

YOUR CAMINO ACCOMODATION GUIDE

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY...

When I started the research for my first Camino in 2016 it was amazing how many things were going through my head. I had no idea the difference between an Albergue (what is an Albergue anyway?) and a Pension or a Municipal.



I remember speaking with my walking buddy Julie and contemplating if we needed to take a bivvy bag or a tent of some kind, just in case we get caught on the mountain or that there was a lack of beds at the hostels. I was obsessed with the Camino forums and they can often create unnecessary worry, especially when it comes to your accommodation.

Before I answer all of those questions that are probably rattling around in your head, let me put your mind at rest. **There will ALWAYS be room at the inn.** If the large community hostels are full then you may need to pay a bit more for a private room, but it is highly unlikely that you will struggle to find somewhere to stay for the night.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

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#1 - How to find accommodation on the Camino Frances Route

When you arrive in St Jean Pied De Port the first stop is usually the Pilgrims Office. From here you will collect your Pilgrim's Passport (known as a credential) and they will also give you a printed A4 sheet with maps of the different stages, along with Albergue information at each of the main stages. If you do not bring with you a guidebook, or downloaded any of the Camino apps, then you can survive on the maps and details that you receive at the Pilgrims office.

GUIDE BOOKS

The most common guidebook for the Camino Frances route is the John Brierly guide. It is quite heavy and full of maps, history and of course accommodation details. There are many guides available and if you like the comfort of knowing you have your guide with you then this is probably the right book for you. I personally take a very lightweight guide by Michelin, which gives me the basics that I need to know.

APPS

There are many applications that you can use, but probably the best one that will help you with maps, routes and accommodation (including being able to book ahead) is The Wise Pilgrim app.

#2 - What are the different types of accommodation?

If you are considering walking the Camino Frances route then understanding the different types of accommodation is an important factor. We are all very different and to some people, the thought of sharing a bunk bed with a room full of 100 other people will send shivers down their spine. All is not lost. There are accommodation options along the way to suit everyone's needs and budgets, from camping to luxury five-star hotels.

Before you decide which type of accommodation suits your requirements, I will find ask you the question, what do you want to get out of your pilgrimage? If the answer is solitude then perhaps the smaller, private pensions may suit you better. The answer may be companionship, then the municipals will be for you. Below I have listed all accommodation options, including the Spanish names for each type of listing. I will start off with the most inexpensive option and work my way up to the most expensive.

CAMPING free - €15 per night.

Wild camping in Spain is forbidden as all land is owned privately, therefore if you are camping then you must seek permission from the landowners. Saying that most Albergues will often let you camp in their grounds and use their facilities for a minimum fee. There are a few campsites (campgrounds) on the Frances route, however, the prices are very similar,

if not more expensive, than staying in an Albergue. With this in mind, camping is an option, but it is not widely embraced. Most people will stay in an Albergue (hostel) for both the true Camino experience and inexpensive accommodation.

ALBERGUES (PILGRIM HOSTEL) €5-€35 per night.

The most common type of accommodation along the Camino is the Pilgrim hostels known as Albergues (pronounced al-burger). They are extremely cost effective at €5-15 a night. On the Camino Frances route, you will find that these hostels are aplenty. During busy periods they tend to get full at the main stages as per the John Brierley guidebook. However, if you are planning to venture out on the Camino during June, July, August or even September then consider walking different stages and experiencing Albergues that are in between the stages mentioned in the guidebook.

- You will need your Pilgrim passport to allow you to stay in a pilgrim hostel.
- Usually, most pilgrim hostels close their doors at 10 pm (lights out by 10.30pm)
- Dormitory rooms can vary from 4 to over 100 beds in one room.
- You cannot usually book a pilgrim hostel. It will be on a first come, first served basis.
- You cannot stay more than one night.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF ALBERGUES?

Very cheap (or some are free)

MUNICIPAL ALBERGUES

The word “municipal” in Spanish means “community”. Think of a community hall in the UK and you can imagine what a Municipal Albergue is like. The municipal Albergues are usually old schoolhouses, disused monasteries, church halls or even old hospitals or industrial buildings. They are often in a poor state and may not always be the most comfortable of stays.

ASSOCIATION ALBERGUES

These are usually operated by ex-pilgrims and have volunteered to work in the Albergue for a few weeks. These are often the best hostels to stay in as the people really care about the pilgrims and often nothing is too much trouble. Association Albergues are often supplemented by donations (donativo) or there may be a low fee.

Private Albergues – these will be similar to a YHA hostel in the UK. Rooms can vary from dorms of up to 10, to a private solo room just for you. Prices vary from €10 - €35 a night, but you often get the trimmings of luxury. Breakfast, pilgrims meal in the evening, washer & tumble dryer, internet service and beloved wifi! The private Albergues are there to make money so they are organised like proper businesses. Some private hostels have the feeling of a good bed and breakfast, whilst others are a little more impersonal and feel like a small hotel.

TOP TIP!

Most Albergues only accept cash, so always have at least €30 in your wallet.



HOTELS (KNOWN AS PENSIONS) €20 - €35 per night

Most of the towns along the Frances route will have hotel accommodation. Often the hotel will also provide special discounts for pilgrims or offer pilgrim meals if you show your credential. I have stayed in some wonderful hotels during my Camino trips and there is nothing better than treating yourself to a long soak in a hot bath when you have been walking all day.



GREAT HOSTEL

Free Wifi and a huge double bed!

TOP TIP!

“If you go by the popular guide books recommended stops, expect those albergues to have more competition for beds.”



#3 - Do I have to book ahead?

If your intention is to stop in a municipal Albergue then you are not able to book ahead. As mentioned above, the community hostels are usually on a first come, first served basis.

If you are using the Wise Pilgrim App then you will see options to book at certain hotels. Many of these link to www.booking.com and if it is busy then I would suggest booking your hotel or hostel the day before.

There are some disadvantages of booking ahead.

- You cannot stop in a different location if somewhere else looks attractive without incurring a cancellation charge.
- If you have an illness, or you can no longer continue due to blisters, aching muscles etc then you will need to grab public transport to your accommodation for the evening. Not only will this mean that you miss walking part of the Camino, but it also means that you will incur an extra expense.
- You miss the excitement of deciding “where am I going to stay tonight?”
- Often you will be walking with your Camino family. These are people that you met along the way and now are your close walking family. If they decide to stop at a little oasis Albergue that you have stumbled upon with a cold foot bath and free massage for pilgrims, then you will certainly regret having booked that room the day before. (yes, it happens!).

#4 - What happens if you can't find a place to sleep?

You will always have somewhere to sleep as you have money in your pocket. As mentioned previously, if you are walking in the height of the season (June, July, August or September) then I would recommend stopping in the smaller villages rather than the guidebook stopping points. You will find the smaller villages less crowded and you will often experience something special at these Albergues as the owners are competing with the guidebook stages. Massages, sing-alongs, special pilgrim community meals, poetry evenings, and much more.

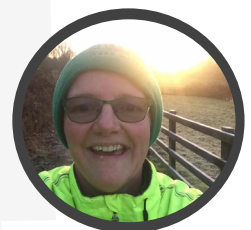
#5 - What facilities do most Albergues have?

Depending on the type of Albergue you decide to stay in will depend on the facilities. In most Albergues you can expect:-

- Bunk beds made from wood or metal. (I slept in one that was held together with cable ties!, but most hostels have good quality beds).
- Blankets – very often you can collect a thick woollen blanket to throw over your sleeping bag or sleep sheet to keep warm).
- Power outlets (some have one per bed, others are community outlets)
- Hot showers (hot is a word I use loosely)
- Breakfast (select hostels)
- Wifi (often)
- Kitchen with self-catering facilities (most places)
- Vending machine (often)
- Microwave (nearly all have microwaves, but not all have kettles, so if you want coffee in the morning then heat up the water in the microwave).
- Library (used books are often available free to Pilgrims).
- Hikers boxes – there are where most people discard items that they no longer need and donate them in a hiker box for others to take. You can find all sorts in these boxes. From food (tinned) to rain jackets, walking poles and much more.
- Disposable sheets and pillowcases (most hostels give you a disposable sheet which helps stop the spread of bed bugs).

TOP TIP!

Private Albergues usually take reservations. You can have your hospitalero from where your staying call ahead for you and set up your next night so you won't have to worry about getting a bed at the next stop.



#6 - Bed bugs on the Camino

You will hear some horror stories about bed-bugs on the Camino, but if you follow these simple rules then you really should be able to avoid them at all costs. I have only seen one person who had suffered from bed-bug bites and it was not a nice site.

As the old saying goes "prevention is better than cure". So to help prevent getting bitten by bed bugs then implement these golden rules.

- Take a bed bug sheet (or a large sleep sheet that includes a pillow area).
- Pre-treat your gear with a bed-bug repellent. Permethrin is by far the most popular repellent which you can find on Amazon. Treat your rucksack, sleeping bag, sleep-sheet and clothing. I know you will be washing your clothes daily, but a dose of permethrin can withstand many washes.
- Never put your rucksack on your bunk bed.
- Always inspect the area before spreading your sleeping kit out on your bed. What are you looking for? Well, you are ideally looking for tiny black spots (a bit like a poppy seed). You may also spot reddish/brown stains on the bed linen or the walls. Look behind pictures, in the crevasses of your mattress or groves in the bed frame. Bed bugs are only active at night, so it is unusual to spot any hopping around the bed.

#7 - Albergues Etiquette

I perhaps should have written this as number one in the eBook as it is probably the most important. There are rules of an Albergue, and many are unwritten rules. I enjoyed writing these and once I got into the swing of it the list kept growing! You will learn most of these rules along the way, and for many of us, it is just common sense. The message is simple, be courteous and considerate of others.

If you do not want to be an outcast on the Camino then please take note of the Camino etiquette



TOP TIP!

“Don't miss your 10pm curfew... you WILL get locked out.”

BEAUTIFUL BAYONNE
Stroll along the river

PLASTIC BAGS

DO NOT take plastic bags with you. Pilgrims that pack away their gear into plastic bags (such as grocery bags) are noisy and the rustling sound is infuriating. Those pilgrims that are trying to sleep will get annoyed with you if you produce one of these bags. Try zip-lock bags or proper dry bags/stuff sacks but please avoid cheap grocery bags.

ALARMS

I lost count how many times a fellow pilgrim had set their alarm and it went off at 6 am whilst others are still trying to sleep. Keep your alarm to a buzz. When it does ring then please turn it off... do not hit snooze. It is very annoying when a pilgrim hits snooze, then decides to get up and go to the toilet, meanwhile, the phone is happily buzzing and waking everyone else up. It's not cool! Also, place your phone where you can easily get to it. I have mine in the hooded / pillow area of my sleeping sheet. There is nothing worse than listening to a pilgrim trying to find their phone whilst it is buzzing away.

CURFEW

Respect the curfew of 10 pm. Most pilgrims will be tucked up in bed by 9 pm and lights are out at 10 pm. Don't be the drunken pilgrim who staggers in trying to be quiet when you are really making one hell of a racket! Fellow pilgrims will not thank you for that. Many pilgrims start the day early (5-6am), so sleep is important.

SNORING

I guess you already know if you are a snorer or not. If you know you snore then please make every effort to minimise the noise that you create. As you get further into the Camino you will find other snorers. Wouldn't it be great if all the snorers slept in one dorm all to themselves? If you have a sleeping position that helps minimise snoring, or if a tennis ball sewn into your t-shirt helps prevent you from snoring then perhaps that is a worthy consideration. Perhaps do not drink too much wine in the evening as this is also a known factor of snoring (I know that I only snore if I have had a drink or two).

SQUIRRELLING

This is a pilgrim process that helps minimise noise when packing up in the morning. The squirrelling technique is for you early birds. It simply means that you pack as many of your items into your rucksack the night before and then leave your pack by the door. In the morning, grab all of the outstanding belongings (wash bag, change of clothes, phone charger, your jacket that was hanging up to dry, towel etc) and shove it all into your sleep sheet or sleeping bag and then take everything into the common room/community room. You will feel like a squirrel who is stowing away nuts for the winter! From here you can take the essentials to the bathroom to get changed, brush teeth and have a quick wash. I would not recommend having a shower in the morning (you should shower the night before). The last thing you want is damp feet as this is the perfect feeding ground for blisters.

SHOWERS

Take short showers to save hot water for late arrivals. Please do not wash your clothes in the showers, there is a properly laundry area for that.

TOILET PAPER

Don't steal the toilet paper. Whilst we are on the subject of toilet paper, please do not leave dirty toilet paper on the trail, its just disgusting. Pack it out in a ziplock bag (or take a few doggy poo bags with you) and dispose of them when you find a bin.

LAUNDRY

Please be respectful of others pilgrims. If your washing is dry then remove it from the line, or from the dryer so that other people can use the facilities. It is the same with washing machines. Also, why not share a washing machine with other pilgrims? You can probably wash four or five pilgrims clothes in one load and share the costs.

BE QUIET IN THE SLEEPING AREA

Many people will take a siesta or an afternoon nap, so please be respectful and quiet in the sleeping areas at all times.

HEADLAMPS

If using a headlamp to pack away your clothes in the early hours whilst others are sleeping then please use the red light setting, not a full beam.

VALUABLES

There is nothing worse than losing your valuables. The anxiety of worrying about your phone is awful (we have all been there). Always take your phone, wallet or any valuables with you at all times (even in the shower using a ziplock or waterproof bag). Some Albergues do offer lockers which are secured with a €1 or €2 coin. Make use of these lockers if available.

SECURING YOUR BED

Never place your backpack on a bed to secure it as this is a way of spreading bed bugs (as mentioned previously). Secure your bed by spreading out your sleeping bag or sleep sheet

OFFER YOUR BOTTOM BUNK

If you see another pilgrim who struggles to get up to the top bunk then do the decent thing and offer to swap. That person will be your friend for the rest of the Camino.

DON'T USE HOT AIR HAND DRYERS

To dry your clothes!

DON'T GET NAKED

I know that some cultures are happy to wander around with next to nothing on, but other cultures (like us British folks) are highly uncomfortable with people prancing around in their skivvies. There was once a French lady in the shower room completely naked and lathering herself up. My then 13-year-old daughter thought it was highly amusing.

WASH UP

If you cooked, then wash the dishes afterwards. Leave the kitchen as you would like to find it. (Even if it was a mess when you arrived).

SHARE

Be kind and thoughtful to others at all times. Share your secret coffee stash, offer to help with blisters and the Camino will provide for you as well.

#8 - The Pilgrim Stamp

When you arrive in St Jean you receive your very first stamp in your Pilgrims Passport (known as your credential). When I first started my Camino journey I assumed that I could only collect these stamps at Albergues, but this is not the case. You can find stamps in churches, café's, bar's, tourist attractions and even small side street sellers that sell small Camino gifts or fruit and refreshments will have a stamp.

When you reach Sarria then the rules are that you need to collect at least two stamps a day over the last 100km. Your passport will be checked when you collect your Compestella in Santiago. If you have not collected at least two stamps each day on the last stretch of the Camino then you may well be refused your Compestella (certificate of achievement).

#9 - Winter lodging & closing dates for seasonal Albergues

I have walked in November and there are limited Albergues open in the smaller villages. Saying that there are also fewer people so you can usually find a bed quite easily on the Frances route in the winter time.

In the John Brierley guidebook, you will find the opening times of the year for each Albergue. I would never take the guidebook for granted though as circumstances change on a daily basis.

If you are walking between the dates of 1st November to 1st March, then you can find completely up-to-date, accurate details of which Albergues are open/closed on what days in the following website: www.aprinca.com/Alberguesinvierno.

You are requested, however, NOT TO MAKE PHOTOCOPIES of this information and NOT TO COPY/PASTE IT INTO OTHER EMAILS/ DOCUMENTS, as this information is susceptible to very rapid and very frequent changes.

The website is updated on a daily basis, since the availability (or not) of accommodation in a given Albergue can vary, even from one day to the next, at this time of year.



REFUGE ORISSON
5 miles from St Jean De Port

#10 - What identification is required for the Hostels?

When you arrive at a hostel or a hotel you will need to show your actual passport as ID (or a national ID card) and your Camino credential. No need for showing a driving licence, it is not counted as official ID apart from being needed if you are driving. I would recommend taking a photo of your passport and keep this in your favourites on your phone (or take a photocopy of your passport with you).

#11 - Is there many power point sockets in the Albergues?

There are sockets for recharging phones in nearly every Albergue. All that is necessary is that you have an appropriate Spanish (European) adapter, which can be bought at any airport, chemist or Amazon before you arrive in Spain.

The problem is that everyone will want to recharge their phone and it is considered very selfish to take up more than one socket. So if you have kindle etc. do make sure you also bring a multipoint adapter with you and use it in such a way as that it does not block the adjoining socket. I have an adapter with x 4 USB outlets. It is a great way to become everyone's best friend quite quickly.

#12 - What do people wear to bed at an Albergue / Hostel?

Believe me, you will see everything in an Albergue. Yes, some people sleep in thongs, others wear full pyjamas and there are some people who sleep in their birthday suit. Please don't be that person that sleeps naked if you are in a dorm with others, it simply makes other people feel uncomfortable. Most men will just wear their boxer shorts and perhaps a t-shirt.

Many women will wear leggings and a t-shirt or light cotton shorts and t-shirt. Some people sleep hot and others are cold no matter what the weather.

If you are a cold sleeper then do not sleep in a bunk near the window as there will always be someone who will open the window at night.

#13 – Sleep sheet or sleeping bag?

If you look at the Camino forums then you will find that most people who travel from June to September will carry a sleep sheet only. There are usually blankets available from each Albergue if you get chilly at night. I have walked in October, November and May and the sleep sheet has been more than adequate for my needs. On the occasion in May when I did take a lightweight sleeping bag, I found that I used it more as a quilt than an actual bag. The answer to this question is really a personal preference. If you are in doubt then take your sleeping bag with you. You can always ship it to Santiago if you find that it is not needed.

#14 - Top or Bottom Bunk?

There are pros and cons of both. Sometimes you are allocated a bunk when you register at reception, but often you get to chose your bunk.

As mentioned in the etiquette section, be aware that some people who may be poorly or older will be more comfortable with a bottom bunk. Do the right thing and swap bunks if this situation arises.



In 2017, on my solo hike, a lady that was in her 70's was late to arrive in the Albergue. She was walking on her own and did not speak any English. She was hobbling and I jumped up out of my bed to help her with her rucksack. She looked up and saw that she was in the only empty bed left in the room which was the top bunk. I launched Google translate and offered to swap bunks. She burst into tears and started saying all sorts of things that I couldn't understand, but I guessed she was a bit happy about it. I felt good that I had made her day.

If you do have the option to chose a bed for yourself, then I would recommend:-

- **A bed away from the main door**
- **A bed far away from the loo (people get up to go to the toilet throughout the night).**
- **Also stay away from the window as the bugs are a nightmare**

#15 - Daily opening times of a typical Albergues

As a general rule, many Albergues will open their doors for check-in from 1 pm – 3 pm. Most pilgrims like to finish their day's walk by 2 pm as this is when the sun will become too hot to walk.

In the mornings, you will find that the hostels will have “chucking out time” no later than 8.30am.

#16 - What is the best way to pay?

If you are staying in a hotel, in one of the big cities such as Pamplona, Estella, Burgos, Leon or Santiago then you should be able to pay by card. Unfortunately, most hostels do not take cards so the whole Camino is operated with good, old-fashioned cash. ATM's are also scarce in the small villages so “top up” at every opportunity. Unlike the UK where we are accustomed to contactless payments for our coffee in the mornings, the Camino is a cash country. Bars, restaurants, supermarkets and bakeries are all cash.

A typical pilgrim will spend between €20-€40 a day.

#17 - Are there towels in the Albergues?

On the rare occasion, you will be offered a towel (sometimes you can rent one). I would, however, suggest bringing a lightweight microfibre travel towel with you. Wherever you get a fresh one provided you will feel like a queen/king.

#18 - Do Albergues provide food?

Some hostels will provide food, but it is not guaranteed. Others will also provide breakfast but please be aware that it will not be a cooked breakfast. Often it will be half a baguette which you pop in the toaster and add butter and jam. Coffee is often made by the Hostellerie the night before and left in flasks for you to pour out into a cup in the morning and then you pop it in the microwave to warm it through. Yes, it's not a great breakfast in the hostels. In my experience, you are much better off walking a few miles in search of your first café that will serve fresh croissants or pastries with a Café Con Leche... bliss!

The Pilgrim Menu is also supplied by many Albergues.
The most common “menu del Peregrino” in my experience is something similar to:

- **First course:** green salad, pasta, or potato salad, occasionally vegetables (always with some meat/sausage) or soup;
- **Second course:** fileted (thin piece of sautéed meat, usually beef), something made from pork, or fish and all dishes seem to be supplied with French fries.
- **Third course:** some pre-made dessert (ice cream in a little cup, ice cream cake, yoghurt, fruit).
- **Wine is also included typically.** If you ask about an “upgrade” of wine you can usually get something decent for not a lot more.
- **Coffee is also available,** but the menu usually covers only coffee OR dessert, so you will pay extra for both.



OUR PILGRIM MEAL
At the Orisson Albergue

If you are a foodie, the menu Peregrino is likely to disappoint. But lots of good food is available on the Camino. On the Camino Frances you are likely to find that a restaurant serves a menu del Peregrino, but if you go off Camino a bit you'll find the locals eating where there are fabulous menus available.

I am pretty un-demanding in my food needs, but even I don't find the typical menu del Peregrino to be too enjoyable. The food is way too much but will give you enough calories to replenish the body for tomorrow's walking, but rarely a culinary experience!

REGISTER YOUR TRAIL NAME HAVE YOU PICKED YOURS YET?

It is a part of the “hiking culture” to have a trail name.
It is a nickname that is bequeathed to you by your hiking comrades or you can pick your own at
www.adventuregeek.co.uk/adventure-geek-trail-name-register

