CAPTAIN'S CHOICE

THE CRUX OF THE CAMINO

We set forth upon the epic Camino de Santiago, taking us through lands inspired by ritual and legend. Our journey grants us the opportunity to walk more than 220 kilometres of the Camino's most striking sections. Enjoy this authentic experience as part of a small group of no more than 18 guests.

A JOURNEY OVERVIEW

San Sebastian - Saint Jean Pied de Port - The Pyrenees - Roncesvalles - Pamplona - La Rioja - Burgos - Carrión de los Condes - León - Astorga - Canedo - Sarria - Arzúa - Santiago de Compostela

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19 Days Walking Journey

Departing 15 May & 12 September 2027

Day 1 San Sebastián (Spain)
A geographically gifted city, San Sebastián's beaches line the Bay of Biscay. We land here for a short hedonistic stop before the walk begins in earnest, which offers us a chance to contemplate the adventure that lies ahead. For the next two nights, we call San Sebastián's Hotel de Londres y de Inglaterra home. It is set directly on Playa de la Concha, said to be Europe's best city beach. Take a stroll along the sand before sitting down to a classically Basque dinner in our hotel's dining room.

Day 2 San Sebastián
San Sebastián is also Spain's gastronomic capital. We explore the old city and treat ourselves to pintxos washed down with Txakoli, a fruity, quaffing wine. Spend the afternoon at leisure, perhaps taking advantage of San Sebastián's renowned beaches. This evening, the traditional cuisine of the region is enhanced by produce selected from our restaurant's own garden at Zelai Txiki.

Day 3 St Jean Pied de Port (France), Vierge de Biakorri, Roncesvalles (Spain)
Hike - 16.5kms

We cross the border today and arrive in the town of St Jean Pied de Port, the traditional starting point for the Camino Francés route. Our convenient courtesy vehicle enables us to bypass the route's steepest section, however, and we begin our walk from Vierge de Biakorri, ordinarily the route's 14-km mark. Upon reaching Roncesvalles Pass, we are again in Spain. Dotted around each bend, we find farms owned by the umpteenth generation of each family. From here, it is downhill into town and the beckoning hospitality of the Hotel Roncesvalles.

Day 4 Pamplona
Hike - 21.9kms

Between Roncesvalles and Zubiri, the countryside undulates in a manner more forgiving than yesterday's route. We follow the trail along forested terrain, which soon opens up to more pastoral scenes and the occasional village. In the last hour of this section, we descend 200 metres in elevation to Zubiri, then drive to Pamplona, bypassing the less inspiring portion of this walk. We rest this evening in the Gran Hotel La Perla.

Day 5 Rioja
Hike - 18kms

While you have the choice of walking any section of today's journey, our recommendation is to rest your feet and feast your senses on the grand churches dating from the Middle Ages. Highlights are the Gothic Church of the Crucifix and the Moorish-inflected Church of Santiago el Mayor. For the next two nights, our residence is the Hotel Palacio de los Ángeles. This evening's dinner takes place at our hotel.

Day 6 Rioja

Winemaking in La Rioja originated with the Phoenician settlers who once called it home. Today, we delve into this pre-Camino aspect, meeting master winemakers at renowned vineyards and new, inventive ones. Sample their creations as we go. Then follow your own path for a while, with an afternoon at leisure. For dinner tonight we have a choice of dining venues.

Day 7 Burgos

Hike - 12kms

A morning drive places us in Villafranca Montes de Oca in the region of Castilla, with peaceful views to be savoured. Interestingly, for travellers past, this was a treacherous stretch where bandits and thieves lay in wait. Arriving in San Juan de Ortega, we drive on to Atapuerca, where Europe's oldest human remains were found. We travel on to Burgos, where the best examples of Gothic architecture are to be found. Most impressive is the town's cathedral and, at its centre, the tomb of El Cid, military genius and national hero. Our residence tonight is the Palacio de Burgos, near the Plaza Mayor. Dine in one of Burgos' many tapas bars this evening, and savour a selection of dishes sautéed, smoky or spiced.

Day 8 Carrión de los Condes

Hike - 13.3kms

Today, our vehicles transport us from Burgos to Hontanas. From here, our journey continues part of the way across the Meseta, the plateau that is Spain's heartland. While it is flat and easy walking, there is little in the way of shade. We soon reach Castrojeriz, notable for its castle ruins. In Carrión de los Condes, on the edge of the Meseta, we find our home for the night, the Real Monasterio de San Zoilo. Extraordinarily historic, the 10th-century complex features a cloister with 200 carved arch keystones. This evening, dine on the famed lamb at the rustic Mesón de Villasirga.

Day 9 León

León welcomes us today. Founded in the first century BC, there are a wealth of sights to discover here. The city's cathedral dates back over 600 years and is a masterpiece of the Gothic style. As there is so much to explore within this ancient city, we take time to set off on our own discoveries. Tonight's residence is the lovingly restored convent, the Parador de Leon and we dine at our hotel's restaurant.

Day 10 Astorga

Hike - 17kms

The path out of León now runs through industrial areas, which is why we choose to drive today, making our way to Puente Orbigo, famed for its arched bridge. From here, today's leg is a moderately challenging one, to the town of Astorga, which we break up with a picnic lunch along the way. Our further efforts are rewarded with a satisfying tapas dinner on reaching our destination. Tonight, half our group will spend the night at Posada Real Casa de Tepa, with the remainder residing at nearby Hotel Via de la Plata.

Day 11 Canedo
Hike - 14kms

Our vehicle takes us the short distance to Rabanal del Camino. After the last two days, our legs are ready for some work. With the Meseta behind us, the land becomes a little more lush, and the path a little less straight. We pace ourselves as we navigate gradual inclines on our way to Cruz de Ferro, the route's famous iron cross. From here, our ever-reliable vehicles drive us the rest of the way to rural Canedo, a short detour from the Camino, where the Palacio de Canedo welcomes us for the night. The walk will have whet our appetites for the chef's tasting menu and wines from the hotel's estate.

Day 12 Sarria
Hike - 11.6kms

In the morning, we survey the Templar ruins of Sarracín Castle. Then, a new province calls. With Kerry-esque green hills and misty lakes, Galicia is a mirror of the northern British Isles, in culture and in landscape. The high point of today's walk is at its end – O Cebreiro is an ancient Celtic town where time has stood still for more than 1,500 years. Here we marvel at pallozas, low stone huts with sweeping circular roofs. Tonight, we rest at the Hotel Alfonso IX in Sarria.

Day 13 Portomarin
Hike - 21kms

Those determined to earn their Compostela must walk the rest of the way. We collect, in our pilgrim's passport, a stamp at each town, proof that we are committed to our challenging journey. On our way to Ferreiros, our courtesy vehicle stops momentarily so we can see the 12th-century Iglesia de Santiago, one of Galicia's premier Romanesque churches. We then arrive in Ferreiros, where we begin our day's walk. Eucalyptus and pine trees line the trails as we head toward Ventas de Narón. Along the way, we are also met with the sight of several hórreos, Galician grain storage buildings, dotted along the route. Tonight, we take our rest at Spa Hotel Vistalegre.

Day 14 Portomarin
Hike - 20kms

A short drive takes us to Ventas de Narón, from where we walk to O Coto, sustained by our picnic lunch en route. Along the way, the pretty countryside distracts us at regular intervals. Old villages, once hubs of activity, lie quietly along our path; our peace disturbed only by the occasional bird or chatty walker. On reaching O Coto, our trusty transport delivers us to nearby Portomarin, where we dine in one of its charming restaurants. The chef's culinary specialties suitably nourish us, before we return to Spa Hotel Vistalegre, for a restful sleep.

Day 15 Arzúa
Hike - 20kms

The starting point of today's walk is O Coto. We soon reach the enchanting hamlet of Leboreiro, known for its ancient, yet modest, church, the Igrexa de Santa María de Leboreiro. About halfway along our route, we arrive in Boente, whose residents are renowned for producing the finest local cheeses. A sample or two may just be the perfect supplement to our picnic lunch. Our walk concludes at the Church of Santa Maria Magdalena in Arzúa. The rest of the afternoon is ours to enjoy at leisure, before we are conveyed to this evening's residence, Pazo de Brandeso. Tonight's meal is enjoyed in our accommodation's elegant dining room.

Day 16 Arzúa
Hike - 24kms

Our westward journey continues as we set out on our walk from Arzúa, the hamlet of O Amenal today's goal. We enter and depart the forest at regular intervals and reach the small town of Boavista, enjoying a light lunch along the way. O Amenal welcomes us and we take the rest of the day at leisure. Our vehicles then return us to Arzúa, where our vitality is restored in one of the town's finest restaurants. We then enjoy a second night at Pazo de Brandeso.

Day 17 Santiago de Compostela
Hike - 15kms

We have 15 kilometres left to go. One hour from Santiago de Compostela, we reach Monte do Gozo, where we glimpse our first sight of the grand cathedral's spires. We feel an emotional tug – we are on the finishing stretch. Modern roads give way to winding medieval lanes as we enter the old city, then suddenly, from the square of Obradoiro, we see the cathedral itself, soaring from the ground. We have arrived. With reverence, we enter via the Portico of Glory, itself a microcosm of the bible in exquisite stone. We each take a moment, coming to terms with the magnitude of our endeavour. This evening, we select from Santiago de Compostela's many first-rate restaurants. In May, the charming Hotel Quinta da Auga Santiago welcomes us for the next two nights, while the magnificent Parador de Santiago is our home for two nights on our September departure.

Day 18 Santiago de Compostela
One final ceremony marks the end of our journey – the legendary pilgrim's mass at the cathedral. It features the incredible Botafumeiro, a giant thurible, or incense burner on chains. Weighing 80 kilograms when full and 21 metres at maximum swing, it requires eight men to operate. They pull on it in unison, swinging the thurible above the congregation's heads and perfuming the air. Tonight, we indulge ourselves with a private dinner within our hotel, calling for multiple toasts to our incredible experience. It would not be amiss to say that we have grown in wisdom and resilience, and lighter in spirit.

Day 19 Santiago de Compostela
We enjoy a final morning at leisure before our rewarding adventure concludes.