Through the western gate

ABOUT

Photo: Turismo Centro de Portugal

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On the western side of the Serra da Lousã it's well worth visiting three settlements that provide an initial introduction to the Slate Villages Network, for those arriving from the West.

Begin your trip in **Casal de São Simão**. Hidden in the midst of dense vegetation, this village huddled around a single main street, with a fountain and chapel, is the perfect setting for a few days of absolute calm, including a riverside beach standing between the Fragas (or "Cliffs") of São Simão.

Nearby, we encounter **Ferraria de São João**, another charming village that can be reached via a delightful footpath that allows visitors to fill their lungs with the local fresh air. The villages are located on a ridge in the Serra da Lousã, where the landscape is marked not only by slate but also by quartz, in a perfect transition between the two types of rock.

Travelling along the breathtaking mountain roads you'll reach another settlement within this group – **Gondramaz**. At the entrance to the village, you'll encounter the car park - which is also a belvedere, with many wooden benches. Sit down at your ease and admire the landscape, before walking through the village's narrow streets and hidden recesses.Here you'll feel a strong presence of slate, not only in the walls of the houses but also on the ground you tread. Observe the deep tones of the hand-crafted stone and the expert manner in which they have been placed into position by hand, thereby creating a genuine work of art. In order to bring back a souvenir, seek out the stone sculptures produced by local artisans.

If you still have the energy, walk along the sinuous path that starts next to the Pátio do Xisto, on the outskirts of the village. At the end of the path, you'll encounter the Penedo dos Corvos, a giant boulder that almost seems to be suspended in midair. Relax and appreciate the magnificent view over the giant valley of chestnut trees. This spectacular panorama is the fitting reward for your endeavours.

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