



Bilbao, the Basque Country & La Rioja

Includes ➔

Bilbao	399
San Sebastián	416
Vitoria	428
Navarra	433
Pamplona	433
The Navarran Pyrenees	438
La Rioja	446
Logroño	446

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Arzak (p423)
- ➔ La Cuchara de San Telmo (p424)
- ➔ Mina Restaurante (p408)
- ➔ La Fábrica (p424)
- ➔ La Cocina de Ramon (p448)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Hotel Marqués de Riscal (p452)
- ➔ Palacio Guendulain (p435)
- ➔ Pensión Aida (p421)
- ➔ La Casa de los Arquillos (p432)
- ➔ Hotel Calle Mayor (p447)

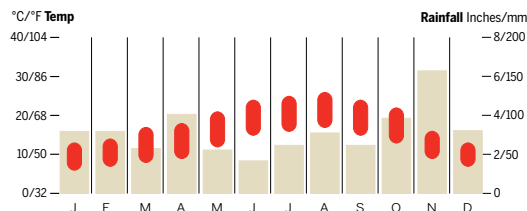
Why Go?

The jade hills and drizzle-filled skies of this pocket of Spain are quite a contrast to the popular image of the country. The Basques, the people who inhabit this corner, also consider themselves different. They claim to be the oldest Europeans and to speak the original European language. Whether or not this is actually the case remains unproven, but what is beyond doubt is that they live in a land of exceptional beauty and diversity. There are mountains watched over by almost-forgotten gods, cultural museums and art galleries, street parties a million people strong, and arguably the best food in Spain.

Leave the rugged north behind and feel the temperature rise as you hit the open, classically Spanish plains south of Pamplona. Here you enter the world of Navarra and La Rioja. It's a region awash with glorious wine, sunburst colours, dreamy landscapes, medieval monasteries and enticing wine towns.

When to Go

Bilbao



May–Jun Beat the crowds to the art galleries of Bilbao and the *pintxo* bars of San Sebastián.

6–14 Jul Savour the chaos of Pamplona's world-renowned Sanfermines festival.

Sep Hike the high passes of the Navarran Pyrenees and relish the autumnal colours.

Advance Planning

Book accommodation for San Sebastián in high summer and for Pamplona during the Sanfermines at least six months in advance – more if you can. Reserve a table at any of San Sebastián's three-Michelin-star restaurants as far in advance as possible. And buy tickets for the Museo Guggenheim online in advance to save queuing – Bilbao gets very busy over Easter.

FIVE PERFECT DAYS

Day One: Bilbao

Check out the art in the Museo Guggenheim (p399) and the Museo de Bellas Artes (p403), follow our walking tour of the city and peck at some *pintxos* (Basque tapas) in the old town.

Day Two: San Sebastián

Catch some rays on Playa de la Concha (p417), one of the most beautiful urban beaches in Europe. Admire the views from the summit of Monte Igeldo (p417) and dine in one of the city's multi-Michelin-star restaurants.

Day Three: Pyrenees

Drive lazily through Pyrenean foothills (p438) taking in picture-perfect villages like Zugarramurdi, Roncesvalles (p439) and Ochagavía (p440).

Day Four: Southern Navarra

Climb the castle turrets in Olite (p442) and marvel at the desert scenery in the Parque Natural de las Bardenas Reales (p443).

Day Five: La Rioja

Tour the wine bodegas in La Rioja and visit the Dinastía Vivanco (p451) wine museum.

HIKING THE BASQUE COUNTRY & NAVARRA

The Navarran Pyrenees crash into several Basque massifs, making this prime hiking country, with numerous trails winding across the mountain passes. However, finding a suitable place to start walking can be a little confusing. Almost every bookshop in the region stocks hiking guides, but most are in Spanish only. Tourist offices have booklets detailing route descriptions in English.

Best Wine Experiences

- Visit the best wine museum in Spain: Dinastía Vivanco (p451).
- Make your own bottle of wine with Rioja Trek (p448).
- Tour a bodega around Haro (p452).
- Learn about the history and culture of the vine in Olite's Museo de la Viña y el Vino de Navarra (p442).
- Buy a *bota* from Félix Barbero Botas Rioja (p448).

Historic Spots

- See a castle that housed giraffes in Olite (p442).
- Walk the streets of the Roman town of Andelos (p445).
- Hear the footsteps of pilgrims past and present in Santo Domingo de la Calzada (p441).

Top Five Food Experiences

- Graze through a plate of *pintxos*, the culinary masterpieces of San Sebastián (p424).
- Eat a dinner you'll remember forever in one of the Basque country's three-Michelin-star restaurants (p423).
- Sip a glass of wine in La Rioja, home to the best *vino* in the land (p446).
- Go on a *pintxo*-making course (p420).
- Savour barbecued fish on the seashore in Getaria (p415).