Basque Country, Navarra & La Rioja

Includes »
Bilbao .................... 408
San Sebastián .......... 425
Vitoria ..................... 437
Pamplona ................. 442
The Pyrenees .......... 448
Logroño .................... 454
Wine Region ............. 459

Best Places to Eat
» Arzak (p434)
» La Cuchara de San Telmo (p434)
» Río-Oja (p441)
» Mesón las Migas (p452)
» Querida María Restaurante (p440)

Best Places to Stay
» Pensión Bellas Artes (p430)
» Palacio Guendulain (p444)
» Hospedería Las Pedrolas (p453)
» La Casa de los Arquillos (p440)
» Casa Rural Legado de Ugarte (p462)

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Temperature</th>
<th>Rainfall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May–Jun</td>
<td>Beat the crowds to the art galleries of Bilbao and the pintxo bars of San Sebastián.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–14 Jul</td>
<td>Get caught up in the chaos of Pamplona’s renowned Sanfermines festival.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>Hike the high passes of the Navarran Pyrenees and relish the autumnal colours.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
No matter where you’ve just come from, be it the hot, southern plains of Spain or gentle and pristine France, the Basque Country is different. Known to Basques as Euskadi or Euskal Herria (‘the land of Basque Speakers’) and called El País Vasco in Spanish, this is where mountain peaks reach for the sky and sublime rocky coves are battered by mighty Atlantic swells. It’s a place that demands exploration beyond the delightful and cosmopolitan main cities of Bilbao, Vitoria and San Sebastián. You travel through the Basque Country always curious, and always rewarded.

Basque Country, Navarra & La Rioja Highlights

1. Play on a perfect beach, gorge on fabulous pintxos (Basque tapas), dance all night and dream of staying forever in stylish San Sebastián (p425), the food capital of the planet
2. Wish that you too could paint like a genius in the galleries of Bilbao (p408)
3. Get barrelled in the surf at Mundaka (p421) and re-create the Guggenheim in sand-castle form on a beautiful Basque beach
4. Learn the secrets of a good drop in the museums and vineyards of La Rioja (p454)
5. Roll back the years in the medieval fortress towns of Olite (p451) and Ujué (p452)
6. Climb mist-shrouded slopes haunted by witches and vultures in the Navarran Pyrenees (p448)
7. Pretend you’re Hemingway during the Sanfermines week of debauchery in Pamplona (p442)