

History comes alive in Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, northwestern

To the apostle's

Santiago de Compostela is located in Spain's far northwest, in the heart of the region of Galicia. Pilgrims come to the city by the thousands seeking to end their suffering or draw new strength by visiting the tomb of St. James the Great, patron saint of Spain. Santiago is also the ideal starting point for anyone wishing to tour the region. And it's a destination worth visiting for itself.

Martin Steiner

Between light and darkness comes a piper. I know not whether from the sea or from the wind.

Celso Emilio Ferreiro

Arriving in Santiago de Compostela I sense the fresh sea breeze coming in off the nearby coast of Galicia, which carries the song of distant pipes to my ears. And on my first stroll through the old town I am accompanied by the skirl of the *gaita*, the Galician pipes. Galicians have Celtic roots, giving them a heritage in common with the Welsh, Irish and Bretons. And so it is no surprise that they too love mystical poetry and melancholy tunes played on the Celtic harp.

Apostle's tomb found by farmer

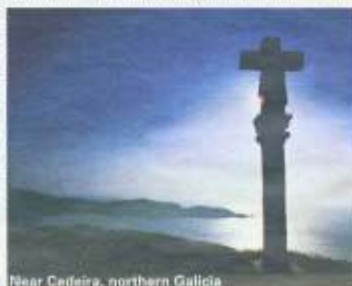
Even today, many Gallegos, as the Galicians are referred to in Spain, still believe in witches and barefoot "physicians", who are said to possess magic powers. Magic forces of another sort work on me in Santiago's impressive cathedral. According to legend, on this site between 812 and 814 A.D. a local farmer found the grave of the apostle James, who died a martyr's death in Jerusalem in 44 A.D. at the behest of Herod Agrippa. His mortal remains were later transported by ship to Galicia.

As I enter the cathedral pilgrims carrying double-length walking sticks adorned with the symbolic cockle shell (*coquille* St. Jacques prostrate themselves in front of the image of Spain's patron saint while a few metres away tourists film the magnificent interior of the basilica as the organ plays softly in the background.

Awesome cathedral

From the vantage point of the Plaza de España, an imposing square surrounded by historic buildings, anyone admiring the awe-inspiring yet graceful cathedral would be unlikely to believe that beyond the Baroque facade its Roman nave still stands complete.

Not only pilgrims, weary from their arduous journey, are overwhelmed by this structure, the construction of which began in 1077 and ended in the 18th century. I, too, feel drawn to climb the steps to the *Pórtico de la Gloria*, the entrance to



Near Cedeira, northern Galicia



A view of the old city and the cathedral

which features some truly marvelous masonry.

After visiting the cathedral I soon surrendered to the magic of the Baroque old town, which was built in the 17th and 18th centuries. Santiago de Compostela has much to offer indeed: picturesque alleyways, tranquil squares with plenty of street cafés, and a vast inviting city park that offers a magnificent view of the cathedral. As a city of learning, Santiago de Compostela is also rich in cultural activity. Its numerous galleries and museums specialise in contemporary art.

Once the end of the world

The city also serves as an ideal starting point for a tour of Galicia's northwest coastline, either by public transport or in a rented car. The coast's fjord-like indentations are particularly scenic. In summer boys with their sandy beaches are an inviting place for a cooling dip. A

Spain, the city famous as the final resting place of the apostle James.

final resting place



Land and water: the fishing village of Muros

trip to via Muros to Fisterra, which during the Middle Ages was considered the world's most westerly point, is highly recommended.

Trip tips:

Getting there: Iberia operates non-stop flights from Zurich to Santiago de Compostela on Saturdays. Otherwise, visitors have to change planes in Madrid or Barcelona.

Accommodation in Santiago de Compostela: *Parador Los Reyes Católicos* (not particularly cheap, but a very historic location and one of the most attractive and beautifully-situated hotels in Spain).

Food: Galician cuisine features a wide variety of fish and seafood dishes, among them the "vieira", in which the abalone is served in a variety of ways on a shell

Fisterra today, like Muros, is a picturesque fishing village. From Muros it is possible to follow a marked hiking trail that gives the visitor a chance to become acquainted with the life of Galician farmers, who in many places still use hand-ploughs to work their tiny plots of land, whose size has shrunk due to a complex method of bequeathing property. Each little plot of land is marked off by stone walls.

Contrast upon contrast

An outing to La Coruña, Galicia's largest city with its 235,000 inhabitants, is an exercise in contrast. La Coruña is an important port for shipments of oil, making it one of the region's leading industrial centres. It is also home to popular sandy beaches. Heading north from La Coruña via Ferrol, you eventually arrive in the charming little town of Cedeiro, where you will

find plenty of green landscape and tranquillity as your reward. Further to the north the coastline becomes steeper. The route is marked by piles of stones at intervals along the way, which are supposed to bring good luck to pilgrims bound for San Andrés de Teixido. Traditionally, pilgrims add a stone to the pile as they pass.

Another holy sepulchre

In contrast to Santiago de Compostela, the town of San Andrés, named after the apostle Andrew, is no longer a "must see" for pilgrims. Despite the saying "A San Andrés de Teixido vai de morto o que non vai de vivo" (If you do not make a pilgrimage to San Andrés during your lifetime you will have to do so after your death). In any case, the journey there is certainly worthwhile, the barren landscape and its steep cliffs possess their own unique appeal.

Stone walls serve as property lines



The cathedral of Santiago de Compostela attracts thousands of pilgrims