

2021

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### Recommended Citation

Echarri, Fernando (2021) "Non-Dual Experiences for the Dual Pilgrim: from the Spanish Way of Saint James to the Japanese Kumano Kodo," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*: Vol. 9: Iss. 6, Article 7.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.21427/sntg-yk13>

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp/vol9/iss6/7>

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# Non-Dual Experiences for the Dual Pilgrim: from the Spanish Way of Saint James to the Japanese Kumano Kodo

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The twinning of Sacred Paths is a new experience because of the possible synergy it creates. This article studies the twinning of the Way of Saint James in Spain with the Japanese Kumano Kodo. This twinning unites the pilgrimages, unites spirituality, unites nature, unites creation, unites culture, but in totally different contexts. From Western Christian culture we pass to Eastern Buddhist-Shintoist culture. The pilgrim acquires significant life experiences, Non-Dual experiences on both routes and is transformed, and thus accredited, as a dual pilgrim. Different spheres of the person will be affected: the perceptual sphere, emotional sphere, cognitive sphere, social, relational, cultural and natural sphere and spiritual sphere.

Key Words: non-dual experience, dual pilgrim, Saint James Way, Kumano Kodo

## Introduction

Pilgrimages to sacred places are part of the cultural history of humanity as a substantial part of the religious reality. For millennia people have travelled to sacred sites. People visited these places based on a

*desire to become closer to divinity, seek forgiveness for wrongdoing, worship ancestors and nature gods, or petition deities for blessings* (Kocyigit, 2016:21, citing Olsen & Timothy, 2006; Nyaupane *et al.*, 2015).

But nowadays, pilgrimages are not just religious or spiritual activities (Marine-Roig, 2015). There are also secular reasons:

*economic, political, and social processes that create destinations and routes enabling the circulation of people, goods, and ideas* (Scriven & O'Mahony, 2020:1).

Today the secularisation of pilgrimages and travel to sacred sites is

*an emerging global phenomenon that greatly impacts the contemporary tourism industry'* (Gou & Shibata, 2017:22).

These thousand-year-old pilgrimage routes are presented as powerful attractions that bring together numerous cultural, natural and spiritual resources for tourism. The resources that are shown recurrently throughout their long journey make them a powerful and attractive centre

of interest. For this reason, many people choose them as a tourist destination. The pilgrimage routes are full of opportunities for personal growth. This great variety and quantity of resources that they present allow for growth to take place in an integrated way, affecting all the areas of the person. That is why they are given great relevance and stand out among the different existing tourist resources.

The potential for these routes to provide significant experiences offers great value. That is why they have become an outstanding destination that tourists do not hesitate to explore. On the trails, there is 'slow tourism' (Kato & Prozano, 2017) that provides significant experiences. These provided experiences can affect in a high degree and in an integral way all the spheres of people: perceptual, emotional, cognitive, social, natural, cultural and spiritual. The tourist knows that they will face a great personal challenge full of experiences. These pilgrimages do not leave anyone indifferent, they become significant experiences that last for a long time in the memory. That is why this topic is of interest and becomes the objective of this article, to explore the impact not only of the pilgrimage routes and their possibilities as a tourist potential, but also to contrast the synergies that can be established between them. Under this general objective, we pose the following research question (RQ1):

*Can a synergy be established between two ancient routes that provide significant experiences that add value to tourism?*

As an example of the possible synergies between two ancient pilgrimage routes, this article presents a 'case study' on the case of the twinning of the 'Way of Saint James' route in Spain and the 'Kumano Kodo' route in Japan.

## The Case Study of Two Different Ways, two Linked Ways

### *The Way of Saint James*

The Way of Saint James is a Catholic Christian pilgrimage route that has experienced a huge boom in recent decades in terms of the number of pilgrims who travel it (D'Entremont & Tanco, 2019). Many of its different European branches come together in its final section, which runs through the north of Spain (Slavin, 2015). The Way begins its entry into Spain in the village of Roncesvalles located in the Pyrenees mountain range and advances westward to Santiago de Compostela, in the north-westernmost part of the Iberian peninsula, where Saint James was buried (Figures 1, 2, 3). The Spanish section of the Way is approximately 764 kilometres long.

At present, the Way of Saint James is one of the busiest pilgrimage routes in the world. Its origin dates back to the 9th century, when the tomb of the Apostle Saint James was discovered in Galicia (Spain). Santiago was one of the twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ. According to Christian tradition, the Saint preached in Spain before being beheaded in Jerusalem in the year 44 (AD). Legend has it that his body was transferred by boat to the end of the western world (Galicia), where it would be buried. Following the discovery of his tomb (in approximately the year 813) vast numbers of pilgrims from all over Europe came to visit the remains of the Apostle and within a few decades it became highly important as a Catholic pilgrimage destination. The three major pilgrimage destinations in Christianity since medieval times are Jerusalem, Rome and Santiago de Compostela. Subsequently, plagues and religious division, among other factors, caused the pilgrimage to decline significantly until the end of the 20th century, when a renewed interest began. This resurgence has resurrected the Way in all its splendour, through its paths, some of which were almost forgotten, and has made it one of the main pilgrimage routes in the world today.

Along its kilometres, the Saint James Way, in its Spanish section, gathers an important thousand year cultural and natural legacy, which contributes enormous value to its original spiritual meaning. Its value includes a built

heritage of historical importance created to meet the needs of pilgrims, including cathedrals, churches, hospitals, hostels and even bridges (UNESCO 2015). It could be said that for the visitor, the coexistence of experiences of nature, landscape, history, art and culture in a context of spiritual pilgrimage is perfectly combined in the Camino (Felones, 1999).

Over the years, several artistic movements and cultures have influenced the works of art and buildings that accompany the paths of the Way of Saint James, this includes the Romanesque, which is the predominant artistic movement of the Way. This also incorporates different features from the Arab or Gothic culture to blend them into a unique architectural and artistic style. Literature, lyrics and legends, such as those of Leire and Saint Virila, which have become part of popular culture, also play a role in the Way, making it one of the most important cultural and artistic references in Europe for centuries (Martín *et al.*, 1991).

Churches, bridges, old roads and monasteries are interspersed among the various natural resources, forming a rich variety of landscapes, in harmony with the environment and with human traditions (Martín *et al.*, 1991). The Way is surrounded and integrated by this diversity of landscapes, which are endowed with an important cultural charge due to the actions of human beings through the years. This interrelationship of nature and culture (Báscones, 1999) gives the Way a beauty and harmony that add to its spiritual dimension.

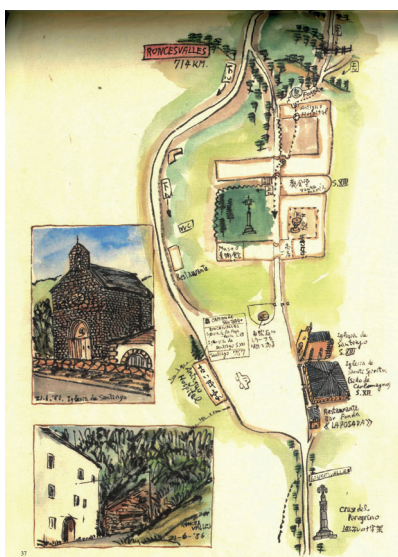
This is how nature and art, from the tradition that marks history, can manifest themselves in very diverse forms in the service of the spirituality that the Way contains throughout its journey. The Way of Saint James, due to its incalculable patrimonial value, which combines both its cultural and natural aspects, has received numerous international distinctions in recent decades; an example of this is its consideration as the first European Cultural Itinerary, a distinction granted by the Council of Europe in 1987, or that obtained in 1993, when UNESCO declared it a World Heritage Site.

The studies that have been carried out on this World Heritage Site are numerous, since its inception. One of the earliest is the *Codex Calixtinus* (also known as the *Book of St. James*, c.1150), and many more have followed, particularly since its revival from the 1980s of the twentieth century. As an example of the richness of

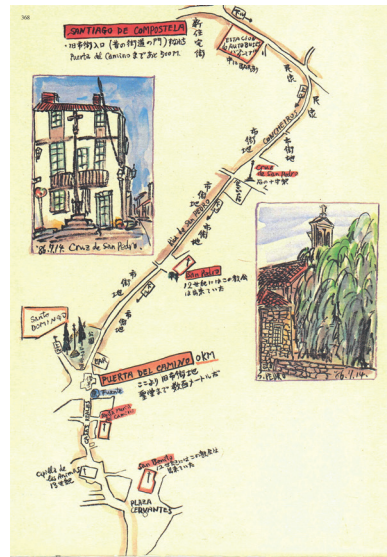
the publications on this route, the Jacobean Library of the Centre of Studies of Compostela located in Palencia (Spain) includes more than six thousand books on a wide range of subjects that cover culture, religion, nature, experiences, pilgrimage routes and travel diaries, in addition to Jacobean Congresses Proceedings. The Way arouses the interest of many researchers who, in different publications, congresses and conventions, enrich the study of the past and the present reality of this thousand-year-old route. In this library you can find ‘Almost everything that has been written about the Way of Saint James’ (<https://bibliotecajacobeia.org/>).

These publications, along with other partial studies of the places along the Way, are fundamental pillars for understanding the history, present and future of the Way of Saint James. From among the many publications already made, the work by Ikeda Munehiro (1999), a Japanese artist who made the pilgrimage to Santiago illustrating it from beginning to end, has been chosen to illustrate the Way of Saint James (Figures 1, 2 & 3), giving it a continuity that includes the main geographical, landscape and cultural resources of the historical-artistic heritage that are collected during the 764 kilometres of the Way. In itself, this work it is a compendium of the cultural wealth gathered in a single publication. The artistic and continuous vision of the Way configures it as a unique holistic work, more than a compilation. This is evident in the oriental vision of Munehiro.

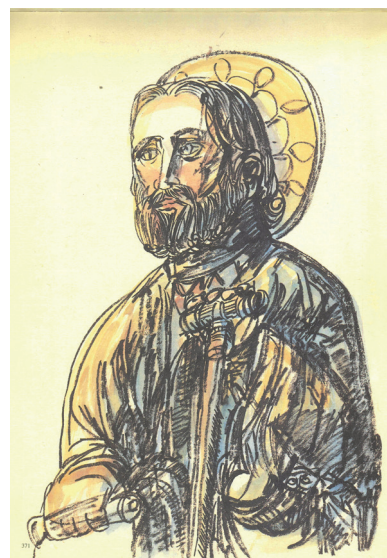
**Figure 1: The Way of Saint James at its Start in Roncesvalles - according to Munehiro (1999)**



**Figure 2: The Way of Saint James - its completion in Santiago de Compostela, according to Munehiro**



**Figure 3: The Apostle Saint James, According to Munehiro**



**The Kumano Kodo**

The Japanese way known as Kumano Kodo is a pilgrimage route that runs through the Kii Peninsula near the cities of Osaka and Kyoto.<sup>1</sup> The Way links the so-called Kumano Sanzan, three sacred shrines in Japan: Kumano Hongu Taisha, Kumano Nachi Taisha and Kumano Hatayama Taisha. The Kumano shrines were among the most popular pilgrimage sites of Japan and this pilgrimage

1 Editor’s note: for a detailed discussion of the Kumano Kodo see the paper by Moira *et al.* (2021) in Issue 9(3) of this Journal - available at <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp/vol19/iss3/5/>

is often seen as a paradigmatic and formative example of Japanese popular religion (Moerman, 1997). These sacred sites and the spectacular Kumano Kodo pilgrimage routes that connect them were declared a World Heritage Site in 2004 (UNESCO, 2004), because of their cultural and natural value and their need for protection and conservation. There are seven Kumano Kodo pilgrimage routes and they are diverse (Figure 4). They start from various points on the peninsula and converge at a central point, the Kumano Hongu Taisha temple.

In the early Heian period (794-1185), members of the Imperial court would travel from the capital city of Kyoto to the Kumano region to visit its shrines (Progano & Kato, 2018). Kumano’s faith spread from the imperial family to the aristocracy, who made an arduous journey of up to 40 days from the former capital city of Kyoto. This is where the three great shrines of Kumano Sanzan were established. Then the pilgrimage spread to the samurai warrior class and so on. ‘There were so many people that the pilgrims began to be called ‘the Kumano ant march’” (Wakayama Official Travel Guide, 2020). Kumano’s faith was unique in Japan, since it was open to everyone, regardless of class or gender, including the marginalised. Today, there are some 3,000 Shinto-Buddhist shrines along the Kumano routes. The pilgrimage along the route includes strict religious rites of worship and purification. Of the seven existing routes, the most widely used is the route called Nakahechi, which is about 68 kilometres long.

The way runs through a vast natural area with formidable mountains that contain ancestral forests that are home to a silence and beauty that is difficult to forget (Figures 5, 6 & 7). Kumano Kodo has been venerated and worshipped since ancient times, considered a sacred dwelling place of primeval gods, linked to nature and some of the places have become Shinto shrines. The Grand Shrines were established,

*at locations where Japan’s native animism developed into Shintoism blended with Buddhism. Travelling to Kumano and back was regarded as a rebirth experience, and thus Kumano is often referred to as ‘Yomigaeri-nochi’, the place you go into the other world and back (Kato & Progano, 2017:247).*

**Figure 4: Kumano Kodo Routes. At the central point is the sacred Kumano Hongu Taisha temple.**



**Figure 5: Kumano Kodo Landscape**



Photo: archive of Fernando Echarri

**Figure 6: Temple on the Kumano Kodo Route**



Photo: archive of Fernando Echarri

Figure 7: Kumano Kodo Way



Photo: archive of Fernando Echarri

These shrines became mixed with later Buddhist traditions and from the sixth century onwards were conceived of as a syncretic combination of both religions in so-called ‘Shinbutsu shūgō’.

With a history of over a thousand years, the spiritual traditions of the Kii Peninsula form a unique and exceptional cultural landscape that combines nature and religion. Walking through ancient Kumano Kodo thus becomes a ‘unique way to experience the unique cultural landscape of the spiritual territory of Kumano’ (Tanabe city Kumano Tourism bureau, 2020). Contemporary spirituality has reinterpreted these ancient Japanese pilgrimage sites and given them new meanings related to self-discovery and healing (Kato & Prozano, 2017). Today, the routes are visited by those who are

*not necessarily motivated by religious reasons, but rather, seek qualities such as positive elements of natural environment - serenity, beauty, cleanliness, a sense of spiritual and physical wellness, as well as a sense of achievement gained through completing a certain distance on foot* (Kato & Prozano, 2017:243).

## Synergies Between two World Heritage Sites

The widely studied context of the Way of Saint James invites authors to explore new intentions and possibilities. One exploratory way is to study synergies with other comparable trails, such as the Japanese Kumano Kodo Route. That is why the objective of this article focuses on the synergies between these millenary routes. To better understand the synergetic poteneials of these two paths, the author made the pilgrimage along both Ways, experiencing for himself the synergy that their conjunction would allow.

The Saint James Way and the Kumano Kodo Way are very different in many of their religious, cultural and natural aspects. However, we could say that there are many points in common that unite them. For example, the interdisciplinary perspective presented by each of them separately is clearly enhanced by their conjunction. This reinforces the potential that is being targeted by their partnership. As Scriven & O’Mahony suggest:

*The inter-disciplinary focus on pilgrimage in recent years has broadened our understanding by illustrating the range of scales and forms involved* (2020:1).

In recent years, the importance and parallelism of these different routes has become evident. Both are ancient pilgrimage paths and both paths have an enormous spiritual, cultural and natural heritage. In fact in this specific aspect there does not seem to be too much dissonance between East and West except for the logical differences that history, traditions and rites show us in the memory of the diverse people travelling the routes.

These two routes comply with Hugo’s thesis (1999), which argues that trails should be more than links between places, but should, rather, enable the creation of holistic, integrated person–environment systems. Especially remarkable is that the two routes make possible the culture of the inner life, through the conformation of their exterior: Silence and Beauty. Both trails favour Contemplation and spiritual practice. Due to these characteristics, the Kumano Kodo Route and the Way of Saint James are the only pilgrimage routes declared as World Heritage sites by UNESCO. In 1998, the twinning agreement between the two sacred routes was made, in mutual recognition of their millenary spiritual, cultural and natural values. This twinning makes possible the realization of joint tourism strategies for the Wakayama

Prefecture in Japan and the Autonomous Community of Galicia in Spain. These two regions have been working together for more than 20 years to contribute to world peace through youth exchange programs and campaigns promoting both Ways in a synergic way, taking into account their cultural, natural and spiritual values (Rodríguez del Alisal, 2018). Although there have been numerous studies and publications on both paths separately, some with orientalist visions (Munehiro, 1999), there are still very few publications on their twinning and the synergetic possibilities they present, such as the one by Rodríguez del Alisal (2018); or the book of photography ‘Santiago-Kumano’ (Ocaña & Muda, 2008) published by renowned photographers from both countries: Luis Ocaña from Spain and Tomohiro Muda from Japan.

### The result: the dual pilgrim seeking non-dual experiences

As a result of the twinning of the two Ways, and seeking a synergic relationship, the possibility has been created to convert pilgrims into ‘Dual Pilgrims’ (Rodríguez del Alisal, 2018). Among the advantages of walking the two Ways is the possibility of getting to know diverse cultural and natural elements of eastern and western culture and nature, as well as getting to know ‘different forms of religious-spiritual practice and beliefs in place’ (Brace *et al.*, 2011). For this it is necessary to obtain the credential that accredits having made the pilgrimage of the two Ways, the Dual Pilgrim credential (Figures 8, 10, 11). The

credential includes the icons of the two Ways: the icon of the Way of Saint James, represented by the so-called ‘Venera’, the shell of a scallop mollusk; it also includes the symbol of the Kumano Kodo route, a three-legged raven called ‘Yatagarasu’ (Figure 9), which represents a Shinto deity that symbolises divine intervention and guidance.

This twinning between geographies, philosophies and East-West contexts qualifies these pilgrimages as ‘New Age tourism’, according to Olsen’s classification, New Age tourism includes experimentation with faiths and practices that are outside one’s own cultural sphere, and also includes traditions from past civilizations, in addition to places or beings that emanate ‘power’ (Olsen, 2015, cited in Prozano & Kato, 2018).

The two Sacred Paths include a heritage of culture, nature and spirituality of a very high quality. It is difficult to define and to clearly delineate pilgrimage from other categories of human travel, especially within cultures that are constituted by ease of mobility, relative affluence, and the destabilising malaises of postmodernity. Beyond the distinctions between pilgrimage and other categories of human travel (Watkins, 2009; Terrault, 2019), it can be said the particular intention of most pilgrims on Sacred Routes is to have meaningful ‘on-site experiences’ (Gou & Shibata, 2017) - transformative experiences during one’s pilgrimage. Therefore, such routes provide the pilgrim with a wide variety of significant and powerful

Figure 8. Reversible Covers of the Dual Pilgrim's Badge (Way of Saint James + Kumano Kodo)



Photos: archive of Fernando Echarri

**Figure 9. Icons on the Credential of the Dual Pilgrim (Way of Saint James+ Kumano Kodo)**



Photo: archive of Fernando Echarri

experiences around the different cultural, natural and spiritual elements. It is important to note that pilgrims are looking for authentic experiences (Tsung *et al.*, 2020). This is important in the context of pilgrimage, as these experiences can sometimes acquire a great degree of significance and be remembered for life - referred to as Significant Life Experiences (SLE) (Tanner, 1980) or

**Figure 10. Stamps on the Badge During the Pilgrimage to Kumano Kodo**



Photo: archive of Fernando Echarri

inner experiences (Bataille, 1973). These experiences are burned into people’s hearts. Their origin begins in the perceptive sphere, connected with the sense of wonder (Carson, 1956). Then an intense awareness opens up in the present time (Han, 2016:13). ‘Meaning,’ ‘happiness,’ ‘freedom,’ a ‘sense of union’ or ‘sense of timelessness,’ ‘absorption in the moment,’ an ‘unforgettable experience,’ ‘life-changing’ - all of these expressions are common among pilgrims and indicate how difficult it may be to address the vast array of possible meanings and manifestations of these experiences. SLEs can affect a person’s physical, emotional, intellectual or spiritual sphere. They can provoke in a very intense way, an opening of the mind, empathy, a loss of the sense of temporality (Smith, 2017), a feeling of union and belonging, like the experience of being ‘immersed in the world’ (Abram, 1997:45, 204). This corresponds to what Terreault (2019) calls ‘pilgrim bodies-in-the-world’, where the experience joins the person in an integral way with the path, understood as a complete unity. The pilgrim bodies become:

*centres of feeling and thought, agents of process and mobility, vectored toward relationship with and in the world (Terreault, 2019:1)*

The pilgrim can make a link with the Way, which is understood in an integral way, in a relationship of union, care, mutual interconnection and need, increasing spiritual sensitivity (Terreault, 2019).

When the ‘I’ is diluted in order to integrate oneself in the Way, as it can happen on pilgrimage, we can speak of ‘Non-Dual Experience’, considered as,

*a pure, timeless and thought-free experience of Reality that is produced through the perception*

**Figure 11. Requirements to be a Dual Pilgrim**



Photo: archive of Fernando Echarri



*of the senses and occurs when the separation between an inner 'I' and a separate world disappears* (Spira 2014:167).

This is a Non-Dual experience, of pilgrimage in communion with the Way. In this state there are no judgments, mental concepts, or separation between subject and object. There is an experience of.

*openness to Reality, which illuminates our life. The light is expansive and its expansion produces joy, beauty and love. It affects the whole of life, and everything has its proper place in harmony* (Martin. 2017, p. 158).

The Non-Dual experience thus favours the development of transcendent intelligence (Gardner, 2010), also called spirituality (Wolman, 2001), since it allows individuals to transcend their own limits and establish broader connections with the universe to obtain a feeling of happiness (Seligman 2017).

## Conclusions

The Sacred Ways such as the Way of Saint James and the Kumano Kodo Route have immense cultural, natural and spiritual values considered separately. Their typology of values can be considered different due to their belonging to such opposite cultures as the West and the East. However, their twinning makes possible a synergy between the two Ways, which can enhance their separate values, providing a more complete and complex vision of the world. It may be easier to appreciate the points in contrast between paths with such different cultures, however, the points in common include their enormous cultural legacy, their millennial history, their great religious and spiritual load, their great environmental value, their promotion of personal growth and the pilgrims' acquisition of a more complete interpretation of the experiences obtained.

Whatever the reasons that lead the pilgrims to undertake either journey: religious, spiritual, or secular, they have the opportunity to establish contact with a millennial natural-cultural past. They can thus become aware of belonging to a millenary culture that contains a vast 'power'. This 'power' exists on the Way of Saint James and the Kumano Kodo Route, and provides meaningful experiences for pilgrims. These experiences can be considered as Significant Life Experiences (SLE) or Non-Dual experiences, in which a feeling of communion with the Way is established that helps the spiritual development of people and their sense of well-being and happiness.

The new concept of twinned pilgrimage called 'dual pilgrimage' fits within the new ways of understanding tourism, leaning towards spiritual and New Age tourism. This includes new possibilities, experiences of openness of mind towards an over-abundant and complex world embodied in two millennial routes with a vast natural-cultural heritages. This new way of understanding pilgrimage opens paths of new possibilities that are interesting to study and explore in more depth.

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