



## Six highlights on the road ...

**1 MENU PEREGRINO**  
 Some hostels provide a simple communal supper, cooked by pilgrims and volunteers; others have basic kitchen facilities or restaurants. Pilgrim's menus and *del día* (daily menu) are widely available at local cafés, bars and restaurants for an average €10. The private **El Palo de Avellano in Zubiri** ([elpalodeavellano.com](http://elpalodeavellano.com)) serves a hearty set menu for €12.

**2 THE COMPOSTELA**  
 This is a Latin-inscribed certificate delivered on completion of the walk, to those who have done at least the final 100 kilometres, on presentation of your *credencial*. Pick up a *credencial* from the pilgrim offices in St-Jean-Pied-de-Port or Roncesvalles. Your

stopovers will be stamped by warden *hospitalero* in the hostels, or at churches, bars and town halls along the way.

**3 PET PILGRIM'S REFUGE** The **Refugio Gaucelmo**, at mountainous Rabanal del Camino between Ponferrada and León, is located in the old parish house - converted in the early 1990s by the Confraternity of St James into the first pilgrim's lodgings in the area.

**4 POST-CAMINO PARADOR** The splendid, cathedral-nudging **Hostal Dos Reis Catolicos**, commonly known as the **Parador de Santiago de Compostela**, is a 15th-century historic gem of pilgrim hospitality, equally

renowned for its beds and restaurant. Doubles from €186; [maptravel.ie](http://maptravel.ie).

**5 RUSTIC CHARM** The **Casa Os Vilares** is a lovely stone inn, five kilometres north of Santiago de Compostela. Doubles from €62; [osvillares.com](http://osvillares.com).

**6 PILGRIM DEODORISER** The call of the Camino originates in the shrine of St James at the Romanesque **Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela**. Consecrated in 1211, its nave is more than 100 metres long, with a Baroque façade added in the 18th century. One of its famous features is the *Botafumeiro*, or incense burner, which swings from a pulley system in the dome and succeeds in perfuming the pongy pilgrim masses.

## Getting there ...

It is a four-hour train trip from Bordeaux – six hours by train or bus from Bilbao – to Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, popular starting point for the Camino Francés.

**GO** Anytime from March to November; March-May and September-October are less crowded and hot.

**ORGANISED TRIP** Ireland's Camino Ways ([caminoways.com](http://caminoways.com)) can take a load off your back and mind – they also organise cycling tours. Follow the Camino ([followthecamino.com](http://followthecamino.com)) also does horse tours.

**CYCLE THE CAMINO** Many sections of the pathway can be used by cyclists; you can easily deviate from unsuitable parts and follow rural roads going in the same direction. Read *The Way of St James: A Cyclist's Guide*, by John Higginson (Cicerone Guides).

**ESSENTIAL READING** The Camino is not suitable for armchair travel or a "virtual pilgrimage", but *A Pilgrim's Guide to the Camino de Santiago* by John Brierley, or *Walking the Camino de Santiago* by Bethan Davies and Ben Cole, will help you prepare.





Below, last provisioning stop on the French side of the Pyrénées - the cobblestoned town of Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port.





Above, humble splendour at the medieval monastery of Roncesvalles and, top, Puente la Reina, both Navarra. Left, cockleshell, the symbol of the pilgrim.



