

PRIVATE COLLECTIONS AND MANOR HOUSES IN NORTH PORTUGAL

Wednesday, October 17th to Saturday, October 27th, 2001

On this program we visit the north of Portugal, a veritable Aladdin's cave of secret treasures.

Protected by historical accident, saved from the great earthquake that ravaged Lisbon in the eighteenth century, hidden in remote countryside estates, and overlooked by Napoleon when he invaded Portugal, these fragile relics from distant countries speak of Portugal's illustrious but largely forgotten past as a world maritime power. Many of the works of transient beauty, such as the delicate porcelain and early glassware, did not lend themselves to transportation, and were destroyed. Others, however, packed in straw barrels, and taken inland directly from the Ribeiro in Oporto or from sailboats that anchored in the harbour of Viano do Castelo, have survived intact through the centuries. Early Ming China, carved jade and ivory, lacquer work from Japan, porcelain from India, paintings on ivory, silver from Holland, Anglo-Indian furniture, delicate embroidered textiles, jewels from Royal houses of Europe; these – and more exotic fare, unrecognizable to even the most sophisticated collector – are amongst the wonders one may find in the North.



Portugal in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was the center of the trading world, celebrated for her voyages of discovery to the East and West. The names of Vasco da Gama, who in 1497 sailed to India and back, Pedro Alvares Cabral, who in 1500 discovered Brazil, or Ferdinand Magellan, who first completed circumnavigation of the globe in 1522, are well known to all students of history. And it was Portuguese Northern sailing vessels that were responsible for settling the Azores and the Congo, and for mapping the banks of Newfoundland. But the story of Portugal, and the story of her Northern regions, is not simply one of ships sailing out of port, but also those that returned, and the riches that they brought with them. Shipbuilding, learned from the Muslims in the eight century, together with astrolabes and compasses, took Portugal across the Atlantic to Brazil, South America and Africa to return with gold; to India to return with perfume, spices, Chinese silk, porcelain and gemstones. While great treasures from each trade were destroyed by the 1755 Earthquake in Lisbon, no such tragedy befell Oporto, so that the region retained much of the treasures of the ancient maritime world, giving the families of the coastal towns great wealth and royal titles. Great ancestral family lines, such as the House of Cruz, Oliveira de Silva, de Matos, or Real were established, and through service to the crown, families were rewarded with diplomatic or political positions. When gold was discovered in Brazil in the eighteenth century, many of the families saw their riches increase to even greater degrees, and they housed the treasures they accumulated in their inland estates, as Aladdin might in his cave.

It is to these more remote parts of Portugal that we travel, seeking treasure. It is a place of dreams: strange, full of color, with sea towns dating back to medieval times, Roman ruins, and wise, silent churches watching over the winding streets. It is also a place of enchantment, with its mix of Manueline Baroque and eighteenth century Manor House architecture. And once you have sailed up the golden river waters of the Douro Row, you will also experience the enchantment of the wine and port regions, where row upon row of twisted vine roots climb on the rocky ledges, yielding a yearly harvest of rich, potent Port wine, a place where the magic that only time, and perhaps fine wine, can create.

The program will be led by Gaye Blake-Roberts, Curator of the Wedgwood Museum, England, and previously of the Decorative Arts Department at The Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Her in-depth knowledge of the decorative arts studied over a twenty year period will lead us to the discovery of objects that because of their fragility have never been seen in western museums. We will also have assistance from local experts in jewellery, architecture, silver and port wine. Collections on this program have not previously been open to the public.

Wednesday, October 17th

Our journey begins in Portugal's oldest town, Oporto. We stay in the colorful Ribeiro section in the town's newest five star hotel, the Hotel Porto Carlton, situated on the waterfront of the River Douro. Presiding over the narrow streets of Oporto are the narrow medieval buildings that climb the hillside overlooking the river. The colorful tiles, or azulejos, bejewelling their facades sparkle in bright hues of blue, yellow and orange. The cobbled streets and dilapidated exteriors of some of these buildings, often belie the riches within, and hide relics of secret and ancient religious sects. After walking these streets with our guide, we are introduced to the story of Port Wine through a privileged visit to The Factory House. Built in 1786 by John Carr of York for the English traders who maintained Port wine farms inland as well businesses in Oporto, it was an establishment for meeting and entertainment. To this day the Association of Members remains highly exclusive. The building's main ballroom retains its classical splendor, and the kitchen, drawing room and music gallery have changed little since the nineteenth century. The Factory House has an important collection of eighteenth century porcelain, as well as glass and silver objects associated with the drinking of Port Wine. Participants will enjoy a sampling of vintage Ports. Dinner is at Graham's Lodge, home to the Port Wine industry of the Symington family, who moved to Oporto in the eighteenth century and established vineyards in the Douro valley. We are personal guests of the family and dine in their private room overlooking the harbor.

Thursday, October 18th

The history of maritime trade in Portugal, its links with West and East, and the cargos that passed through its ports over a four hundred year period will be discussed by Gaye Blake-Roberts. We take an architecture walk that includes the Ethnographic Museum, providing history of the Douro region, stretching back to Roman times. We enjoy the picturesque narrow streets, the coffee shops boasting delicious custard pies, and the cathedral, Igreja de Sao Francisco, with its famous golden interior and its atmospheric view of the city. Lunch is at the Ateneu Commercial do Porto, which houses an exquisite faience porcelain collection dating back to the seventeenth century. With the curator and Gaye Blake-Roberts we note the influence of Oriental, Arabic, Dutch and English porcelain on factories in the Porto Viana, Coimbra and Lisbon areas. Gentleman have an alternative afternoon program with a visit to the Graham Port Wine Factory and a study of the history and manufacture of port wine, and extensive tasting of Graham's Ports. Private dinner on an estate outside the city.

Friday, October 19th

The Douro River, set in an imposing geography of deeply incised valleys and rugged terrain, where bald mountains tumble into the valley, and where as you travel deeper into its still world, the terraced slopes of the hills are lavished with vines, allows for a day of nurturing silence. As we travel along the river, we pass eighteenth century manor houses and steep granite cliffs and our minds wander to the lives of the early English and Scottish settlers who came to seek their fortunes in this terrain, thousands of miles from the culture and civilization they understood. Like these noble travellers we end our day with a pilgrimage to Braga, one of Portugal's oldest towns where we stay at Castelo Bom Jesus, a former home for Cardinals and built at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Its imposing rooms of granite and white alabaster and lavish antique furnishings are belittled by the glory of its terraced gardens. Grand, sweeping staircases lead to courtyard upon courtyard where fountains and flamboyant stone ornaments and pinnacles create a spectrum of spatial ambiguity. This ambiguity is deliberate as the gardens have a religious significance, created to correspond with the religious journey of those who sought sanctification at the Castelo. The Castelo has only eleven rooms and the experience of staying in this palatial structure is key to our understanding of the North and its culture, as well as to our own journey into a history that is not recorded on the pages of any history books.

Saturday, October 20th

We enjoy a lecture on Portuguese silver and jewellery by Portugal's most noted author and expert Gonalo de Vasconcelos e Sousa, whose book on Portuguese jewellery covers four centuries of the art of the goldsmith and gem traditions. We drive north to visit one of the oldest goldsmith families in Portugal, who for the last two centuries have traded gemstones with India and Brazil and achieved a level of craftsmanship that rivals the finest in Europe. We study the jewellery collection, as well as items from their private collection, including pieces from European Royal Houses of the eighteenth century, as well as glass from Spain and Persia and early Ming China. A traditional Portuguese lunch accompanies our study. We dine at Castelo Bom Jesus.

Sunday, October 21st, Monday, October 22nd, and Tuesday, October 23rd

We are received by members of prominent families dating back to the sixteenth century, and gain entr e to private homes with collections carefully guarded over the centuries. We spend

the next two days viewing architecture and artefacts illustrating the North's exceptional character, and its important place in the development of Western Art. The items viewed, many of which are highly unusual and unique to the region, will be expertly identified and explained by Gaye Blake-Roberts. In addition, we visit Casa dos Biscainhos, which dates back to 1665, and is today the Decorative Arts Museum in Braga, and the Casa de Vale de Flores, with its splendid gardens. We visit Palacio do Raio, one of the most fascinating residences in the north of Portugal, and view its magnificent tile work. Viana do Castelo, at the estuary to the river Lima, was an important trading port from the thirteenth century. The museum here houses collections accumulated through the donations of important families, rendering a complete picture of cargos that arrived in Portugal over a five hundred year period; and our study here enhances the tapestry that we weave of early maritime trade. We will visit Casa de Mateus near Villa Real where priceless maps, antique costumes, lacquered furniture; fans and paintings are displayed inside a splendid Baroque palace. We dine here with the present descendant owner of the palace.

Wednesday, October 24th

We make our way to Buçaco. In this sylvan forest is the Buçaco Palace Hotel, known for its fantasy architecture. This nineteenth century palace designed by an Italian architect and scenery painter who took as his influence the surrounding forest, one of the world's oldest, is a place like no other. Inside, as if enshrouded within the enchanted forest, we are lost in an opulent and antique other-world. Gifted sculptors have created a wonderland of lichens, mosses, giant ferns, ornamental cabbages, and festoons of fruits in the interweaving of carved stone and arched vaulting. As we dine in the palace's splendid hall and enjoy vintage port wines, we are transported to a territory outside of any experience we have previously enjoyed. If fact, it is as if having rubbed the golden lamp, Aladdin's genie had granted us our wish to taste the nectar of a world unspoiled by man. In the midst of this primeval forest we will have time to wander through the ancient trees, stumbling upon hermit shelters, for the forest was used as a monastic retreat as early as the sixth century. None will leave as they entered; all will be enchanted.

Thursday, October 25th and Friday, October 26th

We drive to Coimbra. Here we stay at Quita das Lagrimas a charming eighteenth century house. We visit Alejo Museum where we study the pattern of tiles prevalent in Portugal and their

evolution through the centuries. We will also look at Moorish influence as well as the impact of other cultures. The Botanical Garden of Coimbra has been famous since the eighteenth century and contains many rare species of plants. Notable is the Jardim da Manga. Outside of Coimbra we visit the factory of Viste Alegre, known for its fine porcelain and where the most famous porcelain in Portugal is produced. Our journey concludes with the excavations of Portugal's earliest history – Conimbriga, the largest and most extensively excavated Roman site in Portugal.

Saturday, October 27th

Departure via Oporto Airport.

Registration

The fee for the program is \$8,000 per person double occupancy with a \$1,500 single supplement, including round trip business class airfare to and from New York. This includes ten nights luxurious accommodation, most meals, wine with meals, entrée to private collections and to places not generally open to the public, private entrée to museums, private sessions with curators, expert scholars, entrée to the palaces, meals at the homes of leading Portuguese families, and collectors, extensive scholarly reading material prepared by Arts to Life, cocktail receptions, luxury ground transportation and boat travels. Arts to Life reserves the right to make changes to the schedule. Registration must be accompanied by a deposit of \$3,000. The balance of payment is due on August 31st, 2001, and after this date no cancellations will be accepted and no refunds will be made unless the space can be filled. Any cancellation before the cancellation date will be subject to a processing fee of \$250 per person. We advise all persons to take out travel insurance and can provide information upon request. Arts to Life reserves the right to make any changes to the schedule whatsoever, should the need arise. Should any speaker or host withdraw we will endeavour to make a suitable replacement. Arts to Life does not act as a travel agent and any additional reservations at hotels, changes to scheduled airline, or extensions of vacation, are to be made by the participants individually. For more information, please contact Arts to Life on 646-792-2340.