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tips for Camino success

Walking the Camino Way is an unforgettable experience. Aisling Hussey has some tips for a good trip

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It's not about the destination but the journey," noted my philosophical friend before we embarked on our walk of the Camino. At the time, we were facing what felt like endless kilometres ahead of us – with minimal training completed beforehand – and were becoming slightly fearful.

Indeed, during our few days of walking, there were moments when we wanted nothing more than to reach the next pit stop. However, it was – as many other walkers before us can testify – an unforgettable experience. But what possesses anyone to walk hundreds of kilometres and call it a holiday?

The Camino de Santiago (Way of St James) is the pilgrimage to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia in north-western Spain. The cathedral is the focal point of the city, and where the remains of the apostle St James are buried.

For this reason, many complete it for religious purposes. Others do it to get away from everything, or as a personal challenge.

There are a myriad of different routes to take, but the French Way is most popular with pilgrims. Many will do the last 100km from Sarria to Santiago, which can be completed in five

days and is the minimum needed to collect your certificate of completion. Some braver souls will start further back and walk for a month or more.

When we walked the French Way in June, it was thronged with walkers and cyclists. The crowds, coupled with the markers along the way, make it impossible to get lost.

Thinking of completing the Camino? Follow these tips for a good trip.

1 LEAVE EARLY IN THE MORNING

If you plan on walking the Camino during the hotter summer months, aim to be on the road by 7am. You might feel tired and sore early in the morning, but most walkers will be on the road early.

2 TAKE YOUR TIME

Walking the Camino is not a race. Take in your surroundings and chat to fellow pilgrims, many of whom have travelled from all over the world.

The highlight of our trip was undoubtedly the camaraderie on the way – not one person will pass without the customary "Beun Camino" greeting.

It may sound simple, but it made the walk so much easier. Also don't forget to pack your pilgrim passport and get it stamped everywhere you go.

3 REMEMBER MEDICAL SUPPLIES

Blister pads, plasters, insect repellent and sun cream are all essential items for the Camino. When we arrived in Santiago, this writer visited numerous pharmacies in search of Epsom salts but to no avail. Book a hotel with a bath and bring the salts – you won't regret it.

4 STAY HYDRATED

Another important thing to remember is to stay hydrated. There are plenty of cafés to pick up some water, so you won't be stuck.

5 TRAIN BEFOREHAND

This writer started out with great intentions and tried to follow a training plan. However, I left for the Camino having barely completed a 10km walk. Unsurprisingly, I was in agony after two days. Camino Ways have a lots of plans and tutorials on www.caminoways.com – it's definitely worth your while building up your fitness levels before the trip. And don't forget to break in your shoes! **CL**



Getting there



FLIGHTS

Aer Lingus operates up to five flights per week from Dublin to Santiago de Compostela with one-way fares including taxes and charges starting from €49.99. This is a summer service and runs until 31 October. For further information, log onto aerlingus.com



TOURS

Dublin-based CaminoWays.com specialises in walking and cycling tours on the many Camino de Santiago routes, including the famous French Way, Camino Frances.

They organise both self-guided and guided tours. Prices for a six-night self-guided tour walking the last 100km into Santiago de Compostela start from €560 per person sharing including half-board accommodation, luggage transfers, pilgrim passport and holiday pack with practical information.

For a free quote visit caminoways.com, email their travel specialists info@caminoways.com or arrange an appointment at their Dublin city centre office.



ACCOMMODATION

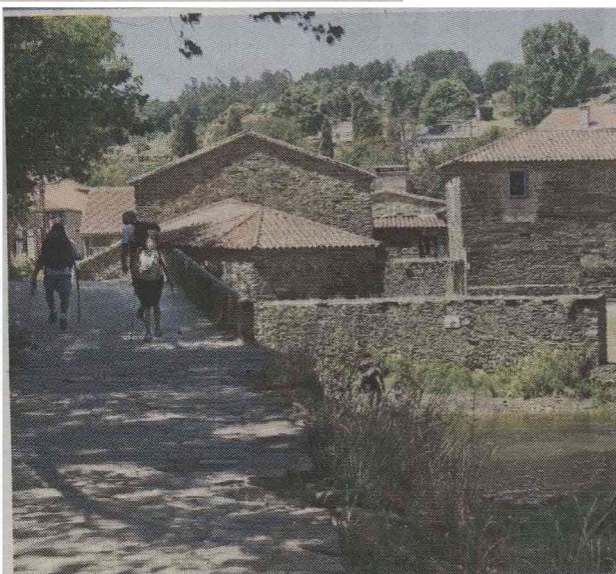
All kinds of accommodation can be found on the Camino, from hostels to more up-market boutique options.

A full week of walking from Sarria (six nights) would start at €560 per person sharing, including standard accommodation, with dinners on walking days, luggage transfers and holiday pack with practical information, including pilgrim passport. This package is offered by Dublin-based [Camino Ways](http://CaminoWays.com). The company also offers a Country Cottages package.

We stayed for three nights, starting from Arzua, which cost €299 per person sharing, including accommodation, one dinner, luggage transfers and holiday pack.

The first place we stayed was Casa Teodora in Arzua. It's a family-run guest-house in the market town.

Our final stop was Hotel Gelmirez in Santiago de Compostela, which is ideally located in the old town near the cathedral and has modern and comfy rooms.



Take in your surroundings and chat to fellow pilgrims.



Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia in north-western Spain.