

READER SUBMISSION

Livraria Lello: the bookstore that inspired Flourish and Blotts

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"This Christmas and new year, I will be visiting Portugal," I told my Portuguese friend, Elisa.

"That's really amazing! In which city?" she asked.

"Lisbon and Porto," I replied.

I received long travel guidelines from Elisa before I left for Portugal on the eve of the new year in 2023. However, I could not read everything she wrote, but I remembered the name Livraria Lello, which is the bookshop from where J.K. Rowling allegedly received inspiration for architectural elements in *Harry Potter*.

In 1991, Rowling visited Livraria Lello while working on the first *Harry Potter* book. It is a popular theory that Livraria Lello inspired the interiors for Hogwarts as well as Flourish and Blotts, the wizarding bookshop, in the *Harry Potter* universe. The bookstore also revealed that she bought a book and spent several hours there. This is why many *Harry Potter* fans, including myself, make a point of visiting Livraria Lello when they are in Porto.



PHOTO: AUTHOR

On my first morning in Porto, I rushed out of my room in search of the bookstore, which is located in Rua das Carmelitas, surrounded by cafes, restaurants, and shops. The streets around the bookstore

are typically narrow and winding and are lined with traditional Portuguese buildings and cobblestone streets, giving it a captivating atmosphere. The area is relatively pedestrian-friendly, making it easy to explore on foot.

In front of the bookstore, there's a narrow street that might be a bit crowded but it's also a pleasant spot to take a stroll or sit down in one of the street-side cafes to enjoy a drink. Many tourists can be spotted walking around, taking photos of the beautiful architecture, trying to capture the charming atmosphere of the area.

Livraria Lello was designed by brothers José and António Lello, who owned the store, and was built in 1906. It is considered one of the most aesthetically pleasing bookstores in the world, and upon seeing the interior, I realised the claims were not exaggerated.

The interior features ornate wooden shelves, stained glass windows, and a grand staircase that winds its way up through the middle of the store, which instantly transports fans to the fictional Flourish and Blotts. In the interior, you will notice a vaulted ceiling decorated

with frescoes and illuminated by skylight. The bookstore's design is reminiscent of Art Nouveau, a style that was popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Livraria Lello carries a wide range of books in various languages, such as Portuguese, Spanish, French, English, alongside German, Italian, and more. Their collection is incredibly diverse, offering a selection of fiction and non-fiction titles, including literature, poetry, history, science, philosophy, and children's books. In addition to books, visitors to Livraria Lello can purchase a variety of items including souvenirs, stationery items, posters, art prints and many more.

While it may not be confirmed that Rowling did indeed take inspiration from Livraria Lello for Flourish and Blotts, visiting the bookstore was an amazing experience nonetheless. In this case, I owe it all to my friend Maria Elisa Dias de Freitas.

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