



Pilgrimage, Spirituality, and Personal Transformation

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Introduction

El Camino de Santiago (The Way of St James) is one of several pilgrimage routes from around the world. It has its origins in the middle ages when Christian pilgrims could earn a Papal indulgence by completing pilgrimages to holy places. El Camino de Santiago is actually many different paths that can begin almost anywhere and lead to Santiago de Compostela where the bones of St James are said to lie. Its popularity has escalated in the last decade due to portrayals in movies and television shows, social media, and word of mouth. Many people are choosing to travel its byways with the number of pilgrims showing marked increase for the past several years.

The origins of this project were in a pilgrimage that I undertook with my nephew in 2015. We walked El Camino Primitivo for a grand adventure across the Cantabrian Mountains from Oviedo in Asturias, Spain to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain.

Among all of the wonderful people we met, it became clear that they all had different experiences and different reasons for their pilgrimages. Some people were seeking spiritual answers to questions they could not quite define, others were on an adventure vacation that would challenge their physical strength and mental/emotional resolve, and others were either somewhere in between or something entirely different.

Following our return to the “real” world, I knew that something in me had changed, but I was not sure what it was. I thought that I might use my training as a social scientist to explore further what it was that I had experienced by examining the experiences of other pilgrims.

After receiving authorization from the University of Missouri – Saint Louis Institutional Review Board, and with the input of various pilgrims, I wrote a survey that was disseminated via multiple Facebook groups, through networks of friends, and in various newsletters. I originally thought it would be a uniquely American survey that might have up to 100 people complete it. It ended up being completed by over 460 individuals from 32 countries.

The survey included basic demographic questions such as age, sex, marital status, what country people were from, income, how many pilgrimages they had completed, and how had they completed their pilgrimage (i.e. on foot, by bike, on horseback, etc.). There is a Religion/Spirituality section that asks questions about people’s religious preferences and behaviors, as well as how spiritual they feel themselves to be. In addition, it questions how much their spirituality influences their ability to forgive themselves and others, and how they use their spirituality to cope with life’s challenges.

One of the major features of the survey is that it asks how people have changed based on their-completion of the Camino. The domains are: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and connectedness to others. Along those lines is a section that was originally a measure of how people had changed following a traumatic event that I adapted for use among people who had completed El Camino de Santiago.

A separate section of the survey asks about basic personality characteristics - extroversion, agreeableness, emotional stability, conscientiousness, and openness to new experiences – known collectively as “the Big 5 personality traits.” The survey has a General Self-Efficacy Scale that looks at how confident people are that they can complete goals they set for themselves.

Finally, the survey had 10 open ended questions that allowed people to expand on their responses and to provide comments in their own voices. It is here that people talk more about the struggles they endured and the wisdom that they gained. Responses to these questions also helped me to grow and to see areas in the survey that I would like to change if I could do it differently.

The purpose of this report is to share basic results with my fellow pilgrims first. If you would like an electronic copy of this report, please send me an email. Feel free to share it. This information is not publishable in its current form, though I expect it to appear in modified form in academic journals. While this report might raise more questions than it answers, most of those are beyond the scope of what we are presenting here and will require further analysis.

I would like to thank all of the many people who have helped with this project. Without your input, none of this would have been possible. I would also like to thank all of the people who took time out of their lives to respond to this survey. Most of all, I would like to thank my Higher Power, to whom I now feel closer.

Buen Camino,

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Executive Summary

Demographics

Age and Gender

Of the 487 survey participants, 34% are male, and nearly 66% are female. The remaining respondents identified as other or did not specify a gender (Figure 1). The average age of respondents at the time of the survey was 58.3 for males (n=166), and 55 for females (n=319) (Figure 2). The oldest respondent was 82 years old, and the youngest was 20 years old.

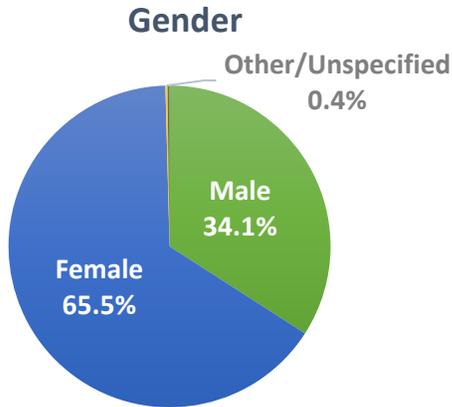


Figure 1. Gender of survey respondents (N=487)

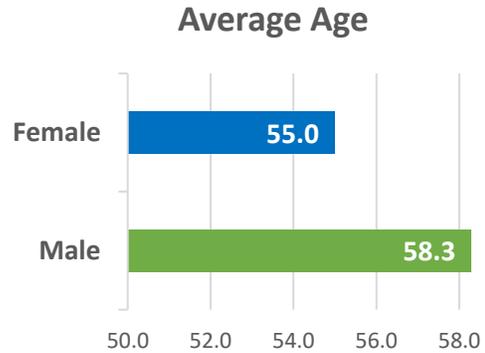


Figure 2. Average age of survey respondents at time of survey (N=485)

Education

The majority of survey respondents are highly educated. Ninety-eight percent have graduated from high school or have a general equivalency diploma (GED), and over 75% have at least a Bachelor's or Professional degree. Only 1% have less than a high school degree (Figure 3).

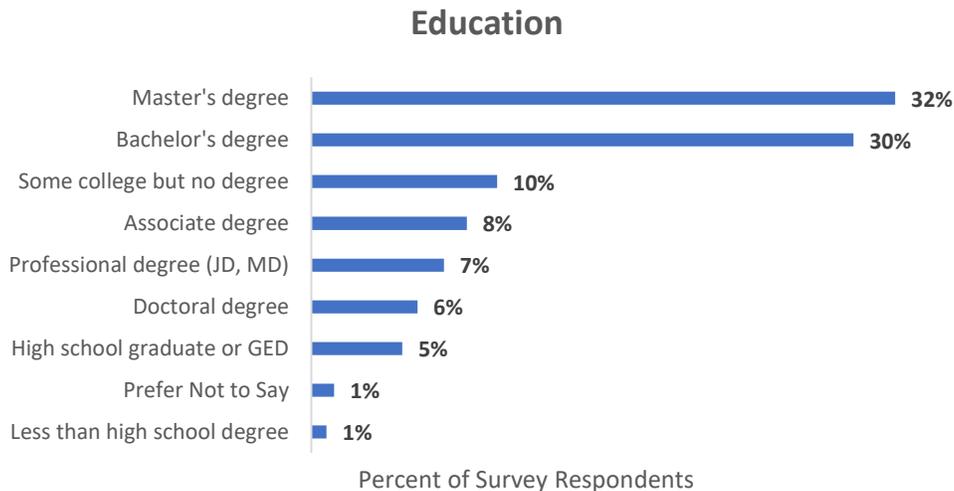


Figure 3. Highest level of education obtained by survey respondents (N=484)

Income

The median pre-tax household income of survey respondents is \$70,000 to \$79,000 (N=432). Responses vary from less than \$10,000 (2%) to \$150,000 or more (12%). Seventeen percent of respondents have incomes of \$10,000 to \$39,999, and 42% percent have incomes between \$40,000 and \$99,999. Over a quarter (27%) of respondents have incomes of \$100,000 or more (Figure 4.)

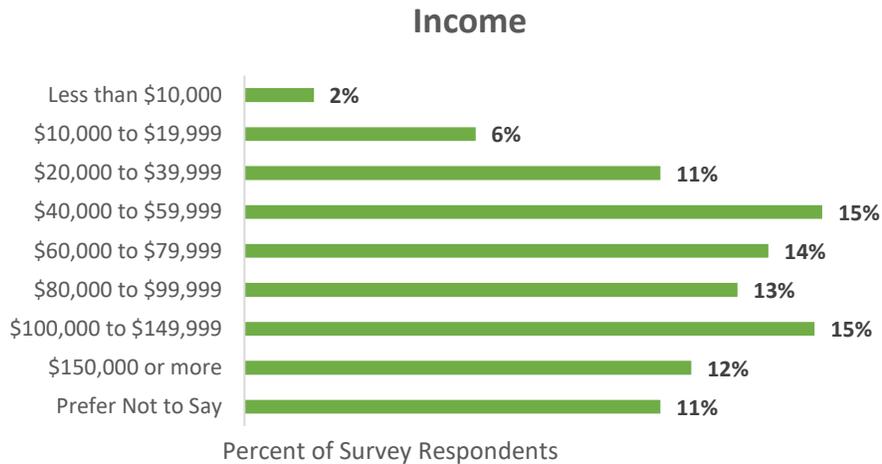


Figure 4. Household income of survey respondents (N=486)

Marital Status

The majority of survey respondents are married (55%). The rest are either divorced (16%), have never been married (14%), partnered but not married (7%), widowed (5%), or separated (2%) (Figure 5).

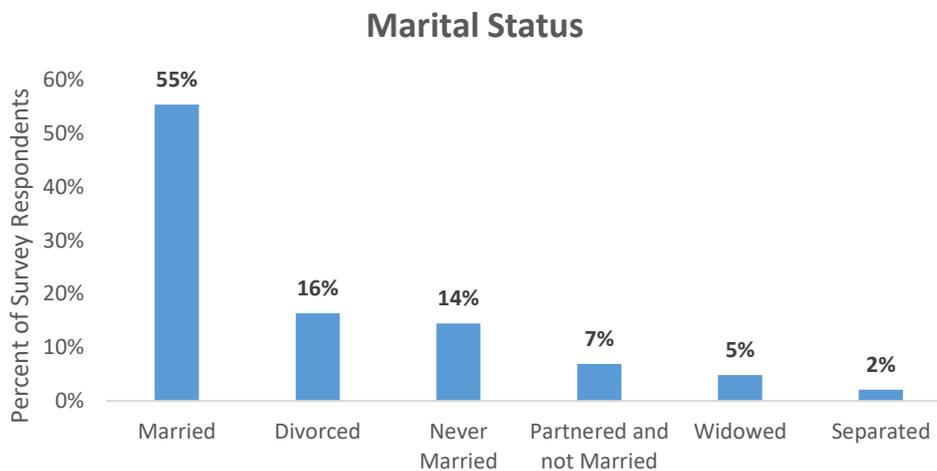


Figure 5. Marital status of survey respondents at time of survey (N=477)

Race and Ethnicity

A clear majority (93%) of survey respondents are White (Figure 6). Among other races represented in the survey are Asian (2%), and those who identify as Other (5%). Survey respondents who identify as American Indian or Alaska Native, Black or African American, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander are each less than 1% of respondents. Additionally, only 9% of survey respondents identify as Spanish (3%), Hispanic (2%), or Latino (4%) (Figure 7).

Liberal/Conservative

More than half (64%) of survey respondents self-identify as somewhat to extremely liberal, while 36% consider themselves to be more conservative than liberal (Figure 8).

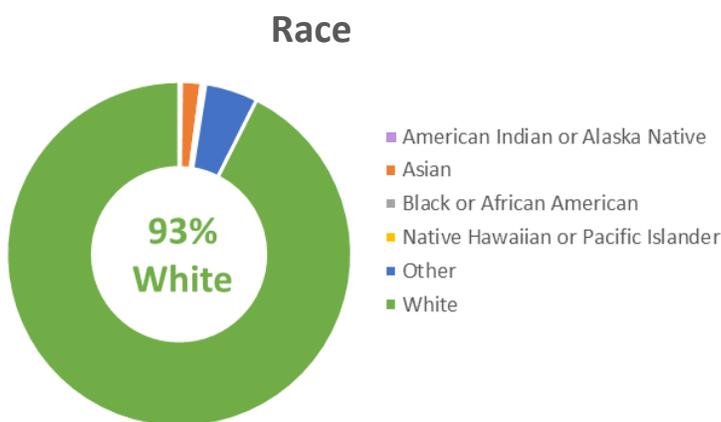


Figure 6. Race of survey respondents (N=485)

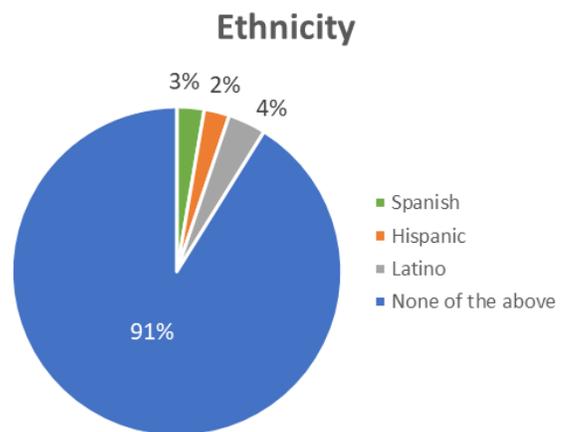


Figure 7. Ethnicity of survey respondents (N=485)

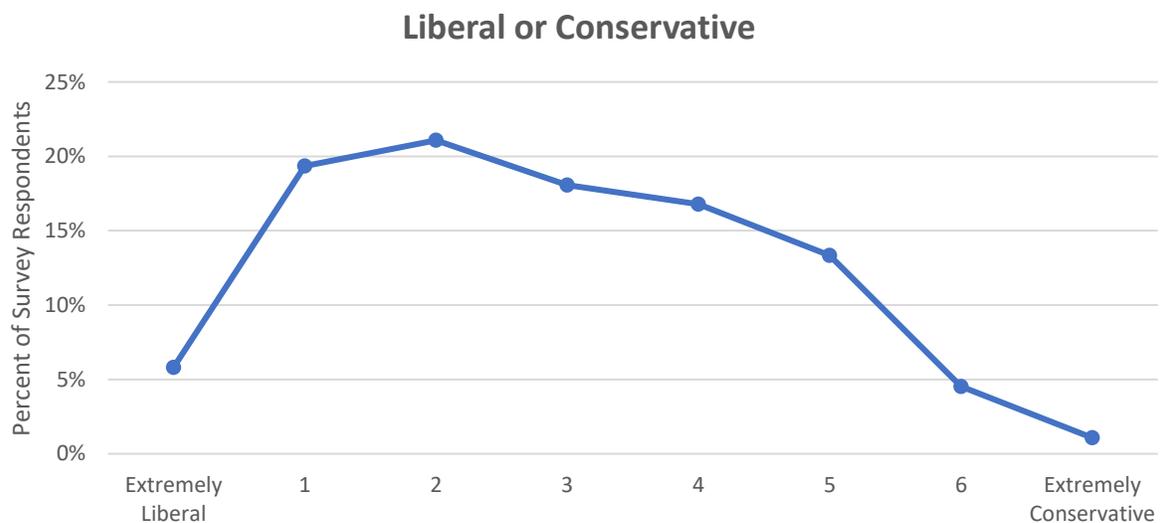


Figure 8. Respondents' self-reports of how liberal or conservative they are on a scale ranging from 0 (extremely liberal) to 7 (extremely conservative) (N=465)

Home Country

Nearly half (45%) of survey respondents are from the United States (Figure 9). The other six most popular home countries are Australia (10%), Canada (10%), United Kingdom (9%), South Africa (5%), Netherlands (4%), and Ireland (3%). Fourteen percent of respondents come from 25 other countries.

State

Of the 202 survey respondents who identified the United States as their country of residence, 15% live in California, 7% live in Virginia, 6% live in New York, and 6% live in Washington (Figure 10). The remaining 66% of respondents reside in 43 other states.

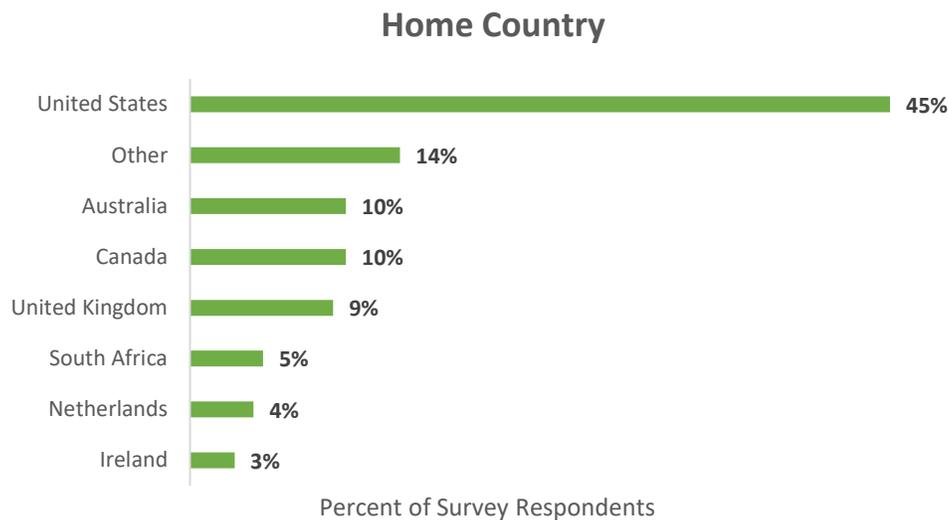


Figure 9. Home country of survey respondents (N=486)

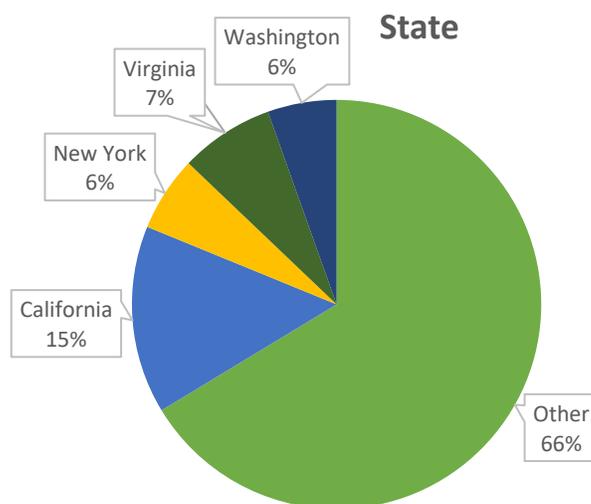


Figure 10. Survey respondents' state of residence (N=202)

Camino History

Survey respondents spent an average of 38 days on their Camino (N=467). The most days spent on the Camino was 365 (over the course of various pilgrimages), and the fewest was 4 days. Over 95% of respondents completed their pilgrimage by walking or a combination of walking and some other mode of transportation such as running, biking, or horseback (Figure 11). Several respondents (42%) have completed more than one Camino (Figure 12). Of them, 23% (9.7% of the total sample) have completed pilgrimages other than El Camino de Santiago (Figure 14). The average age of survey respondents at the time they completed their first Camino was 52 years old. Respondents who have completed more than one Camino averaged 58 years old at the time of their last Camino (Figure 13).

Ways Camino Was Completed



Figure 11. How survey respondents completed caminos (N=480)

Number of Caminos

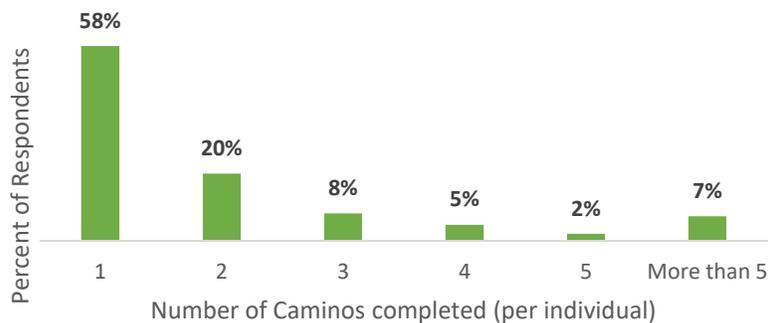


Figure 12. Number of Caminos survey respondents completed (N=481)

Average Age

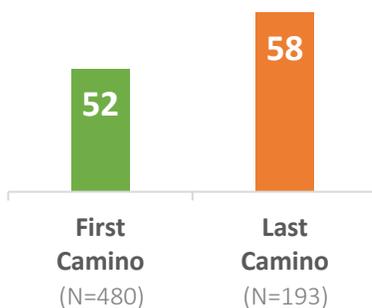


Figure 13. Average age of survey respondents at completion of Camino(s)

Pilgrimages other than El Camino de Santiago?

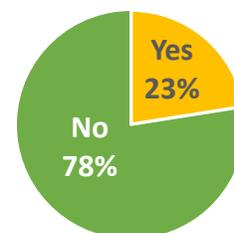


Figure 14. Percent of survey respondents who have completed a pilgrimage other than El Camino de Santiago (N=480)

Religion and Spirituality

Religion

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of survey respondents identify with a particular religion, while about a third (34%) do not identify with any particular religion (Figure 15). The four most popular religions among respondents are Catholic (31%), Christian (16%), Anglican/Episcopal (5%), and Mainstream Protestant (5%). The remaining 7% of respondents (of the 64% who identify with a religion) identify with some other religion, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism, to name a few.

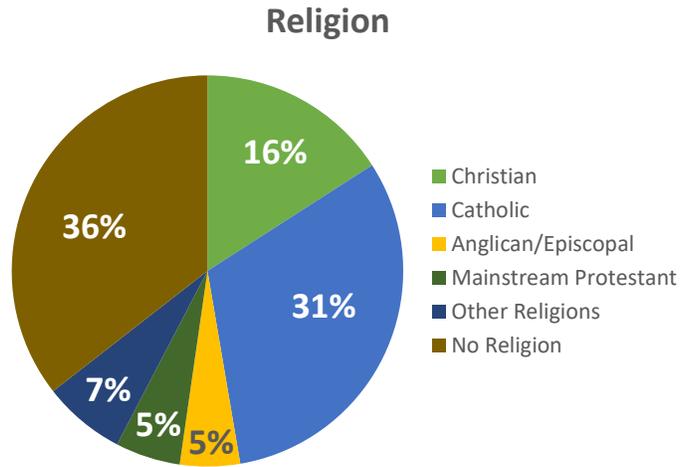


Figure 15. Religion of survey respondents (N=484)

Religious and Spiritual Attitudes

Overall, survey respondents consider themselves to be more spiritual than religious. While only 11% of respondents self-identify as very religious, 39% self-identify as very spiritual (Figure 16). Furthermore, 28% of respondents are not at all religious, but only 3% state they are not at all spiritual.

Religious and Spiritual Attitude

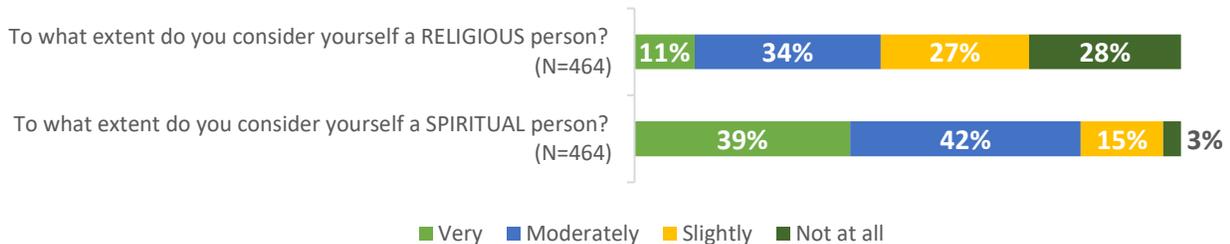


Figure 16. Religious and spiritual attitudes of survey respondents

Organized Religious/Spiritual Practices

A majority of survey respondents attend religious services, or take part in other activities at a place of worship once or twice a year or less (53% and 60%, respectively) (Figure 17). However, 34% of respondents attend religious services every week or more often, and 17% take part in other activities at a place of worship every week or more often.

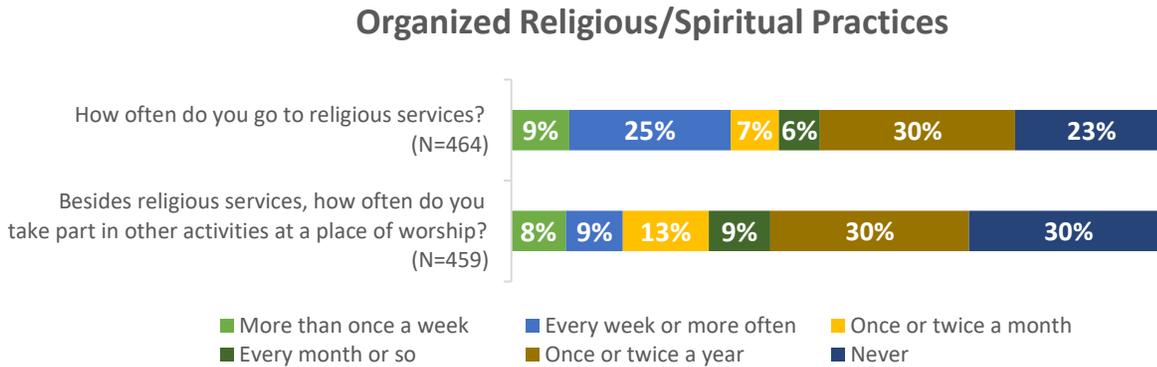


Figure 17. Organized religious/spiritual practices of survey respondents

Private Religious/Spiritual Practices

Nearly half (44%) of survey respondents pray privately in places other than at churches, synagogues, etc. at least once a day (Figure 18). Almost a quarter (23%) meditate at least once a day, and 20% meditate a few times a week. Over a third (34%) of respondents read religious or spiritual literature a few times a week or more. However, several respondents neither pray in places other than at churches, synagogues, etc. (22%), meditate (24%), nor read religious or spiritual literature (17%).

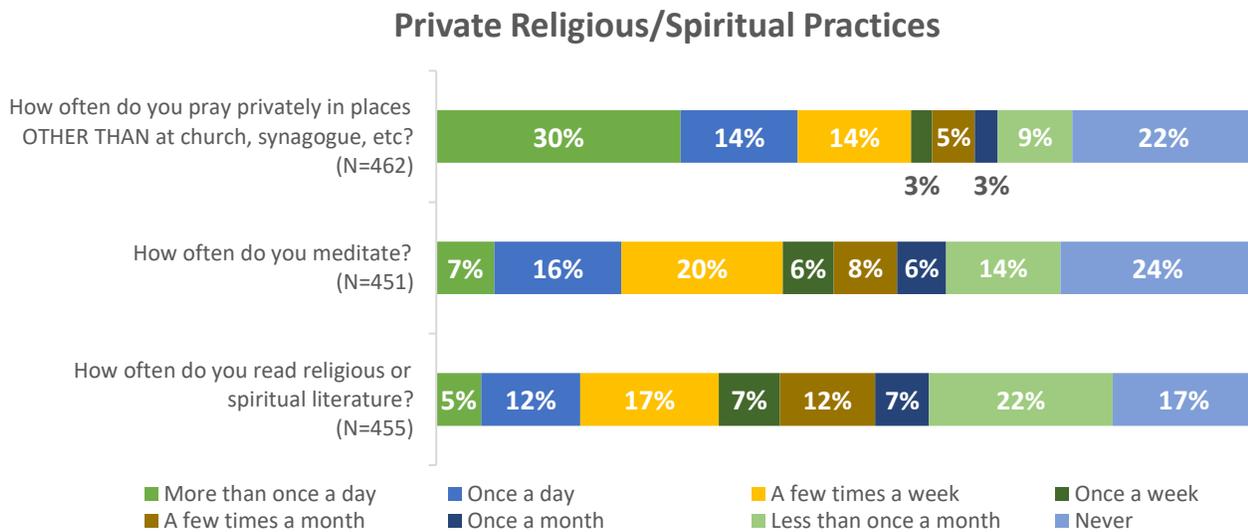


Figure 18. Private religious/spiritual practices of survey respondents

Daily Spiritual Experiences

The Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale is a combination of six different items, each of which is scaled from a low of one to a high of six (total = 6 to 36). The items are: 1. I feel God's presence. 2. I find strength and comfort in my religion/spirituality. 3. I feel deep inner peace or harmony. 4. I desire to be closer to or in union with God. 5. I feel God's love for me, directly or through others. 6. I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation (Figure 19).



Figure 19. Survey respondents' Daily Spiritual Experience scores (N=487)

Spiritual Values/Beliefs

The Spiritual Values/Beliefs is two questions; 62% of respondent say they either agree or strongly agree with the statement, "I believe in a God who watches over me," while 38% either disagree or strongly disagree (Figure 20). 88% of respondents say that they either agree or strongly agree with the statement "I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world", and 12% either disagree or strongly disagree (Figure 20).

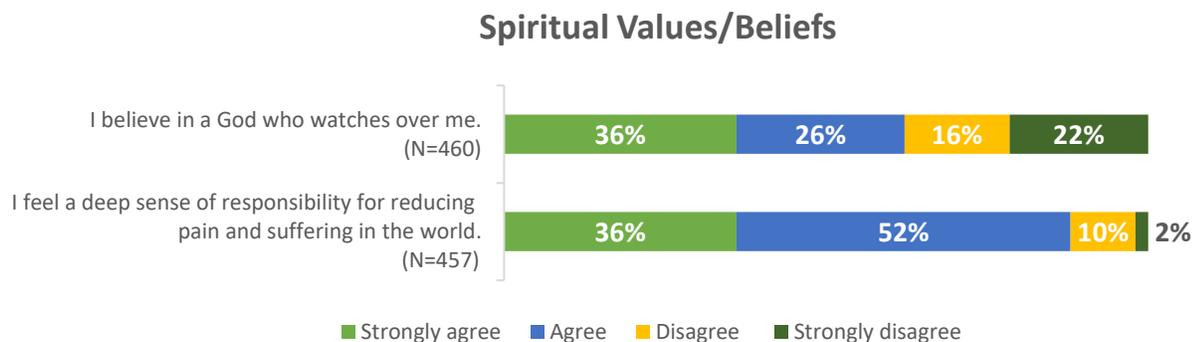


Figure 20. Spiritual values/beliefs of survey respondents

Religious and Spiritual Coping

Survey participants were asked several questions about their religious and spiritual coping behavior. Most respondents (86%) think about how their lives are part of a larger spiritual force, and nearly two-thirds (61%) report they work together with God as partners (Figure 21). Negative Religious and Spiritual Coping has been found to have negative effects on people's health. It was ascertained through a combination of two items, "I feel God is punishing me for my sins or lack of spirituality," and "I wonder whether God has abandoned me," and the scores were combined for a possible score of 2 to 8 (Figure 22). The vast majority of people (86%) strongly disagree with those statements.

Positive Religious and Spiritual Coping

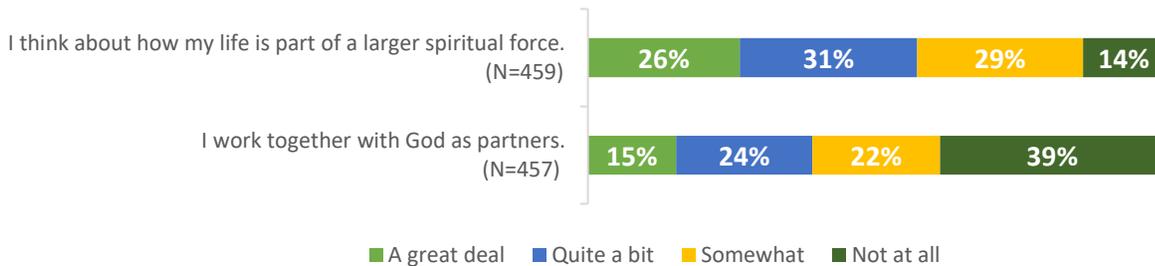


Figure 21. Positive religious and spiritual coping behavior of survey respondents

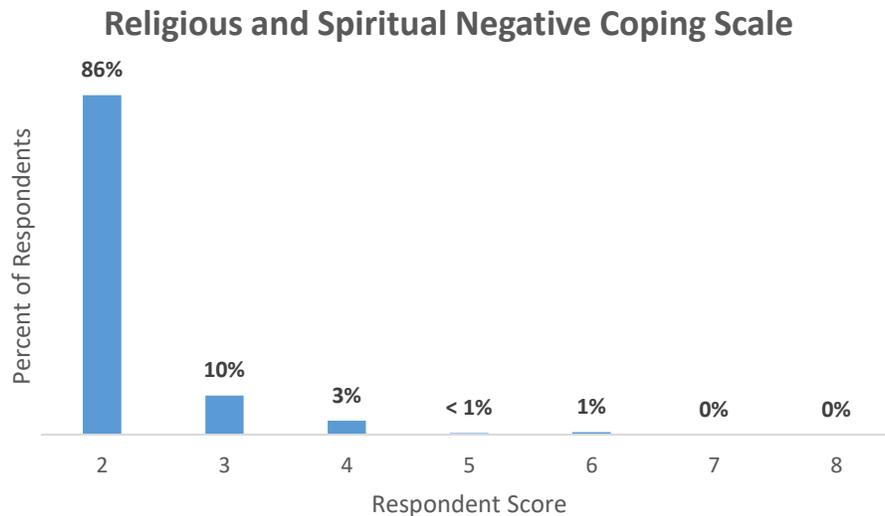


Figure 22. Negative religious and spiritual coping score of survey respondents (N=487)

Forgiveness

Survey respondents were asked a series of questions regarding their beliefs about forgiveness. Over four-fifths (81%) of respondents forgive themselves for things they have done wrong often or almost always (51% and 30%, respectively) (Figure 23). Nearly the same number of respondents (89%) forgive others who have hurt them often or almost always. A majority of respondents believe God forgives them often or almost always (16% and 54%, respectively), while 23% believe God never forgives them – a number that is likely affected by the number of people who do not hold this as part of their belief system (e.g. people who do not believe in God).

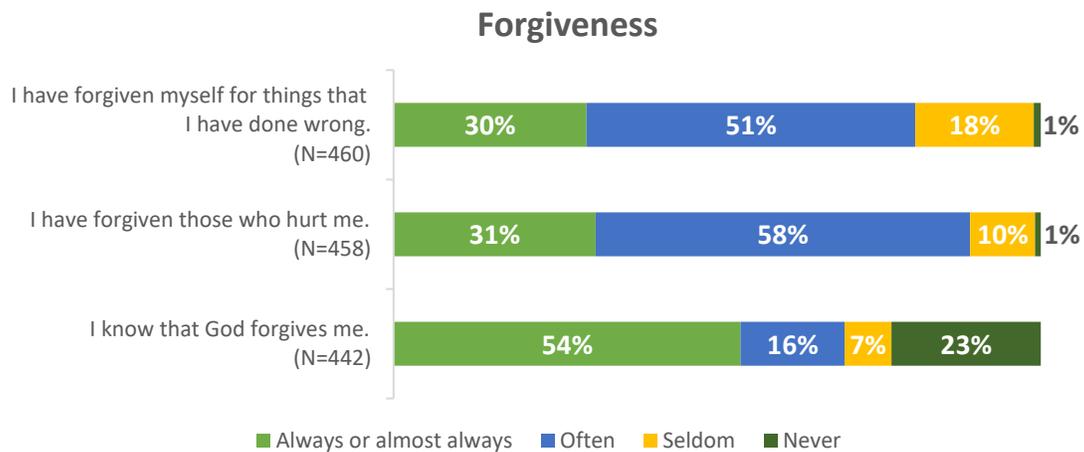


Figure 23. Forgiveness behavior and beliefs of survey respondents

Personality and Personal Growth

Personality Traits

Respondents rated the degree to which they agreed certain characteristics applied to them. These characteristics are related to five major personality traits: extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to new experiences. Final scores can range from 2 to 14 (Figure 24). Extroversion has the lowest average score, while the openness to new experiences has the highest average score (9 and 12, respectively) (Figure 24).

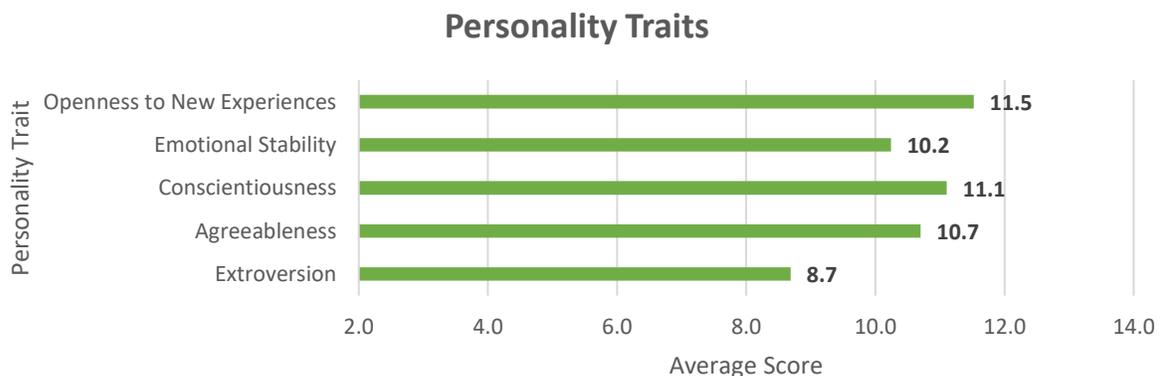


Figure 24. Personality traits of survey respondents (N=487)

Self-Efficacy

Survey respondents were asked a series of questions related to self-efficacy. The sum, or score, of each individual's responses ranges from 10 to 40. Higher scores indicate a stronger belief in one's ability to accomplish tasks, and overcome adversity. Over a third (38%) of respondents have a general self-efficacy score ranging from 26 to 30, and over a half (60%) have a scores above thirty (Figure 25).

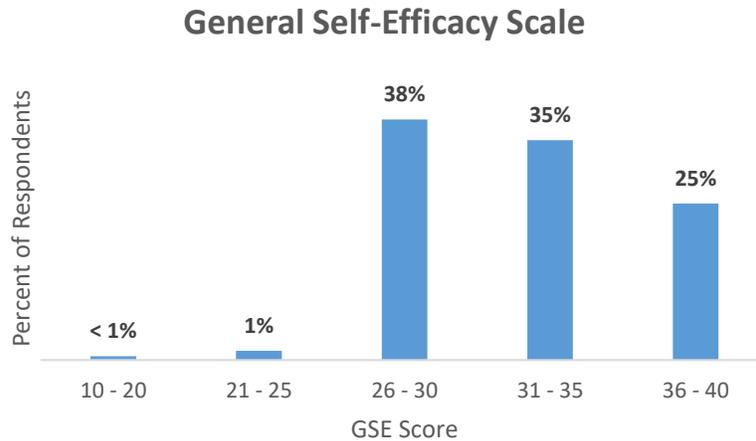


Figure 25. General self-efficacy score of survey respondents (N=487)

Respondents Feelings Before and After Camino

Overall, survey respondents report feeling better immediately after completing their Camino compared to their feelings before their Camino; they also report feeling better three months later than before they had gone, but some of the initial glow seems to have faded. Respondents rated on a scale of 1 to 10 how they felt in five key areas: physically, mentally, emotionally, connection to others, and spiritually (with one equal to very low, and ten equal to very high). The average rating of all respondents ranges from 5.9 to 6.2 before Camino, and 8.1 to 8.4 immediately after Camino (Figure 26). This is an average increase of 2.4 points, or 38%. (Though not clearly captured here, some individuals actually felt less good in certain domains; these are overall average scores for the survey.)

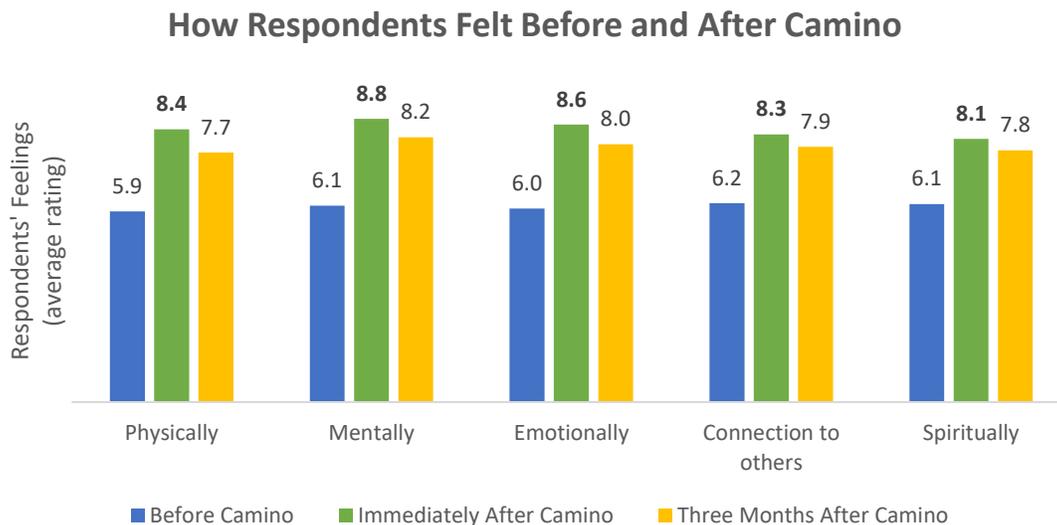


Figure 26. Survey respondents' self-report of how they felt before and after Camino (N=487)

Meaning of Life Post Event Growth

The Meaning of Life Post Event Growth Inventory was originally a measure of how people had changed following a traumatic event and was adapted for use among people who had completed El Camino de Santiago. Though not necessarily a traumatic experience, many people find El Camino de Santiago to be life changing, and with modifications, this seemed an appropriate scale. Study participants were asked to rate the degree to which they experienced change in five key areas: personal strength, relating to others, spiritual change, new possibilities, and appreciation to life. Their final scores can range from 2 to 12 on each domain (Figure 27). Respondents experience the least growth in spiritual change and the most in personal strength, with average scores of 6.6 and 8.5, respectively

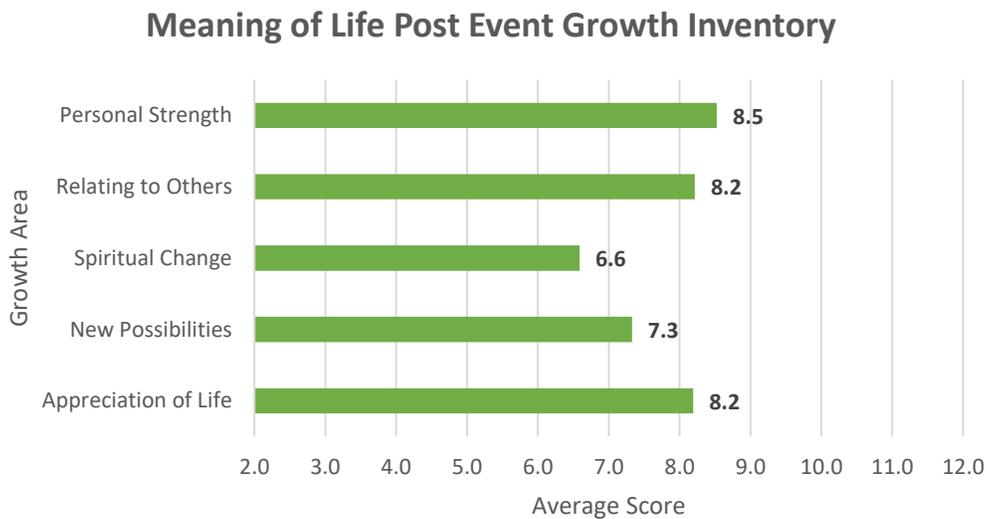


Figure 27. Meaning of Life Post Event Growth score of survey respondents (N=487)

Respondent Comments and Intimate Reflections

Survey respondents were asked 10 open ended questions that allowed them to expand on their responses and to provide comments in their own voices.

Question 1: Why did you decide to do a pilgrimage?

While many people chose to do a Camino as an adventurous vacation or as a holiday, many people felt the "call," and knew that they needed to go, even if they could not articulate the reason:

I felt compelled to do it. I didn't know anything about it, but once I learned about it, was an undeniable calling. I went into it with a determination to walk it, more of an athletic adventure. I knew I would learn why I was called to walk along the way.

No idea, when I heard about it and researched it, I felt a strong pull to walk it.

I felt an inexplicable inner compulsion to walk the Camino. It was like an inner calling, much as one experiences a vocational call.

I love Spain and the language. I doubt it would have called me if it was in a non-Spanish speaking country. But I also felt like there was a lesson there for me to learn.

I first heard of the Camino in LePuy France. Saw pilgrims bring blessed. The Camino called me that day. Took me 9 years to get there.

The first time was in 1999 and I was just drawn to the idea

God told me to do it.

I felt a strong "call", even a Divine "threat", a voice in my head saying that if I didn't walk the Camino that year (after wanting to walk for ten years) that "my life would be forfeit". That finally motivated me to move forward and devise a plan of action.

I felt drawn to do it but did not know why.

The Camino chose me. I'm sure you heard this before!

Other people did the Camino to give thanks:

To give thanks for a good working life (my husband had just retired) and a good marriage of 37 years.

Two family friends with kids with Cancer. I put my shoe leather where my faith was!

I wanted to say thank you for my life.

Spiritual – gratitude

Two of my sons almost died due to illness at the same time. I walked to say thank you to God.

Others decided to do a Camino as a marker of a transition in life, to grieve a loss, or to spend some time in getting perspective on life or a decision:

I was leaving the workforce to return to school and wanted a period of time for reflection and transformation.

As a recent retiree, I decided to do the Camino to give thanks for a good life and to mark the change brought about and the new opportunities that might arise in my new life.

A break from over 20 years of parenting and a moribund marriage

Loss: redundancy and therefore loss of well-loved profession left me depressed, exhausted, lost, sick - and even though I had known about the Camino for 33 years this was the catalyst that led me to do it.

My younger son ... died ...I walked my first Camino in his honor and as a way to handle his loss.

Needed time away from work to think what I wanted to do with life

It was a promise to myself that I made during the six years that I took care of my elderly mother. I did it for closure after her death.

Question 2: Did you walk the Camino(s) with any spiritual intention(s)? If yes, can you please describe it?

Many people responded that they did not walk the Camino for any spiritual reason, but some of the responses from those who did follow:

I wanted to get a better appreciation for who I was as a person, and I took the Camino as a way to reconnect with the world around me and to regain some of my faith in human nature. After a long career in which I had long seen the worst side of humanity, I wanted to recalibrate my sense of the essential goodness in people.

I walked as a Christian pilgrim and went to pilgrim's masses when available. I walked in honor of a dear friend and mentor who was struggling with cancer. I lit a candle for him at every opportunity. He died 5 days before I reached Santiago. I attended the pilgrim's mass with a special devotion for his life and soul.

I wished to listen to my inner voices. I felt I needed quiet and removal to hear them.

To have the daily quiet time and reflection with God as I walked.

I was uncertain. The call came from somewhere but I had no idea why. However I also felt strongly that as I was walking I was honouring the women in my family who had passed on.

Yes - to connect to Mother Earth. To live simply. To enjoy the experience

Intentions to dedicate the challenge to my children, to environmental sustainability and to the loss of (...)

Wanted to connect with all the pilgrims who had walked it before in spirit

Yes - I wanted to regain the sense of wonder I previously had.

Yes, but I wasn't sure what it was.

Not when I started, but soon after starting it became spiritual...

I spent 30+ years in Christian fundamentalism and I was done with religion. I was interested in watching the flow of the universe and her energy around me, however, and through me to other pilgrims and the people of Spain.

To be nearer to my son in spirit, to deal with my anger with God

Yes, to be open to God's leading.

Restart my life and heal my heart...

Yes. I needed to deal with some painful horrible things that happened to me.

Yes. I am a great admirer of Saint James - in short, I sought to be more like him. He walked away from the comfortable life he knew to follow Jesus. I felt I had to step temporarily away from my own life to know Jesus better. Our lives have become chaotic and hectic and the Camino is a great opportunity to think of nothing all day but putting one foot in front of the other, contemplating God's plan for you, and listening for his voice.

Question 3: What did you expect to get from your Camino(s)? In what ways have your expectations been met and/or not met?

While many people travelled with an open mind and without expectations, others wanted to prove to themselves that they could do this exhausting task, some people wanted to increase their spirituality, some people were trying to heal something inside or to make a decision, and some people just wanted the solitude. Some typical responses were:

I expected to refresh my religious beliefs, connect in a simple & direct way with nature, attune myself with my body, shed cynicism open up to whatever the journey presented

I happily unplugged from idle communication, tested and affirmed my physical health and strength, feel like I'm in touch with the Camino and its people

I was able to turn my brain off for a couple of months. Great but it took a long time to turn my brain on again.

I went with no expectations; whatever was supposed to happen would happen - and it did.

I was unsure at the start but knew that I wanted to experience walking everyday feeling the sun on my face, and feeling the energies of the country as I walked.

I wanted a sense of personal completion, as if I was just a step away from becoming who I knew I could be. My expectations were met, and I felt as if I had proven to myself that I could go beyond what I thought I could.

I expected to rebalance myself mentally, and physically, and to take time out to re-evaluate my place in the world. My expectations were vastly exceeded by the experience. I returned home with a clearer mind, a fitter body, and a strong sense that I had over-complicated my life. Today I try to live with greater compassion, less stuff, and a greater sense of focus.

Question 4: Did you travel alone or with other people? Did you meet people along the way that you traveled with?

Most people travelled with others, and many people responded that they met people who they ended up feeling close to.

I started alone and made friends of other pilgrims. I walked with one pilgrim for 500 km!

With my husband

Traveled with my spouse. Met people that we still maintain contact.

Walked with a friend. We walked quite slowly so most people passed us but we did meet regularly with two French women and a couple in their 70's from the US.

I booked with a Camino tour group & travelled with a daughter & sister-in-law. I met many people from all over the world.

Traveled with two other people. Met wonderful people along the way - I still have contact with them.

I went alone but met a woman via a Facebook group that I started off with. I spent a lot of time trying to do my own thing but did loosely walk with five others off and on. My daughter met me and walked from Sarria.

I traveled alone, and met some life friends.

Travelled with my sister, but met my Camino family.

I started out alone and met some beautiful people from around the globe on my way.

I went alone, and I fell in love with hundreds of people from all over the world.

Question 5: What was the most difficult part of your Camino(s)?

People most often described difficulty physically, emotionally, and with relationships. Some examples are:

Physically difficult, emotionally much more so.

The cold on the first Camino, heat on the second.

The physical challenge, which became my greatest accomplishment/joy. Bring on the next Camino! I can't wait!

Emotionally - I felt drained having to be with a group of people that I did not know well. I wanted to be with a close friend or alone. The Camino is so personal, and that's hard when you're with people who don't care the same way you do.

Some of the people I spent time with...

Working through communication with my partner...

Bedbugs, broken tailbone

My travel companion

Patience with my friends

Being sooooo out of condition and doubting myself

Illness. Ran out of money. Blisters.

The physical test of walking the average of 23km per day.

Sometimes the monotony got in my head. Also the physical aches and pains

Physically challenging at first, emotionally challenging until I got into the rhythm, which took several weeks

The physical strain on feet, hips and knees, but I don't think it would have been so life changing if it was not so grueling.

Actually, the most difficult part for me is to come back home after Camino. It is really difficult to take all the values and the rest of it back and to implement this in my life. In that sense, my life became a little painful, longing for Camino and not knowing how to merge this Camino feeling in my life.

Question 6: Did you suffer in any way? If so, how?

The responses were similar to the previous question, though there were more comments about blisters, injuries, etc. Many people reported that they continued to walk even though they experienced injuries.

Where do I begin? Physically my feet. I injured a muscle in my thigh and walked 72 km on it. I learned to listen to my body at that point. My knee...I suffered when I wanted to quit twice mid-way and had to dig deep.

Blisters. Aching muscles. Bad cough.

Physically - blisters, blisters, blisters

Yes, from foot pain, some severe, from a couple of nagging blisters and from bunion pain.

I was injured the first day but continued. I was in pain for three weeks but continued.

Severe dehydration walking up to Orisson. Temps were near 100, and I was drinking Coca Cola, not water. Also left my boots at an alburque, bought new boots, and immediately got blisters.

Using Compeed made them much worse.

Tore my meniscus on my last Camino. But on all others the struggle is mental - "Are we there yet??"

A bit. Emotionally; it was hard being parted from my husband and family for that long. Physically; my muscles took a week or so to settle down.

I got sick immediately & by Santiago had Pneumonia.

Via de La Plata -extreme heat over 40 degrees and food poisoning. Both Caminos provided blisters.

I suffered from very bad blisters but coped with it and it never hampered my intention to finish the walk.

Severe blisters, severely painful and swollen knee joints

Question 7: What surprised you along the way?

Answers tended toward the beauty of the landscapes, the generosity of the spirits, and how much stronger people were than they had known.

Many things - the warmth of fellow pilgrims and people who live along the way, the beauty of the countryside, the effect of long distance walking on introspection - lots of other things too, but these are the main surprises.

How much my endurance and stamina increased; what was so difficult in the beginning was so easy by the end.

I never got tired of the beauty that surrounded me. I am a city girl, so I was surprised at how the details of the nature that surrounded me.

The beauty of northern Spain, the hard-working Spaniards.

The beauty of the country and coast. The friendliness of fellow pilgrims (generally!). The fact that I was physically and emotionally capable of walking the Camino!

The kindness of strangers.

I can do what I put my mind to.

How hard it was and how joyful it was.

Everything. The joy. The Spanish people's long suffering patience. Fellow pilgrims. The landscape variations.

My strength and stick ability.

Sunrise and shadows, rainbows, my own resilience; the kindness of strangers; many conversations about God with strangers.

The people. The warmth in their hearts. The openness and the stories I heard.

I thought that I would be a solo walker and dip in and out of company with others. I was very surprised that I became part of a "Camino Family".

Question 8: What was the most fulfilling thing about your Camino(s)?

Answers were most often about a sense of accomplishment and relationships, Some typical responses are below:

At the end of each day no matter how hot, exhausted and painful you may be - the way you feel about yourself after you shower and set up your bedding is amazing when you reflect on your day - you just cannot get over how well you did.

I was able to forgive myself.

Coming to the realization that I like myself, which I never did, not since I have memory.

Changing the relation with my wife in the most positive manor after my return back home.

The sense of being on a spiritual journey, and the sense of peace, as well as the knowledge that we can do extraordinary things by placing one foot in front of the other for a million steps.

The feeling of accomplishment in completing such a long trip.

Learning more about myself.

I now know I can do anything.

Finding out more about myself.

Finishing it and the people that we met.

Finding out I'm stronger mentally than I thought I was.

I see God's presence all the time. I noticed that He was always there whenever I needed Him and continue to see this in my life today four years later.

Feeling a part of centuries old tradition and learning about myself.

Finishing. Realizing I could do something so big on my own. It changed me in ways I couldn't realize until months later.

The change in how I wanted to interact with people.

The camaraderie and people. Our mutual struggles. Our simple humanity.

Again the people. There were so many that were kind and helpful. I was feeling way too cynical about others when I left. I trusted few, but on the Camino I trusted everyone and that is such a peaceful feeling.

Question 9: What did you learn from your Camino(s)? In what ways did your Camino(s) change you?

The responses tended to follow similar themes as previous questions, though they seemed to reflect a gaining of wisdom. Several people found they needed to change their work lives, down-size their possessions, and be kinder to others. Some examples follow:

I found that I was able to form friendships in a way that I hadn't since I was much younger, for example at school. I found that people came to rely on me, and I on others. I learned, or had reaffirmed, that there are a lot of good people in the world. I gained a lot of confidence in myself.

My priorities changed somewhat. I know I'm stronger now, that I can rely on myself and not be dependent on others. That life is short and I need to be making the most of every day, not always with big things, just whatever I'm doing, do it well with dedication. To simplify, to try to declutter at home, that I can live with what I can carry on my back. Mostly, I learned to not be so afraid of the weather, that I won't die if I get wet. I learned that I can appear in public without face makeup, and I won't self-destruct. I learned that I can sleep in clothes other than pajamas. I learned to look after my body as well as possible so that I can stay active longer and walk more Caminos.

I changed the work I do, focusing now on how you can be present while moving, personal development (using skills from my previous work in a new way)

I learnt that material things don't make you happy, that we can survive with very little and be happy with that. I think that the Camino has made me more mellow; I don't sweat the little things anymore.

I think I have a different perspective on challenges that come my way now. I feel more confident in God's providential care in even the most seemingly small events of my life.

I learned to breathe... to enjoy the beauty in simplicity. I'm changed in too many ways to count.

I learned just how capable and strong I am. It gave me a major closeness with my husband. Drew me closer to spirit and my family.

I worry much less. I think before jumping in and saying yes. I do more of what I want to do rather than following the crowd. I honour myself much more, but I think that I am kinder, offer assistance to others more readily than before. Do not be fearful. Trust that it will always be ok.

A strong need to integrate my Camino experience with my life: Life is a Camino and We are all pilgrims. The Camino truly provides. Just be where and when I am. Even very big problems can be solved a step at a time. Became active in some local charity and ecology organizations, including one helping those wanting to make their Caminos.

I learn that I don't need much in my life. I reduce my wardrobe and spend more times with my love ones. I learn that it doesn't matter race, religion, culture, beliefs, sexwe are all humans.

All things are possible with faith. Stronger faith.

I learned that coincidences are not coincidences. I learned that I am guided. I learned that whatever happens, I can always walk the Camino, as long as my feet allow me.

That I can forgive.

We can make powerful connections with people and make new friends, no matter what age we are.

It accentuated my connection with nature, being greeted most mornings by happy road side poppies & the cuckoo's call. It certainly enforced my spirituality. I would greet Kitchi Kinew (the eagle my spirit guide), Kitchi Manitou, the creator, Kitchi Musqua, my clan family & mishowmish, the grandmothers & grandfathers. This greeting did not start till about a week in. The poppies & cuckoo were from the start. Interestingly, after a while, I noticed that every time I had a decision to make, a magpie would come by & stay with me until I had made the correct decision!

It made me appreciate people more. It also made me appreciate other cultures. I became more confident in myself because I knew I could do anything I set my mind to. I became so thankful for the body that God has given me. I knew that God was the only thing that got me through it, so I became closer to Him in prayer and devotion.

That every day is new start full of potential & opportunity.

I'm already a minimalist, but my life is even simpler Post Camino. Also, I have a deeper appreciation for my siblings and mother.

That I am part of a great wave of redemptive people on the earth; that I am capable of doing great things for others in small ways.

It welds itself to your personality, it becomes a reference point to look back to if you're having a difficult day, it adds so much more than it takes and is a gift for life.

Showed me the importance of love and spirituality. Made me realize what is important in my life.

Deepened my belief in myself.

Peace. I am much happier.

Question 10: What would you like to add that has not been asked?

When responding to this question, people interpreted it in different ways. Some people gave ideas for questions that I should have asked, and other people took an opportunity to provide critique of the survey. Many people talked about their desire to return, and many people talked about how people at home are unable to understand the power of the experience. Some people talked about their dissatisfaction with certain other pilgrims, the lack of toilets, and so forth. Another common theme (that I wish I had explored more!) was that some people experienced a bit of depression or let-down after their Camino. Other people opened up and shared in a deeply personal way. I hope these selected comments add something richer to your understanding of the Camino experience.

People should be more respectful of the environment (toilet paper and other waste). I wouldn't leave trash in my backyard, so pilgrims should not leave it in Spain. I like the idea (seen on a sign in Astorga): the tourist demands, the pilgrim thanks.

For Americans the Camino is a pilgrimage in Spain. In Europe I would guess people see it bigger than Spain. There is a huge difference in experience between walking the Camino in Spain or the paths leading up to it.

The Camino experience is hard to explain; I cannot wait to do my next Camino.

It is hard to verbalize all that happened on a spiritual plane.

Not to listen to all the "rules" spouted as to how to walk, carry, where to stay etc. That was my most negative experience. People who assume they have all the answers as to how to be a pilgrim should be avoided.

It was only after recovering strength, and in the following months after returning home, that the beauty and power of the experience began to affect me strongly, so strongly that within a year I wanted to return ... What I did learn was that the effect of lengthy periods of time spent in walking, especially on the Meseta, and the exhaustion that would set in late in the day after the first ten days or so when the adrenaline and novelty had been used up, were perfect for emptying the mind of thought and enabled me to just be when and where I was. Later along the Camino, great experiences of receiving and giving help lift my somewhat jaded attitudes to the human race and made me feel much more together with them, and especially together with the other pilgrims. I wish I had made my first Camino at a younger age, so that it could have affected me earlier in my life. I was able to accomplish in a matter of days on the Camino more than I had been able to in years of daily meditation...

It has been the most fulfilling thing in my life.

You don't need to be religious to have a spiritual journey.

It was a significant turning point in the middle of my life and changed my view of myself.

Pilgrimage is an excellent and universal spiritual practice, but not a complete spirituality -- for some it's a boutique spirituality, Christianity, Buddhism, Franciscanism "lite." It can provide extended access to spiritual opportunities and companionship free of dogma, but ideally it should invite pilgrims to more substantial communities and theologies.

The Camino has stayed with me. I feel changed, but it's hard to put into words.

The Camino is not for everyone. You have to be ready to delve deeply into yourself, your psyche, and learn to accept and love yourself for who and what you are in the moment. The Camino is all about being in the moment, being fully aware at all times what you are doing and why. So much our lives are spent in a state of suspended animation. You are fully alive while walking the Camino, but you have to be open to the experience and willing to let your soul fly.

It is so hard to bring such a huge experience back to regular life and to share with others in a meaningful way. Months later, I still feel changed and my family sees it as an accomplishment that is now put behind me. I took the hospitalero training as I would like to give back to the Camino community.

Many people are called to the Camino. Many of us had very similar experience. I can tell who has a calling and who is not. There is a connection those who are called - we don't understand why we are chosen, but we know that we were. When I talk with people about the Camino, I can tell who is called. They are compelled to learn and ask many questions. Those not called want a one sentence summary of the experience.

Advice to others: I would recommend the Camino to people who are in times of transition, or looking for clarity about some issue of concern. I wish I had walked the Camino when I was younger and looking for answers. I suppose it is a good thing that I returned from my Camino feeling that "all is well" in my world.

The experience did, in fact, help me to reconnect with myself and my values, and gave me the strength to make major changes in my life.

This kind of pilgrimage would be much better for criminals to change their lives instead of prison time.

A few days before my husband's death he asked me to go to Santiago again for the both of us. I couldn't even think about it, and I didn't make a promise. After 1 1/2 years I had a feeling: I have to go. The feeling didn't go away, so I went. I cycled for our love, for him, and for myself. It made me stronger. It feels like a posthumous, big gift from him.

What would you do to improve your experience? Not taking mobile phones for start would be great!

I have to say that my Camino experience was "an experience of a lifetime" for me! Although I've traveled and seen a lot of the world just putting a pack on my back and walking 730km all the way across Norther Spain just DID something TO ME! One of the first questions asked on this survey was "how did you feel immediately after you hiked the Camino" I didn't really answer it accurately because to tell you the truth I felt "low". I was VERY sad that it was OVER and I wanted to go back and do it AGAIN IMMEDIATELY! I just didn't want it to end! :-)

The Camino has inspired me to find my artistic side again. This has brought me much inner peace again.

The Camino is the most remarkable thing I have ever done. I cannot narrate my experiences without getting emotional. Standing in my front yard telling the mail lady about my trip and tears start running my face.

While the Camino is difficult, coming home is even harder.

I did get a two week depression after the last Camino.

...I got depressed during and after and spiraled into despair because the plan I made did not result with my intended outcome.

The world's leaders all need to walk the Camino together. Perhaps if they together experienced pain, fatigue, thirst, hunger, and the freedom of the Camino they might be more aware of real human values.

For me it was not life changing but more life enhancing. I would do it again if I could.

I know that by walking the Camino - God was preparing me for my mom's death. He knew that I needed a deeper relationship with Him and my Catholic faith in order to manage the grief of her death.

I began 'broken' and discovered that the healing I needed, came in imperceptible moments of beauty, solitude, prayer, companionship and the simple rhythm of walking. I could not have asked for more than I received.