SLACKPACKING THE CAMINO FRANCESC

By Sylvia Nilsen

Lightfoot Guide
‘Slackpacking’ is a relatively new term used to describe any kind of trekking or hiking with support. Whether trekking with pack-horses in the Andes, donkeys in Peru, or employing Sherpa when hiking in the Himalaya, slackpacking has been the preferred mode of trekking for millennia.

It is thought that the term was first used to describe hikers doing the Appalachian Trail in the US with backup support and resupply. In contrast to the extreme hikers who trek long distances carrying heavy loads on their backs and sleeping outdoors, the slackpacker carries a daypack with basic necessities and transfers the rest of his or her baggage ahead. On many such treks rooms in hostels or hotels are pre-booked.

Any tour company that offers multi-day walks with baggage transfer and accommodation booked, whether it is guided or guided, is offering a slackpacking experience.”
About the author

*Sylvia Nilsen* is a South African freelance writer who has been published in numerous local and international publications. She worked as a research agent and editor for a UK-based travel guide publisher and produced several African city and country guides.

Sylvia has walked over 5 000 km of Camino trails in France and Spain, as well as from Switzerland to Rome on the Via Francigena pilgrimage.

She has served as a volunteer hospitalero in Spain and is a Spanish accredited hospitalero volunteer trainer in South Africa having trained 42 new volunteers.

With amaWalkers Camino (Pty) Ltd she leads small groups of pilgrims on slackpacking trails on the Camino Frances.

This is Sylvia’s 7th pilgrimage related book.

Other books by this author published by LightFoot Guides

**YOUR CAMINO on foot, bicycle or horseback in France and Spain**

A comprehensive Camino planning guide offering advice to pilgrims on choosing a route, how to get to the start, info for people with disabilities, cyclists, walking with children, with a dog, a donkey or doing the Camino on horseback, with 300 pages of advice and information.

**CAMINO LINGO, English-Spanish Words and Phrases for Pilgrims on el Camino de Santiago.**

Compiled by Sylvia Nilsen and her Spanish teacher Reinette Novóa, this is a cheat’s guide to speaking Spanish on the Camino. No complicated verb conjugations or rules on grammar, this book offers over 650 words and phrases just for pilgrims.
e-Books available from Amazon Kindle

- **Pilgrim Footprints on the Sands of Time**  
  (12th century historical novel)

- **Three Short Hikes on el Camino de Santiago**  
  (Aragones Route, Camino Ingles and Santiago to Finisterre plus 15-day hospitalera in San Roque)

- **La via Turonensis – from Paris to Spain**  
  (1120km walk to Spain in the 2004 Holy Year)

- **La via Francigena – Five Pilgrims to Rome**  
  (From Switzerland to Rome in 2006)
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Pilgrimage Publications:
I am especially grateful to Babette and Paul at Pilgrimage Publications for taking this book on as a project.

People who shared information from their websites include:

Joan Fiol – Gronze.com: Camino maps
Arturo Murias – Godesalco.com: Itineraries
Photos from Wikipedia
Reinette Novóa – for Appendix 1 from Camino Lingo
Sandi Beukes for the illustrations

Disclaimer
At the time of going to print, the distances between towns and villages were correct. Hotels, pensiones, hostales and other accommodation websites were checked as correct. Place names change, hotels close down and new ones open; websites, telephone numbers and email addresses change. Sometimes routes are changed and new deviations or detours are established which can affect the mileages.

Changes are inevitable and we welcome any feedback on changes that will enable us to enhance the quality of this guide. Please post changes or new information on my website:
www.sylvianilsensbooks.weebly.com
# CONTENTS

## Introduction
- Pilgrims on the Camino – then and now 1
- Doing “The Way” your way 2
- Is this book for you? 3

## Chapter 1

### When and where to start walking 4
- Towns that are easily reached where you can start your Camino 5
- Credencial del Peregrino – Pilgrims’ Passport 5
- Best time to walk a camino 6
- Weather Tables 6
  - May and June 6
  - September and October 7
- Where to start and how to get there 7
- Starting at St Jean 7
- Starting at Roncesvalles 10
- Starting at Pamplona 11
- Starting at Burgos 12
- Starting at Leon 13
- Starting at Astorga 14
- Starting at Ponferrada 15
- Starting at O Cebreiro 16
- Starting at Sarria 17
- Getting back home 18

## Chapter 2

### Accommodation 19
- Different types of accommodation 19
- Reserving rooms online 23
- Booking hotel rooms 23
- Booking rooms in Hostels 23

## Chapter 3

### Luggage transfers and camino tour companies 25
- Luggage Transfers 25
- Backpacks 25
- Companies that transfer luggage 27
- Posting luggage ahead 29
- Camino Tour Companies 31
Chapter 4

Walking stages and itineraries
Notes for this itinerary:
  Itinerary 1: 10km to 15km daily stages
  Itinerary 2: 15km to 20km daily stages
  Itinerary 3: 20 km to 25 km daily stages
  Itinerary 4: 5km to 8km, 17 daily stages from 100km to Santiago
Notes for this itinerary:
  17-day, 5km to 8km stages from 100km to Santiago

Chapter 5

Detours on the Camino Frances

Appendices

Appendix 1
Camino Lingo – checking into accommodation

Appendix 2
Packing lists - Ladies and Men

Appendix 3
Camino Planner

Appendix 4
Trains and buses

Appendix 5
Taxis
Introduction

“I’ve walked to Santiago seven times since 2002, mostly carrying a full backpack and sleeping in pilgrim shelters. Every year the number of pilgrims grew and I started to dread the daily race for beds and queuing for a bunk-bed in over-crowded shelters. Staying in rooms, especially private pilgrim refuges, means that I still enjoy the camaraderie of other pilgrims, and get a good night’s sleep! Being able to send my back-pack ahead some days also makes a huge difference to my enjoyment of walking the Camino. Just knowing that I have a bed and a hot shower waiting for me at the end of the day takes all the stress and anxiety out of walking. It gives me time to smell the wildflowers, stop for lunch or do some sight-seeing if I want to”.

Sylvia Nilsen 2013

Pilgrims on the Camino – then and now

From the time the tomb of the apostle James the Greater was discovered in the 9th century, there has been a melting pot of people on the road to Santiago with as many different types of pilgrims in the Middle Ages as there are today. Besides the hoards of poor, unemployed and penitential pilgrims foot-slogging thousands of miles to the tomb of the apostle, we read about lords and ladies with their entourages, kings and queens with their servants and slaves (who might have carried the lords and ladies in litters for much of the way!); ecclesiastic pilgrims – priests, bishops and even a couple of popes - accompanied by their servants and clerics, and knights travelling with their ladies with their large retinues. These pilgrims would have been hosted in the best monastic quarters, the finest inns, or in castles and palaces with the local royalty.

Many pilgrims went on horseback; others had donkeys or mules to bear their loads. Most of the classic pilgrim stories that have come down to us were written by pilgrims on horseback. There are historical accounts of large caravans of pilgrims on the roads to Santiago – some with camels!

The majority of pilgrims did not walk alone but walked in groups for safety sake. In many countries, large towns and cities had guilds that organised guided group walks to Santiago. It was much safer to travel this way and, like the tour groups of today, pilgrims walked with like-minded people and supported each other on the long journey.
St Bona of Pisa, patron saint of travelers and specifically pilgrims, guides, couriers and flight attendants, led ten such groups of pilgrims from Italy to Santiago in the 12th century and was made an official pilgrim guide by the Knights of Santiago. From the end of the 15th century, anyone who could afford to was able to travel with the postal service – a service with horses and carts that were changed at regular staging posts. From the mid-17th century the ‘Grand Tour’ became popular and it was possible to travel in comfort with a ‘Cicerone’ (a knowledgeable tour guide) and travel agents known as ‘carters’ provided transport, accommodation and food on the road to Santiago.

Slackpacking might be a new term but has been a popular way to trek since the beginning of time and having someone cart your luggage each day while you hike a trail is nothing new. It is becoming more and more popular as people who are not normally extreme hikers take to the trails around the world.

Pilgrimage has always had a commercial aspect with taxes collected to maintain roads and bridges, vendors providing goods and souvenirs, locals offering rooms and tour guides offering safe passage to groups. The large pilgrim churches along the pilgrimage routes in France and Spain survived mainly on donations and bequests made by pilgrims.

**Doing “The Way” your way**

Everyone is entitled to do the Camino their way. Some pilgrims like to walk alone, carrying everything they possess on their backs and staying only in pilgrim shelters. Others enjoy walking for long distances, starting in different countries and taking many months to walk to Santiago – often camping along the way.

Until the reanimation of the old pilgrimage trails in the late 1970s nearly every pilgrim to Santiago arrived there by bus or train. Many went with organised groups or tours, as they still do to other Christian shrines such as Jerusalem, Rome and Fatima or Lourdes. Very few people walk to these shrines.

Over 10 million pilgrims visited Santiago in 2010 (a Holy Year) and of those, only 2% (272 700) walked or cycled the route, the bulk covering the last 100 km. The great majority arrived there by plane, car, bus and train.

Perhaps you prefer not to walk alone for weeks carrying everything on your back, or rough it by staying in crowded pilgrim hostels.

You can choose to walk alone and take pot-luck on finding a room when you arrive in a village or town. (Look out for signs that advertise “Habitaciones/ Rooms/ Zimmer/ Chambre.”) Just remember, if you don’t have a place booked you will have to carry your backpack.
You can book your accommodation ahead of time and have your backpack transferred each day. Or you might prefer to walk with like-minded people in an organized group. You can book guided and unguided tours on the Camino with any of the reputable companies listed in this book. If you are pressed for time you can choose to walk a section of the trail, then get a bus or taxi further down the route. Many people don’t have five or six weeks to spare, meaning that they have to take a taxi or a bus to a few places.

This book is to help you plan your perfect Camino. It can be used alone or as a companion to my comprehensive planning guide “YOUR CAMINO on foot, bicycle or horseback in France and Spain”.

Is this book for you?

• You want to do the Camino but don’t fancy staying in crowded dormitories or pilgrim refuges every night.

• You would you prefer to take your time walking, stopping when you want to and sightseeing, knowing that you have a room with a hot shower waiting for you at the end of the day.

• You would prefer to carry just a day-pack and send your heavier baggage ahead where possible.

• You can afford to pay upwards of €18 per day for a private room and between €5 and €7 per day to have your luggage transferred.

If you said YES to these five statements, then this is the perfect book to plan your Camino!
When and Where to Start Walking

In Spain, ‘all roads lead to Santiago’. This book focuses on one road, the Camino Frances, the route most people have read about, or seen a film on it. This is the Jacobean Route par excellence, the one with the best infrastructures, buses, trains, transport companies, airports, and the largest variety of accommodations.

Many guide books list the starting place for the Camino Frances at the medieval village of St Jean Pied de Port (St John at the Foot of the Pass) in France, or at Roncesvalles in the Spanish Pyrenees.

In the Middle Ages pilgrims left from their front door which might have been 1000 km or 120 km from Santiago! You can start walking this route from anywhere along the 780km trail – including St Jean and Roncesvalles - but also from Pamplona, Burgos, Leon, O Cebreiro or Sarria.

If you want to earn the Compostela, the certificate of completion based on a 14th century document, you will have to prove to the pilgrim’s office staff that you have
walked the last 100 km to Santiago by producing a pilgrims’ passport (the Credencial) filled with stamps from the places where you have stayed or from tourist offices, churches, bars etc. The nearest biggish town to the 100 km mark is Sarria -114 km from Santiago.

**Towns that are easily reached where you can start your Camino**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Distance from Santiago</th>
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**Credencial del Peregrino – Pilgrims’ Passport**

The Credencial will give you access to the albergues in Spain, including the private albergues. You can obtain this passport from the St James association in your country or from the pilgrim’s office in St Jean, the albergue in Roncesvalles or Pamplona. It is also available from some churches, cathedrals or tourism offices in Spain.

Although you are ‘slackpacking’ and staying in private rooms, the private albergues, where you can book ahead or have your luggage transferred to, require that you present the pilgrim’s credencial in order to stay with them. (You don’t need one for other establishments.)

When you register at the albergue, you will receive a rubber stamp in your passport and these are often a wonderful souvenir of your pilgrimage with delightful stamps from all the different places you’ve stayed in.

You will need to present the stamped credencial at the Pilgrim’s Office in Santiago in order to earn the Compostela, a certificate of completion given to all pilgrims who walk the last 100 km or cycle the last 200 km to Santiago.
BEST TIME TO WALK A CAMINO

The best months to walk the Camino Frances are May/June and September/October. Spring arrives late in the northern villages of Spain and in the Pyrenees there can be snowfalls and heavy rain right up to the end of April. Spring is a great time to walk, when everything is green, the wild-flowers are spectacular and the large white and black European stork all have fat babies in their huge nests on top of church towers and specially built towers.

In September the countryside is drier but although the stork and flowers have long gone, walking in autumn has its own beauty with fields of gold and ochre and the gifts of harvest time. The grapes are heavy on the vines, wild bramble berries line the paths, figs, nuts, raspberries and other fruits are plentiful.

July and August are generally hot months and, with August being the Spanish holiday month, the trails and pilgrim accommodation in Spain can become overcrowded.

By the end of October the chill returns and it can be frosty in the high places in October and November. Daylight hours are shortened and whilst the sun sets after 10pm in May and June, sunrise in October is 8am and sunset before 7pm.

Winter is the most challenging time to walk, with even shorter daylight hours, probability of heavy snowfalls covering the yellow arrows and many places closed.

Weather Tables

These weather tables detail 30-year average weather figures on the Camino Frances.

### MAY

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### WHERE TO START AND HOW TO GET THERE

**Starting at St Jean - 775km**
Getting to St Jean Pied de Port

UK to Bayonne
From London - Eurolines – National Express overnight coach.

Nearest airport Biarritz:
From the UK: Ryanair and EasyJet.

From Paris: If you fly to Paris, you can get a local flight or EasyJet flight to Biarritz. Or you can take a fast or slow train. www.sncf.com

There is no direct bus or train service to St Jean Pied de Port from the main cities of France or Spain. From France you have to get to Biarritz/Bayonne and then travel from there to St Jean by bus or train (whichever is running that day).

From Biarritz you can travel to Bayonne by train or on the #6 bus to the train station. It leaves about every 30 minutes and takes about 45 minutes. From Bayonne you take another train or bus to St Jean, about 1.5 hours through pretty countryside. www.sncf.com

Download an up-to-date timetable here. Under ‘My Journey’ enter ‘Line 62 Bayonne to St Jean Pied de Port’ http://tinyurl.com/bj9cmcu

A quicker and easier way (but obviously more costly) is to take a taxi from Bayonne/Biarritz to St Jean using the local taxi service: www.taxisbiarritz.fr

Express Bourricot (Smart Donkey), which is based in St Jean, operates a shuttle service between French airports and St Jean, transporting pilgrims from Pau, Bilbao and Irún to St Jean Pied de Port. There is a facility on their website to form a carpool. They also transport luggage over the mountain from St Jean to Roncesvalles. www.expressbourricot.com

From Spain

From Madrid or Barcelona you can travel to Pamplona by train or bus. In Pamplona you have the choice of a daily, 18h00 bus to Roncesvalles where taxis wait to take pilgrims to St Jean. (No Sunday bus). www.autocaresartieda.com

In the summer, from mid-June to September, ALSA put on two buses a day between Pamplona and St Jean at 14h00 and 17h30, with one return bus at 19h30. www.alsa (International search)

Or you can take the taxi from Pamplona to St Jean
Tel: 948 23 23 00  948 35 13 35

Weekdays: Pamplona to St Jean €96: Pamplona airport to St Pied €100.
Weekends and holidays: Pamplona to St Jean €120: Pamplona airport to St Jean €125.
There is an option to share a taxi with other pilgrims - more information on the website. www.taxipamplona.com/comparte.php
Esprit du Chemin - a pilgrim hostel in St Jean - offers a page on their website for you to put your name down for a ‘carpool’ so that you can share a taxi to St Jean from Pamplona or Roncesvalles.

[www.espritduchemin.org/EC/carpoolEN.html](http://www.espritduchemin.org/EC/carpoolEN.html)

They also have a link to the timetable for the rail/bus line to St Jean, a town map and information on parking your car in St Jean and walking the Camino from there.

[www.espritduchemin.org/English/travelinfo.html](http://www.espritduchemin.org/English/travelinfo.html)

When you arrive in St Jean visit the Pilgrim’s Office to collect a pilgrim passport (credencial) and your scallop shell, symbol of St James. Accueil des pelerins de St-Jacques, 39 rue de la Citadelle. The office is open from 7h30 to 12h30 and then from 13h30 to 22h00.

Accommodation in St Jean Pied de Port
There is plentiful accommodation in St Jean from hiker’s gîtes to B&Bs, pilgrim albergues and hotels. Use this handy website to find rooms by clicking on the accommodation logos on the interactive map. [http://tinyurl.com/adpgwg3](http://tinyurl.com/adpgwg3)

Recommendations:

- **Budget:** Gite Compostela

- **B&B:** Errecaldia
  [www.errecaldia.com/](http://www.errecaldia.com/)

**Route Napoleon or through Val Carlos**
There are two routes over the Pyrenean hills from St Jean to Roncesvalles. The ‘road route’ which is on the original pilgrim’s route through the small village of Val Carlos (Valley of Charlemagne), now a small tarred road with many detours onto walking trails and paths, and a partly cross country route called the Route Napoleon which is a bit steeper and goes a bit higher than the route through Val Carlos.

On the Route Napoleon, many people take two days to walk from St Jean to Roncesvalles, stopping at Refuge Orisson which is 8km up from St Jean. The refuge only has 18 beds in a dormitory room and 6 two-person tents in the grounds behind the refuge. There are no private rooms in Orisson. If you don’t mind sleeping in the tents, you can reserve one by emailing: refuge.orisson@wanadoo.fr

The better solution is to book rooms for two nights in St Jean. Walk to Orisson the next day, or beyond, and arrange for a local taxi to collect you from Orisson, or at the 11.5km mark where you will see the statue of the Biakorri Virgin on the rocks on your left. The taxi can take you back to your accommodation in St Jean. The following day, the taxi can take you back to where you left off so that you can continue walking to Roncesvalles.

If walking two days on the road route you can stay at Val Carlos in a B&B or Casa Rural.
www.luzaide-valcarlos.net/es/fr_turismo.htm

Recommendations:
Hostal Maitena: www.hostalmaitena.com
Casa Marcelino: www.casamarcelino.com

Val Carlos Taxi: Ander Urolategui operates a taxi minivan for 8 people. Tours, hotel transfers, airport, train station. Mobile: 636 191 423. Tel / Fax: 948790218

Useful website: www.turismo.navarra.es

**Starting at Roncesvalles - 750km**

**Getting to Roncesvalles**

Nearest airport Pamplona

The airport is about 7 km from the city accessible by bus or taxi. The daily bus to Roncesvalles leaves from the main Pamplona bus station at 18h00 and takes 1 hour ten minutes to Roncesvalles. Monday to Friday: 18:00 (From July 1 to August 31 there is another at 10h00): Saturdays: 16:00 (July 1 to August 31, there is another at 10h00): Sundays: No Service: Price: €6
www.autocaresartieda.com/?scc=roncesvalles
From 1 June to September, the bus company ALSA.es has two buses per day at 14h00 and 17h30 from the Pamplona bus station to St Jean. It stops at Roncesvalles on the way - €15. The return trip from St Jean is at 19:30. Tickets can be purchased online from the international section of ALSA

**By Taxi**

**Teletaxi San Fermin**  Tel: 948 23 23 00  948 35 13 35
Weekdays: From Pamplona to Roncesvalles €57: from Pamplona airport to Roncesvalles €60
**Weekends and holidays:** From Pamplona to Roncesvalles €70: from Pamplona airport to Roncesvalles €75
There is an option to share a taxi with other pilgrims. More information [www.taxipamplona.com/comparte.php](http://www.taxipamplona.com/comparte.php)

**Accommodation in Roncesvalles**

Roncesvalles is a small monastery complex that boasts two inns, a new Hotel that occupies a part of the monastery and a pilgrims’ hostel – where you can book a bunk bed. Your luggage will be transported to the La Posada.

- Pilgrims’ albergue realcolegiata@hotmail.com
- Casa de Beneficados [www.casadebeneficados.com](http://www.casadebeneficados.com)
- La Posada [www.laposadaderoncesvalles.com](http://www.laposadaderoncesvalles.com)
- Casa Sabina [www.casasabina.es](http://www.casasabina.es)

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**Starting at Pamplona - 707km**
Getting to Pamplona

Pamplona, the historical capital of Navarra, is famous for the San Fermin festival and the running of the bulls which takes place from 6 – 14 July every year. Accommodation in and around Pamplona is at a premium during the festival and prices quadruple.

From Madrid:
By bus: www.alsa.es
By train: www.renfe.es
Fly: www.iberia.com

From Barcelona:
By bus: www.vibasa.es
By train: www.renfe.es
There are three trains to Pamplona daily.

Accommodation in Pamplona

Check Booking.com for a variety of accommodation from pensiones and hostales to five star hotels.

Recommendations:

Pension Sarasate  http://pensionsarasate.es/
Hotel la Perla  www.granhotellaperla.com/
(Ernest Hemingway’s room has been preserved in this recently renovated 5-star hotel.)

Starting at Burgos – 490km

Getting to Burgos

From Barcelona
Train: www.renfe.es
Bus:  www.alsa.es

From Madrid
Three trains a day: www.renfe.es
About 20 buses per day: www.Alsa.es

Accommodation in Burgos

Check Booking.com for a variety of accommodation from pensiones and hostales to five star hotels.
Recommendations

AC Hotel Burgos
www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/rgsbufac-hotel-burgos/
Hotel Maria Luisa
www.marialuisahotel.com/es/burgos/

Getting to Leon

From Barcelona
By bus: www.alsa.es
By train: www.renfe.es

From Bilbao
By train: www.renfe.es

From Madrid
By bus: www.alsa.es
By train: www.renfe.es
By air: Fly to Valladolid.
Alsa.es runs a direct bus service from the airport to Leon – 1h45mins.

Accommodation in Leon

Check Booking.com for a variety of accommodation from pensiones and hostales to five star hotels and a parador.

Recommendations

Hostal San Martín         www.sanmartinhostales.es/
Hotel Albany             www.albanyleon.com
Parador de Leon          www.parador.es/en/parador-de-leon
Getting to Astorga

By bus: There are 4 daytime buses from Madrid to Astorga

**Or From Madrid to Leon:**

Travel to Leon by train or bus. You can get the ALSA bus from Madrid Barajas airport. It takes about five hours [www.alsa.es](http://www.alsa.es)

Train: [www.renfe.es](http://www.renfe.es)
The train station you need is Madrid-Chamartin. You get there on the metro line which leaves from the airport.

Once in Leon you can get an ALSA bus to Astorga. There are over 20 buses a day, they take about 50 minutes

Accommodation in Astorga

Check [Booking.com](http://Booking.com) for a variety of accommodation from pensiones and hostales to five star hotels

**Recommendations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hotel</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Gaudi</td>
<td><a href="http://www.gaudihotel.es">www.gaudihotel.es</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostal Coruña</td>
<td><a href="http://www.reservascoruna.net/">www.reservascoruna.net/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Starting at Ponferrada – 210km

Getting to Ponferrada

From Bilbao
By bus: www.alsa.es
By train: www.renfe.es

From Madrid:
By bus: www.alsa.es
By train: www.renfe.es

Accommodation in Ponferrada

Check Booking.com for a variety of accommodation from pensiones and hostales to five star hotels.

Recommendations

Hotel Los Templarios  www.hotellostemplarios.info
Aroi Ponferrada  www.aroihoteles.com
Hotel Novo  www.hotelnovo.com/es/index.html
Getting to O Cebreiro

There is no public transport to the hilltop village of O Cebreiro. Buses stop at Piedrafita Cebreiro which is at the bottom of the hill, about 5km from O Cebreiro. You can walk up the tarred road to O Cebreiro, a pleasant 5km walk with picnic tables on the side of the road about half-way up. Or, you can take a taxi from Piedrafita to O Cebreiro.

From Bilbao
By bus to Piedrafita: www.alsa.es

From Madrid
By bus to Piedrafita: www.alsa.es

From Pamplona
By bus to Piedrafita via Lugo  www.alsa.es

From Santiago de Compostela
By bus to Piedrafita www.alsa.es

Accommodation in O Cebreiro

There are more inns and Casas in O Cebreiro than local homes! Check the Spain info website for a complete list and reserve a room from there.
http://tinyurl.com/b6trjmy

Recommendations

Hostal Residencia San Giraldo de Aurillac
Casa Rural Venta Celta*
Casa Rural Centro de Turismo Rural Casa Carolo
Starting at Sarria — 114km

Getting to Sarria

From Madrid:
By Train: Monday to Friday and Sunday (no service on Saturday): There is a Hotel-Train at 22:30 which arrives in Sarria at 6:50 the next day. www.renfe.es

From Santiago:
You can fly to Santiago and take a taxi from there or a bus to Lugo and from there to Sarria.

Flights to Santiago:
There are 5 daily flights on Iberia, from Madrid to Santiago (1hr10mins) ± $134 return (€101) or check RyanAir for flights ‘in season’ for about $40 (€30) one way

By bus from Santiago (you will need to take two buses – one to Lugo and then to Sarria)

To Lugo: The Company Freire, SL runs between Santiago and Lugo. You can get the bus from the Santiago airport or from the bus station in Santiago. Check the timetables on the website http://www.empresafreire.com

From Lugo to Sarria: The Company Monforte, SA runs buses from Lugo to Sarria. There are several buses every day of the week. http://www.monbus.es

Taxi: From Santiago airport to Sarria for about $132 (€100). The taxis take 4 people so you could share with other pilgrims

Accommodation in Sarria

Check Booking.com for a variety of accommodation from pensiones and hostales to five star hotels.

Recommendations

Casa Matias Booking.com
Pension/apartment Escalanata www.pensionescalinate.es
Hotel Oca Villa de Sarria Booking.com
Getting back home

- The Central Bus Station in Santiago is at Plaza Camilo Díaz Baliño: Tel: 54 981 24 16 [www.tussa.org](http://www.tussa.org).
- The Train Station – Rua Hórreo: Tel: 902 240 202 [www.renfe.es](http://www.renfe.es)
- The Freire bus line connects Santiago to Lavacolla airport. Tel: 58 981 81 11 [www.empresafreire.com](http://www.empresafreire.com)
- La Coruna: You can go by bus or train: [www.renfe.es](http://www.renfe.es) Bus is cheaper and more frequent. [www.monbus.es](http://www.monbus.es)
- Barcelona: Fly Spanair, Vueling or Ryanair. By bus 17 hours – no direct train.
- Biarritz: Train [www.renfe.es](http://www.renfe.es)
- Bilbao: Train [www.renfe.es](http://www.renfe.es) 10.5 hours
- Irun: Train [www.renfe.es](http://www.renfe.es) 11.5 hours
- Paris: You can take the Renfe train from Santiago which leaves about 9h00 and connects with the SNCF night train at Hendaye arriving in Paris at about 7h00, or fly on [Vueling.com](http://Vueling.com)

**Airlines that fly from Santiago’s Lavacolla airport**

- Aerolineas Argentinas Buenos Aires-Ezeiza
- Aer Lingus Dublin [seasonal]
- Air Berlin Palma de Mallorca
- Air Europa Fuerteventura, Lanzarote, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Tenerife-South
- Iberia Madrid
- Ryanair (seasonal so check website [ryanair.com](http://ryanair.com))
Chapter 2

ACCOMMODATION

There are many different types of accommodation on the Camino Frances with something to satisfy every pilgrim from basic rooms in private pilgrim refuges to sumptuous suites in paradores.

Different types of accommodation

Parador (Photo Wiki)

Paradores are top class luxury hotels in monasteries, castles, palaces and other historic buildings. Guests between 20 and 35 years of age (inclusive) can often stay at participating paradores for under €60 per person per night with buffet breakfast included. During low season, guests 55 years and older can enjoy a 30% discount.

The Hostal de los Reyes Catolicos in Santiago was built in 1499 as a pilgrim hospice and hospital. It became a hotel in 1953 and is one of Spain’s most sumptuous state run paradores with rooms costing from €210 to €525 per night. It retains the tradition of providing a free meal to at least ten pilgrims each day. Some paradores offer a limited number of double/twin standard rooms from €60 per night and reduced rates for seniors. Rooms must be booked in advance.  

www.paradores-spain.com
Hotel

One to five-star hotels can be found throughout Spain. Most hotels have seasonal price structures and room charges will depend on the time of year you travel. The annual Guía oficial de hotels published by the Instituto de Turismo de España is available from most bookstores, or contact your local Spanish Tourist Board for a copy. 

www.spainbookers.com/

Casa rural

These country houses include B&B, cottages and apartments. Accommodation ranges from simple and homely to upmarket luxury. www.colourofspain.com

Posada

A chain of affiliated lodging inns or rustic hotels (not to be confused with fondas), these are usually upmarket country or city inns with good accommodation and meals. www.posadascaminodesantiago.com/alojamientos.php

Hostal

A little downscale from hotels – the hostales are graded according to a three-star system. (Not to be confused with hostels). www.todohotel.com/Hoteles/hostales.html

Pension

Marked with a ‘P’ on a sign, there are many more pensiones than fondas and they generally offer more up-market accommodation than the fondas. Many are family owned and in towns and cities occupy one or two floors in a general purpose building.

Fonda

Marked with a white ‘F’ on a blue sign, the fondas are small inns; most are very basic and do not offer en suite bathrooms or any luxuries.

Hostels

Spain has about 200 youth hostels, most of which are members of the Red Española de Albergues Juveniles (REAJ). (Not to be confused with the hostales) www.reaj.com

Albergue del peregrinos

Albergues are also known as refugios, refuges, pilgrim shelters and albergues del peregrinos.
In 1987, at a meeting of interested Camino Associations in Jaca, it was decided to create special overnight lodgings along the Camino Frances for pilgrims. Each region was responsible for motivating for the church and municipality to provide ‘refuges’ for pilgrims – not for tourists – in their area. Found in almost every town and village, they follow a 1 000-year-old tradition of providing shelter to pilgrims on their way to the tomb of St James.

In order to differentiate between tourist and pilgrim, a simple ‘credencial’ or pilgrim’s passport was designed. These are carried by the pilgrim and produced at the ‘refugios’, churches, museums, tourist offices etc along the way where they are stamped to prove that the pilgrim is walking, horse riding or cycling the Camino. The Spanish Federation of Hospitaleros Voluntarios (volunteer wardens) trains people to serve as volunteers in the many donativo pilgrim shelters in Spain. Training courses can also be done in the USA, Canada, South Africa, France and Italy.

On the Camino Frances there are 10 645 beds spread over 242 hostels. The average price for a bunk bed in a hostel is €6.50. There is, on average, a place with a shelter every 6.3 km. Pilgrim refuges are found in restored churches, halls, renovated barns, private homes and specially built structures. Some are open all year; others only in summer, so always check your guide book before deciding on where to stay.

What are they like?

Some are modern and upmarket, others are ancient and basic. Some are small and accommodate only 10 or 12 people. (Medieval shelters often housed 12 pilgrims, the number of the apostles.) Others can accommodate 200 people.

In Hospital de San Nicolas, 10 people sleep in the loft of a restored hermitage church. As part of the pilgrim blessing the hospitaleros wash the pilgrim’s feet – following the tradition of Maundy Thursday when Christ washed the feet of his disciples – and you have a communal dinner by lamplight.

Some of the 242 albergues on the Camino Frances are up-market, like university campus digs with all mod-cons including vending machines, cafeteria, bar and computer room with Internet. Many also have wifi.

Some albergues are supported by the church, some by the local government or municipality; others are owned and run by volunteers from different Confraternities of St James around the world. There are albergues that are owned by individuals or
families who have devoted their lives to providing shelter to pilgrims. Most of the municipal, church and confraternity owned albergues are ‘donativo’ – for a donation. The municipal or church sponsored albergues in the Province of Galicia charge €6.

You cannot book a bed ahead at a donativo church, municipal or CSJ owned albergue. These are run on a first come, first served basis. Most of these also don’t accept pilgrims with vehicle back-up, those who have sent their backpacks on ahead, or who have arrived by bus, train or taxi, and many do not accept large groups – usually more than six pilgrims. These albergues also have a ‘pecking order’ in that walking pilgrims take priority and pilgrims on bicycles often have to wait until evening before being told whether or not they have a bed for the night.

Some of the newer albergues offer private single and double rooms, rooms for four or six people with en suite bathroom and dormitories that sleep up to 80 pilgrims. The charges vary from €5 for a general dormitory to €30 for a private double room. Many of the privately owned albergues have come together under the umbrella of an organisation called Red de Albergues Camino de Santiago. They publish an annually updated fold-out list of all the albergues along the Camino Frances, ‘donde el Camino se hace reposo’ (where the Camino sleeps), with the mileage between villages and towns, and symbols indicating whether the establishment has Internet, a kitchen, laundry facilities, a bar or restaurant, etc.

Their ‘Rules of Use’ are that the albergues are for the exclusive use of pilgrims on foot, bicycle or horseback who have the pilgrims’ credencial. However, one can reserve beds ahead at many of these albergues and they also provide contact details for pilgrims wanting to send their backpacks on ahead.

If you would like to experience the camaraderie of staying in an albergue and interacting with other pilgrims, without having to sleep in overcrowded dormitories, these types of albergues are the ideal option. You will sleep in a private room but will share the public areas, kitchen and/or dining room with pilgrims from all over the world. [www.redalberguessantiago.com](http://www.redalberguessantiago.com)

To find out more about the pilgrim albergues you can visit these websites:

**Albergues in Spain:**
[www.caminodesantiago.consumer.es/](http://www.caminodesantiago.consumer.es/)

**Accommodation in France:**
[www.chemindecompostelle.com/](http://www.chemindecompostelle.com/)
Reserving rooms online

Booking hotel rooms

Internet booking

Booking accommodation over the internet has never been easier. You can book rooms directly with the hotel or use an online, hotel booking service.

You don’t even need to be able to speak Spanish to book rooms. Most hotels will use a translator to translate your email request.

See Appendix 1 for a list of Spanish words and phrases to help you make reservations online in Spanish. (Taken from the book ‘CAMINO LINGO English-Spanish Words and Phrases for Pilgrims on el Camino de Santiago’)

Most accommodation booking websites like Booking.com are paid a commission by the hotel so you are not charged upfront for the reservation. In many cases you don’t pay for the rooms until you arrive there. They will take your credit card details and if you do not pitch up, they will charge the booking to your card. Some charge a small deposit which is refundable up to a certain cut-off date.

Which Internet booking service to use?

Frommer’s recently did a survey in search of the best and the not-so-best hotel booking websites taking into consideration the ease in making the reservation, how much information about each hotel is given, if customer reviews are provided, what fees are charged and best of all, if it truly is a rock-bottom deal. Read more here: http://tinyurl.com/aplcm4l

Frommer’s top six hotel booking sites

Booking.com
Hotels.com
morehotels4less.com
Getaroom.com
Hotelreservations.com
HotelGuide.com

Booking rooms in Hostels

Many hostels have private rooms some with shared bathrooms, that are excellent value.

Read reviews on the top hostel booking websites by TravelChimps here: http://inblighty.com/best-hostel-booking-sites.php
TravelChimps top six hostel booking sites

Hostelbookers.com
Hotelworld.com
Hihostels.com
Hostelz.com
Hostels.com
Hostelclub.com

Top Tour of Spain

This website provides a link to inns, hostels, pensions, hotels, paradores, monasteries and apartments, which they believe offer the best rates going.

www.top-tour-of-spain.com/hotel-information-for-spain.html/

www.top-tour-of-spain.com/Camino-de-Santiago-walking-tours.html
Chapter 3

LUGGAGE TRANSFERS AND CAMINO TOUR COMPANIES

Luggage Transfers

Many historical books, movies and websites on the Camino show statues, sculptures, stained glass windows and other works of art depicting pilgrims from the early 12th century to around the 18th century.

The majority of foot pilgrims wore a long, dark robe, carried a simple a shoulder bag called a ‘scrip’, a gourd for water and a staff.

Pilgrims who could afford it went on horseback and they were able to take extra changes in clothing and a few other comforts.

Backpacks

The one thing you won’t see in books or film are medieval pilgrims carrying a backpack! A pilgrim from the middle ages would be astonished to see today’s pilgrims slogging across the Camino with huge packs on their backs.

But, those were different times and modern pilgrims are expected to bathe and change and wash their clothes so most pilgrims carry extra clothing, washing soaps and toiletries and need a back-pack to carry their gear.

Most walking Camino pilgrims only need a small capacity pack to carry their clothing, medication and toiletries. If you intend sending your backpack ahead you could manage with a day-pack whilst walking but ensure that it is comfortable and secure.

In your pack you will carry a rain jacket or poncho, a jacket or fleece, a sitting plastic in case you decide to picnic on the side of the path or sit on a mossy wall, your first aid kit, snacks and drinks. I also recommend carrying your sandals so that you can change into them when you arrive at your hotel.