

Great Explorations

CAMINO DE SANTIAGO

Cycling · 8 or 15 Days



CAMINO DE SANTIAGO

For any traveler interested in history, art, & culture, the Camino de Santiago certainly ranks as one of the most spectacular trips in the world today.

From the 10th Century to the present day, pilgrims have come (by foot and now bicycle) from near and far to experience this enigma of Spain. For riders of this trail, you can choose between a paved or off-road route as it threads its way across Spain. The scenery is breathtaking with lots of cultural and historical sights along the way. For those with the time, we

highly recommend that you consider our Classic route; we maintain that this journey has the potential to change your life (in good ways). For those wishing a shorter journey we also offer the Regular trip beginning in Leon. On both trips we stay in the best hotels available, ranging from traditional inns to luxurious paradors.

ITINERARY

Getting there

Pamplona

You can reach Pamplona through Madrid, Bilbao or Vitoria.

Day 1

Pamplona

Our tour starts in Pamplona. Your hotel is included on arrival day into Pamplona and we'll be meeting at 7:00 pm for orientation and a night of tapas. We stay in a 4-star hotel in the historical centre.

Day 2

Roncesvalles to Pamplona, 26 miles (42 km)

After breakfast we'll transfer to Roncesvalles, the traditional start of the pilgrimage, to begin our journey. This first day's ride is almost all downhill. We'll finish the day with a walking tour of historical Pamplona with a local guide before dinner at our favourite restaurant in town.

Day 3

Pamplona to Estella, 25 miles (40 km)

Leaving Pamplona we'll climb towards the foothills of the Sierra del Perdon, reaching Puente la Reina, with its famous Romanesque bridge and charming town. We'll spend the night in Estella, near the beautiful 12th century Palace of the Kings of Navarre.

Day 4

Estella to Logrono, 29 miles (43 km)

We'll start the day with a stop at the winemakers 'Bodega Irache', where a free-flowing wine fountain welcomes thirsty pilgrims. Our ride takes us through vineyards and past castles before crossing the great Puente de Piedra into Logrono, a bustling town with an interesting history, architectural jewels, cafes and music. Our hotel is in a beautifully renovated historical building with all amenities.

Only Great Explorations

- **Small groups, extraordinary guides, and authentic experiences.**
- **Cooking course with a local chef will be a trip highlight.**
- **Wine tasting at the esteemed Bodega Irache in Estella.**
- **Order off the menu at restaurants you won't find in guidebooks.**
- **A moment you will never forget: receiving your Compostella in historic Santiago at journey's end- felicidades.**
- **We design and operate our own trips so there are only good surprises.**

Trip Dates

2014

Classic:

May 2-16

May 23-Jun 6

Aug 22-Sep 5

Regular:

May 9-16

May 30-Jun 6

Aug 29- Sept 5

2015

Classic:

May 1-15

May 22-Jun 5

Aug 21-Sep 6

Regular:

May 8-15

May 29-Jun 5

Aug 28- Sept 4

Self-guided and custom trips also available and can start any day. Call or email for details.

Trip Size

8-16 participants

Total Days

Classic: 15 days/ 14 nights

Regular: 8 days/ 7 nights

Arrive/Depart

Pamplona/Santiago

Leon/Santiago

Day 5

Logrono to Santa Domingo de la Calzada, 28 miles (45 km)

Our goal today is to reach a town long linked to the pilgrimage. The town's namesake, St. Dominic, was a hermit who devoted his life to helping pilgrims on their way to Santiago. Among other deeds, he built a pilgrim's bridge, hospital and much of the medieval road (which we ride) that still survives from the 11th century. The other reason we stop here is to stay at the extraordinary Parador Sata Domingo de la Calzada Hotel - one of Spain's best.

Day 6

Santa Domingo de la Calzada to Burgos, 42 miles (67 km)

The riding today is superb through bell heather on rolling trail. Lunch will be provided today in San Juan de Ortega; on the afternoon's ride we'll count stork nests in the bell towers along the route. Arriving in Burgos, we'll visit the Gothic Cathedral, one of the most outstanding artistic monuments in Spain. After dinner, for those wanting a little night life, there are plenty of tapas bars and clubs to tempt you!

Day 7

Burgos to Carrion de las Condes, 50 miles (80 km)

The riding through most of the Castilian stages is on more level terrain allowing us to comfortably cover more distance. Although no less beautiful, the scenery changes dramatically through this region. We'll have lunch today in the curious town of Hontanas, where the barman drinks wine in a most unusual way. Our destination, Carrion de las Condes makes for a relaxing town, between the bustling cities of Burgos and Leon.

Day 8

Carrion de las Condes to Leon, 55 miles (88 km)

Although one of our longer days, the gentle grade should allow us to take our time and enjoy the ride. We'll provide a picnic lunch at a beautiful site on the river Esla in Mansilla de las Mulas; afterwards we'll continue into Leon with its impressive monuments including the 13 C Cathedral. We'll organize a walking tour here, finishing with a visit to a wine bodega. Our 3-star hotel for tonight is located in the historical district, steps from the cities best shopping and restaurants.

Regular (short) trip

For those beginning in Leon, you can make your way from Madrid by flight, train or coach. Your accommodation on Friday is included in your trip. You will have a full day in Leon to see the sights and rest from your flight before beginning cycling the following day.

Day 9 / Day 2:

We will have a local guide show you the many treasures of Leon, followed by a picnic lunch in a fabulous park in the city center.

Day 10 / Day 3

Leon to Rabanal del Camino, 39 miles (63 km)

Riding out of Leon we'll visit Hospital del Orbigo arriving in time for lunch in Astorga. For Epicureans, Astorga is known for mantecadas, one of the famous delicacies in Spanish pastrymaking. We'll overnight in Rabanal del Camino, one of the more famous pilgrimage sites along the trail staying in a beautiful posada.

Activity Level

Moderate to challenging ●●○
25-55 miles daily van supported

Terrain

Rolling to hilly, choice of paved or un-paved route

Temperature in Pamplona, Spain

(Avg. Daily High)	°C	°F
April	16	60
May	22	72
June	24	75
July	28	82
August	28	82
September	24	75
October	19	66

Temperature in Santiago de Compostella, Spain

(Avg. Daily High)	°C	°F
April	17	62
May	18	65
June	22	71
July	24	75
August	24	75
September	22	71
October	18	65

Day 11 / Day 4

Rabanal to Villafranca, 36 miles (58 km)

Our route today will begin with a visit to Castrillo de los Polvares, a town immortalized by the writer Concha Espina in her novel The Maragato Sphinx, a portrait of the village and its centuries-old customs. Just before lunch we'll reach the Cruz de Ferro, one of the most symbolic monuments along the pilgrims' route. Whenever pilgrims add a stone to the pile they become part of an ancient tradition; the Romans called these stone heaps, 'mounts of Mercury' after the god of travelers. In Ponferrada, you can visit the impressive Templar Castle, one of the oldest and finest examples of

Spanish military architecture. We'll finish the day in Villafranca, one of the most attractive towns on the camino. Our hotel for tonight is in a 3-star parador hotel.

Day 12 / Day 5

Villafranca to Sarria, 43 miles (69 km)

From Villafranca, you will climb through unspoiled countryside of heather and broom, pines, chestnuts and oaks enjoying a magnificent view over the Valcarce valley up to El Cebreiro, famous for its pallozas, straw-roofed dwellings. In Samos we visit a monastery before continuing on to Sarria and its Monastery of La Magdalena and its hospitable Mercedarian monks.

Day 13 / Day 6

Sarria to Leboeiro, 35 miles (56 km)

From Sarria, the terrain changes again, as you find yourself in a rural

part of the country with people living much as they did centuries ago. We'll have lunch in Portomarin, and then enjoy some of the best biking of the camino on rolling terrain arriving to Leboeiro; we'll be treated to a medieval feast and spend the night at a most charming inn.

Day 14 / Day 7

Leboeiro to Santiago de Compostella, 35 miles (56 km)

We start this day with crossings of medieval bridges at Disicabo and Furelos before reaching Melide, particularly rich in pre-Roman remains. We'll pass many small hamlets hidden among eucalyptus trees before reaching the environs of Santiago. Your adrenaline will surge as you make your way through Santiago itself, packed with vestiges of the pilgrimage. Nothing quite prepares you though, for arriving at the Cathedral itself, where you can share in the sense that pilgrims have

felt since time immemorial. We'll stay at one of the finest hotels in the city located just 200 meters from the Cathedral. Enjoy.

Day 15 / Day 8

We recommend a leisurely last day and leave time for those who wish to do last minute shopping or time to explore the monuments of Santiago. For those that are heading back to Madrid, there are flight, train and bus connections (with special fares for pilgrims).



HOTELS

Palacio Guendulain

Pamplona

Built in the 18th Century, this 4-star luxury boutique hotel is located right in the heart of the city centre facing the Palace's inner courtyard.

Hostellerie Chapitel

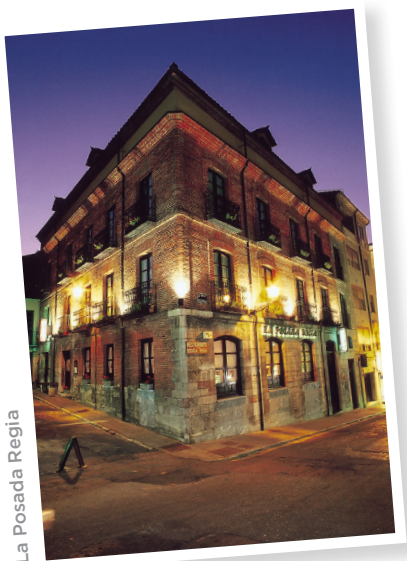
Estella

This is our newest find and a wonderfully charming hotel.

Hotel Marques de Vallejo

Logrono

This boutique hotel is located in the historical district on a quiet pedestrian street. Constructed in 1911, renovations and interior redesign created the 51 modern and stylish guest rooms available today. The décor is contemporary and the service is professional.



La Posada Regia

Parador

Santo Domingo de la Calzada

What was once a pilgrim's hospital from the 12th century is now one of Spain's finest paradors with grand marble interior and a lobby with Gothic arches, and wooden coffered ceilings. The large, comfortable guest rooms are exquisitely decorated.

Hotel Norte Y Londres

Burgos

Located in a beautiful square just 100 meters from the Cathedral, this hotel has been classically renovated with all amenities. There are hardwood floors in many of the rooms and lots of natural light through the large windows.

Hotel Real Monastery San Zoilo

Carrion de las Condes

Built in 947, this former convent was once the court of kings in the middle ages and was refurbished to include a Gothic Cloister in the 16th century. The expansive gardens around the hotel ensure a quiet, restful sleep.



Parador Santa Domingo de la Calzada

La Posada Regia

Leon

Ideally located on a quiet lane near the Palacio de los Guzmanes, this charming Leonese building dates back to the 14th century. With its medieval furnishings, this hotel exudes a rustic charm. We spend 2 nights here and Leon is a wonderful city filled with good restaurants, including one of the best in our hotel.

Palacio Guendulain



Hotel Norte Y Londres

La Posada Gaspar

Rabanal del Camino

This charming inn is our newest discovery, and was built using centuries old stone in the traditional style. Classic décor enhances the rooms, which are each inspired by points along the Jacobea Route. Terraces and balconies offer view of Mt Irago.

Parador de Villafranca

Villafranca del Bierzo

This hotel had a complete refurbishment recently with a contemporary design. Its views over the Bierzo Valley are stunning.

Hotel Alfonso IX

Sarria

A 3-star modern hotel situated on the river with an excellent restaurant. Amenities include a gym, sauna, and outdoor swimming pool. Renovated in 2003 the rooms are large and comfortable and guests can enjoy pleasant views of the surrounding area.

Casa Somoza

Leboreiro

A country inn with terrific food and gracious hosts makes this a traveler favourite.

Hotel Monumento

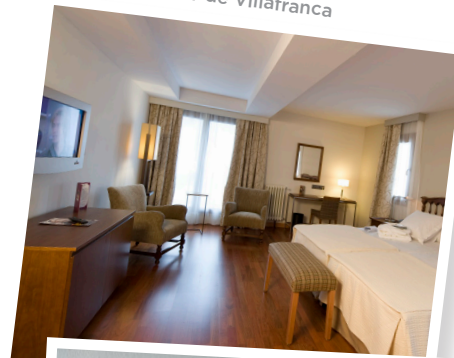
Santiago de Compostella

Situated in the historical city centre just 150 m from the Cathedral, this 18th century Franciscan convent has been renovated into a luxurious, historic 4-star hotel with heated swimming pool and jacuzzi with views of Mt. Pedroso.

La Posada Gaspar



Parador de Villafranca



Hotel Monumento San Francisco



Casa Somoza

What's included in cost?

- Services of one or more experienced Great Explorations guides and support vehicle
- Accommodations in luxurious paradors, hotels and charming inns
- Classic Trip: 14 nights lodging based on double occupancy, all breakfasts, 5 lunches, 10 dinners.
- Regular Trip: 7 nights lodging-based on double occupancy, 7 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 5 dinners.
- Entrance fees for selected tastings, historical sites and museums
- Detailed map and route instructions
- All luggage transportation
- All transportation from initial meeting point to final drop-off (see arrive/depart cities)
- Detailed Trip Planner full of pre-trip preparation material and travel information
- City Guide Madrid



OUR GUIDES

Our guests tell us time and time again that our guides are what set us apart from other companies. Caring, knowledgeable, athletic, articulate and fun-loving, each one is a natural leader...

Here at *Great Explorations*, we are tremendously proud of our guides. A diverse group of passionate and charismatic professionals, they have the local know-how and expertise to make your vacation incredibly rewarding. Whether it's fitting your bike, arranging a one-of-a-kind activity or being your personal interpreter, our guides wear many hats with ease. They are intimately familiar with their

travel regions, having either lived or traveled there extensively.

Comfortable speaking the local language and knowing all of the off-the-beaten track secrets, our guides ensure you'll have the journey of a lifetime. Our website features detailed bios on some of the more than sixty guides who lead trips for us worldwide.

OUR BICYCLES

For this trip, we provide Cannondale Trail SL 3 mountain bikes which are suited to the trail. Our Cannondale mountain bikes have components are follows:

Frame: Aluminum 6061
 Front Derailleur: Shimano Acera
 Rear Derailleur: Shimano Deore, 9 speed
 Cassette: 9 speed; 11-34
 Fork: Rockshox XC30
 Seat: Cannondale Stage 3



Cost

Land Cost (current year):

Classic: US \$3450 *Includes 15B/5L/10D*

Regular: US \$2450 *Includes 7B/2L/5D*

Single Supplement:

Classic: US \$800

Regular: US \$600

Bike Rental:

Classic: US \$280

Regular: US\$180

Ready to reserve?

- Call or email Travel Advisor with any remaining questions and to reserve your space 1.800.242.1825
- Reserve your flights to and from the region
- Book your night before hotel, if necessary
- Consider travel insurance

Please note: Final itinerary is subject to revision; any changes made are done so in an attempt to provide the best possible trip given route conditions and available services. Due to the nature of our business and exchange rates, prices are subject to change. All prices quoted are U.S. dollars but we gladly accept payment in Canadian dollars also. Due to cancellations and waiting lists, trip availability fluctuates daily. If you have any questions or would like to confirm space on this trip before making your reservation, please contact us at info@great-explorations.com or by telephone at 604.730.1247

OUR CONNECTION

I first cycled the Camino de Santiago in 1995. I was traveling across the Pyrenees and found myself in the village of Roncesvalles, Spain. I saw yellow arrows and camino signs throughout the village and stopped to learn about the history and legend; it was believed that James the apostle was buried in what is now Santiago de Compostella and beginning in the 8th century, Christians from all over Europe made their way along what became known as the Way of St. James. Many of the villages along the way sprang up to house and feed these travelers and even today, in towns such as Rabanal del Camino, El Cebreiro or Santa Domingo de la Calzada, you'll think you've travelled back in time. So there in Roncesvalles I was intrigued by this pilgrimage- riding a bike from Roncesvalles to Santiago sounded like a great adventure- I just didn't have time to walk the entire trail (which takes at least 30 days)

and biking it seemed the right pace to me. What intrigued me was that this was a bona fide journey. I would meet other travelers along the way, and travel through a magnificent part of Spain. That first trip I kept mostly to the paved roads which is an option for people who don't ride trails- I enjoyed the route thoroughly but I vowed to return and ride the historical trail itself. I did just that, in 1997 (this was the first official Great Explorations trip) with a group of 12 intrepid travelers. I have returned many times, most recently with my 4 brothers, who I invited to join one of our trips. They were all up for the challenge including a younger brother, who I don't think had biked more than 5 km in his life (he has just one leg!). He provided inspiration for others on the trip and made it to Santiago smiling (determined guy, my brother). For all of us, it was bonding experience that will never be forgotten.

Very few clients sign-up for this trip for a religious experience. In fact, when you get your credencia, or 'pilgrim's passport', most indicate their reason for the trip is to visit Spain. Most, like me on my first, are simply intrigued by the journey. I do tell people that this trip, more than any other we offer, has the potential to change your life. There is something spiritual about arriving after a 750 km journey (350 km if from Leon) and having that moment to recognize what you have just accomplished. You'll definitely meet other travelers along the route- more likely European than North American. If you want a vacation, there might be more suitable trips, but if you want a journey, don't hesitate- follow James Michener's advice- it's one of the best in the world and buen camino!

Robbin McKinney,
Founder and owner of Great Explorations



ACCOLADES

“Definitely one of the best trips of my life. Made life-long friendships, learned much about Spain, (and a lot about myself!)” Esther L. - Whistler, BC

“The guides were very personable. The views from the trail were spectacular. It was well worth the effort!”

Anna & Doug S. - Red Deer, AB

“The whole experience was unbelievable. From the guides, to the people on the trip, the people you met along the way and the ride itself” Denise C. - San Jose, CA

For additional testimonials, please visit www.great-explorations.com/testimonials.

