

## 4. Do I dare? Safety, fears & concerns

Everyone who goes on a pilgrimage alone for the first time (or repeatedly) for several weeks in a foreign country has fears. This is human and “normal”. It helps to accept yourself with your insecurities and fears. There is a fitting saying: “Courage is not not being afraid, courage is fear plus one step”.

In this chapter, I try to give you answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about the Camino Francés. In addition, if you are going on a pilgrimage alone, it can be a good idea to find a friend/family member/coach at home in advance, with whom you agree that you can contact him/her at any time in emergency situations as a safety net. Just knowing that someone is there to listen to you on the phone if you reach your personal limits along the way can be very reassuring.

But perhaps I can allay some of your fears in advance by going through the following questions:

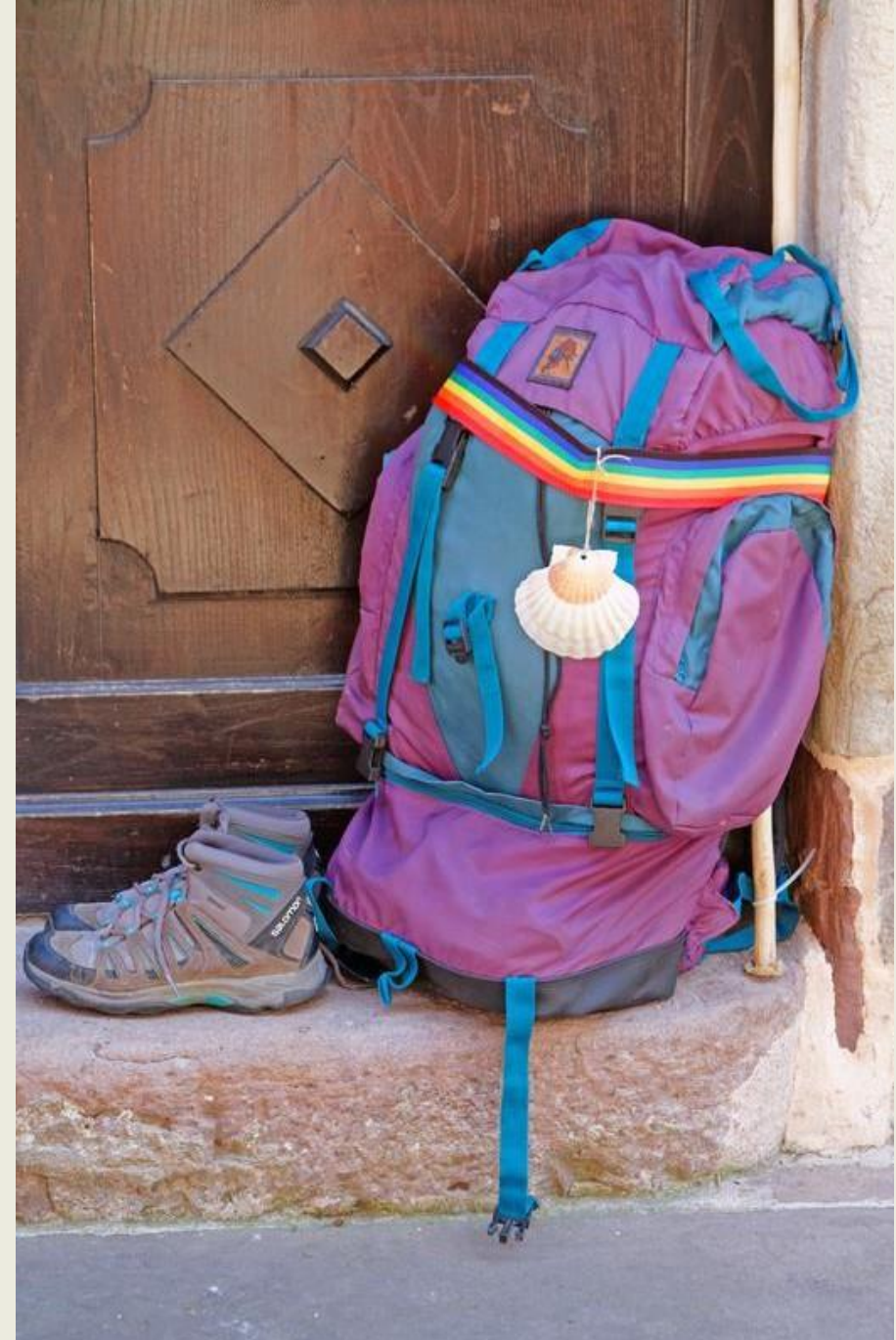
I...

**... am afraid that I won't be able to do the Camino Francés physically..**

Gain confidence by doing a few practice hikes in your home country before you set off from home - ideally with a full rucksack. This will give you a feel for what it's like to be out and about with a full trekking rucksack

and also a feeling for whether you have packed “well” or have too much luggage with you. If your back hurts, this means Reduce your luggage to the absolute essentials

(see also the extra chapter on packing lists). As far as the few really demanding mountain stages on the Camino Francés are concerned, the following applies: walk slowly, take enough water and food with you and don't carry any unnecessary luggage. In addition, there are often options to “split” the difficult stages a little by not walking the entire stage in one day - as suggested in the pilgrim's guide - but by stopping at the hostel along the way and splitting the route into two one-day sections.





**...am afraid of getting lost.**

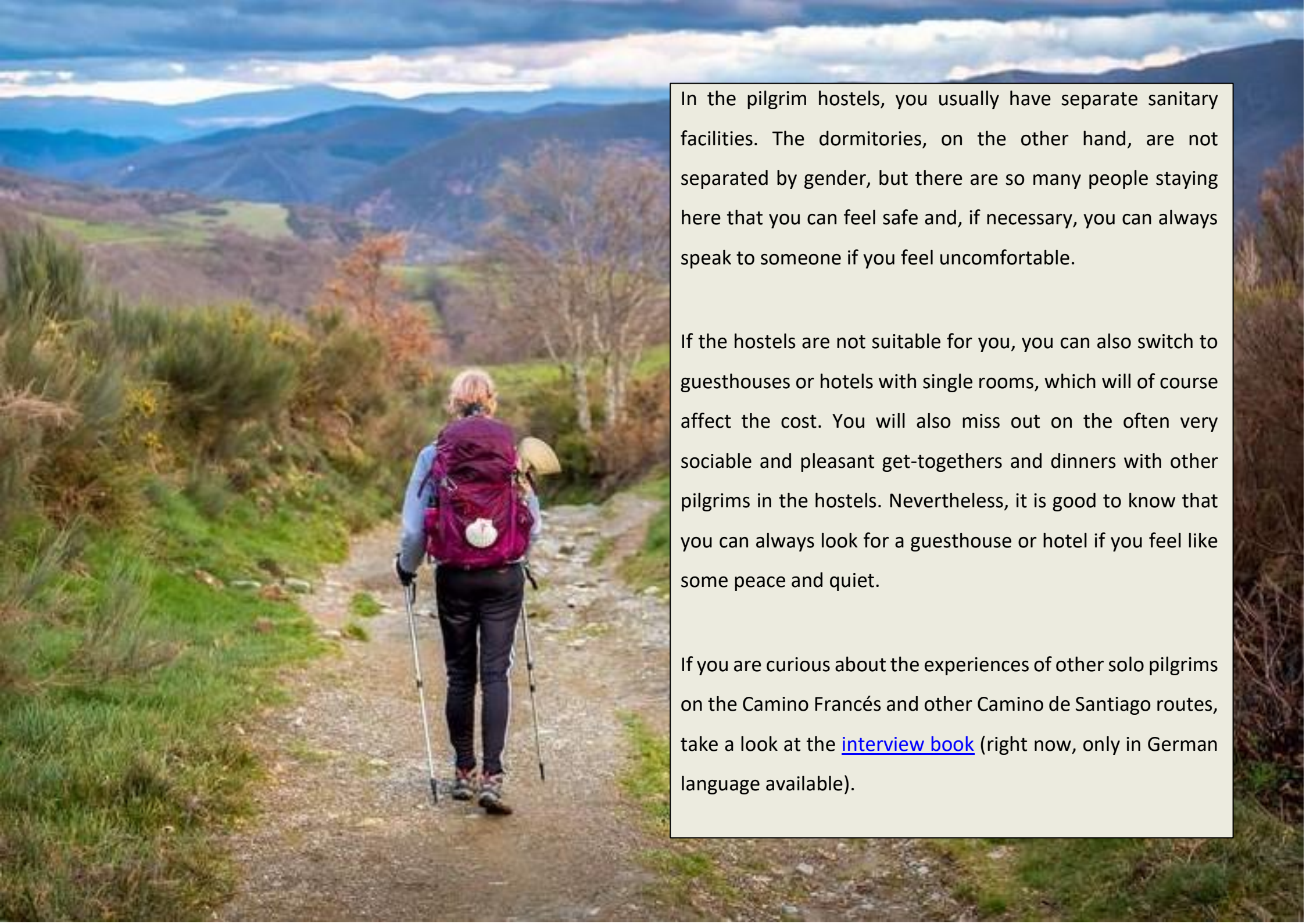
This is a common fear of new pilgrims. As far as the Camino Francés is concerned, however, I can allay your fears: The path is so well signposted and marked that it is almost impossible to get lost. If, contrary to expectations, this should happen anyway, the best thing to do is to take a deep breath and slowly walk back and get your bearings until you are back on the Camino.

**...am afraid to walk the camino alone as a woman.**

More and more women are walking the Way of St. James alone. You will quickly make friends along the way, as many pilgrims are traveling alone and are therefore generally open to contact. Alternatively, you can also take a good friend with you and you can always split up on the way and each go on your own pilgrimage and then meet up again in the next town, for example.







In the pilgrim hostels, you usually have separate sanitary facilities. The dormitories, on the other hand, are not separated by gender, but there are so many people staying here that you can feel safe and, if necessary, you can always speak to someone if you feel uncomfortable.

If the hostels are not suitable for you, you can also switch to guesthouses or hotels with single rooms, which will of course affect the cost. You will also miss out on the often very sociable and pleasant get-togethers and dinners with other pilgrims in the hostels. Nevertheless, it is good to know that you can always look for a guesthouse or hotel if you feel like some peace and quiet.

If you are curious about the experiences of other solo pilgrims on the Camino Francés and other Camino de Santiago routes, take a look at the [interview book](#) (right now, only in German language available).

**...I'm afraid I won't be able to communicate.**

To give you more confidence in this regard, it can be helpful to learn a little Spanish a few weeks before your pilgrimage. There are now also good apps and other ways to get a taste of a new language in a fun and entertaining way. On my own pilgrimages, I always have a small booklet with me with the most important phrases in Spanish as well as a English-Spanish and Spanish-English dictionary.

Apart from that, you will often get by on the Camino Francés with English, and sometimes even with German: there are always fellow pilgrims along the way who speak English or even German and can translate in an emergency. In addition, the infrastructure of the Camino Francés is specially designed for new pilgrims and “pilgrim tourism”, which makes communication and orientation easier.





**...am afraid of not getting a bed in the albergues.**

Unfortunately, nobody can take this worry away from you. And especially during the vacation season & summer, there can be situations where hostels are full ("Completo") and you are forced to improvise. So what can you do?

First of all, you can choose a travel period other than the high season and vacation period. If this is not possible or in addition, you can usually pre-book a bed in private hostels (but not in public ones) by calling the night before or the morning before and asking.

Thirdly, you should be reassured by the fact that the Camino Francés has by far the best infrastructure in terms of accommodation compared to any other Way of St. James. You really do have a very good choice of private hostels, public hostels, guesthouses and hotels here on the Camino Francés. Also, the distances between the accommodations are often only a few kilometers, so that in the worst case you can get to another accommodation reasonably quickly (exception: the stage through the Meseta).



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Christoph Erkens

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