

## In Portugal's Historic Tejo Wine Region, Medieval Towns and Villages Draw Visitors to Europe's Oldest, Continuously Operational Wine Estates

-- *Defined by a River. Refined by Tradition* --

(New York, NY, December 15, 2015) – Portugal's historic Tejo region has been producing some of the most unique wines in Europe since winemaking first began there in 1170. During the Middle Ages, land concessions required trustees to plant both olive trees and vineyards on the land parcels. Before long, villages began springing up along the lengthy and ancient Tejo River, and with this grape cultivation came the beginnings of a local wine culture. Pulsing with a rich heritage, Tejo claims a bounty of historical treasures from those medieval moments, with architectural relics and medieval hilltop villages dotting the picturesque landscape. Today, many of Tejo's historic wineries -- bridging tradition and modernity -- bear witness to the region's centuries of quality wine production since medieval times.

To the Portuguese, Tejo is known as the land of vineyards, olive groves, foot-treading, cork forests and the famous Lusitano horses. Visitors seeking an off-the-beaten-path wine tourism experience will also find ancient routes leading through medieval villages that offer up sites of historic importance with unique characteristics. The area provides a breathtaking landscape for lovers of nature, culture, and authentic wines. A sampling of Tejo's villages and monuments of great significance that date back to the Middle Ages include:

### **Santarém**

A picturesque medieval city, **Santarém** has a panoramic view overlooking the Tejo River. Gothic art and architecture abound, and it boasts the most number of Gothic churches of any city in Portugal. Santarém is home to a medieval castle and large numbers of convents and monasteries. Its history began with the overturning of the period of Muslim domination in 1147, when the first King of Portugal, Afonso Henriques, conquered the city. The conquest of Santarém is told in heroic style in the medieval chronicle *De expugnatione Scalabis*, which celebrates and justifies the power of the first Portuguese King. After the reconquest, the city was frequently visited by Kings -- King Fernando I was buried in the **Convent of Saint Francis** (his tomb is now in the Carmo Museum in Lisbon). The picturesque city center includes many monuments of architectural importance, including the **Old Castle of Santarém** (partial medieval walls and towers with a garden overlooking the river); **Church of Saint John of Alporão** (built by the Knights Hospitallers, now housing an **Archaeological Museum** and the Gothic tomb of *Duarte de Meneses*); **Cabacas Tower** (ancient defensive post of the medieval city wall with a **Time Museum**); **Fountain of the Fig Tree** (14<sup>th</sup>-century tower decorated with merlons and Portuguese coats-of-arms); **Church of St. Stephen—Church of the Holy Miracle** (13<sup>th</sup> century); **Church of the Grace** (14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century with tomb of the discoverer of Brazil); **Church of Marvila** (16<sup>th</sup> century with outstanding tile decorations); and **Cathedral of Santarém** (Jesuit church).

### **Tomar**

The charming medieval town of **Tomar** began inside the walls of the Convento de Cristo, which was first constructed in the late-12<sup>th</sup> century under the orders of Gualdim de Pais, the fourth grand master of the Knights Templar. Considered a medieval jewel as the last Templar town commissioned for construction, Tomar became the center of Portuguese expansion during the 15<sup>th</sup> century under Henry the Navigator. It grew further with the admission of Jewish people following their expulsion from Spain in 1492, bringing



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high levels of skilled artisans, traders and professionals. The original **Synagogue of Tomar**, built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the best preserved medieval synagogue of Portugal, now houses the **Jewish Museum Abraão Zacuto**. Also of historic interest are the **Castle and Convent of the Order of Christ** (a UNESCO World Heritage Site); **Aqueduct of Pegões** (built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Philip I, now offering a “train tour bus” taking visitors from city center to the monument’s highest point at 98 feet); **Church of Santa Maria do Olival** (13<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic Church built as burial ground for the Templar Knights); and **Church of Saint John the Baptist** (built in the main square with flamboyant Gothic portal, Manueline tower with 16<sup>th</sup>-century clock, and painted panels by Portugal’s famed Renaissance artist Gregório Lopes). Tomar also contains the eccentric **Museu dos Fosforos** with the largest private matchbox collection in Europe, the **Museu de Arte Moderna—Coleção José Augusto França** and other art galleries.

## Almourol Castle

Approximately 12 miles south of Tomar and thought to be one of Portugal's most romantic and beautiful castles, the **Almourol Castle** is built on a small island in the middle of the Tejo River. Drawing from influences that existed in the early days of the kingdom of Portugal and the Order of the Templars, a renowned religious/military order, this 12<sup>th</sup>-century castle is considered one of the most impressive examples of medieval military architecture. The castle has been heavily restored yet many of its original architectural characteristics are preserved, such as the towers and crenellated walls. Reached through an internal staircase, the "Torre de Managem" (the castle's main defensive structure) honors the memory of the Templars Knights. Boats typical of the region leave the river banks in front of the castle daily to bring visitors to and from Almourol, providing a scenic river cruise experience along the way.

Other picturesque towns of medieval origins grace the region of Tejo, including **Abrantes**, **Cartaxo**, **Ferreira do Zêzere**, **Vila Nova da Barquinha**, and **Torres Novas**.

Throughout the area, Tejo’s more than 80 wineries – many of them family-owned for generations – produce distinctive wines defined by the Tejo River’s breadth and strength, impacting the soil and climate to produce three distinct wine-producing zones: *Bairro* (northern highlands with rich clay and limestone soils), *Charneca* (south of the River with warmer temperatures), and *Campo* (along the Tejo riverbanks with a moderate climate and well-drained soils).

*Comissão Vitivinícola Regional do Tejo (CVR Tejo), known in the United States as Wines of Tejo, is an organization that oversees the viticultural and vinification practices of over 80 producers from the region. Nestled in the heart of Portugal along the banks of the Tejo River, which stretches from just beyond the Spanish border to the Atlantic Ocean at Lisbon, the Tejo region has been producing wines from native Portuguese varietals since the Middle Ages. The Tejo River’s breadth and strength elementally impact the soil and climate of the region, deeply defining the region’s terroir. These wines embody the enthusiasm, commitment and collaborative nature of its producers, and reflect the unique terroir and winemaking heritage of the Tejo region.*

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