The name Ribadeo defines itself: the riba, ripa or bank of the River Eo. This natural boundary forms the border between two communities bathed by the immense Bay of Biscay and linked by the Dos Santos Bridge and very similar cultures and customs: Asturias and Galicia.

The locals are proud of the diminutives they use throughout their everyday conversation. They are tender, sweet and affectionate of speech and expression, although sometimes overly so. Let the stranger be warned: these Galicians, practically Asturians, are more complex than they like to show even themselves. Of course they are Galicians, but before that, they are Celts above all. They are Cantabrian, of the Bay of Biscay, and Atlantic, fishing these intense seas out of necessity and vocation. It is a bold way of life. Their sweet tongue clashes with their upright and daring nature. They have always been, still are and always will be an audacious people, adventurers.

They enjoy a land and climate as inclement as it is fertile. The coast provides them with virtually everything. But it is not a gift. The cost is clearly greater than the ever-questionable benefits. Galicians crowded the first boats of immigrants to the far-off Americas.

But they will never sin; there is no hint of pride or other venial presumptions. In many parts of this land, all along the so called Line of Portugal, Galicians have been invaded, and thankfully, have also been “invaders”: itinerant seasonal farm laborers, knife grinders, and experts in the great many other trades in demand.

On the plateau of Castile there is still a saying which we will repeat here, although it is a foolish stereotype: “You can always spot a Galician because when he’s on a staircase, you can never tell if he’s going up or down.” But this is not the whole picture. Like anyone else, you have to get to know the Gallegos. They are both charming and charmed, for the good of their druids and meigas, or witches.

The ría has determined the nature and development of this region, and is intrinsic to its very nature, its history and its progress. The ría was one of the reasons for which this town was founded. A group of fishermen gradually settled along the shores and the beach. Then came their huts, set atop the flat ground, protected from the rough weather of the Bay. These small settlements flourished and grew into villages further inland. The ría of the Eo would end up becoming more and more important. It would become the main resource and means of survival, a source of fish and trade.

To take better advantage of the river’s resources, the vessels used had to be modernized. We know that in the 18th century, along the entire Biscay coastline, they used the barlote, with a single mast and one rig, the dragnet. As the century went on, the ría’s fishing grounds became exhausted, and fishing required greater skill to meet the growing demand. Vessels were improved and the region’s three classic models developed, the
trainera, with oars; the batel, a skiff; and the lancha de altura, a motorboat.

The trainera, typical of the north, is the best boat for fishing small fish such as anchovies and sardines. It uses a large net with lead weights. It is easy to sail, but rather dangerous due to its frailty. Anxiety and shipwrecks are an everyday occurrence for these sailors, and their families.

However, until the 19th century, the most common boat on the ria of the Eo was the trincado, used to transport merchandise and for trade. Other vessels were also used, such as pataches, lugres or quechemarines, and those with greater tonnage, bergantines and foletas. At last would come the steam engine, but that type of boat would disappear as the use of motorized vessels became common.

Now the landscape of the ria is very different: it changes with the movement of the tide. At low tide it is common to see tesons, sandbanks, and of course, it is populated by working and pleasure boats, sailboats and motorboats of fiberglass or wood. The last are traditional: the bote, chalano or “sardine tin”. The boats share the ria with species such as herons, redshanks, plovers, sandpipers, salmon, trout, and more.

**Views and Landscapes of Infinite Memory**

“I see elegant streets and squares, I see the bridge, the ria and the sea beyond lovely squares and dazzling towers “meiga” town, how lovely you appear to me! Although my wandering life may take me far away “Meiga” town, you always travel with me...”

Canción Popular

In addition to everything offered by the rich banks of the Eo River, above all, here one can find landscapes worthy of the best of painters. The Parador is one of the most remarkable sites in the town. It stands proudly opposite a ria which never tires of lending its beauty and tranquility to all those who rest and enjoy its shelter, not a few, to be sure.

With the ambiance of a typical large seaside house, and every luxury and convenience, lodging within the walls of this building is the best way to dive right in and immerse oneself in the traditions of life in Ribadeo.

Travelers can enjoy the most delicious traditional cooking of the region, washed down with refreshing Galician wines. Open
Since prehistoric times, the area around Ribadeo was occupied by pre-Roman peoples who built fortified towns and mámoas, a type of burial mound. Remains of the hill forts, the typical dwelling place of the Celtic peoples, can be found in Villaselán, Arante and As Anzas, evidence of the life of the peoples of this area. There is proof of the passing of the Celts, who left for posterity the valuable Ribadeo Diadem – held safe in the Louvre in Paris. Five fragments have been unearthed in the forts of the area, together with other similar treasures, such as the arracada de Bedoia, a round earring.

The mámoas, also known as medoñas, are another type of structure, used by Neolithic peoples. Remains of these have also been found in Mondigo.

Visits to the region by Phoenicians, Carthaginians and Greeks were not in vain. Traditional trading and sailing peoples, they came to Galicia and exercised such a great influence throughout the entire coastal region that even centuries later vestiges of their cultures still remained.

The Roman people, however, did not leave a significant mark on the area, only some coins or small remains, but there is no evidence of Roman buildings or infrastructure.

In relatively recent times, present-day Ribadeo took shape. The Cabanela and Porcillán areas were abandoned by their inhabitants, who settled in the new town around the 12th century. Once the town had been repopulated and the boundaries of its church set, there were rivalries and competition between bishops and lords. Eventually the Episcopal See returned to Mondoñedo, where the bishop, close to King Alfonso IX, raised a cathedral, which visitors can still gaze at and worship in today.

The town of Ribadeo, indignant because of the transfer of the See, managed to obtain certain ecclesiastic privileges, among them the granting of a collegiate church which, as told in old documents, was governed by “a canon of four razoeiros, sons of honored citizens of Ribadeo”.

These privileges and concessions would give way to the Estate of Abadengo, characterized, among other things, by the bishops holding authority and power in military, judicial and legal matters over the lands which had come into their possession. Even when this estate disappeared, the prelates continue to enjoy the benefits of some of their ancient prebends.

The territory of Ribadeo as once made up of seven parishes: Santa María del Campo (the early parish church); San Juan de Ove; Santa María de Villaselán; San Juan de Piñeira; San Vicente de Cubelas; San Pedro de Arante and Santa Eulalia de la Devesa. This division was altered to the current structure, which has been in place since the final years of the 19th century.

After the ecclesiastical hegemony, the territory was shared out amongst soldiers and captains “deserving” of the favor of certain kings. The first to control Ribadeo was the French military man Pierre de Villaines, who was succeeded by Rui López Dávalos, who made the purchase with the help of a loan from the Archbishop of Toledo. Conflicts among nobles would determine the fate of this land, which would pass from the hands of knights such as Rodrigo Villandrando to either his son or Diego Gómez de Sarmiento, eventually coming to the Hijar family, who held title to the Duchy of Ribadeo.

The town resisted, fighting tooth and nail against the invading peoples who came by sea to pillage the land. The invaders could not overcome the determination of the Galicians. In 1719 the English landed on the shores of Ribadeo, and after cruel confrontations and much plunder, in the end they accepted a handful of gold doubloons and returned to their native land.

The War of Independence lasted somewhat longer, touching the town, and all of Spain. When the invading French arrived, as in other regions, the people of Ribadeo remained true and loyal to their king, Fernando VII. This patriotism exacerbated the situation, giving rise to terrible incidents and outrages. Under these circumstances, the Governing Committee of Ribadeo, established for this reason, issued the following communiqué:

“The Committee knows of the love and the zeal of the noble and honorable inhabitants of the town of Rivadeo, and that it is only imprudent indiscretion, driven by the affection towards Our August Monarch, King Fernando the Seventh, which inspires all of us, which may cause some to commit certain atrocities, which have already made a brief appearance. For the purpose of preventing disturbances, which is the primary goal of these magistrates, and provide the public safety so required by the urgent circumstances of the day, we hereby:

Exhort each and every person, with no distinction between sexes, classes or status, to abstain from uttering expressions of insubordination or agitating in the least. Anyone who contravenes this order does so on pain of trial before the Higher Committee of La Coruña. This will thus serve as a warning that anyone who should commit these atrocities will be punished.”

After the French took Ribadeo, it was sacked. Joseph Bonaparte was declared king, but resistance continued. The Asturians continued their unceasing and determined struggle. In the ria area, names such as Antonio R. Ibáñez, founder of Sargadelos, dedicated themselves to the cause. It would end up costing him his life, that of his family and part of the fortune he had amassed.

The military hospital of Asturias, which until 1810 was located in Ribadeo, was transferred to the Castle of San Damián until the invaders
left the country. Shortly afterwards, three new military hospitals were founded: one in the Convent of Santa Clara, another in the Hospital of San Sebastián and the last in the Gibraltar Barracks.

During this period there was a terrible epidemic, which made it necessary to build a cemetery for the vast numbers of dead. For this reason, and due to other circumstances, Ribadeo tended a great many of the Asturian ill. With this mission, in 1813, a large area was created in the house-factory to put up sick Asturians who arrived in the town on their way to Galicia.

The non-conformist, rebellious and independent nature of the town has made itself clear throughout its entire history. In June 1843, the city of Lugo spoke out against the measures of Mendizábal, and Ribadeo did the same in the guise of the cultured and liberal Luciano de Azcárate. With a group of like minds, he formed the Revolutionary Committee, charged with defending the town and supervising each inhabitant’s arms. The committee also controlled prices and trade, as shown by this edict:

“Altering the price of basic necessities is hereby prohibited. The fine for doing so shall be one ducat for the first infraction, double this amount for the second, and for the third, the same fine and a loss of the merchandise, to be sent to prisoners in jail.”

The Pleasant Breezes of Modernism

With the coming of the 19th century, the process of industrialization had spread to the entire Iberian peninsula. However, in Ribadeo, industry was still an extremely precarious business: forges, textile mills, cereal mills, grey paper mills, etc. all still operated using traditional methods, as they had long done.

In 1886, the Town Council of Ribadeo was classified as “Excellent” by the king “as proof of the royal appreciation owed this town by his highness’s illustrious and distinguished ancestors because of its steadfast adherence to the monarchy”.

The 19th century brought a serious economic crisis. The catalyst was the beef market, an essential means of support of a large part of the region, which traded with other European countries. The economy of Ribadeo came to a standstill when the English market for Spanish products and cattle was closed. Other causes included the entrance of countries such as Argentina and the United States into the market as strong competitors in beef exports.

In the early 20th century, with modern working methods and mechanization, the dairy product industry began to establish itself. It gained greater and greater importance, growing to dominate the economy and life of the area. In addition to facilitating fishing and trade, Ribadeo’s location, open to the sea, allows the town to export minerals and other raw materials from throughout the province of Lugo. This became more important with the appearance of the first ground infrastructure, such as the mining train from Vilaodriz, essential for transporting coal, and the first main roads.

Crossroads and Cultures

“Santa Cruz está en un alto y Ribadeo en un bajito, y a la vera de la carretera está la Virgen del Camino.”

Folk poem

The art and culture of Ribadeo bear traces of other times: they are intimately tied to religious life, to a deeply felt Catholicism. Thus, a walk through the town and its surroundings leads one to churches and chapels, the best testimony of exquisite art and artists as ancient as they are exemplary.

The oft-mentioned parish church of Villaselán, so often praised for its virgin, is located in a paradise-like setting. The exterior appears quite austere, and its most emblematic feature is the bell tower which rises from the main body of the church. The interior offers the opportunity to contemplate baroque altarpieces and magnificent images.

The Convent of Santa Clara deserves a relaxed visit. A retreat for the devout since the 12th century, and a convent since the 15th, it remains in excellent condition. There are also the Chapels of La Misericordia, San Miguel, San Roque, Virgen del Camino, Santa María del Campo and La Trinidad. The last has a truly outstanding location, offering a panoramic view of the ría.
Secular structures also occupy an important place within the town's art and history. On the banks of the Eo sit such jewels as the Tower of the Moreno Family, one of the town's most emblematic structures. It was built in the early 20th century by the Moreno and Ulloa brothers. To do so, ancient Ribadeo's fortress had to be pulled down. The tower is a unique structure with a blend of styles, glassed-in balconies and marble floors. Possibly the most outstanding part of the building is its dome roof, covered with glazed tiles.

Another important site is the Town Hall, a neoclassic structure dating from the end of the 18th century. It was built by the Marquis of Sargadelos in a magnificent area which includes España Square (Plaza de España); the 15th-century Patín House with its lovely architecture and fantastic site; Sela House, typical of those built by Spaniards who returned to Spain in the second half of the 19th century, having made their fortune in Latin America. Also noteworthy is the Old Customs House, an 18th-century structure with large balconies, like many other buildings constructed using slate masonry. Unfortunately, it is very poor condition, now lying virtually in ruins. And let us not forget Fort San Damián, a 17th-century military structure which still appears to watch over the town.

Curiosities and Smiles

The people of Ribadeo have a truly special nature: they sing and dance, they laugh at their own foibles, and engage in quarrels and a healthy “rivalry” with the inhabitants of neighboring town such as Vegadeo, Castropol and Figueras. Perhaps it is for this reason that folk poems and songs are a very common part of their folklore and culture. Here we offer you a small sample:

“The river, when it flows downstream carries chestnuts and leaves; it must also carry gossiping tongues.

Ribadeo has a series of features which have made it unique. A surprising fact is that in the 16th century a “free trade” agreement was reached between the councils of Ribadeo and Castropol, direct neighbors along the ria. Its people are also reluctant to engage in armed conflict. Until the 17th century, the town sent no men to war; they believed that they should keep their forces back in order to defend their own territory. Ribadeo was also exempt from housing the troops which passed along the bank of the river.

Hoe the Earth, Plough the Sea

“...a little gust of wind pulled Aniceto out to sea. The fault was Aniceto’s For not knowing how to sail...”

It is obvious: it is Ribadeo’s beaches which cause us to fall in love with the landscape, immense stretches of fine sand and rough seas. They extend into the distance, framed by a beauty which is difficult to describe. Visitors will find one of the coast’s most spectacular beaches at Catedrais, or Cathedral Beach, located between the Foz and Ribadeo Rias. Its cliffs and rocky setting make it exceptional, an untouched spot to discover and enjoy.

Other pleasant beaches in the Ribadeo area include the small cape of Esteiro, or Las Islas; Os Castro Beach or Olga Beach. Heading in the direction of Faro you can enjoy O Cargadeiro and Rocos Blancas Beaches. In the town itself is the beach of Os Bloques, on the ria itself. Water sports and traditional beach activities are both possible.

To get a better idea of the coastline and the pleasures of the area, there are two viewpoints: from Atalaya, located above the marina, you can enjoy a splendid view of the ria; the Mount Santa Cruz viewpoint offers a broader view. A few kilometers away you will find the fish observatory at Reme, dedicated to observing the species which populate the ria.

But the visit does not end with the city limits. In the Ribadeo region there are twelve parishes, a division which dates from the end of the 19th century. These parish churches encompass more than one hundred population centers, each different, but united by the similarity of the landscape of Lugo. These parishes include the mountainous Cedofeita, Villaselán, Arante, A Devesa, Ove, Vilaosenda, Couxela, Covelas, Piñeira, Rinlo and Vilaframil.
We highly recommend exploring the principal nearby towns. Although they now belong to the Principality of Asturias, they maintain a close relationship with Ribadeo. Vegadeo, also called A Veiga, a town of cobbled streets and slate, is famous for its fair and ambiance, its people being excellent hosts. Castropol, separated from Ribadeo by little but the ria, has much in common. Both are seaside towns, towns of ports, fish and seafood.

Tables Without Cloths: The Senses of Both Mouth and Fingers

The local gastronomy characteristically features fish and seafood, always accompanied by good wines, primarily whites such as Ribeiro and Albariño.

The specialty par excellence is, without a doubt, Caldo Gallego, a stew made with turnip greens, potatoes and fabes beans, cooked with pork fat, bacon, chicken, veal shank bone and chorizo sausage. It is a delicacy to be enjoyed any wintry day, and even those not-so-wintry ones. Whenever the weather forces the “Ribadenses” to stay at home, they always enjoy their caldo.

Fish and seafood: Pulpo a Feira, or octopus Galician-style: The octopus is boiled and served with boiled cachelos, a local variety of potato. The only other ingredients are a splash of olive oil and paprika, and a touch of rock salt.

In the port of Porcillán you can enjoy grilled sardines, crabs, goose barnacles, mussels, salmon or trout. The magnificent quality of fish and seafood from the ria and the coast allows you to enjoy a taste of the sea with every bite.

Fish is also used to prepare the best homemade Savory Pies, called Empanadas. You will find them throughout the region, made with cockles, bonito tuna or cod, and even meat. Another typical dish, almost a cliché, is Lacón a la Gallega. It is similar to Pulpo a Feira, but made with boiled ham, every bit as good as the local beef.

Queimada, a Ritual and Delight for the Palate

We could not possibly neglect to mention Queimada, a traditional hot punch which involves an entire magical and symbolic ritual whose origin is unknown. What we do know is that it is a pagan conxuro, or spell, designed to frighten away bad spirits and cure the soul.

Each ingredient has a specific meaning, apparently based on the Celtic belief in the three fundamental elements of life: earth, fire and water. The earth would be the clay dish in which the beverage is prepared; water is the eau-de-vie; and finally fire, which is the purifying flame which sets light to the alcohol.

The main ingredients used to prepare the queimada are eau-de-vie, the basis of it all, lemon, sugar and coffee. All this is burned by the fire, creating the most ardent and intense beverage you will ever taste. The conxuro is recited while the flaming punch is stirred with a ladle. Below you will find the magic words:

“Mouchos, coruxas, sapos e bruxas. Demos, trasgos e diånos, espritos das nevoadas veigas. Corvos, pintigas e meigas, feitizos das mencíñeiras. Podres cañotas furadas, fogar dos vermes e alimañas. Lume das santas Compañas…”

“Little owls, barn owls, toads and witches. Demons, imps and devils, spirits of the snowy meadows. Ravens, salamanders and witches, spells of the witch doctors.

Rotten stalks of cane riddled with holes, home of worms and vermin. Fire of sorrowful souls…”
Local festivals are celebrated in style along the banks of the ria. There are a wide variety of events to celebrate and enjoy. As in most places, summer is the peak period.

July brings the beginning of an endless number of special days. The first is the Festival of Carmen, in honor of the Virgin del Carmen, patron saint of fisherman. The spectacle is extremely beautiful: the procession takes place on boats, which fill the ria with faith and emotion, giving thanks to the fishermen's protectress.

August scarcely has a day free of festivities, beginning with the Xira de Santa Cruz. This is a pilgrimage in the traditional style, held on the mountain of the same name and accompanied by bands of bagpipes and regional dances. It ends in an open-air dance where the people eat, drink and dance all day and into the night. This same month also brings the Festival of San Roque. The proceedings start with a mass and procession, then the large figures of the cocos and cabezudos come out, and a pilgrimage takes place. Nautical Week, organized by the yacht club, has regattas, fishing competitions and other water-based activities.

The Festival of the Patron Saint honors Saint María del Campo and lasts for an entire week starting the 8th of September. On each of these seven days it is possible to enjoy different activities, open-air dances and processions, all permeated with music, laughter and an atmosphere as uncontrollable as it is pleasant.

Carnival, Entroido in Galician, is another fantastic time: in addition to the typical street parades, there is the Crepe Festival, the famous Burial of the Sardine and the Great Entroido Parade.

Another popular festival is Las Cruces in A Ponte. Various local parishes celebrate the victory of their ancestors over Napoleon's French troops during the War of Independence.

It would truly be a shame if the pious, although pleasure-seeking, pilgrim did not set aside a little time to visit Ferrol, located nearby. And Ferrol is more than just Ferrol, which is enough in itself: it is the Bay of Biscay, the Da Morte Coast, and Finisterre. It is A Coruña and other magnificent landscapes which seek to fuse and confuse the land and seas of Biscay with those of the Atlantic.