



Port: A Beloved Portuguese Tradition

Description

Our Eighth Featured Libation of the World comes from lovely Portugal

When thinking of Europe, you picture all the beautiful and vibrant countries and the cultures that go with them. One such place is brilliant Portugal. In a place like Portugal, you would expect that it has to have a special drink to match its culture. With the number of vineyards they have, you may think wine would be their focus, and it is. However, this is not your average wine. It is a specific wine known only to Portugal. A potent, rich, and sweet drink that most whither at the comparison. Visiting the Duoro Valley in Portugal, you have to try the Port. Let's pour some Port wine while we learn more about this delicious nectar.



What is Port Wine?

Port wine (also known as Vinho do Porto or Port) is a Portuguese fortified wine produced in the Douro Valley of northern Portugal. Port wine is typically a sweet red wine, often served with dessert, although it also comes in dry, semi-dry, and white varieties. Other port-style fortified wines are produced outside

Portugal. These countries are Argentina, Australia, Canada, France, India, South Africa, Spain, and the United States. However, under the European Union Protected Designation of Origin guidelines, only wine from Portugal can be labeled “Port.”

Types of Port Wine

There are many different types of port, which are, in most cases, distinguished by varied aging techniques.

Ruby Port

Distinctively fruit-forward flavors often characterize Ruby Port due to reduced reductive aging in oak barrels. The wine must age for at least two years, but this usually occurs in huge balseros barrels or steel tanks. This results in a smoother profile while retaining its fruity profile. Labeling as a reserve refers to the high-quality grape they are using.

Tawny Port

Tawny describes a variety that has undergone more extensive barrel aging. Consequently, it tends to have a spicier profile with less emphasis on the fruits. Tawny Port labels tend to show age, indicating the minimum time spent in the wood barrels of all the mixed in the final blend. If no age is given, it will likely mean it spent 3 years aging. Reserves will have had at least 7 years in the casks.

White and Rose Port

White Port is made of white grapes. It is mainly used as a cocktail ingredient but makes a good aperitif too. Rosé Port is a derivative of Ruby Port. The wine has undergone a short maceration time, like a rosé wine, to create a distinctive pink color.



Vintage Port

If the harvest was especially excellent, the producers might choose to declare a vintage, which I.V.D.P must approve. The bottle will reflect a year that all the contents of the bottle came from that harvest.

These are aged in barrels or vats for a maximum of 2 1/2 years before bottling. They are bottled with sediment that consists of the remaining grape solids. This allows the port to continue aging in the bottle. In most cases, they will spend an additional decade bottle aging but may go much longer.

Late Bottled Vintage Port

Most often referred to as “L.B.V.,” a late bottled vintage port emerged during the 1960s when the popularity of Vintage Port lessened. Rather than being bottle-aged, producers left their wine in the barrel. Traditionally, L.B.V. port is bottled unfiltered, which results in a similar albeit more affordable alternative to vintage port. However, some producers have started filtering and fining L.B.V. Port before it is bottled. Traditionally, L.B.V. port is bottled unfiltered, which results in a more affordable alternative to vintage port. However, some started filtering and fining L.B.V. port before bottling.

Colheita Port

The term describes port wine that has spent a significant amount of time barrel-aging. Colheita Port must age for at least seven years, but it can spend decades aging in wooden barrels.

Crusted Port

Crusted Port combines several vintages and allows producers to create new flavors with a unique blend. Vintage and late bottled vintage varieties crusted port is bottled with sediment.



Region and production

Port is produced from grapes grown and processed in the demarcated Douro region. The wine produced is then fortified by adding a neutral grape spirit known as aguardiente to stop the fermentation. This leaves residual sugar in the wine and boosts the alcohol content. The fortification spirit is sometimes referred to as brandy, but it bears little resemblance to commercial brandies. The wine is then stored and aged, often in barrels stored in a lodge (same meaning as “cellar”), as in Vila Nova de Gaia, before being bottled. The wine received its name, “Port,” in the latter half of the 17th century from the seaport city of Porto at the mouth of the Douro River.

Porto is still where much of the product was brought to market and exported to other European countries. The Douro valley, where Port wine is produced, was defined and established as a protected region. The Douro was thus an official appellation in 1756, making it the third oldest, after Chianti (1716) and Tokaj (1730).

The valley of the Douro River in northern Portugal is a microclimate optimal for cultivating olives, almonds, and especially grapes, necessary for making Port wine. The region around Pinhão and São João da Pesqueira is considered the center of Port production. It is known for its picturesque Quintas – estates clinging to almost vertical slopes dropping down to the river. The conditions where the grapes

are grown are harsh, and the terrain makes for difficult labor in the scorching heat.

Wine regions



The demarcation of the Douro River Valley includes a broad swath of pre-Cambrian schist and granite land. Beginning around the village of Barqueiros (43 miles upstream from Porto), the valley extends eastward almost to the Spanish border. The region is protected from the influences of the Atlantic Ocean by the Serra do Marão mountains. The area is subdivided into three official zones: the Baixo (lower) Corgo, the Cima (higher) Corgo, and the Douro Superior.

Baixo Corgo – The westernmost zone located downstream from the river Corgo, is centered in the municipality of Peso da Régua. This region is the wettest port production zone, receiving an annual average of 35 in of rain, and has the coolest average temperature. The grapes grown here are used mainly to produce inexpensive ruby and tawny ports.

Cima Corgo – Located upstream from the Baixo Corgo, this region is centered on the town of Pinhão. The summertime average temperature of the region is a few degrees higher, and annual rainfall is about 27 inches). The grapes grown in this zone are considered higher quality and are used in the bottlings of Vintage, Reserve, aged Tawny, and Late Bottled Vintage Ports.

Douro Superior – The easternmost zone, extending almost to the Spanish border. This is the least cultivated region of Douro, partly due to the difficulties of navigating the river past the rapids of Cachão da Valeira. This is the aridest and warmest region of the Douro. The overall terrain is relatively flat, which offers the potential for mechanization.

What is the main grape variety used?



Our complimentary Vinsanto

Over a hundred varieties of grapes (castas) are sanctioned for Port production. However, only five (Tinta Barroca, Tinto Cão, Tinta Roriz (Tempranillo), Touriga Francesa, and Touriga Nacional) are widely cultivated and used. Touriga Nacional is widely considered the most desirable Port grape, but the difficulty in growing it and the small yields cause Touriga Francesa to be the most commonly planted grape.

White Ports are produced the same way as red Ports, except that they use white grapes – Donzelinho Branco, Esgana-Cão, Folgasão, Gouveio, Malvasia Fina, Rabigato, and Viosinho. While a few shippers have experimented with Ports produced from a single variety of grapes, all Ports commercially available are from a blend of different grapes. Since the Phylloxera (aphid-like insect) crisis, most vines are grown on grafted rootstock. One notable exception is the Nacional area of Quintado Noval, which, since being planted in 1925, has produced some of the most expensive vintage Ports.

Grapes grown for Port are generally characterized by their small, dense fruit, which produces concentrated and long-lasting flavors, suitable for long aging. While the grapes used to create Port made in Portugal are strictly regulated by the Instituto, do Vinho do Porto, wines from outside this region that describe themselves as Port may be made from other varieties.

Are you interested in visiting beautiful Portugal? Check out our [Portugal Travel Guide](#) to guide you in planning your next adventure

The Character of Port



Port wine is typically richer, sweeter, heavier, and higher in alcohol content than unfortified wines. The addition of distilled grape spirits causes this. It fortifies the wine and halts fermentation before all the sugar is converted to alcohol. This results in a wine usually with 19% to 20% alcohol.

Port from Portugal comes in several styles, divided into two categories: wines matured in sealed glass bottles and wines that have matured in wooden barrels.

Without exposure to air, the former experience what is known as “reductive” aging. This process leads to the wine losing its color very slowly and produces a smoother wine on the palate and less tannic.



The latter, matured in wooden barrels, whose permeability allows a small amount of exposure to oxygen, experience what is known as “oxidative” aging. They, too, lose color but at a faster pace. They also lose volume to evaporation (called angel’s share), leaving a slightly more viscous wine.

The I.V.D.P. (Instituto dos Vinhos do Douro e Porto) further divides Ports into two categories: regular Ports (standard rubies, three-year-old Tawny, and white Ports) and Categorias Especiais, special categories, which include everything else.

How best to experience Port



Port, like other wine, should be stored in a cool but not cold, dark location (as light can damage the Port), at a steady temperature (such as a cellar), with the bottle laid on its side if it has a cork, or standing up if it is stoppered. You can serve White Port cold, and you should serve between 15 and 20 °C (59–68 °F). Tawny Port may also be served slightly cooler.

Going to any vineyard is a great way to enjoy some beautiful scenery while doing some tastings. All our winery experiences in Duoro Valley were friendly and informative. There are plenty of Port Houses in Porto to visit while exploring this beautiful city; they are all just as welcoming and knowledgeable.



If you want the best experience, we suggest walking across to the Porto warehouse side of the river and taking a tour of one of the Port Houses there. You will need tickets, so order in advance if you have time constraints. During our visit, we found many were booked. Luckily we had dedicated our afternoon to this side of the river so we could easily return in a couple of hours for the tour and tasting. Our favorite visit was the Calem Port House, and it was indeed a unique experience. Walking through the historic Port House while learning about Port production and the characteristics of all the different

types of Ports. The best part is the generous tasting of Ports included at the end. We will be returning to explore more Port Houses, it was just that much fun.

What to pair with the Port



Most people serve Port after meals as a dessert wine in English-speaking countries. It pairs with cheese, nuts, or chocolate. As for White and Tawny Ports, they usually are served as apéritif. In Europe, all types of ports are frequently consumed as apéritifs. We feel there is no wrong time to enjoy such a tasty libation, even with a meal.

One of our favorite places in Portugal was the walled city of Obidos. Check out our blog post- [Obidos: Portugal Perfection](#).

Taking Port home



Though you can find an extensive collection of Ports back in your home country, the specific one you enjoyed during tastings in Portugal will not likely be there. Especially ones with limited production. Any exceptional ones you enjoy, you should purchase when in Portugal. One of our regrets was not purchasing more.

Purchasing Port at Home



you can find Port in every quality store where alcohol is carried. It is hugely popular worldwide, and many places have some incredible Port collections for sale. It can be pricey compared to the prices in Portugal. You will have sticker shock. The prices in Portugal for quality Ports are shockingly low at times. This is why you should get all you can while in Portugal.

We buy Port in our local liquor/wine stores. Depending on the location, large-scale stores like Total Wine will often have an excellent Port collection to choose from. If you don't see it in the store, check what they have online; you may be able to special order it. Costco even has a Kirkland Port that is quite good.

[Drizly.com](https://drizly.com) is an online company that delivers to your door and best serves those living in bigger cities. This is a newer site, and it has a pretty impressive inventory.

We found a site called [Wine-Searcher.com](https://wine-searcher.com) which will search online sources worldwide for any wine, beer, and spirits. They have an extensive Port collection online. They will ship to your home if your state allows it.

May we suggest a couple of recipes to expand your Port experience?



Refreshing and Tangy

Port and Tonic

Ingredients

4 ounces White Port Wine
8 ounces of tonic water
1 orange slice
2 lemon slices
2 lime slices
Ice

Add ice to a tall glass. Add the sliced fruits. Pour the White Port wine. Stir gently while pressing the fruits so some juice is released. Pour in the tonic water and stir.

Adapted from [Wine Lover Magazine](#)

Classic and Elegant

Porto Negroni

Ingredients

1 ounce Tawny Port
1 ounce of Gin
2 Tbsp Campari
Fresh orange Zest
Ice

Add ingredients to a cocktail shaker with ice. Stir for several seconds and strain into an old-fashioned glass over 2 ice cubes. Garnish with orange zest.

Recipe adapted from [Portcocktails.com](https://portcocktails.com)

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Delicious Ruby Gem

Portuguese Daisy

Ingredients

2 ounces Ruby Red Port Wine
1 ounce of Brandy
2 Tbsp Fresh Lemon Juice
1 tsp of Simple Syrup
1 tsp Grenadine
Orange Slice
Ice

Combine all ingredients into a cocktail shaker with ice. Shake for 20 seconds. Strain into a chilled glass and serve. Garnish with an orange slice.

Fabulous and Creamy

Valentino's Delight

Ingredients

2 Tbsp Ruby Port
1 1/2 ounce bourbon
2 Tbsp Coffee liquor
1 1/2 ounces of heavy cream
Chocolate sprinkles
Crushed Ice

Combine all ingredients with the crushed ice into a cocktail shaker. Shake until the shaker gets cool—strain into a chilled Martini glass. Sprinkle on the chocolate sprinkles.

Adapted from [Wine Lover Magazine](#)



Image from [Wine Lovers Magazine](#)

Where to stay when visiting Porto or Duoro Valley

Our recommendation is the stay as close to the river in either location. It all revolves around the river and it is the heart of the Port region.

We believe it is important to price out properties on various sites. [Expedia](#) is a US-based company, whereas [Booking.com](#) is Europe-based. Not all properties appear on both. If the establishment has a website, check the price there as well.

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