Beat: Arts

Eiffel Before the Eiffel Tower

Eiffel ` s Bridge in Porto

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USPA NEWS - On an autumn morning I arrived at Sao Bento Railway Station , in the historic heart of Porto .My first encounter with the city was an unexpected journey through Portugal , s past .The station `s grand entrance hall is covered with approximately 20.000 blue and white azulejos , created by the Portuguese painter Jorge Colaço .These ceramic masterpieces depict important episodes in Portuguese history . Yet the main purpose of my journey to Porto was to discover one of the most important engineering works associated with Gustave Eiffel : the Maria Pia Bridge across the Douro River .Completed in 1877 , twelve years before the inauguration of the Eiffel Tower in Paris , the Maria Pia Bridge represents a decisive moment in the history of European engineering . Designed by Gustave Eiffel and Théophile Seyrig , the bridge connected Porto with Vila Nova de Gaia and allowed Portugal `s Northern Railway Line to cross the Douro River .The bridge is approximately 354 meters long and only 4,5 meters wide .Its railway deck rises about 61 meters above the waters of the Douro and is supported by a monumental iron arch with a span of 160 meters .Construction began in January 1876 and lasted in 1877 .

Rising sixty meters above the Douro River , the Maria Pia Bridge was a triumph of nineteenth century engineering . Its great iron arch crossed the river in a single span , without any supporting pier in the water .Before the official inauguration of the Maria Pia Bridge in 1877 , a courageous women Adelaide Lopes , crossed the unfinished structure high above the Douro River ; Ignoring warnings and the fears of those around her , she carefully made her way from Gaia to Porto , becoming the first person to cross the bridge .The bridge was officially inaugurated on 4 November 1877 in the presence of King Luis I of Portugal and Queen Maria Pia of Savoy whose name is received .The bridge brought Gustave Eiffel international recognition and established him as one of the leading engineers of his time .From the iron arch of Maria Pia Bridge rose the vision that would one day become the Eiffel Tower .

Eiffel transformed an extraordinary technical challenge into a work of enduring beauty and took one of the first great steps towards the masterpiece that would immortalize his name : the Eiffel Tower .

The Maria Pia Bridge remained operational until 1991 . As it carried only a single railway track and could no longer meet modern railway requirements . Portuguese engineers constructed a new bridge nearby .I

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