

48 hours in Santiago de Compostela

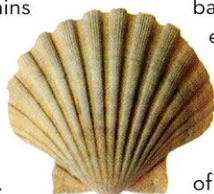
Best known as the end of the Camino, this Spanish city is steeped in history. But, as **Lauren Murphy** finds, the student population keeps it young.



Don't miss ...

HISTORY The magnificent 11th-century **Cathedral** in the Plaza del Obradoiro dominates both Santiago's cityscape and its history. The reputed burial place of St James, whose decorative silver casket is on display in the bowels of the building, it marks the end point of the 800-kilometre-long pilgrimage Camino de Santiago (Way of St James). A pilgrims' Mass takes place daily at midday and guided tours can be booked in the visitors' centre at the main entrance.

CULTURE A complex of awe-inspiring buildings designed by American architect Peter Eisenman, the **City of Culture** on Mount Gaiás (ciudadadacultura.org) intended as a cultural hub for the Galicia region and its sleek, ultra-modern contours juxtapose wonderfully with the rustic charm of the old town. Unfortunately, the development remains unfinished – but several buildings, including an exhibition space, library and museum, are open to the public.



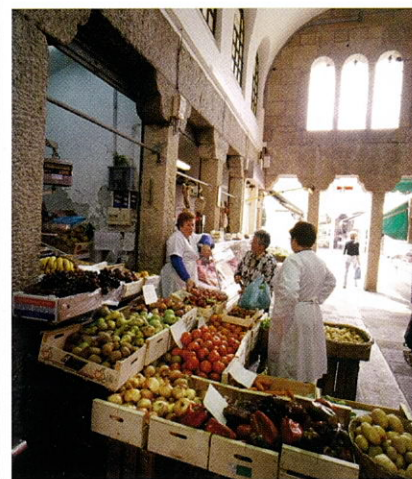
GASTRONOMY Wander down Rúa das Ameas to the **Mercado de Abastos** (mercadodeabastosdesantiago.com), the bustling fresh food market and the second most-visited site in Santiago – no surprise, considering the Galician obsession with food and eating well. Dating back to the 19th century, it's open every day except Sundays and is a great place to sample some tasty local cuisine on a budget. There's even a kitchen that will cook your purchases on-site for 10 per cent of the price.

Eat at ...

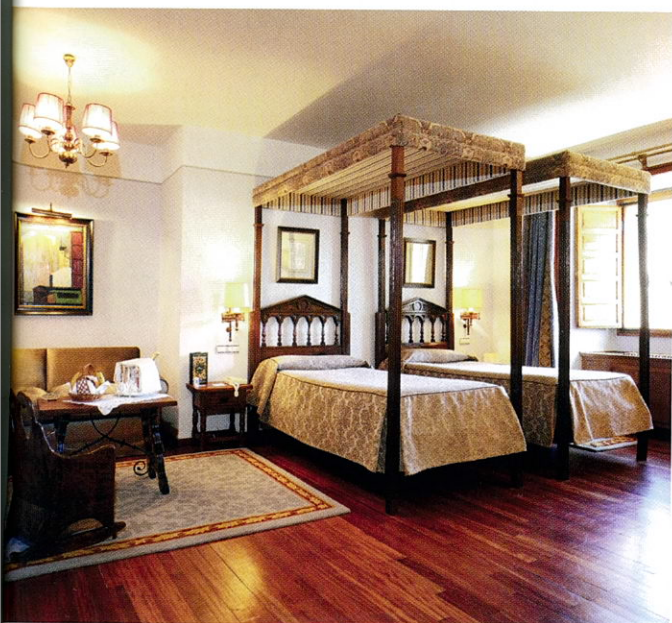
CASINO BITES The **Café Casino** (Rúa do Vilar 35; +34 981 577 503; cafecasino.es) has been serving the people of Santiago since 1873 and it retains an old world charm even today, with its plush furnishings, ornate chandeliers and Art Nouveau décor. A *café con leche* and a slice of *tarta Santiago* (the delicious local almond tart) are highly recommended, but there are more substantial dishes and an extensive cocktail menu at reasonable prices, too.

MODERN TWIST Located slightly off the well-trampled tourist trail, **A Tafona** (Rúa da Virxe da Cerca, +34 981 562 314; restaurantetafona.com) is something of a hidden gem. Its menu is at the pricier end of the budget but its dishes are a gastronomic delight, providing a contemporary take on traditional Galician cuisine, including the ubiquitous local speciality *pulpo* (octopus). Various meat and vegetarian options are available, as well as an eight-course tasting menu for a reasonable €40.

FOODY FICTION Traditional Mediterranean dishes such as *paella* are rare on menus in the seafood-dominated Galicia region, but **Restaurante Don Quijote** (Calle Galeras 20, +34 981 586 859; quijoterestaurante.com) has something to suit all tastes. This is the sort of place you'll see local families enjoying a hearty meal; there's great ambience, attentive service, warming dishes from grilled hake to tasty tortillas and a dessert of Grand Marnier pancakes to drool over.



Top, left, the sleek modern City of Culture buildings contrast with the ancient cathedral. Right, farm fresh goodies at Mercado de Abastos.



Sleep at ...

SPLURGE Part of the state-run Paradores chain, the five-star **Parador de Santiago** (Plaza do Obradoiro 1, 01 878 3111; maptravel.ie) is the ultimate in luxury and elegance, *left*. Just beside the cathedral, it's reportedly one of the world's oldest hotels, dating from 1499 and originally functioning as a hospital for pilgrims. Rooms from €200.

MID-PRICE The four-star **San Francisco Hotel Monumento** (Campillo de San Francisco 3; +34 981 581 634; sanfranciscohm.com) is a restored 13th-century convent – the foundations of which are still visible in the reception area. With 82 spacious rooms, two covered cloisters, a very good breakfast buffet, free Wi-Fi and a swimming pool/Jacuzzi, it's less than a three-minute walk from the centre of the old town. Rooms from €88 (single) and €115 (double).

BUDGET **Badalada Pensión** (Rúa Xelmírez 30, +34 981 572 618; badalada.es) is situated down a quiet side street close to all Santiago's main tourist sites and is a short hop from the newer part of the city, too. Tastefully decorated, it's rustic, no-fuss accommodation with free Wi-Fi in reception, TV in rooms and staff that would go to the ends of the earth for you. Double rooms from €40.



Drink at ...

LIVELY Although it's an historic city, Santiago is a university town and is kept young by the constant influx of students flooding its winding streets. The café-bar **Kunsthalle** (Rúa da Congo, +34 981 575 170; kunsthalle.es) attracts a younger crowd later in the night with its music, colourful walls and trendy basement bar. Cheap *pinxtos* (small plates) are available if you're feeling peckish.

RELAXING It's true that Galicia suffers from the Irish problem of perpetual rain showers in spring and winter – but if you're lucky to snatch a sunny day, **Fonseca Café Bar** (+34 981 583 704) in the shadow of the cathedral on the pretty Plaza de Fonseca is the perfect place to people-watch. A cold glass of the refreshing local beer, Estrella Galicia, will quench your thirst.

TRADITION Remnants of the original use of **Modus Vivendi** (Praza Feixó 1, +34 981 576 109;



pubmodusvivendi.net) as a stable for an 18th-century mansion remain today, giving this cavern-like bar in the old town plenty of character. It regularly stages gigs, DJ sets, poetry readings and exhibitions. Open until 3am most nights.

Above, far left, Kunsthalle, the place to go for *pinxtos*, and above, the ideal day-trip, the fishing village of Finisterre.

CaminoWays offer tailored packages with both guided and unguided tours on the Camino de Santiago from Dublin. See caminoways.com.

Go the extra mile ...

If you feel like experiencing a little of the Camino yourself, day trips to **Finisterre** can be arranged via the **Tourism Office** (santiagoturismo.com) on Rúa do Vilar 63. It takes about a 90-minute drive to reach this fishing village on the ominous-sounding Costa da Morte (Coast of Death), where some pilgrims continue on from Santiago to burn their boots metaphorically (and sometimes literally) at the "end of the world". Don't worry: you won't have to walk further than the lighthouse at the end of the pier.

If architecture is your thing, it's worth paying a little extra to take the **rooftop tour** of Santiago's cathedral and experience the city's most iconic landmark from a different perspective. A guide will explain the reasoning behind the numerous bell towers and the importance of the building throughout the ages.

While Santiago is a city steeped in history and culture, it also offers plenty of 21st century delights. To that end, **shoppers** will be satiated by well-known brands such as Bershka, Zara, Tiger, Mango and Sephora, which line streets Rúa do Xeneral Pardiñas and Rúa de Montero Rios in the "new town" area of the city. 🍀

AER LINGUS FLIES FROM DUBLIN TO SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA THREE TIMES A WEEK.