



# Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome



## Planning Resource Pack

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# INTRODUCTION

The mission of the Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome is to inform, advise and support those wishing to undertake the journey from Canterbury to Rome, or any part of it, on foot or by bicycle. All the information contained in this resource booklet comes from our web pages, and is freely available.

We have now compiled all these planning resources into a pdf which can be downloaded to phone or tablet, to take with you on your journey, or to your computer of course, with the possibility of printing relevant pages.

The Confraternity is a small charity whose income, like that of most others, has dropped sharply during the Covid-19 pandemic. This pdf is free, but you might like to donate to the Confraternity (there is a 'Donate' button at the foot of the Home Page of our website), or please consider joining us to receive our regular e-newsletters and our annual printed journal. To do so visit the 'Join Us' page of our website, [www.pilgrimstorome.org.uk](http://www.pilgrimstorome.org.uk).



## Walking the Via Francigena



This major European Cultural Route extends approximately 2000km between Canterbury and Rome and passes through five countries – England, France, Switzerland, Italy and the Vatican State. It ranks with the greatest pilgrim paths of the world.

Walking this route, we follow in the footsteps of millions who have gone before – not only pilgrims, but soldiers, traders, statesmen, kings and queens, and clerics, not least Archbishop Sigeric in 990, whose clerk recorded the stages of his journey back from Rome.

From the seat of the Anglican Church in Canterbury to that of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome, the pilgrim on the Via Francigena walks the North Downs Way to the White Cliffs of Dover, disembarks in Calais, and follows the broad rolling countryside of Northern France, pausing to honour the countless poignant cemeteries of those who fell in the First World War. The path goes onward to the great cathedral cities of Laon and Reims, and through the vineyards of Champagne to glimpse at last the foothills of the Jura with their gorges, cascades and forests. Across to Switzerland with distant views of the snow-capped Alps, and onward through Lausanne and round Lake Geneva to the ever-narrowing valley of the mighty Rhône.



At the halfway point – geographically and psychologically – in the pilgrimage the traveller crosses the Alps with the shades of Hannibal and Napoleon at the Great St Bernard Pass to rest a night at the Hospice where monks have welcomed travellers for more than a millennium. And then down through the spectacular Val d'Aosta, to find the misty waterlands and rice fields of the Po







plain. One of the highlights for many pilgrims is crossing the vast Po river in the launch of Danilo Parisi, who will entertain you with his jokes and his (apocryphal) stories of Sigeric, and then adorn your pilgrim passport with a magnificent stamp. After Fidenza the Apennines present the next challenge, and as the traveller crosses the Passo della Cisa they will glimpse the Mediterranean shining in the distance, and rejoice knowing they have walked from sea to sea.

Now the pilgrim is in beautiful Tuscany walking through the famed landscape of cypresses, olives, vineyards, through glories of Lucca and Siena, up to the landmark heights of the fortress of Radicofani, and into Lazio and so to Rome.

The current “official” route is about 2000km, but it is easily possible for a reasonably fit person to walk it in less than the 90 days allowed in the Schengen zone for non-EU travellers, even without taking variant, shorter, sections (find details on travel in the Schengen zone for non-EU travellers on page 35).

## Accommodation

Many pilgrims come to the Via Francigena having walked one or more of the Caminos to Santiago. It should be noted that the pilgrim infrastructure is less developed than on the routes to Santiago de Compostela, and in France where the VF passes through depressed and depopulated rural areas there are often few places between one evening’s stop and another where you can buy food. However, in France the organisation of the route in terms of accommodation and facilities has improved hugely in the past year or so, and it is a myth that France is a boring “desert” through which pilgrims should speed on a train or bus. Our booklet, published in collaboration with the Fédération Française de la Via Francigena “Accommodation and Facilities on the Via Francigena in France and Switzerland” (available to purchase each spring in the online shop. If out of print in English it can be bought in French from the website of the Fédération Française de la Via Francigena <https://ffvf.fr/boutique/>), and updated every year, will allow



the pilgrim to find a bed for the night on every stage of the journey – from the “donativo” pilgrim host household and the parish presbytery in the “chain of hospitality” to the luxury hotel. In Italy there are pilgrims hostels and religious accommodation (convents, monasteries) virtually all along the way.

See our list and interactive map at

<https://pilgrimstorome.org.uk/accommodation/> and the annually-updated "There is also a free app for iPhone and Android, developed by the EAVF, which lists accommodation <https://www.viefrancigene.org/en/guides-app> (see page

The use of all specifically pilgrim accommodation or the acquisition of a pilgrim discount requires a credential, stamped and up-to-date (see page 15. It is also courteous, and usually indispensable, to ring ahead claim a place. It is also important to let a host know if for any reason you have to cancel. Emails are less likely to be answered than the telephone.

## Language

For this reason, if no other, it is useful and polite to learn a few basics in French and Italian. Google Translate will help you prepare a phrase to use when you ring up and demonstrates the pronunciation for you to learn. Remember that even local people will not necessarily have heard of the Via Francigena. If you get lost. In France a *pèlerin* is usually going to Santiago.

## Waymarking

Waymarking is pretty good, but not the succession of yellow arrows as in Spain (see illustration on next page). In France it is either ubiquitous red/white GR® (Grande Randonnée) flashes, or in some *départements* the little pilgrim with his bundle shows the way. In Switzerland there are yellow signposts. In Italy there is a variety of VF signs: red/white flashes, the pilgrim, or brown and white. It is hard to get lost here.



We are often asked whether it is worth carrying a tent (and cooking utensils). It certainly reduces costs, and in France campsites are plentiful, and some



accommodation will permit you to erect a tent in the garden. Wild camping is forbidden in France, Switzerland and Italy, and the few campsites are usually off the route.

It is not only in infrastructure that the Via Francigena differs from the Caminos to Compostela in both Spain and France. The route is far less known still, especially in France, and therefore perhaps more likely to be solitary. You may – or may not – meet companions on the road or in the hostel. In Italy, especially Tuscany and the final 100km to Rome in Lazio, the route is popular, and it would be unusual not to meet others.

It is not a difficult walk. By the time a pilgrim encounters the Jura mountains they will be walking fit, after nearly four weeks. The Great St Bernard Pass is in reality a long slog uphill with no tricky sections (though unwise in snow: see page 20 on crossing the St Bernard Pass), and similarly the Cisa Pass, the gateway into Tuscany, is not particularly steep.

But any effort is more than amply compensated by the intense beauty of this ancient path and its rich variety of scenery and experience.

***Buon cammino!***





## Cycling the Via Francigena

This section has been revised and updated by CPR member and experienced distance cyclist, Paulo Seth, who wrote a blog on cycling the Via Francigena ([http://eyecycled.com/en\\_GB/index-pages/via-francigena/](http://eyecycled.com/en_GB/index-pages/via-francigena/)).



### Introduction

This covers the main issues for those pilgrims wanting to cycle the Via Francigena. It provides some basic information, and also gives references to books and websites that can supply more detail. We welcome feedback from cyclists.

### Choice of bike

If you are already an experienced cycling tourist you will have made your choice long ago. Newcomers may think of using a mountain bike or hybrid rather than one specifically designed for long distance cycle touring. Think carefully and take advice from friends, colleagues, local cycle clubs, and borrow or hire different types of bike to see which suits you. Type of handlebars (drops or straights), range of gears (range of rear cogs and double or triple chain ring on the front) and tyre type are the crucial choices. If you opt for a mountain bike do fit road tyres which will have less rolling resistance than off-road tyres. Make sure the cycle rack is strong and can be secured to the bike frame at four points. You will need a comfortable saddle – gel saddles offer good levels of comfort, and there are



saddles designed specifically for women. Only by doing several long rides will you really know if your saddle suits you.

If buying a new bike, spend time looking in several shops, and if possible go to a reputable specialist dealer to discuss your needs with the experts in terms of daily distances you aim to travel, luggage weight you will carry, and the need for a good range of gears, for pedalling yourself and your luggage over steep hills, long mountain passes and into head winds. **Make sure you fit a bell and lights.** A good dealer will ensure you get the right size of bike and set up the handlebars and saddle to give you the best position for comfort and efficiency. Do not be tempted to go for the cheapest possible – you could buy a mountain bike for well under £500, but you would pay dearly in terms of pedalling a heavy machine with poor gear ratios and components. Talk with the dealer about what you want to achieve in terms of daily distance, amount of luggage you aim to carry, and your experience (or lack of it) of cycle touring. I would recommend £500 - £600 price range... a used one could probably be found for half of that. These are obviously bikes that are likely to be more adequate to a 2000km ride.

Much also will depend on the distance you will cover, your route, the type of terrain and your plans and budget in terms of lodging or accommodation during the journey. If you are planning to cycle from Canterbury to Rome (nearly 2000 km) you need to consider you'll be cycling for about a month or more.

## Accessories

If you're planning to camp, you'll have to add to the weight of the bike the camping gear as well as kitchen utensils and stove, and the necessities for sleeping in a tent (sleeping bag appropriate for the time of the year, air mattress, etc). The overall setup is very much down to your budget, as the lighter the equipment, the more expensive it tends to be. This may result in having to equip your bike with a frontal rack for panniers as well as a rear one, that is four panniers in total (two in the back and two in the front). We strongly recommend a quick release handlebar bag for important documents (passport, IDs, credential) as well as your wallet and more expensive gadgets you may want to have easy access to (cameras, mobile phone, etc). Think of weight distribution and centre of gravity. Consult more experienced cycle-tourers for advice. Try to avoid the temptation to carry anything you think you may not use and do a few "full-load" test rides of at least 30km to make sure you're comfortable with your setup, making adjustments if needed. Consider attaching a flag pole to the rear of the bike. Even if you don't plan to ride at night, you may have to ride in windy, rainy





and dark hours of the day. Being visible is extremely important even in bright daylight.

**Bags and panniers:** Purchase good quality panniers that are waterproof and have strong fastenings that will keep them locked firmly onto the bike. Get a handlebar bag that can be easily unclipped and has a map case attached to the top as this will make route finding easier, and allow you easy access to sunblock, food, glasses and other essentials on the journey. Do not carry too much stuff – your first practice ride with a fully-loaded bike may help focus your mind on what is essential, and what you can leave out to lighten your load. The author of this article never uses front wheel panniers, even when camping, as everything can be fitted into a handlebar bag and two rear panniers with just the tent and sleeping mat strapped on the top of the carrier. Any cycle touring book will offer advice about lightweight camping equipment and suitable clothing.

## **Bike security**

Secure locks can be both bulky and heavy. You need a compromise that will prevent opportunistic thefts but is reasonably light – a combination lock, for example. If you are going as a pair or in a larger group, each person can have a lightweight lock to secure several bikes together, as well as at least one locked to an immovable object. Most hotels and hostels will have secure storage for bikes. If camping, there is usually some object close to your tent to lock the bike to. Failing that, tie a length of string to the bike and attach the other to a tent pole: any attempt to move the bike will shake the tent and alert you!

If you are going alone, there will be moments in which you will need to lose line of sight from your bicycle to go to toilets or buy supplies, or to obtain pilgrim stamps in churches, tourist information centres and other places. Many panniers tend to have a quick release mounting system, which is intended to facilitate their removal, so one tip is to buy luggage straps at pound shops to tie the panniers to the rack (some will even come with a simple combination lock). They are not effective to protect your luggage for a long period of time but will add an extra level of difficulty for opportunists for short moments.

**Bike maintenance** At very least you need to carry the tools, and have the skills, to remove wheels and tyres, to change inner tubes, mend punctures, adjust brakes and possibly change brake pads. Find a friendly cyclist and ask to be shown how to carry out these tasks and practise them until you are confident you can carry them out with reasonable efficiency. Carry a chain breaker, spare chain links, spare spokes and spoke spanner. Even if



you can't use them yourself many other cyclists will be able to, and most would stop to offer assistance if they see you in difficulty or stranded. There are many good basic bike maintenance guides and it is fairly easy to find classes in basic cycle maintenance and repairs.



**Clothes:** Make sure you have several pairs of padded shorts or underwear to allow a daily change and time for drying. A high standard of personal hygiene is vital if you are to avoid a sore backside when cycling significant distances on a daily basis – a daily shower and change of padded shorts. A small first aid kit with non-stick dressings, a bandage, Elastoplasts, antiseptic creams, Vaseline and pain killers are essential. E45 Cream is a useful all-purpose cream to soothe sore skin, and rehydrate areas exposed to the sun. There are good brands of Chamois cream that prevent soreness. While using padded cycling trousers/shorts (lycra), don't use any underwear while cycling long distances for hours as they will cause friction and irritate the skin. Use a neutral, all purpose, soap that you can bathe and wash your clothes with.

Cycling gloves or mittens provide extra padding for your hands on roads with bad surfaces. As well as a good quality waterproof and windproof jacket, make sure you have enough clothes to wear several layers in wet/windy/cold weather. There are several high mountain passes to cycle over and even in summer time it can be cold in the Jura Mountains, the Alps and Apennines. Remember to carry some clothes appropriate for visiting churches – many have dress codes and will not let you in wearing shorts or sleeveless tops.

## Health and fitness

Cycling such a long distance as Canterbury to Rome needs determination, resilience and fitness. Whilst cycling 70-140km a day as a one-off is not too difficult, maintaining the effort most days for three weeks is much harder, unless you have developed a good level of fitness before you start



your pilgrimage. You need to cycle at least twice a week for some months before your start date. Over a period of a few weeks, work up to your expected daily distance, and then go out several times to cover this distance with fully-packed panniers. Use the bike and clothes you will use for your pilgrimage to iron out any problems. If in doubt as to your general health seek the advice of your GP. Swimming, walking and running will all improve your general fitness levels as you prepare for your journey and, if winter weather prevents outdoor cycling, many gyms have bike machines. Home trainers which fit your own bike are now reasonably priced. You will enjoy your journey so much more if you are not permanently exhausted. Be realistic in your daily distance target and put some rest days into your schedule.

## General safety points

Purchase – and always wear – a good quality helmet. It can make all the difference between minor injuries and a major trauma if you come off your bike, or are knocked off by traffic. Sunglasses are essential in bright sun, and regular use of sunblock will help avoid painful skin conditions caused by sunburn. If coming from the UK cycling on the right can cause problems – first thing in the morning, for example, or when starting after a break and there is no other traffic about. Be vigilant at all times for traffic coming from side roads, for potholes and loose surface gravel.

If you like to listen to music while cycling or may have the need to take or make phone calls during the ride, consider using bone conduction headphones which will free your ears and allow to enjoy your music without blocking ambient noise as your ears are not covered or blocked by conventional headphones.

## Maps and routes

Google Maps will provide cycling-specific directions in the UK and France. Technology will help a lot and it is part of modern pilgrimage, yet a low-tech or offline fall-back option is advisable as technology can fail where paper cannot.

In Italy the Via Francigena cycle route is well waymarked in blue and white, as shown:



## Websites, books and apps

European Association of the Via Francigena website

<https://www.viefrancigene.org/en/bicicletta/>

<https://www.lifeintravel.it/cicloturismo.html>

EuroVelo 5 London-Brindisi [www.eurovelo.com](http://www.eurovelo.com) via Rome, provides a cycle route although it deviates from the Via Francigena. The Rhône route [www.en.viarhona.com](http://www.en.viarhona.com) covers the route from Lausanne to Martigny, mainly on dedicated cycle tracks

Cycle touring club [www.ctc.org.uk](http://www.ctc.org.uk) has a great deal of information and advice on its website. Good for tips on equipment, safety and insurance at very good rates

The Bike Book – Complete bicycle maintenance, Milson. F. (2017) Haynes Publishing Yeovil, UK.

## Blogs

[http://eyecycled.com/en\\_GB/index-pages/via-francigena/](http://eyecycled.com/en_GB/index-pages/via-francigena/)

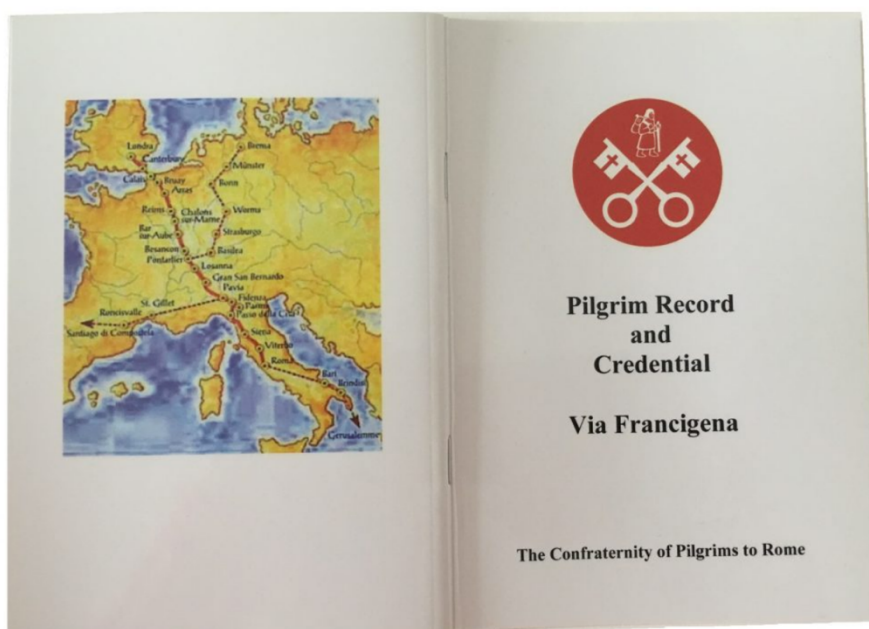
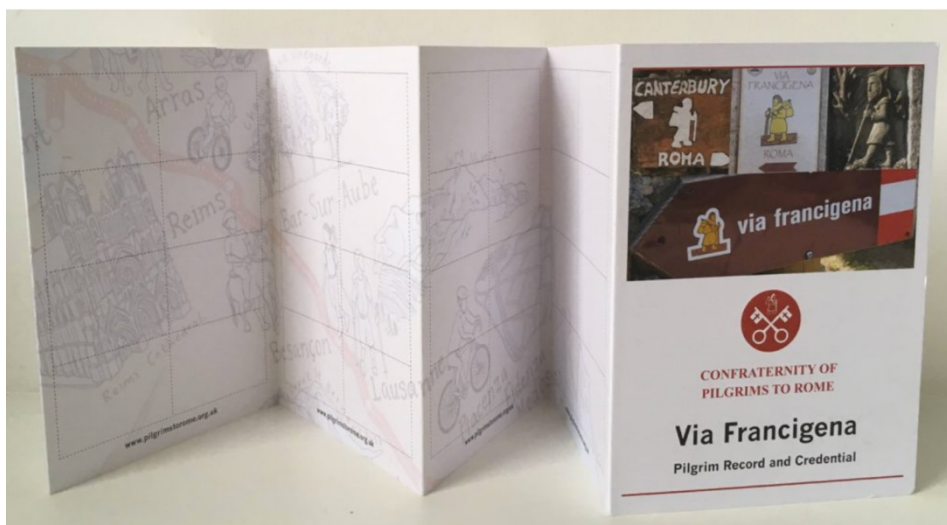
<https://kevinandlinda4.wordpress.com>

<http://rishiandbenridebikes.blogspot.com/au>

<http://www.harlechjoe.wordpress.com>



## The Pilgrim Credential



*The Confraternity's choice of credentials*

The credential, also known as the pilgrim passport, or credenziale is a vital document if you wish to stay in pilgrim accommodation and/or obtain the Testimonium when you arrive in Rome.

Those who have walked any of the Caminos to Santiago de Compostela will be familiar with the concept. You get a stamp in the 'passport' each day (in churches, cathedrals, pilgrim hostels, hotels, restaurants, bars) to prove that you have walked or cycled the route. Unlike the Camino, you do not need two stamps per day over the final 100km.





Much pilgrim accommodation is available only on presentation of the credential. Occasionally this will get a discount in hotels, restaurants and shops. When you arrive in Rome you present the credential and will be awarded the Testimonium, and get the final Vatican stamp in it.

The French for stamp (in a credential) is **un tampon** (verb – **tamponner**); in Italian **timbro** - (**timbrare**).

## Where to get a credential

The Confraternity issues its own pilgrim credential to members which you will receive on joining. This is a souvenir fold-out credential, which comes free with membership, and which has 80 spaces for stamps. Our booklet credential is the only one which has sufficient space to get two stamps a day (only one is necessary, but some are large) from Canterbury to Rome, having 164 squares. It can be bought for £10 from our online shop:

[\(https://pilgrimstorome.org.uk/shop/\)](https://pilgrimstorome.org.uk/shop/).

Pilgrim passports are also available at the information office at Canterbury Cathedral, Kilometre 0 of the Via Francigena.



## The Testimonium

### The Testimonium Peregrinationis ad Limina Petri

This is the certificate (similar to the Compostela) issued to those who have walked the final 100km (opinions differ whether this is 140km from Acquapendente, 100km Montefiascone – where signs abound saying ‘100km ad limina Petri’ – or Viterbo), or cycled 400km from Lucca. In reality your credential is unlikely to be scrutinised with attention.



Updated instructions for receiving the Testimonium (with thanks to Sandy Brown):

- *Testimonia* are given inside the security barriers at St Peter's Basilica. This means you must find a place to store your backpack before you receive your testimonium.
- Back at St Peter's Square, pilgrims with credentials can skip the long security queue by going directly to the first metal detector under the colonnade and showing your credential to the security officer. He or she will direct you immediately to the metal detector at the front of the line.
- After clearing the metal detector, head to the "Coat Check" area (see photo below) to the right of the steps leading into the basilica. There you'll find



another metal detector and a plainclothes guard behind a glass booth. This is where you'll receive your testimonium.

- The guard(s) will stamp your credential (Francesco pilgrims make certain that they stamp the first page of your credential where it says, "Sigillo del Luogo di Arrivo) and will also hand you a blank *testimonium* certificate. They anticipate that you will fill out the certificate yourself, but it's ok to ask them to fill it out for you, which I did. They will also give you a large envelope to protect your *testimonium*.

You can also receive the Testimonium from the **San Lorenzo Pilgrims' Office Ad Limina Petri** (Via Pfeiffer 24) in Rome. The centre is open Monday to Friday from 11am to 5pm (summer time), and the process can be swift and simple. This is useful because you can leave your rucksack here in safety, and there are toilets.

It is also possible to obtain a Testimonium by post by writing to Fabbrica di San Pietro, 00120 Città del Vaticano, and enclosing a photocopy of your ID card or passport, a photocopy of your duly stamped pilgrim passport, your full address, date of birth, the starting place of your pilgrimage, the starting date and arrival date, whether you walked or cycled, and the reasons for your pilgrimage.



## When to go

The Via Francigena is practicable for most of the year, although winter is not necessarily recommended. However, if you are walking all the way from Canterbury to Rome in one go, or are starting from the Great St Bernard Pass, you will need to plan your journey to take into account the altitude and weather conditions at 2473m (8114ft) above sea level. The Great St Bernard Pass is accessible only on skis or snowshoes between (approximately) October, depending on when the first snow falls, and late May or early June, and the only safe alternative for walkers when the pass is snowbound is to take the bus through the tunnel from Bourg Saint-Pierre. The pass is normally free from snow from late May to late September, although snowfalls can occur at night even during July and August (and snow remains during the day). See our guide to crossing the Great St Bernard Pass (below, page 19) for specific details.

If you are starting in Aosta, or further on, in the winter, early spring or autumn, you may be able to avoid the heat in Italy for a substantial part of your journey, although the advantages of cooler weather will be offset by shorter hours of daylight.



## Guide to crossing the Great St Bernard Pass

**We are often asked when it is possible to cross the Great St Bernard Pass. This always varies from year to year according to the weather and snow conditions, which must be taken seriously. CPR trustee Tim Redmond has written this personal guide to crossing the Great St Bernard Pass. Tim Redmond can be contacted at [tim@walkingtim.com](mailto:tim@walkingtim.com)**



I have crossed the Pass twice, and did not find a single site or book which gathered together all the information I wanted, so I thought I would put something on record myself. I was somewhat confused, not knowing quite where the road and the tunnel began and ended, nor what the different options were.

The Great St Bernard Pass, or the Col du Grand Saint-Bernard, or the Colle del Gran San Bernardo (henceforth GSB) is at 2473m (8114 ft) and it is the commonest place for pilgrims walking to Rome to cross from Switzerland into Italy. You can of course walk in the opposite direction.

The highest point of the pass is in Switzerland, but at that point you are just about 200m from the Italian border. There are no border formalities, just a sign at the edge of the road and an unmanned customs post. If you are walking from Canterbury to Rome, the GSB is more or less the halfway point of your journey, depending on your route, at about 1000km from Canterbury.



The pass has been used for a long time and there is evidence it was in use during the Bronze Age. It was important during the duration of the Roman Empire, though Hannibal probably *didn't* cross the Alps at that point (alternative myths, legends and facts are available). Napoleon certainly did.





For the walker, there are essentially three ways to cross the pass:

- On foot on the waymarked footpath
- On the old tarmac road
- Through the road tunnel. You cannot walk through the tunnel; you need to go in a vehicle. You cannot cycle through the tunnel. This blogpost will probably be useful to cyclists <https://tourdetravoy.wordpress.com/2017/05/02/a-grand-day-for-climbing-the-grand-saint-bernard-mountain-pass-from-switzerland-to-italy/>

When is the pass open? The pass is ALWAYS open – but it is not always passable.

The famous hospice of the Canons Regular of St Bernard of Menton is situated at the pass in Switzerland, and has been there for more than 1000 years, during which time it has “never closed”. Canons (by the way) are priests who live in community, but who are not technically monks. These priests staff the Hospice and a number of parishes in the mountains around about.

So, if the pass is ‘always open’, what is the big issue? The big issue is snow, not the altitude *per se*. In 2017-2018 the snowfall during the winter was 18m. It is extremely cold by night and by day, it snows often and it can also be windy and very foggy. The rate of ascent on footpath or road is not a problem for a fit walker and your ascent is over several days.

What is usually meant, I think, when people ask ‘is the pass open?’ is ‘Is the tarmac road open?’ And this is the key. There is an old tarmac road which runs through the pass from Switzerland into Italy. It is a perfectly normal tarred road, with one lane in either direction, which winds gently up through the pass and down the other side. It is clearly well maintained in what must be punishing conditions.

I consider the default way to the pass to be by foot. The footpath is well waymarked with yellow-and-black painted lozenges and frequent signposts. It is narrow in parts and clings to the side of the mountains but is never dangerous or disturbing to people who do not like heights (I am uncomfortable with heights myself). In terms of difficulty I would say that the stretch from Martigny to Orsières, and in particular from Martigny to Sembrancher was much more physically challenging than any part of the road over the pass during the summer.

When there is no snow, the footpath would be the obvious way of choice and it is shorter than the road (because it is steeper in parts and doesn’t meander as much). If you start in Bourg St Pierre, a village with hotels and bars, you cross the valley and walk up on a path on the far side of a large reservoir, with the road





clearly visible at all times back across the valley on the “village side.” You are committed to staying on that side of the reservoir until you come to Bourg St Bernard, the last-named habitation in Switzerland before the pass. There is nothing in Bourg St Bernard except the tunnel offices, and an old and dilapidated and abandoned road café.

So at Bourg St Bernard you finally make your choice. If the weather is good, continue on the clearly marked and lovely footpath, which will bring you all the way to the hospice at the pass, crossing the tarmac road once or twice and past an emergency refuge which is open and which you can visit.

If the weather is poor, because of wind or rain, or particularly fog, or if there is snow on the path which is more than you are comfortable with, you can cross over easily back to the tarmac road at this point. I am grateful to a clarification from Gaetan Tornay on this point. You CANNOT walk on the road from Bourg St Pierre to Bourg St Bernard because you CANNOT walk through the snow galleries (overhead protection from avalanches). So if you don't want to walk on the footpath across the valley, but wish to take the road **after** the tunnel entrance you will have to get a lift or the bus from Bourg St Pierre to Bourg St Bernard.

The entrance to the tunnel is enclosed in a gallery which protects traffic from avalanches. There are kiosks for paying the toll but no other facilities. Bourg St Bernard is also a bus stop and you can get on or off the bus there. The Swiss bus continues through the tunnel south to Aosta with perhaps half a dozen stops along the way in Italy. There is a useful app with timetables. Note that the bus does not operate every day of the week in the winter. You can also hitch a lift. I did this, and despite being old and benign-looking, I waited about two hours in sub-zero temperatures for someone to stop,

If the road is open, you can continue on the road, now much quieter in terms of traffic because most will choose the tunnel. The road is dangerous in winter and is closed absolutely from about late September to early June, and you cannot then drive or walk on it. The exact dates vary from year to year.



The road is opened by being cleared of snow, by heavy machinery, initially leaving walls of snow to right and left. These are dangerous and likely to fall onto the road. Once the road is formally opened, there will still at first be much snow around, but the key is that once the road is officially open it is cleared every day of any snow which later accumulates. It can snow all year around – I had a snow shower at the pass in July.

The photo in this article will give you a good idea of both cleared road and remaining snow. <https://www.rts.ch/info/regions/valais/9624838-le-col-du-grand-saint-bernard-a-nouveau-ouvert-aux-voitures-pour-l-ete.html> So from June to September you are essentially guaranteed to be able to walk across easily because the road is available as a backup in case the footpath is difficult. Or you may simply prefer the road.

So in what sense is the pass ‘always open’? You can get to it at any time of the year by cross-country skiing – and that is how the priests at the hospice travel up and down when necessary throughout the winter. I am not a skier, but I think you would need to have prior skill and experience to do this, and probably a guide.

There is an intermediate time, in the weeks immediately before the road is open, and after it is closed when the footpath may still be passable on foot. You can borrow or rent snowshoes (racquettes) if you plan to walk in the snow. You can rent them from Cristal Sports in Orsières. It is a regular sports shop easy to find in the small town. I understand that you can make an arrangement by phone to be served “out of hours” if necessary, although I have no experience of this.

Here is what I did. I was time-constrained and had to leave Canterbury on 1 April so I arrived in Bourg St Pierre on 6 May. I had never expected to be able to walk across the pass in May and was expecting to take the bus. However, I was in contact with a few people ahead of me on Facebook and I think two couples and a threesome had reached the pass separately on snowshoes during the ten days ahead of me, which meant I was open to trying. But the road itself was absolutely closed.

I decided to stay in the comfortable and hugely friendly, but not cheap, Bivouac Napoléon Hotel. It is at the site where Napoleon and his troops bivvied in 1800. They are knowledgeable about the conditions and were encouraging about my chances. You need to check every day. I also phoned the priests at the hospice and was told it was feasible to attempt the trip on snowshoes next day. The Bivouac gives free loan of snowshoes to guests – you return them to a bar on the far side and they come back with the postman. There is a similar arrangement for Cristal Sports. I had not come upon any snow on any road or path up to Bourg St Pierre, though there was snow certainly on the mountains around. I woke early on the Monday morning to dazzling light through the curtains as it had snowed moderately heavily during the night. There is no bus on a Monday, and it was clearly impossible to walk, so I decided to stay for the day in the hotel. I would decide later in the day: if I couldn’t walk by Tuesday, I would need to get the bus through the tunnel then. There is a nice church and a friendly bar in the village



where you could idle an hour or two. There is even a swimming pool. During the day, the temperature rose and the snow on the main road outside the hotel cleared. I discussed my options and was encouraged to try the next day, so I was loaned snowshoes and practised a little walking in them.

Next morning, I left at 8am and crossed the valley and walked on the waymarked footpath from Bourg St Pierre to Bourg St Bernard. It was not easy but was not *too* difficult. There was snow on the path, and I needed to use the snowshoes for many stretches, though I found them an encumbrance when the snow cleared occasionally. It was very cold, but not windy nor raining and I did not find the cold a problem while I was moving. For that 10km I could always see ahead of me the next waymark. It was difficult at times and on a few occasions, I had to take my own diversion because the footpath was blocked with a mini-avalanche – perhaps a height of 10 feet of snow. There was wispy fog, but visibility was more than 50m. I am a fairly careful person, and I don't take unnecessary risks, and can honestly say I did not feel in any danger for this stage of the walk. I took a 20-minute break at the southern end of the reservoir, where it is possible to cross over back to the tarmac road and where you are at the beginning of the tunnel and from where the tarmac road continues up to the pass.

I continued onward on the footpath and from here the path initially is a moderately steep climb. I went on for another 1.5-2km in increasingly difficult conditions, and two things made me decide to turn back. I sank up to my knees two or three times in fresh snow and eventually came to a point where I could not see the next waymark on any rock or tree. So I turned around and came down again which was *not* extremely easy! However after about 40 minutes I was back at the point at which you can cross to the road.

I rested outside the crumbling café building and rang the hospice. *Absolument non!* I was told when I asked if I could walk up on the road: “Under no circumstances.” So that was the end of that adventure. I waited inside the cavernous, cold and dark tunnel entrance for a lift for two hours, by now shivering vigorously. Two things would have made a slight difference. If I had rung the hospice that morning before setting out, they would have told me not to attempt walking. And having a walking companion for that one day would have made things easier.

And so I got a lift. The tunnel is passed in a matter of minutes, it is only about 5km. The road thereafter through galleries goes down quickly and soon I was in St Rhémy-en-Bosses on a beautiful late spring day. I alighted and stayed there the night.

Epilogue. Another 1000km of walking saw me to Rome and I arrived on 28 June. I had a few days in hand before I had to get back home so I took an overnight bus from Rome to Aosta and then took local buses back across the pass. I got off at Bourg St Bernard, just at the tunnel entrance (though the bus obviously does not come through the tunnel in summer.) And so on 1 July I made my way to the very spot where I had abandoned my journey on 8 May. It was high summer, with



only the last vestiges of snow in deep gullies. The footpath was like walking though the English Lake District in Summer. At the very place where I had stopped and turned back there was a man fishing in a stream and a young couple sunbathing.

I walked easily back up towards the hospice, passing many recreational walkers who had made the day trip to the pass. I visited the emergency refuge and then came back to the hospice where I had changed buses a few hours before. Coach loads of chattering tourists filled the place. There is a hotel across the road from the hospice linked by a 'bridge'. There is a bar and souvenir shop. If you walk the few hundred metres around the lake you come to Italy (and a huge drop in prices of beer, coffee and snacks). There is another hotel on the Italian side. Both hotels are only open in the summer.

I stayed for two nights in the hospice and I have to say I benefited from the enormously generous 100% discount for priests. It is a hugely fascinating place, steeped in history, with a beautiful chapel and another prayer space in the crypt. The crowds at the pass on the Sunday were a little much for me but the Monday was quiet and gentle. Monday night there was a heavy snow and hail storm for about an hour which turned everything white, though it didn't 'stick'. And even in July it was cold at night.

Finally next day I took the footpath back down to St Rhémy-en-Bosses where I picked up the bus to Aosta. Along that final stretch of footpath is possibly the most haunting monument of the whole way – a simple white marble plaque dedicated to an unspecified number of *zingari* ('gypsies') 'consumed in a whirlwind of snow.' There is no date. Not everyone is walking for fun or recreation or pilgrimage.....for some it is a difficult way of life, up to the present day.

## Tips

- Ring ahead to the hospice on the morning of your walk if it is winter. The situation changes all the time and you need the most up-to-date information.
- If possible, walk with another person if you are crossing the pass in winter.
- If your plan is to start your walk in GSB I would strongly advise, whether you are coming at it from the Italian or the Swiss side, to go to Bourg St Bernard, or even to Bourg St Pierre and walk to the hospice from there. It is a stunning and unique walk and during the summer is not physically difficult and it is only a few hours walk. It is quite possible in the summer to continue on downhill in Italy but if you can afford the time and the money I would recommend a night or two at the pass.

Website of the tunnel <http://www.letunnel.com/homepage.asp?l=3>

A weather website in French <https://gsbernard.com/fr/?page=meteo-gsb>

The Canons of St Bernard <http://www.gsbernard.ch/>





## Budgeting for the Via Francigena

There are many things to consider when determining your budget for the Via Francigena. This section will mainly discuss options at the lower end of the affordability scale.

When considering an overall budget, you might find outlining (daily) spending for the following useful:

- Accommodation
- Food
- Kit
- Travel

As discussed below, where you are on the route will also have a significant impact on expenditure.

### Accommodation

It is likely that accommodation will be your biggest expense as a pilgrim.

**UK:** Although it's likely that you won't spend too long in Kent, there are hostel options in both Canterbury and Dover. There are also some B&Bs in and around Shepherdswell.

**France :** In France, the situation is improving year on year, and it is always possible to find a bed with some forward planning. The best guide, which lists hostels, gîtes, B&Bs, hotels, campsites and - importantly - pilgrim hosts (as well as tourist offices and mairies) is the Livret Hébergements et Services\* sold on the FFVF website <https://ffvf.fr/boutique/index..> \*There are some donativo and hostel options but they are not at every stage. This means, if you require a bed to sleep in every night, you will have to rely on gîtes and B&Bs. However, if your French is up to some basic conversation, there are now many pilgrim hosts, often former pilgrims themselves, who offer a bed and usually supper and breakfast, for a donativo contribution, or a modest set charge. You should always ring or email ahead 24-48 hours to book these. Some parts of France are more expensive than others, but on average you should expect to spend €30-40 per person, which will often include breakfast. Some gîtes and B&B owners will be familiar with the Via Francigena and might offer a pilgrim discount.

\*The Confraternity translates and publishes the slim and handy booklet "Booklet of Accommodation and Facilities on the Via Francigena in France", on sale from our online shop in the spring. This lists accommodation for all budgets, pilgrim hosts, transport, food and shops for the length of the route in France.



**Switzerland:** Something that you will read and hear frequently is that Switzerland is expensive. This is undoubtedly the case. One budgeting tip might be to simply run through it. Pilgrim-specific accommodation is sparse to the point of non-existence but there are several hostels that will provide the best value for money. For a hostel place you might expect to pay between 20-40 CHF. For a B&B or similar, prices of 50-100 CHF per person is expected. As is the case with France, it can be considerably more expensive in these scenarios to be a single pilgrim. If you are walking in a pair or a group, your relative price will be lower. It is worth contacting parish priests or pastors as there are often options to stay in parish rooms.

**Italy:** In Italy, you can walk nearly the entire route (with a handful of exceptions) sleeping in a *donativo* (donation) or specific pilgrim *ostello* each night.

There is a huge variety in the quality of this accommodation. It is typically fairly spartan, always shared, but can often be charming. If it is priced, expect to pay between €20-25. If it is a *donativo*, a donation of €20 a night should be considered a minimum, €25 if food is offered. You will see a much discussion about what is considered an appropriate donation. Consider what you can afford and remember that the service cannot function without its expenses being covered.

Of course, there are numerous bed and breakfast options all along the way including *agriturismos*. As a minimum, you might expect to spend from €20-40 per person. More luxurious places can charge considerably more.

If you are attempting the full Via Francigena on a tight budget, bringing a tent and sleeping mat with you is an option that is worth considering. In France, there are several campsites along the route itself, although some parts of the country have much better provision than others. A pitch will usually cost around €10 in France. In Switzerland you will find campsites at almost every stage of the route. They are more expensive (up to 20 CHF) but much cheaper than the other options. It is also worth saying that camping on the banks of Lake Geneva is a charming experience. Camping in Italy is harder and less appealing than in France and Switzerland. There are fewer campsites on the route and they are more expensive. Because of the more developed *donativo* infrastructure, you would often pay more for a pitch than a bed. For this reason it is quite common for pilgrims send their tent back home when they arrive in Italy.

Wild camping is prohibited in all the countries of the Via Francigena. This being said, enforcement isn't always rigorous. Sleeping in national parks and protected areas is not recommended, but you will find numerous spots where you can be discreet and have minimal impact on the environment. Permission from the landowner should always be sought and can usually be easily done. Camping in this way, even if not every night, can save you a great deal of money.

If you are keen on the idea of spending the odd night outside but don't think you will be doing so too often a lightweight tarp and/or a bivvy bag is a good option.



They're much more portable and usually cheaper but they do offer much less protection from the elements and consequently your options will be reduced if the weather is poor.

Cycling pilgrims will benefit from a wider range of potential choices for their accommodation and can almost always go further to find somewhere more within their price range.

## **Food**

Food is a variable expense. It can be difficult to eat cheaply and sufficiently along the way. You might often find yourself in small towns and villages, especially in France, that don't offer much provision.

Often, but by no means always, pilgrim-specific accommodation will offer an evening meal as well as breakfast. In donativos, this should be taken into consideration when making your donation. Similarly, it is worth working out what accommodation provides access to some kind of kitchen. Preparing your own dinner will considerably reduce your costs.

In addition, you will find some restaurants along the way, almost exclusively in Italy, that offer a pilgrim menu where you can expect to pay around €15 for a good dinner.

For lunch, cafés and bars will rarely be absent in Italy and usually offer reasonable value. Pre-prepared food from supermarkets, or purchasing picnic options will almost always be cheaper, though.

If you are planning on camping because of a tight budget, then bringing a pan and a burner will reduce your costs further. There are several ultra-lightweight options and they give you the flexibility to prepare meals for yourself in most circumstances, reducing your expenditure considerably. If you do this, and keep a tight hand on your purse strings, you will be able to set yourself a budget of €10 a day for food, or slightly less. Of course, you would be forgoing some exciting cuisine.

## **Kit**

It is worth thinking carefully about these pre-departure expenses and making sure that you are confident in your choices. If you are drawing up a budget for the whole trip then your kit will be a significant proportion.

Of course, it will be a balancing act between affordability and quality. Do remember that if you are planning on walking the entire distance then the kit that you buy should ideally last you 2000km. There are several opportunities to restock along the way but that can be difficult and cause delay.



Weight is something that can have a significant impact on price, especially with items such as tents. Knowing what sort of weight you can carry is a prerequisite of choosing. Do not expect yourself to be able to carry more than you actually can. If you are trying to economise as much as possible and are considering a tent and cooking materials then your pack will, of course, be heavier. Lightweight tents can cost a small fortune but there are cheaper brands out there that can do the job without weighing you down too much. Try to do your research and decide how much you are willing to spend.

If you have no intention of camping, a common question is whether or not you'll need a sleeping bag. Almost always a sleeping bag liner will suffice (and is usually mandatory in hostels), or perhaps if you are walking in slightly colder months a thin two-season bag. In some of the pilgrim hostels you will find blankets and mattresses but no washable bedding. Purchasing something you can wash yourself will save both yourself and the hostel. Some people carry a pillow case with them for reasons of hygiene.

## Travel

In your total budget you should think about getting to the starting point of your pilgrimage and also returning from where you will finish.

It is always better value to book in advance.

## A final word

It is possible and rewarding to do the Via Francigena on a shoestring. You should ask yourself about how much you plan, and can afford, to spend. A lot of the communities along the Francigena have become reliant on the pilgrim trade. Money you do spend is almost always directly invested into those local communities. In return, that investment will help develop and maintain the infrastructure for future pilgrims.



## Safety for the solo woman pilgrim

### Walking the Via Francigena alone as a woman safely and with confidence

By Kym Wilson (adapted from a longer article in [our e-newsletter number 9, December 2019](#))

Sadly, from time to time there are reports of women being approached or attacked when hiking. This is a rare occurrence, and walking alone on the Via Francigena is no more dangerous than walking in a city. I don't believe fear of this happening is a reason not to walk alone, but it is a risk to be aware of and to be prepared for with tools or a strategy to fall back on just in case. As the Scouts' motto says, *Be Prepared in Mind* "by having thought out beforehand any accident or situation that might occur, so that you know the right thing to do at the right moment, and are willing to do it." This is how we can empower ourselves.

As you prepare to walk the Via Francigena, some questions to ask yourself and contemplate around your personal safety are:

- What do you need to feel safe wherever you are in the world?
- How do you need to resource yourself so you feel confident as you walk?
- What would you do if you were approached or someone tried to attack you?

Here are some suggestions for walking safely.

#### 1. Walk mindfully with awareness of your surroundings

Choose carefully when or if you wear headphones and listen to music as this could prevent you from hearing someone approach, as could losing yourself in thought or day dreams.

Practise being present and aware. Not only will this aid your safety but it will give you a deeper and more complete experience of the places in which you walk using all your senses.

#### 2. Take a self-defence course or do a refresher before you go

This will teach you effective skills to defend yourself and be safe. You don't need to be fit to do this and it's not about learning some kind of Hollywood style Kung Fu moves. You will learn really useful skills that will support you in everyday life and boost your confidence.





### 3. Trust your gut instincts

As you walk through nature, your intuition will continue to be fine-tuned and refined. Listen to your intuition and gut instincts.

Not all strangers are dangerous! Along the way you will most likely meet kind and generous people who want to help you and take you into their homes. Listen to your intuition to discern whether or not you should accept help from a stranger.

If you get a sense it really isn't safe to walk a certain path or route or at a certain time of day such as after sunset or before first light, trust your instinct and don't. You will find another way.

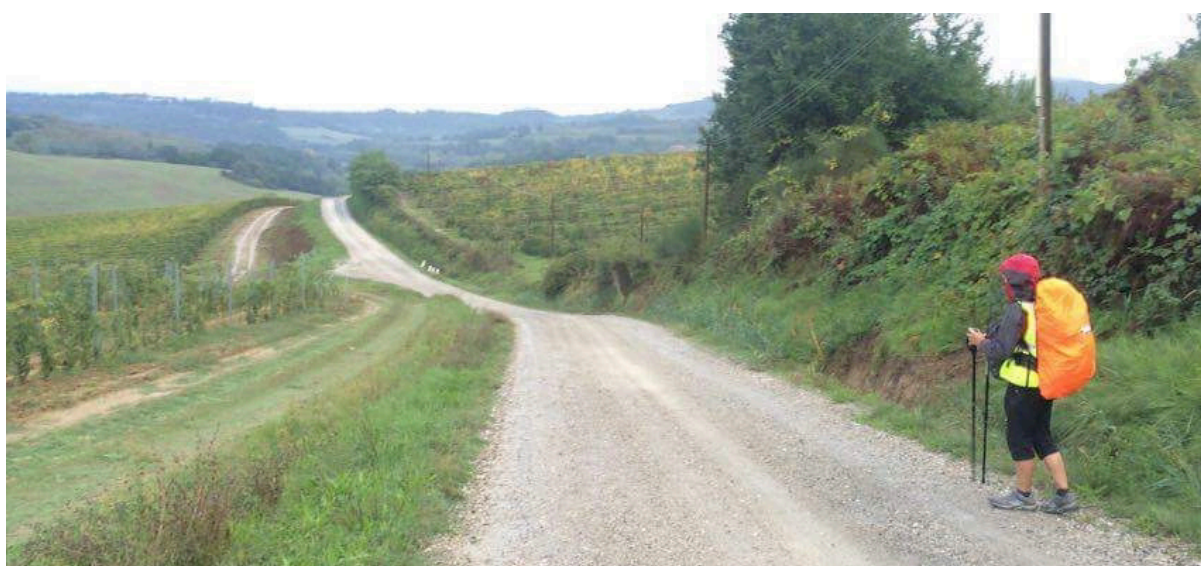
### 4. Pre-programme police and emergency phone numbers into your phone

You never know when you might need them and they are different from country to country.

You can find the different contact numbers for each country in 'The Basics in' section at the beginning of each *Lightfoot Guide to Walking the Via Francigena*.

### 5. Use an app on your phone such as Follow Me or Find My Friends and have someone back home follow your journey

My brother-in-law tracked me when I walked and I had given him instructions that if he didn't see me move for a day to check in with me because something could be wrong. This gave me comfort and confidence that someone knew roughly where I was in the world.



## **Travel in the Schengen Zone for Non-EU Nationals (including UK Citizens) after Brexit**

The Schengen Zone acts as one country in terms of borders and border controls. As long as you stay in this zone, you can generally cross borders without going through passport control checkpoints again. Similarly, by having a Schengen visa, you do not need to apply for visas to each of the Schengen member countries.

Countries of the Schengen Zone include Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic (Czechia), Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Thus when walking the Via Francigena you enter the zone at Calais.

The Vatican City, surrounded by the city of Rome, doesn't have formal border controls. However, you do have to go through a metal detector when entering the Vatican Museums or St Peter's Square, and entry to other parts of the Vatican requires arrangements in advance.

The Schengen Zone covers immigration controls, whilst the EU is effectively a customs union. Therefore, you do not need to pass through customs when travelling between a Schengen and a non-Schengen EU country. The converse is true for travel between EU and non-EU Schengen countries: you must pass through customs if you have goods to declare, but not immigration.

- It is a legal requirement to have your "papers" on you at all times; that is, your passport and your Schengen visa, or visa waiver, if applicable. It is also wise to carry proof of insurance.

### **Travel in the Schengen area for UK citizens after Brexit.**

#### **ETIAS**

The requirement for an ETIAS visa waiver will apply to UK citizens, and the European Travel Information and Authority System (ETIAS) will be fully operational sometime in 2024. The legal procedures to pass the ETIAS started in 2016/ <https://www.etias.info/> and <https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/etias/>.

The ETIAS is a waiver program that will allow citizens with valid passports from more than 60 countries (including the United Kingdom) to apply for visa-free entry into the Schengen Area. It is important to remember that although UK travellers will not require a visa, they will be required to make arrangements with European authorities with sufficient time before travelling, which will mean an online application for ETIAS. At present the estimated cost will be €7 or £6.



Once approved, ETIAS waiver holders from the United Kingdom will be eligible to stay within the Schengen Area, visiting as many countries as they please, for up to 90 days within 180 days. Note: An ETIAS is valid for multiple entries as long as 90 days of stay within the Schengen Area has not been exceeded over a period of 180 days.

Pilgrims walking the Via Francigena from Canterbury to Rome will enter Schengen as soon as they arrive in France. Switzerland is part of Schengen, even though not in the EU. It is entirely possible for most to walk Calais-Rome in 90 days, given reasonable fitness, and still take the occasional day off.

If, however, once these constraints apply, and you find yourself likely to outstay the 90 days, contact the nearest British embassy or consulate for advice.

<https://www.gov.uk/world/france>

<https://www.gov.uk/world/switzerland>

<https://www.gov.uk/world/italy>

The ETIAS waiver application when necessary can be completed online unlike typical visa applications, which need to be completed in person at a consulate or embassy.

## Schengen visas

Visa-free travel to the Schengen area (for eligible non-EEA and non-Swiss nationals) are valid for only short stays (90 days or less within any 180-day period – for all the area). Any non-EEA or non-Swiss national who wishes to stay for a longer period must apply for an appropriate long-stay national visa, which is valid for a particular country only.

The nationals of the following countries do not need a visa for entry into the Schengen Area: Albania, Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Bahamas, Barbados, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Honduras, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, New Zealand, Nicaragua, North Macedonia, Palau, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Serbia, Seychelles, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan (Republic of China), Timor-Leste, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United States, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Vatican City, Venezuela, additionally persons holding Hong Kong SAR or Macau SAR passports and all British nationals (including those who are not European Union citizens).

The non-EU/EFTA visa-free visitors noted above may not stay more than 90 days in a 180 day period in the Schengen Area as a whole and, in general, may not work during their stay (although some Schengen countries do allow certain nationalities to work – see below). The counting begins once you enter any



country in the Schengen Area and is not reset by leaving one Schengen country for another.

## **Interpreting length of stay and number of entries**

We are often asked what happens if you overstay your 90 days. Many travellers have said that they were not subject to a fine, but you can never rely on that, and we always advise you to stay within the law. Pay particular attention to the validity dates and length of stay: make sure to leave before they expire.

If by any chance you fall ill or are injured and have to exceed the 90 days, contact your consulate or embassy immediately for advice. The maximum 90 days in 180 is counted in a moving window of 180 days. If you stayed the 90 days at the end of your previous 180 days, you are not allowed to re-enter before 90 days have elapsed. If your previous stay was shorter you are allowed to re-enter immediately, but have to leave before the recent days of your last stay and the days of your current stay add up to 90 (in the past 180 days).

## **Entering the Schengen Area**

Unlike in most other countries, incoming passengers are normally not required to fill in any additional paperwork to present to passport control officials.

When travelling through a Schengen airport, flights are separated into Schengen and non-Schengen flights, similar to domestic and international flights elsewhere. This means if your flight originates from a non-Schengen country but are connecting via a Schengen airport to another Schengen country (or vice-versa), you must clear passport control at the first (or last) airport you travel through within the Schengen area. When a connection is inevitable, consider the connection times and the potential for queues when booking your flights.

If you are a non-EU/EFTA national (even if you are visa-exempt) make sure that your passport is clearly stamped both when you enter and leave the Schengen Area with all the pertinent dates visible. Without an entry stamp, you may be treated as an overstayer when you try to leave the Schengen Area; without an exit stamp, you may be refused entry the next time you seek to enter the Schengen Area as you may be deemed to have overstayed on your previous visit too. For those who need another visa in the future, the application may be refused or the processing of your application may experience further prolonged processing. If you cannot obtain a passport stamp or the ink is not too visible, make sure that you retain documents such as boarding passes, stamps of passports from other countries, transport tickets, financial documents, attendance records at work/school, which may help to convince border inspection staff that you have stayed in the Schengen Area legally.



## Getting around the Schengen zone

Once you are allowed into the Schengen zone, you can generally travel to any member state without having to go through formal passport control procedures again. Certain uncommon types of visas are exceptions, restricting you to the member state that issued the visa.

When using a plane to travel between two airports within the Schengen area, it will be as if you are taking a domestic flight. Some countries like France, Italy and the Netherlands require non-EU/EEA/Swiss nationals to declare their presence to relevant local authorities even if they arrived from another Schengen member state. This may be done when you check in at your accommodation, but otherwise you will have to visit the relevant authorities yourselves. Consult the Wikivoyage pages of the individual countries as well as the websites of their respective immigration authorities for more information.



Map of the Schengen and EU Countries





## Dover to Calais as a Foot Passenger

**(There has recently been some confusion after P&O Ferries said they would no longer take foot passengers after the end of 2022. This announcement was followed by a swift U-turn, and the Confraternity has had written confirmation that they will continue to do so on some sailings. December 2022).**

Only P&O carry foot passengers on this route, at a one-way price (standard). Cyclists can take a bike at no extra cost. We recommend that you check their website ([www.poferries.com](http://www.poferries.com)) for up-to-date information on this, and other crossing options.

The P&O ferry terminal is 1.5 miles from the centre of Dover (P&O Ferries Ltd East Camber Building, Eastern Docks, Dover, Kent CT16 1JA. Tel: +44 (0) 1304 862539 Fax: +44 (0) 1304 862577). It is probably wise to book if you know approximately what time you will get to Dover just in case there is a large group travelling at the same time. However, the chances are if you turn up at the ferry office you will get a ticket.

You need to be there 45-60 minutes before the boat departs. After check-in you will be taken by bus to go through airport-style security and bag check. The crossing takes 90 minutes. On disembarkation you will again be taken by bus to the ferry terminal office. From there it is a short walk into Calais, or you can get a taxi. It is as safe to walk through Calais as it is anywhere.



## Public holidays along the Via Francigena

### England

1 January - New Year's Day

Good Friday

Easter Monday

May Day - first Monday of May

Late spring bank holiday – last Monday in May

August Bank holiday - last Monday of August

25 December - Christmas Day

26 December – Boxing Day

Where New Year's Day, Christmas Day, and Boxing Day fall at a weekend the next weekday is taken as a holiday in lieu.

\*\* In 2023 there will be an additional bank holiday on Monday 8 May to celebrate the coronation of HM Charles III on 6 May.

### France

1 January – New Year's Day (le Jour de l'An)

Easter Sunday (dimanche de Pâques)

Easter Monday (lundi de Pâques)

1 May - Labour Day (Fête du Travail)

8 May – VE Day (Journée de la Victoire en Europe)

Ascension Day (always a Thursday)

Whit Monday (lundi de Pentecôte)

14 July – Fête Nationale

15 August – Feast of the Assumption of the BVM (Jour de l'Assomption)



1 November – All Saints Day (Toussaint)

11 November – Armistice Day (le onze novembre)

25 December – Christmas Day (Noël)

Where a holiday falls near a weekend (eg Ascension Day) shops and restaurants will often faire le pont (bridge between the holiday and the weekend).

## **Switzerland**

1 January – New Year's Day

Ascension Day (always a Thursday)

1 August – Swiss National Day

20 September – Federal day of Thanksgiving, Repentance and Prayer

25 December – Christmas Day

Individual cantons may have local holidays

## **Italy**

1 January – Capodanno

6 January – Epiphany (Epifania)

Easter Sunday – Domenica di Pasqua

Easter Monday – Lunedì di Pasqua

25 April – Liberation Day (Giorno della Liberazione)

1 May – Labour Day (Festa del Lavoro)

2 June – Republic Day (Giorno della Repubblica)

15 August – Feast of the Assumption (Ferragosto)

8 December – Immaculate Conception (Festa dell'Immacolata Concezione)



25 December – Natale

26 December – Santo Stefano

Local towns may have their own holidays



## A Packing List

One of our members, Vicky Williamson from New Zealand, has provided a packing list from her experience on the Via Francigena. Everyone's preferences are different, but this a helpful basis.



### PACKING LIST IN 35L BACKPACK

- 1 waterproof backpack liner
- 1 waterproof backpack cover
- 1 sleeping bag – 650gms
- 1 silk sleeping bag liner
- 1 X 2L water bladder
- 3 pairs knickers
- 2 bras
- 1 pair running shorts – sleeping (with 1 walking shirt)
- 2 walking tee-shirts
- 1 short-sleeve shirt (merino)
- 1 pair baggy trousers (evening)
- 1 long sleeve merino or synthetic top
- 1 pair walking trousers – zip-off lower legs
- 1 pair walking shoes/boots
- 3 pairs walking socks
- 1 pr light shoes for evening
- 1 pr sandals for shower
- 1 microfibre zip front jacket – optional
- 1 waterproof seam-sealed jacket
- 1 pair waterproof over trousers
- 1 wide-brimmed sun hat
- Sunglasses
- 1 bungee cord style elastic clothes line
- 4 large safety pins
- 1 flat disc rubber plug
  
- 1 cake soap for body, hair and clothes
- Toiletries as desired in waterproof toilet bag
- Microfibre towel 90cm X 50cm
- 1 pack of Compeed
- 1 roll of smooth medical tape, no dressing, for hot spots on feet
- Mug and plate – collapsible
- Small holder containing plastic cutlery
- 1 X 200ml lidded tub
- 1 small sharp knife bought on arrival
- 1 pack of muesli for breakfast.





- Charger, adaptors and cords as necessary for devices
- Carabiners – optional
- Small whistle attached to backpack (emergency)
- Small tin of sweets in backpack waistband front pocket
- Pack of tissues
- Ziploc bags + spare plastic bags for rubbish, etc.
- Journal and pens
- Tablet/Kindle
- Phone
- Watch
- 1 headlamp/torch
- RoadID\* on my wrist
- 1 black satchel holding my passport, money, phone, tablet, sunglasses and carried on my front as shown in photo.

There is no need to take large quantities of toiletries because shops exist along most pilgrim trails. With 1.5L of water in the bladder in my backpack it comes to just under 8kgs in total. I weigh 50kgs so my clothes are smaller than average but there is no way I can get it down to the recommended 10% of body weight!

\*[www.roadid.com](http://www.roadid.com) I highly recommend it as a means of ID if you are in a state that you cannot communicate who you or your contacts and health details if you are (eg) knocked unconscious.



## Taking your dog on pilgrimage



A question the Confraternity is often asked is about the feasibility of walking the Via Francigena with a companion dog. Whilst we appreciate this sounds appealing, we would - for the reasons given below - advise strongly against it.

- The welfare of the animal should be paramount at all times.
- Most dogs are not bred to keep going all day. Even those working dogs which are will likely suffer after three months of constant walking in difficult terrain and in extreme heat. Few dogs relish extreme heat, and it gets very hot - over 40C. Their pads walking over scorching surfaces will be burned, and cut by rough rocky tracks. There is the possibility of snake and scorpion bites, ticks, as well as attacks from other dogs. In the case of injury or illness of the animal there is no option but to wait until they are better, maybe jeopardising the Schengen 90 day limit..
- Veterinary practices may be few and far between in rural areas. veterinary care and pet insurance for trips abroad are expensive.
- The formalities of getting a pet passport (any pre-Brexit pet passport is not valid) are complex and expensive. An animal health certificate from a vet at least ten days before travel in Europe is required. For this a dog needs to be microchipped, vaccinated against rabies and wormed. These certificates will cost around £150 plus all the jabs and treatments. The certificate lasts four months, and is available for one trip only.
- The pilgrim accompanied by a dog needs to carry dog food, a great deal of extra water (one litre of water weighs one kilo). Very few pilgrim hostels will admit dogs, and the same goes for B&Bs and hotels. The pilgrim will therefore have to consider camping, which means including a tent and bedding in an already heavy burden. Wild camping is illegal in France and Italy, and campsites on the VF are few and far between.
- The pilgrim considering taking a companion dog should also be aware that this will increase the likelihood of attack by bovines, and by other dogs - both domestic and guard dogs who will defend their territory, often with extreme aggression.

**Companion animals:** The advice of the Confraternity is against taking a companion animal on pilgrimage.



**Emotional support** animals are not trained to aid their owners, as is the case for assistance animals such as guide dogs, and in many countries owners have found it difficult to claim the same legal protections. The risks to the animal outlined above apply.

**Assistance animals:** The same risks will apply, and any pilgrim needing an assistance animal, however well it is trained, should consider whether a long walking pilgrimage is appropriate.

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### What to do if threatened by guard or sheep dogs

All pilgrims should be aware of how to comport themselves when threatened by a guard dog or a sheepdog. The Maremmas in Italy and other sheepdogs often guard flocks without the presence of a shepherd.

The following is generally accepted advice in those circumstances, but the pilgrim should also make judgments according to the context:

- If you come across a herd while walking or cycling, make a wide detour around where the animals are grazing or resting.
- Be aware of how you act when near a flock. Even if the dog is acting in a friendly manner, what you might think is harmless behaviour (taking photographs, trying to feed or pet the dog, sheep or lambs) can easily be misinterpreted as an attack.
- If you end up face to face with a herd dog act calmly and passively to reassure him that you are not a threat. Do not run away, shout or throw anything at it.
- If the dog does try to intimidate you, turn slowly around and walk away. And if he follows you remain calm and ignore him, he will follow you until he feels you are a safe distance from his flock.
- If you must walk with your dog, keep it on a lead at all times. If your dog is off lead and reaches the flock before you do they are much more likely to cause the herd dog to become defensive. Keep your dog on its lead to avoid any aggressive behaviour from the sheepdog
- If you are on a bike it is recommended to dismount before passing the herd as this is less disturbing.
- The presence of flocks and sheepdogs is sometimes but not always, especially in Italy, signposted. Keep an eye out for the signs and the flocks!

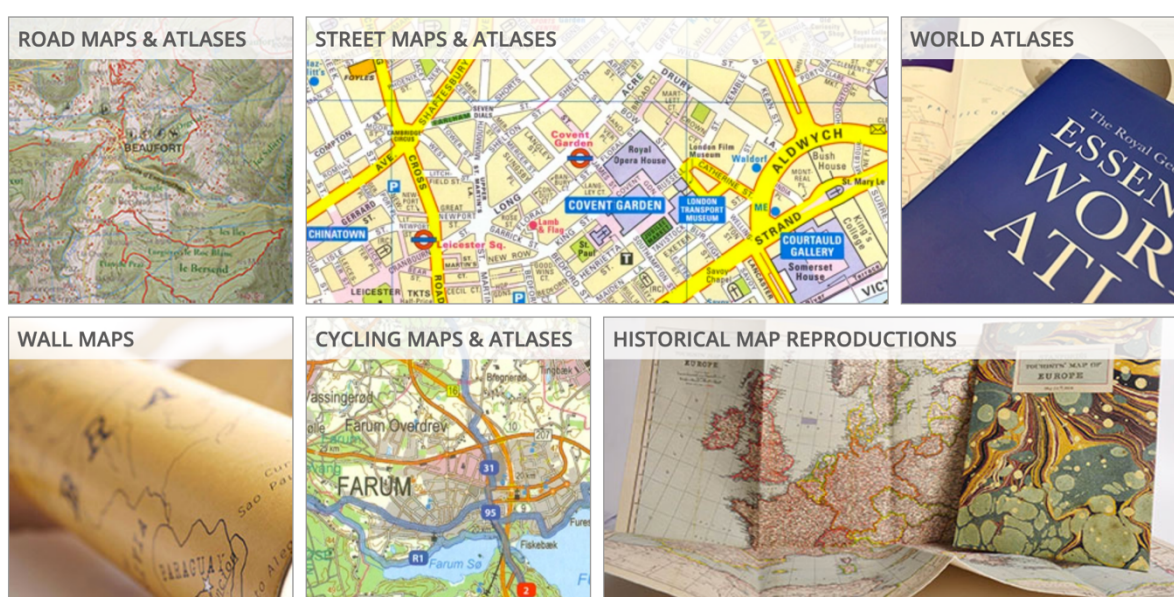


## Maps covering the Via Francigena

### HARD COPY LARGE-SCALE WALKING AND CYCLING MAPS

For those who prefer a real map in their hands, or who like them for planning purposes – and for retracing memories.

All maps available at Stanfords, who deliver worldwide and can print maps specially (<http://www.stanfords.co.uk/>, 7 Mercer Walk, Covent Garden, London WC2H 9FA. + 44 207 836 1321)



### UK

- Ordnance Survey Landranger 179 1:50,000 Canterbury and East Kent
- Ordnance Survey Explorer sheets 150 and 138 1:25,000

### France

- IGN maps
- Stanfords (as above)
- [www.themapcentre.com](http://www.themapcentre.com)
- [www.mapsonline.co.uk](http://www.mapsonline.co.uk)

Cycling maps: [www.freewheelingfrance.com](http://www.freewheelingfrance.com)



## Switzerland

- [https://www.stanfords.co.uk/switzerland-swiss-survey-50k33k-hiking-editions-of-topographic-maps\\_si00000372](https://www.stanfords.co.uk/switzerland-swiss-survey-50k33k-hiking-editions-of-topographic-maps_si00000372) (Special hiking editions of the topographical survey of Switzerland at 1:50,000, and also 1:33.333 waterproof and tear-resistant hiking maps.)
- [www.myswissalps.com](http://www.myswissalps.com)
- [map.wanderland.ch](http://map.wanderland.ch)
- [www.swisstopo.admin.ch](http://www.swisstopo.admin.ch)

## Italy

- Kompass 50K hiking maps
- Stanfords (as above)
- [www.themapshop.co.uk](http://www.themapshop.co.uk)
- [www.traildino.com](http://www.traildino.com)



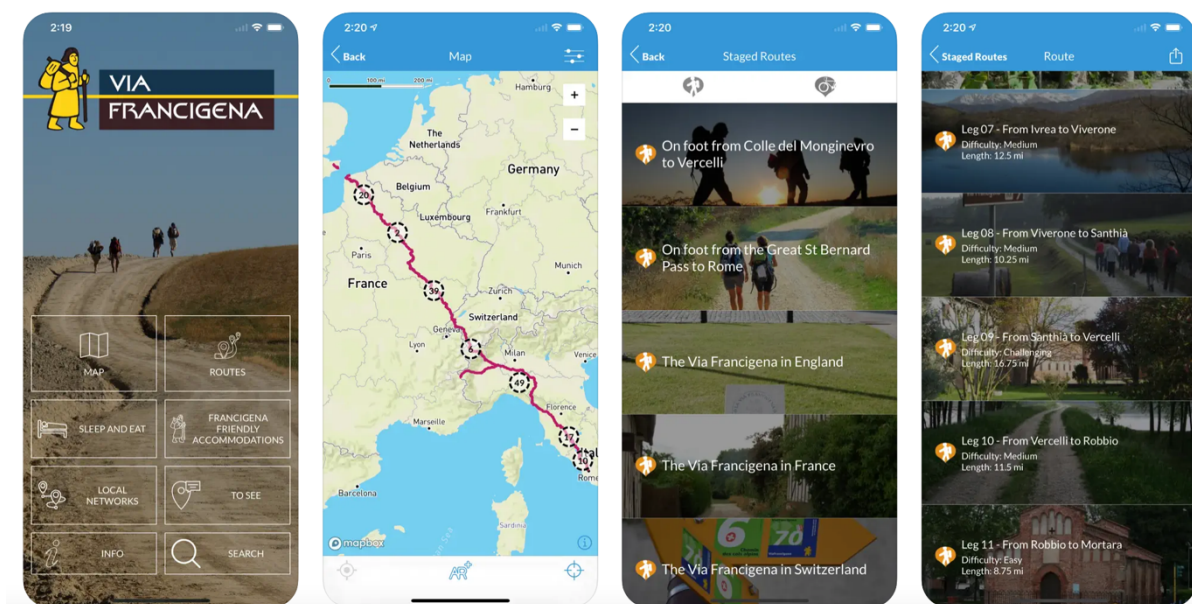


# Apps to use on the Via Francigena

## Via Francigena official app

The App for iPhone and Android allows the GPS navigation along the whole Via Francigena route, from Canterbury (Kent, England) to Rome (Latium, Italy), more than 2200 km divided in 104 stages.

The maps and detailed descriptions can be pre-downloaded to the smartphone, which can also work without any internet connection.



The official App of the European Association of the Via Francigena, the Cultural Itinerary of the European Council, allows to easily find the route while walking or cycling. The interactive map allows you to locate your position on the route through the device GPS, even without an internet connection: the maps and tracks can be pre-uploaded, avoiding the roaming costs.

In case of oversight, an alarm advises if you are leaving the path, and it is possible to signal potential problems on the itinerary communicating the GPS position.

The accommodations along the Way are geo-localized onto the map, and it is possible to call them directly from the smartphone.

The App was created thanks to the contribution of the Regions crossed by the Via Francigena and developed by the European Association of Vie Francigene Ways (EAVF/AEVF).



## Sloways

The App for **iPhone** and **Android** allows the GPS navigation along the whole Via Francigena route, from the Great Saint Bernard Pass to Rome, more than 1000 km divided in 45 stages.



The maps and detailed descriptions can be pre-downloaded to the smartphone, which can also work without any internet connection.

*The App was developed by SloWays in collaboration with the European Association of Vie Francigene.*

## Mapping Apps

These will give you not only a map, but you can decide what points of interest to show on it, for example accommodation, food and drink, shopping, public transport, health and medical, money, and also tourist guides on places to see, how to get about, order a taxi.

A major challenge with all navigation apps is that GPS drains battery power, so use the app only when you need to. An external battery pack, about 8000mAh, reduces the risk.

The “free” maps in many apps are from the community-driven [openstreetmap.org](http://openstreetmap.org) so coverage detail may vary by region, especially in the country side away from roads. Download all maps required along your route when you have a wifi connection.

### Pocket Earth (free and Pro version)

(iOS only)

Very good on iPhone and iPad. The Pro version includes standard maps offline.



You can buy extra topographic maps in-app. Helpful information is available about hotels, restaurants, bars, tourist sites, even metro and public transport info. There are also individual travel guides for numerous locations and Wikipedia articles to provide information about many locations. All can be downloaded and accessed offline with Pocket Earth. It is easy to navigate and use, which can sometimes not be true of an application brimming with information. Pocket Earth is an application well worth a download whether the free or Pro



version.

- Easily readable offline maps.
- Access your maps online and offline.
- Shows only the info you want.
- Works anywhere... cities, small towns, in the country side.
- Street address search (online)
- Import/Export support for GPX and CSV files

<https://pocketearth.com>

## ALL TRAILS

For iOS and Google. Turns your phone into a GPS tracker and follows your trail so you don't get lost. Records your pace, distance, elevation, and max speed and share your adventures with friends and family. Large collection of detailed, hand-curated trail maps.



## MAPS.ME

Similar, but available for both iOS and Android. Offline navigation.

<https://maps.me/>

## Locus Map

Android only. Recommended by experienced pilgrims. In the free version you can download maps for offline, plan routes (automatically worked out), save and upload GPS files, record a track you are walking on, and measure distances. The paid-for version gives elevation profiles as well.

[locusmap.eu](https://locusmap.eu)

## Open Street Map

The classic version is good for street maps, restaurants, hotels, attractions etc. OSM Open Topomap is good for walking trails, and is downloadable. Another downloadable alternative is OSM MTB Europe.

[openstreetmap.org](https://openstreetmap.org)



### Mapy.cz

Also allows you to download maps for offline use. When online you can switch between the map and satellite view. This app covers all of Europe including the Czech Republic.

[www.en.mapy.cz](http://www.en.mapy.cz)

### Wikiloc

iOS and Android. Outdoor navigation app which lets you track your walking or cycling with GPS and navigate over 15 million trails worldwide.

### Géoportail

<https://www.geoportail.gouv.fr/>

Excellent French and European topographical maps, zooming down to street detail, and showing tracks and paths.

### iPhiGéNie, maps of France (also Italy, Switzerland, England)

These are topographical maps.

Installing the app is free but upgrade versions are available which allow you to zoom down from all of France to 1:12500 and further to 1:3125 and finally aerial photo 1:1560. With the Vmax module you can record tracks, manually create and edit, export-import and follow tracks in GPX format, add waypoints/POLs etc.

If you search inside the app. You will find the Italian 1:200k, 1:100k, 1:50k, 1:25k maps by Geoportale Nazionale. They are useful in the countryside because they give small communal roads, mule tracks and “strade bianche”.

<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/iphigénie-maps-of-france/id350346756?mt=8>

[https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.iphigenie&hl=en\\_GB](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.iphigenie&hl=en_GB)

### Swiss map mobile

You can download the app for free and see all maps online. You get 10km<sup>2</sup> map for free offline use, which is very little. To get and save more maps for offline use you have to subscribe for a year at CHF38. Good topographic maps from 1:1million down to

1:10000. <https://map.schweizmobil.ch/?lang=de&land=wanderland&route=all&bgLayer=pk&season=summer&resolution=50&E=2526464&N=1163736&trackId=4692485&logo=yes&layers=Wanderland>



## Weather Apps

### **BBC Weather**

Worldwide coverage, iOS, Android and Amazon

[bbc.co.uk/weather](http://bbc.co.uk/weather)

### **Météo-France**

iOS and Android

<http://www.meteofrance.com/appli-meteo>

### **MeteoSwiss**

iOS and Android

[www.meteoswiss.admin.ch](http://www.meteoswiss.admin.ch)

### **Meteo.it**

iOS and Android

<https://www.meteo.it/mobile-app/>

## Transport Apps

### **Rome2Rio**

This app will tell you how to get from A to B.



Whether you are traveling by plane, train, bus or car, the app gives you estimated





prices, journey duration and booking details from over 5000 companies in 160+ countries.

Enter any address, landmark, or city as your destination and the app will instantly display all your travel options. View journey times, prices and all your different transport choices in one convenient place, along with accommodation searches and booking options.

<https://www.rome2rio.com/about/rome2rio-app/>

### **SNCF (Assistant) – Transports**

French national railway timetables and booking, available iOS and Google Play.

### **The Trainline**

Railway information and booking through Europe

<https://www.thetrainline.com/>

### **DB Navigator**

Die Deutsche Bahn “Anwendung”, the German railway’s travel app does about the same in Europe as Rome2Rio and you can book and buy tickets too. You can select German or English language.

<https://www.bahn.com/en/view/booking-information/booking/db-navigator-app.shtml>

### **TrenItalia**

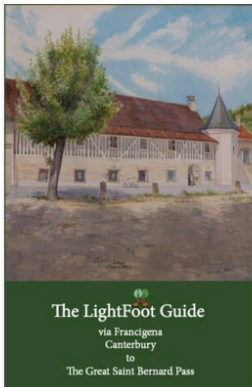
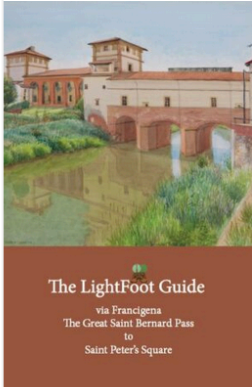
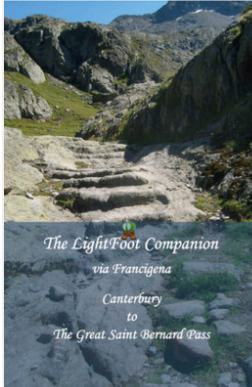

The App of the Italian State railway. FS – Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane. The Italian’s app allows you to buy your tickets for national and regional travel, display, change, apply for a refund of purchased travel tickets ... and much more!

<https://www.trenitalia.com/tcom-en/Purchase/Mobile-Ticketing>



## Books on The Via Francigena

### Guidebooks

 <p><b>The LightFoot Guide</b> via Francigena Canterbury to The Great Saint Bernard Pass</p>	 <p><b>The LightFoot Guide</b> via Francigena The Great Saint Bernard Pass to Saint Peter's Square</p>	 <p><i>The LightFoot Companion</i> via Francigena Canterbury to The Great Saint Bernard Pass</p>	 <p><i>The LightFoot Companion</i> via Francigena The Great Saint Bernard Pass to Saint Peter's Square</p>
<p><b>The LightFoot Guide to the via Francigena Canterbury to the Great Saint Bernard Pass – 8th Edition</b> <b>€16.99 – €25.99</b></p>	<p><b>The LightFoot Guide to the via Francigena the Great Saint Bernard Pass to Saint Peter's Square- 8th Edition</b> <b>€13.99 – €20.99</b></p>	<p><b>The LightFoot Companion to the via Francigena Canterbury to the Great Saint Bernard Pass</b> <b>€7.99 – €11.99</b></p>	<p><b>The LightFoot Companion to the via Francigena Italy: Great Saint Bernard Pass to St Peter's Square, Rome</b> <b>€10.99 – €15.99</b></p>

**The Lightfoot Guide to the Via Francigena Canterbury to the Great St Bernard Pass** 2020 edition updated 2022 by Paul Chinn and Babette Gaillard, Pilgrimage Publications, available as paperback and e-book

**The Lightfoot Guide to the Via Francigena The Great St Bernard Pass to St Peter's Square, Rome** 2020 updated 2022 edition by Paul Chinn and Babette Gaillard, Pilgrimage Publications, available as paperback and e-book

(Waypoints available as downloads in .gpx format onto a mapping app)

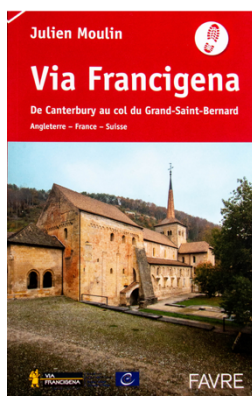
**Booklet of Accommodation and Facilities (Pilgrims on the Via Francigena from Canterbury to the Swiss border)** Edition 2020 (updated annually), published by the FFVF and CPR, on sale from our online shop £5.



## New Cicerone guides by the Rev Sandy Brown



Part 1 Canterbury to Lausanne is due out February 2023. The other two are already published.



**Via Francigena: De Canterbury au col du Grand-Saint-Bernard**, Julien Moulin, Editions Favre, 2020, 208pp. Price €22.75 plus postage from Amazon France. In French.

**(FFRP) Fédération Française de la Randonnée Pédestre GR145:** The Via Francigena in Pas-de-Calais FFRP Topo-guide No. 1451 generally intended for walkers within that department only – however, in the Pas-de-Calais the Via Francigena meanders around. You can save several days by studying the well-presented maps in this booklet, and discerning short-cuts. Good on history and culture.



**Via Francigena: Pilgrimage from Lucca to Rome** (Pilgrimages of Europe)  
2019 by Carla Mackey, published Carla Mackey

**Walking to Rome: Preparing and Packing for the Tuscan Via Francigena**,  
2018 by Ryan Tandler, published CreateSpace Independent Publishing  
Platform

**Pilgrimage: The Great Pilgrim Routes Of Britain**, 2017 by Derry Brabbs,  
published Frances Lincoln

## Accounts of Journeys on the Via Francigena

**A Long Way for a Pizza** by Brian Mooney 2012, published Thorogood  
Publishing Ltd

**The Wrong Way for a Pizza** by Brian Mooney 2013, published Thorogood  
Publishing Ltd

**Like a Tramp, Like a Pilgrim: On Foot, Across Europe to Rome**, 2014 by  
Harry Bucknall, Bloomsbury Continuum

**The Long Walk: A Pilgrimage from Canterbury to Rome**, 2015 by Robert  
Muirhead, published by CreateSpace Independent Publishing

**The Crossway**, 2018 by Guy Stagg, Picador

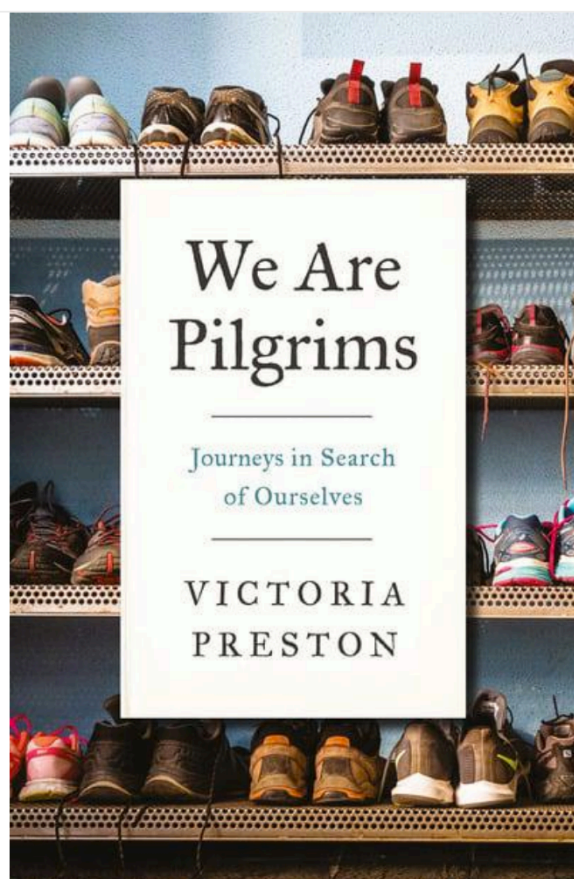
**The Path You Make, a woman's search for purpose walking the Via  
Francigena from Canterbury to Rome**, 2019 by Kym Wilson, published  
Kym Wilson



**A Pilgrimage to Eternity, From Canterbury to Rome**, 2019, by Timothy Egan, Viking USA.

## Pilgrimage as a Concept

**We are Pilgrims: Journeys in Search of Ourselves** by Victoria Preston, published Hurst.



- Also see the many blogs from our members <https://pilgrimstorome.org.uk/pilgrim-blogs-2/>





## VIA FRANCIGENA FORUMS

As with all online forums, these require membership, which is free.

**Camino de Santiago forum** has separate pages for:

<https://www.viafrancigena.me/forums/via-francigena-in-italy.17/>

<https://www.viafrancigena.me/forums/via-francigena-del-sud.19/>

<https://www.viafrancigena.me/forums/assisi-to-rome.18/>

### Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/19899007360/> (VIA FRANCIGENA)  
administered by the CPR

<https://www.facebook.com/Confraternity-of-Pilgrims-to-Rome-1439019926329097/> (CONFRATERNITY PAGE)

<https://www.facebook.com/viafrancigenaforum/> (VIA FRANCIGENA FORUM)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/289838098362264/> (WOMEN OF THE VIA FRANCIGENA)



<https://www.facebook.com/viafrancigenasuisse/> (VIA FRANCIGENA SWITZERLAND)

[https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=via%20francigena%20nel%20sud&epa=SEARCH\\_BOX](https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=via%20francigena%20nel%20sud&epa=SEARCH_BOX) (VIA FRANCIGENA NEL SUD)

[https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=amici%20della%20magna%20via%20francigena%C2%AE&epa=SEARCH\\_BOX](https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=amici%20della%20magna%20via%20francigena%C2%AE&epa=SEARCH_BOX) MAGNA VIA FRANCIGENA



## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the Via Francigena?

The modern Via Francigena – literally the Way of the Franks – is the traditional pilgrim way from Canterbury to Rome, which broadly follows the route taken by the Archbishop of Canterbury Sigeric when he journeyed to Rome in 990 to receive his pallium or cloak of office. His clerk recorded stages of his return journey.

### How long does it take to walk the Via Francigena?

It takes a reasonably fit person about 90 days to walk the 2000 km from Canterbury to Rome, allowing for some rest days. It can be done in less. It takes about 30 days to cycle .

### When is the best time of year to go?

The Via Francigena is walkable all the year round, with some major constraints – the Great St Bernard pass over the Alps is normally passable only from the end of May to late September. There can also be snow in the Jura and the Apennines in winter. Some accommodation may be closed during the winter. Walkers should remember that daylight hours are shorter then. Late summer and early autumn are pleasant months, though Italy can be hot well into October. Rain is more likely in spring.

### What happens if the pass is still closed?

See page 20. You can take the bus from Orsières or Bourg St Pierre in Switzerland through the tunnel under the pass towards Aosta in Italy. Snowshoes can be hired, but local advice about avalanches **must** be followed.

### Will I find cheap accommodation along the way?

Italy and Switzerland have sufficient accommodation along the way, ranging from pilgrim hostels and parish provision to hotels and B&Bs, but certain sections of the route in rural France require planning by ringing ahead, and sometimes walking days can be lengthy. However, France is becoming more conscious of the Via Francigena, and a visit to the local mairie (town office) or the lists from local Francigena-Compostela associations will suggest local people who will accommodate and feed pilgrims for a small sum. Our "Booklet of Accommodation and Facilities on the Via Francigena in France" is an invaluable resource to finding food and a bed in France.

### Where can I find contact information about accommodation to book?

The Confraternity website has an interactive map and accommodation list – see the main menu “Accommodation.” This is supplemented by the booklet on



French accommodation and facilities (see preceding section). The European Association of the Vie Francigene website (<https://www.viefrancigene.org/en/>) also publishes lists. Their 'Accoglienza per i pellegrini lungo la Via Francigena' directory is updated every year.

### **Will I find food and water?**

Food and water are plentiful in most parts of Italy and Switzerland, but crossing some parts of rural France requires planning the day before in order to carry sufficient for a long day. Drinking fountains in Italy may run dry in high summer. In France you can usually find a tap in cemeteries.

### **Do I need to speak French and Italian?**

It helps to have some knowledge of both languages, especially if you are planning to use your mobile to call ahead to book accommodation. Learn a couple of phrases to be able book ahead. It is always courteous to learn the basics of polite greeting - but a smile can also work miracles.

### **Is the Via Francigena waymarked?**

The short section in England along the North Downs Way from Canterbury to Dover is easy to follow. The way-marking in France is more challenging – particularly in the Pas de Calais where it tends to snake a bit, following the GR© 145 route (red and white horizontal flashes as waymarks). Some guides (eg Cicerone) recommend shortcuts. Thereafter it is better, and improving all the time as local associations take charge of their part of the route. The route through Switzerland is easy to follow and most of Italy, especially Tuscany, is well waymarked.

### **Do I need maps?**

Not necessarily but a guidebook is helpful and there are also various apps and GPS aids available.

### **Where should I start?**

Kilometre Zero is at Canterbury Cathedral but some British pilgrims set out from London or from their homes. Other popular starting places are Besançon, Lausanne, the Great St Bernard Pass, and Aosta.

### **How do I qualify for a Pilgrim Testimonium?**

You need to walk at least the last 100 km from Viterbo or Acquapendente, or cycle the last 400 km from Lucca, and have sufficient stamps in your credential to prove it..

### **Will I meet many other pilgrims?**



Compared to the Camino Francés to Santiago de Compostela and most of the other well-known Camino routes in Spain the Via Francigena is a more solitary experience, especially in the northern sections. In Italy, and closer to Rome, you will meet many more pilgrims.

### **Is it safe for a woman on her own?**

Yes. Many women have successfully completed the journey by themselves without any problems. Just take the same safety precautions that you would anywhere – for example, stay alert, and don't have ear buds /headphones in listening to loud music so you can't hear. See page 33.

### **How about general safety?**

As above, take usual precautions. On some stages of the VF in Italy there are stretches where you have to walk on busy roads. It's advisable to wear something hi-viz, and always walk facing oncoming traffic. In larger towns don't leave belongings unattended or easily accessible.

### **Is this a religious experience?**

Although this can be a spiritual undertaking, many people set out on the Via Francigena simply to follow an ancient pilgrim route, and for many it is an entirely secular and cultural experience.

### **How much should I carry in my rucksack?**

The golden rule is less than you think. While most people carry around 10kg, experienced walkers can keep their loads down to under 5 kilos. Another gold rule is leave behind most of what you *think* you may need.

### **What about mobile phones, SIM cards etc?**

3G and 4G connections are generally good, but do not rely on hostels or even bars having wi-fi as they do in Spain. A SIM card bought within the EU will not incur roaming charges throughout the Union.

### **Do I need a tent and sleeping bag?**

A tent is generally not necessary as the amount of pilgrim accommodation is increasing every year. In France it can be a useful addition if you are on a tight budget, and most towns have campsites. In Switzerland and Italy there are few campsites along the route, and 'wild' camping is strictly prohibited. Depending on the time of year a sleeping bag or an inner liner can be useful, and hostels in Italy will usually insist on at least a liner, or disposable sheet. Most hostels have blankets. See page 28.





### **Where can I find a GPS trail for the Via Francigena?**

GPX tracks from the Great St Bernard Pass to Rome are downloadable from the [viefrancigene.org](http://viefrancigene.org) website.

