

Santiago de Compostela - True Physical and Mental Challenge



The South-European Spain provides many attractions for tourists. Its fabulous beaches, warm waters, great food and lively music draw visitors from all over the world. Adventurers, art lovers, history admirers - everyone is satisfied with this beautifully diverse country. Nevertheless, there is yet another way of how to appreciate Spain's treasures; and it isn't for the faint-hearted. Some call it The Way of St. James, some The Camino de Santiago - it is a famous route taking the pilgrims some 800 km from France to the Spanish Santiago de Compostela.

Its history goes back to the year 813, when the bones of St. James (Santiago) - one of Jesus' disciples - were washed up on the shores of Galicia, Spain. According to some sources, the bones were verified and sanctified by a local bishop. Eventually, king Alfonso II. paid tribute to St. James, built him a chapel and proclaimed him patron saint of Spain. The town where the chapel was built - Santiago de Compostela was declared a holy city in 1189.

This almost divine quality of Santiago immediately started attracting pilgrims from all over Europe, as it was widely believed that the pilgrimage there would purify one's soul and erase all past bad deeds. Even nowadays, many travelers take part in this challenging adventure. Religious reasons are no longer the only inspiration; cure-seekers, sport enthusiasts, nature lovers - the motives to get on the road are diverse. There are several routes to Santiago, the most popular of which is the so-called French route. It leads from the north of France. A shorter version of this route starts at Roncesvalles and is nearly 760 km long. There are 1800 historic buildings on the way and since the pilgrimage draws a lot of tourists, hostels, shops, and restaurants are numerous on the way. The chances of getting lost are very small; yellow arrows are the most common indicators directing the travelers.

Anyone interested in this experience should bear in mind that walking an average 17 - 25 km a day will become physically demanding after a few days. Smart packing is a must. On the other hand, once anyone steps into the majestic Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela, which presents the ultimate goal, the pain and struggles of the past days will be forgotten. Many claim the journey opened their eyes and was well worth the effort.

Date: 2007-07-17

Article link:

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