

THE DOURO VALLEY & THE MINHO EXPLORING NORTHERN PORTUGAL

THURSDAY 20 – FRIDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 2018 (9 DAYS)

LECTURERS: TOM DUNCAN & FRANCISCO MARQUES

£3195

- **Leisurely visit to Portugal's beautiful northern region with time for independent exploration**
- **Two full days in Porto, to include an excursion to the Atlantic coast**
- **Wonderful selection of sacred & secular buildings including Bom Jesus do Monte with its stunning views**
- **We stay in Porto's city centre, then in historic hotels in Pinhão & Monção**



Braga, Bom Jesus do Monte

OVERVIEW

The Douro Valley and the Minho are two of the most scenic and atmospheric regions of Portugal. The Rio Douro, the “River of Gold” stretches some 160 or more miles from the Spanish border to the sea, and originally flowed through wild countryside. The development of port wine lodges in the eighteenth century changed the area and it has lovely countryside, full of pretty villages, historic towns and much else besides. Bordering Galicia, the Minho is less well known, though the Portuguese consider it to be the most beautiful of all and it has two of the country's most lovely cities, Guimarães and Braga sitting amidst spectacular natural scenery.

Porto is the Douro's delightful capital and we shall spend three nights there, allowing us time to explore it in detail. The city was European City of Culture in 2001 and this precipitated an extensive programme of repair and restoration, making it a particularly attractive place to visit. One of its highlights is the work of the Italian architect Nicolau Nasoni, who arrived in Porto in 1725 and designed many important churches and other buildings in the prevailing baroque style, such as the Clérigos Church and Tower. Other places we shall see include what is definitely one of the world's most beautiful railway stations, São Bento with its fabulous tiled interiors. Inevitably, we shall take the opportunity to visit one of the city's famous port-wine houses, Taylor's for a tasting and dinner.

Leaving Porto we travel eastwards along the Douro valley to Pinhão, which will be our base for two nights and it is a delightful spot. Nearby we shall visit Lamego with its lovely cathedral, the Sé, while the town's museum has fine paintings and wonderful Flemish tapestries. We also drive through the hills to visit a local monastery and other sites. We also visit one of the local port wine vineyards at Quinta da Roêda.

Continuing on to the Minho area, we base ourselves at the lovely old spa town of Monção for three nights. From here we visit Guimarães, a UNESCO World Heritage City, and it certainly deserves this accolade. This was Portugal's original capital and it has many fine buildings in the historic centre – an impressive medieval castle, the palace of the Dukes of Braganza and some lovely churches. Braga is Portugal's ‘religious capital’ and we shall be selective in the churches we visit, the most extraordinary of which is the Bom Jesus just outside the city.

The pace throughout this visit will be gentle, with time to relax and explore independently. In Porto we stay for three nights at the 5* Hotel Pestana Porto - A Brasileira; it is very close to many of the city's major sites and museums. In Pinhão we stay for two nights in the 5* Vintage House Hotel, a very comfortable historic wine lodge where all rooms have balconies which overlook the River Douro; in Monção, we stay for three nights in one of the area's most captivating historic properties, the 4* Hotel Rural Convento dos Capuchos.

ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1: Thursday 20 September – We fly from Gatwick to **Porto**, arriving late afternoon and check into our hotel, the 4* **Hotel Pestana A Brasileira**, for a three night stay. The city's fame is, of course, partly based on the port wine trade, and after settling in at our hotel we shall visit Taylor's Wine Lodge, one of the famous port wine houses in **Vila Nova de Gaia**, across the river from Porto, where we have our group dinner– wine, water and coffee are included with all group lunches and dinners.

Days 2 & 3: Friday & Saturday, 21 & 22 September – We spend two days exploring **Porto**, one of Europe's most charming cities. Selected as European City of Culture in 2001, the consequent restoration of the old quarter has transformed this atmospheric area. Some of the city's finest classical buildings are the work of an Italian baroque architect, Nicolau Nasoni, and we shall visit his famous **Clérigos Church and Tower**. The city's cathedral - the **Sé**, and the adjoining **Paço Episcopal**, continue the baroque theme. In total contrast, we visit one of the world's most beautiful railway stations, **São Bento** with its fabulous tiled interior. Other visits will include the impressive **Stock Exchange Palace**, a magnificent example of nineteenth century neo-classical architecture, and the **Church of São Francisco**, the most prominent gothic monument in Porto. An excursion to the coast at **Foz do Douro**, returning by the ancient tram, is planned for Saturday. Lunch is included on both Friday and Saturday, and formal visits aside, there will also be time for independent exploration on the Saturday afternoon.

Day 4: Sunday 23 September – We leave Porto and drive to **Vila Real** to visit **Casa de Mateus**, a splendid historic house designed by Nasoni with fine, formal gardens. We continue to the Douro valley, stopping for lunch in a lovely riverside restaurant from where we shall embark on an afternoon **River Cruise** to **Pinhão**, where we shall visit one of the famous port wine lodges, Quinta da Roêda. We shall stay for two nights at the highly regarded **5* Vintage House Hotel** in Pinhão, located directly on the River Douro. The evening will be free.

Day 5: Monday 24 September – We drive to **Lamego**, a fine city with splendid eighteenth century buildings. We visit the **Museu Regional** with excellent paintings and impressive Flemish tapestries. The cathedral, the **Sé**, is a striking building with elements from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. From here we make our way to the monumental **Sanctuary of Nossa Senhora dos Remédios**, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, with its magnificent views of the town. We continue to **Ocana** to see the impressive medieval bridge, where we also have lunch. In the afternoon we drive to see and the extensive remains of Portugal's first Cistercian monastery, **Mosteiro de São João de Tarouca**. We have dinner in our hotel.

Day 6: Tuesday 25 September – Leaving Pinhão, we drive to the lovely, rural area of northern Portugal known as **The Minho**, where we visit **Guimarães** which is a delightful UNESCO World Heritage Site. Our walk through the medieval city centre will include the medieval **Castelo**, the grand **Palace of the Dukes of Braganza**, some lovely medieval churches and much else. We have a group lunch in the town and we continue to **Monção** where we spend three nights in the **4* Hotel Rural Convento dos Capuchos**.

Day 7: Wednesday 26 September – **Braga** is a handsome city and Portugal's most important religious centre. As the old Portuguese saying has it: 'Coimbra studies, Braga prays, Porto works, and Lisbon plays...' Thus, much of what we shall see marks the strong faith of Portugal over many centuries: the amazing **Sé** (cathedral) with its **Museum of Sacred Art** and the remarkable **Bom Jesus do Monte**, with its monumental baroque stairway and amazing views of the surroundings. We have lunch locally and on our return to Monção, the evening will be free.

Day 8: Thursday 27 September – We visit two delightful towns, **Ponte de Lima** and **Viana do Castelo**, with their wonderful mix of medieval, renaissance and later buildings. Both are dramatically places amidst fine local scenery. Our final dinner will be in our hotel.

Day 9: Friday 28 September – On our final morning we visit the **Palácio da Brejoeira**, with charming interiors and a lovely garden. We continue to the remarkable walled town of **Valença** for some free time and lunch (not included) and leave for Porto Airport and the flight to Gatwick.

PRACTICALITIES

Price £3195

Without Flights £3045

Deposit £300

Single Supplement £470 (Double/Twin Room for Sole Use)

Hotels 3 nights at the 5* Hotel Pestana Porto - A Brasileira, Porto; 2 nights at the 5* Vintage House Hotel, Pinhão; 3 nights at the 4* Hotel Rural Convento dos Capuchos, Monção. All accommodation includes breakfast.

Flights British Airways

Outward: **BA2782** Departs London Gatwick (South Terminal) **1410**, arrive Porto **1635**

Return: **BA2783** Departs Porto **1725**, arrive London Gatwick (South Terminal) **1945**

Price includes 3 dinners & 6 lunches with wine, water & coffee, all local transfers, City Tax, entry fees & gratuities, services of Tom Duncan & Francisco Marques with tour manager David Sketchley

Not included Travel to/from Gatwick, 5 dinners & 2 lunches



CICERONI TRAVEL
2 The Square, Aynho, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX17 3BL
Telephone +44 (0) 1869 811167 Fax +44 (0) 1869 811188
Email info@ciceroni.co.uk Website www.ciceroni.co.uk

