



Spanish Jubilee Year Honors St. James in Santiago, Next Jubilee Year Will Be 2021

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The Cathedral of Santiago, Spain, is said to be the final resting place of the martyr St. James.

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Storm clouds streak the sky in Santiago, Spain. Courtyard stones glisten with fresh rain and a clean swept scent. Vendors sell trinkets and tokens. Pilgrims stand in awe at the end of their long trip. Couples stroll arm in arm. The melancholy music of a bagpiper echoes over the ancient streets.

Santiago de Compostela is a marvelous blend of intriguing history, natural beauty, old world charm, friendly people and modern amenities. Narrow streets around the towering

cathedral are filled with shops, cafes, markets and dining spots featuring famed local wine, cheeses, tapas and fresh seafood. With a population of about 100,000, Santiago can easily be strolled north to south in barely an hour.

But this year – considered a Jubilee Year - Santiago will be welcoming millions of visitors for the annual Feast of St. James. The patron saint of Spain, St. James is the reason Santiago came to be and also its namesake. Santiago is Spanish for St. James.

“Whenever the Feast of St. James falls on a Sunday, it is a Holy Year,” said guide Suso Martinez. “We expect more than seven million people to come for July 25.”

During the Holy Year, the Puerta Santa or Holy Door of the Santiago cathedral is open the entire year. The door is normally closed. The feast will be celebrated with special masses, festivals and fireworks. The next Holy Year will not be until 2021.

FOUNDING OF SANTIAGO

Built on tradition or fact – depending on personal beliefs - the town of Santiago de Compostela has a fascinating past. The tale of its founding stretches back to the times of Christ. For centuries, pilgrims have trod olden roads to pay their respects at the tomb of St. James the Greater in Santiago.

“It’s a question of faith,” said Yolanda Ferro of Turismo De Santiago de Compostela. “Some people believe it is the body of St. James and some people believe it is not. One reason they knew it was St. James is because there was no head with the body ... But finding his body was the beginning of this city.”

One of the first apostles of Christ, James came to the area that is now Santiago to preach the gospel. “It was supposed to be the ends of the earth, the last place where he was preaching,” Ferro said.

When James was later beheaded in Jerusalem by King Herod, the disciples of James reportedly took his body to Spain and buried him in a tomb near a prehistoric fortified settlement. Two of James’ disciples – Teodoro and Anastasio – were said to have been buried on either side of him.

As time went by and Christian persecution increased, the tomb was forgotten. Then, in the early 9th century, a hermit named Pelagio saw and heard wondrous lights and sounds coming from a nearby woods. “The strange light was pointing to the place where the remains of St. James the Greater were buried,” Ferro said.

Pelagio shared his apparitions with a local bishop, Theodimir of Iria, who had the area cleared of shrubs and discovered a tiny chapel with an altar and crypt containing three tombs.

The King of Asturias ordered that a basilica be erected over the tomb and that a monastery be constructed nearby. Twelve Benedictine monks arrived and that was the beginning of the town of Santiago de Compostela.

“Our city is built on religion,” Ferro said. “We are not an industrial city. The four materials of our city are religion, tourists, the university and politics. The town’s name comes from the Latin “campus stellae” meaning “field of stars” in reference to strange lights near the tomb.”

For more information: Contact the Tourism Office of Spain in Chicago at (312) 642-1992 or check out the Websites www.spain.info or www.santiagoturismo.com

Santiago, Spain



Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Santiago in Spain was founded on religion and faith.