

Escape: Budget break

Sip and munch your way through the colourful streets of Portugal's second city

Porto for under £100 a night...



Illustration: PHIL ARGENT

WE POUND THE STREETS... YOU REAP THE REWARDS!

CLUSTERED by the north bank of the Douro river, Porto's old town is a higgledy-piggledy warren of hilly cobbled streets, blue-tiled buildings and charming churches. The focal point here is Gustave Eiffel's double-decker Dom Luis bridge. Cross it to the south and you'll find the historic port houses offering tastings of the tippie. Good value restaurants are all about, as are affordable hotels... perfect for a budget city break.

still warm and welcoming. A small gym and on-site deli are handy. One of the hotel's touches is a welcome basket with Portuguese wine and local treats. Doubles from £85, villagebyboa.com.

■ **Hotel Carrís Porto Ribeira**
IF YOU want to be in the heart of the old town with the Douro on your doorstep, Hotel Carrís Porto Ribeira's location is hard to beat. Housed in a set of historic buildings from the 14th century, the renovated rooms embrace original details such as exposed brick walls and stone arches yet are decorated in a contemporary style with a mostly monochrome palette. There are two excellent restaurants, plus terraces with sweeping city views. Doubles from £52, carrisportoribeira.com.

■ **Casa Carolina**
THIS tiled townhouse turned eight-room guesthouse comes with lovely original wood floors and whitewashed walls. Floor-to-ceiling doors with Juliet balconies open up to the bustling street below. It's on a quiet street, but in a central position. Doubles from £77, casacarolina.pt.

Where to stay

■ **Village by BOA**
BEHIND an unassuming door on a quiet street on the edge of the Bolhão area, this collection of 40 rooms is centred around a pretty courtyard garden. Each comes with a fully-equipped kitchen and living space. The design is modern Nordic and minimal yet

What to see and do

Pick up some port
AT COCKBURN'S Port Lodge, the largest wooden port cellar in Vila Nova de Gaia, you can see the centuries-old practice of making this fortified wine using the grapes from the Douro Valley. Watch the team of coopers making wooden barrels by hand, while learning about the history of Porto's most popular export. At the end, you taste three different types. A 90-minute tour and tasting is £17.50 pp (cockburns.com).

Spot the azulejos
THE churches in Porto are best viewed from the outside thanks to the stunning array of *azulejos* – hand-painted blue tiles – that adorn them. Start your free DIY walking tour at the Chapel of Souls, the jewel in the crown with an impressive 16,000 tiles, before moving onto Saint Ildefonso Church and Igreja do Carmo. Not a church, but the Sao Bento train station, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is also a must-visit for its floor-to-ceiling tiling.

How to get there
RYANAIR flies from Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Leeds Bradford, Stansted and Manchester to Porto from £14.77 one way (ryanair.com). With three departures an hour the metro (purple line) links the airport with Trindade station in the city centre (journey takes 30-40 minutes, £1.75 one way). More information at visitportugal.com.

■ **Porto A.S. 1829 Hotel**
FOUND at the end of the main pedestrian street, Rua das Flores, this hotel is housed in a historic stationery shop. The 41 rooms embrace its past and feature original typewriters and vintage furniture. Doubles from £68, artsoulgroup.com/portoas1829hotel.

Where to eat
■ **Taberna Dos Mercadores**
THIS cave-like restaurant seats 16 diners. Watch the collective gasp as dishes of flaming salt-crusted sea bass (£16.50) are whisked out of the tiny kitchen. Start with classic cod croquettes (£2.60), and finish with port-soaked pears (£3.45), while enjoying a glass or two of Branco, a Douro Valley white wine (£3.90). 36 Rua dos Mercadores (tabernadosmercadores.eatbu.com).

■ **Mercado do Bolhão**
DATING from 1914, Porto's main market benefited from a major makeover last year. The ground floor functions as a produce market with 79 stalls while upstairs are sit-down restaurants. Pick up a plate of cheeses (£4.35) from Queijaria do Bolhão or swing by Bolhao Winehouse for a sardine and mackerel tasting (£5.20). 322 Rua Formosa, mercadobolhao.pt.

■ **Manteigaria – Fábrica de Pastéis de Nata**
NO TRIP to Portugal is complete without trying a Pastéis de Nata. These crispy flaky tarts filled with thick custard – deliberately slightly burnt on top – are a mainstay for breakfast or as an afternoon treat. Buy to take away (£1.30) or enjoy in the adjoining coffee shop. 24 Rua de Alexandre Braga, manteigaria.com.

ELIZABETH BENNETT

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