

SPAIN – CYCLING THE WAY OF SAINT JAMES

10-days / 9-nights fully supported guided cycling holiday,



Follow in the tracks of ancient travellers and join us as we make our way along the legendary Way of Saint James, the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route to the burial place of the apostle in the northwest corner of Spain. This is a gently paced tour in a land of miracles, mysteries and legends. Following quiet roads and well-surfaced tracks, we enjoy the Spanish sunshine as we cycle in hillsides alongside the Cantabrian Mountains.

This trail is as popular to day as it has ever been. For over eleven centuries pilgrims have followed this ancient route to Santiago de Compostela through the rolling Galician hills - a land of idyllic hamlets, incredible Gothic cathedrals and tranquil Romanesque monasteries.

Along the journey, you'll hear of King Charlemagne and St. Francis of Assisi and the stories of medieval hero El Cid, as we ride the paths once protected by the Templar Knights. Highlights include the stunning cathedrals of Leon and Santiago and the Celtic huts (pallozas) of Cebreiro and over everything, the great camaraderie of fellow travellers that you will meet on the route.

Accommodation is in small hotels, chosen for their location and quality. Breakfasts are taken at the accommodation, lunches picnic style, and evening meals at local restaurants allowing you to sample the delicious regional cuisine.

As with all of our tours, the support vehicle is never far away, should you need a snack or a lift on a particular section of the route.

Cost per person: AU\$3350 per person (twin share) - Single room supplement AU\$500

Bike hire: AU\$250 if required

Departs: 24th June & 2nd September 2010

Tour includes: Accommodation (shared twin rooms) in small good quality hotels with private bathrooms, all meals as per the itinerary (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Evening Meal), full tour service including guides support staff and support vehicle(s) - unless stated at least one leader is qualified in First Aid, return airport transfers.

Not Included: Personal clothing and equipment, alcoholic drinks, travel insurance, personal expenses or bar bills, telephone calls, souvenirs, entry fees etc, bike hire (if required at AU\$250), flights & any charges for travelling with your own bike (if applicable).

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations

Suggested itinerary

Day One – Arrive Santander (bus transfer to Leon) – Thursday

Arrive in Santander airport for the journey by bus to Leon. Our route takes us across the 'meseta', a flat plateau that occupies much of Old Castile. This is a high tableland of an altitude of 700metres. It is a landscape of brown and grey earth veined with narrow roads and cart tracks, weaving through wheat fields and farms. Once we have arrived in Leon we check into our hotel before preparing our bikes for the cycling ahead. Leon's name actually comes not from the Spanish for lion as you would expect, but from the Roman 7th legion; Legio Septima Gemina and in medieval times it soon became an important stop on the Camino.

Day Two - Leon to Astorga – cycling @ 40kms – Friday

This morning is Leon's spectacular cathedral. No visit to Spain - never mind the Camino is complete without a visit here. The stained glass here is remarkable not only in its scale but also in its design, which pales the impressive exterior into insignificance! 1800 square metres of vivid golds, reds and violets light-up this immense building that also boasts superb sculptures and Renaissance paintings. Sights abound in the city and include for the more modern amongst you Gaudi's *Los Botines* – 'the spats'. Other highlights are the Hospital de San Marcos at Paseo Condesa de Sagasta and the Real Basilica de Isidoro with its lovely frescos.

Once we have seen the sights of Leon we set out to Astorga. This is an undulating start to our cycling and we'll soon find ourselves reaching the town of Astorga, where we will stay for the evening. Once a Roman town it is now the capital of Maragatos. A nice city of varied architectural styles blending effortlessly together and includes Gaudi's fairytale castle *Palacio Episcopal* (Bishop's Palace). **(B,L)**

Day Three - Astorga to Ponferrada – cycling @ 40kms – Saturday

Soon after Astorga our route takes us to the typical Maragato village of Murias de Rechivaldo. Next are the thatched roofed houses of El Ganso (the Goose), whose origins date from pre-historic times and which contrast dramatically with the splendour you have witnessed in Leon.

Next stop is the rustic Rabanal del Camino, a stop safeguarded by the Templars to ensure safe travel to pilgrims, who had to pass through this lonely stretch. Rabanal is followed by a climb of 12km past the Cruz de Ferro. This is an ancient symbol of the Camino, the stones there representing the sins of the millions of travellers before us and whose origin is said to date to the Celts who would give stones to roadside shrines to placate dangers ahead. A wonderful 15km descent to Molinaseca through the ruins of Manjarin and the medieval El Acebo provides the perfect end to a day before arriving at our stop for the night in Ponferrada. Named after the long-gone Puente de Ferro (iron bridge), erected to help pilgrims over the Rio Sil, Ponferrada is home to the 12th century Castillo de los Templarios – a castle that oozes tales of ancient battles from its thick walls and lofty ramparts. **(B,L)**

Day Four - Ponferrada - Villafranca – cycling @ 25kms – Sunday

Today's short ride is from Ponferrada to Villafranca del Bierzo. The ride is characterised by fortresses originally used to extract tolls from travellers...don't worry though as they don't yet accept the Euro! Built at the confluence of the Rio Burbia and Valcarce and surrounded on all sides by mountains, Villafranca del Bierzo is one of the most attractive small towns on the entire Camino. Here we are free to explore the town, rest, reflect and enjoy the comforts few pilgrims experienced.

As it's name suggests, the city of Villafranca was founded by the French in the 11th century. Worthy of a visit is the 16th century Castillo de los Marqueses de Villafranca and the 12th century Iglesia de Santiago. The latter is a simple yet not insignificant church, due to its Puerta del Perdon ('door of pardon'). Pilgrims too weary to continue to Santiago de Compostela needed only to touch the door to receive indulgences as they would in Santiago. Of course you have the advantage of our support vehicle! **(B,L)**

Day Five - Villafranca - Triacastela – cycling @ 40kms – Monday

We start the day with a climb, a challenge for all cycle 'pilgrims', the ride over the Sierra de Ancares to Cebreiro.... though don't worry the support vehicle will be close at hand should you wish to hop aboard at any stage! After congratulating yourself with your achievement the remainder of the day is gently paced with our route going through wonderful countryside initially taking a lovely stretch of downhill through mountain meadows, chestnut groves and tiny hamlets to reach Triacastela. **(B,L)**

Day Six - Triacastela - Portomarín – cycling @ 35kms – Tuesday

Most of the day sees us following the narrow wooded Ouribio Valley. En route we see the Benedictine monks at the immense Abadia de San Xulian at Samos, before continuing through the bustling town of Sarria to reach Portomarín. Once the headquarters of the Templars and the order of St. John of Jerusalem this was an

important pilgrim halt protected by the Templars. This delightful town is recently famous for being moved stone by stone in 1962 when the Rio Minho was dammed to form the Embalse de Belesar (Belesar Reservoir) and it is where we stay for the evening. **(B,L)**

Day Seven - Portomarin - Melide – cycling @ 40kms – Wednesday

The tracks now, whilst being off road are well surfaced and are a much nicer option than busy asphalt road sections as we continue on our route. As with tomorrow the countryside here is simply lovely and is surely the most beautiful part of the Camino, as we ride through lush countryside and eucalyptus forests. The route today is not particularly hilly and with you now well in 'your stride' the distance will speed by. Once more lunch is picnic style mid route - more opportunity to taste all those Spanish hams, cheeses and local delicacies....and maybe even a glass of vinto tinto! **(B,L)**

Day Eight - Melide - Santiago de Compostela – cycling @ 35kms – Thursday

From Melide we pass through Pedra de Raposo and the crumbling church of Santa Maria with its 15th Century murals to Arzua the traditional pilgrims last night overnight stop. Labacolla is next and a very important site prior to your arrival in Santiago. The name means a washing place and is where 'for the love of the Apostle'...or was it really to stop lice reaching Santiago, pilgrims would bathe in the stream by the nearby church. We will of course have bathrooms in our Santiago hotel...but if you fancy getting the full Camino experience then feel free to wash away!

Finally at Monte del Gozo (Mount Joy), the long awaited sight of Santiago comes into view. From Mount Joy it's downhill all the way, to a place declared a World Heritage Site in its entirety by UNESCO. Our sights will be set on the Plaza de Obradoiro, Santiago's impressive cathedral square, which houses its greatest treasures. This will be a special moment that will last a lifetime and signify the end of a truly memorable cycle ride. **(B,L)**

Day Nine - Santiago de Compostela – Friday

Today it's time to leave your bike and embark on a wander around this amazing city to celebrate your achievement over the last few days. There is so much to see that a day here is seldom enough and for those with more time, why not extend your time here and fly home a little later. Highlights abound; the cathedral never fails to impress and delight, especially the impressive incense bearing 'Botafumerio' as it swings from the rafters. Other sights of particular interest include Convento de San Paio de Antelares, which houses the Museo de Arte Sacro, the Praza de la Azabacheria and Museo do Pobo Galego. The Hospital Real (now a luxury hotel) is worth a visit, even if it's for a quick drink in the bar. Or why not take a few moments to relax and reflect on the trip and watch the world drift by in the plaza. **(B,L)**

Day Ten - Connection Day – Saturday

For those departing today, time to either jump aboard our support vehicle for the journey back to Oviedo or Santander or for those flying back from Santiago transportation to the airport is available. **(B)**

Tour Grades: These cycling holidays have been graded by using four basic categories based on distances covered, combined with route conditions (routes may include cycling on road or unmade tracks), climate and on the amount of altitude gained. They are intended as a guideline, to check your suitability for a specific tour, please feel free to contact us. **This trip is graded 2-3**

Grade 2 - Gentle - For the leisure cyclist who exercises regularly - will include some steeper climbs. Distances average between 35 - 50kms per day.

Grade 3 - Moderate - For those who cycle regularly - includes some steep climbs. Distances average between 40 - 80kms per day.

Outdoor Travel offers a wide range of guided or self-guided inn-to-inn cycling holidays in most countries in Europe including France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Turkey, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Bulgaria, Ireland and the United Kingdom. We also offer Bike & Barge holidays for those interested in a more relaxed pace combination of cycling and cruising

Contact **Outdoor Travel** or your travel agent for more details, travel brochures and reservations:

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