

## PORTUGAL DUORO RIVER TRIP BY MELODY BOHLMAN, TC

Once upon a time, really, not too long ago, there was a group of 33 adventure seekers from the Houston area that sought to go to a mysterious land, one of the great Iberian capitals named Lisboa (Lisbon, Portugal) and the Douro River valley that was far, far away.



Group Dinner at Saraiva's, in Lisbon,  
Photo by Diane Gresko

The adventure seekers discovered that Lisbon is truly a gem among Europe's capitals. It was built on seven hills overlooking the mouth of the Tagus River. It has a storied history that includes Julius Caesar giving it the status of a municipium over 2000 years ago. After the disintegration of the Roman Empire, the town came under Muslim control in 711 AD and remained a melting pot of cultures. Lisbon became the capital of Portugal in 1256. Lisbon experienced growth as a trading port and Portugal emerged as a major colonial power with unprecedented commercial activity centered on raw materials from the New World, Africa and Asia. Lisbon's great economic growth and renowned architecture as one of the world's most splendid capitals was seriously impacted by The Great Earthquake of 1755 and the ensuing tsunami. The city was in ruins but managed to re-create itself with large open squares and avenues flanked



Group Photo Jeronimos Monastery in Lisbon,  
Photo by Dottie Morrogh



Fatima, Portugal, Photo by Diane Gresko

by imposing palaces, public buildings, and churches. It is so breath taking that it is hard to imagine that the city was once in ruins.

We had a panoramic tour of the city which included the Monument to the Discoveries that is a tribute to the explorers from the Golden Age of Discovery. We went to Belem Tower, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that stands over



Dinner at Quinta da Pacheca Vineyard, Photo by Dottie Morrogh



We survived the walk up to Quinto do Tedo Winery,  
Photo by Diane Gresko



Group photo at  
Coimbra University,  
Photo by Dottie Morrogh

the waterfront in Lisbon. We also witnessed the beautiful Manuelino style of architecture seen throughout the Jeronimos Monastery.

Our club dinner at Saraivas Restaurant and Bar allowed us to sample some of the delicious local cuisine and wines, and although not far from our wonderful hotel, Hotel Sana Lisboa, was a "very short walk on level terrain, Houstonian translation uphill and maybe not "just there" but good exercise for sure and worth the walk.

Although we all loved Lisbon, we were excited to be on our way to our ship for the river cruise portion of our journey. On the way to Porto, we stopped at Fatima, an important Catholic shrine where we witnessed devote worshippers seeking miracles making their way down a hill on their knees with padded knee pads all the way to a shrine. Whether one believes or not, it is something to behold and can be quite moving to witness the faith of such individuals.

Our next stop in Coimbra, found us among wizards of the Hogwarts fashion featured in the Harry Potter movies and books. No, really, I'm not making it up! Coimbra is home to one of the oldest universities in Europe and the oldest academic institution in the Portuguese-speaking world. The university students wear the traditional Portuguese attire to class which does happen to look exactly like the wizards at Hogwarts. Some of the wizards (students) sell pencils and pens to earn money, and what college student doesn't need money?! As it



The "Wizards" at Coimbra University  
Photo by Marsha Lutz

turns out, J.K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter series, taught English as a second language in Porto a short distance from Coimbra. The University garb, the library, and other settings may have inspired settings for her books.

At last, we reached Porto and the MS Emerald Radiance our home for

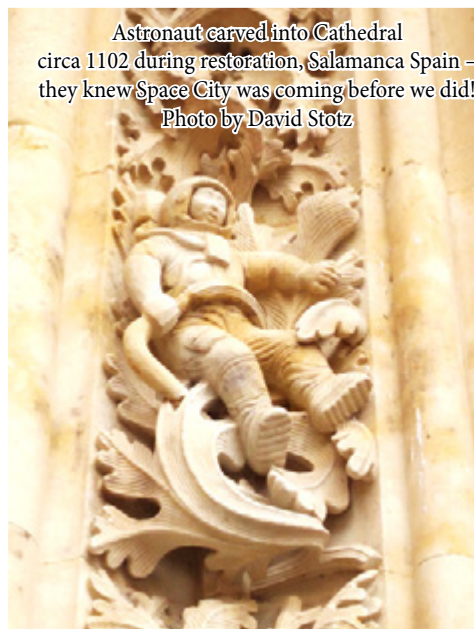
seven nights. So many of our adventurers were impressed with the elegance of the ship! I think the unlimited beverage package didn't hurt either ... cheers to that! We had a wonderful sunset cruise on the Douro River through Porto where we could see the fabulous views that the river and the city of Porto had to offer from our ship.

We sailed along the Douro Valley which has lots of winding turns and twists and is designated a UNESCO World Heritage site. Our first stop was Pinhao that sits on a river bend and is surrounded by terraced hillsides that produce some of the world's best Port wines. We were able to see the railway station that is more than a century old and is notable for a series of 24 large pictures made from tiles that depict motifs relating to wine cultivation and production as well as the local scenery and traditions. Some enjoyed a wine-tasting at the station.

After we left Pinhao, we enjoyed a guided tour of and a Port tasting at the Quinta do Tedo vineyard with spectacular views of the steep hillsides with vine cultivation and the terraces of the Douro Valley. We had some adventurers



TSG Group Photo aboard SS Emerald Radiance in Porto, Photo by Dottie Morrogh



Astronaut carved into Cathedral  
circa 1102 during restoration, Salamanca Spain –  
they knew Space City was coming before we did!  
Photo by David Stotz

that were tempted by the strenuous label and chose to hike up rather than ride the bus up to the vineyard.

Our ship docked at Vega de Terron, considered the gateway to Spain, where we were able to walk into town and explore. The next day we boarded a coach that took us to the center of the Castile y Leon region of Spain and a visit to Salamanca. Salamanca is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the most important university cities in Spain. We enjoyed a guided walking tour where we saw the detailed and intricately carved buildings of the university, the 12th century Romanesque Church of San Martin. Apparently, they knew Space City was going to be visiting at some point as during the restoration of the church an astronaut was carved into a stone façade. We also saw the interesting house of shells. We then enjoyed the Plaza Mayor, the heartbeat of the city, where many had gelato and watched the local families enjoying the wonderful weather.

Our ship continued the journey to Pocinho where some of the adventurers canoed on the Sabor River and others enjoyed an excursion to the Coa Valley Museum. The museum houses prehistoric stone carvings made by early inhabitants of the Douro which were uncovered during construction of a nearby dam project. We enjoyed a lazy afternoon cruising along the Douro River on the MS Radiance heading to Folgosa where we disembarked to have dinner at Quinta da Pacheca, a traditional vineyard estate. The dinner was fabulous and the winery was decorated beautifully with flowers and lights and we were serenaded by a local Fado.

A few of us visited and bonded at the local hospital in Lamego (all are fine!) while the rest of the adventurers journeyed by coach to the baroque village of Lamego. While in Lamego, they visited the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Remedies which is a sanctuary perched on top of a hill with 686 step granite stair case decorated with the traditional Portuguese blue and white azulejos tiles. A few of our adventurers actually climbed the steps!

We sailed on from Lamego back to Porto, one of the oldest European centers and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We had a guided tour of Porto, a beautiful and eclectic mix of modern and ancient architecture. We also experienced a Port tasting at Taylor's, one of the largest and oldest (1692) port producers in Portugal and a supplier of port wine to H.M. Queen Elizabeth II.

We had lots of entertainment while on board the ship with active participation in game shows like name that tune, a tour of the galley on ship – amazingly efficient, card playing, a traditional Portuguese BBQ on top of the ship, watching how the many locks operate, watching how the ship navigates the river bridges and taking in the breath taking scenery. The main trip participants flew home from Porto while some of us went on to Barcelona where we saw Dali's Museum among many, many other interesting sites. I encourage you to visit Space City's website and look at our photo album – we have over a couple of hundred photos and I cannot do the trip justice.



Group Photo outside Dali Museum, Barcelona,  
Photo by Dottie Morrogh