



Galicia

HIGHLIGHTS

- o Marvelling at the treacherous beauty of the **Costa da Morte** (p191) with the ocean licking at your feet
- o Reaching the top of Monte Pindo on the **Monte Pindo** walk (p192) and seeing the 'end of the earth' amidst the massive blue expanse of the Atlantic
- o Sharing the solitary, green ridges of the eastern serras with agile deer on the **Serra dos Ancares** walk (p210)
- o Following a sinuous canyon through timeless villages and ancient chestnut groves on the **Rio Lor Meander** walk (p206)

Area: 29,574 sq km

Average summer high: 24°C

Population: 2.77 million

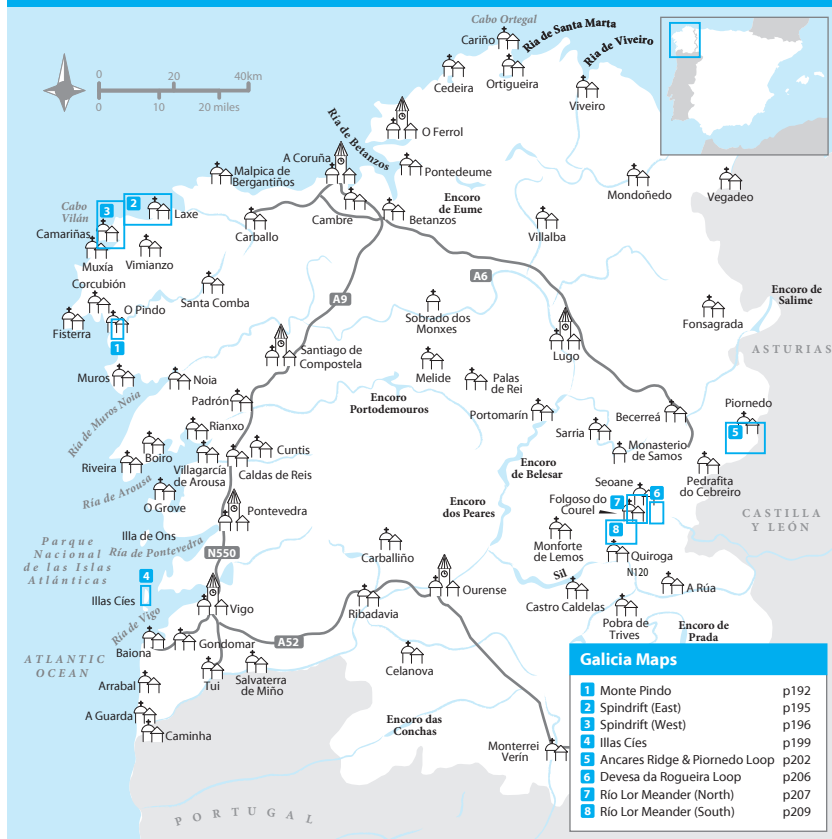
Quietly nestled in Iberia's northwest corner, Galicia has a great wealth of natural riches for the walker eager to experiment in this largely rural corner of Spain. Plunging sea cliffs and expansive dunes, deep forests and water-fed mountain slopes, are enhanced by fascinating cultural history: prehistoric sites; medieval monasteries, churches and bridges; and surprising vestiges of arcane ways of living – thatch-roofed houses, unique stone granaries and yoked oxen driving wooden ploughs.

The walks detailed here explore parts of Galicia's 1200km of coastline along the isolated Costa da Morte (Death Coast) and the Illas Cíes (Cies Islands), which form part of Spain's newest national park. In the Serras dos Ancares and Courel mountain ranges of Galicia's magical, rural interior are rounded crests, river systems and enclosed lush valleys.

Despite these attractions, don't expect excellent walking infrastructure (good trail markers, English-language guides and easy public transport). Galicians are not avid recreational walkers and no private or public agency regularly maintains trails. Hopefully, this situation will change.



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HISTORY

Megalithic peoples (around 3500 BC) intentionally changed the landscape leaving behind dolmens (burial chambers built with huge stones) and later petroglyphs. Around 600 BC Iron Age peoples (some of them Celts) intensively settled the area, filling Galicia with some 3500 castros – permanent, fortified, circular settlements. There are excellent examples of dolmens on the coast and castros all over Galicia. Romans arrived in 137 BC and eventually conquered the area in search of mineral wealth. Iberia's oldest (and still functioning!) Roman lighthouse, La Torre de Hércules, protects La Coruña (A Coruña). Roman walls still

encircle Lugo. Both of these monuments are Unesco World Heritage sites.

The 9th-century discovery of James the Apostle's tomb in Santiago de Compostela (see History in the Camino de Santiago chapter, p304), forever put Galicia on the map and the region achieved its maximum glory by the 13th century. The mid-19th-century Rexurdimento, Galicia's political and cultural renaissance spawned a nationalism which embraced a largely imagined (and romanticised) Celtic past.

Galicia's economic mainstays have been animal husbandry, agriculture and fishing. When these proved to be inadequate, many Galicians fled to richer areas (such as the Americas and other parts of Europe).