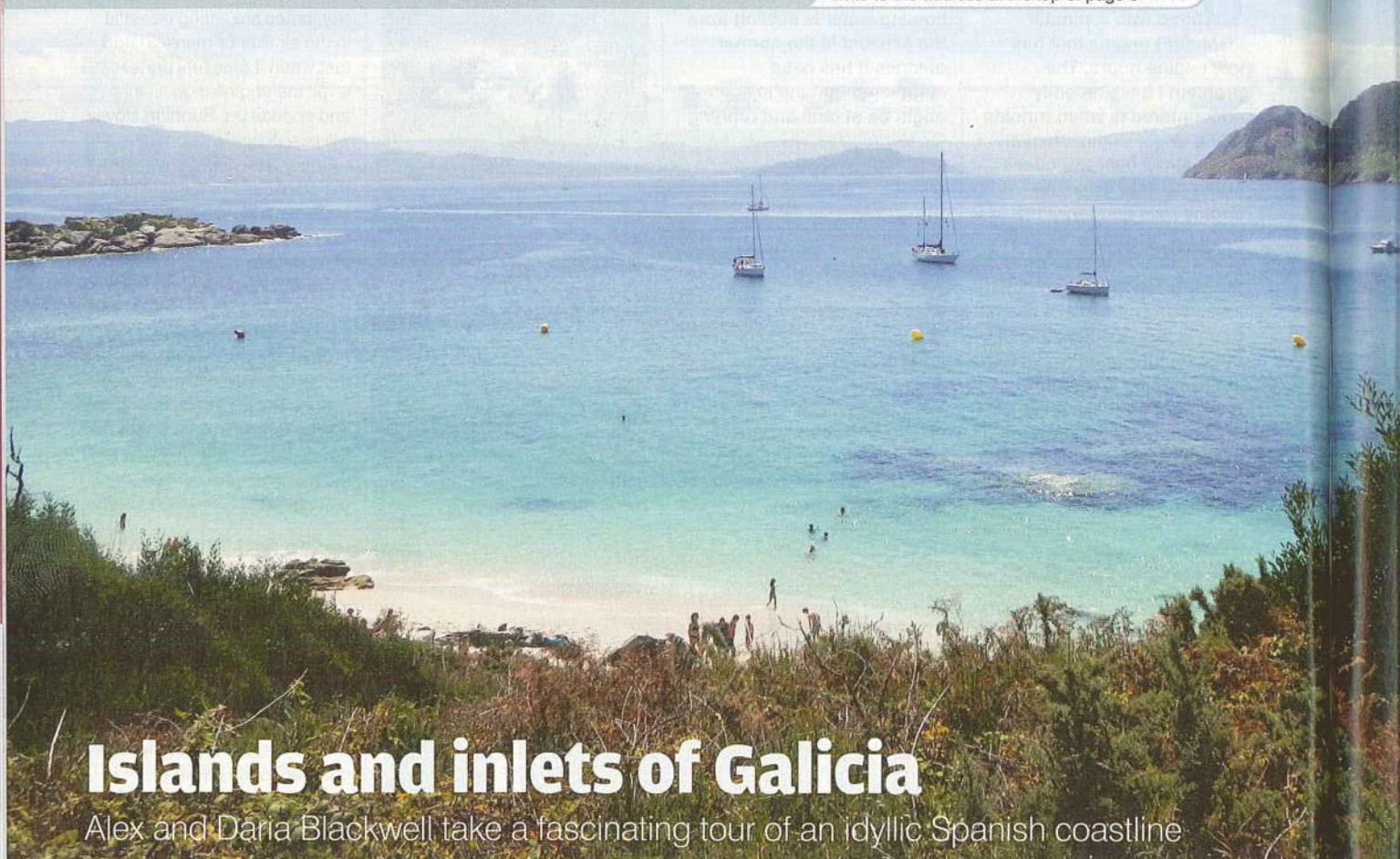


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## Islands and inlets of Galicia

Alex and Daria Blackwell take a fascinating tour of an idyllic Spanish coastline

**B**lessed with protected sea inlets and inviting coastal villages and harbours, the Rías Baixas – as the western coastal region of Galicia has come to be known – is an idyllic cruising ground.

Technically these rías are the four main estuarine inlets on the north-west coast of Spain south of Finisterre.

Like in Scotland, you can pull up anchor in one harbour, stop in another for lunch, and continue on to a marina in a third for the night. It's easy to get lazy about pulling up sails between destinations, but there are days when the wind is too good

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Captains Alex and Daria Blackwell write fiction and non-fiction books and articles, often sailing related. Their cutter rigged Bowman 57 ketch

*Aleria* is currently overwintering in Galicia. Their work can be found on [www.whiteseahorse.ie](http://www.whiteseahorse.ie) and [www.coastalboating.net](http://www.coastalboating.net)

to pass up a more lengthy sail.

At the mouth of several rías are islands that are part of a national park system. Permits are required to anchor and go ashore. The general permit, which lasts for two years, must be acquired well in advance, and daily anchoring permits may then be applied for as needed.

Up-to-date charts are advised as much infrastructure has changed in recent years. Sailing from one ría to another can require careful navigation to avoid the many granite boulders that dot the coast, not to mention the countless mussel farm rafts in the rías.

Travelling from north to south are five or six main rías, depending on how you define 'main'.

### Ría de Corcubion

Often not included in the list of Rías Baixas, Corcubion is tucked inside Cape Finisterre and below the charmingly named Costa del Morte; it terminates to the north. It features Corcubion, an enchanting old world village flanked by Cee, a small city. There is no marina, but holding is good in mud and the anchorage is protected by surrounding hills.

### Ría de Muros e Noia

Muros has a new gated marina in an ancient town undergoing a resurgence. The anchorage outside the marina is nicely protected and has access to shore via a massive slipway.

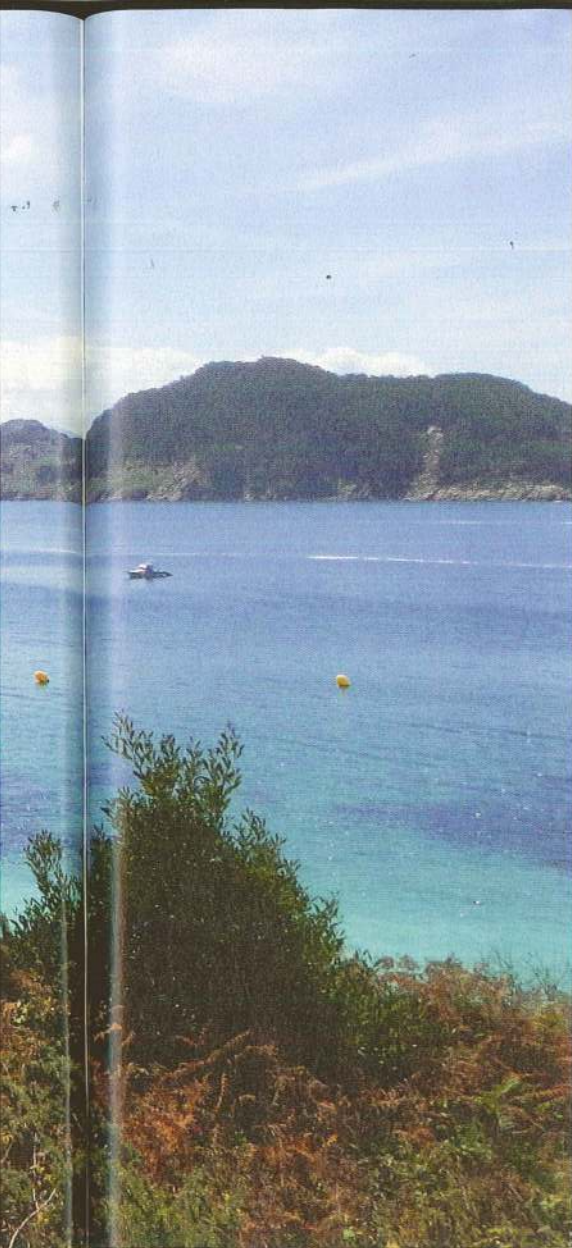
Across from Muros is Portosin where the Real Club de Portosin has an extraordinarily helpful multi-lingual, English-speaking staff, and a stable of good mechanics, electricians and others. The facilities are excellent.

At the head of the Ría is Noia, now only accessible by shallow draught vessels. Noia was one of the main landing points for pilgrims transiting the 'English Camino' to Santiago de Compostella from Britain and what is now Ireland. Departure points in Ireland included Dingle and St. James' Gate in Dublin.

### Ría de Arousa

Arousa is the largest ría with the most ports and anchorages to explore. The islands of the Salvora archipelago which sit in its mouth are part of the National Park system. Santa Uxia de Ribiera and Vilanova are busy fishing ports with small marinas. Pobra do Caraminal's waterfront is tree lined





**ABOVE** Picturesque anchorage off the Illas Cies in aqua blue water

and inviting and the old town boasts a lovely church and private, high walled estates.

Caraminal marina is convenient to the town, but many of the planned amenities are not yet available.

The Illa de Arousa, connected by bridge to the mainland, has nice anchorages, one just inside the Punta Caballo where the lighthouse is now a restaurant.

The small fishing port Xufre has excellent haul-out facilities. Nito, the owner of the yard is a yachtsman and keen to assist. He even keeps a car for clients' use.

### Ría de Pontevedra

The Illas de Ons (National Park) are at the mouth of the ría. Club Nautico de San Vicente del Mar has an interesting marina with a fine restaurant and access to some of the nicest beaches in the rías.

Combaro at the head of the ría has a new marina with a massive outer concrete pontoon. A unique centuries-old area along the waterfront has shops, restaurants and bars carved into the rock walls and many hórreos, or granaries.



Compared with other Galician towns that seem to have little planning, Cambados, with its charming main street, bodega-lined courtyard and large church on a major central plaza, is aesthetically pleasing. It is considered the home of albariño wine; there are numerous wine bars, a wine museum and winery in the Castillo.

Alas, the harbour and its approach is shallow so anchoring way out is the only option. A marina is planned.

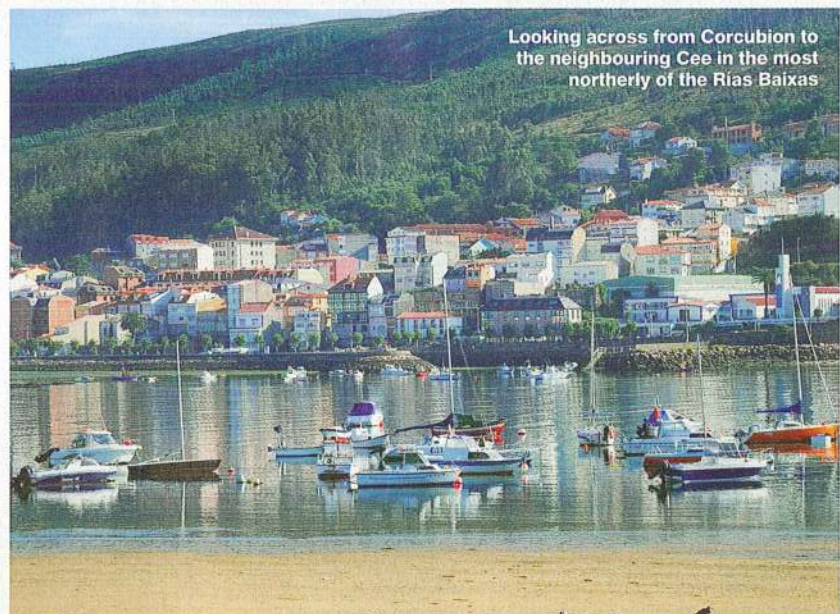
### Ría de Aldán

Arguably part of the Ría de Pontevedra, the Ría de Aldán terminates to the south. There

is no marina but there is good holding in sand and shelter from all but the north. Its water is the warmest of all the rías – long stretches of white sand warm the water as the tide comes in. The village has all the basics plus a couple of very good restaurants and a beach bar. Walk up the hillside streets to the village of O Hío to see the magnificently carved cruceiro and take in the spectacular vistas.

### Ría de Vigo

The Illas Cies (National Park) form a protective barrier at the mouth of the Ría de Vigo, southernmost of the Rías



Looking across from Corcubión to the neighbouring Cee in the most northerly of the Rías Baixas

Alamy



Baixas. On its north shore is Ensenada de Barra, a lovely anchorage with wooded hills and long beaches. Along the north shore lie Cangas and Moaña, charming ports with welcoming marinas, fresh food markets plus all amenities.

Across is Vigo, an industrial port and ancient city with much charm and boating heritage. The Real Club Nautico de Vigo, in the heart of the old city, welcomes visitors. Vigo has everything a yachtsman might need. With its nearby airport, Vigo is excellent for crew changes or overwintering a boat. Alberto Lagos, of the boatyard Astilleros Lagos, is looking after our boat and can cater to your every need. Several larger marinas with good services can be found in either direction outside of town.

### Baiona

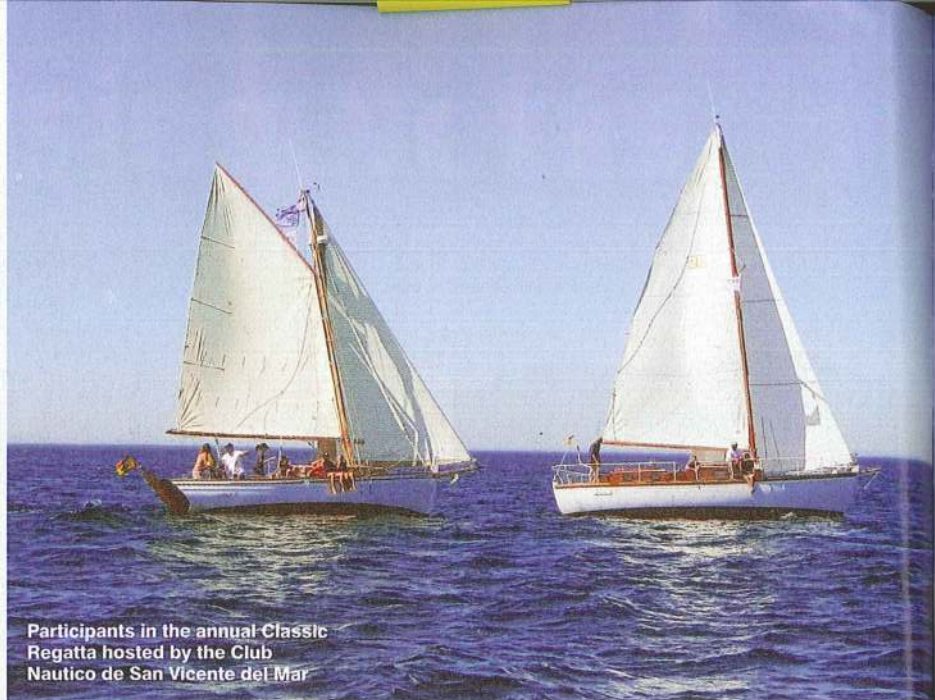
(Bayona in Spanish), in the southwestern corner of the Ría de Vigo is protected by an ancient fortified promontory owned and run by the state as a Parador hotel.

The Monte Real Club de Yates de Bayona (MRCYB) is at the base of the fort. Once very exclusive, the MRCYB marina now welcomes visitors. It has an excellent fuel dock, showers, laundry service, and restaurant for food and cocktails. A visit by car is highly recommended to Castro de Santa Tegra (or Tecla), overlooking the Rio Miño and Portugal, where a prehistoric Celtic city has been unearthed.

Culturally distinct and easily accessible, Spain conjures up images of flamenco, paella, intolerable heat, and bullfighting. You won't find any of these in Galicia.

Galicians are of Celtic origin and share roots with Celtic Brittany, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland. Their music is made with bagpipes that look just like the Irish uilleann pipes, drums similar to Irish bodhrans, shells and rhythmic vocals.

Gallego as a language is distinct from Spanish, hence signs and menus are written in both (think A Coruna and La Coruna or Baiona and Bayona). Gallego sounds more akin to Portuguese than Spanish. Though English is not common,



Participants in the annual Classic Regatta hosted by the Club Nautico de San Vicente del Mar

the people are very helpful and friendly.

*Spanish for Cruisers* by Kathy Parsons is useful to have aboard for nautical terms, as is Google Translate on your smartphone.

The Camino to Santiago de Compostela is central to life here. Follow the trail of scallop shells and two-sided crosses or cruceiros that mark the pilgrim paths through many towns.

The climate catches some by surprise. On the Atlantic coast, Galicia shares similarities with the west of Ireland. It rains quite often. Being farther south, Galicia is warmer than Ireland, but the waters are cold. Fog is common, especially in the mornings. The afternoons are often sunny and warm, before cooling down towards evening. The prevailing winds in Galicia in the summer are northerly. Forecasts are delivered via VHF in English and Spanish, though the former can still be quite difficult to understand.

Life in Galicia has a different rhythm. Shops open late in the morning, close for much of the afternoon, then reopen for the evening hours. Dinner starts around 9pm. Prices are very reasonable.

### Seafood tapas

Galicia is one of the best places to eat seafood in the world, and is among the world's biggest producers of farmed mussels. Giant mussel rafts are anchored straight down on heavy chains in about 60ft of water; navigation between the rafts is not a problem. Pulpo (octopus), a traditional favourite, and clams, mussels, lobster, crab, scallops, prawns and small fish – with



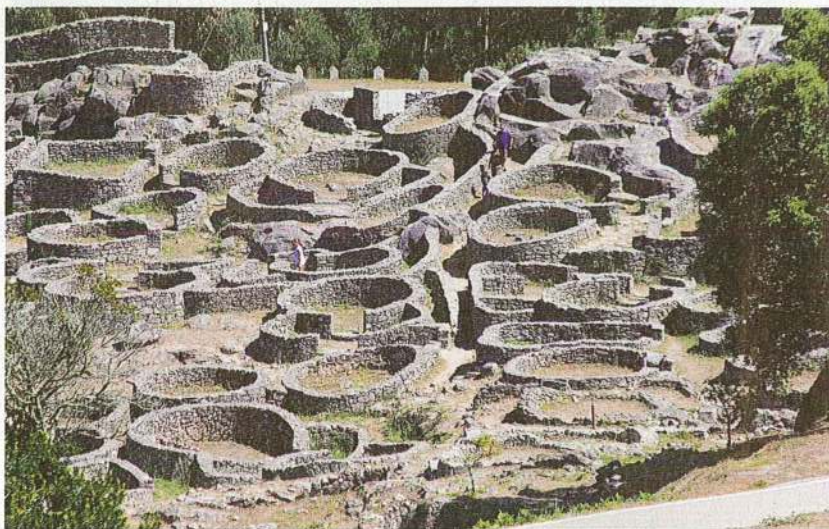
Typical seafood tapas meal

or without rice – are served up in tapas portions. Pork is the meat staple, but vegetables are rarely served so prepare to be a carnivore.

The Rías Baixas have secured a Denominación de Origen designation for Albariño, a crisp full bodied wine with sea salt overtones. There are many opportunities to sample the wines and visit vineyards.

The region is blessed with crystal clear aqua waters and white sand beaches, many of which make excellent anchorages.

If marinas are your preference, then it pays to join Asociación de Clubes Náuticos de Galicia (ASNAUGA), a collective of 27 yacht clubs with more than 3,000 berths on the north coast and in the Rías on the west coast. ASNAUGA's passport (cost €5) earns you a 15 per cent reduction on berths in its clubs. Ask at the office of any ASNAUGA club, install their handy app on your smartphone and you'll have information on all their clubs in the palm of your hand. Visit [www.asnauga.com](http://www.asnauga.com) to learn more.



Castro de Santa Tegra, a prehistoric city built atop a mountain