



Celtic hill-fort village on Monte de Santa Trega in Galicia's far southwest corner.

Percebes bear a disconcerting resemblance to claws - you hold the claw, twist off the other end and eat the succulent bit inside. Galicia is also famed across Spain for the quality of the meat from its rich inland pastures. And it isn't resting on the laurels of its top-class ingredients: A generation of 'Nova cocina galega' chefs are concocting innovative taste sensations in restaurants all around Galicia. Try Abastos 2.0 and O Curro da Parra in Santiago de Compostela, and you'll find others listed at Grupo Nove (nove.biz).

Wines of the Galician soil

Galician wines are not (yet) as well known as some other Spanish wines but they are enjoying a big resurgence - and they're perfectly suited to Galicia's cuisine and ambience. Best known are the fruity albarino whites of the Rias Baixas DO - whose attractive little 'capital', Cambados, was chosen as 2017's European City of Wine. But you shouldn't miss the rich mencla reds from the precipitous hillsides of the Ribeira Sacra DO, or the whites of Ribeiro. Many Galician wineries welcome visitors for tastings and/or tours.

Art in stone

No whitewashed villages here. In these damp northern climes it's pure natural stone that stands up best to the elements. (Yes, Galicia's rainy reputation is justified - but you could easily strike a warm sunny spell, and if you don't, the rain showers will often be spaced between sunny intervals.)

Two millennia ago, Galicians fortified the Roman town of Lucus Augusti (today Lugo) with a 2km circuit of stone walls and 85 towers that still stands strong today. Some 800 years ago a stonemason, known simply as Maestro Mateo, carved the portico of Santiago de Compostela Cathedral with 200 biblical sculptures that add up to one of the greatest works of Romanesque art. There's barely a village anywhere that isn't adorned by a little old stone church. Centuries-old manor houses dot the coun-



Fishermen work on their nets in the harbour at Fisterra on the Costa da Morte

tryside, and some of them are now among Galicia's most delightful places to stay.

The roadsides are liberally decorated with pretty, carved-stone wayside crosses known as *cruceiros* - a distinctive Galician art form that reaches its highest expression in the 19th-century *Cruceiro de Hio*, delicately sculpted with key Christian scenes from Adam and Eve to the crucifixion. Stone grain stores on stone stilts are another picturesque feature of the countryside - the biggest *hurreo*, at Carnota, is 34.5 meters long.

A different people

Galicians think of themselves as Celts, distinct from other Spaniards, tracing their origins to a wave of migration from the east in the first millennium BC, and earthwork forts from that period, known as *castros*, dot the landscape. Scenic Monte de Santa Trega in Galicia's far southwest offers the most spectacular examples of these relics.

The Galician language, *galego*, is, like Portuguese and Castilian Spanish, a Romance tongue derived from the colloquial Latin spoken in Roman times - but it also includes many words of non-Romance, Celtic origin. The flower of Celtic culture today is Galician music, led by the bagpipe (*gaita*). Top pipers such as Carlos N'nez and Susana Seivane are Galician folk heroes. The skirl of busking bagpipers swirls around Santiago de Compostela's grand square, *Praza do Obradoiro*, daily. For memorable Galician folk jam sessions dive into Santiago's *Casa das Crechas* on a Wednesday night. And if you're here in mid-July, you can head to the *Rias Altas* for the four-day Festival *Festival Ortigueira*, bringing together musicians from all over the Celtic world.

— (www.lonelyplanet.com)