



➔ 42°2'10" N 8°38'48" W

Day 1 | THROUGH THE ALTO MINHO REGION

Valença ➤ Rubiães

The first stage **begins in the city of Valença**, beside the International Bridge over the River Minho and at the start of Avenida de Espanha. **It ends in the village of Rubiães** (Municipality of Paredes de Coura), next to the romanescque Church of St. Peter. It covers 18 km and can be walked in 5 hours. With altitudes ranging from 10 m to 275 m it makes for **an easy, enjoyable day's walking**. The landscape consists predominantly of **forests and valleys with abundant vegetation** and is dotted with villages and hamlets. This is the lush and fertile terrain of the Alto Minho region, which extends southwards from the River Minho and is irrigated by its tributaries.

➤ 42°1'57" N 8°38'47" W





➔ 41°56'46" N 8°37'47" W

Over the course of this stage, which passes through the Municipalities of Valença and Paredes de Coura, the **multi-secular cultural heritage** is a constant presence, above all in the form of chapels, churches and monasteries. These granite buildings, which are found in towns and villages, as well as scattered across the landscape, are an architectural testimony to centuries of history, and play a key role in the life of the communities they belong to, in which the sacred and profane are intimately linked. Traditions are brought to life during local festivities, while the region's authentic gastronomy, cooked with ingenuity and art, is a constant feature and underscores how important culinary culture is.

When setting out on this stretch of Portuguese terrain, plan your time in accordance with your motivations and interests.



➔ 40°43'37" N 8°28'37" W

One could walk non-stop, pausing briefly and keeping a steady pace. However, you could also pause at certain points to contemplate aspects of the landscape and discover striking cultural or environmental features, or else simply take a break.

If your pilgrimage begins in Spain, in the region of Galicia, at some point along the Way of Saint James, you will have to plan accordingly to ensure you join the Northern Route, which leads to the Sanctuary of Fátima. From Valença onwards there is a **network of hostels** and other types of accommodation, which are all signposted.

During the initial part of this first stage, the **River Minho is a fundamental element of the landscape and the region's history**. It marks a frontier between two countries. The bridge that crosses it was opened in 1886 to create a rail link between Portugal and the Spanish region of Galicia.

On entering Valença's historic centre, you will see the city's ancient **fortifications** and discover a rich historical and artistic heritage. The medieval fortifications, dating to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, were extended and modernised in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, above all during the War of Restoration, with a sophisticated system of bastions, ravelins and moats. Inside this



➔ 42°1'58" N 8°38'47" W

architectural monument, classified as national heritage, you find the roads, avenues and squares of a lively city.

Leaving the walled-town and following the roads through the outskirts of the town, continue until you reach the EN13 roundabout, where you will gradually leave the traffic behind and, taking rural footpaths combined with just a few roads, make your way to quieter and more peaceful places.

In **Arão**, a village that in the thirteenth century was called Vilar de Lamas and belonged to the Bishopric of Tui, you can see **the Parish Church of the Holy Saviour**, a building with an eighteenth-century baroque façade, crowned with a broken pediment.

As you pass through **Fontoura**, nestled between farmers' fields, the tower of the **Church of St. Michael** is worthy of note. Then, on leaving Fontoura a mountainous region begins and the Route makes its way through rugged and wild, yet also very beautiful countryside.

Continue until **São Bento** (Parish of Cossourado), where you can pause to visit the **Chapel of St. Benedict of the Open Door**, a eighteenth-century building with a side tower and baroque façade.





➔ 41°56'3" N 8°34'52" W

The Route continues to follow farm tracks and gradually approaches **Rubiães**. Prior to entering the village, you cross a **medieval bridge over the River Coura**, a tributary of the Minho river. This Gothic bridge was built during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and is supported by three arches. Here we can observe the landscape and contemplate the past, as this was the route of an ancient Roman road, which from the Middle Ages onwards became part of the Way of Saint James. Sticking to quiet footpaths head into the centre of the village, where a **pilgrims' hostel** (located in an old primary school) and the Church are points of reference.

The **Church of St. Peter** dates back to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and it is classified as national heritage. It is a singular example of **Romanesque architecture** with its single nave. On the façade, of particular note is the portal framed by archivolt that spring from columns adorned with sculptures of the Archangel Gabriel and Our Lady, clear allusions to the biblical episode of the Annunciation. The capitals are decorated with animal motifs.