

Casa da Ínsua – Hotel de Charme



Roteiro da Água [Water Tour]

The tour suggested here aims to highlight the importance of water—theatrical, exuberant and magnificent—, in the setting of *Casa da Ínsua*. Without the spectacular nature of Italian fountains, we can nevertheless say that water plays an important role in many places and manor houses in Portugal. In *Casa da Ínsua* you can also admire this essential counterpoint, which in addition to functioning as a link between humans and life, as water is constantly present.

The evolution of the concept of water as a decorative element is associated with the very concept of nature, following the changes which were taking place in the house, as well as in the social life around it. The great change came with the Renaissance, a time when the garden area of the house was expanded, at a time when windows and balconies were opened up to enjoy nature. At that moment nature was made commonplace and lakes, ponds, fountains and small corners multiplied.

The tour that will take you to discover the secrets of the Casa da Ínsua water system, beginning at the **Pátio do Chafariz** [Fountain Courtyard], where all the attention falls on the harmonious fountain by the Venetian Nicola Bigaglia. The water comes out from four pipes and falls into cups placed in an intermediate plane, where it then spills until it is deposited at the base. The shape of the base accompanies the design of the upper cups creating a dynamic contour, which is interrupted by projections and recesses. The water arrives here through a complex and vast system of springs, underground galleries and aqueducts which feed all the fountains and water bodies of the farm.

On the way to the north tower of *Casa da Ínsua*, we discover, in a small garden corner, a **Fountain** signed by the same architect. In it, a sea monster is prominent and water comes out from its mouth when its tail is touched, producing a gurgling sound that completes the playful definition of the place.

Walking through the gardens, the care to preserve and expand the landscape elements by creating and installing fountains and ponds in various spaces becomes evident. Stone benches alternate with these fountains, inviting you to enjoy the intimacy of the gardens and the sound and visual composition of the aquatic show.

The **Jardim Francês** [French garden] is remarkable for its geometric exuberance of its forms. It is divided into two terraces linked by stairs with spiral stone handrails, giving it a theatre like ambiance. The boxwood hedges with complex shapes (spirals, fans and vases), define flower beds where flowers of assorted colours grow throughout the year, designed to be admired from the front balconies.

In the central lake of the **Jardim Francês** [French garden], we can appreciate the most emblematic symbol of Ínsua, the **Lotus Flower**, an aquatic plant of the nymphaceae family, also known as the Egyptian lotus, sacred lotus or Indian lotus, for being a flower native to Southeast Asia. This flower with white petals is cultivated for ornamental purposes and is characterized by its short life, lasting only 24 hours. Revered throughout the world, it is the symbol of spiritual purity.

Around it, centuries-old rose bushes and camellias (planted around 1840) dominate a large part of the garden and take on great prominence. Roses and camellias are considered two of the most beautiful flowers and have always been a source of inspiration for poets and composers. Roses or camellias, which of them is the prettiest? Flowers have their own symbolism, they invoke calm and peace in us, and it is difficult not to stop and contemplate the beauty of such a floral landscape.

In the iconographic programme of the garden complex, defined as a true “compendium of the world”, the **Tanque dos Cisnes** [Swan Pond] is presented as a true water mirror, where you can admire nature in all its fullness. Stopping here for a minute and letting yourself take in the calm movements of the swans as they glide through the water is a gift for the senses.

Continuing the tour towards the **Casa da Nora** [Waterwheel house], we find some of the wells from which the valuable liquid is drawn, waterwheels that carried it to the surface and ponds where it was stored. These are images that belong to everybody’s imagination. They are images that belong to everyone’s imagination.

Building a well required the mastery of ancestral knowledge, which began with the choice of where to drill. Likewise, the coating was delivered to specialists, since the strengthening of its walls was important so that they would last for many years, preserving the water. In the upper part, the waterwheel is installed, consisting of a system of geared wheels which, due to the rotation of the vertical axis (generally guaranteed by human or animal traction - the typical donkey), made the vertical wheel rotate where the buckets were. These were filled with water from the well and deposited in a duct that later channelled it to various irrigation or water consumption systems.

This crossroad takes us to the **Fonte dos Amores** [Lovers' Fountain], a place for idyllic encounters; or the **Fonte do Eiteiro** ["Eiteiro" Fountain], which evokes other stories and where tribute is paid to the origins of the *Casa da Ínsua*.

Taking the **Cruzamento das Quatro Virtudes** [Crossroad of the Four Virtues] as a point of reference and going down (**Rua**) **Camila de Faria** towards the **Painel de Santo António** [Saint Anthony panel] you will be able to enjoy the magnificent experience of crossing these spaces, the freshness of its corners and the diversity of botanical species.

Halfway there you will find the **Lago dos Jarros** [Lake of the vases], surrounded by decorative stone vases dating back to 1898, signed by Bigaglia, where plants from Brazil grow. A little further on, we come to the Waterfall whose enchanting water feeds the **Tanque dos Tijolos** [Brick Pond]. Nearby is also the **Fonte do Menino** [Kid's Fountain], another of the points of interest of the tour. The language of these fountains is framed by formal lines which aim to surprise visitors as its poetic spirit is contagious.

In this area we can see what remains of the old **Ice Factory**, which is included in this tour precisely because it also used the valuable liquid: water. In the surroundings we find the **Fonte do Leão** [Lion Fountain] and close to it the entrances to the underground galleries which are part of the complex water supply network of the estate.

This century-old water supply system, which is comprised of springs, underground galleries and reservoirs, gutters, surface channels, wells, ponds, lakes, fountains and waterfalls, has always been the basis of the life and daily production of the estate. You can visit it by touring its extensive network of underground galleries.

The water comes from four mines, four wells and a stream

The **Arvelos Mine** ensured the water supply to the Manor House and to the **Lago da Mata**. The water channel is regulated by means of two taps placed in an underground box, controlling the water level of the reservoir located next to the **Casa do Guarda Mata**. This reservoir also had an unusual feature: when the reservoir was filled, the excess water came from the serpent's mouth, located next to **Lago da Ilha** [Island Lake]. From the **Lago da Ilha** [Island Lake], the water is led to the waterfall by a stone aqueduct. The **Santa Ana Mine**, which is on the grounds of the current Ínsua primary school, supplies the **Tanque dos Tijolos** [Brick Pond]. The water from the **Estate Mine**, which begins in the forest, supplies the **Tanque das Lavadeiras** [Laundress' Tank], the **Waterfall** and the **lake of the Jardim Inglês** [English garden]. The water that comes from the **Tanque das Lavadeiras** [Laundress' Tank] joins the one coming from the **Lago dos Nenúfares** [Waterlily Lake] through an underground duct and goes to the orchard, passing through the citrus section. In the forest there is another mine, which is currently deactivated.

In addition to the mines, there are four wells (three in granite and one ringed, which has an iron ladder). The **Poço da Vinha** [Vineyard Well] feeds the irrigation system of the orchards and the vineyard. The water from this well is stored in an underground reservoir located next to the **Lago da Ilha** [Island Lake], then it goes to the lake and from there, by gravity, it reaches the ends of the estate. The **Poço do Pomar** [Orchard Well], to the southeast, supplies the **Tanque da Estufa** [Greenhouse Pond] and the **Tanque da Nora** [Waterwheel Pond]. Next to this pond there are two taps which control the water that reaches the lake and the hexagonal pond of the **Jardim Francês** [French garden] is controlled. The **Poço de Anéis** [Rings' well] is located in the southern orchard, in the area that borders the Manor House. In the past, the water of the **Côja River** fed the **Lake of the Waterfall**, and from there the different channels that make up the irrigation system of the orchards were supplied.

The complex water supply system (galleries, channels and ducts) and collection system (underground reservoirs, wells, ponds and lakes) has made it possible to create water reserves for irrigation for years as well as to feed the structures which make one enjoy the presence and the sound of water.

Some wonderful points of interest on this tour, such as the original **Lago dos Nenúfares** [Waterlily Lake], the unique **Lago da Ilha** [Island Lake] or the traditional **Tanque das Lavadeiras** [Laundress' tank] are still undergoing a renovation process, but people will soon be able to enjoy them.

On the way back, head to **Rua dos Buxos** [Shrub lane] and enjoy a relaxing walk through the **Jardim Inglês** [English garden]. There you will find some of the species brought by Luís de Albuquerque from Brazil. The **Jardim Inglês** [English garden] was revolutionary in its time, as it broke the rigid and symmetrical patterns of other garden styles. Back to nature. Its concept enhances the natural landscape, with curved and rounded shapes both in the relief and in the paths and structure of shrubs and forests. Trees and shrubs are often arranged according to their size and colour, which does not prevent them from being mixed or used in isolation on other occasions. Small plants with fragrant flowers form large winding beds in the middle of the lawn. It is intended to give to those who walk through them the sensation of going through an ancient and natural forest, in which apparently there is little or no human intervention. The presence of light and shade areas, in addition to creating magnificent environments, helps to create gentle breezes which delight those who stroll around there.

In this garden, in addition to admiring the giant trees which are more than two centuries old, we also realize the importance of water: in the lake and in the waterfall, places that are set among the trees and that transport us to fantastic settings; or in the **Fonte dos Meninos** [Kid's Fountain] an example of a theatre-like backdrop, which rests on a posthumous pedestal by Nicola Bigaglia, masterly executed by Duarte Machado, from 1910.

This is just one of the many paths that will take you exploring the infinity of corners and small treasures which *Casa da Ínsua* hides. An almost never-ending search that has just begun...