

# DRIVE YOUR ADVENTURE

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Portugal

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Clémence Polge and Thomas Corbet

Lannoo





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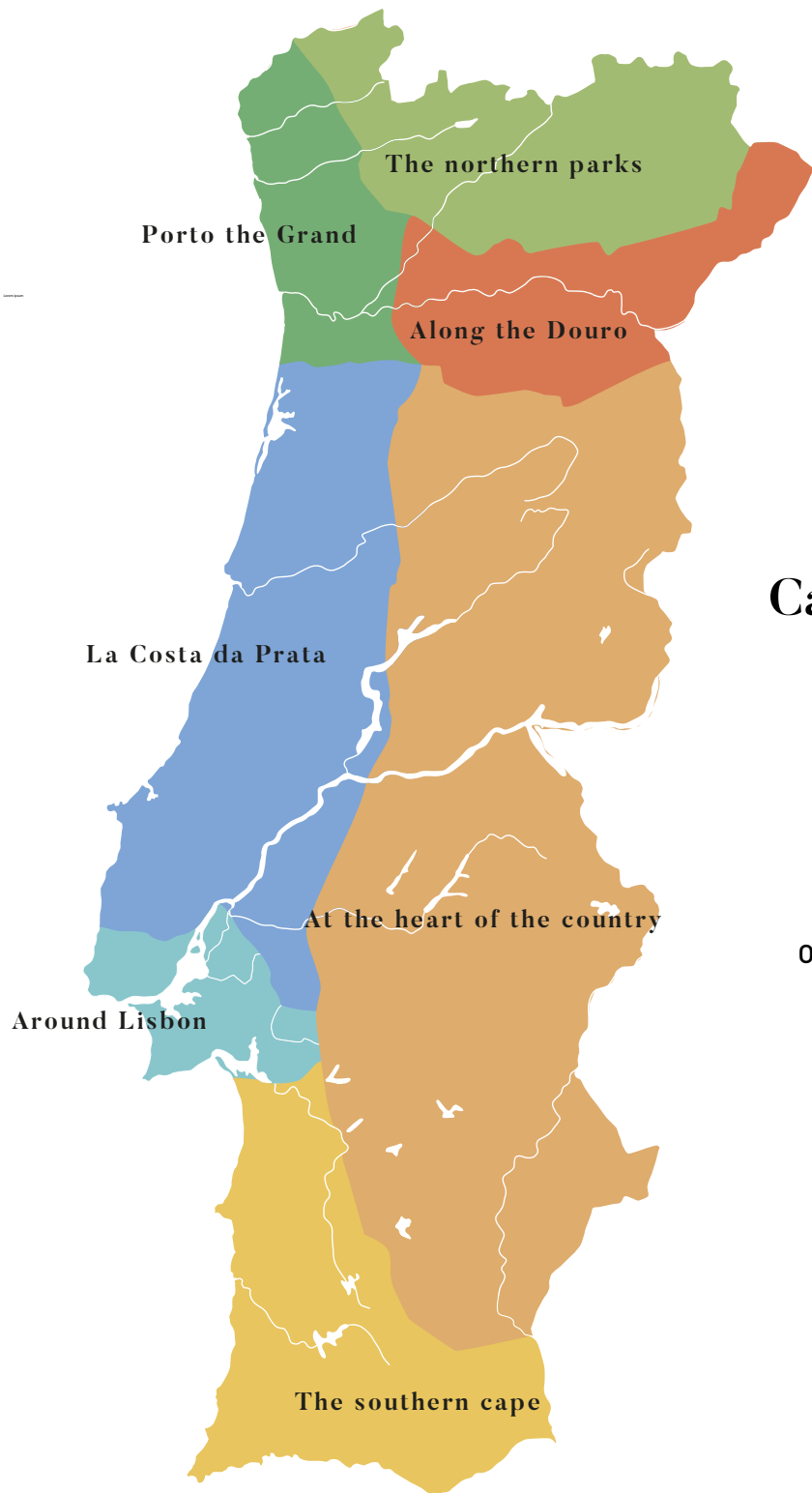
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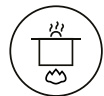
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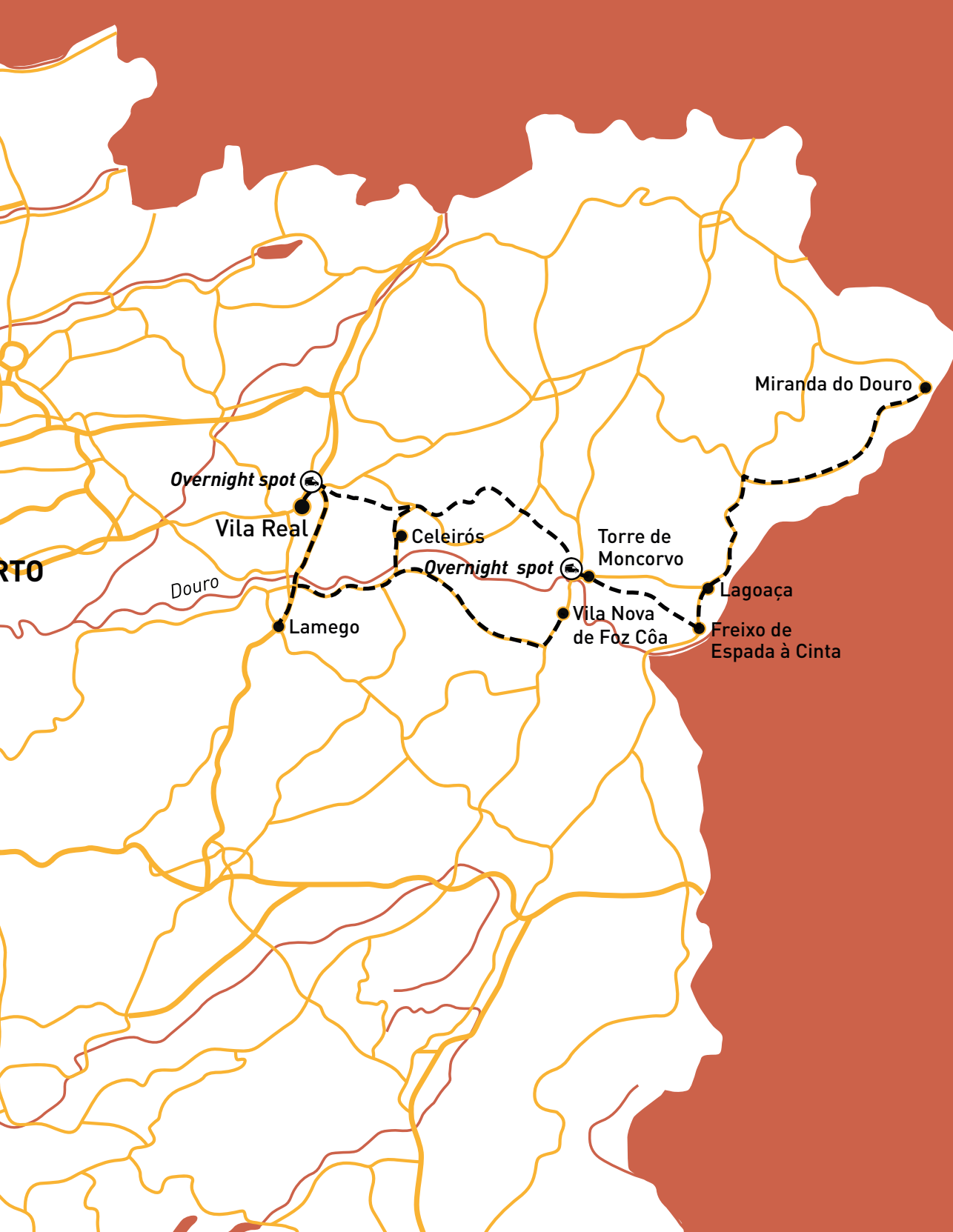
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It's nearly 28 September, the date we are due to set off on our Lusitanian (i.e. Portuguese) adventure. It's the day we've spent four months preparing for, months in which we drew up the best possible itinerary and contacted loads of people to organize meet-ups and activities, all so that this guide would be as comprehensive as possible.

For this voyage, we collected a brand-new Marco Polo from the Mercedes-Benz France offices and drove back down along the River Ariège to polish off the final details, break in our new equipment and so forth. and figure out what we should call our camper van! After an animated discussion, we decided on Fernão, the first name of the Portuguese explorer Magellan. Clémence, Thomas, Nel and Fernão: now the gang's all here.

Finally, our departure date has arrived! We set off from the camper van trade fair Salon du Véhicule de Loisirs, cheered on by a delirious crowd. (OK, largely made up of friends and the WeVan and Mercedes teams, but delirious nonetheless.) After driving for about fifteen hours, we cross the Spanish-Portuguese border. Portugal, here we come!





Miranda do Douro

Overnight spot

Vila Real

Celeirós

Torre de Moncorvo

Overnight spot

Douro

Lamego

Vila Nova de Foz Côa

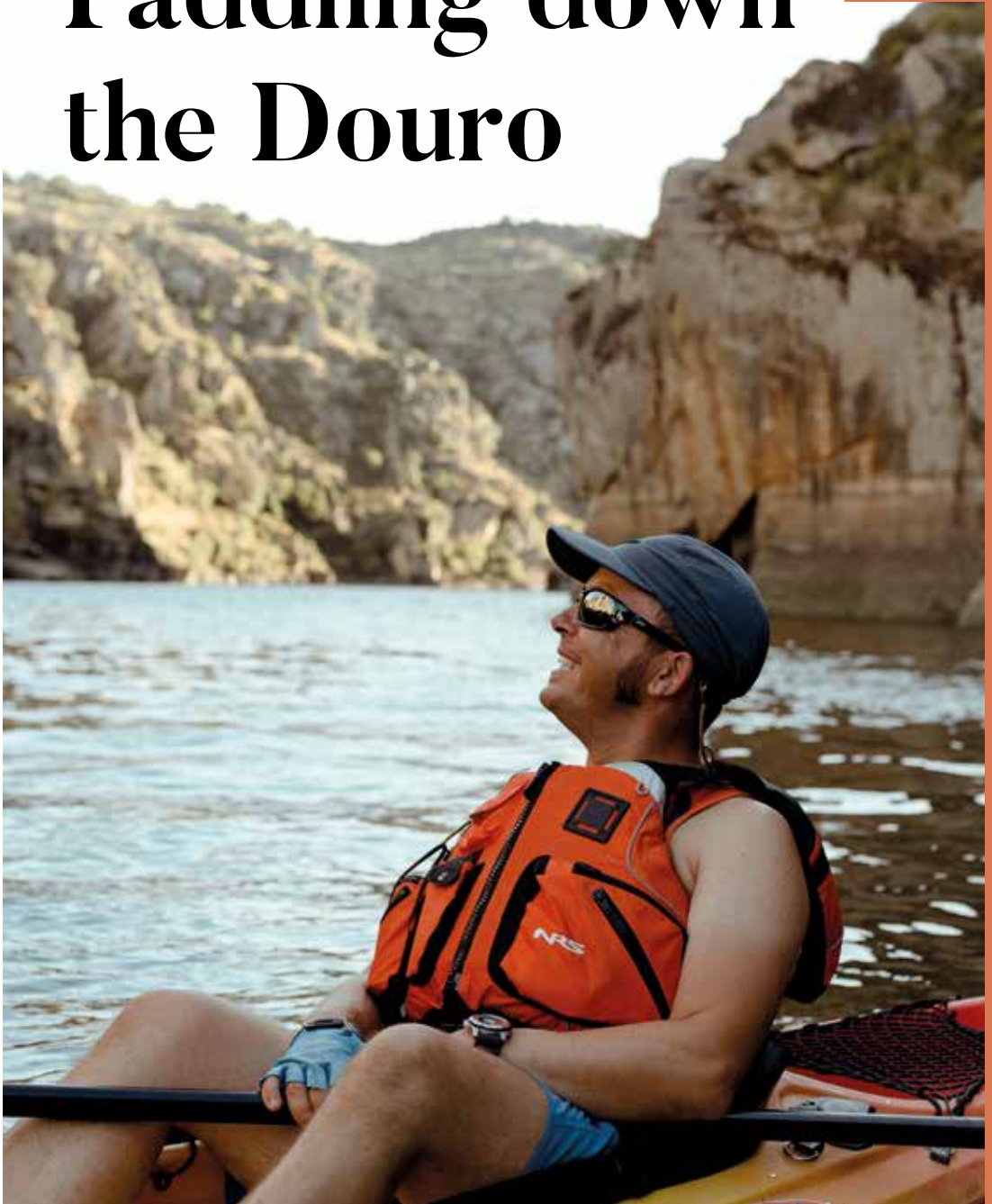
Lagoaça

Freixo de Espada à Cinta

PORTO

Along the Douro

# Paddling down the Douro





## Along the Douro



For our first encounter with Portugal, we decided on the little town of Miranda do Douro and the Douro International Natural Park. Located in the north-east of the country, this little town is not on the international tourist radar. But there is nothing ordinary about its history and our guide for the day, Pedro Cordeiro, enjoys regaling us with some fascinating details.

One aspect in particular will catch your eye – or ear (given that like us, you will have been revising your Portuguese before starting your trip): the locals in Miranda don't speak Portuguese to one another, they speak Mirandese, which was recognized as an official language in 1999 and is the only other official language in the country. Here's how!

Well, towards the end of the eighteenth century the European monarchies were not exactly on the best of terms. In other words, there were wars going on everywhere. Portugal and Spain were no exception and in 1762 Spain decided to invade its neighbour, attacking (you guessed it) Miranda do Douro. Although thought virtually impregnable, the town still fell after the gunpowder stored in the castle exploded, destroying a third of the place to create a way through. A few years later, the bishop of Miranda fled the town for the splendour of Bragança, taking with him all the riches of the diocese. Miranda never recovered; it had to wait nearly two centuries before it could rise again from the ashes thanks to the construction of several dams in the River Douro. This isolation for two centuries explains why the town has such a distinctive culture!

We're in luck because Pedro turns out to be an inexhaustible source of information on this topic. During the off-season, he's an ornithologist who liaises with wind farm operators to

make sure migrating birds don't experience any problems in the south of the country. But he is also (and most importantly as far as we are concerned) the only kayaking guide in Miranda do Douro.

After a morning of discussions and taking care of business, we meet him at the edge of the water before setting off for a few hours paddling along the bottom of the splendid canyon carved out by the Douro. The river forms a natural border between Portugal and Spain as it meanders past amazing cliffs coloured by lichen and inhabited by various species of eagle and even black storks. The rhythm is relaxed, Pedro is a joy to listen to, while he also takes





the time to pick up bits of rubbish floating around.

We totally recommend calling on the services of our new friend (30 euros per person for our trip). You won't regret your time with this nature lover and advocate for his region. He can take you out on the water or along the local tracks in his 4x4, on foot or on bike to show you the area or go bird spotting. It's a must!

## **Douro Pula Canhada**

Cais Fluvial, 5210-000 Miranda do Douro

Pedro is the only kayak guide in Miranda do Douro and for this section of the river. Best period for kayaking trips: May to October. Specialized in trips for a few friends or family (larger groups accepted). Outdoor shower available for use on arrival!



## Overnight spots in Portugal

Camping 'in the wild' is banned in Portugal, whether you are doing so in the countryside, on private land or in natural parks (where punishments are harsher). However, a converted van can spend the night in a parking place on two conditions:

- There must be no sign saying overnight parking is prohibited.
- The camper van mustn't be bigger than the parking space.

However, normal camping practices are not tolerated at all. So you won't be able to put out tables and chairs or set up the awning wherever you are parked (excluding campsites of course).

For the first few nights, you are advised to get to your spot during daytime to help you get your bearings. Make sure your spot is legal, quiet and flat. Whether it's a parking area on the edge of a forest or park or close to a beach, next to a harbour office or even in a quiet side street, always make sure you won't be disturbing the locals and check there aren't any signs banning parking entirely or during certain times (on market days, for example). Finally, don't park in front of an outdoor seating area or shop window or somewhere that obstructs the view from a home.

There are lots of digital tools to help you find suitable spots. There's the indispensable Park4Night to get other travellers' advice on a spot, Google Maps and its extension Street View to locate that rare gem using aerial view, or various social networks (especially Instagram) where vanlifers share their plans with pictures and GPS coordinates.

If you're not sure, if there's a storm brewing or you're just very tired, it may not be very glamorous but you can always find refuge in a supermarket car park. Many chains, such as Intermarché or Continente, have special parking spaces with a few key services (launderette, discharge of dirty water and blackwater, refilling your drinking water tank and so on).

# Hunting for lookout points



We're only one day into our Portugal adventure and we've already been able to admire the beauty of the Douro International Natural Park from the water. In addition to our kayaking trip, our guide also took us to a miradouro, or lookout point in English, the São João das Arribas, perched a few dozen metres above the river.

It's a magnificent site that has been occupied since the Stone Age. You can also still clearly see traces of structures from the Roman Empire. You can also find a chapel there, which is obviously more recent. On Pedro's advice, we now plan to go hunting for more of these famous miradouros tomorrow. Many of these

lookout points are little known and some only became official just before the summer of 2019. No matter, we'll manage to track them down!

So we follow the path of the Douro (at a distance) driving along the N221, deviating now and then to take in some cliffs. Which was not always an easy matter! Take the example of the lookout point in Picote, a tiny village with very narrow streets. We'd advise parking in the church square (or Largo da Igreja for language purists) and then continuing on foot. The walk will take you five minutes and you won't regret it.

## Along the Douro

If you think the views from Picote were dazzling, you will love what comes next! The viewpoints come fast and furious almost without interruption as we drive south along the N221. Without listing them all, we were particularly impressed by the miradouros of Cruzinha, Carrascalinho (spectacular in the fading light of the day!) and Penedo Durão, all accessible by road. Even if 'road' sometimes means no more than a dirt track... but nothing our trusty Fernão can't cope with. But here too, it was definitely worth the effort.





## Great addresses we found

### Area de servicio para autocaravanas

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Torre de Moncorvo  
41°10'51.2"N | 7°02'29.6"W

A small, well-run site for motorhomes, camper vans and even classic campers, with a large grass area for people to pitch their tents. It's laid out in terraces like the surrounding vineyards. The sanitary facilities are basically clean, a few electric sockets are available (depending on how busy it is), there's water, bins, somewhere to empty your tank, the municipal Wi-Fi – everything you need for a very affordable zero euros: you can stay at this site free of charge!



### Gruta Nossa Senhora de Lourdes

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Sanfins do Douro  
41°17'31.1"N | 7°30'51.7"W

It's a little weird, but this little parking spot where we decided to spend the evening has a small cave containing a religious statue. Presumably Our Lady of Lourdes, given the name of the place. Whatever; this spot on the west-facing hillside gives a nice view of the valley and we were able to enjoy a totally amazing sunset in reds and oranges. You could almost spend the night there!



## Overnight spot

41°10'38.55"N | 7°6'45.976"W

### La Praia Fluvial de Foz do Sabor

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If you're looking for a great place to spend a sunny day, go for a swim or enjoy some aquatic sports, there's no need to look any further! The Praia Fluvial de Foz do Sabor, at the point where the Sabor and Douro rivers meet, is ideal for you. With its vast stretches of greenery, clear water, barbecues and water tap points available for all, it is also the ideal spot for blowing up your stand-up paddling board by hand. Well, it's a long story.

And if blowing up your SUP board ever takes you all day and you get caught by surprise by the setting sun, this attractive little riverside beach is just the place to spend the night! It means you will be able to dip your feet in the water in the morning, take advantage of the sanitary facilities (under Café Sabor) and eat your breakfast with a lovely view of the river.



# The quinta as a home from home



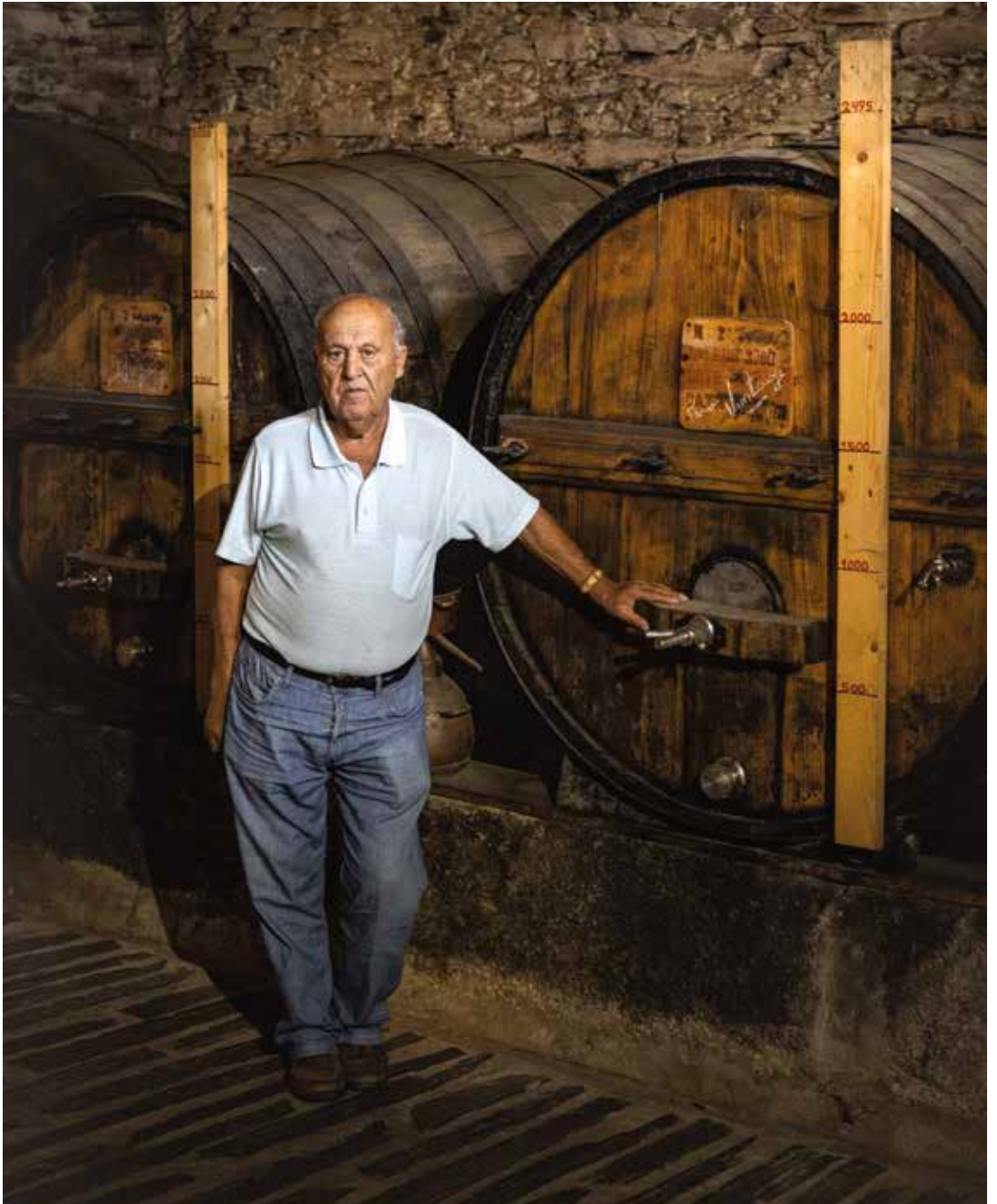
It's Thursday 3 October and we've made our plans. After a day off yesterday, we will be doing a big loop through the Douro valley, famous for its vineyards (a detail that will be important later). On the programme are some beautiful sun-baked routes, views of the Douro and a full tank of fuel. In short, non-stop happiness.

But it doesn't take long for our plans to get derailed after we stop off in the little town of Sabrosa, one of several places that claim to be

the birthplace of Fernão de Magalhães. Of course we couldn't pass up an opportunity to pay homage to the famous navigator Magellan and the namesake of our faithful four-wheeled steed! A few photos later, we are just about to get in our camper van to set off again when we are accosted by Alfredo Martins, a cultural officer at the town hall, who offers to give us some information about the region. Our stickers aroused his curiosity. It seems our programme is set to be extended.



Along the Douro



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If you have any questions or comments about the material in this book, please do not hesitate to  
contact our editorial team: [redactiekunst@lannoo.com](mailto:redactiekunst@lannoo.com)

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