

## Episode 74: Santiago de Compostela

### Summary

After walking for 39 days to get there, Nick and Wendy talk about the city of Santiago de Compostela itself: the Celtic atmosphere, the historical architecture, and going up to the rooftop of the cathedral.

### Transcript

*Nick: Dear listeners, this is a special episode that comes from our new audio series, The Way. If you enjoy the episode, you will love the rest of the series, which includes 10 more episodes. For more information, visit our website: [englishin10minutes.com/theway](http://englishin10minutes.com/theway). Happy listening!*

Nick: Today Wendy and I are coming to you from Santiago de Compostela after our long walk of thirty-nine days to get here. And so we're finally here! And when you're walking, you almost forget that there's actually a destination that you're trying to get to<sup>1</sup> at the end, right?

Wendy: Yeah, that's true. It's, uhh, at the beginning, you know, it's eight hundred kilometres away, and for much of it it's still very, very far away. So you're just trying to get to the next town, umm, and, you know, I think the Camino de Santiago is really the epitome<sup>2</sup> of something where it's all about the journey and not the destination itself. Umm, but even so, the destination turned out to be a place that we really liked.

Nick: Yeah, I would say that it wasn't until, probably we got to Galicia, umm, and we still had about six days of walking, maybe, to go until the end. But once you get there, you realise you're getting close, and you start thinking about the city. And we didn't really know a lot about the city. Umm, I like ... I try to avoid looking at pictures of places I haven't been to or places that I'm going to go to because I don't want to see that. I want to be surprised when I arrive. Umm, obviously when you're on the *camino* you see pictures of the cathedral of Santiago all over the place, because that's the symbol of Santiago. So we knew that there would be this very large cathedral, which dominates the town. Beyond that, I didn't really know anything about it. And so it was a nice surprise to come here and find that it's a really, really nice place.

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<sup>1</sup> to get to (phrasal verb) to reach

<sup>2</sup> epitome: perfect example. Note the pronunciation, which doesn't follow normal English rules.

Wendy: It is. It's a beautiful, uhh, old city with, uhh, a historic centre that still has a lot of the old buildings intact, although from different eras. I mean, originally it grew up as a medieval city. Umm, it grew up around the cathedral, around the relics<sup>3</sup> of Santiago, of St. James, because before that there was nothing at all here. So the *camino*, the pilgrimage to see these relics, is really what has created this entire city. And then you also have later additions from the Renaissance period and the Baroque period and that's true of the cathedral and also of some of the other buildings in the city as well.

Nick: Yeah, but I think because the materials used have been the same throughout, there's quite a good, umm, continuation between those different, uhh, architectural periods. And so it doesn't ... it looks very ... nothing seems out of place in the city, as I see it. I think the historical centre is very uniform. Basically all the buildings are built with this grey granite and then some of them have whitewashed façades, or if they don't have that, they have white window frames. And so you basically have these two colours - the grey and the white - that play off against each other. And as you walk through the historical centre, that's what you see in every building. You know, sometimes when you're in old towns you might see one new building in amongst the other ones and it kind of spoils the scene a little bit, but you don't have that at all here. It's all very uniform, I find.

Wendy: Yeah, it's true. All of the buildings are quite similar. And the roofs, most of the, uhh, roofs are covered with these red tiles, which also makes it very beautiful. Uhh, the one thing, umm, that we found, which was also not a surprise, because as you said, you do see lots of photos of the cathedral on your way, including some recent photos. And so we saw that there was scaffolding<sup>4</sup> on the façade and so that was something that we were prepared for. We were hoping that maybe it would be gone or at least some of it would be gone by the time we got here, but, no, actually the façade is completely covered in scaffolding. You really can't see it at all. They're doing major, major renovation works which began several years ago and will continue, they say, until the end of 2020. Umm, so, that part of arriving in the plaza, in the square in front of the cathedral, and not actually seeing the cathedral itself, at least not that front façade, that was a little bit disappointing. But I knew that it was probably going to be like that.

Nick: Yeah, it's true, that was disappointing. But apart from that, the arrival and the city was really interesting for me. Because you hear about Santiago and Galicia as a region, as a whole, being a very Celtic region, being similar to places like Ireland and Scotland and Wales and Brittany in France. And, having not been to Galicia before this trip, I sort of didn't believe that. I just found it so hard to believe that that type of place could exist in Spain with the rain and the greenery and all the things that come with it because it's so opposed to the image that I generally have of Spain. And we've been to Spain a lot of times. We were talking about it the other day. I think among various different types of trips, we've been to Spain about

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<sup>3</sup> relics: venerated remains of a Christian saint or sacred person

<sup>4</sup> scaffolding: temporary framework covering a building that assists in its renovation

twelve or fifteen times, umm, and this place, this city and this region is unlike anything else that we've seen in Spain.

Wendy: Yeah, and we've spoken to pilgrims who come from these other Celtic lands, from Scotland and Wales and Brittany. And all of them have said that it really does remind them of their homeland in so many ways.

Nick: Right. One Scottish guy we met said it was like home with better weather. Umm, and that was after four days of rain, so we didn't really necessarily agree at that time, but in fact the last couple of days have been really sunny, really hot, so he was right on the money<sup>5</sup> with that. But yeah, the colours of the city remind me of Edinburgh, which is also a kind of grey, dark grey city. Umm, and so, yeah, it's really fascinating from that point of view. You don't feel like you're in Spain, but yet the life, the street life does feel like Spain, so it's this kind of mixture of two different things. So I think it's really interesting.

Wendy: Yeah, and even the street life can be a mixture too, because when we arrived, there was a very local festival just in this one particular neighbourhood in the city, and it was the neighbourhood that we were walking through. It's where the *camino* goes through in order to get to the cathedral, it's called San Pedro. And there were bands playing bagpipes and other traditional instruments that I think of as being Scottish instruments. But actually they play them here too in the traditional Celtic music that is part of the cultural heritage of Galicia.

Nick: Yeah, and I think that's important, 'cause we've seen other people playing bagpipes, but they're busking<sup>6</sup> for tourists and things like that. Umm, but in this case it was a very localised festival, and we were staying right near that area, so we went and enjoyed the music and had a drink there as well. Umm, so, yeah, I thought those links with Celtic lands might be tenuous<sup>7</sup> or contrived<sup>8</sup>, but I found that it hasn't at all been the case.

Wendy: No, I think that the people here seem to really identify with that Celtic heritage.

Nick: And so one of the things we did yesterday which was really interesting is that you can go to the cathedral museum, which a lot of people do, and then there are these separate themed tours that you can do, that centre around the cathedral. And one of them was to go up to the rooftops of the cathedral, and we did that. And even despite the scaffolding that's on some of the towers and things, that was really fascinating.

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<sup>5</sup> right on the money (fixed expression - colloquial): correct with a prediction or assessment

<sup>6</sup> busking: playing music on the street for tips

<sup>7</sup> tenuous: thin, weak, lacking a sound basis

<sup>8</sup> contrived: artificial

Wendy: It was, and we learned so much about the cathedral and about the city. It was a very informative tour, a very interesting tour.

Nick: Yeah, I think from the rooftop is the only real place where you can get a good understanding of the cathedral - how it works, how it was built up. Umm, because it was described as a fortress church, but when you're at the ground level, you don't see anything that resembles a fortress in any way. But from the rooftops, you can see some crenellations<sup>9</sup>, uhh, that still remain from the fortress period. And we were told that there were eight defensive towers, and now there aren't any defensive towers, but two of the bell towers retain the foundations, umm, from their period as a defensive tower, and you can see that from the rooftop as well. Umm, and also, there are, on some parts of the roof, there are these tiles like you mentioned for the other buildings in the city, but on other parts there aren't tiles. And this was for guards who would guard the cathedral and the city from the rooftop, and so that they could move around easily, umm, just kind of walking on steps rather than walking on tiles.

Wendy: Mmm-hmm.

Nick: And so it was quite amazing to be up there. You could also see some of the parts of the original Romanesque church which had been covered over by later Baroque parts as you were talking about before. And so from the ground level, you only see those newer Baroque parts, but when you're up on the top, you can see the older parts that are behind them, and that they were trying to cover up from the ground level, but when you're on the top you can still see these different periods of history in the church, so I thought that was fascinating.

Wendy: Yeah, I did too, I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Nick: And so it's been a really great end to our *camino*, to our path to be here. And one of the things, and we were talking about it last night, was that staying for three extra days in Santiago like we have has meant that we've bumped into<sup>10</sup> some pilgrims that we met along the way. Maybe some of them we haven't seen for a while. So for the last three nights we've had dinner with three different people or three different groups of people, umm, and that's been really great as well.

Wendy: Yeah, it's been wonderful to meet up with those people, to hear about their journeys. And, you know, we've had some shared experiences where, you know, we ended up at the same hostel on different nights. And we said, 'Oh, did you go there?' 'Yes, wasn't it wonderful?' And then other experiences that were different. And they told us about things that they had seen and done that we hadn't. So, yeah, it was great to be able to share that experience, umm, because it is something that you can't really fully understand unless you've done it yourself. And

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<sup>9</sup> crenellations: spaced, fortified top parts of a wall or tower that protect defenders while still allowing them to fire arrows down onto the attackers

<sup>10</sup> bumped into: run into, met accidentally or unexpectedly

so I'm glad that you and I have done it together, that we'll always have that to share with each other. And it was also great to be able to talk about it with other people who could also understand it in that same way.

Nick: Yep, for sure. And for anybody considering the Camino de Santiago, it's great to say that the city of Santiago is really worth the effort. Even though it was quite a lot of effort to get here.

Wendy: Yep.

*Nick: A final reminder that you can visit our website [englishin10minutes.com/theway](http://englishin10minutes.com/theway) for more information about the rest of this special audio series. Thanks for listening!*

## Comprehension Questions

1. Why were Nick and Wendy disappointed with their first sight of the cathedral in Santiago?
2. Why didn't Nick believe that Santiago and Galicia would have a Celtic feel?
3. Why did Nick like going to the rooftop of the cathedral?

## Exercises

*Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.*

1. The new market in town has been designed to look like an old market. It's a nice idea, I guess, but they didn't do it very well and it just looks very \_\_\_\_\_.
2. If you take a tour underneath St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, you can see the \_\_\_\_\_ of St. Peter himself.
3. This would have been a great photo if there wasn't all that \_\_\_\_\_ on the church that they're renovating in the background.
4. The acclaimed classical violinist Joshua Bell once went \_\_\_\_\_ in a metro station in Washington, D.C., [as part of an experiment](#) to see if passersby could recognise his musical talent.
5. He \_\_\_\_\_ his old high school girlfriend on the street the other day. It was the first time they had seen each other for over 20 years.
6. For many people, Barack Obama's election as the first African-American president of the United States in 2008 was the \_\_\_\_\_ of the saying, 'You can achieve anything.'
7. They tried \_\_\_\_\_ the shop before it closed, but they were five minutes too late.
8. The defensive towers and \_\_\_\_\_ are among the most significant features of the Great Wall of China.
9. I thought their relationship would last but my sister didn't think so. In the end, she was \_\_\_\_\_ because they broke up.
10. He always mentions that he is descended from the British royal family but those links are \_\_\_\_\_ at best. He can't prove it beyond doubt.

## Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Would you like to walk the Camino de Santiago to Santiago de Compostela? Why or why not?
2. Nick describes the architecture of Santiago de Compostela as being uniform (consistent from one building to another). Can you describe another city or town with uniform architecture?
3. Have you ever been to the rooftop of a church or some other special building? What was it like?

## Answers

### Comprehension Questions

1. Because there was a lot of scaffolding on it as part of the ongoing restoration of the cathedral.
2. Because the image of a Celtic land was so different from his image of Spain based on his previous trips elsewhere in the country.
3. Because he said he could understand and appreciate the long history of the cathedral much better from that vantage point.

### Exercises

1. contrived
2. relics
3. scaffolding
4. busking
5. bumped into
6. epitome
7. to get to
8. crenellations
9. right on the money
10. tenuous