

## **CAMINO FRANCES (SPAIN)**

### **FULL LENGTH**

### **ITINERARY: 41 DAYS**

#### **Day 1**

##### **ARRIVE ST JEAN PIED DE PORT**

Arrive into this delightful mountain town at the foothills of the Pyrenees after your journey from Pamplona or from Bayonne. The old town of St Jean Pied de Port winds down the hill with narrow cobbled streets that are a delight to explore.

Take in the views from the Citadelle, which looks across the wooded valleys as you meet pilgrims from all over the world ready to embark on their Camino. St Jean was built in an important position that guarded the passes through the Pyrenees and the armies of Charlemagne and Napoleon passed this way. It has become the traditional starting point for pilgrims walking the French Way and you will see many people arriving and preparing for the challenging Pyrenees crossing. Decide if you will take the Napoleon route (very scenic but more difficult) or the Valcarlos route (for bad weather).

Before you embark on your Camino journey make sure you buy any last-minute supplies, pack your lunch and warm gear and waterproof jacket and light a candle at the church for good luck.

#### **Day 2**

##### **ST JEAN PIED DE PORT TO RONCESVALLES (25KM)**

Set off in the predawn darkness through the old streets and under the statue of St. James, follow in the footsteps of millions of others who have preceded you over the centuries. The streets are full of pilgrims walking towards the hills, it is a magical feeling as you cross the old bridge and head out of town.



Today will be the first time you follow the famous yellow arrows which mark the 790 km journey all the way to Santiago; you will get very practiced at looking out for the markings and for other pilgrims along the route. The first section today is steep as you follow country lanes and farmland up out of the Valley of St. Jean. Make sure you take time to enjoy the views of the beautiful countryside.

As you climb higher you will pass the Albergue at Orisson, which is great for a food/drink stop and then head into open country above the tree line, where sheep, cattle and ponies graze. Look out for the statue of the Virgin of Orisson and the van which sells hot drinks and snacks to weary pilgrims. The inconspicuous border crossing from France to Spain lies within a patch of forest marked by an old stone sign stating the distance to Santiago and a small drinking fountain. Continue onwards to the highest point at the Col de Lepoeder (1450m) and take some time to enjoy the extensive views over the Pyrenees.

After this, you start your descent through woodlands to the monastery at Roncesvalles which beckons enticingly between the trees on your downhill climb. Arrive at Roncesvalles and enjoy a well-earned drink at the Posada before checking into your accommodation. Roncesvalles or 'the valley of thorns' is a beautiful spot still cloaked in a medieval atmosphere.

Make sure you visit the beautiful 12th-century church, cloisters and museum before dinner, where you will share tales with fellow pilgrims from every corner of the world, all relieved to have finished today's section and some would say the hardest day of all the Camino!

### **Day 3**

#### **RONCESVALLES TO ZUBIRI (22KM) OR AKERRETA (28KM)**

Today's walk is mostly undulating downhill as you head down through valleys and enjoy delightful woodland walking. Meander on country paths, following the river Arga and climb two small hills with plenty of shade and drinking fountains en route. It is very pleasant largely shaded walking and not as strenuous as the day before.

Towards the end of the day, you will descend into the town of Zubiri and possibly your overnight accommodation or onwards to Akerreta another few kilometres away depending on your itinerary. Today is a long walk but well worth it once you reach your hotel in Akerreta which is a beautiful converted country house that featured in the movie 'The Way'.



Enjoy the lounge and library or relax with a drink before your meal which is prepared from produce grown in the gardens of the hotel, you will never taste anything fresher!

#### **Day 4**

##### **ZUBIRI OR AKERRETA TO PAMPLONA (20KM/14KM)**

Depending on your starting point, today's walk leads you out of the peaceful countryside and toward the famous city of Pamplona. Along the way, you'll cross several beautiful old bridges, and as you climb a gentle hill, the city gradually comes into view.

The excitement builds as you walk through the outskirts of the city, over the river and through the old city walls. Once inside the city, you're immediately immersed in the narrow cobbled streets which burst with colour and life. The Camino passes through famous streets forming the route for the running of the bulls as part of the San Fermin festival and spills into the central plaza area. Check into our centrally located hotel and explore the many galleries, churches and sights of this vibrant city.

Alternatively, head to Cafe Iruna on the main plaza where Hemingway and other celebrities hung out, pay close attention to its art deco interior which has not changed over the decades.

That evening, dine in some of the city's award-winning restaurants specialising in elaborately prepared 'pinchos' or finger foods.

#### **Day 5**

##### **PAMPLONA – REST DAY**

A day to sleep in, explore the sights of Pamplona and take in its artistic, historical and gastronomical highlights! You may choose to spend your time doing a foodie tour of Pamplona.

#### **Day 6**

##### **PAMPLONA TO PUENTE LA REINA (24KM)**

The Camino quickly leaves the city and enters tranquil rolling countryside, passing through Cizur Menor on your ascent to the hill of the Sierra del Perdón. Here you'll find the iconic sculpture of 12 medieval pilgrims in a procession (the translated inscription reads: 'Where the way of the wind meets the way of the stars').

After the rocky and steep descent, you have the option of a side trip to the distinctive eight-sided church of Eunate, linked to the Knights Templar who



defended the pilgrims on the road to Santiago, continue on to Puente la Reina, famous for its perfectly balanced 11th-century stone bridge and one of the famous photos of the Camino. Overnight in Puente de la Reina.

## **Day 7**

### **PUENTE LA REINA TO ESTELLA (22KM)**

Today's track initially follows the River Arga before it begins its uphill journey and today you will climb to three hilltop villages with wonderful views of the surrounding farmland. The walk continues through fields and past the remains of the 13th-century Monasterio de Bargota.

After walking for approximately 5km you reach the town of Mañeru. Leaving the village, the path winds through picturesque olive groves and vineyards and past a cemetery. Another 2.5 kilometres sees you pass through a gothic arch and into the medieval hilltop village of Cirauquí. A little unusually the Camino guides you through a building where you can stamp your own credentials. Look out for the beautiful 12th-century Iglesia de San Román with its impressive doorway.

Leaving Cirauquí through another gothic arch, the Camino takes a downhill path leading to an old paved Roman road considered to be one of the best-preserved examples along the Camino. After crossing a rather dilapidated Roman bridge, the route meanders through rolling arid hills where the Roman road disappears and reappears.

The next town is Villatuerta where at the top of the hill you will find the gothic 12th-century Iglesia de la Asunción, an ideal place to rest awhile. You will also find the Iglesia del Espiritu Santo and the Iglesia Santo Domingo just before reaching the pretty town of Estella.

## **Day 8**

### **ESTELLA TO LOS ARCOS (22KM)**

The day starts in Estella, a lovely small town split in two by the Ega River and surrounded by conic, wooded hills topped with castles (or their ruins) and churches attesting to its long history as a crucial centre of commerce.

Just outside of Estella you will find the famous Irache fountain which dispenses free red wine to thirsty pilgrims (courtesy of the Bodegas)! After taking a sip and visiting Estella's most important monuments, your walk enters a dense forest of evergreen oaks and passes through fields of red poppies, wheat, grapes and white asparagus; the latter a local grown specialty.



Continue on to Los Arcos a classical pilgrim halt, where you can enjoy narrow tranquil streets.

## **Day 9**

### **LOS ARCOS TO LOGROÑO (28KM)**

Most of today's route is on natural paths and dirt tracks and is very enjoyable walking with some steep sections as you cross a set of hills prior to crossing the river valleys of the Rio Linares and Valdearas.

At Torres del Río you'll pass another architectural wonder of the Camino, the 12th-century octagonal Holy Sepulchre Church, associated with the Knights Templar. Further on you reach Viana, a well preserved historical town whose centre has changed little over the centuries.

Today our goal is Logroño and the capital of the La Rioja region and home of some of Spain's most celebrated red wines. Logroño has one of the most distinguished culinary traditions in Spain and there are over 50 taperías (tapas restaurants) located within a four-block area close to the town centre.

The traditional tapas restaurants often serve only one tapa (such as mushroom), served as pincho (pintxo in Basque) and meaning one serving. Many pilgrims also elect to include a rest day here.

## **Day 10**

### **LOGROÑO TO NAJERA (29KM)**

Before you leave Logroño make sure you have a hearty breakfast and carry lunch, snacks and plenty of water in your day pack. The next town Navarrete is 13km away with very few opportunities to stock up between. Soon after leaving Logroño you will come across the restored ruins of the Hospital de Peregrinos, which was founded in 1185 to administer to the Peregrinos (pilgrims) undertaking the Camino.

Shortly after this you arrive in the small town of Navarrete, another town where efforts have been made to preserve the original period homes. The 16th-century Church of the Assumption takes a commanding position at the top square. On the main road on the other side of town, there is another busy square with a number of cafes and restaurants and you may want to stop here for lunch as it is a further 14km downhill walk into Najera, your final destination for the day.

Historically important, Najera was used by Navarran kings during medieval times after King Garcia Sanchez chose it as his base. The town is built on the banks



between the river Najerilla and where you will find the Monasterio and Iglesia de Santa María La Real built in 1032. You enter this town via the modern eastern quarter and the old town sandwiched between the river Najerila and the towering rock face that acts as a spectacular backdrop with its ancient Castillo.

## **Day 11**

### **NAJERA TO SANTO DOMINGO DE LA CALZADA (21KM)**

Today we walk along wonderful wide country tracks passing through remote gently rolling farmland. The first 5km is leisurely and brings you to the town of Azofra. Azofra is a tiny village with an approximate population of 500 which relies on the Camino for its survival.

In medieval times Azofra was the site of many pilgrim hospitals, and a hostel has been here since 1168 when it was founded by Isabel la Católica. From Azofra you pass over the Rio Tuerto and continue on a pleasant winding track to the village of Cirueña.

From here you start an enjoyable descent into Santo Domingo de la Calzada. Santo Domingo de la Calzada owes its inspiration to Saint Dominic of the Road who dedicated his life to improving the physical route for the pilgrims and built a pilgrims' hospital (now the Parador) and a church which has now evolved into the Cathedral. Both buildings are located in the historic town square, Plaza del Santo.

## **Day 12**

### **SANTO DOMINGO DE LA CALZADA TO BELORADO (22KM)**

Today's walk towards Belorado is along a road which is quite close to the main N-120 and has little shelter or water. Be careful along this section and make sure you carry full water bottles. You receive some respite from the busy road when you pass through the villages of Grañón, Redecilla del Camino, Castildelgado, and Vitoria de Rioja before reaching Villamayor del Rio which might be a nice rest spot en route to Belorado.

Belorado has a nice down to earth feel about it and is populated by locals who live life at a leisurely pace. There is a medieval arcade lined with shops, bars and restaurants located in the spacious Plaza Mayor. The 16th-century Church of Santa Maria, built alongside limestone cliffs, has a lovely altarpiece with images of Santiago Matamoros y Pellegrino and Santiago Peregrino.



### **Day 13**

#### **BELORADO TO SAN JUAN DE ORTEGA (24KM)**

The varied terrain is today's mission and makes for a nice change from yesterday's walking along a busy road. Earthen paths and tracks guide you through level open countryside with some shade provided by hedgerow and woodland. Once past Villafranca Montes de Oca you begin the fairly difficult ascent to the highest point of the day at Alto de Pedraja. Passing through beautiful oak woods you reach the peak and gradually descend into San Juan de Ortega. San Juan, a disciple of Santo Domingo, was known for his work serving pilgrims en route to Santiago. He built bridges, hospitals, churches and hostels and founded an Augustinian monastery, which is now dedicated to San Nicolas de Barri who is said to have saved San Juan from drowning when returning from the Holy Land.

### **Day 14**

#### **SAN JUAN DE ORTEGA TO BURGOS (26KM)**

From San Juan de Ortega the walking is leisurely and mostly downhill to Burgos. From San Juan de Ortega you drop down into the peaceful valley of the Rio Vena and once past Atapuerca you have a final hill to conquer before descending the final section. Once you reach Burgos make sure you stop at the cathedral as the 13th-century Catedral de Santa Maria is one of Spain's largest and most beautiful and combines many different architectural styles but is predominantly Gothic. Rest in Burgos for the evening and have tomorrow to explore and recuperate.

### **Day 15**

#### **BURGOS – REST DAY**

Spend your rest day exploring all that Burgos has to offer including the beauty of the city's many buildings. Burgos is sometimes known as the Gothic capital of Spain and has a growing population of around 180,000. The week either side of the 29 June is the city's main festival of San Pedro y Pablo. Caution is recommended in Burgos with common stories of theft and overcharging, so it's best to keep your wits about you.

### **Day 16**

#### **BURGOS TO HORNILLOS DEL CAMINO (21KM)**

Back on the road we leave the bustling city of Burgos for the wide-open spaces of the Meseta. The track on this section is mainly dirt and you travel through what seems like never-ending crop fields. You may come across a shepherd and his herd, but if not, it will be you and the birds!





This section, the Meseta, also has little shade or shelter from the sun, wind and rain, so make sure you are well protected. Hornillos del Camino is your destination for the night and is a classic pilgrim village where little has changed over the centuries and a great place to immerse yourself in the ancient atmosphere of the way.

### **Day 17**

#### **HORNILLOS DEL CAMINO TO CASTROJERIZ (20KM)**

Once you leave Hornillos del Camino there are few towns en route to Castrojeriz, so make sure you are well stocked with any water and supplies you may need. You are again travelling along the lonely Meseta towards Hontanas, a small village tucked away within a fold in the landscape.

This town is largely undiscovered except by pilgrims and has a solid parish church that dominates the tiny village square. From Hontanas there is less than 10km to Castrojeriz and 80% of this section is quite a flat with the last 2km downhill into Castrojeriz where you will spend the evening. Castrojeriz is the perfect place to rest for the night as it is a small sleepy town of just 600 with an obsession for siestas. If you still have enough energy it is well worth the walk to the hilltop castle Castillo where you enjoy lovely views over the town and countryside. If not, relax with a beer in one of the local bars.

### **Day 18**

#### **CASTROJERIZ TO BOADILLA DEL CAMINO (19KM) OR FROMISTA (25KM)**

Start your walk with a steep climb out of Castrojeriz and onto the Meseta, but never fear there is a downhill slope on the other side. Again today's walking will see you with little shade on dusty tracks with few water stops, so make sure you take precautions.

About 7km into your walk you come across the small village of Itero de la Vega with a population of only 190. After Itero de la Vega you will pass over the Canal Pisuerga with a gentle incline before descending into Boadilla del Camino. Boadilla del Camino originally had a population of over 2,000 and once served the multiple pilgrim hospitals. The population is now a mere 200. You may be staying in Boadilla or continuing on to Fromista.

### **Day 19**

#### **BOADILLA DEL CAMINO TO CARRION DE LOS CONDES (25KM)**

Continuing on from Boadilla, for a few kilometres you will reach Fromista. Fromista is best known for the beautiful 11th-century Iglesia de San Martin that was built with gorgeous mellow stone. With over 300 external corbels each





carved with a different human, animal or mythical motif, this is a must-see tourist site.

From Boadilla set off on flat earthen tracks and onto what are often referred to as pilgrim autopistas, which run alongside the main road. Around 13km from Fromista you will enter the town of Villalcazar de Sirga which is well known for its hospitality. Now declared a national monument, the town of Villacazar de Sirga is home to the superb Templar church of Santa Maria la Virgen Blanca. This church houses the tombs of royalty and nobles alike. Only 5km to your resting place for the night at Carrion de los Condes. This fascinating town retains its medieval atmosphere with its quiet side streets and was one time home to no less than 14 pilgrim hospitals. The town has a variety of shops, bars and restaurants so take your pick!

## **Day 20**

### **CARRION DE LOS CONDES TO TERRADILLOS DE TEMPLARIOS (27KM)**

Today's walking is generally flat and once you leave Carrion there are few towns in between so make sure you eat a hearty breakfast and your water bottles are filled as there are no facilities for the first 17km until you reach Calzadilla de la Cueva.

If you need to stock up on snacks you can do so here, or wait until Ledigos which is another 6km further. Leave Carrión de los Condes by crossing the 16th-century bridge and passing the 10th-century Benedictine Monasterio de San Zoilo (now a 4-star hotel). This was originally built as a convent but was used by the royal family of Castilla Leon as their court. From here the Camino de Santiago is reasonably straight and follows an old Roman road known as the Via Aquitana, alternatively known as the Calzada de los Peregrinos. This ancient road provided a link between Burgos and Astorga.

After approximately 16km you come to the village of Calzadilla de la Cueva but you will have spotted the church tower a long time before you reach the village. The village is tiny, primarily just one street. Head out of the village taking a right at the main road and follow the gravel path to the left.

Continue along the track before a slight upward climb then descend into Ledigos and the few final kilometres to Terradillos, a small humble village of just 80 residents and the approximate halfway point of the full Camino walk.



## Day 21

### TERRADILLOS DE TEMPLARIOS TO BERCIANOS DEL REAL CAMINO (23KM)

Setting off in the morning, your next major town is Sahagún, which is full of ancient monuments. Sahagún was the seat of great religious power, largely due to the influence of Alfonso VI who, with his numerous wives, is buried in the Benedictine Convento de Santa Cruz.

Sahagún is approximately 16km into your walk, so you may wish to stop here for lunch. From Sahagún you will make your way to Bercianos del Real Camino. Leave Sahagún through the old town, passing through the Arco de San Benito and cross the Rio Cea using the Puente de Canto bridge built by Alfonso VI in 1085.

Continue along the path for 4km until you reach Calzada del Coto. Here the route diverges but you will follow the Real Camino Francés to Bercianos del Real Camino for your overnight accommodation. There are some opportunities for food and drink along this path and after 1.7km you will pass a laguna or lake on your right.

After 2km you come to the Ermita de Nuestra Señora de los Perales just before Bercianos del Real Camino.

### OPTION 2: TERRADILLOS DE TEMPLARIOS TO CALZADILLA DE LOS HERMANILLOS (27KM)

Setting off in the morning, your next major town is Sahagún, which is full of ancient monuments. Sahagún was the seat of great religious power, largely due to the influence of Alfonso VI who, with his numerous wives, is buried in the Benedictine Convento de Santa Cruz. Sahagún is approximately 16km into your walk, so you may wish to stop here for lunch. From Sahagún you will make your way to Calzadilla de los Hermanillos where you spend the night.

Leave Sahagún through the old town, passing through the Arco de San Benito and cross the Rio Cea using the Puente de Canto bridge built by Alfonso VI in 1085. Continue along the path for 4km until you reach Calzada del Coto, where the route diverges, take the right hand split crossing over the A-231 using the overpass and continue onto Calzadilla de los Hermanillos via the Fuente del Peregrino (pilgrims' fountain).

## Day 22

### BERCIANOS DEL REAL CAMINO TO MANSILLA DE LAS MULAS (24KM)

Leave Bercianos and continue along the familiar roadside path to El Burgo Ranero approximately 7.5km in the distance. To leave El Burgo Ranero follow the main road through the village, past the church and then past the cemetery. Walk



for approximately 4.5km and you will come across a brick fountain set back slightly from the road amongst the trees.

Keep straight on for another 3.5km until you pass a turning that takes you to the village of Villamarco, if you need services and amenities continue for about a kilometre from the Camino, if not continue on for another 2km at which point the route crosses the railway line. From here we more or less follow the railway line, keeping it to our left for the next few kilometres.

We soon enter a small valley, crossing two usually dried up rivers, firstly the Valdearcos and then the Santa Maria. After crossing the Santa Maria, the landscape becomes a little hillier with wine storage cellars and bodegas set into the hills. Approximately 2km later you will enter the village of Reliegos joining a stony track which leads you to the township of Mansilla de las Mulas which can be seen about 6km into the distance. The path is more or less straight from here until you reach the main road.

Cross over the road, then walk over the bridge spanning the canal and enter the town of Mansilla de las Mulas. Whether you have walked the Camino Real Francés or the alternative Calzada de los Peregrinos, Mansilla is where both Caminos meet and where you will spend the night.

#### **OPTION 2: CALZADILLA DE LOS HERMANILLOS TO MANSILLA DE LAS MULAS (24.5KM)**

Leave Calzadilla de los Hermanillos and continue along the plateau of wheat and cereal crops to the crossroad. This is your last chance to get back to the main road at El Burgo Ranero (3km left). If you continue across on this alternative route there are no facilities until Mansilla de las Mulas.

From the crossroad, we follow the old Roman road that has been used throughout history by such luminaries as Caesar Augustus and Charlemagne. The path is wide but uneven, with very little shade so be prepared. In the distance to the right you will be able to see, on a clear day, the Cordillera Cantabrica, an extension of the Pyrenees mountains.

About 13km from the crossroad you will come to the highest point of today's walk (920m), where there is an option to turn left and continue to the town of Reliegos (1.5km) which is on the main route and has facilities. Otherwise, continue straight for another 7.5km into Mansilla de las Mulas.

**Please note:** *If you opt to stay on this route option for the whole day you will need to take all your supplies with you as there are no amenities or towns along the way. It is also very exposed with little shade.*



## Day 23

### MANSILLA DE LAS MULAS TO LEON (18KM)

Today you leave behind the high plateau setting of the remote Meseta and continue your journey to the wonderful city of Leon. Leave Mansilla de las Mulas by crossing a stone bridge over the Río Esla, then take a left onto the old road which soon becomes a track that runs more or less parallel to the main road for about 5km.

Back on the track and after 4km you pass through the village of Villamoros de Mansilla, 2km further you cross the 200m-long 20-arched Puente de Villarente spanning the Rio Pormo and enter the village that shares its name.

Pass through Puente Villarente and after a petrol station on your right, you will find the way-marked gravel path that runs parallel to the main road passing through the small village of Arcahueja after about 4.5km. Unfortunately, shortly after Arcahueja, the path disappears and you follow the main road. You begin an uphill walk towards Alto del Portillo from where you will enjoy wonderful views over the city of Leon set against a distant mountainous backdrop.

Eventually, you come to a bypass called the Avenida de Madrid, which veers to the right, however, you need to fork left towards the Puente Castro, over the Rio Torio and into the city limits of Leon. Cross the pedestrianised footbridge about 50m from the main bridge and keep along the Avenida del Alcalde Miguel Castaño for approximately 1.5km until you come to the Plaza Santa Ana. Follow the Calle Barahona then the Calle Puertamoneda passing the Iglesia de Santa María del Mercado on your right, down the Calle de la Rua and the Calle Ancha until you reach the cathedral in Leon.

## Day 24

### LEON – REST DAY

Spend your day exploring this beautiful city and its incredible Gothic cathedral, renowned for its marvellous stained-glass windows. In the evening the narrow streets and plazas come alive when locals flood the local bodegas, cafes and restaurants.

## Day 25

### LEON TO VILLAR DE MAZARIFE (22KM) & VILLAVANTE (10KM)

Today it takes some time to clear the city limits of Leon and you may choose to catch a taxi as many pilgrims do to 'La Virgen del Camino' on the outskirts of the city to avoid built-up areas. There are two walking routes available from La Virgen del Camino (marked in your guidebook) which meet again in Hospital de Orbigo, the Villadangos route is the original Camino de Santiago but you will



walk via the picturesque route to either Villar de Mazarife or Villavante, dependent on your accommodation.

The best way to leave Leon is from the cathedral. Follow the scallop shells that pass the Real Colegiata de San Isidoro and towards the Parador of San Marcos. By the hotel follow the bridge over the Rio Bernesga and walk through the Parque Quevedo before taking a left turn at a fork in the road. There is a crossing here over the railway line via a footbridge, follow this and keep straight passing La Iglesia Capilla de Santiago. The road begins to go uphill from this point. At the set of traffic lights, about halfway up the hill, take a right onto the Camino de la Cruz, through some bodegas and an industrial estate.

Keep straight on, walking past factories to rejoin the main road heading towards the large village of La Virgen del Camino where you can stock up on snacks and drinks. The very modern church La Iglesia de la Virgen del Camino, built in 1961, stands in place of the original Ermita and is managed by a Dominican Order.

The Camino continues across the road leading from the church down a minor road and towards the cemetery. After about 100m you have a choice of routes which both lead towards Hospital de Orbigo. As mentioned, our preferred route wanders through picturesque countryside. Both routes are clearly marked.

## **Day 26**

### **VILLAVANTE TO ASTORGA (21KM)**

At the end of the village turn left to return briefly to the main road. After a little way, you need to fork left onto a path running parallel to the road. Try to follow this track as far as you can before re-joining the road.

There is no choice but to walk along the road as the land is crisscrossed with canals, dykes and irrigation channels. After about 4km you come to the village of San Martin del Camino. Walkthrough the village and cross the road forking right, down to the path running parallel to the road.

After about 2km take a left turn crossing over a bridge and a dyke and return to the main road. After about 1.5km you come upon a gravel works, take a right turn down a lane and walk through fields heading towards the town. Take the Calle Orbigo walking adjacent to the river and cross the fabulous medieval bridge into Hospital de Orbigo.



## Day 27

### ASTORGA TO RABANAL DEL CAMINO (21KM)

Leaving behind Astorga you will be walking on pleasant paths across plains and with good views of the hills before you. This next section of the Camino de Santiago journeys through to Ponferrada and passes through the area known as La Maragateria and then enters the Bierzo region with its mines and bordering Galicia. The La Maragateria area has very few villages and we recommend you always carry enough food and water for emergencies.

Make sure you carry warm clothing even in the height of summer with you as you will be walking into high mountains. Follow the Camino markers through Astorga past the cathedral, taking a left onto Calle Portería and through Puerta Obispo. Take a right into Calle Sancti Spiritu, down Calle San Pedro and pass a church. At the crossroads pass over to Calle de los Mártires and towards Santa Colomba de Somoza. You know you're following the correct route if Ermita del Ecce Homo is on your left. The path runs parallel to the road, after approximately 5km from Astorga you reach Murias de Rechivaldo.

Approximately 5km later you enter Santa Catalina de Somoza, walk down the Calle Real and rejoin the main road at the large cross. Soon after the path begins to climb again. Keep along this track for 4km until you reach El Ganso, which sits 1020m above sea level. The Camino continues through El Ganso, down a track and runs parallel to the road. Here it passes an old oak tree Known as El Roble del Peregrino where many a pilgrim have rested in the shade of its canopy. As you walk along the path towards Rabanal del Camino (1155m) you pass the remains of the Roman gold mines of La Fucarona.

## Day 28

### RABANAL DEL CAMINO TO MOLINASECA (26KM)

As you leave Rabanal del Camino you'll start to feel the incline which steepens as you head into the hills towards Foncebadon (the infamous deserted village which is no longer deserted). The incline is always walkable and there are plenty of switchbacks with great views back over the plains behind you.

At the top of the hill is the Iron Cross – Cruz de Ferro – an ancient monument said to be erected by the Celts and where pilgrims leave something, usually, a stone or pebble that represents their burden or a memorial to a loved one. Passing over a few more hilly sections you will reach your highest point at Collado de las Antenas (1515m), from here it is a steep downhill to Molinaseca (610m).





## **Day 29**

### **MOLINASECA TO VILAFRANCA DEL BIERZO (31KM)**

Leaving Molinaseca you firstly descend before climbing again towards the city of Ponferrada which can be clearly seen in the distance. Once in the city of Ponferrada, continue past the castle of the Knights Templar, make sure you enjoy a quick coffee in the plaza to admire the hills you've just climbed. After Ponferrada, the walk continues through gentle rolling hills and vineyards before reaching the charming town of Villafranca del Bierzo which is nestled in the hills that mark the border into Galicia. Both Molinaseca or Villafranca del Bierzo are great places to consider an additional rest day.

## **Day 30**

### **VILAFRANCA DEL BIERZO TO LAS HERRERIAS (21KM)**

Walk down Calle del Agua and at the far end turn left at the statue of the pilgrim. Walk across the Río Burbía, past the convent and Iglesia de la Concepcion and keep walking until you reach the exit of the road tunnel through the mountains. Cross over and take a right turn, walk another 3km before turning right into an older section of the NVI road just before you enter the village of Pereje. Walk down the Calle Camino de Santiago until you reach where the motorway crosses the NVI, turn right onto the main road and follow this road until you reach the village of Las Herrerias.

## **Day 31**

### **HERRERIAS TO O CEBREIRO (9KM)**

The Camino from this point onwards climbs through the mountains starting gently but progressively getting steeper until you reach the atmospheric hilltop hamlet of O Cebreiro. From Las Herrerias you drop into the valley taking a quieter road and then ascend through deep woodland to the village of La Faba. The path continues through the village to Laguna de Castilla and on to the delightful hilltop hamlet of O Cebreiro.

## **Day 32**

### **O CEBREIRO TO TRIACASTELA (21KM)**

From O Cebreiro take the main road towards the village of Liñares which is about 3km away.

Walk through the village and join the road at the end, following the markers to a rough track that runs parallel to the road. The path now climbs steeply for 1km to the Alto de San Roque, where on a clear day you will get wonderful views across the mountains and into Galicia. The path continues to climb and after 1.5km you reach the small village of Hospital da Condesa. Walk through the





village and down a minor road signposted to Sabugos. This will take you along a lane and track through the small town of Padornelo. Once through the village the track begins to climb steeply towards the Alto do Poio some 3km away.

Walk through the village and down the road forking right to walk down a track parallel to the road and into the village of Fonfría in 3.5km. From here is it downhill all the way to the town of Triacastela.

### **Day 33**

#### **TRIACASTELA TO SARRIA (19KM)**

As you leave Triacastela you arrive at a T-junction where you are given a choice of two routes towards Sarria. The left-hand route takes you to past the impressive monastery at Samos about 11km away, the right-hand route guides you through a more rural path towards San Xil before meeting the Samos route a few kilometres prior to Sarria. Both routes are clearly marked.

In Samos you will find the impressive Benedictine Monasterio de San Julián de Samos. To leave Samos, continue along the main road towards Sarria. Sarria has been inhabited for many thousands of years both by the Celts and the Romans but the town was founded at the end of the 12th century by Alfonso IX, the last king of León who named the village Vilanova de Sarria.

### **Day 34**

#### **SARRIA – REST DAY**

Sarria is a busy, modern town with plenty of shops, hotels, restaurants and bars, but its origins are Celtic and it was an important and major medieval centre for pilgrims. Remnants of its ancient past can still be seen in the old quarter along Rua Major.

The Igrexia de Santa Maria has an ancient pilgrim's mural. If you follow the Camino route to the top end of town you will see the ancient Convent Monasterio da Madalena, the ruins of the Castle and the medieval bridge Ponte Aspera that crosses the River Celerio. Nowadays the town is bustling with peregrinos, from those that started their Camino hundreds of kilometres back, to the large number that walk the final 100km to Santiago de Compostela to qualify for their Compostela.

You can get your credential from the Igrexia Santa Maria on Rua Major or the Convent Monasterio da Madalena on the outskirts of town, which you pass on the first stage of this section of the Camino. Now is a good time to stock up on any equipment. You will find the Peregrinoteca equipment shop, located by the



steep stairway at the start of Rua Major is good for hiking socks, walking poles and a variety of hiking gear.

### **Day 35**

#### **SARRIA TO PORTOMARIN (22KM)**

The majority of the walk is on sheltered woodland pathways or quiet country roads and passes through many hamlets and small villages. The scenery along the way is wonderfully green and lush and very rural. It is a good idea to have food and toilet provisions with you as there are long stretches with no amenities.

You start this section climbing the steep stone stairway at the start of Rua Major then wind your way through the old quarter, across the river and alongside the railway track. Once you cross the river there is a climb through the woodland to open fields and onto Barbadelo, a 10th-century village with a 12th-century church that has national monument status because of its ancient frescos. From here the hamlets of Baxan and Leiman are the last stops for refreshments.

The next section is uphill for 5km until you reach Morgade which is a lovely place for lunch or overnight if you prefer to walk shorter daily distances. It is downhill for the next 5km, passing through Ferrerios with its ancient chalice stone and Romanesque church until you climb the final section and high point of the day (660m) at Alto Momientos, which has wonderful views over the reservoir and surrounding countryside. From here begin your steep descent into Portomarin. Now cross the Mino Reservoir over its modern bridge into Portomarin.

### **Day 36**

#### **PORTOMARIN TO PALAS DE REI (25KM)**

Portomarin has been inhabited for thousands of years and its importance grew with the popularity of the Camino in the middle ages. At one time it had three orders of Knights: the Knights Templar, the Knights of St John and the Knights of Jerusalem, which may go some way to explaining the castle-like edifice of the 12th-century Romanesque church of San Nicolás that stands in the square at the centre of town. The town was previously divided by the Rio Mino but was flooded in 1960 to create the Mino Reservoir.

Every historic monument was moved brick by brick to the town that stands on the hill today; you can see pictures of the old town in some of the bars and cafes that line the main street. Today's walk is uphill for 15km; the gradient is never too steep and you gradually climb to a height of 720m. The path crosses and runs parallel to the main road to Gonzar, though you spend most of your days walking on woodland tracks and quiet roads.



The Camino starts at the Escalinata de Nuestra Señora de las Nieves (Stairs of Our Lady of the Snow) crosses back over the Mino Basin and then a climb up through woodland to the main road where it crosses several times passing through Toxibo on the way to Gonzar. After Gonzar the Camino leaves the road and goes down a small track to Castromaior, onto Hospital de la Cruz, then a country road to Ventas de Naron, which is a good place to stop for the night if you are walking shorter distances. Begin the climb to Sierra Ligonde, today's high point at 720m. From here the walk is now downhill to Ligonde and Eirexe and on to A Calzada. There is a detour here of 2km to the National Monument, Vilar de Donas where the Knights of Santiago are buried and is worthy of a visit if you have time. A gentle climb now takes you through several small hamlets to Alto Rosario, a good vantage point on a clear day and then down into Palas de Rei.

### **Day 37**

#### **PALAS DE REI TO ARZÚA (29KM)**

Today's walk is mostly on paths through quiet woodland, crossing over the main road to Arzua several times and guiding you through six river valleys to reach a high point of 515m at Coto.

On route you will pass Melide, a busy town founded in the 13th century and has many historic buildings and churches including the Capilla de San Pedro and San Roque next to which stands a 14th century stone cross said to be the oldest in Galicia. The museum and the buildings around the Plaza de Convento are well worth a visit. Melide is also famous for Pulpo Gallego, octopus cooked Galician style and reputed to be the best in Spain.

Much of the path after Melide winds through woodlands of oak, pine and eucalypt, passing over several valleys though Boente, Castañeda and then Ribadiso from where you can see the Hospital San Anton, one of the oldest pilgrim hospitals in existence. From Ribadiso follow the country road on a steep uphill climb and through the outer suburbs before entering Arzua.

Arzua with a population of around 7000 is the last large town before you reach Santiago. The 14th-century Capilla de la Magdalena is the town's main monument. Arzua is most famous for its local cheese, Queixo, a smooth creamy cheese made from cow's milk which most restaurants feature in some way and is definitely worth trying. The town also celebrates its cheese with a Queixo Cheese festival every March.

### **Day 38**

#### **ARZÚA TO O PEDROUZO (21KM)**

The majority of today's walk to O Pedrouzo is through wonderful pine and



eucalyptus-scented woodland. The path is mostly level, passing through three shallow river valleys with a gradual climb up to Alto de Santa Irene at 404m.

Out of Arzúa it alternates between track and county lane passing through several small hamlets before crossing through a shallow valley and stream and into A Calzada where you will find a roadside cafe. Another 1.5km brings you to Calle, a quaint village of traditional houses and two more cafes. The Camino now winds its way over another shallow valley and into A Salceda, a small village with a bar and shop.

There is good accommodation here, just off the Camino, for those who are walking shorter distances and want to spend the night. The path continues on woodland paths passing a monument to Guillermo Watt who died at this spot, a day from completing his Camino. The path now takes you through two small hamlets and onto A Brea where you have the option of continuing on the road to Santa Irene or through a woodland path to Alto de Santa Irene, the high point of today and a good picnic and rest area.

From here the path continues down through woodland and then a tunnel into Santa Irene. After Santa Irene the path climbs steeply to the main road, into eucalyptus woodland and onto A Rua and the village to O Pedrouzo.

### **Day 39**

#### **O PEDROUZO TO SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA (20KM)**

O Pedrouzo is a small but busy village with plenty of shops, restaurants and bars and the last stage of the Camino before entering Santiago de Compostela. Today's route will be a busy as pilgrims begin the last stage of their walk into Santiago.

The pilgrim mass at Santiago Cathedral begins at 12 noon so you will need to leave early to arrive on time. The first section of today's route passes through eucalypt forests with most of the route on quiet roads and pathways before the final kilometres and a climb to Monte do Gozo before descending into the suburbs of Santiago. The Camino wends its way through eucalyptus forests and farmland through the village of San Anton, onto Amenal and climbs to Cimadevila and the forestry area around Santiago airport. The path runs alongside the airport and you will see many crosses of twigs and branches used by pilgrims to decorate the fence.

The path now follows the road into San Paio where there are many popular bars and restaurants and a good place to take a break. After San Paio the path heads



uphill to a tree-lined pathway and into Lavacolla. This is the village where pilgrims traditionally washed to purify themselves before entering Santiago and Lavacolla literally means to wash your tail. From Lavacolla the path heads steeply uphill to Villamaior then on a track to the studios of TV Galicia and the high point of day at 396m.

The Camino then heads downhill into San Marcos where there are several bars and cafes, here you will find a monument commemorating the visit of Pope John Paul II. In less than a kilometre you will come to Monte do Gozo, Mount of Joy, as this is where pilgrims first sighted the stunning Cathedral de Santiago spires. The route is now downhill, along and over the railway and into the city suburbs. From here the route is well signposted into the old quarter with its wonderful historical buildings and narrow shop-filled alleyways until you finally reach the Praza do Obradoiro and the wonderful ancient Cathedral.

#### **Day 40**

##### **SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA AT LEISURE**

Today you have the whole day to enjoy and explore historic Santiago with its many enticing tapas bars and restaurants. You can attend the midday pilgrim mass and look around the famous Cathedral of St. James which forms the city's heart and watch the steady stream of pilgrims walking into the square as they finish their epic journey.

#### **Day 41**

##### **DEPART SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA**

You are free to check out of your hotel any time before 10 am. If you'd like to explore Santiago further, you can leave your bags with reception. Interested in more walking options from Santiago? Consider extending your journey with our captivating 6-day Camino de Finisterre for an epic journey to 'The World's End'.

**[ends]**

