BIRDS, PORT WINE & UNESCO SITES IN THE DOURO VALLEY, PORTUGAL

Programme run by ©PORTUGAL ECOTOURISM -
- organizing ecotours since 2007

Egyptian Vulture © Erik Menkveld

Douro Internacional Natural Park © Diogo Carvalho
GENERAL INFORMATION

8 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS

DATES

April to September
(please note: July and August can be very hot)

FOCUS

Birds, Port Wine and World Heritage Sites

HIGHLIGHTS

- Cliff-breeding birds (Egyptian and Griffon Vulture, Bonneli’s and Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Black Stork)
- Black Wheatear, Orphean Warbler, Blue Rock-Thrush, Bee-Eater, Woodchat Shrike, Hoopoe, Azure-winged Magpie
- The Port wine region
- Faia Brava Nature Reserve
- Douro Internacional Natural Park
- Alvão Natural Park
- Douro Valley Wine Region (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
- Côa Valley Archaeological Site (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
- Historic Centre of Oporto (UNESCO World Heritage Site)

PRICE

1450 €

SINGLE ROOM SUPPLEMENT

270 €

PRICE INCLUDES

All meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner), accommodation, day-time snacks, Port wine tasting, transportation in an air-conditioned minivan, boat tours, entrances to monuments when specified, checklist of species, services of specialized guides, personal accident and liability insurance, documentation about the tour, a PORTUGAL ECOTOURISM® gift, donation for FAIA BRAVA conservation projects, and taxes.

PRICE DOES NOT INCLUDE

Flights, travel insurance and personal expenses.
DEPOSIT (30%)
435 €

GROUP SIZE
6 – 16 participants

GRADING
Some half-day walks that are at maximum 5 km (3 miles). Walks are mostly flat.

MEETING POINT
Oporto International Airport

MAP – Northern Portugal | Itinerary
INTRODUCTION

If you love birds, appreciate unique cultural assets, and savour moments drinking Port wine, standing by the river, and watching the sunset, this is the trip for you. In this programme watch bird species in northern Portugal while, following the Douro River. We will travel along its upper region where it runs through an amazing gorge with vertical cliffs, to the vineyards where Port wine is produced, and then to the estuary where it meets the ocean. We will drive and take boat tours at different points along the river that allow us to visit a diversity of habitats that host a variety of species. We will also explore three UNESCO World Heritage Sites and two Natural Parks.

Departing from the Oporto international airport, the tour starts at the Douro Internacional Natural Park. Here we will see impressive birds nesting and flying near the cliffs, such as Egyptian and Griffon Vultures, Bonelli’s and Golden Eagles, Black Storks and Peregrine Falcons.

On a short trip to the Côa River, a tributary of the Douro River, we can explore the amazing Prehistoric Rock-Art Site of the Côa Valley, a UNESCO Site with the biggest open air site of Palaeolithic art in Europe. Close to this region is the Faia Brava Reserve where an interesting conservation project has been running since 2000 to protect cliff-breeding birds and the rich biodiversity found here. In addition to these birds we will be watching for the Black Wheatear, the Orphean Warbler, the Blue Rock-Thrush, the European Bee-Eater, the Woodchat Shrike and the Short-toed Snake Eagle.

By taking part in this ecotourism programme you are helping nature conservation, as 2% of the cost is donated to ATN – Transhumance and Nature Foundation – an organization that manages the Faia Brava Reserve (www.atnatureza.org).

As we head to the central part of the Douro River (the heart of the Douro wine region), we will focus on the production of Port wine. We will go wine tasting and visit the Quintas, wine producing farms, where the vines grow in beautiful terraces. This is the second UNESCO site of the tour. It will be time for relaxation surrounded by amazing landscapes.

We will end our tour in the city of Oporto, which was built along the hillsides overlooking the mouth of the Douro River. The third UNESCO site of this tour is the historic centre of Oporto, an outstanding urban landscape with a 2,000-year history. Where the Douro River reaches the ocean, its estuary holds a Nature Reserve for the Protection of Birds. This is a special place for birdwatchers and nature photographers who are eager to see a Squacco Heron or a Bluethroat.

OUR GUIDES

In all our tours we have a minimum of two guides. A biologist that works as a permanent guide at PORTUGAL ECOTOURISM® provides general information on nature and culture throughout the tour and handles all of the logistics. We also invite one of the region’s foremost researchers with expertise in the theme of the programme to serve as the second
guide. For this tour we will invite a researcher from the local university (LEA – UTAD) with vast experience bird watching in northern Portugal. Both guides are biologists and speak English fluently.

**ACCOMMODATION**

Four star hotels and family-run rural houses. Comfortable rooms with en-suite facilities. Some hotels have a swimming pool so make sure you bring your swimming suit and cap.

**FOOD & BEVERAGE**

All meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner) are included in the price of the programme. Wine and soft drinks are also included at meals. Other drinks (e.g. beer, cocktails) are at the participants’ own expense. If you have special dietary requirements please note them in the booking form and we will do our best to accommodate your needs. Portugal is famous for its excellent cuisine and wines. Often throughout the programme we provide picnics for lunch with the best home-made local products. Our guides live in the region and know where to find high-quality products.

**ITINERARY**

**DAY 1 – SATURDAY**

*Pick-up: Oporto international airport | Transfer and Overnight: Miranda do Douro (Douro Internacional Natural Park)*

We will pick you up at Oporto international airport and travel (3h30 driving) to the most north-eastern point of the country to the picturesque village of Miranda do Douro in the Douro Internacional Natural Park. After arrival there will be time to see the village’s beautiful historic centre, observe plenty Rock sparrows, visit a belvedere over the Douro.
river cliffs. Pay attention to the sky here since there are often Egyptian vultures, Griffon Vultures and Black Storks flying over the village. Excitement will start on the first day!

Dinner and accommodation: Hotel in Miranda do Douro

DAY 2 – SUNDAY

Visit: Douro Internacional Natural Park | Overnight: Miranda do Douro

Today we will take a boat tour on the calm and deep waters of the Douro river for a dizzying view of the vertical cliffs and the canyon above us. The cruise will allow you to observe the geology of the steep valley along with its fauna, flora, and the environment’s ethnographic aspects. We should see the nests of Black storks and observe the flight of Egyptian Vultures and Griffon Vultures. We will then go for a short walk (4 km; 2.5 miles) to a nearby village in the middle of groves and agricultural fields. Here many colourful birds live, such as the Woodchat Shrike, the Golden Oriole, the Wryneck, the Thekla Lark, the Crested Lark, and the Woodlark. We will have a delicious picnic of local products near an old roman fortress with incredible scenic views over the Douro canyon. This viewpoint offers one of the most beautiful views of the region. You can admire a panorama of the Douro River framed by green hills. This a great place to see the Golden Eagle and the Griffon Vultures flying over the valley. The surrounding shrub lands are a good spot to see the Subalpine Warbler.

Dinner and accommodation: Hotel in Miranda do Douro

DAY 3 – MONDAY

Visit: Douro Internacional Natural Park | Overnight: Castelo Rodrigo

We will spend the day driving along the cliffs from the north part of the park to the south while stopping frequently at breath-taking lookouts. Here we will see the region’s famous cliff-breeding birds: Egyptian Vultures, Griffon Vultures, Bonneli’s Eagles, Golden Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, Black Storks, Alpine Swifts, Red-billed Choughs and
Blue Rock Thrush. At the emblematic quartz rock of Penedo Durão, watch the Vultures flying below you - it's an unforgettable image! Nearby we can expect to see the Black Kite, the Short-toed Eagle, the Red-rumped Swallow, the Black Redstart, the Sardinian Warbler, the Black Wheatear, the Rock bunting and the Cirl Bunting.

Our hotel tonight is inside the picturesque citadel of Castelo Rodrigo, a beautiful historical village on the top of a hill with an impressive view over the flat yellow terrain. The village maintains its traditional architecture with well-preserved houses, narrow streets and the remains of an old castle. We won’t miss the opportunity to enjoy roasted almonds, a local delicacy and major source of income for local people.

Dinner and Accommodation: Family-run rural house in Castelo Rodrigo

**DAY 4 – TUESDAY**  
Visit: Faia Brava Nature Reserve | Overnight: Castelo Rodrigo

Today we will have a guided tour to the Faia Brava, a 600 ha (1500 acres) Natural Private Reserve created in 1999 for the protection of vulnerable cliff-breeding species from the Côa River Valley. During a 1.9 km (3 miles) walk a local researcher will explain the important work being done here and show us the amazing biodiversity of this unpopulated, rough region. Our donation programme helps this conservation project and we will have the chance to see where our money is being applied.

In addition to the cliff-breeding birds common to the Douro region we will see bird species indigenous to various habitats, including the agricultural fields (Hoopoe, Woodchat Shrike, Bee-eater and Azure-winged Magpie), the forested areas (Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Short-toed Eagle), and the hillsides (Western Orphean Warbler and Dartford Warbler). Certainly Faia Brava Reserve has a rich biodiversity that is not to be missed. Enjoy free time during the afternoon.

Dinner and accommodation: Family-run rural house in Castelo Rodrigo.
DAY 5 – WEDNESDAY
Visit: Côa Valley Archaeological Site (UNESCO World Heritage Site) | Overnight: Pinhão

Today we will visit the unique Côa Valley Archaeological Park. Inscribed on UNESCO’s World Heritage List, this park is the most remarkable example of early human artistic creation. It is an exceptional concentration of open-air rock art dating from the Upper Palaeolithic Era (about 25,000-10,000 B.C.E.). It is comprised of thousands of engravings depicting horses, aurochs (wild bulls), mountain cattle, deer, and also human figures. The ancient artists have used pecking, abrasion, and fine line incision techniques on vertical schist surfaces. We will take a guided walk to see the figures and afterwards visit the Côa Valley Museum.

On our way down to the Douro valley you will understand why Torga, a local poet, called it "a geological poem - absolute beauty". The Douro Valley creates a colourful palette from the leaves and flowers of plant species found here. In the springtime when the almond trees are in blossom, white and violet flowers blend with the green trees. In the autumn, the hills and valleys are covered in a carpet of copper and brown. At sunset there will be time to relax at the Hotel in Pinhão, in the heart of the Wine Region. Standing outside and enjoying a nice glass of Port wine while watching the dark Douro River surrounded by vineyards is a unique experience. Some birds like the Red Kite, the Black Kite, the Goshawk or the Montagu’s Harrier might show up.

Dinner and accommodation: Family-run rural house in Pinhão

DAY 6 – THURSDAY
Visit: Douro Valley Wine Region (UNESCO World Heritage Site) and Alvão Natural Park | Overnight: Vila Real

Today we will explore the region where Port wine is produced – the Douro Valley. In the Douro region nature lives in harmony with the farmers who work the land while preserving the scenery and keeping its beauty intact. In 2001 UNESCO recognized this area as a World Heritage Site because “The region has been producing wine for nearly two thousand years and its landscape has been moulded by human activities. The components of the Alto Douro landscape are representative of the full range of activities associated with winemaking – terraces, Quintas (wine-producing farm complexes), villages, chapels,
and roads. The cultural landscape of the Alto Douro is an outstanding example of a traditional European wine-producing region, reflecting the evolution of this human activity over time." (UNESCO website). After a boat tour on the Douro River region we have a wine tasting in one of the Quintas and share a meal with local cuisine. In Pinhão we will also see beautiful hand painted tiles at the train station.

In the afternoon, we will head towards Alvão Natural Park, a small protected area that is off the beaten track and has a high biodiversity. It hosts many species endemic to the Iberian Peninsula like the Iberian-wolf (Canis lupus signatus), the Iberian Emerald Lizard (Lacerta schreiberi) and the Golden-Striped Salamander (Chioglossa lusitanica). It is a park with a diverse landscape of natural waterfalls and mountain meadows – lameiros – mixed with oak forests of Quercus pyrenaica. We will see old granite villages where houses with thatched roofs and corn granaries are still present. We will stop at the natural lookout point over the amazing waterfalls "Fisgas de Ermelo" – one of the highest waterfalls in the Iberian Peninsula – where we should see the Eurasian Crag Martin.

Dinner and accommodation: Rural Hotel in Vila Real

**DAY 7 - FRIDAY**

Visit: Estuary of the Douro River | Visit: Oporto Historic Centre (UNESCO World Heritage Site) | Overnight: Oporto

In the morning we will leave our hotel and head towards the mouth of the Douro River, which stretches in between the cities of Oporto and Gaia before it reaches the ocean. We will go for a short walk at the Douro Estuary Natural Reserve where we may find Kingfishers, Grey Herons, White Herons, Common Sandpipers, Ruddy Turnstones, Knots, a variety of Gulls, and many Bluethroats in March and late summer tours. With some luck we’ll see the Squacco Heron. For lunch we will try a traditional "Francesinha", the most famously tasty sandwich of Portugal.

The afternoon will include free time to visit monuments, shop in the bustling narrow streets of the city, or simply relax at the promenade near the Douro River. Oporto is a mix of some fantastic baroque carvings and monuments created by leading world architects. Oporto is Portugal’s second largest metropolis and one of Europe’s most charismatic cities with a historic centre that is classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. You should not miss the famous wine cellars where Port wine rests before being bottled and shipped to the world. Traditionally, the wine was taken down river in flat-bottom boats called Rabelos (you will see them all over) to be stored in barrels in cellars in Gaia, just across the river from Oporto.

Dinner and accommodation: Hotel in Oporto
DAY 8 – SATURDAY

Departure: Oporto airport. Return home or extend the trip to Lisbon...

Transfer to Oporto international airport. If you wish to extend your stay at Oporto, head to Lisbon, or another destination in Portugal, we will be pleased to help with your extended travel plans. Please feel free to ask.

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This programme is organized by PORTUGAL ECOTOURISM®, a brand of Montes de Encanto®, a nature tourism company fully licensed (RNAAT nº 49/2008) by the official Portuguese Tourism Office, with experience in organizing ecotours since 2007.

Our local travel agent partner is Ponto por Ponto – license RNAVT nº 3645.

This and other ecotourism programmes in Northern Portugal are available at www.portugalecotourism.pt. For any questions please contact me at clara@portugalecotourism.pt.