



left: Cappela de Boa Nova, a church en route; a beach by Baiona; Clérigos Tower, Porto

From Portugal to Santiago on a

- Hitting the Portuguese Coastal Way, **Lizzie Enfield** and family find a land that's a world away from the tourist hotspots

“Caminho com crianças?” the waiter asks, and I wonder if his question has to do with our order. We are seated in a rough-hewn, rustic restaurant right on the coast in the resort of Apúlia. It's busy, even though it's out of season, suggesting that A Cabana's reputation as one of Portugal's top 50 restaurants is deserved. To be honest, whatever we ate would be manna from heaven. My two children (14 and 11) and I have just walked 16km and we're starving.

I pull out my phrase book, hoping that it will shed light on what the waiter is saying, and discover it's “Caminho with children?”

I nod and he smiles, disappears and returns almost immediately with bread, olives and a plate of smoked Portuguese sausage, an entrée to the grilled sardines which will follow.

“Muito resistentes,” he says and claps.

I think he's applauding the children's “great resilience,” rather than the food, which is equally if not more deserving of acclamation, and which we fall on, ravenous.

His reaction is typical of our reception



along the route dubbed the “friendly Caminho” — the Portuguese Coastal Way, which leads to the pilgrimage site of Santiago de Compostela. Not all, but a great number of roads lead to Santiago and some are a bit like the summit of Mount Everest: clogged with tourists, wearily making their way towards its pinnacle, the magnificent Romanesque cathedral, where the bones of St James are interned.

More crowded today than it was in medieval times, the route has become a magnet for pilgrims of all persuasions; some on religious journeys, others on personal spiritual or physical quests. Join it from France or Spain and you're more likely to spend your time greeting fellow travellers than in quiet reflection.

Yet the Portuguese Coastal Caminho (Caminho da Senda Litoral), which starts in Porto and winds north along the Atlantic coast, is a quieter, more peaceful alternative. It is the route favoured by the writer Paulo Coelho and used by Queen Isabella of Portugal in the 13th century and is shorter than any of the others; possible to complete in 11 days, compared with the five weeks needed to hike from St Jean Pied de Port in France.

We walked just the first leg: five days from Porto to Baiona in Galicia, an appealing resort with castellated medieval walls, where Columbus landed in 1493, after reaching America. There's a replica of the *Pinta*, the surprisingly small ship in which he made the voyage, in the harbour not far from a tempting line up of tapas bars.

However, this trail is not just a fast track to Santiago, it is more a passage through a Portugal which is a world away from the touristy Algarve and the bustle of Lisbon; a place where little English is spoken, agriculture is predominant and history is in evidence on every winding cobbled street and coastal track.

Before setting out we explored the Unesco heritage site of Porto, with its colourful tiled buildings, wide waterfront and eponymous fortified wines. The city is

Need to know

Lizzie Enfield and two of her children travelled as guests of Camino Ways (caminoways.com). To walk the Portuguese coastal route from Porto to Baiona takes six days and costs from £498pp for accommodation, luggage transportation and guided walking notes and route maps.

How to get there

TAP Portugal (0345 601 0932, flytap.com) flies from Gatwick to Porto from £121 return.

Lizzie Enfield's latest novel *Living With It* is published by Myriad Editions (£8.99)

stuffed with architectural gems from the iconic Clérigos Tower, which dominates the skyline, the modernist Casa da Música and Gustave Eiffel's precursor to Paris — the metal arched Dom Luis Bridge. The highlight for the children was the Livraria Lello bookshop, with its neogothic façade and curvaceous dual staircase — the inspiration for Hogwarts' moving ones.

On our first day's walking we hugged the coast, bouncing through dunes, along an impressive network of wooden boardwalks, skirting the edges of rugged Atlantic beaches. We discovered the remains of stone tanks, used by the Romans to make the fermented fish sauce, garum, while farther out to sea lay the remains of the English steamer *Veronese*, wrecked in 1913 and a Second World War German submarine, *Alemão* — enough evidence of carnage to put a smile on the face of a weary 11-year-old boy.

His sister took more delight in the sighting of an egret as we passed through the Mindelo bird reserve on the outskirts of Vila do Conde. This medieval shipyard, dominated by the imposing 14th-century monastery of Santa Clara, eventually morphs into the busier resort of Póvoa de Varzim, home, among other things, to one of Portugal's most famous bullrings.

Half an hour's walk from our hotel, opposite Póvoa de Varzim's imposing art deco casino, and we are heading through eucalyptus forests and out-of-season deserted tourist villages into an agricultural area. Potato pickers on their hands and knees wish us “Bom Caminho” cheerily,

walking trail along the coast

from a landscape dominated by polytunnels and beet-laden tractors, before our route heads back to the coast.

On the night we arrive in the elegant golden sand resort of Esponsende the fog-horn on the lighthouse is broken and has taken on a life of its own. That means that our meal of grilled hake with roasted pimentos washed down with wine from the nearby Douro Valley is accompanied by a blast of sound every few minutes rather than the gentle soundtrack of waves lapping a few feet from our table. The blasts continue long into the night.

Nevertheless, we probably sleep better than the folk who passed through the old pilgrims' hospice in the former Roman town of Viana do Castelo. The building used for shelter in the 15th and 16th centuries now houses the tourist office and is surrounded by opulent Manueline and baroque buildings. These are reward enough after several days walking, but a ride on the funicular railway to the magnificent 20th-century Basilica de Santa Luzia on the hill above Viana delivers a view which as "one of the world's finest panoramas".

On a clear day you can see exactly where the Caminho has taken you: beside miles of wild Atlantic beaches, fringed with coastal forests and dotted with historic towns and fishing villages. Ahead, the route crosses the Minho River into Galicia and A Guarda, a seaside town and "lobster capital", before heading north at the foot of the Argallos and Groba mountain ranges. "Did we walk all that way?" my son asks.

"And are we going all that way?" my daughter wonders.

This has been a trip outside their usual comfort zone. Yet they've risen to the challenge of walking 25-30km each day and found ways to cope with the hardships and boredom that balance the excitement. They chat, they sing and they pretend to be making video blogs. "We've basically been walking all day, and tomorrow we are going to walk all day."

They also look out for each other.

"Kitty, what size are your walking boots?" my son asks.

His older sister has terrible blisters. "Perhaps we could swap?"

This sort of solicitousness is unheard of back home.

As we remove our boots for the final time, having reached the spot where Columbus docked with his world-changing news, we feel some of the sense of achievement the explorer must have experienced. "Porto seems such a long time ago," both children agree, as we look out from the grounds of the parador towards the Cies Islands, bathed in a spectacular sunset.

And it's true. We may not have crossed oceans and continents but we've covered a variety of terrains and pushed through enough personal barriers to feel pleased with ourselves. And, as ever, we are hungry.

Heading for a table outside the superb Gastrobar El Gordo, we soak up the last of the evening sun, then tuck into a selection of mouthwatering tapas brought to us by a smiling waiter, before toasting the "friendly Caminho" and all who walk on it.

Last-minute family breaks

Cornwall

Stay in a remote wooden cabin set within a pine forest on a break offered by Forest Holidays (03330 110495, forestholidays.co.uk). The cabins at Deerpark are dotted around an ancient millpond – all with terraces and some in treehouses. The price for a week for four staying in a Silver Birch cabin with a hot tub is from £1,547 in August, down from £1,820; enter the promotional code SUMMER15 when booking online.

Dorset

Perfectly located for walks along the Jurassic Coast and close to the Regency seaside town of Sidmouth, the characterful Core House Cottages, each sleeping four, still have availability in August. The two cosy red-brick cottages are on a hill with sweeping countryside views. A week departing on August 8 is from £800 – a £244 saving (01395 519009, premiercottages.co.uk).

Pembrokeshire

Llangwm is a quiet village with a shop and a pub, the Cottage Inn, which is in easy walking distance of Westland, a mid-terrace stone

cottage with two double bedrooms sleeping four. Coastal Cottages (01437 772760, coastalcottages.co.uk) still has availability in August for a week, with the price starting at £595 (a saving of £105). The cottage has cosy, modern rooms, a wood-burning fire and a barbecue patio.

Costa Brava, Spain

Stay in a fully-equipped Espace tent by a beach on the Costa Brava on a 12-night break arriving on August 17 and save 30 per cent on the usual price. It's now £605 for 12 nights for two adults and up to four children at Camping Playa Brava at Playa de Pals with Venue Holidays (01233 629950, venueholidays.co.uk). The tents have air-conditioning, mini kitchens and two double bedrooms, plus a "quad room" with four beds. Ferry crossings can be arranged on request and cost from £118 a Dover-Calais return.

Tenerife, Spain

Rooms at the Barcelo Santiago hotel are from £41pp per night, based on two sharing in August – 10 per cent off the usual rate, with breakfast included (barcelo.com).

The hotel is close to a beach and has pools and a spa. Decoration is modern and many rooms look out across La Gomera island and the dramatic Los Gigantes cliffs. Fly to Tenerife with Ryanair, Monarch and easyJet from £104 return.

Fethiye, Turkey

Anatolian Sky (0844 2733586, anatoliansky.co.uk) has knocked 25 per cent off the price of a week-long stay at the minimalist Yacht Classic Hotel in Fethiye next month. The price for a family of four staying on a B&B basis for a week is now from £2,208 including return flights and transfers departing from Gatwick on August 11 – a saving of £732.

Rhodes, Greece

Superb tennis and watersports facilities make Mark Warner's Levante Beach Resort a great choice for sporty families (0844 2736796, markwarner.co.uk). The resort is on Rhodes's longest beach, Afandou. A seven-night stay with a full-board upgrade, six half days' child care and return BA flights is from £1,095 per adult and £787 per child.

Prices available as we went to press

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Walking holiday



Barcelos on the Portuguese Coastal Way; at a milestone, left; Cappela de Boa Nova, a church en route; a beach by Baiona; Clérigos Tower, Porto

THE TIMES Saturday July 26 2014

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