

GALICIA - THE LAND OF TRADITIONS



Over the past decade visitors to Spain have started to explore some of the country's more northerly regions, the largest and most popular of which is Galicia.

Green All Over

Galicia is a green and temperate part of the Iberian Peninsula situated in the North Western corner of Spain. It is sandwiched between Portugal to the south, Asturias to the east and the infamous Bay of Biscay to the north. As a result it is very different from the Mediterranean resorts of southern Spain.

Another feature that sets Galicia apart is that it has four distinct seasons that, whilst enjoying warm summers, can also experience much cooler and wetter winters. Indeed it is this unique climate that results in Galicia often being described as "Green Spain".

But the uniqueness of Galicia does not stop with its climate and scenery. Galicia, although part of mainland Spain, was actually an ancient kingdom with a Celtic rather than a Spanish culture and heritage. This corner of Iberia was once part of the Visigoth Empire and it remains distinct and independent to the rest of Spain. This is visibly evident as traditional buildings are constructed from dark granite stone rather than the whitewashed render seen in the country's south.

Rias & Historical Cities

However, the first thing that any visitor notices is the lush greenness of the scenery. This is a region with meadows, forests and lots of rivers and this produces a landscape that mixes hills, grasslands, mountains and coastal coves (known locally as "rias"). These rias are famed for their preponderance of seafood like crabs, lobsters, shrimps and mussels, along with pulpo (octopus) and calamares (squid). It is recommended to any visitor to the re-



gion to try these delicacies which can be found in any local tapas bar.

As a tourist destination, Galicia has a lot to offer. There are the obvious beach resorts like the ostentatious Sanxenxo and the 7 kilometer long beach at Carnota, but for most of the region's visitors it is the towns and cities like Pontevedra, la Coruña, Santiago de Compostela and Ourense that have the greatest appeal. In fact there is little doubt that Galicia has some of the finest cities in Spain and nearly all feature a significant medieval quarter with atmosphere, character and a wealth of bars and restaurants.

The old districts of towns like Betanzos, Ribadavia and Noia are all notable for their historic buildings, and the tall beach facing terraces at la Coruña city, famous for their large glass fronted balconies (called galerias), have led to this particular city being known as the glass or crystal city.

Four Spectacular Provinces

The geography of Galicia is easy to understand as the region is split into four provinces, each with its own capital city. The province of Pontevedra has a coast that is littered with beautiful seaside towns whilst a couple of kilometers inland the bodegas take over in what is serious wine growing country. This is the part of Spain from which the highly regarded (and expensive) Albariño wine originates. Pontevedra also holds Galicia's largest and most prosperous city of Vigo.

La Coruña province features both the city of the same name and the famous regional capital of Santiago de Compostela – the city of the Saint. This is Galicia's largest and most easily explored province and a drive down its winding coast road offers one of the most appealing road trips in Europe. A trip along this route sees the backdrop to the coast range from quaint fishing villages to mountains and cities.



Galicia's two other provinces, Lugo and Ourense, are perhaps less well documented on the tourist map, however they have much to recommend them. The city of Lugo is enclosed by a completely intact medieval wall and holds a stunning Neo-classical cathedral. Its largely rural countryside is littered with towns like Mondoñedo and old monastery settlements like Samos. This makes it a fascinating province to explore by car.

Ourense is the only province in Galicia without a coastline and it sits inland, sandwiched by the other three principalities. Like Pontevedra it is a wine producing zone and it has what is probably the most spectacular scenery in the region. Its self named capital city has a beautiful old town and it also boasts a Roman bridge, ancient Roman baths and a number of historic towns like Ribadavia, Celanova and Allariz.

So what else does Galicia have to offer the vacationer? You can start with the world's oldest lighthouse, then visit a medieval castle – and the list goes on. The only way to fully appreciate Galicia is to experience it first hand.

By **Martin Lambert (Galicia Guide)**
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