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THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO THE CAMINO FRANCÉS

From Preparation to Your First Steps



Have you heard of the Camino de Santiago? Walking, eating, sleeping... Rinse and repeat... For a month straight...

It is a challenge of a lifetime, but it is also the dream of a lifetime.

If you are in the planning stages, you might be feeling a little anxious or confused about the logistics.

Where do I sleep? How do I wash my clothes? Do I need to carry food? Before I embarked on my first Camino journey, I had those exact questions too.

Fear not! I'm here to calm your anxieties and answer the questions that keep future pilgrims up at night reading every thread and blog post they can get their hands on. Whether you are walking for a simple love of hiking or healing from grief, this guide will help you prepare physically, mentally, and logistically for the journey of a lifetime.

PART 1: PLANNING WHERE TO START

If you are planning to walk the Camino Francés, starting your pilgrimage from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port (SJPDP) is an excellent choice to get the full experience. This starting point usually takes anywhere from 30-35 days to complete.

Located at the foothills of the Pyrenees mountains, this picturesque town offers stunning landscapes, rich history, and a vibrant community. It is the classic starting point, and the energy here is unmatched. You are surrounded by people who are all about to embark on the same crazy adventure.

Getting There

Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port is accessible by train or bus from nearby cities like Bayonne, Biarritz, or Pamplona.





I took a plane from LAX to Charles de Gaulle, connecting to Biarritz. I stayed the night in Biarritz (as there is a hotel walking distance from the airport). Then, in the morning, I took a bus to the train station that took me to Saint Jean.

OR one could fly into Madrid, take a flight to Pamplona, and arrange a [private transfer from Pamplona to SJPD](#).

Pro Tip: Check train schedules in advance to avoid delays.

First Night: It is highly advisable to book your accommodation in Saint Jean ahead of time, especially during peak pilgrimage seasons. I have failed to do so in the past and was forced to stay far from town.

PART 2: A HOLISTIC APPROACH FOR PREP

Preparing to pack your life into a bag and walk long distances can be intimidating. You might be thinking, "*Can I actually do this?*" or "*Do I actually want to do this?*"

The truth is, you don't have to prepare. You could simply show up and start walking. But to make it more enjoyable (and much less painful), I recommend focusing on three areas of preparedness: physical, mental, and spiritual.

1. Physical

Train Your Feet

You don't need to be a seasoned hiker or an outdoorsy person to do this. You just need to strengthen your feet, core, and endurance.

My Personal Training Plan:

Treadmill: 30 minutes at incline 12. Pace 3 (3-4x a week).

Strength: 30 minutes of strength training/weight lifting (3x a week).

Weekends: Take a longer walk (at least 5 miles). This is a time to take your backpack out for a little joyride and trial run.

Gear Check: Use these training walks to make sure you actually like your shoes and backpack! We want to mitigate blisters on your feet during your trek, and that starts with your training.



A "MUST" FOR ME

The Cruz de Ferro ritual is when a pilgrim takes a stone from their home (or one found on the trail), carries it with them on their journey, and throws it into the vast mound of rocks at the Cruz de Ferro. Letting go of the rock symbolizes personal, emotional, or spiritual impediments that one releases.



2. Mental

Find Your "Why"

There will be hard days on the trail. You might feel like you are being broken down.

In those moments, having a clear "why" will help you stick it out.

Ask yourself: *What is my intent?* Is it just to enjoy walking? Is it to process a life change? Have thoughts, memories, and positive messaging for yourself

to help motivate you when the going gets tough. The Camino tests us physically, but it is a mental challenge above all else.

3. Spiritual

Do Your Research

The Camino is a historic trail with rich treasures, whether you are religious or not.

Doing prior research can calm your worries and get you excited. Read books, listen to podcasts,

and watch documentaries to understand the history of the path you are about to walk.

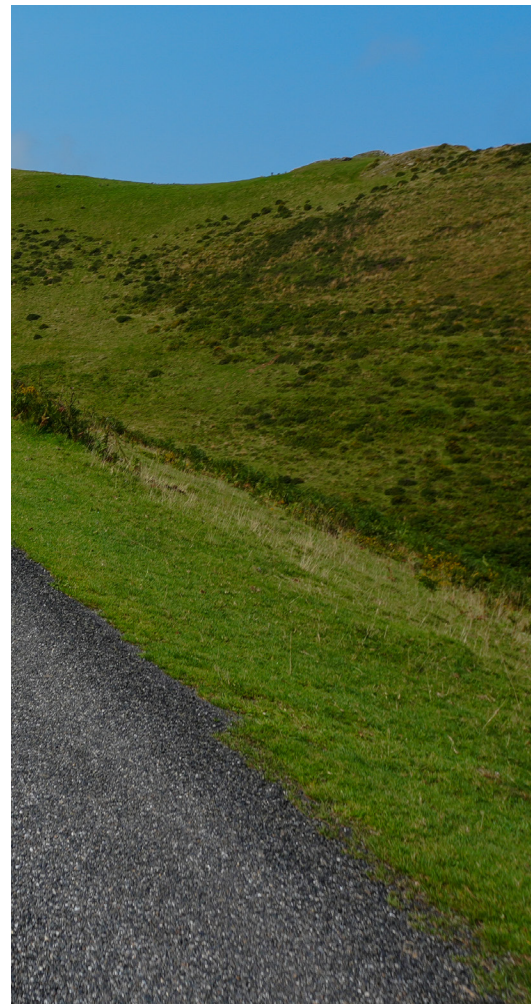
Resources: books I liked, podcasts or videos I found helpful - and don't miss the rock for the cruz de farro ritual.

PART 3: A TYPICAL DAY ON THE CAMINO (LOGISTICS)

What does a day actually look like?

The Walk

You get to go at your own pace. It is not a race.





Golden Rule

ALWAYS TAKE
ADVANTAGE OF A
GOOD LAUNDRY SETUP
WHEN YOU FIND ONE.
ALSO, BRING TWO
PAIRS OF EVERYTHING
(ESPECIALLY SOCKS)
SO YOU NEVER HAVE
TO PUT ON DAMP
CLOTHES IN THE
MORNING.

Routine: For the first 5 days, we knew exactly where we were walking and staying. After that, we decided to "let go" and walk with no strict plans.

Timing: We typically woke up around 5:30 AM and finished walking by 1:00 PM or 2:00 PM.

For the summer months, it is nice to get the walking done before it gets too hot, especially during the meseta section (the mostly flat and open plains). Walking early also gives you time to get

to a town, find a bed, relax, wash your clothes, and go to bed early.

Sleeping: The Albergue Lowdown

Accommodation on the Camino (Albergues) comes in all shapes, sizes, and price ranges.

Municipal Albergues (€5-€10): These tend to be donation-based or very cheap. Expect large bunk rooms (sleeping with 20-80 people!) and basic bathrooms.

Private Albergues (€10-€15):

Smaller dorms (approximately 10 people) with more privacy in the bathrooms.

Private Rooms (€25-€50): If you need a break from the crowds, you can pay for a private room. The price depends on whether you want your own bathroom.

A note on laundry: Laundry facilities vary wildly. Sometimes you are washing clothes in a shower or sink; sometimes there is a proper washing station or even a machine.



Eating & Drinking

The French Way on the Camino is famous for its accessible cafes! You will start dreaming of coffee, round a corner, and there it is—the perfect spot for breakfast.

Snacks: I usually carried extra fruit, a granola bar, or a chocolate bar for the trail.

Dinner: Many albergues offer a "Pilgrim's Dinner" for €12-€14, which almost always includes wine. Alternatively, you can find local restaurants after your siesta.

Health Tip: Vegetables can be surprisingly hard to come by. I actually took AG1 supplements with me because I'm extra. (And I missed greens!)



PART 4: LET'S GET GOING!

The First Stage: Saint-Jean to Roncesvalles

This is the big one. The first stage from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port to Roncesvalles is beautiful but challenging.

The Terrain

Expect steep climbs and incredible views of the Pyrenees.



Strategy: Start early to give yourself plenty of time to rest and soak in the scenery.

Navigation: The route is well-marked; just keep an eye out for the iconic yellow arrows.

Check out the [refugio](#) where I stayed.

Staying here at the Refuge Orisson makes the first day a 5-mile trek (instead of a 15-mile trek).

PART 5: FINAL TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CAMINO

The camino always provides. After taking my final steps, here are the three lessons I took with me:

Cultivate Silence

The stories, emotions, and limiting beliefs that create my life are loud, and they are on repeat. In stillness, you can listen and observe.



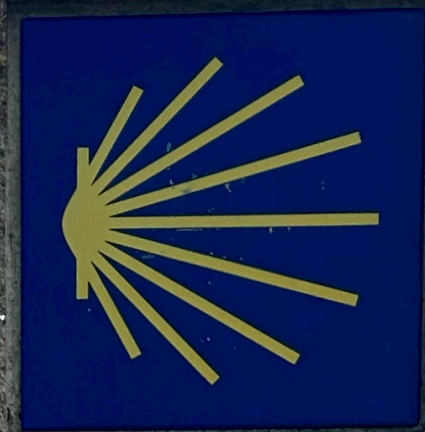
I am capable

Change your narrative to: *I am strong enough for that.* "Confidence is what determines whether this will be a source of anguish or an enjoyable challenge." - Ryan Holiday



You can't chase happiness

"The greatest misfortune is to not know contentment. The world calamity is the desire to acquire, and so those who know the contentment of contentment are always content." - Laozi, author of the Tao Te Ching



Km 0,000

A scenic landscape featuring a herd of sheep grazing on a grassy hillside in the foreground. The sheep are white with some grey patches and are scattered across the slope. In the background, a deep valley is visible, filled with green fields, small villages, and rolling hills. The sky is blue with some white clouds. The text "Buen Camino!" is written in a white, cursive font across the middle of the image, with a small decorative icon below it.

Buen Camino!

