



Erin Leider-Pariser



Spain's Camino--April 20-27, 2013

The Spanish Camino de Santiago--The Way of St James--is one of the most ancient walking routes in the world. Ever since the C9, the "French Road" has led thousands of pilgrims on an 800km/500mi journey across northern Spain, winding from the Pyrenees across the wheat fields of old Castile to pass through Leon--the seat of Spanish kings, full of soaring cathedrals and hushed convents. Everyone on the Camino has a "Pilgrim Passport" that can be stamped in bars, hotels and churches along the way to qualify for a certificate from the official Pilgrim Office in Santiago. But in order to get that certificate, we have to walk at least 100km. Along with your passport, you'll notice a heart warming camaraderie with other walkers, as day by day you fall in step with people from all over the world and cheered on by complete strangers wishing you "Buen Camino" which means Enjoy your walk!

April 20 - International flights into Santiago arriving in the late afternoon. We will be scooped up and transferred to our hotel in Sarria, a luxurious country rectory, complete with chapel and al fresco dining patio. We will get the lay of the land with an orientation and get psyched for our walk.

April 21 - We will need our yoga stretch before heading out for 13 miles after breakfast to a Roman bridge directly on the Camino, where we'll traverse the hamlets of the southern flank of the Sierra del Paramo. After lunch, we will descend into Portomarin--the original village was drowned by the Belesar Reservoir, and houses still shimmer below the surface. We arrive in the late afternoon at Casa Rural Santa Marie and meet our host Mario before cleaning up and meeting for our opening ceremony. In the evening, we will meet Mario's horses and enjoy wine from his vines before a waterside stroll after dinner.

April 22 - Another beautiful yoga day followed by a 12 mile drop into Portomarin's church following the Torres stream passing between cornfields lined with ox-eye daisies. We will stamp our pilgrim passport in country churches dedicated to the Order of St James before arriving at our delightful rural farmhouse set deep in the countryside directly on the Camino for the evening.

April 23 - We can sleep in this morning because it's only an 8 mile walk today on country lanes leading past fortified farmhouses into the hillside town of Palas del Rei (Palace of the King) as we enter the province of A Coruna. We'll pass typical raised Galician granaries as chickens scamper across narrow streets as we enter vineyards with views east to the Montes del Vacaloura. Casa de Los Somoza is our home for the evening. Full of rustic charm. No English is spoken in this village.

April 24 - We will OMMM before breakfast and 11 miles. It is a short stroll from O Coto into Melide--a thriving country town with tavemas brimming with locals enjoying Galician seafood in specialist pulperias (octopus restaurants). We drop into the Romanesque church to admire the frescoes before lanes lined with bright yellow celandine and shady oaks, which bring us into the lively market town of Arzua. We will get picked up from here and taken back to Melide for one more night of rustic charm.

April 25 - Another glorious day and 12 miles on the Camino as we transfer back to Arzua's colonnaded streets which lead us into open country where local farmers wear berets as they tend vines and build haystacks with pitch forks. Our route rises and falls through river valleys crossing rushing streams. Just off the Camino can be found one of the loveliest and most unusual properties to stay. This evening we will marvel at Javier and Maria's breathtaking converted water mill, where original machinery has been turned into spectacular period furniture, blending perfectly with the bar and dining area. The open riverside garden invites us for a drink while the entire place feels as if it is a mythical secret hideaway.

April 26 - Javier will wake us with the aroma of coffee and take us back to the Camino for another 12 miles. Excitement mounts as we set off towards Monte do Gozo—the Mount of Joy—where pilgrims of old caught their first glimpse of the spires of Santiago. It is a bit busier these days. On reaching Santiago's historic centre, congratulations are everywhere as a steady stream of pilgrims reach journey's end below the cathedral's spectacular Baroque façade. We will go directly to the Pilgrim Office to collect our certificate and then check into our historic hotel Virxe da Cerca near the old marketplace, still a riot of color. We have a huge celebratory dinner and off to the local clubs to dance all night.

April 27 - a well deserved sleep in. We will enjoy this beautiful city of Santiago and the cathedral before our afternoon flights home.

The Investment is \$4,400, not including international airfare.

• 203-253-9534 • erin@stattrip.com • www.stattrip.com