

40 hours

## A Coruña

This northwest Spanish city  
deserves more than just a quick  
stop on a cruise, finds **Sarah Bridge**

Cruise passengers who disembark at A Coruña only to shoot straight through to nearby Santiago de Compostela are missing out on one of Spain's lesser-known gems.

Perched on an isthmus at the north-westerly corner of the country, it has beaches just a few minutes from the heart of town, 10 miles of scenic promenade sweeping along the Atlantic coast, and a growing foodie reputation thanks to award-winning tapas, a vibrant food market and its first Michelin-starred restaurant. Known as La Coruña in Spanish, but A Coruña in its native Galician, this compact city is perfect for a weekend stay. ➤





## top tip

A Cořuna comes alive with bonfires and street parties at Noche de San Juan, the most important festival of the year, on June 23

### CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Historic buildings in the marina; fish market; Tower of Hercules; Old Town; San Anton Castle; cycling on the coastal path

PICTURES: Gabriel Tizon; Sandra Garcia Rey; A Coruña Tourist Board

### DAY ONE

**10.00:** A great way to get your bearings in this hammerhead-shaped city is to start in A Coruña's marina, home to dozens of sailing ships as well as a modern cruise terminal. The historic buildings that line the main avenue show off Galician style at its best, with former fishermen's cottages clad in glass facades that seal off the open balconies and make the tall, terraced homes glint in the sun. A short walk along the marina, past A Coruña's only five-star hotel, Hesperia Finisterre, leads to San Anton Castle. Built on a tiny island, this former fortress is now the city's history and archaeology museum, and boasts many historic artefacts as well as great views across the water.

**12.00:** Weather permitting, you're in the perfect place for a cycle, stroll, run or scooter-ride along the coastal path that hugs the northern shore of A Coruña as far as the Tower of Hercules, a 2,000-year-old monument and the oldest active lighthouse in the world. Having indulged in some great views from the top of the 55-metre tower – possibly to the sounds of bagpipes, a key instrument in Galician traditional music – it's time for a different sort of indulgence. A Coruña's only Michelin-starred restaurant, Arbore de Veira, has superb views from its glass-fronted clifftop location, although you might have eyes only for the delectable dishes crafted by chef Luis Veira himself.

**15.00:** Work off lunch with a walking tour around the cobbled streets of A Coruña's Old Town, which dates from the 13th century. For added drama, you could choose as your guide British military hero Sir John Moore – aka enthusiastic actor Suso Martinez – to bring history to life, including the Napoleonic Wars and the story of local heroine Maria Pita, after whom the impressive main square is named. Visitors wanting something more up to date should head for A Coruña's main shopping district. The first Zara fashion store opened here in 1974, while those on the lookout for something unique to the city should seek out the brightly coloured, hand-painted ceramics of Sargadelos (true fans can also visit the factory outside town).

**20.00:** No trip to Spain is complete without sampling the local tapas and visitors are spoilt for choice in A Coruña, with hundreds of bars in the centre of town, especially around the streets of Barrera, Troncoso and Franja. Each venue has its own speciality – you can try anything from salt cod and cockles arancini to smoked sardines, fried octopus and apple caviar – and make sure you visit any that have been awarded a prize in the annual Picadillo tapas competition, now in its 15th year. Accompany it with a tippie or two from the local Ribeiro wine region or an Estrella Galicia beer, and if you're lucky, you might come across an impromptu music and dancing session, much enjoyed by the locals. ➤



Lizzie Walker-Arnott, marketing assistant, Walks Worldwide

It's hard not to get caught up in the intoxicating culture of A Coruña, from evenings full of tapas and red wine in the atmospheric, bustling streets to spontaneous dances, a rich cultural heritage and a deep-rooted love of the sea. I can imagine it's hard for pilgrims to drag themselves away from this captivating town, as they begin their journey walking one of Europe's most iconic pilgrimage routes, the Camino Ingles, towards Santiago de Compostela.



Monica Prinic, product manager, Exodus Travels

I didn't know what to expect but I was pleasantly surprised by the destination. It's a lively city and its food scene is incredible. I was particularly impressed by the variety of the seafood and the freshness of the ingredients on offer. The hotel standards are really high and further investment is making them even better. From a historical point of view, Picasso lived there at a young age – it was interesting to visit his house and listen to how this stage of his life influenced his painting career.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

La Cerveceria; local seafood; Casa Museo Picasso; Los Vinos

PICTURES: Gabriel Tizo; A Coruña Tourist Board

DAY TWO

**10.00:** Start the day with a spot of culture and a visit to Picasso's childhood home, Casa Museo Picasso. The young artist lived in the narrow townhouse for five years from the age of 10, but historians say it is where Picasso became an artist. He completed more than 200 works in A Coruña and even had his first exhibition in the city, at the age of 14.

**12.00:** A Coruña's gourmet reputation owes a lot to its fresh seafood, so a visit to the vibrant fish market is a must. From fresh octopus and barnacles – both local delicacies – to lobsters, mussels, fish of all varieties and plenty of other edible delights, the market is a riot of noise and colour. The city hosts

many food events throughout the year, such as the Bocata Gourmet festival, where chefs compete to make the best sandwiches – extensive sampling is a must.

**15.00:** A Coruña is not just near the pilgrimage site of Santiago – it's actually on one of the routes leading to Santiago itself. It's known as the Camino Ingles or English Way, as many of the pilgrims that came here in the Middle Ages were from Britain and Northern Europe. They would travel by boat to A Coruña and then walk to Santiago on an easy-to-follow route that winds its way through the undulating countryside – a great way to experience a part of one of the world's biggest pilgrimage routes,

even if you don't have the time or inclination to walk the full 50 miles to Santiago itself.

**19.00:** Finish off your trip to A Coruña with a pilgrimage of a different sort. Estrella Galicia beer is a regional icon and used to be brewed in the centre of town at La Cerveceria. The site is now a bustling bar, but head upstairs to the restaurant, and you can enjoy a beer tasting with food in calmer surroundings. Then head back to your hotel – the five-star Hesperia Finisterre has a prime spot on the marina, a heated outdoor swimming pool, and is within walking distance of all of A Coruña's main sites – or carry on to bustling wine district Los Vinos to see the city really come to life. **TW**