

Which Route Next?



Introduction

The Frances from St Jean Pied de Port and the Portuguese from Porto have been walked. What will my next Camino be? The pilgrim is spoilt for choice!

Since 2013 I have walked 13 Caminos on 7 different visits to Europe, so how do I rate them? The answer is, it depends. What is it you are seeking? Are you looking for solitude, the company of pilgrims, a Camino without the steep bits, religious infrastructure, history? Here are some facts and some thoughts on Caminos I have walked.

Camino Frances

The Camino Frances is the classic Camino. It has everything, including perhaps too many pilgrims. There is a wonderful infrastructure. It is set up for pilgrims. For those seeking religious aspects there is much support. The trail ends in Santiago de Compostela. 771 km.

Camino Nordt

This Camino has stunning sea views in the first weeks and lots of hill work. It has too much tar seal and often turns away from towns. In the coastal areas tourists are a priority. I remember noticing as the Nordt morphed into the Frances the increased frequency of cafes and bars. It joins the Camino Frances at Arzua. 825 km. I found this Camino to be quite spiritual.

Camino Portuguese from Lisbon

I would not recommend this Camino. Neither did our two presenters. Too much tar seal, conurbations and lack of green. I felt the general population were not as aware of this Camino. The towns of Tomar, Coimbra are some compensation. 626.6 km.

Image: The trail heading towards the Pyrenees on the Camino Aragonés.

Camino Portuguese from Porto

This has become a very popular Camino putting stress on accommodation at pinch points. The signposting is good and the terrain fairly flat. There is a coastal variant, (Senda Litoral) which I chose. The Central includes old towns and villages. Porto is a beautiful town with great waterfront dining. This Camino ends in Santiago de Compostela. The town of Padron has a number of historic places in close proximity to visit related to the St James story. 260 – 280 km (The Central is slightly longer.) **The Variant Espiritual** has become popular in recent times, is well worthwhile and probably requires booking of accommodation. It adds a day, 29.4 km.

Via del la Plata

I commenced the Via del la Plata in Merida, where the Mozarabe finished. Other starting points are Cadiz and Seville. **Heat Warning.** It is important to avoid the months with high temperatures. There is little shelter, or water stops and the days can be longish depending on accommodation availability. This Camino joins the Camino Frances at Astorga. I left it at the Granja de Moreruela junction for the Camino Sanabres and continued to Santiago de Compostela 938.6 km (from Seville.)

Camino Sanabres

The Camino Sanabres begins at Granja de Moreruela, Spain and is a continuation of the Via de la Plata. A good starting point is historic Ourense. (116 km) It's an interesting walk back to Santiago de Compostela entering through its own city walls portal. A bus ride to Zamora and Salamanca for sightseeing prior to commencement is recommended. This Camino is in Galicia so expect hilly sections. Pilgrims were fairly sparse in 2023. 368 km.

English Way

This Camino has all the requisite features of a Camino and yet may be walked in a week. It begins in Ferrol and concludes at Santiago de Compostela with its own entry point. It is easily accessible and makes it an ideal add on to say the Portuguese from Porto. It is becoming popular. 112 km.

Chemin Le Puy

This Camino would easily be the most picturesque regarding villages and towns and stunning landscapes. It has abbeys, farmhouses with demi-pension, good signposting. It's a good idea to carry lunch for picnics. Pilgrims are mainly 7 day walkers. Being France, booking of accommodation is the norm. There is a meaningful pilgrim blessing daily in the cathedral. Ends at St Jean Pied de Port and I continued on to the Frances and Finisterre. 740.1 km.

San Salvador

This is a beautiful Camino divided between walking in and out, and two days walking terrain equivalent to walking in the Port Hills near Christchurch. I walked it on my own but made sure I was near others for safety, if possible. It commences in Leon and ends in Oviedo. Avoid commencing on a Friday. It can be overrun by distance runners from Leon making accommodation scarce. Check out how to book a takeaway meal from a Casa Rural when in the mountain section. 120 km.

The Primitivo

This Camino commences in Oviedo, and joins the Frances at Melide. It is one of the oldest routes. It would suit pilgrims who like tramping in New Zealand. And yet there is

sufficient infrastructure to have some pampering. I found a modest number of pilgrims. 313.6 km.

Camino Aragones

This trail commences at the top of the Somport Pass (albergue/bar/restaurant in Spain, just!) and finishes at Puente la Reina on the Camino Frances. Following a steep descent there's a rolling river flat. Towns tend to be sited on hills. Good accommodation, carry lunch and possibly breakfast. I enjoyed the landscapes. Few pilgrims. 170 km.

Camino Invierno

This Camino commences in Ponferrada and joins the Sanabres for the final two days. It is well set up with good accommodation and signposting. It hasn't been discovered so few pilgrims. It is quite demanding. The albergue at Outeiro had a beautiful kitchen but no utensils etc. (I made a cup of tea in my water bottle. Bring meals to this albergue.) One of my favourites. 270.5 km.

Camino Arles

This Camino commences in Arles in the south of France. (I took a train from Barcelona.) It is a long Camino with varied terrain, from following the flat Midi canal, climbing the Somport Pass to walking part of the Masif Central. It is necessary to carry several meals. The trail is not well kept, with armpit high grass in places, uneven surfaces and poor signage. There is a mixture of accommodation: camping ground cabins, bed and breakfast, albergues, monasteries which can be booked a day ahead. There were pockets of pilgrims. This trail ends at the top of the Somport Pass. 970 km (170 being in Spain on the Camino Aragones.)

Camino Mozarabe

This Camino has 3 starting points: Almeria, Jean, Malaga. I began in Almeria, after flying in from Madrid. It ends at Merida on the via de la Plata. Initially the Serra Nevadas need to be climbed. An association looks after the albergues between Almeria and Granada. Visits to the Alhambra in Granada require bookings weeks in advance. The infrastructure is good with good signage. **Heat Warning:** Walk in the cooler months only. 620 km.

Camino Finisterre This is a delightful Camino to walk. Accommodation is well spaced and allows for days of varying lengths. It's a wonderful feeling to reach the 'end of the earth.' 117 km.

Camino Finisterre to Muxia

The walk alongside the coast from Finisterre to Muxia is flat and off road. There is an albergue at Lires which is roughly half way. 29 km.

Summary

Different people seek different things from a Camino route. Hopefully this taster will whet the appetite for further research. And there are many other Caminos to explore.

Philip

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