Tour Code
XPR

ADVENTURESABROAD

EL CAMINO DE SANTIAGO

Walking The Way of St James

15 days

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Day 1 Arrive in Bilbao, Spain

We arrive in Bilbao, the Basque city that serves as our gateway to the Camino — though it earns its place on this journey in its own right, not merely as a starting point. This is one of Europe's most culturally distinctive cities, where a language older than any other on the continent is still spoken daily, where cuisine has been elevated to something approaching philosophy, and where a single titanium building transformed a post-industrial waterfront into an international destination overnight.

We gather this evening for a first meal together — a fitting introduction to Basque hospitality that will set the tone for the table experiences ahead.

Overnight in Bilbao.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Bilbao: The Guggenheim & Cooking Experience

Bilbao rewards exploration on foot, and this morning we begin in the Casco Viejo — the Seven Streets that formed the original medieval settlement in 1300, where the Gothic Cathedral of Santiago stands as our first reminder of where this journey is headed. Narrow lanes open unexpectedly into plazas, and the particular Basque genius for street-level food culture announces itself at every corner.

We then cross the Nervión River to Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum, whose titanium curves have become as recognisable as any medieval landmark in Spain. Opened in 1997, it did something architecture rarely manages — it changed the economic and cultural trajectory of an entire city. The collection inside spans modern and contemporary masters, but the building itself remains the centrepiece: a structure that seems to move as you walk around it.

This afternoon we join a hands-on Basque cooking class, learning the techniques behind pintxos — the sophisticated small plates that distinguish Basque food culture from anything else in Spain. These are not mere appetisers but an entire social architecture, where the ritual of moving between bars and grazing from counter displays creates the fabric of daily life. We prepare both traditional and contemporary versions before sitting down to eat what we've made.

Walk Summary: 2-3 hours, 4-5 km/2.5-3.1 mi, cobblestone streets and riverside promenade, minimal elevation change.

Overnight in Bilbao.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Bilbao - San Sebastian - Pamplona

We drive east this morning to San Sebastián, where the Bay of Biscay curves into one of Europe's most elegant urban waterfronts. The city's reputation rests on food — more Michelin stars per capita than almost anywhere on earth — but the Parte Vieja's narrow streets reveal a culture where gastronomy and identity are inseparable. We explore the pintxos bars of the old quarter, understanding how this tradition evolved from simple tavern food into an expression of Basque distinctiveness that no outside influence has managed to dilute.

After lunch we continue south and east to Pamplona, where Ernest Hemingway's shadow falls long across the Plaza del Castillo and the city's more complex identity — medieval capital of Navarre, fortress town, pilgrimage waypoint — competes for attention with its famous July bulls. We arrive in time for a brief orientation through the old quarter, where the Gothic cathedral and well-preserved city walls establish Pamplona as something considerably richer than its running-of-the-bulls reputation suggests.
Pamplona sits at the foot of the Pyrenees, and tomorrow the Camino begins in earnest.

Overnight in Pamplona.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Pamplona: Roncesvalles Forest Walk

The Camino de Santiago has had a western starting point for as long as it has existed, but for pilgrims crossing from France, Roncesvalles has always been the true beginning — the Pyrenean pass where the mountains release you into Spain and the long westward walk properly starts. In 778 CE, Charlemagne's rearguard was ambushed here in a battle that became the seed of the great medieval epic, the Song of Roland. Twelve centuries of pilgrims have crossed this same threshold since.

We begin at the Collegiate Church of Roncesvalles, where the traditional pilgrim blessing ceremony has welcomed travellers since the 12th century. Receiving our pilgrim credentials here is not mere ritual — it connects us to the physical and spiritual continuum that the Camino has maintained across a thousand years of European history, through plague, war, reformation, and revolution.

Our forest walk follows 6-8 km of beech and oak woodland, the ancient canopy creating a quality of light and silence that urban life rarely offers. These are the same forests that sheltered medieval pilgrims uncertain of what lay ahead and the same paths that have absorbed every kind of human intention — faith, grief, adventure, curiosity — without distinguishing between them. The westward impulse that will carry us to the Atlantic edge begins here, under these trees.

Walk Summary: 2-3 hours, 6-8 km/3.7-5 mi, forest paths, 200 m/656 ft elevation change.

Overnight in Pamplona (dinner on your own this evening).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 5 Pamplona: Ancient Roman Roads

Rome built roads the way it built everything — with the intention of permanence. The Via Trajana that crosses Navarre toward Santiago was laid two millennia ago, and sections of the original stone paving survive beneath modern feet with the particular solidity of things made to outlast their makers. This morning we walk one of the Camino's most historically layered sections, from the octagonal enigma of Santa María de Eunate to the medieval hill town of Cirauqui.

Santa María de Eunate stands alone in open countryside, its 12th-century Romanesque geometry drawing scholars and pilgrims in equal measure. The unusual octagonal design connects to Templar traditions and Holy Land influences brought back by Crusaders — a building that poses questions it refuses to answer, which may be why it has fascinated travellers for nine centuries.

Our walk follows original Roman stone paving where it survives, the careful engineering of empire still functional after two thousand years. In Estella this afternoon — a medieval town that grew wealthy from Camino commerce and earned the nickname "little Toledo" for its cultural diversity — Romanesque civil architecture and a palace built for the Kings of Navarre speak to a prosperity that the pilgrimage route made possible.

Walk Summary: 3-4 hours, 8-10 km/5-6.2 mi, Roman stone roads and medieval village paths, 150 m/492 ft elevation change.

Overnight in Pamplona.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Pamplona - Wine Experience & Santo Domingo de la Calzada - Burgos

The Camino passes through Rioja almost incidentally, but the region's agricultural rhythms have shaped the pilgrimage experience for centuries — travellers have been stopping at these estates since Roman times, when the first vines were planted in soils that have never been given over to anything else. This morning we spend extended time at a family winery, understanding how Atlantic and Mediterranean climate influences converge in these particular valleys to produce wines of unusual complexity. Barrel tastings and a traditional lunch with the winemaking family provide the kind of access that the region's growing wine tourism rarely delivers.

Our afternoon brings us to Santo Domingo de la Calzada, a town with an unlikely founder — an 11th-century hermit-engineer named Domingo who devoted his life to building bridges, hospitals, and roads to ease the pilgrim journey. The cathedral he inspired houses the Camino's most peculiar tradition: live roosters kept in a Gothic cage, commemorating a miracle involving a wrongly accused pilgrim whose roasted chicken reportedly returned to life to prove his innocence. The story is absurd and the tradition is genuine, which captures something essential about Camino culture.

We arrive in Burgos by evening.

Overnight in Burgos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 7 Burgos: Medieval Village Circuit

Burgos Cathedral is one of Gothic architecture's great achievements — a UNESCO World Heritage structure that took three centuries to complete and houses El Cid's tomb in a space of soaring stone vaulting. Our enhanced visit includes the atmospheric crypt and chapter house, where the accumulated artistic ambition of medieval Castile reveals itself in carved choir stalls and tapestries. That the cathedral was funded substantially by Camino commerce is worth remembering: this pilgrimage route didn't just move people westward, it moved wealth, ideas, and artistic influence in every direction simultaneously.

This afternoon we walk a selected section connecting medieval villages through the Castrojeriz area toward Frómista, where Castile's essential character asserts itself — vast horizons, golden grain fields, the occasional church tower marking a village that has occupied the same ground since Roman times. The landscape feels genuinely ancient because it is.

At Frómista, the Church of San Martín — built in 1066, considered the purest Romanesque structure on the entire Camino — rewards close attention. Every carved capital tells a distinct story, from biblical narrative to fantastical creatures that populated medieval imagination. This is not decoration but theology made visible, designed for an illiterate congregation that read stone the way we read text.

Walk Summary: 3-4 hours, 8-10 km/5-6.2 mi, rural tracks and village paths, 100 m/328 ft elevation change.

Overnight in Burgos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Burgos - LeÃ³n

The drive to León follows the Camino's central spine across the Meseta, the vast Castilian plateau that has tested pilgrims' resolve for centuries. The landscape's austerity is not emptiness — it is a different kind of fullness, where the absence of distraction creates conditions for the kind of interior travel that exterior journey sometimes enables. Medieval pilgrims called this section the most spiritually demanding of the entire route, not because of physical difficulty but because the Meseta offers nowhere to hide from your own thoughts.

León's cathedral earns its nickname — the House of Light — through 1,800 square metres of medieval stained glass that transforms interior stone into something luminous and weightless. Our visit includes roof access, where the engineering logic behind those soaring walls becomes visible: every structural decision was made in service of creating more window, more light, more dissolution of solid matter into colour.

This evening, the Gregorian chant sung at the cathedral's evening service provides a sonic counterpoint to the visual splendour — the same chants that have filled this space since the 13th century, unchanged.

Non-walking day

Overnight in León.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Meseta Plains - Astorga

The Meseta walking experience reveals what medieval pilgrims understood and modern travellers often resist: that vast, simple landscape is not boring but clarifying. Our 8-10 km walk from Hospital de Órbigo captures the plateau's essential quality — enormous sky, minimal interruption, the rhythm of walking becoming something close to meditation.

Hospital de Órbigo's medieval bridge carries more history than its modest appearance suggests. In 1434, the knight Suero de Quiñones held a month-long tournament here, challenging 300 knights in honour of his beloved — a piece of medieval theatre so extravagant it became legendary across Europe. The bridge has been here since before that, and will outlast the story.

Astorga rises from the plain as a Roman city that became a crucial Camino crossroads, where multiple pilgrimage routes converge and where the ancient logic of roads meeting becomes visible in the urban structure. The Gothic and Baroque cathedral rewards a visit, but the day's architectural surprise is Antonio Gaudí's Episcopal Palace — a fantastical neo-Gothic confection commissioned in 1889 that demonstrates how the creative restlessness animating the Camino's great builders never entirely disappeared.

Walk Summary: 3-4 hours, 8-10 km/5-6.2 mi, packed earth Camino paths, 50 m/164 ft elevation change.

Overnight in Astorga.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Cruz de Ferro Mountain Section & Transfer to Lugo

The Cruz de Ferro is a simple thing — an iron cross on a wooden pole, standing at 1504 m/4,934 ft above sea level in the mountains west of Astorga. The cairn of stones beneath it has been accumulating for over a millennium, each stone carried from home by a pilgrim and deposited here as a symbolic release of whatever weight they were carrying. The ritual predates Christianity on this site, absorbed into the pilgrimage tradition the way the Camino absorbed everything it encountered — without erasing what came before.

Our forest approach walks 8-10 km through oak and chestnut woodland to reach the Cruz, the gradual ascent through pristine mountain terrain providing time to understand what the ceremony means before it arrives. The cultural presentation on Celtic-Christian fusion that begins our morning establishes the context: Galicia's spiritual traditions were never simply Christian, but a layering of pre-Roman Celtic belief beneath Christian symbolism, producing something unique to this corner of Europe.

At the Cruz de Ferro, we participate in the stone ceremony — carrying a stone from home if you've thought to bring one, or finding one on the mountain if you haven't. The cairn receives both equally.

We transfer to Lugo this afternoon through Galicia's green hills.

Walk Summary: 3-4 hours, 8-10 km/5-6.2 mi, forest paths and mountain trails, 400 m/1312 ft elevation gain.

Overnight in Lugo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Lugo & Celtic Galicia

Lugo's Roman walls are the best preserved in the world — 2 km of 3rd-century fortification that still completely encircle a living city, their 85 towers and multiple gates as structurally sound as the day they were completed. Our morning walk along the ramparts covers the full circuit, the views inward over the old city and outward across the Galician countryside equally rewarding. That Romans chose to build here with this permanence speaks to how seriously they took the western frontier — this was the edge of empire, and they intended it to hold.

The Cathedral of Santa María reveals the architectural layering that characterises Galician religious spaces — Romanesque foundations overlaid with Gothic additions and Baroque embellishment, each century leaving its mark without erasing what came before. The same principle applies to the culture: beneath the Christian surface, Celtic traditions persist in music, folk practice, and a relationship with landscape that predates Rome.

Our afternoon walk explores the O Cebreiro highlands, where rounded hills scattered with ancient palloza houses — circular stone dwellings with thatched roofs unchanged since pre-Roman times — preserve a way of inhabiting the land that the Camino passed through without transforming. The 9th-century church here houses treasures of medieval legend, including relics connected to the Holy Grail tradition.

Walk Summary: 2-3 hours, 6-8 km/3.7-5 mi, Roman wall circuit and Celtic highland paths, 150 m/492 ft elevation change.

Overnight in Lugo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Lugo - Santiago Final Approach

Everything the past eleven days have built toward arrives this morning. The credential stamps collected since Roncesvalles, the stones carried up mountain paths, the Roman roads walked and the medieval towns passed through — all of it points to the same place, the same plaza, the same twin towers rising above the Galician rooftops as they have risen for nine centuries of arriving pilgrims.

We follow the traditional final 8 km approach from Monte do Gozo — the Mount of Joy, named for the emotional reaction medieval pilgrims reported upon seeing Santiago's cathedral towers for the first time after months of walking. The descent toward the city follows the same path those pilgrims walked, the towers growing larger with each kilometre in exactly the way they always have.

Our arrival in Plaza del Obradoiro completes the westward journey that began at Roncesvalles' beech forests. The Baroque cathedral facade, the elegant Hostal dos Reis Católicos opposite — originally built as a pilgrim hospital by the Catholic Monarchs — and the sound of the cathedral bells create a arrival that rewards everything that preceded it. The westward impulse that has carried us across northern Spain finds its first completion here.

This evening we gather for a celebratory Galician feast, concluding with a traditional queimada ceremony — flaming aguardiente mixed with coffee beans, lemon peel, and sugar, a ritual that is simultaneously ancient and theatrical.

Walk Summary: 2-3 hours, 8 km/5 mi, traditional Camino paths and urban walkways, 100 m/328 ft elevation loss.

Overnight in Santiago de Compostela.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Santiago de Compostela Exploration

Santiago Cathedral has been receiving pilgrims since the 9th century, and the accumulated weight of that reception is visible everywhere — in the Portico de la Gloria's carved figures polished smooth by millions of touching hands, in the incense smoke that has blackened stone vaulting over centuries, in the sheer scale of a building whose ambition was proportional to its importance as one of medieval Christendom's three great pilgrimage destinations.

Our comprehensive visit includes the museum and roof access, where the engineering solutions medieval builders developed to support massive stone vaulting become visible from above, and Santiago's urban development spreads below in a pattern shaped entirely by the needs of arriving pilgrims. Master Mateo's 12th-century Portico de la Gloria represents medieval sculpture at its most sophisticated — complex theological narratives rendered in stone with a vitality that no amount of familiarity diminishes.

The afternoon is yours — for the old quarter's streets and markets, for the Gelmirez Palace's Romanesque architecture, for sitting in the plaza watching other pilgrims arrive, or simply for the particular satisfaction of being somewhere you walked to.

Overnight in Santiago de Compostela.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Finisterre

Santiago was never quite the end. Medieval pilgrims who had walked for months from France or Portugal or further looked at the cathedral, completed their devotions, and then kept walking — another 90 km west to the rocky Atlantic headland where the known world ran out of land. Finisterre, the End of the World, was the geographic conclusion that the spiritual one somehow required. We cover that distance by vehicle, arriving at the conclusion the Camino has been pointing toward since Bilbao.

We begin at Muxía, a fishing village on Galicia's wild coast where a coastal walk of 3-4 km around the sanctuary reveals how Christian tradition settled onto pre-Roman sacred sites without displacing them — the same rocks, the same ocean, the same human need to stand at the edge of things and look outward.

The drive to Finisterre follows coastline of increasing drama to the lighthouse that marks continental Europe's westernmost point. Our clifftop walk covers 2-3 km above Atlantic waters that medieval Europeans believed extended without limit to the world's edge. Standing here, looking west at an ocean that has no land between this cliff and America, the westward impulse that began at Roncesvalles finds its true completion — not in a cathedral, magnificent as that arrival was, but at the literal end of the ground.

A seafood lunch overlooking the Atlantic closes the journey appropriately.

Walk Summary: Morning coastal walk 1-2 hours, 3-4 km/1.9-2.5 mi. Afternoon clifftop walk 1-2 hours, 2-3 km/1.2-1.9 mi. Undulating coastal terrain, 100 m/328 ft elevation change.

Overnight in Santiago de Compostela.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 15 Departure

Our Camino journey concludes with departure from Santiago de Compostela, carrying memories of landscapes that have inspired travellers for over a millennium. We leave having experienced not just Spain's most famous pilgrimage route, but a cultural journey that revealed how historical currents shaped European civilization through centuries of international exchange.

Buen Camino! Bon Voyage!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast