

ACROSS THE PYRENEES:
The Pilgrim Routes through France and Spain to Santiago de Compostela
LES CHEMINS DE COMPOSTELLE – THE ST JAMES WAYS
A World Heritage pilgrimage trail by coach across Southern France & Northern Spain

ITINERARY & DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME JUNE 2017

Paris (1 night) - Le Puy-en-Velay (2 nights) – Saint-Flour (1 night) – Figeac (2 nights) – Toulouse (2 nights) – Oloron-Sainte-Marie (1 night) – Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port (1 night) – Estella (1 night) – Burgos (3 nights) – León (2 nights) – Lugo (1 night) – Santiago de Compostela (3 nights).

Day 1: WEDNESDAY 31 May 2017. Paris (1 night)

Pre-coach tour preparation. This will give everyone the chance to meet each other and dine together in Paris, as well as having the opportunity to discuss the tour and ask questions with the tour leaders prior to the start of the tour programme.

Participants are requested to be settled in the hotel in Paris by mid-afternoon.

17h00 Get-together for a general tour briefing followed by a presentation of the tour itself by Chris and Annie. In the evening there will be a simple group dinner. Early to bed!

Day 2: THURSDAY 1 JUNE 2017. Paris - Lyon – Le Puy-en-Velay (2 nights).

Transfer by coach to the Gare de Lyon. TGV to Lyon. On arrival at Lyon, luggage to be placed in coach. Lunch arrangements will be announced closer to the date, depending on the time of the train from Paris to Lyon.

Afternoon “trek” - drive by coach from Lyon to **Le Puy-en-Velay**. The trip up from Lyon to Le Puy-en-Velay passes through some of the most magnificent scenery of the Massif Central. While not grandiose in the way the Alps can be, the superb panoramic scenes across the ancient volcanic hills, depending of course on light and visibility, can be completely stunning.

After settling into hotel, free until *Welcome Dinner* in the evening.

Day 3: FRIDAY 2 JUNE 2017. Le Puy-en-Velay.

All-day exploration of Le Puy. Guided visit of the old town, the cathedral and of St Michel d’Aiguilhe.

The cathedral is one of the three great traditional medieval starting points for the St James Way in France. It is a magnificent Romanesque building, with some very exceptional construction features which you will readily appreciate when you first climb up to the cathedral!

In terms of church history in France, Le Puy, a pagan centre of considerable importance prior to the 3rd century AD, ranks as a centre of major religious importance equal to that of Chartres. The place of the Black Virgin in the cathedral’s history will be fully explained during the guided visit! The whole area around the cathedral, including the fine cloister, has much to offer the visitor. Leaving the cathedral, we pass in front of the superb statue of St James (the faithful pilgrims will touch his feet!) and descend the monumental stairs to explore the Old Town below.

At midday you will visit, as all pilgrims have been doing for nearly a thousand years, the extraordinary 10th-century sanctuary of St Michel d’Aiguilhe which stands high above the town. The site is unique and the church crowns this rock “needle”. The climb is not easy (268 steps) but the reward colossal!

After lunch, those who wish to walk will be taken back to the cathedral to place their hands on the feet of the celebrated St James statue, and start out on the St James Way to Compostela as far as Saint-Christophe-sur-Dolaison. A fairly stiff – but most enjoyable – climb at the end of which you will be picked up by the coach and taken back to the hotel for dinner.

The non-walkers will have plenty of time to explore this unique and fantastic city!

Group dinner

Day 4: SATURDAY 3 JUNE 2017. Le Puy-en-Velay – Saint-Flour (1 night)

This is really a day of travelling, as the route immediately south of the city is slow and the main pilgrim route requires crossing considerable country on foot. We will therefore have a day's detour before re-joining the main route the following day.

First we have a short drive (in passing just outside Le Puy you will see the extraordinarily impressive Château de Polignac) to the historic site of **La Chaise-Dieu** (a halt on one of the less important St James routes through Auvergne), but world-renowned for its wonderful basilica. The basilica is especially famous for three things : the magnificent 144 oak-carved choir stalls dating from the 15th century; the fabulous collection of tapestries dating from the beginning of the 16th century and which hang right round the church; and as the setting for one of the major European music festivals each August (created in 1965 by the celebrated pianist Georg Cziffra who had fallen in love with La Chaise-Dieu). (The tapestries have been undergoing major restoration since 2013 – fingers crossed that they will be back in place by June 2017!)

After the visit, another short drive through hills and woods to the small town of **Brioude**, also on the pilgrim routes across Auvergne with a stop to look at yet another famous basilica – its 16th-century paved floor is quite magnificent (you climb above the nave to look at it properly), a superb collection of capitals throughout the basilica, and traces of the original 12th & 13th-century paintings and decoration are extremely well preserved. Time for lunch before leaving Brioude..

Early afternoon yet another short drive further south through the Massif Central to **Saint-Flour**. (Saint-Flour is almost the only place to be visited on the whole tour which has never been a halt for the St James pilgrims. But it offers a convenient stopping place for the tour, and is fascinating to visit anyway!)

Our hotel is in the “low town” at the bottom of the hill, while the old town, dominated by its extraordinary cathedral, looks out over the whole region. Built during the 15th & 16th centuries following the specific orders of the Duc de Berry for its construction, the cathedral resembles much more a fortress than a great church, while two of the rooms in the tower were actually conceived as a prison! After settling into the hotel, there will be a short guided visit of the old town and the cathedral.

Group dinner in the evening.

Day 5: SUNDAY 4 JUNE 2017. Saint-Flour – Figeac (2 nights) (Whitsuntide)

The emphasis for the day will be the entire World Heritage stretch of the *Chemin du Puy* from Nasbinals to Estaing and on to Figeac. Villages to be visited : **Nasbinals – Saint-Chély-d'Aubrac – Saint-Côme-d'Olt – Espalion – Estaing**.

Attractive countryside throughout the day! Historically interesting villages and small towns (all of them are either World Heritage places in their own right or hold WH monuments within their walls) offer view upon view of old streets, great market places and more intimate squares, buildings from the 14th to the 18th centuries magnificently restored, churches, chapels, sculptures, a non-stop series of havens for the camera lover!

For the walkers : if the weather allows, we suggest, for those who wish to walk for an hour/hour and a half on the pilgrim way, to do so for part of the stretch between Saint-Côme-d'Olt and Espalion. The coach will take the others to Espalion, where the walkers will eventually rejoin the other members of the group.

Lunch to be taken in Espalion before going to Estaing! (Both Estaing and Espalion boast ancient World Heritage St James historic pilgrim bridges!)

Time to explore Estaing – one of the officially classed but also actually genuinely “most beautiful villages in France” - before taking the coach into **Figeac** for the evening. (In the interests of time, the coach will take the main road between the two towns.)

Group dinner

Day 6: MONDAY 5 JUNE 2017. Figeac – Conques – Figeac (Whit Monday)

A morning excursion to the wonderful medieval village of **Conques**, one of the highlights of the trip through France. The great Basilica of Sainte-Foy which dominates the whole site is one of the glories of France. Both the basilica and the village itself are classed World Heritage (just like Vézelay), together with a most beautiful Roman bridge by which the foot pilgrims leave Conques. The Romanesque tympanum is considered one of the most beautiful in France. France is not particularly renowned for the quality of its church treasures as most of them were melted down at the time of the Revolution: the exception is here in Conques, considered the finest collection of church treasures in the country.

Group lunch in Conques after the visit. Before leaving Conques, time to walk across the ancient medieval (World Heritage) bridge over the river Dourdou!

For the afternoon we are back in **Figeac**. And the rest of the day free. (Maps and tourist information will be provided for everyone)

Figeac is one of the finest remaining examples of a small medieval town unspoiled by 19th-century restoration. The architecture, sculptures, churches, and residences, be they modest or luxurious, from the 12th to the 14th centuries, offer unparalleled insights into the society and culture of this period, which was followed by equally important architectural developments still to be seen from the Renaissance. Now part of the Compostela World Heritage sites, Figeac is one of the most attractive small towns on the tour. And if today there is little trace of its activities as a major commercial crossroads as was the case six or seven centuries ago, it is still an extremely attractive place to visit. To lose oneself in the narrow, twisting medieval streets overhung with sandstone and wood-lined buildings is to share at least in a small way something of the setting which welcomed all the Compostela pilgrims all those centuries ago.

Figeac's most famous son was Jean-François Champollion, founder of the whole field of modern Egyptology. Born into a family too poor to send him to school, he had nevertheless mastered a dozen languages by the age of 16! At the age of 19 he was appointed assistant professor of history at Grenoble University. Among his many achievements in his relatively short life, perhaps the greatest was as decipherer of Egyptian hieroglyphics which enabled him to publish the first translation of the *Rosetta Stone* (discovered only some 20 years previously). He subsequently became Professor of Egyptology in the prestigious *Collège de France*, but died of a stroke at the age of 41.

For any members of the group who would be interested in learning a little more about Champollion a short walk will be arranged to see his birthplace and the central *Place des Ecritures* opened in 1990 in honour of the 200th anniversary of Champollion's birth and the Rosetta Stone.

Evening free – so own arrangements for dinner

Day 7: TUESDAY 6 JUNE 2017. Figeac – Moissac – Toulouse (2 nights)

On leaving Figeac, we drive first to the World Heritage site of Cahors, to see its famous Gothic bridge, the “Pont Valentré” - and, if there is time, to have a short visit to St Etienne, its beautiful early 12th C cathedral.

Then we drive on to **Moissac**, where there are plenty of opportunities for lunch.

If Spain is renowned throughout the world for the beauty of its cloisters, those in France, often lesser known than many of those in Spain, can sometimes quite simply take your breath away— one such example is Moissac. Here the great cloister is considered to be one of the finest examples of Romanesque architecture anywhere, not only because it is one of the oldest to survive, but for the sheer beauty of its columns and capitals. The cloister alone justifies the World Heritage status of the abbey – but there is more to come!

While many churches offer traces of splendidly colourful decorations of the past, there are few where you can experience the full impact! The abbey church at Moissac is one such treasure, where the church has been restored in all its colourful patterns throughout exactly as it appeared in the 15th century.

After lunch there will be a guided visit to help us appreciate the marvels of Moissac to the full, while at the same time bringing to light the importance of Moissac as a pilgrimage halt on the way to Compostela. (Records show that there were plenty of other superb buildings around the abbey precincts, which were destroyed in the 19th century to make way for...the railway!!)

After the visit, we leave for the time being the St James route from Le Puy to join another of the major routes, that which starts in Arles and along which pilgrims from as far away as Venice and Zagreb would pass.

We drive down into **Toulouse**, one of the major halts on the St James route from Arles into Spain. Toulouse, famous for its rugby, its red-bricked architecture (it is known as “la ville rose”) and for its spiritual heritage, is quite simply one of France’s loveliest cities, and frequently voted by the French as the ideal city in which to live!

After settling into hotel, free until group dinner in the evening

Day 8: WEDNESDAY 7 JUNE 2017. All day in Toulouse

Morning guided tour, concentrating in particular on the great *Basilique de Saint-Sernin*, certainly the most famous and the most beautiful of all the great churches in the south of France. Building started in the 11th century on the site of the original church built in the 4th century, though the present basilica was not completed until the middle of the 14th century. Unfortunately, as so frequently happened in France at the time of the French Revolution, the crypt was destroyed along with a number of other religious buildings, but the damage to the church was comparatively slight.

The other site to be visited will be the *Eglise des Jacobins*, generally considered not only to be the masterpiece of Gothic architectural design in the whole of southern France, but the most beautiful Dominican church in the whole of Europe. Once you have seen the amazing “palm tree roof” you will never forget it! Toulouse is the birthplace of the Dominican order, founded here by St Dominic in 1215. St Thomas Aquinas was brought to the church to be buried in 1369 – for a time his remains were transferred to *Saint-Sernin* but were restored back in the *Eglise des Jacobins* in 1974.

Group lunch after the morning visits, in a restaurant well-known for its *cassoulet*. This great local dish, (now completely national if not international!), is the most famous regional dish in the region spreading from Toulouse to Carcassonne.

No visit to the region can be complete without a *cassoulet* meal – but it is highly recommended that it be eaten at midday rather than the evening!

Rest of day free. Plenty of suggestions will be made for things to see and visit during the afternoon, ranging from the celebrated *Capitole* (which houses both the Mairie and the Concert Hall), the *Ancienne Chapelle des Carmélites*, the *Hôtel d'Assézat* (certainly the most beautiful Renaissance building in the city), the *Musée Saint-Raymond* for those interested in the archeological and ancient artistic history of Toulouse, the *Fondation Bemberg* – the principal art gallery with some excellent late 19th and early 20th-century works, the *Musée des Augustins* with a superb collection of Romanesque and Gothic sculptures and paintings – and perhaps finishing with a visit to the famous *Atelier du Chocolat de Bayonne* (all the chocolates – and what a choice! – are guaranteed 100% pure without any fat additives whatsoever!)

(Free for the evening. Toulouse is one of the most music-conscious cities in France, home to one of the country's finest national orchestras, while the churches house some great organs – if there is any chance of a concert or recital this evening, you will be advised accordingly well in advance of the tour!)

Day 9: THURSDAY 8 JUNE 2017. Toulouse – Oloron-Sainte-Marie (1 night)

Morning drive to the town of **Auch**.

Auch was a major centre for pilgrims on the Roads to Compostela, and is now a World Heritage site. It is also intimately associated with the story of the *Three Musketeers*, for d'Artagnan was born only 35 kms from Auch. His statue stands at the foot of the monumental staircase by which you can climb up from the river to the cathedral (232 steps for those who are game), known as the *Escalier d'Auch*!

The guided visit will include both the cathedral and the old town. The World Heritage Cathedral of Sainte-Marie, over 100 metres long, is not only one of the largest in France, it is one of the most recent – started in 1487, it took 200 years to complete. When finished, it also housed the celebrated Jean de Joyeuse organ, the largest in France at the time of its construction in 1694. There are also 18 magnificent stained-glass windows dating from the very beginning of the 16th century, while the cathedral's greatest treasure is without doubt the set of 113 oak-carved choir stalls (including 60 upper stalls), dating from the first half of the 16th century, with more than 1500 figures carved in the oak, and which took more than 50 years to make.

The guide will leave the group in the centre of the old town where there will be time for an early - and rather rapid - lunch. If the afternoon appears rather long in the coach – some three to four hours – it is because we feel that it would be a pity not to call in to the absolutely fabulous site of **Saint-Bertrand-de Comminges**, a small ancient town which, like many of those through which we pass in this area of the Pyrenees, has been declared a World Heritage site on the roads to Santiago. The imposingly massive cathedral stands high above the town, dominating the valley of the river Garonne, and has always been a major centre for pilgrims.

After visiting Saint-Bertrand there will be a short stop at the exquisite (World Heritage!) Romanesque basilica of **Valcabrère**, standing quite on its own in this lovely countryside within view of the cathedral!

In one way, the visit to Saint-Bertrand is one of the most important on the tour. The beauty of the countryside (we are close to the Pyrenees) is unmatched anywhere else on the tour, but it is the absolute peace and serenity of the whole experience, perhaps even more so at Valcabrère, which evoke what must have been, and presumably still is, so important to the real pilgrim!

Then on into the (World Heritage!) town of **Oloron-Sainte-Marie** for the evening. Group dinner.

Day 10: FRIDAY 9 JUNE 2017. Oloron-Sainte-Marie – Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port (1 night)

After breakfast, a short visit of Oloron-Sainte-Marie which is in fact two small towns which have become blended into one : Oloron itself has its origins in the Roman occupation of France, paying a predominantly military role, while Sainte-Marie, which interests us especially, grew up in the Middle Ages, the fine cathedral

church of Sainte-Marie being constructed mainly in the 12th century. The west door with tympanum and the superb decoration surrounding it represent its most celebrated features – especially that of a knight in armour being devoured by a lion!

On leaving Oloron, we travel across one of the richest areas of interest in the programme, where the three great routes across France, those from Le Puy-en-Velay, Vézelay, and Tours, meet at Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port before crossing into Spain at Roncevaux.

The trip takes us through most beautiful scenery, all the time close to the Pyrenees, and although we do not travel through the high mountains, the hill country of this whole western part of the range through which we pass is particularly attractive.

A short stop in **Navarrenx** (few may have heard of it but it is one of the World Heritage sites!), originally a “bastide” of considerable strategic importance on the St James Way. Passing in front of the house of Jeanne d’Albret, there will be time to evoke the important role of this Queen of Navarre, mother of Henry IV of France, a central (if not particularly attractive) figure in the history of these times!

Depending on time, two short stops will follow : **Saint-Palais** – we are now right into Basque country – where there are several most interesting historical traces of former pilgrimages to be seen, and **Harambels**, an important halt, to see the remarkable St Nicolas chapel – a most wonderful surprise for the 2015 group!

For the walkers : before reaching Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port those who so wish could be dropped either at Utziate (for a walk of 11 kms) or just before the entrance of the town for a short walk down through the town.

Then on into **Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port** for the rest of the afternoon and the overnight stay. One of the major stopping places in the whole region for pilgrims on the way to Compostela. Even if one has no interest at all in the St James Way, the town offers the visitor a great deal of pleasure – one of the loveliest places on the tour, with its delightful old streets and numerous ancient buildings, all sorts of fascinating historical places associated with the St James pilgrims, its old bridge and sheltered ancient stone seats close by, and above all the World Heritage fortified St James Gate (*Porte de St Jacques*), which leads directly down into one of the most beautiful streets in the town.

There will be a short guided walking tour of the town before the group dinner.

Day 11: SATURDAY 10 JUNE 2017. From France into Spain: Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port – via Roncevaux & Pamplona – Estella (1 night)

After breakfast, we have a short drive up into the Pyrenees and across the border into Spain to one of the smallest, but most historically famous, places on the whole tour, just on the other side of the border, the legendary **Roncevaux** (Roncesvalles in Spanish, Orreaga in Basque).

All the St James Ways sites in Spain are classified World Heritage

Roncevaux / Roncesvalles : one of the most important halts on the St James Way, the place where the *Camino Francés* begins, its monastery welcoming, housing and feeding pilgrims for a three-day period up until the 17th century. As many as 50,000 pilgrims a day from all over Europe could pass through the village at Jubilee festival time – its *Chapelle Sancti Spiritus* (*Chapel of the Holy Spirit*, the oldest surviving building), was built in the 12th century. It is hoped that there will also be a short visit to the Musée de Roncevaux, not large, but great in some of the medieval exhibits stored there!

The chapel has another name, *Chapelle de Roland*, (*Roland’s Chapel*), which brings us to the other reason why Roncevaux is so famous. The chapel is built on the rock where, according to legend, Roland tried to break his

sword Durandal after his defeat. For it was here that Roland, in charge of Charlemagne's rear-guard army, suffered a surprise attack by the enemy on 15 August 778: his horn resounded round the Pyrenees, calling Charlemagne for help, but the help came too late....The sword legend has many variations – one of them says he threw it away, for it to reappear in Rocadamour!

The visit to Roncevaux will cover both its importance as a pilgrim halt, and as the setting for Roland's defeat.

After the visit, we continue the coach drive across the Pyrenees, and arrive in the Spanish city of **Pamplona** – here you will be introduced to Spanish meal times! Free for lunch with time afterwards to explore the historic centre of the town. (Documentation will be provided).

For those who would like to walk for a while, it would be possible to drop them off at Zbaldica to walk into Pamplona (5kms) and to meet up with the group at an agreed site. A sandwich might help to calm any hunger pains!

The town's historical and religious past saw it once the ancient capital of the Kingdom of Navarre, and a major halt on the Way to Compostela. Its main claim to fame today is to be found in bullfighting, and the celebrated *feria* of the bulls racing through the streets of Pamplona. You will have time to wander through the historical centre relating to The Saint James Way, including visiting the most outstanding religious architectural feature of Pamplona, the 13th-century cathedral cloister, considered one of the richest examples of medieval church architecture in Europe.

Mid-afternoon, a short drive to the celebrated **Puente la Reina**, the historic meeting place for all the Spanish and French pilgrims on the way to Compostela. It is here that all the *Chemins de Compostelle* across France come together! Cross the 11th-century bridge on foot, and photograph away!!

Then into the town of **Estella** close by : place luggage in hotel rooms. Then late-afternoon guided visit of this famous historic town which evokes better than most the days of medieval pilgrimages with its ancient Romanesque and medieval centre, including the 12th-century palace of the kings of Navarre, as well as the famous church of San Pedro de la Rua just opposite, Always reputed for its excellent food and wine, as well as its hospitality, the city authorities in 1991 set up a fountain at the entrance to the town for the pilgrims to refresh and fortify themselves for the journey ahead – from the fountain flows a very reasonable local red wine!!

Group dinner.

Day 12: SUNDAY 11 JUNE 2017. Estella – Burgos (3 nights)

After breakfast, back on the road!

First to Torres del Río – for a short visit of the Church of the Saint Sepulchre, and then passing through Viana to reach mid-morning **Logroño**, a town rich in history and a major halt for pilgrims on the way to Santiago, offering a fascinating variety of architectural features.

Our tour has been planned so that we arrive in Logroño on the day of its most important annual *fiesta*, the patronal festival of *San Bernabé* (June 11), which is focussed around the theme of “sharing fish, bread, and wine”.

No nation makes more of its festival days than Spain, always a splendid experience, especially the traditional parade of the giants. Logroño is also the capital of the most famous wine-growing area of Spain, the Rioja, so there will be a wine-tasting before we leave.

Late afternoon - drive to Burgos by motorway. Settle into hotel then free for the evening.

Day 13: MONDAY 12 JUNE 2017. Burgos and Santo Domingo de Silos

Much of the day until mid-afternoon will be spent in Burgos exploring this most beautiful city, and one of the most important of all the stopping places for pilgrims on their way to Compostela. The cathedral, one of the four original World Heritage monuments in Spain, is acknowledged as one of the great Gothic glories of the world. It offers a wonderful experience of the range of the great Gothic style over three centuries (building started in 1221 but was not completed until well into the 15th century).

Burgos is also famous for its association with one of the legendary heroes of Spanish history going back more than a thousand years: Rodrigo Diaz, better known the world over as The Cid. He was born less than 10 kms from Burgos, and the ashes of the Cid and his wife Ximena lie buried in the cathedral. In the streets of Burgos you will inevitably encounter references (statues, street names, restaurants...) to the Cid. The influence of the Cid and his exploits have been a major source of literary inspiration down the centuries, from a medieval *chanson de geste* to the *Légende des Siècles* of Victor Hugo, but undoubtedly the greatest work linked to his name is the play *Le Cid* by the 17th-century French dramatist, Pierre Corneille.

The guided visit of the cathedral will be followed by visits to the two other sites of major interest, the *Royal Convent of Las Huelgas* and its *Museum of Medieval Materials*, with its outstanding collection in particular of royal clothing in 13th-century Castile. The visit terminates with the *Miraflores Carthusian Monastery*, which dates from the end of the 15th century, and which contains three extraordinary treasures – an outstanding wooden sculpted altarpiece, the spectacular Royal Mausoleum in flamboyant white marble exuberantly decorated, and an extremely ornate funereal recess (“enfeu”) which houses the tomb of the *infante* Alphonso whose death led to his sister, Isabella the Catholic, inheriting the throne of Castile.

At approx 15h30 you will be taken by coach to the Benedictine abbey of *Santo Domingo de Silos*, famous for two reasons : the abbey possesses what is generally considered the most marvellous of all the Romanesque cloisters in Spain, and offers a quite unique musical experience! If the abbey church itself is a more recent Baroque building, the cloister dating from the 11th and 12th centuries offers a collection of sculptures which are totally remarkable both for the quantity and for the quality of the workmanship.

The abbey was abandoned in the 1830s, and remained in total neglect for almost 50 years, until a group of young French Benedictine monks decided to buy the site, thereby saving not only the cloister but the abbey’s medieval archives. One of the first decisions of the young monks was to plant a cyprus tree in the centre of the cloister precinct, which today stands as the abbey’s emblem.

The group of young monks was led by a monk who came from the Abbey of Solesmes, known in liturgical musical circles the world over for the quality of their presentation of the *Gregorian Chant*. The monks of Silos were thus to become the Spanish equivalent of their illustrious French brothers – and indeed the recordings made of the Gregorian Chant in Silos are every bit as remarkable as those of Solesmes. The visit to Silos will commence with a guided visit of the cloisters, and finish with the sung Vespers in the Abbey church.

We should be back in Burgos about 21h00, a decent time in Spain to think about the group dinner!!

Day 14: TUESDAY 13 June 2017. Santo Domingo de la Calzada and San Millán

After breakfast we drive to the *San Millán Yuso* and *Suso* monasteries, one of the most superb architectural World Heritage sites in Spain, with its religious history going back to the 6th century. Language and literature are an integral part of the historical importance of the two monasteries, considered the birthplace of the modern written and spoken Spanish language. The monasteries are linked to the St James theme, though they are not on the principal route from Logroño to Burgos. Many pilgrims made the detour to San Millán in order to visit the monasteries, which are classified in their own right as World Heritage sites, but also as St James Way sites! Short guided visits of both monasteries and plenty of time for photography!

After the visits, a short drive to *Santo Domingo de la Calzada*, a major World Heritage halt on the Way. Time for lunch.

But rich though Santo Domingo is in all it has to offer the visitor in the way of historical interest, architecture, sculpture, - and wine! -, by far its most famous curiosity is to be found in the cathedral (begun in 1158, it is an architectural model of the style of churches conceived specifically for welcoming pilgrims). Facing the tomb of St Dominic, a hen house in wrought iron, containing both a (live) hen and cockerel, perpetuates *since the 14th century* the memory of the miracle of the roasted cock and hen!!

After a short discovery visit of the cathedral, we drive back to Burgos and then free time until group dinner.

Day 15: WEDNESDAY 14 JUNE 2017. Burgos – León (2 nights)

After a relaxed breakfast, leave for the excursion from Burgos to León.

We spend much of the day travelling through a sequence of attractive and historically interesting villages and small towns, past churches and monasteries of differing styles and periods, on the pilgrim way, where as many stops will be made as time permits : in particular **Hornillos del Camino, Castrojeriz, Frómista, Sahagún** (perhaps the most historically important and interesting of the small towns through which we pass), as well as **Mansilla de las Mulas** where the monastery of Saint Miguel de Escalada is considered one of the jewels of the whole region.

Late afternoon: into the city of **León** for the evening. Here we are privileged to be in an ancient and beautiful building belonging to the history of the St James Way, the quite glorious monastery of San Marco, now (partly) a *Parador* hotel – needless to say it is also one of the World Heritage sites on the St James Way in Spain!

For those who would like to walk : they can be dropped off at Valdelafuente, 6 kms from León, and join the group in the hotel.

Group dinner in the evening.

Day 16: THURSDAY 15 JUNE 2017. León

All day visiting and exploring León, like Burgos one of the major stopping places for pilgrims on their way to Compostela.

Morning guided visit of the great 13th-14th-century cathedral, the only cathedral in Spain to have copied the French Gothic style of architecture. Extremely rich in architectural forms and design, equally so in its works of art and sculpture, the cathedral is in many ways the “Spanish Chartres” in that it has perhaps the finest collection of stained glass in the country. Much of this is from the 13th-15th centuries, with magnificent rose windows and 1200 square metres of stained glass windows – part of them having been created during later centuries, including some in recent times –, but the whole effect is quite fabulous! The visit will also take in the unforgettable Royal Pantheon, one of the first examples of Romanesque style in this part of Spain, but the main impact comes from the magnificent 12th-century wall decorations and paintings in an extraordinary state of preservation.

After the guided visit you have the rest of the day free to relax and wander!

Group dinner in the evening.

Day 17: FRIDAY 16 JUNE 2017. León – Lugo (1 night)

As on the trip from Burgos to León, we will explore as many of the small towns, villages and sites as possible in this very concentrated area of St James pilgrimage history :

- at **Orbigo** to see one of the most remarkable bridges on the entire Way;
- at **Astorga** to see the flamboyant Gothic cathedral, the most impressive Plaza Mayor, and the most intriguing of all the architectural curiosities of the town - the huge building designed by Gaudí at the beginning of the 20th century as the Bishop's Palace. Although never completed by Gaudí, it has eventually been transformed into a museum dedicated to the St James Way;
- at **Ponferrada** to see the colossal Castle of the Knights Templar;
- at **Villafranca del Bierzo**, a small town dating from the 11th century, rich in churches, old houses, great portals recalling a more glorious past;
- at **O Cebreiro**, now a small picturesque village, with an importance for pilgrims almost equal to that of Roncevaux. It was originally a small shelter for pilgrims but in the 14th century it became a hospital for pilgrims celebrated all over Europe thanks to the miracle of the Holy Grail taking place here at the beginning of the 14th century (the wine changing into blood, the bread into the flesh of Christ) – the chalice is preserved in the church. (Wagner makes a reference to this miracle in *Parsifal*).

For the walkers, a very short walk (2kms) would be possible from *Laguna de Castilla* to *O Cebreiro*

From O Cebreiro we will leave the Way to reach the town of **Lugo** for the last one-night stand of the tour! During the Roman occupation of Galicia, this was the capital, and its walls built during the 1st and 2nd centuries stretch for more than 2 kilometres round the town. There are ten doors leading into the old town – which we will explore as much as time permits. From the rampart walls there are fine views over the town and the countryside. Lugo was a St James' halt for those who had followed the coastal route across northern Spain, before the final trek into Santiago.
Group dinner in the evening,

Day 18: SATURDAY 17 JUNE 2017. Lugo – Santiago de Compostela (3 nights)

Relaxed morning in Lugo. Time especially to walk on the ramparts, visit the cathedral, explore the historic centre, - even go to the market (after all this is a major cheese-producing area). The centre of the town abounds in bars and restaurants, especially in the two main *plaza*, so no problem for an early lunch!

After lunch, we continue on through a series of small villages and sites on the last stage of the pilgrim route, **Portomarín, Laboreiro, Melide**, each with their treasures to reveal to the visitor – how many stops will depend on time and weather, and on how many want to take advantage of the last stage before entering Santiago.

For the walkers : the coach will stop at **Monte del Gozo** (approx 5kms) to allow those who wish to finish the journey on foot to do so. Monte del Gozo (the Mount of Joy) is the spot where the pilgrims see their holy destination in the distance for the first time and kneel with tears of joy in their eyes! We will all share the sight before separating!

Those not walking will be taken into Santiago to settle into the hotel, where the walkers will join them later.

Free until group dinner in the evening.

Days 19 & 20: SUNDAY 18 and MONDAY 19 JUNE 2017: Santiago de Compostela

One of the most remarkable cities in Spain: one of the first city centres in Europe to be classed World Heritage; only Jerusalem and Rome are more important in the Christian world (and indeed at the time of the Turkish conquest of Jerusalem Compostela became for some time “second” after Rome); its university going back to the 14th century; and, of course, the history and legends associated with St James.

But even for the non-pilgrim, for the non-Christian, the city attracts, fascinates, bewitches - with a sort of indefinable mystic quality. To look at it face on, the cathedral does not appear to be what it really is, a wonderful

construction dating from the period of the great pilgrimages between the 11th and 13th centuries, hidden behind the Baroque façade, added in the 18th century, but in itself an architectural masterpiece. The cathedral's *Pórtico de la Gloria* goes well with its name, for this main portal is one of the glories of Compostela, one of the finest examples of late Romanesque architecture anywhere.

There will be two guided tours of the historic centre, all World Heritage since 1985 (including your hotel!)

- On the theme of St James of Compostela, the great Plaza del Obradoiro which takes its name from the cathedral's great Baroque façade, and the cathedral itself. This guided visit will be timed to allow people to be seated (hopefully, given the crowds every day of the year) in plenty of time for the unmissable mid-day pilgrims' mass including the ceremony with the cathedral's giant censer. (There's a good sequence on YouTube if you can locate it on the web!)
- The old city.

For the rest, everyone will be provided with appropriate documentation to help them explore those parts of the city which interest them most.

Those who wish to attend a mass in the cathedral will be advised of the times of the main weekday masses. We will provide you upon arrival with details of any musical, artistic events or exhibitions taking place during the two days we are here.

The Farewell Dinner will take place on the evening of 19 June. The best local food that this region of Spain can offer!

Day 21: TUESDAY 20 JUNE 2017.

Departure – coach transfer to airport.

WORLD HERITAGE

On every single day of the tour you will be in contact with World Heritage sites and/or monuments. In France you will visit 17 specifically declared sites or monuments, as well as three World Heritage parts of the original medieval *Chemins de Compostelle* across the countryside. In Spain, all sites relating to the *Camino Francès* along which we will pass are part of Spanish World Heritage.