

{ TRAFARIA PRAIA }

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**TRAFARIA
PRAIA**

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Lisbon and its Ferries

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THE LISBON FERRIES KNOWN AS *CACILHEIROS* DISCREETLY SPREAD OUT ACROSS THE BRILLIANT, SHINING GLARE OF THE RIVER TAGUS, PART OF A CONTINUOUS HUSTLE AND BUSTLE OF SHIPS, QUAYS, AND PEOPLE, WITH THEIR UNMISTAKEABLE ORANGE HULLS, THEIR PROWS POINTING TOWARD BELÉM, CACILHAS, CAIS DO SODRÉ, MONTIJO, PORTO BRANDÃO, SEIXAL, PRAÇA DO COMÉRCIO, OR TRAFARIA. THESE ARE THE *CACILHEIROS*. AT THEIR STERNS THERE IS THE SAME WHITE WAKE SPLASHED WITH BLUE ONCE DRAWN OUT BY THE OLD STEAMERS OF THE LINES TO CASCAIS, TO PAÇO DE ARCOS, TO PEDROUÇOS, TO COVA DO VAPOR, OR TO ALCOCHETE.

They were once called *Progresso* and *Victória*, *Renascer* and *Flecha*. Some perpetuate the same name in successive ships; there have already been four *Lisbonenses*, and *Trafaria Praia*, the present one, is the second to have that name. Today we continue to use the term *cacilheiros* for these characters from a centuries-old maritime Lisbon, motifs of the landscape of the River Tagus and of its cities. This picture, which geography and history have woven over time, remains part of the daily lives of the people who cross the River Tagus every day.

Lisbon is a maritime city. It is the true Atlantic capital of Europe. It was born and grew over 25 centuries based on the fluvial and port reality provided by the generous and exuberant environmental conditions of the estuary of the River Tagus. This circumstance attracted the people and the economic activities that, as time passed, led to the establishment of the harbor of Lisbon.

The local geography spread human activity throughout the region of the River Tagus estuary, with several different groups interacting through fluvial transportation. Their connection was undertaken by ships that were designed locally, under a Mediterranean and Phoenician influence. Some of these ships carried passengers across the River Tagus, and the shortest route was between the area known as the Ribeira, or riverbank, which is now the Cais do Sodré, and the tip of the Cacilhas area, close to Almada.

The ships that ran the route to Cacilhas were called *cacilheiros*, a term that was then extended, over the years, to the many different ferries, regardless of their destination. Exceptions to this were the Barreiro ships, which since 1860 covered the route going from the Praça do Comércio to the town of Barreiro, mainly serving the railway to the south of Portugal.

The fluvial navigation around Lisbon was always so important that the River Tagus became one of the first in Europe to receive local traffic steamers. Since 1821, and for more than 100 years, sailboats coexisted with the steamboats. But the word *cacilheiro* remained in the heart of popular culture in Lisbon, as this ferry is the oldest means of collective transportation in the region.

The *cacilheiro* is also the oldest and most full of traditions and episodes of these boats, given that, besides their function, they are a perennial expression of Lisbon's maritime soul. One of the living characters of this history is the *Trafaria Praia*. It is one of the most attractive and best-loved *cacilheiros*, with years of service on the River Tagus, connecting Lisbon to the opposite bank, or, more specifically, Belém to Porto Brandão and to Trafaria.

A Cacilheiro with Soul

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Joana Vasconcelos's artistic spirit continues to surprise us through her many projects, which are always original and creative. When she was invited to represent Portugal at the 55th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia, she chose the *Trafaria Praia* as the starting point of her project. The *cacilheiro* lives the dream of the old soul of Lisbon and Portugal, which the *Trafaria Praia* takes to Venice, transformed by Vasconcelos's imagination and will. On its metal hull, in its memories, in its conversion into art, the *Trafaria Praia* bears witness to the utopia of Lisbon and of the River Tagus in Venice.

In Venice, there is thus a restless, even somewhat nomadic, Portuguese pavilion, consistent with the Portuguese spirit of joining the ship and setting off. This was how Portugal

changed the world during the Renaissance. This was how the Portuguese people shifted the center of the maritime and trade universe from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, from the Adriatic to the River Tagus, to the temporary ruin of Venice and the fleeting glory of Lisbon. What remains from those times are two beautiful cities full of charm shared by people and ships...

The *Trafaria Praia*

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The *Trafaria Praia* is a passenger ship that has been used, over the last 15 years, on regular trips between the banks of the River Tagus. It came to Lisbon in July 1996 after having been bought by the Lisbon-based company Transtejo from the Hamburg-based company Hadag. Since 1888 Hadag has run the fluvial passenger transportation on the River Elbe. The acronym Hadag comes from *Hafen-Dampfschiffahrt A.G.*, the original name, which means “steam shipping company from the port (of Hamburg).”

The robustness and quality of the construction of the *Trafaria Praia* was conducive to very comfortable and pleasant journeys between Belém and Trafaria. Trafaria is a village on the left bank of the River Tagus with easy access to the beaches there, the most famous of which is Costa da Caparica. This is the reason for the name that was given to the *cacilheiro*; it had been used for a previous ship also bought in Germany, in 1964, which sailed to Trafaria until 1982.

For decades, the Belém-to-Trafaria crossing was the easiest way to get to the beaches, thanks to the construction of a landing stage in Belém. This was part of the infrastructure built on the occasion of the Belém Portuguese World Exhibition of 1940, in which the “Portuguese World” was portrayed at a time when Europe was already steeped in World War II.

For many people, setting off from Belém to Trafaria and coming back was a way of relaxing and enjoying the River Tagus. The upper deck of the *Trafaria Praia* (and of its sisters and fleetmates on the route, such as the *Castelo*, the *Marvila*, the *Mouraria*, the *Porto Brandão*, and the *Vouga*) is open-air on the poop, making this the ideal place to situate oneself for these brief cruises. The current ferries do not allow for this, as they are all enclosed. Today, there is increasing pressure to close down the route from Belém to Trafaria. At the moment, the route has been reduced to just one ship.

The existence of the *Trafaria Praia* goes far beyond the Belém-Trafaria crossing. The ship was commissioned by Hadag and built by the Hamburg-based shipyard Hanseatische Werft GmbH in 1959 and 1960. It was part of a series of dozens of passenger ships, all very similar, called “Typ II” and “Typ III.” These vessels were built during the 1950s and 1960s in order to support the transporting of passengers on the River Elbe in the region of the city of Hamburg. They became famous because they were unique, a sort of riverboat Volkswagen, design items typical of Germany as it was undergoing reconstruction after World War II.

The *Trafaria Praia* was originally called *Pöseldorf* and started to be built on December 17, 1959, when its keel was laid in the shipyard. It has a gross tonnage of 249 tons, a length of 30.10 meters, a breadth (width, in nautical terms) of 7.50 meters, and a depth (height) of 3.65 meters. It was built quickly and launched into the River Elbe on February 11, 1960, ready to sail.

It was registered in the port of Hamburg four days later and then began its activity with Hadag, being certified to transport up to 604 passengers at a time. In April 1978 the *Pöseldorf* gained a few more years of life when it was modernized at the Scheel & Jöhnk shipyard, also in Hamburg. It carried on providing passenger and tourist transportation on the River Elbe until it was removed from active service in 1996 and put up for sale.

Transtejo, which was already running its River Tagus crossings with four passenger ships identical to the *Pöseldorf*, took advantage of this opportunity and bought it, along with the *St. Pauli*. Both vessels left the port of Hamburg on board the dock-ship *Condock V* on July 6, 1996, en route to Lisbon, where they arrived after a five-day journey.

The *Pöseldorf*, still with its German name and colors, was taken off the *Condock V* at the Alcântara quay in Lisbon and towed to Cacilhas. Neither the *Pöseldorf* nor the *St. Pauli* were operational yet, and it was necessary to undertake lengthy repairs. In the case of the *Pöseldorf*, it was renamed *Trafaria Praia* and registered in the Captaincy of the Port of Lisbon on March 26, 1997. The new ferry started out on the Belém–Porto Brandão–Trafaria route soon after.

Port Cities

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Lisbon is one of several European port cities that have developed important public transport systems with ferries. This is also the case with Hamburg, where the Hadag has run the river crossings since 1888. This is also the case with Venice, where the famous *vaporettos* compete with the gondolas for the preferences of the locals and the visitors, sailing along the various canals. It is also the case with Istanbul, where the fleet of passenger ferries and local services is fascinating.

In Lisbon, fluvial passenger transportation was developed in the 19th century with the steamships of the Burnay company, which gave way in 1899 to the Parceria dos Vapores Lisbonenses, which became the Sociedade Marítima de Transportes in the 1950s. This latter company had exclusive rights to operate ferries transporting people and vehicles. Its activity was greatly affected by the opening of the bridge over the River Tagus in 1966. This bridge connected Alcântara and Almada, diverting a portion of the ferries' customers and thus weakening the financial situation of the corporation.

Besides the Sociedade Marítima de Transportes, four other companies operated on the River Tagus: the Sociedade Nacional de Motonaves, the Empresa de Transportes Tejo, the Sociedade Jerónimo Rodrigues Durão, and the Sociedade Damásio, Vasques & Santos. They were all family businesses, with small fleets of three or four ships, almost all of which were still made of wood. With the political changes that took place after April 25, 1974 (the Carnation Revolution), all of these companies collapsed, forcing the Portuguese state to intervene, nationalizing the fluvial transportation and establishing a new company, the Transtejo, in December of 1975.

Germans of the River Tagus

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The state of degradation of the several different fleets at the time led Transtejo to buy five second-hand passenger ships from Hadag. These first ex-German vessels were purchased for 2.6 million marks in 1977. They were about 20 years old and could carry 400 passengers. The *Volksdorf* was the largest, and was renamed *Marvila*, the twins *Ottensen* and *Otmarschen* altered their names to *Mouraria* and *Vouga*, the *Falkenstein* was given the name *Porto Brandão*, and the *Lichtwark* became the *Castelo*.

These five ships became known in Lisbon as the class of ex-Germans, and they entered into service for Transtejo at the beginning of 1978, providing an immediate improvement

in the river crossing service. So, when in 1996 there was the opportunity to buy two more vessels, the *Pöseldorf* swapped the River Elbe for the River Tagus, becoming the *Trafaria Praia*. The name could not be more suggestive, as during the summer months it transported many hundreds of Lisbon dwellers to the other side of the River Tagus on their way to the beaches. The *cacilheiro* would make continuous trips from Belém on Saturdays and Sundays. It would dock, fill up, set off, and return immediately to take a new group of passengers. There were lines and lines of candidates for the ferry outside the riverboat station, waiting.

The years went by for the *Trafaria Praia*, and it made innumerable successive trips over the River Tagus. In 2005 it suffered a serious breakdown in its main engine, which was replaced by a new motor so it could carry on with its routine. In September 2009, the *Trafaria Praia* went to Aveiro to undergo a final major overhaul at the Navalria shipyard, returning to Lisbon in October 2009 for two more years of service on the Trafaria route. When its sailing certificates expired and it was in need of further investments and repairs, the *Trafaria Praia* was laid up in the Margueira dock, in the old shipyards of the Lisnave company, where it awaited its fate.

This was where Vasconcelos discovered and rescued it. An agreement with Transtejo allowed for the temporary loan of the *Trafaria Praia* to the artist and its transformation into the most original and international ferry of the 21st century. After having sailed in Hamburg, Lisbon, and Venice, all that is left for the *Trafaria Praia* is to one day discover the waters of the Bosphorus Strait, so it can say that it has performed in all four major ports for *cacilheiros* in Europe. . .