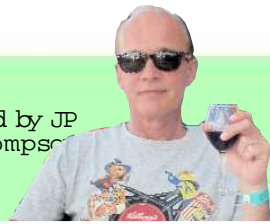


ESCAPE

Edited by JP Thompson



SUNWAY has two departure options for a week away on June 15. There's seven nights in Tenerife, leaving from Dublin, from €499. Or if you fly from Knock you can get a week in Lanzarote from €399. See sunway.ie or phone (01) 288 6828.



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FALCON has a week in Lanzarote, flying from Shannon on June 17, and staying at Balcon del Mar, Puerto del Carmen, from €399. Or from Dublin on June 10, there's seven nights in Turkey, at the Green Park Apartments in Marmaris, from €319. See falconholidays.ie for more information.

WALK THIS WAY



TAKE A HIKE: Jim gets set for another day on the

By Jim Gallagher

A few years ago not many Irish people had even heard of it. Now everyone seems to be doing the Camino de Santiago. The famous medieval pilgrimage goes all the way from St-Jean-Pied-de-Port in the south-west corner of France to the beautiful city of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, northwest Spain. The 770km route takes a month to walk, but most people tackle just one section of it over a week. And today you will find not just pilgrims on its meandering route but also avid hikers, young backpackers, adventurous pensioners and holidaymakers looking for

something different. And many people prefer to do it on mountain bikes.

Much of the recent interest is down to Hollywood star Martin Sheen's 2010 film *The Way*, which was set on the Camino and which was directed by his son Emilio Estevez.

Shen played an American doctor who travelled to France to pick up the remains of his son who had died in the Pyrenees during a storm while doing the walk, also known as The Way of St James.

He decides to complete the pilgrimage in memory of his son and the movie follows his adventures as he hooks up with a multitude of other pilgrims.

The Camino was something I had been hearing about for years, and finally I had a chance to try it for a week.

Many people simply throw a bag on their back and set off from France, stopping off in the hostels and pensions that line the route.

But carrying a full backpack for five or six hours a day is hard work! Instead I booked the trip through Camino Ways, a Dublin company that arranges everything for you.

Not only are the comfortable hotels booked in advance, but they move your bag from location to location every day. All you have to do is walk and admire the gorgeous rolling hills!

A multitude of restaurants and cafés along the way means you only need to carry essentials such as



AT LAST: Jim reaches Santiago de Compostela

Our pilgrim tells of his progress along

water, sun cream and a waterproof jacket if bad weather threatens.

I chose the most popular section, the last week from Sarria to Santiago, a distance of 120kms, which is done by thousands of people every year.

Aer Lingus have a direct flight into Santiago and there is either a public bus service to Sarria or you can arrange a pick-up through the travel company. Then you just walk back to Santiago!

My first night was spent in the

comfortable three-star Hotel Alfonso IX, a stone's throw from the river in Sarria which is lined with cafés and where I tried the local delicacy, pulpo (octopus). It was delicious.

The big walk began the following morning at 8.30am in thick fog, which was a surprise. It cleared after three hours to reveal lovely rolling countryside.

A rapid pace took me the 22km in five and a half hours, arriving at the beautiful town of



ROAD LESS TRAVELLED: Camino Portomarin at 2pm, where I was booked into the lovely Hotel Pousada with its huge rooms.

Coming into the town you pass over a spectacular bridge before walking along the main street, lined with archways and cafés, to the stunning main square and church. A large dance festival took place that Sunday evening, with dancers decked out in traditional Galician costumes, which added to the occasion.

On Monday it was another 22km to Palas do Rei, this time taking six hours with the route gently uphill most of the day. My accommodation was just outside town in a row of comfortable log cabins.

Galicia is far cheaper than Ireland and that night I wandered into the town and ordered a Spanish omelette, which was big enough to feed three or four people, for just €7. The next day, Tuesday, was the longest walk of the trip at 28km.

Like most autumn days in this part of the world, the temperature started at a comfortable 17°C, slowly rising into the low 20s. But on this day it peaked at a sweltering 28°C as I neared the end of the hike. I was ready for a siesta in the centrally-located Hotel Teodora in Arzuá.

Most walkers along the way were Spanish, although there was an occasional Irish, American or even New Zealand accent.

By the third day I was surprised by the number of people with bandaged knees or limps. One or two were even in bare feet because of blisters.

Walking 25km is fine, but when you do it every day it



strains muscles and chafes skin. Wednesday seemed a doddle of just 18km. Leaving at 8.45am I was in my next hotel in Rua at 1.15pm, a lovely spacious place with a large garden to sit in.

I walked into Santiago the next day and was bowled over by its beauty. The first view of the historic cathedral was amazing and the adjoining square was a vast meeting place for walkers reuniting with people they had met along the way.

I was booked into the Hotel San Carlos and spent the following day relaxing and strolling around this gorgeous city, filled with narrow cobbled streets and archways, which is well worth a visit in its own right. And the whole trip was completed without one drop of rain.

TRAVEL FACTS
My trip was organised through Camino Ways in Dublin (01) 525 28 861 or

HOLY CITY: The cathedral at Santiago de Compostela, walkers at a café on the trail (far left) and the dance festival in Portomarin (left)



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By Michelle Jackson

It has been a tough season for Liverpool FC supporters. Nevertheless, my 12-year-old son begged me to make the pilgrimage to Anfield. So we took the short half-hour flight and, with three hours before kick-off against West Ham, I was determined to squeeze some culture into this trip (to my son's dismay).

For a nominal fee, much less than the official tour bus, our Scouser taxi driver was happy to take us on a tour of Beatles sites. We passed Quarry Street and pulled up at St Peter's Church in Woolton, where John Lennon and Paul McCartney met and played together for the first time at a fete.

In the grounds is the headstone of Eleanor Rigby and, raising my son's interest, the shrine to the great Bill

SCOUSE

Liverpool's a

Shankly. Next stop was Paul McCartney's simple family home on Forthlin Road, followed by John Lennon's Aunt Mimi's house - which is an impressive semi-detached and not exactly the humble beginnings to be expected of a working-class hero. The children's home at Strawberry

Fields is a stone's throw away but the famous red gates are kept in storage with replicas in their place due to constant graffiti. We drove down Penny Lane towards our Beatles-themed hotel in the centre of town, appropriately named A Hard Days Night.

With the promise of kick off in Anfield after a swift lunch in Jamie Carragher's Sports Bar, we sat through a dull two halves that produced no goals.

Liverpool is unrecognisable to the town I visited in the Eighties. It is now a bustling metropolis with a host of museums to honour the city's nautical past.

As an art lover, the Tate Gallery is not to be missed; my son snoozed on a seat while I browsed. The Beatles Museum is in a great location at the dock, and right beside that the Liverpool Eye

boasts spectacular views of the Liver building and the River Mersey.

We found a trendy Italian restaurant called Gusto before making our way back to Hotel, which was conveniently placed beside the Cavern nightclub.

Next morning we paid a visit to the Liverpool FC store on Williamson Street and after shopping there he was happy to accompany me to the other department stores at Liverpool One. It was only a whistlestop tour and unfortunately not the result that my son wanted, but with his confirmation clothes packed in two bags and a feast of culture enjoyed, Liverpool turned out to be an unexpected win for his mum.

Michelle Jackson's novel *5 Peppermint Grove*, is published by Pookbeg Press, €6.99, and available in all good book shops now. For more information see www.michellejackson.ie

IN TUNE: At Strawberry Fields

SHEIKH THINGS UP WITH A WATERY

THERE are more than 200 species of coral and 1,000 species of fish - including barracuda, turtles and eagle rays - off the coast in the Red Sea Riviera. In the resort of Sharm el Sheikh in Egypt you can snorkel from the beaches, off pontoons or go on dive cruises. Direct Holidays has a couple of options for those who like the underwater. The five-star Baron Palms features snorkelling at its private sandy beach, and private boat excursions and scuba diving courses for beginners. A seven-night all-inclusive stay starts from €1,019, departing Dublin on June 5, with meals, drinks and entertainment included.



DIVE RIGHT IN: Snorkelling in Egypt

With its beach looking out on the Tiran Straits, there are also excellent diving facilities at the four-star Hotel Hilton Sharks Bay, where all-inclusive costs from €859 for a week on June 12. The three-star Golden Shores near Naama Bay is on offer from €565 on June 5. See directholidays.ie



late deals

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