

Portugal: Porto, Minho & Douro Valley

Tour-Only Itinerary

The northern reaches of Portugal exude a rural beauty unlike anywhere else. Exploring them by foot is a true privilege. You'll begin in the spellbinding province of Minho, a rich patchwork of soaring slopes and emerald-green terraces criss-crossed by ancient, rugged shepherd trails that link tiny secluded stone villages. On these contemplative trails, your solitude is part of the adventure as Garrano horses, Cachena cattle and a shepherd tending his flock may be your only companions. Your pathways then point to the Douro River Valley, where vintners have been producing Portugal's prized port wines for generations. Traverse gentle downhill slopes past lush vineyards and the elegant wine estates. Pause for a glass or two while taking in breathtaking vistas. And marvel at scenic vine-laden slopes from the celebrated river during a small group boat excursion. Along the way, join local guides on informative walks through historic Guimarães, birthplace of Portugal, and Porto, one of Europe's most authentic cities. This is Portugal at its purest.



Highlights

Trace ancient shepherd trails through breathtaking mountain vistas and terraced farmland to traditional stone villages in remote Peneda-Gerês National Park.

Join a local guide for a fascinating walk through Guimarães, birthplace of Portugal and a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Enrich your strolls along the Douro River Valley's terraced vineyards with wine tastings at charming hillside *quintas*, or wine estates.

Savor a moveable feast in Porto as a local guide shows you around and welcomes you to a mouthwatering trio of eateries for Portuguese cuisine.

On all Self-Guided Adventures you can count on ...



A local representative available 24/7.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Detailed maps & route notes featuring turn-by-turn directions and places of interest.



Experts to handle all the details, including moving your luggage between hotels while you're out exploring.



Scheduled taxi transfers to bring you to and from each day's walks.



Access to a Self-Guided Flight Concierge—ask our knowledgeable team to find flights that sync with your planned trip.



Delicious meals—many are included.

Activity Level

This tour is one of our Self-Guided Walking Adventures, rated moderate with challenging sections with an average of 4-7 miles of walking per day. This itinerary also includes informative walks with local guides in both Guimar and Porto. Throughout this tour, cumulative elevation gains are up to 1,350 feet and cumulative elevation losses are up to 2,700 feet. The first portion of the tour is in the remote Peneda

National Park. Walks here follow a variety of terrain that is often roughly maintained and may not be well marked over hard-packed trails, paved-granite paths and stairways, and cobbled routes through villages, forests, and pastures, past agricultural terraced landscapes, and over shallow river crossings and high-elevation routes marked by stone cairns. Some of these routes are quite steep and rugged and will require your careful attention. This is a secluded area of northern Portugal; it is unlikely that you will pass others along your trails so you need to be a confident, sure-footed, and self-sufficient walker; a handheld GPS unit will be provided at your orientation meeting for additional reassurance. Walking sticks are highly recommended to aid with steep ascents and descents and uneven rocky trails involving loose rocks that are often slippery, especially when wet or mossy. Following an interlude in Guimares, a UNESCO World Heritage site, the second portion of the tour traces the soft contours of the Douro River Valley along gentle hills, terraced vineyards and olive groves, with opportunities to break up your easy-to-moderate, mostly downhill walks with wine tastings and a relaxing boat excursion. Your tour concludes with a guided walk through the authentic streets of Porto. Reaching these locations requires transfers of up to 2 hours. Remember: preparation is key to your enjoyment; the more you walk or participate in aerobic exercise prior to your trip, the more rewarding your experience will be!

DAY 1

Your Portugal: Porto, Minho & Douro Valley tour begins. Peneda-Gerês National Park: Trilho dos Moinhos de Parada (Path of the Mills)

3.6 miles, easy to moderate, 550-ft cumulative elevation gain and loss

Arrive in Porto and make your way with a Country Walkers representative north into Portugal's remote Minho province at the Spanish border. Your destination is the country's first and only national park, Peneda-Gerês, a striking landscape of forested hills and isolated villages that evoke the rich rural traditions of Portugal. As one of the country's least developed regions, accommodations here are simple and trails are not perfectly maintained. Therein lies its adventure and its charm, as you'll discover during a two-night stay that puts you at the heart of this tranquil and unspoiled place. You'll follow paved granite trails through deep wooded valleys and up to remote uplands reaching up to 4,900 feet, passing through tiny villages that haven't changed for centuries. It's common to walk an entire day without passing anyone else here, save perhaps a shepherd guiding his flock.

Stop in the small town of Ponte da Barca for last-minute items before arriving in the village of Lindoso, best

known for its 13th-century medieval castle and its dozens of 19th-century *espigueiros*, granite corn granaries elevated on pillars to keep rats and mice at bay. The castle is one of Portugal's finest examples of medieval military architecture with its Vauban-style, star-shaped wall and dramatic situation above the valley of the Lima River. Central to the nation's identity, it played a major role as the Minho region changed hands between Spain and Portugal in the 1660s.

After time to explore the castle and its *espigueiros*, continue with your representative to Parada, an old granite village dripping with rural, old world charm. Cows and goats not only share the narrow streets with residents; they also share the houses, relegated to street level while owners live upstairs. On your way to your rustic guesthouse, you might pass women doing laundry in the communal wash basin. At your modest guest house, you will meet your host, Patricia, over a light lunch and then accompany your representative on a warm-up walk along the Trilho dos Moinhos de Parada (Path of the Mills). Ascend a steadily climbing, wide cobbled pathway in the shade of grape arbors. Moss-covered stone walls and small vineyards of Portugal's famed *vinho verde* grape line your trail, as do magnificent views of the Lima Valley, the slopes of Peneda Mountain dotted with tiny villages, and Parada and its granaries. Later, your wide path narrows into uneven stone footpaths and ancient shepherds' trails that lead past towering oak trees. As you reach the plateau, you're surrounded by the pristine Terras de Lindos mountains, overlooking deep valley contours and soaring peaks of the Serra Amarela. After time to admire the sweeping view, and perhaps the wild, free-roaming Garrano horses that frequent the area, follow stone cairns downhill through yellow gorse and purple heather and over ancient granite bridges to Poço da Gola, one of the park's many natural pools, with its abandoned water mill. Take a dip here if you'd like, then continue on this trail back to the village, passing the historic jailhouse, city hall, and courthouse along the way. Your Country Walkers representative will leave you to delight to a true Portuguese rustic dinner (prepared by your host) in your eat-in kitchen.

Overnight in Parada/Lindoso

DAY 2

Peneda-Gerês National Park: Gavieira to Peneda

5.2 miles, moderate to challenging, 1,350-ft cumulative elevation gain and loss

After a hearty breakfast, transfer 40 minutes to the stone village of Gavieira amidst the granite uplands of Serra da Peneda. Today's walk is sometimes gentle and sometimes challenging. It begins along a

pilgrimage route, heading out of the village on a moderate trail through a varied terrain of narrow paths, river banks, and an emerald-green patchwork of terraced pastures. Continue up a gentle slope under the hushed canopy of oak and chestnut trees, later stepping into a more humid environment of ferns and mossy stone walls. A trail through a pine forest leads to open fields of rocks dotted by stone cairns, which lead you over a hillock and up a granite mountain trail through tall vegetation. At the plateau, more cairns point the way to a picturesque artificial lake formed by a dam. On the distant hillsides, you might spot the region's ubiquitous Cachena cattle with their long lyre-shaped horns or even see more Garrano horses. You're sure to find an ideal spot to enjoy the picnic lunch that Patricia prepared for you this morning. A steady descent down a magnificent old granite stairway, one of Portugal's great mountain routes, delivers you to the large main square of Peneda, straddling a deep ravine at the foot of a towering cliff draped in green.

The focal point of Peneda has long been the Sanctuary of Senhora da Peneda, a pilgrimage destination for many of the devout who call these mountains home. Each September, the Nossa Senhora da Peneda Festival fills a music-filled square with thousands who have walked the same trails that brought you here. In the open portico, take a moment to admire statues of the four evangelists and the 20 chapels representing the Stations of the Cross. If you wish, you can take in the ambiance of this quiet village at an outdoor café before a meal of simple mountain food at your hotel.

Overnight in Peneda

DAY 3

Branda da Avelreira to Padrão or Sistelo. Transfer to Guimarães with visit en route to the Sanctuary of Bom Jesus do Monte in Braga

5.2 mile or 6.7 miles, moderate with challenging sections, 300-ft cumulative elevation gain and 1,950-ft or 2,700-ft cumulative elevation loss.

Today's walk follows the Romeiros da Peneda, a shepherd's trail through stunning agricultural landscapes. Your route traces the seasonal pathways used by shepherds as they moved their flocks to higher pastures and dwellings (*brandas*) in warm months and lower pastures and dwellings (*inverneiras*) in cold months. From the summer hamlet of Branda da Avelreira, you will head out on a wide rocky dirt track through fields and past long-horned cattle to descend into the Rio Vez Valley, a U-shaped glacial-cut expanse littered with large, smooth granite boulders. You'll cross the Rio Vez and pass the stone dwellings

of picturesque Branda do Furado and later ascend a wide grassy path to a steep rocky climb. This ancient cobbled path through a majestic oak forest past mossy stone walls leads to the pinnacle of today's hike in the Serra da Peneda. Take time to soak in the rugged mountain vistas, keeping a watch for vultures overhead. When you're ready, follow the stone cairns through high pastures where shepherds often tend to their herds. Through an open pine forest, follow an ancient stone path known locally as a *carreteiro* for its past use as an ox-cart trail. Still today, it is marked by centuries-old wheel ruts. Numerous summer dwellings point the way to the mountain village of Porta Cova, a short distance from your final destination, Padrão. This small hamlet is known for its *socalcos*, perfectly preserved terraces of deep fertile soil held in place by heavy stone walls. They are an astonishing sight in this rugged mountain terrain.

Padrão embodies the typical mountain community of old Portugal. Compactly arranged, the communal-like houses make the most efficient use of space, keeping maximum land available for farming. Padrão and villages like it are many things to the local people: an entry into the surrounding fields for farming, a starting point into the mountains for grazing, a private space for families, and a meeting place for neighbors. Despite their remoteness, they were designed with brilliant intention for function and sociability.

If you wish, you may join your affable taxi driver here for a lift to the lovely village of Sistelo. But we recommend you continue walking for another hour. The cobbled path is downhill, bordered by stone walls with spectacular views of farming terraces. Lush grape arbors, vineyards, vegetable gardens and their farmers lend a beautiful rustic ambiance to the day's final leg. Once in Sistelo, you can rest your feet and grab a drink at a local bar, then join your driver for a transfer to Guimarães. En route, pause to marvel at the hilltop church of Bom Jesus in Braga, one of the most important pilgrimage sites in the country. Its spectacular Baroque stairway of some 600 steps zigzags upward. Some of the chapels on the stairs' many landings date to the 14th century.

Arrive in Guimarães later today in time for dinner. Birthplace of the Portuguese kingdom and a UNESCO World Heritage site, the city is a treasure trove of history and a revered point of pride for locals. There'll be time to explore tomorrow when you're joined by a guide. Tonight, you'll have many dining options before retiring to your room in the heart of the city.

Overnight in Guimarães

DAY 4

Guided walking tour of Guimarães

2–3 miles, easy

Guimarães enjoys a stunning setting, surrounded by emerald hills. This gracious city is the birthplace of Portugal, as it was here that Afonso Henriques declared himself king in 1139. The place of his birth, the Castelo de São Miguel, originally built to deflect Moors and Normans in the 10th century, lords over the town with its massive square keep and imposing battlements. It was the Battle of São Mamede in the nearby countryside that determined Portugal's fate as Afonso led his troops to victory. For several decades after, the city was the national capital until the needs of the famous Reconquest required the seat of government to be moved to Coimbra.

After a hearty breakfast today, you will join a local guide for a three-hour walking tour that traces the city's rich history. From your hotel on the Largo da Oliveira, the main square, stroll over to the Church of Our Lady of the Olive Tree, founded by Henriques and named for a centuries-old olive tree that is said to have lit the altar lamp with its oil. After time to admire the interior, walk up the cobbled lane of Rua de Santa Maria, passing the Convent of Santa Clara and many stately houses adorned with ornate Baroque statuary. You will pass the 15th-century Paço dos Duques, or Palace of the Dukes of Braganza, before arriving at the Castelo de São Miguel. Take some time to admire its battlements. (If you wish, you may return later on your own to visit the interior of the palace and castle at your expense.) Your route back to your hotel passes through the Couros district, named for the small river that once fed a thriving leather and tanning industry.

You will have the afternoon to spend as you please, shopping or dining around the Largo da Oliveira. Return to the Paço dos Duques or Castelo de São Miguel to delve more deeply into the city's past. Browse the fascinating exhibits at the Museu Martins Sarmiento, a rich repository of archaeological finds from the region. For some peace and tranquility, climb aboard the cable car for a 10-minute ride to a 2,000-foot peak simply known as "Penha." Your ride casts you afloat in the air over the back gardens of Guimarães residents and delivers you to walking trails, grottoes, cafés and lovely picnic spots with fantastic views. This evening, you may find a restaurant for dinner on your own.

Overnight in Guimarães

DAY 5

Transfer to Pinhão with guided visit en route to Casa de Mateus in Vila Real. Douro Valley: Provesende to Pinhão

4.6 miles, easy to moderate, 1,700-ft cumulative elevation loss

After breakfast, transfer for about an hour to Vila Real, a busy town perched upon the edge of a gorge. Here, the striking Casa Mateus Palace, a masterful Baroque solar, or manor house, boasts what may be the finest formal gardens in Portugal. On a guided visit, you will see the ornate chapel, the wood-paneled library with its collection of 2,000 parchments and royal charters dating back five centuries, and several other richly adorned rooms with period furnishings. In the garden, admire richly textured topiary originally laid in the 1930s and 40s, including a visitor favorite: an aromatic 115-foot tunnel sculpted from tightly planted cedars.

Continue to the village of Provesende in the heart of the wine-growing Douro River Valley. In this unassuming little hamlet, Porto's 17th-century wine elite established the regulations for port production. Following lunch in a rustic local restaurant or armed with a lovely picnic lunch (equivalent value; based on restaurant opening times and availability), set off on your walk into the Douro Valley, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Descend a gentle hill, traversing the area's famed terraced vineyards, olive trees and stone walls, with views of the sparkling Douro River. From the pretty whitewashed village of São Cristóvão do Douro, continue to Pinhão on the banks of the river. Here, we have scheduled a winery tour and port tasting for you at the Quinta do Bomfim, across the street from your hotel. This family-owned *quinta*, one of the region's many wine estates that dot the countryside, has been making port for five generations. This evening, savor dinner in your hotel's elegant dining room, the award-winning Rabelo restaurant.

Overnight in Pinhão

DAY 6

Douro River small group boat excursion and winery visit with tasting. Douro Valley: Casal de Loivos to Pinhão

3.9 miles, easy to moderate, 150-ft cumulative elevation gain and 1,150-ft cumulative elevation loss

To get a true sense of the beauty of the Douro River and the terraced hills that guide its course, you will follow breakfast today with a small group two-hour boat excursion (by sail or motor, conditions permitting). Meet your captain, Paolo, at the Pinhão dock and embark on a leisurely morning among breathtaking

vistas of sloping river banks blanketed with vineyards and dotted with charming white *quintas*. Along the way, Paolo will regale you with stories and history of the region that he knows so well. After, continue (along with any other boat passengers) into the hills with Paolo to his family's historic quinta. Operating since the 18th century, it is one of the valley's oldest. Despite the estate's modern look and feel, the family proudly produces wine using the most traditional methods, providing you a more intimate glimpse into Douro viniculture. You are Paolo's guests for lunch, a generous spread of ingredients sourced from his family's farm and paired with its wines.

After, your host will drive you either back to your hotel or to the starting point of today's walk, depending on your energy! If you wish to walk, begin at the small village of Casal de Loivos in the hills. The views from its *miradouro*, or Douro viewpoint, are considered the best of the valley. From here, enjoy a leisurely downhill to the valley floor, passing the Quinta da Roêda, where you may stop for another tasting if you'd like. Once you arrive back at the river, follow its shores back to your hotel. Dinner is on your own tonight.

Overnight in Pinhão

DAY 7

Transfer to Porto. Guided walking tour of Porto

2–3 miles, easy

A taxi takes you to Porto this morning, about 1½ hours away. Upon arrival at your hotel, you will meet a guide for a three-hour food tour and orientation walk of this authentic city. Porto has long benefited from commerce, whether providing provisions to medieval crusaders on their way to the Holy Land, importing goods during Portugal's famed Age of Discovery, or exporting its fortified port wine to Britain. The grand yet unpretentious architecture you'll see was built on that wealth. Your hotel is on the edge of the city's Cathedral district, putting the city's mammoth church within easy reach. As you explore, you'll sample the flavors of a city heralded for its cuisine. Stop at a local café for a drink and appetizer. Settle in at a traditional *taberna* for lunch, perhaps trying codfish *pataniscas* (fritters) or the classic francesinha (pork and beef sandwich with melted cheese and a spicy sauce). And cap off your moveable feast at one of Porto's historic cafés for coffee and dessert.

This afternoon is free for you to return to the sites that interested you during your tour. Or perhaps you'll step into the São Bento train station to admire its artful display of *azulejos*, Portugal's famed painted tiles.

Linger in the Ribeira district, where *rabelos* (small wooden boats) bob on the river's currents. These modest vessels laden with casks transported wine to Porto from the *quintas* upriver until the railroad came along. Admire the girders of the Ponte de Dom Luís I bridge, designed by an apprentice of Gustave Eiffel. Or head over to Vila Nova de Gaia across the river, where wines brought downriver from the valley are still matured and prepared for shipping at local *armazéns*, or wine lodges.

Overnight in Porto

DAY 8

Your Portugal: Porto, Minho & Douro Valley tour concludes Porto

After breakfast, you may depart at your leisure.

What's Included

Tour Only

Breakfast daily, six lunches (days 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7), and three dinners (days 1, 2, and 5); beverages not included	✓
Guided visit to Casa de Mateus in Vila Real (day 5)	✓
Winery tour and port tasting at Quinta do Bomfim (day 5)	✓
Winery tour and wine tasting at historic family quinta (day 6)	✓
Douro River small group boat excursion (day 6)	✓
Guided walking tours of Guimarães (day 4) and Porto (day 7)	✓
All accommodations while on tour	✓
Local transfers as noted in the itinerary	✓
Luggage transfers between the hotels	✓