

Shiver Me Timbers, I Just Ate Gooseneck Barnacles

From the rocky shores of Spain's coast, a slip of the foot and you'll plunge 300 feet into the deep icy waters of the sea. As the water violently beats against the cliffs, the crustaceans are not weary, in fact they take pleasure in hard beatings which will eventually make them, the gooseneck barnacles, even more bankable.



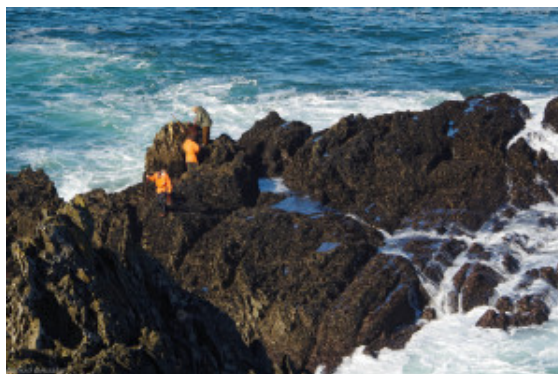
© Arturo chausinho, on Flickr

The crustacea challengers on the other hand are tired yet persist knowing all too well the danger of prying away the pesky little creatures. At least one life per year is lost gathering the opponent, but the bottom line is getting paid. The risk is high, but well worth it because far too many people will relish a plate of gooseneck barnacles nonetheless.

Percebes or goose barnacle is a crustacean that grows on wave beaten rocks mainly in Asturias, Basque Country, Cantabria and Galicia. They attach themselves to mussels and can only be reached near the bottom of cliffs mainly along the Spanish coastline.

As you can imagine, the location of one of Spain's most sought after delicacy is difficult to reach. At dusk and dawn, and

always at low tide, the brave divers or *percebeiros* as they are called work in teams of two to four. Using their sharpened hand tool and awaiting cues from the safety lookout, they quickly take the chance to pry small clusters of the treasure from the rocks sometimes jumping from one cliff to another to avoid the strong tide surges.



Divers in search of Percebes, © Gabriel González GGL1, on Flickr

Sailors consider the hull-adhering barnacles a nuisance to their ship, which can create considerable drag on the boat, slowing it down and costing fuel. On the other hand, foodies consider percebes an ultimate gourmet treat. Captain Haddock, said “Blistering Barnacles” probably not because of the appearance, but the price, where in Europe, barnacles cost up to \$100 a kilogram.

For some the taste is to die for, and the quest to get them is as well and many *percebeiros* drown in an attempt to reach the crustaceans before the pounding icy waters reach them first. Some amateurs attempt to capture percebes, but the locals watch over their territories to safeguard their livelihood.

The percebes flavor depends on water motion for feeding, hence the stronger the waves crash against the cliffs, the more flavorful they become. Tasting like the sea; not salty but briny, I’d say the flavor is a mix of crab and scallops, but you’ll just have to see for yourself. That is if you can get

over the appearance. Remember how grotesque the crustacean-faces were from Pirates of the Caribbean? Well, percebes look similar to that–no they look worse, more like dead toes or little arms.



Gooseneck barnacles, an expensive foodie choice

The components of percebes are the shell, claw, and delicious meat within the claw. After a glass of the local beverage or two, you get over the less than visually appealing appearance as the platter of long, slender, percebes in their triangular shells are served steaming hot.

At the current prices you have to pay, one thing is for sure, you had better not waste a single gram by eating them incorrectly. Pay attention to your restaurant neighbor, or follow these guidelines to enhance your blistering barnacle dining experience:

1. Grab a percebes from the end of its claw end.
2. Break the sleeve (outer shell) from the claw to expose the arm (meat).
3. Slide off the sleeve and eat the arm.
4. Imagine the ocean's roar, and suck the briny juices from the sleeve.

Finally, sip a glass of Spanish white wine and repeat steps 1-4!