

BASQUE COUNTRY - A JEWEL TO DISCOVER

VISIT OFF-ROAD VILLAGES, TOWNS AND LANDSCAPES

NATURE - MONUMENTS AND GASTRONOMY

Day 1) AIRPORT OF BILBAO - SAN SEBASTIAN - 63 miles

Arrival at Bilbao airport where you will go through passport control and other corresponding landing procedures while the Gamma Tours representative will welcome you.

Departure through the highway towards San Sebastian and arrival at the hotel. After checking-in, room distribution and time to relax and freshen up.

Time at leisure. Welcome dinner in a good local restaurant.

Back to the hotel and accommodation.

Day 2) SAN SEBASTIAN - 31 miles

Breakfast in the hotel and led by the guide you will start a tour through this nice city, considered and known as the **Cantabrian Pearl**.

The city, which name in *Euskera* or Basque language is **Donostia**, expands along a white sandy bay between the Urgull and the Igeldo hills.

It started being a fishermen's cottage, evolving gradually into a high end **lordly enlargement** with modern quarters, being converted into one of the most attractive cities on the Bay of Biscay. **The Museo de San Telmo, the Peine del Viento or the Kursaal** are tokens of how the city combines tradition with modernity in its layout of streets.

You will go up to the **Monte Igeldo**, which is the landmark as the limit of one of its ends, an unbeatable Belvedere to enjoy the views over the city. At its feet lies the **Punta Torrepea**, where was installed the "**Peine del Viento**", a sculptural ensemble by the famous Basque artist Eduardo

Chillida. Right in this spot starts the beach named **Playa de Ondarreta**, framed by a garden area and the **Pico del Loro**. This was the location chosen by queen Maria Cristina (19th c) where to build the **Palacio de Miramar**, her summer residence.

Peine del Viento (Wind Comb)

It is one of the most popular works by sculptor Eduardo Chillida. The sculpture ensemble is formed by pink granite terraces and three steel pieces hooked into the rocks. It is one of the most frequented spots, a magical space from which one can contemplate the sea in all its splendour, especially during stormy days, when the waves ram with all their fury against the rocky cliff.

MIRAMAR ROYAL PALACE

The palace was projected by English architect Selden Wornun, in 1888, but works were carried out by Benito Olasagasti, under the management of the architect José Goicoa. The palace is composed by the basement and three floors, being the first two for private use while the top floor -with a garret- was kept for the staff of servants. The access through one of the sides is presided by a Tudor arch decorated with high relieves, where the front side emphasises the coat of arms of the Habsburg, the date MDCCCXCII (1892) and the octagonal tower. Among the series of buildings stands out the *Casa de los Oficios*, the Gatekeeper's House and the Guard House.

A beautiful seashore promenade with elegant railings and lamp posts incircles the **playa de La Concha beach**.

While walking facing always the sea you will reach the ancient gambling Casino, the present day **city hall**. In this area between the sea and the Urumea River you will find the old part of the city and, on the way to the **Monte Urgull**, the sports marina and the fishermen's quarter. The Urgull hill's summit is crowned by the *la Mota* castle and a representation of the Holly Heart.

In the **Old Part** or *Barrio Viejo* of San Sebastián await you the churches of **San Vicente** and **Santa María del Coro**: one is gothic and the latter is renaissance-baroque. Its lively streets, full of typical bars, will lead you to the **porticoed square of the Constitución**. Among its balconies, numbered and whitewashed unveiling its original use as a bullring, rises the old neoclassical city hall, reconverted into a Municipal Library.

The **Alameda Boulevard** is a poplar grove and the best entrance way to the romantic city quarter, appeared after the demolition of the old walls. On the banks of the Urumea River you will distinguish the **Victoria Eugenia Theatre** hall and the **María Cristina Hotel**, erected in neo-plateresque style. Scattered around this rationalist layout you will also be able to see the landscaped **Guipuzcoa Square**, with the **Diputación Foral** headquarters (elected provincial executive power), the **Koldo Mitxelena Cultural Center** plus the central **Post Office** building. Not far, **San Sebastian's Cathedral**, the neogothic **Buen Pastor** church, is the largest temple in town.

Located in the **Amara Enlargement**, it was the work of the local architect Manuel de Echave. The church covers a surface of 2,400 square yards and was consecrated in 1897. Having the rank of a **cathedral** since 1953, it has a rectangular, symmetrical ground plan of a latin cross with three naves, transept and presbytery. It was built with limestone proceeding from the quarry in *monte Igeldo* and is gifted with abundant decorative elements such as stain glass work (by Juan Bautista Lázaro), gargoyles, spires, etc. On the inside it has a very roomy crypt and the outer tower, built by Ramón Cortázar, reaches a height of 75 meters. In the high altar, consecrated to the Good Shepherd, you can find the statues of Our Lady of the Carmen, Sant Anthony, Saint Theresa and the Holly Heart.

Once back to the **river bank**, a set of abundant lordly mansions from the beginning of the 20th c. will lead you to the **María Cristina bridge**, the most monumental one of all those spanning the river. Four lampposts by sculptor Marià Benlliure light up the way onto the **railway station**, **designed by A. Eiffel**. On this bank of the river there are the modern quarters of *Eguía* and *Gros*. On the Gros beach stands the turn of the century structure of the **Kursaal**, conceived by the architect Rafael Moneo.

Lunch will take place in one of the good restaurants in the city.

In the afternoon you will visit the **Eduardo Chillida Leku Museum** - located at a 20 minutes' ride from the city-, undoubtedly the most relevant Basque sculptor in contemporary times. Chillida Leku is a particular museum, conceived as a huge piece of art where the fusion between art and nature happen in a most natural way. The sculptures are integrated in the landscape as if they always had been part of it. In the garden, beech trees, oaks and magnolias live together with the monumental steel and

granite sculptures located in perfect dialogue with the surrounding area. Back to San Sebastian.

Time at leisure to stroll on your own to observe some beautiful corners. Go back to the hotel on your own.

Dinner and logging in the hotel.

Day 3) SAN SEBASTIAN AND ITS ENVIRONS - 16 miles

After breakfast a short bus ride towards the eastern side of the coastline will take you to the Oyarzun River mouth, where lie the villages of *Pasajes de San Pedro* and *Pasajes de San Juan* (in the Basque Country's language, euskera, Pasajes is Pasaia). Pasaia is a group of 4 small centres of population.

In Pasajes de San Pedro you will get on a boat which, sailing across the estuary, will take you to Pasajes de San Juan.

After a stroll through this nice fishing port you will head towards a restaurant where you will be given a cooking lesson on the delicious Basque food. The cook will have **purchased and prepared the needed products by the chef and, under his/her supervision, you will cook the food that will later be served to you for lunch.**

In the afternoon you will take a **trip on a sailing boat or a motorboat** through the Pasaia estuary, leaving the coast for a while and being back in the port an hour later.

Back to San Sebastian. Time at leisure to wander on your own discovering nice corners or walking down the most commercial streets such as **calle Urbietta, calle Fuenterrabia or Calle Getaria**, full of little shops for all styles, including the most **famous international brands**.

The guide will take you thereafter to the Old Part of the city, where most of the bars in town are located, and **doing as the locals do**, you will start a trail from bar to bar, including a drink on each, enjoying the **typical "Pintxos", the snacks that will be your dinner for that evening.**

The stroll will end up walking back to the hotel. Overnight.

Day 4) - SAN SEBASTIAN - IDIAZABAL - VITORIA - 81 miles

Breakfast and departure towards the **Centro de Interpretación del queso Idiazabal**, a museum about the Idiazabal cheese manufacture process.

The Izal mouse audio-visual show: The Izal mouse welcomes you and during your visit he will tell you by means of an audiovisual show the story of the Idiazabal cheese, its process of elaboration and much more.

The shepherd's txabola: A reproduction of a traditional shepherd's hut or *txabola* allows you to get to know the utensils and tools that were used in the past to elaborate this cheese. The space is fitted with two tactile screens which broaden up the information and show you how some of the tools were put into operation.

The Latxa and Carranzana sheep: Next to the green mountain pastures and the shepherds knowhow, this is one of the singular factors in the making of the Idiazabal Cheese with *Appellation d'Origine*. Its special typology and its millenary relationship with the country's shepherds make it a symbol of the Basque landscape.

Within the boundaries of the present **Natural Parks of Aralar and Aizkorri-Aratz** the grazing activity has been of key importance since Pre-history.

Idiazabal cheese: A millenary tradition. Pastures of Aralar and Aizkorri. Within the boundaries of the present Natural Parks of Aralar and Aizkorri-Aratz the grazing activity has been of key importance since Pre-history, while at present day about 65 shepherd families, with their corresponding flocks of *latxa* sheep, make the most of the pasture resources with the traditional shepherding system.

Idiazabal cheese: A gastronomical jewel. It is elaborated with raw *latxa* and *carranzana* sheep milk, following the procedures which in the past shepherds from the mountain ranges in the Basque Land transmitted from generation to generation.

The *Appellation d'Origine*. The *Appellation d'Origine* was started in 1987 in order to protect the *latxas* and *carranzanas* sheep and shepherds plus the elaborator of the authentic IDIAZABAL cheese by granting its

origin and quality to the consumer.

The tasting: A space meant for the tasting allows you to deepen your knowledge and put it into practice. An easy tasting lesson shows you the key elements to be considered while tasting an Idiazabal cheese with *Appellation d'Origine*.

After this visit you will head towards a **craft cheese workshop** where to discover how to elaborate this highly appreciated cheese kind, specially in the Basque land and Navarra

The tour starts in the stable observing the sheep and lambs while the shepherd will explain everything related to this ancestral occupation: shepherding. You then visit the milking area in order to know the different milk types and their properties... Thereafter you will visit the cheese shop and the smoking hut, where the shepherd will tell you about the handmade elaboration of their cheeses. The tour will end with a tasting of their different cheese sorts, accompanied with wine, cider and water. There could be small variations in the tour according to each season's timetable.

From there you will head to **Vitoria/Gasteiz**, the capital city of the Álava region (or *Araba* in Basque) and political centre of the Basque country, as well as the site of the **Basque Parliament and Government**.

Check-in in the hotel. **Lunch will be served in a local select restaurant.**

In the afternoon you will visit this nice city of the Basque country's inland. The present **Vitoria-Gasteiz** was founded in 1181 on top of a small hill by king of Navarre Sancho VI under the name of *Nueva Victoria* (new victory). This stronghold fell onto the hands of Castilian monarch Alfonso VIII in 1200. The town soon started a flourishing handicrafts vocation. In the 15th c. king Juan II of Castile granted to Vitoria the title of city. The city developed its **enlargement** grid all along the 18th and 19th century.

The Basque capital city, political and administrative centre of the Basque territory, unveils a **medieval core** where one can find quite charming corners, gardens and tree lined promenades which are in fact the city's green lungs, without neglecting an accurate urbanism, where the medieval streets intermingle harmoniously with renaissance palaces and neoclassical churches. The town's nerve centre is the **Plaza de la Virgen Blanca**, presided by the monument to the battle of Vitoria. On that square you will find the **church of San Miguel**, hosting the religious image of the

white *Virgen Blanca*, patron saint of the city. **The present edifice dates back from the 14th to the 16th century.**

On top of the city rises the **Cathedral of *Santa María***, the **Old Cathedral**, a magnificent gothic temple which construction -started in the 13th c.- took all next century to be completed. In 1496 it became a Collegiate church until 1861 when, finally, it was given the rank of **Cathedral**. The building, declared a **Historical Artistic Monument**, is notorious for its verticality. In terms of its outward appearance the monumental sculptures of its gates from the 14th c. are worth mentioning too.

The oldest streets in town are spread around the Cathedral, as their guild names attest: Cutlery, Blacksmiths, Belt makers street, etc., which in their turn host several palaces of great artistically value, some of them having been declared a **Historical Artistic Monument**.

Before leaving the old part of the city, you will come across the palace of the ***Diputación Foral de Álava***, from the 19th c. and the slender ***Torre de Doña Otxanda***, current site of the Natural Science Museum.

The city's expansion outside the ancient walls was called ***Enlargement***, laid out in the 19th c. In its grid you shall find the ***Plaza de los Fueros***, a square designed in the 80's by the prestigious Basque artist Eduardo Chillida. The itinerary will take you to the **Cathedral of *María Inmaculada*** or **New Cathedral**, started in the beginning of the 20th c. following neogothic rules. Next to it you'll see the **Basque Parliament** (19th c.). Vitoria provides **several green spaces** such as the ***La Florida Park***, that of ***Judizmendi*** or the ***San Juan de Arriaga Park***.

Among the numerous little palaces in the romantic part of the city we shall make a short stopover at the ***Palacio Augusti***, hosting the Fine Arts Museum and declared **Historical Artistic Monument**. Also started in the beginning of last century, the ***Palacio de Ajuria Enea*** is an example of lordly Basque architecture and **site of the Basque Government's presidency**.

Back to the hotel. Dinner and lodging

Day 5 - VITORIA - RIOJA ALAVESA - VITORIA - 170 miles

After breakfast you will head to the Basque part of La Rioja, more specifically to the medieval village of **Laguardia**.

Laguardia is the nicest and most important spot in the *Rioja Alavesa*. It is worldwide famous for its wines and for being the birthplace of the fable writer Samaniego.

The Rioja Alavesa enjoys a very adequate climate for growing vineyards, which gave it a well merited reputation. The area has abundant archeological remains, with traces of Palaeolithic, Roman and medieval times.

The whole urban layout in Laguardia is surrounded by **defensive walls**, built at the beginning of the 13th c.

On both ends of its **Main Street** you find the churches of **San Juan** - Romanesque in its origin but a mixture of various styles at the present time- and that of **Santa María de los Reyes**. This one stands out for the impressive Gothic gate, one of the last examples from that time keeping its original polychrome frescoes. Located next to the wall, together with the church of *San Juan Bautista*, it was part of the walled enclosure that protected the medieval village.

The temple has a basilican ground plan, with three naves of three spans. The sanctuary ends in a semicircular apse which has a polygonal shape on the outside. The front gate shows a representation of the Apostles, Mary with the kid and a storied tympanum. The sacristy can be found on the Epistle side and is linked with the high altar. At its feet stand the quire and the tower. We can observe two constructive periods: one in the 12th c. -to which the two lower spans belong- and the other one in renaissance style, comprising the first span and the sanctuary. Inside, the remarkable main altar table was made in the 17th century.

In one of the walled enclosure's ends –in the promenade "**El Collado**"-, there is a monument to the fable writer Samaniego, born in this village. It is highly recommended to stroll through Laguardia, since all its ancient core offers a doubtless artistic and historical interest, as well as getting close to one of its manyfold wineries to taste and purchase some magnificent wines.

You will, of course, visit a very particular winery: a subterranean winery. The wine cellar **El Fabulista**, located at the heart of Laguardia, is a carved out set of underground spaces buried seven metres deep under a **Palace from the 18th c.**, owing its name to one of the most prestigious dwellers of the Palace and the Village: Félix María Samaniego.

The visit to the wine cellar starts outdoors, with a brief explanation on the palace where Samaniego lived, as well as his life and habits. Thereafter,

the itinerary dives into the Palace subsoil until reaching the four spaces that form the winery: one for the elaboration, another one for the ageing and two more for the tasting of the wines.

Lunch will be served in the best restaurant in town.

Thereafter you will head to the **Valle Salado de Añana**. This is a cultural and natural landscape of salt, over 7000 years old, in a full process of recovering its sustainability.

Under a recovery project open to public access, visitors of all ages and communities can enjoy different guided itineraries and experiences in order to get to know the history, architecture, archaeology and biodiversity of the saltern. They will be involved in the making and tasting of their own Añana Salt samples and take advantage of the salty water's therapeutic effects.

The "**Valle Salado**" or salty valley tour is the ideal itinerary for those who approach a saltern for the first time or wish to have a general impression of the landscape, its importance and recovery process while emphasising its value.

Between the months of April to October this tour includes the choice of enjoying the open **air Salt Spa**. In their facilities you will be able to plunge your feet and hands into the hyper-salty waters proceeding from the springs. This way you will feel the beneficial effects of salty water.

Upgrade your visit to the "**Valle Salado**" with other experiences, such as "The saltern workshop" or the "Salt tasting".

After breathing the salty air, you will drive back to Vitoria. Once in your hotel, some time to relax and freshen up.

Considering it has been a long day for everyone, dinner in the hotel and overnight.

Day 6 - VITORIA - "SHEPHERD FOR A DAY" - LOIOLA - ZARAUZ - 82 miles

Breakfast and departure towards the **Natural Park of Urkiola**, where you will visit a sheep farm and you will be able to feel "**Shepherd for a day.**"

During this experience the group of visitors shares the daily duties of a shepherd: milking the sheep, giving the baby lamb their bottle, feeding the flock with their own hands and enjoying the shepherd dogs dexterity leading the autochthonous *latxa* sheep flock.

When they start, the group will experiment the soft sensations felt during the craft transformation of the **natural wool** using various tools -some of them ancient, others more modern - to work the wool. They will go through the different stages of the process: breaking the wool, back-combing it and carding it until discovering how easily, by using soap foam and an amusing massage, one can turn this natural fibre into whatever our fantasy can shape: be it a drawing made out of wool or manufacturing curious balls or key rings that later each participant will take home as a souvenir from that day.

The tour includes: milking the sheep, sharing the shepherd dogs dexterity and an introduction to the craft transformation of the wool. In November the sheep start to be born and thus during the winter you can give the baby lamb the bottle, while in June you can shear the sheep.

Durangaldea is a corner of the authentic Basque cuisine. There you shall find a large choice of restaurants: from those holding an international reputation in the *Atxondo* valley until the humble inns where one could say: "It was like eating at home".

Lunch will be served in the restaurant in the town of **Durango**.

In the afternoon you will head to the **Sanctuary of Loyola**, located in the Urola River valley. It is an architectural complex built around the manor house of the Loyola family.

The events turned Loyola into a Pilgrimage Center: the birth of Iñigo López de Loyola in 1491, his conversion to christianity in 1521 and when Saint Ignatius of Loyola was the founder of the Society of Jesus, better known as the Jesuits in 1530 in the quarter of Montmartre in Paris

The meaningful manor house in Iñigo's history make it a space of refuge, gathering and reflection open to everybody, be they believers or non-believers. The drawing of this large architectural monument's ground plans was no easy task. The high altar, in *churrigueresco* style, was designed by Ignacio de Ibero and built between 1750 - 1757 with the intarsia technique (marble inlayed in marble).

In the upper part stands out a statue of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, made out of silver and offered in 1758 by the royal *Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas*. The rest of the altars are dedicated to Saint Francis of Borja, Saint Francis Xavier, the Holy Heart of Jesus, the madonna of the *Patrocinio*, Saint Pedro Claver and Saint Alonso Rodriguez.

This monument was erected in his honour.

From there you will head to the coast, specifically **Zarautz**, where you will have dinner at a small prestigious restaurant. The chef, is one of the known Basque cooks. In case the hotel might be sold out due to its small capacity the overnight will be at a near hote

Day 7) THE BASQUE COAST - BILBAO - 81 miles

After breakfast you will have a stroll through this seaboard town named **Zarautz**. This ancient whale hunters' settlement turned into an important tourist village as from the 19th century. The elegant beach, the longest in its district, hosts a quiet promenade on the Bay of Biscay, adorned with numerous vanguardist sculptures. Its swell turns Zarautz into a paradise for surf lovers.

Its urban grid provides visitors with important surprises like the gothic **tower of Luzea**, the **medieval church of *Santa María la Real*** and the **Narros palace**, in renaissance style. This town's layout of streets is complemented with numerous palace like manor houses and the Portu palace (16th c.), all on the Bay of Biscay's shore. Other cultural proposals are the Basque Museum of Photography and the Museum of History and Art of Zarautz.

You will then head to **Getaria**. During the Middle Ages and even later on, when the harpoons were still thrown by hand, the town's inhabitants spend their time hunting whales, as shown in its coat of arms. The stroll through the village is very attractive, with its medieval houses, the port and the promenade until the Getaria lighthouse. As a place of cultural interest we can outline the **San Salvador Church**, built in gothic style in the 15th century. It carries a high historical significance since it is there where in 1397 was held the *Junta General* meeting declaring Guipuzcoa a province.

Getaria's harbour disposes of an ideal infrastructure to be a fishing and touristic port. "**The mouse of Getaria**" is a small peninsula ending in Saint

Anton's hill, having been given that name for its peculiar shape. The town is linked to the "mouse" by a dike which, in fact, is the mole of the fishing port. A narrow road leads to the summit of mount Saint Anton, from where one can enjoy a magnificent panoramic view over the sea and the mountain.

But if Getaria is known for anything it's for its *Txakolí Wine* of an undisputed quality, giving birth to the **Getariako Txakolina Appellation d'Origine**. Visit a **txakolí winery**, possibly one of the most renowned, where they will explain the grapes' features, the harvest and the whole process of elaboration, ending with a tasting of two wines.

The town erected a monument in memory of **Juan Sebastián Elcano**, one of the most distinguished personalities from Getaria, given that he tried, together with the Portuguese Magallanes - who died during the voyage- to circumnavigate the world. It was therefore Elcano, as second in command, who first sailed around the world. The monument is made out of elaborate stone and has a rectangular body with *tronco-piramidal* shape supporting a terrace.

You shall subsequently visit the **Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum**. A thorough review of his costumes and designs, it offers a path through the trajectory of the brilliant Spanish couturier Cristóbal Balenciaga.

Located in his birth place, Getaria, it is the first museum in the world to be dedicated exclusively to a fashion designer. Prominent figures such as Christian Dior, Givenchy or Coco Chanel showed their admiration for Balenciaga. The museum is in an annex building to the **Aldamar Palace**, the very place where the dressmaker started his career in the world of the haute couture. The permanent exhibit consists of a selection of 90 pieces, among which you can see the bridal gown of queen Fabiola from Belgium or the evening dresses designed for Monaco's princess, Grace Kelly. Furthermore, the whole collection of the Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation, formed by over 1,200 models, is exhibited in rotation.

The lunch will be served in one of the best restaurants in town.

You will proceed thereafter towards **Zumaia**, located in a privileged spot on the coastline, in the bay where the Urola and Narrondo rivers meet. Its origin was an ancient monastery: in the middle ages the inhabitants scattered in the *Sehatz* valley, tired of suffering endless blows of piracy and pillage, fortified an urban core. Hence the defensive look of its church.

Zumaia has two beaches, Itzurun and Santiago, apart from various interesting places such as the **House-Museum of the painter Ignacio Zuloaga**, which contains among others works by El Greco, Rivera, Zurbarán and Goya. Just across the street there is the handicrafts museum called 'Laia'. Once in the urban grid you find Saint Peter's church, built in Basque Gothic style. The temple boasts a magnificent altar table by Juan de Antxieta, the only work by this Basque sculptor in Gipuzkoa.

On the road again towards **Deba**, a town representing the traditional ways of tourism in the utmost positive meaning: "to escape massified spots while looking for peace and quiet". The sea and the nearby hills allow it to offer multiple resources for leisure and tourism.

Deba has in its municipal boundaries three centres of population - Deba, Itziar and Lastur - plus some 130 cottages spread all over its territory. The village of Deba, placed on the right bank of the Deba estuary, has a large and nice beach. In the Lersundi Street you shall find the magnificent façade and portico of **Our Lady of the Assumption church**, a Basque gothic construction from the 16th c., with a beautiful cloister done in the same style. The Baroque town hall is another notorious building.

On top of a civil and religious heritage, Deba enjoys an important and abundant archeological heritage, where the grottos of *Ekain*, *Ermittia* and *Urtiaga* stand out.

The most relevant festivities in Deba are those of *San Roque*, its patron saint. They are held between the 14 and 20 of August, being the most remarkable events their starting ceremony, the drum performance, the running of the bulls and young bulls, the autochthonous dances and the fairs.

The church of Saint Mary is located in the historical part of town. Its ground plan is a hall with three naves and a flat sanctuary. The naves are equally high and separated by columns covered with renaissance vaults, built by Juan Martínez de Arrona in the 16th century. The cloister has a quadrangular plan with four spans, covered by Gothic ribbed vaults. Inside there is the noteworthy *Santa María la Real* altar table, a work done by Pedro de Alotis, in the 16th c. On the outside its tower stands out at the feet of the church.

You will head on to **Mutriku**, the old part of this town, was founded in 1209, is shaped by narrow cobble streets where to find numerous

palaces, towers and lordly houses with their blazons. The **Galdona Palace**, for instance, is a construction with 18th c. ashlar façades. The **Parrish church of Our Lady of the Assumption** is another of the emblematic buildings in the area, since it is one of the most representative examples of neoclassical architecture in Gipuzkoa.

Following the coastline from Mutriku you will reach **Lekeitio**. At an end of the Bay of Biscay, Lekeitio boasts important Gothic gems, with a seashore hamlet and large beaches. Lekeitio is located at the mouth of the *Lea* River. Two wonderful beaches look onto the isle of *San Nicolás*, accessible on foot during low tide. On the Bay of Biscay's shore there is a popular hamlet with strong seafaring roots, a token of its origin: fishing activities.

Next to this traditional Basque architecture some gothic jewels emerge, such as the **Basilica of the Assumption of Saint Mary of Lekeitio**. It is one of the most remarkable gothic buildings in Bizkaia, particularly for the external elements: buttresses, flying buttresses, pinnacles, etc. It has three naves with four spans each, in a polygonal apse. The spans are covered by ribbed vaults in the side naves and a groined vault in the central one. Later, an apse aisle and chapels were added.

Seen from the outside it has a step-like shape due to the fact that the central nave is higher than the side naves. The main gate is placed at the feet of the church while the gate's decoration is organised in two sections. The main altar piece is one of the high exponents of the **Hispano-Flemish sculpture in the Iberian Peninsula**. The flying buttresses host a beautiful Flemish altar table, representing Mary's life and the Passion of Christ. Some elegant manor houses of the ancient Basque aristocracy were erected around the temple.

From the coast you will head to the inland, specifically to the capital of Bizkaia, which is the big city of **Bilbao**.

Accommodation, dinner and overnight at the hotel.

Hotels: Hotel Gran Bilbao, Hotel Hesperia Bilbao, Hotel Melia Bilbao, Hotel Carlton

Day 8) BILBAO - 32 miles

Breakfast and tour of the city with its outskirts. This Basque destination could also be named "**the city of the Guggenheim foundation**", given that ever

since this original museum was erected in 1997, Bilbao was transformed forever. In fact, it nowadays has a great impact on visitors for its breaking structures created by prestigious architects, becoming an international paradigm of modernity. Since its grand opening in 1997, both the Guggenheim foundation and the Puppy -a floral sculpture of a dog by Jeff Koons placed outdoors next to the building- have turned into the most international symbol of Bilbao. As part of the collection there are works of great figures in the artistic world: David Salle, Chillida, Jeff Koons, Louis Bourgeois and Robert Rauschenberg among some examples. The Guggenheim Foundation offers also a wide range of activities for all those visitors who wish to broaden up their artistic knowledge.

Although, curiously, what gives it its unique character is the combination of an avant-garde look with the traditional flare of its old core, filled with charming streets and bars with counters crammed full of *pintxos*, which shows that gastronomy is lived here with passion. All of this has earned for Bilbao a place of honour on the list of Spain's most interesting cities.

The tour of the city is a stroll full of contrasts, starting with the **Guggenheim Bilbao Museum**. It is one of the most surprising examples of the 20th c. architecture, since Frank Gehry used 33,000 very thin titanium plates to create his curious curved forms. In terms of its content, it shares with New York and Venice the world's most important modern and contemporary art private collection. Furthermore, Bilbao boasts another asset among the first class picture galleries in Spain: **the Fine Arts Museum**.

In addition to betting the city for a braking and imaginative image we must mention the **Euskalduna Palace**, the **subway stations by Norman Foster**, **the towers by Isozaki and Pelli**, the **Zubizuri bridge and the airport by Calatrava** or new cultural centres like the *Alhóndiga* by Philippe Starck, who adapted a former winery's storage house.

On the other hand, Bilbao cannot be conceived without its typical old part with over 7 centuries of history. It is a real treat to stroll through the area known as the "**Seven Streets**" while you find emblematic buildings such as the **Cathedral** or its most elegant theatre hall - inspired by the *Opera* in Paris- the **Arriaga theatre**, as well as stumbling into a mixture of shops and cafes, ranging from the most traditional to the coolest settings.

The **Saint Mary's basilica**, a temple mixing gothic and renaissance styles, overlooks the city from the Old Town. Next door there is the **Salazar's Tower**, built in 1379. The visitor will also be able to contemplate the convent of Saint Claire, with an outstanding renaissance-plateresque bell tower.

We need to mention two relevant points of this capital city: the Basque cuisine and the fact of being a green city.

The proof that in the Basque Country gastronomy is an art - it is one of the areas with more Michelin Stars per person worldwide - is the very city of Bilbao. Converted into an urban reference in the Old Part of Bilbao, the **Plaza Nueva** is one of the key spots in the city's social life. Under the arcade of this neoclassical monumental complex shops mix with bars, restaurants and cafes where one is almost obliged to stop and enjoy the square's bustling atmosphere.

Even more so if we add to all this the choice of visiting the **Market of the Ribera**, a wonderful building where **they can cook your own purchase** after doing the shopping **for lunch while the chef of the market will cook them in front of you. This will be your meal for lunch.** (In normal circumstances) you will be able **to buy the basic products** and to eat them to the rhythm of life music.

This particular supplying market is located in the middle of the Old Town - next to the Bilbao estuary - having a monumental, eclectic style with a clear functional character. Its inner structure is pillar free, with completely open spaces and where the lighting gains a special importance. The zenithal light coming from the roof crosses the floor, built with translucent materials, generating an overall natural brightness.

On the outside, the Ribera Market boasts a very varied Art Deco adornment, mixing stain glass and lattice windows with flowered decorative elements. It not only stands out for its nice stain glass colours, but also for the excellent offer of fish and sea food.

Besides the cultural and gastronomic assets of Bilbao it is also a green city with **parks** like that of **Doña Casilda de Iturrizar**, being surrounded by hills (maybe you fancy to ride the **Artxanda funicular**, a classical way to see Bilbao from the heights).

Its estuary is the other main paradigm of Bilbao's regeneration. In fact you will be able to see people practicing paddle surf, rowing in it or perhaps you will prefer to sail on board of a ship that will take you to the famous **Suspension Bridge of Portugalete** and the **Bizkaia Bridge**, very close to Bilbao, is the world's oldest transporter bridge put into operation in 1893 and at present is still in full activity: every year cross it almost six million travellers; both bridges were designated **World Heritage sites** by the **UNESCO**. The steep streets of Portugalete's Old Part are, together with the Bizkaia Bridge, one of the most interesting spots in town. A historical-artistic set of buildings that keeps its medieval essence.

The structure's measures are 45 meters high and 160 m. long, spanning the Nervión River and linking the towns of Portugalete and Getxo. It happens to be a revolutionary work, since it was the world's first transporter bridge allowing at

the same time the navigation through the river, thanks to a suspended nacelle that moves from one bank to the other. This technique was later used in many similar bridges in Europe, Africa and America.

In order to reach the right bank you will cross over the **Rontegui Bridge** while heading towards the town of **Getxo**, a nice and elegant village with magnificent palaces and villas, plus a 10 km long seashore of beaches and cliffs. This is where to find Algorta, possessing an old fishing port, modern water sports installations and beautiful little palaces next to the beach.

The Old port of Algorta is located at one end of the Ereaga beach, a perfect spot to practice water sports and well known for its great night life. The sailors quarter is made of narrow lanes and white washed façades displaying doors, windows and balconies painted with vivid colours. Countless pubs or *tabernas* offer “pintxos” (snacks) and other appetisers to take with the drinks. The **Mirador de Usategi** shows, as a belvedere, astonishing views over the El Abra estuary.

While returning from Algorta you will cross **Neguri**, undoubtedly the most exclusive district in Bilbao’s metropolitan area, ideal for folks with a very high purchasing power.

Back to the hotel, dinner and lodging.

Day 9) NORTH OF BILBAO - 62 miles

After breakfast following today’s itinerary you will head towards **Bermeo**, a seaboard town with a port that still keeps all the old charm of a typical fishermen’s village. You will visit a canned fish factory where you see the elaboration process of anchovies and tuna fish. (Depend the sanitary reasons and seasonal fishing period)

Since 1239, when it was founded as a small village, **Bermeo** has a rich history. As a token to its past there still are in its urban grid a whole series of monuments. These were declared spots of **Historical-Artistic interest**: the cloister of the **Saint Francis church**, built in 1357; the gothic tower, present site of the Fishermen’s Museum; the church of Saint Mary and that of *Santa Eufemia*, an “Oath” church, probably the oldest in Bermeo; the **Town Hall**, erected in 1732, adorned with two sundials on its façade and the *Casa Kinkubera*, classified under the “Basque rationalism”, with a shape recalling a ship.

Other sites that we should emphasise the **arch of San Juan, from the 14th c.**, and the Old Part of town, where the fishermen's houses with medieval reminiscences border on charming streets, squares and the old harbour.

Bermeo is located on the **coast of Bizkaia**, within the *Busturialdea* county. It makes up one of the main fishing ports in the historical territory. It is placed on the slope of Mount *Sollube*, while its shoreline presents abundant cliffs and rocky edges like that of **San Juan de Gaztelugatxe and the isles of Akatz and Izaro**. On its coastline there are several small inlets that form the **cape of Matxitxako**.

This Biscayan town has a **singular personality and charm**. Furthermore, it will offer you the chance of visiting its very **abundant cultural heritage**. You start with the monument by Nestor Basterretxea in homage to Benito Barrueta: if you glance at the landscape from the opening in the monument, you shall notice that the isle of Izaro matches in the hollow groove, making an excellent visual impact. From there you will reach the **Fishermen's museum**, hosted in the *Ercilla* Tower, visiting as well the gambling **casino in Bermeo**, with the looks of a French palace. Finally, you shall get to the beautiful gothic church of *Santa Eufemia*.

In the heart of Bermeo, in the very coast of Biscay, there exist spectacular spots that will seduce you easily. Amongst them all stand out the delightful **isle of Izaro**, the **Matxitxako cape** and the **Tala**, a magnificent copse on the upper part of town.

Likewise, **San Juan de Gaztegulatxe**, one of the most visited spots in the whole historical territory of Bizkaia, belongs to the municipal boundaries of Bermeo in spite of being 8 kilometres away from the urban centre. Its bustling street life and its excellent restaurants are two more good reasons to stopover in Bermeo.

Departing from Bermeo's port - a village with one of the largest fishing traditions in Euskadi - these routes show you each one of the charms of **Urdaibai Natural Park designated Reserve of the Biosphere by the UNESCO**.

An area with scattered villages of strong personality like Mundaka or Elantxobe, caressed by the sea in practically all its extension, this small rural entourage invites you to sail around the isle of Izaro or the *Ogoño* Cape, true jewels of nature. Other than contemplating very unique spots, these maritime itineraries allow us to enjoy watching birds of great beauty such as sea eagles or spoonbills. Birds that are hard to be spotted and, thanks to the large ecosystem existing in Urdaibai, can quite often be observed.

Lunch takes place in one of the selected restaurants in Bermeo

Therafter you head **Mundaka**, is a village with an uncertain origin. Legend has it that in the 10th century a ship arrived in Mundaka coming from Scotland in which was travelling an exile princess. The Scotts found a fountain which attracted their attention by the clarity of its water and called it “**munda aqua**”, meaning exactly that in latin: “crystalline water”. The legend goes on explaining that the princess had a son named **Jaun Zuria** who became the **first Lord of Biscay**. Although this story cannot be verified with certainty, what we can indeed certify is that Mundaka has played an important role in the Basque history and mythology.

At present, Mundaka is a small and charming village grown around the **fishing harbour**. The port is as well the most colourful corner in town and the meeting point where the locals from all ages meet and spend their time, be it next to the seashore, in the park, the *pelota* court or in some of the bars of the area.

On top you can enjoy the splendid views on the **Isle of Izaro**, the **Mount Ogoño** and the **estuary**, the most emblematic area in the **of Urdaibai Reserve**. This is an utterly beautiful and varied natural space, therefore declared **Reserve of the Biosphere** by the **UNESCO** in 1984. Its core is the Oka River, born in the Mount **Oiz** and transformed into an estuary when reaching Mundaka, creating some spectacular salty marshes busting with life. The **Reserves of the Biosphere** are spots that the **UNESCO** has distinguished within the **Programa MAB** (“Man and Biosphere”) in which to find the balance between humans and their entourage. These spaces are representative of a **valuable ecosystem**, but are **not protected natural spaces**, although part of their territory is indeed hosting spots that do have some protection charts. **Those territories are considered adequate for the conservation**, the scientific research and the implementation of sustainable development patterns in which the **local population is playing a key role**.

In Mundaka you will embark for a sail through the estuary and get until **Urdaibai, a reserve of the biosphere**. The itinerary on the boat lasts some two hours approximately. This outing is subject to the state of the sea, the wind and the rain.

The **Reserves of the Biosphere** must respect the **rules established by the UNESCO**, assume the guidelines determined in the Lima declaration **Declaración de Lima (2016-2025)** and comply with the requirements established by law Ley 42/2007, de 13 de diciembre, of the Natural Heritage

and the Biodiversity. This Law determines three basic requirements to be followed by a Reserve of the Biosphere.

Proceeding further south you will reach **Gernika Lumo**. This town lies in the Oka River Valley, shaping the Gernika estuary.

While in town, not to be missed are the visit to the **Lordship of Biscay's Casa de Juntas**, with its symbolic tree - Basques used to gather under it in order to decide on the community's interest-, the "Oath" church of Saint Mary, the **Euskal Herria Museum** and the **Park of the Peace**, with colossal sculptures by Eduardo Chillida and Henry Moore.

Gernika, one of the most charming towns in the Biscay area and the most meaningful historical spot in the Basque Country, accounting no more than some 16,000 inhabitants, it is a prosperous area in services, industry, culture and education.

During the Civil War the town was almost totally destroyed on 26th April 1937 by the German aviation sent by Hitler, to help General Franco during the Spanish Civil War, destroying most of the town. This experimental act - which inspired **Picasso for his famous painting Gernika**.

In 1987 was commemorated the 50 anniversary of the bombardment, during the Pre-congress of the World Association of Martyr Cities. Gernika was given the "**City symbol of Peace**" award, favouring twinings of towns and agreements on collaboration with other cities in fields such as culture, education and industry: Berga (Catalonia), Pforzheim (Germany) and Boise (Idaho - USA).

A symbol of liberty and peace and not to be missed, is the seat of the **Euskal Herria Museum**. This magnificent baroque palace, built in 1733, stands out for its ashlar façade, the balconies with railings and the Allende Salazar family's coat of arms. Furthermore, the palace boasts some splendid gardens: one in romantic French style, while the other is laid out in English style.

In the **Foundation of the Peace Museum**, located next to the City Hall, visitors will get to know this historical moment, while the **Euskal Herria Museum** provides detailed information on the Basque culture, its history and ethnology. The historical **Casa de las Juntas**, present seat of the **Asamblea General de Vizcaya**, is a real must, since this is where to find the **famous Guernica Tree**, symbol of the **Basque liberties**, where kings swore an oath respecting the ages old charts.

On the highest part of town stands Saint Mary's church, a gothic parish started in 1418. Nature lovers will enjoy the **Park of the European Folks**, where a large variety of tree kinds hosts sculptures by Basque artist Eduardo Chillida

and English artist Henry Moore. In the itinerary you cannot skip the **Convent of Saint Claire**, united by a semicircular arch to the ancient Lordship Hospital plus the **ceramic mural Gernika**, a **hand made reproduction of Picasso's masterpiece**.

At the end of this visit you will be back to the hotel. Dinner and overnight

Day 10) OTHER ACTIVITIES IN BILBAO - MUSEUMS

Breakfast in the hotel. Bilbao, as the largest city in the Basque Country, offers also other alternative ideas to spend a FREE day in an entertaining and different way. Being the last day of the trip, most clients feel like resting and having a free day for their personal activities.

In the cultural field we suggest visiting the **Fine Arts Museum**, with pieces from the 12th c. until the present day. Quite remarkable are the paintings by El Greco, Zurbarán, Ribera or Goya and among the foreign authors, Van Dyck, Jacob Jordaens, Domenico Piola, Gauguin, Paul Cézanne, Rembrandt and many others.

The water sports lovers can visit the **Maritime Museum**. The outer zone, some 20.000 m² big, hosts the ancient dry docks of the Euskalduna shipyards, where are sheltered the ships, the **Pumping Station** and the singular **Carola Krane**. Inside, the exhibit is articulated around three key subjects: "**The Estuary: a maritime port**", "**The Estuary: a market and a factory**" and "**The Estuary: a shipyard**". It displays different kinds of restored ships plus most modern and advanced technology such as simulators, while describing an itinerary through Bilbao's maritime history.

If you feel like shopping we suggest the **Old Part** of the city: it is a swarm of shops of all kinds. In this area concentrate from the fashion brands to the oldest shops in town or those with the longest tradition. Here you can find fashion boutiques, accessories, shoes, handicrafts, etc. The **Enlargement** area hosts the largest and most elegant shops in town. In the triangle framed by the **Gran Vía avenue, the Marqués del Puerto and Rodríguez Arias** streets lies what has been nicknamed the 'the Gold Mile' since this is where the most exclusive brands are located. The **Indautxu** area, especially the *Ercilla* street and surroundings, has stores where to make all kind of purchases: fashion clothes, opticians, shoes, accessories, jewelleries, household, etc.

Once in the **Gran Vía**, one feels since the very first moment to be strolling through one of the areas with the highest purchasing power: the streets are treelined, buildings are lordly and date from the 19th century. Here are

concentrated **the most exclusive luxury shops**. There is no shortage of bars and restaurants either, for you will find all kind of them, from the very traditional to the most modern ones.

Lunch will happen at a restaurant of the clients' choice and at their expense.

This area characterise also for being the city's financial heart and therefore it should surprise no one to see business people continuously walking along this street, which belongs to **Bilbao's Enlargement: here are also abundant the souvenir and handicraft shops**.

Going further south you will reach Indautxu, another comercial part of the city. **Ercilla street**, particularly, is a very pleasant pedestrian area where to stroll and go into its shops: here you will find clothing stores, household and shoe shops... Although it is undoubtedly the best spot for a break. On top of its restaurants and bars, this area has numerous **confectioners' shops** where they make the **traditional local pastries**: butter rolls, *Carolinas*, rice cakes... It might as well be a good souvenir to take back home.

Once in **Plaza de Don Federico Moy**, please head to **Marqués del Puerto** street to resume with the shopping day. In this part of the enlargement can be found the best boutiques for cloths of the most exclusive brands. **Cross the Rodríguez Arias** street, where to put an end to your shopping route through Bilbao's heart and Enlargement.

The Basque Country is undoubtedly known internationally for the walled courts where the **Basque pelota** is played in its diverse modalities: hand-pelota, *cesta punta* (basket), *pala corta* (short bat) and *pala larga* (long bat). Betting on the winners is one of the interesting parts of attending those performances.

At a previously given time, meeting in the hotel reception in order to head to the excellent restaurant where the farewell dinner will be celebrated. And possibly have a toast with the new friends made during the trip.

Back to the hotel and lodging

Day 11) BILBAO DEPARTURE - 19 miles

After breakfast, time at leisure or transfer to the airport depending on your flight schedule: check-in at your air carrier desk to obtain the boarding card. You will thereafter proceeds to security control and boarding towards your next destination through the corresponding gate.

Disclaimer Responsibility:

This program-itinerary has been conceived for your own enjoyment, but we reserve the right to modify it due to force majeure, other unforeseeable circumstances or in order to improve the itinerary. Some activities are subject to the weather conditions. All visits and activities depend on the prevailing opening timetables at the moment of the trip whether they don't have advise us in advance of any change.

If for any reason of force majeure or for an unforeseen cause some of the visits or activities could not take place, we will then offer an alternative choice whenever possible.

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