

## After the pilgrimage

That feeling, to arrive after a day with a little too many kilometers and to be able to sit down. A cool glass, shoes off and backpack off. After a shower with your legs up in the evening sun in the garden. Eating with other pilgrims at a long table in the orchard and having beautiful conversations. You want that every day, don't you?

After three hikes on the Chemins de Compostelle, I am sure. I want my own pilgrim's hostel in France. The plan is to renovate an old farm and convert it into a donativo overnight stop for pilgrims. The concept is simple, but how do you find an affordable farm that is also close to the hiking trail?

I intend to look for a property for a maximum of two years and it should be ready within 6 to 7 years. To keep this up, you need structure. I ask three French pilgrim friends to help me and form a sounding board. This works great. Three Dutch innkeepers are also at my side with advice and assistance.

The town of Flavignac will be the focal point. Flavignac is a day's walk from Limoges on Via Lemovicensis. There are still few accommodation options there and it is easily accessible by public transport via Limoges.

Even from my attic room I experience new adventures this way. A Dutch pilgrim friend sent me a picture of a dilapidated farm. This would be the ultimate location for an inn. We contact monsieur Le Maire (mayor) of the town, to ask who owns this property. No response, so asked my French pilgrim friend Georges to call. It turns out to be an old water mill with a local owner,



who wants to turn it into a pilgrim's hostel. I have not given up hope and will continue to work with the mayor and others involved. If this property would come back on the market then hopefully I can buy it.

Due to Corona, traveling to France is currently not possible, so I focus on the website [www.lecoeurduchemin.org](http://www.lecoeurduchemin.org) with a bimonthly newsletter, in French. In addition, there will be articles in all French Camino newsletters and Facebook groups. That results in interesting contacts. Mainly local tips will take me to the right building. An extensive network is therefore necessary.

I've been looking for six months now. Have identified about 20 properties that are on the various routes and for sale, and four locations that I would like to visit. The newsletter goes to 60 people and the network in France is growing. I also have contact with two French pilgrims who also want to start a hostel themselves. We help and inform each other where possible.

Kim is a 60-year-old Frenchwoman who went to Santiago on horseback 30 years ago and after a long stay abroad, has recently returned to France. She is looking for a house. She wants to combine this with a hostel, in order to supplement her pension. Due to health problems she can no longer walk herself, but she is still close to the pilgrims. Hugo wants to found a donativo hostel from a religious vocation. Unfortunately his resources are limited, so he is urgently looking for sponsors. We exchange addresses of buildings and we talk about the possible joint setting up of an inn.

In 2018, a special overnight stay was at Gîte L'Arbladoise in Arblade-le-Haut, a beautiful country house. The owner had pasted the maps of the Via Podiensis on a wall in the hall. An area of 12x6 meters; too big for a photo. This was already special, but when we sat down to dinner it became really special. The table was set for four courses with fine porcelain



crockery, matching cutlery and crystal glasses, in a beautiful grand dining room that exuded the grandeur of the past. I particularly remember the aperitif, the wine and the digestive from dinner. The country house is now for sale for € 700,000, unfortunately this does not fit in the budget, but in this way thesearch brings back beautiful memories.



My search continues and with the help of fellow pilgrims and Saint James it will succeed. If you are interested in tracking progress or if you would like to help with this quest, please visit the website [www.lecoeurduchemin.org](http://www.lecoeurduchemin.org).