

Vila do Conde

Porto District · Portugal

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Vila do Conde is a coastal town where the Ave river meets the Atlantic, about 20 km north of Porto. For centuries it was a shipbuilding port, and it is still known for handmade bobbin lace. Today it is a calm town with a river harbour, a large monastery, a long beach coast and an easy metro link to Porto.

It suits a relaxed stay of one to three nights. Many visitors use it as a quieter base for Porto and the Minho region. The writer *José Régio* was born here.

When to visit

Summer is warm and dry, and it is the best time for the beach. Spring and early autumn are mild and quieter. Winter is cool and wet, with rough seas. The Atlantic stays cool even in August.

The biggest annual event is Curtas Vila do Conde, an international short film festival. It runs for about ten days in mid to late July, with screenings across the town. Book a room early for that period.

MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Fair Fair for sightseeing	13° / 16° Feels like 10°	7° / 1°	13 rainy days · Dry air
February	Fair Fair for sightseeing	14° / 19° Feels like 11°	7° / 2°	Dry air
March	Good Good for sightseeing	16° / 22°	8° / 4°	Dry air
April	Good Good for sightseeing	18° / 24°	10° / 6°	Dry air
May	Great Great for sightseeing	20° / 27°	12° / 9°	Dry air
June	Great Great for sightseeing	23° / 30°	15° / 12°	
July	Great Great for sightseeing	25° / 32°	17° / 14°	22 sunny days
August	Great Great for sightseeing	26° / 33°	17° / 14°	23 sunny days · Humid air · Calm winds
September	Great Great for sightseeing	24° / 30°	16° / 13°	Calm winds
October	Good Good for sightseeing	21° / 27°	14° / 9°	14 rainy days · Calm winds
November	Fair Fair for sightseeing	16° / 20°	10° / 5°	14 rainy days · Dry air
December	Fair Fair for sightseeing	14° / 17° Feels like 11°	8° / 2°	14 rainy days · Dry air

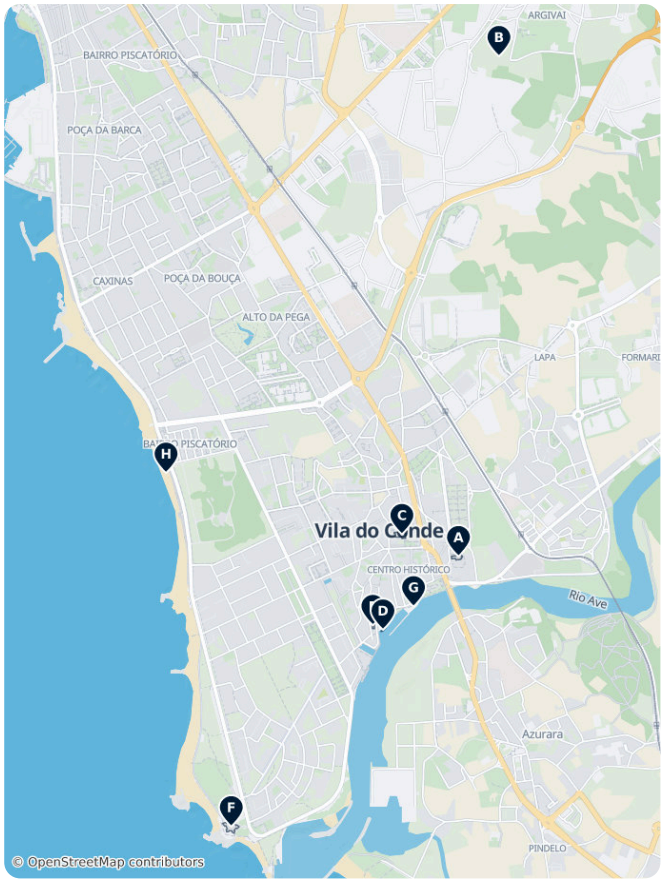
Best months: May, June, July, August, September

Climate data: NASA POWER + Copernicus ERA5-Land and ERA5 · 1996–2025

Top sights

Most sights are in a compact area around the river. The monastery and the aqueduct are a short walk or ride away.

- A Igreja de Santa Clara is the Gothic church of the old Santa Clara monastery, founded in 1318. It holds the tombs of the founders. The monastery buildings next to it are now a hotel.
- B Aqueduto de Santa Clara is a long stone aqueduct with 999 arches. It brought water to the monastery from a spring in Póvoa de Varzim and was finished in 1714.
- C Igreja Matriz is the parish church of São João Baptista. It is a National Monument and is known for its Manueline style.
- D Nau Quinhentista is a full-size replica of a 16th-century Portuguese ship, moored on the Ave. You can go on board.
- E Alfândega Régia is the old royal customs house. It is now a museum of shipbuilding and navigation, next to the ship.
- F Forte de São João Baptista guards the mouth of the Ave river and is often called the town's castle.
- G Monumento à Rendilheira honours the lace makers. The Lace Museum, in an 18th-century house on Rua de São Bento, shows bobbin lace and lace makers at work.
- H Praia das Caxinas is a sandy beach in the fishing district north of the river mouth.



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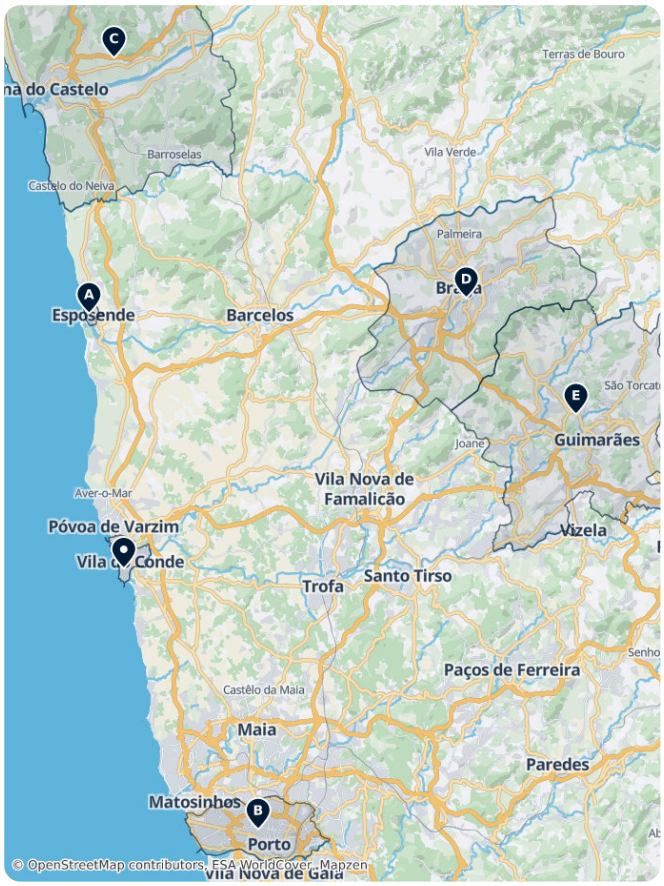
What to experience

Things to do here that you cannot do in most places:

- Watch lace being made: Lace makers work with bobbins at the Lace Museum. Bobbin lace is the traditional craft of the town.
- Visit the National Handicrafts Fair: This large crafts fair takes place in the town gardens in summer, around July and August. About 200 artisans from across Portugal take part, and there is a bobbin lace day.
- Join São João in June: This is the town's biggest popular festival, with events through the month. Check the dates before you plan.
- Try the Azurara surf: South of the river, the beach has bigger waves. It is popular with surfers and bodyboarders.

Day trips

Vila do Conde is a good base for day trips in the north. All of these are day trips out and back.



- Póvoa de Varzim: a short metro ride north on the same line. It is a beach town with a casino and a long seafront.
- A Esposende: a short drive north. It is a small town at the Cávado river mouth, with dunes and a protected coast.
- B Porto: about 50 minutes by metro to Trindade, or about 25 minutes by car. It is the main day trip, with the river, bridges and old town.
- C Viana do Castelo: about 45 minutes by car. It is a river and coast town with a funicular up to a hilltop church. Public transport is limited.
- D Braga: about 40 minutes by car. It is one of Portugal's oldest cities, with a cathedral and the Bom Jesus hill sanctuary.
- E Guimarães: under 1 hour by car. It is a historic centre with a medieval castle and a ducal palace. By public transport, change in Porto and allow much longer.

Where to explore

Nearby places for a day out:

- Along the coast: Esposende has quiet dunes and a protected coastline to the north. Viana do Castelo is farther north at the Lima river mouth.
- To the south: Porto is the regional capital and the end of the metro line.
- Inland in the Minho: Braga and Guimarães are historic cities about an hour away by car.
- Inland: Amarante is a riverside town on the Tâmega, east of Porto.

Getting there

- By air: Porto airport (Francisco Sá Carneiro, OPO) is the gateway, about 20 km south. A taxi takes about 20 minutes. By metro, take the airport line to Verdes, change to Line B towards Póvoa de Varzim and get off at Vila do Conde.
- By metro from Porto: Line B runs from Trindade in Porto to Vila do Conde in about 50 minutes. Trains run several times an hour in the daytime. This is the easiest way to arrive. See Metro do Porto for lines and times.
- By car: The A28 coast motorway passes Vila do Conde. It is toll-free. The drive from Porto takes about 25 minutes.

Getting around

- Metro: The town has two Line B stations: Vila do Conde in the centre and Santa Clara near the monastery. Tickets are zone-based. Buy one at the station machine and validate it at the reader before you board.
- On foot: The centre, the riverfront and the monastery are all walkable. The nearest beach is about 1.5 km from the main station, a walk of about 15 minutes.
- Taxi: Taxis are a simple option for the beaches in the evening and for luggage.
- By bike: The town is mostly flat. The seafront path along the coast is the nicest route, and the wind can be strong.

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

High

The centre, riverfront and monastery are compact and mostly flat. The beaches are a 15-minute walk or a short ride away.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Moderate

The terrain is mostly flat and a seafront path follows the coast. Wind can be strong.

Driving

- Do you need a car: Not for the town. The metro and your feet cover the centre and the beaches. A car helps for Braga, Guimarães and Viana do Castelo.
- Tolls: The A28 coast motorway is toll-free. It has been free since January 2025.

Food & drink

Fish and seafood are the local focus, as this is an old fishing and shipping town. Look for grilled fish, seafood rice and salt cod.

Restaurants cluster around the river and the old centre, and near the seafront by the beaches. The Mercado Municipal is the place for fresh produce.

What to eat & drink

LUNCH

Caldo Verde
A simple, comforting soup of shredded kale, potato, and slices of chourico sausage.

Francesinha
A hearty Porto specialty: a meat-stuffed sandwich covered in melted cheese and a spiced tomato-beer sauce.

DINNER

Bacalhau
Salt cod, Portugal's national dish, said to be prepared in hundreds of different ways across the country.

Sardinhas Assadas
Charcoal-grilled sardines, especially popular in summer street festivals and along the coast.

Arroz de Marisco
A rich, soupy seafood rice, similar to paella but wetter, packed with shellfish.

SWEETS & DESSERTS

Pastel de Nata
A small custard tart in flaky pastry, best eaten warm with cinnamon and sugar.

DRINKS

Vinho Verde
A young, light, slightly sparkling white wine from northern Portugal, meant to be drunk within a year of harvest.

Port Wine · Vinho do Porto
A fortified wine from the Douro Valley, aged in cellars around Porto, ranging from sweet ruby to complex aged tawny styles.

Ginjinha · Ginãa
A sweet liqueur made from sour cherries, traditionally served in a small cup, sometimes with a cherry at the bottom.

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Safety & health

Vila do Conde is safe for visitors. Pickpocketing is uncommon, but keep bags closed in crowds and at festivals. Do not leave valuables in a parked car near the beaches.

The Atlantic is the bigger risk. Waves and currents can be strong, and the water is cool. Swim at beaches with lifeguards, which work in the summer season. The sun is strong from late spring to early autumn.

History

The town appears in a document from 953 as *Villa de Comite*. In 1318, *Afonso Sanches* and his wife *Teresa Martins* founded the Santa Clara monastery on the hill above the river. Its church, Igreja de Santa Clara, still stands. In 1516, King *Manuel I* gave the town a royal charter.

The 16th century was the town's peak, when shipyards on the Ave built wooden ships for the Age of Discovery. The brothers *Paulo* and *Francisco Faria* from Vila do Conde sailed with *Vasco da Gama*. Shipbuilding on the river continued for about five centuries. Today the Alfândega Régia and the Nau Quinhentista tell that story.

In the early 18th century, the nuns built the Aqueduto de Santa Clara to bring water to the monastery. Bobbin lace, made by hand in town, became a symbol of Vila do Conde. The town became a city in 1987.

Country facts

Quick practical facts for Portugal at a glance:

CURRENCY
EUR €

EMERGENCY
112

ELECTRICITY



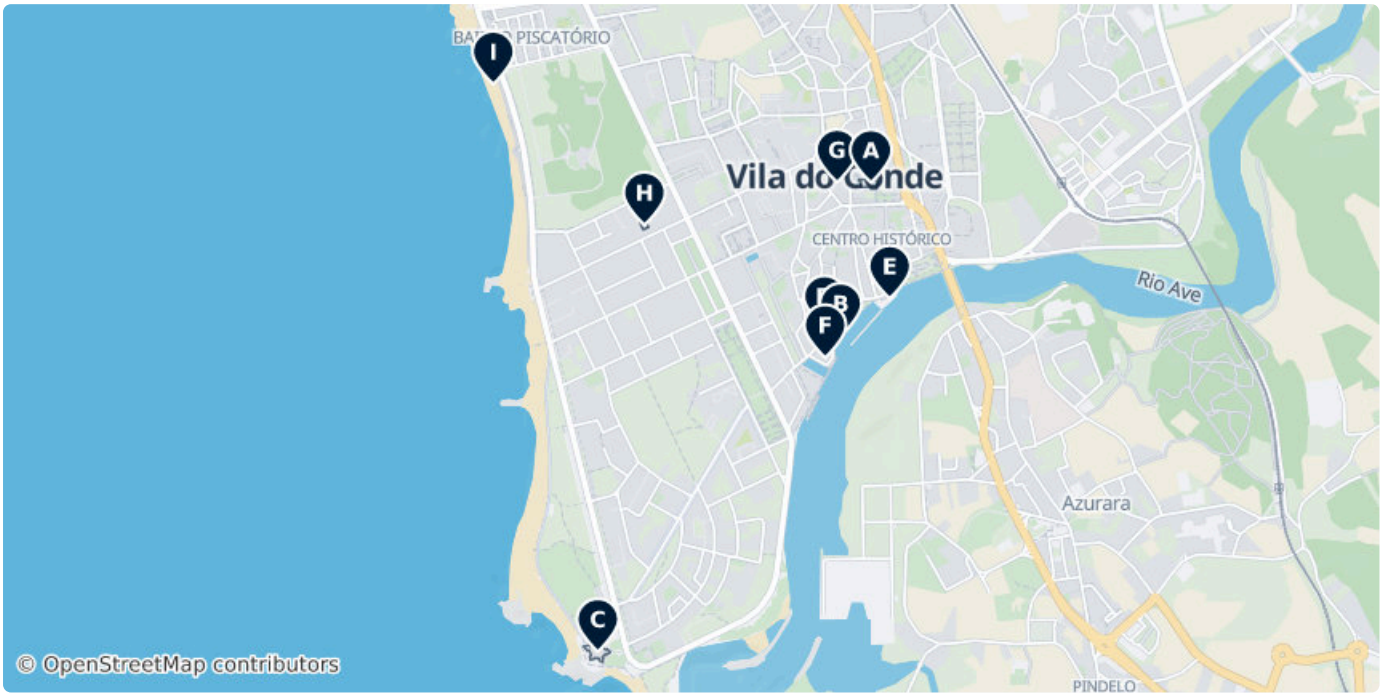
Type C / Type F
230 V · 50 Hz

LANGUAGES
Portuguese

TAP WATER
Safe to drink

Vila do Conde Essentials

Vila do Conde preserves Portugal's maritime heritage through the Nau Quinhentista, a full-scale replica of a 16th-century vessel, and the Alfândega Régia museum. The town's religious history is visible in the Manueline architecture of the Igreja Matriz and the unique circular dome of the Capela de Nossa Senhora do Socorro. Defensive structures like the Forte de São João Baptista guard the coast, while the Monumento à Rendilheira honors the local bobbin lace tradition. This collection highlights the Gothic and Manueline landmarks situated between the Ave River and the Atlantic shoreline.





A Igreja Matriz de Vila do Conde

A 16th-century parish church featuring a prominent Manueline portal designed by architect João de Castilho. The interior contains gilded wood altarpieces and a vaulted ceiling reflecting Gothic and Renaissance influences.

Rua da Igreja, Vila do Conde (41.35393, -8.74227)

viladoconde.com/igreja-matriz/



B Nau Quinhentista

A full-scale, seaworthy replica of a 16th-century Portuguese ship. Docked on the Ave River, the vessel showcases the living conditions, navigation tools, and construction techniques used during the Age of Discovery.

43 Largo da Alfândega, Vila do Conde 4480, Portugal (41.34993, -8.74333)

Tu–Su	10:00–13:00, 14:00–18:00

viladoconde.com/nau-quinhentista/

C Forte de São João Baptista

A 17th-century coastal fortress situated at the mouth of the Ave River. Built to defend the port from pirates, the pentagonal structure maintains its original ramparts and watchtowers.

Avenida de Manuel Barros, Vila do Conde 4480, Portugal (41.34168, -8.75178)

viladoconde.com/forte-de-sao-joao-baptista/

D Alfândega Régia

Housed in the former Royal Customs House, this museum documents the history of wooden shipbuilding in Vila do Conde. Exhibits include traditional tools, ship models, and the administrative history of the 15th-century port.

57 Rua do Socorro, Vila do Conde 4480, Portugal (41.35012, -8.74389)

Tu–Su 10:00–18:00

viladoconde.com/alfandega-regia/, +351 252 248 468

E Monumento à Rendilheira de Vila do Conde

A bronze monument dedicated to the 'rendilheiras,' the local women who have preserved the traditional art of bobbin lace for centuries. It stands as a tribute to one of the town's most significant cultural crafts.

(41.35090, -8.74162)

viladoconde.com/monumento-a-rendilheira/

F Capela de Nossa Senhora do Socorro

A 16th-century chapel distinguished by its unusual circular floor plan and white dome. The interior is decorated with 18th-century azulejo tiles depicting religious scenes.

3 Rua do Socorro, Vila do Conde 4480, Portugal (41.34936, -8.74387)

viladoconde.com/capela-nossa-senhora-do-socorro/

G Pelourinho de Vila do Conde

A 16th-century Manueline-style pillory located in the historic center. The stone column is topped with a sphere and an armillary sphere, symbolizing the town's municipal authority and judicial autonomy.

82 Rua da Misericórdia, Vila do Conde 4480, Portugal (41.35393, -8.74346)

viladoconde.com/pacos-do-concelho-e-pelourinho/

H Palacete Melo

A 19th-century mansion featuring eclectic architectural details. Located near the waterfront, it serves as a prominent example of the grand residential buildings constructed by the town's wealthy merchant families.

Avenida Bento de Freitas (41.35282, -8.75016)

viladoconde.com/palacete-melo/

I Praia das Caxinas

A wide sandy beach associated with the historic Caxinas fishing community. The area is known for its strong maritime traditions and proximity to the coastal walking paths.

(41.35650, -8.75542)

Historic Churches & Monuments

Vila do Conde's historical center is defined by its religious architecture, spanning the Manueline, Renaissance, and Baroque periods. This collection highlights the 16th-century Igreja Matriz with its intricate sculpted portal and the unique circular Capela de Nossa Senhora do Socorro overlooking the Ave River. The list also includes civic landmarks like the Padrão da Memória, which commemorates the 1832 Liberal landings, and the town's traditional wrought-iron bandstand, reflecting the intersection of spiritual tradition and local history.



A Igreja Matriz de Vila do Conde

A 16th-century Manueline masterpiece featuring a highly detailed portal by João de Castilho. The interior contains ornate gilded Baroque altarpieces and a fortified bell tower.

(41.35393, -8.74241)

viladoconde.com/igreja-matriz/

B Capela de Nossa Senhora do Socorro

An 18th-century chapel notable for its unusual circular floor plan and ribbed dome. It sits on a prominent site overlooking the mouth of the Ave River.

3 Rua do Socorro, Vila do Conde 4480, Portugal
(41.34936, -8.74387)

viladoconde.com/capela-nossa-senhora-do-socorro/

C Igreja de Nossa Senhora do Carmo

An 18th-century Baroque church known for its ornate gilded woodcarvings and traditional Portuguese tilework decorating the interior.

110 Rua dos Prazeres, Vila do Conde 4480, Portugal
(41.35154, -8.74390)

viladoconde.com/igreja-e-convento-do-carmo/

D Igreja da Misericórdia

A 16th-century church featuring a Renaissance portal. It historically served the local charitable brotherhood and houses significant examples of sacred art.

2 Rua Cruzeiro dos Chãos, Vila do Conde 4480, Portugal
(41.35439, -8.74397)

viladoconde.com/igreja-da-misericordia/

E Capela de São Bento

A small 17th-century chapel featuring a simple facade and interior walls decorated with traditional blue and white azulejo tiles.

156 Rua de São Bento, Vila do Conde 4480, Portugal (41.35191, -8.74417)

viladoconde.com/capela-de-sao-bento/

F Padrão da Memória

An obelisk monument erected to commemorate the 1832 landing of the Liberal army led by D. Pedro IV during the Portuguese Civil War.

Avenida Marquês de Sá da Bandeira, Vila do Conde 4480, Portugal (41.34110, -8.75054)

G Relógio de Sol

A stone sundial located near the riverfront, serving as a historical timekeeping instrument for the local maritime community.

31 Praça Dom João II, Vila do Conde 4480, Portugal (41.34863, -8.74433)

H Coreto

A traditional wrought-iron bandstand located in the Praça da República, used for public musical performances since the early 20th century.

(41.35265, -8.74897)

DATA SOURCES

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IMAGE CREDITS

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- Nau Quinhentista — "Réplica de Nau Quinhentista - Vila do Conde - Portugal (38693558622)" by Vitor Oliveira from Torres Vedras, PORTUGAL, cc-by-sa-2.0

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