

TRAVEL IN SPAIN: CÍES ISLANDS OFF THE GALICIA COAST INVITES NATURE LOVERS



The Cíes Islands are an archipelago off the coast of Pontevedra in Galicia, in the mouth of the Ría de Vigo. Thanks to their rare flora and fauna the islands were declared in 1980 a Nature Reserve and are part of the Atlantic Islands of Galicia National Park created in 2002.

Tree islands form the Spanish archipelago - Monteagudo, do Faro and San Martino. Monteagudo is separated from the Morrazo peninsula by the North Canal while San Martino is separated from the coast of Santoulo cape (mount Ferro) by the Freu da Porta Strait. The Do Faro island is linked to the North island by an accumulation of sand 1,200 m (3,937 ft) long known as Rodas Beach, in the Eastern side of the island. During high tide the sea flows between the islands in the Western side and, blocked by the beach it fills the lagoon between the sandy area and the rocks. The highest peak is the Alto das Cíes (197 m) in Monteagudo.

The Rodas Beach was declared by The Guardian the top beach in the world. In summer, boats link Monteagudo with the ports of Vigo, Baiona and Cangas. There is a camping area but visitors have to reserve their permission at the Vigo port. A supermarket, a **visitor center and a restaurant cater to the tourists** interested in discovering all the beauties of the islands. What might be however surprising is that there are no waste bins in the islands. Visitors are thus required to take their litter back to the mainland.

The islands were formed by the end of the Tertiary, when some parts of the coast sank, creating the rías ("estuaries"). All three islands are the peaks of the coastal mountains now partially under the sea and are formed mainly of granitic rock.

The land is mountainous with rough, nearly vertical cliffs of more than 100 m (328 ft) on the Western side, and numerous caves (furnas) formed by erosion from the sea and the wind. The Eastern side is less steep, covered by woods and bushes and protected from the Atlantic winds, allowing the formation of beaches and dunes.

Atlantic squalls pass over the islands, unloading as they collide with the coast. **Therefore the Cíes receive more or less half of the rain the rest of the Rías Baixas coast receives.**

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Date: 2009-12-14

Article link: <http://www.tourism-review.com/galicia-off-the-beaten-path-cies-islands-news1971>