

Return to Portugal – Part 3 A Port Wine Toast in Porto



We're back in Porto for one more day!
After two days of nonstop sightseeing, we'll take a more leisurely pace today.



We're heading back down to the *Ribeira* (riverfront) for a short cruise on the Douro River.



We waited on line for about half an hour with fellow travelers from all over the world.



And here's our ride! All aboard!



No inside seats for us! We headed straight for the front of the boat.



We'll be getting a different perspective on Porto today as we pass under several of its bridges.



Ponte Dona Maria Pia was the first bridge, designed by Eiffel (pre-tower fame) for the railroad. Opened in 1877, it was still in use until 1991; though now retired, it's an historic landmark.



The sweeping curves and latticework do evoke the structure of the later (1889) famous tower.



The *Ponte São João* bridge in front of Maria Pia took over the railroad traffic in 1991. The one behind her (*Ponte Infante*) opened in 2003 for local vehicular traffic.



Further downstream, the *Arrábida* bridge was opened in 1963 for major interstate traffic.



Then there's the symbol of the city, the *Ponte Dom Luis I*, also built by Eiffel's firm but opened 9 years after the first in 1886. It was made a double-decker to carry more traffic.



From the river you can see this little church with a Templar cross and a huge *azulejos* mural.



Zooming in, we can see it honors Prince Henry the Navigator and the bold Portuguese maritime explorers. The church was built in 1776, but the congregation was founded by sailors back in the 16th Century. The sailing Prince himself was a member of the order!



There's a great view of the *Ribeira* & the *Sé* as we return to the dock after the hour-long cruise. But the day is just getting started!



We're going to cross the Douro on foot via the lower level of the Ponte Dom Luis.



Welcome to Vila Novo de Gaia! The views of Porto are beautiful, but the real attraction is....



Port wine! It's all about the wine on this side of the river.



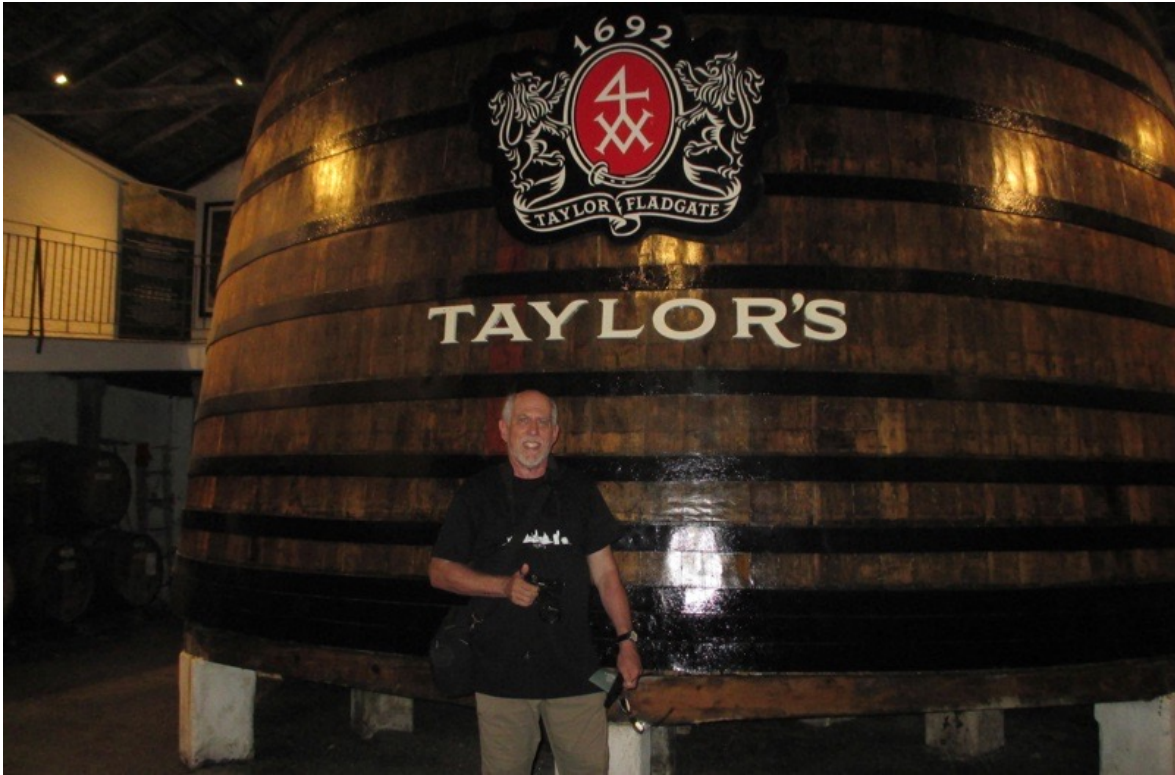
All the port wine producers are located here.
In fact, by law you can't call it port wine unless it comes from the Douro Valley through Porto.



The Douro Valley vineyards are 60 miles upriver, where the grapes are crushed & the juice extracted. In olden days the barrels were transported in boats like these for aging in the cellars.



Now with better methods of transport, the *rabelos* remain only as tourist attractions and floating advertisements for each brand. And they are so totally picturesque!



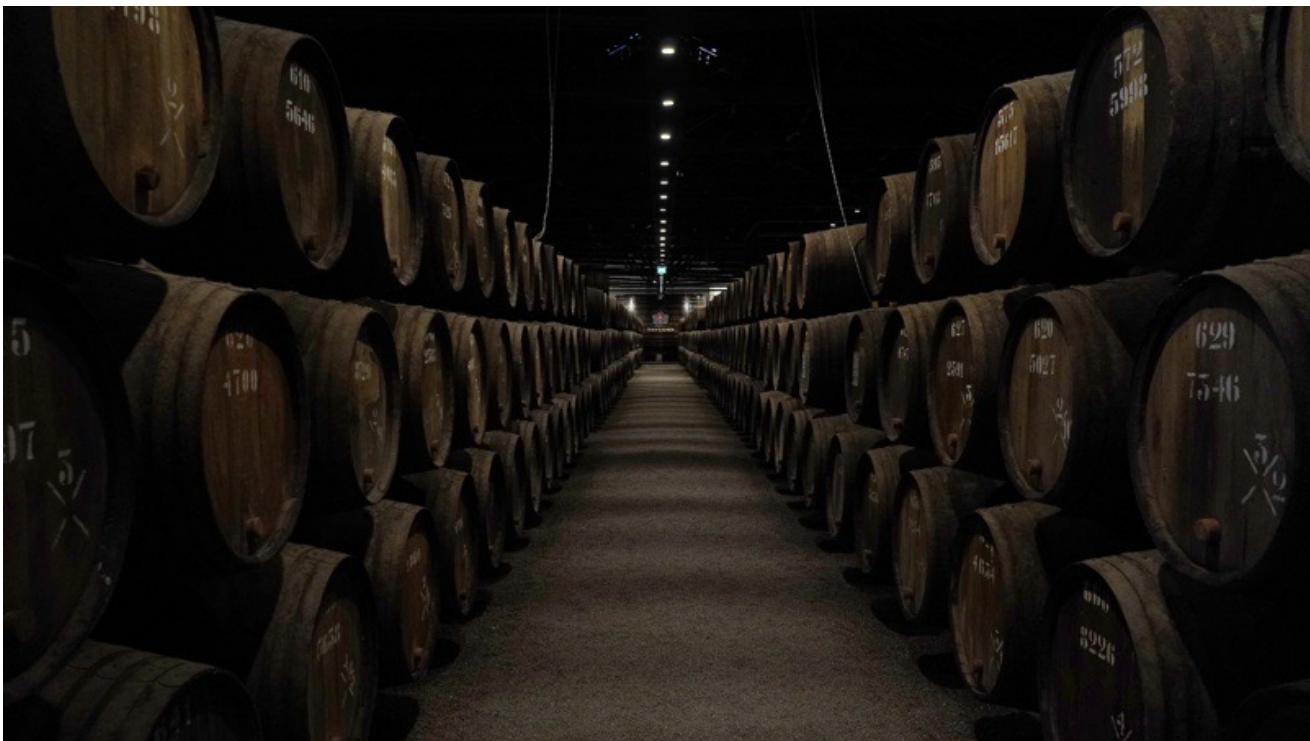
All the producers offer tours and tastings. We opted for Taylor's because....



....it is an authentic cellar, and the tour was self-guided with a handheld audio device (meaning no long-winded guide with bad English.... in fact, the narration was in perfect British English!)



That's because most of the Port wine vintners are British owned. Around 1700, war with France stopped imports of French wine; so, the Brits turned to their Portuguese allies, and an industry was born. And if it's good enough for The Queen, it's certainly good enough for us!



Not sure if these barrels still have anything left in them now, but they are the real deal — this place smells really winery! You could get a buzz just on the fumes. The tour was very interesting, taking us through the journey from vine to barrel to bottle.



The grapes are crushed to release the juice which then ferments before being fortified with grape spirit.

Making wine the old-fashioned way! Believe it or not, they really still do this with select wines. They claim that foot stomping provides the proper gentle pressure to mix the juice, fiber, and skin to add flavor without crushing the seeds which can be bitter (but imagine the laundry bills!) There are even some private Douro Valley tours where you can pick & stomp your own grapes.



We'll pass on the stomping, but we're all in on the tasting! And it's fitting that today we toast "à nossa!" (to us!) since it's our wedding anniversary!! Eighteen years, and it's still magical!



We continued the celebration that night with a fancy feast: Judy had a whiting filet topped with caviar on a bed of fregola (a tiny round pasta); I had Iberian pork cheek with barley & broccolini. (I've eaten plenty of piggy parts, but never a cheek — it was tender and sumptuous!)



And a sensuous dessert: white chocolate *crème brûlée* with berries and raspberry sorbet. Yum!
What a sweet finish to our anniversary day and a great way to wrap up our visit to Porto.
Tomorrow, we move on to Portugal's capital, Lisbon.