

Pilgrim trip, The St James's way 37 days/36 nights

Accommodation

- ST JEAN PIED DE PORT
- VALCARLOS
- RONCESVALLES
- ZUBIRI
- PAMPLONA
- PUENTE DE LA REINA
- ESTELLA
- LOS ARCOS
- LOGROÑO
- NAJERA
- STO DOMINGO DE LA C.
- BELORADO
- S. JUAN DE ORT./ATAPUERCA
- BURGOS
- HORNILLO DEL CAMINO
- CASTROJERIZ
- FRÓMISTA
- CARRION DE LOS CONDES
- MORATINOS/BERCIANOS
- MANSILLA DE LAS MULAS
- LEON
- S MARTIN/VILLADANGOS
- ASTORGA
- RABANAL DEL C
- MOLINASECA
- CACABELOS
- AMBASMESTAS
- CEBREIRO
- TRIACASTELA
- SARRIA
- PORTOMARÍN
- PALAS DE REI
- ARZÚA
- RÚA
- SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

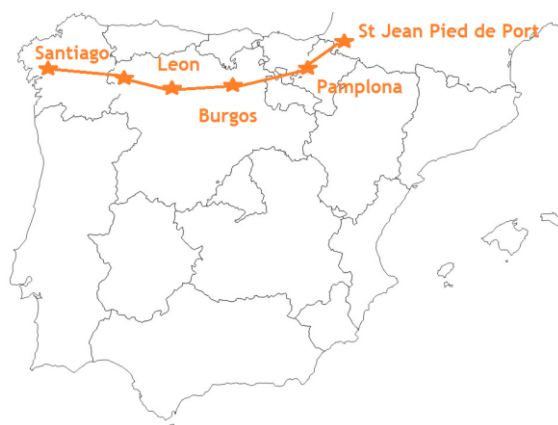
The St James Way



The Camino de Santiago is the name of any of the pilgrimage routes, known as pilgrim ways, to the shrine of the apostle St. James the Great in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia in northwestern Spain, where tradition has it that the remains of the saint are buried.

Today, hundreds of thousands of Christian pilgrims and many others set out each year from their front doorsteps or from popular starting points across Europe, to make their way to Santiago de Compostela. Most travel by foot, some by bicycle, and a few travel as some of their medieval counterparts did, on horseback or by donkey (for example, the British author and humorist Tim Moore). In addition to those undertaking a religious pilgrimage, many are hikers who walk the route for other reasons: travel, sport, or simply the challenge of weeks of walking in a foreign land. Also, many consider the experience a spiritual adventure to remove themselves from the bustle of modern life. It serves as a retreat for many modern "pilgrims".

Detailed program



1st day: ARRIVAL IN SAINT-JEAN-PIED-DE-PORT.

Fill in your pilgrim's passport (La Credencial) and enjoy this picturesque French Basque village.

2nd day: ST JEAN - VALCARLOS (12 km- 4h - difficulty 3/3)

From Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, there are two ways to reach Roncesvalles, either via the so-called Napoleon Route across the mountains, or via the hamlet of Valcarlos, down in the valley. Taking the Valcarlos route will mean your ascent will be more gradual and the highest point will be Roncesvalles.

This day is one of the most challenging on the Way as the route crosses the Pyrenees.

3rd day: VALCARLOS - RONCESVALLES (15 km - 4h - difficulty 2/3)

The Valcarlos Camino mainly follows the road which runs through the valley alongside the Nive and Valcarlos rivers. Don't miss the Collegiate Church in Roncesvalles. This day is one of the most challenging on the Way as the route crosses the Pyrenees.

4th day: RONCESVALLES - ZUBIRI (22 km - 6h - difficulty 1/3)

From Roncesvalles, the route continues through beech and oak woods before reaching Espinal taking in two mountain passes: Alto de Mezquiriz and Alto de Erro. The trail then descends towards the town of Zubiri and its medieval "Puente de la Rabia" (Rabies Bridge) over the River Arga.

5th day: ZUBIRI - PAMPLONA (20 km - 6h - difficulty 1/3)

Today, the Camino follows the river Arga to the hamlet of Larrasoana, which was an important stop for pilgrims in Medieval times. The second half of the day gets busier, as you approach the bustling city of Pamplona. Although it is famous for its Saint Fermin bull-running festival, there are many other attractions to visit in Pamplona, such as exploring the city's medieval streets, visiting the cathedral, tasting some of the local food and wine, or, for

Hemingway fans, sampling a coffee in one of the writer's favourite haunts in the Plaza del Castillo main square.

6th day: PAMPLONA - PUENTE LA REINA (24 km - 6h15 - difficulty 1/3)

As you leave Pamplona behind you, you will start your ascent towards the "Alto del Perdón" (Hill of Forgiveness). Get your picture taken with the photogenic pilgrim sculpture at the top and enjoy the views of Pamplona and the valley beyond. From there, you will begin your descent towards Puente la Reina with its medieval alleys and impressive 11th century bridge over the River Arga.

7th day: PUENTE LA REINA - ESTELLA (23 km - 6h15 - difficulty 1/3)

The route to Estella is very uneven and quite agricultural. Small towns and villages are dotted amongst cereal fields, vineyards and olive trees. Perched on a hilltop, Cirauqui is a pretty little village with winding medieval streets where you will find one of the best preserved stretches of Roman road.

8th day: ESTELLA - LOS ARCOS (22 km - 6h30 - difficulty 2/3)

Today's stage moves towards the Rioja region with its olive trees, cereal fields and, most importantly, its vineyards. From Villamayor do Monjardin to Los Arcos, you will cover 12 km without coming across a single village. Ensure that you have plenty of water and use sun protection.

9th day: LOS ARCOS - LOGROÑO (28 km - 8h - difficulty 1/3)

It's time to leave Navarre and move into La Rioja. Expect a pleasant hike through undulating countryside. On this route, you will pass the little town of Viana before coming to the town of Logroño, capital of the world-famous wine-producing region of La Rioja.

10th day: LOGROÑO - NAJERA (29.7 km - 8:15h -difficulty 2/3)

Today is an easy stage through a vineyard-dominated landscape. You will come to the village of Navarrete after 12 km and will have a chance to stop for some refreshments and visit the fabulous Baroque church of La Ascension. You will reach Najera in the afternoon, where you can enjoy panoramic views from this hill-top town.

11th day: NAJERA - SANTO DOMINGO DE LA CALZADA (22 km - 6h - difficulty 1/3)

Country roads dominate this stage, which runs through the Cantabrian mountain range to the north, and the La Demanda mountain range to the south, perfect for enjoying a shorter walking day with great views. Later today, you will arrive in Santo Domingo de la Calzada; another milestone on the road to Santiago.

12th day: SANTO DOMINGO DE LA CALZADA - BELORADO (23 km - 7h - difficulty 1/3)

After a brief walk through a wooded area, the Camino takes us through crop fields, interspersed with small brooks and oak woods. This landscape warns us of the approaching mountain range and, indeed, you will soon see the Oca mountains looming on the horizon. This afternoon, you will have the chance to relax in the lovely main square of Belorado.

13th day: BELORADO - SAN JUAN DE ORTEGA (27.4 km - 7h15 - difficulty 2/3)

This stage is similar to the previous one until you get to Villafranca Montes de Oca (14km). However, as you go deeper into the woods, you will soon discover the beautiful Oca mountains. In St Juan de Ortega, have a look at the Gothic mausoleum.

14th day: SAN JUAN DE ORTEGA - BURGOS (27 km - 6h15 - difficulty 1/3)

Today's walk is mostly across mountainous terrain on the Sierra de Atapuerca with spectacular views of the Burgos region. You will pass the town of Atapuerca, known for its UNESCO World Heritage prehistoric caves where the earliest ever human remains have been discovered (3km off the Camino trail). As you begin to descend, you will reach the flat river valley taking you to the suburbs of the city of Burgos, home to one of Spain's most beautiful

cathedrals. In addition to a visit to the historic quarter, go for a walk along the banks of the Duero and Arlanza rivers or discover the delicious and varied local cuisine in one of the city's restaurants.

15th day: BURGOS - HORNILLOS DEL CAMINO (21.4 km - 5h30 - difficulty 1/3)

From Burgos, the route goes through the crop fields that are typical of the region and then through some small Holm oak and conifer woods, which serve as a reminder of the time when one of the largest forests in Europe existed on these lands.

16th day: HORNILLOS DEL CAMINO - CASTROJERIZ (20 km - 5h - difficulty 1/3)

Today's stage heads towards Castrojeriz, upwards to another plateau and then down towards the River Bol valley. A pleasant day spent between pasture and crop fields.

17th day: CASTROJERIZ - FROMISTA (25 km - 6h30 - difficulty 1/3)

After Castrojeriz, situated on the hillside between the valleys of the Odrilla and Pisuerga rivers, comes Alto Mosterales - the highest point on the Meseta, and the last plains in the Burgos region. The River Pisuerga brings you into the province of Palencia and on into the Tierra de Campo.

18th day: FROMISTA - CARRION DE LOS CONDES (19 km - 5h - difficulty 1/3)

Before you start, take time out to visit the beautiful 11th century Church of St Martin in Fromista. Today's route takes you along a track parallel to the road, but if you prefer, you can take a more scenic route at Población de Campos, via Villovieco, along the peaceful banks of the Ucieza river and rejoin the Camino at Villalcazar de Sirga.

19th day: CARRION DE LOS CONDES - MORATINOS (29 km - 4h45 - difficulty 1/3)

This stage includes 13km of the historical "Via Aquitania" (another famous route to Santiago which begins in Bayonne, France) taking in isolated countryside and poplar woods, crossing several irrigation channels.

20th day: MORATINOS - BERCIANOS DEL CAMINO (20 km 4h difficulty 1/3)

Expect hilly terrain as you cross some "cuezas", or little valleys. This part of the Camino leaves the road and heads through oak woods, before coming back to familiar cereal fields and crossing the River Valderaduey on route to the countryside of Leon. In Sahagun, the Church of St Lawrence is certainly worth a look.

21st day: BERCIANOS - MANSILLA DE LAS MULLAS (26 km - 6h30 - difficulty 1/3)

Today's stage takes in the pretty village of Reliegos on your way to Leon and the chance to follow the "Via Traiana" (another route to Santiago, starting in Bordeaux, France).

22nd day: MANSILLA DE LAS MULLAS - LEON (18 km - 5h - difficulty 1/3)

This stage runs parallel to land that has been set aside for irrigated crops. Later, the first signs of industrial activity become visible. From Portillo Hill you will be able to make out the beautiful city of Leon. Leon was the capital of the kingdom of Leon in the Middle Ages, and is a historic enclave on the pilgrim's route to Santiago de Compostela. The city's Gothic Cathedral and the Romanesque Basilica of Saint Isidore are well worth a visit as is the "Barrio Húmedo" (Wet District) which is filled with bars and restaurants.

23rd day: LEON - SAN MARTIN DEL CAMINO OR VILLAR DE MAZARIFE (21.3 km - 5h - difficulty 1/3)

The route out of Leon takes you right through the city to the village of Virgen del Camino, where legend has it that the Virgin appeared to a shepherd in 1506, and asked him to build a shrine. This stage is quite exposed as you cross the barren plains.

There are two alternatives for this stage, either to Villar de Mazarife which is a longer more scenic route to Astorga or a shorter route to Villadangos which runs closer to the main road.

24th day: SAN MARTIN OR VILLAR - ASTORGA (22 km/ 29 km 6h15 - difficulty 1/3)

Today's journey follows the script of the previous day with the endless plains of the wilderness for company. When you reach Órbigo Hospital, the Camino gives us two alternatives. Instead of taking the path to the left, you can turn right along a marked path that runs across the fields. This is the pilgrim option which runs through two small villages and moves away from the heavy traffic.

25th day: ASTORGA - RABANAL DEL CAMINO (19 km - 5h - difficulty 1/3).

The first village we come to after leaving Astorga is Murias de Rechivaldo. The Camino starts a gradual and steady ascent to the intersection of Santa Catalina de Somoza before moving onto to El Ganso, after about an hour's walk. It's now time for the last steep slope of the day before we reach the end of the stage in Rabanal del Camino after hiking through an oak forest with its huge Pilgrim's Oak that provides a resting point for travellers.

26th day: RABANAL DEL CAMINO - MOLINASECA (25 km - 6 h - difficulty 2/3)

This stage is the highest on the entire route and is one of the most picturesque routes on the Way. The road out of Rabanal climbs to a mysterious landscape wrapped in clean mountain air. The Camino leads to the Iron Cross at an altitude of 1,500 metres, which is marked by a simple tall cross on a large wooden mast. The route continues onto El Acebo, another famous hamlet and essential stop on the Camino which welcomes us to the Bierzo region. Then it moves onto Riego de Ambrós and returns to the 21st century in Molinaseca.

27th day: MOLINASECA - CACABELOS (22.5 km - 6h - difficulty 1/3)

This is one of the most beautiful stages on the pilgrim route which ends in Ponferrada. Ponferrada is the last major urban area before Santiago. You will cross the Bierzo region, a sunken plain nestled within a ring of mountains before arriving in Ponferrada, where the Templar Castle is well worth a visit.

28th day: CACABELOS - AMBASMESTAS (23.9 km - 4h30 - difficulty 1/3)

You will first cross the small village of Pieros to reach Villafranca del Bierzo, where you will be rewarded with a visit to the famous Puerta del Perdón (Door of Forgiveness) in the church of Saint James. The route moves onto the small village of Pereje and then Trabadelo, La Portela and Ambasmestas. Part of the route runs parallel to the road. Tomorrow will bring the ascent of O Cebreiro.

29th day: AMBASMESTAS - CEBREIRO (13.7 km 4 h 15 - difficulty 2/3)

The Camino runs parallel to the road and then goes through the villages of Ruitean and Las Herreras. This is when the climb really begins, with a short but very difficult ascent. There are now only 150 kilometres to go before you reach Santiago.

30th day: O CEBREIRO - TRIACASTELA (21.7 km - 5h30 - difficulty 2/3)

You are now in Galicia, and O Cebreiro offers us one of the most beautiful landscapes on the Way, as a place of great tradition and mysticism, with its emblematic Romanesque church of Santa María de O Cebreiro. Then you will start the climb towards the Alto de San Roque and later to the Alto de O Poio (1,335 m), which is the highest point in Galicia on the French Route, offering spectacular views. After crossing the Alto do Poio, the descent to the hamlet of Triacastela begins.

31st day: TRIACASTELA - SARRIA (via San Xil 18.4 Km /via Samos 20.5 km - 5h30 - difficulty 1/3 or 2/3)

From Triacastela, there are two ways to reach Sarria, via San Xil or via Samos, (the latter crosses Samos, with its beautiful Benedictine monastery but is more dangerous). The path to San Xil is well signposted and runs through a mainly hilly landscape. The route branches off at the end of Triacastela to the right. Initially, you will be walking on a road, but this soon changes into forest bridleways. The next village is Fonte dos Lameiros, with its large pilgrim

shell monument, and then after some undulating hills, you will reach San Xil, before continuing onto Sarria through different villages. Sarria is the main town between Ponferrada and Santiago de Compostela. The Romanesque Church of Our Saviour, with its Gothic façade, and the convent of Magdalena are well worth a visit, as are the Rua Maior main street and the ancient medieval castle tower.

32nd day: SARRIA - PORTOMARIN (23 Km - 6h - difficulty 1/3)

Expect a peaceful walk in shady oak woods through pretty villages on quiet country roads. The village of Barbadelo (580m) has a beautiful Romanesque church that is worth a visit. The village of Ferreiros is also on route. When you arrive in Portomarin, you can chill out at one of the numerous outdoor cafés in the main square.

33rd day: PORTOMARIN - PALAS DE REI (25.6 Km - 6h15 - difficulty 2/3)

The day starts by crossing over the Belesar dam footbridge, followed by a gradual climb ending in the village of Ligonde. This stage runs mainly along andaderos (paths), next to the road, or in some cases along paved trails. There are many signs indicating that we are on a pilgrim route, including the famous "cruceiros" (crucifixes). Check out the Cruceiro of Lameiros and the Monastery of Our Saviour of Vilar de Donas (2 km detour off the Camino).

34th day: PALAS DE REI - ARZUA (29.5 Km - 7h - difficulty 2/3)

On this stage, you will move into the province of Corunna, where you will find expanses of eucalyptus and pine trees and numerous medieval bridges, such as those in Leboreiro and Furelos, as well as one of the most idyllic locations on the Camino in Ribadiso do Baixo near Arzua. Melide, which is famous for its octopus, is an obligatory stop for pilgrims and lovers of good food, whilst Arzua is famous for its designation of origin cheese. This long walking day can be split into two with an overnight stay in Melide (15km + 14km).

35th day: ARZUA - RUA (18.5 Km - 5h - difficulty 1/3)

Today's route is a nice and easy walk over gentle slopes and through woodland, alternating with stretches near the road, which we will have to cross on occasions, before ending in Rua (500 m before the village of Pedrouzo). Don't miss the beautiful sculpture of Saint James the Pilgrim in the Church of the same name in Boente.

36th day: RUA - SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA (18.5 + 4 m - 4h30 - difficulty 1/3)

The last stage on your Camino de Santiago. The proximity of your goal will bring mixed feelings. On one hand, you will be eager to reach the desired end of the journey, yet on the downside, the feeling that comes to every pilgrim is that the journey is over. A stage of anxiety and joy, where distance does not matter, because you are "already there". The route today is flat, except for the climb to San Marcos, from Lavacolla, passing Monte do Gozo and down to Santiago de Compostela. The entire city of Santiago de Compostela is magical, but especially its Cathedral, which deserves a special visit.

37th day: SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

After breakfast, go to exchange your pilgrim's passport, if you haven't already done it. Alternatively, we suggest you visit the cathedral and the surrounding areas or attend a pilgrim mass.

Package includes

- 36 nights in handpicked hotels and inns, all with en-suite accommodation, on a bed and breakfast basis.
- Luggage transfer from hotel to hotel (1 x max. 20kg bag per person)
- Travel insurance
- Credencial (Pilgrim's passport)
- Tips and maps
- 24/7 telephone assistance (English-speaking)



Improving Travel SL, CICMA 2350
Cif: B- 86467537
C/Juan de la Cierva nº 19, 3º C
Arganda del Rey, Madrid, CP 28500

Tel/Fax: 0034 91 87 00 582
info@improvingtravel.com
www.improvingtravel.com