



Camino de Santiago de Compostela – with Madrid – Trip Notes May 3 – 21, 2018

Happy Birthday Tom – it was Tom’s birthday on May 6 and in my defense we did sort of celebrate his (and Chris’s) birthday before I left. Or at least Chris’s spouse Ouida threw a party. Do we consider my indulging in Husband-Abuse? Fortunately Tom seemingly encourages me to travel so maybe he likes some quiet time at home. Plus, when I get home we are off to a big trip to Zurich, Luzern, Grindelwald, Berne, Basil where we get an 8-day river cruise to Amsterdam, then onto Brugge and finally home out of Brussels.



Where was I going and why? The Camino de Santiago, known in English as the Way of Saint James among other names, is a network of pilgrims' ways serving pilgrimage to the shrine of the apostle Saint James the Great in the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia in northwestern Spain, where tradition has it that the remains of the saint are buried. Many follow its routes as a form of spiritual path or retreat for their spiritual growth. Was I a pilgrim or a hiker? I got confused. See also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camino_de_Santiago

In the 1600s there were as many as 300,000 pilgrims who traveled without hotels or hospitals or airplanes/trains for their return. Then it quieted down until UNESCO and another body named the route as symbolically historical. Now there’s 300,000 paying tour agencies to get their kudos and certificates of completion. Are they pilgrims or hikers or adventure seekers? I don’t know except I was primarily a hiker, when I wasn’t



Pictures compliments of Fresco Tours showing cultural spots, flat trails, tough hard trails, forested soft trails, and steep steps in town.

Fresco Tours highlights:

- Good price. A lot for the money.
- A Camino passport to be stamped along the way and at the end guides stood in line (famous for 2 hour waits) to get our lovely illuminated-manuscript-looking certificates of completion.
- A cinch backpack filled with: plastic folder, pilgrims shell, maps, a book, description, tissues, and an ink pen.
- Two local guides and one bus driver.
- Bus - comfortable walk-through complete with Wi-Fi and music. Back up van for guides to pre-scout.
- Limited attendees. We had seven pilgrims.

- Guides very knowledgeable, full of cultural and historical stories.
- Hotels - country farm houses which were modernized and would be rated as 3- or 4-stars, each more unique than the last.
- Food top billing, fresh and local, and I appreciate their choosing the menu. (A word about food below as if you like French fare, it is NOT).
- Wine included with no apparent limit. I tested it in all ways! A few times grappa and liquors.
- Before dinner a 1/2 hour meeting to discuss the next day plans. Daily maps with marked historical sites, write ups, kilometers, toilet stops, check points, towns and pubs, day's timeline (breakfast, bags due if moving out, and departure time), weather prediction, hotel info, Wi-Fi code.
- Bus driver greets us, checks us off with the time noted, and refills water bottles and snacks. Bags can be left on the bus so "pilgrims" can hike with very little weight. I didn't need my fluid bladder.
- Laundry is arranged at half way point for low price of 3-5 Euros per bag.
- Last eve gift: A photo of the group, a bookmark, and a USB drive of about 350 pictures from the 11 days.
- Bottom line? I'm on the list for their "meaner camino" out of the Pyrenees and looking at the Porto feeder trail that I've done pieces of.

Pilgrim versus hiker. We were referred to as pilgrims but I think many of us were just there as hikers. However, as I was very moved at the end and have accumulated many pilgrim routes, I wonder. Where have I been?

- From the Normandy coast out through the quick-sands to Mt St Michel.
- Jerusalem's stations-of-the-cross 2 times and a 3rd partial.
- Lourdes. Not on my knees!
- Fatima twice.
- Porto Portugal coastal Camino de Santiago – portions.
- Rome. Many times.
- Istanbul/Constantinople mosques.
- Inca Trail - portions.
- Pacific Crest Trail - portions and the marathon which could be called meditative.
- Appalachian Trail - portions.



Total mileage as shown on my usually-lower-count pedometer on my 11 day portion was quite a bit higher than listed by Fresco. I went off course, went back to collect hikers, hunted stamps for my passport, and can show about 100 miles. Small compared to having done seven 50K ultra trail runs in 8 to 9 ½ hours?

Food observations – though other hikers said the food was terrific

- Plain, local, but rather uninspiring. Nothing like Bilbao or San Sebastián; they are great and often beat France.
- Vegetables? Limited to salads or peas or corn, the last two of which I don't count as vegetables. Nor do I count canned white asparagus on salads as vegetables.
- Or puréed vegetables into a creamy soup. If you can't chew it, I don't call it food.
- Gazpacho is available in liter looking milk cartons. Wish we could get it in the US.
- Breakfast includes a disproportionate amount of sugar items. Cereals are full of sugar and/or chocolate. Yuck.
- Dark brown good, healthy, crusty bread with local cheese. There were the calories!
- The local longevity would suggest that I've got something wrong as they live long.
- Picnics prepared by the guides were the best and superior fare.
- Despite above, I didn't lose any weight.

Last couple days on my own:

- More time in the Cathedral though we had a tour the day before.
- Lots of time in the new pilgrim's museum.
- Lunch at their 5-star posada (historical state owned hotel) facing the cathedral.
- Shopping for my usual earrings gift and adding a women's shaped black t-shirt with a modernized white pilgrim-shell design.
- Wandering the streets and outside the ring road of the historic section. That is the suggestion of Anthony Bourdain and Rick Steves and has always been my Modus Operandi. More days. More local.

Airports: Santiago airport, though small, seems huge for them and brand new. Iberia Air let me on with my luggage but didn't let me board until last. I'm really spoiled. The Madrid airport is quite a different story, being huge with four terminals, confusing, old, and hordes of people.

United has reconfigured their business class pod seating. Now they are more private pods and basically everyone has an aisle. Unfortunately they didn't tell me and re-booked me into a window pod which felt claustrophobic. I am clear that I should not complain and be glad to have a lie-flat seat.

On the subject of United, I am thrilled that Parker, aka Uncle David, has completed his United Airlines attendant training and has been assigned to Newark. After multiple degrees, including one or two masters and consideration of a PhD, I think he may have finally found himself. Having a partner in the sweet man named Rich of Atlanta should have helped too. To add an extra gift, a friend from the past has a central park view apartment where he can live in between flights.

The sun – The Time. Don't laugh but I swear that this is a really odd situation where Spain really needs to change their clock. It is still bright out at 10:30 PM. At 3 PM the sun is straight overhead like it should be at noon. I wonder if that is why restaurants don't open or start to serve till about 8:30 PM.

The language. We with the English language are very spoiled. Yet not so much so in Spain. I think they learn English in school but with a lack of any English television stations (I never found one and even the Disney Channel is in Spanish), they are left a bit behind. I've been in quite a few countries and I would say that in Spain they have the least amount of working English. Maybe in part too because they have so many languages from Spanish, Catalan, Basque, and surely more.

First report home - I'm off to Spain.

My main goal is the pilgrim's route called Camino de Santiago but first I'm meeting hiker friend Sonya in Madrid for a few days. On Tuesday I train to Leon.

From www.FrescoTours.com I've chosen A Kinder (Gentler) Camino - 11 days & 10 nights - The Last 112 KMs to Santiago - *The crown jewel of Spanish walking trails, the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela began as an act of faith as Europeans crossed Spain to visit the sacred tomb of Saint James. One thousand years later, the Camino continues to draw the spiritual as well as the traveler looking to enjoy the beauty of the green rolling hills and small hamlets of northwestern Spain's Galicia. Come be part of this magical route that is very special for us - it is on the Camino where the idea for Fresco Tours was first born in 1999.*

Expected Highlights:

- *Experience and expertise: Your two bilingual guides that accompany the tour are either Spanish or live in Spain year round. This is our home and we love to share it with you!*
- *Fabulous food: All your meals are included, so you only need to worry about enjoying the trail! Weather permitting; our gourmet picnics showcase the freshest of local flavors.*
- *Unique accommodations: Charming restored manor homes and 3-4 star hotels that offer the best in hospitality, comfort, and location.*
- *La Compostela: Our itinerary qualifies you for the Compostela certificate upon your arrival to Santiago.*

- *Semi-independent tour: You choose! Walk alone with the assurance that we'll take care of you or enjoy the company of others and your knowledgeable guides.*
- *Van supported: No need to carry a heavy pack - let us do the lifting while you do the walking.*

This itinerary gives you the opportunity to walk the last 100KM into Santiago. This is a requirement needed to request the compostela, the certificate granted by the church of Santiago upon the completion of the pilgrimage. End.

Compared to the book I am reading by Shirley McLaine who did three months on the Camino when she was 60, this itinerary is very civilized. She believed that you must spend no money and beg for your food and bed. At least she wasn't one of those who thought it must be done on your knees.

But first – Madrid. I have only been two other times. Once pre-and post our Granada to Seville hike and another time for the Basque region hike, both with Tom. This time Sonya has offered to take me to my first tennis match, I'll finally get into the palace for a guided tour, have booked a Tapas foodie tour, another overview tour, and hopefully some more time in the Prado.

Tom spoils me with giving me a limo service to the airport. I wish he could give me fast service through TSA pre-check. Darned if I can figure out how all those people paid for fast pre-check as the lines are pretty much like in Disneyland. And still in keeping with how we should not brag about how everything is perfect, the United lounge is still under renovation and it is now a choice of either using a little pop-up lounge near to my gate or walking the full length to the far end. Real food and real drink called so I walked. I had plenty of time, thanks to Tom.

I am on board and the new united business class pods are rather special. They give us our own pod, a side desk, and much more privacy. So far the only downside I see is that there is not as much under seat baggage room.

I will get to have an appetizer of seared tuna with kale salad and a quinoa mixture with wasabi, a salad of cabbage, Bok Choi, carrot and mango, and topped with seared beef short ribs. I give up the cheese platter and Ice cream sundae. Ice cream sundae. The flight into Munich is long enough that we have snacks in between and before arrival I will choose the south western omelette with chicken sausage, potatoes, black beans, corn and fruit.

My flight connection into Munich is very short. Needing to get through passport control and it will be amazing if I make it. Yes it seems pretty stupid to go as far east as Munich but the flight cost was hugely less. It means I have to connect to a Lufthansa airlines which is always risky. Their employees strike more often than even the Parisians.

I'm on board and will send this to you now for a couple of reasons. I might be tired when I get in. And I want you to know that Sunday, May 6 is Tom's birthday. Yes I agree that that is husband-abuse but he is so kind to encourage me to do some travels on my own. On May 30 he and I depart for a real big spectacular trip. More on that then. Au Revoir. Bon Voyage. Whatever in Spanish.



From friend Ellen who has been everywhere and remembers all the places in perfect detail and with the historical background: *This is a perfect hike for you. So enjoy. I've been to Santiago de Compostela. I was there in August of 1997. I was traveling with David Iverson who owns a tour company in Seattle called "A Cook's Tour." I had travel with David previously, and when he announced a tour of northern Spain eating at all the best restaurants, starting in Barcelona, and ending in Santiago de Compostela, I decided to join the tour. But I told David I was going to fly to Madrid, rent a car and do some exploring of parts of Spain I had not seen before. Then I'd drive back to Madrid, drop off my rented car at the airport and fly to Barcelona and join his tour. Someone at his tour company asked where I wanted to go. I gave him my route, and he suggested that I stay in paradors, luxury hotel accommodation in Castles, Palaces, Convents, Monasteries, Fortresses and other historic buildings. David's staff actually made my reservations. I'm sure of the date of my trip, because as I was checking in to the parador on Sunday in August of 1997, the bell captain brought in my luggage, then without my permission turned on the TV and showed me a video of a car crash in Paris. I found out later that day the Diana Princess of Wales, was in that car crash. And the date of her death is how I know the date of my trip.*

Now, Shirley McLaine is actually right. Back in the days when people would spend a year of their lives to walk to Santiago de Compostela on a Pilgrimage there were no hotels, The only source of a roof over your head and food was in monasteries. So you would knock on the door of the monastery and beg them to give you food and a place the place to spend the night. Which they would do for free. So you begged and spent no money. Now back in the middle-ages, when people from all over Europe went on Pilgrimages they were seen as a gift to god to help you earn a place in heaven. The energy it took to get there was meant to earn you a place in heaven. So the more difficult the pilgrimage was the better.

Now, your tour has a very diffident intent. Your tour is intended to be easy so you can concentrate on enjoying yourselves. So the easier, the better. So have a great trip and I'll look forward to your trip report. Hugs, Ellen P.S. Actually in Paris, if you stand with your back to the Paris City Hall, over on the left in the plaza there us a white tower that marks the beginning of the Pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela. The next time you're in Paris, you might want to look for it. But for now, just enjoy.

From Madrid

I don't imagine that many of you will be going through Munich for a flight connection. But if you do I recommend you only take a 50 minute (legal) connection if you can run, if you can do multiple flights of stairs, take two shuttles, get through passport control, and only then it only works if your arrival flight was early. It worked. That was all I needed. The Munich airport is huge, clean and modern. The Madrid airport not so much so. But taxis have a flat €30 rate to get into town and all that went well to include getting a room upon arrival.

I have a cute little tiny room that is well-appointed and includes a refrigerator and Nespresso maker. It is a four-star and I'd better get used to this small size and get ready for some three-star hotels along the Camino. The only disappointment was learning that AC hotels owned by Marriott do not give Marriott Elites the same benefits. Thus I went grocery shopping for cereal, yogurt, milk and of course a little alcohol.

Sonya is around the corner at a cute little eclectic place called one shot. Also nearby was an all-day tapas bar where we met for dinner. I say all-day because grocery stores close for a long mid-day lunch siesta and restaurants don't open till about 8 PM. All those times mean next to nothing when your body-clock is six hours off. The 4 o'clock syndrome means you're dead at 4 PM and wide awake at 4 AM.

Despite missing most all of the night's sleep due to jet lag, I was up and going at 6 AM because we had this wonderful tour out of town to a place I've never been:

Royal Monastery of El Escorial and the Valley of the Fallen – Top star rated by Rick Steves. Sales pitch: *Discover the Royal past life of El Escorial and learn part of the recent Spanish history at the Valley of the Fallen. A unique and unforgettable day. The Royal Monastery of El Escorial is an architectural complex built in the 16th century. Is a 'must see' to visit the Hapsburg Royal Palace, the Kings and Princes Mausoleum and the Basilica. All built following the Renaissance style. The Valley of the Fallen was built to commemorate the combatants who died during the Spanish Civil War. The Basílica de la Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caídos is carved into the mountain. Itinerary: In this tour we will visit the Royal Monastery of El Escorial, an architectural ensemble declared a World Heritage Site, and the Valley of the Fallen, a basilica that stands out for its gigantic size.*

We will start our visit at El Escorial, a symbol of the Spanish power in the XVI century that commemorates the battle of St. Quentin. It is also a mausoleum for Charles V. Due to the symmetry and balance of its construction, according to the

humanist Renaissance style, for years it had been considered the eighth wonder of the world. The visit includes the Habsburg Palace, the Kings and Princes Mausoleum, the Chapter House and the Basilica. *Basilica of the Valley of the Fallen: Located 9 km away from El Escorial, this enormous monument was built between 1940 and 1959 to honour the fallen during the Spanish Civil War. The basilica is carved into the mountain at 1350 metres of altitude, where an impressive 150 metres high cross places itself over the magnificent nature reserve of Madrid mountain range. End*

Escorial - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Escorial

It was a doozy getting back to our hotel for a couple hour rest and change of clothes because there were demonstrations in our way. Then to get to the start of the evening event, the taxi gave up and we almost gave up getting through the crowds. We arrived rather late but just in time.

Madrid Authentic Tapas & History small group tour: By a local combining variety of tastings, History & Culture handed by native Madrilian. Highlights: *Tapas are a miniature culinary art well-distinguished in the Spanish cuisine. Appetizers that are enjoyed most with wine, a delicacy that delights locals and visitors. Some of the taverns to visit have won the 'best Spanish tapa of the year' prize, food that visitors will love. Get a quick yet authentic insight into Spanish culture, history, and gastronomic tradition. Inclusions: Foodie specialized Local Guide, Tapas and drinks in each Bar. Unveil the knowledge. Discover the hideouts. Be a local combining variety of tastings, History & Culture with our Authentic Tapas Walking Tour experience handed by native Madrilian.*

All tapas and drinks included; an inside look into tapas culture. Streetwise local guides will take you to the best tapas places and hideouts in the city. You'll visit 4-5 emblematic venues and enjoy drinks and authentic tapas at each stop. Enough food for Dinner. Get a quick yet authentic insight into Spanish culture, history, and gastronomic tradition on this 3.5-hour walking tour. The guides are Madrid-born connoisseurs with a deep knowledge of Spanish culture, history, and traditions. They enjoy cooking and know all there is to know about tapas. Tapas culture involves ancient and vibrant social traditions passed down from parents to children, generation after generation. Conversations about life combine with fantastic Spanish wines and food. For centuries Madrid has had the benefit of the finest products from farms and the bounty from the seas, including the Mediterranean, Cantabrian, and Atlantic. Have a chance to taste Iberian ham, chorizo, local cheese, gazpacho, croquettes, and a lot more delicious favourites with a selection of Wines. Over 10 different types of tapas. End.

We didn't risk our blood levels by walking home thru the crowds; we got a taxi and were comfortably in our hotel by 11 PM. Best of all I was able to sleep in until I woke from natural causes.



Sistine ceiling type chapels abound. The memorial with mixed feelings about Franco. Starting a food tour.



Artichokes like blooms. Chorizo in red wine. Famous thick chocolate. Dip or drink or both.



Two web pictures of the monastery. Inside pictures were not allowed though our guide made it clear he'd not look when we photographed their "Sistine Chapel" ceiling.

From Madrid - miscellaneous

The weather? It has been wonderful with blue skies and puffy clouds. A little bit of rain came on our Monday walking tour and at the tennis match that stadium had to close the roof for short burst of heavy rain. The full path of the Camino has not only had constant rain but I met someone who had tripped thru Snow. He said he didn't mind the snow because it kept him cool but did mine all the cow patties. We will see. I don't melt and I have a good rain poncho. Don't know what to do about the feet except to keep a watch.



Yet. Why does my hair dry within two hours? This is not normal. When I travel I use lots of moisturizer. I don't know but maybe I won't be so lucky on the Camino since it has been famous recently for monsoons and wet and mud etc. Am I sounding nervous? I am probably more nervous about the stories of all the wild dogs. Even pet dogs don't like me.

Sunday gave me my first sleep-in. I happily woke from natural causes vs alarm clock. Sunday gave us a guided tour of the Prado Museum. Some people believe this is the best museum in the world and only maybe outshined by the Louvre. But with a guide it is so much easier and we had one of the best. Did you know that they claim to have one of Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa? Almost a copy but more brilliant colors because it was found late in the Prado cellar and only restored in 2012. Mona Lisa in Prado? Maybe!

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mona_Lisa_\(Prado%27s_version\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mona_Lisa_(Prado%27s_version))

There was an add-on special exhibit by Peter Paul Rubens which showed his cartoons and sketches against the final product and in many cases sketches which never became a piece of art. Wow! I ate my French "croque monsieur" in the Prado Museum cafeteria and Sonya kindly waited for me to get through eating and viewing.

Sunday also gave me a revelation that was too long a time in coming. I think Sonya will forgive me this and will maybe even appreciate that I draw attention to the subject. Over and over again (it's not only at Starbucks) wait staff are not kind to her. They tell her that her food is not available and don't bring a menu for a substitute, they accept my order and forget her. Sonya is a lovely, super smart professional woman who retired early from HP as a top director, meaning that there is zero excuse for this inattentive behavior. It brings tears to my eyes that this goes on to so many. (But we did have a big laugh when they once momentarily forgot my order.) I can't even be glad for having been born under the white-cloud as I am just much too embarrassed about it. It is hard to know how to speak about it or how to react but I think we all must get gutty and recognize it and call it out for what it is. Trump is only making it worse. If you don't understand privilege please look at this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqPgXhslGWY>

New subject: remember that I told you I was reading the Shirley MacLaine book about her walk on the Camino when she was 60 years old? I knew she was pleasantly crazy but halfway through the book I thought she was probably pretty sane. Then I got into a new chapter and I wondered? Then Tom sent me a link that makes me think that I should be paying more attention to Shirley MacLaine. I first erased this link and then Tom insisted I see it and I propose that you too should. Wow! (Will find and add later. Magician and baby.)

Las Meninas: Chicago had their cows, Palm Beach had there alligators, and now Madrid has there Las Meninas all around town, fancied up, and we had to ask what they represented. Here is the answer:

<https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/las-meninas/9fdc7800-9ade-48b0-ab8b-edee94ea877f>

Also enjoy: Masterpieces of Madrid - <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/spain/articles/6-masterpieces-you-can-only-see-in-madrid/>



Monday morning walking tour included old town and then the inside of the Royal Palace. The palace portion fortunately gave us the same super guide that we had in the Prado Museum.

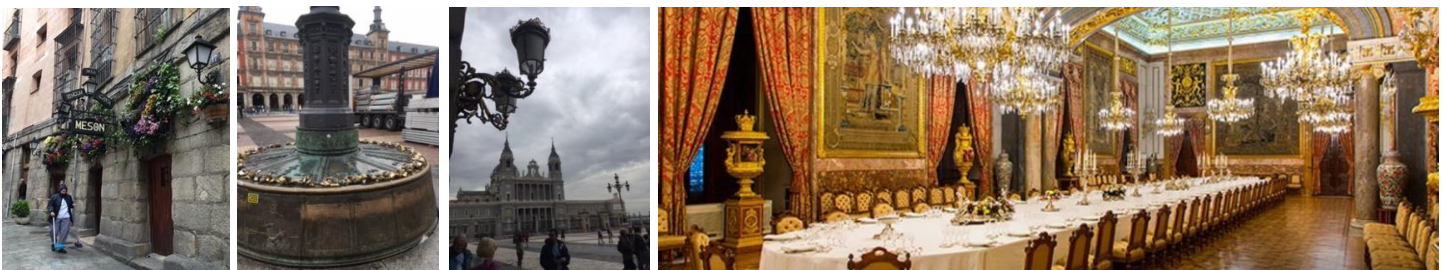


I like the street signs in old town. It reminds me when shopkeepers had to hang the sign showing a loaf of bread for a bakery or issue for repair. Of course I like Plaza de Santiago since I am on my way to Santiago. There was also a Calle de Sacramento which is where I was born. Do you see the arrow with the shell on the lower sign? That's when I will be following all the way to Santiago. A few years ago I did part of the feeder trail from Porto Portugal crossing into Spain.

This is the church honoring St. James. He is the reason for the Camino de Santiago. How it is that he lost his head and then his remains were found a few hundred years later, just in time to create the cult of Santiago, evades me and I wasn't much the pilgrim when I heard he was famous for killing Muslims. (The news at the time of my pilgrims-completion was especially heartwarming: One of the children of slaves is marrying a royal whose forerunners sanctioned slavery; the lion is lying down with the lamb.)



Near to the oldest square is the Mercado famous like those markets in Barcelona. Olives, fresh mozzarella cheese, and packages of cured beef.



No pictures were allowed in the Royal Palace. Maybe that's just as well because it would take a lot of pictures to cover their nearly 3000 rooms. And no we didn't see that many but we sure saw a lot. It might be worth your curiosity to look it up because it is said to be the most decorated of all palaces in Europe. It certainly is far beyond anything I've seen. I'll add one picture from the web showing the dining room. Each room has hard to believe crystal chandeliers with one weighing in excess of 1000 kg. One room had what is said be the world's best collection of Stradivarius violin's. Do we wonder why Spain is so poor? (This comment must have been politically incorrect as I got some grief and they could be valid. I was basically told: *"Do you realize how much class envy you display. Rather than simply enjoy the pomp and celebre of the rich and ruling classes, the artistry of their castles and adornments, instead of using our American Progressive Socialist Left commentary to let everybody know these leaders should have what? lived in hovels? In our country, most of the Hollywood elite who push for reforms have plenty of money and want others to part with their money. What exactly is wrong with this picture?? We are all created equal but do not stay equal. Isn't it grand to visit these places that you and I would not live in? Why would you complain?"* Food for thought.)



Sonya had taken up my request for an invite to see a tennis match. She was very patient with me as she knew I had never indulged. I was quite fascinated and probably surprised her that I was so entertained we stayed until after midnight. And that was tough because then we had to go find a taxi, get home, pack and I had to get up at 6 AM for my train to Leon. I got a picture of the fabulous stormy sky just before the rains opened up and the stadium cover closed up.

Obviously this is not the end as I'm just starting the main purpose of my trip from Leon. I am yet to know if Madrid is the best or if the Camino will be. It depends on how much mud and cow patties get in my way.

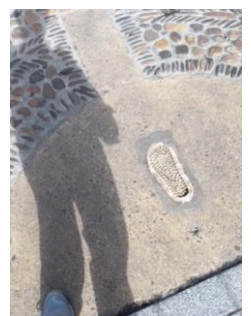
Into Leon

I came to Leon from Madrid by train. Europe is sure ahead of us on transportation in that it is comfortable, convenient and cheap. Travel time was under 3 hours.

Sweet little town. A joy to walk around and with ease. I'd have never found my hotel as it's hidden away in a monastery that only recently opened as a hotel. Hotel site with pictures: <http://www.hotelrealcolegiata.com/>

The hotel sent me to a pedestrian street lined with shops and restaurants, which culminated at their huge cathedral. On the way was their recommended cafe and a delightful experience. Low prices, high quality food, and helpful staff. It is said that Leon is happy and so far I agree. The cafe was a delight.

The hotel rightly offers a tour of the complex and it took about 1 1/2 hours. Next up is tour of the town as given by the local historian and compliments of my tour company.



View from my room window with sounds of the fountain. The patron saint San Isidoro is the reason for this church and monastery complex, now a hotel. The rooster and San Isidoro seal is embroidered on sheets and towels. The rooster seal is everywhere. Their cathedral is huge and known to have a huge amount of Stained glass. I will have a tour inside later. Leon cathedral: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le%C3%B3n_Cathedral
 Me beside one of many gold colored footprints that lead to Santiago. Why footprints and not the sign of the shell is still unknown.



Pastry with their home cured ham as an appetizer. Sardines, and anchovy, eggplant and red peppers was a delight. This is a half order as suggested by the waiter. Portobello mushrooms, asparagus, with slivers of fois gras. Price? All in somewhere around €20! Little did I know that this would likely be my best meal of the trip.



The start of the hotel walking tour of the complex took place on some of the old wall that partly looks like ramparts.



From my room window I have a view of the courtyard and fountain; just at my door I have this view of the complex entrance. My room is lovely and both modern and yet in keeping with some of the history of the monastery. The wall of the window is all stone with a small seating area. Again, Leon seems such a bargain at €90 which includes a big breakfast.

I am sorry to hear that some devices are turning my pictures upside down and I have no idea why. From Apple device to Apple device they look fine. I am low and slow tech. I hope you didn't feel a need to stand on your head to see my pictures?

Next up is the start of the Camino de Santiago – but not like this guy. My life among marathoners would suggest that there's a new game starting called One-Upmanship.

After Leon and thru our third hiking day.

I think I ended last with a monastery/hotel tour in Leon but before the city and cathedral tour. That was Wednesday and a lot has happened through today, Saturday. I'm tired. But all goes well into the third day of hiking on the Camino de Santiago.

Well, it did hail on us twice today and we had to climb a muddy bank of the trail so a big tractor could go by. But we had bits of sun in between and for two days before we had next to perfect cool weather with clear skies except for lovely wispy clouds. I legs are working like they are supposed to so there are no complaints.

Before we got here, back in Leon, we first met our tour Roberto and Dora for an Orientation Meeting, then a local historian for a visit of León's magnificent Gothic Cathedral, whose stained-glass windows have led people to say that it is made more of glass than stone. It is generally considered to be second only to that in Chartres France. Then we went immediately to a luxurious multi course meal in the hotel.

There are seven participants, two guides, one bus driver and a walk through bus, and one support van. They have various checkpoints and meet us with either the van or the bus at various points. One of the guides is always with us and the other checking on us or fixing a picnic or making arrangements. The guides have been filled full of history and stories about the area.

Day 2 of hike - 5 miles with lots of rocky terrain and fairly steep climbs starting in Rabanal. The goal was the Iron Cross or Cruz de Ferro, where pilgrims leave a stone to ask for protection while on their journey. In keeping with the long-standing pilgrimage tradition, some brought a stone from home to leave at the foot of the Iron Cross. Our lunch was in a restaurant tho many coming up will be picnics. Then onto the mountaintop village of O Cebreiro a famous miracle that took place in the 15th century. They are all pretty hard to believe but they do make for profitable religious stops.

Hotel Torre do Barrio in Sarria would be our home for two nights. The owner is famous for raising her own lamb and growing her own produce. Not everyone was so happy with learning the lambs were only three months old when they are slaughtered for our dinner. The setting was lovely and the accommodations were quite sweet but the rooms were not well planned.

Day 3 of hike - 9 miles

We drove to the market town of Sarria noted for being the 100km marker, a milestone (or kmstone!) for the millions of pilgrims who have traversed this same spot during the last millennium. Later but early evening we toured the Benedictine Monastery of Samos, said to be either the largest in Spain or others say the largest in Europe. Of course we got a dinner of local fare and wines but first we got in over the top picnic prepared by our guides.

Day 4 - 10 miles

We packed up and moved out early before the van returned us to where we left off the day before. Weather prediction was rotten and half the day turned out to be true. Our goal for lunch was the hilltop village of Portomarín, where the 12th century Church of San Juan, a fortified church, once stood guard over the banks of the River Miño before it was moved stone by stone to the new center of town. After lunch, the Camino takes us through farmland and woods and brings us to the agricultural hamlet of Gonzar where the van met us. We had endured hill twice, but our ponchos on three times, and dried out after each storm. It was a long day so after moving into our new very pleasant farmhouse hotel, I made my own picnic and gladly gave up dinner.

Hotel Casa do Campo would be our home for two nights. It is in Monterroso. There was no website but here's what one reviewer wrote: Hands down best stay on last 100KM Camino - Casa do Campo was the most beautiful, serene, and welcoming place we stayed on our pilgrimage. It is a beautifully restored farmhouse hidden behind a huge (several stories high) wooden door that gives it a wonderfully secluded feel with an amazing garden. The rooms are very comfortable, with thick stone walls, comfortable beds, and nice bathrooms. Sonia and her mom are wonderful hosts, and they shared so many interesting facts with us about Galicia. The food was AMAZING and Sonia's mom makes her own home made liquors which they offered us to sample after dinner.



Cathedral unique! Building designed by Gaudi of Barcelona for the Guell family. Gaudi himself memorialized. One of the first hostels where we'd get our Camino passport stamped. We were guided. Some hire their packs to be moved hostel to hostel. See picture of a pile of backpacks waiting transport.



A sample of Auberge bunks where one brings their own sleeping bags. Not me! Watering holes. An extreme!



Dora the guide with Dani the bus driver over a lunch of soup, salads, then grilled meats. The Iron Cross highest point at 5000'. Mementos. It had recently snowed and was due to snow again in a couple of days. We would be lower a nap in elevation that all we would get was some hail and mid-40s to low 50s weather.



Villages generally could use a bit of tidying. More good but simple food. That's the Camino shell on the fence.



Monastery. A Roman bridge. Many lovely trails shaded and like a tunnel. Another picnic!



The largest monastery in Europe or at least in Spain. It is full of modern frescoes depicting history. The town of Portmartin that was moved up the hill stone by stone after a flood. Our lovely little hideaway for two nights.



I heard this sounds and it reminded me of Switzerland and looked out my bedroom window to see the animals being brought home via the main road. No wonder the streets are full of poop. Then a picture out the other side of my window to say good night.

Sunday, Monday and Tuesday - Days 5, 6 and 7 of Camino

Sun Day 5 of hike - 11 miles.

I heard all about the wonderful Capon dinner that I missed last night but all I was really envious of was the homemade grappa they were served. Grandma makes the grappa.

Itinerary: Walking from Gonzar to Palas de Rei is a walk back into time! The Camino takes us through many small hamlets and villages of historical importance. Some sights that we should not miss are the 17th century Cross of Lameiros, the 16th century hospice where Carlos V stayed on his journey to Santiago, and the 13th century Romanesque Church of Santiago in Eirexe.

Weather? Darn cold at just over 40° and never hit more than about 52. It rained off and on but I mostly kept my poncho on since I was cold.

We were given passports that are stamped all along the Camino. One must have at least two stamps per day in order to receive the certificate of completion. I got carried away and stopped everywhere I could to get my stamp and then suddenly realized that all these cute little stamps are using up every page of my passport and what will I do now? (I doubled up.)

Second night in Casa do Campo in Monterroso was a treat. I don't like moving. Like Anthony Bourdain, I believe that staying somewhere for 10 days to two weeks is a way to learn the area best.

A word about mileage: my iPhones pedometer usually shows less than everyone else's but each day it has shown a mile or two more than the itinerary. I do take some side trips and sometimes wander back to walk with my new friends.

Mon Day 6 of hike - 9 miles.

Following the now very familiar yellow arrows, we ramble up and down gentle rolling hills along quiet footpaths. Little has changed in this quiet corner of Spain, and the peaceful, rural environment of local farmers tending to their lazy cattle in stone houses, accompany us back to another time. We quickly arrive back to the present in the bustling market town of Melide, where tender octopus, or pulpo, is still boiled in large copper kettles by the street.

We moved to Casa Rural Pazo Sedor in Castañeda for 2 nights and I skipped the move-in night's dinner at the hotel. Of course I heard the next morning how wonderful it was. So was my quiet time.

Tue – Day 7 of hike - 9 miles.

Half way to our destination, we leave Melide and on small country roads we wind our way across the Galician countryside. Along the trail, our journey is filled with tiny churches dating back to the 12th and 14th centuries, dedicated to Santiago and Santa Maria. Once in Arzúa, take advantage to try some of the famous local cow cheese or perhaps a bit of empanada, a light crusty pastry filled with either beef or tuna.

Downhill? I don't think at this stage of life I like the word but we are on the downhill side of completing the Camino de Santiago. My passport book is stamped almost full so I am now doubling up to make room for the next three day's worth of stamps. For a little extra entertainment I have taken it upon myself to stop wherever I thought I could get a stamp. I got on overload.

Health? The most important body parts would be the legs and feet and they are performing well. However the nose is running probably faster than the feet and I think I have a real cold. It shouldn't stop the feet.

Future? I dream of the legs continuing so I'm able to do the portion of the Camino out of the Pyrenees. Both my guides kindly insist that I would be able.



It seem like every time we took our ponchos off the rain started again. But they were helpful to keep the cold out. The Spanish tortilla, potato and egg. Lots of little churches to stop and get your stamp and hear the history. Some are even eighth century. Some 11th century. Old is old.



Another Roman bridge and the two sisters traveling together with us. I have no idea what this gal was about. But you see a lot of odd things on the Camino. And on that subject you see mostly older people and you can make a good guess how long they have been on the Camino by their state of shoes and dress. You care less and less about looks the longer you are walking. We've had cow pastures, trails along the road, rocky roads, mud, and some beauties that were through the forest with moss and more moss.



Octopus is the specialty of the town and most of us enjoyed it. I might've been the only one that ate a plate full of green peppers. It reminded me of living in NM, indulging in hot Mexican foods, ice cream for dessert with the joke that we'd be wishing "come on ice cream" the next day. We have had a lot of sausage types and this chorizo is quite spicy. I took one home for my dinner.

The hotel is a very ancient farmhouse with thick stone walls, wisteria all over, and large expansive grounds. Fortunately the rooms were modernized and I am quite comfortable. A picture of the thick old stone steps going up to our room from the lobby and then a picture out my balcony. There was this little miniature kiddy car running all around the grounds and when it bumped into something it would turn around. A mystery. The next day I learned that it was like those Robo vacuum cleaners - it was mowing the grass. Hi tech on ancient grounds.



Churches and more churches and each with a special story, cemetery, as after all this is the pilgrim's route.



I might have enjoyed the greenery and farms along the way just as much as the history. Remember we follow the yellow arrows? Someone made a few yellow arrows out of flowers. These guys were carrying their musical instruments. That's still another story . . .

Strapping On His Cello for a 600-Mile Bach Pilgrimage:
https://mobile.nytimes.com/2018/05/09/arts/music/bach-cello-dane-johansen.html?emc=edit_th_180512&nl=todaysheadlines&nid=229827440512
 Strapping On His Cello for a 600-Mile Bach Pilgrimage



Plenty of real Roman bridges. And another time an even older Celtic encampment. Now we're into clear weather so we can have another picnic and this time it was Roberto's turn to "cook" and I do believe I enjoyed picnics better than most restaurants. Quick, healthy, and full of local info.



Now – there might be no more trip notes. Was it that I was tired? Could be. Or was it also that it all got to be much of the same? Could be. Eleven days was a long time.

(Never finished notes home):

Wed May 16 – Day 8 of hike - 9 miles (I got 11.5)

Itinerary: Our day starts with a morning excursion to the 13th century Santa Maria Monastery of Sobrado, whose Benedictine monks welcome those pilgrims coming from the Northern Route. Afterwards, we continue to enjoy the wonderful scenery of the Galician countryside and charming atmosphere of tiny 3-house villages. Get a feel for the people and greet a local villager with a "Buenos días" or "Hola". You'll see how these quiet and reserved people quickly wish you well on your journey to Santiago. On this trek, you are no longer a tourist but a pilgrim on the Camino de Santiago.

Hotel: Pazo Andeade in Touro - <http://pazodeandeade.com/>

It is the best known pazo of the Concello de Touro, in A Coruña (Galicia). Also called A Casa Grande de Andeade, it was founded at the beginning of the 18th century and it has all the characteristic elements of La Paz buildings: coat of arms, a chapel with a Compostela altarpiece of the time, a dovecote, a laundry room, a decorative fountain, large gardens, carballeira ("roble dal") and entrance franked by rows of banana trees. It was restored in 1995 with original materials and hardwoods, and nowadays it functions as a rural tourism establishment and a place for celebrations and banquets. The Pazo de Andeade Restaurant uses only high quality products, proven provenance and exclusively seasonal. The kitchen and the service offered by its professionals, enjoy a recognized prestige gained through the excellence of the raw material used and a careful traditional elaboration. End

I was thrilled with my room. I had prior agreed to pay for any upgrade and I have this medieval looking room with modern amenities that is absolutely exciting - to be living in such a historical building. I understand that as much as 20 generations of the same family have lived here. I'll share some pictures but you can also Google and ask for images. The gardens and grounds are extensive.



The iron gateway and huge stones on way to garden. The rough narrow and uneven stones going up to my room. The balcony and garden view, then view from bedroom window that has old iron barred shutters. Remember that I arrange and pay for these upgrades direct with the hotel. The rooms provided by Fresco Tours seemed fine but small and remember that European single rooms are notoriously small.



The view from top of the stone steps. Huge room, old wooden beams, large bathroom with the first time I had counter space and also complete with a huge high skylight. The living area with fireplace. Old touches but fortunately bedpans and water jugs were only for looks.

Jump a few days and many miles to Santiago

Incense at Santiago's cathedral: <https://www.pilgrimagetraveler.com/botafumerio.html>

If you saw Martin Sheehan in "The Way" then you will remember the incense show. My pictures were limited if not prohibited and this link tells it best if you are interested. There are pictures and a good video. Some said it was the best part of the entire Camino trip. I'd agree it was pretty spectacular.

Participants: Beryl was one of my favorite people other than Tom. Beryl was the oldest of the group, had 2 new knees and a new hip, but kept up. Not only an inspiration but someone I'd like to have nearer as a friend. In the group we had two sisters, one younger and one my age. We had a couple from New South Wales Australia, but Mark was not only heavy and surely limited in his walking,



but his blisters got infected necessitating a trip to the hospital. His wife went ahead with another hiker as they both seemed to have no interest in the tourist and cultural side of the Camino. One introduced herself as a distant runner so I never mentioned my past and she never asked.

What's next? Tom and I are off to a big remembrance trip: first to Zurich, Lucerne, Grindelwald and Bern before joining a river cruise from Basel to Amsterdam. We have a few days in Brugge before coming home through Brussels. Then I'm to a hiking trip out of Belfast to Northern Ireland after a few days in Dublin.

Can you believe I'm working on a trip with Tom and Marie to Santiago Chile? Yes, another Santiago! When I was there in 2015 I declared that I needed to return and I've tried since but it got aborted for another trip.

South America is before a wedding outside of St Louis, a later August hike with www.ParksPlusHiking.com in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, followed by Tom and I to the Alsace/Lorraine region for 2 weeks in September. Then a few days in Milwaukee before joining another PPH 7-day hiking trip on the Ice Age Trail, with only a quick NJ turn around before joining sister Beverly in Everett/Washington for Skate America. I'll need the early November West Indies cruise with Tom to rest up for December and a 9 day trip to Vancouver with Beverly for more skating called the Grand Prix finals. I've got more but that starts 2019 and I can just hope the body holds up.

Itinerary

Thu May 3 – Day 1

5:30pm Depart Newark EWR via UA#30

Fri May 4 – Day 2

7:35am Arrive Munich MUC for plane change

8:25am Depart Munich MUC via LH1800

11:00am Arrive Madrid MAD and Taxi – flat rate of 30 Euros

Note Sonya Departs May 3 DFW at 4:40pm, arrives May 4 via AA#36 at 9:05am. Meet up for taxi?
Sonya returns via AA#37 May 9 at 11:10am, arriving DFW 2:50pm

Tourist? Suggest hop on/hop off if sufficient energy to do so. Otherwise do on Sunday.

Route nº 1 (Blue color): Museo del Prado, Puerta de Alcalá, Barrio de Salamanca, Plaza de Colón, Plaza de Cibeles, Gran Vía, Plaza de España, Templo de Debod; Teatro Real; Palacio Real, Puerta de Toledo, San Francisco El Grande, Catedral Almudena, Plaza Mayor, Puerta del Sol; Círculo Bellas Artes, Museo Thyssen, Museo Reina Sofía, Jardín Botánico Museo del Prado.

Route nº 2 (Green color): Plaza Neptuno, Plaza de Cibeles, Plaza de Colón, Museo Esculturas Museo de Ciencias Naturales, Nuevos Ministerios, Santiago Bernabéu, C.S.I. Científicas Museo Lázaro Galdiano, Serrano, Museo Arqueológico, Puerta de Alcalá, Alcalá, Puerta del Sol Plaza de las Cortes, Plaza de Neptuno.

Hotel Diana AC Hotel Recoletos – 4 nights

Calle Recoletos, 18 Madrid, 28001 Spain Tele: 34 91 4361382

<https://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/madrc-ac-hotel-recoletos/>

AC Hotel Recoletos has an unbeatable location in Madrid between Calle Serrano and Paseo de Recoletos, one of the oldest and best-known areas in the historic centre of the city. Our urban hotel is situated near Plaza de Cibeles, Retiro park and the Prado, Reina Sofía and Thyssen-Bornemisza museums, and has excellent transport links to the Retiro, Colón and Banco de España metro stations. It is also near the Recoletos RENFE train station. This hotel is an example of the typical Neoclassical architecture of Madrid. It retains the elegant aura of the original construction with all the details that AC Hotels brand is known for. Try our fitness centre with its latest equipment, or the library, where you can relax with a book or free press. Our AC Lounge features a simple menu of light, healthy, and well-prepared treats and is open until midnight. Free Wi-Fi access throughout the hotel so that guests can connect to the internet whenever they want.

Hotel Sonya Hotel One Shot Recoletos – 5 nights

Salustiano Olózaga 04, 28001 – Madrid Tele: +34 911 82 00 70

Email: recoletos04@oneshot-hotels.com <http://www.hoteloneshotrecoletos04.com/>

Sat May 5 – Day 3

8:45am – Royal Monastery of El Escorial and the Valley of the Fallen – 5 hours

Tickets Purchased through Grayline/Julia Travel – meet at Calle San Nicolas, 15, corner Plaza Ramales. Top 3-star rated by Rick Steves

Discover the Royal past life of El Escorial and learn part of the recent Spanish history at the Valley of the Fallen. A unique and unforgettable day

The Royal Monastery of El Escorial is an architectural complex built in the 16th century. Is a 'must see' to visit the Hapsburg Royal Palace, the Kings and Princes Mausoleum and the Basilica. All built following the Renaissance style. The Valley of the Fallen was built to commemorate the combatants who died during the Spanish Civil War. The Basílica de la Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caídos is carved into the mountain.

Itinerary: In this tour we will visit the Royal Monastery of El Escorial, an architectural ensemble declared a World Heritage Site, and the Valley of the Fallen, a basilica that stands out for its gigantic size.

Royal Monastery of El Escorial: We will start our visit at El Escorial, a symbol of the Spanish power in the XVI century that commemorates the battle of St. Quentin. It is also a mausoleum for Charles V. Due to the symmetry and balance of

its construction, according to the humanist Renaissance style, for years it had been considered the eighth wonder of the world. The visit includes the Habsburg Palace, the Kings and Princes Mausoleum, the Chapter House and the Basilica.

Basilica of the Valley of the Fallen:

Located 9 km away from El Escorial, this enormous monument was built between 1940 and 1959 to honour the fallen during the Spanish Civil War. The basilica is carved into the mountain at 1350 metres of altitude, where an impressive 150 metres high cross places itself over the magnificent nature reserve of Madrid mountain range.

7:00pm Small Group: Madrid Authentic Tapas & History Tour

Booked through Grayline/Julia Travel. Meet at Plaza Isabel II, right beside statue of Queen Isabel II, close to the metro station Opera.

Be a local combining variety of tastings, History & Culture handed by native Madrilian

Highlights: Tapas are a miniature culinary art well-distinguished in the Spanish cuisine. Appetizers that are enjoyed most with wine, a delicacy that delights locals and visitors. Some of the taverns to visit have won the 'best Spanish tapa of the year' prize, food that visitors will love. Get a quick yet authentic insight into Spanish culture, history, and gastronomic tradition.

Inclusions: Foodie specialized Local Guide, Tapas and drinks (wine, beer, soft drinks or water) in each Bar, Tour will be guided in English & Spanish language.

Itinerary: Unveil the knowledge. Discover the hideouts. Be a local combining variety of tastings, History & Culture with our Authentic Tapas Walking Tour experience handed by native Madrilian.

Book a tour with all tapas and drinks included and get an inside look into tapas culture. Streetwise local guides will take you to the best tapas places and hideouts in the city. You'll visit 4-5 emblematic venues and enjoy drinks and authentic tapas at each stop. Enough food for Lunch or Dinner. Get a quick yet authentic insight into Spanish culture, history, and gastronomic tradition on this 3.5-hour walking tour. The guides are Madrid-born connoisseurs with a deep knowledge of Spanish culture, history, and traditions. They enjoy cooking and know all there is to know about tapas. Tapas culture involves ancient and vibrant social traditions passed down from parents to children, generation after generation.

Conversations about life combine with fantastic Spanish wines and food. For centuries Madrid has had the benefit of the finest products from farms and the bounty from the seas, including the Mediterranean, Cantabrian, and Atlantic.

Have a chance to taste Iberian ham, chorizo, local cheese, gazpacho, croquettes, and a lot more delicious favourites with a selection of red and white Wines, beer, or soft drinks. Over 10 different types of tapas. Make the most of your visit to Madrid with this tour and get hints and tips from your guide to continue exploring this capital.

Sun May 6 – Day 4

Open for more Hop On/Hop Off, other tours, Toledo, Prado Museum and/or Marques de Linares/ Casa de America (see below)

Mon May 7 – Day 5

10:00am Small Group: Hapsburgs Madrid Walking Tour and Royal Palace – booked through Grayline/Julia Travel

Meet at Julia Travel Gray line office at Calle San Nicholas, no. 15, corner Plaza Ramales. Ends at Royal Palace.

Why go? Go for a walk in the Hapsburgs Madrid and admire the magnificent architecture of time in the past. Discover the Royal Palace and its monarchy history

Highlights: The Royal Palace majestically shows its history of monarchs. It reigns in Plaza de Oriente in front of Catedral de la Almudena. Plaza Mayor is the heart of Hapsburg Madrid. Arco de Cuchilleros, Casa de la Panadería and the Statue of Felipe III mark this square charm. In Plaza de la Villa has its place the Casa de la Villa which was the seat of the local government. In this unique open-air space are also built the Casa de Cisneros and Casa y Torre de los Lujanes.

Santa Cruz Palace was built as a jail. This palace stands out for its central great shield and two high-spire towers.

Inclusions: Free drink at an emblematic Café during the tour. Entrance and guided tour to Royal Palace.

Eve/time? Tennis match with Sonya at Mutua Madrid Open – Diana owes Sonya

Tue May 8 – Day 6

9:30am Depart Madrid's Chamartin Train Station

11:45am Arrive Leon

Hotel provided a map for walking from train station 1 ½ km or 20 minutes. Too complicated!

Hotel Leon, Hotel Real Colegiata – 2 nights - 1 night on own + 1 night with tour
Plaza de Santo Martino, 5, 24003 León, Spain
Tele: +34 987 875 088 – WiFi Yes

Located in Leon's historical center, the hotel offers history and comfort combined with beautiful surroundings.

From <http://www.hotelrealcolegiata.com/> REAL BASILICA OF SAN ISIDORO - The hotel - We invite you to a journey through time, a journey through the history of León: from its Roman origins represented in the walls of the Legio VII; contemplating the paintings of the Royal Pantheon (Sistine Chapel of Romanesque); admiring from the choir of the basilica the noble architectural simplicity of Romanesque; strolling through the silent and imposing cloisters that invite recollection: from this compendium of art and spirituality the Hotel Real Colegiata de San Isidoro offers its guests and visitors a unique stay. "Open to the public in 2005, integrates original architectural elements with materials and current forms, resulting in a unique hotel in the city that combines functionality and history. Discover, in the cradle of the Kingdom of León, a unique architectural ensemble in Spain that is both a temple, a pantheon of kings, a convent, a palace, a library and a museum. "

Wed May 9 – Day 7 and Day 1 of hike

Overview from www.FrescoTours.com - 2017 A Kinder (Gentler) Camino - 11 days & 10 nights - The Last 112 KMs to Santiago - The crown jewel of Spanish walking trails, the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela began as an act of faith as Europeans crossed Spain to visit the sacred tomb of Saint James. One thousand years later, the Camino continues to draw the spiritual as well as the traveler looking to enjoy the beauty of the green rolling hills and small hamlets of northwestern Spain's Galicia. Come be part of this magical route that is very special for us - it is on the Camino where the idea for Fresco Tours was first born in 1999.

Camino de Santiago with Fresco Tours Highlights - What's Included

- Experience and expertise: Your two bilingual guides that accompany the tour are either Spanish or live in Spain year round. This is our home and we love to share it with you!
- Fabulous food: All your meals (B,L, D) are included, so you only need to worry about enjoying the trail! Weather permitting; our gourmet picnics showcase the freshest of local flavors.
- Unique accommodations: Charming restored manor homes and 3-4 star hotels that offer the best in hospitality, comfort, and location.
- La Compostela: Our itinerary qualifies you for the Compostela certificate upon your arrival to Santiago.
- Semi-independent tour: You choose! Walk alone with the assurance that we'll take care of you or enjoy the company of others and your knowledgeable guides.
- Van supported: No need to carry a heavy pack - let us do the lifting while you do the walking.

The Compostela & the Camino de Santiago Tour -- This itinerary gives you the opportunity to walk the last 100KM into Santiago. This is a requirement needed to request the compostela, the certificate granted by the church of Santiago upon the completion of the pilgrimage. It is not mandatory, however, to walk 100km (60 miles) to participate in this Fresco Tour. As with all our trips, your walk is accompanied by a support van and shorter walk options are available on a daily basis.

3:30PM You will be met by your Fresco Tours guides Roberto and Dora in the lobby of Hotel Real Colegiata, for your Orientation Meeting, followed by a guided tour of León by our local historian Lourdes, including a visit of León's magnificent Gothic Cathedral, whose stained-glass windows have led people to say that it is made more of glass than stone. We finish our evening with a meal fit for kings! (D)

Hotel Hotel Real Colegiata in Leon – 2nd of 2 nights

Thu May 10 – Day 8 and Day 2 of hike

Walking: 8 KMs or 5 miles

After breakfast, we hop in the van and drive west to Rabanal, as we begin our walk visiting the Iron Cross or Cruz de Ferro, where pilgrims leave a stone to ask for protection while on their journey. In keeping with the long-standing pilgrimage tradition, make sure to bring a stone from home to leave at the foot of the Iron Cross. After lunch, we continue our journey to the mountaintop village of O Cebreiro and learn about the famous miracle that took place here in the 15th century. Finally, we head to our accommodations for the evening. (B, L, D)

Hotel Torre do Barrio -1st of 2 nights
Pazo Torre do Barrio
Lugar barrio 41 San Martino Parroquia Louseiro, 27619 Sarria, Spain
Tele: 982 533 730 (different # on website) WiFi code Louseiro36

Fri May 11 – Day 9 and Day 3 of hike

Walking: 14 KMs or 9 miles

As we leave the market town of Sarria, make sure to keep an eye out for the ruins of Celtic castros hiding in the vegetation along the Camino. Our destination today is the 100km marker, a milestone (or kmstone!) for the millions of pilgrims who have traversed this same spot during the last millennium. We return to our hotel for a rest before heading to the Benedictine Monastery of Samos and a wonderful dinner of local fare. (B, L, D)

Hotel Torre do Barrio – 2nd of 2 nights

Sat May 12 – Day 10 and Day 4 of hike

Walking: 16 KMs or 10 miles

Continuing from where we left off the day before, we walk along the Camino de Santiago to Portomarín, where the 12th century Church of San Juan, a fortified church, once stood guard over the banks of the River Miño before it was moved stone by stone to the new center of town - your Fresco Tour guide will tell you more about that! After lunch, the Camino takes us through farmland and woods and brings us to the agricultural hamlet of Gonzar. (B, L, D)

Hotel Casa do Campo – 1st of 2 nights
Lugar San Miguel 3, 27568, Monterroso
Tele: +34 982 371 731 WiFi code: casadocampo11

No website – from a reviewer: Hands down best stay on last 100KM Camino - Casa do Campo was the most beautiful, serene, and welcoming place we stayed on our pilgrimage. It is a beautifully restored farmhouse hidden behind a huge (several stories high) wooden door that gives it a wonderfully secluded feel with an amazing garden. The rooms are very comfortable, with thick stone walls, comfortable beds, and nice bathrooms. Sonia and her mom are wonderful hosts, and they shared so many interesting facts with us about Galicia. The food was AMAZING and Sonia's mom makes her own home made liquors which they offered us to sample after dinner.

Sun May 13 – Day 11 and Day 5 of hike

Walking: 17 KMs or 11 miles

Walking from Gonzar to Palas de Rei is a walk back into time! The Camino takes us through many small hamlets and villages of historical importance. Some sights that we should not miss are the 17th century Cross of Lameiros, the 16th century hospice where Carlos V stayed on his journey to Santiago, and the 13th century Romanesque Church of Santiago in Eirexe! In Palas de Rei, we regroup and take the van to our hotel for a well-deserved rest. (B, L, D)

Hotel Casa do Campo in Monterroso – 2nd of 2 nights

Mon May 14 – Day 12 and Day 6 of hike

Walking: 14 KMs or 9 miles

Following the now very familiar yellow arrows, we ramble up and down gentle rolling hills along quiet footpaths. Little has changed in this quiet corner of Spain, and the peaceful, rural environment of local farmers tending to their lazy cattle in stone houses, accompany us back to another time. We quickly arrive back to the present in the bustling market town of Melide, where tender octopus, or pulpo, is still boiled in large copper kettles by the street. (B, L, D)

Hotel Casa Rural Pazo Sedor in Castañeda – 1st of 2 nights
Lugar Sedor, 1, 15819 Arzúa, A Coruña, Spain
Tele: +34 981 50 16 00 WiFi Open

Tue May 15 – Day 13 and Day 7 of hike

Walking: 14 KMs or 9 miles

Half way to our destination, we leave Melide and on small country roads we wind our way across the Galician countryside. Along the trail, our journey is filled with tiny churches dating back to the 12th and 14th centuries, dedicated to Santiago and Santa Maria. Once in Arzúa, take advantage to try some of the famous local cow cheese or perhaps a bit of empanada, a light crusty pastry filled with either beef or tuna. (B, L, D)

Hotel Casa Rural Pazo Sedor in Castañeda – 2nd of 2 nights

Wed May 16 – Day 14 and Day 8 of hike

Walking: 15 KMs or 9 miles

Our day starts with a morning excursion to the 13th century Santa Maria Monastery of Sobrado, whose Benedictine monks welcome those pilgrims coming from the Northern Route. Afterwards, we continue to enjoy the wonderful scenery of the Galician countryside and charming atmosphere of tiny 3-house villages. Get a feel for the people and greet a local villager with a "Buenos días" or "Hola". You'll see how these quiet and reserved people quickly wish you well on your journey to Santiago. On this trek, you are no longer a tourist but a pilgrim on the Camino de Santiago. (B, L, D)

Hotel Pazo Andeade in Touro – 1 night only
Place of Casa Grande, nº 1, Santiago de Andeade, 15824 Touro - A Coruña
Tele: +34 981 517 359 WiFi andeade1995

<http://pazodeandeade.com/> - It is the best known pazo of the Concello de Touro, in A Coruña (Galicia). Also called A Casa Grande de Andeade, it was founded at the beginning of the 18th century and it has all the characteristic elements of La Paz buildings: coat of arms, a chapel with a Compostela altarpiece of the time, a dovecote, a laundry room, a decorative fountain, large gardens, carballeira ("robedal") and entrance franked by rows of banana trees. It was restored in 1995 with original materials and hardwoods, and nowadays it functions as a rural tourism establishment and a place for celebrations and banquets. The Pazo de Andeade Restaurant uses only high quality products, proven provenance and exclusively seasonal. The kitchen and the service offered by its

professionals, enjoy a recognized prestige gained through the excellence of the raw material used and a careful traditional elaboration.

Thu May 17 – Day 15 and Day 9 of hike

Walking: 12 KMs or 8 miles

Today, we return to the Camino and walk our way into Lavacolla, where in the middle ages, weary pilgrims would wash themselves before entering the holy city of Santiago, our destination tomorrow! (B, L, D)

Hotel Ruta Jacobea in Lavacolla – 1 night only
Lugar Lavacolla, 41, 15820 Santiago de Compostela, A Coruña, Spain
Tele: +34 981 88 82 11 WiFi hotelrutajacobea network

<http://rjacobea.es/hotel/> - Located in Lavacolla - obligatory reference on the road to Santiago - very close to the airport. Equipped with all the necessary quality services to meet the demands of those who approach the capital of Galicia, whether for reasons of pleasure, rest or work. Hotel Ruta Jacobea is located in a recently built building that maintains a careful balance with the architecture of the Camino de Santiago. It has 16 rooms and 4 suites individually decorated with a comfortable and modern style, and served with the warm and friendly touch of its staff.

Fri May 18 – Day 16 and Day 10 of hike

Walking: 11 KMs or 7 miles

9 days, 120 kilometers, and we have arrived to Santiago de Compostela. Congratulations! You are going to love this magical city filled with fantastic monuments and with a lively buzz from the international pilgrims and university students that fill its medieval streets. After requesting our Compostela certificates at the Pilgrims' Office, we head to our hotel and get ready for our evening celebratory dinner! (B, L, D)

Hotel Hotel Virxe da Cerca in Santiago – 2 nights – 1 with tour and 1 on own
Rúa da Virxe da Cerca, 27, 15703 Santiago de Compostela, CORUÑA, A, Spain
Tele: +34 981 56 93 50 WiFi VIRXE user, 2017 password

https://www.galahotels.com/en/Hotel/spain_210/santiago_de_compostela_19393/virxe_da_cerca_hotel_66875?qclid=EAlaIQobChMIs9zO_MKh2gIVmoizCh2mVQCgEAAAYAiAAEgLvZ_D_BwE

This charming hotel comprises a total of 42 rooms spread between 2 buildings connected by a romantic private garden. Both in the main building, a 5-storey carefully refurbished eighteenth-century building, once a bank house and formerly a residence of the Jesuits and also in the modern one, a 3-floor annex block, modernity and tradition have been masterly blended keeping all the charm of years-gone-by. A 24-hour reception with safe and public Internet terminal (both free of charge), free WLAN, air conditioning, heating, room and laundry services, lifts, buffet breakfast room in the garden, cafe. The Virxe da Cerca Hotel is a friendly hotel settled over a monumental building, originally from 1700 which was carefully restored. This hotel located in the heart of Santiago de Compostela, next to the Belvis Park, the traditional market of the old town and close to the mythical cathedral from Santiago. The Virxe da Cerca Hotel preserves the charm of an ancient noble house. Its 43 rooms are decorated in a style combining tradition with modernity. Enjoy its decoration based on regal furniture with walls in pastel tones, as well as its comfortable equipment including, among others, satellite TV, Wi-Fi connection and air conditioning. For the relaxation moments, nothing better than spend the time in its garden. If you are looking for the romanticism, discover its intimate summerhouse surrounded by glazed avenues similar to those of a cloister.

Sat May 19 – Day 16 and Day 11 of hike

After breakfast, our local historian, Margariña, gives us a closer look at the amazing Cathedral that has seen so many transformations since the original chapel built in the 9th century. After the tour, we sadly say our last "buen camino" as we leave you at the Cathedral in time for the Pilgrims' Mass at noon. (B)

Hotel Hotel Virxe da Cerca in Santiago – 2nd of 2 nights
Reservation #59223 on own

Sun May 20 – Day 18

5:50pm Depart Santiago de Compostela SCQ via Iberia Air #IB3879
7:00pm Arrive Madrid MAD Terminal 4

Hotel AC Hotel Coslada Aeropuerto – 1 night
Calle Rejas, Madrid, 28022 Tele 34 91 7462730
Conf# 96384795 – form in file

Mon May 21 – Day 19

11:35am Depart Madrid MAD via UA#50
2:15pm Arrive Newark EWR

Note: We depart to Zurich on May 30.

Participants:

Diana of NJ
Mark and Terrie of New So Wales Australia
Sheila of IL and cA
Rebecca of NY
Carol of CT
Beryl of FL
Guides Roberto and Dora

Emergency

Fresco Tours - www.FrescoTours.com
Calle Luzarra 14-16, Planta 4, Departamento 1, 48014 Bilbao, Vizcaya, Spain
Tele: (Toll Free in the US): 1 888 246 6089 and +34 626 40 09 81
Fax: +34 917 913 305 Email: info@frescotours.com

Guide is Roberto, cell: +34 619 774 330

U.S. Embassy

Calle de Serrano, 75, 28006 Madrid, Spain
Tele: +34 915 87 22 00
I registered with STEP at www.travel.state.gov

Emergency Assistance Plus Program – 24/7

United Mileage Plus member #0186014 (card in file and in D's Wallet)
Tele: 866 816 2073 or 60 328 1752 collect

Reading

The Camino: A Journey of the Spirit by Shirley MacLaine

Links of interest

Pics from a Camino group with same tour I'm using -
https://www.frescotours.com/photos_kindercamino_11may2015.asp

Tourist

Incest, a Murdered Love Child, and Endless Gold: Inside Madrid's Most Lavish Gilded Age Palace - Sent to Sonya. Interesting. For Madrid. But I don't see a way to get tickets other than going there.
<https://www.thedailybeast.com/incest-a-murdered-love-child-and-endless-gold-inside-madrids-most-lavish-gilded-age-palace>

Marques de Linares, Casa de America www.casamericas.es 8 Euros entry at Plaza de Cibeles off Calle Alfonso. Ticket sales M-F 9-3 and 4-8. Tours only Sat and Sun at 11, 12 and 1 for 50 minutes

Past trips to Madrid area

2015 Madrid with Basque hike

https://libertyladies.weebly.com/uploads/3/4/8/4/3484697/basque_country_trip_notes_10-15.pdf

2016 Madrid with Granada to Seville hike

https://libertyladies.weebly.com/uploads/3/4/8/4/3484697/spain_trip_notes_5-16.pdf

Excluding a few Barcelona trips.