

CULTURE + WALKING

# BASQUE COUNTRY

San Sebastián, Bilbao & Pyrénées



*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, 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

## DAILY ITINERARY

### BASQUE COUNTRY | SAN SEBASTIÁN, BILBAO & PYRÉNÉES | CULTURE + WALKING

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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

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### 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

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### BILBAO

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

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## 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.

**OVERNIGHT: | 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

Tour Dates	Price per Person	
	Double Occupancy	Single Occupancy
May 10-16, 2020	\$4,895	\$5,690
June 14-20, 2020	\$5,095	\$5,890
September 6-12, 2020	\$5,095	\$5,890
October 11-17, 2020	\$5,095	\$5,890
May 9-15, 2021	\$4,995	\$5,790
June 13-19, 2021	\$5,195	\$5,990
September 5-11, 2021	\$5,195	\$5,990
October 10-16, 2021	\$5,195	\$5,990

Want a different date? Or your own date? Visit [CLASSICJOURNEYS.COM/PRIVATE](https://CLASSICJOURNEYS.COM/PRIVATE) to learn more about private journeys.

## Trip Essentials

**TRIP LENGTH:** 7 Days, 6 Nights

**START:** 3:30 PM Lobby of hotel, Saint Jean-de-Luz, France

**END:** 1:00 PM Bilbao, Bilbao, Spain Optional transfer to Biarritz, France with arrival at approximately 4:00 PM.

**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

- Memorable accommodations for 6 nights
- 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

1-833-387-1210

Mon-Fri 8:00AM – 5:00PM PST

[moreinfo@classicjourneys.com](mailto:moreinfo@classicjourneys.com)



## TRAVEL WORRY-FREE!

It's easy with insurance from Travel Guard. Your policy can cover trip cancellation, travel delays, lost luggage, medical emergencies, and more. If you are traveling with kids, add them to your policy at no extra cost. [Click here](#) or call 800-826-4919 for details.

## 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 the Basque Pyrenées...

- 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

*"I enjoyed the other travelers. I also liked that even though we did lots of things, I did not feel rushed or like we were on a schedule that was too tight. It was wonderful to have everything handled for me!"*

—Jane W., Durham, NC

Let's Go!

TO RESERVE: 833.493.5038 | CLASSICJOURNEYS.COM/RESERVATIONS

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## Spain

### Barcelona to Costa Brava

Culture + Walking

#### PICTURE YOURSELF...

- Following scenic footpaths to medieval villages
- Learning time-honored techniques from master potters
- Walking craggy coves and beautiful beaches

For more information, visit <https://www.classicjourneys.com/barcelona/>.



## Loire & Burgundy

### Dijon, Chenonceaux & Châteaux

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- Following riverside footpaths to stunning chateaux

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- Crossing a tidal estuary to an island fortress

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#### Culture + Walking

##### PICTURE YOURSELF...

- Rambling the winding streets of whitewashed villages
- Strolling through olive groves to a private tasting
- Exploring a palatial "paradise on Earth"

For more information, visit <https://www.classicjourneys.com/southernspain/>.

# “Enthusiasm is Contagious”

AS TRAVEL + LEISURE NAMES CLASSIC JOURNEYS THE WORLD'S BEST TOUR OPERATOR FOR 2019, FOUNDER EDWARD PIEGZA REVEALS HOW IT FEELS. ENTHUSIASTICALLY.



*EDITOR'S NOTE: Just before publication of this issue, Travel + Leisure magazine announced that its readers have voted Classic Journeys the World's Best Tour Operator for 2019. It's the second time Classic Journeys has won that recognition and the 14th consecutive year the company has been in the Top 10.*

### **Congratulations! How did you get the news?**

I received a top-secret email and phone call from the editor of *Travel + Leisure* a few weeks ago with orders not to tell ANYONE. Friends and neighbors must have wondered why my smile has been so extra big lately. Now they know.

### **And how does it feel to be the World's Best Tour Operator again?**

Awesome. Humbling. So, so satisfying. Deeply gratifying to learn that we have achieved what we set out to do which is to handcraft trips of a lifetime for every guest who travels with us. I'm known as long-winded, so I could probably come up with 10 or 15 more ways to describe it if you want me to keep going.

### **Why do you think *Travel + Leisure* gave you this recognition?**

Actually, it isn't the *T+L* editors who make the decision. That's the best part. Their readers cast the votes. So the people who do the traveling, the guests who explore the world with us and our competitors — they are the ones who raised their hands to tell *T+L* that Classic Journeys is the World's Best Tour Operator based on their own experiences. Let me say it right here: "To all of you who voted for us, you are the World's Best Guests!"

### **What do you think makes your guests the World's Best Guests?**

That's easy. They are curious. They care about connecting with people of different cultures and immersing themselves in the world. They treasure experiences more than things. Like the old ad slogan went, they go for the gusto and crave the chance to have one-of-a-kind moments. They are incredibly interesting and interested people, and all of us at Classic Journeys count it as a real privilege to share in their passion for travel. And we feel that way on the

other 364 days of the year when we're not celebrating recognition like this.

### **I guess this is what you meant when you told me that "Enthusiasm is contagious."**

Absolutely. That's not our official motto, but it could be. We love what we do. We enjoy helping guests figure out how to invest their precious time and budget. I can honestly say that all of us feel that way — the Guest Services folks who interact with you while you're planning your trip, the Tour Operations team members who plan all of the logistics, the local guides who lead each one of our trips full time. There's just a huge amount of positive energy in what we do, and I think it truly is hard to resist. We'd climb into every one of our guest's suitcases and go along with them if we could. Because we can't, we call each guest while they're on tour just to be sure they are having a trip of a lifetime.

### **Has anyone ever called Classic Journeys obsessive?**

I hope so, because we are. Everything is in the details. For instance, we've created a special tour for the total eclipse of the sun which is going to pass over parts of South America in 2020. We've already analyzed likely traffic patterns in the most remote areas and figured out how to structure our itinerary so that our guests will be in place in the path of totality while the people who don't plan ahead will be stuck in jams on remote dirt roads. We enjoy obsessing about details like that so that our guests never have to.



### **How can you top this?**

Oh, we never let ourselves think of it that way. We just continue to approach every single guest on each and every departure like the most important guest we've ever had. It seems to be working! Of course, we keep looking for new ways to win more converts. For 2019, we've launched a new series of Classic Journeys that are based from

## **"I voted for you!"**

We've heard that expression so many times lately from guests who registered their votes with *Travel + Leisure*. Given the results, we know it's true ... and you know that your votes really count!

### **STAFF AND GUIDES**

"I always feel like I'm traveling with a best friend. I prefer your local guides to the ones that other companies fly in."

### **ITINERARIES AND DESTINATIONS**

"If it's on my bucket list, you always seem to go there. Of course, with so many options you always seem to make my list longer and longer!"

### **ACTIVITIES**

"On your trips, I've cooked with Michelin chefs, sung songs with Quechua schoolchildren, and walked on glaciers with the descendants of Vikings. Fun doesn't begin to describe it."

### **ACCOMMODATIONS**

"How you manage so many 5-star properties on these trips shocks me. But please, please, please keep it up!"

### **FOOD**

"I have never eaten so well so often so happily. When you people claim that you are foodies, you aren't kidding."

### **OVERALL VALUE**

"We have never had a better vacation at any price."

river cruise boats. On a different note, seeing how many travelers can't always find as much vacation time as they really want, we have developed a series of 6-day or shorter quick trips that go as far afield as Iceland, the Galápagos and Morocco.

### **Final thoughts?**

It's always an honor to win recognition. But, for all of us at Classic Journeys, the biggest privilege is to share the dreams of our guests and make those dreams come true. That connection is the best feeling of all.