



The Douro

From Porto to Pinhão

8–15 October 2024 (MK 489)

8 days • £3,710

Lecturer: Martin Symington

One of the most remote and picturesque corners of Europe.

Visit the major museums of Porto as well as some fine medieval and Baroque architecture.

Further highlights include palace gardens, Paleolithic art and wine tastings.

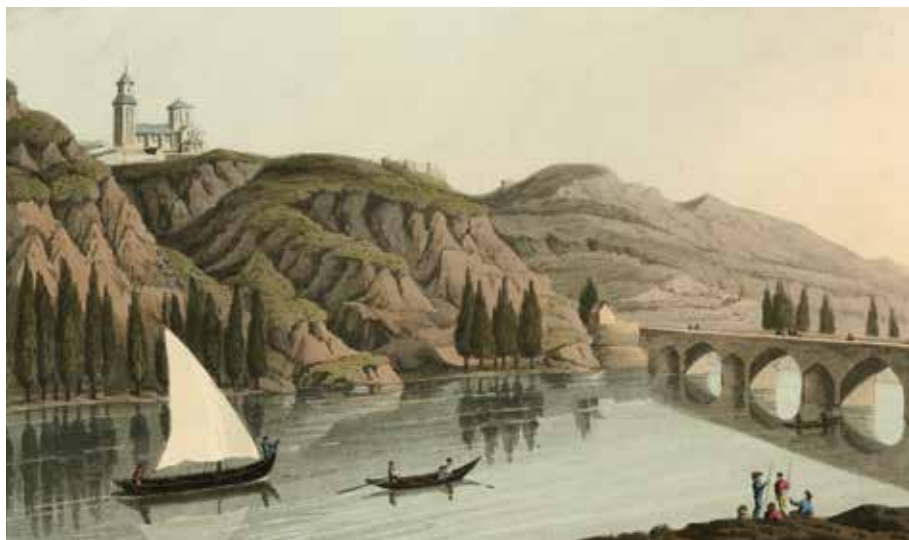
Journeys of immense beauty by rail and boat along the Douro valley.

The upper reaches of the Douro in Portugal present a landscape of extraordinary beauty and tranquillity. The banks rise steeply into the surrounding hills which are clothed with terraced vineyards, patches of woodland, little villages and quintas. Until recently one of the remotest clefts in western Europe, the region remains remarkably unspoilt and difficult to access. It is best approached by train; a journey into mountains that begins at the mouth of the river in Porto (Oporto).

The capital of northern Portugal, Porto is synonymous with the port wine trade, which since time immemorial has been dominated by the British. Hence an architectural peculiarity of Porto: the serene Neo-Palladianism of buildings by John Carr of York and his imitators cheek-by-jowl with the highly wrought, startlingly pigmented and lavishly gilded Baroque style of churches and public buildings. Baroque was virtually introduced by another foreigner, the Tuscan painter-architect Nicolau Nasoni who had a hand in the design of many churches and houses in the city and along the Douro.

Porto is also relatively unspoilt, retaining a jumble of historic architecture on its undulating, even precipitous site, but it is also a city of parks and gardens and the occasional flash of ultra-modern architecture.

This is not a tour in pursuit of masterpieces, rather an exploration of delicious scenery and ancient townscapes in a most beautiful but often overlooked corner of Europe. The port wine industry is a subsidiary theme, along with the excellent red wines now produced here.



The river Douro, lithograph 1813.

Itinerary

Day 1: Porto. Fly at midday from London Gatwick to Porto (TAP Air Portugal). Introductory talk and time for a stroll along the Douro before dinner. First of three nights in Porto.

Day 2: Porto. Begin at the cathedral, basically 13th-century with later embellishments, many by the painter-architect Nicolau Nasoni. The Clerigos Church with its wonderful Baroque tower is also by Nasoni, the church of the Misericórdia has good Flemish paintings and São Francisco has an amazingly rich carved and gilded interior. Also see the magnificent decorative tiles, azulejos, in the railway station.

Day 3: Porto. Walk through the botanical garden of the Palácio de Cristal, with far-reaching views across the city, to the nearby Museu Romântico in the Quinta da Macieirinha, with a garden and 19th-century furnishings. Álvaro Siza's Fundação de Serralves is set in an attractive park and houses contemporary art. Cross the Douro for a tasting at a port lodge.

Day 4: Porto, Douro Valley, Pinhão. Visit the Factory House (by special arrangement and subject to confirmation), a club of British port wine traders founded in the 18th century. Early afternoon train journey up the Douro Valley which becomes increasingly rural and beautiful, with vineyards and quintas clinging

to the hills. Pinhão is a tiny town with a hotel in a former port lodge overlooking the Douro. First of four nights in Pinhão.

Day 5: São João de Tarouca, Lamego. In the church of São João de Tarouca there are paintings by Grão Vasco (1506–42) and Gaspar Vaz (1490–1569) beside which are the ruins of the first Cistercian abbey in Portugal (1169). Continue to the busy little town of Lamego, replete with Baroque mansions and dominated by the pilgrimage church of Nossa Senhora dos Remédios atop a ceremonial stairway. The town museum in the former episcopal palace contains a series of panels by Grão Vasco. See also the cathedral, largely Renaissance behind a Romanesque belfry.

Day 6: the Douro by train and boat. A leisurely day in the heart of the wine-making area. Travel by rail downstream for a visit to a winery, with a tasting and lunch. Sail back to Pinhão on a private rabelo boat.

Day 7: Vale do Côa. Close to the border with Spain, the River Côa valley holds one of the greatest archaeological finds of recent years, an extensive array of outdoor Paleolithic art, the largest in Europe. There are well-preserved engravings of auroch, horse, deer and goat along a long stretch of steeply slate-banked river. Visit one of the key sites by 4x4. Return to Pinhão on the train beside the Douro.

The Douro continued

Day 8: Vila Real. The Palácio de Mateus at Vila Real, a Nasoni design made familiar by the rosé wine label, is a fine 18th-century manor house, well furnished and with gardens including a box tree avenue. Continue to Porto airport for the flight to London Gatwick, arriving c. 8.15pm.

Lecturer

Martin Symington. Travel journalist and author, who grew up in Portugal. His work appears in national newspapers and magazines, and his books include Dorling Kindersley's *Eyewitness Guide: Portugal*. He has taught travel writing at the University of Bath, and has been Royal Literary Fund Writing Fellow at the University of Reading.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,710 or £3,490 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,460 or £4,240 without flights.

By train: London – Paris – Hendaye – overnight to Coimbra – Porto: c. 24 hours. Contact us for more information.

Included: flights (economy class) with TAP Air Portugal (Airbus 320); travel by private coach and by train; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 2 lunches and 5 dinners with wine, water, coffee; tastings as indicated in the itinerary; private boat charter; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation: Pestana Vintage, Porto (pestanacollection.com): excellently situated on the Douro river bank in a series of historic houses. **Vintage House, Pinhão** (vintagehousehotel.com): delightful hotel surrounded by vineyards, with gardens overlooking the river. Both hotels are rated locally as 5-star; all single rooms are doubles for sole use.

How strenuous? Visits in Porto are on foot and uphill (via some flights of steps and steep terrain). The archaeological park requires sure-footedness. Travel is by coach, train (luggage is transferred separately) and boat. A good level of fitness is necessary. Average distance by coach per day: 37 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.