

# PILGRIMAGE TO *Santiago de Compostella*

FOLLOWING THE VIA TOLOSANA & CAMINO FRANCÉS

11-27 JULY 2019

Led by Canon Peter Sills

*The joyful annual Festival of St James on 25 July is the highlight and goal of this Pilgrimage. Pilgrims first made this journey in AD812 when the remains of the Apostle St James were believed to have been discovered in Santiago de Compostella. In the Middle Ages it became one of the three main pilgrimage routes, attracting many pilgrims. In later centuries the number of pilgrims declined, but after it was declared the first European Cultural Route in 1987, its popularity increased, and it is now travelled by many thousands of pilgrims each year. In the Middle Ages pilgrim routes gradually became settled and certain cities became established starting points. One of those cities was Arles, where we begin. We follow the Via Tolosana initially, the most southerly of the French routes, to Castres and Toulouse, crossing the Pyrénées at Somport and joining the Camino Francés at Puente La Reina, and so on through northern Spain to Santiago. We end with the traditional last stage to Finisterre, the 'end of the earth'.*

## ITINERARY

**Thursday 11 July *Journey Out*** – Early afternoon easyjet flight Gatwick / Montpellier; transfer to Arles for two nights at Brithôtel Acacias. Early evening orientation tour.

**Friday 12 July *Arles / St-Gilles*** – The pilgrimage begins with a celebration of the Eucharist in Arles Cathedral, the traditional gathering point for pilgrims. The heart of the day is free to explore Arles noted for its Roman antiquities and a wealth of Gothic and Classical buildings. Later in the afternoon we visit St-Gilles, the first stage on the Via Tolosana.

**Saturday 13 July *St Guillhem-le-Désert / Lodève*** – Leaving Arles we travel to St Guillhem-le-Désert, stunningly situated, and one of *Les Grands Sites de France*. We visit the C11th Abbaye de Gellone, a UNESCO World Heritage site. We continue to Lodève, with its beautiful medieval bridge, *Pont de Montfort*, and cathedral, then to Castres for two nights at the Mercure Castres L'Occitan hotel.

**Sunday 14 July *Bastille Day Castres / Dourgne*** – Today we join with local Christians for the Eucharist at Castres Cathedral. The heart of the day is free to explore the delightful old town; in the afternoon we visit the twin Benedictine monasteries of *St-Benoit d'En-Calcat* and *Ste-Scholastique* at Dourgne, joining the community for Vespers.

**Monday 15 July *Toulouse / St-Gaudens*** – Leaving Castres we drive to Toulouse, from where the Via Tolosana takes its name. We visit the majestic Romanesque cathedral of St-Sernin, followed by free time to explore the city. Most of the notable sites are near the spacious *Place du Capitol*. Late afternoon we take one of the alternative pilgrim routes south towards the mountains, to St-Gaudens for two nights at the Hôtel Pedussaut.

**Tuesday 16 July *St-Bertrand-de-Comminges / Tournay*** – This morning we visit two notable churches: St-Just de Valcabrère and St-Bertrand-de-Comminges. After lunch we go to the Abbaye Notre-Dame de Tournay, peacefully situated in a bend of the River Arros. We enjoy a quiet time at the Abbey, joining the monks for Vespers before returning to St Gaudens.

**Wednesday 17 July *Morlaàs / Pau / Oloron-Ste-Marie*** – Rejoining the main pilgrim route at Morlaàs for a brief visit, we continue to Pau for lunch and time to explore this elegant town with its magnificent panorama of the Pyrénées, château and Musée des Beaux Arts. Then to Oloron-Ste-Marie, situated at the confluence of two rivers, the Gave Oloron and Gave Aspe, for two nights at the Hotel Restaurant Chez Germaine.

**Thursday 18 July *Oloron-Ste-Marie / Gabas*** – A free day to relax at Oloron. Alternatively, you may like to join a guided walk in the foothills of the Pyrénées at Gabas, a picturesque mountain resort and gateway to the Pyrénées National Park.

**Friday 19 July *Somport / Jaca / Puente la Reina / Estella*** – A spectacular drive takes us over the Pyrénées to Spain, via the *Col du Somport* (1632m). We call at Jaca and Puente la Reina (where the Via Tolosana joins the other pilgrim routes from France), and continue on the *Camino Francés* to Estella for one night at the Estella Alda Hotel.

**Saturday 20 July *Najera / St Domingo de la Calzada*** – After free time in Estella, a former capital of Navarre with two notable churches and C12th royal palace, we continue along the *Camino Francés* through the Rioja wine region, visiting en route Najera and St Domingo de la Calzada, both with churches noted for their architecture and decoration. Then to Burgos where we stay for two nights at the Hotel Corona de Castilla.

**Sunday 21 July *Burgos / Santo Domingo de Silos*** – Burgos is noted for its impressive Gothic cathedral, where we join the local congregation for the Eucharist. The city also has two notable museums and the Cistercian Abbey of Las Heulgas Real, formerly the summer palace of the kings of Castille. In the afternoon we visit the Monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos, renowned for the sculptures of its cloister, one of the most beautiful in Spain. We join the monks for Vespers before returning to Burgos.

**Monday 22 July *St Mary Magdalene Carrion de los Condés / Leon / Astorga / Ponferrada*** – This morning we drive to Leon via Carrion de los Condés with its ancient pilgrim bridge. The heart of the day is spent in Leon with its fine Romanesque and Gothic monuments, including the C13/14th cathedral and the Panteón Real. Late afternoon continue to Lugo via Astorga and Ponferrada for one night at the Hotel Méndez Núñez.

**Tuesday 23 July Lugo / Samos / Santiago** – Lugo was the capital of Roman Galleacia, and the roman walls, 2 km long, still completely encircle the city. They are a *UNESCO* World Heritage Site – and great fun to walk around! In the afternoon we visit the Benedictine Monastery of St Julian de Samos. A medieval foundation, it was destroyed and rebuilt in the C18th, and remains an important resting place on the pilgrim route. Continue to Santiago for four nights at Hotel Virxe de Circa.

**Wednesday 24 July Santiago** – Santiago will be in festive mood when we arrive, and this morning we have a guided introduction to the city and the festival. The rest of the day is free to explore the city and enjoy the festivities, including a *Son et Lumière* show in the cathedral and spectacular firework display in the evening.

**Thursday 25 July St James the Great Santiago** – The day of the Festival. In the morning we attend the Festival Mass, which includes the ceremony of the *Botafumero*, the huge censer for which the cathedral is famous. The rest of the day is free to rest, enjoy the festival and further explore the city.

**Friday 26 July Finisterre** – Traditionally medieval pilgrims finished their journey by continuing to Finisterre, and on our last day we follow in their footsteps. After a short visit to Noia, we follow the scenic coast road via Muros and Corcubión to ‘the end of the earth’. The journey to Finisterre gives time to reflect on the pilgrimage in a peaceful coastal setting.

**Saturday 27 July Return** – Early morning transfer to Santiago airport for the easyJet flight to Gatwick.

*Please note that exceptional circumstances and local conditions may require changes to the itinerary.*

### FLIGHTS & TRAVEL

Pilgrims are asked to make their own arrangements for travel to France and from Spain. The recommended flights are with **easyJet** – *OUT* Gatwick to Montpellier: July 11; dep. 12.50; arr. 15.40; *RTN* Santiago to Gatwick: July 27; dep. 10.15; arr 11.10. **NB** Transfers will be arranged for these flights. If you make other arrangements you are responsible for booking any extra accommodation required and airport transfers. Travel on the pilgrimage is by air-conditioned coach.

### ACCOMMODATION & COST

Accommodation in a variety of good, medium-priced hotels offering regional cuisine, on a half-board basis. The cost per person, based on a group of thirty pilgrims and in shared rooms, is £1280 (at the current exchange rate) – very good value for a bespoke tour in high-season. The supplement for a single room is £425. The cost includes accommodation, travel within France and Spain, airport transfers for the recommended flights, and guiding in Santiago. It does not include travel from/to the UK / USA, insurance, gratuities, lunches, drinks and any entrance fees that may be required.

**NB** The cost may be adjusted (up or down) according to the current exchange rate at the time of payment, and if the number of pilgrims falls below 30.

### PARTICIPATION & BOOKING

Participation in this private tour is by personal invitation, and is subject to the Conditions sent with the Booking Form, which include the requirement that you arrange your own travel insurance. Bookings should be made on the Booking Form, and sent to me at the address below. To secure your booking an initial payment of £400 per person is required, preferably by online payment (sort code: 07-02-46; a/c no: 17182989), or by cheque payable to Dr Peter M Sills.

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