

# Another side of Santiago

Galicia's top town for tourists has one of its big Holy Years this year. **Adrian McManus** lays his pilgrim staff down to go in search of more than spiritual fulfilment

**V**OLUMES HAVE BEEN written about Santiago de Compostela and its centuries-old pilgrims' rituals.

Historians, in fact, still argue passionately about its pivotal role, not only during the Reconquest of the Iberian peninsula from the Moors, but also during the conquest and evangelisation of the Americas

On this occasion however, the plan was to seek out the other side of Santiago de Compostela, a vibrant university town, which, along with Salamanca, is one of Spain's most beautiful cities. Its ancient, winding granite-paved streets are home to some beautiful cafés, stunning

restaurants and *taperías* and imaginative pubs. In the new town, there's an abundance of swish *tiendas* for those in search of active retail therapy.

This year, the feast day of Santiago on July 25 falls on a Sunday, which means it's Jubilee Year, or, as it's known here, *Ano Xacobeo*. This basically means that pilgrims converging on the city will receive special indulgences from the Church, all resulting in a shorter stay in that awful limbo land that is Purgatory. However, not all is contrition and repentance, the city will be hosting a series of concerts with big name acts such as Bob Dylan, David Bowie, The Cure, Peter Gabriel, Iggy Pop and others.







Palacio de Fonseca

### Pressing on

The Cathedral, and the gorgeous squares that surround it, is considered the beating heart of the city. In front of the main façade of the Cathedral is the immense *Plaza del Obradoiro*, which houses the neo-classical town hall and one of the most beautiful hotels in Spain, the *Hostal de los Reyes Católicos*.

On the left-hand side is the *Plaza de la Imaculada* with the enormous (20,000sq/m) monastery of *San Martín Pinario* facing the Cathedral. Jetsmiths used to ply their wares here in mediaeval times. To the right is the beautiful *Plaza de las Platerías*, with its lovely baroque fountain of horses' heads.

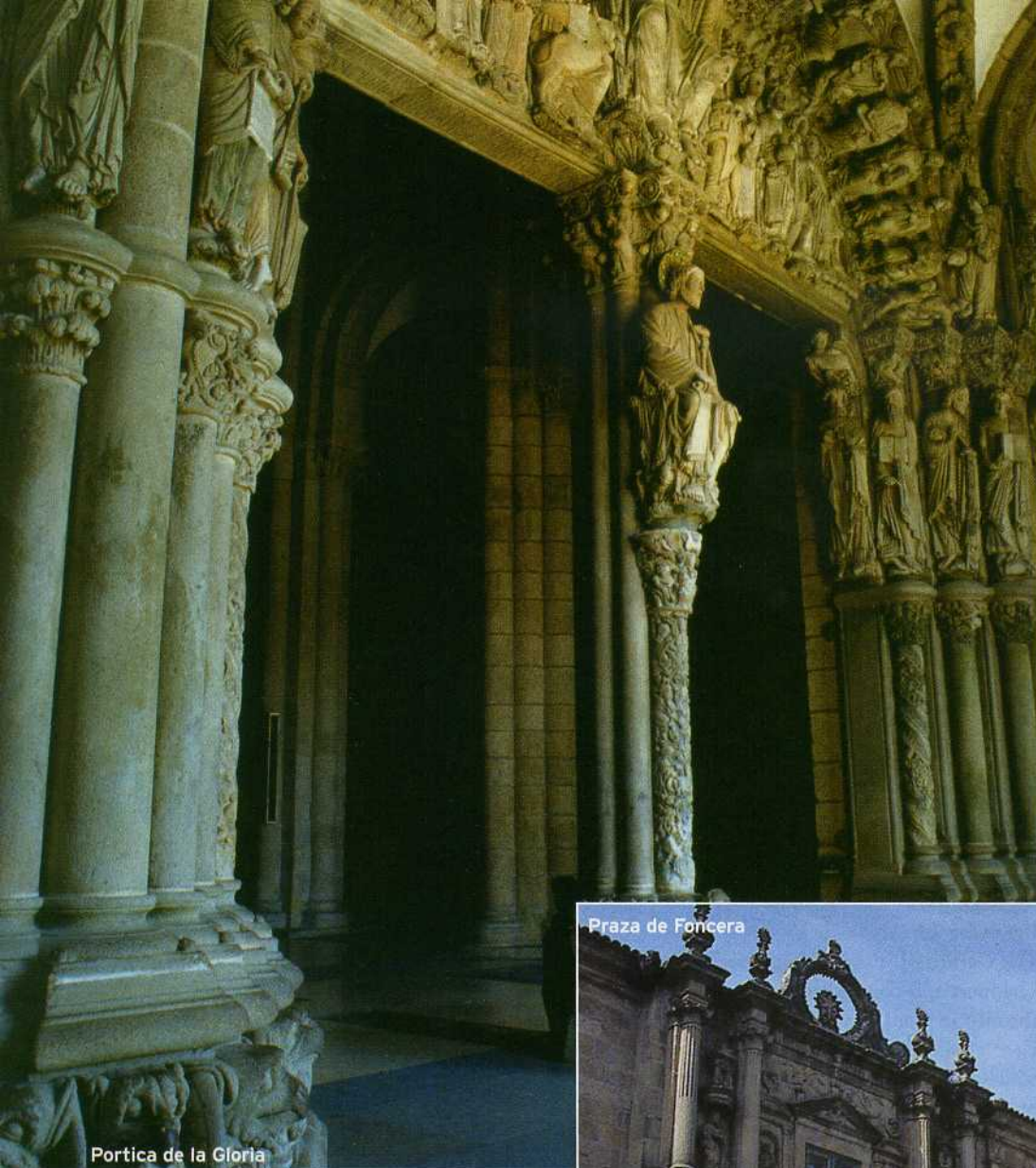
A flight of stairs leads to the *Plaza de la Quintana*, also known as the square of the literati, and a delightful venue for concerts in the summer. The perspective of the rear of the Cathedral from the top of the steps at the far end of this square is quite stunning, especially at night. The *terrazas* here are also the perfect place for that first glass of *Albariño*, Galicia's gloriously fragrant white wine.

Those wishing to *ganar el jubileo*, or 'pay one's respects' to the apostle *Santiago*, should head for the *Portico de la Gloria* inside the West Front of



Intrepid pilgrims





Portico de la Gloria



the Cathedral. Tradition demands that each pilgrim give thanks for their safe arrival by placing their hand on the central column just below the figure of the saint and, rather bizarrely, 'butting the head' of the architect responsible for the *Portico*, thereby gaining some of his wisdom. At this point almost everybody, pilgrims and non-pilgrims alike, gets it all wrong. The head that should really receive the ritual 'nutting' is on the other side of the column, looking straight down the central aisle of the nave.

A perfect opportunity to demonstrate your in-depth knowledge of local customs, and, rather perversely, observe the bewildered looks of those who have walked literally thousands of miles, only to bestow a butt on the wrong head!





As always in Spain, you are faced with two basic choices. *Picar*, in which case you trawl from bar to bar trying out different *tapas*, either sitting down or standing up, or, alternatively, sit down to a formal three course lunch in a restaurant. In Santiago, one is spoilt for choice, with literally hundreds of places to choose from. Most people go for an *aperitivo* at around 1pm, ordering a *caña* or a *corto*, a small glass of beer or perhaps a *vermú*, martini/vermouth, *blanco* or *rojo*, white or red, and *con o sin ginebra*, with or without gin. A perfect place for this would be the terrace of the lively *Hostal Suso* in Santiago's loveliest street, the colonnaded *Rua do Vilar*.

Most of the tourist-orientated places are on the *Rua do Franco*, which, you'll be most relieved to learn, was named after the foreign, but mainly French pilgrims that lodged there in the middle ages, and not that little chap who, very kindly, gave his name to most of the country's *plazas* and *avenidas* from 1936 to 1975, though some cities in the Castilian heartland, such as austere Avila, are still resolutely hanging on to their conservative traditions.

## Favourites

A couple of places on the *Rua do Franco* are evidently worth a visit though, and they are *Abellá* and *Casa Elisa*, both perfect for *tapas* or *raciones*, which in Galicia, usually means fried fare like *pimientos de padrón* (small sweet green peppers). These are unusual in that you never know if one in particular is going to blow your head off, rather like a gastronomic version of Russian roulette, the *gallegos* insist they're not chillies though, so be warned. *Xoubiñas*, baby sardines, *xurelitos*, baby horse mackerel and *cariocas*, baby hake, enchantingly served biting their own tails, are perennial favourites.

Cephalopods under various guises are immensely popular, names to look out for are *chipirones*, baby squid, and *choquitos*, baby cuttlefish, the latter served, exquisitely, in their own ink.

## Carnivore pleasure

For meat enthusiasts, the lovely sounding *zorza* (lisp that z!) is excellent, which is basically pork marinated in *pimentón*, sweet paprika and olive oil and then fried with chopped *tocino ibérico*, delicious, melt-in-your-mouth lard from the much prized Iberian pig.

*Empanadas*, meat or shellfish pies are a must, and are as Galician as the *orballo*, or misty rain. They can be divided into two sub-species, *de millo*, made with cornflour and quite heavy or *de trigo*, made with wheat flour and therefore much lighter.

The most popular types are *de berberechos*, cockles, *de zamburiñas*, small scallops, *de xoubas*, baby sardines, *de bacalao con pasas*, salt cod and raisins, *de bonito*, tuna. *De carne*, will usually be either pork or chicken.

## Signature dish

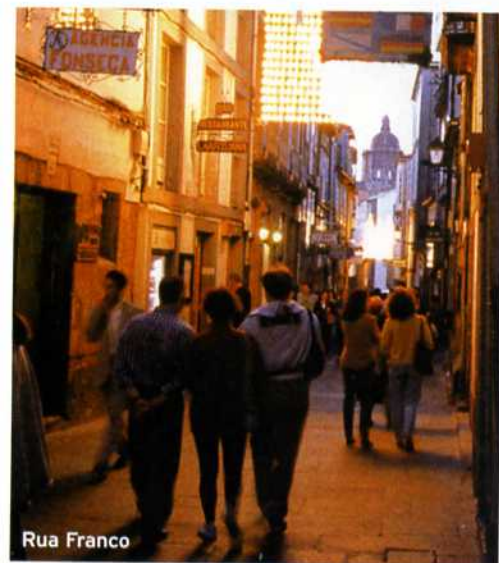
*Pulpo*, or octopus, is for many, the quintessential Galician experience, and if it's well-prepared, an unforgettable one at that. Some say the *Raxería San Marcos*, a few kilometres out on the old airport road is one of the best places to try it. There are lots of other 'lesser' shellfish, which are often served up to unsuspecting *madriños* as a *mariscada*, mega seafood session at *mariscada* prices, such as *navajas*, razor clams, *berberechos*, cockles, *mejillones*, mussels - Galicia is Europe's largest mussel producer - and the truly scrummy *almejas marinera*, clams, served with a

sauce to die for. Spaniards love to *hacer sopitas* with these sauces, i.e. mopping up the sauce with a piece of bread. This kind of behaviour would be frowned upon in more up-market establishments, so if in doubt, check out the people on the next table!

## Local knowledge

Most *santiagueses*, however, eat out in the *Rua Raíña*, which runs more or less parallel to the *Rua Franco*. Here, prices are a little more reasonable and the popular places are *El Gato Negro*, one of the few remaining traditional *tapas* bars in the city. The things to ask for here are the *mejillones encebollados*, pickled mussels laced with sweet onion and *chicharrones*, a kind of pork crackling, and so typical of Santiago.

Other recommendations on *Rua Raíña* are, *María Castaña* for *tapas* and *raciones*, *O Beiro*, an excellent place for sampling wines, ham, cheeses, *embutidos*, cured products in general. For the more adventurous, *Bar Orella*, serves up, surprise, surprise... *orella*, or boiled pig's ear sprinkled with *pimentón picante*, hot paprika. All of the previously mentioned places are perfect for lunch or dinner.



*Casa Das Crechas*, very popular with Celtic music fans, has live music and last but not least, is *Paraíso Perdido*, a hugely popular pub with an imaginative music policy.

When the pubs in the old quarter start to shut down at around 3.30, it's time to move on to the new town, and the place to see and be seen at the moment is the *Sala Capitol* in *Rua Emilia Pardo Bazán* near the *Plaza de Galicia*. Housed in what used to be a cinema, it's also used as a venue for live concerts.

## One more cup of coffee

If anybody makes it to breakfast, a place to really have it in style is the terraza/courtyard of the *Hostal de Los Reyes Catolicos*. There are a number of good cafés serving toast and marmalade, croissants, *chocolate con churros* in *Porta Faxeira* at

the top of *Rua Franco*. The most traditional of the cafés are the *Derby* and the *París*.

University students have their own version of the *París-Dakarr* Rally which entails having a *cañita*, or small beer in each bar along *Rua Franco*, starting in the *Café París* at the top of the street and ending, rather inebriately, in the *Café Dakarr* at the bottom. I wouldn't recommend anybody to try it!

## Soul food

A shrine since the middle ages, Santiago draws a curious mix of pilgrims. The faithful, those just out for a long walk, New Age folk following pre St James ley lines. Actress Shirley MacLaine famously prayed with her feet on the *camino de Santiago*, and soul food awaits all here. And the rest... ■



## Serve somebody

Madrid and Barcelona do not have the monopoly on late night revels. Around midnight, the first port of call could be *O Galo D'Ouro* on *Rua Conga* just off *Platerías*. The friendly owner and his wife worked in England for many years. Great jukebox, too.

Heading up *Rua Conga* and turning into *San Paio* there's the delightfully named *A Borriquito de Belén*, or the little donkey of Bethlehem.

*Metate*, located in what used to be a chocolate factory, and *Modus Vivendi*, whose downstairs part was formerly a stable, complete with a ramp for the horses.



## SEAFOOD HEAVEN



Nobody should leave Galicia without trying some of the spectacular shellfish. A look at what to ask for

In a recent interview, Ferran Adrià, the world famous Spanish chef, described the shellfish of the *rias baixas*, the three 'estuaries' of Vigo, Pontevedra and Arousa, as undoubtedly the best in the world. *Camilo*, with a lovely terrace in summer, and *Sexto*, are the perfect places for that tentative first take on a serious *mariscada*.

The principal protagonists in this wild passion play, and the *gallegos* are ridiculously passionate about their seafood, are the incredible *centolla*, or spider crab, and the *percebe*, or goose barnacle.

*Percebeiros*, or goose barnacle gatherers, crazed individuals clad in wetsuits and armed with small picks, leap insanely from rock to rock, hacking away and stuffing the prized mollusc into the small nets that hang from their waists. Their minders, from a wise distance, scream out warnings and the *percebeiros* then scurry like mad to higher ground in order to take refuge from the waves crashing in around them. Needless to say, many lives are lost in order to satisfy the demand for this strange creature. A demonstration from the waiter on how to eat them will be required, as they're not easy. Squirting the person sitting opposite you with the sea water they contain can be highly amusing, though.

*Vieiras*, or scallops are the symbol of the city and its patron saint. Oven baked with finely chopped onion, white wine and fresh breadcrumbs they are simple, yet lovely.

*Camarones*, sweet red shrimps, cooked with bay leaves are costly, but well worth the expense, at Christmas they can fetch up a £100 per kilo at market. *Gambas a la plancha*, which you will see on most menus, are undeniably great, but the *gamba* or prawn is native to the Huelva area in the south of Spain, not Galicia, so you wouldn't be eating local produce if you ordered them.

*Cigalas*, or dublin bay prawns are local though, and shouldn't be missed.

*Lubrigante* or *bogavante* is the local clawed lobster and can be served *a la plancha* or boiled. *Langosta* is the local lobster, without the claws of course.



*Nécoras*, or the ridiculously named velvet swimming crab are enjoyable but fiddly. Other dishes you may see on restaurant menus, usually in February and March are *angulas*, ridiculously expensive elvers and *lamprea*, lamprey cooked in its own blood!! This extremely odd migratory creature is totally unique in that it has a menstruation cycle and exceedingly unpleasant in that it's a parasite, attacking other fish by means of its bizarre suction type mouth.





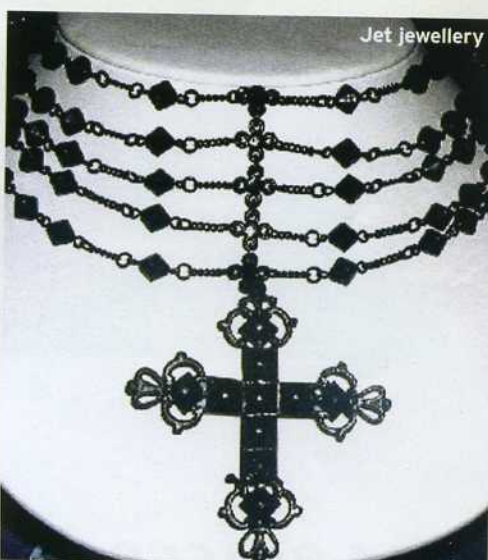
## Serious shopping:

- Wines, cheeses and cured products in *O Beiro* in Rua Raíñas.
- The wonderful *Tetilla* cheese in the *Casa dos Queixos* in Rua Bautizos.
- Typical pastries, including the fabulous *Tarta de Santiago* in *Casa Mora* in Rua Vilar.
- The ubiquitous Jet jewellery between *Azabachería* and the top of the Plaza Quintana.
- Ceramic ware at *Sargadelos* in the Rua Nova.
- For clothes and shoes, leather, fur etc, head for the new town where most of the Spanish designers have their shops. Some names to look out for are *Adolfo Domínguez*, *Roberto Verino* and *Purificación García*.



## Inside the museums

For a peek into Galicia's rich cultural past, head for the excellent *Museo do Pobo Galego*, or Galician People's Museum, located in the beautiful *Convento de San Domingo de Bonaval*



Jet jewellery

near the *Porta do Camiño*. The museum houses theme based displays dedicated to the sea, trade and commerce, regional costumes, the wonderfully sounding 'sumptuous art', meaning jetware, silverware and jewellery, the home, architecture, archaeology, painting and sculpture.

- Open Tuesdays – Saturdays 10:00 – 14:00/16:00 – 20:00 Sundays and public holidays 10:00 – 14:00

For the low-down on the *Camino de Santiago*, there's the *Museo de las Peregrinaciones* located in a lovely mediaeval building reputed to be the residence of King Pedro I. The collection convincingly underlines the fundamental importance and cultural impact that the pilgrimage had on European civilization and Latin America.

*San Miguel dos Agros*, 4

- Open Tuesdays–Fridays 10:00–20:00  
Saturdays 10:30–13:30/17:00–20:00  
Sundays 10:30–13:30

## STAYING THERE

### Budget

#### ■ Hostel Suso

Rua do Vilar, 65, Santiago De Compostela  
Tel: +34 981 586611  
Standard double: 36 euros

### Medium

#### ■ Hotel Virxe Da Cerca

Virxe Da Cerca, 27, Santiago De Compostela  
Tel: +34 902 405858  
Email: [vdacerca@pousadasdecompostela.com](mailto:vdacerca@pousadasdecompostela.com)  
Standard double: 85 euros  
Buffet breakfast: 8 euros

### Blow out

#### ■ El Hostal De Los Reyes Católicos

Plaza do Obradoiro, 1, Santiago De Compostela  
Tel: +34 981 582200 Email: [santiago@parador.es](mailto:santiago@parador.es)  
Standard double: 178 euros

- For more information, check out the following websites: [www.turgalicia.es](http://www.turgalicia.es) and [www.santiagoturismo.com](http://www.santiagoturismo.com)