

Hiking the Camino de Santiago – Frances Route

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How did I get to the St Jean Pied de Port?

Took a City Bus to downtown Madison. Near the University, I took a Van Galder Bus to OHare. Took a flight from OHare to Heathrow in London. I had a 2 hour layover and I just barely made it to my connecting flight. At Heathrow, they make you go through security again because they are not part of the European Union anymore. Took a flight to Madrid. Took a bus from the Airport to the Attocha Area. Went to see Picasso's Guernica Painting at the Museo Sofia Reina (Museum of Queen Sofia.) Got my train ticket for the next morning at the Attocha Train Station, which saved me from having a headache the next morning. Stayed overnight at a hostel near Attocha. At 7:30 am, I took the high speed train to Pamplona. It arrived a 10:30 am. Then I had to figure out how to get to the bus station. Walked out in front of the Train Station and got a city bus to the bus station. The bus station is underground so you don't actually see any buses when you are entering the bus station. I had a reservation for the bus, but I couldn't get the PDF to open up on my phone. Joe from Nebraska let me use his mobile hotspot. Took the 12 noon bus to St Jean Pied de Port, which arrived there around 1:30 pm. Once I got there I went immediately to the Pilgrims Office. Since there wasn't much of a line, I stayed at the Pilgrim's Office instead of looking for an accommodation. I got my Pilgrim's Credential and a shell, the symbol of the camino, to hang from my backpack. The person at the Pilgrim's Office asked me if I had a bed reserved for the night. I said no, so he sent me up to the Municipal Albergue, which would soon be opening for the evening. Walked around and explored St Jean that evening then started hiking the next morning. Don't go through Heathrow. Make sure your phone is working properly. If not call the provider.

I have 30 videos of me hiking the Camino de Santiago – Frances Route. These are videos showing the Camino as it really is. No drones or fancy production values. The index for these videos is located here: <http://tmanshikes.com/frances-route-videos/> Other than my videos, there are many videos about the camino. Lots of books, too

The Bed Race is Real. When I started on September 2, 2022, it turns out that it was one of the busiest days of the year. I hiked over to Roncesvalles and they were all filled up, so I hiked to Burguette where I got the last room available there. So, I recommend booking up to Pamplona. So, you would book St Jean, Roncesvalles and Zubiri. You usually don't have to pre book Pamplona because there are enough beds there. The only exception is when the "Running of the Bulls" is happening in early July. I would avoid hiking the camino through Pamplona at that time. So, when you stay at Zubiri the night before Pamplona, if it is all filled up, then book Puente la Reina for the night after Pamplona. The list of where I stayed and my strategies is located here: <http://tmanshikes.com/where-i-stayed-on-my-camino-trip/> I also recommend booking after Sarria because there are many people just hiking the last 100 km

I don't recommend using a Tour group. My friend Stacia started out using a tour group but they were too slow for her, and she eventually went off on her own, which cost her some money. You should be able to book your own accommodations using booking.com if the camino is busy. There are also luggage transport companies that will transport your bag to the next albergue

The Albergues where you sleep need your passport number. I made a copy of my passport and my sister laminated it for me. That worked for 90% of the albergues I stayed at. I kept my real passport deep inside my backpack where I wouldn't handle it. Still, I almost lost my passport on one occasion.

You need a pilgrim's credential that you get stamped every day. In the last 100 km (60 miles) you need to get your credential stamped twice a day to receive a Compostela. Almost every business you visit, including cafes and bars, have stamps. Leave an extra space at the end for the Pilgrim's Office stamp.

In Spain you cannot do the Dew. Mountain Dew is banned in Spain because it has Brominated Vegetable Oil. In Spain, orange juice is inexpensive, and most cafes have a machine that crushes oranges to make OJ on site. There is Aquarius, which is like Gatorade but is carbonated, and Kas, which is a lemon drink.

For shoes I wore Solomon Sense trail shoes, and I used a Superfeet Orange insert. That system worked great and I didn't get any blisters. But then, I usually don't get any blisters. I wore low (ankle height) Smartwool trail running or hiking socks. If you are prone to blister then you need to figure out a system that works for you.

I used Saxx Underwear on the Camino and they worked well. They are a cross between an athletic jock and underwear. They keep your man parts away from your legs so there is less friction.

John Breirly's guidebook is the standard and most popular guidebook. John selects certain towns that are the beginning and end of daily stages. Often times, these towns are more likely to fill up faster. Sometimes when you walk past the end of the stage and to the next town, that town is not as busy and has beds available.

Right now Wise Pilgrim and Buen Camino are the best apps for hiking the Camino. And www.gronze.com is the best website for rating albergues. Not sure why Gronze doesn't have an app. Plus with gronze you need a browser that will translate it to English.

The creator of the Camino Ninja App was out hiking the way and he died. It's very unlikely that you would die doing the camino, but you should still have a discussion with your loved ones on what to do if it happens. Repatriating a body back to the United States can be very expensive. Meanwhile, if someone is cremated, the urn can be taken in your airplane luggage. The Camino Ninja app is no longer available.

Keep your stuff together. At an albergue in Hospital de Orbigo, I left a shirt, that was not dry hanging on the clothes line. The next morning I forgot it. Fortunately, my friend Brodie stayed an extra day in Leon, so I messaged him and he picked up the shirt. He eventually caught up to me in Santiago.

I didn't take a rest day at all on the camino, (had some short days) but I did stay an extra day in Santiago at the end. In Santiago I managed to see several people that were faster than me, or slower than me.

There are a couple places you can decompress in Santiago after completing the Camino. The Camino Companions have an English speaking room (also rooms for other languages) at the Pilgrim's Office. There is a place called the Pilgrim's House that provides many services for pilgrims. If you just want to hang out, that's okay, too.

Non European Union people can get a Eurail pass that is a economic way to travel. There are several different passes, for instance, travel 5 days in 1 month, travel 10 days over 2 months or travel any time you as much as you want in 15 days, 1 month, two months, etc. If you are sight seeing after the camino this might work out well for you.

If you don't have time to hike out to Fisterra/Finisterre, you can also take the bus out there. That's what I did because several people I knew were out there. It was a great time.

There is a Camino Group called the American Pilgrims on the Camino. They have over 40 chapters in the U.S. They have monthly meetings/hikes, etc. It's a great way to meet some people who you can ask questions. Also, Ivar's Forum on the internet is a great resource