

“Camino de la Alma”

long distance walking training guide

Howdy! My name is Charis Caldwell. Among other spiritual pursuits, I guide international walking pilgrimages along the Camino de Santiago in Spain. A little over five years ago, I stumbled into long distance walking's healing, contemplative gifts while traipsing across the neck of England, following the famed Coast to Coast Trail. After 200 miles of striding and stretching body, mind, and spirit; six months later, I found myself on The Camino de Santiago learning how to guide pilgrimages. Since then - despite the Covid interruption - I have lead three trips. Currently, my co-leader and I are preparing to guide ten folks along the Camino de Santiago in October. Needless-to-say, I am immersed in the how's and why's of walking as a spiritual discipline. And I am thrilled to be playing a leadership role in the inaugural “Camino de Alma”; or “the way of the soul” (pun intended).

Very quickly, if you are considering walking a day or three days over the Labor Weekend, I encourage you to start walking around your neighborhood right now. Consistency is as important, if not more so, as is distance walked. If you can walk a mile a day, six days a week, yay! Hopefully, you can grow that distance to 3 miles a day, bumping up to one longer walk each week ... 5 to 6 miles once a week. That's a baseline mileage goal.

If you want to feel more present as we walk the Rio Grande pathway from Aspen to Glenwood Springs, upping your mileage will support your spiritual experience. As I have biked the pathway in preparation for this guide, our mileage ranges between 12 - 15 miles per day, mostly downhill. There are, however, sporadic, uphills. Be mindful of that fact. One of the strengths of our trail system is that more often than not there are soft shoulders; which when used, can buffer the impact of pavement walking. The nice thing about pavement is how it provides a mostly consistently walking surface (there are tree root bumps on the pathway).

This a guide assumes a mid June start: or, about 12 weeks from Labor Day.

Week 1: Consistent 1 - 2 miles

Week 2: Consistent 2- 3 miles with a 5 miler

Week 3: Consistent 3 - 5

Week 4: Consistent 4 - 5 miles with a 6 miler

Week 5: Consistent 3 - 5 miles

Week 6: Consistent 3 - 5 miles with a 7 miler (by now most should be average 22 minute miles)

Week 7: Consistent 4 - 6 miles

Week 8: Consistent 4 - 6 miles with an 8 - 10 miler (go for a hike!)

Week 9: Consistent 5 - 7 miles with a 10 - 12 miler (go for a hike!)

Week 10: Consistent 4 - 7 miles

Week 11: Consistent 4 - 7 miles with a 10 - 12 miler

Week 12: Consistent 4 - 6 miles (try to average under 20 minute miles)

With this foundation (go more if you feel called to do so), you should be set for a 3 - day pilgrimage. One of the benefits of pilgrimage is that we walk in community, breaking up the mileage. There also will be guided invitations to pause, reflect, go inward to break up the mileage. Plus! We have all day to walk 12 - 15 miles. If you do the math and training, the mileage comes to about 4 - 6 hours of physical activity. In other words, it is doable!

Soooo, happy walking. Walking is one of the best activities for our bodies, brains, and spirits. There is a reason why millions of human beings across the planet are on pilgrimages right this minute. May we all receive pilgrimage's mysterious blessings and healing!

Buen Camino! Charis