

**THE ECOTOPIAN CAMINO DE SANTIAGO**

**A Guide to Walking a Vegan and Sustainable Way**

**August 2019**

## IN THE GUIDE

This guide is for people walking the Camino de Santiago who are looking to:

- **Live and eat as vegans/vegetarians**
- Visit and stay in **places that focus on sustainability, respect for nature, and connection with spirit**
- **Save money** as budget travelers

We've found a handful of blogs, social media posts, and videos about living a vegan and low-impact life on the Camino, but a lot of the information is disjointed and difficult to pull together.

And the thing is --- this type of information is really helpful to have, if you're trying to eat vegan, live sustainable, and not spend a lot of money. Many parts of the Camino don't cater to this way of living, and it can be quite frustrating to arrive into an isolated town tired and hungry, only to find chicken or pork chops available for dinner.

Our guide will tell you:

- **Inspiring places to sleep that are examples of ecological and sustainable living**
- **Where and how to eat vegan**
- **Unique things to bring that will enhance your experience.**
- **Budget sleeping and eating tips**
- **Other insights gained from the Camino**

It will NOT give you:

- A history of Spain or the Camino
- Intricate route planning for stage by stage
- Complete locations of every cafe and albergue on the Camino, with maps, emails or telephone numbers.

**\*\*Please note that this guide is for the Camino Frances. Although much of the general information inside could be applied to other routes like the Camino del Norte or Camino Portugues, there are no specific recommendations for these ways\*\***

## WHY WE WROTE THIS

We came to the Camino De Santiago woefully unprepared. We were full of excitement and gusto, with a vague idea of what to expect, but without any real knowledge of the details.

The extent of our planning was: watching half of the movie “The Way”, spending an hour on different “what I’ve packed for the Camino” YouTube videos, and reading the first 15 pages of our guidebook written by John Brierley (the 2012 version). We knew that we had to start somewhere on the border of France and Spain, and end at Santiago, which lay at the other end of the country.

One one hand, it is an integral part of the Camino experience to go without expectations. You have your ‘beginner’s mindset’ and ‘travel eyes’ on, seeing magic and wonder in every kilometer of walking. You have no preconceptions of what your walk should be, or what kind of amazing connections you’ll have with pilgrims from around the world, or when you’ll have a shimmering epiphany about the direction of your life. You’re just walking and enjoying the mysteries that the Camino presents you.

This is the attitude we began with (also convenient because it meant we didn’t have to prepare anything beforehand). But, after some days of journeying, we realized that it would’ve behooved us to have done a little more research and preparation. Our inner compasses point us towards a vegan lifestyle and living in sustainably-ecologically-conscious places, and this is precisely what we had a difficult time finding and creating on the Camino.

After finishing our walk and reflecting on our experience, we knew that we couldn’t let our Camino lessons go to waste. We had amassed valuable knowledge and travel tips, and wanted to share this with the wider world. This is especially important concerning veganism and sustainability, as the more this message is spread and lived, the more it gains traction with mainstream society.

So, we decided to write a Camino De Santiago travel guide, for people who:

- will walk the Camino as a **vegan** or **vegetarian**, and are looking for advice on how to make their experience fruitful and varied
- want to walk the Camino in a **sustainable** way, seeking out places that exemplify connection with the Earth
- want to be **thrifty** and **save money**

Still, we want this guide to be accessible for a wide range of pilgrims, not only those that fit into the ‘vegan-eco-sustainable’ mindset. Anyone can use these tips, and we’re confident that at least one thing in here will be useful for you.

We hope that this can supplement and enhance your experience, but also let you retain a fresh mind that will help you walk your own unique Camino. With a little bit of preparation beforehand, you can 'put yourself in the way of beauty', with more possibility of finding those experiences that make you come to life.

We hope that this guide will give you the tools you need to walk a Camino based on compassion, health, and consciousness, in a way that doesn't leave you wondering if all your Euros flew out of your wallet on a windy Spanish mountaintop.

Buen Camino,

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## **WHEN AND HOW TO READ THIS**

If you're like us, you aren't prone to much advance planning. You like to live by the seat of your pants, and don't enjoy knowing where you're going to sleep on the next week of your travels. So you don't need to read all of this guide beforehand. But, it will help a little to read it in this order:

BEFORE the Camino: read 'introduction', 'what to bring', 'before Day 1', 'on Day 1'

AFTER STARTING the Camino: 'stay', 'eat', and 'tips' sections

We also recommend to use this guide as a supplement to a more substantial, primary guidebook to the Camino. We (and most other Pilgrims) used John Brierly's Camino de Santiago book, and it worked out perfectly. These guidebooks have maps of each stage, kilometer distances between towns and landmarks, and comprehensive lists of all albergues and cafes.

Alternatively, you could download a comprehensive app or E-Guide from the internet (see our technology section for an example). Or, you could go guide-less, like the pilgrims of olden times. We met many people walking this way, and it didn't seem that difficult -- all you have to do is follow the yellow arrows.

## WHAT TO BRING

You can find 'Packing Lists for the Camino de Santiago' in abundance — in guidebooks, blog posts, Instagram shots, YouTube videos. Our packing list is at the bottom of this section, but especially helpful are some other unique items that will make your life as a Pilgrim interesting and fruitful.

## GOOD TO HAVE

Here are some things you might not think of, that came in quite useful on our Camino.

- **Set of reusable eating utensils.**
- **Small plastic to-go containers.** These are great for storing leftovers from a restaurant or pilgrim meal (ask if you can take something *para llevar*). Also, when you're cooking your own dinner at an albergue, make extra for a Camino breakfast/lunch the next day.
- **Small cheap pocket knife** (with corkscrew, if you like to sample Spanish wine). Perfect for slicing bread, vegetables, etc on the camino, when a knife is hard to find. If you're traveling on a plane, you won't be able to bring one with you, so buy one at a cheap department store when you arrive. It doesn't need to be high quality, just enough to cut an avocado and pull out a cork. Also, you'd be surprised by the number of albergue kitchens that aren't equipped with a corkscrew.
- **Musical Instrument.** Even if you aren't a professional, a small instrument can help to pass the time and make new friends. Think. — ukulele, harmonica, small flute, etc.
- **A bottle of hot sauce.** This can be bought at most medium or large Spanish grocery stores, and can spice up many meals at restaurants or albergues.
- **Plastic or metal cup**
- **Small notebook**
- **Permanent marker** for leaving your mark on bridges, signs, etc.
- **Collapsible day bag** for buying groceries/carrying relaxation essentials around towns with/etc.
- **A sense of adventure** :)
- **Technology.**
  - Translation: **Google Translate:** If you don't speak Spanish and your phone doesn't have service in Europe, you can download the Spanish language to have accessible offline on your phone. Just get the google translate app, go to 'settings', then 'offline translation', and add Spanish.
  - Maps: **Google Maps** and **Maps.me** : both of these apps also allow you to download maps offline, that work even if you don't have service (the GPS on your phone will still be working). Maps.me allows you to download an entire area of the country, while google maps works better for larger cities. We used both, and they came in quite handy a number of times. (Note: on the flip side, it is pretty fun and really quite easy to not use any navigation, and to only follow the yellow

arrows that are pointing the way. You could walk the entire Camino without a guidebook or phone, in the same spirit as pilgrims did hundreds of years ago. This forces you to be extra-present, and totally aware of your surroundings all the time)

- Phone: for phones that don't have service in Spain, it's still pretty easy to make phone calls (i.e. if you'd like to phone an albergue to reserve a bed for the night). We just downloaded **Skype**, put \$5 worth of credit on the account, and made phone calls whenever connected to Wifi. This proved incredibly useful, simple, and cheaper than setting up phone service for the entire trip.

## GUIDES

- Spanish supermarket Eroski has put together an [online guide](#) that has a lot of relevant information re: albergues, stages, bars, etc. Free.
- We also came across this [free handy PDF](#) that recommends albergues for each stage. This helped us a number of times, especially towards the end of the Camino, when there are albergues everywhere, and its hard to know which to pick. You can download it onto your phone, so it works even when you don't have service or access to Wifi. Thank you, anonymous author!
- **The Vegetarian Way:** [Here](#) is a great map made by the folks at [www.heartofthecamino.com](http://www.heartofthecamino.com). A great starting point for choosing restaurant and even albergue options.
- **Happy Cow App.** At the time of writing, this app cost \$3.99. You can download areas to have offline, and is very useful especially in larger cities. Our view is that this is well worth the money -- if the app brings you to one great vegan restaurant you wouldn't have known about, it already pays for itself

## OPTIONAL

- **Tent/sleeping pad:** A note on camping on the Camino — although we haven't camped on the Camino, we met a number of other people that did. It does give you a great deal more independence, but you also will have to be more flexible when looking for a place to sleep, as dispersed camping in Spain is not very widely available. One can always sleep on covered church steps or (usually) city parks. In the end, its about trade offs — albergues give you ease of travel, hot shower, usually a kitchen, running water, plus the chance to meet other pilgrims in a centralized environment. But, if you're comfortable with backpacking and sleeping in a tent, this could be a great adventurous option.

- **Stove and cooking equipment:** The same above goes for cooking equipment. If you're staying at albergues, these are unnecessary, as the majority will have at least a basic kitchen. It also helps to ask ahead of time if there are kitchen facilities where you're sleeping. But, if you decide to go the tent route, the stove and cooking equipment are highly recommended.

## COMPLETE PACKING LIST

Here is a complete list of everything we brought on the Camino.

- **Backpack.** We used the Osprey Fairview and Farpoint, both 40 liters. As we planned on travelling long-term directly after the Camino, these backpacks fit our needs perfectly. They're made for multi-terrain travel (i.e. carry-on size for planes, urban settings, and long distance walking), with a clamshell opening design that gives you easy access to all of your items. Although they don't have the same amount of support as full-on backpacking bags, they did the trick for us.

Size: 40 liters was enough! More than 40 and you'll be throwing in extraneous things that you find you need to mail back home anyway.

If we hadn't already had the Fairview and Fairpoint, we would have gone with a slightly smaller bag with more structure and support, like the Osprey women's SIRRUS 36 or the men's Stratos 36.

- **Walking poles.** They give you a 'full body workout', taking some of the load off your legs and sharing it with your arms and core. They are quite helpful for some of the continuous downhills, especially if you are prone to weak or bad knees.

We found various walking staffs from nature along the way. We advocate for wooden staffs because they:

1. **Are sustainable** -- you find one that calls to you along the way, and give it back to the forest when you're finished. No extraneous waste or plastic involved.
2. **Connect you with nature** -- At the end, it's cool to realize that you've transported a piece of wood 800km across a country, and you quickly form a deep relationship with it, as it has helped you a great deal on your journey.
3. **Are free** -- but, take only what is offered. Don't chop down a live tree for your staff.

However, If you'd prefer the more modern version, you can get the ubiquitous metal and plastic walking poles. If you buy them at home make sure they are the collapsable type so you don't have any trouble getting them on the plane. Perhaps easier, you can buy them at many shops around the way -- a pair will run about 20 Euros. Almost every medium-sized town you pass through on the Camino will have a shop selling these poles, so no worries about procurement here.

- **Rain Gear.** *Very important -- make sure you have rain gear.* Even if it only rains one day out of your entire trip, it will have been worth it. We bought ponchos from Decathlon here in Spain for 7 euros each (re: Decathlon -- see the general budget tips section). These were cheap, folded away nicely, and fit our needs exactly. They were 3-in-1 -- we didn't need to bring a pack cover, rain jacket, or rain pants. We recommend spending a bit more for the luxury version, that has sleeves for your arms (instead of just a flap), and go down to the calf.

Or, if you already have backpacking gear, bring it along! Pack cover, rain jacket, and rain pants are all necessary.

- **Sleeping bag.** You'll need either a sleeping bag or a liner. Some people just use a silk liner to fend off bedbugs and sleep in their clothes. If you sleep hot then that could be an option, especially if you're travelling in the summertime. Many albergues also have thick blankets available for you to use. We brought small lightweight sleeping bags, and they worked perfectly -- again, a cheap version can be bought from Decathlon, for only 20 Euro.
- **Hiking Shoes.** We advocate for the low-top sneaker approach. They are a lot lighter than boots, and give you more maneuverability. But, if you're used to boots and have a nice pair broken in, go for it! In the end, it's all about personal preference. Ideally, you'll already have found something you're comfortable walking in before starting the Camino. *Very important -- make sure you break in your shoes before starting.* Franklin used the La Sportiva Akyra and they worked great, not even one blister.
- **Sandals.** Something to slip on after you're done walking for the day, to wear around town. If you get a version with good support, they can also be used for a day of walking, to give your feet a break if you start to develop blisters from your hiking shoes. We brought Chacos, but you could also have Tevas, Keens, etc.
- **Clothes.**
  - One pair of **zip-off pants** that turn into shorts! Albeit nerdy, these are fabulous for starting off in the pre-dawn as a cold-weather hiker and then magically transforming into a hot-weather hiker once Brother Sun joins you for the day. Or, if you prefer a more traditional approach, you can just bring a pair of **hiking pants** and **hiking shorts**.

- **A 'travel shirt'**. Roll the sleeves down when cold and up when hot. It protects you from the UV rays and provides a lot of ventilation with multiple mesh openings. We used Columbia or ExOfficio shirts.
  - **Hiking socks**. Very necessary -- *don't* wear cotton socks, as you *will* develop blisters. We can recommend Darn Tough Coolmax Socks as a great vegan hiking sock alternative to wool. 2 pairs of hiking socks should be fine, especially if you take care to wash your socks every other day.
  - **A wide brimmed, collapsible hat** -- a strap is necessary for those blustery plains and high-mountain peaks. Very useful for hot days on the meseta
  - **Quick-dry t-shirt**.
  - A smart combination of **relaxation clothes** to change into.
    - For Ladies: A pair of spandex shorts, 3 very thin shirts, and a great travel dress (the Montezuma Dress from Prana made out of recycled polyester and spandex). This gives you options for when certain things are dirty or feel like looking cute.
    - For Fellas: A pair of athletic shorts to put on at the end of the day. A comfortable button-up t-shirt, and maybe a normal t-shirt if you're feeling frisky.
  - **A sarong or camping towel**. You usually won't find towels at albergues, so bringing your own is the way to go. Plus, it's so multi-functional - use it as an extra shade cover when hiking, or a privacy shade to attach to your bottom bunk.
  - **Warm layers**. One thin sweatshirt, one mid-weight jacket and one pair of leggings. You could also swap out the sweatshirt with a warm long-sleeved shirt.
  - **2 pair of travel undies**. Again, don't wear cotton! Some great quick-dry, anti-smell versions are available, like from Ex Officio. They're well worth the extra spend, and can be used for any ensuing travels after the Camino. Just wash one pair when you're washing your socks and other clothes, and you'll be fine.
  - **Buff**. These spandex contraptions that can be used as a neck covering/head wrap/etc. Again, can be bought at Decathlon for a couple Euro.
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- **First Aid Kit**: make sure you have blister care items in here (moleskine, etc).
  - **Headlamp or flashlight** for those days when you start out before sunrise, or when you're trying to pack your bag in the dark albergue
  - **Power Converter** for charging phone at night. This can be bought in Spain, so don't worry about procuring ahead-of-time
  - **Book**. We recommend a thick novel -- sometimes its nice to escape and get lost in a story.

- **Toiletries.** Whatever you need to keep yourself fresh and clean.
- **Soap** for washing clothes. All albergues will have a place for you to hand-wash and hang your clothes. A small bottle of Dr.Bronners works great here, and could double as soap for your body.
- **Water bottle** to fill up at the countless fountains along the way.
- **Sunscreen** and **Sunglasses** to protect you from the strong Spanish sun
- **Journal** and **pen** to record Camino inspirations
- **Headphones** if you like to listen to music when you're walking. An uplifting energizing song can completely change your mood at the end of the day, when you're exhausted and still have 5km to go. Make sure to have some favorite songs downloaded on your phone for this.

## **BEFORE DAY 1**

As we covered in the introduction, the beauty about the Camino (and traveling in general for that matter), is that you don't need to do much preparation. But, some is required. Ideally, before leaving:

- You're set on your packing list (although many items can be bought on the way, and also the Camino has a tendency to give you just what you need, at the moment you need it).
- You've read over some in your guidebook, watched a few Youtube videos, perused a couple of forums on the internet, or talked to a friend who has walked the Camino.
- You've told your bank that you're coming to Spain, so they don't cancel your credit cards.
- You know how long you have, and have given yourself enough wiggle room for some rest days or to explore sites that pique your interest. We recommend 5 weeks, so you can walk without hurry, and are able to go to Finisterre and Muxia (see section on Finisterre and Muxia).
- You've done some training walking, depending on your level of fitness. But, no matter how much training you do, the first couple of days will nonetheless at least be a shock.

If you're walking the traditional and most popular route — the Camino Frances, walked by 63% of Pilgrims — you'll begin in St.Jean Pied de Port. If you don't have enough time to start here, you can easily begin at any point along the Camino. Many people start in large cities like Leon or Burgos, for ease of transportation.

We recommend beginning in St. Jean, as you get to experience a taste of the full glory of the Pyrenees. If at all possible, try to arrive in St.Jean in the morning, so you can secure lodging and figure out logistical necessities before hordes of other pilgrims and tourists arrive.

## **TO FINISTERRE OR NOT TO FINISTERRE?**

We recommend, if you have the time, to take an extra 3-4 days to walk 100km past Santiago and finish your voyage at the Atlantic Ocean in Finisterre. And, if you're feeling frisky, take one more day to walk to Muxia, another renowned terminus of the pilgrimage.

You might be saying right now: “Wait a second? I’m planning on walking 800km to what is supposed to be the end point of this pilgrimage -- and now you’re telling me I should walk 100 more?”

Yes, yes we are.

Although Santiago is generally regarded as the end point of the Camino de Santiago, you’ll hear murmurings along the way that there is an older path which preceded the road to Santiago. That for centuries before the Camino was established, pilgrims from around Europe would walk to Finisterre (literally means the end of the earth [fin -- end][terre -- earth]). That the act of walking as far as you can to the terminus of the world carries a certain spiritual significance and striving.

On a practical level, Finisterre is a much more fitting end point for your journey than Santiago. Of course, Santiago has the magnificent Cathedral with the body of St. James legendarily entombed inside. Pilgrims are recieved every day in Obradoiro Square, to hugs and pictures and bagpipe music. But aside from some of this resplendor, Santiago is still a large city with all of the attendant hustle and bustle. Finisterre, on the other hand, is a welcoming fishing village perfect for contemplation and self-reflection, used to receiving pilgrims for centuries. You’ll find great accomodations, a number of vegan-friendly restaurants, and a relaxing place to process all of your experiences.

There is no more fitting way to end your voyage than climbing to the Finisterre lighthouse jutting into the ocean, seeing the 0.0km marker, and sitting in silence as the sun dips into the sea.

On a spiritual level, Finisterre can be a point of personal re-birth. Paraphrasing our friend and fellow pilgrim Viktor, who walked from Sweden to Finisterre

“The way to Finisterre is all about re-birth. For your entire Camino, you’re walking westward, towards the setting sun. Facing the sun, you’ll always have your shadow behind you. This shadow is the darkness within yourself, all of your fears and wounds, your bad habits and vices, your hate and envy.

When you get to Finisterre, you can’t walk any farther. You’ll sit on the rocks at the lighthouse and watch the sun go down for the last time. And when you get up, you’ll be walking eastward, in a new direction and on a new voyage. You’ll leave your shadow on those shores, and with it, all of the things about yourself you want to give up.”

Wherever you choose to end, we hope these words can still be useful in personal reflection on the Camino. And if you don’t make it to Finisterre this time, it’ll always be there for you on the next trip.

## VEGAN EATING TIPS

Yes, it's sadly true that Spain is largely a meat-cheese-egg-dairy filled monster. But, don't despair! You can still eat a hearty, plant-based, and sustainable diet while walking the Camino. Here are some general tips we've collected:

- **Cook for yourself.** Put leftovers in plastic containers for lunch the next day. You'll also share food with a lot of people from around the world this way. Take advantage of larger supermarkets when you come across them, as many villages only have the most basic of stores. Buy fruit and vegetables at the local fruterias (produce stands), as these will have fresher and cheaper options than chain stores.
- **Check the kitchens of albergues** when you arrive and before you go grocery shopping, as most of them have a 'free section' of food for pilgrims. You could save a lot of money on pasta/rice/etc this way, and avoid the inevitable food waste here.
- **Be aware of upcoming towns** that do and do not have cafes-grocery stores-etc. This can be found via a quick google search, or check on the online Eroski guide. Also note that many stores are closed on Sundays, closed for sietas (1:30 or 2pm to 4 or 5pm), and closed for national holidays. Take all of this into consideration when buying/cooking food-- a bit of advanced planning can save you from going hungry for a night.
- When you're going to **eat at traditional Spanish restaurants**, here are some items to order: pasta with tomato sauce, vegan paella, french fries, mixed green salad (specify no tuna or cheese), pimientos padrón (roasted green peppers), pan tostada con tomate (this is a good breakfast option), vegetable soup. It also never hurts to ask if they can prepare anything for vegans. You'd be surprised at how many places are at least aware of veganism, and can accommodate.
- The majority of restaurants on the Camino offer a **pilgrim's menu** (between 8 and 12 euro). This usually consists of: first course, second course, dessert, bread, and wine or water. You'll find that the first course often contains a few vegan or vegetarian dishes (vegetable soup, salad, pasta with tomato sauce, etc), while the second is meat, fish, or dairy-based. You can always ask to **swap out your second course for another first course**, thus hacking the Pilgrim's menu. For dessert you can often get a piece of fruit. The Pilgrim's menu is a great option if you don't feel like cooking / aren't able to cook / or want to commune with fellow pilgrims that are eating out at a restaurant. Plus, they usually offer liberal quantities of wine.

- Whenever possible, **stay at albergues that offer vegetarian / vegan Pilgrim's menu.** They are very accommodating to dietary needs, and can make vegan menus upon request. The meals here are usually very fresh, with big portions, and made with love -- by far our top dining experiences on the Camino. Between 10-12 Euros, but definitely worth it.
- At places that offer bocadillos, ask for '**bocadillo de vegetales**, sin carne, atun, mayoneisa y queso'. It never hurts to try, and you never know when you'll run into a vegan-friendly chef who can load up your sandwich with fresh vegetables.
- If you're in the right season, you can **forage** figs, grapes, or blackberries from the numerous plants dotting the camino.
- **Don't be afraid to ask for what you want** at a restaurant. If you don't know Spanish, make sure you have some phrases at the ready, or the Translate app downloaded on your phone. (For example: es posible hacer \_\_\_\_\_ sin carne, pescado, leche, y huevo?)(Is it possible to make \_\_\_\_\_ without meat, fish, milk, and egg?)
- Your never-go-hungry and keep your vegan food cache full questionnaire:  
 Does my destination have a grocery store?  
 Will I be in town when it is open?  
 Is it Sunday?  
 Is it a holiday?
- We're sure you have many favorite recipes of your own, and are able to improvise with what is on hand. Here is an **example of a cheap, healthy, and hearty meal we created**, using the ingredients available in a small Spanish grocery store.

### **Couscous Beet Salad**

This is a perfect and easy one-pot meal, as all you need to cook couscous is boiling water. And there is virtually no cooking time -- just chopping vegetables, heating water, and mixing everything together

**Step 1:** Cook the amount of cous-cous you desire in the salad. 1 cup works well with these quantities of vegetables, but of course everything can be adjusted. To cook couscous, all you need to do is boil water, pour it over the couscous, and let it sit for 5 minutes.

One cup of couscous requires 1.5 cup hot water.

**Step 2:** Dice the following vegetables, and mix with the prepared cous-cous

1 red bell pepper  
1 small red onion  
3 cloves of garlic  
1 cucumber  
2 beets (you can buy these pre-cooked, in the veggie section)  
1 jar garbanzo beans (no need to dice)

**Step 3:** dress the salad, and mix some more. Dress it with:

Olive oil  
Lemon juice (1 whole lemon does the trick)  
Salt  
Parsley

**Step 4:** top with half an avocado, and enjoy!

**Step 5:** put the leftovers in your to-go container, and save for a refreshing lunch tomorrow.

## Budget & Sustainable Living Tips

Here are some tips to help you save money and also reduce your waste and ecological footprint on the Camino

- Have a **reusable grocery bag**. Many albergues have free reusable yellow bags for pilgrims to take. You can also buy one at a larger grocery store along the way, or bring one from home. Plus, all stores charge 5 cents for a plastic bag, so you'll save some money this way.
- **Bring a water bottle** to fill up at the countless fountains you'll encounter on the Camino. It's absolutely silly to buy bottled water, when so much is available along the way.
- **Check with your bank back home to see if they have any partner banks in Spain** that won't charge you ATM fees. For example, Bank of America doesn't charge for transactions at Deutsche Bank. You'll end up paying cash at the majority of places along the way, so these fees could potentially add up. And when you do come across these partner banks, take out large amounts of cash, as you never know when you'll come across another one (or actually any ATM for that matter).
- **Spanish sporting goods store Decathlon** can be a godsend. They have cheap products with a great selection, and are the perfect place for buying those couple of items you didn't bring with you. These can be: ponchos, small sleeping bag, travel shirt, hiking socks, etc. Decathlons are in all medium to large-sized cities, so if you arrive in Madrid or Pamplona for example, it could be well worth it to take an afternoon to visit.
- **Hand-wash your clothes**. Bring a small bottle of laundry soap with you. All albergues are equipped with a dedicated sink and scrubbing-board for washing clothes -- having a clean walking outfit makes all the difference. Plus, laundry service is on the expensive side (between 6 and 10 euro).
- **Pick up trash along the way**. Buy a roll of trash bags at a grocery store or ask an albergue for a couple extras, telling them of your intentions. You can also buy latex gloves at a pharmacy, to make the cleanup easier. It will really change your experience for the day, and give you the feeling that you're positively contributing to the beautification of the Camino. We first got this idea from John Brierly -- to quote him:

*"A rewarding discipline is to collect some rubbish along the way each day with the intention of leaving hepath better than you found it. If a sense of superiority arises,*

*visualise yourself cleaning up the mess that you left behind at other times in your life when you were, perhaps, less aware"*

## **ON DAY 1**

### **Arriving to St. Jean Pied de Port**

You will find that this is a town crawling with nervous pilgrims, busloads of tourists, and only a few locals that seem to subsist entirely on the pilgrim economy. If at all possible, try to arrive in St. Jean in the morning, so you can secure lodging and figure out logistical necessities before hordes of other people arrive.

Upon arriving, it would be wisest to go to the Municipal Albergue to get a bed. Doors here open around noon, and you'll likely encounter other pilgrims already waiting in line. If you come later in the afternoon, the municipal is likely to be filled up. This isn't a problem, as you'll just need to resort to any of the other albergues or hostels in town -- they'll just prove to be a bit pricier (5 euro for municipal or 10-15 for private albergues).

### **Pilgrim Credencial**

After finding a place to sleep, go to the Pilgrim information office, to get your all-important Credencial. It's basically a paper book that you fill out with stamps of all the places you visit. The stamps (sellos) are a mini-industry here, and a unique souvenir from each day and site visited on the Camino. The office will also give you very detailed walking instructions for your Day 1, and answer any general questions you may have. They will also give you a list of all the albergues on the route.

### **Eating in St. Jean**

St. Jean is not a budget-friendly vegan town, instead providing overpriced meat-heavy menus to tourists and fresh pilgrims.

Your best bet for eating here would be to venture outside the main part of the city, and buy food to cook lunch or dinner at the albergue. Also make sure to buy breakfast and lunch food for the next day, as you won't find any exciting options on the way to Roncesvalles. There is a nice ALDI supermarket just outside of town — definitely worth the walk.

## ECOTOPIAN SLEEPING ON THE CAMINO

It's surprising to find that many guides don't talk about the importance of where you're staying on the Camino.

You'll often arrive into town exhausted, and all you'll want to do is put your backpack down, take a shower, and laze about. But, we've found that where you stay in town will drastically affect your mental state and attitude for the rest of the day. If you're at an albergue that is dingy, with no kitchen, and smells like mildew, you're not likely to have a peaceful and enlightening experience that evening. On the Camino, you're raw emotionally and mentally, and it's pretty amazing how strongly you can be affected by any small positive or negative input. So, it is well worth your time to spend 10 minutes or so each day thinking about where you'll sleep for the night. This can be done the night beforehand, on the Camino, or even in town when you arrive.

We've found that budget lodging on the Camino is all about value tradeoffs.

If you're looking to spend the absolute minimum, you could stay at **donativos** for your entire trip (donativos are albergues run by the church or non-profit private organizations that operate -- you guessed it -- on a donation basis). We met 'permanent pilgrims' who only stay at donativos on their Camino and are able to walk only by spending money on food. Many places also have 'donativo' dinners or breakfasts, which are simple and vegetarian/vegan. The tradeoff here is that these are pretty spartan facilities, often without a kitchen and many beds packed into one room.

The next step up are the **municipal albergues**, run by the government and often staffed by volunteers (called hospitaleros). These cost anywhere between 5-10 Euros, and range in quality. Some albergues are modern and remodelled, with footbaths, expansive kitchens, and lovely separators between each pair of bunk beds. Others have the bare minimum, and pack all pilgrims into one room, like a tin of Spanish anchovies. More often, the municipals lie somewhere in between these two extremes. They provide a kitchen with the most basic cooking utensils, a lounge/dining area, a courtyard with space for washing clothes, and Wifi.

In our experience, the municipals offered a great congenial atmosphere -- as you are in close quarters with a large number of pilgrims, you're bound to get to know people. If you are keeping pace with the same people, evenings in the municipals can become a mini homecoming.

Farther up the lodging hierarchy would be the **private albergues**, which run anywhere between 8 Euro and 15 Euro for a bunk bed -- If you're looking for private room, costs will be significantly higher). These sometimes include breakfast and sometimes have a kitchen, and will generally

have more personality and more comfortable sleeping options. They are a good way to escape the pilgrim crowds and have a little breathing room for yourself.

Our recommendation: **stay at a mixture of all three**. This gives you a good perspective of life on the Camino, and you'll be able to interact with a larger variety of pilgrims. You will also be able to feel out which fits best for your own personal taste and budget.

One note: as the Camino is getting more and more popular, you will often find places that are full (completo), especially toward the beginning and end of the Camino. This is not a huge deal, as in most cases there will be another place to stay in town. And if for some unlucky reason, there isn't, you can just make your way to the next town. The staff at albergues are usually very helpful in finding you an alternative place to stay. In these cases where it looks like a place will be completo, you either have the option to:

(1) Leave early in the morning, planning to arrive to your destination between noon and 2pm. Most albergues open up their doors to accept pilgrims between noon and 1pm. This may be the simplest if you're on the younger and fit side, and don't tend to linger for a long time at different spots.

(2) If possible, call ahead and reserve a bed for yourself. For the donativos and municipal albergues, this usually isn't an option, as they don't accept reservations. But, you could do this if you find a private albergue that you're excited to stay at. There's no shame in reserving and calling ahead, and you can have a much more carefree walk.

(Although it might not seem to be in the true spirit of pilgrimage to call ahead, it is great to have peace of mind. It's also great to have peace of mind even if you can't reserve, because it's all going to work out.)

(3) Don't plan, and sleep wherever the Camino takes you. There is something liberating about this approach, to walk as far as your feet can take you for the day. It works especially well in larger cities, where there are a number of different cheap accommodation options.

With all of these factors in mind, here is **our magic formula of how we decide or (don't decide) where to sleep**:

***1. Read or heard recommendations for an albergue that is right up your alley?***

*Great, do everything you can to stay there.* Call ahead and reserve if possible, that way you don't have to worry about there not being a room if you arrive. Although these stellar albergues are usually on the pricier end (10-15 Euros vs 5 Euros for a municipal), the extra spend is well worth it. Our experiences at these albergues were some of the most memorable from the entire Camino. You meet inspiring people, are in unique and beautiful environments, and usually are privy to enormous homemade vegetarian/vegan

feasts for dinner. It is also worth it to splurge on the dinner at these places (usually around 10 Euro)(just make sure to ask them for a vegan meal).

You can find some top recommendations by: reading our list in this guide, looking at other recommendations provided (see the resources on \_\_\_\_\_), reading an all-inclusive guidebook like John Brierly's, or simply talking to other pilgrims who have done the Camino before.

**2. *Are you exhausted and need some rest or break from Pilgrim life?*** Consider staying at another private albergue in town. Just remember that many of these places don't have a kitchen, so you'll be eating out at a restaurant or having a sandwich for dinner.

**3. *Are you feeling fine and enjoying communing with other pilgrims?*** Go to the municipal albergue in town. Again, all of them have at least basic cooking facilities, so you should be able to make a decent vegan meal for cheap.

**4. *Are you feeling spontaneous and in the zone?*** Show up in a city and figure things out from there!

Although this sounds a little complicated, you'll quickly figure out what works for you, and will surely enjoy the adventure!

## **WHERE TO STAY AFTER ST. JEAN ⇒ OUR VEGAN ALBERGUE RECOMMENDATIONS**

Although we visited a number of other incredible places on our trip, these are the Albergues that stood out the most -- taking into consideration ease of eating vegan, welcoming atmosphere, sustainable practices, and general spirit of the albergue. These are the special places that we would recommend to anyone, and we would go out of our way again to stay at them. Remember to let them know you're vegan!

### **St Nicolas Association -- Itero de la Vega**

A donativo run by friendly and boisterous Italian volunteers, located in a 13th century stone chapel-turned albergue. With no electricity (except in the bath-house behind it), this is a time machine back to another era of pilgrimage. Simple candle-lit dinner, preceded by a blessing ceremony. With no electricity, storing dairy and meat is not an option, so our meal was deliciously vegan.

Before reserving your bed confirm that this hasn't changed and that the meal planned is a vegan one, or that they will be able to accommodate you otherwise. It's pretty secluded so you won't be able to easily go to a supermarket for lunch, so plan accordingly.

Only open June-September. Only 12 beds and no reservations!

9 km after Castrojeriz

18.4 km after Hontanas

29.2 km after Hornillos del Camino

### **Albergue Amanecer -- Villarmentero de Campos**

629 178 543

An eccentric oasis surrounded by the meseta's harsh plains, complete with geese, a donkey, and lovely options for accommodation such as: a wooden hut 'palace', a concrete tube, and a typical dorm room. This place truly is amazing and a must-stay. The hospitaleros are awesome, the food is prepared with love, and the courses never seem to stop coming.

9.3 km past Fromista

25.5 km past St Nicolas (Itero de la Vega)

There is an alternative route 3.9 km after Fromista that takes you along a river. It might be shaded depending on time of year/day. Even if not shaded, it takes you away from the highway for the last few km.

### **Albergue Ada -- Reliegos**

691 153 010

Pedro (owner) is a great host and keeps the place spic and span. His meditation/yoga room is peaceful and well equipped, as is his large back garden. A friendly dog and some spastic cats may be present in the backyard for loving on. He manages to cook a wonderful dinner, all while running the rest of the albergue himself.

30.4 km after Sahagun

12.7 km after El Burgo Ranero

### **Albergue Verde -- Hospital de Orbigo**

689 927 926

Albergue Verde puts so much heart and soul into its reception, organic garden, free yoga, relaxing backyard, and donativo dinner. They grow most of their own food on land, and the pilgrim dinner is a highlight of the stay, a cornucopia of fresh and local dishes. The vibe is everything a physically and mentally exhausted pilgrim could want.

36.3 past Leon on the optional route.

If you take the route that passes through Villadangos

11.5 after Villadangos

~21.9 after a great Albergue called La Casa del Camino

### **El Serbal y La Luna -- Pieros**

639 888 924

The dorm rooms in this very ancient and mystical building are spacious and comfortable -- the beds seem like thrones, and this was one of the deepest sleeps we got on the Camino. The rest of the atmosphere keeps up the eco-hippy-vibe: healthy and delicious vegan meal, meditation room, and beautiful artwork in obvious and also not-so-obvious places.

~18.7 after Ponferrada

~25 after Molinaseca

### **Albergue El Refugio -- La Faba**

654 911 223

Although we actually didn't end up sleeping here (only eating their delicious lentil burger for breakfast), we heard many rave reviews of the place. They have a very comfortable dorm, yoga classes, and a vegetarian cafe attached to the albergue with a number of great options, all housed in a huge yet cozy remodeled stone farmhouse.

**Albergue Ecologico El Beso -- Lugar A Balsa**

633 550 558

Another incredible Eco-oasis on the Camino. They use fully organic food for their vegetarian breakfasts and dinners, much of it grown on land. Hammocks in trees overlooking the Albergue, plus a really cozy common room, turn this into another paradise on the Camino.

**Albergue Do Sol -- Finisterre**

617 568 648

If you make it out to Finisterre (which we heartily recommend), this is a great way to end your journey. Donativo vegetarian dinner, small dorm rooms, meditation/yoga room, and a large adjacent garden chillout space. A great escape from the commercialized tourist bustle of Finisterre.

## **VEGETARIAN RESTAURANTS**

Here is a handy list of well-reviewed vegetarian restaurants (with vegan options) we've pulled together from some different sources. Although it isn't by any means exhaustive, it can be another resource to support you in your Camino.

You can find other plant-based establishments by:

- Checking the Vegetarian Way map
- Looking at Happy Cow App
- A quick google search for the town you're in, as restaurants come and go quickly

### **Pamplona**

*Baratza Kafea* -- Travesia Bernardino Tirapu 5 (at Calle Rio Arga)

*Larraisko* -- Calle Berrioplano, 4

### **Logrono**

*Camino Vegano* -- Plaza del Mercado, 25, Bajo,

### **Burgos**

*Gaia* -- C/ Fernan Gonzalez, 37 bajo

*Cardamomo Vegetariano* -- Calle Jesus Maria Ordone, 3

### **Leon**

*L'Union* -- C/ Florez de Lemos, 3

*Ecolmado* -- Calle Villa Benavente, 14

### **Murias de Rechivaldo**

*Meson El Llar* -- Calle Santiago 23

### **Sarria**

*Ecoespazo Vitriol* – Rúa Diego Pazos, 18, 27600 Sarria

### **Portomarin**

*Los Andantes* – on the Camino, at km 94, a couple km before Portomarin

### **Melide**

*Casa Alongos* – Rúa Camino Vello de Santiago S/N

### **Arzua**

*Utreia Cafe and Albergue* – Camino de Santiago, 126

### **Santiago de Compostela**

*Entre Pedras* – Rúa Hospitalino 18

*Alice in Wonder Pie* – Rúa da Ensinanza 12

*TS A Casa* – Rúa de San Pedro 113

### **Fisterra**

*Etel & Pan Restaurant* -- Praza da Constitución, 10

*World Family Restaurant* -- Av. Coruna 63

## SOURCES

“The Vegetarian Way” -- heartofthecamino.com

[http://heartofthecamino.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/vegetarian-way\\_heartofthecamino\\_v2.4-2.18.pdf](http://heartofthecamino.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/vegetarian-way_heartofthecamino_v2.4-2.18.pdf)

“Albergues Camino Frances, A Selection of Favorite Albergues.” -- Dutch Society of St. Jacob

<https://www.santiago.nl/sites/default/files/werkgroepen/slaapplaatsen-gps/Divers/favorite-albergues-2018.compressed.pdf>

“Vegan Camino de Santiago” -- The Vegan World

<https://theveganword.com/vegan-trekking-camino-de-santiago/>

“Vegan on the Camino” -- caminoways.com

<https://caminoways.com/vegan-on-the-camino>

## **WHO WE ARE**

We finished the Camino de Santiago in October 2018, as a way of kicking off world explorations.

Our mission in travel is to seek ecotopia, to find people that are living in harmony with each other, their place, and the planet.

You can follow our adventures at [seekingecotopia.com](http://seekingecotopia.com) or write us at [seekingecotopia@gmail.com](mailto:seekingecotopia@gmail.com)