EL CAMINO WALK

Duration: 20 Day Pilgrimage Journey
Departure: 13th October 2017 Ex Madrid
Tour Code: 7PV39

Santiago de Compostela
Amenal
Portomarín
Villafranca
Ponferrada
Astorga
Sarria
Arzúa
Palas de Rei
Sarria
Portomarín
Amenal
Santiago de Compostela

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$5690 LAND ONLY*
20 DAY ITINERARY – Madrid • El Camino de Santiago • Santiago de Compostela

IMPORTANT NOTE
Even though this is stated as a walking pilgrimage, the group will be supported with a bus to carry luggage and transport pilgrims who may require respite at times along the way.

MEAL CODE:
B: Breakfast  L: Lunch  D: Dinner

DAY 1: Friday 13th October – Arrive Madrid
Upon arrival at Madrid’s Barajas airport we will be met and transferred to our centrally located accommodation to rest and prepare for this special walk.
(There will be one transfer from the airport at approximately 10am. Any other transfers will be at your own cost.)
Madrid overnight (D)

DAY 2: Saturday 14th October – Madrid
After breakfast this morning we depart on our city tour of Madrid which will showcase its history, culture, architecture and art. We will visit star attractions such as the Royal Palace and the Santa María la Real Catholic Cathedral which was consecrated only recently in 1993 by Pope John Paul II, we will then tour the Prado Museum. The Prado is renowned as being the largest art gallery in the world. It houses more than 8,600 paintings, of which less than 2,000 are exhibited at any one time due to lack of space. Remainder of the afternoon at leisure.
Madrid overnight (BD)

DAY 3: Sunday 15th October – Madrid to Astorga (Via León)
We depart this morning from Madrid and travel to León. On our arrival in Leon, we will visit the city with a local guide. León amasses some of Spain’s most important historic-artistic monuments, like its Cathedral Santa María de León. A Gothic gem and a masterpiece of architecture with the best collection of stained-glass windows in Europe (only after Chartres), it is also known as the House of Light. Next to the Cathedral, there is the Roman Saint Isidoro Basilica (eleventh and twelfth century), where the Saint Isidoro of Seville’s tomb is kept; and the Saint Marcus Monastery, with its fantastic front in Plateresque style bedecked with shells (the symbol of the pilgrim). We will then stop briefly to each obtain our Pilgrim’s Passport and first accreditation stamp before heading onto our accommodation at Astorga.
Astorga overnight (BLD)

DAY 4: Monday 16th October – Astorga to Rabanal del Camino (19 Km’s)
The Road to Compostela comes out of the past and stretches through a thousand year history of the pilgrim’s journey. During the Middle Ages the Shrine of St. James became the number one pilgrimage site outside of Rome. According to tradition, St. James the Apostle travelled to Spain in 40 AD to spread the Gospel to the far west. He died a martyr after returning to Jerusalem. His remains were brought back to Spain and are today held in the high altar of the Cathedral. Countless pilgrims have made the journey from Madrid to the Pyrenees to Compostela along an historic path which has changed little since the time of the beginnings around the year 1000. Despite wars, floods and famine through the ages, the Old Pilgrim’s Way has survived and at its end Santiago de Compostela has earned the distinction of being a true pilgrimage destination. Modern day pilgrims who walk this sacred road become, whether they know it or not, a part of history.
In the morning we will depart towards the town of Rabanal del Camino. Along the way today we will pass through the town of Castrillo de los Polvazares that has an outstanding architectural heritage and where the genuine atmosphere of the region of “Maragatería” is almost preserved in time. The remains of a Roman encampment are worthy of note. Before we arrive to Rabanal del Camino we will see a big house that was the Hospital for Pilgrims in medieval times. There is also a house called the Four Corners that is said to have given shelter to Felipe II on his walk. We can later take some time out in the small chapel of San José or in the local Parish Church.
Rabanal del Camino overnight (BLD)

DAY 5: Tuesday 17th October – El Acebo to Ponferrada (16 Km’s)
After leaving Rabanal del Camino the route continues westward across the region of Leon. The first village that appears is Foncebadon, the one-time important centre in the Middle Ages that has now been abandoned. Here took place a Council in the 10th century, before the hermit Guacelmo founded a hostelry for pilgrims a century later. Some kilometres off the municipality, surmounting a peak that the Romans dedicated to Mercury can be seen the Ferro Cross, on top of a stick fixed to a big heap of stones. Traditionally pilgrims bring a stone from their places of origin and deposit it on the heap.
El Acebo to Ponferrada overnight (BD)

DAY 6: Wednesday 18th October – El Acebo to Ponferrada (16 Km’s)
We have a short walk today continuing onto Ponferrada. This town, with prehistoric and Roman antecedents, had two access points in the Middle Ages. One was via the Roman bridge spanning the Boeza River, sunk in the 18th century;
the other was via the path of the Gallegos and then, crossing the river by the Medieval bridge of Mascarón.

At the end of the 11th century, the Bishop of Astorga, Osmundo, commissioned the building of a round bridge, “la Pons Ferrata”, a pass with iron banisters which gave name to the city. Later on, between the 11th and 14th centuries, the Castle of the Knights Templar was built. At the end of the 15th century, the Catholic Monarchs commissioned the construction of the Hospital de la Reina, next to the fortress. In this monumental town also stand the Basilica of Nuestra Señora de la Encina, from the 16th century (built to commemorate the apparition of the Virgin in a grove of Holm oaks) and the Baroque Church of San Andrés, from the 17th century, which is home to an outstanding retable of San Andres, from the 17th century, “The Christ of the Wonders”.

We will have some free time this afternoon.

**Ponferrada overnight (BD)**

**DAY 7: Thursday 19th October**
- **Ponferrada to Villafranca Del Bierzo (23 Km’s)**

Today part of our journey will follow the old Roman road that connected Ponferrada with the silver and gold mines located in Las Médulas. We will walk towards Columbrianos. Pass through Fuentesnuevas, with the Chapel of the Campo and reach Camponayara, an important halt along the Route. In the Middle Ages it had two hospitals.

The Route follows its course towards Cacabelos, where the first thing that appears into sight is the Chapel of San Roque; then the Church of Santa María, containing a carving of the Virgin from the 13th century. The neoclassical Sanctuary of the Quinta Angustia from the 18th century is also worthy of note, as well as its Hospital for Pilgrims.

Today’s journey finishes at Villafranca del Bierzo, a town founded in the 11th century, where the Cluny Order had an important representation. We can enjoy the Collegiate Church of Santa María, built between the 13th and 16th centuries; the churches of Santiago (12th century) with its statue of St James wearing full pilgrim regalia, and San Nicolas, as well as the Agua Street, full of palaces and emblazoned houses. The Castle-Palace of the Marquise is also worthy of being visited.

**Villafranca del Bierzo overnight (BD)**

**DAY 8: Friday 20th October**
- **Villafranca Del Bierzo to O Cebreiro (23 Km’s)**

(Possible rest day if required by pilgrim)

Our pilgrimage adventure continues this morning as we walk through the Ancares Valley area. We will be able to see the Castles of Sarracín, of which some ruins can be seen, and Veiga; both castles are connected to Celtic legends. Later we will enter Galicia by Lugo, not far from Santiago. The first village in the region of Lugo along the Route is O Cebreiro, with an altitude of 1,300 metres and home to pre-historic Celtic huts with straw roofs (pallolzas). Finally we come to the ancient Sanctuary of O Cebreiro. Here we will celebrate our group Mass in the pre-Romanesque Church (9th-10th century) and see the renowned Paten of Santo Milagro (Eucharistic Miracle from the 13th century) and a precious Romanesque carving of Santa María la Real.

**Villafranca del Bierzo overnight (BD)**

**DAY 9: Saturday 21st October**
- **O Cebreiro to Triacastela (21 Km’s)**

We continue our walk today – it is good to note that much of it is downhill and to take care as many injuries come in walking downhill rather than uphill.

This morning our path takes us past the ancient parish Church and on a brief uphill climb to Alto de San Roque, where an impressive pilgrim monument overlooks Galicia and its deep valleys. In Galicia we will pass through countless hamlets connected to one another by ancient dry-stone walls separating the trail from an endless patchwork quilt of worked fields and cow pastures. We’ll enjoy the hearty Galician fare – including leafy green soup, called caldo gallego, creamy cow’s milk cheeses, thick, round loaves of wheat, rye and corn meal bread, outstanding Galician veal and pork, seafood and greens – cabbage, broad beans, Swiss chard and leeks. On the way we pass through Fonfria, another Galician village. Finally we arrive at Triacastela, town of the three castles – none of which are standing today. This was an important stop for pilgrims coming off the mountain.

**Sarria overnight (BLD)**

**DAY 10: Sunday 22nd October**
- **Triacastela to Sarria (20 Km’s)**

We will be transferred to Sarria this morning. We will walk via the tiny village of Samos, wrapped around the enormous Benedictine Monastery that we will visit and where we will celebrate Mass. Continuing on the Route we will pass through a picturesque scene full of oaks and chestnut trees.

The end of the stage brings us to Sarria. It was in this town that Alfonso IX died in 1230, while making the pilgrimage. Visit the old quarter which retains a strong medieval character. We will also see the Church of Salvador, with a Romanesque ground plan and Gothic façade; the small chapel of San Lazarro; the hospital of San Antonio, which today houses a Court; and the remains of its old fortress, from the 14th century.

**Sarria overnight (BD)**

**DAY 11: Monday 23rd October**
- **Sarria to Portomarin (22 Km’s)**

Today’s section of the Camino is considered to be one of the most picturesque. Walk through bucolic countryside, traversing enchanted forests and small patches of farmland to the banks of the Mino River. En route we will pass the 100km marker – a milestone for pilgrims who travel the Camino.

Our walking trip for today will finish in Portomarin, picturesquely situated on a hilltop. The old Portomarin, which dates back to the Roman Age, was an important halt along the route in the Middle Ages and lies beneath the waters of the dam built in 1962. Before flooding the town, many monuments were moved, stone by stone, to higher ground. Such was the case of the church-fortress of the Knights of San Juan of Jerusalem, who once ran the old hospital that lay beneath the waters of the Miño River, along with the old Medieval and Roman bridges.

The municipality also has the Church of San Nicolás, from the 13th century; the portal of the church of San Pedro, from 1182; the Count’s House, from the 16th century, and the Palace of Berbetoros, from the 17th century.

**Portomarin overnight (BD)**

**DAY 12: Tuesday 24th October**
- **Portomarin to Palas de Rei (24 Km’s)**

Passing through small villages decorated with cruceiros (carved stone crosses that mark the way to Santiago) and containing only a dozen houses, we will meet other peregrinos on today’s hilly walk.

Although we all share a special quest and a sense of camaraderie with fellow pilgrims from around the world, there are always moments of solitude to contemplate this special journey. The undulating countryside is studded with meadows and forests of eucalyptus and pine as we approach Palas de Rei. This was once an important town in the Middle Ages as it had a Royal Hospital. The Church of San Tirso now stands on its lands, with a Romanesque portal.

**Palas de Rei overnight (BD)**

**DAY 13: Wednesday 25th October**
- **Palas de Rei to Melide (15 Km’s)**

Today we set off walking along quiet paths through hamlets and woodlands, crossing an occasional stone bridge along the way. Stop to admire the tiny village of Samos, wrapped around the enormous Benedictine Monastery that we will visit and where we will celebrate Mass. Continuing on the Route we will pass through a picturesque scene full of oaks and chestnut trees.

**Palas de Rei overnight (BD)**

**DAY 14: Thursday 26th October**
- **Melide to Portomarin (15 Km’s)**

Today we set off walking along quiet paths through hamlets and woodlands, crossing an occasional stone bridge along the way. Stop to admire the tiny village of Samos, wrapped around the enormous Benedictine Monastery that we will visit and where we will celebrate Mass. Continuing on the Route we will pass through a picturesque scene full of oaks and chestnut trees.

**Portomarin overnight (BD)**

**DAY 15: Friday 31st October**
- **Portomarin to Santiago de Compostela (15 Km’s)**

Today we leave Portomarin, where we began our journey, and proceed to the final destination, Santiago de Compostela. The path begins via a hilly climb through the woods, before crossing the river. We walk through the town and reach the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, the final destination of the Camino de Santiago.

We will hold the traditional Camino Mass outside the cathedral, following which we will gather to wave farewell and thank everyone for sharing this incredible journey. We will then move on to our buffet lunch. Enjoy the fine dining on offer, which is sure to be a highlight of your culinary experience on the Camino.

**Santiago de Compostela overnight (BD)**

**DAY 16: Saturday 1st November**
- **Santiago de Compostela – Rest Day**

Today is a day at leisure in Santiago de Compostela. You can explore the historic center of the city, visit the famous Cathedral, or simply relax and enjoy the atmosphere.

**Santiago de Compostela overnight (BD/D)**

**DAY 17: Sunday 2nd November**
- **Santiago de Compostela to Vigo (260 Km’s)**

After breakfast, we say our tearful goodbyes and embark on the final leg of the journey. We will travel by coach to Vigo, a beautiful coastal city located on the Atlantic Ocean. Upon arrival, we will have time to explore Vigo and enjoy a farewell dinner together.

**Vigo overnight (BD)**

**DAY 18: Monday 3rd November**
- **Vigo – Departures**

This morning, we will have the option to participate in a farewell ceremony with the other groups, before saying our final goodbyes and saying goodbye to the Camino de Santiago. After this, we will check out of our hotel and head to the airport, where transfer arrangements will be made for your onward flight.

**End of the Camino de Santiago tour**
20 DAY ITINERARY CONT.

Day 15: Friday 27th October — to Melide to Arzua (13 Km’s)

Today we also pass from Galicia’s Lugo province to Galicia’s A Coruña province. We will have lunch altogether in a typical restaurant in Melide where we will taste its magnificent “pulpo a feira”. A medieval bridge leads pilgrims to Ribadiso, before arriving at Arzua, the next halt on our journey. Surrounded by a beautiful scenery stands the Gothic Chapel of Magdalena, the only part of the old Augustinian monastery that has come down to us. This little town is famous nowadays for its Galician cheese factories.

Arzua overnight (BD)

Day 16: Saturday 28th October — Arzua to Ameal (21 Km’s)

Before departing Arzua we will celebrate Mass in Arzua Parish Church with its statue of St. James and the chapel dedicated to St. Lazarus just outside the village. Here we leave behind the last major centre of population on the Camino until Santiago. Wander through the picturesque village of Calle, with its traditional stone houses. Onwards to Salceda where we see a monument to Guillermo Watt, a pilgrim who died at this spot only a day away from his earthly destination on pilgrimage. Continuing on we climb up through magnificent eucalyptus woods en route to Ameal.

Amealen overnight (BD)

Day 17: Sunday 29th October — Ameal to Santiago de Compostela (16 Km’s)

‘This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad’ (Ps 118:24). Excitement mounts as the trail brings us closer to our destination. Walk through rolling terrain towards Lavacolla, where medieval pilgrims traditionally bathed in the river to purify themselves before arriving in the holy city of Santiago. From here we will begin to ascend the Monte do Gozo, “Mount of Joy”, the point where pilgrims first catch sight of the spires of the Cathedral of Santiago, these days surrounded by the bustling, new city of Santiago de Compostela.

On approach to the centre, we will pass through the city’s walls and under the Arch of Obispo drawing us forward into the great Obradorio Square. Here we have finally arrived at our destination, St. James Cathedral for the traditional Pilgrim’s Mass, ready to receive a deserved grace and special blessing.

Santiago de Compostela overnight (BLD)

Day 18: Monday 30th October — Santiago de Compostela

The city of the apostle is full of historical buildings and other attractions and is thus the ideal place for a quiet unhurried walk of discovery through streets, squares and nooks, to be taken as a reward for the effort of reaching this city of St. James.

This morning we will visit and celebrate Mass at the Cathedral of St James, one of the finest examples of architecture in all of Europe. As pilgrims we have the opportunity to climb the stairs behind the high altar to visit the crypt where the relics of St James are preserved, touch the central pillar (Portico de La Gloria), view the ‘botafumeiro’ and admire the wealth of medieval art inside the Cathedral, before visiting the cloister museum. Afternoon at leisure.

Santiago de Compostela overnight (BD)

Day 19: Tuesday 31st October — Santiago de Compostela & Finisterre

We travel out today to one of the most western points of continental Europe! We firstly come to the lovely seaside town of Finisterre. It is situated on the rocky Costa da Morte (Coast of Death), named because of the large number of shipwrecks along these shores. During our time here we will visit the Chapel of Nosa Señora do Bon Suceso, dating from the 18th century.

Nearby we explore Cape Finisterre, meaning “Land’s End”. This name stems from the fact that this area is on a remote peninsula that is one of the westernmost points of land in Spain. It is also the final destination for pilgrims on the Way of St James. Time permitting we may visit the spectacular lighthouse on the promontory called “Monte Facho” at the tip of Cape Finisterre overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. On the road up to the lighthouse is the parish Church of Santa Maria de Fisterra which contains the Chapel of Santo Cristo.

In the late afternoon we return to Santiago de Compostela. Tonight we celebrate our final night on pilgrimage with a special meal at a local Spanish restaurant.

Santiago de Compostela overnight (BD)

Day 20: Wednesday 1st November — Depart Santiago de Compostela

After breakfast we will be transferred to the airport for your flight connection. (There will be only one airport transfer.)

(B)