



GREEN SPAIN

Report by Lee Jackson 30 April 2011

Almost 30 years ago my career in the travel industry started with an almost endless list of bookings for Benidorm, Magaluf and Torremolinos .

This was my introduction to Spain and then one day the agency where I worked received a guide to the "Real Spain" from Mundi Color, the tour operating arm of the Spanish airline Iberia. For me the guide was a revelation and in particular the discovery of the provinces that run along the Atlantic coast.

I was truly hooked on the area and set about visiting Pais Vasco, Cantabria, Asturias and Galicia over the next few years. And I was not disappointed. Glorious golden sand beaches, spectacular mountains, unique cities and a warm Spanish welcome for which the country was more notorious prior to the tourism boom on the Mediterranean coast.

Of the four regions I have stayed the longest in Asturias. Here the backdrop of the Picos de Europa mountains is truly spectacular. To sit on the Beach at La Isla, Colunga and watch the water evaporate from the sand, flanked by the Picos mountains is a joy unmatched by any other location to date. Here the tidal waters of the Atlantic attract the surfers while the imposing towers of limestone attract walkers and climbers from all over Europe.

While the cuisine may not be the most sophisticated in Europe it remains true to the areas traditions and is a rustic delight. Enter a local "Sidraria" (Cider House) and witness the wine being poured from high over the shoulder to reaffirm the qualities of the cider. It has been served in this way for centuries and the locals generally take great joy in sharing with visitors how the cider should be served and drank.

I once asked a gentleman on the street in the Capital, Oviedo, to recommend somewhere for typical Asturian cuisine.

Some five hours later my friends and I emerged from a "Sidraria" having enjoyed endless hospitality from the gentleman I had spoken to on the street and most of the locals in the hostelry.

To accompany the cider we ate "La Fabada Asturiana" Asturian bean stew with white beans, blood sausage, ham and chorizo. The dish is available throughout the Atlantic region and is to Asturias what the Hot Pot is to Lancashire. We also enjoyed Cabrales cheese, mixed on the plate with the cider and scooped up with the local bread. A few days later I would enjoy the same cheese while staying in the village of origin, "Arenas de Cabrales". This time around having discovered that the uneaten half of my cheese was awash with "Gusanos" (Maggots) I was the subject of amusement in trying to complain when the locals deemed this entirely the norm.

A short journey from Arenas de Cabrales is one of Europes hidden Gems, perhaps the Spanish Grand Canyon. An eight mile walk along the Cares River Gorge. The walk is a spectacular journey of river crossings and waterfalls and most of it at a height not for the faint hearted.

On my last visit to the region a couple of years ago I returned to Galicia at the Northwest tip of Spain. Galicia is home to Santiago de Compostela the third holiest site in the Christian world, and also to the port of La Corunna with its unique windowed verandas, Roman lighthouse and two glorious city beaches. L

a Corunna is blessed with many good seafood restaurants and while you are in the area you should also try the empanada the savoury pastry of Galicia.

The Atlantic regions present a very different view of Spain and are well worth the visit, but don't tell too many people!