



BURT WOLF TRAVELS & TRADITIONS SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

Everyday for the past 1200 years pilgrims who have been walking the ancient road to the city of Santiago de Compostela arrive and celebrate the completion of their journey. They applaud each other, relive moments of shared excitement, and honor their accomplishment.

Pilgrims enter the historic city at the *Door of the Way*, which was one of the original doorways in the walls of the medieval city. The pilgrims are heading for Santiago's great Cathedral.

THE DOOR OF THE WAY

Construction of the Cathedral began in 1075. It is the work of many craftsmen and incorporates various architectural styles.

The most famous image of the Cathedral is the main façade that was put up in the middle of the 1700s.

The entrance to the Cathedral in Santiago was the ultimate achievement for medieval sculpture in Spain. It is known as the *Portico of Glory* and its objective, which was the aim of almost all medieval sculpture, was to explain the Old Testament, the New Testament and other Christian traditions to people who could not read. But a thousand years later the Portico also does a good job of explaining to us what life was like in the Middle Ages.

On the arch above the entrance are a series of 24 elders, talking to each other and carrying a series of musical instruments. The instruments are so realistic that they have become a basic source of information about medieval music and are used to reproduce instruments from the period. All are paired off and in the middle of animated conversations. Even though it is a representation of the Final Judgment it is a joyful and triumphant moment.

An image of Saint James rests on a column that

illustrates the Tree of Jesse—the human genealogy of Christ.

Part of the southern archway of the Portico illustrates the fate of sinners which is a common theme in Romanesque art. This is the *Bible in Stone* and presents the coming attractions that will be found in hell. Lust, gluttony, sloth, anger and avarice will get you VIP treatment.

In 1589, Santiago thought it was about to be attacked by the English pirate Sir Francis Drake and decided to hide the Cathedral's treasures including the relics of St. James. They did such a good job that the relics remained lost until 1878 when they were discovered during a restoration project in the Cathedral.

A PILGRIMS CHURCH

The 11th, through the 13th centuries were the great years for the construction of the pilgrimage church. And many of these projects turned out to be the largest building programs since the time of the ancient Romans. The most important architectural innovation in these churches was an ambulatory—an extension of the side aisles that passed behind and around the altar. This change in the floor plan allowed the pilgrims to circulate around the building without disturbing the solemn ceremonies that were taking place. Each of the side chapels of the ambulatory held additional relics where pilgrims could offer prayers as they proceeded around the building. Keep in mind that each year over two million people were making the trip to Santiago.

But unlike any other pilgrimage church, the physical and spiritual focus of the Cathedral in Santiago is the High Altar which sits above the Apostle's remains.

Pilgrims climb a short set of steps and embrace

the statue of Saint James. Over the centuries pilgrims have developed a rather intimate relationship to this statue which has been around since the 1100s. They see Saint James as a friend, someone who pitched in and helped you get through your long journey. You want to give him a hug and express your appreciation. But even if you are not interested in that level of physical intimacy with the Saint, it's a good idea to come up here because the spot offers the best view of the Cathedral.



The most spectacular work inside is the canopy above the shrine. It was carved in wood, then covered with gold leaf. It's decorated with angels, vines, flowers and coats of arms. The objective of a canopy in a church is to focus the viewer's attention on the altar and this one certainly does the job. Above the statue of Saint James as the Apostle being hugged by pilgrims you have him as a pilgrim sharing the experience with everyone who is hugging him just below. On top there is a third image— Santiago on horseback as the slayer of Moors.

Below, a passageway leads to the crypt where a silver urn contains what are said to be the remains of the Saint being kept in the same spot where they were buried in the first century.

THE PILGRIMS MASS

The veneration of relics and the undertaking of a pilgrimage to a holy place is part of almost every religion. In Spain, relics had been admired and honored since the arrival of Christianity.

But there is no record of any pilgrimage until the discovery of the body of Saint James in Santiago. As a direct result of these pilgrimages the city of Santiago became rich and powerful, and quickly learned to honor the travelers upon their arrival.

Each day at noon the Cathedral holds a Mass for the pilgrims. The country of origin and the mode of transportation used to reach Santiago are announced. The Mass becomes an act of closure, the conclusion of an extraordinary, life altering experience. It touches people who have made the

journey with a religious conviction, but it is equally impressive to people who have no interest in religion. It is a ceremony that marks the physical end of their trip, the moment of arrival at the goal.

THE BOTAFUMEIRO

On special occasions and during a holy year the Cathedral puts its *botafumeiro* into play. *Botafumeiro* means "smoke belcher" and in this case it is a six foot high, 160 pound incense burner that is suspended from the ceiling of the Cathedral. It is one of the largest incense burners in the world and eight men are required to control its movement as it swings through both the north and south transepts in front of the altar.

The original burner, stolen by Napoleon's troops in 1809, has been replaced by a silver-plated tin copy that was made by a goldsmith in 1851.

One of the explanations for its enormity was the need to freshen the air in the Cathedral after it was visited by thousands of travelers wearing clothing that had not been washed for months. The smoke and smell also add to the already mystical quality of the building.



RECEIVING THE COMPOSTELA

Another essential aspect of the arrival in Santiago is a visit to the Pilgrim's Reception Office down the street from the Cathedral. This is where you present the Pilgrims Passport filled with the stamps that indicate your activity on the road. If all is in order, you will be issued the *Compostela*, a document that certifies the completion of the trip. The earliest *Compostela* that we know of was issued to a Frenchman who arrived in 1321.

An attendant at the office will ask you about your trip, where and when it began, the reason you made the journey, and if you would like a list of recommended podiatrists. To qualify for the certificate you must have walked at least 100 kilometers which is 62 miles or 200 kilometers if you used a bicycle.

During the Middle Ages the *Compostela* was

WHERE TO STAY

While in Santiago de Compostela I stayed at the Hostal de los Reyes Catolicos located right next to the Cathedral on the Plaza del Obradoiro. Considered to be one of the oldest hotels in the world, it is also one of the most luxurious and beautiful. It has four cloisters of immense beauty, elegant living rooms, spectacular bedrooms and a luxurious dining room which offers classic Galician dishes.



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proof that you had fulfilled your obligation either to the Church or to the civil authorities who had commanded the journey as part of a penalty for religious transgressions or criminal acts.

The Compostela also separated the real walkers from the big talkers and made it difficult to falsely include the trip on your resume.

WITH GUIDE BOOK IN HAND

During the 12th century the Book of Saint James was published. It consists of five sections that describe the activities associated with the followers of the Saint. It is our best source of reliable information on what was really happening here. And it has been translated into English.

The final chapter is a detailed guide to the road—where to stay, where to eat, what to see, which routes to use, and how to cross specific rivers. There's even a short list of key travel phrases in the Basque language.

The guide pointed out that even though there were laws that guaranteed pilgrims a safe and toll free trip the road was rough. Locals might charge you for use of their roads or the ferries that crossed their rivers. Or they might just kill you for the few meager things you carried. And other pilgrims were also a problem.

When the pilgrims finally arrived at the Cathedral of Santiago they often celebrated with too much drinking and ended up in drunken brawls. The day-to-day functions of the church were constantly interrupted by the need to re-consecrate the

church after someone was killed on the premises. Things got so bad that the Pope granted Santiago a short form of the re-consecration ceremony so the church could quickly get back on line.

The Pilgrims Guide became the prototype for all our guide books. But most important, it spread the word about the Road to Santiago and the magnificent city at the end of that road.

THE PILGRIMS MUSEUM

The pilgrim's museum holds a thousand years of history related to the idea of pilgrimage, the Road To Santiago and the city of Santiago de Compostela.

The towns and villages that sprung up along the road have a characteristic ribbon-like shape. The main street in many of the towns in northern Spain was the original road to Santiago and the town developed alongside it. Some towns were deliberately created by royal decree in order to make the journey easier for the pilgrims.

As the Middle Ages came to a close there was a change in how the pilgrimage to Santiago was viewed. The search for knowledge increased and the religious aspect decreased. A journey described as a "chivalrous pilgrimage" developed in which the real purpose was not to reach the Apostle's tomb, but rather the taking of the trip—a sort of religious tourism.

Pilgrimages to Compostela stimulated the development of a sophisticated trade in print making. Prints served as a means of

communication and religious prints were the most common. Prints of the Apostle certificates of pilgrimage, itineraries, summaries of indulgences and list of relics were produced.

The traditional clothing for a pilgrim was a wide-brimmed hat, a cloak, a wooden staff, a leather pouch and a drinking gourd. Once the pilgrim had finished the trip, the clothing might be kept for special occasions or donated to a monastery. Some people chose to be buried in their pilgrim's garb—symbolizing their journey to the next life.



PLAZA DEL OBRADOIRO

The Plaza del Obradoiro is Santiago's most important square and was designed to hold thousands of pilgrims. The buildings on the sides of the plaza represent the four great powers that control the city—the Cathedral represents religion, the Palace represents government, the University Library stands for knowledge and the Hostel for tourism.

The Neo-classical Palace is headquarters for the Regional Government and the City Council of Santiago. And at the top, Saint James on horseback leading the Reconquest.

On the south side of the plaza is the College of Saint Jerome. It was founded in the 1400s for poor artists and students attending the local university. Today it houses the University's Library.



On the north side of the plaza is the Hospital of the Kings of Spain. It was built in 1499, with funds donated by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel.

The building was both a resting point for the pilgrims and a hospital for the sick. Pilgrims were allowed three days of rest during the summer and five days during the winter. The building is a major work of art.

Of particular interest are the four interior patios,

each designed by a different architect for a different group of guests—one for healthy men, one for sick men, one for healthy women and one for sick women.



Each patio contains an elaborate group of gargoyles whose throats act as waterspouts. The Latin word that gives us the word gargoyle is the word that gives us gargle and gurgle, so no matter how elaborate and scary the sculpture, its not a real gargoyle unless it drains water.

A description of the facility written in the 1500s, pointed out that every patient and pilgrim was treated as if the hospital had been built for his or her particular benefit. The building still takes that approach to its visitors, but today it is no longer a hospital—it is a luxurious hotel—part of the Spanish government's network of Paradores, which are historic buildings that have been turned into hotels.

JET BLACK

Jet is a type of coal that comes from ancient trees that died during the Jurassic period and have spent the last 180 million years being crushed at the bottom of swamps and rivers.

It's light in weight. Takes such a high polish that it can be used to make a mirror and feels warm against your skin. Its blackness is so black that the phrase "jet black" has been part of the English language since the 12th century. In English, it is called *jet* because that was the name of an ancient Greek city where the gemstone was mined.

There's not a lot of jet but for over ten thousand years people have been using it to make lucky charms and elegant jewelry. When you rub jet with a piece of wooly cloth it develops enough static electricity to pick up a piece of straw—a fascinating characteristic for Stone Age people. Wearing a piece of jet with its magical forces was powerful stuff.

One of the few places on earth where jet can be found is the land around Santiago de Compostela. Ricardo Rivas Casal is a master craftsman whose



family has been working in jet for generations. His shop in Santiago produces objects in jet with many of the same techniques and craftsmanship that have been in use for over a thousand years.

A miniature arm with the thumb placed between the second and third fingers of a fist is an ancient Mediterranean symbol. It was, and still is, worn as protection against the evil eye.

When Christianity arrived in northwestern Spain jet with its magical properties was the ideal material for small religious objects. By the ninth century jet was used to produce souvenirs for the pilgrims arriving in Santiago. By the 13th century the jet business was so big that the carvers and dealers had organized themselves into a guild.

The Reformation and the subsequent drop in the number of pilgrims traveling to Santiago resulted in a rapid decline in the jet business, but there are still master craftsmen working here and with the rebirth in the pilgrimage there is a reawakening of an interest in jet.

The Azabacheria Plaza leads into the north part of the Cathedral. In Medieval times it was the entrance used by the pilgrims who had traveled along the French Road. Until the middle of the 1500s this area was filled with the homes and workshops of the jet carvers.

LACING UP

Lace making in the northwest of Spain was introduced by foreign pilgrims coming off the road to Santiago. Its production can be traced to the 11th century, but it wasn't until the 1400s that lace came into fashion with the introduction of ruffed collars.

Lace was often designed to replace embroidery in a way that could easily transform an old dress into a new one. Unlike embroidery, lace could be taken off of one garment and sewn onto another.

Lace was also extremely expensive and therefore an easy way to show your wealth and social standing. By the 1600s it was an important

industry with designers supplying patterns and materials to the lace makers who worked at home.

During the last few years there has been a revival of interest in lace making. Lace making courses and events are programmed in villages and cities throughout Spain.

OPEN DOORS

Every religion that has expanded beyond a single area, a single race or a single culture has incorporated the idea of pilgrimage. It is a communion with the sacred and it has existed since prehistoric times. It is a ritual journey that can be taken alone or as part of a group. It can be taken with the aim of achieving purification, perfection or salvation. It can be a religious experience in which bonds are established between this world and a higher sphere, between an individual traveler and a community, between the pilgrim as he was when he started the journey and what he becomes.

A journey on the road to Santiago can connect you with the divine—it can open doors to a spiritual space, but in the end only you can decide to walk in.



TO LEARN MORE . . .

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