

SPAIN – THE VERY BEST OF THE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO

15-day / 14-night fully guided walking & sightseeing tour from Bilbao to Santiago de Compostela



Departs: 9th – 23rd June or 25th August – 8th September 2012

Cost: AU\$8625 per person (twin share). Double-room for single occupancy supplement AU\$795

Highlights: Outstanding cathedrals & medieval architecture, a Michelin 2-star dinner, the wines of Rioja

Walking: 3 – 8-hours per day on 10-days of moderate to challenging walking - maximum group size 16

Includes: Hotels range from simple 1-star inns to spectacular 4 or 5-star paradors in Santo Domingo, León and Santiago, all rooms with private facilities, all meals in restaurants with quality regional cuisine, wines and coffee, special picnic lunches, experienced tour manager and a walking guide - all highly trained staff with minibus support and baggage transfers.

Not included: Airfares, personal expenses or additional meals/entry fees not mentioned

For this tour we offer the **very best** of everything; the best itinerary, walking route, sightseeing, hotels, and restaurants with carefully selected menus and wines, picnic lunches and a tour manager.

Experience the very best highlights of the **Way of Saint James** - the pilgrimage route across Northern Spain – on what is arguably the highest quality-walking holiday available in Europe. Walk with a small group of like-minded English-speaking travellers supported by experienced guides on the most un-spoilt sections of this famous route, walking to recreate the experiences of the medieval traveller. Drive to the most important places of interest along the way in the comfort of an air-conditioned minibus.

To understand the epic scale of this journey, we begin north of the Pyrenees. Our path will cross these mountains, the Navarre plains and vineyards of Rioja, across the 'green' Spain and the fertile valleys and forests of Galicia linking cities of important history, great cathedrals, fine churches and other religious monuments until, first glimpsing the towers of Santiago, we enter the city on foot. By walking the most interesting and un-spoilt sections, our itinerary recreates as closely as possible the experience of the medieval traveller. However, the hotels we stay in are considerably more comfortable than those experienced by a real life pilgrim!

This is a 15-day tour in which 10 days are spent walking 5-full days and 6-part days. The length of each walking day and the hours of walking may vary from group to group (the actual walking time does not include stops for lunch, sightseeing, rests or siestas) and there are rest days in Burgos and Santiago.

The days we have planned are long and full, with the first half of the trip being more cultural and the second week involving more walking. On certain days our walk takes us into the hills where the paths cross a more rugged terrain, there is also some steep uphill and downhill paths but these are well made and well signed throughout the trip. There are no vertiginous walks, however, some of our walks are very weather sensitive.

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Suggested itinerary:

Day 1 We meet at the airport and travel by road from Bilbao into the Pyrenees and France to the ancient French citadel of St-Jean-Pied-de-Port, enclosed by its red sandstone walls (2.5 hours).

Day 2 The ancient Roman road leads from our hotel at an elevation of 695m through alpine meadows, along the old pilgrims' way to the Col de Lepoeder at 1275m, then down into Spain to the monastery of Roncesvalles (today's walking is @ 27km – but there is a support vehicle on hand for those who want to walk less).

Day 3 We travel the ancient Camino by road to visit the Romanesque church of Eunate, then superb Puente la Reina. We wander through medieval Estella, and then walk from Nájera through the Rioja vineyards to Santo Domingo de la Calzada (8km).

Day 4 We visit the cathedral of Santo Domingo, and the saint's tomb, then follow the Camino through forests to the pilgrim church of San Juan de Ortega. Then continue on to Burgos (12km).

Day 5 A free day to explore in Burgos with opportunities for visiting the cathedral and the 15th century Cartuja de Miraflores, an active Carthusian Monastery.

Day 6 We drive to Hornillos then walk along the Camino across open country to Castrojeriz, continuing to Fromista and the Romanesque church of San Martín. We drive on to León (19km).

Day 7 Today we can visit the superb cathedral in León with its spectacular stained-glass windows and the frescoed Basilica of San Isodoro. We then travel to the ancient crooked bridge at Orbigo and stay in Astorga.

Day 8 We follow the Camino across the Maragatería to Foncebadón, then cross the Montes de León on foot down to the village of Molinaseca. We walk through vineyards to Villafranca where we find the isolated church of St James (24km).

Day 9 We walk from Villafranca through chestnut groves before descending by road to rejoin the Camino. We climb through wooded tracks and open hills to O Cebreiro and its Celtic dwellings (16km)

Day 10 Walking along a mountain ridge we arrive at Triacastela, where 11th century pilgrims received a stone which they carried to Castaneda to make lime for building the 'Apostles' Basilica'. We drive to Samos and its vast abbey. Overnight in Samos (21km).

Day 11 From Sarria we walk past the Romanesque church of Barbadelo (where medieval innkeepers from Compostela solicited business from pilgrims), then down to Portomarín, with its Templar church (24km).

Day 12 We drive along the Camino route, now asphalted, to Santa Eulalia de Boveda with its pagan temple, then walk along the original Jacobean Way of the *Camino del Norte* to the Romanesque church at Vilar de Donas. We drive on to Rúa de Arca where we spend the night (20km).

Day 13 From Rúa de Arca our way lies through lush eucalyptus woods before continuing to San Marcos, Monte de Gozo, and finally Compostela itself (21km).

Day 14 A free day to explore Santiago de Compostela, its renowned Cathedral with Romanesque Puerta de la Gloria and the world's largest censer (which is swung by 8-men on special occasions or for a fee).

Day 15 Breakfast at the Parador. Travel to Santiago airport by coach (@ 30-minutes).

The itinerary is subject to change. If it is not possible to do a walk due to inclement weather, an alternative will be organised. Any such decision is at the discretion of the Tour Leader.

Other walking holidays – guided in small groups or self-guided (with inn-to-inn luggage transfers & meals) are available in many parts of Europe through **Outdoor Travel** including the **Via Francigena** – the pilgrim's *road to Rome*, in Italy and **St Cuthbert's Way** from Scotland to England. Comfortable walking with good accommodation and a gourmet approach to food and wine are offered in the **Lot or Dordogne** regions of France. Challenging walks such as the **Coast to Coast** route in England or **Mont Blanc** in the Swiss Alps are also available.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more itinerary details and reservations

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