

El Camino Adventure for Club Members

During the week beginning Sunday, August 30, three couples from our club traded walking and running shoes for hiking shoes and became pilgrims on El Camino de Santiago. The Kelleys, the Cardens, and the McMahons headed north through Northwestern Spain, with some of us starting as far south as Vigo on the Caminho Português, or Portuguese Way.

While there are many Camino routes to choose from, John, Chris, Kim, Kevin, Jeff, and Liisa enjoyed an incredible variety of scenery along the way. Our journey included spectacular views of the Atlantic coast, rolling hills, national parks, small towns, hobby farms, an impressive assortment of farm animals, and what seemed like an unlimited number of grape arbors. Each day brought something different as we made our way north toward our ultimate destination: the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.

The Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela is one of Christianity's most important pilgrimage destinations. According to Christian tradition, it was built over the tomb of St. James the Greater, one of Jesus's twelve Apostles, whose remains are believed to have been brought to Galicia after his martyrdom in Jerusalem. For centuries, pilgrims from around the world have traveled the Camino to arrive at this cathedral and the tomb of St. James.

While we certainly appreciated the spirituality of the journey, one of the most memorable parts was the overwhelming sense of community. People from all over the world were walking the same path for very different reasons. Koreans, Brazilians, Swedes, Americans, and too many other nationalities to name quickly became our fellow pilgrims—and, in many cases, our pilgrim brothers and sisters. Some of us covered the entire 101 kilometers (63 miles) from Vigo to Santiago, while others joined for portions of the journey.

Of course, as walkers, runners, bikers, and marathoners know, fueling and recovery are key elements of any endurance event. We were very deliberate in our approach to maximizing both performance and enjoyment. We averaged between 10 and 16 miles per day and typically departed around 9:00 a.m., after a few prayers inside a local cathedral or church.

Then came the fueling strategy: a few miles to a mid-morning coffee and pastry stop... a few more miles to a midday sandwich and beer break... a few more miles to a wine, octopus, and squid siesta... and then, finally, a few more miles to finish the day.

Our pacing and nutrition plan was, by all accounts, nothing short of masterful.

To aid our recovery, we headed to Porto, Portugal, for several more days of relaxation and exploration. We enjoyed wine tasting, boat rides on the Douro River, a day trip to Fatima, and sightseeing that included a visit to Nazaré, famous for its world-record waves. The

amazing food and wine, along with a little massage therapy, turned out to be a very effective recovery program before heading back to sweet home Chicago.

The Camino gave us beautiful scenery, sore feet, great food and wine, spiritual moments, and—most importantly—an unforgettable adventure with friends. Several of us are already talking about going back.

So, fellow club members, start training. You never know when the next Camino adventure will be announced!

Editor's Note: Pictures include another friend couple not from our Club, Steph and Jaime.

Respectfully submitted, Jeff M.