



*Santuário de Santa Luzia, Viana do Castelo
Photo by Asta d'Eca. Courtesy of Turismo de Portugal.*

Great Drives

Porto

Around Porto - Sea of love

Test-drive a two-day tour and an [Avis car](#) for the best of the west.

If you're yearning for a little extra romance in your life, the unspoiled beaches and hilltop hideaways in the west and north of Portugal are waiting to seduce you...

Test drive this two-day tour for the best of the Porto region

Pick up your hire car from [Porto Airport](#) and drive north along the A28 road to surf the unspoiled beaches around Vila do Conde, then head inland via Barcelos to the riverside town of Ponte de Lima to sample the unique vinho verde (green wine). From here you follow the lush River Lima valley eastwards to the sea and the sleepy coastal town of Viana do Castelo, where you'll discover the romantic hilltop Pousada do Monte de Santa Luzia— your bed for the night. In the morning it's a scenic drive along the coast and the Spanish border to Monção, before you head south to climb the beautiful baroque staircase at Bom Jesus do Monte near Braga.

High Points en route

Vila do Conde – Sun, surf and seafood

The pristine sandy beaches stretching along the coast north of Vila do Conde are some of the best in northern Portugal just a short drive up the coastal road. The tempting breakers are perfect for honing your surfing skills; boast about your exploits afterwards in the buzzing shoreline Restaurant Caximar, over their fresh-off-the-boat seafood platter.

Ponte de Lima – Sips and sunsets

Pull up a couple of chairs at one of the cafés on the town's main square for unforgettable views of the sun setting over the 31 arches of the elegant Roman bridge. Just a 25km drive from Viana do Castelo on the coast.

Viana do Castelo – Hilltop haven

Tucked among the eucalyptus trees on a hill just north of Viana do Castelo is the chic and tranquil Pousada do Monte de Santa Luzia, a beautifully renovated 1918 hotel with sinfully romantic views across the Atlantic and up the Lima River. Bronze on the terrace, chill in the pool then indulge in local specialties from the restaurant – the sweet torta de Viana is a must.

Monção – Calming Caldas

Park the car and wander through the cobbled streets of this charming border town to a square decorated with flowers and lined with chestnut trees. Visit the convent and dozens of churches and take in the views towards the thick green forests and mountains of Spain, before retreating to Termas das Caldas, the town's spa, for a warm soak in the therapeutic water.

Bom Jesus do Monte, Braga – Baroque beauty

The elegant baroque staircase that leads up the forested hillside to Portugal's most spectacular sanctuary seems to go on forever. While hiking up on foot is enough to earn you both bragging rights and a rest in the colourful sculpted gardens at the top, spare a thought for the numerous pilgrims who make the climb on their hands and knees each year. If you're feeling really lazy, just ride up in the funicular!



High Points en route - Free time on your hands? Take your pick from the following gems:

1/ Peneda Gerês National Park – Extreme exploration

You can discover this lush unspoiled landscape of mountains, gorges and rivers as daringly as you like, with everything from hiking to hang-gliding on offer at one of the adventure centres. To really get back to nature, try a winding mountain bike trail through the forest, with a picnic pit-stop thrown in.

2/ Côa Valley Archaeological Park – Rock-ing art

A trip to an art gallery is the perfect ingredient for any romantic excursion, even if it's only accessible by a bumpy 4WD ride like this one. Discovered a stone's throw from the River Côa in 1990, these 20,000-year old engravings – depicting bulls, horses, fish and humans – are well worth the ride.

3/ Amarante – Fall-in-love food

The delicious warm décor of the Michelin-starred restaurant at the Casa da Calçada – a glamorously renovated noble house on the Tâmega River – perfectly complements its mouthwatering menu. To get the very most from your visit, the very decently-priced *degustação* tasting menu is a must.

4/ Aveiro – Virtually Venice

It's easy to see why Aveiro, with its network of blue canals and humpback bridges, is known as the 'Venice of Portugal'. You'll find it just as romantic too. Meander through narrow streets lined with pastel buildings before hopping into one of the brightly painted, gondola-like *moliceiro* boats for a dreamy cruise to the lagoon.



Need to know

Round trip

218 miles (351 km)
Approx 7 hours driving time.

Best time to come

For the best weather, travel between mid-June and mid-September.

Soundtrack

Dazkariah – Caminhos Turvos

Essential item

2 Person Picnic Backpack

Tip

Motorways are prefixed with an "A" on signs and maps and there is a toll charge to travel on them.

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