

WEEKEND BREAK

## Asturias

# A weekend of peak perfection

Northern Spain offers a very different landscape and you can fly direct from Malaga to Bilbao and travel by car along the coastal route through Cantabria to Asturias

ANDREW FORBES

The coastal route that runs through Cantabria into Asturias affords regular glimpses not only of pristine beaches, but also the dramatic Picos de Europa, Spain's first National Park. Drive towards the end of the day and the evening light softens this rugged coastline and silhouettes the mountain peaks dominating the landscape; it is truly memorable.

For a short break in northern Spain fly direct from Málaga to Bilbao and rent a car for this stunning two hour drive west to the Asturian capital, Oviedo. Thanks to its supporting role in Woody Allen's recent hit movie, "Vicky Cristina Barcelona", Oviedo has attracted substantial interest as

a short break destination.

Like Malaga, the city is a candidate for European City of Culture 2016. It boasts a rich cultural heritage that has inspired artists and writers across the centuries. Yet most now come here to enjoy the great outdoors and recharge their spirits with its delicious regional cuisine.

On arrival head out into Oviedo's labyrinthine old town to relish some splendid northern Spanish tapas, cheeses and of course the local cider. Start in Calle Gascona where you'll find a myriad of bars serving the local beverage.

Surprisingly, in most places the cider is served by waiters holding the bottle high above the glass, splashing the alcohol



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#### HOW TO GET THERE

- **By Air.** Fly with Vueling Airlines direct from Malaga. Tel. 933 78 78 78. [www.vueling.com](http://www.vueling.com)
- **By road:** Take E15/A7 in direction of Motril/Antequera, Take A45 towards A92 Granada road. Then motorway E5/A4 to Madrid. Then autopista E5/A1 to Burgos, then follow signs for Bilbao.



STUNNING SCENERY AUTUMN IN THE ASTURIAS.

slightly over the rim, supposedly to add oxygen to improve taste and texture but also based on an ancient custom of cleaning glasses between use, when they were once shared!

For the great outdoors you probably need hiking boots if you want to really explore the narrow mountain paths that climb hundreds of metres up into the sierra. This is definitely the best way to secure an uncrowded perspective of the extraordinary and mysterious upper glacial lakes of La Ercina and Enol.

Off season however you can also explore by car, taking lanes that wind amongst the striking

limestone peaks which envelop tiny hamlets of stone cottages, many with characteristic lichen-clad "hórreos" or wooden grain stores.

During a short break there is plenty of time to discover the many deserted beaches and secluded coves where you are never far from a traditional restaurant serving simple, hearty stews of fish or meat with local scrumpy.

This northern coast delivers a fresh experience of Spain. It may combine the familiar Iberian qualities of sandy beaches and striking mountains, yet in a gloriously refreshing and unclichéd way.