



# Porto, the Douro & Trás-os-Montes

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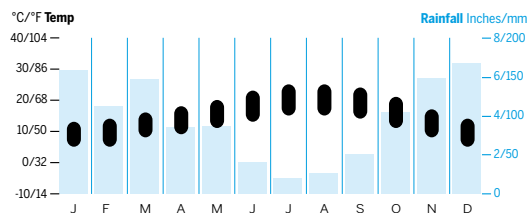
## Why Go?

It's the dynamic Rio Douro that brings diversity to the province it has defined, with its granite bluffs, wine caves, medieval stone houses and steep, terraced vineyards. Porto, Portugal's second-largest city, is at its mouth; the world's oldest demarcated vineyards are close to the source; and scores of friendly villages in between have always relied on it for water, food and commerce. Come for the intricately carved cathedrals, baroque churches, palatial *quintas* (country villas), 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'. Here, rural life is still the region's heart and soul, from the southwest's steep vineyard-clad hillsides, to the olive groves, almond orchards and rugged canyonlands of the sun-baked east, and the chestnut-shaded, heathery highlands of the north.

## When to Go

### Porto



**Jun 24** Festa de São João, Porto's biggest party: 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 opportunities abound in parks.

## Porto

POP 237,580

From across the Rio Douro at sunset, romantic Porto looks like a pop-up town. A colourful tumbledown dream with medieval relics, soaring bell towers, extravagant baroque churches and stately beaux-arts buildings piled on top of one another, illuminated by streaming shafts of sun. If you squint you might be able to make out the open windows, the narrow lanes and staircases zigzagging to nowhere.

Porto's historic centre is the Ribeira district, a Unesco World Heritage site where *tripeiros* (Porto residents) mingle before old storefronts, on village-style plazas and in the old houses of commerce where Roman ruins lurk beneath the foundations. On the downside, here and in other parts of the city centre stand many dilapidated early-20th-century town houses, left to crumble as the young and moneyed flee to the sprawling suburbs by the sea.

Yet despite signs of decay, in the last two decades Porto has undergone a remarkable renaissance – expressed in the hum of its efficient metro system and the gleam of Álvaro Siza Vieira's Museu de Arte Contemporânea and Rem Koolhaas' Casa da Música. More recently, the arrival of low-cost airlines has turned Porto into a popular weekend getaway; hence the boom in tourism.

Culturally, Porto holds its own against much larger global cities. The birthplace of port, it's a long-standing mecca for wine aficionados. Riverside wine caves jockey for attention in nearby Vila Nova de Gaia, with scores of cellars open for tastings. With appealing new kitchens springing up regularly, its palate is slowly growing more cosmopolitan. And thanks to a number of superb venues, Porto residents dance to many of the world's top rock, jazz and electronic artists. On warm summer nights many a plaza can feel like one enormous block party.

Of course, you'll be forgiven if what you remember most are the quiet moments: the slosh of the Douro against the docks; the snap of laundry lines drying in river winds; the shuffle of a widow's feet against cobblestone; 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 1000 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 & Activities

### Ribeira

The Ribeira district – Porto's riverfront nucleus – is a remarkable window into Porto's history. Along the riverside promenade, *barcos rabelos* (the traditional boats used to