

Preparing for the Camino Francés

By Johnnie Walker





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Letter from Board of American Pilgrims on the Camino

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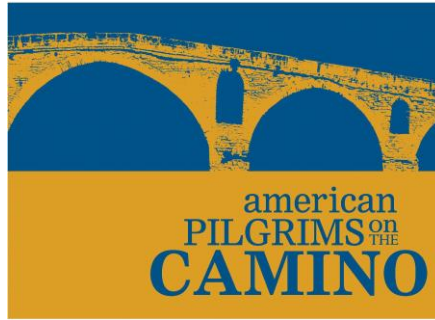
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Dear Pilgrim,

We are pleased to present you with this complimentary copy of *Preparing for the Camino Francés* by longtime Camino luminary Johnnie Walker.

Johnnie wrote this for the benefit of the global pilgrim community. As a member of American Pilgrims on the Camino, he has graciously offered to make this special edition available to our members and friends.

The mission of American Pilgrims on the Camino is to foster the enduring tradition of the Camino by supporting its infrastructure, by gathering pilgrims together, and by providing information and encouragement to past and future pilgrims. Our values are built upon the foundation of our collective experiences as pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago. In every decision we make and every action we take, American Pilgrims strives to be in accordance with the values of community, service, gratitude, and simplicity.

We issue pilgrim credentials, support a nationwide network of local chapters, train hospitaleros, publish a member-supported digital magazine, maintain a resource-rich website and video library full of valuable resources, hold a regular series of in-person and virtual events, and provide extensive financial support for infrastructure projects of nonprofit albergues and associations along the Camino. Learn more at americanpilgrims.org.

We hope you enjoy this guide. We look forward to journeying with you along the Way as fellow members of the global pilgrim community.

¡Buen Camino!

Board of Directors
American Pilgrims on the Camino

Introduction - The Camino Francés

Although the *Camino Francés* is one of many routes through Spain to Santiago de Compostela, it is the most well known and well travelled. It is often referred to in this guide simply as *the Camino*.

Although historically Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port on the French side of the Pyrenees was never considered the “start” of this route to Santiago it has become so in modern times for many pilgrims. However the majority of Spanish pilgrims start in Roncesvalles or Pamplona. Where you start is your choice - there is no “official” starting point. Neither is there an overall authority which oversees any of the Camino routes. Different sections of the routes are signposted and maintained by the various local authorities whose areas the route passes through.

Numbers

In 2022, 51% of the 277,046 pilgrims who registered at the Pilgrim Office in Santiago in order to receive the Compostela did so having walked the *Camino Francés* from various starting points. Of that total 132,179 pilgrims started in Sarria which is situated just over 100 kms from Santiago.

Walking sections of the route

The total of 277,046 does not include the huge numbers of pilgrims who walk part of the route hoping to return at a future date. Whilst there is no accurate way of counting these pilgrims it is thought that perhaps as many as 10 times the number who finally arrive in Santiago have walked sections.

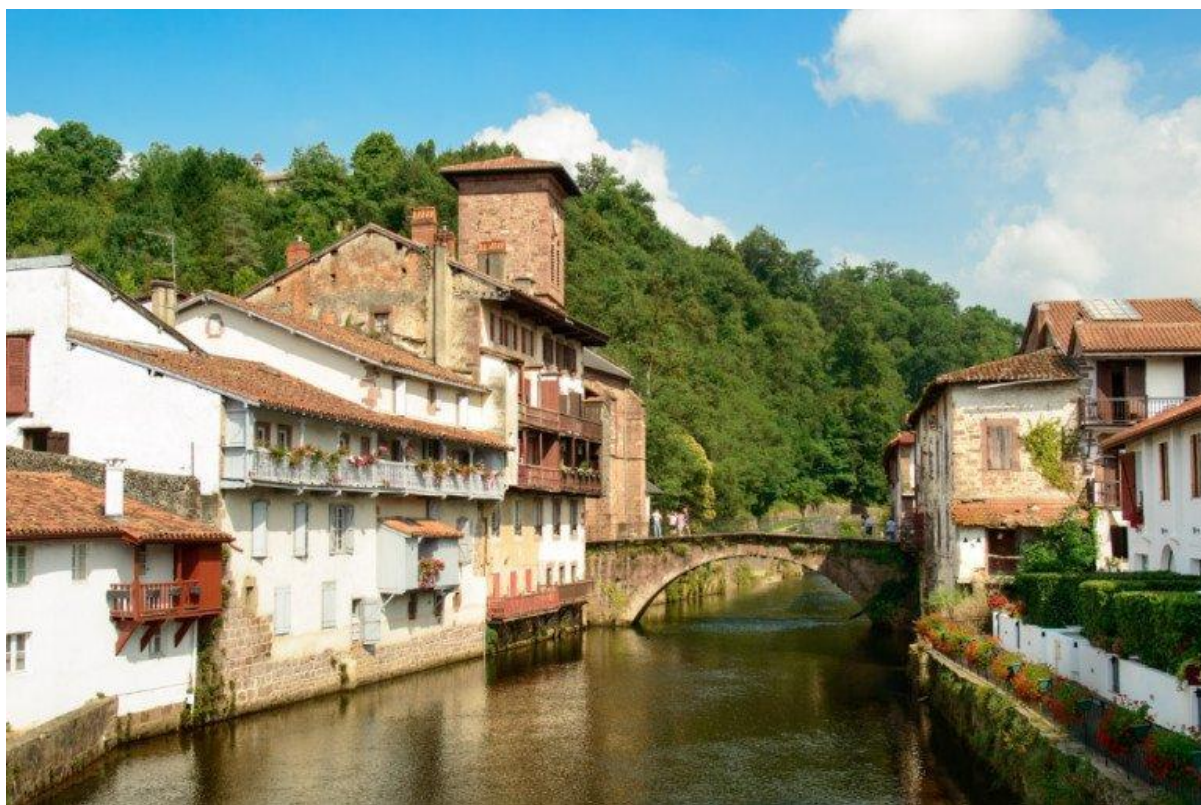
Other routes which connect with the *Camino Francés*

There are many other routes which join with the *Camino Francés*, such as: the route over the Somport Pass, via Jaca, to Puente la Reina, where the two ways meet; the Madrid Route, which joins at Sahagún; and the Via de la Plata and other routes from the south, which can join at Astorga. There are also other routes which detour from the *Camino Francés*, such as: the *Camino del Salvador*, which links León to Oviedo; and the *Camino Primitivo*, from Oviedo to Melide.

Planning your journey

In the middle ages there were no transport systems as there are today. Pilgrims traditionally set out from their own homes - some still do that! In order to plan your journey to begin the Camino you need to decide where to start. Where you start depends entirely on you and the time you have available. Also you do not have to travel the Camino in one continuous pilgrimage. Many people make the journey in sections over time.

Therefore you can start in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port or Roncesvalles, or Pamplona, León or much nearer Santiago, in O Cebreiro or Sarria, for example. The choice is yours. In the Appendix **How to get there** we explain many of the travel options open to you.



Pilgrims set off across this bridge in Saint Jean Pied de Port

How long does the Camino take?

The distance from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port is approximately 774 kms. Walkers generally allow between 4 and 6 weeks. For cyclists it is about two weeks. The weather, the terrain and enjoying a rest in cities like León or Burgos, all affect the total time you take to reach Santiago.

How much does it cost?

The basic *albergues* (pilgrim accommodation) cost an average of 10 - 12 euros per day and a *menú del peregrino* costs 12-20 euros; 30 - 50€ per day would be a reasonable budget, allowing a pilgrim to stay in albergues and to eat in a restaurant each day. Economies could be made by cooking in albergues where there are facilities. If using an albergue which is “*donativo*” (i.e there is no charge but donations are invited) please do leave a donation!

What is the terrain like?

Geographically, the Camino can be roughly divided into five sections:

- First the route crosses the Pyrenees and then descends through woodlands to Pamplona.
- Varied and beautiful sections across western Navarra and La Rioja follow, partly wooded, partly agricultural, with some hills to cross.
- Between Burgos and Astorga the route is on the *meseta*, the high plains of Castile, undulating arable fields at 800-900 metres. There is little shade and it is hot, dusty and arid in summer, but cold and raw in the winter.
- After Astorga, the Camino crosses the Montes de León and passes the highest point at the Cruz de Ferro, followed by the fertile plain of El Bierzo.
- The route climbs up to O Cebreiro and enters the final section in Galicia, a verdant land in total contrast to the *meseta*. The mild Atlantic climate is akin to western Britain. The two mountain ranges rise to c.1500 metres, may be snowbound in winter months and can be subject to bad weather at any time.

Most of the Camino is on tracks that present little difficulty. Whilst some of the mountain sections are steep, there is no mountaineering involved!

When to go?

Most pilgrims walk in the months from May to October, and the most popular times for pilgrims to arrive in Santiago are during Holy Week and Easter (*Semana Santa*), and for the Feast of Saint James on the 25th of July, when the city is in *fiesta* for several days. As well as these festivals, August

and September are the most popular months on the Camino. Each year the number of pilgrims registering at the Pilgrims' Office in Santiago rises by around 10% but, whilst there are peak periods, more accommodation is opened each year in response. The last 100 kms from Sarria is inevitably the busiest section, and the crowds last through July, August and September.

If you decide to go at a busy time, try to avoid the albergues in the larger towns on the route, or use hostels or hotels. Advice is given later about accommodation.

If you plan to walk in winter I recommend that you read Tips from A Winter Pilgrim by Anne Born <https://www.amazon.com/Buen-Camino-Tips-WINTER-Pilgrim/dp/B0B3SDF9RM>

Public Holidays and Religious Festivals

In Spain there are many holidays and religious festivals. You may wish to take these into account when planning your Camino either to avoid them or to see them! Be aware that often shops and banks are closed not only on these days but on the following day. Check locally. The following list is not exhaustive:

2023

1 January: New Year's Day and the Feast of Mary, Mother of God - *Santa María, Madre de Dios*.

6 January: The Epiphany - *Día de Los Reyes*. In **Spain** this feast is celebrated as much as Christmas, and presents are often given on this day. There are street processions and celebrations.

Carnaval: This is the period before the start of Lent and is a time of partying and over indulgence.

22 February: Ash Wednesday - *Miercoles de Ceniza*, and the start of Lent (*Cuaresma*).

19 March: The Feast of Saint Joseph - *San José*. This is when Father's Day is celebrated.

2 April – 9 April: Holy Week - *Semana Santa*, when there will be many religious services and street processions.



Palm Sunday in Santiago de Compostela

1 May: Labour Day - *Fiesta del Trabajo*.

7 May: Mother's Day - *Día de la Madre*.

May/June (moveable dates):

18 May: Ascension Thursday - *Ascensión del Señor* (may be celebrated on Sunday 21 May).

28 May: Pentecost - *Pentecostés*.

8 June: Corpus Christi (may be celebrated on Sunday 3 June), with religious street processions in many places.

25 July: Feast of Saint James - *Santiago Apóstol, Patrón de España*, Spanish National Holiday.



Celebrating the Feast of Saint James in Santiago

15 August: Feast of the Assumption - *Asunción de la Virgen.*

12 October: Día del Pilar (Our Lady of the Pillar) - Fiesta Nacional de España | Día de la Hispanidad (National Day | Hispanic Day).

1 November: All Saints - *Todos los Santos.*

2 November: All Souls - *Todos los Difuntos.*

Around these dates there may be local church services for those who have died in the community in the last year.

6 December: Spain Constitution Day - *Día de la Constitución.*

8 December: Feast of the Immaculate Conception - *La Inmaculada Concepción.*

24 December: Christmas Eve - *Noche Buena*, when traditionally Spanish families gather together at home for a meal. Many restaurants close.

25 December: Christmas Day - *Natividad del Señor.*

31 December: New Year's Eve | Hogmanay - *Noche Vieja.*

Local Festivals and holidays

Almost every village seems to have their own Feast or Feria, for example the Feast of the Ascension, which is the annual festival in Santiago de Compostela with street theatre, bands, orchestras and the circus comes to town.

In towns and villages all along the Camino Francés you may encounter a local festival such as:

Arzúa Cheese Festival – February/March

Bread and Cheese festival in Sahagún – April

Fire water festival in Portomarín – early April

O Cebreiro cheese festival – April

May Festival – Festa do Maio in Villafranca del Bierzo – May

San Fermin running of the bulls and the city's most famous festival in Pamplona – July

San Cristobo Festival in Palas de Rei – July

Estella festival – Estella/Lizarra – early August

Santa Marta festival in Astorga – end of August

San Zoilo festival in Carrión de los Condes – end of August

Rioja Harvest Festival in Logroño – September

Romaria Virxe do Cebreiro dedicated to the patron saint of O Cebreiro – early September

Fiestas de la Encina in Ponferrada, the city's biggest annual festival – September

Music Week in Melide – November

Pilgrim Stories - Inspiring thoughts from John Fletcher's blog
www.the-raft-of-corks.com

"Of all my Caminos the Francés is the most populated by far but everyone who wants still finds time for solitude whereas the other Caminos can sometimes offer only solitude. When I read the phrase, "What's timeless and eternal is in the ordinary of our lives", I immediately saw that the essentials in my life back at home are identical to all that is most wonderful about the Caminos to Santiago.

Pilgrims often talked to me about the simplicity of life on the Way. To begin with, we each walk with as little external baggage as possible. We all comment, with surprise, on how little we need, materially, in order to live and to be happy. Such simplicity highlights the ordinary, the fundamentals which humans need to survive and thrive.

The backpack holds the external essentials while the body, mind and spirit are forced together through the most simple of daily routines - of sleeping, eating, washing and walking. The landscape, the birdsong, the sunlight and weather from dawn to dusk, the villages and cities, cathedrals and hovels are embraced and imbibed by all the senses, immanent with my deepest self which, for moments, knows its own integrity. If the ordinary in my life is not taking me here, to the timeless and eternal, it will be because my life is not ordinary enough, insufficiently empty and harbouring forces of disintegration.

The Freedom of the ordinary.

Most pilgrims on the Camino believe that what they are doing is quite extraordinary but often comment that they feel much more in touch with what life is really about. What a statement that makes about the lives we normally live and the extent to

which we have pampered to our insecurities, to our lack of trust in ourselves, in others and in Goodness in all that is! We seek security, approval, "success" and love in all the wrong ways and all the wrong places and box ourselves in with junk so we cannot move. We cherish our falsest of beliefs in a life of illusion thinking that cars take us places to which only our hearts and our limbs and the humble parts of our minds can lead us.

The freedom of the ordinary can be seen in the way that pilgrims do not compete to have all the best gear, to dress better than others or to hide their difficulties in walking or sleeping or feeling fine. Walking alongside a busy road, I become aware of some drivers' need for speed, of seemingly huge and shiny 4x4s which never leave a tarmac road; and I become sensitive to how encapsulating cars are, like little mobile prisons. The exposure of the pilgrim in his/her ordinariness spills over into a willingness to help, to share and to listen to others until a spirit of giving becomes the norm: and then we notice how naturally many others, not walking the Camino, also share and help and listen. The pointers in the ordinary show us the Way to the timeless and eternal.

Peace, deep peace.

In many ways the ordinary in the Camino leads us deeper into who we really are. While this journey inwards can mirror the many discomforts of the Camino we are drawn further along the way by a voice which says that this is the only way we will ever be at peace, that this is where our true happiness lies. The ordinary is often uncomfortable at first for those of us used to comfort. Learning to share food when arriving in an albergue with no shops or bars, for example, or sleeping in huge busy dormitories, are a couple of common experiences on the

Camino which move us bit by bit into that trinity of interwoven relationships at the heart of the ordinary in our lives: the relationships with ourselves and with others held together by Love. It is here that we catch moments of a very deep peace and, yes, it seems far away from everyday life but it is right beside the ordinary in our lives where we find the timeless and eternal."



Language

Although most Spaniards do not speak fluent English - apart from a growing number of young people - you will quickly find that along the Camino the staff of albergues, restaurants, hotels and hostels are able to communicate with you remarkably well! However as a visitor to Spain it is courteous to at least use some words of Spanish, if even simply to say Good Morning (*Buenos días*), Please (*Por favor*), Thank you (*Gracias*) and Goodbye (*Adiós*). You will find that if you make an effort in this way Spaniards will generally respond warmly. If you wish to learn more you could take a short course or use home study audios or videos.

I recommend this website: <https://spanishforCamino.com/>

Camino Language

Santiago - Saint James! From the Greek Iacobus. Santiago de Compostela is the town where it is held the body of Saint James is buried.

Peregrino(a) - Pilgrim. In Spanish the feminine is denoted by using “a”.

Albergue - Accommodation with dormitories and bunk beds, much like youth hostels. Generally they provide a bed and a shower for pilgrims at a very economic price. More later.

Hostales/Pensiones - Reasonably priced private hostels providing simple accommodation in single or double rooms, often with ensuite facilities.

Clave/Contraseña - *Clave* (pronounced *clabey*) is the word for a key and *contraseña* (*contrasenya*) the word for a password. Either can be used when asking for the internet password.

Potable - Drinkable (water). Seen at fountains and wells. *No Potable* means Not Drinkable.

Hospitalero(a) - A volunteer that welcomes and cares for pilgrims in albergues on the Camino.

Credencial or Pilgrims Passport - All pilgrims carry a *credencial*. It is essential to gain admission to albergues along the route. It is also necessary to obtain the *Compostela* from the Pilgrims’ Office in Santiago – see below. *Credenciales* are available from the pilgrim organisations in English speaking countries or on arrival in Spain in pilgrims’ offices, Cathedrals and many albergues.

Pilgrim Association where you live:

Australia – Australian Friends of the Camino www.afotc.org.

Canada – Canadian Company of Pilgrims www.santiago.ca.

Canada - [Association Du Québec à Compostelle Région](http://www.duquebecacompostelle.org)

<https://www.duquebecacompostelle.org>

Ireland – Camino Society Ireland www.Caminosociety.ie.

South Africa – Confraternity of Saint James SA www.csjofsa.za.org.

United Kingdom – Confraternity of Saint James UK www.csj.org.uk.

USA – American Pilgrims on the Camino www.americanpilgrims.org

Compostela - This is the traditional certificate awarded to pilgrims arriving at the tomb of St. James in the Cathedral of Santiago. To receive the *Compostela* pilgrims must have walked or travelled on horseback at least the last 100 kms to Santiago. Those using bicycles must have travelled at least the last 200 kms. On arrival at the Pilgrims' Office in Santiago, the *Compostela* is awarded when pilgrims present their *credencial* or pilgrim passport containing stamps (*sellos*) which they have obtained along the way.

How to register at the Pilgrims' Office in Santiago to receive the Compostela:

<https://oficinadelperegrino.com/en/>



The Pilgrims' Office in Santiago

Sellos - Stamps which may be obtained in churches, town halls, albergues, hotels, hostels, bars and restaurants and so on along the way. The Cathedral of Santiago stipulates that **you should obtain at least 2 sellos per day**. This is easily done, for example from the place where you sleep and a café where you stop for coffee.



A credencial with sellos

Buen Camino! - “Have a good Camino!” - the greeting you will hear and give many times on your Camino.

Physical preparation, including foot care!

Some people like to prepare thoroughly for their pilgrimage, whilst others prefer just to get up and go, hoping to get fit along the way. If this is your first long distance walk you are strongly advised to do some preparation and training in order to avoid the pain of blisters, muscle strains and other injuries. Start some weeks before departure with stretching exercises and short walks, and gradually build up the distance and the load carried. A few occasional, gentle walks are not enough. You should develop enough stamina to walk, day after day, for a reasonable distance, such as 20 kms or more, with the full rucksack that you will carry.

Foot care and blisters. Blisters can ruin a Camino. At best they are uncomfortable and at worst they are so painful the sufferer can hardly walk. If not treated properly they can become infected. Broadly speaking blisters are caused by friction and moisture. To avoid blisters you should have properly fitting footwear which when laced holds your foot in place. You should also wear good quality socks which will wick away moisture. To avoid friction many pilgrims wear an inner pair of thin liner socks as well as outer socks. The theory being that the thin liner sock hugs the

foot and cuts down friction with the outer sock.

Taping. If you are prone to blisters, or you get blisters which subsequently heal, many long distance walkers recommend using simple surgical tape to cover these areas in order to prevent blisters in future. Prevention is always better than cure. If when you are walking you feel anything uncomfortable with your feet stop immediately, take off your shoes and socks, examine the shoe for the cause - such as a small pebble - and put everything back on. If you feel a “hotspot” developing (an area of your foot where you think a blister may develop) put some tape on it – ensuring that when your sock is on the tape remains in place.

Treating blisters. There are a number of schools of thought about this. Some walkers believe in passing a sterilised needle and thread through the blister, leaving some thread in place to wick away any moisture which gathers. Others believe that the blister, as one of the body’s defences, should be left in place with some padding placed around it to relieve the pressure on it. Others believe in applying a proprietary blister treatment, such as Compeed. Others strongly advise against this. Whatever course of action you choose, if you are unfortunate enough to get blisters please ensure that everything you use is scrupulously clean, including the area around the blister itself. You can buy antiseptic solutions such as the iodine based Betadine. And remember in both Spain and Portugal you are never far from expert help – simply ask in any *farmacia* (dispensing chemist shop).

This comprehensive website gives good information and advice on the prevention and treatment of blisters: <https://www.blisters-prevention.com/>



Gear - what to buy and how to pack

Walkers: the two most important priorities are ...

1) Your footwear. You will need good walking shoes or light boots.

Some people walk in trainers or walking sandals. These are fine in good weather, but that is not always guaranteed! Modern materials mean that you can now have footwear that is rugged, lightweight and waterproof. Go to a reputable specialist outdoor shop for advice and fitting, preferably later in the day when your feet are swollen. Wear the socks you will use on Camino and do not rush the purchase. A tip on sizing is to put on the boot/shoe and make sure there is enough room for you to insert your thumb between it and your heel, so that when you “heel back” and lace up your foot is held snugly and there is also sufficient room in the toe box. Most good equipment shops have an “artificial hill” where you can practice walking up and down a short incline to ensure that your foot is held well in the shoe or boot. Please take time to use this. Having obtained your boots/shoes get accustomed to wearing them. Blisters on a Camino are to be avoided.

2) Your rucksack. It is best to seek specialist advice at an outdoor shop. You want one that does not weigh too much empty, is not

too large for your strict needs (you'll only end up filling it), and which fits you as comfortably as do your boots. An ill-fitting rucksack will cause ongoing discomfort. A rucksack between 35-50 litres in size is sufficient. Again take your time. Good rucksacks come with different sizes of frames as well as different capacities. Get one that fits your body. Also pay attention to the hip belt. The weight of the rucksack and its contents should sit on your hips and not on your shoulders. Try on the rucksack and ask the assistant to help adjust the straps so that you can make sure it is comfortable.

How to pack. The heavier your rucksack the more risk there is of blisters, tendonitis and muscle strains. A rule of thumb which many pilgrims use is that you should carry no more than 10% of your body weight, to a maximum of not more than eight kilos. You may find this difficult to achieve at first but you must be ruthless about what you take, even after you have chosen the lightest of everything. The rule must be: unless an item is absolutely essential, leave it out. Forget "just in case" things. There are shops in Spain! Pack and repack, each time discarding anything that 'might be useful' until you are there. Remember that on the Camino you will be carrying water and perhaps food for the day. When you are walking you will be thankful that you packed light, when you see the suffering of fellow pilgrims with heavy rucksacks. On Camino, especially in Galicia, there is always the risk of rain. Keep your gear in waterproof bags and use a lightweight waterproof rucksack liner plus a rucksack cover. Many pilgrims use a waterproof or poncho to cover both themselves and their rucksack.

What to pack. If you plan to stay in albergues you will need a **lightweight sleeping bag**. In summer, a sleeping bag liner may be sufficient, but in cold weather you would have to rely on albergue blankets, which are not always clean, and may not be available. If you also plan to do much of your own **cooking** you will need basic items, such as a pan, plate and utensils. A stove is not necessary.

A basic **first aid kit** should include: small quantities of plasters; antiseptic solution; one or two sterile pads to place over blisters; and surgical tape - which can also serve to prevent blisters. You may also carry a small supply

of blister treatment, such as *Compeed* or *Spenco Second Skin*. There are *farmacias* in most locations in Spain, which can supply everything you need. To prevent blisters some recommend wearing a thin pair of socks plus a thicker pair. Others use Vaseline, applied in advance every day on all areas of skin subject to friction. And do not forget a sun hat, high factor sun cream, and sunglasses if you use them. If you have any specialist medical requirements try to get a letter, with Spanish translation, so you can show the pharmacist. NB many pharmacists speak some English.

Other items should include: a small torch; ear plugs (snorers are endemic on the Camino); and a fast drying sports towel. Take a pair of lightweight shoes, such as crocs or flip flops, which you can wear after you take off your boots, and use in the shower in albergues, or when sightseeing. One or two walking sticks is a matter of personal choice. Except in summer, gloves can also be useful when starting early in the day.

Sample Packing Checklist – not exhaustive!

Clothes

1 pair of long trousers and 1 pair of shorts - some pilgrims use zip off trousers and convert them into shorts when it is hot. Others walk in shorts all day and wear long trousers in the evening.

Ladies may choose to walk in a hiking skirt and have a sarong for evening wear.

2 pairs of underpants.

2 pairs of socks (and liner socks if using them).

Ladies, 2 Bras.

1 short sleeved T-shirt - synthetic and quick drying.

1 long sleeved T-shirt - or light-weight hiking shirt.

1 fleece (for cooler evenings and mornings).

1 pair of walking shoes/hiking boots or walking sandals.

1 pair of light crocs or flip-flops for the shower and evening wear.

1 rain jacket or poncho.

Toiletries

Almost every pilgrim carries more in their toilet bag than is necessary. Remember that there are shops in Spain where you can buy more supplies! To save weight select the smallest (or miniature) size of everything you need ...

Shampoo and conditioner (if you need these) - buy more as you go.

Miniature size soap (the type you get in hotels).

Miniature toothpaste and toothbrush.

Small roll-on deodorant (buy more as you go).

Small light sports towel (buy them in hiking shops).

Tiny hairbrush or comb.

Sunscreen lotion.

Lip-balm.

Nail clippers - to keep your toenails short.

Makeup. If you are taking makeup, the same approach applies - take the bare minimum in the smallest size possible.

First Aid Kit

Needle and thread.

Band-Aids.

Compeed - see Foot Care Section.

Antiseptic cream.

Vaseline.

Duct-tape or medical tape.

Pain-killers.

Electronics

Adaptor Plug.

Mobile phone plus charger.

Camera (although the camera on your mobile phone may be best).

For sleeping

Ultra lightweight sleeping bag or, in the height of summer, a sleeping bag liner, or one of your own making, such as a single duvet cover that you can climb into the heat of summer - many pilgrims prefer to take a single duvet cover that they can climb into.

Pillow case - which you can stuff with clothes to make your own pillow.

Ear plugs - considered essential + Eye-mask (if used).

Miscellaneous

Guidebook.

Miniature torch (to see in the dark when you need to use the toilet, or if you leave before light).

Sun hat.

Sun-glasses.

Reading glasses.

Lightweight scarf (also doubles as a bandana) to protect your neck/head in the sun.

Hiking poles (if you use them).

Reflective vest - if you are cycling or walking on roads in darkness or poor visibility, wearing a reflective vest compliant with standard EN471 is a legal requirement in Spain. Reflective clothing or backpack covers are also a good idea. Lightweight reflective vests are very cheap – they can be purchased in the UK as cheaply as £1.25 – and are readily available in garages and supermarkets in Spain.

NB - Your gear and airport security

When flying to Spain many pilgrims choose not to check their rucksack into the hold. This is for two reasons: their rucksack is sufficiently small to take as hand luggage; and they do not want the start of their Camino to be delayed if their luggage does not arrive with the flight. This is a personal choice.

However, if taking your rucksack onto the flight as hand luggage, please remember that knives, corkscrews, screwdrivers etc are not permitted in hand luggage at this time. You can buy a simple cheap pen knife and/or cork screw when you arrive at your destination.

Secondly, please note that if you are flying **within Spain** at this time, all Spanish airports do not permit hiking poles as carry on items and these must be checked in. Many pilgrims use the long tubes suitable for architects' drawings for this purpose.

Personal Safety

The Camino to Santiago is generally a very safe place for pilgrims. However, accidents do happen and, like anywhere else, pilgrims must take precautions against crime. Above all, common sense must prevail.

- Do not leave your belongings unattended - keep your valuables with you at all times - even in the shower in albergues.
- Carry a mobile phone - or have access to one. Make a note of the telephone numbers of the emergency services given below.
- Stay alert - be aware of where you are and who you are with. Trust your instincts about strangers. Walk with another pilgrim, if you feel at all nervous or simply want company.
- Wear a reflective vest - Spanish law requires everyone walking on roads or close to traffic to wear a reflective vest before first light and after dark. These are available from gas stations and many shops and supermarkets.
- Keep copies - of your passport and any important numbers - in a separate place from your purse or wallet or email them to yourself.
- Arrange insurance - have appropriate travel insurance which also provides cover for health care and repatriation. Keep the insurance company helpline number handy.
- Trust other pilgrims - but only to the extent you know them. Don't forget the basic precautions you would take anywhere. Do not hesitate to call the authorities if something happens which is of concern to you. Just as you would at home.
- Above all - have fun! But don't forget that the Camino is the same as all other situations where there are people. Use your common sense.

Emergency Numbers. Before calling the emergency services if at all possible work out your location from your guidebook or by asking other people. **112 is the general Emergency Number in Europe.** They will answer very quickly, even if there is no credit on your phone. Explain slowly and clearly that you need to speak to an operator in English, if that is the case.

In Spain there is also a dedicated English-language telephone number for

victims of crimes who wish to make a police report but do not speak Spanish. The number is +34 902 102 112. It operates from 8 a.m. to 12 noon daily.

Alert Cops App - the Spanish Ministry of the Interior provides an app through which you can report a crime and other incidents:

<https://alertcops.ses.mir.es/publico/alertcops/en/>



Healthcare and the Camino

If you are a citizen of an EU state ensure that you have a **current** EHIC (European Health Insurance Card).

The EHIC card entitles you to free or reduced cost treatment in the Spanish health service. The EHIC is not an alternative to travel insurance. It will not cover any private medical healthcare or costs, being flown back home, or lost or stolen property. It is therefore important to have both an EHIC and a valid private travel insurance policy in place before you travel. Some insurers now insist you hold an EHIC, and many will waive the excess if you have one.

There are health centres and hospitals in many places along the Camino as well as a network of private clinics. The local police or *hospitaleros* in albergues will help if you need to find medical assistance.

If you regularly take prescribed medication you should bring a supply sufficient for the time you will be on Camino. In case you need these replaced bring a note of the name (and generic name) and dosage and consult a *farmacia*.

Travel Insurance with health cover

If you are not from an EU country (and even if you are!) you are advised to arrange travel insurance which covers cancellations, theft and other risks. It should also provide medical cover which will give you access to healthcare in the private medical facilities which exist in all of the main Spanish towns along the Camino.



Pilgrim Stories - Sundays on the Camino Francés by Marion Marples

"My second day walking was a Sunday. I left the pilgrim town of Puente la Reina, over its beautiful bridge, before dawn and with barking dogs, crowing cockerels and the morning star for company. I felt brave and cool as I strode out, but the stoney path soon started to climb. The yellow arrow waymarks disappeared for a while in new roadworks but I followed the bootprints in the dust. At Villatuerta I caught the end of Mass and later the priest came to greet us. After a picnic lunch I joined two Brazilians for the walk to Estella where we stayed the night.

By the second Sunday I had walked about 100miles. As we set out before dawn we met the teenagers returning from their discos and were thrilled by a huge orange harvest moon. By 10am we came to a bar for a welcome coffee and then started the steep climb up the Montes de Oca, which in the Middle Ages were feared on account of the wolves and bandits. In the lonely forest we came with relief to the spartan monastery of San Juan de Ortega. Here the priest served garlic soup to all pilgrims.

My third Sunday was the best walk of all. After 2 days off to heal my blisters I felt refreshed as I set off alone from Castrojeriz. I climbed a steep track to regain the higher plateau as the sun rose dramatically behind me, catching the bright quartz in the path. The path levelled out but soon descended to a broad valley, full of stubble fields, with a distant view to a tree lined river. Villages and church towers punctuated the glorious landscape spread before me. After the open plain the path followed the Canal de Castilla, which felt like walking

through a painting with deep green water, golden cornfields, blue sky and sparkling poplars.

By the fourth Sunday I had reached the great city of León. After Mass in the beautiful Cathedral we shared a pilgrim's birthday drink at the San Marcos Hotel bar. I helped my new companion Anne reduce the weight of her rucksack by disposing of some surplus items. In the evening we indulged in heavenly hot chocolate at the Hotel Paris before returning to our very basic 5th floor hotel around the corner.

During the next week we had rain or showers most days. We also reached Galicia, a land of small hamlets and eucalyptus forests, very different from the rest of the walk. Arriving in Melide before lunch we found the pulpo (octopus) festival in full swing. However, we enjoyed an excellent plate of local cheeses and cold meats, washed down with local cider.

The guide book said the 'last 50 kms are surprisingly arduous', with which we concurred and were pleased to arrive eventually at a riverside converted 16th century pilgrim hospital. Everyone went to bed early. Only two more days to Santiago

It was wonderful to arrive in Santiago, stand before the great cathedral and contemplate all that had been achieved. I climbed above the High Altar and hugged St James, thanking him for my safe arrival and all those who helped me get there. The next day's Pilgrim Mass was the emotional climax, as I stood among those who had made the journey with me. I'd arrived but I felt it was just the beginning of a new stage of my life!"

Money

Many pilgrims carry both cash and a credit/debit card. Some carry two cards with one kept separate from the other in case of loss. Visa and Mastercard are the most commonly accepted in Spain. Please note that in Spain only cards with a 4 digit PIN number are accepted at bank cash machines and for purchases. The easiest way to get cash is from a cash machine at a bank. These are widely available in every city, town and even in large villages. They operate in your choice of language. You will find that every few days you can top up your cash supplies. Keep your money and cards secure, advise your bank where and when you are going, and keep a note of the number to call in case you lose a card.

Communication - Mobile phones and Wifi

Public telephones still exist in Spain, although they are decreasing in number due to the popularity of mobile telephones. In some places there are *locutorios*, places where they meter the calls and charge you at the end. Telephone cards are available to purchase. There may also be cyber cafés with computers.

Whether or not you take a mobile telephone or other mobile device is a matter of personal choice. Some people prefer not to be connected in this way with their life at home whilst on pilgrimage. Others take a mobile to send occasional messages home to reassure loved ones that all is well.

For some pilgrims a mobile phone, particularly a smartphone or tablet, is essential equipment. As well as being a telephone it can perform other functions: it can save taking a separate camera or ebook reader; maps, guidebooks, translation and navigation apps and spiritual materials can be downloaded onto it; and it can be your journal of the Camino. It can also be useful to book a bed or a room ahead, if that is your choice. More of this later.

Wifi is available in most bars, restaurants, hotels, hostals and many albergues along the Camino. If your telephone is unlocked, you can easily buy a local SIM card (or indeed a telephone) for telephone calls and internet access, at reasonable cost. These are sold in many places: airport and railway stations; and in shops in larger towns.

In all of this you need to balance the convenience and usefulness of the device against the intrusion it may bring - and the weight of the device and the charger!

Maps, Apps and GPS

Maps. There is little need for detailed maps on the Camino. The route is **very** well waymarked with the traditional yellow arrows for you to follow. There are also distinctive yellow shells on a blue background. Cyclists have found the Spanish IGN maps at 1:200.000 to be useful. For IGN maps you should contact specialist dealers such as:

Stanfords, 12 Long Acre, Covent Garden, London WC2. ☎ 020 7836 1321 or www.stanfords.co.uk. The Map Shop, 15 High Street, Upton-on-Severn, WR8 OHJ. ☎ 01684 593 146. The Hereford Map Centre, 24 Church Street, Hereford, HR1 2LR. ☎ 01432 266 322.

Books of maps for the Camino are produced by Pila Pala Press and John Brierley.

Apps, GPS and Elevation profiles. There is a growing number of Apps available for smartphones, many of which do not need internet access on the Camino. Amongst those currently recommended by pilgrims are:

www.trekopedia.com

www.wisepilgrim.com

www.Caminopilgrimapp.blogspot.com.es

But there are many more available and in development.

GPS Tracks for the Camino are also available from a number of sources, including www.maps.me. However the general advice from pilgrims with experience is that a GPS device separate from a GPS navigation app on a smartphone is unnecessary. The navigation app may prove particularly useful in towns, to locate accommodation, for example.

Elevation profiles are readily available with a simple internet search and also at www.godesalco.com/plan. This site is very useful in calculating distances and provides much other information.

Cyclists

Cyclists comprise about 5% of the total number of pilgrims along the Camino. For specialised information about cycling, and some suggested alternative routes, please see: <https://www.cicerone.co.uk/cycling-the-Camino-de-santiago>

Pilgrim Stories - Day 14, Fromista to Carrión de Los Condes, 21 km
by the Trepidatious Traveller - <https://magwood.me/>

"Yesterday we stayed in a private albergue, very well run with sufficient amenities. We quickly showered and changed and adjourned to a vey nice bar across the road where we drank a few! glasses of wine which were served with generous tapas - a delicious chunk of tortilla Español, which I don't normally care for as it is usually very dry, but this was really good. We ordered a ration of morcilla to share which was huge enough for us and some left over for an Australian couple who shared our table to try. We were there so long that we replenished our appetites and I had an excellent bowl of fish soup and Ella had some croquettes. We returned to the albergue in time for bed. The albergues usually have a curfew of 9:30 -10:00 pm when doors are locked and all lights go out. Most pilgrims are more than ready for bed by then.

I slept well, although I was aware of the wind howling around the building (no street cleaning machine this time - the real thing!). The forecast for the previous day had been winds of 35 km and for today were 45 km. So in the morning we wrapped up well - I wore my long-johns for the first time - and set off for the battle of the breeze. The breeze threatened to win most of the time, hugely strong gusts knocking us off course. I had to grip my walking poles really tight to stop them blowing in front of my legs and tripping me up. Unfortunately, it was way too cold to take off my gloves in order to take photos, so

thus far it is a photo-free day. With my buff wound three times around my head and my jacket hood on top I was not taking much notice of the scenery, just 'head down and keep going'.

We covered our planned 21 km and reached Carrion de los Condes in good time, but failed to find an albergue before leaving the town. On the outskirts was a hotel, an old monastery and I suggested we see how much it would cost to have a room for the night. I decided that if it was 50-€ or less we would stay there. However the receptionist at this 3 star establishment stated the price as 60-€ and I could not persuade him to let two cold and wet pilgrims stay for any less. So he gave us a map of the town and we retraced our footsteps.

We are now staying at the albergue Espiritu Santo, run by nuns, with separate dormitories and facilities for men and women, and single beds for all - no bunks. Bliss!"

Accommodation

Along the Camino pilgrims have a choice of accommodation between albergues, hostels and hotels. All of these range in quality and price.

Albergues. These provide simple Youth Hostel style accommodation. They are available all along the Camino. Some are run by voluntary pilgrim associations or by parish churches or local authorities. These are only open to pilgrims in possession of a *credencial* who are travelling on foot, by bicycle or with a horse or donkey. They usually do not accept reservations. They provide dormitory accommodation (usually unisex) with bunk beds, (usually) hot showers, toilets, clothes washing and drying areas and, frequently, a kitchen. Often paper disposable sheets are provided. Some provide communal meals and/or breakfast. Some of these albergues operate on a *donativo* basis, i.e there is no set charge, rather pilgrims are invited to make a donation. Please remember that *donativo* does not mean "free" - give what you can. They depend on you.

There are also very many privately owned albergues which, as well as providing dormitory accommodation, operate like hostals and have single, double and sometimes triple rooms with a private or shared bathroom. They often provide meals and a range of other facilities. Charges range from 12 - 20€ for a bed in a dormitory and 30 - 50€ per person in the individual rooms.

Reserving accommodation. Every year more pilgrims travel the *Camino Francés* and it is understandable that some may be anxious about securing accommodation each day. There are many albergues and hostals along the way, with more opening each year. Ideally you should be able to walk and simply stop when you wish at a convenient albergue. Many pilgrims do this. If you do choose to reserve a bed or room we advise against booking all accommodation from start to finish, because you may walk slower or faster than you think, or you may stop in a town to rest or see the sights. However, soon after you start your pilgrimage you will become accustomed to predicting where you may wish to stop and, especially at the busiest times of the year, you may decide to reserve a bed a day or a few days in advance. Hotels and hostals and many private albergues accept reservations. Generally speaking municipal, church and association albergues do not accept reservations, although there are some exceptions, which are noted in the guide. Private albergues do accept reservations (and forwarded luggage). Nowadays almost all private establishments, even the smallest albergues, are listed on www.booking.com, which many pilgrims find an invaluable tool.

Arrival and departure. Usually the opening time for all accommodation is mid afternoon; often in dormitories lights out is at 22.00h; and you are expected to leave by 08.00h the next morning. Except in case of illness, the association, parish and public albergues will only allow pilgrims to stay one night. These albergues may also not admit groups and give preference to walking pilgrims. They do not accept luggage which is sent forward.

Hotels etc. Hotel-type accommodation is available all along the Camino. It covers the range from 5 star hotels through to a room above a village bar. Names used for 'hotels' from most to least expensive are: *hotel*; *hostal*; *hosteria*; *pensión*; *posada*; *hospedaje*; *habitaciones* (rooms); and *camas* (beds). Virtually all of these on the Camino are listed in www.booking.com.

Camping. Very few pilgrims carry a tent for a number of reasons, primarily the availability of very cheap accommodation along the way. A tent adds to the weight which is carried because, as well as the tent, often a stove and other equipment is necessary. Secondly “wild camping” - pitching a tent on a suitable piece of ground in the countryside - is illegal in Spain and, given the fear of forest fires, which often occur in rural Spain, the police will take action. Lastly, although there are registered well-organised campsites with good facilities, these are few and far between on the Camino. A few albergues may allow you to camp in their grounds. If you intend to take a tent research these possibilities in advance.

Going to Mass on the Camino

Mass is available in a number of churches along the Camino. Check locally for times of Masses, as these often change in summer and winter. In smaller places, listen for the church bell which often indicates Mass is about to start. You may also consult this useful website:

<https://misas.org/>

Sending mail

Post Offices, *Correos*, are available in many places along the Camino. Ask wherever you are staying and also check opening times. *Correos* are usually open in the mornings in smaller places, and often in the afternoon in larger towns and cities. Sometimes they are open on Saturday. You can usually buy stamps (*sellos*) at tobacconists’ kiosks or shops (*estancos*) - look for the brown and yellow *Tabacos* sign.

If you wish to send things forward to Santiago (or anywhere else) to use there, or simply to lighten your rucksack, you can send a parcel to the hotel you may have reserved or to the Post Office, who will keep it for you for up to 45 days. This service is called *Lista de Correos*. Parcels should be addressed: your name (surname in capitals & underlined) followed by the name of the town with postcode (and province), e.g. Johnnie **WALKER**, Lista de Correos, 15703 Santiago de Compostela (A Coruña). There is no charge, but you will need identification when you collect it.

<https://www.elCaminoconcorreos.com/en/transfer-luggage>

Ivar Rekve runs a private Luggage Store in Santiago, and he will keep luggage for up to 60 days. Email him for further details and charges: ivar@casaivar.com.

Every Post Office sells boxes of all sizes for you to use wherever you are sending your parcel.

Sending luggage forward

Traditionally pilgrims to Santiago carry everything they need on their back. Most still do today. Others, for health reasons or personal choice, may send their luggage forward to the next place where they intend to stay, and simply walk with a day pack containing water and some food. There is a growing number of companies, including the *Correos*, (Post Office) who provide this service. Details are advertised everywhere along the Camino.

Using a luggage forwarding service has pros and cons - we ask you to think carefully about these. Whilst walking without weight is much easier and reduces the risk of blisters and other injuries, it has the disadvantage that you need to have reserved a room ahead and you cannot simply stop whenever you wish. Also, please remember that municipal, church and association albergues will not accept forwarded luggage.

Pilgrims with limited mobility

Many pilgrims with disabilities travel the Camino each year. For more information and a list of guidebooks and other resources see: <http://amawalker.blogspot.com.es/2010/08/pilgrims-with-disabilities.html>.

Pilgrim Stories - Glen and Julies' Camino <https://glenjuliezehr.com/>.

We're happy to say, hand on heart, that we have walked more than 500 miles (800 kilometers) from France across n As we walked for 36 days, we were surprised and delighted over and over again. In fact, this was the highlight of the Camino: each day brought us something new and unexpected. We fell in love with Northern Spain: the landscape, the people living there, and the people walking on the Camino. A special shout out to Jason Erwin from Australia who walked many miles with us and became a very good friend.

In light of our 36 days on the road, we have decided to list 36 things that we will remember, treasure, and enjoy about our Camino de Santiago.

Glen and Julie's Camino Surprise and Delights

Walking. Believe it or not, the walking wasn't laborious. We loved the daily routine of walking long distances. They say you can "walk yourself fit" on the Camino...it's true.

Talking. Chatting with interesting and wonderful people from all over the world, what's not to love, right?

Stopping. Each day we would walk for a few hours and then stop and get a cup of coffee at a small village café; walk a few hours more and stop for a beer with lemon...very civilized indeed.

Sellos (Pilgrim Stamps). Pilgrims are required to collect these in a special pilgrim passport to mark your progress on the journey and receive a special certificate.

Pilgrim Dinners. Three courses of home-cooked food and a bottle of wine for about \$10.

Storks. We were completely caught off guard by all of the storks and their huge nests.

Poppies. Beautiful splashes of red in the green wheat fields.

Crunching Gravel. The crunch of the gravel underneath our feet became a musical rhythm.

Architecture. Roman, Medieval, Gothic, Romanesque, Baroque, Neoclassical, modern... jaw dropping and amazing.

Church Bells. The clocks of medieval life. They still ring out the hour; helpful and we didn't wear a watch.

Statues and Monuments. Reminders and tributes to others that have gone before us...some of them endured incredible things, some of them achieved incredible things.

Vineyards. Small vineyards scattered throughout, producing great wine. We'll struggle when we have to pay more than \$4 a bottle when we return home.

Roses. Roses are everywhere: wild, cultivated - in all colors. We stopped to smell them.

Museums. Incredible works of art, yet often uncrowded. In Leon, they locked us inside their museum and let us wander around. We had it to ourselves.

Hemingway. Ernest Hemingway lived in the Navarra area of Spain and wrote a number of his books in Pamplona's famed Café Iruna. We ate there and stayed on the street where they run the bulls.

Symbols. Ancient and mysterious symbols and figures carved into churches and stone monuments. Curious and enchanting.

The Holy Grail. It's in a monastery in Leon. Who knew? We saw it. Pretty cool.

Fuentes. Fountains along the way with cold and safe water to drink. They are a real lifesaver. In one town, there was even a "wine fountain" connected to a winery.

Crazy Legends. The cathedral in Santo Domingo de Calzada has live chickens kept inside. Ask us about the crazy story.

Charming Hotels. Small hotels full of character with owners that go out of their way to be gracious and welcoming. We'd stay at these over a larger chain hotel any day.

Cathedrals. Whether you're religious or not, these are gothic wonders to behold...Burgos, Leon, Santiago. You should see them.

Celtic Spain. Galicia is a region with bagpipes and Celtic customs. Eat the octopus (pulpo) when you are there...very delicious.

Mountains. We began by hiking across the Pyrenees, but it seemed like we were surrounded by mountains most of the way to Santiago.

Meseta. Dusty, dry, and fields of wheat for as far as your eye can see. Beautiful in their own way.

Small Villages. Charming little farm villages spring up out of nowhere when you turn a corner of the trail.

Breakfast. Coffee, fresh squeezed orange juice, toast, meat, cheese, and more. Waking up hungry is a treat!

Templars. The Templars were the builders of octagonal chapels, odd little churches, huge castles and the first international banking system.

Trees. Olive, Cherry, Almond, Eucalyptus, and Poplar with white fuzzy pollen.

Animals (all sorts). Trout swimming in the streams, snails and slugs on the trail; mice, horses, donkeys, cows, goat and sheep in the fields, and dogs and cats in the villages. We enjoyed all of the creatures.

Town Squares. Sitting out in the town square in the evening...we watch families eat, socialize, children play...in one big community.

Bird Song. We would often stand and watch the birds sing to one another. Little beaks fluttering and making amazing sounds.

Local Foods. Each town seemed to have its' own special dish of cheeses, meats, fruits, vegetables...and we loved eating every yummy bit of it.

Hawks. They look majestic as they swoop and soar high in the wind; looking for a small animal below. Circle of life.

Sketching and Journaling. Every day, Julie journaled and I drew a sketch of something that caught our attention.

Ancient Paths. Well worn, trod upon for nearly a thousand years. We added our footsteps too.

Chacos. Julie stopped wearing her boots early on and switched to Chacos. Her feet felt better and she finished the rest of the walk in her sandals.

One extra for good measure:

Saying Buen Camino. There's a greeting that one peregrino (pilgrim) says to another, "Buen Camino!" We loved saying and it, and really loved getting it from the locals.

So, wherever you are on your life journey...Buen Camino!

Finally may I wish you a wonderful and fulfilling pilgrimage

*May the road rise up to meet you.
May the wind always be at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
and rains fall soft upon your cheeks.
And, until we meet again,
may God hold you in the palm of His hand.*

Buen Camino!

Appendix

How to get there

Please check all times and prices with the companies concerned.

Overland to Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port.

Via Bayonne. Bayonne can be reached either by train or by coach. Check times and prices.

Train: www.voyages-sncf.com or <https://www.thetrainline.com>

Bus: www.checkmybus.co.uk/bayonne/london.

There is a direct train service from Bayonne to Saint-Jean.

By air. *Ryanair or Easyjet* to **Biarritz**. There is an airport bus to Bayonne railway station from where there are trains to **Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port**. See www.voyages-sncf.com for up to date timetables and fares.

Access to other starting points for example:

Valladolid - Bus connections to León.

Santander - Bus connection to Burgos, Pamplona or León - goes from the bus station (*estación de autobuses*).

Bilbao - The airport bus to the city centre, 15 mins - or else the nearby metro service from *Sondiko* station. Turn left out of Arrivals. Tourist Office at the airport.

From Bilbao to Saint-Jean - Coach service to Irun. Tickets and bus stop at *Termibus* by the *Hospital Civil de Basuto*. 1hr 50mins. Cross river to Hendaye by train or via Pont Saint-Jacques on foot. Hendaye by train to Saint Jean via Bayonne.

NB Euskotren has a direct service from Bilbao to Hendaye station <https://www.euskotren.eus/en>

From Bilbao to Pamplona, Roncesvalles or Saint-Jean - Bus service to Pamplona.

Pamplona to Roncesvalles - Local bus service to Roncesvalles, run by *Autocares Artieda*, www.autocaresartieda.com. Mon-Fri dep 18.00h, Sat 16.00h. Check availability early and late season. ☎ 948 302 787. There

is also a taxi service from Pamplona to either Roncesvalles or Saint-Jean. It is operated by *Francisco Igoa Martinez*. Uses an 8 seat VW minibus. Check prices. ☎ 649 725 951.

Express Bourricot, based in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, provides: a minibus service to Saint-Jean from a number of destinations, including Biarritz and Bilbao airports; a daily shuttle from Saint-Jean as far as Croix Thibault on the Route Napoléon; and to Roncesvalles on the road route for those who do not feel up to walking this first stage. Prices vary according to the numbers using the service as well as distance. ☎ 0661 960 476. www.expressbourricot.com.

From Bilbao to Logroño or Burgos train - By ALSA coach from **Bilbao to León or Astorga or Ponferrada**.

From Madrid by bus to **Astorga**, or **Ponferrada** or to **Pamplona**.

By Sea.

Brittany Ferries operate Portsmouth to Bilbao and Santander and Plymouth to Santander. The Bilbao ferry port is in **Santurzi**, 15 kms from the city centre. There are coaches, or the RENFE *Cercanias* rail service, into the centre. Access to regular starting points as given above.

Starting at Sarria. Fly to Madrid and take the overnight train to Lugo, which stops at Sarria. Or fly to Santiago and use the bus service to Sarria from the airport or from the bus station in central Santiago.

<https://www.rome2rio.com/es/s/Aeropuerto-Santiago-de-Compostela-SCQ/Sarria-Estaci%C3%B3n>

Useful websites to check timetables and prices:

For timetables of Spanish railways and of the main bus companies go to: www.renfe.es | www.alsa.es | www.continental-auto.es.

Ferries: www.brittanyferries.com | www.poferries.com.

European rail travel: <http://en.voyages-sncf.com/en/>.

Additional Notes

Links in English for ALSA and RENFE are

<https://www.alsa.com/en/web/bus> Alsa advance tickets changeable without penalty up to 1 hour b4 scheduled departure time.

<https://www.renfe.com/es/en>

Monbus for Sarria direct and via Lugo you can change language to English. Likewise for A Coruña and Ferrol.

From Madrid: Worth noting that trains to the north generally depart Madrid Chamartín. To Sahagún also from Principe Pio station via Valladolid, this is the 'bumpy and slow' (columpio) route.

Renfe: if booking in advance choose the Elige fare which allows refundable cancellation or one change of date/time.

As well as ALSA from Bilbao there are more services to Logroño (and Estella) with Álava bus. <https://alavabus.eus/es/lineas-y-horarios>

For the Camino Primitivo, flights to ASTURIAS (OVIEDO) direct + 1hr Alsa to Oviedo city all day every day from early until almost midnight, or ALSA and RENFE from Madrid **airport** and city.

Alsa buses to Ponferrada, Astorga, León, Burgos, Lugo direct from Madrid airport plus more from city.

Flixbus Madrid city to Burgos. For Somport/Canfranc, train from Madrid Atocha to Zaragoza then Avanza bus to Jaca and regular local bus to Canfranc Estación plus French bus every hour or so to Somport.

<https://www.avanzabus.com/> <https://www.mavaragon.es/horarios-autobus-jaca-astun> also for Canfranc or Jaca the RENFE 'Canfranero' from Zaragoza 2x daily.