

Pontevedra - a Town to Watch

* A Vignette *

I don't think anyplace can top Santiago de Compostela as my favorite city in Spain, but Pontevedra comes really close. Today the walkers are doing 12+km (8+ miles) with no opportunity for me to shorten the walk or use the support bus. Garry and Deborah (my Camino Angels) recommended I spend the day in Pontevedra, exploring its medieval historic center and engaging in some energetic "urban trekking."



Pontevedra, Spain

You know how they say that if you want to know what Antigua, Guatemala (a beautiful colonial city, now a UNESCO site) looked like 50 years ago, you should visit Suchichoto in El Salvador? Well, that is like comparing Pontevedra to Santiago de Compostela. Stone buildings, stately mansions, picturesque squares filled with sidewalk cafes and lots of chapels and churches and medieval lanes that trail off as far as the eye can see. But, even though it is on the Portuguese Camino de Santiago route, it is not well-touristed. It is quiet, charming and most of all, welcoming.



Archways beckon you to walk thru and discover what's on the other side. Often they lead to a quiet square like Plaza de Lena, where wood was sold in days gone by. Notice the cross which marked the path for pilgrims on their way to Santiago.





We are two nights in a beautiful 16th century renaissance palace now part of the Parador (historic building) chain across Spain. This property is called “Casa del Baron” or Home of the Baron. He must have been THE man in town, as it is one of the biggest intact properties I’ve I come across.

View from my window. Room is teeny, but the view is great!

A very kind and patient man at reception has drawn me a walking tour on the city map that includes churches, lovely plazas and the Pontevedra Museum. He warns me it has short hours on Sunday (just 11 to 2), so I hurry over just after it opens.

Am I glad I did! The main (modern) building is a four story glass structure housing a comprehensive collection of Spanish (19th and 20th century) and Galician (this province) art from the 14th century to the present. There are a few separate collections of noted artists. In addition, the the adjacent building with modern galleries carved out of a 19th century building, has 2 floors with a large porcelain collection and Neolithic and Roman archaeology exhibits. At closing time, I am shooed out by the security guard -- I could have used another hour.

This is one of the best museums I’ve ever visited. I am able to enjoy only two of its six buildings - so there is good reason to return! Everything is beautifully displayed and lighting is motion sensitive, so as I approach a series of works, spotlights go on. In addition to saving electricity, this will, over time, save the artworks from fading. I didn’t spend too much time in the 14th and 15th century galleries, as this is mostly religious art, but from the 16th century on - the works are fantastic.

This (new) main building has floor-to-ceiling glass walls and on the upper floors, doors open onto a wide terrace overlooking the rooftops and church steeples of Pontevedra. The whole experience is visually spectacular.



The main building of the Pontevedra Museum

There is tight security. Though photographs are allowed, all purses and bags are left in lockers. It is very freeing not to be encumbered with my purse except when I have to change camera batteries and take time to run down to the lockers and take care of this.

As I viewed the paintings, one scene looked so familiar. I have been to this place - it is a "Somewhere in Time moment!!!! So after lunch, I set out to find this square again, and I do!



Painting by Alfredo Souto Cuero (1862-1940) of the Praza da Pedreira (1898)

And my photograph! I discovered this quiet corner while exploring earlier in the day.



Today, everyone got what they wanted. The walkers added an additional 12km to their accumulation of 100km for their compostela (proof that you have walked the last 100km thus lessening time in purgatory), and I had a great time surrounded by culture and history as well as some good exploring and urban trekking.

Pontevedra is a town to watch and will always be close to my heart.

Family crests adorn many buildings in the historic center. Some are connected to Royalty.

