



Bilbao, Basque Country & La Rioja

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Arzak (p424)
- ➔ La Cuchara de San Telmo (p425) Mina Restaurante (p413) La Fábrica (p423)
- ➔ Bar Torrecilla (p450)

Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Hotel Marqués de Riscal (p455)
- ➔ Hotel Zubieta (p416)
- ➔ Miró Hotel (p408)
- ➔ Pensión Aida (p422)
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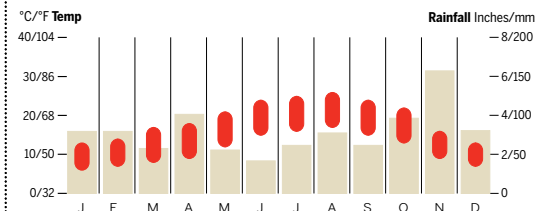
Why Go?

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 Spring brings crowds, and a bustling modern art scene, in the museums and galleries of Bilbao.

Jul–Sep Lively San Sebastián at its best and, unless you're skiing, the best time to visit the Pyrenees.

Sep Harvest festivals bring festivity and free-flowing wine to the villages of La Rioja.



Bilbao, Basque Country & La Rioja Highlights

- 1 San Sebastián** (p417)
Playing on a perfect beach, gorging on fabulous *pintxos* (Basque tapas), dancing all night and dreaming of staying forever in stylish San Sebastián.
- 2 Bilbao** (p401) Finding artistic inspiration at the Museo Guggenheim Bilbao and in exceptional galleries.
- 3 Mundaka** (p415) Catching a ride in the home of the best waves in Europe.
- 4 La Rioja** (p448) Learning the secrets of a good drop in the museums and vineyards of La Rioja.
- 5 Olite** (p444) and **Ujué** (p445) Rolling back the years in medieval fortress towns.
- 6 Navarran Pyrenees** (p441) Climbing mist-shrouded slopes haunted by witches and vultures.
- 7 Pamplona** (p436) Pretending you're Hemingway during the Sanfermines week of debauchery in Pamplona.