

Romancing the roam

Portugal's Douro Valley will make your heart beat faster, whether you're on honeymoon... or not!

'We kick into gear, spin the dust off the rear wheel and head into the mountains'

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 on either side. Each one is a terraced vineyard lined with rows of vines full of plump purple grapes being warmed by the late summer 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 motorcycle. We're exploring one of the world's most famous wine regions and the only thing on our minds is whether we'll be having red wine or white this evening. Now this is a proper honeymoon...

That 'do' moment

Last week we were in the UK saying, 'I do' in front of our family and closest friends. And two years ago, we were firmly into our round-the-world motorcycle trip, making our way through Thailand en route to Australia when Covid hit. At which point, we had to abandon the bike in a mate's garage and fly home.

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, in light of our recent wedding, 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 was turn up and ride - 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



Andy and Alissa on a honeymoon with a difference

'Last week we were saying 'I do' in front of family and friends'

we're alone and without a guide but 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 100 miles. We kick into gear, spin the dust off the rear wheel and head into the mountains.

Taking the National 222

The legendary National 222 road sign flicks past and our smiles widen. Dubbed one of the 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 roads are immaculate, the bike begs for faster riding and we oblige - twirling up mountains like

Continued over

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

With the routes planned, all you have to do is ride



Ancient villages with welcome drinking fountains



'Will it be red or white with dinner this evening?'

'The tracks cut through the valleys into the distance'

red wine swirling in a glass.

At home and elsewhere 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 in Portugal it's non-stop... the only limiting factor is the battle of attrition with your wrist. Rewarding roads 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 have found, or spend a lifetime searching out.

Yes, chef

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 the people are warm and welcoming.

These alluring little towns and villages could easily trap you for days with their laid-back lifestyle. Then the route pulls us into 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 local wine probably didn't help either.

Vineyards in the sky

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 three to 20 miles 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 through carefully, trying not to flick any grapes with the KTM's mirrors.

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. Snowdonian stone walls line the country lanes, the mountainous forests are borrowed from Cyprus' wild interior, the coffee houses, the 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 amongst 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 spoiled us, it's like going on a luxury all-inclusive holiday, but you get to ride a bike all day. Portugal is the perfect dream ride. [MCN](#)



Terraced vineyards line the mountains

Douro Valley Tour Stats

- Miles: 600+
- Hottest temperature: 36C
- Riding days: 5
- Nights on tour: 4
- Kg gained: 4
- Bottles of wine bought: 8

THE ESSENTIAL INFO



Andy and Alissa went with Freeride Spirit

'It's a literally a turn up and ride service'

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.

What do I need?

You'll need a valid motorcycle 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 money. It's best to carry cash for small town cafes.

What's included?

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.

How much?

Our five-day riding and four-night accommodation tour was £2180. With a pillion it's £3280. You'll need to factor in flights as well - we paid around £150 return each on top. There are options for shorter or longer tours as well.

When to go?

Riding tours are run all year round, but the best time to visit is during the spring and autumn as the weather is neither too hot nor too cold.

Which company?

We went with Freeride Spirit and thoroughly recommend the company and the tour. More info can be found at freeridespirit.pt

Why join a biking tour?

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 of 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 vs self-guided

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 likeminded 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) but without a tour guide. Instead, you'll get a pre-loaded GPS with the route. Both types of tours include the same setup such as the motorcycle, hotel, transfers etc.



Don't worry you won't get lost on the route



No need to hunt out the best roads



The optional off-road routes add to the fun



You can expect some stunning food and scenery