

# Going for green

Why are so many of the Spanish going north rather than south this summer? **Adrian McManus** goes to Asturias and discovers the treats that we are missing

**M**UCH IS being said at the moment about people turning their backs on the established costas and looking for something other than the sun, sea, sand and sangría. We could do well to follow the example of the Spanish and start looking to the north of Spain a bit more. The charms of Asturias have been enjoyed in summer by the great and the good of Spanish society since the 18th century and it's time we too were let in on the secret.

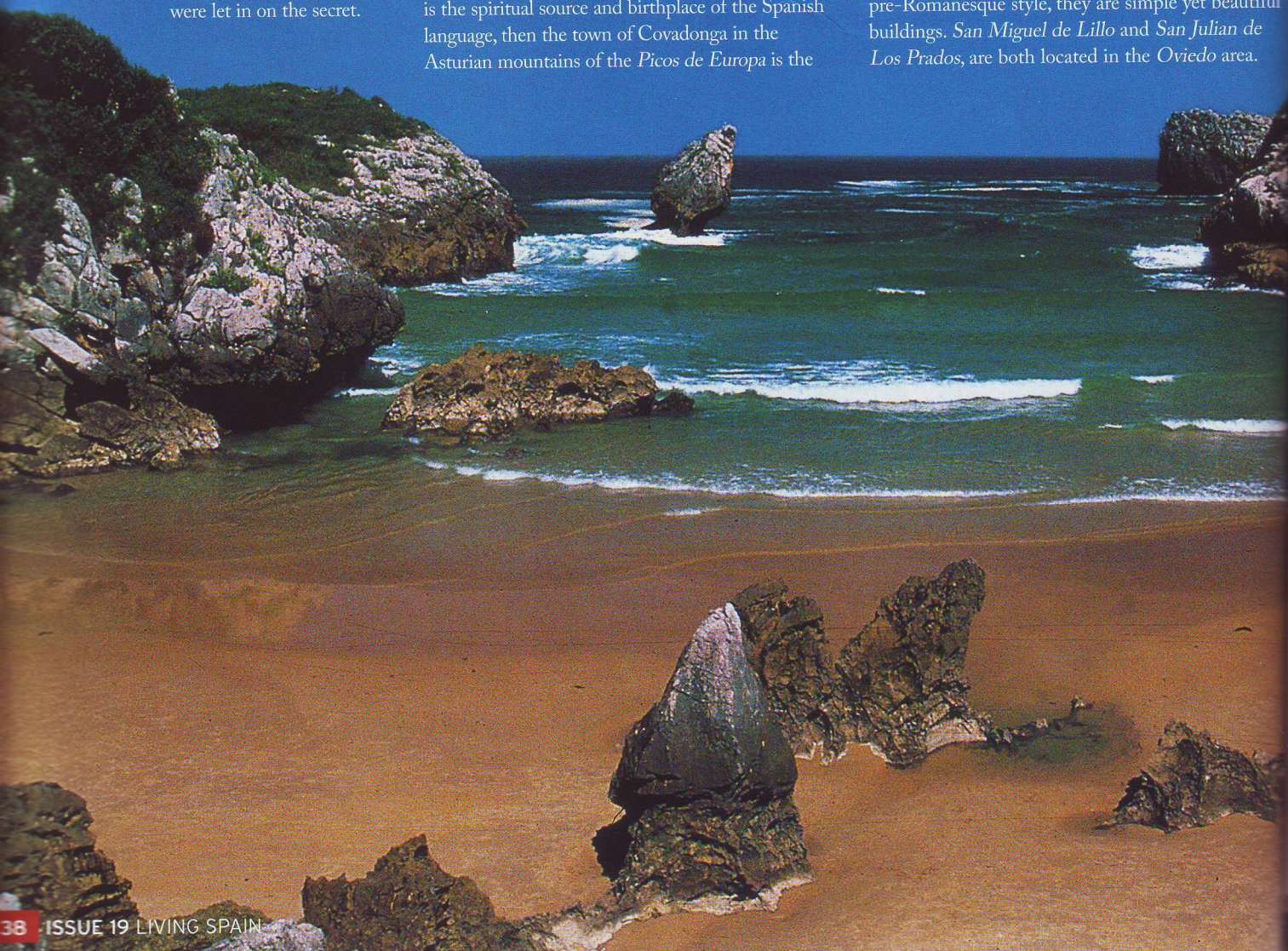
It's a doddle for us to get there now, and it might be a good idea to go before too many people realise that. EasyJet are working their magic with low cost flights, the ferry port of Santander is just a couple of hours drive away from Oviedo so you can bring your car and fill up with goodies. Or simply fly into Santander on a low cost flight and take a hire car along the stunning coast road. Which ever way you make it, you have a treat in store.

Asturias has a long and rich history. If the monastery of *San Millán de La Cógolla* in La Rioja is the spiritual source and birthplace of the Spanish language, then the town of Covadonga in the Asturian mountains of the *Picos de Europa* is the

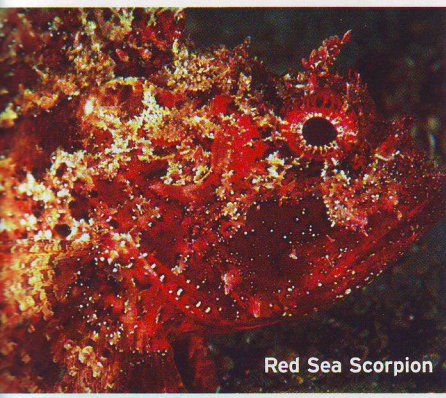
spiritual source and birthplace of the Spanish nation itself. It was here that the Moors suffered their first serious setback at the hands of the Asturian king, *Don Pelayo* in the 8th century.

What followed was a political and military tug of war until the year 1492, when the *Reyes Católicos*, or catholic monarchs, Fernando and Isabel finally ousted them from their last Spanish foothold in Granada, thereby putting an end to eight hundred years of Moorish rule in the Iberian peninsula.

Some of the oldest churches in Spain are also to be found in this area, built in the 8th century pre-Romanesque style, they are simple yet beautiful buildings. *San Miguel de Lillo* and *San Julian de Los Prados*, are both located in the Oviedo area.







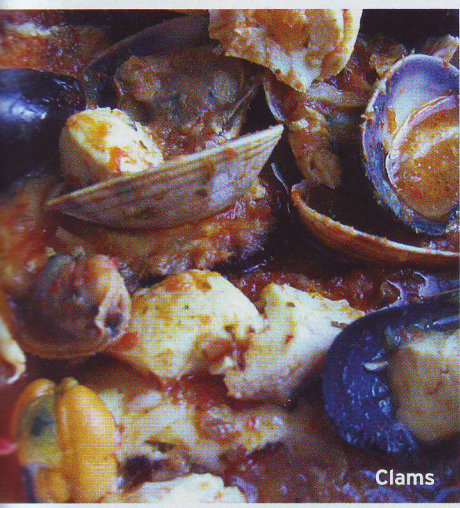
Red Sea Scorpion

### Dishes to die for

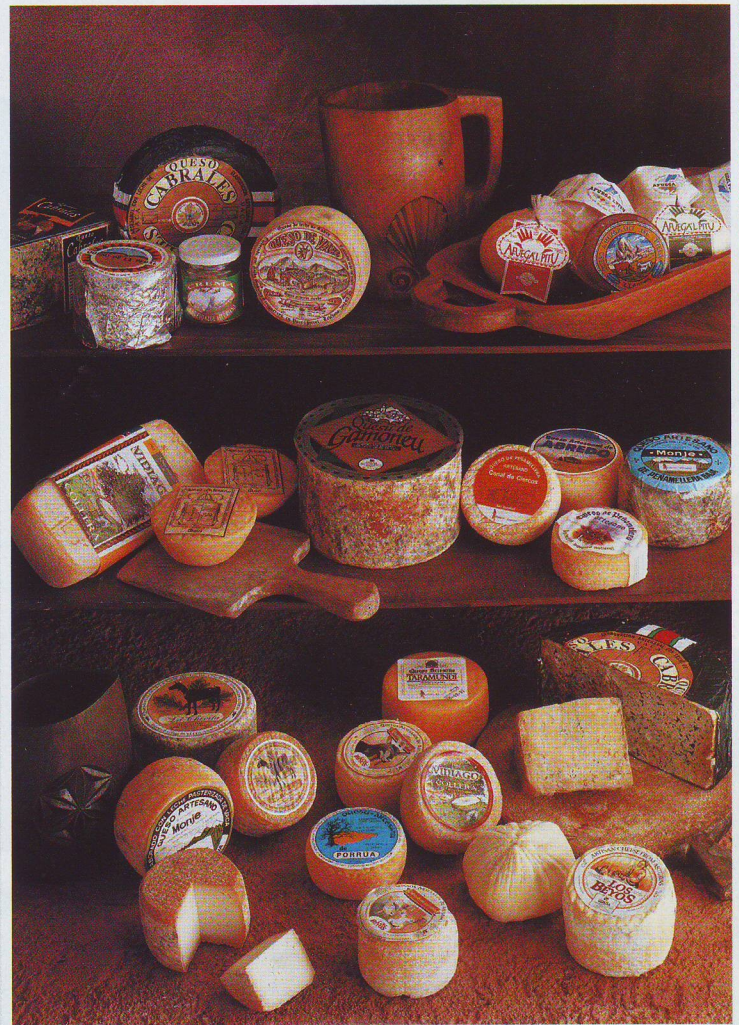
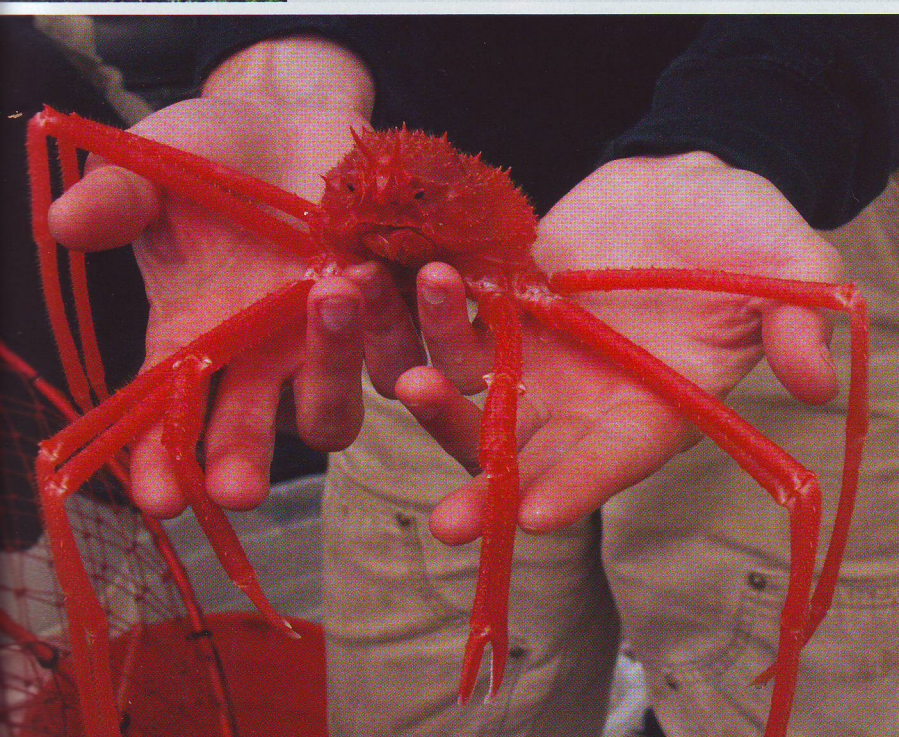
Asturias is home to some of the most fabulous food in Spain. The portions are hearty and the emphasis is on haricot bean based stews like *pote* and *fabada*. Fish, as in the rest of the country, is enormously popular and local favourites are *pixin* or monkfish, *cabracho* or red sea scorpion, a venomous, angry looking individual that can inflict some serious pain if handled carelessly. *Cabrachos* are converted into a delicious *pastel* or mousse, which is well worth trying. The omnipresent *merluza* or hake is cooked with

king crab in a rich cider and tomato sauce, and in the right establishment, is an unforgettable experience. Look out for *caldereta de marisco y pescado* or seafood and fish stew. This really is a dish to die for. Usually prepared for a minimum of two persons and costing around €40, it's a real treat, and my most memorable gastronomic experience to date. Another firm favourite is *fabes con almejas o centollo*, or haricot beans with clams or spider crab. One of the most spectacular fish dishes to be had is *besugo a la espalda*,

whole red sea bream, part boiled, then opened up flat and finished off under a grill with garlic, lemon juice & parsley. *Cabrales*, a crumbly blue cheese, not quite as creamy as Stilton, but perhaps stronger, goes perfectly with the local beverage.



Clams



### Cider house rules

Asturias is Spain's cider country and one of the most popular rituals is ordering a bottle of *sidra natural* and having the waiter pour it, arm raised aloft, into a glass at knee level. It's amusing to watch and great fun to try.

Etiquette demands that drinkers share just one *carolino* or glass and pour only a small quantity of cider into the glass so it froths up nicely, being *sidra natural*, it's not carbonated.





**BEST BEACHES**

Whether you want solitude or to hang out with the surf crowd, you want rare birds or naked birds, western Asturias has a beach for everyone

**NATURE - PENARRONDA / PEÑARRONDA**

This beach has fine sand and gentle winds have created attractive dunes, home to birds and wild plants. The beach has been declared a Natural Monument due to it being the westernmost nesting limit for the Eurasian Oystercatcher and it is the only place that the lovely plant, the sand stock (*Malcomia Littorea*) appears on the Asturian coast.

**SURFERS - SANTA GADEA / PANTORGA**

Beach boys and girls should head here. It's very safe for swimming too and an unusual sight at high tide when the beach completely disappears. Puts a bit of a dampener on the post-surf beach partying though.

**NATURISTS - MEXOTA**

Although some of the locals are none too happy, this is the place to get your kit off. Those not of a naturist persuasion have neighbouring Serantes beach. Both have spectacular, beautiful, crystalline waters and, with a cute island that divides the beach, the clothed and the starkers are kept apart.

**HISTORY - EL FIGUS**

You can only reach el Figus on foot from the village of Medio but it's worth the effort. It has a melancholy beauty and was a favourite with the Vikings when the horny helmeted came raping and pillaging along this coast long ago. Unusual number of striking blondes around.

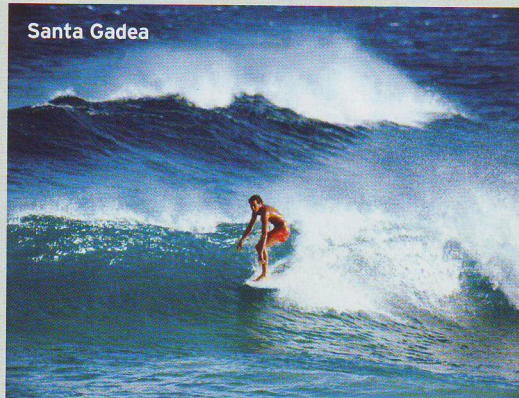
**HILL WALKERS - POLEAS**

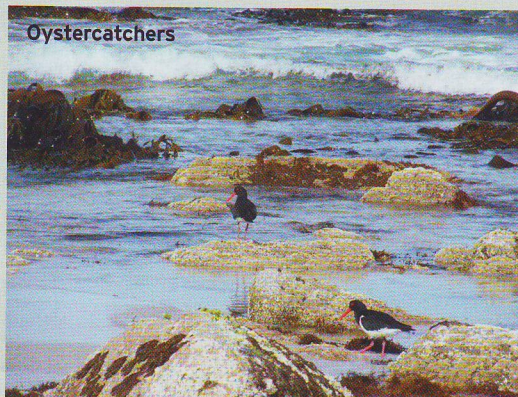
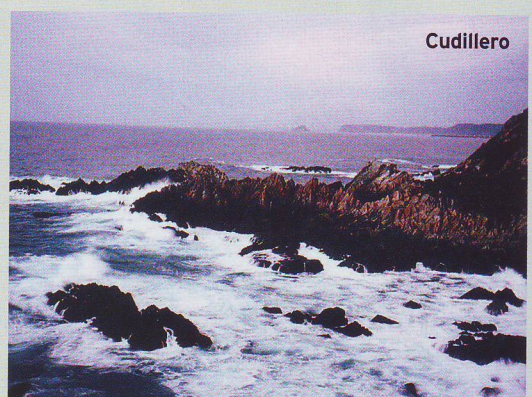
One for the adventurous and in search of solitude. This pebbly beach is little visited and no wonder. There's a really steep path to get down there and even the locals employed pulleys to haul up seaweed for agriculture and rocks for building from the coastline. Hence the name of the beach, the imaginative pulleys.

**PICNICS - PORCÍA**

Asturias along with Galicia has a bit of a reputation for wet weather but both regions can have truly great summers and the coast is a delight for al fresco eating. Porcia has a mixture of pebbles and sand, as well as an attractive setting with dunes and wooded areas, which are great for shady picnics.

**Peñarronda**

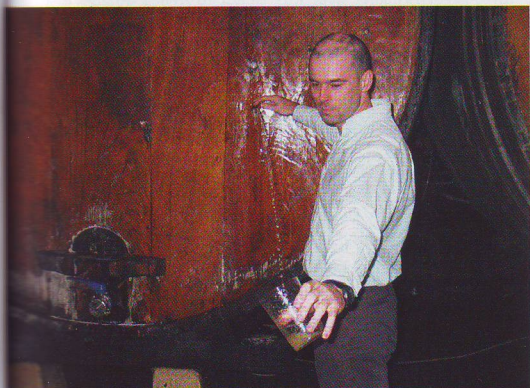
**Santa Gadea**

**Lastres**

**Oystercatchers**

**Cudillero**




The secret is to stare nonchalantly at some vague point in the distance, never looking down at the glass, which is quite a feat in itself. It gets progressively more difficult, the more cider you drink, naturally.

On special occasions known as *espichas* the cider is drunk direct from the barrel; the knocking out of the bung producing a torrent of cider which is then caught in a glass.



The best places are easy to spot, look for the word *sidrería*, they should be heaving with punters, with seriously overworked waiters and waitresses running around, mopping the sweat from their brows. Ideally, and this is of the utmost importance, your shoes should squelch as you move around the place. A very reassuring sound indeed!

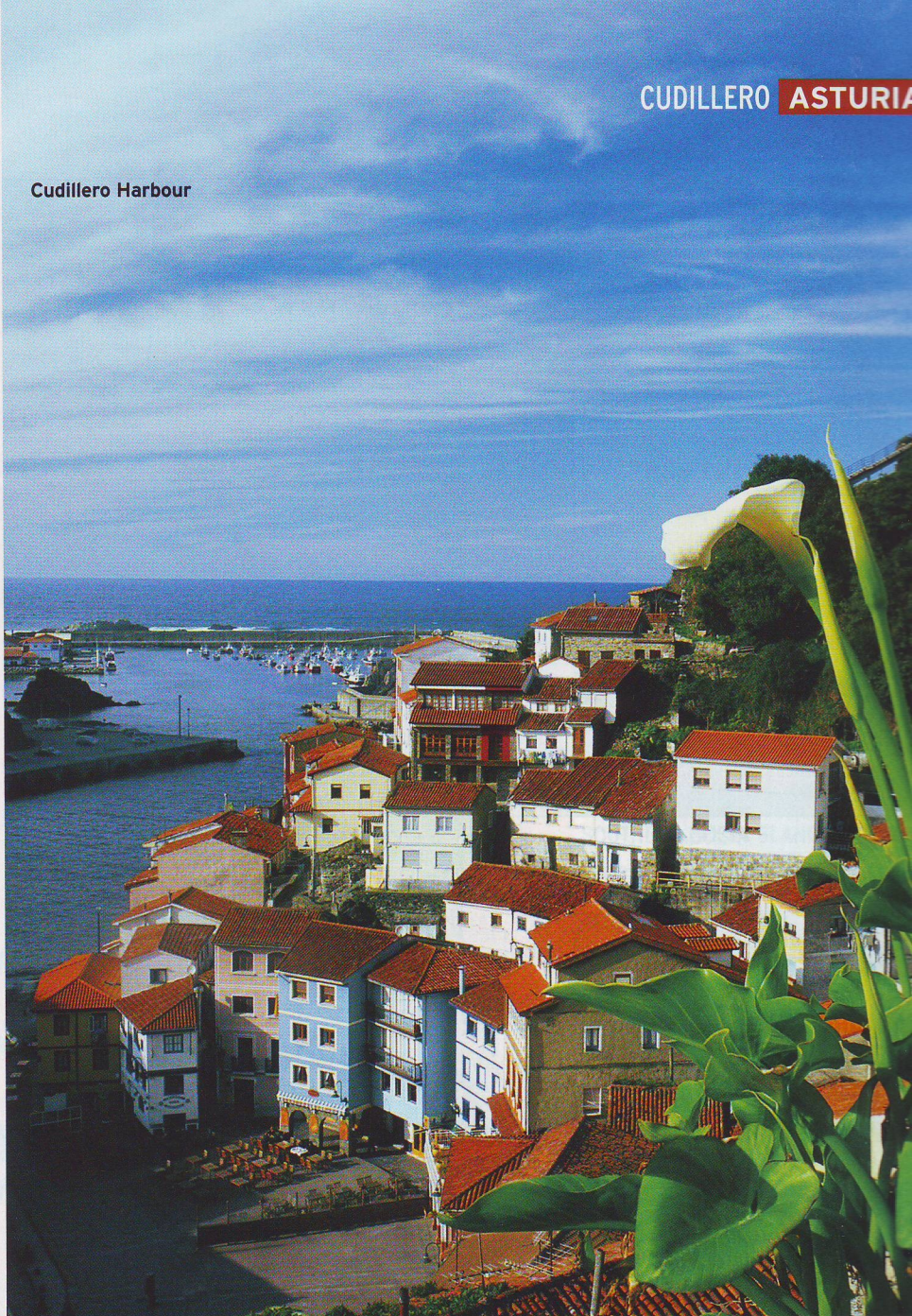
One should try to visit as many *sidrerías* as possible in one session, so that bar owners *pepe*, *paco* and *pepita* all get a piece of the action. Well that seems to be the excuse for an extended bar crawl, as if an excuse is needed to prolong this extraordinary and unique experience.

#### Picture postcard charm

To the west of the region's capital Oviedo, and just over half an hour's drive away (or moments from where you land with easyJet), Cudillero is your typical picture postcard Asturian fishing village. Nestling in a natural amphitheatre, its charming houses and cottages cling precariously to the cliff-side and are connected by a series of narrow, winding, cobbled streets. The village itself is stoically protected from the ravages of the Cantabrian sea by a solid harbour wall, behind which, dozens of brightly painted fishing vessels are to be seen bobbing around in the bracing Atlantic breeze. It's not surprising then, that many British and Irish visitors draw comparisons with Cornwall and Devon.

The beautiful fishing villages, the verdant pastures, the jagged coastline, the secluded coves and pristine white sandy beaches are a veritable magnet for tourists escaping the searing heat of central and southern Spain during the summer months. More of us too are visiting, making the drive from Santander. You'll see fabulous beaches all the way from Cantabria but the best maybe yet to come, here in Asturias. Go Spanish this summer. Go north. ■

Cudillero Harbour





## STAYING THERE

Try the wonderful rural houses (*casas rurales*) in Asturias, *La Casona de Selgas*, for example in Pitu, just off the main road above Cudillero. The hotel is only 5 minutes from the port by taxi, but a very steep twenty-minute walk. *Casonas* are elegant town houses and mansions, built at the turn of the century by émigrés returning from the Americas. Many have now been tastefully converted into family hotels and are excellent value for money.

### ■ La Casona de Selgas

Avda. Selgas, s/n. 33154  
El Pito.  
Cudillero  
Principado de Asturias  
Spain  
Tel: +34 985 59 01 13  
Fax: +34 985 59 01 22  
Email: hcasonaselgas@eresmas.com  
[www.geo.ya.com/hcasonaselgas/](http://www.geo.ya.com/hcasonaselgas/)

## EATING THERE

For some gastronomic delights of Cudillero, try *Restaurante Isabel* in the *terrace* area of the port, it's the second, blue building on the left as you enter. These terraces serve as great vantage points for people watching and are perfect for the *aperitivo* before lunch. At night they are also busy and serve drinks into the early hours. Though you'll be spoilt for choice in terms of restaurants and bars, do bear in mind that things can get extremely busy in the summer months, so, if possible, bag that table well before the time you plan to have lunch or dinner.

## Viewpoints

For great views and some stunning photo opportunities in Cudillero, have a wander up to the lighthouse.

## Don't miss

For an insight into the working life of the village's inhabitants, early birds should try to check out the auction of the returning fishing boats at the *lonja de pescado*. You might want to arm yourself for the experience by having a stiff *carajillo*, or steaming hot black coffee with a shot of brandy, heart warming stuff indeed. Ask at the *pescadería* in the terrace area for the best time to catch this *subasta de pescado*.

## GETTING THERE

Easyjet now flies from London Stansted to Asturias.  
[www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)

## GETTING ABOUT

Regular coach services operate between Oviedo, Avilés, Gijón, and the airport.

■ One-way to Oviedo and Gijón costs €5.40 (€10.30 for a return ticket). One-way ticket to Avilés costs €2.60, and €4.95 for a return ticket.

■ There is a taxi rank just outside the terminal. Approximate prices: Oviedo €40, Gijón €37, Avilés €17.

■ Brittany Ferries sail to Santander with their superb, super-fast ferry the *Pont Aven* if you want to take your car and stock up with cider, cheese and *fabada* kits. Oviedo is about a 2-hour drive and there's that stunning coastal scenery along the way.  
[www.brittany-ferries.com](http://www.brittany-ferries.com)

■ Ryanair flies into Santander. Pick up a car at the airport and enjoy the drive.  
[www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Check out the excellent tourist board website:  
[www.infoasturias.com](http://www.infoasturias.com)

Local authority website: [www.usuarios.lycos.es/eloy\\_ega/](http://www.usuarios.lycos.es/eloy_ega/)

Tourist information: [www.cudillero.org](http://www.cudillero.org)

