

LE PUY CAMINO (FRANCE)

ITINERARY: FULL LENGTH (40 DAYS)

Day 1

ARRIVE IN LE PUY-EN-VELAY

Today you need to make your way to Le Puy-en-Velay on the upper reaches of the Loire and a pilgrimage centre since the Middle Ages. Internationally recognised as a starting point for the St James Way (the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela), Le Puy-en-Velay enjoys a unique historical and architectural heritage that we recommend you spend time discovering before you start your journey.

Overnight: Le Puy-en-Velay

Day 2

LE PUY-EN-VELAY

Le Puy was much visited during medieval times by pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela and highly venerated for its Black Madonna statue. You can explore the historical and well-preserved old town with its maze of small cobbled streets, flanked by tall, pastel coloured houses. The charming streets, winding their way up to the UNESCO World Heritage listed cathedral, provide a great place to stop in one of the many restaurants where local specialities are served. Famed for centuries for its lace making, visitors can also see lace makers at work, keeping the old tradition alive.

Meals: B

Day 3

LE PUY-EN-VELAY TO ST PRIVAT D'ALLIER (23.9KM, 6.5 HOURS)

The Cathedral Notre-Dame is the starting point for today's walk. You may wish to attend the Pilgrims' Mass, which is held in the cathedral every morning at 7 am. As you follow the trail up and out of town, enjoy great views over Le Puy and the surrounding area. Rural landscapes will now be your companion as you gently ascend and cross the volcanic soils of the Velay, past fields of the famous green lentils. You will pass by the first of many ancient stone crosses marking the way of the original pilgrimage route. Continue through the small village of Saint-Christophe and, just before Montbonnet, visit the small Chapel Saint Roch built from the local volcanic rock. Saint Roch (pronounced *Rock*) became the patron saint of pilgrims and this is the first of many



chapels along the Camino that bear his name. The path then passes through the spruce forest of La Baraque, before a steep descent into the small village of St Privat d'Allier.

Overnight: St Privat d'Allier

Meals: B

Day 4

ST PRIVAT D'ALLIER TO SAUGES (19KM, 6 HOURS)

The first part of today is spent crossing the valley of the River Allier, starting with a level walk to Rochegude, famous for its ancient St Jacques Chapel and tower (the remnants of an old 13th-century castle). The path descends steeply along a spruce lined, stony footpath towards Monistrol d'Allier with its stone buildings set in the valley below the volcanic cliffs. Walking out of town over the iron bridge designed by Gustave Eiffel, you encounter a sustained ascent that continues to a water fountain at Montauze where easy walking across an agrarian and forest plateau takes you to Saugues, the meeting point for pilgrims coming from the Auvergne region. This town features in the history of the Hundred Years War and as a marshalling point for hunters of the legendary Beast of Gevaudan, which terrorised this region in the mid-1700s.

Overnight: Saugues

Meals: B

Day 5

SAUGES TO LES FAUX (26KM, 7 HOURS)

On leaving Saugues, a large, wooden statue of Saint James points the way to open farmland and the hamlet of La Clauze, with its remnant tower of the 100 years war perched alone on a large granite rock. A picturesque walk takes you across the Margeride Plateau with grassy plains, moors of broom and heather and conifer woods. After the past two days, you will find this section relatively easy going, gently ascending most of the day. Continue through forests and around a huge estate called Le Sauvage with its massive solid stone barns and courtyard. Here you leave the Department of Haute-Loire and enter that of the Lozere. On the way you pass the Fountain St-Roch and rest stop, followed by the St-Roch Chapel founded in 1198 as a hospital for pilgrims and travellers. After the chapel, the track commences a gentle descent into Les Faux and your accommodation for the night.

Overnight: Les Faux

Meals: B

Day 6

LES FAUX TO AUMONT-AUBRAC (21.2KM, 5 HOURS)

You will continue on a downhill ascent today towards Saint-Alban-sur-Limagnole with its grey slate roofed stone houses laid out neatly along the slope of the hill. From here you continue to traverse the vast plain of the Margeride toward Aumont-Aubrac, also known as 'Terre de Peyre' (land of stone). This stage follows the same pattern as yesterday; beautiful rolling landscapes following mostly along comfortable earthen tracks between forests and fields. A short steep climb takes you up to Grazieres-Mages before



descending to the hamlet of Les Estrets through quiet woods and farmland, then gently ascending to Aumont-Aubrac, a pleasant market town. Part of the route here follows the ancient Roman Agrippa Way. Gateway to the mythic Aubrac high plateau, Aumont-Aubrac has always had strong links to the Camino. Back in medieval times, this is where pilgrims coming from the East on the Le Puy route rested before tackling the upcoming bleak and isolated lands of the Aubrac.

Overnight: Aumont-Aubrac

Meals: B

Day 7

AUMONT-AUBRAC TO NASBINALS (27.1KM, 7 HOURS)

From Aumont-Aubrac the trail passes through groves of pines before reaching the endless pasture lands of the vast volcanic and granite Aubrac plateau that is dotted with traditional stone shepherd's huts called *burons*. Pass through the village of La Chaze to the tiny Chapel de Bastide, with its 16th-century ceiling mural, and then through the village of Labros where you start to cross the Aubrac. This is a desolate region of wildflowers and contentedly grazing Aubrac cows. It is largely treeless and empty of people. You will observe the vast stretches of dry stone walls and *drailles* (old drove roads), originally built for the summer 'transhumance', where cattle were returned to summer pastures of the Aubrac after the long cold winter. The trail takes you through tiny hamlets and farmsteads, crossing streams over ancient granite bridges to arrive at Nasbinals, a herding village that marks the beginning of the Aveyron region.

Overnight: Nasbinals

Meals: B

Day 8

NASBINALS TO ST-CHELY-D'AUBRAC (16.5KM, 4.5 HOURS)

This stage of the walk takes you through the heart of the Aubrac plateau and the entire route has been classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Aubrac plateau has a tough reputation; cold, windy, remote and originally country for wolves and bandits. This can be an exhilarating day, much of it on open grassy hillsides and passing beech forests, dry stone walls of the *drailles* and ascending to 1368m – the highest point of the Le Puy Camino. The trail then delivers you downhill to the historic centre of Aubrac, another transhumance centre. In Aubrac you can see remnants of an ancient *domerie* (the name given to the hospital in Aubrac in medieval times). The *domerie* also provided a rescue service; lost travellers were summoned by an evening bell and horsemen scoured the surrounding district to escort wanderers to safety. After Aubrac you drop steeply past the ruins of Knights Templar Belvezet castle to pretty St-Chely-d'Aubrac in its secluded valley.

Overnight: St-Chely-d'Aubrac

Meals: B

Day 9

ST-CHELY-D'AUBRAC – REST DAY



Today is a rest day, so you can explore the village of Saint-Chely-d'Aubrac at your leisure. The Tower, built in the 15th century, belonged to the congregation 'Chaplains of Cuisine' until its purchase by the surgeon of Saint-Chely after the Revolution (now private property). The Place de la Mairie was, until the 1920s, a space occupied by a block bounded by two streets. To the left of the hospice, inaugurated in 1927 to house the elderly and sick, there is a wrought iron cross of the 19th century. The early 15th-century church is steeped in history and the old bridge, called 'Bridge of Pilgrims' was formerly known as the street of weavers. Today is yours to explore, relax and reflect.

Overnight: St Chely-d'Aubrac

Meals: B

Day 10

ST-CHELY-D'AUBRAC TO ESPALION (22.3KM, 6.5 HOURS)

Descending the cobbled streets of St-Chely-d'Albrac, you cross the Boralde River on the old stone UNESCO World Heritage listed Pont des Pelerins – built by 12th-century bridge-building friars, whose mission was to help pilgrims make their way towards Compostela. Leave the country of the 'Boraldes' on an ascending road and trail before descending to the Lot valley. Your path passes along beech-clad slopes and then descends through chestnut woods to cross a few little bridges to ascend suddenly to the hamlet of La Roziere. There is a little more undulation until finally you descend to St-Come-d'Olt, the first of the "Les plus beaux villages de France" (most beautiful villages in France), with its medieval gateways, old quarter and famous twisted church spire. You continue along a ridge above the Lot valley with some short steep ascents and descents towards Espalion. As you walk into Espalion the 16th century Veieux Palace and 11th century Pont Veieux arched bridge connecting the ancient tanner's houses lining the river come into view. The bridge and church of Espalion are listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. High above the town are the ruins of the 10th century Chateau de Calmont d'Olt.

Overnight: Espalion

Meals: B

Day 11

ESPALION TO GOLINHAC (26.4 KM, 7 HOURS)

Continuing on the Way of St James, you follow the UNESCO World Heritage listed trail along the Lot river, then climb upwards to the beautiful Romanesque church of Bessuéjols, one of the oldest along the route with an 11th-century chapel in the bell tower. After Tredou, cross a mosaic of rich red soils, and green fields alternating with more forests of oak and old chestnut trees, before passing through the village of Verrieres. A narrow footpath then winds up and over a forested spur of a gorge, and a small section of road-walking leads to the village of Estaing; an impossibly beautiful picture-postcard village with its imposing 15th-century Chateau of the Estaing family rising above the old houses. The Church of Saint-Fleuret in the centre of Estaing is important to pilgrims because of the relics of St-Fleuret within. The annual St- Fleuret fair has been held here since the 14th century, when a great procession travels through the village in period costume. Leaving Estaing, you start winding your way through



beautiful villages to the tiny hilltop village of Golin hac. With commanding views over the countryside, Golin hac is known for its church, which preserves the Roman foundations of a Benedictine priory, and an original stone cross with a small-sculpted pilgrim erected on it – a replica greets you at the entrance of the village.

Overnight: Golin hac

Meals: B

Day 12

GOLIN HAC TO CONQUES (21KM, 6.5 HOURS)

Today's walk is a favourite amongst pilgrims. It is a hilly rollercoaster but an otherwise easy walk across wonderful countryside and peaceful woodlands as you leave the Lot valley towards the famous village of Conques. You pass through the tranquil village of Espeyrac, perched on a rocky promontory on the side of the valley, then Senergues, with its 14th-century square tower castle. Undulating trails lead you to a final dramatic descent into Conques, one of the finest hill-towns in France and a perfect example of a medieval village. The view over the village is breathtaking with its lauze stone-roofed cottages and dominating towers of the Romanesque Abbey Church Sainte Foy.

Overnight: Conques

Meals: B

Day 13

CONQUES TO DECAZEVILLE (16.1KM, 4 HOURS)

After tearing yourself away from the charming village of Conques, it's a steep climb to the chapel of Sainte-Foy and upwards to the surrounding hills where the view over the village of Conques is striking. The trail leads to the hamlet of Noailhac followed by the small chapel dedicated to Saint Roch, rejoining the GR6 before the steady descent through forests, fields and dairy farms to the town of Decazeville. You continue through Decazeville and cross the Lot next to the buttress remains of the old suspension bridge built at the beginning of the 19th century.

Overnight: Decazeville

Meals: B

Day 14

DECAZEVILLE TO FIGEAC (33KM, 8 HOURS)

Leaving Decazeville, a steady climb on quiet country lanes leads you to the hilltop village of Montredon, dominated by its church Saint Michel and Romanesque Chapel of Saint Mary. The route then crosses beautiful countryside to arrive in Figeac. A medieval town founded in 830 AD around its Benedictine abbey, Figeac became a thriving city in the 13th century thanks to agriculture and commerce. Now with a population of almost 10,000, it contains a substantial and interesting medieval historical centre, dating in part from as far back as the 9th century. It is the birthplace of Champollion, (decipherer of the Egyptian hieroglyphs), and you can visit the Champollion museum. On the 'Place des Ecritures' there is a giant copy of the Rosetta stone.



Overnight: Figeac

Meals: B

Day 15

FIGEAC TO CAJARC (31KM, 8 HOURS)

It's a long hike today as you leave the Aveyron region for Le Lot, one of the few remaining unspoilt regions of France. The route crosses the Cele River before ascending the limestone plateau offering fantastic views. You will pass *dolmens* (old tombs constructed of large stone slabs used as funerary chambers and altars by the people who preceded the Celts), small stone shepherd huts unique to the region, and dry stone walls. You will walk through the smart little village of Faycelles, and then skirt Beduer where the imposing Chateau de Beduer has stood guard over the Cele valley for 800 years. Finally arriving in Cajarc, you can see part of the original 13th-century castle in the main street, The Boulevard du Tour de Ville, which today forms a ring road around the town, once a moat that provided additional protection to the heavily fortified village.

Overnight: Cajarc

Meals: B

Day 16

CAJARC TO LIMOGNE-EN-QUERCY (17.5KM, 4.5 HOURS)

From Cajarc the Camino leaves the lush greenery of the Lot and crosses the Parc Regional des Causses du Quercy, a relatively arid plateau where rainwater seeping through the limestone has created a landscape of deep valleys, underground rivers, caves and depressions. In the past, pilgrims dreaded crossing the Causses, no dwellings, very little water and ground conducive to the attacks of bandits who roamed the region. The pilgrims would group themselves and reach Cahors in one go, more than 60km in one day. A little different to today with a shorter walk to Limogne-en-Quercy allowing time to absorb the ancestral heritage of the area. Limogne-en-Quercy is famous for its truffle fair, usually held on Sunday mornings from December to March and summer. Take the opportunity to savour this most celebrated delicacy.

Overnight: Limogne-en-Quercy

Meals: B

Day 17

LIMOGNE-EN-QUERCY TO LALBENQUE (26KM, 7 HOURS)

Another great walk today through the isolation of the Causses. A level trail takes you through woods of scrubby oak trees and low bushes passing by abandoned farms with few people between the towns. You are likely to see more dolmens, old windmills, wells, dry stone walls and a pretty monolithic cross, (carved from a single block). Pass by the village of Varaire and 1.5km after Bach you will be walking on the old 'Cami Ferrat', the originally paved 'Iron Path' Roman road constructed on the orders of Julius Caesar during the invasion of Gaul. Continue on to either Lalbenque for your evening stop.

Overnight: Lalbenque

Meals: B



Day 18

LALBENQUE TO CAHORS (19KM, 5 HOURS)

Today will be similar to yesterday's walk, although with some gradient changes and will be the last one in the Causses. The isolation of the past few days is temporarily lost as the shock of a brief return to civilisation is realised as the trail passes under the busy A20 motorway. From here it is a rollercoaster walk on various paths and road surfaces toward Cahors. The forest is never far away as Julius Caesar wanted his troops to be able to move to the edge of the trees to take refuge if necessary. As you make your way on the final downhill, take in the great views of the medieval town of Cahors, the largest and one of the nicest towns on the Le Puy Camino.

Overnight: Cahors

Meals:B

Day 19

CAHORS – REST DAY

Cahors is perhaps best known as the centre of the famous AOC 'black wine', referred to by many as the darkest in the world and known since the Middle Ages. The medieval town dates back to the 13th century and grew with the arrival of bankers and merchants. They built fine houses, usually of brick and often with arcades for their shops, good examples of which can still be found in the narrow streets. Located in the city centre with its two great domes and tall facade, the 11th century cathedral (Cathedrale Saint-Étienne), is Roman Catholic and a national monument of France. The famous 14th-century fortified Valentre bridge, an emblem of the city classified as World Heritage by UNESCO and a well-known pilgrim milestone, crosses the Lot on the west side of town. It has three towers each with large arched gateways due to its historical role as a defensive bridge during the Hundred Years War. Discover the legend of the pact that the bridge builder made with the devil. Cahors has become well known for its gardens and has in recent years, created some wonderful small gardens scattered throughout the town.

Overnight: Cahors

Meals:B

Day 20

CAHORS TO MONTCUQ (30.6KM, 8 HOURS)

Finally departing the Lot Valley and also the Causses, the Camino now enters the Quercy Blanc, which takes you through the Garonne River plain with its green round hills. The earth here is mostly limestone, with a whitish colour, hence its name of Blanc. Your day starts with a short but steep climb up stone steps followed by a gentler walk on a stony lane uphill through a forest of pines to 'Croix de Magne', the Magne Cross. The rest of the day will then be following mostly flat and exposed trails. Enjoy long stretches of being alone with nature, an opportunity conducive to contemplation. You will pass various villages, chiefly Labastide-Marnhac and Lhospitalet before continuing along open uplands with occasional woods, before reaching the charming and prosperous



little village of Lascabanes, once home to a 15th-century pilgrims' hospital. Its an uphill walk out of Lascabanes to arrive at the lonely forest chapel of Saint Jean with its druid spring. The view as you approach the quaint medieval village of Montcuq is dominated by two towers, one of the church and the other the remains of a 12th-century castle.

Overnight: Montcuq

Meals: B

Day 21

MONTCUQ TO LAUZERTE (14.2KM, 3.5 HOURS)

The journey today passes through the department of the Tarn-et-Garonne. After several days of quite flat walking, the trail now follows an undulating path through farmland, cultivated fields and orchards. Vegetation of small oaks along with dwarf maples dot the landscape. In spring, enjoy the rich flora, particularly with the many orchids. Look out for ancient raised dovecotes along the way. Arrive at one of the best preserved Bastides, (fortified town), the medieval town of Lauzerte, and the half way point from Le Puy to Saint-Jean- Pied-de- Port. Situated above the valleys and hills of the area and founded in the 12th century by the Count of Toulouse, Lauzerte is another of the 'Most Beautiful Villages of France'.

Overnight: Lauzerte

Meals: B

Day 22

LAUZERTE TO MOISSAC (28.6KM, 7.5 HOURS)

The path today involves some steep paths together with lengthy stints on quiet roads. Approaching the Tarn valley, orchards of apples, plums, pears, peaches, kiwifruit and cherries replace the vineyards. Moissac is situated at the confluence of the Garonne and Tarn rivers. Formerly a major pilgrim halt on the road to Santiago de Compostela and 2nd most important sacred site for the medieval pilgrims on this route after Conques, Moissac is famous for its Abbey Saint-Pierre. One of the most beautiful Romanesque buildings in France with its perfectly preserved Romanesque cloister, it is World Heritage listed by UNESCO. The cloister (an enclosed garden used by the medieval monastics for walking meditation and contemplation) dates back to 1100 and is reputedly the oldest in the world.

Overnight: Moissac

Meals: B

Day 23

MOISSAC TO AUVILLAR (20.7KM, 5.5 HOURS)

Today you depart Moissac on the flat towpath of the canal of the Tarn and Garonne rivers. You will walk on quiet roads through productive orchards, vegetable gardens and fields before crossing the Garonne and walking uphill to the village of Auvillar, built on a promontory and classified as another of the 'Most Beautiful Villages in France'. Auvillar, originally an ancient river-trading settlement from Gallo-Roman times until the 10th century, is another lovely town with cobbled streets and wooden framed arched



buildings; it has a distinctive medieval feel. In the centre of town is the triangular market place with a unique circular corn market hall at its centre which was built in 1824. Also of interest is the clock tower and Church of Saint Peter.

Overnight: Auvillar

Meals: B

Day 24

AUVILLAR – LECTOURE (28.6KM, 7.5 HOURS)

A short and easy walk today as you leave Le Lot department to enter the beautiful rolling farmlands of Le Gers. The Gers department is the heart of Gascony and the most rural area in France; an agricultural paradise of wheat, corn, grains and sunflowers. The Camino takes you to lovely villages such as Bardigues, Saint-Antoine and up to Flamarens where the ruins of the 12th-century castle are currently being restored. Cross through undulating countryside to arrive in the small town of Miradoux. Built on a small promontory, Miradoux is one of the oldest Bastide towns on the Camino with character filled stone houses and a fortified church. From Miradoux there is a slow descent across lush fields passing through the hamlet of Castet-Arrouy. The cathedral tower of Lectoure will come into view guiding you into this town sitting on a rocky promontory above the Gers River. Lectoure is an attractive historic walled town, with the impressive Cathedral of Saint Gervais and Saint Protais. Nearby is the ancient Fontaine Diane, a natural spring inside a little gothic building that at one stage provided the source of water for an active tannery industry in the town. Lectoure is known for growing one-third of all of the garlic in France, and in spring the surrounding slopes are covered with rows of rose-green garlic shoots.

Overnight: Lectoure

Meals: B

Day 25

LECTOURE TO LA ROMIEU (18.6KM, 4.5 HOURS)

Leaving Lectoure and the Ger River behind, the trail takes you along quiet back roads to Marsolan, a tiny village on a steep hillside. Leave Marsolan through fields and woodland and after the chapel at Abrin the route goes northwards for La Romieu. This is not the historic route; pilgrims would in the past have headed directly for Condom. However, the imposing 14th century church at La Romieu, whose towers resemble a castle, is UNESCO World Heritage listed and the cloister with the delicate stonework of the arches is a must see.

Overnight: La Romieu

Meals: B

Day 26

LA ROMIEU TO CONDOM (13.5KM, 3.5 HOURS)

From La Romieu, the Camino rises and falls across this part of Gascony and you will enjoy expansive views over the countryside and, on a clear day, possibly see the Pyrenees far away in the distance. Pass through tiny Castelnau-sur l'Auvignon, before



the old Romanesque chapel of Saint Germaine and a serene lake before the final stretch into the welcoming town of Condom.

Overnight: Condom

Meals: B

Day 27

CONDOM TO MONTREAL-DU-GERS (16.3KM, 4.5 HOURS)

Today is a relatively short walking day so you can take your time, pace yourself and enjoy the scenery. This section of the Le Puy Way from Condom is full of history and interesting architecture. On route you will pass the Eglise de Routges, the oldest church in the region. Passing a castle you will arrive in Montréal-du-Gers, home to the biggest vineyard of Armagnac, the famous brandy.

Overnight: Montreal-du-Gers

Meals: B

Day 28

MONTREAL-DU-GERS TO EAUZE (16.3KM, 4.5 HOURS)

Today you have another short walking day ahead but the trail has some nice and steep inclines alongside lush vineyards. The first 8 kilometres of the trail passes vineyards and pretty countryside until you reach the hamlet of Lamothe with its 13th century guard tower. From here on the path is on a former railway line, guaranteeing good easy walking and providing a flat tunnel of greenery for the remaining 7km into Eauze. Eauze, a former Roman town, is the capital of the Armagnac region and offers one of the liveliest and biggest agricultural markets in the Gers.

Overnight: Eauze

Meals: B

Day 29

EAUZE – REST DAY

Take a well-earned rest day in Eauze, a beautifully presented town with a fascinating history. Visit the Gothic Cathedral of Saint Luperc built in the 15th century from Roman rubble, destroyed during the Wars of Religion and rebuilt in the 18th century. Don't miss the Archaeological Museum with the only ancient Roman treasure in France kept in its entirety, including gold coins, jewellery and statues. Observe the numerous historic houses built of wood and brick or plaster, in a style reminiscent of English Tudor. Almost everything of interest in Eauze is on and around the main square, the Place d'Armagnac, where you can also visit the tourist office for a leaflet that explains the highlights in the village. Don't forget to sample the Armagnac and duck and goose foie gras for which the area is famous.

Overnight: Eauze

Meals: B

Day 30

EAUZE TO NOGARO (20.8KM, 5.5 HOURS)



Departing Eauze, the Camino passes through open countryside with fields of corn and sunflowers, and the many vineyards of Armagnac which have been a constant companion for the past several days. Arrive in the pretty town of Manciet in time for lunch where historically pilgrims coming from Auch met those walking from Le Puy. The route continues through the countryside with a few small ascents and descents. Look out for the Greenwich Meridian sign, where you will be zero degrees, zero minutes and zero seconds neither East nor West. Arrive Nogaro, a busy but inauspicious service town. The town contains a bullring, a 12th-century Romanesque church and is also home of the Circuit Paul Armagnac, a purpose built motor race track opened in 1960. It was here that four-times Formula One world champion Frenchman Alain Prost started his career in 1974.

Overnight: Nogaro

Meals: B

Day 31

NOGARO TO AIRE-SUR-L'ADOUR (27.2KM, 7.5 HOURS)

Much of today's walk will be on quiet country roads, initially with more ups and downs followed by a long and easy descent into Aire-sur- l'Adour. There will be fewer vineyards, now giving way to cereal crops, farmland and pine trees but also some of the prettiest villages and hamlets on the entire route. There will be some road walking but there is little traffic – mainly tractors. Aire-sur- l'Adour, divided by the river Ardour, is an extremely ancient town, at least as old as Julius Caesar. It was the residence of the king of the Visigoths in the 5th century and in the middle ages became established as a major pilgrimage centre on the route to Spain. Today it is known as a gastronomic center and its economy is largely dependent upon the production of ducks and geese and its twice weekly market is one of the busiest in France.

Overnight: Aire-sur-L'Adour

Meals: B

Day 32

AIRE-SUR-L'ADOUR TO ARZACQ-ARRAZIGUET (32.8KM, 8.5 HOURS)

Another long but easy and enjoyable walk today, through large, open fields and superb tree canopied woodlands. Soon after leaving Aire-sur l'Adour, the trail passes around the beautiful lake Brousseau then crosses under the A65 motorway. Make your way along quiet, country back roads, passing an amalgamation of many small farms. Continue by small hamlets and eventually reach a forest path that approaches the village of Miramont-Sensacq on the edge of a deeply eroded valley. On a clear day there should be a great view of the Pyrenees on the southern horizon. The Camino then loops around the hills, passing the church of Sensacq, on a hill all alone in the middle of the fields. The boat-hull carpentry above the altar gives the appearance of an immense scallop shell. The trail continues on an undulating and indirect path to Pimbo, one of the oldest towns in the Landes. From Pimbo the Camino descends into the plain before gently rising to the town of Arzacq-Arraziguet. We are now in the department of Pyrenees-Atlantiques and the hills of the Bearn region. Arzacq-Arraziguet used to mark



the boundary between France and the then independent country of Bearn. It is another fortified town and has two main squares.

Overnight: Arzacq-Arraziguet

Meals: B

Day 33

ARZACQ-ARRAZIGUET TO ARTHEZ-DE-BEARN (30KM, 8 HOURS)

There is a lot of walking on paved roads today. The Camino is now slowly approaching the Basque country and the Pyrenees. You will notice the language beginning to change from French to more Basque words, for example, the spelling on menus. The trail passes hamlets and small villages over hilly terrain, with the Pyrenees appearing closer than ever. The route passes through woods to Castillon, owing its name to a prehistoric fortress on top of hill where bronze axes were found. Next is Caubin, originally the site of a hospital for pilgrims on the route to Santiago de Compostela. Today there is only the chapel with its bell tower and a lying figure of a knight clothed with chain mail and a sword in a flamboyant burial. This restored chapel is now classified as a Historic Monument. Arrive in Arthez-de-Bearn, a small regional town built on a ridge top with stunning views of the Pyrenees.

Overnight: Arthez-de-Bearn

Meals: B

Day 34

ARTHEZ-DE-BEARN TO NAVARRENX (31.7KM, 8 HOURS)

The trail now follows a natural contour around the edge of the plateau, gently descending to Argagnon and Maslaq. Located on the Gave de Pau, which is a tributary of the Adour, both towns have a population of about 700 each. The Camino follows the Gave de Pau through fields and forests. An undulating trail will take you to the Abbey of Sauvelade. The church you see here now is all that remains of an ancient abbey, founded by a crusader and destroyed during the 100 Years War and Wars of Religion. The trail enters a region of small hills, some of which are surprisingly steep. Finally passing through the small village of Meritein, a short stint on a back road leads to Navarrenx. Navarrenx sits above the river of Gave d'Oloron, and is another 'Plus Beau Village de France'. One of the oldest in the Bearn region with the earliest history of the site dating to 1st century, the town was the first in France to be fortified with Italian style ramparts, successfully defending it during the Wars of Religion. Bastions and military buildings within the walls remain today.

Overnight: Navarrenx

Meals: B

Day 35

NAVARRENX TO LICHOS (15.1KM, 4 HOURS)

Today is a short one so enjoy the morning by continuing to explore Navarrenx. The trail begins by meandering through forested, hilly areas, more cornfields, crossing small streams and passing through attractive, small villages. Just before Lichos, the Camino



now crosses over a narrow river into Pays de Basque, the Basque region of France. Here you will notice bilingual French/Basque signs. The transition from the Bearn to the Basque is sudden and dramatic. Lichos is the first Basque village that you will encounter. Note the distinctive architecture of the buildings which are built with white painted stone, dark red half-timbering, shutters and red roof tiles.

Overnight: Lichos

Meals: B

Day 36

LICHOS TO SAINT PALAIS (24KM, 6.5 HOURS)

Today's walk is filled with history, culture and beautiful scenery, passing by many iconic sites and chapels relevant to pilgrims. It seems that the route has saved the best until last. The trail will take you up over pointed hills, along narrow ridges, on a circuitous route through immaculate farms with the Pyrenees as a permanent, breathtaking backdrop. At Hiriburia you will come across the Stele de Gibraltar, a stone cross erected in 1964 to symbolise where the three French Camino routes converge. Now officially in the Basque country many of the signs are written in the Basque language and in every town and village there is a pelota court (a traditional Basque game). You make your way towards Saint Palais for the night.

Overnight: Saint Palais

Meals: B

Day 37

SAINT PALAIS TO LARCEVEAU (14KM, 3.5 HOURS)

Today your destination is Larceveau and on the way you will pass through Ostabat, a small village today, but in the Middle Ages it was a very important gathering point housing 5000 pilgrims each night. The name Ostabat is taken from the old Occitan language and means valley of hospitality. The trail continues to Larceveau, your stop for the night.

Overnight: Larceveau

Meals: B

Day 38

LARCEVEAU TO ST-JEAN-PIED-DE-PORT (23.3KM, 6.5 HOURS)

While the last stage of the Camino from Le Puy to St-Jean-Pied-de-Port takes you along some major roads, the magnificent views of the Pyrenees are ever present. An easy day strolling through picturesque farmland and pristine Basque villages you will bring you to St-Jean-Pied-de-Port, your final destination and the last of the 'Most Beautiful Villages of France'. St Jean is a small border town on the river Nive and is always busy with Camino pilgrims, as it is the starting point of the French Way to Santiago. Reward your arrival by walking the ancient cobbled streets lined with ornate old Basque style houses and enjoying a celebratory meal and drink at one of the many restaurants.

Overnight: St-Jean-Pied-de-Port

Meals: B



Day 39

ST-JEAN-PIED-DE-PORT

Today you have the whole day to enjoy and explore historic St Jean-Pied-de-Port. Walk up cobbled rue de la Citadelle and visit the citadel, which is now a local school, or stroll around the Basque region's capital and try some of the gastronomic specialities in the many cafes and restaurants. It's a treat to sit and watch the stream of pilgrims starting or finishing their epic journey.

Overnight: St-Jean-Pied-de-Port

Meals: B

Day 40

DEPART ST-JEAN-PIED-DE-PORT

Depart St-Jean-Pied-de-Port, or consider another day's walk to Roncesvalles, reputed to be one of the most scenic days of the entire Camino from Le Puy to Santiago de Compostela.

Meals: B

