



# \* 14 tips for doing the Camino de Santiago



Every year thousands of pilgrims and walking enthusiasts walk the Camino de Santiago, the Way of St James, following the many routes to Santiago de Compostela. The Pilgrims Office in Santiago de Compostela has reported that nearly 240,000 pilgrims received their Compostela certificate in 2014 from 140 countries around the world. The Irish are still among the top nationalities on the Camino; more than 5,000 walked to Santiago last year alone. If you are among the pilgrims walking the Camino this year, listen up as Roland Monsegu, [director of CaminoWays.com](#) offers you his top 14 Camino de Santiago tips.

## 1.

### Take the right gear

Check the forecast a week before you travel so you can pack the appropriate clothing and gear: such as a light raincoat, warm jumper or fleece, and hiking trousers. Don't forget sun screen if you are walking in spring and summer. This is one of the most common mistakes of hikers who embark on the Camino.

## 2.

### Footwear

New walking shoes/boots are a no-no. Make sure you take comfortable walking boots that have been worn in. This will be extremely important to avoid blisters. A good pair of hiking boots and walking shoes can help you immensely.

Avoid wearing sandals. They might be suitable for casual evening attire but if you wear them for walking you risk damaging your feet

or twisting an ankle as they don't give you enough support.

Long walks or treks can be hard on your soles. You can use benzoin oil on the bottoms of your feet to toughen the skin (you will find it in health food shops and pharmacies). Try to walk barefoot at home and outside whenever you can, this will also toughen the skin, but be careful where you walk.

## 3.

### Get out and about

'Do I need to train for the Camino?' is a frequently asked question. It is highly recommended that you do. While everybody can walk the Camino, you should definitely get out and about on a few walks to build stamina before you head on your trip. You should start doing regular walks at least three months in advance of departure. The walks should be mixed with various exercises, stretches and workout routines to prepare for the many terrains encountered on



Clockwise from top: Pilgrims enjoying the city of Santiago. Alto del Perdón (780m) or Mount of Forgiveness on the Camino. A man sells octopus along the route. Santiago's famous cathedral.

the different trails. Going on prep walks will also help you break in your walking boots/shoes.

#### 4.

##### Find your own pace

The Camino de Santiago is about enjoying the journey, not just the destination (although Santiago is a pretty awesome little city!).

While many walkers choose to start walking at the crack of dawn and finish early, the most important thing is that you find your own pace. Pilgrims staying in public hostels (albergues) tend to start walking early to secure a place at the next hostel as they can get booked up pretty quickly, particularly in the summer months. If you have your accommodation pre-booked, you don't have to worry about that.

**Many people choose spring and autumn to walk the Camino but summer is a great time if you are opting for a coastal route, such as the Finisterre Way, the Northern Way and the Portuguese Coastal Way.**

#### 5.

##### Choose the right 'Camino' for you

The most popular route of the Camino de Santiago is the so-called French Way or Camino Frances but there are many other routes starting in France, Portugal and Spain. If you are looking for the classic Camino experience, choose the French Way. If you'd like a less travelled Camino trip, why not reach Santiago on a different 'way' like the Portuguese Way? You can also choose a starting point closer to Santiago; you don't have to cover the whole 800km from Saint Jean de Port to Santiago de Compostela. The beauty of the Camino is that you can start your journey at any point along the way.

#### 6.

##### Pick your season

The weather is the one thing you can't control but you can plan your trip according to your

preferences. Many people choose spring and autumn to walk the Camino but summer is a great time if you are opting for a coastal route, such as the Finisterre Way, the Northern Way and the Portuguese Coastal Way. And if you are walking in Galicia mostly, average summer temperatures are usually in the mid-20s°C.

#### 7.

##### Read up on the history

The Camino de Santiago is more than just a walking holiday; it is a unique cultural experience. So we recommend you read up on the history of the trail, as well as the areas you will be visiting, to understand the local customs, discover interesting stories about the places along the way and learn about traditions, local cuisine and festivities. From spring to autumn you will encounter great little festivals that will make your Camino even more special. We write many weekly articles for the [CaminoWays.com](http://CaminoWays.com) blog about customs, food and events taking place along the route. Camino guidebooks – such as those by John Brierley's or those published by Cicerone – will give you information about the history of the steps.

#### 8.

##### Learn a few words

Having a few words of the local language will help you interact with the locals, understand signs and generally enjoy the experience even more. While you will find many signs in English along the most popular routes, such as the French Way, and in bigger towns, these become less common on other Camino routes and in smaller towns and villages. If you can, learn a few words in Spanish, French, Portuguese or Galego!

#### 9.

##### Don't forget your camera

Walking the Camino will be an unforgettable experience and you should come back home having made at least one new resolution and a few new friends! Don't forget your camera!

#### 10.

##### Eat the Camino

As you walk the Camino and cross different regions, you will encounter different food specialities, wines and other delicacies: from the wines of La Rioja to the seafood of Galicia. Our advice? Taste them all!

#### 11.

##### Have a map at hand

If you take the most popular route, which is the Camino Frances, it is more likely that you will run into many other pilgrims and walkers en route to the famous Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela. However, if you decide to walk one of the less well-known routes you may find yourself on a road alone for a long period. Having an up-to-date map, good guidebook and/or walking notes is important. It will help you to pinpoint where the next town is located, the main roads leading to Santiago and often

detail some of the highlights to see along the way. John Brierley's Camino guidebooks and those from Cicerone have useful maps. They can be bought in most bookshops and online.

#### 12.

##### Get your Compostela

Make sure you walk at least the last 100km into Santiago de Compostela to receive your Compostela pilgrim certificate from the Pilgrims Office. If you are cycling, you will need to ride at least the last 200kms.

#### 13.

##### Follow the yellow arrow

The most common marking that can be found along the way is the image of a scallop that you will see imprinted into stones and trees. The scallop shell is said to be a metaphor, representing the different routes that people travel from around the globe. In 1984, a priest called Don Elias started painting yellow arrows along the routes of the Camino. Today you will find both scallops and yellow arrows to guide the pilgrims to the final destination of Santiago de Compostela. But be careful, the orientation of the scallop can change depending on the region! Your best bet? Follow the yellow arrow.

#### 14.

##### Explore Santiago

Santiago de Compostela is a gem of a city. Take a couple of extra days to explore the cobbled streets and markets of the UNESCO-listed old town by day and enjoy the vibrant atmosphere of its many bars and restaurants by night. If you haven't done so yet, make sure you take a trip to the Atlantic Ocean to Cape Fisterra, the final point of the Camino de Santiago, where pilgrims used to swim in the sea and burn their clothes as a symbolic gesture marking the end of their journey. ☘



##### About Roland Monsegu

The Camino Frances (or French Way) was the last stop on Roland's two-year long trip around the world when he was in his 20s. The experience on the Camino de Santiago inspired him to set up his own adventure travel company in 2006 when he got back to Ireland. He has since walked, cycled and motor-biked thousands of Camino miles across France, Portugal and Spain. Roland hails originally from France. For more Camino de Santiago advice and tips, visit: [www.caminoways.com/travel-tips](http://www.caminoways.com/travel-tips)