

Sara Lovecká: A Slow Travel Experience and rationale

The Camino de Santiago Five-day Travel Guide

Dear slow traveller,

I invite you on an adventure of walking. I invite you on the Camino de Santiago in northern Spain, a pilgrim's route dating back to the Middle Ages. It starts in St Jean Pied de Port and finishes in the World Heritage Site of the city of Santiago de Compostela (Lois González, 2013; see Figure 1). I walked this route myself over the summer of 2020, and this slow travel experience changed my life. Therefore, I decided to create a guide to this experience with aims, thinking prompts, and suggested actions (as well as my photographs). I hope this guide can aid you in your journey and reproduce some of the joy and beauty I experienced. The official Camino de Santiago route is around 1000 km long, and I recognise that not everyone can take the necessary time off work, family, and other life commitments. Therefore, I invite you to join for as long as you can, if even for a couple of days and use this five-day-long guide in any part of your journey. I realise that what I am proposing is scary, and I know it feels strange because we are used to traveling as quickly as possible with a clear route and a destination in mind. However, I ask you to trust me, just this once, and let go of your speed conditioning. I ask you to travel slow.

Why travel slow?

The Slow Travel Movement asks you to focus on the journey rather than on the destination, be curious, make conscious and sustainable choices of modes of transport, engage with the local community, and embrace uncertainty (Gardner, 2023). Walking the Camino de Santiago is an excellent opportunity to experience slow travel since you are covering all distances by foot, living a minimalist lifestyle with your backpack only, and sleeping in local albergues in small villages along the way. The benefits of the Camino for one's body and spirit have also been well documented (Im & Jun, 2015; Kim et al., 2016).

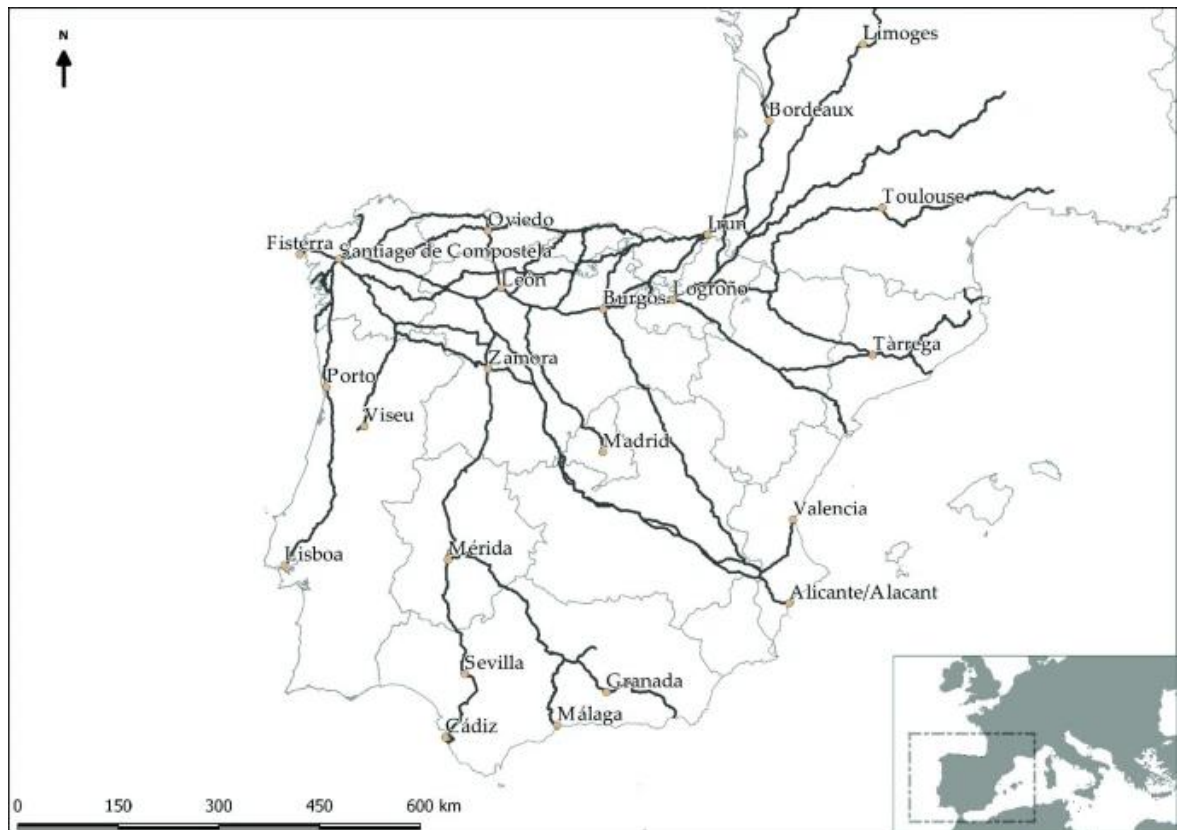


Figure 1. The different routes to Santiago de Compostela depicted on the map of Spain (Lois González & Lopez, 2021).

The Guide:

DAY 1
Aim: Recognising and enhancing the inner journey that takes place while we travel.
Prompt: Do you focus on your journey or the destination when you travel?
Action: Visit a local store, buy a journal, and reflect in it at the end of each travel day.



DAY 2

Aim: Building awareness and noticing.

Prompt: How often do you pay attention to your surroundings when you travel?

Action: Document (in any way you see fit - e.g., photography, painting, writing...) (1) a body of water, (2) a field, (3) wild animals, (4) a stranger's smile, and (5) the sky while walking today. Take the time to stop and meditate at one of these places.



DAY 3

Aim: Seeking to understand and support the local culture and businesses.

Prompt: When you travel, how often do you visit locally owned enterprises, and how much time do you spend in international chains?

Action: Visit a local café, bar or marketplace, buy a warm drink or food and talk to the owner about their business.



DAY 4

Aim: Recognise and aim to minimise the environmental footprint of your travels.

Prompt: How environmentally friendly are you when travelling?

Action: Pick up trash you find along the way, leave nothing behind, do not disturb wildlife, and talk to other pilgrims about their sustainable travel habits.



DAY 5

Aim: Becoming conscious of the time of day and the changes it brings in nature.

Prompt: How often do you notice the changes in weather, light, plants, and animal behaviour at night?

Action: Take your sleeping bag outside, listen to the sounds of nature around you, and look at the stars as you fall asleep.



Rationale

This Slow Travel Experience centres around the principles of the Slow Travel Movement explored in week three of the module. In this critical reflection, I will describe the process of designing the travel guide, the benefits of travelling slowly (especially walking), and the limitations of my approach.

As we were learning about the principles of Slow Travel in the module, my mind immediately went to my pilgrimage experience of 2020. After living my academic life at an unsustainable speed, I had to take a year out of university to treat my severe burnout and the idea of a contemplative holiday emerged. I went through with it, travelled to Spain at the end of July, and walked 400 km from León to Santiago de Compostela with only the things I could carry on my back. I lived according to most of the Slow travel principles without any notion of the Slow Movement back then. I stayed in small local hostels, made conscious ethical decisions about my food, drink, and other expenditures, engaged in conversations with other pilgrims and locals, got to know the Spanish food and culture, noticed the land and all its changes, and contemplated the speed of my life back home (Gardner, 2023; Guliver & McGrath, 2016). I felt the benefits of Slow travel directly, such as improving my mental health, connecting with the place I visited and its people, and having a clear conscience about my environmental footprint. However, after critically examining the scholarship around slow travel in the module, I thought of ways my pilgrimage could have been made even slower and more sustainable. To utilise this knowledge, I decided to compose a travel guide to offer this experience to other slow travellers.

Based on my reflections and the academic literature, I composed aims, prompts, and actions for a truly slow Camino. In my guide, I combined reflection with action, as advised by the critical contemplative pedagogy, to accomplish intentional learning and transformation (Kaufman, 2017). I based each day on a different principle of the Slow Travel Movement: (1) focusing on the journey, (2) reshaping our relationship with place, (3) making connections with the local community, (4) prioritising environmentally sustainable decisions, and (5) challenging our understanding of time (Gardner, 2023). By offering a guide instead of a strictly scheduled itinerary, this experience allows for flexibility and accounts for individual differences in people's needs. This approach also makes the guidebook relevant to walking experiences other than the Camino. It is also crucial to note that walking does not always need to be slow. As Petrini puts it in Honré's book *The Slow Movement*: "If today I want to go fast, I go fast; if tomorrow I want to go slow, I go slow. What we are fighting for is the right to determine our own tempos" (Honré, 2004:14). This guidebook is there to support people on their journeys by providing the space for reflection and action without dictating the number of kilometres one should walk in a day.

Finally, I recognise that this slow travel experience has limitations, especially in its financial accessibility and its association with the Christian religion (due to the historical background of the pilgrimage; Lois González, 2013). Firstly, even though the trip costs are minimal, there is the need to buy plane tickets to get to Spain and take time off work and leave family, friends, and other responsibilities, which is only an option for some. I recognise these limitations of my proposal and suggest choosing alternative pilgrimages or hikes closer to home for people who cannot afford plane tickets (e.g., the Pacific Crest Trail for people living in the US) and using this guide there. Another possibility is to walk around the neighbourhood and go through the aims, prompts, and actions every morning. I designed the plan to be flexible to accommodate

various experiences based on people's resources and availability. The second limitation of my plan is its religious connotation which might not feel comfortable to everyone, however, there is no need to follow a specific religion to be allowed to walk the Camino and very few tourists still walk it for religious reasons (Smith, 2018; Kim et al., 2019). It is only necessary to be open-minded and willing to experience and reflect.

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