

Beat: Travel

## The Spanish Civil Guard reinforces the security of the Camino de Santiago

### For the Xacobeo Holy Year

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**USPA NEWS** - With the end of restrictions on mobility in Spain, a consequence of the improvement in the health situation, tourists are beginning to arrive. And the Camino de Santiago begins to receive the first pilgrims. This year is Xacobeo Holy Year, so the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, in Galicia (Northwest of Spain), acquires greater importance. For the protection of pilgrims, the Civil Guard this week presented the security device that it has established for the 2021 Xacobeo Holy Year.

This year, the specific Security Plan for the Camino de Santiago that the Civil Guard designs every year within the framework of the Safe Tourism Plan of the Secretary of State for Security, takes on special relevance as it is in the Xacobeo Holy Year. "To this circumstance, we must add that the summer season is approaching and that mobility restrictions have been 'eased' due to the health crisis caused by Covid. That is to say, more pilgrims are expected again and from the Civil Guard we try to redouble our efforts to guarantee their safety, their protection and attend to the needs of the people at all times along the almost 4,000 kilometers that the different Jacobean routes add up. This is the message that we want to launch today: the Camino is safe because the Civil Guard is present," affirmed the general director of the Civil Guard, María Gámez.

As she explained, a special effort will be made on the French Way, which runs through Galicia, Castilla y León, La Rioja and Navarra regions, since, according to the groups associated with the Camino, this Jacobean route concentrates most of the traffic, around 95%, especially in the last 100 kilometers.

The general director referred to the services that the Civil Guard carried out last year related to the Camino. In total, more than 26,800 services were counted, including humanitarian ones, and 19 aid and 24 mountain rescues were carried out on pilgrims. She also pointed out that "the Corps units collaborated in the evacuation of thousands of pilgrims from the Jacobean routes, in collaboration with the national pilgrim associations, when the first state of alarm due to the pandemic was decreed in mid-March 2020."

As a novelty for this edition, María Gámez highlighted the deployment of four Mobile Pilgrim Assistance Offices (OMAP's in its Spanish acronym) to enhance safety on the French Way. "These itinerant offices will be highly visible to pilgrims, each of them will be staffed by three civil guards with language skills and will facilitate the presentation of complaints if necessary, in addition to offering information of interest through QR codes." The purpose of the OMAP's of the Corps is to provide close attention to the pilgrim who, during their stay on the Camino, requires personalized assistance through a specialized team of the Civil Guard and, in cases deemed necessary, in a jointly with members of foreign police forces.

In addition, she assured that the Guardians on the Road communication campaign will continue, with the distribution of posters with safety advice in various languages at different points along the way; and with the use of the Alertcops application of the Ministry of the Home Affairs, which provides information of interest and the possibility of setting locations and activating alerts if necessary.

According to the director general, international police cooperation is also being strengthened and foreign visitors are cared for. "In 2020 it could not be done due to the pandemic, but together with the Civil Guard this year the French gendarmic bodies will be again, with 11 troops; Portugal with nine other agents, and Italy with another seven, between July 1 and August 31. In total, 27 troops on the French Way. And this year, for the first time, the presence of the police from Brazil, Germany and the United Kingdom is scheduled for the week before and after July 25."

The Civil Guard provides the fundamental nucleus of the protection of the pilgrim and the Camino, giving priority to the preservation of citizen security, traffic regulation, land use planning and the protection of the historical-artistic and environmental heritage, expanding this year the device to the more than 4,000 kilometers that comprise the Jacobean routes (Caminos de Galicia, Caminos del Centro-Vía de la Plata, Caminos del Norte and the Camino Mozárabe), which complement the other traditional and historical routes, such as the French Way. The operation during this year involves the participation of thousands of agents in 11 regions, which will be grouped by specialties: Citizen Security, Traffic Group, Nature Protection Service (SEPRONA), Information Service, Judicial Police, Cavalry Squad, Mountain Service and Air Service.

This Xacobeo Holy Year will also serve to renew the name that the Civil Guard receives as Guardian on the Camino through the existing collaboration between the French Association of Municipalities of the Camino de Santiago (AMCS) and the Spanish Federation of Associations of Friends of the Camino de Santiago (FEAACS).

Through the novelties contemplated in the Jacobean Security Plan for the Xacobeo Holy Year, the Civil Guard reinforces its presence in territories with low demographic density and becomes another instrument of the administration to address the demographic challenge. According to recent statements by the general director of the Corps, the Civil Guard will continue to be the hand that helps the citizens that are more remote, more dispersed or with fewer resources, in a commitment to emptied Spain, to which the armed institute does not will quit.

In addition to the physical presence of the agents on the Jacobean routes, the Civil Guard will intensify its virtual presence by enhancing the Alertcops application of the Ministry of the Home Affairs. By downloading it, the pilgrim / user will be able to activate the Benemérito Guardian function, which will provide services such as 24 / 7 attention from the operational service centers, receipt of geolocated security alerts in real time, as well as the possibility of contacting Telephone 062 of the Civil Guard, all in an environment available in seven languages. Likewise, pilgrims will receive random messages with safety tips based on their geopositioning. With this, it is intended to develop the Virtual Guardian aspect of the Path.

Since it is the Xacobeo Holy Year, an exceptional year in terms of its international significance, mixed patrol services will be organized together with civil guards, in places and events with a special influx of citizens of those nationalities. In addition to the regular participation of agents from the National Gendarmerie (France), National Guard (Portugal) and the Arma de Carabinieri (Italy), this year the Civil Guard is in contact with agencies from various countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Japan, South Korea and Brazil to specify their possible collaboration.

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