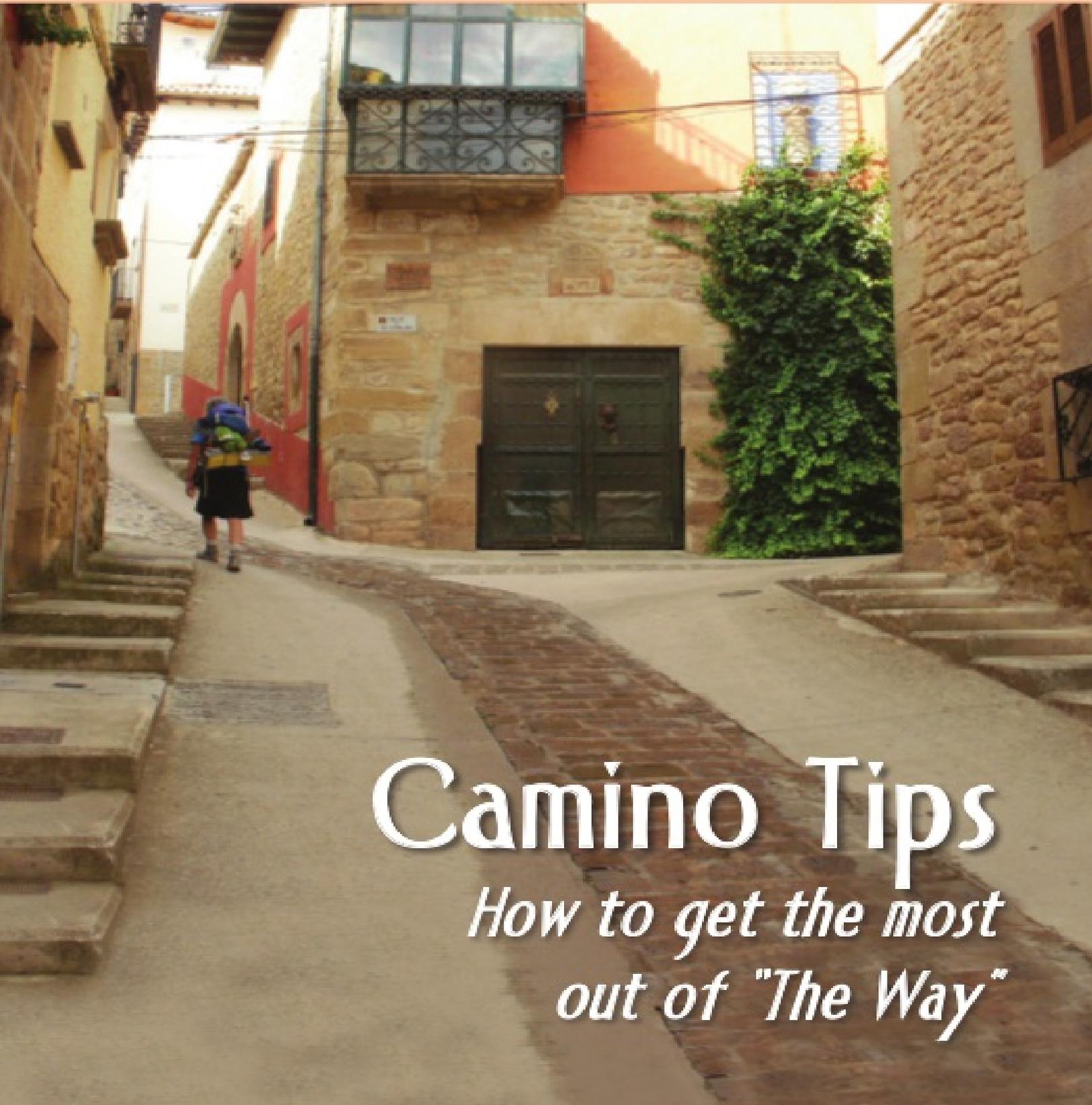




physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wanderings

Jane V. Blanchard



Camino Tips

*How to get the most
out of "The Way"*

To My Readers

I want to congratulate you for deciding to walk the Camino de Santiago, hereafter called simply the Camino or The Way. Having made that decision, you might be wondering what to do next. For many of you, this is your first hike and first overseas travel venture. I hope that these Camino tips will help you plan your pilgrimage and get the most out of The Way.

I walked the Camino Francés in 2011 and the Camino Portugués in 2013. I also attempted a *bici-Camino* (a biking Camino) starting from Barcelona, but I ended up taking a nasty fall in León and not finishing the ride. I developed the following Camino tips from the research I did before my first trip, from other *peregrinos* (pilgrims), and from personal experience—good and bad. I hope these tips are helpful to you as you prepare physically, philosophically, and spiritually for this life-changing adventure.

Except for two targeted demographics, these advice tidbits are for anyone of any age. The exceptions pertain to those over sixty (like me) and to those who have a religious motive for completing the Camino and wish to prepare spiritually. I listed the Camino tips for these two groups last in each section, if applicable.

To make the tips convenient, I divided them into three chapters: before, during, and after the Camino. Each chapter is divided into sections. The tips in *The Itinerary* section are chronological; all the others are not.

Before the Camino

- The itinerary
- Preparations
- The pack

During the Camino

- Taking care of yourself on the Camino
- The journey

- Making memories

After the Camino

- Keeping the Camino alive

Many of the tips include a list of resources and/or links for more information. To ensure that the links remain current, I have created an [Errata page](#). As links change, I will post the changes there.

If you have a nifty tip that you would like me to include in a future edition of this book, please drop me a note at jane@janevblanchard.com. I will credit you for the tip.

Camino Tip No. 2: Choose your Camino



*There is no 'right' way. Follow your heart—and your dreams.
~ Jane V. Blanchard*

Now that you've decided to hike the Camino, you may be wondering how to go about planning your pilgrimage. First, you must decide which Camino you will walk. The movie *The Way* takes place on the Camino Francés (The French Way), the most popular of all the Caminos and the one with the best infrastructure for pilgrims.

For many European pilgrims, the route to Santiago starts at their door, walking from all over the continent to arrive at Santiago de Compostela, a city in the northwestern part of Spain. Others start the pilgrimage in St-Jean-Pied-de-Port (hereafter referred to as St. Jean), a small town in France. From there, they climb over the Pyrenees or take the less difficult route through the Valcarlos Valley to Roncesvalles.

Besides having a myriad of routes within Spain, there are variant Caminos in Portugal and France. For those coming to Spain from outside of Europe, getting to Santiago requires international travel as well as travel from the airport or port to the starting location.



Major Caminos leading to Santiago

Caminos in Spain

Within Spain, the most famous route is the [Camino Francés](#), which starts in Roncesvalles and heads west for 790 km (490 mi). The Camino Francés takes a little over four weeks to walk. If you have limited time, consider starting at points closer to Santiago.

The following routes connect with the Camino Francés. Note: The distances listed below are from the point of original to the Camino Francés. Don't forget to factor in walking time from where the route connects to the Camino Francés to Santiago.

[Camino del Norte](#). Irún, France, to Arzúa 825 km (512 mi). This Northern Route travels along the coast. The rough terrain and continuous climbs and descents make this a challenging walk. The signage is sketchy and there are few pilgrim hostels.

[Camino Aragonés](#). Somport to Puente la Reina (160 km). Starting in the Pyrenees, this route is well-marked and has a developed pilgrim infrastructure.

[Camino Mozárabe](#). Granada to Mérida 406 km (252 mi). Yellow arrows indicate the way, but there is little pilgrim support. Most towns along the Mozarab Way have hotels and *hostales* (rooms rented in a family house).

[Ruta de la Lana](#). Alicante to Burgos (380 km). The waymarking along the Moon Path is scanty and there is no pilgrim infrastructure, though there are hotels, *hostales*, *pensiones* (similar to *hostales*, but not as elegant), and *casas rurales* (country houses similar to a B&B) all along the way.

[Camino Catalán/Cami St. Jaume](#). Follow the Cami St. Jaume from [Llançà to Montserrat](#) (270km) and then the [Camino Catalán from Montserrat through Huesca](#) (330 km).

[Ruta del Ebro](#). Tortosa through Zaragoza to Logroño (350 km). This route along the Ebro River is supposedly that used by St. James when leaving Spain. The waymarking is complete and there are several *albergues* (hostels). When there are no *albergues*, there are commercial lodgings.

[Camino de Madrid](#). Madrid to León (321 km). This modern route is well-waymarked and has adequate accommodations.

[Via de la Plata](#). Seville to Astorga 1000 km (620 mi). This Silver Route

runs south to north and follows an old roman road. It takes about six or seven weeks to walk to Astorga. The following routes connect to Via de la Plata:

- [Camino de Levante](#). Valencia to Zamora (900 km).
- [Camino Del Sureste](#). Alicante to Medina del Campo (1050 km).
- [Camino del Sur](#). Huelva to Zafra (176 km).

[Camino Primitivo](#). Oviedo to Melide (approximately 320 km). In this sense, "primitivo" means original, not primitive. First used in the 9th century, the Original Way is also known as La Ruta del Interior. It is said to be the friendliest—and hardest—Camino.

[Camino Vasco del Interior](#). Camino from Irún to Santo Domingo de la Calzada. The Basque Interior Road was the gateway to the center of the peninsula during roman times.

[Camino Baztan](#). Bayonne, France, to Pamplona (103 km). This route through the Bastan Valley and lower mountain passes is another way of crossing the Pyrenees.

[Camino Vadiniense](#). Potes via Riaño and Cistierna to Mansilla de las Mulas (135 km). The Camino of the Peaks is a demanding hike that passes through some of Spain's favorite tourist areas. For this reason and because there are only a few *albergues*, the route can be pricey.

[Camino del Cid](#). Alicante to Burgos (a meandering 2,000 km). This route is based on the literature and historical figure represented in the "Song of my Cid." The route crosses eight provinces and four regions. It can be traversed on foot or by car.

[Camino de Invierno](#). This is an alternate route on Camino Francés from Ponferrada to Santiago (261 km). The Winter Way is often used to bypass the climbing to O Cebreiro and the crowding that occurs starting at Sarria. There are long stretches without *albergues* or accommodations.

[Viejo Camino de Santiago](#). Bilbao to Villafranca del Bierzo (450 km). Information about the Old Road is mostly in Spanish.

From my experience on the Camino Francés, there are many alternate

routes offering choices for a more scenic view, a side trip to a point of interest, or a shorter, more direct—but noisier—near-the-road experience.

Caminos in Portugal

In Portugal, the [Camino Portugués](#) (*Caminho Português*) starts at the cathedral in Lisbon and follows the Atlantic Coast in Portugal to Spain, and then to Santiago. It is 625 km (388 mi). There is a side trip to Fatima. There are also other routes for the coast, the north of Portugal, etc. Many pilgrims start in Porto. From Porto to Santiago it is 237 km (147 mi).

The [Caminho da Senda Litoral](#) is the Portuguese Coastal Way. It starts in Porto and follows the coast before crossing by ferry to A Guardia, in Galicia.

The [Caminho da Costa](#) also starts in Porto but heads inland. It is better signposted than the *Caminho da Senda Litoral* and also ends up in A Guardia.

Caminos in France

In France, the Camino is called the *voie* or *chemin*. There are four major routes in France, and three converge in St. Jean.

The [Voie de Tours](#) starts at the tower of Saint-Jacques in Paris and is about 960 km to St. Jean. Many pilgrims walking from more northern countries use the *Voie de Tours*.

The [Voie de Vézelay](#) starts near Vézelay, Burgundy, and is about 1087 km to St. Jean.

The [Voie de Le Puy-en-Velay](#) continues paths from Cluny, Burgundy, and Geneva, and is about 720 to St. Jean.

The [Voie d'Arles](#) starts near Marseilles and meets up with the Camino Francés in Puente La Reina 860 km later. This route is traditionally used by pilgrims coming from Italy and the south of France.

As you can see, there are many ways to get to Santiago. For more information on the individual routes, visit the [Camino de Santiago](#), [The Confraternity of Saint James](#), [American Pilgrims on the Camino](#), or the [Camino de Santiago Forum](#). For books on the Camino, visit [Camino Books](#).

Whichever ever path you choose, let in the spirit of the Camino—be kind, be aware, and be open to the possibilities.