

Excursion 1: DONOSTIA – SAN SEBASTIÁN

Outside the three-month summer period (from 15th June to 15th September) you may park your car at **Ondarreta** beach without paying. To park your car in the centre of the district we recommend the underground car park for its convenience. You can start your excursion in Ondarreta, at the end of which is located Eduardo Chillida's sculpture the "**Wind Comb**". In that spot you will be well-placed to ride the funicular railway up and down **Mount Igeldo** and take in the breathtaking view of the city from the panoramic viewing-point.

Next you have the choice of going through the headland via La Concha tunnel, or over it. The top of the headland is the magnificent setting of Miramar Palace and gardens. It's the perfect site from which to look out over the beautiful beaches on either side. At the end of La Concha Promenade, after going through **Alberdi-Eder** Gardens, you'll come to the San Sebastián City Hall (a former casino) and the Boulevard which, together with the María Cristina Hotel and the Victoria Eugenia Theatre, date from the Romantic period during which the city was built. You're now in the city centre, and you can cross the River **Urumea** by any of the three bridges and carry on walking along the Paseo de Francia or the **Zurriola** beach promenade.

The city's most attractive pedestrianized area is around the *Plaza de la Constitución* square in Donostia's Old Town, at the foot of Mount Urgull and alongside the small fishing harbour (**Naval Museum** and the **Aquarium**). This area has the highest concentration of restaurants, bars, small shops and historical monuments (The **St. Telmo Museum**, **St. Vincent's Church** and the **Basilica of the Virgin of the Choir**) which, without a doubt, are a satisfying alternative tourism experience with something for everyone. It's worth taking the time to go up **Mount Urgull** by the circular paths that will take you all the way to the top, where you'll find the "Castle on the Motte" and inside it the San Sebastián **History Centre** – highly recommended.



Donostia-San Sebastián, besides being a centre for many prestigious chefs and restaurants offering the best of Basque cuisine, provides a complete all-year-round alternative cultural, sport and leisure experience, with

annual festivals and concerts that get bigger and better each year.

Excursion 2: THE FRENCH-BASQUE COAST

We head out of Donostia-San Sebastián on the A-8 motorway following signs for "Irun-Frantzia" (the border town of Irún, and France). Once across the border we'll go past the first town on the French side, Hendaia, then a small town called Urruña; then we'll come off the motorway at exit 2, signposted "San Juan de Luz Sur-Donibane Lohitzun". Three rivers flow into the sea in this lovely bay, larger than La Concha, hence there are three villages: **Donibane Lohitzun**, **Ziburu** and **Zokoa**. **Donibane Lohitzun** is a picturesque village with a special charm. It has a wealth of "local colour" which comes from its traditional Basque-style houses and narrow pedestrianized streets with neatly-kept shops selling a variety of goods, bars with terraces and the fishing harbour. A scenic coastal road runs along the beach all the way to Ziburu (*D912*), where the house in which the famous composer Maurice Ravel was born is situated.

We recommend that you stay on the road that runs along the beach until you come to Zokoa. Continue on the same road, which will take you over spectacular clifftops, until you come to **Hendaia**. As you come to the beach you'll pass the Château of Antoine d'Abbadie, a staunch defender of Basque culture and language. Hendaia has a vast open expanse of beach facing Hondarribia.

Cross over the River Bidasoa to reach **Hondarribia**, a walled border garrison town which is in itself a historical monument. The most interesting sights in the Old Quarter are the Parish Church; the Castle founded by the King of Navarre, which has been converted into a high-class state-operated tourist hotel; the Parade Ground; and the lovely cobbled streets, into which jut out façades with carved eaves, coats-of-arms and balconies with wrought iron railings. Down below, in the neighbourhood surrounding the harbour you can admire fishermen's cottages on which colour is used to great effect, and numerous restaurants and traditional bars with terraces serving *pintxos*.

We recommend you take the (*GI-3440*) road which goes up **Mount Jaizkibel**, so as to enjoy the panoramic coastal views. On your way down you can visit the **Shrine to the Virgin of Guadalupe** and, a short distance away, the **Fort of Guadalupe**. On Jaizkibel there are several trails you can walk, enjoying the natural surroundings and wonderful views. When you come down Jaizkibel you'll reach one of the only natural fjords on the Basque coast: **Pasaia**.



Excursion 3: BAYONNE - BIARRITZ

We head out of Donostia-San Sebastián on the A-8 motorway following signs for "Irun-Frantzia" (the border town of Irún, and France). Once across the border we'll pass the first town, Hendaia; and in the next small town, Urruña, we'll turn off for Azkaine. Between **Azkaine** and **Sara (D4)** is St. Ignatius' Hill and after that, the funicular railway station of the **Little Train of Larrun**, which runs from mid-March to early November. From its summit 905 metres above sea level, the Basque Country's Sacred Mountain, **Larrun**, offers one of the loveliest 360° views imaginable. As far as the eye can see, one can trace the summits of the Pyrenean chain and the Basque coastline, along the Atlantic ocean front from San Sebastián to Biarritz and the beaches of Les Landes.

Continuing, your journey will take you through the little town of Sara, where there are a variety of sights to see. Five and ten minutes respectively from Sara, you'll come to **Ainhoa**, **Ezpeleta** and **Kanbo** (*Arnaga Villa houses a Museum featuring Edmond Rostand, author of the play Cyrano de Bergerac*), all located in a delightful rural setting.

Having reached this point you have two different options: the first is to head for the towns of **Bayonne** and **Biarritz** along the D-932 road; and the other is to cross the lovely Navarrese Baztan Valley to **Elizondo** along the (*121-B*) road. Bayonne is the administrative capital of this area. Situated at the confluence of the Atturri (Adour) and Errobi (Nive) rivers, its mediaeval-style central streets are filled with attractive and varied shops. Its two most important museums are the **Basque Museum** and the **Bonnat Museum**. Head out of Bayonne on the (*N-10*) towards Biarritz. Biarritz, the star attraction of this coastline, has been regarded for many years as the "Queen of Beaches". The town still retains its beauty, classy air and good name. It's an Aladdin's cave for tourists, full of charming little spots and with plenty of sights to see.

The other option is to head for the **Baztan Valley** leading to **Elizondo** or take a shortcut via **Zugarramurdi** and **Etxalar**, **Donamaria**, **Doneztebe** to reach **Lesaka** and **Bera** along the (*N-121*) road.



Excursion 4: ZARAUTZ – GETAIA - ZUMAIA

We can get to Zarautz along the (*N-634*) coast road going through Usurbil Aguinaga and Orío, or by taking the (*A-8*) motorway, which will get us there in 15-20 minutes. **Zarautz** is situated in a broad coastal plain opening onto the ocean. It's an attractive, modern locality engaged in tourism and the provision of services. Its beach is the longest on the Gipuzkoan coastline and the cult-sport of surfing is practised all year round.

Continuing along the scenic (*N-634*) coast road we come to the fishing port of **Getaria**, famous both in its own right and by association with Getaria-born navigator Juan Sebastián Elcano, who completed the first world circumnavigation in history. The "musts" in Getaria are: 1. a visit to the old quarter with the traditional fishermen's cottages – clean, gaily coloured and with wooden balconies; 2. eating a fine turbot, sea bream or angler fish in the harbour and drinking *txakoli*; 3. enjoying the beach and the area around the small peninsula known as the Getaria "Mouse"; and 4. visiting the museum of world-renowned fashion designer **Cristóbal Balenciaga**.



From Getaria we come to **Zumaia**. On the outskirts of the town as you come in, you can visit the museum of Painter Ignacio Zuloaga and Laia Craft Museum. The town has two beaches, Itzurun and Santiago, completely different from one another. Santiago Beach, with some small sand dunes, is situated outside the town as you come in; while Itzurun Beach, on the other side of the town, is known for its sands and for its waters beneficial to health due to a high concentration of iodine.

Follow the (*N-634*) towards **Deba**, situated amongst limestone mountains. The **Ekain Caves** (1969) are regarded as one of the five best examples of cave art in

the world because of the important polychrome paintings found inside them.

After Deba continue on the road till you come to the traditional fishing harbour of **Mutriku**, famous for its fish preserves, especially anchovies. At the end of the harbour you'll find a natural rock pool containing sea water where you can bathe most enjoyably. There are some interesting walks along well-waymarked footpaths.

We can go farther along the coast if we wish, depending on how long we want to spend on the excursion. The fishing town of **Lekeitio** is very pretty; and in the heart of **Urdaibai Nature Reserve**, **Ea**, **Elantxobe**, **Bermeo**, **Mundaka**... are attractive places too. We'll return to Donostia-San Sebastián via the (*A-8*) motorway.



Excursion 5: MOUNT HERNIO - ERREZIL

We shall head out of Donostia-San Sebastián on the (*N-1*) as far as **Tolosa**. We shall leave Tolosa at the third and final exit, turning off to the left onto the (*GI-2634*) towards Azpeitia. We shall climb up this scenic road passing through **Albiztur** until we come to **Bidanía Hill**. A short step away from Bidanía Hill we can have a snack on the terrace or verandah of La Trinchera Restaurant with breathtaking views over the **Errezil Valley**. To the right we have the crest of the **Hernio Massif**; and, spread out beneath us, the verdant, deep valley, the water meadows, the hamlet and the woods... the village you can see at the end of the valley is Errezil.

Following the road we shall come to **Azpeitia** where the Loyola Shrine stands. We can visit this splendid Baroque-style group of monuments around the **Basilica of St. Ignatius Loyola**, founder of the Company of Jesus (the Jesuit Order). It's also very interesting to stop at the Basque Railway Museum, where we can enjoy a 20-minute train ride.



From Azpeitia we shall cross the Urola river valley to call at **Zestoa**. One of the sights that's most worth seeing in Zestoa are the replicas of the **Ekain Caves (to book, call 943.868.811)**, regarded as one of the five best examples of cave art in the world because of the important polychrome paintings found inside them. We'll return to Donostia-San Sebastián via the (*A-8*) motorway.

Excursion 6: MOUNT TXINDOKI - ORDIZIA

We shall head out of Donostia-San Sebastián towards **Tolosa** on the *N-1* (20 minutes). At the next exit we shall turn off to a small town called **Alegia** (*GI-2133*).

From Alegia we shall head for **Amezketá** in order to get to the area around **Mount Larrunharri (Txindoki)** (1,000 m above sea level). This is a Nature Reserve (since 1994) of 10,956 hectares containing numerous megalithic monuments, dozens of caves and shrines, and places of importance for the folk legends surrounding them.

From Amezketá, we ascend a road with beautiful panoramic views to **Abaltzisketa**, from which we can make out the full shape of Mount Larrunharri and all its contours.

A short ascent from Abaltzisketa will bring us to the area of Larraitz, on the slopes of Mount Larrunharri.

From Larraitz we shall head down, first for **Zaldibia** and then for **Ordizia**. The old quarter – the town centre – is a listed Historical Site; it has a mediaeval ground plan with narrow streets. But Ordizia's greatest attraction is its local produce market of 11th- and 12th-century origin, held on every WEDNESDAY of the year.

We shall continue our journey on the *N-1* towards a town called **Idiazabal**. In the Basque Country there is a strong pastoral tradition; hence ewe's milk cheeses are one of its most characteristic products, and "Idiazabal Cheese" is an internationally renowned Designation of Origin. This local culture is celebrated in Idiazabal by the Monument to the Shepherd and Cheese Museum. We shall return via the *N-1* National road to Donostia-San Sebastián.

Excursion 7: PAGOETA NATURE PARK

Pagoeta Nature Park is situated in **Aia** (*GI-2631*) very close to the coast, just a few kilometres from Orío and Zarautz. Amongst its many interesting features there are two tours that stand out: 1. a guided tour of **Agorregi 18th-Century Iron-Making Complex** and 2. a visit to **Iturraran Hamlet**, a visitor centre where a botanical garden with autochthonous and exotic species has been created.