

Portugal

Portugal has a wealth of local grape varieties, which produce wines in a range of styles. The reds can be supple and fruity or full-bodied and high in tannins, whereas the whites are usually refreshing and best drunk young.

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CLIMATE

Despite the fact that it is only a small country, Portugal has a range of different climates. The single most important influence is that of the Atlantic Ocean, and much of the country has a maritime climate. However, in many of the inland vineyards the climate is hot, dry and continental. In some regions altitude can help to mitigate the very high temperatures. The large differences in annual average temperature partly account for the diversity of wine styles found in Portugal.

REGIONS AND WINES

Portugal has a wealth of indigenous varieties that provide a point of difference from many other wine-producing countries. This can also make the wines of Portugal rather difficult to understand, particularly as many of the same grape varieties have different names in different regions. Consequently, here we focus on the five main DOCs as well as the largest Vinho Regional and the principal styles of wines made there.

Vinho Verde

Vinho Verde is in the north-west of Portugal; its nearness to the Atlantic Ocean means it has a moderate maritime climate. The most significant feature of the climate is the high annual rainfall. Without careful canopy management in the vineyard, the high levels of precipitation can lead to excessive canopy growth and encourage disease. The modernisation of the vineyards in the Vinho Verde region has meant a move away from the traditional pergola trellising. Spur-pruned VSP, to create airflow in the humid environment, is now used to improve the health and quality of the grapes and to allow for mechanisation.

The classic white Vinho Verde wines are pale lemon coloured, high in acidity and low in alcohol (8% to 11.5% abv). The wines with lower alcohol are usually off-dry in



Portugal is a major supplier of corks for wine bottles. The corky bark from these trees has recently been harvested.

style. If a grape variety, a sub-region or an authorised quality labelling term is mentioned on the label, the wine can have up to 14% abv. The white wines are made from local grape varieties such as **Loureiro** and **Arinto**. Traditionally, these wines have a slight sparkling sensation that enhances their freshness. Vinho Verde Alvarinho is made entirely from **Alvarinho** grapes (Albariño in Spain) grown in the small designated sub-region of Monção e Melgaço. It has slightly higher alcohol (11.5% to 14% abv) and riper, more tropical aromas.

PORTUGUESE WINE LAWS

The Portuguese for PDO is **Denominação de Origem Protegida (DOP)** but the traditional term **Denominação de Origem Controlada (DOC)** is also widely used.

The Portuguese **PGI** is **Indicação Geográfica Protegida (IGP)** but the traditional term Vinho Regional is still seen on wine labels.

Table wines without geographical indication are labelled as Vinho (Wine). Over the years, Portugal has had considerable success with simple, fruity off-dry rosé wines that fall into this category.



KEY

2000 m+
1000–2000 m
500–1000 m
200–500 m
0–200 m

Black varieties are also grown for the production of red and rosé wines: the reds are deeply coloured and tannic; the rosés are fresh and fruity.

Douro

The Douro, the oldest demarcated wine region in the world, is located some 80 kilometres east of Porto and stretches from the Marão Mountains to the frontier with Spain. More information on climate and viticulture can be found in Chapter 44 *Port*.

Wine production in the Douro is dominated by Port, but unfortified wines have always been made. Both Port and unfortified wines rely on the same five principal varieties: Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Tinta Roriz (Tempranillo), Tinta Barroca and Tinta Cão. Of these, the **Touriga Nacional** is considered the highest-quality variety and is the most well known. It gives low yields of grapes and produces wines that have intense colour and flavours and high levels of tannin.

The red wines of the Douro tend to be deeply coloured and full-bodied with a high level of ripe tannins and rich black fruit flavours. The best examples often display subtle toasty aromas from maturation in new oak.

The white wines, particularly those from high-altitude vineyards, can show fresh varietal fruit and medium to high acidity.

Dão

Dão is located in a mountainous area 80 kilometres south of the Douro region. The vines are planted on the gentler hills and slopes. The vineyards lie between 200 and 400 metres above sea level. Cold, wet winters and warm, dry summers combined with a significant temperature variation between day and night, provide excellent conditions for high-quality grapes.

The red wines from Dão often display delicate red fruit aromas, soft tannins and high acidity. Vineyard improvement schemes have seen new plantings of high-quality varieties including **Touriga Nacional**, **Tinta Roriz**, **Jaen** (Mencía in Spain) and **Alfrocheiro**. Alfrocheiro makes wines that are deep in colour with intense aromas of blackberry and strawberry. The best Dão whites are made from the Encruzado variety and range in style from light and fresh to richer, barrel-fermented versions.

Bairrada

Bairrada lies between Dão and the Atlantic Ocean and has a maritime climate, with rainy winters and warm summers. Rain around harvest time can sometimes be a problem for late ripening varieties. **Baga** is the dominant black variety. It is a late-ripening variety with small, thick-skinned berries giving wines that are deep in colour with high tannin levels. If underripe the wines can have high acidity and astringent tannins but later picking gives wines that are softer and display rich, black fruit flavours. Gentler crushing and maceration techniques, as well as blending with other black varieties, have also given softer wines. Other Portuguese black grapes such as Touriga Nacional and Alfrocheiro are also important, as well as international varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah.

White wines are also made, predominantly from indigenous varieties Bical and Maria Gomes.

Alentejo

Alentejo is spread over eight sub-regions in the south east of Portugal. Overall, Alentejo has a warm growing season, but small climatic differences among the sub-regions allow a range of different styles to be produced; those in the cooler, wetter north give more elegant wines and those in the hotter, drier centre and south provide richer examples.

The typical red blend is made with **Aragonês** (another name for Tempranillo) and **Trincadeira**, a drought-tolerant grape with spicy red berry flavours and high levels of tannin. **Alicante Bouschet**, a grape variety high in colour and tannins, is also used in blends. The use of Touriga Nacional and Syrah has been increasing in the last few years. The wines are typically deep in colour, with high yet soft tannins, a full body and expressive ripe fruit flavours.

Arinto, Antão Vaz and Roupeiro make fruity and floral white wines with medium to high levels of acidity. Some



Modern trellised vineyards in Alentejo allow for mechanisation.

wines are fermented or aged in oak to provide extra depth and complexity.

Vinho Regional

The largest Vinho Regional region in terms of production is **Vinho Regional Alentejano**. This region is based around Alentejo DOC but covers a far more extensive

area. Winemaking regulations are more liberal for the Vinho Regional wines and a wider range of grape varieties can be used, particularly international varieties. Lisboa (stretching north from Lisbon), Península de Setúbal (directly to the south) and Tejo (north-east of Lisbon) are also important areas for Vinho Regional wines.