

Medieval Guide Book

The 12th century guidebook *Liber Sancti Jacobi* (*Book of St. James*) described some of the dangers that the pilgrim faced including

- Thick forests.
- Mosquito infested marshes.
- Wild animals.
- Impassable rivers.
- Undrinkable water.
- Disease.

Diseases in the Medieval Period

- In early 1348, a bubonic plague spread from Asia to Europe carried by ship. By mid-year the Black Death had reached England where people died within four days of infection. In the next 30 years about half the population was wiped out. Victims ranged from peasant farmers to the Archbishop of Canterbury.
- Wearing rough wool against the body caused various skin diseases.
- Diseases of the intestinal tract and scurvy were caused by the lack of fruit and vegetables in the diet.
- Harsh winters and draughty houses led to cases of fatal pneumonia.
- During the hot summer, lack of proper sanitation facilities made typhoid a problem. Leprosy was rampant throughout Western Europe and leper colonies were numerous, for example in the 11th-13th centuries there were 2,000 such colonies in France alone.

Personal Safety

- For safety reasons, pilgrims tended to do the journey in a group. After the 11th century virtually no pilgrims travelled alone along the Camino.
- Although punishments for attacking pilgrims were very harsh, it did not stop pilgrims being attacked by robbers and bandits. In northern Italy the problem was with German robbers, in northern Spain on the routes to Santiago de Compostela they tended to be English pirates.
- There were many stories of pilgrims who were robbed or even killed.
- On the road south from Saintes in France to the Pyrenees, professional thieves dressed as pilgrims or even priests in the hope of gaining the friendship and confidence of genuine pilgrims.

The Cost involved

- If pilgrims wanted to undertake a long-distance pilgrimage and travel comfortably, they had to expect to pay for the privilege. Poorer pilgrims relied on the charity of people who provided alms along the way. Most pilgrims relied on hospitality of monasteries to make the journey possible.

Language

- If you had money you could hire your own guide and translator.
- At Santiago de Compostela, the priests despaired that '*all sorts of noises and languages can be heard together, discordant shouts, barbarous singing in German, English, Greek and every other language under the sun*'.

The medieval guidebooks offered some help with common phrases but even the most educated of pilgrims could only speak a few words of any language apart from their own or Latin.

Transport over land in the 13th Century

- People travelled overland on foot or on horseback.
- The poor quality paths were badly sign-posted if at all.
- Where roads were well maintained, the pilgrims were expected to pay a fee or toll for their use.
- Even an experienced rider on horseback could cover no more than 50 kilometres a day.

Travel by sea

- The alternative to the overland route was to travel by sea. Travelling long distances by boat in the Middle Ages was not an easy option. As with the overland route, it was also dangerous, extremely uncomfortable and had the additional inconvenience of being very boring.
- In addition to the obvious threat of shipwreck, there was also the problem of piracy.
- Accommodation was basic. Pilgrims were crammed into small boats where they hardly had room enough to turn over in their sleep.
- The ships were rat and flea infested. Animals brought along as a source of fresh food sometimes broke free and trampled on the paying guests!

Accommodation

- Medieval pilgrims were mainly from the middle class as going on pilgrimage was expensive and meant taking time off work and paying for food and accommodation along the way.
- According to custom, pilgrims were entitled to free food and a roof over their head. Providing this service was the responsibility of the Church and, in particular, the monasteries.
- On the busy pilgrimage routes it became impossible to accommodate everyone in the monasteries, so smaller hospices were built and run by small groups of monks.
- By the middle of the 12th century so many hospices had been built on the routes to Santiago de Compostela through France and Spain that one hospice was rarely more than a day's travel from the next.
- The quality of the hospices did vary considerably. Not all hospices provided food and usually only the very poorest pilgrims received alms. Beds were a rarity and most pilgrims had to make do with a straw-covered floor.

- For the richer pilgrim, there was always the possibility of staying at an inn. However, the standard of comfort was usually much lower than a rich pilgrim was used to at home. People were expected to share a room with a number of other paying guests.
- The innkeepers of the Middle Ages did not have a good reputation. They were often accused of cheating the pilgrims with high prices for poor quality food and flea infested beds.

Advertising

- Churches competed to attract pilgrims by using a range of different 'advertising' techniques. Packaging the product was very important, with vast sums spent on the elaborate decoration of shrines and magnificent reliquaries.
- Pamphlets were written which listed the miracle 'track record' of the local saint; jingles and rhymes were composed and preachers were employed to drum up interest amongst passing pilgrims.

Relics

- Relics are holy objects associated with Jesus or the saints. The motivation for most pilgrimages was to see and touch something holy and consequently benefit from being in contact with it.

There are two types of relic

- The first kind were called **brandea** and were the most common kind of Christian relic in the centuries immediately following the death of Christ. These were often ordinary objects that had become holy by coming into contact with holy people or places.
- The second kind of relic that became common after the 7th century was **bodily relics**, these were actual pieces of the body of the saint: a bone, a piece of hair, the head etc.

Reliquaries

- As long as a relic was never moved or stolen, there was less of a problem in guaranteeing its authenticity.
- In 1215, the Church decided that to minimise theft, all relics should be stored and displayed in a special box, a 'reliquary'.

In 1255, it was further decided that under no account should relics be removed from their reliquaries.

Ships

In the 13th century boats were still being built in the *Scandinavian tradition*. This tradition went back to Viking ships. Typical features of the Scandinavian tradition were

- A single mast.
- A square sail.
- The boat is double-ended with strong curves at bow and stern.
- One main deck.

- By about 1300 a type of boat called a cog began to replace the traditional boats. The cog was a wide and spacious cargo boat, when compared to the traditional boat. Raised structures (like a turret) at the bow, called the forecastle, and at the stern, called the sterncastle were introduced. These were designed primarily for defence but also provided the only covered accommodation on board.

In the 15th century, a ship called a carrack was developed in the Mediterranean (Christopher Columbus' flagship *Santa Maria* was a carrack). Features included

- Usually three masts.
- Fore and main masts with square sails.
- A high rounded stern.
- A forecastle and sterncastle.
- Greater weight (making them more stable in rough seas).
- Spaciousness (below deck, room for crew, passengers, provisions and cargo).