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# Travel



## By George Keegan

GALICIA PART 2

The column before last concentrated on Santiago de Compostela and a short walk along a route of The Camino. This week we look at the stunning coastal area within easy reach of the city. It is difficult however to ignore The Way completely as on every direction taken from Santiago de Compostela you are bound to encounter pilgrims or cross through one of the many routes they take. The region consists of Rias or estuaries ranging in size from the equivalent of a motorway to a small footbath. The Rias Baixes, the largest, are to be found south of Fisterra while the Rias da Costa de Morte is a more rugged coastline north of Fisterra with many spectacular high cliffs. The Rias are one of the reasons tourists flock to this part of Spain, so a visit should include the Rias Baixas, Costa da Morte, Muros e Noia and Pontevedra. The latter offers both coastal and inland options with an abundance of hotels and tourist attractions. Galicia as a whole contained more than

Baixas, Costa da Morte, Muros e Noia and Pontevedra. The latter offers both coastal and inland options with an abundance of hotels and tourist attractions. Galicia as a whole contained more than 1400km of coastline comprising almost 800 beaches.

The Coast of Death or Costa da Morte is so named because of the hundreds of shipwrecked which have taken place along here over the years. The most recent and one which caused serious pollution was 'The Prestige' — a larger tanker that sank in 2002 causing an oil spill which devastated the entire coast and wildlite. A large monument can be seen on a hilltop as a reminder of what occurred. Look out for the numerous Granaries (Horreos) dotted around the countryside and now protected. The largest of these can be found at Carnota. Probably the best way to explore any region is by hiring a car. Include on your itinerary Fisterra (once believed to the end of the earth), Samos with its wonderful monastery and the town of Muros and Cambados.

Visitors to Galicia go there mainly to enjoy a cultural holiday combining great scenery, historical monuments and friendly people. However there are many beautiful beaches to be found but the weather, with the exception of July/August, is generally much like Ireland so perhaps the south of Spain is more suitable for anyone seeking a sun holiday.

PLACES OF INTEREST

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Monasterio Benedictino de Samos – one of Spain's oldest monasteries and thought to be one of the oldest in the Western world. Founded in the 6th century this really impressive building is still in use today. When it adopted the Benedictine Rule in 960 the monastery began taking the pilgrims and to this day it is possible for people walking The Camino to spend one night without charge. The monks have their own private area but if lucky you might well come across one going about his daily work. Because of either plundering or as a result of serious fire outbreaks the building has received several major restorations and today contains an array of architectural styles. The large Baroque style chapel with high dome is particularly worth viewing. Look out also for the interesting (and somewhat controversial) Baroque fountain in the centre of the smaller cloister and the statue of Father Feijoo, a well loved monk who lived here for several years during the 17th century, in the larger one. A good part of the monastery is open to visitors but check opening times. Entry is by ringing the hanging bell beside the entrance. On leaving you will find a small museum/bookshop inside the gate. A visit is highly recommended.

O Pindo Waterfall — a large hydro electric power station was built here meaning visitors were only allowed see the magnificent waterfall for a brief period of Sunday. However last year a law was passed stating the waterfall must be open to visitors at all times. Well worth visiting.

Muros — this lovely town 70km from Santiago de Compostela had many well preserved squared and an impressive church. The town had been declared of Cultural Interest and in 1970 was designated as a Historic — Artistic Monumental Site. Here you will see original sea arcades under which in bye-gone days

Historic – Artistic Monumental Site. Here you will see original sea arcades under which in bye-gone days fishing tackle was stored and fish salted. Muros boasts 25km of coast and large beaches.

Carnota - location of the largest granary in all of Galicia. It is situated in a small hamlet close to a church

Cambados - visiting this town in the heart of the Sainés valley with its historical centre also offers the opportunity to take a tour of the famous Martin Códax Winery founded in the mid nineties. Tours and

tastings available.

Fisterra – (the end of the earth) The final stop for pilgrims who continue after Santiago de Compostela. On arrival it has been a tradition to burn your clothes on rocks just below the lighthouse to symbolise the beginning of a new life. This is also a well know spot for watching spectacular sunsets. Look down towards the sea on your way along the road to the lighthouse to see if you can spot a recently built graveyard, which contains no graves (yet) because local people refuse to be buried there. When in this area include a meal in Restaurante Parrillada Tira Do Cordel. Located in the picturesque village of Fisterra with front door opening on to a sandy beach. Excellent seafood and friendly staff. Highly recommended. Village of Puente Madeira – on the route of The Camino after Santiago de Compostela this really delightful village contained an old mill (now a restaurant) where the Tambre river is crossed by a bridge dating from the 13th century. Look for the Pazo – a traditional Galician more where General Franco stayed on several occasions for some game shooting. This village is the perfect setting for some quiet time and taking photographs.

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FOOD & WINE

Anyone interested in wine should consider raking the Riax Baixas wine route. Apart from visiting wineries there is also the opportunity to see several protected natural areas along the way noted for wildlife and a variety of outdoor activities. The Albarino variety of white grape is native to the Galicia

region and had a balanced, pleasant and unique flavour.

As mentioned previously the region is rightly famous for its seafood, shellfish in particular. All restaurants offer a great variety including scallops, mussels, oysters, clams and cockles. Those situated near rivers have wild salmon and freshly caught eels on their menus.

THE CAMELLIAS

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The Rias Baixas is famous for being one large camellia garden. Although this shrub is native to the Orient the first specimens were introduced here in the 17th century and today there are almost 80 different species and some 30,000 varieties. Pontevedra offers perfect conditions for cultivation in the open so using greenhouse in Winter is not necessary. The most common species to be found here is C. Japonica and the best time of year to catch all varieties is between January and March.

USEFUL CONTACTS

www.indeedspain.com www.turgalicia.es
WALKING THE CAMINO www.spain.info www.riasbaixas.org

WALKING THE CAMINO

When planning a walk on The Camino it's important firstly to contact The Irish Society of The Friends of St. James. The voluntary organisation issues the Pilgrim passport – an essential document to carry at all times. The organisation is non-political, non-denominational and covers all of Ireland. A new venture The Santiago Welcome Project (or Amigos Project) sponsored jointly with the UK Confraternity of St. James was started in 2012 and proved to be a great success. The idea is that a small group of past pilgrims volunteer to meet and greet Irish pilgrims on completion of their journey. To learn more about the society click on www.stjamesirl.com.

As mentioned previously two companies based in Dublin are specialists on The Camino. Follow The Camino – was founded in 2006 and specialises in organising walking, cycling and horse riding along the

Camino de Santiago.

Camino Ways – are currently offering a discount of 5% on trips to The Camino in September if you book

### GETTING THERE

Aer Lingus fly ex Dublin to Lavacolla airport (just 10km from Santiago de Compostela 3 times weekly) Check www.aerlingus.com

Stena Routes to Britain - Enjoy a 'car-cation' this summer with a Stena Line sailing to Britain. Travelling with Stena means no restriction on your luggage and plenty of on-board entertainment for the whole family. Stena routes from Ireland are: Belfast - Cairnryan or Liverpool, Dublin Port - Holyhead, Rosslare - Fishguard and Dun Laoghaire - Holyhead. Visit a travel agent or click on www.stenaline.ie Cruise Holidays with O'Hanrahan Travel - Local travel specialist O'Hanrahan Travel had a selection of hot cruise deals during the summer. In June or July the company is offering an Eastern Mediterranean cruise on the 'Navigator of The Seas', a Western Med cruise or an Ancient Wonders cruise on the Thompson Celebration. Prices quoted based on 2 adults sharing include flights, transfers, plus 7 nights cruising with all meals and on-board entertainment. T&C apply. Tel. 042 9663111 or 47 81133

N. IRELAND NEWS

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Motor Cycle Event – Following last year's success the 2nd Enniskillen 100 Revival Motor Cycle Road Races will be held on 22nd June. This event is supported by Fermanagh District Council and Cookstown & District MCC. Again this year there will be demonstration runs and parades of historic motorcycles on a mile long course at Enniskillen Airport plus a PSNI 'Bike Safe' event and a display of old racing and rally care. For details tel 0044 (0)28 6632 3110.

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Book Festival – Details have just been announced of the 2013 Belfast Book Festival set to bring the very best of literature from across the globe highlights travel, cooking, memoir and music. Among the writers attending will be Paul Therous and John Boyne as well as food critic Jay Rayner and Scottish poet Liz Lochead. The Festival will be held from 10th – 16th June.

Go Walking – The NITB are encouraging people to put on their walking boots and enjoy the many organised walks over the summer. Fiona Cunningham Manager for the ROI believes the walks and hikes across N. Ireland give visitors the opportunity to take in some of the North's most breathtaking scenery. "From a fun walk in the Sperrins, a 3 peak challenge in Co. Antrim to a 40km self guided walk in the stunning Mourne mountains of Co. Down, N. Ireland is waiting to be explores by walkers of all abilities," Fiona savs.

Dates for the Diary – Mourne International Walking Festival 28th – 30th June, Sperrin Hill Walking Festival 20 – 21st July and Wee Binnian Walking Festival 6th – 8th Sept (taking in Mournes, Slieve Gullion & Cooley Mountains).

For more walking information plus places to stay & things to do in N. Ireland – contact NTIB or call save 1850 230 230 or visit www.discovernorthernireland.com