

Pilgrimage Tour of France & Spain

10 or 12 Night Tour – Bed & Breakfast

Your itinerary

The following pages contain general information about your car or motorcycle tour and the locations where you will stay. The order in which they appear may not be the order your hotels have been confirmed for you - for your individual itinerary please refer to your holiday documentation.





Route planning
You may wish to go to one of the travel websites such as Google maps, viamichelin.com* theaa.co.uk.
*Motorway tolls, where applicable, are indicated on this site.

Hotel directions With your travel documents is an information sheet for each hotel giving directions together with some further details.

Arrival Unless stated, you will be expected to arrive at each of the hotels pre-booked for you by 6pm each day. This should allow time for a fairly leisurely drive between overnight stops but if you find you will be arriving later than this please ring the hotel so your room is held for you.

This tour is on a bed and breakfast basis.

The historic Way of St James dates back to the Middle Ages when pilgrims made their way to Santiago in Galicia, Spain, via a network of different routes. This new tour for 2020 follows part of those routes visiting some magnificent places in western France and northern Spain along the way.

There's so much to see so a bit of advance planning is worthwhile - a useful source of information is www.unesco.org where the 'Routes of Santiago de Compostela' is featured on the list of World Heritage Sites. It may also be worth checking the websites of individual attractions, monuments and museums for opening dates and times to avoid disappointment.

Tours

is the largest city in the Loire region, known for its wines as well as reputedly being the place where perfect French is spoken. In the 4thC Tours was the third most important pilgrimage city after Rome and Jerusalem, associated with St Martin and his compassion for the poor. Place Plumereau in the old quarter is a lovely square with pavement cafés, half timbered houses and cobbled streets with the Gothic



cathedral and Basilica not far away.
There are many places to visit in the area such as Amboise (24k) which was a stopover for pilgrims crossing the river

Loire at this point and the former home of Leonardo da Vinci, Le Clos Luce, is here. Also the châteaux of Azay le Rideau (30k), Villandry (18k - famous for its stunning gardens) and picturesque Chaumont sur Loire (44k - an annual themed festival is held in its grounds).



Saintes

has the impressive remains of a Roman amphitheatre dating back to 40AD and the gladiatorial era. The town itself is attractive and a long avenue leads to a bridge across the river Charente where there are boat trips. St Eutrope church is another of Saintes' architectural gems worthy of a visit.

It's less than 2 hours' drive between Saintes and Libourne so you may like to stop en route to see the medieval town of Pons, where France's best preserved Pilgrim Hospital was built in the 12thC for the poor and for pilgrim travellers. Another place to stop is Blaye (and its Presbytère St Romain), where pilgrims crossed the Gironde on their way to Bordeaux.

Libourne

This fortified town is the wine making capital of the northern Gironde region, close to the charming village of St Emilion and there are numerous wine producers

offering tours and tasting. Bordeaux (34k) is listed as a World Heritage site and is overflowing with history and culture! The tourist office has details of a 3 hour self guided tour with a booklet indicating the most important points of interest including the churches, the location of 3 hospitals that received pilgrims and also the Aquitaine museum, where there is a 15thC statue of Santiago.



Biarritz



The drive from Libourne is around 2 hours 30, depending on your route, and you may like to stop at Bayonne, 8k from Biarritz. Its Sainte Marie Cathedral has been added to and rebuilt over the centuries and used as a landmark by pilgrims. The 13-14thC Gothic cloister is adjacent and has a fine view of the cathedral and its decorated windows. Le Petit Bayonne on the other side of the river Nive is stunning with narrow streets of tall buildings and vibrantly painted shutters.

The beautiful seaside resort of Biarritz is renowned for its surfing beaches where a number of international competitions are held. A walk along the promenade takes you beside elegant hotels and villas or follow the clifftop path for views across the bay and don't miss the famous Rocher de la Vierge - a huge hollowed out rock linked to the coast by a footbridge. Near the Spanish border, St Jean de Luz is a picturesque fishing port with a beach and some typical Basque streets and squares.

Santo Domingo de la Calzada



Santo Domingo was once an important staging post on the old Pilgrims Way of St James and the medieval streets of the town centre with its wonderful old walls, cathedral and Pilgrims' hospital have been classified as a site of National Historic Interest.



On your route, around an hour west of Santo Domingo de la Calzada it's worth making a stop at Burgos, the regional capital of Castilla y León. This medieval city is renowned for its magnificent Spanish-Gothic style cathedral (the only one in Spain listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for the building itself) seen from miles around.

Burgos is another of the important stopping points for pilgrims with a wealth of history to discover.

León* or Villafranca del Bierzo



Originally a Roman settlement, León is a lively university city with wide boulevards, pedestrian squares and many architectural treasures such as the twin towered cathedral with its sculptures and very beautiful stained glass windows - it is equally impressive at night when it's illuminated.



The scallop shell symbol of the Pilgrims' Way

Surrounded by mountains, Villafranca del Bierzo was one of the last stopping places on the Pilgrims' route before reaching Santiago. At the entrance of the village is the 12thC Romanesque church of Santiago and the Puerta del Perdón gate is to the side of this. Pilgrims who

could not continue to Santiago de Compostela because they were ill or too frail were given a blessing here.

* While refurbishment is being completed on the Parador in León, the Parador in Villafranca del Bierzo is offered as an alternative.



Santiago de Compostela

This is Europe's greatest pilgrimage centre, the ultimate destination for those following the Way of St James. Here they will find one of the most beautiful cities in the world, according to UNESCO. The city was rebuilt in the 11thC and centres on its spectacular cathedral. The ancient streets, filled with Romanesque, Gothic and Baroque architecture, have a particularly special atmosphere. There is a huge

amount to see in this city, founded in 813 after the supposed discovery of the tomb of St James, with squares and narrow streets filled with appealing shops, taverns and bars.

Ribadeo



This is a beautiful Galician fishing and farming village with a number of bars and restaurants, and you can buy some of the popular local ceramics. There are boat trips along the river Eo and many lovely beaches nearby.

Cangas de Onís

Cangas is a lively town with an ancient bridge and a good choice of shops, bars and restaurants.

Arriendas (5k from Cangas) is the starting point for many white water sports on the Rio Sella. The



Roman bridge, Cangas

annual kayak festival is held here at the beginning of August with participants from all over the world. Covadonga (14k from Cangas), the birthplace of the reconquest of Spain from the Moors has an impressive monastery and the shrine of La Santina - the patron saint of Asturias, is in a nearby cave.

Santillana del Mar

This is one of northern Spain's most picturesque villages with its wealth of historic buildings including medieval, Baroque and Renaissance styles. The Colegiata church is said to be the best example of Romanesque architecture in Cantabria. At holiday



Santillana del Mar

times, particularly at Easter and in August the village becomes extremely busy so during these periods it's best to visit in the evening after the crowds have gone. Altamira, about 20 minutes' walk away has some famous prehistoric cave paintings discovered at the end of the 19thC. The original caves cannot be visited except by special request made well in advance but you can visit the museum where the replicated caves are displayed. Suances (5k from Santillana) is a fishing village and small seaside resort with 2 good beaches including one popular with surfers.