



fresco
TOURS

A Fresco Start Camino 200 km
Your Self-Guided Walk to Santiago
- an adventure from our backyard -



A Fresco Start Camino 200 km

13 days / 12 nights The Last 208 km to Santiago

I first walked the Camino de Santiago in 1999 and since then, I've led over 100 groups along the Way. Over the years, I've seen many pilgrims walk, cycle, horseback and a few wheelchairs on their way to Santiago de Compostela. While we are very proud of our high-quality, full-service, guided cultural walking tours of the Camino de Santiago, we also recognize that some people would rather not have 2 guides with them and there are others that just do not like "group tours", despite the fabulous gourmet picnics we prepare!



In addition, we also understand that people do want to walk the Camino, BUT....

- ➔ Would rather not sleep in albergues, the communal dormitories available along the trail. Some pilgrims enjoy having their own bedrooms with a door, an en-suite bathroom, and plenty of hot water!
- ➔ Do not want or cannot carry all their belongings with them. In fact, they enjoy being able to add some extra weight to their load and have some creature comforts, such as that iPad!
- ➔ Are nervous and scared! Coming to a foreign country to walk for a couple weeks is daunting no matter how many books and web forums you've read. You want more than just an Orientation Packet sent to you in the mail – you want a LIVE person to answer your questions and help you take those first steps on your journey.
- ➔ Don't want to eat alone. Independence can be great when traveling, but it is also nice to have some occasional companions to share those tales from the trail and a meal or two!

With these thoughts in mind, we created "A Fresco Start Camino – Self-Guided Walk to Santiago". On this journey, you will cover the last 208 km of the trail on foot as you start from the town of Ponferrada. We will take care of your hotel arrangements, breakfasts, and luggage transfers as you go along the trail. All walking will be from inn to inn, so no need for shuttles in taxis or regrouping points.

A Fresco Start Camino will have set departure date, which ensures that our favorite hotels have already been booked. It also means that you will coincide with other pilgrims of the "group" (max 15 pilgrims on each departure date) that you can interact with and have that glass of *tinto*, if you wish.

Lastly, but most importantly, A Fresco Start Camino means just that – a Fresco Tours guide will meet you at the Start! On the first evening in Ponferrada, we will personally meet you to give you an Orientation Meeting, hand out your Welcome Packet that includes the Pilgrim's Passport, and take you out for a fine meal of local cuisine! On the very next morning, your guide will be on hand to answer any questions that may have popped up overnight and walk with you out of town to help get your "feet wet" and introduce you to the symbols and markers of the Camino! Just a bit of experienced guidance, before you head out to Santiago on your own!

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Day 1: Ponferrada

In the afternoon (7:00PM), we meet the group in the town of Ponferrada, home of the Knights Templar's amazing 12th century castle. Your Fresco Tours guide will hand out your Orientation Packets and review all the materials to get you ready for your Pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago! Afterwards, we'll take you to get your first stamp in your Pilgrim's Passport before enjoying a traditional meal from the Bierzo Valley. (D)

Day 2: Ponferrada to Villafranca

With our boots and scallop shells on, your Fresco Tours guide escorts you out of town following various Camino markers and the famous yellow arrow. Shortly after, we find ourselves among the vineyards of this up- and- coming wine region. Here we bid you a last "Buen Camino" as you continue on your own along the Way to Santiago! You finish the walk in the town of Villafranca del Bierzo, where you first come upon the 12th century Romanesque church dedicated to Santiago. (B)

23 km / 14 mi



Day 3: Villafranca to Ambasmestas

15 km / 9 mi

Today is a short day to give your feet some relief. You have a gentle walk along the Valcarce River Valley passing through serene hamlets of classic slate roofs and tiny gardens. As you walk through shady stretches, you see evidence of the lumber industry that is helping to support this area. Although you have yet to enter into Galicia, this area certainly feels very Gallego/Galician, the Ireland of Spain. Listen carefully and you'll note the melodic rhythms of the locals as they speak and go about their day. (B)

Day 4: Ambasmestas to O Cebreiro

12 km / 8 mi

Have an extra coffee at breakfast, as today you walk up to O Cebreiro! Fortunately, today is another light day, which will give you plenty of time to meander up to the top at a leisurely pace. Make sure you enjoy the hamlets along the way – perhaps a stop in Herrarias to dip your toes in its refreshing river! Once in O Cebreiro, sit on the stone wall and watch the setting sun. After a magnificent view, visit the tiny church of Santa Maria. (B)

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Day 5: O Cebreiro to Triacastela

21 km / 13 mi

After breakfast, get the blood going with a steady climb to the Alto do Poio, the highest point on the Camino de Santiago in Galicia. Keep an eye out for Carmen, a local villager who sells freshly made crepes to the pilgrims that pass by her door! After a stamp and a coffee, you begin your steady descent down to the town of Triacastela, named after the three castles that once stood watch over the village. (B)

Day 6: Triacastela to Sarria

San Xil: 17 km / 11 mi, Samos: 24 km / 15 mi

Today is the day of the difficult decision! What to do? The Camino de Santiago has two paths to reach Sarria – take the high road through San Xil (shorter) and enjoy the beautiful views from atop the ridge or visit the ancient monastery of Samos along the river valley. You'll have to choose one or the other, or



maybe do both! By day, walk along the hills of San Xil and in the evening, catch a taxi to visit one of Spain's oldest monasteries! (B)

Day 7: Sarria to Portomarín

22 km / 14 mi

Sarria is a large market town filled with small shops that cater to both locals and faraway pilgrims. Strolling through the countryside on a combination of tiny backroads and country footpaths, you will pass the 100 km marker, a milestone (or kmstone!) for the millions of pilgrims who have traversed this same spot during the last millennium. Onward, we continue to Portomarín, where we see the 12th-century Church of San Juan, a fortified church, standing guard over the River Miño. (B)

Day 8: Portomarín to Lestedo

20 km / 12 mi

More than halfway to Santiago, leaving Portomarín the walk begins with a gentle climb out of the river valley and through typical Galician villages, decorated with hórreos, raised corncribs, and the occasional carved granite cross that marks the way to Santiago. In the hamlet of Lameiros, pay special attention to the 17th century Cross showing the Crucifixion of Christ. As you work your way into Palas de Rei, you'll begin to notice the many eucalyptus forests of Galicia. (B)

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Day 9: Lestedo to Melide

19 km / 12 mi

Following the yellow arrows, you continue to ramble up and down gentle rolling hills along quiet forest paths. Little has changed in this quiet corner of Spain, and the peaceful rural environment of local farmers in stone houses accompanies us back to another time. You quickly arrive to the present– day at the bustling market town of Melide, where octopus (pulpo) is boiled in large copper kettles next to the street! (B)

Day 10: Melide to Arzúa

14 km / 9 mi

On the outskirts of Melide, stop to admire the 12th century church of Santa Maria, a gem of the Romanesque period. Following the Camino through eucalyptus forests, you quickly come into Boente, whose tiny Santiago Church has a simple, but lovely wooden altarpiece. (B)

Day 11: Arzúa to Arca

18 km / 11 mi

Today, you start to get closer to Santiago and the excitement starts to build! Get a feel for the people and greet a local villager with a “Buenos dias” or “Hola”. You’ll see how these quiet and reserved people quickly wish you well on your journey to Santiago. On this trek, you’re no longer a tourist, but a pilgrim on the Camino de Santiago! Just a few steps from Santiago... (B)

Day 12: Arca to Santiago

20 km / 13 mi

11 days, 208 kilometers, and you have arrived at Santiago de Compostela. Congratulations! Head to the Pilgrims' Office for your last stamp in your passport and request that well– deserved certificate, the Compostela, for having walked to Santiago. You are going to love this magical city filled with fantastic monuments and with the lively buzz from the international pilgrims and university students that fill its medieval streets. (B)

Day 13: Itinerary Ends

After breakfast, our local historian 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)

* Please note, this itinerary is subject to slight modifications due to hotel availability, weather, festivals & other occurrences



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For 2024 Tour Dates:



WHAT'S INCLUDED:

Orientation Meeting: A Fresco Tour guide will hand deliver you an Orientation Packet and give you a detailed meeting on the first night in Ponferrada. Your Welcome Packet is filled with all the materials you'll need to transform into a pilgrim: Your credentials (Pilgrim's Passport), a scallop shell, daily maps of the route, a guidebook with historical information of the villages that you will pass through, and a few other goodies for the trail! We will answer any questions that you have before starting your journey to Santiago and on the next morning, lead you out on The Way! Minimum of 3 people for this service to be provided.

Accommodations: 12 nights in a combination of 3 & 4– star hotels, restored manor homes, and small inns located on the Camino. All rooms have their own bathrooms. We have chosen places for their hospitality, comfort, and location. *Keep in mind that as you will be walking through rural countryside, the availability of 3 & 4– star hotels all along the route is not possible.

Meals: All breakfasts are included with your hotels. We have arranged that they will be supplemented from the standard Spanish breakfast of coffee & toast. The first night of the itinerary, our guide will take you for dinner at one of our favorite places in Ponferrada – wine and beer included. Afterwards, we will provide you with a list of places along the Camino with food recommendations. Let us know if you have any dietary restrictions and we can ask our hotels to accommodate for those as well!

Limited Group Size: Although this tour is Self– Guided, we have limited the size of each departure 15 passengers. Availability is on a first come, first serve basis.

Luggage Transport: We will arrange for the transfer of 1 suitcase / piece of luggage (20 kg / 45 lbs) per person between your hotels on your walk along the Camino. If you require more than 1 bag, please contact us for details.

Guided Visit: In Santiago, our local art historian will provide you with a guided visit of the Cathedral and the surrounding squares. **Minimum of 5 people is necessary for this service to be provided.**

Pre / During / Post Service: We are here to help! Need assistance with hotels prior to or after your trip? Train tickets to Ponferrada? Returning from Santiago? Questions about what to wear? Need a taxi while on the trail? Based in Spain, we are here to make sure that your trip runs smooth as can be – don't hesitate to ask for our help!