

## Episode 91: The Douro Valley

### Summary

Nick and Wendy talk about their recent trip to the Douro Valley in northern Portugal. They talk about the region's famous vineyards and its other attractions.

### Transcript

Nick: Today Wendy and I are talking about the Douro Valley, which is a region of northern Portugal. And we visited recently for the first time and it was a great time.

Wendy: It was, it was absolutely beautiful and, uhh, I'm really glad that we were able to explore that part of the country that we'd never seen before.

Nick: So we went as part of this trip that we talked about last time with some people in my family. And so we spent three days in Porto and then we also spent three days in the Douro Valley. And we decided in advance that that would be a really nice little trip to take, because we could have some city experience in Porto and then some more rural and country experience in the Douro Valley. And so it was a really good balance between the two, I think.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah, I think it was. And we were staying in a tiny little village that was really kind of untouched by tourism and it was, you know, the authentic rural countryside of Portugal, uhh, where it was mostly old people in the village, very, very old people. Umm, I think most of the young people have probably moved out to the cities. But we were staying in a beautiful, you know, old renovated farmhouse and got to look out onto the views of the countryside and just relax there.

Nick: Yeah, it was a tiny village. It had probably 20 houses, maybe. It had no shops, so you had to go to the next village along if you wanted to just buy any kind of basic supplies. Umm, but there's an Air BnB there. And we had been searching, or I had been searching for an Air BnB for us, umm, and it was a little bit difficult because we needed a place that could accommodate five people and have three bedrooms and things like that. And there weren't that many options in the entire Douro Valley, but this was the one that we chose. And we probably didn't realise how isolated it was, but that actually made it better in the end. Umm, and the owner of the place, Luís, was very, very friendly and very nice, and I think you talked with him in particular about the history of the house and things like that.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah, I did. It was his grandmother's house, uhh, but it used ... when she lived there, it was very, very different. So it was much smaller and much

simpler. And it was a two-storey<sup>1</sup> house where the animals would be kept in the ... on the first floor, and then the people would live up on the second floor. Umm, so very, very rustic. And it was completely renovated. Well, first, his mother renovated it, and, but it was still a very small ... I think, basically, like a little one-room apartment. And he would stay there maybe overnight, if he was out on a cycling trip or something like that, but it wasn't really a place where you could live. And then he just completely renovated it and expanded it so now it's a three-bedroom apartment. And, uhh, you know, very comfortable, has lots of amenities<sup>2</sup>, but you also, when you're staying there, you still feel like you're, you know, living in the countryside. You're not in some resort or hotel or anything like that.

Nick: No, not at all. And there was a fireplace, and it was a little bit chilly<sup>3</sup> up in the mountains, so even though it was May, we put the fire on every night and that was really nice. Umm, we cooked every night, because there weren't really any restaurants in the area, and so that was a fun thing to do as well. And so it was a great little base. Umm, actually, it was quite a way north of the Douro River, and so it was right near this national park which is quite different in landscape. It's quite a dramatic difference. It was very rocky and mountainous with pine trees and things like that. And then if you just go a little bit further south, once you get towards the river, that's when you get into the vineyards and the, sort of, rolling hills and things like that. And so it was really interesting to see that contrast in the landscape.

Wendy: Yeah, so we explored the national park for a little while. And we took a walk, a hike, to a waterfall, uhh, and that was really impressive. And then we went to the vineyards later and, uhh, visited one of those and then also took another river trip, umm, like the one that we had taken in Porto but more rural, more out in the countryside this time.

Nick: Right, so it's actually the same river, the Douro. Umm, but yeah, completely different trip and so it was a very relaxed trip. Umm, we had a little bottle of wine that we brought onto the boat and so we just kind of lazed down the river and looked at the vineyards that were there and the rural houses and the things like that that were on each bank<sup>4</sup> of the river. And so that was a really, really nice trip. It was in the late afternoon, so it was very relaxing and a great time was had by all.

Wendy: Yeah, and it was gorgeous weather, so it was really sunny and warm and just a spectacular day for a boat trip, really. Umm, and the wine, of course, made it, uhh, even more enjoyable. Umm, wine was a big part of this trip, overall, I would say.

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<sup>1</sup> storey: floor, level (for a building)

<sup>2</sup> amenities: features, comforts

<sup>3</sup> chilly: cold

<sup>4</sup> bank: shore of a river (so a river has two banks)

Nick: Yes it was, but I think it's funny that between the five of us, we don't really know a lot about wine.

Wendy: No.

Nick: And so a lot of people will go to the Douro Valley and visit, you know, a lot of these different vineyards and taste the different wines. And we're not really ... we don't really do that kind of thing exactly, because I think the difference between the different varieties is lost on us<sup>5</sup> a little bit.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: So we did drink quite a bit but not, umm, in that way, I suppose.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah, we enjoy having a bottle of wine but we're not connoisseurs<sup>6</sup>. Yeah, we don't know much about wine, we just enjoy drinking it. And I actually don't like port wine very much at all, which is, you know, the wine that is famous in Porto. So we didn't have any of that, I don't think, on this trip.

Nick: I think we got a little taster, uhh, one time after a meal.

Wendy: Oh OK, yeah, maybe. Yeah, someone gave us a taste for free. But other than that we stuck to the more, kind of, traditional wine.

Nick: And the other wine that we had was a rosé called Mateus, and there's a bit of a story behind that because the Casa de Mateus, the place where this wine was invented or created, I suppose, originally, is in the Douro Valley, and we visited it. And the reason we did that, mostly, was because my parents used to drink this wine when they were younger, I think because it was cheap and they didn't have much money. This was when they were just first married or before they got married. And so it was a nostalgic experience for them to go to the place where it's produced.

Wendy: Mmm-hmm. Because the image on the bottle is actually the image of, you know, the house, the estate, uhh, that we visited. So I think that was fun for them to actually, you know, be inside that whole landscape, the image that they were so familiar with.

Nick: Yeah, and so we went into the grounds of this estate, and it was a beautiful place. Lots of beautiful gardens and the buildings were really nice as well and there were ponds and there was a kind of tree-maze thing and, uhh, it was very ... it was a really nice place to visit.

Wendy: Yeah, for sure.

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<sup>5</sup> lost on us: we don't understand or appreciate it

<sup>6</sup> connoisseurs: experts, people with special knowledge in a field (often related to 'arts')

Nick: Umm, one of the other things we did was we then went even further north from where we were staying and we went into another national park, umm, which was very off the beaten track<sup>7</sup>. And it was funny because we had to put, uhh, the directions into the GPS, and it was actually quicker to go up into Spain and then come back into Portugal and so we did that. Umm, and there was a, an old bridge that you and Tim and I walked to. Umm, and then towards the end of that day, we also visited a town called Bragança, which is just in this very, kind of, northeastern part of Portugal, and that was a great little town.

Wendy: It was, it was fantastic. Yeah, I didn't know much about it, I had heard the name, but I really didn't know what was there. And so it was a lovely surprise. Umm, yeah, lots of history there. Uhh, it's a walled city, there are walls that you can, uhh, walk on and walk around and there's a fortress-castle there. And a nice church and, uhh, some nice bars.

Nick: As always. Umm, but, so, yeah, there's a citadel<sup>8</sup> in the city, and so it's completely walled, it's 12th century city walls, uhh, citadel walls. And then inside there's this sort of little residential quarter as well, inside the citadel, and it's really well preserved. And the buildings are all, uhh, very similar, and so you get a great view from on the ramparts<sup>9</sup>, and, yeah, it's just a really lovely place to walk around. Umm, and, so, yeah, we had ... spent a great couple of hours there and everybody really enjoyed it. And then we had a glass of cider at one of the aforementioned bars and, uhh, that was nice as well.

Wendy: Yeah, so we decided to deviate<sup>10</sup> from our usual glass of wine and so we had a glass of cider instead, I think because it was quite warm and we were all a bit hot and we wanted something cooling and refreshing. Umm, so, yeah, we really enjoyed Bragança.

Nick: And so it was just one of these places in the Douro Valley that we really liked. So I guess when we decided to go there, we thought, 'OK, you just go there for the wine and that's pretty much all that there is,' and I think Tim said, 'You know, I hope we get to do other things other than going to these vineyards,' and we did. And so it's a great place because there's a lot of different things you can do, if you have your own transportation, which we did. Umm, and you can, yeah, you can see historic little towns and cities, you can see national parks where you can go hiking, you can go to the vineyards, you can do your river trips. So, yeah, it's a great area to explore.

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<sup>7</sup> off the beaten track (phrase): not a major tourist destination

<sup>8</sup> citadel: a castle within a city

<sup>9</sup> ramparts: the top part of city walls that you can walk on

<sup>10</sup> deviate: go away from the normal course

Wendy: Yeah, and you can even do a much longer river trip. They have, I think, overnight trips where you could go for maybe two days or three days and spend that whole time on the river, which would also be a great way to explore the area.

Nick: Alright, well maybe we'll do that next time.

Wendy: Maybe!

## Comprehension Questions

1. Where did Nick and Wendy stay in the Douro Valley and what was it like?
2. What was the difference between the boat trip in the Douro Valley and the one in Porto?
3. Why did Nick's parents want to visit the Casa de Mateus?

## Exercises

*Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.*

1. Once he makes a decision, he doesn't like to \_\_\_\_\_ from the path he's chosen. He can be quite stubborn that way.
2. Although the desert is extremely hot during the day, it can actually get quite \_\_\_\_\_ at night.
3. The largest Palestinian territory is called the West \_\_\_\_\_ because it's on the western side of the Jordan river.
4. We are moving our office to the new skyscraper that's being built in the city centre. It's a 40-\_\_\_\_\_ building and we'll be almost at the top of it!
5. When you go to a very popular tourist destination like Italy, it can be hard to get away from the crowds and \_\_\_\_\_, but it's worth trying to do it if you can.
6. In the medieval age, when attackers breached a city's walls and gates, the defenders would retreat to the \_\_\_\_\_, where they could make a last stand.
7. They go to France on holiday every year. They like to think of themselves as food and wine \_\_\_\_\_, so it's a great destination for them!
8. We didn't know anything about the history of the French revolution, so when we attended Bastille Day celebrations while we were on holiday in Paris, the significance of the event was \_\_\_\_\_.
9. We found a great deal online for a holiday apartment that wasn't expensive and had all the \_\_\_\_\_ that we were looking for.
10. One of the most enjoyable things about visiting castles is walking on top of the \_\_\_\_\_. That way, you can really imagine what it would have been like to defend the castle hundreds of years ago.

## Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Would you like to go to the Douro Valley? Why or why not?
2. Of the activities Nick and Wendy mentioned (visiting vineyards, doing a river trip, hiking in a national park, and visiting a historic town with a citadel), which appeals to you the most? Why?
3. Are you a connoisseur of wine? Or a connoisseur of something else (e.g. food, art)?

## Answers

### Comprehension Questions

1. They stayed in an Air BnB in a very small village in the mountains. It was a beautiful house that had a fireplace and all the amenities they needed.
2. The Douro Valley boat trip went through rural areas and they could see vineyards and other country landscapes, as opposed to the city boat trip in Porto.
3. Because they drunk a lot of Mateus wine when they were younger and the Casa de Mateus estate is pictured on the wine bottles.

### Exercises

1. deviate
2. chilly
3. Bank
4. storey
5. off the beaten track
6. citadel
7. connoisseurs
8. lost on us
9. amenities
10. ramparts