

THE HOME OF PORT

LIKE A FINE WINE, THE PORTUGUESE WORLD HERITAGE CITY OF OPORTO IS UNDERSTATED YET VIBRANT. GISELLE WHITEAKER HAS A TIPPLE IN THIS FINE CITY.

Oporto, often shortened to Porto, is Portugal's second-largest city, although it doesn't have a big city feel. One moment my friend Lizzie and I are at the airport, the next we are being whisked through the centre on an impressively efficient Metro. Chugging through the city, the view as we cross the Ponte Luis I railway bridge comes as a delightful surprise. Colourful buildings dot the elevated river banks on the north side with mottled fuchsia and egg-yolk yellow, the russet-tiled roofs glowing in the afternoon sun. The Douro River snakes onwards below the bridge, sailboats tacking to and fro in the mild afternoon breeze and in Vila Nova de Gaia on the south bank the signs of major Port brands vie for attention. It's gorgeous and we can't wait to explore more.

We are staying at The Yeatman, in the heart of the Gaia district, known for its Port cellars or caves, where the fortified wine is stored and aged. Port is produced exclusively in the Douro Valley in the northern provinces of Portugal. It took its name in the latter half of the 17th century from the city of Porto, where much

of the product was, and still is, brought to market. It seems only logical then to stay in a hotel that dotes on the beverage.

The Yeatman bills itself as a wine hotel, the theme running through the entire establishment, from the elevators wrapped in wine-related imagery to the cellars packed with a comprehensive collection of Portuguese wines. The wine theme even extends to the Caudalie Vinothérapie Spa with the exclusive products and therapies using extracts from the vine. The connection is not arbitrary – The Yeatman family entered the Port trade in 1838 and are among the most distinguished and enterprising of the historic Port families. Their descendants maintain this tradition, owning three of the big Port names and showing a clear pride in their affinity with the grape.

The hotel is fully booked this weekend, but the hushed lobby is tranquil. It's that kind of place. The soaring ceilings and grand scale of the hotel contribute to the feeling of exclusivity, as does its elevation. Seemingly carved into the hill, the hotel is terraced

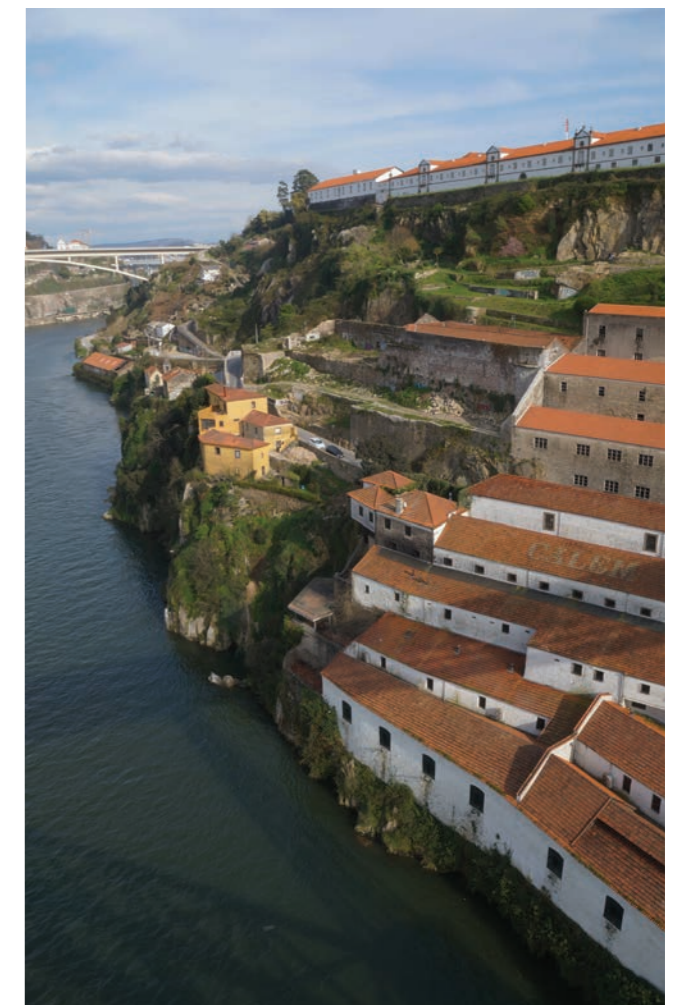


like a vineyard, every room offering a balcony with a superb view of the city. From the terrace outside Dick's Bar, named in tribute to Dick Yeatman, the panoramic view is mesmerising as we gaze at the city over the rim of the wine-glass-shaped outdoor swimming pool. We'll venture back here in the evening to admire the night lights over a Port-based cocktail, but before then there's a city to explore.

Porto is known as the city of bridges, although its first permanent bridge, the Ponte das Barcas, collapsed in 1809 only three years after its inauguration, under the weight of thousands of fugitives from the French Invasions during the Peninsular War. It was replaced decades later by the Ponte D. Maria II, but it's the Ponte Luis I that anchors the city. The two-hinged double-deck arch bridge's intricate blue-grey metalwork resembles the Eiffel Tower for a reason – the bridge was created by Teophile Seyrig, a former partner of Gustave Eiffel.

Crossing over the top level of the bridge, the sun warming our faces, our spirits are high. Our plan is simply to idle away a few days here, admiring the architecture, sampling the Port and dining on the local speciality; *bacalhau* or salted codfish.

There's plenty to take in – Porto's historical centre contains a plethora of impressive buildings, many of which line the imposing Avenida dos Aliados, a sloping boulevard lined with grand buildings and a central promenade. At the top of the avenue stands the Town Hall, made of



Clockwise from left, opposite page: The Ponte Luis I; a view of Porto from the Gaia district; the facade of The Yeatman Hotel; the view downriver.



granite and marble, a palatial building with a tall bell tower. Nearby, São Bento's train station contains delicate blue and white tiled panels painted by artist Jorge Colaço which allude to the history of Portugal and the development of transport.

For a different lofty perspective of the city, Clerigos Tower is one of the easily spotted architectural landmarks. The 1763 structure is part of the Clerigos Church, representing its bell tower. It was designed by Italian architect Nicolau Nasoni, who was also responsible for the design of many of the other landmarks of Porto.

Closer in to the river is the 12th Century Porto Cathedral, one of the city's oldest monuments and an important Romanesque monument. The cathedral is flanked by two square towers, each supported with two buttresses and crowned with a cupola. The flamboyant interior of the São Francisco church, dripping with gold on every internal protrusion, provides a direct contrast and the catacombs below are a somewhat more macabre sight.



As the sun fades, we stumble down to the riverside to sip sangria and nibble on tapas plates of cured meat and cheese. On the opposite bank we can see the Telerférico de Gaia, a cable car that runs from the upper level of the Dom Luis I bridge down to the quayside, where the *barcos rabelos* boats of the Port houses bob on the Douro River.

As the street light twinkle into life, we amble back to The Yeatman for cocktails at Dick's Bar. We have two more days stretching languidly ahead. We will sample the Port and explore the markets, wander down cobbled alleyways and day-cruise under the six bridges. Most of all, we will relax and take in the peaceful atmosphere of this riverside retreat. It's easy to feel comfortable here. Despite the sun-seeking tourists exploring every nook and cranny it's uncrowded and unhurried. People walk around smiling under the pure blue sky.

Our final day rolls around quickly and we take a dip in The Yeatman's indoor pool. The city is laid out before us, visible through the enormous floor to ceiling windows curving in a gentle arc that reflects the Douro River's bends. We float in companionable silence, the vistas making conversation unnecessary. It's the perfect end to this city break, with only one task left on our to-do lists; to choose a bottle from The Yeatman's stock of smooth Port from Porto to take home. ■

For more information about The Yeatman Hotel see www.the-yeatman-hotel.com

Here's our pick of fabulous Portuguese properties, the perfect locale for a glass of port.

Villa in Albufeira with ocean views

This property represents a rare opportunity to own a contemporary masterpiece that combines the latest technology with the highest standards of living in one of Europe's most sought after areas. Tucked away in the exclusive San Lorenzo North section of Quinta do Lago this individually designed retreat on a generous plot of 2.140m² provides five spacious bedrooms and six bathrooms, with two en-suites featuring open-air rain shower suites. The attractive floor plan is laid out to accommodate entertaining on the South-West facing terrace with spectacular views over the 10th hole of one of Europe's top golf courses, San Lourenço. A spacious, light-filled basement offers sufficient space for a gymnasium and will have facilities such as, sauna, Turkish bath, games room and cinema room.

Guide Price: 5,950,000€

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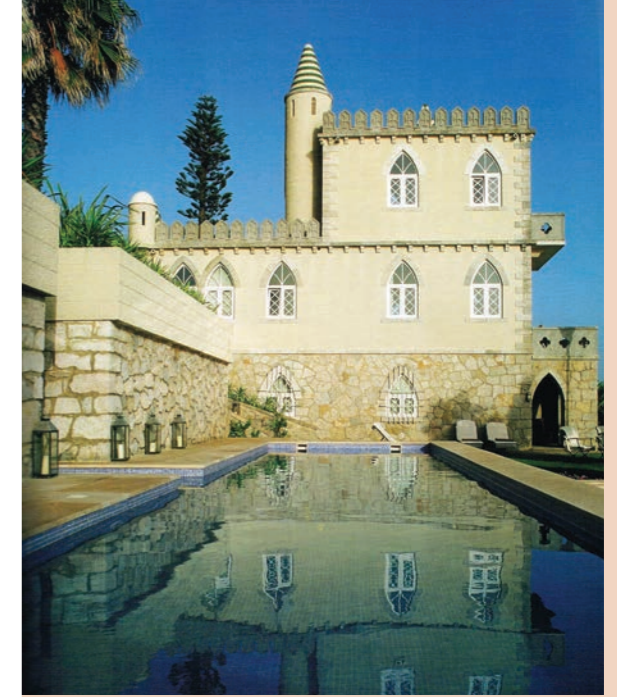


Five bedroom villa in Quinta do Lago

In the 1950's a leading Portuguese family submitted a project to Lisbon Townhall requesting permission to demolish an existing building in order to construct a new home. The authors of the project were Architect Fernando Silva and Engineer Cansado de Carvalho. The project was approved and the works were completed in 1958. The dimensions of the property remain true to its heritage but various improvements have been made over the years, making this a stunning manor house in central Lisbon.

Guide Price: POA

Email: infoirg@fineandcountry.com



Stone castle in Estoril

This castle located in Estoril is a reminder of mid-20th Century Estoril populated by a cosmopolitan elite, exiled monarchs and their entourages, famous screen actors, aristocrats and high rollers. From the swimming pool and garden to the rooms of the property, there are uninterrupted ocean views stretching across the whole bay of Cascais. The quaint castle is built over four floors and features a unique third-floor room with a magnificent terrace with panoramic views from Lisbon to Cascais. Above the top floor there is a smaller terrace accessed by a circular staircase hugging the turret of the castle.

Guide Price: 3,500,000€

Email: infoirg@fineandcountry.com



A modern masterpiece at San Lorenzo North

An impressive driveway leads to this modern property in Quinta do Lago that sits over two plots. Located only a short walk from the Ria Formosa natural park and beach access this spacious property features an impressive entrance hall with double-height ceiling, five airy en suite bedrooms and a designer kitchen area opening up to the terrace and pool area. Bright colours and light marble throughout the property makes this a one of a kind beach-style residence.

Guide Price: 4,900,000€

Email: quintadolago@fineandcountry.com



Top to bottom: The pool at The Yeatman; a lip-smacking Port cocktail at Dick's Bar; salted cod; The Yeatman's wine cellar.