The País Vasco

Maribel’s Guide to the Spanish Basque Country ©
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The Spanish Basque Country
Planning your trip to the País Vasco

The capitals of the three Basque Provinces of Spain are San Sebastián-Donostia in Gipuzkoa, Bilbao-Bilbo in Bizkaia and Vitoria-Gasteiz in Álava. Euskadi is the politically correct term for the Basque Country, but some prefer the more historically inclusive Eusklal Herria, which means the Basque Lands or home of the Basque people, which includes Navarra and the three French Basque provinces of Basse-Navarre (Nafarroa Beherea), Labourd (Lapurdi) and Soule (Zuberoa). The police force in the País Vasco is called Ertzaintza and they wear blue dress shirts and snappy red berets, but there is no equivalent Basque police force in the French Basque country. The Navarran police are called Nafarroako Foruzaingoa (Basque), Policía Foral de Navarra (Spanish), and are similar to the National Police, but with more responsibilities.
About The Language

The Basque language of Euskara, or Euskera, is an incomprehensible (to non-Basques), non-Indo European language of unknown origin spoken for more than 4,000 years and now by roughly 1,000,000 people on both sides of the Pyrénées, the Pays Basque (French Basque) and País Vasco (Spanish Basque.) On the Spanish side, in the last twenty years, the percentage of Basques who speak Euskera has increased, now more then 30% of the population is considered Basque speaking. The Basque language existed in this part of the world before the Greek, Latin, Slavic, Germanic, or Celtic languages appeared. When the Romans arrived, they told of encountering a people who had lived here “since the dawn of time”. The Basque language is extremely difficult to learn as an adult, and it has a spelling with mostly consonants that looks like a typing exercise gone wild, has twenty cases, twelve declinations, but pronunciation is phonetic. It has many different regional dialects as well. An euskaldun is a speaker of the Basque language.

As a traveler, all the Euskara you really need to know are the Basque names for the towns and cities you plan to visit, as you'll see signs written in Euskara, replacing the Castilian names: Donostia rather than San Sebastián, Iruna or Iruña rather than Pamplona, Gasteiz rather than Vitoria, Biasteri instead of Laguardia and Hondarribia in place of Fuenterrabía. Bilbo for Bilbao is the easy one.

How to Arrive

Flying


There is also a smaller airport in nearby Hondarribia, the San Sebastián airport, 20 minutes drive from San Sebastián-Donostia, with flights to and from Barcelona and Madrid.

The Biarritz-Anglet-Bayonne airport in the Pays Basque (France) is 25 minutes away.

By Train

The Spanish Basque Country has train service from Madrid to Bilbao, Barcelona and Madrid to San Sebastián-Donostia, and from Paris to San Sebastián-Donostia. There is also a narrow-gauge railway, the Metro Donostialdea, locally known as the “Topo”, connecting San
Sebastián with Bilbao and the villages along the coast, as well as the train station in Hendaye (France).

Traveling by Bus

There is long distance bus service to and from Madrid and Barcelona, plus excellent regional bus service provided by PESA and ALSA makes it fairly easy to reach most destinations along the Basque coast, the principle towns and villages that lie inland in the País Vasco and Pamplona (Navarra). There is regular bus service between San Sebastián and the airport in Hondarribia on the Lurralde Bus, which leaves from Gipuzkoa Plaza in San Sebastián-Donostia.

Getting around by Car

Day trips from San Sebastián-Donostia, Hondarribia or Pamplona are easy for exploring the provinces of Laboure and Basse-Navarre, but if you are interested in experiencing the province of Soule’s capital of Oloron-Sainte-Marie and the Jurançon, Madiran, Béarn, Pacherenc du Vic Bilh, Tursan and Saint Mont wine regions around Pau (Béarn), and to the north, and possibility the fortified villages Larressingle and Bassouès (Gascony), then you should plan on spending a few days, using the Pays Basque as a base.

Police in the País Vasco and Navarra

The police force in the País Vasco is called Ertzaintza, created in 1980 after the restoration of democracy and the creation of the autonomous state. They normally wear dark blue shirts and pants, or red coats and snappy red berets when dressed more formally, and are the main police force in the País Vasco. There is no equivalent Basque police force in the French Basque country.

The Navarran regional police, created in 1929 as traffic police, are called the Policía Foral de Navarra in Spanish, or Nafarroako Foruzaingoa in Basque, and are similar to Spain’s National Police but with more responsibilities. Their standard uniform is red and gray, and the traditional red Basque beret.
Must Sees in the País Vasco

- The coastal villages of Hondarribia, Zarautz, Getaria, Zumaia in Gipúzkoa, and Lekeitio, Mundaka and Elantxobe in Bizkaia.
- Gernika is the spiritual homeland of the Basques and home to the moving Museum of Peace de Guernica, the Peace Museum, commemorating the saturation bombing on market day, April 26, 1937, during the Spanish Civil War.
- The Biosphere Reserve of Urdaibai with its pretty beaches of Laida and Laga.
- The caves of Santimamiñe and adjacent Agustín Ibarrola’s Painted Forest, the Bosque Pintado de Oma.
- The Shrine of San Juan de Gaztelugatxe.
- The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.
- The “Swiss Alps” of the Basque Country, from Amurrio to Balmaseda.
- The medieval walled city of Laguardia, capital of the Rioja Alavesa wine region.
- The view of the Rioja from the Balcón de la Rioja, where on a clear day you can see the entire Ebro River valley.
- Discover the Routes of Saint James: the inland route from Irun to Briñas and the coastal route from Irun to Kobaron by car, bicycle or on foot.
- Museo Chillida-Leku (Officially closed to the public on January 1, 2011)
Lodging in the País Vasco

You'll find accommodations to fit all budgets and styles, from Casa Rurales belonging to the Nekazalturismoa Association like the Iketxe and Artizarra in Hondarribia and Agroturismos, small working farms like Urresti and Lur-Deia, the unique Castle Parador in Hondarribia in the Gipúzkoa province, the Parador Argómaniz, a manor house outside of Vitoria-Gasteiz in Álavaor and the Castillo de Arteaga, a unique castle in the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve. Or escape to the 10-room Hotel Rural Arresi, a large country estate surrounded by gardens on the slopes of Mount Arresi, near the surfing beaches of Plentzia and Sopelana in Bizkaia.

Stay in the beautiful Belle Époque hotels in San Sebastián-Donostia; the historic 5-star María Cristina, the classic 4-star Londres y de Inglaterra sitting on the beach facing La Concha Bay, or try the unique 19th-century Villa Soro, a 15-minute walk from San Sebastián’s old quarter.

Spend a few nights in the Frank Gehry designed 5-star luxury boutique hotel, the Marques de Riscal, set amid the vineyards in a small village in the Rioja Alavesa, or the more modestly priced luxury boutique design hotel, the whimsical Hotel Viura. The central location of the family run 3-star Villa de Ábalos is perfect for exploring the Rioja wine region. There is also the modest 10-room Castillo el Collado in the medieval walled village of Laguardia, capital of the Rioja Alavesa.
Some of my favorite Casas Rurales

Casas rurales, or country homes, are similar to the agroturismos of Italy and the gites or chambres d'hôtes of France, and are typically located in the countryside, or in the case of Hondarribia, just outside of the city center.

Some of my favorites in Hondarribia are Iketxe, a 5-room farmhouse which the owners built from scratch and Artizarra, a typical farmhouse with three double rooms and its own pelota court.

In San Sebastián you find Kanpoeder, with 5 double rooms in the hills above Ondarreeta beach. Casa Landarte, with 6 double rooms, and Jesuskoa, a renovated 18th-century farmhouse, can be found in Zumaia, a few minutes west of San Sebastián.

In the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve near Gernika, Txopebenta, with 6 rooms, was one of the original country homes. Nearby is Urresti, a 17th-century farmhouse with 6 double bedrooms and 2 luxury apartments. The beautiful and restful country home Ontxene can be found in the village of Busturia, just off the road to Bermeo. Lur-Deia, a beautifully restored country home with 8 double rooms, and organic farm (Lurkoi Baserria), is in the hills overlooking the port city of Bermeo.

30 minutes drive from Bilbao, near the coast on the hillside overlooking the bay at Plentzia, you’ll discover Larrakoetxea, with 6 luxury double rooms and a restaurant.

Caserio Iruaritz, in the “Switzerland of the Basque Country”, Álava, is a special place for romantics. It is also the country home of Luis Pedro Lezama, priest, businessman and journalist and owner of the Taberna del Alabardero restaurants in DC and Sevilla.

In the Ayala valley, 25 minutes from Bilbao and Vitoria-Gasteiz, surrounded by oak, beech and pine forest, is Usko, with 3 double rooms, tennis court and swimming pool. Great for children.

Casa Maribel, a 15th-century working farmhouse with 4 double rooms is in Kuartango (Aprikano), in the valley west of Vitoria-Gasteiz.
Festivals in the País Vasco

San Sebastián International Jazz Festival
You can check the schedule for the 53rd anniversary of the Jazzaldea, which takes place in late July, 2018. If you find yourself in the city, please be sure to take advantage and attend a concert. We’ve had wonderful experiences over the years, having seen such greats as Wynton Marsalis, Chick Correa, Bob Dylan, Rubén Blades, Keith Jarrett, Herbie Hancock, Neville Brothers and Caetano Veloso. There are two outdoor venues: one facing the beach behind the Kursaal Center and one in the tiny Plaza de la Trinidad in the Old Quarter. Remember that the “reserved” seating is first come, first served, so be sure to arrive at least one hour before the concert starts, if not earlier, particularly for the minuscule Plaza de la Trinidad, if you hope to grab one of the folding wooden chairs. If not, be prepared to stand for the entire time.

Getxo International Jazz Festival
The Jazz Festival season in the Basque Country began this year on June 28 with the 41st edition of the Festival Internacional de Jazz de Getxo, and included groups from Italy, Germany, Greece, Poland, the UK, Lithuania, South Korea and Spain. Featured this year was
the Cuban pianist Chicho Valdés and Grammy-winning jazz singer Dianne Reeves from Detroit.

**Festival of Jazz de Vitoria-Gasteiz**
The Getxo Jazz Festival is followed by the annual Festival of Jazz de Vitoria-Gasteiz, which has in the recent past included Chick Correa and Herbie Hancock, and this year included Rubén Blades, Patti Austin, TS Monk, son of Thelonious Monk, and 4 by Monk by 4, with Jazz great Kenny Barron.

**Hondarribia Blues Festival**
The 13th annual blues festival takes place in mid-July 2018. Performers in the past have included the biggest bluesman from Mississippi, Pinetop Perkins, electric blues guitarist Johnny Winter, James Yancey (Tail Dragger) Jones, the legendary Eric Burdon and Taj Mahal, and Bob Stroger, the bluesman from Missouri who was at the Blues Festival to celebrate Muddywaters 100th anniversary. This year’s list included the blues legend Zac Harmon, Kenny Neal (Baton Rouge swamp blues) and Canadian blues guitarist JW Jones.

**BBK Live Festival**
The Bilbao BBK Live will take place July 12-14, 2018. Check the website for the list of artist, which last year included Mumford and Sons and Monsters and Men. The 3-day tickets are 80€, 90€ with a camp site.

**The Quincena Musical**
This is a month-long classical musical and dance program that goes from first week of August to first week of September, with performances in the Rafael Moneo designed Kursaal Center, the classic Victoria Eugenia Theatre and Miramar Palace. Tickets for the 79th edition will go on sale in early June.

**International Film Festival**
The 66th International Film Festival will be held from September 21-29 in 2018. Gregory Peck received it’s first award in 1986. James Franco’s “The Disaster Artist” received the award for best film and “Three Billboards” received the audience award for 2017. The festival attracts celebrities and fans from around the world.

**Herri Kirolak**
Definitely not for wimps, is Bilbao's annual rural sports games that make Australian Rules football look tame by comparison. Typical events include tree-trunk chopping, hay-bale tossing, iron bar tossing, grass cutting, tugs of war, ox-cart lifting and relay races with heavy sacks of corn. There is also something called aritopeka, which is a bit like cockfighting, but featuring sheep. However, for displays of unadulterated brute strength, there is nothing to beat the stone lifter, or harrijasotzaile. Dressed in leather padding, contestants repeatedly lift
a series of granite and lead filled stones weighing up to 315 kilograms in a timed contest. Refinements include dragging them, or twirling them round their heads. The sport is believed to have originated with the huge weights traditionally lifted by farmers laboring on their land. “Harria” means stone in Basque.

**Semana Grande - Aste Nagusia**
This event takes place in mid August (12-19 in 2018 in San Sebastián). It’s Bilbao’s yearly week-long, 24 hour party, which includes special concerts, parades with traditional folk dances accompanied by the "txistu" (a 3-holed flute), fireworks, food stales, the Herri Kirolak (above) and bullfights each afternoon featuring Spain’s leading matadors.

**Las Regatas de La Concha**
Regattas of the thirteen-member “trainera” boats are held in the bay the first two Sundays of September. The regattas have been taking place in San Sebastián since 1879.

**La Tamborrada**
It happens on only one day of the year, starting at 12:00 am January 20. Participating in San Sebastian’s La Tamborrada festival is easy; all you have to do is bang on a drum. For 24 hours from the first stroke after midnight on January 20, St. Sebastian’s day, the city’s culinary societies of the Old Quarter parade in full 19th-century military regalia through the streets with a non-stop ear-splitting whacking of drums that keeps everyone awake, in honor of their patron saint. Some say this dates back to 1720, when a baker filling water barrels from a local fountain began to sing, and passing girls banged on the barrels to accompany him. Others claim the event recalls how the town’s laundresses mocked invading Napoleonic troops during the 1800s Peninsular War by following them around, banging on their washtubs.

The procession kicks off in Plaza de la Constitución and is phenomenally noisy. The drum beating itself used to be the domain of males only, but although some groups are still holding out, there are now female participants, too. It’s becoming increasingly popular: in 1967 there were fewer than a dozen teams and by last year the number had risen to over 90. Today over 8,000 Txoko, gastronomic society members, dress up as chefs and soldiers to re-enact this event. There’s also a children’s section in which several thousand youngsters get to have the time of their lives.

**Fiestas de La Virgen Blanca**
This is the main celebration in Vitoria-Gasteiz, which takes place August 4-9, following the July 25 celebration of Santiago, the Día del blusa, day of the blouse. Everyone dresses in traditional Basque costumes and there’s a donkey race, La carrera de burros, in the Plaza de la Vigen Blanca. The main festival begins on the 4th with the firing of the rockets, el txupinazo, and ends 6 days later with the Procesión de los Faroles, the parade of lanterns.
Visiting a Txakoli Vineyard
Gipuzkoa

The Route of the Txakoli of Getaria runs along the coast from Hondarribia to Deba and inland to Olaberria, Oñati and Arrasate, and currently includes 31 wineries belonging to the Getariako Txakolina D.O.. The majority of the wineries, 11 surrounding Getaria, and 6 around Zarautz that can be easily visited from San Sebastián. Among our favorites are:

**Bodegas Talai-Berri**
The vineyards, set high in the hills above Zarautz, 3 km from the town center on the road towards Orio, are open to visitors by prior appointment.

**Txomin Etxaniz**
One of the oldest vineyards (17th-century), the land, slopping down to the sea, covers 35 hectares of mostly Hondarrabi Zuri grapes, just east of the heart of Getaria. The harvest is done by hand in 20kg boxes starting at the beginning of October. The produce three wines, including the late harvest, Uydi, perfect with foie gras. Visits by appointment only.
Bodegas K5
Located in Aia, 9 km from Zarautz, the vineyard sits on 15 hectares 300 meters above the Cantabrian sea, surrounded by chestnut, oak and beech trees and produces an outstanding Txakoli from 100% Hondarrabi Zuri grapes. The winery, which opened in 2005, was designed by Alonso & Balaguer to compliment the surroundings. Visits are available by appointment only.

Bizkaia
The village of Bakio, considered the birthplace of of txakolina wine in Bizkaia, lies about a 30-minute drive north of Bilbao on the coast, and about 40 minutes from Gernika-Lomo. The production of the Basque Country’s txakoli, is divided into three separate appellations, called Denominaciones de Origen, one of which is found around the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve, the D.O. Bizkaiko Txakolina, which is comprised of 6 regions; Encartaciones, the Left Bank, Uribe, north of Bilbao, Urdaibai, in the Nature Reserve, Lea-Artibai, the easternmost coastal district, and Duranguesado, from the Oiz Mountain south to the slopes of the Anboto mountain. Although white txakoli, made from the hondarrabi zuri grape, (sometimes rounded out with Folle-Blanche, mune mahatsa), represents between 80-95% of the production, you will find rosé and red txakoli, made with the hondarrabi belza grape, along with the new vendimia tardía, sweet, Sauterne-type wines and even an espumoso, or sparkling txakoli.

Doniene Gorrondona
Situated in Bakio, the winery sits on 10-hectares of vineyards, in the hills above the seaside village, in the Uribe district, where it produces the widely proclaimed barrel fermented Doniene white Txakoli, as well as a Gorrondona white and a fine red Txakoli, the Gorrondona Red, made from 150-year old vines, with the predominate flavors of dark cherries and mushrooms. Utterly delicious! They also produce Doniene Apardune, a sparkling brut, plus Doniene and Herbal eau-de-vie. Open year around, you can opt for one of 7 different visits.

Itsasmendi
There are currently 37 wineries in Bizkaia D.O, the largest being in Gernika-Lomo, in the Urdaibai, with 35 hectares of vineyards. Their Itsasmendi 7 2013 received the highest rating ever for a Txakoli in the Peñín Guide for 2018. The winery is open for visits Monday-Saturday, but closed on Saturdays in August.

Mendraka
You’ll find this family winery of nearly 5 hectares of Hondarrabi zuri zerratua grapes is in the small village of Mendraka near the historic village of Elorrio and the necropolis of Argiñeta, with its Visigoth tombs from the 8th-century. You can take a walk through the vineyards of
the 400-year old farm before touring the cellar and tasting their fine txakolina. Reservations required.

**Bodega Ados Basarte**

Also in Bakio, on the side of the mountain looking out to the Cantabrian Sea, is this small family winery with a 5-bedroom guest house, Agroturismo Basarte, surrounded by vineyards. Ados in Basque means “agree”, which is the name of their only wine, a fine, barrel fermented Txakolí made from the native Hondarrabi Beltza and Hondarrabi Zuri grapes.
In The Heart of Cider Country
A Visit To an authentic Basque cider house

The vast majority of authentic Basque cider houses, Sidrerías, or sargardotegiak in Basque, are located in Gipúzkoa (156), with the largest concentration being in the village of Astigarraga just outside of San Sebastián. In addition, there are 52 cider houses in Bizkaia, 8 in Álava/Araba, 26 in Navarra/Iruña and 7 in Iparralde, in the Pays Basque, the French Basque Country. The cider houses are very popular with local families and groups of friends, especially on weekends. Some are open for visits in December, but the actual cider season doesn't begin until January, with most opening the last two weeks of the month. A few are open all year. Cider houses can be quite rustic, some being located down narrow country roads, making them difficult to find.

Apples are harvested in August, the juice left to ferment from September to November, but each year, between January and March, before the cider is bottled, the ritual tasting is carried out. Cider, having been consumed in the Basque Country since at least the 12th-century, is an emblem of its culture.
Cider is ordered by the bottle or the glass in a restaurant, but in traditional cider houses the custom is to stand while eating. Plates of food are placed on long wooden communal tables and when the gigantic wooden barrels of cider lining the walls are unplugged, and someone yells mojón in Spanish, or txotx in Basque, txotx being the wooden plug of the barrel, diners rush with glass in hand to the barrels. Cider gushes out in an arc stream and everyone queues up to fill his glass, but always holding it at knee level to create froth and release its bouquet. The more height on the pour, the better, since it gives the drink some fizz, and it should be drunk in very small amounts and downed immediately. Then diners go back to the tables to continue their eating until the next mojón. It's a very dress down affair because you'll be splashed again and again. It's quite messy. One should also wear sturdy shoes. A Bacchanalian feast, it's a messy and highly entertaining, convivial experience that shouldn’t be missed if you’re game for an excursion into San Sebastián’s nearby countryside.

Zapiain

All cider house menus are essentially the same: tortilla de bacalao (cod omelette), sometimes a cod with green pepper dish, bacalao con pimientos verdes, a massive chuletón, or T-bone of veal or ox, and Idiazábal cheese, walnuts and honey with quince paste for dessert, as well as all the hard cider you can drink, for a fixed price of 28€ to 35€ a person. A few cider houses also offer à la carte fish dishes. One of the most noted Sidrerías in Astigarraga is open only in the evenings between January 19 and April 30, except on Sundays, when it’s open year round.

Zelaia

Is in neighboring Hernani at Martindegi, 29. Again, open January 19-April 30, and year around on Sundays.

Sagardotegia Petritegi

This is the most tourist-friendly of the cider houses in Astigarraga. Surrounded by hectares of apple orchards, it’s open year around, and not just during the traditional cider season. Tours are available for a minimum of 4 people. The “Essential” tour is 13,50€. Closed Monday mornings. Its delicious five cider house menus range from 28,50€ to 36€ for adults, with a children’s menus for 11€ and 23,45€. And if you’re not a cider fan, you can simply taste and pair your menu with red wine. Seating is around traditional large, communal, bare wood tables. Take a taxi. Although there is usually enough space to go without a reservation, you may want to call ahead: (+34) 943 457 188.

Sidería Beharri

If you don't make it to the cider country, but want to try a typical cider house meal in San Sebastián, then try the Sidería Beharri, at Calle Narrika, 22, in the Parte Vieja, the old quarter. Open daily.
San Sebastián-Donostia

Compact, elegant, sophisticated and stately, San Sebastián, once a simple fishing village, has evolved into a Parisian looking city filled with Belle Époque architecture. Called “La Bella Easo”, the Pearl of the Cantabrian Sea, the beachside city is considered one of Spain’s most beautiful destinations. And like Biarritz, its neighbor just up the coast in the French Basque Country, San Sebastián is a mix of traditional Basque charm, sophistication and savor-vivre, while its cuisine is widely considered to be some of the best in the world thanks in no small measure to the host of great Basque chefs who call San Sebastián home. Made famous during the second half of the 19th-century by the Spanish Royal Family who came here to take the waters, San Sebastián, the capital of Gipuzkoa, soon became the official summer residence of the Spanish Court, a fashionable spa and meeting place for royalty, aristocracy and Spain’s ruling classes. You’ll marvel at the elegance of both the spectacular turn of the century homes overlooking the Bay of Biscay and the beautiful crescent shaped La Concha Beach, which, along with El Sardinero in Santander, is the prettiest stretch of sand in Spain.

With just 186,000 inhabitants, it and its suburbs have been bestowed 16 Michelin stars, more per square meter than any other city in the world. As a New York Times travel article stated, “To visit San Sebastián on Spain’s northern coast is to fall in love. The first sight of
the shimmering scallop-shaped bay, replete with crescents of golden sand and turquoise waves will sweep you off your feet. Pairing this natural beauty with the unrivaled local cuisine may leave your head spinning”!

When To Visit

Spring is generally mild along the north coast from Galicia to the Basque country. July through mid-September are the busiest times, when most Spaniards take their month-long vacations and head to the beaches and mountains. Lodging will be at a premium during this period, so plan on booking well in advance. September is the ideal month for visiting the Basque coast, but early to mid-June is nearly as nice weather-wise and high season rates normally don’t begin until July 1. The water will be warm enough for swimming, although it’s a bit too nippy for more timid tastes used to the waters of the Mediterranean or those of Cádiz and Portugal’s Algarve region. It does rain quite often, so a great beach day may come along only once every three or four days. When that happens, the beaches will be packed.

Winters can be rainy, but we’ve experienced some beautiful days around the time of the Tamborrada, San Sebastián’s yearly festival in honor of their patron saint. The celebration begins at midnight on January 19, the start of St. Sebastian’s day, in the Plaza de la Constitución, and continues non-stop for the next 24 hours as the city’s culinary societies parade through the streets of the Old Quarter in full 19th-century military regalia to the a ear-splitting whacking of drums that keeps everyone awake. An event not to be missed!

The 27th International Youth Football Tournament, the Donosti Cup, will be from July 1-7 in 2018, and expected to attract 300 teams with more than 50,000 players and their families from around the world, so plan accordingly. The 5th International Football Tournament of Veterans, the “Donosti Masters Cup”, will be from June 8-10, 2018.

The 53rd Heineken Jazzaldia Jazz Festival, featuring Chick Corea and Gregory Porter, will be from July 25-29, 2018, while the 66th International Film Festival will be held from September 21-29, 2018. The festival attracts celebrities and fans from around the world, drawing more than 174,000 spectators to last year’s 9-day event.

The Quincena Musical, a month-long classical musical and dance program goes from the first week of August to the first week of September, and the Regattas of the thirteen-member “trainera” boats are held in La Concha bay the first two Sundays of September.

The Aste Nagusia Festival, or Semana Grande in Spanish and Big Week in English, is a week long celebration which traces its origins to the middle of the 19th-century, began as a celebration to entertain the bourgeoisie who would spend their summers in San Sebastián, and is now one of the city’s biggest festivals, which in 2018 takes place from August 12-19 and follows up in Bilbao from August 18-26.
Exploring Donostia on your own
Zurriola Beach to the Comb of the Wind

Take a self-guided walking tour to discover the spirit of this beautiful city on the bay. If you have parked at the Rafael Moneo designed, giant translucent cubes of the Kursaal Center on Avenida Zurriola in Gros, then you can begin your walk by crossing the Urumea River to Alameda del Boulevard by way of the Zurriola Bridge, with its six unique Art Deco style lamp posts dating from 1921. On your left facing the Boulevard, after crossing the bridge, is the beautiful Victoria Eugenia Theatre. Built in 1912, it is one of the cities most emblematic buildings in Belle Époque style. Boulevard Alameda marks the dividing line between the old quarter, the Parte Vieja, and newer sections of the city and in summer the area fills with musicians playing around the gazebo, cyclists and skate boarders, and folks filling the tables at the outdoor cafés or waiting in line for an ice cream cone at Oiartzun.

At the end of the Boulevard is the Alderi-Elder Park, the large public space facing bay and the eastern sweep of the stunning La Concha beach. On your right you’ll see the elegant Ayuntamiento, the City Hall, originally built in 1882 as a Casino. The parks popular, early 19th-century (1813) carrousel or Carrousel Palace, will be filled with children day and night.
Keeping to the left, you’ll past another classic beauty of Belle Époque San Sebastián, the Hotel de Londres y de Inglaterra. Originally opened in 1916 as a small hotel on the beach, it evolved over the years as it was able to grow and has been host to many aristocrats including the Prince of Wales and the Archduchess Elizabeth of Austria, painters and artists such as Toulouse-Lautrec, Grand Prix drivers for the Circuito Lasarte (1923-1935), actors such as Orson Wells, and during the First World War, arms dealers and spies, including a Dutch seducer going by the name of Mata Hari, or “eye of the day” in Malay, the perfect handle for the infamous double agent.

Continue your stroll with the locals, walking down Paseo de la Concha, a boardwalk edged with an elegant Art Nouveau, white wrought-iron balustrade running the entire length. The boardwalk parallels the magnificent crescent-shaped La Concha Beach, one of Europe’s most beautiful and elegant urban beaches, which lies sheltered between Mount Urgell and Mount Igueldo. On a sunny day, during low tide, Donostiarras will be down on the beach taking a brisk walk, engaging in one of Europe’s finest beach strolls! If you want, and you’re dressed for it, you can join them, or continue along the promenade that leads you through a tunnel under the grounds of Palacio de Miramar, finally ending at Ondarreta beach, the city’s third, family-friendly beach, which is situated in the aristocratic neighborhood of Antiguo, an area filled with elegant homes, excellent examples of Basque architecture, steps from the beach. Take a few minutes to stroll along Infanta Beatriz Kalea to see some of these architecturally impressive late 19th century villas in the neighborhood.

Walking along Ondarreta Beach past the Royal Tennis Club, whose Wimbledon Pub is open to the public, you will soon come to Paseo de Eduardo Chillida, at the westernmost tip of La Concha bay. Here, at the end of a large stone esplanade, you’ll find three immense iron sculptures by famed Basque artist Eduardo Chillida (1924-2002) placed in a triangle on the protective boulders. Called “Peine del Viento”, “Comb of the Wind”, they sit where the waters of the Atlantic continually crash against them. Each piece of this collection weighs in at over ten tons.

While returning to Ondarreta Beach, you may want to take take a ride on the Funicular de Igueldo to the summit of Mount Igueldo for the spectacular views of the bay and mountains, especially at sunset. This charming, little red, two carriage wooden funicular railway, with large Coca-Cola signs painted on the cars, is located behind the tennis club and inaugurated in 1912, when the Mont Igueldo Park opened. The cars are pulled up the steep incline by a series of pulleys and motors and runs every 15 minutes between 10:00 am and 9:00 pm. Cost of a round-trip ticket is 3,15€ for adults, 2,35€ for children. The terraces, with their panoramic view of the city, are open daily. Declared a historical landmark in 2014, there is also a small children’s amusement park.
On your return from your funicular ride, walk back above the beaches on the promenade and stop to stroll through the grounds of the stately Miramar Palace. Inaugurated in 1893, and constructed in English Cottage-style by British architect Selden Wornum, it was built for the Regent Queen María Cristina at her own expense because she didn’t want it to be a burden to the people who gave her such a warm welcome during her summer holidays here. The palace is not open to the public but the beautifully manicured grounds are free to all to visit. I love to come here on Sunday mornings to sit on a bench, read the paper and soak up the breathtaking views of the perfect, scallop shaped bay-just gorgeous!

A walk around Mont Urgell

For another “walkabout” on a sunny day, start from Alderi-Elder Park in front of city hall, at the northern end of La Concha Beach, and stroll down to the fishermen’s pier following the path to where the Aquarium sits at the end of the pier. From the Aquarium, take the Paseo Nuevo, which circles around the base of Mont Urgell, and brings you back to the Old Quarter and the Zurriola Bridge, a very pretty seaside walk.

On this walk you can stop at the Basque Country’s Naval Museum, Untzi Museoa, housed in a 18th-century building, a tower house on three floors in the fisherman’s quarter, puerto pesquero, at Paseo del Muelle, 24. Here you will learn a bit about Basque maritime heritage and discover the long-standing tradition that Basques have had with the sea. The first floor explains the traditional ship making methods, the second floor shows the evolution of Basque vessels in style and construction and the third floor houses temporary exhibits.

And be sure to pay a visit to the avant-garde San Sebastián Aquarium, considered the best oceanographic museum in Europe. The special Immersion Tour is available on Saturdays for certified divers, 18 years or older. Opens daily year around at 10:00 am. Entrance is 13€ for adults, 9€ for seniors, and 6,50€ for children 4-12. Audio guide is 2€. Bokado Aquarium Mikel Santamaria, the restaurant occupying the top floor of the Aquarium, offers a 55€ tasting menu, plus VAT, of haute cuisine, and enjoy the sweeping views of both La Concha Bay and the Bay of Biscay. There is also a more informal cafetería.

Monte Urgull

If you have the time one afternoon, be sure to walk to the top of the “mountain”. One path to the summit starts next to the San Telmo Museum, in Plaza Zuloaga, at the end of your walk around Mont Urgell. Another can be found next to the Basilica de Santa Maria. At the top you’ll find a city park, crowned by the semi-ruined 12th-century Castillo de la Mota, a former military fortress, and a huge Franco era sculpture of Christ, the Scared Heart statue, Cristo de la Mota, which overlooks the city. Go for the picture-perfect views. Closed at night, it is
open daily from May 1 to the end of September from 8:00 am to 9:00 pm and until 7:30 pm during the rest of the year.

Returning from Mont Urgell, be sure to sit at one of the outdoor terraces lining the lovely Constitution Square in the heart of the Old Town, the Parte Vieja, where in the old days, the 1860s, bullfights took place. This is the heart of the pintxos bar area, where locals come each evening starting around 8:00 to do their traditional pintxos crawl from bar to bar.

**A view of the city from the bay**

To see the city and its magnificent bay from a different perspective, one can take a 30-minute catamaran ride. The Ciudad San Sebastián (City of San Sebastián) catamaran departs hourly between noon and 7:00 pm from the fishermen’s port. Tickets are 11€ for adults, 6€ for children (3-10). Closed during the winter months.

Or take a short boat ride out to the island of Santa Clara for a new perspective on the city’s shoreline. Motoras de la Isla offers this service, and they have a ticket office in the fishermen’s quarter on the pier at the beginning of Paseo de Mollaberria. The island boat ride costs 4€, with departures every 30 minutes during the summer starting at 10:00 am, depending on the weather. Or take their 30-minute trip around the bay for 6,50€ between noon and 7:30 pm. Children under 4 are free. Available from June 1 to September 30.

**San Sebastián’s churches**

Include a visit to San Sebastián’s two main churches, standing at opposite ends of the city facing one another. The oldest is the 18th century Basílica de Santa María del Coro in the Old Quarter, whose gorgeous Churrigueresque-style façade has been recently restored. Built in flamboyant Baroque style, beginning in 1743 atop of an older Romanesque church, it has three naves and Gothic ribbed vaults, and houses the image of the city’s patron saint, Nuestra Señora del Coro.

At the other end of town, you’ll find the Catedral del Buen Pastor, the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, built in 1887 in neo-Gothic style intended to mimic the great medieval churches of Germany and France and is the largest religious building in the city. On it’s main façade you’ll see the “Cross of Peace”, a work by the famed Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida. And from its main façade you can see the Basilica of Santa Maria del Coro. While in the Old Quarter, you can also visit the Iglesia de San Vicente, Calle 31 de agosto. This 15th century church is thought to be the oldest monument in San Sebastian.
City Tours
Guided Tours

The Tourist Train and Bus Touristic
The “Txu-Txu”, leaves from Paseo de Salamanca beginning at 11:00 am for a 40-minute tour of the old town; Boulevard, City Hall and the La Concha promenade, Ondarreta Beach, Miramar Palace, Buen Pastor Cathedral and Teatro Victoria Eugenia Theater. Tickets are available at the Tourist Office and cost 5€ for adults, 3€ for children (5-12). The Hop-On Hop-Off bus runs daily, starting at 11:00 am, 10:30 am during August. You can join the tour from 15 different departure points around the city (see map) for a 1-hour tour. Tickets are 12€ for adults, 6€ for children (5-12).

Explore San Sebastián by Bike
The 2-1/2 hour tour (English) is available daily starting at 10:30 am. Cost is 43€, including bike rental and tax. Tickets are available at the main Tourist Information office, Boulevard, 8, as well as at the Train station at Frantzia Pasealekua, 23 and the information kiosk in Cervantes Plaza (open during the summer only from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm). A 3-hour tour by electric bike is also available on Wednesdays and Fridays for 40€. Tickets are available at then main Tourist Information Office at Boulevard, 8. Tickets will also be available online later in the year.
Essential San Sebastián

This 2-hour bilingual (Spanish/English), guided tour, offered by the San Sebastián Tourist Board, takes you on an introductory tour of the city, hitting all of the major tourist sights of the Parte Vieja, the old quarter. The tour runs on the weekends year around starting at 11:00 am, and daily, May-September, departing from in front of the Tourist office at Boulevard, 8. Cost is 12,50€, free for children under 12 years of age.

The Tourist Board also tours to the cities other three other barrios:

- Antigua District - 45-minute tours, starting from Plaza Eduardo Chaillida, 13, at 10:30 am on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, July-August and on Saturdays in June and September for 7€.

- Centro District (Romantic San Sebastián) - 2-hour tours (English) starting at 5:00 pm Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays in July and August for 12,50€

- Egia District - 45-minute tours starting at the entrance to the Cristina Egia Park at 5:00 pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays in July and August for 7€.

Private Tours

Tenedor Tours

A more exclusive private pintxos walking tour can be arranged with the leading American food expert in the Basque Country, Gabriella Ranelli, or with her husband, retired professional jai alai player (pelota), Aitor Aguirre. The tour departs from the Tourist Office at Boulevard, 8, at your chosen hours, preferably early enough to avoid the crowds, for lunch or dinner, and usually last around 2-1/2 hours. She’s highly personable, a great guide and friend. Private tours include a Pintxos/Tapas Walkabout, Gourmet Walking Tour, and the 3-day San Sebastián City Break. Gabriella also offers gastronomic excursions outside of the city and visits to vineyards in Getaria.

Burt Wolf used Gabriella for his PBS special on San Sebastián and the Basque Country in his Local Flavors #107: San Sebastián, Spain, and she made the arrangements for Anthony Bourdain’s Parts Unknown Destination San Sebastián” program filmed in May 2017 featuring the Basque Country.

San Sebastián Food

This is another company offering pintxos tours and excursions, but Gabriella is the best English-speaking gastronomic guide in the Basque region, if not all of Spain.
San Sebastián’s Beaches

It rains quite a bit along the north coast, which is why it’s referred to as “Green Spain”. For every four days, perhaps one will be a great beach day. But when the sun does come out everyone heads to the beach (so go early!). The beaches are also extremely popular with walkers that on a sunny summer day everyone who cans heads to the beach for a long walk; morning, afternoon or evening.

While the magnificent, and most photographed, crescent shaped La Concha Beach, with its golden sands stretching more than 1-1/2 kms, considered the second best beach in Europe by Travel and Leisure magazine in 2017, attracts the most walkers, Zurriola Beach, in the Nuevo Gros quarter to the east, with its generally wilder surf, is a magnet for surfers and youngsters. The smaller Ondarreta Beach, in the Antiguo quarter to the west, where the water is a little calmer, is the most family-friendly beach, providing a children’s playground, above ground swimming pool, chiringuitos (beachfront bars and restaurants), stands for ice cream or sandwiches, handicapped access, a free Wi-Fi zone, kayak rentals, tents, a jogging trail, bike trail, ping pong tables and beach volley ball. You can walk between La Concha and Ondarreta at low tide through “Pico de Loro”, or the parrot’s beak, a small passage with stairs over the rock outcropping below the Miramar Palace that disappears at high tide.
The island of Santa Clara has a small beach, referred to as the “4th beach”, measuring only about 30 meters, and while not much in the way of a beach, especially at high tide, it offers a bar with terrace, first aid station and a natural sea water swimming pool. You can reach the beach by canoe or kayak, boat or paddle board, or by swimming to the island.

Note that these are public beaches and, as with most northern Spanish beaches, are rather conservative, not as much topless bathing as you’ll find is in the Mediterranean or in Portugal, but everyone is welcome and the beaches are kept very clean. No dogs.

**Surfboards and bicycle rentals**

For surfboard rentals, head to Pukas Surf Eskola (school) at Zurriola Hirbidea, 24, across from Zurriola Beach, or to Zurriola Surf Eskola at Calle Usandizanga, 14, with a shop on the beach. Sanse Bikes, at Boulevard, 25, rents bikes for exploring the city.

Or, try dBizi, the city’s own electric (Booster Bike) bike rental system with 16 locations around the city. Buy a card for 1, 3 or 5 days. Bikes are available from 6:30 am to midnight during July and August, until 11:00 pm the rest of the year.

**Thalassotherapy**

**La Perla Spa**

After a long walk along La Concha Beach, you might enjoy a thalassotherapy-spa experience along with unmatched views of the Concha Bay. The spa, sheltered by the roof of an eclectic building, the Balneario La Perla del Océano, dating from the beginning of 20th century (1912), was designed to cater to European nobility. Inside you will find 4,500 square meters of cutting-edge technology for sports circuits, physical therapy. There is also a fully equipped gym. Open daily from 8:00 am to 10:00 pm, day passes are available from 18€ to 37€.

Or relax in the afternoon on the terrace of their bar-restaurant. The terrace is open daily during the spring and summer until 11:00 pm. Great late night spot for a GinTonic under the stars.
Cooking Classes and Schools

Basque Pintxos Cooking Classes

Tenedor Tours
Gabriella Ranelli offers one-day, private, “hands on” pintxos cooking classes on a limited basis. The Classic Cooking Class features pintxos and traditional Basque dishes with a modern touch, then enjoy the fruits of your labor with wine and good conversation.

Basque Cooking Classes

Luis de Iriazar
In the Parte Vieja at Mari, 5, but he has a waiting list a mile long. Courses are for both professionals and amateurs, in Spanish, but will conduct courses in English for small groups (8-12) during the summer. He’s featured in the San Sebastian chapter of Anthony Bourdain’s “Kitchen Confidential” book: “A Cook’s Tour”.

El Txoko del Gourmet
Located in the Parte Vieja at C/Aldamar, 4, it offers intensive cooking courses for professionals as well as practical courses for tourists.

Karlos Arguiñano
The famous TV chef offers cooking classes at his hotel in the nearby coastal village of Zarautz.

Faculty of Gastronomic Sciences
The Basque Culinary Center, the second gastronomic university in Europe, and a pioneering academic institution, opened its classrooms in 2011 and offers university degrees in the culinary arts as well as offering courses for cooking enthusiasts in Spanish, Basque and English under direction of some of the Basque Countries top chefs.
Donostia’s Markets

Mercado de la Brecha (La Bretxa)
In the "Parte Vieja", the Old Quarter, off Calle Aldamar, is now located underneath a two-story shopping mall where you’ll rub elbows with the culinary star chefs of the Basque Country (Martin Berasategui, Andoni Luis Aduriz, Pedro Subijana, and Juan Mari and Elena Arzak) who will be choosing the freshest of fish for their famous Michelin-starred dining emporiums that day. This market, along with Bilbao’s Mercado de la Ribera, rivals Barcelona’s La Boqueria in the amazing variety and quality of food on display. There are also daily outdoors farmers’ stands on the street level.

Mercado de San Martín
Then move on to the corner of San Marcial and Loyola downtown. This market has an exciting look and a great buzz to it and is housed on two floors, with gourmet boutiques plus meats/vegetable/cheese stands on the ground floor and the fishmongers in the lower, basement level, along with a handy supermarket with coffee bar and a branch of the Barrentxea pastry shop. The supermarket opens at 9:00 am. Carnicería Maribel has been selling the finest Iberian ham, including Joselito Gran Reserva and Joselito 5 Bellotas for 40 years.
Sociedad Gastronómica

In your daily walks in the Old Quarter you will probably pass by a Sociedad Gastronómica, commonly referred to in Basque as a “txoko”, the traditional gastronomic social clubs, strictly for men, whose members gather to relax and to prepare amazing meals in kitchens often filled with equipment that equal those found in the finest restaurants. They originated as places where men could gather to drink and play cards, later evolving into associations where members of different brotherhoods; cobblers, fishermen, metalworkers, mechanics and lawyers, would meet and cook for each other. The oldest Sociedad was formed in 1870.

In San Sebastián alone there are more than 200 Sociedades, with over 2,000 in the entire French/Spanish Basque Country. Some clubs have hundreds of members, others only 20 to 30. The clubs are also known for their fine singing, and many a fine choir, orfeón, has originated in a gastronomic society. The most famous Sociedad is Gaztelubide, whose headquarters are in the Old Quarter of Donostia-San Sebastián.

Most of the famous Basque chefs first honed their skills in these all-male eating clubs. Gastronomic Socialites are normally closed to visitors except by invitation, and on San Sebastián Day, January 20th, during the Tamborrada celebration, lead by the Sociedad Gaztelubide.
Performing Arts

The Basque Country, rich in a history of music and the performing arts, offers two excellent venues in San Sebastián-Donostia.

Teatro Victoria Eugenia

See who’s performing at the ornate theatre at Paseo Repúlbica Argentina, 2, one of the most emblematic buildings in Donostia. Renovation of the theatre, which first opened in 1912, began in 2001 and was finally completed 6 years later. Visits are free. The theatre is one of the main venues for Jazzaldia, the San Sebastián Jazz Festival, in July. Parking is available nearby.

Kursaal Convention Center and Auditorium

You can also check out what’s doing on, or take a back stage tour, at the Kursaal Center, a controversial design by Navarran architect and Pritzker Prize winner, Rafael Moneo, where opera and ballet are often held. The “cubes of light” is also where the International Jazz Festival is held in late July and the San Sebastián Film Festival in mid to late September. A parking garage is conveniently located under the Kursaal Center.
Doing The “Txikiteo” or “Poteo”
A gourmet pintxos crawl

If you prefer a “pintxos crawl” rather than sit-down lunch or dinner, visit a few of the best of the city’s “miniature haute cuisine temples”, where the pintxos served are an art form, a true gastronomic experience. The term “pintxo” refers to a more elaborate tapa, a mouthful or two of foodstuffs originally spread out on a stick, and comes from the verb, pinchar, to skewer or puncture. Some were originally called banderillas, which are the ribbon draped darts used by the banderilleros in a bullfight. Nowadays, pintxos can be small knife and fork creations as well.

At each stop you choose, order a pintxo, preferably one made to order in the kitchen, a pintxos al momento or pintxos calientes, and a zurito, a short draft beer, a crianza, a red wine, usually from the Rioja Alavesa, or a txakoli, the slightly effervescent, tart, young Basque white wine, which in the more traditional bars, is served in a small, wide-rimmed glass rather than a goblet. For decades txakoli was considered a local, unsophisticated wine but has now become internationally known. In the Gipuzkoa province it’s produced in the towns of Aia, Zarautz and Getaria.
It’s more fun to do a pintxos crawl with a group of friends, Basque style, as the local txikiteros always go out with their cuadrilla. But if not with your cuadrilla, just forge right ahead anyway, survey the bars and choose the ones that appeal to your style, then squeeze your way up to the crowded bar. Observe the locals and their well-honed art of ordering, then order without hesitation. This traditional style of doing the txikiteo is, however, slowing disappearing.

There are now two types of bars from which to choose from, the traditional “old school” pintxos bar, where the cold pintxos are presented lined up in a row, groaning board style at the bar, with a chalkboard menu for hot pintxos made up fresh in the kitchen, and the more creative bars, which now have a much smaller selection of cold pintxos displayed at the bar (or none at all) and a larger, and much more impressive collection written on a chalkboard behind the bar, meaning that their most creative and original dishes are made to order in the kitchen.

An example of such traditional “old school” pintxos bars would include Baztán on Calle Puerto, with plenty of table seating for the increasing demand for “pintxos tours” - not too authentic, what some would consider a “pintxos mill”. In some of these traditional bars, the custom still remains of asking the waiter for a plate and choosing the pintxos yourself, usually topped with toothpicks, placing them on your plate, with all cold items priced the same. The waiter then charges you according to the number of toothpicks remaining on your plate. An example of some of these newer style bars include La Cuchara de San Telmo and Borda Berri, with all of their creations being made to order in an incredibly tiny kitchen.

To get an “early start”, and beat some of the crowds. Begin your lunch crawl around 12:30, some kitchens won’t be open until noon. In the evening, just before 8:00 should work, with some bars now opening at 7:00. The txikiteo is most successfully done Tuesday-Saturday, as some bars are closed Sunday, and many more are closed on Monday. If you are a beginner, you will want to head to the city’s picturesque Old Quarter, La Parte Vieja (or just Lo Viejo). While less than a square mile in size, it offers an almost endless supply of pintxos bars for every budget and appetite.

Our favorite stops in the Parte Vieja

Restaurante Ganbara*

You should make this classic bar, the “queen of La Parte Vieja”, at San Jerónimo Kalea, 21, across from the Basílica de Santa María, the first stop in your pintxos crawl through the Old Quarter before making your way to more avant-garde spots like Cuchara de San Telmo, Borda Berri, Korta.31 and A Fuego Negro. Recommended in the Academia Vasca de Gastronomía, specialties here include chistorra, a spicy Basque sausage in puff pastry, their magnificent assortment of wild mushrooms, setas. Another stellar pintxo is their gamba y
espárrago rebozados, or shrimp and white asparagus in tempura batter served with homemade mayo. Their recipe for garlic shrimp with chiles de árbol has been featured in Bon Appetit. Closed Sunday afternoon and all day Monday.

Tel: (+34) 943 422 575

Casa Vergara
Located on the street parallel to San Jerónimo, at Mayor, 21, to the west, is another very traditional spot but offers some contemporary creations, such as their Manolo, red peppers with salmon, shrimp, anchovy, vinaigrette and homemade mayonnaise, their Habanito, a “cigar” of brick pasta filled with black pudding with almonds and red pepper marmalade, and the Incompredido, eggplant filled with spinach and carrots in a vermouth reduction sauce. There is also a special menu, wine included, for 21,95€ + VAT. The Cider Menu (for two) is 58€ + VAT. The owners are the husband and wife team of Alvaro Manso and Brazilian chef Vera María Cruz da Silva, who did a stage at Martín Berasategui. It also has a restaurant. Recommended in the Repsol Guide. Open Friday-Wednesday from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm for lunch and from 7:00 pm to midnight for dinner, closed Thursday.

Tel: (+34) 943 431 073

Moving onto Calle 31 de Agosto...

A Fuego Negro*
Eat, Drink, Listen, Watch, Learn

This contemporary space at 31 de Agosto, 31, is considered one of the most avant-garde of all the designer pintxos spots in the city. Done in red and black, is as cutting edge as La Cepa, down the street, is old-fashioned. The chalkboard menu is written mostly in Basque, so you’ll need a sense of humor to decipher it. It’s all quite amusing. Some pintxos are served in shot glasses, txupitos, others in paper cups. Some pintxos are sweet; it’s one of the few bars offering dessert pintxos, including their chocolate zombie. It offers a quite impressive, varied selection of wines by the glass from a multitude of appellations.

One can feast on pintxos sitting down, as it has a small dining area with nine tables and offers a tasting menu for 35€, and a super degustation menu for 50€, excluding wine. Serves its tasting menus in the dining space only. The bar was featured in an LA Times travel article on dining in the Basque Country; “If Arzak is elegance, A Fuego Negro is funk”, and recommended in the Repsol Guide for 2017. Kitchen is open for lunch from 1:30 pm to 3:30 and in the evening from 8:30 to 10:30 pm. Closed on Monday and two weeks in February.
**Gandarias**

Across the street at 31 de Agosto, 23, displays both a groaning board of cold pintxos, all equally priced at 2,50€, and a chalkboard menu of hot pintxos, prepared al momento. We recommend their risotto of mushrooms, pintxo de solomillo, a seared beef sirloin with a green pepper, and the Idiazábal cheese. In addition, it offers a restaurant for feasting on chuletón, fish and fine Iberian ham of the Joselito label, and has a gluten free menu. There is also an excellent selection of wine to choose from. Open daily from 11:00 am until midnight.

Tel: (+34) 943 426 362

**La Cuchara de San Telmo***

At 31 de Agosto, 28 bajos, it’s tucked away at the end of a small square, Plazuela de Don Alvaro del Valle de Lersundi. Still fantastic, it’s constantly evolving and still packing them in. It now offers wine pairings with its pintxos. Still on my top ten list, although its “spin off”, Borda Berri is far less crowded. Outside, around the corner, the bar offers some table seating for sit-down dining. The kitchen doesn’t open for lunch until 12:30. If you can make it here before 1:00 pm you can usually find a nice spot at the bar. Featured a few years ago in the NY Times - “36 Hours in San Sebastián, Spain”. Some of the stand-out creations here include: foie con jalea de manzana, pan fried foie with apple jelly - unbelievably good!, risotto cremoso de bacalao, canelón cremoso de carnes, meat-filled cannelloni, and pulpo salteado con berza, sautéed octopus with red cabbage. For dessert try the terrine de chocolate con naraja confitada or the cold strawberry cappuccino.

Open Wednesday-Sunday noon to 3:30 pm and Tuesday-Sunday evening for your pintxos crawl from 7:30 to 11:00 pm, closed all day Monday.

Tel: (+34) 943 435 446

**Bar La Cepa**

Opened in 1948, the most typical, most Basque of all, is at Calle 31 de Agosto, 7-9. Besides the selection of pintxos at the bar, they offer a daily lunch menu for 18€ and a weekend lunch menu for 30€. Open Wednesday-Monday from 11:00 am to midnight.

Tel: (+34) 943 426 394

**La Viña**

At Calle 31 de Agosto, 3, can serve as your pintxos repast’s final course, your dessert stop on this fine bar-laden street, as chef Santiago Rivera’s cheese cake, tarta de queso, brings in the crowds. Open Tuesday-Sunday from 10:30 am to 5:00 pm and in
the evening from 6:30 to midnight. Winner of 2017’s “Más gastronomía” award. Closed on Mondays and all of November.
Tel: (+34) 943 4427 495

**Galtxagorri**

*Formally known La Montanera by Kota.31*

This is the somewhat new kid on this pintxos-bar lined block, at 31 de Agosto, 22. Look for the orange façade that says La Montanera. It is primarily a sit-down pintxos dining space, as it has a large back room for dining small plates style for lunch or dinner. But its very creative hot pintxos are also served at the bar. And it serves Iberian ham of the Montanera label, thus the change in name. It’s equivalent in avant-garde style to La Cuchara, Borda Berri, A Fuego Negro and Zeruko. Best pintxos here; the foie with black tea yoghurt and roasted garlic (foie con yogur de té negro y ajo asado, and the scallop with “popcorn” (vieira con palomitas). Quite original. Open Monday-Wednesday and Friday from 10:30 am to 4:00 and 7:00 to 11:30 pm, weekends from 10:00 am to 4:30 and 6:00 until closing. Closed Thursdays to rest.
Tel: (+34) 943 429 936

**Now, moving beyond Calle 31 de agosto...**

**Bar Tamboril**

Calle Arrandegi, 2, near Plaza de la Constitución, is a classic with friendly service and a bar heaped with beautifully presented pintxos and lower prices. Specialties-breaded red pepper stuffed with cod and their grilled mushrooms (champis). There is an English menu at the bar.

Tel: (+34) 943 423 507

**Bar Txepetxa**

Across the street, at Pescadería, 5, is where anchovy lovers will want to make a beeline here to this Anchovy Cathedral, as this lively bar serves the best anchoas in the Cantabrian Sea and prepares them in about fifteen different guises. Specialties: Anchovies topped with a spider crab cream sauce and anchovies with trout roe. Open Wednesday to Sunday from noon to 3:00 pm, and Wednesday to Sunday evenings from 7:00 to 11:00 pm. Closed all day Monday and Tuesday afternoons.

Tel: (+34) 943 422 227

**Bar Zeruko**

I’ve been less impressed lately with this award-winning bar, located nearby at Pescadería, 10, due to the high prices; 4,00-4,50€ for each pintxo, and smaller wine pours, but their
signature *La Hoguera*, a piece of cod that the client smokes to his pleasure on a grill, then places it on a piece of toast with cream and herbs, is a “must try”, as is the *Txupa Txup* of cod pil pil style. Open Tuesday to Sunday from noon to 4:00 and Tuesday to Saturday evenings from 7:00 to midnight, closed Monday.

Tel: (+34) 943 423 451

**Bar Néstor***
This popular spot be found at Pescadería, 11, directly across from Zeruko. The owners, Néstor Morais and Pilar Senra Lizarazu, like to keep it simple and have been doing so since 1980, using prime quality ingredients to create three special masterpieces: a fabulous *chuletón*, or rib steak of Galician aged beef, a delicious garden fresh tomato salad, and the mouth-watering, highly coveted *tortilla de patatas*, their famous potato omelet. The omelet comes out twice a day; once for lunch at 1:00 and then later in the evening at 7:00. Cut into 16 equal portions, so you should plan on arriving at least 15-20 minutes ahead to put in your order, and you may be one of the lucky few to taste the city’s best Spanish omelet. The secret ingredient, says my spy, is the caramelized onion.

Or reserve ahead and come here to sit at the pre-reserved mythic “mesa 19”, Néstor’s one and only table, to feast on a meal of tomatoes and their fabled *chuletón*. Open Tuesday-Sunday and noon and 7:00 pm.

Tel: (+34) 943 424 873

**Bar Goiz-Argi***
While you might pass on this bar at Fermín Calbetón, 4, thinking that this very tiny space is very “old style”, and it is, the locals know to stop here for its amazingly delicious *brocheta de gambas*, prawn skewers, and its famous *mari juli*, a cold canapé of smoked salmon, anchovy and green pepper. Recommended by Mugaritz. Opens at 10:00 am Tuesday-Sunday.

Tel: (+34) 943 425 204

**Borda Berri***
Fermín Calbetón, 12, gets my gold star for its better prices, delicious, creative treats made to order in the kitchen, and friendly service. Other than the tortillas they have displayed on the counter, every dish is made up fresh in the kitchen. This bar was opened by Iñaki Gulin, one of the creators of *La Cuchara de San Telmo*, and displays the same kind of originality and creativity in the kitchen, earthy Basque fare not to be missed. Recommended in the Repsol Guide.

Try their *viera*, grilled scallops, *asada con puré de colifor*, *viera a la plancha con mermelada de melocotón*, *keso de kabra tostado con ciruela*, goat cheese toasted with
plums, *risotto cremoso de Idiazábal*, cheese risotto, *carrilera de ternera al vino tinto*, veal cheeks braised in red wine, *pato confitado con puré de ciruelas pasas*, duck confit with dried plums, and *tomate relleno de bonito*, tomato filled with albacore. For dessert try their chocolate ganache with Cointreau. Open Wednesday-Sunday from 12:30 pm to 3:30 pm and Tuesday-Sunday from 7:30 pm to 11:30 pm.

Tel: (+34) 943 430 342

**Casa Urola***

Chef Pablo Loureiro’s landmark restaurant at Fermín Calbetón, 20, one of our favorites in Donosti, offers stylish dining in the upstairs dining room, along with very high quality pintxos in its renovated downstairs bar. Although not inexpensive, Pablo's creations, including his *txapelas de hongo a la parilla con yema de huevo, salsa de pato y piñones* (grilled wild txapelas mushrooms with egg yolk, duck sauce and pine nuts), are quite memorable and worth the moderate splurge. Chef Pablo is a member of the *Sukatalde* group of chefs from Gipuzkoa. **Two Repsol suns.** Opens for lunch from 1:00 to 3:45 pm and dinner at 8:00. Closed Sunday evening, all day Tuesday (in the winter), the second half of February, June 26 to July 6, and the last 10 days in November.

Tel: (+34) 943 441 371

**A pintxos crawl in Gros**

Once you’ve experienced the traditional txikiteo, the “pintxos pilgrimage” from bar to bar in the Old Quarter, you might want to try some of the bars in the neighborhood of Gros, a pleasant walk east from the Kursaal Center off Zurriola Beach. On Thursdays the following bars in Gros participate in the initiative known as the pintxo-pote, offering a wine or beer along with a pintxo of the day for only 2-3€: **Café Kursaal**, Ramón María Lili, 2, **Elostoa**, Paseo Colón, 42, **Ipotx**, San Francisco, 42, **Ezkurra**, Miracruz, 17 and **Txalota**, Birmingham, 24.

**Here are our personal favorites in Gros**

**Starting at the Kursaal Center**

**Ni Neu***

Located at the western end of the Rafael Moneo-designed Kursaal Performing Arts Center, at Avenida Zurriola, 1, Ni Neu (meaning “I Myself” in Basque) is now in the hands of two-Michelin starred chef *Andoni Luis Aduriz* of Mugaritz, Restaurant Magazine’s number 3 best chef in the world, and his new Grupo IXO, and now awarded **one Repsol sun**. It’s designed for versatility, to provide something for all types of diners-with a downstairs bar open for
breakfast, sandwiches, pintxos, large plates and mini plates, and a terrace for cocktails, along with a dining space with picture windows facing the river and sea. What we enjoy is stopping here for pre-lunch pintxos around noon. There is a degustation menu for 38,50€ + VAT, wine included. If it’s a sunny day, we grab a tray and take our treats out to the terrace, as there is no table service there-just grab a tray and sit at an open table and soak up the sea views. The service at the bar is first rate, and if one orders a drink, the homemade potato chips come on the house. The bar opens at 10:00 am Tuesday-Saturday, closing at 10:00 pm Tuesday, Wednesday and Sunday and at 11:00 pm Thursday-Saturday. The restaurant serves lunch from 1:00 to 3:30 Tuesday-Sunday and dinner from 8:30 to 11:30 on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays only. From June 30 to September they are open everyday for lunch and dinner.

Tel: (+34) 943 003 162

**Ramuntxo Berri**

Also in the Nuevo Gros section, but nearer to the Kursaal center at Calle Peña y Goñi, 10, is yet another pintxos bar award winner with a small restaurant in back. It has a large chalkboard menu of designer pintxos, most around 3€, plus a menu of wines by the glass. There are stools for sitting at the bar, and one can have a pintxos tasting menu in the air conditioned dining area. Offers four menus from 27-43€, bread, water, wine and desert included. Open daily from 10:30 am to 5:00 pm and from 7:00 to 11:30 pm, midnight on Friday and Saturday. Closed from February 15-21 for holidays.

Tel: (+34) 943 020 528

**Bodega Donostiarra**

At Calle Peña y Goñi, 13, across the street from Ramuntxo Berri bar, with picture windows painted in bright blue, this lively spot founded in 1928 in an old wine warehouse, again draws primarily a local crowd, and is known for its “Gilda”, Donostia’s signature pintxo consisting of an anchovy, green chili and olive on a toothpick. The “Gilda” is a reference to the Glenn Ford, Rita Hayworth film, Gilda, of 1946. Another favorite is the “Indurain”, as in the 5-time Tour de France champion cyclist from Navarra; a pintxo of albacore, with five guindilla peppers and a slice of raw onion. They also serve delicious individual potato omelets, tortilla española, that can be prepared with ham, chorizo or even cheese, all made to order. And the most popular items on the menu are its skewers; brochettes of charcoal grilled meats, octopus and prawns and grilled vegetable platters to be shared. There is table seating with wait service. Open Monday-Thursday from 9:30 am to 11:00 pm, and Friday and Saturday until midnight.

Tel: (+34) 943 011 380
**Hidalgo 56**
Walk down Peña y Goñi and take a left onto Paseo Colón to #15. On the left side of the street is Hidalgo 56, opened in 2005 by Michelin chef Juan Mari Hidalgo. Look for the yellow awning. This much-loved local’s haunt serves some of the very best foie gras in town. Here you can sit out on the terrace or feast inside on pintxos or raciones or have a tasting menu of pintxos. Its specialty is the artistically presented “Begi-aundi”, which is a large squid filled with a ratatouille made also with squid, accompanied by a little shot glass of green onion foam! Another original dish: a “mojito with a twist”, a glass of tomato juice with fresh basil leaves and Iberian ham. You’ll find the place packed to the rafters on the weekends, with a primarily local crowd, especially during Jazaldea, the Heineken Jazz Festival, in July, the Quincena Musical Festival in August and the September International film Festival because of proximity to the Kursaal Center venue. Closed Sunday nights and Tuesday, first week of February and last two weeks of June.

Tel: (+34) 943 279 654 / 627 591 804

**Casa Senra Donosti**
This is a true classic, a charmingly old style bar at Calle San Francisco, 32, with an outdoor terrace, traditional beams and bare trestle tables, offering a groaning board of pintxos. Highlights here include the grilled squid on a bed of chestnut purée drizzled with black squid ink, a champi con foie, a mushroom filled with foie and an alioli sauce and clam croquettes. The house offers a large chalkboard menu with pintxos and baguettes, several for vegetarians. Open daily from 10:00 am to 11:30 pm.

Tel: (+34) 943 359 984 / 662 088 785

**Bar Bergara**
Just off Calle Birmingham at General Artetxe, 8, you’ll find this outstanding pintxos bar, with white communal wood tables for sit-down pintxos sampling, and wait service, where the congenial owner takes enormous pride in the beauty of the establishment and the quality of your experience. It also has a small terrace with several tables set under an awning. This is a much-loved-by-the-locals classic (opened in 1950) and the only pioneer remaining in Gros of the “miniature haute cuisine movement”, since the closing of Aloña Berri, down the street, and was a favorite of the late Duchess of Alba who used to summer in the city. They serve award-winning miniature haute cuisine pintxos, but not meant to be shared, as each little jewel-like morsel consists of no more than two mouthfuls, a benchmark of miniature cuisine in a city full of outstanding options. Try the pintxos tasting menu for 18€. Truly amazing! Recommend in the Repsol Guide. Kitchen is open daily from 9:30 am to 4:00 pm and 6:00 to 11:00 pm. Closed 15 days in March and November.

Tel: (+34) 943 275 026
Pintxos in El Centro

Antonio Bar

Somewhat of a secret gem in the pintxos bar circuit, it is found downtown at Bergara, 3, (red façade with black awning) offers fantastic creations such as Cantabrian anchovies in salt with hot pepper and green pepper confit is the best of the best. Not to be missed. Don’t judge this simply fantastic bar by its simple appearances, hidden as it is behind a somewhat undistinguished red and black exterior with window open to the street, as inside you’ll find some of the city’s most spectacular little dishes. The folks here work exclusively with what’s freshest and best at the market and they source from the finest purveyors. Here the product is king. Their fish comes from Coro Sotero in San Martín market, their meats from an exclusive Tolosa butcher and mushrooms, beans, cheeses and vegetables from the gourmet Aitor Lasa, and of course, Iberian ham from Joselito. Two pintxos we love: Cantabrian sea anchovies with roasted green pepper confit over a slice of bread dripped with olive oil, and the Igueldo, consisting of anchovies, ventresca, tomato and a guindilla pepper. Divine! And Antonio bar pours the best draft beer in town. The chef, José Ramón Ezkurdia, chef of
Restaurante Urepel until it closed in 2012 (now recently reopened) honed his skills at Akelañe.

Antonio Bar makes for a great Monday evening stop when many of the acclaimed pintxos bars of the Parte Vieja close up shop. Down a narrow winding staircase you’ll find a small 6-table restaurant and a space for private dining for up to 14. Open from 7:30 am-11:30 pm. Open Monday-Saturday from 7:30 am to 11:00 pm. Closed Sundays and holidays.

Tel: (+34) 943 429 815

**Bar La Espiga**

Another one of our favorites, and a city classic from 1928, can be found at Calle San Marical, 48. It eschews the “groaning board” of pintxos and instead offers freshly made cooked-to-order treats and plates of the day, along with a more formal dining space in the basement. The chef serves paella every Saturday after 1:30 pm. Its signature pintxos are La Chorrera, a hot pintxo of breaded egg, cheese and ham, and Jalisco, made with ham and mushrooms in the shape of a Mexican sombrero. Open daily from 10:30 am to midnight.

Tel: (+34) 943 421 423

**Zazpi Bar**

Along with the ever-popular La Espiga, also on Calle San Marcial at number 7, we recommend the newly renovated bar-restaurant Zazpi (number 7 in Basque) with two young rising stars at the helm. The chef, Paul Arrillaga, won the gold medal during the prestigious Gipuzkoa pintxos competition in 2014. Among its delicious pintxos is the ravioli cremoso de rabo, a creamy ravioli of ox tail. And here you’ll find desserts such as chocolate cake, rice pudding and quince with baked apple, cheese and orange blossom. Offers a seasonal menu and an outdoor terrace in the summer. Recommended by master chef Luis Irizar. Open Monday-Friday 8:00 am to 1:30 am, Saturdays from 9:00 am.

Tel: (+34) 943 506 767 / 651 563 956

**Casa Vallés**

At Calle de los Reyes Católicos, 10, behind the Buen Pastor Cathedral, is a San Sebastián institution, one of the city’s most charming old-style bar and grill houses. Founded in 1942, it is supposedly where the famous gilda pintxo was invented. Special dishes include deep fried mussels and the prawns and its Iberian ham from Jabugo. There is an outdoor terrace. The weekday lunch menu is 18€, or 25€ on weekends. Open daily from 9:00 am to 11:00 pm, 11:30 pm on Friday and Saturday.

Tel: (+34) 943 452 210
The city’s best wine/gastro bar

Vinoteca Bernardina

Our go-to spot for a well chosen selection wines by the glass and fabulous prepared-to-order pintxos and small plates can’t be found in the fabled pintxos bar filled Old Quarter but instead in the aristocratic neighborhood of Antiguo, just south of Ondarreta beach, which was the city’s original residential district, at Vitoria-Gasteiz, 6, the city’s most sophisticated wine/gastro bar/restaurant. We love their baby limas served with Joselito Iberian ham, their scrambled eggs with morcilla de Burgos, black pudding, their individual tortillas (jamón, chorizo or patatas), baby vegetables in tempura, Grandma’s ensaladilla rusa con salmón, Russian salad, and their mini hamburgers (buey and atún rojo).

You can count on gracious, attentive service, a stylish setting, an interesting local crowd and excellent cuisine magically prepared in the tiniest of kitchens. Bernardina is open Monday-Friday from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, 9:00 am on Saturday. Open Monday-Saturday for pintxos or dinner from 7:30 to midnight.

Tel: (+34) 943 314 899
Dining in Donostia
San Sebastián-Donostia’s Michelin stars

Pedro Subijana’s Akelaré on Mount Igueldo, our personal favorite, Andoni’s Mugaritz in Errenteria, the most cerebral and cutting-edge, or Restaurant Martín Berasategui in Lasarte, are all located in the suburbs, a taxi ride away from the center of the city, but worth the experience. Juan Mari’s acclaimed Restaurant Arzak is a convenient 15-minute walk from the Hotel Villa Soro, or a 10-minute taxi ride from the Hotel Maria Cristina.

If you plan on dining at one of the “big four”, expect a final check of at least 200€ per person, plus tax and wine. Tasting menus range from a low of 60€, at Restaurant Alameda in Hondarrribia, to 260€ at Restaurant Martín Berasategui in Lasarte, not including the wine paring. The other top Michelin star destinations are Dani López’s Restaurant Kokotxa in the old quarter, the Parte Vieja, 3rd generation chef Rubén Trincado’s Mirador de Ulia, with the best views of the city, and the new addition in 2017, Paulo Airaudo’s Amelia, in the Romantica district. A taxi ride away are Hilario Arbelaitz’s Zuberoa in Oiartzun, by far the most traditional of the Michelin stars, the Txapategi brothers, Mikel, Kepa and Gorka’s Restaurant Alameda in Hondarrribia, and Aitor Arregui’s Elkano in Getaria.
Creative and Contemporary Cuisine

Besides its great Michelin starts, San Sebastián has a number of excellent restaurants offering everything from awarding winning haute cuisine to the more traditional market driven cuisine that has made the Basque Country a major destination for foodies.

Kokotxa

The cooking of young chef Dani López simply gets better and better each year. His wife, Estela Velasco, runs the room and acts as the sommelier. Located at Campanario, 11, in the Old Quarter near Basílica de Santa María del Coro, they offer a daily market driven menu from Tuesday-Friday for 58€ + VAT. The tasting menu is priced at 82€, plus VAT, wine and coffee not included. It’s also a small space with white walls adorned with black and white photographs of the city at the turn of the century. The stemware is Riedel. We continue to believe that for lunch, this is the most impressive one Michelin star bargain in all of Spain. It also has 2 Repsol suns and is recommended by the Academia Vasca de Gastronomía. Opens for lunch at 1:30 pm and for dinner at 8:45 pm. Closed Sunday night and Monday, plus December 24, 25 and 31, January 1, February 10-26 and October 12-29.

Tel: (+34) 943 421 904

Narru

Conveniently located at 56, Paseo de la Concha, the bar looks out over La Concha Bay, while the restaurant occupies the basement of the Hotel Niza on La Concha beach. This gourmet spot, with 1 Repsol sun, gets the award for the “best value”, as on Tuesday-Thursday for lunch and dinner, and Friday evenings, it serves a stylish fixed price menu for only 35,50€, including wine, bread and coffee. The a la carte menu is also quite reasonable for the quality. Chef Iñigo Peña began his career at the age of 16 at Arzak’s before training under Berasategui and Andoni at Mugaritz. The Wall Street Journal named him one of the 10 young rising European chefs. We can attest to the high quality and the excellent service. The kitchen opens for lunch at 1:30 pm and dinner from 8:30 pm. Closed Sunday night and all day Monday.

Tel: (+34) 943 423 349

Casa Urola

Chef Pablo Loureiro’s landmark restaurant (founded in 1956) at Fermín Calbetón, 20, one of our favorites in Donosti, offers stylish dining in the upstairs dining room, along with very high quality pintxos in its renovated downstairs bar. Although not inexpensive, Pablo’s creations, including his txapelas de hongo a la parilla con yema de huevo, salsa de pato y piñones (grilled wild txapelas mushrooms with egg yolk, duck sauce and pine nuts), are quite memorable and worth the moderate splurge. Chef Pablo, who took over the restaurant in
2012, is a member of the Sukatalde group of chefs from Gipuzkoa. Has 2 Repsol suns. Opens for lunch from 1:00 to 3:45 pm and dinner at 8:00. Closed all day Tuesday, the second half of February, July 1-10, and the last 10 days in November.

Tel: (+34) 943 441 371

**Bodegón Alejandro**
Fermín Calbetón, 4, is where 3-Michelin starred chef, Martin Berasategui honed his skills at his family’s former restaurant, now belonging to the IXO group of Michelin starred chef Aduriz of Mugaritz. The cozy basement restaurant presents the same high quality of service and care with presentation that the other members of the IXO group are noted for. Recommended in the Repsol Guide, the Michelin Guide for 2018 and the Academia Vasca de Gastronomía. Chef Inaxio Valverde offers an excellent small plates tasting menu for 46€, with the optional wine pairing for 17,50€/person. Closed Sunday and Tuesday nights and all day Monday, Christmas and New Year’s Day, and from January 21 to February 7. Open daily during high season, July 1 to October 15.

Tel: (+34) 943 427 158

**Bokado Mikel Santamaria**
At the Aquarium at Plaza Jacques Cousteau is a member of the highly regarded Bokado catering group, which also supplies the pintxos bar of the San Telmo Museum. If you don’t normally associate haute cuisine with an aquarium, well, think again! The chefs here are two brothers-Mikel and Jesús Santamaría, who have a partnership with Arzak. The views here just couldn’t be more panoramic, facing La Concha bay at the foot of Mount Urgell. Their Bokado tasting menu runs 47€ + VAT, wine included, and the market menu is 55€ + VAT, wine not included. The restaurant also offers a cafeteria bar where one can feast on pintxos and sandwiches, their bokados. 1 Repsol sun and is highly recommended in the Academia Vasca de Gastronomía. Open for lunch from 1:30 to 3:30 pm and for dinner from 9:00 to 11:00 pm, closed Tuesday and Sunday nights, all day Monday, and 15 days in November.

Tel: (+34) 943 431 842

**Eme Be Garrote**
Hidden away in the Igarra neighborhood of the Antiguo quarter, in a former cider house at Camino de Igara, 33, belongs to 7-Michelin starred chef, Martín Berasategui, (his initials in Spanish: Eme Be), who opened this, his most affordable dining spot in Spain in 2013. The design maintains some of the original cider house trappings including the enormous barrels or kupelas, while updating the space with a minimalist Nordic look (euskandinavo-style), with bare, blond wood tables, generously set apart and large, and inverted hanging apple baskets functioning as lamp shades. The executive lunch menu, served Tuesday to Friday, is
35€. The tasting menu is priced at 66€, with a wine paring for 28€, tax included. Recommended in the Repsol Guide. Closed Sunday evenings and all day Monday, plus September 5-20, October 3 (San Sebastián Gastronomy) November 1, and December 5 and 21-25.

Tel: (+34) 943 227 971

**Agorregi**
Also in the Igara neighborhood, at Portuetxe, 15, is from another insider tip from our friend Gabriella of Tenedor Tours. The two owners, Gorka Areclus and his wife Beatriz, alumni of Bodegón Alejandro (under Martin Berasategui), Arzak and Akelarre, offer warm hospitality. The desserts are quite acclaimed. They offer a 6-course tasting menu for 35€ + VAT, with 1/2 bottle of wine, and an 8-course tasting menu for 51€, wine and tax not included. It gets lots of great press, as well as being awarded a Michelin Bib Gourmand in November 2013 and one Repsol sun. Opens for lunch at 1:00 pm Monday-Saturday from June through September. Closed on Sunday year around. Also closed Monday evenings in May and October and Monday-Wednesday evenings from November through April.

Tel: (+34) 943 224 328

**Rekondo**
Take a taxi to the slopes of Mount Igeldo to Paseo de Igueldo, 57, to this classic asador, a traditional Basque caserío, or farmhouse, that has become a Mecca for wine lovers and carnivores alike. It specializes in charcoal grilled meats and game dishes prepared by chef Iñaki Arrieta, and boasts a wine cellar of more then 120,000 bottles, which in 2011, was recognized by Wine Spectator as being one of the 5 best wine cellars in the world and declared the best wine cellar for 2016 by *La revue de vin de France*, the oldest viticulture magazine in the world (1927). Opened by the Rekondo family in 1964, it is now run by the second generation. You’ll find a lovely terrace for al fresco dining (weather permitting). The restaurant has added a gastro-bar where diners can enjoy a pintxo and wines by the glass before their meal. Try the warm apple tart for dessert. It has 1 Repsol sun from the prestigious Repsol Guide. Open for lunch from 1:00 to 3:30 and dinner at 8:30. Closed Tuesday evenings, except during the summer, and all day Wednesday, 15 days in June and November.

Tel: (+34) 943 212 907

**La Muralla**
Stroll over to the Old Quarter to this intimate restaurant at Embeltrán, 3, where the cities 12th-century fortress wall (Muralla) once stood. Great 30€ lunch menu during the week, 41€ on the weekend, with several options for each course and includes a carafe of water, wine,
bread and coffee. Opens daily at 1:00 pm for lunch and dinner at 20:30. Closed Sunday evenings in the winter.

Tel: (+34) 943 433 508

**La Fábrica**

Or try its equally cozy and charming sister restaurant of La Muralla at Calle de Puerto, 17, where you will also find a great value 30€ menu during the week, plus a child’s menu for 15€. Closed Sunday night and all day Monday. Closed annually February 19-March 4 and November 12-26.

Tel: (+34) 943 432 110

**Urepel**

Under the same ownership as La Muralla, the restaurant, at Paseo Salamanca, 3, bajo, offers equally fine dining at a moderate price in a gracious setting on two floors. During the week the chef offers a 35€ menu and a 20€ child’s menu. The degustacion menu “Kubos” is 55€. Open daily from lunch from 1:00 to 3:30 pm and for dinner from 8:30 to 11:00 pm.

Tel: (+34) 943 420 723

**Xarma Cook & Culture**

Calle Miguel Imaz, 1, is the new gourmet destination in the Gros neighborhood run by a very talented couple Aizpea Oihaneder and Xabier Díez Esteibar, members of Sukatalde, the association of young chefs of Gipuzkoa. The restaurant has received a number of excellent reviews and has two Repsol suns. There is a bar on the ground floor with dinning in the lower level. Opens from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm, Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, and until 2:00 am on Fridays and Saturdays, closed Tuesdays.

Tel: (+34) 943 142 267

**Juanito Kojua**

The oldest restaurant in the Parte Vieja (1947), at Calle Puerto, 14, is very popular with locals. It’s immaculate, warm and homey. The dinning room upstairs has a nautical theme, while downstairs the stone walled dining room has a farmhouse décor. Very reasonable prices for gargantuan portions! The traditional tasting menu is 48€ + VAT and wine. Open for lunch from 1:00 to 3:30 and for dinner at 8:00, closed Sunday evening.

Tel: (+34) 943 420 180

**Astelena 1997**

At Calle Euskal Herria, 3, you’ll find good price to quality ratio and great homemade desserts. Chef Ander Gonzalez offers a 30€ lunch menu Tuesday-Friday, plus a degustacion
menu for 42€. It's located at the eastern end of the Parte Vieja quarter, just 3 blocks from
the Kursaal Center and Zurriola Bridge. Open for lunch at 1:30 and dinner at 8:30. Closed
Sunday and Wednesday evening, and all day Monday. Recommended in the Repsol Guide.
Tel: (+34) 943 425 867

Aldanondo
At Euskal Herria, 6, is another popular dining room in the Old Quarter. It hosted dinner for
Julia Roberts and Javier Bardem during their appearance at the International Film Festival.
The name of the game here at this asador—simply prepared charcoal grilled meats and fish.
This grill house is known for its oxen steak, chuleta de buey, grilled over vegetable charcoal,
seasoned with sea salt and accompanied by sautéed green Gernika peppers. You can’t go
wrong with the price for their asador menu—€28, including house salad, chuleta, a choice of
one of their fine homemade desserts, wine, water, bread and coffee. Open from noon to
11:00 pm, closed on Tuesday.
Tel: 943 422 852

La Rampa
Located next to the Aquarium on the pier at Muelle, 26-27 bajo, this is an informal, open air
seafood “shack” with a tiny interior dining room offering with paper tablecloths and napkins
but offering prime ingredients. It offers quick service if you don’t have the time or
inclination, for leisurely dining. Favorably reviewed by Rafael García Santos, Spain’s
foremost food and wine critic, and is recommended in the Academia Vasca de Gastronomía.
Try their squid croquettes, “croquetas de txipirón” and grilled grouper (mero), sole
(lenguadgo), or rodaballo (turbot). Open from 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm for lunch and 8:00 to
11:00 pm for dinner. Closed Tuesday and Sunday evenings and all day Wednesday.
Tel: (+34) 943 421 652

Gastronomic Splurges Outside The City
Restaurant Fagollaga
Outside of the grim, industrial village of Hernani, at Ereñozu Auzoa, 68, you have yet
another country hideaway in a pretty Basque farmhouse founded by the chef’s great
grandmother in 1904. Fagollaga means “place of many beech trees” in Basque. Just follow
the signs to the Goizuetza highway. The restaurant, with two Repsol suns, is on the road,
alongside the Urumea River, and has a beautiful glass enclosed terrace. Off all the gourmet
temples in this area, this is the one most reasonably priced. It also has a very good pastry
chef. It offers fine service with ample portions.
In recognition of chef Ixak Salaberria’s talent and potential, Spain’s most influential restaurant guide, Lo Mejor de la Gastronomía, ranks Fagollaga just a half-pont below Arzak. It also received two Repol suns for 2016. Chef Ixak offers a business lunch for 27,50€ wine + VAT and a tasting menu for 69,50€. Open for lunch Tuesday-Sunday from 1:15 to 3:30 pm and for dinner Thursday-Saturday at 8:30, closed on Monday, during Holy Week and one week at Christmas.

Tel: (+34) 943 550 031

**Asador Bedua**

If you aren’t able to snag a table at arguable Spain’s very finest seafood grills, Elkano, in Getaria, but want to experience one of the north’s other best grill houses, for both beef and fish, you may wish to head to Bedua, just a 15-minute drive away, to the west of the neighboring village of Zumaia. This asador has gained recent notoriety, as one of the most popular scenes of the movie Cien Apellidos Vascos, “A Spanish Affair”, the most viewed Spanish film of all time, was shot here.

The décor of this ancient, 12th-century red stone building is elegantly rustic, with ancient wood beams and stone walls decorated with oil paintings and soft lighting. It boasts its own vegetable garden, and of course, a large outdoor grill, where master griller, José Mari Iriondo, prepares perfectly grilled fish and also an acclaimed txuletón (rib steak), and his wife, Isabel Andia, prepares the homemade desserts, (as cheese cake, ice creams, pantxineta) along with their delicious tortilla española, which has won a national award. And “The Best of Spanish Gastronomy”, Lo Mejor de la Gastronomía, blog declares the restaurant’s rib steak as one of the country’s top fifteen.

Tel: (+34) 943 860 551 / 605 718 090

You can reach this isolated grill house from Zumaia following the N-634, at the circle going west out of town, you’ll see a large brown sign on your left, “Asador Bedua”, Bedua being the name of the neighborhood. Then once you’ve made the turn to the left, look closely on your left for another sign pointing down a narrow road. Asador Bedua sits below at the end of this road, along the river. You won’t be able to make this sharp turn coming from Zumaia but will have proceed a few meters further down the road until you can turn around at the entrance to the industrial park, Joxe Mari Korta Poligono Industrial, and then access the road down to the river. The driveway will be on your right. There is ample parking.
Dining on Mondays in Donostia

Monday’s is always a difficult day for sampling the city’s top tables as most noted restaurants are closed, but there are some exceptions. Here are my suggestions for Monday dinner if you don’t want to do the pintxos route, although several of my favorite pintxos bars are also closed on Mondays.

La Muralla, Embeltrán, 3
Tel: (+34) 943 433 508

Urepe, Paseo Salamanca, 3, bajo
Tel: (+34) 943 420 723

Aldanondo, Euskal Herria, 6
Tel: 943 422 852

Casa Urola, Fermín Calbetón, 20
Tel: (+34) 943 441 371

Rekondo, Paseo de Igueldo, 57
Tel: (+34) 943 212 907

Xarma Cook & Culture, Calle Miguel Imaz, 1
Tel: (+34) 943 142 267

Agorregi, Portuetxe, 15 (June through September)
Tel: (+34) 943 224 328

Juanito Kojua, Calle Puerto, 14
Tel: (+34) 943 420 180

Aldanondo, Euskal Herria, 6 (lunch only)
Tel: 943 422 852

La Rampa, Muelle, 26-27 bajo
Tel: (+34) 943 421 652
Lodging in Donostia-San Sebastián

San Sebastián has a number of excellent apartments and smaller hotels on and around La Concha, Ondarreta and Zurriola Beaches, but only one 5-star hotel and a small handful of upscale 4-star properties from which to choose. If you are planning on staying in the city, then you should make your hotel reservations, or book your apartment, well in advance, especially during the busy summer months of June through September, and over the spring and winter holidays.

Staying on La Concha Beach

The 4-star Londres y de Inglaterra, a white, wedding-cake looking Belle Époque building, has an enviable location at Zubieta, 2, right on the beach. This is where we send our friends who want San Sebastián’s very best location. Renovated in 2013, it now offers 167 rooms and suites; including the new rooftop Attic rooms (345 sf) with large terraces overlooking the beach, some with Jacuzzi.

The 3-star Hotel Niza is located just down the beach at Zubieta, 56. Housed in a white, 1920’s period building facing the bay on the beach side and the square on the front side, and is owned by the Chillida family. The Niza has a Belle Epoque style; a cage elevator, wooden
staircase, lots of marble, and chandeliers. Its 40 comfortable rooms are decorated in a simple, but pleasant blue and yellow color scheme and is an excellent value. Not fancy, but very friendly with a great downstairs pintxos bar run by Restaurante Narru, attractive formal parlor for relaxing and reading, and nice desk staff.

**Staying near La Concha Beach**

The 5-star **Maria Cristina**, a Marriott-Starwood property, is a beautiful Belle Époque structure overlooking the Urumea River, a few minutes walk from the Parte Vieja, the old quarter, and across the river from the Kursaal Performing Arts/Convention Center. Commissioned by King Alfonso XIII, it opened in 1912, and was designed by the same architect who created the classic Hotels Ritz in Paris and in Madrid. This is a Grande Dame of hotels with old world charm, attracting many of the celebrities attending the International Film Festival in September each year. Completely renovated, it reopened in July 2012 in time for the International Film Festival.

The **Villa Soro** is a charming 25-room 4-star luxury property located in a beautiful renovated 19th-century villa close to Arzak’s at Avenida de Ategorrieta, 61, and is within an easy walking distance of Zurriola beach, Kursaal Convention Center and the Old Quarter. It was built in by Don Ramon Londaiz for his daughter Maria and served as the family home for several generations. This is one of the nicest hotels in San Sebastian. Deluxe rooms are located in the original Villa; other rooms are in the annex.

**Hotel Astoria 7**, a former movie theater, is a stylish movie themed hotel, each room dedicated to an actor or director who has visited the city. Located near the Urumea River, at Sagrada Familia, 1, it is extremely popular during the San Sebastián International Film Festival in September.

**In the Parte Vieja**

**Hotel Parma**, Paseo de Salamanca, 10, is a favorite of Rick Steves’ readers and where the budget travel guru has stayed himself. This 27-room urban inn sits in an enviable location, next to the Old Quarter and right at the water’s edge.

**Lasala Plaza Hotel** is the new 58-room, 4-star boutique property in the old quarter at Plaza Lasala, 2, with views of La Concha Bay, opening July 2018.

**Casa Nicolas Guesthouse**, is the upscale 11-room pension housed in what was formerly the most famous and one of our favorite dining establishment in Donostia. Opened in 2014, it’s a one minute walk from La Concha beach, on the route of the pintxos, but away from the bustle of the interior of the old quarter. The deluxe double room, with balcony, overlooks the Bretxa market and the old town. The superior double rooms have a private terrace.
Pensión Itxasoa, San Juan 14, a five-room sister to the Aida, also makes a fine choice for those on a budget who wish to be in the heart of the Old Quarter yet away from the constant noise.

**In the heart of Donostia**

Legazpi Doce Rooms & Suites, with its 11 rooms and 5 studio suites, opened in 2016, in a beautiful late 19th-century building in one of the cities main plazas, Plaza Gipuzkoa, minutes from La Concha Bay and the old town. The exterior double rooms have balconies overlooking the plaza.

**In the Gros Quarter, near Zurriola Beach**

A new 4-star designer hotel with 42 rooms and suites, One Shot Tabakalera House is located near the train station, inside the Tabakalera International Center for Contemporary Culture, San Sebastián’s old tobacco factory, across the river from the Hotel Maria Cristina.

The Okako Hotel, another new addition to the cities upscale avant-garde hotel scene, is located a short walk from bus and train stations, Kursaal Center and Zurriola Beach. For the budget minded, the 12-room 1-star property opened in 2014.

Pensión Aida, Iztueta 9, a member of the three pensión group, “Pensiones con encanto”, offers very good value in its nine rooms, all with private bath. It recently added apartments with kitchenette that will sleep up to four persons.

Pensión Kursaal, at Peña y Goñi, 2, the other member of the pensión group, makes a perfect home for those who wish to attend the Jazz Festival, as it sits directly across from the Kursaal center, the venue for the major concerts. It is housed in a 19th-century building, the former home of the Count of Godó.

**Near Ondarreta Beach in “El Antiguo”**

The NH Collection San Sebastián Aránzazu, renovated in 2014, is an upscale business class hotel offering modern décor and home-away-from-home comfort, in the upscale residential neighborhood of “El Antiguo”, a few minutes walk from Ondarreta Beach.

The Hotel San Sebastián, located at Avenida Zumalacárregui, 20, close to Ondarreta Beach and 10 minutes from the La Concha Beach promenade, offers 90 exterior facing rooms, some of which can accommodate up to 4 people. The suites also have a terrace. Part of the Aránzazu Hotel Group, with hotels in Bilbao and Haro (La Rioja).
We have stayed at the 3-star Hotel Codina on numerous occasions over the years and have always found it comfortable. It's location on Ave de Zumalakarregi puts it only a few minutes walk from Ondarreta Beach and the Miramar Palace. It's also on the main bus line, convenient for getting to and from the Old Quarter if you don’t want to do the walk along promenade above La Concha Beach.

Renting an apartment in San Sebastián
There are a number of agencies offering apartment rentals in and around San Sebastián-Donostia, but we’ve found the best ones to deal with are the local rental agencies; Rentals Collection, Feel Free Rentals and the smaller Always Easy Rental.
Coastal Excursions

West of San Sebastián

Zarautz

Kind of a mini-San Sebastián, Zarautz’s 2500 meter long crescent shaped beach is the largest in the region, and will be filled with bathing tents and families during the summer when the village of 22,000 nearly triples in size. The Fiestas de la Virgen is celebrated the middle of August, while Euskal Jaiak is celebrated in honor of the Virgin of Aranzazu from the August 31 to September 9, along with the Euskal Jaiak (Basque Feast) a celebration of everything Basque. It’s also home to Karlos Arguiñano, the famous Basque TV chef.

Staying in Zarautz

Villa Aiala

Located directly across from the beach at Calle Mendilauta, 13, the 12-room stately manor house has 4 rooms with terraces overlooking the Cantabrian Sea. Built in the early 20th century, it was renovated in 2011 and provides comfortable accommodations within easy reach of San Sebastián-Donostia.
What to see in Zarautz

Espacio Cultural

Beyond Zarautz, there is a very scenic drive along the coast between Getaria and the fishing village of Zumaia, where in the afternoon you can visit Zuloaga's Espacio Cultural, open to the public on select dates only, March thru September (check the schedule), from 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm. Zuloaga, a Basque, native of Eibar, was one of Spain’s greatest painters and portrait artists of the late 19th century, a contemporary of Gauguin and Toulouse-Lautrec, whose works are quite somber and haunting in tone. He is well known for his portraits of the “typical” Spanish characters of his day, peasants, bullfighters and gypsies. There is also a new Museum-Shop of Artisanal Basque Products in Laia across the road from the Zuloaga Museum.

Getaria

Founded in 1204, the medieval walled village of Getaria, 3 kms west of Zarautz, is one of the oldest villages in Gipuzkoa. During the middle Ages whale hunting was the village’s main pursuit, but today it is the center of Txakolí wine production on the Basque coast. The village is the birthplace of Juan Sebastián Elcano, who was the first person to circumnavigate the world, finishing Magellan’s voyage, Domingo Bonaetxea, the conqueror of Haiti, and Cristóbal Balenciaga, illustrious Parisian fashion designer. The 15th-century Gothic designed Iglesia del Salvador, the Church of San Salvador, which houses the tomb of Elkano, has an unusual heavily tilted wooden floor, designed so that the altar sits high above the pews. Getaria contains two of the 16 popular beaches along the Basque coast, Malkorbe beach on the east side of the port and Mount San Antón, known as the Mouse of Getaria (in the shape of a mouse) and Gaztetape beach on the west side.

There’s a txakoli festival in Getaria on the first Sunday of August, if you find yourself in the vicinity at that time. Be sure to stop by Salanort Maestros Conserveros for their excellent selection of canned goods: Atlantic octopus, anchovies and tuna belly products from Getaria.

What to see Getaria

Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa

In the village, at Aldamar Parkea, 6, you’ll find the fashion museum displaying the costumes, ball gowns, and couture creations of the famous Getaria native. In this fascinating display you’ll find ball gowns designed for various and sundry aristocrats and the wedding dress of Generalissimo Francisco Franco’s granddaughter, Carmen. The museum offers free 1-hour guided tours on weekends and public holidays on a first come, first served basis. The
museum is open from November through February, Tuesday-Sunday, from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm, and from March through October, Tuesday-Sunday until 7:00 pm. It’s open every day in July and August from 10:00 am until 8:00 pm. Tickets are 10€, 7€ for seniors, free for children under 9.

**Lunch in Getaria**

Getaria is also well known for its grilled fish, and at of all the restaurants at the pier you’ll find outdoor charcoal grills where they prepare their famous grilled sardines and anchovies.

**Elkano**

Sitting in the center of Getaria, this destination seafood restaurant, with 1 Michelin star and 2 Repsol suns, offers fabulous dining. The rodaballo (turbot) here is superb, as is the bogavante (lobster). All of the fish are grilled on the outside parrilla. They also have a fine wine list. This is one of the best and most comfortable seafood restaurants along the entire coast! Closed all day Tuesday, plus Sunday, Monday and Wednesday evenings. Also closed April 9-27 for vacation.

Tel: (+34) 943 140 024 / 649 335 274

**Elkano Txiki**

For those who can’t snag a table at the mother ship Asador Elkano, this innovative gastrobar of Aitor Arregi, son of the unforgettable Pedro Arregui, founder of Elkano, is an homage to his father. Here you will find well-priced menu items such as pork cheeks with potato puré, Iberian pork loin with apple, a monkfish and prawn brochette and creamy rice with lobster.

Tel: (+34) 943 140 017

**Kaia-Kaipe**

With one Repsol sun, it’s located closer to the port at Calle de General Amao, 4, and offers vegetarian and Coeliac menus, along with its traditional grilled seafood menu. Opens for lunch at 1:00 pm and dinner at 8:00 pm. Closed Monday evenings and Wednesdays, except during the summer. Closed the first two weeks of March and the last two weeks of October.

Tel: (+34) 943 140 500

**Restaurante Iríbar**

This 7-room Pensión-Restaurant is another good option with a 25€ menu. It’s located close to the port at Calle Nagusia, 34, with dining on the terrace, and also offers vegetarian and Coeliac menus. Opens for lunch at 1:00 and dinner at 7:30. Recommend in the Repsol Guide. Closed Wednesday evenings and all day Thursday. Closes annually for 10 days in April, June, October and November.
Staying in Getaria

**Hotel Sazia**
Located right in the village of Getaria itself, the hotel has rooms overlooking the sea from above tiny Gaztetape beach. The rooms in the original 15th century "casa-torre" structure have exposed stone, soft salmon colored walls, beautiful polished wood floors, Persian rugs, 4-poster beds (room. 26), free WiFi, and the rooms in the modern annex have floor to ceiling ocean views. Some are lofts. There's a cozy antique filled sitting room, terrace facing the sea for drinks, computer downstairs to check email, small garage for only three cars (must reserve) and a friendly manager who speaks very good English. To reach the hotel coming from Zarautz, take a right turn up the quite, narrow street at the salmon colored house directly across the street from Restaurant Elkano. It makes a very good choice or those looking for a little hotel of charm right in a picturesque fishing village on the prettiest section of the coast between Bilbao and San Sebastián.

Tel: (+34) 943 140 143

**Hotel Iturregi**
This stunning and peaceful 4-star luxury farmhouse, on a gated estate with 20 acres of gardens, managed by the prestigious Marugal boutique hotel group, is located high above the town, surrounded by beautiful txakolí vineyards. Located less than 30 minutes from San Sebastian, it’s a perfect base to tour the coastal region. It offers six rooms and two suites on the top floor, all named for a Basque village or mountain. “Getaria” looks out on the lighthouse, the white “Jaizkibel” has views of the mountain of the same name and the “Zarautz” looks out on the bay. The least expensive “Orio” room overlooks the pool. All guest quarters are outfitted with flat screen TVs, bathrobes, Molton Brown cosmetics and Lindt chocolates. The “Zumaia” sports a canopy bed and sofa. The deluxe interiors were created by San Sebastian designer, Daniel Rotaeche, who decorated the Palacio Urgoiti outside of Bilbao (also recommended in this guide). Although the Iturregi does not offer an in house restaurant, it does offer a room service menu and a vast terrace where one can enjoy a sunset cocktail and enjoy the fabulous views. In addition it has an outdoor pool (open from mid June until mid September).

To reach the property, guests should turn left on the road towards Getaria before entering at a sign that reads San Prudencio Auzoa (auzoa - neighborhood), then head up to the hills one kilometer to a turn to the left, then one more kilometer. You will pass the Bodegas Urki txakolí vineyards on your right before you reach the gated entrance to the estate.

Tel: (+34) 943 896 134
**Bodega Hotel Gaintza**

This small, family-run contemporary B&B, set amid the 25 hectares of Txakoli vineyards overlooking Getaria, is located above the winery of the same name at Barrio San Prudentzio, 26. The less expensive, but equally tranquil lodging has six-rooms, its junior suite has a private terrace overlooking the vineyards and the sea. One can walk to town easily in about ten minutes. It offers well-kept rooms (one handicapped accessible) with high quality mattresses, flat screen TV, a/c, elevator and complimentary Wi-Fi. There is free parking.

Tel: (+34) 943 140 032
East of San Sebastián

Hondarribia

Featured in Hugh Palmer’s *The Most Beautiful Villages of Spain* (2003), Hondarribia is widely considered one of the most picturesque coastal villages in all of Spain. Its charming and colorful *La Marina* quarter, and much photographed fishermen’s homes running the length of Calle San Pedro, with their green, blue and red shutters, and geranium bedecked balconies, are must-sees. The historic walled medieval quarter overlooking the village is filled with handsome aristocratic mansions and a medieval fortress. The *Castle-Parador Carlos V*, sitting in the Plaza de Armas in the village’s old quarter, where lookouts once watched for a possible invasion from France, overlooks Txingudi Bay at the mouth of the Bidasoa River, part of the natural frontier between Spain and France. The wide beach, facing the Atlantic, is perfect for a family beach day.

This seaside village makes an excellent base from where one can spend several days exploring the French Basque countryside, the *Pays Basque*, the lush green valleys of neighboring Navarra, or inland Gipúzkoa. Whether you decide to stay in the grand style of the 10th-century Castle Parador, or opt for something a little simpler, but still comfortable, like one of the villages *agrotourism homes*, you’ll be rewarded with lovely views, fantastic
gourmet food, a friendly populace and a lively fishing quarter with great pintxos in the evening.

When staying in Hondarribia we pick up grocery staples at the handy Erroski supermarket near the airport, then head to the specialty shops downtown with a first shop first at the gourmet delicatessen Solbes, at Calle Santiago, 2, where you’ll find a nice selection of wines, fresh fruits and their prepared foods. We then head to pedestrians only Calle San Pedro, 45, in the fishermen’s quarter, to the charcuterie Urdai-Azpikoak of Jon Alzaga, which sells a great selection of Iberian hams and Pyrenees cheeses. For the best baguettes (called leñas) I’ve every tasted in Spain stop at Ogi, Artesanos del Pan, also on Calle San Pedro in La Marina, near the Gran Sol restaurant. Don’t buy bread anywhere but here!

At the end of Calle San Pedro there’s also a handy laundry, (lavandería) Ondo Garbí, which provides us with very good, usually one-day service, during our stay. There is a modern indoor/outdoors sports complex, yacht harbor and new fishermen’s pier with restaurant, as well as several children’s playgrounds, all on the way to the very clean and well-maintained family beach. The tourist center for Hondarribia and Bidasoa are located in the Marina complex.

Getting to Hondarribia

If you plan on driving, understand that parking can be difficult on weekends and during the summer. There is regular bus service between San Sebastián and Hondarribia on the Lurralde Bus, which leaves from Gipuzkoa Plaza in San Sebastián-Donostia. The cost is 1,75€ one-way.

Ferry to Hendaye

One can take a little ferry, the Marie-Louise Navette, from the old pier/parking lot area in downtown Hondarribia to the port of neighboring Hendaye, France, just across the Txingudi Bay, where you can walk to the expansive (3 km) sandy beaches of Ondarraitz, one of Hendaye’s main attractions. The ferry departs every 30 minutes and costs 1,70€, one way.

Wine tasting at an Hondarribia vineyard

If your Basque itinerary doesn’t include time for a visit to Getaria or Bakio, you have the opportunity to visit a txakolí winery, Hiruzta, the only winery in Hondarribia. The Rekalde family opened the winery in 2012 and has filled the dream of reclaiming the century-old tradition of txakolí production in the Bidasoa. Visits are available on Saturdays and Sundays. They also have a restaurant with an outdoor terrace.
Dining in Hondarribia

Hondarribia has become well known over the last few years for its outstanding cuisine. The number of young chefs who have migrated here after studying under Pedro Subijana, Martín Berasategui and Arzak, among others, have given visitors a wide selection of great restaurants and pintxos bars to choose from. Bar Gran Sol has won numerous pintxos competition over the years, and is one of the main destinations for gourmands.

Pintxos Hopping

Bar Gran Sol

The first on our list, and winner of this year’s pintxos compition, is located along the pedestrian Calle San Pedro, which is one short block behind the main street in the Barrio de la Marina, the Fisherman’s neighborhood. The bar, run by two young men, has won numerous gastronomic awards for its creative pintxos. Every dish is a little work of art and holds its own with the very best pintxos bars of San Sebastian. And now, you have a new way to enjoy the pintxos, Gastro Toki Gran Sol for 38,50€ + VAT. There is a children’s menu for 13,50€.
Go early because the pintxos disappear quickly and kitchen closes before 11:00 pm. If you arrive at 7:00, you’ll find the bar covered with cold pintxos but you must wait until 7:30 to order the delectable hot pintxos from the kitchen. During the summer, the bar and terrace become mobbed very quickly, opening for pre-lunch nibbles at 11:30. I suggest you grab a spot at one of the barrel tables on the outdoor terrace (no chairs-this is stand up dining) and send one member of your party inside to order and then to wait at the bar. The bartender will ask for your name and call you when your order from the kitchen is ready. No waiter service. It’s survival of the fittest here, but you simply should not miss these highly inventive treats.

Restaurant Gran Sol is located next door at No. 63, and serves lunch from 1:00 to 3:30, except on Sundays when it closes at 3:00.

Tel: (+34) 943 642 701

Yola Berri
The second bar, found at the corner of Zuloaga and San Pedro, is a local hangout with a bar covered with traditional style pintxos. Hot pintxos are also available from the kitchen. There’s also an upstairs dining room that serves huge portions at very moderate prices. Open daily from 7:30 am to 11:45 pm.

Tel: (+34) 943 645 611

Bar-Restaurante Enbata
The Hotel Jauregui has its own fine pintxos bar, which is very handy for late night dining, the kitchen doesn’t close until 11:30 pm. This bar was a finalist in this year’s Euskal Herria pintxos competition.

Tel: (+34) 943 641 054

Gastroteka Danontzat
“Ni restaurante, Ni bar”, the city’s newest, highly innovative, chef-owned gastrobar, receiving much critical acclaim, is located in the Old Quarter at Denda Kalea, 6. The chef, Gorka Irisarri, has won several recent pintxos competitions. Open from noon to midnight, closed Tuesday.

Tel: (+34) 943 646 597

Other bars that we’ve enjoyed on pedestrianized Calle San Pedro include the classic (1940) Bar Itxaropena at No. 67, and Bar Ignacio at No. 20, which serves yummy potato omelets. Look for the green and white façade. You can sit at the bar or at a table. It’s another local classic. Bar Alcanadre, at No. 26, also serves a good value menu del día. Vinoteka Ardoka at
No. 30, is a fashionable spot, with black and white décor, that serves up contemporary pintxos.

**Lunch or Dinner**

**Hermandad de Pescadores**

Directly across from the old wharf at Zuloaga, 12, is a rustic, bustling, convivial place with impeccable seafood, one of the most popular in the city. You’ll dine at communal wooden tables, but you’ll need to reserve ahead of time, particularly on weekends when the French arrive in droves via the ferry from Hendaye. Try the *merluza en salsa verde*, hake in green sauce, the house specialty, and the *anchos caseros en salazón*, homemade salted anchovies. It’s inexpensive, fun and informal, and always crowded. Open for lunch Tuesday-Sunday and for dinner from Wednesday-Saturday. Closed Sunday and Tuesday evenings, all day Monday, Easter week, the first of July and Christmas.

Tel: (+34) 943 642 738

**Restaurante Alameda**

For fine dining, and a Michelin star treat, choose the family run Alameda, across from the road leading up to the Old Quarter and the Parador. Considered by gastronomic critics as one of the finest spots in all the Basque Country. The owners/chefs, Gorka & Kepa Txapartegui, are among the country’s top stars, having trained with Martín Berasategui. If you can dine in only one of Hondarribia’s fine restaurants, splurge on the Alameda. The brothers offer a 5-course set menú, Gartzinea, for 35€, with a wine paring for an additional 15€, a 6-course menu, Hondarribia, for 50€, plus wine paring for 20€, and a 9-course degustation menu, Dastamena, for 80€, with a wine paring for 30€. Receives one Repsol sol (sun), a rating of 15 from the *Guía Gastronómica y Cultural del País Vasco* and a 7/10 from The Best of Spanish Gastronomy. Closes Sunday and Tuesday nights, all day Monday plus the 2nd week of June, 1st week of October and for three weeks around the Christmas holiday season. Reservations available online.

Tel: (+34) 943 642 789

**Restaurante Sebastián - Classic & Bistro**

For something in between, choose this classic restaurant at Calle Mayor, 11, in the Old Quarter, on the way to the Parador, just past the town hall. Housed in a former tobacco shop, it has a cozy downstairs dining room with open beams and a fireplace with walls covered with paintings by local artists. The chef is Miguel Soto Darrozez, who offers a tasting menu for only 45€ + IVA. If you’d like to dine in a more casual atmosphere, then try their Zone 11 Bistro. Open for lunch from 1:00 to 3:30 and for dinner from 8:00 to 11:00. Closed
Sunday nights and Monday (except during the summer), and the first two weeks of November.

Tel: (+34) 943 640 167

**Arroka Berri**

For something less well-known but very nice, serving traditional Basque cuisine with a creative twist, my new Hondarribia favorite is in the upper town on the right side of the road to the Cabo Higuer lighthouse at Higuer Bidea, 6. It’s housed in a typical Basque farmhouse, remodeled in 2005. Chef Gorka Cepeda offers four special group menus for a minimum of 10 people per table. There’s ample car parking across the street. Open daily for lunch from 1:00 to 3:30, and for dinner from 8:00 to 11:00, closed from December 23 to January 3.

Tel: (+34) 943 642 712

**Abarka Jatetxea**

Housed in a traditional Basque farmhouse in the foothills of the residential district of *La Campiña*, at Baserritar Etobidea, 36, is where Chef Natxo Garcia and his team offers classic Basque dishes with an innovative touch. To accompany your seafood dishes, be sure to try the local txakoli wine from the vineyards of *Hiruzta*. Opens for lunch at 1:00 pm and dinner at 8:00 pm, closed Monday.

Tel: (+34) 943 641 991

**Laia Asador-Sidrería**

Opened in 2006, this modern roasting house, at Arkolla Auzoa, 33, excels in grilled meats and fish in a beautiful country setting with mountain views. They offer a 3-course gastronomic lunch menu during the week for 20€ + VAT, bread, water, wine and coffee included, and a cider menu for 32€ + VAT. Reservations are highly recommended on weekends during the summer and holidays. Open for lunch daily from 1:00 to 3:00, and for dinner on Friday, Saturday and public holidays at 8:30. In the summer it’s also open for dinner from Tuesday-Thursday.

Tel: (+34) 943 646 309

**Nightlife in Hondarribia**

Hondarribia offers little in terms of nightlife compared to San Sebastián, but one can have a nightcap at the Parador, or in the pretty garden of the popular bar and dance club, *Q Hondarribia*, located on the road that leads to the city’s beaches. Or head to *Bar Azkenportu*, on the lower level in the picturesque blue building (see above) in the old quarter at San Pedro, 73, for a cocktail with the locals.
Staying in Hondarribia  
**Agroturismos**

Great for budgeters or those who want to “sleep cheap and eat well”

**Iketxe**

I highly recommend the friendly and warm farmhouse that the owners built entirely from scratch. It has only five rooms, but they’re spacious, filled with handmade country furniture, pleasantly decorated with Kilim rugs on polished wood floors, private baths, with hair dryers. Room No. 3 downstairs has its own large private terrace, while room No. #1 has an enclosed sitting area. Upstairs, room No. 6 is quite spacious. The outgoing Patxi speaks no English but his wife, Fátima, does speak some English and is fluent in French. The home has a downstairs kitchen, where Patxi prepares breakfast, with fridge for guests to use, a small library with books and brochures about the region and a breakfast room and lounge with TV for the guests’ exclusive use. After all these years, it is still one of our favorite stops.

Tel: (+34) 943 644 391, or email them at: iketxe5@hotmail.com.
Doubles here in high season go for 66€, plus breakfast for 5,50€, a real bargain. The house has been featured in many Spanish travel magazines and in Alistair Sawday’s Special Places to Stay/Spain, plus it is a selection of Secret Places; thus, it has become extremely popular. For high season, please book several months in advance.

Artizarra

If you are traveling with another couple, or as a family needing 3 bedrooms and 3 baths (but no kitchen), consider the lovely Artizarra which has one huge upstairs bedroom with sofa, round table and chairs, small balcony, also with table and two chairs, and downstairs, two smaller bedrooms (all with private bath-showers only) which are off the living room with TV, mini-fridge, microwave, fireplace and breakfast table. We have rented this home with another couple for two weeks in July. The owner, Lurdes, who speaks English, couldn’t have been more helpful. She did our laundry, served us bountiful breakfasts of homemade cakes, breads, fresh fruits, platters of chorizo and hams, coffee and fresh juice, all for only 6,05€/person. We also had lounge chairs and two picnic tables in the front lawn, where we dined on gourmet products picked up in the markets every other night. And every night we soaked up the indescribable views of the sacred mountain of La Rhune and the lights of San Marical from our living room window.

This traditionally styled farmhouse, called a caserío, was newly built and is lovely. The downstairs guest quarters consist of two bedrooms, each having its own bath (with shower only) that open on to the charmingly decorated living room with two sofas, table covered with brochures about touring the area, picture windows looking out to the garden (spectacular views), a little dining area to the side where breakfast is served, where you’ll find a small microwave and mini-fridge.

Upstairs there is one very spacious bedroom with its own little balcony (and chairs) plus room for a sofa, a rocking chair, a round table and two chairs, which we used for our writing and travel planning. The furniture here is handmade, including the armoire, which serves as the closet. The large dormer bath has a shower only. At the top of the stairs leading to this large bedroom is a small alcove with a fold out bed which could sleep two small children, or where one could put a crib. We used this area to store our luggage.

While the house is not air conditioned, the proprietress will provide fans for each floor, but they usually aren’t necessary. A picnic table and lounge chairs are found in the front garden, which we used every evening when returning from our touring. We bought our dinner provisions and wine at the Solbes market, our bread at the Ongi bread shop, our Iberian ham at the local charcuterie and dined outside watching the sunset. We also enjoyed salads prepared with ingredients from the garden.
Our stay at the Artizarra proved to be very inexpensive and spacious lodging for our two weeks. We rented the entire house and split this cost with the couple traveling with us. We had our own private, 3-bedroom, 3-bath farmhouse (complete with pelota court), yet we didn’t have to bother with cleaning. Our hostess, Lurdes, also changed bed linens and towels daily. She also prepares a bountiful breakfast, but only partook of it a few times, as we chose to have coffee and pastries in town. Again, this makes a perfect base for friends traveling together or for a family.

Tel: (+34) 655 721 834

If you need just one room, I would book at the Iketxe, as the downstairs rooms have their own private terraces.

**Maidanea**

If the Iketxe is full, then you can consider the immaculate Maidanea with 6 double rooms, but no English spoken here, just Spanish, Basque and French. The rates are the same as Iketxe.

Tel: (+34) 943 640 855

All of these homes are located in the countryside, a mere 2 minutes from the center of Hondarribia as the crow flies, but closer to 7 minutes down narrow, country roads that you’ll share with farm tractors and people out for a walk. Best to ask the owners either to send you a very detailed map, or have them meet you at the Hondarribia airport to guide you to the properties. Do not attempt to find them at night. You may be able to pick up directions to all the agrotourism homes and a guide at the Hondarribia Tourist Office.

**Staying in the Old Quarter of Hondarribia**

**Parador de Carlos V**

The 36-room Parador de Carlos, a castle built over a former Arab fortress, dates from the 10th-century. Ferdinand and Isabella, and their son Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, once resided here. One of the most atmospheric castle Paradors in the entire network, its filled with antiques, suits of armor, tapestries, and was converted to a Parador in 1968. Reserve a room with view of bay; room 301 has views of the bay and the Old Quarter and has a sitting room, attic and two balconies. And like the Parador de Limpias (Cantabria), this Parador supposedly has a resident ghost who makes his appearance during the quiet months of January and February.

If booking in high season, do so several months in advance, as this Parador fills up very quickly and is actually quite popular year round. Breakfast can be taken in the beautiful
interior courtyard or on the terrace. This Parador is seldom available in high season through the Parador discount programs, such as the 5-night or Golden Age plans. These discount rates are available here only during the winter months, bringing the rates in January down to as low as 139€/night on the Golden Age Plan. One of the disadvantages of staying here is that the gated parking lot is located below the main entrance, requiring guests to carry their bags up a steep flight of steps. If you are not a Parador guest and drop in for a drink, your access is limited to the lobby and adjacent bar only. The elevator allows easy access to the Parador from the street below.

While the Parador has no restaurant, fine dining abounds in town and within the immediate area. You will be only 20 km away from San Sebastián, one of the premiere dining capitals of Spain.

**Hotel El Obispo**

The 14th-15th century former archbishop’s mansion houses a 16 room, the 3-star hotel, with décor done by the designers of Artespaña. Rooms have TV, mini-bar and pretty views of the estuary. The best room is No. 202 in yellow with a black wrought-iron headboard and two French carved wooden chairs. Room 204 is also very nice. Some upstairs rooms share a walk out balcony overlooking the town. The buffet breakfast included in the room rate is served in a cheerful, salmon and cream-colored downstairs breakfast room or the inviting outdoor terrace. There are six parking spaces for guests in front of the hotel, and parking is also available at a nearby garage. It sits on a renovated square, in a quiet corner, off the beaten path. It seems lighter, airier, more inviting because of its location, on Plaza del Obispo. The hotel is air conditioned and equipped with free WiFi. It also offers room service, Nestles chocolates, breakfast brought to the room, baby-sitting services, and the free use of bikes. Owners are friendly, the property is immaculate and extremely attractive, prices moderate, and they respond to emails quickly.

Tel: (+34) 943 644 400

**Hotel Palacete**

Those who need to watch their budget may want to consider this sweet little hotel on Hondarribia’s prettiest plaza of the Historic Quarter, Plaza de Gipúzkoa. This bijoux, 9-room property is a renovated mansion, with doubles going for as low as 90€/night in early July. The hotel also offers three single rooms and one, which is handicapped accessible. Breakfast is served on terrace. Rooms come with satellite TV, WiFi in all rooms, safes, baths with hair dryer and A/C. Pets allowed. Book the largest room with wall of windows facing the square.

Tel: (+34) 943 640 813 / 677 029 302
Apartments in the Old Quarter

Hotel Jauregui
Located at Calle Zuloaga, 5, at the port, this 42-room 3-star hotel, has 11 duplex apartments, for 4, 5 or 6 people, on the top floor, with A/C, WiFi and daily maid service, that can be rented by the day or week. Comfortable and good for families on a budget who want to be within easy walking distance of the beach and restaurants. Should be booked at least 6 months in advance. The hotel’s Restaurant Bar Enbata is located on the ground floor.

Tel: (+34) 943 641 400

Staying in modern Hondarribia

Hotel Jaizkibel
This 4-star minimalist design, but very attractive boutique hotel, offers very comfortable, modern rooms for at moderate price. In low season the very spiffy doubles are often available starting at 106,40€, with breakfast. There is private parking, a restaurant, bar and all the modern conveniences. It’s located in a quiet, upscale residential neighborhood within walking distance of the center of town. If you’re looking for a full service hotel, this fits the bill nicely and at a lower tariff than the Parador. The hotel’s restaurant serves dinner Monday-Saturday, but is closed Sunday evening. Lunch is served only on Saturdays and Sundays, except in July, August and September, when it offers a set menu.

Tel: (+34) 943 646 040
A Visit to Pasajes

If you have the time on the drive between San Sebastián and Hondarribia, pay a visit to the picturesque fishing village of Pasajes de San Juan, also known as Pasai Donibane in Basque, a village divided by the sea, and one of the most picturesque villages in Guipúzcoa. You can even reach it by a one-minute ferry ride from Pasajes San Pedro, on the other side of the river, but it’s easier to reach Pasai from Hondarribia, taking the road, the G1-3440, to the top of Mount Jaizkibel to the Shrine of Virgin of Guadalupe, the Patroness of Hondarribia, the Black Madonna of Fuenterrabía, with spectacular views and a lovely church. Continuing on this same road west you’ll have even more expansive views of the coast at the second semi-ruined stone watchtower, the Dolmen du Mont Jaizkibel à Hondarribia.

After enjoying the dramatic views at the watchtower, continue down this road until it ends at Pasai Donibane, a village consisting of one long street that actually passes beneath the first floors of a few of the villages houses. It’s typically Basque, and atmospheric. Victor Hugo lived here once for a short while in 1843, in a house overlooking the water, while the noted ceramicist and painter Daniel Zuloaga, uncle of Ignacio Zuloaga Zabaleta, lived and worked in the ceramics factory in Pasai for a couple of years in the early part of the 20th-century creating numerous works for bridges, hotels and houses in San Sebastian.
Lunch in Pasajes

**Casa Cámara**
This charming 17th-century home at the entrance to the port, next to the water at Calle San Juan, 79, is an atmospheric place to dine. The restaurant, which opened in 1884, keeps the lobster and spider crab (*txangurro*) pots under the floor and raise them up to the diners to make their selections. Hake cheeks, (*kokotxas*), monkfish and seafood bisque are specialties. It’s a classic with several seasonal lunch and dinner menus beginning at 45€, or dine al a carte. Closed Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday nights and all day Mondays.

Tel: (+34) 943 523 699

**Txulotxo**
At San Juan, 71, is a casual place with terrace offering excellent port views, along with baked spider crab, *Txangurro al horno*, and impeccably grilled fish. Try the menu of the day for 21€ + VAT, Monday to Friday. The special weekend lunch menu is 36€, wine, coffee and tax included, reservations required. Closed Tuesdays and Sunday nights.

Tel: (+34) 943 523 952

**Nicolasa**
Another traditional family-style restaurant, specializing in steaks and grilled fish, is just down the street at San Juan, 59. The Menú Donibane is only 24€, including bread, wine and VAT. Closed Mondays.

Tel: (+34) 943 515 469

**Casa Mirones**
Located at San Juan, 80, they offer four menu del días from 20€ to 35€, degustación menus of 39€, 40€ and 42€, and a seafood paella for two. The restaurant, with a view of the port from the terrace, is open daily. Closes December 24 (evening) and 25, and January 1.

Tel: (+34) 943 519 271
An excursion into the Basque Highlands

A short drive from San Sebastián, south on the A-1, will take you into the Goierri, the Basque Highlands, a region surrounded by the Aralar Mountains. Continue on the road to the attractive, and very Basque, tiny village of Zerain, a postcard perfect setting, which lies midway between Donostia and Vitoria. On the way you’ll pass through the region known as the Tolosaldea, comprised of 27 small villages and the main village of Tolosa, the red bean town on the banks of the Oria River, former provincial capital of Gipuzkoa, where the wicker baskets, chisteras, used for pelota and jai alai, are produced. Further on is Ordizia, the village famous for its Wednesday weekly market, which this year celebrates the 750th anniversary of it’s founding in May of 1268. A little south you’ll find Idiazábal, the ewe’s cheese village that lies between the Aralar and Aizkorri mountain ranges. The production of Idiazabal cheese, named after the village, follows a centuries-old recipe used by the Basque shepherds of the area. If you can, try to be there the first Sunday in May when the village of Idiazabal holds the Día del Queso, the annual Cheese Day celebration. This area hasn’t been tarnished by as much industrial blight as other areas in the Bilbao-San Sebastian area. It makes a wonderful, idyllic day trip from the coast.
Tolosa

The village’s Saturday **market day**, considered the largest market in the Basque Country, is when local farmers gather to sell their products. Situated on the left bank of the Oria river, the market was totally renovated a few years ago and is where you will find the regions most famous produce, the *Alubia de Tolosa*, the tasty black bean, which is honored each November during the bean festival, *La Fiesta de la Alubia*, or *babarrunaren astea* in Basque. Tolosa, celebrating it’s 750th anniversary, is one on the principal stops on the Inland Way of St. James, one of the alternate routes leading to Santiago de Compostela through the Basque Country.

Tolosa is also the birthplace of **Edurne Pasaban**, the Basque Counties most famous mountaineer and the first woman to climb all 14 eight-thousand meter high mountains in the world.

**Lunch in Tolosa**

Besides sampling pintxos in the local bars, or waiting until the *parrilleros* **gastronomic festival** in early December, you can stop by one of the best Asadores Sidrerías found anywhere in the Basque Country, for an unforgettable experience, a true red meat temple at **Casa Julián Matías - Gorrotxategi**. This carnivore’s delight, which opened in 1954, is housed in what appears to be, at first glance, a scruffy warehouse, at Santa Clara, 6, across from the bridge, but press on and you’ll find a dining room and kitchen in the back, which has housed sophisticated diners from all over the world, including the most famous chefs of the Basque country. Julián offers a 50-page wine list, heavy on reds with labels from Burgundy, Bordeaux, the Douro, Argentine and Chile, plus all of the Spanish appellations, with a few wines for under 15€. The current chef-owner is the son of the original Julián. Number 12 of the top 100 *European Heritage Restaurants* for 2018. It’s also rated highly in all the Spanish gastronomic guides and has a counterpart in Old Madrid, **Julián de Tolosa**, on Cava Baja. Closed Sundays. Prices remain very reasonable. Call (+34) 943 671 417 to reserve at table.

Just across the bridge, on the other side of the river at Avenida Zumalacárregui, 7, you’ll find another noted asador, **Casa Nicolás**, which began in 1953 as a bar near Tolosa’s Plaza de San Juan Arramele, Tolosa’s Chinatown, where young Nicolás Ruíz taught himself to work the grill. Less rustic then Casa Julián, it delivers a fantastic meal in slightly more upscale surroundings. The chef, Pedro Ruiz, or his son Xabier, the 3rd generation, will take your order and deliver you a fabulous meal, along with a bottle of red wine from the 40,000 bottle cellar. Closed Sundays for dinner. You can reserve a place at (+34) 943 654 759.

And please don’t think about leaving Tolosa without seeking out Spain’s best and most famous confectionary shop, **Rafa Gorrotxategi 1680**, now at its new location, Polígono Industrial Usabal, 14, on the south end of Tolosa. Rafa, the 3rd generation, continues the
family tradition. The Pastry Workshop is open Monday-Friday from 9:00 am to 8:00 pm. There used to be a number of pastry and confectionery shops in this town, but they began closing down one after the other, unable to compete with the cheaper industrial products. José María Gorrotxategi, Rafa’s father, was very much interested in Basque lore, began buying all the sweet-making equipment in those shops, one, Xaxu, had been operating in the same building since the 17th-century. José María bought the building and opened the very interesting Pastry Museum with a display of over 400 traditional confectionery utensils, but which is seldom open.

**Ordizia**

A few minutes south of Tolosa, this small medieval village with an old quarter filled with lovely homes, hosts one of the oldest markets in Spain, dating from 1512. The traditional market is held on Wednesdays in the large covered square, which was finally covered in 1925. In early September the village celebrates its "Euskal Jaiak" (Basque Festival), held each year since 1904, and includes the International Idiazabal Cheese Contest, with the Wednesday Market Day being the special day during the festival.

**Lunchtime in Ordizia**

You’ll find a great dining experience here at Restaurante Martínez 1890, Santamaria-Andre Mari Kalea, 10, whose chef, Xabier ‘Martínez, the 4th generation, is taking his mother’s classic asador in more contemporary and creative directions. Tel: (+34) 943 880 641.

**Tximista**, a typical cider house, is located in the center of Ordizia and offers a traditional cider house menu for 30€, Monday-Friday from noon to 4:00 pm and on weekends from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm. Open Thursday-Saturday evenings for dinner at 8:00 pm. Guided tours available for small groups. Tel: (+34) 943 881 128.

**Continuing on the loop**

**Zumárraga**

From Ordizia, you venture a few kilometers west on the GI-2632 to the village of Zumárraga where you can visit the 15th-century hermitage La Antigua, known as the hermitages’ cathedral, which sit in the hills above the village. And if you are thinking about lunch, then **Kabia**, meaning ‘nest’ in Basque, can be found in the village at Calle Legazpi, 5. With two Repsol suns, and recommended in the Michelin Guide for 2018, chef Juanma Hurtado, who began his career working at Restaurante Akelarre, offers a weekly lunch menu for only 20,90€, including bread, wine and VAT. Closed Mondays. Reservations highly recommended. Tel: (+34) 943 726 274.
Legazpi

Further south on the GI-2630, in the Valle del Hierro, the Valley of Iron, you’ll find the village Legazpi along the banks of the Urola River. The village’s main festival, Santikutzak Txiki, takes place the 1st week of May. While here, you can visit the Park Mirandaola, a complex that includes a iron mill from the 18th-century that you can see at work on Sundays between noon and 1:00 pm only, from Easter to September, and the farmhouses where Idiazabal cheese and artisan breads are made.

From Legazpi, it’s only a short drive to the tiny village of Zerain, population 250, on the slopes of Aizkorri Mountain Range, one of Gipuzkoa’s best viewpoints and where you can visit the furnaces of Aizpea. From here you can visit the village of Idiazabal, well known for its cheese more so than its 12th-century Romanesque-Gothic style parish church of San Miguel and stately houses, before returning to San Sebastián, either on the A-1, back through Tolosa, or on another scenic route that will take you to Beasain, then up GI-632 to Zumárraga before heading up through the valley on the GI-631 to Azpeitia and Zestoa, finally connecting to the AP-8, which will take you back to San Sebastián-Donostia in no time.

On the Idiazábal Cheese Trail

The GR 283 is a circular route designed for walkers over a period of 6 stages, covering 95.7 kilometers, covering the Goierri, Alto Urola and Alto Deba regions, but it is also possible to follow the route of the Idiazábal cheese by car starting in Segura, southwest of Idiazábal, then up to Mutiloa and on to Legazpi. From here, you’re next stop would be Oñati, over the Biozkorna pass, the highest point on this part of the route, finishing at the Sanctuary of Arantzazu. From Oñati you head up to the meadows of Urbia, where you can see megaliths and huts, then southeast through the Aizkorri-Aratz nature park, a massif, the highest point in the Basque Country and an ancient route dating from the time of the Romans. From there, you briefly cross into Navarra before heading back into Gipuzkoa to the village of Etxegarate.
Navarra-Navarre
Pamplona-Iruña

Dating to the pre-Roman time of the Vascones, Iruña, *the city*, was an important gateway to Europe for the Romans, who named the city Pompaelo after General Pompeii, the Visigoths and Moors. Navarra’s capital Pamplona, known for its world famous *Fiesta de San Fermín* and the *Feria del Toro de Sanfermin*, the ‘running of the bulls’, is an easy one hour drive inland from San Sebastián-Donostia, and shares the gastronomic traditions of the Basque Country, including a great selection of award winning pintxos bars and outstanding gastronomic restaurants. While officially not part of the Basque Country, Navarra is historically a central part of *Euskal Herria*, home of the Basque people of the western Pyrenees, which is comprised of seven provinces: the País Vasco; the Spanish Basque provinces of Áraba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa, the Pays Basque; the French Basque provinces of Lapurdi, Nafarroa-Behera and Zuberoa, and Navarra. Pamplona is also an important stop along the French route of the *Camino de Santiago* that crosses the Pyrenees at Luzai-de-Valcarlos and Orreaga-Roncesvalles, starting in *Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port* in the Pays Basque.
City Sights

The city boasts the Cathedral de Santa Maria, Santa María la Real, dating from the 14th and 15th centuries, with its Neoclassical façade and Gothic interior, which holds the tomb of Carlos III, the church-fortress of San Nicolás, dating from the 12th-century, and the 13th-century Church of San Cernin, or San Saturnino, the patron saint of the city, whose twin towers, when lit up at night, are a beautiful sight over Pamplona’s old quarter. The clock in San Cernin’s main tower announces the time for the launching of the rocket for the ‘encierro’, the running of the bulls, each morning at 8:00 am during Sanfermines. And then there is the Iglesia de San Ignacio-Capilla de Adoración Perpetua, where the founder of the Jesuit Society, Íñigo de Loyola, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, fell gravely wounded in a battle defending the castle of King Ferdinand the Catholic that originally stood on the site of the basílica.

The Museum of Navarre, at the top of Calle Santo Domingo, is Pamplona’s finest museum, housing an important collection of Roman, Mediaeval, Renaissance and Baroque art, including the Mosaic of Theseus, the 11th-century Chest from Leyre and Goya’s portrait of the Marqués de San Adrián (1804), among other treasures. Open Tuesday-Saturday from 9:30 am to 2:00 pm and in the afternoons from 5:00 to 7:00 pm, and on Sundays and holidays from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm. Open during fiesta. Admission is 2€.

Pamplona’s City Hall, the Ayuntamiento de Pamplona, dates from the 15th-century and sits in the very heart of the city’s old quarter, the convergence point of the city’s three historic defensive systems, and where they launch the rocket ("chupinazo") signaling the start of Sanfermines every year at noon on July 6.

Take a walk along the city’s mediaeval walls which continue for three miles, 5 kilometers, along the western edge of the old quarter. The walls are considered one of the most interesting and best-conserved defensive complexes in Spain.

The Plaza del Castillo, surrounded by colorful 18th-century houses, was used as a bullring until 1844, and remains the center of activity during the Fiesta de San Fermín, as well as the rest of the year.

The Ciudadela, the city’s fortress and largest green space (covering 28 hectares), was built in the 16th-century and is considered to be the finest example of military architecture from the Spanish Renaissance.

The city is the first major stop on the "Pilgrims' Road to Santiago" following the route from St-Jean-Pied-de-Port in the French Basque Country, over the pass at Roncesvalles. The route takes you through the old quarter and south through the Rioja to Burgos. Pilgrims can stop overnight at the Albergue Jesus y Maria, Calle Compañía, 4, a bed for 7€.
Dining in Pamplona

Pintxos Hopping in Pamplona

Semana del Pincho de Navarra, the annual pintxos competition, was held this year from March 2-11.

Pintxos In the Parte Vieja

Join the Pamplonicas for an afternoon (12:30) or evening (7:30) of pintxos and chiquitos (small drinks) as you move from bar to bar in the old quarter. You begin your chiquiteo (bar-hopping) on Calle San Nicolás at one of its popular destinations; Bar Otano, La Mandarria de la Ramos, BaserriBerri, or San Fermín, before moving heading for the famous Café-Bar Gaucho at Espoz y Mina, 7. In Plaza del Castillo, the cultural center of the city, you'll find the Bar Txoko at one end, and the historic Café Iruñá at the other.

On busy Calle Estafeta you can start with Txirrintxa at No. 87, or El Chupinazo at No. 85, then move to Bar Fitero at No. 58, at the corner of Espoz y Mina. From there it’s across the street to Chez Evaristo or next door to Don Hilarión. Chez Beluga is a few meters down the street, as is Bodegon Sarria, at No. 50-52. Stop at La cocina de Alex Múgica in the GH La Perla, further down Estafeta. As you leave Estafeta, you’ll find Qwerty, Lajuana Gastrobar and Iruñazarra on Calle Mercaderes. On Calle Comedias you’ll find Bar Burglés and El Patio de las Comedias.

Pintxos In the Ensanche

If you are spending a night or two in Pamplona, then you can do your evening chiquiteo in the newer parts of the city with stops at our longtime favorites; Casa Luis and Bar El Embrujo on Calle Padre Calatayud, plus Bar Chelsy and Las Migas on Calle Iturrama.

Gastronomic Destinations

The city has its share of top rated gastronomic destinations beginning with Restaurante Alhambra, with 2 Repsol suns, where top Basque chef Juan Miro Arzak often dines, when not helping out in the kitchen during fiesta, and its sister, Restaurante Europa, with one Michelin star and one Repsol sun, located in the Hotel Europa just off the Plaza del Castillo, and under the direction of noted Euro-toque chef Pilar Idoate. Restaurante Enekorri, on Calle Tudela in the Ensanche, with 2 Repsol suns. Chef Koldo Rodero’s Restaurante Rodero, with one Michelin star and 3 Repsol suns, at Calle de Emilio Arrieta, 3, near the Plaza de Toros de Pamplona, the second largest bull ring in Spain. Ábaco, with chef Jesús Íñigo, one Repsol sun and a Bib Gourmand for 2018, is across from the bullring at Juan de Labrit, 19. La cocina de Álex Múgica is in the 5-star GH La Perla, of Hemingway fame, in the Plaza del Castillo, and the restaurant in the 4-star luxury boutique hotel Palacio Guendulain, also in
the old quarter. Chef Iñaki Andradas', who started at Zuberoa in Donostia, new gastronomic
venture is BaserriBerri, at Calle San Nicolás, 32. El Mercáo is at the market in the Ensanche
on Calle de Tafalla, while El Embrujo is in the Ensanche at Calle Padre Calatayud 16-18.
Restaurant Palacio Castillo de Gorráiz is located in the suburb of Gorráitz, a few minutes to
the east.

Traditional Navarran cuisine
Traditional cuisine can be enjoyed throughout the city, including the historic Casa Otano, at
Calle San Nicholas, 5, in the old quarter. Casa Manolo, one of our favorites during fiesta, is
on Calle García Castañón, across the street from the Iglesia de San Ignacio. Still another one
of our favorites, Casa Amparo, is at Calle Esquíroz, 22, in the Ensanche near the Hotel AC
Ciudad de Pamplona, while the very popular La Olla, an institution for 25 years, sits across
the street from the Plaza de Toros, at Avenue Roncesvalles, 2. Restaurante San Fermin, with
chef Matias Giocoli, is on Calle San Nicolás. Asador Olaverri, a traditional roasting house,
can be found at Calle de Sta Marta, 4. For vegetarian cuisine, try Restaurante Sarasate at
Calle San Nicolás, 19-21.

Dining outside the city
You’ll find several notable gastronomic destinations outside the city worth considering if you
are staying in Pamplona for a few days. These include Beti Jai in the village of Aoiz, 28 kms
east of Pamplona. El Molino de Urdániz, with a Michelin star and 2 Repsol suns, is 20
minutes north of the city on the N-135. Venta de Ulzama, another Bib Gourmand, is 30
minutes north just off the N-121-A on the way to San Sebastián, in the Ulzama valley. Hotel-
Restaurant Kuko is another 15 minutes north in the Baztan Valley. La venta de Etxalar,
Asador Oñaska and Villa de Igantzi are also worth a stop while in the Baztan.

Restaurante Túbal, with 2 Repsol suns, is in Tafalla, 30 minutes south on the AP-15. Asador
Epeleta, one Repsol sun, lies 30 minutes northwest of Pamplona near Lekunberri, on the
A-15 towards San Sebastián, as does Venta Muguiro. Both are recommended in the Michelin

In the south of Navarra, about an hour south of Pamplona, you’ll find Treintaitrés, with one
Repsol sun, in Tudela. Restaurant Maher, with 2 Repsol suns, is in the village of
Cintruénigo. Hotel-Chateau Pago de Cirsus, a winery estate in Ablitas, has an excellent
restaurant and one Repsol sun.
Wine Touring in the Kingdom of Navarra

Like the Ribera del Duero and the Rioja, Navarra is home to a wealth of premium wineries including 4 of Spain’s 17 official Vinos de Pagos, or DO de Pago; Señorío de Otazu, Prado de Irache, Señorío de Arínzano, and La Finca Bolandín, which was added in 2014. What is a DO de Pago, a Denominación de Origen? It is the very top classification a winery estate in Spain can achieve, similar to France’s Gran Cru Classé. These Pago wineries can only produce wines from grapes grown and aged on their own estate, and the estate must have an international reputation for producing wines of the very highest quality.

The wine growing region of Navarra covers more than 100 kms from Pamplona in the north to the Ebro River in the south, and enjoys the influence of the Atlantic, Continental and Mediterranean climates, and is comprised of five distinct wine growing regions: Baja Montaña, Valdizarbe, Tierra Estella, Ribera Alta and Ribera Baja in the Ebro River valley, which borders the Rioja Baja sub-region. In the Valdizarbe wine growing sub-zone you’ll find Bodegas y Viñedos Nekeas, producer of Vega Sindoa, which led in the resurgence of Spanish wines under the direction of Concha Vecino, one of Spain’s leading women winemakers.
Although the best known wines of Navarra are the light, fruity rosados, the region also produces a selection of esteemed chardonnays and well regarded tintos from the tempranillo, merlot, garnacha tinta and cabernet sauvignon grapes. **Bodegas Otazu** is the northernmost producer of fine red wines in Spain.

**Wineries southwest of Pamplona**

The **Señorío de Otazu** estate, located just outside of the village of Etxauri, 20 minutes drive southwest of the city, is the closest winery if arriving from San Sebastián-Donostia. It’s also one of our favorites, having been married in its beautiful 12th-century Romanist church, the **Iglesia de San Estebán de Otazu**. **Bodegas Pago de Larrainzar** and **Bodegas Irache** are in the nearby village of Ayegui, while the former Chivite Family Estate of **Bodegas Arínzano**, who’s vineyards cover some 128 hectares, can be found a few minutes away to the east, just off the NA-132. This makes for a couple of great days of wine touring and tasting, but would be much easier, and more relaxing, if staying in Pamplona.

Other wineries in the Valdizarbe wine growing region not to miss are **Bodegas Orvalaiz** in the village of Obanos, 20 minutes south of Pamplona on the A-12, on the road to the Logroño. **Bodegas Nekeas**, is in the village of Añorbe, 10 minutes east of Obanos, off the NA-601, while the estate of **Señorío de Sarría**, whose Bodega de Sarria’s vineyards covers 100 hectares lies 10 minutes to the east, on the road from Puente La Reina, the medieval village 25 kilometers south of Pamplona, where the two main routes of the Pilgrim's Way to Santiago converge.

**Bodegas Tandem** is a newer winery located 30 minutes south of Pamplona in Lácar, in the beautiful Yerri Valley, the fourth stage of the French Way, where summer nights are cooler than in the Rioja, allowing the grapes to ripen gradually. Another new winery in the valley, one of the highest areas in Navarra, is **Aroa Bodegas**. While in Lácar, you can have lunch at Bodegas Lezaun’s **Asador**, in the village. **Bodegas Castillo de Monjardín** is in Villamayor, in the valley of San Esteban, the heart of the Tierra Estella region, about half way between Pamplona and Logroño on the A-12. They produce an excellent barrel-fermented Chardonnay.

**Wineries south of Pamplona**

The estate of **Bodegas Pago de Araiz** and **Bodegas Ochoa** are in the historic village of Olite, in the Ribera Alta, about 40 minutes south of Pamplona on the A-15, while **Bodega Inurrieta**, also in the Ribera Alta, is located near Falces along the Rio Arga, another 20 minutes south in the Ribera Alta.

About another hour south of Olite you’ll discover the 220 hectare wine estate of **Bodega Pago de Cirsus**, La Finca Bolandín, near the village of Ablitas, in the Ribera Baja, just south of
Tudela. The 4-star Hotel-Chateau is only a stones throw from the Rioja Baja, and one of the southern most wineries in Navarra.

**Overnighting in Pamplona**

If you decide to spend a night or two, Pamplona has a good selection of hotels from which to choose, including the 5-star **GH La Perla** and deluxe 4-star boutique hotel **Palacio de Guendulain** in the old quarter. The luxurious 5-star hotel **AlmaPamplona-Muga de Beloso**, just northeast of the old quarter, near the Río Arga, and the 4-star **AC Ciudad de Pamplona** by Marriott in Barrio Iturrama, just south of the **Ciudadela**, Pamplona’s historic fortress and its largest green space.

There is also the 4-star **Hotel Maisonnave**, 3-star **Hotel Europa**, where you might run into the famous Basque chef Juan Miro Arzak during fiesta, and 1-star **Castillo de Javier** and the new 4-star **Pompaelo Urban Spa** in the old quarter, the 4-star **Tres Reyes** and 2-star **Hotel Eslava** located on the edge of the old quarter, the historic 3-star **Hotel Yoldi**, plus the **Hotel Avenida, NH Pamplona Iruña Park** and **Blanca de Navarra** in the city center.
The Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve

Declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1984, the Urdaibai is found on the north Atlantic coast in the province of Vizcaya (Bizkaia), and is one of the most richly diverse landscapes in the Basque Country. Covering some 230 square kilometers, it includes 22 towns and villages and constitutes 10% of the surface area of Vizcaya. Both stunningly beautiful and an utterly tranquil jewel, it’s an area of unspoiled natural beauty, a spectacular wetlands that teems with wildlife, and is the most important wetland zone in the Basque country. Sheltered by Cape Matxitxako, the Urdaibai, which means “River of the Boars” in Euskera, is a place where lush green valleys reach down through the estuary to the Bay of Biscay and the Cantabrian sea. It’s a land of dramatic cliffs, low lying pine forest covered mountains, dense oak groves, and some of the finest, most popular beaches in the Basque Country, including Laga, which faces the sea at the foot of the cliffs of Peñón de Ogoño, Laida, the largest beach, at the mouth of the river with its constantly shifting sands, and Mundaka beach, the most famous, known as the surfers’ beach, with its dramatic left-breaking waves attracting surfers from around the world.

The marshlands and coastal wetlands, a paradise for birds and the many marine species that live here, has been a special protected area since 1994, and offers great birdwatching,
including some of the local nesting species like the Osprey and migrating water fowl such as Spoonbills, Grey Herons, Cormorants and even the Eurasian bittern, a rare sight elsewhere on the Iberian Peninsula. The historic and unique 15th-century Madariaga Tower now serves as home to the Urdaibai Bird Center. There is also network of twenty footpaths for short walks and a countryside sprinkled with traditional Basque farmhouses known as caseríos, several of which have been converted into attractive, family run guest houses.

The Urdaibai has a mild, humid climate influenced by the proximity of the sea, a temperature range with only slight variations, rainfall distributed evenly through the year and few frosts. The best season to visit is May-September, to enjoy its lovely beaches, its world-class surfing, for the opportunity to explore the wetlands by kayak or canoe, to do some birdwatching along the estuary, or to participate in its many festivals. At the heart of the region is the lively and prosperous market town of Gernika, symbol of Basque pride and identity. To the north is the former whaling port of Bermeo, still the most important fishing port on the northern coast, and the surfing center of Mundaka. Bilbao is a half hour’s drive to the west.
Staying in the Urdaibai

Because of its Unesco status, there cannot be any large, multi-story hotels or resorts in the Urdaibai Biosphere other than those that existed before 1984. Most accommodations here are newly built or reconverted traditional Basque farmhouses, some providing 3 or 4-star hotel comforts but at a pleasantly lower rate. For families with children, some of the Landatxea options offer apartments. For more information on rural guesthouses and farmhouse accommodations in Euskadi, the País Vasco, check the Nekatur website.

Staying on the west side of the Estuary

The 12-room country inn Lurdeia, situated in the hills above Bermeo, sits in the middle of an organic farm, complete with its own lake, unbeatable views of the Cantabrian sea and music dedicated by Kepa Junkera, who owns a house nearby, and Juan Karlos Irizar. Founded by five friends who quit their day jobs, the land and farmhouse where completely renovated over several years and now offers a unique setting in the Urdaibai.

The 3-star rural hotel Atxurra, with 12 rooms and 4 apartments, was built on the site of the original “caserio” or farm, 6 kms from the port of Bermeo on Mount Sollube and is run by the decedents of the shepherders. The beautiful 6-room Casa Rural Ontxene is in San Kristóbal.
(Busturia), just off the road from Gernika to Bermeo, and easy bus and rail service to Bilbao, looks out over the expanse of the estuary from the western bank of the river.

**Staying on the east side of the Estuary**

Small and rather isolated, but with truly unforgettable, eye popping views of the Cantabrian sea, Mundaka, Bermeo and the lighthouse at Matxitxako, and Ogoño Capes is Gametxo Hotel & Spa. It's a cute guesthouse with 18 rather compact guest quarters in the renovated Basque farmhouse inn. The adjacent renovated farmhouse houses five family apartments and two studios, but not all the rooms face the sea.

Opened in 1988, the Casa Txopebenta, one of the first rural houses we stayed in, is a beautiful stone and timber farmhouse, complete with wood beamed ceilings, a charming sitting room with a corner fireplace for its guests, and six small, but cozy, antique filled rooms. It was also the first of the Casas Rurales built in the Basque Country, a true pioneer. Nearby, in the Barrio (auzoa) Basetxetas of Gautegiz-Arteaga, Casa Rural Urresti offers tidy and pleasant accommodations both for those traveling on a budget and for families with small children. There are 2 apartments along with 6 double rooms.

And for honeymooners, or those celebrating a special anniversary, there is even a small romantic French Neo-Gothic castle, El Castillo de Arteaga, dating from the 13th-century. Left to the elements, it was ordered restored in 1868 by the Empress Eugenie de Montijo, wife of Napoleon III. Specialists were brought in from Versailles to aid in the restoration. On belonging to Eugenio Bonaparte, the luxury 13-room boutique hotel is in the village of Gautegiz-Arteaga, about a 10-minute drive northeast of Gernika, not far from the Caves of Santimamiñe and El Bosque de Oma, the painted forest.

**Staying south of Gernika**

The beautifully reconverted 18th-century 8-room Basque farmhouse Urune, in the countryside on the slope of the Atxeli Mountain, is a newer upscale property located off the BI-635, the main highway running north-south through the Urdaibai from Amorebieta up to Bermeo, and offers views of Gernika-Lumo and the estuary beyond. The dramatically reconverted Basque farmhouse-turned country inn, and surprisingly avant-garde 6-room Aldori Landetxea, can be found 2 kms from Muxika-Múgica. The inn offers an outdoor terrace, a chill-out lounge, fireplace and dinner service upon request.
Staying west of Gernika

Hotel Katxi

Located in the small, very quiet hamlet of Morga, in the Andra Mari neighborhood (neighborhood in Basque, *auzoa*) in the Urdaibai interior, this 3-star rural hotel, a newly built red stucco and timber farmhouse, is a charmer. It offers nine guest quarters, divided into double rooms, superior doubles, jr. suites and suites, and all are lovingly, individually decorated and beautifully maintained. They offer a/c, heated floors, Wi-Fi, immaculate baths, satellite TV, safes, minibars and bathrobes. Some have DVD and CD players, and all are non-smoking. The bedrooms are all located on the second floor, and there is no elevator. The downstairs has a cozy and inviting living room with fireplace and bookcase stocked with guides and a breakfast room to the right, decorated in charmingly rustic Basque country style. There is a terrace with lounge chairs running along the back of the hotel that provides pretty country views.

It receives a Q rating for quality, and the hostess, Miriam, takes excellent care of her guests and provides plentiful touring information along with laundry service. The owners also run the hundred-year old Restaurante Katxi, which serves traditional Basque cuisine and is well regarded by the locals. Rates-doubles start at 89€, double superiors at 99€, jr. suites at 125€ and suites at 155€. The hotel belongs to Xarma, the association of charming, boutique hotels of the Basque Country. The hotel lies 10 minutes from Gernika. Bilbao is a 15-minute drive away. Plan on a 15-20 minute drive to the airport.

Tel: (+34) 946 270 740

Near the surfing beaches of Plentzia and Sopelana (Slopela)

Larrakoetxea Landatxea

A member of Nekatur, the Basque Rural Homes Association, this lovely property does not technically lie within the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve but instead in the Uribe region of Vizcaya, along with Hotel Arresi. If one comes to the area for swimming or surfing, it makes an ideal spot to rest and relax, as the surfers' beaches of Plentzia and Gorliz sit within a short, 10-minute drive. Bilbao lies a half hour away, as does Gernika, and it is a twenty-minute drive from the Bilbao airport to this rural B&B. This purpose built traditional Basque farmhouse of stone and noble woods is very attractive and is surrounded by meadows and forests. It offers more hotel-like facilities, making it seem less like a country B&B, although it keeps the low *casa rural* pricing. Amenities include a full restaurant, an *asador*, specializing in grilled fish and red meats (the owner is the chef), a café-bar, meeting rooms
for corporate retreats, complimentary Wi-Fi, a full stone terrace overlooking the sea for soaking in the gorgeous sunsets and two living rooms downstairs.

The six spacious and attractively decorated double rooms (one handicapped accessible) have lovely wood furniture and come equipped with satellite TV, a/c, phones, safes and full baths with hair dryer and make up mirror. There is ample outdoor parking.

Tel: (+34) 946 770 860 / 946 770 383

**Kaian**

Both a 3-star boutique hotel and acclaimed restaurant, Kaian sits at the port in the beach town of Plentzia and makes a handy and very comfortable accommodation. Run by sisters Natalia and Patricia Zaldua, it’s housed in a pretty chalet on Plentzia’s main street and offers 7 very attractively decorated rooms, all with a/c, complimentary Internet access and mini bars. The “special” rooms and suites tempt with their lovely sea views. And the suite is a steal at 105€ + VAT, in low season. Breakfast is 6€/person. An additional attraction is its gourmet restaurant on the ground floor with covered terrace for summer dining. The family also owns Arteaga Castle, Komentu Maitea and Baserri Maitea, in the Urdaibai.

Tel: (+34) 946 775 470
Festivals In The Urdaibai

Carnival
On the Sunday of Carnival, dancers, dantzariak, in Markina don bear costumes and perform the zahagi-dantza, whose mission is to ward off ghosts and frighten the children. This is followed by the “goose run” (see Lekeitio below) - here seven or eight young men of the village grab at six dead geese hanging from a rope, pulling them by the neck in an attempt to decapitate them while galloping back and forth on horseback without stopping. In Mundaka there are the dances of the atorras and the lamiak, siren, or nereid-like creatures in Basque mythology that live in the river.

Fiesta de San José
St. Joseph’s Day, March 19, the presentation of the txakolí harvest in Bakio

Summer Solstice
On the eve of San Juan (St. John the Baptist) on June 23, there will be bonfires and dances of the witches in Bermeo and Lekeitio.
**Fiesta de San Juan**
The pilgrimage to the shrine of San Juan de Gaztelugatxe happens on June 24.

**Fiesta de San Pedro**
“Kaixaranka” dances in Lekeitio are on June 29. A dancer dressed in a top hat and tail coat with the keys of St. Peter in hand, dances atop a *kutxa* or chest, carried on the shoulders of eight fishermen.

**Fiesta de la Magdalena**
Following a dispute over who owned the small island of Ízaro, at the mouth of the Mundaka estuary, the fishing villages of Bermeo and Mundaka decided to settle the disagreement with a regatta, with the citizens of Elantxobe serving as referees. Bermeo was declared the winner, and since then, in a tradition dating back to 1641, every July 22 the Bermeo city council verifies its jurisdiction over the island with the celebration of *Las Magdalenas Bermeo*.

The day starts late morning when the city hall delegation proceeds to the church of Santa Eufemia for mass, after which a hundred or so citizens of Bermeo, along with the mayor, and all attired in navy blue, wearing traditional blue and white checked pañuelos (kerchiefs), embark on a boat trip to the island of Ízaro. When reaching the island, the group climbs to its top of the rock and places the Bermeo and Basque flags to symbolize the “retaking” of Izaro. Back on the boat, the mayor throws a tile out to sea, saying “*Honaino heltzen dira Bermeoko ituginak*”. Where the tile falls symbolizes the limits of Bermeo’s sovereignty for another year. Afterwards, the group continues on to the neighboring village of Elantxobe where they disembark to be greeted by the mayor of Elantxobe who will hand over to Bermeo the ceremonial staff, signing authority over island. After that, they proceed to the port of Mundaka where they will do the same ceremony. Around 7:30 in the evening the delegation returns to Bermeo to be greeted by the populace, and march back to city hall.

**Antzar Eguna**
The San Antolin festival, held every year from September 1-8, reaches its peak on September 5 with the "Antzar Eguna", the day of the geese in Lekeitio, one of the most popular, and bizarre festivals in the province. The *Antzar Eguna* is an age-old fiesta, dating back more than 350 years, once celebrated the length and breadth of the country. Prior to 1722, the “goose run” was performed in the village square, but since then the event has taken place in the water. And prior to 1986, the geese were hung alive.

This truly wacky game consists of decapitating a dead goose hanging from a rope in the middle of the harbour – the participants doing so by using nothing but their body weight and the strength of their arms while being hoisted in and out of the water. Each participant...
comes alongside the goose hanging from a rope and grabs the neck of the dead animal, then jumps into the water. Meanwhile, a group of "sailors" - kids from the town - pull on the end of the rope, sending both goose and contestant flying into the air. The “sailors” then release the rope, plunging the contestant and his goose back into the water. The idea is to try to separate the goose’s body from its head while withstanding this constant jostling. If you decide to venture to Lekeitio to get a first hand look at this crazy event, remember that it attracts thousands every year.

Los Marijeses de Gernika
This tradition, dating from at least the 16th-century, involves a large group of Gernika-Lumo citizens (los marijeses) who depart the church of Santa María at 4:00 am each morning during the nine nights before Christmas starting on December 16, and walk the streets of the town for the next two hours serenading the townsfolk with traditional Basque songs having to do with the Virgin Mary and the Nativity. On Christmas Eve they are joined by former components of the group and family members and their songs go on until noon, announcing the arrival of Christmas. In the past it was part of the tradition practiced in Arratia and Zeberio and all of Busturia, Markina and the Lea-Artibai valleys, but continues only in Gernika since the end of the Civil War.
Gernika-Lumo

This historic city northeast of Bilbao, the ancient seat of Basque democracy and symbol of Basque nationhood, was founded in the mid 14th-century and sits at the crossroads of the roads from Bermeo to Durango and Bilbao to Lekeitio. You’ll find a stature of the founder Don Tello, Lord of Biscay, standing in the plaza in front of the town hall and the Peace Museum. Because of its symbolism, and fiercely Republican stance during the Civil War, Generalísimo Francisco Franco targeted Gernika for horrid punishment, becoming the site of the infamous saturation bombing, “a dry run”, to practice the Luftwaffe’s theories of terror bombing in preparation for the saturation bombing prevalent during WWII. This historic tragedy began the afternoon of April 26, 1937, market day, when the villagers and nearby neighbors had gathered at the weekly market. A squadron of Hitler’s Luftwaffe Condor Legion and the Italian Fascist Aviazione Legionaria, fifty-nine warplanes, began their bombardment of the town at 4:30 pm, the attack lasting three hours, uninterrupted, as reported by the journalist George Steer. The Basque government estimated that 1,645 people died in the air raid (later research has reduced that number), and almost every building in the town was destroyed. Picasso’s 1937 painting "Guernica", displayed in the Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid, immortalizes this massacre.
Principal Sights

The Tree of Gernika
Symbol of Basque democracy, *Gernikako Arbola*, the tree survived the bombing and can be found next to the old Basque parliament building, *Casa de Juntas*. The original oak tree, the “father”, was planted in the 14th-century and lasted 450 years. The third tree survived the bombing in 1937 but was replaced because of fungus with the current one in 1986. The trunk of the original oak, under which the lords of Biscay would promise to uphold ancient Basque privileges, *fueros*, is protected in a pavilion while the seedling spreads its branches.

Casa de Juntas
The Assembly House, built in the early 1800s, was designed in neo classical style by architect Alfonso Echevarría, and now serves as the home of the Vizcayan parliament. It is at this site where the Basque parliament met for centuries beneath the branches of a sacred oak tree to make decisions on matters pertaining to Vizcaya. The tradition was broken when the Basque system of law was abolished after the last Carlist War in 1879, but revived in 1979 with the democracy. Inside the chamber you’ll find a magnificent stained-glass ceiling that depicts the ancient oak tree. It is open daily to visitors from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm and 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm during the summer, closes at 6:00 pm in the winter. Admission is free, but you’ll need an appointment to visit.

Parque de los Pueblos de Europa
Behind the Casa de Juntas sits a public park in which are displayed Henry Moore’s “Large Figure in a Shelter” and his contemporary, the Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida’s “Gure Altaren Etxea - Our Father’s House”, that express the symbolism of Gernika as a city of peace. The park is open daily from 10:00 am to 7:00 pm, and until 9:00 pm during the summer.

Basque Peace Museum
There is also a very moving and award winning museum in the Plaza de los Fueros, Gernika’s showpiece, which I highly recommend. Your visit there will leave you with a lasting memory of this tragic event and a greater appreciation of the Basque struggle for freedom to practice their language and culture. I would always include a visit to the Peace Museum in any trip to Gernika. I was so impressed that I bought the video (in English) and shared it with my Modern European History professor friends. The museum is open March-September, Tuesday-Saturday from 10:00 am to 7:00 pm without interruption, and on Sundays from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. October-February it’s open Tuesday-Saturday from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm and again in the afternoons from 4:00 to 6:00 pm. Closed Monday. General admission is free. Guided visits (28€) are available for groups of 8 or more.
Euskal Herria Museoa

This Museum of Basque History and Culture is found in the Alegría Palace, a magnificent Baroque edifice built in 1733, which miraculously remained standing, fully intact, during the bombing of 1937. It sits next to the Parque de los Pueblos de Europa and near the Casa de Juntas and the Tree of Gernika. The museum serves to promote the understanding of the historical, political and cultural importance of the Basque people and displays on four floors, with elevator, a sizable collection of artifacts relating to the Basque history and ethnography. The building is handicapped accessible. General admission is 3€. Free audioguides are available in several languages. Open Tuesday-Saturday from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm and again from 4:00 to 7:00 pm, and on Sundays from 10:30 am to 2:30 pm. In July and August it’s also open on Sundays from 4:00 pm until 7:30 pm. Admission is 3,50€, 1,75€ for seniors, and free on Saturdays.

Market Day

Gernika remains an industrialized town, once considered a punishment by Franco after the civil war. Not much remains of its former glory, but the town is worth a visit nonetheless, particularly on Monday, the traditional market day (since the mid 14th-century), which in the past was considered a holiday for the people of Gernika and the province. Because of the crowds, you must arrive early, between 9:00 and 9:30 am, to find a space to park. Spaces fill up quickly. Local farmers gather and set up their stands surrounding the indoor market in the heart of the city. Here you can purchase the fabled red beans of Gernika, alubias, or the equally prized green peppers, along with locally produced txakolí and the Idiazábal artisan ewe’s milk cheese. On the first Monday of October a cattle fair takes place, and on the last Monday of October, there is a special agricultural products fair.

Dining in Gernika

Zallo Berri

While visiting Gernika, reserve a table for a great lunch at Zallo Berri, Juan Kaltzada, 79, just beyond the Red Cross building on the road leading out of town. Our friend and Basque chef Joseba Jiménez de Jiménez, first recommended this great restaurant to us several years ago. Gorka Ordorika, the skilled sommelier, offers a very well chosen wine list with a good number of quite reasonably priced local txakolís. The restaurant is now in the hands of chef Eneko Ordorika. Try their excellent 27€ lunch menu. Opens for lunch at 12:45 and for dinner at 8:00. Closed Sunday night and Thursday.

Tel: (+34) 946 251 800
**Zimela**

At Carlos Gangoiti, 57, at the northern edge of town on the road to Bermeo, this spot, with an energetic chef, is housed in a three-story, Basque farmhouse-like building painted a bright mustard color with dark green trim. Inside you’ll find contemporary décor, done in white, red, grey and black and very well spaced tables. The name of the game here is grilled red meats and fish. For those folks watching their wallets, Zimela offers a solid value weekday *menú del día*, two courses for only 17€ and a weekend menu for 26€. The restaurant is open year around for lunch, and for dinner on Friday and Saturday. Dinner is served daily in July, August and December.

Tel: (+34) 946 251 012

**Baserri Maitea**

For a treat in a beautifully decorated, atmospheric stone and wood 18th century Basque farmhouse, head a few kilometers up the road to Forúa, the well-to-do suburb of Gernika, to the restaurant Baserri Maitea. Follow the signs up the hill through an upscale housing development. The road may seem more like a farm road, but a great meal awaits you at its end. Former professional soccer star, Juan Antonio Zaldúa is the owner. Decorated in a sophisticated yet rustic style, with its beautifully set tables, charming farmhouse décor, lovely, relaxed ambiance and perfectly executed dishes, as it always makes for a memorable experience. Every dish is delicious here and made of the highest quality ingredients found at the market-filet mignon topped with an Idiazábal cheese sauce, perfectly grilled *chuletón*, or a grilled monkfish or porgy. And the delectable desserts are all made to order. We had one of our most memorable lunches here. Very creative food beautifully presented and a gem of a find. One Repsol sun. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

Tel: (+34) 946 253 408

**Staying south of Gernika**

The beautifully reconverted 18th-century 8-room Basque farmhouse **Urune**, in the countryside on the slope of the Atxeli Mountain, is a newer upscale property located off the BI-635, the main highway running north-south through the Urdaibai from Amorebieta up to Bermeo, and offers views of Gernika-Lumo and the estuary beyond. The dramatically reconverted Basque farmhouse-turned country inn, and surprisingly avant-garde 6-room **Aldori Landetxea**, can be found 2 kms from Muxika-Múgica. The inn offers an outdoor terrace, a chill-out lounge, fireplace and dinner service upon request.
Staying west of Gernika

Hotel Katxi
Located in the small, very quiet hamlet of Morga, in the Andra Mari neighborhood (neighborhood in Basque, *auzoa*) in the Urdaibai interior, this 3-star rural hotel, a newly built red stucco and timber farmhouse, is a charmer. It offers nine guest quarters, divided into double rooms, superior doubles, jr. suites and suites, and all are lovingly, individually decorated and beautifully maintained. They offer a/c, heated floors, Wi-Fi, immaculate baths, satellite TV, safes, minibars and bathrobes. Some have DVD and CD players, and all are non-smoking. The bedrooms are all located on the second floor, and there is no elevator. The downstairs has a cozy and inviting living room with fireplace and bookcase stocked with guides and a breakfast room to the right, decorated in charmingly rustic Basque country style. There is a terrace with lounge chairs running along the back of the hotel that provides pretty country views.

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Tel: (+34) 946 270 740

Near the surfing beaches of Plentzia and Sopelana (Slopela)

Larrakoetxea Landatxea
A member of Nekatur, the Basque Rural Homes Association, this lovely property does not technically lie within the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve but instead in the Uribe region of Vizcaya, along with Hotel Arresi. If one comes to the area for swimming or surfing, it makes an ideal spot to rest and relax, as the surfers’ beaches of Plentzia and Gorliz sit within a short, 10-minute drive. Bilbao lies a half hour away, as does Gernika, and it is a twenty-minute drive from the Bilbao airport to this rural B&B. This purpose built traditional Basque farmhouse of stone and noble woods is very attractive and is surrounded by meadows and forests. It offers more hotel-like facilities, making it seem less like a country B&B, although it keeps the low *casa rural* pricing. Amenities include a full restaurant, an *asador*, specializing in grilled fish and red meats (the owner is the chef), a café-bar, meeting rooms
for corporate retreats, complimentary Wi-Fi, a full stone terrace overlooking the sea for soaking in the gorgeous sunsets and two living rooms downstairs.

The six spacious and attractively decorated double rooms (one handicapped accessible) have lovely wood furniture and come equipped with satellite TV, a/c, phones, safes and full baths with hair dryer and make up mirror. There is ample outdoor parking.

Tel: (+34) 946 770 860 / 946 770 383

**Kaian**

Both a 3-star boutique hotel and acclaimed restaurant, Kaian sits at the port in the beach town of Plentzia and makes a handy and very comfortable accommodation. Run by sisters Natalia and Patricia Zaldua, it’s housed in a pretty chalet on Plentzia’s main street and offers 7 very attractively decorated rooms, all with a/c, complimentary Internet access and mini bars. The “special” rooms and suites tempt with their lovely sea views. And the suite is a steal at 105€ + VAT, in low season. Breakfast is 6€/person. An additional attraction is its gourmet restaurant on the ground floor with covered terrace for summer dining. The family also owns Arteaga Castle, Komentu Maitea and Baserri Maitea, in the Urdaibai.

Tel: (+34) 946 775 470
The Eastern Coastal Drive

Leaving Gernika, you can take the BI-2235 northwest towards surfing capitol of Mundaka, popular Llaida Beach, the fishing village of Bermeo and the Txakoli vineyards of Bakio, or when you reach the fork in the road, you may want to keep right for the drive to Elantxobe and Lekeitio. Follow signs to Gautegiz-Arteaga on the BI-2238 to the village of Kortezubi. There you will find two tourist sites, the first, the prehistoric caves of Santimamiñe, and second, the interesting and beautiful Enchanted Forest of Oma. Both visits can be done the same day.

Prehistoric Cave of Santimamiñe

These cave paintings were discovered in 1916, and a year later were verified as dating from the upper Magdalenian, between 14,500 and 12,000 years ago. The paintings consist of charcoal sketches of thirty four bison, seven goats, six horses, a bear and a deer with incomplete remains of other figures. After ninety years of visits to the cave, it was closed so that extensive cleaning and conservation work could be done to maintain its treasures. The new exhibition here was born as an answer to these conservation requirements, and to allow visitors to enjoy the site in a sustainable, responsible way. The visit here is a virtual one. Unlike touring a “replica” cave, as visitors do at Lascaux II in the Dordogne and the neo
caves of Altamira, here visitors gather at the San Mamés hermitage to don 3-D glasses and experience an exciting, going up and down, virtual visit to the entire cave, to see how it was formed and to admire the prehistoric art within. After the virtual tour, the guide takes visitors up the hill to the mouth of the actual cave to have a glimpse at the restoration process. The whole experience lasts for around ninety minutes. To reach the site from Gernika-Lumo, take the ring road towards Lekeitio and then the BI-638 to the roundabout at Barrutia. Continue on the BI-2238 after passing through Idokiliz, taking a right turn onto the BI-4244 to the end of the road. Leave your car in the parking lot in front of the Bar-Restaurant Lezika. Open for guided visits daily from mid-April to mid-October and Tuesday-Sunday during the rest of the year. General admission is 5€, free for children 6 and younger.

**Forest of Oma - The Painted Forest**

The artist of this unique work is the famed Basque artist, painter and sculptor Agustín Ibarrola, who created this highly unusual work deep in this pine forest between 1983 and 1991. Ibarrola’s canvas is the vast pine forest of Oma, where he used vibrant colors to paint some forty-five tree trunks that sit deep in the heart of this haunting forest. His motifs vary from geometrical figures, to people to animals to giants or eyes or rainbows. This amazing and highly original forest artwork is also known as the *Bosque Encantado*, or Enchanted Forest. Access into the heart of this silent, mysterious art display has been greatly improved with the addition of a bannister and staircase that lead visitors down the 300 meters to the site, but the climb is still steep.

**Elantxobe**

From your visit to the Enchanted Forest and the cave of Santimamiñe, you take the BI-3237 on to this cute little fishing village, whose fishermen’s homes cling precariously to an almost vertical cliff. It’s completely authentic, rather picturesque but also somewhat forgotten. You won’t find shops or gourmet restaurants here, just one very modest hostal with Mom & Pop style dining, but you will find plenty of photo ops. The town is served by the Bizkaia Bus, and in a tiny square in the upper town, the bus must spin around on a turnstile to make its way out of the village. If you find yourself in need of a nice lunch, drive on towards the village of Ea and stop 3-1/2 kms before Ea, in the village of Natxitua, at the modest little Hotel Ermintxo overlooking the coast.

**Lekeitio**

After you visit to Elantxobe, continue driving east via the winding coastal road through the villages of Ea and Ispaster, a beautiful drive, to the atmospheric coastal village of Lekeitio, 55 kms from Bilbao and 72 kms from San Sebastián-Donostia. Impressive, as it is unique, your last stop of the day is fiercely Basque, quite picturesque and a very pro-independence fishing community-cum summer resort. Like Bermeo, Lekeitio was founded as a whaling port and
has a very attractive harbor surrounded by colorful fishermen’s houses with their typical glassed in balconies. It now thrives on timber, fishing, canning and tourism. The excellent Ortiz brand of canned tuna, bonito de norte, is produced here. Its pretty port is filled with brightly painted red, blue and green fishing boats, cafes and restaurants with outdoor terraces and nautical shops. And the ladies of Lekeitio still carry on with their traditions of mending nets and selling fish at the pier. Lekeitio’s crown jewel is its Gothic Basílica de Santa María de la Asunción, considered one of the finest late Gothic edifices in the region. Note its exterior of double tiered flying buttresses and gargoyles and make sure to visit the inside to marvel at its magnificent, recently restored 16th-century Gothic Flemish altarpiece.

Lekeitio is blessed with two excellent beaches, which become extremely crowded during July and August. Playa Itzunza, 250 meters long, is the urban beach. The Lea river estuary divides it from the Playa Karaspio east of town. The Playa Karaspio has a car park (which fills early), a bar, restaurant and lifeguards.

If you venture to Lekeitio on a day trip during the summer you will find it quite challenging to find a parking spot, as it is a hustling, bustling place and the few municipal parking lots fill up quickly, usually by 10:00 am. I sometimes have luck at the parking lot on the south side of town, when exiting town on the BI-2405 towards Markina. You’ll see the lot on your right, where there is a Bizkaia Bus stop, before reaching the Mesón Arropain restaurant on your left. From your Urdaibai base you might consider taking the Bizkaia bus to Lekeitio from Gernika or Gautegiz-Arteaga during the hectic months of July and August.

**Overnighting in Lekeitio**

If you have a day or two to spend in the area and want to use Lekeitio as your base, I highly recommend an overnight at the reasonably priced Hotel Zubieta, a charming 12-room hotel run by the same owners as the Palacio de Urgoiti. It is a charming, atmospheric and comfortable 3-star inn sitting on the grounds of the Zubieta Palace. The restored 18th-century former stables has its own parking, a library, bar bistro and is bike friendly. It also offers four apartments sleeping 4 persons each. While the Hotel Zubieta sits away from the tourist crowds, it is an easy walk into town, and close to the Mesón Arropain restaurant. Palacio Oxangoiti is a very attractive property, an 18th-century noble home, was first converted into a restaurant and is now a beautiful 7-room, family-run inn, just steps from city hall, the Basílica de Santa María, the harbor and about 100 yards from the city beach. While the inn does not provide bar service or meals other than breakfast, nor does it have a lounge or private parking, it does make a very attractive and reasonably priced choice for those who wish a base in the heart of town and aren’t disturbed by church bells and a bit of weekend noise from the bars.
Inland from Lekeitio

Markina-Xemein

Lying inland, in the Lea Aribai valley, a half-hour drive south of Lekeitio, is the medieval village of with its walled town center, known as the “cradle of pelota” because many of the world’s pelota champions hail from here. The locals even refer to its frontón as the “university of pelota”. The town has managed to preserve a fair amount of its monumental heritage of palaces, typical Basque tower-houses and convents, including the beautiful 18th-century Patrokua Palace. You can visit the Monasterio de Zenarruza (Ziortza), with it’s Collegiate Church of Ziortza dating from the 15th-century. On the Pilgrim’s Road to Santiago de Compostela, it’s a popular destination during Carnival, but other than that it’s a somewhat sleepy place. Stop and pick up some artisan Idiazábal cheese, or a handwoven wicker scoop, a cesta for a cesta punta.

Ziortza-Bolibar

You can head back to Gernika-Lumo from Markina-Xemein following the BI-2224, passing through the tiny medieval village, birthplace of Simón Bolívar de la Rementería, the “Liberator”. Here you can visit the Simón Bolívar Museum, housed in the Errementarikua
farmhouse, open Tuesday to Friday from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm and on weekends and holidays from noon to 2:00 pm. Entry is free.

**Munitibar-Gerrikaitz**

This small village sits at the crossroads of Lekeitio, Gernika and Bilbao, in the foothills of Mount Oiz, and celebrates its patron saint’s day, San Pedro, on June 29, with a mass, *trikitrixas*, Basque accordion players, traditional dancing, a mus tournament, and lunch.

If you happen to be in the area during lunch time, there are a few good options, including Antsotegi in Markina-Xemein. Armola is located at Barrio Iruzubieta, 2, in nearby Ziortza-Bolibar, while the farmhouse-Restaurant Ikestei is at Barrio Zeinka-Ziarregi, 3.

**Balcón de Bizkaia**

Or take the BI-3231 at Munitibar to the Balcony of Biscay, an especially beautiful Mirador, or lookout point, where one can view the mountainous scenery of the Urdaibai and its huge expanse of forests. Legend has it that this area was where witches used to gather at nightfall; thus, the locals avoided passing through this place after dark.

To reach the Mirador from Gernika, you go south on the BI-635 from Gernika and turn left (east) at Zugaztieta, passing through the tiny hamlet of Ajuria, where you’ll find the Txakoli winery Bodega Berroja. Continue on the BI-3231 towards Munitibar-Gerrikaitz to km 7.4, where you’ll find the viewpoint, looking northwest into the Urdaibai.
Your Western Coastal Excursion

After leaving Gernika, take the BI-2235 up to the surfers’ paradise of Mundaka and around the coast to Bakio.

Mundaka

I have enjoyed a quick visit or two to this little fishing port with its maze of narrow, winding streets, which has become a surfing town because of its famous left break. If you want to stay in the village, then you can try the well-kept 12-room Atalaya Hotel, with its bright white façade dominated by bay windows and set back from the Cantabrian sea at the mouth of the Roa de Guernica, was built in 1911. Rooms are small, but comfortable. There is also a charming restaurant one kilometer south of town overlooking the river, opposite Laida Beach, Portuondo, with free shuttle service from Gernika and Bermeo.

Bermeo

After a brief stop in Mundaka, I suggest you continue on to the historic whaling port of Bermeo. It is the most important fishing port of the several fishing villages along the coast. It became prosperous from its whaling industry and still incorporates a whale in its coat of arms. In the 1500s Bermeo maintained the largest fishing flotilla in all of Spain. The ships
for Columbus’s second voyage to America were built here, and its proud maritime history is displayed in the town’s excellent Fishermen’s Museum, *El Museo del Pescador*. To actually appreciate this working port you must explore the port area. The colorful harbor is lined with four and five story tall fishermen’s homes with glassed in balconies. A fish auction is still held at the pier on weekday mornings between 7:00 and 8:00 am and again at 6:00 pm in the afternoon.

The town also serves as a surprising outdoor sculpture museum. If you park your car in the large parking lot above the town, next to the park below the cemetery, and walk down to the port, following the “alde zaharra” signs, you will first pass through the medieval gate, the *Arco de San Vicente*. Here you will see the bronze statue of the “Lady Fishmongers”, then the sculpture “They’re Coming!” at the Plazuela de Torrontero, and at the old port is “The Last Wave, the Last Breath” by the painter and sculptor Enrique Zubia. Works in bronze by native son Néstor Basterretxea (1924-2014), a contemporary of Eduardo Chillida and a cultural icon, can be found in the Old Port as well.

**Museum of the Fishermen**

The *El Museo del Pescador* museum, or *Arrantzaleen Museoa* in Basque, is housed in the 16th-century Ercilla Tower, a National Monument, and is one of the few museums dedicated to the life, habits, work, and techniques of the Basque fishermen, *arrantzales*, along with their organization into guilds, their navigational instruments, models of their traditional fishing boats and the history of their voyages. Many sailors from Bermeo accompanied Columbus on his 2nd voyage to the Americas, and the ships for his second expedition were built in Bermeo. It’s quite fascinating. Although there are no signs in English, visitors are given an English language pamphlet. There is an elevator for handicapped access. The museum is open Tuesday-Saturday from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm and 4:00 to 7:00 pm, and on Sunday from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. General admission is 3,50€, with a discount for seniors and free for children 12 and younger and free on 18 May and select holidays.

**Whaling Ship Aita Guría**

This replica of a 17th-century whaling ship, docked across the way from the tourist office, serves as an interpretation center of whale fishing and can be visited Tuesday-Saturday from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm, and again from 4:00 pm until 7:00 pm, and on Sundays and bank holidays it’s open from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm. Opening hours are subject to change depending on the tide. Tickets are 2€ for adults, 1€ for children. It’s also handicapped accessible.

Tel: (+34) 946 179 121
Urdaibai from the sea
There are several enjoyable seasonal catamaran adventures offered by the company Hegaluze departing daily from the Port of Bermeo from March to October, taking passengers around the bay or along the coast on the following routes: The Caves of Ogoño-Elantxobe Route (1 hour), The San Juan de Gaztelugatxe (1 hour), The Basque Coast-Santurtzi to San Sebastián, ideal for lovers of the "Game of Thrones" (starting at 9:30 am). Cost is from 12€ to 85€ for adults, depending on the route. One must reserve in advance by email or by calling (+34) 666 791 021

From April through October they offer whale watching trips on Saturdays. Cost for the Standard Route, the Dolphins Zone, is 40€ for adults, 28€ for children (7-14) and departs at 9:30 am. The Pro Route, large cetaceans-Sperm whales, etc., is 48€ (14 + only), departing at 9:00 am for the 6-hour experience. It is advised to come prepared (see the website).

Matxitxako Lighthouse
This headland at Cape de Matxitxako, located between Bakio and Bermeo is the most northerly point on this stretch of coast and offers superb views from the “new lighthouse”, built in 1909. The old tower, dating from 1852, is no longer used as a lighthouse, but in 2014 was turned into an observatory for watching marine birds and marine mammals that inhabit the Basque coast; dolphins, beaked whales, pilot whales and finbacks (whales).

San Juan de Gaztelugatxe
Gaztelugatxe, which means ‘castle peak’ in Basque, is an overpowering rock that resembles a castle in the water. It is located between the Matxitxako Cape and Bakio. It’s joined to the land by a narrow bridge built on rocks leading to the 231 steps that lead up to the hermitage, a small chapel dedicated to St. John the Baptist. The origin of the shrine dates back to the 10th-century, when tenant farmers of the area built their own parish church on top of the island. Legend says that after St. John the Baptist disembarked in Bermeo, he reached the island in three huge steps, leaving traces of his footprints along the way. In the 16th-century and there after, Gaztelugatxe underwent years of pillage and plundering by corsairs and pirates. In 1596, ships from La Rochele docked at Gaztelugatxe and stole everything they could find, throwing its hermit off the cliffs.

The Shrine of Gaztelugatxe became a place of pilgrimage for sailors and for locals alike. It is a tradition for who make it up the 241 steps to the chapel to ring the chapel bell three times and make a wish, a real cardiovascular workout with extraordinary views. On the feast day of St. John, June 24, there is a traditional romería, a celebration when crowds flock in pilgrimage to the chapel to give thanks to the saint. Another custom is for the fishermen, arrantzales, to visit the chapel before the start of the fishing season to ask the saint to grant them good luck in their labors and a great bounty of fish. Masses in the shrine are held on
June 23 and 24, July 31, August 29 and December 30. The shrine is also open on Saturday mornings during Holy Week and in the summer.

After your workout, and for a fabulous gourmet lunch with stunning ocean views, head straight to the Restaurant **Eneperi**, right along the highway overlooking the hermitage. The restaurant has a charming, updated décor and superb cuisine. But you must reserve in advance for weekends. Closed Monday.

**Hermitage of San Pelaio**

This scenic drive passes this small 12th-century hermitage, one of the jewels of Vizcayan Romanesque architecture. It's on the left and worth a stop. There is a large portico with wooden shelter surrounding the entire perimeter, a common characteristic of Vizcaya churches and hermitages. It only opens for mass on Saturdays and Sundays. On the feast day of San Pelaio, June 26, wine and cookies are served after mass to those who make the pilgrimage to the shrine.

**Bakio**

A few minutes further on you’ll reach this small beach resort town, who’s lovely sandy beach is the longest, at 1 kilometer, on the Vizcaya coast. Many of Bakio’s residents were forced to emigrate to Cuba in the 1870s because of the Carlist Wars, but many returned at the start of the 20th-century after amassing their fortunes. Known for its clean, crystal clear waters, it flies the EU blue flag, an accreditation of cleanliness, and attracts swimmers and surfers alike. You’ll find plenty of free parking, a children’s playground and several pintxos bars with outdoor terraces at the far north end, at the port. One of the best is **Itxas-Ondo**, at Calle Zarrakoa Bidea, 9, while next door is **Birjilanda**. The well-stocked **tourist office** is located on the main road, the BI-2010, south of **Restaurant Joshe Mari**, down the street from the post office and city hall. It’s open daily at 10:00 am, except during the winter when it’s closed on Mondays.

The village celebrates its annual Txakoli harvest on March 19 with the feast of San Jose and welcomes the pilgrims on June 24, with the feast of San Juan with a bonfire next to the Zubiaurralde Bridge in the evening, where grilled sardines are served to one and all, but the largest festival takes place in late August, the San Joan Dolozak patron saint festival, with **Txistularis** and **trikitrixas**, Basque flute and accordion players playing in the streets, giants, pilota games, fireworks on the beach, and a public paella competition.
Bilbao

Founded in the 13th century by Don Diego López de Haro, el Intruso, the Lord of Biscay, Bilbao 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. 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, grimy, 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 Via 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. 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 Rodríguez 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". Visit
Federico Moyúa Plaza and 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 some
pintxos or quick lunch. Try to be there around 1:00 pm, before it becomes packed. It’s still a
great value.

Tourist Office

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

Getting Around

Take a ride on the ultramodern Metro Bilbao, a subway-metro with stations designed by
Norman Foster. You can take the L1 line all the way to the beaches of Plentzia. 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. There is an excellent urban bus system,
the Bilbobus (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€.

The Bilbo Bizkaia 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.
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 please check on-line for the dates of the special exhibits. 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 13€ for adults and 7,50€ for seniors. Children 12 and under are free. Special Exhibits are not included. Guided tours are available. Note: Admission fees may vary depending on the art program. Artean Ticket combo available.
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 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.

Tel: (+34) 944 359 090 / 944 359 023

**1915 Funicular de Artxanda**

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 historic Funicular that will take you in just 3 minutes up to the summit where you can admire spectacular views of the city. Operates daily from 7:15 am to 10:00 pm, and from June to September until 11:00 pm on Fridays, Saturdays and holidays. Trains depart every 15 minutes and takes 3 minutes to climb the hill. Tickets are 1,75€ one way, 3,25€ roundtrip.

**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, and now celebrating its 110th anniversary. 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. Normally closed on Tuesdays, this year it is open from 5 June until 17 September from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm, but will be closed between 18 September and 5 October. General admission for adults is 9€, seniors 7€, free everyday between 6:00 pm and 8:00 pm, but you must have a ticket from the ticket office. The audio guide is 3€. Included in the Artean Ticket combo for 16€.

Tel: (+34) 944 396 060

**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.
The Hanging Bridge

Take the metro to the Las Arenas stop (Areeta in Basque) stop across the ría to Las Arenasto, 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, celebrating its 125th anniversary in 2018. 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. 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. Guided tours are available.

Bilboat

In the late morning before lunch or late afternoon you might enjoy taking a boat ride 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 13€, 9€ 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 Thursday-Sunday 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 19€ for adults and 12€ for seniors, children under 4, both cruises cost 1€.

Athlétic Bilbao Stadium

Estadio San Mamés replaced the 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. 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 lehoiak”, the Lions of San Mamés. You can read the article in the New York Times regarding the club.
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. Tickets for performances can be purchased on-line at [Kutxabank](#), or at the theatre box office.

**Cathedral of Santiago**
The Cathedral, dedicated to Saint James the Apostle, the patron saint of Bilbao, is the city's oldest building, 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](#) 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

**Euskal Museoa Bilbao - Museo Vasco**
If you can't get to the Basque museum in Bayonne in the Pays Basque, then be sure to visit the cultural museum at Plaza de Miguel de Unamuno, 4. A secondary entrance is at Calle La Cruz, 4 and disabled entry at Calle Maria Muñoz. Opened in July 1921, 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. Admission is 3€, free for those over 65 and under 12. Free on Thursdays (Museum Day). 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. Closed May 1, July 31, Aug. 15, Oct. 12, Nov. 1, Dec. 24, 25 and 31, and Jan. 1.

Tel: (+34) 944 155 423

**Museo Taurino de Bilbao**
There's 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. There will soon be a permanent tribute, a statue by sculptor Jesus Lizaso to the Basque matador [Iván Fandiño](#) who died in the bullring in Aire-sur-l’Adour (Pays Basque) on June 17, 2017. See [Club Taurino de Bilbao](#) for their scheduled events. 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.
Mercado de la Ribera

Pay a morning visit to the market 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. It’s restaurant, La Ribera, opens for lunch Tuesday-Sunday at 1:30 and for dinner on Thursday-Saturday at 8:30, closed Monday. Offers a 14.50€ lunch menu, 33€ dinner menu and a 18€ brunch menu. Reservations are required. Book online for lunch, dinner or brunch. Open for dinner Thursday-Saturday at 8:30 pm, and lunch Tuesday-Sunday at 1:00 pm. There is also a bar and live music on Friday and Saturday evenings.

Tel: (+34) 946 575 474
Pintxos (Tapas) Hopping
Pintxos In The Ensanche

After trying out the bars around the Plaza Nueva, take a stroll down Licenciado Poza Street, behind the Gran Vía, in the Indautxu area, to the corner of Maestro García 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. Another favorite is Café Estoril at Plaza Emillo Campuzano, 3, one of the classic pintxos bar specializing in croquettes and chorizo tortillas. It also has one of 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. 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

**Bar 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. Open 8:00 am to 11:00 pm Monday-Thursday and 8:00 am to midnight on Friday and Saturday. Recommended in the Michelin Guide.

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. It’s been around since 1998 and offers nice service and reasonable prices, including a daily menu for only 14,90€. 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. Open Monday-Thursday from 8:30 am to 11:00 pm, Fridays until midnight, and Saturdays from 9:00 am to midnight. Recommended in the Michelin Guide for 2018.

Tel: (+34) 944 436 001
Pintxos in the Old Quarter, the Casco Viejo

Plaza Nueva

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. Note that 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.

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.

Tel: (+34) 944 157 067

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.

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 4:30 pm.

Tel: (+34) 944 150 321

Gure Toki

In the corner of Plaza Nueva at No. 12, it reopened its doors in 2015 and is open Monday-Saturday from 9:00 am to 11:30 pm and on Sundays from 9:30 am until 4:00 in the afternoon. Recommended in the Michelin Guide for 2018.

Tel: (+34) 944 158 037

La Olla

This bar-restaurant at Plaza Nueva, 2, is open every day and features Conservas Zallo brand Thunnus alalunga, white tuna from Cantabria. They offer three menus served all day for 28,50€, 44€ and 54€. Won first prize for the best pintxos bar in Bizkaia 2015-2016.
Pintxos on Calle Santa María

Bar Gatz
Look for this popular bar that regularly wins awards for their creative pintxos. Located next to the hostal Iturrienea Ostatua, it first opened in 1994, and is a good stop for vegans. Open Monday-Thursday from 12:30 pm to 11:00 pm, Friday and Saturday until midnight, and until 4:00 pm on Sundays.
Tel: (+34) 944 154 861

Sältsägorri
This tiny (Lilliputian) but highly popular tavern sits on the corner of La Merced and Santa María, and is a favorite of our old friend Mikel (Tours by Basque). Laura and Ernesto serve some of the best bonito and antxoas pintxos, gildas and their famous Felipadas del Saltsagorri. It’s always packed, but there’s always room for one more.
Tel: (+34) 636 883 296

Two other contenders in the “Siete Calles” area include Xukela at Calle del Perro, 2, and Rio-Oja at Calle del Perro, 4, for casserole dishes.

More Pintxos in the Casco Viejo...

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 Calle de Jardines, 11, running off Calle 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€. Both are recommended in the Michelin Guide for 2018. They also have a third bar-
restaurant, **Berton Goikoa**, located at Rodríguez Arias, 64, not far from the Euskalduna’s Palace.

**Bar Bacaicoa**

Specializing in *Setas al purgatorio, Champiñones a la gloria* and *Chorizo al inferno*, the bar can be found at Plaza Miguel de Unamuno, 2. Originally opened in 1965, they moved to their new location in the plaza in 2003, and are open from noon to 3:30 pm and in the evening from 7:00 pm to 10:30 pm. It’s a small space, and often busy, but you’ll always be welcomed by Juan, Verónica and Kerman.
Dining In Bilbao

Gourmet Dining

**Nerua**

Taking it’s name from the Nervión River, the Guggenheim’s main restaurant, offering the best in haute cuisine, is located in the heart of the museum near Richard Serra’s *The Matter of Time*. It’s overseen by award-winning chef Josean Martínez Alija (IXO Grupo) and has one Michelin star and three Repsol soles. It has its own entrance from the river promenade. It’s menus are 80€, 110€, 145€, plus the “chef’s table menu” for 170€, VAT included. Wine parings available. Open Tuesday-Sunday for lunch from 1:00 to 3:00 pm and Wednesday-Saturday evenings from 8:30 to 10:00 pm. Closed Wednesday nights from November 1-April 30 and from January 1-18 in 2019.

Tel: (+34) 944 000 430

**Bistró Guggenheim Bilbao**

The less formal Bistro, an avant-garde restaurant, with an outdoor terrace overlooking the city, offers a variety of choices under the direction of chef Josean. It offers a child’s menu and selection of vegetarian dishes. There is a menú del día for 29,50€ + tax and a tasting menu for 38€, and now with an express meal, a main course + dessert, for only 22€. You can have an express lunch, main course + desert, for only 22€. Open for lunch Tuesday-Sunday from 1:00 to 3:30 pm and Thursday-Saturday nights from 8:30 to 11:30 pm. Open daily for
lunch and dinner from July 1-September 17. The Bar Guggenheim Bilbao, the pintxos bar, is open from 9:30 am to 8:30 pm Tuesday-Sunday, and every day in July and August.

Tel: (+34) 944 239 333

**Atelier Etxanobe**

This is the new gastronomic restaurant of chef Fernando Canales and Mikel Población’s original Etxanobe restaurant in the beautiful top floor dining room of the Palacio Euskalduna, Bilbao’s performing arts-convention center. The Chef Atelier Menu is 110€, or 150€ with the wine paring. Receives two Repsol soles and one Michelin star. Normally open Monday-Saturday for lunch and dinner, but you need to check the schedule as the restaurant closes for private events.

**La Despensa Etxanobe**

Is yet another new venture of chef Canales and Mikel Población the Palacio Euskalduna offering great traditional Basque cuisine with a “New York” aesthetic. Menus start at 60€. Open Monday-Saturday for lunch at 1:30 pm and dinner at 8:30 pm. Closed August 1-15, plus December 24, 25, 31 and January 1.

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. The new menu Viaje Largo (the long trip) is 95€, VAT included, while the menu Viaje Corto (the short trip) is a more reasonable 65€. Frank Gehry's favorite hangout when in Bilbao. Has one Michelin star and 2 Repsol suns. 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 Bilbao**

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€, wine and VAT included. Open for lunch at 1:30, Tuesday-Sunday at 1:30, and for dinner at 8:30, Wednesday-Saturday.

Tel: (+34) 944 424 267

**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 74€, VAT included, with the option to add three more courses for a total of 85€. You can also do a 14-course custom designed menu for 115€. Wine pairings are available for 55€. Seating is limited to 25 guests. It has one Michelin star. Open for lunch Wednesday-Sunday from 2:00 to 3:00 and for dinner Wednesday-Saturday from 9:00 to 10:00.

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 Javier Iturriaga offers a menú Yandiola for 43€, including wine and coffee. Opens daily at 1:00 pm for lunch and 8:30 pm for dinner.

Tel: (+34) 944 133 636

**Aizian**

This gastronomic restaurant at Calle 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. 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 José Legarreta and his team offers an executive menu for 49,50€ and a degustation menu for 85€, VAT included. Recommended in the Michelin Guide for 2018 and has two Repsol “soles”, suns.

Tel: 944 280 039

**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. 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. Standout 100% traditional, uncomplicated Basque dishes include *txipirones* (squid), *kokotxas* (cod cheeks) *calabacin 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

**Causal 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 32€, VAT included. The degustacion menus are 50€ and 60€. Open Monday-Saturday from 1:30 to 3:30 pm for lunch and dinner Thursday-Saturday from 8:30 to 10:45 pm.

Tel: (+34) 944 009 977

**Atea**

Chef Daniel García has opened this less formal restaurant a few minutes walk away from his famous Zortziko, at Paseo de Uribitarte, 4, with a market driven menu available Tuesday-Friday for only 16,50€, VAT included. Open Tuesday-Sunday for lunch at 1:30 pm and Tuesday-Saturday for dinner at 8:30 pm. Closed Sunday night and all day Monday.

Tel: (+34) 944 005 869

**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. The special menus for lunch or dinner are 35€ for the tasting menu, and 39€ for the Chuletón menu, VAT included. There is also a daily set menu for only 14€, available Monday-Friday, wine and VAT included. Open Monday-Friday from 9:00 am and Saturdays from 11:00 am. Book online.

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 14,50€, Monday-Friday, 21,50€ on weekends.

Tel: (+34) 946 021 021

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 García 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 a Menú Portugal for 49€ and three group menus for 46€, 50€ and 60€, VAT included. 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

Abando y Barra
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.

Tel: (+34) 944 245 186

As you leave, check out the beautiful cheese, fruit and vegetables at Gamazo, across the street at No. 16.

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 Ondárra and Lekeitio and is of impeccable quality. Offers their Zárate 8 plate menu for 62€ + VAT. 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. 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. Another branch, **Serantes III**, is at Alameda Mazarredo, 75, near the Guggenheim and Hotel Miró. 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 55€ each, tax included, and an extensive wine cellar. 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.

Tel: (+34) 944 394 301

**Causal Dining in the Casco Viejo**

**Los Fueros**

Opened in 2015 after a total renovation, the restaurant, which dates from 1878 (Bar Colón), is on two floors, with the informal dining room next to the bar and the more formal tables upstairs on the mezzanine, with views of the kitchen. There is also a small terrace area for people watching on a sunny day. The degustation menu is 37,50€, coffee included. Open for lunch at noon and dinner at 8:00 pm, closed Tuesdays. A Michelin Bib Gourmand.

Tel: (+34) 944 153 047
Dining Outside Of Bilbao
For that very special dining experience

Azurmendi
Proclaimed “Best restaurant in Europe” by Opinionated About Dinning (OAD) in 2015 and most recently ranked 38th in the world by The World’s 50 Best Restaurants for 2018, it has been bestowed three Michelin stars, as well as three Repsol suns. This could possibly be the most memorable dining experience of one’s Basque gourmet explorations-well worth the taxi ride to the outskirts of suburban Larrebetzu, or if driving, take exit 25 and follow the signs to the avant-garde space surrounded by vineyards. Travelers from around the globe come to sample chef Eneko Atxa’s brilliantly inventive cuisine. 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, Eneko, where the original Azurmendi was once housed. There are two tasting menus, “Erroak” (roots) and “Adarrak” (branches), priced at 220€ each. Wine pairings are available. Open Tuesday-Sunday for lunch from 1:00 pm to 3:15 pm, and for dinner on Fridays and Saturdays from 8:30 pm to 10:15 pm.

Tel: (+34) 944 558 866

info@iberiantraveler.com
Eneko Restaurant
But you need not spend a small fortune to sample the Eneko Atxa experience. One can also dine in the more informal Eneko, where you can enjoy the 9-course “Sultan” menu for 77€, wine extra. Open for lunch Tuesday-Sunday from 1:00 pm to 3:30 pm and for dinner on Saturdays from 9:00 pm to 10:30 pm. Before your meal you may wish to reserve a short tour of their txakolí producing facilities, Gorka Zagirre. The estate produces four labels, all whites.

ENEKO Bilbao is now open at the Euskalduna Palace in the city, with the Biscay menu priced at 98€ and the Bilbao menu at 69€.

Asador Horma Ondo
The pretty Caserío Leguina Goikoa farmhouse in Larrebetzu is considered one of the best of the Basque Country’s asadores, 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. It’s popular with chefs, including José Andres, whom we met at lunch this past month. Monday-Friday there is an “executive” set lunch menu priced at only 30€ + VAT. The weekend menu is 55€ + drinks and VAT.

Tel: (+34) 946 565 700

Boroa
Caserío Garai, a beautiful, painstakingly restored, 15th-century farmhouse, can be found just 10 kilometers outside Bilbao in the hills above the village of Amorebieta-Etxano. The one Michelin star, two Repsol sun restaurant rewards diners 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 39,50€ and a longer degustation menu, the “Txindoki” for 99€. Open daily for lunch from 1:00 to 3:30 pm and dinner Monday-Thursday from 7:30 to 9:30 pm, and 8:30 to 10:30 pm on Fridays and Saturdays.

Tel: (+34) 946 734 747

Andra Mari
This 1 Michelin star restaurant is in the lower part of the Asua family’s country home in the village of Galdakao, a few minutes east of Bilbao, with a view over the Ibaizabal river valley, facing the Dima mountains. Besides the outstanding cuisine, there is an exceptional wine cellar with many of the world’s best wines. Closed Tuesdays, and annually the first week of April and the last three weeks of August.

Tel: (+34) 944 560 005
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 and Pastries

Cacoa Sampaka at 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. Another designer chocolate shop, Alma de Cacao, with beautiful designs, is located at Calle Rodríguez Arias, 15, the street that runs behind the Hotel Carlton, also a major shopping street. Chocolates Mendaro Saint Gerons 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. The city’s best pastry shop, Arrese, can be found at Gran Vía López de Haro, 24, with five other locations around the city. Its specialty is truffles.
Staying In Bilbao

In the city

If you decide you’d like to spend a night or two in Bilbao, there are a number of excellent hotel options in the city center, close to everything. The Gran Hotel Domine Bilbao is a luxury, avant-garde property with a rooftop terrace and Beltz, their gastronomic restaurant. It’s located at Alameda de Mazarredo, 61, directly across the street from the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. Originally designed by Javier Mariscal in collaboration with the Studio, it was totally renovated in 2017. Down the street from the Guggenheim, at Alameda Maqarredo, 77, Bilbao’s Golden Mile, is the 50-room boutique Hotel Miró, in minimalist style, open bathroom concept, was created by Catalaan fashion designer Antonio Miró.

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, the Hotel Carlton’s location on Plaza de Federico Moyúa makes this elegant landmark 5-star hotel a natural when visiting Bilbao. The Moyúa Metro Station is steps away from, giving you easy access to the city and surrounding neighborhoods.
Situated between the San Mames Stadium and Guggenheim museum, at Lehendakari Leizaola, 29, the 5-star Meliá Bilbao is a quick 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 the award-winning restaurant Aizian, with chef José Legarreta.

Located across the Nervión River from the Guggenheim Bilbao, at Campo Volantín, 28, the NH Collection Ría de Bilbao, with it’s fanciful façade of colored glass, is only minutes away from the cities historic quarter, while the boutique hotel López de Haro (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.

Outside the city

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. 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 large white Basque farm house with ample grounds (for weddings) and covered porch dining. They offer a degustation menu for 49€, wine and coffee included. All desserts are homemade . Tel: (+34) 944 541 292 / 944 541 972
Excursions From Bilbao
A pretty drive inland

Elorrio
If you have a car, take a morning drive to the scenic Duresangado Valley southeast of Bilbao, 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 7th and 8th century steale and 9th to 11th century sarcophagi. Some of the inscriptions here are thought to be the oldest Christian inscriptions in Bizkaia.

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.
Dining in the countryside

Mendi Goikoa and Mendi Bekoa

There are two ancient stone farmhouses on the side of the hill overlooking the village of Axpe. 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 it’s 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. The rooms in the the Mendi Bekoa, the "Caserio", are filled with antiques. Our favorite room is No. 4, with its beamed, open cathedral ceiling and long terrace overlooking the valley below. No TV or mini-bar, but there is a phone. In the winter choose room No. 7 with its Jacuzzi shower, because room No. 4 can get rather cold when the wind comes howling, 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 also has a cozy bar for the guests. 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 well in advance, since it schedules many weddings where the wedding party takes all 11 rooms. Closed all of January.

Tel: (+34) 946 820 833

Asador Etxebarri

In the center of the hamlet, next to the church and the fronton, is quite the gourmet find, but now that it has been featured in Food and Wine, Gourmet, The Wine Spectator, even Vogue, and again named the 6th best restaurant in the world, for 2018, reservations are an absolute must any day of the week (2 to 6 people only, deposit required). 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’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 outside, where there are 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 pm and dinner on Saturdays from 8:30 to 11:00 pm. Menu is 176€/person, tax included, drinks extra. Closed in August and from December 24 through January 8, 2019.
Call for reservations: Tuesday-Sunday from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm or from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm only.

Tel: (+34) 946 583 042

**Restaurante Lasa**

If you haven't reserved, and find both restaurants 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 29€ lunch menu. Closed Sunday night and Monday and the first three weeks of August.

Tel: (+34) 943 761 055

**To the beach from Bilbao**

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, or at one of the more casual restaurants. Or head to Algorta for lunch at Tamarises Izarra, or Brasserie.

**The Switzerland of the País Vasco**

Very few Americans have explored this part of the Basque Country, where Alava, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa converge. I urge you to take the drive from Aramaio to Amurrio and on to Artziniega, enjoying the beautiful pastoral scenery, then on to an area called Las Encartaciones (Enkarterri), which runs from Balmaseda into Cantabria.
Vitoria-Gasteiz (Álava)

Founded in the late 12th-century by King Sancho VI of Navarra, the capital of the Basque Country is divided into two parts, the upper part, the old town with its medieval city center, and the modern city with its green spaces and tree-lined boulevards. It’s a study in urban design, a place where medieval streets blend easily with Renaissance palaces and Neoclassical churches. The capital’s center is the Plaza de la Virgen Blanca, with it’s monument to the Battle of Vitoria (during the Peninsular War), and the church of San Miguel, home of the White Virgin. The Gothic portico of San Miguel leads you to Los Arquillos, an arcaded walkway that connects the fortified old quarter with the 19th-century suburbs beginning in the Plaza del Machete. The area surrounding the cathedral contains the cities oldest streets, known by their guild names; Cuchillería, Cutlers, Herrería, Blacksmiths and Correría, Couriers, and where you will find the most important Renaissance palaces in the city, including the Escoriaza-Esquibel and Urbina Zárate palaces, the 16th-century Bendaña Palace, which houses the Bibat or Fournier Card Museum and the Museo de Arqueología, and Casa del Cordón, a historic trading house from the 15th-century. Stop and peek into the ancient brick and half-timbered buildings, the oldest in Vitoria.
Sightseeing

Cathedral of Santa María

The 13th-century Cathedral of Santa María, whose construction began in the 13th-century, sits on the highest part of the city. The cathedral is the massive 300 million euro restoration project. On a guided tour, for which you must don a hard hat, you’ll first be shown a video, then be guided up and down the scaffolding and shown the archaeological and restoration work being carried out. For me the most fascinating work is the painstaking, inch-by-inch restoration of the polychrome carvings of the portico. Guided visits are limited to groups of 20 and begin at 11:30 am during the week and at 10:15 am on Saturdays and Sundays. Check the website for visits in English and French. A visit to the cathedral and tower is 10,50€ and takes 75 minutes. The 60 minutes cathedral visit is 8,50€.

Tel: (+34) 945 255 135

Atrium Museum

If you enjoy contemporary art, then pay a visit to the brand new Atrium Museum at 24 Francia Street. It has a few Picasso's, Dali's, Max Ernst, but the bulk of the collection is modern Basque art with which you’ll be unfamiliar. Open Tuesday-Friday 11:00 am to 2:00 and 5:00 to 8:00 pm and on Saturdays and Sundays from 11:00 am to 8:00 pm. Closed Mondays except for public holidays. Tickets are 5€. Art and Gastronomy tickets are 7€ and include a “pintxo” snack and drink at Artium’s Cube café-restaurant.

Tel: (+34) 945 209 020.

Museo de Bellas Artes de Álava

This is a small fine arts museum on Paseo Fray Francisco de Vitoria, just south of la Florida Park in the Palace of Augustin-Zulueta, which houses some painting by Ribera, Zuloaga and Picasso. Open Tuesday-Saturday from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm and in the afternoon from 4:00 to 6:30 pm. On Sundays it’s open from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm. Entrance is free.

Tel: (+34) 945 181 918

Exploring outside of Vitoria-Gasteiz

If you have the time, you can explore the countryside west of Vitoria-Gasteiz with an easy day trip following a loop of about 150 kms that will take you to the village of Villanañe and then north to museum-village of Artziniega, before heading back along the A-624 to Vitoria-Gasteiz.
**Villanañe**

The village is located in the Valdegovia valley, close to the confluence of the Omecillo and Tumecillo rivers, about 40 kms west of Vitoria-Gasteiz, or an hour’s drive north of Haro. Here is where you’ll find Torre de los Varona, a fully restored tower-house dating from the late 14th to the early 15th centuries. It was built upon the original 7th-century fortification, and is considered "the best preserved fortified complex in Álava", and it’s where Alfonso I, the Battler, was held prisoner during his war with Alfonso VI, king of Castilla-León. Closed Mondays.

Tel: (+34) 945 353 040 / 945 35 303

**Artziniega**

This beautiful Alvese village (from the Basque word artzain, meaning shepherd of the ridge), sheltered by the Sierra Salvada mountains, lies an hour’s drive northwest of Vitoria-Gasteiz, 30 minutes southwest of Bilbao, was founded in the late 13th-century by Alfonso X at the ancient commercial crossroads of Araba, Bizkaia and Burgos. The historic Tower-Houses that fill the village, and 47 coat of arms, are a testament to it’s illustrious past. Many of the villages inhabitants emigrated to the American southwest during the Carlist wars and California during the gold rush. Museo Etnográfico de Artziniega. On the other hand, we must mention the Mercado de Antaño, a medieval market day that takes place every year on the first Sunday of September. It is a wonderful event where inhabitants wear medieval clothes and recall 15th-century trades.

**Dining in Vitoria**

**Bar Toloño**

Near the Plaza de la Virgen Blanca at Cuesta de San Francisco, 3, has been serving up some of the city’s best modern pintxos for more than 15 years. Come here for chef Enrique Fuentes’ Txipiron a la plancha, Huevo trufado, Morcilla de Las Landas con pimientos de Tricio and the “Ravioli de Conejo”. Open Monday-Thursday from 9:00 am to midnight, Friday, Saturday and holidays until 4:00 am, Sundays fro 10:30 am to 3:30 pm. Recommended in the Michelin Guide for 2018.

Tel: (+34) 945 233 336

**La Malquerida**

Also near the Plaza de la Virgen Blanca at Correría, 10, is where you can sample the “roasted vegetable cappuccino” served in a cocktail glass. Opens daily at 10:00 am.

Tel: (+34) 945 257 068
**Bar Restaurante Erkiaga**

At Calle Herrería, in front of the Iglesia San Pedro, Chef Josune Menéndez offers his famous *La Vieira del Peregrino*, a candied scallop served in a reduction of Albariño wine with algae vinaigrette and mussel foam, served on a bed of dry ice, inside a scallop shell, the symbol of the Camino de Santiago. Closed Mondays and Tuesdays.

Tel: (+34) 945 276 508

**perretxiCo**

The chef, Josean Merino received an award in 2011 for operating the best pintxos and tapas bar in Spain and was one of the 10 finalists of the Basque Country Pintxos Competition. *Perretxiko* refers to a type of wild mushroom very popular in the Basque Country. Head to San Antonio, 3, bajo, to try their creamy rice with perretxico mushrooms and Iberian ham or their duck/vegetable spring rolls.

Tel: (+34) 945 137 221

**Zaldiarán**

Opened in 1984, the only Michelin-starred restaurant in Vitoria-Gasteiz, first awarded in 2004, can be found at Avenida de Gasteiz, 21, near the Palacio de Justicia. The special summer menu for 2018 is 75€, wine and VAT included. Extensive wine list. Awarded the *Premio Nacional de Repostería* (National pastry award) in 2004 and has two Repsol suns. There is also an informal bistro-style space for pintxos. Open for lunch from 1:00 to 3:30 pm and dinner from 9:00 to 11:00 pm. Closed Tuesdays.

Tel: (+34) 945 134 822

**Restaurante Arkupe**

This gastrobar, which first opened its doors in 1973, is located in the heart of the Old Town at Mateo Moraza, 13. The new informal bar, the Picoteo Area, is downstairs while the traditional dining room is upstairs. Their *Capital* menu is priced at 39€, wine and VAT included. Open for lunch at 1:30 and dinner at 8:30. Recommended in the Michelin Guide for 2018. Closed Sunday evenings.

Tel: (+34) 945 230 080

**Sagartoki**

For a terrific meal, or just a few creative pintxos at the bar, in a casual setting, head to the very lively Basque cider house at Calle Prado, 18, steps away from La Florida Park. You’ll enjoy the huge portions of typical cider house cuisine. Fantastic salads. They have won prizes in the annual Basque Country pintxos competition. Try their creative pintxos such as the “milhojas de hongos” (mushrooms in puff pastry) or dine in the cider house on wonderful
fish, such as porgy (besugo) or sea bass (lubina). Chef Senén González offers three several menus starting at 40€, wine included. Open Monday-Friday from 10:00 am to midnight, Saturday and Sunday from 9:00 am to 1:00 am.

Tel: (+34) 945 288 676

**El Portalón**
This former 15th-century warehouse and coaching inn, with exposed wood beams, creaky floors, antiques and a very medieval feel, now houses a highly atmospheric and acclaimed restaurant. We were guests of the Basque government tourist board and the mayor of Vitoria for lunch on a recent trip. For a perfect combination of medieval atmosphere, refined service and appealing cuisine, it just can’t be beat. Due to its popularity, particularly on weekends, one must reserve well in advance. Open Monday-Saturday for lunch at 1:00 pm and dinner at 8:30 pm, 9:00 pm on Saturdays. Open for lunch only on Sundays.

Tel: (+34) 945 142 755

**Asador Matxete**
There is also this fantastic restaurant located at Plaza del Machete, 4-5, below the Old Quarter. Built into ancient brick and stone wall of medieval Vitoria-Gasteiz, there is a casual pintxos bar downstairs and dining room upstairs. The roasted meats and fish dishes here are wonderful, and it’s moderately priced and a favorite of our friends who live in Vitoria. There is a seasonal menu for 37€, plus VAT, wine included. Closed Sunday night and Monday.

Tel: (+34) 945 141 821

**Kaskagorrri**
You can also find this newer venue in Plaza del Machete at No.6, offering traditional cuisine, with a degustation menu for 55€, plus VAT. Wine parings are available for 20€. It’s recommended in the Michelin Guide for 2018, and is open daily for lunch from 1:30 to 4:00 pm, and dinner, Thursday-Saturday, from 8:30 to 11:00 pm.

Tel: (+34) 945 149 263

degustation

**Where to stay in Vitoria-Gasteiz**

**NH Canciller Ayala Vitoria**
Our favorite city hotel is the very well run Canciller Ayala, Vitoria, at Ramón y Cajal, 5, right across the street from the pretty Parque de la Florida, a gathering spot for locals, complete with gazebo. The rooms are typically very functional, modern, with lots of bathroom goodies, and the hotel’s restaurant has been highly acclaimed. Can’t be beat for its attractive
location facing the park, comfort, buffet breakfast, low rates, parking garage and late check-out on Sundays.

Tel: (+34) 945 130 000

**Silken Ciudad de Vitoria**
The newer Silken Ciudad de Vitoria, located, in front of the Palace of Justice, and a very short walk from the Old Quarter, is another pleasant and stylish option. It offers an executive floor with the Club Silken, offering newspaper, self-service bar, office facilities and a fitness center, WiFi access and good rates for its newly refurbished rooms. The Gastrobar is open from 8:00 am to 11:30 pm daily.

Tel: (+34) 945 141 100

**Parador de Argómaniz**
If you are driving and want to stay outside of the city, then the Parador, a renovated Renaissance Palace, is located 12 kilometers east of Vitoria-Gasteiz, offering views of the Álava countryside, Sierra de Gorbea mountains and Ullíbarri Gamboa Reservoir, where you can spend the day walking the trails.

Tel: (+34) 945 293 200

**Staying outside Vitoria-Gasteiz**

**Caserio Iruaritz**
About 35 km south of Bilbao, in the province Alava in the small country hamlet of Lezama northwest of Vitoria-Gasteiz, in the heart of the Switzerland of the Basque Country, we found a little paradise a few years ago. Our little “secret” is a 4-star rural hotel masquerading as an agrotourism home! Here’s their story: This little 5-room "casa rural" is actually one of the finest examples of 15th-century restored farmhouses in all of the Basque Country. Primarily, because its owner is Jesuit priest Don Luis de Lezama, King Juan Carlos' confessor and priest-turned-restaurateur, who has built an empire of restaurants/hotels/culinary schools, Taberna del Alabardero in Sevilla and Café de Oriente in Madrid among others, to support orphanages and to help underprivileged youth. He started with the original restaurant, *Taberna del Alabardero*, in Madrid and now has a total of nine cafes and restaurants, including four in Madrid and one in Washington D.C.. In his restaurants, and at resort in the hills above Málaga, *Hacienda del Álamo*, where he trains young men to become waiters, managers and chefs.

He bought this farmhouse in his birthplace, the village of Lezama, and spared absolutely no expense in restoring it, to make it the headquarters of his "Fundación", calling it the Fundación Iruaritz. He then opened it as a bed and breakfast when it’s not in use for annual
Fundación meetings. The priest maintains an apartment in the attic but is not often in residence. But he hired a manager, Francisco Hierro, who trained as a chef in his culinary school in Sevilla, to run the home and look after his guests’ every need. Francisco is very caring, speaks good English and runs the place as if it were a private home.

When we arrived he brought us drinks and snacks, we had the run of the house, he prepared us fabulous meals (breakfast/lunch/dinner, including a fantastic Entrecot grilled on the barbecue) and allowed us to explore the house fully. When we saw our room A, the one at the top of the stairs, we sighed: For 82€ in high season we weren’t expecting a huge room with polished wood floor, exposed wooden beams, beautiful antique bed, armoire, writing desk, sheep skin rug, a sitting area, china cups on a silver try for tea and coffee, mini bar (covered in chintz of course), TV, phone and best of all, sheep grazing under our window at night. Rooms D and E are smaller but equally lovely with gorgeous baths. Plus a chef at your beck and call! We stayed for 2 days but could have stayed for a week. Francisco and the rest of the staff are very sweet and so eager for you to enjoy your stay.

Downstairs there’s a leather bound photo album showing the various stages of the reconstruction of the home, painstakingly done, also a leather agenda where the priest has written all the expenses incurred, plus more silver, framed pictures, more antiques and 2 parlors with fireplace in each where you can curl up and read or watch TV or have cognac after dinner. You may in fact, be the only guests; if so, you’ll think you’ve died and gone to heaven! In the fall and spring the house is used as a corporate retreat during the week and is usually full.

Tel: (+34) 945 892 676
Venturing West Into Cantabria

Paleolithic Art

If you have an interest in Paleolithic cave art, you can continue west into Cantabria to the prehistoric cave paintings below Ramales de la Victoria, which are still open for guided visits. Cantabria has a wealth of prehistoric caves, and the easiest to access from Bilbao are the Cuevas de Covalanas. Advanced reservations are absolutely necessary for these cave-guided visits, as only 60 visitors are allowed entrance daily in groups of 10. The front desk at the Posada will gladly make them for you, giving them a few days prior notice. Because only 60 visitors are permitted each day, in groups of 10. One must reserve!

Where to stay

Parador in Limpias
The best base from which to explore these would be the relaxing and refined 4-star Parador just a ½-hour drive west of Bilbao. Once the summer home of Alfonso XIII, this is one of the Parador’s more comfortable properties, nestled in a 14-acre park with outdoor pool and tennis court.

Tel: (+34) 942 628 900

Posada Aire de Ruesga
For for a lower tariff, you can choose the 10-room Posada Aire de Ruesga. It in a 17th-century stone house in the countryside with it’s own restaurant and outdoors pool.

Tel: (+34) 942 619 376
Web Resources

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
- Basque Country Tourism
- Bilbao Tourism
- Bilbao Metro
- Euskotren
- Laguardia

Guide Books
- Footprint Bilbao and the Basque Lands
- Cadogan's Bilbao and the Basque Lands
- Hachette Vacancies The Basque Country - great cultural info
- Petit Futé Pays Basque (in French)
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, and 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.

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