

Pilgrimages: some impressions and thoughts

In this article we will take a closer look at the phenomenon of pilgrimages and pilgrimages. We are particularly looking for the motivation of pilgrims: What drives them? Why did they embark on this journey? We do this, among other things, on the basis of our experiences during the hike from Larrasoña, northern Spain, the crossing of the Pyrenees and some stages of the GR 65, to Navarrenx in southern France.

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Photos: Hans Plas, Pixabay and others



A member of our walking group decided **to walk the St Jacobs route**. Not to Santiago de Compostela, but away from it. To his own house. And we, the rest of the group, accompanied him on the stages just **before and just after the Pyrenees crossing** for a few days. If you walk from Santiago to the Netherlands, you will encounter dozens, if not hundreds, of pilgrims. They walk towards you. What drives them? Why did they embark on this journey? Through our conversations with various pilgrims, we gradually received answers to these questions.

Why? Why?

In the Middle Ages, pilgrims walked from all corners of Europe to holy places, such as Rome and Santiago. Their motives for this were mainly religious. Pilgrims visited shrines out of devotion, to obtain forgiveness of sins, or simply out of pure inspiration.



Santiago de Compostela, the final destination for most pilgrims

Nowadays, however, people go to places of pilgrimage for very different reasons. Nowadays, a pilgrimage often goes hand in hand with an interest in the cultural-historical heritage along the way. The physical challenge also plays a role. In addition, there is also the desire to be in a completely different environment for a longer period of time. In this way, pilgrims try to break free from the rut, incipient dip or a personal loss. Furthermore, factors such as spiritual renewal and the presence of like-minded people also play a role. And of course, there are still the religious reasons.

Also possible and perfectly legitimate: to just walk a nice long tasty route. The motivations can be very diverse. We have heard countless different reasons in our meetings with the pilgrims.

Breaking away from 'ordinary life'



With 300,000 hikers a year, the pilgrim paths can sometimes get quite crowded.

Apart from the individual motives, you can say that pilgrims consciously want to separate their current walking life from life before the start of the journey. Every year, more than 300,000 people go on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. Most of them are weeks to months away. Being on the road seems to be more important than arriving at the cathedral with the relics of Saint James. It seems to be more about meeting fellow brothers and sisters, about helping and supporting each other, about feeling connected during the journey, about sharing experiences with peers.

Een pelgrimage biedt de wandelaar de mogelijkheid te experimenteren met zijn gedrag of gevoel waarvoor hij of zij in het "gewone" leven geen mogelijkheden ziet. Wat ook kan betekenen dat je op pelgrimstocht gaat met de insteek van "een paar maanden nergens rekening mee te hoeven houden". Hoe lekker is dat? Of hoe moeilijk is dat?

On pilgrimage you can take the time to dare to ask questions. *Being able to postpone needs*. Being able to experience that an answer is not necessarily necessary à la minute. That you don't necessarily have to get up early on your pilgrimage to be the first to set off. Why would you? How delicious is that? Or how hard is that?

How hard is that?

For many pilgrims it is quite difficult to leave certain addictions at home. Like using their mobile. They did not take these devices with them to read the route but to keep their contacts informed of everything you experience on your journey. Including the selfies for an *instagramable* photo. To see this phenomenon, all you have to do is type in the keywords "pilgrimage" and "selfie" on Google. Many hikers here seem to pay more attention to themselves than to the environment.

For example, we have been trying to find a YouTube video about [the Lycian Way in Turkey](#) for our website for a few years now. About the beauty of the landscape and the lush cultural expressions in this Ancient Region. Without success. Only waving and full-screen heads of the "walker" with a tiny piece of, for example, the Roman excavations in the background. Relegated to fringe! Or – totally *hot* – just the close-ups of a meal to be enjoyed would tell the story of the walking tour. "*I ate this!*" "*So what?*"

The Modern Pilgrim

According to Hein Bisterbosch in his Pre-master thesis Religious Studies, many authors describe that sometimes there is more attention from the pilgrim for the electronic tools than for the fellow pilgrims. "Restraint in using the digital tools on the Camino is highly recommended. In this way, the pilgrim is not distracted by worries from his home situation". The modern pilgrim blogs, texts and shares his experiences on Instagram and Twitter. 'They often don't realise how paradoxical that is.'

Commerce

Where 300,000 walkers pass by every year, trade automatically arises. Ranging from money-making to well-meaning and hospitable small business owners. Trade along the Camino has been around for all time. Along the way, all kinds of services were and are offered: food, shelter, souvenirs, prostitutes, church services and indulgences. Wealthy pilgrims used to hire carriages, enjoy copious meals and have entertainment in luxurious brothels. The ordinary pilgrim had to content himself with the hay barn. (J. Botman, *the commerce behind the Camino*).



St. Jean Pied de Port

Nothing new under the sun, then. So is the public outcry over these differences. Also notorious is the Menu Peregrino, or *El menu del horror*. Our advice: go for 9 – 11 euros for the Menu del Dia. Often in a restaurant without a sign with "camino welcome".

Also avoid the pizzas on the square in St. Jean Pied de Port. Too thin, hardly any toppings, burnt and expensive. Pure money-making. An experience that we are experiencing more and more often in France: poor service, declining quality, little hospitality.

General comments on this article

- **About us**

In recent months we from Oranginas have written about thirty articles about our multi-day hikes in Europe for Wandelmagazine.nu. In this we have tried to give faithful and engaging descriptions of our experiences along the way. From the routes walked, the surroundings, the landscapes, the walking facilities, special moments or from encounters with people along the way. These articles can be found in the [overview of the blogs on Wandelmagazine.nu](#). Given the many reactions, it seems that the reader has been able to take advantage of it when organizing walking tours himself. Whatever our intention was.

- Also striking are the many alternative pilgrimage routes that are being developed. Not on the basis of historical data or the presence of churches, cathedrals or chapels on the route, but on the basis of the opportunities that an entrepreneur of a "resort" or tourist organization sees in offering a new route through a beautiful landscape with various gastronomic delights and refreshing white wines along the way. Such a route is then marketed as a pilgrimage. As in [Portugal](#), "*Walking a pilgrimage route is fun, perfect for some soul searching. Emptying your head, tasty and well-catered meals, thermal baths and massages in a fantastic environment. How cool is that?*" (advertising text from a travel agency).

- **Disclaimer**

This article is 100% based on my own experiences. On personal impressions and thoughts. Completely subjective, then. It has no pretension to thorough research. Which also means that if you as a reader think "what nonsense" after reading it, we will have no problem with that.



The Pyrenees crossing to Santiago de Compostella



Mark(s)