<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDEX</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Web Resources and Travel Planning - Page 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilbao - Page 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Walking Tour of the City - Page 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Around - Page 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sightseeing in the Ensanche - Page 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Museo Guggenheim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Museo de Bellas Artes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ría de Bilbao Museo Marítimo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hanging Bridge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bilboat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Estadio San Mamés</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sightseeing in the Casco Viejo - Page 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Plaza Nueva</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Arriaga Theater</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cathedral of Santiago</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Diocesan Museum of Sacred Art</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mercado de la Ribera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Euskal Museoa Bilbao - Museo Vasco</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Museo Taurino de Bilbao</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pintxos Hopping in the Casco Viejo - Page 13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pintxos Hopping in the Ensanche - Page 16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gourmet Dining - Page 18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grilled fish &amp; meat in the Ensanche - Page 20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Dining Outside of Bilbao - Page 21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grilled Meat &amp; Fish in the Ensanche - Page 23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual Dining in the Ensanche - Page 24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping in Bilbao - Page 26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where to stay in Bilbao - Page 27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying outside Bilbao - Page 29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excursions from Bilbao - Page 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WEB RESOURCES AND TRAVEL PLANNING

MAPS
I urge you to buy the very detailed regional Michelin map #573, País Vasco, Rioja, Navarra. I guarantee you will find it to be a godsend, as it has the Basque as well as Spanish names for the places you will want to visit, available at Michelin, Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

Or you can purchase the Michelin maps at gas stations and bookstores throughout Spain. Also stop at any tourist office and pick up their handy road map of Euskadi, which is even more detailed than the Michelin map, as well as any other information that may be available. Their brochures are well done.

USEFUL WEB SITES
• País Vasco Tourism - www.paisvascoturismo.com
• Basque Country Tourism - www.basquecountrytourism.net
• Bilbao - www.bilbao.net
• Bilbao Metro - www.metrobilbao.eus/en
• EuskoTren - www.euskoTren.eus/
• Bilbao Tourism - www.bilbaoturismo.net
• Bizkaia Costa Vasca - www.bizkaiacostavasca.org

GUIDE BOOKS
• Footprint Bilbao and the Basque Lands
• Cadogan’s Bilbao and the Basque Lands
• Hachette Vacancies The Basque Country (great cultural info)

TRAVEL PLANNING SERVICES
Exclusive Travel Planning Services by Iberian Traveler & Maribel's Guides. Contact Maribel to arrange a custom itinerary for your trip to Spain, Portugal, Paris or southwest France.

Travel planning services are fee based, depending on the length of your stay. The fee includes the preparation of a customized, day-to-day itinerary based on the client’s specific interests/travel style/budget, customized sightseeing, dining and shopping guides for each destination, booking of all accommodations, making restaurant reservations, securing of performing arts tickets (theater/opera/ballet/flamenco), setting up winery visits, cooking classes, personal guide services or special day tours, car rentals and consultation by email or phone.

USA Tel: (206) 861-9008 / (206) 364-6723
Email: info@iberiantraveler.com
GETTING TO BILBAO
Bilbao is served by an international airport with direct flights from Madrid and Barcelona, Paris, London, Lisbon, Brussels and Frankfurt. There is excellent bus service connecting San Sebastián-Donostia, Vitoria-Gasteiz and Iruña-Pamplona with Bilbao.

BILBAO
Bilbo in Basque, or as the locals call it, “Botxo”, is widely considered Spain's "city of the future". It's definitely a very prosperous city on the move, invigorating, sophisticated, highly underrated, and no longer the grey, grimey, polluted, ugly industrial eyesore it once was, although the grey, gritty suburbs don't give a good initial impression. Once you arrive on the Gran Vía López de Haro, Bilbao’s partially pedestrianized main boulevard, you’ll see that Bilbao is quite cosmopolitan, very well to do and the place to be. Notice the gorgeous rotunda at the Plaza Moyúa, the elegant shops on Rodríguez Arias and Maximo Aguirre. Sit on a park bench in the beautiful little square, the Jardines de Albia next to the Café Iruña, and look around. You’ll think you’re on Manhattan’s tony Upper East Side.

Founded in the 13th century by Don Diego López de Haro, is the capital of Bizkaia (Vizcaya), and is one of the most important ports in Europe. “Reborn” after the opening of the Frank Gehry designed Guggenheim Museum in 1997, the city has continued to reshape itself into Spain’s “city of the future” without forgetting it’s connections to the past. Surrounded by green mountains, Bilbao has a dynamic old quarter and vibrant restaurant scene, offering some of the best cuisine in the Basque Country from some of the top chefs in the world, as well as a world class professional football club in Athletic Bilbao.
We've spent considerable time traveling for business and pleasure in the Bilbao area and have always had a wonderful time. The "Bilbaínos" are friendly, helpful, warm, outgoing-just great folks. I feel very comfortable there.

A ONE-DAY WALKING TOUR OF THE CITY

Bilbao is quite compact, so it's possible to take a self-guided walking tour of the city starting at the Guggenheim Museum. From the museum, stay right, strolling down Alameda Mazarredo to the very pretty Doña Casilda de Iturriazar Park, where you'll see the Museo de Bellas Artes, then down Máximo Aguirre to the flower-filled Plaza Moyúa rotunda. Turn left past the Plaza Moyúa and head down the semi-pedestrian, beautiful Gran Vía López de Haro, an excellent place to shop. There are more stores on Rodriguez Arias and Máximo Aguirre.

Cross the Nervión River on the Arenal Bridge past the fin de siècle Arriaga Theater and into the Old Quarter with its warren of lively streets south of the cathedral, the "7 calles".

End your long walk with a rest on the Plaza Nueva before visiting the Mercado at the very end of the Old Quarter, next to the river. You can return to the Ensanche, the new quarter, either via the subway, or take the Euskotren tram, which will take you back to the Guggenheim.

Between the new city and the old quarter is the Café Iruña where you might enjoy an informal and quick lunch. Try to be there around 1:00 pm, before it becomes packed. It’s a great value.

The Tourist Office is located at Plaza Circular, 1, near the train station. Open daily from 9:00 am to 9:00 pm (www.bilbaoturismo.net).
Tel: (+34) 944 795 760
GETTING AROUND

METRO BILBAO
Take a ride on the ultramodern subway-metro with stations designed by Norman Foster. You can take the L1 line all the way to the beaches of Plentzia (www.metrobilbao.net).

EUSKOTREN Trena
Also try a short hop on Bilbao’s colorful tram, the Euskotren, the commuter line which takes you from Atxuri in the Old Quarter to the Guggenheim and beyond to La Castilla, as it loops around the city, running every 15 minutes during the day (www.euskotren.eus).

BILBOBUS
There is an excellent urban bus system (in association with ALSA) operating 43 lines and a fleet of 147 buses, which will take you almost anywhere in the city you want to go. The standard fare is 1,20€ (www.bilbobus.com).

BILBO BIZKAIA CARD
The card is available for 24 hr (30€), 48 hr (35€) and 72 hr (40€), which gives you unlimited use of the metro, Euskotren, Artxanda Funicular, Bilbobus and Bizkaibus, plus free entrance to the Guggenheim and Museo de Belas Artes de Bilbao as well as several other of the cities excellent museums, plus discounts at select hotels and restaurants (bilbaobizkaiacard.com).
SIGHTSEEING IN THE ENSANCHE
MUSEO GUGGENHEIM
Your first stop in this increasingly popular city should be Frank Gehry's titanium masterpiece, the Museo Guggenheim Bilbao. Gehry's building is a fascinating, awe-inspiring work of art, although I admit to having been quite under-whelmed by the permanent collection, which is clearly a work in progress, but I do enjoy Richard Serra’s monumental sculptural pieces downstairs. Actually, very little of the permanent collection is usually on display, but there are always special exhibits, so check on-line at: www.guggenheim-bilbao.es.

Make sure to check the web page for dates of the special exhibits. Masterpieces from the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Collection runs until 3 April 2016, while Windows of the City, the School of Paris, 1900-1945 runs from 22 April through 23 October 2016.

The museum is open Tuesday-Sunday from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm, and open on Mondays in July and August. General admission, with audio guide, is 10€ for adults and 6€ for seniors. Children 12 and under are free. Special Exhibits are not included. The Bono Artean Ticket (Guggenheim Museum Bilbao plus the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum) is currently 14€. Guided tours are available. Tel: +34 944 359 090 / 944 359 023

Before you leave, make sure to cross the bridge, the Puente de la Salve, to see the museum from the other side of the river, the Deusto area. It’s even more spectacular from that vantage point. Behind the museum is the their newest acquisition, a sculpture of a spider called “Mama”, a complement to Jeff Koons’ famous “Puppy” which sits in front, at the main entrance, and his tulips sculpture. Don’t be startled if you see and hear a little “explosion” in the river. It’s part of the museum experience; a group of gas jets timed to erupt on queue.
Before or after touring the Guggenheim, cross the Calatrava designed Zubizuri Bridge to the opposite side of the Ría, then take a left on Campo de Volantín, then a right up Múgica y Butrón to catch the 1915 Funicular de Artxanda that will take you in just 3 minutes up to the summit where you can admire spectacular views of the city. Hours of operation are from 7:15 am to 10:00 pm, Monday-Saturday, and on Sunday and holidays from 8:15 am to 10:00 pm. From June to September it runs until 11:00 pm. Trains depart every 15 minutes.

MUSEO DE BELLAS ARTES

After visiting the Guggenheim, you may want to walk to the unheralded, but very prestigious Museo de Bellas Artes with its fine collection of Spanish Baroque. They recently added a brand new modernist wing. You will find paintings by El Greco, Goya, Murillo, Ribera, Zurbarán, Van Dyck, Gauguin, Fortuny, Zuloaga and even Mary Cassat. It has some fine temporary shows. I saw a major Rodin exhibit there and a wonderful Herrera to Velázquez show. The museum also has a very tasteful store and a handy bar/cafeteria with outdoor terrace open in the summer, open from 9:00 am to 8:00 pm, closed on Tuesdays (www.museobilbao.com).

The museum is open Wednesday-Monday from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm. General admission for adults is 7€, seniors 5€, free on Wednesdays. The audio guide is 2€. Included in the Artean Ticket combo.
The gourmet restaurant **Arbolagaña**, with avant-garde chef Aitor Basabe, is on the top floor of the new wing, and the room, decorated in minimalist style, looks out onto the Parque de Doña Casilda de Iturrizar next door. The restaurant is open for lunch at 1:30 pm on Tuesday-Sunday and for dinner on Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 9:00 pm. Note: Dining here is by reservation only and the restaurant is closed the last two weeks of July (www.arbolagana.com).

**RÍA DE BILBAO MUSEO MARÍTIMO**
Nearby, under the Euskalduna Palace, you’ll find the excellent nautical museum. It sits on what used to be the dock area of the Euskalduna shipyard in the Abandoibarra, the symbol of the new Bilbao. It also has a café with views of the dock and river. Entrance is 6€ for adults, 3,50€ for seniors. Children under 6 years are free.

It’s open Tuesday-Sunday from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm during the summer. In the winter it is open Tuesday-Friday from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm and until 8:00 pm on Saturday, Sunday and bank holidays. Free on Tuesday (www.mmuseomaritimobilbao.org/).

**HANGING BRIDGE**

Take the metro to the Las Arenas stop (*Areeta* in Basque) stop across the ría to Las Arenas, home of the wealthy Basque industrialists, to take a ride on the world’s oldest transporter bridge, the **Puente Colgante** or **Puente de Vizcaya**, the famous “Hanging Bridge”, designed by Alberto Palacio y Elissague. Inaugurated on 28 July 1893, it united both sides of the Nervión River—the working class Portugalete and bourgeois Las Arenas (Getxo) neighborhoods. A cross between a bridge and a ferry—a bridge for pedestrians and a ferry for pedestrians and cars, it’s considered one of the great monuments of the Industrial Revolution (www.puente-colgante.com).
You can cross the river using this bridge in two ways, either on the “gondola” with space for passengers and cars, or, if you’re not a sufferer of acrophobia, climb up 50 meters to cross via the suspended footpath, like a walk around the first tier of the Eiffel Tower (puente-colgante.com).

While in the Las Arenas area, you might like to have pintxos in this sophisticated, bourgeoisie ‘hood at one of the local watering holes. I’d suggest Bar Cosmo on pedestrian Andrés Larrazabal, 5, open from 9:00 am to 11:00 pm. Sit on the terrace and watch the preppy locals at play.

**BILBOAT**

In the late morning before lunch or late afternoon you might enjoy taking a boat ride on the Bilboat, along the Nervión River. The one-hour cruise departs from the Plaza Pío Baroja, next to the city hall bridge. Boats have refreshments and toilets. Adult tickets cost 12€, 7€ for seniors and children between 4 and 10 years of age, and 1€ for children under 4. City cruises are at 1:00 pm, 4:00 and 5:30. Only runs on Saturday, Sunday and holidays during November and December.

On a Saturday, Sunday or holiday morning one can take a two-hour cruise, departing at 10:30 am. It takes you down the Nervión River and out to the Eiffel disciple-designed Hanging Bridge at Puente Colgante, the world’s oldest transporter bridge, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The fare for the two-hour morning cruise is 17€ for adults and 11€ for seniors, children under 4, both cruises cost 1€ (www.bilboats.com).

**ESTADIO SAN MAMÉS**

Estadio San Mamés replaced Athlétic Bilbao’s old stadium, which had served the club for almost 100 years. The beautiful new stadium, designed by César Azkarate and Mikel Sanz de Prit, officially opened in September 2013, has a capacity of 53,000. It sits along the Nervión River, a 15-minute walk from the Guggenheim Museum, and is served by the metro and tram, the Euskotren (www.athletic-club.eus/).

Tickets are available online or at the ticket windows two hours before the start of the match, with ticket prices generally ranging from 30€ to 110€, depending on the game. But it’s best to book your tickets in advance because of the popularity of Athlétic Bilbao, also known as Bilboko lehioiak, the Lions of San Mamés.

You can read the November article in the New York Times regarding the club at: www.nytimes.com/2015/11/06/sports/.
SIGHTSEEING IN THE CASCO VIEJO

Wandering around the Casco Viejo, it’s hard to imagine that up until the turn of the century this maze of ancient stone palacios contained all the enterprise of this ambitious city. Founded in 1300, Bilbao accreted out of just seven parallel streets, the *Siete Calles*, which run down to the riverfront and still serve as the neighborhood’s heart. Indeed, this city’s antique half remains wonderfully alive. Bilbaínos work, shop, and live in these austere edifices, which are crammed with bars, cafés, restaurants, bakeries, tobacconists, hole-in-the-wall groceries, furniture shops, and boutiques.

**PLAZA NUEVA**

One of the prettiest spots in the Casco Viejo, a dramatic change from its crooked, narrow streets, is the Plaza Nueva, a great square enclosed by grand 19th century apartment buildings and an arcade crowded with cafés, bars, and shops. It's a great place to rest your feet after a day of exploring the Old Quarter, and to sample some excellent pintxos.

**ARRIAGA THEATER**

The neo-classical theater, a copy of the Opera Garnier in Paris, is next to the Arenal Bridge over the Nervión River, just outside the atmospheric the Casco Viejo (teatroarriaga.com). Tickets for performances can be purchased on-line at Kutxabank (ticket.kutxabank.es/teatroarriaga), in advance at the theatre box office, or with a credit card (pin & chip) at a bbk multi-service teller machine.

**CATHEDRAL OF SANTIAGO**

The Cathedral, dedicated to Saint James the Apostle, the patron saint of Bilbao, is mostly 14th-15th century Gothic with a later 19th century facade and it has been beautifully restored.
Make sure to visit the small cloister in the tower, the “Door of the Angel”. At Christmas time it displays a fine collection of belenes, Nativity Scenes.

The Diocesan Museum of Sacred Art (www.eleizmuseoa.com) offers one-hour guided tours of the cathedral including the cloisters and sacristy (in Basque and Spanish only). Tours are available Monday-Friday beginning at 11:00 am and 12:00 noon, and again at 5:00 and 6:00 pm. On weekends by request. Reservation required.
Tel: (+34) 944 320 125

MERCADO DE LA RIBERA
Pay a morning visit to the Mercado de la Ribera, next to the river, while in the Casco Viejo. Completely renovated, the market reopened in 2011 and is considered the largest covered market in Europe (www.mercadodelaribera.net).

It’s restaurant, La Ribera, opens for lunch Tuesday-Sunday at 1:30 and for dinner on Thursday-Saturday at 8:30, closed Monday. You can shop in the market and the restaurant will prepare your meal. Reservations are required. There is also a bar and live music on Friday and Saturday evenings (www.lariberabilbao.com/).
Tel: (+34) 946 575 474 / 627 541 596

EUSKAL MUSEOA BILBAO - MUSEO VASCO
Also, if you can’t get to the city of Bayonne in the Pays Basque, the French Basque Country, then visit the cultural and ethnological Basque museum at Plaza de Miguel de Unamuno, 4. There is also an entrance at Calle La Cruz, 4 and disabled entry at C/ Maria Muñoz. General admission is 3€, free for those over 65 and under 12. Free on Thursdays (Museum Day).
It came into being in 1921 and its collection brings together both the prehistory and archaeology of Bizkaia and the ethnography of the Basque people. Learn about the Basque navigators, the farming system, shepherding, their pottery and textile industry, and see a mockup of a typical Basque farmhouse or “caserío” and Basque furniture. There is a museum store that sells reproduction pieces (www.euskal-museoa.org).

Open Monday-Friday from 10:00 am to 7:00 pm, Saturdays from 10:00 am to 1:30 pm and 4:00 to 7:00 pm, and on Sunday from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.

Tel: (+34) 944 155 423

MUSEO TAURINO DE BILBAO

There’s also a small bullfighting museum in the bullring, Plaza de Toros Vista Alegre Bilbao, at Martín Aguero, 1. The exhibition records the history of bullfighting in Bizkaia and includes bullfighting costumes, capes, swords and original posters.

Open Monday to Thursday from 10:00 am to 1:30 pm and 4:00 to 6:00 pm. In January and February it’s open Monday-Friday from 10:00 am to 1:30 pm. Closed on Saturday, Sunday and holidays. Entrance is 3€. Guided tours available for groups of 15 or more. Check the bullfighting schedule for the August Festival at: www.torosbilbao.com.

Tel: (+34) 944 448 698
PINTXOS (TAPAS) HOPPING
IN THE OLD QUARTER, THE CASCO VIEJO
On Sundays you can see three generations of a family making their way through the neighborhood bars drinking Rioja in sips and feasting on pintxos. In the “Siete Calles” section, those seven parallel, narrow, pedestrian streets running south of the cathedral. Be sure to take your map along.

VÍCTOR MONTES
My favorite haunt in the old quarter is one of the oldest (1849) and liveliest of the Plaza Nueva's restaurants and bars, which have a wonderfully jaunty Belle Epoque décor that are all black and white and gold. Start off with some rabas, fried squid rings, and a txikito of Rioja. The txikito is a sturdy short glass with a thick stem and a small hollow that holds only a few sips of wine (victormontes.com).
Tel: (+34) 944 157 067

Bilbaínos believe in “little and often” and in each bar order only a short “txikito” or “zurito” and one pintxo that they knock back in a minute or two before quickly relocating to another bar. The plaza has so many that you may never get beyond the square before the evening's over.

CAFÉ BAR BILBAO
Another favorite, just next-door at Plaza Nuevo, 6, (has only been around since 1911) and always does well in the annual “pintxos” competition (www.bilbao-cafebar.com).
Tel: (+34) 944 151 671
BAR ZUGA
This is yet another good stop in Plaza Nueva, where chef David Asteinza offers a selection of classic and avant-garde pintxos. Very busy on weekends.
Open Monday-Saturday from 12:00 noon to 11:30 and on Sunday’s until 4:40 pm.
Tel: (+34) 944 150 321
Two other pintxos bars not to miss while in Plaza Nueva are Gure Toki at No.12 (www.guretoki.com), and La Olla at No.2 (www.laolladelaplazanueva.es).

BAR GATZ
On C/ Santa María, look for this popular bar that regularly wins awards for their creative pintxos. A good stop for vegans. It’s located next to the hostal Iturrienea Ostauta (www.bargatz.com).
Open Monday-Thursday from 12:30 to 11:00 pm, Friday and Saturday until midnight, and until 4:00 in the afternoon on Sunday.
Tel: (+34) 944 154 861
On the same street you can check out Irrintzi (www.irrintzi.es) if you like sushi.
Two other contenders in the “Siete Calles” area include Xukela at C/ del Perro, 2, and Río-Oja at No. 4, for casserole dishes, but the ones in the plaza have a more ‘old time’ Bilbao ambience.
Two more of our favorite bars in the Old Quarter, welcomed havens when we need to sit and rest, can be found on Calle (Kalea) Jardines.
BERTÓN BUKOI
This bar-restaurant offers some of the best pintxos around IMO, made with high quality ingredients, try its “solomillo con foie”, a tiny filet mignon on toast. It has table seating, and can be found at C/ Jardines, 11, running off C/ Santa María. Relax with a wine, pintxo and classical music.
Tel: (+34) 944 167 035

SASIBIL
We also enjoy its sister next door at No. 8, which specializes in grilled fish, meat and seafood.
Tel: (+34) 944 155 605 / 944 154 080

Both offer a well-priced menú del día, and both are closed on Sunday night and Monday, and on Thursdays they offer a “Pintxo-pote”, a pintxo and small beer or glass of wine for 2€.
PINTXOS IN THE ENSANCHE
After trying out the bars around the Plaza Nueva, take a stroll down Licenciado Poza Street, behind the Gran Via, in the Indautxu area, to the corner of Maestro Garcia Rivero, between 7:00 and 8:00 pm, for a night’s pintxos adventure. On this small pedestrian street, in an area called “pozas”, you’ll see several bars filled to the rafters with people, some spilling out into the street, enjoying Bilbao’s gourmet tapas.

One of my favorites here is El Huevo Frito, located at Garcia Rivero, 1. Its specialties include zucchini filled with ham and cheese (elhuevofrito.com). Another favorite is Café Estoril at Plaza Emillo Campuzano, 3, a classic pintxos bar specializing in croquettes and chorizo tortillas. It also is has the very best martinis in town.

LA VIÑA DEL ENSANCHE
After everything else is done, head to the pedestrian Calle Diputación for a unique treat at Diputación, 10; great “jamón ibérico” of the Joselito brand, the silkiest ham in the world, better than prosciutto. This is a chic local hangout where everyone drinks “cariñena” red wine to go with the ham, foie and cheeses. First opened in 1927, the Bar offers a tasting menu to share for 30€, or you can simply have pintxos, hot or cold, including ham croquettes, grilled mushrooms, tempura of baby green asparagus, little lima beans sautéed with ham, grilled filet mignon. Have a mozzarella and tomato salad, a carpaccio or a gazpacho. Or try the gastronomic menu, which includes five dishes and two deserts for 60€, in the Taller (Spanish for workshop). There is also a gourmet shop just around the corner (www.lavinadelensanche.com).

Open Monday to Friday from 8:30 am to 11:00 pm and on Saturdays from 12:00 noon to 1:00 am. Closed on Sundays and holidays. The Taller is closed on Monday. Always busy, reservations for lunch or dinner highly recommended in the Bar, and required in the Taller.
Tel: (+34) 944 155 615
EL GLOBO
Next, head across the street to Diputación, 8, for great tapas and good wines. Here you can experience treats like scrambled eggs with mushrooms and roasted red peppers in earthenware dishes that make for a great 4-star meal. It’s filled with locals, popular with business folks in the morning hours. It also features a wine of the month. Great gazpacho! El Globo often wins the yearly tapas competitions with its very original creations. This is very much a local yuppie watering hole, but just can’t be beat (www.barelglobo.com).

Open 8:00 am to 11:00 Monday-Thursday and 8:00 am until midnight on Friday and Saturday.
Tel: (+34) 944 154 221

COLMADO IBÉRICO
If you happen to visit Bilbao in July when the Viña del Ensanche is closed and would like a wonderful sit-down meal built around Spain’s famous jamón, head straight around Alameda de Urquijo, past the post office, before reaching the intersection with General Concha, to this fantastic bar-restaurant-delicatessen-wine store combo.

Nice service, reasonable prices. You can order as much or as little as you wish, just a starter (ham croquettes, Piquillo peppers stuffed with ham), large salad, a dish of scrambled eggs (with ham, wild mushrooms, baby asparagus, limas, etc.), a meat course (their grilled pork loin is dynamite) or a homemade dessert (www.colmadoiberico.com).

Open Monday-Thursday from 7:30 am to 11:00 pm, Fridays until midnight, and Saturdays from 8:30 am to midnight.
Tel: (+34) 944 436 001
DINING IN BILBAO
GOURMET DINING

AIZIAN
This gastronomic restaurant at C/Lehendakari Leizaola, 29, with views of Parque de Doña Casilda de Iturrizar, is located on the ground floor of the 5-star Milia Bilbao. It was opened in 2003 by the Asúa family of the Michelin starred Andra Mari of Galdakao. We had a truly spectacular meal here as guests of the Basque Country Tourist Board. Chef José Miguel Olazabalaga pulled out all the stops and presented our group with extraordinarily creative dishes, that were the highlight of our week’s visit.

The restaurant’s decor is minimalist, but it’s a very relaxing space, with the finest of linens and china, well-spaced tables, quiet and refined ambiance. The chef offers a traditional menu for 49€ (+ tax), an executive menu for 42€ and a degustation menu for 67€. Awarded one Michelin star, it also has two Repsol “soles”, suns (www.restaurant-aizian.com).
Tel: 944 280 039

NERUA
Offering haute cuisine, the Guggenheim’s main restaurant is located in the heart of the museum near Richard Serra’s The Matter of Time. It’s overseen by award-winning chef Josean Martinez Alija (IXO Grupo) and has one Michelin star and three Repsol soles. It has its own entrance from the river promenade. Closed on December 24th and 25th, and from the 4th to the 19th of January for their annual holiday (www.neruaguggenheimbilbao.com).
Tel: (+34) 944 000 430

BISTRÓ GUGGENHEIM BILBAO
The newly refurbished and less formal Bistro, an avant-garde restaurant, offers a variety of choices under the direction of chef Josean, and has an outdoor terrace overlooking the city. It offers a child’s menu and selection of vegetarian dishes. There is a menú del dia for 26,50€ + tax and a tasting menu for 36,50€. You can have an express lunch, main course + desert, for only 19,50€.

It’s open for lunch Tuesday-Sunday from 1:00 to 3:30 and Thursday to Saturday for dinner from 8:30 to 11:30. The Bar Terrace is open from 9:30 am to 8:30 pm Tuesday-Sunday. Both are open daily for lunch and dinner during July and August (www.bistroguggenheimbilbao.com).
Tel: (+34) 944 239 333

ETXANOBE
This is the beautiful top floor dining room of the Palacio Euskalduna, Bilbao’s performing arts-convention center. A lovely and romantic dining spot with a degustación menu by chef Fernando Canales. He offers a gastronomic menu with wines and coffee at 75€ + tax, and a menú del chef for 88€. Receives two Repsol soles and one Michelin star (etxanobe.com).
Open Monday-Saturday for lunch from 1:00 to 4:00, and dinner Monday-Thursday from 7:45 to 11:00. On Friday and Saturday it’s open until midnight. Closed during Holy Week and the first two weeks of August.
Tel: (+34) 944 421 071

ZORTZIKO
Located at Alameda Manzarredo, 17, near the Guggenheim, chef Daniel García’s venture is arguably the most famous in Bilbao and offers two menus; the “gran menú degustación” for 95€, tax included, and “menu tradición” for 65€. There is also a gluten-free menu for groups.
Very formal in the old European style with heavy, grand French Empire décor of lime green walls, crystal chandeliers, alabaster fireplace, gilt mirrors, gorgeous floral arrangements, waiters, all who speak English, in white jackets, formal and flawless service, even the beer is served elegantly, but you can go casually dressed. Frank Gehry’s favorite hangout when in Bilbao. Locals come to dine in shirt-sleeves. It has one Michelin star and 2 Repsol suns (zortziko.es).
Open Tuesday-Saturday for lunch from 1:00 to 3:30 and for dinner from 8:30 to 11:00.
Tel: (+34) 944 423 743

BAITA GAMÍNIZ
Overlooking the river near the Guggenheim at Alameda Manzarredo, 20, was opened by acclaimed chefs Aitor Elizegi and Guillermo Fernández of Restaurant Gamíniz in Zamudio, and has an attractive covered outdoor terrace for summer dining. Recommended in both the Michelin and Repsol guides, it offers four set menus beginning at €50, VAT included (baitagaminiz.com).
Open for lunch at 1:30, Tuesday-Sunday, and for dinner at 8:30, Wednesday-Saturday.
Tel: (+34) 944 424 267

DOMA
Martín Berasategui’s restaurant on the top floor of the Hotel Silken Gran Domine Bilbao offers outstanding views of the Guggenheim Museum along with a gastronomic, market driven menu. Chef Moises Leranoz offers a tasting menu for 65€, as well as vegetarian and coeliac (gluten-free) menus. Considered one of the top 10 restaurants in Bilbao (www.hoteles-silken.com).
Open for lunch Monday-Saturday from 1:30 to 3:30 and for dinner from 8:30 to 11:00.
Tel: (+34) 944 253 300

RESTAURANTE MINA
Widely considered one of the city’s top tables for a wonderful fixed price menu at lunch or dinner. Located on Muelle Zarzana, it sits on a pedestrian promenade near the river facing the pier, with views of the San Anton Bridge and the Ribera Market, but is not within an easy walk from most hotels, so you may want to take a taxi. Chef Alvaro Garrido does not offer an ‘a la carte’ option, but rather a ‘short’ 7-course tasting menu for 60€ + tax, with the option to add three more courses for a total of 75€. You can also do a 14-course custom designed menu for 100€ +
tax. Add 35€ for wine-paring with the tasting menus. Seating is limited to 25 guests. It has one Michelin star (www.restaurantemina.es).

Open for lunch Wednesday-Sunday from 2:00 to 3:30 and for dinner Wednesday-Saturday from 9:00 to 10:30.
Tel: (+34) 944 795 938

YANDIOLA
At Plaza Arriquibar, 4, (Edificio Alhondiga) receives lots of praise from gourmet critics for its highly inventive dishes. Chef Luis Miguel Calderón offers a menú Yandiola for 49€, including wine and coffee, and an 8-course menú Gastronomico Km.0 at 80€ (yandiola.com).
Tel: (+34) 944 133 636

KATE ZAHARRA
Sitting atop the Artxanda funicular at Zabalbide Kalea, 221, with dramatic (read spectacular) views over the city and the Guggenheim, is a carefully restored stone and wood Basque farmhouse (baserri) on 3 floors. It’s extremely popular with local business folks sealing the deal, in-the-know carnivores, famous fútbol stars and wine lovers (kate-zaharra.com).

You might start off your dining experience in the cellar, sitting at bare wooden tables enjoying a plate of hand sliced Iberian ham while choosing your wine from among hundreds of labels (over 6,000 bottles) from their impressive list. The meal continues upstairs where the menu is recited (no prices). This will not be an inexpensive meal-save it for a special occasion as your check will probably be around 130€ for two. Stand out 100% traditional, uncomplicated Basque dishes include txipirones (squid), kokotxas (cod cheeks) calabacín relleno de setas (zucchini filled with wild mushrooms), solomillo (filet mignon), chuleta (a fabulous Basque rib steak).

Open daily for lunch, and for dinner on Fridays, Saturdays and holidays. Reservations are essential!
Tel: (+34) 944 461 347
FOR THAT VERY SPECIAL DINING EXPERIENCE OUTSIDE OF BILBAO
Reachable by taxi

ASADOR HORMA ONDO
In the pretty Caserío Leguina Goikoa farmhouse in Larrebetzu, next to the Artxanda golf club, is considered one of the best of the Basque Country’s asadores, or restaurants specializing in charcoal grilled steaks and whole fish. The secret to their success is the impeccable quality of the ingredients, sourced from Spain’s finest purveyors (www.asadorhormaondo.com).

To sample these ingredients less expensively, come here for the Monday-Friday “executive” set lunch menu priced at only 30€. The weekend menu is 40€.
Tel: (+34) 946 565 700

BOROA
Housed in a 15th century farmhouse, the Caserío Garai, beautifully and painstakingly restored, can be found just 10 kilometers from Bilbao, in the hills above the village of Amorebieta-Etxano. The restaurant has one Michelin star and two Repsol suns, and diners are rewarded with stunning views of the highest peaks in Bizkaia. In the dining room are exhibits by cutting-edge artists on the walls mixed with rustic furnishings. In addition to the a la carte menu, the chef offers a short tasting menu, the “Bizcargi”, for 38,50€ and a longer degustation menu, the “Txindoki” for 88€ (www.boroa.com)

Open daily for lunch from 1:00 to 3:30. Open for dinner Monday-Thursday from 7:30 to 9:30, and from 8:30 to 10:30 on Friday and Saturday.
Tel: (+34) 946 734 747

AZURMENDI
Proclaimed by the British Restaurant Magazine in 2015 the world’s number 19 best restaurant and by the gastronomic website OAD, Opinionated About Dining, as Europe’s best, it has been bestowed three Michelin stars, as well as three Repsol suns. This could possibly be the finest, most memorable dining experience of one’s Basque gourmet explorations-well worth the taxi ride to the outskirts of suburban Larrebetzu. If driving, take Exit 25, Txorierri Corridor.

Perched high on a hill in an avant-garde space surrounded by vineyards, it attracts travelers from around the globe to sample chef Eneko Atxa’s brilliantly inventive cuisine (www.azurmendi.biz).

Open for lunch, Tuesday-Sunday, from 1:00 to 3:15, and for dinner on Saturdays from 8:30 to 10:15.
Tel: (+34) 944 558 866

Within the environmentally sustainable complex, diners find the enormous glass and steel gastronomic restaurant and laboratory, a winery run by the chef’s uncle, a rooftop edible garden, greenhouses and a more informal, less expensive dining space, Bistrot Prêt À Porter, where the original Azurmendi was once housed.

Diners at the formal restaurant are welcomed at the vast atrium with a glass of txakolí, followed by a guided tour of the building and a stroll through the rooftop garden to taste the herbs, then to
the greenhouse where they begin their dining experience with little surprises, nibbles, hidden and left for them to pick up. They then return to the atrium and are given a picnic basket filled with more nibbles, then on to a tour of the kitchen accompanied by two more nibbles before sitting down to the multi-mini course molecular cuisine repast. There are currently two tasting menus offered, the “Erroak” (roots) for 145€ and the “Adarrak” (branches) for 175€.

But you need not spend a small fortune to sample the Eneko Atxa experience. One can dine in the informal bistro, serving an every-changing four-course fixed menu + sampling from the dessert cart, for a very reasonable 38€, not including wine (which is quite reasonably priced). It is open Tuesday-Sunday.

Before your meal at the more casual Bistró Prêt À Porter, you may wish to reserve a short tour of their txakoli producing facilities. The estate produces four labels, all whites.
FOR GRILLED FISH & MEAT IN THE ENSANCHE

ASADOR ZÁRATE

Currently Bilbao’s best asador, or grill house for charcoal grilled fish and meats, is located behind the Hotel Carlton at Licenciado Poza, 65. The fish is brought fresh each day straight from the piers of Ondárrao and Lekeitio and is of impeccable quality. Offers a gastronomic menu for 60€ + tax, and their menú Berezi for 43€. Extremely popular among the local gourmet fans in the know, so it’s best to reserve at table a few days ahead of time. Recommended in the Academia Vasca de Gastronomía and Michelin guides (www.zaratejatetxea.com).

Open for lunch Tuesday-Sunday from 1:30 to 4:00 and for dinner Thursday-Saturday from 9:00 to 11:00. Closed Mondays, the first three weeks of August and from August 31 to September 6.
Tel: (+34) 944 416 521

SERANTES I

Another good option for seafood is a branch of Marisquería Serantes, at Licenciado Poza, 16, near the Hotel Ercilla. In the upstairs dining room you can feast on the Bay of Biscay’s finest fish and crustaceans. They get many foreign guests sent there by the area hotels’ concierges. There are 12 menus ranging from 32,50€ to 68€ + tax. Another branch, Serantes III, is at Alameda Mazarredo, 75, near the Guggenheim and Hotel Miró (www.restauranteserantes.com).

Open daily from 8:00 am to 1:00 am. Serantes III opens at 9:00 am.
Tel: (+34) 944 212 129

ASADOR GUETARIA

Colón Larreategui, 12, is a Bilbao institution, recommended for 30 consecutive years in the Michelin Guide. They offer two tasting menus at 50€, tax included, and an extensive wine cellar (www.guetaria.com).

Open daily for lunch from 1:30 to 3:30 and for dinner from 9:00 to 11:15. Close on Easter Sunday.
Tel: (+34) 944 243 923 / 944 232 527

BERTÓN GOIKOA

The owners of Bar Bertón have recently opened a new pintxos bar/restaurant outside the Casco Viejo in the Indautxu neighborhood, at Calle de Rodríguez Arias, 64, not far from Parque de Doña Casilda de Iturrizar. It offers a wide variety of pintxos, chuleton from the Esla Valley (Zamora), roast lamb, cod and ibérico ham (www.pintxozpintxo.com/berton-goikoa).
Tel: (+34) 944 394 301
CASUAL DINING IN THE ENSANCHE

BASCOOK
For contemporary casual dining in a renovated salt warehouse, a creation of noted local chef Aitor Elizegi of Gaminiz in Zamudio (2 Repsol suns), we recommend the 5-year old Bascook at Barroeta Aldamar Kalea 8, a short walk from the Gran Vía.

With an industrial look, dark lighting and hip vibe, it appeals to an urbane crowd. It’s a member of the Km0 network (Slow Food Movement), is a recommendation of both Michelin and Repsol and is vegetarian friendly. From Monday-Friday it offers a 3-course menú del día at lunch for 29,70€, tax included (www.bascook.com).

Open Monday-Saturday from 1:30 to 3:30 for lunch and dinner on Thursday-Saturday from 8:30 to 10:45.
Tel: (+34) 944 009 977

GURE KABI
After six years as Batzoki de Indautxu, the team moved into the former Goizeko Kabi, at Particular de Estraunza, 4, in 2014 and continues to offer traditional Basque cuisine, as well as more creative fare and options for vegetarians. There is a daily lunch menu for 13€ + tax available Monday-Friday and a special 22€ lunch menu on Friday and Saturday. Try their Arroz con Bogavante (www.gurekabi.com).

Open Monday-Friday from 9:00 am and Saturdays from 11:00 am. Closed from July 26 to August 21.
Tel: (+34) 946 004 843

CAFÉ IRUÑA
For the best lunch, at the lowest price in the most atmospheric setting you can find, head to the lovely, flower filled Jardines de Albia Park. Across the street from the park, at Calle de Colón Larreategui, 13, you’ll find a Bilbao legend founded in 1903, offering extravagant Moorish décor, coffered ceiling, slow-moving Arabic wooden fans and lamps, mosaic tiles and murals. This restaurant is extremely popular and has great tapas all day at the bar. Just point to what looks good. Also try the “pintxo moruno”, a type of shish kebab.

The dining room fills quickly around 1:00 pm most days as the locals drop in to enjoy the great value. A three course menú del día, with wine, is only 14€, Monday-Friday, 19€ on weekends (www.cafeirunabilbao.net).
Tel: (+34) 946 021

You’ll see people standing outside talking on their cell phones, reading off to their friends and family what’s on the menu for the day. It’s a kind of a Parisian brasserie with a heavy touch of the Alhambra. This makes the perfect lunch stop. And if you happen to be there on the 6th of July at noon you can join in on their San Fermín celebration, complete with “chupinazo”. Be sure to dress in your best white and red.
EL VÍEJO ZORTZÍ
Licenciado Poza, 54, where Zortiziko began, is a little bistro and a less expensive way to sample the Garcia family’s Zortziko. This is gourmet dining in a more informal setting. Recommended in the Academia Vasca de Gastronomía. Has an excellent pintxos menu and offers two group menus (45€ and 50€) and a special Christmas menu at 65€, tax included (viejozortzi.es).

Open Monday-Saturday for lunch from 1:00 to 3:30 and for dinner from 8:30 to 11:00.
Tel: (+34) 944 419 249

BREAKFAST OR COFFEE BREAK
Try Abando y Barra, at Iparraguirre, 14, just a block from the Guggenheim. Tiny and sophisticated for an excellent coffee break, or several different continental breakfasts, is on your way from the Guggenheim to the Museo de Bellas Artes. Lovely canapés. They serve a delicious Basqué brand coffee. They also have a good selection of pintxos.

As you leave, check the beautiful cheese, fruit and vegetables at Gamazo, across the street.
SHOPPING IN BILBAO
The main shopping street is the semi-pedestrian Gran Vía de López de Haro, which runs east to west and on which the Hotel Carlton sits at Plaza Moyúa. Here you will find the Hermes-like leather shop, Loewe, and the large El Corte Inglés Department Store, open from 10:00 to 10:00. Across the Alameda de Urquijo from El Corte Inglés, there is a FNAC for music and books.

CHOCOLATES - a Basque Specialty
CACAO SAMPAKA
Calle Alameda Rekalde, 20, the street leading from the Guggenheim to the Plaza de Moyúa, is a branch of the Barcelona chain of designer chocolates (www.cacaosampaka.com).

ALMA DE CACAO
Another designer chocolate shop with beautiful designs, located at Calle Rodríguez Arias, 15, the street that runs behind the Hotel Carlton, also a major shopping street (www.almadecacao.com).

CHOCOLATES MENDARO SAINT GERONS
This has been the top Basque artisanal chocolate maker since 1850 and can be found at Licenciado Poza, 16, the street running parallel to Rodríguez Arias (www.chocolatesdemendaro.com).

PASTRIES
The city’s best pastry shop is Arrese, at Gran Vía López de Haro, 24. Its specialty are truffles.
STAYING IN BILBAO
If you decide you’d like to spend a night or two, there are a number of excellent hotel options in the city center, close to everything.

GRAN HOTEL DOMINE BILBAO
Designed by Javier Mariscal in collaboration with the Fernando Salas Studio, this luxury, avant-garde hotel, with a rooftop terrace and the gastronomic restaurant Doma, by Martin Berasategui, is located at Alameda de Mazarredo, 61, directly across from the Guggenheim Bilbao.

Opened in 2002, it’s mirrored façade reflects the work of award winning architect Frank Gehry. Many of it’s superior rooms and junior suites overlook the museum. Free WiFi. Private parking is available onsite (www.hoteles-silken.com/en/hotels/gran-hotel-domine-bilbao/)
Tel: (+34) 944 253 300

BILBAO HOTEL CARLTON

Less then a 10-minute walk from the Guggenheim and the Casco Viejo, historic quarter, and 6 minutes away from the Museo de Bellas Artes, it’s location on Plaza de Federico Moyúa makes this elegant landmark 5-star hotel a natural for visiting Bilbao. It was a big hit with our Harvard HILR group. The Moyúa Metro Station is steps away from the hotel, giving you easy access to the city and surrounding neighborhoods. Free WiFi (hotelcarlton.es/).
Tel: (+34) 944 162 200

HOTEL MIRÓ
Down the street from the Guggenheim, at Alameda Maqarredo, 77, Bilbao’s Golden Mile, this 50-room boutique property, in minimalist style, open bathroom concept, was created by Catalan
fashion designer Antonio Miró. City Deluxe Rooms have spectacular views of the Guggenheim museum (www.mirohotelbilbao.com).
Tel: (+34) 946 611 880

**MELIÁ BILBAO**
Situated between the San Mames Stadium and Guggenheim museum, at Lehendakari Leizaola, 29, it’s a 5-minute walk from Bilbao’s Bellas Artes Museum. The upscale Eduardo Chillida inspired design, by architect Ricardo Legorreta, features spacious rooms, a gym, semi-heated outdoor pool and award-winning restaurant Aizian. Private parking is available.
Tel: (+34) 902 144 440

**NH HESPERIA BILBAO**
Located across the Nervión River from the Guggenheim Bilbao, at Campo Volantín, 28, the hotel, with it’s fanciful façade of colored glass, is only minutes away from the cities historic quarter (www.nh-hotels.com/hotel/hesperia-bilbao).
Tel: (+34) 944 051 100

**LÓPEZ DE HARO**
This boutique hotel (48 rooms) is located in a restored historic building at Obispo Orueta, 2, a short walk from the old quarter and the Guggenheim Bilbao and Bellas Artes Museum. This is where Frank Gehry stayed while designing the Guggenheim.

The lounge, selected by Moët & Chandon, was recently renovated as part of updating the hotel, and includes a classic English club with fireplace and leather armchairs. Private parking is available. The Moyúa Metro Station is a 5-minute walk (www.hotellopezdeharo.com).
Tel: (+34) 944 235 500
STAYING OUTSIDE BILBAO
PALACIO DE URGOITI
Located in the municipality of Mungía, but in the countryside rather than the town, just four kilometers, a 5-minute ride, from the airport and 11 kilometers from the coast, is a simply stunning, character-filled, late 17th century palace that has been meticulously relocated and rebuilt. Guests are housed in 43 comfortable, and very restful, exterior-facing rooms. After a heavy touring schedule we thoroughly enjoy the hotel’s tranquility and our spacious superior room, with sit-out terrace overlooking the gardens, for our last night’s stay before an early morning departure from the Bilbao airport (www.palaciourgoiti.com).

Golf enthusiasts will find a 9-hole, par 3, pitch and putt course and swimmers will enjoy its indoor pool, while food lovers can enjoy a fine, final Basque meal in its gourmet restaurant. The nightly tariff here is quite moderate for the high quality.
Tel: (+34) 946 746 868

If you plan of keeping your rental car the evening prior to your flight, and don’t wish to dine in the hotel’s restaurant, there is a lovely country option just two minutes away, across from the Petronor gas station, two kilometers from the airport. Opened in 1962, Artebakarra, at Barrio de San Isidro, 17, is housed in a white Basque farm house with ample grounds (for weddings) and covered porch dining. They offer a degustation menu for 48€, wine and coffee included.

We enjoyed their creamy rice dish with clams and filet mignon with onion and foie gras, along with the dark chocolate cake with white chocolate ice cream. All desserts are homemade (www.restauranteartebakarra.com).
Tel: (+34) 944 541 292 / 944 541 972
EXCURSIONS FROM BILBAO

TO THE BEACH

On that rare sunny day you take the metro out to the Neguri stop, then walk down among the enormous, extravagant turn-of-the-century mansions of the industrial elite of Getxo to the Paseo, which takes you down to the Puerto Deportivo. Here you will find movie theaters, tapas bars and one great restaurant, Cubita Kaia, and the beach. You can either dine at Cubita Kaia (www.restaurantecubita.com), or at one of the more casual restaurants.

Or head to Algorta for lunch at Tamarises Izarra (tamarisesizarra.com) or Brasserie (www.hoteligeretxe.com/).

A PRETTY INLAND DRIVE

ELORRIO

If you have a car, take a morning drive to the scenic Duresangado Valley, or better yet, spend an incredibly tranquil night in this beautiful, out of the way spot, with a visit the picturesque town of Elorrio, with its noble homes, beautiful gardens, stone crucifixes and an unusual cemetery at the hermitage of San Adrián de Argineta above the town, with 9th and 10th century sarcophagi.

AXPE-ATXONDO

Once in Elorrio, take a short detour to this tiny hamlet, just a blip on the road. This is a wonderful find if you like being in the country. The village is secluded in a misty, green valley with the Amboto peak hovering above and consists of a stone church with a unique Basque porch, the requisite frontón and two truly marvelous, unforgettable restaurants. It is said that Mari, a witch who watches over the Basques, lives atop the mountain's peak. When clouds hide the peak, Mari is at home.
MENDI GOIKOA AND MENDI BEKOA
There are two ancient stone farmhouses on the side of the hill overlooking the village. The Mendi Goikoa, another great Michelin starred restaurant, and the Mendi Bekoa, a lovely bed and breakfast. The names mean “upper and lower mountains” in Basque and make a perfect overnight stay. Mendi Goikoa’s slogan is "where the silence is heard”, while the Mendi Bekoa’s slogan is “where the silence sleeps”.
The restaurant is celebrated as much for its cooking as for its bucolic setting, and has attracted many notables. The King and Queen of Spain, Nobel Prize winners, and various Prime Ministers have all eaten in the dining room, which once served as a stable. People often drive up from Bilbao for lunch on Sundays. Closed Mondays and Tuesdays. Please reserve in advance, as the restaurant is VERY popular for wedding parties (www.mendigoikoa.com).

The rooms in the he Mendi Bekoa, the "Caserio" that holds the hotel, is filled with antiques. The best room is No. 4, with a long terrace overlooking the valley and a beamed, open cathedral ceiling. No TV or mini-bar, but there is a phone. Stall shower. In the winter choose room No. 7 with a Jacuzzi shower, because room No. 4 gets rather cold when the wind comes howling through, but a more peaceful spot you couldn’t find anywhere. There’s also a glassed in porch where a cold buffet breakfast of chorizo, fruits, breads, and cereals is served. It has a cozy bar.

This is a perfect place to unwind after the madness of San Fermín, but in order to stay here over a weekend from March to October, you need to reserve far in advance, since it schedules many weddings where the wedding party takes all 11 rooms. Closed all of January.

Tel: (+34) 946 820 833

RESTAURANT ETXEBARRI
In the center of the hamlet, next to the church and the fronton, is quite the gourmet find, but it has been discovered by the gourmet press, having been featured in Food and Wine, Gourmet, The Wine Spectator, even Vogue. There is no indication that it’s a restaurant from the outside, just the name written above the door of this pretty stone building. There’s a simple bar downstairs where the locals hang out sipping cider and watching soccer on TV. The dining room is upstairs. You absolutely must reserve, particularly on weekends (www.asadoretxebarri.com).

You’ll delight in fabulous food from Víctor Arguinzoniz, who has been called the Ferran Adrià of the grill, the world’s best master griller. He makes his own charcoal every morning. The grill
area is a separate room off the kitchen with door leading outdoors, with six specially designed grills lined up in a row, as well as a few wood burning ovens.

Open for lunch Tuesday-Sunday from 1:00 to 3:30 and dinner on Saturdays from 8:30 to 10:30. Close in August and from December 24 to 7 January.

Tel: (+34) 946 583 042

RESTAURANT LASA
If you haven’t reserved and both restaurants are full, drive back to Elorrio, then take the BI-2632 to Bergara to dine at the almost equally renowned Restaurant Lasa, a delightful restaurant located along the banks of the Deba River in a 16th century palace, the Palacio Ozaeta, once belonging to the family of the founder of the Jesuits, St. Ignatius of Loyola.

The chef is Koldo Lasa and he prepares traditional fare with a creative touch. Specialties are game and smoked fishes, plus stews and hake. The bread and desserts are homemade. The restaurant offers a special 20€ lunch Tuesday-Friday. Closed Sunday night and Monday (www.restaurantelasa.es).

Tel: (+34) 943 761 055