

Purely PYRENEES

walking and cycling holidays

Compostella Camino: Journey's End: Leon - Santiago de Compostela



Journey's end: *the exhilarating, once-in-a-lifetime climax of the walk finishing at Santiago cathedral. This itinerary is for 16 days walking, but you can begin at any point, and walk for as many or as few days as you wish.*

**17 nights - 16 walking
days**

- Minimum required 1
- From point to point
- With luggage transportation
- Self-guided

Code :
ES2PUS2



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The plus points

- **The triumph of arriving at Santiago de Compostela**
- **Beautiful, historic cathedrals, towns and villages**
- **The green and varied landscape of Galicia - and its cuisine**
- **Easy walking on very well trodden path.**

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Before departure, please check that you have an updated fact sheet.

The Spanish call the Camino de Santiago the Milky Way (a medieval fable said it was created from dust rising from pilgrims), the French call it The Road Of Stars, and in English it is often The Way of St James. What's for sure is that since the 9th century, pilgrims have visited the supposed grave of St James (Saint Iago = Saint James), his shipwrecked body found covered with scallop shells. Routes started from all over Europe, and today people come from all over the world, many to do the last 100 kms to get a pilgrim's certificate, but walkers start from much further away as indeed we do. We offer a complete 45 day walk that you can begin at any point you choose, and do in as many sections as you wish. We are presenting it in three long walks, but you can choose to do as many or as few days of this last section as you wish.

The path becomes more varied after Leon with lots of lovely villages and towns, hills and valleys, forests and woodlands, Celtic culture and Galician cuisine culminating with the medieval city of Santiago and its cathedral reckoned by some to be one of the most beautiful in the world thanks in no little part to pilgrims' donations. Altogether, a most satisfying conclusion to any walk anywhere in the world whether you are a walker or pilgrim.

■ THE PROGRAMME

DAY 1

Start in León with its 13th century gothic cathedral, also called the Pulchra Leonina, the convent of San Marcos now a luxury hotel, but worth visiting for its architecture as is the Antoni Gaudi designed Casa de los Botines, but it's also the medieval lanes and alleyways that might appeal as much. We always enjoy visiting as it is a real, vibrant city, not somewhere preserved in tourism aspic.

You are not staying in a hotel. You are staying at The Royal Collegiate of Saint Isidoro Hotel, and that is something completely different. Well, not completely, but it a marvellously converted hotel in an extraordinarily impressive building. The hotel, without exaggeration, describes it as the history of Leon in one building: Roman origins represented by its Legio VII walls, the Royal Pantheon's paintings (some say the Sistine Chapel of the Romanesque era), the simple yet superb choir of the Basilica, the almost sentient, certainly silent cloisters. The rooms are delightful too, but being a large city you can choose where to dine tonight. You can still appreciate the architecture of the breakfast room the next morning, though.

DAY 2

From León to Villadangos del Pàramo: sadly, the beginning is not auspicious as you make your way following the scallop shell symbols out to Virgen del Camino (modern church), then on across the high, bare plateau (known as a paramo) to Valverde de la Virgen and San Miguel del Camino (you can already tell by these names how history has been dominated by pilgrim traditions) before reaching Villadangos del Pàramo. That's a good walk for one day, but, as the village does not have a good enough hotel, we transfer you (ten minutes) to Hospital de Orbigo.

Hospital de Orbigo is on the banks of the River Orbigo that is crossed by its truly magnificent Roman bridge that was also used for medieval jousting tournaments, not least because it was renowned as a Knights' Templar town. The rural hotel Our Lady Of Lourdes, right in the middle of this attractive town, is characterful, simple and welcoming with a garden, terrace (eat outside option) and a well earned reputation for updated Galician dishes. We're sure you'll enjoy staying two nights here.

Walking time: 5h 10. Distance: 20.5 kms (13 miles). Transfer time: 10 minutes.

DAY 3

From Villadangos del Pàramoto Hospital de Orbigo: we transfer you back to Villadangos to start your walk back to where you've just come from, but it's a totally different experience on foot, and much more enjoyable. It's a short walk too through San Martin del Camino then Puente de Orbigo with its lovely medieval bridge before arriving at Hospital de Orbigo for the second and last time.

Your room and belongings are just as you left them at Our Lady Of Lourdes.

Walking time: 3h. Distance: 12 kms (7.5 miles). Transfer time: 10 minutes.

DAY 4

From Hospital de Orbigo to Astorga: you stroll across more varied terrain now you are off the plateau. and through Villares de Orbigo, Santibanez de Valdeiglesia and San Justo de la Vega before reaching Astorga, an important town since Roman times as the Via Traiana linked it to Bordeaux. Its most famous for its cathedral built in 1471, which also has an interesting museum, but you should also try to visit the Museum of Pilgrimage in the Palacio Episcopal built by Antoni Gaudi, the architect of the Sagrada Família in Barcelona. He died in 1926. It's still being constructed.

The 4 star Hotel Astur Plaza is perfectly located on the main plaza (ideal for a post walk beer and pre-dinner cocktail?), and has balconies overlooking it, and the cathedral that fills one end. The hotel has been tastefully converted, and has very pleasant, wood floored bedrooms as well as a characterful tavern and restaurant.

Walking time: 4h 15. Distance: 16 kms (10 miles).

DAY 5

From Astorga to Rabanal del Camino: you now walk through a wild and beautiful mountain range with some longer ascents, and traditional villages like Valdeviejas, Murias de Rechivaldo, Santa Catalina de Somoza and El Gamso (a cowboy bar is the main attraction!). Rabanal was developed by the Romans because of the nearby gold mines. The camino maintained its wealth, and until the early 20th century it was a centre for the Margato culture - travelling traders who wore distinctive (some say originally German) dress, and many of whom migrated to Patagonia in the 18th century.

We really like the Posada de Gaspar, and think you will too. It's essentially a simple, traditionally built, stone and timber hotel that has bags of character, lovely public and bed rooms, good regional food (award winning, in fact), and is just a great place to stay in the middle of nowhere.

Walking time: 5h 20. Distance: 21.5 kms (13.5 miles).

DAY 6

From Rabanal del Camino to El Acebo: your first village of the day is Foncebadon (the church of San Salvador is still slowly being restored), and soon after you reach the highest point on the Camino Frances at almost 5,000 feet, and topped by the Cruz de Ferro, Iron Cross, where pilgrims traditionally throw a stone (found, or brought from home), although originally pilgrims took a stone to help build Santiago cathedral. The positive impact of the camino is evident after you have descended to the once-abandoned, now thriving village of Manjarin, and similarly, but less dramatically, in El Acebo.

El Acebo sits at 3,000 feet high on a ridge with hills fading into the distance in every direction. La Casa del Peregrino does rather more than provide a home for pilgrims. It's a well located stone building with smart, characterful bedrooms, and a welcoming staff. Good restaurant too.

Walking time: 4h 30. Distance: 16 kms (10 miles).

DAY 7

From El Acebo to Ponferrada: while Riego de Ambros is an interesting enough village, the highlight of today is undoubtedly Molinaseca, a beautiful mountain village with a remarkable Romanesque bridge over the River Meruelo. Indeed, today you are walking through wonderful mountain scenery, and towards the end of the walk you'll enjoy the gentle descent down to Ponferrada, famous for its Knights' Templar castle.

The three star Hotel Aroi Bierzo Plaza is situated in the heart of the Old Town of Ponferrada, you eat in the hotel's restaurant, La Violeta, on the terrace if it is warm enough, facing the main square.

Walking time: 4h. Distance: 16 kms (10 miles).

DAY 8

From Ponferrada to Villafranca del Bierzo: almost certainly you will never have heard of the Bierzo valley, but you'll remember it after today as a lovely, unspoilt place that is a pleasure to walk through, and for the Archaeological Museum as well as the Iglesia de Santa Maria de la Plaza in Cacabelos. Nor will you forget your destination, Villafranca del Bierzo, an attractive town with a church consecrated to Saint Jacques/James /Iago that centuries ago was considered as sacred as his church in Santiago.

The historic, and rather wonderfully named, Posada las Donas del Portazgo combines traditional stone-and timber-interior design with stylish contemporary bedrooms, and good contemporary food, albeit with a definite Galician character.

Walking time: 6h 15. Distance: 24 kms (15 miles).

DAY 9

From Villafranca del Bierzo to O Cebreiro: you walk through the most attractive parts of the El Bierzo mountains today with numerous authentic hamlets along the way. Your walking day ends with a gradual ascent of nearly 2,000 feet before arriving at O Cebreiro, but it's a village well worth arriving at. It has been described as hobbit-like, Celtic and even prehistoric primarily because of the 9 ancient, sunken, thatched, stone built "pallozas" still here, and you can visit 3 of them. An extended family lived in each cheek by jowl with their animals, and you get a real sense of how they lived. There's also the oldest church on the camino - the 836 Santa María la Real, a Romanesque delight that also features a 12th century gold chalice and reliquary as well as a huge, rough hewn full immersion font.

The accommodation is as simple and authentic as you would expect in this magically located and historically invested village, but, unlike living in a palloza, you will have privacy, warmth, comfortable beds and good food.

Walking time: 7h 30. Distance: 27 kms (17 miles).

DAY 10

From O Cebreiro to Triacastela: thankfully, after the previous day's exertions, it's mostly downhill today, and into valleys that feature rich, green pastures typical of Galicia. Politically, you have been in Galicia for a day or so, but now this feels geographically like Galicia - verdant, green fields and stone built villages in the valley bottoms, woods on the valley sides and moorland higher up. It makes for good and varied walking. Triacastela did indeed once have 3 castles, but now has none, and not even a decent hotel, so we transfer you to Samos, which has both a good hotel and is an interesting village.

Hotel A Veiga is not a sophisticated hotel, but it is one our guests have thoroughly enjoyed staying in because it is a warm, friendly, family run hotel that offers genuine hospitality, comfortable rooms and good regional cuisine. After a good day's walking, just what you need!

Walking time: 5h 20. Distance: 21 kms (13 miles). Transfer time: 10 minutes.

DAY 11

From Triacastela to Sarria: we transfer you back to Three Castles so you can enjoy the pleasant and increasingly gentle landscape - the mountains are now behind you - dotted with largely unspoilt hamlets and villages, all with their traditional grain stores/barns. Our route takes you on the lesser travelled path through Samos (wave to the A Veiga as you pass by), and altogether it's a good day's walking that leads you to Sarria, which is where the "lightweights", who want to only do the last 100 kms to get their pilgrim certificate, start.

Hotel Roma is the best place to stay in Sarria. Centrally located, it is a smart 1930s built hotel that is fully upto date with stylish public rooms, recently updated bedrooms, and a restaurant in the cellars that has bare stone walls and loads of character - like the food, in fact.

Walking time: 4h 45. Distance: 18 kms (11 miles).

DAY 12

From Sarria to Portomarin: you walk through the hills of Monte do Cristo and into the Miño valley, which was dammed in the 1950s, and, extraordinarily, the village of Portomarin on the riverside was moved brick by brick up the hill as were the three churches you will see today standing proud above the lake (well, reservoir).

The two star Hotel Vistalegre is right in the historic heart of Portomarin, yet is a smart, contemporary hotel that offers all the comforts and facilities you'd want and expect. It also has a spa centre, and an attractive roof terrace. We think you'll enjoy dining here too.

Walking time: 5h 45. Distance: 22.5 kms (14 miles).

DAY 13

From Portomarin to Palas de Rei: there are plenty of interesting villages and hamlets you walk through today, including a series of three called Castromaior, Castro Lardeiros and Castro Simone. It's a fair day's walk so you deserve somewhere to stay that feels like a reward, so we will transfer you to tonight's hotel as there aren't any good enough here.

Hotel Rio Pambre has a privileged position in its own extensive grounds featuring riverside meadows, woods and the river Pambre itself. The hotel uses these crystal clear waters in its spa facilities, which we'd recommend you to try. The restaurant serves good quality, healthy food. You should leave well refreshed.

Walking time: 6h 30. Distance: 25 kms (16 miles). Transfer time: 13 minutes.

DAY 14

From Palas de Rei to Melide: we transfer you back to Palas de Rei where the coastal camino de nord has now joined your route, so everyone is now on the same path to Santiago. Along this path you will be able to admire "pazos", the traditional Galician houses, "horreos", the stone grain stores, and try octopus, the speciality of Melide, along with the excellent local white wine of the Ribeiro. After enjoying the best Melide has to offer, we transfer you back to the previous night's hotel for the usual reason: no hotels good enough in Melide.

Yes, back to the lap of luxury by the river Pambre.

Walking time: 3h 45. Distance: 15 kms (10 miles). Transfer time: 15 minutes.

DAY 15

From Melide to Arzúa: we transfer you back to Melide to begin today's walk that offers good walking conditions, sometimes past typically Galician farmhouses, stone walls and cornfields with views to the surrounding hills, and sometimes in shady eucalyptus and holm oak woods. It's a fairly short day, so there's time to relax in, and explore, Arzúa before dinner. You may, or may not, want to know that there are more cows here than people.

A Curuxa is a relaxing yet super-modern hotel in style and facilities, not least for the aching walker. There's bags of space for relaxing and reading in its garden, swimming in the pool, and a spa that offers massage. The rooms are light and airy - and just as stylishly modern as the restaurant and cuisine.

Walking time: 3h 15. Distance: 15 kms (10 miles). Transfer time: 15 minutes.

DAY 16

From Arzua to O Pedrouzo: you often walk along ancient hollowed out paths, and pass through villages with names that are synonymous with "camino": Brea, Calzada, Rua and Calle. Also interesting are the medieval shrine of the martyred Santa Irene in Arca with its Baroque fountain of healing waters, and the originally 6th century Puñide bridge crossing the Mera River. Inevitably, though, as this is the last day before Santiago, it's looking forward that really counts.

O Acivro is a rural hotel that blends traditional stone buildings with contemporary bedrooms. Its name - an endangered holly important in Celtic traditions - tells you that the owners respect their environment, and are committed to ensuring traditional hospitality and cuisine. A good last night before Santiago.

Walking time: 4h 45. Distance: 19 kms (12 miles).

DAY 17

Yes! **From O Pedrouzo to Santiago de Compostela:** the last stretch to the goal for pilgrims and walkers alike. It will feel good, if not wonderful, to be getting ever nearer Santiago, and particularly as you arrive at Monte do Gozo where the city appears before your very eyes. We have to say that the last miles are, inevitably, more about modern city outskirts than ancient pilgrim way, but the historic centre of Santiago will live up to your expectations when you focus on its past not present. You should get here by early afternoon, so you'll have plenty of time to explore the city, and get your pilgrim passport to confirm you've done it - and not just the last 100 kilometres. Congratulations!

That the grand Hotel Compostela "owns" the name Compostela tells you a lot about this high quality hotel that is located between the historic and commercial centres, and offers a combination of ancient and modern. It feels suitably impressive after your impressive achievement.

Walking time: 3h 45. Distance: 16 kms (10 miles).

DAY 18

End of stay after breakfast

Elements beyond our control (the weather, your levels of fitness, logistical risks, other miscellaneous reasons) may lead us to modify the programme. We aim to please, but your safety will always be our priority.

■ PRACTICAL INFORMATION

DATES

You can start on any day from 1 April to 8 October, but this journey can get hot and crowded in July and August.

MEETING POINT

Standard option:

You make your own way to Leon.

With extra airport pick-up:

We will pick you up at Valladolid airport and drive you to the hotel.

END OF YOUR TRIP

Standard option:

Your holiday ends after breakfast.

With extra airport pick-up:

After breakfast, we will pick you up and take you to Santiago airport (if you choose an other airport, please consult us for prices).

MINIMUM NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS REQUIRED

1

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

This itinerary features comfortable rather than challenging walking, and is suitable for people who are reasonably fit and enjoy a good day's walking. You are mainly in the foothills rather than in the mountains. Typically, there is 3 to 6 hours steady walking with modest ascents and descents. In July and August it can be very hot for all day walking, so we recommend April to June and September to early October.

LUGGAGE TRANSFERS

We will transfer your luggage to the next hotel, so all you need carry is a daysack with your choice of essentials plus picnic.

TRIP FORMAT

This is an independent, self-guided holiday.

ACCOMMODATION

You stay in double-twin rooms in good quality hotels with en suite facilities as described. On some days we will arrange a transfer to and from a suitable hotel when there is none where you end your walking day.

MEALS

You will eat well. Dinners are based on set menus featuring regional specialities. Breakfast is included every morning, but lunches and picnics are not because there are places to make your own choices, although the night before you can ask hotels for a picnic, which you can pay for locally.

THE PRICE INCLUDES

15 nights dinner, bed and breakfast; 2 nights bed and breakfast (the nights in Leon and Santiago); people transfers as detailed; luggage transfers each walking day as required; detailed walking directions; 1:25,000 maps as required; 24/7 customer phone service.

THE PRICE DOES NOT INCLUDE

The journey to the start point and from the finishing point; all drinks; lunches; dinner on the first and last nights; entry fees; personal and travel insurance.

FORMALITIES

You need to keep your passport with you at all times, and ideally insurance information. You need to make your own arrangements to claim local healthcare. There are requirements in France and Spain for all vehicles to carry safety equipment.

YOUR TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

When we have received the balance of payment for your holiday, and in the month before your departure, we send you all the documentation you need: a detailed itinerary showing dates, times, contact addresses etc; a detailed guide to your walking routes, often also including a lot of cultural, historical and nature background information; formal documents (invoices, contractual terms and conditions etc); luggage labels etc. If you book at the last minute, we can send information to the first night's accommodation.

■ EQUIPMENT

Do pack everything into one suitcase (preferably soft form) and bring a weatherproof daysack (small rucksack) each. We transport your luggage, and large rucksacks are difficult for flights and cars.

Do invest in "tech" clothing - light, waterproof, breathable, quick drying etc - and good walking boots with ankle protection (trainers will not be good enough).

Do simplify your "tech" equipment if you can: for example, can you get communications, internet access, entertainment, music and books all on your smartphone ? There's plenty of space in your luggage for a Kindle, so do you need to take books as well ?

Do choose comfortable clothing for evenings too - usually people dress casual, or at most smart casual, but remember you are usually staying and dining in quality hotels.

Do remember that while you are enjoying some of the most unspoilt and magnificent scenery and landscapes in the world, and walking for hours without seeing another soul, you will be staying in villages and towns with shops that have most of the things you might need as replacements, or if you've forgotten stuff. After all, you are in France and Spain, not the middle of nowhere !

LUGGAGE

- A soft travel bag, avoid suitcases, which are more cumbersome and limit the weight of your belongings to 10 kg if possible.
- A small backpack of 30 litres minimum for your daytime requirements.

CLOTHES

- Waterproof and breathable anorak (Gore-Tex type)
- Fleece or a sweater (depending on the location and season)
- Waterproof over-trousers
- Pair of gloves (depending on the location and season)
- Sun hat (with all round brim)
- Shorts
- Swimming costume + packaway towel
- Several pairs of proper walking socks
- Underwear
- Pair of trainers or light evening shoes
- Comfortable clothing for the evening

EQUIPMENT TO BRING

- Walking boots (with ankle protection)
- Sunglasses, sunscreen and lip protection
- Water bottle or backpack container (allow 2 litres per person per day)

- Tupperware type container for the picnic + cutlery
- Compass
- Waterproof cover for walking instructions and map
- Head torch
- Survival blanket
- Mobile phone (signal strength is often surprisingly good, but cannot be relied on)
- Your identity documents (including driving licence - you never know when...)

FIRST AID KIT

- Small shared kit (gauze, plasters, analgesic, blister plasters, earplugs, pain killers, indigestion tablets)

■ **INSURANCE**

According to the regulation of our profession, Purely Pyrenees is covered by a Civil Professional Liability. However, each client must hold an individual civil liability as well as an individual multi risk guarantee in order to protect themselves from incidents or accidents that may occur before or during their hiking trip.

We remind you that a credit card covers, in general, only assistance in repatriation and not the cancellation of your trip, and this only provided you use the card to pay for the total of the trip.

We offer a choice of three insurance options which you can purchase at the time of booking.

Package 1: simple cancellation insurance at 2.5%

This insurance provides reimbursement of the amount incurred (excluding fees and the cost of insurance) in case of cancellation due to one of the following causes: serious accident, illness or death of insured, spouse or person accompanying them, and certain family members.

Package 2: simple cancellation insurance and assistance / repatriation at 3.7%

This insurance allows, in addition to the benefits described in the plan No. 1; - To benefit from assistance in case of illness or injury during the trip and covers your return home if necessary. - A reimbursement paid on a pro rata basis (excluding transportation costs and with a waiting period) in the case of an interruption of your trip following an accident, the death of a loved one or other specified accidents.

Package 3: Package "super multi-risk": 4.8%

This insurance offers, in addition to the benefits described in the packages No. 1 and No. 2, - A wider cancellation insurance with the repayment of amounts incurred (net of deductible) in case of cancellation for any justifiable reason including an exceptional and unexpected event. - The management of some of the costs incurred at the time in case of return not linked to an exceptional and unexpected event. - Compensation (capped) for loss, theft or destruction of baggage. - Payment of compensation for delayed baggage delivery of more than 48 hours.

The rapatriation is not valid for all countries, please check with us before subscribing the insurance.

You will receive with the confirmation of your booking an extract of the general conditions of contract chosen (in french). Take this document with you on your journey. The validity of all guarantees corresponds with the travel dates indicated on the invoice and applies only to services sold. For departures and returns postponed, please contact us. Warning: If you buy only the contract No. 1 (simple cancellation insurance), this means that you need to have your own insurance, repatriation assistance (related notably to certain credit cards). We advise you to check your contract and cover guaranteed. In this case, we ask you to tell us when you book the name of your insurance company and your policy number. You will assume, therefore, the responsibility of certain risks, especially in the advance payments of certain costs.

Important: If you must use the assistance during the trip, you must obtain the prior consent of Europe Assistance before taking any action or incur any expenditure by telephoning: 33 1 41 85 85 85 and quoting the number of contract: 58662860

■ ACTING FOR RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Purely Pyrenees is a founding member of Action for Responsible Tourism.

The label "Action for Responsible Tourism" was awarded Purely Pyrenees in 2009. It is controlled, every year, by ECOCERT.

Based on common values of respect, solidarity and quality, ATR aims to harmonize professional practices of its members.

To win the confidence of customers, it focuses on four key commitments, which arise from many activities in the field and at home.

- Clear information and awareness of responsible tourism given to the traveller.
- Selection of providers in the spirit of responsible tourism.
- Setting up of a transfer of competencies to the providers.
- Commitment in relation to the tour operator's own structure.

More information on the label ATR on /www.tourisme-responsable.org

■ CONTACT US

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