Porto, truly Portugal

Porto is situated in the north of Portugal. It is the second most visited city by tourists after Lisbon, the capital. I am going to inform about where the tourists most like to spend their time, how much time they spend in Porto, when about in the year they come, to explain why tourists come to Porto, what they like and dislike about the city, and describe what the whole city is about.

There are many tourists that come to Porto. They like to go and see cultural, historical monuments and places that are significant to Portugal. They usually go and see the famous bridges like the Ponte D. Luís, Ponte d'Arrábida. This bridge is made of concrete and it set the world record for concrete bridges for some time. It has an arch, 52m tall and the plate is 70m above water level. There is a river, called River Douro, which separates the city of Porto from Gaia. Almost all the port wine warehouses are located in the riverbank. Tourists like to go and see them, and as they go to the Gaia side, they all go to the restaurants in Cais de Gaia – which is a pacific place where there are many restaurants and some pubs.

Other places where tourists enjoy going are the monuments, and the important buildings. The one I am most interested in is the Clérigos tower; it has a historical meaning, and it is one of the highest monuments in Portugal. It is located near the downtown. This tower has a church connected to it, called the Clérigos church. These buildings are a baroque and rococo piece of work. All the historical excitement lies in the museums, Serralves Foundation – Contemporary Art Museum, Tram Museum, Romantic Museum, Soares dos Reis national museum and many more.

The tourists which come to Porto in May / June or September / October are usually over 50. Some French, English, Italian and Spanish people come in July / August, but most of the Spanish people prefer to come in December. Tourists usually stay from one to three days in Porto. In the year 2001, there were more tourists than ever, because Porto was nominated to be the capital of culture in Europe. In that year, 126594 tourists came to Porto. In December 1996, Porto was taken to the world patrimony.

I did some interviews to some tourists in the Ribeira, and in the Cais de Gaia. I asked them what they didn't like in the city. Some people liked the city as it was although some thought that there should be some improvements to make. Some people enjoyed being in Porto despite the fact that the roads in the downtown were very confusing, there were not many signals to help them. They also said that they hated the traffic jam in the city centre. Many tourists would like to stay more time because they were enjoying themselves, but some didn't want to stay. They usually come here for pleasure, for curiosity, historical reasons, and sometimes in business trips.

To get to the downtown, and that area of Porto, I think the best way to enjoy most is to go by public bus. If you want to go shopping in the downtown, then you need to go to the Rua de Santa Catarina. The first thing to do is that you have to get on the public bus number 35 or 37, which stops at the Avenida dos Aliados. Then you just walk through the slope, which is Rua 31 de Janeiro, and then turn left, and there you are. If you want to go to the Ribeira, you have to get on the public bus number 01.

In order to get on the public buses, you need to buy some bus tickets. They are about 75cents each for 1 trip, there are 10 trip ones which cost about € 7.50. Make sure that you don't buy then from inside the bus, because they are double the price! Despite the fact that sometimes the *autocarros* are very crowded and it doesn't always have the best conditions to stay on or it doesn't smell very well, you enjoy it. Nearly every citizen who is not able to drive a car will go by *autocarro*. As a result, the public buses are usually

crowded, but it always depends at what time you go. In the morning most people go to work, so it might get crowded, but just after midday it might be less. The buses and taxi's have a priority in the city of Porto. They have one track in the road for them. As there are lots of vehicles in the roads, for the buses to get through easily, it was necessary that a track would be built just for buses and taxis.

There are many ways to reach the Gaia side. Mainly all of the tourists like going on boats. It takes you on a mini-tour through the River Douro. It takes about 30 minutes. It will show all the famous bridges, the Ribeira, Porto's edge, Gaia's edge and the Gaia side. It is a very good opportunity to see both Porto and Gaia together; it's interesting, and enjoyable. In Porto's side you will see the Ribeira, although you will be able to see other parts, but not much. While in the Gaia side, you can see the Cais de Gaia, and the Gaia city.

Whenever you need to go shopping, there are many places where you can go. For example if you want to go to an open area, with shops – clothes, footwear, toys, cafés and esplanades – there is the Rua de Santa Catarina. On that same road, there is the Via Catarina shopping centre. It has restaurants (Chinese, Italian, Mc Donald's and many more), shops– to buy clothes, jewellery, decoration, toys…Some people enjoy having fast food, like eating a burger in Mc Donald's, but other people like eating pizza or pasta (Italian) or Chinese. Whenever I go to a shopping centre, I eat something fast, like a burger or a sandwich– so I can walk around and have fun.

Via Catarina is not the only shopping centre in Porto. There is Norteshopping and Maia Shopping, which are in Matosinhos or Maia (Northern side), Arrábida Shopping, and Gaia Shopping (in the Gaia side). All of these shopping centres are malls with millions of shops, corridors, and restaurants. Above all else, each shopping centre has cinemas in it! Arrábida shopping has 20 cinema rooms, Norteshopping has 8, Gaia Shopping has 6, and Maia shopping has 8.

In my opinion, Norteshopping is the best one of them all. It is the largest, with most shops, and the biggest ones. Another reason why I think this shopping centre is the best one is because if you need something, you will always be able to get it. Not a very good aspect about this mall is that Friday and Saturday night (sometimes Sundays) it gets too crowded. You cannot see anything that is in front of you, just will be able to see people. It smells like damp, sometimes muddy and the floor is not always clean, it might have litter and rubbish like chocolate wrappers and tissues – on the top floor mostly, where the restaurants are; you feel sweaty, and hot contrary to how you feel when you're not in the centres (especially in the winter)

In the winter, as it is very cold here in Porto, each weekend, nearly everyone go to the shopping centres, the one which is closest one's home. People go and get together, go to the cinemas, have lunch / dinner, go shopping; they go with their family, friends, anything! Later on the year, people start going to other parts of Porto, instead of being cramped up into a shopping centre, they go for a walk, in the Avenida do Brasil, go to the Parque da Cidade (City Park) and open areas like that.

The city of Porto is the most important in the North of Portugal. This is mainly because it has the most important port called Porto de Leixões. All of the textiles and footwear are made in the North, and those supplies are exported from Porto de Leixões. Many imported items are also collected there.

The city isn't bad at all. It might not have the best weather all time round, but Porto is still a beautiful city, still continuing its tradition, and also developing at the same time. Porto makes me feel glad of what I am.