

# The Douro



The meandering Rio Douro has shaped both the geography and the history of this dramatic region. The Douro region is home to Portugal's most famous vineyards, including those of the Alto Douro, one of the oldest demarcated wine regions on the planet and a Unesco-declared World Heritage Site.

The gateway to the region is Porto, the historic city at the mouth of the river. Wealth from its wine trade has long powered the economy, leaving a legacy of intricately carved cathedrals, beaux-arts boulevards and Parisian-style squares. It is also a city with a burgeoning cultural scene, with cutting-edge modern architecture, forward-looking theatres and galleries, and uninhibited nightlife.

Upriver from Porto, the steeply terraced vineyards show vintners' Herculean efforts to shape this region over the centuries. The riverbanks stretch skyward at impossibly steep angles and are covered by vines. For the curious, there are numerous ways to delve into the Douro experience: visiting vineyards, sailing the Douro, embarking on scenic train journeys, staying in a chateau on a working wine estate, or sampling an aged port in an 18th-century wine-cellar.

The Douro is also a fascinating place to glimpse the artistic treasures left by previous inhabitants. Highlights include Stone Age petroglyphs, Visigothic churches and magnificent baroque churches slumbering in tiny villages. And while the coast isn't the Douro's big draw, there are some worthwhile stops here, including picturesque Vila do Conde, a once-important shipbuilding centre.

Note that this chapter includes a few towns that are technically in the Beira Alta and Trás-os-Montes regions but lie along the Rio Douro.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Wine-tasting in the picturesque vineyards of the **Alto Douro** (p420)
- Losing yourself amid the medieval alleys and riverfront promenades of Porto's cinematic **Ribeira district** (p389)
- Sampling a late-bottled vintage at a port-wine lodge in **Vila Nova de Gaia** (p393)
- Relaxing beside the Rio Tâmega and its medieval bridge in the charming town of **Amarante** (p409)
- Coming face to face with Palaeolithic artwork at **Vale do Côa** (p421), home to petroglyphs dating back over 10,000 years



■ POPULATION: 2.1 MILLION

■ AREA: 3350 SQ KM

