

MARIBEL'S GUIDE TO SAN SEBASTIÁN-DONOSTIA © THE BASQUE COUNTRY – PAÍS VASCO



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WEB RESOURCES

INFORMATION ON THE WEB

- Euskadi Tourism - tourism.euskadi.eus
- Basque Country Tourism - www.basquecountry-tourism.com
- San Sebastian Tourism - www.sansebastianturismo.com
- International Jazz Festival - www.heinekenjazzaldia.com
- San Sebastian Film Festival - www.sansebastianfestival.com



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GETTING TO SAN SEBASTIÁN

The San Sebastián airport is located in Hondarribia with connections from Madrid, Barcelona, Málaga and Sevilla. The Biarritz-Anglet-Bayonne airport is 25 minutes away along the A-63, while the Calatrava designed Bilbao International Airport is one hour away by bus or car.

There is regular bus service between San Sebastián and the airport in Hondarribia on the Lurralde Bus (www.lurraldebus.eus), which leaves from Gipuzkoa Plaza in San Sebastián-Donostia. Cost is 1,65€ one-way.

Served by train from Madrid, Barcelona and Paris, the station, Estación del Norte, is in the center of the city. There is also a narrow-gauge railway, the Metro Donostialdea, locally known as the "Topo", connecting San Sebastián with Bilbao and villages along the coast, and to the train station in Hendaye (France).

SAN SEBASTIÁN - DONOSTIA

The following is from a recent article in the New York Times: *“to visit San Sebastián on Spain’s northern coast is to fall in love. The first sight of the shimmering scallop-shaped bay, replete with crescents of golden sand and turquoise waves will sweep you off your feet. Pairing this natural beauty with the unrivaled local cuisine may leave your head spinning!”*

Compact, elegant, sophisticated and stately, San Sebastián, once a simple fishing village, it has evolved into a Parisian looking city filled with Belle Époque architecture. Called “*La Bella Easo*”, the pearl of the Cantabrian Sea, it is considered one of Spain’s most beautiful destinations. Like its neighbor Biarritz just up the coast in the French Basque Country, San Sebastián is a mix of Basque charm, sophistication and savoir-vivre, and its cuisine widely considered some of the best in the world.



Made famous during the second half of the 19th century by the Spanish Royal Family who came here to take the waters, San Sebastián, the capital of Gipuzkoa, later became the official summer residence of the Spanish Court.

You’ll marvel at the elegance of both the spectacular turn of the century homes and settings along the beautiful crescent shaped La Concha Beach, which, along with El Sardinero in Santander, is the prettiest stretch of sand in Spain.

CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2016

San Sebastián-Donostia was selected in June 2011 to be the European Capital of Culture in 2016 (www.dss2016.eu).

TOURIST INFORMATION OFFICE

The Tourist Information Office is located at Boulevard, 8 (Boulevard Zumardia), just down the block from La Bretxa Market. There you will find a friendly staff who can answer your questions in English, provide you with information on touring, city maps, adventure sports, and inexpensive lodging in agrotourist homes. A stop here is obligatory. Open in summer from 8:00 to 8:00, except Sundays when it opens from 10:00 to 2:00, and from 3:00 to 7:00. See: sansebastianturismo.com.

WHEN TO VISIT

July and August are the busiest months of the tourist season, when most Spaniards take their month long vacations; so lodging will be at a premium. Please book ASAP. The winters are very rainy. September is the ideal month. Early June is also good, as the high season rates normally don't start until July 1. The water will be warm enough for swimming (although it's a bit too nippy for timid tastes), but it does rain quite a bit, for every four days in San Sebastián, perhaps only one will be a great beach day!



On the grounds of the Miramar Palace, overlooking La Concha Bay

DONOSTI CUP

The premier International Youth Football Tournament in Spain (www.donosticup.com) will be held from 5-11 July this year, attracting more than 50,000 players and their families from around the world, so plan accordingly.

SIGHTSEEING IN DONOSTIA

San Sebastián, a great walking town!

Take a self-guided walking tour to discover the spirit of this beautiful city on the bay. Start at Avenida Zurriola, which runs past the Rafael Moneo designed, giant translucent cubes known as the Kursaal Performing Arts Center.

Cross the Urumea river via the Zurriola bridge, which you take you to the Alameda del Boulevard, which marks the limit between the old and new sections of the city and in summer fills with musicians playing around the gazebo, cyclists and folks filling its outdoor cafés. This avenue will lead you to the Alderi-Elder Park, facing the sea, where you'll see the elegant City Hall, Ayuntamiento, to your right, built in 1882 as a Casino. You'll now be facing stunning La Concha beach.



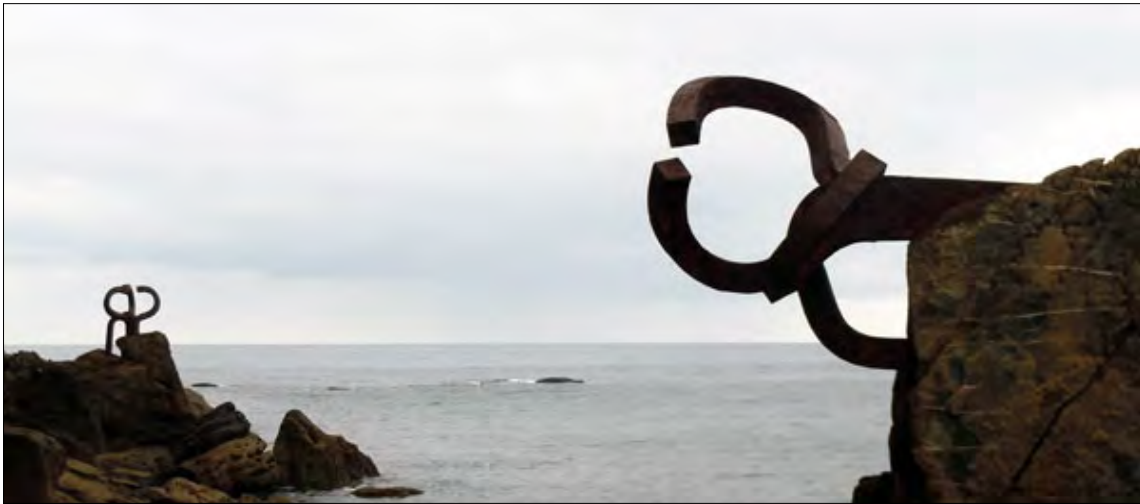
The crowd walking from La Concha to Ondarreta Beach and back on a beautiful “beach day”

Walk to your left past the Hotel de Londres y de Inglaterra and take a stroll with the locals down the magnificent, crescent-shaped La Concha, one of Europe's most beautiful and elegant urban beaches, sheltered between Mount Urgell and Mount Igueldo. On a sunny summer day everyone will be out on the beach doing the same brisk beach stroll. During low tide, one can make a complete beach walk from the northern end of La Concha to the far end of Ondarreta beach, the city's third, family-friendly beach. One of Europe's finest beach strolls!

You can either stroll along the beach with the Donostiarras, or walk above it, along the Paseo de la Concha boardwalk, beautifully tiled and edged with an elegant, Art Nouveau, white wrought-iron balustrade. This promenade along the bay will lead you through a tunnel under the grounds of Miramar Palace and finally to Ondarreta beach.

Continuing past the beach and the Royal Tennis Club, whose Wimbledon Pub is open to the public, you will come to Paseo de Eduardo Chillida, which leads you past Restaurant

Branka to the westernmost tip of the bay, where the Atlantic waves crash against huge boulders. Here you'll see an installation of three immense iron sculptures, the *Peine del Viento*, the "Comb of the Wind", by Eduardo Chillida. Each piece of this work weighs in at over ten tons.



Chillida's "Peine del Viento", Comb of the Wind, at the end of Ondarreta Beach

While the magnificent La Concha Beach attracts the most walkers, Zurriola to the east is a magnet for surfers and Ondarreta Beach the most family-friendly as it provides a children's playground and pool, *chiringuitos*, stands for ice cream or sandwiches, handicapped access, a Wi-Fi zone, kayak rentals, tents, a jogging trail and a bike trail, ping pong tables and beach volley ball.



Ondarreta Beach is situated in the aristocratic neighborhood of Antiguo, an area filled with elegant examples of Basque architecture steps from the beach. Take a stroll along

Infanta Beatriz Kalea to see some of these architecturally impressive late 19th century villas.

After passing the Royal Tennis Club you may want to take the **funicular** up to the summit of Mount Igueldo for spectacular views of La Concha Bay and mountains at sunset. This charming little red funicular, with a large Coca-Cola sign painted on the first car, was inaugurated in 1912. It's pulled up the steep incline by a series of pulleys and motors and runs every 15 minutes. A round-trip ticket costs 3,15€ for adults and 2,35€ for children (www.monteigueldo.es).

The funicular to Mount Igueldo operates during the spring from 11:00 to 8:00 on weekdays and 10:00 to 9:00 on weekends. In June it's open from 11:00 to 8:00 weekdays and 10:00 to 10:00 on weekends. In July it's open from 10:00 to 9:00 weekdays and 10:00 to 10:00 on weekends. August hours are from 10:00 to 10:00 and September hours are from 10:00 to 9:00 daily. Closed on Wednesdays in winter.



The view of La Concha Bay from Mount Igueldo

The Panoramic view terraces are open from 10:30 to 6:30 daily during the winter (closed Wednesdays), 10:00 to 8:30 in the spring, 10:00 to 10:00 in the summer and 10:30 to 8:00 in the fall.

There is also a small children's amusement park on Mount Igueldo, which this year is celebrating its 100th anniversary.

On your return from your funicular ride, walk above the beaches on the promenade and stop to stroll the grounds of the **Palacio de Miramar**, Miramar Palace. It was built for the Regent Queen María Cristina. Inaugurated in 1893, it was constructed in English

Cottage style by British architect Selden Wornum. The Palace was built at the Regent Queen's own expense because she didn't want it to be a burden to the people who gave her such a warm welcome during her summer holidays here. The palace is not open to the public but the beautifully manicured grounds are free to all to visit. I love to come here on Sunday mornings to sit on a bench, read the paper and soak up the breathtaking views of this perfect, scallop shaped bay-just gorgeous!



Miramar Palace, the Royal Residence

In 1845 the doctors of Queen Isabel II recommended that she choose San Sebastián as the site for her summer vacations so that she could relieve her skin problems by taking the waters. The city then became the official Summer Residence of the Court and a fashionable spa and meeting place for royalty, aristocracy and the country's ruling classes who first settled in this neighborhood.

For another walk on a sunny day, start from the square in front of city hall, at the northern end of La Concha beach, and stroll down to the **fishermen's pier**, following the path to where the Aquarium sits at the end of the pier. From the Aquarium, take the **Paseo Nuevo**, which circles around the base of Mont Urgell, and brings you back to the Old Quarter, to the Zurriola bridge and Kursaal Performing Arts Center, a very pretty seaside walk.

On this walk you can stop at **Naval Museum** (Untzi Museoa), housed in a 18th century building, a tower house on three floors in the fisherman's quarter, *puerto pesquero*, at Paseo del Muelle, 24. Here you will learn a bit about Basque maritime heritage and discover the long-standing tradition that Basques have had with the sea. The first floor explains the traditional ship making methods, the second floor shows the evolution of

Basque vessels in style and construction and the third floor houses temporary exhibits (www.untzimuseoa.eus)

The museum is open Tuesday-Saturday from 10:00 to 1:30 and 4:00 to 7:00, Sundays and holiday from 11:00 to 2:00 and closed Mondays. General admission: 1,20€. Free on Thursdays.

Be sure to pay a visit to the avant-garde **Aquarium**, considered the best oceanographic museum in Europe. It's open from 10:00 to 8:00 weekdays and until 9:00 pm on weekends and holidays, and all of July and August, closes at 7:00 pm from October to Easter. Entrance is 13€ for adults and 6,50€ for children 4-12. The special Immersion Tour is available on Saturdays for certified divers, 18 years or older (aquariumss.com).



Restaurant Aquarium Bokado is located above the Aquarium and offers haute cuisine, terrace dining and sweeping views of La Concha Bay and the Bay of Biscay.

To see the city and its magnificent bay from a different perspective, one can take a 30-minute catamaran ride. The City of San Sebastián Catamaran departs from the fishermen's port Monday-Friday in the spring and fall at 12:00, 1:00, 4:00, 5:00, 6:00 and 7:00, and at 8:00 during the summer. Tickets are 10€ for adults and 5,50€ for children 3-10, and can be purchased at the kiosk at the pier (www.ciudadsansebastian.com).

Or take a short boat ride out to the **island of Santa Clara** for a new perspective on the city's shoreline. Motoras de la Isla offers this service, and they have a ticket office in the fishermen's quarter on the pier at the beginning of Paseo de Mollaberria. The ride costs 4€. There are departures every 30 minutes during the summer, June 1 to September 30 and for Semana Santa, depending on the weather. The service operates from 10:00 to 8:00 daily (www.motorasdelaisla.com).

Sit at one of the outdoor terraces lining the lovely **Constitution Square** in the heart of the Old Town, the *Parte Vieja*, where in the olden days, bullfights took place. This is the heart of the pintxos bar area, where locals come each evening starting around 8:00 to do their traditional pintxos crawl from bar to bar.

Include a visit to San Sebastián's two churches, standing at each end of the city facing one another. The oldest is the 18th century **Basílica de Santa María del Coro** in the Old Quarter, whose gorgeous Churrigueresque style façade has been recently restored. It was built in flamboyant Baroque style, begun in 1743, on top of an older Romanesque church. It has three naves and Gothic ribbed vaults and houses the image of the city's patron saint, Nuestra Señora del Coro.

At the other end of town, you'll find the **Catedral del Buen Pastor**, built in 1887 in neo-Gothic style, intended to mimic the great medieval churches of Germany and France. From its main façade you can see the façade of the Basilica of Santa Maria del Coro in the distance.



Basílica de Santa María del Coro



Catedral del Buen Pastor

The ethnographic **San Telmo Museum** in the Old Quarter, in Plaza Zuloaga, reopened after many years of extensive renovations. The architecture of the brand new pavilion is quite unique. Inside you'll see artifacts related to Basque culture, along with interesting temporary exhibits. Open Tuesday-Sunday from 10:00-8:00, closed Mondays, January 1 and 20 and December 25. Open on bank holidays. General admission is 6€, free on Tuesdays (www.santelmomuseoa.com).

While in the Old Quarter, you can also visit the **Iglesia de San Vicente**, Calle 31 de agosto. This 15th century church is the oldest monument in San Sebastian.

In summer, until August 31, take the free microbus to the top of **Monte Urgull**, sitting on the eastern end of the bay above the Old Quarter. At the top you'll find a city park, (closed to traffic) crowned by the semi-ruined 12th century Mota castle and a huge Franco era sculpture of Christ, the Scared Heart statue, **Cristo de la Mota**, which overlooks the city. The bus service departs from the Victoria Eugenia Theatre every 30 minutes, from 11:00 to 1:30, and from 5:00 to 8:00.



CITY TOURS

The Tourist Train, the “Txu-Txu”, leaves from Paseo de Salamanca for a 40-minute tour of the old town, Boulevard, City Hall and the La Concha promenade, Ondarreta Beach, Miramar Palace, Buen Pastor Cathedral and Teatro Victoria Eugenia Theater. Tickets are 5€ for adults, 3€ for children between 5 and 12. Children 4 and under ride free. The Bus Touristic departs from Victoria Eugenia Theater for the 1-hour tour of the city. Tickets are 12€ for adults, 6€ for children from 5-12 and are good the entire day.

You can purchase tickets at the Tourist Office at Boulevard, 8.



The Txu-Txu Train traveling along La Concha promenade toward Ondarreta Beach

WALKING TOURS

ESSENTIAL SAN SEBASTIÁN

This 2-hour bilingual guided tour, offered by the San Sebastián Tourist Board, takes you on an introductory tour of the city, hitting all of the major tourist sights, and departs from in front of the Tourist office at Boulevard, 8. It runs on the weekend year around at 11:00 am and one Friday each month at 4:30 in the afternoon. The 11:00 am tour in July and August is only offered in Spanish. In September this tour is offered at 11:00, except on Tuesdays. Cost is 10€, free for children under 12 years of age.

ROMANTIC SAN SEBASTIÁN

This 2-hour bilingual guided tour takes you past the city's elegant 19th century French inspired Belle Epoque buildings, parks and gardens. It departs on Saturdays at 4:30 in the afternoon from the Tourist Office. In July and August it departs at 5:00, but is bilingual on Sundays only. Costa is 10€.

PRIVATE PINTXOS TOURS

A more exclusive private pintxos tour can be arranged with the leading American food expert in the Basque Country, Gabriella Ranelli, or with her husband, retired professional jai alai player (pelota), Aitor Aguirre. The tour departs from the Tourist Office at Boulevard, 8, at your chosen hours, preferable early enough to avoid the crowds, for lunch or dinner, and usually last around 2-1/2 hours. Cost is 95€/person (minimum of 2), which includes the cost of the wine and pintxos, enough to make a meal. Gabriella also offers, in addition to private cooking classes, gastronomic excursions and visits to vineyard outside the city (tenedortours.com).

She's highly personable, a great guide and friend. Burt Wolf used Gabriella for his PBS special on San Sebastián and the Basque Country in the *Local Flavors* series.

There is another company, San Sebastian Food, which also offers pintxos tours and excursions, but Gabriella is the best English-speaking gastronomic guide in the Basque region, if not all of Spain.

COOKING SCHOOLS

LUIS DE IRIAZAR

In the Parte Vieja at Mari, 5, but he has a waiting list a mile long (escuelairizar.com). Courses are for professionals and amateurs, in Spanish, but will conduct courses in English for groups (minimum of 8, maximum of 12) during the summer.

He's featured in the San Sebastian chapter of Anthony Bourdain's "Kitchen Confidential" book, "A Cook's Tour".

EL TXOKO DEL GOURMET

Is located in the Parte Vieja at C/Aldamar, 4, offers intensive cooking courses for professionals as well as practical courses for tourists (www.eltxokodelgourmet.com).

KARLOS ARGUIÑANO

The TV chef offers cooking classes (www.aiala.es) at his hotel in nearby Zarautz (www.hotelka.com).

BASQUE PINTXOS COOKING CLASSES

Tenedor Tours offers half-day and full day pintxos cooking classes on a limited basis (tenedortours.com).

VISIT TO AN AUTHENTIC CIDER HOUSE

In the suburb of Astigarraga, near Hernani, there are a number of authentic Basque cider houses, very popular with local families and groups of friends, especially on weekends. The Basques flock to these *sagardotegi* for the typical and hearty cider house menu of cod omelettes, grilled cod or hake with red peppers, grilled T-bone steak (*chuletón*), Idiazabal cheese-quince paste-walnuts-cookies for dessert and unlimited pitchers of Basque cider (dry, not sweet) poured directly from the huge oak barrels. A Bacchanalian feast. It's a messy and highly entertaining, convivial experience that shouldn't be missed if you're game for an excursion to the country.

SAGARDOTEGIA PETRITEGI

The most tourist-friendly of the cider houses is **in** Astigarraga, surrounded by hectares of apple orchards. They are open all year long, not just during the traditional cider season of January to May. Tours of its facilities are available for a minimum of 4 people. The "Essential" tour is 13,50€/person. Opening hours are from January 16 until December 20 beginning at noon. In the summer (June 23 to September 20) they are open from Tuesday-Sunday for lunch from 1:00 to 3:30, and Mondays to Sunday for dinner are from 8:00 to 10:00. Closed Monday mornings.

Its delicious cider house menus (5) range from 28,50€ to 36€ for adults, with a children's menus for 11€ and 23,45€. And if you're not a cider fan, you can simply taste and pair your menu with red wine. Seating is around traditional large, communal, bare wood tables.

At other cider houses, the most authentic ones, open only during the "season", diners drink and eat standing up).

Take a taxi. Although there is usually enough space to go without a reservation, you may want to call ahead: (+34) 943 457 188 or reserve online (www.petritegi.com).

PERFORMING ARTS

See who's performing at the ornate **Teatro Victoria Eugenia**, Paseo República Argentina, 2, one of the most emblematic buildings in Donostia. Renovation of the theatre, which first opened in 1912, was completed in 2007 (www.victoriaeugenia.com).



You can also check out what's doing on, or take a back stage tour, at the **Kursaal Convention Center and Auditorium**, a controversial design by Navarran architect and Pritzker Prize winner, Rafael Moneo, where opera and ballet are often held. The “cubes of light” is also where the International Jazz Festival is held in late July and the San Sebastián Film Festival in mid to late September. A parking garage is conveniently located under the Kursaal Center (www.kursaal.com).



DONOSTIA'S MARKETS

Food, food, glorious food!

In the morning, before noon, you might like to take a stroll through one of San Sebastián's two wonderful indoor food markets

MERCADO DE LA BRECHA (LA BRETXA)

in the "Parte Vieja", the Old Quarter off Calle Aldamar, is now located underneath a two-story shopping mall where you'll rub elbows with the culinary star chefs of the Basque Country (Martin Berasategui, Andoni Luis Aduriz, Pedro Subijana, and Juan Mari and Elena Arzak) who will be choosing the freshest of fish for their famous Michelin-starred dining emporiums that day. This market, along with Bilbao's Mercado de la Ribera, rivals Barcelona's La Boquería in the amazing variety and quality of food on display. There are also daily outdoors farmers' stands on the street level (www.la-bretxa.com).

MERCADO DE SAN MARTÍN

Then move on to the corner of San Marcial and Loyola downtown. This market has an exciting look and a great buzz to it and is housed on two floors, with gourmet boutiques plus meats/vegetable/cheese stands on the ground floor and the fishmongers in the lower, basement level, along with a handy supermarket with coffee bar and a branch of the Barrentxea pastry shop. The supermarket opens at 9:00. The Carnicería Maribel stand sells the finest Iberian ham, including Joselito Gran Reserva and Joselito 5 Bellotas, aged for four and a half years (www.msanmartin.es).



THALASSOTHERAPY

LA PERLA SPA

Some may enjoy a thalassotherapy-spa experience, along with front row views with a water view. Installed in the former quarters of the early 1900s Balneario La Perla del Océano, La Perla faces La Concha beach. Indulge in a session in their Thalassotherapy Circuit. (Beauty treatments are not its strong suit). La Perla also has a fully equipped gym, and their famous Thalasso circuit in the pools costs 26,50€ for 2 hours. There is also a terrace bar and restaurant.

The spa is sheltered by the roof of an eclectic building dating from the beginning of last century, designed to cater to European nobility and with unmatched views of the Concha Bay. Inside you will find 4,500 square meters of cutting-edge technology for sports circuits, physical therapy, everything to do with seawater (www.la-perla.net).



The La Perla Spa terrace overlooking La Concha Bay, late afternoon

CRAFT COCKTAILS

MUSEO DEL WHISKI

For a pre-dinner cocktail, or a nightcap and some great piano music, have a drink downstairs at this delightful whisky bar at Boulevard Zumardia, 5. This “museum”/pub is the work of Paul Bordonaba who created the first gin tonic sweets ever, in the shape of ice cubes (www.museodelwhisky.com).

This lounge bar-museum is spread over two floors and is THE place to sample some of the world's finest whiskies and liquors. Its whiskey collection has an astonishing 3,400 bottles hailing from all corners of the world, including the smallest bottle in the world. Not only 300 different labels of whiskies are served here, but also teas, coffees and mixed drinks are prepared and served up with style. Their seemingly “bottomless” gin tonics, served in a huge tumbler, are fantastic and worth every penny. And for your GT you can choose among 20 different gin labels.

If you're a Cuba Libre fan, the bar can offer you 40 different labels of rum.

Insider's tip

The real reason to head here after dinner, right before 11:00 pm, is to run to the downstairs piano bar and grab one of the tiny tables, with the shortest chairs you'll ever sit on, for an evening of top flight entertainment and people watching. For the price of a drink (around 12€) you can while away the evening listening to piano music and even get on your feet to dance the night away. It's addictive, and it's amazing how Spaniards can turn a tiny space in front of the piano into a full throttle dance floor. You may enter at 11:00 pm, but may not want to exit until 2:00 or 3:00 am! Closed Sundays.

CÔTE BAR

This is a popular cocktail bar in the Old Quarter at Fermín Calbetón, 48, which is open Monday-Thursday from 5:00 pm to 3:00 am, Friday and Saturday until 4:30 am and on Sundays from 4:00 pm to 3:00 am.

DRY MARTINI BAR

Also, inside the 5-star Hotel Maria Cristina, master barman **Javier Muelas** has opened a branch of his famed Madrid Bar. It's open Monday-Thursday from 10:30 am to 12:30 am and on Friday and Saturday to 2:00 am (www.javierdelasmuelas.com).

MARIBEL'S SHOPPING GUIDE

If shopping appeals, the city's most fashionable shops are found on and around Avenida de la Libertad in the modern quarter.

SHOPPING IN THE NEW QUARTER

Shoes

- **Ayestarán**, Libertad, 27 (www.ayestaran.es)
- **Farrutx**, Garibay, 16 (www.farrutx.com)
- **Jaime Mascaró**, Garibay, 2, corner of Boulevard (www.mascaro.com)
- **Salvador Bachiller**, San Martín, 21 (www.salvadorbachiller.com)

Leather handbags *equivalent to Louis Vuitton*

- **Loewe**, Fuenterrabía, 24, at San Martín (www.loewe.com)

Chocolates

- **Chocolates de Mendaro Saint-Gerons**, Etxaide, 6 (www.chocolatesdemendaro.com)

Fashion sportswear

- **Massimo Dutti**, Libertad, 21 (www.massimodutti.com).

Designer clothing

- **Adolfo Domínguez**, Urbieta, 7, at San Marcial (www.adolfodominguez.com)

Budget “designer” wear

- **Zara**, Calle de Fuenterrabía, 3-5 (www.zara.com)

Contemporary local designer

- **Minimil**, Elkano, 7 (www.minimil.es)

Gorgeous evening gowns

- **Rosa Clará**, San Martín, 23, and Urbieta (www.rosaclara.es)

Books, DVDs and CDs

- **FNAC**, Urbieta, 9, in the San Martín shopping complex (www.fnac.es)

Spanish perfumes

- **Benegas**, Garibay, 12 (www.perfumeriabenegas.com)

Pastries

- **Pastelería Aguirre** at Garibay, 1, on the corner of Boulevard

Artisan gourmet products *directly from the farm*

- **Lur-Lan**, Boulevard, 7. Here you'll find the best of Basque artisan products—cheese, tuna, Getaria anchovies, honey, Roncesvalles chocolates, Xaxus from Tolosa and fresh cheese with txakoli (www.lurlan.org).

Wines, cavas, hams, oils, vinegars cheeses and other products

- **Lukas Gourmet** in its new branch at Urbieta, 34. Open 10:00 to 10:00 (www.lukasgourmet.com)

Cute graphic design t-shirts

- **Cállate la Boca**, at Kursaal Center, Avenida Zurriola (www.callatelaboca.com)
- **Custo**, Arrasate 15, corner of Guetaria

Beautiful children's clothing

- **Bodoques**, Hernani, 21 (www.bodoques.es)

Children's bedding *made in France*

- **Petit Descamps**, Guetaria, 10 (www.petit-bateau.es)

Coffee and pastry break on a highly atmospheric square

- **Bideluze**, Plaza de Guipúzcoa, 14 (bideluzebarkafe.multiespaciosweb.com)

MY SHOPPING HAUNTS IN THE OLD QUARTER

Traditional Basque handicrafts, pottery linens and costumes

- **Saski-Naski**, Boulevard, 24. Closed Sundays.

Cute nautical wear for children

- **Enbata**, Calle Nagusia (Calle Mayor), 14 (enbata.net)

Beautiful French Basque linens-tablecloths, placemats, napkins, breadbaskets and towels

- **Euskal Linge**, Calle Mayor, 8 (www.euskal-linge.com)

Gourmet items, wines and the finest in Iberian ham

- **Solbes**, Aldamar, 4, near La Bretxa market. It stocks over 200 labels of wine and cavas. It has a branch in downtown Hondarribia, across from the tourist office. (www.solbes.com)

For Basque artisan cheeses, including the delicious, creamy and spoon-able ewes milk cheese, *torta de Idiazábal* (*queso de oveja*) and the city's best selection of wild mushrooms

- **Aitor Lasa**, Aldamar, 12 (www.aitorlasa.com)

Basque Malkorra chocolates, Navarran olive oil (Alfar) and Idiazábal ewe's cheese

- **Zaporejai**, San Jerónimo, 21 (zaporejai.com)

Pamplona "Running of the Bulls" memorabilia and amusing sportswear

- **Kukusumuxu**, Mayor, 15 (www.kukuxumusu.com)

For playful, original graphic designs

- **Viva la Vida**, Narrica, 12 (vivalavidatodalavida.blogspot.com)

Patés and other gourmet items from the Pays Basque

- **Vinos Martínez**, Narrica, 29 (www.vinosmartinez.com)

Pastries

- **Pastelería Otaegui**, Narrica, 15 (pasteleriaotaeguionline.com)

Artisan baguettes

- **Galparsoro**, Calle Mayor, 6 (galparsorookindegia.eu)

Artisan ice cream

- **Heladería Oiartzun**, Igentea, 2, behind the Ayuntamiento, the City Hall (www.pasteleriaoiartzun.com)

MARIBEL'S SAN SEBASTIÁN DINING GUIDE

This epicenter of world gastronomy, San Sebastián earns the distinction of having more fabulous restaurants per square meter than any other city in Spain. And it takes obvious pride in its distinction as the city with the most Michelin starred restaurants per capita in the world!

DONOSTIA'S MICHELIN STARS

Haute Cuisine Temples For "Foodies"

If you plan on dining at one of the "big five", then expect a final check of at least 180€/person, plus wine. All require advance reservations. To reach Akelafe (Mount Igueldo), Mugaritz (Errenteria), Zuberoa (Oiartzun) and Martín Berasategui (Lasarte) you will need to take a rather longish taxi ride, as they are located in the aforementioned suburbs. Arzak is located within the city. Iberian Traveler considers it the least impressive of the lot, although it is the one with the greatest name recognition.

We list them in order of our own personal preference, but all will provide you with a memorable gastronomic feast, Zuberoa offering the most traditional cuisine, keeping true to its original cider house roots and Mugaritz being the most cerebral and cutting-edge.

- **Akelafe** - 3 Michelin stars (www.akelarre.net)
- **Mugaritz** - 2 Michelin stars (www.mugaritz.com)
- **Zuberoa** - 2 Michelin stars (www.zuberoa.com)
- **Martín Berasategui** - 3 Michelin stars (www.martinberasategui.com)
- **Arzak** - 3 Michelin stars (www.arzak.es)

PINTXOS IN THE PARTE VIEJA

DOING THE “TXIKITEO” OR “POTEO”

A Gourmet Pintxos Crawl

If you prefer a “pintxos (Basque tapas) crawl” rather than sit-down lunch or dinner, visit a few of the best of the city’s “miniature haute cuisine temples”. At each stop you choose, order a *pintxo*, preferably one made to order in the kitchen and a *zurito*, a short glass of draft beer, a *crianza*, red wine, usually from the Rioja Alavesa, or a *txakolí*, the slightly effervescent, tart, young Basque white wine.

It’s more fun to go with a group of friends, Basque style, as the local *txikiteros* always go out with their *cuadrilla*. But just forge right ahead, survey the bars and choose the ones that appeal to your style, then squeeze your way up to the crowded bar. Observe the locals and their well-honed art of ordering, then order without hesitation.



There are now two types of bars from which to choose:

There’s the traditional “old school” *pintxos* bar, where the cold *pintxos* are presented lined up in a row, groaning board style at the bar, with a chalkboard menu for hot *pintxos* made up fresh in the kitchen. (Example: Baztán on Calle Puerto, with plenty of table seating for the increasing demand for “*pintxos* tours”, not too authentic). In some of these traditional bars, the custom still remains of asking the waiter for a plate and choosing the *pintxos* yourself, usually topped with toothpicks, placing them on your plate, with all cold items priced the same. The waiter then charges you according to the number of toothpicks remaining on your plate. This traditional style of doing the *txikiteo* is, however, slowly disappearing.

Most creative bars now have a much smaller selection of cold offerings displayed at the bar (or none at all) and a larger, more impressive collection of chalkboard items, *pintxos calientes* or *pintxos al momento*, meaning that their most creative and original dishes are made up to order in the kitchen. Some of these new style bars, in fact, offer nothing at all on the bar, La Cuchara de San Telmo being one, with all of their creations are made to order in their incredibly tiny kitchens.

To get an “early start”, and beat some of the crowds, begin your lunch crawl around 12:30 (some kitchens won't be open until then) and in the evening, just before 8:00 should work. The *txikiteo* is most successfully done on Tuesday-Saturday as some bars are closed on Sundays and many more close on Mondays.

Our favorites in the pintxos bar-filled Old Quarter are:

BAR RESTAURANT GANBARA

San Jerónimo Kalea, 21, across from the Basílica de Santa María. You should make this classic bar the first stop in your pintxos crawl through the “Parte Vieja” before making your way to more avant-garde spots like Cuchara de San Telmo, Borda Berri, Kota.31 and A Fuego Negro. Specialty here: spicy Basque sausage, chistorra, in puff pastry and their magnificent assortment of wild mushrooms. Closed Sunday afternoons and all day Monday (www.ganbarajatetxea.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 422 575

BAR CASA VERGARA

Located on the street parallel to San Jerónimo, at Mayor, 21, to the west, is another very traditional spot but that offers some contemporary creations, such as their *Manolo*, (red peppers with salmon, shrimp, anchovy, vinaigrette and homemade mayonnaise), their *Habanito* (a “cigar” of brick pasta filled with black pudding with almonds and red pepper marmalade) and the *Incompredido*, eggplant filled with spinach and carrots in a vermouth reduction sauce. There is also a special menu for 21,95€. Open Friday-Wednesday, 11:00 to 4:00 and 7:00 to midnight, closed Thursday (www.restaurantecasavergara.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 431 073

Moving onto 31de agosto Street, which runs past the Basilica...

A FUEGO NEGRO

31 de Agosto, 28, is considered one of the most avant-garde of all the designer pintxos spots in the city, this contemporary space, done in red and black is as cutting edge as La Cepa down the street is old-fashioned. The chalkboard menu is written mostly in Basque, so you'll need a sense of humor to decipher it. It's all quite amusing. Some pintxos are served in shot glasses their *txupitos*, others in paper cups. Some *pintxos* are sweet; it's one of the few bars offering dessert *pintxos*. It offers a quite impressive, varied selection of wines by the glass from a multitude of appellations.

One can feast on pintxos sitting down, as it has a small dining area with nine tables and offers a tasting menu for 35€, and a super degustation menu for 50€. The kitchen opens for lunch at 12:30 and serves its tasting menus in the dining space only.

Recently featured in an LA Times travel article on dining in the Basque Country; “*If Arzak is elegance, A fuego Negro is funk*”. Closed Monday (www.afuegonegro.com).

Tel: (+34) 650 135 373

KOTA.31, now called LA MONTANERA 31 or GALTXAGORRI

This is the somewhat new kid on this *pintxos*-bar lined block, at 31de agosto, 22. Look for the orange façade that says La Montanera. It is primarily a sit-down *pintxos* dining space, as it has a large back room for dining small plates style for lunch or dinner. But its very creative hot *pintxos* are also served at the bar. And it serves Iberian ham of the Montanera label, thus the change in name. It's equivalent in avant-garde style to La Cuchara, Borda Berri, A Fuego Negro and Zeruko. Best *pintxos* here; the foie with black tea yoghurt and roasted garlic (*foie con yogur de té negro y ajo asado*), and the scallop with “popcorn” (*vieira con palomitas*). Quite original.



Open Monday-Friday from 10:30 to 4:00 and 7:00 to 11:30. On weekends it's open from 10:00 to 4:30 and 6:00 until closing. Closed on Thursdays to rest (www.restaurantegaltxagorri.es/es/).

Tel: (+34) 943 429 936

LA CUCHARA DE SAN TELMO

31 de Agosto, tucked away at the end of a small square, Plazuela de Don Alvaro del Valle de Lersundi. It's still fantastic, constantly evolving and still packing them in. It now offers wine pairings with its pintxos. Still on my top ten list, although its “spin off”, **Borda Berri** is far less crowded. Outside, around the corner, the bar offers some table seating for sit-down dining. The kitchen doesn't open for lunch until 12:30. If you can make it here before 1:00, you can usually find a nice spot at the bar.

Some of the stand-out creations here: *foie con jalea de manzana* (foie with apple jelly - unbelievably good!), *risotto cremoso de bacalao*, *canelón cremoso de carnes* (meat-filled cannelloni) and *pulpo salteado con berza* (sautéed octopus with red cabbage). For dessert, try the *terrino de chocolate con naraja confitada*.



San Temo is closed Mondays and Tuesdays for lunch.

BAR TAMBORIL

Pescadería, 2, at the Plaza de la Constitución, a classic, with friendly service and a bar heaped with beautifully presented *pintxos*, also lower prices. Specialties-breaded red pepper stuffed with cod and their grilled mushrooms (*champis*). There is an English menu.

Tel: (+34) 943 423 507

BAR TXEPETXA

Across the street at Pescadería, 5, is where anchovy lovers will want to make a beeline here to this Anchovy Cathedral, as this lively bar serves the best *anchoas* in the Cantabrian Sea and prepares them in about fifteen different guises. Specialties: Anchovies topped with a spider crab cream sauce and anchovies with trout roe.

Open Wednesday to Saturday from noon to 3:00 and 7:00 to 11:00, Sundays from noon to 3:00 and Tuesday from 7:00 to 11:00 (www.bartxepetxa.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 422 227

BAR ZERUKO

Located at Pescadería, 10. I've been less impressed lately with this award-winning bar due to the high prices 4,00€ 4,50€ for each *pintxo*, and smaller wine pours, but their signature *La Hoguera* (a piece of cod that the client smokes to his pleasure on a grill then places on a piece of toast with cream and herbs) is a "must try".

Open Tuesday to Sunday from noon to 4:00 and Tuesday to Saturday evenings from 7:00 to midnight, closed Monday (<http://www.barzeruko.com/index.html>)

Tel: (+34) 943 423 451

BAR NÉSTOR

Can be found at Pescadería, 11, directly across from Zeruko. Its claim to fame is the mouth-watering, highly coveted *tortilla de patatas* (potato omelet). It only comes out twice a day, for lunch at 1:00 pm and in the evening at 8:00, so if you arrive at least 15-20 minutes ahead to put in your order, you may be one of the lucky few to taste the city's best Spanish omelet. The secret ingredient is the caramelized onion.



Waiting for the famous tortilla de patatas at Bar Nestor

Or come here to sit at one of the two wood tables to feast on a plate of garden fresh tomatoes and their acclaimed *chuletón*, a charcoal grilled steak of Galician aged beef. Closed Mondays (barnestor.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 424 873

BORDA BERRI

Fermín Calbetón, 12, gets my gold star for its better prices (2,50€-3€), delicious, creative treats made to order in the kitchen, and friendly service. Other than the tortillas they have displayed on the counter, every dish is made up fresh in the kitchen. This bar was opened by Iñaki Gulin, the creator of *La Cuchara de San Telmo*, and displays the same kind of originality and creativity in the kitchen, earthy Basque fare not to be missed.

Try their *viera* (grilled scallop) *asada con puré de coliflor*, *viera a la plancha con mermelada de melocotón*, *keso de kabra tostado con ciruela* (goat cheese toasted with plums), *risotto cremoso de Idiazábal* (cheese risotto), *carrillera de ternera al vino tinto*

(veal cheek braised in red wine), *pato confitado con puré de ciruelas pasas* (duck confit with dried plums) and *tomate relleno de bonito* (tomato filled with albacore).

Open Tuesday to Sunday from 12:30 to 3:30 and 7:30 to 11:30, Closed Monday.

Tel: (+34) 943 430 342

GOIZ-ARGI

Fermín Calbetón 4. While you might pass on this by thinking that this very tiny space is very “old style” (and it is), the locals know to stop here for its amazingly delicious mushroom brochettes, *brocheta de gambas* and its famous *mari juli*, a cold canapé of smoked salmon, anchovy and green pepper. Closed Monday afternoons and Tuesdays.

Tel: (+34) 943 425 204

BAR ITURRIOZ II

We've tried both locations of Iturrioz, the one at San Martín downtown and this, newer and more convivial branch at Aldamar, 12, and always enjoy both the creative pintxos and the friendly service. This is the place to try the white *sangría de txakolí*, even if you're not a sangría fan. House specialties are their popular sea urchins, *erizos de mar*, and a creamy rice dish with black pudding, *morcilla de arroz*, grilled duck breast, *magret de pato a la plancha* and a timbale of red peppers. Decent prices, solid offerings and friendly service put this one high on our list. Closed Monday.

Tel: (+34) 943 425 884

ASTELENA

Euskal Herria, 3, is the restaurant branch of the very popular Astelena pintxos bar on Plaza de la Constitución in the Old Quarter (www.restauranteastelena.com). Good price to quality ratio and great homemade desserts. They have a gourmet tasting menu for €32.50. It's located at the eastern end of the Parte Vieja, just 3 blocks from the Kursaal Center and Zurriola Bridge. Closed Sunday night, Monday and in winter on Wednesday night as well, plus first two weeks of October, first two weeks of February.

Tel: (+34) 943 425 867.

Try **Astelena** (www.restauranteastelena.com), on corner of the square at Plaza Constitución, for pintxos or a sit down meal, and the most typical, most Basque of all, **La Cepa**, Calle 31 de agosto, with a creative new chef (www.barlacepa.com). Open daily from 11:00 to midnight.

Others to look for on 31 de agosto are **Ormazabel**, **Martínez** and **La Viña**, a wine bar at number 3. For traditional pintxos on Calle Puerto, try **Bar Aralar**; open 7 days a week from 10:00 to midnight (www.bararalar.com).

PINTXOS IN THE GROS QUARTER

Once you've already experienced the traditional *txikiteo*, the "pintxos pilgrimage" from bar to bar in the Old Quarter, you might want to try some of the bars in the neighborhood of Gros, a pleasant walk east from the Kursaal Center at Zurriola Beach. Here are our favorites, starting at Kursaal Center.

NI NEU

At the eastern end of the Rafael Moneo-designed Kursaal Performing Arts Center, at Avenida Zurriola 1, Ni Neu (meaning "I Myself" in Basque) is now in the hands of two-Michelin starred chef Andoni Luis Aduriz of **Mugaritz** (Restaurant Magazine's number 3 best chef in the world) and his new Grupo IXO. It's designed for versatility, to provide something for all types of diners-with a downstairs bar open for breakfast, for sandwiches, *pintxos*, large plates and mini plates, and a terrace for cocktails, along with a dining space with picture windows facing the river and sea. What we enjoy is stopping here for pre-lunch *pintxos* around noon.

If it's a sunny day, we grab a tray and take our treats out to the terrace, as there is no table service there-just grab a tray and sit at an open table and soak up the sea views. The service at the bar is first rate, and if one orders a drink, the homemade potato chips come on the house.



The bar opens in the morning at 10:00 and closes Tuesday and Wednesday evenings at 8:00, Thursday-Saturday at 11:00, and Sunday at 9:00. The restaurant serves lunch from 1:00 to 3:30 and dinner from 8:30 to 11:30 only on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays (www.restaurantenineu.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 003 162

VIENTO SUR

At Avenida Zuriola, 4, directly across the avenue from the Kursaal center, an exciting, contemporary design spot for Mediterranean-style cuisine with Oriental influences and an Andalusian touch. The fish, especially the exceptional sea bream and red tuna, is brought up from Cádiz. The chef hails from Sevilla. It has a great vibe, and one can have a sit down meal in its restaurant with open kitchen. It boasts a varied and reasonably priced wine list, and half portions are available. And what's even better is that it's open daily, from 11:30 to 11:30. It also serves a very reasonable priced *pintxo-pote*, which is their *pintxo* of the day accompanied by a house wine, all for the very low price of €2.

We enjoy their *presa Ibérica con salsa Roquefort y patatas*, grilled pork tenderloin with Roquefort sauce and potatoes (www.vientosur.es)

Tel: (+34) 943 291 333

HIDALGO 56

Walk down Peña y Goñi and take a left onto Paseo Colón, 15, on the left side of the street is Hidalgo 56, opened in 2005 by Michelin chef Juan Mari Hidalgo. Look for the yellow awning. This much-loved local's haunt serves some of the very best foie gras in town. Here you can sit out on the terrace or feast inside on pintxos or raciones or have a tasting menu of pintxos. Its specialty is the artistically presented "Begi-aundi", which is a large squid filled with a ratatouille made also with squid, accompanied by a little shot glass of green onion foam!

You'll find the place packed to the rafters on the weekends, with a primarily local crowd, especially during *Jazzaldea*, the Heineken Jazz Festival in July, the Quincena Musical Festival in August and the September International film Festival because of proximity to the Kursaal Center venue.

Closed Sunday night and Tuesday, last two weeks of June and first week of February (www.hidalgo56.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 279 654 / 627 591 804

TABERNA RAMUNTXO BERRI

Also in the Nuevo Gros section, but nearer to the Kursaal center at C/Peña y Goñi, 10, is yet another pintxos bar award winner with a small restaurant in back. It has a large chalkboard menu of designer pintxos, most around €3 plus a menu of wines by the glass. There are a few wine barrels with stools for sitting, and one can have a pintxos tasting menu for 25€ in the air conditioned dining area in the rear. Offers a chuletón menu for 37€ and four additional menus from 25€-40€, bread, water, wine and desert included. Closed Sunday evening (www.ramuntxoberri.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 020 528



A gastronomic delight from Ramuntxo Berri

BODEGA DONOSTIARRA

Peña y Goñi 13, across from Ramuntxo Berri bar, with picture windows painted in bright blue, this lively spot, an old wine warehouse, again, drawing a primarily local crowd, is known for its **Gilda**, Donostia's signature pintxo consisting of an anchovy, green chili and olive on a toothpick. The "Gilda" is a reference to the Glenn Ford, Rita Hayworth film, *Gilda*, of 1946. Another favorite is the Indurain (as in the 5-time Tour de France champion Navarran cyclist), a *pintxo* of albacore, with six peppers and a slice of raw onion. It also serves delicious individual potato omelets, *tortilla española*, that can be prepared with ham, chorizo or even cheese, all made to order.



The menu is on the mirror at Bodega Donostiarra

And the most popular items on the menu are its skewers; brochettes of charcoal grilled meats, octopus and prawns and grilled vegetable platters to be shared. There is table seating with wait service.

Open daily from 9:30 am to midnight, closed Sundays (www.bodegadonostiarra.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 011 380

BAR BERGARA

Located off Calle Birmingham at C/ General Artetxe, 8, you'll find this outstanding pintxos bar where the congenial owner takes enormous pride in the beauty of the establishments (witness the fresh flowers that decorated the bar) and the quality of your experience. They serve miniature haute cuisine pintxos, but not meant to be shared, as each little jewel-like morsel consists of no more than two mouthfuls, a benchmark of miniature cuisine in a city full of outstanding options. Truly amazing! (www.pinchosbergara.es).

(+34) 943 275 026



There's a great fish market, charcuterie and fine wine store, **La Vinatería de Gros**, a quick walk back up C/ Birmingham (www.vinateria.es).

CREATIVE AND CONTEMPORARY CUISINE

The new stars on the block!

KOKOTXA

Campanario, 11, in the Old Quarter, recipient of one Michelin star, offers a three course daily lunch menu, Tuesday-Friday, for 40€. You'll see the menu's choices posted on the front window. You'll be brought an *aperitivo* then a first course, the chef's creation of the day, you choose between the meat or fish course and end with a set dessert. This is a most affordable way to sample San Sebastián's celebrated Michelin star cuisine.

The cooking of young chef Dani López simply gets better and better each year. His wife, Estela Velasco, runs the room and acts as the sommelier. It's a small space with white walls adorned with black and white photographs of the city at the turn of the century. The stemware is Riedel. We continue to state that for lunch, this is the most impressive one Michelin star bargain in all of Spain, even though the price has recently increased from 25€-40€. At night the degustation menu is served and priced at 78€ (plus wine, coffee). It receives a 7.5/10 rating in The Best of Spanish Gastronomy guide. Closed Sunday night and all day Monday (www.restaurantekokotxa.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 421 904



XARMA

Avenida de Tolosa, 123 (a taxi or bus ride away from your hotel) is a very up-and-coming gourmet destination run by a very talented young couple that honed their skills and earned a Michelin star at the now closed luxury Monasterio Rocamador in Extremadura. It's received fine reviews and has earned a Repsol sun, 7/10 in Gourmetour and 7 in The Best of Spanish Gastronomy. It is a candidate for a Michelin star and recently reviewed by Carlos Maribona on 12 April 2015 (abcblags.abc.es/gastronomia).

Aizpea Oihaneder and Xabier Díez Esteibar are members of Sukatalde, a new association of young chefs of Gipuzkoa. It's quite a small space, so reservations are essential. The executive menu, *menú de Mercado*, available for lunch Tuesday-Friday and for dinner Wednesday and Thursday, is priced at 25€ and includes wine, coffee and VAT, and their Xarma tasting menu is priced at 65€. Closed Sunday night and all day Monday (www.xarmajatetxea.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 317 162

NARRU

Conveniently located on the Paseo de la Concha in the basement space of the Hotel Niza, in front of La Concha beach and La Perla Spa, this up and coming gourmet spot gets the award for the non-Michelin "best value", as on Tues./Wed./Thurs. it serves a stylish fixed price lunch and dinner for only 27€ + VAT, which includes wine, bread and coffee. Plus the a la carte menu is also quite reasonable for the quality. We had a wonderful lunch here recently and can attest to the high quality and the excellent service.



Open for lunch from 1:30 to 3:30 and dinner from 8:30 to 11:00. Closed Sunday night and all day Monday (www.narru.es).

Tel: (+34) 943 423 349

BODEGÓN ALEJANDRO

In the Old Quarter at Fermín Calbetón, 4, is where 3-Michelin starred chef, Martin Berasategui honed his skills at his family's former restaurant, now belonging to the IXO group of Michelin starred chef Andoni Aduritz of Mugaritz (Restaurant Magazine's "number 4 best restaurant in the world"). The cozy basement restaurant presents the same high quality of service and care with presentation that the other members of the

IXO group are noted for, and it offers a bargain priced, 3-course lunch menu, although it is a set menu with only two choices for each course.



Gazpacho de sandia con antxoas



Txixarro al horno con refrito



Lomo de cerdo asado con arroz

We recently tried it and enjoyed our summer lunch of vegetable bisque, cod branade, grilled sardines, boneless pork ribs, strawberry Clafoutis and rice pudding, along with house wine, water and bread, all for the princely sum of 23€/person (on Saturdays and Sundays, 16€ during the week). We could have opted for their 6-course, small plates tasting menu for 42€, + VAT, with a wine pairing option for 16€/person.

Closed Sunday night and all day Monday, and from January 21 to February 5, open everyday from July 1 to October 18 (www.bodegonalejandro.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 427 158

AGORREGI

Located in the Igara neighborhood at Portuetxe, 15, is from another insider tip from Tenedor Tours. The two owners, Gorka Areclus and his wife Beatriz, alumni of Bodegón Alejandro, under Martin Berasategi, Arzak and Akelarre, offer warm hospitality and an unbeatable 3-course lunch menu for 20,50€. The desserts are quite acclaimed. They also offer a 5-course menu for 32€, an 8-course menu for 45€ and a special tasting menu on Thursdays for 32,50€. And get lots of great press, as well as being awarded a Michelin Bib Gourmand in November 2013.

Closed on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday nights, two weeks in February and two weeks in December (agorregi.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 224 328.

DINING WITH PANORAMIC VIEWS

On both sides of the bay

BOKADO AQUARIUM

At the Aquarium at Plaza Jacques Cousteau is a member of the highly regarded Bokado catering group that also supplies the *pintxos* bar of the San Telmo Museum. If you don't normally associate haute cuisine with an aquarium, well, think again! The chefs here are two brothers-Mike and Jesús Santamaría-who have a partnership with Arzak.

The views here just couldn't be more panoramic, facing La Concha bay at the foot of Mount Urgell. Their Bokado tasting menu runs around 45€. The restaurant also offers a cafeteria bar where one can feast on pintxos and sandwiches, their *bokados*. Closed Sunday night and Monday (www.bokadogrupo.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 431 842



View of La Concha Bay from the terrace of Bokado during the summer regatta

BRANKA

It faces Ondarreta beach, just beyond the Royal Tennis Club and before reaching Chillida's Peines del Viento iron sculptures in the El Antiguo neighborhood. It attracts the city's most discerning diners in its upstairs restaurant. Arzak, Subijana and several great chefs of Europe had a gala celebration meal upstairs when gathering to celebrate the groundbreaking for the Basque Culinary Institute. Average check-€50/person. *Note-the former chef, Pablo Loureiro, has moved to man the kitchen of Casa Urola in the Old Quarter.*

It receives a 7.5 rating in "The Best of Spanish Gastronomy". Both Branka and Bokado (see below) receive a rating of 11 in the Guía Gastronómica y Cultural del País Vasco. **Closed Sundays but open Mondays.** (www.branka-tenis.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 317 096

MODERATELY PRICED FINE DINING

In the Parte Vieja

JUANITO KOJUA

C/Portu, 14, in the Parte Vieja, has been around since 1947, and is popular with locals. It's immaculate, warm and homey. The dining room upstairs has a nautical theme with ship's lanterns, while downstairs the stone walled dining room has a farmhouse décor. Very reasonable prices for gargantuan portions! Tasting menus are priced at 40€ and 52€, while the Executive Menu, the menú del día, is only 30€ (www.juanitokojua.com). Great rice pudding!

Tel: (+34) 943 420 180.

In your daily walks in the Old Quarter you will probably pass by a **Sociedad Gastronómica**, commonly referred to in Basque as a "txoko", the traditional gastronomic social clubs strictly for men only whose members, food lovers or "tripasais", gather to relax and to prepare amazing meals in kitchens often filled with equipment that equal those found in the finest Basque restaurants. They originated as places where men could gather to drink and play cards, but evolved into associations where members of different brotherhoods (cobblers, fishermen, metalworkers, mechanics, lawyers) would meet. Later, groups of friends from these brotherhoods began to cook for each other. The oldest "Sociedad" was formed in 1870.

In San Sebastián alone, there are more than 200 Sociedades and over 2,000 in the entire French/Spanish Basque Country. Some clubs have hundreds of members, others only 20 to 30. The clubs are also known for their fine singing, and many a fine choir, orfeón, has originated in a gastronomic society. The most famous Sociedad is **Gaztelubide**, whose headquarters are in the Old Quarter. Most of the famous Basque chefs first honed their skills in these all-male eating clubs.

As Food and Wine magazine has said of the city: "*San Sebastián has the best food you've never heard of*". And remember the old Basque saying: "*To know how to eat is to know enough!*" There are more Michelin starred restaurants per capita in the Bilbao-Pamplona-San Sebastián triangle than anywhere else in Europe.

DINING ON MONDAYS

Monday's is always a difficult day for sampling the city's top tables as most noted restaurants are closed, but there are some exceptions. Here are my suggestions for Monday dinner if you don't want to do the *pintxos* route, although several of my favorite *pintxos* bars are also closed on Mondays.

CASA URBANO-PATXI AIZPURU

Stroll over to the Old Quarter to *pintxos*-bar lined 31 de Agosto street (number 17) for a classic Basque feast at the highly regarded Casa Urbano. It's a very small dining room, extremely popular, so one should reserve. We had an excellent lunch here recently, which proved to be a great value for the money as well. The chef serves a good value *menú del día* (set menu) on weekdays for lunch.



Closed Sunday night and all day Wednesday (www.restauranturbano.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 420 434

LA MURALLA

Equally good, especially for its great value fixed price, 3-course, 25€ lunch (with several options for each course and includes water, wine, bread and coffee) is this intimate restaurant at Embeltrán, 3 (www.restaurantelamuralla.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 433 508

LA FÁBRICA

And try its equally cozy and charming sister restaurant at Calle de Puerto, 17 (www.restaurantelafabrica.es), both in the Old Quarter.

Tel: (+34) 943 432 110

In addition to their well-priced, 3-course lunch menus during the week, they also offer a €36, 3-course weekend menu, which also offers a solid value in a comfortable, atmospheric setting.

La Muralla closes Tuesday and Wednesday nights and all day Sunday. La Fábrica is closed Sunday nights.

ALDANONDO

Another popular dining room in the Old Quarter is located at Euskal Herria, 6. It hosted dinner for Julia Roberts and Javier Bardem during their appearance at the International Film Festival. The name of the game here at this *asador*-simply prepared charcoal grilled meats and fish. This grill house is known for its oxen steak, *chuleta de buey*, grilled over vegetable charcoal, seasoned with sea salt and accompanied by sautéed green Gernika peppers.

You can't go wrong with the price for their asador menu at 32€, including house salad, *chuleta*, a choice of one of their fine homemade desserts, wine, water, bread and coffee. Rating of 10.5 in the Guía Gastronómica y Cultural del País Vasco. Closed Tuesday, all of May and November.

Tel: (+34) 943 422 852.

CASA UROLA

Fermín Calbetón, 20, recently remodeled with a few tables for sit-down dining. Its chef, Paco Loureiro, belongs to Sukatalde, the Association of Young Chefs of Gipuzkoa, and he offers very stylish, creative, high quality *pintxos* that are sure to impress. Its star *pintxo*: grilled foie over a white bean cream sauce, *taco de foie sobre crema de pochas*. Its upstairs restaurant is one of the Old Quarter's best. Highly recommended. Open Wednesday-Monday from 1:00 to 4:15 and 8:00 to 11:15 (www.casaurolajatetxea.es).

Tel: (+34) 943 441 371

REKONDO

Take a taxi to the slopes of Mount Igeldo to Paseo de Igeldo, 57, for the carnivore's and wine enthusiast's delight housed in a traditional Basque *caserío*, farmhouse, opened by the Rekondo family in 1964 and now run by the second generation. This classic *asador* has become a Mecca for wine lovers and carnivores. It specializes in charcoal grilled meats and game dishes, and its wine cellar boasts 150,000 bottles.

You'll find a lovely terrace for al fresco dining, and the restaurant has recently added a gastro-bar where diners can enjoy a pintxo and wines by the glass before their meal. Try the warm apple tart for dessert. Its wine cellar has received a recent award from Wine Spectator as one of the 5 best in the world! (www.rekondo.com)

Tel: (+34) 943 212 907

CASUAL OUTDOOR DINING AT THE PIER

LA RAMPA

Located next to the Aquarium at the pier, at Muelle, 26-27, this is an informal, open air seafood “shack” with a tiny interior dining room offering prime ingredients for 30€ to 34€/person. It offers quick service if you don't have the time, or inclination, for leisurely dining. Favorably reviewed by Rafael García Santos, Spain's foremost food and wine critic. Try their squid croquettes, “croquetas de txipirón” and grilled grouper (mero), sole (lenguado), or rodaballo (turbot).

Open from noon to 4:00 for lunch and 8:00 to 11:00 for dinner, closed Tuesday evenings and all day Wednesday (www.restaurantelarampa.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 421 652



Crews preparing for the summer races on La Concha Bay

GASTRONOMIC SPLURGES OUTSIDE THE CITY

RESTAURANT MATTEO

In same area at Barrio Ugaldetxo, 11, right down the road from Zuberoa you will find another Michelin starred caserío, a Basque farmhouse restaurant, which serves creative food and ample portions with gentler prices than Zuberoa, offering a menú del día for only 18€ + VAT, and a weekend menu for 35€ + VAT.

Closed Sunday nights, Mondays, during the Christmas holiday season and Easter week (www.restaurantematteo.net).

Tel: (+34) 943 491 194.

RESTAURANTE FAGOLLAGA

Outside the grim, industrial village of Hernani, you have yet another country hideaway in a pretty Basque farmhouse, or caserío, founded by the chef's great grandmother in 1904, at Ereñozu Auzoa, 68-69. "Fagollaga" means "place of many beech trees" in Basque.

Just follow the signs to the Goizueta highway. The restaurant is along the road, alongside the Urumea River, and has a beautiful glass enclosed terrace and one Michelin star.

Of all the gourmet temples in this area, this one is the most reasonably priced. It also has a very good pastry chef. Offering fine service with ample portions. It was featured in the June '05 issue of *Gourmet* and in recognition of chef Isaac Salaberria's talent and potential, Spain's most influential restaurant guide, *Lo Mejor de la Gastronomía*, ranks Fagollaga just a half-point below Arzak.

Open Tuesday through Sunday from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, closed Monday and all of Holy Week (www.fagollaga.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 550 031

LODGING IN SAN SEBASTIÁN-DONOSTIA

As the premier resort city on the Basque Coast, San Sebastian offers little in high-end accommodations, boasting only one 5-star and two luxury 4-star properties.

5-STAR HOTEL MARÍA CRISTINA

This beautiful Belle Époque structure, at Paseo República Argentina, 4, overlooking the Urumea River, is only a few minutes walk from the Parte Vieja, the old quarter, and across the river from the Kursaal Center. Commissioned by King Alfonso XIII, it opened in 1912, and was designed by the same architect who created the classic Hotels Ritz in Paris and in Madrid. This is a Grande Dame of hotels with old world charm, attracting many of the celebrities attending the International Film Festival in September each year.



The hotel was completely renovated, reopening in July 2012 in time for the International Film Festival (www.hotel-mariacristina.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 437 600

4-STAR LONDRES Y DE INGLATERRA

This white, wedding-cake looking Belle Époque building is decorated in a rather bold Victorian style (bright colors), has an enviable location at Zubieta, 2, right on La Concha Beach. This is where we send our friends who want San Sebastián's very best location. Renovated in 2013, it now offers 167 rooms and suites; including the new rooftop 345 SF Attic rooms with large terraces overlooking La Concha Beach, some with Jacuzzi. The Mata Hari suite (484 SF) on the 6th floor is truly magnificent, one of a kind.



Facing the bay, the hotel offers a great view of La Concha beach, and is a fine choice and much a better value than the María Cristina. The fourteen VIP suites, with beach views, are among the best. The hotel's Swing Bar, facing the beach, is open on weekdays until 1:00 am, 2:00 am on Saturday.

The breakfast buffet is priced reasonably at 19,50€, and there is complimentary coffee before 7:00 am. The hotel has its own parking garage (www.hlondres.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 440 770

4-STAR VILLA SORO

Is a charming 25-room luxury hotel located in a beautiful renovated 19th century villa once known as Eguzki Soro, has been declared a Historical Heritage Building of San Sebastián. Located on Avenida de Ategorrieta, it was built in by Don Ramon Londaiz for his daughter Maria and served as the family home for several generations. This is one of the nicest hotels in San Sebastián and a member of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World. Deluxe rooms are located in the original Villa; other rooms are in the annex.



Located close to Arzak's at Avenida de Ategorrieta, 61, it is within an easy walking distance of Zurriola beach, Kursaal Convention Center and the Old Quarter. There is a fitness gym and bicycles for guests to explore the city. Parking is free. It has one of our favorite destinations in Donostia (www.villasoro.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 297 970

4-STAR HOTEL ASTORIA 7

Associated with the group that manages the Villa Soro, Hotel Iturregi in Getaria, Hotel Viura in the Rioja and the Palacio Guendulain in Pamplona, the Astoria 7, a former movie theater, is a stylish movie themed hotel, each room dedicated to an actor or director who has visited the city. Located near the Urumea River, at Sagrada Familia, 1, it is extremely popular during the San Sebastián International Film Festival in September (www.astoria7hotel.com).

Tel (+34) 943 445 000

4-STAR BARCELÓ COSTA VASCA

At Avenida Pío Baroja, this is a resort-like hotel with 200 rooms sitting above Ondarreta beach, offering parking, tennis courts, gardens and a seasonal outdoors pool. It's a 15-minute walk to downtown, but a shuttle service is provided. This is the hotel that houses

most of the jazz musicians during the International Jazz Festival in July. Perfect for a family (www.barcelo.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 212 428

3-STAR HOTEL NIZA

At Zubieta, 56, the hotel is housed in a white, 1920's period building facing the bay on



the beach side and the square on the front side, and is owned by the Chillida family. The Niza has a Belle Epoque style; a cage elevator, wooden staircase, lots of marble, and chandeliers. The 40 comfortable rooms are decorated in a simple, but pleasant blue and yellow color scheme, with bare wood floors, unadorned walls and small, but nicely renovated baths. Some rooms have wonderful bay views. This is an excellent value. Not fancy, but very friendly with a great downstairs pintxos bar run by Restaurante Narru, attractive formal parlor for relaxing and reading, and nice desk staff (en.hotelniza.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 426 663

Eduardo Chillida, who died in '03, was Spain's most important and prolific sculptor, a contemporary of Henry Moore. Chillida's famous work, the "Comb of the Wind" can be found at the end of the bay, while in the village of Hernani, just south of San Sebastián, is a museum housing his works,

the Museo Chillida Eku, currently closed to the public (www.museochillidaleku.com).

STAYING IN “EL ANTIGUO”

4-STAR HOTEL NH COLLECTION SAN SEBASTIÁN ARÁNZAZU

Renovated in 2014, this upscale business class hotel (superior rooms and suites only) offers modern décor and home-away-from-home comfort, in the upscale residential neighborhood of “El Antiguo”, a few minutes walk from Ondarreta Beach. Parking is available for guests for 17,60€/day (www.nh-hotels.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 219 077

4-STAR HOTEL SAN SEBASTIÁN

Located at Avenida Zumalacárregui, 20, close to Ondarreta Beach and 10 minutes from the La Concha Beach promenade, the hotel offers 90 exterior facing rooms, some of which can accommodate up to 4 people. The suites also have a terrace (hotelsansebastian.net).

Tel: (+34) 943 316 660

3-STAR HOTEL CODINA

Located at Avenida Zumalacárregui, 21, a few minutes walk from Ondarreta Beach and the Miramar Palace, the Codina is a comfortable 65-room hotel. The best rooms are the double superior rooms on the top floor, some with a sit-out terrace (www.hotelcodina.es).

Tel: (+34) 943 212 200



View of Monte Urgull from a superior room at the Hotel Codina

DINING IN EL ANTIGUO

Considered “off the beaten path”, San Sebastián’s upscale neighborhood of Antiguo offer’s some excellent dining options, quite different from what you will find in the city’s Parte Vieja.

VINOTECA BERNARDINA

This very popular neighborhood restaurant is our favorite stop in El Antigo. Located at Vitoria-Gasteiz Kalea, 6, it’s open Monday-Friday from 8:00 am to 4:30 and 6:30 to midnight, Saturdays it opens at 9:00 am, and offers a seasonal menu and Joselito Ibérico jamón (vinotecabernardina.com).

Tel: (+34) 943 314 899



Verduritas en tempura



Secreto de Ibérico



Pulpo a la brasa con espuma de cachelos



Joselito Ibérico