



Porto

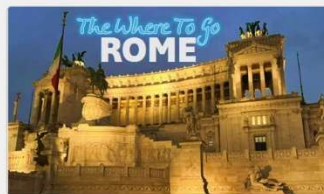
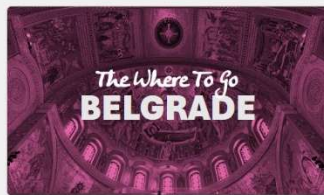
A Journey Through Portugal's Heart and Soul



The inside cover for your information.....



This guide is just one of a series of travel guides under 'The Where To Go' banner. You can also find curated videos of the many different places visited on my tours on my YouTube channel which can be found at www.youtube.com/@thewheretogo. Please feel free to like and subscribe.



You will also find up to date information about my worldwide travels on my dedicated Facebook page at www.facebook.com/TheWhereToGo.



TheWhereToGo
@TheWhereToGo

Porto - A Journey Through Portugal's Heart and Soul

Introduction

Porto's origins date back to Roman times when it was known as Portus Cale. This small settlement along the Douro River gradually grew in significance due to its strategic location for trade and maritime activities. During the Middle Ages, Porto became an important commercial centre especially for the export of goods like wine. It was during this period that the city began to develop its distinctive architectural and cultural identity.

Porto played a vital role in the formation of the Portuguese nation, with its name believed to be the root of the country's name, Portugal. During the 15th and 16th centuries, Porto thrived as a key port for ships embarking on exploratory voyages. The city's wealth increased, and many of its iconic buildings and churches were constructed during this time showcasing a blend of Gothic, Baroque, and Neoclassical styles. The 18th and 19th centuries marked the rise of the Port wine industry, which became synonymous with the city. Wine cellars were established in Vila Nova de Gaia, just across the river, cementing Porto's international reputation.

Today, Porto has evolved into a vibrant city that balances its historical heritage with contemporary culture, arts and industry. Its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage site underscores the city's historical and architectural significance. Porto offers a thriving contemporary art scene, bustling markets and a lively nightlife.

Contents

<i>Dom Luis I Bridge</i>	<i>page 4</i>
<i>Clérigos Church and Clérigos Tower</i>	<i>page 4</i>
<i>Livraria Lello</i>	<i>page 5</i>
<i>McDonald's Restaurant, Porto</i>	<i>page 6</i>
<i>Majestic Café</i>	<i>page 6</i>
<i>Porto Cathedral (Sé do Porto)</i>	<i>page 7</i>
<i>Episcopal Palace</i>	<i>page 7</i>
<i>Carmelite Church and Carmo Church</i>	<i>page 8</i>
<i>The Church of St Francis</i>	<i>page 8</i>
<i>São Bento Railway Station</i>	<i>page 9</i>
<i>The River Douro</i>	<i>page 9</i>
<i>Summary</i>	<i>page 10</i>

This guide is dedicated to Kevin Prince whose visit to Porto was the motivation I needed to finish the guide and tell the story of this beautiful Portuguese city.

Dom Luis I Bridge



Many of Porto's bridges have become city landmarks, but nothing compares to the Dom Luis I Bridge (Ponte D. Luís I) which was first built in 1886 and remains an enduring symbol of the city. This enormous double-decker iron arch bridge was designed by Théophile Seyrig who was a former associate of Gustave Eiffel. The bridge connects Porto to Vila Nova de Gaia, and you can walk across the upper deck for views of the city and river.

Its bold engineering, featuring a lower deck for vehicles and an upper deck for metro lines and pedestrians, is a testament to 19th-century industrial prowess. The upper level offers one of Europe's most breathtaking views, encompassing the River Douro.



Clérigos Church and Clérigos Tower

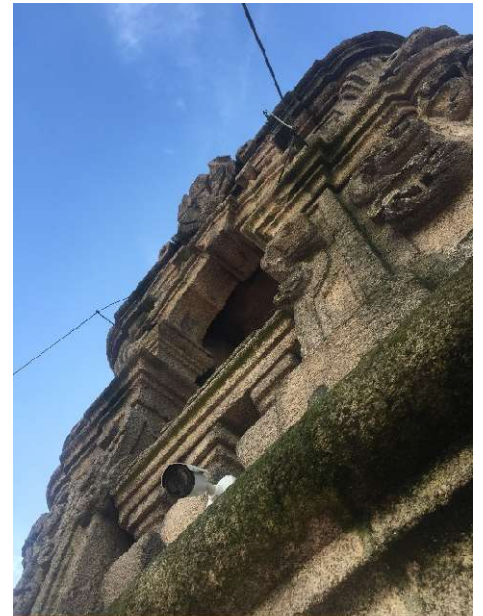


This impressive religious complex consists of a church, a museum, and a tower. The 18th-century Clérigos Church is particularly worth a visit and is an excellent example of the Baroque style especially with its stunning altar.

The adjacent Clérigos Tower (Torre dos Clérigos) is one of Porto's best-known landmarks and was once the tallest building in Portugal. I did manage to climb the 240 stairs to the top of the tower offering an amazing view of Porto.

PS Don't hold me to the number of stairs to the top as I was not countingI cannot climb stairs and breathe at the same time. Guidebooks suggest between 221 and 245 stairs, but I will let you be the judge of that.

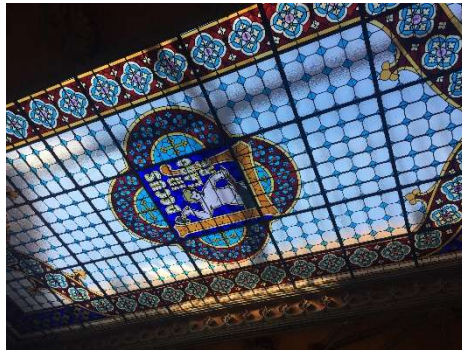




Livraria Lello

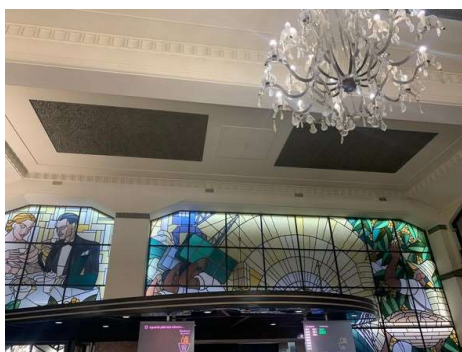
Livraria Lello (which literally translates as the Lello Bookstore) is both a landmark and a literary inspiration. The bookstore is one of the most famous bookstores in Portugal and is rumoured to be the inspiration for Harry Potter's library in Hogwarts which is entirely plausible because J. K Rowling taught English in Porto in the 1990s.....well that's what the guide said!!! The bookstore is famous for its stunning neo-Gothic interior, intricate woodwork and the iconic crimson spiral staircase. This place is a temple for book and architecture lovers and an absolute must-see on your visit to Porto.





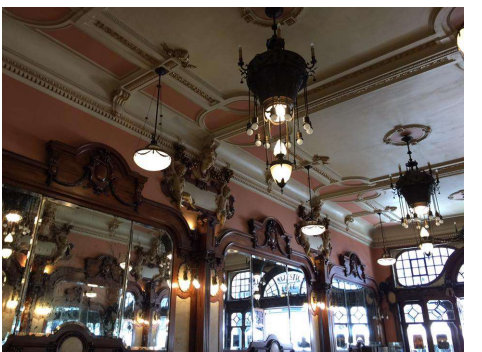
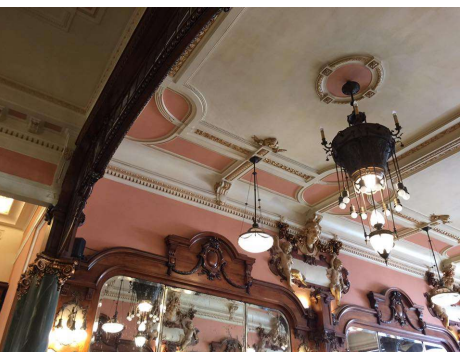
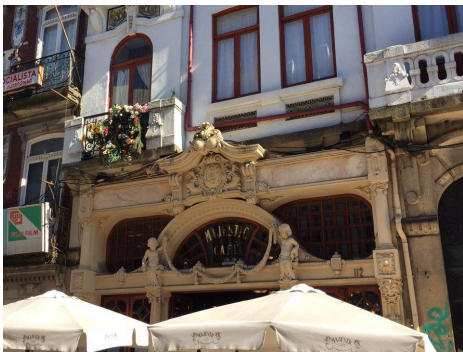
McDonald's Restaurant, Porto

I am sure I shouldn't be advertising McDonald's here, but I wanted to introduce you to this particular place which is not so much famous for its food as for its architectural ambiance. The restaurant was originally the Imperial Café dating back to the 1930s. The building has been beautifully restored including the Art Deco-stained glass windows, the massive chandeliers and the majestic eagle statue which remains at the front of the building. The building is, quite rightly in my opinion, considered to be one of the most beautiful McDonald's in the world.



Majestic Café

The Majestic Café, which opened in 1921 on Rua Santa Catarina, is the epitome of Belle Époque grandeur. This place was once a hub for intellectuals, artists and the city's elite, and it is still considered to be the place to be seen when in Porto. The interior is a lavish spectacle of crystal chandeliers, carved wood, stained mirrors, and plush velvet benches. While the price of everything comes at a premium, it does include a step back into the opulent, early-20th-century café society. It remains a living monument to Porto's cultural and social history.



Porto Cathedral (Sé do Porto)



The Porto Cathedral (Sé do Porto) is a historic Romanesque-Gothic church and one of the city's oldest monuments, offering stunning views and rich architectural heritage. The cathedral, dating from the 12th century, is perched on the highest point of the old city with imposing architecture and wonderful views across the city.

The construction of the cathedral began in the 12th century, resulting in a fortress-like Romanesque exterior with later Gothic and Baroque additions. The austere interior contrasts with the magnificent silver altarpiece and the Gothic cloister adorned with stunning blue tile panels depicting biblical scenes.



Episcopal Palace



Adjacent to the Porto Cathedral, the grand Episcopal Palace (Paço Episcopal) is an 18th-century Baroque masterpiece, though its origins date back centuries earlier. With its imposing granite façade and monumental staircase, it was built as the residence for Porto's bishops, reflecting the powerful influence of the Church. While the interior is not regularly open to the public, the palace's exterior architecture and its commanding position on the city's highest point make it a key feature of the historic skyline. It forms a powerful architectural ensemble with the cathedral, dominating the oldest part of the city. The Episcopal Palace is part of the historical centre of Porto and designated as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.



Carmelite Church and Carmo Church

Porto has a large number of churches scattered around the city but here you get two for the price of one with two churches literally next door to one another. The church on the left is called the Carmelite Church and the one on the right is the Carmo Church, which together were classified as a National Monument in 2013. The older Carmelite Church (17th century) is Baroque, while the larger Carmo Church (18th century) is a splendid example of Rococo. They are divided by the narrowest of houses which legend says was to prevent monks and nuns from mingling.



The Church of St Francis

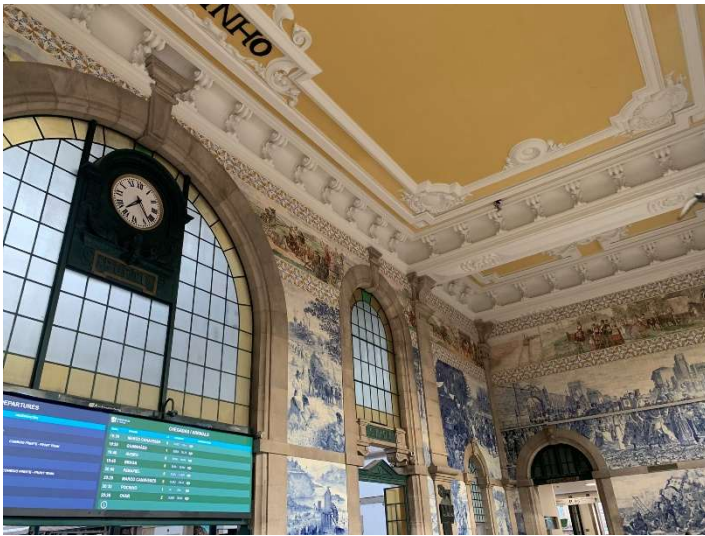
The Church of St Francis is another UNESCO World Heritage Site with one of the most lavish baroque interiors in Portugal. This Gothic church, with its oldest parts dating back to the 13th century, is one of the most impressive buildings in Porto. The outside is imposing in the Gothic style, while the interior is a masterpiece of gold-edged religious artwork. The church is dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi, who championed poverty although poverty is the last thing you will be thinking as you admire the 200 kilograms of gold leaf which cover nearly every surface.... altars, pillars and intricate woodcarvings.





São Bento Railway Station

São Bento Railway Station was inaugurated in 1916 on the site of a former Benedictine monastery. Overall, it feels like a museum or a palace thanks to its 20,000 hand-painted azulejo tiles (tin-glazed ceramic tiles) which adorn the building and show important moments in Portuguese history. The tiles were painted by Jorge Colaço between 1905 and 1916, depict pivotal moments in Portugal’s history such as the Battle of Valdevez and the Conquest of Ceuta, as well as scenes of rural life and the evolution of transport. The tile panels make travelling by train a culturally rich experience.



The Douro River

The Douro River winds through the city, defining its geography, economy, and soul. For centuries, it was the vital route for the port wine trade carrying barrels from the upstream vineyards to the lodges of Vila Nova de Gaia. The riverbanks, including the vibrant Ribeira on the Porto side and the wine cellars on Gaia’s side, are UNESCO World Heritage sites. A cruise along the Douro offers the quintessential perspective of Porto’s hillside architecture and its iconic bridges.



Reflection

My first visit to Porto in February 2017 was love at first sight. This is a city where ancient history and vibrant modern life flow together as steadily as the Douro River itself. From its Roman origins as Portus Cale., and the root of Portugal's very name, Porto has always been a city of trade and discovery.

Its soul is found in the monumental iron arches of the Dom Luis I Bridge, in the baroque gold of the Church of St. Francis and in the 20,000 blue azulejos tiles telling national stories at São Bento Station. It's a place of literary magic at the Livraria Lello and of surprising beauty in a restored Art Deco McDonald's Restaurant.

Porto 's past can be felt while sipping a coffee at the opulent Majestic Café, wandering the UNESCO-listed Ribeira district, or tasting the port wine that made the city famous. This guide is an invitation to discover the layered beauty of a city that is both proudly historic and wonderfully alive.

The outside cover if you enjoyed this guide.....



This guide is just one of a growing series of documentary travel guides collated under 'The Where To Go' banner. The following titles are presently available or coming really soon.....

