

Camino de Santiago - the longest street of Europe

Camino de Santiago - the longest street of Europe which passes through Toruń!

The Way of St. James (Spanish: Camino de Santiago) is a network of roads passing through entire Europe, leading to the tomb of St. James the Apostle, located in Santiago de Compostela, in north-western Spain. Every year, it is crossed by thousands of pilgrims who, since the early Middle Ages (eighth century), when the place where the mortal remains of the Apostle James was discovered and confirmed, have undertaken the effort of trek inspired by faith and search for the most important values. By different routes and various means of transport, but with the same spirit, they have shaped consciousness of the unity of the European continent in the midst of the visible signs of cultural diversity. Probably that is why Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, aware of this truth, drew attention to the fact that Europe came into existence making pilgrimages to Santiago.

After a period of rapid development in the Middle Ages, which translated into emergence of extraordinary pilgrim infrastructure (shelters, hospitals, bridges, roads, etc.), legal protection of pilgrims (beginning of international law, *ius peregrinandi*), privileges to celebrate the Compostelan Year (jubilee years fall on the year in which the feast of St. James, July 25, falls on Sunday – a practice existing from 1120 onwards) and issuing of guides (the first one was the so-called Codex Calixtinus from the twelfth century), there was a time of collapse associated with the turbulent history of modern Europe (especially wars).

It is then no wonder that after the historic call made in Santiago by Pope John Paul II in 1982, which has passed into history as the so-called "European Act", the roads of Europe have anew began to be marked with shells and yellow arrows pointing from year to year to an increasing number of crowds of pilgrims the direction of the city of Santiago, which holds "the memory of Saint James, the friend of God". For centuries, figures well-known in the medieval and modern world have gone on Camino.

In 1987, Camino de Santiago was declared the first European Cultural Route, and as early as 1993, it was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The Council of Europe issued an appeal to the governments of countries, cities and non-governmental organizations to restore and maintain the Way of St. James. Organizations and associations, which quickly attracted pilgrims on European roads, began to form.

That way, a remarkable network of different "Camino" routes, covering virtually entire Europe, which once again makes one realize the major role played by these mass pilgrimages in shaping European spirit, is forming. More and more people, who have already traversed the French Way or Camino del Norte, or other variants of the main James' routes, decide to return to the Way of St. James to other countries, also more and more often to Poland.