

CULTURAL WALKING ADVENTURE

Basque

San Sebastian, Bilbao & Pyrenees



CLASSIC JOURNEYS
THE WORLD'S FINEST WALKING TOURS



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

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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, 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. Experience France and Spain, going from the scenic green meadows of the Jaizquibel to medieval market towns to the dramatic Guggenheim museum you've heard so much about, exploring on foot with our local Basque guide.

The Classic Journeys Difference

- ACTIVE HIKING & WALKING
- LOCAL WELL-CONNECTED GUIDES
- PREMIERE HOTELS
- FOODIE FOCUSED
- HANDCRAFTED TRIP DESIGN
- MORE IS INCLUDED

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

When your group arrives, we whisk you and your bags to your room immediately. No waiting – no tipping.

→ WINE ON US

In many regions, we uncork wonderful local wines at every dinner, compliments of Classic Journeys.

→ PERFECT PAIRINGS DINNERS

A special dinner prepared by one of our favorite chefs with a procession of wines tailored to each course.

→ PRIVILEGED ACCESS EVENTS

One-of-a-kind access to remarkable people, places and activities arranged just for you.

Terrain

Easy to moderate on good trails. At your option, up to 2 to 4 hours of walking per day, always with van support.

CLASSIC JOURNEYS ITINERARIES MAY BE SUBJECT TO SLIGHT CHANGES, HOTEL SUBSTITUTIONS, AND OTHER MODIFICATIONS.

DAY 1 »

Saint-Jean-de-Luz

Just twelve miles south of glamorous Biarritz, Saint Jean is one of the most picturesque towns on the Basque coast. It is also an active fishing port at the mouth of the Nivelle River, known for its tuna, sardines and anchovies. Fishing vessels and sailboats of all sizes float along the harbor. Continue your walk through the quaint town along cobbled paths, through public squares and into lively markets filled with freshly caught seafood.

Stroll 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.

MEALS: D OVERNIGHT: SAINT-JEAN-DE-LUZ

DAY 2 »

Espelette / Saint-Jean-Pied-De-Port

After breakfast, you'll travel east into the heart of Basque country, stopping to visit the charming village of Espelette. Known for its famous red peppers, which are often highlighted in Basque cuisine, you'll notice them hanging from windows to dry and featured in local shops and restaurants. Sample them before heading to where the ancient pilgrim routes to Santiago de Compostela all converged on Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port to visit this town with its singing church bells, too. 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, you'll enjoy a walk along the ramparts.

Later in the afternoon, your guide has arranged a game of pelota (similar to jai alai) 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.

MEALS: B, D OVERNIGHT: BIDARRAY

DAY 3 »

Bidarray

Fortified from breakfast, you'll be ready for this morning's walk through the countryside in picturesque Nive Valley. As you take in the panoramic views of the green rolling hills, you'll get the opportunity to visit a local farmer, and you are invited to see how he makes sheep's milk cheese. This includes the famed Basque cheese "Ossau Iraty", which you can sample during a tasting. You'll continue on foot across picturesque vineyards, working up an appetite for an alfresco picnic of local delicacies hand-selected by your guide.

In the afternoon, you'll visit a winery run by two local sisters who will tell you about Irouleguy wines. Named after a nearby village, these are the only wines with AOC certification in the Northern Basque Country. Given that recognition, these flavorful wines are often referred to as coming from "the smallest vineyard in France." Sip your way through a delightful tasting of Basque wines before returning to Bidarray for the evening.

MEALS: B, D

OVERNIGHT: BIDARRAY

DAY 4 »

Ustaritz / Bayonne

A beautiful walk this morning will lead you from Ustaritz, the first capital of the province, to Bayonne. During your walk along an historic towpath, you'll view the magnificent wildlife and farmland of the riverbank area. Approaching Bayonne, you'll have the opportunity to explore the towers of a 13th-century Gothic church. Your walk culminates in the medieval city of Bayonne, nestled in the foothills of the Pyrenees, with lunch overlooking the lovely houses boasting bright blue, red and green shutters.

En route to San Sebastián, you'll 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, and 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, your guide will lead you on a walk into town for dinner. Along the way, they'll share stories, historical insights, and fascinating facts about this unique region.

MEALS: B, D

OVERNIGHT: SAN SEBASTIÁN

DAY 5 »

San Sebastian

San Sebastián is in many ways more French than Spanish; or at least the most French of Spanish cities. With its mix of architectural styles, and its shops that serve excellent croissants, it was the only city in Spain without a bullring for many years. Its climate is more Atlantic than Mediterranean. Three mountains, Mt. Urgull, Mt. Igeldo and Mt. Ulia rise on either side of town to protect it from all northerly winds, making it very temperate. Enjoy a 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, marvel at the most spectacular views of the town and the sea below. With panoramic views of the Bay of Biscay, it's easy to see why this charming coastal town continues to draw visitors to its famed beaches, bayfront promenade and historic old town. After returning to the hotel, you can enjoy some downtime or set out to explore on your own before dinner.

MEALS: B

OVERNIGHT: SAN SEBASTIÁN

DAY 6 »

San Sebastián / Jaizkibel

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 your guide.

Mid-afternoon, you'll head north along the coast to 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. Starting mid-range to the top of Jaizkibel, you'll then have a guided exploration of Hondarribia, including the old town with its cobblestone streets, charming houses and lively fishing port.

This evening, enjoy a special degustation dinner as you get to sample a variety of the chef's signature dishes. You could give an appreciative toast by saying "on egin" (enjoy your meal) before indulging in your first delicious bite.

MEALS: B, D

OVERNIGHT: SAN SEBASTIÁN

DAY 7 »

Bilbao

This morning, you'll 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 your day in Bilbao. 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.

MEALS: B

Tour Hotels



[Madison Hotel](#)

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.

NIGHTS: 1 nights



[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.

NIGHTS: 2 nights



[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.

NIGHTS: 3 nights

Arrival & Departure

→ ARRIVAL DETAILS

START LOCATION: **Lobby of Hotel Madison**
START CITY: **Saint Jean-de-Luz**
START TIME: **3:00 PM**

→ DEPARTURE DETAILS

END LOCATION: **Downtown city center**
END CITY: **Bilbao**
END TIME: **1:00 PM**