

# Ask the team

Our experts answer your travel queries

**I turn 50 next year and I'd like to do a Camino walk for up to six days in September. Can you suggest routes, places to stay and someone who could organise it all for me?**

*Caroline Doyle, Co Wexford*



#### **Vincent Crump replies**

The first question is, which Camino? The tangled trackways that lead to the shrine of St James in Santiago de Compostela would give Harry Beck nightmares (he designed the London Tube map), with their many variants. My tip, and the classic, is the Camino Frances, a 490-mile epic from St Jean Pied de Port, north of the Pyrenees.

It typically takes five weeks to do the lot, but if you have only six days, you can still get your fill of scrumptious Galician hill country – and your pilgrims' Compostela certificate – by walking just the final stage, west from the medieval stronghold of Sarria, with its 13th-century church and broken-topped castle.

From here, the route stretches 70 miles (62 miles being the minimum to win your official spurs) through a strangely un-Spanish countryside of cattle-chomped green hills, oakwoods and streams. You'll walk enough each day to bag a proper peregrinator's blister or two, and soak up all the atmosphere of the trail, which is never busier than here.

Macs Adventure has a self-guided week, starting in Sarria, from €440, B&B, excluding flights. Baggage transfers cost an extra €89 (00 44 141 530 5460, macsadventure.com). Fly to Santiago de Compostela with Ryanair and catch

the bus to your starting point (for times and prices, visit [monbus.es](http://monbus.es)).

Or try [Caminoways.com](http://Caminoways.com), which tailormakes all manner of trips on the trail.

**My wife has a big birthday in January and has always talked about seeing the northern lights. Is this a good time to view them in Europe or North America?**

*Paul Reynolds, London*



#### **Jeremy Lazell replies**

January is a fantastic time for one of nature's greatest displays: the darker the skies, the better your chances. Low on light pollution, Iceland is one of your best bets. Taber Holidays has

three nights at the Hotel Ranga, in the dark-sky wilds near the notorious Eyjafjallajökull volcano, and a night in Reykjavik; prices start at €1,104pp, including some meals, car hire, flights and day trips to Geysir, Gullfoss waterfall and Jokulsarlon glacial lagoon (00 44 1274 875199, [taberhols.co.uk](http://taberhols.co.uk)).

To see the lights from sea, Hurtigruten has the seven-night Arctic Wonders cruise along the Norwegian coast from €1,862pp, full-board, including flights (00 44 20 3582 6642, [hurtigruten.co.uk](http://hurtigruten.co.uk)). Departing from Bergen on January 5, you'll travel 250 miles inside the Arctic Circle, around the North Cape, with the final night in Kirkenes Snowhotel.

Ramping up the luxury, Frontier Canada has a twin-centre trip, with three nights at Fairmont Banff Springs, one night in Yellowknife and three nights at the beautiful Blachford Lake Lodge – which has a superb northern-lights record and offers snowmobiling,



dog sledding and ice-fishing. Prices start at €3,619pp, including flights (00 44 20 8776 8709, frontier-travel.co.uk).

We are looking for a week in the Nîmes/Avignon/Salon-de-Provence triangle. Ideally, we would like a small, quality hotel in a rural location with a good restaurant. Do you have any suggestions?

*Mervyn Mead, East Sussex*

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QUESTIONS TO  
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**Anthony Peregrine replies**

A fine Provençal triangle indeed, with three historic towns at the extremities, another — Arles — along the base, the Rhône running through and, vitally, the Alpilles hills in the middle. Small but sharp-edged and furious, they rise to the eagle's-nest village of Les Baux-de-Provence, before dropping to Mouriès, French olive-oil capital. Outside Mouriès, Le Vallon de Gayet hotel ushers you into a serenity of old stone, nooks, crannies and rambling buildings. Rooms, through which the fairy of modern decor has flitted, are all on the ground floor, with terraces giving onto gardens and pool. The Provençal food on the €27 menu is toothsome and, in summer, eaten under the trees (doubles from €102; levallondegayet.com).

Or head for the nearby village of Fontvieille and the Hostellerie de la Tour. Its simpler, more rustic rooms all have private terraces, and plumbing arrangements are 21st-century. There's a sunshine warmth about the place, too, from the smiling welcome through to the beguiling restaurant (doubles from €140, half-board; hotel-delatour.com).

The soaraway Pont du Gard — the Roman world's greatest aqueduct — is just a mile or so outside the triangle. My favourite neighbouring hotel is the four-star Bégude Saint-Pierre, recently revamped in its manorial farmstead setup. Stone and parkland without, it goes sober and minimalist within — and there's a sense of Provençal exclusivity throughout. Excellent restaurant to boot, with dinner menus from €42 (doubles from €65; hotel-begude-saint-pierre.com).

