

*Walking the Ramparts:
A Pilgrimage with Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross
June 11 – 21, 2025*

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated August 2024

Q: *Why should I go on this 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. We believe these themes are relevant for the spiritual life generally, and the present moment particularly. Further, Spain's rich history provides an ideal backdrop to engage these themes. 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 some walking from our hotels to various sites nearby. It will be June in Spain, and likely will be warm and sunny. Some parts of Avila and Toledo include inclines and declines, and parts of the old city streets are cobblestone. 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. If your passport is scheduled to expire within six months after the pilgrimage, it's recommended that you renew your passport before traveling. If you are not a U.S. citizen, please contact your embassy or consulate to ensure that you obtain the proper documentation.

A visa is not required to visit Spain from the US. Beginning in 2025 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. Information about ETIAS can be found on the website of the EU: https://travel-europe.europa.eu/etias_en

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, June 11. 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 bus. It takes about 1.5 hours to get to Avila by train from Madrid, and tickets are usually around 13 Euros. There are several trains that depart each day from Madrid for Avila. Once in Avila, we recommend you take a taxi from the train station to the hotel.

In order to arrive on time, pilgrims should fly from North America to Europe no later than Tuesday, July 10 to allow ample time to make journey and get settled. Keep in mind that a stay in a hotel before June 11 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 of the group in advance, and discuss arrival options during a pre-pilgrimage virtual meeting on January 5, 2025.

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, June 21, 2025, in Toledo, Spain. Pilgrims should either make travel arrangements to fly home from Madrid later that day or continue their travels. We will provide a bus from our hotel in Toledo to Madrid-Barajas Airport in the morning. The bus will arrive at the airport by 9:00 AM, and so pilgrims should make flight arrangements with this timing in mind. For pilgrims who wish to stay in Toledo, we will be asked to be out of our hotel by 12:00 PM local time. 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: While this is not a "walking pilgrimage," each day will involve some walking to various sites around Avila and Toledo. It can get warm in these cities in June, and pilgrims are advised to prepare accordingly.

Q: *What about meals?*

A: Breakfast and 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. Pilgrims can have lunch on their own.

Q: *What is 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 spiritual practices, seminars, and experiential activities). This includes time to visit various sites in the two cities.
- 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 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 2024), 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. 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.

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 three required Zoom meeting in the spring of 2025 to prepare for our journey. The dates of those meetings are: March 16, April 13, and May 18. These meetings will begin at 7:00 PM Eastern and end by 8:30 PM.