

galici**ð**

the route of the camellia



XUNTA DE GALICIA

IMPORTANT NOTICE

With the aim of promoting its tourism products, Turismo de Galicia carried out an open tender procedure (arm's length principle) aimed especially at travel agencies.

The itineraries included in this brochure are the outcome of the package holiday proposals created by the winning agency.

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Galicia's flower

Galicia boasts the perfect conditions for the cultivation of camellias. A humid climate, mild temperatures and acidic, fertile soil cause the spectacular growth of these plants, surprising experts the world over.

Camellias arrived in Galicia in the late eighteenth century from distant countries like China and Japan. They were originally planted in the gardens of the manors and stately mansions of the Galician nobility, but eventually found their way into gardens and farms – both public and private – throughout the region, until they converted Galicia into an international leader in the cultivation and production of this plant. Galicia is currently home to nearly 8,000 varieties of camellia.

We'd like to propose several routes through some of the most spectacular gardens in Galicia. We'll stop in the fascinating green spaces of the most unique pazos in the provinces of A Coruña and Pontevedra. We'll discover all the secrets hidden by both the stones as well the botanical species of these uniquely charming places. The most representative local products and wines from each region will intensify the exquisitely tasteful nature of our trip.

index



1 Camellias: accommodation in... Paradores

From Santiago de Compostela to Cambados, we'll stroll through their pazos' most amazing gardens. We'll discover the different species they shelter and all the curiosities hidden in these magical spaces.

p. 8

2 Camellias: accommodation in... Pazos

Padrón is the starting point for this route that takes us to Santiago de Compostela and the most characteristic pazos as far as Pontevedra and Soutomaior. In addition to their gardens, we'll enjoy their history and cuisine.

p. 20



3 Camellias and wineries

This experience combines a visit to some of the most beautiful palatial and stately gardens in Galicia with a tour of the vineyards and wineries featuring a Designation of Origin. On this trip, the wine will be paired with the excellent fish and shellfish of Galicia's estuaries.

p. 32

The Route of the Camellia



- TOLL MOTORWAY
- MOTORWAY
- HIGH-CAPACITY NETWORK
- NATIONAL ROAD NETWORK
- BASIC AND COMPLEMENTARY REGIONAL NETWORK
- REGIONAL ROAD NETWORK
- BROAD-GAUGE TRACK
- NARROW-GAUGE TRACK
- NATIONAL/NATURE PARKS

experiences

1

EXPERIENCE Camellias: accommodation in . . . Paradores

- day 1 | Santiago de Compostela
- day 2 | Santiago de Compostela – Vedra – A Estrada – Vedra – Santiago de Compostela
- day 3 | Vilagarcía de Arousa – Meis – Cambados
- day 4 | Cambados

2

EXPERIENCE Camellias: accommodation in . . . Pazos

- day 1 | Padrón
- day 2 | Santiago de Compostela – Vedra – A Estrada – Vedra – Santiago de Compostela
- day 3 | Vilagarcía de Arousa – Cambados – Meis – Pontevedra
- day 4 | Pontevedra – Soutomaior

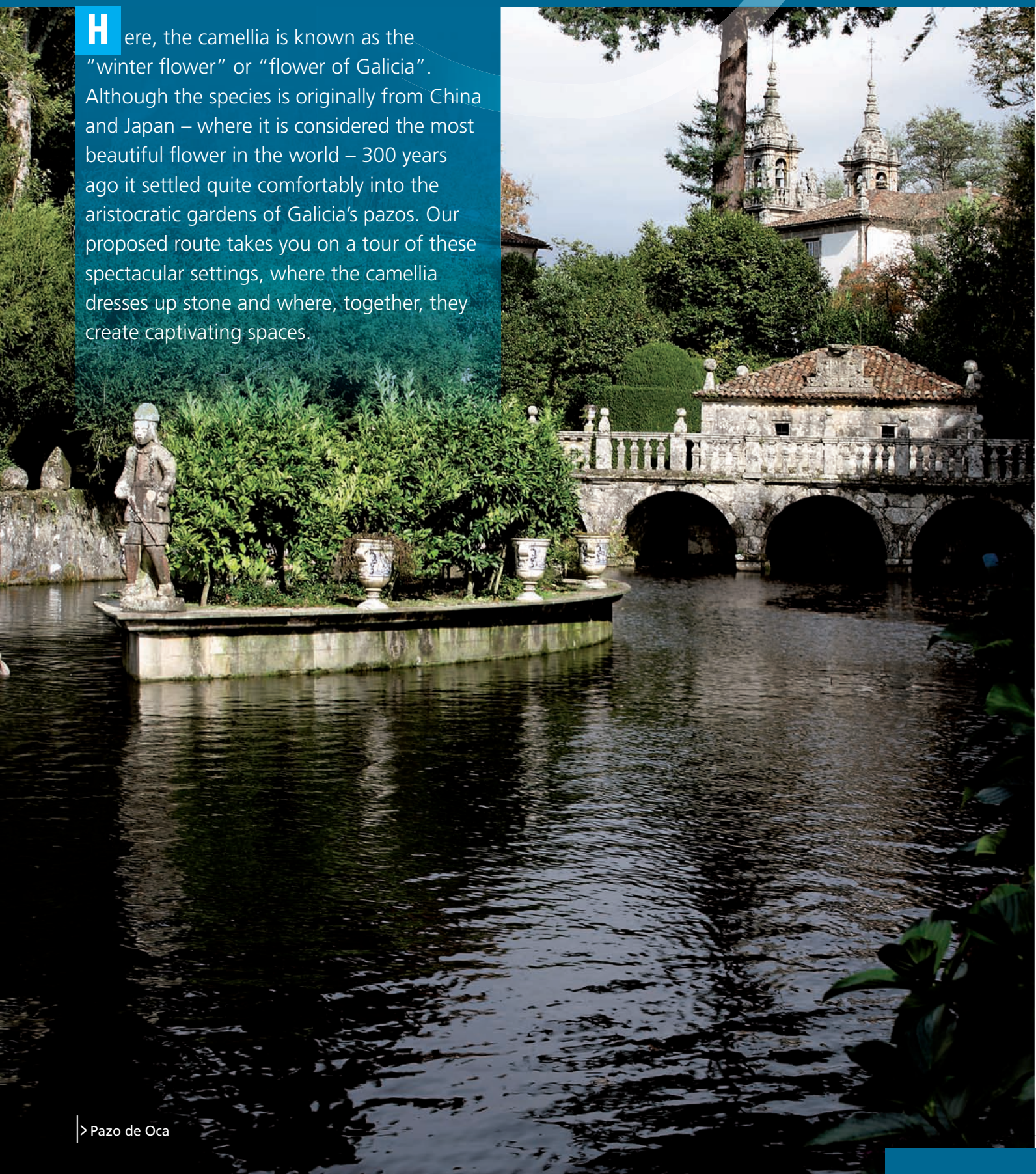
3

EXPERIENCE Camellias and wineries

- day 1 | Cambados
- day 2 | Cambados – Vilagarcía de Arousa – Ribadumia – O Grove – A Toxa Island
- day 3 | A Toxa Island – O Grove – Meis – A Toxa Island
- day 4 | A Toxa Island – Poio – Pontevedra – Soutomaior

Camellias: accommodation in... Paradores

Here, the camellia is known as the “winter flower” or “flower of Galicia”. Although the species is originally from China and Japan – where it is considered the most beautiful flower in the world – 300 years ago it settled quite comfortably into the aristocratic gardens of Galicia’s pazos. Our proposed route takes you on a tour of these spectacular settings, where the camellia dresses up stone and where, together, they create captivating spaces.





day 1|

Santiago de Compostela

- 1_ Hostal dos Reis Católicos
- 2_ Cathedral
- 3_ Old Town
- 4_ Rúa do Franco
- 5_ Rúa da Raiña

day 2|

Santiago de Compostela

- 6_ Alameda
- 7_ Pazo de San Lourenzo
- 3_ Old Town

Vedra

- 8_ Pazo de Santa Cruz de Ribadulla

A Estrada

- 9_ Pazo de Oca

Vedra

- 10_ Locality of Vedra

Santiago de Compostela

- 11_ Santiago de Compostela

day 3|

Vilagarcía de Arousa

- 12_ Pazo de Rubiáns

- 13_ The town of Vilagarcía de Arousa

Meis

- 14_ A Saleta estate

Cambados

- 15_ Pazo de Bazán State-Owned Hotel

- 16_ Fefiñáns district

day 4|

Cambados

- 17_ Pazo de Fefiñáns

START_ Santiago de Compostela

END_ Cambados

DAYS_ 4

MORE INFORMATION_

- Hostal dos Reis Católicos. Tel_ **981 582 200**
- Pazo de San Lourenzo_ www.pazodesanlorenzo.com
- Pazo de Santa Cruz de Ribadulla. Tel_ **981 512 011**
- Pazo de Oca. Tel_ **986 587 435**
- Pazo de Rubiáns_ www.pazoderubianes.com
- A Saleta estate. Tel_ **986 872 323**
- Pazo de Bazán State-Owned Hotel. Tel_ **986 542 250**
- Palacio de Fefiñanes Winery_ www.fefinan.es



Compostela's charming Old Town

Hostal dos Reis Católicos was a hospital for pilgrims

This proposed route begins in Santiago de Compostela, where we suggest that you arrive in the afternoon and enjoy a relaxed stroll through its Old Town, a World Heritage Site since 1985. The city offers a wide range of accommodation, but its most emblematic is the Hostal dos Reis Católicos, an old pilgrims' hospital which has been a state-owned hotel since 1954.

The hostel's privileged location in the Praza do Obradoiro square, next to the cathedral, is admired by visitors. Right before its door – finely decorated in the *plateresco* style – we can identify the Catholic Monarchs, Isabel and Fernando, enclosed in both medallions; the nude figures of Adam and Eve, and the twelve apostles lined up on its frieze. Above these latter are the Virgin Mary, Jesus, St. John the Evangelist and the Apostle James with scallop shell and walking stick. Looking further above, we'll see the cornice decorated with grotesque and obscene gargoyles.

You may visit the inside of the building without being a guest if accompanied by a tour guide. This allows us to explore its four interior courtyards and a beautiful Gothic chapel, declared a Historic Artistic Monument in 1912.



> Cathedral of Santiago from the Alameda

From the cathedral to tapas at Rúa do Franco and A Raíña

You'll be impressed by the wealth of art treasures in the cathedral such as the **Pórtico da Gloria**, a Romanesque masterpiece. We suggest you spend the rest of your afternoon exploring the cobblestone streets of the Old Town, mingling with the mass of pilgrims, university students, visitors and Compostela's locals that reflect the genuine character of this city. You'll find plenty of monuments and churches to visit, as well as numerous museums and galleries.

And when it's time for a drink or dinner, there are all kinds of places suited to the most varied tastes: restaurants, seafood restaurants, tapas bars, wine bars, ham restaurants, traditional eating spots and grills, bars and taverns. A very Compostelan custom is to enjoy tapas and sharing-sized portions, especially when strolling the picturesque **Rúa do Franco** and **A Raíña**.





> Alameda in Santiago



> Cloister in the Hostal dos Reis Católicos

“Chove en Santiago
meu doce amor.
Camelia branca do ar
brila entrebecida ô sol”.

*It's raining in Santiago
my sweet love.
The wind-whipped white camellia
shines sombrely at the sun.*

Federico García Lorca



> Alameda in Santiago

| day 2 |

The Alameda in Santiago and pazo gardens close to the city

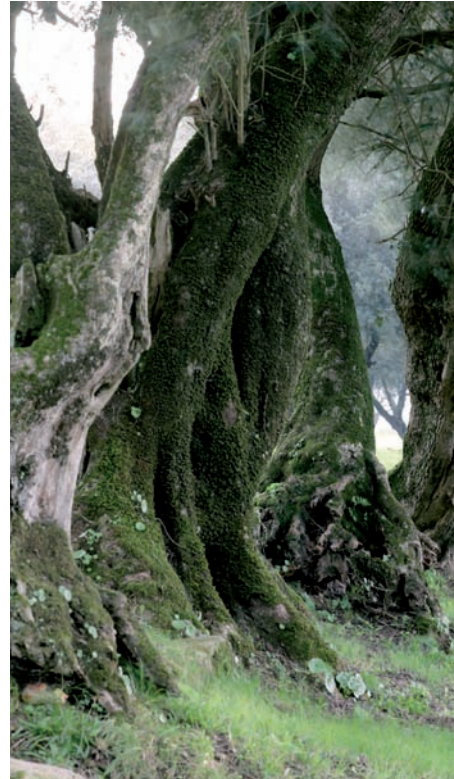
The Alameda has an important botanical significance

Green has always characterised the landscape of Santiago. This is equally true of the Old Town, where its historic gardens are often-visited iconic areas. Preferred by Compostelans for strolling and recreation is the Alameda, which we can visit after breakfast. It is divided into four areas: Campo da Estrela, Paseo da Ferradura, Paseo da Alameda and Carballeira de Santa Susana.

Their flower beds, benches, statues, sculptures, fountains, ponds, bandstand, pigeon loft and churches help recreate nineteenth-century, modernist and up-to-date airs. Also significant is its value as a botanical garden due to its great variety of species, many of which are exotic.



> Carballeira de San Lourenzo



The Santa Susana Oak Wood has trees that are more than 300 years old

Camellia japonica, more than a century of looking towards the cathedral

The silvery linden trees of the **Campo da Estrela** welcome us when we enter via Porta Faxeira. Walking under the wooded dome of the **Paseo da Ferradura**, we'll find some of the 66 specimens of *Camellia japonica* that have been contemplating one of the most beautiful views of the city and its cathedral and monuments for over a century.

The same is true of the giant *Eucalyptus globulus* just round the corner. Don't miss the opportunity to sit for a moment on the wooden bench encircling it, breathing in its fresh and decongesting perfume while at the same time admiring the Obradoiro façade of the Cathedral.

Next, you'll see the "Perona", an *Abies nordmanniana* specimen planted in 1947 to commemorate Eva Perón's visit to the city. And, further up, surrounding Mount **Santa Susana**, is its imposing oak wood, with trees that are more than three hundred years old.

The Pazo de San Lourenzo has camellia specimens dating from the nineteenth century

From the Alameda, we quickly reach another centuries-old oak wood – the **Carballeira de San Lourenzo** – by crossing the Avenida das Burgas. If you look closely, it won't be difficult to spot a squirrel peeking out from a hollow log.

Behind this oak wood, the gardens and forest of the Pazo de San Lourenzo rise up, protected by a high stone wall. Private tours can be arranged. It's a great opportunity to see more than a hundred plant species, including camellias, the oldest of which date back to the nineteenth century.

But it is in the cloister garden where the jewel of the manor is hidden away: a large trimmed boxwood hedge, one of the most important parts of Spanish geometric landscaping due to both its size as well as its four hundred years' of life.

The morning has flown by during these strolls through the gardens. We suggest you return to the Old Town along **San Lourenzo, Poza de Bar** and **Hortas** Streets. The latter is a long, cobble stone climb up to Praza do Obradoiro. Close by there are spots with set menus at affordable prices, along with others that are representative of the cutting edge of Galician cuisine.

A large trimmed boxwood hedge – dating back four centuries – is one of the most significant parts of Spanish geometrical landscaping



Carreira das Oliveiras. Pazo de Santa Cruz de Ribadulla

In Vedra, we'll visit what was Jovellanos' temporary residence

In the afternoon, we can carry on with our garden strolls. There are shining examples near the city of Santiago, following the N-525 towards Ourense. At the neighbouring municipality of Vedra, we'll find a turnoff to the Pazo de Ortigueira, also known as the **Pazo de Santa Cruz de Ribadulla**, which was temporary residence of the politician and writer Jovellanos.

Its gardens are open to visitors, and are considered by many experts to be the most fascinating ornamental botanical space in Galicia. The gardens house many varieties of *Camellia japonica* that join together to form beautiful walks, like the one called "**Carrera de las Novias**". There are giant specimens not only of camellias – which here are grown for sale – but also of magnolia trees.

During the tour there are plenty of spaces to wander among, but don't leave without seeing the **Coca** or **Waterfall baroque fountain**. And, of course, the **Carreira das Oliveiras**, a long walkway with centuries-old olive trees, whose thick, gnarled roots emerge from the soil, capable of carrying us away in our imagination to the landscapes of a Tolkien book.



Pazo de Santa Cruz de Ribadulla

The Pazo de Oca, considered the “Galician Versailles”

After our visit, we'll rejoin the N-525 in the direction of Ourense. We're headed to the Pazo de Oca, which many call the “Galician Versailles” precisely because of the beauty of its gardens, which can be visited. We'll find the turnoff to the right signposted on the road in the municipality of **A Estrada**.

After a short ride, we'll arrive at a large outdoor plaza, dominated by the pazo's main façade –dating from the 18th century – which is surmounted by a mediaeval tower. In the back, at right angle with the pazo, is a baroque chapel that is connected to it by a lovely arched corridor.

Its gardens, surrounded by a high stone wall, are also historical and recreate a number of ambiances. The French garden contains an admirable large boxwood maze inspired by a design on the floor of Canterbury Cathedral. In the most landscaped garden, we'll walk on paths enveloped in a halo of magic and mystery. And in the horticultural garden, our spirits will be lifted by the growing flowers and trellises. This garden is diagonally crossed by the ensemble's most admired item: its great pond.

A pond with a bridge, pier and mill

At the halfway point of the stroll, an arched bridge crosses the pond. Underneath it is a pier and a mill that is still functional. One half of the pond divided by the bridge represents “peace” in the figure of a stone fisherman. The other symbolises evil and war, with guns and beasts of stone. From the centre of the pond arises a large perpendicular avenue of linden trees where – if we let our imaginations fly – it is easy to evoke scenes of thrilling horse race among nobles.

In one of the pazo's gardens there is a boxwood maze inspired by a design on the pavement of Canterbury Cathedral



A 12-metre camellia and a giant sequoia

These gardens are of great botanical value. They feature a specimen of *Camellia reticulata* "Captain Rawes", which is twelve metres high and a centuries-old *Cryptomeria japonica*, both of which are listed in the *Catalogue of Monumental Trees in Galicia*, along with a giant sequoia. Crossing nearly the entire west wing of the garden is a very long row of "Mont Blanc" camellias, splashing it with white in its flowering season.

We recommend that you take your time strolling round this dominion of nature, water and stone, for many elements will capture your attention. For example, the eye-catching **Fountain of the Monkey** or the **Fountain of the Trout**.



> Pazo de Oca

In Vedra, pig ear and wines and spirits from Ulla are local specialities

After the tour, dinnertime will be approaching. We suggest you make a stop in Vedra on your way back to Santiago. Note that the town's delicious cuisine has led to the celebrations of the *orella* (pig's ear) festivals and of the wines and spirits of Ulla.



> Pazo de Oca



> Pazo de Oca

Pazos and camellias in O Salnés

After breakfast, we head out to the region of O Salnés, located in the heart of the Rías Baixas, where the camellia feels right at home due to its mild and damp climate. The symbiosis between pazos and camellias surprises us as well here with specimens of extraordinary beauty.

The first camellias were planted in the Pazo de Rubiáns in the nineteenth century

Our first destination is the Pazo de Rubiáns, in the municipality of **Vilagarcía de Arousa**. The main road connecting it with Santiago is the AP-9. Here, a stately five-century-old perfectly preserved pazo, a large garden, an orchard and a landscaped forest, an Albariño vineyard and a mountain of cork oak trees all come together. Altogether, they cover 65 hectares.

Over a hundred species of flowers decorate the garden, but the camellia has been its emblem since the first ones – a gift of the Duke of Caminha – were planted in the early nineteenth century. Undoubtedly, another element that will catch your attention are the eucalyptus, brought to the farm by the Bishop of Tui about 1820. Today, they are among the largest in Europe, exceeding fourteen metres of perimeter.

If requested in advance, the pazo's staff will serve as guides for us. In addition to orientating us in this natural treasure devised in 1870 by the French landscaper Martin Dorgambide, they'll explain to us the process of making essential oils from the camellias. The Estación Fitopatolóxica do Areeiro (Areeiro Plant Pathologies Station) distills it from seeds harvested on this farm, and it is then used by the nuns of the convent in Armenteira to manufacture soaps, which we can also take away with us as a fragrant memento.





In Vilagarcía, we enjoy mussels, scallops and oysters with Albariño wine

After the visit, we suggest visiting the town of Vilagarcía de Arousa for lunch. Its estuary is the domain of excellent seafood, such as mussels, scallops and oysters, grown on shellfish rafts. And its vineyards are the realm of the Denomination of Origin Rías Baixas albariño wine.

Oils are made from the seeds of these camellias, which are used by the nuns in the convent in Armenteira to make soaps



The A Saleta estate in Meis has an extensive English-style garden

In the afternoon, the last camellia garden awaits us on the A Saleta estate, in the municipality of Meis, where we'll arrive via the PO-531. The exact location is known as "San Vicente de Meis". Here, we'll find a five-hectare English-style garden designed by landscape architect Brenda Colvin, that can be visited by appointment.

At the entrance is a large farmhouse, a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of A Saleta – inside of which is an altarpiece and a polychrome vault – and a large granary. Later we'll also see an octagonal dovecote surrounded by a forest of oaks, eucalyptus and cork oaks.

The garden has many plants of exotic origin: rhododendrons, azaleas, members of the Australian sugarbush and myrtle families and South American heathers, along with many varieties of camellias with white, pink, red, purple, mottled and reticulated petals that fill the garden with colour to the beginning of spring. We'll find everything perfectly identified and labelled, thanks to the tremendous work of the Gimson couple of the UK, which has been recognised with major awards and citations.

Cambados, a good place to dine and sleep

The entire district of O Salnés offers quality establishments where you can sleep, such as hotels, and delightful country hotels and bed and breakfasts. But the most symbolic one is the Pazo de Bazán state-run hotel in Cambados. The town also boasts exquisite dining options. There are a great number of restaurants on offer in the town's aristocratic Fefiñáns neighbourhood, where the signature dish is seafood and fish from the estuary accompanied by a glass of Albariño wine with the Rías Baixas Denomination of Origin.



> A Saleta estate



> A Saleta estate

Tour of the Pazo de Fefiñáns wineries, vineyards and forest

After breakfast, we can take advantage of being in what is known as the “capital of Albariño wine”, the “golden prince of wines” for Álvaro Cunqueiro, and arrange a tour of the wineries at Fefiñáns. They are housed in an impressive pazo integrated into a sixteenth-century artistic complex, declared a Heritage Element of Cultural Interest, which includes the **Church of San Benito**, a watchtower/lookout and a beautiful stately baroque arch-bridge.

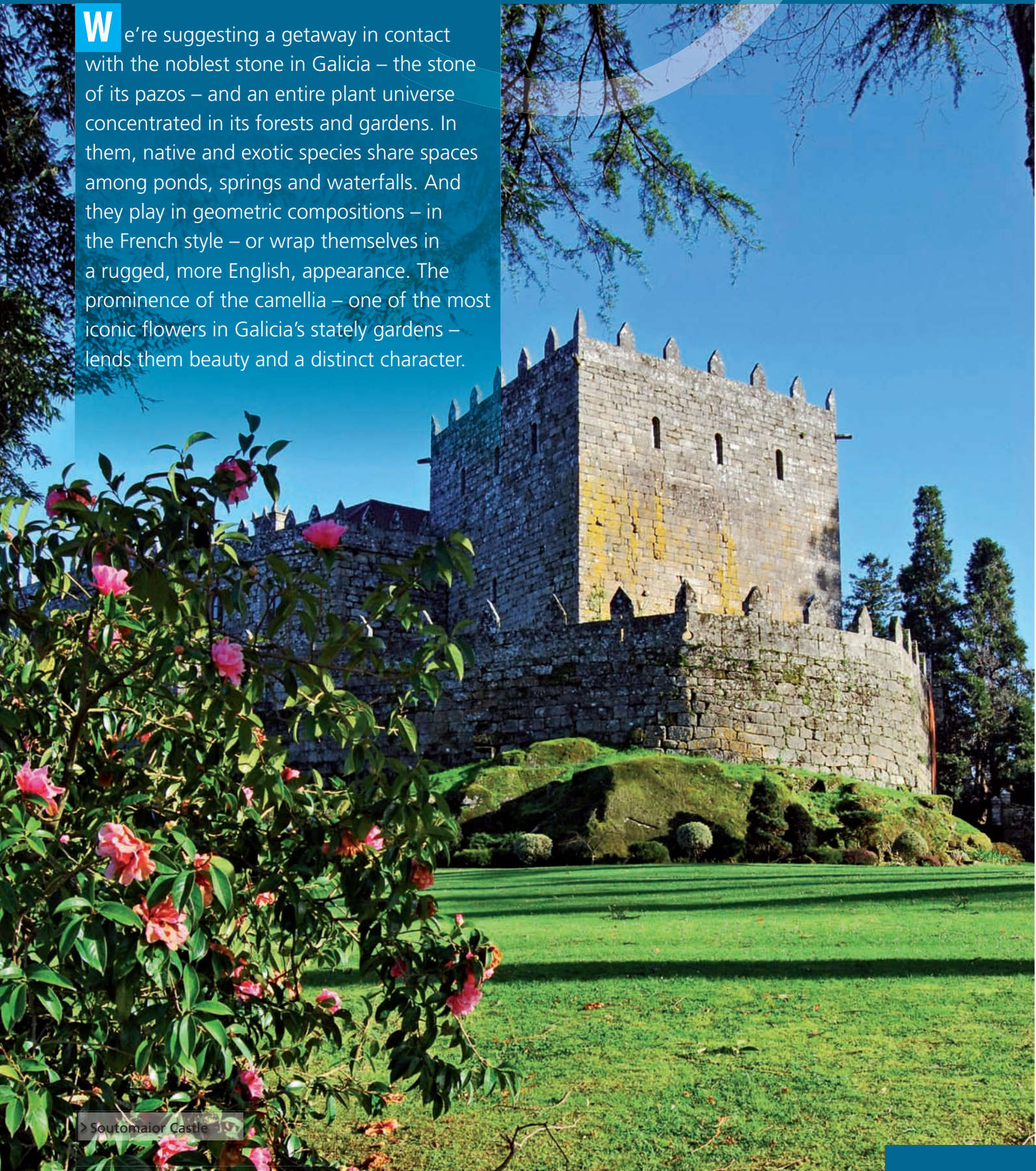
In addition to the wineries, the interior of the Pazo de Fefiñáns holds a hectare of vineyard with centuries-old Albariño vines and a forest of native species and ancient boxwoods among which we can stroll.



Camellias: accommodation in...

Pazos

We're suggesting a getaway in contact with the noblest stone in Galicia – the stone of its pazos – and an entire plant universe concentrated in its forests and gardens. In them, native and exotic species share spaces among ponds, springs and waterfalls. And they play in geometric compositions – in the French style – or wrap themselves in a rugged, more English, appearance. The prominence of the camellia – one of the most iconic flowers in Galicia's stately gardens – lends them beauty and a distinct character.





EXPERIENCE

day 1 |

Padrón

- 1_ Artistic/Botanical Garden
- 2_ Pazo de Lestrove
- 3_ Old Town

day 2 |

Santiago de Compostela

- 4_ Alameda
- 5_ Pazo de San Lourenzo
- 6_ Old Town

Vedra

- 7_ Pazo de Santa Cruz de Ribadulla

A Estrada

- 8_ Pazo de Oca

Vedra

- 9_ Locality of Vedra

Santiago de Compostela

- 10_ Santiago de Compostela

day 3 |

Vilagarcía de Arousa

- 11_ Pazo de Rubiáns

Cambados

- 12_ Pazo de Fefiñáns

- 13_ Town of Cambados

Meis

- 14_ A Saleta estate

Pontevedra

- 15_ Pazo de Lourizán

- 16_ Old Town

day 4 |

Pontevedra

- 17_ Pontevedra

Soutomaioir

- 18_ Soutomaioir Castle



START_ Padrón
 END_ Soutomaioir
 DAYS_ 4

MORE INFORMATION_

- Pazo de Lestrove_ www.pazodelestrove.com
- Pazo de San Lourenzo_ www.pazodesanlorenzo.com
- Pazo de Santa Cruz de Ribadulla. Tel_ 981 512 011
- Pazo de Oca. Tel_ 986 587 435
- Pazo de Rubiáns_ www.pazoderubianes.com
- Palacio de Fefiñanes Winery_ www.fefinanes.com
- A Saleta estate. Tel_ 986 872 323
- Pazo de Lourizán. Tel_ 986 805 000
- Soutomaioir Castle_ www.hotelpousadadelcastillo.com



The gardens of Padrón

Galicia's noble gardens are spaces that lend themselves to sedately strolling and chatting. We can start our tour in Padrón, a town with a Jacobean and literary resonance within the region of Sar, south of the province of A Coruña. In order to peacefully enjoy these settings, we suggest you arrive early in the afternoon and look for accommodation in the town or its surroundings, which offers hotels, guesthouses, country homes and pazos converted into tourist accommodation.

Three hundred different species share space in the botanical and artistic garden

Once you've arranged accommodation, you can head to the Artistic/Botanical Garden declared a Heritage Element of Cultural Interest in 1946 in the category of Historic Garden. It is located on Avenida de Compostela at the foot of the national motorway where it passes through Padrón.

Its design is reminiscent of the French style, which was incorporated into the characteristics of Galician pazos. It is surrounded by a nineteenth-century-style wrought iron gate whose luxuriance increases its romantic air. The entrance leads to the main corridor of banana trees, which helps distribute the paths and different areas into which the garden is divided.

Here, three hundred species – many of which are rare and some of which are unique in Spain – share space in barely one hectare of land. Of note are the coast redwood, which represents the green roof of the garden, next to the statue of the mediaeval troubadour Macías o Namorado; the Judas tree, whose thorny branches become entangled, forming the crown of Christ; and the Senegal date palm, which provides palm branches for Palm Sunday. If we visit in winter, we'll enjoy the colourfulness of the camellias and if we come during early summer, the fragrance of the gardenias.



> Botanical Garden, Padrón



The garden has a coast redwood,
a Judas tree and
a Senegal date palm



> Pazo de Lestrove

The Pazo de Lestrove has five hectares of landscaped grounds

Very near the village centre, following the Rúa do Carme and after crossing the bridge over the River Sar, there is another destination that is of interest due to its architecture and natural areas, which extend across five hectares of landscaped grounds. This is the Pazo de Lestrove, a building that dates back to the 16th century that once served as a mansion for recreational getaways for the archbishops of Santiago; today, it is a four-star monument/hotel.

It is also known as **Pazo Anxo da Garda (Guardian Angel Pazo)** due to its chapel's dedication. We suggest that you go inside so you can see an impressive life-size carving of the Virgin of Sorrows by the sculptor Ferreiro. Another of the more charming elements is a three-tier stone fountain crowned with Saint James depicted as a pilgrim who welcomes us from the courtyard entrance.

The renowned Padrón peppers

After the tour, you can dine in the pazo's restaurant or choose to eat in Padrón. The Old Town's restaurants, tapas restaurants, octopus restaurants and traditional taverns have no lack of typically Galician foodstuffs. Here, the star of the show are the Padrón peppers with the PDO "Pemento de Herbón", which this locality is known by as its accompanying tasting: "Some are hot and some are not".



> Padrón peppers



> Alameda in Santiago

| day 2 |

The gardens of Santiago and of its nearby pazos

The Alameda, Compostela's large green space

Taking advantage of the proximity of Padrón to Santiago de Compostela, we suggest you spend the morning getting to know its spectacular green spaces. They are reached by motorway or the national road. You will find a widely varied range of accommodation: boutique hotels, inns, guesthouses, hostels and rural tourism houses.

When you arrive, we suggest you start the tour along the Alameda, which might be considered the city's palatial garden for the role it played in the life of the Galician nobility as an area for relaxation and recreation. The very same activities that the city's present inhabitants do in this space that is very near the city centre. It is divided into three areas: A Alameda, the Carballeira de Santa Susana and A Ferradura, each one belonging to different eras and designs.

The most photographed sculpture: "As Marías"

The Alameda's starting point is the entrance of Porta Faxeira, where we are received by rows of banana trees, camellias, a magnificent specimen of *Sequoia sempervirens* and a magnolia planted by the Society of Friends of the Country. At the end, we'll find the "As Marías" sculpture, which depicts two women who were very popular in Compostela. It is common to see the statue surrounded by people eager to have a picture taken with these colourful characters.

Behind the sculpture, a large central promenade – once reserved for Santiago's high society – stretches out. Less-privileged social classes could stroll the side promenades, where rows of camellias and silvery linden trees shade beautiful stone and iron benches from the old Sargadelos forge. If tour takes place in the winter, we'll see splendid specimens of saucer magnolia.



> Monument Rosalía de Castro in Santiago Alameda



> View from the Alameda

In the past, the Alameda's central promenade was reserved for members of high society and the side promenades for the more modest classes

Oaks, camellias and ancient eucalyptus trees

A pond and bandstand put the finishing touch on this modernist environment. Also behind "As Mariás", we see a path that climbs to the **Church of Santa Susana**, which is surrounded by a magnificent stand of oaks with trees dating back more than three hundred years. This is the oldest space in the entire complex; a local market since the Middle Ages, some locals still recall it as the setting for the cattle fair.

A Ferradura links the two ends of the Alameda. On one side a large canopy of oaks in the company of centuries-old camellias – known as the **Paseo dos Leóns** due to the two statues contained in two pillars at the entrance – cover the promenade. From here the cathedral and the area with monuments create the perfect setting for a photo.

The university's campus can be seen from the statue of Rosalía de Castro

Further on, an ancient, huge *Eucalyptus globulus* offers us a wooden bench to sit on for a moment while we breathe in the scented air and take a look at the cathedral's Obradoiro façade. Next, there is another interesting space dominated by the statue of the famous Galician poet Rosalía de Castro which gives us an outstanding view of the university campus. This is finished off with other sculptures such as the *A leiteira*, along with fountains and ponds and a tall pigeon loft.

A Ferradura boasts some remarkable trees, such as the "Perona", an example of the *Abies nordmanniana* planted in 1947 to commemorate the visit of Eva Perón. There are also some Lawson cypresses, Nordmann firs and cedars and worthy of note are the rows of Canary Island date palms and horse-chestnut trees.



“I should warn you that `aha´ is what the camellias say when they open, and `hota´ when they let go of the branch and fall; we were taught this by the Japanese”.

Álvaro Cunqueiro

The Pazo de San Lourenzo is home to over one hundred plant species

A magnificent staircase descends from the viewpoint of the gardens of the southern campus. If we go down them and turn right, crossing the Avenida das Burgas, we'll reach the **San Lourenzo oak forest**. Behind it stands the pazo of the same name, built between the 13th and 17th centuries and included as part of the National Artistic Heritage.

Its extensive forest and gardens, which are fully walled, hide more than one hundred plant species. The jewel is located in the cloister garden and is a large four-hundred-year-old trimmed boxwood hedge rich in religious symbolism, making it the most important part of Spanish religious geometric gardening.

In the Old Town, we sample typical Galician dishes

The end of the tour will coincide with lunchtime. The streets of the Old Town – especially the **Rúa do Franco, A Raíña** and others nearby – offer a wide variety of establishments where you can sample traditional Galician dishes: octopus *á feira* style, *raxo*, Padrón peppers, pig's ear, cockles, mussels, dried pork or roast ham, to name just a few. Or, if you prefer, you can choose to try a Galician broth and stew, seafood or fish *caldeirada* style, or Galician beef.



> Pazo de Santa Cruz de Ribadulla

Giant camellias in the Pazo de Santa Cruz de Ribadulla

There are two excellent examples of stately gardens a few kilometres from Santiago; they are well-marked along the route via the N-525 towards Ourense. The first is the Pazo de Santa Cruz de Ribadulla, in the municipality of **Vedra**. You'll find the turnoff indicated as "Pazo de Ortigueira" because of its location.

Many experts consider it to be the most fascinating ornamental botanical space in Galicia. Here, camellias are represented in multiple varieties, some of which are giant specimens. They create a lovely pastoral setting in the so-called **Carrera de las Novias**. But if what you prefer is magic and mystery, then take a stroll through the **Carreira das Oliveiras**, a long walk between olive trees, whose branches intertwine over our heads. And also be sure to not miss such charming sites such as the **baroque Coca fountain** or the **Waterfall**.



> Pazo de Oca

The beauty of the gardens in the Pazo de Oca

If we then continue along the N-525 towards to Ourense, we'll find the turnoff to the Pazo de Oca in the municipality of **A Estrada**. Many call it the "Galician Versailles" because of the beauty of its gardens. Outside, pazo and chapel meet at a right angle via an arched corridor, forming a beautiful ensemble in front of the plaza.

Inside, you can visit the gardens, which are fully walled. One of the most striking features is a large river-like pond running diagonally across the garden. A stone arch bridge, under which there is a pier, crosses over it in the middle of the watercourse. It symbolically separates good – represented in half of the pond by a stone fisherman – from the evil on the other side, which has sculptures of guns and stone beasts.

In the French garden, you can admire a **boxwood maze** inspired by a design on the floor of Canterbury Cathedral. Camellias grow lavishly all around. In the avenue formed by the linden trees, it is easy to evoke scenes from the past filled with strolling people and horse races. We suggest that you allow yourself to wander the entire garden, discovering fountains, open-air laundry, large stone and ceramic vases and niches with plants inside. You'll find outstanding specimens, such as a large *Camellia reticulata*, an ancient *Cryptomeria japonica* centennial and a coast redwood, among many other plant varieties.

The large pond
that runs through the garden
has a bridge that symbolically
separates good from bad

We dine in Vedra

When it's time for dinner, we suggest that you stop off in Vedra and savour its delicious cuisine before returning to Santiago. Products like pig ear and wines and spirits from Ulla have their own festivals in this locality.

The palatial gardens of the Rías Baixas

Following the trail of beautiful palatial gardens, we suggest that you head towards the region of O Salnés in the Rías Baixas after breakfast. What's more, it's quite easy to find accommodation here, as there is a wide range of top-quality choices throughout the area. Even if we stay at a state-owned hotel, we'll find the exceptional **Pazo de Bazán** in **Cambados**; also close by is the one in **Pontevedra**, located in a Renaissance palace in the city centre.

The eucalyptus trees at Pazo de Rubiáns – 14 metres in circumference – are among the largest in Europe

The camellia rules over more than a hundred species of flowers in the Pazo de Rubiáns

The AP-9 will take us to Vilagarcía de Arousa, on whose outskirts is, along the road to Pontevedra, the Pazo de Rubiáns. Here, the camellia has been the leading lady among over a hundred species of flowers ever since the Duke of Caminha gave it as a gift to this farm in the early nineteenth century. Today, their seeds are harvested to distil the essential oil used by the nuns of the Convent of Armenteira to make artisan soaps, which you will also find in the pazo.

Besides the garden, on its 65 hectares the pazo is home to a cork oak-covered mountain and an Albariño vineyard, which supplies the production of the winery's wines which are protected by the Denomination of Origin "Rías Baixas". The *Eucalyptus globulus* trees – planted in 1820 as a gift from the Bishop of Tui – will most certainly catch your eye. They are among the largest in Europe, measuring 14 metres in circumference.



The winery and gardens of the Pazo de Fefiñáns

It's a short trip from Vilagarcía de Arousa to Cambados. In this village – as dedicated to the sea as it is stately – we can visit the gardens and the Pazo de Fefiñáns in the central square of the same name. The **Church of San Benito**, a watchtower/lookout and a beautiful baroque arch bridge are also located here. The entire ensemble has been declared a Heritage Element of Cultural Interest.

The interior of the pazo houses the oldest winery in the area, which has been active since 1904. We'll cross hectare of trellis-filled vineyard and stroll among the gardens that hold carefully tended native species and ancient boxwoods. Access to the rooms inside the pazo is also available. Here, we'll discover the refined taste of the Galician nobility who settled in towns and cities.

Fish and shellfish in Cambados, the "capital" of Albariño wine

After the tour, it will be time for lunch. The surrounding streets hold restaurants, traditional eating spots and tapas bars that will amaze us with their seafood and fish right from the estuary. Do not forget to wash your lunch down with Albariño DO Rías Baixas; it's no wonder we're in its "capital"!

The multiple colours of camellias on the A Saleta estate

In the afternoon we can arrange a visit to the estate of A Saleta in the nearby town of **Meis**. On this occasion, there is a large farmhouse with a barn, dovecote and chapel awaiting us. The whole complex is surrounded by five acres of oaks, eucalyptus and cork oaks, and an English-style garden designed by the landscape architect Brenda Colvin.

The camellia is also the star here, turning the landscape white, pink, red, violet or of a mottled hue during its flowering season. We'll also find rhododendrons, azaleas, members of the Australian sugarbush and myrtle families and South American heathers, all tagged and identified.



> Pazo de Fefiñáns



> A Saleta estate

Striking examples of camellias in the Pazo de Lourizán

We head out towards Pontevedra. Very near this city, on the road leading to Marín, is the Pazo de Lourizán and its large estate of 54 hectares, now home to the **Forest Research Centre**. Its botanical and architectural significance make it worthy of a visit.

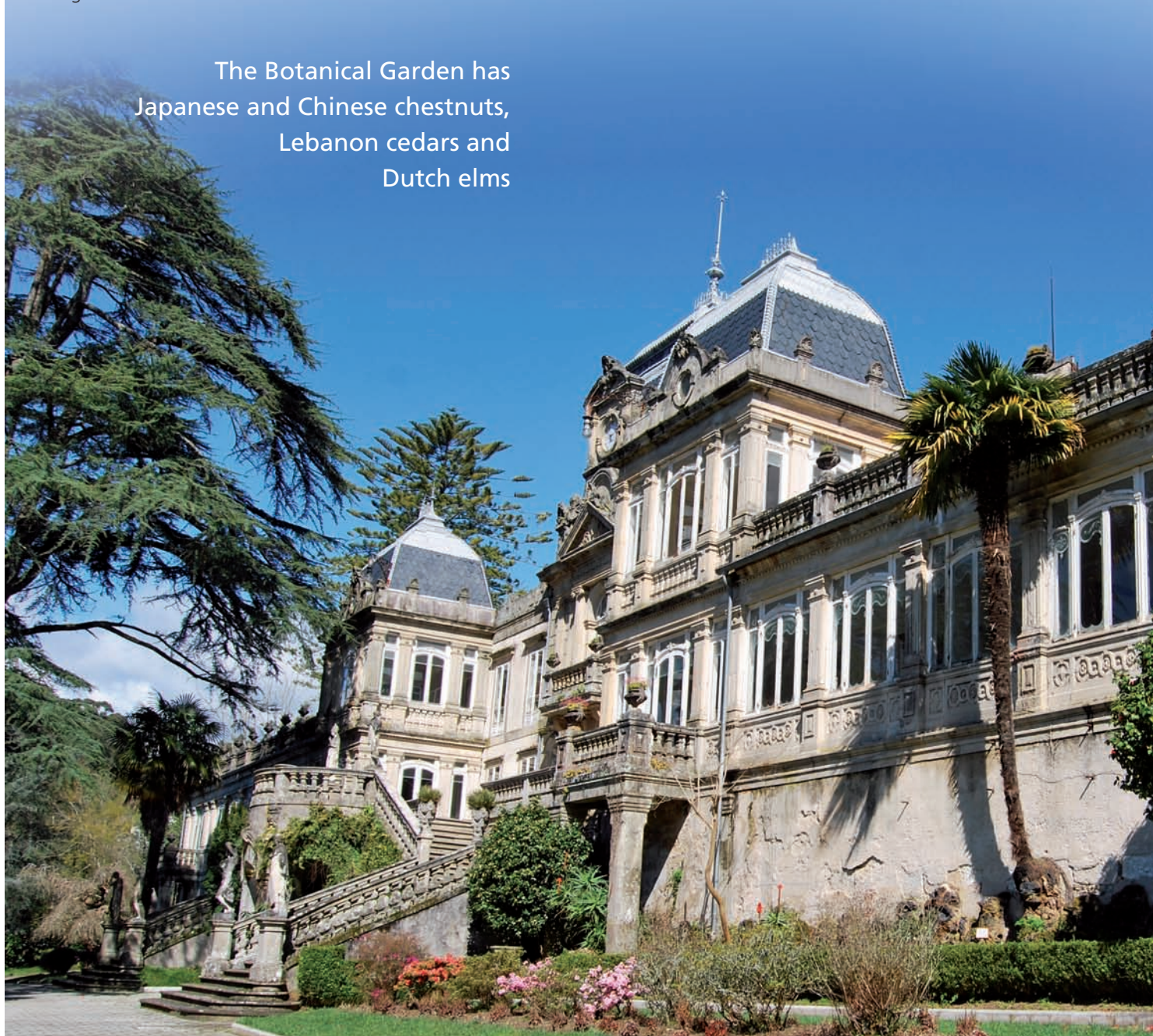
We'll be impressed by the large modernist building with an imperial-style staircase, multiple columns, huge picture windows, statues and ornaments. It was built by Montero Ríos, a politician who negotiated the 1898 Treaty of Paris that ended the Spanish-American War.

Nearby are many attractions such as the glass greenhouse, the pigeon loft, the barn, the winery, the ruins of the mill, the laundry area, trout pond, Rías Park, various historical fountains and the Cave of the Mirrors, decorated with stained glass.

The Botanical Garden, which was created in 1949 under the name of "Arboretum", houses both exotic and native species planted from the nineteenth century to the present. The Lebanon cedar, the *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* and the stand of Japanese and Chinese chestnut trees are included on the *List of Unique Trees in Galicia*. Also of note, however, are the Dutch elm, the queen palm and the avenue of magnolias. The experts describe its specimens of the "Alba Plena" as "impressive". The oldest camellias date from the nineteenth century.

After the visit you can dine in **Pontevedra**. You'll find good traditional eating establishments and restaurants featuring the excellent traditional Galician cuisine in the city's Old Town.

The Botanical Garden has
Japanese and Chinese chestnuts,
Lebanon cedars and
Dutch elms



Soutomaíor Castle and its International Camellia Garden of Excellence

After breakfast in Pontevedra, we suggest that you use the morning for a last tour, this time of Soutomaíor Castle in the nearby town of the same name; by car, it's just a bit more than a half-hour away. Its gardens have been the first in Spain to obtain the title of "International Camellia Garden of Excellence", which was awarded by the International Camellia Society at the International Camellia Congress held in China in 2012, given the importance of this flower in Soutomaíor Botanic Park.

The widest camellia tree in Galicia

This botanical park is home to 400 camellia plants of up to 25 different species, some of which are centuries old. One of the specimens has 18 trunks growing from the tree's base, and its crown has a diameter of 17 metres, making it the widest in Galicia.

Its 35-hectare area contains palms, orange trees, eucalyptus, chestnuts, and oak and magnolia trees on this hill where the mediaeval castle stands. Its original construction dates back to the early twelfth century, and Pedro Madruga – a key figure of fifteenth-century Galicia, both in terms of fighting against the revolts by peasants as well as against the Catholic Monarchs – created his fiefdom here.

The walled complex is accessed by a drawbridge. The coat-of-arms of the Marquis de Mos can be made out over the gate. Inside the palace, we can view the fully restored rooms and the superbly styled "Ladies Gallery", which is a magnificent viewpoint to the courtyard.



> Pazo de Lourizán



> Pazo de Lourizán



> Soutomaíor Castle

Camellias and wineries

We suggest that you take part in a wine tourism experience combined with a visit to the finest stately and palatial gardens in Galicia. In these spaces, the camellia blossoms shine with their own light, accompanied by other species – both native and exotic – of great botanical and aesthetic value, tended with loving dedication. During our journey, we'll also be surrounded by gardens, orchards and vineyards, from whose grapes the excellent DO wines of Galicia are made.





START_ Cambados
END_ Soutomaior
DAYS_ 4

MORE INFORMATION_

- Pazo de Bazán. Tel_ **986 542 250**
- Museo Etnográfico e do Viño. Tel_ **986 526 119**
- Palacio de Fefiñanes Winery_ www.fefinanes.com
- Pazo de Rubiáns_ www.pazoderubianes.com
- Pazo Quinteiro da Cruz_ www.pazoquinteirodacruz.es
- A Saleta estate. Tel_ **986 872 323**
- Soutomaior Castle_ www.hotelpousadadelcastillo.com



day 1|

Cambados

- 1_ Pazo de Bazán
- 2_ Alameda da Calzada
- 3_ Museo Etnográfico e do Viño (Ethnographic and Wine Museum)
- 4_ Ruins of Santa Mariña Dozo
- 5_ Fefiñáns Square
- 6_ Pazo de Fefiñáns

day 2|

Cambados

- 7_ Town of Cambados
- Vilagarcía de Arousa
- 8_ Pazo de Rubiáns
- 9_ Carril
- Ribadumia
- 10_ Pazo Quinteiro da Cruz
- O Grove
- 11_ Boardwalk
- 12_ Marina
- Isla de A Toxa
- 13_ A Toxa Island

day 3|

Isla de A Toxa

- 13_ A Toxa Island
- O Grove
- 12_ Marina
- 14_ Arousa estuary
- 15_ Port
- Meis
- 16_ A Saleta estate
- Isla de A Toxa
- 13_ A Toxa Island

day 4|

Isla de A Toxa

- 17_ Chapel of As Conchas (the Shells)
- 18_ Museum/shop
- Poio
- 19_ Combarro
- Pontevedra
- 20_ Old Town
- 21_ Chapel of the Pilgrim
- Soutomaior
- 22_ Soutomaior Castle



Cambados, the cradle of Albariño wine

Cambados, a stately fishing town, is located in the region of O Salnés in Pontevedra, in the Rías Baixas. It is an excellent starting point for this adventure which marries vineyard and garden. Getting here will be very easy thanks to the proximity of the Atlantic Motorway (AP-9) and other major roads.

We recommend arriving in the early afternoon, in time to get settled in at the hotel and begin to discover the area's many delights. Accommodation on offer includes pazos, country and manor houses, as well as wineries that also offer accommodation. The flagship is the **Pazo de Bazán**, a seventeenth-century building, now converted into a state-owned hotel where General Charles De Gaulle once stayed.

The pazo is centrally located opposite the **Alameda da Calzada**, where poplars and cottonwoods provide shade to the visitors during the "Festa do Viño Albariño", held the first week of August and declared a National Tourist Event. If your visit coincides with this event, you'll see the place

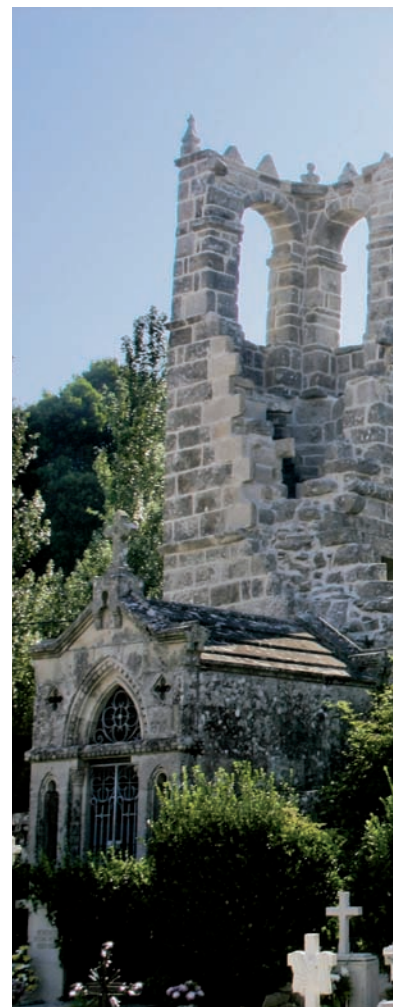
become a mass of people given over to good food, drink and talk in the stands installed by the winemakers. This is when they offer – at highly affordable prices – their best Albariños, which can be accompanied with excellent seafood right from the estuary.

The secrets of O Salnés wines

We suggest starting the afternoon off in the Museo Etnográfico e do Viño (Ethnographic and Wine Museum), one of the first wine-focused museums founded in Spain. From the Alameda da Calzada, we'll follow a stretch of Avenida de Vilariño to its junction with the Rúa de San Francisco, and we'll continue on this to where it intersects with Avenida da Pastora, which we'll take to reach the museum. It is housed in a former sixteenth-century rectory called "**Casa de Ricoy**" and we'll identify it by the big sign on its façade. Inside, we'll discover the secrets of O Salnés wine and of the Rías Baixas Denomination of Origin.



> Alameda da Calzada. Cambados



The ruins of Santa Mariña Dozo

A few steps away are the ruins of Santa Mariña Dozo – declared a National Monument – where there is a cemetery described by Álvaro Cunqueiro as “the most melancholy cemetery”. As soon as you pass the gate that leads to what remains of this church, which is representative of the “maritime” Gothic style, you’ll understand why your visit is a must. The remains preserved of the stone walls still support arches which confront the sky uncovered, but are richly decorated with ball-shaped ornaments. The floor space is covered by many tombstones with crosses, sculptures and flowers decorating them, alongside rebellious shrubs that have taken strong root among the stones.

The hypotheses that speak of the partial destruction of the church in the nineteenth century mention an accidental or deliberately set fire due to clashes or the ongoing unrest of the time. The feelings of melancholy and romanticism that this place may inspire are stronger on cloudy days or, if sunny, when the sun moves lower across the Atlantic from the **Monte da Pastora**. When this happens, this setting becomes filled with beautiful plays of light between the arches, so it will be a great opportunity to take some lovely photos.



> Ruins of Santa Mariña Dozo

Wine in the Fefiñáns district

Once the visit is over, it’s a sure bet that it will be a good time for tasting some O Salnés Albariño wines. We suggest you return to the centre of Cambados and delve into the aristocratic neighbourhood of Fefiñáns until you reach the square of the same name. This formidable stone plaza is surrounded by an artistic ensemble built in the sixteenth century and declared a Heritage Element of Cultural Interest. It comprises the **Church of San Benito**, a watchtower/lookout called the **Torre da Homenaxe** (Keep), a beautiful baroque-style arch bridge, and the portentous **Pazo de Fefiñáns**, flanked by two circular balconies reminiscent of pulpits.

A visit to the Fefiñáns wine cellars

Since 1904, the oldest winery in the locality has been housed inside the Pazo de Fefiñáns. Bodegas del Palacio de Fefiñanes produces three different types of Albariño wine and pomace brandies. If we schedule it in advance, we can explore its various rooms used for fermentation, ageing and bottling, as well as see the production process in situ, together with winery staff, who will guide us and explain step-by-step how they make their wines, which we’ll have the opportunity to taste. In these history-steeped facilities, we’ll see how modern production technologies coexist in harmony with ageing wine in oak barrels and stored in an environment dominated by stone and wood.



> Pazo de Fefiñáns winery. Cambados



> Pazo de Fefiñáns

The vineyard, the garden and the “magic” forest of the Pazo de Fefiñáns

Another attraction inside the walls of the pazo is its historical vineyard, the tour of which is organised by the Gil Armada Winery. It is possible to walk around the plantation guided by a winemaking expert, who will explain the particular qualities of this grape, how it is grown, its climate and its soil. She'll then stay with us during the final tasting to help us identify aromas reminiscent of lemon, wet grass, wild rose or tropical fruits. A whole symphony of smells and tastes that can emanate from our wineglass.

At the end of the gardens – where these ancient vineyards are preserved – is the “magic” forest. The nickname is well-deserved, as it appears by surprise after passing through a corridor of trellised vines. As if by magic, we are within an impressive boxwood vault, surrounded by native species such as ancient chestnut and oak trees. We'll also pay a visit to the garden, which – depending on the season – is invaded by different colours and scents, thanks to roses, peonies, lilacs, heliotropes, mock-oranges and lilies of the valley, to mention just a few.



Inside the pazo

The same winery also arranges tours of the rooms in the pazo, whose decor reflects the exquisite taste of nobility in towns and cities, removed from the peasant cultural universe. You will surely be amazed by items such as the lovely oriental-motif-inspired wallpaper in one of the lounges. It was an exotic indulgence brought back by the first Marquis of Figueroa from Russia, where he served as ambassador in the early nineteenth century.

Fish, seafood and Albariño wine

When we bid farewell to the wineries and their various spaces, it will be time for dinner. Fish and shellfish from the estuary, grilled or prepared with more or less sophisticated sauces and garnishes – even Albariño-wine-based – reign on the menus of local restaurants and tapas bars in the streets surrounding the Praza de Fefiñáns.



Camellias and vineyards in the pazos in Vilagarcía de Arousa and Ribadumia

The Pazo de Rubiáns, a majestic winter garden

After a leisurely breakfast in Cambados, we suggest you start the morning off with a visit of great botanical, historical, artistic and wine-related value. We're talking about the Pazo de Rubiáns, very close to the town of Vilagarcía de Arousa, which we will reach in just twenty minutes by car from the VRG-43.

When we are facing the gate entrance to the estate, we notice the historical inscription made by García de Caamaño y Mendoza, Lord of the House of Rubiáns. The two-hour tour will be guided by estate staff and will turn out to be a highly informative stroll through gardens, park, forest and vineyard, ending up inside the Case de Rubiáns which was, since its refurbishment in the eighteenth century, converted into a pazo.

Here, the camellia has been the leading lady among over a hundred species of flowers ever since the Duke of Caminha gave them as a gift to the lords and ladies of this estate in the early nineteenth century. Their age and stance have converted them into striking formations. Today, there are more than 35 species and 800 different varieties, making Rubiáns a majestic winter garden.

One of the mythical places along the walk is the **The Pond of the Frogs**, with its pergola and trellised arbour surrounded by bananas and boxwoods. Behind it, we'll enter a forest of landscaped wood of lush deciduous trees. If the day is sunny, take a look at how the light reveals all the vegetation of the underbrush.

Camellias reign at the Pazo of Rubiáns,
ever since the Duke of Caminha
gave them as gifts to the lords and ladies of this estate
at the beginning of the nineteenth century





> Pazo Quintero da Cruz



> Pazo Quintero da Cruz

We take can part in the grape harvest, if the time is right

From this spot we go up a slope where mainly Albariño vines are grown and from which we'll enjoy magnificent views of the estuary and of Vilagarcía de Arousa. The vineyard covers 25 hectares and is done using both arbours and trellises. We may be able to watch the vineyard workers at their job. If we want, we can also take part in the harvest, in season and when scheduled in advance.

Beyond the vineyard, we'll discover the newest part of the garden, 25,000 square metres, of alternating areas of rocky slope and a beautiful waterfall. The philosophy that drives the works – some still in their initial stages – is to recover an area that was affected during the 2006 wave of fires in Galicia.

The peculiar smell of camphor

Our hosts will not allow us to miss any details of the ensemble of elegant cedars, palms, the evergreen magnolias at the entrance, incense cedars, enormous cork oaks and camphor trees, inviting us to tear a leaf from the latter to check out the typical odour of camphor. We will surely also be amazed at the magnitude of the giant specimens of *Eucalyptus globulus* planted in 1820, among which is the largest specimen in Europe, measuring 14 metres in diameter. The surprises seem endless in Rubiáns.



> Pazo Quintero da Cruz

Tours of the interior of the pazo, its bakery and wine cellar

After touring the outside, it's time to go inside the pazo, with rooms decorated in the eighteenth-century style. We'll also visit the family chapel, a sixteenth-century building dedicated to Saint Joseph, where we can observe a rarity in religious symbolism: the betrothal of the Virgin. We'll also find the representation known as "San Xosé Milagreiro" – a holy image of the young saint with a baby Jesus in his arms – to be highly unusual.

We'll finish off with a tour of various buildings dating back to the fifteenth century, such as the bakery, winery and stables, which have been restored and now provide service to visitors and the shop. In the shop, we'll find handmade products related to the plant life in the pazo, such as camphor candles, camellia oil soaps, handmade jewellery, plus the wine produced in its cellars.



The Pazo Quinteiro da Cruz has winery tools and farm implements on a European Historical Wine Heritage List

The clams of Carril

When lunchtime rolls around, we suggest you take a little drive to Vilagarcía de Arousa – one of the main towns in Galicia – where the restaurants serve excellent seafood. Another option is to drive ten minutes north to the town of Carril, famous for its clams, honoured with their own food festival in August. We recommend a menu with this exquisite bivalve, together with other local seafood, accompanied of course by Albariño wines from the O Salnés subzone with the Rías Baixas Denomination of Origin.

The “Gold Camellia” in the Pazo Quinteiro da Cruz

After the post-lunch table conversation, we encourage you to visit one of the most outstanding examples of palatial gardens in Galicia, the Pazo Quinteiro da Cruz, in the parish of Lois in the municipality of **Ribadumia**. This area is of great botanical and ornamental value, and the camellia is the star of the garden, not only because more than a thousand varieties are grown here, but because it is done with so much care and wisdom. As a result, on several occasions it has received the “Gold Camellia” award at the International Camellia Exhibition/Competition.

Walking through this seven-hectare estate, you’ll see how the environment seems to distil the essence of much of the Galician symbolism for the elements that compose it: the manor house; a beautiful eighteenth-century building; two spectacular traditional barns, one measuring 15 metres long and the other similar to a laundry-pond; two stone crosses; ornamental fountains; the dovecote, and the chapel. You’ll notice how they are all wrapped in the simple beauty of Galician granite, marinated for decades in the dampness of moss and lichen.

The estate includes a porch with porticos where important ethnographic elements as an ancient *lareira*, winery instruments and farm implements, part of the catalogued on the European Historical Wine Heritage List as well as that of the Historical-Artistic Cultural Heritage of Galicia.

A family-run winery

The garden is surrounded by Albariño vineyards, which we will also tour. A limited – but exquisite – production is extracted from them and used to make their highly appreciated whites in the family winery, housed in an old stone building on the estate. Inside, you can admire all the equipment needed for the cold maceration of the must and the subsequent fermentation and monitoring process done at a low temperature in stainless steel tanks. The end of the tour will be a good time to sample their wines.



We dine in O Grove and spend the night on the island of A Toxa

After the tour we suggest you go southwest toward O Grove, known worldwide as the “seafood capital” and enjoy a short walk along the promenade watching the intense activity of the marina, before dinner. When hunger strikes, any of area seafood restaurants will surely fit the bill. Top-quality overnight accommodation can be found on the beautiful nearby island of A Toxa, as it boasts two hot-springs hotels along with a thalassotherapy hotel that are icons of luxury and hot-spring spa tourism.



Seafood, gardens and micromedicinal waters

A journey through the Arousa estuary

After enjoying a good breakfast with spectacular views of the sea and the Arousa estuary from A Toxa, we'll embark on a water-based tour through the estuary to discover its delightful scenery and wealth of shellfish. Don't forget that Galicia's Rías Baixas are considered to be one of the planet's largest reserves of phytoplankton, according to the FAO, which is why the different shellfish raised here on shellfish rafts (wooden platforms on the sea) attain an exceptional size and flavour.

To begin the adventure, we'll need to go again to the **marina in O Grove**, just five minutes away by car. This is the departure point of the sailboats, catamarans and transparent-bottomed boats offering these estuary trips. Many of them are now offering food on board, featuring a typically Galician menu that usually includes sampling seafood served fresh, in Galician-style pies and other typical dishes, served with DO Rías Baixas Albariño wine, so we highly suggest you take advantage of this option.

Work on the shellfish rafts

During the excursion, the boat is docked alongside authentic forests of algae, which are easy to observe from the glass at the bottom of the boat. We'll also stop in front of the shellfish rafts to see just how hard the *bateeiros* toil. With mechanical help they uncoil the ropes – which can weigh up to 300 kilograms – that hold the shellfish, and they clean the ropes of algae and parasites so that they don't affect the growth of the mussels, oysters or scallops grown on the raft. The boat's transparent bottom allows us to see how these ropes hang towards the sea bottom, and also discover banks of fish of different species, like white seabream, boga and triggerfish.

When we disembark in the **port of O Grove**, we can restore our strength after the trip with a refreshment while seated at one of the nearby outdoor cafés and then set off to the locality of Meis, where we will arrive after a quick half-hour via the AG-41.





The A Saleta estate, a reference in botany

This is where the A Saleta estate – a reference in botany in the registries of “Gardens of Spain” of the Spanish Society of the Camellia – of great significance with regard to the cultivation of this flower. Two hundred camellia specimens are grown here, in a prairie that seems to be splashed with white, pink, red, violet and mottled hues during its flowering season (between November and March).

We'll also come across rhododendrons, azaleas, members of the Australian sugarbush and myrtle families and South American heathers, all tagged and identified; a corridor with different varieties of vining plants and spots where the shrubs have turned into trees. The estate is surrounded by five hectares of oaks, eucalyptuses and cork oaks, among which an octagonal dovecote is hidden. In short, we're going to see a garden reigned over by a perfectly ordered chaos designed by landscape architect Brenda Colvin.

Next to the farmhouse, we'll find a granary and a chapel that still conserves an altarpiece and a polychrome vault where the locals gather to celebrate the day of “A Virxe da Saleta”.

A hot-springs treatment on A Toxa

When the tour is over, we suggest that you return to A Toxa Island and indulge yourself in an afternoon of relaxation and take advantage of the healthy effects of the sea- or hot-spring water. You can also receive beauty, relaxation or health treatment. Some are tempting, like those combining thalassotherapy with the beneficial properties of the *Albariña* grape. This way, we won't miss another of the aspects that the O Salnés grape growing industry exports to sectors such as those related to therapies and cosmetics.

After the hot-springs treatment, it's always appropriate – and even desirable – to finish relaxing with a small siesta. When we wake up, we'll feel completely rested and ready to take a walk round the island, an excellent pre-dinner activity that will open our appetite. The island's shores offer spectacular views of the estuary whether we walk on the sand or on the white-balustrated boardwalk. Inland, there are also rows of palm trees and pine-filled park for breathing pristine air.



> Chapel of the Shells. A Toxa



> A Toxa

| day 4 |

From A Toxa to Combarro, Pontevedra and Soutomaior

A Toxa's soapmaking tradition

After breakfast, we can't leave the island without touring the one-of-a-kind **Chapel of the Shells**, right in the centre. The inner conserves a certain seafaring air, but the true attraction is its outside, completely covered with scallop shells offering us a perfect setting to immortalise our visit with a photo.

If we want to do our final shopping or gift-buying, we can visit the "**La Toja**" **museum/shop**, which produces one of Spain's most traditional soaps in addition to other cosmetic

and personal hygiene products. Inside, we can follow its history via some explanatory panels, and we'll find salts, soaps and creams made with water from the thermal springs for sale. When we leave the island, we'll inevitably run into people selling shell necklaces who station themselves next to the road, bidding visitors hello and goodbye.

We invite to you to follow the route via the PO-316 and the PO-308, a coastal road that crosses the northern outline of the Pontevedra estuary. As we travel, we'll find small fishing villages and large tourist towns, like Sanxenxo and Portonovo.

Combarro's charm

Shortly before arriving at Pontevedra, we'll see signs for the town of Combarro, which is amazing due to its unique fishing village style. We suggest you to make a small stop and visit its historical district until you reach the **San Roque square**, strolling its steeply sloped streets that descend towards the estuary. From this point, we'll feel like we're standing on a huge mass of granite, where the houses have been sculpted with their porches and balustrades made of iron, stone or wood.

During our walk, we'll find a great number of *cruceiros*, the majority with the images of the Virgin and Jesus, joined back-to-back. If we look in the direction that the image of Christ does, we will be looking at land, and if we do the same thing with the Virgin, we'll be facing the sea. This is the peculiarity of the *cruceiros* in Combarro.

Later, continue on towards the **beach in Padrón**, which shows us the most amazing panoramic view of Combarro, formed by thirty granaries lined up at the edge of the sea. Decorated with plants, even with the chipped paint and small islets of grass in their tile roofs, their appearance is captivating. Traditionally, sailors used them as fish dryers and storage facilities for maize, potatoes and other products brought by boat from the other side of the estuary, where they owned farmland, due to this land being mountainous and less suitable for crops.



The lively squares in Pontevedra's Old Town

When we leave Combarro, following the same direction towards the interior of the estuary, we'll immediately arrive in Pontevedra, where we suggest you enjoy lunch in one of the taverns, bars or restaurants in its Old Town, which the locals are proud of as it is one of the best-preserved in all of Galicia. Reserve your after-lunch coffee for an outdoor café in one of the city's lovely squares, like **A Verdura**, **A Ferrería** and **A Leña**. These public areas are always very lively as they are enjoyed with a special intensity.

Nor can you leave Pontevedra without visiting the **Chapel of the Pilgrim**, one of the city's most symbolic constructions, as it is the shrine of its patron saint. Its ground plan is practically round – in the shape of a scallop shell – and its convex façade is preceded by a atrium with a stairway decorated with a pinnacled balustrade. Look at the upper section, where you can see the images of Saint James, Saint Roque and the Pilgrim, all dressed as Xacobeian pilgrims like protectors of the faithful who went to Santiago via the Portuguese Way.



Curiosities in the garden of Soutomaioir Castle

And to put the finishing touch to the last day among vineyards and gardens, we encourage you to visit the only garden in Spain declared “International Camellia Garden of Excellence”, a title granted by the International Camellia Society. This is the botanical park at Soutomaioir Castle, located in the municipality of the same name in the region of Redondela.

It takes us about 25 minutes via the N-550. We shouldn't delay the visit too much, because this destination is filled with surprises, like an extensive collection that includes more than 500 specimens of 25 different species of camellias. The star of the garden is the oldest specimen,

at whose base there are 18 trunks growing, which makes it the one with the largest canopy in Galicia. Although by age, the dean of the place is an 800-year-old chestnut in a forest with native trees. We'll also find palms, sequoias, plantations of fruit trees and a spectacular panoramic view of one of the vineyards arranged on terraces on the hill.

Access to the outside is unrestricted and free, but the interior is subject to morning and afternoon schedules. If you have the opportunity to visit, don't miss the chance to discover the restored rooms inside this fort, where Pedro Madruga – a key figure in Galician mediaeval history – had his fiefdom.









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