

Knud Hammerschmidt

# *Dude looks like a Pilgrim*



The Way of St. James for Beginners



**The magic of Galicia**

## About the author



Knud Hammerschmidt Born in Germany in 1963, married, living in Munich. Traveling is a passion to him, the best way to meet new friends, to discover, to learn and to experience. Since this first Camino in 2012, he walked the Caminho Portuguese in 2013 and is already in anticipation of all the other ways to Santiago. Presumably in the month of May he can be found along the way.

When he is not traveling, he likes to cook, to surf, to cross town on a skateboard and enjoy the company of good friends in a Munich beer garden.

Among (mostly German but some of APOC too) pilgrims with a strong affinity to social networks, he is not unknown and may even be considered notorious.

<http://facebook.com/knudthedude>

***“Time is an illusion. Lunchtime doubly so.” Douglas Adams***

This book is meant as a declaration of love to the Camino, as a guidebook and maybe an inspiration and last but not least as, hopefully, an amusement.

“One’s destination is never a place,  
but a new way of seeing things.”

**Henry Miller**

“Not all those who wander are lost.”

**J.R.R. Tolkien**

“Wandering re-establishes the original harmony  
which once existed between man and universe.”

**Anatole France**

“So throw off the bowlines, sail away from the safe  
harbour. Catch the wind in your sails.  
Explore. Dream. Discover.”

**Mark Twain**

For my grandparents and everybody who taught me lessons in life.

Thanks to my pilgrim buddy Tom and thanks to all the cool and lovely people I met.

“You are stardust. You are golden.” \*

\* Thanks to Joni Mitchell for the quote.

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## **Dude looks like a pilgrim.**

### **Good idea, caused by a stupid reason**

There are as many reasons to walk the St. James way as there are people that walk it. And almost everybody is able to walk the way. As long as one is halfway healthy it is not even a question of age.

Until April 2012, I did not have the slightest inclination to walk on my own feet for a few hundred kilometers through the north of Spain. Of course, I knew about the Camino. But there was no reason for me to do it. I had found my spiritual way in life a long time ago. I was able to carry the weights and burdens of life and I was not that much into sports.

And then, out of nowhere, as malicious as a Disney witch, my midlife crisis lingered round the corner and flashed me an evil grin. My inner Peter Pan screamed like the first victim in a teenage slasher movie. The little scumbag took the chance to remind me of the fact that there was less than one year until I'd reach the magic frontier called FIFTY. I tried to calm him down with a drink and the declaration that fifty is the new thirty-nine. No way, José. My inner Peter Pan wanted some adventure. He told me that it is not hip to be square. He babbled something about backpacks and reminded me of Greece, Indonesia, Paris, Istanbul, Amsterdam and New Orleans. And one of my buddies, Reinhard, who already did the way twice, backed him up and didn't stop telling me how wonderful the Camino de Santiago is. It took me a few drinks to calm my inner voice, and then I surrendered.

Four weeks later, I'm sitting at the gate of Munich airport, waiting for my flight to Oviedo /Asturias with two weeks

time and 320 kilometers to walk. From Leon to Santiago de Compostela.

## **Why Leon - Santiago?**

Of course there are some other possibilities to walk along the way. Some have the luck of having enough time to walk the whole 790 kilometres. Some split the stages over a few years. And some take one of the shorter routes to Santiago, like the Camino Portuguese or the Camino Primitivo, which can be done in an average of two weeks.

I, like many others, had the intention to reach Santiago on my first Camino. It may well be that the way is the destination, but every pilgrim wants to reach Santiago de Compostela. Having followed ancient trails, to a place that has been a destination of desire for so many over more than thousand years. To catch the special spirit. To have arrived together with others one has met along the way.

Since I did not know if I would repeat that kind of walk, and considering the fact that I only had two weeks time, starting at Leon became my choice. Of course another starting point, like Ponferrada, Sarria or Portomarin is possible too, but a normal human being needs about 10 days to get into the real pilgrims groove.

## **Great Expectations**

What to expect? It depends on you. It could be one of the best experiences in your entire life, maybe just a good time, or possibly tears and pain.

The best scenario is to expect nothing and to be prepared for everything. It does not matter if you do the way for spiritual or religious reasons, because of a sportive or

adventurous challenge or just for fun. Whatever you experience, the way will change you.

You will go beyond your known limits. You will meet people from all over the planet, and you are going to know them in a way you never will in your daily life, because you and they all share the same exceptional circumstances. You will experience extremes, hospitality, friendship, amiability, love and last but not least yourself.

Absolute strangers might tell you their deepest thoughts, you will have a fantastic time, you will swear and curse, you will be proud of yourself and others, you will sympathize, laugh, savour, drink and enjoy. And when you are back, at home, a part of you will remain there on the Camino de Santiago.

Remember: it is your way. "The Way" is a good movie, not more, not less. Something like "the way" doesn't exist. It is always your way. So walk with cheer, an open mind and without expectations - and everything might happen.

## **Some Basics, Facts and some Experiences**

### ***The Credential and the Compostela...***

...is something like the alpha and the omega for a pilgrim. The pilgrimage starts with the "credencial", the certificate that proves you are a pilgrim; it is your pilgrims' passport and the precondition to stay at the pilgrims' albergues. The credential is stamped at the albergues and, if you like to, at many other places along the way, like bars and restaurants, museums and churches. The stamped credential (Spanish: stamps = sellos) is the proof for the pilgrims office at Santiago, that you have walked the way or done it by bicycle. As a walking pilgrim the minimal distance you must