

SHIP TO SHORE ♦ PORTO



Traditional Rabelo boats with barrels of port wine on the Douro River, Porto.

FIVE WAYS TO DRINK IN PORTO

Portugal's second largest city is becoming a hub for ocean and Douro River cruising

CELESTE MITCHELL

YOU'RE LIKELY HERE BECAUSE PORTO IS THE BIRTHPLACE OF PORT

of port. For an express pass to sounding like a connoisseur, visit a historic port wine cave, such as Graham's or Ramos Pinto, or join a Porto Walkers tour (portowalkers.pt) to visit three cellars and sample seven varieties of the DOC drop.

TO YOUR (AD) VANTAGE
Wherever you walk in Porto, it's likely to be uphill so if you prefer to start from the top and work your way down, hitch a ride on the Guindals Funicular from just near the Dom Luis bridge. For panoramic views over the city and a look into the world of the Brotherhood of Clerics who had it built, take the 225 steps to the top of Clerigos Tower – it's incredibly narrow near the top – and afterwards have a drink among the olive trees at Base (baseporto.com).

There are parks throughout the city, but if you only make it to one, walk among the peacocks in Jardins do Palacio de Cristal – you'll spot it by the giant glass dome seen from any high point in the city. With views down the Douro beyond the Arrabida Bridge, rose gardens and medieval towers to climb, it's understandably popular at sunset.

ESCAPE TO THE BEACH

If you're arriving in Porto via ocean cruise, you'll greet the city at the architectural icon that is the Lexoes cruise terminal in Matosinhos. Pop into the fish markets in the morning to watch this port town in full swing, then wander past chefs manning the grills outside on Rua Heróis De Franca to pick your perfect lunch spot. Order sardinhas and wash it down with a vinho verde – "green wine" – from northern Portugal.

After some beach time, wander the wide promenade or catch a bus to trendy Foz to browse designer boutiques and enjoy afternoon tea overlooking the sea. If you're coming from the city, board one of the historical tram cars (line 1) for a scenic ride to Passelo Alegre or hire bikes to ride along the Douro until it meets the Atlantic.

It's undoubtedly been Portugal's year in 2017 after visitor numbers soared nearly 13 per cent in 2016.

With Porto being named European Best Destination 2017 and picking up the gong for Europe's Leading Tourism Destination at the World Travel Awards, the spotlight is squarely on Portugal's second-largest city, and for good reason.

It's impossible not to feel enamoured with the UNESCO World Heritage-listed city's ramshackle layout, tiled facades and Douro Valley wine, accessed by both river and ocean cruises.

Whether you're visiting on an organised day tour or in town for a night or two, here are five essential experiences to add to your hit-list.

EXPRESS YOURSELF

Through struggle, the greatest art is born. Following a repressive 42-year dictatorship, which only ended in 1974, and the grueling effects of the GFC, it's only recently that Porto has seen the renaissance you'll experience now, with vibrant street art and exciting local makers.

Wander the galleries in Miguel Bombarda – aka the Art District – and pick up a piece from an emerging artist to take home. If music and theatre are more up your cultural alley, catch a bus to Boavista to join a guided tour of the meteor-like Casa de Musica (casadamusica.com).

HELLO, HARRY POTTER

There's a reason you'll always find a queue outside Majestic Cafe, and its

beautiful art deco interior is not always it. Rumoured to have been the cafe of choice for J.K. Rowling while she lived in Porto in the '90s, tour guides like to pontificate that Harry Potter was born in this very spot.

Fan or not, it's worth the wait to sip a deliciously thick hot chocolate and enjoy the cafe's signature rabanadas (French toast). You'll score bonus points with staff if you're not wielding a selfie stick.

Brave enough for another queue? The interior of the Livraria Lello bookstore, dating to 1906, is spellbinding in more ways than one – its elaborate forked staircase is said to have inspired Hogwarts.

Due to its popularity, an entry fee was introduced in 2015 but is redeemable on books.

EAT LIKE A LOCAL

You may have heard about pastel de nata – those famous Portuguese tarts – but in Porto they're just one part of the sweet story. Start your day at Confeitaria Moura with a strong espresso and a delicate Jesuita pastry – layer upon layer of wafer-thin pastry topped with a sugary glaze, made with a secret recipe that's been in the family since 1892.

You need to try a Francesinha while you're in Porto and locals will point you to Cafe Santiago. The jury is still out on how this sandwich came to be such an icon, but the rules are simple: the egg on top is optional but fries and a Super Bock beer, brewed in Porto, are mandatory accompaniments. But you're likely here because Porto is the birthplace



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