

Trazeel TRAVEL.

THE TRAZEE BOOK

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Off the Beaten Paths

Follow in the footsteps of those who walked lesser-known pilgrimages around the world. BY SUSAN B. BARNES

Sacred Spaces: The Monastery Petra, Jordan (above), and (opposite page) Kumano Kodo trail in Nachi, Wakayama, Japan

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After hours of hiking in the Jordanian desert landscape alongside other adventurers in my [Escapes by Globus](#) group, we rounded a corner leading to the “back door” of [Petra](#) and caught our first glimpse of the Rose City, one of the New Seven Wonders of the World that began to prosper in the first century B.C. because of its trade in frankincense, myrrh and other spices. An earthquake in A.D. 363 destroyed much of the city, leading to its abandonment in the seventh century A.D.

Standing in front of the Monastery and walking through

the once-thriving city proved jaw-dropping. I had seen photos, but nothing could have prepared me for the sheer magnitude of the city, its buildings carved into rock faces and towering over a hundred feet overhead. The intricate carvings and attention to detail by skilled masons and artisans still impress travelers, just as they did thousands of years ago.

It wasn't until I returned home that I learned Petra is just one of the ancient stops on the [Jordan Trail](#), which officially opened in 2017 and stretches from Um Qais in the north to Aqaba in the south, passing through 75 villages and towns en route, including



Petra. What's more, the Jordan Trail is part of a larger pilgrimage, the [Abraham Path](#), comprising more than 1,200 miles of walking trails in Jordan, Israel, the Sinai and Turkey.

The concept for creating the Abraham Path drew inspiration from the biblical figure Abraham, who was known for his hospitality and kindness to strangers; he is a key figure in Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Following that inspiration, forging the Abraham Path began in earnest in 2007 with a vision to be a place where people connect through conservation, change perceptions and transform relationships.

In Japan the [Kumano Kodo](#) features a network of seven ancient trails that wind through the mountains found on the Kii Peninsula. Follow in the footsteps of samurai, emperors and monks who have walked the 1,000-year-old trail system in search of spiritual enlightenment en route to Kumano Sanzan, the collective name for the area's three most sacred shrines: Kumano Hayatama Taisha Shrine, Kumano Nachi Taisha Shrine and Kumano Hongu Taisha Shrine. In addition to walking through serene natural land-





The Long Way:
A section of the Via Francigena pilgrimage route from Canterbury to Rome, just below the St. Bernard Pass in Italy

PHOTO: © NEIL HARRISON | DREAMSTIME.COM

scapes and villages, pilgrims can also visit the 99 Oji shrines found along the way. These shrines are meant to provide protection and guidance for those making the pilgrimage to Kumano Sanzan.

Just an hour from London lies the [Pilgrims' Way](#), a 153-mile, 15-day walking route from Winchester to Canterbury. People began making their pilgrimages to Canterbury and the cathedral in 1172, two years after Thomas Becket was martyred and buried. In addition to crossing countless fields and quaint villages, pilgrims can visit Jane Austen's house in Chawton and even stop for afternoon tea in the café across the street.

If 153 miles is too long or pilgrims don't have 15 days to devote to walking Pilgrims' Way, consider the shorter alternative, Becket Way, a 90-mile, 11-day walk from Southwark to Canterbury. The route is so named because it is believed to be the way that Thomas Becket himself made the journey to and from London.

From Canterbury pilgrims can pick up the Via Francigena, a route that follows in the footsteps of Sergic the Serious, the Archbishop of Canterbury in the late 10th century. The *via* traverses England, France, Switzerland and Italy, certainly a walk to remember. It's a quiet walk — only about 500–1,200 pilgrims walk the route each year. It's a long walk, though, covering nearly 1,100 miles in total from Canterbury to Rome, but it's easy to break it up, too, if pilgrims prefer to take it a bit at a time. And if

pilgrims would rather ride a bicycle than walk, a cycling itinerary is available, too.

Eight pilgrim paths, collectively known as [St. Olav Ways](#), meander through three Nordic countries — Denmark, Norway and Sweden — and lead to Trondheim, where St. Olav is buried in the [Nidaros Cathedral](#). Olav was a martyr who died in 1030 and gained sainthood soon thereafter, in 1031. Because of the sheer number of pilgrims that began journeying to Trondheim over the next century, in the 1120s King Oistein Magnussen built shelters for them at several spots on Dovre Mountain, their route at the time.

Each of the eight routes that comprise St. Olav Ways is marked by the same beautiful symbol, a waleknot with the Olav cross. The symbol is managed and protected by the National Pilgrim Centre, the organization that also coordinates and develops the pilgrim paths to Trondheim.

[The Camino de Santiago](#) pilgrimage that winds through France, Portugal and Spain is not exactly a lesser-known pilgrimage, but its history may be: It dates back more than 2,000 years, and the route is described in a 900-year-old guidebook. Before Christians started traveling the route nearly 1,300 years ago to journey to the burial place of St. James, the apostle James the Greater, people of Celtic tribes walked to the Atlantic coast of

Galicia to watch the sun set over the ocean, which they considered a spiritual experience.

Rather than one specific route, 13 main and most-walked routes comprise the Camino de Santiago, the most popular of which is the Camino Francés, dating back to the 11th century. Also known as the French Way, more than 60 percent of pilgrims opt for the 477-mile Camino Francés route because they can “get the most of the pilgrim experience.” Traveling the Camino Francés was documented in Codex Calixtinus, a medieval guide that dates to 1135 and describes the pilgrimage, mentioning people, local customs, hospitality, food, natural springs and more.

A new official starting point for the Camino de Santiago was announced this summer: the [Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine](#) in St. Augustine, Florida. The cathedral was the site of the first Catholic mass and location of the first Catholic parish in North

America; the city’s Catholic heritage dates back to its founding in 1565.

In addition to its being a new starting point for pilgrims traveling from the United States to Spain, Portugal or France to walk the Camino de Santiago, the Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine is part of a new network of pilgrimage routes in the Americas: the Camino del Mestizaje, a network of routes that connect Santiago de Chile with St. Augustine.

Not all pilgrimages are spiritual, though, nor do they have to cover a lot of ground. A different type of pilgrimage altogether is one that seeks out our ancestry, where we come from. Yet another disconnects us from the business of our day-to-day lives and reconnects us with ourselves and nature on a quiet walk that can last days, weeks or even months. Pilgrimages are deeply personal; the best one to seek out and take is the one that calls to you most.

Solo Journey:
Pilgrim with backpack walking the Camino de Santiago in Spain

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