

Starting the Camino Santiago St. Jean Pied de Port, Pamplona, Logroño

Day 4: After two nights and one full day of spending time with Our Lady of Lourdes, it was time to move on to the next leg of our journey. Today we are going to cross the peaks of the Pyrenees mountains that stand as a natural border between France and the Iberian Peninsula that is made up of Spain and Portugal.

We chose to take the scenic route following the slower National roads and not the highways. First stop was the City of St. Jean Pied de Port just inside the France side of the border. This is where the pilgrims who take the full 960 kilometer trek of the *Camino Santiago Francaise* begins. It is a small city but with a fort with walls that are still intact and within which are very old buildings that date back to the 10th century. The cobblestone streets come up from fortified gates with one of them over the river Argo providing quite a picturesque entrance to the city. The favorite store turned out to be the sports shop where one can find various clothings, shoes and gadgets that trekkers might need in their quest to complete the Camino Santiago.



St. Jean Pied de Port



Plaza del Castillo, Pamplona

to mind the short walk to the Plaza del Castillo where we had lunch in separate groups. The calamari with *tinto negro* was delicious and so were the other fish items and chicken that tasted like our "afritada". We were told to meet at the Plaza where we were then tended by Sandra #2 and were escorted back to the bus station a few blocks away.



Calamari tinto negro

The wet and relatively cool day plus the conscious effort to keep hydrated made us look for the restrooms at almost every turn. With limited facilities and close to 100 pilgrims vying for a turn, the lines were long and so was the wait. With a late second start, the city tour of Logroño in the Rioja Valley (yes the wine) was made on bus with no further attempt to challenge mother nature as she continued to rule the rest of the day.

It was late by the time we got to Hotel Ciudad de Burgos which was located just outside the city. It was a little more spacious than Hostel Le Mediterranee in Lourdes and the staff was more accommodating. After a late dinner, it was time to repack our bags again this time with the intention of leaving in the bus the things that were not needed until we got to the cruise. This would minimize our time lugging all our baggages everyday and clogging the smallish elevators in the hotels.

Burgos, Castrojeritz & Leon

Day 5: Hotel Ciudad de Burgos was kind enough to accommodate our request to set up a projection screen in the dining room. CME 2 on "Primer on Presentation" and CME 3 on "Exercise and the Heart" were covered amidst the noisy background of shared breakfast with a lot of other travelers.

Then it was time to visit the City of Burgos that was once the capital of the Crown of Castille where the infamous Burgos Laws that governed the behavior of the Spaniards towards the natives



It took another 1 1/2 hours after crossing the border to reach



Pamplona, the capital city of the District of Navarre that was made more famous by the running of the bulls celebrating St. Fermin's feast from July 6-13. It was drizzling a little but nobody seemed



Cathedral of Burgos

of the Americas was promulgated in 1512. This also affected the natives of the Philippines. It was from here that the “castillas” that ruled over the Philippines came from. Burgos was also the headquarters of Generalissimo Franco during the Spanish civil war in the mid 20th century. There was only so much time to be spent in the Cathedral of Burgos where the tomb of the military leader “El Cid” (remember Charlton Heston and Sophia Loren?) as the moors referred to him, or “El Compeador” as revered by the Spaniards, was located. The gate to the walled city fronted by a stone bridge led to a square in front of the Gothic cathedral. There was an almost endless display of religious artifacts that dated back to the medieval years.

A short drive farther west brought us to a small village just outside the small town of Castrojeritz that was dominated by the ruins of a castle on top of a hill. We were then dropped off



Walking the Camino de Santiago from San Anton to Castrojeritz. Pilgrim of the Day is Romy Tamayo who survived a head contusion in order to finish the walk

about 2 1/2 miles away at the small village of San Anton where we began our “mini-camino #1”. Almost all went for the walk including our “pilgrim of the day”, Romy Tamayo from Albany, NY, who made it all the way despite his health issues, including an accident upon arrival at the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao. With only a few shops open there was a challenging hunt for an open restaurant to eat and for restroom break. A large group found one that was owned by a former *toreador* complete with posters of his feat in his heydays. He was an instant celebrity

“deja vu all over again”.

The day was hardly over as we arrived in Leon and checked in at a very fancy hotel, the Paradores of San Marco, a four-century old convent, a national monument that was converted into a 5-star hotel. We quickly unloaded then got ready to go



Parador Hostal San Marco, Leon, Spain

to the Cathedral of Leon. As a favor, our guides accompanied us to the place. Since they were not as familiar with the streets, we took the wrong turn once, adding to the additional sacrifice our pilgrims had to make. It was all worth it as we got to see the house of Gaudi before he moved to Barcelona where his fame really got established with works such as the still unfinished Sagrada Familia basilica. The cathedral of Leon is famous for the centuries-old stained glass that adorn the windows and was



House of Gaudi



Cathedral of Leon

given the distinction of a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Despite the long and more physically taxing day, everybody

was in high spirit appreciating the pampered accommodations and the hearty meal and gallons of wine that made the majority pleasantly boisterous. Life is good indeed!

Huh! Sino Ka?

One of the pleasant surprises in trips like we are doing is meeting people you have not seen for sometime. So was the case when Esperanza Vasallo and Rebecca Paguio saw each other at the JFK airport. It had been forty seven years since they last saw each other during their college days as Food and Nutrition students at the University of Santo Tomas. “You have not changed a bit. You still look the same since I last saw you.” Rebecca exclaimed. “So do you”, answered back Espy.



They both live and practice in New York City and had not had a chance encounter all this time. And to think that they have the next two weeks to reminisce the past and compare notes and share their current experiences.

Burgos to Leon

Greg Tolentino, MD'72

Adios Burgos. Today is Tuesday and it started quite pleasantly. It is about 52°F outside but cozy warm inside Hotel Ciudad de Burgos. The breakfast “PP CME” followed by “The heart and exercise” topics were very practical.

To make the loading of luggages more efficient the “luggage brigade” was launched and worked like a charm and efficiently like the oompah loompahs. It was not a surprise that the bus was full of music early.



Luggage Brigade

Before saying goodbye - onwards first to the town of Burgos and to the Catedral in particular. The one word to describe it- spectacular - a fitting tribute to the God we worship since the time began. Saints, monarchs, archbishops & bishops, warriors and



Cathedral of Burgos

nobilities were memorialized in stone and in wood and in gold and lapis and oil and pigments- in their service to God and humanity. All these through the hands and chisels of artists and



Camino de Santiago

artisans.

After coffee and salmon tosta (and "bladder break") we're off to Leon - and after a 4 km walk in the town of Castrojeriz it's time to head to Leon. But not before an interesting lunch break at

Iacobus restaurant whose owner walked the Camino 3 times (2500 km) and belonged to a family of bullfighters.



Parador Hostal San Marco

Finally we reached Leon and what a beautiful place! Hotel Paradores Leon used to be a convent, a pilgrim hospital and a jail. And the splendor that greeted us was a reminder of the grandeur and the glory of old Spain. After a walking tour of Leon Cathedral and the Basilica of St. Isidore we had another sumptuous dinner and deep slumber. Tomorrow the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela will be almost complete.



Catedral de Leon

Astorga and Ponferrada

On Day 6 we got up early almost loathing to leave behind our luxurious 5 star accommodation. Breakfast was sumptuous, then it was time for the luggage brigade to load up. The Parador Hostal San Marco was indeed a perfect place to stay.

Traveling farther west brought us to Astorga that was once a mayor kingdom, now reduced to a smaller region where there is an important cathedral and an Episcopal palace (bishop's palace) that was designed by Gaudi.



Cathedral of Astorga and Palace of Gaudi

It is an important stop in the Camino Santiago. This is where we decided to have the next Camino experience, this time consisting more of a city walking tour that resulted in frantic



Episcopal Palace designed by Gaudi





shopping on the way back to the bus station. As it turned out, Astorga is famous for chocolate for this is where cacao from Mexico was first brought to by the *conquistadores*. This resulted in an industry that persists to this day. You can just imagine the throng of revelers packed in one lucky store buying everything that they could see. It was indeed a chocolate-lover's delight.



Our next stop was the city of Ponferrada where once stood the main castle of the Knights of the Order of Templars that was awarded the vast region after proving themselves helpful in protecting the pilgrims and preventing the advance of the



moors during the age of the Crusaders. They are also known for their legendary quest for the Holy Grail. They have since been disbanded by the Spanish rulers and renamed as the Order of Christ in Spain and the Order of Malta in Portugal. The heavily fortified castle still remains intact and quite very picturesque providing beautiful scenes for photo opportunities. There was



a chance to have lunch with many taking advantage of the local cuisine including seafood paella in buckets. Next stop is Santiago de Compostela where the journey ends for most of the pilgrims.

