

Exploring the Alto Douro Wine Region

On The Road - Caldas de Aregos to Pinhão



Looking west along the Rio Douro from the beautiful Quinta do Pêgo wine estate

One of the most beautiful wine regions in Europe is centered around the Rio Douro in the Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro regions of northern Portugal, upstream from Porto, sheltered from the influence of the Atlantic.

Known primarily for its Port wines, the Douro produces several excellent non-fortified wines comparable to many of the finest premium wines of the Ribera del Duero wine region of Spain, where the waters of the Rio Douro begin their long and winding journey to the sea.

MEANDERING THE ALTO DOURO

As highlighted in our December newsletter, our recent harvest adventure began in the world heritage city of Porto, the gateway to the Douro Valley. But visiting the port aging cellars of Vila Nova de Gaia-Porto, and not extending one's trip to the vineyards themselves would be missing an integral part of the port wine experience, so we headed east to the *Alto Douro Vinhateiro*.

The Alto Douro Vinhateiro is both a Unesco World Heritage Site and the oldest demarcated wine region in the world, designated as such in 1756. The Douro appellation encompasses 64,250 acres and is crossed by the winding Douro River, running 900 kilometers from Spain's Old Castile to Porto.

Although long famous for its fortified wines, in the last decade the Douro has come into its own as a producer of world-class dry table wines, especially reds. There are now an astonishing 33,000 wine growers in the region, and surprisingly, its brittle, schistous granite soil sustains a wide spectrum of grape varieties. Tending the vines on these vertiginous terraces is exhausting physical labor, as all the work is done by hand. And many estates, or *quintas*, still maintain the tradition of grape treading by foot in granite tanks, called *lagares*.



In addition to its multitude of wine estates dotting the stepped hillsides, the Douro is endowed with some of the Europe's most spectacular scenery and exhilarating, hairpin drives, making it a world-class wine tourism destination.

The valley boasts a luxurious Relais Chateau resort, new hip, Asian-style spa hotel, gracious manor homes, top flight restaurants, scenic river cruises and slow poke train rides. Here you'll also find graceful Baroque churches, Cistercian monasteries, an abundance of olive, orange and almond trees planted alongside the vines, and even

prehistoric outdoor rock carvings.

For our wine touring in the Douro, we based ourselves in the center of the appellation, in the Cima Corgo sub-zone, above the village of Pinhão, in the very heart of the port wine producing area, where visitors will find the most beautiful and best known estates.

MUST SEE QUINTAS & THE "BEST OF WINE TOURISM" AWARD WINNERS

Quinta do Seixo - Belonging to the iconic port producer Sandeman, this is one of the most breathtakingly scenic wine estates in the entire Douro. Here "robotic" *lagares*, grape-crushing machines, simulate the rhythmic movement of the worker's feet, as it's now difficult to find enough workers to perform the arduous treading. In its ultra-modern tasting room, with the area's most awe-inspiring views, we enjoyed a VIP sampling of six ports, from their refreshing Apitiv white port to their elegant Imperial Reserve Tawny.

Quinta Nova de Nossa Senhora do Carmo - Dating from 1758, and now owned by the cork-producing Amorim family, this winery focuses on first class table wine production, such as the Quinta Nova Grande Reserva, on its 85-hectare estate high on the northern banks of the river. The Quinta opened the region's first wine hotel in its 18th century antique-filled manor home and sells its wines, honeys, fig jam, teas and fragrant candles at its shop/museum in the beautifully tiled Pinhão railway station.

Quinta do Vallado - Situated on the banks of the Corgo River tributary, Vallado belongs to the

descendants of legendary *Doña Antónia Adelaide Ferreira*. It has been in the family for six generations and is one of the "Douro Boys" energetic projects. This band of five winemakers, descendants of the old port-producing families, has dramatically lifted the region's estate bottled table wine profile, and the Quinta's Touriga Nacional 2008 was awarded the number seven spot on Wine Spectators Best of 2011 list.

In their dramatic new tasting room we sampled the entire gamut of the winery's superb production, including their intense 100% Sousão.

Quinta do Portal - These striking new cellars in Sabrosa were designed by the acclaimed Porto architect, Álvaro Siza, and won the III

edition of the Douro Architecture Prize. Along with great value reds and whites, muscatels and vintage ports, the winery also produces a sparkling wine, Mural. And it offers a small guesthouse, *Casa das Pipas*, and restaurant manned by a very talented young chef.



Sandeman Port tasting room

THE ALTO DOURO WINE REGION



LODGINGS WITH AN UNFORGETTABLE VIEW

Hotel Rural Quinta do Pego

Opened in 2009, this Danish-owned, 10-room boutique property is unquestionably the area’s loveliest, most charming small hotel. It enjoys a privileged position in the most prestigious section of port wine country, just west of Pinhão. The lovely grounds boast multiple outdoor terraces where one can soak up this extraordinary scenery while sipping a sunset portonic. The stunning infinity pool overlooks the Douro and was even open for business in mid-October.

The Quinta serves delicious multi-course dinners paired with their excellent wines in the formal dining room, with floor to ceiling windows overlooking the river. And lodging here comes with a remarkably ample breakfast buffet offering every item imaginable, including their irresistible custard tarts, *pasteis de nata*.

Each of the rooms has been meticulously decorated, enjoys unforgettable views and is blissfully quiet. A decanter of port welcomes guests, and the elegant marble baths sport double sinks, power showers and bathrobes. A tasting of their gold medal port and red table wine is also included in the room rate and available any time. This award-winning hotel provides gracious service from Carlos, the general manager, and Erica, who brilliantly mans the front desk. Sheer perfection!



Private Villa overlooking the Rio Douro

Opened in 2011, this beautiful modern natural stone villa, with infinity pool and garden, is located between Régua and Pinhão, across the river from the village of Covelinas. Situated on a small, private estate, the unique air-conditioned home offers unobstructed views of the Douro River.

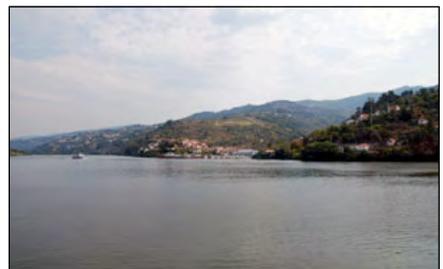
The spacious 3-bedroom, 2-bath villa, with its modern kitchen, comfortable living room with fireplace, and large covered terrace facing the Douro, is available year around, and can accommodate up to six people. Available weekly throughout the year.



Private Villa on the Rio Douro

Downstream from Régua, across the Douro from the spa village of Caldas de Aregos, you'll discover another unique property sitting at the banks of the river, with its own dock and kayak. This lovely contemporary home, only 1-1/2 hours from Porto, will comfortably accommodate three couples.

Belonging to the owners of the popular B&B **4Rooms** in Foz do Douro (Porto), the villa offers the same level of attention to detail in design and accommodations. The downstairs is a large spacious open floor plan with kitchen, dining room and living room with fireplace, floor to ceiling windows and an expansive terrace overlooking the river. The upstairs offers three comfortable, luminous bedrooms with full river views. From this waterside perch, guests can do their wine touring the luxurious way, via a private sailboat on a day-trip or overnight excursion, followed by a spa treatment. This hideaway home, available year around, is a haven of total relaxation!



Contact [IberianTraveler](#) for our special packages and availability of these private villas in the Douro

OTHER LODGINGS OPPORTUNITIES IN THE ALTO DOURO

Hotel Rural Quinta do Vallado - Situated on the Corgo River a few minutes outside of Régua, the family owned wine estate has been recommended by Travel & Leisure, Food & Wine and the New York Times' Frank Bruni and offers 5 rooms in its 1756 restored manor home. The new addition of 8 spacious guest quarters was under construction when we visited in November and should be ready later this year.

DINING IN THE ALTO DOURO

D.O.C., the sleek and stylish outpost of chef Rui Paula of Porto's D.O.P., is undoubtedly the region's finest, most atmospheric dining spot. It sits on a pier above the Douro between Régua and Pinhão with an outdoor terrace and a pier for diners arriving by boat. Every seat at D.O.C. offers a perfect view of this unique, extraordinary landscape. Here we highly recommend the terrific 5-course olive oil menu with wine pairings.



Douro Inn sits next to the newly revamped Museu do Douro at the riverbank in Régua. Its upstairs restaurant offers updated, traditional Portuguese cuisine, a sophisticated Phillippe Stark décor and memorable river views.

Castas e Pratos is a new downstairs wine bar-top floor restaurant, housed in a stylishly refurbished former wine warehouse, siting between the river and the rail tracks. It offers creative small plates and an unbelievably extensive wine list.

The Taylor Fladgate port house owns **Rabelo**, the cozy British manor style restaurant in Pinhão's riverside CS Vintage House Hotel. It features traditional Portuguese cuisine and offers romantic terrace dining under the pergolas.

MUSEUMS AND OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Museu do Douro - Peso da Régua's excellent regional ethnographic museum, should not be missed! Its permanent collection, housed in a former warehouse, traces the fascinating history of Douro viticulture. In the new structure facing the river walk, we toured an enlightening exhibit celebrating the singular life of Doña Antónia Adelaide Ferreira, one of the most prominent figures in Douro's history.

The museum also houses a wine shop, wine bar and gourmet restaurant, **A Companhia**.

