

# TOP 10 PILGRIMAGE DESTINATIONS IN EUROPE



A growing number of travelers decide to try one of the pilgrimage routes offering history, hiking, nature in its purest form... and let's not forget the historic cities, and the feeling of companionship arising among travelers who undertake the same journey. Tourism-review.com presents the best pilgrimage destinations in Europe worth experiencing.

## Seven Pilgrim Churches of Rome, Italy

Rome is the most important city for Catholicism, for being the home of the Catholic curia and the Pope, in addition to containing the tombs of two apostles of Jesus of Nazareth, such as Saint Peter and Saint Paul. On both of these places of rest, two monumental basilicas were built: the Basilica of St. Paul outside the Walls, and 11 kilometers away the Basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican, known as the "greatest of all churches of Christendom". Both churches are part of the Seven Pilgrim Churches of Rome.

## Sanctuary of Fátima, Portugal

In 1917, three young shepherds claimed to have seen an apparition of the Virgin Mary in Cova da Iria, an area that belonged to their family. Soon, pilgrims began arriving at Fátima, illegally at first, until in 1930 the Holy See approved the story of the apparitions, and the government built the sanctuary. To date, the Sanctuary of Fátima remains a very religious and important place for Catholics, although there are many people who visit the place mainly due to its historical valued. After taking a few vows, believers are allowed to visit Fátima to pray to the Virgin, or take part in the impressive and famous candlelight processions that are celebrated every month. You can join a tour to the 6 places where the apparitions were supposedly seen. In 2017, the year celebrating the centenary of Fatima, the sanctuary received 9.4 million pilgrims, confirming the place as one of the most popular pilgrimage destinations.

## Sanctuary of Lourdes, France

The Sanctuary of Lourdes became the largest center for French pilgrimages ever since a 14-year-old girl, Bernadette Soubirous, claimed to have seen the Immaculate Conception approximately 18 times in 1858, at the cave-grotto of Massabielle. At first, the local religious authorities were skeptical, but Rome confirmed the apparitions and ended up accepting them as a Miracle in 1862. Since then, churches and sanctuaries were built near the grotto and millions of pilgrims from all over Europe began arriving in Lourdes to visit them.

## Pilgrimage to Assisi, Italy

The Assisi pilgrimage route was created almost spontaneously, by joining several shorter pilgrimage roads in the area such as La Verna, Casella, Cerbaiolo, Montecasale or Montepaolo. The pilgrimage route extends through incredible landscapes of the Italian countryside, and believers claim to be following the footsteps of Saints Francis and Saint Anthony. The pilgrims follow the route that Saint

Francis of Assisi traveled in the Middle Ages. He traveled throughout Italy and then he followed the Pilgrimage to Santiago, like many of his contemporaries did. Today, in addition to pilgrims who travel for religious reasons, many of the visitors who join the pilgrimage to Assisi do so by reconnecting with nature and living a modest life for a few days. In 2017, the city of Assisi hosted almost a million visitors, many of them were Chinese. This is the reason, why the local authorities started this year with a city map written in Chinese.

## **Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, Spain**

The Camino de Santiago is without a doubt one of the pilgrimage destinations in Europe with the largest outreach and importance. From the Middle Ages to our days, it has contributed to the development of many towns, leaving behind a rich cultural legacy, testament to knowledge, coexistence and faith of all those who one day undertook the Jacobean route. In 2017, Santiago de Compostela welcomed 2.6 million visitors. Moreover, the Jacobean route witnessed 300 000 pilgrims.

## **Mount Athos, Greece**

Mount Athos is the oldest surviving independent monastic republic in the world, tracing its origins back to the Byzantine era, more than a thousand years ago. At present, there are 20 active monasteries in Athos, in which about two thousand brothers live. Most visitors arrive at Mount Athos from Thessaloniki, where they take a ship that leaves the port of Ouranopolis, in the south of the peninsula. The ship takes the passengers to Daphni, stopping at different monasteries on coastal areas. From Daphni, a bus is taken to Karies, the administrative center of this monastic society. The pilgrims arrive here moved by more than religion and faith, but also by historical curiosity: Mount Athos is one of the last remains of the Byzantine era, and the fact that it is an autonomous community makes it unique. Moreover, Athos is closed for women. Additionally, you can visit its rich collection of holy relics, ancient books, documents and invaluable works of art. Athos was considered a sacred place even in pre-Christian times. Here were the temples of Apollo and Zeus.

## **Jasna Góra Monastery in Częstochowa, Poland**

Although there are several shrines to the Virgin Mary (known as Marian shrines) in Poland and all over the world, Jasna Góra occupies a unique position among them. This monastery stands out among other famous pilgrimage destinations in Europe, and has never stopped attracting millions of pilgrims, especially, though not exclusively, the Polish people.

## **Međugorje Pilgrimage, Bosnia and Herzegovina**

In 1981, apparitions of the Virgin Mary appeared in front of six children in this Adriatic city, which in return have made the city a popular pilgrimage destination. The location attracts a million visitors every year from more than a hundred countries. Most numerous groups are from Italy and Poland. Some of the pilgrims reported visions in the sky, including hearts and crosses around the sun.

## **Monastery of Santa Maria de Guadalupe, Spain**

At the end of the 13th century, or beginning of the 14th century, the Cáceres-born cattle herder Gil Cordero, after a miraculous apparition, finds the image of the Black Virgin hidden somewhere in the deep mountain ranges of Las Villuercas. From there, a sanctuary is established and starts welcoming pilgrims from their nearest surroundings. King Alfonso XI of Castile and Leon visited the area

around the year 1330. He encouraged the initial construction of the Monastery of Santa María de Guadalupe in 1337, which led to the arrival of more pilgrims at the sanctuary. But this historical effect of the monastery goes even further than its enclosure, and a network of roads, cultural and natural corridors was created, giving room to a large ensemble of architectural heritage and oral, intangible tradition, which is still possible to appreciate. It is a privileged territory with enormous landscape and natural riches, crossing protected natural areas (national and natural parks, special protection areas...), wetlands, forests, mountain ranges and valleys ... with a high degree of biodiversity and very good state of conservation. In 2017, the place welcomed more than 3 million pilgrims.

## **Pilgrimage from Glastonbury Tor to Stonehenge, UK**

In 2008, a group of researchers and archaeologists who studied the Stonehenge complex determined that more than 3000 years ago, the location had been a place of pilgrimage for the sick, who believed that these stones had healing properties. Pagan traditions surround the mystical locations of Glastonbury Tor and Stonehenge, found in the heart of the English countryside. On top of the Glastonbury Tor hill is the St Michael's Tower, which is said to guide pilgrims on a journey of rebirth, from which they will return transformed into a new person. From the top of the hill, travelers can enjoy the unique and breathtaking views of the rural Somerset.

A good walk from Glastonbury Tor is the famous Stonehenge, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, whose construction dates back to 2600 BC. In its day, the structure was a ceremonial place for neo-pagans and druids. The distance between both locations is about 68 kilometers, which will take you about three days to cross, while visiting each small and beautiful town in the area. The best time of the year is June, when about 20,000 people gather at Stonehenge for the summer solstice festival. In 2017, Stonehenge recorded approximately 1.58 million visits.

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