



## From Pedrafita do Cebreiro to Samos... the Saint James' Way enters Galicia

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The Saint James routes connected Galicia to Europe for centuries and still do so. The French Way is the best known and enters Galicia at O Cebreiro. Our journey follows the first stages inside Galicia of one of the world's most important routes for pilgrims.





**P**edrafita do Cebreiro is a transit point. Over the years a number of road infrastructures were developed at this 1,099-metre pass which marks the division between Galicia and the Central Meseta (plateau) and is a departure point for those going to Os Ancares or O Courel. This small mountain village is Galicia's highest municipal capital. It is famous for its cheese makers, *Queixo do Cebreiro* being one of the most highly regarded in Galicia. From Pedrafita do Cebreiro the road to O Cebreiro runs along the side of the mountain, with constant views of

an unbelievably green countryside. O Cebreiro is a major landmark on the Saint James' Way in Galicia. The traditional village, which has become a spiritual centre and

*O Cebreiro,  
transmisor de costumes e  
estruturas prerromanas  
é sempre fito e feudo dos  
peregrinos a Compostela.*

one popular with tourists, is in a privileged location and contains various features of cultural interest. At the top of the Alto de San Roque

an imposing statue pays tribute to the effort of pilgrims. Not far from here is the village of Hospital, its name indicating it was once the site of a pilgrims' hostel. Although no remains have been found to confirm this, it is also known as Hospital da Condessa, as a hospital may have been founded there by Doña Egilo, Lady of Triacastela, in the ninth or tenth century. Alto do Poio (1,335 metres) is another landmark on the route. In the heart of the O Rañadoiro range with views of the Serra de Oribio and the Serra do Courel, it is typical of the mountain scenery in the area and the difficult

▼ View from the *alto do Cebreiro*







The pilgrim battles against the elements in this windswept spot. This is the scene portrayed in the statue on the **Alto de San Roque**. The work of José María Acuña, this huge bronze figure depicting a mediaeval pilgrim stoically withstands the winter cold and summer sun. At 1,270 metres, with frequent snow and strong winds, San Roque is considered one of the toughest ascents on the Saint James' Way. But the traveller is rewarded by impressive views of the O Courel range and some of the most beautiful sunsets in the Galician interior.



Alto de San Roque. ▲

terrain pilgrims must traverse. After Triacastela, the road becomes more level. Various services are available in this small village. The route then runs through the leafy valleys of the Oribio and Sarria rivers, with their green meadows. The San Xulián Monastery occupies

a central position in the town of Samos, on the banks of the Sarria. Founded by the Benedictine order in the Middle Ages, its buildings and other features are in various architectural styles, predominantly Renaissance, Gothic and Baroque. The monastery is large and

contains two cloisters and an eighteenth-century Baroque church. The River Samos defines the shape of a pleasant town surrounded by woods, always lively because it is a well-known stopping point on the Saint James' Way in Galicia.





Don't miss...

## O Cebreiro

! The **Faial de Liñares** is an unusual wooded area bordering the Saint James' Way and a good illustration of the area's biogeographical conditions. Concentrations of beech trees (*Fagus sylvatica*) only occur in cold, high mountain conditions with cool soil which must be relatively moist. In autumn, the colours of the leaves of these noble trees are gorgeous, contrasting with their grey bark with splashes of white.

O Cebreiro is a traditional village with spiritual associations in the mountains of Lugo, undergoing a revival as an important folk culture site. Marking the point where the French Way enters Galicia, the Santa Maria a Real sanctuary stands at its centre. The Pre-Romanesque ninth-century building was built with rough slate, although the façade has been renovated. It contains various relics and items of interest, including a twelfth-century chalice.

The village also contains four *pallozas* which have been turned into a museum focusing on the importance of sheep and cattle in traditional village life. The circular buildings are the perfect design for this mountain location: the absence of apertures helps keep them insulated while the thatching withstands snow.

The altitude of the village (1,300 metres) means that it is very exposed to weather conditions but also enables it to take full advantage of sunlight. Oral tradition records that the bells in the church were used to guide travellers on days when the area's frequent fog and snow made their journey difficult. These conditions, together with the steep ascent from León, have made O Cebreiro an epic landmark on the Saint James' Way.

