

# Great white wonder

Head for enchanting Cambados in the heart of Albariño country for a fabulous food and drink fiesta and help celebrate Spain's finest white wine

**R**ETURNING TO this gorgeous little town after the Galicia's horrific forest fires of last year, it was a joy to see the lush Salnés Valley remarkably none the worse for wear, which is extraordinary considering that this province was the worst hit. Almost a hundred thousand acres of forest were reduced to a pile of ashes in just two weeks. The sad thing is that most of the fires were allegedly started deliberately by forest guards disgruntled over fixed term contract abuses.

## Fiesta de Albariño

The leafy paseo de la calzada in Cambados is the setting for one of Spain's longest running food fairs. About to celebrate its 55th anniversary, this year from the 3rd to the 6th of August, the Fiesta de Albariño draws huge crowds of up to 200,000 people, from presidents and their entourages, to glitterati from the world of television, film and literature. Things get underway with the ceremony of investiture of the new Knights and Dames of the Most Serene Order of Albariño. The inductees take part in a solemn procession, receiving their distinctions from the Grand Master of the Order. Then, after a rigorous tasting session, the much coveted gold, silver and bronze medals are awarded to the best wines of the year. The fiesta, a hedonistic affair, rages on well into the early hours with good natured throngs, all sporting the distinctive t-shirts of their *peñas* or party gangs.



## Scumptious specialities

A walk through the paseo de la calzada will reveal stand after stand selling Albariño by the glass or bottle. Others are piled high with Galician specialities like *empanada de xoubas* or sardine pie, *tetilla* and *san simón* cheese. The stall with the biggest queue by far though, is the *Pulpeira* or octopus lady who serves up the delicious *pulpo a feira* which is octopus snipped onto wooden plates, sprinkled with sea-salt and *pimentón*

*picante* or hot paprika and drizzled with olive oil. This is usually washed down with another wine from the area called *Barrantes*, it's a thick and spicy Ribena-red that stains the teeth and leaves a delightful flower like swirl called the wine rose, *la rosa del vino* in the bottom of the white porcelain bowl it's served up in. Those with a sweet tooth can choose from a plethora of local cakes like *tarta de Santiago*, *bica* or sweet, aniseedy doughnut like things called *rosquillas*.



Albariño square



Peña femenina



Cambados

**Villas and mansions**

Strolling up the Rua Principe, near the *Parador de Albariño*, you'll find the *Pazo Torrado*, a beautiful example of a Galician mansion house and which houses the superb *Museo de las Rutas del Vino* or Wine Routes Museum. The philosophy of the museum is to emphasise the importance of the culture of wine by focussing on the different wine producing areas around the world. There are interactive displays, currently only in Spanish, but the curator assured me that English versions were due to arrive anytime. Continue along the Rua Real, though for the real jewel of Cambados, the wonderfully aristocratic *Pazo de Fefiñanes*. This awe inspiring building, dating from the 17th century, also doubles as a winery, where you can taste the excellent *Pazo de Fefiñanes Albariño* and buy all kinds of wine related products such as *licor café*, *aguardiente de hierbas*, *aguardiente tostado*. *Aguardiente* is the potent liquor distilled from the grape skins left over after the wine-pressing process.

The whole square and its adjacent buildings, including the lovely church of San Benito, at one time, belonged to just one individual, Don Juan



**FURTHER INFORMATION**

■ **GETTING THERE**

With Ryanair. London Stansted to Santiago de Compostela. Santiago de Compostela - Cambados: 52 mins - 64.7 kms.

■ **STAYING THERE**

**PAZO A CAPITANA**

Sabugueiro, 46  
36630 Cambados  
Tel: +34 986 52 05 13  
[www.pazoacapitana.com](http://www.pazoacapitana.com)  
*Turismo Rural* and Winery. Simply breathtaking.

**PARADOR DEL ALBARIÑO**

Paseo de la Calzada  
36630 Cambados  
Tel: +34 986 54 22 50  
The impressive Pazo de Bazán is now a spectacular Parador. Great location facing the Ría de Arousa estuary with the Fiesta taking place right under your nose.

**BODEGA VISIT**

Adega Condes de Albarei  
A Bouza, 1  
36639 Castrelo (Cambados)  
Tel: +34 986 54 35 35  
[www.condesdealbarei.com](http://www.condesdealbarei.com)  
In Castrelo, about 2 kms from Cambados. These are the guys that paved the way for Albariño's first appearance on the world stage. Now exporting their stunning wines to the USA and Canada, Japan and the rest of the globe. Stock up at Tesco.

■ **VISITOR INFORMATION**

The Tourist Information Point is directly in front of the *Praza do Concello* or Town Hall. Look for the seafront building with the flags. Very friendly staff, who will be only too happy to provide you with stacks of maps, leaflets and brochures on wine routes, *pazos* and museums.  
Tel: +34 986 52 07 86  
The Tourist Board official website provides up to the minute information on cultural events in this most charming of Galician towns.  
<http://www.cambados.es>



**INTERNATIONAL FAME**

**Albariño is prized throughout Spain and is now more available in the UK and Ireland**

The first international rumblings of what would become one of Europe's premier white wines were heard in 1991, when the *Bodega Condes de Albarei* scooped Spain's very first gold medal in the white wine category at the *Concours Mondial de Bruxelles*. Xavier Zas, the managing director of Condes de Albarei, confessed to me that the British really knew their stuff, marvelling at the sophistication and knowledge of buyers, he also was delighted at having their *Pazo de Serantellos* brand in Tesco.

The Tesco taster was clearly impressed with Xavier's vino: "Albariño is my favourite Spanish white grape variety. It is the sort of wine to look out for in smart restaurants in Spain, because very few of the top estates ship their wines to the UK. The best versions are ethereal and yet vivacious at the same time - the nose being wonderfully evocative of tropical fruit and the palate bracingly dry. It's the perfect wine with smart fish dishes, and yet it can cope with Asian spices, too. This cheeky, inexpensive wine is open, balanced and refreshing on first glance, but if you look beneath the surface there is plenty of tropical fruit and richness. If you've never tasted this grape then this is the place to start."

The flagship of the company however, is the splendid *Condes de Albarei*, a stunning, fruity, aromatic beauty currently supplied to the national

*Paradores* network of hotels. *Condes de Albarei* arrange group or individual visits, in English, where you'll be able to sample some of their other excellent wines such as the superb *Enxebre* and *Carballo Galego*, which before bottling, spends about four months in bordelaise barrels made from *carballo*, the Galician Oak. Keep it local.

■ PAZO DE SERANTELLOS ALBARIÑO  
 £34.14 for 6 bottles  
[www.tesco.com/winestore](http://www.tesco.com/winestore)



Sarmiento Valladares, adviser to King Phillip II. The town was originally divided into three separate areas, the aristocratic Villa de Fefiñanes, the Villa de Cambados, where the petty nobility lived and the Villa Marinera de Santo Tomé, humble abode of the local fishermen and their families.

**Real food find**

The former aristocratic area today is given over to a myriad of bars and restaurants, offering traditional Galician *tapeo* and some Cambados institutions that specialise only in seafood. The competition between them is stiff, so the quality is exceptionally high. Some *marisquerías* or seafood restaurants to look out for, throughout town, are *A Posta do Sol*, *Ribadomar*, *Casa Rosita* and *Dos Islas*. Whilst there I was shown a gloriously atmospheric place known as *Taberna de O Bajo*, there's no sign, so just head up the Rua San Gregorio next to the café in front of the entrance to the Parador and ask for directions. Between one and two o'clock it's usually packed with people having an *aperitivo*. The *empanada*, tortilla and staples like *callos*, spicy chick-peas with tripe are excellent and house red or white wine is served from white porcelain jugs into white porcelain bowls known as *cuncas*. The tiled walls are hung with pots, saucepans and frying pans and in the back room, refreshingly smoky, septuagenarian fisherman sit at formica tables playing cards. While there I heard two blazing rows over football and one over card cheating, always a good sign. As we walked past I asked the guide if it was a bar or a private house, a bar he replied, at which point we were beckoned in by the jovial owner, also a retired fisherman. I would most definitely put the *Taberna de O Bajo* at the top of your *must see before leaving Cambados* list.





Ladies of the Taberna de o'bajo



**Wine hotel**

Walking the length of the Avenida da Pastora you'll come to the fab 15th century *Pazo de Ulloa* with lovely gardens and a *cruceiro* or granite cross and about 100 metres further along Rua Sabugueiro is the charming winery and hotel *Pazo A Capitana*. Built by a family who served in the Spanish colonial government in Cuba, an imposing gate leads through to an impressive courtyard with a fountain, overhead vines, centuries old boxwood trees, and a huge granite *borreo*, or rat-proof granary. The Argentinian manager Pilar is lovely and will give you a guided tour and invite you to taste some of their excellent *Albariño*, produced and bottled onsite. Apart from the *rosa del vino* at the bottom of the bowl story, Pilar proudly informed us that there was now mounting evidence to suggest that the *Albariño* grape is native to Galicia and not to the Rhine Valley, as was previously thought. The most common theory is that they were brought by Cluniac monks along the Camino de Santiago in the middle ages. Recent testing however has shown that there is no genetic link to the grape varieties of the Rhine Valley.

The Rua Hospital is probably one of the most picturesque streets in town. Lined with beautiful granite cottages with stone staircases leading up the front door, green window frames and flower boxes, it's a wonderful place for a stroll after lunch. The *Continental Café* downstairs from the swish new Galician cuisine restaurant *Yayo Daporta* is the perfect spot to unwind with a *café con hielo*, or iced coffee. Get your bearings here because this is the place that you'll probably end up at around midnight. The streets running parallel to Rua Hospital is the *Zona de Copas*, the place to go for after dinner drinks. Bars will start to fill up from 11.30 onwards, so just take your pick if you have the energy after a hard day at the Albariño and one of Spain's finest celebrations of food and drink. ■

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**Cambados Rua Real**

