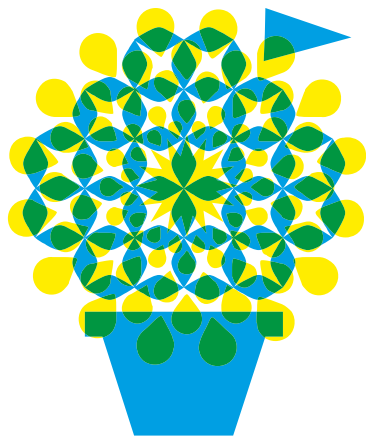




—
São
João
—



Porto.



PORTO'S SACRED AND PROFANE SÃO JOÃO

The brand **Porto**, Cultural World Heritage, in strong harmony with the authentic popular celebration of Porto's São João, reaches its most meaningful expression during these festivities, turning it into the most important celebration and longest night in Porto.

This guide will be your explanatory route as to the expressions and the symbols of the São João festivities in Porto, leading you into the soul and the people of this town, through the unique experience of living the celebration that best characterizes them.



PROFANE

The liturgical calendar assumes since prehistory an extremely important role in the life of communities, with the selection of key-dates that used to mark the magical relation with earth and heaven. The *São João* celebration, the Summer solstice celebration indicates the peak of the solar course and inherits all the symbols that characterize a pagan celebration. The cult of stones and herbs, of water and plants, and of fire is for long connected with the religious occasion in honour of St. John the Baptist, these elements reflecting their benefits over love, health, happiness and beauty.



The Porto celebration

São João Baptista (St. John, the Baptist) is considered a "Popular Saint" in Portugal, as he is celebrated on the streets and by everyone.

The first references to the festivities in honour of *Porto's São João* are already from the fourteenth century, and were made by a writer of the King. The Porto inhabitants have always participated in these festivities with great enthusiasm and wholehearted commitment as to the organisation of the various cultural and entertaining popular events, parades, dances and social intercourse. The festivities also comprise several competition events: the traditional *Rabelos* Regatta, running along 1,5 km, from the Foz do Douro (the river mouth) to the Luís I Bridge, at Ribeira; the *São João* Run; the cascades, shop windows, popular parades and popular *São João* quatrains competitions.

The streets are filled with colourful decoration and lights, appetizers sellers, open-air dances and entertainment, for people to celebrate a cheerful and friendly popular *São João*.

The profane art and the popular religiosity of *Porto's São João* are part of the artistic and cultural expression of this people, shown through this celebration, and are based on a set of popular symbolic practices, explained through a collection of symbols, somehow reflecting the origin of this event.

The *Porto* celebration is more than popular entertainment; it is the pride of coming from *Porto* and the evidence of the Portuguese hospitality. During its grand celebration and its longest night, neither the people, nor the city get to sleep. Its main actors have no end; they defy the meaning of amusement, moving cheerfully throughout the city in an ancestral ritual, which is part of their existence since immemorial times.

Crown in Ribeira



Balloons



The bonfire and the fireworks

The *São João* bonfires are lit on the streets by residents and friends, who demonstrate their courage by jumping over them. They have purifying virtues, as far as health, marriage and happiness are concerned.

On 23 June at midnight start the *São João fireworks*, which keeps on being one of the reasons why people go out on the streets, moving towards Ribeira, where thousands of people finally get together, filling both sides of the River Douro to watch the most important show of the year, full of light and colour. The sun rituals were already celebrated by the primitive Aryans who used to light "sky fire" bonfires through imitative magic, as they believed that by doing it they would be bringing into the night the daily power of the sun. By this time of the year the sun was already on its descending course and this caused a great deal of worry to the people depending on natural cycles. Also associated with the fire, the traditional *São João balloons*, made of colourful paper, are carefully lit and let loose into the sky during the evening and the night. It is a singular sight, that of hundreds of balloons spotting the sky.



Water and Dew



Beside its references to the cult and to pagan rituals, water is particularly significant, being an element from the biblical scene of baptism played by John and Jesus. According to popular wisdom, water goes to sleep every night, except on *São João's Eve*. On *São João's* eve and dawn, dew is blessed, acquiring the power of healing and giving beauty to young people, as to enhance love, among other benefits.

On the Alameda das Fontainhas there used to be a fountain, to which people would go on the 23 June, between midnight and sunrise, to drink water or to wash themselves on it. On this night dew is given a special meaning and becomes part of the festivities itself. The *São João* night ends at Foz do Douro (the river mouth) and people walk towards the sea until sunrise.



The Cascade

These are sceneries for free representations, coming probably from the Christmas crib, perhaps owing to the perfect symmetry between the solstice celebrations. Water, an indispensable element in the *São João* cascade, most likely justifying its name, and the image of St John the Baptist, baptizing Jesus, are the central items in the set. The efforts placed on their construction show the particular devotion of Porto inhabitants to the Saint. Cascades get to comprise entire villages with tiny houses and paths made of sand and moss, depicting parts of the city and old local customs. The colourful clay images called "mascates" are true works of popular art created by the "mascate"-makers. They represent people in their daily occupations, many of them not existing anymore, and animals that you can no longer see in the city. These one-of-a-kind cascades are most colourful, some of them with moving images, and lots of adornments and lights, as well as different kinds of plants. A set that gives origin to curious interpretations, also personifying the way people live this celebration. They vary in size and have no original model; they are made according to the imagination of those who create them with passion at any corner, those being groups organized to show their activity, or children doing it to gather money in name of the Saint. An annual competition tests their authenticity, awarding the most beautiful and traditional, as a prize for the persistence of Porto inhabitants. The most traditional "cascata" is definitely the one in Alameda das Fontainhas, a place of pilgrimage and prayer.





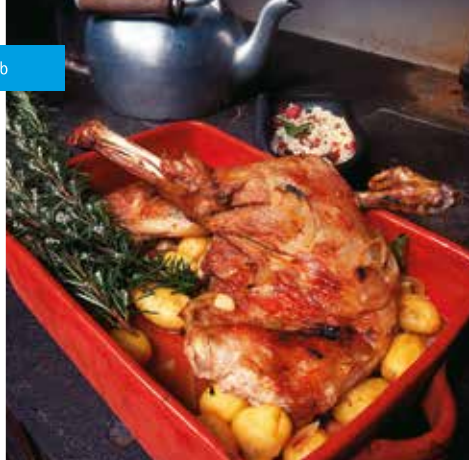
Basil



Wild leek

Wild leek and Basil

Herbs are natural on this time of year and of particular significance to this event, on the one hand because they are believed to be of benefit to health and on the other hand for the symbolism people have given them, thus becoming a *São João* icon. They're also called "*São João herbs*" and hold magical and therapeutic virtues, and traces of complex agricultural rituals, from which the Roman and Celtic celebrations originated, as well as the beliefs associated with the Walpurgis celebrations. For example, wild leek, or "*São João leek*" has become the ultimate symbol of the Porto's *São João* festivities and it is used in the evening and throughout the year's longest night to democratically touch others and let them smell it, as a wish for good luck and wealth. Basil is the most popular herb of the season, and it can usually be bought in any street in the city centre for decoration or to offer. It is sold in pots carrying a little flag-like paper with a popular quatrain about the celebrations, the Saint or the people's most wicked intentions. It should be "smelt" with your hand only.



Gastronomy

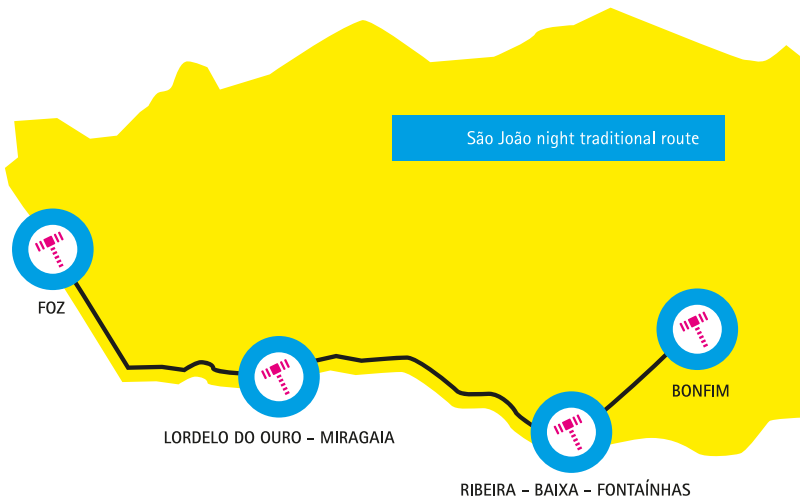
On *São João's* evening or on *São João's* day tradition recommends "caldo verde" (cabbage soup) and corn bread, roast lamb or kid or barbecued sardine, pepper salad and for dessert, creamy custard. On 23 June, at dawn, one usually has coffee with milk and bread and butter. The origin of this tradition is not very precise. Some say that the dish of lamb or kid is related to the presence of this animal in the *São João* images, alluding to the Holy Lamb, and that the sardine was later used because it was cheaper and quite abundant on this time of the year. The tradition of the *São João* cake is now being regained. The official recipe takes flour, baking powder, crystallized fruit, nuts, almonds, liqueur, rum, cognac and milk for kneading - a delicacy when enjoyed together with the famous "nectar of the gods" - Port Wine.



São João play hammers

São João play hammers

At the city centre where sellers cry the traditional basil pots, carnations, lemon balm and wild leek, one can also find nowadays the modern play hammers made of plastic, producing a characteristic sound and found to be essential for the friendly "hitting" among *São João* night's revellers. It was created aiming at amusement and it is the vital instrument of the party, producing cheerful sounds that enthusiasm whoever is in the city since the morning, thus announcing the later revelry. Each one chooses its own accordingly among many different colours, shapes and sizes. They are used to "hit" on the head those passing by, without any kind of bothering, only fun.





SACRED SÃO JOÃO



São João Baptista (St. John the Baptist) is the Precursor Saint, announcing and preparing the arrival of his cousin - Christ, the Redeemer. He baptized Him in the Jordan River, in Palestine, introducing Him as the Messiah. Images portray him in two different ways: a young boy playing with a lamb, or an adult covered with a lamb's fur. He can also be represented only by a head, serving its sculpture as reliquary. The saints are always represented showing symbols or attributes, most of the times imposed in their hands, associated to the story of their lives, allowing us to get to know the role they played.

We recognize St. John, the Baptist wearing a single camel or lamb tunic, a leather belt and barefooted, his forefinger pointing up to the sky or to the lamb, the *Agnus Dei* - God's Lamb. Covered with a red cloak, the colour of martyrs, he holds a cane or a cross in the shape of a banner with the inscription *Ecce Hominem* ("Here's the man") or *Ecce Agnus Dei* ("Here's God's Lamb"), and a lamb, a prefiguration of Jesus destined to be offered as a sacrifice for men's salvation.




Santa Clara Church

The annual celebrations in honour of his birthday take place on the 24 June and the Porto inhabitants have made this day their municipal holiday. St. John, the Baptist is the protector of diseases of the head and patron of entertainment, as well as of the wine sellers, the baptisteries and many jobs connected with leather and wool. He is also the patron saint of sacred musicians. It is known that the names of the music notes come from the first syllables of the liturgical hymn's first stanza. The origin of the São João festivities is believed to be connected with the homage paid by man to the victorious and fecund sun. The pagan festivities have been associated to the religious celebrations in honour of the precursor saint for ages. The Church fought against them once, trying to avoid the blend between what was sacred and what was profane. On the seventh century *Santo Elói* used to say to the faithful: *"Eu vos peço... que na festa de São João e em outras solenidades dos santos, se não faça uso do solstício; que não se entreguem a danças, a jogos, a corridas, a coros diabólicos."* (I request you not to use the solstice or give yourself up to dances, games, races, diabolic chants during the São João celebrations or other saints celebrations.). This position is also clearly declared within the religious law about popular superstition: in 1639, it was written in the "Constituições do Bispado de Lamego" *"...pode-se também pôr em exemplo (de superstição) no que se tem introduzido em dia de São João Baptista, que se colham as ervas e levem a água da fonte para casa, ou se lave a gente e os animais nela, antes do sol nascer, metendo a gente de pouco saber que redunde em honra e louvor do Santo."* (meaning that an example of superstition would be what was being done on the day of St. John the Baptist, that is to cut the plants and take home the water of the

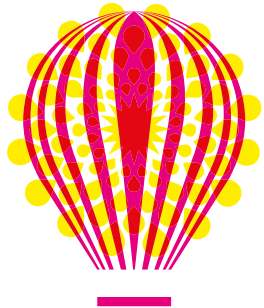


fountain, or wash the people and the animals on it before sunrise, using those with less knowledge who honour and pray for the Saint). Later on, the Church would allow some equivalencies between the practices in use and Christian religion. Water gives life and purifies and when it reaches the land as dew it benefits the land and the people. All peoples and civilizations used it to purify themselves and the midnight water is sacred: everything that touches it will be blessed and touched by God's grace. The water assumes special significance to the figure of St. John, the Baptist, owing to the meaning of the baptism of Christ. The bonfires of *São João's* eve symbolise on earth the heavenly fires. There were times when the 24 June, called the day of *São João Baptista*, was an obligatory mass-day. Lifestyles have changed, but the Festivity remains, although in different circumstances and settings, keeping the same human frame and the same action and repeating itself year after year, sometimes recycling and integrating habits. It is still a celebration of the present times, based on pillars of the past. The religious expression is now quite faint, framed inside the holy spaces where the memory of the people materializes - churches and chapels - and on the altars in honour of the Saint. The Fontainhas cascade receives the visit of the people, who also pay tribute to their beloved Saint on the street, by offering prayers and thanks giving. In the cities, highlights are the celebrations, the street decoration and the people's cheerfulness. However, Porto and its inhabitants have always felt a special kind of devotion and care for *São João Baptista* - "Long live my dear *São João*". They refer to the Saint and to his day throughout the history of the city, in streets' names and in significant events. They have also perpetuated their affection to the cult by looking after the religious patrimony, as evidenced by the São João Novo Convent Church, built where the São João Chapel (of the no longer existing São João Baptista de Belomonte parish) used to be located. About three hundred years later, the São João da Foz Church, in the Foz do Douro parish, where he was patron saint, was built.





His image is frequently represented through sculpture, plastic and decorative arts, remaining unchanged and visible inside the city's churches and chapels.



Before coming over, please confirm the operating hours with the various entities

Ribeira

The **Misericórdia Church**, in Baroque style, dating from the sixteenth century and rebuilt in the eighteenth century, following the proposal of the painter-architect Nicolau Nasoni. The São João Baptista Chapel is of Mannerist style and presents an Empire style altarpiece. In the Santa Casa da Misericórdia museum centre there is a panel by António Carneiro in honour of St. John, as well as a head-shaped reliquary of St. John, the Baptist.

The **São Nicolau Church**, seventeenth century. It belongs to a Mannerist style trend, although presenting some Baroque-like solutions. The baptistery displays a painting depicting St. John baptizing Christ. During the *São João* celebrations a small but valuable image of the Saint is proudly exhibited in the church.

The **Monument Church of S. Francisco de Assis**, of the fourteenth century, in Gothic style. This is, however, one of the most important Baroque works in Portugal, owing to its gilt carving. Worthy of notice is a painting of the biblical scene of the Baptism, showing the Holy Trinity, upon a retable from the sixteenth century, in the so-called Carneiros or Baptismo de Cristo or even São João Baptista Chapel.

Sé

The twelfth century **Cathedral**, was built in Romanesque style, but presents significant changes from the Baroque era. In the baptistery there is a bas-relief by Teixeira Lopes (father), depicting the Biblical scene of the Baptism of Christ by St. John, the Baptist. This representation shows Jesus's evident humility before the baptism.

The **Santa Clara Church**, of Gothic origin, with its interior covered by gilt carving, presenting a particular composition, comprising a traditional sculpture of St. John, the Baptist, on the top of a kind of *São João cascade* and a St. John reliquary, in the shape of his head, thus reminding the beheading episode.



Miragaia

The ***São João Novo Church***, of Baroque origin, dates from the end of the seventeenth century. On the inside there is an altarpiece in gilt carving dedicated to St. John the Baptist, dating from the end of the seventeenth century. Nowadays a solemn mass in honour of the Saint takes place on his birthday - 24 June - in this church.

The ***São Pedro de Miragaia Church***, was the first Porto's cathedral, but went through several changes, beginning in the seventeenth century. Its interior displays the image of St. John, the Baptist in the chapel in honour of Santa Rita. In the Fraternity room there is a triptych of the Flemish School of the sixteenth century, showing St. John the Baptist baptizing Christ in the Jordan River.





Misericórdia Church

Baixa (city centre)

The **Congregados Church**, of the end of the seventeenth century, in Baroque style. Inside there's a neoclassical altar dedicated to St. John the Baptist.

The **Clérigos Church**, in Baroque style. The architectural set includes the Church and the Clérigos Tower, the city's *ex-libris*. Several artists worked on its construction, with a special remark to Nicolau Nasoni. The image of São João Baptista is displayed on the altar dedicated to N^a. Sr^a. das Dores.

The **Lapa Church**, in neoclassical style and dating from the eighteenth/nineteenth centuries, first designed by João Glama Stroberle and holding D. Pedro IV's heart in a granite mausoleum, offered to the city by his widow, the Empress D. Amélia de Beauharnais, thus fulfilling her husband's wish. On the inside there's an altar exclusively dedicated to St. John the Baptist.

The **Almas Chapel**, built in the beginning of the eighteenth century. On the twentieth century the church was all covered with tiles representing parts of the life of São Francisco de Assis and Santa Catarina. On the inside there is a neoclassical altar dedicated to São João and a head-shaped reliquary of the Saint.

The **Trindade Church**, in neoclassical style, built during the entire nineteenth century. Its main chapel shows a large panel by the painter José de Brito, representing the Baptism of Christ. This painting shows also the Holy Trinity, main evocation in this sacred space. There is also a sculpture of St. John on the left side of the church.



Praça da Ribeira



São João da Foz Church

Bonfim

The **Bonfim Church**, dating from the nineteenth century. Inside, on the right side, there is a niche holding a sculpture that depicts the Saint in the most traditional way.

Foz

The **São João da Foz Church**, of the Renaissance era. On the façade there is a niche holding the image of St. John. On the inside he is depicted on a decorative painting in the baptistery, as well as through a sculpture on the main altarpiece, carved in the eighteenth century.

Cedofeita

The **Anjos Chapel**, dating from the nineteenth century, presenting on the inside an image of St. John, the Baptist with his arms open, as if preaching. Though this is a quite uncommon representation as a sculpture, there is no doubt of it being St. John the Baptist, owing to the presence of the lamb and the book.

The **Carmelitas Church**, of the eighteenth century, in Baroque style. The architect-painter Nicolau Nasoni is believed to have done some work in its façade. The image of St. John, the Baptist is presented on one of the walls, together with the images of São Pedro and Santo António.

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