

Thousands of Young People Already Reached Fatima, on Their Way to Lisbon

Less than a week before World Youth Day, many young people want to come and experience Fatima.

Since the beginning of this week, the spaces of the Shrine of Fatima are increasingly crowded with young people who came to Portugal to participate in the World Youth Day Lisbon (WYD Lisbon 2023), between 1 and 6 August. For many of them, Cova da Iria is an obvious stopping point, where many go on pilgrimage for the first time.

“I feel blessed to start here, with my group, the journey to WYD Lisbon 2023,” explains Sandra, from Mauritius, who is part of a delegation from the diocese of the capital, Porto Luís. She is pilgriming with her friend Tessa, who does not hide the “great grace” she feels on this first visit to Fatima.

“There are no words to explain what I feel. I have already learnt the story of the three children to whom Our Lady appeared, I have visited their tombs and the basilica where

they are, which I found beautiful," says Tessa, who considers this passage through Cova da Iria as "an opportunity to bring Mary to the WYD".

Since the 17th of July, the Shrine of Fatima has received numerous organised groups of young people who come to Portugal to participate in WYD Lisbon 2023, a presence that has been increasing in number daily. Yesterday alone, the services of the Shrine welcomed about 4,000 young pilgrims, in organised groups. France is, so far, the country with the most representation, but a brief walk through the Prayer Area is enough to understand the whole world is represented.

Karen, from the Dominican Republic and living in the United States of America, came to Fatima for the first time accompanied by a North American group.

"Being here is the fulfilment of a dream. It has been a wonderful, peaceful experience. I know that my family and friends would love to be here, and praying in this place is a blessing for me," says the young woman.

Laura Castro, from Mexico, speaks with the same fascination of a "dream fulfilled" with this first visit to the "Shrine of the Virgin".

"I am very excited about this visit, which will certainly be a remarkable experience, just like participating in WYD Lisbon 2023," she predicts.

Between organised programmes and free visits, the young people are scattered throughout the various spaces of the Shrine of Fatima. As a roadmap, they use the Young pilgrim's itinerary, created to help young people follow a route for a prayerful, spiritual and cultural experience of Fatima. In the moments of celebration, the colours and flags are a clear mark of the presence of foreign groups, such as the one Bartek, from Poland, belongs to.

"The most incredible experience was the Mass we just attended... It was a marvellous moment of sharing our faith in assembly," he describes, as he leaves the Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity. Further ahead, Zezinha Alfama, leader of Catholic Scouting in Cape Verde, is accompanied by her family and friends on this visit to Fatima, where they came to "greet the Mother of Heaven". "It is a great joy to be here, to socialise and share this unique moment in the life of a young person," says the head of the group.



“From here, with all the strength and grace that come from the encounter with the Blessed Mother, we will continue and participate in the WYD.”

Most of the young people are arriving by bus, which park next to the Youth Village, a space in Park 12 that the Shrine has prepared from scratch for the young people to sleep and eat, available 24 hours a day. From there, the entrance is through the top of the Prayer Area, from where they can catch their first glimpse of the Shrine of Fatima. It is there that we meet Arturo, from Mexico, who celebrates two first times: participating in a World Youth Day and coming to Cova da Iria.

“I just got off the bus and, already here, I feel privileged and blessed that the Virgin Mary invited me to come to this Shrine and to this Day with so many young people. In this first moment, I feel the love and tenderness of our Mother, with whom I have come to meet in order to advance even more in my conversion,” the young Mexican reveals.

A few metres away stands David Bernal, a Colombian from Bogotá, who underlines the peace he immediately felt when he arrived at the Shrine of Fatima, pointing to the opposite side, where the landscape is surrounded by the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary. There, at the top of the staircase, Romain is “amazed” by the sight of the Little Chapel of Apparitions and the Prayer Area, but he feels above all “enriched” by the experience of faith he has gained in this place.

“This first experience of Fatima is being very positive, especially at the level of my faith. I have met other people who have enriched my life and my journey. I hope to come back to discover even more about this place,” says the young pilgrim from France, already on his second day in Cova da Iria.

Clites Cardoso and Aline Fernandes are accompanied by a delegation from St Mary's parish in Dubai. The Portuguese surnames reveal the origin of these young Indians from Goa. They passed through Fatima, on their way to WYD Lisbon 2023, as part of a group of 180 young people from the Apostolic Vicariate of Saudi Arabia, which brings together the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Yemen.

“Since the theme of WYD Lisbon 2023 is ‘Mary arose and left in haste’, this is the right place to start our journey. Visiting the place where Our Lady appeared and witnessing the faith of people of different nationalities is a very enriching experience,” they say together, recalling the Candlelight Procession they had participated in the night before.

“From here, with all the strength and grace that come from the encounter with the Blessed Mother, we continue to WYD Lisbon 2023, with all the other young people, to live a unique experience of faith,” says a consecrated woman, spokesperson for a group of young people from Colombia.

As a preamble to World Youth Day, which is being held this year in the Portuguese capital, Fatima, as a worldwide Marian shrine, has been a place of pilgrimage for many young people from abroad. After the world youth meeting, the Shrine will keep its doors open to welcome those who come to Cova da Iria. For a small group of young people, patients and prisoners, Fatima will be, on the morning of 5 August, a privileged place to meet the Holy Father, who will come to Cova da Iria to pray with them in the Chapel of the Apparitions.

Photo gallery available HERE

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