

Slow Train through Asturias



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You should already have received the following documents, either with your holiday confirmation/invoice, or by links on your MyInntravel webpage (please let us know if you have not received them):

- Spain Country Information document

In addition to the following pages, you should also find in this pack:

- Luggage labels
- A copy of your outline itinerary

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General Information

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General Information

Contact details

The following pages contain contact information for emergency services, Intravel, your hoteliers. **We recommend that you take this information with you each day.**

In the rare event that you should encounter any problems during your stay, please contact the owners/agents in the first instance as they act as our representatives. Please do not wait to report any serious dissatisfaction until you return home as problems can only be rectified if you give us the chance to do so at the time.

Emergency

The local emergency services in Spain can be contacted on **112**.

If you need to contact Intravel on urgent matters, please phone

[phone number]

Note that the international dialling code for the UK is **+44**.

Outside office hours, your initial call to this number will be taken by our emergency assistance service. Please provide them with your contact telephone number, location, booking reference number (if you have this easily to hand) and a brief description of your problem; they will then immediately contact Intravel's 24-hour Duty Officer, who will call you to assist. If you are unable to reach us on this number at any time, you should call **[phone number]** as an alternative way of reaching our emergency assistance service.

Please do not call this emergency number for routine matters or enquiries which can be most effectively handled by our full team during office hours.

The international dialling code for Spain is **+34**.

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Accommodation

[Hotel 1 name]

[Address]

Tel: [number] / Email: [email address]

Manager: [Name]

[Hotel 1 alternative name]

[Address]

Tel: [number] / Email: [email address]

Manager: [Name]

[Hotel 2 name]

[Address]

Tel: [number] / Email: [email address]

Manager: [Name]

[Hotel 3 name]

[Address]

Tel: [number] / Email: [email address]

Manager: [Name]

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Practicalities

Important – before you travel

We provide links to websites for places of interest in our notes and strongly recommend you read ahead, and check train and bus timetables, opening times, prices and whether or not booking is required before you travel.

Where arrangements are on a bed & breakfast basis, we recommend making table reservations in advance if we have not indicated that a table has been reserved for you; whether choosing to eat in or elsewhere, please contact hotels or restaurants directly or use their online booking systems. Restaurants are often closed at least one day a week; where we include recommendations, please check their closed days before you travel.

What to take

An umbrella! It can rain in Asturias so be prepared, although all the hotels can provide them. A torch (or you can use your mobile phone) – in Cudillero you may need one for very short sections when walking to certain restaurants. Comfortable walking shoes that can negotiate cobbled streets.

Diet

We will have passed on any special dietary requirements you may have informed us of, but suggest that they also be reconfirmed locally.

Meals

Breakfast is included in your stay at each hotel.

Money

ATMs are available in Cudillero, Avilés, Oviedo, Ribadesella and Llanes.

All the hotels accept credit card payments which are also widely accepted in shops and restaurants.

NB tourist tax, where applicable and not already included in our arrangements, is usually a few euros per night, and is to be paid directly to the hotel(s); they may ask for this in cash.

Swimming

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In warmer months, some of the beaches are good for sea swimming so you may wish to take a beach towel, they are not provided by the hotels.

Rail Pass

Included in this holiday is a rail pass (one per person) for use on the local FEVE narrow gauge railway network to travel between the three locations and for some visits from each of them (see below). Any additional journeys are to be paid for locally. The pass will be provided locally when you check in at your first hotel in Cudillero.

Journeys covered by the rail pass:

Optional: From Cudillero to & from San Esteban and / or Aviles

From Cudillero to Oviedo

From Oviedo to Ribadesella

Optional: From Ribadesella to /from Llanes and you can break your journey in Poo and Celorio as mentioned in the notes.

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Your Holiday – An Overview

You start your journey through Asturias in the west at Hotel Casona de la Paca, above Cudillero; this is a fabulous old Casa de Indianos with lovely public spaces and excellent hosting. We suggest you first wander down to the natural amphitheatre facing the sea that is Cudillero village itself to explore and get your bearings. From here, you can choose to enjoy a short coastal walk to San Esteban and catch the train back or take the train east to Áviles, a much-overlooked town with a stunning medieval centre.

From Cudillero, you will head inland by train to reach Oviedo, the regional capital and Spain's oldest Christian city; it is also one of the most important stops on the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela.

Hotel Barceló Oviedo Cervantes, your base in Oviedo, is ideally located for exploring the elegant historic centre. Follow our self-guided city tour which takes in the cathedral, ornate squares, several good museums as well as dozens of inviting restaurants and *sidrerías* – cider bars, for which Asturias is famed. Just a short bus ride away above the town are the UNESCO protected pre-Romanesque churches, the symbol of Oviedo.

Continuing east by train, your final stop is Ribadesella and the Hotel Villa Rosario. This is a beautifully ornate example of a Casa de Indianos and occupies a fabulous position right on the seafront; from here it is a short walk along the promenade and across the river into the village.

Fill your days by exploring Ribadesella itself, divided in two by the River Sella with its long curving stretch of beach, seafront promenade and colourful waterfront. A short walk upriver leads to the Tito Bustillo UNESCO protected caves, housing some of the most important examples of Palaeolithic art in Europe. From here, you can take the train to Arriondas, followed by a short bus ride to Cangas de Onis, to experience the lively Sunday morning cheese market, or take the train east to Llanes, another delightful coastal village with a walled medieval centre, perhaps choosing to stop off at some of the lovely beaches such as Poo and Celorio which can also be accessed by this charming *slow* train.

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Background Information

Asturias

This is a beautiful region full of contrasts – the romantic coastline of the ‘*Costa Verde*’ (Green Coast), with bustling fishing villages, rich pastureland tumbling down to grassy cliffs and sandy coves; and the magnificent Picos de Europa mountain range, so named during the great period of world exploration by Spanish sailors, for whom they were the first sight of home on returning from the Americas. Its Celtic Atlantic culture is the polar opposite of the indolent, sherry-sipping, sun-lounging outdoor life of the Mediterranean.

A little history

A much-quoted, popular saying sums it up:

“Asturias is Spain - the rest is conquered territory”

Asturias has been settled for over 100,000 years, with the people of the Upper Palaeolithic period leaving a legacy of extraordinary cave paintings in the eastern part of the area. In the Mesolithic period, *Asturiense* the native culture developed and later, with the coming of the Bronze Age, megaliths and tumuli were constructed here.

In the Iron Age, the territory came under the cultural influence of Celts, known locally as *Astures* who built and occupied fortified hill-towns, known as *castros*. Today the Astur Celtic influence can be found in place names, and those of rivers and mountains.

With the conquest of Asturias by the Romans under Augustus (29-19 BC), the region entered into the annals of history. After several centuries without foreign presence, the Suebi and Visigoths occupied the land from the 6th AD to the beginning of the 8th, ending with the Moorish invasion of Spain. However, as it had been for the Romans and Visigoths, the Moors did not find this mountainous territory easy to conquer, and the lands along Spain's northern coast never fully became part of Islamic Spain.

The Battle of Covadonga in 722 symbolically marked the beginning of the Kingdom of Asturias, with the first of its King-Chiefs, Pelayo, and so, with the beginning of the Moorish conquest in the 8th, this region became a refuge for Christian nobles and the cradle of the incipient Reconquista (Reconquest).

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Of key importance during this formative time in Asturian history was the discovery of the supposed grave of the apostle James (Santiago) in Compostela, which led to the establishment of the **Camino de Santiago**, the pilgrim route that developed cultural, social and political importance in medieval Europe, and continues to draw pilgrims, scholars, tourists and walkers to this day.

In the C10th, the Kingdom of Asturias gave way to the Kingdom of León, and during the Middle Ages the geographic isolation of the territory made historical references scarce. However, through the rebellion of Henry II of Castile in the C14th, the Principality of Asturias was established. The most famous proponents of independence were Gonzalo Peláez and Queen Urraca who, while achieving significant victories, were ultimately defeated by Castilian troops.

After its integration into the Kingdom of Spain, Asturias provided the royal Spanish court with high-ranking aristocrats and played an important role in the colonisation of the Americas. Since 1388, the heir apparent to the Castilian (later Spanish) throne has been titled Prince of Asturias.

The population continued to grow with the arrival of American corn and, during the C18th, Asturias became one of the centres of the Spanish Enlightenment. Benito de Feijóo, a renowned monk and scholar, and key proponent of the Enlightenment, settled in the Benedictine Monastery of San Vicente de Oviedo, and Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, a polymath and prominent reformer and politician of the late C18th, was born in the seaside town of Gijón.

The discovery of coal and iron resources brought the Industrial Revolution to Asturias in the mid-C19th. Around the same time, there was significant migration to the Americas (in particular to Argentina, Uruguay, Cuba and Mexico) and those who succeeded overseas often returned home much wealthier. These entrepreneurs were known collectively as *Indianos*, for having visited and made their fortunes in the West Indies and beyond.

As across all of Spain, Asturias played its part in the events that led up to the Spanish Civil War. In 1934, the Marxist workers' movement fought the right-wing government of the Second Spanish Republic in the Revolution of Asturias and a socialist republic was briefly formed in Asturias, with a totally Marxist administration. However, troops under the command of Francisco Franco were rapidly brought from the North African colonies to put down the rebellion and a ferocious oppression followed.

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Asturias remained loyal to the democratic republican government during the Spanish Civil War, and was the scene of an extraordinary defence in extreme terrain, the Battle of El Mazuco. With Franco eventually gaining control of all Spain, Asturias – traditionally linked to the Spanish crown – became known just as the Province of Oviedo from 1936, until Franco's death in 1975. The province's name was restored fully after the return of democracy to Spain in 1977.

In 1982, Asturias became an Autonomous Community in the decentralised territorial structure that was established by the Constitution of 1978, with the Asturian regional government being given responsibility for areas such as health, education and protection of the environment.

Today a sizeable portion of the region's economy is dependent on the production of dairy and high value food products and, in the areas around the larger cities of Oviedo and Gijón, there has been a determined attempt to diversify the region's industrial base, including plastics and chemicals. However, unemployment has long been traditionally high and remains so.

In Asturias, you're likely to notice a feature that is quite particular to this region of Spain: the colourful houses in many of the villages and towns. Reds and pinks are common, along with blues and yellows, though almost any colour seems feasible! Historically, a coloured house was a sign of wealth, as only the well-off could afford pigmented render. A commoner's house would simply be made from local stone and not rendered. Ironically, when houses are now renovated, or a new-build appears in one of the villages – often second homes, in both cases – the more traditional stonework look is preferred! In coastal towns the house colour had a different meaning though, as fishermen and anyone else who made a living through a vessel would paint their house the same colour as their boat.

Asturias and the Americas

The legacy of the waves of immigration to the Americas (Indies) during the late C19th and early C20th on the architecture and face of urban and even rural Asturias cannot be overstated. Almost every town and city is littered with large, ostentatious, colourful and hugely ornate mansions and villas – these are the magnificent *Casas Indianas* but there is much more to this phenomena than the legacy of colonial architecture.

The causes of the high levels of migration from Asturias to the Americas are many: demographic pressure caused by a reduction in the mortality rate creating

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poverty and a scarcity of resources that could not be 'absorbed' by the developing mining industries. In rural Asturias a growing population meant that the traditional *caserías* (farms) were divided ever smaller and over-farmed. Historians also argue that Asturians from the countryside, unlike many of their counterparts elsewhere in Spain, usually owned their own land, albeit a small patch and therefore preferred to migrate rather than not have a piece of their own land. One has to also consider the geographical location of Asturias and the centuries-old sea-faring traditions of the region. The sea and ocean-faring exploits and explorations was in their blood. So, once the first emigrants had settled in their new homeland, they naturally sent word to their families to join them and the word spread. Children were brought up on tales from exotic Cuba, Mexico and Colombia and the term 'emigración en cadena' (chain migration) was coined. The Americas became infinitely more attractive than moving to Castile or Catalonia.

Exact records of migration were not kept prior to 1882 although it is known that the first significant wave of migration was in the late 1850s – a culmination of slavery being abolished and a shortage of labour, particularly in Cuba coinciding with a relaxing of Spanish law prohibiting emigration.

In the 1880s it is believed that the numbers escalated considerably with about 12,000 leaving Asturias in 1889 alone – this constituted around one in five males from the region.

The migration continued apace into the early C20th and records show that between 1904 and 1918 numbers averaged around 4,000 a year with a record 12,000 leaving in 1912 – now one in four of the male population.

World War I saw the first decline in numbers because of the obvious disruption to world travel, such as it was at the time. However, the pace picked up again in the post-war period and between 1921 and 1930 about 80,000 Asturians left their native homeland, most bound for the Americas. It wasn't until the Great Depression of the 1930s alongside the outbreak of the Civil War at home that the mass migration phenomenon finally ended. Final figures estimate that a total of 330,000 Asturians migrated during this period, a number that represented a staggering 41% of the population.

The migrants settled in many destinations although the chain migration factor led to certain countries being the destination of choice for certain regions of Asturias – many from the east would end up in Mexico while those from the west would

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be more likely to go to the silver mining countries of South America – Colombia, Argentina or Paraguay. From the start of the C20th the economic expansion in Cuba following independence from Spain was the destination of choice for many.

The typical migrant, as one might imagine, was a young male (around 16!) from a rural background who would already have some family installed in the destination country – but it was wrong to assume that the migrants were uneducated as basic schooling in rural Asturias at the time was relatively good. The typical Asturian migrant was hard working, literate and prepared to fully integrate in the local communities. This was evident in the roles and professions they followed in their adopted country and although many had come from an agricultural background the majority now looked to commerce and business as their livelihood and made their fortunes (after years of hard work) in the sugar, tobacco and textile trades.

What is significant is that the Asturian migrants never lost touch with their homeland. Importantly, much of the family was still in Asturias, and money was sent back. As fortunes grew and were passed on from father to son, grand summer and permanent residences in Asturias began to spring up, often in privileged locations and always bearing the hallmarks of ‘Indiana architecture’ - dominating its surroundings because of its size and design. The *Indianos* introduced a flamboyant style of architecture which certainly symbolised their success. Their gardens, grand and full of imported tropical plants and trees such as palms, magnolias, camellias and bougainvillea, were always on view with the unashamed use of railings.

Importantly, this influx of wealth also trickled down to the rest of the region and the social and architectural landscape of many towns and villages was changed radically. The returning *Indianos* became great social benefactors: whole groups of civic buildings such as schools, churches, town fountains and washhouses were built as well as recreational facilities (bowls courts and casinos); some donated land which was converted into public parks. The face and fabric of Asturian society would never be the same.

Picos de Europa National Park

The highest peaks of the Picos have been created by the action of slightly acidic rain water that slowly erodes the limestone forming an underground drainage system. Above the 1,600m line there is virtually no surface water, just a dramatic lunar type landscape, with vast slabs of limestone and a sub alpine flora. This

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underground drainage system gives rise to a vast network of caves – a pot-holing paradise where depths of over 1,400m have been reached!

Beneath the 1,600m line there is a softer landscape where delightful mountain vegetation predominates and where there is a mixture of beech woods, limestone outcrops and idyllic mountain pastures. Traditional farming patterns of transhumance still persist in many areas where farmers gradually move their cattle in spring, from the lower valley settlements (where they spend the winter) upwards, following the melting snow line to the high mountain pastures for summer grazing.

Herdsmen prepare for the movement by (controversially) burning large areas of land during the month of March, clearing herding routes and promoting the growth of new grass. The subsequent warm temperatures and abundant rainfall produce the highest vegetative growth in Spain and the well fed Asturian cows produce almost all of Spain's butter and milk. Few herdsmen now stay through the summer with their animals, and the number of abandoned shelters (*cabañas*) are testament to this changing way of life, as are the increasing number of well-made vehicle tracks that penetrate the higher levels.

Traditionally, farmers leased land from larger landowners as a *Quintana*. This was a package of five parts: a house, an allotment, an *hórreo* (wooden store-house on stone or wooden pillars), a barn and a private space in front of the house. Grazing rights were also leased.

Women have also always played a full part in Asturian mountain life and you will notice even quite elderly ladies getting stuck in, working the fields – still using wooden rakes – and tending to the cows.

Flora & Fauna

The National Park shelters a representative selection of mountain and southern European flora and fauna. Above the tree-line, ground-hugging shrubs such as Dwarf juniper, savin and Alpine bearberry can be found. In late spring or early summer, you cannot fail to be impressed by the wealth of flowers such as Musky and Purple saxifrage, harebells, gentians, Cantabrian thrift, Moss campion, daffodils, Martagon lilies, irises and orchids. Later in the year, the hillsides will look familiar to British visitors, with heather, blackberries and bracken. Thanks to the climate, many damp-loving plants thrive by streams and waterfalls, including Maidenhair and Hart's Tongue ferns, willows and alder. The mixed deciduous

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forest of the lower slopes includes holm and cork oak, beech, chestnut, hazel and birch.

There are a few bears, wolves and wildcats but you're unlikely to see the animals themselves. There is a polarisation of opinion regarding wolves, with resident farmers increasingly unhappy at the wolf population increase in recent decades, but the park authorities pleased and keen to ensure they remain a protected species in the park.

Casual visitors are more likely to see chamois, foxes, roe-deer, wild boar and perhaps beavers. Raptors wheeling overhead include golden eagles, griffon vultures, Egyptian vultures and peregrine falcons. In the woodlands and heathland, you might hear Capercaillie calling and may spot partridges. Crows and Alpine choughs look similar, but the choughs are far more acrobatic and have yellow beaks. A bonus of being caught in a rainstorm is that rain brings out the 8-inch-long Fire salamanders from their daytime hiding places. These nocturnal amphibians are beautifully marked in yellow and black.

The Hórreo

You cannot fail to notice these unique structures everywhere in Asturias, even in urban landscapes. The *hórreo* is one of the most distinctive features of the area; they were built to store grain and are found right across Northern Spain - Asturias, Galicia and Cantabria) as well as some parts of Northern Portugal. Hórreos have an extensive vocabulary associated with their different parts: it is raised off the ground by stone pillars known as *pegollos*; which can be made of either wood or stone (stone pillars denoted permanence and that the land belonged to the labourer, whilst wooden pillars denoted that the land it was built on was rented and that the *hórreo* could be dismantled and moved to another spot); at the base of the hórreos are huge slabs of stone called *pilpayos*, on which the *pegollos* stand. These in turn are topped by a large flat stone called a *muela* which prevents rodents from getting in, the essential purpose of the hórreo; finally, a small stone is placed between the *muela* and the beams, on which the granary itself is built. The sides are usually slatted for ventilation and the roof can be thatched, tile or slate – but always pitched. These days very few are still used as granaries. Some are used to keep firewood or even the car dry, or as storage.

The oldest still standing date from the C15th, and even today new ones are constructed. It is estimated that there are around 18,000 *hórreos* and *paneras* in

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Asturias, and there is a growing awareness from owners and authorities to maintain this unique architectural heritage.

Food & Drink

The sea, mountains and fertile plains provide a wide variety of fresh food according to season. Traditional *cocina asturiana* (Asturian cuisine) is wonderful in its simplicity and heartiness. We suggest you take note of the heartiness as it is not for the faint hearted! The uncontested king of local dishes is the nationally acclaimed *fabada asturiana*, a take-no-prisoners stew of *fabas* (white beans) with pork and an assortment of sausages such as chorizo and *morcilla* (blood sausage). Many dishes include a variety of game, such as deer and wild boar. Apples, walnuts, hazelnuts are widely used in sauces, and cabbages and beans (*fabes*) are common additions; *fabes con almejes* (dried beans with clams) is a tasty example.

Free-range chicken, *pollo de corral* or *pitu de caleya* (in Asturian) is popular and very succulent; the chickens are fed on everything except factory feed, and the taste is almost game-like. As in most of Spain, pigs or *gochu* (Asturian) are found on family farmsteads and the meat is usually salted or cured in the form of spicy sausages. Chorizo of course is made to traditional local recipes. It is delicious when cooked in the local cider (*chorizo a la sidra*) usually taken as a starter or a tapa

Cachopo is the relatively new kid on the block; it features on many bar menus. It is a huge breaded steak filled with cheese and serrano ham and normally served with french fries and red peppers and can be of biblical proportions. It is now so famous that a non-official rank of *cachopos* has been made called the 'Cachopómetro', rating the size and flavour.

Entrecôte a la Cabrales is a steak that is covered in the pungent local blue cheese, Cabrales.

Fish and seafood in Asturias is characterised by its excellent quality. Both freshwater and seawater fish, and shellfish, are used in local recipes. Much of the seafood is cooked in *agua de mar* (seawater) so hardly ever needs any kind of seasoning.

Merluza a la Sidra (hake in cider) is a delicious blend of hake, clams, onion, garlic, tomato, potatoes, apples and cider.

Salmón a la Ribereña (salmon with cider Asturian style) is made with salmon, bacon, ham and cider or white wine.

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Pixin is monkfish in Asturian and commonplace on restaurant menus; you may like to try *fritos de pixín*, (deep fried succulent monkfish pieces).

You will find a sometimes-overwhelming array of fish and seafood on offer in most restaurants, usually priced on the day according to market (always a good sign of fresh produce) – this list should help you decipher most menus.

Glossary of common fish & see seafood.

Pixin or Rape (Ra-pay) - monkfish

Merluza - hake

Rodaballo - turbot

Lubina - sea bass

Besugo – sea bream

San Martin – John Dory

Salmonete – red mullet

Mero – grouper

Pulpo – octopus

Bonito/atun – tuna

Anchoa – anchovy

Percebes – barnacles

Bogavante – lobster

Navajas – razor clams

Nocla/cangrejo – crab

Almejas – clams

Mejillones – mussels

Andarica – rock crab

Desserts

The most traditional Asturian dessert is unsurprisingly creamy rice pudding (*arroz con leche* – literally, rice with milk), usually infused with cinnamon and lemon zest and served with caramelised sugar on top. Not all apples are sent to the cider

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brewers and *tarta de manzana* (apple tart with freshly sliced apples baked in a pastry shell and topped with apricot preserves) is very popular.

The delicious *uesada asturiana* is a traditional cheesecake made with goat's cheese and decorated with fruit.

Other local specialities include: *Casadielles*, which are little turnovers filled with chopped walnuts that have been soaked in anise liqueur and sugar, then fried and coated in sugar; *milhojas de crema*, a custard *millefeuille*; *pastel carbayón*, which is an almond pastry, and *frixuelos*, crepes with traditional Asturian fillings of apple compote and creamy custard.

Asturian Cheese

Asturian cheese deserves a section all of its own. In a country that is not traditionally fond of dairy products, this is a region where the locals love cheese unashamedly. An estimated 40 different cheeses are produced in Asturias, three of which have Denominación de Origen status.

Cabrales is the best known, a blue cheese produced from a mixture of goat, sheep and cow's milk. It is made with unpasteurised milk, salted and matured on wooden trays in the area's natural caves for up to five months until it becomes a single mass of blue veins. It certainly packs a punch but one which is softened by the creamy texture. We suggest you try it mixed with cider (yes, really) on small salted biscuits or, even better, with a piece of sweet *membrillo* (quince jelly).

Other cheeses you may come across are the impossible to pronounce and supposedly one of the oldest in Spain, *Afuega'l Pitu*. This soft, artisan cheese is made from unpasteurised cow's milk and comes in white and red (with added paprika) varieties – you will spot this because of its unusual shape, like an upturned flower pot.

Gamoneu, also prepared by local artisans in the Cangas de Onis region, is a ripe, high fat cheese made from a mixture of sheep, cow and goat's milk. The cheese is seasoned and left to settle in a hut for a couple of weeks before being transferred to a cave until it matures. Unlike *Cabrales*, this cheese has a pale interior with the faint blue veins only visible close to the edges.

If you order a *plato de quesos variados*, you will be served with a plate of different local cheeses, making this an ideal introduction.

Cider (*sidra*)

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Cider is the tippie of choice here and is deeply embedded in Asturian culture. Its importance by far outweighs that of beer or wine in this part of Spain and this goes back a long way; ancient documents prove that the locals were quaffing *sidra* here as long ago as the 8th. Today, Asturians produce 80% of Spanish cider – up to 45 million litres a year, depending on the harvest. And they don't let much of it get away, either; around 95% of annual production is consumed by Asturians themselves, and the cider-drinking scene appears to be going from strength to strength.

It is in the cider bars (*sidrerías*) that the appreciation of this honey-coloured liquid is elevated to an art form. While the drink itself (around 6% ABV, similar to a strong beer) is 'still', it tastes much better when oxygenated. You will therefore often see a skilful *escanciador* (a cider-pouring waiter or barman) artfully decanting the drink, with the bottle at full stretch above his head, and the glass down below waist level, held at a 45-degree angle; because the stream of cider hits the inside of the glass at an angle, this causes the cider to fizz... and this is what makes it taste so good!

But don't worry – there's no expectation that you should be able to do this yourself; this gives the bar staff the opportunity to demonstrate their skills, honed over many years, and passed down through the generations. They seem to barely even look at the glass or bottle as they pour, and are as likely to be chatting to a friend or regular customer over their shoulder as concentrating on what they're doing.

As well as the apparent nonchalance of the display, the type of glass is also significant. Short and stubby in appearance, a wide, flat-bottomed variety seems to work best, and is again designed to maximise the cider's fizz when poured from high above the glass. Only a small amount (about one-fifth of a glass) is poured each time, with the drinker immediately knocking back the shot (*culete* or *culín*) in one go, before the fizz can subside.

When drinking with friends, it is traditional to not only pour the cider for yourselves, but also to use just one glass. Each person leaves a little cider in the bottom before throwing it out onto the floor to 'clean' the glass for the next person to drink. This is why you will often notice a covering of sawdust on the floor of the most traditional *sidrerías*, and why the ritual can often appear to be more akin to a group hug than a mere meeting of friends.

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In most sidrerías if you are sitting down to eat though, you will be given a glass each and the waiter will re-pour when he sees it is empty, if he/she has not spotted you just raise your empty glass as they pass. Some restaurants (not sidrerías) have their own cider pouring contraptions that they will put on the table for customers to pour their own and to no doubt avoid the sawdust and mess, not to mention the smell! Sidrerías really do have a smell of their own!

Wine

Although you will find wine in Asturias from all of Spain's wine producing regions, the reds tend to come from nearby Rioja, and the whites from neighbouring Galicia.

Galicia is famed for its white wines, considered among Spain's finest. The region has its own unique collection of grape varieties, with the best known probably being *Albariño* from the Rías Baixas region, on the Atlantic coast. One we have enjoyed with all seafood is the very good value O Rosal, the flagship wine for the Terras Gauda winery, a delicate, crisp white.

Further in from the coast, the lesser known regions of Ribeiro, Monterrei and Valdeorras produce a range of other white grapes, including *Godello*, *Treixadura*, *Loureira* and *Caiño*. All of these wines have a lovely refreshing hit of acidity and a natural affinity with one of the passions of this region – the seafood!

Meal times

Lunch (*la comida*) often starts around 1400, and dinner (*la cena*) around 2100.

The FEVE (Ferrocarril Española Via Estrecha)

Travelling on this local narrow-gauge network is certainly an experience and one which we recommend you embrace as if you were a local. The whole line (a trio of 1,000mm narrow-gauge lines dating from 1965) dawdles from Bilbao in the Basque Country to Galicia in Spain's north-west corner and stops at no fewer than 100 stations along the way.

The *FEVE* remains integral to Asturian rural life, and behind its refusal to rush lies much of its charm. The train's inexorable trundle means that the sumptuous views are admiringly absorbed, rather than merely flashed on the retina, and the sheer number of stops – may in what often appears to be the middle of nowhere – makes for some very tempting ways to fill your days.

As its name suggests, the FEVE (Ferrocarril Española Via Estrecha or National Narrow Gauge Railway) is a rather different entity to the broad-gauge railways that emanate throughout Spain from Madrid. As the age of rail took hold in Spain in the 1850s, the obvious decision was made to construct 1.67m wide lines to connect the capital to the principal towns and cities across the country. This *ancho ibérico* (Iberian Gauge) became among the widest in the world in regular use, currently second only to the Indian Gauge in use in South Asia and parts of the Americas. In the latter part of the C19th, however, it was realised that this was not going to be sufficient for full connectivity in Spain. While this is an excellent interregional system, it resulted in the remoter termini becoming confined to the end of the line, like spokes on a rimless wheel.

A rail network along the northern coast was therefore required to avoid the towns there from becoming cut off from each other. This was not simply to ease passenger rail travel – it was essential for industry. Asturias was, and still is, the home of the majority of Spain's coal mining, and so a reliable source of transport between the mines and the coast was paramount. Between 1896 and 1912, the section between Irún and Oviedo was linked by narrower tracks able to wind through river valleys and mountainous terrain, and so an altogether more meandering system of rail travel began to take shape. The natural topography of the area shaped the direction of the locomotives, and lines were forced to penetrate or else pick their way through what were essentially the foothills of the Picos de Europa, and bridge the rivers determinedly running towards the sea.

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To call it a singular network at this stage would be incorrect – individual sections of the first narrow-gauge railways were each operated by different companies. The various firms had varying levels of success and growth – branch lines appeared between Donostia and Pamplona well before more central routes were completed. To the west and north of Oviedo, through Gijón and Avilés, and Cudillero, the railways were completed much later, largely to the disruption and uncertainty of the Civil War and latterly due to neglect by the Franco regime. In fact, the narrow-gauge line would not extend to the entire length of the northern coastline until 1972, by which time the government-run FEVE had been created and taken over operation of the network. (Seven years prior to this, FEVE had succeeded an earlier organization which, since 1926, had been gradually taking over the private railways as they folded one by one.)

From 1972, FEVE was run as a government-owned commercial company, managing the narrow-gauge railways along the northern coastline, other than those running through the Basque region, which are controlled by Euskotren. In 2012, the narrow-gauge FEVE and the broad-gauge RENFE merged, and the two now operate under the banner of Renfe Operadora.

Climate

This region is known as the Costa Verde with good reason! While the green landscape is beautiful, it is the result of plentiful rainfall, so do be prepared for this. The temperatures are however generally very pleasant.

Travel Information



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Travel Information

FEVE Pass

Included in this holiday is a rail pass (one per person) for use on the local FEVE narrow gauge railway network to travel between the three locations and for some visits from each of them (see below). Any additional journeys are to be paid for locally. The pass will be provided locally when you check in at your first hotel in Cudillero.

Journeys covered by the rail pass:

- Optional: From Cudillero to & from San Esteban and / or Aviles
- From Cudillero to Oviedo
- From Oviedo to Ribadesella
- Optional: From Ribadesella to /from Llanes and you can break your journey in Poo and Celorio as mentioned in the notes.

The trains tend to be fairly punctual, but it is not unknown that there can be a slight delay so please don't be alarmed if it does not arrive on the minute.

Please check the FEVE section of the Spanish National Rail (RENFE) website for up-to-date timetables because schedules can change at short notice:

<https://www.renfe.com/es/en/suburban/cercanias-am/horarios>

The stations are always manned so you should be able to find out if there is a serious delay although you may have to brush up on your Spanish train related vocabulary!

A qué hora sale/llega el próximo tren? - What time does the next train leave/arrive?

Retraso - delay

Hay (pronounced 'I' as in I am) *retraso?* - Is there a delay?

Bus timetables and information can be found here:

<https://www.alsa.com/en/web/bus/home>

Abbreviations

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Any walking directions that are included in our notes are written in a concise bullet-point style. Please familiarise yourself with the following abbreviations:

L	left
R	right
LH	left-hand
RH	right-hand
J	junction
TJ	T-junction
YJ	Y-junction or fork
X-roads	crossroad
SA	straight ahead, straight across or straight on
SP	sign post/sign posted to
R/A	roundabout

Compass directions are also written in abbreviated form.

In the town trails, we have also frequently used the abbreviation C/ meaning Calle (street)

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Arrival

If you have booked your connecting transfers through Inntavel:

From Asturias (Oviedo) Airport

Direct taxi

You will be met at the airport at the time shown on your itinerary for the short (20mins) transfer to your first hotel.

If your flight is delayed for any reason, please take the earliest opportunity to contact our office or Hotel Casona de la Paca (**phone number**) and they will inform the taxi company.

From Santander Airport

Direct taxi

You will be met at the airport at the time shown on your itinerary for the (2hrs 15mins) transfer to your first hotel.

If your flight is delayed for any reason, please take the earliest opportunity to contact our office or Hotel Casona de la Paca (**phone number**) and they will inform the taxi company. It is important to advise as soon as you are aware of any delay, bearing in mind the taxi driver will leave for the airport 2hrs 30mins to 3hrs before your scheduled flight arrival time.

By coach & taxi (via Gijon)

We include the ALSA coach ticket for your journey from Santander to Gijon. Please note this ticket is only valid on the specific service as detailed on your itinerary. Some services depart from the airport.

The airport shuttle bus is also operated by ALSA and runs every 30mins from the airport to the main bus station in Santander, should you need to pick up your bus to Gijon here.

On arrival in Gijon, you will be met by your taxi for the 40mins drive to Cudillero.

If your flight is delayed or, if for any other reason you will not be in Gijon at the time specified on your itinerary, please make every effort to contact the Inntavel

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office or Hotel Casona de la Paca (**phone number**) and they will inform the taxi company.

From Bilbao Airport

Direct taxi

You will be met at the airport at the time shown on your itinerary for the 3hrs 15mins transfer to your first hotel.

If your flight is delayed for any reason, please take the earliest opportunity to contact our office or Hotel Casona de la Paca (**phone number**) and they will inform the taxi company.

Important information

Your holiday is largely dependent on public transport in quite rural areas and timetables can change according to season. We strongly recommend you check timetables locally the evening before and familiarise yourself with both train and bus options (where available).

Trains <https://www.renfe.com/es/en/suburban/cercanias-am/horarios> **Buses** <https://www.alsa.com/en/web/bus/home>

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Departure

Note: If your return flight is early in the day and you will leave before breakfast, please settle any bills the night before your departure.

To Asturias (Oviedo) Airport

Direct taxi

You will be collected from your hotel at the time shown on your itinerary for the transfer to the airport (1hr 15mins). Please be ready in reception.

Taxi/coach (via Gijón)

You will be collected from your hotel at the time shown on your itinerary for the short (5mins) transfer to Ribadesella coach station. Please be ready in reception.

We include the ALSA coach ticket for your journey from Ribadesella to Asturias airport with a change in Gijon as detailed on your itinerary. Please note this ticket is only valid on the specific service as detailed on your itinerary.

To Santander Airport

Direct taxi

You will be collected from your hotel at the time shown on your itinerary for the transfer to the airport (1hr 15mins). Please be ready in reception.

By coach & taxi (via Llanes or Ribadesella)

You will be collected from your hotel at the time shown on your itinerary for the short (5mins) transfer to Ribadesella coach station or to Llanes coach station (30mins). Please be ready in reception.

From Ribadesella or Llanes we include the ALSA coach ticket for your journey to Asturias airport. Please note this ticket is only valid on the specific service as detailed on your itinerary. Note that some coaches go direct to the airport and others require a change in Santander central coach station, from where there is a regular (every 30mins) shuttle to the airport.

To Bilbao Airport

Direct taxi

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You will be collected from your hotel at the time shown on your itinerary for the transfer to the airport (2hrs 15mins). Please be ready in reception.

By coach & taxi (via Llanes)

You will be collected from your hotel at the time shown on your itinerary for the journey to Llanes coach station (30mins). Please be ready in reception.

From Llanes, we include the ALSA coach ticket for your journey to Bilbao City Centre (please see your itinerary for times). From here, either take a bus or taxi to the Airport (pay locally)

Please note this ticket is only valid on the specific service as detailed on your itinerary.

Cudillero



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Cudillero

Arrival in Cudillero

Casona de la Paca

Tel: **[phone number]**

The Casona de la Paca boasts a striking orange façade and sits on the hill above Cudillero, one of the most charming fishing villages in Asturias. This is a fine example of an Asturian *Casa de Indiano*, having been built from an émigré fortune made in the Americas; it is now a stylish 19-bedroom hotel with elegant lounges and attractive gardens. Hands-on owner Montse and head receptionist Juana are extremely accommodating, nothing is too much trouble and they always have time to inform guests on the best restaurants, days out, their favourite routes etc. Montse speaks English but Juana only a little so do take your Spanish phrasebook.

Your stay here is on a bed and breakfast basis. Breakfast is taken in the pleasant breakfast room. Try the delicious cakes prepared in-house, usually up to four different kinds – we tried walnut and carrot, apple and a very good chocolate and orange and the frixuelos (crepes) with a light curd and apple compote. The ample breakfast also consists of fresh fruit, a selection of local cheeses and cold meats, bread, jams and pastries. You can order eggs if you prefer something hot. If you want an early start, provision can be made for an earlier breakfast for about 08.30. Please give as much notice as possible so that someone can be available to prepare the breakfast (this is a very small team).

Eating out and walk into Cudillero

The centre of Cudillero is a 15-20 minute walk steeply downhill with a plethora of restaurants, there are also two restaurants close to the hotel (100m and 750m). Montse will be happy to pre-book a taxi for you, a short journey to the centre should be approx. €10. The taxis are nearly always available immediately for the short journey so you only need about 15-30mins notice.

Restaurant recommendations

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Please also ask at the hotel for restaurant recommendations for the most up to date advice.

Nearest the hotel

Restaurant Abichera This is a very simple, good value, family run local bar/restaurant is popular with locals and offers a wide range of traditional dishes. It is fine if you want something close to hand. The *cachopo* is their speciality, be warned it is huge and is to be shared.

To get there:

Go straight out of the driveway of the hotel to the junction with the main road. Cross the main road and take the small lane directly opposite following SP for the restaurant. The restaurant is 50m further on the R.

El Pescador is a more formal (and expensive) restaurant and part of a hotel, and as the name implies, the menu is predominantly fish and seafood.

To get there:

Turn immediately R out of the hotel and follow the country lane for 750m to find the restaurant on the R.

Restaurants in Cudillero

If you prefer to walk, the quickest way down to town is the Tolombreo route, it takes about 15-20 minutes. It starts with a well-lit country lane, as you start to descend you take a cobbled stepped path. Which is a little steep in places but well maintained and with a good solid handrail. **You will need a torch or the light of a mobile phone for a short 200m section. You will also need comfortable footwear suitable for the descent.**

- Turn immediately R on leaving the hotel (don't go as far as the main road) and pass the camp site on the R
- Keep R SP Calle Tolombreo
- After 600m pass the Hotel-Restaurante, Pescador on the R
- Almost immediately the road bends to the L and starts to descend more steeply and you come to a TJ. Leave the lane and turn R to take the cobbled steps heading downhill.
- Keep following the path/steps downhill as you wind down towards the town.

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- At a point where the path divides keep L – noting a painted red boat on the steps. (this is one of the marked town trails).
- Just continue heading downhill, whichever way you go you will end up at the main road where you turn R to wind down to the main square and the majority of the restaurants.

'Anyone who doubts the freshness of the fish in Cudillero need only order fish at one of these (fish restaurants) then watch their waiter pop across the road to the fish shop to collect the 'ingredients'.

- Buzz Trips

There are plenty of options for all budgets in Cudillero, many – as you might imagine – offering excellent, fresh, local seafood. Here are our and your host's recommendations – all in the centre near the main square. Note that not everyone speaks English nor are menus automatically translated.

Most of the restaurants close one day a week and many will need a reservation, especially in high season and at weekends. Montse knows all the restaurants well so have a chat with her about your preferences and she will be happy to guide you and help with making reservations if necessary. She will also book a taxi for the return to the hotel.

Bar Casa Julio

www.restaurantguru.com/Casa-Julio-Cudillero

A small, unpretentious, friendly restaurant with excellent quality fresh fish and seafood – priced according to market. All desserts are usually home-made and the rice pudding with burnt sugar topping is exquisite! It is popular with locals and visitors alike and only has a handful of tables so booking is almost always necessary.

El Faro

www.elfarocudillero.com/

It is a larger more sophisticated restaurant but again with excellent quality fish and seafood straight from the harbour and a good wine list.

Opera

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www.restaurantguru.com/Opera-Cudillero-Cudillero

Another, reliable choice right on the main square serving the freshest of local fish. The owners are very friendly and the menus are often translated into English.

Cudillero – Background Information

Cudillero is the name of the county or *municipio* as well as the capital. Within the county three distinct cultures have developed over the centuries. The *pixuetos* were the fishermen and those dedicated to the sea (including the residents of the town of Cudillero); the *marinuetos* were the agricultural workers and the local tradesmen residing on the flatter lands of the interior; and finally, the *vaqueiros*, who were the mountain-dwelling people dedicated to the raising of livestock. Until recent times the three distinct cultures with three distinct languages (now obsolete) had rarely integrated - indeed marriage outside their 'own people' was frowned upon and would result in the banishing of young couples from their own communities.

Many of the sea-faring *pixuetos* migrated in the C19th and C20th to seek their fortune, and the result of their wealth can be seen in numerous grandiose, almost palatial, homes that dot the area.

Cudillero itself is in a natural amphitheatre facing the sea, with the colourful houses tumbling down the terraces towards the small cove. The cobbled streets and stepped alleyways are a delight to explore. The whole town is dedicated to the fishing industry; tourism is a much more recent phenomenon. As far back as 1751 it was recorded that Cudillero had 30 docking points for fishing boats serving an industry based on salt-cured and pickled fish which has continued almost to the present day. The village has succumbed to the almost inevitable dependence on tourism, but around half of the population still earn their living from the sea. This proud fishing community is also one which respects the local environment. The fishermen here don't use large nets, only hooks and fishing regulations are strictly adhered to in order to avoid over-fishing and is said to be the last place in Spain which has a small-scale hand fishing industry like this.

There is a weekly market on Friday mornings and Cudillero celebrates Pixueto culture and the construction of the San Pedro church in the Fiesta de l'Amuravella on the 29 June each year.

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Palacio Selgas <http://selgas-fagalde.com/>

The palace, just a short walk (300m) from Casona de la Paca, was built between 1870 and 1895, the creation of two brothers, Fortunato and Ezequiel de Selgas – the first a devoted art collector who designed the palace, the second a successful Madrid businessman, able to provide funds for the building, decoration and landscapes.

The estate comprises a beautifully ornate mansion with much of its original interiors intact, and formal gardens. The mansion deliberately harks back to French neo-classical architecture. Paintings by Great Masters such as Goya and El Greco hang among the luxurious furniture and golden moulded archways. The three gardens cover nine hectares, and were inspired by the main English, Italian and French designs of the time. Here you find Versailles-esque geometry contrasted with irregular paths, terraces with meadows, quatrefoil-shaped ponds with fountains and rivers. In 2006, the Friends Foundation of the Royal Botanical Garden of Madrid named Selgas as the Best Spanish Garden in recognition of its variety and design.

Until 1992, the Selgas family still owned the estate. It is now run by the Selgas Foundation who occasionally open the house and gardens to the public. Opening hours are sadly not consistent, and availability is limited, so do check before visiting. Your hosts at Casona de la Paca can help to arrange a visit for you if you are lucky enough to find it open while you are in Cudillero.

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Around Cudillero

1. **Explore the town of Cudillero** with walks to the lighthouse and other viewing points – half day
2. **Historic Avilés** – half or full day – train out and back from Pito Piñera station.
3. **Easy coastal walk** – *Ruta de los Miradores* (panoramic trail) with beaches for swimming en-route, lunch overlooking the estuary in **Sant Esteban de Pravia** and a wander around the town discovering its interesting industrial history. Short taxi (5mins) out and train or bus back. Return to Pito Piñera station or Pito bus stop.

The FEVE trains from Cudillero

Cudillero is served by two FEVE stations: Cudillero station 2km from your hotel, for travel to the west, and Pito Piñera, 1km from your hotel for travel to the east. Strangely, most trains do not pass through both stations so make sure you are heading for the right station for your days out.

The walk to Pito Piñera is a pleasant undulating stroll on quiet country lanes whereas the walk to Cudillero station is a slightly more demanding walk (40mins) either by road or cross country (shorter) following part of the St James Way (Camino de Santiago). If you prefer to take a taxi, the hotel only need 30mins notice and can hail a taxi almost immediately. If it has been raining, we do not recommend the cross-country route to Cudillero station as it could be muddy.

Note there is a shelter at Cudillero but not at Pito Piñera.

ALSA bus

You can also catch the local buses run by the company ALSA using your pass, they work best for visiting Avilés or to return from San Esteban de Pravia. The ALSA bus stop is 200m along the road (L out of the hotel) just outside the Hotel Palacio de Selgas. For up to date timetables see: www.alsa.es And note that the bus stop nearest the hotel is called El Pito rather than Cudillero.

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Exploring Cudillero

Our favourite things to do

1. Lose yourself in the steeply winding streets lined with beautifully galleried buildings. If you prefer a more ordered stroll, the tourist office provides a town map with three village walking routes each of which takes in a panoramic viewpoint (mirador). If you like walking, take the Atalaya route out via the village cemetery with its marvellous views over the village; it is steep but well maintained. After visiting town, if you think your knees can take more, return via the Tolombredo route up through the houses that tumble down to the main square (see below for directions for both). A taxi back is also an option, either call the hotel and they will send one or start walking back uphill from the main square and there is a taxi rank after about 250m on your L just after the Bar el Rincón de Berto.
2. Don't miss the return of the fishing boats to the harbour to unload their catch, most of which will arrive between 1500 and 1900 every weekday. The catch, much of which is destined for the prestigious restaurants of the interior, is taken straight to the market for auction.
3. It's a short walk and climb from the seafront out to the lighthouse at Punta Roballera for stunning views of the village. The lighthouse was built in 1858 replacing the bonfires lit by the fishermen's wives to guide their menfolk home. The current lighthouse has a range of 25 miles.
4. Indulge in some of the best seafood in the area.
5. Take a walk through the 700m underground tunnel from the port to the Capilla del Humilladero. The tunnel was originally used to transport goods such as fish and coal from one side of the town to the other and it is used by locals as a shortcut. (well it's not really that exciting, but interesting to see!).

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To walk to Cudillero via the Atalaya route (2.2km):

- At the end of the hotel drive continue SA to the main road and turn L
- After 250m and just after the Hotel Casona Las Selgas turn L onto Camino Fuente Villar
- Ignore the immediate L (Camino Fuente Villar) and continue SA following the country lane as it meanders through fields. After approx. 1km bear L and pass a row of pink houses on the R
- At the end of the houses the lane bears gently round to the L and reaches the town cemetery wall on the R where you bear R passing the no entry sign.
- Skirt the cemetery walls and then follow the lane as it heads steeply downhill with views of the port opening out below you.
- Continue heading down to the village, passing the viewing point Mirador de la Garita-Atalaya on the way. You will eventually come out in the main square by the port, La Plaza Marinera.

From the plaza to get to the Tourist Office, [address]

<http://www.turismocudillero.com/>

Facing the sea front, bear L and cross the pedestrian bridge to find the tourist office a little further on, on the L next to the police station. Here you can pick up a town plan and various information leaflets on English.

The tourist office can provide you with a map of three town trails or you can follow the routes by following the symbols painted on the streets. Note that these have to be re-painted every year as they tend to fade over winter so if your visit is at the beginning of the season they may not be as clear, they are usually painted around Easter. Note also that the map indicates that all the routes start in the Plaza Marina but they don't!

The red and green routes start next to the grocery store, La Gijona, near the old fish market, now a restaurant (La Lonja de la Pesca). So, from the restaurant head back uphill uphill and after only 50m *Comestibles La Gijona* is on the L.

The blue route starts behind the town hall.

1. The Espera Route is waymarked with a red boat
2. The Fishermans district (Barrio pesqueros) is a green anchor

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3. The route of the watchmen (Ronda de los Vigias) is a blue fish.

Whichever route you take, the following buildings are of note:

Capilla del Humilladero (Church of the Humble One)

The chapel dates back to the C13th and is the oldest in the town, so called because in medieval times prisoners were held here before being executed.

Iglesia Parroquial de San Pedro (the Parish church of San Pedro),

The original C16th gothic building was burnt down during the civil war. It was rebuilt after the war in the same style with an unusual semi-circular apse and a single nave.

While wandering the winding streets discover little workshops selling local crafts. The area is famous for black ceramics and an unusual local stone, *quiastolita*, often bought by pilgrims on the way to Santiago because of the cross-shaped flower that appears on its surface naturally.

From the Plaza to the Punta Roballera Lighthouse

The walk up to the lighthouse is an easy 10-minute walk. From the Plaza Marinera head down towards the port and bear R. You will soon see the start of the lighthouse walk off to the R.

This lighthouse has a spectacular site, even by the standards of this coast: It seems almost suspended above the sea. It earns its nickname as *El Guardián del Vértigo*. Bonfires have been lit at this spot for centuries to aid sailors. The lighthouse was expanded in 1921 and again in the 1980s as part of the General Maritime Signals Plan; at that time the tower was heightened with a new lantern and the second gallery.

To return on foot after visiting the village via the Tolombredo route

- From the Plaza la Marina with your back to the blue and white Restaurante la Lonja, turn L and start heading uphill.
- Pass the church on your R and the road swings L.
- Then in just 150m just before a bar and taxi rank on L, turn L up steps and wind up through the village following blue hand rails most of the time.
- Once you have joined the road at the top (about 300m), pass the Hotel-Restaurant El Pescador on your L and continue SA to reach the hotel in 600m.

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Historic Avilés

Avilés is a gem of a city and lies about an hour's 'Slow Train' journey to the east. First, make your way to **Pito Piñera** station.

Directions to Pito Piñera (1km / 15mins)

- SA at the end of the hotel drive to meet the main road where you turn L
- After 320m bear R onto a narrow lane, Camino La Vallina (signed) – this is the second R after the bus shelter.
- The lane bears L with a wire fence on R
- After 200m at the end of the lane turn R heading downhill on a quiet country road
- Follow the road as it winds down to meet the tiny station of Pito Piñera after about 500m

Note: Trains to Avilés are in the direction of Oviedo/Gijon and they can arrive from that direction too!

There are two FEVE stations in Avilés: Avilés and Avilés Apdro. You need to get off at the first one (Avilés) as not all trains will stop at the second one, Avilés Apdro.

Timetables: <https://www.renfe.com/es/en/suburban/cercanias-am/horarios>

Avilés

Far too often overlooked, in our opinion, due to its former industrial associations, this is a gem of a city to explore. The historic centre, with its elegant, colonnaded streets and central Plaza de España, fronted by two fine C17th buildings, makes a fine place to wander, and there are some good authentic Asturian restaurants to enjoy. You can also visit the striking Cultural Centre designed by Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer, one of the world's most influential modern architects.

On the surface, this a typical Spanish provincial city, yet it is a quite a revelation and is finally taking its rightful place on the Asturian tourist trail.

Historic and cultured, with one of the best harbours on the Cantabrian coast, for centuries the city did well out of fishing and trade. However, in the early 1950s Avilés was earmarked for an industrial future by Franco's government. The

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wetlands of the *ría* (estuary) were partially drained; the course of the river altered; smoke from factories 'painted' the stones of the old town a shade of charcoal grey; the giant factory complex of Spain's premier steel works, Ensidesa, was installed within a few hundred yards of Avilés' charming old town. Yet, in spite of this, Avilés has managed to reinvent itself. It has embraced its industrial heritage which now lives comfortably side by side with the beautiful medieval, vibrant city that you will find today.

Avilés has a long and distinguished history, with evidence suggesting that humans have settled there since the Stone Age. Its situation on the coast, bisected by the *Ría de Avilés* estuary, gave it a prime trading position, and the city was an important port and naval centre in the Middle Ages. Indeed, Avilés' coat of arms (a ship laying siege to a fortified town) illustrates the importance of sailing and shipbuilding to the city.

The sea was not just a gateway to commerce, but exploration and conquest as well. It was a son of Avilés, Pedro Menéndez, who in 1565 founded the settlement of Saint Augustine, Florida, one of the oldest continuously-inhabited settlements in the United States of America.

The old town is colourful with pale sandstone buildings standing side by side with buildings rendered in pink, lemon, green and blue. Its narrow streets regularly open out into large sunny squares surrounded by arcaded buildings, many of which are bars and restaurants and offer lovely spots to stop and people-watch.

Wander among the medieval centre's network of pretty streets, such as the Plaza de España, home to the town hall located in the very grand-looking Palacio Municipal and a great place for a morning coffee. Or drop into one of the pavement cafés in Plaza de Mercado, along Calle de la Ferrería or on Calle Galiana, the old merchants' street which boasts a wonderful arch-covered walkway.

Avilés has several major monuments: You wouldn't want to miss the church of San Francisco, its Romanesque facade eaten away by centuries of salt spray; the impressive Romanesque Iglesia de San Nicolas de Bari; or the beautiful C14th chapel; and the barrio of Sabugo, formerly the fishing quarter, is worth a visit to see the stone table beside the church where mariners met to finalise their travel plans.

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Cross the Penas River to discover Avilés' more recent attraction, the magnificent Oscar Niemeyer Centre in the new cultural heart of the town. This sleek, white, modern creation offers a complete contrast to the streets of the old town. The centre is home to art exhibitions and an auditorium with a stage that can open outwards for al fresco concerts during summer months.

Lunch suggestions

Casa Alvarín [address] www.casaalvarin.com/) is a cider house with sawdust on the floors and Joselito hams hanging from the ceiling, and serves up plates of octopus and slabs of Cabrales cheese.

Tierra Astur [address], www.tierra-astur.com/tierra-astur-aviles/) is a small local chain of *sidrerías* (only in Avilés, Gijón and Oviedo) and included here because it is probably worth visiting for the experience of sitting in a huge cider cask – look out too for the cider bottle chandeliers! It has a very reasonable menu of the day, although you will need a large appetite.

Casa Tataguyo [address], www.tataguyo.com/) one of the 'Mesas de Asturias' (an Asturian mark of gastronomic excellence); food has been served here since 1845.

Casa Lin [address] www.sidreriacasalin.com/) A down to earth sidrería with an excellent range of fresh fish/seafood and high-quality tapas.

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Avilés Town Trail

The suggested tour of Avilés spans the two oldest districts of the city – the old fishing neighbourhood of Sabugo to the North, and La Villa, the former aristocratic centre. Towards the end of the trail, you cross the site (Calle La Muralla) where the ancient city walls once stood – walls which divided the two boroughs, built to protect the commercial interests of La Villa.

Enjoy this much-overlooked town with its ancient porticoed streets, lively plazas, plethora of chapels and churches and burgeoning food scene. Take your time...it's worth it.

- Leave the railway station cross the main road and turn L
- Ignore the first R, Calle Luis Casanova and take the next R SP *Casco Historico* (old quarter) and *Informacion Turistico*
- Take the next R onto a little square, Plaza Carbayo, by a beautiful Romanic church on your R (Iglesia Vieja de Sabugo)

Iglesia vieja de Sabugo (old church of Sabugo)

Sabugo was a hamlet just outside Avilés connected by a small narrow bridge and only incorporated into the city at the end of the C19th. Its residents were fishermen and shipbuilders who made their boats from the heavily wooded surroundings.

This small gem of a church was the original parish church, built in the late C 12th/early C 13th. It is said to have taken so long to build that it is a mixture of two styles: simpler, more rounded Romanesque and more elaborate pre-Gothic.

Running along the south side of the church is a long stone bench which was where the fishermen's guilds used to meet, stone supports suggest it would have had a porch for shelter. The parish church was replaced in the C20th by the much bigger Saint Thomas of Canterbury church just around the corner, and is now closed to the public to undergo conservation works.

- Continue through the little plaza and at the end of the street turn L onto Calle Marcos de Torniello SP Santo Tomas de Canterbury which is at the end of the street on the R.

Iglesia Santo Tomas de Canterbury

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Also known as Sabugo's new church, it was built at the beginning of the C20th. By the C19th, the old church of Sabugo was full to capacity, so a new church was built, coinciding with Avilés' great 'bourgeois expansion'. Like its predecessor, it was dedicated to the English Saint Thomas Becket. Pilgrims passing through Avilés on the *Camino de Santiago* may also have journeyed to St Thomas' shrine in Canterbury.

- With your back to the main entrance of the church, cross the road to your L (pedestrian crossing) heading towards a taxi rank.
- Pass the taxi rank and take the first R (passing a no-entry) *SP Ruta Monumental* and at the end of the street pass under an archway into a beautiful colonnaded square, Plaza de Abastos with the covered indoor market in the middle.

Plaza de los Hermanos Orbón or Plaza de los Abastos (market square).

In the late C19th under the bourgeois urban expansion scheme, much of the marshland in and around what is now the centre of Avilés was drained and urban spaces such as this square were created.

The market place is rectangular in shape and surrounded on all sides by beautiful colonnaded buildings with ornate wooden galleries. It is named after the local born Orbón brothers who migrated to Cuba, where they made their name, one as a composer and the other as a journalist.

In the centre of the square stands the new covered market which is open every day **except Sundays**, and on Mondays the whole square comes alive with the traditional outdoor market. Take time to explore the market, the indoor one houses a tempting array of fish and meat, cheeses and beans, giving a wonderful flavour of Asturian fare.

The place to go for morning coffee or pre-lunch aperitif is the Bar la Escuelina (www.restaurantguru.com/La-Escuelina-Aviles) - just up the stairs as you enter the indoor market on the first floor. The speciality here are the small sandwich type snacks that are offered to all clients by the very attentive staff here. It is a lovely spot if you can get a table by one of the windows, either looking out onto the square or down into the indoor market.

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- Leave the square via the opposite side to which you entered – either passing directly through the market or walking round the outside.
- Exit the square and turn R onto Calle Muralla.

Calle Muralla (wall) - so called because this is the site of one of the five gates in the medieval city walls. It is hard to believe that this was once the course of the River Tuluergo which was channelled underground during the urban expansion of the late C19th.

- Walk to the end of the street and turn L heading slightly uphill on the pedestrianised Calle Camara with its ornate wrought iron streetlamps and lined with more beautiful galleried buildings. At the end of the street enter the main square Plaza España.

Plaza España

This square has been at the heart of Avilés for centuries, no less than 6 main streets converge at this spot. The sandstone Town Hall with colonnaded arches, García Pumanino House and the ornate Marquis Ferrera Palace, now a smart hotel, are the most outstanding buildings of this square.

The Town Hall houses the main offices and council rooms for the administration of Avilés. It was one of the first city buildings to be erected outside of the city walls, and its construction in the C17th marked a period of urban expansion. It was seriously damaged by bombing in 1936, during the Spanish Civil War.

- To leave the square turn R passing the NH Hotel Palacio Ferrera on your L* and, keeping the side of the hotel to your immediate L come to the famous fountain - Fuente de los Caños de San Francisco.

* the **Terra Astur restaurant** (see eating out section) is here on your R just after passing the hotel and before reaching the church.

Fuente de los Caños de San Francisco

The C17th fountain is one of the emblems of the city and is attached to the walls of San Nicolás the Bari Church. It is a series of six water fountains, which aided public health by providing a cleaner water supply for the citizens. Above the gargoyles are two coats-of-arms representing Avilés (the central emblem represents the Kingdom of Castile). Dating from the C16th, this is the oldest surviving public water fountain in Avilés.

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- Continue your course passing the church on your L and the **Palacio de Balsera** on your R

Originally a convent, the church of **San Nicolas de Bari** was built outside the city walls in the C13th by the Franciscan order.

Palacio Balsera was built at the beginning of the C20th and commissioned by Victoriano Fernández Balsera, a wealthy local businessman, the palace is modernist in style, very popular in Catalonia at the time. The building originally had extensive gardens, very little of which remain. Today the palace houses the Julián Orbón Municipal School of Music.

- After passing the Palacio de Balsera, continue SA onto one of the most iconic streets of Avilés, Calle Galiana SP *ruta monumental* and for the Capilla de Jesusin de Galiana

Calle Galiana

You won't be able to resist spending time on this iconic street (the longest colonnaded street of the city) trying to get the perfect shot of its Baroque arcades and colonnaded walkway, where sunlight dapples the cobblestones.

The majority of the buildings are from the C17th when the street was built just outside the city walls and where craftsmen could work comfortably outdoors whatever the weather. As you make your way along the street, notice the characteristic paving – one side is cobbled for cattle, while the other half is tiled and smooth for human feet.

Part way down the street, look out for the Santa Cecilia heraldic shield on the wall to your left. This marks the location of a space designated by the Council of Avilés for and culture (St. Cecilia being the patron saint of music). It may host live music, but respect for the serenity of the area is clearly paramount, as indicated by the motto on the shield: *Comer, Cantar, No Molestar* – Eat, Sing, Don't be a Nuisance! Also on the L is *Casa de los Arias de la Noceda* - a fine example of a *Casa Indiana*, built in 1883. It is now the offices for the Social and Environmental Services.

- At the top of the street and just after the last arch on the R, you are going to turn L through the stone pillars into the Parque Ferrera. But just before you do, head up to the R into a grassy square to see an *hórreo*, El Hórreo de Carbayedo, right in the middle of a very urban landscape

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This area used to hold the old cattle market during the C19th although there is little other evidence of it today. This *hórreo* is considered the best preserved urban *hórreo* in Asturias.

- Return to the top of Calle Galiana and enter the Parque Ferrer.

Parque de la Ferrera

This is one of the largest public parks in Asturias, officially opened as a municipal park in 1976 by the King and Queen of Spain. Before this, it had belonged to the Marquisate of Ferrera, whose *Palacio* borders the park's north-eastern side. Abandoned in the mid-C20th, the land fell into disrepair and forest before being purchased by the city. Along with Parque del Muelle, Parque de la Ferrera is now designated a *Jardín Histórico*, a historical garden. www.aviles.es/en/parque-de-ferrera

- On entering keep a straight-ish course through the park, heading for the stone wall running down the far side.
- Then, keeping the stone wall to your R, bear L to skirt the park passing an exit on the R through the wall.
- The stone wall is replaced by a hedge and you pass a second exit but continue, now heading in the general direction of a children's play area.
- After passing between a pond to the L and the children's play area to the R your path swings to the R to exit the park between 2 stone columns onto another pedestrianised, arcaded street, Calle Rivero (although you cannot see the name yet).

Calle Rivero

Rivero Street (Riverside), is another iconic street in the city and one of the oldest. It was considered the poor quarter of town and also lay outside the city walls on the road to Oviedo and was part of the Camino de Santiago.

- Turn L onto Calle Rivero following SP ruta monumental, Capilla de San Pedro and Plaza España.
- Almost immediately you pass an old fountain on the L (Fuente de los Caños de Rivero), surrounded by stone benches and a tiny C17th chapel (Capilla de San Pedro).

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- Continue to the end of the street which takes you back to the Plaza de España.

Detour to viewing point of the Niemeyer Centre and estuary

- On entering the square, take the first R onto Calle Ruiz Gomez SP amongst other things Tourist Office. You can see the distinctive white Niemeyer Centre at the end of the street.
- Walk to the bottom of the street passing the tourist office on your L on the way down.
- At the end of the street, cross the road and bear R over towards some stone steps.
- Take the steps and ramps to a viewing point of the Niemeyer, the estuary and the industrial hinterland of the port – a stark contrast to the futuristic white building.
- Return to the Plaza España by the same route

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Centro Niemeyer

It has been described as a surreal, space-age barge, a monument to the shifting cultural economies of the C21st, the great white hope and a cultural nexus between the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America. The eponymous designer of the Centre, the Brazilian Oscar Niemeyer, donated his first work in Spain to the Principality of Asturias in 2011, as a gift for the 25th anniversary of the Prince of Asturias Award for Art, of which Niemeyer himself had been a recipient in 1989.

Although it may not quite have had the same impact as the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao 150 miles to the east, it has certainly contributed to the regeneration of Avilés in recent years. It hosts a varied multi-disciplinary arts programme, with music, film, dance, exhibitions, gastronomy and “the word” all on the menu. For more information, please visit: www.centroniemeyer.es/.

From the Plaza España

- Facing the Town Hall take the street immediately to the R of the building, SP *Ruta Monumental* and passing the restaurant **Casa Alvarín** on your R (see eating out) – you may spot the Camino de Santiago waymark on the wall to your L. This is Calle Ferrería.

Calle Ferrería

So-called because of the blacksmiths (or *ferreros*) who had their workshops here. Antique buildings frame the street, and give you a sense of taking a step back into an earlier century.

- In 100m pass the beautiful Palacio de Valdecarzana on the L

Palacio de Valdecarzana

This C14th palace is the oldest civil building in Avilés and the only secular gothic building in the city. The only remains of the original construction is the main façade facing the street, the two large arches are where produce will have been stored. The upper floors with the smaller windows will have been the living quarters. Legend has it that Pedro I the Cruel spent the night here when he freed Avilés from the siege of his bastard brother, the insurgent Enrique de Trastámara, in 1352.

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- Continue to the end of the street passing the small Capilla de las Alas on your R and near the end of the street a more modern building on the L with white brick frontal.

This is the Museo de la Historia Urbana de Avilés – if time allows, visit here for an interactive guide to the heritage and development of Avilés, from its earliest Cantabrian settlers to the present day. www.aviles.es/en/mhua

- At the end of the street you meet a road and beyond a park that opens out onto the estuary on the R.
- On your L here is another palace, Palacio Camposagrado.
- Cross the road head into the park, notice the statue of a seal (La Foquina) on the L.

Parque del Muelle

Before Parque de la Ferrera was opened, this was the main public recreation area for citizens. At its centre stands a bandstand where the town musicians would perform at midday every Sunday and feast days. There is also a monument to Pedro Menéndez (1519–1574), famous son of Avilés, who was an admiral and distinguished explorer. He is remembered for founding St. Augustine, Florida, the first successful Spanish settlement in Florida ...and La Foquina, the cheeky statue of a seal a few metres to the left of Pedro. This is a beloved Avilés character, who has gazed out over the park since 1951.

- Cross the park and pass to the L of a statue of Pedro de Menendez surrounded by four cannons, then turn L to leave the little park.
- Cross the road and head up the street by the ornate Santander bank and a no entry to traffic sign.
- In only 20m pass a statue on your R of the unfortunately named La Monstru

La Monstrua (The Monster)

This is a statue with a tragic story behind it. It represents Eugenia Martinez Vallejo, known in her lifetime as *La Monstrua*. By the age of six she reportedly weighed 75 kilos, believed by some to be due to a hormonal imbalance known as Prader-Willi syndrome. King Carlos II was known to fill his courts with people who had physical and learning disabilities, exploiting them for entertainment. Due to her size, Eugenia's parents presented her to the King, and she became one of his

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favourite curiosities. Two portraits survive of her, both painted in 1680 by Juan Carreño de Miranda, who was born in Avilés. This statue is a recreation in bronze of 'La Monstrua Vestida' – The Clothed Monster. Eugenia died aged only 25.

- Turn R immediately after the statue of la Monstrua onto Calle la Estación
- Continue to the end of the street to find the FEVE station across the road

Important

At Aviles station the national RENFE lines have a separate gate to the FEVE trains, you have to use the steps/escalators to cross the main lines to access the FEVE platforms.

From Pito Piñera to Casona de la Paca

- Leave the station and turn R, first downhill then uphill, heading towards the church
- After 500m at the back of the church bear L then R to meet the main road
- Turn L to find the hotel on your R after 320m

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Aguilar Beach & Senda Costera Miradores de Muros de Nalón

Coastal Path of the Viewing Points & lunch in Sant Esteban (6km / 2h)

If you fancy stretching your legs, this lovely, gentle coastal walk is a great introduction to this gorgeous stretch of coastline. In good weather, you might want to take a towel because there are opportunities to detour to a couple of pretty beaches as well as the splendid Playa del Aguilar where the walk starts.

Note there are a quite few steps to negotiate at the start and end of the route.

First you will need to organise a taxi for the short 10-minute taxi ride to Aguilar Beach, whose inviting golden sands stretch beneath dramatic cliffs. Ask the taxi driver to drop you off at the recreational area (El Miradorio), with parking, picnic benches, information boards and toilets just beyond (about 100m) Playa de Aguilar. En-route you pass a magnificent viewing point of the beach, you could ask the taxi driver to stop for a quick photo opportunity.

Please check the return train or bus times/durations in advance in order to plan your day to suit you best.

Senda Costera Miradores de Muros de Nalón

- From the recreational area, walk back to visit the first beach of the route, the blue flagged Playa de Aguilar, considered one of the loveliest in Asturias.

The 600m arc of sand stretches between Punta Castiello in the east and Punta Gaviero in the west. In high season, this is a very popular spot with parking, showers, refreshments and lifeguard services. The distinctive rock formation in the middle of the beach is the Peña el Cabellar. Legend says that this knight (Cabellar) was turned to stone as a punishment for trying to free a beautiful water nymph from a wicked spell.

- After visiting the beach head back up towards the recreational area to find the next beach (Playa de Xilo) and the start of the route on your L.

Playa de Veneiro o Xilo

This wild beach hemmed in by steep cliffs was renamed Xilo by locals in the early C20th after the gruesome discovery in 1913 of the remains of a local man, Hermenigo (Xilo) Alvarez in a cave on the beach. The perpetrators of the crime were never brought to justice and locals renamed the beach in his memory. **Note – this beach is not suitable for swimming.**

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This scenic coastal route from here is well signposted and takes you up past a further four viewing points before reaching the end of the path at the tiny chapel of the Spiritu Santo.

Capilla del Espíritu Santo

The chapel is built on a natural balcony overlooking the mouth of the River Nalón and the beaches of Quebrantes and Bayas beyond. To the west the entire coast can be made out all the way to Cape Vidío Lighthouse. The chapel was built here on the spot of a former lighthouse in the C15th and was used by fishermen and sailors of San Esteban and Muros de Nalón.

- After taking in the views, continue past the chapel to find the start of the descent down into San Esteban

Take care it is steep (you can go via the road if you prefer – there is a pedestrian route down LHS of road)

- At the bottom of the descent, reach the port area and turn R to follow the estuary to the centre of the village.

The route offers outstanding views of both the estuary and San Juan de La Arena on its right bank. You finish in colourful, riverside San Esteban, a former mining port with a rich industrial heritage and one which the town has proudly embraced.

San Esteban de Pravia

The information boards around town retell the history of this once important port. The town was already gaining importance as commercial port in the middle-ages trading principally in salt from nearby Pravia. In the C18th wood and arms were the main exports, then towards the end of the C19th came the boom, when the large mining companies invested heavily in the port and the railway access connecting the harbour with the heart of the mining valleys and providing a vital source of energy for the steel factories of the Basque country. Some of the most interesting and best-preserved examples of industrial heritage are still visible today. Walk through what was once the biggest coal port on the Bay of Biscay until the mid-C20th with its large ship owners' villas, shipyards, a railway station and three impressive riverside cranes (only one is the original) all reflecting a prosperous past. Back in the early C20th the Sociedad General de Ferrocarriles Vasco-Asturiana (Basque-Asturian Railway Company) brought the railway to the

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heart of San Esteban thus providing a lifeline of Asturian coal for the thriving Basque Steel industry. The station here at San Esteban, built in 1904 was one of the busiest in the whole of the province. The original railway line continued beyond the station through the town to reach the harbourside area but the last section has now been preserved for leisure use. Parts of the old rails can still be seen on what is now known as the Senda Carbonera (coal path) which passed through the houses lining the estuary.

There are several options for refreshments or lunch in San Esteban, we have been recommended Can de Ribera (www.camderibera.com/) and its good value 'menu del día' which is on the road just behind the middle crane.

Return train to Cudillero (Pito Piñera)

Follow the riverside path to the third crane and a roundabout with an anchor in the middle from where you will see the FEVE station just beyond.

Please check the train times/durations in advance as these are subject to change. To see timetables, please visit:

<https://www.renfe.com/es/en/suburban/cercanias-am/horarios>

<https://www.renfe.com/es/en/suburban/asturias-suburban/timetables>

There are also buses from Sant Esteban de Pravia every couple of hours (Mon-Fri) and less frequent Sat-Sun. The bus takes 10 minutes.

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Moving on to Oviedo

A taxi has been included to take you and your luggage the short 10-minute transfer to Cudillero station as per the time on your itinerary. There are just two direct trains a day, one of which is at a convenient time – giving you the full afternoon in Oviedo after leaving your luggage at the hotel (and your room would be ready)*. For the rest of the services you have to change in Pravia where there is a small bar/café and toilets on the platform. Pravia itself has nothing of note to delay you further.

The train line to Oviedo first heads east to meet the River Nalón, the longest and fastest flowing river in Asturias, which you then follow upriver as it twists and turns through bucolic countryside and woodland of juniper, birch and beech. The railway and river part company just before Oviedo.

*** if you wish to catch one of the indirect trains at a different time, please let your host know in advance as she will be booking the taxi for you.**