

72 hours in Portugal's Historic Port City On The Road to the Alto Douro - Part One

Port wine became popular in England in the late 17th century, when British merchants who settled here began to add brandy to the wine of the Douro valley to prevent it from souring during transit.

They discovered that the sweeter and stronger the wine, the better the taste. In 1703 Britain and Portugal signed a treaty providing for the exchange of cloth from England for barrels of Portuguese wine.

This paved the way for the enormous expansion in the 18th-19th centuries of the Port trade.



A traditional Barco Rabelo (Port boat) on the Rio Douro in Porto.

PORTO (OPORTO)

Birthplace of Henry the Navigator, Portugal's second largest city, has a rich history, dating back to the Phoenicians who came to trade in the 8th century BC. Later the Romans developed settlements on both sides of the river, giving them the names Portus and Calus. Spread along the steeply tiered hillsides, Porto, Oporto in English, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site sitting at the mouth of the Rio Douro, the river traversing northern Portugal's major wine producing region, the Douro DOC, where the port wine grapes are grown and harvested, with most still being shipped to the Port warehouses for maturation and export.

Today the heart of the port wine trade is found on the steeply terraced hills across the river, in Vila Nova de Gaia, a suburb devoted to the aging, blending, and shipping of port. Many of its fifty-some port lodges are still in British hands, and some are still family-run, such as the esteemed Croft and Ramos Pinto. Most are open daily to tours.



RIVER CRUISES, PORT TASTINGS, MUSEUMS AND OTHER ATTRACTIONS

72 hours is just about enough time to sample the charms of this gracefully faded, unassuming, hard working city. Stroll the alleyways of its Dickensian, cobblestoned quayside, *Cais de Ribera*, which sits below the towering Dom Luis I bridge, an Eiffel disciple edifice connecting Porto to Vila Nova de Gaia.



Visit its Baroque churches, peek into its old-fashioned shops, some selling just one item. Gaze at its lovely glazed tile work, *azulejos*, relax on a short river cruise down the Rio Douro to the Atlantic.

Take a tour, or two, of its Port lodges after visiting its excellent Museum of Port Wine, and of course, sample more from a vast selection of Ports on the relaxing terrace of the Port Wine Institute.

But there is more to enjoy here than wine: striking contemporary architecture abounds, courtesy of the prestigious Porto School of Architecture. The Serralves Contemporary Art Museum was designed by native Pritzker Prize winner Alvaro Siza Vera, along with the oceanside Boa Nova Tea House, reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright).

The 2011 Pritzker Laureate, Eduardo Souto de Moura, has left his mark on the new Porto metro stations.

One shouldn't miss a concert in Porto's most talked about architectural masterpiece, *Casa da Musica*, the city's performing arts complex, a stunning Rem Koolhaas design.



A visit to Porto isn't complete without a short trip to the coast, where the Douro meets the Atlantic, on the charmingly rickety, circa 1930s, #1 tram, with a visit to the Tram Museum along the way.



You will alight at the fashionable, well-to-do neighborhood of *Foz de Douro*, which is blessed with a captivating and photogenic old quarter, *Foz Velha*, where the Porto School of modern architecture blends seamlessly with its ancient, tiled fishermen's homes. Visit its two fortresses, trendy shops, pulsating clubs and gourmet restaurants-by-the-sea and stroll its classically elegant seaside promenade that runs along its pristine, Blue Flag beaches.

AROUND PORTO



The Dom Luis I Bridge connecting Porto and Vila Nova de Gaia



The major Port tasting houses can be found along the south bank of the Rio Douro



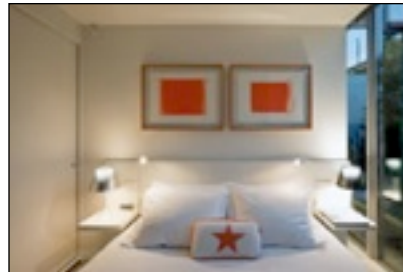
The colorful quay Cais de Ribera

WHERE TO STAY

Although you can lodge at a 5-star luxury hotel & spa in Villa de Gaia, or at an international known chain downtown, we highly recommend instead the intimate **4Rooms** guest house in the heart of quiet, atmospheric *Foz de Douro*.

The highly attentive and detail-oriented hosts, Antonio and Caterina, will pamper you with their personalized service and make you feel like a privileged local. Lovers of modern design will be most impressed here, as the house was a creation of Pritzker Prize winner and native son Souto de Moura, and recently hosted another Pritzker winner, Spain's Rafael Moneo.

Choose the cozy, romantic Loft room with its private entrance and little garden or spread out in the new Loft apartment across the street,



designed to resemble a modern Greek temple. It's a "Wow".

Each room has a heavenly comfortable bed outfitted with luxury linens, designer furnishings

and art, contemporary baths featuring Anne Semonin bath products, bathrobes, high tech features such as Wi-Fi, flat screen TV (iMac), DVD players and i-Pod docks. Porto's top chef, **Pedro Lemos**, provides the gourmet breakfasts (different each day), stylishly served in the pretty interior courtyard. And it's just a short walk from the 4 Rooms to a health club with indoor pool, or to the beach.

The 4Rooms can be rented entirely by a family or small group of friends (up to 4 couples), and makes for a perfect, and super stylish, pied-à-terre.

DINING IN PORTO

We believe that the very finest dining experiences in Porto can be found at **Restaurante Pedro Lemos** in Foz, a short taxi ride from the heart of the city, and luckily, only a few steps away from the 4Rooms.

Pedro Lemos, the former chef of the Douro Valley's luxury Relais Chateaux **Quinta da Romaneira**, will wow you with his market driven, updated, traditional Portuguese cuisine, especially with his perfectly executed 5 and 7 course tasting menus.

The equally talented and gracious sommelier, *Eduardo Neto*,



will perfectly pair your meal with the country's very best, from his all-Portuguese wine list. Housed in an old stone two-story building

in the heart of Old Foz, the restaurant has two cozy dining rooms, an upstairs bar and second floor outdoor terrace. This is Michelin star quality dining, sophisticated, atmospheric, friendly and utterly delicious. *Don't miss it!*

Other stylish Foz de Douro restaurants we enjoyed:

Casual small plates dining, **Casa de Pasto da Palmeira**; Fusion-by-the-sea, **Shis**; New Portuguese cuisine, **Foz Velha**.



Fishing boats along the river at Foz de Douro