



Travel feature

Walk this way

Think the Camino de Santiago is just for pilgrims? Look closer and you'll find a holiday that has something to offer everyone

For centuries, the Camino de Santiago has been a popular walking route for pilgrims across the globe. However, in recent years, the many Camino paths have seen an increase in popularity with those who are looking for something slightly different than the average sun holiday. There's a common misconception that the Camino is boring and simply involves walking along roads, but if you take a closer look, you'll see that whichever path you choose, you'll meet new friends, see some spectacular sights, and have a wonderful experience.

We spoke to Claire Dunne, the Sales and Customer Service Manager for travel operator Caminoways.com to find out just what you need to know about the Camino.

WHAT IS THE MOST POPULAR ROUTE FOR IRISH HOLIDAYMAKERS?

The most popular route is called the French Way and that one starts just on the French border in St Jean Pied de Port. It crosses Northern Spain for 800km as far as Santiago. Most people will [walk the Camino] for a week and they'll do the last 100km from a place called Sarria. That one is the most popular, but we've found, in recent years, people are venturing out to slightly different routes. Two routes that we've found are very popular are the Portuguese Way [and] a route called the Portuguese Coastal way. That one starts in Porto and goes all the way to Santiago.

WHEN'S THE BEST TIME OF YEAR TO VISIT?

May and September are very, very popular. The weather is usually quite pleasant – not too hot, not too cold. You always have the chance of rain, but it's typically quite pleasant within those months.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO BRING? DO YOU NEED ANY SPECIALIST EQUIPMENT?

On a walking holiday the most important thing is to take good care of your feet. We recommend a good pair of trail shoes or



runners. You can get a good pair in any of the outdoor stores. Some good trekking clothes [are important] as well. Something that's comfortable and breathable, and a good pair of socks. We usually recommend Merino wool.

DO YOU NEED WALKING POLES?

In general, if you don't use them when you're walking at home, there's no need to get them for the Camino because they can slightly change your style of walking and they can actually make you sore in the evenings because your walking has changed a little bit. The main things are good, comfortable clothes and a good pair of runners or walking shoes.

SHOULD YOU TRAIN BEFORE EMBARKING?

The Camino is not a very difficult thing to do. For anyone of a moderate fitness level it's perfectly fine. You don't have to be very fit to do it... In terms of training, we generally recommend, for people who are used to walking, that they build it up a bit more day-by-day. It would be good to do a couple of 10km or 12km walks within the month. It definitely helps to try and push yourself that little bit more. You're walking on consecutive days, so if you're someone who is used to doing a walk just on Saturdays or a Sunday, it would be good to try and build it up during the week.

WHAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO DO BEFORE YOU ARRIVE?

To have your trip well planned. There are two ways of doing the Camino. One way would be to just book a flight, arrive, walk

as much as you can and then try and stay in albergues or hostels. Typically those can't be pre-booked, so it's just a matter of showing up and seeing if they have a bed. With ourselves, it's a little different. You do have that little bit more comfort and we pre-book all of the accommodations... [Also] look at what you want to achieve from the Camino. Do you want to finish in Santiago or is that not important? Would you prefer a coastal route?

IS THE CAMINO JUST FOR PILGRIMS?

Some people do the Camino for religious reasons, but not everyone. Sometimes people just want to challenge themselves a little bit. Some people are looking for a holiday that's completely different and that really is what the Camino offers. You'll meet people from all places around the world. People that maybe in normal circumstances you wouldn't meet, but the Camino brings people together. **WW**

For more information about walking the Camino log on to www.caminoways.com