

Spain: Classic Camino de Santiago

Air Package Itinerary

Outside the medieval church at Roncesvalles, the air buzzes with anticipation. For nearly 1,000 years, walkers have gathered here on the threshold of Europe's oldest pilgrimage route. The trail sign—Santiago de Compostela 758km—can't begin to capture the magic of the journey ahead. More than a week of walking the Camino's most beautiful sections, from the Pyrenees to La Rioja's vineyards to Galicia's Atlantic coast—with your friendly guides and their handy support van helping you cover the remaining distance. Ahead of you awaits the promise of spontaneous traiside moments with your fellow peregrinos (pilgrims), nights at country inns and city-center boutique hotels, and locals-only discoveries in tapas bars, vineyards, and ancient archaeological sites. Every epic journey begins with a single step, and you couldn't ask for a better way to start your Camino de Santiago walking tour.



Highlights

Explore the Atapuerca archaeological site, where researchers have confirmed evidence of the earliest-known hominids in Western Europe, dating to about 1.2 million years ago.

Admire coastal views in Muxía, the true end of the pilgrimage, stopping for lunch to enjoy the region's superior seafood along with a glass of *albariño* white wine.

Discover the towering Episcopal Palace in Astorga, a bishop's residence designed by celebrated Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí.

Savor a delectable meal of tapas in Burgos, a foodie haven, and tour the magnificent Burgos Cathedral, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

On all Guided Adventures you can count on ...



Expert local guides to introduce you to the best of your destination.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Off-the-beaten-path places you'd never find on your own.



Experts to handle all the details.



A maximum of 18 fun-loving fellow travelers to share the journey.



Flight + Tour Combos include plane tickets, airport car service, and pre- and post-tour accommodations.



Delicious, authentic multi-course meals—virtually all are included.

Activity Level

This tour is one of our Guided - Full Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate, with an average of 5 to 9 miles per day. Options are limited and include skipping some of the walks and exploring or relaxing at each night's destination. The terrain includes minimal elevation gains and losses, except for two days, with 1,000- and 2,000-foot ascents. Walks are on extremely well-maintained, wide trails, sometimes paved, but most often on packed dirt or gravel paths, with occasional loose rocks. From the French border to Santiago de Compostela, the diverse inn-to-inn itinerary selects highlights of the entire Camino Frances of the St. James Way, including several Spanish provinces with widely varying scenery: the Pyrenees,

Atlantic-influenced forests, limestone-capped vineyards of the Rioja region, the open plains of Castile and Leon, and the verdant pastures and gray stone of Galicia. Thanks to daily transfers ranging from 20 minutes to 2 hours, this tour is a literal walk through history, with a unique camaraderie shared by fellow pilgrims. Each step reveals medieval towns, cities, churches, monuments, and UNESCO World Heritage sites such as the cathedrals in Burgos and Santiago and the prehistoric site of Atapuerca. Additionally, Spain's long days allow ample time for exploration as well as relaxation.

DAY 1

Fly to Bilbao, Spain

Begin your adventure by departing from a convenient gateway city in the United States or Canada. Spend your first night aloft.

DAY 2

Arrive in Bilbao, Spain

Upon arrival at Bilbao Airport, a representative holding a Country Walkers sign meets you as you exit the baggage claim area and provides a complimentary small-group transfer to the Hotel Hesperia Bilbao, approximately 20 minutes away. The remainder of the day is at your leisure (no meals included).

If you are going to be delayed meeting our transfer representative for more than 15 minutes due to delayed or lost luggage, please contact our local partners at the following (Spanish) mobile number +34 647 751 105 to advise of your delay, and they will contact our transfer service on your behalf. Our drivers are generally able to wait for up to 45 minutes from the time your flight lands, after which you would be responsible for your own transfer.

Please note: If you arrive early, and your hotel room is not available prior to the designated check-in time, you may store your luggage with the reception desk.

Country Walkers provides you with City Information including recommendations on what to see and do in Bilbao during your stay.

Accommodation: Hotel Hesperia Bilbao, Bilbao

DAY 3

Join your *Spain: Classic Camino de Santiago* tour

Roncesvalles to Bizcarreta; 7 miles, easy to moderate, 900-ft. elevation loss

Awakening refreshed, you enjoy an included breakfast at your hotel before meeting your group at 8:30 a.m. in the lobby of the Hotel Hesperia Bilbao. After a brief introduction to the group, your adventure begins.

Your tour begins in Bilbao, the Basque country's largest city and a major port that has experienced a renaissance with its striking Bilbao Guggenheim Museum. Leaving the city, you travel by private coach into the heart of the countryside, rising from the coast and through rolling foothills, approaching the spine of the Pyrenees. Today's walk begins near the tiny town of Roncesvalles, just below the Ibañeta Pass at an elevation of 3,000 feet on the border between France and Spain. Small, but rich in history, Roncesvalles is a popular starting point for many pilgrims—*peregrinos* in Spanish—walking the Camino de Santiago, and it was also the site of the defeat of Charlemagne by Basque tribes in the year 778. From an 18th-century stone hostel, a former pilgrims' lodging, the trail descends through beech forest alternating with lush pasture into the village of Burguete. This is the trout-fishing area described in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. You enjoy lunch at a local restaurant before embarking on the afternoon trail. Passing the sturdy stone and white-washed Basque farmhouses, you continue through the meadows of Altos de Mezquiritz before descending to the town of Bizcarreta, also a 12th-century pilgrims' way-point, where you are met and transferred to your hotel in Pamplona. This city is best known for the running of the bulls through its historical center during the San Fermín festival. Dinner this evening is at a restaurant within your hotel, a perfect opportunity to toast the days ahead with a glass of fine regional wine.

Accommodation: Pamplona Cathedral Hotel

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 4

Uterga to Cirauqui

9 miles, easy to moderate, 700-ft. elevation gain and loss

After breakfast this morning, a 20-minute transfer takes you to the start of the day's walk in the town of Uterga, where, although not far from the Pyrenees, the Atlantic-influenced geography gives way to a more Mediterranean feel with olive groves and vineyards. You walk through small, peaceful towns with buildings made of the region's golden stone, which in the late summer, matches the hue of the nearby grain fields. From Uterga, you come into the village of Muruzábal with its Baroque-era palace, now a wine cellar. Crossing some quiet roads, you enter Puente La Reina, home to an 11th-century Romanesque six-arched bridge, constructed for pilgrims to cross the Arga River. Past the 13th-century Santiago Church, you follow along the right bank of the Arga into the wine town of Mañeru, where a lunch of local specialties refuels you for the trail ahead. One of the Camino's most picturesque views awaits along a trail that winds up through vineyards to the medieval hilltop town of Cirauqui. A short, steep ascent leads to the ancient walls surrounding the town and the San Román Church. Later, you transfer to your hotel in the heart of the Álava region, where sheltered vineyards and numerous wineries surround you. Here you are offered a private tour of one of the many bodegas followed by a tasting to elucidate the intricacies of Rioja wine. This evening, you enjoy dinner in a region blessed with its own regional bounty, as well as fresh Atlantic seafood from the north, and high-quality meats from the southern plateau.

Accommodation: Hotel Viura, Villabuena de Álava

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 5

Ermita de Valdefuentes to Agés

6 miles, easy to moderate

This morning, a 75-minute transfer brings you to the 12th-century Ermita de Valdefuentes. With a central statue of St. James watching over the pilgrims, this tiny hermitage is said to be the last vestige of a Cistercian monastery on the site. You enter a tranquil forested plateau where, in the past, lurking thieves made this section one of the Camino's most dangerous. Now, the pine and oak trees provide habitat for deer, wild boar, and raptors. Continuing past the 11th-century monastery complex of San Juan de Ortega, you emerge from the forest onto the Atapuerca plains and continue to the town of Agés for lunch. Afterward, you transfer to Burgos, where you embark on a guided tour of the town's 13th-century cathedral—a crucial stop for Camino pilgrims and a UNESCO World Heritage site. Its delicate spires are a rare choice for this cathedral's French-Gothic style. You are now in the region of Castile and León, where Burgos was an important historical city for the Spanish because of its location at the confluence of the

Duero and Arlanza rivers. In Burgos, a statue memorializes the birthplace of national hero El Cid.

Your city tour concludes at your hotel, ideally located in the heart of Burgos, where, just a short walk away, is a true pilgrim hostel (and an organization that Country Walkers proudly supports), the Burgos Association of Friends of the Camino de Santiago. Time permitting, you enjoy a brief visit to the hostel. Your hotel provides an ideal base to choose from the city's many excellent dining options, as confirmed by its status as a "Spanish Gastronomy Capital."

Accommodation: AC Hotel Burgos, Burgos

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 6

Castojeriz to Itero de la Vega

7 miles, easy to moderate

This morning, you transfer to the Atapuerca UNESCO World Heritage site—where recent archaeological research has confirmed evidence of the earliest-known hominids in Western Europe. You are guided around the excavation site, where fossils and stone tools were uncovered dating to around 1.2 million years ago, thus predating the French site of Lascaux. Afterward, you return to Burgos for a visit to the new Museum of Human Evolution. The museum's displays complement your visit to Atapuerca, as you learn more about the network of caves in the Atapuerca mountains, where incredible discoveries are ongoing.

You enjoy a lively tapas-style lunch before leaving the city, perhaps traditional *patatas bravas* (potatoes with spicy sauce), the region's excellent cured ham and cheeses, salads, calamari, olives, and croquettes—the small-plate possibilities are endless. Afterward, you drive about 45 minutes to join the Camino at Castojeriz, an important pilgrim way-station once home to several hostels and a stone hilltop castle that is now a ruin. In this vast landscape of Spain's central plains, you make out windmills on the far horizon and arrive in the hamlet of Itero de la Vega. From here you are transferred about 30 minutes to the small *pueblo* (village) of Villoldo and tonight's accommodation—a family-run inn, which is also a true culinary destination. As throughout your tour, local and seasonal ingredients are presented in traditional dishes with a light and creative touch, such as grilled octopus with rosemary potatoes and red-pepper aioli.

Accommodation: Estrella del Bajo Carrión, Villoldo

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 7

Villares de Orbigo to Astorga

9 miles, easy to moderate, 650-ft. elevation gain, 530-ft. elevation loss

Breakfast this morning is a delight of homemade juices, breads, pastries, and jams of local fruits and berries. After checking out, a drive of a little over an hour takes you to the start of today's walk at Villares de Orbigo. You are entering yet another region—the terrain here has a more Mediterranean feel, with its underlying geology of red stone, vineyards, and oak forests. Look for the stork's nest on the town's Santa Maria Church.

After passing the cross of Saint Turibius, who was the region's 5th-century bishop, you descend past the village of San Justo de la Vega, making your way to the city of Astorga. You are welcomed here with a tasty lunch, perhaps followed by a sampling of hot chocolate. This is the Spanish birthplace of chocolate, thanks to the dry climate and location on the trade routes from the north and Andalucía to the south. You'll have a short tour of the town's Roman ruins, as well as the cathedral and the stunning bishop's palace, one of only three buildings designed by Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí outside of Catalonia. Late afternoon you settle in to your hotel with time to relax and refresh before dinner. The menu this evening features traditional regional dishes—accompanied by excellent wines—and may include lamb, delicious local ham, fresh river fish, and frog legs for the true gourmet!

Accommodation: Hostería Camino, Luyego de Somoza

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 8

Las Herrerías to O'Cebreiro

5 miles, moderate, 2,000-ft. elevation gain

This morning's transfer is just under 90 minutes, bringing you farther west to the trailhead in the hamlet of Las Herrerías. Just past the trailhead is the Barrio de Hospital, which housed a medieval hospital for

English pilgrims. As you move toward Galicia, the landscape takes on a more Celtic feel—leaving behind Mediterranean vegetation, you enter a countryside that evokes the British Isles, with verdant pastures and ancient, gray granite stone. Most of the day's hike is a long gradual uphill. However, you are able to warm up on the paved flat terrain of the lush valley. Leaving the pavement, the Camino begins the gentle ascent on a path bordered by moss-covered stone walls and shaded by chestnut trees. After the village of Fada, the wooded area transitions to wide-open vistas of the forests along the Atlantic coast. The ascent eases up as you reach the village of Laguna de Castilla and, soon after, you cross the border from the province of León and officially enter Galicia. Your trail ends in the town of O'Cebreiro, where you'll find panoramic views over the province, as well as the Royal Saint Mary's Church, built on the foundations of a pre-Romanesque church. Most importantly, you'll also find lunch at an ancient hostelry. A Roman road predated the Camino here, and the *pallozas*—prehistoric stone homes—provide evidence of earlier people in the region. Driving down from O'Cebreiro toward your next hotel, you enjoy stunning views of the seasonally snowcapped mountains of León. Your efforts today are rewarded with a delicious dinner of updated Galician cuisine, perhaps featuring dishes such as suckling pig, lamb, and *pulpo a la Gallega* (Galician-style octopus), paired with a glass (or two) of excellent wine.

Accommodation: Hotel Pazo de Orban, Lugo

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 9

Sarria to Ferreiros

8 miles, easy to moderate, 1,020-ft. elevation gain

You transfer from your hotel this morning to the town of Sarria. For many, this is the start of their Camino walk, as it marks the point where pilgrims can begin the minimum consecutive distance (100 kilometers/60 miles) necessary to achieve the *Compostela*, the official certification of completion of the pilgrimage. Pilgrims have their Camino “passports” stamped along the way at the major local churches or official hostels. You're likely to meet many walkers and pilgrims today—people from around the globe sharing this long walk and a unique camaraderie. You begin on the main street and encounter a set of steep stairs leading up to the center of the town and the hilltop Convent of Magdalena, dating from the 15th to 18th centuries. The Camino then descends to the Rio Pequeño, which you cross on the medieval Ponte Áspera bridge, and continues through fertile pasture and small vegetable patches. Depending on the season, small farms offer fresh berries for sale. You conclude your walk in Ferreiros, where you can relax and

savor lunch.

By late afternoon you enter Santiago de Compostela and set off on an easy walking tour of this capital of the autonomous region of Galicia. Narrow, granite-cobbled streets loop past the Plaza de Cervantes with its small statue of the writer, and on to the Plaza de Obradeiros, overlooked by the cathedral's main façade. The Rua do Franco, a bustling shopping street, leads down to the Alameda Park. The tour culminates at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in time to participate in daily mass—a breathtaking gathering, due to both the cathedral's grandeur and the sense of accomplishment and emotion in the pilgrims who have arrived here from the many Camino routes. The *peregrinos'* final steps lead to the statue of St. James at the cathedral's entrance. Construction of this cathedral, now a UNESCO World Heritage site, began in 1075 over the remains of a pre-Romanesque church. Expansion and embellishment continued from the 16th through the 18th centuries as it gained importance as an Episcopal see and place of pilgrimage—it is the third most important destination for Christians after Rome and Jerusalem.

This evening, your guides provide suggestions for dinner in Santiago's lively pedestrian Old Town, designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in its entirety for its wealth of historical buildings—choose from a myriad of cafés, tapas bars, and restaurants.

Accommodation: Altaïr Hotel, Santiago de Compostela

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 10

A Costa da Morte

Moraime to Muxía; 2-3 miles, easy

After a hearty breakfast, a 90-minute drive takes you northwest of Santiago to the coastal town of Muxía—considered the true end of the pilgrimage by many pilgrims who continue their walk after reaching the cathedral in Santiago. The coastline's spectacular beaches and surf have made it the site of many shipwrecks, as well as a reputation as the Costa del Marisco (the "Seafood Coast"). Understandably, lunch is Galician-style seafood, perhaps clams or mussels, accompanied by an *albariño* white wine.

Returning to Santiago, you have time to rest or explore more of this fascinating city before gathering for a

final celebratory dinner of regional specialties, toasting your “pilgrimage” journey on this ancient route.

Accommodation: Altaïr Hotel, Santiago de Compostela

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 11

Your Spain: Classic Camino de Santiago tour concludes

After saying goodbye to your group in Santiago de Compostela, linger in the city for additional exploration and a post-tour night. If your schedule permits, you may wish to attend the daily noontime mass at Santiago's cathedral; the use of the famous incensory suspended from the cathedral's ceiling—the *botafumeiro*—cannot be guaranteed at this mass or any other services at the cathedral as the schedule of its use changes regularly. (Lunch and dinner are on your own.)

Country Walkers provides you with City Information including recommendations on what to see and do in Santiago de Compostela during your stay.

Accommodation: Altaïr Hotel, Santiago de Compostela

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 12

Departure

Adios! This morning a complimentary small-group transfer is provided to Santiago de Compostela Airport based on your departure time. (Transfer time to be communicated locally by your tour guides.)

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included

Air Package

Tour Only

Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓	✓
All on-tour meals except 2 dinners	✓	✓
Local (expert!) guides with you throughout tour	✓	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓	✓
Travel assistance available 24/7 provided by Allianz	✓	✓
Roundtrip airfare	✓	
One extra night in Bilbao and one extra night in Santiago de Compostela	✓	
Airport car service for arrival & departure	✓	
Pre- and post-tour breakfasts	✓	
Business-class upgrades available	✓	