Mountains

The Vinhos Verdes region mountains display a profusion of riches expressed through landscape, culture, and heritage. They are bastions of purity, unblemished beauty, and authenticity. And every mountain is unrivalled, offering a totally different world—readily available for exploration—and waiting for you.

Serra D'Arga

No visit to the beautiful Alto Minho region is complete without taking in the panoramic views from Serra d'Arga . And getting there is easy. Excellent roads wind through the mountain villages, including the famous "argas": Arga de São João, Arga de Baixo and Arga de Cima. Climbing these granitic mountains perched at just over 800 meters above sea level, between the Lima and Minho Rivers, leads visitors through a veritable museum of human history and an evolving natural landscape.

Many vestiges of human activity throughout the centuries are still visible here. Among them are remote megalithic monuments, remnants of Iron Age villages, and traces of the period when the area was heavily populated by corn farming communities. Here you will still find beautiful granite corn cribs (espigueiros), houses made of schist, and ancestral traditions such as linen craftwork and the matança do porco (annual pork slaughter), a deeply rooted celebration of rural heritage. All of this is nestled in a landscape set amid crystalline mountain streams, freshwater coves, green fields, oaks, cork oaks, pine trees, alders, and chestnuts. Visitors just might catch sight of elusive, wild animals such as otters, the petite roe deer, or even the indigenous toupeira d'água, or water mole.
Whether travelling by car or on foot, over asphalt or dirt roads, or even traipsing over shepherds' trails, visiting the Serra d'Arga is the perfect opportunity to see the Alto Minho from an angle that is both distinct and surprising.

Serra da Aboboreira

The Portuguese have an expression that reads "Os homens não se medem às palmas", which literally means "a man cannot be measured in hands". In other words, "good things come in small packages". So it is with mountains. Serra da Aboboreira occupies just 100 km2, but it has much to offer. This ancient granite formation stretches across three municipalities—Amarante, Baião and Marco de Canaveses—climbing as high as 1000 m in altitude.

The charm of Serra da Aboboreira lies predominantly in its natural wonders. Shrublands typical of higher altitudes include gorse, heather and broom plants interspersed with oaks, cork oaks, chestnuts, and stone pines—and then there's the beauty of the holly. Rivers, brooks, and streams cross this striking landscape. Birds of prey fly overhead, while reptiles, felines, and countless other species find shelter here.

One of the main attractions of the mountain is its remarkable megalithic necropolis, one of the largest in the country. Most of the monuments are to be found on plateaus, with roads that are not always obvious to the unaccustomed eye. The mountain villages, though, are more readily accessible, perched on slopes or in narrow valleys. Here, despite the migration of many residents to centers of greater opportunities, many farmers can still be found herding and practicing subsistence agriculture. All of this and whatever else your curiosity might seek out is awaiting your visit to Aboboreira.

Serra da Freita

Serra de Freita rises above the region between Entre Douro and Vouga. It is a favorite getaway for the residents of local cities and towns who, especially in the hot summers, enjoy an afternoon spent amid pristine views. For those coming from further afield, the main attractions tend to be a few emblematic villages and two captivating natural phenomena, the Mizarela waterfall of more than 60 meters, and the so-called parideiras, or birthing stones.

Yet Frieta has much more to offer than the breath-taking Frecho da Mizarela, and the strange stones that spring forth from their mother stone. There are also steaks from the native Aroquesa cattle breed with its own Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) status that can be eaten thick-cut and seared on the grill (posta arouquesa) or as the renowned Alvarenga steak, fried or grilled and served with a rich, secret pan gravy. What is more, the mountain is rich in waterways. The Paiva is a typical mountain stream that tumbles through narrow valleys until it broadens out to indulge the enjoyment of bathers on quiet river beaches. Walking the roads and paths will bring visitors to rustic villages wedged into the mountainous terrain where residents still resist the lure of out migration, seeking to maintain their ancestral lifeways.

Serra da Freita is an austere plateau with sparse low-lying plant-life that stands in stark contrast with the deep river valleys wrapped in dense vegetation. The mountain also shelters ghost mining operations, like that at Rio de Frades, where, during World War II, highly sought after tungsten was hotly contested between the Allies and the Axis powers.

Serra de Montemuro

Supposedly described once as the "least well-known mountain in Portugal", Serra de Montemuro is no longer such a mystery. It is bordered on the north by the Douro River, by the Paiva on the west, and on the southern and eastern edges by a straight line that passes through the municipalities of Lamego, Castro d'Aire and Régua. It is well worth a visit—not only for its natural wonders, but also to see the vestiges of human labor.

Awash in natural viewpoints with panoramic views of the valleys of the Bestança and the Douro rivers, the landscape here is adorned with granite boulders where erosion has formed whimsical shapes. Higher elevations are dressed in heathlands with heather, broom plant, gorse bush or the indigenous Iberian carqueja, sometimes called a three-toothed broom plant. Lower slopes sport patches of pine, oak and chestnut, while along the riverbanks willows, ash, and alders decorate the shore.
As for fauna, partridges, Eurasian woodcocks and blackbirds, owls, and nightingales may be spotted, as well as weasels, hares and wild boars. And people, as in the
typical villages like Boassas, Gralheira or Vale de Papas, with their flocks of sheep and goats, or in the small Mezio Museum, where artisans keep alive local basketry, weaving, and clogging traditions.

Not to be forgotten are those people of old whose work can still be appreciated in the ruins of the walls of Portas de Montemuro, remnants of a pre-historic Castro culture hillfort.

Serra do Alvão

Wide horizons, magnificence and year-round beauty

This is a striking rugged mountain range with vast horizons. Northeast of Vila Real, the mountain itself would be sufficient to convince unbelievers of its strength and majesty. Yet, were visitors to climb to Alto do Fojo and take in the magnificent rocky escarpment, they would find the famous Fisgas de Ermelo, where the Olo River cascades down rocky slopes. This is a stirring and mysterious place with a special magic inviting contemplation. It is a must for first-time visitors to Alvão and irresistible even for local residents.

Yet, Alvão has many more sights to offer. Granitic mountains are bordered by plateaus and a Quartz-rich landscape marks the transition between mountain and valley. The steep valleys, with their abundance of water, attract exuberant life. Further down, pasturelands and lime meadows nourish indigenous Maronese cattle. Mountain villages such as Lamas de Olo, Barreiro, and Ermelo have schist and granite houses, some of them still thatched. Time runs slowly here, and traditions still remain, such as the smoking of sausages, and the kneading of bread. Summer is the usual tourist season, though Alvão is equally delightful in the winter when the white mantle gives it a special charm, or in the autumn when the trees are decked in warm colors.

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Serra do Gerês

You're invited to an unforgettable experience

Gerês is another world. It is both immense and powerful. Its beauty is sublime. It is close, calm and accessible on many occasions, and yet distant, abrupt and mysterious on many others.
It is bright and colorful. Grim and gray. A day or even a week is not long enough to discover the matchless experience of Peneda-Gerês National Park. For many people, Gerês is the destination of a lifetime.

And even a lifetime is not enough to savor all the mountain’s treasures. The suggestions offered here should be regarded as just the first steps toward many other, future visits.

The primarily granitic mountains of Gerês, Soajo, Peneda, and Serra Amarela are all part of the National Park created in 1971. The highest point, at 1,500 meters, is to be found in Gerês. Oaks predominate in the forests, but it is on high that Gerês stands out, sheltering species found nowhere else: Gerês's indigenous lilies, ferns, and the famous St. John's wort. And then there are the ancient forests, such as those of Albergaria or Cabril. Fauna make their homes in the water, the land, and in the air. There are vestiges of thousand-year-old hamlets . And signs of Imperial Rome. And then there are the villages—Castro Laboreiro, Pitões das Júnias, Lindoso, Soajo, and Tourém. The rivers crisscross it all, the Lima and the Cávado are the principal ones, plus the smaller Vez and the Arado. Wait no longer. Welcome to the stunning world of the Peneda-Gerês mountains.

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