



Lorena Varela
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Rías Baixas

Rías Baixas Wine Route: Gastronomy Tips for Galicia's Crown Jewel

Food & Drink: Do you have any tips for travelers coming to the region for the first time?

Lorena Varela: First of all, we recommend coming here with enough time and a real desire to have fun. Apart from that, bring comfortable clothes. If you really want to discover different places and engage in some amazing sightseeing, you should walk for a while at some point. Our natural, historical, and cultural environment includes many attractions on the Rías Baixas Wine Route. We also suggest arranging for your local transportation. The best option is renting a car to get from one place to another. Taking into account that our wine route has five different sub-regions, visitors should ensure they can get from one place to another. You'll notice that our member wineries are localized in five different sub-regions. If you really want to discover the charm of our Wine Route, you should visit at least two or three of these sub-regions. (The five sub-regions are Ribeira do Ulla, Val do Salnés, Soutomaior, Condado do Tea, and O Rosal.) It can take from 30 minutes to 90 minutes to get from one region to the other, depending on the regions, but the drives are worth it. Traveling to the different sub-regions allows an opportunity to enjoy the area and all of our beautiful, lush green coastal landscapes.

FD: Are there any special yearly events or festivals in the region that you would recommend visitors consider booking their travel around?

LV: Our territory is very well-known for its numerous gastronomic and cultural festivals. Apart from the Albariño D.O. Rías Baixas Festival during the first week of August, we also have other wine festivals in the different sub-regions during summer. These include the O Rosal Wine Festival (Feira do Viño do Rosal), which is usually held during the second or third week of July in O Rosal; the Rías Baixas Red Wine Festival (Festa do Tinto D.O. Rías Baixas), taking place in the second week of July in As Neves; and the Condado do Tea Wine Festival (Festa do Viño do Condado do Tea), which occurs during the last week of August in Salvaterra de Miño. I would also recommend our many other wine and gastronomic festivals in the spring. One such festival is the Ulla Wine Festival (Exaltación do Viño da Ulla), which takes place during the second Sunday of April in Vedra. There is also the Lamprey Festival (Festa da Lamprea de Arbo), which takes place during the last week of April in Arbo, and the popular Shellfish Festival in O Grove held during the first two weeks of October.

FD: In addition to indulging in Albariño, what are some other culinary highlights travelers must try?

LV: There is no quick answer to this question. Our region is renowned for our fresh seafood, so visitors will do well to indulge. We have top-quality fresh fish and shellfish, and simple preparation can often be best. One of our most well-known dishes is the Pulpo á feira, simply boiled octopus with salt and paprika. Oysters and clams can be enjoyed raw with just a dash of lemon. Almejas a la Marinera is a very traditional dish of boiled mussels with a dash of lemon. Lobster (bogavante), spider crabs (centollo), brown crabs (buey), crabs (nécoras), or barnacles (percebes) should also be tasted. Our scallops are likely some of the best you will ever taste. You can also enjoy many types of fish, including hake and monkfish; but we are not just fish. Our meat is also of some of

the country's top quality. Ternera Gallega is a beef with a certificate of origin, while Lacón Gallego (pork shoulder) also has certification. Many of the Galician processed food products also have Appellation/Certificate of Origin, including cheeses (Arzúa-Ulloa, Tetilla, San Simón da Costa, or Cebreiro); peppers (Herbón, Couto, Arnoia, Oímbra, or Mougán); Galician turnip tops; Galician potatoes; and Galician broad beans. As you can see, our gastronomic choices are endless, and all of them can be perfectly paired with Rías Baixas wines produced by a host of the Rías Baixas Wine Route's partner wineries. Many of our wineries offer visitor packages combining guided visits, lunches, and dinners.

FD: Can you share an "insider secret" with us? Something travelers to the region might find surprising?

LV: One of the most surprising things for visitors is the annual harvest in D.O. Rías Baixas. In addition to our traditional pergola trellising system for the grape vines, tourists are often very surprised to learn how artisanal the winemaking process is here, including that all grapes in the region are hand harvested—a very time consuming and back-breaking process. We have more than 180 wineries, some of which are larger scale and others that are smaller, family-owned operations. We recommend that visitors experience both. At many of the smaller wineries you may meet the owners and the winemakers who will share many stories and insights about their wineries that you can't learn anywhere else. Visiting many of these wineries will give the visitor an opportunity to taste wines that are not exported. Another thing that I think many visitors are surprised by when they come here is that our wines are extremely age-worthy. While many of the wines sold in the US tend to be young and of the previous vintage, coming to the region will offer a chance to taste aged, sparkling, and even sweet botrytized Albariño wines. You will learn that Rías Baixas also produces many indigenous red grape wines, most of which don't make it out of the local region. We feel very fortunate for the bounty of our region and take great pride in sharing all that it has to offer to those who come to visit.

Lorena Varela is the Manager of Ruta do Viño Rías Baixas. She has a Publicity and PR degree from Antonio de Nebrija University and has lived in Galicia, Madrid and Portugal. Lorena has centered her professional life in event management and coordination both nationally and internationally. Deeply in love with her motherland, she is focused on building Rías Baixas one of Spain's leading destinations for wine tourism.