

FESTIVAL de SAN XOÁN

SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA



SAN XOÁN INSTRUCTION MANUAL
RITES AND SPELL VOUCHERS

THE DAY OF SAN XOÁN



In the evening of June 23, the eve of San Xoán, coinciding with the summer solstice, when the sun is at its highest point, festivals and ritual practices have been held since ancient times in many parts of the world, mainly centred on bonfires. This is an ancestral event in which different cultures celebrate this solar phenomenon.

In Galicia, the festival of San Xoán is one of the most interesting celebrations, anthropologically speaking: a night of food, drink, music and dancing around the fire, one for strengthening neighbourly bonds, an initiation rite for young ones, a collective catharsis, preventive enchantments, and fusion with nature, while legends refer to the contrast between good and evil, the sun and the moon, and humans against fantastic beings such as goblins, fairies and witches that come out of their refuges during the shortest and most mysterious night of the year. Therefore, in order to protect oneself against the power of these forces unleashed during the magical festival of San Xoán, there are numerous rites designed to ward off evil spells and invoke the protection of natural elements: jumping over bonfires (called “cacharelas” in the Santiago area), putting a bunch of San Xoán herbs in one’s doorway to protect against the witches, washing oneself at dawn in fountains or with water and herbs, etc. In short, a great festival with a lot of local participation to celebrate the arrival of summer and the dominance of the sun, following a traditional model that links us with past history and with our rich cultural identity.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The days before San Xoán:

*On the eve of San Xoán, you can go on your own to collect your San Xoán herbs in the Granxa do Xesto Forest Park (20’ walking from Praza do Obradoiro), Selva Negra or Parque do Paxonal, among other city green spaces such as hills, meadows, river banks and pathways.

*You will also find bunches of San Xoán herbs on sale in Santiago’s “Mercado de Abastos” (Food Market) during the morning.

*Once you have your flowers, you can go to “facер o cachо”: collect water from the following seven Compostela fountains, or carry out the magical rites related to the charming of water there.

The night of San Xoán:

*Comfortable footwear and old or half-worn cotton clothes (avoid synthetic fibres), which you do not mind becoming impregnated with the smell of smoke and grilled sardines.

FIRE



According to legend, the robin redbreast brought fire from the sun. Considered a sacred, protective and purifying element that must be looked after so that it does not dwindle, fire is the main symbol of the summer solstice and, therefore, of the night of San Xoán.

***Jumping over bonfires:** In the evening of June 23, purifying bonfires fill the cities, towns and villages. Their magical power wards off ailments, evil and spells, bringing luck, favours and predictions. In order to receive the fire's benefits, you must jump over the bonfire an odd number of times after midnight. People usually jump 3, 5, 7 or 9 times in a genuine collective catharsis surrounded by music, dancing, wine, shouting and a lot of grilled sardines in the streets and squares. Numerous associations, groups and resident associations prepare San Xoán bonfires in Compostela: a tour around them guarantees a genuine atmosphere, which usually features live music, dancing, food and drink (wine, sardines, chorizo, pie, etc.).

***Smoke:** Smoke protects humans and animals from the evil eye and spells, and its purifying power is transferred to the ashes, which are kept to provide protection against thunderstorms and to favour human and business relations. It used to be customary to smoke cattle on the night of San Xoán to protect them from evil spells. Today, immersing oneself in the smoke from the bonfires provides added protection to the rituals that are carried out this evening.

***Watching the sun dance:** At dawn on June 24, the Day of San Xoán, the sun dances joyfully alongside the moon in the sky, accompanied by all the witches in the universe. In order to contemplate this phenomenon, there is a tradition of going up to a high place at dawn to see the sun dance during this magical sunrise. Due to their special meaning, we recommend contemplating this special dawn from Monte Pedroso, in Santiago de Compostela, or Pico Sacro (Boqueixón).

WATER



It is an essential element for life and “washes away” both dirt and diseases. It plays a symbolic-ritual role in the San Xoán Festival, because in this evening it acquires magical properties that it does not have the rest of the year. We therefore have to go to rivers, fountains or springs (preferably those closest to monasteries and sanctuaries, which transfer their sacred power to the water) to practice certain rituals related to the belief that water has purifying properties for the body and soul.

****“Facer o cacho”:** Water and San Xoán herbs that are left outside to collect the night’s dew have miraculous properties. It is therefore customary to collect water from seven fountains on June 23 to fulfil this rite.

***Dew:** This night’s dew is considered salubrious and purifying. It is therefore recommended to leave out woollen garments, bedspreads, cattle, etc., under its special powers. Dew is also used to carry out divination and protection spells.

***Fountains:** According to legend, old fountains are home to “mouras” and fairies, virgins and washing ladies, as well as evil beings that only come out of their refuges during the night of San Xoán. It is believed that drinking from these fountains after 12 midnight can cause ailments, since from then on the water is asleep. On the other hand, water that is drunk shortly before dawn, having been collected from seven fountains, has salubrious, positive properties, prolonging life and being unbeatable for making bread. It is said that whoever washes in one of these fountains after midnight will be cured of all of his or her ailments.

****“A flor da auga”:** The best water is that which is collected at dawn on the Day of San Xoán, called “flor de auga” or “flor de auga fría.” It is endowed with special powers, especially for those who wash themselves with it; they thereby receive the magical powers that the water has acquired during the night, obtaining a genuine panacea of health and beauty. “A flor da auga” is water that is collected from a fountain when it receives the first rays of sunshine at dawn. Here we have the combination of two antagonistic elements that reinforce each other, water and the sun-fire, which produce beneficial water for combating the body’s ailments, but also for warding off “meigas” (witches), a symbol of evil during the night of San Xoán.

PLANTS AND THE PLANT WORLD



Plants are associated with protective and healing values. There is a great variety of plants related to the rituals of this event, especially those that smell nice, as opposed to those that smell badly and are associated with witches: foxglove, wild rose, fern, laburnum, spurge flax, bulrush, mallow, sagebrush, elder, oak, alder, etc.

***Water with San Xoán herbs:** On the eve of San Xoán, you have to collect the “seven San Xoán herbs”: wood fern, male fern, laburnum, St. John’s wort, mallow, rosemary and lemon verbena. These plants and flower should be left outside in water, exposed to the dew, and then used for washing oneself the following morning (in some places people wash themselves facing the sunrise, to receive the first rays of sunshine). The objective is to cure or prevent skin disease and rejuvenate one’s skin.

***Premonitory properties of San Xoán herbs:** When left all night on a table, if they are green and fresh in the morning, they augur prosperity for the house; if they wither, they announce misfortunes.

***Protection from San Xoán herbs:** Magical San Xoán herbs protect the house from witches (who roam around particularly freely during this night) when bunches of flowers are placed on doors and windows. This protective property lasts all year: you have to dry the San Xoán herbs and hang them somewhere in the house to stop witches from entering. The plant world, symbol of nature’s regenerative power, thereby works in favour of the cultural world in order to protect the basic social, economic and cultural unit in the Galician countryside, the home.



PLACES

1. Praza de Mazarelos. Festival de San Xoán
2. Granxa do Xesto (out of map)
3. Selva Negra (out of map)
4. Parque do Paxonal
5. Mercado de Abastos
6. Alameda
7. Ensanche
8. Parque da Almáciga
9. Parque de la Música. Vite
10. A Peregrina (out of map)
11. Lاراño (out of map)
12. Villestro (out of map)

FOUNTAINS

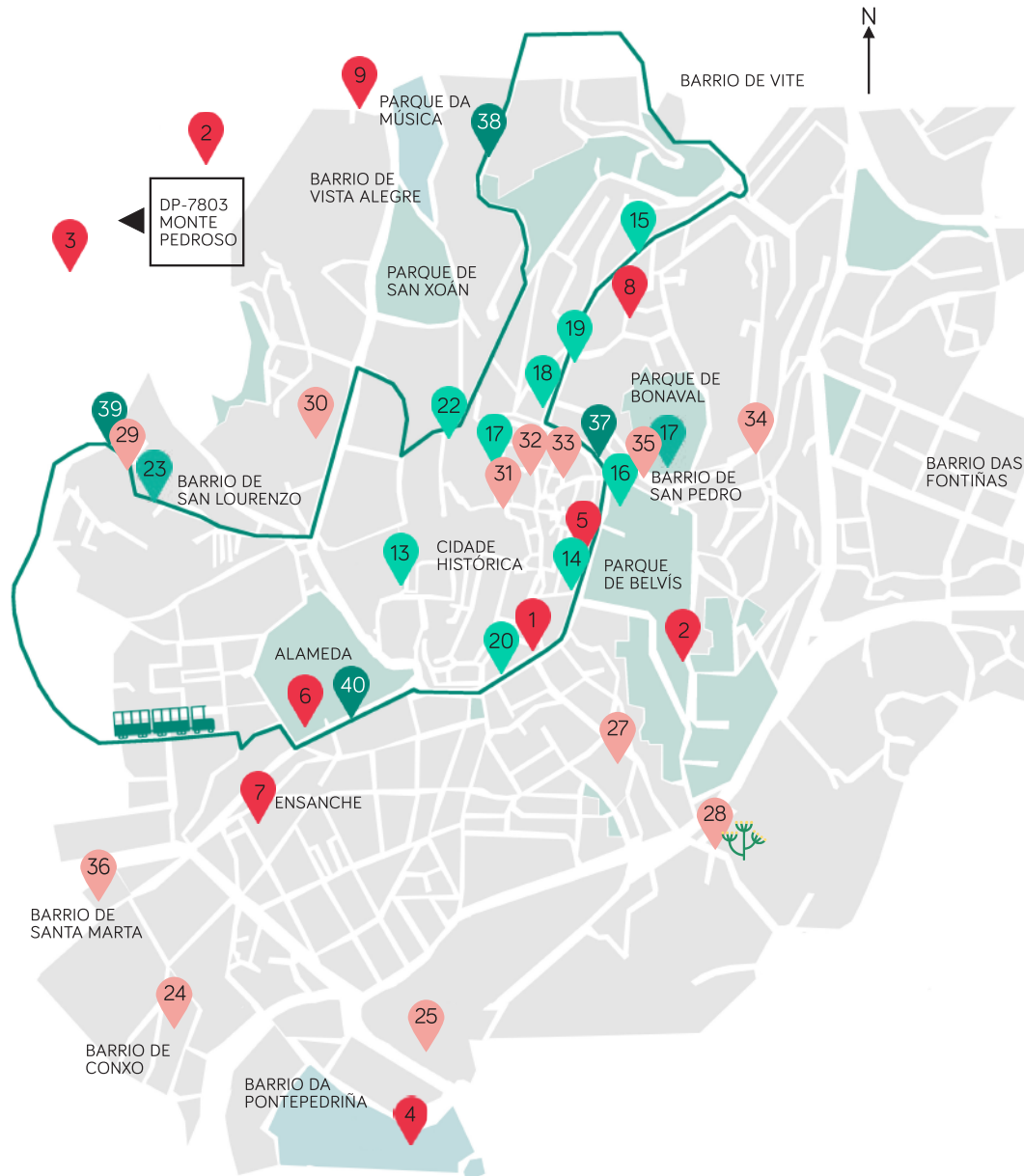
13. Fonte da Porta da Trinidad
14. Fonte da Virxe da Cerca
15. Fonte de Basquiños
16. Fonte de Porta do Camiño
17. Fonte de San Martiño Pinarío
18. Fonte de Santa Clara
19. Fonte de San Roque
20. Fonte de Santo Antonio
21. Fonte do Santo Domingo de Bonaval
22. Fonte do Campiño de San Francisco
23. Fontes de San Lourenzo

BONFIRES

24. Conxo (Centro Cívico)
25. Castiñeiriño (Asoc. Sandra Priego Rial e Asoc. Amigos do Castiñeiriño)
26. Marrozos (out of map)
27. Sar
28. Ponte de Sar
29. Carballeira de San Lourenzo
30. Galeras
31. Ruela de Xerusalén
32. Praza de San Paio de Antealtares
33. Praza de Salvador Parga
34. Cruz de San Pedro
35. Praza 8 de marzo
36. Santa Marta. Praza Escultor Ferreiro

CACHARELO'S TRAIN STOP

37. CGAC
38. Burgo das Nacións
39. Carballeira de San Lourenzo
40. Avda. Xoán Carlos I



SPELL VOUCHERS FOR THE NIGHT OF SAN XOÁN



After 12 midnight, choose a bonfire in Santiago de Compostela and jump over it an odd number of times, greater than three, shouting out this popular ritual saying to ward off all evil and witches:

*“Salto por riba,
do lume de San Xoán,
para que non me morda,*

*cadela nin can,
nin bicho vivinte,
que ande polo chan.”*



Write down the name of those who would like to go out with you on each of the following pieces of paper, roll them up tightly, put them in a glass of water and, the following morning, the one that appears unrolled will reveal the name of your future partner:



Write down your afflictions and throw them into the bonfires in order to leave them behind:

Physical afflictions: _____



Write down your afflictions and throw them into the bonfires in order to leave them behind:

Emotional afflictions: _____