

# Viva Galicia

Annie Bennett finds Spanish flavour in the O Salnés region in the country's northwest

**S**ailing down the Arousa inlet, we watched women in waders on a sandbank, rhythmically raking the shallow water for clams.

All along the fjord-like estuary, thousands of ropes bristling with mussels dangled into the water from wooden rafts. A few hours later, we were sitting at a harbourside table devouring a huge platter of this superb

seafood. You couldn't get more locally sourced than this - it was zero-kilometre eating at its freshest and best.

If you ask Spaniards which region of their country has the best food, a lot will say Galicia. That might explain why so many of them choose the region for both their main holiday and short breaks year-round. Another reason is the climate, which tends

to be pleasantly warm in summer rather than stiflingly hot.

▶ **SELL**

The region of O Salnés hugs the coast between the Arousa and Pontevedra estuaries in the west of Galicia, an area renowned for its spectacular beaches and green hills in northwest Spain. It is in the heart of the Rías

Baixas, an area characterised by deep, crinkly inlets where fresh and salt water mix to create an ideal marine environment for shellfish cultivation. People come here for the Caribbean-style beaches, watersports, outdoor lifestyle and gastronomy, which makes the area very





**LEFT:**  
Arousa  
island

**RIGHT:**  
The Pazo  
Baion  
Outono  
winery

**BELOW:**  
Cambados



→ appealing for couples and families with children of all ages looking for somewhere with a stronger regional identity than a typical seaside resort.

The green landscape is the result of higher rainfall than other parts of Spain, but sunshine is pretty much guaranteed from June to September. It looks a bit like Cornwall or Ireland, but with better weather.

The main resort is Sanxenxo on the north side of the Pontevedra inlet, where hotels line the promenade either side of the marina. There are several lovely beaches, lots of restaurants and lively nightlife in summer.

There is also a good range of hotel and self-catering accommodation, as well as campsites, on the peninsula of O Grove, which is flanked by gorgeous beaches. A Lanzada is a glorious strip of golden sand that stretches along the isthmus that joins the peninsula to the mainland and is a favourite with windsurfers.

The main town in O Salnés is



**The green landscape is due to more rainfall than other parts of Spain, but sunshine is mostly guaranteed**

Cambados, a charming place on the coast, with granite buildings housing little shops, cafes and restaurants. A grand building by the sea is now a Parador hotel.

Cambados is also the capital of the Rías Baixas wine area. Albariño grapes are widely grown and produce some of the best white wine in Spain. Winery visits are very popular and there are wine routes you can follow, taking in cultural heritage and festivals as well as vineyards, many of which are attached to mansions in splendid estates.

Most of the area is rural and quiet, with lots of walking and cycling routes both around the

coast and inland. Although not essential, it is very useful to have a car, as distances between points of interest are mostly short, with journeys of half an hour or less.

You can fly to Santiago de Compostela airport, about 40 miles north of Cambados, with easyJet and Vueling from Gatwick or Ryanair from Stansted. Vigo airport is 34 miles south of Cambados, with a new Air Nostrum route from Luton between July and September.

#### ▶ SEE

O Salnés lends itself to lazy days on the beach with long outdoor dinners at excellent restaurants – whether basic or fancy, the food is rarely less than terrific – but is an equally good choice for a more active or cultural break.

Getting out on the water is essential. Amare is run by a former fisherman who offers a variety of boat trips, ranging from the purely leisurely to the more educational where you learn about shellfish, birds, local culture or whatever you are

particularly interested in. [amareturismonautico.com](http://amareturismonautico.com)

There are fishing options for beginners or the more serious, or you might just want to sail to a deserted beach on one of the islands for a spot of snorkelling. The Translatio route up the estuary traces the journey that – according to legend – the vessel carrying the body of Saint James took nearly 2,000 years ago, guided by a star, which led to the founding of the cathedral and city of Santiago de Compostela.

Arousa island, joined to the mainland by a mile-long bridge, has some wonderful beaches, including Area de Secada, which has Blue Flag status. You can walk or cycle around the coastal path from the fishing harbour to the Carreiron nature reserve, shaded by pine forests along the way.

The Stone and Water Route is an easy walk along a well-signposted path that follows the course of a stream through a magical hillside landscape of beech, birch and bay trees. The route is punctuated by



→ a couple of dozen stone mills, which were formerly used to grind wheat and corn. The route leads up to the Armenteira monastery, which dates back to the 12th century and is now run by Cistercian nuns. This stretch is also a variant of the Portuguese route of the Santiago pilgrimage.



La Toja - A Toxa in Galician - is a little island linked by a bridge to O Grove peninsula at the mouth of the Arousa inlet. In the mid-19th century it was discovered that not only the water from its thermal springs but also the mud there had healing properties bordering on the miraculous. This led to the founding of a spa that attracted people from Spain and beyond. The island now has a handful of upmarket spa hotels and a nine-hole golf course.

## STAY

There is a wide range of beach, urban and rural hotels in O Salnés, some in historic buildings such as the granite pazo manor houses that are found only in Galicia.

The Quinta de San Amaro is a chic rural hotel on the edge of the village of Meaño, two and a half miles from the sea. A traditional house has been tastefully remodelled and extended to create 14 smart,

spacious rooms with classic design, which are all different and have large bathrooms with Yves Rocher toiletries. There is a tendency for rural hotels in northern Spain to verge on the twee, but thankfully there is no hint of that here. This is the sort of place where you can totally switch off. Start the day with a leisurely breakfast in the light-filled restaurant, then have a dip in the small but lovely pool, gazing across the vineyards as you swim. Then you might want to sink into a hammock under the trees with a book or slide onto a daybed in the hórreo, a stone



granary on stilts that has been converted into a stylish sunroom. There are lots of attractive spots around the property to enjoy a glass of chilled albariño wine.

In the evening, the restaurant serves traditional food with a contemporary creative twist using the excellent local produce. If you fancy having a go at some Galician dishes yourself, you can do a fun cookery class in the hotel and then eat all the things you make for dinner.

Double rooms start at £66 including breakfast.

[quintadesanamaro.com](http://quintadesanamaro.com)

One of the most luxurious

places to stay in O Salnés is the five-star Gran Hotel La Toja, now run by Eurostars. The elegant hotel opened more than a century ago and the belle époque atmosphere is still very much in evidence today. It is well worth booking a room with a terrace overlooking the Ría de Arousa as the sea views are mesmerising. In the lavish spa, treatments include a body wrap using the mineral-rich La Toja mud. The hotel has an outdoor pool, a grand bar and good restaurants. Double rooms start at a very reasonable £85 including breakfast.

[eurostarsgranhotellatoja.com](http://eurostarsgranhotellatoja.com) 



LEFT:  
Quinta de  
San Amaro

RIGHT: Gran  
Hotel La Toja

