

Post



Scott Farnsworth

Jun 2, 2025 · 6 min read

# Market day - June 3, 2025

Updated: Jun 7, 2025

## ***SUMMARY***

The plan for today was to drive out to the Douro Valley for two nights, stopping in the picturesque town of Amarante for lunch. But first, a booth to booth exploration of the Bolhão market and an Über ride to the airport to pick up our rental car. We never did find a restaurant but managed to scrape together a lunch from our bags. The drive is really spectacular, just jaw-dropping. Our inn was equally fabulous, a beautiful property on a hill overlooking the Douro Valley and the vineyards. All kinds of flowers blooming, swimming pool, hot tub, honor system bar and a 4-course dinner. Heaven! - Karen

### ***DETAIL***

We wake, have our usual coffee in the room followed by another breakfast down stairs. Our packing goes on both before and after breakfast. With our bags mostly packed, with us fed, and with checkout not for a few hours, we walk across the street for a more in-depth inspection of the market. It's sunny and the sky is pure blue.

Here tourists are already out in force. Given the variety of places they're from, and the languages they speak, it's sometimes hard to tell who's from here and who's not. Most at the market are tourists, and most of what's for sale is directed at the tourists, not locals. There are some exceptions: the squash that's much bigger than a watermelon, the enormous flower arrangements, and the big, whole fish.

The stalls are arranged to put like with like. If you see a stall selling dried fruit you can bet there are one or two more adjacent. Some common themes for products offered include the 'ready to eat', the 'sample the local foods' (e.g. for the sardines and cod, aka bacalhau), the small sized (small and easy to pack), the pre-portioned and pre-priced items. Another give-away are items with packaging promoting Porto or Portugal. Port and wine are on offer, and being consumed, despite it being just after 9 a.m.

The four of us start out together, but it's soon apparent that Nancy and Karen want to spend more time inspecting things than Ron or I. The guys are done checking everything out pretty quickly, while we keep note of the girl's progress. Given how much time we're ultimately there, Ron and I do our more cursory inspection of the whole market maybe two or three times over.

Us guys are drawn to the knives (complete with sharpening services and optional engraving). We also find the pasta booth interesting. There they make fresh pasta throughout the day and have boiling water and huge, hollowed-out Parmesan wheels available for anyone with an urgent craving for cooked pasta with sauce.

A couple of gifts are purchased for family back home and we climb the stairs to the 2nd and 3rd floors of the market to see the restaurants and the views (including of our rooms).

Back in our hotel we haul our luggage down the four (plus) flights of stairs to the street. We don't check out because there's no one at the front desk. We pre-paid and we don't have any outstanding charges (we hope!)

José, a slight, older Uber driver with thick glasses, gets us to the airport. The sign at the Avis counter tells us where to go (i.e. take the Avis shuttle bus to the rental car lot).

It takes a while but we're finally in our automatic Renault SUV hybrid heading east. Having sat in the sun all day the car is hot. The two physical fan buttons let us choose between having the fans off or on max. For any speed in between you must do a dive deep into the arcane French-designed LCD control panel. Sadly this same panel is telling us where to go, and here in town there's another roundabout every 100 meters. Eventually we're on a bigger road and can get the interior temperature somewhat under control.

For lunch we pick a spot halfway to our next hotel and aim the GPS in that direction. We arrive and it's not an eating establishment. To say it's a broken down old shack would be unfair to broken down old shacks. Try number two takes us into the heart of the small downtown, to a pedestrian street. At times the street is so narrow we consider folding in our car's mirrors. Multiple signs declaring "authorized vehicles only" are flatly ignored. We never do find the (any) restaurant and for Ron to continue driving ahead I have to jump out and pull aside one of those big metal barricades. We're not supposed to be driving here. A few yards on we pull over, put on our flashers, and have a delicious lunch of nuts, dried fruit, granola, digestive biscuits and water.

Ron and Nancy have previously been where to we're staying tonight, but the last time here they drove in from the other direction. From this direction we're very high up on a mountain and the road is barely wide enough for two cars. At times we're again considering folding in the mirrors, but we finally make it.

Madame (Señora?) greets us and show us around on our way to the reception desk. We pass the room that is an honor system bar (one of two), a billiard room, and we get a peek into the big kitchen and the dining rooms. It's all gorgeous. Outside we see a wide variety of flowers growing everywhere and Douro Valley vineyards are visible in all directions. Up from the pool is the big dining room (with glass on three sides) and below that is our room (five rooms, actually). It's amazing but being in the middle of nowhere it's not too pricy. Karen mentions wistfully how nice the outdoor patio next door to our room looks. Madam corrects us and notes that, too, is a part of "our room." Ron and Nancy's room is further away but equally nice with similarly amazing views.

We have some local wine on the patio and meet other guests before it's time for the prix fixe dinner (with paired wine included). It's delicious from start to finish and we manage to keep it all on the table, to the dismay of the hotel's two stocky bulldogs.

Part of our dinner are scrumptious roasted mini bell peppers. This reminds me that I need to convert our grill at home from natural gas to propane. "You don't have natural gas??" Ron and Nancy ask in surprise. No, I explain. At our house, if you do smell 'natural gas', look at the person to your left and the person to your right. One of the three of you just produced some 'natural gas'.

One of the house dogs, a bull dog named Molly, comes to visit. That gets us talking about dogs and names. My name is Scott, so guess what kind of dog my dad had when he was a boy? That's right, a Scottie dog. I'm named for a dog breed! The shame.

As this line of conversation continues, I mention how my sister's name is Barbara, and guess where she was conceived? On a beach in Santa Barbara! Nancy tops that. They have a friend whose son is named Hyatt. Guess where HE was conceived? We all agree it's good they don't stay at the Motel 6.

Many courses and too much wine later it's time to retire to our rooms. Tomorrow we're here all day. Lots of relaxing pool time is envisioned.

---

## Photos



Mirror coming down the stairs for breakfast. Must pause.



Across the street to check out the market in more detail.



On the third level of the market. A big Instagram-worthy 'can' of sardines.



From top left: Millefeuille (with only one layer of filling), open-faced deer carpaccio sammies, hot sauce alley, poison mushroom scene.



From top: Edible mushrooms, tins of sardines, nuts, seeds.



From top left: Pastel de Nata, RTE fruit cups, pasta prep hallowed out parmesan wheel, apricot and walnut sammies.



This family of three got stretchy covers for their suitcases each with their own face on it. No one is taking their suitcases by mistake.



Driving east for more time in the Douro Valley.



At our hotel. One of two self-serve, honor system bars. This place seems dangerous.



The main area (sleeping space) in our room. The closet and changing room is to the right. There's another sitting room to the left. Too many rooms in the room.



Our room's front sitting room.



We enjoy some local wine as we sit outside, in the shade of very old olive trees.



Dinner time. The vineyards of the Douro Valley in the background.



FARNSNIENTE ≡



Our view during dinner (and most meals, really).



Enjoying the meal.



Sorry, Molly, no scraps for you.

[Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Index](#)

## Subscribe Form

Email Address

Submit



©2023 by FarnsNiente. Proudly created with Wix.com