

PORTUGAL

F.I.C.B. 52nd FICB CONGRESS: TRAVEL DIARY

By Claire Cuccio
Gentle Lady, Order of the Knights of the Vine USA

From May 27 – June 2, 2022, nearly 250 participants from 10 nations (Austria, Canada, France, Hungary, Japan, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the U.S.A.) attended the 52nd FICB International Congress in Porto, the Douro and the Vinho Verde regions and the extension to the Lisbon area. It was the first in-person FICB Congress since 2018. We were hosted by the Portuguese Wine Brotherhoods Federation, local Portuguese Brotherhoods and the F.I.C.B.



After many inquiries from travelers planning to arrive a few days before the festivities were scheduled to begin, our hosts graciously set up several “early bird” options. The

first was a port tasting and dinner at Quinta da Boeira on Friday, May 26. There were about 50 in attendance. It was a fabulous way to begin our Portugal adventures! The winemaker shared an explanation of the vineyards and winemaking process before we were invited to taste the four samples of port in front of us. We learned that in 1756, Douro became a demarcated and regulated region and in 2001, UNESCO declared it a World Heritage site and here we are ... fortunate to get to experience it. There was a pre-test to show knowledge of port wines and the winner was Master Lady Trish Hagner (KOV USA) who won a bottle of Quinta da Boeira, a 20-year-old tawny. We had a delicious dinner in the barrel room and were served Douro wines and a port from 1917. They only had 350 liters of it, so they created spray bottles as a unique way to control the portions. We passed the bottle around and sprayed 5 pumps in our mouths and then sipped the port. It was delicious! We ended the night serenaded by a fantastic, traditional, Fado singer.



On Saturday morning, there was another pre-FICB activity planned. This was a city tour of Porto. First stop was the British Factory House, a private club for the big port houses. We were lucky to see this as it is not open to the public. It still functions as a meeting place and every Wednesday members gather for a lunch, and they bring out a copy of the Times (a daily UK newspaper) from that same date, but 100 years earlier! Guests enjoy vintage ports and catch up on the news of the day ... well, from 100 years ago! It has been the place for many great events and visits from kings and queens over their long history. We were able to be a witness to this great history and visit their wine library with vintages that go back to the early 1900s. We then visited the São Bento

Railway Station, a masterpiece of renowned artist Jorge Colaço, which had over 20,000 tiles. It was a beautiful tribute to Portuguese history and the daily activities of the Portuguese people. Finally, we had lunch at a historic restaurant, O Escondidinho (circa 1931), with traditional dishes from Porto and never-ending glasses of wine. We returned to our hotel to get a little rest before the big event of the day the official opening of the 52nd F.I.C.B. Congress.

Day 1: The Opening Ceremony and Welcome Dinner took place at the Hilton Porto Gaia hotel. We were greeted by the President of the Portuguese Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa (by a video message), and the Mayor of Gaia, Eduardo-Vitor Rodrigues. F.I.C.B. President, Alan Bryden, along with the President of the Portuguese Wine Brotherhoods Federation, Pedro Rego, and the President of the Congress Organizing Committee, Albino Jorge de Sousa, who welcomed the attending wine brotherhoods and formally opened the 52nd F.I.C.B. Congress. We were treated to a delicious traditional dinner with Douro DOC whites and reds and a bottle of Quinta de Boeira 20-year-old tawny on every table. The entertainment was a fabulous concert by a combination of two choruses. We also met the two buglers from the national police who would keep us on time throughout the program. It was a great reunion of old friends after a five-year break and much celebration ensued throughout the evening.



Day 2: We traveled up north to the Limia River Valley to the Santuario da Santa Luzia (Sanctuary of the Sacred Heart of Jesus) in Viana do Castelo, which is the region where vinho verde is produced. We attended mass in our brotherhood regalia and posed for a group photo outside the church. The mass was celebrated by the Bishop

of the Diocese de Viana. We were told that it was rare for the bishop to conduct the mass; so rare, in fact, that it was being broadcast to all of Portugal in real time. What an honor! We then had lunch catered by the restaurant Quinta do Carvalho and drank some nice vinho verde. The enthronement ceremony into the Confraria do Vinho Verde was held in downtown Viana Do Castelo at the Teatro Municipal Sá de Miranda (Municipal Theater). Afterwards, all the brotherhoods marched by country through Viana on the way to dinner. Portugal, as our hosts, led the way and the colorful robes from the different countries attracted attention from the townspeople. A young girl carried a sign that said USA which we followed along with the Oregon Wine Brotherhood. Dinner was downtown at the Cultural Center in Viana do Castelo, also provided by the restaurant Quinta do Carvalho, and we were, once again, entertained by dancers and singers performing traditional song and dance. It was a great day!





Day 3: No surprise ... day 3 was even more amazing than the day before! We took the bus out to the Douro Valley with lunch and a tour at Quinta da Pacheca, one of the first properties to bottle wine under its own label since 1738. Pacheca is the feminine form of the family name of Da Mariana Pacheco Pereira, who owned the property back then. Quinta da Pacheca is famous for its ten specialty rooms designed by owners Paulo Pereira and Maria do Céu Gonçalves. They are situated in the vineyard near a hotel and spa on the 140-acre estate. We could see the accommodations in the vineyard that looked like barrels laying on their sides. Reason enough for a return trip! We had an amazing meal of traditional green soup, bacalhau (unsalted cod), tournedo de vitela (veal) and leite crême (custard milk). We then boarded a river boat in Régua, the Acqua Douro, and cruised back to downtown Porto. We passed through two locks on the journey. The first, we were told, was the deepest lock in Europe ... about 100 feet! It was like being in a deep cavern. The second lock was not as deep but came with some surprises! As we began to move, there was a brief firework display and then, as we descended into the lock, we enjoyed music from a band on the shore. After a while, they were hard to see since we were so far down! Soon after, we enjoyed a meal on the boat paired with wonderful wines from Pacheca, while admiring the terraced landscapes. Our guides told us this is a perfect microclimate for growing grapes, olives and almonds. Everyone must come to Porto at some point and cruise this beautiful landscape!

Day 4: We started the day with a Scientific Forum with several recognized Portuguese experts in wines, sustainability, tourism, marketing and cork. This was followed by the Wines of the World event where attendees bring wines from their home regions. It

gives us a chance to get excited about new wines and share with new worldwide friends. There was a buffet lunch with some port-of course! After a short rest, we dressed elegantly for the Enthronement into the Port Wine Brotherhood and our Gala Dinner. We paraded through the streets of Porto-Gaia in our respective brotherhood regalia, hopped on a boat to cross the Douro and continued the parade on the other side. Large crowds gathered as the bands played and soon, we were joined by four white stallions in full regalia and ridden by officers in handsome uniforms who led us through the streets to the ceremony and dinner. The brotherhoods from each country followed a lady or gentleman dressed in traditional Portuguese costume and we marched in time to the beat. Onlookers cheered and took lots of pictures as we traversed the narrow streets. Everyone agreed ... this was the best F.I.C.B. parade ever! Upon our arrival, the ceremony began, and a number of guests were inducted with the rank of Cavaleiro, which means Knight. A "farewell" dinner followed with beautifully plated foods and perfectly timed presentation of the plates at each table. We were once again serenaded by a talented young woman singing Fado who tried her best to help us understand the genre. As we exited the building and began some goodbyes, we were surprised once again by our hosts who had arranged a fabulous fireworks display over the Douro River with the port houses of Porto-Gaia in the background. It was a perfect ending to the 52nd F.I.C.B. and we said "goodbye" to those not staying for the extension.

Day 5: After exploring the Porto area, those who had signed up for the extension were excited to continue this adventure giving us a little more time in this beautiful country. That exploration would include learning about and exploring the Alentejo wine region. Today was our "repositioning" from Porto to Lisbon. Along the way, we stopped in the beautiful town of Alpiarça for lunch at Quinta da Atela, greeted by the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Tejo (whose Grand Master is Pedro Rego) and then visited a local museum. Casa dos Patudos hosts the collection of Jose Relvas - a local politician who bequeathed his collection and house to the town upon his death. Then it was on to Lisbon for dinner at the hotel to rest up for the upcoming days of wine and more of Portugal!

Extension Day 1: Today we traveled from Lisbon on the bus to the Alentejo region, city of Évora, a UNESCO World Heritage city. The first stop was the São João Evangelista Church (Church of St John the Evangelist), where some attendees were enthroned into the Vinho Do Alentejo Brotherhood. This beautiful church was founded in 1485 and is covered by polychrome tiles ("azulejos") from the 17th century. We took a picture in front of the Templo Romano de Évora, a Roman temple from the 1st century dedicated to Diana, the ancient Roman goddess of the moon. Next there was a parade in our brotherhood regalia through the beautiful streets of Évora followed by lunch at the former Espinheiro Convent. The convent has a rich history starting with an apparition of the image of the Virgin Mary on a thorn tree around 1400. It is now a luxury hotel, spa and conference center. Toward the end of the day, we were treated to a visit to the Cartuxa Winery, which boasts over 600 hectares of vineyards. Cartuxa white wines mainly use recognized Alentejo varietals such as Roupeiro, Antão Vaz and Arinto, while red wines are obtained from traditional varietals such as Trincadeira, Aragonês and Castelão. After a wonderful visit, we traveled back to Lisbon and enjoyed dinner at the hotel.



Extension Day 2: This morning we left for Oeiras, 16 kilometers west of Lisbon, to have wine and lunch in the beautiful Marquês de Pombal Palace and gardens. They date back to the 18th century and was a home of Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, the Marquês de Pombal. In fact, the Marquês made a personal appearance to welcome everyone! The palace also hosts a winery where Carcavelos wine is produced, which can be drunk both as aperitif or digestive. During lunch we were entertained by a small band and dancers demonstrating traditional dances in colorful costumes. After lunch,

we drove by Cascais/Estoril with its beaches and lovely old homesteads, as well as the Tower of Belem on the riverfront that looks out at the Padrão dos Descobrimentos (Monument of the Discoveries), the 25th of April bridge (which was designed, built by and looks like the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco) and the Christ the Redeemer monument across the Tagus River on the opposite hill. After a return to the hotel for a rest, we then returned to the Casino Estoril to celebrate the end of our FICB Portugal Congress with a lovely dinner accompanied by music and dancing. We want to thank the Portuguese Wine Brotherhoods' Federation who were magnificent hosts and organized a Congress that included unique events, featured great wine and food and, most of all, shared the warmth and friendship that is a hallmark of Portugal. This Congress is sure to be with us for a long time ...and we want to say THANK YOU for the memories!