

The Basque Lands

June 29 – July 5, 2021



VentureOut
Distinctive Tours for LGBTQ Travelers since 1998

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Situated in the crook of the Iberian Peninsula between Spain and France on the Bay of Biscay, the Basque Country stretches from the foothills of the Pyrenees to the wine country of Rioja to the fishing villages of the Cantabrian coast. Its urban hubs in Spain are Bilbao and San Sebastián, and in France, the resort city of Biarritz.

It could be argued that Europe's oldest people are actually very modern – progressive in social attitudes, gastronomy, and urban planning. Euskadi (the Basque name for this region) doesn't feel very Spanish and has a high degree of autonomy from the rest of Spain. The Basque people have preserved their culture for more than two millennia and their own language, too – Euskara. And it's quite a strange-looking language with its preponderance of x's and z's that would burst Scrabble scores. Unrelated to any other known language its origins have long eluded linguists.

The food is top-notch. San Sebastián has more Michelin stars per capita than any other city, barring Kyoto, and Bilbao is certainly no slouch in that department either (witness the restaurant in our Bilbao hotel).

The Basque people are devoted to their unusual sports: *pelota* (also known as *jai alai*), wood-chopping, stone-lifting, tug-of-war, log-sawing, and caber tossing. And betting on outcomes is very much a part of it all.

Decades ago, terrorism in the name of Basque separatism roiled the region. Today, thankfully, that has passed.

Join us in this unique corner of Spain (and a little nook of France)!

PLEASE NOTE: The following itinerary represents our current intentions for this new 7-day tour through the Basque region. We reserve the right to modify some of the itinerary details after further research and on-the-ground inspections.

Day 1 — June 29, 2021— Arrival in San Sebastián

Kaixo! (That's Basque for *Hola!*)

In the early evening we'll meet at our beautiful and centrally located hotel in **San Sebastián** for a welcome drink and to get acquainted. Afterwards we'll head out for our first of several memorable meals on this trip!

Welcome Drink, Dinner included
Overnight San Sebastián

{*Notes:* If you'd like to arrive a day before our tour begins to help with the adjustment to any jetlag we can set you up with an extra night at our group hotel.

Please refer to the **Arrival & Departure Logistics** further on in the brochure for information about getting to San Sebastián.}

Day 2 — San Sebastián

Situated on La Concha Bay and surrounded by lush green hills this is one of the Iberian Peninsula's most beautiful cities. Beyond its superb natural setting elegant and prosperous **San Sebastián** (called **Donostia** in the Basque language) enjoys top restaurants, a delightful beachfront promenade, a regular influx of international stardom during its film festival in late September, a couple of excellent museums, and a piece of world-class modern architecture. San



Sebastián even sometimes pops up on lists of the world's best cities. And with a soaring statue of Christ high up on one of the hills the city can draw a parallel to Rio de Janeiro (a visual one anyway).

After one of Spain's queens came here in the mid 19th century for a medical treatment the country's aristocracy was intrigued, and the city soon became a seaside resort. By the turn of the 20th century San Sebastián was a testament to the grandeur of the Belle Epoque era.

Today we'll explore the lively *Parte Vieja* (Old Town) on foot with its mostly Neoclassical architecture, with a sprinkling of Baroque and Gothic here and there. One of the highlights here is the array of buzzing tapas bars. Widely considered as the gourmet capital of Spain, San Sebastián dishes up some of the best tapas anywhere in the country. (Note: In the Basque country tapas are called *pintxos*.) We pass through the handsome Plaza de la Constitución; have a wander around the Bretxa public food market; and witness the fishing industry in action at the port as boats unload their catch of the day and women mend fishing nets.

For superb views we go up Monte Igueldo where a lovely panorama takes in the city, the Cantabrian coastline, and the distant green mountains.

Dinner this evening is open, and San Sebastián has a great deal to choose from – from a myriad of *pintxos* bars to Michelin-starred restaurants. If you're a foodie you can really go to town!

Breakfast, Lunch included
Overnight San Sebastián

Day 3 — French Basque Country

Today we'll cross the border into the *Pays Basque*, the French side of the Basque region and begin our explorations in glittering Biarritz on the Bay of Biscay. A former imperial beach domain (and now Europe's surfing capital), **Biarritz** was once known as “the resort of kings and the king of resorts.” It was Empress Eugénie (a Spaniard and the wife of Napoléon III), who gave Biarritz its coming-out party, transforming it into a favorite of European royalty and the most prominent of France's Atlantic coastal resorts.



Although it doesn't have quite the same glitz as the French Riviera, its elegant Belle Epoque-period villas are remarkable, and one does see affluent holiday-makers in designer duds alongside surfers in flip-flops. Like the tides, Biarritz' popularity has been in and out, but it's been on the rise in recent years, now with hip boutiques (lots of espadrilles), a good dining scene, and as always classic French pastries. We'll stroll the narrow streets around the Port Vieux (old port); pass through the festive Place Ste-Eugénie, still considered the social center of town; and walk the promenade along the Grande Plage – the city's popular sandy beach with views of foaming breakers approaching the historic Art Deco casino – following in the footsteps of the fashionable set of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Nearby, the camera-ready village of **St-Jean-de-Luz** shows off quirky, colorful, and asymmetric Basque architecture. It was here in 1660 that King Louis XIV married his Spanish bride, and ever since travelers have journeyed here to enjoy its charms. It's got a colorful harbor, narrow streets, brightly painted shutters, a curious church with three-tiered oak galleries, and elegant beach. The town's seafaring history can boast whalers who sailed as far as America in their three-masted ships.



We make our way back to San Sebastián, and you're free to explore the excellent dining scene in the city with dinner on your own.

*Breakfast, Lunch included
Overnight San Sebastián*

Day 4 — Getaria / Gernika / Bilbao

Leaving San Sebastián this morning en route to Bilbao our first stop will be in the fishing village of **Getaria** on the Vizcayan coastline. It's a picturesque town with cobbled streets winding their way to the harbor, and it's the acknowledged Basque center of the anchovy. The town is renowned for its production of



txakoli, the young white wine. This was the hometown of Juan Sebastián Elcano who set sail in 1519 on an expedition captained by Magellan. When Magellan was murdered in the Philippines Elcano took command and thus became the first to circumnavigate the world.

But another local hero – of more modern times – is the gay fashion designer Cristóbal Balenciaga Eizaguirre who founded the Balenciaga fashion house. Christian Dior called him “the master of us all,” and Coco Chanel said he was “the only couturier in the truest sense of the word.” Our program will include a visit to the Museo Balenciaga here in his hometown of Getaria, which opened in 2011 and has a collection of more than 1,200 pieces designed by him. His most famous clients included Grace Kelly, Ava Gardner, Audrey Hepburn, and Jackie Kennedy.

We then continue westward to **Gernika**, a name that weighs heavily, as it was bombed by the Nazis as an “experiment” during the Spanish Civil War in 1937, resulting in hundreds or possibly thousands of deaths. Gernika was for many centuries the sight of Basque assemblies that met under an oak tree, and so the town had become (and still is) the spiritual heart of Basque pride and nationalism. One of the most famous results of the bombing was Picasso’s painting named after the town and widely considered one of the greatest antiwar works of art. Although it resides in the Reina Sofia gallery in Madrid we’ll see a ceramic copy of it in the town. Gernika remains the center of Basque patriotism; their figurehead leader is still chosen under the oak tree; and a visit here is a moving experience.



Finally we reach Bilbao. After checking in at our new city-center hotel we’ll enjoy a group dinner together in a city known for its culinary excellence.

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner included
Overnight Bilbao

Day 5 — Bilbao

Today we have a full day to explore the Basque region’s largest city. Our moving about will be on foot and public transportation, taking advantage of the excellent tram that runs along the river and links the old town with the Guggenheim Museum.

Urban regeneration . . . **Bilbao** has recently witnessed a remarkable transformation as depressed areas from a difficult past have been given new life through innovation, with the stunning Guggenheim Museum at the head of the pack. Think industrial past meets exciting future of a buzzy cultural capital. Other recent notable projects have included a flashy Metro system designed by



Englishman Sir Norman Foster and a new airport terminal by renowned Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava. The city has a bustling bar scene, old and new architecture, superb eating, and a sense of pride in its industrial roots.

We'll begin with a walking tour in the *Casco Viejo*, Bilbao's old town, lined with tight lanes, shops, *pintxos* bars, and a great market. This quarter evokes a cramped medieval past and it's long been the city's social focus. Dominating the old town is the 14th-century Gothic Santiago Cathedral and the 64 graceful neoclassical arches that enclose the Plaza Nueva completed in 1849, the favorite meeting point of locals and stuffed with *pintxos* bars. The entire barrio has been declared a national landmark with its attractive architecture.

Bilbao's late 20th-century "renaissance" is rooted in Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum along the Nervión River. The concept was daring – and controversial – but it's undeniable the impact it's had on local confidence, the economy, and further projects. "Architecture as art" seems to apply here. Gehry used shimmering titanium, making the building appear to capture motion. Also distinctive is Jeff Koons' giant floral sculpture, *Puppy*, at the museum's entrance.

We'll have a guided tour of the museum, which counts among its permanent pieces the interactive, *Snake*, by Richard Serra. But most pieces are temporary visitors, some taken from the permanent collection of the Guggenheim Foundation.

We'll have some free time in the afternoon for shopping and exploring further according to your own interests, and dinner is open this evening.

Breakfast, Lunch included
Overnight Bilbao

Day 6 — La Rioja Alavesa

Our final day has us venturing up into stunning landscapes and one of the world's renowned wine zones – the **Rioja** – skirted by the striking Sierra de Cantabria. Many of the finest Rioja wines come from the Álava province, which is part of the Basque region (although it tends to feel more Spanish here than Basque). From small traditional cantinas to striking modern wineries and boutique oeno-resorts, there's a lot here.



The small walled hilltop town of **Laguardia** is one of the most atmospheric places in the Basque region at an elevation of 2,000 feet, commanding the plain below like a sentinel, and its narrow streets a lovely place to wander, its old town oozing charm. Underneath its medieval streets are hundreds of catacomb-like *bodegas* – cellars used for the making and storing of wine.

Visitors from across the globe come here to sample its precious vintages. Leave it to us to select a nice one for a lovely tour and wine tasting experience. We'll have lunch up here as well before returning back down to Bilbao for some free time and last-minute shopping.

Tonight is our farewell dinner.

*Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner included
Overnight Bilbao*

Day 7 — July 5, 2021— Departure

After breakfast you're free to depart from Bilbao according to your travel arrangements.

Please refer to the **Arrival & Departure Logistics** for information about departing from Bilbao.

Breakfast included

{*Note: If you'd like to extend your stay in Bilbao we can set you up with an extra night or two at our group hotel.*}

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE LOGISTICS

There are about a half dozen flights a day from Madrid to San Sebastián. Flight time is a little over an hour. If you fly into Madrid early enough (or if you're already spending time there) you could connect to one of these short flights into San Sebastián. Please remember that we'll be meeting around 6pm at the group hotel in San Sebastián. Alternatively, you could arrange to arrive in San Sebastián the day before the tour begins.

There are also a couple of nonstop flights each day from Barcelona to San Sebastián.

Departing out of Bilbao at the end of the tour there are many route options with flights to Madrid, Barcelona, London Gatwick, Paris, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Munich, Lisbon, Brussels, Zurich, and possibly others.

Note >> As there are many more flight choices for Bilbao another option is to fly *both in and out of Bilbao*. If you were to do this the driving time from Bilbao airport to the hotel in San Sebastián at the beginning of the tour is around 75 minutes, which you could do by taxi or private car.

WEATHER

The climate of the Basque region of Spain is cooler and wetter than the rest of the country as it's on the north coast — meaning the Atlantic coast. It's not Mediterranean. For the time period of these tours the average daytime high temperature is about 73 F and the average overnight low is around 55 F.

Rainfall during these times of the year is around 2.5 inches over the course of a month.

ACCOMMODATIONS

{Please note: We reserve the right to alter these accommodations. Any changes would be to a similar standard of hotel.}

San Sebastián

Situated at one of the city's best locations — next to the port with views of La Concha Bay — our selected 4-star hotel opened in 2018, but the building dates back to 1917 — completely renovated yet preserving its original architectural characteristics.

There's easy access to both the beach and the city center. The 58 rooms are equipped with state-of-the-art technology, Nespresso

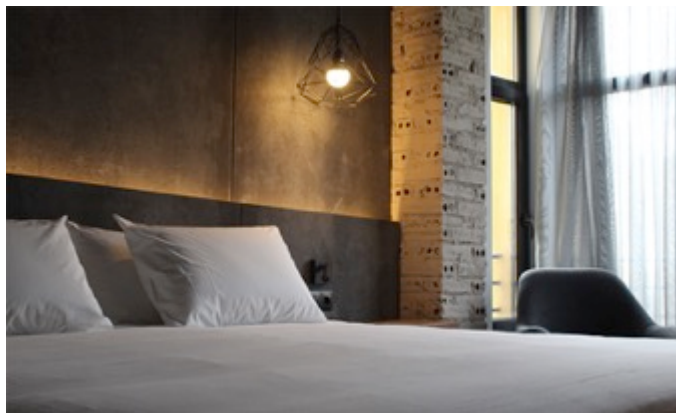
coffee machines, vintage black-and-white photos, stylish marble and wood furniture, and gorgeous bathrooms. San Sebastián's inevitable relationship with the sea is reflected in many of the details inside the hotel, and the rooftop boasts a small pool, solarium, and staffed bar with great views of the port, bay, and the city. An excellent restaurant, beloved by locals and headed by a highly regarded local chef, features Basque cuisine with a contemporary touch. There's also a more casual, lighter-fare space. Professional service rounds out the attractive features of this lovely hotel.



Bilbao

Our selected 4-star hotel has 54 rooms and just opened in 2019 to excellent reviews. It's in a building that dates from the 1920s, next to the Arriaga Theater and on the Nervión River. After the renovation some of the unique elements of the original building, such as the concrete structure, the wooden staircase, and the stained-glass windows, have been

maintained. Rooms are decorated in blacks and grays and come with wooden floors, extra wide beds, smart TVs, tea and coffee service, L'Occitane amenities, free wifi, and complimentary mineral water. There's an in-house gastronomic restaurant helmed by a legendary Basque chef offering both a tasting menu and à la carte choices. He holds 10 Michelin stars in total, more than any other Spanish chef. There's also a casual gastrobar.



TOUR COST

\$3,895 (with 14-15 participants)

\$3,995 (with 12-13 participants)

\$4,095 (with 8-11 participants)

Single Supplement: \$695



A note about tier pricing: On most Venture Out tours the price of the trip depends on the final number of people who sign up because of minimum fixed costs that need to be covered.

With this tiered pricing structure we are generally able to offer slightly lower pricing if we get a higher number of guests enrolled on the trip.

Costs are based on double occupancy of a room. If you are traveling alone and wish to share a room, we will match you with a roommate if one is available. Should there be no one to pair you with, the single supplement fee will apply.

Tour Cost Includes:

- * Accommodations as described above
- * Breakfasts every morning at our accommodations
- * Five lunches and three dinners
- * Limited wine included with group meals as well as other beverage options
- * Welcome drink
- * A Basque professional tour guide accompanying the group each day
- * Venture Out tour manager
- * Entrance fees at sights mentioned in the itinerary
- * Private tour bus throughout

Tour Cost Does Not Include:

- * Airfare
- * Gratuities (see below)
- * Three dinners
- * Any extra hotel nights that may be needed or desired pre- or post-tour
- * Entrance fees to sights not specified in the day-to-day itinerary
- * Personal expenses such as laundry, phone calls, room service, minibar charges, etc.

Currency Exchange Rates: Our costs to operate this tour are tied directly to the exchange rate between the Euro and the Dollar. Over the past few years the value of the U.S. dollar has fluctuated in quite a volatile manner against the Euro. *We reserve the right to alter the trip pricing indicated here should there be a significant fluctuation in the exchange rate.* Please refer to the Terms & Conditions that accompany the Trip Enrollment Form.

Tippling: In an effort to make it as simple and seamless for our guests as possible, on some trips, such as this one, we think it's better to collect some tip funds from you at the beginning of the tour on Day 1 so that you don't have to fuss with that every day as we go along. These tip funds will be distributed by the tour manager as the trip unfolds to the

wait staff in restaurants, driver(s), and hotel porters. We prefer that you tip the local tour guide directly at the end of the tour.

TRIP PACING & OTHER THINGS TO KNOW:

>> WALKING: The towns and cities we visit cannot be driven through on a bus as the city centers are many hundreds of years old. We have to explore the towns (and other sights) on foot. This could pose a challenge to those who have any walking issues. **Please check with us if you have any concerns in this area.** In general you should be able to walk up to 3 miles a day in total (but not all at once), occasionally on hilly terrain. Being able to do steps is also very important.

>> TIMING: We aim to begin each day's program at 9:00am, though on one or two days we may have to start a bit earlier. Breakfasts in the hotels typically begin at 7:00 or 7:30.

>> DRIVING: We have structured the days in this program in the most logically flowing way in order to keep driving times to a minimum and to avoid repetition of roads. However, some days will see more driving than others. None of the driving is done at long, uninterrupted intervals. We stop throughout the day for our visits, thus breaking up the day's activities. Our transportation will be in a comfortable tour bus (although not the large 40 or 50-seater variety), and at no time will it feel like an endless road trip. The Basque region is fairly compact. The day trip from Bilbao up into the Rioja wine country is about an hour and a half each way. The day trip into the French Basque country involves about two hours of driving all together.

CAVEAT

PLEASE NOTE: The preceding itinerary represents our current intentions for this new 7-day tour through the Basque region. We reserve the right to modify some of the itinerary details after further research and on-the-ground inspections.

While as accurate as possible at the time of printing, this itinerary should be considered an approximate indication of the schedule and scope of activities, trip routing, and meals, rather than an inflexible schedule of events; it is subject to change due to circumstances beyond our control. We reserve the right to maintain flexibility in order to take advantage of unforeseen opportunities. This trip is subject to the Limitation of Liability and all the Terms and Conditions as detailed in the Trip Enrollment Form.

To realize the maximum enjoyment from your Venture Out trip, we encourage participants to have flexibility, a sense of humor, curiosity and enthusiasm about new people and places, and an openness to the unexpected. With a spirit of adventure and positive attitude, we're sure you will have a very special travel experience. If you are uncertain about the level of comfort, difficulty, or any of the activities described in this itinerary, please email us or call Venture Out at 1-415-626-5678 to discuss your concerns.

California Seller of Travel #2036134-4