

Camino Memories

Camino Inglés • Autumn 2019

I've known (or at least hoped) for years that eventually I would walk some part of the Camino. When my friend and long-time Pilgrim Companion, Lisa Moriarty, mentioned the Camino Inglés last spring, my heart leapt and I knew I had found my Camino, and that the time was right. We had four months to plan, prepare, and dream...

I do not have a hiker's body – in fact my body was not really made for great adventures, and I don't have an athletic bone in me. I have a spiritual heart, though, and pilgrimage in all its forms calls me to surpass my limitations and take to the Path. My Camino story actually began in 2009 when I visited Santiago as a researcher and tourist with my husband and Lisa who was to become my walking companion. We had flown from England to Santiago en route to various of Galicia's ancient labyrinth rock carvings, and we, of course, made time to visit the city and its cathedral. As we made our way from the underground parking and up into the streets of the old city, we followed an unknown pilgrim. I have no idea who he was or what his story was. I just knew I was riveted. I chased after him, wanting to see him approach the cathedral, already feeling my own dream beginning to form. It seemed impossible. I don't speak Spanish. I don't do well in heat and strong sun. I'm not a hiker, no matter how much I'd like to be.



I had read about this pilgrimage, though, and we took our own arrival seriously, visiting the cathedral, praying with the other pilgrims, and embracing St James. I felt a bit shy, reticent to arrive as a pilgrim without making the walk. I didn't feel like I could walk the Camino, but I was in need of an opportunity to say thank you to God for some very big blessings in my life.

Every one of us will have our own stories. This is mine. I hope that in telling my story I will accomplish several things: 1) I want to leave a legacy for my descendants. I want them to hear in my own words the ways in which I tried to be a vital woman and an example for them. 2) I want to tell others what worked for me, for us. In particular I want to encourage other ageing non-athletes to find ways to invite the challenge of traditional pilgrimage into their lives. 3) I want to plumb the depths of my experience so that I can integrate its richness into my life in a conscious and meaningful way.

Six months after seeing the pilgrims in Santiago, Lisa and I set out to walk the 60 miles from Paris to Chartres in France. Paris has long been either a starting point or a waypoint for pilgrims walking to Santiago. We started our pilgrimage at the Tour St. Jacques not far from Notre Dame, which is both the centre and the heart of the city, and walked down the Rue St Jacques as pilgrims have done for centuries. In my mind's eye, I could see myself taking my rightful place in that long line of people, and it felt very good and very significant.

We didn't know much about pilgrimage in those days and made plenty of novice mistakes as we tried to follow an unmarked route... but we made it! Three days after setting out, we walked in to

the medieval city of Chartres where we shed real tears as we rounded the corner and saw the North Portal of the cathedral directly in front of us. My feet were blistered and in bad shape, but we had shouldered our packs and navigated our way south to the cathedral that is very dear to both of our hearts.

That pilgrimage is a different story, however. You can read about all three of my Paris – Chartres pilgrimages on my personal websites, *Ariadne's Thread* and *Walking in the World*. Specific links are given in the resources at the end. I made that walk a total of three times over the past decade, and Lisa returns to lead a new group of pilgrims to Chartres every year. That route was enough, and... it wasn't. The Spanish Caminos never quit calling, and I was always aware that as I got older and older, and then was diagnosed with coeliac (celiac) disease, my chances of ever making a Spanish walk were getting slimmer.

Lisa heard about the Camino Inglés last spring (2019), just about the time that I was visiting Lisa's home state of Minnesota in the USA, and we were both in a perfect position to begin dreaming of a Spanish Camino that seemed to lay within the realm of possibility for both of us. She is a strong walker who doesn't seem to suffer from blisters and an overly sensitive body - the exact opposite of me - but we both recognise and appreciate our roles as companions (and friends) and we enjoy the planning and anticipation as much as the opportunity to walk together.

She gets a pilgrim passport from the US agency every year before she goes to France, but I had never had one before. I decided that it was important to me to get mine here in England, and to walk as a British pilgrim. I joined the Confraternity of St James which operates out of London, obtained my passport, and dove into reading as much about the route as I could without overwhelming myself. I recommend some general reading about before setting out. It can be helpful to know about some of the common pitfalls before putting on your boots. It also helps to do a bit of reading about the specific route you have chosen (or that has chosen you). Personally, though, most of the route information just flowed and swirled around me without really having a context in which to settle. I know everyone prepares differently, so this is a good stage for beginning the practice of recognising and acknowledging (and benefitting from) what really works for you. My mantra became *You Do You* – and it was both a lesson and an aspiration.

The most important pre-pilgrimage advice that I received came from a book. In *Camino Inglés: 6 days (or less) to Santiago*, Susan Jaggannath emphasized the importance of being realistic, of making whatever decisions are necessary to ensure that you will be able to finish your Camino. I have heard too many stories of how stubborn adherence to an idea of pilgrimage could ultimately prevent you from finishing.

A few things stood out for me as I read, and I assembled a short list of things I wanted to see or do along the route. Personally, I like to explore my surroundings as I come to them, to let them surprise me as I go along. To know too much is to ruin the surprise, but to not know enough is to risk your whole Camino. I'm hoping this short memoir will help you to strike a balance that will work for you.

On September 29, 2019 Lisa and I took a late night flight from Heathrow to A Coruña. There aren't a lot of flights to Galicia from the London area, and this one seemed to be the best for our particular timetable. To avoid having to make our way into the city centre in the middle of the night, we arranged for a taxi ahead of time and a lovely driver met us just outside of



Arrivals to drive us to our hotel for the night. We wanted to see a bit of A Coruña before going to Ferrol, so we gave ourselves the whole of the next day to walk around the city, see the Lighthouse of Hercules, and visit a church or two. We got our first stamps and saw our first Camino markers before making our way to the train station on the edge of town en route to Ferrol, which is where our chosen route began.

The Walk

Starting Point

We opted to take the train from A Coruña to Ferrol, and found it to be comfortable and clean, though not especially quick. We enjoyed the scenery, knowing that we'd soon be walking back along much of its route. Other passengers noted our packs and scallop shells and one man dressed in priestly black even came over to give us a blessing – in Spanish with a google translation on his phone.

It was a short walk from the train station to our hotel, **Hotel Zahara**. I wasn't expecting much from the hotel as it was quite cheap and hadn't got rave reviews, but we loved it. Loved it so much that we chose to have our dinner there that night even though we had had a good nose around in search of something different, and also our breakfast the next morning. The restaurant was crowded at both meals, mainly with locals which seemed a good sign, and ordering was easy – helped by a friendly woman at the next table who wanted to help and insisted I order what she was eating. Not sorry that I did – it was delicious!!

We spent our afternoon wandering through the little city. Things were mostly closed as we walked down to the harbour where the Camino Inglés officially begins. Happily, the tourist information office was open when we arrived, and the woman was very helpful with suggestions, maps and a stamp (sello, pronounced say-oh) for our pilgrim passports. I recommend this as the place to begin!



Starting point in Ferrol

The first waymark is just outside, and after emotional smiles and Day One selfies, we had drinks in the café next door then started following the arrows. The route leads up and through the narrow streets of the old city where derelict buildings and modern restorations nestle tightly together. We browsed a bit and visited the *Parroquia Castrense de San Francisco* before turning into the more modern shopping district. Following our map, we decided to walk to the very edge of town so that we could easily pick up the route the next morning without having to retrace too many of our steps.

We did stop at the *San Julian Co-Cathedral* honouring the patron saint of Ferrol where we had to wait a bit before finding someone who could guide us to the male-dominated office where we could have our passports stamped. It felt important to have a spiritual stamp to mark our start as well as a secular one. And it was not an unpleasant place to linger.

TAKEAWAY/TIPS

- Hotel Zahara is a delightful place to stay and to eat.
- Go to the Tourist Info Office when you arrive to get a few kilometres under your belt – but be sure to check their hours! They will set you up with maps, a pilgrim passport if you need

one, and give you your first sello. Scallop shells for your pack are also available. When you see the waymark, be sure to point your smartphone camera at the QR code to access the iBeaken app with all its information. Visiting the Co-Cathedral was worth the few blocks of backtracking we had to do as it had been closed when we walked past it the first time. Don't miss it!

Day One: Ferrol to Neda

After breakfasting at the hotel, we shouldered our packs and headed back to where we had left off the night before, a waymark right on the edge of the city. We followed the edge of the estuary, delighting both in the watery views and the signposting. We had no problem navigating out of the city, stopping once for coffee and an additional sello.



San Martino Monastery

Probably my favourite site of the day was the *Monastery of San Martino de Xuvia* (aka *O Couta*). The monastery, which was associated with the Abbey at Cluny when it was founded in the 13th century, has gone through numerous renovations and changes over the centuries. The church was locked, but we explored the churchyard and met its guardian cat. The path was feeling decidedly rural by this time and we enjoyed seeing the small farms we were passing, with their orchards and animals. Not far from here, the path turned through a small eucalyptus grove. The lovely fragrance would become very familiar in the coming days, and I will now always associate it with Galicia, though the eucalyptus is not native to the area. Today's groves originated in the mid-19th century when the trees were brought over from Australia and Tasmania.

As we approached the northern edge of the Ferrol estuary, we were presented with a choice; two waymarks stood side by side with their arrows pointing in opposite directions. A nearby sign indicated that we could walk all the way around the estuary and past an abandoned tidal mill, or shortcut across a bridge and go directly into Naron. We chose the longer (traditional) route. It didn't actually add much mileage and it was interesting to see the mill from various vantage points.

As we rounded the estuary, the path followed a newly constructed walkway that was quite pleasant and took us through a park which lead to the beautiful double hoop bridge that was not only fun to walk across, but took us directly to our Pensión Maragoto, our accommodation for the night.



The Maragoto was a no frills B&B, but spotlessly clean and offering a great view of the bridge and the river which only became more spectacular as night fell. We had been lead to believe that the Maragoto offered evening pilgrim meals, but I think Pilgrim Season was pretty much over by the time we arrived, so we walked back to Narón in search of dinner and a grocery store. We found stores where we replenished our snack supply, but the restaurants didn't open till after 8 and it was still early. We decided to order some wine from a bar with seating out in the main plaza and they fed us enough snacks – chicharrones, olives, and whole crabs – to tide us over for the evening. The Pension was wonderfully quiet and we slept well, noticing again that dawn didn't arrive until well after 8 the next morning.



Takeaways/Tips

- Plan to stop at the Monastery of San Martino. Apparently there are some interesting carvings there, possibly erotic, but we didn't manage to find them. We wondered if they were similar to the Sheela-na-gigs we have seen in Ireland and Britain.
- Dinners are served late in Spain, so plan accordingly. We thought we would be able to get pilgrim meals a bit earlier, but we didn't find any bars or restaurants offering them, though it seemed like some of them might have done so earlier in the season. Apparently the Inglés route doesn't have quite the pilgrim infrastructure of some of the other routes.

Day Two: Neda to Pontedeume

Breakfast at the Maragoto was hearty and delicious with freshly squeezed orange juice and lightly toasted rustic bread accompanying the eggs and bacon. (As I couldn't eat the toast, I got a reduction in the price of my breakfast.) While eating, we chatted with four other British pilgrims who started out walking just behind us but then mysteriously disappeared on the steep hill leading out of Neda. When we arrived at Fene and collapsed into a local bar for coffee, they were already there laughing and eating. As they hadn't passed us on the single track path, we assume they must have taken a taxi! I'm not sure how I feel about that. They left before us and we never saw them again.



Today was actually my hardest day, with quite a few climbs that I wasn't used to. There were spots of drizzle, not enough to soak us, but we finally pulled out our ponchos for an hour or so. Again, we came to a choice in routes. One was marked as shorter but dangerous and the other longer but safer. We went with the latter, encouraged by the piles of stones on that marker which were obvious votes from earlier walkers.

By the time we crossed the bridge into Pontedeume I was tired and my pack felt heavy. In addition, my digestive system was rebelling against the hip belt and I was feeling desperately nauseous. Our accommodations, unfortunately, were at the top of the hill leading up and through the old city. The name *Montebreamo* should have been a clue, with *monte* being the Spanish word for mountain. The climb is rather infamous on the route, and we hadn't realised we'd be making it at the end of what already felt like a long and difficult day. We made it in the end, of course, and the rustic beauty of the B&B somehow made it worthwhile. Maybe taking a taxi from the middle of town at the bottom of the hill would have been a good idea if we had realised what was ahead of us. While being so high up the hill made the next morning infinitely easier, we could have left our packs at the top and scaled the hill relatively unencumbered before picking them up again and continuing onwards the next morning.



Again that night, no dinner was available at Montebreamo, so we went into the village on the main road. There was little to choose from and the one bar that was open really didn't want to take on the responsibility of feeding a coeliac. The owner was lovely, but wary. So we drank *vino tinto* (red wine), and eventually managed to get green salads with tuna and sweetcorn. It was good enough. And we had our beautiful room to go back to for the night.

I spent some time that evening writing a very candid blog post about the importance of listening to one's body, of doing your camino in a way that fits with who you really are – but then I didn't post it because I felt vulnerable and I was afraid that if I let those thoughts into the world, then my readers, from the goodness of their hearts, might respond by trying to "fix" me in some way. I knew I couldn't handle it at that point, and wasn't ready for input on a lesson that was still only half-baked. I have included that post under the section *Life Lessons from the Camino* because this was such an important turning point for me, the point at which I realised that my Camino really held the seeds for life changing lessons if I chose to accept and integrate them. I have identified three such lessons, and have written about them with as much honesty as possible at the end of this article.

Takeaways/Tips

- If a place name contains any variation of the word monte, it is probably at the top of a mountain. Think twice before booking if you are on foot! That being said, Montebreamo was a delightful place to spend the night, and we loved being there, especially as it was right on the route for the next morning.
- Remember to get a sello when you stop anywhere for coffee or a meal.

Day Three: Pontedeume to Miño

As I mentioned, our climb out of Pontedeume was minimal and we accomplished it easily as the steepest part of the climb out of the city was already behind us. This was another shorter day for us, only 6.25 Camino miles. There were some hills, but mainly it was forest walking which is ever so beautiful. And fragrant! We met up with another pilgrim, a woman named Maria from Madrid who spoke English. Her leg was bothering her, and she seemed happy to limp along at our speed, chatting as we went along.

Coming down out of the forest, we stopped at a delightful little café and shop aptly called *Ultreia et Suseia*, a familiar Camino catchphrase in Latin meaning *Onwards*, or more literally, *Above and Beyond!*

Turning back towards civilisation at that point, we passed a well-known mural of Camino graffiti and images, then began to wind towards the coastal town of Miño. As we got into town we said goodbye to Maria who was going to consult a pharmacist for advice on her leg and then (hopefully) carry on to Betanzos. We had purposely chosen to break up the travel at Miño so as not to have overly long and difficult days – and to enjoy one last day at the beach.



Lisa had far more energy left than I did, so I stayed in the room to rest and tend my feet while she went out to find her beloved water and draw a labyrinth on the beach. I would have liked to have done that with her, but I felt that perhaps under the circumstances, discretion would be the better part of valour. The truth was hitting me hard that my body struggles with physical challenges and that if I didn't rest when I had the opportunity, if I added extra miles by sightseeing after completing our day's walk, that I might do myself damage that would eventually mean having to abandon my camino. I also made a big decision that afternoon. Still thinking back to the theme of *you do you* and running my own race, I decided to have my bag ported for a couple of days. I emailed *Correos*, the Spanish Mail company who operates a pack service for pilgrims, and gave them my details for the following two days. They emailed right back, and assured me that they would deliver my pack if I had it labelled and waiting at the desk by 8 in the morning.

We had been met with ice cold hydration drinks when we arrived at Hotel Crisol de las Rias, and the receptionist had assured me that providing gluten free (*sin gluten*) food would be no problem. She told us that we could eat anytime after 5pm, but when we went downstairs in search of dinner, we were told no, not until 8:00. And then something very nice happened.

We sat at a table and ordered wine. When it appeared, a friendly man (who we think was actually the general manager) appeared and put a wrapped loaf of warm gluten-free French bread into my hands, covering my hands with his to show me that the bread was warm. Now, I don't normally eat gluten free flours or baked goods anymore, but I ate that bread! Clearly the receptionist had passed on my request for a meal without gluten and they were taking good care of me, even outside the hours of service. My heart was touched as my belly was filled. And later that evening we enjoyed huge plates grilled local pork and beef with crispy potatoes – far more than we could actually finish!

Takeaways/Tips

- Believe that there are Camino angels and accept their gifts as gracefully as they are offered.

Day Four: Miño to Betanzos

This was another short day for us, and the first in which I was not carrying my full pack. I still had a daypack and a full waistpack to carry everything that I either needed during the day or didn't want to trust to the mail service. I was also carrying a host of voices in my head, negative voices whispering that I wasn't a real pilgrim if I didn't carry my pack the entire way. And that Lisa no longer respected me, that she thought I was weak - all kinds of nasty and negative criticisms that were absolutely not rooted in truth. But I had to deal with them, one by one, until I finally managed to vanquish them the following day. More about that later.



We walked out of Miño, following the edge of the water until we finally began to turn inland. We were passing through an area that was quite wooded and fragrant, crossing over an old stone bridge and passing fountains and churches, making sure we stopped at each. One local who was out walking his dog stopped to talk, asking me where I was from, telling me that tomorrow's walk would be hard but that we were nearly at the top of today's hill. When I said I don't speak Spanish, he corrected me and said, "You do. A little." That puffed me up a bit, and I was glad I was at least trying despite my meagre vocabulary and poor

pronunciation.

As we approached Betanzos, I sensed a shift in what we were passing. We could see the old medieval city perched on the hill on the other side of the river, and there seemed to be more urgency, more activity. We went into an old church at the crossroads where we turned to head towards Betanzos, then walked down the steep cobblestone road where we saw many signs of the Camino – shells, images of St James, handpainted signs pointing towards Santiago – attached to private homes. We also saw more of what had become a common sight, modernised buildings nestled up against derelict properties where the walls were just roofless shells, often with trees growing up inside them. It was a bit hard to take in, and we wondered if the dereliction was left over from the suffering that happened during the Franco era. I don't know the answer to that, but I know that we saw a lot of that dichotomy in the rural villages and less of it as we got closer to Santiago.

Betanzos is a walled city with an interesting cultural heritage. There are a number of churches, and also a huge park, the *Parque do Pasatempo*, an old amusement park donated to the city in the 18th century as a space for learning where culture could be accessible to everyone. A hedge labyrinth was constructed sometime in the last decade, and we were eager to see it. It looked dry and deserted, but it was beautiful and in quite an incredible setting on the edge of such an old city. It was, we felt, well worth the visit!



We enjoyed Betanzos. After walking the labyrinth we shopped for some food for the following day (which was going to be our longest and hardest walk). We then climbed the steps and hills back up to the top of the Old City to visit the churches perched there, practically on top of each other. One was open, the other locked, a common thing in that part of Spain. We visited and paid our respects as best we could, then walked through the shops in what is described as a beautiful shopping district. Most of the shops were still closed for siesta, and we didn't want to buy anything we'd have to carry, but Lisa did manage to find an optician who was happy to fix her broken reading glasses.

Our hotel, Hotel Garelos, was large and well-run. It felt like a hotel rather than a pensioné or B&B, but that was actually quite welcome. I think we were both ready for a little anonymity. My pack was waiting for me when we arrived, and we were again greeted with hydration drinks. When we asked about dinner, we were told that nothing opened until much later, but the girl at the desk suggested we go to one of the small restaurants off the main square. Lisa, who is so good at finding little gems, read about Casa Miranda which seemed to be in that general direction, so as night fell, we headed out in search of it.

What a difference! The sleepy little city we had explored that afternoon had blossomed into a good-natured festival after dark. Everyone seemed happy, with food being served on the sidewalks. We found Casa Miranda and took the last table – within 10 minutes the bar was crowded and people were standing outside, with food being handed out through the open doors and windows. Before long the crowds were singing and eating, and we were fairly amazed by what was happening. It turned out that this was Tortilla Week, with all the restaurants serving their own version of the famous Spanish dish, of which Betanzos apparently has its own prized version. We were told they were only serving tortillas that night, and scallops. We ordered both, with local wine, which we had read was quite special but only available locally. We dined like queens that evening, and neither of us will ever forget the incredible atmosphere.



Takeaways/Tips

- Head to Casa Miranda in Betanzos if you can, but no matter where you are remember that asking a few questions and doing a bit of research will help you find some truly remarkable places. We always asked for local specialties, including local wines, and were rarely disappointed.

Day Five: Betanzos to Bruma

I had been worrying about this stretch for quite some time. There really wasn't any way around the need to walk these 15 miles, and we were hearing that the climb out of Betanzos was challenging - something we could well believe after walking up and down through the city which clung rather precariously to the side of the hill. We ate an early breakfast then paid our bill and walked out into the misty pre-dawn morning. Other pilgrims were doing the same, all of us converging on the main square and following the road up and out of town. I felt like a real pilgrim that morning, and I liked being with others as we each found our own rhythms, walking in ones and twos. This is what I had imagined the Camino would be like.

We were of all ages. There were a few young people, at least one elderly couple, and others similar in age to us. One small group included a blind woman, whom they were guiding with a quiet arm link. One man in particular was well decorated with badges from other caminos, and he walked with her the most, looking peaceful in himself as he matched his pace to hers. We walked in a stretched out line for most of the morning, but got separated after stopping for coffee.

Lisa and I missed a waymarker and walked down a long (but scenic) hill before realising that we were off the route and needed to hike back up to rejoin the path and head into yet more hills. We never caught up with any of the pilgrims from our morning's walk, but we were just in time to beg some water from a woman setting up for a party in a park, and then we watched as a large group of cyclists admitted defeat and dismounted so they could push their bikes up the same hill we were

climbing. I'll admit I felt a bit better as I watched these fit athletes huffing and puffing as much as I was.

I was, nonetheless, wearing out by the time we turned on to a main road and I glanced up to see the sign for *Casa Avelina* – the designated meeting place for our rendezvous with our hotel host for the evening. We had done it! Our longest day! I was exuberant, delighted that my feet were holding up and my soul was reaching into its depths to find the lessons the Camino was offering. I say more about this in the Life Lessons section.

Casa Avelina. What a delight. The proprietress sat us down and insisted we eat and drink before calling our hotel. Along with the olives, she handed us some laminated news clippings that showed John Lennon's sister visiting that same café. She then brought out a scarf that we assume she had been given as part of the visit, then she picked up our phones so we could take photos of her with each of us, with the scarf. Only then, fed, hydrated, and photographed, would she let us telephone our contact Raoul to come pick us and give us a ride to Hotel Canaima. Still bossing us around, she sat us in the car and buckled us in.



Hotel Canaima was ruthlessly efficient. Everything was organised and spelled out for us – keys, wifi, price lists, schedules and a map to get us back onto the Camino the next morning. The efficiency worked. They did our laundry for 5 euros and that night fed us a delicious three-course home-cooked meal. The hotel rooms were not sound-proofed, but it was all ok. Oddly, there were flies around during the daytime but they disappeared come the evening. It might not have been the lap of luxury, but we felt cared for, like being with family. The next morning when we peeked into the kitchen, it was rather comforting to see that they were already starting to cook the food for that night's guests.

Takeaways/Tips

- Don't be afraid to ask people to fill your water bottle for you. I had to do it several times when fountains weren't available. Everyone I asked seemed happy to help, and they helped me to avoid the dangers of dehydration.
- I've heard that Hotel Canaima has discontinued their pilgrim pick-up service, possibly just for the winter. It was very welcome and kept us from having to walk on busy main roads that I've heard are quite dangerous. Be careful! Consider a taxi. (Canaima gave us simple and clear instructions for rejoining the route the next morning.)
- If you suspect that you have gotten off of the Camino route (it happens), check your whereabouts with GPS. This is easily done with the Buen Camino app.

Day Six: Bruma to Ordes

Our shortest day. The weather was lovely and autumnal as we walked along the rural roads from Bruma to Ordes. We heard a lot of hunting dogs who are apparently in training at this time of year. There were quite a few art installations along the route, from super-sized St James statues to mammoth pilgrim-eating dinosaurs. We enjoyed the overstated but gentle humour as much as the photo opportunities. The route was feeling more civilized by then, no longer just walking through forests, and there were few hills to climb.



One elderly man out walking in his village wanted to know if we were British. I said I was and he wanted to tell me about when he lived in London and about his daughter who still lives in the UK. And then Brexit came up. Without exception, everyone I met thinks it is a disaster, as do I.

We arrived at our destination for the day quite early, at lunchtime. Anton Veiras outside Ordes is right next to the *albergue* (pilgrim hostel), but it is very upscale in a cottage-chic sort of way. Beautiful and comfortable!!

We were quickly checked in and shown to our room while a Sunday lunch crowd gathered in the dining rooms below. It felt a bit odd, but when we went downstairs (after cleaning up our dishevelled pilgrim look) we were made to feel very welcome. We wandered around the grounds then settled into the sun porch with wine and nibbles to wait the reopening of the dining room for dinner at 8:00. The food was amazing! Lisa had a salad while I started with a pan of large prawns and garlic sizzling in olive oil and then slices of cod filet sautéed to crispy perfection. With vino tinto, of course - and followed by tiny iced tumblers of the *Lua* (coffee liqueur) we remembered from 10 years ago.

A couple of other people came in as we were eating, and we think they might have been pilgrims from the *albergue* next door. The conversation was getting lively, and by the time we said good night, it was starting to feel very pilgrim-y, in the nicest possible way. Friendly.

Day Seven: Ordes to Segueiro

Breakfast was typical, bread and cakes for Lisa, with orange juice and fruit for both of us. Our host kindly brought me slices of cheese as everything else had gluten. I appreciated that.

We could feel ourselves getting very close to Santiago by now. We had a longer day, 9.5 miles, but we felt up for it. The walk was stunning, one of our best days overall. We started by skirting around the edges of field and forest, with mist hanging low. We amused ourselves by looking at the cornstalks, where every stalk seemed to produce a single ear of corn. Is that right? Normal? Why did we never know about that before? Our first stop came quite early on, in O Cruceiro, as signs warned us that this was the last stop before Segueiro, 13 kilometres away. I'm not sure that was absolutely correct, but it was a nice place to stop and enjoy a morning coffee con leche and collect a sello.

Our walk took us through neighbourhoods where enormous spider webs glittered with early morning dew, creating nature's mandalas for us to marvel at as we walked past. The flowers continued to amaze and astonish us as they had all week long. I have a photo of Lisa standing next to a hydrangea which is bigger than her head. Such a joy to see the colour variations and how big they grow, to see the signs of the seasons and be out in nature in an unfamiliar place. I loved that we passed old men chopping up tree branches to burn as winter fuel, much as my husband was doing



back at home in England that week. I will forever associate the walk through Galicia with the autumn harvest. We were right at the height of it.

We seemed to be walking quickly and the morning flew by. As we drew closer to Segueiro, we were following a highway, but the path kept us safely off the road and protected by a fence. It was surprisingly peaceful. We stopped at a lovely fountain, *A Santina*, or as it is known locally, Saint Margaret's Fountain. The modern fountain now stands on the site of the older historic fountain that was used by locals because of its healing properties, including healing sore throats. It is mentioned in chronicles dating back to at least 1745.

Our host for the evening had earlier sent a text with detailed instructions on how to get to Pension Vilanova from Waymark 3211. Absolutely brilliant! And the same text showed us how to walk out of Segueiro the following morning.

Pension Vilanova was one of my favourite overnight stops, not so much because of its luxurious amenities, though it was spotlessly clean and very comfortable, but because it felt like staying with good friends. Our hosts – a mother who greeted us warmly in Spanish, her son who used technology to perfection, and his wife who was as lovely as can be – had created an efficient and homey setting for their guests. Our fellow pilgrims that night were people we had encountered in Miño and they greeted us like old friends.

We walked into Segueiro, a kilometre or so down the road, in search of a late lunch or at least a grocery store. We found both, buying food for the next day and then finding a restaurant, the Cortez, which we later realised got rave reviews from other pilgrims. For €9.50 we got a delicious 3-course lunch of rich soup, sliced pork, and flan along with a good wine. Very full, we walked back to the Pension thinking we'd never be hungry again. And we weren't, until about 8:00 when we began to wish we'd made some kind of arrangements for dinner. I went upstairs to see if they could order a gluten free pizza or something. They tried, but nothing was available, so our hosts offered to drive us into the grocery store in town. We bought a take-and-bake pizza and a large Santiago tart to share with everyone. As we were leaving, we met up with the other pilgrims in what felt like the beginning of a party. We felt, by that time, like family. I handed out slices of the almond cake and was given a ripe cherimoya in return, an exotic fruit I had never tasted before. Above all, I loved the warm conviviality of the evening.

Takeaways/Tips

- Pension Vilanova is a lovely place to stay on the outskirts of Segueiro – plenty of rooms and a friendly host to make sure you're comfortable, plenty of amenities! They will make an 8 pm run into town to pick up dinners. Yes, the Pension is a ways out of town, but it's easy to find, very quiet, and it isn't a hard walk into town. If you didn't want to walk, taxis are available.
- The Cortez restaurant in central Segueiro is open all day and provides an excellent meal for a small price. Lots of locals eat there, not just tourists! There are also quite a few shops and several grocery stores for picnic provisions.
- Santiago Tarts are gluten free, though (obviously) not sugar free. As they are not terribly sweet, I confess that I love them and discovered they are as good for breakfast as they are later on in the day.

Day Eight: Segueiro to Santiago

After a typical carbohydrate-heavy breakfast we set out on our last day of walking. By afternoon we would be in Santiago. It was a wet morning and we pulled our ponchos on and off several times. I

have to admit that despite it making me sweaty and steamy, I loved the way it tented me. My clothes and pack stayed dry and it made me feel like I was walking in my own little world.

There were several climbs, starting with the road leading out of Segueiro. When I had been planning this Camino, the thing that I hoped I would experience was getting to a point in walking where it all blurred and became a simple matter of carrying on. I realised that day that this had finally happened. I was perfectly happy just walking. Up a hill or down, it was just walking. In the rain or in between showers, it was just walking. Close to the destination or not, it was just walking. I had found my stride and discovered the rhythm of MY Camino.

The first part of our day after leaving Segueiro took us through rural countryside, passing small farms and well-tended homes. By late morning we had turned onto a forest track and we enjoyed being back amongst the trees. We were happy to see a handmade sign advertising coffees and hot food at a restaurant that seemed to be just off the route, but then opted to continue on and found a rather funky Celtic-themed hotel that had a coffee bar set up downstairs for passing pilgrims. It was wet and cold enough that we both downed two large cups of coffee con leche and shared a packaged tortilla that I had in my pack. Their cakes looked good, but we needed to eat up the food we were carrying.

The hotel kitsch carried on as we walked on into the 'Enchanted Forest' in which the hotel was situated. As I wrote in my blog, we saw a witch, which made us smile. And we carried on. Climbing the final hill that lead us out of the forest and into an industrial estate, we realised that our walk was nearing its end. There was a lot of construction going on, and finding the waymarks was not easy amidst all the chaos. Suddenly our companions on the road were construction workers and (bizarrely) business people in formal suits huddled under huge umbrellas.



The route itself is under consideration and has recently been modified to keep it both safe and as interesting/beautiful as possible as pilgrims approach Santiago. I think we must have turned mistakenly at an old marker because we got off the route and finally had to use google maps to navigate our own way into the city until we could reconnect with the official route and again follow the yellow arrows to the cathedral. We were clearly on an older route, though, as we passed a couple of old fountains that would once have offered thirsty pilgrims fresh water. Unfortunately, though, the water they provided is no longer potable so we didn't stop for long.

We passed the intersection with the difficult-to-photograph statue of St James, and then suddenly we were in the Old City, approaching the cathedral square.



The cathedral is currently undergoing extensive renovation, so we weren't sure what to expect. On the outside, it looks impressive, though not particularly welcoming as you can't go in through the main doors (and initially we weren't sure if you could actually go in at all). We already knew that the famous Pilgrim Masses are being held at an alternate location for the time being.

The rain had cleared by then and we walked into the slightly crowded square. I had the odd sense of a graduation ritual. We walked 'onstage' and went to the centre to see the cathedral we had been walking towards all week, took the obligatory photos and selfies, and then walked on to make room

for new arrivals. To be honest, it felt rather rote, though of course it was a moment we wouldn't have wanted to miss.



We found our hotel nearby, the Hotel San Clemente, where the staff was extremely welcoming and we were given a little suite at the back of the garden. It was nice to clean up and head back into the city that we had both fallen in love with so many years earlier. It was too late to get in line for our *compustelas* that afternoon and we felt an urgency to go into the cathedral to light a candle for a friend who had requested our prayers there. We went into the main Tourist Information Office, not the one for pilgrims, and found a woman who was very happy to help us find the right spot to do that. She told us which door we could enter and suggested we make our way to the *La Corticella* Chapel, telling us that it is a 13th century chapel that was part of an even older monastery. The chapel has been subsumed – and preserved – by the cathedral as it expanded over the centuries. We were grateful for her understanding our need for both history and spirituality, and we found the chapel without difficulty by following her directions.

It was lovely, and we had it pretty much to ourselves until a tour group arrived and crowded us out. We especially appreciated the beautiful sculpture set into a side niche as it seemed to embody a spirituality that fit well with us. An embodied Christ prayed to a hovering angel in a scene that touched us deeply. Leaving there, we saw the line of people waiting to embrace St James, something that we had ourselves done the first time we visited. It had been a moving experience for me then and I wanted to do it again, but a group of about 50 tourists in matching neckerchiefs were herded in just in front of us and we decided not to wait. We also chose not to attend the Pilgrim Mass that evening. Attendance at masses hadn't really been an option for us as we walked – perhaps we missed out by not staying in albergues, but more likely it was just the lateness of the season, and many things seemed not to be happening with the regularity we had expected.

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|  <p>MARMAGOTU 11 Avenida de la Libertad P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100</p> |  <p>CERVEZERÍA NUEVO TARNAS 11 Avenida de la Libertad P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100</p> |  <p>CONSEJO DE DISTRITO 11 Avenida de la Libertad P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100</p> |  <p>Vianovo 11 Avenida de la Libertad P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100</p> |
|  <p>Cervecería Montebello 11 Avenida de la Libertad P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100</p> |  <p>BAR CASA AVELINA 11 Avenida de la Libertad P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100</p> |  <p>K 11 Avenida de la Libertad P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100</p> |  <p>Cervecería 11 Avenida de la Libertad P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100 P.O. Box 100</p> |
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Takeaways/Tips

- A rainy day is not all that bad. Nor are hills. Walk on!
- End your camino in whatever way feels right to you. Stay in touch with your pilgrim self as you walk back into crowds that you haven't been part of as you walked through Spain. There are traditions and rituals that you can choose between. This is the moment when it is really important to stay true to yourself. Assuming I walk into Santiago again someday, I might make very different choices then.
- Go out in style – dress up and have a celebratory tippie in the Parador! You've earned it!

Our last breakfast offered us a buffet of breakfast foods and local delicacies, including a Santiago Tart for me. Less overwhelmed by the kitsch and commercialism of the city after a good night's sleep, we went back to our favourite shops to buy a few Santiago souvenirs and goodies. Our big splurge was to buy ourselves tiny gold scallop shell earrings so that we could continue to wear the symbol that has come to mean so much to us during our walks in both France and Spain.

We had booked a room at the Hilton Express at Heathrow's Terminal 4. It was easy to get to and wonderfully efficient, clean, and comfortable. Being so close would let Lisa catch her flight back to

Minnesota, and I could head straight across London on the Underground, then catch a local train back home. By midmorning, the trains were rather empty, letting me relax as I pondered the amazing experience we'd had. I will freely admit that I had tears in my eyes.

Takeaways/Tips

- Give yourself plenty of time to make your connections for your onward travel. In fact, don't rush your return if you don't have to. We flew from A Coruña as the flight from Santiago airport was an early one and we really didn't want to feel rushed on our final morning.
- You can pick up edible goodies at the duty-free shops before and after security. We both bought tiny bottles of *Lua* that they bagged for us to take through Security.

Life Lessons from the Camino

I suppose that everyone who chooses to walk the Camino harbours some hope of having a deep soul experience, possibly a transformation. I've learned from my several walks and my years in the field of psychology that you cannot plan or predict these things. We can set intentions, but really we just walk to a threshold as we open to who we really are, to who we find ourselves to be when we simply keep walking, mile after mile.

I can identify several life lessons from my time on the Camino Inglés.

You do You

As I mentioned earlier, I wrote a blog post in Pontedeume that I ultimately never posted. I'm sharing it here because I want to be clear that hard moments can and do happen on the Camino. I do believe that it is usually best to incubate important insights and lessons before sharing them with the world, but I also think it is important to write about them as they are emerging, fresh and untested. I wrote:

Today was hard. We walked a long way, longer than expected because of a diversion and because our (really lovely) hotel was up a very (very) steep hill - at the end of a long day with way more hills than we expected. Happily, the hotel is on the Camino, so we've already walked some of tomorrow's miles and hills. But today was also about Life Patterns and Lessons. I had to contend with some misguided voices in my own head. When my negative self-talk would start, I returned to my promise to myself to walk my own Camino, reminding myself, You Do You.

In truth, no one (and especially not Lisa) is asking me to do anything less. This is a life pattern, an externalisation, trying to live up to what I imagine someone else might be thinking or wanting. I fought my imagination all day long as I struggled with my slow pace on steep hills. The last bit was gruelling, and I was tired and hungry. Pilgrimage felt beyond me.

Then dinner got difficult. Feeding a celiac in rural Galicia is not straightforward, and it looked like it might be cheese and salami and nuts in the room. I felt like the Problem Child, and Me Doing Me was slipping away from me as my Poor Little Me thoughts gained momentum. I'm ready to let go of this old pattern. Athletes are taught to run their own race, to play their own game rather than react to others on the field. I know this, but I still struggle to trust my own worthiness when my body is challenged. In truth, pilgrimage is often hard, especially when what we find on the path is simply yourself.

Tomorrow is a shorter day, though there will be some more hills. I will set out again with the intention of being true to myself as well as supportive of my walking companion. That, I believe, is the true spirit of Pilgrimage.

You Do You. Maybe we all struggle with running our own race that way, or maybe I am just very adept at using self-effacement as a coping mechanism. I think the problem really starts when I start to believe my overactive and self-critical imagination.

I was quite discouraged at that point and feared my pilgrimage might be slipping away from me. I certainly wasn't enjoying it at that point, and that was a huge disappointment after all our months of preparation and expectation. I asked myself to define what was really true for me in that moment, and what I heard was a gritty determination to endure. Endure? I didn't want to 'endure' for another six days of walking. I wanted to see the Galicia that I was walking through and have enough energy left at the end of the day's walk to be able to treasure this Path that I may never walk on again. Hell, I wanted to drink deeply, not just endure.

I knew that it could well be that my not overly heavy backpack was tipping me over my edge. For some reason I experience a lot of pain and nausea when anything is tight across my abdomen, and I was experiencing some serious (and scary) symptoms by that time, and it was making both eating and walking quite difficult. I felt like carrying my load was weighing me down in ways I really didn't care to itemize. In a brave moment, I invited an internal dialogue on survival vs. enjoyment. I found I was very adept at buying into the dark side of my mental conversation, but it really all boiled down to deciding how important it was to me to complete my pilgrimage, and if I decided I wanted to complete it, whether I wanted to walk with enjoyment and happiness, or under a dark cloud of suffering. I realised that day that I have always equated endurance with worthiness. What an old-fashioned and spiritually dead version of values that is! Man is made to suffer? I don't believe that, and yet I was allowing some outdated but deeply held conviction to continue to feed my choices.

Arranging for my bag to be ported for a couple of days gave me some respite and bought me some time and space to think even more deeply and put my new insights to the test.

Liberation

I dreaded telling Lisa what I had done, and voices in my head were shouting that I wasn't a real pilgrim if I didn't carry my own pack every inch of the way, as if I wasn't living up to some invisible measuring stick against which I would eventually be judged. Judged? Was there really a heavenly scorekeeper tracking my progress? Are pilgrims any better than people who never step onto the Camino? If so, REALLY?? If not, did it make sense that I would lose imaginary points for listening to my body when it asked for support?

I remembered the encouragement I'd read in one of my pre-Camino preparation guides that it would be important to note if something was becoming a serious threat to continuing. What would it take to make your eventual arrival possible, even a reality? I decided to find out. I shushed my voices, told Lisa (who actually wanted my companionship far more than she wanted me to carry my own pack) about my decision, and turned paid attention to my actual experience.

It began to feel good to head out in the morning and look forward to the day. My confidence was growing, both in terms of my walking, but also in terms of my ability to listen to my own body. Personal teamwork was happening and I was *enjoying* my Camino.

Watching others, everyone seemed to have their own strategy and pace, and I was often the tail walker. Privately I thought of myself as a turtle, plodding on slowly but deliberately, and getting there in the end.

The image of the wooden cross that I saw laying in the grass continues with me, reminding me to lighten my load, to let go of what I can. What a metaphor! We don't always have to struggle with a heavy cross if we choose to honor our path and our bodies. I felt liberated, and better yet, I realised I was free to choose liberation over suffering. I was actually free to enjoy my body, that path, and the delights of the natural world.



What would happen, I wonder, if I expanded that metaphor into the rest of my life? What if I made conscious decisions to choose liberation over suffering and endurance, when and where I could. I don't think we get to simply choose a pain free life, but I do think that focusing on the dramas is more about suffering than about the values I actually want to develop. I am, for example, a much kinder and more compassionate person when I am not fixated on my own woes. It is possible to choose to appreciate simple joys rather than focus on burdensome over-complications and potential dramas in our lives.

I vowed to take that lesson to heart.

Rhythm

My hope for pilgrimage has long been that my body would hold up long enough and far enough to let me fall into the rhythm of the walk. The shorter pilgrimages from Paris to Chartres, while challenging, only lasted three days, not long enough for my body to accept the idea of an ongoing onward motion. Get up, walk. Stop, eat, sleep, Get up, walk. I've always heard that finding that rhythm was a defining experience, and I longed for it - but I really wasn't sure that my blister prone feet would accept that kind of continued pounding. That is one of the reasons we opted for shorter days over a longer time. While the literature said we could do this as a 5 day walk, we took 8 – and it worked well for me.

By the last two days, I stopped caring about hills and arrival times, didn't give any thought to Santiago itself. I was just walking. When we set out in the morning, the weather didn't really matter because we were simply going to walk on. Even hills didn't seem so daunting, and I quit checking the route profile because it really didn't matter. We were simply going to walk on. That's when I began to feel the rhythm of the pilgrimage. By then my body knew what was expected of it, and didn't protest or bargain. It was no longer a matter of enduring the day, but of waking up curious and eager to see what the Path would offer us.

My mind, too, began to quietly accept that I would – and could – cope with whatever came my way. Hills, weather, blisters, injury, diversions. I'd cope. Even if it meant making new decisions about the plans we'd made so carefully. For someone with lifelong control issues, that is a very big deal, and it's a lesson I hope I have brought home with me.

Practicalities

Feet

I don't have Pilgrim feet. I have always been very blister prone. (I can still remember the pain of getting new school shoes every autumn!) I have always and forever been in search of my perfect shoes!

I did two things to prepare for the Camino which seem to have made all the difference. When I injured my toes during training, I had to quit for a couple of weeks, and even then lost a toenail just before I left for Spain. I used my down time to research possible resources, though I truly feared I would have to abort the whole Camino.

I heard about an Australian podiatrist who specializes in blister care and prevention. Rebecca Rushton has created an affordable online course which I decided might be worth signing up for – and that really made all the difference. First of all, I realised that I am not actually a freak of nature with horrible feet, nor am I to blame for the problems and sensitivity I experience. Once I felt better about that, I began to assemble a personal toolkit of supplies and knowhow, which all boosted my confidence immensely.

Realising that my feet swell after a couple of days of back to back hiking, I bought new shoes half a size larger than I usually wear. And I bought socks of differing thicknesses to pad them out as appropriate to the day. And not just any socks! I know people swear by Wright socks with their double-layer technology, but they don't seem to work particularly well for me. I invested in Injini toe socks which look ridiculous but protect my toes from rubbing together inside my socks. They are far more comfortable than they look and kept me from losing any skin.

I spent time each morning carefully preparing my feet for the day ahead. I used some Body Glide, but am not convinced that it helped much. I put gel toe caps on my most sensitive toes and used Compeeds on a couple of toes that seemed to benefit from daily protection. I spent time touching my toes to check for tender spots from the day before and used various of Rebecca's tips and tricks to prepare for the day ahead.

Most days I had no problems, but the course gave me the knowhow to address any I did have. I made sure that my personalised blister kit was easily to hand, though I rarely had to reach for it. I slipped up one day when I felt a hot spot developing on the edge of my heel but as there was no easy place to sit down and take care of it, I walked on, knowing it wasn't a usual trouble spot for me. By the end of the day, I had a fresh blister, though it wasn't bad – and I knew how to treat it so that I could walk into town that afternoon as well as continue walking the rest of the week.

Tips/Takeaways

- Rebecca Rushton's course can be found at www.blisterprevention.com.au. If you take her blister course, she is very prompt in responding to any personal questions you might have, even while out on the Camino. Oh the wonders of modern technology!
- Don't be afraid to give your feet the time and attention they need. Listening to them and responding to them is a body awareness practice that can benefit us for the rest of our lives. As we get older our bodies will need increasing attention, so the Camino is a good place to prepare for the inevitability of the ageing process.
- Learn to lace your shoes in different ways that can address various problems or needs. I had no idea that could make such a difference. Again, I recommend Rebecca's course.

Coeliac (Celiac) Travel

This is tricky. I am one of those people who goes down hard if I ingest even a small amount of gluten. I don't just get a stomach ache, and I knew that gluten exposure could easily end my Camino. However, with only one exception, I had no problem having my needs understood and met, and even then it was a matter of the proprietor being overcautious rather than careless. I was perfectly safe at all times.

Here's the trick: Use the words *sin gluten*. At first I carried a Coeliac card which explained in Spanish what I could and couldn't have. It seemed to scare people, and one bar simply refused to feed me because they couldn't be sure there was no cross-contamination. I realised then that showing the card upped the drama without accomplishing the goal. After that I just said *sin gluten* and I was

always understood. And fed. People understand. Most restaurants have the info right on their menus, but if not, the need will be understood and you'll be kept safe.

When you order coffee (or wine) in Spain, you are usually given a small snack along with it. I didn't ever make any demands, or even make my gluten needs known. I just drank my coffee and ate something from my rucksack – other people were always too happy to eat my cake or cookies. If the snack happened to be lentils or olives or nuts, I was fine. If you are travelling with an allergy, you must take responsibility for yourself. Always, always have a backup snack or meal on hand. Even a few squished BabyBel cheeses can keep you going if needs be. I brought four protein bars with me for emergencies, but every shop I visited sold something appropriate for a coeliac.

Is a Ketogenic Camino Possible?

I am actually far stricter with my diet than most coeliacs. Staying gluten free is an absolute necessity and I am militant about it. But in real life, I actually avoid all grains, legumes and higher carb foods including most fruits. I have been following a ketogenic lifestyle for more than a year and it is second nature to me now. I wasn't sure, though, if I'd be able to find high fat/moderate protein/low carb meals on the Camino, and I worried about how a sudden change in diet might affect my walking. I found a few references to the availability of gluten free foods on the Camino on various websites and social media, but nothing about anyone trying to follow a ketogenic diet.

It might have been easier if I didn't have to be so militant about gluten and possible cross-contamination. Sometimes getting that need across is a conversational roadblock, especially in a foreign language. Oh, you're gluten-free? Here's some gluten free bread. Or here are potatoes (or rice). I decided to be careful, to make my choices as wise as possible but not to stress about it beyond ensuring that I stayed safe (from gluten). I realised early on that eggs were my friends here, but that the ever-present tortillas were all going to have potatoes in them. C'est la vie. Sometimes I picked around them, sometimes I just ate them. Fruit at breakfast? Again, I was happy to skip it if there was something else on offer, but sometimes breakfast was just fruit and bread and cake. I drank fresh squeezed orange juice a few times simply because it was so good, but I didn't cave on sugar until the last two mornings when I couldn't resist the Santiago tart.

Lunches were mainly snacks on the road. I carried cheese and nuts with me at all times, and had a few protein bars for hungry days and emergencies. No problem.

Dinners weren't too hard – meat was served with potatoes, and there was usually enough meat on the plate that I didn't need to eat the potato to fill me up.

Can one stay keto on the Camino? Not easily, but it wasn't hard to eat healthy meals so long as I was willing to be slightly flexible. As I follow strict keto guidelines when I'm at home, I really don't advocate going off-plan while travelling, especially if I want my body to support my increased physical activity. But I also believe in being a gracious traveller. I can expect people to keep me safe by supporting my need to avoid gluten, but I simply don't expect them to cater to my preferences, especially when they are sharing their culture and/or their home with me, along with their food. And to be honest? I love exploring interesting food when I can. A conundrum!

What if I had been staying in albergues? I can imagine that communal meals would be difficult but preparing one's own meals would be fairly straightforward if you didn't mind sticking to simple meats, cheeses, veg, etc. They were, as I mentioned, pretty easy to come by. But pretty much everyone I met was eating plenty of high-carb breads, pastas, and rice.

How did it go? I didn't notice any immediate problems with the potatoes or morning glass of orange juice, but I noticed some bloating and inflammation when I started to splurge on dessert. That took a few days to get rid of once I got home, but returning to a keto diet was easy and natural – and I loved coming home to my favourite recipes! I had, thankfully, left a few things in the freezer and my husband shopped before meeting me at the train station.

And lastly, hydration. Drinking water is not always enough, so be sure you watch your hydration no matter what the weather. You may need added extra electrolytes. I carried powdered lemon juice to tip into my water in the afternoons, but we both found we needed an additional boost from time to time. Hydration drinks were available in most cafés, bars, and shops, and we carried salt chews that we brought from home. Both came with small carb counts and probably a few questionable ingredients (i.e. sweeteners), but I chose to accept the carbs when I knew I needed extra hydration. Read the labels and make your own choices.

Takeaways/Tips

- Give some thought beforehand to how militant and inflexible you want or need to be. You will be a guest in Spain, so make graciousness a priority and balance it carefully with your health. Be clear about the dividing line between health requirements and personal preferences – they are not necessarily one and the same.
- Always, always have a backup plan! If there is nothing you are happy to eat, you will have to provide for yourself or go without. If you have to go without, others will be uncomfortable and will almost certainly try to take care of you, which can be quite awkward.

Technology

Technology on the Camino is a controversial topic. Some believe in it, some spurn it – but either way, it needs to be considered with consciousness so you can make informed and balanced decisions about what role you want it to play on *your* Camino. I knew I would be carrying my kindle guidebooks on my smartphone, but I didn't realise just how much modern technology could support my pilgrimage. I really didn't want to be one of those people who walk with a pole in one hand and a phone in the other as I didn't want my traditional pilgrimage to be co-opted by modern technology. There, too, I sought balance and here are the options that worked for me.

- *Booking.com*: We chose to book our accommodations in advance for the entire route. Our purposes for walking might have been different than those for other people, but we knew that we wanted a guaranteed bed and private bathroom for every night of our journey.
- *Duolingo*: Yep. Silly as it sounds, it really did help me learn enough Spanish phrases to let me show I was at least trying. Mostly it gave me the confidence to ask for a glass of water, or the check, or make other simple requests. When my Spanish (actually Galician) failed, there was...
- *Google Translate*: People along the Camino were adept at using the app to boost a conversation. Need directions? Speak or type your question into the app, click to translate, then hand over your phone. The Spanish speaker would respond, click the button, hand back the phone and you had your answer. Quite brilliant! Equally helpful was the camera function that let you read a translated menu or sign through the camera of your phone. Serious magic!
- *Buen Camino*: I used this app more than any other. Some of the routes are free, but I believe others come with a small price tag. Worth every penny! Most useful to me were the route profiles that gave a sense of the topography ahead. (You can read this as me wanting to

know how many hills I was going to have to climb on any given day, especially at the beginning.) I loved that it could show me exactly where on the hill I was. Similarly the Route Map located us very precisely on the few occasions when we missed a marker and got off the route. It was then very easy to navigate back to where we needed to be.

- *iBeaken*, which was downloaded when I used the QR reader to get information at the very first Waymark at Km Zero in Ferrol. As you followed the route it gave information about the places and sites you were passing as well as route information.

Books & Resources

- *Ariadne's Thread* was my original blog/website and contains the story of my first two walking pilgrimages from Paris to Chartres in 2009 and 2014.
<http://ariadnethread.net/tag/2009-pilgrimage/> and <http://ariadnethread.net/tag/2014-pilgrimage/>
- *Walking in the World* is a blog and website that I started in 2016 to specifically document my walks out into the world. There are many posts about pilgrimage, but it specifically contains the posts I made while walking the Camino Inglés in 2019.
<http://walkingintheworld.net/tag/camino-ingles-2019/>
- *Camino Lingo* by Reinette Nóvoa with Sylvia Nilsen - a simple phrase book for Camino pilgrims. Many carry the kindle version on their phones
- *Camino Inglés* by Camino Pilgrim, Confraternity of St James – the official guide and the only one we took with us to Spain
- *The Camino Inglés* by Susan Jagganath – a very concise and encouraging guidebook which might be enough all on its own
- *The Confraternity of St. James* The Confraternity is the official UK organisation for Camino pilgrims no matter which route they walk. They have amazing resources on all aspects of pilgrimage and can provide Camino Credenciales. www.csj.org.uk.
- *It's About Time* by Johnnie Walker – If you're hearing the Camino calling to you, this short book will help you decide if it's time to respond.
- *Steps out of Time* by Katharine Soper
- *Two Steps Forward* by Graeme Simision and Anne Buist – a wonderfully written narrative, fiction but based on experience. You will want to walk the Camino after reading this book!

Camino Pack List

This is what I actually took, used, and would take again in the future. I include it as a guide for others, but also as a reminder for me of what I learned from experience. I think I will try to go even lighter next time in hopes of lightening my pack to a point where I can carry it more comfortably. To be honest, it was already pretty light – and I used everything I took – but I would eliminate all the items that are crossed out if I were to go again, especially at the same time of year. I carried an Osprey 30 litre pack and would like to try going back to my super comfy but ultra small Osprey 22 litre pack next time. The rule of thumb is to ensure that your pack does not weigh more than 10% of your body weight. For me that would be in the region of 15 pounds/6.8 kg.

Clothes

- Walking shirt, short sleeved (grey floral)
- Tee shirt for sleeping (Pink thin)
- Extra walking shirt (purple)

- White long sleeved shirt
- Pink thin sweatshirt
- Maroon $\frac{3}{4}$ sleeve
- Weirdfish walking trousers
- Black Kiwi walking trousers
- ~~Green tank top~~
- ~~Grey stripey overshirt~~
- ~~Green blue tunic~~
- ~~Blue leggings~~
- ~~Silk shorts~~

Undies

- 3 pair undies
- Sport bra
- ~~Regular bra~~ (or second sport bra)
- Socks
 - Injinji – heavy and med depending on whether my feet are swollen I wore thicker socks at the beginning of the walk and thinner ones as the days wore on and my feet swelled
 - Wright – short for night, regular for a switch from Injinjis.

Shoes

- Merrell's
- Karrimor sandals

Misc

- Buff (a multifunctional scarf available wherever hiking clothes are sold)
- Vest
- Scarf
- Cycle Jacket
- Pack Cover
- Poncho
- Shopping Bag
- Ultra light foldable day pack

Washbag

- Deodorant,
- toothpaste, toothbrush, dental picks
- Makeup stick, eyeliner, lipstick
- Dr Bronners
- Moisturizer, sunscreen
- Contacts, eyedrops
- Nail clippers, tweezers
- Essential Oils – lavender, thieves, peppermint, protect
- Safety Pins

Power Cords

- USB wall plug
- Portable charger
- Short and long USB C
- Short USB B
- Fitbit charger

First Aid Kit

- Blister Kit with gel toes, scissors, moleskin, paper tape
- Foot balm
- Salt Sticks
- Pain Relief: Ibuprofen, Cocodamol
- Benadryl for sleepless nights
- Stomach Remedies: Windex/Buscopan/Zantac
- Daily Tabs: thyroid
- Mosquito Repellent
- Vagisil with lidocaine – more versatile than you might think!
- Neosporin