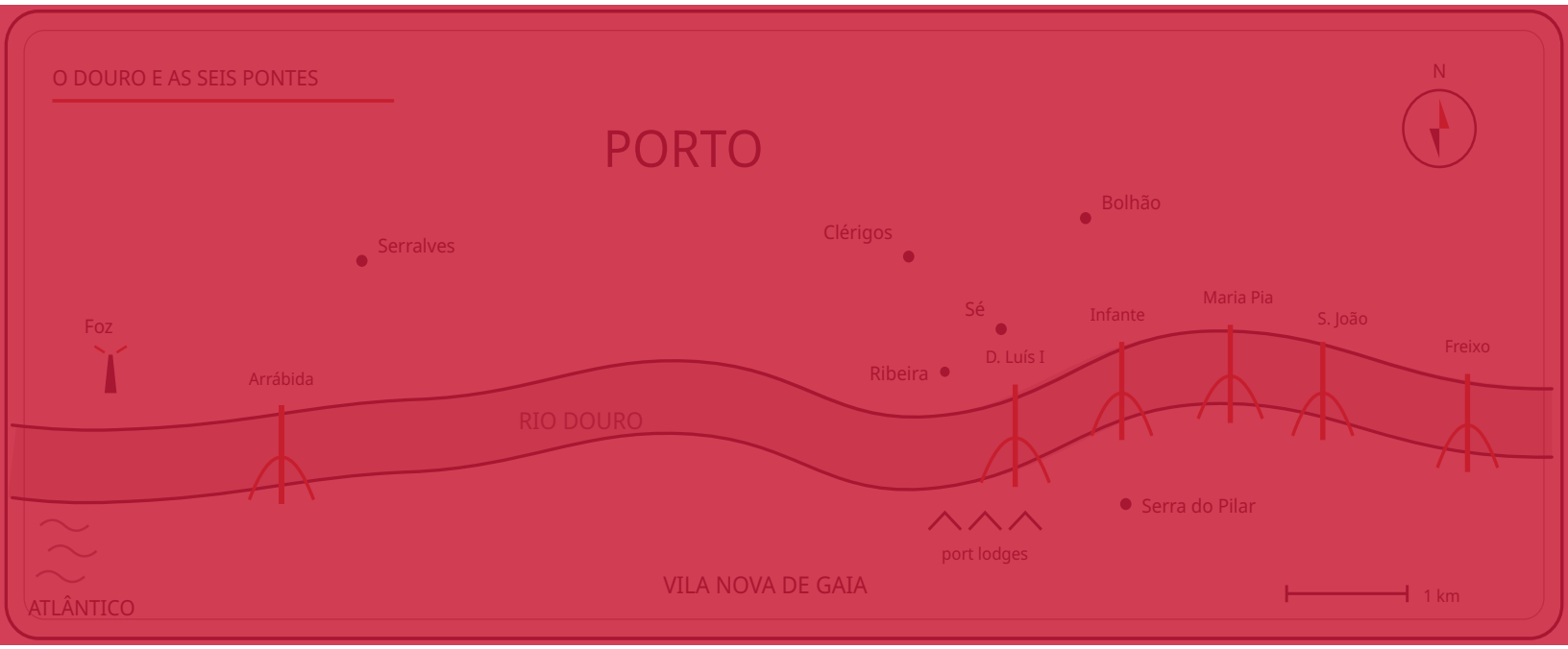
CITY GUIDE 08 · PORTUGAL

PORTO

A weekend on foot

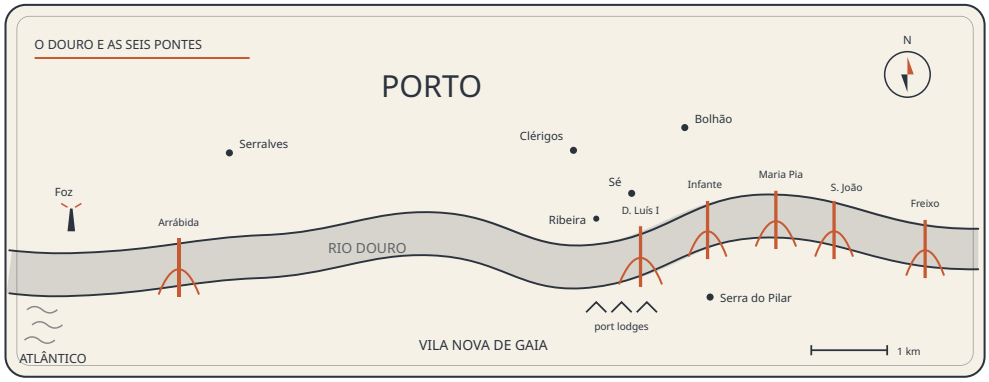
Granite churches, tiled façades, a river the colour of strong tea — Portugal's second city rewards anyone who arrives hungry and keeps looking up.



THE LIE OF THE LAND

Porto is a city built on a disagreement between land and water. The Douro arrives from Spain through gorge after gorge, takes one look at the Atlantic, and slows into a broad, tea-dark ribbon; the city answers by refusing to be flat anywhere at all. Everything you will love here — the tiled churches, the bookshop staircases, the port lodges across the water — is arranged on a slope, and the slope is the point. Measure your plans in metres of climb, not kilometres of distance.

Orient yourself from the top deck of the Ponte Luís I. To the north: Porto proper, stacked from the Ribeira's arcades up to the granite needle of the Clérigos Tower. To the south: Vila Nova de Gaia, where the port wine sleeps in long, low lodges. The Atlantic waits a forty-minute riverside walk to the west, at Foz, where the city ends in lighthouses and salt spray.



The Douro at a glance — six bridges stitch Porto to Gaia, and the river runs west until it hits the Atlantic at Foz.

Two days is enough, but only just. Porto is small on the map and enormous underfoot — allow twice the time the map app suggests and you will still arrive late, and happier.

SIX NEIGHBOURHOODS, SIX MOODS

Six districts, six temperaments. Take them one or two per half-day, always heading downhill, and let the funiculars undo your worst decisions.

RIBEIRA

The postcard. Arcaded quays, laundry strung over the river, rabelo boats posing for photographs. Come at eight in the morning, before the tour groups, when the fish restaurants are still hosing their doorsteps.

BAIXA

The working heart around the Avenida dos Aliados — beaux-arts banks, tiled façades and the Bolhão market's shouting fishmongers. The best people-watching per square metre in the country.

CEDOFEITA

The gallery mile. Rua de Miguel Bombarda flips its exhibitions on synchronised Saturday openings; between the galleries come record shops, a brutalist church and vegetarian lunch counters.

FOZ DO DOURO

Where the river gives up. A belle-époque promenade, pine-shaded gardens and the city's best sunset bench, just beside the Felgueiras lighthouse. Take the vintage tram out; walk back along the water.

BONFIM

The neighbourhood the guidebooks reach last: tascas with handwritten menus, azulejo façades going gently to seed, coffee roasters in former garages. Go now, before the postcards find it.

VILA NOVA DE GAIA

Technically another city, spiritually the cellar downstairs. Port lodges by the dozen, a cable car for the lazy, and the single best view of Porto — which is, of course, not in Porto.

THE CITY'S BEST BALCONIES

Every terrace in Porto is aimed at the river — six miradouros, free and unticketed and open until the light gives out, and worth the climb between the neighbourhoods. Chase them anti-clockwise as the sun swings west.

1	Jardim do Morro	the whole river bend, a patch of grass, and the sunset crowd
2	Miradouro da Vitória	rooftops tumbling to the water — the postcard the postcards copy
3	Jardim das Virtudes	terraced lawns stepping down to the Douro, a bottle encouraged
4	Passeio das Fontainhas	a quiet iron balcony over the upper bridge, mostly just locals
5	Palácio de Cristal	box hedges, strutting peacocks, and a dome above the valley
6	Serra do Pilar	the monastery terrace, and the one definitive picture of the city

EAT & DRINK

The rule of thumb: granite walls, paper tablecloth, a menu shorter than this paragraph — sit down. Porto eats generously and without ceremony, and the bill will embarrass you in the best possible way. Book the serious rooms a week ahead; walk into everything else and trust the counter.

EIGHT TABLES WORTH BOOKING

1 Casa Guedes	The roast-pork sandwich raised to civic monument. Take the Serra-cheese version and a glass of vinho verde.
2 Cantina 32	Comfort cooking in a bare-concrete room; the chouriço mash first, then the caramel bomb they call abade.
3 A Cozinha do Manel	Tripas à moda do Porto done the slow way, in a dining room every Bonfim grandmother approves of.
4 Taberna dos Mercadores	Twelve seats a step from the Ribeira; octopus rice worth the inevitable queue outside.
5 Conga	Bifanas since 1976 — pork, chilli oil, no apologies. Stand at the counter like everyone else does.
6 Café Santiago	The francesinha benchmark: a sandwich asleep under a duvet of cheese and beer sauce. Split one.
7 O Gaveto	Out along the coast in Matosinhos, for turbot grilled over coals and a seafood rice that feeds a table.
8 Época	The new guard: market cooking, natural wine, a room the size of a kitchen. The hardest reservation in town.

A francesinha is a commitment, not a snack. Schedule nothing ambitious within two hours of finishing one.

SMALL SPENDS, BIG RETURNS

Espresso, standing, any counter ..... €

Pastel de nata at Manteigaria ..... €

Bifana at Conga ..... €

Port tonic on the Gaia quay ..... €€

Francesinha at Café Santiago ..... €€

Cellar tour and tasting, Gaia ..... €€€

FILE UNDER

COFFEE | NATURAL WINE | VIEWS | VINYL

PASTELARIA | AZULEJOS | PORT CELLARS | MIRADOUROS

ONE PERFECT DAY

Start uphill of breakfast and let the city fall toward the river. The route below is six kilometres, two funiculars shorter if you cheat, and it ends with the Atlantic in your glass. The times are honest but Portuguese: treat them as suggestions with good intentions.

> Sunset queue mathematics: the bridge's top deck fills forty minutes before golden hour. The monastery terrace behind it never quite does.

One perfect day

TIME	STOP	WHY
08:30	Café Progresso	Porto's oldest coffee counter; toast, butter and the day's first opinion.
10:00	Livraria Lello	The staircase you have seen online. Buy the ticket; it converts to a book.
11:30	Clérigos Tower	Two hundred and forty steps for the whole city in one slow circle.
13:00	Mercado do Bolhão	Lunch standing up: cheese, cherries, a sardine someone insists you try.
15:00	São Bento station	Twenty thousand azulejos of battles and harvests in the ticket hall.
16:30	Ponte Luís I, top deck	Walk the high iron over to Gaia as the light goes long and golden.
18:00	Serra do Pilar	The monastery terrace with the definitive postcard view. Linger a while.
21:00	Galerias de Paris	One street, thirty bars; the night sorts itself out from here.

PRACTICALITIES

Porto is a short flight from anywhere in Europe and a six-euro ride from its own airport: the violet E line runs from Aeroporto to Trindade in about twenty-five minutes.[a] Once you are in, the metro matters mostly for arrivals and football nights — this is a city you cross on foot.

Andante fares — one card, loaded and reloaded at any machine

Ticket	Zones	Price	Good for
Z2 single	2	€1.40	One hour of metro, bus and tram
Z4 single	4	€2.25	The airport run
24-hour, Z2	2	€5.20	A full day downtown
Andante Tour 1	all	€7.50	Twenty-four unlimited hours
Andante Tour 3	all	€16.00	The whole weekend, everywhere

Wear shoes you trust on wet granite; the calçada is beautiful and treacherous in exactly equal measure. Museums close on Mondays, the Bolhão sleeps on Sundays, and lunch is sacred from one until three — plan around it, never through it. Tipping is a rounding-up, not a percentage.

Buy an Andante card at any metro machine the moment you land — €0.60 for the card itself — and stop thinking about tickets for the rest of the weekend.

[a] Load the card with a Z4 title for the airport leg; Z2 titles cover everything you will do downtown, including the Gaia side of the river.

SEE YOU AT THE COUNTER.