PORTO is a UNESCO's World Heritage City. It is of outstanding universal value as the urban fabric and its many historic buildings bear remarkable testimony to the development over the past 1,000 years of a European city that looks outward to the West for its cultural and commercial links.

The historic centre of is a townscape of high aesthetic value, with evidence of urban development from the Roman, medieval, and Almadas periods. The rich and varied civil architecture of the historic centre expresses the cultural values of succeeding periods - Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, neoclassical and modern. The active social and institutional tissue of the town ensures its survival as a living historic centre. Military, commercial, agricultural, and demographic interests converged here to shelter a population capable of building the city. It is a collective work, not accomplished at a particular moment but the result of successive contributions. One of the most relevant aspects of Oporto is its scenic character, resulting from the complexity of the landform, the harmonious articulation of its roads, and the dialogue with the river. It also represents a successful interaction between the social and geographical environments.

There has been human occupation on the site of modern Oporto, at the mouth of the Douro River, since the 8th century BC. There the Romans established a town under the name of Portus. With the arrival in the early 5th century of the barbarians, the town became very important as an administrative and trading centre. By the early 11th century, it was firmly established as part of the Castilian realm. The first period of expansion came with the construction in 1374 of a new town wall protecting the two urban nuclei - the original medieval town and the hitherto extramural harbour area. Porto lent support to the expeditions organized by Henry the Navigator (who was born in the town) in the early 15th century. English entrepreneurs invested in the vineyards of the Douro valley, to supply the huge English market, and Oporto, as the port for the export of these wines, benefited greatly, as the wealth of Baroque buildings in the town attests. The citizens reacted against Pombal's creation of the Companhia do Alto Douro, designed to end the English monopoly. Oporto was the birthplace of the Liberal Revolution in 1820, which led to the adoption by the monarchy of the Seminal Constitution of 1822. During the 19th century, the town centre moved from the banks of the river to the new developments around the Praça da Liberdade: Gustav Eiffel designed the railway bridge across the river (1875), and many new buildings were constructed.

The historic centre is enclosed within the enceinte of the 14th-century Fernandine walls, together with some smaller areas that retain their medieval characteristics. This area conserves to a large extent the medieval town plan and urban fabric, with some later monumental insertions. Remains of the 12th-century ramparts that survive in place were erected on Roman foundations. Only two sections of the Fernandine walls, initiated by Dom Afonso IV in 1336 but named after his successor, Dom Fernando, in whose reign they were completed in 1376, are still standing. The massive crenellated stone walls were strengthened with many bastions and square towers. In this area there are many important ecclesiastical building, such as the Romanesque core of the cathedral. Among the many fine Gothic churches are São Francisco, São Lourenço dos Grilos, in the Mannerist style, Santa Clara in the Gothic Manueline style with later classical Renaissance elements, Nossa Senhora da Vitória, the early Baroque Igreja da Misericórdia, and Igreja dos Clérigos of Niccolò Nazzoni. Oporto also has a number of outstanding public buildings: the São João Theatre, the Palácio da Batalha, the Palácio das Sereias and the former Prison da Relação. Among the important later structures are the neo-Palladian Hospital Sant'António, the imposing Alfândega, and the Palace da Bolsa in neoclassical style, the Ferreira Borges Market, the São Bento railway station and the Paços do Concelho.