

THE SPANISH PILGRIMS TRAIL, CAMINO DE SANTIAGO

14 DAYS COMMENCING 17TH SEPTEMBER 2012 EX LEON (SPAIN)

GRADE - EASY TO MODERATE

DETAILED ITINERARY

The Pilgrim's Way to Santiago - the Camino de Santiago as it is called in Spanish, or "Way of St. James" is a journey of the soul and spirit, that takes the traveller in the footsteps of millions of others over a millennium, who sojourned from all over Christendom to this green and misty spot in the northwest corner of Iberia to venerate the tomb of the Apostle St. James - Santiago as he is known in Spanish. The site, now known as Santiago de Compostela, came to be Christianity's 3rd Holy City, along with Rome and Jerusalem, and Santiago became the Christians' patron saint and inspiration in their long struggle to reconquer Spain from the Moors.

Today, the Camino - "One of the world's 2 or 3 great journeys", according to American writer James Michener - is undergoing a renaissance unlike anything known since the 13th century peak of the pilgrimage. Modern-day 'pilgrims', like their forerunners, come from all over, but nowadays those with purely religious motives are joined by lovers of adventure, art, history and legends, all with a desire to take part in an experience that is unique in the modern Western world.

Our destination is the cathedral in Santiago's fabulously preserved medieval centre, which has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in its entirety. We follow the ancient pilgrim's way through storybook-beautiful landscapes and tiny stone-built villages where time seems to have stopped, visiting Gothic cathedrals and Romanesque chapels, and a profusion of art of all kinds created throughout the centuries in honour of St. James.

Over the 1000-year history of the pilgrimage, various principal routes to Santiago evolved. These days most pilgrims follow the so-called Camino Francés or "French Way", and this is our journey through the most picturesque parts.



DAY 1 - 17TH SEPTEMBER

ARRIVAL IN LEON

Leon is one of the most historic towns of Old Castile, a large province boarded by Galicia, Asturias, Palencia and Zamora. There is evidence of Roman occupation as well as the Moors; however it was the knights of Templar who built the castles and fortifications in the middle Ages. Ensure you take the time to visit the old city. One of Leon's glories is without doubt the Cathedral. Constructed from the 13th Century for a period of 200 years, the Collegiate Church of San Isidoro houses an impressive collection of early manuscripts. The Town Walls are of Roman and medieval construction.

This evening there will be a briefing with your tour leader.
Your hotel is located across from the Basílica de San Isidoro
Overnight in Leon.

DAY 2 - 18TH SEPTEMBER

LEON - PUENTE DEL ORBIGO - ASTORGA

WALK approx 3.5 hours, 12 km

After breakfast you will have a walking tour of León's downtown area to see some of its most interesting monuments such as the 11th century Real Basílica de San Isidoro. This Basílica is considered one of the greatest Romanesque treasures in the Pilgrim's Way and it houses the Royal Panteón of 23 visigothic monarchs. The remarkable frescoes painted in the ceiling are considered the "Sistine Chapel of Romanesque art" and is the best Gothic cathedral in Spain, famous for its wonderful stained glass and central market.

Today you will pick up your credentials before leaving Leon, which are to be stamped along the Camino. After enjoying a Tapas lunch, you will transfer by private transport to Puente del Orbigo. "Puente" means bridge in Spanish. This great bridge is one of the most famous bridges along the Camino, both for its architectural qualities and its history.

Walk from Puente de Orbigo to San Justo de la Vega along medieval paths through rolling landscape. The day is easy walking without any steep accents or descents.

There will be time in the late afternoon to visit Antoni Gaudi's neo-gothic Bishop's Palace which houses the Pilgrim's Way Museum. Astorga has Roman walls and a 15th century cathedral and is an important town along the Camino.

Overnight in Astorga

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner



DAY 3 - 19TH SEPTEMBER

ASTORGA-CASTRILLO DE LOS POLVAZARES-RABANAL DEL CAMINO

WALK approx 4 hours, 15 km

This morning there will be a short transfer to Castrillo de los Polvazares, only 5 kms past Astorga. Castrillo is a small medieval stone village which has been declared a National Monument. You will love this village.

The walk today will be a steady climb to Rabanal del Camino passing through Santa Catalina de Somoza and onto El Ganso. The landscape will change into densely populated oak trees, heather and conifers as you ascend "los montes de Leon" before reaching Rabanal Del Camino (1200m), a charming mountain village. On the way to Rabanal, you will pass El Roble del Peregrino, an oak tree that pilgrims have rested under for centuries.

Overnight in a beautiful private albergue, Rabanal del Camino

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 4 - 20TH SEPTEMBER

RABANAL DEL CAMINO-FONCEBADON-VILLAFRANCA DEL BIERZO

WALK approx 4 hours, 16 km

Short transfer from Rabanal to Foncebadón. An eerie and affecting place that features heavily in the Camino accounts of Shirely MacLaine and Paulo Coelho. Houses are built with thick stone walls to block the wind and steeply angled roofs to deflect snow. A couple of kms later we reach the Cruz de Ferro, a masive conical pile of stones brought by pilgrims that mark the pass over Mt. Irago. Adding a stone to the pile is an important ritual, many pilgrims bring stones from home to place it here. You will walk some stretches on narrow paths hemmed in both sides by tall heather. Enjoy fabulous views of the Meruelo valley. After El Acebo (The Holy tree) pass we will head down and descend towards Molinaseca on a path of broad slate rocks, one of the loveliest stretches in the Camino.

On the way the beautiful Templar Knights Castle can be seen. This afternoon there will be a walking tour of the town to see its medieval splendid mansions, churches, monasteries and castle.

Overnight in Villafranca del Bierzo

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 5 - 21ST SEPTEMBER

VILAFRANCA DEL BIERZO-HERRERIAS- O´CEBREIRO

WALK approx 4 hours, 9km

Early morning transfer to Herrerias to start our walk today. Las Herrerias was famous in the old times for its iron forge. Our path takes us steeply uphill, this is an enchanting section, zigzagging uphill between stone walls. As we climb there are dramatic changes in landscape and architecture, it feels like a fast rewind through history, finally settling at some misty, magical period of cobbled streets and a new language, "gallego". O´Cebreiro is an emblematic stop in the Pilgrim´s Way which has sheltered pilgrims from mountain storms for centuries, and lays right on the border between Castille and Galicia. It has a lovely 12th century church which is the subject of a fascinating legend and curious thatched-roofed dwellings called "pallozas" whose origins date from prehistoric times.

Overnight in O´Cebreiro

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6 - 22ND SEPTEMBER

O´CEBREIRO-TRIACASTELA-SAMOS

WALK approx 4 hours, 14 km

We will start our stage today from Fonfria "cold spring water". The views as we curve along the ridge are fantastic with picture-perfect lush fields and farms you will walk along a track lined with beech trees. After Biduedo, it is downhill following an ancient heather lined path. From Triacastela the path is shaded by birches, oaks, chestnuts and poplars through tiny hamlets hidden deeply in the green Galician forest to arrive at the 6th century Benedictine Monastery of Samos, a seat of learning. Its influence was once so great that the Monastery controlled some 200 towns, over a hundred churches and 300 other monasteries.

Overnight in Samos

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 7 - 23RD SEPTEMBER

SAMOS-SARRIA-PORTOMARIN

WALK approx 5.5 hours, 21.5km

From Sarria there are 111 kms left to Compostela, and pilgrims walk all the way in order to get the "Compostela", certification of having completed the pilgrimage. This stage is considered one of the most beautiful; the path winds through rolling hills, along verdant forest, grass meadows, fertile orchards and simple stone villages scattered over this deeply rural landscape. After crossing the river Miño you will arrive in Portomarín, which is perched on the banks of this great Galician river. Transfer to the historical town of Lugo.

Overnight in Lugo (choose your own dinner option today)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



DAY 8 - 24TH SEPTEMBER
REST DAY IN LUGO - PORTOMARIN

Today is a free day for you to visit Lugo. Its Roman Walls are the greatest monument inherited from the Roman Empire. The Walls, surrounding the whole downtown area, are UNESCO World Heritage. After lunch, transfer to Portomarín to enjoy the late afternoon. You will be able to choose your own lunch and dinner options today.

Overnight in Portomarín

Meals: Breakfast



DAY 9 - 25TH SEPTEMBER
PORTOMARIN-PALAS DO REI

WALK approx 4.5 hours, 17.5 km

The Camino continues on through lush and beautiful Galician countryside to Palas do Rei. There will be a stop for lunch in Vilar de Donas, next to the 10 century Romanesque church which has been declared a National Monument. The walk then continues along the path to Palas do Rei.

After finishing today's stage our private mini bus will transfer the group to Castañeda to the Pazo de Sedor Manor House where you will spend the following 2 nights. In this way you do not need to pack and unpack which will give you more rest and the feeling of "being at home". This luxurious Manor House will make your trip unforgettable.

Overnight in 17th century Galician Manor House, Castañeda

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 10 - 26TH SEPTEMBER
PALAS DO REI – MELIDE-CASTAÑEDA

WALK approx 5.5 hours, 22km

Transfer back to Palas do Rei to resume the walk at the point where they ended yesterday. The Camino goes along the ancient path through rolling green landscapes dotted with cows, stone walls and Romanesque churches. Pass through the town of Melide where you will have a picnic lunch and continue walking for 2 more hours to the Manor House, right next to the Camino.

Overnight in 17th century Galician Manor House, Castañeda

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 11 - 27TH SEPTEMBER

CASTAÑEDA-SANTA IRENE-O'PINO

WALK approx 6 hours, 23 km

Today you will start walking from the Manor House. Excitement begins to build as you are nearing Santiago de Compostela. There are noticeably more pilgrims as you walk along rural paths and rolling terrain through a series of vegetable orchards, meadows and oak groves, then pine and eucalyptus woods.

Overnight in Galician Manor House

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 12 - 28TH SEPTEMBER

O'PINO-SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

WALK approx 6 hours, 23km

The final day of walking takes us into the heart of the Plaza del Obradoiro. Walk through green meadows and rolling hills stopping for a picnic lunch in Lavacolla. From there you will approach Santiago de Compostela through country lanes.

On reaching the Monte del Gozo "Mount of Joy" (so named for the emotion felt by those who arrive there), you are rewarded with the first view of the towers of Compostela's cathedral, though still 5 kms away.

The remaining section of the walk is downhill into the city. The path leads directly into the ancient centre, which has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage site and is one of the most beautiful squares in all of Spain. Here you will reach the ultimate goal of all pilgrims, the Cathedral where the remains of St James are stored.

Entering the magnificent square of El Obradoiro is a magical moment for all who have walked the Camino.

Dinner is not included tonight so you can try one of the many restaurants in town.

Overnight in 3 star hotel, Santiago de Compostela

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



DAY 13 - 29TH SEPTEMBER SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

In the morning you will enjoy a guided tour of Compostela with an English speaking official guide who will inform you of the history and culture. We will also visit the central market which is filled with fresh produce from the country orchards and the sea. There is time to stroll the medieval streets in a relaxed way in the afternoon. There are many shops and museums as well as a great variety of restaurants and tapas bars with a wonderful gastronomic offer for your lunch today. Farewell dinner tonight to rejoice the end of the journey. Overnight in 3 star hotel, Santiago de Compostela
Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

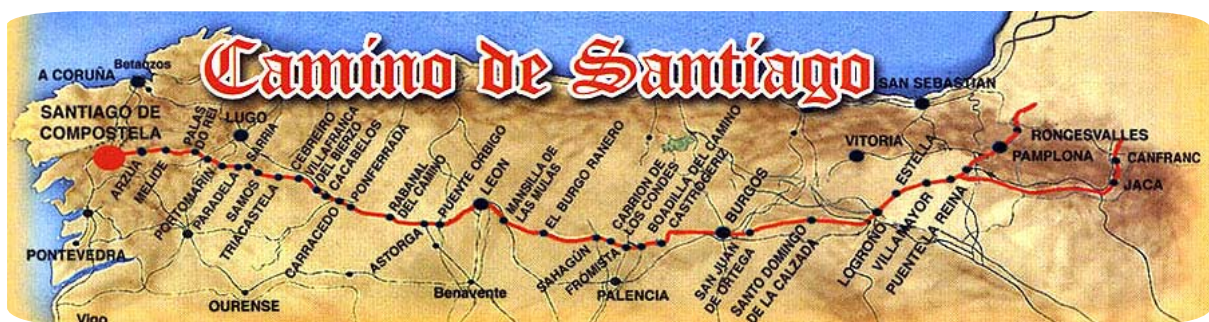
DAY 14 - 30TH SEPTEMBER DEPARTURE DAY

The trip concludes in Santiago de Compostela today.
Meals: Breakfast

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

Arrival to Leon - It is best to fly to Madrid and travel by train to Leon. The train takes about 4 hours and there are several departures per day.

Departure from Santiago de Compostela - the quickest and easiest method is to fly to Madrid and connect with your international flight.





INCLUDED WITH THIS TRIP

- All taxes and service charges at the hotels
- Local English speaking guide
- Baggage transfer between hotels

ACCOMMODATION

- 13 nights twin share accommodation in 2 star Hotels, 3 star Hotels, rural bed & breakfast style, Manor House

MEALS

Meals included as detailed on the itinerary. All food quality is carefully selected following the true local Spanish tradition.

While travelling with us you will experience the vast array of wonderful food available in the world.

LOCAL GUIDE

Every day the group will be accompanied by a local English speaking guide. Our guides are highly professional, very nice with an extensive knowledge of the territory. They know every hidden corner of the area and will give you the opportunity to experience all the unspoiled places and the real culture of Spain.

TRANSPORT

A private vehicle will be available for the group for its everyday transfers and transportation of luggage. If you do not wish to walk on any day the transport is there as backup for you.



NOT INCLUDED WITH THIS TRIP

- Visa fees - each member of the group must carry a valid passport (valid for at least 6 months beyond the duration of your trip) and have obtained the appropriate visas
- Tips, personal telephone charges...
- Travel Insurance (compulsory) - You will need to give the policy number prior to departure
- Items of a personal nature; postage, drinks and souvenirs
- Entrance fees during free time
- Other meals not mentioned on the itinerary
- Additional optional activities
- Medical Advice - Please refer to your GP or local travel clinic for up to date travel health advice for the area(s) you are visiting.



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