
The Douro Valley

ABOUT



Photo: António Sá

The Douro Valley

The Douro Valley could as easily be called the enchanted valley, such is the beauty and magic that its landscapes offer.

Departing from Porto, where the river flows into the sea and where the Douro wines (table wines and Port wine), produced on its hillsides, also end up, there are various ways to get to know this cultural landscape, listed as a **World Heritage Site**: by road, by train, on a cruise boat and even by helicopter. None will leave you indifferent.

Following a route between the viewpoints that offer the best vistas, you need to cross the river from north to south and back again. But along the way you can admire breathtaking landscapes over the river and visit vineyards, towns and villages until you reach Miranda do Douro, the point at which the river enters Portugal.

Start at Vila Nova de Gaia with a visit to the lodges where Port wine is aged. Here you will get to know this wine a little better, taking the opportunity – how could you do otherwise? – to taste the precious nectar. And you can still see the old rabelo boats on the river, the vessels that carried the wine from the quintas where it is produced to the mouth of river, before the various dams that made the river navigable were built.

In **Peso da Régua**, the **Douro Museum** will provide a different perspective on the region and wine growing. Not far away, on the south bank, is **Lamego**, one of the most beautiful cities in Northern Portugal, located at the base of an immense blue and white tiled flight of steps leading to the **Shrine of Nossa Senhora dos Remédios**. In **Pinhão**, right by the river, the railway station is a must-see to admire its ancient tiles dedicated to the cultivation of vines.

Before arriving in Pocinho, you can make a detour on the south bank to visit the **castle of Numão** and enjoy the view over the skyline. A little further to the east is the **Vale do Coa Archaeological Park**, an open-air rock art gallery, classified as a World Heritage Site, and the attached **Museum in Vila Nova de Foz Coa**.

Once you get to Barca de Alva, you enter the **International Douro Natural Park**, as the river from here to Miranda do Douro makes the border between Portugal and Spain. At this point, the course of the river narrows, running between tall escarpments until it reaches the small border town on entering Portugal.

The **Douro Wine Region Valley**, up to Barca de Alva, is the oldest demarcated wine region in the world. First, the river carved the deep valleys out of the land and then Man transformed the schist mountains into soil and walls and planted the vines, green in summer, flame-coloured in autumn. With knowledge handed down from generation to generation, he inclined the terraces to expose the vines to the rays of the sun which give the grapes the warmth that the wine craves. It was from the fruits of the land and Man's labour that this unique wine and landscape were made.

Don't miss

- > visit some of the wine producing quintas which provide wine tourism activities
- > spend the night at a wine hotel in Porto or the Douro Valley
- > join in the grape harvest
- > go on an environmental river cruise near Miranda do Douro
- > visit the wine growing villages of Barcos, Favaios, Provesende, Ucanha, Salzedas and Trevões

FIVE VIEWPOINTS OVER THE RIVER DOURO**1 - São Leonardo da Galafura**

The São Leonardo da Galafura viewpoint is close to Régua. One look takes in the Douro Valley and the Marão Mountain in this landscape that the writer Miguel Torga described as a “geological poem”.

2 - Quinta do Noval

Its privileged location and the colourful geometry of its vineyards make this estate a showcase of the Douro to this day. Situated on the left bank of the River Pinhão, the quinta extends across schist walled terraces, divided by flights of steps marked by stripes painted in the same white as the houses and the slanted road that crosses the estate.

3 - Casal de Loivos

This is a true balcony overlooking Pinhão and the valley with the river at the bottom meandering along an ‘S’ around the village. The BBC called this view one of the six most beautiful in the world.

4 - São Salvador do Mundo

A sacred and mythical place a few kilometres from São João da Pesqueira, on the south bank, São Salvador do Mundo is a destination for pilgrimages, mainly by women, according to local tradition. From here, you can see half the Douro. The river runs at the bottom of the abyss, contorted by rocky escarpments, now tamed by the Valeira Dam and freed from the famous rapids which were an insurmountable obstacle to navigation until the late 18th century.

5 - Quinta do Vale Meão

Sited on a soft slope on the right bank of the Douro, close to Pocinho, marking the northerly edge of UNESCO’s listed area, the vastness and grandiosity of this quinta boast the mark of its founder, the mythical D. Antónia Ferreira, who revolutionised Port wine growing in the 19th century. From this perspective, this view epitomises the essence of the Douro: the beauty, the dream, the legend and Man’s creative genius in transforming the schist of the river banks into arable land.

THE DOURO BY CAR

The Douro is not just its viewpoints, and the car is still an excellent means to discover the river and the surrounding areas. But first, you must be prepared for the constant ups and downs on narrow, winding lanes. You will find quiet towns and villages, vineyards hugging the bends, castles from the time of the Reconquest and other places worthy of a stop to look far into the horizon.

On the north bank, as you begin the journey in Peso da Régua, after crossing the plateaux that protect the Douro Valley, you will arrive in Alijó. From Alijó to Carrazeda de Ansiães, you will cross the River Tua and you can continue on the EN214 road until Vila Flor. If you take the IP2 from Vila Flor to Torre de Moncorvo, you can carry on to Barca de Alva on the EN220 and the EN221, past Freixo de Espada à Cinta.

On the south bank, between Vila Nova de Foz Coa and the Douro, past São João da Pesqueira, the connection is by the EN222, back to Pinhão. On this bank, there are two mandatory detours: the EN222-4 which goes down to Quinta do Vesúvio, and the EN324, which takes you to the imposing Castle of Numão.

The tour offers spectacular views over the Douro

THE DOURO BY BOAT

Departing from the quay at Vila Nova de Gaia, you can go on a boat trip up the Douro until Barca de Alva, the duration of which will depend on the distance you want to cover. Or you can depart from somewhere else, like Régua, and combine boat and train. You can sleep on the boat or in quintas or manor houses close to the river and experience the Portuguese tradition of hospitality. The tour includes a full programme with visits to regional landmarks, themed meals and wine tastings.

The beautiful terraced slopes of the Douro valley, covered in vines, start near Barqueiros, extending to Barca de Alva, and offer one of the most striking man-made rural landscapes.

Until the late 19th century, the river was the major access route inland and the means of transport for produce from the distant interior. Navigation was challenging and risky, the rabelo boat being the only vessel capable of crossing the natural obstacles. The sturdiness and expertise of the boatmen made it possible to navigate the river and carry the great wine barrels. These would never be completely full so that, in the event of an accident, they could float.

Today you can also take a short ride on a rabelo boat. It will be an unforgettable experience.

THE DOURO BY TRAIN

If you're a fan of train travel, going alongside the Douro like in the early 20th century is an unmissable experience. In this reencounter with the past, the stars are the steam and diesel carriages and engines which, travelling at 30 km/h, preserve the memory of a time when they provided the connection between towns and helped deliver the famous Port Wine.

You can follow the river on the Douro Line, between Régua and Tua. The Régua station was the most important in the region, and the Pinhão station is one of the most attractive in the country, with its tiled façades.

But you can also follow the Douro Line by regular train from Porto or combine a train and boat programme. The two options offer a complementary approach.

THE DOURO BY HELICOPTER

The Douro can also be discovered from the air, on a trip that leaves from Porto, initially flying over the historic centre of the city and the six bridges that link it to the south bank. You will be at the heart of the Upper Douro in a short time.

Another possibility between the river mouth in Porto and Barca de Alva is to combine the helicopter with a river trip on a luxury yacht. The tour can include lunch in a quinta in the Douro and accommodates up to 6 passengers.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Douro historic train: www.cp.pt/cp/

You can combine the ride on the historic train with a return trip from anywhere in the country. There are partnerships with hotels and car parks for the users of the historic train.

This region can also be visited along the Port Wine route: www.ivdp.pt/

Find out more:

visitportoandnorth.travel/

GETTING HERE

The N222 road hugs the south bank of the river.

Train: www.cp.pt

Coach - Rede Expressos www.rede-expressos.pt

Airport: Francisco Sá Carneiro Airport (Porto)
