Tour Code
XPR

ADVENTURESABROAD

THE WAY OF SAINT JAMES

Walking El Camino de Santiago

16 days

Created on: 29 Mar, 2024

Day 1 Arrive in Bilbao, Spain

We arrive in Bilbao and transfer to our hotel.

PLEASE NOTE: Due to extremely limited accommodation along El Camino, our hotels may be located in the general vicinity of the overnight points indicated on our itinerary (with the exception of major centres like Bilbao, Leon, and Santiago).

Overnight Bilbao.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Bilbao & The Guggenheim

Today we have a guided half-day "panoramic" tour of Bilbao, including the newest and biggest attraction in town, the Guggenheim Museum.

The 31329 sq m (349,000 sq foot) colossus is one of the focal points of a $1.5 billion redevelopment plan for the city. The Frank Gehry design features a 50 m- (165 foot-) high atrium -- more than one-and-a-half times the height of the rotunda of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum in New York. Stretching under the bridge and incorporating it in its design, the museum reanimates the promenade with its towering roof, reminiscent of a blossoming "metallic flower." The museum is devoted to American and European art of the 20th century, featuring the works of such renowned artists as Kandinsky, Mondrian, Picasso, Ernst, Pollock, Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Serra, and others.

We will likely finish at the museum so that those who want to linger after the formal guided portion of our visit may do so.

Overnight in Bilbao.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Bilbao - San Sebastian - Pamplona

Today we travel to Pamplona, located within the region of Navarre. The city is best known for the tradition of the running of the bulls which occurs in July every year as made famous by Ernest Hemingway's "The Sun Also Rises."

En route we stop at San Sebastian, the undisputed queen of the Basque resorts. Set around the deep, still bay of La Concha and enclosed by rolling low hills, it's beautifully-situated; the old town sits on the eastern promontory, its back to the wooden slopes of Monte Urgull, while newer development has spread along the banks of the Urumea, around the edge of the bay to the foot of Monte Igueldo and on the hills overlooking the bay. We have a guided tour and time for lunch and some exploration before continuing to Pamplona.

We have a walking tour of the old fortress city of Pamplona (Iruna), said to have been founded by the Roman general, Pompey. In the ninth century it became the capital of Navarra. This otherwise quiet city explodes into life in July during the fiesta of Los Sanfermines, with its dare-devil bull running. From the old city walls (murallas) we can get a good overview of Pamplona. The nearby cathedral, which is built in ochre-coloured stone, looks down on a loop in the Rio Arga.

Overnight in Pamplona.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Pamplona - Eunate - Puente la Reina

This morning we leave Pamplona and make a stop at the spectacular Lumbier Gorge. You will be struck by the power of the water and the erosion which, over millions of years, has managed to carve these ravines in the mountain. They are inaccessible spots with vertical walls, deep rivers, rocky places furrowed with cracks and caves, the refuge of many animals and birds. We'll walk along the rim for about 5km (flat surface).

We continue to Santa de Maria de Eunate, a striking octagonal Romanesque church built by the Knight Templars and rising romantically in the middle of the green fields. Today we begin our walk along El Camino from the church to the proud village of Obanos, where many houses still preserve the Coat of Arms (2 km, mostly flat). From Obanos, the trail brings us to Puente la Reina (3 km).

Puente la Reina, an evocative medieval town built for pilgrims at the meeting point of two Spanish pilgrim routes. The Camino Frances from Roncesvalles, France and the camino Aragones converge at Puente la Reina's 11th century bridge. The town retains its original vocation and the genuine atmosphere of a place of pilgrimage.

DAY SUMMARY: 11 km (7 mi) of easy walking.

Overnight in Puente la Reina.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Puente la Reina - Maneru - Lorca - Puente la Reina

We stroll the timeless main street, cross the thousand-year-old bridge that spans the green Arga River, and hike El Camino along the Raga for a while (flat), and then uphill towards the village of Maneru (approx 90 min). After Maneru, the trail meanders through a lovely patchwork of vineyards and orchards up to the hilltop village of Cirauqui, with its remarkable collection of both civil and religious buildings. From Cirauqui, we follow an ancient paved road (downhill) lined with cypresses and we cross the Roman bridges still in use to reach the town of Lorca. We return to our hotel in Puente la Reina for the night.

DAY SUMMARY: About 15 km (9.5 mi), rolling terrain.

Overnight Puente la Reina.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Puente la Reina - Estella - Laguardia

This morning we drive to the town of Estella for a one-hour walking tour around town. This town is also known as Estella la Bella for its beauty and was also a favourite pilgrim stopover. The creation of the town in 1090 is associated with a mysterious statue of the Virgin found in a cave nearby. The town is full of Romanesque religious buildings dating from the 12th and 13th centuries. We walk to the Monasterio de Irache a 10th century Benedictine monastery, for a look at its Fuente de Vino, a wine fountain built by the monks of Irache to refresh passing pilgrims.

We continue to Azqueta and end in Villamayor de Monjardin, where we will board the bus and drive to Torres del Rio to visit Iglesia Santo Sepulcro, a 12th-centrury gem of Romanesque architecture and a highlight of our day. We continue by bus to our hotel in Laguardia. This is a rather long stretch with lots of sun exposure, though it is almost completely flat.

DAY SUMMARY: 9 km (uphill walking, we will gain 300 m/984 ft of elevation over the course of the walk)

Overnight Laguardia.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Laguardia - Burgos

Today we travel to Burgos, set along the Arlanzon River, for a well-deserved rest day. The promenade along the river is one of Spain's

prettiest, and we have the afternoon to enjoy this setting and (possibly) visit Burgos's diaphanous Gothic cathedral and castle ruins above town.*

Burgos preserves one of the greatest collections of Gothic art and monuments in southern Europe, yet it has also had a long role as a military camp, from the days of El Cid in the 15th century to General Franco, who during Spain's Civil War made Burgos his capital. It was here that Franco held his infamous trials of 16 Basque separatists. The Kingdom of Castile was born in the town of Burgos, and its castle stands on what was the Moorish frontier in 884. Old Castile and Leon, which we visit in a few days, encompass two ancient kingdoms on Spain's Meseta, a semi-arid expanse of dun-coloured plains spotted with patches of mountains.

* NOTE: The castle maybe closed during our spring departures, in which case we will be able to admire from exterior only. Our summer and fall trips should be able to visit the interior.

NON-WALKING DAY.

Overnight Burgos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Burgos - Carrion de Los Condes

We drive to the 14th century remains of the Monasterio de San Anton and then pick up El Camino and walk to the medieval castle and village of Castrojeriz (flat, 3 km). We enjoy the fine Gothic church called Santa Maria del Manzano, named after a local apple tree where a statue of the Virgin was found. Those who like can take an optional scramble up the castle (45 minutes, steep, but well worth it!).

Afterwards we drive to Boadilla del Camino, where we check out some interesting dovecotes, then continue our walk to the town of Fromista (flat, 6 km), a key stop since the days of the Codex Calixtinus. If open, we can visit its perfect Romanesque church, the golden St Martin. The barrel-vaulted interior is loaded with extraordinary sculptural detail full of occult and medieval symbols.

From Fromista, we drive to our hotel in the ancient town of Carrion de los Condes, with its two 12th century Romanesque churches. Our accommodation here is a beautiful monastery that has been converted into a hotel. In Spain, a number of historic buildings of notable architecture have been converted into fine hotels and are known as Paradores.

DAY SUMMARY: Total walking, 9 km (5.6 miles) and optional extra 3 km

Overnight Carrion de los Condes.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Carrion de Los Condes - Leon

After a leisurely morning in Carrion de los Condes, we leave the mountains and drive across the treeless plains of Castile to visit the engaging city of Leon, for a non-trekking day. Within the two cities it encapsulates, ie the old medieval part and the modern one that stretches alongside the river, there is an extraordinary historical and artistic heritage. The Roman and medieval walls in between help to highlight the beautiful contrast between the old quarter and the squares, known as the Plaza Mayor and the Plaza del Mercado, and the avenues, modern buildings, parks and gardens that lie to the west. The three most characteristic monuments that stand out for their great artistic value in Leon are the Cathedral, the Collegiate Church of San Isidoro and the Convent of San Marcos.

NON-WALKING DAY.

Overnight in Leon.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Leon - Villafranca del Bierzo

We drive to the village of Santa Catalina de Somoza to begin our walk to El Ganzo (5 km, slight incline), where on the main trail we can visit a craftsman who makes walking sticks from local beech trees. We begin our hike here climbing a path through the forest to emerge in a moor of heather and Scotch broom.

Our hike takes us up to the town of Rabanal del Camino (slight rise, 7 km), where the bus picks us up and drives us to the stunning Cruz del Ferro. We stop to enjoy views from the top of the Montes de Leon. From here we walk downhill to Manjarin (2km) where the bus will pick us up and drive us to Acebo for some free time for lunch and a stroll about town. We depart Acebo by bus and drive down a steep switchback road (5km) to Compludo where we can see a medieval-era forge still in use. Later, we drive to the charming town of Villafranca del Bierzo, capital of a former station on the pilgrim's road to Santiago. Villafranca del Bierzo was built in the 11th century at the confluence of two rivers and is surrounded by mountains. As its name suggests, it was founded by the French and in its heyday had six pilgrim hospices and eight monasteries.

DAY SUMMARY: Todays walk is about 16 km, not all on the Camino (2 km to the medieval-era forge and back dont count toward the Camino)

Overnight Villafranca del Bierzo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Villafranca del Bierzo - Trabadelo - O Ceibreiro - Lugo

The lush Cordillera Cantabria mountains are the last barrier before Santiago. Here in a very rural stretch of Galicia, we find Spain at its most Celtic. We hike today on a part of El Camino that rarely coincides with any roads and is especially pleasant. The first 3km (1.8 mi) are steep, then the route levels off to a gentle incline for about 6km (3.7 mi). The final 3km is a gentle descent to Trabadelo.

Our bus picks us up at this point and takes us to the mystical Celtic village of O'Ceibreiro, which once ranked with Roncesvalles as a resting place for pilgrims. A Benedictine monastery, Santa Maria del Ceibreiro, was built here in the 9th century over an ancient Celtic temple. O Ceibreiro and the mountains to the north form part of the Reserve Nacional de Os Ancares, partly a hunting reserve of roebuck and boar. We continue by road to Lugo, a town with largest intact Roman walls in Spain.

DAY SUMMARY: Todays hike is about 10 km of some incline and flat walking.

Overnight in Lugo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Lugo - Portomarin - Palas de Rei

We drive to Peruscallo and pick up the Camino to Ferreiros, with its Romanesque churches and many rural villages, where we begin our relatively easy day's walk (mostly flat). This stage is one of the most beautiful because of its mountain scenery and countryside. We pass down through the Mino Valley we will arrive to Portomarin, passing through small hamlets along the way. We drive to our hotel near Palas de Rei, where you have the opportunity to soak in the hotels thermal pools (additional cost).

We finish our day at nearby Palas de Rei, an important town in the Middle Ages located on El Camino.

DAY SUMMARY: Our hike today is about 15 km.

Overnight in Palas de Rei.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Palas de Rei - Lavacolla

Palas de Rei is an excellent starting point for today's on-foot exploration of more Galician countryside. We follow lovely backroads that pass through hamlets and farms flanked by grain silos in granite. We will see the first forest of eucalyptus, which heralds the proximity of the

ocean. The churches here are small and very moving, and numerous religious crosses along the way testify that Christianity is deeply anchored in the land of Galicia.

We walk downhill to Leboreiro, a medieval village famous for a 14th Century miracle in which the Eucharist was transformed into actual flesh and blood. We continue on mostly flat ground to Melide from which we drive to Lavacolla. We have relatively easy walking today despite the length of 16km (10 miles).

DAY SUMMARY: 16 km (10 miles), well-trodden easy terrain.

Overnight in Lavacolla.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Lavacolla - Santiago de Compostela - Santiago de Campostella

This morning we see Santiago from the ancient pilgrim overlook above town, and then make our final hike, about 12km (7.5 miles), following El Camino into Santiago itself, where all roads lead to the vast central plaza and extraordinary cathedral containing the remains of St James.

Santiago is one of Spain's most beautiful cities, built of golden granite and declared a national monument in its entirety. It's a wonderful place to walk, with its arcades and flagstone streets, and we have the afternoon free to enjoy the town.

Overnight in Santiago.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Santiago de Compostela: City Tour

This morning we have a walking city tour of Santiago, a UNESCO World Heritage city. Our tour begins at Obradoiro Square where some of its more prominent monuments can be seen: the Archbishop's residence which preserves some 12th century lounges; the Town Hall, former Raxoy Palace, with its classical facade; the San Jeronimo College, whose facade shows Roman influences.

We also include the city's famous cathedral, a truly grand building adorned with many statues of St James in his familiar pilgrim guise with staff, broad-brimmed hat, and scallop-shell badge.

We also visit the Cathedral Museum, the Cloister and finally, the Platerias Gate, the only Romanesque one that is still preserved; and we take a guided tour of the Cathedral roofs, which allows us to climb to the very top of the building and look out over the historic centre from the heights. To do so we make for the Gelmirez Palace, located to the side of the Cathedral in the Plaza del Obradoiro square. We pass through the interior of the Gelmirez Palace, past the Cathedral gallery (above the Gloria doorway) and up to the roof of the cathedral.

Overnight in Santiago de Compostela.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Departure

Departure from Santiago.

BUEN VIAJE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast