

Lifted by the Weight of Words

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The Camino provides us the opportunity to adopt a new daily spiritual habit, such as journaling, prayer, meditation or scripture readings. One cannot live on bread and hiking alone!

Reflecting on my state of mind during each of my Caminos, I recall several approaches to enhancing my spirituality. Although the popular advice is to carry less, I couldn't resist sneaking something small into my backpack to remind me to do a spiritual practice each day. Instead of weighing me down, these tools spiritually lifted me up!

On my first Camino, I wanted to embrace the pilgrim lifestyle, so I focused on the bonus material in the guidebooks. I found John Brierley's "Camino Portugués" guide packed with historical and spiritual aspects of the route. Most notably, "the best kept Santiago secrets and little visited Monte Santiaguíño." "Camino Portugués My Way," which I purchased at the famous Livraria Lello bookstore in Porto, had fascinating tidbits but was a little bulky, so I did a pilgrim hack to reduce the weight.

For my second Camino, I enjoyed pulling a daily reflection card from "The Way of St. James" deck, purchased in Santiago. Continuing this

daily card tradition on my third Camino with the "Sacred Traveler" deck became a fun icebreaker. I had pilgrims I met pull a card while I read comments from the accompanying app. To reduce bulk, I brought only one card for each day of the Camino Primitivo.

In 2018, I'd committed to read scripture daily through the "One Year Bible" reading plan. Having made copies of readings for the month I was to travel and walk the Primitivo, I recycled the pages as I finished each day's reading—lightening my load each day.

For my Camino Invierno last year, I brought Karin Kiser's "Your

Inner Camino." As suggested by the author, each day I randomly opened it and pondered that particular point. I loved the contemplative activities in this booklet and the size—no paring needed!

I definitely think about what I want to work on before each Camino, and all these tools enhanced my experience. But there is also something to be said for just letting go and seeing what unfolds day after day. You can decide if you feel the need to bring a guide, prefer to write your own experiences in a journal or find a fresh way of spiritual connection.



Examples of contemplative cards the author used on the Caminos Inglés and Primitivo.

Next page: Along the Camino Francés in Galicia.
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