

Tell Me More . . . “Just Get Me Started” Camino Group Program

What is the “Just Get Me Started” group?

“Just Get Me Started” is a group program for independent pilgrims walking the Camino Francés route of the Camino de Santiago in Spain. The program is designed to equip you with all the elements of a successful start to the pilgrimage, to prepare you for your unique journey, and to orient you to the Camino trail while on the trail.

The “Just Get Me Started” program gives you assistance with pre-Camino planning, a soft landing at your starting point, and on-trail support for the first five days of your pilgrimage.

All programs are conducted in English, with some mediocre Spanish and truly bad French thrown in for fun.

Who joins this group?

“Just Get Me Started” is specifically designed for first-time, independent pilgrims on the Camino Francés. Walking the Camino is a big undertaking, and it's normal to feel eager and excited about the journey. It's also normal to feel a bit overwhelmed and intimidated by the enormity of the task and the thought of embarking on the Way on your own.

You may also find that your family members and friends are a bit concerned about you embarking on this unknown adventure on your own.

Joining this group can give your family and friends the peace of mind to know that you will be greeted at your starting point and accompanied for your first five days on the Camino trail.

Whether you are rarin' to go, slightly scared, or shaking in your boots (and your family and friends are feeling the same, on your behalf), I will be with you to facilitate your successful start. And by the time we reach Pamplona, you will have the knowledge and confidence you need to reach your Camino destination.

I also welcome people who prefer a shorter walk on the Camino and who don't want to go all the way to Santiago de Compostela. If you plan to walk just part of the Camino Francés, you are welcome to join one the group, and walk with us as far as you like.

The group is open to anyone from any country. The only requirement is that you must be able to communicate in written and spoken English, as this is the primary language of your guide and all the pre-planning information you will receive.

How much does it cost?

The cost to join the 2023 group is \$930.

Note: Conversion to currencies other than US dollars depend on the current exchange rate at the time of booking. Note that your bank and the payment processor may charge an additional fee for the transaction.

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What does the fee cover?

The fee includes all Zoom calls, written and audio materials, Q&A, activities, discussions, workshops, on-trail support, and the Welcome dinner in Saint Jean Pied de Port. Specifically:

- An experienced guide for all your pre-travel planning and the first five days of your Camino journey, from Saint Jean Pied de Port to Pamplona
- Weekly Zoom calls with your guide and group beginning three months before your start-walking date (and twice a month from the time you register until that three-month mark)
- Guidance and assistance with planning your travel to and from the trail
- Private Facebook group for your specific Q & A
- Tips, tricks, and tools for preparing and planning your walk, in written and/or audio formats, including:
 - A detailed training plan to get you ready for the physical challenges of the walk
 - A guide for managing money and important documents in Spain
 - Suggestions for selecting and using guidebooks and apps and how to use them to plan your day-to-day stages
 - Recommendations for how to pack for your unique Camino experience
 - Tips for selecting and using the right gear for you
 - Practical methods for communicating with home and within Spain and France
 - Ideas for how to record your journey
 - Trail-tested ways for staying safe and secure while traveling and walking
 - Advice on how to prevent and handle problems
 - to returning home after your walk.
 - Questions for reflection to use throughout the entire journey, from saying *Yes!* to returning to your after-walking life

The fee does NOT cover the costs of your flights, train/bus/taxi fare, the rest of your food, beverages, incidentals, accommodations, travel insurance, medical care, phone or internet expense, or baggage transfer along the trail.

Why doesn't the fee include food, accommodations, and some of the other things regular Camino tours cover?

The “Just Get Me Started” program is for people who ultimately want to walk the trail independently but who still want some expert support to get started. Once you are on your own on the Camino, or walking with a group of new friends, you will be arranging and paying for your accommodations yourself. You will be finding food, water, and services on your own. I will help you get good at those things using maps, apps, and your smartphone. In other words, this purpose and goal of this group is to provide you with everything you need to empower you to be an independent pilgrim on the Camino. That said, I will arrange our accommodations for the five nights the group is together (and show you how it's done from the very start), so you don't have to worry about selecting those places.

How is it different from a tour on the Camino?

The first difference is that typically a ‘tour’ is an organized, pre-arranged affair, with all of the responsibility for planning and execution falling on the tour company. Not everyone likes to travel that way, and the Camino itself easily lends itself to an independent travel experience. With the “Just Get Me Started” program, I prepare and empower you to be successfully independent on the Camino, and then you plan the rest of your pilgrimage as you go, as you like.

The second difference is that independent pilgrims often have much different needs and wants for their pilgrimage experience. They want the freedom to set their own pace. They want to choose where they stay and eat based on

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what feels right at the moment, and often that’s where their new Camino friends are staying and eating. They want the flexibility to rest when they need to, sightsee when they want, and choose their accommodations as they go, as they learn about what is available on the trail.

Those other tours look great; they’re just not what you’re looking for this time.

Where does the program start and end?

The “Just Get Me Started” group will meet and start walking in Saint Jean Pied de Port in France. I will accompany you until we reach Pamplona. Here is the proposed itinerary:

Day 1: Meet in Saint Jean Pied de Port

Day 2: Walk to Orisson, 8 kms

Day 3: Walk to Roncesvalles, 19 kms

Day 4: Walk to Zubiri, 20 kms

Day 5: Walk to Pamplona, 20 kms*

*Based on availability of accommodations, we may add an additional stop between Roncesvalles and Zubiri, making this a six-day itinerary instead of five days.

Walking with the group is just the beginning of your pilgrimage; *your* journey doesn’t end until you reach Santiago de Compostela, or Fisterra, or wherever else you are going. By the time we reach Pamplona, you will be ready to continue on your pilgrimage, with the knowledge and peace of mind to know you *will* reach your destination.

When are the programs scheduled?

The “Just Get Me Started” programs are available during the Spring and Fall walking seasons each year: May, June, September, and October, to allow us to take advantage of the best weather for walking. See the website for upcoming dates.

What do I bring?

Walking-pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago need to bring along the basics of clothing, toiletries, and personal items. You will need to bring a sleeping bag or sleep-sheet if you will sleep in the *albergues* (hostels), plus weather-appropriate clothing for the season you will be walking in – things to keep you warm and dry or cool and comfortable. Unless you plan to camp (statistically uncommon), you don’t need to carry a tent, camp stove, or prepackaged food.

If you plan to carry your backpack, you will transport your belongings in a backpack, or rucksack. If you plan to use a baggage transport service (for a fee), you can carry everything in either a backpack or a regular suitcase.

Once you join a “Just Get Me Started” program, I will share you with my Camino packing philosophy and a sample packing list, plus some tips on how to keep your pack light.

Where do we sleep?

In general, you have several choices for where to sleep on the Camino, and your choices mostly will depend on your budget and the kind of experience you want to have.

Walking pilgrims have full access to the 400+ pilgrim hostels, or *albergues*, all along the Camino Francés. Albergues

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offer shared accommodations, usually in mixed-gender dorm rooms. Dorm rooms come in all sizes, the smallest being two-person cubicles and the largest with more than 100 beds under a single ceiling. Most fall somewhere in between, in the eight to twenty range. Many *albergues* now have private rooms as well, which couples, friends, and small groups can share.

Albergues also offer the unique experience of being right in the heart of the pilgrim community. Not only will you share sleeping quarters, but often *albergues* provide pilgrims with a shared meal, complete with local wines, and the opportunity to connect with people from all over the world. It truly becomes a case of ‘we’re all in this together’ as you open your heart and mind to new experiences and learn that while we are all unique and different, in many ways, we are all the same.

If sharing space with friends, barely-friends, and sometimes strangers isn’t your thing, you can seek out the pensions, guesthouses, hotels, and other private accommodation options along the Camino. These cost between €30 to €100 a night, and they come with real sheets and usually with en suite bathroom facilities.

Private accommodations can be booked in advance, either before you leave home, or from the trail a few days in advance. All you need is some very basic Spanish phrases, which I will share with you.

When you start your Camino experience with the “Just Get Me Started” program, I assist you with booking your first five nights on the trail. That way you have the peace of mind to know you have a good place to sleep when you arrive in Saint Jean Pied de Port, and for your first days walking, too.

Where do we eat?

Where you eat depends on where you are, but don’t worry, there are plenty of options on the Camino Francés. For example, in Saint Jean Pied de Port we take advantage of the abundant selection of cafes and restaurants, a luxury we won’t encounter again until Pamplona.

If we are staying at Refuge Orisson, we will partake of the shared pilgrim’s meal in the large dining hall, where we eat and share stories with pilgrims from around the world who are beginning their own journey-of-a-lifetime. The bar at Orisson will provide lunch for your first two days on the trail – the first day when you arrive there, and the next day as a packed lunch to take with you on the trail.

In Roncesvalles we will enjoy a *Menú del Peregrino* (Pilgrim's Menu) at one of the three dining rooms there. After that we will find bars and restaurants as we go, using a guidebook, app, or personal knowledge. You won’t go hungry, I promise!

Don't worry if you have specific dietary requirements - vegetarian, vegan, gluten free, celiac, diabetic, etc. I will show you where to find what you can eat and how to order it in Spanish.

What if I want to do it with my husband/wife/partner/friend/my own group?

Bring ‘em along! It’s the right time to bring along everyone you know who has an interest in walking the Camino with the special Bring Everyone rate: book two or more people in the same program and receive a quantity discount of \$15 off the per person program fee.

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Can I bring my kids?

Definitely, if they are at least 18 years of age. Unfortunately, I can't accommodate your younger kids due to liability concerns.

Can I bring my dog?

Better not. It's not that your dog wouldn't love the Camino, it's just that the infrastructure on the Camino Francés isn't set up to accommodate pets.

What happens if the weather is bad?

By bad I mean inclement, like rain, snow, intense heat, or something equally unpleasant. Part of walking the Camino de Santiago is refining your deal-with-unpredictability skills. What could be more unpredictable than Mother Nature?

The first thing is to dress appropriately for the weather. Have the right gear. Once you book, I will make sure you know what that is.

Our first two days of walking from Saint Jean Pied de Port are scheduled to take us up and over the Pyrenees Mountains. There are two routes from which to choose from Saint Jean Pied de Port to Roncesvalles - the Napoleon Route, or high road, and the Valcarlos Route, or low road. If the weather is bad, and the local people in the town of Saint Jean Pied de Port recommend against crossing the Pyrenees on the high road, we will take the very different but equally beautiful and challenging low road. Be assured, if the weather conditions pose a viable threat to our safety, we will not cross the Pyrenees on foot.

How physically fit do I have to be?

You do need to be reasonably fit to walk the Camino de Santiago. To walk with the “Just Get Me Started” group from Saint Jean Pied de Port, you must be able to walk for at least 20 kilometers each day for four straight days. And you must be able to tackle the Pyrenees Mountains in your first two days on the trail. That means 20 kilometers steeply uphill, and 5 kilometers steeply downhill.

Heart, lungs, back, hips, knees, feet - the whole body is put to task when you walk the Camino. You may be able to walk 20 kilometers in a day, but can you walk that distance every day for a month? Be sure to plan some training time before you leave home so you can 'practice' walking with your hiking boots and loaded backpack to build up your strength and endurance.

Once you reserve your place in a “Just Get Me Started” group, I will provide you with recommendations for how to prepare physically for your Camino experience.

What happens if I can't walk the whole way one day?

If you absolutely can't walk the entire distance on any given day, I will help you to arrange for a taxi to pick you up or will get you to the bus stop (the ride will be at your expense).

There are a couple of things to consider ahead of time, if you are concerned this might happen for you.

First, you will have from sun-up to sundown – at least nine hours – to walk the required distance each day. If the day's walk is 20 kilometers, that means you have plenty of time to take it slow, rest along the way, and care for any physical problems as they come up.

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Second, there are some places on the trail, especially from Saint Jean Pied de Port to Roncesvalles, where it's not possible or practical for a taxi to reach you. For that reason, **it is your responsibility to ensure that you are in the physical and mental condition to complete this and all other parts of the trail.**

What if I don't want to carry my own backpack?

Some walking pilgrims carry their backpacks, and some do not. If you prefer not to carry your backpack, you can make use of one of the baggage transportation services along the way. For a fee – usually around €3-8 – these services will pick up your backpack from your *albergue*, hotel, or pension and take it to your next destination. If you choose to transport your bag each day, you will still need to carry a small daypack with some essential items: water, snacks, guidebook or phone, an extra layer of clothes. I will show you how to use this service, if that's your preference.

How do I sign up and when do I have to pay?

If you are ready to book, click [BOOK NOW!](#) and enter your personal details and preferred program dates. I will email you a confirmation for your reservation which will include the Terms & Conditions for joining the group, the Registration Form, and payment instructions.

Full payment is due 90 days before your program start date. If you are planning ahead, more than four months out, you can reserve your spot with either a \$300 deposit or the full payment. If you choose to make a deposit, then your final payment will be due at the 90-days-out mark.

Payments are made in US dollars through PayPal or by bank check or money order. If you choose to pay by check or money order, you may need to pay farther in advance.

What is the cancellation policy?

I hope it never comes to this, but sometimes things come up that require us change our travel plans. If that happens, you have until 90 days before your start date to cancel and request a transfer to another group with another start date.

If you cancel before the 90-day mark, I will keep \$100 of whatever you've already paid, whether it was just a deposit or the full program fee, as an administrative fee. The rest will come back to you within 45 days of cancellation. Alternatively, you can skip your refund and I will hold your place in a future group for up to a year, but only if you give me that 90-day notice. If you do that, the 90-day cancellation policy is in effect for your new program date and the entire deposit becomes non-refundable.

If you cancel fewer than 90 days before your group start date, there are no refunds – unless someone from the waiting list takes your place. If that happens, I will refund all but the initial \$300 deposit.

I recommend you purchase a travel insurance policy that covers trip cancellation. Once you book, I will provide information about companies that provide this type of insurance.

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My question isn't here...

Did I miss anything? If yes, please email me and I will fill in the missing information.

Email: nancy@thecaminoexperience.com

Wishing you a beautiful Camino journey!

~ Nancy