

## Spain: San Sebastian, Bilbao & Basque Country

### Tour-Only Itinerary

Experience the best of Basque country on a walking tour that takes you along pilgrimage trails, past dramatic seascapes and quaint villages. Walk the ancient “Way of St. James,” a coastal route with striking views, and tour the famous Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. As you stroll through pastoral landscapes of vineyards and orchards, let farm-fresh meals and gourmet delights fuel your exploration. An exclusive dinner with a gastronomic club gives you a chance to sample even more of the distinctive Basque cuisine, accompanied by the region’s delectable wines. Unwind at the end of the day in luxurious accommodations, including a historic seaside resort and a restored palace. Breathtaking landscapes, rich culture, and delicious cuisine make your Basque walking tour an adventure you won’t soon forget.



### Highlights

Join a private gastronomic club, or txoko, for an exclusive dinner as the members share their love of Basque cuisine.

Live like royalty in a setting beautiful enough to earn the honor of hosting Louis XIV and Maria Theresa's wedding in St. Jean de Luz.

Tour the world-famous Guggenheim Museum – one of the largest museums in the world and an architectural phenomenon.

Satisfy your cravings in an area with more Michelin-star rated restaurants than Paris.

Participate in a cooking demonstration of traditional Basque cuisine.

## On all Guided Adventures you can count on ...



Expert local guides to introduce you to the best of your destination.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Off-the-beaten-path places you'd never find on your own.



Experts to handle all the details.



A maximum of 18 fun-loving fellow travelers to share the journey.



Flight + Tour Combos include plane tickets, airport car service, and pre- and post-tour accommodations.



Delicious, authentic multi-course meals—virtually all are included.

## Activity Level

This tour is one of our Flex-Guided Walking Adventures, rates easy with an average of 2 to 5 miles of hiking per day. The trails/walking paths feature a combination of easy terrain and paved roads mixed with moderate hills. We walk primarily in the open countryside and in small cities on a variety of surfaces, including uneven footpaths over grass and soil, and cobbled streets. We plan longer, optional walks for those who wish to spend more time on their own exploring the small towns and surrounding areas. We also provide short and easy options for those who prefer to spend more time relaxing in Basque Country. Our on-tour support vehicle is available at specific meeting points for those who need assistance. This tour is ideal for both enthusiastic beginners and experienced walkers. Several of the walks require a transfer from

our hotel to the start of the walk. Our guides often use this time in the van for our morning route review, so we can enjoy a more leisurely morning at breakfast. As one of our Flex-Guided tours, some days offer options for self-exploration, cultural visits, or free time to relax on your own.

## DAY 1

### Join your *Spain: San Sebastian, Bilbao & Basque Country* tour.

Walking tour of Bilbao: 3 miles, easy

Your guide(s) meet you at 9:00 a.m. in the lobby of the designated meeting point hotel in Bilbao. Your guide(s) will be wearing a Country Walkers shirt. Please be dressed for walking.

Following introductions and a welcome briefing you will walk to the world-renowned Guggenheim Museum, designed by acclaimed architect Frank Gehry. You will enjoy a 90-minute informative tour given by one of the museum guides regarding the building's architecture and the current works on display. At the end of the tour, you will enjoy a tram ride with your guides to Bilbao's old town where you will have an opportunity to have lunch on your own.

Later this afternoon, join your guides on a walk and discover how this city has reinvented itself, with its host of modern sites designed by world-renowned architects. The metro is a combination of architectural craft and engineering prowess by Britain's famed architect Sir Norman Foster, and you will readily see his dramatic, curved-glass metro entrances, which are locally known as *fosteritos*, or "little Fosters." Other masterpieces include Philippe Stark's La Alhambra, which is an old wine warehouse converted into a multicultural center; and Iberdrola Tower, the tallest tower in the Basque country, designed by Cesar Pelli.

This evening, get to know your fellow travelers and guides during a welcome reception and dinner.

Included Meals: Dinner

Accommodation: NH Collection Villa de Bilbao

## DAY 2

## Walk the pilgrimage path “Way of St. James” / Hondarribia walking tour

Way of St. James from Mount Jaizkibel to Hondarribia: 6.5 – 10 miles

After breakfast, your transfer (approximately 90 minutes) will take you to the start of today's historic walk along the “Way of St. James.” The coastal route that you follow today is considered to be the oldest of the paths leading to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, where many believe St. James is buried. Our path dates back more than 1,000 years and is believed to be the first institutionalized route used by religious pilgrims. The natural beauty of today's walk—featuring vistas of the Bay of Biscay and small rugged coves—will become even more spectacular as you reach the summit of Mount Jaizkibel. Continuing downhill you will reach the Sanctuary of Guadalupe, where a 15th-century Black Madonna is kept. Our trek continues through local vineyards to the Restaurante Oilurta Azpi where you will sample the region's white wine - txakoli. After the visit you may shuttle to the hotel or continue on a path through the vineyards and the Rio Bidasoa marshlands and gardens before entering Hondarribia and your hotel.

After free time on your own in Hondarribia, you will explore the town with a local guide, who will acquaint you with the history of your home for the next three nights. Hondarribia is a town with two identities: one belonging to the lower port town and the other to the 800-year-old medieval walled town above, with its balcony-lined cobblestone streets and magnificent vistas of the sea, the Bidasoa River, and neighboring France.

This evening, you can choose from among Hondarribia's many gourmet restaurants for dinner on your own.

Included Meals: Breakfast,

Accommodation: Hotel Rio Bidasoa

### DAY 3

## Hondarribia's fishing port & marina. Dinner at a Txako

Hondarribia walking tour to fishing port & marina: 5.5 miles, easy

After breakfast, walk to Hondarribia's marina and fishing port to see the many holiday boats and fishing trawlers. You will continue your exploration of Hondarribia following Calle San Pedro and the city wall before ending your day's journey at the hotel. Later in the afternoon, you may explore the town's restaurants and shops or simply relax in the hotel's lovely gardens and enjoy the swimming pool.

This evening, you will have the special privilege of being a guest at a members-only, private gastronomic society, or txoko, as it is known in Basque. Txoko members tend to be mostly men who have shared interests in cooking creative meals for their guests. When Basque culture was suppressed under the reign of Francisco Franco, txokos became safe havens where members could share their language and traditions as well as their love of cooking. Women used to be banned from the society; today, however, they are welcome to dine with the men.

Included Meals: Breakfast,

Accommodation: Hotel Rio Bidasoa

## DAY 4

### French Basque country. Coastal walk from St. Jean-de-Luz. Basque cooking demonstration

Coastal walk St. Jean-de-Luz to Hondarribia: 4 – 9 miles, easy to moderate

For today's walk, you can choose from among several options, depending upon your interests. After breakfast, walk to Hondarribia's marina and fishing port to see the many holiday boats and fishing trawlers. You may start a later morning walk from the hotel to the River Bidasoa marshlands, at times treading in the pilgrim's footsteps on the "Way of St. James." Later in the afternoon, you have the option to shuttle back into Hondarribia and explore the town's art galleries, restaurants, and shops.

Tonight, you'll learn how to replicate the flavors of Basque Country in our own hotel kitchen during an exclusive cooking demonstration, followed by a dinner in the hotel.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodation: Hotel Rio Bidasoa

## DAY 5

### Transfer from Hondarribia to Tolosa / Basque Country hills and forests

Basque rural walks on country roads and forested paths: 4.5 – 8, easy to easy-moderate

After breakfast, you'll transfer 45 minutes to the town of Tolosa, located on the Oria River. After a brief tour of Tolosa, you'll have a short shuttle ride into the surrounding hills to the quaint village of Bidania. Today, your path will be a mostly steady incline through lovely forested hills and valleys. Stopping for lunch, you'll have the opportunity to feast on a Basque specialty: alubias de Tolosa, or Tolosa beans—purple-black legumes that turn red when cooked and are celebrated for their rich, buttery flavor. You'll also have a chance to sample the local sidra (hard apple cider). Following lunch, you have the option to shuttle or continue walking through the lovely countryside to our accommodations—a hotel within a restored, 17th-century jauregia (palace).

This evening, meet the jauregia's owners and learn about the history of and future plans for this unique property. Enjoy dinner on your own, or perhaps for a walk into the village to sample a simpler dinner at the local pub.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodation: Iriarte Jauregia Hotel

## DAY 6

### Walk through Basque villages / Farm visit / Farewell Dinner

Loop walk from hotel to the Urdapilleta's family farm: 2.5 – 5 miles, easy

Today's walk immerses you in Basque country life as you meander through a series of hamlets on lesser-traveled (but paved) roads, past peaceful pastures nestled in the valleys. You'll hear tinkling cowbells and see sheep grazing as you walk beneath the shade of apple trees. A charming stone farmhouse will be the

setting for today's lunch. Our hostess is Maite, wife of Pello Urdapilleta, whose family has raised Euskal txerria—a breed of pig found only in the Basque region—for generations. Maite will introduce us to the rural culinary delights of this region of Spain. After an included lunch, you have two options: You can shuttle back to our hotel, or you can return by foot retracing your morning path.

Tonight, enjoy your farewell dinner at the jauregia. You will be treated to a delicious dinner created by the palace's renowned chef.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodation: Iriarte Jauregia Hotel

## DAY 7

### **Transfer to San Sebastián / Funicular to Monte Igueldo / Your *Spain: San Sebastian, Bilbao & Basque Country* tour concludes**

San Sebastián walk: 3 miles, easy

This morning, you'll transfer to San Sebastián. Upon arrival to this beautiful seaside town you will enjoy an easy stroll along the town's two-mile-long beachfront promenade, which offers views of beautiful La Concha Bay. You will soon discover why Queen Isabella II and other wealthy aristocrats would spend their summer holidays in this scenic corner of Spain. To help get your bearings, you'll ride the funicular to the lookout atop Monte Igueldo, which will give you a great perspective on this scenic seaside resort. After saying goodbye to your guides you may want to continue with your exploration in the Casco Viejo (Old Town), which dates back to the 12th century. Here you'll enjoy lunch on your own in one of the many restaurants. You may want to sample local pintxos, the Basque form of tapas. Given the Basque passion for cuisine, these delectable small plate morsels are usually more substantive and complex than their Spanish tapas counterparts.

Your luggage will be stored for your pick-up at the nearby Hotel de Londres y de Inglaterra where your walking tour will end at 1:00 p.m. Please note: The hotel will help you book a taxi at your own expense to your next hotel, train station or airport.



Country Walkers provides you with City Information that includes recommendations on what to see and do in San Sebastián during your stay.

Included Meals: Breakfast



## What's Included

### Tour Only

Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓
12 on-tour meals: 6 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 4 dinners	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓
Emergency travel assistance hotline available 24/7	✓