

An overview of our 12 day visit to Portugal - including 9 days in five of Solares de Portugal Manor houses.

Our visit to the northern and central regions of Portugal was a wonderful experience.

Being able to spend two days exploring Porto, then two days in the Ponte de Lima area, two days in Guimarães, two days in the Douro Valley area, two days in Anadia and finally one day in Óbidos with a short visit to Peniche on our way to Lisbon.

We both found that all the people of Portugal were very friendly and helpful towards us with regards to information, directions (or even just filling the car with petrol).

The GPS in our hire car was an invaluable asset, making the driving to / from our stop-over Manor houses or to towns and villages a little further away quite easy.

The weather was good apart from a couple of days in Ferrão but overall we were able to take around 500 photographs of both the areas and the Manor houses.



Porto Photographs

1. Paco de Calheiros, Ponte de Lima

Our first stopover was the Paco de Calheiros, an astonishingly beautiful manor house high on the hillside in the heart of the Lima Valley.

Our arrival at the large Iron front gate which bears an ancient inscription dating from 1450 “*From this old noble house precede the Calheiros family noble people of this manor*” and the tree lined driveway towards the villa and ancient stone fountain was just the start of a wonderful stay which we did not want to leave.

Surrounded by 75 hectares’ of grapevines, the Calheiros family became the established owners on February 12th 1336, by King D.Afonso 1V and thus everything within the boundaries belongs to the Calheiros family by right of Royalty and handed down through the generations to their eldest sons. The present Lord of the Manor represents the title “Count of Calheiros”.

The inside of the Manor is a maze of enchanting rooms with historic periodic furniture and ancient Romanesque paintings. There is also a chapel within the manor and the choice of six beautiful double suites and three twin suites. Within the grounds there are another six separate apartments and a cottage, plus the entire complex is surrounded by gardens, water

fountains and vineyards filled with grapevines for the wine production - all overlooked by a large swimming pool and double tennis courts.



For more information or bookings, <http://www.center.pt/EN/casa-detalhe.php?casa=2>

2. Casa de Sezim - Guimarães

Our second stop was the Casa de Sezim, close to Guimarães (which was Portugal's first capital). Once again this is the ancestral home of the present family with a small section originally dating back to 1376 and the main structure dating back to 18th and 19th century. Its history is well recorded and there are eight large bedrooms (three double and five twins) for guests to stay in. There is a range of historic rooms to relax in, all covered in the most beautiful hand painted 19th century panoramic wallpapers. There is also a Chapel, Library and a bar within the Manor and the gardens include a swimming pool, tennis court and marked walking tracks.

The entrance to this historic home is outstanding and very different and we were privileged to be shown through the huge wine making workshop area where three prize winning wines are produced. Close by there are 75 hectares of golden hillside vineyards with the grapes growing in perfect conditions and we were driven in and around those vineyards by the Manager of the Casa de Sezim to further explain to us all the details of the estate and its history.



For more information or bookings, <http://www.center.pt/PT/casa-detalhe.php?casa=42>

3. Quinta da Veiga – Ferrão, Sabrosa

This restored 18th century farm house and now a stylish and elegant Manor house with a land history going back to the 16th century was located high above the right bank of the river Douro in Ferrao.

The Douro Valley is an astounding area where the vineyards of old have been shaped in perfect harmony with the steepness of the valley slopes leading down to the river. There has been evidence of wine production for more than 2000 years, and today, the traditional harvests are still done by hand which becomes obvious as you quietly (and very carefully) drive along the winding narrow roads up and into the estate. The roads have been patterned into the landscape which can be challenging as there is no room to allow cars to pass each other without backing up to a wider section.

The Quinta da Veiga had seven bedrooms (two doubles and five twins) for guests to stay in and there are several elegant and large rooms decorated with ancient furniture to relax in by the fireplaces. Guests can wander in the wine terraces or swim in the pool, all of which overlook the beautiful River Douro far below. The weather was a little stormy during our stay and the antique heavy metal windows do tend to rattle loudly from the wind rushing up from the valley below

The estate consists of 50 hectares of very steep land, 25 of which is used to cultivate the grapevines, producing five labels of sumptuous wines, three reds and two whites which are known for their fruitiness and elegant structure. As usual, we were treated like one of the family with our two day stay, a perfect stop-over of warm hospitality and the art of good living and of course we were treated to a free wine tasting! My choice was the 2009 Cerro Das Mouras white wine (with the grapes grown at an altitude of 350 – 450 metres), and the 2006 Murzelo red wine (with the grapes grown at a lower altitude of 170 – 220 metres).



For more information or bookings, <http://www.center.pt/EN/casa-detalle.php?casa=56>

4. Casa de Mogofores – Anadia

Once again, a beautiful Manor house dating back to the 19th century in a very quiet neighbourhood and street. Our accommodation in the small village part of Anadia was a

complete and separate two story apartment with all facilities - and all within the grounds and close by to the Manor house.

With a couple of tiny restaurants, just around the corner, the beauty of this stop-over location is not so much the town of Anadia itself - but its closeness to the Spar town of Curia, another of Portugals historic worlds and an afternoon visit to the Hotel Termas da Curia for a relaxing spa and massage was well worth the visit.

But back at Casa de Mogofores the best was yet to come on our second day - a personal tour by Manuel Campolargo over the largest family wine producing cellar we have ever seen – the Quinta de S Mateus. Overlooking 110 hectares of beautiful vineyards (they also have another 60 hectares in Arcos Quinta de Vale de Azar). The tour and wine tasting also included a visit to the laboratory where Christina explained all about the extensive testing which is done throughout the wine production. Of course the beautiful wine tasting followed the tour.



For more information or bookings, <http://www.center.pt/EN/casa-detalhe.php?casa=61>

5. Casa d'Óbidos - Óbidos

Obidos is an outstanding tourist destination, having been elected one of the 'Seven Wonders of Portugal' and as we wandered through the narrow winding medieval streets of this 'Pearl of Western Portugal' we were enchanted by its Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque features. The beautiful narrow lane-ways filled with picturesque recesses, rough-hewn steps, steep inclines and fascinating doorways all covered in beautiful full flowering bougainvilleas were breathtaking, and above all of this – the Castle!

Originally built in Roman times on the top of the highest craig on the northern end, it's a perfect specimen of a medieval fortress which was successively enlarged and repaired by various monarchs over the centuries, and being part of the long wall, it afforded the town below both shelter and protection. The southern end of the walls features a high torch-lit watchtower.

Our beautiful accommodation (just outside the ancient city) dated back to the 19th century. Casa d'Óbidos, was built by an engineer from the French Eiffel team who was in Portugal to lead its railway construction. Open all year round with cosy interiors, it offered us a warm and peaceful atmosphere and with a choice of six bedrooms with private bathrooms plus four fully self contained apartments it was easy to relax in, especially in the large lounge and

game room area. The outside swimming pool, tennis court and gardens were perfect and of course all the staff were wonderful.



For more information or bookings, <http://www.center.pt/EN/casa-detalhe.php?casa=68>

Articles made by:

Graham Stephenson Freelance Travel Writer & Photographer