

TIMELESS

Autumn 2016

£5.95

Travels



Captivating Cappadocia
Jordan: 70 years of Independence
Weekend in: Zagreb
The Nazca Lines: A Life's Work
The Grand Canyon - Just Amazing!
Kraków: Renaissance City
The Pilgrim's Steps: Porto and Braga
Interview: Francesca Leoni
Exhibition Focus: Power & Protection
Intrepid Traveller: E.H. Palmer
Traveller's Tales: Hilary Bradt
Museum Focus: Han Yangling, Xian
Book Reviews
Latest archaeological and
arts news and exhibitions

FOR LOVERS OF TRAVEL, ARCHAEOLOGY AND ART



The Pilgrim's Steps

Life, Death, and the Afterlife in Porto and Braga

Garry Shaw follows in the footsteps of pilgrims in the Portuguese cities of Porto and Braga to explore life, death and faith in these vibrant historic centres

Anybody who tells you that the first step is always the hardest has never tried walking the nearly 600 steps that lead to the Catholic church of Bom Jesus do Monte near Braga, Portugal.

In my humble opinion, having completed the pilgrimage, the last one is far worse, particularly when it's raining. This exquisite baroque church at the hill's summit has been the goal of sweaty, panting pilgrims since the 19th century, but earlier incarnations have existed on the same spot for far longer, probably all the way back to the 14th century. Since that time, the climb from the bottom of the hill to its top has represented a journey towards purification and salvation – a stairway to heaven. And like any pilgrimage, it isn't easy. To reach the peak, pilgrims must ascend three separate stairways – built successively since the early 18th century, set among the hillside's dense forest – stopping at chapels on platforms along the way to make offerings. Each chapel, spread along the route, represents a stage in the story of the Passion of Christ – Jesus' journey towards his crucifixion. Your struggle to reach the church is a spiritual quest, meant to bring you closer to Christ.

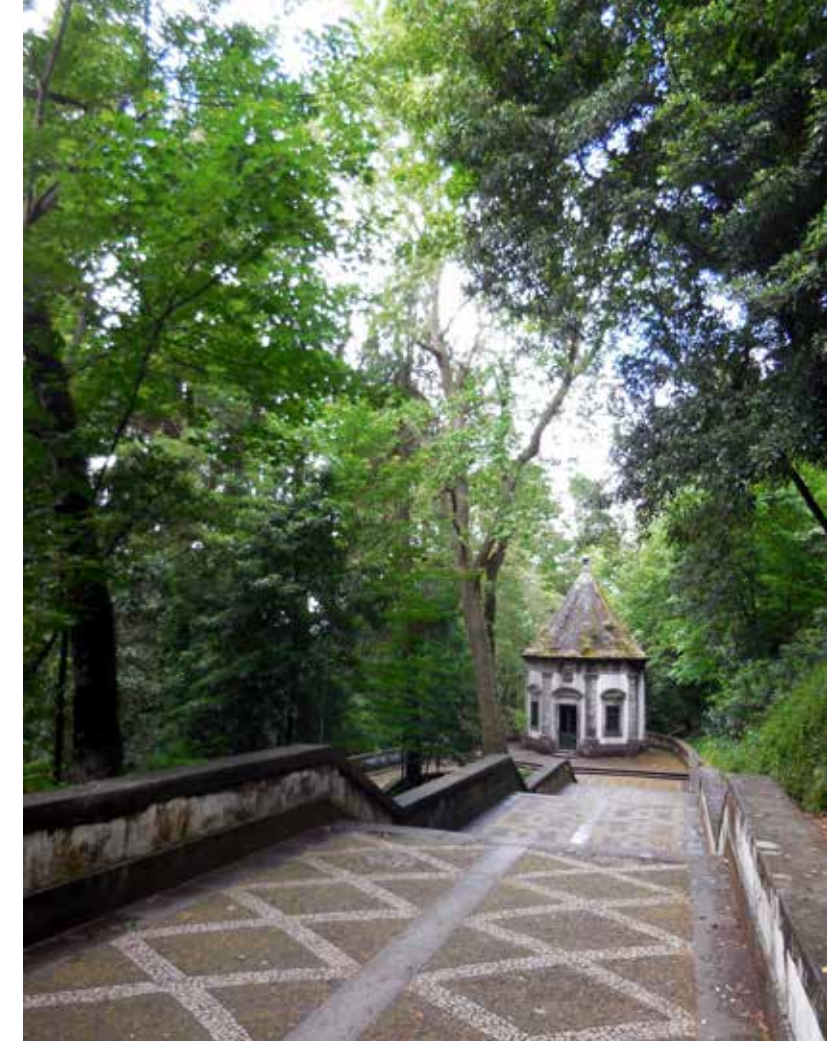
Though not a pilgrim myself, I wanted to experience the journey properly. I arrived at the foot of the hill of Bom Jesus do Monte by bus from nearby Braga. The first challenge? To resist the water-powered vertical tram that, since its installation in 1882, has made the pilgrimage to the top, shall we say, a little easier. While I looked on, the latest juddering antique tram clunked its way up the hill, relieving my temptation, so I went to stand in front of the trail's entrance gateway. It was a tall arch of grey stone, a crest at its peak, bearing the coat of arms of Dom Rodrigo de Moura Teles, who commissioned the first stairway leading to the church. Flanking the gate were twin fountains:

over one, a sign, stuck to the wall, explained in Portuguese that the water was unsafe to drink, both at these fountains, and at each subsequent fountain along the route. Was this another lesson to resist temptation? I thought. No, I later read: the same water flows through each fountain, from the top of the hill to the bottom, making it all rather unsanitary. As I stood there, a passing jogger – the first of many using the hillside and its sacred steps as a sport's track – washed his face in the flowing water. I hope no one had done the same at the top.

Two small chapels flanked the first platform, just beyond the gateway. Doors, locked with chains, barred entry, but open panels, themselves crossed by metal bars, provided a glimpse inside. I peeked through the gaps to look into the squat, square chapel to the left of the gateway: within, in the semi-darkness, illuminated by small windows to the side, stood Jesus and three apostles (sleeping) – not a painting (or the real deal), but a diorama of life-size painted terracotta statues. I felt like I was intruding. This was the 'Capela da Agonia', dedicated to Christ's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, a fitting name for the start of a climb to the top of a hill. The chapel opposite – this one octagonal – housed a recreation of the Last Supper, its arrangement inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting.

These two chapels mark the beginning of the pilgrim's journey, the start of the ascent with Jesus on his way towards death. I started my journey too (though, I must admit, not walking on my knees, as pilgrims are supposed to do). The wide stairway led upwards and directly ahead, the blue sky now hidden by leaves from the dense trees. The path then made an abrupt turn to the right, the first zig in what would be a long and zigzagging route. With each step, the journey towards death, purification, and resurrection was on my mind. I

Previous pages:
Reflex Cityscape of
Porto Town
(Image: Associação
de Turismo do Porto
e Norte, AR)



Above, top left: The Capela da Agonia, along the first stairway of Bom Jesus do Monte

Above, right: A chapel along the first stairway of Bom Jesus do Monte

Above, bottom left: Within the catacombs of Porto, beneath the Casa do Despacho of the Third Order of São Francisco

(All images: © Garry Shaw)

thought back to my experiences in nearby Porto, Portugal's second city, just a few days earlier. In a catacomb, death is never far away.

Into the catacombs

The bottom of the pit was lined with a crumpled grey rug. I knelt down to take a closer look, bringing my head near to the square hole in the ground. The rug turned out to be a mass of bones: random pieces of dead people. Here an arm. There a skull. Here another arm. I craned my neck to see how far the remains continued beneath the floor: they disappeared into the distance. All that separated me from them was a thin layer of stone and wood, resting on supports, and hopefully about seventy-plus more years of life (knock on same wood). I'd wandered around the crypt for some time before tripping over the entrance to the bone pit – luckily for me, it was covered by a glass plate and a metal grate. But somehow, only when peering down into the hole did my surroundings become real. It's one thing to be told you're touring chambers filled with bones, but another to confront said dead people in the flesh (ok, only I had flesh, but you know what I mean). Numbered wooden floor panels hid the rest of the bones from view. I stepped from '79' to '80', wondering who rested beneath, and listened to the choral music

pumped from speakers on the walls. The arched chambers were lined with sealed black and white niches, each numbered and topped by a tiny skull (just in case you forgot where you were). These were the burials of the clergy, each introduced by the words 'Here lies' in Portuguese and given a date of death. No anonymous fate below the floor among the sea of bones for them. Elsewhere, there was a statue of charity, brought from a nearby cemetery, and a display of ossuaries. Before the 19th century, it was normal for the Portuguese to be buried within their religious buildings (in which the rich, and members of the clergy, received the best spots). Indeed, there weren't any legal open-air public cemeteries until the 1830s. Even then, most people resisted them, preferring to be buried inside of, or as close as possible to, a church. As the churches and their associated buildings expanded or were rebuilt, these remains were gathered and moved, to be placed in catacombs below.

The catacombs that I'd found myself within are located beneath a complex of buildings – once a monastery – owned by the Third Order of São Francisco, their entrance down a stairway in the Casa do Despacho (the suitably named 'Dispatch House'), built in the 1750s. Above ground, you can visit a treasury, filled with precious items and paintings from the monastery's past, and the



Sessions Room, with its gilded wood-carved ceiling and large crucifix set within a golden shrine. For centuries, people were buried within this monastic complex, many in the associated church and some within a private catacomb beneath the Casa do Despacho from as early as 1746. In 1795, it was decided that this cemetery should be extended beneath the church, and eventually, the bodies from within the church were moved there. Burials continued until 1866, effectively until the clergy were forced to send people elsewhere.

Despite the macabre fascination of the catacombs, they aren't the main reason people visit this part of Porto: normally they head straight for the Church of São Francisco, just across from the Casa do Despacho. Built in the 13th century, but reconstructed and adapted many times since, the church's austere grey exterior is gothic in style. In stark contrast, its fabulous and over-the-top, baroque interior dates to the 17th-18th centuries. Exploring, you feel like you're drowning in gold – every surface is carved and gilded. No artist involved ever thought: subtlety, that's the plan. Small ornate tombs are spread throughout; cherubs emerge from walls, as if launched by a golden explosion; there's a gruesome altar piece, showing the martyred saints of Morocco in the middle of being martyred. Golden vines weave their way across the walls, perched on by birds. But perhaps most famous is the elaborate Tree of Jesse altarpiece. This depicts the family line of Jesus (present at the top), down via such famous individuals as kings David and Solomon, to Jesse himself. Each figure stands on the branches of a tree – made from carved and gilded wood (of course) – its trunk emerging from Jesse's body.

The Stairway of the Five Senses

By the time I'd completed the first stairway of Bom Jesus do Monte, with Jesus, I'd witnessed the kiss of Judas, experienced the chapel of darkness, Christ's flagellation, and the crown of thorns. I can safely say it'd been a busy afternoon. So far, the incline had been slight, the steps numerous, and I'd emerged from the forest at a large circular platform. It was flanked by two chapels: one representing the Road to Golgotha, and the other



Left, top: A fountain representing the sense of smell, on the Stairway of the Five Senses at Bom Jesus do Monte (Image: © Garry Shaw)

Left, middle: The Church of São Francisco, Porto (Image: CC BY-NC-ND - Livio)

Left, bottom: The glittery interior of the Church of São Francisco (Image: CC BY-NC-ND Ordem S. Francisco)

Above: Looking up at the church of Bom Jesus do Monte (Image: © Garry Shaw)

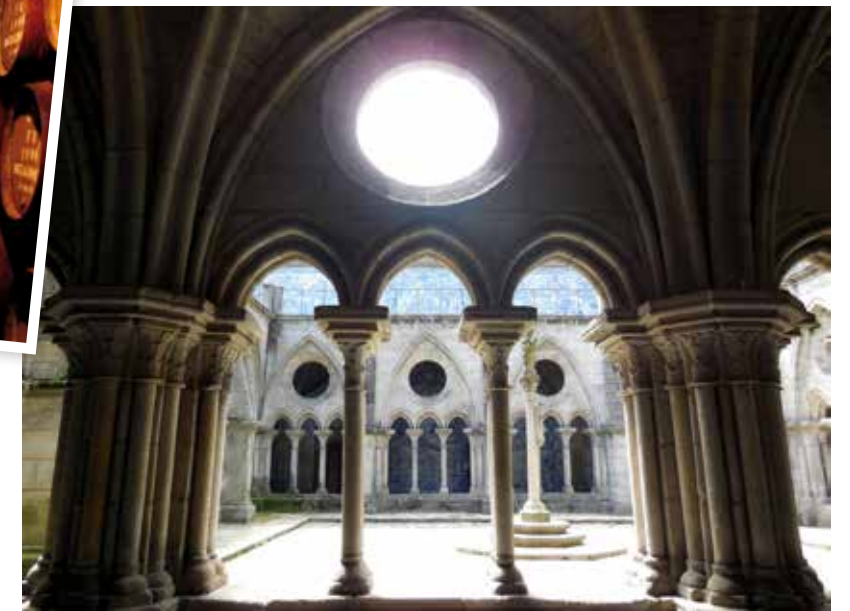
showing Jesus before Pilate. The platform provided great views over Braga too: Portugal's third city was in the distance across the hilly, wooded terrain below. Behind and above me, I now also got my first clear view of the church. Its dual towers pointed to the sky, each adorned with its own bell. It was a neoclassical building – balanced and restrained – coloured cream and white, with a triangular central portion topped by a crucifix. Below it was my next challenge, the much steeper and ornate part of the climb: the Stairway of the Three Virtues. Both were carved from granite, their sharply zigzagging balustrades painted white.

The Stairway of the Five Senses is formed of five platforms connected by stairs. And at the centre of each platform is a face, serving as a fountain, from which water pours. It's as creepy as it sounds. At the first fountain, water empties from the figure's eyes, representing the sense of sight; at the next, it pours from the ears, representing hearing. Then comes the nose (smell); the mouth (taste); and finally, the water is poured from a jar, representing touch. The figure with water pouring from his mouth looks the most unwell; the one with water in his eyes simply looks concerned; and the ones with water pouring from their ears and nose seem peculiarly happy with their situation. Above each fountain is the statue of a Biblical figure, such as Joseph and Solomon.

As pilgrims walk, or kneel, their way up the steps, they touch the fountain that closest matches their own ailment, or the ailment of a loved one. I passed between two columns, encircled by snakes, and joined the pilgrims on my upward journey. As I walked, I became lost in my memories of Porto – a city that overwhelms the senses.

Picturesque Porto

Porto's colourful and vibrant historic core is a UNESCO world heritage site. Elegant buildings of baroque and neoclassical design, lining wide boulevards, compete for your attention with centuries-old houses painted, pink, yellow or blue, crumbling along medieval alleyways. There's grey gothic and Romanesque churches, such as the city's cathedral, and baroque monuments, like the Torre de Clerigos, a 76 metre tower built in the 1700s. Rickety antique trams crisscross the streets between parks and statues of dignitaries. Even the bookstores are elegant – particularly Livraria Lello & Irmão, famous for its wooden staircase and stained glass ceiling. Every street has its own friendly cafes, and each fills with local workers at lunchtime, looking to enjoy a glass or two of wine with their set meal of soup, then meat and potatoes. This lively tableau is painted across hillsides, forcing you to ascend and descend as you travel from place to place.



As you explore the city, the sound of Portuguese mixes with languages from across the world, the words overheard, drifting from cafes and restaurants. There's the call of seagulls and the flow of the Douro River. The rumble of construction. Church bells. And then there's fado. Experienced in worn local cafes and tourist joints across the city, sung from the heart accompanied by weeping guitars, and inscribed on UNESCO's list of intangible heritage, fado is the sound of Portugal. Energetic and haunting, infused with 'saudade' – a sense of sadness and longing for times gone by – these are songs of yearning and nostalgia for home and of longing for those you love.

Being a port city, seafood can be found on every menu. But tripe, made with white beans and served with rice, is also a famous local dish. For comfort food, there's nothing better than Porto's special creation: Francesinha, a sandwich made with various meats, topped with cheese and a tomato and beer sauce, served with fries. But Porto is perhaps best-known for its eponymous drink: port. In the Ribeira District, when standing on the waterfront promenade, you can look across

the Douro River towards Vila Nova de Gaia. Spread across the hills, there's an array of restaurants and bars, and among them, the 'lodges' or 'cellars' of the city's port manufacturers, each with the company's name prominently displayed on its roof. Many offer tours and tastings, in which you can smell and sip ports of different kinds and vintages. I can particularly recommend the tour of the Ramos Pinto lodge: you get to see their old offices, preserved as they appeared in the 1930s (along with their risqué antique posters), and explore their wine cellar before sitting down for your tasting. Afterwards, stroll along the waterfront, watching the traditional flat-bottomed boats bob up and down on the river. Boats of this kind once transported port barrels along the Douro. Today, they're just used to move tourists.

Porto is also famous for its tradition of hand-painted tiles, known as 'azulejos'. You can find them everywhere, decorating buildings across the city: the Church of Carmo on Rua do Carmo is entirely covered in them, as is the Capela das Almas de Santa Catarina, from the early 18th

Above, top left: Pergola – Foz area

Above, bottom left: Clérigos Market (Images: Município do Porto)

Above: A street in Porto, with the city's cathedral in the background (Image: © Garry Shaw)

Right, top, left: The Francesinha and barrels of port (Images: Município do Porto)

Right, top, right: The cloister of Porto Cathedral

Right, middle: A tiled scene from the upper level of the cloister at Porto Cathedral

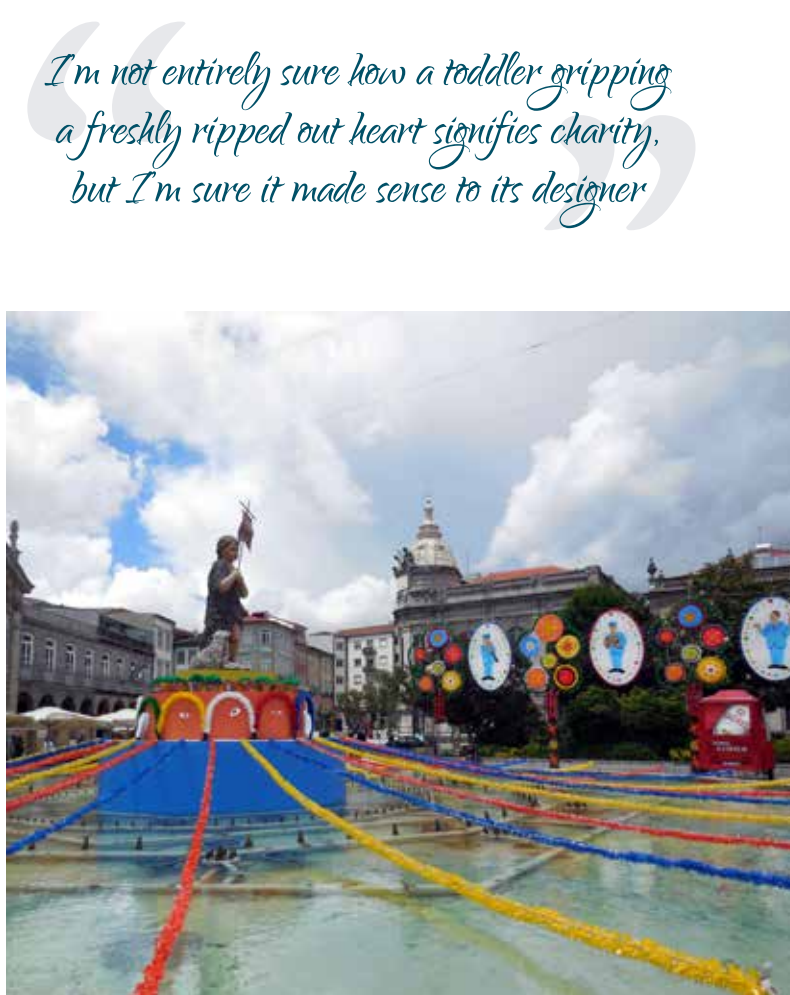
Right, bottom: The Cathedral in Porto (All images: © Garry Shaw)

century, on Rua de Santa Catarina. You can even buy your own in the tourist stores, though instead of traditional religious scenes, these most often bear images of animals, including the Barcelos rooster, symbol of Portugal, or cats. One of the city's most famous tiled scenes can be found in the cathedral. Originally constructed in the 12th century in the Romanesque style, but with alterations since, Porto's Cathedral rests atop a high hill, looking down over the city. It is reached through a network of medieval streets, lined with colourful run-down houses, all on a steep incline. From the top of the hill, standing in a large square, where Porto's market was once held, there's fantastic views over the salmon-coloured roofs of the city. Inside the cathedral, take in the magnificent baroque apse, filled with gilded twirling columns and statues, before ascending a set of steps to the upper level of the cloister. Here you'll find wall after wall covered in blue tiles. Made in the 18th century by Vital Rifarto, these show scenes from Solomon's Song of Songs, in which the king expresses his love for his bride. Cue plump cherubs, winged angels, and – that universal symbol of love – 18th-century nobles on horseback chasing an emu.

The stairway of the three virtues

My feet were starting to hurt, but only one set of steps now stood between me and the church of Bom Jesus do Monte: the Stairway of the Three Virtues. This was dedicated to faith, hope, and charity, each represented by a fountain. Faith was a cross with three spouts for water (though it only poured from the lowest spout during my visit); hope was represented by an image of Noah's ark, the flood water below; and charity was two children, one holding a heart from which the water flowed, like a tiny Mola Ramm from Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom. I'm not entirely sure how a toddler gripping a freshly ripped out heart signifies charity, but I'm sure it made sense to its designer. On each level, as I continued to ascend, mini obelisks and statues of holy men looked down at me from above. I imagined them cheering me on.

As I walked, my mind took me back to Braga, where earlier that day I'd already witnessed the



I'm not entirely sure how a toddler gripping a freshly ripped out heart signifies charity, but I'm sure it made sense to its designer

virtue of faith. In this ancient city, founded by the Romans as Bracara Augusta, where various trade routes united, I'd walked the streets admiring the preparations for the annual festival of São João (St. John) – the biggest two nights of the year, held every June, when people dance the night away and enjoy fireworks displays. As I strolled past the oldest cathedral in Portugal (noted for its outstanding baroque organ), and Roman archaeological sites, people everywhere were busy decking the streets with colourful decorations – tinsel circles of blue, yellow, and green, colourful lights, and the city's crest. In the Jardim da Avenida Central, a freestanding 'church' had been erected, decorated with blue tinsel and hearts and stars of blue, yellow, and green. Paintings of dancing men and women, set in giant ovals, hung from lines strung across the park, high off the ground. Others showed laughing women and men in blue suits (with matching hats) playing saxophones. Multicoloured tinsel streamers stretched from the rim of the park's large, round fountain to its centre, where a statue of the child São João had been erected, a lamb by his feet. This celebration of the saint would be one huge party, enjoyed by everyone

in the city, and highlighted the continuing importance of religion in Portuguese society.

Bom Jesus do Monte – Good Jesus of the Mount

By the time I met the martyr Saint Clemente within the Church of Bom Jesus do Monte, he'd been dead for nearly 2,000 years. Luckily, his face, like the rest of his body, had been covered in wax and plaster, preserving a more recognisably human form than the scattered bones I'd met earlier on my trip down into Porto's catacombs. A slot beneath him asked for 'Esmolas para S. Clemente' ('Alms for St. Clemente'). A barrier stopped me from approaching, but from my vantage point, Clemente looked as if sleeping, his eyes closed, his mouth slightly open. Upon two pillows, on his side, he lay within an ornate altar, topped with a white cloth, a layer of glass separating him from the outside world. He wore a crown, a yellow cloak, and a tunic of white. His red shoes had faded to pink. In life, Clemente had been a Roman soldier, martyred in the 3rd Century AD. And like many martyrs and saints in churches across Europe, he'd been preserved, dressed, and put on display to attract pilgrims.

Above, left: A gateway in the city of Braga

Above, right: Preparations for the festival of São João at Braga (Both images: © Garry Shaw)



Earlier, caught in a sudden downpour, I'd finished the last steps of the Stairway of the Three Virtues, and rushed inside the church – my goal – to find its open space filled with similarly soggy tourists and pilgrims. Paintings decorated niches carved into the grey stone walls. Chandeliers and windows of various sizes, some above balconies, some in the high dome, let in light, illuminating statues of holy men in the walls. A sign beside a prominent slot in a box urged people to donate to the sanctuary (the word 'offering' in capitals). If you did so, Jesus would reward you, it said. In a side chapel, the image of Senhor do Monte was undergoing restoration work – it was probably the recipient of some of these donations. I made my way along the nave, coming across the preserved Saint Clemente on the right. He wasn't the only attraction for pilgrims: above Clemente, in an alcove, around 50 tiny busts of saints were arranged in lines on increasingly smaller platforms, like a holy wedding cake. Each figure contained a relic of the saint represented. And at the top, above everything, was a relic of the true cross.

But all of these signs of religious devotion paled in comparison to the decoration of the apse – the

final destination of all pilgrims to the sanctuary. Where you might normally find a painting by some Renaissance master, or at least a gilded crucifix, here a full scale reproduction of the crucifixion had been created in the round. The rocky peak of Golgotha was populated by Roman soldiers, relaxing now that their day's work was over. Other figures stood close to Jesus' cross, Mary at the front, a halo above her head. The two crucified thieves, flanking Jesus, were also faithfully reproduced, hanging on their own crosses. They were being snubbed by everyone present.

I turned around to look at the other people in the church, seeing faith and charity everywhere: the devout were praying, seated in rows, others were dropping Euros into offering boxes, contributing to the upkeep of the church and supporting the brotherhood that manage it. I'm sure that hope was present too, but this is normally kept in the mind and heart. Many pilgrims probably hoped for healing, forgiveness of sins, or perhaps for resurrection in the next life. Me? I simply hoped to one day return to Portugal. That, and to never have to walk uphill ever again. ●

Above: The crucifixion scene in the church of Bom Jesus do Monte (Image: © Garry Shaw)

Getting there

Flying

Various carriers provide direct services from the UK to Porto's Francisco de Sá Carneiro Airport. Among them is British Airways, Easyjet, Ryanair, and TAP Portugal (Portugal's national carrier).

Visas

Members of the EU do not require a visa to visit Portugal. Those from Canada, USA and Australia can also enter without a visa, as long as they stay for less than 90 days.

Getting around

Porto is served by a metro network, as well as buses and trams. Services are affordable, efficient, and frequent. Taxi ranks are also spread out around the city. Braga can be reached by taking one of the 'urbano' trains from Porto's São Bento Railway Station; these operate frequently throughout the day. From Braga, a short local bus ride brings you to the foot of the hill of Dom Jesus do Monte.

Weather

Summers are hot in Porto, with average temperatures reaching from 20 to 25°C. Winters are mild, but expect lots of rain.

Holidays

In 2017: January 1 (New Year's Day), April 14 (Good Friday), April 25 (Freedom Day), May 1 (Labour Day), June 10 (National Day), June 15 (Corpus Christi); August 15 (Assumption), October 5 (Republic Day), November 1 (All Saints' Day), December 1 (Restoration of Independence), December 8 (Immaculate Conception), December 25 (Christmas Day).

For more information about visiting Porto see www.uk.visitportoandnorth.travel

The Essentials

Time difference: GMT - 0

Language: Portuguese is the official language of Portugal. English is also widely spoken

Electrical current/plugs: Plug sockets have two round pins and have a current of 120V AC, 60Hz.

Religion: The vast majority of Portugal's population are Christian.

Water: Tap water in Portugal is safe to drink, and bottled water is widely available.

Politics: Portugal is a democracy with a president as Head of State.

Money

Currency: The currency in Portugal is the Euro (EUR; symbol €) = 100 cents. Notes are in denominations of €500, 200, 100, 50, 20, 10 and 5. Coins are in denominations of €2 and 1, and 50, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1 cents. ATMs are widely available throughout Portugal.

Credit cards: MasterCard, American Express, Cirrus, Maestro and Visa are widely accepted.

Traveller's cheques are widely accepted. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take traveller's cheques in Euro, Pounds Sterling or US Dollars.

Short history of Porto

Porto has been an important trading centre since Roman times. The city fell under Moorish control in 711, remaining so for the next 150 years, until Vimara Peres re-conquered the city. He called his newly won territory: the County of Portugal (after the town of Portus Cale, now in the greater Porto region). The Kingdom of Portugal was established in 1297. Afterwards, Porto became the launching pad for many seafaring missions, an age of exploration and maritime trade initiated by Henry the Navigator in the 15th century, leading to the creation of the Portuguese Empire. Relations between the English and Portuguese were strengthened by the signing of a mutual assistance pact in 1386, and the marriage of King João I and Philippa of Lancaster in 1387. These good relations continued for centuries, and in 1703, the Methuen Treaty enabled English trading posts to be established in Porto. From this time, England played a major role in the port wine trade. Over successive centuries, Porto continued to grow as an important centre of trade and industry, and today remains the economic heart of northern Portugal.

Shopping

Port wine is undoubtedly at the top of most tourists' shopping lists in Porto; bottles can be bought directly from the port-producing lodges in Vila Nova de Gaia, or from stores throughout the city. Porto is also well-known for its fashion stores, bookshops, and antique shops. For souvenirs, head to the Ribeira District, where you can get your hands on one of Porto's famous hand-painted tiles, or pick up a statuette of the Barcelos rooster to take home.



Above: Facade of the Church of Bom Jesus (Image: Jose Goncalvea)

This article has been reproduced from the Autumn 2016 issue of



FPE MEDIA

Timeless Travels Magazine is published by FPE Media Ltd

www.timeless-travels.co.uk

© 2016 FPE Media Ltd. All rights reserved. Whether in whole or in part, in any form or by any means, this publication may not be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted without the written permission of the publisher.