



PORTUGAL

Portugal's Douro Is the Next Big River Cruising Destination

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A series of new ships have changed the landscape for traveling Portugal's famous wine region starting this year.

On the Douro, or River of Gold, some say that on late afternoons, the sun's setting rays turn the blue-grey Portuguese waters a golden hue, and that's where it gets its nickname. Others claim it's a nod to the color of the local port, made from prized grapes. You can decide for yourself which theory is most credible on a **new group of ships** that have made a Douro River cruise one of the hottest trips to take in 2020.

Not only is the Douro River Valley well-known among fans as Europe's oldest demarcated **wine-growing region**, the villages and farms that trace the river's path offer a number of historic sites and notable activities. From the Douro's narrow waterway and steep banks, passengers can ogle the views before stepping on land to dig right into it all. Here, our round-up of the latest ships that cruise the Douro, and what each trip offers. Note: Most sail eight-day itineraries, roundtrip from **Porto**, Portugal's second largest city and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and cruise from April through November. Plenty of time to fit it in before the year is out.



Courtesy AmaWaterways

Enticing Douro, Ama Waterways

Fitness buffs, this is your Douro River cruise. There are so many active daytime trips you can take, like climbing the nearly 700-step staircase of Sanctuary of our Lady of Remedies in Lamego (one of Portugal's most important pilgrimage sites), and an uphill trek to Castelo Rodrigo, a village with centuries-old walls. You can refuel in **Salamanca** at a lunch that comes with with a side of a flamenco show, opt into regional food tastings in every port, and quaff *muito* wine along the way. You'll be sailing on the 102-passenger *AmaDouro*, specially designed to showcase the Douro River Valley with ample balcony staterooms. Despite its compact size, you can swim laps in the heated pool on the top deck, take a break in the fitness room or with a massage on board, and expect locally sourced food and wine even during meals on the ship. Cruising roundtrip from Porto, the eight-day trip also feature an optional three-night, pre-cruise stay in **Lisbon** (from \$3,199 per person).



Courtesy Tauck

Villages & vintages: cruising the Douro River Valley, Tauck

An infinity pool, canopied Balinese daybeds, a pop-up restaurant that rises from the stern on hydraulic lifts to deliver elevated countryside views—just a few amenities you'll find onboard the *Andorinba*, which debuts in April 2020 and is purpose-built for this river. While approximately the same size as the other Douro riverboats we mention here, it carries just 84 passengers and was designed to evoke a sense of place. You'll see regional decorative tiles in shimmering blue and gold hues, posh Portuguese bath toiletries, and daily tastings of local wines and foods. The eight-day itinerary showcases Tauck hallmarks, like personalized guest attention and **VIP outings** (a museum in an archeological park where you can view rock art exhibits dating to the Valley's Paleolithic era; a private dinner with wine pairings at a distinguished family-run *quinta*, or wine-growing estate, in the Cima Corgo region). Explore Guimarães, a medieval town where the kingdom of Portugal was born. Its UNESCO World Heritage Site city center houses a 13th century church and a 17th-century palace. Tauck also offers some eight-day Douro cruises designed specifically for families in June and July (from \$4,190 per person).



Courtesy Uniworld River Cruises

Douro River Valley, Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection

Come April 2020, the 100-passenger S.S. *São Gabriel* makes its much-awaited Douro splash. Typical to **Uniworld riverboats**, the painstakingly designed décor (the line's working with local craftsmen to outfit every element) and sophisticated menus richly immerse passengers into the sailing region. Think beautifully glazed Portuguese tiles—even the reception area features artwork sculpted with them—soothing blue and cream hues, richly polished wood, and pops of brass. Expect more suites (16 total) than on Uniworld's former Douro riverboat, *Queen Isabel*—the entire top Azores Deck is all-suite. Butler service comes with suites, too. On the ship, menus offer regional specialties such as chorizo and kale soup, octopus carpaccio, and Portuguese fish stew, in three dining venues. Two wine tasting rooms ensure everyone gets to learn about and sample the area's best. Along the route, tour Salamanca's university—Spain's oldest—founded in 1218, visit the Douro Museum and learn how the valley became such a venerated wine-growing region, and how port-making evolved over the centuries. In **Porto**, stroll Ribeira, a UNESCO World Heritage historic waterfront neighborhood dating to the 1300s. You'll get a chance to tour excavated Roman ruins, and along the cobbled alleyways, watch *rabelos* (flat-keeled sailboats), bob at the quay (*from \$3,899 per person*).



Courtesy Viking Cruises

Portugal's River of Gold, Viking River Cruises

Tear into fresh-baked bread, pulled from an ancient oven fueled by wood and grapevines, in one of the last old-school bakeries in tiny Favaios. In Marialva (near the Spanish border), enjoy a picnic in the castle's shadow of this 2,500-year-old town. Since this is Viking, where **experiences are everything**, you'll learn the secrets to fine Port wine-blending at a *quinta*, and taste wine and popular regional delicacies, like *bola de carne*, an irresistible bread filled with a combination of meats and smoked sausage. While identical to Viking's other three Douro ships, the 106-passenger *Viking Helgrim*, which debuted in 2019, is the newest. Guests often gather on the sun deck, notable for its swimming pool, shaded seating area, putting green, and organic herb garden. Sweeping floor-to-ceiling views enhance the lounge, restaurant, and the many staterooms and suites with verandas. The 10-day cruises include two nights in Lisbon, and two days in Porto (*from \$3,599 per person*). ♦

<https://www.cntraveler.com/story/why-you-should-take-a-douro-river-cruise>