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Wine Along the Winding Douro River



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From powerful reds to angular whites and succulent fortified wines, Portugal has a rich history in the winemaking world. Since 200 B.C., the Portuguese and their ancestors have cultivated vineyards, over time furthering the development of over 250 native winegrape varieties. A country with diverse microclimates and distinctive terroir, this stretch of the Iberian Peninsula has a unique wine landscape, producing a variety of wine styles from these many varieties.

One of Portugal's most well-known wine regions is the Douro Valley. This area, surrounding the mighty Douro River as it flows west from the Spanish border to the Atlantic, is known the world over for both its unique Port wines and more traditional red and white still wines. The terrain is rugged and mountainous, with vines planted along steep slopes leading down to the river and its tributaries.

The vineyards of the Douro produce wine for both its still wines and its most famous wine style, Port, which is a fortified wine made in the city of Porto at the mouth of the Douro River. The region is a laboratory for a number of indigenous grapes, but four key varieties stand out in both styles of wine production: Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Tinta Roriz, and Tinta Barroca.

Touriga Nacional

One of Portugal's most famous native grapes, Touriga Nacional produces full-bodied red wines with great aging potential. The grape is often used in Port but also finds itself in unfortified red wines. Because of its structure, flavor profile and role in the region's blends, it often is compared to Cabernet Sauvignon.

Touriga Franca

The other star of the region, Touriga Franca is one of the most widely planted red grapes in the Douro Valley. It is one of the principle varieties in many Ports and often is used in the regions red blends, again in a Bordelais tradition similar to the role of Cabernet Franc.

Tinta Roriz

Also known as Tempranillo across the border in Spain, Tinta Roriz is one of the key grape varieties planted in the Douro Valley. A rich and lively red wine, this grape is adaptable, often picked early and preferring a warmer climate like those nearer to the Spanish border. It tends to be used in red blends and bottled in a varietal wine but is also often found as a component of Port.

Tinta Barroca

A very popular Portuguese grape, Tinta Barroca thrives in cooler parts of the Douro further east. Due to the grape's high sugar levels, this variety, blended with others,

lends itself to port, adding perfume and aroma, but can also be used to add aroma and softness to big Port blends.