

San Sebastián, Bilbao & Pyrénées

Basque Country Cultural Walking Adventure



Classic
JOURNEYS



“Classic Journeys provides unbeatable access to experiences around the globe.”

— *Travel + Leisure*

Perched Villages, Sandy Beaches & Guggenheim

A museum sheathed in titanium. Wild horses that eat baguettes. Villages with names in three languages—Basque, French and Spanish. Every time we venture onto the gentle western slopes of the Pyrénées on our tours of Spain and France, the richness of Europe's oldest culture surprises us again. Farmers on tractors yield the right of way to fierce but friendly pelota games in village squares. Garlands of brilliant red pimientos dry in the sunlight...then show up on a dinner plate stuffed with seafood. This region may well have more festival and market days per person than anywhere else in Europe, and we're always happy to change plans and join in. As this Classic Journey moves between France and Spain, we go from the scenic green meadows of the Jaizquibel to medieval market towns to the dramatic Guggenheim museum you've heard so much about. The Basques have a deep affection for Americans and you'll experience it time and again as you go exploring with our local Basque guide.

DAY 1

SAINT-JEAN-DE-LUZ

- Enjoy an afternoon exploration around the charming coastal village of Saint-Jean-de-Luz
- Savor a festive welcome dinner

Just twelve miles south of glamorous Biarritz, Saint Jean is one of the most attractive towns on the Basque coast. It is also an active fishing port, noted for its tuna, sardines and anchovies. Most guests fly into Paris and take the TGV high speed train that runs directly to Saint-Jean-de-Luz. We meet here at our hotel and take an afternoon walk around the town.

In Saint Jean, our walk takes us past the homes of the old quarter, including Maison Louis XIV. This was the temporary residence of the Sun King in 1660, when he came to Saint Jean for his marriage to Maria Theresa, the Infanta Castile. Saint Jean Baptiste, the nearby church where Maria Theresa and the king were married, is the largest French Basque church, with huge oak galleries reached by wrought iron staircases.

Overnight: Saint-Jean-de-Luz

Meals: D

DAY 2

SAINT-JEAN-PIED-DE-PORT / OSSES

- Mingle with locals on market day
- Join a morning countryside walk that precedes an afternoon game of pelota

After breakfast, we leave Saint Jean and travel east into the heart of Basque country, stopping to visit several very typical small Basque villages, like Sare and Ainhoa. The ancient pilgrim routes to Santiago de Compostela all converged on Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port...and we visit this town with its singing church bells, too. We time our visit for market day, when it's a real treat to mingle with the vendors, selling everything from beautiful crafts to local produce. In the Middle Ages, caravans of travelers would descend on Saint Jean, singing in reply to the church bells that would ring whenever a group was spotted on the horizon. After lunch in the walled fortified town with its old quarter enveloped in pink sandstone walls, we walk along the ramparts.

Later in the afternoon, our hosts arrange a game of pelota (similar to jai alai) for us with some of the locals. Rural sports play a large role in Basque life and it's been said that the Basques will bet on anything that has a number and moves. Even poetry and gastronomy become contests, as amateur poets improvise duels, and men-only sociedades gastronómicas compete in cooking contests to see who can make the best marmitako (tuna stew)! Pelota is the most widely known Basque sport and is played in a three-walled court in every little town, with one of the walls often part of the church. Basque farmers, shepherds, even the local priests are drawn to the contests and place bets on the action—something forbidden elsewhere in France.

This evening, we settle in for the first of two nights in Bidarray.

Overnight: Bidarray

Meals: B, D

DAY 3

BIDARRAY

- Sample local cheeses and wines at tastings separated by a vineyard walk

On our morning walk through the countryside, we visit a local farmer and are invited to see how he makes sheep's milk cheese, followed by a tasting. We continue on foot across picturesque vineyards, breaking for a picnic of local specialties and wines.

In the afternoon, we visit one of the vineyards for a tasting of Basque wines before returning to Bidarray.

Overnight: Bidarray

Meals: B, D

DAY 4

USTARITZ / BAYONNE

- Morning riverbank walk in an area rich in wildlife
- Cross the border into Spain

A beautiful walk this morning leads us from Ustaritz, the first capital of the province, to Bayonne. During our walk along an historic towpath, we will view the magnificent wildlife and farmland of the riverbank area. As we approach Bayonne, we have

the opportunity to explore the towers of a 13th century Gothic church. Our walk culminates in the medieval city of Bayonne, with lovely houses boasting bright blue, red and green shutters.

We'll enjoy lunch in Bayonne. After finishing our walk in the mid-afternoon, we leave the Lower Navarra for the Guipuzcoa and three nights in San Sebastián.

On our way to San Sebastián, we see how Basques have lived for centuries and how many still live in isolated homesteads of fewer than 30 people. Many Basques living along the coast became expert shipbuilders and seafarers. As early as the 14th and 15th centuries, Basques were venturing as far as Greenland and Newfoundland on whaling and fishing expeditions. This, along with their seafaring nature and their desire to avoid central control, meant that they lived in freedom while many of their European brethren lived in serfdom. By the 15th century, these individual freedoms were enshrined in *fueros*, a body of ancient laws and privileges that were protected until well into the 19th century.

Tonight, our guide leads us on a walk into town for dinner.

Overnight: San Sebastián

Meals: B, D

DAY 5

SAN SEBASTIAN

- Explore San Sebastian and walk along Concha Bay
- Enjoy a tapas lunch

Our last three nights we are guests at one of the best hotels in the center of the seaside town of San Sebastián. Originally erected in 1865, Hotel de Londres accommodated Queen Isabella II during her exile and shortly thereafter transformed into a palace-hotel. It has since gained fame for its Casino and magnificent location on the scallop-shaped La Concha bay. During our stay we relax in the hotel's luxury, perhaps linger on the terrace overlooking the bay, and use it as a base for our last three days exploring the Spanish coast.

Mid-morning, we explore town, learning about its mix of architectural styles. San Sebastián is in many ways more French than Spanish; or at least the most French of Spanish cities. Its shops serve excellent croissants, it was the only city in Spain without a bullring for many years, and its climate is more Atlantic than Mediterranean. Three mountains, Mt. Urgull, Mt. Igeldo and Mt. Ulia rise on either side of town and protect it from all northerly winds, making it very temperate. We walk along the beautiful Concha Bay, stopping in the old part of town for a lunch of tapas, or pintxos as they're called in Basque. Continuing on to the top of Monte Igeldo, we enjoy the most spectacular views of the town and the sea. You can enjoy some time on your own or with our guide exploring the town this afternoon.

Overnight: San Sebastián

Meals: B

DAY 6

SAN SEBASTIÁN / JAIZKIBEL

- Follow scenic footpaths that overlook Spain and France
- Explore the cobblestone streets of Hondarribia

A Spanish saying has it that "in the summer, the rich go south and the wise go north." The northern coast offers intensely green rolling hills, lush valleys and meadows, wave battered cliffs and isolated sandy stretches of remote, beautiful beaches. This morning, you can choose to relax at the hotel, go for a swim – enjoy some time on your own or with our guide.

After lunch, we walk in the hills above and around San Sebastián, with beautiful views of the river on the Spanish side of the border and the French Basque countryside on the other. Our afternoon walk starts mid-range to the top of Jaizkibel. We will then have a guided exploration of Hondarribia, including the old town with its cobblestone streets, charming houses and fishing port. Our last evening together, we enjoy a special degustation dinner as we get to sample a variety of the chef's signature dishes.

Overnight: San Sebastián

Meals: B, D

DAY 7

BILBAO

- Marvel at the futuristic and fanciful architecture of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao

DAILY ITINERARY

Basque Country: San Sebastián, Bilbao & Pyrénées | Cultural Walking Adventure

• Part company in Bilbao

This morning, we venture along the northern coast of Spain to Bilbao to see one of Europe's greatest new architectural treasures. The Guggenheim—a museum that many say is so spectacular you can visit it for the architecture alone—is the highlight of our final day together. Opened in 1997, it was designed by noted California architect Frank O. Gehry using cutting edge computer technology to wed architectural tradition with futuristic fancy. Of course, the museum is not the only reason to visit Bilbao. As the capital of the Basque region, it has a fascinating old quarter and some of the best food in Spain.

We part company in Bilbao in the early afternoon. Here, you may catch a train to Madrid, or if you prefer, you can continue with our guide and van to Biarritz for trains to Paris. Biarritz is a lovely seaside town that became popular in the mid 19th century when the Spanish born Empress Eugénie—wife of Napoléon III whom she met here—brought the entire royal court of the Second Empire to what had been her favorite childhood seaside town.

Meals: B



Tour Hotels



Madison Saint Jean de Luz

Located in the heart of Saint-Jean-de-Luz, just a few steps from the beach, the historic hotel offers elegant modern rooms combined with traditional Basque charm.

OVERNIGHT: Saint-Jean-de-Luz | **NIGHTS:** 1



Ostape

A cluster of Basque-style farmhouses on a hilly estate, this unique property in the Navarre region offers the comforts of a 5-star hotel. Each suite blends classic and contemporary design. The heated outdoor pool overlooks pastures dotted with sheep.

OVERNIGHT: Bidarray | **NIGHTS:** 2



Hotel De Londres Y De Inglaterra

With its location on La Concha Bay, this grand beachfront hotel is the perfect spot to enjoy vibrant San Sebastián. Built in 1865 and lovingly renovated, the rooms blend romantic touches with modern amenities and have views of the wide beach and the sea.

OVERNIGHT: San Sebastián | **NIGHTS:** 3

Tour Dates & Prices

To see the full list of dates and prices for this tour, go to our website by clicking [here](#).

Want to travel with just your group on a date of your choosing? Visit [CLASSICJOURNEYS.COM/PRIVATE](https://www.classicjourneys.com/private) to learn more about Private Journeys.

Trip Essentials

TRIP LENGTH	7 Days, 6 Nights
START	Lobby of Hotel Madison , Saint Jean-de-Luz, France
END	Downtown , Bilbao, Spain
TERRAIN	Easy to moderate on good trails. At your option, up to 2 to 4 hours of walking per day, always with van support.

What's Included

- All breakfasts and 5 dinners
- Full-time experienced guide(s) who are with you throughout the trip and handle behind-the-scenes logistics
- Admissions to tastings, historic sites and other scheduled events as noted in the detailed daily itinerary
- Gratuities for hotels, meals, and baggage
- All land transportation during the trip

Above & Beyond Benefits

- Invisible Check-In
- Wine on Us
- Perfect Pairings Dinners
- Privileged Access Events

READY TO BOOK?
CLICK TO MAKE A RESERVATION

Or give us a call

1-800-200-3887

Mon-Fri 8:00AM – 5:00PM PST

moreinfo@classicjourneys.com

AMBASSADOR CLUB

As a Classic Journeys guest, you are invited to join the Ambassador Club after your first Classic Journeys tour. As a member, you'll have access to [a whole suite of Ambassador benefits](#) you can use immediately and as often as you like.

ENJOY THE UNEXPECTED

When you travel with Classic Journeys, you can expect handcrafted surprises built into every trip, but some things just can't be anticipated. Unusual weather, a once-a-year festival or an unscheduled site closing will inspire us and your local guide to improvise and modify this itinerary. Likewise, the hotels named here are used on the majority of our trips, but occasionally one of them can't accommodate us. If that happens, you can count on us to let you know before departure and make sure you're in a hotel of equal or better quality. It's our goal to make your trip exceptional!

**Any discount offered cannot be combined with other offers, and only applies to published (regularly scheduled public) departure dates in our catalogs or on our website.

THE Classic Journeys Difference



HANDCRAFTING TRIPS OF A LIFETIME.

At the end of the day, we fundamentally believe that every guest on every departure of every trip should have a trip of a lifetime. We're fortunate to play the role of well-connected friend, linking our guests with amazing guides, artisans, winemakers, hoteliers, restaurateurs, naturalists, and too many others to list here.

That's what motivates me and our team — in our La Jolla HQ and around the world — every day. Join Us!

President & Founder



You can expect the highest standards:



Luxurious Lodgings:

Ours include coveted properties that appear in "World's Best" and "Gold List" rankings.



Included Activities:

You'll never be surprised with add-on fees on your activities that include snorkeling to cooking lessons.



Local Guides:

Your guides are locals who are always at your side like well-connected friends.



Small Group Travel:

With an average of just 10-12 guests, it's a small footprint that guarantees you access that's off-limits to larger groups.



Amazing Cuisine:

From Michelin-starred restaurants to lunch in a farmhouse kitchen, you'll have a seat for the region's signature dishes.



Unmatched Value:

"Excellent value" and "unbeatable access" are two of the reasons that Travel + Leisure has consistently voted us a World's Best Tour Operator.

You'll enjoy these handcrafted travel experiences in Basque Country...

- Strolling in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, a French fishing village
- Visiting a farmer to see how he makes sheep's cheese
- Walking along the beautiful Concha Bay
- Luxuriating in perfectly-sited accommodations, including your luxury seaside Belle Epoque hotel
- Exploring Bilbao's acclaimed Guggenheim museum on a personally guided visit

"In every town, nestled in the cradle of a mountain, the fire engine red shutters spilled over with flowers. There are no exceptions. The other surprise was the highly sophisticated coastal cities of San Sebastian and Biarritz. We were delighted with this trip and Classic Journeys."

-Bob and Mary O., Alexandria, VA.