

The Pays Basque

Maribel's Guide to the French Basque Country ©



Maribel's Guides for the Sophisticated Traveler™

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The French Basque Country

What the Pays Basque offers the visitor

- A long coastline of cliffs and jagged rocks and wide, sandy beaches that have become a haven to surfers from around the globe attracted by some of Europe's best waves.
- Elegant seaside resort towns including a four-Flower Village, a *Ville Fleurie*.
- Beautiful rolling hills and pastures dotted with lovely three-flower, highly picturesque mountain villages filled with handsome whitewashed farmhouses (*etxe* in Basque) with shutters painted red and green, the colors of the Basque flag, with many dating back beyond the 17th-century.
- The unspoiled mountains of the majestic Pyrénées with spectacular vistas and bracing hikes.
- The major staging area of the pilgrims' route to Santiago de Compostela, in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, which has welcomed pilgrims since the Middle Ages.

Must Sees in the Pays Basque

- [Basque Culture Museum](#), Musée Basque, Bayonne
- [Bonnat Fine Arts Museum](#), Bayonne
- [Musée de la Mer Aquarium](#), Biarritz
- [Villa Arnaga - Edmond-Rostand Museum](#), Cambo-les-Bains
- [The Caves of Sare](#)
- [Ortillopitz](#), the Basque House of Sare
- The red pepper village of [Espelette](#)
- [Vintage 1924 rack railway](#) to the summit of La Rhune mountain
- The prehistoric caves of [Isturitz Oxocelhaya](#)
- [Kakuetta Canyon](#), Sainte Engrâce
- 12th-century Romanesque [Church of L'Hôpital-Saint-Blaise](#),
- [Château D'Arcangues](#), home of the Marquis d'Arcangues
- The 600-year old [Château d'Urtubie](#), St-Jean-de-Luz/Urrugne
- [Château Abbadia Observatory](#), Hendaye

Farmers' Market Days

Opening around 7:00 am, closing at 1:00 pm

- Bayonne - Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday
- Biarritz - covered market open daily
- Saint-Jean-de-Luz - Tuesday, Friday and Saturday in July and August
- Ciboure - Sunday
- Urrugne - Thursday
- Ascain - Saturday
- Saint-Pée-sur-Nivelle - Saturday
- Espelette - Wednesday and Saturday only in July and August
- Cambo-les-Bains - Friday
- Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port - Monday
- La Bastide-Clairence - night market every Friday in July and August

Thalassotherapy (spa) Treatments

- [Loreamar Thalasso Spa](#) in the Grand Hotel Luz, Saint-Jean-de-Luz
- [Hélianthal Spa](#) in the Hélianthal hotel, Saint-Jean-de-Luz
- [Thalassa Miramar](#) in the Sofitel Miramar hotel, Biarritz
- [Atlantal](#) in the Atlantal Hotel, Anglet

Local Golf Courses

Open for fee to non-members, must reserve at least 24 hrs in advance.

- [Golf de Chantaco](#), Saint-Jean-de-Luz, 18 holes
- [Golf du Phare](#), Biarritz, 18 holes (the second oldest course in France opened in 1888)
- [Golf d'Ilbarritz](#), Bidart, 9 holes
- [Golf de Chiberta](#), Anglet, 18 holes (reserve 48 hrs. in advance)
- [Golf d'Arcangues](#), Arcangues, 18 holes
- [Golf de la Nivelle](#), Ciboure, 18 holes

How to Arrive

Flying

The French Basque Country's main airport is [Aéroport Biarritz Pays Basque](#) with direct flights to/from Châteauroux, Berlin, Brussels, Birmingham, Basel, Copenhagen, Dublin, Geneva, Helsinki, Lille, London, Lyon, Madrid, Marseille, Nice, Paris, Southampton, Stockholm, Luxembourg and Strasbourg.

By Train or Bus

You can reach the French Basque Coast by train or bus from [Paris](#), or by train from [Madrid](#) through San Sebastián-Donostia. There is limited daily bus service on [PESA](#) between Bilbao and San Sebastián-Donostia in the País Vasco, and Irun, Hendaye, St-Jean-de-Luz, Biarritz and Bayonne in the Pays Basque. Hourly bus service is available between Hendaye, Irun, Urrugne, Ciboure, St-Jean-de-Luz, Guéthary, Bidart, Biarritz, Anglet and Bayonne on [Autocars ATCAB](#). Local bus service on the Basque Coast is provided by [ChronoPlus](#), with free shuttle service, [Les Navettes](#), in Biarritz and Bayonne.

By Car

Day trips from San Sebastián-Donostia, Hondarribia or Pamplona are easy for exploring the provinces of Labouré 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.



Lodging in the Pays Basque

You'll find accommodations to fit all budgets in the French Basque Country, from the historic 5-star [Hôtel du Palais](#), luxury boutique hotel [Beaumanoir](#), or the Belle Époque [Le Régina](#) in Biarritz, to more moderately priced 3-star accommodations like [Hôtel Edouard VII](#) in Biarritz, 4-star [Hôtel Ithurria](#) in Ainhoa, the 3-star country inn, [Hotel Arcé](#), in Saint-Etienne-de-Bäigorry, or the more exclusive Relais & Châteaux [L'Auberge Basque](#) in Saint-Pée-sur-Nivelle, the 17th-century 5-star [Auberge Ostape](#), sitting in the countryside just outside of the small village of Bidarray, or Christine and Laurent Nederlof's exquisite [Château de Lamothe](#) in the village of Moumour, perfect as a base for exploring the Pays Basque and Béarn countrysides.

There are also self-catering apartments and [Gîtes](#) (rural homes), including excellent B&Bs like Quentin and Karen's 2-room [Maison Anderetea](#), in the interesting little village of Mendionde, not far from Hasparren, home of the famous [Bob's Beer](#). The historic 17th-century "labourdine" farmhouse [Ihartze Artea](#) is in the 3-flower village of Sare, and 3-room [Maison Ohantzea](#), with its unique blue trim, located in the heart of Ainhoa, said to be one of the prettiest villages in all of France, where you can also find the traditional [gâteaux Basques](#), the authentic Basque cake, and Xabier and Cristina's 4-room [Aire Berria](#), dating from 1880, in the beautiful little village of Irissarry.

Excursions into the Pays Basque

Along the Côte Basque

Nestled in the southwest corner of France, the Pays Basque region of [Nouvelle-Aquitaine](#), is divided into three provinces, Labouré (Lapurdi), Basse-Navarre (Nafarroa Beherea) and Soule (Zuberoa), and extends south along the Atlantic coast and the Bay of Biscay from Bayonne to Hendaye and from the mouth of the Bidasoa River east along the deeply caved valleys and summits of the pastoral green hills of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques, dotted with handsome blond cattle and sheep, to the Jurançon wine region of Béarn.

If you're without a car and just want to dip your toes into the French side of the Basque Country at a more expansive and warmer beach, take the little yellow Marie-Louise ferry (navette) from the pier in Hondarribia across the bay of Txinguidi to the town of Hendaye for a nice beach day. The ferry departs daily on the half hour. From June 15-September 15 it departs every 15 minutes from 10:00 am to 1:00 am. Across the border in France the town of Hondarribia is known as Fontarrabie.

If you are staying in San Sebastián-Donostia, have a car, and want to venture into the Pays Basque for an outing or for lunch, it is about a 30-minute drive via the old border at Irún, but be prepared for congestion due to heavy truck traffic, especially during the summer months, especially during the '*great exodus*', when Moroccans are heading south to catch the ferry to Tangiers. Once in the Pays Basque, for the most scenic drive, take the coastal route, the *Corniche D912*, from Hendaye north to Ciboure and St.-Jean-de-Luz.

The inland route

An alternative route we often use during the summer months, and staying in San Sebastián or Hondarribia, is to head to the small village of Bera/Vera in Navarra and follow the old smugglers route through the forest, the NA-4410/D406, to Sare. It's a longer drive, but great if your first planned stop is in Sare, Ascain or Ainhoa.



Saint-Jean-de-Luz

Known as *Donibane Lohizune* in Basque, [St-Jean de-Luz](#) is a charming, lively, sophisticated, but extremely busy in summer, tuna, sardine and anchovy fishing port with 5 sandy beaches, turned tourist draw. Its fortune grew thanks to whaling; in the 16th-century it served as the point of departure for the cod fishing expeditions to Newfoundland and in the 17th-century, when cod fishing became more difficult, it became a “vipers nest”, a refuge of pirates.

Take a walk atop the seawall on the Promenade Jacques Thibault. Survey the sardine boats moored in the small, protected harbor, or stroll along the soft sandy beach, *la grande Plage*, which is the very best way to appreciate the town’s fine architecture. The beach promenade runs from the end of Rue de la République to the elegantly restored Edwardian-style [Grand Hôtel](#), which overlooks the beach and where you can have afternoon tea. A walk around the entire town consists of a stroll of about two kilometers, starting from the central square, Place Luis XIV. A complete ring around the bay including its neighbor Ciboure can also be done on foot in about two hours.

Or you can travel across the bay to the fortress of Socoa in a shuttle boat, [Le Passeur](#), which operates from mid-July until the end of August. For a longer coastal excursion to the Spanish resort of Hondarribia, the [Nivelle V](#) departs daily at 2:00 pm, returning at 3:45 pm,

from April to mid-October, 18€ for adults, 14€ children. From July 10 to September 9, 2018 there will be an additional morning excursion departing from the port at 10:30 am.

Saint-Jean's beaches are family friendly with several children's beach clubs, plenty of tents and lounge chairs for rent and fine, soft sand, making for a perfect family beach day and safer swimming than you'll find in nearby Biarritz. But go very early in the day during July and August, as it will be packed with sun seekers. You can even have spa thalassotherapy (seaweed) treatments at the [Hélianthal Hotel](#), Place Maurice Ravel. And golfers can play at the historic [Golf de Chantaco](#), 66€ for 18 holes (July-October), 46€ for 9. Rates vary by season. Book your tee time 24 hrs in advance. Golf clubs and carts can be rented.

Once the center of Basque corsairs during the 17th-century, the former whaling port of Saint-Jean-de-Luz became famous as the setting of an historic royal event when in 1660 a twenty-two year old Louis XIV married the daughter of Phillip IV of Spain, the infanta María Teresa, in the Église-Saint-Jean-Baptiste (while still under renovation). After the royal wedding, the main church door was walled up forever.

If you'd enjoy viewing a game of *pelote or jai alai*, the resort's municipal *Frontón* holds games in July and August every Sunday at 6:00 p.m. And in this same *Frontón*, visitors can attend a display of Basque rural sports, *Force Basque*, on Wednesdays at 9:00 pm in July and August.

Nota bene: Although Saint-Jean-de-Luz has everything one could want in a Pays Basque coastal fishing village; pretty setting, interesting history, lovely beach with play areas for children, nice dining, upscale shopping, water sports, golf, spas, a lively market, painters at work on the leafy square, complete with bandstand, surrounded by outdoor cafes, little tourist train, cesta punta (jai alai) at the frontón, and on and on... it suffers from tremendous crowds in July and August. It's the Laguna Beach of the French Basque coast. Rue Gambetta will be as crowded as the wait to ascend the Eiffel Tower during high season! Go in early June or better yet, off-season!

Festivals

The city's patron saint's day, the [Fetes de Saint Jean](#), will be celebrated beginning June 21, 2018, when the villagers deck themselves out in black and red for the 5 days of celebration. [La Fête du Thon](#), the traditional tuna festival, dating from the 15th-century, is held on the second Saturday in July beginning in the afternoon at 6:30 pm, and marks the history of Basque fishing. The [International Film Festival](#) takes place the first week of October. And for something different, [Christmas in Saint-Jean-de-Luz](#) is celebrated from December 23 to January 6 each year. All great family events.

Sightseeing in Saint-Jean-de-Luz

[Église-Saint-Jean-Baptiste](#)

Don't miss seeing this lovely Basque church with its 3-tiered wooden balconies, scale models of traditional sailing ships hanging from the ceiling and the most beautiful altarpiece in the entire Pays Basque. In summer there are often [evening concerts](#) offered by the Maurice Ravel Academy of Music (9:30 pm) in the church, and there are Basque choral CDs for sale at the information desk.

[Maison Louis XIV](#)

You can also visit the beautiful 17th-century ship owner's mansion on a guided tour. It was built for a wealthy ship owning family, the Lohobiagues, during the "Golden Age" of Saint-Jean-de-Luz (1640-1660), and was used by the Sun King as his temporary residence in the days preceding the extravagant wedding. Sitting beside the Hotel de Ville, it is closed annually, opening the beginning of Easter Week (31 March 2018) and will close again from November 5, 2018, until April 5, 2019. Opens daily at 11:00 am, but closed on Tuesdays during the season. Admission is 6,50€ for adults.

[Les Halles](#)

Don't forget to visit the terrific, popular, covered farmers' market, particularly on Tuesday and Friday mornings all year long and on Saturdays in July and August when the purveyors of fine farm produce set up stands outside. Renovated in 2012, the market now has space for 43 stalls inside, including 8 for fishmongers, where you can buy fresh line-caught hake every morning. Go early, before 9:00 am, to be able to park in the public lot across from the train station, or try the underground parking garage on Boulevard Victor Hugo, at the theatre across from the Market. Be sure to pick up some fresh bread and Ossau-Iraty cheese at the market. Irouléguy wine is available across the street at the [Nicolas](#) wine shop for that lunchtime picnic in the park.

Shopping

The principal shopping area is along the pedestrian, boutique-lined *Rue Gambetta*, which connects the fishing port to the beach. Unfortunately in and among the sophisticated shops, one will now find an abundance of tourist trinkets, and trying to get around in July and August can mean complete gridlock. Nonetheless, there are lovely handicrafts and delicious Basque gourmet treats to be found.

Look for caramels at "*La Maison du Kanouga*", the house of caramels, [Maison Pariès](#) pastry shop at 9 Rue Gambetta. There are all sorts of wonderful gourmet products down the street at No. 32, [Maison Thurin](#).

White, red, and blue pottery and table linens can be found at [Jean-Vier](#), No. 48, with another beautiful store at the port on 1 Rue d'Infante, and to find more “bargain” prices then in the Paris boutique, drop by the [Ecomuseum of the Basque Tradition Jean-Vier](#), their 19th-century farmhouse on 10-hectare estate on Rue Chemin de Chibau, just off the D810 highway.

Stylish t-shirts and casual sportswear can be found at [Boutique 64](#), 79 Rue Gambetta. Soft, cream colored [Helena](#) table linens and towels, robes, slippers are available at 8 Rue Louis-Fortuné Loquin, and a branch of Bayonne's [L'Atelier du Chocolate](#) is at No. 13. And let's not forget [Chocolaterie Henriët](#), 10, boulevard Thiers, a 2-minute walk away.

And try the world famous [macarons](#), made here since 1660, at the [Maison Adam](#) on the main square, Place Louis XIV, which for me, taste even better than at [Ladurée](#) in Paris. These macaron were served at Louis XIV and María Teresa's wedding. The maison also sells a delicious [gâteau basque](#) and gourmet chocolates. And for the resort's best artisanal ice cream, head to [Txomin](#) at 54 rue Gambetta, tempting with 52 flavors.

Dining in the Saint-Jean-de-Luz

If you come in to Saint-Jean to shop and would like lunch during the high season, I highly recommend taking refuge from the hordes, far away from Rue Gambetta, Place Saint Louis and the touristy “restaurant row” of rue de la République, with two notable exceptions, the first, Kaiku, on rue de la République and the second, Zoko Moko, a few steps off Place Saint Louis on rue Mazarin.

[Kaiku](#)

We discovered this gem in a beautifully renovated space, ancient stone walls decorated with striking modern art in a former *gendarmérie* from the 16th-century house, the oldest home in St-Jean, at 17, rue de la République a few years ago. There are two small dining rooms with spacious tables overseen by Michelin starred, Bayonne-raised chef Nicolas Borombo, who honed his skills at Paris' Georges V, and who offers an outstanding 32€ menu during the week. Open for lunch Thursday-Sunday at 12:30 and for dinner at 7:30. Reservations only.

Tel: (+33) 559 261 320

[Zoko Moko](#)

If you come to Saint-Jean for an evening concert, have an early dinner at this contemporary gastronomic restaurant, whose name means “quiet corner” in Basque, tucked away from the fray in a lovely mansion at 6, rue Mazarin. The chef offers a market menu for 26€, a three-course menu for 20€, a la carte for around 45€, and wine by the glass or bottle. Receives a

high rating from the French food guides. Open Tuesday-Sunday for lunch from 12:30 to 2:00 pm, and Tuesday-Saturday for dinner from 7:30 to 10:00 pm.

Tel: (+33) 559 080 123

Pil-Pil Enéa

If you're a fish lover, particularly of cod and hake, and want an authentic, hearty Basque meal away from the madding crowd, we enjoy this cute little Bistrot near the market and next to a girls' school at 3, rue Salagoïty. It serves some of the freshest fish in town. Opens for lunch from 12:15 to 2:00 pm and dinner from 7:30 to 9:30 pm, closed Sunday and Tuesday evenings and all day Wednesday.

Tel: (+33) 559 512 080

Olatua

We like to lunch above the madness this small restaurant at 30, Boulevard Thiers, where they offer a very good value prix fixe lunch during the week for 25€, and child's menu for only 10€. Highly recommended by us and the red Michelin Guide. Garden dining is available in the rear.

Tel: (+33) 559 510 522

Le Bar Basque

For more casual fare such as tapas, salads or plats complets (lunch platters) try the atmospheric Bar Basque at 22, Bd Thiers. Look for the pink façade and green awning. They also serve miniature haute cuisine tapas at the bar and lunches on the outdoor terrace. A local hangout that attracted Hemingway and Ravel in their days. They offer a prix fixe lunch menu for 16€ and a dinner menu for 28€. Open daily from 8:30 am to midnight.

Tel: (+33) 559 851 663

L'Océan

A little further up the Bd Thiers at No. 43, is another outstanding Michelin star restaurant where chef Christophe Grosjean has found his new home in a luxurious space facing the Bay of Saint-Jean-de-Luz, the Grand Hôtel. Dine on the terrace overlooking the beach.

Tel: (+33) 559 263 536

Kako Etxea

An institution of sorts, this Basque bistro and tapas bar sitting on the main square by the market at 18, rue du Maréchal Harispe, offers a fixed price lunch menu during the week (expect during July and August) for only 14€, but we went for the mussels and the Bob's Beer. Dining indoors or out. Closed annually from January 7 until February 6.

Tel: (+33) 559 851 070

La Boëte - Bistrot de la mer

This popular and friendly little bistro specializing in seafood and shellfish, great mussels and *palourde* clams (12,50€), is located at 3 rue Jean Bague, in the heart of St-Jean-de-Luz just off rue Léon Gambetta. The owners, Arnaud and Valenine (chef), are recent arrivals from Normandy and are an excellent addition to the local food scene. Opens at noon for lunch and 7:30 on for dinner. Closed Monday and Tuesday and Sunday evenings, but open on Tuesdays during the summer. Ask for a table on the covered terrace (rain or shine) during the summer months. Reservations highly recommended.

Tel: (+33) 559 225 476

Across the Nivelle River in Ciboure

Arrantzaleak

Or if you want to escape the crowds of Saint-Jean entirely, drive or walk across the bridge to Ciboure, home of composer Maurice Ravel, where you'll find the seafood "shack" on the Nivelle at 18 avenue Jean Poulou, "*chemin de halage de la Nivelle*", on the path to Nivelle. Superb grilled fish, particularly the *thon blanc*, white albacore tuna-a Patricia Wells favorite. Chef Ramuntxo Courde offers menus starting at 38€. Recommended in Gault Millau. Open daily for lunch at 2:00 and dinner at 7:15. Closed Monday and Tuesday from October to April.

Tel: (+33) 559 471 075

Chez Mattin*

63, rue Evariste Baignole, for three generations has served hearty regional cuisine: Basque specialties such as fishermen's stew, *toro*, a Basque bouillabaisse (the house specialty), and squid stewed in its own ink, all dished up in a rustic atmosphere of beams, dark wood tables and copper pots. Rumor has it that famed chef Michel Guerard has dined here. It's a Ciboure institution. Chalkboard menu. Michelin recommended. Closed Sunday and Monday (outside of high season).

Tel: (+33) 559 471 952

L'Ephémère*

This is the village's trendy gastronomic restaurant, a newish seafood emporium with a more sophisticated nautical décor and a noted chef, Sylvain Mauran, who for three years ran the kitchen of Kaiku across the Nivelle river. The chef serves a reasonably priced market driven menu with starters priced at 9€, mains beginning at 14€ and desserts for 6€, served both for

lunch and dinner. Located at 15 quai Maurice-Ravel. Recommended in the Michelin Guide for 2018.

Tel: (+33) 559 472 916

Chez Pantxua

For a view of the Bay of Saint jean de Luz and seat on a terrace, head for this small traditional family restaurant at 37 ave du Commandant Passicot, Port of Socoa, in Ciboure. Offers a weekday menu of 26€. Open daily except on Tuesdays during low season. Recommended in the Michelin Guide.

Tel: (+33) 559 471 373



Biarritz

A quick 15-minute drive up the autoroute from Saint-Jean-de-Luz is the elegant, stately, and formerly very staid, international resort, the crown jewel of the Côte Basque, [Biarritz](#), a Four-Flower Village (*Ville Fleurie*) with a climate similar to Carmel, California. The more time we spend in Biarritz, the more we fall under its spell. While it can't boast the exciting nightlife of its Spanish cousin San Sebastián-Donostia, just an hour away, it is a small city of great style, with a gorgeous coastline and stunning Belle Époque architecture.

A former playground of British and European aristocracy, it's now inhabited in the summer by a mix of old money, of the Belle Époque style, and a large contingent of young surfers of the bohemian persuasion, making it less snobby, more friendly, hip and even affordable, if you know where to look. While it doesn't have as much a true Basque flavor other than its neo-Basque architecture, a "modern" version of a traditional Basque farmhouse, it remains very posh, sophisticated, and beautiful summer resort favored by many Parisians.

Biarritz was first made famous in the 19th-century by Napoleon III and his Spanish wife, Empress Eugénie de Montijo, who purchased dunes facing the sea and build an immense palace in 1855, rehabilitating it in 1867. Eugenia had spent summers with her parents in Biarritz and her presence here launched the city as a resort, inviting Russian nobles to

summer here. Prince Romanoff claimed that the ocean reminded him of the Black Sea. In 1890 a Russian Orthodox Church was built. The composer Igor Stravinsky moved his family to nearby Anglet in 1921 for 3 years. Upon the death of Napoleon the Empress left the city and sold her property, which was then transformed into the Hotel-Casino le Palais in 1881.

It has adopted to its new claim-to-fame as the surfing capital of France, along with being a popular golfing destination. In July it hosts an annual [Biarritz Surf Festival](#), drawing around 150,000 spectators, and in May 2017 hosted the [ISA World Surfing Games](#). The annual [International Summer Bridge Festival](#) will be held from Friday, June 29 to Tuesday, July 10, in 2018. Think Cannes without the show biz glitz, or Monte Carlo without the Grimaldis, mega yachts, and high-rise condos and heavy police presence.

At the [Casino](#) on the Grande Plage you can stop for an ice cream, brunch, tea or a drink and survey the surfing scene at [Dodin](#), facing the beach since 1923, or walk over to [Le Bleu Café](#) and have a coffee, cocktail on the terrace and watch the sunset. Both have fairly reasonable prices considering the prime real estate.

The Beaches

The Basque coast is one of cliffs and jagged rocks, but sheltered within that rugged coast are Biarritz's six beaches; Miramar, La Grande Plage, Port-Vieux, Cote des Basques, Marbella and Milady. The long, immaculate beach of [Grande Plage](#), close to the town center, is one of Europe's best surfing beaches, but for a swim, one must be very aware of the tides. The former fishing port area, [Port Vieux](#), has a small, secluded beach, sheltered from the winds and is popular with locals year around. There is a free shuttle from the town center. But for families, the beach of Saint-Jean-de-Luz is safer. Marbella beach is currently undergoing restoration of the cliffs due to major storm damage during the winter of 2016-2017. The walkway should reopen by May 2019.

Getting Around

The in-city bus [La Navette de Centre-ville](#), is free and operates Monday-Saturday (except public holidays), every 15 minutes from 7:30 am to 7:30 pm (every 20 minutes between noon and 2:00 pm). La Navette Saint-Charles-Milady bus runs every 20 minutes (every 40 minutes between 12:30 pm and 2:00 pm).

Biarritz Sightseeing

[Marché Couvert Les Halles](#)

I always begin my Biarritz day with a 9:00 am visit to the animated covered market on rue des Halles, in the center of the city, and enjoy it far more than its rival in Bayonne,

particularly during the busy summer months when it buzzes with life. The market is open daily from 7:30 am to 2:00 pm and from July 12 through August 23 it's open in the evenings 6:00 to 9:00 pm.

Here you'll find the finest in fruits, vegetables, fish, meats, including the famous Bayonne or Ibañona ham at [Maison Montauzer](#) (since 1946), or [Boucherie Ferreira](#), and delicious cheeses from [1001 Fromages](#), [Chailla](#) or [Olga](#). And there are no less than three Boulangers to choose from: [Les Délices de Biarritz](#), [Chez Flo](#), and [Maquirriain](#), who also offers traditional *gâteau basque*. For artisan pastries, there is [Gusto](#) and [La Croustade d'Odette](#). Have a delicious coffee, or glass of wine at [Chante l'Oiseau](#) at the western end, in the right corner-a tiny spot with only 6 bar stools, or a coffee and tortilla at [L'amuse gueule](#) at the opposite end of the market.

Across the street from the market, at 8, rue des Halles, is [Carlier Traiteur](#), a recipient of the [Meilleur Ouvrier de France](#), Best of France 2007. This award-winning delicatessen, offering jambon de Bayonne, Axoa d'Espelette, foie gras, chaperones and mussels, is open Tuesday-Saturday from 8:00 am to 1:00 pm and in the afternoon from 3:30 to 7:00 pm.

[Rocher de la Vierge](#)

Be sure to include in your own tour a stroll over to the Rock of the Virgin, an outcropping topped by a statue of the Virgin Mary and reached via a long iron footbridge made by Eiffel workshop. If it's a clear day, you'll enjoy views of the entire Basque coast.

[Aquarium de Biarritz](#)

The former Musée de la Mer reopened in 2011 after a major renovation that doubled its size, children will enjoy the art deco Biarritz aquarium on the Esplanade, on your walk to the Rocher. Open daily in high season, July 7 through August 31, from 9:30 am to midnight, until 8:00 pm, April through July 6 and September 1 through October 31. Closes at 7:00 pm in the winter. They feed the seals daily at 10:30 am and 5:00 pm. You can watch the sharks being fed every Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at 2:30 pm, but only during school holidays (France). Admission is 14,90€ for adults, 11,90€ for teenagers and 10,50€ for children. Purchase your tickets ahead of time so you don't have to wait in line.

If you have the time, don't forget to see the [Cité de l'Océan](#) (city of the ocean) at 1, avenue de la Plage, in the la Milady section of the city. Designed by [Steven Holl Architects](#), construction of the new facility was completed in 2011, in conjunction with the reopening of the aquarium, and celebrates the city's link to the sea. In July and August it's open daily from 10:00 to 10:00. Tickets are 12,50€ for adults, 9,90€ for students (13-17) and 8,50€ for children (6-12). There is a discount if buying combined tickets for both the aquarium and city of the ocean.

[Eglise de Sainte Eugènie](#)

On your way to the Rocher you can visit the charming and beautifully maintained neo-Roman-Byzantine church sitting on top of the hill, facing the old port and beach. Dating from 1856, it was dedicated to Sainte Eugenie, patron saint of Eugenie de Montijo, wife of Napoléon III and Empress of France. The stained glass windows by Luc-Olivier Merso, painter and illustrator whose work can be found in the Musée d'Orsay, help make it one of Biarritz's major landmarks. The church offers weekly concerts during the summer, jazz, gospel and chamber music. Check the performance schedules. Tickets are sold at the door. Open all year. Entrance is free.

[Port-des-Pêcheurs](#)

Then stroll down to the former fisherman's quarter at the Port Vieux, the old port. You can have an exemplary outdoor seafood lunch looking up at the Eglise at the highly regarded [Chez Albert](#). Open for lunch at 12:15 and for dinner at 7:30 pm. menus here start at 40€ (Closed Wednesday except in July and August). Or try [Casa Juan Pedro](#), a casual canteen and much less expensive alternative for families to the gourmet crustacean temple Chez Albert. Here adults and kids can dine on picnic tables outside and enjoy tapas, grilled fish and mussels. No placemats or tablecloths here-just low prices.

[La Pointe Saint-Martin](#)

After lunch, take the longer walk up to the northern end of the city to the lighthouse, *Le Phare*, for even more expansive views of the entire coast, and climb the 249 steps to the top for even more amazing vistas.

If you tire of walking there's also the [Petit Train de Biarritz](#) to take you around the compact downtown area (but only goes up to the lighthouse with groups). It departs from the Casino on the Grande Plage every 30 min.

[Eglise Orthodoxe Russe](#)

On your walk to the lighthouse, you'll want to stop to visit the Russian Orthodox Church, at 8, Avenue de l'Impératrice, overlooking the opulent Hôtel du Palais. Built in 1892, it was designed by local architect, M. Tisnés, and decorated with icons from St. Petersburg. In Biarritz's heyday as the aristocrats' playground, so many Russians came down by train from St. Petersburg that they found the need for their own blue-domed Byzantine church, which they built across the street from the Empress's villa, the present-day Hôtel Impérial. Open to the public on Saturdays and Sundays from 3:30 pm to 6:00 pm and on Wednesdays during school holidays. Entry is free.

[Chapelle Impériale](#)

In the same neighborhood peek in at the Imperial Chapel on rue Pellot, an 1865 creation of Napoleon III and Empress Eugénie. Designed by French architect Émile Boeswillwald in a combination Roman-Byzantine art with Hispano-Moorish style, and dedicated to the Black Madonna, Our Lady of Guadalupe (Mexico), it was declared a historic monument in 1981. Open Thursday and Saturday afternoons from 2:30 to 6:00 pm, July-September, and on Saturdays only during the rest of the year. *Currently under renovation.*

[Musée Asiatica](#)

Museum lovers should include the city's Museum of Oriental Art, which displays 1,000+ works from Nepal, India, China and Tibet, and is considered one of the best oriental art collections in all of Europe. It's located at 1, rue Guy Petit, directly opposite the Hôtel Louisiane. One can rent an audio guide in English. Open Monday-Friday from 2:00 pm to 6:30 pm and until 7:00 pm on Saturday and Sunday. Admission is 10€ for adults, 8€ for students 13-25 and 2€ for those 8-12.

A few minutes away, at 5, Avenue de la Gare, is the tapas bar [Restaurant Txango](#), (Trip in Basque) should you need to take a break for lunch with their 17€ menu. Open Tuesday-Saturday at 12:30. They will be closed February 11-26, 2018 for the annual winter holiday.

Shopping

Linens & Things

You'll find world class shopping radiating from the Place Clemenceau on Rue Mazagran- rue Gambetta-rue Espagne and Av. Edouard VII. Park in the underground [Halles Clémenceau](#) parking garage at 16, Avenue Foch, at the corner of Ave. Jaulerry.

There's a branch of [Hermès](#) at 19, Avenue Edouard VII, and a [Mephisto](#) shoe store at 4, Avenue du Maréchal Foch, offering styles not seen in the U.S., and a branch of [Galeries Lafayette](#) at 17-19, Place Georges Clemenceau. For a unique Basque Gift, stylish linens are your best bet here – you have a vast assortment from which to choose: There's [Jean-Vier's](#) new collection, [Biarritz 1930](#), available at 25, rue Mazagran and [Helena](#), with two shops in Biarritz; 27 Av. Edouard VII and 33 rue Mazagran. For more rustic linens, see [Euskal Linge](#) at 14, rue Mazagran. For very chic, contemporary linens of the [Artiga](#) brand, there is a store at 23, Rue Gambetta.

The super star Parisian chef, Alain Ducasse chose Jean Vier table linens to adorn the tables for the [Auberge Iparla](#) restaurant in Bidarray, now under the direction of chef Stéphane Carricaburu, and Jean Vier bathrobes for the 5-star guest house [Auberge Ostapé](#). I purchase cream and white bath towels (collection blanc), robes, slippers and baby bibs from Helena,

table linens from Jean-Vier and kitchen towels, *panieres*, trays and other accessories from Maison Charles Larre (now closed). Check their web sites to compare styles and colors. See what most appeals and works best with your color schemes and convert the measurements of your dining table to the metric system.

Although [Jean-Vier](#) does have a shop in Paris at 43, rue Boissy d'Anglas, in the 8th arrondissement, the selection is better here and at the stores in St-Jean-de-Luz (3), Bayonne and St-Jean-Pied-de-Port. You can also purchase the very chic [Artiga](#) linens in their boutiques in Espelette, Bordeaux, Pau, St-Jean-de-Luz and Magescq.

Head to [Boutique 64 Biarritz](#), 16, rue Gambetta, below the covered market, for very “in vogue” t-shirts and other casual sportswear items for men, women, children and babies. They represent perfectly the casual-chic Côte Basque life style, and the co. is named for the department 64 of the Pyrénées Atlantiques.

A father and son team at [Cazaux Biarritz](#), 15, rue Larréguy, produces beautiful hand made ceramic vases, bowls and tiles in their trademark blue and lavender, continuing a tradition dating back 6 generations. Their gallery is located at 10 rue Broquedis.

Regional Products

Food & Wine

Typical Basque food products, wines and brandies can be found at the fine gourmet shop [Maison Arostéguy](#) at 5, Avenue Victor Hugo, and [Les Mille et Un Fromages](#), across the street at No. 8. For outstanding Jambons, saucissons, pâtés, plats and fromages du Pays basque, stop by the [Pierre Oteiza](#) shop in Biarritz at 22, Avenue Foch. No need to go out to the farm in Les Aldudes unless you want to see where the fabulous [Kintoa ham](#) comes from. For chocoholics, you'll find great chocolates at [Daranatz](#) at 12 Ave. du Maréchal Foch, below the Clemenceau parking garage, on the left side, walking towards Place Clemenceau. There is also [Chocolaterie Henriët](#) on Place Georges Clémenceau. For caramels (*kanougas*) *mouchous*, a type of macaroon, and gourmet Basque chocolates, there's [Pariès](#), at 1, Passage Bellevue and a branch of [Pâtisserie BAMAS](#) at 10 Place Georges Clémenceau. Head to 11, Rue des Halles for delicious artisan ice cream at [Maison Dézamy](#).

[Au Comptoir des Gourmets](#), at 30, rue de la Bergerie in the Saint Charles quarter, near the market, is an upmarket delicatessen offering a wide range of French and Spanish Basque products and carefully selected wines and spirits.

The [Celliers des Docks](#), which started as *Celliers des Halles* in 1991 in a small store across from the market, eventually outgrew the original space and opened a new store at 5, Bis Rue Luis Mariano, out near Gare de Biarritz, the train station. They have a great selection of

Irouléguy wines plus Gaillacs and Cahors and supply many of the restaurants in the Pyrénées Atlantiques with their wines. [L'Artnoa Cave à Vins](#) is both a terrific wine shop and wine bar, opened by Antoine Vignac, and located below the Hotel Radisson at 56, rue du Gambetta. The owner runs tasting classes. But for your convenience, there's a handy [Nicolas](#) wine boutique (a nationwide chain) at 6, Place Clémenceau (unbeatable prices).

Biarritz also has an interesting [Planète Musée du Chocolat](#), 14, Ave. Beaurivage, which offers 45-minute visits ending with sampling for 6,50€ for adults. Also offers a course on Basque chocolates. Open daily from 10:00 am to 12:30 pm and from 2:00 to 7:00 during July and August, until 6:30 pm during French school vacations. Closes annually from January 7 through February 4.

Take the car and head the short distance, about 15 minutes, beyond the train station in La Negresse quarter to the route to Arbonne. Before reaching Arbonne village, take a right at the sign marked Domaine de Bassilour (or Quartier Bassilour) in Bidart. When you reach the pink chateau, the Domaine, you'll see another sign left towards the [Moulin de Bassilour](#). There you will find a wonderful 18th-century (1741) working flourmill, which makes the area's very best *gâteau basque* (can purchase a whole *gâteau* or simply a miniature, choose from black cherry or pastry cream fillings), plus bread (*pains de campagne*), *sablés* (butter cookies), *méture* (corn bread) and *miches* (sweet, anise-flavored bread). Recommended by Patricia Wells of *The Food Lover's Guide to France*. Not to be missed. It's open daily from 8:00 am to 1:00 pm and 2:30 to 7:00 pm.

For A Break From Shopping

For an afternoon spot of tea or cup of hot chocolate with separate bowl of whipped cream, head straight to [Miremont Biarritz](#), at 1bis, Place Clémenceau. Very much a "ladies who lunch" type of spot, this elegant tearoom has large picture windows with lovely views of the beach scene below. For nice lunch break, have the 30€ gourmet menu on the lovely terrace facing the ocean at [Le Galion](#) at 17, Boulevard du Général de Gaulle. For a simple salad as a main course head to the *place Sainte-Eugénie* next to the church and bandstand, to one of the outdoor terraces of the brasseries on the square; Le Luna, Le Napoléon or Café de la Mer, or dine indoors at [La Cantine d'Eugénie](#) in the Hotel Florida.

Biarritz Dining

Tapas Bars & Hamburger Joints

For a choice of Spanish-Style tapas, *gambas* (grilled shrimp), *tortillas* (omelets) or *parrilladas* (grilled fish medley), cross the street from the market to the always-lively [Bar](#)

[Jean](#), 5, rue des Halles, in the same spot since the 1930s. Reservations not required, but be prepared to wait for a table.

Around the corner is the newer, and more sophisticated, [Puig & Daro](#), at 34, rue Gambetta, while up the street at No. 21 you'll find [Casa Bixente](#). Further up rue Gambetta, at no 66, is the popular [California Kitchen](#).

On the other side of the market you'll find [Comptoir du foie gras](#), at 1 rue du Centre, serves apéros and tapas and tastings of regional products every evening, starting at 6:00 pm and Saturday and Sunday before lunch time, and nearly next door is [Le B2](#), at No.5, while a few more steps away at 8, rue des Halles is [Le Bar du Marché](#).

And if you don't mind a short walk, our new favorite, [Bonheur](#), *La Maison de Hamburger*, can be found at 30, Ave. Victor Hugo. Well worth the walk, and the wait if you're not there early enough.

More Dining Options

Besides an excellent array of tapas bars and newer hamburger joints, Biarritz has some good options for lunch, or dinner if you are staying in the city.

[Le Bistro Gourmet](#)

This Parisian-Style bistro can be found at 8, Rue de la Bergerie, a quiet neighborhood of Saint-Charles, a few minutes walk from the Hôtel du Palais and Chapelle Impériale. Recommended in the Michelin Guide, it opens for lunch at noon, and dinner at 7:00 pm. Offers an outstanding bargain priced lunch menu during the week for only 19€ and a menu in the evening for 29€. Closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Tel: (+33) 559 220 937

[Restaurant L'Impertinent](#)

A little further on, at 5, rue d'Alsace, is another Michelin one star gastronomic delight offering a market driven lunch menu available Wednesday to Saturday for 38€, including a glass of wine. [Chef Fabian Feldmann](#) selects the fish daily from the auction in Ciboure to insure its freshness. And everything here is homemade, including the bread.

Tel: (+33) 559 510 367

[La Table d'Arranda](#)

After a short walk from the center of Biarritz, you will find another good gastronomic option for lunch or dinner at 87, Ave. de la Marne. This rustic Basque restaurant, specializing in

roast meats, has two market driven lunch menus, two courses for 16€ or three for 22€. The menu changes every Tuesday. Closed Sunday and Monday.

Tel: (+33) 559 221 604

[Le Pim'pi Bistrot](#)

Closer in, and only a couple of minutes walk from the parking garage at Halles Clémenceau at 14, Avenue de Verdun, this bistro-style small restaurant in the heart of Biarritz is another good lunch option with two menus, *le menu du jour*; two courses for 14,50€ or three for 19€, available Tuesday-Friday and on holidays. Reservations highly recommend, day or night. Closed annually the last two weeks of January. Recommended in the Guide Michelin 2017.

Tel: (+33) 559 241 262

[L'Entre Deux](#)

Just down the street from the entrance to the parking garage, on the right side at 5, Avenue du Maréchal Foch, across the street from [Daranatz](#), the chocolatier, you'll find yet another outstanding option for lunch or dinner, where the former chef of Zoko Moko (St-Jean-de-Luz), is now involved in this trendy bistro with his childhood friend. Opened in 2016, Rémy and Jean offer two lunch menus; two courses for 21€ and three for 26€, and one three-course dinner menu for 40€, plus a degustation menu (proposed by the chef) in the evening for 52€. Opens for lunch Tuesday-Saturday at 12:15 pm and for diner at 7:30 pm. Also included in the Michelin Guide for 2017.

Tel: (+33) 559 225 150

[Ville Eugene, L'impratrice or Hippocampe](#)

If you'd like to dine in grand splendor, there is no place better in Biarritz than lunch at the historic [Hôtel du Palais](#), where [chef Jean-Marie Gautier](#) will prepare an elegant meal which you can enjoy along with a panoramic view of the bay. Three venues to choose from. Opens for lunch at 12:30 pm, dinner at 7:30 pm. Ville Eugenie has 1 Michelin star. L'impratrice will reopen in March 2018.

Tel: (+33) 559 416 400

[Chez Philippe](#)

Chef Philippe Lafargue learned his skills with Alain Ducasse at Le Louis XV in Monaco and he and his wife, Servane, operate this eponymous restaurant with open kitchen and a bold, bright and eclectic (some say "bizarre") contemporary décor. The chef offers several tasting menus plus a menu-carte with entrées for 11€, plats for 27€ and desserts for 10€. The restaurant is located at 30, avenue du Lac Marion. Recommended by le Fooding, Michelin

and le Pudlo guides. Open Wednesday-Sunday in the evenings at 7:30, and every night in August. Closed annually for 15 days in March and November and one week in June.

Tel: (+33) 559 231 312

[Le Clos Basque](#)

At 12, Rue Louis Barthou, is a tiny bistro in the historic center of Biarritz with a cozy dining room decorated with Spanish tiles and lovely, shaded outdoor patio. There is a fixed price luncheon menu for 26€, in the evening for 31€. Chef Edgar Dühr took over from Michel Guérard in 2011, maintaining it's a terrific value. Guests receive a warm welcome.

Recommended in the Michelin Guide, it's also highly rated by Gault Millau, le Pudlo, and Petit Futé. Reservations required, as it is very, very popular. Closed Mondays.

Tel: (+33) 559 242 496

[Ahizpak Le Restaurant des Soeurs](#)

Ahizpak, "the sisters" in Basque, is a casual family-run restaurant, and a new Bib Gourmand for 2018. After six years in Biarritz, the three Arangoits sisters decided to move to a larger space overlooking the ocean at 65, avenue de Biarritz, at the entrance to Bidart, a few minutes drive south, and within walking 20 minutes distance of *Cité de l'Océan*. Yenofa Arangoits, the chef, studied with the [Ibarboure brothers](#), 3-star Michelin chef [Michel Guérard](#), one of the founders of nouvelle cuisine, and star chef [Jean-Marie Gautier](#) of the Hotel du Palais. Closed Wednesday evenings and Sundays. Great for families.

Tel: (+33) 559 225 881

[La Table des Frères Ibarboure](#)

This lovely dining venue just outside of Guéthary, 7 kms from the Biarritz airport, is owned by the Ibarboure family and is housed in a contemporary hacienda, composed of 3 dining rooms, and an a luxury 4-star hotel, a member of Relasi de Silence. The restaurant was renovated in 2015 and has one Michelin star (30 years) and received a 16/20 in the Gault Millau. The two Ibarboure brothers, Xabi and Patrice are the 3rd generation chefs and offer a gourmet menu at lunch for 43€ and dinner menus starting at 63€ in an elegant setting with refined service. it boasts an exceptional wine list. The restaurant is closed on Monday and Wednesday and from the evening of March 4 until Thursday March 15 (2018) for the annual holiday. It is located off the D335 from Guéthary towards Ahetze. (It's adequately signed). Sheer perfection. Well worth the splurge.

Tel: (+33) 559 548 164 / 559 475 830

L'Atelier de Gaztelur

Another addition to the Michelin star family (2018), this magnificent residence named *Gaztelur*, which means “home of the water” in Basque, dating from the beginning of the 15th-century, hides the latest offerings from master chef Alexandre Bousquet. Located just a few minutes drive from the Biarritz train station in the village of Arcangues, it is not for the faint of wallet with their gastronomic menus starting at 75€, plus wine.

Tel: (+33) 559 230 406

Bidart and Guéthary

Informal beachside dining at a “guinguette”

Le Blue Cargo

Frequented by Parisian vacationers, quite chic and preppy on the Plage d’Ibarritz in Bidart. This is the most elegant of the beachside restaurants. Recommended by Petit Futé and the Guide Hubert. Open May - September until midnight, offering drinks and dancing.

Tel: (+33) 559 235 487

La Plancha d’Ibarritz

Also found on the Plage d’Ibarritz in Bidart. Recommended by the Petit Futé guide and the Guide Hubert. Go to La Plancha for food, Le Blue Cargo for drinks. Open all year.

Tel: (+33) 559 234 495

La Tantina de la Playa

On the Plage du Centre in Bidart, open daily in season, and serving the usual grilled sardines, squid, anchovies, *daurade*, and salmon.

Tel: (+33) 559 265 356

Les Alcyons

Follow the signs in Guéthary village past the train station, down to the “Plages” and the Jetée des Alcyons. It’s a narrow, curving, one land road, traffic regulated up and down by a light. A typical “beach shack” that serves great grilled sardines, anchovies, *daurade*, tuna grilled before your eyes. Main courses go for 15€, as well as most wines, but they offer good value lunch platter specials for 11,50€.

Tel: (+33) 559 265 572

[Txamara Rafi-Art](#)

Up the street from Les Alcyons at 195, Chemin du Port. A little more upscale. Dining is upstairs, with sweeping views of the ocean. Open daily from April 1-September 30 for lunch and dinner, and on Thursday-Sunday from October 1-December 31, and from February 14-March 31. Closed all of January.

Tel: (+33) 559 265 144



Bayonne

The Spiritual Capital of the Pays Basque

For genuine, un-touristy Basque flavor, venture a little further up the coast from the elegant, bustling resort of Biarritz to the quintessentially Basque city of [Bayonne](#), or *Baïona* in Basque, once the most important commercial port on the coast and the spiritual capital of the Pays Basque. Straddling the Rivers Ardour and Nive, and home of the largest summer festival in France, [Fetes de Bayonne](#), the city was founded by the Romans and is still protected by the ancient ramparts, complete with a fort built by [Maréchal Vauban](#), Louis XIV's leading military engineer. On a side note, during the many armed conflicts of the 17th-century, soldiers in Bayonne, running out of ammunition, shoved knives into the barrels of their muskets, thus inventing the bayonet.

Unlike Biarritz, Bayonne, with its hard working population of 45,000, does not “pretty up” for tourists. Not putting on airs, it is what it is. While many of the whaling merchants' mansions facing the rivers may still be in need of a fresh coat of paint, and the city still shuts down for siesta, it's a charming and totally authentic place to spend the day, or even a few days, as a base to explore the immediate area.

If you are not driving to Bayonne, you can reach the city from Biarritz by bus: [Chronoplus Bus](#) (about 22 min), or on the #816 [ATCRB Bus](#) from the Biarritz-La Négresse bus stop near the train station, or from the Biarritz Airport. The 816 [ATCRB Bus](#) also runs between St-Jean-de-Luz-Ciboure and Bayonne several times a day.

If you don't want to take the bus, then you can hop on the train (highly recommended) between St-Jean-de-Luz, (36 min), Biarritz (16 min) and Bayonne, and save on parking and fighting the traffic during the busy summer months. Once in Bayonne, the in-city bus (centre-ville), [La Navette de Bayonne](#), is free and operates Monday-Saturday, running every 10 minutes between 7:30 am to 7:30 pm. It also operates on Sundays in December.

Festivals

Bayonne celebrates a Chocolate Festival May 10 - 22, a Cider Festival May 29, a Ham Festival three days before Easter, a mid-July Jazz on the Remparts Festival and their famous [Fêtes de Bayonne](#), riotous five-day celebration from July 25-29, 20218, with Basque brute strength sports, jai-alai matches, music, fireworks, parades of giants, bull running and bullfights, when the entire city dresses in red and white, ala Pamplona's San Fermín. If you're in Bayonne in early July, all the store windows will be decorated in red and white, in anticipation of the festival.

Sightseeing

Bayonne has a few major tourist attractions besides the culinary ones of [Bayonne ham](#), [chocolates](#), [honey](#) and [Basque liqueurs](#), that prove to be time very well spent. Stroll along the pedestrian rue Port-Neuf, Grand Bayonne's major thoroughfare, where you'll find Bayonne's most famous purveyors of fine chocolates. Bayonne in fact introduced chocolates to France and at one time had more chocolate artisans than all of Switzerland-and seven of the original chocolate artisan shops remain.

While there are far better known chocolate cities in Europe, Bayonne is the "unsung capital of cacao". After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, the edict of Nantes allowed Jews in France to worship freely, and because Bayonne was a port city, the Spanish Jews, after taking refuge in Portugal, took refuge here, bringing their chocolate making skills and imported cacao from the New World, and began the chocolate industry in 1496, settling in St. Etienne, in the St. Esprit quarter, across the River Ardour, where a small synagogue still exists on #33 rue Maubec as well as a Jewish cemetery.

If driving, you should park in the [municipal parking](#) lot off Place de Charles de Gaulle, near the Mairie de Bayonne, and walk back across the bridge, *Pont Mayou*, to visit Petit Bayonne.

Another option is to use Parking Porte d'Espagne or Parking Lautrec. [Paid parking](#) is between 8:30 am and 7:00 pm. All of the parking areas have a free shuttle to take you to the city center.

Petit Bayonne

Musée Bonnat-Helleu

The city's fine arts museum, originally a gift from Leon Bonnat, a Bayonne-born 19th-century artist, was closed in 2011 due to extensive water damage, but is now scheduled to reopen in 2019 after a complete renovation designed by Bordeaux architects [Brochet/Lajus/Pueyo](#), that will more than double its space to 5000 sq meters. As part of its permanent collection of more than 7000 works, you'll find paintings by Bonnat himself, Botticelli, Degas, Dürer, Murillo, El Greco, Rubens, Goya, da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo, Delacroix, Géricault and Ingres. This collection is among the richest in France.

Musée Basque

One of the finest and largest ethnographic museums in all of Europe, the [Basque and History of Bayonne Museum](#), at 37, quai des Corsaires, will educate you in the history, culture, religion and general way of life of the Basque people, explain how Basque society is organized and the role of the port of Bayonne in the 19th-century. Originally *la Maison Dagourette*, a bourgeois home built in the 17th-century for a wealthy merchant, this is a truly fascinating museum. Printed tour guides are available in English, German and Japanese. In July and August it's open everyday from 10:00 am to 6:30 pm and until 8:30 pm on Thursdays. Closed on Mondays and public holidays the rest of the year. Entry is 2,50€, and free if under 18. Free the first Sunday of the month from 11:00 am to 3:00 pm. Accessible for those with reduced mobility.

Grand Bayonne

[Cathédral Sainte-Marie](#)

Bayonne's third monument of note is its twin towered Gothic Cathedral of Saint Mary, Our Lady of Bayonne, with its enormous cloisters, considered the largest in France (great photo op from here) and beautiful stained glass windows, and the area immediately surrounding it, the small but atmospheric *place Louis Pasteur*. Originally built between the 12th and the 15th centuries, Bayonne's whalers funded its construction, as the bishops demanded from them one tenth of their profits. The towers were added in the 19th-century when the cathedral was restored. A UNESCO World Heritage site, you may see modern day pilgrims here, as Bayonne's cathedral is a staging area for the trek down to Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port to begin the long Road of Saint James to Santiago de Compostela. The view of the illuminated cathedral at night from the bridge to the St. Esprit quarter is lovely. The cathedral is

normally open Monday-Saturday from 8:00 am to 12:45 pm and in the afternoon from 3:00 to 6:30 pm, and on Sundays from 8:00 am to noon and 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm.

If you need a break after visiting the Cathédral, a few minutes walk away, at 6 Rue Port de Castets, is [Kitchen DADA](#), where you can have a coffee and snack, or a simple lunch with a gastronomic touch like a sautéed pork with mustard and homemade mashed potatoes, mushrooms with walnut oil and a vanilla crème brûlée.

Château-Vieux

Built in the 12th-century near the cathedra, was once the official residence of the governors of the city, belongs to the military and is not open to the public.

Jardin Botanique

The Jardin botanique des Remparts, located at the Avenue du 11 Novembre and Allée de Tarride, near the city hall, is only open from April 17 to October 13 in 2018.

Château-Neuf de Bayonne

Sitting on the right bank of the Adour River, this citadel-fortress overlooking place Paul Bert and Petit Bayonne, was built by Vauban as part of the reorganization of the defensive system along the Spanish border. Part of the Basque Museum (in Petit Bayonne), it can only be visited on special occasions, like the National Day of Patrimony, the third weekend of September.

La Tour Vieille Boucherie

Inside the Grand Bayonne one can still see the oldest structures in the city, the so called “*tower of the old meat shop*”, the only remaining part of the Roman defensive wall, dating from the 4th-century. In the 12th-century the wall, which extended to the river Nive, was covered in native yellow stone, and in the 16th-century became part of the work undertaken by Vauban to improve the cities defenses.

Les Halles de Bayonne

Like its counterparts in Biarritz and Saint-Jean-de-Luz, Bayonne’s covered market at 2, Quai du Commandant Roquebert, opened in 1994, is the center of activity. Sitting on the banks of the Nive River, its 22 shops offer fresh produce and regional products, and are open daily until 1:30 pm. It’s also where you will find our favorite breakfast stop when staying in Grand Bayonne, Chez Pantxo Le Bistrot des Halles.

The outdoor farmers’ market day at Les Halles is Saturday. Other public markets in Bayonne are Place de la République, Place du Marquisat Blvd Jean d’Amou and Place du Polo (Fridays), Place des Gascons (Wednesdays and Fridays) and Rue Sainte Catherine (Sundays).

Saint-Esprit

You can cross the Adour River from Petit Bayonne using the Pont Saint-Esprit to this neighborhood that was once part of Gascony. Here you will find the 19th-century Beaux-Arts style train station, *Gare de Bayonne*. The 16th-century [Citadel de Bayonne](#), considered a Vauban masterpiece, sits behind the rail station, but is not open to the public. Nearby is *L'Atelier du Chocolate* workshop (see below). The St-Esprit quarter became the Sephardic Jewish ghetto because Grand Bayonne was, at that time, off-limits for residence by non-Catholics.

Shopping

Linens & Things

For traditional Basque handicrafts, linens, hand painted ceramic dish ware, music, bères, you'll find them all under one roof at [Atmosphere Basques](#), at 21 Rue de Luc, which intersects rue d'Espagne. For Espadrilles created by Francis Brisé, head to [Espadrille Arin](#) at 20, rue Poissonnerie in Grand Bayonne, or check out [L'Art de L'Espadrille](#) at their new location, 3, Plaza Berri, Saint-Pierre-D'Irube, just across the Nive River. Open from 2:00 pm to 6:30 pm Tuesday-Saturday only.

[Monsieur Léoncini](#) is one of the remaining three artisans who still hand make the famed *makhilas*, the Basque walking stick with concealed dagger. His shop can be found in the old quarter of Grand Bayonne at No. 37 rue Vielle-Boucherie, near Place Montaut, the street found at the top of the rue d'Espagne. If these walking sticks strike your fancy, and you'd like to make a purchase, you can do so online from the other famed makhila maker, the [Atelier Ainciart-Bergara](#) in the village of Larressore.

For unique scents for both men and women: perfumes, lotions, soaps unique to this area, see [Parfums et Senteurs du Pays Basque](#) at 4 rue de la Salie (between Pont Marengo and Pont Pannecau). Their wares make nice gifts. There is another branch in Espelette and headquarters in La Bastide Clairence. Open Tuesday-Saturday from 11:00 am to 7:00 pm.

Regional Products

Food & Wine

The famous chocolate factory, [L'Atelier du Chocolate](#) with its [workshop](#), is at 7 Allée de Gibéléou in St-Esprit, a 20-minute walk from the train station, or about 5 minutes by taxi. Tours to the facility last 1-1/2 hours. They also have a boutique store in at 37 Rue Port Neuf. The [Cazenave](#), founded in 1854, and next-door [Daranatz](#) chocolate shops, under the archways on rue Port Neuf, Grand Bayonne, are world famous for their chocolate creations.

The former will tempt you with their famous hot chocolate, *mousseux de chocolat*, made by beating the chocolate with fresh farm milk, and served along with thickly buttered toast, in Limoges china decorated with tiny pink roses. The latter is known for its chocolate bonbons filled with Cointreau, Cavados and Grand Marnier. The *Creole* is a dark chocolate filled with rum and ganache (mixture of cream and chocolate), and the *Moctezuma*, is flavored with Mexican spices and orange flowers. And at 1 Rue Argenterie, you'll find [Chocolaterie Puyodebat](#).

Chocolate was first introduced in Bayonne by the Sephardic Jews who fled the Spanish Inquisition at the beginning of the 16th-century and was an important contribution to the city. Most of the chocolate in Bayonne now comes from South America, whereas Belgian chocolate is imported from Africa. Bayonne celebrates [Les Journées de Chocolate](#), the Chocolate Days festival, over two days in May.

You'll find one of the best Bayonne artisan hams at the [L'Atelier Pierre Ibaïalde](#) workshop at 41 Rue des Cordeliers in Petit Bayonne. Pierre gives a demonstration then a tour of the drying room, ending with a sample of his delicious wares. Tours are free, reservations not required. The Ibaïona hams come from year old pigs fed only cereal and the ham is coated with a mixture of sea salt, garlic and ground red Espelette pepper powder before being hung to dry. As you make your way from the cathedral to rue d'Espagne to see the food shops, is the Pays Basque's leading charcuterie, and our personal favorite, [Pierre Oteiza](#), at 70 Rue d'Espagne, where you'll find the finest in gourmet items (hams, cheeses, black cherry jams) plus Irouléguay wines. Open from Monday to Saturday from 10:00 am to 7:00 pm. And the charcuterie [Maison Montauzer](#), at 17 rue de la Salie, is yet another purveyor of fine Bayonne ham.

The "petit prince" of scrumptious Basque pastries and chocolates, and European pastry champion, Thierry Bamas, has a shop, [Pâtisserie BAMAS](#), at 83 rue d'Espagne, next to the [Bar Du Palais](#). Other stores can be found in Anglet and Biarritz. Open Tuesday-Saturday from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm and in the afternoon from 3:00 to 7:00 pm.

There's also a branch here of Biarritz's [Pariès](#) at 14, rue du Port-Neuf, which is famous for its *kanouga*, a chocolate caramel created for the visiting Russian dukes in 1905, flavored with coffee, vanilla and hazelnut.

Before leaving Petit Bayonne, you'll also want to stop at 52 Quai des Corsaires, next to the Basque Museum, for a sample at the [Loreztia confiture](#) shop, selling the best black cherry jams and honey in the Pays Basque. Tours are available (free) and last 45 minutes to 1 hour. Open Tuesday-Saturday from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm and again from 2:30 until 6:30 pm, and in July and August from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm.

Dining in and around Bayonne

If you don't wish to spend that much money on your dining, there are plenty of casual restaurants with outdoor terraces along the River Nive quai where you can have an inexpensive lunch.

[La Table de Pottoka](#)

After the success of his Parisian restaurant Pottoka (in the 7th), chef Sébastien Gravé returned to his roots and opened his latest venue a couple of years ago at 21 quai Amiral Dubourdieu, the more lively quai, bordering the River Nive, serving bistro dishes inspired by the best produce the Southwest has to offer. Of these the crispy-tender pork belly might just become his signature dish. One of the best places in the city. Offers an excellent lunch menu during the week for only 21€ for two plates, or 26€ for three. Closed Sunday and Monday. Reservations required.

Tel: (+33) 559 461 494

[L'Embarcadère](#)

A little further down the Nive, on the same side of the river, at 15 Quai Amiral Jauréguiberry, is another good option for lunch, with delightful, market inspired cuisine. Has a small outside covered dining area on the street, typical of Bayonne. Open for lunch on Sunday, closed Monday. Recommend in the Michelin Guide for 2018.

Tel: (+33) 559 256 013

[Côtes et Braises](#)

A few more steps will put you at 9 Quai Amiral Jauréguiberry, where you will find another popular spot on the Nive. Chef Jean-Philippe Bouvet offers a simple weekday lunch menu for only 19,90€. Open for dinner on Sunday, closed Wednesday. Outdoor seating. In the Michelin Guide. Reservations recommended.

Tel: (+33) 524 336 314

[Le Bistrot Itxaski](#)

At 43 Quai Jauregiberry in Grand Bayonne, the more lively quai, you'll find typical regional dishes, with several plates to share, and wines from around the world. Offers three menus, 15€, 20€ and 25€. Open for lunch at noon and dinner at 7:00 pm. Closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Tel: (+33) 559 461 396

La Grange

On the opposite side of the river Nive in Petit Bayonne, in an old grocery store at 26 Quai Galupéri is where chef Jacques Diharce offers his Bistro-style cuisine. Open for lunch at noon and dinner at 7:30 pm with a 24€ menu for both. Closed for lunch on Sunday and Monday.

Tel: (+33) 524 461 784

Le Bayonnais

Chef Christophe Pascal offers an inventive seasonal lunch menu for 20€ in this comfortable renovated space (2014) at 38 Quai Corsaires, with dining on the terrace, near the Basque Museum. Specializing in roast lamb. Offers a 21€ lunch menu during the week. Open for lunch at noon and dinner at 7:30. Closed Sunday and Monday. Open Easter Sunday and Mother's Day.

Tel: (+33) 559 256 119

Auberge Du Petit Bayonne

We had a delightful lunch here recently at this popular traditional family restaurant at 23 Rue des Cordeliers, which was recommended by a friend. An excellent value. The Menu du jour at 12,50€, and the Menu Auberge for 16,50€, are hard to beat, especially if you love good Axoa, the typical Basque dish prepared with mashed veal, onions, sauté tomatoes and Espelette. Simple, but perfect on a rainy day in Bayonne. It's not a large space, so reservations are highly recommended. Closed Tuesday and Wednesday. Closes annually from the last week in October to mid-November.

Tel: (+33) 559 598 344

Auberge du Cheval Blanc

If you're a foodie, set aside some time for a splendid lunch in Petit Bayonne at 68 rue Bourgneuf, considered to be one of the city's top tables. Housed in a former pony-express mail relay station from 1715, is neither formal nor fussy. We loved the cuisine of Chef Jean-Claude Tellechea, the service, the relaxing ambience, the paintings by a local artist and our *menu entre amis*, currently priced at 45€. There is also a 25€ mid-week market driven menu and a 7-course tasting menu for 84€. Closed Saturday at lunch, Sunday evenings and all day Monday and from July 1-9.

Tel: (+33) 559 590 133

Chez Martin

At 29, rue d'Espagne, the boutique-lined shopping street, is a relatively new chef-owned, creative "bistronomic" with a simple, whimsical décor and only 28 seats (and small sidewalk

terrace), opened by chef Lionel Elissalde, serving a market-driven menu and a weekday set *formule* for €16 plus a very popular Sunday brunch. Chef Elissalde has cooked in the US, England, Belgium and Switzerland and is considered one of the “hot young chefs” of the moment in the Pays Basque. His cooking has been influenced by Japanese, Italian and Hindu culture. Michelin and Guide Hubert recommended. Open daily for lunch at noon and Tuesday-Saturday for dinner starting at 7:30. Sunday brunch from 11:00 am to 2:30 pm.

Tel: (+33) 559 558 441

St-Pée-Sur-Nivelle

L'Auberge Basque

Marion and Cédric Béchade's restored 17th-century farmhouse, at one time a roadside inn offering simple food and lodging to travelers on the old highway to Saint-Jean-de-Luz, and now a Relais & Châteaux, can be found off the D307, 15 minutes from the heart of St-Jean-de-Luz, just before the entrance to the village of Saint-Pée-Sur-Nivelle. Cédric trained for ten years with Alain Ducasse who put him in charge of the garden restaurant of the [Plaza Athénée](#) in Paris, although he started his career at the Hotel du Palais in Biarritz, vowing that he would return someday to the Basque Country.

The open kitchen concept allows the guests to watch the chef at work, while permitting Cédric to be an intricate part of your dining experience. There is a gastronomic lunch menu for only 46€ (3 plates), wine parting available. Spain's foremost gastronomic critic, Rafael García Santos, gave the restaurant a rating of 8/10 after only a few months in operation- a higher rating than he gives to Les Pyrénées in St. Jean Pied-de-Port, Villa Eugénie in Biarritz. The restaurant received a Michelin star a few years later.

The uniquely designed glass wall of the restaurant slides open, disappearing into the wall itself, offering a spectacular view of the Pays Basque countryside looking west toward the coast, St. Jean-de-Luz and La Rhune mountain. If you choose to dine in one restaurant outside of Biarritz or Saint-Jean-de-Luz, make sure that you choose this one! Closed Mondays year around, closed Tuesdays at lunch from June-September, Sunday evenings from October 1-November 18, all day Sunday-Tuesday from November 19-March 25, and Sunday evenings and Tuesdays for lunch from March 26 through April. Closed annually from December 16-25 and from January 6-February 12, 2019. Will be open Easter Monday, April 2, 2018 for lunch. Reservations are a must.

Tel: (+33) 559 517 000

Restaurant Ttotta

In the village of St-Pée-Sur-Nivelle, at espace Ibarrondoan, you'll find this delightful little restaurant. After being away from the Pays Basque for 15 years, the owners, Annie Ibarra and Laurent Boulanger, returned in 2011 to their roots. They offer an excellent market driven menu during the week for only 19€, along with a selection of regional wines. Opens for lunch at noon and dinner at 7:30 pm. Closed Tuesday night and Wednesday, and annually from October 29-November 15. A Bib Gourmand for 2018.

Tel: (+33) 559 470 355

La Ferme Ostalapia

Located halfway between St-Jean-de-Luz and Biarritz, a few minutes inland from Guéthary, on the D855, the road to the village of Ahetze, is a delightful country farmhouse restaurant, informal and charming, with red and white checkered tablecloths and chalkboard menu. A perfect example of "*Convivialité et bonhomie*", serving traditional French and Spanish Basque cuisine. It has an inviting outdoor terrace facing the mountain of La Rhune for dining in summer *al fresco*. It serves a weekday fixed price menu for 15€. Closed on Wednesday and Thursday (except Thursday night in high season), the last week of June and from December 1-January 15.

Tel: (+33) 559 547 379

Le Moulin d'Alotz

Housed in a Basque farmhouse dating from 1694, with garden, off the road from Arcangues to St. Pée, on Chemin Alotz Errota, also with one Michelin star, a 14/20 rating from Gault Millau. San Francisco Basque chef Gerald Irigoyen also recommends it highly. The young chef Benoît Sarthou has earned the praise of the area's gourmands. Sometime difficult to get a table, so reservations are essential. Closed all day Tuesday and Wednesday for lunch, plus July and August.

Tel: (+33) 559 430 454



The Pays Basque To Béarn

Exploring The lovely Bucolic Countryside

Full-day excursions covering the Labourd, Basse-Navarre and Soule provinces of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques are possible starting either from San Sebastián-Donostia or Hondarribia on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees, or from Saint-Jean-de-Luz, Biarritz or Bayonne on the France side. The daylong excursions will take you through dewy inland country pastures, meadows and rolling hills, home to some of the most handsome cream-colored cows in all of Europe. The incredibly picturesque countryside surrounding the Pays Basque's 2 and 3-flower villages stands out as unique in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine (Aquitaine, Limousin and Poitou-Charentes) region of southern France. The Pyrénées-Atlantiques includes the area from the blue waters of the Atlantic, the Côte Basque, to Béarn's Jurançon wine region south of Pau. Bordered on the north by Landes and on the east by Hautes-Pyrénées, and a touch of Gers, the three provinces cover an area roughly 3000 square miles but with a population of slightly less than 700,000, mostly Basque, while the Basque Country on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees (not including Navarra) has a population of a little over 2 million in an area that's slightly smaller in size. Together they have about the same population as Brooklyn, NY, only with 90 times the area to live and play in, and all of it incredibly picturesque.

Ascain

Your first stop should be at well-groomed, prosperous 3-flower village of [Ascain](#), or *Azkaine* in Basque, a few minutes drive inland from the coast, at the foot of La Rhune mountain. Originally founded in the 13th-century, it was destroyed during the Thirty Years' War, but is now ranked among the most beautiful villages in France, and is another stop on the road to Composella, and home of the "[chistera](#)", the wicker scoop used by pelota (jai alai) players. Here in the square, as in other Basque villages, you'll find the Holy Trinity of buildings: the pelota court, which on this side of the border is normally pink or salmon colored, a 17th-century Basque church, and the town hall, *Mairie*, or *Herriko Etxea* in Basque. Ascain's pretty church, *Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption*, has a typical two-story wooden balcony, square bell-tower and manicured, flower bedecked cemetery. In this, as in all the villages in the Pays Basque, the cemeteries are tourist-worthy sights. Note the beautiful porcelain flowers decorating the lovingly cared for tombstones. If you notice the names on the tombstones you'll see many begin with "*Etche*", such as Etchevery, Etcheverria or Etchegory.

The red and white facades of the 17th-century labourdine houses, where three generations of the family would live together under one roof, the family residing above, animals below, line the street. Traditionally, the eldest, boy or girl, and usually the first to marry, would inherit the home and take over the family affairs. The *etxea*, which means house in Basque, was always given a name, which was frequently adopted by the family as its own name.

There is a three-arched Roman bridge spanning the Nivelle River in the village dating from the 5th-century. The traditional market day is Saturday, but for shopping at your first stop, [Le Confit d'Ascain](#) is a good place to pick up duck confit, foie and other gourmet items.

If you happen to be in Ascain at lunchtime, treat yourself to the 16€ or 25€ menu on the courtyard terrace at [Moments Gourmand](#) at the Place du Fronton, open Tuesday-Sunday. Or try [Restaurant Larralde](#) offering traditional Basque cuisine for 17€ or 24€. Closed Sunday evening, all day Monday and Tuesday for lunch. And if you want something a little more sophisticated, Marion and Cédric Béchade's [L'Auberge Basque](#), a Relais & Châteaux, can be found about 15 minutes away in Saint-Pée-sur-Nivelle, on the road to Espelette, he D918.

In the typical Basque church in Ascain there are two, sometimes three, tiered balconies, the fiefdom of men- being closer to God, while the women remained below, standing guard on the floor above the family tombstones. In some Pays Basque churches you'll find sculpted tiles on the floor of the nave. Each represents a house in the village. During services, the women were responsible for standing on their own family tile and would melt wax over the tomb in memory of the house's dead. Look for the unusual discoidal (round-headed) gravestones with what looks like four commas joined together, and not to be confused with a swastika. The lauburu, the Basque cross, represents the movements of the sun and is the

ancient symbol you'll see duplicated on Basque handicrafts on both sides of Euskadi, the Basque Lands. Predating the Christian cross by hundreds of years, it's now come to be used as a symbol of good luck and fortune. Curiously enough, this same symbol is used by Hindus and the Navajo tribe in North America.

Dining in Ascain

Restaurant Larralde

This 4th-generation family run restaurant at 55, Rue Oletako bidea, Ascain, offers a formule at lunch for 13€, 17€ and 24€. Has two terraces for outside dining. Open Wednesday-Sunday for lunch at noon and Tuesday-Saturday for dinner at 7:00 pm.

Tel: (+33) 559 540 010

Moments Gourmand

At Place du Fronton, next to the pelota court in Ascain. Renovated in 2017, offering seasonal dishes and traditional cuisine. Weekday lunch menus of 16€ and 25€. Terrace dining during the summer. Open Tuesday-Sunday from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm, and in the evening from 6:00 to 10:30 pm, Saturday evenings until 11:00 pm. Closed annually from November 6-29, 2018.

Tel: (+33) 768 407 971

Sare

After a visit to Ascain, you head southeast on the D4 to another pretty 3-flower village. **Sare**, another "*les plus beaux villages de France*", which became wealthy during the 19th-century through the smuggling trade, or as the Basques called it, their "*night work*", lies ahead along a road winding through the wooded countryside. It's separated from Spain by the Pyrénées, but the mountains have never constituted a barrier. They've served as a private link between the Basque families on both sides and have over the years seen a constant movement of sheep, contraband, war-time refugees, both from the Spanish Civil War and World War II, and even ETA terrorists in the seventies and eighties.

The village is picture-postcard perfect with its two frontons and lovely white homes decorated with geraniums, and highlighted with bulls-blood red, blue, green or brown shutters. There are also the sweet-faced, gentle *Pottoks* or *Pottokas* (little horse in Basque), a sturdy Basque pony native to the Pyrenees which freely roam the countryside, and available to ride at the Olhadea equestrian center. These ancient horses were formerly exported to Britain to work in the mines and were later saved from extinction, but only a few hundred still remain. There's a *pottoka* reserve in Bidarray to protect them. You can take a

promenade in a *caleche*, a 40-minute carriage ride around the village during the summer. And you're sure to stumble upon some sort of festival in July or August, either a *pottoka* exhibition, a Basque *brute* (rural) sports contest, a *pelota* match, a choral concert or a performance by Basque dancers.

There are a number of nice shops in the village where you'll find Basque linens and gourmet products. I'm particularly fond of the hand painted Basque dinner wear in cream with red/green stripes, the "*Amatxi*" pattern. The Hotel Arraya has a shop attached and even a stand on the street that sells its famous *gâteau basque*, but I believe the [Musée Gâteau Basque](#) bakes a superior one. The village tourist office upstairs on the square has a bounty of information about the surrounding area and a brochure listing all the summer festivals. The *Eglise Saint Martin* in Sare is quite pretty inside and its cemetery with Basque tombstones is interesting.

If driving to Sare through Bera (Navarra) on the D406, you'll, pass the [Musée Gâteau Basque](#), a typical Lambouridan farmhouse, the *Maison Haranea*, a couple of kms south of Sare, where they offer an 90-minute demonstrations on how to prepare the traditional Basque dessert of Gâteau Basque, with ample tasting during and after. The demonstrations are given only in French, but the pastry chef Bixente Marichular does speak very good English and will chat with you afterwards. We've sat through the French demonstration twice, understanding very little (missed most all the engaging chef's jokes) but enjoying the ample sampling and buying the special cake pans and a mini-gâteau for our evening's dessert. Open Tuesdays-Fridays from April 10 through November 2, 2018. Closed October 1-22, except for groups. Fantastic!

While I firmly believe that Bixente Marichular bakes the best gâteau around, there are also two alternative and also fine sources, if the Museum is closed. In the Bidart countryside, in the Bassilour quartier, there's the [Moulin de Bassilour](#), and if driving through St. Pée-sur-Nivelle, stop at *Pâtisserie Pereuil* (Maison Pereuil) on the main road in front of the church. Their secret recipe dates from 1870.

If you happen to visit Sare during the fall, around mid-October, you may be witness to "*l'enfer des palombes*" or wood pigeon hell, an ancient ritual hunt that began in the 14th-century that takes place in the countryside along the old smugglers' route between Sare and Bera (Navarra). Miles and miles of nets are strung between the trees along the Lizarrieta Pass. As the unsuspecting wood pigeons, *Le pigeon ramier*, migrating from northern Europe to Morocco, swoop down through the pass where they're trapped, and later served for lunch. But the hunt, organized by the association [Sarako Ondarea](#) has changed somewhat over the years as the numbers of wood pigeons have declined from thousands in the 40s to mere hundreds during the last decade. Orson covered the hunt in a [1955 documentary](#) about the Basque Country made for the BBC.

If you are driving from Saint-Jean-de-Luz or Biarritz through Ascain, you'll pass La Rhune, the mountain that straddles the border between Navarra (Spain) and the province of Labourd (France). Here you'll find a delightful open-car, wooden cog-railway from 1924, the "[Petit Train de La Rhune](#)" which takes you 905 meters (2,969 ft) up the sacred mountain to an unforgettably scenic view point looking out over the coast and the peaks of the Pyrenees. On the ride up to the summit you'll likely pass shaggy Pottoka grazing along the slopes. You may also see sheep and the Griffon Vulture, the emblematic bird of prey of the Pyrénées.

The mountain of La Rhune has been considered sacred since the Stone Age, and since Empress Eugénie visited in 1859, it's been the most important tourist attraction in the French Basque countryside. The trip takes about 35-minutes covering the four-kilometer route with the train moving at only about 8 km per hour. Most hikers go early during the summer months, on the first or second runs, so that they can take the walk back down while it's still relatively cool. Many hearty souls do prepare a picnic, but there's also a *venta* or "roadhouse" restaurant where one can have a quite decent lunch. If you are going to walk back down the mountain, take a backpack and have plenty of water, and follow the well marked trails on a trek of about two hours.

If you decide to take the train in the summer, arrive *early, early, early and early* so as to be in line at the ticket office by 8:00 am to purchase your tickets when the office opens at 8:30 for the first run up at 9:00 am. We arrived "late" on our first visit, about 8:30 am. The line had already formed, so we ended up missing the first train but were able to get a seat on the second one. By noon, all runs for the day can be sold out! It becomes extremely crowded during the summer months with tour bus groups, hikers and families. La Rhune will be open from March 17 to November 4 in 2018. If you can, book your tickets online [here](#).

Another tourist attraction in Sare are the prehistoric caves, [Grottes de Sare](#) which can be visited via a guided *son et lumière*, a light and sound show tour lasting about an hour. It requires an easy half-mile walk in this subterranean labyrinth following a guide. While you won't see any Paleolithic cave paintings a la Lascaux or Altamira, it makes for an interesting visit, nonetheless. Visit starts with a 15 minute video, in French, about the tiny bats inhabiting the cave-these bats you won't see on your walk unless the guide points his flashlight into a crevice for you. Tour is in French only, but an explanation sheet in English will be given to you at the ticket booth. Open year around but closed Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, New Years Day and January 6. Check times [online](#). Tickets are 8,50€ for adults, 5€ for children. Photographs are not permitted in the caves.

If you won't be visiting the superb Basque ethnographic museum in Bayonne, stop for a guided tour (alas, in French only) to a restored Basque farmhouse, a "basseri" in Basque, circa 1660, the [Maison Ortillopitz](#), 1 km off the road between Sare and Ascain, to get a sense of Basque rural daily life. There is another 17th-century Basque farmhouse, typical of

Labourdine architecture, [la Maison Labourdine](#), located 4 kms from the village of Ustaritz on the Nive River that can also be visited. Guided one-hour visits available daily from May to October.. The village of Ustariz can be found on the D932 between Cambo-les-Bains and the A63. But again, neither farmhouse is a really equal substitute for the truly impressive Museum of Basque culture in Bayonne.

Dining in Sare

[Restaurant Arraya](#)

Located in the Hôtel Arraya, just off the main square in Sare, this long established family restaurant offers an excellent seasonal menu along with a good selection of wines. Dine in its elegant dining room with impeccable service or in the shade of the plane trees as the warmer warms in the spring. Chef Gabriel Zugasty offers a *menu de Terroir* for only 27€ and a gastronomic menu for 37€ during the week. Open for lunch at noon and dinner at 7:30 pm. Closed all day Monday and Tuesday and Thursdays for lunch, but open every day in high season, July-September. Closes annually from November 4 (2017) to March 30, 2018.

Tel: (+33) 559 542 046

Ainhoa

After Sare, move south to this village of just one street, filled with 17th and 18th-century half-timbered homes with asymmetric roofs, many bearing the family name and the year constructed carved above the door lintels. Another 3-flower village, “*les plus beaux villages de France*”, some say [Ainhoa](#) is one of the prettiest villages in all of France. Founded in the 12th-century, it served as a stopping off place for pilgrims on the road to Santiago de Compostela. Look for the historic *La Maison Gorritia*, built in 1662, one of the most photographed houses in the village. The church, *L'église Notre Dame de l'Assomption*, is particularly beautiful with its two-tiered wooden balconies and a graveyard of discoidal tombstones. There are Basque dances in the Place du Fronton from July 24-31, a celebration honoring *la gourde*, the traditional bota bag (wineskin) carried by the workers in the field, will be on Sunday, July 29 this year, in the Fonton. The annual village fête runs from August 15 -18, and *La Fête de la Palombe*, the festival of the wood pigeon, takes place this year on Sunday, October 21.

There's a very nice store here next to the church for Basque linens and handicrafts along with cherries and Espelette peppers. There is also a branch of [Pierre Oteiza](#) for gourmet items and wines. The *Arts Populaires* shop, as the name implies, sells a bounty of Basque handicrafts, books, and music, including my favorite hand painted ceramic dinnerware in the “Amatxi” pattern- it's located on the opposite side of the main drag, near the car park.

Dining in Ainhoa

Hotel Ithurria

If it's lunch time when you reach the village, the restaurant in the 4-star hotel (1657) at Place du Fonton has a fabulous and elegant dining room with Parisian-formal style service, awarded with Michelin macaron (star), and a set mid-week menu for 35€, if you're up for a splurge. Closed all day Wednesday and Thursday for lunch, except from mid-July to late August. Also closed annually from November-April, reopening Friday, April 8, 2018. Chef Maurice Isabal prepares the best *cassoulet* with red beans and duck confit you might ever have! The Ithurria is widely considered one of the best restaurants in the entire Pays Basque, and pre-booking for the weekends is essential. The seasonal menu is 45€. Opens for lunch at noon, dinner at 7:30 pm.

Tel: (+33) 559 299 211

La Maison Oppoca

Or for something more moderate, the restaurant, in a totally restored 10-room, 17th-century hotel down the street from the salmon colored pelota court, is where owner/chef Dominique Massonde serves a delicious traditional hearty Basque menu for 25€, with a child's menu for 15€. There is also a tea room should you only need to take a break from a day of touring. Dine on the terrace with a view of the mountains. The restaurant is closed on Thursday, Friday for lunch and Sunday for dinner annually from September 15 to January 5 and closed completely during the winter from January 7 until March 22, 2018.

Tel: (+33) 559 299 072

Hotel-Restaurant Argi-Eder

The restaurant in the 4-star hotel, the "Basque House", in the Quartier Boxate, is where chef Philippe Dottax offers a reasonable price seasonal *Menu Auberge* for 29€, or splurge with one of his degustation menus, with dining on the terrace overlooking the swimming pool. The restaurant is open for lunch from 12:30 to 1:45 pm and for dinner from 7:30 to 9:00 pm. Closed Monday-Wednesday and Friday at midday, plus Wednesday evenings, except from July 10-September 15, when they are open daily. Closed annually from November 3-March 31.

Tel: (+33) 559 937 200

Espelette

Upon leaving Ainhoa, drive northeast to my favorite of all the Labourdian villages, the much photographed, picture perfect, red pepper village of [Espelette](#), *Ezpeleta* in Basque, a colorful,

captivating town of red and green shuttered white buildings. If you could visit only one village in the interior of the Pays Basque, this would be it. The town's 17th-century church, *Église Saint Etienne*, has beautiful carvings inside and outside you'll find the customary Basque graveyard filled with discoidal grave markers. The restored castle, *Château des Barons d'Espeletta*, one of oldest houses in the Pays Basque, dating from around the year 1000, now houses the town hall and tourist office.

If you visit in October, the village will be a riot of red with buildings dressed in the small red peppers known as *Piment d'Espelett*, hung in garlands on the house facades to dry in the sun. Typically quiet, or as quiet as any Basque town can be, it does get busy on the weekend and during the summer months as visitors flood its streets and fill its shops. The pepper festival, *Fête du Piment*, is held on the last Sunday in October and attracts thousands of visitors for the traditional blessing of the peppers, along with the singing and dancing and processions.

The red chili peppers, native to Central and South America, were brought to the Basque Country in the early part of the 16th-century by a returning seafarer who had sailed to the new world with Christopher Columbus. Baked in an oven and ground into powder, they were originally used in medicine, as a preservative for meat (jambon) and as an ingredient in chocolate. They grow well here because of the hot, humid summers, typical of the immediate area. The pepper harvest, done by hand, lasts for ten weeks, commencing in mid-August. Once harvested, the peppers are strung together in traditional *cordes*, strands or garlands, or ground to make various and sundry condiments. Piment d'Espelette is as important an ingredient in French Basque country cooking as curry is in India. Only ten villages in the area are allowed to produce the peppers, which have their own AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) and AOP/PDO (Appellation d'Origine Protégée/Protected Denomination of Origin),

You might want to hit Espelette on a Wednesday, which is the traditional market day (also on Saturdays in July and August). Kids will enjoy the free samples at [Antton Chocolatier](#), one of the Labourd region's best chocolate makers, open from March 1-November 15. Try their *ganache* made with Espelette pepper. We buy our favorite slate blue, white and sand colored Basque linens at [Maison d'Artiga](#), 435 rue principale, the main street running through the village. Unusual perfumes and lotions, which make great gifts, can be sampled and bought at the [Parfums et Senteurs du Pays Basque](#). You can pick up the red pepper Espelette powder and paste at any one of the shops along the main street, or at the [Bipia](#) factory in the nearby village of Larressore, *Quartier Errepira*, on the D932 highway going south to Cambo, exit at the first roundabout. Open daily from 9:30 am to 4:30 pm, but closed on weekends during processing. Prices here are a fraction of what this expensive powder retails for in the States. Also available online through [La Tienda](#), with a store in

Williamsburg, VA, and [The Spanish Table](#), with stores in Berkeley, Mill Valley and San Francisco CA.

If you visit on the last Tuesday and Wednesday in January, you will be able to witness the annual [La foire au Pottok](#), the Pottok horse fair, where these shy, shaggy horses are bought and sold - *for the first time the horse fare was held on the last Saturday and Sunday in January 2018*. The 23rd edition of the [Gauargi Festival](#), “Children and Dances of the World”, will be held from Wednesday, July 18, to Tuesday, July 24, in 2018. But the festival kicks off on Saturday, July 15, with a free concert.

Dining in Espelette

[Restaurant Pottoka](#)

Our favorite stop in Espelette is this small family restaurant at 5 Place du Jeu de Paume, is open Tuesday-Sunday, but closes annually from February 19-March 21. Completely renovated in 2014, Chef Sabine offers two fixed price menus during the week, 15€ and 20€, and a degustation menu for 42€. Dining on the terrace during the summer. Very popular. Reservations required for dinner on weekends.

Tel: (+33) 559 939 092

[Hotel Chilhar](#)

This small hotel restaurant run by Beñat et Charlotte Etchart gives you another good option should you be unable to find a table at Pottoka. Normally closed Sunday evening and Monday, and annually in January and February, they are open daily from mid-July to the end of August for lunch and dinner, when you can dine in the garden with a lunch menu, available Monday-Friday, for only 17€. Specializing in products from the farm of the acclaimed [Pierre Oteiza](#) in the nearby Aldudes valley.

Tel: (+33) 559 248 901

[Hôtel Euzkadi](#)

You can also dine in the heart of the village at this classic hotel where the restaurant offers a value menu at lunch for only 20€ during the week, except on holidays. There is a child’s menu for only 12,50€. Or, as we often do, enjoy a few ‘tapas’ at the bar. Closed on Mondays year around, Tuesdays from October-May, and annually from February 15 until March 20.

Tel: (+33) 559 939 188

Larressore

Before venturing southeast into the Basse Navarre, your next stop, a quick detour off the Espelette road, should be to [Larressore](#), sitting south of the historic Mondarrain and Atxulegui mountains, where you can visit and shop at the famous walking stick studio, [Makhila](#), of the Ainciart-Bergara family, who have been in business here for more than 200 years. In 2017, *L'atelier Ainciart Bergara*, the Ainciart Bergara workshop, was awarded its 3rd star by the Michelin Green Guide.

These world-famous traditional Basque walking sticks, first used by shepherds and pilgrims during the Middle Ages, have beautiful silver or gold plated handles that can be monogrammed with ones' initials and a motto of one's choice, and all are still made by hand from the wood of the medlar tree. The branch is cut and dried for up to 12 years to increase its strength. You can see the artisans at work, and a lady will give you an explanation in English. Makhila means "death giver" in Basque, as every makhila has a hidden blade in its handle. The lady, during her explanation, will unscrew the handle to reveal a tiny sharp spike.

Famous makhila owners have been members of royalty, popes, as well as current and past heads of state, including Reagan, Churchill and de Gaulle. Makhila in Basque means "death giver", as every makhila has a hidden blade in its handle. Nicole, during her explanation, will unscrew the handle to reveal a tiny sharp spike. Some say the makhila was the inspiration for the Bayonne blacksmiths who invented the bayonet. You can order by mail, but it's best to have your makhila custom made. They'll take your measurements when you visit, but you'll have a 6-month wait before you receive your perfectly balanced walking stick. Prices start at 290€.

Itxassou

Leaving Larressore, you can head south on the D918 with a quick detour to the right (west) to the small, sleepy, but attractive village black cherry village of [Itxassou](#). Like most of other the villages in the area, it too was heavily damaged during the Spanish-French war in the early 1800s, but survived. Not much to see here but the pink pelota court at the square, and the village's extremely pretty 17th-century church of Saint-Fructueux with its 3-tiered wooden balconies and lovingly tended, flower bedecked cemetery in the lower town.

We always stop on the way out of town at a local farm, the [Ferme Antxondoa](#) (follow the *ferme cerises noires* signs), to pick up a jar of the town's famed *confiture de cerises noires*, black cherry jam, and then at the [Mirentxu Elissalde Parachu](#), on the *Route Du Fromage*, for Ossau-Iraty ewe's cheese. But there is a shop next to the church in the lower town selling these items and which is conveniently open on Sunday.

Doing lunch in Itxassou

[Hotel du Fronton - Maison Bonnet](#)

This traditional restaurant, opened in 1948 by Joseph and Jeanne Bonnet, located in the upper village at the pelota court (where you can learn pelota), is where chef Beñat Bonnet (3rd generation), serves a weekday seasonal lunch menu for 23€. Closed Wednesdays. Recommended in the Michelin Guide for 2018.

Tel: (+33) 559 297 510

[Hotel du Chêne](#)

The “Oak”, a small 2-star, 15-room hotel next to the church in the lower village, has a lovely shaded patio if you need a stop for a coffee or a *panaché*, a glass of beer cut with lemonade or sweet soda. Or if you land here for lunch, chef Serge Caumont offers a 33€ menu during the week, with several options to choose from. Open Wednesday-Sunday for lunch at 12:30 pm, plus Tuesdays during high season.

Tel: (+33) 559 297 501

[Haize Hegoa Ostatua](#)

There is also this small bar-café-basseri located just down the street from the Hotel du Fonton, which opens at 11:00 am if you are early and want to relax with a glass of wine or beer on the terrace before lunch. Seating for 24 inside. The bistro opens for lunch at noon from April to the end of December, but closed on Monday and Tuesday during low season, and Mondays from June 1 to September 1. The lunch menu is a practical 13,50€. We stopped here recently for lunch on a rainy Sunday afternoon, where chef Eric Lacaze served a never-ending bowl of Axoa.

Tel: (+33) 559 741 103

Bidarray

Continuing southeast on the D918 and crossing the boundary from the province of Labourd to Basse-Navarre, you follow the River Nive to small village of Bidarray, located at the foot of the peaks of “Iparla” of “Artzamendi” and “Baigura” mountains. In order to see the upper town, with its incredibly scenic views from town square, you must cross the Roman bridge, the *Noblia*, that the villagers call the “Bridge of Hell”, built by the *Laminak* or *Sorginak* (witches in Basque mythology) in one night, and detour up to the top of the plateau. Park at the fonton next to the church. This is well worth the detour for the vistas alone, plus a great lunch stop at the restaurant in the heart of the village, the [Auberge Imparla](#), which reopened in August 2017.

Bidarray's church, *Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption*, is unusual, a 12th-century building constructed of red sandstone but without the usual, 3-tiered wooden balconies. Inside you will find a selection of wooden carvings and a stained glass windows that create a moody, tranquil light. It once served as a chapel for pilgrims on the road to Santiago de Compostela, and is the only church in the immediate area. It is surrounded by the usual cemetery with Basque crosses and has a stunning belvedere for fantastic views.

And now for something different, Henri Parent, owner of Auberge Ostapé, with his passion for Porsche, opened a private Porsche museum and a luxury caretaker service for exceptional cars on his estate in April 2016. [L'Ecurie Ostape](#), in the estate's former stables, is where you can see this rare collection of 18 Porsche models. The museum is open to the public on Saturdays and Sundays from 2:00 pm to 6:00 pm.

Dining in Bidarray

[Auberge Imparla](#)

Once in the hands of Parisian super chef Alain Ducasse, the new owners/chefs [Julie and Stéphane Carricaburu](#), reopened the restaurant in 2017 and offer a selection of fresh, seasonal and local products, pigeon and trout (in season), beef from Galicia, and a 32€ menu. Open Wednesday-Sunday from 9:00 am to 10:00 pm. It has a handsome, casually elegant dining room with an outdoor terrace. We are hoping that it will again become one of the destinations for gourmets in the Pays Basque countryside outside of the Biarritz area. Reservations highly recommended on weekends and during high season.

Tel: (+33) 559 378 709

[Auberge Ostapé](#)

The restaurant Lore Tipia, in the 5-star Auberge Ostape, can be found just outside the village in the countryside on a 45-hectare estate. Chef Cédric Roubin from Bordeaux, who took over the restaurant in 2007, offers seasonal menus featuring local producers starting at 39€. Meals can be served on the terrace overlooking the mountains or in the dining room. Recommended in the Michelin Guide for 2018. Reservations required.

Tel: (+33) 559 379 191

Ossès

After Bidarray, you continue on the D918, the road to St-Jean-Pied-de-Port, following the course of the river Nive, past the [Poterie Goïcoechea](#), famed pottery workshop in Ossès- look for the enormous clay water jugs outside. If you're in the market for an attractive, hand painted clay wine cooler, this is the place to purchase it, or a hand painted vase. Their

boutique shop is in St-Jean-de-Luz, at 1 Place Louis XIV. On the road here you'll also pass the [Arnabar](#) shop, which sells duck confit, foie gras, and other delicious Basque delicacies. You can also visit their farm in neighboring Irissarry to see the ducks themselves on Monday and Thursday from 10:00 am to noon, July-September. But don't make a stop here if it's Monday, as you'll see the Arnabar folks at the Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port outdoor market, or stop by their shop in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, 15, rue Labrousche, next to Les Halles. If you're in need of espadrilles, stop in Ossés at the shop and museum, [Don Quichosse](#), to watch them be made by artisan Jean Jacques Houyou. The museum is open from April to October.

Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port

Then on to the pretty, but always annoyingly crowded [St-Jean-Pied-de-Port](#) or *Donibane Garazi* in the Basque language. Spanning both sides the river Nive, this classic and ancient village boasts pink sandstone walls, red roofs and wooden, geranium draped balconies. It is also an important way station on the Camino de Santiago, the route of Saint James, and the "gateway" to Spain. In the summer the village fills with modern day pilgrims, resting and getting their credentials and gear in order before starting off on their 800 plus mile journey, scallops shells, the symbol of St. Jacques, attached to their bags.

Monday is the fabled market day, and [this is indeed](#) the day to visit as all the major *bergers*, purveyors of farm products, set up their stands in the area above the main road, where "*Donibane Garazi*" is spelled on the hill with flowers. We find ample parking nearby on the hill. By hitting the town on market day, you need not stop at every farm along the route-the farmers handily come to you. It all ends around 1:00 pm, so you'll need to get an early start to your day, or divide this driving tour into two, one for Labourd villages, another for the Basse-Navarre, which is my recommended manner of seeing all the delights of the Pays Basque countryside. This market is a real treat!

Aside from the market, you may not want to linger here because of the omnipresent crowds and summer heat, but with kids in tow, there's the 13th-century Bishops' Prison, [la Prison des Evêques](#), where, for 3€ (15 yo and older, children free), you can visit the cells and the dungeon in a 30-minute guided tour. Exhibits on the 1st floor are free. In 2018 it will be open in July and August from 10:30 am to 7:00 pm, while from April-June and September-October, it will be open from 11:00 am to 12:30 pm, and in the afternoon from 2:30 to 6:30 pm, closed on Tuesdays. Guide tours are in French only.

You may also want to stop in for a look at the [L'Église Notre Dame](#), and the [Citadelle](#), originally built by Chevalier Deville in 1628 under the reign of Richelieu, later renovated by Vauban, Louis XIV's military architect. The Citadelle is open from July 9-August 29, 2018.

If you haven't had time to pick up gifts on the coast, across the bridge you'll find plentiful (but crowded) shopping along the rue d'Espagne. Look for Basque linens and bères at [Helena](#), 7 Rue d'Espagne, or [Jean Vier](#), 17 Place Charles Floquet. Handcrafted espadrilles from the village of Mauleon are available at the [L'Espadrille de Litxu](#), 2, Rue d'Espagne.

Iroulégué wines or spirits, eau de vie, pear, raspberry or prune brandy or delicious coffee liqueur (*liqueur de cacao a la Poire Brana*) can be found at [Domaine Etienne Brana](#), on the way to this shopping street at #2 rue de l'Eglise. For Iroulégué wine sampling, the cellars of [Domaine Mourguy](#) are open to visitors in the suburb of *Ispoure*, with its single walled fonton. The owners also offer donkey rides for the children through the vineyards.

Just a few kms southeast of St-Jean-Pied-de-Port, about a 12-minute drive through a scenic valley following the river Nive, you'll come to the small village of Estérençuby and [Ferme Xaltoinia](#), where Jean-Michel Maitia produces wonderful pure Brebis, ewe's milk cheese, from the Manex *Tête Noire* sheep, the black headed sheep, nicknamed "the conquering princess of the Basque mountains." The farm, part of the [Slow Food Foundation](#), is open daily from 8:00 am noon and from 2:00 to 8:00 pm.

The home base of the charcuterie extraordinaire, [Pierre Oteiza](#), can be found 15 km south of St-Jean-Pied-de-Port on the Route d'Urepel, in the heart of the Aldudes Valley. This is a *gorgeous* drive that should be taken even if you're not even vaguely intrigued by ham! The shop is open for visits from 8:00 am to 7:00 pm daily. We recently had a magnificent, but quite simple lunch here, the most memorable of our entire stay, in the adjacent dining room, consisting of a platter of the delicious ham and sausage, a platter of Ossau Iraty ewe's milk cheeses and rustic bread, along with a bottle of Iroulégué wine. Superb!! You can also visit the black hoofed pigs and piglets, resting or grazing in their fields below the shop. Although you can buy these products in Bayonne, St. Jean-de-Luz, Biarritz and even Paris, there is nothing quite like sampling them here.

Lunch in Saint-Jean-Pied-Port

[Les Pyrénées](#)

This three Michelin starred hotel and restaurant is located directly on the main road winding through the village is for throw-caution-to-the-winds haute cuisine dining. This is a Relais & Chateaux property run extremely smoothly by the Arrambide family. The father, Firmin, oversees the dining room while his son Phillippe stokes the fires in the kitchen. While an a la carte feast may run over 100€, a special 3-course menu, *menu du terroir*, choice of 2 starters, 2 mains and 2 desserts, is offered for 40€ at lunch-other menus for 70€ and 85€. The dining room closes Monday for dinner from Nov.-March and closes on Tuesdays from Sept 20-June 30. It also closes November 20-December 22 and January 5-28.

Tel: (+33) 559 370 101

[Hotel-Restaurant Pecoitz](#)

Nearby, 5 kms to the east on the D401, is the miniscule village of Aincille where you can stop for lunch at the wonderful family-owned restaurant surrounded by the mountains and Irouléguy vineyards “a little corner of Paradise”, says a noted French gourmet magazine. Recommended in the Michelin Guide for 2018. Weekday lunch menus are offered for only 17€. It’s open April 1-January 1, but closed Thursday evening, Saturday mid-day and Friday, except for school vacations.

Tel: (+33) 559 371 188

[Les Sources de la Nive](#)

If that doesn’t fit, continue on the Estérençuby road past Saint-Michel and Estérençuby, 4 km down to the village of Béherobie to a hotel-restaurant sitting right on the banks of the river where you’ll enjoy a 23€ weekday menu. Opens for lunch at 12:30 pm and dinner at 7:30 pm. Closed January and February and on Tuesdays in November and December.

Tel: (+33) 559 371 057

[ART'ZAIN](#)

If you’re hungry, or are planning ahead, from Ossès (5,2 km) follow the D8, or 15 minutes from St-Pied-de-Port, in the center of the small village of [Irissarry](#), you’ll find chef Henri Amestoy’s new passion and gastronomic sensation offering a special *formule du midi* for only 15€, and seasonal menus at 32€ and 39€. Open Wednesday-Saturday for lunch at noon and dinner at 7:30 pm. Open for lunch only on Sundays.

Tel: (+33) 559 372 383

Saint-Etienne-de-Bäigorry

From here you head due west for about 11 km to the even prettier and much more serene agricultural village of [Bäigorry](#), which means “beautiful view” in Euskara, the Basque tongue. The town sits in the heart of the very scenic Aldudes valley on the edge of the river, and is home to many of the Basque shepherders who immigrated to California, Montana and Nevada from the late 1800s until the 1970s. In the village square visit the lovely Basque church with its beautiful gold Baroque altarpiece and two-tiered wooden balcony with one very famous German Remy Mahler organ used in July-August for the Festival Musical de Basse-Navarre concerts by some of Europe’s most renowned organists. On weekends services are sung in Basque. There are Force Basque (rural Basque “iron man” sports) competitions in July.

Be sure to visit the historic medieval castle, [Chateau d' Etchauz](#), a 7-room boutique hotel sitting amid centuries old oaks along the Nive River has overlooked the village since the 11th century. Guests can spend the night in the comfortably large Art Deco style Charlie Chaplin room. Chaplin, whose scriptwriter/assistant director was Harry d' Arrast (The Gold Rush 1925), was a frequent guest of the d'Abbadie d' Arrast family. Harry's wife, an American actress, lived in the chateau until the early 1970s. Or opt for the much larger Suite Navarraise with a 270 degree view of the village, the vineyards, Oilandoy, and the Nive River.

Here you can sample [Irouléguay wines](#), France's smallest appellation established in 1970, and consisting of 60 members and covering around 500 acres, at the [Cave d'Irouléguay](#). The wine cooperative was founded in 1952 by 9 passionate winemakers to guarantee the highest level of quality of the local wines. There are 81 winegrowers in the cooperative. It's a nice way to sample the wines of all the major producers, pick up some of the local [Ossau-Iraty AOC](#) sheep's cheeses, and purchase an attractive, hand painted, clay wine cooler from [Poterie Goichochea](#), if you missed the factory in Ossès. The store is open daily for from 7:00 am to noon and 2:00 pm to 6:30 pm, April to September, closed on Sundays from October through March.

You can also sample some of these wines at their source in the tiny village of Irouléguay, about half way between St-Jean-Pied-de-Port and Bäigorry, at one of the three wineries in the village open to visitors; [Le Domaine Ilarria](#), run by Peio Espil, is open from 10:00 am to noon and 2:00 pm to 6:00 pm, closed Saturday and Sunday, [Le Domaine Arretxea](#), run by [Thérese & Michel Riousepeyrou](#) the husband and wife team, and the [Domaine Etxegaraya](#), run by the 5th generation of the Hillau family, is open from 10:00 am to 12:30 pm and in the afternoon from 3:00 pm to 6:30 pm, closed on Sundays. The rustic Tannat grape is the variety that reigns supreme in the production of Irouléguay, but it's sometimes blended with Cabernet Sauvignon or Cabernet Franc to give it more balance and softness.

Dining in and around Bäigorry

[Hotel Arcé](#)

This country inn, which has been run by the same family for 5 generations, has a comfy, welcoming and prettily decorated flower-filled parlor with fireplace, antique-filled nooks, twenty simple, a tennis court and pool that you reach by crossing a private bridge over the river Nive. It's set in the Aldudes valley surrounded by spectacular mountain scenery. The cuisine is quite nice, brought to you by chef owner, Pascual Arcé, and evening lantern lit dining on their pretty outdoor terrace shaded by plane trees is a special, peaceful and romantic treat. It's also a "Bibi Gourmand".

Tel: (+33) 559 374 014

[Auberge Hôtel Restaurant Erreguin](#)

If you're feeling hungry after visiting the wineries, continue up the D948 through the Valley of Aldudes, on the road to Pamplona (Navarra). The Hotel Restaurant sits directly above the village of Banca. Here, the 3rd generation of the Bidart family, Stefania and Xabi, offer seasonal lunch menus from 11€ (one plate plus café) to 20,90€. Desserts are all priced at a very reasonable 4,80€, if ordered with lunch. English menus. Reservations recommended on the weekend and during high season.

Tel: (+33) 559 374 037

If you happen to be running a little late for lunch, and don't mind a short drive, then head up the D949 to Navarra and follow the NA2600/N-121-B toward Elizondo, in the Baztán Valley, where you'll find [Santxotena](#), a 4th generation family restaurant offering traditional Navarran cuisine. Lunch only during the winter months except for Saturday. Closed Sunday nights and all day Monday, annually the first two weeks of September, and from December 24 to January 5 for the Christmas holidays.

After lunch, you can head back to Ainhoa on the N-121-B, a 30-minute drive.

Cambo-les-Bains

Not far from Bayonne, quietly nestled in the heart of the French Basque country, in the Nive valley, you'll find the spa-town of Cambo-les-Bains, or *Kanbo* in Basque, a village of half-timbered houses with red or green shutters, once a noted center for the treatment of tuberculosis. One of the more interesting buildings in Le Quartier des Thermes is the art-deco style [Thermes de Cambo](#). The luxurious 15-hectare garden is filled with palms and flowers and is free to explore. There is also a Roman bridge in lower Cambo, *Bas Combo*. And if you love chocolate, be sure to visit [Chocolaterie Puyodebat](#), the artisan chocolatier at Avenue de Navarre, if you missed the shop in Bayonne. The store is open Monday-Saturday. In October, the village celebrates the traditional Gâteau Basque, the Basque cake that originated in the Labourd province in the 17th-century, with a festival the first week of October.

But here is where also you'll discover the historic [Villa Arnaga](#), the *Musée Edmond Rostand*, author of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, a lovely masterpiece, a Neo-Basque villa decorated in Belle Epoque style with exquisite formal Versailles-style gardens, covering more than 15 hectares, complete with strutting peacocks. The home has been kept very authentic, with family furniture, minstrels' gallery, newspaper clippings of Rostand's theatrical works, his letters, and pictures with stars of his day and visiting celebrities, such as Sara Bernhart. A theater festival is held here the second week in August. We very much enjoy our visits here, which are free, or one can take a guided tour of the villa for 1€ (in French only). Allow at least an

hour to see the entire estate. Strollers and backpacks are not allowed in the villa, which is open every day from April 1 through Halloween. You can wander the gardens at your leisure. The gardens were restored to their original beauty in 2014, the paths redone to allow wheelchair access. The best time to visit is from April to June when the garden is in full bloom. Parking is free.

From Cambo, you can head to Hasparren, home of [Bob's Beer](#), on the D10, then south on the D251 to small hamlet of Isturitz for a visit to the prehistoric, 80,000 year old caves, [Grottes d'Isturitz-Oxocelhaya](#), one of the more important Paleolithic sites in France, and part to the Pyreneo-Cantabric chain. Discovered in 1913, the caves in the *Vallée de l'Arberoue*, the Arberoue Valley, are open daily from mid-March to mid-November. Visits are 11€ for adults, 4,50€ for children from 7 to 14. Every Wednesday in July and August there is a special photographic tour for 14€, reservations required at least 24 hours in advance.

If you happen to find yourself in Cambo at lunchtime you have a couple of options. [Le Bellevue](#) is a small restaurant in the old post office (1834) at 29 Rue des Terraces, and that is now the Hôtel Bellevue, where you can enjoy the seasonal gastronomic menu (25€ and 35€) with a view overlooking the Nive River. [Auberge Chez Tante Ursule](#), *Aunt Ursule's Kitchen*, can be found next to the pelota court and offers a 28€ menu at lunch, which changes daily, Monday-Friday. Both come recommended in the 2018 Michelin Guide.

La Bastide-Clairence

After your visit to the caves, return to Hasparren to take the D10 or D510 north to another three-flower village, [La Bastide-Clairence](#), one of the prettiest and least discovered of all in the French Basque country. This fortified hamlet, created in 1312 by Louis I King of Navarre, lies just far enough east of Biarritz and Bayonne to be missed by those touring on the Sare-Espelette-Ainhoa circuit. A tiny, one street village, a [Plus Beaux Villages de France](#), “*Most Beautiful Villages of France*”, does have one of the most lovingly cared for cemeteries next to its village church, *Notre Dame du Chemin*, that you'll see.

Beyond the church's cemetery, you'll find another, ancient, gated cemetery, the “*cimetière juif*”, a Jewish cemetery dating back to the 1610 with 62 tombstones now maintained by the [Israelite Consistory of Bayonne](#). The Jewish settlement in La Bastide-Clairence, seventy to eighty families, was an adjunct to the Jewish colony that settled in the St. Esprit quarter of Bayonne, after the Jews fled the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal. These “Portuguese merchants” benefited from royal protection orders passed in 1550 and became a powerful economic group in the city. The first Jewish families buried here were “marranos”, those who officially converted to Catholicism but in secret continued to observe their Jewish faith.

During the 1700s practicing Jews could be buried here due to the protection of the Dukes of Gramont. In 1941 the Nazis destroyed most of the cemetery.

The tourist office in the *Maison Darrieux, Place des Arceaux*, in the center of the village, offers guided tours, and is also an exhibition gallery where we've purchased some nice, reasonably priced watercolors by local artists. The [Trinquet](#), a covered court with galleries on the left hand side and at the back, where typical pelota basque games are played, dates from the 16th-century. It was renovated in 2008 and is the world's oldest *jeu de paume*, or real tennis court, still in use. The Farmers Market, which takes place in the village square every Friday evening in July and August from 7:00 pm to 10:00 pm, is where you can meet the local artisans and farmers, while enjoy the dancing and music.

From the village, you can also visit the nearby Benedictine [Abbaye Notre Dame de Belloc](#), located off the main road to Urt, the D10, 5 minutes from La Bastide Clairence, to purchase the delicious, world famous, Brebis (sheep's milk) cheese [Abbaye de Belloc](#) made only from the red-nosed Manech ewes brought to the monastery from neighboring farms, and religious memorabilia or Basque choral CDs sold by the monks in their shop, which is only open Tuesday-Friday in the afternoon from 2:45 to 5:45 pm. Also available at [Olsson's Fine Foods](#) in Princeton, N.J.

The Sisters' [Monastère Sainte-Scholastique](#) is nearby. Their shop is open daily from 9:45 am to 12:30 pm and in the afternoon from 3:30 to 5:30 pm, but closed Sunday afternoon. Payment is by cash, or check if you're from France.

For lunch in La Bastide-Clairence you might consider chef Frédéric Inguenault's offerings at restaurant [Ostatua Iduki](#) with a simple lunch menu during the week of only 15€. Located at the entrance to the village, you can park along the river in the shade of ancient oaks and dine on the terrace. Open daily from May the end of August, closed annually from December 22 to January 8.

Web Resources

Useful links for planning your Pays Basque vacation

- biarritz.fr
- bayonne-tourisme.com
- saint-jean-de-luz.com
- euskoguide.com
- urrugne.com
- touradour.com
- tourisme64.com (French/Spanish only)
- bearn-basquecountry.com
- bayonne-tourisme.com

Guide Books

- Cadogan's Southwest France, Gascony & the Pyrenees
- Lonely Planet's Southwest France
- Petit Futé Pays Basque (in French)
- Lonely Planet's Biarritz-Baonne et la Côte Basque (in French)

Maps

I urge you to buy the very detailed Michelin Zoom map #133, Basque Coast, and the Regional map #524, Aquitaine, available at Michelin and Amazon. Or you can purchase the Michelin maps at gas stations and bookstores throughout the French Basque region.

Travel Planning Services

Exclusive Travel Planning Services by [Iberian Traveler - Maribel's Guides](#). Contact Maribel to arrange a custom itinerary for your trip to Spain, Portugal, Paris or southwest France.

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

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