"You say: Galicia is very small. And I say: there is a World of Galicia. Every piece of a land is in itself as the entire World. You may journey from North to South, from East to West, in little time; you may do so over and over again, and yet you shall not travel it whole. And every time you go, you shall come across new things (...) The surface may be small; in depth, entity, Galicia is as great as you wish ... " VICENTE RISCO
The Road to Santiago
has been, and continues to be, without doubt, the oldest, most covered and most celebrated route of the old continent. Jerusalem and Rome were, for centuries, the two poles of attraction for the European pilgrims and travellers, but neither of them had an established route to get there. Santiago has also shared with them the appeal of walkers and wanderers of all the times but has also created a route, a Road. Santiago and Galicia can be reached in many ways. But the best way of getting there is along the ROAD TO SANTIAGO.

The first pilgrims, in the XI century, only came from the interior of the kingdoms of Galicia and Asturias. However, with surprising speed, Compostela began to attract travellers and pilgrims from other Christian kingdoms, including those from beyond our own frontiers. The first, whose name we know, Godescalco, Bishop of Le Puy, was French, and arrived in Compostela in 951. The influx of pilgrims then began to grow forcefully and, before the century was over, it was deemed necessary to supply accommodation for them. This began to take place in the monasteries such as San Martín de Albelda, San Millán de la Cogolla, San Juan de la Peña, Samos, Sobrado...

There are many reasons and motives given by historians for the fever felt by the Franks to cross the Pyrenees. For some, it was for political motives. The Papacy and Cluny were decided, for reasons of their own safety, in supporting the kingdoms in the north of Spain, thus making a Muslim invasion a more remote possibility. Others came out of curiosity and the lust for adventure. On many occasions the reasons were based on commercial interests or for making cultural exchanges. And sometimes, also, the zeal for robbing and taking advantage of the helpless pilgrims. There is no doubt, nonetheless, that in nearly all cases the underlying reason was religious.

In the Middle Ages the pilgrimage was a symbol of the life of Christ, an unsafe path towards the eternal home.

The knights of the XV century came to take part in tournaments and discover new lands, although always doing so with the customary gallantry. It was not only the Frankish people who came. Italians such as Giordano de Ribalta boasted of having been three times in Rome and four in Santiago. Jean van Eyck, the Dutch painter portrayed his Annunciation on the inside of the cathedral. The Englishman John Goodyear donated a precious alabaster to the Compostela treasury. And those four boats full of Germans who set off from the port of Hamburg to make an unconventional Road to Santiago by sea. All of these people came before the end of the XV century, and all of them to worship the relics of Christ’s disciple and to give the ritual embrace to the Apostle.

One of the most famous and well-known medieval pilgrims in Compostela was the Frenchman Aymery Picaud, a monk from the French town of Poitou. His fame comes from having written a chronicle of his journey, around 1130, in precise details, with an endless list of advice and recommendations for other walkers. This chronicle, entitled “Guide for the Pilgrim to Santiago de Compostela”, is included within one of the most beautiful documents preserved in the Compostela cathedral library: The Codex Calixtinus. This Guide to the Pilgrim is an obligatory reference book whenever talking of the old French Road.
The modern traveller who goes along the roads of northern Spain from the Pyrenees to Galicia often comes across the sign which indicates the way to Santiago, accompanied by the number of kilometres separating them from Santiago de Compostela. The signs are there for those travelling by car and are placed on the roads closest to the early road. The successive modernisation of the road network, from the old royal ways to the national roads and modern motorways have erased many stretches of the road tramped on by the pilgrims over centuries. On some occasions, however, the present roads do not exactly follow the medieval Road. It is then when those participating in “slow tourism”, be it on foot, horseback or bicycle, can retrace the tracks of the ancient way. This original route still preserves, in many stretches, the cobbled paving, the landmarks of the Road, the old inns, the hermitages-refuges, the fountains, the crosses, the old bridges, etc...

The Guide to the Road to Santiago, by Aymery Picaud, states with a typical French clarity: “There are four routes to Santiago which join into one at Puente la Reina, in Spanish territory...and from there only one road leads to Santiago”. The first one left from Arles, close to Marseilles, the only one crossing the Pyrenees via Somport. The other three left from Paris, Vézelay and Le Puy, which entered Navarra at Roncesvalles. These were the traditional routes taken intermittently by the pilgrims to Compostela.

Good footwear, short clothing and shoulder cape, a stick for support and defence, a gourd for water and wine, a small pouch and a wide-brimmed hat. All these features made up the typical appearance of the pilgrim from the Middle Ages. The “vieira” or scallop shell that was already a feature of the walkers in pagan mythology was the most important souvenir that the pilgrims brought with them from Galicia, this mollusc being abundant along the coastline. The hat, pouch and gourd would later be added to the image, becoming an emblem and safeguard of the pilgrim.

In the past, on leaving Compostela to return home, the pilgrim would offer their clothing, with all their travelling equipment, to a sanctuary, or they would keep them, and wear them on processions they attended in their home towns and countries. Today’s pilgrims return with an album of photos, a scallop shell, a silver censer and, above all, an unforgettable memory of all they have seen and experienced along the Road to Santiago.

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Whatever our reason for travelling to Galicia, if we want to do it by following the Road to Santiago, we must enter Galician lands by the N-VI national road, climbing the Pedrafita pass. Alternatively, if we want to enter by the old way, with beautiful landscapes all around us, we can do so via Vega de Valcarce and Herrerías. The medieval pilgrims entered along a way which crossed the mythical villages of A Faba and Lagos de Castilla, until seeing, just before reaching Cebreiro, the illustrated landmark marking the Galician boundary, 152 kilometres from Santiago by the walkers route.

In O Cebreiro, the "steepest of the mountains on the French Road", as described by Aymery Picaud, a hostel to attend to the pilgrims, especially French pilgrims, was founded by the Saint Count Giraldo de Aurillac in the late IX century. It later became a Benedictine monastery and was not abandoned by the monks of this brotherhood until the XIX century. The church, pre-Romanesque, is the oldest temple on the Saint James route preserved in its entirety. It is now possible to stay at the hostel, now called Mesón de San Xirald de Aurillac, but only by booking well in advance. In the sanctuary the Holy Grail is exhibited, the heraldic symbol of Galicia, whose legends inspired the literary content of Wagner's Parsifal. The town of O Cebreiro preserves an interesting series of "pallozas", pre-Roman dwellings which were inhabited until not that long ago in time. One of them has been converted into the Ethnographical Museum while others have been reformed in order to attend to pilgrims.

The next twelve kilometres run between the Os Ancares and O Courel ranges, with magnificent mountain landscapes, forming the highest stretch of road in Galicia. We pass through villages, now almost totally abandoned, such as Liñar do Real, today Liñares, Veiga de Forcas, the...
founding home of the Knights of the Order of Saint James, Hospital, a reminder of what was founded by the Countess Exilo, Fonfría, famous for a spring which sprouts on the edge of the Road, as well as a now disappeared inn, which offered the walker fire, salt, water and a bed with two blankets for free.

Crossing over the Poio pass, the landscape gradually becomes softer and prettier. The high tower of the church of Tríacastela appears, marking the end of the eleventh stage, the shortest at 47 kilometres, but also the hardest since the Pyrenees. Three castles, three “castros” (ancient hill forts) or three paths towards Castile, there is no agreement regarding its etymology. The Road passed before the church, with a Romanesque apse, and crossed the town, where the portal of the old hostel is preserved. Tríacastela was the first town to raise a monument in honour of the pilgrim.

The French Road did not pass through Samos, but many were the pilgrims who made the short four kilometre deviation to visit one of the oldest Galician monasteries, founded by San Martín Dumiense in the VI century. The present road does in fact pass through Samos, which gives us the opportunity, and with great enthusiasm, to visit this interesting Benedictine monastery and the humble pre-Romanesque chapel of the Ciprés. The new buildings date from the XVII and XVIII centuries, and the steps leading up to the facade served as a test for the Galician architect Fernando de Casas before the construction of those at the Obradoiro of Santiago.

The way becomes more comfortable and pleasant. The valley opens up and the fertile and extensive lowlands of Sarria spread before us. The town grew over a hillock where the powerful Counts of Lemos and the Marquise of Sarria had their fortress. Only a singular medieval tower reminds us of its grandiose past. Opposite the tower is the Romanesque church of Salvador and, very nearby, the old hostel of the Magdalen, both also resisting the passing of time.
The proximity of Santiago begins to be felt with the abundance of churches adhering to the Compostela Romanesque style, which begin to mark the Road. We will move off the Road a little to visit the magnificent Romanesque example of Santiago de Barbadelo, or the simple rural churches, also Romanesque, of Biville, Belante, Mirallos or Paradela. With the construction of the Belesar reservoir along the River Miño, the old town of Portomarín was left sunken beneath the water. Its main monuments, nonetheless, were saved, being moved stone by stone. These were the Romanesque church of San Pedro and the giant church-fortress of San Nicolás, one of the most beautiful Romanesque temples to be found along the Road. Some of the old medieval palaces were also moved to the new siting and placed in the main square. The medieval bridge that crossed the Minho remained beneath the water. Nevertheless, as an example, the spring and one of the arches have been preserved at the entrance of the new bridge. On reaching Portomarín, we come across the first Galician vineyards, which produce that exquisite liquor which the town of Portomarín pays homage to every year in the Festa da Augardente (Local Festival).

The River Miño is an incision in the Lugo plateau. Leaving Portomarín behind, the route once again climbs to cover the lands, which in Galicia are called montaña or mountains, for their contrasting position to the ribeira or lowlands. While still climbing, we pass by the humble Romanesque church of Castromaior, which got its name from a nearby castro or prehistoric Celtic settlement. Another village, called Hospital, is a reminder of the Hospital de la Cruz, now disappeared.

Ligonde is today a small village with some remains of old buildings. Nevertheless, all the old pilgrims’ itineraries name this hostel as one of the most important. Among other important figures, Charles V and Philip II stayed here. In the atrium of the nearby Romanesque church of Tarrío are the granite crosses of an old cemetery for poor pilgrims. The tombs of the nobility and Knights of the Military Order of Saint James, who patrolled the Road to rid it of highwaymen and bandits, surround the temple of Vilar de Donas. The donas were two women of the medieval nobility who met the costs of the construction of the monastery and Romanesque church. Their figures appear on the XIV century mural paintings adorning the central apse.
We are now in the region of Ulloa, of the pazos, the stately homes of Galicia, immortalised by the writer Pardo Bazán, of the lone castle of Pambre, the region which prides itself on not a having a single parish without its Romanesque temple. Esporitz de Monterroso, Novelúa, Leborei, Vilareda, Marzá, Foncetucuberta, Ferreira, Palas de Rei, are but a few of the many to be found along the way. Palas de Rei was the place where those whom had preferred to take the Lugo route from Pedrafita rejoined the Road. This town was a special favourite of King Alfonso IX of Galicia and León, from whom it received its name, although popular legend attributes its name to the Visigoth king Witiza who had his palace here. From a monumental point of view, only a Romanesque portal is preserved in the church of San Tirso. Palas de Rei was the end of the twelfth stage and beginning of the last one.

The last stage passes without any major difficulties across the rolling lands of Melide and Arzúa. The pilgrim or cultured tourist will be able to pass through villages which admirably preserve their medieval aspect, such as Leboreiro, with its fine restoration of houses and streets around a beautiful Romanesque church. Another extraordinary spot is Furelos with one of the most beautiful Gothic bridges of the entire Road, in a delightful setting.

Melide, in the very heart of Galicia, was the town to which the brotherhood of Saint James went to receive the new Archbishop on his arrival from Rome. There are two notable Romanesque pieces here: The portal of the old church of San Pedro, alongside the route, and the temple of Santa María, each of them possessing their typical cruzeiro, or cross on a pedestal. The one at San Pedro is considered as being the oldest cruzeiro in Galicia.

The last village of any size on the French Road is Arzúa, whose chapel of the convent of Agustinas and its corresponding Hostel, now used for other purposes, is barely preserved. Lavacolla was the last stop before entering Compostela. Between its Baroque church with the large atrium and splendid cross, and the hermitage of San Roque, runs the small stream of Lavacolla. The pilgrims carried out their ritual bathing in its crystal-clear water and washed themselves thoroughly before their dignified entry into Compostela. A fast and enjoyable walk began from here until Monxo, the Mountain of Joy, from whose summit the towers of the Compostela basilica can be seen for the first time. The first pilgrim to see them would be crowned king of the group.

Santiago was entered by the district of the Concheiros, where the sellers of scallop shells, the symbol of the pilgrimage, were set up. The first monument the pilgrim sees is the convent of San Domingos de Bonaval, site of the Museo do Pobo Galego (Museum of the Galician People) and the Pantheon of Illustrious Galicians. Opposite is the Porto do Camiño or the Puerta Francígena, where the keys of the city were handed over to the new archbishops. From here, passing along the Casas Reais and Acibachería streets, the pilgrims would arrive at their final destination with a joyful spring in their step.
Although the French Road features as the most famous of the Saint James routes, the pilgrims reached Compostela from many other points and followed distinct routes, many of the northern ways being even older than the classical French route. In fact, the first pilgrimages arrived from Asturias, before the X century, fostered during the times of the Asturian monarchy. The route began in the Basque Country, covering the Cantabrian Coast, passing through Oviedo, and dividing on entering Galicia. The inland way crossed the Acevo pass, arriving in Galician territory in A Fonsagrada. From there, after resting in the mythical Hospital de Montouto, the pilgrims descended with the view of the Castroverde tower in their sight until happily crossing the Roman walls of Lugo. This route can be covered today by taking a mountain road, which on an unending descent, offers us the views of the ancient remains of Pobra de Bourón, stately houses like those of Abraira, Cellán do Mosteiro or Piñeiro, the hill fort of Viladonga, as well as the ever present tiny Romanesque churches of rural Galicia. Also not to be forgotten are the relaxing natural spaces such as the Teixeiro Lakes.

But this Northern Route, the Cantabrian Route or High Road, as it was also known, had other variants, the main one being that which entered Galicia via Vegadeo. More pleasant and more comfortable to walk, it did not take long to arrive at the monumental city of Mondoñedo, with its old quarter surrounding the cathedral, a synthesis of all the architectural styles. Here are examples of Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque, housing one of the most important museums of Sacred Art in Spain. Of the town’s early church, the temple of San Martín de Mondoñedo de Foz is still preserved. It possesses a stone altar-piece, the only remaining example of Romanesque style, within a singular nave of the same style. The route later crosses the Terra Chá region, famous for its livestock, cheese and “capones”, and the well-attended fairs held in Vilalba in the shadow of the tower of the Counts of Andrade.

The latter stages of this road crossed prettier lands, via Baamonde and Guitiriz, stopping in Sobrado dos Monxes, a monumental Baroque monastery, today perfectly restored. The delightful Romanesque temple of Santa María de Mezonzo can be visited, dedicated to the author of the Salve Regina and abbot of the monastery, who as Bishop of Santiago saved the remains of the Apostle from Al-Mansur’s armies. Later, after crossing the Bocelo mountains and making a short stop at the pre-Romanesque church of San Antolín de Toques, we join up with the French Road in Melide, continuing as one towards Compostela.
The Ruta de la Plata, the Silver Route, a natural path connecting the south and north-east of the peninsular, was originally only an expansion route for the Christian kingdoms towards Al-Andalus and a Mozarab transmigratory route towards the north. It later became a road for taking the riches, the plata, or silver, brought from America, which the bishops from Andalusia and Extremadura offered to the Compostela See. It finally just became a difficult Road to Santiago, though inspiring and attractive, for the pilgrims who came from these parts.

From Cordova and Seville, via Badajoz, Cáceres and Salamanca, the pilgrims arrived in Galicia. One section, aiming to avoid the high mountain passes, entered Portugal via Quintanilha and Bragança, but all of the ways coincided in Verín, overshadowed by the imposing fortress of Monterrei, then passing through Xinzo de Limia, between Laza, famous for its carnivals, and the natural park of O Invernadeiro. The route continues through Xunqueira de Ambía, with its cathedral-like Romanesque church, and Allariz, the historic and monumental town favoured by Alfonso X. In Ourense, the Portal del Paraíso of its grandiose cathedral is suggestive of the Portal de la Gloria by Master Mateo.

Crossing the River Miño by the widest span Roman bridge of those preserved from the Roman Empire, we see a varied landscape before us, scattered with Romanesque churches, stately houses and medieval bridges. Outstanding among them are the monastery of Oseira, a synthesis of all the architectural styles, the Oca stately house with its gardens and, finally, the sacred Peak, from which one can see the towers of the Compostela basilica.
The Portuguese feel very proud of being, since its origins, the people most connected to the culture of the Road to Santiago, possessing a great assortment of routes to make their way to the Apostle. Its Northeast Road left Porto and hardly left the coastline, via Viana do Castelo and Caminha, entering Galicia at Tui. The Lima Road and North Road also left from Porto, following distinct itineraries until they all joined together at Tui. This was the fortress city which forgot frontier squabbles in order to take in the pilgrims and into the boat which took them across the River Miño, to let them "cross without payment", in a privilege granted by Queen Theresa of Portugal in 1123. There were also several routes from Braga, which entered at A Cañiza, Celanova or Verín, being incorporated into the Silver Route.

From Tui the Road took the same route. It crossed O Porriño between the colossal granite quarries and the humid Gandaras de Budiño. In Redondela, famous for its folkloric festivals of the Corpus and the Cás, the parish church is dedicated to Saint James, as is that of the village of Arcade, in the shadow of the perfectly restored Soutomaior castle. Pontevedra dedicated its most emblematic temple to the Pilgrim Virgin. Its original plan was scallop-shaped, because according to tradition, it guided the pilgrims who had gone astray towards Compostela. The way from Pontevedra to Caldas de Reis is a peaceful and inspiring stroll. From the atrium of the Baroque church of Pedrecanai, a view of the entire valley can be seen, showing the distant Romanesque forms of Agudelo, the stately houses of Curuxal and Casal Novo, along with the raucous sound from the tall bell tower of Arcos da Condesa of the bells cast in the "house of two bell towers" of Badoucos.

From the Roman mansion to the Gothic town, Caldas de Reis, the “Rex” possibly being a reference to Alfonso VII, there are important remains. Among them feature the spa and one of the best urban oak groves at the banks of the River Umia. Then we can see the Romanesque apses of Santa María de Vemil, the portal in the same style in Xanza, and we can also see the etched cave paintings of Campo Redondo, whose deer and circular forms, despite having no relation with Santiago, suggest a sacred pathway towards the west. Shortly after we enter Pontecesuras, where the River Ulla flows into the sea, offering the most exquisite of freshwater and estuary gastronomy: sea trout, lamprey, river trout and salmon. A long medieval bridge, built over Roman foundations crosses the river, to which Master Mateo made reforms. The town of Padrón immediately sends us straight onto the Saint James route.

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Cathedral of Tui  Church of San Telmo, Tui  Soutomaior Castle

River Ulla  Pontevedra  Church of Virgen Peregrina

Bell makers’ House, Bedoucos  Church of Pedrecanai  Apse of Santa María de Vemil
There were always pilgrims who approached Galicia from the northern ports of Europe by sea. In the XV century, there were two chosen routes which began to bring walkers to the ports of Ferrol and A Coruña, or to Vilagarcía de Arousa. Up to 3,000 English pilgrims registered in the A Coruña port in 1434, the port which would end up accepting nearly all these sea-faring pilgrims. They also disembarked in Ferrol, from where they would set off on their route on foot. The monastery of O Couto, with its beautiful Romanesque church of San Martín de Xubia, reflected in the Ferrol estuary, was the first stop to be made. The monastery of Caaveiro was perhaps their second port of call, but they almost certainly crossed the medieval bridges built by the Andrade family. They passed through Pontedeume, Lambre, Betanzos and O Burgo, where they joined the A Coruña route, after having crossed “one of the most beautiful and varied regions of Europe” as we read in the “General Chronicle of Spain”, written in 1865. It is full of unforgettable medieval monuments, such as the castles of Pontedeume, the Romanesque one at Breamo, Tiobre, Santa María de Cambre, and the monumental city of Betanzos.

The two routes joined up in Santiago de Sigrás. Those coming from A Coruña had entrusted themselves to the Apostle in the Romanesque temple of Santiago, or in its associated church of Santa María, the two buildings forming part of the monumental and historical complex of the “Ciudad Vieja” (Old City). They left the city via Eiris, with the views of the historic Elviña fields facing them, overlooked by the hill fort. From Sigrás, an undulating way, pleasant and enjoyable, the route climbs to Mesón do Vento, where Philip II left his mark on the illustrious houses of Sarandons and Poulo with his coat of arms, as did Queen Marian of Neuburg on the stately house of Marzoa. Crossing the Romanesque and Gothic bridge of Sigüeiro, the pace was stepped up to see the towers of the Compostela Cathedral standing out before them from Bonaca.

The other sea route arrived from the port of Vilagarcía, entering the Arousa Ria, wider than the Rías Baixas (low estuaries), and with more fish. From Aguito and Ribeira to Rianxo on the north shore, and from O Grove to Carril on the south bank, sailing boats and rowing boats, and today motor boats too, work the estuary to supply us with the very best seafood and fish. From the island of Cortegada onwards, there are a series of cruceiros placed on islets or on the shores of the Ulla estuary, marking the Road, passing the mythical Torres de Catoria and the unspoilt area of the Brañas de Laín, until reaching Padrón. This sea route was also followed by the Portuguese, who were overjoyed to be following the exact route taken by the disciples who brought the relics of Saint James.

**The Sea Routes**

A Coruña | Church of San Miguel de Breamo, Pontedeume
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Ferrol Estuary | Tower of Andrade, Pontedeume
Ferrol Estuary | Convent of San Francisco, Betanzos

Facade of Santa María de Cambre

Church of Santa María de Cambre

Monastery of Caaveiro

Church of Santa Maria, Betanzos

Church of Santiago de Sigrás

Western Towers, Catoira
Nowadays, when the traveller, pilgrim or tourist arrives in Compostela and looks up to the sight before them of the Obradoiro facade, they can only exclaim, "It's been worth it". Such a simple sentence has never meant so much. The city of Santiago possesses an unparalleled series of monuments. Its monasteries, churches, palaces, old streets and typical popular constructions, combined with its spiritual and cultural significance, have given it its deserved inclusion in the list of World Heritage Cities.

The history of Santiago began on the 25th of July, 813, when the Bishop of Iria, Teodomiro, confirmed the discovery of the sepulchre of the Apostle Saint James in the village of San Fiz de Solovio, which would end up becoming the city of Compostela. News of the discovery spread quickly across the whole of the Christian world, threatened at that time by the Islamic invasions. A grand basilica was built over the Apostle’s sepulchre, and a continual coming and going of travellers and pilgrims was established between Santiago and the rest of Europe. Faith, culture, trade and politics converged along the Road. Santiago de Compostela and its Road became the "Root and Foundation of Europe".

Four magnificent squares open up before the four doors of the basilica. The main one was given the name of Obradoiro, for having had for nearly ten years, between 1738 and 1747, the obradoiro, or workshop, where the stones for the Baroque facade were cut and carved. It was the work of the Galician architect Fernando Casas e Novoa, and it replaced the early Romanesque facade. The towers reach a height of 74 metres. Alongside, the Palacio de Gelmírez still survives, built in the XII century at the same time as the early Romanesque cathedral. The canons’ residence, on the opposite side, now houses the Cathedral Museum.
Another three buildings, of diverse periods and styles, close the square. Firstly, the College of San Xéróme, founded by Bishop Fonseca, with a Romanesque-ogival portal; The Palacio de Raxoi, of XVIII century neo-classical style, which was built as a confessors’ seminary, a choirboys’ residence and town hall for the city. And finally, the Hospital Real, ordered to be built by the Catholic Kings to take in pilgrims and sick people. It is a fantastic example of Plateresque style, quite uncommon in Galicia, and is today a Tourist Parador.

The Plaza de la Aclíbaría is the first square encountered by the traveller entering Santiago by the French Road. It was known as the Puerta del Paraíso, but was replaced by the present neo-classical style square in the XVI-II century. The craft of jet working, closely linked to the Pilgrimage, prospered in Santiago from the XV century on. The workshops and stalls were here in the square.

On the opposite side, the door of the southern arm of the cathedral’s cross aisle preserves all the iconographic richness of the Romanesque art of Compostela’s golden age. It is the Puerta de las Praterías. Alongside it stands the Torre de Reloj (Clock Tower), or the Berenguela, of Baroque style, as are the other buildings surrounding this square. Behind the cathedral is the wide expanse of the Plaza de la Quintana. The Puerta Santa, which faces this square, is only open in the Compostela Holy Year, when the Apostle’s festival, the 25th of July, falls on a Sunday.
The buildings, towers and facades, which were added throughout the centuries, hide the great Romanesque cathedral. Construction began in 1075 at the order of Bishop Diego Peláez. The Pórtico de la Gloria, with its two hundred superbly carved figures, represents one of the most valuable works of universal Romanesque art. The central nave is a model of harmony, sobriety and grandiosity. In the nave of the cross aisle we can see an incredible spectacle, a gigantic censer, the *Botafumeiro*, one and a half metres high and fifty kilograms in weight, which swings from one end to another of the transversal nave during the great religious ceremonies. The ritual is as old as the cathedral itself, and was written about in the Guide to the Pilgrim by Aymery Picaud in the XII century. At the head, with its beautiful apse aisle which opens out into ten apsidal chapels, a chaotic baroque altar surrounds the Romanesque sculpture of the Apostle to which the ritual embrace is given. Below the altar is the crypt containing the chest in which the mortal remains of Saint James are kept.

Before taking an entertaining and inspiring stroll around the network of streets surrounding the cathedral, with their religious and civil monuments, we will collect the *Compostela*, the document certifying a completed pilgrimage. The certificate is only given to those who can prove with documentary evidence that they have come to Santiago on foot or on horseback from over one hundred kilometres away, or over 150 by bicycle, in either a religious spirit or with a spiritual concern. It is handed out in the Casa do Deán, at 1, Rúa do Vilar street, a Baroque building which is also a pilgrims’ refuge.
If the route from Santiago to Fisterra is made along the coast, the traveller will find a Compostela in miniature in Noia. It was the French archbishop, Berenguel de Landoire, who, after being made to feel unwelcome by the Santiago people, established his residence there, building churches and palaces. At the mouth of the estuary, the rooftops of the fishing village of Muros are grouped together, immediately followed by the open coast towards Fisterra. This is a coastline with wide stretches of sand open to the ocean and high mountains behind them. The most impressive of its elevated and mysterious pink rocky granite crags is Monte Pindo, the Celtic Olympus of the Galicians. And finally, the town of Fisterra, surrounding its central Plaza del Ara Solis, a nostalgic reminder of the altar raised by the Romans to worship the setting sun.

The road leading to the end of the headland starts next to the Romanesque church of Santa María das Areas, where the sculpture of Santo Cristo da Barba Dourada, the source of numerous legends, is preserved. In the highest reaches of the mountain, there was a hermitage and some carved stones that gave the spot a sacred character. Today a lighthouse guides the incessant parade of ships along one of the busiest maritime stretches in the world. We are now no longer at the end of the world, but at the end of the Road to Santiago. All that remains is to return, to return to Santiago happy and satisfied. Having completed the Road to Santiago is a medal that can always be worn with pride. If you have reached Fisterra, even more so.

The journey to Santiago de Compostela, as either a pilgrim or tourist, is completed by a visit to Padrón and Fisterra, spots closely connected to the pilgrimage. Padrón is reached by crossing the Amaía region, “all Galicia in a grandiose synthesis”, where we can see the Otero house, the childhood home of Rosalía de Castro. Nonetheless, it is in Padrón itself where we can visit the house where she spent the last years of her life, now a museum. Padrón is a modern town, which according to the legend, is the spot where the boat containing the remains of the Apostle Saint James from Jerusalem moored. The boat was tied to a stone, or pedrón, in reality a Roman altar which can be seen below the altar of the church of Santiago. Padrón, with the name of Iria Flavia, was one of the great Roman metropolises of Galicia. There are also reminders of Saint James at the Fuente de Santiago and in Santiaguíño do Monte, where a hermitage and some megalithic remains remind us of the first preaching of the Apostle.

Its setting as being “the end of the earth”, is also an incentive to set off on the Road to Santiago, since all travellers always want to go that much further, to the end of the road. Thus the Roman historian Lucius Florus told of how the legionnaires of Rome watched in holy terror as the sun set over the ocean, when it reached the Finis Terrae, in the XII century BC. The Finis Terrae, Finisterre, or Fisterra as it is called in Galicia, became, from that time onwards, an obligatory spot to visit for all those who had taken part in the Saint James Way.

Rosalía de Castro House-Museum. Padrón
Collegiate of Iria Flavia
Hermitage of Santiaguíño do Monte. Padrón
Costa da Morte
Santuario Vixe da Barca. Muxía
Church of Santa Comba. Carnota
Church of San Martiño. Noia
Church of Santa María das Areas. Fisterra
Church of Santa María a Nova. Noia
Church of Santa María das Areas. Fisterra