

Compostela Pilgrimage



Once upon a time, Carl expressed a wish to mark his 60th birthday by walking part of the Pilgrim Way to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. As we cannot remember the last time he had a dream that didn't feature Sheldon, Sarah quickly organised a guide, accommodation and travel arrangements and the whole Community and 25 friends met up at Heathrow airport to begin our pilgrimage. Sue hosted the single centre week and she and Jan will write about this in September. Here is a snapshot of our Camino - the pilgrim way (words by Hillary and pictures by Sarah - <http://public.fotki.com/SheldonCamino/> for more)

Best things about the Pilgrimage ...

Good flights out and back; leaving Sheldon in safe hands; excellent company age range 37 to 70+; determination of fellow walkers despite horrible

blisters, mysterious rashes, painful muscles; prayers together as we set off and again as we reconvened for the evening meal each day; walking in companionable silence; walking and sharing stories and interests as we went along; lots of laughter

Beautiful scenery ...

oak, chestnut and eucalyptus (in full flower and scented) woods, river valleys, old stone bridges and stepping stones; open heathland and wide views, small farms, hamlets and villages; wild flowers, many new to us; seeing a black kite and cirl buntings (birds)



Varied vernacular architecture

red tiles or curved irregular slate roofs, immovable slabs of granite; the horreos - Galician outdoor storage units made of wood, bricks or stone; huge airy baroque churches; simple wayside chapels, tiny shrines, ancient crosses; the squares and streets of the old city of Santiago

The pilgrim waymarks ...

yellow arrows on buildings, trees, stones, the road surface; the scallop shell of St James, kilometre posts encouraged us on our journey

Delicious food and wine, good hotels ...

comfy beds, enough hot water, bars open from early until late; Torta Santiago – almond tart (every day!); octopus – once tried, never forgotten ... huge portions and quickly learning the Spanish for “one between two” continental breakfasts with fruit, pastries, cold meat, cheese; freshly squeezed orange juice from Wallace & Grommit style machines (coveteousness is a sin, I know)



The weather ...

1 wet & windy day, 1 starting damp and getting better, then warm, sunny, perfect for walking

Fiesta time in Santiago ...

sunshine, fireworks, the fun fair and the big wheel, relaxed family atmosphere as we ambled through the city at night, hearing the Cathedral organ being played at full tilt one afternoon



The sense of ...

achievement (and relief!) at the end of each day; pride collecting our pilgrim certificates at the end of the journey; privilege at our affluent lifestyle compared to subsistence rural communities we walked through; history, faith, tradition and common purpose following in the steps of others; being grateful.

(Worst things ... long noisy coach journeys at the beginning and end; the Botafumeiro censer not in action due to an industrial dispute; single centre group hotel not so good as the walking pilgrims' accommodation; missing those who should have been with us but weren't able to be there.