

# 10 tips for the Camino de Santiago

Walk this way.



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It's one of the world's great pilgrimage routes, but these basic tips can make the difference between a trip of a lifetime, and weeks of blister-infused misery. Buen Camino.

## 1. Make a packing list

This is the smartest step you'll take on the Camino.

Start your list several weeks before you travel. Talk to pilgrims. Consult blogs, tour companies and Twitter (use the hashtag [#caminodesantiago](#)). Unless you're organising luggage transfers, you'll have to carry everything you pack... and that can be a big burden. Essentials include: a sun hat, sunscreen, water bottle, medicines,

camera, blister plasters, anti-inflammatories, wipes, a plastic bag, light fabrics that dry easily, travel towel and sleeping bag if necessary.

Weather can be unpredictable in Galicia, so bring a poncho and fleece for cool evenings.

## 2. Break in your boots

There is a time to buy new hiking boots, but that time it is not the day before your Camino.

Blisters are a problem for even the hardest of hikers, so be sure to get your boots ahead of time and break them in over several long walks before you travel. Blister plasters are a godsend - they contain a gel that cushions already-formed blisters, making it easier to hack through those killer end-of-the-day kilometres. These were the best few euro I spent.

## 3. Bring ear-plugs

Lots of pilgrims stay at cheap-and-cheerful *refugios* (hostels) along the route. That means sharing dorms... and snoring. Not all *refugios* provide bedclothes, so plan your ahead or pack a sleeping bag.



## 4. Start early

Hitting the trail between 7 and 8am means you avoid the worst of the day's heat, and crowds.

“I used to walk an hour or so and then stop off for breakfast,” says Shane Carney, whose undertook a Camino from O’Cebreiro to Santiago in 2012. “My average distance was about 25km a day, which meant I walked for about five hours, arriving at my *refugio* for lunch.”

## 5. Book ahead

The Camino has exploded in popularity over the past decade, with almost half of pilgrimages taking place in summer months. Make sure to book your accommodation in advance - especially on busy stretches like Sarria to Santiago.

## 6. It's good to talk

You won't always feel like talking to fellow pilgrims – and indeed, some of the most deeply enjoyable moments can be those spent alone in the countryside, accompanied by nothing more than the hypnotic clump of your footsteps.

There is, however, an amazing camaraderie on the route.

The people you meet, and the stories you share, are all part of the atmosphere - and something pilgrims tend to remember far more vividly than the landscapes. Perhaps due to the nature of the route, or the time on their hands, conversations are amazingly open, and can continue for days.



## 7. Pace yourself

Anyone with a reasonable level of fitness should be able for a stint on the Camino - but you can be sure as Sunday that your body will throw curved balls at regular intervals along the route.

It's a good idea to do long walks before you go, getting to know your comfort levels and warning signs. Take the first week slowly. 25km is a doable average – I found it a bit much (due to dodgy aches and blisters, rather than a lack of fitness, which I found frustrating) but others walk up to 30km a day.

## 8. Stay hydrated

It can be hot on the Camino, and you're asking a lot of your body, so be sure to replenish all those fluids and minerals you're losing through hard work and sweat. In medieval times, pilgrims used the famous scallop shells as water scoops and spoons - centuries later, a good water bottle is essential.

## 9. Do at least 100km

This is the minimum distance required to get a certificate of completion.

Typically, the start point is Sarria (111km from Santiago on the French Way), which takes about six days to walk. By taking your passport to the Pilgrim's Office (Oficina del Peregrino) in Santiago, you can have the distance verified and claim a certificate... and cherished memento.

## 10. Plan your arrival in Santiago

Book your accommodation ahead for at least the first night in Santiago. This especially applies to peak periods like June, July and August, when pilgrims and tourists throng the Galician city.

Shane Carney recommends the Hotel as Artes ([www.asartes.com](http://www.asartes.com)), just off the main square. “We also splurged for our last night and stayed in a Parador ([www.parador.es](http://www.parador.es)) - it set us back almost €200, but after walking all those kms, we felt we deserved it!”

## Getting there...

Aer Lingus ([www.aerlingus.com](http://www.aerlingus.com)) flies from Dublin to Santiago from March 29th.

Camino Ways ([www.caminoways.com](http://www.caminoways.com)) offers walking and cycling packages on the Camino, with six nights on the French Way starting from €489pp in low season. The price includes rooms, dinners and luggage transfers, but not flights. It and is offering 10pc off trips booked during the remainder of 2014.

J. Barter Travel ([www.travelnet.ie](http://www.travelnet.ie)) also does packages, with a 92km guided walk from Santiago to Finisterre starting from €590pp, including guides, transfers and 3-star B&B accommodation.

## More info...

The Irish Society of the Friends of Saint James is a voluntary organisation promoting the Camino routes, as well as the many ancient pathways and within Ireland itself. See [www.stjamesirl.com](http://www.stjamesirl.com).

John Brierley's Pilgrim's Guide to the Camino de Santiago (Camino Guides, £17.99) is favoured by most pilgrims.

In Santiago itself, the Pilgrim Office (Oficina del Peregrino, +34 981 568846) provides toilets, backpack storage and certificates.

Read more: [Pilgrims' Progress: Santiago de Compostela](#)

<http://www.independent.ie/life/travel/europe/10-tips-for-the-camino-de-santiago-30818417.html>