



TOUR of BEAUTY

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With international travel well and truly back on the cards, have you ever thought about a riding holiday in Portugal?





1. Look at the road below - perfect 790 Adventure country
2. Not a bad location to catch your breath
3. Just as well Andy and Alissa were on a self-guided tour: they stopped everywhere...
4. Between a rock and a hard place
5. Portugal: a jewel in the Iberian crown

From this secluded height we have one of the most beautiful parts of Europe all to ourselves. The mighty Douro River winds its way through the valley below us while towering lush green walls climb into the sky either side. Each one is a terraced vineyard lined with rows of vines full of plump purple grapes being warmed by the sun. The sandy trail we're chasing snakes between the vines until it wraps around the sloping mountain and disappears into the distance. We sip water and take in the view as the breeze cools us and our ticking motorcycle.

We're exploring one of the world's most famous wine regions and the only thing on our minds is if we'll be having red or white this evening. Now this is a proper honeymoon...

Last week we were in the UK saying 'I do'. And, as you might remember, two years ago we were a few years into our round-the-world motorcycle trip, making our way through Thailand en route to Australia when Covid hit. We had to abandon the bike in a mate's garage and fly back to Blighty.

Fingers crossed we'll be back on our trip by the end of the year, but that means returning to sleeping in a tent and boiling noodles on a fire most nights. So, we thought we'd treat ourselves to a little luxury for our mini-moon first and sign up for a self-guided tour of Portugal. All the planning, prep, gear, bike and hotels, etc. are taken care of. All we had to do is turn up and ride - absolutely perfect.

We jump back on the KTM 790 Adventure and follow our dirt road through the valley until it eventually swings back onto the main road.

Being on a self-guided tour means we have a pre-loaded GPS with all our daily routes mapped out. We have an accompanying book explaining the points of interest marked on our device and a bunch of optional off-road routes plotted out, too. We just completed our fourth dirt track of the day and our reward is a squiggly purple road route for the next 160km. We kick into gear, spin the dust off the rear wheel and head into the mountains.

The legendary National 222 road sign flicks past and our smiles widen. Dubbed one of the



OUR PURPLE ROUTE CLEVERLY CARVES ITS WAY THROUGH THE MAZE OF PEAKS AND OVER THE MIGHTY BRIDGES

best - and most romantic - roads in the world, we might as well give it a go. The road clings to the river as we fly around it constantly flitting between second and third gear. It shoots upwards and along the breadth of the valley before dipping back down to chase the riverbank. The KTM's parallel-twin is in its element and launches us up steep ascents with the slightest flick of the wrist.

We disappear deeper east into Portugal's northern region until we hit the border with Spain, then dip south into the National Park where the temperature hikes up to 36°C and the scenery rolls into sunburnt meadows. The days glide by quicker than the riding.

But the mountains are the most fun. Our purple route cleverly carves its way through the maze of peaks and over the mighty bridges and gargantuan dams that connect them. The main



YOUR TURN

We signed up for a self-guided tour of Porto, Portugal with Freeride Spirit. If you fancy a go at the same tour, here's what you need to know

YOU'LL NEED a valid driver's licence and passport and must be over 21. But that's about it. All the riding gear including helmet, intercom, gloves, boots and suit are included. So just take clothes for the evening and a bit of money. It's best to carry cash for small town cafes.

Included in the price is the bike (KTM 790 or 1290 Adventure), luggage, route, GPS, riding gear, hotels (4 or 5 star), breakfast and dinner, transfers, road support, medical and vehicle insurance. It's literally a turn up and ride service.

Our five-day, four-night accommodation tour was \$A3908, which ups to \$A5880 with a pillion. You'll need to factor in flights as well, which we paid around \$A270 return each on top from the UK. There are options for shorter or longer tours too.

Tours are run all year round, but the best time to visit is between spring and autumn as the weather is neither too hot nor cold. More info can be found at freeridespirit.pt





roads are immaculate, the bike begs for faster riding and we oblige – twirling up mountains like red wine swirling in a glass.

At home and in Europe, we'll search out twisty roads, ride them and then turn around to ride them again because they're in short supply or few and far between. But here it's non-stop... the only limiting factor is the battle of attrition with your wrist. They'll just keep on coming so long as you can keep on riding.

Whoever designed this curated route is a composer, summoning the best out of their country and enchanting the KTM to hum its sweetest tune along roads we'd never otherwise find, or spend a lifetime searching out.

Dizzy from the ride and in need of shade, we pull into a little village and search out the local coffee shop. All the villages have the same Portuguese feel: cobbled streets, a church, steep hills, a much-needed water fountain in the main square and a quaint coffee shop coupled with older chaps smoking and laughing the day away while basking in the sun. The coffee is short, sharp and strong, the food keeps on coming and



HANG ON, WHO ARE THEY?

Andy and Alissa packed up, sold everything and left the UK on 1 January 2018 to motorcycle round the world indefinitely. You can follow their adventures on madornomad.com

the people are warm and welcoming.

These alluring little towns and villages could easily trap you for days with their laid-back lifestyle. The route pulls us into Portugal's forests where the smell of pine fills our helmets before looping us out into the grasslands where almond and olive trees line the road.

The sun begins to dip in the distance and paints the sky a blend of orange and purple. The day passes and the chequered flag pops up on our GPS. The hotels are pre-booked and paid for on the tour along with dinner and wine. And it's posh, too. You know it's swanky when there's no menu and the chef comes over to your table to tell you what he'd like to cook for you. We eat so much that we waddle to bed feeling food drunk – the copious amounts of wine probably don't help.

The optional off-road routes are marked in green on the Garmin. They veer off the main route and cut across the countryside before linking back up and are anywhere from five to 30km long. They're too tempting to miss. Luring us in, we swing right and scramble up a dirt track, over a few ruts, through a gravel pit and blast out into the open. The tracks cut their way through the valleys into the distance and over the top of the Douro River. It's as though we're riding on Portugal's second floor, somewhere in the clouds. We roll into hanging vineyards in the sky. Vines are strung along the path and we ride

GAZING OVER THE BEAUTY LAID OUT IN FRONT OF US CONJURES MEMORIES OF FOREIGN LANDS

WHY TOUR?

Why pay for what you can do yourself?

MOTORCYCLE TOURS take the stress out of planning a trip. They're perfect for those who might not have the time to ride their own bike to a foreign country or spend hours researching routes, roads and hotels. Instead, that's all sorted by professionals who know their country inside out. All the leg work is taken care off so all you have to do is book a flight, turn up and have fun. Organised tours are a great and easy way of exploring countries on two wheels.

Guided tours are led by a professional tour guide and there will usually be more riders with you. So, if you have a bunch of like-minded mates and enjoy the social aspect of riding in a group then this is a great option.

A self-guided tour can be done alone (or with friends, too) but without a tour guide. Instead, you'll get a pre-loaded GPS with the route that you'll need to navigate and follow yourself each day.

Typically, both types of tours include the same setup such as the motorcycle, hotel, transfers, etc.



STATS

Distance 980km
Hottest temperature 36°C
Riding days 5
Nights 4
Kg gained 4
Bottles of wine bought 8



through carefully, trying not to flick any grapes with the mirror.

Gazing over the beauty laid out in front of us conjures memories of foreign lands. Swap the grapes for rice and we're back in Vietnam's cascading paddies. Welsh Snowdonian stone walls line the country lanes, the mountainous forests are borrowed from Cyprus's wild interior, the coffee houses and gorgeous towns from Italy and the French riviera lines the sea. Portugal ignites the best memories of other countries and wraps them up into one exquisite package.

We plot our last trail through one more vineyard as it leads us on a back route to the town and our hotel for the night. Whitewashed houses with orange tiled roofs appear from among the vine leaves in the distance and we can already smell the food and taste the wine...

We take the river road back to Porto. Leather-skinned fishermen line the promenades, coffee and ice cream shops invite you in, old yellow trams trundle by, fishing boats bob on the sea and our panniers clank from all the wine we've bought. This tour has spoilt us, it's like going on a luxury all-inclusive holiday, but you get to ride a bike all day. Portugal is just... perfect. ■