

Walk in Beauty: Pilgrimage of El Camino de Santiago, Spain

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A Brief History of El Camino: Legend & Lore

El Camino de Santiago, or “The Way of Saint James,” is the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain. According to legend, Santiago is believed to contain the remains of the apostle, Saint James the Elder. The Camino has been in use as a Christian pilgrimage for over 1,000 years, utilizing ancient Roman roads and trade routes. It was one of three important Christian pilgrimage routes during the medieval period. Pilgrimage to Jerusalem, to Rome, and to Santiago de Compostela would earn the pilgrim plenary indulgence, or freeing of the soul’s sins.

Seventh and eighth century documents suggest that St. James the Elder spent a number of years preaching on the Iberian Peninsula before returning to Jerusalem where he was beheaded in 44AD by Herod Agrippa I.

His remains were gathered by his followers, placed in a stone boat and guided by the angels to a place called Iria Flavia, south of what is known as Santiago de Compostela – St. James in the Field of Stars. His remains were forgotten until the 9th century when a hermit, Pelagius, investigated a ‘field of stars’, a celestial beam of light illuminating a small knoll, and discovered the remains of this holy person. Soon after this discovery, the King of Asturias, Alphonso II, authenticated the remains and found them to be those of Santiago. This apostle became the patron saint of Spain.

Walk in Beauty: Pilgrimage of El Camino de Santiago, Spain is a 118 kilometer (70 miles) pilgrimage walk which begins in Santiago de Compostela and explores Galicia’s magnificent coastline. Leaving the hustle and bustle of the city of Santiago, the route passes through rural landscapes of high plateaus, forested tracks, country villages, and stunning coastal trails and headlands where the pace slows to that of centuries of sea faring life.

Dating back as far as the 9th century, pilgrims have been walking to both Muxía and Finisterre as the final stretch of the itinerary traced by the Milky Way to the westernmost explored part of continental Europe: to Finisterre. In medieval times, Finisterre was described as the ‘end of the world’, where the cliffs plunge steeply to the sea and the sun disappears into the horizon each evening.

During the Middle Ages, the Virgin Mary is said to have arrived in Muxía, the remote rocky peninsula, to the north of Finisterre, by stone boat to encourage St. James (Santiago) in his preaching. Sections of the boat still remain and hold mythical properties still believed to this day. Today a small chapel, the Sanctuary of A Barca, stands on the site of the miracle. This pilgrimage traverses the little-known route from Santiago to Muxía then onwards, via the coast, to Finisterre, where, as an added bonus of this pilgrimage, you will receive the Fisterrana, a certificate of completion of the pilgrimage to 'Finis Terrae'.

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