The Rioja Alta, Alavesa & Baja

Maribel’s Guide to the Rioja ©

Maribel’s Guides for the Sophisticated Traveler ™

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Getting To The Rioja

Arriving By Car

**From Madrid**
If driving from the Adolfo Suárez Madrid-Barajas Airport, follow the A1/E5 north toward Burgos. If you are in need of a coffee stop in route, you’ll find an Auto Grill at km 107, an easy exit off the A1, just after the Riaza-Soria exit. Continue on through Aranda del Duero and Burgos in the Ribera del Duero wine region to the E5/AP-1, just beyond Miranda de Ebro.

**From Barcelona**
If arriving from Barcelona by car, the quickest route would be to take the AP-68, which will take you directly into Logroño, but since the drive is nearly 4-1/2 hours long without stops, we recommend you spend the night in or around Tudela in southern Navarra.

**From Bilbao**
The Basque Country’s vibrant city on the coast is just over an hour’s drive from the Haro, capital of the Rioja Alta wine producing region. It also makes for a easy guide day-tour of the Rioja if your time is limited.

Arriving By Train
Most visitors to the Rioja arrive by car, but there is an ALVIA train departing Madrid in the afternoon at 6:35, arriving in Logroño at 9:58 that evening. There is also an ALVIA departing Barcelona Sans station at 7:35 am, arriving in Logroño at 11:22 am, with a second train departing at 3:30 in the afternoon, arriving in Logroño at 7:23 pm. See Renfe or Petraba to book your tickets.

Flying to the Rioja
The closest international airport to the Rioja is Bilbao. The smaller regional airport in Logroño, the capital of La Rioja, only handles Air Nostrum (Iberia) flights to and from Madrid and Barcelona and private aircraft.
Overnighting In Lerma

While the trip from Madrid to Haro will only take you around four hours, you might enjoy breaking up your drive, particularly if you happen to be arriving on an International flight that morning. When we vacation in the Rioja we plan an overnight at the very restful Parador de Lerma south of Burgos, which lies within an easy two-hour drive of Madrid’s Barajas airport.

This popular monument-Parador, housed in an early Renaissance ducal palace from the Hapsburg era, formerly belonging to the Duke of Lerma, has four imposing towers and an immense interior patio surrounded by columned arcades. It offers forty-four very large, beautifully decorated and very comfortable guest rooms, some facing the square and some with balconies facing the fields and river. The marble baths come with double sinks and power showers. Be sure to request a room with balcony on the 3rd floor, the noble floor. Some favorites are 328 and 325 facing the square and 307, 312 and 314 facing the meadow.

This Parador provides a very quiet and relaxing night’s stay. While the town of Lerma can be visited in under an hour, as it is still a rather sleepy spot, it comes to life on weekends, filling up with day-trippers from Madrid out for a drive and to enjoy the region’s culinary claim to fame, its delectable roast baby lamb. A weekly farmers’ market is held on the square on Wednesday mornings.

The very ample, even lavish, breakfast buffet costs an additional 18€, while three-course lunches and dinners (enormous portions) cost 34€. When booking make sure to check for

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promotional rates online, especially the Parador’s own “Tarifa Unica” (Fixed Rate) discount, which can be very advantageous. Also check for availability of their 5-Night Card (if you plan to stay at other Paradors during your trip), the promotion for seniors 60+ (Golden Days) and the discount for those 35 and under (Young Getaway). See the current promotions at: www.parador.es

Dining In Lerma

Casa Brigante

For dining in Lerma, the Parador has a lovely dining room with a solid reputation, which we frequent for dinner, but for lunch we prefer the charmingly decorated Casa Brigante, on the square to the left as you step out the front door of the Parador. This Asador, a restaurant specializing in grilled and roasted meats, with its large wood burning adobe oven in the center of the dining room, is well known as one of the areas best, specializing in lechazo, roast suckling baby lamb, which must be ordered in advance.

When we arrive around noon, our first order of business is to walk over to Casa Brigante to make a lunch reservation and order the usual forequarter of roast lamb for two. Everything about this noted local eatery is authentic and inviting - its décor of hunting rifles, antique sabers, antique photos, wagon wheel lamps, stuffed wild boards’ heads, adobe roasting ovens - makes it charmingly rustic and cozy, particularly in winter. Downstairs there are only eight tables, but upstairs you’ll find two additional private dining rooms for the overflow. We
usually dine at 1:00 pm, but the last lunch reservation is taken for 3:30 pm. If you plan to sample their famous roast lamb, you must reserve this in advance: Tel: (+34) 947 170 594.

As for its menu, along with its famous roast lamb, 37€ for two, it also features baby lamb chops, tenderloin of duck, *solomillo de pato*, with a special sauce, grilled seasonal wild mushrooms, braised chorizo, blood pudding, *morcilla de Burgos*, wonderfully tender grilled pork loin, *presa de ibérico*, grilled lamb steak, *churrasco*, a simple but delicious onion and lettuce salad and game dishes in season. House wine is available by the carafe, but there is also a list of the region’s best Ribera del Duero labels plus the local Ribera del Arlanza labels, which for us are just as fine and less expensive.

Try the terrific Lerma *tinto* (red) *crianza*. Most diners opt for the homemade flans, such as *flan con nata*, *flan de queso* or the fantastic *flan de café* for dessert. Spain’s renowned gastronomic critic, Rafael García Santos, hails this fine restaurant as one of the very best roast lamb purveyors in the country. Diego Peña, your talented chef, speaks some English and has now translated his menu into English, as many English speakers have now stopped there to dine, having read about him in this guide.

Don’t leave the town without sampling the area’s truly excellent wines from the Ribera del Arlanza wine-producing region. The Lerma red is first rate, along with Ribera del Duero’s Arzuaga wines (Arzuaga and La Planta reds and a delicious white, Fan d’Oro), plus their outstanding olive oil.
Wine Touring In The Ribera del Duero

On The Way To The Rioja

If you plan on spending a night or two in Lerma or Burgos to rest up before moving on to the Rioja, the following prestigious wineries do accept visitors to their facilities, provided visits are arranged in advance, by email or online. Or ask Iberian Traveler-Maribel’s Guides to create a wonderful wine tasting adventure for you.

In The Burgos Province

_A short detour from the A-1_

• **Peñalba López** - just below Aranda de Duero.

• **López Cristóbal** - in Roa de Duero - Our clients love the welcome here by the gracious, English-speaking winemaker.

• **Condado de Haza** - owned by Alejandro Fernández, in Roa de Duero.

• **Bodegas Valduero** - Carretera de Aranda, near the village of Gumiel del Mercado.

• **Ismael Arroyo-Valsotillo** - delightful family-run winery with ancient underground cellars, in Sotillo de la Ribera.

• **Bodegas Prado Rey** - Real Sitio de la Ventosilla

• **Carmelo Rodero** - Pedrosa
• **Pago de los Capellanes** - Pedrosa

• **Pérez Pascuas (Viña Pedrosa)** - Pedrosa de Duero - our clients are assured a fantastic VIP visit here.

**In The Valladolid Province**

*If you have 2-3 full days to dedicate to wine tourism*

- **Bodegas Abadia Retuerta** - The estate, *L'Domaine*, can be found along the Golden Mile near the village of Sardón del Duero in the Ribera del Duero, just outside of the Burgos province.

• **Alejandro Fernández Pesquera** - Pesquera de Duero.

• **Emilio Moro** - Pesquera

• **Bodegas Protos** - housed in the spectacular Richard Rogers designed, 30 million Euro project lying below the stunning castle in Peñafiel.

• **Legaris** - Curiel de Duero

• **Comenge** - Curiel de Duero

• **Cepa 21** - Castillo de Duero

• **Matarromera** - Valbuena de Duero

• **Bodegas Trus** – Piñel de Abajo
Overnighting at a Wine Hotel

In the Ribera del Duero

**Finca Torremilanos**

If you’d like the experience of spending your first night at a winery in Spain’s other renowned red wine-producing region and don’t wish to venture off the A-1, the 4-star, 37-room boutique hotel, with its own restaurant and stylish accommodations, fits the bill. The hotel is located on the grounds of the Bodegas Peñalba López, a 102-year old estate on 492 acres, slightly southwest of Aranda de Duero. Several wine touring companies use this hotel for their Ribera del Duero wine tours.

Tel: (+34) 947 512 852

**Hotel Pesquera AF**

However, if you have the time to spare for a two-night stay before venturing further north to the Rioja, we highly recommend choosing this stunning 4-star avant-garde wine hotel and spa, a complete remake of a hundred year old flour factory. It’s located in Peñafiel, the capital of the Ribera del Duero Burgalesa, just a 40-minute detour west from the A1, and is the creation of the celebrated winemaker Alejandro Fernández of the famed Bodegas Pesquera. Its 36 rooms, all stylishly outfitted in contemporary mode, are divided among doubles, suites, special rooms and lofts. The generous breakfast is included in the room rate, and for an additional charge, offers underground garage parking. For overnighters, the hotel has very handy in-and-out access, right off the N-122 highway, across the street from the Repsol station.
Here you’ll find the perfect package of splendid regional dishes prepared with a modern touch, great wines, fantastic salads and gracious, well-trained service. Recommended in the Guía Repsol. The sommelier speaks very good English and will choose the perfect wine to accompany your meal. You’ll find this unique boutique property just off the Valladolid-Aranda del Duero highway, on Paseo de la Estación, across the street from the Repsol station.

Tel: (+34) 983 881 212

**Residencia Real Castillo de Curiel**

Another great option if you have a couple of nights, and want to stay in a castle from the middle ages, then this little 24-room gem sitting on top of the hill in Curiel de Duero, 10-minutes (4 kms) north of Peñafiel, might fit the bill. All rooms have views out over the Douro valley. The double rooms of this wine hotel are on the small size, 150 to 193 sf, but comfortable and air conditioned, but you may want to opt for a slightly larger superior room or the suite if you plan on extending your stay to more than a couple of nights.

There is a restaurant and small rooftop pool for relaxing in the evening after a day of wine touring. And Bodegas Comenge is only a short 15-minute walk away. Parking is free.

Tel: (+34) 983 880 401
The Rioja Wine Region

The Rioja is a stunningly beautiful and ancient land, inhabited since the Neolithic era, where you’ll find atmospheric fortress towns on a hill, some with their medieval walls still intact and filled with Noble homes displaying their heraldic shields. There are enormous Gothic churches, each with its own amazing, ornately gilded Baroque altarpiece, but seldom seen, because these churches are kept tightly shut other than for mass. Ancient burial markers (dólmenes), scattered about the fields intermix with the wineries, both boutique and the larger, industrial wineries. Here is where you’ll also find a number of charming family run country inns along with superb Riojan and Basque cuisine.

Proposed for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage Listing in 2013, it’s three distinct sub-zones make up the wine-producing region of Spain’s oldest DO - the Rioja Alta, whose “capital” is Haro, the Rioja Baja, the majority of which lies in the very dry and much hotter southeastern portion of the Rioja, and the Rioja Alavesa, that section of the Rioja that

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belongs to the Basque Country, in the southern portion of the province of Álava. A smaller section of neighboring Navarra also belongs to the Rioja Denomination de Origen.

There are now more than 900 hundred wineries in the Rioja DOC, Spain’s largest, with some 63,000+ hectares of vineyards currently under harvest. The Rioja Alavesa, with 13,000 hectares of vineyards under production and nearly 400 wineries, and the Rioja Alta, covering the western portion of the Rioja, with most of the vineyards of its 580 wineries lying south of the Ebro River, hold the most interest for wine tourism, as they boast the most prestigious wineries in the region.

Looking north from Briones to San Vicente and the Sierra Cantabrian mountains, late winter

The most picturesque villages, some in the Rioja Alavesa, others in La Rioja Alta, can be found following the route of the wine from Haro, in the Rioja Alta, to Logroño, in the Rioja Alavesa, a journey of only 50 kilometers. We recommend visiting the following historic towns along the way:

• **Briñas**, noted for its many mansions formerly inhabited by Haro’s wine nobility.
• **Labastida**, a historic Basque village and impressive fortress town, celebrates the traditional 17th-century dances to the Christ Child during Christmas.
• **Briones**, one of the most atmospheric and unspoiled villages in the Rioja sits adjacent to the impressive Dinastía Vivanco wine museum.
• And just across the Ebro River from its former enemy is **San Vicente de la Sonsierra**, which celebrates Holy Week with a fascinating Maundy Thursday celebration followed by
the Good Friday procession of “Los Picaos”, one of the best known and most important in all of Spain. In San Vicente be sure to drive up to the top of the village to the Santa María la Mayor church for wonderful views of the area and of the castle of Davalillo lying just to the north of the small village of San Asencio.

We also recommend visiting the sleepy and tiny wine villages of Ábalos, home to a dozen small wineries and Samaniego, another wine-making hamlet filled with mansions of warm, golden stone.

Back in the Rioja Alavesa (Basque Country), there is Villabuena de Alava, home to an astonishing 33 wineries, including two of our favorites, Bodega de la Marquesa (Valserrano) and Bodegas Luis Cañas, and the architecturally cutting-edge Hotel Viura.

Our very favorite village in Alava remains Laguardia, the fortified bastide town and capital of the Rioja Alavesa.

And finally Elciego, where the Frank Gehry-designed hotel complex for Marqués de Riscal, the Ciudad del Vino, was inaugurated in September, ’06, which put the region firmly on the international wine tourism map.

If you have time to visit only one of the aforementioned villages, make sure you choose Laguardia, smack dab in the middle

You can pick up a brochure of the ‘Rioja Alavesa Wine Route’ at the tourist office in Laguardia, at Calle Mayor, 52, open daily at 10:00 am, 10:45 am on Sundays. It will provide you with an excellent driving tour of these villages.

Or if you begin your visit to the region from Logroño, be sure to pick up the available brochures and booklets at the Tourist Office of La Rioja, Calle Portales, 50, open weekdays at 9:00 am and at 10:00 am on weekends.

In addition, the Michelin Regional Map #573 of the Basque Country-Navarra-La Rioja is very detailed and extremely helpful when planning your route to and from the three sections of the Rioja DOC, as some maps of the Rioja Alta do not include the Basque villages, as maps of the Alavesa region sometimes forget their Rioja region cousins. It can be a bit confusing to the first time visitor.
Planning Your Visit

When to come? Although the Rioja can be a year round destination, for the best weather and the most scenic beauty, you’ll want to visit from early April through May and September through late October. The vibrant fall colors are at their most spectacular after the harvest, around the first or second week of October.

While most wineries, bodegas, in the region provide guided tours, most still require you to schedule an appointment at least a day or two in advance. And while the wineries conduct the majority of their tours in Spanish, and occasionally French, some are now offering at least one, if not two tours on most days, in English, particularly those wineries in and around Laguardia, which has been thoroughly discovered by English speaking visitors to the Rioja. When booking ahead, advise the public relations staff that you will need your tour in English.

Visiting hours to bodegas are usually restricted, some are open in the morning only, and all are closed during siesta. Many of the wineries remain strictly no-nonsense, business operations not set up for massive wine tourism like many their counterparts in the sherry region of Jerez de la Frontera, such as González Byass, or in the cava growing region in the north, Spain’s “bubbly” bodegas, in Sant Sadurní d’Anoia, Catalunya, and certainly nothing like those in California’s Napa Valley. Most wineries in the Rioja now have web pages that detail visiting hours along with instructions for making an appointment, including online reservations for guided tours and tastings and available languages.
It can be difficult, but not impossible, to visit three wineries on any given day. To do so, one would need to make their first reservations at 9:30 to 10:00 am, the second between noon and 1:00 pm, scheduling the last visit between 4:00 and 5:00 pm, making sure that the three wineries are in close proximity, as most tours and tastings take at least 90 minutes. Most visitors settle for just two daily visits, then enjoy a long, leisurely lunch, Riojan style, along with an equally leisurely drive through the vineyards themselves.

It can also be a challenge getting an early start in the Rioja as most inns don’t start serving breakfast until 9:00 am (8:30 am at the very earliest), and the villages themselves don’t begin to come to life until later in the morning, generally between 10:00 and 11:00 am, but you need to be aware that shops shut down tight in the afternoon for lunch.

After several years the area is slowly changing, adapting its mind set with the opening of new, more flamboyant "designer" wineries designed to attract larger scale wine tourism. These wineries by world class architects, or “starchitects”, such as Santiago Calatrava’s striking pavilion designed for Bodegas Ysios in Laguardia, Bodegas Baigorri in Samaniego, designed by Basque architect Iñaki Aspiazu Iza, the dramatic and enormous Bodegas Campo Viejo by Ignacio Quemada, which sits in the hills outside Logroño, the Bordeaux-based Philippe Mazières designed Bodegas Viña Real, just to the east of Laguardia, Bodegas Darién in Logroño, a creation of Navarran architect Jesús Merino Pascual, and Iraqi-born British architect Zaha Hadid’s famous decanter-shaped tasting pavilion designed for Bodegas López de Heredia-Viña Tondonia in Haro.
The picture changed most dramatically with the September ’06 opening of the Frank Gehry designed headquarters for one of the oldest producers of wines in the region, Marqués de Riscal, in the small village of Elciego. This striking complex, the City of Wine, at its time the most talked about winery project in the world, boasts a forty-three room, 5-star boutique hotel managed by the Sheraton Luxury Collection. The project includes a wine spa offering Vinotherapy plus a Michelin-starred restaurant supervised by chef Francis Paniego of Restaurante El Portal del Echaurren in Ezcaray. We have toured and dined at this complex several times since its opening, and I urge you to add a visit to Marqués de Riscal, in sleepy Elciego, on your list of Rioja destinations.

As mentioned above, touring bodegas “on-the-fly”, à la Napa Valley, is still quite a challenge since most wineries require a prior appointment, so I urge you to do some advanced planning to get the most out of your visit. If you wait until your arrival in the Rioja, thinking you can just “drop by” these wineries and pop in for a tour, you’re bound to be disappointed, particularly if needing an English speaking tour.

First choose a base and time frame for your stay. Three days will give you a taste, but five is optimum. You could even spend a week, alternating winery visits one day with cultural touring the next. Afterwards, make a list of wineries that interest you and found within an easy driving distance of your base, then begin with reservations online, making phone calls (P.R. reps do speak English) or sending emails to arrange your appointments, being aware that many wineries do not open on Sunday.

Don’t rely entirely on your hotel staff to do this for you particularly if you plan on traveling in or around harvest time or during the very busy summer season. And please note that during the hectic harvest season some of the small, family-owned wineries may not open for visits at all, although the “major players”, such as Riscal, Bilbaínas, CVNE, López de Heredia, Darién, Ysios, Finca Valpiedra and Age will continue to provide tours.

Most wineries will charge a fee, anywhere from 3€ and 50€/person for a visit and tasting, sometimes accompanied by a plate of local cheese or chorizo. Very few wineries offer a complimentary visit, except for professionals.

For each recommended winery, I have listed contact numbers, email addresses or web pages. I’ve also listed visiting hours, but these are subject to change, as they often do! If you don’t have the time or desire to do this preparation “leg work”, put yourself in the hands of Iberian Traveler, superbly well-equipped to arrange your entire Rioja visit and provide you with an excellent, informative English-speaking local guide.

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Wineries At The Top Of Your List

The “old guard”, the most venerable, aristocratic, ultra-traditional

- Bodegas R. López de Heredia Viña Tondonia - Haro’s Barrio de la Estación
- Bodegas Muga - Haro’s Barrio de la Estación
- Bodegas Marqués de Riscal - Elciego
- Marqués de Murrieta - Logroño

Small, traditional and family run

- Bodegas Miguel Merino - Briones
- Bodegas Remírez de Ganuza - Samaniego
- Bodegas Ostatu – Samaniego
- Bodegas Amézola de la Mora - Torremontalbo
- Tierra Agrícola - Labastida
- Bodegas Luis Cañas - Villabuena de Alava
- Eguren Ugarte - Páganos
- Tona de Oño - Páganos

State-of-the-art and family run

- Finca Valpiedra - Fuenmayor
- Bodegas Roda - Haro’s Barrio de la Estación
- Vivanco - Briones

Cutting edge, corporate, architecturally stunning

- Bodega Viña Real - Laguardia
- Bodegas Ysios - Laguardia
- Campo Viejo - Logroño
- Bodegas Regalía - Marqués de Terán - Ollauri
- Bodegas Baigorri - Samaniego
The Do’s & Don’ts Of Winery Visits

• **Do** email in advance to schedule a visit in the language of your choice, and have your hotel call to reconfirm the day before. The guide who conducts the English visits may not be available every day of the week.

• **Do** arrive on time; some wineries, such as Muga and Bilbaínas, require check in and pre-payment before the visit.

• **Do** plan according to distance between wineries; keep visits within close proximity of each other. Don’t schedule a visit to Marqués de Murrieta in Logroño to be immediately followed by a visit to Viña Tondonia in Haro, a drive of at least 36 minutes.

• **Do** ask how long each guided tour and tasting lasts so as to allow ample time to make the drive from one winery to the next – some tours last only 45 minutes, some one hour, others 90 minutes, and a few will take up to two hours.

• **Do** expect a charge of from 3€-50€/person for the tour/tasting. Very few wineries give complimentary visits. If you would like a “premium” tasting, this should be booked in advance.

• **Don’t** plan your visit during the Christmas or Easter holidays when wineries are shut tight. In the month of January some inns and restaurants close for vacation.

• **Don’t** plan your visit to the region in August when many wineries close for vacation. (Exceptions include Ysios & El Fabulista in Laguardia, Marqués de Riscal in Elciego)

• **Don’t** attempt to schedule more than three visits per day; two are optimum, followed by a leisurely lunch.

• **Do** try to find the time to experience one traditional Rioja lunch at a winery. Remelluri, Baigorri, Eguren Ugarte, and Dinastía Vivanco have panoramic dining rooms to provide this delightful experience that one shouldn’t miss.
Wineries Open On Sunday

Mornings mostly, until 1:00 or 2:00 pm

Ábalos
- Bodegas Solana de Ramírez

Badarán
- Bodegas David Moreno

Briones
- Vivanco

Elciego
- Bodega Marqués de Riscal
- Valdelana

Haro
- Bodegas Bilbaínas
- Ramón Bilbao (closed Sunday afternoon)
- C.V.N.E.

Laguardia
- Carlos San Pedro Pérez de Viñaspre
- Bodega El Fabulista
- Eguren Ugarte
- Viña Real
- Ysios

Lapuebla de la Barca
- Bodegas Loli Casado

Logroño
- Campo Viejo
- Ontañón
- Bodegas Franco-Españolas

Ollauri
- Federico Paternina
- Conde de los Andes

San Vicente de la Sonsierra
- Bodega Clássica
- Bodegas Ramírez de la Piscina

Torremontalbo
- Bodegas Amézola de la Mora

Villabuena de Alava
- Izadi
Rioja Wine Classifications

Classifications

• **Crianza** - 3-year-old wine that has spent 1 year in the oak cask and 1 year in the bottle.
• **Reserva** - 4-year-old wine, 1 year in oak casks and 2 years in the bottle.
• **Gran Reserva** - 6-year-old wine, having spent 2 years in oak casks followed by 36 months in the bottle.

Grape Varieties

The four grape varieties most commonly used for red wine production: Tempranillo (which dominates), Garnacha, Graciano and Mazuelo. For the production of white wines: Viura, Garnacha Blanca and Malvasía are the most commonly used, with the addition of Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Verdejo.
Wine Touring in the Rioja Alta & Alavesa

My Suggested Wine Touring Routes

From West to East, Haro to Logroño, which lie 40 kilometers apart

Haro

We usually start our wine touring in Haro, the wine capital of the Rioja Alta, a town of 12,000 inhabitants, where you'll find a fairly large concentration of wineries that can be visited, both highly traditional and new generation, most all requiring a prior appointment.

Most of the notable wineries are located north, below the town, in the Barrio de la Estación, also known as the Barrio de las Bodegas, near the railway station, on both sides of the railroad tracks. Here you'll find Bodegas Rioja Santiago, C.V.N.E., Muga, Bilbaínas, López de Heredia, La Rioja Alta, Gómez Cruzado and Roda.

The easiest way to access these bodegas is via the Labastida-Laguardia highway, the A-3023, which will bring you into the town past the Barrio de la Estación area before hitting the Haro upper town maze.

The tourist office in the Plaza de la Paz, across from the Hotel Agustinos, keeps an up-to-date listing of the visiting hours of each winery that does open to the public. The office opens daily at 10:00 am, but is closed on Mondays (except for public holidays).

I recommend using Haro as your lodging base only if you want to walk to the wineries, as it's somewhat difficult to navigate and lacks the charm of the small wine towns listed further on.

And save for festival days, the city is a rather sleepy place after the sun goes down, with the exception of the area of La Herradura, the horseshoe-shaped tapas circuit, where you'll find the town’s tapas bars- Beethoven, los Berones, el Pasadizo, los Caños, Los Rotos.

Other than visiting the wineries, there’s little else of monumental importance to see in Haro other than the Basilica de Nuestra Señora de la Vega. It can be visited in under an hour, if you’re lucky enough to find a parking spot (don’t forget to feed the meter—all of Haro is a blue zone).

That said, Haro’s wine interpretation center has recently been expanded, modernized and renamed, and it merits a visit. It’s housed on three floors, and the tour starts on the second floor, where the entire process of wine cultivation is explained. On the first floor the main features of the wine making process can be seen. The ground floor illustrates the character and characteristics of the Riojan villages and its people and their close relationship to the world of wine. The La Estación Enológica de Haro is situated at Bretón de los Herreros, 4.
The center is open Tuesday to Friday from 10:00 to 2:30 and from 3:30 to 7:00, Sunday and holidays from 10:00 to 2:00, closed Monday. French and English explanations are provided. It also offers a beginners’ wine tasting course on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays at 11:30, which costs 15€ and includes entrance to the museum. Tel: (+34) 941 305 71

Haro Winery Visits

*In the Barrio de la Estación (Barrio de las Bodegas)*

**López de Heredia Viña Tondonia**

The striking glass tasting pavilion and wine shop, in the shape of a decanter, designed by internationally acclaimed, Pritzker prize winning Zaha Hadid to celebrate this classic winery’s 125th anniversary has caused quite a buzz in the architectural world. It is a daring adjunct to the most traditional (Bordeaux style) of all the Rioja bodegas where centuries old wine making methods are scrupulously preserved.

![Zaha Hadid designed tasting pavilion, Bodegas López de Heredia](image)

The winery houses 72 oak fermenting vats, and the wines are aged in 15,000 French oak barrels produced and constantly repaired by the winery’s team of three coopers. It is one of the few wineries to have its own *tonelería*, barrel making shop. Visits here are strictly by prior appointment only but are some of the most fascinating, as only time honed traditional methods are employed at the winery. Temperature during fermentation is controlled through the use of natural ventilation, and a natural penicillin mold covers the dark and
dank cellar’s walls. And the spider-web covered underground tunnels of the original winery run up to 200 meters in length.

On Saturdays at 10:30 am the winery offers a 2-1/2 hour visit to its Viña Tondonia vineyard followed by a tasting, which costs 15€. Visitors are made to feel most welcomed by the charming, English speaking guides. We recently toured at 10:00 am with the highly informative Lidia Zanza, and our two-hour visit was one of the highlights of our latest “scouting” trip. If you only have time for one in Haro, this is the one not to miss!

You can call (+34) 941 310 244, email, or arrange your visit by filling out the form on the bodega’s web page. Tours are available Monday-Saturday, and costs 10€, but the visit is complimentary with a wine purchase. Closed Sundays and holidays. The shop is open for tastings and wine sales Monday-Saturday from 10:00 am to 7:00 pm.

Bodegas Roda
This relatively “young” winery, established in 1987, lies slightly north of Viña Tondonia at the very north end of town, sitting on top of a hill. It produces some of the region’s most exciting wines in its ultra modern installations. Experts consider these to be some of the best wines in the world.

Visits are arranged by appointment and are given in English, French and Spanish at 10:00 am and 12:00 noon, Monday-Saturday. The visits, which costs 10€, are followed by a tasting of two wines and Aubocassa olive oils. Two-hour private tours are available Monday to
Saturday at 10:00 am for 50€/person, with a tasting of 4 premium wines. The 30-minute visit to the vineyards “Perdigón” is available on Saturdays, depending on the weather, for 5€.

In September of 2010, Roda inaugurated their new space, a wine bar, 90 meters long and 6 meters wide, housed in a 19th-century aging vault carved into the rock. There, lucky visitors can sample four Roda labels; Sela, Roda, Roda I and the award-winning Cirsión. The wine bar is open Monday-Saturday from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm and from 4:00 to 6:00 pm, Sunday from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm, closed Thursdays.

C.V.N.E.
Located just south of the train tracks, C.V.N.E., who’s initials stand for Compañía Vinícola del Norte de España, was founded in 1879. Visits here are also strictly by reservation only, and one must reserve through the central office for appointments to visit all three wineries operated by C.V.N.E.. Book online, or call them at (+34) 941 304 809. Cost is 12€ for the one-hour guided tour and tasting of two wines, or 25€ for the “premium” tour, tasting of four of their best wines and tapas.

The winery is open Monday-Saturday from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm (summer hours), but closed on December 24, 25 and 31, and January 1, 5, 6 and 7 (in 2017). Visits available in English and Spanish only.

If you are an architecture buff you may want to make C.V.N.E., along with López de Heredia Viña Tondonia, your top priorities. CVNE’s architectural showpiece is its barrel nave created between 1890 and 1909 by the famous French civil engineer and architect Gustave Eiffel. Instead of using conventional columns, metallic trusses were extended from wall to wall, allowing for a great diaphanous space for easier racking and maintenance. This structure has been used for aging the famed C.V.N.E. Imperial label.

Bodegas Bilbaínas
You’ll find this bodega, founded in 1859, in the same area of the lower town, just behind C.V.N.E., on the southern side of the railroad tracks. It is a fascinating and immense hundred-year old winery with 3,000 meters of underground cellars, and the very detailed guided tour of these installations takes a bit over 90 minutes, followed by a generous tasting. Bodegas Bilbaínas produces the highly regarded La Vicalanda and Viña Pomal, and now belongs to Codorniú, the Catalán bubbly makers.

Open Monday-Saturday with visits on Monday at 11:00 and the rest of the week at 11:00, noon and 5:00. On Sunday there is only one visit, at 11:00. On bank holidays, there are usually visits at 10:00, 11:00, 2:00 and 5:00. Call them at (+34) 941 310 147, or you can contact them by email at: m.oyono@bodegasbilbainas.com. Mabel, who conducts the English tours, will promptly answer your request and inform you of the possibility of an
English tour (the large group, Saturday tour at noon is only given in Spanish). Cost is 5€ for the tour and tasting of two wines.

**Bodegas Muga**

Also found in the Barrio de las Bodegas below Haro, Muga is another highly traditional winery that clings to age-old methods, producing spectacular wines, and like Viña Tondonia, it too has its own cooperage for making its vats and casks. Bodegas Muga offers a standard 60-90 minute tour in English with a tasting of two wines from Monday to Saturday for 10€/person, and a tour of the vineyards for 25€/person, by appointment only. Spanish tours are given at 11:30 and 4:30, Monday to Saturday. Please email for current times, as some tours are seasonal.

![Checking the color of the wine at Bodegas Muga](image)

Participants in their 25€ “Premium Tour” move to the tasting room in the tower, the Espacio Muga, after their winery tour and enjoy five tastings, a Muga white, a Crianza, Reserva Selección, Prado Enea Gran Reserva and a Torres Muga. For reservations for either email, book your tour online, or call (+34) 941 306 060.
In addition to the tasting room, the Espacio Torre Muga (Torre Muga Space), is open Monday-Friday from 8:30 am to 6:30 pm for wine tastings, and on Saturdays and Sundays from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.

**Bodegas La Rioja Alta**

This traditional winery, maker of Viña Ardanza, now celebrating their 125th birthday, is located across the street from López de Heredia, at Avenida de Vizcaya, 8. Like Muga, it maintains its own cooperage. Two-hour tours are given Monday-Friday at 10:00 am (English) at a cost of €30, which includes a tasting of 4 wines. The tour at 11:30 (Spanish) also costs 30€ and includes a tasting of 3 wines, a snack and gift bottle of wine (37.5 cl). The 1-1/2 hour tours on Saturdays (10:45 am, 11:30 and 12:15 pm) and Sundays (noon) are in Spanish only and include a tasting of 3 wines for 15€/person. Sunday tours are not available in August or from 18 December to 19 March. Book online or call them at (+34) 902 123 904.

The shop is open for tasting by the glass Monday-Friday, June through September, from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm, and on Saturdays from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm. Check online for the opening days and times for the rest of the year. Closed on Sundays in August.

**Bodegas Gómez Cruzado**

Situated between Bodegas Rioja Alta and Muga, this small and very pretty family-run winery was founded in 1886 by the Duke of Moctezuma de Tultengo. Guided tours and tastings (three wines and one olive oil) are available Monday-Sunday, bank holidays included, at

info@iberiantraveler.com
12:00 noon, Saturdays at 10:30 am and 12:00 noon, for 10€. A premium tasting is available for 30€, Monday-Friday, upon request. You can call (+34) 941 312 502, or email Casilda at visitas@gomezcruzado.com to arrange a tour and tasting.

Walk-in tastings are available Monday-Sunday from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm, and on Saturdays until 5:00 pm. Cost is 2€/glass, or 2,50€ for a glass of “Honorable”.

**Bodegas Rioja Santiago**

This is the southern most winery in the Barrio de la Estación neighborhood, just beyond the bridge that leads up to town. The winery opens its doors on Saturdays from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm with guided visits from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm. The cost of the visit and tasting is
3€. Or, one can schedule a visit during the workweek, on Sundays and holidays (when there is a minimum of 12 participants required) by contacting Margarita Ríos at (+34) 941 310 200 or email her at: rojasantiago@fer.es.

**Hacienda El Ternero**

This unique estate, dating from the 11th-century when it was part of the Cistercian monastery of *Santa María de Herrera*, lies along the route of Saint James, a short 20-minute drive west of the Barrio de la Estación in Haro. Although officially part of the Castile-León province, it’s location, a unique microclimate in the foothills of the Obarenes Mountains, places it on the western edge of the Rioja DO. The Tempranillo grapes for their *Picea 650*, fermented in new French Oak, are hand picked from vineyards located at the highest elevation of the estate, 650 meters, one of the highest vineyards in the Rioja.

Tours and tastings, including a visit to the vineyards, are available Saturdays and Sundays by appointment only. You can contact them online, email Ana at: info@elternero.com or call (+34) 941 320 021 to arrange a visit.
Ollauri Winery Visits

Bodegas Valenciso

This winery can be found at kilometer 4 on the highway to Nájera. It was launched in 1998 by local winemakers, Luis Valentín and Carmen Enciso, who to this day produce only one very high quality red wine each year, a Reserva made from their Tempranillo grapes, from old vineyards with low yields, aged for 17 months in new French oak barrels and simply labeled Valenciso. Their Valenciso White, made from Viura and white Garnacha grapes, is fermented for 9 months in oak barrels from the Caucasus.

The two hour tour and tastings, for two (50€/person), three (35€/person) or four (25€/person) people, are given Monday-Saturday, including holidays in Spanish, English and French. To schedule a tour, email valenciso@valencisco.com, or call Luis and Carmen at (+34) 941 304 724.

Regalía de Ollauri, Marqués de Terán

Also located on the Nájera highway, at km 1, this has been a spectacular addition to the architectural scene in the Rioja Alta, a striking creation of Riojan architect Javier Arizcuren, inaugurated in ’06. The winery was begun by the great grandsons of the founders of the acclaimed Age winery in Fuenmayor and it produces a “vino de autor”, Emprendedor and the Marqués de Terán. Eighty per cent of this winery has been buried into the hillside, at the top of the town, and like Bodegas Baigorri, it utilizes the principle of gravity for the reception
and transport of the grapes. This unique construction allows the building to be almost entirely camouflaged by the landscape. Very striking, especially at night.

This young winery integrates tradition with an innovative wine making process, one of the most advanced in the world - “criomaceration” - a cold maceration process, or the use of dry ice to add carbon dioxide.

The winery is open for tours Monday-Saturday from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. The 1-hour visit, with one tasting, is 10€, or 15€ for a 2-hour visit with tasting, accompanied by a Riojan almuerzo, or snack of sausages and cheese. You can also book a visit followed by lunch, catered by the Restaurante La Cueva de doña Isabela of Casalarreina, with a minimum group of 10. Book your visit online, or call them at (+34) 941 338 373.

Bodegas Beroña
This classic Rioja wine estate, surrounded by 25 hectares of its own vineyards, was founded in 1973 by a group of friends from a gastronomic society (Beroña Txoko of San Sebastián-Donostia) who had a passion for fine food and high quality wine. Their Reserva and Gran Reserva wines have been listed in the Wine Spectator Top 100 for a number of years. The underground cellar contains nearly 30,000 barrels of aging wine, decanted every four months, are soothed by Gregorian chants recorded at a local monastery.

The winery offers a typical 60-minute visit to the winery for 10€, a 90-minute visit to the vineyard with a tasting of three wines for 20€, a 90-minute premium tour with a tasting of
three of their premium wines and traditional Riojan appetizer for 30€. There is also a two-hour wine tasting course with the tasting of five different wines for 25€. A special VIP tour is available upon request. Reserve online, by email consultas@beronia.es, or call them at (+34) 941 338 000

In the vineyards of Bodegas Beroña, Ollauri (Rioja Alta)

Paternina - Conde de los Andes

Founded in 1896, and along with López de Heredia and Muga, remains one of the most traditional in the region, while at the same time keeping up with the times through constant renovation of its facilities, winning a prestigious award in ‘05 for the restoration of its ancient aging cellars, the oldest of which dates from the 16th-century, and which were originally carved by hand out of the sheer rock 40 meters deep. The treasure of these cellars is the special corner where visitors can find bottles of red from 1928 and whites dating from 1918 in perfect drinkable condition! This has been a Mecca for wine lovers and over the years has received visits from such notables as Hemingway and the legendary matador Antonio Ordóñez. In 2003 the winery added a gourmet restaurant, El Conde (closed Sunday night and all day Monday). If one has lunch in the restaurant, one can also visit the cellars.

Tours are by prior appointment only Tuesday-Friday at 1:00 pm, and Saturday and Sunday at 11:00 am and 1:00 pm. The visit and tasting costs 15€, while the charge for a visit and tasting, with tapas, is 20€, the latter available only on the 11:00 am tour. Call them at (+34) 941 310 550, or email enoturismo@paternina.com to arrange a visit.
Briones

After a visit to Haro (with a possible detour to a winery in Ollauri) my next suggested stop on the wine trail comes about 5 km down the N-124 / N-232. You should exit at Briones for a visit of several hours and lunch. Briones, coupled with neighboring San Vicente, are the two most interesting villages of the four belonging to the sub zone known as *La Sonsierra Riojana*, composed of Abalos, Briñas, San Vicente de la Sonsierra and Briones.

*The village of Briones, looking west from the Castillo de Davalillo*

A visit to Briones and San Vicente, plus a trip up to the Castle of Davalillo, and stop at the Romanesque church of Santa María de la Piscina, makes an easy all-morning excursion from your hotel base, whether it be in Abalos, Laguardia or Logroño.

Your first stop on this excursion is found right off the highway-one of Europe’s finest wine museums, the *Dinastía Vivanco*.

This sleepy village’s most important monument faces the town square-its imposing parish church, the 16th-century Renaissance *Iglesia de Santa María de la Asunción*, whose sacristy houses a beautiful sculpture of the Assumption of the Virgin.

A new sightseeing addition to the village has been opened in the Palacio del Marqués de San Nicolás; *La Casa Encantada*, an ethnographic museum, and an extension of the *Museo de la Rioja en Logroño*. It consists of a reconstruction of a typical Riojan dwelling from the 18th-century spread over three floors. Visitors can view the vestibule, go down to the subterranean wine cellar, to the stables, then up to the top three floors to visit the dining
room, living room, kitchen, pantry, bedrooms and sewing room, all decorated with original period furnishings.

Open June 1st-September 30th from Tuesday-Sunday, 11:00 to 2:00 and 4:00 to 9:00. From October 1-May 31 it is open Tuesday-Saturday from 11:00 to 2:00 and 4:00 to 8:00, and on Sunday and holidays from 11:00 to 2:00 only. Free admission.

Adjacent to the town square is an attractive wine and accessories store which sells Rioja wines, of course, plus wine therapy creams and beautiful hand-woven woolen blankets from Ezcaray, some done in mohair, starting at 70€. If you’d like to personalize a wine bottle with your own label and last name, the shop that do that for you too. The shop also sells Rioja gourmet products: cheese, honey, chocolates, pates, and olive oils.

If you find yourself in Briones in the middle of June, you may witness their Medieval Days Celebration when many of its inhabitants dress in medieval costumes, carrying out mock Inquisitions, jousting, dancing along with a sampling of the local cuisine and wines.
Briones Winery Visits

Dinastía Vivanco-Museo de la Cultura del Vino

A must-see destination of any tour of the Rioja is this most impressive and very engaging museum of wine culture opened in April ’04 by King Juan Carlos. If traveling on the N-232 highway from Haro to Logroño, you can’t miss noticing this spectacular complex, located at km 442. It is the largest wine museum in the world, an ambitious project of the Vivanco family, displaying their amazing private collection of wine materials, including ancient drinking vessels, centuries old pruning shears, massive 300 year-old wooden grape presses and all types of wine paraphernalia, sculptures, even Roman mosaics of Bacchus from the 2nd century, paintings (two by Picasso) featuring wine as the key ingredient in feasts, plus a collection of over 3,000 corkscrews.

The Vivanco family spent years researching all over the globe, collecting works of art all pertaining to the culture of wine. All these treasures are housed in five immense rooms. There are fascinating inter-active exhibits explaining the role of wine in religion, how wine spread from its origins in the Caucasus, the fermentation process, how wine was transported, how wine barrels and corks are made and a chance to sample various wine aromas. And in the botanical garden devoted to wine, the Jardín de Baco, you’ll find 200 different grape varieties from all over the world.
The museum has a most attractive shop offering very tasteful souvenirs, wine guides and all types of wine paraphernalia including goblets, decanters, corkscrews, etc.

The 20€, 75-minute tour of the winery and museum (in English & Spanish), plus a tasting of 2 wines, is available Tuesday-Friday and Sundays at 11:00 am and 1:00 pm, Saturdays at 10:00 am, 11:00, 12 noon and 1:00 pm. The 2-hour tasting course (24€) is only available in Spanish.

The museum, with more than 6000 pieces on display, is open Tuesday-Friday and Sunday from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm, and on Saturday from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm. Check the opening hours throughout the year at. You more information you can call them at (+34) 941 322 323.

**Bodega Miguel Merino**

We are always delighted when we visit this small, but outstanding, father-son winery located below the hill town of Briones. Miguel speaks very good English as he spent his high school years in North Carolina (his son studied in New England) and will be sure to take you aside to give you a translation of his explanations. He loves to talk to visiting Americans. This is one of my favorite wineries to take guests, since the visit is so personal.

In the words of Miguel: "I have long dreamt of having my own small bodega, where I could make a few bottles of wine of the best quality possible. Twenty years later, we restored an old 19th-century house on the outskirts of Briones, in Rioja Alta. On the adjoining land we built facilities for vilification and barrel and bottle aging and planted a small experimental vineyard. In the year 2000 our first Miguel Merino Reserva "1994" went into the market, raising the interest and enthusiasm that encourage us to keep our joy for wine making".

Tours are available Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. This is a very small family operation, so you must arrange your visit in advance. The best way to reserve is to email Miguel: info@miguelmerino.com, or call (+34) 941 322 263.
Continuing Your Tour...

From Briones, before you head north, you should have time for a quick detour to visit a castle and take in the expansive views before return to the highway N-232 and heading east towards Logroño. When you come to the Bodegas San Chicón, before reaching the Repsol and Cepsa gas stations, you’ll see a small road detouring off north through the vineyards. Take this road, which will lead you up to the Romanesque, 13th-century Castillo de Davalillo. It is the only remains of the former 12th-century village of Davalillo. Wonderful views are to be had of the fortress towns of Briones and San Vicente from here.

![Castillo de Davalillo near Briones](image)

After this very special photo op, you’ll find another ancient winery that can be visited just a few kilometers east on the N-232 towards Logroño at Torremontalbo on the right side of the highway.

**Torremontalbo Winery Visits**

**Bodegas Amézola de la Mora**

This is a beautiful sandstone winery surrounded by 70 hectares of estate vineyards in French chateau style who’s underground cellars date from 1816. The phylloxera blight halted production from the late 1800s until 1986 when the family’s great grandsons restarted the
winery and in 1999 the sisters, María and Cristina de Amézola Downes, took over, becoming the youngest winemakers in Spain.

They are open for tours Monday-Sunday at 11:00 am, 1:00 pm, 4:00 pm and 6:00 pm. The 45-minute guided visits are 7€, available daily with a minimum of 2 people. The 2-hours tour, with a tasting of 3 wines with cheese from the Camerano, is 33€/person, with a minimum of 2 people. Call (+34) 941 454 532, or email info@bodegasamezola.es to arrange a visit.

In January and February one can join in the pruning of the vines and have lunch with the winemaker, or come in September and October to join in the harvest for a few hours one day.

**San Asensio Winery Visits**

**Señorío de Villarica**

This small family winery (1940) can be found in the tiny hamlet of Hervías, south of Haro off the N-120 toward Nájera. Their special crianzas and reservas, picked by hand, are from the Finca La Plata vineyards, 40 hectares of Tempranillo vines. They are open for tours and tastings by appointment only, Monday-Friday at noon and 5:00 pm, Saturdays from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. Call (+34) 941 457 171, or email bodega@billarrica.es to arrange a visit.
San Vicente de la Sonsierra

From Torremontalbo, head north, crossing the bridge over the Ebro to neighboring San Vicente de la Sonsierra, another medieval fortress town, which once belonged to the ancient Kingdom of Navarra. Here you should drive to the top of the village to visit the remains of the 12th-century castle, the hermitage of San Juan de la Vera Cruz and the imposing parish church dating from the late Gothic period, *Iglesia de Santa María la Mayor*, declared a National Monument in 1933. Chances are good, however, that it will be locked up tighter than a drum, as we’ve been frustrated many times in our attempts to visit the inside, to see its famed Renaissance altarpiece (1550-1560), restored in 1991.

![San Vicente de la Sonsierra in the Rioja Alavesa](image)

However, if you speak Spanish and have some time to wait, you can call (+34) 941 334 004 to ask if the keeper of the keys can come up to open the church for you, on contact the parish priest at (+34) 686 387 526. And you may not be able to navigate to the top with your car, as the road may be closed to vehicular traffic, so park in the lower village and walk up, a vigorous cardiovascular workout that you’ll surely need after a traditional Riojan lunch!

San Vicente is known throughout the Rioja, and the rest of Spain for that matter, as having the most morbidly curious of Holy Week processions. This village supports a Guild of the Flagellants; know as *Los Picaos*, whose headquarters is the little hermitage of the *Vera Cerca*, within the confines of the *Santa María la Mayor* church. On Maundy Thursday and again on Good Friday, the *Picaos* silently present themselves during the religious processions. The men’s identities are strictly unknown, their faces covered by hoods, and
they walk barefoot during the procession, along with a non-hooded companion or aide at their side. After kneeling to pray in front of an image of the procession, the penitents then remove their brown capes, and their companion undoes a section of their tunic in the back, exposing the men’s bare flesh. Then the Picaos begin to punish themselves, whipping their backs with a 2-pound madeja (a cotton skein), which is held in both hands, for around 20 minutes, from 800 to 1,000 blows, alternating between left and right, until their backs redden and swell up.

At this point another member of the brotherhood appears with the esponja, a wax ball incrusted with six glass splinters, placed two by two, and he pricks these self-imposed bruises in twelve spots (symbolizing the Twelve Disciples), and the wounds begin to bleed. The Picao (watch the video) then hits himself again 15 to 20 more times to allow the blood to run properly. Afterwards, his companion covers the penitent’s back, returns his brown cape to him and leads him to the hermitage, where members of the brotherhood cleanse the wounds with a balm of rosemary water. This act of self-flagellation is completely voluntary, and the picaos motivations vary; some carry out this extreme act of penitence to connect with the suffering of Christ, others to ask for a special favor, others to give thanks.

This ritual of the Picaos takes place on Maundy Thursday during the procession of the Holy Supper around 7:30 pm, then at 11:00 pm inside the church and again on Good Friday during the procession of the Viacrucis, which begins around 11:30 in the morning and during the Procession of the Holy Burial, which begins around 8:30 in the evening.

The picaos also perform their penitence during the Cruces de Mayo celebration, the first or second Sunday in May, around 6:00 in the evening, and on September 14, when it falls on a Sunday, or when it does not, then on the following Sunday.
San Vicente Wineries

Bodegas Hermanos Peciña

This small family owned winery, founded in 1992, is located along the Vitoria-Logroño highway at km 47, at the entrance to San Vicente. The wine maker, Pedro Peciña Crespo, keeps the doors open for half-hour visits and tastings Monday-Friday from 9:00 am to 1:30 pm and 3:00 pm to 6:30 pm, and on Saturday and holidays from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm and 4:00 to 7:00 pm. On Sundays they are open for visits from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.

In September 2016 the Wine Advocate awarded 94 points to their Gran Reserva 2009, which spent 48 months in American oak barrels and an additional 36 months in the bottle before being released.

The tour and tasting is complimentary, Email Pedro at info@bodegashermanospecina.com, or call him at (+34) 941 334 366 to make a reservation. There is also a dining room that can accommodate groups of 10 to 30. Tel: (+34) 941 334 366.

Ramírez de la Piscina

The family has been growing grapes in the Rioja for several generations and began producing their own wines in 1945. The children, who took over from their father Julio in 1980, created the new brand, Ramírez de la Piscina, in 1987 and opened the modern facilities in 2001.

The winery is open Monday-Friday mornings from 8:30 am to 1:30 pm and in the afternoon from 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm. Open on weekends and holidays by prior arrangement. Email info@ramirezdelapiscina.com, or call them at (+34) 941 334 505 to reserve a tour and tasting.
Sierra de Cantabria
The family has been producing premium wines for five generations. Wine Enthusiast ranks the *Reserva 2010* (93 points) number 52 of the top 100 wines of 2016.

![Harvesting the grapes by hand in the vineyards of Sierra de Cantabria](image)

The bodega, *Señorio de San Vicente*, located in the village at Calle Amorebieta, 3, is open in the summer Monday-Friday from 8:00 am to 1:00 pm. The rest of the year you’ll find it open Monday-Thursday from 8:00 am to 12:00 noon and 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm. The visit is free of charge. English spoken. Email them at info@sierracantabria.com, or call (+34) 902 304 080 to request a reservation.

Bodega Classica
Located on the road leading to the cemetery, Camino del Cementerio, s/n, *Bodega Classica-Hacienda Lopez de Haro* is open daily from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. It’s the first winery you see when driving north from Briones. Email: comunicacion@vintae.com Tel: (+34) 941 271 217.
Hermitage of Santa María de la Pisciña

After your visit to San Vicente, backtrack east on the N-232a/A-124 towards Abalos. Once back on this route, look for the LR-424 and head north toward the small village of Peciña. Watch for a sign to take you on a short detour to this small hermitage sitting in the vineyards to the east.

This Romanesque treasure, a Bien de Interés Cultural, built in 1138, was founded by the son-in-law of El Cid, who supposedly brought back from the Crusades a piece of the ‘True Cross’. If you’d like to visit the inside of the church, which is always kept locked, you must inquire at the city hall in San Vicente de la Sonsierra or call (+34) 941 291 260 to schedule a visit. Otherwise, next to the church you can see the necropolis dating from the 10th-century. The landscape surrounding this little church merits this detour.
Labastida-Bastida

After your visit to San Vicente, and the hermitage, drive up the main Laguardia-Haro road, the LR-132, and take a left turn, going west towards Haro for the drive back into the province of Álava, to the small fortified medieval town of Labastida.

The village, the second gem of the Rioja Alavesa, been beautifully preserved over the years. Like its cousin Laguardia, Labastida was a walled stronghold of the Kingdom of Navarra until the year 1200 when it became part of the Kingdom of Castile.

One enters the village through a majestic medieval gate, the Arco de Larrazuria, passing a number of large stone mansions with their well-preserved heraldic shields. The monumental highlights of the town are its Town Hall Place, dating from 1732, declared a National Monument, and its immense 17th-century Church of the Assumption, housing yet another jewel of Baroque art that includes an altarpiece, elaborately carved walnut choir stalls and one of the most important organs in the Basque Country, but the church can only be visited at noon, on a tour that’s given, in English by the folks at the tourist office on Calle Mayor (but visiting hours may have changed).

This noble town lies at the foot of the Sierra de Toloño Mountains, where, after about an hour’s walk, one can enjoy outstanding views of the town and the meandering Ebro River, which serves as a natural frontier between La Rioja and Álava. There is a tradition among the inhabitants of the town to walk up to the mountain on the first Sunday in June, where a party is celebrated, along with a lunch of chorizo, morcilla, chistorra, cheese, and of course, Labastida wines. The pilgrimage into the Toloño Mountains, to the Hermitage of San Ginés, is repeated in December, on the Tuesday following the feast day of Santa Lucia.

The village doesn’t have the wealth of bars, restaurants and shops that Laguardia, its more frequently visited cousin, has, but it does have a couple of excellent wine shops and one of our favorite asadors in the Rioja, Restaurante Ariño.
Church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción

This majestic church, declared a *Bien de Interés Cultural* in 1984, is located in Labastida’s town hall square. Dating from the 16th-18th centuries, it was built in a mix of Renaissance and Baroque styles, whose most striking feature is the façade of the style prevailing in the 17th-century. Inside you’ll find a beautiful example of a Gothic-style altarpiece and an amazing 17th-century organ. You’ll need to check with the tourist office located across the plaza from the church about a visit, and for information on any upcoming organ concerts, which are conducted regularly. Tel: (+34) 945 331 015

Don’t miss stopping at the medieval necropolis and hermitage on the way up to the Remelluri estate. You’ll find it on the left side of the road leading to the estate.
Labastida Wineries

Nuestra Señora Granja de Remelluri

This distinguished winery is located on a noble estate just northeast of the Labastida on the road, LG-316, towards the village of Rivas de Treviso. The estate once belonged to the Monastery of Toloño and covers 154 hectares, 105 of which are under production. The venerable Remelluri, which produces outstanding red wines, is open for visits to its estate, shop and small museum from Monday-Saturday. Visits can be conducted in English by prior appointment only.

You can visit the vineyards for a walking tour on your own, or request a guided tour, which are available at 12 noon and cost 12€/person for small groups of more than 4, slightly more if less than 4. The winery is open on Saturdays and Sundays depending on the request and availability of the guides.

At Remelluri, a group of 10 or more can reserve ahead for an unforgettable lunch on the covered terrace, a perfect, set meal of leek and tomato salad, Piquillo peppers, potatoes Riojan style (stewed with chorizo), perfectly grilled, all-you-can-eat baby lamb chops grilled on vine shoots and pears poached in red wine (the cost is 55€/person for visit and three course lunch, including bread, wine, coffee and after dinner cordials). Call (+34) 945 331 801 or 636 284 217, for reservations, or send an email to info@remelluri.com.
Ábalos

This tiny, blissfully quiet hamlet with only 280 friendly inhabitants, is just a blip on the road, but has more than a dozen small, family wineries, a parish church, la Iglesia de San Esteban Promártir, which boasts a beautiful Baroque altarpiece (church is open only at mass time or by appointment with the deaconess) and most importantly, here you’ll find our very favorite little rural inn, Villa de Ábalos, our home away from home.

The first weekend of September the village celebrates its “Day of Open Doors” when all the village’s wineries are open to the public for touring and sampling.

Ábalos Wineries

Bodegas Puelles

This family run, boutique winery and hotel is at the end of the road, Carretera de los Molinos at the northern end of tiny Ábalos. Follow the burgundy signs indicating Bodegas Puelles. This stunning noble home and winery, surrounded by vineyards, lies below a 17th-century watermill. The small, 6 room hotel, Hospedería del Vino, originally designed to accommodate wine buyers, will be open from 12 May to 11 December in 2017.

Hour-long tours are given Monday-Saturday at 11:30 am and in the afternoon 5:00. The cost of the visit is 6€, with a tasting of 5 different wines. The tasting room and shop are open from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm and 4:00 to 7:00 pm. An extended tour of the winery and
vineyards, lasting approximately 1-1/2 hours, is available for groups of at least six for 25€/person. Call (+34) 941 334 415 to make a reservation, or email them at informacion@bodegaspuelles.com.

Solana de Ramirez Ruiz

This small winery, with 50 hectares of vineyards surrounding the village, produces between 400,000 and 500,000 bottles of red, white and rosé wine, including their excellent Valsarte Gran Reserva (24 months in a barrel, 48 months in a bottle). The bodega is open for tours and tastings Monday-Saturday from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm and 4:00 to 8:00 pm, and in the mornings on Sunday at 10:00. Cost of the tour and tasting is 4€. There is also a wine bar and tasting room. You can email consultas@solanaderamirez.com for reservations, or call (+34) 941 308 049.
**Samaniego**

The tiny golden sandstone village of 300 residents is home to several renowned wineries, including *Remírez de Ganuza*, *Ostatu* and the cutting edge *Bodegas Baigorri* and boasts yet another immense, 15th-century fortress-church, the *Church of the Assumption*, with two defensive towers, one cylindrical and the other rectangular. Once again, the church is kept locked outside of mass hours.

As do other towns in the Basque Country and Navarra, on Easter Sunday every year the townsfolk celebrate the ‘Judgement of Judas’ with a mock trial, condemnation and subsequent burning of the effigy for all of the bad things that the village has gone through the past year. The celebration of Pentecost takes place 50 days after Easter, while the celebration of Our Lady of the Valley, the *Fiestas de Nuestra Señora del Valle*, is held between September 7-11 and is the most popular festival of the year. Then on December 7 they celebrate *Las Mañas*, a celebration in which the villagers walk through the streets holding burning branches to purify the town of evil spirits and keep the demons at bay.

![Church of Assumption, Samaniego, with the Cantabrian mountains in the background](image)

The caves of Samaniego, the subterranean cellars in the *Matarredo* neighborhood, date from the 14th and 15th centuries and play an important part of the wine making tradition of the region.
Samaniego Wineries

Remírez de Ganuza

Founded in 1989 by Fernando Remírez de Ganuza, this family run winery located in the center of Samaniego, with 80 hectares of hand-picked tempranillo, viura and malvasía grapes gracing the slopes of the Cantabrian mountains, produces high quality wines through a unique innovative extraction process developed over the years. Robert Parker’s ‘The Wine Advocate’ awarded the Ramírez de Ganuza Gran Reserva 2004 a score of 100, the highest possible rating given by any publication, and was the first Gran Reserva to receive 100 points. The 2005 (2400 bottles produced) and 2006 are now in release. The 2006 Gran Reserva received 95 points from Guía Peñín.

Guided tours are available daily, except holidays, at 10:30 am, 12:30 and in the afternoon at 4:00. Reservations are required and can be requested online.

Bodegas Baigorri

This spectacular, avant-garde winery, designed by the late Basque architect Iñaki Aspiazu, opened to much acclaim in ’05. Located outside of Samaniego on the Vitoria-Logroño highway, km 53, in the foothills of the Sierra de Cantabria, you can’t miss it, although it does not appear, at first glance, to be a winery with its very large and empty zinc and glass cube, sitting like a lighthouse above the vineyards. The rest of the design is hidden 20 meters underground. The winery itself is seven stories deep, sunk into a hillside to take advantage
of the natural process of gravity to produce the wines, avoiding the use of pumps and machinery that could harm the grapes. Grapes fall into the presses, from the presses, the juice falls into the fermentation tanks and then into the casks. This innovative winery won the “Best of Wine Tourism” award for architecture in ’06 and its Baigorri De Garage Rioja 2010 was recently rated No. 10 of the top wines of the world for 2016 by the WAWWJ (World Association of Wine and Spirits Journalists and Writers).

Twice daily tours are given Tuesday-Saturday at 11:00 am and 1:00 pm. Cost for visit and tasting: €10/person. The visit at 1:00 can include a tasting menu at lunch for a total cost of 45€/person. And these Baigorri lunches have received rave reviews. The set menu consists of two appetizers, a starter of delicious local white beans with blood sausage, a main course of pork jowl, carrilleras de Ibérico, braised in red wine and a decadent dessert.

The ultra modern tasting and dining rooms exude style, and the wines are superb. In addition to fine reds Baigorri also produces a barrel fermented white, a rosé and a spirit, crema de orujo, similar to but far more delicious than Bailey’s. The store is open Monday-Saturday from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm. For reservations, call (+34) 945 609 420 or email: mail@bodegasbaigorri.com.
Bodegas Ostatu
Just across the highway from Baigorri, this small winery belongs to the Sáenz de Santamaría family, who have been growing grapes and producing wine in the village for generations.

This is your chance to visit a winery and be given a tour by the winemakers themselves, rather than a member of the PR staff. They are open from 8:00 am to 1:30 pm and 3:30 to 6:30 pm, Monday-Friday, and on Saturday from 10:30 am to 12:30 pm. The regular 1-hour tour is 12,50€, while a tasting with 4 wines (your choice) and a pintxo is 26,50€. To schedule an appointment, call (+34) 945 609 133 or email Ainhoa at ostatu@ostatu.com.

Bodegas Amaren
Named for the mother of Luis Cañas, this newly renovated winery continues the long family tradition of producing premium quality wines and for 2016, its Amaren Tempranillo Reserva 2008, 100% Tempranillo, was ranked No. 56 of the top 100 wines of the world by WAWWJ, while Guía Peñín in 2015 awarded all of Amaren’s wines with a score of 90+.

Located on the road to Villabuena, Amaren opened it’s doors last September and guided tours are now available Monday-Thursday from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm and 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm, Fridays from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm and Saturdays from 10:30 am to 2:00 pm. In June, July and August it opens Monday-Friday from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm and on Saturdays from 10:30 am to 2:00 pm. Closed Sundays and holidays. You can make reservations online, contact Natalia by email at: info@bodegasamaren.com, or call them (+34) 945 175 240.
Villabuena de Álava-Eskuernaga

Situated along both the banks of the Herrera River, Eskuernaga, as it is called in Basque, this small village has a collection of 42 bodegas, more than one for every ten of its residents. With a long tradition of wine making, it sits in the very heart of the Rioja Alavesa, a few minutes west of Laguardia, 10 minutes from Elciego and less than 30 minutes from Logroño, capital of the Rioja. Founded in 1164 during the reign of Sancho VI, king of Navarra, it’s ancient castle was an important defensive position against the Moors and Castilians.

Besides the number of wineries, the village is noted for its numerous Renaissance houses, notable mansions with decorative coats of arms that identify the original owners, “Indianos” and noble stone palaces dating from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, and now for the avant-garde architecture of the Hotel Viura, which sits next to the 17th-century church of San Andrés, one of the oldest in the Álavesa, and has unobstructed views of the Cantabrian mountains to the north.

Villabuena Winery Visits

Viñedos y Bodegas De La Marqusa S.L.

We first visited this small, family winery, now in its 5th-generation, more then 15 years ago when wine tourism in the Rioja was just beginning to take off. Although they were not open for wine touring at the time, the son, who had recently returned to help run the business, was
gracious enough to give us a private tour of the winery, followed by a tasting of their excellent Valserrano, and pintxos of course, in traditional Basque style. The Valserrano Blanco Gran Reserva 2009 was recently awarded 92 points by the Wine Advocate and 93 points by Guía Peñín.

The winery is open for visits Monday-Friday in the morning and afternoon, and on Saturday mornings by appointment only, no minimum group size. The Premium Tour and Tasting (5 wines), starting in the ancient underground cellars, will take about 1-1/2 to 2 hours. Tours are available in Spanish, French and English. You can contact them online at visitas@valserrano.com or call (+34) 945 609 085 to schedule a visit. The bodega is located a few minutes walk from the Hotel Viura.

The Valserrano Wine bar and Shop, where you can taste their wines without an appointment is now open Monday-Thursday from 9:00 am to 1:30 pm and after lunch from 3:00 to 6:00 pm, and on Fridays and Saturdays it’s open from 10:00 am to 1:30 pm.

**Bodegas Izadi**

Part of the Artevino Group: Bodegas Izadi, Orben, Finca Villacreces and Vetus, the winery first came into being in 1987 on land the Antón family already grew grapes, and offers several different types of visits, including dining in one of there three dining rooms (with a minimum of 10).
Visits are 10€ for a tasting of three wines with cheese and chorizo and 20€ for a tasting of four wines from different D.O.s, paired with cheese from the same region (for a group of 6 or more). Guided tours are offered Monday-Friday at 11:00 am, 1:00 pm, with the last one at 4:00 pm. On Saturday and Sunday tours are given at 11:00 am and 1:00 pm only. Email club@grupoartevino.com to arrange a visit, or call them at (+34) 945 609 086

**Bodegas Luis Cañas**

This friendly family-run winery, now in its 4th generation, offers a warm welcome to our wine-touring clients and is easy to find, right on the highway (A-3214) south of Samaniego, at km 10, in Villabuena, behind a wrought iron gate. In 1970 the Luis Cañas first went to market selling his own wines, and now at 88, he and his family are enjoying the fruits of their labor.

The *Luis Cañas 2004 Gran Reserva* was the recipient of a gold medal at the International Wine Challenge. Its *Reserva Selección de Familia 2006* was ranked No. 9 of the top 100 wines in the world for 2015 and its *Reserva Selección de Familia 2009* is ranked No. 4 of the top 100 wines of the world in 2016 by the WAWWJ.

**Entrance to Bodegas Luis Cañas and tasting room**

The *Glass in Hand Tour* takes approximately one hour, with a tasting of 3 wines, and the *Visit the Viewpoint Tour*, with a tasting of 5 wines, lasts 1-1/2 hours. The Wine Bar and Shop is open Monday-Saturday for tasting wines by the glass, no reservations required, but can be closed for special events.

Open Monday-Thursday from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm and 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm, Friday from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm and Saturday from 10:30 am to 2:00 pm. In June, July and August it opens Monday-Friday from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm and on Saturday from 10:30 am to 2:00 pm. Closed on Sundays and holidays. Make your reservations online, contact Carmen by email at: enoturismo@luiscanas.com, or call (+34) 945 623 373.
Laguardia-Biasteri

After passing Samaniego and Villabuena, continue east on the A-124. Next stop on your tour is the largest of the fifteen municipalities of the Rioja Alavesa, and the “crown jewel”, Laguardia, the most captivating of all the wine towns and considered the wine “capital” of the Rioja Alavesa.

The capital of the Rioja Alavesa, Laguardia, or Biasteri in the Basque language, looming imposingly atop a hill halfway between Haro and Logroño, makes a wonderful and unusual base for your visit to the Rioja. Along with tiny Abalos, it’s our occasional home away from home. This fortified bastide town, with around 1,500 inhabitants, was founded in the 13th-century by King Sancho el Fuerte as a defensive fortress for the kingdom of Navarra. This sentinel, originally baptized as La Guardia de Navarra (the guard), is dramatically perched high atop the hill, surrounded by medieval walls, two meters thick, complete with ramparts and thick gateways. Seen from below, the town is particularly striking, set between the vineyards of the Ebro valley below and the dramatic Sierra de Cantabria Mountains in the background.

The hilltop village of Laguardia, looking south from the vineyards of Bodegas Ysios

There are only four medieval gate entrances to the village. Once inside the walls you’ll take a step way back in time and find a highly picturesque village, very medieval in look and feel, filled with noble homes, their coats of arms still visible, laundry hanging from the geranium bedecked balconies. There are only three long, narrow and dark, pedestrians-only streets leading north and south that converge on the Plaza de San Juan, where you’ll find the
subterranean Bodegas El Fabulista. The pedestrian-only streets serve as the villagers’ front yard and meeting place.

Walk these dark, narrow streets and you will meet all the townspeople within an hour. Hanging from the facades of the houses you’ll see strings of red peppers drying in the sun, which are featured in the hearty local cuisine.

Subterranean Caves

The entire walled town is closed to traffic except for delivery of butane via electric carts, only a dozen at a time, because below the village lies a warren of 320 wine cellars or “cuevas” excavated under the homes, two stories deep. These subterranean caves were dug most likely for defensive use, during the period of constant battles between the feuding kingdoms of Navarra and Castilla. Centuries later they came into use as places where wine could be produced and stored. Nearly all the houses have these wine cellars, so the subsoil is completely bored through like a Swiss cheese.

Underground Laguardia is, in fact, larger in surface than the above ground village. Built in the 16th and 17th centuries, the cellars were inter-connecting so that during sieges the villagers could go underground, survive for months and plot their counter attacks. These
underground cellars have huge wine vats the size of small swimming pools where the villagers store their home brew.

**Santa María de los Reyes**

A “must visit” monument in Laguardia is the impressive 14th-century covered portal of the church at the top (north end) of the walled village. Its larger than life, perfectly preserved, brightly colored polychrome sculptured statues of the Apostles, dating from the 14th-century, are a true treasure, in absolute mint condition and are considered one of the architectural gems of the Rioja. This incredibly, well-preserved portico, is the jewel in Laguardia’s crown. Please don’t miss, even if you have to return another day!

![Detail of the polychrome statues of the Apostles (14-century)](image)

Inquire about a guided tour of the church at the tourist office, located below the main square, which also has ample information about winery visits, both in Laguardia and the surrounding towns of the Rioja Alavesa. The ladies of the tourist office give guided tours of the church daily at noon for €2/person. Their explanation is in Spanish, but translation sheets are provided for English speakers. Tours are usually given daily at 11:15 am, 1:15 pm, 5:05 and 6:30 and last 30 minutes, but times may change during holidays.

**El Reloj Animado**

In the Plaza Mayor, on the town hall building (Ayuntamiento) façade, you’ll see a shield of the village and a carillon clock whose automated dancers “perform” daily at noon, 2:00, 5:00 and 8:00 from October to May with additional “performances” from June through September at 1:00 and 10:00 pm.
Torre Abacial
The 12th-century Bell Tower, on the western part of the defensive walls of the village, is now open for visits for 2€/person. Call +(34) 945 600 218 for reservations.

Paseo del Collado
At the north end of town, outside the protective walls, is a lovely park/promenade with a gazebo and statue of the fabulist, Don Félix María de Samaniego (Spain’s Aesop), and offering stunning panoramic views of the miles of vineyards protected from the fierce north winds by the rocky Sierra de Cantabria.

Dolmen
Another reminder of this area’s antiquity is its collection of nine prehistoric dolmens (ancient burial markers) scattered about the region. The largest and most important, with nine upright slabs, is la Chabola de la Hechicera (discovered in 1935), just before the atmospheric village of Elvillar on the A-3228, east of Laguardia. Other dolmen, including El Soltillo (discovered in 1955) and San Martin (discovered in 1956), are marked with a symbol along the highways and are easy to find. The tourist office provides a brochure with map, “Los Dólmenes en Alava”, so you can visit these ancient burial sites. The app, “Ruta de Los Dólmenes”, is now available for Apple and Android devices (Spanish only).

Poblado de la Hoya
If you have any interest in archeology, visit the small museum on the Camino de la Hoya, right below the town. You’ll see on display artifacts of the prehistoric settlement of La Hoya,

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3,200 yrs. old, dating from the first millennium B.C, from the bronze to iron age, including a life size replica of a typical bronze age home. Entrance is free, and although signs are in Spanish, the guard will give you an explanatory brochure in English. There’s a short explanatory video, in Spanish only.

From October-April the museum is open Tuesday-Saturday from 11:00 am to 3:00 pm, Sundays and holidays from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. In May-October it’s open Tuesdays-Friday from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm and from 4:00 to 8:00 pm, Saturdays from 11:00 to 3:00 pm and on Sundays and holidays from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. You must enter at least a 1/2 hour before closing time.

**Guardaviñas**

While driving along the Haro-Logroño highway, you may pass a few circular stone huts where in olden days a worker would be responsible for keeping watch over the vineyards and would use these structures for shelter from the elements. If you happen to get down to Badarán (Rioja Alta), near San Millán de la Cogolla, on the Route of the Monestaries, there is one in the vineyards of Bodegas David Moreno that is worth a visit.

**Balcón de Europa**

For a very scenic drive to take in the entire Rioja Alavesa, follow the back route, the A-2124, through the Puerto de Herrera pass, past the scenic overlook, the Balcón de Europa (not at all well marked) - look for the picnic area sign on the road to your left, just a few minutes from the turn off, drive down to the picnic tables and the mirador, or scenic overlook, where on a clear day, you can see all seven villages of the Rioja Alavesa. Unfortunately vandals have destroyed the plaque that identifies each village, but the fine views remain, nonetheless.
Laguardia Wineries
There are multiple opportunities for wine tasting in Laguardia itself and within a few kilometers radius. Saturday and Sunday are Laguardia’s most hectic days for sightseeing and bodega touring, so you will find a parking spot and table for lunch more easily if you visit the town mid-week.

Bodega El Fabulista
Located in the Plaza San Juan inside the walls of Laguardia, the small family winery is housed in the 15th-century palace where the writer Felix María de Samaniego was born. Eusebio, the owner, conducts private tours Monday-Saturday at 11:30, 1:00, 5:30 and 7:00 pm daily and Sundays at 11:30 am and 1:00 pm by appointment only. The one-hour+ guided tours in Spanish (French or English by arrangement), take you underground to one of the warrens of the over 300 underground cellars in Laguardia.

You’ll end your tour in an atmospheric, brick vaulted tasting area, where you’ll be given a generous sampling of two wines, a white and a young red, made entirely from Fabulista’s own grapes. Eusebio runs these tours alone, unless Maria, his assistant, who speaks excellent English, is there to help him, so they fill rather quickly, and he only produces young wines, so do not expect to sample a fine reserva or gran reserva. Book your tour by email at info@bodegaelfabulista.com, or call them at (+34) 945 621 192.
Carlos San Pedro Pérez de Viñaspre

Another winery located within the medieval walls of Laguardia, Carlos San Pedro is located at Calle Páganos, 44, which runs parallel to the main street Calle Mayor de Migueloa. The cellars, more than 600 years old, have been used in wine production for 250 years and lie at a depth of eight meters below the street. Documents attest to the fact that the San Pedro family has been producing wines in the region for over 500 years.

A visit to the premises, whose walls are blackened with mold and covered with spiders’ webs, is a trip into the past. The visit includes an explanation of the traditional methods of producing wine in these underground caves and a video, then participants explore the subterranean cave where they will taste a crianza wine.

Tours are conducted by prior reservation and are given by the owner himself in English on Mondays and Wednesdays at 1:15 and 5:00 pm, Tuesdays and Thursdays at noon, Fridays at noon and 5:00 pm, Saturdays at noon and 5:15 pm and Sundays at noon. The standard tour is 4€ and lasts about 35 minutes.

Bodegas Ysios

For a visit to one of the region’s most architecturally stunning wineries, drive two kilometers west of town towards Samaniego, and follow signs to La Hoya and Ysios to this very impressive, state-of-the-art bodega, an ultramodern design of the famed Valencia architect, Santiago de Calatrava. Look for the undulating titanium roof “waving” in the distance.
the entrance door and park behind the lot to the left of the building. Visits customarily start from the back entrance.

Regularly scheduled tours are given Monday-Friday at 11:00 am, 1:00 and 4:00 pm, Saturdays at 10:00 am, 11:00 and 1:00 pm, and a tour in English on Saturday at 4:00 pm only. The tour and a tasting cost 12€, with a discount for wine purchases in the shop. Ysios is now part of the Allied Domecq wine empire. Reserve your visit online or call (+34) 902 239 773. Open during August.

**Eguren Ugarte**

Located just 4 minutes west of Laguardia, towards Samaniego on the Vitoria road, you'll find this family owned winery with its charming, 21-room hotel overlooking the vineyards. You can't miss it, just look for the large boulders in the front that are meant to imitate the area's dolmenes, ancient burial sites, and make the complex look like something out of a Flintstones movie.

Always one of our favorite stops, this very popular bodega gives their guided tours daily (in Spanish and English) at 10:30 am, noon, 1:30 and 4:30 pm, and 6:00 pm during the summer. The visit begins with a 7-minute video, followed by a 25-minute guided tour through deep underground caves of the winery, finalizing with an introduction to wine tasting. After your visit to the galleries, you are offered a tasting of three wines, the barrel fermented white, a red crianza and a red reserva along with cheese, bread and chorizo. A
wine tasting starter course is held on Sundays from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm (reservations required).

Afterwards you can stroll about the winery grounds. You will long remember the wonderful views of the vineyards from the back, next to the family’s boutique hotel. Call (+34) 945 600 766, or reserve online or email: reservas@egurenugarte.com.

**Bodegas Torre de Oña**

Found at the entrance to the small village of Páganos, this small winery, once only open to club members, excels in its production of outstanding wines, and recently opened a new two million euro wine processing facility (October 2016). We visited this winery for the first time in the spring, having passed it by over the years as it was only open to club members. Part of *Grupo La Rioja Alta, S.A.*, the winery is situated 630 meters above sea level, in a prime location sheltered by the Cantabrian Mountains. The winery is open for private tours Monday-Friday at 10:00 am, 11:00 am and 4:00 pm, and on Saturdays at 11:30 am.

Tours last 1-1/2 hours and costs €15, and include a tasting of 3 wines and a snack. From mid-June to mid-September tours are only available at 10:00 am and 11:30 am. Closed from July 30 through August 31. The 2-hour premium visit includes a tour of the vineyards and is available at 11:30 am only, for up to 12 people.

This beautiful estate, *Casa Palacio* (*Casa Señorial de Torre de Oña*), is now open to everyone, and perfect for small groups of 6 to 10 who wish to stay at a luxury wine estate in
the heart of the Rioja. You need to book a minimum of three of the five double rooms and this beautiful (5-star) palace is yours. Email Izaskun at correo@enoaventura.com, or call (+34) 636 379 877 to reserve a tour.

Looking north across the vineyards of Torre de Oña

**Bodegas Campillo**

This beautiful château-style winery, surrounded by 50 hectares of vineyards, with the Cantabrian mountains as a backdrop, was designed by Logroño architect Aurelio Ibarondo Fragüela. The winery belongs to the family-owned Faustino Group, and was named for the families first estate, and celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2015.

Open Monday-Friday at 10:00 am, 12:00 noon, 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm, Saturdays at 11:00 am and 1:00 pm, with the standard tour (vineyards, fermentation tanks and cellar) lasting 90 minutes, and cost 10€/person. The ‘Vintage Experience’ tour is 4 hours and costs 25€, is available for the whole family during the harvest season (September-October). And now they also offer a 4-hour Segway vineyard tour during the harvest season. You can make your reservations online, email visitas@grupofaustino.es, or call (+34) 945 601 228.

**Bodegas y Viñedos Artadi**

Founded in 1985 by a group of local winemakers rooted in tradition, this 83 hectare vineyard produces only organic wines. Their **Viña el Pisón 2014** was recently awarded 97 points by Robert Parker and selected “wine of the year” from the Rioja by Tim Atkin, who awarded it 99 points.

The winery sits across the highway from Bodegas Campillo, and is open for visits Monday to Friday by appointment only. You can request a tour online, or call them at (+34) 945 600 119 to arrange a visit.
Elciego-Elziego

If you make your home base in Laguardia you’ll be able to hop back and forth from there to Gehry/Riscal-land in less than 10 minutes as the two villages are only 7 km apart, connected by the A-3210.

There’s far more to keep you entertained in Laguardia, as Elciego, with only 900 inhabitants, is still a very conservative, sleepy, somber, no-nonsense wine producing village despite its new fame as the home of one of the most talked about wineries in the world. It is a charming village in its own quiet way, filled with noble homes bearing coats of arms and a fine, immense church, la Iglesia de San Andrés, 16th-century Gothic-Renaissance mix. If you’d like to see the inside, either hit it during mass, or inquire at the tourist office in the village square.

Frank Gehry designed City of Wine, Hotel-Bodega Marqués de Riscal

Elciego Winery Visits

Herederos del Marqués de Riscal

Opened in 2006, here we have the highlight of this entire area for wine lovers and the oldest and best-known wine producer in Spain, dating from 1860. Bilbao’s famed Guggenheim Museum architect, Canadian-born Frank Gehry, designed a spectacular 33,000 square foot, $10 million project, the City of Wine, which includes a gift shop, tasting pavilion and 5-star,
43-room boutique hotel with a gourmet restaurant and bistro (1860 Tradicion), under the direction of Michelin stared chef Francis Paniego, and wine spa (Spa Vinothérapie Caudalie) created by the Source de Caudalie of Bordeaux.

Wines stored in La Catedral, the ancient cellars, date from 1862

The 90-minute tour, conducted in Spanish, English, French, Italian and German, and given daily, starts with an explanation of the Gehry project, continues with a video, and afterwards takes you through the original winery, throughout the grounds and even through the belly of the hotel. It ends in the tasting room attached to the gift shop/cafeteria with a tasting of their Rueda-produced white and a red reserva. Tickets can be purchased online for 12€. Check the calendar for available dates and times for the English language tours.

Other wineries to consider visiting while in Elciego include Bodegas Valedlana, Viñadores Artesanos, Murua and Fos.

Pick up some Idiazábal cheese, tins of delicious roasted red peppers, asparagus and have a snack or a lunch of a cheese or a charcuterie platter at Vinoteca La Ermita. A visit to Elciego isn’t complete unless you stop to sample some of this little shop’s wares, local wines served by the glass and a few tapas. We always take home a liter (or two) of the superb Maja label olive oil from the Navarran town of Mendavia, which belongs to the Rioja DOC. This vinoteca is located on the square in the center of the village and opens daily at 11:30 am, but closed on Monday.

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Laserna

A few kilometers southeast of Laguardia, just off the N-232a, the Laguardia-Logroño highway, sits a small hamlet with two wineries not to be missed.

Laserna Winery Visits

Bodegas Viñedos del Contino

This was the first château (1973) belonging to C.V.N.E. in the Rioja. The estate dates from the 14th-century and was named for the officer in charge of a troop of one hundred soldiers tasked with protecting the royal family "de contino", continuously, from the times of the Catholic Monarchs.

Covering 62-hectares of prime farmland along the sweeping bend in the Ebro River, the vineyards are protected by the Cerro de la Masa to the north and the high banks of the Ebro to the south. The combination of soils, Atlantic-Mediterranean climate and technique have made Contino a premiere wine for more than 30 years, both inside and outside Spain.

90-minute gourmet wine tastings (3 wines) are available at 12:00 noon and 4:00 pm for 40€. You can picnic in the vineyards for 50€ (4 hours). Lunch is also available for 70€. The store and wine bar are open from 9:30 am to 6:30 pm. Book your reservations online or call (+34) 941 304 809. Closed in August and the last week of December.
Viña Real

One the north side of the Cerro de la Masa, on the road to Logroño, you’ll find this spectacular winery belonging to Compañía Vinícola del Norte de España (C.V.N.E.). Built in 2004, the winery covers nearly 30,000 square meters and was designed by French architect Philippe Mazières. It sits near the top of the hill and is constructed of red cedar in the form of a huge wine fermenting vat, measuring 56 meters in diameter and 16 meters tall. The vineyards flow down the hillside toward the Ebro River.

A 90-minute tour and tastings for a minimum group of 6 (4 wines) is available for 20€/person. You can also picnic in the vineyards for 50€ (4 hours). Lunch is also available for 50€ for a minimum group of 6. The store and wine bar are open from 9:30 am to 6:30 pm. Book your reservations online or call (+34) 941 304 809.
Fuenmayor

This small village, a few minutes drive south of Elciego, and across the Ebro River, is filled with historic palaces and mansions and is one of the most important wine-producing villages in the Rioja Alta.

Fuenmayor Winery Visits

Finca Valpiedra

Opened in 1999, this chateau-style winery sits on 80 hectares and belongs to the Martínez Bujanda family, producers of Conde de Valdemar in Oyón. Producing about 300,000 liters per year, the bodega lies just outside Fuenmayor in the Rioja Alta, below Elciego, in a beautiful setting on a bend of the Ebro River. The area is well known for its stony soil, which helps to aerate and drain the soil but retaining enough heat to speed along the maturation process of the vines and produce a luscious fruit.

The stunning calao, aging cellar, of Finca Valpiedra

The Finca is a gorgeous place to see. Their calao, or aging cellar is just stunning, cathedral-like. They change their 4,000 French oak barrels every three years. The winery also displays paintings by Muñoz Vera and López Garrido in their art gallery. This is one of my favorite new generation, state-if-the-art, and family-owned wineries to visit in the entire region. As the only Pago in the Rioja (Gran Pagos de España), and one of only 30 in all of Spain, Finca Valpiedra does not buy grapes—using only their own Tempranillo, cabernet (for blending

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only), and a Graciano Mazuelo mix and make only a red here, the tinto reserva Valpiedra, which is outstanding. The Finca Valpiedra 2010 has been rated exceptional and has received 95 points by Tim Atkins in the Rioja 2017 Special Report.

A visit here can be easily combined with a tour of Marqués de Riscal in nearby Elciego, or to the Dinastía Vivanco Wine Museum in Briones. Reservations are an absolute must. The basic tour, for a minimum of 2 people, is €15/person and last 90 minutes. Currently tours are given Tuesday-Saturday at 11:00 am, 12:30 pm and 4:00 pm. For reservations call: (+34) 941 450 878, or fill out the on line form at: www.fincavalpiedra.com.

For lunch, you can reserve a table at Asador Alameda.

Bodegas Age
The winery, dating from 1881, can be found in the Barrio de la Estación, on the LR-251 near the Ebro River, before crossing over to the village of Lapuebla de Labarca. Like Campo Viejo and Ysios, this one also belongs to the Allied Domecq/Pernod-Ricard Empire and has scheduled visits weekdays from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm, and in the afternoons from 3:00 until 5:00 pm, by appointment only, and last around 1-1/2 hours. Also open on weekends by appointment only. Tour cost 4€/person. Call (+34) 941 293 500 or email: info@domecqbodegas.com to request a visit.

Marqués de Arviza
This family winery, the second oldest in the Rioja (1874), was constructed over ancient cellars dating from the 16th and 17th-centuries and produces only two wines, a premium red reserva and high quality crianza from manually sorted hand picked grapes from it’s 38 hectare vineyard. Visits can be arranged by calling (+34) 941 451 245, or emailing them at info@marquesdearviza.es.

Bodegas Montecillo
Founded in 1874, the third oldest winery in the Rioja is now part of the Osborne family. In January 2016, the Wine Advocate awarded their Montecello Reserva 2010, with 24 months of aging in American and French oak, a solid 90 points. The winery is located a 5-minute drive south of Fuenmayor, just off the Fuenmayor-Navarrete road, the LR-137. Guided tours (10€) with a pairing of 5J Iberian ham, are available by reservations only. Email visitas.montecillo@osborne.es, or call (+34) 941 100 306 to arrange a visit.

Bodegas Altanza
Opened in 1998, this 300 hectare estate, located a few minutes west of Logroño off the N-232, uses 100% Tempranillo to produce its award winning red reserva wines. The 2005
Lealtanza Club Reserva was recently awarded 95 Parker points by the Wine Advocate. They also produce an excellent organic EV Olive Oil under the Lealtanza brand.

Visits to the beautiful state-of-the-art winery are available in Spanish and English, Monday to Friday at 11:30 am and Saturdays at 12 noon for 12€, and can be booked online, by emailing them at: enoturismo@bodegasaltanza.com, or calling (+34) 941 450 860/618 629 086.

Bodegas LAN
The winery, founded in 1972, takes it’s name from the initials of each of the three provinces that make up the Rioja DOC: Logroño, Alava and Navarra. Their limited edition Lan A Mano 2011, produced from hand-harvested grapes, is listed as one of the best 25 wines in the world by Wine Spectator. The Viña Lanciano vineyards, which cover 72 hectares, lay along the southern banks of the Ebro River, where you will find the Mantible Roman Bridge dating from the 2nd-century AC. Legend says Charlemagne passed through this area, crossing the bridge on his way to rescue his knights who had been captured by the Saracens.

Visiting hours, by appointment only, are from 9:00 am to 12:30 pm and from 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm, Monday to Friday. In July and August the winery is only open from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm. Call (+34) 941 450 950 or email info@bodegaslan.com to arrange a tour.
Logroño

You now end your Rioja DOC wine touring in the capital of the autonomous region of La Rioja. The Rioja’s largest city (but still no more then a village), with its busy plazas, narrow streets, a mixture of popular gastro-bars, traditional pinchos bars and restaurants, could serve as your base during the festival of San Mateo in late September, or as a second and final base if you have a full week to tour the region.

In the center of the old quarter you’ll find the Church-Catedral de Santa María de la Redonda, Museo de Ronda and Félix Barbero Botas Rioja, where you can buy the classic goat-skin wine bag.

Logroño Winery Visits

Bodegas Marqués de Murrieta

This venerable family winery, recently reopened to the public after being carefully rebuilt stone by stone over eight years (completed in 2014), was the first in the Rioja, in existence since 1852 when it’s founder, Luciano Murrieta, produced his first Bordeaux style wines. Murrieta was also the first to export his wines. The winery is located on the 300-acre Finca Ygay estate a few minutes outside of town, just off the Logroño-Zaragoza highway, the N-232, near the airport. In the center of this beautiful estate visitors find the Castillo de Ygay, where rare vintages, dating from 1852, are housed in the “Library”. Its Castillo Ygay
White Grand Special 1986 Reserve was awarded 100 Parker Points in September 2016, a first for a white wine from Spain. It is now ready for release, 30 years after the harvest.

The winery is open January-March and July-August, on Monday to Saturday mornings only, and from April-June and September-December Monday to Saturday with visits in English,
Spanish, French or German by prior arrangement only. Closed on Friday and Saturday afternoons. You can request a visit online, email: visitas@marquesdemurrieta.com, or call Natalia at (+34) 941 271 374. Visits and tasting are €30 to €142/person.

**Bodegas Ontañón**

For those staying in Logroño, this is the one bodega that is a fairly short taxi ride from a downtown hotel. Located at Avenida de Aragón, 3, it is open daily with regular tours Monday-Saturday at 10:00 am, noon and 5:00 pm and on Sundays and holidays at 11:00 am. There is also a special tour at followed by a wine tasting course, sampling their finest wines. This tour is given for a minimum of 4 participants. English is spoken, but you must call ahead to book a tour (and specify that you will need it in English). Visits end with a primer on proper wine tasting, and the wines poured are impressive.

Because this in-city winery lacks the charm of being surrounded by vineyards, it makes up for it by serving instead as a museum, exhibiting the work of local artist Miguel Angel Sainz, who's works evolve around a mythological theme of the wineries stained glass, paintings and sculpture. Their reds were chosen by Plácido Domingo to be served at the Washington Opera during his performance.

Call (+34) 941 234 200 or email Jesús Arechavaleta at: enoturismo@ontanon.es. They also have an online reservation system.
**Bodegas Olarra**

This is another winery those staying in Logroño. The Y-shaped bodega with 111 hexagonal domes, opened in 1973 and commonly known as the *Cathedral of Rioja*, is located on the north side of the Ebro River, a few minutes by taxi from the center of the city. Guided tours are available Monday-Friday at 11:30 am and 4:00 pm and on Saturdays at 11:00 am and 1:00 pm. Tours (10€) last 1-1/2 hours and includes a tasting of a Reserva Especial and an appetizer, and must be reserved in advance. Book your tour online, by email: info@bodegasolarra.es, or contact Álvaro Garcia at: (+34) 941 235 299 to arrange a visit.

**Bodegas Campo Viejo**

This dramatically contemporary, immense winery, a spectacular design of Riojan architect *Ignacio Quemada*, is as amazing to behold as it is almost impossible to find. Opened in 2001, the 45,000 square meter winery takes up an entire hillside with its vast hallways and subterranean cellars, and can house up to 70,000 vats of wine, piled high in rows of six, with a whopping six million bottles of *crianza* and *reserva*. During the entire elaboration process, the grapes are moved by gravity only, without suffering any type of pressure that could alter the final result. This bodega also houses a particularly attractive restaurant, which has lovely vineyard views.

In order to reach it, have your desk staff call a taxi and make sure that the taxi driver does know how to locate it or the taxi is equipped with a GPS. The official address is Camino de Lapuebla, 50 bajo, La Rad de Santa Cruz (which may do you absolutely no good).

Although it’s located only 5 km (15 minutes by car or taxi) from Logroño, on our first visit to the winery, when it was Bodegas Juan Alcorta, we were escorted by the Rioja Tourist Board. On a second trip, a few years later, we attempted to find it ourselves and spent nearly two hours searching, finally locating it beyond a huge housing project. But signage has improved since then. Now, if driving from your hotel in Logroño, take Avenida de Burgos west to Calle Portillejo, following C/Portillejo north to Calle Fuenmayor, then west to the end of Calle Dinamarca, and then follow Calle Rumania until you see the signs for Campo Viejo. Drive up an entire kilometer of curving private road leading up to the pavilions. You must buzz at the gate to be let in.

A visit and tasting of 2 wines (10€) is available Monday-Friday at 10:30 am and 1:00 pm by prior appointment only. Private group visits for up to 30 people (240€) are available Monday-Friday and on weekends. Reserve online or call (+34) 941 279 900 to arrange a visit.
Oyón-Oion

If staying in Laguardia or Logroño, you can take an easy morning drive to the Basque village of Oyón in the Rioja Alavesa, a few kms north of Logroño, where you'll find three esteemed wineries whose products you surely have sampled.

Oyón Wineries

Bodegas Faustino
One of the most prestigious wineries of the Rioja of international fame, still completely in the family’s hands, Faustino mixes tradition with modern wine making methods. It owns 650 hectares of vineyards and a cave of 47,000 barrels. Faustino is Spain’s leading exporter of grandes reserves, exporting 37% of this category abroad. The winery is open for visits Monday-Friday during normal business hours, visits on Saturday are conducted only at 10:30 am and 1:00 pm. Tours (7€) last about 1-1/2 hrs, followed by a tasting of two wines. To visit this venerable winery, send an email to info@bodegasfaustino.es, or call (+34) 945 622 500.

Bodegas Conde Valdemar
In 2014 this family winery celebrated 125 years of winemaking as the 5th generation continues the work of its founder Joaquín Martínez Bujanda. The 275-hectare winery offers tours of the bodega and vineyards, as well as a chance to enjoy a glass of wine on the terrace without visiting the winery. For additional information, or to make reservations, email them at enoturismo@valdemar.es, or call (+34) 945 622 188.

Bodegas Valdemar vineyards in Oyón
**Bodegas El Coto de Rioja**

With its first harvest in 1970, it followed with opening the original winery six year later, finally expanding to its currant facilities in 1995 to meet the world-wind demand for its wines. In 2004, with the addition of Finca Los Almendros in Ausejo, El Coto de Rioja, a combination of twelve small wineries, became the largest producer in the Rioja DO, with a total of 730 hectares of vineyards on eight farms spread throughout the Rioja. It was named the best Spanish winery of 2016 in London at the International Wine & Spirit Competition (IWSC). Call (+34) 945 622 600 to inquire about visiting the winery.

After a morning of touring and tasting, take a peek at the village church, *Iglesia de Santa María de la Asunción*, and the Plaza Mayor. The Baroque tower of the church is considered to be one of the most beautiful and best designed in the Rioja Alavesa.

Look for the wine shop in the plaza, *Bar Vinoteca Escudo Mayor*, where you can relax, sample some of the local wine (more then 100 labels), perhaps followed by lunch in Laguardia at Restaurante Amelibia, or in Páganos at Héctor Oribe (reservations required).

The Bar Escudo Mayor is open during the week from 9:00 am to 10:00 pm and on the weekends from 10:30 am to 10:30 pm.
Wine Touring in the Rioja Baja

Alfaro

The largest town in the Rioja Baja makes for a nice excursion, particularly in the spring, as you drive southwest through the Ribera agricultural zone of the lower Rioja, where vegetables reign supreme. Alfaro, the city of the white storks, is world famous for its stork nests, where on the rooftop of the 17th-century masterpiece, the Colegiata de San Miguel Arcángel, you’ll find 400 nests, the largest urban collection of stork nests in the world. Friday is market day.

The Festival of San Roque in August fills the town with music, parades of giants and big-heads, bullfights and gastronomic events. The village of Enciso, and the Rioja’s “Jurassic Park”, the Palaeontological Center, lie one hour to the west.

Alfaro Winery Visits

Bodegas y Viñedos Ilurce

Before lunch one day, schedule a visit to this 4th-generation family owned winery at Carretera de Alfaro a Grávalos, s/n. Founded in 1940, the families modern winery was built in 2010. Their excellent 2014 Rosé received 90 points in Guia Peñín, while the Rio Madre, by winemaker Jorge Ordoñez, consistently rates 90 Points by Robert Parker.
Visits to the winery (1-1/2 hours) and the vineyards (60 hectares) are available in Spanish, English, French and German. Tel: (+34) 941 180 829, or message them at WhatsApp: 647 922 270 to arrange a visit.

**Finca Egomei**

The family owned 125-hectare estate of Hermanos Torres-Librada (Finca Estarijo), located on the Alfaro-Corella highway a few minutes south of Alfaro, was purchased in ’07 by Arturo Beltrán Picapeco, owner of the 'Vista Alegre' arena in Madrid and Grupo Bodegas A&B (Navarra), and is now a small modern, avant-garde winery producing only two red wines, both Crianzas; *Egomei* and *EgomeiAlma*, of which the 2009 releases both received 90 points from the Wine Advocate. Email info@egomei.es, or call (+34) 902 108 101, to arrange a visit to this prestigious, boutique winery. Open Monday-Friday and Saturday mornings.

**Ausejo**

You’ll find a ‘newly recovered’, 800-hectare, nearly century old estate (1920), in this small village on the N-232 highway from Logroño to Alfaro.

**Ausejo Winery Visits**

**Bodegas Natural Rioja Vintage**

Not everyone in the Rioja managed to survive the crisis of ’08. The family estate of *Bodegas Alicia Rojas*, one of the largest in the Rioja, was one. Luckily, the chateau-style estate was resurrected from the ashes by a group of European investors, including some from the Rioja, releasing their first vintage, a limited bottling of the 100% Tempranillo *Solarce Crianza 2013*, in late 2016.

This beautiful estate encompasses 112 hectares of vineyards, 12 hectares of Arbequina olive trees, two man-made lakes, rich farmland (piquillo peppers) and a private game reserve. Tours of the winery are available by request. You can contact them online, by email at: info@naturalriojavintage.com, or call Tel: (+34) 941 430 010 to schedule a tour.
The Navarre Rioja Alta

Navarre, with nearly 6800 hectares of vineyards under production, offers some excellent options for wine touring from Logroño.

Mendavia Winery Visits

A first stop would be a classic wine estate, a historic 16th-century castle-fortress monastery thirty minutes drive east of Logroño, on the north bank of the Ebro River, in Mendavia, outside the southern Navarran village of Lodosa, best known for its world-famous Piquillo Peppers.

Bodegas Barón de Ley

With the first planting of the vineyards in 1985, the Monastery Estate grew over the years to include more than 1000 hectares around the villages of Mendavia, Cenicero, Carboneras and Ausejo. The vineyards in Carboneras, at 840 meters elevation, are the highest in the Rioja. Grapes are picked and sorted by hand.

The estate, constructed in 1548 by the Count of Eguía as a castle-fortress, sits on the banks of the Ebro River on land that once belonged to the Kingdom of Navarra but by then had come under the control of the Crown of Castile and Aragón. The monastery and estate later become part of the Benedictine Order, being used for grazing their wool-producing sheep, but the Benedictines were also experts in making wines and spirits. The estate remained in their hands until 1836 when it was confiscated by the Spanish government during the “Mendizábal Disentailment”, and given to Zurbano, who ended up losing the estate some years later in a historic card game to a French Count. The estate was finally acquired by the founders of Barón de Ley in the 1980s.

Tours of the Monastery of Imas, completely restored in the mid-90s, and its cellars containing 15,000 new American and French-oak casks, and six French-oak “foudres”, unique fermentation vats, is by appointment only. You can email info@barondeley.com, or call (+34) 948 694 303 to arrange a tour.
Classic Riojan Cuisine

Riojan cuisine has often been thought of as very traditional, no-nonsense, robust “home cooking”, more peasant food, meat and potatoes fare, than haute cuisine, but the dining scene has rapidly changed, becoming more avant-garde, like that of its cousin in the Basque Country.  It is influenced by the bounty of fresh fruit and vegetables from the Ebro Valley plus the abundance of excellent meats and game, along with fresh fish (trout from the Ebro) river crabs and shellfish from the Basque coast, only an hour away.

Look For The Following Classic Riojan Dishes On Local Menus

• Chuletillas al Sarmiento - baby lamb chops grilled over vine cuttings
• Chorizo - paprika-laced sausage
• Menestra - stewed local vegetables in season, asparagus, peas, artichokes, with cured ham, chorizo and eggs
• Patatas a la Riojana - an irresistible stew of potatoes, garlic, chorizo, onions and peppers
• Pimientos asados - roasted red peppers fried with olive oil and garlic
• Pencas - Swiss chard in a cream sauce
• Bacalao a la Riojana - salt cold with red peppers and tomatoes
• Rabo de buey al vino de Rioja - ox tail stew
• Cordero lechal - roast suckling lamb
• Cordero al chilindrón - lamb and red pepper stew
• Cabrito asado - roasted goat
• Conejo al tomillo - rabbit seasoned with thyme
• Carrilleras - veal cheeks braised in red wine
• Patorrillo - lamb’s tripe
• Caracoles a la Riojana - land snails
• Pochas - fresh white beans cooked with chorizo to make an orange-tinged soupy stew or cooked with local quail
• Borrajás - borage, a very popular local green vegetable
• Picadillo - stir fried ground pork with paprika
• Manitas de cordero o de cerdo - lamb’s or pig’s trotters
• Caparrones - delicious red beans made into a stew, from the village of Anguiano.
• Peras al vino - local pears poached in red wine
• Melocotones con vino - peaches soaked in red wine
• Canutillos - cones filled with pastry cream

Another local pastry, fardelejos, while not on restaurant menus, can be found in pastry shops, a small puff pastry pocket filled with an almond paste, typical of the village of Arnedo.
Also found in local pastelerías is mazapán from the village of Soto en Cameros, slightly different in texture and lighter than the more “famous” marzipan from Toledo. This marzipan is made with almond paste, boiled potato, sugar and lemon peel. Sweets, in general, in the Rioja are referred to as golmajerías, following the ancient Arab recipes with almonds as the principal ingredient.

Cheese making has long been a proud tradition in the Cameros region of the Rioja and enjoys much prestige throughout Spain. At Rioja’s finest restaurant, Echaurren, I was served a dessert of a warm canapé topped with Cameros cheese, golden apple and honey ice cream—heavenly! The red label Los Cameros mixed blend cheese (milk of ewe, cow and goat) from Lácteos Martínez in Haro recently won a gold medal at the World Cheese Award international competition in London.

Another Camerano cheese, a type of moist “cottage cheese with character” is made of unpasteurized milk of mountain goats and usually served with carne de membrillo, quince paste, or local mountain honey.

A visitor can dine extremely well in the Rioja, as the area is chock-a-block with fine family-owned, informal asadores, specializing in wood-fire, grilled meats, chef-owned bistros, gastronomic, Michelin starred restaurants and new wave dining rooms in wine museums, the wineries themselves and wine hotels.

You’ll find that folks dine in the Rioja a little earlier than in Madrid and Barcelona. We usually have lunch between 1:00 and 2:00 (although on holidays and weekends one can dine until 4:00), and we head to dinner around 9:00, although a few restaurants now open for dinner at 8:30.

Some Of Our Favorite Dining Spots In The Rioja Include:

- Asador Ariño - Labastida - Tel: (+34) 945 331 024
- La Bodega de Rivas - Rivas de Tereso - Tel: (+34) 941 334 329
- Casa Toni - San Vicente de la Sonsierra - Tel: (+34) 941 334 001
- Héctor Oribe - Páganos - Tel: (+34) 945 600 715
- Asador Alameda - Fuenmayor - Tel: (+34) 941 450 044
- Amelibia - Laguardia - (+34) 945 621 207
- Marqués del Riscal - Elciego - Tel: (+34) 945 180 898
- Echaurren - Ezcaray - Tel: (+34) 941 354 047
- Kabanova - Logroño - Tel: (+34) 941 212 995
- Venta de Moncalvillo - Daroca - Tel: (+34) 941 444 832
- Las Duelas - Haro - Tel: (+34) 941 311 308
- La Vieja Bodega - Casalarreina - Tel: (+34) 941 324 254
You’ll find that folks dine in the Rioja a little earlier than in Madrid and Barcelona. We have lunch between 1:00 pm and 2:00 pm (although on holidays and weekends one can dine until 4:00 pm), and we head to dinner around 9:00 pm, although a few restaurants will open for dinner at 8:30 pm.
Dining In La Rioja

Haro

El Claustro de Los Agustinos
The reinvented restaurant (reopened 22 April 2016) is located in the 4-star Hotel Los Agustinos, a former 14th-century monastery in the center of Haro on Calle San Agustin. Chefs, Oscar Puente and Jorge González, offer traditional Riojan dishes in addition to more modern creations. The Menu Caparrones (Riojan red beans) is available for 19€ + VAT during the week.

Open for lunch Monday-Saturday from 1:30 pm and for dinner at 8:30 pm, closed Sundays in low season and from January 1 to the 25.

Tel: (+34) 941 311 308 / 941 304 463

Mesón Atamauri
A favorite of many local winemakers, at Plaza de Juan García Gato, 1, near the town square, Plaza de la Paz, this classic rustic tavern housed in an 1800s building, with stone walls and wood beams, serves traditional Riojan fare, such as pochas, patatas a la riojana, menestra, and of course, roast lamb, along with delicious pintxos (tapas) at the bar. Closed Sun nights and all day Monday as well as the first two weeks of July. Peruse the menu (in Spanish only).

Open for lunch from 1:30 to 3:45 and for dinner from 8:30 to 11:30. Close Sunday nights and all day Monday.

Tel: (+34) 941 303 220

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Casa Terete
Lucrecia Arana, 17, one block up from the Plaza de la Paja, was first opened in 1877. It appears in all guidebooks, and you'll find a menu prominently displayed in English at the entrance. This legendary asador has long, unvarnished pine tables and pine benches on the floor above a butcher shop and is a very informal place to try the regional specialty, roast baby lamb along with a Rioja selected from its vast wine list. Offers 8 fixed menus, plus a special seasonal menu. Open Tuesday to Saturday for lunch from 1:15 to 4:00 and for dinner from 8:30 to 11:00, and Sundays for lunch from 1:15 to 4:00. Closed Mondays.
Tel: (+34) 941 310 023

La Cueva de Doña Isabela
Located 5 kms south of Haro, in the village of Casalarreina, at Travesía Jardines, 15, in the northern part of the town, is where we were treated to a delightful gastronomic feast as guests of the Rioja Tourism Board, a meal of hearty regional specialties including a main course of delicious roast lamb. They also serve a terrific T-bone steak, a chuletón, partridge salad, wild boar stew, wild mushrooms in an onion confit and fabulous foie-gras. You'll find over a hundred labels on their wine list.

This former 17th-century winery has a charming, rustic-inn décor, decorated with farm utensils, traditional Castilian carved furniture, wrought iron chandeliers, polished wood floors, walls of exposed stone, beamed ceilings.

Count on an average check of around 40€-45€/person. It receives a 6/10 rating from the Gourmetour guide a 10 from the Guía Gastronómica y Cultural del País Vasco y su Entorno. Closed Monday night, all day Tuesday and from December 24 - January 6, the last week of February to the first week of March.
Tel: (+34) 941 324 122

La Vieja Bodega
This lovely former wine cellar is also found in Casalarreina on Avenida La Rioja, 17. We dined here on a previous familiarization tour, guests of the Rioja Tourist Board. This is another reconverted winery dating from the 17th-century with charming country-sophisticated décor and a wood-burning oven, quite popular among the local winemakers. We recommend it equally highly.

The cuisine here is a bit more contemporary and Chef Angel María Pérez Aguilar procures his vegetables (tomatoes, artichokes, pumpkins, peppers) and herbs straight from the restaurant’s garden. The restaurant receives a 14.50 rating (quite high) from the Guía
Gastronómica y Cultural del País Vasco, a 6.25/10 from Gourmetour and commands one sol (equivalent to a Michelin star) in the reliable Repsol guide.

It boasts a wine list of over 300 labels. An English menu is available. Average fixed menu cost 58€-60€/person. One must reserve here in advance, particularly for a weekend. Open Monday-Sunday for lunch from 1:30 to 4:00, Friday and Saturday for dinner from 9:00 to 11:00.

Tel: (+34) 941 324 254

Briones

Hotel Restaurante Los Calaos

On a recent visit, the friendly wine owner Miguel Merino suggested that we lunch here, since we had dined several times at Dinastía Vivanco, so we made a reservation several days in advance, as it fills quickly on weekends.

Los Calaos, meaning “aging vaults”, is found on the main pedestrians only street in the upper village of Briones leading to the town square, on the right. There are two dining rooms in this pretty stone 17th century residence, the more atmospheric one that seats only 35 is housed in the ancient cellar, and has a terrific ambience. The Euro-Toque chef serves traditional Riojan asador fare: roast lamb, roast suckling pig, baby lamb chops, chuletón (a hearty T-bone steak), local asparagus, menestra (the yummy stewed vegetable medley with ham), roasted piquillo peppers. The wine list features Rioja Alta wines such as the excellent Puelles crianza from Abalos. Standout desserts include their yogurt mousse with banana ice cream and mandarin ice cream with hot chocolate sauce.

Upstairs you’ll find four cute guest rooms with sitting area and private bath, 25 square meters in size, prettily decorated in rustic style with TV but no a/c. The price is very, very right, only 58€/night and 4€ additional for breakfast. Vat tax is extra.

Tel: (+34) 941 322 131
San Vicente de la Sonsierra

Casa Toni

Located in the heart of the town on the main street at Zumalacarregui, 27. In ‘07 the restaurant received a total transformation by the design studios of Pedro Ortega. Behind the most traditional of stone facades, now lies the most contemporary of spaces, decorated in a bold electric red, white, black and grey color scheme with murals created by Polish artist Jull Dziamski. A family enterprise, the innovative chef, Jesús Sáez Monge, and his sister Mariola who handles the dining room, serve his creative fare plus a menu of more traditional Riojan dishes such as baby lamb chops, rabbit stew, home made croquettes or patatas a la Riojana. The chef now offers a daily menu for 27€. The restaurant’s cuisine, of Michelin star caliber, proves true to its slogan “Awaken your senses”.

The restaurant has received one Repsol sol or “sun”, and is recommended in the Michelin Guide for 2017. Open for lunch Tuesday-Sunday from 1:30 to 3:30 and for dinner on Friday and Saturday from 9:00 to 10:30.

Tel: (+34) 941 334 001

Rivas de Tereso

La Bodega de Rivas

A kilometers north of San Vicente, and about equal distance from Labastida, in the heart of the Toloño Mountains, we found a true gastronomic surprise, one that had been recommended to us by our friend Gabriella. Located in the upper neighborhood of this small village (30 residents) near the Church of San Miguel, chef Raúl Muñiz offers an outstanding seasonal menu including sautéed mushrooms, roast lamb and suckling pig, along with grilled octopus and other seafood fresh from the Basque coast, plus an good selection of local wines. Opened in 2013, this Michelin quality restaurant is recommend in the Repsol Guide.
Open daily for lunch at 13:30 pm. Closed Mondays and Tuesday-Thursday for dinner except during the summer. Reservations highly recommended.

Tel: (+34) 941 334 329

**Restaurante Jose Mari**
This is a traditional family-run asador has been part of the Riojan dining scene since 1974 and has always been an excellent value for the money. They offer typical Riojan cuisine with modern touches, outstanding homemade desserts and a large wine list. Outdoor dining is available during the summer season. Closed Monday and Tuesday.

Tel: (+34) 941 334 061

**Labastida**

**Asador Ariño**
This friendly, casual, family-run restaurant, a local favorite of winery owners, is located on the main street of Labastida, just below the city hall and tourist office on the same side of the street. From the outside it appears to be a medieval, half-timbered ancient home. Inside the medieval ambiance continues with exposed beams, rustic décor and bare wood tables. This completely unpretentious, diminutive restaurant is a 100% family affair. The daughter prepares the desserts. Your waiter will be her brother, who can explain the menu to you in his Basic English, while Mom and Dad man the stoves in the kitchen.
There may be Basque folk music playing on the sound system and you’ll notice pictures on the walls of family members, former national jai alai champions. You’ll know that here you have set your foot firmly in the Basque country. Expect very generous portions of hearty Basque cuisine, such as meat filled roasted red peppers, huge T-bone steak for two (or more!), their famous chuletón. The son may recite the menu, but there is also a printed menu- you can peruse it, as it’s displayed at the door.

On our last visit we enjoyed a gargantuan feast, consisting of a large mixed green salad, scrambled eggs with wild mushrooms, revuelto de setas, a plate of roasted red peppers, pimientos, their famous T-bone steak, chuletón, a seemingly bottomless bowl of red bean soup, alubias rojas, and homemade cheesecake tarta de queso, accompanied by a bottle of the house red from ’01, a silver medal winner in France. Other winners include the house filet mignon, solomillo, a sirloin, entrecot, an assortment of home made croquettes, surtido de fritos, artichokes with ham, alcachofas con jamón, fried asparagus topped with a delicious mushroom sauce, espárragos fritos con salsa de setas, monkfish, rodaballo, and the traditional Basque dessert, goxua, (typical of Vitoria) similar to crema catalana.

This small family restaurant serves as a popular daily meeting spot for the locals, so one should reserve. It was recommended to us by the proprietor of the Hotel Villa de Abalos and by the owner of the Bodegas de la Marquesa, and we always make time for lunch here with the family and our superb local guides on our Rioja scouting trips. Cost is about 60€ per couple with three courses, wine, coffee.

Tel: (+34) 945 331 024

Laguardia

Amelibia

Opened in 2006 by a young couple, Patxi and Alex, at Calle Barbacana, 14, it has twelve very well spaced, nicely set tables with lovely views of the vineyards below. Four of the tables face the floor to ceiling windows and should be reserved in advance. Patxi, the chef, offers an innovative seasonal a la carte menu as well as a tasting menu, and he’s gotten excellent reviews from sophisticated local diners, including noted chef Héctor Oribe. We can attest to his talent from a recent lunch here of partridge salad with tropical fruit, pork cutlets topped with Idiazábal cheese and a bitter chocolate with olive oil creation for dessert. It has now become our favorite spot to dine in Laguardia. Menu is displayed in English outside.

Open daily for lunch at 1:00 pm and Friday and Saturday for dinner at 9:00 pm, closed all day Tuesday. They offer a daily menu at lunch for 18€ and a 6-plate degustacion menu for 40€.
**Restaurante El Medoc Alavés**
This is the attractive dining room of the Villa de Laguardia hotel, which is just below the walled village on the Vitoria-Logroño highway. The Basque chef, Jokín de Aguirre, presents highly sophisticated creations in a relaxing setting. The reasonably priced tasting menu for 42€ is a 4-course affair with appetizers, fish, meat and wonderful desserts.

**Restaurante Marixa**
Opened by the Acillona family in 1954, chefs Asier and Sergio Curero continue to offer an updated traditional Basque-Rioja menu along with delicious deserts and panoramic views from the upstairs dinner room of the lakes of Laguardia and the vineyards to the east. The former family winery, the Bodeguerno room, has been refurbished as a dining room.

Tel: (+34) 945 600 165

**Gastro-Bar Dona Blanca**
Another important investment by the owners of Hotel-Restaurant Marixa, this café/restaurant/pintxos bar, situated outside of the walls of Laguardia at Sancho Abarca, 4 bajo, offers an excellent selection throughout the day, a boon for visitors to this historic walled city who do not have restaurant reservations.

Tel: (+34) 630 677 073

**Paganos**

**Héctor Oribe**
Can be found in the tiny hamlet of Páganos, one kilometer to the west of Laguardia, just off the main Vitoria-Logroño highway. The restaurant is signed once you approach the village entrance. This remains our favorite place to lunch in the countryside after a Laguardia area winery visit. It’s now ten years old and has become a meeting place for all the local wine growers, along with their international guests. Both the owner of the Bodegas de la Marquesa in Villabuena, as well as the proprietor of the Hotel Villa de Abalos recommended his gem to us, and it’s been a favorite ever since.

This eponymous restaurant, created by 35-year old Basque chef Héctor Oribe, has only a dozen or so tables, and it’s charmingly decorated, very inviting, sophisticated yet cozy. The chef trained with Basque chef greats Juan Mari Arzak, Hilario Arbelaitz and Karlos Arguiñano. He offers a fantastic price to quality ratio short menu of Riojan classics presented in a modern, updated style. There is also a bargain lunchtime *menú del día* for
18€, available Tuesday-Friday (you may need to ask for it specifically since it’s not presented to non-locals). And the chef’s full tasting menu is available for only 33€.

The restaurant has been chosen as a Bibi Gourmand selection in the Michelin Red Guide and earns a 7/10 rating in the Gourmetour Guide. For our most recent meal we opted for a starter of raviolis filled with black pudding and pine nuts, followed by a main course of steak, lomo de vaca. The wine bottle on your table serves as your wine list. After dinner coffee comes with chocolate truffles and madeleines. Count on around 38€/person when dining a la carte. Highly recommended! Open Monday-Saturday for lunch, beginning at 1:30. Closed in the evenings except Friday and Saturday, July and August. Closed all day Sunday, July 1-15 and December 20-January 15.

Tel: (+34) 945 600 715

Elciego
Marqués de Riscal

The hotel’s restaurant is named for, and its kitchen supervised by, 2-Michelin starred chef Francis Paniego, of the famed El Portal del Echaurren restaurant in Ezcaray. The demand is quite high for tables, so reserve far in advance for this one. Call the hotel directly, reconfirm by email and call again to reconfirm on the day of your reservation. I can’t stress this enough!

The room itself is a soaring space, rather small for a 43-room, 5-star hotel, seating 40 (50 in a pinch) with bare Brazilian hard wood floors and walls. The amply spaced tables are luxuriously set with wine colored Baccarat crystal stemware, Puiforcat sterling silverware and Rivolta Carmignani linens. The extra virgin olive oil comes from Puesolé. Diners are offered a breadbasket with olive oil, mushroom, and corn breads. Because we dined on Friday night, the village church was illuminated (M de R convinced the local priest to light up the church for their hotel guests enjoyment on the weekends).
The English speaking staff, spiffily dressed in black and white, appeared well trained, and waiters pour your wine, setting the bottle aside. We ordered from the reasonably priced a la carte menu, choosing Francis Paniego’s mother’s famous ham croquettes (a must) as a starter and loin of roast lamb over a bed of potatoes and hake in saffron broth as our main courses. Desserts are home made, priced equally and must be ordered at the beginning of the meal. Their cheese dessert with Idiazábal soup and quince jelly was simply divine, as well as their raspberries with yogurt mousse and red berries soup. The initial, surprisingly small all Marqués de Riscal 8-label wine list was supplemented later with a complete list of great labels (200) from around the world.

The restaurant "1860 Tradicion", with views of the village, vineyards and mountains, is a more informal dining venue as an alternative to the gastronomic restaurant, and is open daily for breakfast (7:00 to 11:00), lunch (1:30 to 3:30) and dinner (8:00 to 10:15) offers the Riscal Menu for 65€.

Tel: (+34) 945 180 888

Mesón La Cueva

A restaurant and casa rural combo, the restaurant is housed in an ancient wine cellar, built of stone and wood, while upstairs it offers inexpensive B&B accommodations with four spare, but nicely decorated double rooms, two of these in the attic, all having private bath and a/c. The four rooms share a common downstairs lounge equipped with TV, DVD and
CD players. The entire house can be rented on the weekends for a group of eight for a very reasonable 400€. Continental breakfast is served for an additional 3€/person.

Tel: (+34) 945 606 440 / 626 217 157

**Gastrobar Asador Real Fortuna**

This rustic roasting tavern serves your usual traditional fare of Riojan potatoes, huge steaks, baby lamb chops, red peppers, vegetable stew, etc. Huge portions, high quality to price ratio, with very reasonably priced wines.

Tel: (+34) 945 606 008

**Fuenmayor**

**Asador Alameda**

Run with great aplomb by husband and wife team, Esther and Tomás Álvarez, it’s located in a two-story home on the main square, Plaza Félix Azpilicueta, across from the church. Come here for the very finest of prime ingredients prepared simply, but exquisitely. There are two grills, one for red meats and the other for impeccably fresh fish. Have their ham croquettes, goose foie, their steak, **chuleta de vaca gallega** or their delicious roast suckling pig, **cochinillo asado**, or the freshest of fishes, simply grilled, such as their turbot, **rodaballo**.

Desserts, like the chocolate soufflé and rice pudding are home made and worth saving room for, and the wine list boasts 300 labels. English menu is available. I would rate the Alameda as one of the top five dining experiences in the Rioja, one not to miss if in the vicinity of Fuenmayor, but if you come on a weekend, or during the wine festival, you must reserve a few days in advance. It’s quite famous among the local gastronomes (only 12 km from Logroño) and those visiting from Bilbao and Madrid.

The restaurant receives a 7/10 rating in The Best of Spanish Gastronomy, a 6.5 in Gourmetour, a 13 from the Guía Gastronómica y Cultural del País Vasco y Su Entorno and has been bestowed a Repsol sol (sun), the Spain equivalent of a Michelin star. Average check is 50€/person. Opens for lunch at 1:00 pm and dinner at 8:30 pm. Closed Sunday night, all day Monday, August and Christmas week.

Tel: (+34) 941 450 044

**Mesón Chuchi**

If there is no room at the Alameda inn, call (on a weekend) or stop by its cousin on the way out to the N-124, a favorite of the local winemakers. This is where the female chef of Alameda honed her skills, in her family’s roadside grill. The roast suckling pig, **cochinillo**, is
a specialty, along with beans, potatoes Rioja style, roast suckling pig, grilled fish. Desserts are home made. The mesón serves a weekday luncheon menú del día for 20€. It’s closed Wednesday night and September 10-20.

Tel: (+34) 941 450 422

Logroño
Tondeluna
This 2011 entry into the Logroño dining scene is brought to you by Michelin starred chef Francis Paniego of Echaurren in Ezcaray. It sits facing the Plaza del Espolón at Muro de la Mata 9, bajo. It is a contemporary design bar-restaurant with an open kitchen and six communal tables (and free Wi-Fi) created for informal dining. Drop in here (no reservations) for a meal based on traditional tapas (its famous ham croquettes, ensaladilla rusa, calamares a la romana), or small plates or order their daily menú del día. Their signature dessert: torrijas con helado de queso, a type of French toast with cheese ice cream.

Opens daily for lunch at 11:30 am and for dinner at 8:30 pm, closed Sunday evening. Brunch is available on Saturdays and Sundays from 11:30 am to 1:45 pm.

Tel: (+34) 941 236 425

info@iberiantraveler.com

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**El Rincón del Vino**
This charming spot is easily found at Marqués de San Nicolás, 136, in the heart of the Old Quarter. It is housed in an ancient wine fermenting cellar and owned by the Soto Mendi family. They serve traditional Riojan fare such as *pochas, chuletillas a la brasa* with a modern touch. Their wine list boasts over 300 Rioja labels. Closes on Sunday nights, Monday and first two weeks of August. Average check 35€-40€. They have another restaurant in the village of Ezcaray.

Tel: (+34) 941 205 392

**La Concina de Ramón**
José Ramón Piñeiro, former chef of the Marques de Riscal restaurant, who worked under the guidance of Francis Paniego for more than a decade, has joined the list of top chefs in the Rioja, the “Cooking Team” and opened his venture in Logroño at the end of 2012. There is a house menu for 25€, a Chuletón menu for 35€, and gastronomic menu for 45€, + VAT. Add a 3-wine paring for 10€.

The restaurant, at Calle Portales, 30, is open for lunch and dinner Tuesday-Saturday, closed Sunday and Monday evening, except for holiday evenings and special group bookings. Closed annually from January 9 to February 14 and for two weeks during the summer.

Tel: (+34) 941 289 808

**La Galería**
Located at Calle Saturnino Ulargui, 5, chef Raúl Martínez, with one Repsol sun, offers market driven creative cuisine rather than traditional fare-dishes such as warm anchovies in a salad of watermelon and touch of Modena Balsamic vinegar, and for dessert a rice pudding emulsion and vanilla tulip. Their executive menu goes for 31€, the seasonal menu is 25€ with a long tasting menu for 46€. There is also a special gastronomic menu consisting of 9 plates and 9 wines. Closed Sundays, Holy Week and the second week of June and the 1st of August.

Tel: (+34) 941 207 366

**Las Cubanas**
San Agustín, 17, in the Old Quarter, this local favorite restaurant/gastro bar has reopened after several years of absence, offering a combo of traditional dishes along with more innovative offerings. The dynamic duo of Alejandro Muro and Mikel Garcia prepare such items as monkfish with mushrooms and roast suckling pig, *cochinillo*. Closed on Sundays and at the end of September. Average check 35€-40€.
Tel: (+34) 941 220 050

**Cachetero Comidas**

Logroño’s most renowned *asador*, or roasting tavern, is now operated by the fourth generation of the Arechinolza family. It’s handily located on tapas bar central, at Calle Laurel, 3. As a Food and Wine travel article once put it, “an oasis of peace in the midst of the tapas maelstrom of Calle del Laurel”. It serves time honored specialties of *bacalao ajoarriero* or cod stewed with potatoes, tomatoes, red peppers, garlic, and onion, *patitas de cordero*, lamb shanks, roast baby lamb, plus modern, creative desserts. There is a tasting menu (5 dishes), which changes daily, for only 28€.

Look for the bright red doors and sign in wavy red letters above, Cachetero Comidas. Open for lunch from 1:30 to 4:00 and for dinner from 9:00 to 11:45. Closed Tuesday, all of January, and the last week of August.

Tel: (+34) 941 228 463

**La Sidrería de San Gregorio**

Located on Calle San Gregorio at No.27 in the Old Quarter, this typical Riojan cider house is housed in a brick, vaulted wine cellar from the 16th-century. Here you’ll dine Riojan on a 342 menu of charcoal broiled steak, *chuletón*, hake braised in cider, *merluza a la sidra*, cod omelets, *tortilla de bacalao*, and rice pudding, *arroz con leche*, for dessert. They also offer a daily lunch menus for 25€ and 28€. Closed Sunday night and Monday except during festivals. Also closed 10 days in January and 15 days in August.

Tel: (+34) 941 252 524

**Venta Moncalvillo**

This makes for a perfect spot for lunch on a weekend-most worthy of the journey. This gastronomic restaurant, in the tiny village of Daroca de Rioja (30 inhabitants), is a 20-minute drive south from the capital, and is run by the Echapresto family and also recommended in the Food and Wine article, “Rioja: Come for the Wine, Stay for the Food”. It comes highly rated in the Repsol (with one Repsol sun) and the Guía *Gastronómica y Cultural del País Vasco y su Entorno* guides, boasts one Michelin star and two Repsol suns. The chef, Ignacio, is self-taught, and his brother Carlos will greet you and be your expert maitre-sommelier.

The outside of the inn is deceiving, as it appears to be a simple roadside eatery, a *venta*, as its name suggests, but inside you’ll find a quite serious gastronomic restaurant, one of the very best, in fact, in the region. The menu is based on local products and changes seasonally. In the spring, the focus is on vegetables from the restaurant’s own garden, in the summer, fish,
in the fall, local wild mushrooms, and in winter, local game dishes. The desserts are homemade and again, revolve around the local pears from Rincón and Rioja peaches braised in red wine. For after dinner coffee, plate of cookies, cordials and the best Cuban cigars, diners are invited to the cozy Salón Retiro, a particularly inviting spot in winter with its blazing fireplace.

It’s open Monday-Thursday for lunch only from 1:30 to 4:00 pm. Dinner is served only on Friday-Saturday from 9:00 to 11:00 pm. There is a Classic Menu for 70€ and Gastronomic Menu for 90€, with wine parings for 35€ and 45€/person. The wine list is divided into four categories: Rioja, the rest of Spain, the world and special wines (sparkling, sherries, muscatels, etc.) The 120 Rioja labels on the list focus on small vineyards with limited productions. Closed all day Sunday, for dinner Monday to Thursday and for Christmas. Reservations are absolutely essential. Walk-ins will be strictly but politely asked to return another day with reservation.

Tel: (+34) 941 444 832

**Alfaro**

**Restaurante Asador San Roque**

At San Roque, 3, this classic Asador was founded in 1956 and today in the hands of a young couple serving Riojan dishes and excellent vegetables, is the place for lunch. Have the traditional artichokes with ham, filet mignon with foie and Port sauce, scrambled eggs with
scallions and shrimp, or their roasted baby goat. They serve a new menu for 30€, VAT included, and one can dine a la carte for around 25€. Open daily for lunch from 1:30 to 4:00 and dinner from 7:30 to 11:30.

Tel: (+34) 941 182 888

**La concina de Clotilde**

Another nice option would be this small restaurant located nearby at Calle Alfanova, 4. It’s owned by Bodegas Barbarot, a small family winery in Briones. You need to reserve 2 to 3 days in advance. Offers several set menus for lunch (35€-40€), which begins around 2:00 to 2:30, dinner is available from 9:00 pm to 1:00 am.

Tel: (+34) 941 183 584

**Ezcaray**

**Echaurren Tradición & El Portal del Echaurren**

I have had two of my most memorable meals in all of the Rioja here. The first, a mid-week lunch in El Portal, which I reserved two weeks in advance, as this much applauded, 2-star Michelin restaurant is arguably Rioja’s finest. Recently, I grabbed a last minute table on the equally pleasing traditional side, in his family’s Hotel Echaurren, where his mother, Marisa Sánchez, still offers her advice and experience in preparing the traditional Rioja fare in the hotel’s original restaurant, Echaurren Tradición. The Menú Echaurren Tradición is 65€, wine extra.

Francis Paniego’s gastronomic restaurant, El Portal, sits next door in the annex, producing cutting edge, highly inventive cuisine. The dining room has room for only 40 diners and has been decorated in a classically elegant style, with well-spaced and large tables that invite leisurely dining. Plan to spend at least two hours enjoying one of the two imaginative seasonal tasting menus (125€ and 150€). The Portal Classic Menu is 125€. The is also a Menú del día for 24,20€.

At the E-Tapas Gastrobar, one can enjoy a glass of wine and tapas and the Restaurante Bistrot Comilon, opened in 2001, is for more casual dining, with a short menu, Menú corto, for 18€ and degustación menu for only 30€. Very popular with the locals. Closed Sunday nights during the winter, the second half of July and 15 days in December

Paniego’s cuisine receives a 8/10 rating from Spain’s Best of Gastronomy Guide, 2 soles (suns) from the Repsol Guide, two Michelin stars, a rating of 8.25/10 from Gourmetour and
very highly rated by the prestigious *Academia Vasca de Gastronomía*. Paniego is the “Arzak” of the Rioja, and yes, he trained with “best chef in the world”, *Ferrán Adría*.

The Hotel Echaurren, a Relais & Chateaux, offers an excellent getaway, their “Gourmet Weekend”, two nights for 400€/person, which includes dinner in El Portal de Echaurren, the tasting menu paired with 3 different wines on Friday night.

Tel: (+34) 941 354 047
Informal Tapas Hopping

Logroño

The so-called *Senda de los Elefantes* (ask a local to explain the joke), the streets of Laurel, Travesía de Laurel (the extension of Laurel around the corner), Calle Albornoz and now extending on to Calle San Agustín in Logroño’s Old Quarter, are home to a whopping 58 tapas bars, one placed every two meters! This is where the locals head each evening around 9:00 for the nightly traditional tapas crawl or *chiquiteo*. On weekends residents of the province come to join them, and by 9:00 you’ll find no room inside the bars, as customers spill out into the narrow streets to take their drinks and tapas and to socialize. This ritual on Calle Laurel and environs is well known through the province.

Don’t try to compare these tapas to those of their cousins, the Basque *pintxos*, “miniature haute cuisine”, that you’ll find in San Sebastián, Bilbao, Vitoria, Hondarribia or Pamplona (Navarra). These Logroño tapas, for the most part, are more simple preparations, not terribly elaborate or push-the-envelope gastronomic but delicious nonetheless and usually based on just a few ingredients.

*Calle Portales, Logroño*

Each bar has its own specialty that it does extremely well. You’ll see their specialty, usually prepared with one main ingredient, proudly listed at the door, or in a photo. One of the most popular bars, the Bar Soriano, serves only one dish, nothing more. The young house wine

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served at some of the more traditional, “old style” bars can be surprisingly mediocre, so if you’d like a good Rioja, make sure to ask for a *crianza*.

Since the Logroño tourist board initiated a tapas or *pinchos* competition, similar to those one finds in Donostia, Bilbao and Pamplona, the presentation of the tapas in the 70 participating city bars inevitably stepped up and become more sophisticated. All the competing bars served a *crianza* to accompany their *pinchos* entry. You can pick up a guide at the Logroño city tourist office (at the end of Calle Portales) to all of the bars with their addresses, specialties and location on a city map—the *Guía de pinchos y platos estrella*.

**Here Are A Few Bars To Try**

*Bars here come and go, so don’t be surprised if one mentioned here has closed its doors or changed its name.*

- **Pata Negra** - Laurel, 24, is noted for its little hot ham and cheese sandwiches, *bocaditos de jamón*. Tel: (+34) 941 213 645
- **Casa Pali** - Laurel, 11, does crepes of fried asparagus, or eggplant with cheese or cheese, mushrooms and shrimp. Tel: (+34) 941 256 795
- **Bar Achuri** – Laurel, no number, roasted garlic, *cabezas de ajo*.
- **Donosti** - Calle Laurel, 13, currently the bar that comes closest to the high style, creative pintxos bars of San Sebastián (hence the name, Donosti, which is the Basque name for the city of San Sebastián). Standout dishes include wild mushrooms with ham, goat cheese on toast mixed with peach or apple jam, also filet mignon, *solomillo*, with Roquefort. Not quite *La Cuchara de San Telmo*, but as good as it gets in Logroño. And this one doesn’t open in the evening until 8:30. Tel: (+34) 941 220 111
- **Bar Lorenzo** - Travesía del Laurel, 4, a *bocatita Tío Agus*, little barbecue sandwich. Tel: (+34) 941 200 9290
- **Juan y Pinchamé** - Calle Laurel, 9. For a *brocheta de piña con langostinos*, prawn and pineapple brochette. Tel: (+34) 678 589 633
- **Pata Negra** - Laurel, 24, Iberian ham, hence the name. Tel: (+34) 941 213 646
- **La Méngula** - Travesía del Laurel, 11 - delicious open faced sandwich of cured ham and tomato olive oil and garlic, a *zapatilla de Jamón*. Tel: (+34) 941 202 973
- **El Soriano** - Travesía del Laurel, 2. An institution on C/ Laurel, its claim to fame, and its only dish, is its tapa of 3 giant grilled mushrooms, *Champi*, on a toothpick topped with a tiny shrimp and drizzled with a “secret” sauce served with a slice of bread. Fight your way into the bar and just yell for a *champi* and a *crianza* (glass of red). It will set you back only a euro or two. They have been grilling up these *champis* for more than 30 years, and on
any given Saturday night, some 3,000 will be consumed. Closed Wednesday. Tel: (+34) 941 228 807

- **La Tavina** - Calle Laurel, 2, tapas bar, wine shop and restaurant, on three floors, at the entrance to Calle Laurel. Best of Turismo Vitivinícola 2016. Tel: (+34) 941 102 300

- **La Gota de Vino** - Calle San Agustín 14. Stand out tapa here—their *zorropito*, a sandwich with alioli, ham, cheese, pork loin and bacon. Nice wines by the glass. Tel: (+34) 941 204 200

- **La Anjana** - Calle San Agustín, 8. With lively outdoor terrace, the star here is the filet mignon, *solomillo*, topped with foie. Tel: (+34) 941 287 909

- **Cafe Bonsai** - Calle San Agustín, 1. Try their *sordito*, which is battered and fried eggplant with bacon and cheese. Tel: (+34) 941 204 481

- **Bodeguilla Los Rotos** - Calle San Agustín, 8, with outdoor terrace and interesting décor of old radios. Their artery clogging specialty of broken eggs, *huevos rotos*, eggs scrambled with oven-baked potatoes is irresistible. Tel: (+34) 941 502 664

- **Taberna de Correos** - Calle San Agustín 8 bis, next door. Nice wine selection and a sublime *La Pluma*, which is a brochette of grilled pork loin in a honey reduction sauce. Tel: (+34) 941 894 040

- **El Soldado de Tudelilla** - Calle San Agustín, 33. Their specialties: *El Capricho*, a filet of sardine and slice of green pepper sandwiched between two pieces of bread, and a sweet onion, olive and tomato salad. Tel: (+34) 941 209 624
• **Bar El Sebas** - Calle Albornoz, 7. The yummist *tortilla de patatas*, egg and potato omelet. Tel: (+34) 941 220 196

**Tapas Hopping Outside Of Laurel & Environs**

• **UMM by Álex García** – *Umm Food and Drink* at Calle Torrecilla en Cameros, 11, and *No Sólo Tapas* at Calle San Juan, 1. Tel: (+34) 941 519 724

• **La Fontana Laurel** - Calle Bretón de los Herreros, 34 at the entrance to Calle Laurel. Tel: (+34) 941 223 092

• **Bar Vinissimo** - Calle San Juán, 23, is *not* on the “Senda de los Elefantes”, Laurel route, but still in the Old Quarter and worth seeking out as one of Logroño’s best wine bars that is also a wine store with decent prices. Opens at 12:30 pm. Tel: (+34) 941 258 828

• **Tastavín** - also on San Juán at No. 25, serves high quality *pintxos*. Recommended in both the Michelin and Repsol Guides. Tel: (+34) 941 262 145
Beyond The Wine
Sightseeing Outside Of Haro

Along route N-232 west of Haro, towards Pancorbo, at the border of Castile, almost to the province of Burgos, you’ll find two picturesque medieval towns, Cuzcurrita del Río Tirón and Sajazarra.

Cuzcurrita del Río Tirón

Lying southwest of Haro, you’ll discover the small village with its 16th-castle, Castillo de Cuzcurrita, and beautiful San Miguel church with a façade in a Rococo Italianate style. The restored castle, with its beautiful grounds, was turned into a notable family winery in 1999, and is open for visits Monday-Friday from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm and 4:30 to 8:00 pm and on Saturdays mornings only. The guided tour, in Spanish, English or French, take 90 minutes and must be reserved ahead of time. Tours include tastings (10€ to 25€). Email info@castillodecuzcurrita.com or call (+34) 941 328 022 to schedule a tour and tasting.

The other “must see” winery in the village is the small, family run Bohedal Botique Bodega, for its Gran Bohedal Blanco, Crianza and Reserva labels. Call Blanca or Leire at (+34) 941 326 064, reserve online, or email experiencia@bohedal.com to arrange a visit.

Sajazarra

Nearby, a few kms west of Haro, lies the small village of Sajazarra, filled with old stone noble homes and small Romanesque churches. Its castle-palace, dating from the 14th-century is the finest preserved in the Rioja. Not opened to the public except during the International Baroque Music competition held here during the last week in August.

In Sajazarra, wine enthusiasts can visit the winery opened by the Libano family in 1973, Bodega Castillo de Sajazarra, from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm. Because of the location and microclimate, the harvest here is usually late in the season, from mid-October to early November. Contact the winery at bodegas@castiooldesajazarra.com, or call (+34) 941 320 066 to arrange a visit.

These two villages are completely authentic, photogenic and most important, off the beaten path.

Briñas

The wine town of Briñas, just 3 km due north of Haro on the N-124, is often overlooked as one drives east from Haro, but this medieval village, whose old quarter has been declared a Historic-Artistic Monument, considered on of the most beautiful villages in the Rioja, is
worth a stop. Pay a visit to the village church, *Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción*, dating from the 16th-17th centuries. It boasts a well-preserved 17th century altarpiece and marvelous Baroque organ. One can visit the church Monday-Saturday from 6:30 to 8:00 pm and on Sunday from 11:30 to 1:00 and 6:00 to 7:00.

Briñas is known for its collection of 16th and 17th-century palace-manor homes with heraldic shields intact, one of which, the Palacio del Conde de Cirat, served as barracks for the Italian troops fighting here during the Spanish Civil War. Another has been converted into a *casa rural*, or B&B, Casa de Legarda.

**Casalarreina**

Just to the south of Haro, in the village of Casalarreina, you can visit the *Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de Piedad*, a National Historic-Artistic Monument. The bishop of Calahorra founded this convent for cloistered Dominican nuns in 1509. Construction began in 1514, concluding in 1524 in the richly ornamented Gothic Isabelline style, popular during the reign of Queen Isabella. Of the site’s three components, only the church with its beautiful Plateresque façade and the lovely two-story cloister are open to visitors. Closed Mondays.

From Haro, or any base you choose in the Rioja, it’s possible to make a daylong cultural or historic excursion.

**Monastery Route**

**Yuso and Suso**

For cultural and historical tourism in the Rioja one can visit the ancient World Heritage Monasteries of *Suso*, dating from the 9th-century, and *Yuso*, in the village of *San Millán de la Cogolla*, in the middle of the Cárdenas River valley south of Nájera.

The diminutive, pink stone Mozarabic Monastery *Suso* is set on a wooded mountainside with caves dug out in the rock to form chapels. Notice the Mozarabic horseshoe arches and the empty sarcophagus of the hermit San Millán. Suso is open daily from Easter to October from 10:00 am to 1:30 pm and 4:00 to 6:30 pm, closed Monday.

*Yuso* is the lower monastery built in the same
stern and somber architectural style as El Escorial and is called the *Escorial of the Rioja*, as in its day, was a center of letters. Here is where the first words written in the Castillian language were found, the *glosas*, which were margin notes that a monk, *Gonzalo de Berceo*, scribbled in the vernacular rather than in Latin. Yuso is open daily from Easter to September from 10:00 am to 1:30 pm and 4:00 to 6:30 pm, closed Mondays, except in August.

**El Monasterio de la Luz**

Following your visit to Suso and Yuso, head back north on the LR-204, detouring northeast onto the LR-206 to visit the beautiful and lesser known 12th-century Cistercian abbey, *Abadía de Santa María de San Salvador*, at Cañas. It’s just exquisite!

**Monastery of Santa María la Real**

Then follow the LR-206 or the LR-205 north to the N-120, and head east to Nájera to visit this beautiful Gothic-Plateresque monastery. Once in town, park on the south side of the river in the modern town, (ample free parking available in the lot behind the Hotel San Fernando), walk across the pedestrian bridge and enter the atmospheric old quarter and follow signs through the narrow streets to the monastery. Visits are by guided tour, which takes you upstairs first to see the magnificently carved choir stalls, then down to the Cloisters, the Church and the Royal Pantheon.

![Carved wood choir stalls and the Royal Pantheon, tomb of the Kings of Nájera-Pamplona](image)

**Bodegas David Moreno**

Located only 6 km from the village of San Millán de la Cogolla, a visit to this bodega can be easily combined with a cultural visit to the Monasteries of Suso and Yuso and Santa María la Real in Nájera, as it lies between the two on LR-205. It is one of the most visited of all the Rioja Alta wineries since it opens its doors freely, Napa Valley style, everyday of the week. It offers free, self-guided visits for tasting and buying Monday-Friday from 8:30 to 1:30, then
3:30 to 6:30. On Saturday it’s open from 8:30 to 2:30, then 3:30 to 6:30. On Sundays it opens from 11:30 to 1:30. If you wish a guided tour of all the facilities, there are two that take place Monday-Saturday, 12:15 and 5:15. Price: 6€. Lunch is also available in the bodega. Reservations required. Tel: (+34) 941 367 338

**Santa María de Valvanera**

This secluded monastery, tucked away in a thick mountain forest 20 minutes south of Nájera, was built to shelter the 11th-century Romanesque-Byzantine statue of its Virgen, the patroness of the Rioja, as well as for beekeepers. The drive up to this secluded spot rates as one of the countryside’s most scenic.

According to legend, the construction of the monastery is owned to the discovery of an image of the Virgin, by a repentant bandit named Nuño, in the cavity of an oak tree plagued by bees. The statue is located in a private room high above the altar and is reached via marble steps on the right side of the church.

**Anguiano**

Santa María de Valvanera is just below the village of Anguiano, where spectators from all around the region descend on July 21-23 for the celebration of the village’s parton saint, when its dancers, the *Danza de los Zancos*, perched atop 1/2 meter tall wooden stilts perform, precariously (and astonishingly), descending 45 meters from the church, first down six stone steps, then down a narrow, and very steep, cobblestone street, called the *Cuesta de los Danzantes*. The dancers, dressed in a costume of blue shirt, colorful vest and large yellow and white billowing skirts, set into flight as they twirl around, accompanying the procession carrying an image of *Santa María Magdalena*. Spectators of the vertiginous and dangerous dance form a human shield to catch the dancers as they launch themselves into seeming oblivion, spinning down the steep street.

This four hundred-year old tradition is one of the most noteworthy events in the Rioja and is also performed the last Saturday in September when the image of the Virgin is taken back to her hermitage where she will wait until the following spring.

**Route Of Saint James**

The pilgrims’ route passes through a section of La Rioja, and Santo Domingo de la Calzada, on the banks of the Oja River south of Haro, has, for centuries, been a major staging post for pilgrims on the way to Santiago de Compostela, a mere 528 kms to the west.
Santo Domingo de la Calzada

This is a major staging post on the Camino de Santiago. Park outside the walled town and enter by foot to visit the Cathedral. The town’s founding father, Saint Dominic, is buried here in an elaborate mausoleum with small crypt underneath. He dedicated his life to the building of a road, bridge and pilgrims’ hospital-this hospice becoming a focal point for the pilgrims to Santiago and constituted the beginnings of the new town, which was named Santo Domingo after his death. Since he is the patron saint of road workers and engineers, surrounding the burial site are votive plaques and offerings from engineering firms. But what tourists really flock to the cathedral to see are its live cock and hen kept in a carved wooden gallery. They have to do with a miracle whose tale goes something like this...

In the Middle Ages, a married couple and their 18 year-old son, Hugonnell, arrived to Santo Domingo from Germany as pilgrims on the road to Compostela. The girl at the inn where they were staying fell in love with the son, but he rebuffed her. Seeking revenge, she planted a silver goblet in his luggage, and when the family took up their journey onward to Santiago, she denounced the lad as a thief. Under the laws of the time, the punishment for robbery was death; thus once captured and judged, the innocent boy was hanged.

His grief stricken parents continued on their journey to Compostela, but several months later they returned. They went to the spot to see where their son had been hanged. Upon arriving at the gallows, they heard his voice telling them that Santo Domingo had saved his life. Their son was alive! They went straight to the Judge’s house to inform him of the miracle and demand that the boy be cut down from the gallows. The Judge replied with scorn that their son was “about as alive as the roast cock and hen I’m about to eat.” And at that moment, the cock and hen leaped from the Mayor’s plate and began to crow. The boy was then set free.

In memory of this event, a white cock and hen are kept in an ornate henhouse inside the cathedral, to the left of the entrance. Local farmers donate these birds, and they’re changed every month.

Route Of The Dinosaurs

One can follow the route in the Valle de los Cidacos, situated one hour west of the Calahorra on the LR-281/LR-123, in the Jurassic Park of the Rioja Baja, where over 1,400 dinosaur tracks have been catalogued. The Museo Paleontológico in Enciso, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, where you’ll find a collection of scale reproductions of skulls, eggs and teeth of the dinosaurs that inhabited this area 120 million years ago, perfect for a family outing. Open from mid-April to mid-October.
Sightseeing Outside Of Logroño

Ezcaray and the Oja Valley

From the village of Santo Domingo de la Calzada, south of Haro, you continue south on the LR-111, into the heart of the Sierra de la Demanda, the **roof of the Rioja**. It’s a gorgeous short drive past forests of oak and beech trees to the beguiling mountain town of Ezcaray, in the Oja Valley, one of the **Seven Valleys of the Rioja**, a traditional summer retreat for Riojan and Basque families and a winter sports center, the Vladezcaray ski area, and the majestic San Lorgezo mountain, the highest peak in the region. Nearby, the Picos de Urbión marks the border between Burgos and Soria.

In early July Ezcaray holds the [International Jazz Festival](#) and this year, on July 21, 22 and 23, the village celebrates the [Ezcaray Fest](#), a major new music festival.

![The Oja River in the Sierra de la Demanda](image)

If you do land here by 3:00 in the afternoon and want one of the top gourmet experiences in the Rioja, be sure to dine at Echaurren, a restaurant/hotel on the square in the center of the village with two fantastic chefs, Francis Paniego, the son of the lady founder, and his mother, Marisa Sánchez, who’s called the doyenne of Riojan cooking.

Los Cameros (La Rioja sur)

A delightful way to spend a Sunday off the wine touring circuit is to take a leisurely drive down through the pastoral **Sierra de Camerso**, irrigated by the waters of the Iregua River, a verdant valley of great natural beauty, particularly impressive in the spring, when the cherry and peach trees are in full bloom, and in mid to late October, when the oak, chestnut and
beech trees reach their peak of Splendor. This mountainous comarca (region) of Camero Nuevo was made extremely prosperous in the 16th-century thanks to its role in sheep transhumance. It consists of 13 stone villages, some now with as few as 20 remaining inhabitants. In fact, the population density of Camerso is only four people per square kilometer. home of the famous Los Cameros cheese and the Sierra de Cebollera Nature Reserve, less then an hour drive south of Logroño.

Driving south from Navarrete on the LR-137, you pick up the N-111 at the Río Iregua, the natural dividing line between the Rioja Alta and Rioja Baja, in the Valley de Leza, and continue to the village of Torrecilla en Cameros, where you can stop to visit the 15th-century Parish Church of San Martín with its three naves.

**El Rasillo de Cameros**

From there you continue south to the village that overlooks the popular Gonzalez-Lacasa reservoir, and if adventurous, you can head to Ortigosa de Cameros and visit the caves *La Paz y La Viña*, where you will see spectacular examples of stalactites and stalagmites. These are the only caves in the Rioja open to visitors. Guided visits begin at 11:30 am take about one hour.

The ladies of the Cameros villages make colorful patchwork quilts, almazuelas, one of which I received as a wedding present to frame or hang—these are prized possessions. Stop at the
workshop of Laura Fraile in Villanueva de Cameros on the road to Soria, or at the workshop of Elena in Villoslada de Cameros, a slight detour south from the N-111.

Another highly regarded almazuela maker can be found in a mill in the woods outside the village of Sorzano; Lola Barasoain studied design in Paris and was a Givenchy model in the 60s. She came to live in the Rioja in the early seventies to study the customs of rural Rioja society and learn the technique of almazuela making. She has made almazuelas for the Royal Family and is considered the world’s specialist in Spanish Patchwork. One can visit her workshop in person or order her designs online. Prices start at 300€.

**Mirador del Cañón del Leza**

After a loop around the reservoir, head north on the N-111 to the LR-245, the road to the tiny villages of Almarza de Cameros and Muro en Cameros and then north on the LR-250 to Soto en Cameros, where you will find the Mirador del Cañón del Leza. Here is where you might see the large colony of Griffon vultures in flight, and where, if you go out for a walk, signs of the sauropod dinosaurs, terapods, and Neolithic burial sites. Guided tours are available.

On the drive back you can visit the villages of Torre en Cameros and the old basket weavers’ workshops of San Román de Cameros. And don’t forget to taste the world-famous Camerano cheese.

If you happen to be in Soto en Cameros and want to stop for lunch, you can try the Albergue Hospital San José, an historical building restored by the government and now a albergue
(currently closed) and restaurant. It’s located at Calle Hospital de San José s/n, along the highway.

**Between The Camero Nuevo And La Demanda**

On another full-day excursion, you can venture south from Valvanera to visit the completely unspoilt, untouched, small, medieval, rough stone villages, complete with cobblestone streets, of Viniegra de Abajo and Viniegra de Arriba, two of the seven Viniegra villages in the Rioja region. Situated between the San Lorenzo and Urbión mountains, just 8 kilometers apart, you’ll experience a trip back in time.

The houses of Abajo are constructed primarily of reddish stone and have three stories, the downstairs stable for the cattle, the first floor living quarters for the family and top floor used to store herbs and grains. Considered one of the prettiest villages in the Rioja, there are only a few cafes here with outdoor grills and a couple of small B&Bs for fishermen... That’s about it.

And here lies the family run restaurant of La Venta de Goya, on the LR-113 highway next to the bridge, at the banks of the Najerilla river, where a yearly international fly-fishing competition takes place. Its *menú del día* costs a paltry 12€. This modest looking restaurant has been featured in Saveur magazine, Food and Wine, as well as the new Spanish language cookbook, *La Rioja: Mesas de Calidad*.

Dishes offered here include trout filled with ham, wood pigeon, partridge, red beans, lamb stew, venison with apple and chestnut compotes and wild boar stewed with wild mushrooms. Solid, traditional food in an out-of-the-way destination!

Tel: (+34) 941 378 007
Festivals In The Rioja

Fiestas de San Felices

The fiesta in Laguardia runs from June 23-29 and combines the feast day of San Juan to San Pedro/San Pablo. During this festival, twice daily *encierrros* (bull runs) are celebrated, Pamplona style. Cows, rather than bulls, are run through cordoned-off streets, and in accordance with Alava regulations, the cows’ horns are covered, but these animals weigh 400 kilos nonetheless, and can still pack a powerful punch, if you are hit. In addition to the daily *encierrros*, there are also visits by the *Chachimorro*, parades, and a small carnival for the children, *churros y chocolate*, of course, dancing to an orchestra at 11:00 each evening.

![El Cachimorro & Los Danzarines in the Plaza Mayor, Laguardia](image)

The traditional drink of the festival is *zurracapote*, a type of sangria made of red Rioja, cinnamon and sugar that the locals make and let ferment for months in the underground cellars.

Festival de la Vendimia

The Wine Harvest Festival in Logroño occurs the last week of September, which coincides with Logroño’s Fiesta de San Mateo, on September 21. The city’s celebrations include the traditional barefoot crushing of the grapes, an offering of the first grape juice to the Patron Saint of the Rioja, the Virgin of Valvanera.

In addition there is a mini “running of the bulls” (cows), bullfights by major Spanish matadors in their covered bullring, *pelota* tournaments, parades, dancing, evening fireworks, a public barbecue of baby lamb chops grilled over vine shoots on the square of the Old Quarter- this offered by the *peñas*, local social clubs in charge of organizing festival events.
activities, plus special concerts at the state-of-the-art Rioja Forum, the city’s stunning performing arts center.

**Batalla del Vino**

The most "festive" day (read sheer madness) in Haro, the capital of La Rioja Alta, falls on June 29, the feast day of San Pedro, when its internationally famous Wine Battle takes place. If you happen to be in town around noon, you’ll have a chance to witness the hundreds of locals (even a scattering of foreigners) proudly wearing wine-stained white garb, completely soaked in *vino tinto* as they return from their morning pilgrimage up the six kilometers to the shrine of San Felices, Haro’s patron saint, at the Riscos de Bilibio, over whose domain the city of Haro and neighboring Castilian city, Miranda de Ebro, battled in ancient times. This ancient *lucha* (struggle) has been transformed into a modern day *ducha* (shower).

Once the 8:45 morning mass in the hermitage ends (10:00 am), all hell breaks loose. The participants in this pilgrimage begin dousing each other with wine from their wineskins, buckets or anything else that sprays liquid for a few hours before staggering back to Haro’s main square, the Plaza de la Paz, where they dance around the square then continue their raucous journey to the bull ring. Thousands of liters (approximately 70,000) of red wine are sprayed on the participants that day. Wear cheap, white, disposable garments if you plan to participate!

But the party doesn’t stop at noon. In the afternoon, at 6:30 pm, a bullfight is held. At 8:00 pm an orchestra plays in the square, fireworks are shot off at midnight then back to the square for more music at 12:30, followed by the bull of fire, which is ignited at 1:45 am. If you’re looking for a restful night of sleep, stay far away from the center of Haro.

On June 27, the children celebrate with their own Wine Battle-dousing each other with grape juice from their *bota* (goatskin) wine bags!

**Other Celebrations In The Rioja**

- January 22 - Local fiestas in Oyón and San Vicente de la Sonsierra.
- Sunday before February 3 - *Fiesta de San Blas* in Páganos.
- February 12 and 13 - Wine Carnival in Haro.
- Late February-Fat Tuesday - *Carnival* (Mardi Gras) in Fuenmayor and Ezcaray.
- Last weekend of February - Festival of the Young Wine in Lapuebla de Labarca.
- Palm Sunday - The religious procession “La Borriquita”, departing from the Plaza del Mercado in Logroño at noon.
- Maundy Thursday-Good Friday - “*Los Picaos*” (self-flagellants) in San Vicente de la Sonsierra. Religious processions in Logroño-on Maundy Thursday, the “Procession of
Silence”, departing from the cathedral at midnight and on Good Friday, the “Procession of the Holy Burial”, departing from the Plaza del Mercado at 7:30 pm.

- Easter Sunday - Burning of Judas in Samaniego, Ollauri and Cenicero.
- May 1 - Día del Gaitero, the ‘Day of the Piper’, one of the most popular festivals in Laguardia.
- May 10-15 - Festival of Santo Domingo de la Calzada.
- May 24 (date varies from year to year) - Bagpipe day in Laguardia.
- 2nd Weekend of June - Medieval festival in Briones.
- June 24 - Pilgrimage to the fountain of Pobres, followed by a Wine Battle (Sanjuanada) in Casalarreina.
- Mid-July - International Jazz Festival in Ezcaray (see the details at jazzdezcaray.com).
- July 21 - Stilt dancers of Anguiano, Danza de los Zancos.
- July 26 - Wine Battle, Batalla del Clarete, in San Asensio.
- August 3 - Feast day of San Esteban Protomártir in Abalos.
- August 10 - Feast day of San Lorenzo in Ezcaray.
- August 29 - San Juan Degollao in Laguardia marks the end of the summer season.
- 1st Saturday of September - Open Doors to all Wineries in Abalos and the Berberana Pilgrimage.
- September 16 - Feast day of San Cornelio and San Cipriano in Briñas.
- 4th Saturday of September - Wine Market & Festival in Ollauri
- 1st Sunday after September 14 - Fiesta de Santo Cristo de los Remedios, patron saint of Briones.
- Last weekend in September - Dance of the Stilts in Anguiano.
- December 7 - Bonfires in Labastida’s Historic Quarter.
- December 24 & 25 - Los Pastores, the dance of shepherders to announce the birth of the Christ Child, declared of National Tourist Merit.
Where To Base Your Stay

While the temptation exists to choose a city base, and the provincial capital of Logroño does have many charms, if you come to the region by car, I strongly suggest that your base yourself in the countryside, in one of the charming, medieval stone villages surrounded by vineyards, to experience the real flavor of this enchanting land.

If you need to rely on public transportation, Logroño is your only practical choice, but the city itself doesn’t exude the feel of a wine town until September 21st, when the wine harvest festival begins, the city bursts alive with merriment, and you can join in the fun of daily parades, outdoor lunches of grilled baby lamb chops, bullfights, concerts, fireworks. But book your hotel FAR in advance for this festival. Also remember that most wineries in Logroño are located outside of town, the most emblematic being found on the highway to Zaragoza, near the airport, so a taxi ride is required.

If you must have easy access to large scale shopping and some nightlife, yes, choose Logroño, but if you can do without dance clubs, tapas bars at your beck and call and you enjoy communing with nature, driving through vineyards, you will be happier outside of the city. Do as we do and spend a late evening in Logroño’s famous Calle Laurel for tapas crawl, and then return to the country for a restful night’s sleep.

Accommodations In The Rioja

We have been very happy when using as our base either teeny, tiny Ábalos (Villa de Abalos, Hospedería del Vino, with 12 rooms) on the western side, which belongs to the Rioja Alta... or Laguardia - Castillo de Collado, Mayor de Migueloa, Villa de Laguardia, Antigua Bodega Don Cosme Palacios (now closed), or Hospedería de los Parajes at the eastern edge, belonging to the Alava province of the Basque Country. These two small villages are only 12 kms apart and lie within easy striking distance of the capital Logroño, and of Haro, and both offer plentiful fine dining within an easy drive, spectacular scenery with the Sierra de Cantabria as their backdrop and atmospheric, comfortable accommodations in the mid-range price level.

Another option could be Elciego (Álava), 5 kms down the road from Laguardia, which could appeal both to sybarites (5-star Marqués de Riscal) and also to budgeters (Casa Rural La Cueva) or to those a seeking self-catering experience (El Txoko del Inglés).

Those looking for 4-star luxury, avant-garde architecture and gourmet food should seriously consider Villabuena de Alava, also very close to Laguardia, where you will find the exciting boutique Hotel Viura.
Another option for those who would like to walk to many noted wineries - Haro, the wine capital of the Rioja Alta, a town both elegant and slightly ramshackle. One can stay here at the renovated Hotel Agustinos (similar in look and feel to an older style Parador), dine well at its signature gourmet restaurant, Las Duelas, or its more casual Bistró, have coffee at one of the cafes on the pretty arced square with bandstand, Plaza de la Paz, sample tapas at the bars of La Herradura (the town’s horseshoe-shaped historic Old Quarter), visit its enlarged Museum of Wine and walk to the emblematic wineries located in the Barrio de las Bodegas, near the railroad tracks just below the town. In this part of town visitors will find nine wineries open to guided tours, eight in the very same neighborhood, the Barrio de las Bodegas, around the railroad tracks, including the exemplary López de Heredia Viña Tondonia plus Muga, Bodegas Bilbaínas, CVNE and Roda.

As mentioned above, the many lodging options in the Rioja now range from ultra-deluxe-sybaritic-architecturally stunning to very proper and comfortable 4-star full service hotels, to designer boutique 3-stars, to small, cozy family run inns, posadas and hospederías, to inexpensive rural B&Bs, the casas rurales. From expensive to moderate to bargain budget, there’s something to suit everyone’s pocketbook. I have visited most all of the region’s lodgings and list below only those I’ve personally inspected and where I would choose to stay, in four different price ranges. And as stated above, just one base is necessary to be able to explore the entire wine area, since distances are short. I’ve listed the description of each property under the city or town in which it’s located.

For A Splurge, Honeymoon, Anniversary, Or The Very Well-To-Do
5-star Hotel Marqués de Riscal - Elciego

Moderate to Moderately Expensive
• 4-star Hotel Viura - Villabuena de Alava**
• 4-star Villa de Laguardia and Wine Spa - Laguardia*
• 3-star Hospedería de los Parajes - Laguardia
• 2-star Hotel Castillo del Collado - Laguardia*
• 3-star Hospedería Señorío de Casalarreina
• 3-star Hospedería Señorío de Briñas
• 4-star Parador Santo Domingo de la Calzada

Inexpensive to Moderate
• 3-star Hospedería Villa de Abalos**
• 3-star Hospedería del Vino - Abalos*
• 3-star Hotel Eguren Ugarte - Pábanos*
• 4-star Hotel Agustinos – Haro
• 3-star Marqués de Vallejo - Logroño
• 3-star Portales - Logroño*
• 3-star Hotel FG Logroño
• 4-star Gran Hotel AC La Rioja - Logroño
• Posada Mayor de Migueloa - Laguardia
• Antigua Bodega de don Cosme Palacios - Laguardia (still open ?)
• Hotel Echaurren – Ezcaray*
• Casa Rural La Casona del Pastor - Ezcaray
• Palacio de Samaniego - Samaniego

Budget
• Hostal Rural Los Calaos - Briones*
• Casa Rural Osante – Labastida*
• Casa Rural Legado de Ugarte - Laguardia
• Casa Rural Legarda - Briñas
• Casa Rural El Encuentro - Leza
• Casa Rural Chicote - Abalos
• Casa Rural El Mesón - Briones
• Casa Rural La Molinera Etxea - Samaniego

Self-catering Apartments
• Larrazuria Enea - Labastida*
• Solar de Quintano - Labastida
• Señorío de Haro - Haro

Self-catering small rural homes for 2-4
• El Txoko del Inglés - Elciego*
• La Cueva - Elciego

Whole House Rentals or “Villas”, Self-catering
For those who are traveling with other couples or with a large family and would like to rent a property for a week or more, the “villa” options are quite limited, that is, in those areas that would not require long drives to the major wineries. In each of my favorite Rioja wine towns, I have given options for apartments or small rural home rentals.
Options For Larger Groups:

Casa Josephine
19th-century townhouse set in the tiny village of Sorzano, due south of Logroño. Designer done, featured in several fashion magazines, with five bedrooms and four baths. It offers daily maid service and Wi-Fi. Breakfasts, catered dinners and airport transfers are available on request, sleeps 12.

Tel: (+34) 941 447 166 / 606 717 021

El Mirador de Moncalvillo
In the neighboring, and equally tiny village of Daroca on the Camino del Santo. 4 stylishly decorated double rooms with en suite baths, sleeps up to 10. Rooms can also be booked.

Tel: (+34) 619 777 675

La Carpintería del Abuelo
In Camprovín, is within the same area, with 6 doubles and 6 baths.

Tel: (+34) 941 201 589

Vinea et Oliva
In the Rioja Alavesa wine town of Navaridas, sleeps 10 and is a member of Nekatur, the Basque Country’s Rural Tourism Association.

Tel: (+34) 945 605 172 / 618 574 659

Note: If you’ve come to the Rioja primarily for the art, cultural and historical tourism or to walk part of the Road to St. James and plan to spend little time visiting wineries, then, and only then, should you consider a stay at the Parador in Santo Domingo de la Calzada. This does not make your best base at all for wine touring, and Santo Domingo is a rather unimpressive town from an aesthetic point of view. But for those who must overnight in Spain’s Paradors, the Santo Domingo Parador is certainly more convenient that the Parador in Calahorra, which makes both a highly inconvenient and totally non-atmospheric base on the far eastern edge of the driest and most unattractive part of the Rioja.
For Those Who Choose To Stay In A Spanish Parador

**Parador Santo Domingo de la Calzada**

The 4-star Parador, a former 12th-century hospital, may have one of the least attractive exteriors of all the Paradors we visited, but inside you’ll find impressive public rooms with stone arched ceilings and filled with antiques, a nice conservatory for drinks and a very pretty dining room. But it’s very hard to access, as the square where it sits is closed to traffic, and finding the entrance to this square takes time.

Once you do find it, there will be a mechanism with button to push to lower the concrete cylinder, the *mojón*, or *bolardo* that will allow you to drive your vehicle in, but only to unload luggage. Then you must circle around yet again to find the Parador's parking garage. This makes a stay here not terribly convenient for touring the Rioja, but the Parador keeps busy thanks to the Road to St. James pilgrims’ trade and tour bus groups.

**Parador San Bernardo de Fresneda**

Santo Domingo’s second and newest Parador has been converted into a 3-star Hotel-School. This lovely Parador, housed in a former pilgrims’ hospital, is easy to access as it sits right off a main road, has far more charms, with beautifully decorated public spaces and plush rooms, some 4-poster beds, and a contemporary dining room—just a far more attractive Parador over all.
Staying In Haro

Hotel Los Agustinos

After a recent visit to López de Heredia, I stopped in to take a look at the dramatically and beautifully renovated cloister of this venerable inn, and I liked very much what I saw. Housed in a former 14th-century sandstone convent (founded by the Augustinians in 1373), during its long history los Agustinos has been an army barracks, a hospital, prison and a school. The inn was renovated in ‘06 and its enormous 17th-century cloister enclosed with glass ceiling houses the gourmet restaurant, Las Duelas.

The guest quarters have been redecorated in a very traditional, “rustic Parador” style, while the cloister has been furnished with contemporary chrome and leather. The overall ambience of this property, run by the Aránzazu group, is one of tranquility and well-being. The hotel offers 54 doubles, 6 singles, 1 junior suite and one suite. The Wi-Fi comes free, there is a “cyber corner” downstairs, and an on-site garage, and room service is available.

If you must have a full-service hotel and only have a couple of days to spend touring, the Agustinos makes for a comfortable and peaceful haven. Several high-end wine tour companies utilize this hotel to house their clients. But expect the front desk staff to be similar to a Parador’s. Here you will not find a well-connected concierge, experienced in arranging your winery visits, as you will at the Hotel Villa de Laguardia and Hotel Viura.

Solar de Febrer

An option within a 6 mile (10 kilometer) drive of Haro, to the southwest, a Salvador, 8, in the small hamlet of Tirgo, this 19th-century restored mansion built of local stone sitting at the river’s edge has been recently turned into a small country inn with grill restaurant. With only 10 rooms distributed on four floors (with elevator), this inn has chosen a very contemporary interior design. The managers, Fernando Calzada and Chus del Pino receive glowing reviews from Trip Advisor and Booking for their warm hospitality.

Guests have praised their friendliness, the cleanliness of the inn, its quiet location and the comfort of the rooms. All guest quarters are outfitted with private baths, hair dryers, robes, slippers, safe, phone, flat screen satellite TV, a/c, complimentary Wi-Fi and balconies. The best rooms, especially room 204 in the tower, face a small park. Downstairs guests will find the reception area, a living room-library and the dining room, beyond which lies a small private garden with reflecting pool. The managers also provide their guests with wine touring information, bikes and picnic lunches.

The owners also run the traditional grill restaurant, Asador Bodega Casa Pimiento, which serves typical, traditional Rioja fare. It features a set menu of salad, grilled chorizo & morcilla (boudin noir), grilled baby lamb chops, roasted red peppers and home made...
desserts, such as their puff pastry cake and cuajada (ewe’s milk curd) accompanied by locally produced red Rioja. During the winter the restaurant, however, is only open on weekends.

This well-regarded inn would make a fine base for touring the Haro area wineries, a ten-minute drive away, but it does lie 30 miles or 53 kilometers from Logroño.

Accommodations consist of seven doubles (four which are “special” doubles), one single and two suites; some are non-smoking and all are adorned with contemporary art. The very reasonable rates include vat and breakfast. There is private parking on the premises.

Tel: (+34) 941 301 826

**Hospedería Señorío de Casalarreina**

A lovely rural hotel, a reconverted Dominican Monastery founded in 1509, Nuestra Señora de la Piedad, whose rooms we inspected during FAM tour sponsored by the Rioja Tourist Board. It sits next to the Monastery’s church, which can be visited, and was created inside the building that housed the monastery’s former school. The Hospedería is an inn filled with character, with just 15 beautiful rooms.

Each of the large rooms has been individually decorated by the prestigious Pedro Ortega design team (thus the steep tariffs), and each has stonewalls, polished wood floors, antique mirrors, beds and armoires and very spiffy baths with Jacuzzi tubs. The lovely rooms also come equipped with a/c and sat. TV. A local artist did the trompe l’oeil that you will find scattered about the hotel. Even the elevator doors are disguised in trompe l’oeil. The atmospheric downstairs breakfast room is decorated with large hanging wine barrels.

Tel: (+34) 941 324 730

This inn is a member of Secret Places and receives a red gable for charm in the red Spain Michelin guide. And to my mind, it is an even prettier and atmospheric choice than its former sister, Hospedería de Briñas, a member of Secret Places and Rusticae. The drawbacks-high weekend/holiday room rates, 139€-180€, with breakfast, compared to the other inns in this guide, and Casalarreina is not the most picturesque of the Rioja towns. Here you will not be surrounded by vineyards or have the Sierra de Cantabria mountains as your backdrop. The hotel won a Best of Wine Tourism award in ’06. And it, along with its sister Hospedería Señorío de Briñas, is a member of the Hoteles Vinos de La Rioja (www.hotelesconencantodelarioja.com), a group of six charming wine country boutique inns.

*If you’d like to pick up some Rioja gourmet specialties during your stay, head to the Casalena shop on Avenida La Rioja in Casalarreina, which sells jams, sausages, cheeses, pates, sweets, wines and local liquors.*
Loft Suites and Apartments

Señorío de Haro

Pedro Ortega, the antique restorer and designer of the aforementioned two boutique Hospederías, has created the interiors for another member of the group, the Apartamentos Señorío de Haro. I’ve yet to see them from the inside, but the building is quite well located, just a half block from Los Agustinos and 100 meters from the main square, Plaza de la Paja.

These apartments, six studios and 4 duplex lofts, come equipped with TV, DVD, stereo, iron, hair dryer, juicer, toaster, microwave, washing machine and Internet access. They accept animals.

Tel: (+34) 941 304 498 / 661 962 658

Staying In Labastida

Larrazuria Enea

A newer, and perhaps even more stylish apartment option in neighboring village of Labastida, a fortified hill town lying just beyond Haro in the Alava province, these lovely apartments were created inside a beautifully restored Baroque palace complete with a coat of arms at Calle Mayor, 10, next to the medieval gate. Within this restored building (with elevator) one finds four duplex apartments, each sleeping four persons in two bedrooms.

The apartments come equipped with A/C, kitchen with dishwasher, microwave, mixer, stove top, Nespresso coffee maker and washing machine, classic Basque furnishings, phone, plasma TV, DVD player, stereo and bathrobes. It receives very favorable reviews on Top Rural. English spoken. A stocked mini-bar and breakfast are complimentary. English spoken. Weekend rates, Friday-Sunday are currently set at 176€/night.

Tel: (+34) 671 580 194

Solar de Quintano

A more traditional apartment option, furnished with antiques, in housed in a neoclassic style manor home in the historic quarter of Labastida, at Calle Varajuela, 7, and offers three independent apartments; Toloño, Gorbea and Cantabria, with elevator access, a garden and private parking. The apartments share a downstairs laundry room outfitted with washer, dryer, ironing board and iron.

Tel: (+34) 646 492 352
Staying In Briñas

**Casa de Legarda**

Provides those on a low budget with charming accommodations in a four-centuries old noble home, completely restored in ’05. Its seven guest quarters have been furnished in good taste, some rooms sporting canopy beds. All have exposed stone, wood beamed ceilings, antiques, TV and small baths with shower only. English spoken. They also have a small family restaurant, Masón Chomin, located nearby.

Tel: (+34) 941 312 134

*Note: some reviewers have remarked about the lack of soundproofing between rooms, and the house does require a 2 or 3 night minimum stay.*

**Hospedería Señorío de Briñas**

This boutique property, at Travesía de la Calle Real, 3, a member of Rusticae and represented by Secret Places, is a former 17th-century stone palace, decorated with antiques and converted into a 14-room country inn. Guests choose between modern accommodations with a/c or traditional period rooms with balcony. Breakfast and light snacks are provided but for lunch and dinner guests need to dine at one of the two in-town restaurants or drive to Haro for more options. The inn provides laundry and room service, complimentary Wi-Fi and it has a small Jacuzzi and sauna. Reviews on Booking and Top Rural are generally quite positive.

Tel: (+34) 941 304 224

**Briones Lodging**

**Casa Rural El Mesón**

Below the town, on the road to Dinastía Vivanco, a former wine tavern was totally renovated in 2000 by the owner, Mari Cruz Díaz, and transformed into a rural bed and breakfast, which has garnered a Q for quality from the Rioja government. It offers 8 spacious dormer rooms on the second floor, all named for grape varietals, two lounges upstairs with library and internet corner, a backyard garden and tiny vineyard, a bar, breakfast room and lounge downstairs, plus free Wi-Fi.

The guest quarters have been furnished with antique beds and armoires and sport walls of stone, wood beamed ceilings and terra-cotta floors. The owner’s grandmother knitted the bed covers. And the tariffs are very gentle on the pocketbook. Mari Cruz will organize visits to three bodegas, Muga, Viña Ardanza and López Heredia for her guests. During the summer guests may use the town’s municipal swimming pool.

*info@iberiantraveler.com*  
*Maribel's Guides ©*
Hotel Restaurante Los Calaos
Upstairs, above the restaurant, you’ll find four cute guest rooms with sitting area and private bath, 25 square meters in size, prettily decorated in rustic style with TV but no a/c. The price is very, very right, only 58€/night and 4€ additional for breakfast. Vat tax is extra.
Tel: (+34) 941 322 131

Staying In Ezcaray
Echaurren Hotel Gastronómico
If spending a night in this lovely mountain village holds appeal, this nicely maintained hotel dating from 1898, and now a member of Relais & Chateaux, is located right on the main square across from the parish church. It has an inviting sitting room with fireplace, helpful English speaking staff and has very pleasant, traditionally furnished rooms (some 3-star and some 4-star) that are priced from 160€ for a double in low season to 290€ in high season. You can experience a Gourmet Weekend, Friday-Sunday, for 400€/person, tax not included.
Tel: (+34) 941 354 047

Palacio de Azcarate
Another very comfortable inn, and member of the new six-member Hoteles Vinos de La Rioja group, is the 3-star Palacio de Azcarate, a reconverted 19th-century palace with 16 double rooms, two singles and two suites. All rooms are exterior, overlooking the garden, and filled with light. Amenities include free mini bar (juices, water, soda), safe, satellite TV, a/c, Internet access and the possibility of in-room wine therapy treatments. They also have apartments in a separate building, with a swimming pool and rates staring at 130€/night.
Tel: (+34) 941 427 282

La Casona del Pastor
A very attractive rural house B&B type option, the “House of the Sheepherder” lies in the quiet village of Valgañón, 6 km from Ezcaray, in the heart of the Sierra de Demanda. The nine guest quarters of this former farmhouse are warm and inviting and the surrounding countryside quite beautiful, particularly in the autumn and winter. The delicious breakfasts can be taken in one’s room or next to the fireplace. English and French are spoken. It has received solid reviews on Top Rural.

This inn would be a smart choice for those on a budget traveling with children or those who would like to do some skiing in Valdezcaray, hiking in the evergreen forest or following the medieval monastery route rather than winery visits.
Tel: (+34) 941 427 608

**Casa Masip**

The Masip family has been in the hospitality business in Ezcaray since time immortal, and their spacious restaurant (and pintxos bar) is housed in a cozy, traditional stone home with rustic décor in the heart of town. It has a very pretty porch and garden where dinners are served al fresco in summer. Only the finest of raw ingredients go into the classical Riojan dishes served here with a modern flair. The restaurant closes Sunday night, Monday-Thursday evenings, all day Tuesday and 15 days in November. The Gastro Menu is 28€. They serve a menú del día for only 18,90€ + VAT.

The family also runs an equally charming stone inn whose rustically sophisticated twelve rooms are very well priced, including free Wi-Fi access and buffet breakfast. Standard rooms are 90€ in high season.

Tel: (+34) 941 354 327

**Ábalos Lodging**

**Villa de Ábalos**

This 3-star rural hotel, called a *hospedería*, in a re-converted 17th-century mansion, has been our cozy home-away-from-home now twice a year for the last decade. We very luckily discovered it in a Rioja article in the Oct. ‘02 issue of Food & Wine, and we were the inn’s first American based guests. The genuine warmth of the Ruiz-Tejada family has brought us back again and again, as we feel so well cared for by them and their staff. You will find it a warm and welcoming family enterprise. It has won several “Best of Wine Tourism” awards and is rated in the red Michelin and Repsol guides.

This little inn has only 12 rooms, half on the second floor, the rest are dormer rooms, all with lovely wood reproduction furniture, bedside wall mounted reading lights, monogrammed bed linens, large built-in closets, warm terra cotta tiled floors and pretty tiled baths or Jacuzzi showers. Simply decorated, but very tasteful. You won’t find a mini-bar in your room, but it’s not needed, because there is a cozy downstairs bar/lounge area for enjoying glasses of Rioja from Ábalos and neighboring villages for a few Euros per glass. In the reception area, guests will find a computer available for their use and home made gourmet items, such as jams and jelly, are sold to take back as memories of your stay. You can also purchase bottles of the superb house wine, Empatía, which you will not find in many shops, although you will see it on the wine list of some of the country’s Michelin starred restaurants. You will find satellite TV (CNN) in your room and free Wi-Fi.
All the rooms are pleasant in décor and ample in size. On the top floor, dormer room No. 8, has rose and cream colored walls. No. 12 has small table lamps instead of wall-mounted sconces and is decorated in tones of green and cream. All dormer rooms come with heavy wood shutters that slide horizontally, to keep out the early morning sun. And closets are large; all have the same dimensions, and are made of the same dark hardwood as the desks. The inn also sports an elevator, outdoor terrace for drinks/snacks in the summer, secure car park (you will be given a key to open and close the electric gate), bar/lounge, brochures and maps for wine and cultural touring and laundry service.

On the 1st floor our favorites are No. 2 with a Jacuzzi shower and facing the garden, No. 5 also with Jacuzzi shower, is slightly larger and faces the village, and No. 4 with an exposed stone wall. We’ve also enjoyed the cozy dormer room No. 9, but all the rooms are equally comfortable.

An ample and home cooked breakfast is included in your room rate. Breakfast is served starting at 9:00 am in the small downstairs dining room, La Cocina de Merche, where you’ll find an unusual but pleasing-to-the-eye décor of lavender and orange. If you are staying more than one night, the kitchen makes sure to vary your breakfast, offering perhaps one morning fried eggs and chorizo and the next day maybe an omelet or Iberian ham and a variety of cheeses, and always juice, home made breads and marmalades, fresh fruit skewers and cereal are available.

Delicious evening meals (for guests only) are served from a limited tasting menu (two selections in each of the three courses) of Rioja specialties, and they offer a short but very
well chosen wine list, exclusively of wines produced in and around the village—all superb. The owners now produce their own delicious white and red wines, both under the Empatía label, from three hectares of fifty-year old vines. Make sure you do try these wines, as they are sure to impress. We try to have dinner there at least one night during our stay.

The owner and winemaker, José Luis, will be your evening host and sommelier, his wife, Merche, is the accomplished chef who works in a full, professional kitchen in the hotel annex. The staff will ask you each morning if you plan to dine that evening in the hotel, as the diminutive dining room holds only a half dozen tables, and tables must be reserved.

José Luis, or his resident manager, can arrange visits for you to the area wineries, will give you terrific dining-out recommendations, will show you the magnificent 16th century gilded, Baroque altarpiece of the village church and can take you to see one of the area’s lugares rupestres from the 15th-century, where grapes were crushed by barefoot. And during the harvest, you can try your hand at grape stomping after collecting your own bucket full of grapes.

You will see testimonials in the hotel’s guest books to the many guests, Spanish, British and American (including a US wedding party, whose nuptials José Luis and Merche arranged), who have been delighted by the warm hospitality of the Tejada-Ruiz family-José Luis and his wife Merche. Over the past ten years they have made us feel that Villa de Abalos is truly our second home.

Tel: (+34) 941 334 415

**Hospedería del Vino**

The family built the hotel as an addition to the ancestral home and 17th-century water mill, and it’s a beauty. Each of the six rooms is individually and lovingly decorated in an original but classic style and comes equipped with a flat screen TV, elegant bedspreads and drapes from Gaston y Daniela, Italian designed wooden headboards and side tables to match, ultra modern baths with Jacuzzi shower and wine therapy bath products along with bathrobes. The décor is simply impeccable. It would make a perfect base for a family touring outside of the summer season as it has a small, but inviting indoor pool, Jacuzzi and sauna.

The hotel also has a small breakfast room where a buffet breakfast is served daily. No other meals are provided, but dining recommendations are given to the area’s best restaurants. One can take drinks *al fresco* on the inviting terrace of the mansion. Parking and Internet access are complimentary. Rates are as low as 115€/night for a stay of 5 nights or longer. Open from March 22nd to December 9th.

Tel: (+34) 941 334 302 / 649 841 746
Samaniego Lodging

**Palacio de Samaniego**
This tastefully decorated, comfortable and reasonably priced 12-room former palace is now under the direction of Bodegas Remírez de Ganuza, which sits across the square from the hotel. Visits to the winery can be arranged by the hotel staff. The hotel’s restaurant and wine tasting bar are open to guests and visitors alike.

Tel: (+34) 945 609 151

**La Molinera Etxea**
A member of the Nekatur Association of Basque Rural Homes, the owners, Endurne and Amaia, provide comfortable budget priced accommodations in a golden stone, 3-story Renaissance home dating from the 17th-century. The six brightly colored guest rooms are distributed on the upper floors, with two on the 1st floor and four dormer rooms above. An electric mill from the 60s, still intact, on the ground floor serves as the guests’ common room.

Rooms come with private baths, (shower only), TV and free Wi-Fi and parking, and range in price from 69€ to 85€ in high season, with one suitable for a family with two small children. Breakfast is available for an additional 5€ and dinner for 15€. Breakfast is served in the garden txoko. The house was completely renovated in 2016 and they now offer a complete range of services including winery tours, relaxing massages and restaurant. English spoken.

Tel: (+34) 945 623 375 / 629 975 546

**Between Samaniego And Laguardia**

**In the village of Leza**
**El Encuentro**
The village is located just six kilometers west of Laguardia, sitting equidistant between Laguardia and Elciego. This is a lovely property offering five double rooms with bath and some with a/c, a rarity for B&B accommodations in this area. The house is a typical sandstone Renaissance manor home dating from the 16th-century, which was completely renovated in ’06. On the ground floor, there is a full kitchen, dining room and living room with fireplace, TV and DVD, along with a “relax room” with small sauna (which can be used for an extra fee). Three double rooms painted in vibrant colors are found on the first floor, while the top floor houses two more doubles with A/C and corner fireplace. The house also
offers free Wi-Fi and massages are available upon request. Room rates range from 54€-75€, with breakfast costing an additional 6,42€/person. Laundry service provided.

Tel: (+34) 660 583 736 (WhatsApp)

**Staying In Villabuena de Álava**

**Hotel Viura**

This strikingly cutting-edge, grayish white and rust concrete cube hotel, designed by Joseba and Xabier Aramburu of Design Houses of San Sebastián, opened in mid-March, 2010, in the small wine-producing village of Villabuena de Álava (390 inhabitants). It was named for the predominant white grape of the Rioja and sits on the town’s main square, next to the 17th-century church of San Andrés and directly across from the village playground and municipal pool (which guests are welcome to use in summer). Although on first glance, this avant-garde structure of concrete cubes piled in helter-skelter style on top of each other appears rather incongruous, upon further reflection it seems less jarring, when one focuses on the all-glass façade of the main entrance which cleverly reflects the entire village.

The 26 guest rooms, 13 standard and 13 deluxe, and 7 suites, have spectacular views overlooking the village and the Sierra de Demanda. Room numbers are scratched on chalk on the doors as they are on wine casks, and the raw wood is meant to resemble wine barrels. Suite 302 has its own private terrace outfitted with two contemporary design sun loungers. All guest rooms come equipped with laptop large safe, mini-bar stocked with white Rioja,
Perrier-Jouet champagne, chocolates and complimentary non-alcoholic beverages (water and soft drinks), bathrobes, 32-inch flat screen TVs with international channels, complimentary movies from the hotel collection and free Wi-Fi. The suites also boast 42-inch flat screens and nifty red Nespresso machines for whipping up one’s own cappuccino. Those with privacy issues should note that the bathrooms have been designed to be completely open to the bedrooms with only a curtain separating the two sleeping and bathing spaces, and toilets are separated from the bath with only a curtain.

The hotel offers a very stylish restaurant decorated with gold-painted wine barrels suspended from the ceiling, and well-spaced and well-dressed tables, where chef Emilio Andrés Contreras prepares traditional Basque-Riojan cuisine. The weekday 20€ set menu with wine constitutes a particularly good value. The vast lobby space, done in “industrial chic” is divided into several areas—the wine library, the Internet research area, the living room and the café/bar. The Viura also offers a roof top chill out lounge bar with 360-degree views of the village, a small fitness room, free parking, daily press, laundry service, room service, complimentary bicycles for cycling through the vineyards and wine tastings.

The cellar houses 200 wine barrels, 80% from the Rioja and a number of old vintages from the esteemed Riscal, López de Heredia and Muga. The resident sommelier, Pedro García, advises guests on their wine choices and accompanies them on their explorations of the wine cellar. Spain wine guru, John Radford, author of Rioja Revisited, was a recent guest.

Tel: (+34) 945 609 000

Staying In Laguardia-Biasteri
Here you’ll find four small and charming, atmospheric lodging options to suit every taste and budget, from sumptuous to quaint, along with a full service, 84-room 4-star hotel.

Hospedería de los Parajes
This five-story boutique inn, positioned on the main street, Calle Mayor, facing the square and Town Hall, inside the medieval walls of Laguardia, was inaugurated in May 2010. It is a skillful conversion of three town houses, the project of the owners of El Bodegón restaurant—offering only eighteen guest quarters. Each room has been individually decorated and is named for a particular scenic spot, a paraje, in the village. The upstairs rooms wrap around a central courtyard topped with a glass roof. There are 4 standard doubles, 6 superior with Jacuzzi tubs and one penthouse suite with outdoor terrace. One rooms has been outfitted for handicapped accessibility. Free Wi-Fi is available throughout the hotel.

All rooms come equipped with a/c, have dressing rooms rather than closets, robes and slippers are provided in the baths. The 270-meter subterranean cave houses (on two floors)
the wine cellar, an atmospheric tasting room, wine therapy spa with Hammam, alternative restaurant and a small gift shop selling wines and gourmet items. The first floor dining venue, Las Duelas, was built with a transparent floor allowing dinners a glimpse of the subterranean wine cellar and serves a small plates menu of traditional cuisine. The other, more formal dining space, Los Parajes, just beyond the “neo-Baroque” style small lobby and bar at the entrance serves more innovative fare, albeit at rather high prices. Main courses go for 20€-25€, while all desserts are priced at 9€.

Tel: (+34) 945 621 130

**Sercotel Villa de Laguardia**

This smoothly run, full service property, located on the Logroño highway, remains my recommended choice for families and for those who do not care for small, family run inns or B&Bs. With eighty-four rooms (69 doubles, 9 junior suites and 4 suites), ample parking, large lobby with computer access and free Wi-Fi, library of wine-related books, an elevator, bikes to rent, gourmet restaurant, casual café, buffet breakfast (for an additional 12€), wine shop and wine library, it provides 4-star comfort for a very reasonable price. The rooms have been decorated in a type of Provençal style. We have toured all its facilities, stayed here ourselves and have dined in the Restaurant Medoc Alavés on their fine French-Basque cuisine. Along with their gourmet restaurant, the hotel offers a casual dining option with Italian menu downstairs (pizza for the kids). Guests here receive prompt and personalized attention from the English-speaking desk staff.
In addition to arranging winery visits, the hotel can arrange 4x4 excursions; a visit to the church of Santa María de los Reyes, horseback riding or buggy rides. The pool in the hot Rioja summer months is an added bonus for children (the lower town also has an indoor pool). And bikes are available for cycling around the vineyards.

In the spring of ‘09 the hotel proudly inaugurated its Wine and Oil Spa, which offers complete panoply of services and 1-6 day programs, including hydrotherapy, wraps and peelings (of olive oil, Gran Reserva wine, white chocolate mint, chocolate and cinnamon, cherry, green mud), anti-cellulite and weight loss treatments. The spa opens Monday-Thursday from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm, Fridays from 10:00 am to 11:00 pm, Saturdays from 9:00 am to 11:00 pm on Sundays from 9:00 am to 8:00 pm.

For a splurge, choose room 320, a junior suite with entry, large sleeping area, flat screen TV and bath with double sinks. The junior suites are an excellent option for families, as they are spacious enough to add an extra bed easily. Suite 321 has a sloping ceiling, is done in white, complete with fireplace and bath with double sinks.

Suites offer bathrobes and complimentary half bottles of wine. Room 301, a superior double (no flat screen) is large enough for 4 people, but bath has only one sink. Room 228 is a standard twin done in blue, with twin beds and an armchair (no flat screen). Room 215, a junior suite, has a very large sofa, antique desk and a bath/shower combo with double sinks. Standard double 302 has a sloping ceiling, is decorated in green and cream with writing desk. Room 229, a superior double, is quite pretty and has a sitting area with sofa and two armchairs. Superior double 201 features a canopy bed, sofa and two armchairs. Off-season rates are surprisingly low for the quality of this hotel. Make sure to inquire about seasonal specials.

Tel: (+34) 945 600 560

**Castillo El Collado**

This charmer, located in upper Laguardia, outside the walls, is one of the most delightful rural guesthouses in the area. The little former mansion, looking more like a small castle than a hotel, was lavishly refurbished in ‘96, completely, down to the radiators which were brought from the old Diana cinema in Logroño, during an 8-year labor of love and was a lifelong dream for its energetic owner, Javier Acillona, whose family also own the Restaurante Marixa down the street, along with the Bodegas Santamaría López. This much-lauded 8-room gem is a personal favorite of ours for a Laguardia-based stay due to the gracious welcome of owner Javier. It is the original home of the wealthy Tapia family (of the Chimbo soap fortune) and later was turned over to the church to serve as a bishop’s residence, Each room is individually and fancifully decorated, with an elaborately tiled bath, and named for a fable by Laguardia’s version of Aesop, the 17th-century fabulist Samaniego:
El Ruiseñor, La Paloma etc. Each has a framed poem on the wall celebrating Laguardia’s noble past.

The rooms measure from 20 to 25 meters each. Ask for either the La Fábula (room 6), with a double bed, carved headboard brought from Madagascar and Andalusian tiles in the bath, Doña Blanca, or the Amor y locura (Love and Madness) suite in the turret, which has a Jacuzzi behind the bed. When it opened, the Collado was featured in the Spanish edition of Vogue in an article about luxurious feeling but affordable boutique hotels and in the Spanish tome, Nidos de amor (“Love Nests”). Although it has only 2 stars, it receives a red designation for charm in the Michelin guide, plus plenty of accolades from the international travel press.

Note: The hotel has a/c and complimentary Wi-Fi, but is not handicapped accessible, given the number of stairs guests must climb. There is no elevator. Guests have free parking in a public lot across the street but must walk up to the hotel with their luggage for check-in.

**Dining in the Hotel**

Your gracious and attentive host, Javier Acillona, is a fine chef, who serves traditional Riojan specialties, such as pastel de puertos (a delicious leek pie), pencas de acelga rellenas (yummy cream filled Swiss chard) and roast baby kid, cabrito asado, in the pretty, formal dining room boasting a beautifully sculpted artesonado ceiling and oriental rugs. For dessert try his homemade sorbets, like the traditional sorbete de limón al cava. And the extensive wine list covers all the prestigious labels of the Rioja. An English menu is available. The restaurant opens for lunch at 1:00 and for dinner at 8:00. It receives a rating of 10.50 in the Guía Gastronómica y Cultural del País Vasco y su Entorno.

There is a bar area at the entrance to the hotel, the original chapel 17th-century gold and silver gilt chapel is on the left, a wine cellar turned tavern/music bar is downstairs, open Easter to October to guests and non-guests, offering tapas and casual fare plus music for the young and young in heart.
Note: The music bar and tavern are well removed from the hotel’s guest quarters so that there is no disturbance of one’s sleep.

Tel: (+34) 945 621 200

**Posada Mayor de Migueloa**

A refurbished antique-filled 17th-century stone mansion, the Palacio de Viana, built by the Samaniego family in Baroque style, was the pioneer entry in Laguardia’s charming inn type lodgings and the first one located within the walled town, on its pedestrianized main street, Calle Mayor de Migueloa. The 8-room Posada is quaint and charming, think Old World, rather than sumptuous, with exposed beams, polished wooden floors covered with oriental rugs, antiques. The feel here is more upscale B&B, and it’s very popular with British travelers, as it’s a recommendation of Brittany Ferries. Guest rooms have granite walls, bare, stone floors accented by oriental rugs, beamed ceilings, antique armoires, antique beds and nightstands and small baths. Owned by Jaime Guitiérrez, an enologist and U. of Logroño professor and his wife Meri.

![Posada Mayor de Migueloa Interior](image)

It has an atmospheric wine bar in the cellar with an ancient wine press where one can sample the owner’s own label of Rioja along with a small selection of pintxos at the bar, at a half dozen tables or on the tiny outdoor terrace. Access the cellar bar from the street behind the main entrance to the hotel. Gourmet meals are served in three small dining rooms and the menu is Riojan-Basque. The restaurant offers a well-priced *menú del día* served for lunch on weekdays as well as a degustación menu and excellent homemade bread and desserts. It receives a rating of 10.50 in the *Guía Gastronómica y Cultural del País Vasco y su Entorno*.

Tel: (+34) 945 600 187

**Legado de Ugarte**

This small cozy option located on Laguardia’s principal street, the Calle Mayor (17), it has been created from a pretty stone home with wrought iron balconies. The home offers just 4 double rooms with private baths; flat screen TV, some ceilings sport antique chandeliers, and
guest quarters are decorated in a type of French provincial style in floral shades. Rents for 225€/night during the week, 900€ for the entire week or 450€ over the weekend. English spoken.

Tel: (+34) 945 600 114 / 699 621 841

Note: The Posada Mayor de Migueloa, Legado de Ugarte and the Hospedería de los Parajes would NOT be wise lodging choices for those who cherish their sleep during the June 24-29 festival, as the orchestras play quite loudly at right from 11:00 pm to 2:00 am on the square.

Hotel Restaurante Marixa
Owned and run by two generations of the Acillona Santamaría family, this hotel offers ten simply decorated but comfortable and quiet rooms above the restaurant that can fill the bill for those seeking a reasonably priced option during the June 24-29 Fiestas, when hotel rooms in Laguardia fill up far in advance. All rooms have private baths, Internet access and terraces with views of the town’s medieval walls or the valley below. Either phone or email for reservations.

Tel: (+34) 945 600 165

Lodging In Neighboring Páganos

Hotel Eguren Ugarte
Opened in 2010, this long-anticipated 21-room, five-story boutique hotel on the Eguren Ugarte family estate, sits directly behind their Heredad Ugarte winery, and has magnificent, unobstructed views from all of its guest quarters of the vineyards, all 321 acres worth. The stylish and cozy rooms, 18 doubles and 3 suites, come equipped with 32-inch wall mounted flat screen TV, large comfortable beds with duvets, writing desks and have polished hardwood floors. Each room is named for a chapter of the autobiography of the family’s patriarch, recalling an important moment in his life. Baths have double sinks and large showers but a solid glass door that separates the sleeping quarters from the bathroom.

The top floor suites are particularly inviting. From the floor to ceiling glass walls of the bedroom corridors guests have dramatic views of the aging cellars below. Wi-Fi is complimentary, as is the mini bar, and there is a panoramic elevator, a tower and a winery restaurant. Rates are inclusive of breakfast in the downstairs lobby/lounge/breakfast room and a tour of the winery. The hotel has a/c, laundry service is available and it is handicapped accessible.

Tel: (+34) 945 600 766
Casa Señorial de Torre de Oña

Once reserved exclusively for club members, this beautiful former palace is now available for friends and families reserving a minimum of 3 rooms. Each of the 5 rooms, with ensuite baths, has views of the vineyards and gardens. There is also a fully equipped gymnasium and a steam room for the guests use. Reservations must be made well in advance.

Tel: (+34) 945 621 154

Staying In Elciego

Frank Gehry designed 5-star Marqués de Riscal Hotel

The most eagerly anticipated event in the Rioja Alavesa finally came to fruition on September 1, 2006, in tiny, sleepy Elciego, after several years of delays. The inauguration of this ultra deluxe Gehry designed hotel adjacent to the Marqués de Riscal winery. Sheraton set the inaugural room tariffs above its other Luxury Collection hotel, the María Cristina in San Sebastián, making the Riscal the highest priced hotel in the entire Basque Country. Fortunately, rates have since been reduced and start at around 290€ in low season, during the week, more on weekends, and tops out at around 810€ (high season-executive suite), still quite a stretch for many budgets. There is ample outdoor car parking, and guests are greeted at their car. An attendant opens the car doors, quickly unloads the trunk and whisk away
guests’ luggage. The bell staff appeared to be imported, as Spanish (or English) is not their first language.

This extravagant flight of fancy, traffic-stopping building, a kind of continuation of Gehry’s Guggenheim Bilbao work, is constructed of local sandstone and adorned, or “wrapped” with fanciful rose, gold and silver titanium ribbons, the titanium having been mined in Russia and Australia. The colors of the ribbons are symbolic: pink, for the color of the wine, gold represents the bottle netting and silver, for the foil covering the cork. The hotel’s height is one meter shorter than the village church steeple so as not to completely eclipse this tiny hamlet. The priest came to bless the building at its inauguration.

The interior décor was granted, through a national competition, to designer Javier Muñoz and the results are stunning, although the small, sparsely decorated (minimalism to the max) lobby and the adjacent wine bar don’t make such a grand impression. The pie-shaped bar does however have a soaring ceiling, wine bottles in individual cubicles stretching to the sky (ladder required to retrieve them), designer chairs and a very nice outdoor terrace with great views of San Andrés church.

The picture improves significantly once you move upstairs. The spacious guest rooms, lined in pale raw maple (floors and walls) with angular shapes are equipped with Bang & Olufsen flat screen TVs, CD players, a Cisco phone system, pillow menus, burnt caramel leather headboards, green and black marble baths, with separate shower stalls, orange Ligne Roset chairs, Nespresso machines, with pods, 800 thread count linens, and white canvas cloud lamps designed by Gehry himself. And each room is blessed with a view from the bay window with tilted glass that wraps around a wood and leather bench.

The Gehry suite, Room 03, the most photographed and most expensive (but not the largest) has an expansive private balcony overlooking the village. There are only 13 rooms, plus the suite, in the Frank Gehry designed building, where he opted not to label a room No.13. The remaining 29 rooms, which are larger, are located in a box-like annex (some equate it to a bunker), reached through a long glass corridor. Best rooms to book in the Gehry building are 101-104, 112, 114 and 115, while the best rooms in the annex are 116, 117 and 118.

The warm and cozy top floor Library in the Gehry building is reserved for guests only, has a great terrace overlooking the village, accessible as well via room key. Buffet breakfast is served in the alternate Bistro 1890 restaurant on the 3rd floor of the main Gehry building. The wine bar is open from 10:00 am until 1:00 am and serves tapas.

The Vinotherapy spa with, black-bottomed indoor pool, deep red loungers and 14 exotic treatment rooms is on the ground floor of the annex. Pool access is complimentary, where at other 5-star spas there is usually a daily charge. The spa is one of the most attractive I have visited in Spain and offers an expensive but impressive array of wine-related treatments.
Their signature treatment, the Vigneron massage, is a shiatsu mixed with presses from a rolling pin applied to energy points down the body. The cabernet scrub invigorates skin with grape seeds, honey and brown sugar. These treatments are now available to non-hotel guests, but a reservation for 3 treatments is required. An exercise room is also available 24/7, accessed with one’s room key card.

Tel: (+34) 945 180 880

Lodging In Logroño

5-star AC Ciudad de Logroño

Because Logroño is a very challenging city to navigate and having a car is a decided obstacle, when arriving by car and with kids in tow, you might consider lodging out of the city center (a 15-20 minute walk) at this 5-star belonging to the AC chain, which has an underground garage and where one can usually find street parking. I suggest it for families traveling with children since it does have an indoor pool, offers a full American style breakfast buffet, 24-hour room service, fitness room and its in-house restaurant is well regarded in the local circles. And it’s easy to book as Marriott now markets the AC group. And members of Marriott Rewards also receive points. It’s also very well priced for a 5-star.

The minus: the longish walk from the Plaza Espolón (although I enjoy this walk) and the 76 smallish rooms (at AC properties, always book a superior, rather than a standard). Superior
rooms do come equipped with bathrobes and slippers, and free mini bar, juices, water, and soft drinks.

**Hotel Marqués de Vallejo**

This reasonably priced and reasonably spiffy little boutique hotel, our home during a Rioja Tourist Board sponsored trip through the region, offers a “couldn’t be more central” location on a pedestrians-only street in the center of the Old Quarter, only steps away from the Plaza del Espolón, the city center square. It was completely redone ten years ago and designer decorated in tones of red, grey and black. The downstairs living room is inviting, with a fireplace, and the adjacent breakfast room serves a breakfast of scrambled eggs, bacon, juices, cereals, yogurts and coffee plus snacks during the day. There is also an upstairs library with free Internet access.

The hotel has 51 rooms with modern, functional IKEA type furniture and bare wood floors. All rooms have a/c, a safe, minibar, desks, satellite TV; some are non-smoking. Our room was compact but made good use of space. The bath offered thick towels and the shower produced terrific water pressure. Our room, No. 116, faced the alley, and we did notice the street noise during the weekend, so one should request an interior room. Those who arrive by car (which is really a must for touring), from the main square, Plaza Espolón, cab drive down this tiny, one block street in the Old Quarter to drop off bags, and park in the underground lot under Espolón square. The hotel offers complimentary Wi-Fi.

Tel: (+34) 941 248 333

**Hotel F&G Logroño**

This fairly new hotel on the Logroño scene makes for a sound choice if one plans to do considerable wine touring in the Rioja Alavesa, since it offers a garage and a location conveniently close to the bridge, which leads to the highway to Laguardia, for a fairly easy exit from the city. It is also a solid bet for families as it has a basement spa with small pool and gym, along with cafeteria service and room service. The three junior suites can accommodate three people in each suite. There are 2 handicapped accessible rooms, 3 singles and 64 standard doubles. Guest rooms are decorated in a soothing color scheme of brown, black and beige, sport bare wood floors, in room safe large enough for a laptop, Wi-Fi and flat screen TVs.

Tel: (+34) 941 008 900

**Sercotel Portales**

Another nice and reasonably priced property located smack dab in the middle of Logroño’s atmospheric Old Quarter on pedestrian Calle Portales, right below the city tourist office is
this well-run member of the Sercotel marketing group. It offers a perfect location for strolling and offers free parking in a garage across the street, along with a handy cafeteria for casual “any time” dining. The hotel is quite reasonably priced and offers discounts on advanced bookings and several advantageous packages.

For the money, guests are afforded early morning coffee service, in-room safes, free Wi-Fi, mini-bars, wall mounted flat screen TV. Rooms are done in wine and white, in a pared down IKEA style, similar to those at the F&G.

Tel: (+34) 941 502 794

**Fuenmayor Lodging**

**Hotel-Bodega Finca de Los Arandinos**

Although the wine-producing village itself doesn’t offer any premium accommodations, this modern 4-star Bodega-Hotel-Winery-Restaurant-Spa, in the middle of the vineyard, a creation of David Dolphín, is located just to the south of Fuenmayor outside of the village of Entrena (La Rioja) and is part of the “Slow Food” movement.

Tel: (+34) 941 446 126
Returning From The Rioja
Driving from Logroño to Madrid

Since the best way to explore the Rioja wine region is to travel its width, west to east, starting in Haro and ending in Logroño, to avoid backtracking, I suggest returning to Madrid via an alternate route through the Cameros valley, if you haven’t had the time to visit the valley beforehand. Departing Logroño on the N-111, you head south through the lovely Iregua valley and the Sierra de Cameros, stopping in one of the picturesque Camero villages; Torrecilla, El Rasillo, or Ortigosa to look around and have a morning coffee. This route takes about as much time but is more scenic then driving back to Madrid via Burgos, particularly in the spring when the cherry and pear trees blossom, or in late October during the height of the fall foliage.

Soria

After driving through the Cameros valley, continue south on the N-111 to the relatively undiscovered (by foreigners at least) provincial capital of Soria, the city of poets, where you can have a leisurely lunch at the updated 4-star Parador de Soria, which sits in the Parque del Castillo, high on the hill high above the city. Nearby are the villages of Calatañazor and El Burgo de Osma, the ruins of the Celtiberian settlement of Numantia, Serena Cave.

The dining room, with its fresh, contemporary décor, sports a beautiful view of the town and surrounding countryside, and offers a three-course menu, not including wine, for 35€. We’re especially fond of their borage dish, borrajas, as well as their broken eggs with wild mushrooms; huevos rotos con boletus, veal steak, entrecot de ternera and ossobuco of venison. Your aperitivo, such as an espuma (foam) of white beans and chorizo served in a shot glass, comes on the house. The wine list includes some interesting and lesser-known Ribera del Duero reds produced in the Soria province (Castile and León).

We often use the Parador dining rooms as our lunch stops in-route while exploring rural Spain, and because we belong to the their Amigos frequent guest program, we even earn points from our meals to redeem for future Parador stays.

If you have time for an overnight stay, you’ll be delighted with the Parador in Soria and its renovated and very comfortable, contemporary designed guest rooms. Suite 201, nice for a family of 2 adults and 2 small children, is located directly off the reception area, has an enclosed balcony, a sitting room with a chair, which makes a bed, and separate bedroom with queen sized bed. In addition, there is an adjoining room with a double bed that can be added for a family with teenagers. The room with the most impressive views looking below to the wooded park and the Duero River is No.19, a superior double. Some of the superior
doubles have canopy beds. All the extremely tranquil guest quarters sport lovely, highly polished wood floors, green marble baths with double sinks, make up mirrors, powerful hair dryers, plentiful toiletries and beds with comfortable mattresses dressed in high quality linens.

**Plaza de Toros, Calle San Benito, Soria, dating from 1854**

**Gourmet dining in Soria**
For those wishing a gourmet experience for dinner or just prefer to venture outside the confines of the Parador, I highly recommend:

**Restaurante Baluarte**
You will pass it on the left side of the road, at Caballeros, 14, bajo, when driving up the hill to the Parador. The restaurant occupies an historic building next to the Diputación Provincial but its interior space is quite contemporary. Now with two Repsol suns, Chef Oscar García serves an excellent, well-priced and seasonal tasting menu for around 51€, without wine, and a truffle menu (during the 2017 season) for 62€, without wine.

Opens Tuesday-Sunday for lunch at 1:30 pm and Tuesday-Saturday for dinner at 8:45 pm. Closed Monday (except for holidays). Open for lunch only in August. Reserve online, or call: (+34) 975 213 658.

From Soria continue south, on the N-111 connecting to the E90-A2 to Madrid.
Web Resources

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

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

Useful Web Sites

- Basque Country Tourism
- La Rioja Turismo
- Ruta del Vino de Rioja Alavesa
- Rioja Wine
- Ruta del Vino Rioja
- Vino Turismo Rioja

Guide Books
Rioja Revisited - The British guide by John Radford was updated in 2011 and is available through Amazon, now in a Kindle Edition.
Travel Planning Services

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

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

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