

River Douro 14-17 May 2014

By Karen Swann – Senior Travel Consultant

One of the many highlights of 2012 and the Jubilee celebrations was the magnificent Thames Pageant, led by Her Majesty The Queen aboard the luxurious 'Royal Barge' – The Spirit of Chartwell.

Now making new history, the ship sails in the waters of the beautiful Douro River in northern Portugal. Exclusively chartered by Titan, I was invited along to experience a taste of what it may have been like for the Royal party.



The Spirit of Chartwell is owned by Douro Azul, a Portuguese cruising company based in Porto that offers cruises on the Douro River Valley landscape, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO from Porto to Barca D'Alva, on the Spanish border.

Day 1 – London to Porto

The TAP Air Portugal flight left Gatwick at 4.40pm and after a pleasant two hour flight on which we were served a snack and a drink we arrived in Porto.

The transfer time from the airport is approximately 30 minutes and upon arrival, we were warmly welcomed by the crew who offered us a glass of Port!



The three course dinner was excellent with varied choices for each course and included water and wine. Afterwards, we went ashore and strolled around the pretty water front. Once back on board the pianist asked if we had any requests and duly sang and entertained us.

Day 2 – Porto – Regua – Pinhao

We set sail from Porto at 11am for Pinhao past many scenic vineyards. We also travelled through many dams which was interesting to see the manoeuvres through each lock. We arrived in Regua after lunch and were taken by coach on an excursion to Mateus Palace and gardens. After our visit there we were driven to the highest point in the Douro Valley to a vineyard where we dined 'local style' at Quinta Da Avesada and obviously tried the produce! I was amazed to find this vineyard produced over 30 million bottles per year. After a very enjoyable evening being serenaded by musicians playing drums and an accordion, we were taken back to re-join the barge which had made its way to Pinhao.



Day 3 – Pinhao – Lamego

After breakfast we disembarked and headed for our excursion to Lamego. We were driven to The



Sanctuary of Nossa Senhora dos Remedios where we admired great views from its elevated position and walked down 686 steps to the city, using the ornate staircase. The design of the staircase is exquisite with landscaping along the sides of the beautiful granite steps that had carvings on each terrace.

That evening we dined alfresco with a Portuguese barbeque dinner and live music on the sun deck.

Day 4 – Porto – London

After a very early breakfast we were transferred by coach to Porto Airport for our flight home to Gatwick.

To Summarise:

The barge itself is very small and intimate with only 14 cabins and 1 suite. They are all outside cabins with air conditioning, flat screen TV, telephone, hairdryer and a safe. En suite facilities include a walk in shower, washbasin and WC.

Since the Jubilee many of the ship's features still remain, adding that special touch. If you have an interest in British history and the Royal family you will love the Spirit of Chartwell, two of the original Cote D'Azur Pullman Express armchairs can be found in the lounge having been fully restored.



There are no lifts on the vessel so it is not suitable for anyone with mobility difficulties as there are steep steps down to the cabins. The ship's voltage is 220V and there is no need for adaptors and the plugs are 3 pin UK style.

You can combine a 3 or 4 night river cruise on the Douro with a 3 or 4 night stay in a Portuguese Pousada with a starting price of £1695 pp including flights from London. This also includes up to 17 meals, excursions and door to door pick up from your home.

I would definitely recommend this cruise to anyone who would like a relaxing break and are happy to socialise within a small group. All the staff are excellent and you will be well looked after.