

La Peregrinación del Año: Una aventura de 210km hasta las valles Catamarqueñas

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On the 30th of November, 2025, a group of pilgrims from Santiago del Estero left the house of their coordinator, Lorenzo Garvan, to begin their seven-day journey on foot to the Virgin of the Valley, or “La Morenita,” as they like to call her. This specific group, San Expedito, was made up of 33 members—an unusually high number compared to other years. Lorenzo, who has been leading the group for decades, expressed both his interest in the number of people willing to join the trek this year and his worry about the level of organization, patience, and intelligence needed to take care of such a large number of faithful pilgrims.



Grupo San Expedito, 6 de Diciembre

The group averaged around 30–40 km a day, with Lorenzo stopping in his car at different intervals along the road to offer snacks and water to combat the heat. The coordinator would designate a stop halfway along to rest, eat, recharge, and continue on to the final resting place of that specific day, which was usually the backyard of residents of Santiago del Estero willing to house the wayward pilgrims.

The days consisted of walking, talking, and pushing forward in the heat. On the first day, the group left around 6 p.m. and walked until midnight, when they stopped for dinner and only a couple of hours of rest before waking up at 3 a.m. to continue walking before the sun rose. They would be awakened to fresh homemade bread and mate cocido, set out by the designated cooks as sustenance to keep going. Each pilgrim would then begin walking once again for an average of four to five hours, depending on everyone's pace, before reaching the first stop, where they would be greeted with more mate cocido, pastafrola, and bread to recharge their energy.

Though my job was to document, film, and photograph, I found myself doing my best to walk with them instead of climbing onto the bus that would keep pace with the pilgrims in case someone couldn't walk any further. During that time, I began to understand the reasoning behind the pilgrimage and the unwavering faith of all of San Expedito's members—some of them had been walking for decades as fulfillment of a promise to La Morenita, the Virgin of the Valley, and all were going to ask for health, happiness, and abundance for their friends and family. As I got to know more of them, they added the health of my family to their lists.

After four days, the highways of Santiago del Estero turned into lush landscapes as we crossed over into Catamarca. Here, we were met with varying levels of weather bipolarity—strong winds and bone-wetting rain swiftly followed by the same stifling heat everyone had felt in Santiago del Estero. The problem, at least to Lorenzo, was not that of continuing on, since stopping was not an option, but how he could make everyone more comfortable as they kept walking. Even my rain-soaked shoes ended up on the roof of his car so they could dry faster.

Nearing the end of the week, the group reached their longest stop: Guayamba. Whereas every other stop had either been to eat, recharge, and continue on, or only to sleep for a couple of

hours, Guayamba, located in the province of Catamarca, was a stop of almost a day and a half, since the next trek of the journey, according to multiple members, was the hardest.



Guayamba, 2025

The hill, even for many seasoned pilgrims, posed a significant challenge. From Guayamba, it was a 10 km walk to its base, followed by an average of six hours trekking uphill

and four to five hours on the way down. The hill served almost as a symbolic hurdle before crossing into El Portezuelo and the city of Catamarca, where the Cathedral—and everyone’s final destination—resided.

The hours of rest at every stop were filled with DIY shower stations, community lunches and dinners, and the occasional chacarera danced to the rhythm of music and guitar. Guayamba was no different—everyone took the extra time to sleep, clean their clothes in the local river, eat, dance, play, and re-bandage their feet in preparation for the hill.

As the group left Guayamba the next day in the early hours of the morning, it was the first time all of them were clothed from head to toe in preparation for the strong winds that would hit them on the way up. As the early morning hours and pink sunrise progressed into the stifling heat of midday, those layers promptly disappeared, replaced by the familiar sweat of the summer heat.

The pilgrimage, at its core, is a demonstration of faith. The San Expedito group was only one of many groups all heading to the same place—the Cathedral where the Virgin of the Valley resides. Along the journey, we saw multiple backpackers, buses, and stragglers all making their way to the same destination, all bound by the same faith and drive.



Technical stop in Catamarca

This journey, which averages about 210 km and seven days of walking, is for many a normal occurrence and a yearly event. For the rest of Argentina, it is a cultural experience that most have not even heard of—but one that must continue to be preserved and respected, just as these pilgrims preserve and respect their faith, their peers, and their love for La Morenita.