

Arouca Geopark: The Gem in Northern Portugal

Located just at one hour drive from Oporto city, the Arouca Geopark is one of the best well kept secrets of Northern Portugal. A place where Geology, Nature, Architecture, Culture and Gastronomy transform this region in a “must stop” destiny.

A member of the European and Global Geoparks Networks under the auspices of UNESCO, since 2009, Arouca Geopark hosts a valuable and unique geological heritage, with more than 500 million years. Across its 327 km² area, the visitor can find 41 places with geological relevance (geosites) that are identified and classified. The Ordovician giant trilobite fossils of Canelas – the biggest in the world – the “Rocks Delivering Stones” (or rather “stones that give birth”) of Castanheira, and the Mizarela Waterfall in Freita Mountain are among the most important and well known geosites of Arouca Geopark.

Nature & Culture

The mountains of Freita, Arada and Montemuro, as well as the unspoiled Paiva River are classified areas of the “Natura 2000” Network, which integrate an exceptional biodiversity and are the main attractions reflecting the beauty of the landscape.



Along with this outstanding natural and geological heritage, Arouca Geopark has also a very strong legacy in terms of architectural heritage, such as the Arouca’s Monastery, the biggest Portuguese monument built in granite, dating the beginning of the building from the 10th century. Here is housed one of the most important Portuguese private collections of sacred art.

The abandoned tungsten mines of Rio de Frades and Regoufe, exploited by Germans and British respectively, are an important mining heritage that keeps some interesting histories related to the World War II and the Portuguese neutrality.

Walking, Rafting, Biking

One of the best ways to discover this territory is by trekking. Visitors can choose one of the thirteen walking trails and discover traditional villages, see the land being worked and make friends with the local people. If adrenalin is what you’re looking for, rafting and kayaking at Paiva River, with the best rafting tracks in Portugal, or mountain bikes at Freita Mountain are options to bear in mind. There are many tour

agents and several locals that offer these experiences of sport and adventure.



Arouca Geopark also offers educational programs and Tourist Routes for those who are looking for a familial or scholar program. The units of local accommodation and travel agents offer tourist programs that provide unique sensations and emotions.

For Your Taste Buds

One of the best ways to finish the visit to Arouca Geopark is without any doubt tasting the local delicacies. For the main course you can choose “posta arouquesa” or the roasted veal. The meat comes from the local cattle bred "arouquesa", being raised free in the surrounding mountains. Don't miss the possibility to taste the exquisite sweets such as “castanhas doces” or “barrigas the freira” which were prepared in the old times by the nuns at the monastery and whose recipes are carefully kept by local producers. “Pão-de-ló”, "melindres" and “pedras parideiras” are also regional sweets not to be missed as well.

In the Arouca Geopark territory you have a set of diversified places for accommodation: a three stars hotel, located right at the centre of Arouca town; a rural hotel, just 10 minutes away by car; several traditional houses, located some of them in traditional villages; and the camping park in the Freita Mountain, with bungalows, and space for tents and caravans.

Folk Festivals

During the year a diversified set of events animates the Arouca Geopark territory, namely the International Festival of wild waters, in the Paiva river during the winter time; the European Week of Geoparks, at the end of May; the International Folk Festival in August; and the “Feira das Colheitas”, the biggest local festivity which celebrates the local legacy related to the land and to the local ethnography. These are just a few of the several suggestions to complement your next visit to the Arouca Geopark.

By Arouca Geopark Association (AGA)

<http://www.geoparquearouca.com>

Date: 2010-04-26

Article link:

<http://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-arouca-geopark-the-gem-in-northern-portugal-article1185>