



Fostering the enduring tradition of the Camino

Vía Tolosana (Arles)

General Description: The Arles Route is one of the four medieval pilgrim routes described in the Codex Calixtinus in the 12th century. 905 km (745 km in France and 160 km in Spain). From Arles (Provence) through Montpellier and Toulouse then southward, crossing the Pyrenees into Spain by the Col du Somport. In Spain the route is also known as the [Camino aragonés](#) and continues from Somport through Jaca then westward to join the [Camino francés](#) just east of Puente la Reina.

Waymarking: Well marked. In France it is waymarked with the red and white bars of the Sentiers de Grande Randonnée as GR 653. In Spain it is waymarked with yellow arrows but also with red and white bars as GR 653 as part of the network of Senderos de Gran Recorrido.

Terrain: Described as tough and extremely varied. From the Camargue (drained marshlands of the Rhône delta) through the steep hills of the Haut Languedoc and then vast areas of commercial forest to the crossing of the Pyrenees at Col du Somport.

When to go: Weather on the Vía Tolosana is strongly affected by the Pyrenees, meaning extremely variable from day to day. Languedoc and Aragón can be very hot in the summer in the lower areas but very cold in the higher reaches. The Col du Somport crossing the French-Spanish border will be snow-covered in the winter. Spring and autumn are the best times to walk. Summer brings crowds of tourists. Crossing the Col du Somport in the winter is not advised. Climate tables for [Toulouse](#) and [Arles](#).

Accommodation: The concept of the pilgrim *albergue* or refuge does not exist on the French portion of the route but does in Spain. The hotels, gites and chambers d'hôte used by tourists are available and are generally expensive. Sometimes a pilgrim discount is offered.

Guidebooks: Confraternity of Saint James: [Arles to Toulouse](#) (2011 but with a 2014 update included) and [Toulouse to Puente la Reina](#) (2011 but with a 2014 update included), covering the French Via Tolosana (Arles) route from Arles to Puente la Reina in two separate guides. *Le Chemin de Saint Jacques de Compostelle par la Voie d'Arles* (2014-15), Miam-Miam-Dodo, Editions du Vieux Crayon. Its schematic presentation makes it easy to use for non-French speakers. Also available from the [Confraternity of Saint James](#). (French) *Chemin d'Arles vers Saint-Jacques-de-Compostelle: La Voie du Sud* (2004), Rando Editions & Association de Coopération Inter-Régionale. A step by step guide with schematic maps. (French) *Via Tolosana, Jacobsweg GR653* by Norbert Rother (ISBN 978-3-86686-162-6) which is described as being compact, efficient, effective and lightweigh and as Including all necessary information. Needs to be augmented with 6 (French) IGN TOP100 topographical maps. (German)

Internet links: [Backpack45.com](#) has posted an excellent overview of the *Tolosana* including numerous links to other sites, guidebook recommendations and suggestions about maps and

accommodations. The [Confraternity of Saint James](#) has an overview of the Via Tolosana (Arles) route. The site [Chemin d'Arles](#) has a large photo gallery, a small but focused forum, maps and suggested stages and a good list of useful links. The list of suggested stages provides a good overview of the route. (French, English, German) The four original routes to Santiago de Compostela through France have been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site. For further information, visit [UNESCO's site](#). The association [Les Amis de st-Jacques de Compostelle dans le Gers](#) maintains a website which has information on the Arles route as it passes through the department of Gers. (French)

Other remarks: The Vía Tolosana is a very solitary route - very few pilgrims and much of the way is in forest. Accommodations may be problematical in that they are sparse and may be full in high season and closed other times. Generally difficult terrain with many hills. Described as being especially difficult for cyclists. We have had a strong recommendation to carry the appropriate IGN maps (1:25,000 series) in addition to a guidebook.

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