



## PORTO: PORTUGAL'S PICTURESQUE SECOND CITY

FAST FACTS		Similar To
Urbanized Area* Population	1,035,000	Suwon (South Korea), Auckland, Adelaide, Memphis, Oslo, Hiroshima
Urbanized Land Area: Square Miles	150	St. Catherines-Niagara, Oslo, Busan (South Korea), Honolulu
Urbanized Land Area: Square Kilometers	390	
Population per Square Mile	6,900	Los Angeles, Nagoya, Oslo, Stuttgart, Budapest, Fukuoka
Population per Square Kilometer	2,600	
*Continuously built up area		

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For any for whom San Francisco's physical setting is insufficiently pleasing, a trip to Porto is recommended. Porto? Most people haven't even heard of it. But Portugal's second urban area has much to offer.

It is hard to imagine a more interesting urban setting. Add Porto to the list of just a few cities where the water, geographical relief and urban development combine to form extraordinarily spectacular images, along with Hong Kong, Seattle, Sydney, San Francisco, Rio de Janeiro, Naples, Barcelona and Halifax. But its strongest competition may come from larger Lisbon, just a few hours south by autopista (toll motorway).



Porto is Portugal's second largest urban area. It used to be the nation's second largest city after Lisbon. But Porto, like virtually all other central cities in the high-income world that have not annexed or consolidated has lost population. Suburbs, such as Sintra (growing like a north Dallas suburb) in the Lisbon area and Villa Nova de Gaia, south across the river from Porto are now larger. Porto peaked at 330,000 in 1981, and had fallen to 263,000 by the 2001 census. Now there are fewer people in Porto than in 1950. The suburbs have added at least

400,000 people over the same time. The loss rate since 1981 is substantial. Porto is losing population at about the same annual rate that has occurred in Milan, Copenhagen and Cleveland. Few cities have experienced a materially larger loss rate. But, overall the loss is not nearly so great as in other cities, such as St. Louis and Antwerp where earlier affluence rendered core densities as unsustainable much earlier.

At nearly 16,000 per square mile, the 16 square mile city is approximately the density of San Francisco, and a quarter the density of the ville de Paris or Manhattan. The highest density districts approach 50,000 per square mile. But, to offer some context to Porto's density and its extent, "sprawling" Los Angeles has approximately twice as much land area at city of Porto densities is covered by the entire, much lower density Porto urbanized area. And, while the city itself is losing population as the suburbs grow, it would be as erroneous to claim that the suburbs are "bleeding" the city in Porto as in much of Western Europe or North America. Over 50 years, the population loss in the city has been less than one-tenth the gain in the suburbs, as people have poured into the area from smaller towns and rural areas.

And, both Porto and Portugal are well on their way to European Union standards of income. For the new European Union nations to the east, Portugal, and its Iberian neighbor Spain are models of what can be. All over the Iberian peninsula is evidence of prosperity. New roads, construction cranes, new suburban housing. These are nations that are closing the economic gap (what little of it remains) quickly with Northern Europe.

As unknown as Porto is the River Douro, the north bank of which it occupies. Unlike Lisbon or Rio de Janeiro, Porto's core is not exposed to a wide estuary or bay for the world to see. The core of Porto is a few miles inland, similar to the relationship of central Sydney to the Pacific. By this location the river has narrowed considerably, and cuts through bluffs. On the north side is the city of Porto and on the south, Villa Nova de Gaia (if the US Census Bureau metropolitan area standards were applied to naming this area, it would now be known as Villa Nova de Gaia-Porto metropolitan area, just as San Jose has become the principal name in a metropolitan most know by the name of its second largest city, San Francisco).

Between the two cities are spectacular bridges. The most impressive is the double level, arched, iron Luis I Bridge, opened in 1886. The new "light" metro, a technology of similar age, will appropriately use this fine old structure. There are other impressive bridges, such as a Gustavo



Eiffel designed arch bridge opened in 1877 that was used by intercity trains until the early 1990s. Now trains cross on a nearby modern concrete span. Of course the urban area's busiest bridges, by far, are the modern Douro River crossings by the ring road to the east and west of the core.

And like San Francisco and Lisbon, the beauty found in the core is just the beginning of the metropolitan area. Spreading to the north, south and east of Porto is where most of the people live --- the growing

suburbs where people are now able to afford the single-family homes and cars at rates at rates achieved in the 1970s and 1980s in Northern Europe. It is sometimes difficult to obtain a good image of the suburban housing, because of the Iberian/Latin American custom of enclosing the yard behind a masonry or stucco wall. The other major Iberian difference is that much of the new housing construction takes on hues of the sun --- light pinks and rose, not unlike the custom in some affluent Orange County (the California one, not Florida) neighborhoods. The neighborhoods are also testimony to Australian imperialism, with large eucalyptus trees are plentiful, as is the case in other down-under colonies, such as Sao Paulo and San Francisco.

Public transport market share appears to have fallen to the Western European average (approximately 15 percent for the area) and appears to have fallen nearly one-third in the past two decades.

Porto is well served by freeways. One has recently been partially completed through Villa Nova de Gaia, and another is being upgraded to the southern suburb of Espinho from the south side of the ring road. The main north-south A-1 Autopista (drops its tolls in the metropolitan area, as is also the custom in Spain and France. This makes the local labor market more efficient, making travel between work and home less expensive. The city itself, and Villa de Gaia are nearly surrounded by a ring road that because of the rolling morphology, gives a good perspective on the development from the core to the suburbs. Central Porto is small enough that the ring road never wanders more than about three miles from the core. One of the most interesting views is from the bridge over the Douro River on the west side, where on one side can be seen the core of Porto and on the other side the Pacific. More than one crossing, however, is recommended for an adequate appreciation of the views.

But as central as the ring road is, it provides an object lesson on how automobility defines the modern urban area. Through much of its alignment, the ring road is enclosed by commercial developments that can only be classified as suburban, despite their location within bicycling distance of the core. There is even an under-construction metro station on the north side, even as unsustainable core densities are being daily transformed into more livable arrangements in the suburbs. The metro line will provide fine service to the core, but to get to the metro station from anywhere else will require a transfer in the core. And, as local officials rush to serve yesterday,



development continues on the fringes. More freeway oriented development will be found along the more peripheral IC-24 freeway between the A-1 and the international airport.

To paraphrase the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, “all experience hath shown” that people don’t spend a lot more time getting where they need to go than they have to, at least voluntarily. Which is why cars and highways compose the dominant transport system from Porto to Portland, Pheonix, Perth and Paris.













#### PICTURES

Eiffel's Railway Bridge  
Luis I Bridge and Porto (Right Bank)  
Ring Road Development  
Suburban Housing (5)  
Development on the IC-24  
Core

By Wendell Cox

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