

On the Camino: A Pilgrimage to Remember, Release, and Reimagine
July 17 – 26, 2024

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated August 2023

Q: *Why should I walk the Camino with Shalem?*

A: Many organizations offer pilgrimages on the Camino, and many individuals make the trek on their own. Shalem's pilgrimage is intentionally contemplative, rooted in silent prayer and holy listening in small groups. Shalem's experienced pilgrimage leaders also will offer meditations on three themes: remember, release, and reimagine. 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: *How should I prepare physically for the pilgrimage?*

A: Unlike other pilgrimages offered by Shalem, walking the Camino involves moving to different locations on foot each day. For seven consecutive days, we will walk 10 to 18 miles each day. This is a significant distance and it includes steep inclines and declines every day. We strongly recommend that pilgrims train their bodies at least four months in advance for the journey. Additionally, pilgrims must train using the boots or shoes they will wear on the journey. You do not want to break in new boots during your pilgrimage experience! Here are three training guides that offer suggestions for preparing your body for the walk.

- Follow the Camino: <https://followthecamino.com/en/blog/your-camino-training-plan/>
- Camino Ways: <https://caminoways.com/how-do-i-train-for-the-camino-de-santiago>
- Stingy Nomad: <https://stingynomads.com/camino-de-santiago-training/>

Q: *Does the pilgrim community meet before the pilgrimage?*

A: Yes. The pilgrimage leaders will begin holding four monthly orientation meetings (via Zoom) beginning in March 2024 with the pilgrim community. These meetings will be held at 7:00 PM Eastern on March 10, April 14, May 12, and June 23. Attendance at these 90-minute orientation meetings is required as they will provide a space to check in on everyone's physical preparation, offer important logistical information, and support the spiritual development of our pilgrim community.

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

A: We are meeting on Tuesday, July 17 at 4:00 PM local time at a hotel in Oia, Spain. We will provide the exact address of the hotel and further details as we get closer to the start of the pilgrimage. Pilgrims will likely fly into nearby larger cities, such as Madrid, Lisbon, A Coruna, Vigo, or Santiago. Pilgrims should fly from North America to Europe no later than Sunday, July 15 to allow ample time to make the ground journey to Oia.

If you don't fly directly into Vigo, it's possible to take a train there. Then, from Vigo pilgrims can take a taxi or bus to Oia.

Google Maps (maps.google.com) can provide information about public bus schedules from Vigo to Oia. Please note, we are meeting in Oia along the Atlantic coast. There is another town named Oia further

inland. The Oia that we meet in is near the highway PO-552, a little south of a village called Viladesuso and a little north of a village called Portecelo.

Because bus routes can be confusing to navigate, you may find calling a taxi or arranging a car service to be easier, even if it costs more money. This website provides a list of taxi and car services in Vigo: https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g187509-Activities-c59-t182-Vigo_Province_of_Pontevedra_Galicia.html

Pilgrimage leaders are willing to discuss ways to get to the starting location in more detail with pilgrims. We will share travel details of the group in advance, and discuss arrival options during pre-pilgrimage virtual meetings.

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

A: The pilgrimage ends on the morning of Friday, July 26, 2024, in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Pilgrims should either make travel arrangements to fly home from Santiago anytime that 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.

Q: *How much walking is it?*

A: We will be walking 10-18 miles per day for seven consecutive days. The route includes steep inclines and declines each day for some duration. We will begin walking in silence each morning between 7:30 and 8:30 AM. Pilgrims are not expected to walk as a group for each day's journey, and different pilgrims may have different walking paces. Generally, pilgrims will arrive in the next lodging location before or around 3:00 PM (including a lunch stop). Pilgrims are advised to wear hiking socks (can be purchased at a sports store) to avoid blisters and to carry lamb's wool, anti-blisters pads and gels. If pilgrims experience difficulty and pain, they are welcome to make their own ground transportation arrangements to the next lodging location.

Q: *Do I have to carry all my things with me each day?*

A: No. The cost of the pilgrimage includes a service that will transport our baggage from lodging site to lodging site each day. Therefore, you only need to carry in your pack anything you would like to have during the day's walk (water, snacks, journal, ID, cash, sunscreen, first aid supplies). Keep in mind, the baggage courier service only allows one bag per pilgrim. Therefore, pilgrims should plan to only have one suitcase that will be transported and one backpack to wear. Also note, the baggage courier service limits the weight of each pilgrim's suitcase to 15 kgs (33lbs).

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 walk. 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 in Santiago, pilgrims will dine on their own at their own expense. Pilgrims can have lunch on their own. The path goes near many restaurant options during the day, many of which have special "pilgrim lunch" options. The whole group will not stop or meet together for lunch each day.

On the pilgrimage application form, we invite prospective pilgrims to disclose dietary restrictions. Please note: a restriction is a necessity and not just a preference. For example, if you truly cannot eat something because you are allergic to it, like nuts, please let us know, and we will try to accommodate your need with the restaurants. On the other hand, some people are able to eat some foods, like meat, but generally prefer not to. This *would not* be considered a dietary restriction. Please understand, dining is less customized in Spain than in the United States, and restaurants cannot – and will not – accommodate extensive dietary preferences of a large group (vegan, gluten free, etc.). Therefore, to support pilgrims with true dietary restrictions, we ask applicants only list foods that they truly do not and cannot eat. Specifically, we ask that only true vegetarians – people who do not eat meat at all – list that as a dietary restriction.

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) ;-)

General Daily Rhythm

- 6:00-6:30 AM: Suggested time to wake up
- 7:00 AM: Simple Presence (a morning prayer time, in the lobby or right outside the lodging location)
- 7:15 – 8:30 AM: Breakfast and depart for the day in silence. Baggage must be at the front desk of the lodging location by 7:30 AM each day for courier pickup. The exact timing of breakfast and our morning departure will vary because different lodging locations begin breakfast at different times. Some start at 7:00 AM and some don't start until 8:00 AM.
- 8:00 AM-Noon: Group walks the path in silence. You may walk by yourself or with others at your own pace.
- Noon – Pilgrims are invited to break the silence and have lunch somewhere along the path.
- 1:00 – 5:00 PM: Pilgrims likely will arrive at the next night's lodging location in this timeframe.
- 1:00 – 6:00 PM: Free time. Pilgrims should get settled in the night's lodging location and feel free to explore the town or take a nap.
- 6:00 – 8:15 PM: Some days, this time will be set aside for prayer and listening circles. Some days this will be extended free time. Pilgrimage leaders will provide the exact details during the pilgrimage.
- 8:15 PM: Group meets at the lodging location for evening announcements before dinner.
- 10:30 PM: Dinner will likely be over by this time, and pilgrims are free to explore the town some more or head to bed.

Q: *What do I need to bring?*

A: The most important item you will bring is your boots or shoes. You must, must, must break these in well before the pilgrimage. You may want to bring a pair of sandals or flip-flops to put on in the evening. They will feel good on your feet after the day's walk. Also, bring clothes that are comfortable to walk in. We recommend pants/shorts made of light water-resistant, wicking fabric. Do not wear cotton or denim – you will get hot and uncomfortable. We recommend hiking socks (bring extras), made of soft material that will not rub against your feet/toes and cause blisters.

Also, bring:

- Hat
- Rain poncho (good to be prepared)
- Sunglasses
- Backpack
- Water bottle
- Sunscreen & bug spray
- Journal and writing utensil
- Snacks
- ID (passport)
- Cash
- First Aid – anti-blister kit, foot powder, lamb’s wool
- Toiletries
- Phone & Camera
- Hiking poles (some people find these help alleviate joint pain)
- Outlet adapters
- Phone charger
- Earplugs & snoring aids
- Covid-19 rapid tests (at least four) and face masks

Q: *How much cash should I bring?*

A: First, you should notify your financial institutions that you will be in Spain so that they do not suspect fraud when you use your ATM or credit cards there. Your financial institution can set your ATM card so that it will work in Spain allowing you to withdraw cash (in euros) at ATM kiosks. Also, there are stations at international airports where you can exchange currency (i.e. converting US dollars to euros). We recommend pilgrims have access to cash and suggest 200 euros as a minimum amount to cover lunch expenses for the duration of the pilgrimage. Pilgrims may want to carry more for additional expenses.

Q: *Do I need to have a passport? A visa?*

A: You must have a passport to enter Spain from the United States. Please make sure your passport is not scheduled to expire before, during, or within six months after the pilgrimage (or the date you intend to return the US). If it is scheduled to expire in less than six months after you plan to return home, we strongly recommend that you renew your passport as soon as possible keeping in mind that standard processing can take several weeks.

A visa is not required to visit Spain, but beginning in 2024 travelers from visa-exempt countries (like the US) to the Schengen Zone (30 European countries, including Spain) will be required to register with the European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS). This will be available online and will include a small fee. As of this writing (August 2023), the registration system is not open, but information about ETIAS can be found on the website of the European Union: https://travel-europe.europa.eu/etias_en

Q: *Will my cell phone work in Spain?*

A: In advance of the pilgrimage, all pilgrims need to establish with their cell phone carriers international roaming in Spain. Most major US cell phone carriers (Verizon, T-Mobile, AT&T) will

allow you to pay an extra fee for the period of time you are abroad to maintain cell service. This is necessary because the pilgrim community will communicate during the pilgrimage using the text messaging application WhatsApp.

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

A: Shalem strongly encourages all pilgrims to be vaccinated against Covid-19 (including all booster shots a pilgrim may be eligible for). Pilgrims are advised to pay attention to what requirements the United States, Spain, and various airlines may have related to Covid-19 and travel. At the time of this writing (August 2023), Spain no longer requires proof of vaccination for non-citizens to enter and the US no longer requires proof of a negative Covid test to return. However, these requirements changed frequently throughout the pandemic and may change again. 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 at least one week before flying. Pilgrims are advised that if they have a layover in a third country, they may be subject to that country's Covid-19 travel requirements and should investigate those requirements accordingly.

Additionally, Shalem asks all pilgrims to pack at least four Covid-19 rapid tests and to bring a personal supply of face masks should either become necessary for the safety of the pilgrim community.