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Spain: Classic Camino de Santiago

Travel Style - Guided Walking Tour

This small-group Guided Walking Adventure offers an authentic travel experience, one that takes you away from the crowds and deep into the fabric of local life. On it, you'll enjoy 24/7 expert guides, premium accommodations, delicious meals, effortless transportation, and local wine or beer with dinner. Rest assured that every trip detail has been anticipated so you're free to enjoy an adventure that exceeds your expectations.



For over a millennium, pilgrims have traversed the lush meadows, misty mountains, sun-swept wine country, and stonework villages of northern Spain on their way to Santiago de Compostela. It's a journey that can take over two months to complete, but our innovative itinerary brings you all the highlights of "the Way" in just nine days. From the poppy fields and Basque villages of the Pyrenees to the tranquil beaches of Galicia, you relish all of northern Spain's history and natural beauty, in the company of local knowledgeable guides. In Burgos, wander crooked cobblestone streets past tapas bars and bustling squares before losing yourself in its acclaimed cathedral. Delight in the intricacies of Rioja wine during a private tasting with a local expert at a bodega in Álava. And finally, share a quiet moment with pilgrims during a visit to the acclaimed Santiago de Compostela Cathedral, an exquisite culmination to a journey that, for many, is life changing.

Tour Only Itinerary - 2019

Day 1

Join Your Country Walkers *Spain: Classic Camino de Santiago* Tour

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

The 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. The 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 the 18th-century stone hostel, the former pilgrims' lodging, the trail descends through



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beech forest alternating with lush pasture into the village of Burguete, 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 Mezkiritz 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—the city that 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 unique opportunity to taste and toast the days ahead over a fine regional wine.

Accommodation: Pamplona Cathedral Hotel, Pamplona

Located within the ancient walls of the city's old town, this hotel is an ideal home base for travelers hoping to make the most of the first urban hub along the Way of St. James. This four-star property makes exceptional use of its former-convent building, with a restaurant housed in the onetime chapel and unique, contemporary rooms. Conveniently close to the Portal de Francia (where the Camino enters the city) and the Plaza del Castillo, it also boasts free high-speed Wi-Fi room service, and an excellent staff.

Day 2

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 peaceful small towns with buildings made of the region's golden stone, in the late summer matching the hue of the grain fields nearby. 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 with its 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 winding up through vineyards to the hilltop medieval town of Cirauqui. A steep but short 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 you are surrounded by the sheltered vineyards of numerous wineries. 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 not only blessed with its own excellent products, but also benefitting from the fresh seafood of the Atlantic to the north and the high-quality meats from the southern plateau.

Accommodation: Hotel Viura, Villabuena de Álava

Stunning modern architecture amidst a traditional Basque village describes this special hotel located in the heart of a small but beautiful Villabuena de Álava. The restaurant features first class service,



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creative and inspiring cuisine, and a host of local wines. The rooftop terrace offers expansive views of the surrounding hillside while rooms and public spaces stylishly combine contemporary architecture with luxurious comfort.

Day 3

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 Saint James to watch 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 forest onto the Atapuerca plains, and then continue on to the traditional town of Agés for lunch. Afterward, you transfer to Burgos, where you embark on a guided tour of the 13th-century cathedral—a crucial stop for Camino pilgrims; with its delicate spires, it is unique for its scale and French Gothic style. You are now in the region of Castile and León, and in a city key to Spanish history at the confluence of the Duero and Arlanza rivers—a statue memorializes the birthplace of national hero El Cid, and the magnificent cathedral is also a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The tour concludes at your hotel, ideally located in the heart of the city, 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 of the hostel this evening. Your hotel provides an ideal base to choose from the city's many excellent dining options as confirmed by its status as the 2013 “Spanish Gastronomy Capital.”

Accommodation: AC Hotel Burgos, Burgos (or equivalent)

AC Hotel Burgos is ideally located to visit this historic city with nearby attractions including the sumptuous UNESCO-protected Gothic Cathedral, the Museum of Human Evolution, and a myriad of topnotch tapas bars. Located in the historic pedestrian zone, this hotel features sleek exterior guest rooms, and trendy dining options.

Day 4

Castojeriz to Itero de la Vega

7 miles, easy to moderate

This morning, you transfer to the Atapuerca UNESCO World Heritage location—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



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around 1.2 million years ago, thus predating the French site of Lascaux. Afterward, you return to Burgos for a visit of the new Museum of Human Evolution—to complement your visit to the site and learn more about the network of caves in the Sierra Atapuerca, 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 pick up the Camino at Castojeriz, also an important pilgrim way-station that once had 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 where you are transferred about 30 minutes to the small *pueblo* (village) of Villoldo and the family-run inn there, a true culinary destination. As throughout the tour, local and seasonal ingredients are presented in traditional dishes with a lighter and creative touch, such as grilled octopus with rosemary potatoes and red-pepper aioli.

Accommodation: Estrella del Bajo Carrión, Villoldo

Between the cities of Burgos and León, three sisters run the hotel founded by their father over 30 years ago. The modern and airy country house features balconied guest rooms and common areas with fresh flowers and unique architecture. In addition to the fine-dining restaurant, the hotel features a library, billiard and wine room, and a willow-shaded terrace for breakfast or drinks *al fresco*.

Day 5

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 and pastries, and jams of local fruits and berries. After checking out, a drive of a little over an hour takes you to the walk's start 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 nourishing vineyards and oak forests. Look out for the stork's nest on the town's Santa Maria Church.

After passing the cross of Saint Turibius, 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 herewith a tasty lunch, perhaps followed by a sampling of hot chocolate, the specialty of 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 have a short tour of the town's Roman ruins, as well as the fine cathedral and the 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 frogs' legs for the true gourmet!



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Accommodation: Hostería Camino, Luyego de Somoza

This boutique hotel constructed in a restored home has spacious, individually decorated guest rooms with polished wood floors combining Spanish antiques with exposed beams and brick. Common areas include a fireside living room with inviting couches, a relaxed café for drinks or light fare, and a dramatically lit fine-dining restaurant. An antique shop is also on the premises. Using local and seasonal ingredients, the hotel's elegant restaurant is especially known for mushrooms prepared traditionally, perhaps sautéed, in soups, crêpes, salads, or with foie gras. Traditional regional dishes include lamb, frogs' legs, excellent local ham, and fresh river fish and are accompanied by wines from their extensive cellar.

Day 6

Las Herrerías to O'Cebreiro

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

This morning the transfer is just under 90 minutes, bringing you farther west to the trailhead in the hamlet of Las Herrerías; just past it 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 are entering countryside that evokes the British Isles—verdant pastures, ancient gray granite stone. Most of the day's walk 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. The walk ends in the town of O'Cebreiro, with its panoramic views over the province, as well as the Royal Saint Mary's Church, built on the foundations of a pre-Romanesque church, and most importantly, 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 (or equivalent)

Located right in the historic center of Lugo, the Hotel Monumento Pazo in Orban e Sangro offers the tranquility and ambiance of an 18th-century Baroque palace, while combining all the services and amenities of a four-star hotel. A full bar, restaurant and even on-site museum will keep guests busy during their stay.

Day 7



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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 minimal consecutive distance (100 km) 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. Concluding the walk in Ferreiros, you 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 Obradoiros, 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, both from the cathedral’s grandeur and from 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 Saint 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—the third most important destination for Christians after Rome and Jerusalem. This evening your guides provide suggestions for dinner in the 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: Altair Hotel, Santiago de Compostela (or equivalent)

This family-owned-and-operated boutique hotel located in a quiet corner of Santiago de Compostela’s historic center has been renovated to seamlessly blend minimalist décor and soothing colors with the building’s stone walls and exposed beams. A personal greeting from the owners and a welcome drink in the adjoining garden of a sister property provide an insider feel to the historic pilgrimage destination city of Santiago. The capital of the autonomous region of Galicia, the entire old town has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage site for its wealth of historic buildings. Santiago’s narrow granite-cobbled streets invite exploration while providing plenty of stopping points at myriad cafés, tapas bars, and restaurants.

Day 8



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A Costa da Morte

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, but this location also means it is the Costa del Marisco (the “Seafood Coast”); therefore, 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” on the ancient route.

Accommodation: Altair Hotel, Santiago de Compostela (or equivalent)

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Day 9

Your Country Walkers *Spain: Classic Camino de Santiago* tour concludes

You depart Santiago de Compostela after breakfast this morning at your leisure. 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.