



Walking to Santiago

On foot for selected sections of the pilgrims' way

17–28 September 2025 (ML 778)
12 days • £3,970 – *flights not included*
Lecturer: Dr Rose Walker

The last great pilgrimage route in Christendom which still attracts walkers; scenically wonderful with much fine architecture.

Selected sections from the Pyrenees through northern Spain to Santiago de Compostela.

Walking in comfort: good hotels; luggage transferred separately.

Still one of the most splendid walking routes in Europe, the Camino de Santiago runs almost 500 miles across northern Spain to the supposed tomb of St James, Santiago. Normally, the journey takes a month on foot. We are setting out to walk the highlights in 12 days, taking in the most historically charged and beautiful sections.

For earlier pilgrims, the lure was a reduction of the soul's time in Purgatory; now the motives are more usually historical and cultural, and sometimes also deeply personal. Religious commitment is less in evidence. But for many who undertake the magnificent walk there is also a spiritual dimension.

Asceticism is not a necessary ingredient. Instead of staying in bunk beds in pilgrim hostels we repose in hotels, ranging from workaday to some of Spain's finest. Instead of carrying huge packs with all our necessities, we carry only our own day sacks while the luggage moves by road. We eat well, occasionally picnicking in deep country, and try some of the fine wines grown along the route. But as with all pilgrimages this is a linear walk, involving a new hotel each night except on two rest days.

We are like pilgrims, rather than tourists, visiting monuments along the route and what time and tiredness allow at the end of the day's walking. There will be interpretative commentary by the lecturer and an introduction to the major buildings. But the experience of walking the *camino* is what is essentially on offer, along a route which has for centuries compelled the imagination.



Burgos Cathedral, Capilla del Condestable, steel engraving c. 1850.

Itinerary

Day 1: Biarritz to Roncesvalles. Leave from Biarritz Airport following the arrival of the flight from London Stansted (Ryanair, currently departing at 10.30am). *Flights are not included – see 'Practicalities'*. Drive to Roncesvalles for the night.

Day 2: Roncesvalles to Lintzoain/Erro: 14.7 km, c. 4 hours. Weather permitting, we start at the summit of the pass and drop down on foot to Roncesvalles, traditional starting point of the pilgrimage in Spain. It has a fine collegiate church preserving memories of Sancho the Strong of Navarre. From here, walk downward through rustic, gentle sub-Pyrenean landscape and stately stone-built villages.

Day 3: Nájera to Santo Domingo de la Calzada: 21 km, c. 5 hours. Drive to Nájera, another of the burial places of the royal house of Navarre. Climb through red sandstone with vines in rocky corners, through varied irrigated crops and out into rolling wheat country with mountains lying north and south - this is a good day for striding out. Lunch is in a village café. Continue to Santo Domingo de la Calzada

where there is time to visit the cathedral. Overnight Santo Domingo.

Day 4: Villafranca Montes de Oca to Agés: c. 16 km, c. 4 hours. Begin with an hour's walk uphill into mildly mountainous country, passing a disturbing monument to victims of Civil War assassination. Cross a plateau and continue through pine and oak forest to a beautiful valley enclosing the monastery of San Juan de Ortega (fine Gothic church). Picnic in the woods. Continue to the village of Agés. Drive to Burgos for the first of two nights.

Day 5: Burgos, rest day. Rest, nurse feet and loiter in this Castilian city rich in memories of El Cid and medieval pilgrimage, Wellington and Franco. There is time to see the magnificent cathedral, the charterhouse of Miraflores (superb sculpture by Gil de Siloé), and the monastery of Las Huelgas (fine architecture and images relevant to the *camino*).

Day 6: Rabé de las Calzadas to Hontanas, c. 19 km, c. 4 hours. A fine if strenuous walk, swinging through hills with an upland feel, plenty of skylarks, wide views, scant shade and stone built villages. There are three manageable

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continued

climbs, each one shorter than the last. Lunch in a village café, then drive to León for the night. The royal pantheon of San Isidoro is one of the first, and finest, Romanesque buildings in Spain, with important sculptures.

Day 7: Hospital de Orbigo to Astorga:

c. 13 km, c. 3 hours. About one hour into the walk we make a modest ascent and suddenly the plains are over. There are two or three small climbs this morning through remote-feeling countryside and wheat fields ending in shady corners under small oaks. We finish just outside Astorga, with views down to the cathedral. Continue into town by coach. Here, the bishop's palace was designed by Gaudí and there is an impressive town hall. Overnight Astorga.

Day 8: Foncebadón to Acebo: 11 km, c.

4 hours. From the charming village of Foncebadón with its reticulated slate roofs and crooked balconies, climb to the highest point of the *camino*, with spectacular views. Lunch in a pilgrim's restaurant in Acebo. Drive from here to Villafranca del Bierzo for the night.

Day 9: Triacastela to Sarriá: c. 18.5 km, c. 5

hours. Drive to Triacastela via O Cebreiro, first port of call in Galicia for pilgrims, with Celtic buildings and an ancient church. The walk starts low and climbs through Galician-green valley and into country of tiny hamlets where cows chew the cud in dark medieval sheds. Sunken tracks, ferns and ivy abound and there is later a fine upland feel. After lunch in a bar en route we begin a slow descent to Sarriá. Continue by coach to Monforte de Lemos. Overnight Monforte de Lemos.

Day 10. Phase 1, Sarriá to Ferreiros: c. 13 km, c. 4 hours. Phase 2, Monte del Gozo to Santiago de Compostela: c. 4 km, c. 2 hours. Return to Sarriá by coach and walk to Ferreiros. After lunch in a bar, drive on to Monte del Gozo. Here pilgrims once fell to their knees at the first view of the cathedral spires of Santiago (harder to see now through eucalyptus). Walk a further 4 km through suburbs into increasingly ancient city centre and right into the Parador, another important and beautiful historic building. First of two nights in Santiago de Compostela.

Day 11: Santiago. Visit the cathedral, a Romanesque masterpiece with a magnificent carved portal. Time is allowed for those who wish to attend Pilgrim's mass at midday. The rest of the day is free.

Day 12. Drive to Santiago Airport in time for the flight to London Stansted (Ryanair, currently departing at c. 4.50pm).

Lecturer

Dr Rose Walker is a specialist in the art and architecture of medieval Spain. She was Academic Registrar and Deputy Secretary of The Courtauld Institute of Art, before deciding to pursue a second career as an art historian and is now an Honorary Research Fellow at The Courtauld. She has published two books: *Views of Transition. Liturgy and Illumination in Medieval Spain* (1998) and *Art in Spain and Portugal from the Romans to the Early Middle Ages: Routes and Myths* (2016), as well as a range of articles on manuscripts, sculpture, wall-paintings and the sumptuary arts. Currently she holds an Emeritus Research Fellowship from the Leverhulme Trust for a new project that encompasses the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela and builds on previous courses and lectures.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,970

Single occupancy: £4,460

Included: airport transfers from Biarritz (day 1) and to Santiago de Compostela (day 12) and all other road travel by coach (flights are not included); accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 8 lunches (2 are picnics) and 8 dinners, with wine, water and coffee; admission costs; tips for waiters and drivers; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Flights are not included in the cost of the tour as the most convenient flights are with Ryanair and we cannot make a booking without knowing the passenger name. Recommended flight details are provided with your confirmation of booking.

By train: London – Paris – Biarritz: c. 9 hours. Contact us for more information.

Accommodation. Hotel Roncesvalles (hotelroncesvalles.com): 3-star hotel in an 18th-century building. **Eurostars Los Agustinos, Haro** (eurostarshotels.com): 4-star in a converted convent. **Parador de Santo Domingo de la Calzada** (parador.es): 4-star parador, former medieval pilgrim hospital. **NH Collection Palacio de Burgos** (nh-collection.com): 4-star hotel in a converted palace. **NH Collection Plaza Mayor, León** (nh-collection.com): a functional 4-star hotel, centrally located. **Eurostars Via de la Plata, Astorga** (eurostarshotels.com): modern 4-star hotel in the centre. **Parador de Villafranca del Bierzo** (parador.es): 4-star parador in a contemporary building. **Parador de Monforte de Lemos** (parador.es): 4-star Parador in a former-17th-century monastery. **Parador de Santiago de Compostela** (parador.es): 5-star parador in the former pilgrims' hospital. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use throughout.*

How strenuous? This is our most strenuous walking tour, graded **challenging**. We cover up to 134 km of the full 780 km pilgrimage route with an average of 17 km of walking per day, on 8 of the 12 days. Terrain is moderate in difficulty, but the durations and cumulative effects of walking every day make it a strenuous tour. It is essential for participants to be in good physical condition and to be used to country walking with uphill and downhill content. Strong knees are essential, as are a pair of well-worn hiking boots with good ankle support. Safety and comfort are our main concern and while there are opportunities to retire, the coach is intended as back-up rather than an alternative means of transport.

Group size: between 8 and 18 participants.