

CAMINO DE SANTIAGO BEGINNERS GUIDE



CAMINO
WAYS.COM



WELCOME

The Camino de Santiago is one of the most inspiring walks in the world. Thousands of pilgrims, walking enthusiasts and explorers have embarked on a Camino journey since the Middle Ages.

This beginners guide is designed to help anyone planning a trip or simply learn more about the trails, the history and the culture of 'The Way'. If you are planning to go on the Camino for the first time, you will find our best advice in this free guide.

Each section is carefully put together to assist you in learning about the different routes, the places you will visit, the people you will encounter and preparing for this wonderful experience ahead of you.

ABOUT US

CaminoWays.com is a team of travel enthusiasts specialised in walking and cycling wonderful trails such as the Camino de Santiago across France, Spain and Portugal. Our experienced team will build Camino journey around you.

In addition, we also organise walking holidays on the Camino to Rome (Via Francigena) and St Francis Way (from Florence to Rome) at FrancigenaWays.com as well as exciting walking and cycling holiday at IrelandWays.com and other adventures and challenges at TrekkingBug.com.

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20 Camino de Santiago Facts



- 1 Camino de Santiago means Way of St James and refers to the routes leading to Santiago de Compostela, in Galicia. It was the Council of Europe's first cultural trail and it is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- 2 Santiago de Compostela means St James of the field of stars.
- 3 There are many Camino routes from various points in France, Portugal, Spain and beyond.
- 4 Pilgrims used to start their 'Camino' from their own homes.
- 5 The yellow scallop shell and yellow arrows guide pilgrims on their way to Santiago.
- 6 The Camino Primitivo from Oviedo is the oldest Camino route.
- 7 However, the most famous Camino route is the Camino Francés starting in St Jean Pied de Port.
- 8 The trail from St Jean Pied de Port to Santiago is 800kms / 500 miles long and takes approximately five weeks to complete.
- 9 You need to walk at least 100kms / 62 miles into Santiago to receive your Compostela certificate.

- 10 This makes Sarria (111kms from Santiago) the most popular starting point for walkers.
- 11 You will need to cycle at least 200kms (124 miles) to Santiago to receive your Compostela certificate.
- 12 Over 300,000 pilgrims arrive in Santiago each year and receive their Compostela certificate. Many more walk or cycle other sections of the trails across Europe.
- 13 If you walk the Camino for cultural or non-religious reasons, you can receive a certificate of welcome.
- 14 The pilgrim passport (known as credencial) needs to be stamped at least once a day during your trip; or twice a day if you are starting your Camino in Galicia.
- 15 The stamped pilgrim passport is required to stay in first-come first-served 'albergues' (public hostels). At CaminoWays.com we book accommodation with local guest houses and hotels so you don't have to worry but it's still a good memento and you will need it to request your Compostela.
- 16 The 12th century Codex Calixtinus is the oldest Camino de Santiago 'guidebook'.
- 17 The Camino is a long-distance trail with thousands of kms across Europe.
- 18 KM 0 or the very end of the Camino is actually not in Santiago but in Cape Fisterra, considered to be the 'end of the world'.
- 19 25th July is St James Day, a holiday in Santiago and Galicia's National Day.
- 20 Santiago's old town is a UNESCO heritage site since 1985 and its University dates back to 1495.



CHAPTER 1. THE HISTORY

The Pilgrimage

Thousands of people come from all corners of the world every year to walk what has become one of the world's most renowned pilgrimages, but where did it all begin?



SAINT JAMES

Mystery, legend and colourful myths are all part of the history of the Camino.

According to the official history of the pilgrimage, the body of Saint James the Apostle, son of Zebedee and brother of John the Evangelist, was discovered by a shepherd named Pelayo in a field in Galicia during the reign of King Alfonso II, back in the 9th century. The Apostle gives the route its name: Camino de Santiago means the Way of Saint James; Santiago or Sant Iago meaning Saint James.

Saint James had died some 800 years earlier and according to legend transported to Galicia (to the town of Iria Flavia, today's Padron, on the Camino Portugues) by two disciples in a boat led by angels. Somehow his body was then buried in a field not far from there; where it would be discovered a few centuries later.

Informed about this important discovery, King Alfonso II had a small chapel built in this holy place and would later commission a larger temple to attract pilgrims from all over the world, competing with other important religious centres of pilgrimage such as Jerusalem and Rome. Of course, at this point in time, religious buildings across Europe were busy competing for the best relics, as a way of attracting pilgrims, and the



relics of Saint James would transform Santiago de Compostela into one of the world's most important pilgrimage destinations.

Apart from the obvious religious aspect, the discovery and the development of the pilgrimage route was also vital from a political point of view, as a big influx of faithful Christians travelling across Northern Iberia, settling along the way and creating strong cultural links with the rest of Europe, was a very powerful tool to keep the Moors away.

However, there is also an interesting pre-history of the Camino as it seems the 'way' might have had attracted pilgrims even earlier than the 8th century, as a route that followed the Milky Way all the way to Fisterra (Finis Terrae). Finisterre was believed to be the end of the world, and a magical place where the living could get closest to the land of the death, to the 'other world'.

The Camino Passport

This Camino passport (Credencial del Peregrino) will be proof that you have walked the 100km necessary to obtain your 'Compostela' or 'Certificate', the official documents testament to your journey.

CaminoWays.com has its own 'Pilgrim Passport' that walkers can get stamped and take to the Pilgrims Office in Santiago to get their Compostela or certificate of pilgrimage.



If you start your Camino in Galicia you will need to collect at least two stamps per day from churches, town halls or other official establishments on your way to Santiago (at least for the last 100km). If you start from outside Galicia you will only need one stamp per day. Once in Santiago de Compostela, you must show your stamped Pilgrim Passport at the Pilgrims Office to apply for your Compostela certificate and any other pilgrim certificate you might want to receive.

What is the Compostela?

The 'Compostela' is the original religious certificate written in Latin, expended by the Church when pilgrims prove they have either walked 100km or cycled (or travelled by horse) 200km to Santiago de Compostela.

From the 12th century, the Church introduced a more rigorous system based on letters, the origin of the 'Compostela'. The 'Compostela' was a valuable document: pilgrims used to travel to Santiago in pilgrimage, in many cases as a penance. For some, walking to Santiago and getting their 'Compostela' meant they had secured their reference letter or VIP ticket to heaven: the 'Compostela' was considered an important paper, one to show St Peter at the gates of heaven!



What is the Certificate of Welcome?

Many cycle or walk the Camino for leisure, as a cultural experience and other non-religious reasons but this doesn't mean you can't get a certificate of this very special journey. Pilgrims travelling for sport or cultural reasons can obtain a non-religious version of the Compostela, called Certificate of Welcome, also from the Pilgrims Office in Santiago (Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino, Rúa Carretas, 33). The same rule of 100km for walkers and 200km for cyclists apply for this certificate.

Both the Compostela and Certificate of Welcome are issued to pilgrims, on a donation basis, by the Pilgrims Office in Santiago. It is also possible to request a Certificate of Distance (€3) including your starting point. The requirements as the same as the Compostela.



All yellow arrows and shells lead to Santiago



The scallop shell

The scallop shell is one of the most iconic symbols of the Camino de Santiago and today it is used, along with the yellow arrow, to guide pilgrims heading to Santiago de Compostela along its many different routes. Painted on trees, sidewalks, tiles, etc... the scallop shell (or 'vieira' in Galician and Spanish) will help travellers find their way.

There are many stories, legends and myths trying to explain the ancient link between the scallop shell and the Saint James Way. It is no coincidence that in French the scallop is called Coquille Saint Jacques, while in German scallops are called 'Jakobsmuscheln' (James mussels). The scallop shell is said to be a metaphor, its lines representing the different routes pilgrims travel from all over the world, all walking trails leading to one point: the tomb of Saint James in Santiago de Compostela.

However, it is open to interpretation. Which side points to Santiago? In some regions, the scallop's longest line is considered the one pointing towards Santiago. This is the case in Asturias, for example if you are walking the Camino Primitivo or the Camino del Norte, and some parts of the Camino Portugues Way. But don't let this fact confuse you, take the scallop shell as a symbol of the Camino, reassuring you that you are on the right path!

The scallops are most of the time placed next to a yellow arrow so always follow the arrows (no confusion here!), as they are the most accurate 'road signs' to follow. Medieval pilgrims often wore a scallop shell attached to their cloaks or hats during their journey to Santiago.



More than being just a symbol or a pilgrim badge, the scallop shells also had a practical purpose: they were a handy and light replacement for a bowl so the pilgrims could use them to hold their food and drink on their long journey. Pilgrims would also be given food at churches and other establishments, and a scallop shell scoop was the measure for the food they would be donated.

Since the scallop is native to the coast of Galicia, the shell also became a memento, a physical proof of having completed the pilgrimage to Santiago (and quite often walked to or via Fisterra, on the Costa da Morte). The shells could be picked up at the very end of the journey in Fisterra but also became a popular souvenir and source of business for the shops near the Cathedral in Santiago and other establishments along the way.



Following The Yellow Arrow

The name of Don Elías Valiña Sampedro might not ring any bells but you will certainly recognise his most 'famous' creation: the yellow arrow pointing the way along the Camino de Santiago. Don Elías (1929-1989) was the parish priest in O Cebreiro in Lugo and studied the history of the St James Way pilgrimage to Santiago in depth, writing many documents, articles and even a thesis on the Camino de Santiago for the University of Salamanca.

Don Elías was a bit of visionary and a Camino 'pioneer': after years studying the St James Way, he was convinced of the importance of this ancient trail and set himself the challenge of reviving the route we call the French Way. In 1984, he put in motion his mission to rescue, clean and mark the trails along Camino, starting in Roncesvalles, in the Pyrenees.

He also started painting the iconic yellow arrows to indicate the right way at the various tricky crossroads along the trail. Legend has it that Don Elías drove across the whole north of Spain on his Citroën GS packed with yellow paint, painting arrows leading to Santiago.

He also promoted the creation groups and associations to revive and maintain the different stretches of the Camino; and travelled to other European universities and conferences to explain the importance of the Camino

de Santiago as a space of communication and understanding for people of many nationalities. So today's walkers owe much more to Don Elías than just the yellow arrows helping them find their way, in fact. We probably owe him the fact that the Camino is still in existence at all!

Back in the 80s, when encountered by curious bystanders (and even the police!) Don Elías would explain he was 'planning an invasion'.

Since he died in 1989, he didn't get to see his vision for an 'invasion' fully accomplished, but we are sure he would be pleased to see the Camino today and would rejoice at the view of thousands of pilgrims of all ages and nationalities following his yellow arrows to Santiago every year.

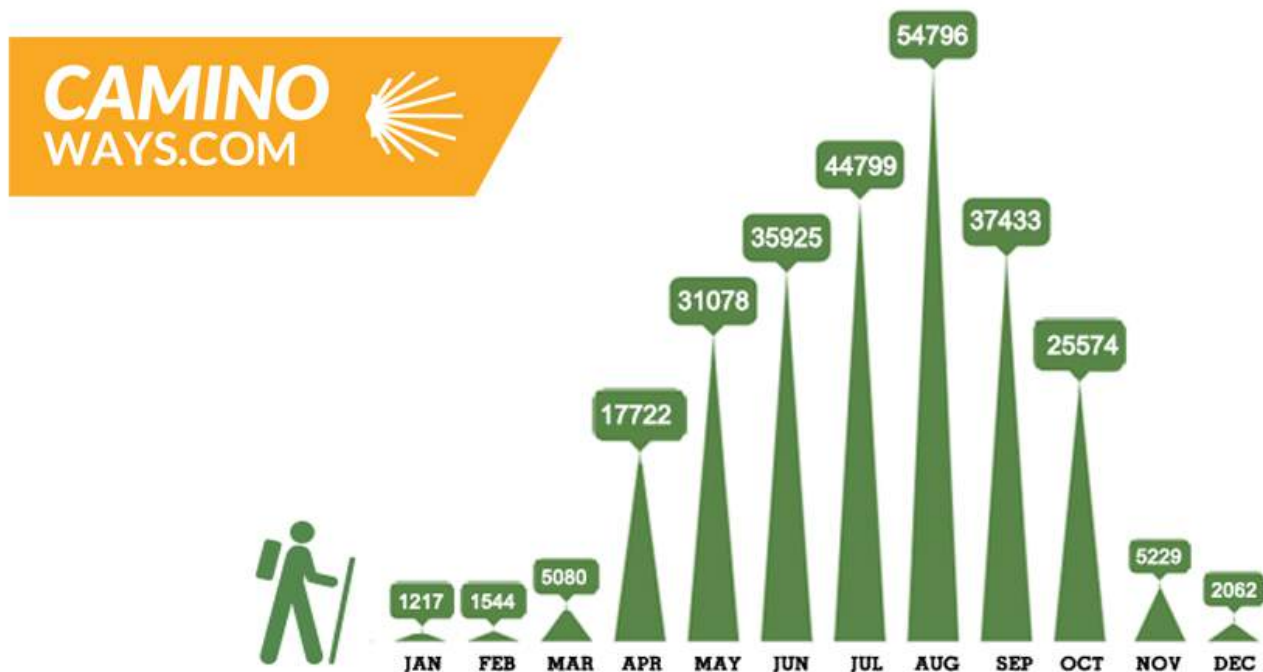
CHAPTER 2. THE ROUTES

Introduction

Over 300,000 pilgrims completed at least the last 100km of the Camino de Santiago each year with thousands more walking the different Camino routes and sections across France, Portugal and Spain.

The route that you choose for your Camino journey will depend on a numbers of factors; are you a solo traveller, are you going with a group, are you doing the Camino for spiritual reasons, are you doing the Camino for a new adventure, what airport would you like to, what type of weather are you looking for?...

Our travel specialists are experts in helping you decide which route is best for you. In the meantime we have put together a guide to help you choose and have included a list of the most popular walking and cycling routes.



How to Choose the Right Route for You?



Which one is the best Camino de Santiago route for you? Our Camino travel specialists have compiled a list of useful tips to help you choose the right Camino de Santiago route:

It is my first Camino and I'm looking for a social experience

If the social element of the Camino de Santiago experience and meeting fellow pilgrims along the way is important for you, the French Way is your best option. The French Way, or Camino Francés, is the most popular route, starting in Saint Jean Pied de Port, so it is also the best Camino for those looking for that special Camino social experience or who have never walked the Camino before. It takes approximately 30 days to walk from Saint Jean Pied de Port to Santiago de Compostela but you can walk shorter stretches. According to statistics from the Pilgrims Office in Santiago, over 60% of those receiving the Compostela certificate walk the Camino Francés. The second most popular would be the Camino Portugues (nearly 20%) and Camino del Norte (nearly 6%).

But I don't have much time

You don't have to start your Camino walk in Saint Jean Pied de Port, you can start at any stage of the way and create an itinerary adapted to the time you have available. For instance, you can walk the last stretch of the Camino Frances from the town of Sarria in just 5 days. If you have two weeks you could start your walk further away from Ponferrada, for example, and so on. Sarria is actually the most popular starting point of the Camino, followed by Saint Jean Pied de Port, León and O Cebreiro. Tui and Porto, on the Camino Portugues, are also among the top Camino starting points.

I'd prefer a quieter route

There are thousands of kilometres of Camino trails across Spain, Portugal and France so there are many options for those looking for a quieter route. If you are looking to finish in Santiago, you could walk the Via de la Plata from Ourense; or the Camino Ingles from Ferrol in a week. You will still meet pilgrims but far less than on the Camino Frances. And if you'd like to have the best of both worlds you could start in Lugo city: walking a couple of days along the Camino Primitivo and then joining the Camino Frances half way to Santiago. This will allow you two quiet days and three days of socialising as you approach Santiago.

For a truly off the beaten track experience the Camino de Invierno is your ideal trail.

I've done the Camino Frances before, what could I do next?

If you are already familiar with the 'classic Camino', the French Way, you have plenty of other routes to explore. Our suggestions: you could go for the Camino Portugues, the second most popular, or its coastal alternative from Porto.

Another great trip would be the Camino to Finisterre and Muxía, starting in Santiago de Compostela and heading to the Atlantic Ocean; or you could try any of the fantastic Camino routes in France such as Le Puy, Chemin d'Arles or Vézelay Way.

If you would like to try something really different, you could walk another heritage trail such as the Via Francigena in Italy or the Kumano Kodo in Japan, which is the only trail twinned with the Camino and also UNESCO listed for its fascinating history and culture.

I love cycling

You can cycle most of the Camino routes. In general, our Camino cycling packages cover an average of 50 to 60km per day, depending on the terrain; double the amount of kms you would cover walking. We recommend cycling the Camino only for those familiar with cycling and basic bike maintenance. We also recommend avoiding the Camino Frances in the busiest months if you'd like to follow the same trail as the walkers.

I am a very experienced walker, I'd love a challenge

If you feel you'd like to walk more kilometres than those we have allocated to each section, let the travel team know. However, we feel they offer a good balance, are challenging enough and give you the chance to wind down in the evenings. The Camino Primitivo from Oviedo, across the mountains, could be a good option for you, as it is one of the most challenging sections. However this is a quite a quiet route.

The Camino del Norte from San Sebastian to Bilbao might also be a suitable section for you. In Italy, we can suggest the St Francis Way which is stunning but challenging. For more adventurous challenges you can check out TrekkingBug.com.

I'd like to walk a coastal route but also see Santiago

If you are looking for a Summer Camino with coastal tracks, there are a couple of fantastic options: the Portuguese Coastal Camino from Porto, follows the Atlantic coastline to Baiona in the first week, then continues along the seaside villages and towns of the Rías Baixas until Pontevedra. You could also choose the

Camino to Finisterre and Muxía, the only route starting in Santiago, to discover the fabulous Costa da Morte with its pristine villages.

I'd like to walk a Camino along the coast but don't need to finish in Santiago

Then the Camino del Norte is ideal between the cities of San Sebastian, all the way to Ribadeo takes you along the Northern coast of green Spain.

I'm travelling on my own but I'd like to have a social experience

If you are travelling on your own but are looking to meet people and make friends, we would recommend you choose the Camino Frances. You can either book a self-guided tour or join one of our Camino guided tours.

Most Popular Camino Routes

- The most popular Camino de Santiago route is still the Camino Francés or French Way with 60% of all Compostelas issued (180738) in 2017.
- The classic Camino Portugués is the second most popular with 19.68% of all pilgrims.
- Camino del Norte – Northern Way is third with 5.92%.
- Camino Primitivo is next with 4.55%.
- Camino Ingles attracts approximately 3% of pilgrims (nearly 10,000)
- Via de la Plata follows with 3.04% of all pilgrims

It is worth noting that statistics only account for those pilgrims who have received the Compostela, hence finishing in Santiago and therefore not taking into consideration those pilgrims walking stretches of the Camino de Santiago routes in France, Spain or Portugal for instance but not reaching Santiago.



CHAPTER 3. THE CULTURE

Camino de Santiago Lingo

Here is a short and fun guide to the most useful Camino de Santiago lingo, a few sentences in Spanish and Galician to help you along the way!

Buen Camino! – This is the one sentence you will always remember. It is the meet and greet between pilgrims, and between pilgrims and locals.

Bo Camiño / Bon Camiño - Once you are in Galicia you might hear this instead! As it is in Galician language. As you enter Galicia, you'll see the Camino is referred to as: Camiño de Santiago.

Ultreia! – It is a less known version of 'Buen Camino!' but the sentiment remains the same: safe journey to Santiago!

Peregrino: male pilgrim / **Peregrina:** female pilgrim

Bicigrino: male bike pilgrim / **Bicigrina:** female bike pilgrim

Me gusta... el pulpo (Spanish): I like... octopus. Of course you can replace 'octopuses with any other food of your choice! Calamares (squid), pollo (chicken), caldo gallego (Galician stew), ensalada (salad)...

No me gusta... el pulpo: I don't like... octopus. **Non me gusta ... o pulpo** would be the same in Galician.

Me encanta ... el pulpo: I love... octopus. **Encántame ... o pulpo** in Galician.

Me duelen los pies (Spanish) Dóenme os pés (Galician): my feet are sore

Necesito... un café: I need ... a coffee but you can easily replace coffee with...

Un descanso: a little rest or break

Por favor: please

Muchas gracias (Spanish) Moitas grazas (Galician): thank you very much!

Useful Spanish for the Camino

ENGLISH

I'm looking for...

I'd like to...

Where is...?

How much is ...?

Where are the toilets?

Does anyone here speak English?

Hello

Good morning

Good evening

Bye/See you

Please

Thank you

You're welcome

Sorry/Excuse me

What's your name?

SPANISH

Estoy buscando

Quisiera

Donde está...?

Cuanto cuesta...?

Dónde están los servicios?

Hay alguien que hable inglés?

Hola

Buenos días

Buenas noches

Adiós

Por favor

Gracias

De nada

Perdone

Como te llamas?



My name is	Me llamo
It's a pleasure to meet you	Encantado/a
Where are you from?	De dónde eres?
I am from...	Soy de...
Can I have a ... beer please?	Una cerveza por favor?
Could you help me please?	Puede ayudarme, por favor?
I'm allergic to...	Soy alérgico/a a...
ATM	Cajero
How do I get to...?	Como puedo llegar a...?
Is it far?	Está lejos?
Go straight ahead	Vaya derecho
Turn left	Tuerza a la izquierda
Turn right	Tuerza a la derecha
I am lost	Estoy perdido/a
Where is the ...hospital? post office? bus station?	Dónde está... el hospital? correos? estación de bus?



Useful Portuguese for the Camino

ENGLISH

I'm looking for...

Where is...?

How much is ...?

Where are the toilets?

Does anyone here speak English?

Hello

Good morning

Good evening

Bye/See you

Please

Thank you

You're welcome

Sorry/Excuse me

PORTUGUESE

Estou à procura de...

Onde é...? (for a place)
Onde está...? (for someone)

Quanto custa...?
Quanto é...?

Onde é a casa de banho?

Alguém fala inglês?

Olá

Bom dia

Boa noite

Tchau / Até logo

Por favor

Obrigado

De nada

Desculpe / Com licença



What's your name?	Como é que se chama? Qual é o seu nome?
My name is	Meu nome é...
Where are you from?	De onde você é?
I am from...	Sou de...
Can I have a ... beer please?	Posso ter uma cerveja, por favor?
Could you help me please?	Poderia ajudar me por favor?
I'm allergic to...	Sou alérgico/a a...
I'm looking for the...	Estou a procura de...
How do I get to...?	Como chego ao.....?
Is it far?	Fica longe?
Go straight ahead	Siga em frente
Turn left	Vire à esquerda
Turn right	Vire à direita
I am lost	Estou perdido/a
Where is the ...hospital? post office? bus station?	Onde é ... o Hospital? Correios? Estação de ônibus?



Useful Galician for your Camino

Santiago de Compostela is the capital of Galicia, as such you will encounter many signs and businesses using Galician (galego), as well as native speakers.

ENGLISH

Does anyone speak English?

Hello

Good morning

Good afternoon

I'm allergic

What's your name?

I am from...

What time is it?

What time does the bus leave?

What time does the bus arrive?

Today

Tomorrow

I'm looking for

GALEGO

Alguén fala inglés?

Ola

Bos días

Boas tardes

Son alérxico (male) alérxica (female)

Cómo se chama?

Son de... Irlanda (Ireland), Estados Unidos (USA)...

Qué hora é?

A qué hora sae o bus?

A qué hora chega o bus?

Hoxe

Mañá

Estou buscando...



Food on the Camino

Many walkers booking with us ask the Customer Care team about the food options included as part of the standard package. 'What will I be eating?' seems to be one of the most common questions. Our standard package includes half board accommodation. So, what's the food like on the Camino? What will you be eating?



Breakfast

Breakfast is always included in the price of your room (room prices in Spain include breakfast at no additional cost) but the type of breakfast offered will depend on the hotel. Continental breakfast is the norm, as cooked breakfasts aren't common in France, Spain or Portugal. A frequent option will be buffet-style breakfast including fruit, bread or toast, pastries or cake, cheese and cold meats, coffee, tea and juice.

Lunch

Lunch is generally organised independently. We recommend you visit the local shop at your departure point or stop in the bigger towns/villages along the way to purchase basic supplies, including water, snacks, fruit, etc... Depending on the section of the Camino or route chosen, you might be able to stop at cafés along the way.

Dinner



Our standard package includes dinners during the trek (apart from the first and last night) and these will be generally the 'Pilgrim menu', including three starters to choose from, three mains and desert. Starters usually include soup or broth, salad or fish. Mains usually include fish or meat with chips, potatoes and bread. There is typically a vegetarian option.

Alcoholic drinks are generally not included. It might be included at the hotels' discretion. Some might provide wine free of charge but it is not included as standard. The type of dish will vary depending on the region you are walking, as each area has its own seasonal and local dishes and specialities. For example, fish will be more common in Galicia, the Northern Coast and the Portuguese coastal regions than in other inland areas.

Dietary requirements

Your booking will include your dietary requirements and all the hotels will be notified, however, please remind them once you have arrived. Most hotels will do their best to accommodate dietary requirements.

Although we also recommend bringing specific products you might be used to and might not be readily available in other countries (remember you can pack them with your luggage and get them transferred to the following stop).

Also worth knowing...

Before you travel, be aware of the different way of organising meals in other countries: for example in Ireland and the UK salad might be included as part of the main course.



In other countries, such as Spain, this might not be the case and salad might be included as a starter option instead. However, in most restaurants/hotels you will be able to order additional side dishes, if you feel the need, for a few extra euro.

Also bear in mind restaurant opening and meal times are different. Across most of Spain restaurants open for lunch until 3-4pm and for dinner from 8pm (at the earliest!).

However, particularly in bigger towns and cities, most bars will serve free nibbles with your drink in the evening (7pm ish) or have very reasonably priced tapas available to keep you going until dinner time.

It is also worth keeping in mind breakfast can vary greatly from country to country: what's normal in one place, will not be the norm in another one. Bigger properties will generally try to cater for all styles but in smaller places, choices will be more limited.

Please note, our packages are also available on a B&B basis, if you prefer to arrange your dinners independently.

The Camino in 10 Dishes

The many routes of the Camino de Santiago cross different regions (in some cases countries), each with its own traditions, culture and food. If you are walking the Camino Frances, from the French border, here are some classic dishes and traditional produce you will be able to taste.



1-White Asparagus

Navarra's white asparagus are the most famous in Spain. They are delicious with just a dollop of mayonnaise sauce. Another Navarrese speciality is 'pochas', a regional type of bean, stewed with Serrano ham cubes. Here's a picture of Helena from Casa Sabina in Roncesvalles, serving her delicious 'pochas'.

2-Chilindrón sauce

Chilindrón is a traditional sauce from Navarra, Basque Country and Aragón regions, made with red vegetables, mainly tomatoes and red peppers. You will likely find meats such as lamb or chicken cooked 'al chilindrón', in 'chilindrón' sauce.

3-Potatoes Rioja style

From La Rioja region of course, famous for its red wine, you will find a variety of dishes cooked 'a la Riojana', 'Rioja-style', including potatoes. This is more than just a potato dish, the potatoes are stewed in a clear broth with chorizo sausage.

4-Ice cream in Logroño

Marzipan, goats cheese with blueberries, cherry and orange sorbets, Ferrero Rocher... any ice cream flavour you might imagine you will find it in Logroño, capital of La Rioja and famous for its wine but also a city with a deep ice-making tradition.

5-Tapas in Burgos

Go for tapas in the many bars in Burgos, offering a wide variety of flavours and combinations so you can taste as many different dishes as possible.

6-Cured meats in León

As you get into Castilla-León, cured meats become even more prominent in restaurant menus. Cecina, smoked beef, is a local specialty and cured meats (embutidos) from this region are of exceptional quality.

7-Cakes and Chocolate from Astorga

Astorga had at one stage up to 64 chocolate factories - we were assured by Camino, the shop assistant, at the Alonso Mantecados shop in the Plaza de España. As good an excuse as any to stop and taste some of the artisan chocolate made locally. Don't forget to try the famous 'mantecados' (little buttery cakes) and 'hojaldres' (super sweet sticky puffy pastries). There is also a chocolate museum in town.

8-Botillo in El Bierzo

You will cross El Bierzo on sections 6 and 7 of the French Way, its capital being Ponferrada. The most famous dish of this region is 'botillo'. It is a dish where various parts of the pig chopped, seasoned, spiced and stuffed together to be cured and smoked for a few days. It gets cooked and sliced before serving and can also be eaten in stews.

9-Octopus 'market fair style' in Melide

Galicia's most traditional dish is octopus, eaten traditionally on market days, hence its name in Galego (pulpo á feira – octopus market day style). Stop for a 'ración' (portion) at a real 'pulpería', a bar or restaurant specialised in cooking octopus, where the octopus is simply boiled and served with a sprinkle of sea salt and smoked paprika.



10-Arzúa cheese

Before you get to Santiago, you will pass the market town of Arzúa. Explore the small shops in town to get a taste of the local cheese, for example at the old school butcher shop of father and son Luís and Luís, also known as 'Carnicería Tarazona'. They will milk the cow for fresh milk on the spot and they sell the traditional Arzúa cheese, as well as their meats. The family has been running the establishment for over 100 years.

For more Camino food inspiration, you can download our [Camino Food Guide](#).



Camino Accommodation Options

There are many different types and styles of accommodation along the Camino de Santiago, ranging from hostels to guest houses and luxurious paradores.



Albergues – hostels

There is a good network of albergues (hostels) along the Camino de Santiago, particularly along the most popular route such as the French Way or Camino Frances. The classic Camino albergues are public, run by ‘hospitaleros’ (Camino volunteers) and they can’t be booked in advance. Beds in dorms are allocated on a first come first served basis. You will need to have your passport stamped, as part of the ‘check in’ process and walkers always take priority over other pilgrims (ie. on horse back or bike pilgrims).

Guest houses – pensiones

Guest houses can be called ‘pensiones’, ‘hostales’ or ‘casa’ and they are small family-run businesses. They might not have a star rating but they are a good accommodation option where you will have your own room and they’ll generally provide dinner.

Hotels

Bigger Camino towns and cities will have a good range of hotels of all styles and sizes, from 3 star to 4 and 5 star rated properties.

Paradores

A parador is a luxury hotel belonging to the state-run company Paradores in Spain. They are usually historic buildings such as castles and monasteries; as well as buildings set in nature reserves and areas of outstanding beauty. Check out the many paradores located on the Camino de Santiago in our article: [What is a Parador?](#) The most famous Camino de Santiago parador is the Hostal dos Reis Catolicos in Santiago de Compostela; which has been in operation for 500 years. In Portugal, you will find similar properties and they are called Pousadas de Portugal.

Casas Rurales

Casas Rurales or country cottages are a relatively recent development in the hospitality industry in Galicia and North West Spain; and one that has brought new life to many rural communities. They are boutique country properties refurbished keeping in mind the traditional architecture of the region. They are generally farm houses, manor houses and restored homesteads located in rural settings; they generally offer home-cooking using local or even home-grown produce. We work with many casas rurales along the different Camino de Santiago routes and we arrange for our clients to be picked up from the trail.

Bigger towns and cities will have a better choice and range of accommodation options; while accommodation in smaller villages and hamlets can be limited. The Camino is a long-distance trail so the mix of accommodation styles will also be part of your journey.

The Camino Francés is the most popular route and therefore the one with a wider range of accommodation options, however it also gets busier, particularly in Summer months certain towns might get completely booked up. Our advice: if you are planning your trip on the French Way, book well in advance.

At CaminoWays.com we don't provide hostel accommodation and we work with the best accommodation options for each route and section. Our standard packages generally include stays in hotels, guest houses and casas rurales; we also have a 'country cottages' option in Galicia and a Superior Collection where you will get booked in our top properties along the way, including 4 and 5-star hotels where available.

Famous Annual Festivals along the Way

1. **Ancient Carnival and flour battle in Laza (March):** The tiny village of Laza in Ourense is home to one of the oldest carnival festivals (Entroido) in the world.
2. **Holy Week in Ferrol and Seville (April):** The cities of Seville and Ferrol host some of the most important Easter celebrations in Spain.
4. **São João in Porto (June):** Fireworks, grilled sardines, dancing and street concerts – all in the spectacular setting of Porto’s UNESCO riverfront.
5. **Running of the Bulls in Pamplona (July):** Pamplona’s world famous running of the bulls, San Fermín, has amazed visitors for centuries, including writer Ernest Hemingway.
6. **Saint James Celebrations in Santiago de Compostela (July):** 25th July marks Saint James Day so it is the most important festivity along the Camino de Santiago. Many pilgrims aim to reach Santiago for Saint James’ Day and celebrations in the city. From free concerts to fireworks, there is plenty to keep you entertained after your rewarding trek. Get a real insight into Galician culture with the wide range of traditional and contemporary performances taking place in the city’s old town.
8. **Wine harvest in La Rioja (September):** The city of Logroño celebrates its most famous export with the Fiesta de la Vendimia Riojana, the Rioja Grape Harvest Festival.
9. **San Froilán in Lugo (October):** Originally an agricultural fair, San Froilán is one of Galicia’s best loved festivals.



CHAPTER 4. WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO GO?

When is the best time to walk the Camino? It is a question we get asked a lot at CaminoWays.com and there are many answers to it.



It will depend on the route you choose, the specific section of that route, as well as what you are hoping to experience on your Camino.

It is important to keep in mind that the popularity of Camino has increased over the past decade. Therefore you are likely to find more walkers/ pilgrim during the peak season. Please note that if you intend to walk during the winter months you will find the route more challenging due to the snowy and cold weather. Moreover many cafes, restaurants and accommodations may close (more rural areas) during the winter period (if you book with us you will not have accommodation problem).

Generally, most pilgrims choose to travel from **SPRING** to **AUTUMN**. The most famous route, the Camino Frances, crosses very different regions. It ranges from the Pyrenees to the Galician countryside, and the weather differs greatly from region to region.

Summer months can be very hot for walking across the Meseta, the middle sections of the Camino Frances. However, if you are walking the last section from Sarria to Santiago, temperatures won't be as high, as Galicia has a mild Atlantic climate.



Coastal routes such as the Portuguese Coastal Camino, Finisterre Camino and Camino del Norte are best appreciated in the Summer months when seaside towns come to life. Each of our tours has a weather tab where you can check the average temperature and rainfall per month.

Weather on the Camino de Santiago

The weather on the Camino de Santiago will depend on the season and the region you choose to travel. Some parts of Spain can reach very high temperatures during Summer, but from Autumn to Spring you will find colder days.



During late Autumn and Winter some hotels might close and flights and ferries operate less frequently than in the warmer months. Daylight hours are also reduced, so you will need to adjust and manage better the daily distance you want to cover. The weather on the Camino de Santiago starts to get milder in Spring.

The rainiest months are definitely in Autumn but Spring can also be pretty rainy. In the North of Spain, it is not unusual to get some rainy days in the Summer also.

A positive aspect of Autumn and early Spring (October and April for example), is that the number of pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago is lower than July and August, when the affluence of pilgrims can be very high. Bear in mind some sections might be too hot for walking in July and August, for example, the Via de la Plata in Andalucía.

Some sections are not recommended during Winter season: from October/November to February/March, as there might be snow in high altitude and it could be very difficult to walk. This is the case in sections crossing mountains along the Route Napoleón in the Pyrenees. During the coldest months, this section is usually completely covered by snow. The mountains of León, O Cebreiro and the Camino Primitivo from Oviedo to Lugo also get snow in the Winter. However, most sections approaching Santiago, including the last section of the Camino Frances from Sarria to Santiago, are quite low in altitude and therefore pretty mild in Winter.



The landscape, climate and weather on the Camino de Santiago is very varied, not just from one country to another, but also from one city to the next. Always make sure that you check the forecast before leaving for your Camino holiday.

CHAPTER 5. IS THE CAMINO DIFFICULT?

All our holidays are graded from Easy to Challenging. This grading system will allow you to select the ideal holiday for yourself or your group.

Have a look at our grading system that will assist you to decide which walking trip is best for you! When grading our holidays, we take 3 main factors into consideration: Distance, Gradient, Trail Type (i.e. mountain track, forest road, surfaced road, etc.). Our Easy walking and cycling holidays are best for families with young children. With older children, experience and fitness level should be considered when deciding on a holiday.

Easy and Easy +

- Time: Under 5 hours per day on average.
- Gradient: Gentle, no steep climbs.
- Trail Type: Walking path, easily accessible.
- Suitable for: Everybody. Some easy preparation walks should increase your enjoyment.

Medium and Medium +

- Time: 5 to 7 hours / less than 20km per day on average.
- Gradient: Up to 1000m ascent per day on average, possibility of some steep climbing.
- Trail Type: Walking paths, mountain trails, not technically difficult.
- Suitable for: Moderate level of fitness required. Some weekend walks of around 3-4 hours should help your preparation.

Challenging

- Time: Days can be over 7 hours / 20km.
- Gradient: Days can be more than 1000m, some steep climbing.
- Trail Type: Walking paths, mountain trails, can be technically difficult.
- Suitable for: Good level of fitness required. Previous experience would be best. These should include some mountain walks.



CHAPTER 6. GETTING READY

Fitness & Training

One of the main questions people ask is, will I physically be able for this? So allow us answer that question in two parts: 'Yes!' and 'You will be!' You now have some time to prepare, to get in shape and allow your body to adapt to the physical requirements which will be demanded for your Camino adventure.



What is your physical condition? We would recommend a visit to your general practitioner for an overall check-up before you set off on your travels. If you have a health concern/condition, knowing and understanding the implications and consequences of strenuous exercise will be very important.

Are you in good shape? If not, then let's get you started on a regular fitness programme, one which is consistent, realistic and enjoyable.

Regular walks of 25-30 minutes three times per week on alternate days and combining walking with jogging. Include your hiking gear and keep your routes varied (mixing hills, steps and uneven terrain). Take more difficult hikes; add to your existing fitness programme always making sure that it works in accordance to the demands of your Camino.



5 Great Exercises for Walkers

1. **Front of Thigh:** Catch heel with hand and bring forward to buttocks. Use a wall or partner for balance. Ensure knees are aligned and back is straight. Hold stretch for 30 seconds, repeat.
2. **Back of Lower Leg:** Bring one leg in front of the other, toes pointing straight. Keep heel of back leg firmly on the ground. Lean gently forward. Keep leg straight, keep heel on the ground.
3. **Ab Work Out on the Move:** Blow out until you can't anymore. You will feel your tummy getting tight. Once you feel tightness, hold and breathe normally. Do it as often as you can when walking or cycling, holding for 15-30 seconds each time.
4. **Shoulder Stretch:** Bring the arm you want to stretch across your chest. Hold this arm with the other, pushing it towards your chest. You should feel a pull in your shoulders. Hold stretch for 30 seconds.
5. **Shin Stretch:** Place one leg across and in front of the other. Place tip of foot on ground. With the knee of the leg behind press gently on the calf of the leg in front. A stretch can be felt on the lower leg in front. Hold for 30 seconds and repeat.



Download our [Camino fitness guide](#).

Packing for Beginners

Deciding what to pack for the Camino de Santiago can be a daunting task, for this reason we have selected our top 5 Camino packing tips to get you ready for your Summer Camino. Packing for the Camino de Santiago shouldn't be hard but planning is key. You should have a detailed list of what to bring on your walking holiday and just as important: what not to bring.





Everyone dreads packing their suitcases when they are going away on vacation but we have narrowed our list to the basic essentials. Let us help you to get organised with a small packing list!

1. ESSENTIAL CLOTHING

Although its summer remember to be ready for all seasons. You can do all of the research in the world and watch daily weather updates on your phone but the weather in Northern Spain can have unpredictable patterns. It is generally warm in the summer months but you could experience dispersed rainfall too. A good lightweight jacket or raincoat will make your life a lot easier. Try to bring a jacket that is foldable, rainproof and easier to carry. Follow the 'onion' advice: layering your clothing. Wear your different layers for warmth when it's cooler and take layers off as the day gets warmer.

When you are packing for the Camino remember the type of holiday that you are about to embark on. You want to be comfortable while you are walking so glamorous outfits are unnecessary. Also, avoid any clothing that will irritate your skin. You need soft fabric, suitable for long distance walking and relaxing in the evenings. For the long-haired men and women, don't forget some hair bands or a bandana to help keep your neck cool.

2. BACKPACK

Yes, you will probably have a suitcase of clothes even though you will live in your favourite pair shorts and t-shirt. If you book with us we will help to take care of your main luggage bag transferring it to your next stop every day. In addition to your main suitcase you should take a small backpack (10 litres is ideal). If you buy a backpack with hip straps it will help to distribute the weight more evenly and take the weight off of your shoulders. A small day bag to carry your water, wallet, a few nuts and snacks and a bandana will prove to be key on those hot days of walking.

3. SUNCREAM AND SUNGLASSES

These are obvious but easily forgotten items. Bear in mind wind can be just as damaging as the sun to the skin. A high factor sunscreen lotion will help to infuse moisture into dried out skin and protect against sun burn. Apply the cream generously each morning and make regular top-ups during the day. In addition to sunscreen buy or borrow a good pair of sunglasses. These will protect your eyes and help you to keep on track if the sun is blinding.

4. TAKE CARE OF YOUR TOES

The right pair of walking shoes and hiking boots can be the difference between an enjoyable walking holiday and a nightmare of a trek across Europe. Be sensible when it comes to your shoe choices. The most important things to remember when buying a new pair of walking shoes is to make sure that they are waterproof and to break them in before the Camino de Santiago journey. We have a fitness preparation guide for anyone planning on walking the Camino and you should use your preparation walks to get used of your walking shoes.

In addition to walking shoes a great pair of thick socks can help to prevent blisters, protect your feet and absorb sweat. It is worth spending on these essential items. Cheap shoes and socks will fall apart with daily wear and tear. Walking boots will give you better ankle support than walking shoes and of course, walking sandals.

5. BRING A BOOK

There are nights where you will want to just curl up with a book after a long day walking. A book is a great companion for the walk if you need to take a quick rest, turn off the thinking switch from the day or if you are walking the route solo.

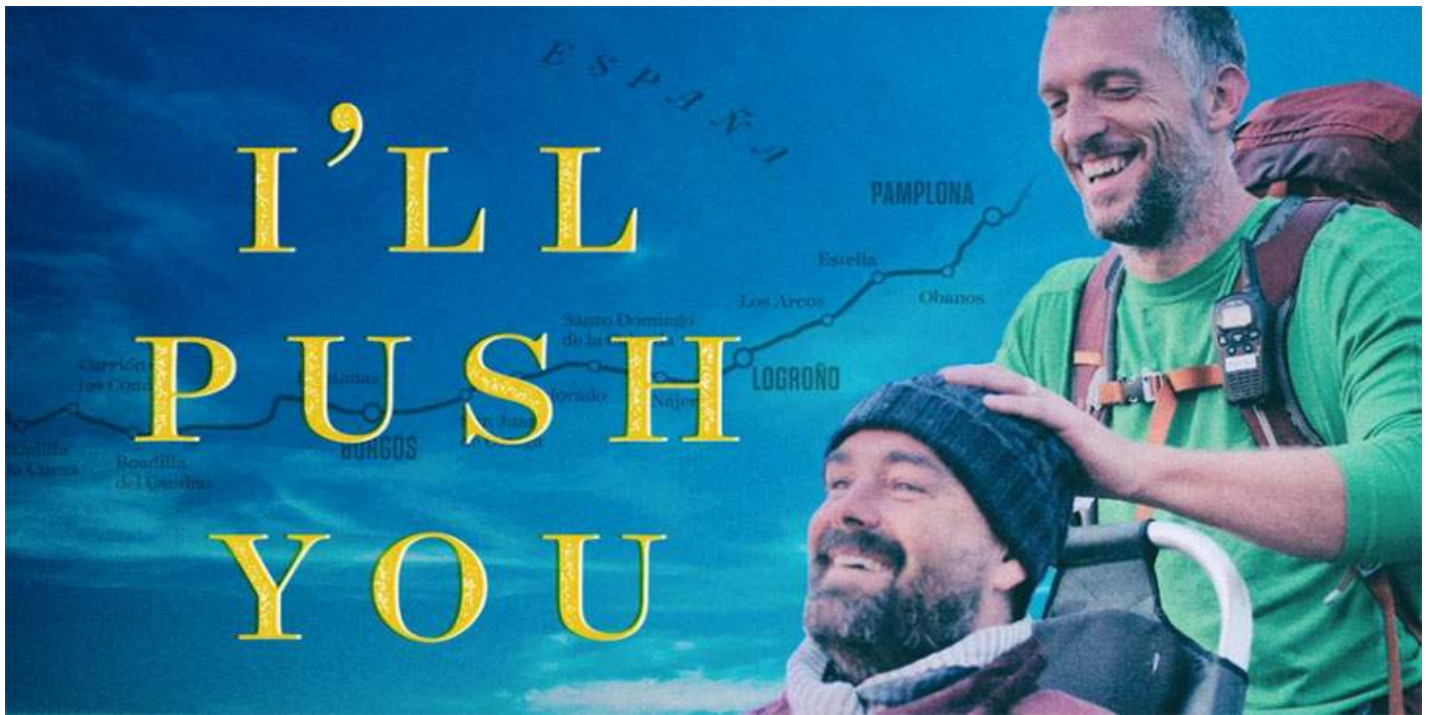
Movies about Walking the Camino

THE WAY (2011)

This is probably the most popular movies about the Camino de Santiago. The story follows a loving father and son plot, detailing the journey of Thomas Avery (actor Martin Sheen) along the Camino de Santiago route to Santiago de Compostela. The film starts off with the death of Mr.Avery's son, played by Emilio Estevez. Mr.Avery uses various points along the Camino to scatter his sons ashes. There are some great scenes of the Northern Spain's landscapes.

WALKING THE CAMINO: 6 WAYS TO SANTIAGO (2009)

This is a great documentary film for anyone interested in learning about the Camino Walk. The director Lydia B.Smith and her crew begin their journey at St.John Pied de Port, travelling to the finish line at Santiago de Compostela. They meet over 15 pilgrims and interview many Camino experts along the way.



I'LL PUSH YOU: A JOURNAY OF 500 MILES (2017)

Best friends Justin and Patrick decide to embark on the Camino journey together. After Justin was diagnosed with a rare neuromuscular disease that left him without the use of his arms and legs he was confined to a wheelchair. As it had been Justin dream to walk the famous Camino de Santiago Patrick agreed to push him all along the route. With highs, lows, challenges and emotions, this is a beautiful story of friendship and overcoming boundaries.

TRES EN EL CAMINO (2004)

This critically acclaimed documentary is also called 'Within the Way Without'. The story tells the journey of three individuals; one lonely man from Holland, a Japanese poet and a strong Brazilian girl. Each character is walking the Camino in different seasons of the year and for different reasons. This film has recently been made available to watch on YouTube.

OH YE OF LITTLE FAITH (2004)

Paul Tobey is both a renowned film-maker and a pianist. This is evident in his movie with some beautifully composed music. In this film we get sample the stunning scenery along the route of Camino Frances. It also brings us closer to the pilgrims spiritual journey with interviews of some modern day spiritual adventure seekers.

CAMINO, THE JOURNEY TO SANTIAGO (2013)

'Camino, the journey to Santiago' is a short independent documentary filmed by Alicia Wszelaki and premiered in 2013. Beautifully shot, this intimate film follows the Camino journey from St Jean Pied de Port to Fisterra. In 2013 we interviewed director Alicia about her Camino movie.

10 Books to Read Before Your Camino Journey



THE PILGRIMAGE BY PAULO COELHO

This was the famous author's first book, written in 1987 and an absolute Camino classic. Paulo reflects on his experiences as he embarked on a journey of self-discovery to Santiago de Compostela in 1986. Readers should be aware that this is not a travel guide and it will not provide a detailed picture of any trails on the Camino walking route.

THE CAMINO: A JOURNEY OF THE SPIRIT BY SHIRLEY MACLAINE

Shirley MacLaine is well known as an academy award winning actress. For Shirley, the journey of the Camino was a physical and emotional challenge. Although we are listing it as one of the travel books to read it should be noted that this book is more about Shirley's dreams and reflections than the physical environment encountered on the various routes.

BUEN CAMINO BY NATASHA AND PETER MURTAGH

This is a joint writing venture between a father and a daughter who embarked on the journey together. It provides a nice account of various aspects of the most popular route along the Camino



Frances. Starting out with an Irish pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick and finishing the walk at Finisterre. This is a travel book and the reader will be glad to learn of tips along the way.

TWO STEPS FORWARD BY GRAEME SIMSION AND ANNE BUIST

This story follows an inspiring fictional account of a women and a mans journey on the Camino. One is suffering the aftermath of a bad divorce, the other is a widow. Zoe and Martin's story takes many twists and turns. From sleeping habits to food to everything along the way, this is a great read for anyone who wants a little motivation to get out on the trails. This is a charming book with a touch of romance and some handy travel tips keep you entertained throughout.

SHADOWS, SHELLS AND SPAIN BY JOHN MEYER

A page-turner with some mystery is how I would describe this novel. Told as a fictional travel memoir, this story follows the disappearance of Pam who left her husband without any warning. She leaves a series of letters along the Camino trail. The authors personal experience of the trail and his love for history give this account an edge. This is a captivating story and will give you a taste of the scenery you might encounter along the way.

THE CAMINO WAY: LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP FROM A WALK ACROSS SPAIN BY VICTOR PRINCE

With a unique angle, this book examines how the Camino can steer you in the right leadership direction. Victor tells us how we can assess our values and dramatically change our approach to leadership in any corporation by following some lessons learnt from his experience of the Camino de Santiago trail. With a personal writing style and practical business suggestions this book is perfect for anyone who wants to be a leader or change their leadership strategies.

I'LL PUSH YOU: A JOURNEY OF 500 MILES, TWO BEST FRIENDS AND ONE WHEELCHAIR BY JUSTIN SKEESUCK AND PATRICK GRAY

We were delighted to support Justin and Patrick on this epic Camino journey in 2014. Since then they have traveled the world speaking about their experience and inspiring everyone that they meet along the way. A story filled with friendship, love and endurance this account of the Camino will force you to re-think your troubles and focus on the positives in life.

8. Walking Home by Sonia Choquette

After suffering the unexpected loss of two family members, a divorce and been left down at work Sonia needed to escape and regain her sense of self. In this revealing book Sonia shares her up's and down's as well as the moments that lifted her spirits in the darkest hours. This is a great read by a renowned author. What are you waiting for, grab a fresh cup of tea and dive in.



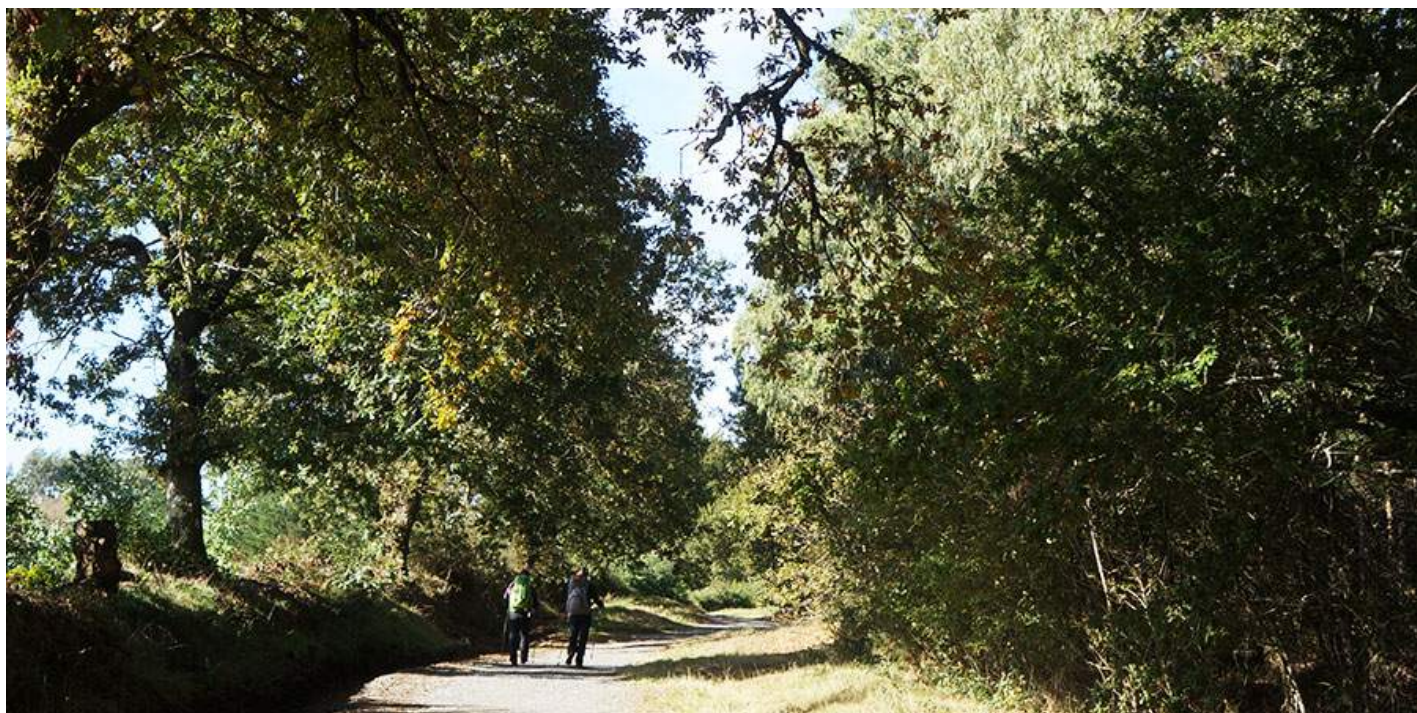
SPANISH STEPS: TRAVELS WITH MY DONKEY BY TIM MOORE

This is one of the funnier travel books about the pilgrims journey. Tim provides a welcome break from the spiritual, drama heavy writing often linked with the long walk on the Camino. The novel starts with a simply read history of the route followed by a comical account of his journey on a donkey called Shinto. Readers who have already completed the pilgrimage will delight in the comical characters in this novel.

THE LONGEST WAY HOME BY ANDREW MCCARTHY

Hollywood actor Andrew takes us on his personal journey along the trails of the Camino de Santiago. This is an honest account of Andrew's experience walking the Camino detailing his commitment struggles and the highlights of his career. This is more of a travel diary than a travel book as it doesn't give a lot of detail about the various stops along the way. However, it does give a full picture of Andrew's reasons for embarking on the journey.

We hope that you enjoy these fascinating books and let it inspire you.



Reasons to love the Camino

7

REASONS TO LOVE THE

Camino



FREEDOM



TIME TO THINK



PEOPLE



LIVING HISTORY



FOOD



LIFE LESSONS



**THE CAMINO
LIVES ON**



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Buen Camino!

