

Section C

SPECIFIC NORMS AND CONDITIONS OF THE HOSTEL IN THE CISTERCIAN MONASTERY OF OUR LADY OF SOBRADO

All monasteries which live according to the Rule of St. Benedict (late 6th century) have the explicit obligation to receive pilgrims, people who are travelling and the needy in general. For many centuries, long before chemist's shops, health centres, schools and hospitals existed (things we all take for granted these days), it was generally the monasteries and other religious institutions which provided these services, especially in necessary or urgent circumstances, to those in need and without alternatives (health problems, accidents, basic education, food in times of famine, crop failures, local conflicts and wars).

Even today it is possible to come across monasteries dotted around various stretches of the Pilgrims' Way to Compostella, which continue to offer the possibility of spending the night in a historical and, at times, monumental setting such as Sobrado. We are not talking about luxury accommodation: the principal aim here is to provide all the basic and necessary facilities for pilgrims passing through, at a physical, material and spiritual level, so they can rest peacefully and continue on their way the following day renewed in body and spirit.

As well as what one would expect to find in any hostel these days: a (bunk) bed, hot water, the possibility of washing and drying clothes (by hand or using the machines available), a kitchen and dining room to eat and socialize in, we also offer the possibility for visiting the monumental part of the building, according to the established timetable.

SHARING IN THE SUNG SERVICES WITH THE MONKS

Everyone (of whatever religion or none) is invited to participate, if they so wish, in the offices/services – in our Chapel, which is on the first floor of the Medallions Cloister. The Oratory is not part of the normal tourist visit: access is only permitted when there is going to be a service. From the moment you start to go up the main granite staircase, it is important to do so as quietly as possible, bearing in mind the acoustics and resonance of so much stone. It is important to switch off mobile phones for the same reason. You must arrive punctually at the beginning and not leave before the end, out of respect for the service itself, and the other people who are present.

- 7.30 a.m. Mass (Eucharist) together with Lauds, the morning office, literally “praises”. The time may vary depending on the Feast being celebrated. (Duration: 60 minutes, more or less).

The Eucharist/Mass on Sundays is always at 11.00 a.m., unless otherwise indicated.

All the monastic services are sung in Spanish, and Galician is sometimes discretionally used.

- 7.00 p.m. VESPERS (the evening office, hence “Evensong” in English, lasting for roughly 45 minutes).

- 9.15 p.m. COMPLINE (Completorium in Latin, because it is the final service of the day: think of the word “Completion”. Lasting around 20 minutes, this service always concludes in our monasteries with the traditional Cistercian plainsong version of the Salve Regina.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION AND SPECIFIC NORMS OF THE SOBRADO MONASTERY PILGRIMS' HOSTEL

1) The Hostel and its monastic context.

Our hostel, with a total of 98 beds spread around 8 dormitories, occupies the entire ground floor of the first cloister, which is why it is commonly referred to as the “Pilgrims’ Cloister” (other, historical names being the “Knights Cloister” or the “Porter’s Cloister”). Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that this cloister is not exclusively reserved to pilgrims.

Sobrado continues to function as a Cistercian (Reformed Benedictine) monastery which means that, apart from the Hostel, we also have a Guest-House for people who come for longer stays, retreats or to rest from their normal routines, which is situated directly on the two floors above the pilgrims’ hostel. Something else to keep in mind is that the monastery, which was designated as a human heritage site in 2015, is also open to tourist visits, with access to the ground floor of the first two cloisters, and including the Gothic kitchen, the Chapter-house and the big church. Visits are every day of the year (with few exceptions) and go on until 7.00 in the evening. For this reason one must be constantly aware of the possible presence both of guests overhead (by trying to keep noise as low as possible, especially at siesta time and at night) and of tourists walking around the ground floor. We recommend that you close all doors to dormitories, the kitchen/dining room space and the exit to the areas outside where washing is hung out to dry so as to avoid private spaces being invaded by over-curious visitors. The information sheets given to visitors inform them that the hostel and guest-house and their facilities are NOT included in the visits and, from their point of view, they should not have to put up with scantily dressed pilgrims sunning themselves bang in the centre of the cloister or improvising little musical concerts or acrobatics inside the monastery. We all need to respect the rights of other people if we wish to receive the same consideration from them, as well as respecting the monastic setting as much as possible. All of this means being constantly aware of the fact that we are staying in a monastery, as well as showing respect and consideration to other people who may be present by observing the normal social rules of appropriate behaviour and doing all we can to create a positive, tranquil ambience in general.

What is obviously unacceptable is to have to endure people shouting or singing at the top of their voices (for example in the showers), quite simply because that shows a total lack of respect for the general climate of the monastery, and may also be a source of irritation for other people, above all for fellow pilgrims who may understandably want to relax for a while or even take advantage of a quiet, peaceful moment after arriving. All of this does not mean that talking or communication in general is prohibited! It *does* mean that it is not necessary (or acceptable) to scream at people who are standing close by as though they are totally deaf. We need to put into practice the golden rule concerning human coexistence, which is to be found at all times and in all cultures: “treat others the same way you would like them to treat you.”

The green public spaces directly in front of the monastery are perfectly suitable for small groups of friends or new acquaintances to socialize (weather permitting), but to congregate under the windows of people in the guesthouse or in the pilgrims’cloister itself or, even worse, in the dormitories does nothing to create and maintain an atmosphere of silence which is so characteristic of a monastic setting, and frequently leads to complaints and avoidable friction.

This is perhaps the best place to remind people that they are NOT allowed to inspect or view the hostel and its facilities *before* deciding whether to register or not for that night – the same being true for hotels and other establishments. You will find plenty of photos and information on our web-page as well as in many other places on the internet. Again, it is a matter of going back to the beginning of this section on our hostel here in the monastery: we are offering the basic essentials for pilgrims on their way to Santiago and are not trying to collect Michelin stars. As with all historical buildings, the physical structures are untouchable. We cannot insert or amplify windows or modify spaces at whim, though we were able to ensure that all the dormitories have an installation for forced ventilation. The dormitories are for exactly what their name suggests: sleeping, *not* looking at the view

outside. Showers and toilets are shared spaces and it is necessary to go out of the dormitories to use them. In the hostel we do *not* have private bedrooms with en suite (though by all means consult the section on the Guest House on our webpage to explore that option). The average number of beds per dormitory is around 10, and we normally expect younger pilgrims and those in better physical shape to occupy the top beds in case older or less flexible pilgrims arrive later on.

There is an equipped kitchen for those who have the strength or desire to cook their own food (in fact there are two supermarkets in the town for shopping). For those who don't want the hassle, there are several establishments in the town offering food,

The time for closing for the night is 10.00 p.m., as stipulated by the general norms of the authorities, section A). It doesn't matter whether there are important football matches or concerts or celebrations in the town: those who are not back by the established time will have to rough it outside. While still on the subject, the doors will open at 6.00 a.m., no earlier, even though in summer some people may want to start the day earlier because they are in a hurry and dawn comes sooner.

People who come to our hostel are, generally speaking, already familiar with our conditions and its facilities, either because they have already stayed here previously or they may have researched the matter carefully before deciding or may perhaps have been in touch with other people who tell them about their experience. For that reason, pilgrims with claustrophobia, or difficulties in falling asleep or who are unable to put up with people who snore loudly or use a machine for their apnea should seriously consider the option of sleeping somewhere else in the town because, apart from everything else, things are often so busy simply registering all those who *do* want to spend the night here that it is impossible to explain all the ins-and-outs to people who are undecided and doubtful, or have special exigencies. Those who for whatever reason do not feel happy about any of the rules in our hostel are perfectly free to look elsewhere in the town for accommodation; indeed they are encouraged to do so. At the moment of writing there are three options:

1. The private hostel LECER.
2. The Hotel SAN MARCUS **
3. The pensione VIA SACRA

All three establishments are within a short walking distance from the monastery, each with their own characteristics, options, norms and, of course, corresponding prices, as well as their restricted opening dates, depending on the time of year, since they are private enterprises.

2) UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR

It is totally unacceptable to enter our hostel under the visible and unmistakable effects of alcohol (or anything analogous for that matter): our prime concern must always be the general well-being of all those staying in the hostel and to avoid creating problems for the other people who will be sleeping in the same dormitory. Those in charge of the hostel have the unpleasant task of deciding whether to expel the person in question or not, on the basis of calculating the risk of his/her subsequent behaviour which may seriously disrupt the night for those sharing the same room. In the case of extremely bad or unacceptable behaviour there exists the real possibility of having no other choice but to call the local competent authorities (Guardia Civil or Police).

The obvious approach is to try to avoid all excesses which might cause tensions or conflicts in the hostel, thus leading to justified protests or even to people deciding to call the police on their own initiative out of sheer desperation. Such extreme situations would inevitably lead to us having to add the personal details of such problematic people to the official blacklists of the other network hostels: something we believe should be avoided at all costs.

You are advised that in the Pilgrims' Cloister itself (NOT in the dormitories or other private spaces) there are 8 security cameras to protect the general ambience and make it possible to review

in detail any incidents which may occur there. Apart from the cameras, there are also fire alarms, fire extinguishers in all the dormitories and around the whole hostel and an emergency exit, all of which are required by law. It should be remembered that the emergency exit is precisely what the name implies: only for emergencies. Given that the door only functions when the fire alarm is activated, in other words, when practically everyone in the hostel and guesthouse will have been rudely awoken, any improper use for whatever pretext is to be considered a major infraction, and will have to be dealt with by the authorities.

3) OTHER DETAILS AND RULES.

The general rule in all official hostels is that it is forbidden to eat or drink in the dormitories (with the obvious exception of water, of course), and here in Sobrado this prohibition extends also to the cloister area itself, so as to avoid dirtying the common, shared areas (tourists and guests, for example) and also to avoid unwittingly encouraging the proliferation of pigeons and other creatures (great and small) in their constant search for food. Eating and drinking should be limited to the dining room or the area in front of the monastery outside. Please make use of the rubbish bins for selective disposal of refuse (paper, plastic, glass, organic) which are abundant in the whole of the hostel. Buckets with mops and also brooms will be available in strategic places and, if in doubt, consult directly with the hostel personnel.

Yet another detail concerns the general, justified concern regarding insects and things that bite or sting or infest the unwary pilgrim. The hostel is treated regularly by professionals as a matter of course. The problem is that the pilgrims themselves may often be the carriers of unwanted visitors. For instance, many people who arrive early in summertime take the opportunity to lie on the grassy area facing the monastery entrance, without realizing that it is precisely there that the dog owners of the local town bring their pets every morning to run around for a while and, if all goes well, do their business. It is never a good idea to lie on a stretch of grass where animals roam freely, be they dogs, cats, cows, horses or whatever, because little treasures such as lice, fleas and ticks can remain on the hiding on the ground for long periods patiently waiting for a new host to jump onto. Remember there is a Chemist's shop just across the road to the left in front of the monastery, so if you notice unusual persistent itchy spots or bites the best thing is to ask the staff there about something you may have already picked *on your way here* and to look for a suitable solution, thus avoiding spreading whatever you may have caught elsewhere among the other pilgrims here. In summertime especially it is NEVER a good idea to drink the "crystal clear water" from an irresistible fountain or beautiful stream. Stick to bottled water if you want to avoid a most unpleasant bout of gastroenteritis! Bearing in mind all of the above, it should come as no surprise to learn that we take a very dim view of people removing pillows or blankets from the dormitory beds to go and lie on the grass – Forbidden, and also a major infraction.

While on the subject of beds, it should be pointed out that each bed has its own little reading lamp, a USB connection and an electric socket for the personal use of each pilgrim. At the same time, this also means that the beds should never be moved around to avoid disconnecting them inadvertently. The beds are intended for one person at a time: even the attempt to sit perched (precariously) with other people on the edge of the lower beds, to share and enjoy some Facebook "treasure" will almost certainly result in breaking the bed base (expensive subject). The receipt you are given on registering is to ensure that you can freely enter and leave the hostel up until 10.00 p.m. simply by showing it, but you should not forget that your name and surname also figure on the receipt (and its stub which is retained) and you will be held responsible for any little "accidents" of whatever nature. That is also why you should also *not* exchange the bed you have been assigned without informing the hostel staff.

The person in charge of the hostel has a small fridge in the office where perishable health products (insulin etc.) can be left, if necessary.

For the well-being of everyone, shoes should be left outside the dormitories, using the racks provided or standing them vertically against the walls near the doors. If they are wet, talk to the person in charge who always has an endless collection of old newspapers to help them dry overnight.

The kitchen is at the disposal of all the registered pilgrims. We ask everyone to leave things (including floors and surfaces) clean and tidied up. The fact that we close at 10.00 p.m. means that it is impossible to start preparing and cooking supper at, say, 9.30 because there simply won't be time to prepare, cook, eat and clear everything up by 10.00 p.m. Remember, please, that there is a dormitory (N.º 7) directly upstairs and the pilgrims sleeping up there have the right to sleep if they so desire. We strongly insist that loud, numerous "parties" at night are not acceptable in a space which is directly beneath various bedrooms in the guesthouse.

It is important to understand that the mere fact of having one's backpack, copious collection of plastic bags or whatever, delivered to the monastery using the services provided by Correos or the local taxi network **does not** automatically guarantee a bed for the night, especially in high season (summer). Beds are assigned personally to the pilgrims on their arrival when they register, not to their belongings. Except for very special cases, "booking in advance" (see Annex A) is not allowed. People walking with family/friends should ensure they arrive all together if they want to be more or less in the same dormitory, demand and numbers permitting. No-one can register on behalf of someone who has not yet arrived and who may, in the end decide to go elsewhere anyway. The person concerned must be physically present to register.

Please be scrupulously careful about not leaving personal items when you leave the following morning. Pilgrims "forget" such trivial things as wallets, identity documents, credentials, cameras, jewellery, pendrives, their favourite shirt, towel or hat and then expect us to send it to them by post, MRW, express delivery and then, curiously, also "forget" to repay the expenses involved, despite their promises and assurances to the contrary (a very frequent experience over the past 5 years or so). From this year on, if a pilgrim realizes half-way to Arzua or wherever that he/she left his/her sunglasses, expensive camera or or diary under the pillow, will have to catch a taxi to recover their belongings in person, which may be expensive but it could also perhaps help them to make sure they don't continue making the same mistake in future.

CONCLUSION

Finally, sorry to impression of being a obsessive fuss-pot over trivial details. That, most definitely, is *not* my intention at all. The various details mentioned in these 5 pages or so are by no means exhaustive., but they do, I think, touch upon some of the most important practical aspects of staying in a monastic hostel, with a view to ensuring the best possible experience for pilgrims in Sobrado as you pass through on your way to Compostella. I have never regarded myself as a control freak, nor a policeman for that matter, but I *do* feel obliged to present certain basic guidelines and references for those staying here, while not forgetting that with the capacity we have here (98 beds in all) there exists the real risk of having to face unpleasant episodes, simply because we sometimes "forget" where we are and what we are doing here. All of us need to contribute in a conscious and responsible way to the general well-being of *all* those who are here with us. This text has grown and grown because, especially in high season, there are so many people to "process" in the afternoon that it simply is not possible to talk to each and every pilgrim in a dedicated, personal way until later in the evening, when things quieten down a little. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions or voice any doubts you may have: it may take a little while, but that is one of the reasons we are here. Remember: Please be patient! And, above all Buon Camino! L.