

Via de la Plata, a pilgrimage route in Spain

Looking for an alternative route to Santiago de Compostela? Then the Via de la Plata is for you! Via this 'paved road' you walk from the south to Santiago, with Seville as a starting point. A journey of about a thousand kilometers, in which the traces of the Roman past are omnipresent. Admittedly, it can get quite hot along the way, but the landscape and cultural-historical heritage make this well worth it!

Pilgrims had a wide range of motives for their pilgrimage from the Middle Ages onwards. Out of devotion, to obtain forgiveness of sins, for receiving an indulgence, to keep a promise, to do penance, out of pure inspiration, to want to visit a sanctuary, out of thanksgiving or to deepen and reflect. As a result, they determined their route to be walked mainly by "the shortest way". So if a native of Seville, southern Spain, found it necessary — or became mandatory? - to ask forgiveness of his sins at the tomb of Saint James in Santiago de Compostela, then a route through the beautiful Sierra de Andújar Natural Park was already cancelled in advance. Way too many rounds! After all, his pilgrimage was not about enjoying the beautiful nature in this Sierra or satisfying the desire for adventure. Instead, he espouses more religious motives, such as suffering and penance... forgo, so to speak. And we can imagine something about this after walking only a few stages of the Via de la Plata.



The Meseta

Via de la Plata

The route, from south to north, is about 1,000 kilometers long. You cannot walk a longer pilgrimage route in Spain. Once a Roman road ran here that ended in Astorga. To get to Santiago de Compostela, change to the *Camino Francés* in Astorga. This route then takes you to your final destination in 250 kilometers.

Contrary to popular belief, "plata" does not mean "silver." Instead, it is a corruption of the Moorish for "paved road." The Moors occupied the Iberian Peninsula for centuries during the Middle Ages.

On its way, the Via visits several towns and villages that belong to the top of Spain's cultural heritage: Zafra, Mérida, Cáceres, Salamanca, Zamora, Oviedo and Astorga, to name a few. We decided to start our walking tour in Salamanca.

Salamanca

From Madrid airport (Madrid Barajas) it is still more than 2 hours by bus to Salamanca. In this Renaissance city you will find various buildings and traditions that belong to the top of the Spanish cultural heritage, such as the main square: Plaza Mayor. With its baroque sandstone buildings and arcades, attractively lit. Or the Semana Santa, the holy week before Easter. With its processions with lots of incense, music, drums, bells, passion scenes, sculpture groups and many emotions. A spectacle that you must have seen once.

Once outside the city limits of Salamanca you will arrive at the Meseta, Spain's plateau with endless yellow grain fields. "A landscape like a tabletop: high and flat." Where it can get very hot in summer. On our website we have placed this photo of a painting [by Angeles Nieto](#): *Tarde en la Meseta, in the afternoon on the Meseta*. A painting that, in our opinion, beautifully depicts the emotional state of a hiker on these sparsely populated, dry, yellow grain plains with red paths and sleepy villages.¹



Plaza Major Salamanca

¹ "In the upcoming issue of Wandelmagazine we literally follow in the footsteps of well-known artists, by exploring their favorite hiking areas". That's how we read. On our website we show paintings several times that often reflect the mood of a walking area even better than a photo.

The Via de la Plata continues here on red dusty sandy paths that reach to the horizon. After the necessary restraint, you will reach the first vineyards in the area south of the Douro, the river that flows into the sea near Porto (Portugal). Still a nice prospect for a thirsty pilgrim.



On trail, the Meseta

Zamora

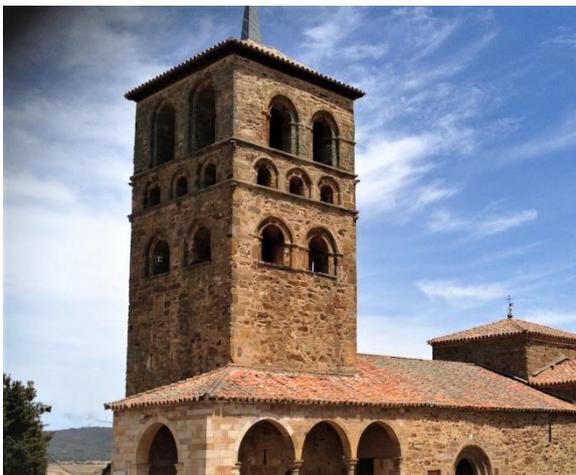
From here you enter Zamora through the Puente de Piedra, completed at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Yes: over the water(!), of the Douro river. Zamora was an important place during Roman rule. There are still many tangible memories of that time to admire. But as a hiker, after the stages through the Meseta, you especially need people around you and liveliness. Who knows how many pilgrims from Seville arrived here already thought: "we have already earned that indulgence for sure!" And then, the next day, dive back into the Meseta. You're going to secretly love it after a while. Although both routes are completely incomparable, I also had that with [the Noaberpad](#). On the first stage from Nieuweschans, to be precise. Here I walked through the clay fields and beet fields. Over time you come to love the vastness, the "emptiness", the impressive infinite landscapes and something of a realization dawns on you that your own importance can be a bit less. Or something like that



Tarde on the Meseta (Angeles Nieto)

Tabara via Montamarta

The hills come into view. The villages are reminiscent of the Spaghetti western, where *a poor lonesome cowboy* walks in with a delay at sunset. We pass the ruins of the imposing castle of the knights of the Order of Santiago. In earlier times, this knighthood guarded the transition of the Rio Elsa. And according to tradition, they also protected the pilgrims. By the way: the knights of this order did not have to take the vow of chastity. Exceptions have been made to everything. Even then. One more stage and you will arrive at the Iglesia de Santa María de Tábara. A Roman church from the tenth century. But luckily Tabara also had a café.



Tabara, tenth century

General route tips

- The route is fairly signposted. Yellow stripes or the well-known scallop. There are many elongated straightforward pieces.
- Try to arrange your accommodation in advance. Or book a package with a travel agency (recommended).
- "La acampada libre" - free camping - is prohibited. The fines would not be tender. That's all we know.
- It will have become clear from the report: bring enough water and enough to eat. And protect yourself well from the sun on the way.



Semana Santa (Holy Week)



Bridge medieval over the Douro



A mark



Samana Santa 2



Zamora





Time to think?



Like the old Irishman said: "You're on your own now".