



VIA FRANCIGENA: 2019 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PATH.

A snapshot of the Via Francigena development in 2019 through a sample analysis of 2,000 EAVF pilgrim passports and rest stops. This non-exhaustive estimate provides a useful base for understanding of the route tourism trends and economic potential.

The analysis was carried out on **2,000 EAVF pilgrim passports** distributed in 2019 along the entire route **from Canterbury to Rome**. It provides **estimates and indications**, useful for understanding route's perspectives, hiker's profile, travel motivations and needs. It also provides final considerations on the Via Francigena development.

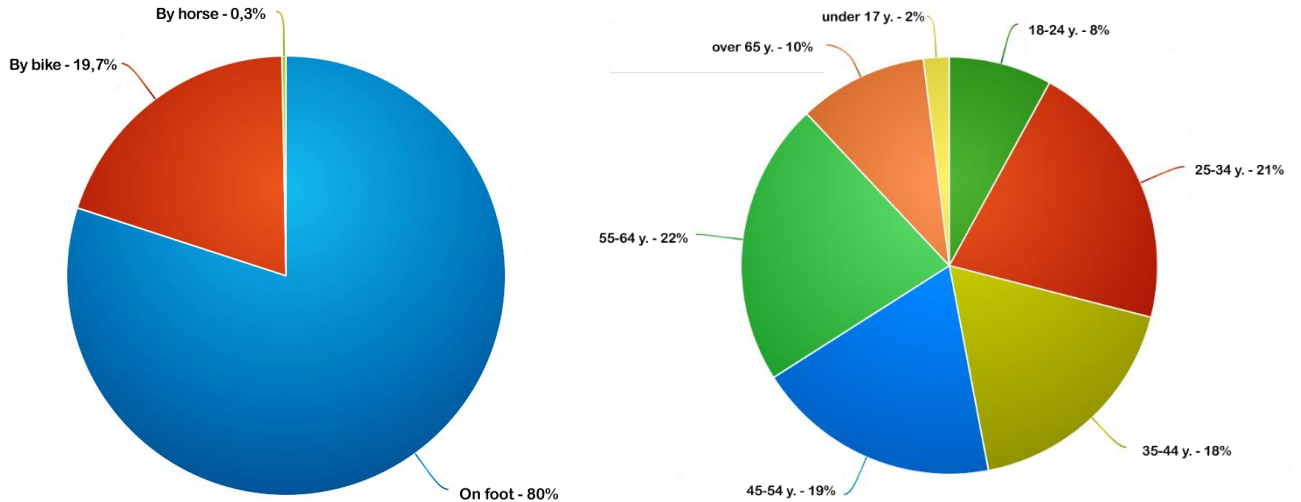
HIGHLIGHTS:

- The Via Francigena becomes increasingly **international**, hosting hikers come from **over 60 countries**. In Europe, Italian walkers dominate the route, followed by visitors from France, Germany and Switzerland;
- Hikers from the United States of America and Canada are top visitors from the American continents. The Asian segment on the Via Francigena is dominated by hikers from China, South Korea and Japan;
- 80% walkers travel on foot; 19.7% - by bicycle, 0.3% - by horse;
- Accommodation choice: **50%** stay in pilgrims' hostels, **50%** - in more upscale facilities that offer variety of services;
- Most popular departure points: **Lucca, Siena, Fidenza and Pavia** in Italy; **Grand Saint Bernard Pass and Lausanne** in Switzerland; **Canterbury** in England - zero kilometre of the path;
- The Via Francigena embraces hikers between **16 and 80 years old**. The **age group of 25-34** is ever growing;
- **Pilgrim's profile**: educated, passionate about culture and nature, curious, in search of experience, gastronomy amateur;
- Numbers of **services and businesses** that support the Via Francigena increase;
- The Via Francigena favours **territorial economic development**;
- 2019 walkers estimate is **50,000** along the entire route;
- Website <http://www.viefrancigene.org> registered over **4 million page visits and 620,000 users**;

PILGRIM PASSPORT. Number of **distribution points** for the EAVF pilgrim passports has increased, thanks to collaboration of many tourism offices and local associations. It has grown from 52 to 74 distribution points along the entire route, including those in **Canterbury in the UK, Paris in France, Orsières in Switzerland; Aosta, Milan and Viterbo in Italy**. Along the southern section the new entries are **Monte Sant'Angelo** and **Barletta**. The distribution centres are important as they are the first contact points for pilgrims with the Via Francigena world.

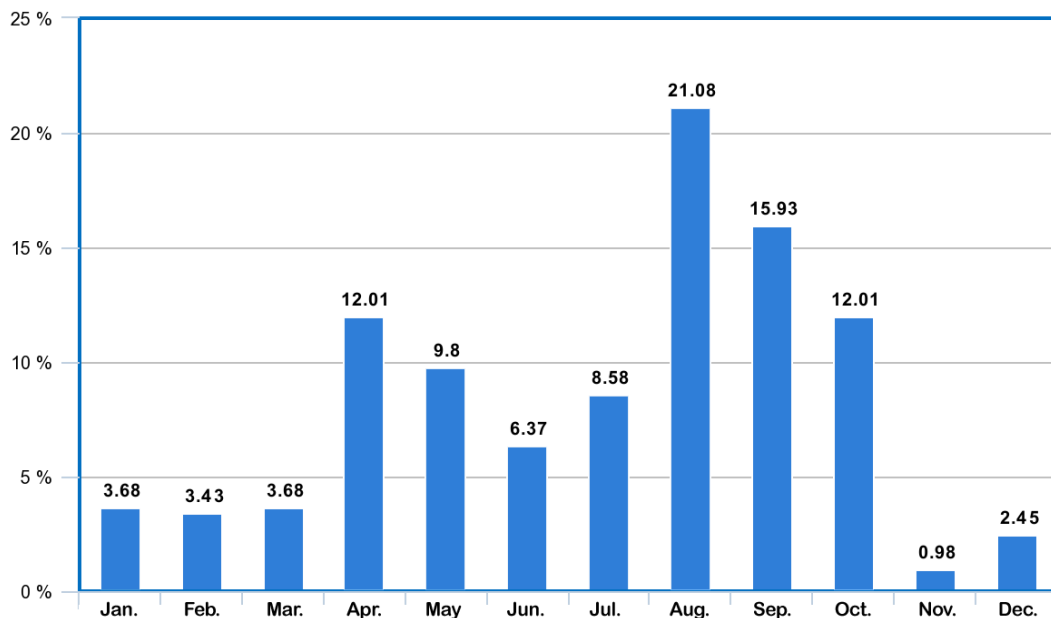


TRAVLLERS' PROFILE. Means of transport: 80% on foot, 19.7% by bicycle and 0.3% by horse. Hikers' average age: 8% - 18-24 years old; 21% - 25-34 years old, 18% - 35-44 years old, 19% - 45-54 years old, 22% - 55-64 years old, 10% - over 65 years old, 2% - young people under 17.



The ratio between **men and women** was registered as 52% men and 48% women.

Preferred departure months (in order of attendance): August (19%), September (16%), April (12%), October (12%). Cold months from December to January gathered over 10% of walkers.





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Hikers who purchased the EAVF pilgrim passports were predominantly Italians (70%), confirming three factors: a growing trend in Italy for experience and outdoor tourism and hiking routes; relatively little knowledge about the Via Francigena outside Italy; distribution of alternative pilgrim passports produced by tour operators and associations in some countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands.

Hikers from the following European countries are more frequent along the Via Francigena (in descending order): **France, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium**. From American continents, tourists from the **United States of America and Canada** top up the list, followed by **Brazil and Argentina**. From the Asian segment an increase in pilgrims from **China, South Korea and Japan** has been significant. Australia is confirmed as a "friendly" continent of the Via Francigena with a constant flow of pilgrims towards the entire route crossed by four countries. In total there are over **60 countries** represented along the route, including **Singapore, New Zealand and Taiwan**. There is a great growth potential of the Via Francigena, which can be untapped with adequate promotion.

DEPARTURE AND FINAL DESTINATION. Starting points of the Via Francigena in Italy are in order of attendance: the Grand Saint Bernard Pass - 17%, Lucca - 15%; Siena, Fidenza and Pavia - 6%. They are followed by Siena, Acquapendente, Viterbo. However, there are many other departure points in each of the four countries, well connected by means of transportation. In England, the symbolic departure point is Canterbury, kilometre zero of the route. In Switzerland, Lausanne is confirmed as the most popular start of the journey.

For 48% of travellers the **final destination** of the trip was the **city of Rome and St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican**. The other intermediate destinations are primarily those of Tuscany, such as Monteriggioni, Siena, Lucca, Pontremoli; as well as Ivrea in Piedmont or Viterbo in Lazio. In view of the development of the Via Francigena in the south, other destinations such as Monte Sant'Angelo, Bari, Brindisi, Santa Maria di Leuca in Apulia have potential to become journey's terminus.

MOTIVATIONS. **Spiritual motivation** dominates the reasons for travel, linked to soul searching and immaterial aspect of the journey experience. It is often combined with **cultural tourism**. Among other motivations there is a will to share and to live a shared experience, followed by nature, sport and religion.

ACCOMMODATIONS. The numbers of overnight stays in some hostels were collected and analysed to understand the trend in comparison with the previous year: Ivrea and Vercelli 1204 (+ 5%), Senna Lodigiana 600 (+ 20%), Fidenza 880 (+ 6%), Cassio, Aulla and Gambassi Terme 5000 (+ 25%). It is important to emphasise a growing number of different types of hospitality facilities that host pilgrims and travellers, varying from modest structures of religious accommodations, hostels, pilgrim's houses to more upscale Bed & Breakfasts and hotels. On average, 50% of travellers prefer the pilgrim's hostels, while the other half – more comfortable upscale accommodations.

TRAVEL DURATION AND BUDGET. The time spent travelling along the Via Francigena is on average 7 days. Many people re-take the route each year successively, picking up where they left off. In this case a pilgrim passport from the previous years is re-used. The estimate of pilgrims, wayfarers and walkers of 2019 along the entire Canterbury-Rome axis is **50,000 persons**. The **average expense** of those who travel on foot was 50 € per day, while bicyclists spent 60 € per day. Thereby economic benefits from the route can be estimated **20 million euros per 2019**.

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EAVF ASSISTS PILGRIMS. In 2019 **19,100 EAVF pilgrim passports** were distributed (in comparison with 16,900 in 2018) thanks to collaboration with numerous local associations. The EAVF staff coordinates the work of the association and manages distribution of pilgrim passports. The association provides useful information in various languages and responds to pilgrims' demands and requests. In 2019 the secretariat received **505 questions** and **460 specific requests** concerning technical questions about the route (received from the separate *Routes* email). Over **250 requests** came from the Association's Facebook page.

These important numbers prove an overall growth of the Via Francigena and contribute to a greater awareness of the importance of a united **3,200 km** Via Francigena European track, which also involves the southern stretch up to Santa Maria di Leuca. The European dimension remains the most important strength of the Via Francigena, as well as its ability to aggregate 16 regions and 600 municipalities in four countries. This impacts the **complexity of governance** which manages to keep together the specificities, beauty and potential of each territory while at the same time trying to promote the entire route. The Via Francigena will be stronger if each individual regional stretch is stronger and vice versa: each individual regional stretch will be stronger with strong Via Francigena in its integrity.

FUTURE CHALLENGES. In more immediate future, the primary challenge is a matter of understanding how the Via Francigena and all its hospitality, catering and service systems will be able to react to the ongoing COVID health emergency, based on the directives from local and national authorities. These points, among others, will be discussed within the European International Interregional Coordination Committee (CECTI), scheduled by the EAVF on 28 April 2020 in electronic format. In this phase of uncertainty, also for tourism, it is important to find common strategies to better face the **future of the Via Francigena** - outdoors and *en route*. The Via Francigena and the routes represent an **ideal example for post-pandemic tourism solutions** and relaunch of tourism based on people, slow motion, experiences, nature and small villages.

10 ACTIONS to be realised in upcoming future:

1. To implement promotional campaigns, especially on an international scale. The role of national governments and regions are fundamental in this activity and is proved by past actions, such as a splendid example of the Tuscany region which in 2014 launched a promotion campaign in five languages "*The Via Francigena Straight To The Heart*";
2. To improve pilgrims' hospitality services with a particular reference to hostels, religious structures, refuges. The religious structures, as learnt from the experience of the Saint James's Ways, can play a decisive role. The EAVF has recently made contacts with the CEI's Ad Limina Petri network establishing a channel for fruitful dialogue at the Italian section;
3. To raise awareness and activate the Lazio region - the "Galicia" of the Via Francigena – to take a decisive role in the Via Francigena network of paths that arrive to Rome;
4. To improve a **permanent route maintenance system** along the entire European route (through collaboration of national governments, regions, local authorities and associations) and to spend at best **20 million euros** that the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage has made available on the entire Italian section for infrastructural interventions;

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5. To improve existing communication tools and introduce new ones based on storytelling. Currently the EAVF offers the official app of the route and two official guides: from Canterbury to the Grand Saint Bernard Pass (Favre) in French, whose edition in Italian and English is being negotiated, and from Grand Saint Bernard Pass to Rome (Terre di Mezzo). The goal for 2021 is the guide of the **Via Francigena in the South**;
6. To recover **spiritual values of the Via Francigena** which come from Christian roots in view of the important Jubilee 2025;
7. To pay greater attention to statistics and monitoring of qualitative and quantitative data by creating a single **observatory** capable of collecting and analysing data of pilgrims along the way and those, who arrived to Rome;
8. To continue work on the Via Francigena candidacy to the **UNESCO World Heritage List**, which is now to be shared with the governments of the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland and Italy;
9. To **develop symbolic traits** passable in 8-10 days, such as Canterbury-Arras; Arras-Reims; Besancon-Lausanne; Martigny-Ivrea; from the Po to the Passo della Cisa; from Fidenza to Lucca. This will only be possible with the interest of local and regional administrations and the support of a network of tour operators and service providers;
10. Consolidate collaboration with *friends associations* and *trail angels* who, in agreement with the territories, contribute to the animation of the Via Francigena on a local scale.

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