

De La Espada

Guide to Oporto

De La Espada can't hide a soft spot for Oporto. Not only do many of our staff come from Oporto, but today the city is our administrative and technical support hub and is one of our centres for product design. With our main production plant an hour away and many of our partner companies within striking distance, De La Espada is more intertwined than ever with the city. So when we were invited to participate in the Oporto Show, we felt like the prodigal son (or daughter) coming home.

Oporto is an old city with over 1000 years of history, but much of what you will see is traced to the growth of the city as one of the leading exporters of wine during the 18th and 19th centuries and to the industrialisation of the city during the early part of the 20th century. As little as 10 years ago, the region was amongst the top ten industrialised regions in Europe, but as happens elsewhere, this is fading away. So without denying the fact that this small city of around 1.5 million has its provincial elements, it has been open to the world for a very long time. The result is a citizenry that is better travelled than you imagine, that speaks English more comfortably than virtually anyone else in the Iberian Peninsula. So the foreign traveller is likely to feel very much abroad, but somehow find someone to make them feel at home. It has not been taken over by hype, like so many other "hip" cities, and hopefully it will guard its identity zealously.

The city contains at this present time, the most promising raw material, that frustratingly for many of us, may or may not go somewhere. In the end that is in the hands of good fortune

1. Finest View

A sunset over the Atlantic can be quite ravishing, but we think that the sunset view when looking at the old town (the Ribeira district) from Gaia is still the reigning champion. Take the upper level of the Ponte D. Luis (King Luis Bridge) which you will have to share with the metro, but the views from the bridge or from the Jardim do Morro (Morro Garden) on the Gaia side of the river are more than worth it.

2. Best Meal

Cafeina is not exactly something that opened last month, but it has stood the test of time, and it is a great excuse to visit the neighbourhood of Foz, which faces the Atlantic and has gone from weekend beach resort surrounded by farms at the turn of the 20th century to posh neighbourhood in the last thirty years. Tree lined streets, great sea views and invigorating fresh air

will contribute towards a hearty appetite. Cafeina itself provides a comfortable environment supported by good food, in a typical turn of the century "beach bungalow".

<http://www.cafeina.pt/>

3. Most Peaceful Spot

The Contemporary Art Museum, designed by Alvaro Siza, is a quiet, softly spoken, and beautiful work of art in itself. The gardens that surround the Museum, part of the estate of the Count of Serralves, are why sometimes Oporto feels like a Shangri-La, with a temperate climate that favours every type of vegetation from conifers, to palm trees. Great place to have a coffee.

<http://www.serralves.com/>

4. Most Intriguing Store

Vintage has been done in so many places that I hesitate to mention this, but in a city that can't lay claim to be the hub of luxury goods retail, you have to cast your net wide. Casa Almada is all about the owners pursuits and is in a typical Oporto building, wrapped in granite like so much of our city.

<http://www.casaalmada.com/>

5. Most Striking Architecture

Rem Koolhaas must be onto something, because this concrete rock crystal he dropped into a western suburb of the city obviously looks out of place and yet, somehow, many of us are willing to forgive him everything. This is a building that is about sheer wonder, a building that infects visitors and staff with energy, which is exactly what the arts and music in a small city needs. Take the guided tour, and witness all for yourself.

<http://www.casadamusica.com/>

6. Best Wine Cellar

Not only is Taylors a venerable firm in the Port wine business, but its savvy English founders (and that goes back over 300 years), were able to lay their hands on some outstanding real estate, with views across the river to the old town. The tour of the cellars is good and the restaurant puts in a solid performance, supported by outstanding views. Sorry if it sounds cliché, but if you come to Oporto, you must visit one of the cellars.

<http://www.taylor.pt/>
<http://www.tresseculos.pt/>

7. Best Bar

I am not an expert so I will have to go on hearsay. I know bar/shop doesn't quite make all the sense in the world, but I will forgive anything as long as it has a river view.

<http://www.bazaar.com.pt/>

8. Getting Around

The metro is good for getting to and from the airport, sadly despite having been for awhile one of Europe's biggest construction projects, it doesn't reach many places the visitor might want to see. But it does feature stations designed by Eduardo Souto de Moura, which are far from the high tech architecture so popular with this kind of project. Tickets are in my opinion fiendishly complex to buy, so spare yourself and purchase the one day pass.

<http://www.metroporto.pt/>

The local town hall's site is useful and reasonably well put together. Make sure to download the city centre map, probably the best one you will find.

<http://www.portoturismo.pt/>

Porto Tours is an organisation that handles bookings for many of the tour operators in the region including bus tours, river tours, trams and even helicopter trips up the river to see the vineyards.

<http://www.portotours.com/>

If you fancy putting your Portuguese to the test, this is the tourism site for the natives. Its title translates as "short break" and has been put together by the national tourist office

<http://www.escapadinha.com.pt/>

9. Star Of The Show

None other and none less than the river. Douro, the river of gold, winds its way to the Atlantic through a dramatic gorge, having powered through hundreds of miles from the heights of northern Spain. This isn't a river that has been cornered into submission like the Thames or the Seine, or that flows at a leisurely pace like the Danube. Despite all the efforts to contain and dam it, it is still in charge. As it flows under six bridges on its way to the sea, it runs the show. The views towards the sea, with the sun setting on the Atlantic are not to be missed.