

DOURO VALLEY FOR WINE-LOVERS

Intoxicating views, fruity wines, as much port as you can drink... Portugal's ripe for a boozy weekend



Ever tasted Douro wine? You'll recall instantly just how deliciously smooth it is. The grapes for this fruity number are grown on the slopes of the Douro River valley, running inland east of Porto – one of the most scenic viticultural areas in the world for a long weekend. It feels like Tuscany before the crowds: a tranquil agricultural land, with other sensory pleasures to savour, too.

By Laura Ivill



WHAT TO SEE & DO

● Porto is a jumble of red-tiled roofs sloping to the river, inviting you to stroll beside the flowing Douro. Cross the iron bridge south to Vila Nova de Gaia, where port is aged: here a line of wooden boats (*rabelos*) await to whisk you on a fascinating river cruise (www.manosdo.douro.net; €8 for one hour). The highlight is a visit to the port wine cellars, dating from 1588, all cobbled floor and lanterns. **The port-and-truffle-tasting combo is sensational.**

● Art and music also flow in Porto. Check out changing exhibitions at contemporary museum Serralves (Rua Dom João de Castro 210; www.serralves.pt; €8); Luc Tuymans has exhibited his bare-palette figurative work here. **On July evenings Serralves Park gets jazzy** – Dave Douglas is a name to look out for. His six-piece includes three trumpeters, sparking off each other as trees rustle in the breeze.



● Drive an hour into the valley and you'll reach the grape-growing region. The Baroque-style palace-with-vineyards Casa de Mateus (00 351 259 323121, www.casademateus.com; £7), near Vila Real, is a must-visit. **Breathe woody scents as you wander gardens filled with roses.** Inside, note the ornate 18th-century gentleman's shoe, beside his wooden litter, which required four men to carry it.

● Past Vila Real turn south; in 20 minutes you'll reach Régua, main town of the wine-producing region. Drink in local history at Museu do Douro (www.museudodouro.pt; £4). Vintage tools arouse kids' curiosity, and old photos show harvest workers on the wine terraces (it's still all done by hand). Stick your head in the old vat and **inhale the giddy smell of fermented fruit.**

● Follow the Douro east for 15 minutes from Régua to the riverside village of Pinhão. It's a

distillation of old Portugal, **the station ticket office clad in tiles depicting vineyard life.**

Park and walk to the riverbank, where small ferryboats idle from May to September. Slip into one and glide along a glassy green Douro tributary on a 20-minute trip (£8pp) to Quinta do Panascal, the air full of birdsong and heady with the scent of olives...

● The Quinta do Panascal (www.fonseca.pt; tastings free), owned by port brand Fonseca, is a winery with century-old vines. Little disturbs their growth except a barking dog or two and a few visitors. **The 20-year-old tawny, with its stewed-fruit taste, is the one to swill around your tongue.** An audio tour takes you on a vineyard trail; pause en route to pick bursting-sweet black grapes.

● The moody, modern, streamlined Sandeman winery Quinta do Seixo (www.sandeman.eu; tours from £4) was full-on

Slope and glory: from left, the Douro Valley's verdant vine terraces; port barges on the Douro River; a farmer lays out baskets for the September grape-pickers; the beautifully Baroque Casa de Mateus

architect-designed – yet comfortably hunkered into the land. The tasting room looks out onto the sun-baked valley, dazzling in contrast. On a hot day, **sip a white port and lemon-sorbet cocktail in the library bar.** Heavenly.

● In September, the harvest draws pickers from miles around (machines can't cope with the steep slopes) to pick and tread the grapes at Quinta da Pacheca (near Lamego; 00 351 254 331229, www.quintadapacheca.com). **The whitewashed winery is alive with the sounds of machinery and workers singing as they squash.** The restaurant punches above its weight – ask for the slow-cooked pork cheek, with shallots, puréed potato, and green beans. ➤

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WHERE TO STAY

Quinta do Vallado (Vilarinho dos Freires, 5050-364 Peso da Régua; 00 351 939 103591, www.quintadovallado.com). Among the oldest port-producing *quintas* (from 1716), this place makes international-class wines, too. Aim for one of the five rooms in the main house (eight more are new-builds), and eat meals cooked in the family kitchen. Idle, too, on the lawn by the pool, a suntrap by a Douro tributary. Doubles from €79, B&B.

Casa do Visconde de Chancelheiros (5085-201 Pinhão; 00 351 254 730190, www.chancelheiros.com). Personality pours from this manor house, in flagstones, blue-and-white tiles and copper pans above the range. A maze of gardens, littered with orange and lemon trees, overlooks the valley, and activities (tennis, *boules*) are free. The inviting sauna, carved from a wine vat, is great value. Doubles from €84, B&B.

Casa das Pipas (Quinta do Portal, EN 323, Celeirós do Douro; 00 351 259 937000, www.quintadportal.com). The winery here is clad characterfully in cork tiles, and emits earthy aromas. At the 12-room hotel, views of vineyards fill the sitting-room windows. In pretty grounds of lavender and eucalyptus is an apartment for 12, complete with an original olive press. Doubles from €100, B&B.

Quinta Nova (5085-222 Covas do Douro; 00 351 254 730430, www.quintanova.com).

Dating from 1764, this friendly 11-room renovated farmhouse is filled with the vintage furniture of former owners (ie, four-poster beds). It's baking up here on the slopes in summer, but October is 'fire time' (the colours of autumn). There's plenty to fill the days – olive-oil tasting, orange-picking – or simply flop by the pool, listening to birds. Wine tours/tastings free. Doubles from €101, B&B.



The Yeatman (Rua do Choupelo, Vila Nova de Gaia, Porto; 00 351 220

133100, www.theyeatman.com). On the Gaia side of the Douro, newly built rooms have terraces taking in splendid views over Porto, a Unesco-protected city. There's a decanter-shaped pool and a spa peddling 'vinotherapy', along with Michelin-star dinners and a 25,000-bottle cellar. Doubles from €167, B&B.

Aquapura Douro Valley (Quinta Vale de Abraão, 5100-758 Lamego, Douro; 00 351 254 660600, www.aquapurahotels.com). This traveller's home-from-home has grown out of a grand 19th-century manor house. Now it's a contemporary hotel of 71 rooms, suites and villas, with full-length windows gazing on the river valley's drama. Breakfast in the courtyard overlooking landscaped gardens, then soak in the pool or the spa. Doubles from €209, B&B.



WHERE TO EAT

Café Astoria (Intercontinental Palacio das Cardosas, Praça da la Liberdade N25, 4000-322 Porto; 00 351 220 035600, www.intercontinental.com).

After a morning's port-tasting, lunch here under a ceiling of intricate white plasterwork and furnishings in zingy lime. Sit outside for people-watching. Mains (steak, fries and eggs) average around €13; three-course kids' menu €6.50.

Castas e Pratos (Rua José Vasques Osório, 5050-280 Peso da Régua; 00 351 254 323290, www.castasepratos.com). In a converted freight-train warehouse in Régua is this wine-bar/restaurant: a post-industrial place with gourmet menu and mainly Portuguese wines. Sample salt cod in a cornbread crust with olives and mashed chickpeas. Mains around €13.

Don Tonho (Cais de Ribeira 13-15, 4050-509 Porto; 00 351 222 004307, www.dtonho.com). Right where the world strolls along the Porto promenade, this bar-restaurant has one of the best spots in town, elevated above the street. Dishes are hearty and trad – say, Iberian pork tenderloins with clams. Mains around €13.



Shis (Praia do Ourigo, Esplanada do Castelo, Foz, 4150-000 Porto; 00 351 226 189593, www.shisrestaurante.com). This place overlooks the ocean a taxi-hop from central Porto – from either terrace or deck you can hear the surf pounding. Dishes have oriental twists (try Chateaubriand with green pepper, eggplant, tempura, ginger and spicy sauce). Sushi is prepared by a master. There's an extensive wine list, too. Mains around €15.



Corking views: from left, the Aquapura's pool has a stunning valley and vineyard outlook; a grand suite at The Yeatman; DOC restaurant's dish, 'Autumn'

DOC (Estrada Nacional 222, Folgosa, 5110-204 Armamar; 00 351 910 014040, www.ruipaula.com). On a riverbank in the heart of the Douro Valley is celebrated chef Rui Paula's delightful DOC. Hear fish jump while dining by candlelight on the terrace. Trad recipes have a modern twist: smoked duck breast with Requeijão cheese, for instance. Mains around £21.

MICHELIN QUALITY **Largo do Paço** (Casa da Calçada, Largo do Paço 6, 4600-017 Amarante; 00 351 255 410830, www.casada calcada.com). On your Douro drive, pitstop at this palace, where Michelin-starred Vitor Matos serves a seven-course tasting menu. Classics are given clever complexity: sardines preserved in olive oil and garlic, with gazpacho and stuffed tomato. Tasting menu from £50.

WHERE TO SHOP
Graham's (Quinta do Agro, Rua Rei Ramiro, 4400-281 Gaia; www.grahamsportlodge.com). They'll ship home quality bottles from this lodge in Gaia. It's one of the grand vintage port houses, founded by two Scottish brothers in 1820, and is still family-owned by the renowned Symingtons.

By the roadside on the Avenida da Noruega, near the centre of Vila Real, buy the local handmade pottery, **Barro Negro de Bisalhães**, with its distinctive black patina. ■

Ask the local



Francisco Ferreira is one of the owners of Quinta do Vallado. He is the sixth generation of his family producing wine in the Douro Valley

'Most people who live in Porto are from Porto – **so it's like a family, people are very friendly.** I especially love the old city. To eat, I go to **Cafeina** (Morada, Rua do Podrão; 00 351 226 108059, www.cafeina.pt) and Terra (opposite Cafeina; 00 351 226 177339), both in Foz; **they are fashionable and serve really great food.** I also like Cais da Villa in Vila Real (Rua Monsenhor Derónimo do Amaral; 00 351 259 351209, www.caisdavilla.com), which has the same owners as Castas e Pratos – **it's also in a train station.** For traditional food, the Museu dos Presuntos (Avenida Cidade de Orense 43, Vila Real; 00 351 226 106965) is good value. In Poiares, A Repentina (00 351 254 906145) is amazing – **servicing wood-roasted lamb.**'



Get me there

GO INDEPENDENT

EasyJet (0843 104 5000, www.easyjet.com) flies from Gatwick from £48; **Ryanair** (0871 246 0000, www.ryanair.com) flies from Stansted from £46. **TAP** (0845 601 0932, www.flytap.com) flies from Gatwick from £112.

GO PACKAGED

Arblaster & Clarke (01730 263111, www.arblasterandclarke.com) has six-night

Douro Valley walking tours from £1,799pp (some meals, flights extra). **Grape Escapes** (0845 643 0860, www.grapeescapes.net) has a Porto/Douro three-nighter from £369pp, with transfers, tours, tastings and a lunch; no flights.

GET AROUND

Self-drive the signed Rota do Vinho do Porto (www.rvp.pt). From the airport, **Budget** (0844 544 3439, www.budget.

co.uk) has four days' car hire from £65, or **Avis** (0844 581 8181, www.avis.co.uk) has seven days from £110. Or hire a car with a driver-guide: **Top Travel** private tours (00 351 917 253 333) charges about £184 a day.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more details on Port and Douro Valley wines, visit www.discovertheorigin.co.uk and www.ivdp.pt.