



BAIONA

AND ITS PARADOR

THE ROCKY COAST OF THE ATLANTIC

Before the God of the Christians was known here, these coasts were already rugged, and the waters fierce. The hills were fertile, the valleys and rivers filled with mystery, and the people courageous, cultured and superstitious.

The earliest inhabitants, who we know from the “*lightning stones*” they left scattered along this ria, lived in cramped hill forts. The men grew rye and tended their fields much as they do today. The women wove colorful cloth skirts, similar to those still found here until quite recently. They ate black bread and the meat and produce of the valleys, and animals from the rocks and beaches, not unlike they still do.

The inhabitants of these forts lived amongst spells and invisible spirits called mouros, and sought the help of the gods of the waters, rocks, plants, and moon. Olive and bay trees were known to frighten off storms. The waters of the Miño would heal a sick child if a candle stayed alight as it floated down the river placed amongst the child’s clothes in a basket. And a baptismal ceremony for pregnant women would be held on a bridge at night to guarantee safe childbirth.

This was what the first Romans to reach these coasts found upon their arrival, when the changing sound of the sea heralded the approaching land. But the legions came to these distant shores looking for more mundane adventures, just as six centuries before our time a different Columbus discovered that these lands hid precious treasures. Greek and Phoenician colonies had dotted these coasts even before the Romans. They came in search of silver most of all, but also sought tin and gold, all to be found in abundance.

The consul Flavius Servilianus spread terror throughout the lands along the Miño. He besieged the rebels holding out in the fortified enclosure of Erizana, as Baiona was then known. Reliable sources record that Viriato bravely appeared one night in secret to free the Galician patriots and seamen. It is said that this was when they cried: “*We have no gold or silver to buy our freedom, but we have plenty of iron to defend it!*”

It was the famous Julius Caesar who brought these beaches into the empire. He built a fleet of ships here to defeat the Herminians who had taken refuge on the Islas Cíes, and set up his main barracks there. The Romans established camps that grew into towns and later provinces, and built roads to take away more than they brought in. But they also left laws and new customs. The Empire’s weapons conquered these Celts, but the Druid gods made a space for themselves on Rome’s Olympus.

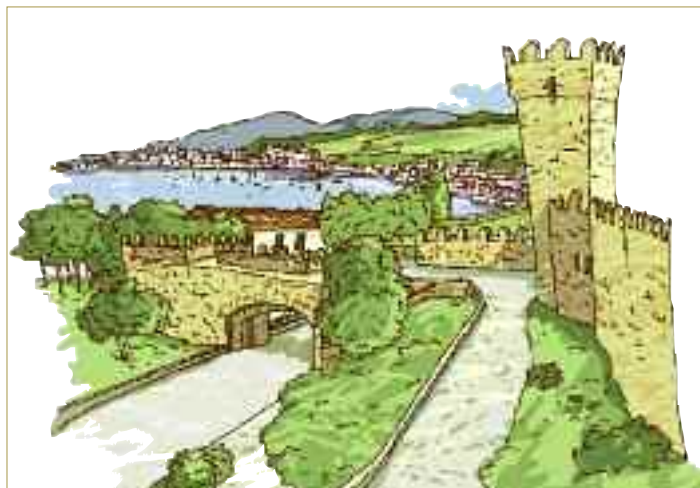
In the end Christianity arrived and crosses came to live alongside hill forts. Otero Pedrayo, who has recounted so much about Galicia so well, said that: “*Gazing upon a hill fort crowned by the church, after so many centuries one experiences in such a simple and common sight, a moment of infinitely transcendental emotion.*” It links moving Celtic features with the initiation of the evangelicals. This was the core of medieval life in the Galicia of believers, and the origin of Galicia’s intellectual, sentimental, and artistic metropolises.

The early centuries of the Christian faith were sparked off by the words and charms of Priscilian, which enamored the men, and especially the women, of these lands. This caused considerable envy



amongst other preachers, who finally put an end to him with a shady and mysterious decapitation. His Christian doctrines, interwoven with Celtic pantheistic beliefs, did not end with his death. On the contrary, they continued to grow and take root well into the 6th century. His influence was felt throughout the Western world. Notable saints and Christian scholars such as Saint Ambrose, and even Saint Augustine, were extremely interested in the beliefs of this local sect.

The Swabians were the next of the area's inhabitants, during a time of



hunger, plague, cruel pillage, and endless calamities. Leovigildo eventually put things back in order by making the Swabian kingdom part of the Visigoth realm. Around the beginning of the 7th century,

Recaredo built a fortress in this fortified town and in neighboring Tui. To celebrate such a difficult and admirable achievement, he ordered a special coin to be minted.

But as they say, happiness never stays long in the poor man's house. The Saracen and Berber furies arrived with a thirst for pillage and domination. It was about this time that stones became the wall and castle which would one day flourish as the palace in which today's visitor is privileged to stay.

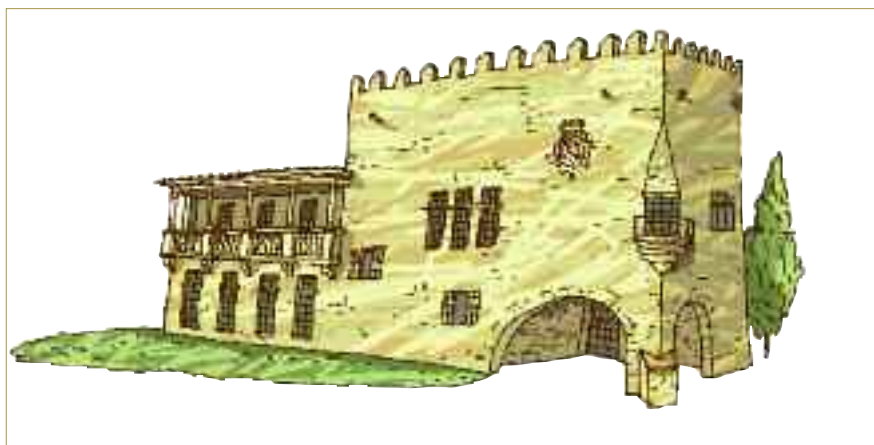
GATEWAY TO EUROPE; GATEWAY TO THE AMERICAS

Groups of English, gangs of Germans, hoards of Japanese, bunches of French and gypsy-like Latin Americans, some come in search of the sun without heat, others for the wind that tans. Some want to play in the surf and many come for the romance of the mists of time, with history and sun-soaked legend.

They all come to Baiona and acquire a taste for it. They enjoy the Monte Real castle and palace. They enjoy the Parador where the Count of Gondomar offers a miraculous spa for the soul and pleasant stimulation for the body. The traveler is lodged in an exceptional area, amidst a history of charms and spells, between the past recalled by the land and the future hinted at by the sea. So much has passed through these lands that this mountain has experienced the comings and goings of all Galicia.

The eventful life of this Parador became part of history during the time of the Moors. Almanzor stayed here briefly, although it is not known whether this was before or after his fierce pillaging of Santiago. Early in the year 1000, the Saracen ruins were restored to Christianity by King Alfonso V, and a long period of wars and truces, greed and splendor had begun.

These walls saw the first fraternal wars between the Spanish and the Portuguese. In the 12th century, Emperor Alfonso VII successfully defeated the invasion of his cousin, the Lusitanian King Alfonso, with the help of the people of this area, still known as Monte do Boi. The jubilant emperor ceded the land to the neighboring monastery in Oia. Its Cistercian monks acted as efficient



artillerymen against the frequent attacks by Turkish and Algerian ships. It is said that the abbot brought down enemy ships by making the sign of the cross over the cannon. It was soon given its own title and charter by the ninth King Alfonso on the "Isles of the Gods," the same Islas Cies which the visitor still sees today. The inhabitants of Baiona were granted full freedom to engage in maritime trade. Their ships visited the ports of Gascony and La Rochelle, England, Ireland, Flanders, and Seville.

The squadron of the Holy King, Fernando III, was built in these waters, in preparation for his celebrated and hard-fought conquest of Seville. The beautiful Romanesque collegiate church, which is now the town's parish church, was being completed at about that time.

Baiona was the foremost port in Galicia for trade with Europe and Spain when, at the end of the 14th century, it received the unwelcome visit and unappreciated occupation of the English, led by the Duke of Lancaster. It was the scene of the bloody forays of Pedro Madruga, Count of Camiña, who put the locals to the sword and built the house that still bears his name atop this hill. With pacts and the favor of Archbishop Fonseca, and using the then little-known gunpowder, he turned half of Galicia upside down, including the rebellious Irmandiños, and the town of Santiago. The Catholic Monarchs finally brought peace and then glory

to this area and throughout Spain. Since then, the Gothic cross of the Trinity has greeted the walker at the Porta de la Vila, keeping a pious and vigilant watch over the town. The monarchs decided to put the town's center of government inside this fortified enclosure, which has been known as Monte Real (Mount Royal) ever since. The governor and his castle,

the town hall and the Franciscan monastery were all located within the walls. Sailors, traders, and craftsmen lived outside.

It was only by chance that Baiona was privileged to be the first town in Spain to receive the good news of Columbus’s successful adventures. Pinzón’s vessel, the *Pinta*, put in here before Columbus’s *Niña* reached Lisbon. The waters of these beaches were the first baptismal font for the unfortunate natives they brought back with them.

The town’s streets soon began to fill up with beautiful buildings which withstood the test of time. Today’s town hall was a palace with a Renaissance tower and courtyard built by Lorenzo Correa. The House of Zeta, also known as The House of Pardon, was famous for having the privilege to pardon any condemned man who managed to find refuge there. And then there was the austere Dominican convent.

The town’s port activity and prosperity sparked the ambition of intrepid pirates. Drake was responsible for many a plundering visit. Happily, the young Count Gondomar brought these to an end, and was named governor in perpetuity. Felipe II considered the place to be no less than the “*key to his kingdom.*” Gondomar would also eventually become governor of Valladolid and ambassador to France, England, and Germany, taking with him the nobility and produce of Spain wherever he went.



From the 16th century, the inhabitants of Baiona experienced newfound abundance, together with epic pillaging from the sea. When King Felipe V broke off relations with the English in the 18th century, many of the local people turned to the profitable and legalized trade of privateering, operating as corsairs of “*unblemished honorability and profound religious feeling.*” They formed the Corpo Santo Guild, and enjoyed the shelter and protection of this fortress’s cannons. The “*Hawk*”, the “*Swift*”, and the “*Swordfish*” – all fearless and virtuous men endowed with unquestionable bravery – found fame and abundant fortune. Cod, cheeses, leather, wine, sugar, and more were supplied to the markets of the town and the entire region.

The town grew wealthy in tales hidden in legend and noble buildings: the proud Torre del Príncipe (Prince’s Tower), thus called because it served as the dismal abode of the scion of the Hapsburg dynasty whose identity was hidden beneath an iron mask, later to appear in the book by Alexandre Dumas; Santa Liberata Chapel, named for the twin sister of eight other child martyrs whose crucifixion is shown on the high altar; the chapel of San Juan; and today’s cultural center, formerly the Sancti Spiritus Hospital.

When the French invited themselves in, they were met with a barrage of gunpowder from the children of this ria. This was the first town in Galicia to send our neighbors back home.

Since then, time has flown. The canons and gun ports have fallen forever silent. In the mid-19th century, they became the immortal souvenirs of adventures and enchantments.

STREETS OF THE PIOUS CORSAIRS

1. Parish of Santa María Church
2. Dominican Convent
3. Chapel of Santa Liberata
4. Shrine of La Misericordia
5. Monument commemorating the arrival of the *Pinta* in Baiona in 1493



THE INDISCREET CHARM OF SEAFOOD

Wherever they may eat here, diners feel an almost inescapable, yet delicious, urge to partake in the age-old tradition of the seafood feast. You can almost imagine those earliest of Galicians joining you at table. The first inhabitants of Baiona found as much abundant food amongst the rocks of these hills and in the sand of the beaches as they needed to give themselves as many abundant feasts as their appetites might require.

There is no lack of evidence, with mountains of shells hidden throughout the centuries: limpets, mussels, winkles, oysters, sea scallops, and clams. Experts say that they were able to cook them by heating stones in the fire and using them to boil the water necessary for these luxurious foods. The visitor would do well to imitate this venerable custom, and this is the best place to do so.

If in the search for culinary advice, you should meet up with some of the few remaining talkative locals. Your questions will be answered by still more questions, but necessary ones. If you want to eat you are likely to be asked whether you prefer the coast or the area further inland up the ria; Vigo or heading towards Pontevedra, or down towards Portugal; fish or shellfish. Or you might be asked if you want to try what the locals eat, **Ham with Turnip Greens, Boiled Octopus Seasoned with Olive oil and Paprika**, or savory pies called **Empanadas**.

The Galician table can offer as much variety as the most capricious palate could ever desire. But it should never be forgotten that area is one of the best for excellent shellfish, where mollusks reach the most

elevated gastronomic heights. It is only here that the clam reaches its full maturity. The mussels are low in price but priceless in taste, and the dainty cockles are an addictive appetizer. These can all be eaten in whichever manner you prefer: raw, barely alive, steamed, or in a sauce, perhaps *marinière*.



Sea Scallops, Lobster, Swimcrabs, and Spider Crabs can all be found in the waters around the nearby *Islas Cíes*. All they need is to be boiled, but will gratefully accept the company of a sauce, but not just any sauce.

This is a paradise for eels and sea **Lamprey**, ugly to look at, but lovely to eat. They can be served **Fried**, in **Sauce, Bordelaise Style**, or in a **Pie**. There are also **Oysters, Crayfish, Shrimp, Crab, and Octopus**.

Baiona offers the usual fish from the Atlantic off Galicia, as well as other more local and less frequent varieties, such as **Salmon, Sea Trout, Shad, Monkfish, and Turbot**. There are other smaller, but no more humble, varieties, such as **Horse Mackerel, Skate, and Pout**, not to mention **Sardines**, baked, fried, or marinated, or made into a **Xouba Pie**.

Sweets include **Filloa Crepes, Melindres, and Roscón Buns**. There are also other ancient recipes rescued and hidden in the convents. There are **Ribeiro and Albariño Wines**, particularly **El Condado, El Rosal, and Espadeiro**.

You will find all these dishes and more almost anywhere you go. The Parador always offers a carefully chosen selection which will undoubtedly be to the diner's complete satisfaction.

RIAS OF SUN-SOAKED BREEZES

The Ria of Baiona inlet is no more and no less than an apprentice and excellent student of the Ria of Vigo. The traveler can trace a path alongside it through endlessly surprising parishes and countryside. There are nature sports such as rock climbing, which can be combined with a search for the secrets of the past and art hidden in these lands. Peerless cuisine always brightens and leads the way.

■ Mount Santa Tecla

This spot is exceptional for a number of reasons: as a singular vantage point overlooking countryside and hills that hold the greatest archaeological treasures of the entire peninsula, or the boundary stone that God chose to place before the ocean to mark the edge of the lands of Galicia. Enormous blocks of granite and numerous varieties of sea birds can be seen on the way to the **Monastery of Oia**. This important historic building was originally Romanesque, but now displays a Baroque façade.



The fishing village of A Guarda holds **Santa Tecla** and a **Celtic hill fort**, the initial settlement and evidence of the early life of these people.

■ On the Islas Cíes

Monte Agudo, San Martín and other small islets have made up this archipelago guardian just off the coast of Baiona since the earliest times. It has been a Celtic and Roman camp, a shelter for Vikings and pirates, and a monastery for Benedictine prayers and chants. The visitor will find evidence of all these former inhabitants and will enjoy this natural paradise, a busy oasis for abundant sea birds.

■ Along the Green Line

This is the beginning of the green Portuguese coast, while still in Galicia. Wide beaches of fine, golden sand are washed by blue transparent waters, and contrast with green pine forests, and a thousand varieties of flowers. These lands and peoples are Baiona's neighbors, with a shared past of love and hate. **Viana do Castelo**. The very essence of pure Lusitanian folklore is preserved here. The people have a taste for multi-colored pottery, lace, and filigree work. **Valença de Minho**. Its 13th-century fortress watches jealously over the waters of the Miño, witness to long-ago wars and present-day contraband.



José Churriguera.

■ Vigo

Baiona's little sister grew up in the last century, bold in trade. Until then it had been an important fortress and fishing village. There are no major monuments or historic remnants of the past, but it is an interesting spot filled with shellfish and handicrafts.

Monte do Guía is the observatory overlooking the town and its ria. **Monte do Castro** is the site of the original settlement, with the legendary **O Penso Castle**, which was condemned to ruin by the restless Archbishop Fonseca. On the way down, enjoy a pleasant wander through the Cidade Vella around Constitution Square and the former fisherman's neighborhood known as the **Berbés**.

El Pazo do Castrelos, built in the 17th century, is today the town's Municipal Museum. The **Church of Santa María**, 13th-century Romanesque, belonged to the Order of Malta. The high altar is in the style of



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