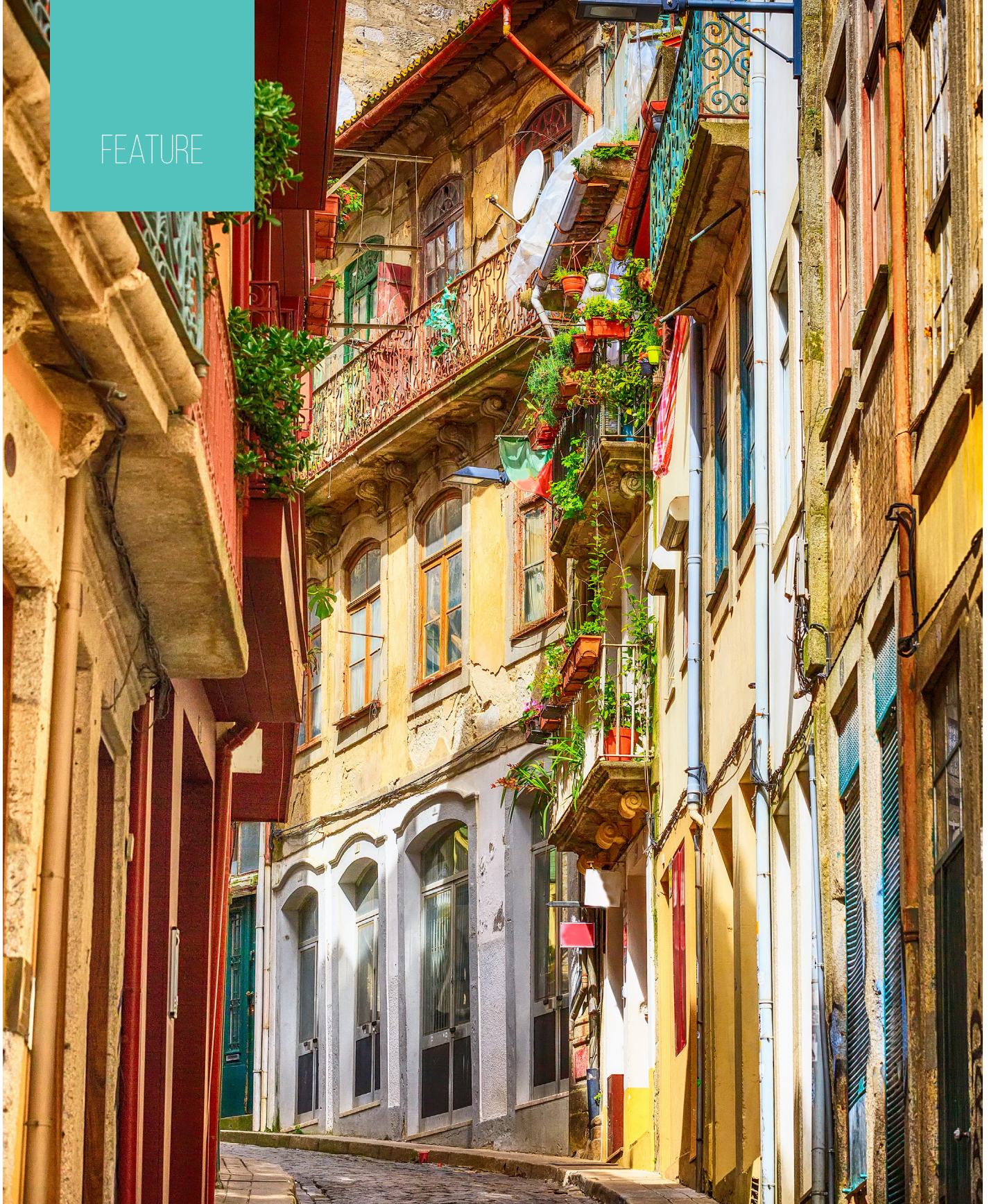


FEATURE



# ADVENTURES IN PORTUGAL

BY NATALIE COMPAGNO AND GREG FREITAS



**A**s the sun sets on the Atlantic, Porto's stunning skyline goes into bold relief against the darkening sky. The stately Douro River flows briskly past the Viking river cruise ships moored amid the intricate bridges linking it to Vila Nova de Gaia. Enormous signs are lit up behind the deck with incongruous names like Graham's or Taylor's that attest to the country's remarkable 632-year-old alliance with England.

Portugal's second city is decidedly calmer mid-August than the bustling capital, but the sidewalks of waterfront Ribeira still teem with strollers enjoying the summer heat. The roads are packed as well, but ride sharing is cheap here, and ubiquitous. Every driver has their own hidden taverna that they are eager to share with their new friends in near-perfect English. Without fail, each suggestion delivers the delectable combo of fresh seafood and quaffable wine for which Portugal is justifiably famous.

The word is out--Portugal is booming. The current darling of international travel, its selection on every hottest destination list is also supported by the facts. With an annual growth rate of 30% in American visitors, tourism has injected much-needed capital into a struggling economy, and pizzazz into an aging populace. Residents and travelers alike can hardly fail to notice the mid-summer crush of tourists packed

like sardinhas into Lisbon's famed Tram 28. None of this should deter even the most casual traveler. Portugal isn't a land of must-sees or must-dos; it's not about visiting one museum, one chapel, or one restaurant. Portugal is a state of mind that equates to relaxation, escape, adventure, and comfort.

### LISBON BY BIKE

Lisbon can be a baffling quagmire of ancient Moorish streets pitched at steep angles on 250-year-old cobblestones. Getting lost in the Alfama or hiking up

to the Bairro Alto for a chic but inexpensive dinner at The Decadente (reservations recommended) or Pub Lisboa (just pop in) are some of the city's greatest pleasures. But be sure to set aside one day to meander along the banks of the Tejo River on the capital's brand new, dedicated bike paths. Even the laziest cruisers can take in the sea breezes and epic bridge views. The highly motivated can see the best of the city in just one day.

After a satisfying breakfast of strong coffee and pastel de nata (custard tarts) stroll down to the water and rent a bike from Bike Iberia. Head west towards the district of Belem. The flat, five-mile ride takes in some of the most beautiful sights in the city. Visit the Torre de Belem and the Monastério Jeronimo for pristine examples of Manueline architecture, so ornate it makes Baroque look plain. Stop to browse the collections at Museu Coleção Berardo, which intersperses exciting new Portuguese artists amidst international greats. Heading back towards the city center for lunch, LX Factory is a "creative island" featuring artisanal shops and hip eateries in a transformed industrial factory setting. Then keep heading east, afternoon activities await.

Just past the Praça do Comércio, the well-curated Museu do Fado provides a glimpse into the national psyche with this uniquely Portuguese art form. Explanations abound, but the most satisfying aspect is the chance to listen and sample dozens of different musicians from the past hundred years of Fado, the plaintive song of fate. Just three kilometers east of the Praça do Comércio, the essential









**THE PORTUGUESE HAVE A WORD, SAUDADE, WHICH DENOTES A DEEPLY EMOTIONAL LONGING, INTENSE NOSTALGIA, OR PROFOUND MELANCHOLY. THEIR FADO MUSIC EMBODIES SAUDADE AND BRINGS TEARS OF PASSION TO ITS LISTENERS. NO NEED TO UNDERSTAND IT JUST YET--ITS FULL IMPACT ARRIVES THE MOMENT IT'S TIME TO BID FAREWELL TO PORTUGAL.**



Museu Nacional do Azulejo delivers. "Decorative tiles" doesn't begin to describe the importance or the place in the Portuguese imagination of these iconic building blocks. Fantasize redecorating a second home, or just take in the kaleidoscope of color.

Close out this perfect Lisbon day in Maravila, Lisbon's hippest neighborhood. The formerly industrial area is filled with street art, boutiques, galleries, and craft beer. Thirsty cyclists bored with Sagres should make a beeline for Dois Corvos. Microbrews are slowly gaining traction in Europe but Dois Corvos excels at every style, from IPAs to sours. Go figure, it was founded by an expat from Seattle over 20 years ago.

### A DOURO RIVER CRUISE

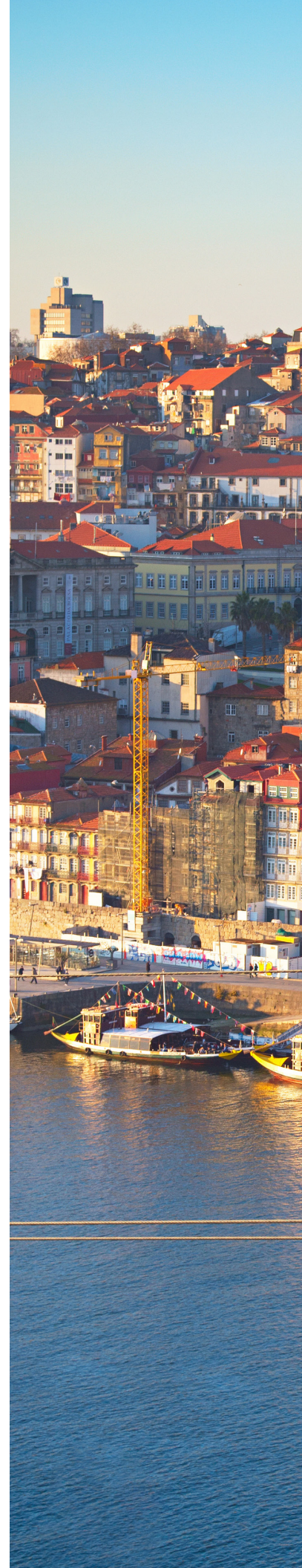
Portugal has become well-known for their array of wine, which runs the gamut from bold reds to mineral intensive whites. The Douro Valley is among the most scenic wine regions in the world, with verdant hills zooming sharply up 2000 feet above the water, covered in terraced vines. The grapes are

still picked by hand and sometimes crushed by foot. Nothing says relaxation in Portugal like sipping a vinho verde while scenic riverbanks float by, and a river cruise is the best way to make it happen.

Viking River Cruises provided a combination of food and wine with culture that makes them the perfect partner for discovering the highlights of the Douro. They offer a variety of staterooms, and with only 53 cabins the lower head count keeps things convivial. Conde Nast Traveler awarded their most recent Reader's Choice Award to Viking for best river cruise, with the cultural enrichment program setting them apart.

Porto and the Douro are the birthplace of port wine; ruby and tawny will be familiar to most visitors. Lesser known but more refreshing, white port makes a wonderful light aperitif. Even better, order a port tonic--the bitterness of the tonic cuts the sweetness and a healthy slice of lime makes it the ideal summer refresher.

The delights of the Douro go far beyond the bottles to sample and take home. It is an ancient region dotted with colorful villages and loaded with





### PORTO LIKE A LOCAL

Porto is a magically photogenic town of almost perfect size. Surrounded by water, accessible by boat, bike or subway, the city also boasts an international airport and maintains a cosmopolitan flair. Grab a local map at the hotel, the hosts will be more than happy to draw detailed walking tours with local food, shops, and attractions.

Majestic Café and Livraria Lello (aka the Harry Potter library) are worth visiting but the crowds can be daunting. Rua das Flores is packed with book stores and boutiques. At 43 Branco, browse through the chic gift items and bags. Finish at Cantina 32, an adventurous take on traditional Portuguese cuisine in a lovely, shabby chic room.

Don't forget to hit the beach. With over 1000 miles of sun-drenched, west-facing coastline, Portugal offers beach lovers endless options. Just north of Porto but still within the metro area, the community of Foz provides picturesque sandy beaches just a short ride from town. Grab a seat at one of the many beachside cafés and order a Super Bock to accompany the bacalhau. Heat up on the sand and then take a refreshing dip in the Atlantic—temperatures are brisk, but the water is crisp and blue. Save time for a late lunch at Cafeina to indulge in fresh seafood as the afternoon breezes roll in off the ocean.

The Portuguese have a word, *saudade*, which denotes a deeply emotional longing, intense nostalgia, or profound melancholy. Their Fado music embodies *saudade* and brings tears of passion to its listeners. No need to understand it just yet—its full impact arrives the moment it's time to bid farewell to Portugal.

history. Many from the Viking team grew up in the region, so be smart and ask for personal walking tours. Here are a few villages not to miss in between port tastings.

In Lamego, the baroque Shrine of Our Lady of the Remedies looms magnificently over the town. Climb the estimated 686 steps to the top for sweeping views of the valley below. It's easier than it looks, and there are fewer steps than reported. Then grab a pastry and coffee *bica* at charming Pastelaria da Sé before a visit to the informative Lamego Museum.

Casa de Mateus in Vila Real is a stately manor to rival the great houses of England or Italy. The impossibly well-kept estate is home to gardens that recall a miniature Versailles. The wood-paneled library contains one of the earliest illustrated copies of *Os Lusíadas*, the epic poem of Portugal by Luís de Camões.

With hundreds of quintas worth visiting in the Douro, Quinta da Avessada is one of the best. They provide luscious meals on handsomely manicured vineyards, with an exuberant host known far and wide for his entertaining stories. His historical knowledge and comedic delivery are a treat.

Tiny Favaios is an ancient village which embraces equally old baking techniques, stop in for mouthwatering wood fired oven bread. The surrounding area produces the aromatic Moscatel grape used in the fragrant fortified wines.

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