



PICTURE: Phil Dorby/Shutterstock



# Art of the matter

A stylish sailing from Southampton offers a creative take on cruise, writes **Katie McGonagle**

**b**etter to be lost here somewhere than on my way to nowhere,' reads the rather poetic translation of the words on an enormous mural by Lisbon-born street artist Mário Belém, which we'd paused for a moment to contemplate.

Painted during the height of the pandemic, it depicts a woman sitting amid an oversized plant pot while leaves and flowers spring to life around her, staring up at the word 'saudade' – which means 'yearning' – capturing everything we felt just a few years ago about longing to get out and experience the world (*pictured, overleaf*).

Apt, then, that it's one of the highlights of a tuk-tuk tour of Lisbon led by engaging guide Andre Mendes, who whizzed us around the city's key sights with an insightful commentary along the way.

Having missed out on a planned girls' weekend to the Portuguese capital back in 2020, I'd finally made it here on a mother-daughter trip that had turned into a journey of discovery. For me, it was a chance to tick off some of the destinations on my travel wish list, while for my mum – a reluctant flyer – it was a way to test the waters of a cruise holiday, with *Celebrity Apex* sailing out of Southampton for the sunnier climes of Portugal and the Canary Islands.

Andre pointed out more striking murals, from a macabre image of a skeleton smoking a cigarette marking the 150th anniversary of Portugal's abolition of the death penalty in 1867, to a joyous celebration of traditional fado music (*pictured, left*) and a futuristic vision of urban life made from

53,000 hand-painted tiles. By which point, I was glad the tiny tuk-tuk engine was doing the work of getting up and down these steep hills, so I could focus on the art.

The tour was just the right balance of history and quirky culture, ending at local restaurant Solar dos Bicos for cod croquettes and *pasteis de nata*. This traditional diner was a chance to admire the city's signature blue-and-white azulejo tiles up close and reflect on the artistic flair, both old and new, that brings Lisbon to life.

## DESIGNER CRUISING

That creativity was reflected back on board *Celebrity Apex*, the Edge Class ship based in Southampton this summer and returning from May to October 2026. With designer Kelly Hoppen at the helm of its interiors, the aesthetic is light and modern without verging on bland, from the curved lines of the Rooftop Garden to the bright Italian-inspired Grand Plaza atrium.

The three-deck-high Eden bar and restaurant is the star of the interior design show, blending mid-century modern furniture and retro 70s chic with touches designed for the Instagram age. It took several visits to discover all of its nooks and crannies, with sectioned-off spaces offering privacy even in a sizeable venue.

The moveable Magic Carpet platform – which doubles as a bar, restaurant and extension to the pool deck – might be more functional than aesthetic, but that didn't stop it from becoming a favourite spot on ➤

# DESTINATIONS

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### FOOD MARKETS

**Funchal:** Mercado dos Lavradores sits within easy reach of the port with a beautiful façade, made from hand-painted tiles and stalls stacked high with fruit, vegetables, flowers and spices.

**Las Palmas de Gran Canaria:** Covered Vegueta market was built in 1863 and sits on the waterfront, a good spot for tapas of Canarian cheeses and cured meats.

**A Coruña:** Plaza de Lugo has fish and seafood stalls at ground level showing why the Galician coast is famed for its fishing, plus local cheese and meats (pictured) upstairs. It's best from Tuesday to Saturday when the fresh catch is in.



### BOOK IT

**Celebrity Cruises** will base *Celebrity Apex* in Southampton from May 8-October 18, 2026, with an expanded programme to the Norwegian fjords and the Arctic Circle – including the new port of Trondheim in Norway – and a solar eclipse departure. An 11-night Canaries & Portugal cruise departing September 26, 2026, starts from £1,739 for an Inside cabin or £2,512 for a Veranda stateroom. [celebritycruises.com](http://celebritycruises.com)



### top tip

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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Magic Carpet, *Celebrity Apex*; Eden bar and restaurant; mural by Mário Belém in Lisbon

PICTURE: Steve Dunlop; vpogarcia/Wikimedia Commons



board, offering all the sea views you could want while sheltered from the accompanying sea breeze.

Likewise, our Infinite Veranda stateroom, with floor-to-ceiling windows that can be retracted half-way, was a good fit for a shoulder-season sailing where the weather didn't always play ball – though cruisers who like a full balcony might find it takes some getting used to.

There was more innovation in store in the theatre, where flagship performance *Crystallize* was a show-stopping display of aerial acrobatics – with a husband-and-wife team taking centre stage – to a soundtrack of an electric violin belting out pop anthems. I ventured behind the scenes on a backstage tour for an insight into the fast and furious pace of being a performer at sea – whether learning a show from start to finish in just 10 days or the practicalities of quick costume changes in the wings – and was wowed all over again by the inventiveness of both cast and crew.

### APEX EATS

There's plenty of culinary creativity too, from the classy cocktail menu and impressive wake views at Eden to the inventive Le Petit Chef experience, plus a wide-ranging wine menu courtesy of 20 onboard sommeliers.

Refreshingly, though, guests don't have to shell out for the speciality restaurants to experience top-quality food and drink. Edge Class ships have swapped large, grand dining rooms for four smaller

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spaces more akin to a regular restaurant with plenty of tables for two or four. With some menu items in common alongside specials unique to each venue – the slow-cooked lamb shank at Cyprus and Venice-style pappardelle at Tuscan were favourites – the low-key atmosphere and quality ingredients were every bit as impressive as the speciality restaurants.

With space to chat at our table for two, we weighed up the highlights of each port of call – from our tuk-tuk tour of Lisbon to venturing into the hills of Funchal and admiring the peak of Mount Teide in Tenerife – finally ticking off some of western Europe's must-see spots.

But was my mum convinced about the joys of a holiday at sea? The standout service, varied dining and constant sea views were a hit, so much so that she's already eyeing up a cruise in the Norwegian fjords. The only challenge was finding our way around the ship amid its array of onboard facilities – but as we'd discovered earlier, we'd rather be lost somewhere than on the way to nowhere, and getting lost together was all part of the fun. **TW**