

A Tour of Portugal with the American Friends of Versailles

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American Friends of Versailles outside Palacio de Queluz.

TRAVEL • BY: **SHARON HOGE**

Liberally sprinkled with Bourbons, Beauharnais, Orleans and other descendants of noble French families, Portugal was a fitting destination for the American Friends of Versailles annual tour. Raising funds to restore the peeling painted Baroque ceiling of the room where guards were stationed to keep watch on **Marie Antoinette's** suite of Versailles apartments, the group sponsors annual trips overseen by **Princesse Beatrice de Bourbon des Deux Siciles**, herself a scion of those noble lineages. This year about two dozen of us joined her to visit historic monuments, sites, estates — and her relatives — in Lisbon, Evora, the Duoro Valley and Porto.



Tape sustains the ceiling of the Queens Guards Room in Versailles which the AFV is raising funds to restore.

TUESDAY, September 26

On a beautiful afternoon in late September we assembled in Lisbon's historic Bairro Alto Hotel where Princesse Beatrice had preregistered us and arranged welcome gifts in our rooms: lotion and soap of the region, the city's hallmark custard tarts, and a mini bottle of porto rose. Late that afternoon we all gathered in the lobby reuniting with friends and meeting some new traveling companions before proceeding for cocktails at the home of art connoisseur and Christie's curator **Pedro Girao** whose light-filled apartment perches high over views of the city.



Assembling in Lisbon, the American Friends of Versailles group met up with Princesse Beatrice in the hotel lobby.

After watching dusk descend on the pastel colored buildings below, we walked next door for a Welcome Dinner at the Gremio Literario, an historic private club. Housed in the **Visconde de Loures** mansion, it was founded in 1846 by writers, poets, scientists dedicated to using their intellects to achieve moral improvement. Dinner concluded with a quartet performing the country's characteristic *fado* music, mournful, sentimental strains which are included on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List.



Our host Pedro Girao shows AFV board member the Comtesse Serge de La Bedoyere and Princesse Beatrice the view from his terrace.



Since the 1870s intellectuals have gathered at the private club Gremio Literario.



Dinner was set for us in a Gremio Literario grand salon.



Princess Beatrice previewed the week's itinerary.



Former AFV President Olivier, the Vicomte de Rohan, greeted the group.



Richard Holthaus made a toast.



The Vicomte de Rohan, Suzanne McDonough, and David Hamilton at dinner.



Our guide for the week Cristina Leal introduced the fado musicians.

WEDNESDAY, September 27

Wednesday we were introduced to unique features of the country which at one time was among the richest and most prominent regions of Europe. Beginning at the Royal Coach Museum, we followed the collection's curator who pointed out details on some of the most elaborate vehicles ever created. From there it was a short walk to snack on Portugal's iconic custard tarts at the Pasteis de Belem.



Museum director Dra. Silvana Bessone led us through the coach museum and provided lively commentary.



Queen Amelia, the French princess wife of Carlos I, established the coach museum in 1905.



The coaches are among the most sumptuous vehicles ever created.



We stopped to sample the renowned custard tarts at Pasteis de Belem.



The flakey crust of the custard tarts at Pastéis de Belem is based on a secret monks' recipe.

Originally a country hunting lodge, the Palacio Fronteira has been surrounded by city buildings, but remains a fantastic, historic enclave. Guided by the manager, we learned the historic significance of its tiled walls, frescoed panels, private chapel, and formal gardens. After aperitifs on the terrace, we were served lunch in a room lined with tile murals depicting battles which led to the ascendancy of the Braganza dynasty.



Now in a Lisbon suburb, Palacio Fronteira was originally a hunting lodge.



Palacio Fronteira is surrounded by formal gardens.



Blue and white tiles result from the discovery of cobalt blue and reflect influences of imported Ming china.



Blue paint on garden walls controls mosquitoes which linger on the surface from dusk to dark.



AFV Founder Catharine Hamilton was recovering from an ankle-breaking fall. A bust of King Manuel keeps an eye on our group's James Conrad Hanson.



Betty Smith, Catharine Hamilton, and Richard Holthaus.



A formal luncheon was served in the dining room decorated with tile murals of battles that established the Braganza dynasty.



Dr. Susan Kendall admires a globe in the library. French Minister of Justice Emeritus Pascal Clement finds a third use for the historic tiles which both beautify and protect against mildew.

Some of us took a tram ride back to the hotel then rested before driving to the resort town of Estoril where **Diana Morta e Costa** greeted us in her childhood home the Forte da Cruz. Originally a coastal defense, the forte is on the beach overlooking the Atlantic Ocean and now steps away from Estoril's famed casino where "James Bond" was depicted gambling. We dined in a salon where we could overhear the crashing waves outside.



Our group enjoyed jolly comfortable bus trips between locations.



Oceanside Forte da Cruz in Estoril was our destination for dinner.



Diana Morta e Costa welcomed us to Forte da Cruz, the seaside castle in Estoril where she grew up.



The great grandfather of the current owners hired artisans to transform the fort into the elegant home where we dined.



The Forte's dessert mousse was a multi-flavored work of art.

THURSDAY, September 28

In a day focused on Portugal's dynasties, we began with a drive toward Sintra and a private tour of Queluz National Palace which embodies the extravagant period of Portuguese culture that followed the 1690 discovery of Brazilian gold. A reaction against heavier Renaissance style, commissioned in 1747, its Rococo exterior and formal gardens were clearly influenced by Versailles.



One of the country's most sumptuous palaces, Rococo Palacio de Queluz was influenced by Versailles.



The extravagance of Queluz is an expression of Portugal's enrichment after the discovery of gold in Brazil.



A portrait of Queen Maria I over a French piano which may have been played by Mozart. Maria's consort (and uncle!!) Pedro III supervised construction of Queluz. Beyond the formal gardens, in the background where the town now stands, people would gather to glimpse the nobles strolling, playing games, cruising the garden canals.



A selfie portrait of Francis Hammond, the professional photographer who accompanied us. Intrepid traveling companions Gale Arnold and Marjorie Vickers.

From there we proceeded to a luncheon where Princesse Beatrice introduced us to her cousin the **Duke de Braganza** who was our host. Presumed heir to the throne, he is the man who would rule if Portugal still had a king. He recounted stories of his ancestors pictured in portraits on the walls and **Duchesse Isabel** showed us her collection of miniature birds, some damaged when her children played with them. We dined on salt crusted cod served with the Duke's vintage wine which is sold to benefit his charity.



The Duke and Duchesse de Braganza hosted us for lunch at their home in Sintra.



Duchesse Isabel in stripes with AFV members Nathalie de la Bedoyere, Michele Fouan , and Sharon Hoge.



If Portugal still had a monarchy, the Duke would reign as king. The Duke's own vintage was served at lunch.



Catharine Hamilton thanked the Duke for hosting us at lunch.

Before dinner we toured the Jeronimos Monastery, the prime example of the extravagantly ornate Manueline style. Built throughout the sixteenth century, it was funded by a tax on commerce from Africa and Asia that added up to 150 pounds of gold per year.



After a twilight visit to the Jeronimos Monastery we proceeded to a reception at the French embassy with spectacular views to the harbor.

A short ride away we re-joined the Duke and Duchesse de Braganza at Santos Palace, another former royal residence, now one of France's most elegant embassies. **Ambassador Jean-Michel Casa** served cocktails before we walked up the hill to dinner served in the Restaurant A Travessa, a former 1653 convent. Now converted to one of Lisbon's most popular eateries, it is acclaimed for its use of local, seasonal produce.



French Ambassador Jean-Michel Casa received us at the French embassy, Santos Palace.



In the 15th century, Santos Palace became a royal residence for the marriage of King Manuel I.



Considered one of the finest French Embassies, Santos Palace has one ceiling totally encrusted with porcelain plates.

FRIDAY, September 29

From palace to palace was the theme of the day. We started in the charming town of Vila Vicosa at the Ducal Palace which is the traditional home of the Dukes of Braganza. Once the family ascended to the throne in the early 17th-century, the kings lived primarily in Lisbon and Brazil and the Ducal Palace was largely undisturbed until the advent of the railroad made it more accessible. Today

family photos and memorabilia intermingle with official furnishings in the mammoth structure and the room where **King Carlos** slept the night before his 1908 assassination has been kept intact.



Approaching Vila Vicosa, an ancestral home of the Braganza dynasty.



Furnishings removed from Vicosia to the royal palaces in Lisbon and Brazil have been returned or replaced during the 20th century. Elaborate furnishings expressed wealth from the New World.



The NYC boro of Queens is named for Catherine of Braganza who also introduced drinking tea to the English. The room where King Carlos slept the night before his assassination has been kept intact.

Steps away, a former convent has been converted into Pousada D. Joao IV an elegant posada/hotel where we relaxed at lunch in a charming dining room overlooking the central courtyard.



Luncheon was served at the Posada D. Joao IV, an elegant inn across from the palace. Inset: Thinly sliced pineapple carpaccio was served for dessert.

After an hour's drive we arrived in Evora and had a few minutes to explore the winding streets of town before dinner with an "old friend" **Diana Alvares Pereira de Melo, the Duchesse de**

Cadaval, who had traveled with us in Spain two years ago. Dynamic, inventive, creative, Duchesse Diana, is current head of the second most prestigious branch of the Braganza family. Her efforts to preserve tradition include writing books about past queens and princesses, opening parts of the palace as a public museum, and promoting local artisans and designers.



Standing beside her cousin Princesse Beatrice, Diana, 11th Duchesse de Cadaval, greeted us at the entrance to the Chapel of Palacio de Cadaval.

She greeted us at the palace's chapel, noted as the country's most beautiful private place of worship, where a chorus of singers dressed in traditional costumes serenaded us a capella. Proceeding upstairs to the Palacio Cadaval, we wandered among exhibits of family and historic artifacts before the Duchesse and her mother served a delicious dinner based on favorite family recipes.



Tiled arches and murals lead to the altar in the chapel which is considered one of Portugal's most beautiful private places of worship.



The acclaimed chapel interior is the setting for an AFV group portrait. A local chorus filed into the Chapel singing traditional songs in a concert Duchesse Diana dedicated to Bonnie Deutsch and Philip Hartung's first wedding anniversary.



Married last year during the AFV tour of Sicily, Bonnie Deutsch and Philip Hartung celebrated their first anniversary in Portugal. A charming junior hostess was Duchesse Diana's daughter Isabelle,

Princesse d'Orleans, the daughter of our hostess.



Duchesse Diana's mother Claudine joined us for a dinner featuring favorite family recipes.



Duchesse Diana organized the Palacio museum's exhibit featuring family artifacts interspersed with witty fashions by designer Agatha Ruiz de la Prada.

SATURDAY, September 30

A long cross country bus ride through the lands of the Knights Templar took us first to the extraordinary Convent of Christ in Tomar where we marveled at another important example of extravagant Manueline architecture and saw sites frequented in the sixteenth century by **Prince Henry the Navigator**.



Founded by crusaders, the Convent of Christ in Tomar is one of Portugal's most important historic buildings.



Princesse Beatrice, James Hanson, Philip Hartung, and Curry Glassel pause in one of the Convent cloisters originally tiled for Prince Henri the Navigator. Inspired by Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Convent's 16-sided Charola is elaborately decorated with religious paintings and polychrome statues.

In a nearby village, the former Palace of the Salazares has been converted into the Hotel Palace da Lousa. We were treated to lunch served in its library — shrimp veloute, mushroom risotto with monkfish, berries cake with chocolate ice cream.



The Hotel Palace da Lousa was once a noble residence.

Proceeding into the valley of the Duoro River we entered the exclusive port wine area where grapes are grown on hillside terraces to maximize exposure to sunlight. Our guide explained how the climate fosters the sugary grapes with deep humidity-seeking roots that are required to produce the eponymous wine.



Luncheon was served in the paneled dining room of the Hotel Palace da Lousa.

We spent the night at the sumptuous Hotel Six Senses. Eight levels have been added to an historic palace, descending down the hill and offering spectacular views of the Duoro river below. The ultra-modern guest rooms are mini-suites with mammoth marble bathrooms and partitions separating the sleeping and sitting areas. Cellular phones control the window shades and lights and guests are invited to make use of fitness rooms, indoor and outdoor pools, and luxurious spa treatments.

Seated at one long table for dinner we were joined by the hotel's director of marketing Malfalda Braganza, a cousin of Princess Beatrice.



A ducal palace has been transformed into the 8-story Hotel Six Senses.



Partitions delineate guest room sleeping and seating areas overlooking forest views.



Views from the hotel overlook vineyards and the Duoro River below.



Candlelit dinner at one long table was hosted by Marketing Director Malfalda de Braganza, a cousin of Princesse Beatrice.

SUNDAY, October 1

Driving up the steep hill after leisurely breakfast, we stopped in the Baroque city of Lamego where some of the group attended services in the cathedral. The 18th-century Bishop's Palace beside the church has been remodeled into a museum displaying a fine collection of extravagant altars, five significant religious paintings by **Grao Vasco**, and a unique set of tapestries depicting the story of Oedipus and commissioned by the bishop as a cautionary warning to **King Joao III** who had considered marrying his father's comely widow.



Breakfast was served by the fountain on the terrace.



The excellent Lamego Museum exhibits an extraordinary collection of 17th-century gilded chapels.



Baron Roland de l'Espee and our excellent guide Cristina Leal discuss details of the Oedipus tapestries.

Towering over the city square, the Shrine of Our Lady of Remedies is a place of pilgrimage, and I climbed the 612 steps of its terraced staircase to arrive at the chapel nestled between twin bell towers high over the city.



The famous pilgrimage site of Our Lady of Remedios rises above Lamego's main square. I climbed 612 steps to the chapel at the top.

Arriving at the Quinta da Pacheca port wine estate, we were served wines produced at the vineyard as we lingered over lunch at a table elaborately decorated with local fruits and flowers.



Former owner Mrs. Teresa Serpa Pimentel greeted us at Quinta da Pacheca vineyard.



Patsy and Brinkley Dickerson survey the vineyard view.



Luncheon was served at a long table decorated by Mrs. Serpa Pimentel.



Marketing Director Ricardo Santos described the vineyard's wines. Once decanted, port must be consumed within 5-15 days.

After a quick stop to admire the Casa de Mateus, one of the country's finest examples of civilian Baroque architecture, we arrived in Portugal's second city Porto and were ensconced in wonderful old-world rooms of the convenient Intercontinental Hotel.

Dinner was served across the river at the exclusive Yeatman Luxury Wine Spa Hotel, which touts not only the "best views over Porto" but the city's only Michelin restaurant, awarded two-stars, where we feasted on the specialties of chef Ricardo Costa while overlooking the panorama of the city lights sparkling below.



We stopped en route to Porto to visit Casa de Mateus, one of the country's finest examples of baroque civilian architecture.



My room in the Intercontinental Hotel overlooked Porto's main square.



We descended the grand staircase for a formal dinner at Yeatman Hotel.



Menu of our 2-star Michelin dinner at Yeatman Hotel.

MONDAY, October 2

We spent the day exploring highlights of Porto, a UNESCO Heritage City, and were overwhelmed at the intricate décor of the Arabian Salon in the Bolsa Palace “Stock Exchange” and surprised by the ornate interior of the deceptively somber grey stone St. Francis Church. Boarding a typical Rabelo boat, we took a luncheon cruise under the city’s six bridges (one designed by **Gustav Eiffel**) downstream to where the Duoro river spills into the Atlantic Ocean.



The Palacio da Bolsa or Stock Exchange was constructed wholly by Porto craftsmen.



The wealth pouring into Portugal during the 19th century is expressed in the Arab Salon of the Palacio da Bolsa.



Around the corner from the Bolsa Palace we climbed the steps to Gothic Saint Francis Church.



Luncheon was served on a traditional Rabelo boat while we cruised Porto's harbor.



While we dined, the boat headed down river to the mouth of the Duoro river at the Atlantic.

After a reception with officers of the private gentlemen's Club Portuense, our Farewell Dinner was held in the room where local debutantes are presented each spring. The meal concluded with deliciously oozy local *Queijo da Serra* cheese and vanilla soufflé, accompanied of course by still more port wine which we had come to love. AFV Founder Catharine Hamilton presented each of us with an *azulejo* tile as a souvenir of the many memorable experiences of the trip.



A farewell reception was held at Porto's oldest private Club Portuense.



Francisco Mendia, architect Luis Pessanha Moreira, and Catharine Hamilton. Some AFV gentlemen bought the club's attractive official necktie.



Dinner was served in the ballroom where Porto's debutantes are presented to the public.



Catharine Hamilton toasted our hosts and the AFV group.



Always appreciating plentiful port.



Each of our group received a commemorative azulejo tile bearing the royal coat of arms.

TUESDAY, October 3

While some of us returned to the States, those who stayed behind did a bit of shopping and toured Porto's historic Sao Bento railway station, its vestibule lined with a blue and gold floral frieze and 20,000 tiles depicting important battles and scenes from the country's history. The trip concluded with a luncheon where guests toasted the trip with final glasses of port.

Many of us are looking forward to June 11-14 when we will reassemble in Paris for Un Sejour Magnifique to visit art collections, embassies, and private homes concluding with a dinner at Versailles in the Salon d'Hercule.



A walking tour of Porto was a Tuesday morning highlight.



Elaborate tiles decorate the vestibule walls of Sao Bento train station.



Catharine Hamilton bid the group farewell.



A final glass of port to toast a wonderful trip.

Photography by Francis Hammond