

Walking the Ramparts: A Pilgrimage with Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross
July 5 – 15, 2023

Frequently Asked Questions
Updated September 2022

Q: *Why should I go on a pilgrimage with Shalem?*

A: Many organizations offer pilgrimages, and some individuals go on pilgrimage alone. Shalem pilgrimages are intentionally contemplative, rooted in silent prayer and holy listening in small groups. In this pilgrimage, Shalem's experienced pilgrimage leaders will offer seminars and reflections on spiritual deepening and the dark night of the soul. Combined, this experience offers spiritual enrichment and connection through individual reflection and the pilgrim community that will form. The pilgrimage leaders have also taken care of many logistical details to make your pilgrimage experience more spiritually centered.

Q: *Does the pilgrimage entail physical challenges?*

A: This pilgrimage involves walking outside in Spain in July. It will likely be hot and sunny, and some parts of Avila and Toledo include inclines and declines. The bus will drop pilgrims off in Toledo, and pilgrims will need to carry their bags up a hill on the sidewalk. While this is not a "walking pilgrimage," pilgrims with mobility challenges and/or sensitivity to the sun may experience difficulty. Our pilgrimage leaders are available to talk with you if you have questions/concerns about mobility issues or physical readiness.

Q: *Do I need travel documents?*

A: You must have a current, non-expired passport to travel from the US to Spain. A visa is not required. If you are not a U.S. citizen, please contact your embassy or consulate to ensure that you obtain the proper documentation.

Q: *Where does the pilgrimage begin? How do I get there?*

A: We will begin our pilgrimage with an opening circle at a hotel in Avila, Spain at 4:00 PM on Wednesday, July 5. We will provide the exact address and further details as we get closer to the start of the pilgrimage. Avila is a relatively small town. Pilgrims will likely fly into Madrid. It is possible to get to Avila from Madrid via train or coach. It takes 1.5 to 2 hours to get to Avila by bus from Madrid, and tickets are usually around 12 Euros. Buses leave every 1-2 hours.

We recommend that pilgrims fly from North America to Europe no later than Monday, July 3 to allow ample time to make the journey and get settled. Keep in mind that any stay in a hotel before July 5 will be at a pilgrim's own expense. Pilgrimage leaders are willing to discuss ways to get to the starting location in more detail with pilgrims. We will share travel details with the group in advance, and discuss arrival options during a pre-pilgrimage virtual meeting.

Q: *What about travel insurance?*

A: We strongly recommend Comprehensive Travel Protection Insurance. Please consult your travel agent or visit one of the various websites such as www.travelguard.com.

Q: *Where does the pilgrimage end? How do I get home?*

A: The pilgrimage ends on the morning of Saturday, July 15, 2023, in Toledo, Spain. Pilgrims should either make travel arrangements to fly home from Madrid later that day or the following day, or continue their travels. We will likely be asked to be out of our hotel by 12:00 PM local time (will provide exact timing as we get closer to the pilgrimage). There will be no formal programming on this day, so pilgrims should make their travel arrangements as they so desire. We will provide a bus from our hotel in Toledo to Madrid-Barajas Airport on the morning of July 15. The exact timing of the bus has yet to be determined.

Q: *How much walking is it?*

A: While this is not a “walking pilgrimage,” each day will involve some walking to various sites around Avila and Toledo. It can get quite hot in these cities in July, and pilgrims are advised to prepare accordingly.

Q: *What about meals?*

A: Breakfast and most dinners are included in the cost of the pilgrimage and will be held as a group each day. All of our hotels include breakfast, and we will eat before beginning our daily schedule. Dinner in Spain happens later than many North Americans are accustomed to. We will likely have dinner right when restaurants open for the evening at about 8:30 PM. During one of our evenings, pilgrims will dine on their own at their own expense. Pilgrims can have lunch on their own.

Q: *Ok. So, remind me again, what’s the daily schedule like?*

A: We will follow a general daily rhythm (see below). It’s important to remember that exact timing will vary somewhat day-to-day and depend on factors that are hard to predict or plan on in advance. Pilgrimage leaders ask for flexibility from pilgrims and invite you to embrace the Spanish notion: *Tiempo es relativo* (time is relative) ;-). We will provide a more detailed itinerary closer to the pilgrimage dates.

General Daily Rhythm

- 6:45-7:15 AM Suggested time to wake up
- 7:30 AM Simple Presence (a morning prayer time, at the hotel)
- 8:00 AM Breakfast
- 9:00 AM – Noon: Morning Plenary (a blended time of worship, seminars, and experiential activities)
- Noon – 6:00 PM: Contemplative free time. Pilgrims are invited to have lunch somewhere local, reflect on the morning’s presentations, and explore the town.
- 6:00 – 8:15 PM Seminars and listening circles.
- 8:30 PM Dinner

Again, pilgrimage leaders want to emphasize that this is not the exact itinerary and each day will be distinct in terms of the exact timing of plenary and free time.

Q: *What do I need to bring?*

A: You'll want to bring casual, comfortable clothing and shoes that are comfortable for walking. We recommend pants/shorts made of light water-resistant, wicking fabric. Also consider that cotton or denim may get hot and uncomfortable.

Also, bring:

- Hat
- Sunglasses
- Water bottle
- Sunscreen
- Journal and writing utensil
- Backpack or bag to carry items during the day
- Snacks
- ID (passport)
- Cash
- Toiletries
- Phone & Camera
- Outlet adapters
- Phone charger
- Earplugs & snoring aids
- Covid-19 rapid test(s) (we strongly encourage this)

Q: *Will my phone work in Spain?*

A: Most cell phone providers (Verizon, AT&T, T-Mobile, etc.) have country-specific (i.e. Spain) international coverage plans for limited durations (i.e. the dates of the pilgrimage). We will rely on a WhatsApp messaging group to communicate announcements with the full group while we are in Spain. Your phone will need to be set up to work in order to receive those communications. Therefore, we strongly recommend that you connect with your cell phone provider and arrange for cell phone coverage while you are on the pilgrimage.

Q: *What are the COVID-19 requirements?*

A: Shalem requires all pilgrims to be vaccinated against COVID-19, including all booster shots a pilgrim may be eligible for. Pilgrims must provide proof of vaccination and booster shot (send a photocopy of your vaccination card to registrar Trish Stefanik at trish@shalem.org) at the time you register. Further, the United States, Spain, and various airlines have different COVID travel requirements. At the time of this writing (August 2022), travelers from the United States to Spain must show proof of vaccination and booster shot, but do not need to provide proof of negative COVID test to travel. However, these requirements have changed frequently throughout the pandemic and may continue to fluctuate. You can find up-to-date information on the COVID travel requirements from the US to Spain at the US Embassy's website: <https://es.usembassy.gov/covid-19-information/>. Pilgrims should also determine if their airline has separate requirements and take appropriate action one week before flying.

Q: *What is the currency? Where can I find out the exchange rate? How/where can I change money? How much money do I need?*

A: The currency throughout Spain is the Euro (EUR). Exchange rates change daily, and the easiest way to get an approximate rate comparing dollars to euros is to search on Google "1USD to 1EUR." The actual exchange rate you receive may differ slightly from this. Most stores in Avila and Toledo as well as our hotels accept credit cards, but some shops may not. You may wish to withdraw cash at any ATM in town or at the airport when you arrive. You will need money for any personal expenses such as beverages, laundry, room service, meals not specified on our itinerary, any extra excursions, snacks, souvenirs, as well as contributions you may choose to make to local churches, organizations or charities.

Q: *Is there anything else I should know right now?*

A: Our pilgrim community will have two to three Zoom meetings in the spring of 2023 to prepare for our journey. Pilgrimage leaders will be in touch in the new year about the exact timing of those meetings.