

# Santiago de Compostela

Santiago de Compostela, World Heritage City and capital of Galicia, is the final challenge on the Pilgrim's Road. Centuries of splendour and development have left us a urban layout where medieval Christian inheritance blends in with monumental Baroque constructions.

Legend has it that the appearance of the remains of St. James gave rise to this town (C. 9th), that would become a pilgrim's centre and holy city, alongside Jerusalem and Rome. Medieval Santiago lived centuries of scientific, artistic and literary exchange thanks to the affluence of pilgrims arriving from all over Europe. The **Pilgrim's Road to Santiago de Compostela**, together with the city of Santiago de Compostela, is now World Heritage, for what its historic and artistic route has to offer. With the Catholic Monarch and archbishop Fonseca, the University arrived in the city, and in the centuries that followed, different religious orders would establish monasteries and churches in its streets, thereby adding to the rich Renaissance and Baroque appearance of Galicia's capital.

## Historic Centre

The city centre is plaza del Obradoiro, where important monuments including the Cathedral can be found. Its present Baroque façade gives way to the Romanesque entrance of the original construction, 'Pórtico de la Gloria', carried out by Maestro Mateo in the 12th century. Inside, Romanesque and Gothic elements alternate with other decorative Baroque items. In the Cathedral you should follow the tradition: on the Romanesque portico gently bang your head on the craftsman's figure to obtain wisdom and prudence. On the high altar the bust of St. James awaits us, which we can embrace. Another tradition in the solemn celebrations is swinging a huge incense burner, the 'Botafumeiro', through the lower transept and it even touches the vaults.



Other squares, those of Quintana, Azabachería and Platerías surround the different door and façades of the Cathedrals, the latter being the only Romanesque one.

Fine examples of the civil Romanesque, Renaissance and neoclassical styles are also present in the **Obradoiro**. Pazo de Gelmírez, Colegio de San Jerónimo and Pazo Raxoi accompany the Cathedral and the Old Royal Hospital, now the "Hostal de los Reyes Católicos" Parador, a five star luxury establishment. An exceptional opportunity for an overnight stay in a building over 500 years old, set in the heart of the medieval city.

The importance of the religious orders associated with the Pilgrim's Road to Santiago and the University, mean the city boasts an abundance of churches, convents and monasteries, as well as noblemen's houses, such as that of Cabilo, la Parra or los Canónigos. We can highlight the monasteries of San Martín Pinario and San Paio de Antealtares (C. 17th), San Francisco convent and San Clemente college.



After touring the oldest streets in the city, that date from the 12th century, for example rúas Franco, Vilar and Nova, we can go the food market in the medieval building. Nearby stand the University (neoclassical design), the Romanesque church of San Fiz de Solovio and the Baroque temple of San Agustín.

Without moving too far away from the historic quarter, we can also visit the Museum of the Collegiate Church of Sar, Museo do Pobo Galego (in the convent of Santo Domingo de Bonaval), that of the Pilgrimages and the Galician Contemporary Art Centre.

## Fiestas of the Saint

The best date to come to Santiago de Compostela is during the **Fiestas of Saint James**, a fiesta named of International Tourist Interest, which is held on 25 July. During the fiestas you will be able to try traditional Santiago delights, such as scallops, 'santiaguínos' and Santiago tart. Seafood and fish from the estuaries, turnip tops from Santiagos and Padrón peppers, make up one of Galicia's most varied cuisines. And all of this accompanied by wines of any one of the five Galician Denominations of Origin.

The capital of Galicia is a perfect departure point for a tour of the entire province of A Coruña. Along its coastline lies the **Rías Baixas**, with medieval seaside towns, such as Noia and Muros. On Costa da Morte, a setting with cliffs overlooking the Atlantic, stands the lighthouses of the end of the world. For example that of Finisterre (Fisterra) a town which for centuries was through to be the end of the known world. Corcubión, Camariñas and Corme-Laxe are other estuaries of fishing villages and home to the best 'percebes' (edible barnacle) in the region. The **Rías Altas** offer us locations, namely A Coruña, Betanzos and Ferrol, besides Pontedeume, Viveiro and Ribadeo, amongst others.

Inland we can visit the villages through which the Pilgrim's Road to Santiago de Compostela passes, for example Samos, Portomarín, Melide or Lavacolla. The route of the Galician monasteries will take us to the Cistercian abbey of Sobrado dos Monxes in the province, as well as the monasteries of Caaveiro and Monfero, in Fragas del Euma Nature Reserve. Besides this reserve, the wealth of Galician landscape and environment lead us to the dune complex of Corrubedo and Lagoons of Carregal and Vixán, which is situated right on the Coruña coast.