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hotel insider The Boutique Hotels Figueira, Lisbon

Hip, in the heart of a European capital of culture

The welcome

The smart olive-green façade of the Figueira, the first of the Boutique Hotels collection, stands out from the crumbling, romantic-looking buildings around Praça da Figueira (Fig Tree Square). The 18th century structure has been completely renovated and it shows – outside and in. As I walk through glass doors, the first thing I notice is the staff: they all look like models. Two handsome men in grey suits, and a woman with glossy black hair and thick-rimmed glasses greet me. Looking dishevelled after my early flight, I worry they may be too cool to be kind. Luckily, I couldn't be more wrong, and I am quickly escorted straight to my room, assured every whim will be catered to.

The neighbourhood

One of many boutique hotels springing up in Lisbon, this one – its interior conceived as a tree with 50 rooms at its branches – is surely one of the best located. Next to Rossio Square, most sites are within walking distance. These include the magnificent hilltop Castelo de São Jorge, the seafont and the high-end Avenida da Liberdade



A fig tree motif features inside and out. Courtesy of The Boutique Hotels Figueira

shopping boulevard. For everything else there's the yellow tram, which goes from right outside the hotel and is itself an attraction.

The room

Floorspace is at a premium; standard rooms are only 19 square metres but it's the thoughtful touches by the award-winning designer Nini Andrade Silva, inspired by the fig tree (the hotel's namesake) and the 1950s, which make it work. A black

rotary telephone sits alongside an iPod dock, signifying the hotel's balance between old and new, and the room's earthy tones are a nod to nature. In keeping with Silva's mission statement, "I don't follow trends, I seek to create them", the bed is a futon on a wooden plinth, looking right onto the square. At night, the lighting gives the impression the statue of King John I is going to gallop on his bronze horse right through the giant open windows.

The service

The Boutique is little over a month old and service isn't yet slick but what staff lack in efficiency, they make up with good humour and a willingness to help.

The scene

Thanks to the adjacent bar and restaurant, business travellers, couples and glam young hipsters ensure a lively vibe. Light projections of fig fruits and leaves along the hotel's curving corridors add to the impression that not only is this a fun sort of treehouse, it's also a treehouse to don your Prada sunglasses, stilettos and be seen in.

The food

The hotel's restaurant, Honra, is run by Nathalie Costa, the sister of Michelin-star winning Olivier da Costa and the restaurant prides itself in Portuguese home cooking from the recipes of the Costas' grandmother. Tapas-style dishes emerge, including a fresh octopus salad (€9; Dh42) that is wonderfully tender and salty. Pandering to my sweet tooth, the warm custard tart (€1.50; Dh7) with fig and tangerine ice cream for dessert is my

highlight – the delicate pastry gives way to a soft, immaculately creamy filling. To my delight, the breakfast buffet includes liquid chocolate.

Loved

The spa. As I enter, I'm greeted with tea and a seat with a porthole looking out to the Castelo. I'm treated to a blissful detox massage (€45; Dh215), starting with acupressure on my feet, leading up to an invigorating honey and crushed cinnamon exfoliation on my back.

Hated

The bathroom – far too small and standard for a hotel which in most other categories is one-of-a-kind.

The verdict

Locals love it – for a view into hip, urban Portugal, this place has all the elements for success.

The bottom line

A double room costs from €125 (Dh596) per night, including taxes. Hotel Figueira, Praça da Figueira No 16 (www.theboutiquehotels.com; 00 351 210 492 940).

★ Hannah Stuart-Leach