



DOMUS DEI  
CHURCHES, CONVENTS AND MONASTERIES IN SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

ENGLISH

## ENCLOSED CONVENTS

A tour around places of contemplation and silence

Santiago de Compostela features countless monumental riches, among which religious heritage stands out, especially enclosed convents and monasteries.

Shrouded in mystery and hidden behind tall walls, bars and lattice windows, time seems to stand still within them. They are places of silence, of serenity, of an austere and contemplative lifestyle, of devotion to God.

We invite you to go on a tour around Santiago de Compostela's enclosed convents, so that you can discover their history and heritage and be absorbed by their atmosphere of meditation and peace. And, naturally, sample the nuns' exquisite baking.

### Guided visits

**Itinerary:** Convent of Mercedarian nuns. Convent of Dominican nuns. Former Convent of San Domingos (Dominicans) garden. Convent of the Order of St. Clare.

**Languages:** Spanish (Thursday) and English (Saturday)

**Meeting point:** Turismo de Santiago Main Office, 63 Rúa do Vilar, 5 min before visit begins.

**More information and bookings:**  
Compostur  
Tel 902 190 160  
www.SantiagoReservas.com

Turismo de Santiago Main Office  
Rúa do Vilar, 63  
Tel: +34 981 555 129  
www.SantiagoTurismo.com



# ENCLOSED RELIGIOUS ORDERS IN SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA



**Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy**  
Enclosed Convent of Mercedarians

1

A mendicant order founded in Barcelona at the beginning of the 13th century by St. Peter Nolasco, under the protection of the king of Aragon, to rescue Christians under Islamic captivity and in danger of losing their faith. At that time, Christians and Moslems were fighting for control over the Iberian Peninsula. The Mercedarians therefore originated as a military order (of priests and knights; the superior was called General), although this status was subsequently changed.

The present-day mission of Mercedarians (both male and female) is redemption from new kinds of captivity: prisons, shelters, drug addicts, the sick, helpless elderly ones, abandoned children, maltreated women... a mission that they actively fulfil in their schools, old people's homes, etc., or by means of the contemplative life (enclosed), as is the case in Santiago.

Today, the Order is present in Spain, Italy, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Ecuador, Mexico, Venezuela, Guatemala, Panamá, El Salvador, Brazil, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Honduras, Bolivia, Santo Domingo, Cameroon, Angola, Mozambique, India and the USA.



**Order of Preachers or of St. Dominic**  
Enclosed Dominican Convent of Belvis

2

This is one of the main mendicant orders. It was founded at the beginning of the 13th century by the Spaniard Domingo de Guzmán, in response to the growth of new kinds of religion that broke away from ecclesiastic authority (Cathars, Albigenses, Waldenses). It was based on peaceful preaching against heretics. The Dominicans quickly spread throughout France and Spain and later on to America, where they undertook intensive missionary activity.

The preaching nuns or Dominicans, without leaving the convent, cooperate through prayer with the preaching of Dominican friars, calling on the Holy Spirit to enlighten them.

St. Dominic was the founder of the Rosary, to which this order shows great devotion: simple prayer that is repeated extensively and rhythmically and which is used to calm the mind, thereby predisposing it to spirituality.



**Order of St. Claire or of Franciscan Claires**  
Enclosed Convent of the Order of St. Claire

3

St. Claire was born into a noble family in Assisi, Italy, in 1193, but gave up her family riches and founded this order along with St. Francis of Assisi, of whom she was a friend and follower. Therefore, the Order of St. Claire is also considered a Franciscan order (the Second Order of St. Francis) as well as a mendicant order. And the nuns of St. Claire are also known as poor ladies in view of their poverty.

The order spread rapidly in the medieval world, which was a very dynamic world in which changes and growth of new phenomena, particularly religious ones, took place very quickly. There are calculated to be almost 20,000 nuns in around 1,250 convents belonging to the Order of St. Claire around the world.

St. Claire was the first women to write a rule of religious life for women. In 1985 she was declared the patron saint of television by Pius XII.



**Order of the Discalced Carmelites**  
Enclosed Convent of O Carme de Arriba

4

The Carmelites were established around 1190, in the context of the third crusade, on Mount Carmel (Israel) to emulate the prophet Elijah, who they considered one of the founders of monastic life. Their golden century was the 14th, at the end of which a female branch of the order was organised.

The branch's relaxation led to its reform in the 15th and 16th centuries, promoted by St. Teresa among others. Along with St. John of the Cross and others, she founded the Discalced Carmelites or Teresian Sisters at the end of the 16th century.

Their founders, St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, were exceptional writers that attained the very heights of Spanish and universal mysticism.

There are currently 11,600 Carmelites divided among 800 convents in 84 countries.



**Order of St. Benedict**  
Enclosed Monastery of the Benedictines of San Paio de Antealtares

5

A religious order founded by Benedict of Nursia in the Abbey of Monte Cassin (Italy). It follows St. Benedictine's Rule, written in the year 529, whose main principle is *Ora et labora*, i.e. pray and work. It was later used by other founders of religious orders as the basis of their own rules.

St. Benedict contributed decisively to the evangelisation of the European continent and is therefore the patron saint of Europe. The order is now present throughout the world, with both male and female monasteries.

Benedictine nuns are subject to "constitutional" enclosure (as opposed to "papal" enclosure, whose members are dedicated entirely to God, in solitude and silence). They can therefore combine their contemplation with activities such as teaching and providing accommodation, always within the monastery.



"This is the House of God and the Doorway to Heaven"  
Convent of O Carme entrance.

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## THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE IN SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

Starting in the Middle Ages, convents and monasteries belonging to the West's main religious orders were erected around the Apostle's basilica: Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans, Order of St. Clare, Carmelites, Jesuits, Augustinians, Mercedarians, etc.

Mainly entrusted with guarding the tomb and taking care of pilgrims, these orders made an important contribution to the city: their secular knowledge regarding pharmacy and medicine (the origin of Santiago's current medical-healthcare fame), their educational vocation (which contributed to the birth of the University), their devotion (their patron saints were adopted by the entire city), their architectural and artistic traditions (to which Santiago owes its monumental riches)... Enclosed convents, devoted to the contemplative life, and therefore isolated from society, had an essential role in this context: saving the world through prayer.

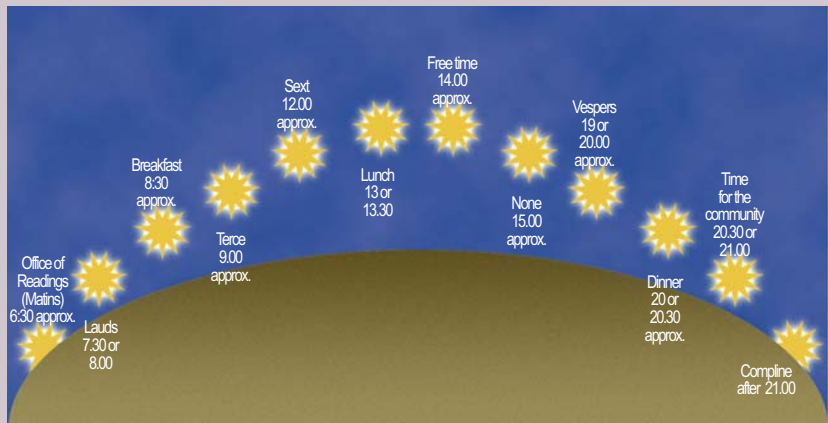
Santiago currently has 5 enclosed convents, each of which belongs to a different order of contemplative life: Mercedarians, Dominicans, Claires, Discalced Carmelites and Benedictines.

## CLOISTERED LIFE

### Prayer

This is the centre of religious life: monks and nuns are obliged to pray the Divine Office (Liturgy of the Hours), which is a series of prayers that are said at different times of the day, in order to consecrate them to God. Many of the prayers are accompanied by singing. The bell is essential since it summons to community services, inviting the members to pray.

Daily prayer is divided as shown by the following schedule, with variations according to each order:



- **Office of Readings (Matsins).** Dawn prayer, before the beginning of the new day, although some orders recite it the previous evening. Place: basilica. Duration: 40' - 50'.
- **Lauds.** This means "praises" because it celebrates daybreak. Place: basilica. Duration: 30'.
- **Breakfast.** After the day's first prayers, the members go to the refectory for breakfast.
- **Terce.** Prayer of the third hour after sunrise. Duration: less than 10'. Place: varies according to each order.
- **Sext.** Sixth hour after sunrise. Duration: less than 10'. Place: varies according to each order.
- **Lunch.** It is eaten in silence, which is only broken by the reading of the Bible or a selected book. Place: refectory. Duration: 30'.
- **Free time.** Time for resting, recreation, walking in the garden... Duration: between 30' and 60'.
- **None.** Prayer that is said before going back to work, at the ninth hour after sunrise. Place: varies according to each order. Duration: 10'.
- **Vespers.** Derived from vesper, evening: prayer that is said at dusk. Place: basilica. Duration: 30'.
- **Dinner.** After the initial prayer, and during the entire dinner, a spiritual book is read. Place: refectory. Duration: 30'.
- **Time for the community.** In the common room, the superior encourages dialogue in order to share the day's experiences. Duration: 30' approx.
- **Compline.** Last prayer of the day. After the Compline, it is time for resting and silence. Place: varies according to each order. Duration: 10'.

There is also the conventual mass, which is the main service, the community mass, also open to people from outside. Each order celebrates it at a different time. Duration: between 30' and 60'.

### The habit

"Clothes do not make the man" but they certainly help. This is another essential element. The nuns' habits are the same colour as those of their corresponding male order. They usually cover their head with a white headdress and white veil, in the case of novices, or black veil if they are professed nuns and have taken their three vows (poverty, chastity, obedience).

### Daily work

Between each prayer there is still time for domestic chores; gardening; singing and organ rehearsals for the Divine Office; periods of silence and meditation; attending to the revolving window; washing, ironing and embroidering for outside... Some female orders (the Dominicans and Benedictines in Santiago) prepare exquisite desserts, real conventual delicacies that just have to be sampled.



# B R E V I A R Y

## Religious orders



## Mendicant orders



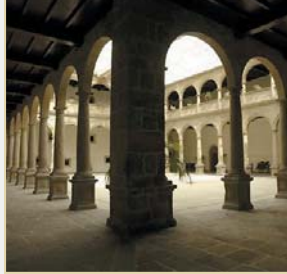
## Convent



## Monastery



## Cloister



## Enclosure



## Iconography



## Visual message



These are groups of persons united by a rule of coexistence established by the order's founder. They have the common mission of dedicating their lives to God, either actively (by preaching, taking care of the poor, education, etc) or contemplatively (subject to enclosure and devoted to prayer). They enjoyed their peak from the late 11th to the 19th century. Since there are public social services almost everywhere in the West today, religious orders, which used to play an important social role, have been declining.

These are orders that were originally (13th century) governed by an ideal of poverty (they could not own property or receive income but lived on alms and donations). They were established to detain the expansion of a series of heresies, mainly through action (mostly prayer) but also contemplation (enclosure). They are made up of monks and nuns that have taken the 3 vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Unlike the monastic movement, they live in convents located inside cities.

The word comes from the Latin *conventus*, meeting. Although used as a synonym of monastery, this term refers specifically to the building that houses monks and nuns belonging to a conventual or mendicant order but not to a monastic order. They were normally built near cities, beside the main approach roads, since they wanted to be close to society in order to transform it.

The word comes from the Greek root *monos*, only one (all Christian monks were originally hermits). It denotes the house of monks or nuns whose order, in search of isolation, was usually located in secluded places, normally outside towns. Monastic orders, unlike mendicant or conventual orders, could own properties and obtain income from them.

Cloister (from the Latin *claudere*, to close) is the gallery or corridor enclosing the inner courtyard of a church, convent or monastery, supported by columns or pillars. It is the centre of religious life: here is where the monks and nuns meditate and walk about. It also links the different parts of the building. It usually features a garden and fountain and there may be more than one. It is surrounded by the church, the most important building, chapterhouse (for community meetings and reading the chapters of the order's rule) and refectory (dining hall). There is also a library, cells (sleeping quarters), a garden and, according to the order, a guesthouse (for pilgrims and other guests).

The word is related to "cloister." It expresses the monks' and nuns' obligation of not leaving the enclosure and the prohibition against laypeople entering it. By removing undue interference from people or things, enclosure creates a space of perfection, of silence, of absolute dedication to God and prayer on behalf of the world.

This means "description of images." Christian iconography studies the way of representing the dogmas and saints that appear in churches, convents and monasteries: how they originated, what they represent (virtues, vices, values, etc) and which attributes (colours, objects, etc) usually accompany each one, thereby enabling their identification.

The programme of paintings and sculptures is different in each religious monument because it honours the saints considered to be the main ones there (in religious orders, normally the founder or founders and other members of the order who became saints, as well as the Virgin and Jesus). Amazingly, this visual message was a lot easier to decode for Catholics in the Middle Ages and in later times than it is for us today.



## ENCLOSED CONVENT OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY OF MERCY

Founded: 17th century. Style: baroque.

The Convent of Mercedarian Nuns, founded in the second half of the 17th century, is located beyond the city walls, opposite the Mazarelos gate (the only original city gate left standing). In fact, on leaving the walled enclosure, there is a wonderful view of the façade through this gate, which shows that its builders were interested in enriching the city perspectives.

## The convent

The convent has a rectangular ground plan, which includes the church housed in the centre of the right-hand side of the complex. The façade reflects a simple design and great sobriety, which is only broken by the belfry and the section marking the exterior of the church. At the centre of the latter there is a relief of the Annunciation (when the archangel Gabriel tells Mary that she will give birth to Jesus) surrounded by archbishops' coats of arms. Above these, a window bordered by strings of fruits, flowers and leaves, unequivocal motifs of the local baroque style.

## The church

It is very simple with a single nave. The transept stands out, being covered by a dome decorated with numerous strings of leaf motifs.

As in all enclosed convents, the most outstanding feature is the grating covering the two choirs, the upper one (for solemn occasions) and the lower one (for normal worship), where the Mercedarians attend liturgical offices.

The order's coat of arms is present throughout the church.

## The visual message

The images in the convent church represent the order's favourite saints:

- The main altarpiece, from the late 19th century, contains four principal images from the previous altarpiece: the lower ones are two Mercedarian saints (St. Peter Paschasius and St. Peter Armengol); the upper ones are St. Joseph and St. Joaquin, husband and father of the Virgin respectively.

In the centre, a relief of the Annunciation, the same theme that appears in the convent façade.

Everything in this altarpiece is related to the order's history and, above all, to the Virgin Mary, who is highly venerated by all Mercedarians.

- The neoclassical altarpieces in the transept (the intersection between a church's main nave and transversal one) contain the Virgin of Mercy with St. Peter Nolasco (at the moment when Mary inspires him to create the Order) and, in another one, the founder himself helping some captives. The upper circular adornments represent the founder taking holy orders and St. Raymond Nonnatus, one of the most famous Mercedarian saints, who was tortured during captivity.

## The Discalced Mercedarians in Santiago

There are currently 17 nuns in this convent. Apart from prayer and domestic chores, including looking after the church, they wash and iron for the Church and accept orders for embroidery and table linen.



Tránsito da Mercé, 1.  
Tel. +34 981 56 44 10

Convent mass (sung): 8.30 am; also at 12 noon on Sunday (except summer).

Revolving window: 10 am to 12.30 pm and 4 to 6.30 pm.

## The "Virgen del Portal" chapel

This is a simple chapel in which the "Virgen del Portal" statue (13th-century Gothic) stands out. The Virgin is accompanied by two small statues, which probably represent the Christian people. Above the Virgin's alcove is an image of the order's founder, St. Dominic. On the left, St. Joseph, and on the right, the Dominican St. Martin de Porres (better known as "Brother Broom").

Devotion to the "Virgen del Portal" is deeply rooted in Santiago. Her name comes from an image that appeared during the convent's original construction in the 14th century and which was initially placed in the gatehouse. In the 17th century the nuns took it into the church on several occasions, but the image always returned mysteriously to the gatehouse. They therefore decided to make a small sanctuary there.

The Virgin began working miracles and her fame spread abroad. She was invoked for all kinds of illnesses and also for passing exams. Her feast day is celebrated on September 8th with a very popular pilgrimage, which some self-sacrificing devotees undertake on their knees or with bare feet. Other rites to implore this Virgin's favour involve the offering of candles, requesting the Virgin's cloak to place on the sick and holy water from the sanctuary.

## The Dominicans in Santiago

There are currently 30 nuns in the Convent of Belvis. Their daily routine includes, apart from domestic chores, looking after the garden and musical rehearsals (for mass and the office of vespers), embroidering for churches and for individuals, as well as making waters for the city's churches. They are famous for their delicious desserts, which can be ordered (almond biscuits, "mantecados", Santiago's typical almond cake) or are available (biscuits, water) for buying whenever the revolving window is functioning.



Belvis, 2.  
Tel. +34 981 58 76 70

Church can be visited from 9 am to 1 pm and 3.30 to 8 pm.

Convent mass: 7.15 pm; Sunday at 12.30 pm.  
Rosary: 6.45 pm; Vespers: 7.45 pm

Revolving window: 9.30 am to 12 noon and 4.15 to 6 pm



## ENCLOSED CONVENT OF SANTA CLARA

Founded: 13th century. Current style: baroque.

Located to the north of the city walls, Santiago de Compostela's Convent of Santa Clara was the Order of St. Claire's first one in Galicia. It was founded and promoted during the second half of the 13th century by Doña Violante, wife of King Alfonso X the Wise, and therefore bears the title of "Royal."

## The convent

The construction of the present-day convent dates from the baroque period (late 17th century). The main façade, designed by the Compostela architect Simón Rodríguez (18th century), is one of the best examples of the theatrical sense of Spain's baroque style: it is a curtain-façade that hides the cloister and, at the back of a small interior garden, the church, which is also baroque but simpler.

This curtain-façade reflects the characteristic Compostela style called "barroco de placas," which refers to the pure geometric shapes that seem to be superimposed on the walls: a style imposed by the hardness of granite, which obliged the sculpting of emphatic shapes.

The Convent of Santa Clara was declared a National Monument in 1940.

## The church

Inside, all that remains of the original medieval construction is the granite pulpit and the founders' coats of arms. The main altar is baroque from the 18th century and is dedicated to the Immaculate, who is highly venerated by the nuns of the Order of St. Claire and the Franciscans,



## ENCLOSED CONVENT OF O CARME DE ARRIBA

Founded: 18th c. Style: Carmelite.

Facing the impressive façade of the enclosed Convent of Santa Clara is the discrete and austere Convent of Discalced Carmelites, an enclosed order that was brought to Compostela by the Galician mystic writer Maria Antonia de Jesus.

## The convent

The façade, built in the 18th century following the order's own style ("Carmelite"), is very simple and features pure lines, which give it a sturdy aspect. The polychrome image of the Virgin of Carmen, patron saint of the Carmelites, stands out.

## The church

The church has a Latin-cross ground plan, while its interior emphasises the simplicity announced by the exterior. The height of the columns supporting the vault is noteworthy.

The main altarpiece, from the 19th century, tends towards neoclassicism and is dominated by the Virgin of Carmen. The side altarpieces are dedicated to the order's founders, St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross.

The church has 2 chapels in the apse: one is dominated by the image of St. Joseph and the other by the "Virgen de las Angustias" at the time of the "Descent from the Cross."

and to the founding saints. The altarpieces in the transept are dedicated to the Virgin and St. Anthony of Padua. There are also several Churriguera-style altars (an over-elaborate ornamentation style used in Spanish architecture during the 18th century) in the nave, dedicated to Franciscan saints.

As in all enclosed convents, the most outstanding feature is the grating covering the two choirs (the upper and lower ones), where the nuns of the Order of St. Claire attend the liturgical offices.

## Are you getting married?

According to tradition, if you do not want it to rain on your wedding day, you should take a basket of eggs to a convent belonging to the Order of St. Claire. This tradition is still alive in Santiago.

## The Order of St. Claire in Santiago

There are currently 13 nuns living in the convent. Apart from prayer and other convent chores, they do work for individuals and the city's churches: ironing, starching and gold embroidery (even football team pennants!).



Santa Clara (no number).  
Tel. +34 981 58 38 88.

Guided visits to church: 4 to 7 pm, except Sunday.

Convent mass: 8 pm everyday.

Revolving window: 10.30 am to 12.30 pm and 4.30 to 6.30 pm.

The wall of the gospel (the left-hand wall) in the main chapel contains the lower choir, for ordinary use, and the communion window through which the nuns receive communion. The upper choir, in the last section of the nave, is used for more solemn celebrations.

## The Discalced Carmelites in Santiago

Apart from the contemplative life and music rehearsals for the offices, the nuns carry out domestic chores, including looking after the garden and henhouse, make Eucharistic bread for the city's churches and liturgical objects for outside (rosaries and scapulars).

There are currently 20 Carmelite nuns in the convent in Santiago (the Rule of St. Teresa allows a maximum of 21 in each convent).



Santa Clara, 8.  
Tel. +34 981 58 32 01

Convent mass: 8.15 am; Sunday and solemnities (except August) at 12.15 pm (sung).

Revolving window: 10 am to 1 pm and 4.15 to 7 pm.



## ENCLOSED MONASTERY OF SAN PAIO DE ANTEALTARES

Founded: 9th century. Current style: baroque.

San Paio's bells resound daily in the old town, reminding us of the centuries-old relationship between the city and the monastery, which was a centre of Benedictine power and is one of the best examples of Compostela's baroque style. But what is truly overwhelming is listening to its interior life by means of the Benedictines' Gregorian chant.

It was founded in the 9th century by King Alfonso II in the eastern part of the recently discovered tomb of St. James, which explains the name "Antealtares". It was initially inhabited by 12 Benedictine monks, entrusted with looking after and venerating the saint. After they left in 1499, it was occupied by enclosed Benedictine nuns.

Its nuns included women from the upper nobility, making it the most important female monastery in Galicia: it enjoyed the support of the Crown and was the one with the most income and property, including valuable gifts donated by noble women taking vows (that is why these nuns were also called "ladies").

The monastery was dedicated to St. Paio (Pelagius), a Galician saint from the 10th century that, while still a boy, was beheaded in Cordoba by the Muslims. His image dominates the church façade.

## The monastery

The present-day construction belongs almost entirely to the 17th and 18th centuries.

The wall overlooking Plaza de la Quintana stands out due to its sobriety and purity. In the middle, a stone plaque commemorates the "Literary" Battalion, organised by university students (which explains its name) to defend the city from Napoleon's troops.

The façade opposite that of the square contains the gatehouse and, in the corner, the so-called "Puerta de los Carros" or "Puerta de la Boniqueta": this gate depicts the Biblical episode of the Flight to Egypt, with the Virgin riding a little donkey.

## The church

Apart from the quality of its natural brightness, it has 5 magnificent baroque altarpieces, full of reliefs, paintings and sculptures, the same as the reliquary front. The choir (upper and lower) are impressive; the 18th century organ is very curious, being used for religious offices and now and again for baroque music concerts.

## Sacred Art Museum

The museum is accessed via the church. It features interesting images and liturgical objects, including the original altar that accompanied the Apostle's sarcophagus.

## The Benedictines in Santiago

There are currently 40 sisters. One of their daily chores is rehearsing music and Gregorian chant, essential in Benedictine communities, which can be heard in the convent mass and in lauds and vespers.

They also work for around 6 hours per day in: the guesthouse (hospitality is one of the most characteristic aspects of the entire monastic tradition); the university residence (60 beds); the children's school (four classes); the Sacred Art Museum; the archives and they also embroider liturgical ornaments;

The Benedictine nuns also make exquisite confectionery: biscuits and Santiago's typical almond cake (available everyday at the revolving window), and swiss roll, almond biscuits and other desserts (by order).



Antealtares, 23 (church entrance in Via Sacra)  
Tel. +34 981 58 51 27 / +34 981 56 06 23

Convent mass: 7.30 pm (working days); 8 am (Saturday, after lauds); 12 noon (Sunday and public holidays)  
Lauds: 8 am; Vespers: 8 pm; Saturday at 7.30 pm; Vigils: Saturday at 9.15 pm

Revolving window: 9 am to 1 pm and 3.30 to 7 pm

