

On the Santiago Pilgrimage Way "Via de la Plata" 2023

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Yes, I am happy, grateful, humbled, and also amazed at the sheer numerical figures of this journey: From Easter Tuesday to Pentecost, I made a pilgrimage for almost **50** days, covering a total of about **1200** km and about **2,000** meters of altitude walking from Sevilla to Santiago de Compostela, Spain on the Camino Finisterre via Muxia to the so-called, "end of the world". Now I've been back in Coesfeld for almost two weeks and still, it will take a little longer time for me to arrive here again.

Since 2004, I had the chance to walk multiple times on the most diverse caminos (pilgrimages), preferably in Spain. I worked in hostels and was thus able to experience the pilgrimage in the reception and care of many pilgrims. My motivation was to give back to the pilgrimage something of what it had given me.

A time away, a donated time of three months now gave me the opportunity to take the *Via de la Plata*, The Way, which was built by the Romans already before the birth of Christ, as a trade route from the south of Spain to the north.

What was the Via like and how did I experience it?

When I had to wait all alone in front of an inn, an elderly gentleman came up to me and said: "Signora sola?" I replied, "Si, senior." Oh, Mama mia," he said, with a questioning and thoughtful look. Then he took my hand and signed a cross on my palm. A touching encounter that I often thought about when the path became difficult or rocky and the stages long and exhausting. And yet, the Via is magnificent, making a deep impression on me, incomparable with my other Caminos. Its rugged beauty, the infinite expanses, where walking for hours you can see heaven and earth touching.

In reality, the Via lacks any so-called "comfort - pilgrimage" which offers basic conveniences. There were the long gravel roads, the vineyards to the left and the olive groves to the right, the giant pastures with flocks of sheep and cows, the numerous cork oaks, and the splendor of flowers in spring. I had probably come during the best season. Then there were the small villages with few lovely inhabitants and the simple hostels, often equipped only with the bare necessities. In the big cities of Sevilla, Merida, Salamanca, and Zamorra, life was raging, just like in Germany. Magnificent cathedrals and churches (which I of course looked at and marveled at), plus the palaces which dominate the cityscape for lovers of artworks of great importance. I, nevertheless, was attracted by the Via itself.

The Via does not want to be admired; it wants to be recognized for its own beauty. It took a few days for me to recognize it, and then it didn't let me go. It burned itself deeply into my soul.

I just say THANK YOU, also for the fact that I needed neither a doctor nor a pharmacy, and for the fact that my rain cape remained in my backpack until I reached home.