



# Visit Coruña

## *Kieran Walsh reports from Coruña on the Camino de Santiago's English Way*

CORUÑA is one of the traditional starting points of the Camino de Santiago route called the 'English Way' (the other starting point being Ferrol). In order to receive their 'Compostela' pilgrim certificate in Santiago de Compostela, walkers must complete at least the last 100km of a Camino route to Santiago. For this reason, Ferrol tends to be a more popular starting point, as walkers who start here will qualify for the 'Compostela'.

Back in the day, Waterford pilgrims used to go to La Corunna by ship and the famous Sir James Rice went there in the mid 1400s, being a Mayor of Waterford, 11 times, he was a major commercial and political leader in his day.

Rice's house is now the McLearys restaurant on High St. and his tomb is in Christ Church.

He did the pilgrimage to Santiago via Coruña, which is a little less than 100km so if you start your Camino de Santiago walk there, you won't be able to receive a 'Compostela'. However, many choose to stop over in this bright and lively city before heading to Ferrol to start their 100km Camino.

We paid the city a visit prior to the Camino Walk.

There are many sights in A Coruña but the symbol of the city is the Tower of Hercules, a UNESCO-listed lighthouse. It is a Roman lighthouse dating back to the second century. Many legends surround the tower of Hercules, one of them linking the city with Ireland. It is the only Roman lighthouse in the world still in operation.

There are also Irish connections with the lighthouse.

One of the most famous legends is included in the 'Book of Invasions' (Lebor Gabála), written by Irish monks in the 11th century. According to the legend, King Breogán (who is mentioned in the Galician national anthem as Galicia's founder) founded the city and built here a huge tower. On a clear night, one of his sons, Ith, could see a distant green land from

the top of the tower and decided to sail north to explore that unknown land. This green land would be Ireland. Unfortunately, the locals didn't take to Ith and his invasion plans very well; as a result Ith was murdered and sent back to Coruña. To avenge the death of his brother, Mil (another son of Breogán) decided to take a big army and sail to Ireland to conquer this land, once and for all. The descendants of Mil and his army (Milesians) are said to have stayed in Ireland, becoming the Celtic ancestors of the Irish people.

The Romans conquered here in 50 BC approx under Augusta and used it as a base to travel to England and West France for future conquests. Roman remains can be seen in town and at castle near port. Well worth a visit, good bus service there.

In the Armada times Sir Francis Drake attacked the town and the Duke of Wellington also made it here with the battles against Napoleon.

Other sights to visit in the city: San Antón castle, a stroll along the marina (where you can see the traditional white balconies called 'galerias' of Galicia's coastal towns), the Santa Margarita Park, the Maria Pita square dedicated to the city's heroine, the old town with its roman-esque and baroque churches and convents including the St James Church dating back to the XII century. Old town great to explore down its alleys etc and try the tapas along the way. The city has a young feel and is fairly vibrant but also safe.

The city is also a great spot to taste Galicia's famous seafood and fish. Try the Sola

restaurant, we had some fine fresh bass there. Great tapas can also be had for as little as €1.50, or €4.50 for a starter, which represents great value to be enjoyed alongside a nice Albarino white wine or Estrella beer.

The city has also some Irish bars, Breens and the Dublin play live music nightly, so there is

something going on there. We heard Spanish guitar at art centre, near Plaza Espana.

For convenience we stayed in the comfortable Plaza Hotel, a five minute walk from the train and bus station, which connects with Santiago. You can also use the high speed commuter train in a journey of twenty minutes..

The city is like San Sebastian but better value and less touristy, but does well with cruise ships.

The city has had better days, with many empty shops., Shipping was big in its day but the city is making a comeback and tourism shall help.

On a sunny day, the city beaches of Riazor and Orzán are perfect for a swim or just to chill in the sun. The promenade is a popular spot for locals to stroll both in summer and winter.

The Monte de San Pedro has a 360 panoramic lift with stunning views of the city and the bay.



Corunna's harbor.



## **FACT FILE**

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Corunna's Roman lighthouse.