

Clothing can be complicated. The materials, the sizes, the colors, the durability, the availability, the pricing, the comfort, the fashion, the style ..

Some basics about clothing. Most of the hiking clothing is made with polyester. Many of the marketing qualities can be misleading. The clothing is over emphasized with UPF ratings, with promises of breathability, rain proofing, strength. Polyester is plastic. What you buy at many of these hiking retailers is plastic clothing. You are buying plastic shirts and plastic pants and plastic socks and plastic underwear. These are not natural materials. Let's see what the alternatives are.

Cotton / Polyester combo. Say 65% Cotton & 35% polyester with breathability & fast drying qualities. Well that is a good change. I can buy into that combo.

Cotton - say 100% with a 25% reduction in weight with breathability and faster drying and rugged and full size fitting and belt loops and a button. I like that idea.

Linen - say 100% linen. Linen has good sun blocking qualities, is breathable, is fast drying, is the strongest material available and will last much longer than other materials. Even when the material has faded in color it will still be wearable. Linen is also fairly good with odor protection and temperature control .

Wool - Wool is a great natural material but it usually has shrinkage problems. Wool is good for base layers for cold weather and for hiking socks. The traditional hiking socks are thicker than the newer hiking socks and is available in 100% wool or a combo of wool with other materials which is fine.

I am going to provide some advice on how to diversify out of polyester and into some of these materials mentioned. Certain materials have to be plastic, like the Gore tex rain jackets, other clothing can be combo material. I will also talk about fit because if the clothes don't fit properly you have wasted your money.

Let me start with hiking shoes and then talk about clothing. At the end of this presentation I will provide some retailers with their web sites.

Hiking shoes

This is the most important component of your clothing equipment. The Camino Frances is over 850 kms. Your shoes have to last at least 50% more than these 850 kms. So you need a new pair of hiking shoes after each full Camino hike. If you hike the Muxia Camino you should be ok and if you later hike the O Porto - Santiago camino you should be ok if done in the same trip. Every Camino trip = a new pair of hiking shoes. Take an extra pair of shoe laces just in case.

The sole - my preferred sole is the Vibram sole. It has been proven in the Camino terrain. Some brands do not have Vibram, such as Solomon & Oboz, but their tread is of high quality.

When you buy hiking shoes try to locate a retail outlet with these brands and try them on. You will need a full size larger than the normal tennis shoe size you use. Wool socks take space and you need extra space in the front portion when you are hiking downhill in a mountain range. You don't need mid ankle or higher rise. Regular rise is fine. Make sure they are not too heavy.

These are the brands I have tried. Merrell, Asolo, Solomon, Oboz. Buy an extra set of shoe laces or two for the trip. Check the shoe lace measurement. When you buy hiking shoes read the comments. Comments are very useful. I once bought a brand of hiking shoes - not mentioned - and failed to read the comments. I later read the comments which indicated the sole would tend to come apart. So I did not take these for a hiking trip. Much later, while using these hiking boots in dirt terrain the sole did come apart. There was no fix. Not even crazy glue. Once the sole is gone, it is gone. Also hiking shoes are glued. As time passes, the glue tends to wear out and the soles come apart. So, hiking shoes do come with an expiration date and with mileage limits. Read the comments of whatever clothing equipment you plan to buy.

Rain Jacket

A rain jacket can be a life saver. I recall my 2nd trip of the Camino. I started in St Jean Pied de Port. I was with another person who happened to be in poor health and could not walk uphill at a fast pace. It was already past mid day when we arrived at Valcarlos. I should have stayed at Valcarlos. But instead we continued to hike another 18 kms to Roncesvalles. The rain drizzle became heavier. It became dark. The rain

drizzle continued for hours. I finally arrived at Roncesvalles at about 10 pm. When I took the rain jacket off I was dry. My shirt was dry and I was not wet. The rain jacket I had was a 3 ply Gore Tex LL Bean jacket. I used this jacket for another 10 years. I have 4 rain jackets. An LL Bean Gore tex, two REI Gore tex jackets. One lightweight and another one I recently bought which is a 2 ply gore tex with similar thickness and length as the original LL Bean jacket, and another Fjallraven hydractic rain jacket which I ordered from REI on a good sale. This jacket is lightweight and the sizing is for European markets. This jacket I ordered as an XL because it is European sizing. Whenever you order European clothing check the sizing well. Most likely you have to go a full size larger. This jacket has a good long hip length to it. These jackets are held together by tape. Before the 1st use, I wash them with a special laundry soap such as nickwax which is available at REI. Don't wash these jackets with fabric softener because the tapes that hold the jacket will become loose and destroy the jacket. The 1st wash with nick wax assures the pores of this material will seal. Gore tex is breathable material, even in the rain. Wash the jacket with nick wax to clean and waterproof before every trip. Line dry the jacket.

Jacket / Coat

I have a wonderful army style coat from LL Bean. It is loaded with pockets inside & out, a green field color in large. It is 74% cotton and 26 polyester. It has a hood with a zipper. When the weather is cooler I tend to wear it. If the weather become very cold then I use base layers. This coat is breathable material - cotton. It washes easy and is sturdy. I don't have a sleeping bag, so if the albergue is cold I use it as a blanket. I have not seen this jacket available for some time in LL Bean, however LL Bean has unlined field jackets made of similar material and very sturdy.

Pants

Pants are tricky. I tended to use full polyester LL Bean - Cresta pants but have tended to look for combo materials - Cotton / Polyester. LL Bean has these combo materials and REI has the Kuhl brand or go directly to the Kuhl website for these combo materials. Kuhl also has cotton pants which are 25% lighter than normal cotton. Kuhl tends to lean on the European sizing model so go up a full sizing. I have had to go from a 36 waist to a 37 waist which is 38. I grew a little wider during the covid lockdown. It has been a little difficult to get rid of the covid belly. Another issue is the tight fit of some of these pants. When you see the description "cuffed" that means they are

tighter at the ankles. I hate tight clothing so I tend to look for the traditional classical or full fit. Beware of the buttons. Some pants have a traditional button, others have a snap button and others have a drawstring. Keep with the traditional button which can be repaired with a sewing kit. Try and skip the snap button enclosure and the draw strings. Take an extra belt (nylon). Read the comments for this type of clothing in either LL Bean or REI.

Shirts

Good news with shirts. Almost free of plastic shirts. There are 2 materials I can use. One is cotton flannel which are available at LL Bean or linen shirts available at Banana Republic. With the linen from Banana Republic I had to go with the XL. They seem closer to the European sizing model and linen does have some slight shrinkage. I also tried several of these shirts at the retail store before buying them on the web site. Wash these shirts and line dry - no dryer. I watch out for the sales. I recently bought a dark brown linen shirt which has a slight hint of purple on a liquidation for \$ 29. I wear these shirts untucked and they are superior to any polyester hiking shirts. These shirts are breathable, have superior sun protection qualities, control the temperature much better, dry fairly fast and are very comfortable.

T shirts - a couple of T shirts . I still have several LL Bean polyester for indoor use. I also have linen T shirts. Good for indoor use.

Socks

Wool socks are the better choice. Some are 100% wool and others are combo wool and polyester and a stretch material Both are fine for hiking as long as they have some padding. Some of the newer wool socks have no padding. I tend to go with LL Bean midweight or lightweight wool socks if they have some padding. REI brand also has similar socks. These socks seem to get tighter as time goes so I have had to go with one size larger with socks. Read the comments before you buy.

Underwear

Underwear is complicated. My better results have been the Ex - Officio brand which are available at LL Bean or REI. These are fast drying. As always, hang dry. When you pack take a handful of clothes line hanger clips - wood, no plastic.

Wool & Linen & Base Layers

If you plan to hike the Camino starting mid October through December you may need a wool base layer top. There are 2 weights. The 150 and the 250. The 150 is fine. Check the sizing and the comments before you buy. I have an LL Bean base layer top. A light wool sweater with a T shirt would serve the same purpose. I also have a Banana Republic Henley button-down linen long sleeve shirt which again I had to buy in an XL size because of the European sizing which works fine as a base layer. For deep winter I would take the base layers, the wool sweater, the army jacket, the Gore Tex rain jacket. These are all breathable materials and much better than a down jacket which would leave me soaking. If I had rain or snowing conditions I could use the base layers with the Gore Tex rain jacket, otherwise I would use the army jacket. Wool and linen are the best material for cold weather protection. Nothing else comes close. Remember - Line dry.

Shorts

If you plan to walk the Camino on a semi warm day then take along a pair or two of shorts. I go full plastic with shorts. REI sells the Columbia brand with side pockets which have been very good. I had to go with the 38 waist with 10" length with a stretch waist for comfort. If you go with a European brand you have to size up. These can double up as a bathing suit also. Take an extra nylon belt or two just in case.

Vendors

www.llbean.com

www.rei.com

www.kuhl.com

www.bananarepublic.gap.com