

## Spain: San Sebastian, Bilbao & Basque Country

### Tour-Only Itinerary

### Highlights

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

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

Satisfy your cravings in a region with more Michelin-star rated restaurants than Paris.

Rest your mind and body in a restored 17th-century palace, or *jauregia*.

Follow in the footsteps of pilgrims as you walk the “Way of St. James,” a historic coastal path and part of the Camino de Santiago.

### Activity Level

This tour is one of our 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 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 guides meet you at 9:00 a.m. in the lobby of the designated meeting point hotel in Bilbao. They'll be wearing Country Walkers shirts. 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. 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 board a tram with your guides to Bilbao's Old Town, where you will have free time for 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 city's metro system, for example, is a combination of architectural craft and engineering prowess by Britain's famed architect Sir Norman Foster. 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 Alhondiga, 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

## DAY 2

### Walk the pilgrimage path "Way of St. James." Independent exploration of Hondarribia. Hondarribia walking tour

*Way of St. James from Mount Jaizkibel to Hondarribia; 6.5 – 10 miles, moderate*

Enjoy breakfast, then travel (approximately 90 minutes) to the start of today's walk along the historic "Way of St. James." The coastal route is considered to be the oldest of the paths leading to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, where many believe St. James is buried. Your 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. Your trek continues through local vineyards to the Restaurante Oilurta Azpi where you can sample the region's white wine—txakoli. After the visit, you may choose to shuttle to the hotel or continue on a path through the vineyards, gardens, and the Rio Bidasoa marshlands, to Hondarribia and your hotel.

There is free time on your own in Hondarribia, followed by a city tour with a local guide, who will acquaint you with the history of your home base 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 city 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

## DAY 3

### Independent exploration of Hondarribia. Dinner at a *txoko*

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

After breakfast, you'll have an opportunity to walk to Hondarribia's marina and fishing port where you'll see many holiday boats and fishing trawlers on the water. You may continue your exploration of Hondarribia along Calle San Pedro and the city wall, before ending this morning's journey at the hotel. Later, you may explore the town's restaurants and shops or simply relax at the hotel's lovely gardens or 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, Dinner

## 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*

Today, you'll shuttle to St. Jean-de-Luz, one of the most attractive towns on the French Basque coast. There are many sites to visit in this idyllic town, such as the Maison Louis XIV, a temporary residence of the Sun King, who came here in 1660 for his marriage to Maria Theresa. You can also visit the nearby church where the pair was married, which is the largest Basque church in France. Or, explore the town's picturesque harbor, open-air market, and pedestrian-friendly streets. Enjoy lunch on your own in one of the many outdoor cafés.

Fueled by your satisfying lunch, you begin your walk back to Hondarribia by joining a narrow dirt path meandering past stunning cliffs, scenic coves, and the seaside resort town of Hendaye with its long stretch of beach. Saying au revoir to France, a five-minute ferry ride takes you across the Bidasoa River back to Spain. A short walk leads to your hotel in Hondarribia.

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

## DAY 5

### Travel 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*

Once you've enjoyed breakfast, you'll drive 45 minutes to the town of Tolosa, located on the Oria River. After a brief tour of Tolosa, a short shuttle ride into the surrounding hills brings you 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 your accommodation—a hotel within a

restored, 17th-century *jauregia* (palace).

This evening, meet the *jauregia*'s owner and learn about the history of, and future plans for, this unique property. Enjoy dinner on your own in the hotel or, perhaps, for a walk into the village for a simple dinner at the local pub.

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

## 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 amid 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 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 your hotel, or you can return by foot, retracing your morning path.

There will be a farewell dinner at the *jauregia* this evening with a delicious meal created by the palace's renowned chef.

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 7

### Travel 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 travel to San Sebastián. Upon arriving at this beautiful seaside town, take an easy stroll along the 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 spent 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 town.

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, the train station, or the airport.

**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

Travel assistance available 24/7 provided by Allianz  
Global Assistance

Telescopic walking sticks provided on tour