towers and walls remain perfectly preserved.

The Portuguese masterfully crafted castles, but the need for walls dramatically changed in 1453. The Turks began using a new invention, the cannon, to blast through the “impregnable” walls

of Constantinople. Portugal needed a freshly designed castle to stop the cannons and warships.

These fortresses differed from the previously built castles. The walls sat low and were backed by earthworks. Walls also sloped to keep cannon balls bouncing off them. The star-shaped structures allowed defenders to create

deadly crossfire.

The fortress of Almeida stands watch over Portugal's mountainous east, not far from the Spanish border. Completed in 1641, it resembles a 12-point star from the air and the perimeter includes a moat and massive gates. The village remains mostly within the walls, which are intact, well preserved and easy to explore and admire.

Elvas once guarded the road to Lisbon, a town dominated by an astonishing 13th-century Moorish castle. Visitors will find churches, military barracks and miles of walls to walk and explore. Main plazas are filled with shops and tascas – inexpensive Portuguese restaurants. A local favorite is bacalhau dourada, salted cod with fried egg, mixed with very thin fries.

Valença protected Portugal's northern most borders. The massive fortress still looms over the Minho River, with Spain just a cannon shot away. It's a masterpiece of 17th-century military architecture. It's connected forts once shielded a historic town with pretty squares, medieval lanes and shops, cafes and inns. A Roman milestone that dates to the first century resides inside the fortress.

Portugal's castles are grand sites and can withstand quite a punch. Traits that complete a perfect setting.



SMART MOVE – Cadillac is expected to unveil the Escalade IQ later this year. *Image: NewsPress USA.*

Escalade IQ expected to hit showrooms this year

General Motors' priority to become primarily an electric-vehicle automaker by the next decade took a luxurious step forward, with the recent announcement of the Escalade IQ.

GM didn't specify which year the Escalade IQ will debut, but it could be soon. Cadillac confirmed that three new EV models (Celestiq sedan and Lyriq SUV) will debut in 2023 and Escalade is expected to be one of them.

More details soon should become

available. Escalade IQ is expected to be powered by GM's Ultium battery technology, similar to the GMC Hummer EV SUV. That would give Escalade roughly a 177-kWh battery capacity and three electric motors generating more than 800 horsepower. Also, the same commitment to craftsmanship, technology and performance will not be lessened.

Cadillac is expected to reveal the Escalade IQ later this year. It should be well worth the wait.

Hyundai is offering an EV subscription-based plan

Hyundai is working to increase the number of electric vehicles on our roadways with its Evolve+ subscription service. It provides flexibility and affordability to consumers who want to drive the automaker's newest EVs without committing to a purchase or longer-term lease.

Evolve+'s month-to-month model covers 1,000 miles, insurance, maintenance, registration and roadside assistance at a starting price of \$699 per month for a Kona Electric and \$899 per month for an IONIQ. The subscriber can cancel at any time during each subscription period and there is no long-term commitment required. Other subscription services require customers to lock into a three- to five-month minimum term.

“With no paperwork, no commitment and no long-term loan, Evolve+ is an optimal solution for the ‘EV-curious’ car shopper,” said Olabisi Boyle, vice president, product planning and mobility strategy, Hyundai Motor North America. “We’ve prioritized simplicity and flexibility with the subscription process, allowing customers to place orders and renew on their own terms on their own time all via smartphone. We are hoping that by offering a subscription-based option, we will increase EV adoption and awareness as customers transition into an EV future.”

There are several reasons why

customers might need a car for a short term – “snowbirds,” who need a car at their winter home, a college student home for the summer, or a worker on remote assignment are among many consumer situations.

Hyundai Evolve+ offers consumers a unique digital-buying experience, allowing them to select their vehicle and payment terms through a custom app. Then, the customer can simply go to the dealership to pick up the vehicle. It's a no-hag-gling, stress-free delivery experience.

How it works:

- Customers download the Evolve+ app
- Customers begin by searching for a vehicle by price or zip code, then select a model from inventory and choose a monthly term that can be renewed
- The price is clearly displayed and there is no need for negotiation
- Log into account or create a new account
- Customer follows in-app instructions to qualify
- Customer then pays for the subscription by using a credit card
- Payment via credit card reserves the vehicle
- A pickup time at the dealership is chosen

The program currently is available in six states but is expected to grow throughout the U.S.