

From Monforte de Lemos to Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil... heroic routes in the Ribeira Sacra



17

The landscape of the Ribeira Sacra is one of the most distinctive in Galicia. The geography of the River Sil gorge produces a characteristic climate in which vines and woodland predominate. It combines with the area's rich cultural heritage to make this a region defined by quality: the quality of its wines, its religious architecture and the landscape itself.



considerable importance in the political and historical development of Galicia. The thirty-metre tower, built between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in conjunction with the mediaeval wall, was declared a Cultural Heritage Site in 1994. Doade is one of the area's wine growing centres. Leaving the village, a spectacular view of the River Sil opens up before us. Welcome to the Ribeira Sacra in all its splendour. Descending between the vineyards, pause at the Souto Chao lookout point, then head down to the jetty at Doade, where you can board a catamaran to sail along the river. The bridge links the provinces of Lugo and Ourense, and from here the route climbs back up steeply to its original altitude. Castro Caldelas stands on a hill, gazing out from its castle. Its origins are uncertain, although it is known that it belonged to the House of Lemos. It was declared a Cultural Heritage Site in 1994. The carefully preserved village has been declared a Historical and Artistic Site. At A Teixeira, on the way to Cristosende, the views the lookout point at A Galeana reveal what is to come next: the

Monforte de Lemos has been an important town for centuries. Standing on the banks of the River Cabe, it occupies a central position in the productive Lemos valley. Equidistant from Lugo, Ourense and Ponferrada,

it is a key communications hub, especially in the rail network. Considered the capital of the Ribeira Sacra, its most notable monument is the great keep of the castle of the Counts of Lemos, the noble lords of these lands, a county of

▼ Miradoiro da Columna





The **Souto Chao lookout point** (Doade, Sober) is on a promontory in the Sil gorge. The steep slopes did not prevent the planting vines, arranged so that they have as many hours of sun as possible, taking advantage of the mild climate. On the opposite slopes there are large areas of dense woodland. From Souto Chao one can truly appreciate the grandeur of the Sil gorge. Produced originally by a geological fault, it was eroded by the river to give it its present appearance. The land was further shaped by human activity, creating a landscape that is a veritable treat for the senses.



Ribeira Sacra at Cristosende ▲

gorges of the Mao and Sil rivers. Cristosende is an example of a *bocarribeira* village, a concept defined by Galician geographer and writer, Ramón Otero Pedrayo. The village is on flat land at the upper edge of a valley, while its crops are grown on the valley slopes, terraced to increase the amount of land under cultivation. The route descends once more, with extensive views of the Sil, to A Fábrica da Luz, by the River Mao, where there is an unusual treetop walkway. The route continues through the Sil gorge, past coppices and vineyards,

through villages such as Barxacova, Sacardebois and Purdeus, to Parada de Sil. A short detour goes to Os Balcóns de Madrid, one

*Ascende o home
pola ribeira en costa.*

*Agatuña o socalco,
salmodia do alén.*

of the most popular spots in the Ribeira Sacra because of its direct views of the walls of the Sil gorge. Despite the impressive views all along this route, those from the lookout point at Cabezoá are still breathtaking. Located on a steep

slope running down to the Sil, it has a metal platform overlooking a meander in the river, where the gorge can be seen in all its splendour. The route ends at the Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil Monastery (Nogueira de Ramuín). Dating back to the sixth and seventh centuries, it has three cloisters in different architectural styles: Romanesque, Baroque and Renaissance. Declared a Historical and Artistic Monument in 1923, it is recognised as a Cultural Heritage Site. The monastery is surrounded by the leafy chestnut trees so typical of the Ribeira Sacra.

Don't miss...

A Fábrica da Luz-River Mao walkway

! In areas where the gradient may be as much as 70% the cultivation of vines can be a heroic task! In some vineyards rails are installed to bring the grapes up on motorised trucks and there are even plots that can only be reached by boat along the Sil. Harvesting the grapes in such areas can seem a Herculean endeavour.

The River Mao is the Sil's little brother and also runs through a beautiful gorge with steep sides and distinctive vegetation. Like the Sil, the Mao is used to generate electricity, and was one of the first rivers in Galicia to be exploited in this way.

A Fábrica da Luz is an old hydroelectric power station built in 1914. In 2011 it was redesigned as a hostel for tourists, a multi-purpose facility and a centre for training in environmental issues and active tourism. It blends perfectly with its surroundings, exemplifying the positive use of industrial heritage, in harmony with the natural environment.

A path leads from the power station, turning into a walkway running high above the left bank of the Mao until it reaches the Sil near the village of Barxacova. The area's micro-climate allows Atlantic woodland to grow alongside Mediterranean species such as holm oaks and the strawberry tree.

