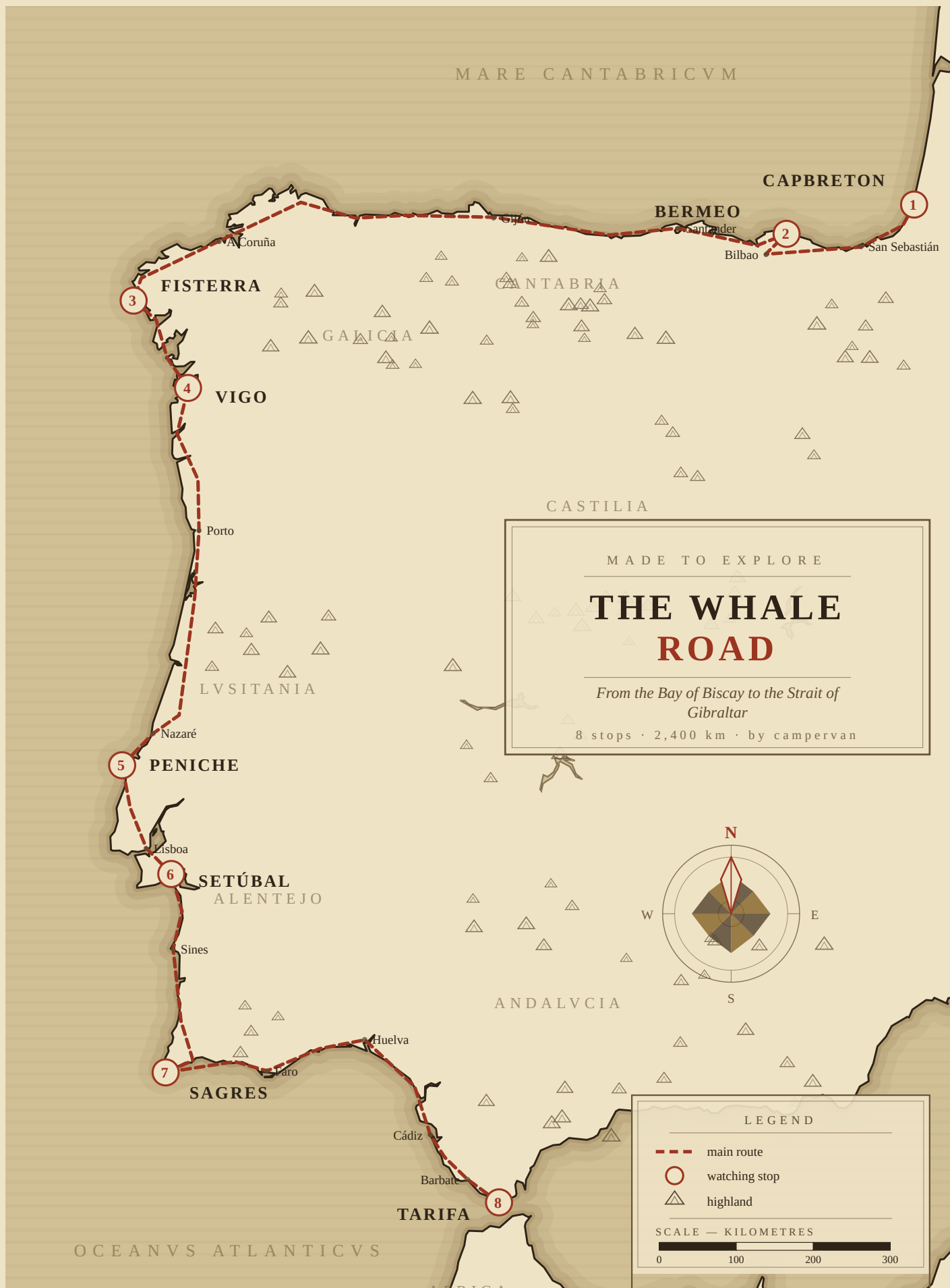




1

CAPBRETON

Landes, France — where the deep begins

PAID	Watching trips leave from Capbreton, Hendaye and Saint-Jean-de-Luz. They run half a day or longer, because the Bay of Biscay is not an hour's outing. Common dolphin, pilot whale, Cuvier's beaked whale.
THE CAMPER	The Landes coast is thick with campsites, but July books out. Free overnighting is restricted in season and the pine forest carries strict fire bans.
FREE	The Gouf de Capbreton, a submarine canyon, reaches to within a few hundred metres of the jetty. From the north mole, with binoculars, deep water starts almost under your feet.

| Capbreton → Bayonne → San Sebastián → Bermeo, 190 km on the A63 and AP-8 · ~3½ h by camper. Border crossing without formalities.

2

BERMEO

Bizkaia, Spain — the hunters' coast

PAID	Trips from the small harbours around Bermeo and Mundaka. Common dolphin, pilot whale, occasionally fin whale. The offer is far thinner than in France, so check before you plan the day.
THE CAMPER	Urdaibai is a biosphere reserve and a Natura 2000 site: overnighting outside designated places is forbidden and enforced. Use the areas in the villages inland, not the cliff.
FREE	The lookout towers on the cliffs. The Basques hunted the right whale here from the eleventh century, and Bermeo, Lekeitio and Getaria all carry a whale on their coat of arms. The species is gone from the eastern Atlantic.

| Bermeo → Santander → Gijón → Ribadeo → Fisterra, 700 km · ~9½ h by camper. The longest leg of the route; take two days.

3

FISTERRA

Costa da Morte, Galicia — linking stop

PAID	Almost nothing to pay for. Organised trips only start at Vigo; here the sea is watched from land. It is a cheap day, placed deliberately between two expensive ones.
THE CAMPER	Galicia has good areas, but most of the coast is Rede Natura. The coastal roads are narrow and slow — take the motorway for distance, stay low for the view.
FREE	From Cape Fisterra, Touriñán and Vilán you can scan the open sea without paying anything. In summer, early and clear, fin whales are caught from the rock. The Romans believed the land ended here.

| Fisterra → Muros → Vigo, 150 km on the coast road · ~3 h by camper. Three hours for 150 km, and worth all three.

4

VIGO

Rías Baixas, Galicia — the dolphins in the bay

PAID	Sailings to the Cíes Islands from Vigo, Cangas and Baiona, inside a national park. The resident bottlenose dolphins are often seen from the scheduled boat, with no separate tour.
THE CAMPER	The camper stays on the mainland, in Vigo or Cangas. Access to the Cíes needs an online permit, capped per day, obtained before the boat ticket — in summer it sells out a week ahead.
FREE	Arroaces, as the Galicians call them, come into the rías after fish and are seen from shore, at Cangas or from the cliff at Baiona. The mussel rafts explain why they stay all year.

| Vigo → Porto → Aveiro → Peniche, 410 km on the A3 and A1 · ~5½ h by camper. First day in Portugal, where the rules change sharply.

5

PENICHE*Berlengas, Portugal — linking stop*

PAID	The crossing to the Berlengas, half an hour across open water. Common dolphins often escort the boats: the crossing is the reason, not the island.
THE CAMPER	Peniche has places. Berlengas does not. Daily visitor numbers are capped and online booking is compulsory, even for a day trip.
FREE	Nazaré is 40 km north. The canyon that makes the winter waves runs under the cliff, and from the lighthouse at Sítio the geography explains itself. In summer you see only the beach — and that is the lesson.

| Peniche → Lisbon → Setúbal, 150 km · ~2 h by camper. A short leg, kept short on purpose.

6

SETÚBAL*Sado estuary, Portugal — the one certainty*

PAID	Trips from Setúbal into the estuary, and longer ones from Sesimbra towards the Setúbal canyon. On a route where everything depends on luck, the odds here are the best before Tarifa.
THE CAMPER	Arrábida is a natural park, so overnighting is banned, and it is one of the places where it is actually enforced. ASA or campsite, no improvising.
FREE	The group of some thirty bottlenose dolphins in the Sado goes nowhere: they are there in winter and in summer, known individually to biologists. They are often seen from the Tróia ferry, which costs about as much as a coffee.

| Setúbal → Sines → Lagos → Sagres, 290 km along the Alentejo coast · ~5 h by camper. Quiet road, few villages.

7

SAGRES*Cape St Vincent — the edge of the old world*

PAID	Trips from Sagres, Lagos and Portimão. Common dolphins in groups counted in hundreds, occasionally a fin whale or a sperm whale. Algarve prices are resort prices, not fishing-village ones.
THE CAMPER	The Costa Vicentina is a natural park and the part of Portugal with the most overnighting fines. Campsite or ASA, no exceptions, however empty the cliff looks.
FREE	From the cliff at Cabo de São Vicente, sixty metres above the water, the large groups are visible without a boat. Henry the Navigator's fortress stands beside it: the edge of the map left from here.

| Sagres → Faro → Huelva → Cádiz → Barbate, 500 km · ~7½ h by camper. The last long driving day of the route.

8

TARIFA*Strait of Gibraltar — the end of the route*

PAID	Daily trips from Tarifa: resident pilot whales all year, three dolphin species, sperm whales in spring and summer, orcas in July and August. A hard Levante cancels everything, and Barbate and Gibraltar face the wind differently — hence the four-night rule.
THE CAMPER	Tarifa in August is packed with kitesurfers and books out early. The clean alternative is to sleep at Barbate or Bolonia and drive in each morning along the coast.
FREE	Baelo Claudia at Bolonia: the Roman tanks where tuna was salted, a few kilometres from the almadraba that still catches the same fish today. Africa is visible with the naked eye from Punta de Tarifa.
WHERE TO SLEEP	Campsite · Camping Pinar San José, Zahora (Barbate) · GPS 36.20109, -6.03262

| End of the route. The Iberian orcas follow the bluefin tuna: the Gulf of Cádiz in spring, the strait in summer.

THE ROUTE IN BRIEF

Distance	~2,400 km
Driving time	~37 h in all, without stops or waiting for ferries
Recommended time	21–26 days
Stages	8
Countries	FR · ES · PT
Southernmost point	Tarifa, 36° N
Direction	north → south, no return
Best months	Jul

GOOD TO KNOW BEFORE YOU LEAVE

The route is built for July and August, with the north–south direction compulsory.

For the Cíes Islands, the online permit is capped per day and is obtained before the boat ticket; in summer it sells out a week ahead.

Urdaibai, the Atlantic Islands of Galicia and Arrábida are protected areas: overnight stays outside designated places are forbidden and checked.

WHEN TO GO

Ideal: leave 1–5 July, so you reach Tarifa in the last ten days of the month, when the orcas enter the strait after tuna.

Slow version: mid-June and six weeks. Calmer sea in Biscay, emptier harbours in Galicia, the same ending.

Avoid: leaving on 1 June with three weeks in hand — you reach Tarifa a month before the orcas.

Forget: the Canaries. 35 hours of ferry each way and a single direct return sailing per week.

PORTUGAL — OVERNIGHTING

The ban is on overnighting and camping, not on parking as such: in Natura 2000 sites, protected areas and the zones covered by the coastal management plans you may not spend the night, but you may park by day wherever parking is open to any vehicle.

Fines are higher in protected areas than elsewhere.

Outside the protected zones, staying is limited to 48 hours in the same municipality, unless that municipality has regulated otherwise. The limit does not apply in expressly authorised places.

The exception is the designated places: ASAs and campsites inside those zones are legal, Arrábida, the Costa Vicentina and the Berlengas included. On the Portuguese leg that is where you sleep.

SPAIN AND FRANCE

In Galicia and the Basque Country the rules are municipal and differ from village to village; most of the coast is Rede Natura.

Urdaibai and the Atlantic Islands of Galicia are protected areas — overnighting banned and enforced.

Access to the Cíes and the Berlengas needs an online permit, capped per day. Sort it a week ahead, not on the morning.

On the Landes coast free overnighting is restricted in season, and the pine forest carries fire bans.

CHOOSING A BOAT

Distance In Spain, approaching cetaceans has been regulated by law since 2007, with an exclusion zone around the animals and minimum approach distances. Authorised boats carry a marking; look for it before you board.

The engine A serious operator cuts the engine and lets the animals come. Anyone who chases the pod, accelerates after it or cuts across its path exhausts it — and drives it off for everyone who comes later.

The guarantee If a sighting is guaranteed, walk away. These are wild animals offshore, and the only honest promise anyone can make is that the boat sails if the weather allows.

The cancellation The final test: if the trip is cancelled for wind and you get your money back, you chose well. Anyone who sails in any weather sails for the money, not for the sea.

Can you park a camper overnight on the Portuguese coast?

The ban is on overnighthing and camping, not on parking as such. In Natura 2000 sites, protected areas and coastal management zones you may not spend the night, but you may park by day wherever parking is open to any vehicle.

How long can you stay in one municipality in Portugal?

Outside the protected zones, staying is limited to 48 hours in the same municipality, unless that municipality has regulated otherwise. The limit

does not apply in expressly authorised places — ASAs and campsites.

When can you see whales and dolphins on the route?

The route is built for July and August, north to south, which is compulsory. At Tarifa whales are watched in the strait, and in the Sado estuary the dolphins are resident all year.

How long is the route?

About 2,400 km from Capbreton to Tarifa, through France, Spain and Portugal.

THE RULE OF THE ROAD

“On this route you are not buying the animals, but an hour of good sea.

The whales belong to no one and cost nothing.

What you pay for is the boat — and the patience to wait for the wind.”

Documentary check: September 2026. Places, hours and conditions change — check them before you leave.