



ISBS
Proposed holidays
MINHO VACATION
July 2011

1. Minho region

The Minho region, cradle of Portugal

The Minho is a historic region in the verdant north-western corner of Portugal. It begins at north of Porto and stretches to the frontier of Spain. Its lush green landscape is built of an intricate of green pasture lands contrasting with forests filled with pines, eucalyptus and chestnuts. Vines have traditionally been grown on arbours high above the ground and the region's best-known product is the Vinho Verde wine – a light, acidic and often slightly sparkling wine, whose name means 'green wine' – a reference to its youth.

This sunny region is rich in old cities and villages, some coming from pre-roman times, with an incredible monumental heritage. The beautiful hills and river valleys have elegant and aristocratic manor houses from the 17th and 18th centuries.

Celebrations are very popular in Minho and this is the kingdom of folk songs, dances and displays of traditional costumes. The women often wear woollen skirts and festively decorated aprons with floral designs. Their bodices are pinned with golden filigree and draped with layers of heart- or cross-shaped pendants.



2. Suggestion of Hotels for accommodation in the region

Hotel Axis Ofir Beach Resort ****, Esposende

Hotel Axis Ofir is a four star Hotel, ideally located directly on a long sandy beach, with a protected landscape as surrounding the mouth of the river Cávado and only 35 km of Porto airport. The Hotel consists of 191 rooms and suites, all of which are equipped with a complete bathroom, air conditioning, Satellite TV, direct dial phone, minibar and balcony. The Restaurant reveals a spectacular panoramic view over the beach and Atlantic Ocean, where one can enjoy a classic sunset dinner setting. During the day, in the Summer, a Snack-Bar supports the swimming pool, serving lunch and a wide selection of light meals and drinks. The Hotels spacious lawns and decorative gardens are backed by fragment Pine woods and Sand dunes which lead to 3 Km stretch of sandy beach. Within the gardens are two *Tennis Courts*, *Outdoor Swimming Pool*, separate children's pool, *Putting-green* and *Children's Play Park*. Spacious public areas, *Lobby Bar*, *TV / Games Room*, *Table Tennis*, *Ten-Pin Bowling*, *Poole* and other activities enhance the stay of any visitor. *Fado Nights*, *Folklores*, *Live Music* and a complete Animation programme ideal for adults and children alike. Two Golf courses nearby: one with 9 holes and another 18 holes Championship. Super fresh & sea water fishing locations and other nautical activities are all close by. Hereby the Hotel Axis Ofir acts as the perfect base from which to discover the many interesting facets of Northern Portugal.



Price and conditions:

- Price for accommodation in a double standard room: 71 Euros / room / night
- Price for accommodation in a double standard room, with garden view: 83 Euros / room / night
- Includes Bed and Breakfast

- No-show charge: 1 night

Hotel Axis Ponte de Lima Golf Resort *, Ponte de Lima**

Located in the heart of the Minho region, Hotel Axis Ponte de Lima was recently built and equipped offering high standard services and accommodation. Hotel Axis Ponte de Lima has 40 bedrooms, all equipped with air conditioning, satellite TV, direct dial telephone and internet connection. A wide range of facilities include an indoor heated swimming pool, a gymnasium and four spacious meeting rooms. Just 100 metres from the Hotel is the Club House, which was originally a manor house. It has been graciously converted to a beautiful restaurant and bar with an outstanding panoramic terrace. The hotel is located on the top of a small hill facing the golf course and a vast green landscape that stretches out for miles. This area is known for its rare beauty, natural preserved landscapes and relaxing quietness.



Price and conditions:

- Price for accommodation in a double standard room: 65 Euros / room / night
- Price for accommodation in a double standard room, with golf view: 75 Euros / room / night
- Includes Bed and Breakfast

- No-show charge: 1 night

3. Suggestion of visits in the region

Visit the enchanting sea-coastal town of Viana do Castelo with a rich heritage

Viana do Castelo was founded in the thirteenth century by D. Afonso III, the king of Portugal, under the name of Viana da Foz do Lima. The sea was always the main reason for the city's existence: at one time it had 70 merchant ships and, in the period of the Discoveries (in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), carracks and caravels set sail from the shipyards of Viana to follow the sea routes to India and North and South America, returning laden with sugar, ebony, ivory and other exotic goods. Viana is rich with palaces, churches, convents and fountains forming a remarkable heritage that is well worth a visit. A beautiful, extrovert and lively city, Viana do Castelo has successfully preserved the wealth of its deep-rooted popular traditions.



Visit the ceramics and crafts market in the centre of Barcelos (every Thursday)

Pleasant riverside town, Barcelos is known as the country's leading ceramics and crafts market and the source of the legendary cock that has become Portugal's national symbol. As far as landscapes are concerned, some belvederes with beautiful landscapes stand out: the ruins of the Ducal Palace and its surroundings, S. Bras in Barcelinhos, the top of Mount Franqueira, the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Aparecida in Balugães, the Mount of S. Lourenco in Alheira, the Mount of S. Mamede and the Mount of Facho. Thursday is market day, the most important one of North of Portugal and no doubt worthy of a visit. Here you will find the traditional products and ceramics of the region.



Ponte de Lima, the oldest village of Portugal

Ponte de Lima is a small town in the picturesque province of Minho. This attractive riverside town, the oldest of Portugal, takes its name from the ancient bridge over the River Lima. This historical bridge has 24 arches of which four on the south bank is the original roman construction. During the middle ages, the town played a pivotal role in the defence of the Minho against the Moors. The roman bridge has only five of its original stone arches; the rest were rebuilt or restored in the 14th and 15th centuries. The town is overlooked by watchtowers, built in the fourteenth century, which, together with the whitewashed houses make it an attractive town. There are many magnificent palaces and manor houses in the town and surrounding area, and some receive houseguests. The charm of the place lies in its sandy riverbank (the site of fantastic bimonthly markets and annual fairs) and shady riverside walks, its rural surroundings and laid-back atmosphere.



Guimarães, World Heritage by Unesco

Guimarães, which historical center is classified as World Heritage by Unesco. Guimarães was the cradle of the Nation and there exists the castle of the first King of Portugal that from here, in 1143, conquered the independence to Portugal. The narrow streets with a medieval look that leads to the beautiful Largo de Oliveira, are highlights not to miss.



Braga and the Sanctuary of Bom Jesus do Monte, a master-piece of the European Baroque

Braga, the Roman *Bracara Augusta*, which boasts the most extensive and rich religious architecture and heritage in Portugal. Visitors cannot help being affected by the vivacity that is felt here, the youngest city in the country, with its major University, ancient streets, gardens and squares, beautiful shops and lively cafés.

On a forested slope east of Braga stands Portugal's most spectacular religious sanctuary: the 18th century Bom Jesus do Monte Basilica, the most important religious sanctuary in the North of Portugal and famous for its impressive baroque staircase and gardens; a notable example of European baroque.

Inaugurated at 25 March 1882, the Bom Jesus Elevator is the first funicular built in the Iberian Peninsula. The project was from the Swiss engineer Nikolaus Riggerbach, being the oldest of the world to be used with the system of water counterbalance. With more than 120 years, the Bom Jesus elevator is today one of the most notable pieces of the industrial and technical heritage in Portugal.



Visit to the walled town of Valença

The walled town Valença still keeps the characteristics of the 17th-18th Century's fortified town, to the style of the French architect Vauban. The fortress, its walls, for more than once destroyed by the Barbarian, Arabian and also French invasions, were successively rebuilt and are unique in this kind in Portugal. As you scour the walls of town, you can enjoy panoramic views in each angle and each bulwark. Passing the doors, inside this fortress, you will turn up with the impressive roman church of Santa Maria dos Anjos (St. Mary of Angels), from the 12th century, and the lively commerce that fascinates both Portuguese and Spanish visitors.



Gerês National Park and the typical mountain village of Soajo

Gerês National Park, one of Portugal's greatest natural attractions covers an area of 72,000 hectares and has an extraordinary diversity of climate, environments and scenery, comprising the transition zone between the Mediterranean and Euro-Siberian regions. This was the first protected area to be founded in Portugal in 1971 and it is the only national park in the country. Having once been the home of the brown bear and the mountain goat, Peneda-Gerês is today one of the last refuges of the great predators, such as the wolf and the royal eagle. Thanks to the heavy rainfall, there is a very dense hydrographical network. The vast heritage still to be found makes Peneda-Gerês an essential visiting point for anyone who wishes to discover Portugal. The typical mountain village of Soajo is famous by its collective threshing floor with are twenty-four "*Espigueiros*" granaries in the Minho-Galician style, with a long, low stone body and variations in the forms of the roof posts, bases and doorframes. This is a reminder of a time when people lived in a true communitarian way. The oldest one is from 1782. Those granitic monuments were built to protect the corn from the intemperate weather and from the animals. Some of those granaries are still used by the people of the village.



Charming fishing village of La Guardia (A Guardia), lobster capital, Spain

Looking out over the Atlantic and flanked by the river Minho and the mountain of Santa Tecla, the village of La Guardia is a picturesque fishing port, famous for its lobster. Maritime, river and mountainous scenery plays host to one of the most traditional fishing villages in Galicia, on the border with Portugal.

Our suggestion is to have lunch in a restaurant in the fishing port, with gastronomic specialties from the two sides of the border, the fresh fish from the day and the seafood specially the lobster, since A Guardia is the capital of Lobster.



The mountain of Santa Tecla and its pre-historic hill-fort village, Spain

The mountain of Santa Tecla, declared to be Historic-Artistic Heritage, is one of the most significant examples of Galician hill-fort culture. Once we reach the summit, there is a museum where personal adornments, ceramic and other objects found in the sites are kept. From the vantage point, one can actually enjoy the feeling of catching a glimpse of other continents. Also on the mountain are the hermitage of La Santa and a monument of the way of the cross. The town's major pilgrimages and festivals are under here.



Santiago de Compostela, Spain

Santiago de Compostela is the capital of Galicia. Located in the northwest region of Spain in the Province of A Coruña, it was the "European City of Culture" for the year 2000. The city's cathedral is the destination of the important medieval pilgrimage route, the Way of St James (in Galician the Camiño de Santiago). The popular etymology of the name "Compostela" holds that it comes from Latin *campus stellae*, i.e. "field of stars", making Santiago de Compostela "St. James in the Field of Stars". This name would come from the belief that the bones of St. James were taken from the Middle East, to Spain. These bones were then buried where a shepherd had spotted a star and a church was eventually built over the bones and later replaced with the Cathedral de Santiago de Compostela. Santiago de Compostela is also relevant for its University, Gastronomy and Cultural Events.

