Gerês
between Minho and Trás-os-Montes
Five days Itinerary
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Situated within the districts of Viana do Castelo, Braga and Vila Real along the border with Galicia in the northwest of Portugal is the Peneda-Gerês National Park.

The municipalities of Melgaço, Arcos de Valdevez, Ponte da Barca, Terras de Bouro and Montalegre are the guardians of the only National Park and the oldest protected area in Portugal, which was classified in 1971. It is one of the greatest natural attractions of Portugal because of its natural value and the stunning beauty of its landscape which changes through the seasons in a succession of unique sceneries.

With almost 70,000 hectares, the territory of the National Park features a large geodiversity, which began about 400 million years ago. Granite dominates the rugged and uneven landscape. The major geomorphologic units are the mountains of Peneda, Soajo and Gerês, the second highest mountain in mainland Portugal, the plateau of Castro Laboreiro and Mourela and the many valleys which support a dense hydrographic network. Granite morphology is one of the most important features of the National Park with bornhardts, castle koppies, mushroom-shaped rock tors and granite bas, being the main examples of granite formations, as well as many others. Glacier action on the highest peaks of the Gerês, Peneda and Amarela mountains around 18,000 years ago, an indication of a far colder climate than in the current one has left evidence on the landscape, for example, the glacial valley in the upper section of the river Homem (Man), which remains one of the most emblematic geosites in the park, incorporating the inventory of the Portuguese geological heritage. The National Park also has an exceptionally rich biodiversity, which is perfectly adapted to the physical environment and to specific climatic conditions which are subject to Atlantic, Mediterranean and Continental influences. The territory is home to a variety of well preserved natural habitats where important species of flora and wildlife fauna flourish.

The flora of the Peneda-Gerês National Park is a true botanical treasure, with species that have high floristic value, as is the case of rooting chain fern, daffodil, Gerês iris, the sundew and the butterwort. Many plants are indigenous to the Iberian Peninsula, while others find in the National Park unique growing conditions enabling them to flourish in Portugal. It is one of the few places in the country where patches of yew and centenarian holly grow to 15 meters in height or would require five men to reach around their trunks.

The oak woodlands, riparian woodlands, pine forests, peat bogs and scrublands are some of the most typical inhabitants of this park. The Albergaria-Palheiros forest, an extensive oak forest classified as a Biogenetic Reserve by the European Council, is the best living example of an ancient woodland. It is considered the only mature pendunculate oak forest in Portugal.
The park also has a rich diversity of fauna, with many species protected by Portuguese and international legislation. The Iberian wolf is the top predator in the park. In spite of being an endangered species throughout Portugal, the wolf population has remained relatively stable in recent years within the park. The roe deer is the symbol of the Park, and is found throughout the protected area. In the highest peaks of the mountains of Gerês and Amarela we can find the Iberian wild goat, which has a growing population after becoming extinct in the late nineteenth century and being reintroduced a little more than a decade ago. Among birds, there is a great diversity of species, although many birds are migratory and therefore are the only seen in some seasons and for specific periods of time.

The eastern part of the National Park, which includes the eastern edge of the Gerês mountain and the Plateau of Mourela is one of the most interesting areas for bird watching. A variety of birds can be seen from rocky habitats, forest and agricultural areas to riparian habitats. Some birds are imposing by their size, such as eagle-owls and eagles. Others are distinguished by their beauty, like the Kingfisher, a small aquatic bird and one of the most colourful birds in the Portuguese avifauna. Shaping the landscape, the climate and soil type, geomorphology also influences the types of settlement and the existence of the very unusual settlements. The most original model of this respect is the parish of Castro Laboreiro, organized according to three types of settlements: the summer settlements (brandas), the permanent and the winter settlements (inverneiras). There are also unusual cattle settlements (stations) in the Peneda, Soajo and Amarela mountains, such as Bosgainhôos, Bordenla and Bilhares brandas.

The Peneda-Gerês National park is also known for its spectacular waterfalls, which plunge down from the heights of the granite boulders forming cascades and natural ponds of crystalline waters. The waterfalls and the natural ponds are high with both sightseers and practitioners of mountain sports such as canoeing. The whole territory combines the ideal conditions for the practice of ecotourism activities, particularly those associated with mountaineering, observation and interpretation of nature, leisure riding and water sports.

In Portugal, the Peneda-Gerês National Park is a mystical place that attracts thousands of visitors every year. Activities related to visits and public use such as visitor management, access, routes and trails through the interior of the protected area, require attention in order to combine nature conservation and biodiversity with the fact that it is one of the most visited natural areas in our country.

To enhance the knowledge of those who visit the park, there are numerous walking trails and facilities suitable for serving the public and providing public information. In the Park there are five Portas (Gates), which are important
centres of information, visitor reception and the interpretation of the territory, and also an Environmental Education Centre that provides useful information for visitors wanting to learn more about this protected area from a more didactic and educational perspective. The tourist attraction of this region has contributed to the development of the local rural communities. A visible feature of this dynamic tourism is the provision of accommodation services, catering and other touristic activities on offer, which are continually becoming more diverse and qualified.

While natural resources are the main attraction, visitors are also attracted by rich cultural heritage of this territory, with human occupation dating back to proto-historic times. There are countless remnants of the Neolithic epoch, such as dolmens or tumuli from the Roman occupation, to Roman road which crosses the Gerês Mountain, or Geira, as it is known, and from mediaeval times, which is well represented by castles of Lindoso and Castro Laboreiro and the Monastery of Santa Maria das Júnias. In addition to the testimony of the earliest human occupation more recent man-made buildings were added to the ancient landscape, buildings made ingeniously to withstand the hardships of the mountain. The causeways, water channels, the mills, espigueiros (a sort of traditional stone granary), community ovens, shelters for shepherds and wolf pitfall traps are some examples of those constructions. Many are built through communal spirit, typical of mountain communities, which is still present in many traditional activities associated with agriculture and animal husbandry. Presently we seek to conserve and recover that legacy and exhibit the history and ethnography of the local communities in museums and eco-museums, to keep the memory of those past times alive.

Traditional arts and crafts also preserve the know-how and the art of earlier times: the artisans of today adapt to modern methods, creating utilitarian pieces, which are useful and decorative but made out of ancient materials using older techniques, thus retaining the uniqueness of their products.

Although tourism is growing in importance for the local economy, many villages within the National Park still maintain the pace of the life of former times.

Traditional activities related to agriculture and cattle breeding still remain a major source of revenue for some families. To support a wide variety of economically important indigenous breeds are reared. These included barrosã and cachena cattle, the bravia goat, the bordaleira sheep and the bisaro pig. The Castro Laboreiro dog and the garrano hore, a horse created bred in the free pasture, also complete the list of indigenous breeds.

This is the territory of the Peneda-Gerês National park, one of the most beautiful natural treasures of Portugal and a legacy of different cultures. It is a collective heritage and its on-going development must be carried out with a commitment to nature conservation, public awareness and sustainability.
TERRAS DE BOURO

Terras de Bouro is the most rural municipality in the district of Braga, in the very heart of the fantastic Peneda-Gerês National Park. As this region has been inhabited since pre-historical times, it has a vast patrimony of archaeological sites deriving from its different occupations. The Roman Path is one of the main archaeological sites in the Iberian Peninsula, which used to connect Braga to Astorga. It was used as one of the famous Santiago’s Routes and still keeps over 30 millennia-old Roman marks.

The Germanic tribe of the Buri accompanied the Suebi in their invasion of the Iberian Peninsula and establishment in Gallaecia (modern northern Portugal
and Galicia). The Buri settled in the region between the rivers Cávado and Homem, in the area known thereafter as Terras de Boiro or Terras de Bouro (Lands of the Buri).

The architecture in Terras de Bouro shows local materials and the rural quality of its mountain landscape, where one can find dry stores (sequeiras), granaries (espigueiros), threshing-floors (eiras), water-mills, small chapels and wayside shrines (alminhas). All over the region, there are lovely small rural villages, full of tradition, where time seems to have stopped.
How to get there

Depart from Oporto. The nearest international airport to the area is the Airport of Oporto. From here you can drive for about an hour to come close to the most magnificent landscape ever. Cars can be rented at Oporto Airport.

Take E1/A3, leave towards E82 (Valença/Braga/A4/Valongo/V. Real); continue to A3/E1, take exit 8 towards A11 (Guimarães/N14/Braga/Celeirós) and drive to IP9, then A11. Keep on your left (Braga Norte), drive up the hill to Braga Centre /Terras de Bouro. At the roundabout take the first exit to N101, towards Terras de Bouro, then take N205-3.
You can also take a bus or a train in Braga, if you happen to be there (Bus Station: Largo de S. Francisco; Train Station: Rua Nova da Estação).

**What to visit**

In the village, Nossa Senhora da Abadia Church and the old Benedictine Monastery are worth a visit.

Also, don’t miss São Bento da Porta Aberta Sanctuary: the monument is a Portuguese Christian sanctuary, located in Rio Caldo Parish, in Terras de Bouro Council. It got the name São Bento da Porta Aberta (open door St. Benedict), since the small chapel used to always keep its doors open to be used as travellers’ shelter.

There are very few surviving documents that allow us to reconstruct the history of this sanctuary built in homage to St. Benedict, in 17th century. The saint has been worshipped since the mid-18th century, when the church was known only as the chapel of St. Benedict. There are pilgrimages to the sanctuary on 20th and 21st March, 10th and 11th July and 10th and 15th August.

**What to do**

Gerês thermal stations are located 20km away from Terras de Bouro, at the bottom of a beautiful valley crossed by Gerês river. Gerês thermal stations are housed in a beautiful restored building, in the surroundings of the pleasant thermal park. The therms in Gerês date back to Roman times, but it was in the eighteenth century that D. João V ordered the construction of the first thermal complex.

The characteristics of the waters are indicated for the treatment of hypertension, obesity, diabetes, gout, kidney stones and gallstones. The climate, the tranquility of the place and the ritual of the thermal treatment, coupled with a healthy diet and balneotherapy, have very positive effects in relieving stress and fatigue, anorexia, depression, rheumatism and poor circulation.
The treatment is based on the ingestion of water from Fonte da Bica, recommended for a minimum period of 14 days. The intake of water takes place in small amounts, usually 3 to 4 times a day. The water has a markedly alkaline high pH of 9.1. It is weekly mineralized, tiosulphated of ionic composition and sodium bicarbonate. It is hyper thermal water, since water emerges at a temperature above 40°C. It is clear, odourless and atypical. Other kinds of treatment include various kinds of showers and baths, as well as gymnastics in the swimming-pool.

In the involving area, there are some of the most magnificent spots of Peneda-Gerês National Park. For instance, Portela de Leonte is an 862m high passage through the mountaintop along the road that connects Caldas with Portela do Homem. It is a highly beautiful natural place with water streams and dense vegetation.

Caldas do Gerês, in Terras de Bouro, is also the right place for shopping, if you’re looking for handicraft. Wood toys and trays are painted in bright colours, reminding the older people’s childhood. Basketry, weaving, clogs or special shoes making (tamancos), ceramics and embroidery are the region’s main crafts. Linen and wool handicraft is also very popular among tourists.
Where to eat
The typical dishes of Gerês include goat meat, ham, sausages, sarrabulho porridge, seasoned pieces of pork loin, Portuguese stew, caldo verde (soup), cod fish fritters, breaded cod fish, giblets rice and the famous bean and cabbage stew from the Caldo River area. You must then finish your meals enjoying the local sweets, in particular the Santa Eufémia pastries and the orange roll of Amares, among many other monastery-made sweets.

Our first choice restaurant for you goes to Adega Regional o Vaticano (Lugar da Igreja - Souto, Terras de Bouro).

Where to sleep
If you enjoy camping, you'll be glad to know that there are campsites in the council of Terras de Bouro.

Or else, you can look for rural tourism accommodation; in this case, highly recommended by some visitor as an amazing place to stay, with amazing hosts, rooms and breakfast, is Quinta de Pais (Rua da Ponte de Rodas, 7, Vila Verde).

You can also choose Quinta do Bárrio, located in Chorense, Terras do Bouro, which is surrounded by the mountains and lakes of Peneda-Gerês National Park. It offers its own chapel and an infinity pool with a panoramic view of the surrounding mountains, comfortable accommodation and free WiFi in all public
areas. It features a modern layout with a rustic feel, enhanced by the exposed stone walls and wooden beams.

Day 2

PENEDA-GERÊS NATIONAL PARK

Whether on foot or by car, visitors can come into close contact with nature through several paths. The road infrastructure in Peneda-Gerês National Park is good. The park offers short pedestrian trails, with unique geological interest, with conventional signs on site, and some trails with map orientation, some of which with GPS-supported PDAs.

Peneda-Gerês National Park is an amazing place, with 702.9 km2 and a great variety of wildlife, where you can find wild horses, wolves, deer, and more than 200 other protected and endangered species. It has a wonderful landscape, with waterfalls, lakes and a huge green area. The Council of Europe classified it as one of the Biogenetic Reserves of the European Continent.

As for when to go, you can visit Peneda-Gerês National Park all year long, depending on what types of activities you’re interested in.
In what concerns **what to wear**, opt for simple and comfortable clothing and footwear. Don't forget to bring hiking shoes or sneakers, bikini/swimsuit and a towel! To prevent any unexpected situation, be sure you bring warm clothes, sunscreen, water and food.
How to get there

Leave Terras de Bouro by N205-3, drive along Covide, take N307 and then CM1269 (cross Rio Homem); take M531 (towards Bouças), then take Cm1149, drive along CM1348 and CM1349 – you’re in Peneda-Gerês National Park.

What to visit

While you enjoy your visit to the park, keep your eyes open for the Garranos, the wild horses of the Gerês Mountains, which will certainly be your delight. Find some time to gaze at Amarela mountain range and take a deep breath.
Take the waterfalls tour - this tour, towards the southern eastern part of the park, will show you some of the most amazing spots of Gerês, including the famous Tahiti Waterfalls, where you can enjoy a refreshing swim, and the Pedra Bela viewpoint, which has an incredible view over the whole landscape and where you can picnic. Take a trip deep inside this natural paradise with all the safety and plenty of fun.

Discover all about the region’s ancient villages, such as Soajo, with its granite houses and small granaries used for drying corn (espigueiros) and its longstanding rural traditions.
Visit Lindoso Castle: King D. Dinis, on his first journey to the territory of Lindoso, is said to have found it "so bright and exquisite" that he called it lindoso (meaning beautiful). The village is situated on a slope overlooking a narrow gorge in the River Lima valley. Due to its geographical location near the frontier, the place has always had great military importance for Portugal, particularly during the War of Restoration between Portugal and Castile in 1640.

Also don't miss the Monastery of Santa Maria das Júnias: this is the most isolated of all the Cistercian churches in Portugal, set in a valley surrounded by mountain peaks, close to the border with Galicia. To reach the church, visitors must walk 200 metres down into the valley, but the site's uniquely magical atmosphere is a fine reward for all the effort.

Visit Caniçada Dam on your way to Vilarinho das Furnas.
Albergaria Woods (Mata da Albergaria) is located 10km north from Caldas and is an impressive botanical reserve that you can discover on foot along the left margin of Vilarinho das Furnas reservoir. The woods is rich, not only in the diversity of fauna and flora, but also in the Roman traces left all over the place, as is the case of the Roman Path in Geira. In the reservoir formed by the dam of Vilarinho das Furnas, there is an old village – now submerged under the water – which reappears above the surface in years of drought, offering a curious spectacle.

What to do
There are a number of traditional Portuguese dynamic games and activities you can do, according to your personality and age, as well as the time available. You can choose from ropes, malha or wine game to paintball, rappel or slide, among others.

Enjoy the surrounding landscape of rare beauty and enjoy the traditional shops that complement the thermal bath activity. One of the most iconic items you can buy here is the tea bags to treat ailments of the liver, gall bladder, obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure. You can also find embroideries and items in
linen and wool, the traditional Valentine handkerchiefs, baskets, toys and wooden clogs, which will make wonderful souvenirs.

Where to eat
Maybe the most gorgeous place you have ever been for lunch, Caniçada Restaurant, in Gerês Inn (Pousada do Gerês, Peneda-Gerês National Park), which shows off its Certificate of Excellence 2014, is definitely the choice, for the wonderful view you get from there.

Refúgio do Gerês, in Águas do Gerês Hotel (Av. Manuel Francisco da Costa, 136, Gerês), right in the heart of the village, is also a very good restaurant, known for its delicious food. Its specialties are roasted lamb (cabrito assado à Gerês), codfish (bacalhau à chefe) and barrosã veal with roasted potatoes (naco de vitela barrosã com batata a murro).
Where to sleep
Take advantage of the fact that you are in a region of communal villages and fantastic natural surroundings to enjoy a different kind of sleep for the night. You can choose between the campsite, the park’s casas de abrigo (shelters that were previously used by shepherds) or a casa de aldeia (one of the guest houses in the villages).

The youth hostel in Vilarinho das Furnas is another alternative. If you leave the park and drive a bit south, the Aquafalls Spa Rural Hotel is near the park, in Vieira do Minho. This is the place where time goes by very slowly and where calmness and comfort provided by the overwhelming beauty of the green and granitic hills and the clear blue water of Caniçada reservoir are priceless. Sleep in one of the suites in the private bungalows, scattered around the 30 thousand sq.m property.
Montalegre is one of the municipalities of the National Park of Peneda-Gerês in the district of Vila Real, a north region, inside Alto Douro e Trás-os Montes. Its capital is the Portuguese village Montalegre, with around 1800 inhabitants. It is the seat of a frontier municipality with 805.46 km and 10,537 inhabitants (2011), divided into 25 parishes. The municipality is bordered to the north by Spain, east by Chaves, southeast by Boticas, to the south by Cabeceiras de Basto, southwest by Vieira do Minho and west by Terras de Bouro.
The Montalegre municipality is with Boticas, one of the two municipalities of Barroso. Around 26.25% of its county's surface is part of the Peneda-Geres National Park.

The highlands of Barroso, which include the mountains of Gerês, Larouco and Barroso, are a remote zone of heather hillsides and woods of oaks cut by rivers and streams, numerous waterfalls and several dams, of which the largest Barragem do Alto Rabagão, attracts many fans of fishing and water sports to its artificial lakes.

Across the county, there are several interesting Pre-historic and Roman remains, such as the cromlechs of Veiga or the milestones of the Roman Way linking Braga to Chaves.

Montalegre's handicrafts reflect the county's rural character and visitors may still find rustic capes of woollen cloth and wood clogs, besides more delicate crafts such as lace and embroidered linen.

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**PITÕES DAS JÚNIAS**

**How to get there**
Take the N304 and cross Boucas, take EM529, turn right in EM1392. Cross penedo and turn left to N103. Continue in Cambedo to N103-6, continue to N308-4. Continue in Paradela and cross Outeiro. Continue N308-4. In Covelães turn left to EM 513 and continue 513-1. You are in Pitões das Júnias.

**What to visit / What to do**
The Rail Pitões das Júnias is a small trail of 4.5 km that begins near the cemetery and it wants to show 3 of the main area of interest: the Monastery of Santa Maria das Júnias, the Cascade and the village itself.

One of the county's most curious sites are the ruins of the Pitões das Júnias monastery, dating from 1174 and rising isolated on a wild and beautiful
landscape, crossed by a stream which ends in a romantic cascade.

Then we continue the journey towards the Waterfall with a slight increase, followed by a large descent in a very rough terrain.

This cascade is approximately 30 m high, standing out as one of the main highlights of Pitões das Júnias. This village has preserved traditional stalk-covered houses, along with an ancient Cister convent. Crystal-clear waters proceeding from Pitões river stream flow along grey rocks until they reach a century-old oak tree. Legend has it that an elf still lives in these lands.

The descent to the waterfall in its final part is done in a wooden staircase ending in a balcony from where you can admire the miracle of soft water in hard rock. They told us that we should see this waterfall at times when the sun falls into the open slot in the stone, causing the drops of fantastic rainbow water.

Back to Pitões we follow the sign to the Eco Museum and go directly to the village. Received by the enchanted prose of Miguel Torga about the area and the holly berries, we can enjoy the traditional and the modern that it has installed and integrated so well.
NaTurBarroso - Promoção e Organização de Eventos

Set off on foot to discover Pitões das Júnias, follow the Trilhos do Lobo, or learn to distinguish varieties of mushrooms in the Picking of the Yellow knight (tricholoma equestre) in October/November. If you prefer to ride off-road, make sure that you visit the typical villages of Barroso.

Where to eat

Casa do Preto Restaurant
Already famous among lovers of good Portuguese cuisine, it has kept the simplicity and cozy atmosphere of its debuts. Besides the gastronomic quality, you can still enjoy the Gerês mountain views.

**MONTALEGRE**

**How to get there**
Take the EM 513 -1, continue to 308 at Covelães, along and next to the river Câvado in a 5km way, during 8 minutes.

**What to visit**
Montalegre is dominated by an imposing 14th-century castle, built on the site of a previous fortified construction, with an imposing keep rising more than 27 metres tall. Nestled at its foot, the old town displays granite buildings and the graceful Miserichord Chapel.

Montalegre Castle is situated at a place inhabited by Lusitanian people, Romans, Suevi and Visigoths in ancient times. D.Dinis ordered its reconstruction. Under D. Afonso IV ruling, the still existing keep was erected. This castle is about 21m high and it has a cistern covered by carved stone (National Monument).

**What to do**

**Festivals /Festivities**

Fair of Barroso Ham and Smoked Sausage

In this event you can taste and buy ham, many different sausages and chorizos in the dozens of pubs there. There is musical entertainment with pipers and concertina and traditional games.
Since 2002, Montalegre City Council has attached to its events an amusing Witches Party, taking advantage of every match between a Friday and the 13th day of the month. The party brings the whole city together and is part of the local cultural calendar. The participating restaurants present innovative menus and from the town square departs a ghostly procession towards the castle where take place the Esconjuro de Dom Bruxo (The Imprecation of the Warlock) and the traditional Queimada. The festival ends with fireworks.

A whole weekend devoted to the Barroso kid, a product from the region of Montalegre. On the menus of participating restaurants visitors can select among various dishes of kid. There are also exhibitions, conferences and lots of music.
Queima do Judas (Burning of Judas)

Groups of friends, associations or villages build a puppet, Judas, who this day is displayed in the streets of the village. In the evenings, a parade goes from the City Hall Square to the castle where these puppets are hung and burned with great clamour in a ceremony symbolizing the exorcism of evil. In the end, The City Council awards prizes to the best Judas.

Magusto

This is a community festival that takes place in several villages in Montalegre on the occasion of St. Martin. There's a dinner, people eat chestnuts and drink the 'água-pé'. The animation is done by concertina players and singers of the village.

Where to eat

As for the gastronomy, besides the renowned roast barrosã veal, from calves bred on the mountainous slopes, there are excellent dishes of pork and kid and delicious trout, often stuffed with the local ham.

A simple and comfortable restaurant, with good service and good food, it also sells smoked sausages and hams

Nevada Restaurant
Where to sleep

Montalegre Hotel is set within the magnificent and tranquil landscape of the Peneda-Gerês National Park, five kilometres from the border.

VILAR DE PERDIZES

How to get there
From Montalegre you’ll take the EM 508 and you’ll take 23 minutes by car in a 17Km drive to Vilar de Perdizes.
Vilar de Perdizes - São Miguel is a parish in the municipality of Montalegre, with 25.56 km² and 460 inhabitants (2011).

What to visit

It is known by the annual meetings that are taking place there, subordinated to the theme of folk medicine. Esoteric Fair, which serves as a meeting point for curious adventurers, magicians, healers, witches, wizards and many others.
Among the attractions are the conferences and lectures on different themes, the sales and live making of crafts, therapy sessions, the drinking of the "burning of witches" and street entertainment.

Then come back to Montalegre where you can eat and sleep.

**Day 4**

**SÃO VICENTE DE CHÃ**

**How to get there**
Take the EM 509 1 from Montalegre to Chã through Medeiros.

**What to visit**

![Roman church](image)

Roman church with two aisles, which is not normal in Portugal, with neoclassic interior decoration and a wooden ceiling with popular paintings.

**CABRIL**

**How to get there**
Leave Chã by EM509-1, turn right to N103 through Venda Nova. In Cambedo turn right to N103-6. Continue and cross Sidrões. Then you are in Cabril.

![Cabril village](image)

Cabril village still preserves popular architecture exemplars, used by local inhabitants for drying cereals. There is also a restored olive oil press room, called “Lagar das Olas”. Take the road connecting Ferral to Cabril full of strawberry trees and many wild pine trees.
Also worth visiting are the Romanesque churches of São Vicente da Chã and of Viade, the ancient Misarela Bridge near the village of Sidrós and several noble houses, such as the palace of Vilar de Perdizes.

Roman bridge of solid masonry construction granite, dating from the Medieval period. It features a round arch erected with a caresisódomo device. The floor consists of regular slabs. It is on the creek Cabril, and most of the year it is submerged because of the high level of the water. We only can see it when the water levels of the reservoir Salamonde goes down.

**What to do**

Javsport

Specializing in nature sports activities, it has its own adventure playground, in the Gerês mountain. Here you can practice slide, abseiling, mountain bike or just have walking tours.
Where to eat

Simple and familiar restaurant, located in a residence beside the road. Here you can have good traditional cooking.

Day 5

MELGAÇO

The village of Melgaço is as far north as you can get in Portugal and is only separated from Spain by the River Minho. Surrounded by hills, forests, vineyards and the mountains of Peneda Gerês National Park.

Its history

The historical center is compact and dotted with cute-looking restaurants, leafy squares, fountains and old churches. It's dominated by the castle which was once a strategic element in the ongoing battles to keep Portugal from being
taken over by the Spanish. Outside the main gate, a statue of two women fighting marks Portugal’s final historic victory.

**Melgaço castle**

Walking around the outside of the castle, you’ll find a café, pretty flower gardens and colourful benches. There you’ll have amazing views over the River Minho and the Spanish mountains.

You can climb to the rooftop for 360° views of Melgaço, Spain and the peaks of Fiães and Peneda Gerês National Park.

**Alvarinho and vinho verde**

The Minho region of Portugal is famous for its *vinho verde* (green/young wine) and the area around Melgaço is renowned for the Alvarinho grape. This is why you can see vineyards in every spare inch of countryside.

The Solar do Alvarinho offers tastings of the many versions of *vinho verde* they sell on behalf of local producers. There you can also find a shop selling local delicatessen items and handicrafts.

If you have time you could follow the Alvarinho Wine Route as a way of exploring the countryside and learning more about the grape and wine production in the region.

**The Cinema Museum**

Film buffs are in for a treat at the Museu de Cinema de Melgaço. Film critic Jean Loup Passek donated his extensive collection to Melgaço. It’s an extraordinary wide collection of machines, posters, photographs and other
cinema-related items which chart the course of cinematography through the ages.

**Walks and views**

It's worth trying to get up to Fiães hilltops. The views are well worth the effort and there's a monastery, too.

If you fancy a relatively short walk around Melgaço, there's a 5.7 km route which takes you downhill from the statue of Inês Negra, past a convent, through the sports complex, along the river, between vineyards into villages and ends up at the Termas de Melgaço Spa in Peso.

You should spend some time exploring Peneda Gerês Portugal’s only National Park, with its diverse and dramatic scenery, fascinating villages and crystal clear water. A good place to head for if you're based in Melgaço would be Castro Laboreiro which has a small museum and is the start of the Megalithic Monument Walk.

**Spa treatments**

Even if you’re just passing through, it’s worth stopping to have a look at the glass and steel building next to the treatment center and possibly try a glass of the fizzy water.

The water from the thermal springs at Peso is credited with the ability to relieve diabetes, as well as other ailments. The Termas de Melgaço spa has just reopened after extensive remodeling and is modern, bright and stuffed with all
manner of equipment designed for both medical use and relaxation. If you fancy a massage and the use of the spa pool with its jets and currents (not for swimming), it’s possible to book yourself in.

**Sports facilities**

**Swimming pools**

If you want to swim, you’ve got a couple of options in Melgaço. As well as an indoor pool near the Urban Park, there’s an outdoor one in the sports complex outside of the village center.

**Sports Complex**

To reach the Centro de Estágios (Sports and Leisure Complex) follow the orange signs and you’ll find sport facilities that include an athletics track and tennis courts as well as mini golf and picnic tables. You can walk (or jog) from Melgaço, stopping for a workout at a little roadside fitness station. If this seems too energetic, you could go for an amble in the woods or have a drink or meal at the Hotel Monte Prado and enjoy the views.

**Active Sports**

Active tourism has taken off in the Melgaço area and it’s possible to go rafting down the River Minho, go hang-gliding, mountain biking, all-terrain karting as well as horse riding, abseiling and canyoning. It’s important to bring appropriate clothes and sunscreen.

**Where to eat**

**Chafarix Restaurant**

It’s a restaurant located in a square with a large fountain. Its specialty is cod, such as the "Alvarinho cod" but they also serve a variety of meats and seafood such as sirloin and octopus. It is good traditional cooking from the northern
region of Portugal. Chafarix also has great wines especially from the Alvarinhos area and caters for weddings and other events. I recommend it as one of the best in the area.

**How to get there**

**By car**

**Coming from the south**


**Coming from Galiza**

- A6 que liga a Galiza ao centro de Espanha.

- AP9 A Coruña

- AP9 Santiago de Compostela

- Vigo A52, saída, As Neves ou A Cañiza, depois direção Arbo – Portugal

- Ourense A52 saída A Cañiza e depois direção Arbo – Portugal

**By train**

Nationals and internationals to Valença do Minho. For further information about paths, schedules and rates go to www.cp.pt

**By plane**

To reach Melgaço you may take a flight either to Oporto or to Vigo airport.
PONTE DA BARCA

History

Ponte da Barca has very distant origins. Archaeological findings have proved that it was already inhabited since prehistoric times.

Among the vestiges of the Roman occupation of this land, there are several ceramic objects, coins and sculptures. Among all these findings, the most important one is Pedra dos Namorados (Lovers’ Rock), which was found in the parish of Ermida. This rock is carved with the figure of a man and a woman and should date back to a period when the northeast region of Spain was fully Romanised. It can be seen at the Museum of the parish of Ermida.

The history of this village is related to the crossing of the Lima river. In fact, it was initially named Barca because, at the time, only one boat was used for the crossing, but it later became Ponte da Barca when the first bridge was built, probably in the mid-14th century. Once the bridge was built, this locality increased its importance in terms of trade, representing a major transit point, center and regional corridor to the coastal region.

Heritage

The monumental heritage of the municipality is also very rich. In Ponte da Barca, the bridge occupies a relevant position, for it is one of the most important medieval bridges in Portugal, dating back to the first half of the 15th century. Within the municipality, one can find manor houses, the Castle and the Espigueiros do Lindoso (granaries), the Romanic Monasteries of Bravães, S. Martinho de Crasto and of Vila Nova de Mui, the Mother Church, the Pillory, the Old Market, the Antas and Barrows of Serra Amarela, among many other examples of the municipality’s built heritage.
Location

Approximately half of the municipality is integrated in the National Park Peneda Gerês territory. Across the whole municipality, the rivers and brooks, the lagoons, the river beaches, the waterfalls and the lush landscape of Serra Amarela offer unique images and the possibility to come into close contact with Nature.

Activities

Offering a wide-range of outdoor activities, with different duration and/or characteristics and intended for people of all ages. These sports, leisure and adventure activities favour a deeper immersion into the natural environment and into the lifestyles of the local communities.

Tradition and craftwork

The craftsmen of this municipality dedicated themselves to embroidery, weaving, basketwork, manufacture, carrying poles and old pieces of furniture, fireworks - traditional activities that were essential in the daily life of the communities and people.

The growing interest in the local arts, crafts, traditions, customs and gastronomy that were progressively lost with time, is what motivated the Ponte da Barca Town Hall to invest in the creation of the Centre of Exhibition and Sale of Regional Products. The Centre offers its members a space where they can display and sell their work, among which we can find the traditional Lenços de Namorados (lovers’ handkerchiefs), embroideries, open hems, stone masonry and wooden miniatures, among others.

Gastronomy

Among all gastronomic specialties, a particular mention should be made to the Cozido à Portuguesa (Portuguese Stew), Sarrabulho (a thick sauce made with pig’s
blood), Papas de Sarrabulho (a stew made with pig’s blood), Cabrito da Serra Amarela (goatling) and Posta Barrosã (steak), as meat dishes; Lamprey, Allis Shad and Trout, for fish dishes. The cocking technics were influenced by the famous monastery of Vila Nova de Muía, where the Canons Regular of St. Augustine stayed and where D. Afonso Henriques (first king of Portugal) retired, for two weeks, to prepare for a battle.

Desserts and pastries are also excellent, there is bolo branco (white cake). There is also leite creme (burnt custard) and Rabanadas de Mel (Fried Toast with honey), that can be found on the menu of several restaurants.