



THE WAY OF ST. JAMES

GUIDE TO THE
CAMINO FRANCÉS

ST JEAN PIED DE PORT TO SANTIAGO
DE COMPOSTELA

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PREFACE

The Camino Francés is traditionally a Christian pilgrimage from the small town of St. Jean Pied de Port in southern France to the city of Santiago De Compostela in northwestern Spain. Currently the most popular route of the Camino Pilgrimage, the Camino Francés is often referred to as the Camino De Santiago or the Way of St. James.

Like me, you probably have a few questions you'd like answered before you consider making the journey yourself. In addition to answering these questions, you'll find the Guide to the Camino Francés packed full of useful information to assist you each step of the way.

After walking the Camino pilgrimage in 2013 and return again in 2015, we couldn't help but notice a lack of useful information available in the guide books at the time. More importantly, the distances listed between the towns and cities appeared to be inaccurate. You need to consider the additional distances required to walk into and out of the larger cities along the route, and the additional distances on your ascents and descends along the way. I have taken this in account and included these details in each stage of the journey. This, and the opportunity to share my experiences with my readers, was the motivator for writing the Guide to the Camino Francés.

There's no doubt that the Camino Francés is one of, if the best adventures you could ever consider undertaking. It was by no means easy – and if you intend to walk the whole way, you'll find it a true test of mind, body and soul, but a true pilgrimage is never meant to be easy.

In saying that, don't let this scare you off. *'It's your Camino'*, and you can set your own pace. It's not a race and most pilgrims (regardless of age and fitness level) won't have an issue completing the journey. If you find you're struggling with a particular stage, there are a number of other options available, to help you along the way.

Aside from a great list of travel tips, the Guide to the Camino Francés provides you with a convenient day by day itinerary of each step of your Camino journey, including an extensive list of accommodation options in each town and city along the route*. I've also included details on how to prepare for your journey; how to get there, your level of fitness, your equipment, personal safety and lots more.

*While all attempts are made to provide accurate details on available accommodation options - some facilities may be closed and operators may have moved on, despite being listed in this guidebook.

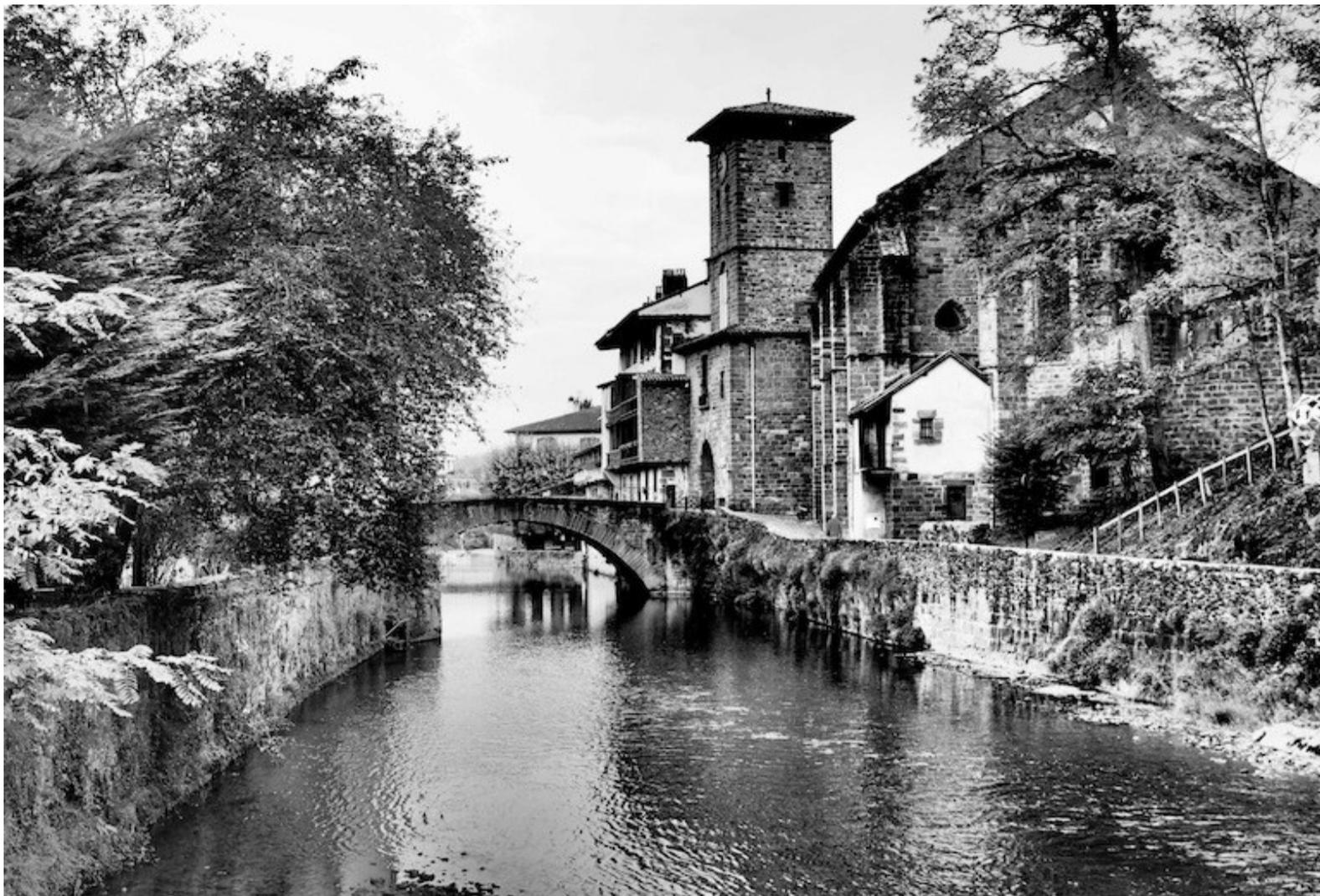
The Guide to Camino Francés is based on a 32 day journey to Santiago De Compostela - on average it will take you between 25 - 35 days to complete, which includes 3-4 rest days. *Each Camino is different* and if you find the distances between the towns described in this book don't suit your needs; we've also included details of accommodation options in the smaller towns and cities between each stage.

Although most of the terrain is relatively flat and easy to navigate, there are some tricky sections where you'll have to watch your step, especially in wet weather. No one should take the journey lightly and if you intend to walk the Camino in the warmer months, you can expect some long hot days with very little shade.

It's also not uncommon for pilgrims to sustain a few minor injuries along the way; sore knees, muscle strains, minor cuts and abrasions, the occasional broken bone, and of course blisters. However, the number of injuries sustained on the Camino is relatively low, considering how many pilgrims actually walk the Camino each year.

The Guide to the Camino Francés is your ideal travel companion - whether you'd prefer to cover more ground over any given day, or you'd prefer to walk at a slower pace, the Guide to Camino Francés will cater for your every need.

While all attempts are made to ensure the accuracy of this guidebook, the author cannot guarantee that the details including but not inclusive of; routes, distances, place names, addresses or accommodation contact details may change at any time and without notice.



1

THE HISTORY

The Camino De Santiago or The Way of St James is a 1000 year old Christian pilgrimage to the Cathedral of Santiago De Compostela in northwestern Spain. It's believed that the remains of the apostle St James are buried in the Cathedral in Santiago De Compostela.

The Camino De Santiago remains one of the most significant Christian pilgrimages since medieval times. Legend has it that during the 7th & 8th century, the apostle St James spent many years preaching to his followers in Spain, before returning to his home in Jerusalem.

When St. James died, his body was transported back to Spain by angels and the wind, in a stone boat. In the early 9th century a commoner was led by a vision to Santiago De Compostela. A tomb was discovered and the remains were supposedly authenticated by a local bishop to be those of St. James. At the time and with local and political unrest in the region, Spain needed something to motivate the Christian believers; so began the Camino Francés or the Way of St.James.

The Camino pilgrimage was highly traveled during the middle ages however, events like the Black Plague around the 16th century led to its' decline. Thankfully since then, there has been a steady increase in the Camino's popularity, with over 200,000 pilgrims walking the Camino each year; most of which make the journey in the Holy Year, which the Santiago Cathedral declares whenever St. James Day (the 25th July) falls on a Sunday. The majority of pilgrims that travel the Camino, walk the last 100kms into Santiago De Compostela. This is the minimum required distance to obtain your Compostela (a certificate of completion of your journey). If you plan to ride a bicycle, the minimum required distance to obtain your Compostela is 200kms.



Above: Certificate of completion or Compostela

The Pilgrim Passport or Credential is issued to pilgrims on commencement of their journey and is required for access into the many albergues (dormitory style accommodation) along the route. The Pilgrim Passport is routinely stamped (*sello in Spanish*) at least once a day at any of the churches, albergues, hotels, bars, cafes or town halls along the way; then normally twice a day from around the last 100kms to Santiago De Compostela. Pilgrims present their completed Credential at the Pilgrim Office in Santiago De Compostela to receive their Compostela. You can obtain a Pilgrim Passport from the Official Pilgrim Office in St Jean Pied de Port.

If you find you get a little over enthusiastic and fill up your Pilgrim Passport before you arrive at to Santiago De Compostela, simply pickup another Pilgrim Passport along the way and start where you last left off.



Above: Certificate of completion or Compostela

Today, the Camino De Santiago attracts a growing number of modern day pilgrims from a variety of religious and cultural backgrounds. While the most common method of travel is by foot, others may choose to ride a bike, and some may even travel as their medieval counterparts did, on horseback. Aside from those undertaking the journey as a religious pilgrimage, the majority of pilgrims are adventure hikers and travelers who walk the route for non-religious reasons.

One of the most popular routes for pilgrims on the Camino De Santiago is the Camino Francés. Historically most medieval pilgrims came from Paris France, Le Puy, or St Jean Pied De Port. Of these, the most popular starting point is in the small French town of St Jean Pied de Port, on the French / Spanish border of the Pyrenees. The distance from St Jean Pied de Port to Santiago De Compostela is approximately 800kms.



2

PREPARATION

If you're relatively fit and healthy, and walk regular basis, the Camino is the type of adventure where you can literally book a ticket, pack a bag and go. If you're like me however, you might have a few questions you'd like answered before you go, and you may prefer to read up on where you're going, the history, the people and culture, and the recommended do's and don'ts. The Guide to the Camino Francés aims to cover these common questions.

The first 3 towns along the route are relatively small and have limited accommodation, so I'd recommend that once you've made the decision to go, and you have your arrival date into St. Jean Pied de Port. Book your accommodation for the first 3 nights well in advance; in St. Jean Pied de Port, Roncesvalles, and Zubiri. The rest of your accommodation can be booked as you go.