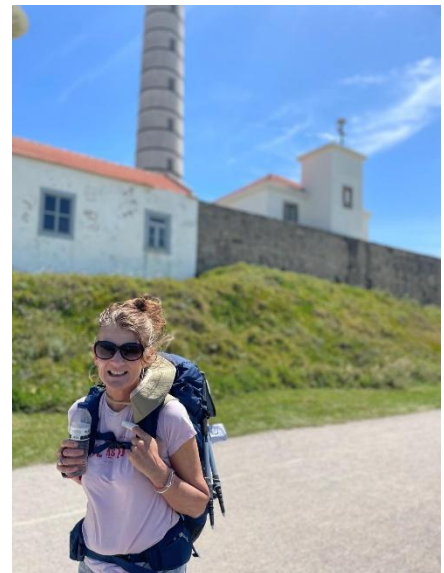


**“I learnt that the world and the people in it are innately good
and full of beauty”**

In May 2025, Kate Nightingale (SVP CEO) walked 165km of the Camino de Santiago, on the Portuguese route. Here is what Kate shared about her journey:

“I left for the Camino not knowing what to expect. I am not really a walker; I like to run and to swim. My only real preparation had been to purchase a decent rucksack, as my friend Jo and I were carrying our belongings, and a pair of trail shoes (trainers). I also borrowed a hat and some walking poles. Our neighbour and priest of the local church posted a shell through my door. Why would I need that? He told me I’d find out... I was ready to go.

The first hurdle was trying to squeeze everything I needed into a 26-litre rucksack. It took 3 attempts until I finally managed it, with the spare pair of trainers I’d been advised to take tied to the outside (these remained unused).



We arrived in Porto and found our hostel, the Poets Inn, which is a popular stop for those starting the coastal route through Portugal and into Spain.

A top tip given to me by a previous Camino walker was to get a train out of Porto to Matosinhos saving 5 kilometres of walking through industrial estates. This was a good tip, although finding the train station in Porto took a while.

So, we set off and followed the yellow arrows for 165 k to Santiago. We stopped each night at a local inn or hotel for much needed rest and sustenance. We walked for 7 days straight in glorious sunshine and met some inspiring people along the way who shared their stories – as we shared ours. A wonderful young woman from Germany whose husband had recently died, was walking alone in his honour. He had always encouraged her to be brave and try new things. We met a father and daughter who had bonded over walking last year; she had returned home, quit her job, and joined him for the rest of the Camino. We met many others, from all over the world walking alone, in pairs or in groups. Each had their own story. We witnessed lifelong friendships being formed and long-standing relationships being transformed.



The terrain and scenery changed daily but the constants were the pure joy of the locals – every single time they saw a walker they cheered with the words “Buen Camino”. The beauty of the land and its people, the churches, and cafes - full of warmth and welcome. What a delight to see the Jubilee Year Pilgrims of Hope logo emblazoned on a small church in remote Portugal.

What did I learn on this trip?

I learnt that walking is tough; you can't rush it like running or swimming. It demands you stay present. I learnt that the body is resilient but also needs to be taken care of and respected. We take our feet for granted but they do all the tough work, carrying us every step. I learnt that the world and the people in it are innately good and full of beauty. I learnt that you do not need much to make you happy and meet your needs, it can fit in a rucksack! The most overwhelming gifts were time, solitude, easy companionship, and the absolute magic of hope that's palpable as you walk. These are God given gifts.

And why did I need the shell? Well, the scallop shell is used as a symbol of direction along the Camino, pointing pilgrims towards Santiago. Its also worn by Pilgrims to demonstrate solidarity and camaraderie with other walkers. And whenever you saw someone wearing it, you knew you were on the right track.



I would encourage anyone - SVP members, staff and volunteers, friends and family - to sign up to the SVP Camino de Santiago Pilgrimage in 2026. It is truly a unique experience which I am grateful to have had, and walking alongside other SVP members/supporters will only make it that much more special”.

You can find out more about the SVP Camino de Santiago Pilgrimage online at <https://svp.org.uk/camino-de-santiago-pilgrimage-2026-information-page> or by contacting camino@svp.org.uk.