

NORTHERN PORTUGAL

Active, Uncorked and Around the Table



2014 Small Group Departures: May 17, June 14 & August 30 as a private trip at nearly any time
8 days in Northern Portugal, including: Porto, the Douro Valley & the Minho

Trip Overview

If asked what Northern Portugal evokes in the traveler's mind, the main reference is probably port wine. Additional facets of this nearly undiscovered regional gem reveal themselves upon further investigation, from the compelling UNESCO World Heritage sites of Porto's atmospheric *Cais Ribera*, historic Guimarães and the jaw-dropping terraced landscapes of the Upper Douro Valley, to over half a dozen protected *Domination of Origin* wines, cheeses and even autochthonous breeds of livestock.

And while world-class art & architecture, fine wine and a treasure-trove of UNESCO world heritage sites are indeed beguiling features of this remarkable region, it is the fascinating personality beneath the surface which captivates & transforms the traveler fortunate enough to experience it.

It is the fierce independence of the region's proud people, the unbreakable bonds of sacred social institutions, millennial myths, rituals & traditions and the supreme importance placed on family, friends and food that leave their indelible mark on us. This is the hidden world of Northern Portugal that we hope to share with you, our faithful family of fellow Xplorers.

Many magic moments of our trip take place gathered around the table, breaking bread with local friends. We balance out these delicious meals - several home-hosted and accompanied by the region's fine wines - with invigorating walks through trellised vineyards, through Porto's charming urban core and along the Minho's coastal roads. There is even an option for a morning canoe trip down the Douro.

Signature Experiences

- **Porto: Behind the Tiles.** Join the entrepreneurs behind some re-purposed historic buildings in Porto for a local's glimpse into the renaissance taking shape behind formerly forlorn façades.
- **Gliding Down the Douro.** Canoe down some of the most picturesque bends of the Douro River on a morning excursion, passing historic *quintas*, *rabelo* boats and terraced vineyards along the way.
- **Family Pride.** Meet the talented winemaker of the boutique *Quinta do Infantado*, which has been in the same family's hands since the end of the 19th century. Savor some of the finest port in the Douro Valley over an intimate lunch in the Quinta's tasting room.
- **Heavenly Hike.** Join Ricardo, a local guide and avid hiker, on a winding route of majestic beauty, passing historic *Quintas*, endemic flora and centuries old terrace walls along the way.
- **Harvest in Favaio.** Take part in the annual wine harvest at *Avessada Enoteca*, an interactive museum and working vineyard dedicated to celebrating Douro history and culture. After picking and stomping grapes, enjoy a well-earned lunch with views over the vineyards.
- **Daily Bread.** Visit Manuela, a salt-of-the-earth baker who crafts unbelievably dense, moist & crusty bread in her turn-of-the-century wood-burning oven.
- **Ancestral Lunch.** Meet Jose Paulo Mesquita, a multilingual descendent of a noble Portuguese family whose ancestral estate near Guimarães has been in the same family for 32 generations.
- **Market Day in the Minho.** Walk along picturesque coastal roads to Viana do Castelo, arriving at the peak of their Friday market activity.
- **Culture Klatch.** Swap stories and cultural perspectives over a home-hosted dinner.

Thumbnail Itinerary



Saturday: Porto: Behind the Tiles & Welcome Dinner

You are met upon arrival to Porto and taken to our charming *pension*, a lovingly renovated, seven-room historic townhouse in central Porto.

Over a welcome drink, meet your fellow travelers and the impassioned entrepreneurs behind several historic buildings in Porto's atmospheric urban core for an insider's glimpse into the architectural & cultural renaissance taking shape behind formerly forlorn façades. Finish with a family-style welcome dinner at a reclaimed locale with loads of local warmth and flavor. (Meals: D)

Lodging for two nights in Porto is at the cozy, rustically charming *Pensão Favorita* (or similar) a renovated, historic townhouse in central Porto. For a preview visit: www.pensaofavorita.pt

Sunday: Porto Unveiled + Modern Art & Garden Walk

The fact that Porto's historic center has a UNESCO world heritage designation will come as no surprise during a walking tour this morning. The town evokes a frayed, enduring charm and its rich history echoes off its narrow, cobblestone streets and teetering townhouses.

Our walk takes us to iconic landmarks and well as hidden, photogenic corners of Porto, from the Sunday bird-market to the *Bataria da Vitoria* lookout, from the *Clérigos* Church with its magnificent bell tower, to the more than 20,000 *azulejos* (Portuguese tiles) at the *São Bento* train station, from the narrow Rua das Flores, to the crumbling, atmospheric riverside district of *Cais Ribeira*. (Meals: B, L)

This afternoon, switch from historic & urban to modern & verdant with a visit and privately guided tour of the highly acclaimed *Serralves Museum of Modern Art* and its extensive, shady gardens.

Monday: Gliding Down the Douro & D.O.C.

After a sinuous early drive along the winding, vertigo-inducing & visually spectacular roads of the UNESCO heritage designated upper Douro Valley, arrive Pinhão, where we launch out on our morning canoe excursion. Glide past historic *quintas* and dramatically terraced vineyards that help define the landscape of the Douro. Note: those amongst us who prefer a more leisurely option may board a *rabelo* boat (the historic, flat-bottomed boats originally used to transport port wine from its production center in the Douro Valley to the storage warehouses of *Vila Nova de Gaia*) for a scenic river ride.

Break for a well-earned lunch with views out across the Douro. Rui Paula's airy, modern D.O.C. remains a benchmark for its modern interpretations of locally inspired Douro cuisine.

Continue this afternoon to *Casa do Visconde de Chancelheiros* our relaxing base in the bucolic Douro Valley. Take a swim, a leisurely walk through the trellised vineyards or simply relax with a glass of port as you admire the sunset with stunning views from one of the many terraces of our artfully restored manor house lodge. (Meals: B, L, D)

Lodging for three nights in the Douro is at the magnificently restored 18th century manor house *Visconde de Chancelheiros* (or similar). For a preview visit: www.chanceleiros.com



Tuesday: Heavenly Hike & Family Pride

Set out for an invigorating 5 kilometer (3.1 mile) hike this morning which has been designed to immerse you into the dramatic terraced landscapes leading steeply down to the Douro River far below. Join Ricardo, a local guide and avid hiker, on a winding route of majestic beauty, passing historic *quintas*, endemic flora and centuries old terrace walls along the way.

This afternoon, meet the owner and/or the talented winemaker of the boutique *Quinta do Infantado*, which has been in the same family's hands since the end of the 19th century. João Ribera, the owner, is known for his passionate personality, and Fatima his winemaker for producing some of the finest port in the Valley. We'll have a chance to visit their vineyards, production facility and aging barrels. Savor the family pride over an intimate lunch in the Quinta's tasting room. (Meals: B, L, D)

Wednesday: From Field to Lagar – Wine Harvest in Favaios

Our September trip coincides with the annual grape harvest in the Douro Valley. You're invited to join the seasonal festivities at *Avessada Enoteca*, an interactive museum and working vineyard dedicated to preserving and sharing the Douro's rich living culture.

Roll-up your sleeves - and later your pant legs - as you first pick ripened grapes off the vines and later, stomp wine grapes in a traditional *lagar*. Of course, there will be plenty of food, drink and regional music to enliven the harvest festivities. (Meals: B, L, D)

Thursday: Ancestral Lunch & Exploring Guimarães

Our journey this morning takes us northwest into the *Minho* province of Portugal, to the 2012 European Capital of Culture, *Guimarães*, whose historic center is designated a UNESCO world heritage site.

After stopping at the pousada to drop bags and freshen-up, continue to nearby *Casa Sezim*, a secluded country estate belonging to the same family since 1376 (32 generations!). When not traveling, Jose Paulo Mesquita, one of the family's multilingual descendents, is our host for lunch at his ancestral home. Before eating, there is time to admire the early 19th century painted panels in the public areas depicting scenes from the New World and to wander the gardens of this country estate, known for its award-winning *vinho verde*. Return to Guimaraes, considered the cradle city of Portugal, for an afternoon walk to explore of the town's compact medieval center. (Meals: B, L)

Lodging for two nights in Guimarães is at *Pousada de Oliveira* an intimate, historic lodge on one of Portugal's most enchanting medieval squares (or similar). For a preview: www.pousadas.pt



Friday: Coastal Trails to Viana do Castelo & Home-hosted Culture Klatch

Our trajectory today takes us through two of the loveliest small towns in Portugal, *Viana do Castelo* and *Ponte de Lima*. Ponte de Lima enjoys a privileged location on the south bank of the Lima River framed by a squat, low-arched Roman stone bridge. Viana do Castelo, an elegant seaside town, is considered the folklore capital of Portugal and renowned for its lace embroidery. After walking along a picturesque coastal route, we arrive at the peak of market day activity, experiencing Viana do Castelo at its vibrant best.

This evening back in Guimarães, swap stories and cultural perspectives over a home-hosted, celebratory cocktail to toast your experience in N. Portugal. (Meals: B, L & evening cocktail)

Saturday: Homeward Bound

Transfers are arranged this morning to the Porto airport for your return flights home. (Meals: B)

The Culture Xplorers Foundation

At Culture Xplorers, we insist on being not only responsible travelers, but on actively making a positive impact in the communities with which we come into contact. We work hand-in-hand with local leaders in every destination we visit to spend time as well as our money in local communities and with family businesses. We build our trips around plentiful opportunities to genuinely engage with local friends and hosts, to openly exchange ideas and to support the rich living traditions that make each of these destinations so special.

As a catalyst to these deep-rooted community partnerships, the non-profit Culture Xplorers Foundation was created in 2008 with the goal of fostering the sustainability of local culture in indigenous communities worldwide. Our positive impact partnerships focus on sustaining endangered traditions, strengthening education, fostering community-based travel and breaking the cycle of poverty through the support of comprehensive micro-loan and education programs.

For more details on the long-term, positive impact work of our Culture Xplorers Foundation, please visit: www.cultureexplorers.com/positive-impact/cx-foundation

YOUR PARTICIPATION IN A CULTURE XPLORERS PROGRAM HELPS FOSTER THE SUSTAINABILITY OF LOCAL CULTURE IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES WORLDWIDE

Cost & Details



5 to 10 Travelers: Cost for 8 Days in N. Portugal = \$2,995/pp (sgl. rm. \$635)

2 to 4 Travelers: Cost for 8 Days in N. Portugal = \$3,395/pp (sgl. rm. \$635)

Included:

- Our locally-based Culture Xplorers' trip leader accompanies our travelers throughout the trip
- Specialist guides, urban architects, innovative chefs, master wine and port makers, artisan bakers and other cultural ambassadors meet & accompany us throughout our journey, offering us unparalleled access into the living culture of this magical region
- Culture Xplorers' *Signature Experiences* listed in the itinerary
- Lodging: double occupancy in charming, boutique hotels and lodges loaded with local flavor, color & character. These include: a lovingly restored 19th C. townhouse in Porto, an historic manor home in the Douro and a charming *pousada* steeped in history in Guimarães.
- Meals: breakfast & lunch daily, plus four (4) dinners during our eight-day journey
- Private ground transportation throughout in modern, air conditioned vehicles
- All entry fees to included museum visits, national parks and monuments
- Purified water provided throughout the journey – each participant receives their own aluminum eco bottle to re-fill each morning and evening, thus avoiding the waste of throwing away plastic bottles
- Airport pick-up and drop-off coordinated for any time on day of group's arrival & departure
- Comprehensive pre-departure planning materials

Items not included and estimates:

- International air RT to Porto, Portugal. Budget \$1,000+ (coach)
- Approximately (3) meals during our eight-day core journey. Budget \$25+ per meal
- International departure tax in Porto. Note: most airlines now include this tax into the fare
- If you are traveling alone or opt for a single room, add \$635 for 7 nights. Note: to avoid this fee, ask us to assign you a roommate. *If no roommate is available only 50% of the single room upgrade will be charged.*
- Tip to Culture Xplorers trip leader (\$4 to \$7/pp/day) and specialist guides (\$3 to \$4/pp/day)
- Traveler's medical and emergency evacuation insurance (recommended)

Details:

- Maximum travelers: 10 (2 travelers minimum)
- Trip length: 8 days, plus international travel
- Activity level: Active. Participants must be able to walk comfortably and unassisted for up to 90 minutes at a time & up to three hours per day on terrain that will include: cobblestones, flagstones, unpaved dirt & gravel roads, mountain footpaths and hilly vineyards.