**Walk, rest & play**

*In May, a group of supporters from the UK & Ireland joined us for a walking challenge, taking on the last 100km of the Portuguese Camino, over five days. Steph, one of our fundraisers, shares her experience:*

We walked the last 100km of the Portuguese Way, starting in a town called Tui and finishing in Santiago de Compostela, as all the Camino routes do. This region of Spain is called Galicia and it has prolonged rainy periods, but we were so lucky with the weather - every day the sun was shining, not a poncho in sight!

For the most part it was a pleasant 21c, but a couple of the afternoons reached the high 20s and at the end of 10+ miles that’s a struggle. Never has an ice-cold drink at the end of the day, tasted so good!

We walked through beautiful forests and countryside - saw goats, horses & even a pig on the loose (as an urban dweller, this caused much excitement). Occasionally you’d come across a stand in the middle of nowhere, selling cold drinks, fruit or trinkets - never did I think I’d be buying a pair of earrings in the middle of a Spanish forest (always time to shop!).

It sounds cliché, but everyone we travelled with and met along the way, were so genuine, supportive and kind. There is a like mindedness and camaraderie, as you’re all on the same path, working towards the same destination. Amidst the crazy world we live in, it restored my faith in humanity.

It was so nice to switch off, meet new people and spend time outdoors. It genuinely felt like being in a Camino bubble for the week, where all you were thinking about was getting from A to B, enjoying the scenery along the way. You felt a real accomplishment at the end of each day.

I would recommend it to everybody - I can’t speak for the other routes (yet!) but the Portuguese Way was really picturesque and although challenging in parts, much less so than the more mountainous regions of the French Way and alike.

I managed to finish up pretty unscathed - a little bit of heat rash & potential blisters were starting to show on the last day, and my feet were aching - but legs up the wall (of the hotel room) helped to relieve them. I also learnt that zig-zagging your way down hills is nicer on the knees!

Santiago de Compostela, where the Camino finishes, is such a beautiful city and it’s tradition to finish the walk, by attending the pilgrim’s mass in the Cathedral. The region itself is very authentic and Spanish - whilst the local cafes do cater for the walkers, there’s very little English spoken, which was really refreshing. It’s not a region I was at all familiar with before, but I’d definitely recommend visiting.

Having completed 100km, and getting our Camino ‘passport’ stamped in each town along the way, we were delighted to receive an official Compostela certificate from the Pilgrim’s Reception Office in Santiago, as recognition of our achievement.

We’re so proud to have collectively raised over £11,000 for Self Help Africa - and grateful to all who sponsored us and sent words of support and encouragement along the way.

*If you’re interested in walking the Camino for Self Help Africa in 2024, we’d love to hear from you - e-mail* *steph.smith@selfhelpafrica.org* *to find out more.*