

The Pilgrim's Way to 'Santiago de Compostela'

The discovery of Saint James' remains around the year 820 constitutes the beginning of the pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela – initially only a simple sanctuary it developed into a city due to the influx of pilgrims who came to pay homage. Gradually the city has become one of the three major cities of Roman Catholicism along with Jerusalem and Rome.



It was King Alfonso II El Casto ('The Chaste') who ordered to build the little church in the place of St. James' remains. The news quickly spread among the community of believers and the Western Christian kingdoms. Since then millions of pilgrims have been coming to see the resting place of the saint.

The Pilgrim's Way to Santiago, also known as the way of the stars ('O Camiño das Estrelas') was born and it was consolidated in the XII and the XIII centuries with some spiritual indulgences granted. These indulgences would have their maximum reach during the so called 'Compostela Holy Years' ('Anos Santos Compostelanos').

The Holy Years

The origin of the Holy Year has been attributed to a supposed concession of Pope Calixto II, in 1122. The papal bull Regis Aeterni, of Alexander III, ratified and perpetuated the privilege of the Jubilee or the Holy Years to the Church of Santiago.

The Jubilee is a period in which the Church traditionally awards the congregation special spiritual graces. To get the Jubilee the pilgrim must honour the three traditions: visit the grave of the Apostle in the Cathedral and pray, receive the sacrament of confession, and make the communion.

The Holy Year happens when the 25th of July – the day dedicated to St. James – falls on Sunday. Each century there are 14 Holy Years that come every 6, 5, 6, and 11 years. In 2010, Santiago de Compostela will celebrate the second Holy Year of this new millenium.

It is a festival that brings together thousands of people from all over the world. It became very popular not only among pilgrims but also other tourists thanks to the festival's organizing committee which always develops a year-long program including a range of diverse and innovative cultural and social events.



The Routes

In 1987, the Council of Europe declared the Pilgrimage Route as the first European Cultural Route and it was recognised as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1993. The Way of Saint James is an historic path that extends across Spain and many parts of Europe, joining together to lead the faithful to Santiago de Compostela.

Over the years, lots of different routes have been used by the pilgrims to reach Compostela and it was history that established the main pilgrimage routes:

The French Way: several routes enter Spain by the Pyrenees (mountain range that separates France and Spain) and get united in Puente la Reina, a village in Navarra. From there, the Way crosses the Communities of Navarra, La Rioja and Castilla y León in order to enter Galiza from Pedrafita (from Lugo).

The Way from the North: even though the French Way is the most famous route of all, pilgrims arrive to Compostela from different directions. One of them is the Way from the North that starts in the Basque Country (in Spain) and crosses Cantabria and Asturias to enter Galiza by Fonsagrada (Lugo) until it gets united to the French Way close to Compostela.

The Silver Route: this is the natural communication way between the peninsular South and Northwest. It is a difficult route but very suggestive and attractive. From Córdoba and Seville (South of Spain), passing by Badajoz, Cáceres and Salamanca, the pilgrims arrive to Galiza.



The Portuguese Route: there have always been several Portuguese routes to Santiago. An old Way from the Northwest left from O Porto, crossed Viana do Castelo and Caminha (different villages in the North of Portugal) and reached Galiza by Tui. There were also several ways or paths from Braga that entered by A Cañiza (Pontevedra), Celanova (Ourense) and they unified with the Silver Route. The

paths that get together in Tui cross all the region of Pontevedra (Southwest of Galiza) and arrive to Santiago from Padrón.

The Routes from the Sea: there were also pilgrims that came to Galiza from the ports in the North of Europe. Two routes brought travellers to Santiago since the XIV century; they arrived to the different ports in Galiza first: Ferrol, A Coruña and Vilagarcía de Arousa. The British Way arrives to Santiago from the two first ports mentioned. The Sea Route called 'Ruta do Mar de Arousa e Río Ulla' arrives from Vilagarcía. After the pilgrims arrive to this port, they walk to Padrón to finally reach Santiago de Compostela.

Nowadays, the different routes of the Way to Santiago in Galiza have more than 50 hostels to house the hundreds of pilgrims in the Galician country. Furthermore, the paths are continually maintained to secure comfortable pilgrimage for walkers or cyclists who want to visit the famous Santiago de Compostela.



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