



Porto, the Douro & Trás-os-Montes

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Why Go?

It's the dynamic Rio Douro that brings diversity to the province it has defined, a province with granite bluffs, wine caves, medieval stone houses and steep, terraced vineyards. Romantic Porto, Portugal's second-largest city, is at its mouth; one of the world's oldest demarcated wine regions is close to the source; and scores of friendly villages in between have always relied on it for water, food and commerce. Alongside the river, the region also boasts intricately carved cathedrals, baroque churches, palatial *quintas* (estates), beaux arts boulevards and 18th-century wine cellars.

Sandwiched between the Rio Douro and the Spanish border in Portugal's extreme northeast corner, ruggedly beautiful Trás-os-Montes is named for its centuries-long isolation 'behind the mountains'. Life here unfolds at a different pace, dictated by harsh, pristine nature. Both its food and its people are hearty and no-frills, as you'll soon find out when travelling its towns and wilderness areas.

Best Places to Eat

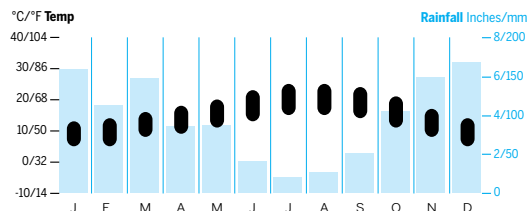
- ➔ Cantina 32 (p378)
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Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ 6 Only (p375)
- ➔ Casa Cimeira (p405)
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- ➔ Pedras Salgadas (p415)
- ➔ Guest House Douro (p374)

When to Go

Porto



24 Jun Festa de São João, Porto's biggest party, with music, fireworks and plastic mallets.

Aug-Sep Lamego's Festa de Nossa Senhora dos Remédios runs for weeks.

Sep Hillsides of Trás-os-Montes hang heavy with grapes; hiking abounds in parks.

PORTO

POP 237,600

Opening like a pop-up book from the Rio Douro at sunset, humble-yet-opulent Porto entices with its medieval centre, divine food and wine, and charismatic locals.

Porto's charms are as subtle as the nuances of an aged tawny port, best savoured slowly on a romp through the hilly backstreets of Miragaia, Ribeira and Massarelos. It's the quiet moments of reflection and the snapshots of daily life that you'll remember most: the slosh of the Douro against the docks; the snap of laundry drying in river winds; the sound of wine glasses clinking under a full moon; the sight of young lovers discreetly tangled under a landmark bridge, on the rim of a park fountain, in the crumbling notch of a graffiti-bombed wall...

History

Porto put the 'Portu' in 'Portugal'. The name dates from Roman times, when Lusitanian settlements straddled both sides of the Rio Douro. The area was briefly in Moorish hands but was reconquered by AD 868 and reorganised as the county of Portucale, with Porto as its capital. British-born Henri of Burgundy was granted the land in 1095, and it was from here that Henri's son and Portuguese hero Afonso Henriques launched the Reconquista (Christian reconquest), ultimately winning Portugal its status as an independent kingdom.

In 1387 Dom João I married Philippa of Lancaster in Porto, and their most famous son, Henry the Navigator, was born here. While Henry's explorers groped around Africa for a sea route to India, British wine merchants – forbidden to trade with the French – set up shop, and their presence continues to this day, evidenced in port-wine labels such as Taylor's and Graham's.

Over the following centuries Porto acquired a well-earned reputation for rebelliousness. In 1628 a mob of angry women attacked the minister responsible for a tax on linen. A 'tipplers riot' against the Marquês de Pombal's regulation of the port-wine trade was savagely put down in 1757. And in 1808, as Napoleon's troops occupied the city, Porto citizens arrested the French governor and set up their own short-lived junta. After the British helped drive out the French, Porto radicals were at it again, leading calls for a new liberal constitution, which they got in 1822. Demonstrations in

support of liberals continued to erupt in Porto throughout the 19th century.

Meanwhile, wine profits helped fund the city's industrialisation, which began in earnest in the late 19th century, at a time when the elite in the rest of Portugal tended to see trade and manufacturing as vulgar. Today the city remains the economic capital of northern Portugal and is surpassed only by much-larger Lisbon in terms of economic and social clout.

Sights

With the exception of the blockbuster Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Porto's must-sees cluster in the compact centre and are easily walkable. Many of the big-hitters huddle in the Unesco-listed Ribeira district and Aliados, while hilltop Miragaia has some peaceful pockets of greenery and knockout views. For port-wine lodges aplenty, cross the river to Gaia.

Ribeira

Igreja de São Francisco

CHURCH

(Map p366; Praça Infante Dom Henrique; adult/child €4/2; ☉9am-8pm Jul-Sep, to 7pm Mar-Jun & Oct, to 6pm Nov-Feb) Sitting on Praça Infante Dom Henrique, Igreja de São Francisco looks from the outside to be an austere Gothic church, but inside it hides one of Portugal's most dazzling displays of baroque finery. Hardly a centimetre escapes unsmothered, as otherworldly cherubs and sober monks are drowned by nearly 100kg of gold leaf. If you see only one church in Porto, make it this one.

High on your list should be the nave, interwoven with vines and curlicues, dripping with cherubs and shot through with gold leaf. Peel back the layers to find standouts such as the Manueline-style Chapel of St John the Baptist, the 13th-century statue of St Francis of Assisi and the 18th-century Tree of Jesse, a polychrome marvel of an altarpiece. The church museum harbours a fine, well-edited collection of sacred art.

In the eerily atmospheric catacombs, the great and the good of Porto were once buried. Look out for sculptural works by Italian master Nicolau Nasoni and prolific Portuguese sculptor António Teixeira Lopes.

Sé

CATHEDRAL

(Map p366; Terreiro da Sé; cloisters adult/student €3/2; ☉9am-12.30pm & 2.30-7pm Apr-Oct, to 6pm Nov-Mar) From Praça da Ribeira rises a