

# Northern Spain Road Trip

## - *In a wheelchair accessible vehicle*

A diary of superb accessible stays and fabulous scenery 2024

### Help from Paradores

Simon Miller, Founder at Enable My Trip spends a great deal of time liaising with appropriate accommodation suppliers. Following a meeting in 2022 with Paradores España, they supplied Enable My Trip (EMT) with a list of accessible Paradores throughout Spain, which are featured on EMT's website.

### What are Paradores?

In Spain since 1928, a Parador is a state-owned luxury hotel, usually located in a converted historic building such as a monastery or castle, or in a modern building in a nature area with a special appeal or with a panoramic view of a historic and monumental city.

### The Plan

The plan was to experience taking our daughter Vicki, a permanent wheelchair user on the Brittany Ferries route from UK to Spain, and experience staying in Paradores. We needed our large wheelchair van so that we could carry all her essential items easily plus an all terrain buggy as well as an electric patient hoist.

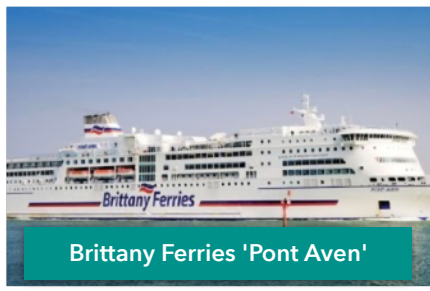


Parador at León

## Planning an Itinerary

I believe that all mobility challenged travellers would need some assistance when planning such a trip. In the UK that assistance was provided by 'Keytours International' the UK representative for Paradores. We needed to explain that our daughter did not need to sleep in a bed. This is due to her disability as she is more comfortable when travelling, to sleep in her fully reclining wheelchair. She is also tube fed as has no requirement for food in the normal way. The excellent agent at Keytours worked with us ensuring that we were not charged for food for Vicki (e.g. if breakfast was included) and planned the whole trip meticulously, explaining our exact requirements. Getting across this kind of message to multiple properties without help could have proved difficult, explaining in Spanish the needs of the party. Thank you Keytours for a job well done!





Brittany Ferries 'Pont Aven'

## Pre-Trip Requirements

As the wheelchair van we used for this trip is 2.26m high and 5.3m long, we made this reservation with Brittany Ferries by telephone, explaining that the vehicle had a rear lift and that we needed extra space for loading etc,

The size of the van meant that we could take a lot of useful mobility equipment with us such as a Delchon All-Terrain 'Delta' Buggy (or 'Stroller') <https://www.delichon.uk/shop/delta/buggies> and a Molift Smart hoist (or in the USA 'Hoyer' Type) <https://youtu.be/zWrgHVYSsV4>.

We hoped to use the all-terrain Delta buggy to get out on some country trails which would not be suitable for most wheelchairs.

As mentioned, all the accommodation for this trip was arranged through "KEYTOURS" in London. <https://www.keytoursinternational.co.uk/paradors-of-spain/> They were most helpful in reserving exactly what we needed for our 14-night stay. We particularly requested that we stay in PARADORES which are of a specific standard and Paradores has been around as an accommodation organisation since 1928. See more about them here: <https://paradores.es/en>

This is the first time we have taken our own wheelchair accessible vehicle to another country, and the pre-trip planning needed care to make sure that the following were covered:

1. Comprehensive Motor Insurance Covering Driving in Spain.
2. Travel Insurance (Personal)
3. Disabled Blue Badge plus printed notice in Spanish.
4. DVLA V5 Vehicle Registration Document to be Carried in the Vehicle
5. Breakdown Cover applicable to Spain.
6. Driving Licence(s) and Insurances Checked and OK.
7. Vehicle Fully Serviced Before the Trip, Tyre Pressures, Oil etc.
8. Mandatory 2 x Warning Triangles for Spain.
9. Mandatory Spare Lamps to be Carried at All Times.
10. UK Sticker on rear of vehicle
11. Hi—Viz Reflective Yellow Tabards/Jackets Obligatory **for all** Occupants of the Vehicle.
12. Application of Headlight Lens Deflectors.

*PLUS all the usual electric socket adapters for medical equipment plus a UK four or six-point extension cable (an absolute must!)*



**Esta tarjeta pertenece a una persona con movilidad reducida que visita su país**

La mayoría de los Estados Miembros de la UE y la UEE reconocen y aceptan esta tarjeta de aparcamiento para personas con movilidad reducida procedentes de otro país. Esto les concede las mismas facilidades de aparcamiento que a los ciudadanos con movilidad reducida del país donde se encuentran. (Recomendaciones del Consejo de la Unión Europea 98/376/EC y 2008/205/EC ; Resolución 97/4 ECMT)

Para más información, visite:

[http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/document/index\\_en.htm#h2-5](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/document/index_en.htm#h2-5)

**Nota: Exponga esta tarjeta al lado de su tarjeta de aparcamiento**

**Notice Available on UK DVLA Website**

# Northern Spain Road Trip

- *In a wheelchair accessible vehicle*



## Day 1 - Wednesday 22nd May 2024

**Travel from Dorset to Plymouth (Millbay Docks) 86 miles.**

**Journey on Brittany Ferries ship 'Pont Aven' from Plymouth to Santander (21 hours)**

The check-in at the ferry terminal went very smoothly. The ferry appeared to be full and we had to make sure that when our wheelchair van is loaded that they leave enough space behind our vehicle for the rear lift and space to manoeuvre the wheelchair. The access point from the car deck to the elevator took some effort as it was a very steep ramp with a lump right at the top .

We reserved cabin 6304 - an accessible 4-Berth Cabin. It was OK for one night but the threshold between the cabin and bathroom was very high and I would imagine quite a challenge for some wheelchair users.



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### Day 2 - Thursday 23rd May 2024

#### Arrival Santander Drive Santander to Parador Cangas de Onís (88 miles)

We spent a comfortable night on board, and disembarked the ship at 12.25 the next day. The staff onboard Brittany Ferries were kind and helpful.

The drive from Santander was fairly easy with motorways ('Autopistas') most of the way. The **Parador at Cangas de Onís** is built around the historical 12th century monastery and has a great deal of history; the accommodation and restaurant part is modern and clean. The accessible room, number 215 was a good size with a suitable 'roll-in' shower. <https://paradores.es/en/parador-de-cangas-de-onis>



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## Day 2 - Thursday 23rd May 2024 Cangas de Onís



# Northern Spain Road Trip

## - *In a wheelchair accessible vehicle*



### Day 3 Friday 24th May 2024

#### In Canga de Onís Drive to Covadonga Lakes and Return (33 miles)

This incredibly scenic journey is not for the faint-hearted as the road is quite narrow in places with some very steep drops to the edge of the road, often without barriers. It was challenging with many hairpin ends and steep inclines, with encounters of tour buses ,which always seem to appear at the narrowest part of the road.

The journey up to the summit took longer than planned due to the terrain and challenging roadway. <https://www.spain.info/en/discover-spain/lakes-covadonga-asturias-practical-advice/>

We did have bit of a panic with the fuel situation in the van. As the round-trip was only 33 miles we believed that over a quarter of a tank of fuel would be OK. This turned out to be over optimistic. The amount of steep inclines drained the fuel to such a point that half way up the mountain the fuel warning light illuminated . There was no phone signal and the nearest petrol was 22 miles away on the way back to Cangas de Onís . We had visions of running out of fuel on a narrow mountain road with no means of direct phone communication .

The scenery was spectacular and the summit offered hikers a great choice of trails.

The great thing about going downhill is that you use very little fuel . Thank goodness! We made it to the petrol station running on fumes. Lesson learnt: Never leave so little fuel in your tank if you do not know where the next petrol station is, and you are unsure of the terrain of your journey.

In the afternoon we took a stroll into the town of Canga de Onís about 3-4 miles roundtrip. This is a pretty town with an amazing Roman bridge as a striking landmark.



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## Day 3 Friday 24th May 2024

In Canga de Onís  
Drive to Covadonga Lakes and Return (33 miles)



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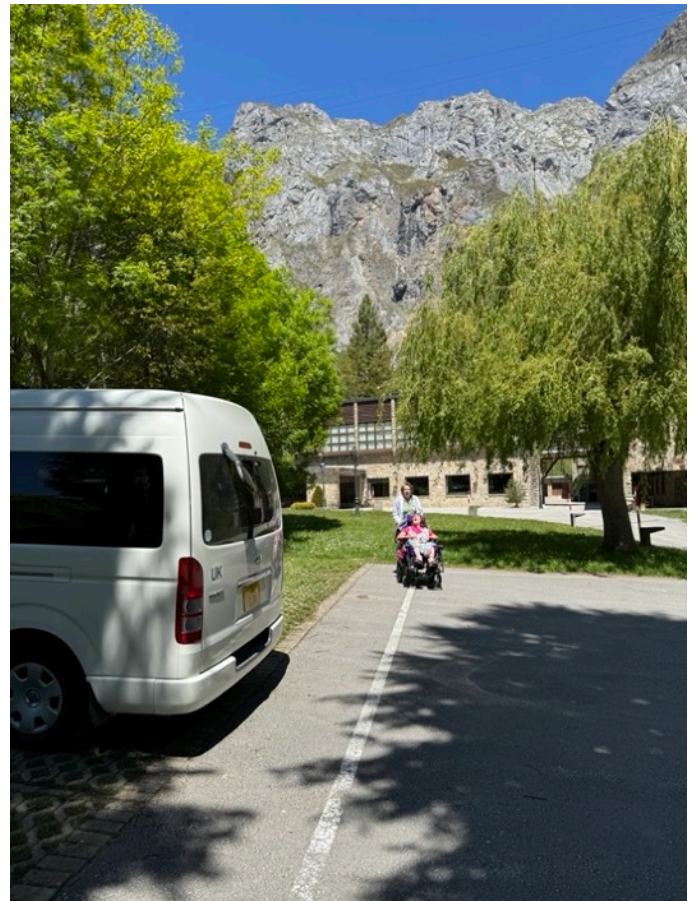


## Day 4 Saturday 25th May 2024

### Drive from Canga de Onís to Fuente Dé (88 miles)

The journey from Canga de Onís starts with good wide roads and a bit of motorway. Once you leave the main roads, the route takes you through some very mountainous countryside with fabulous vistas. There were a lot of roadworks with one way traffic on the main routes which made the journey slow going, but it was worth the delay, once we arrived.

Fuente De'' is in the heart of the National Park 'Picos de Europa' ( <https://www.spain.info/en/nature/picos-europa-national-park/> ) and offers some excellent hiking trails for the able-bodied.





# Northern Spain Road Trip

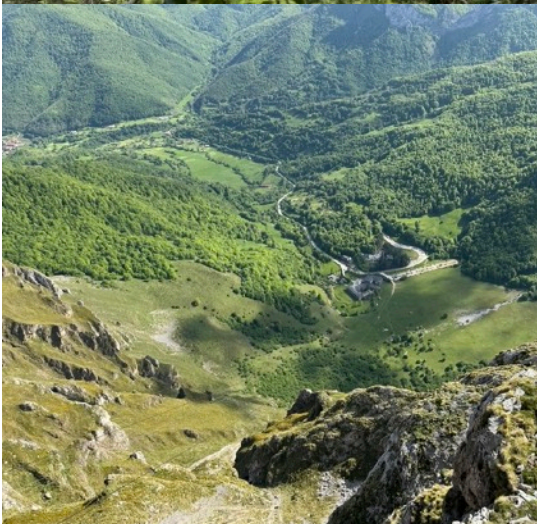
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The Parador is in a spectacular setting with a mountain backdrop, and is next door to the accessible cable car which whisks visitors to the top of the mountain in just under 5 minutes. The ramped access was built in 1966, so the ramps are quite steep at around 25 degrees, so some help is needed in embarking and disembarking, but the personnel are very helpful. The views from the top are quite spectacular. Many hiking trails start from the top of the mountain .

The Parador is in traditional mountain style. <https://www.turismoasturias.es/en/descubre/donde-ir/municipios/cangas-de-onis> We were aware that there was no accessible room available for our first night, but the remaining two nights would be ok, we accepted this and the room we had was OK, but a bit cramped. Wheelchair access into the bathroom was possible if arm rests were removed!

<https://www.turismoasturias.es/en/descubre/donde-ir/municipios/cangas-de-onis>



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## Day 5 - Sunday 26th May 2024

### In Fuente Dé All-Terrain Buggy Walk

This morning the helpful Parador staff made sure that our accessible room was ready for us to move in by 11am. Room 101 was spacious and had a good size bathroom with roll-in shower. It was noticeable that there were no WC grab rails etc, so not great for everyone.

After moving rooms we hoisted Vicki into her all-terrain buggy and set off on what looked like a fairly easy trail. It was OK for a mile or so (rough in parts, a bit muddy) but some of the steep inclines were quite a challenge. Who needs to go to the gym?? After a couple of miles and a good work out, it was time to relax.



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## Day 6 - Monday 27th May 2024

In Fuente Dé

Trip to Potes (31 miles)

<https://turismodecantabria.com/municipios/potes/>

The weather today was cloudy with no views of the mountain tops, but the sun did come out later. Potes is about a 30 minute drive away, and slightly hilly in places - the fifth (motorised) wheel on the wheelchair came into its own today. The Parador has a lovely outside terrace with views of the mountains - lovely to listen to the silence and birdsong.



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## Day 7 - Tuesday 28th May 2024

### Drive to León (117 miles)

The route from Fuente Dé takes you through some spectacular scenery - the upwards mountain gradients seem to last a long time but the views are spectacular; once we were out of the National Park 'Picos de Europa' the terrain became a little more driver friendly with less gradients and wider, faster roads.



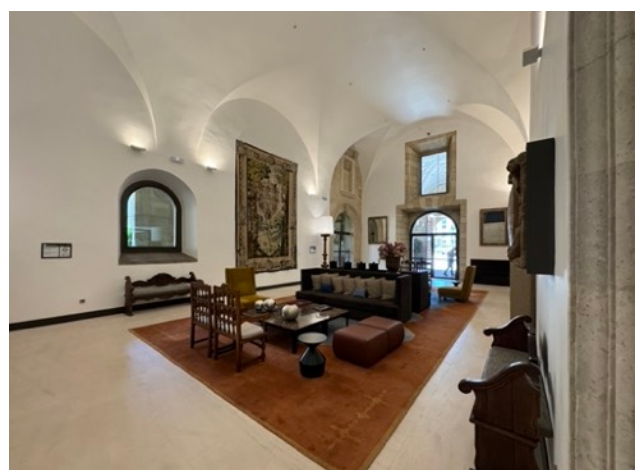
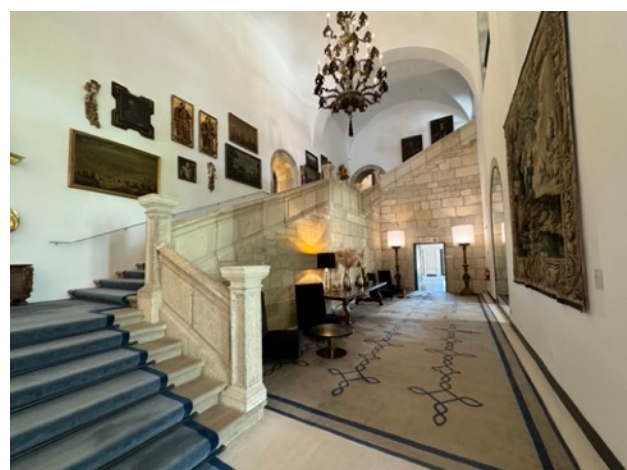
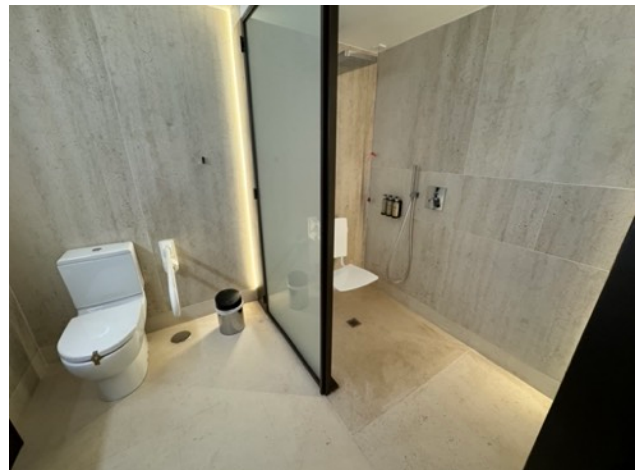
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The Parador in León is centrally located (<https://paradores.es/en/parador-de-leon>) in the most beautiful historic building. Secure parking is to the rear of the hotel with ramped access into the building. We followed the signs to reception and then - steps! For a wheelchair traveller without assistance this would be a challenge as they would then have to find out a way of speaking to someone in the hotel for assistance (there was no-one around at the time of arrival). Apparently it is normal practice to drive across the spacious pedestrianised area at the front of the hotel, check in and unload luggage. Wheelchair users have to enter the building this way and not from the car park, which has marked disabled spaces.

Accessible Room 104 was spacious and the wet room shower door could be moved through 90 degrees for even better access. All rooms in this section are ultra modern with hi-tech lighting systems.



# Northern Spain Road Trip

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### Day 8 - Wednesday 29th May 2024

In León

<https://www.spain.info/en/destination/leon/>

The city is mainly flat and we did not encounter any issues moving around with a wheelchair . Plenty of ramped kerbs and no nasty surprises. There is a very pleasant riverside walk below the main paseo, that looks wheelchair friendly but we did not have time to explore the points of access. The stroll up to the fabulous 13th Century Cathedral is quite easy. Access into the building and the cloisters areas are easily found, with some lumpy bits to deal with due to the age of the entrances.



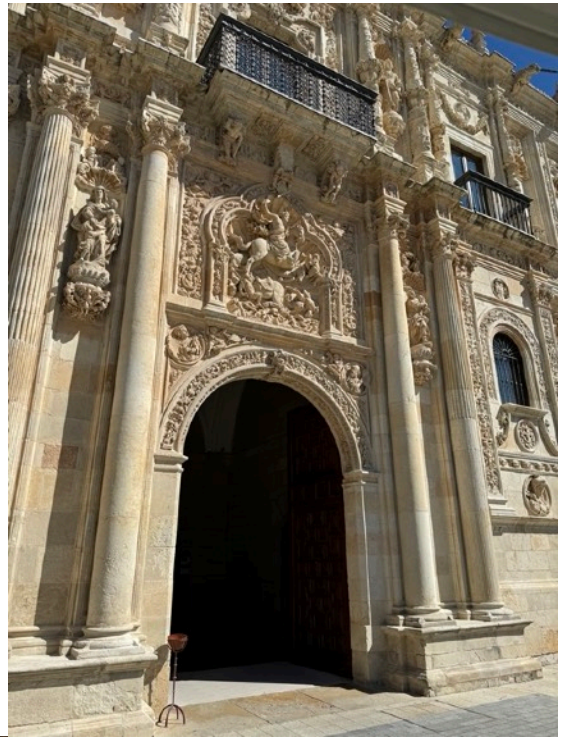
# Northern Spain Road Trip

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**Day 9 Thursday 30th May 2024**

Preparing to leave León





# Northern Spain Road Trip

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### León to La Toja (250 miles)

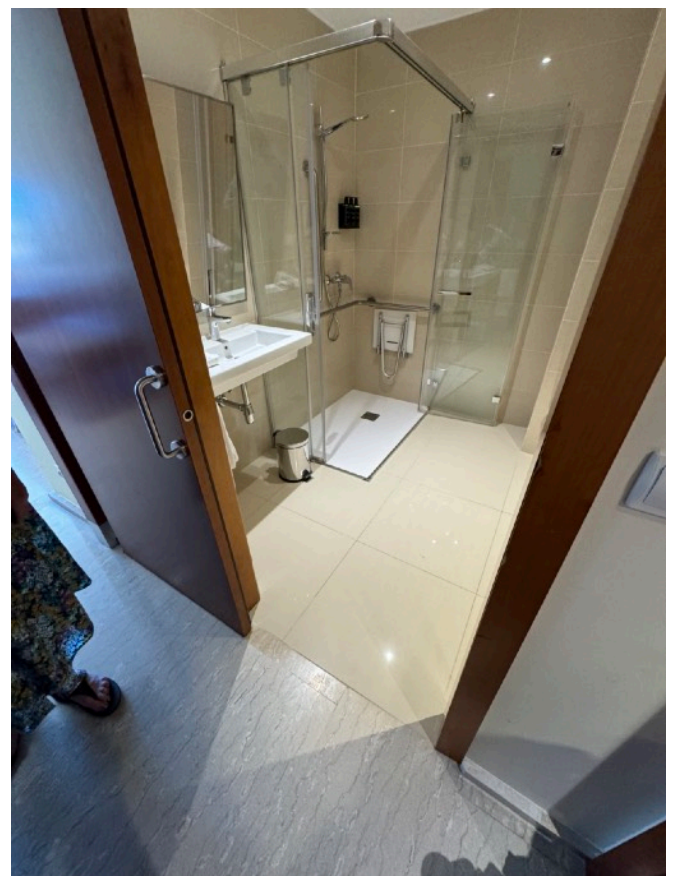
La Toja is an island resort in Galicia <https://tourgalicia.es/la-isla-la-toja/> in the north-west of Spain. There was no Parador in this area which was fully accessible so we booked the **Eurostars Isla de La Toja hotel** <https://tinyurl.com/5475b983> The hotel is in a lovely position with sea views on either side and it offers a lot on thermal treatments with a focus on health and well-being. To use the thermal families costs an extra €18 per day . However, for wheelchair users this is a no go area - no access to the pool and no pool lift. There is also an outside pool (unheated) for which there is no extra fee , but again, no pool lift and you have to ask reception for a key to the side gate for ramped access.

The hotel offers two lifts - the one closest to our room was really difficult with the interior of the lift being an oblong shape 90 degrees to the doorway - we only just about managed to squeeze Vicki in with a lot of manoeuvring and lifting - not ideal.

The other lift was better, although further from the room - the inside space was the same but at 180 degrees to the entrance (i.e. 'straight in' ) .

The accessible room number 211 on the second floor which was allocated to us was the smallest we have had on this trip. The bathroom was small and the accessible shower I would not class as a 'roll-in' as there was a one inch metal lip all the way around which made access for the hoist a bit difficult. Showering resulted in a very wet bathroom floor. The Paradores we have stayed in were much bigger and better designed.

Moving the beds and bedside table gave us more room to manoeuvre Vicki's wheelchair.



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## Eurostars Isla de La Toja Hotel and Surrounding Area

An informational sign for the 'Complejo Ons - O Grove' area. It includes text in Spanish and Galician, a map, and contact information for the local authorities.

**Complejo Ons - O Grove**  
Zona de Especial Protección dos Valores Naturais

O Complejo Ons - O Grove integra unha rica variedade de ecosistemas con características que constitúen unha escolma dos máis destacados hábitats do litoral galego. A Enseada, as lagoas, os sistemas dunares e o seu perfil costeiro convérteno nun lugar privilexiado para que milleiros de aves acuáticas fagan deste espazo unha das principais zonas de invernada do litoral oeste peninsular.

**Centro de Visitantes A Siradella**  
Monte A Siradella, s/n. O Grove.  
Telf.: 986.680.284

**Punto de Información "Punta Carreirón"**  
Illa de Arousa

**Servizo de Conservación da Natureza**  
Rúa Benito Corbal, 47. Pontevedra  
Telf.: 986.805.483

**Plano de Uso Público**

- ▲ CENTRO DE VISITANTES
- PTOS. INFORMACIÓN
- OBSERVATORIOS DE AVES
- ▲ PTOS. INTERESE PATRIMONIAL
- VISTAS PANORÁMICAS
- ÁREAS RECREATIVAS
- VISTEDE ESTA AQUÍ
- VISTAS A PÉ
- CAMPING
- ESPAZO NATURAL PROTEXIDO

XUNTA DE GALICIA  
CONSELLERÍA DE MEDIO AMBIENTE  
Dirección Xeral de Conservación da Natureza

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## Day 10 - Friday 31st May 2024

In La Toja - walk to O Grove (about 4 miles round trip)

We learnt fairly early on that any dropped kerbs are a bonus rather than a regular feature. Most Spanish cities seem to be really good at catering for the wheelchair user crossing roads etc, but in the lesser populated areas it really is hit and miss. We were presented with quite a few challenges with crossings that sometimes had really high kerbs. We don't mind negotiating a few high kerbs to reach some tempting pastries!

The scenery around O Grove is spectacular with golden beaches and a turquoise sea ; the town has a pedestrianised area - once you reach it, surfaces are good and smooth. <https://www.spain.info/es/destino/o-grove/>



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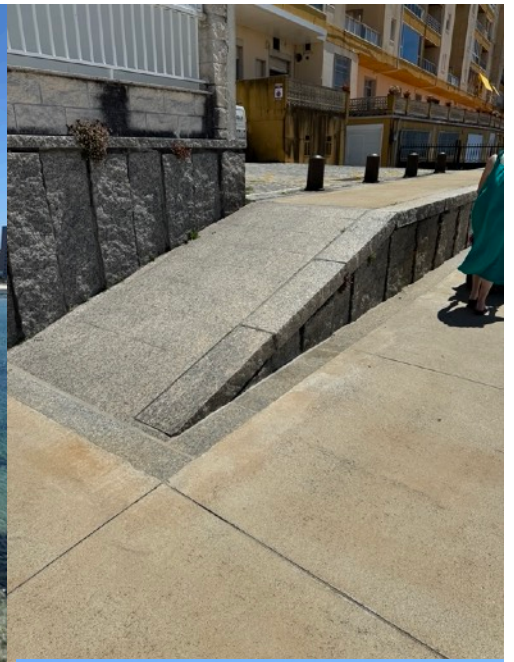


## Day 11 - Saturday 1st June 2024

### La Toja to Vilagarcía de Arousa (42 miles round trip)

This medium sized coastal town and small port was quieter than we expected. There is a very flat and level coastal walkway which goes for miles. It was such a beautiful sunny and hot day and yet there were only a few people on the sandy beach. The sea was very clear and inviting but no doubt cold, being the Atlantic Ocean. Apparently the **Netflix series 'Unauthorised Living' (or 'Vivir Sin Permiso')** was filmed here. <https://www.vilagarcia.com/>

There were quite a few empty properties with good deal of CCTV and security features which suggested that maybe crime is a concern here. We would not describe this as a particularly attractive town, but has this fabulous accessible coastal walkway. Moving back into town, the wheelchair user encounters again, poorly maintained pavements and a lack of dropped kerbs.



# Northern Spain Road Trip

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## Day 12 - Sunday 2nd June 2024

### La Toja to Corias (250 miles)

The journey time to Corias was scheduled as 4 hours - in the end it took 5 hours which included a short fuel stop. Again, the journey takes the traveller through stunning rolling countryside flanked at times by vineyards, rivers and countless breathtaking viaducts. The roads are generally quite good, however some of the 'Autovia' roads are in need of repair. Towards the end of the route, the quickest way was based on some very steep and narrow roads with hairpin bends; at times there was a sheer drop without barriers. Needless to say we were very cautious. Eventually we reached road AS-15 which offered a safer route to the Parador at Corias. <https://paradores.es/en/parador-de-corias>



# Northern Spain Road Trip

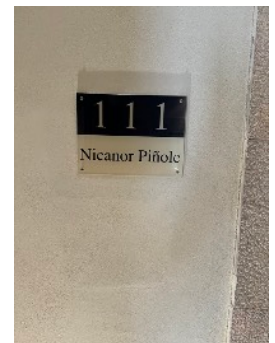
## - *In a wheelchair accessible vehicle*



The Parador at Corias is an ex-monastery which traces its roots back to the 11th century. The current building was completed in the late 18th century and offers the guest not only a unique historical environment but also quality accommodation and excellent food.

A lift was needed to reach our accessible room number 111. The total room area was probably the most we have experienced so far, with an extremely large bathroom with a small roll-in shower (it is a pity that the shower is not bigger) The dressing area offers the wheelchair user pull down clothes rails, and the bathroom sink taps have easy turn handles with good space underneath.

Parking is right outside the property with a rustic but flat surface. The indoor pool sadly is not accessible to wheelchair users. The breakfast room is on the second floor and has several steps by the entrance - those with limited mobility are accommodated in an area just outside of the entrance, in consequence that wheelchair users would have to rely on an able bodied companion or staff to access the buffet style breakfast.



Each room has a pair of wooden clogs outside. Was it intentional that the accessible room has only one clog?!

# Northern Spain Road Trip

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## Parador at Corias



# Northern Spain Road Trip

## - In a wheelchair accessible vehicle



### Day13 - Monday 3rd June 2024

#### Walk from Corias to Cangas del Narcea (4 miles round trip)

The walk is slightly uphill most of the way and there is a pavement, although there is a 50kph limit on this road you wouldn't believe it! There was a distinct lack of dropped kerbs on this walk - we were prepared to make sure that we were noticeable with our hi-viz waistcoats . We always pack these if we encounter an area where we are forced into the road to negotiate high kerbs and difficult surfaces. <https://www.turismoasturias.es/en/-/blogs/las-10-mejores-cosas-que-ver-y-hacer-en-cangas-del-narcea>

The town of Cangas de Narcea possesses a Baroque church, ' Colegiata de Santa María Magdalena' and an attractive pedestrian suspension bridge over the river . The whole area is part of the Muniellos Biosphere Reserve.( <https://www.turismoasturias.es/en/descubre/naturaleza/espacios-protegidos/bosque-de-muniellos> )





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### Day 14 - Tuesday 4th June 2024

#### Corias to Limpias (197 miles)

On this day's three and a half hour drive the roads are wide with lots of bends as the route ends its way through the mountains - again with some spectacular views. Once you reach towards the coast the road becomes wider and more like a two lane motorway; there are a few glimpses of the sea, but mainly the road winds its way through the hills of Asturias and Cantabria.

The Parador at Limpias <https://paradores.es/en/parador-de-limpias> is situated in the village and offers guests high quality accommodation - again in an historic building. Rooms are large, and accessible room 118 has one of the largest shower areas we have seen in a while with two places for showering, and two sets of shower controls, one with a flip down seat. The sink has a large space underneath to accommodate wheelchairs.

There is garage parking with direct access to a lift, but we could not use this as our van is over 2 metres high. The upper parking area has a disabled parking spot and ramp access through to reception.

The lift from reception is not at all spacious - anyone with a large wheelchair would have difficulty. We were able to tip Vicki's wheelchair into an upright position and only then could she fit in the lift.



# Northern Spain Road Trip - In a wheelchair accessible vehicle



## Parador Limpias



# Northern Spain Road Trip

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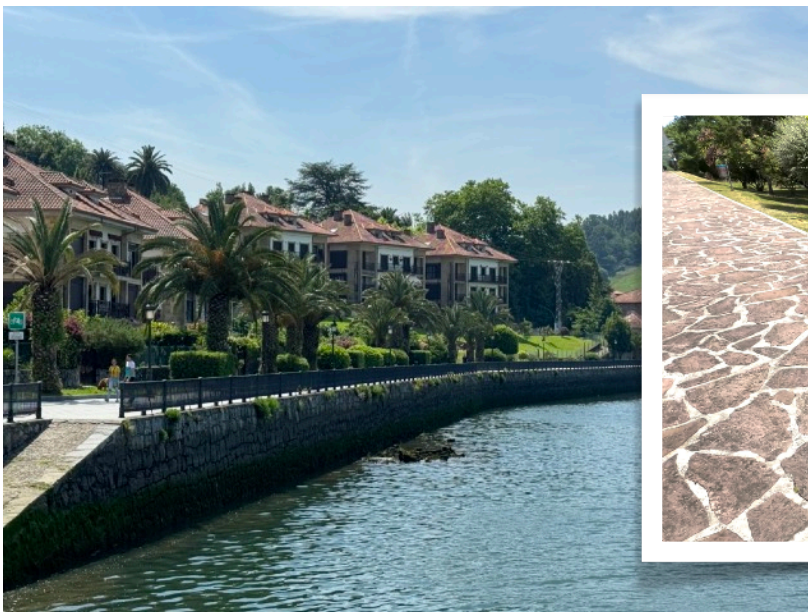


### Day 15 - Wednesday 5th June 2024

#### Walk into Limpias for a riverside walk (about 3 miles round trip)

The garden area surrounding the Parador is well kept and there is a level riverside walk with seating areas about half a mile from the hotel. Initially you have to go down a hill towards the town, so some power is required to come back up the hill. Alternatively you would have to drive into town or as far as the lower car park. Dropped kerbs in the town are few. <http://turismososteniblecantabria.com/limpias/>

There is an outdoor pool and tennis courts at the hotel - the pool did not open until a few days after we had left, and there is no pool lift.



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## Day 16 - Thursday 6th June 2024

Limpias to Santander for Ferry to Plymouth

<https://turismodecantabria.com/descubre/santander/>

An hour or two in Santander before the overnight ferry back to Plymouth . As always, the Spanish bocadillos and pastales are a temptation! We had no delays boarding the ferry and had a smooth crossing and a similar cabin to the outward journey.

