

Below is the proposed itinerary for the trip. As is true on any adventure travel trip, plans for any specific day may be modified due to weather considerations, unforeseen circumstances, new opportunities, and group interests.

DAY 1

Arrive in Madrid, Introductions and Welcome Dinner

Our trip starts at 5 p.m. when we meet at our hotel in Madrid. We will have our trip briefing that is as detailed as our jet lag allows us to stay awake for; fortunately we can always finish up the next morning. We will then walk to dinner where we start getting to know each other as we enjoy the first of many dinners together. (D)

DAY 2

Bus to Ponferrada, hike to top of Cebreiro Pass, transfer to Sarria

We leave Madrid on a private bus this morning, bound for Ponferrada and the beginning of our trip. The Cebreiro pass, which is the gateway to Galicia, is the last big climb on the Road for pilgrims who are coming from France. Our private bus will meet us at the Ponferrada bus station and transfer us partway up the pass, allowing us a warmup walk for the last 2 - 3 miles as we enjoy the green hills and views back down the valley. At the top of the pass our guide will recount the legend of Cebreiro's church and see the "pallozas", a Celtic style stone and thatch dwelling almost unchanged for more than two thousand years. We then transfer to Sarria where we have our first dinner and night on the road. (B, D)

DAY 3

Walk Sarria to Portomarin

We're going to start today with our only bus transfer, a short one that will have us start walking at the 105-kilometer marker. Walking the last 100 kms (62 miles) and stamping our pilgrim passport entitles us to an official pilgrim certificate at the end of the trip. Today we'll walk through tiny stone hamlets with slate roofs, often following lanes between stone drywalls that thread their way through oak and chestnut forests. Our destination is Portomarin: when the original town was flooded by a reservoir built in the 1960's, the entire town, including one of the original churches, was relocated to the top of a hill above the water.

Walking: about 9.5 miles, more down than up (B, D)

DAY 4

Walk Portomarin to Palas

Again, today we pass through small stone villages where time seems to have stopped. Some of the older people still wear traditional clothes and we may be greeted with "Buen Camino" (Good Road), the traditional greeting for pilgrims on the Road. We will start seeing eucalyptus trees today. While not native, they were introduced more than 100 years ago and now look like part of the landscape.

Walking: about 15 miles, rolling terrain with some ascents (B, D)

DAY 5

Walk Palas to Melide

Today we leave the province of Lugo and enter Coruna province. The change is apparent in the use of tile on the roofs (instead of slate) and more eucalyptus and pine:

Today we leave the province of Lugo and enter Coruña province. The change is apparent in the use of tile on the floors (instead of slate) and more eucalyptus and pine, the oak and chestnut trees almost disappear. After we finish our walk, you have the opportunity to try octopus at a lunch spot, a Galician specialty! Typically, it's washed down with local white wine sipped from ceramic cups. If Octopus isn't your favorite, don't worry there's also a delicious salad option among other food.

Walking: about 9.5 miles, more down than up (B, D)

DAY 6

Walk from Melide to Arzua

On the outskirts of Melide we pass a pretty church and, not far from that, a fun stepping-stone bridge. Then our road becomes a series of ups and downs through forest and farmland to Castaneda. This is where medieval kilns burned the limestone that long-ago pilgrims brought from near Cebreiro, their way of contributing to the construction of the Cathedral. After Castaneda, a steep descent takes us to Paradise Bridge, a play on the name of the Iso river. Our lunch spot is by the river, so you will have a chance to dabble your feet in the water before we climb to Arzua, a town known for a smooth cow cheese and delightful local restaurants. Dinner is on your own tonight so you can peruse options from casual Italian pizza to small town fine dining.

Walking: about 9 miles (B)

DAY 7

Walk Arzua to Rua

The trail from Arzua is mostly forested and rolling, though lots of hamlets. We pass several memorials to pilgrims who died on the Road just a day from Santiago; some pilgrims leave a pebble, a flower, or even a note. With any luck we'll have another chance for Arzua's cheese at a factory shop just off the Road. We'll ascend a small pass and take a rest stop at the top before our last descent.

Walking: about 12 miles, rolling with a moderately big up and down towards the end (B, D)

DAY 8

Walk Rua to Santiago

Today is the final day of our Camino journey, and boy is it a beautiful one. Our hike today includes a forest where you might feel that magical creatures are hiding behind the trees, even if you cannot really see anything specific. We ascend our last real hill and go around the runway of the Santiago airport, inexplicably built on top of the ancient route. In medieval times, pilgrims washed in a stream in Lavacolla, perhaps for the first time since they started their journey (somehow the name in Spanish is explicit without being naughty). At Monte del Gozo we get our first sight of Santiago and fulfill our last pilgrim traditions before reaching the city (you should bring a stone from your home for one of these traditions). After our time in the countryside, it is quite a shock to return to a city - but soon we are in the medieval quarter, following the traditional route to the Cathedral square and the end of the Road right in front of the Cathedral. After celebrating our arrival with photos and hugs, we'll get our pilgrim certificates and then have most of the afternoon to wander.

Walking: about 15 miles, rolling with a moderate ascent (B, D)

Overnight: Santiago de Compostela

DAY 9

Day of exploration around Santiago, Optional Attendance at Traditional Mass

We will awake this morning with a full day to explore the historical town of Santiago de Compostela. A full day in town will allow us to have all of Friday to explore the museums, cathedrals, and maybe a trip to the coast (if time allows). The old part of Santiago is great for strolling or people watching, with a lot of sidewalk cafes and gift shops. Don't miss the traditional jet, silver, or enamel jewelry, often with Celtic symbols. We will probably see other pilgrims we have met during our journey, all with different reactions about having reached their destination. It's traditional though certainly not obligatory to attend mass - we might get to see the huge botafumeiro incense burner swing in front of the main altar, almost touching the roof on both sides. At night, a celebration dinner full of memories and maybe plans to return to Santiago someday.

Walking: 0-3 miles, around the city of Santiago (B, D)

DAY 10

Return to Madrid for flights home or on to your next adventure

You are free to leave anytime today. There are a number of options from here. If you have to return home, then the easiest way to get back to Madrid is by train or plane. But if you have time for more adventures, the Santiago airport offers flights to other European cities. Or perhaps you want to continue walking - some pilgrims continue on to the sea and then up the coast, a route that has fewer people and is also full of historical significance. (B)