

# Basque Country, Navarra & La Rioja



The Basque Country and its associated regions of Navarra and La Rioja seem worlds apart from Spain, from Europe and, sometimes, from the rest of the world itself.

The Basques claim their country as a nation and it is easy to see why. Even the most casual visitor cannot help feeling a powerful sense of uniqueness amid the forested hills and timeless villages of the northern Basque provinces. You feel that same uniqueness on the corrugated coastline with its string of tough fishing ports, where Euskara, the Basque language, holds sway above all others. You feel it too in the crowning glories of the Basque Country, the cities of Bilbao and Vitoria, paradigms of cultured, sociable urban life and San Sebastián, a sublime beach resort and boasting some of the finest food in Spain and, some say, in Europe too. Add to all of this the ancient Basque heartland of Navarra, less self-consciously Basque today, but with a colourful identity that also sets it apart.

It is a land of breathtaking contrasts that take you from the seductive heat of the low country south of Pamplona, through that ambivalent city of sedate tradition and bull-running excess, to the snowy coxcombs of the Pyrenees and their green, forested valleys – paradise for walkers, skiers and climbers. And then there's La Rioja, awash with glorious wine, linked by geography to the more temperate north, yet persuasively Mediterranean in its sunburst colours and its dreamy landscape of vineyards, grassy hills and bone-white limestone escarpments, its medieval monasteries and enticing wine towns.

BASQUE COUNTRY,  
NAVARRA & LA RIOJA

## HIGHLIGHTS

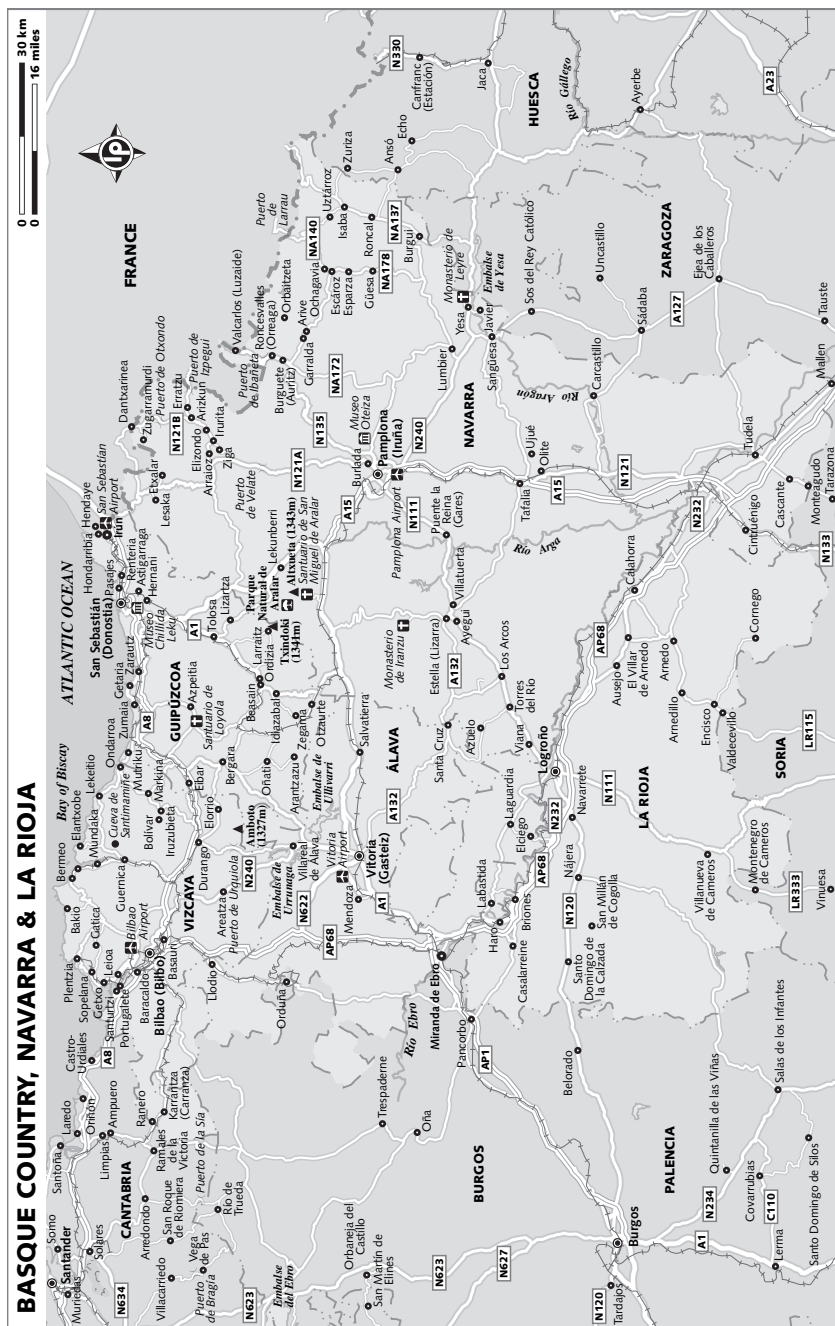
- Wine and dine in fabulous **San Sebastián** (p465), city of beautiful beaches and *belle-époque* buildings
- Don't miss **Bilbao's** (p453) stunning Museo Guggenheim and its Museo de Bellas Artes; big windows on great art
- Relax in civilised **Vitoria** (p476), where the pedestrian triumphs over the car
- Wander the velvety **La Rioja** (p491) wine country
- Escape from the mainstream and explore the medieval towns of **Olite** (p487) and **Tudela** (p488)
- Get high on the pure air of the Navarran **Pyrenees** (p488)



■ AREA: 22,670 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 28°C,  
LOW 12°C

■ POP: 3.02 MILLION



## BASQUE COUNTRY

The Basque Country proper, known to Basques as Euskadi or Euskal Herria, the 'land of the Basque Speakers' and known in Spanish as El País Vasco, somehow manages to cope triumphantly with its multifaceted identity. Hopefully emerging from the shadow of political violence, although only time will tell, this is a land that demands exploration beyond its delightful main cities of Bilbao, Vitoria and San Sebastián. It's a land of tumbling hills and rocky ridges, often swathed in forest, and subject always to the quixotic weather of the great sea that washes on to its equally fascinating and varied coastline. At every turn are towns and villages that are emphatically Basque, yet have unique and intriguing identities.

Even the names of the region's three provinces of Guipúzcoa (Basque: Gipuzkoa), Álava (Basque: Araba) and Vizcaya (Basque: Bizkaia) seem to resonate with intriguing possibilities. You travel through the Basque Country always curious, and always rewarded.

### History

No-one quite knows where the Basque people came from (they have no migration myth in their oral history); but their presence here is believed to predate even the earliest known migrations. Even the Romans left the hilly Basque Country more or less to itself, but the expansionist Castilian crown gained sovereignty over Basque territories during the Middle Ages (1000–1450), although with considerable difficulty; Navarra constituted a separate kingdom until 1512. Even when they came within the Castilian orbit, Navarra and the three Basque provinces extracted broad autonomy arrangements, known as the *fueros* (the ancient laws of the Basques).

After the Second Carlist War in 1876 all provinces except Navarra were stripped of their coveted *fueros*, thereby fuelling nascent Basque nationalism. Yet, although the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV; Basque Nationalist Party) was established in 1894, support was never uniform, as all Basque provinces included a considerable Castilian contingent.

When the Republican government in Madrid proposed the possibility of home rule (self-government) to the Basques in 1936, both Guipúzcoa and Vizcaya took up the offer. When the Spanish Civil War erupted,

conservative rural Navarra and Álava supported Franco, while Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa sided with the Republicans, a decision they paid a high price for in the four decades that followed.

Today, with the Basque terrorist organisation Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA; Basques and Freedom) declaring what is, hopefully, a final ceasefire in 2006, and with Madrid proving positive about strengthened autonomy to the regions, the Basque Country seems ever more likely to progress its nationalist ambitions.

### Language

'The Basque language is a country', said Victor Hugo, and language certainly encapsulates all things Basque. Known as Euskara, the Basque language is acknowledged as being one of Europe's oldest and most quixotic languages, with no known relationship to the Indo-European family of languages. Its earliest written elements were thought to be 11th-century manuscripts found at the Monasterio de Suso (p496) at San Millán de la Cogolla in La Rioja province, but discoveries in 2006 at the archaeological site of Iruña-Veleia near Vitoria included inscriptions in Basque dating from the 3rd century AD.

Suppressed by Franco, Basque was subsequently recognised as one of Spain's official

### SIGNS IN BASQUE

Basque words that commonly appear on signs include the following:

Basque	English	Spanish
<i>aireportua</i>	airport	<i>aeropuerto</i>
<i>erdia</i>	centre	<i>centro</i>
<i>erdialdea</i>	city centre	<i>centro de la ciudad</i>
<i>jatetxea</i>	restaurant	<i>restaurante</i>
<i>kalea</i>	street	<i>calle</i>
<i>kale nagusia</i>	main street	<i>calle mayor</i>
<i>komuna/kontzu!</i>	toilet/s caution/ beware!	<i>servicios</i> <i>¡atención!</i>
<i>nekazal</i>	agrotourism homes	<i>casas rurales</i>
<i>ongi etorri</i>	welcome	<i>bienvenido</i>
<i>turismoa/turismo</i>	tourism	<i>turismo</i>
<i>turismo bulego</i>	tourist office	<i>oficina de turismo</i>

## BASQUE NATIONALISM

Basque nationalism is many faceted, yet at its heart, its motivation lies in the Basque peoples' compelling sense of identity and of cultural uniqueness, a passion that becomes evident to even the most casual traveller through the northern Basque provinces.

In 1961 a small group of Basque separatists known as Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA; the name stands for Basque Homeland and Freedom) carried out its first terrorist attack. Its goal was to carve out an independent Basque state from the Basque territories of northern Spain and southern France. Thus began a cycle of violence that became increasingly self-defeating in the face of the granting of wide-ranging autonomy in the early 1980s and 1990s. The antithesis of ETA was the emergence of a powerful, though peaceful, nationalism, especially among the young, that saw the Basque language as the most potent symbol of nationhood and independence.

In the last 40 years ETA's grisly war killed more than 800 people. Sporadic 'ceasefires' and initiatives foundered on the unwillingness of both sides to make major concessions. Relations reached their nadir in March 2004 when the government of José María Aznar, made a desperate, and ultimately failed, election play by trying to blame ETA for the terrorist bombings in Madrid.

In March 2006, ETA declared a 'final' ceasefire, the most hopeful yet. The response of Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero was to state that the Madrid government 'has the best opportunity for a peace process for more than 30 years'. Zapatero's pragmatism and his party's stated intent of holding talks with ETA and with Herri Batasuna, the perceived political wing of ETA, may yet progress the situation in spite of continuing opposition from Spain's conservative Popular Party and ingrained suspicion of Madrid by many Basques.

No-one would claim that all Basques are passionate nationalists, but with expanded autonomy on the cards for Catalonia, the realisation of the peaceful aspirations of a large majority of Basques seems more promising than ever. Complex and conflicting issues remain, however, not least the vexed question of the Madrid government's policy of imprisoning outside the Basque Country those whom many Basques see as political prisoners. Resolving this would be a major step forward.

languages. Although Franco's repression meant that many older Basques are unable to speak their native tongue, it has now become the language of choice, and of identity, among a growing number of young Basques, fuelling a dynamic cultural renaissance and a nonviolent political awareness. There are now Basque-language radio and TV stations and newspapers.

For more information on the Basque language, see p877.

## Sport

The Basques indulge in a wonderful and, to outsiders, eccentric assortment of sports, that range from grass-cutting and log-chopping to caber-tossing and tug-of-war. The most famous is *pelota vasca* a form of handball played on a walled court known as a *frontón*. There's also a version involving the use of a *txistera*, a kind of hand-held basket that allows the ball to be slung with disconcerting velocity at the wall. You can often see local teams whacking away at the town or village *frontón*. The traditional game, with teams of

two players each, is played with the bare hand, but there are up to 20 variants of the sport, now played all over the world.

Coastal Basques are superb rowers in the tradition of their historic use of pilot vessels and whaling boats. Today at ports such as Ondarroa (p464), rowing is a passion and there are famous races, such as the Regatta de Traineras in San Sebastián (see p469).

Football (soccer) is well-served by the much-loved Athletic de Bilbao team, known for its admirable, though often difficult, policy of only signing Basque players.

## Food & Drink

Food to the Basques is both a necessity and an art form and Basque cuisine is generally regarded as among Spain's finest, both for its classical food and for its tapas, which are known more commonly as *pintxos* in the Basque Country (see the boxed text, p470).

Fish is probably the favourite natural ingredient in Basque cuisine and famous dishes include *bacalao al pil pil* (salt cod cooked with garlic) and *merluza a la vasca* (hake in green

sauc). Meat usually turns up as delicious stews throughout the Basque Country and as *chuletas de buey* (enormous beef chops). Other distinctive ingredients include mushrooms, *pimientos* (red peppers) and *alubias* (black beans).

The great Basque drinks are *sídra* (cider) and a refreshing young white wine, *txacoli*, light in alcohol content and a classic accompaniment to *pintxos*. A good part of the La Rioja wine-producing region extends into the Northern Basque Country and the choicest Riojas are a rich complement to Basque cuisine.

Led by such master-chefs as Juan Mari Arzak and his daughter Elena, and Pedro Subijana, the Basque Country's contribution to *nouvelle cuisine* has become internationally famous with what is commonly called the *nieuva cocina vasca*, a world-class 'school' of innovation. Signature dishes, using classic Basque produce, include treats such as mushroom terrine, partridge stuffed with grapes and sea bass with green peppers.

## BILBAO

pop 372,000

Bilbao (Basque: Bilbo) is a city to dream about – vital, vibrant and culturally dynamic, yet somehow stress-free and, above all, civilised in the true sense of that overused word.

The Basque Country's biggest and busiest city, Bilbao lies on Ría Nervión and is neatly wedged into the green hills of Vizcaya province. At its heart it is sliced in two by the murky waters of Ría de Bilbao, the Nervión's channel to the sea.

*Bilbainos* (residents of Bilbao) have long called their city the *botxo*, the 'orifice', an ironic and affectionate multimetaphor for the city's topography and its once-ugly industrial sprawl. Post-industrial decline into an even deeper black hole seemed to be Bilbao's fate during the late 20th century. Yet by the 1990s visionary planning, and Bilbao's tradition of hard work, saw the city well on the way to reinventing itself as a 21st-century metropolis, even before Frank Gehry's iconic Museo Guggenheim gave it international cultural status. *Bilbainos* appreciate 'El Goog', but they know also that their city was going places anyway.

Today, Bilbao throngs with sophisticated yet earthy locals, its cuisine is positively lip-smacking, there's nonstop partying if you want to burn out in style, and a rich Basque culture more than matches the internationalism of the Guggenheim.

## History

Bilbao was granted the title of villa (a city state) in 1300, and medieval *bilbainos* went about their business in the bustle of Las Siete Calles, the original seven streets of the old town, and on the wharves of San Antón and Abando. The conquest of the Americas stimulated trade, and Basque fishers, merchants and settlers soon built strong links to such cities as Boston. By the late 19th century the smokestacks of steelworks, shipbuilding yards and chemical plants dominated the area's skyline.

From the Carlist Wars through to the Spanish Civil War, Bilbao was always considered the greatest prize in the north, largely for its industrial value. Franco took the city in the spring of 1937 and reprisals against Basque nationalists were massive and long lasting. Yet, during the Franco era the city prospered as it fed Spanish industrial needs. This was followed by the seemingly terminal economic decline that has been so dynamically reversed in recent years.

## Orientation

Bilbao's old quarter, the Casco Viejo, lies bundled up on the east bank of Ría de Bilbao, Río Nervión's channel to the sea. *Pensiones* (small hotels), cafés, restaurants and bars cluster in the pedestrianised streets, Las Siete Calles. Between the Casco and the river is Plaza de Arenal, a broad open area in front of the handsome façade of the Teatro Arriaga. From here the Puente de Arenal spans the river and leads into the Abando area and Plaza Circular (Plaza de España). The plaza is the eastern hub of El Ensanche, the 19th-century 'extension' of Bilbao with its swathe of tall, handsome buildings. The main train stations are between Plaza Circular and the river. The main bus station, Termibus, is just over 1.5km west of Plaza Circular.

## Information

### BOOKSHOPS

Newsstands around Plaza Moyúa usually have a fair selection of foreign newspapers. There are well-stocked bookshops at the Guggenheim and at the Museo de Bellas Artes.

**elkar** (☎ 944 16 14 50; Calle de la Cruz) Basque publications are strongly represented here. Also stocks books in Spanish and a few in English, and there's an excellent map and travel section.

**Tintas** (☎ 944 44 95 41; Calle del General Concha 10) Travel bookshop with a broad selection of travel books, road maps and topographical maps for trekkers.

<b>EATING</b>	Artalo..... 25 D2	<b>SLEEPING</b>	Bilbao Jardines..... 13 A4
Bar Cure Tok..... 26 B4	Gran Hotel Domine..... 14 C1	Hostal Begoña..... 15 D3	Hostal Roquefer..... 16 A4
Café Boulevard..... 28 A3	Café Guggenheim..... (see 12)	Hotel Carlton..... 17 C2	Hotel Ripa..... 18 D3
Café Guggenheim..... 29 D2	El Aranda de Julen..... 30 E4	El Globo..... 31 C2	El Perro Chico..... 32 D4
Fres. Co..... 33 D2	Gregorio Martín..... 34 B4	Kafé Antzokia..... 41 A4	La Deliciosa..... 36 A4
Los Candiles..... 37 D2	Mercado de la Ribera..... 38 E4	Passerela..... 39 C3	Restaurante Vegetariano..... 40 C3
Sasibi..... 41 A4	Vitor..... 42 B4	<b>DRINKING</b>	Da Virid..... 43 D3
Kafo..... 44 B3	Toriggi..... 45 C3	Zulo..... 46 A4	<b>ENTERTAINMENT</b>
Arriaga Theatre..... 47 A3	Conjunto Vado..... 48 D3	El Balcón de la Lola..... 49 D3	Le Club..... 50 E4
<b>SHOPPING</b>	Gilli-Gilli..... 51 A4	Gilli-Gilli..... 52 B4	<b>TRANSPORT</b>
Buses to Santurtzi..... 53 D2	Buses to the Airport..... 54 C2	P&O Ferry Office..... 55 D1	Terminus..... 56 A2

**EMERGENCY**  
**Cruz Roja** (% 944 22 22 22) Ambulance service.  
**Emergency** (% 112)  
**Policía Nacional** (% 091; Calle de Luis Briñas 14)

**INTERNET ACCESS**  
**Net House** (% 944 23 71 53; Calle Villarias 6; per hr €3; h 10.30am-10.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-11.30pm Sat, 11.30am-10.30pm Sun)  
**Web Press** (% 944 23 39 37; Calle Esquina Barraincúa 9; per hr €2.60; h 10am-10pm Mon-Fri, 4-10pm Sun) A well-run place with a photocopying service.

**MEDICAL SERVICES**  
**Hospital Civil de Basurto** (% 944 41 87 00; Calle de Gurtubay)

**MONEY**  
 There are numerous banks, most with ATMs, in Bilbao, particularly around Plaza Circular (Plaza de España).

**POST**  
**Main post office** (% 944 22 05 48; Alameda de Urquijo 19)

**TELEPHONE**  
**Web Press** (% 944 23 39 37; Calle Esquina Barraincúa 9; h 10am-10pm Mon-Fri, 4-10pm Sun) Cheap international calls.

**TOURIST INFORMATION**  
**Tourist office** (% 944 79 57 60; www.bilbao.net/bilbaoturismo); Main Office (Plaza del Ensanche, 11; h 9am-2pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Fri); Arriaga Theatre (Plaza Arriaga; h 9.30am-2pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-2pm Sun Jun-Sep, 11am-2pm & 5-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm & 5-7.30pm Sat, 9.30am-2pm Sun Oct-May); Guggenheim (Avenida Abandoibarra 2; h 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Jul-Sep, 11am-6pm Tue-Fri, 11am-7pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun Oct-May); Airport (% 944 71 03 01; h 7.30am-11pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-11pm Sat & Sun) Bilbao's friendly tourist staffers are extremely helpful, well informed and above all enthusiastic about their city. At all offices ask for the free bimonthly *Bilbao Guia*, with its entertainment listings plus tips on restaurants, bars and nightlife.

**Sights**  
**MUSEO GUGGENHEIM**  
 Opened in September 1997, Bilbao's Museo Guggenheim (% 944 35 90 80; www.guggenheim-bilbao.es; Ave Abandoibarra 2; adult/student/under 12 €10.50/6.50/free; h 10am-8pm Tue-Sun Sep-Jun, daily Jul & Aug; ✓✓) lifted modern architecture and Bilbao into

the 21st century – with sensation. It boosted the city's already inspired regeneration and stimulated further development.

Some might say that structure overwhelms function here and that the Guggenheim is probably more famous for its architecture than its content; but Canadian architect Frank Gehry's inspired use of flowing canopies, cliffs, promontories, ship shapes, towers and flying fins is irresistible.

Like all great architects, Gehry designed the Guggenheim with historical and geographical contexts in mind. The site was an industrial wasteland, part of Bilbao's wrenched and decaying warehouse district on the banks of Ría de Bilbao. The city's historic industries of ship building and fishing reflected Gehry's own interests, not least his engagement with industrial materials in previous works, while the gleaming titanium tiles that sheathe most of the building like giant herring scales are said to have been inspired by the architect's childhood fascination with fish.

The interior of the Guggenheim is purposefully vast. The cathedral-like atrium is more than 45m high. Light pours in through the glass cliffs. Leading off from the atrium is Gallery 104, the fish gallery, a vast arena 128m by 30m wide that houses Richard Serra's *Snake*, and his *The Matter of Time*. These installations comprise massive iron sheets arranged maze-like and mysterious and between which you wander in a rust-red world of muffled, sibilant or clanging sound.

Galleries 103 and 105 house selections from the Guggenheim permanent collection, and can include works by Picasso, Braque, Mondrian, Miró, Rothko, Klee and Kandinsky; but these works are not always on display (check the Guggenheim's website for a full programme of upcoming exhibitions).

Admission prices may vary depending on special exhibitions and the last ticket sales are half an hour before closing. Free guided tours in English take place at 11am, 12.30pm, 4.30pm and 6.30pm; you sign up half an hour before at the information desk. Groups are limited to 20, so get there early. Excellent self-guided audio tours in various languages are free with your general admission.

**FUNICULAR DE ARTXANDA**  
 For a breathtaking vista of Bilbao take the three-minute ride up Artxanda hill on the funicular (% 944 45 49 66; Plaza Funicular; one-way adult/under

### OPEN-AIR GALLERY

Part of the Guggenheim experience is a quiet wander around the outside of the building, appreciating the extraordinary imagination behind its design and catching the different colours reflected by the titanium tiles, limestone and glass. Lying between the glass buttresses of the central atrium and Ria de Bilbao is a simple pool of water that emits at intervals a mist 'sculpture' by Fuyiko Nakaya. Nearby on the riverbank is a sculpture by Louise Bourgeois, a skeletal canopy representing a spider entitled *Maman*, said to represent a protective embrace.

In the open area to the west of the museum a fountain sculpture fires off jets of water into the air randomly and youngsters have the time of their lives taking their chances as they leap to and fro. Beyond is a kids' playground. On the Alameda Mazarredo, the city side of the museum, is Jeff Koon's kitsch-whimsy *Puppy*, a 12m tall highland terrier made up of thousands of begonias. Bilbao has hung on to 'El Poop', who was supposed to be a passing attraction as part of a world tour. With the fond, deprecating humour of citizens of all tough cities, *bilbainos* will tell you that El Poop came first – and then they had to build a kennel behind it...

12 €0.80/0.35; 7.15am–10pm Mon–Sat, 8.15am–10pm Sun Oct–May, to 11pm Sat & Sun Jun–Sep). The base station in Plaza Funicular can be reached from the pleasant northside river walk that links the Paseo del Arenal to the Guggenheim. It can also be reached from the Uribitarte Eusko Tran stop by crossing the exuberant Zubizuri Footbridge, creation of architect Santiago Calatrava.

### MUSEO DE BELLAS ARTES

A mere five minutes from the Museo Guggenheim is Bilbao's Fine Arts Museum (944 39 60 60; www.museobilbao.com; Plaza del Museo 2; adult/student €5/3.50, Wed free; 10am–8pm Tue–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun; √), a more than satisfactory complement to the Guggenheim.

The museum houses a compelling collection that includes everything from Gothic sculptures to 20th-century pop art. There are three main subcollections; Classical Art, with work by Murillo, Zurbarán, El Greco, Goya and van Dyck; Contemporary Art, featuring work by Gauguin, Francis Bacon, Anthony Caro; and Basque Art with the work of the great sculptors Jorge de Oteiza and Eduardo Chillida, but also with strong paintings by the likes of Ignacio Zuloaga and Juan de Echevarria. A useful audio-guide costs €2.

### CASCO VIEJO

It's a worthwhile stroll through Bilbao's atmospheric old town, with its worn, grungy façades, bars, restaurants and shops. At the heart of the Casco are Bilbao's original 'seven streets', Las Siete Calles. Midmorning there's a bit of a rout as delivery vans compete for space. It's all part of the quarter's happy vibe. At the heart of the Casco is the 19th-century

arcaded Plaza Nueva, a rewarding *pintxo* haunt. There's a lively Sunday market here that offers coins, stamps and other bric-a-brac. The quarter's Gothic Catedral de Santiago, has a splendid Renaissance portico, itself once the scene of medieval markets and civic meetings.

### EUSKAL MUSEOA (MUSEO VASCO)

The Museum of Basque Archaeology, Ethnography & History (944 15 54 23; www.euskal-museoa.org; Plaza Miguel Unamuno 4; adult/student/under 10 €3/1.50/free, Thu free; 11am–5pm Tue–Sat, 11am–2pm Sun; √), to give it its full title, is a well-executed display of archaeological findings from the Basque region, enhanced by exhibits about traditional working practices and domestic life. The museum is housed in a fine old building, at whose centre is the peaceful cloister that was part of an original 17th-century Jesuit College. In the cloister is the Mikeldi Idol a powerful pre-Christian, possibly Iron Age, symbolic figure.

### Tours

An enjoyable way of catching a close quarters' flavour of Bilbao is on a walking tour (944 79 57 60; per person €3; 1 Sat & Sun) of the Casco Viejo and of the Ensanche–Abandoibarra district on the west side of Riá de Bilbao. They are led by local guides who have excellent language skills, great knowledge of the city and infectious enthusiasm. The tours last 90 minutes. Ask at tourist offices for times.

### Festivals & Events

Held in February, *carnaval* is celebrated with vigour, but Bilbao's grandest fiesta begins on the first Saturday after 15 August and is

known as the Aste Nagusia (Big Week). Traditional parades and music mix with a full programme of cultural events over 10 days.

About 25km north of Bilbao, Getxo hosts a week-long international jazz festival in July, as well as a smaller blues music festival (June) and a folk music festival (September).

### Sleeping

The Bilbao tourism authority has a very useful reservations department (902 87 72 98; www.bilbaoreservas.com).

Places to stay in the Casco Viejo are usually spread across the upper floors of tall, old buildings with street level intercoms. Many places are pleasantly creaky and late-night noise at weekends can be irritating; but double-glazing often helps. Ask for a room facing away from the street, pack the earplugs, or join the party.

### BUDGET

**Camping Sopelana** (946 76 19 81; www.camping-sopelana.com; sites per person/ten/car €5/5/5; √) This pleasant site has a swimming pool as well as nearby Sopelana Beach to play on. Facilities are very good. It's on the metro line, 15km from Bilbao.

**Albergue Bilbao Aterpetxea** (944 27 00 54; aterpe@albergue.bilbao.net; Carretera Basurto-Kastrexana Erep 70; dm/s €14.50/18.50; i ) A modern, well-run facility, spread over eight floors, this hostel is a 10-minute ride on bus 58 from Plaza Arriaga, Plaza Zabáburu and from Basurto. Prices shown are for under-twenty-fives; over twenty-five's pay about €1.30 more. Meals, internet access, bike hire, money exchange and laundry facilities are some of the extras on offer. Student groups often book it.

### AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Hostal Begoña** (944 23 01 34; www.hostalbegonia.com; Calle de la Amistad 2; s/d from €51.35/61; i ) The owners of this outstanding place, in a quiet side street near Plaza Circular, don't need voguish labels for their very stylish and individual creation. Begoña speaks for itself with colourful rooms decorated with modern artworks, and all with funky tiled bathrooms, minibar, cable TV and wrought-iron beds. Bonuses include free internet access, books, magazines and drinks. Prices drop in the low season.

**Pensión Méndez** (944 16 03 64; www.pensionmendez.com; Calle de Santa María 13; s/d without bathroom €27/38, s/d/tr with bathroom from €39/52/68) There's a dual choice on the 1st and 4th floors of this centrally located, lofty building. Rooms are fresh and clean and have tiled or wooden floors. The 1st floor has en-suite rooms with pleasant décor. The 4th floor has shared bathrooms, but the general standard is still good.

**La Estrella** (944 16 40 66; fax 944 16 70 66; Calle de María Muñoz 6; s/d €27/45, with bathroom €39/57). Estrella has been around for a while and offers decent rooms that have no great character but that are clean and comfy. There's a dining room and bar.

**Hostal Roquefer** (944 15 07 55; Calle de la Lotería 2; s/d with washbasin €25/40, with bathroom €38/50) Buried inside a classic old-town building and with high ceilings and narrow hallways, Roquefer is a touch fusty and dusty to match the old-fashioned style; but the very kindly owners are a pleasure.

**Pension Gurea** (944 16 32 99; Calle de Bidebarrieta 14; s/d €40/45, without bathroom €30/35) There's a sparky air around this busy, well-run place where you get a friendly, up-beat welcome. Rooms are adequate and clean.

**Pension Mardones** (944 15 31 05; www.pensionmardones.com; Calle Jardines 4; s/d with washbasin €35/40, with bathroom €40/45) Deep in the heart of the Casco this long-established favourite is very well kept by the cheerful owners. The rooms are high-ceilinged and spacious and there's lots of polished wood on the floors.

### MIDRANGE

**Pensión Iturrienea Ostataua** (944 16 15 00; fax 944 15 89 29; Calle de Santa María 14; s/d €50/60) Reflecting a marvellous Basque individuality at the heart of Bilbao's Casco Viejo – say hello to the lifelike sheep at the door – this place oozes character and charm. There's been a recent refurbishment of the spacious rooms and the whole place is filled with natural wood, stone and antiques. It also serves a good breakfast (€8).

**Hotel Ripa** (944 23 96 77; www.hotel-ripa.com; Calle de Ripa 3; s/d €50/65; p i ) Across the bridge from the Casco Viejo, the comfy rooms here are fresh and bright and the ones at the front have great river views.

**Bilbao Jardines** (944 794 210; www.hotelbilbaojardines.com; Calle Jardines 9; s/d €4.20/85.60; p a i ) A sparkling newcomer to the Casco Viejo's dusty façades, the Jardine's fresh, modern

décor and comfy, but unfancy furnishings offer a reasonably priced alternative to the sometimes worn charm of the quarter's long-serving  *pensiones*.

**Hotel Sirimiri** (☎ 944 33 07 59; www.hotelsirimiri.com; Plaza la Encarnación 3; s/d/tr €74.90/96.30/117.70; P i ) An excellent choice with very friendly and helpful management, Sirimiri is just under 1km downriver from Plaza Arriaga, but has the overwhelming advantage of being only seconds away from the Atxuri Train Station and Eusko Tran Terminal. Rooms are spacious and very comfy. There's even a free gym in the basement and a sauna which costs €5.

#### TOP END

**Hotel Carlton** (☎ 944 16 22 00; www.aranzazu-hotels.com; Plaza de Federico Moyúa 2; s/d Mon-Thu €188.30/236, Fri-Sun €101.65/117.70) Grand dame of Bilbao hotels and still lording it over the buzzing Plaza Moyúa, the delightful Carlton draws you in past an army of staff and slightly flouncy regulars, into soothing marble interiors, vaulted ceilings and graceful rooms. 'El Goog' is even within walking distance.

**Gran Hotel Domine** (☎ 944 25 33 00; www.granhoteldominebilbao.com; Alameda Mazarredo 61; d from €216) With designer chic all the way from the Javier Mariscal main interiors to the Phillipe Starck and Arne Jacobsen fittings – and that's just in the loos – this stellar showpiece of the Silken chain has views of the Guggenheim from some of its pricier rooms and from the roof terrace.

#### Eating

Bilbao may not have snared the same starry reputation for food that San Sebastián enjoys, but it can more than match its rival's  *pintxo* bars for quality if not quantity, while its top restaurants offer terrific Basque cuisine.

#### PINTXOS

**Bar Gure Toki** (☎ 944 15 80 37; Plaza Nueva 12; pintxos €1.20) Tucked away in the northwest corner of Plaza Nueva is this cosy little  *pintxo* bar that has a cosy attitude to match. There's a subtle but simple line in creative  *pintxos* (€1.20) such as  *hongos con foie* (mushrooms in sauce).

**Victor** (☎ 944 15 16 78; Plaza Nueva 2) A long-established Bilbao favourite with a popular restaurant where you can sample the great Basque signature dish of  *bacalao al pil pil*; but it's in the main bar where you'll find classic  *pintxos*.

**Café-Bar Bilbao** (☎ 944 15 16 71; Plaza Nueva 6) This place prides itself on very creative  *pintxos*, so plunge straight in, if you dare, for a taste of  *mousse de pata sobre crema de melocotón y almendras*. Don't ask; just eat...

**Sasibil** (☎ 944 79 05 71; Calle Jardines Victor 8) Sasibil gets a mixed business crowd at lunchtime and early evening for such treats as  *bracheta de pulpo y langostinos* (octopus and prawns). The squawking as you enter? Ignore it...

Don't restrict your search for the perfect  *pintxo* to the Casco Viejo. The El Ensanche area also has some good options.

**El Globo** (☎ 944 15 42 21; Calle de Diputación 8) One of the best, this popular bar at a pedestrianised crossroads near Plaza Moyúa, has a terrific range of  *pintxos modernos*, including favourites such as  *txangurro gratinado* (spider crab) and  *morcilla rebozada* (blood sausage in light batter).

**Los Candiles** (☎ 944 24 14 79; Calle de Diputación 1) A narrow little bar, low key, but with some subtle seafood  *pintxos*. Exotics include  *erizo*, a small spiny sea urchin chopped in half and filled with an unquestionable taste of the sea.

**Artajo** (☎ 944 24 85 96; Calle de Ledesma 7) Very Bilbao in its ambience; you won't feel like a tourist if you're after its famous  *tigres* (mussels dressed in a spicy tomato and anchovy sauce).

#### RESTAURANTS

**Fresc Co** (☎ 944 23 30 01; Calle de Ledesma 12; meals lunch €7.95, dinner Sat & Sun €9.70; ✓ ) You can cram your plate with salad and then scoop up soup, pasta, and pizza as well as tasty desserts at this seductive budget venue. It's usually packed. Pitch in roundabout 4pm for some space.

**Passerela** (☎ 944 10 05 04; Alameda de Urquijo 30; menú €9) World nosh is the style at this bright, cheerful place that dishes up pasta, burgers and pizza (€5.30 to €12) as well as fresh salads for €5.

**La Deliciosa** (☎ 944 15 09 44; Calle Jardines 1; menú €9) This quietly understated restaurant at the heart of the Casco Viejo has clean, modern lines and reasonable prices that still deliver a fairly classy eating experience.

**Restaurante Vegetariano** (☎ 944 44 55 98; Alameda de Urquijo 33; menú €9.50; ✓ ) There is an excellent lunch at this cheerful, brightly decorated place, with crisp fresh salads and some tasty specialities such as  *torta de alcachofes*, a delicious artichoke quiche. Check the noticeboard for just about every alternative scene in Bilbao.

**Kafe Antzokia** (☎ 944 24 46 25; Calle San Vicente 2; menú €11) A terrific lunch spot in a spacious old theatre, which is at the heart of this vibrant Basque cultural centre. There's a daily changing  *menú del día* (daily set lunch) that delivers classic Basque dishes. The great atmosphere comes free.

**Café Guggenheim** (☎ 944 23 93 33; lunch menú €17, restaurant mains €25-35) Modernist chic and Frank Gehry designer furniture go with the landscape at El Goog's classy restaurant and café which are under the direction of top chef Martin Berasategui. Fine  *nueva cocina vasca* is served, but reservations are advised. It serves up a fabulous lunch menú from 1pm to 3.30pm, enabling you to enjoy creative Basque cooking without the usual price tag.

**El Arandia de Julen** (☎ 944 33 10 86; Plaza Encarnación 2; menú €25) An exemplar of modern Basque cuisine, Arandia has retained the best traditions in its creative dishes. There's a special Wednesday  *menú* of traditional red beans with a lip-smacking mix of pork  *chorizo* (red sausage),  *morcilla* (black pudding) and more, plus a delicious hake course. Excellent Rioja's add lustre.

**El Perro Chico** (☎ 944 15 05 19; Calle de Aretxaga 2; meals €33) Long established and still with its feet firmly in the kitchen in spite of visits from Frank Gehry, and a supporting cast of hungry celebs, this popular restaurant dishes up the very best in Basque cuisine, treating signature dishes, such as hake in béchamel sauce, with due awe and emotion. Reservations are essential.

#### CAFES

The porticoed Plaza Nueva is a good spot for coffee and people-watching, especially in summer.

**Café Boulevard** (☎ 944 15 31 28; Calle del Arenal 3) A Bilbao institution since 1871. The slightly dusty Art Deco surroundings still outclass much modern décor and even the colours of the fruit machine match the stained-glass windows. It serves breakfast specials (from €2.50).

**Café Iruña** (cnr Calles de Colón de Larreategui & Berástegui) With its Andalusian Mudéjar-style décor still intact, this very popular place has been going strong since 1903 and is still one of the best places for coffee or lunchtime  *pintxos*.

#### SELF-CATERING

**Mercado de la Ribera** (Casco Viejo) For self-catering, try this market. Drifting round the fish section is a marvellous experience in itself.

**Gregorio Martin** (☎ 944 15 37 07; Calle de Artekale 22) For more delicate delicatessen-ware don't miss this terrific food shop with mountains of salt cod,  *chorizos*, hams, preserves and discerning wines, all at reasonable prices.

#### Drinking

In the Casco Viejo around Calles Barrenkale, Ronda and Somera there are plenty of terrific hole-in-the-wall, no-nonsense bars, often political, definitely alternative, and with a generally youngish crowd. Passive smoking in some places may well go to your head. Across the river in the Ensanche area, there's a more sophisticated slant on things in the numerous wayside bars and cafés.

**Zulo** (Calle Barrenkale 22) This is Ikurriña (Basque flag) country. Full-on rock, terrific atmosphere, nonstop yelling in ears. You'll be out in the street anyway, where things still rock.

**Twiggy** (☎ 944 10 38 14; Alameda de Urquijo 35) Retro psychedelio! Happy posthippy place with a cheerful mix of '60s kitsch for lovely people.

**Kamin** (☎ 944 44 41 21; Manuel Allende 8) Laid-back listening in rosy light among the Bilbao cognoscenti. The music trails sweetly through everything from rock and pop to alternative and fresh new sounds on the Basque scene.

**Da Vinci** (☎ 944 23 23 00; Arbolantxa 6) Tricked out with Leonardo trimmings, this popular bar is comfortable and has plenty of room, although it gets busy. There's a relaxing background of pop and R & B.

#### Entertainment CLUBS

There are plenty of clubs and live venues in Bilbao and the vibe is friendly and generally easygoing. Websites usually have details of upcoming gigs.

**Kafe Antzokia** (☎ 944 24 46 25; www.kafeantzokia.com; Calle San Vicente 2) The vibrant heart of contemporary Basque Bilbao, featuring international rock bands, blues and reggae, but also the cream of Basque rock-pop. Weekend concerts run from 10pm to 1am, followed by DJs until 5am. Cover charge for concerts can range from about €4 upwards. DJ sessions are free.

**Conjunto Vacio** (Muelle de la Merced 4) House is the spin here and there's a very style-conscious and confident, young, mixed-gay-and-straight crowd. There's a door fee on Saturday nights of about €10.

**Le Club** (☎ 944 16 71 11; www.leclub.es; Muelle Marzana 4) Three floors of wildly differing décor to shake down on, from floor bashing, to relaxed, to very chilled. Entrance is about €8 with one drink included.

**El Balcón de la Lola** (☎ 946 08 67 20; Calle Bailén 10) One of Bilbao's most popular mixed/gay clubs, this is the place to come if you're looking for hip industrial décor and a packed Saturday-night disco.

## THEATRE

Bilbao offers regular performances of dance, opera and drama at the city's two principal theatres.

**Arriaga Theatre** (☎ 944 79 20 36; www.teatroarriaga.com; Plaza Arriaga) The baroque façade of this venue commands the open spaces of El Arenal between the Casco Viejo and the river.

**Euskalduna Palace** (☎ 944 31 03 10; www.euskalduna.net; Avenida Bandoibarra) About 400m downriver from the Guggenheim is another modernist gem, built on the riverbank in a style that echoes the great shipbuilding works of last century. The Euskalduna houses the Bilbao Symphony Orchestra and the Basque Symphony Orchestra. Check the theatre websites for current information.

## Shopping

**Gili-Gili** Calle Sombrero (☎ 944 16 77 94; Calle Sombrero 5); Calle Loteria (☎ 944 79 07 06; Calle Loteria 4) If you want to know what fashionable young Basques are wearing head for the Casco Viejo outlets of this store for labels such as Lois, Fornarina, Beste Bat and Nolita.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Bilbao's airport** (☎ 944 86 96 36; www.aena.es) is near Sondika, 12km northeast of the city. Services are excellent. There's a first class **tourist information office** (☎ 944 710 301; 7.30am-11pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-11pm Sat & Sun), a medical centre, ATMs, shops, cafés, a restaurant, and car-hire offices. Easyjet (www.easyjet.com) have cheap flights between London and Bilbao although booking well ahead is advised.

### BOAT

At the time of writing a new ferry service between Santurtzi, about 14km northwest of Bilbao's city centre, and Portsmouth had just been set up by the Spanish company Acciona Trasmediterránea (www.accionaferry.org) running

three ferries a week in July and August, and two ferries a week the rest of the year. Prices are about 10% less than P&O Ferries.

**P&O ferries** (☎ 944 23 44 77; www.poportsmouth.com; Calle de Cosme Echevarrieta 1) leave twice weekly, except November to March, for Portsmouth, from Santurtzi. Tickets prices vary due to special offers, but a guide is €61 per passenger and €488 per car and passenger. Departures from Portsmouth/Bilbao take 33/30 hours.

## BUS

Bilbao's main bus station, **Termibus** (San Mamés), is southwest of the centre. You can get to virtually anywhere in the city by metro. Renfe train and the Eusko Tran (opposite) from right outside the Termibus. From Termibus there are regular services operating to/from Madrid (€24.70, 4¼ hours), Barcelona (€38.10, seven hours), Burgos (€10.90, two hours), Vitoria (€4.95, 50 minutes), Pamplona (€11.60, 1¼ hours), Logroño (€10.90, two hours), Irún and the French border (€7.40, two hours), Santander (€5.85, 1½ hours) and Oviedo (€17.60, five hours). Pesa (☎ 902 10 12 10) operates services every 30 minutes to one hour to San Sebastián (€8.65, one hour) and also serves Durango-Elorrio and Oñati.

**Bizkaibus** (☎ 902 22 22 65) travels to destinations throughout the rural Basque Country, including coastal communities such as Lekeitio and Bermeo.

## TRAIN

The **Renfe** (☎ 902 24 02 02; www.renfe.es) Abando train station is just across the river from Plaza Arriaga and the Casco Viejo. There are two trains daily to Madrid (€32.80, 6¼ hours) and Barcelona (€38, nine hours). Other cities served include Valladolid (€21.90, four hours) and Burgos (€16.70, three hours).

Next door is the Concordia train station with its handsome Art Nouveau façade of wrought iron and tiles. It is used by the FEVE (☎ 944 23 22 66; www.feve.es) private rail company for running trains west into Cantabria and Asturias.

The Atxuri Station is about 1km upriver from Casco Viejo. From here, **Eusko Tren** (☎ 902 54 32 10; www.euskotren.es) operates services every half-hour to Bermeo (€2.25, 1¼ hours) via Guernica (€2.25, one hour) and Mundaka (€2.25, 70 minutes) and hourly to San Sebastián (€6, 2¾ hours) via Durango, Zumaia and Zarautz.

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT & PORT

The airport bus Bizkaibus A3247 (€1.15, 30 minutes) leaves from a stand on the extreme right as you leave Arrivals. It runs through the northwestern section of the city passing the Museo Guggenheim stopping at Plaza Moyúa and terminating at the Termibus (bus station) where there are connections to the metro, Renfe and Eusko Tran. It runs every half-hour from 5.25am to 9.55pm. You're expected to have the exact cash ready.

Taxis from the airport to the Casco Viejo cost about €20 and to the Termibus about €24. Each piece of baggage is charged €0.80.

Buses for the port of Santurtzi leave from near the junction of Calle Hurtado de Amézaga and Plaza Circular.

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Bilbao is a difficult town for driving in, if you are a stranger. Metered street parking is strictly enforced. There are several underground car parks, including one beneath Plaza Nueva, and overground ones, including a new riverside facility at Muelle del Arenal north of Plaza Arriaga, that was scheduled for opening in 2007.

## METRO

There are metro stations at all the main focal points of the Ensanche and at Casco Viejo. Tickets start at €1.20. The metro was designed by architect Sir Norman Foster and opened in 1995. Locals instantly dubbed the concertina-style glass and chrome entrances 'Fosteritos'. The metro runs to the north coast from a number of stations on both sides of the river and makes it easy to get to the beaches closest to Bilbao.

## TRAM

Bilbao's Eusko Tran tramline is a boon to locals and visitors alike. It runs to and fro between Basurtu in the southwest of the city to the Atxuri train station. Stops include the Termibus station, the Guggenheim and Teatro Arriaga by the Casco Viejo. Tickets cost €1 and need to be verified in the machine next to the ticket dispenser before boarding.

## AROUND BILBAO Beaches

Two reasonable beaches for swimming are **Azkorri** and **Sopelana**. The latter's Playa Salvaje section is set aside for naturists. Better beaches can be found east of Plentzia (the Bilbao metro

services Plentzia and costs €1.45). Also good is the sheltered beach at **Gorliz**, which has a pretty lighthouse and some fine views from the Astondo end of the beach. There are well-signposted tracks for walkers.

A worthwhile stop en route to the beaches is the newly restored **Puente Colgante**, the world's first transporter bridge which opened in 1893 – it links Getxo and Portugalete. A platform, suspended from the actual bridge high above, is loaded with up to six cars plus foot passengers; it then glides silently over Río Nervión to the other bank. Rides are €0.30 one-way per person. You can also take a lift up to the superstructure at 46m, and walk across the river and back (not for those prone to vertigo) for some great views (€4). Another choice is to cross the river by small ferryboat (€0.25). The nearest metro stop from Bilbao is Areta (€1.20) and the nearest Renfe stop is in Portugalete (€1.25).

## Castillo de Butrón

This marvellous piece of medieval fantasy with its dark stone walls and crenellated towers, surrounded by a moat and set in a dreamy park, makes the term 'fairytale' seem inadequate. The castle (☎ 946 15 11 10; www.castillodebutron.com; adult/child €6/3.50, with guided tour €8/5; 7-10.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat & Sun Oct-Feb, 10.30am-8pm daily Mar-Sep) is located a few kilometres west of the village of Gatica (Basque: Gatika), about 20km north of Bilbao. It was built in the 14th century as the bastion of the Basque Butrón clan but owes much of its present splendour to a 19th-century renovation. It makes for an excellent outing for youngsters, but school groups often add to the decibel level around the various displays and audiovisuals.

To get there, take the metro to Larrabastera, then the bus in the direction of Mungía, which leaves from Calle de Akilino Arriola 71, about 500m from the metro station, every 90 minutes.

Nearby Elorrio has many impressive mansions. Calle de San Balentin Berrio-Otxoa in particular is loaded with noble façades and spills out onto the delightful Plaza Gernikako Arbola, which is dominated by the austere 15th-century Basílica de la Purísima Concepción. Opposite the church is the local *frontón*.

Regular buses and the ET/FV train, coming from Bilbao or San Sebastián, stop in Durango, from where buses run every hour or so to Elorrio.

## Guernica

pop 15,454

Guernica (Basque: Gernika) is a state of mind as well as a place. At a glance it seems no more than a very ordinary modern country town, surrounded by gentle wooded hills. Yet such is Guernica's iconic significance that you cannot fail to be impressed, and moved, by a visit. There is a dual significance here. The essence of Basque democracy and independent lawmaking is enshrined in the Tree of Guernica, today a young oak tree. Beneath the branches of the original oak, a Basque parliament met from medieval times until 1876. Yet Guernica is even more significant worldwide as the victim of one of the most barbarous acts of the 20th century, the saturation bombing of civilians on 26 April 1937 by Nazi and Italian Fascist planes, at the behest of Franco. An estimated 1645 civilians died in the attack which was seen by Franco as 'teaching a lesson' to the ever-recalcitrant Basques and by Hitler as a test run for future carpet bombing of major cities. The victims of Guernica have been remembered with transforming hope while the perpetrators have been reviled. The tragedy is given even greater international resonance by Picasso's iconic painting *Guernica*.

Guernica's architectural ordinariness is understandable. It was rebuilt functionally after the bombing.

### INFORMATION

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 946 25 58 92; www.gemika-lumo.net; Artekalea 8; 10am-7pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, Oct-Jun, 10-2pm Sun) has friendly multilingual staff. They can organise guided tours of the city sights at 11am (€2, 1½ hours). They also sell a Global Ticket, a combined entry ticket for the town's sights (€3).

### SIGHTS

Guernica's seminal experience for visitors is a visit to the **Museo de la Paz de Gernika** (Guernica Peace Museum; ☎ 946 27 02 13; www.peacemuseumguernica.org; Plaza Foru 1; adult/under 13yr €4/free; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) where audiovisual displays transcend the predictable with a calm humanity that is the antithesis of the 1937 bombing. Display panels are in Castilian and Basque, but the ticket office hands out good English and French translations of almost all the captions. There are guided tours, in four languages, each day at 12pm and 5pm.

A couple of blocks north, on Calle Allende Salazar, is a ceramic-tile version of Picasso's *Guernica*.

Further west along Calle Allende Salazar is the **Euskal Herriko Museoa** (☎ 946 25 54 51; Calle Allende Salazar; admission free; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun), housed in the 18th-century Palacio de Montefuerte. The comprehensive exhibitions on Basque history and culture are well worth a look, with fine old maps, engravings, and a range of other documents and portraits.

The open area in front of the museum used to be the town market and it was here that the bombs of 1937 took their most devastating toll.

The pleasant **Parque de los Pueblos de Europa** (10am-7pm, to 9pm summer) behind the museum contains a couple of typically curvaceous sculptures by Henry Moore and other works by Eduardo Chillida, and leads to the attractive **Casa de Juntas**, where the provincial government has met since 1979. Inside the chamber is a superb modern stained-glass window on a huge scale (235 sq m). Outside is the famous Oak Tree, now a mere stump, sheltered by a neoclassical gazebo. Another tree was recently planted in the rear courtyard.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Albergue Gernika** (☎ 685 75 22 86; www.alberguegernika.com; Kortezubi Bidea 9; dm €13) On the outskirts of town is this spick and span hostel run by the same management as Pensión Akelarre. Reception is staffed from April to November. Phone ahead otherwise.

**Hotel Boliña** (☎ 946 25 03 00; www.hotelbolina.net; Calle de Barrencale 3; s/d €35.30/51.30) In the centre of town is this comfortable hotel, which has a recommended restaurant (*menú del día* cost €9.50).

**Pensión Akelarre** (☎ 946 27 01 97; www.hotelakelarre.com; Calle de Barrencale 5; s/d from €45/60; 1 ) Near Boliña is this well run place with clean, comfy rooms and a top-floor sitting room and outdoor area. Prices drop considerably out of season.

**Restaurante Gernika** (☎ 946 25 07 78; Industria 12; menú del día €9) Gernika has numerous cafés and restaurants. This is a popular place that serves up filling traditional dishes.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Guernica is an easy day trip from Bilbao by ET/FV train from Atxuri train station, where trains run every half-hour (€2.25, one hour).

## Cueva de Santimamiñe

The grotto of Santimamiñe is a crowd pleaser for its impressive stalactites, stalagmites and well-preserved prehistoric cave paintings. Free guided tours (with a maximum of 15 people) start at 10am, 11.15am, 12.30pm, 4.30pm and 6pm Monday to Friday.

There's no public transport, although the Guernica-Lekeitio bus can drop you off at Kortezubi (€1.10), from where it's a 3km walk. If you're driving, take the BI638 to Kortezubi, then turn off to the BI4244 just before town.

## El Bosque Pintado de Oma

Near the grottoes is one of the region's most unusual attractions, the 'Painted Forest' of Basque artist Agustín Ibarrola who has adorned dozens of trees in the Oma Valley with rainbows, outlines of people and colourful abstract shapes. While at first they seem rather disjointed, several trees together form a complete picture.

The Bosque is accessible, part of the way on foot, from the BI4244. Follow the directions to the Cueva de Santimamiñe, and from a turn-off near the caves a marked forest track leads in 3km to the Bosque. Cars should not use this track.

## Mundaka

pop 1686

The legend of one of surfing's longest sand-bottom, left-hand breaks (a wave that breaks across clean ground from right to left) took a slight whack at Mundaka in 2005 when the famous sandbar diminished. The good news is that the bank reformed in 2006 and the break with it. Spain's biggest surf event, the Billabong Pro Mundaka took place again in October 2006. There's a small tourist office (☎ 946 17 72 01; www.mundaka.org; Calle Kepa Deuna).

**Camping Portuondo** (☎ 946 87 77 01; www.campingportuondo.com; sites per person/tent/car €5.20/5.30/5.30, bungalows from €78.60; 5 ) has lovely terraced grounds, a pool and restaurant.

Buses and ET/FV trains between Bilbao and Bermeo stop here.

## Bermeo

pop 16,092

Located just a few minutes to the north of Mundaka and on the open coast proper, this tough, fishing port is refreshingly down-to-earth.

The **tourist office** (☎ 946 17 91 54; Askatasun Bidea 2; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm

Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) is on the waterfront and has several excellent leaflets in French and English about the town. The absorbing **Museo del Pescador** (☎ 946 88 11 71; Plaza Torrontero 1; admission free; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2.30pm Sun), in the handsome 15th-century **Ercilla Tower**, is steeply uphill from the tourist office and just past a sculpture of a family of fisherfolk gazing out to sea.

A few kilometres beyond Bermeo, the **Ermita de San Juan de Gaztelugatxe** stands on an islet that is connected to the mainland by bridge. It also has two natural arches on its seaward side.

Half-hourly buses and ET/FV trains run from Bermeo to Bilbao (€2.25, 1¼ hours).

## Durango

Industrial Durango makes few concessions to the picturesque although the **Iglesia de Santa Ana** has an interesting blend of Renaissance, Gothic and Herrerian styles. The real attraction is the **Duranguésado**, the mountainous area around the city. The drive south to the **Puerto de Urquiola** pass is festooned with spectacular lookouts. For more information on mountain walking, contact the Durango tourist office (☎ 946 03 00 30; Calle de Bruno Mauricio Zabala 2).

Regular buses and the ET/FV train, coming from Bilbao or San Sebastián, stop in Durango.

## THE CENTRAL BASQUE COAST

The coast road from Bilbao to San Sebastián snakes its way past some spectacular seascapes, with cove after cove stretching east and verdant fields suddenly ending where cliffs plunge into the sea. Agrotourism homes and camping grounds are plentiful and well signposted.

## Elantxobe

pop 460

The tiny hamlet of Elantxobe spills down to its small harbour beneath high cliffs and fends off over-commercialisation with its still authentic atmosphere of a Basque fishing community. See the Lekeitio section for bus connections.

## Lekeitio

pop 7354

Of the two beaches in this attractive fishing town, the one just east of the river is nicer. The harbourside is dominated by the late-Gothic **Iglesia de Santa María de la Asunción**.

Accommodation is scarce and pricey but **Camping Endai** (☎ 946 84 24 69; sites per person/tent €3.50/3.50; 17 mid-Jun–mid-Sep) is a smallish camping ground with a bar and a shop on Playa Mendexa, a few kilometres before you reach the town.

The waterfront and back streets of the old town teem with bars and snack joints.

Bizkaibus A3513 leaves from Calle Hurtado Amezaga, by Bilbao's Abando train station, about eight times a day, except Sunday, and goes by Guernica and Elantxobe.

Fairly regular buses from Lekeitio run to San Sebastián (€5.45).

## Ondarroa

Slotted into the coastal hills of Vizcaya province just inside the border with Guipúzcoa, Ondarroa is the Basque Country's biggest fishing port, a fascinating and gutsy place in every sense. It is also implacably Basque, especially when it comes to language. Locals do not tolerate central government officials who don't speak Euskara and yet they are the kindest and friendliest of people when it comes to visitors. The harbour is the vibrant focus and Río Artibai winds inland beneath several bridges; one an ancient, iconic symbol of Basque resistance, the other a signature example of the modernist work of Santiago Calatrava, who was responsible for Bilbao's Zubizuri Footbridge (p456). Ondarroa is also a terrific centre of *estropadak* (rowing).

The **tourist office** (☎ 946 83 19 51; www.learjai.com; Kalea Kantiope 3; 17 10am–2pm & 4–7pm Mon–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 10.30am–1.30pm & 4–7pm Fri & Sat, 10.30am–2.30pm Sun mid-Sep–mid-Jun) has plenty of information about the area.

Just across the river on a high cliff is the cheerful **Arrigorri Itsas Ostatua** (☎ 946 13 40 45; www.arrigorri.net; Calle de Arrigorri 3; s/d €28/48, with bathroom €40/50). Breakfast is included at this one-time *balneario* (spa) with a stairway to the beach. It's run by a friendly crew and also serves good meals (June to September) for €10 on weekdays, €15 on weekends.

In Ondarroa there's a branch of Bilbao's **Kafe Antzokia** (☎ 946 83 41 41; www.kafeantzokia.com; Iparragirre 10) located in an old cinema and serving up drinks and the same hot music and cultural events as its city counterpart.

## Inland to Markina & Bolívar

The BI633 turns south just after Ondarroa to reach, after about 10km, the pretty town of

Markina, whose great claim to fame is the home of *pelota* (handball; see p452) – the local *frontón* is even known as the Universidad de la Pelota.

Another 5km south is Bolívar, the birthplace of Simón Bolívar, the great early-19th-century South American independence fighter. It's a tiny place with great charm; the little square is graced by a handsome statue of the great man and nearby is the 'trial yard', where oxen haul massive stones during festivals. The **Museo Simón Bolívar** (☎ 946 16 41 14; Calle Boko 4; admission free; 17 10am–1pm Tue–Fri, noon–2pm Sat & Sun, also 5–7pm Tue–Sun Jul–Aug) is dedicated to his exploits. Hourly buses between Ondarroa and Bilbao stop at Iruzubieta, from where it's a 2km walk.

## Mutriku

pop 4188

Back on the coast, the picturesque fishing village of Mutriku is clamped by a steep rocky vice cut into the coast, its streets winding tortuously down to a small harbour. Four camping grounds surround the town, largely because of the fine beach of **Saturrarán**, a few kilometres west, which has a fine rocky headland.

## Zumaia

pop 8320

For beach lovers Zumaia has the **Playa de Izurun** wedged in among cliffs, while the **Playa de Santiago** is a more open strand a couple of kilometres east of the town centre. Next to the latter stands the surprising and richly rewarding **Museo de Zuloaga** (admission €4; 17 4–8pm Wed–Sun), housed in the one-time studio of Basque artist Ignacio Zuloaga (1870–1945). It contains some of his important works, as well as a handful by other headliners, including El Greco and Zurbarán.

## Getaria

pop 2494

Getaria is a small medieval fishing settlement huddled in the shadow of El Ratón (Mouse), the distinctive islet watched over by the sober mass of the 14th-century Gothic **Iglesia de San Salvador**.

In 1522 this port saw the return of its most illustrious son, the sailor Juan Sebastián Elcano, who sailed with Magellan and completed a round-the-world trip after Magellan's death.

A couple of local homes offer cheap beds, and there's **Pensión Guetariano** (☎ 943 14 05 67; Calle Herrieta 3; s/d €38/54). Several harbour-front

restaurants grill up the fresh catch of the day, which washes down well with a glass of crisp, locally produced *txakoli*.

If surfing's your thing, you may want to stop in the resort town of Zarautz, a few kilometres beyond Getaria, which hosts a round of the **World Surfing Championship** every September.

## SAN SEBASTIÁN

pop 182,930

San Sebastián (Basque: Donostia) has been holding court on the shores of the beautiful, crescent-shaped Bahía de La Concha for a very long time and shows no sign of losing any of its poise or its subtle flavour of high camp. This is no Grande Dame either; more a cool, svelte, diva who has seen them all, from *belle époque* blue bloods, to 21st-century international rock stars. It's here too that the gourmet subculture of the *pintxo* underpins Michelin-starred cuisine. Thirteen Michelin stars fret the San Sebastián firmament of classy eateries, a galaxy matched only by central Paris.

There are no great cultural icons in San Sebastián, but the city entertains you at every turn not least because of its cheerful, upbeat atmosphere. La Concha beach is one of the world's most beautiful city beaches and across the river is Playa de la Zurriola (Zurriola Beach), also known as Playa de Gros, less glamorous and with a strong surfing appeal. Add to this the atmospheric Parte Vieja (Old Town), said to have more bars than any other *quartier* (neighbourhood) in the known world, and the Centro Romántico, with its pedestrianised shopping streets, lined with the handsome façades of Art Nouveau buildings.

The city is also exuberantly Basque by nature and is the event capital of Europe's Atlantic Arc, with cultural and corporate happenings around every corner. These include the annual San Sebastián Jazz Festival and International Film Festival.

## History

San Sebastián was for centuries little more than a fishing village, but by 1174 it was granted self-governing status by the kingdom of Navarra for whom the bay was the principal outlet to the sea. Whale and cod fishing were the main occupations along with the export of Castilian products to European ports and then to the Americas. After

years of knockabout trans-European conflicts that included the razing of the city by Anglo-Portuguese forces during the Peninsular War, San Sebastián was hoisted into 19th-century stardom as a fashionable watering hole by Spanish royalty dodging the searing heat of the southern *mesas* (tableland). By the close of the century, the city had been given a superb *belle époque* makeover that has left a legacy of elegant Art Nouveau buildings and beachfront swagger.

Modern day San Sebastián maintains its style and excitement with a growing reputation as a major venue for international cultural and commercial events.

## Orientation

San Sebastián has three main centres of action. The lively Parte Vieja, San Sebastián's 'old town', lies across the neck of Monte Urgull, the bay's eastern headland. It is neatly underlined to the south by the Alameda del Boulevard whose broad promenade leads into the pedestrianised Parque de Alderdi Eder, which in turn merges with the famous Paseo de la Concha with its elegant balustrades and background of well-manicured buildings.

South of the Alameda del Boulevard is the sleeker commercial and shopping district, the Centro Romántico, whose handsome grid of late-19th-century buildings extends from behind La Concha Beach to the banks of Río Urumea. On the east side of the river is the district of Gros, a pleasant enclave that, with its relaxed ambience and the surfing beach of Zurriola, makes a cheerful alternative to the honeypots on the west side of the river.

## Information

### BOOKSHOPS

The newsstand outside the Mercado de la Bretxa stocks the previous day's issue of many foreign newspapers.

**elkar** (☎ 943 42 00 80; Calle de Fermin Calbetón 21–30)

A great selection of books, maps and music including an excellent Basque section.

**Librería Graphos** (☎ 943 42 63 77; cnr Alameda del

Blvd & Calle Mayor; 17 10am–1.30pm & 4–7.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat) Excellent for travel books and maps, with a good stock of Lonely Planet guidebooks.

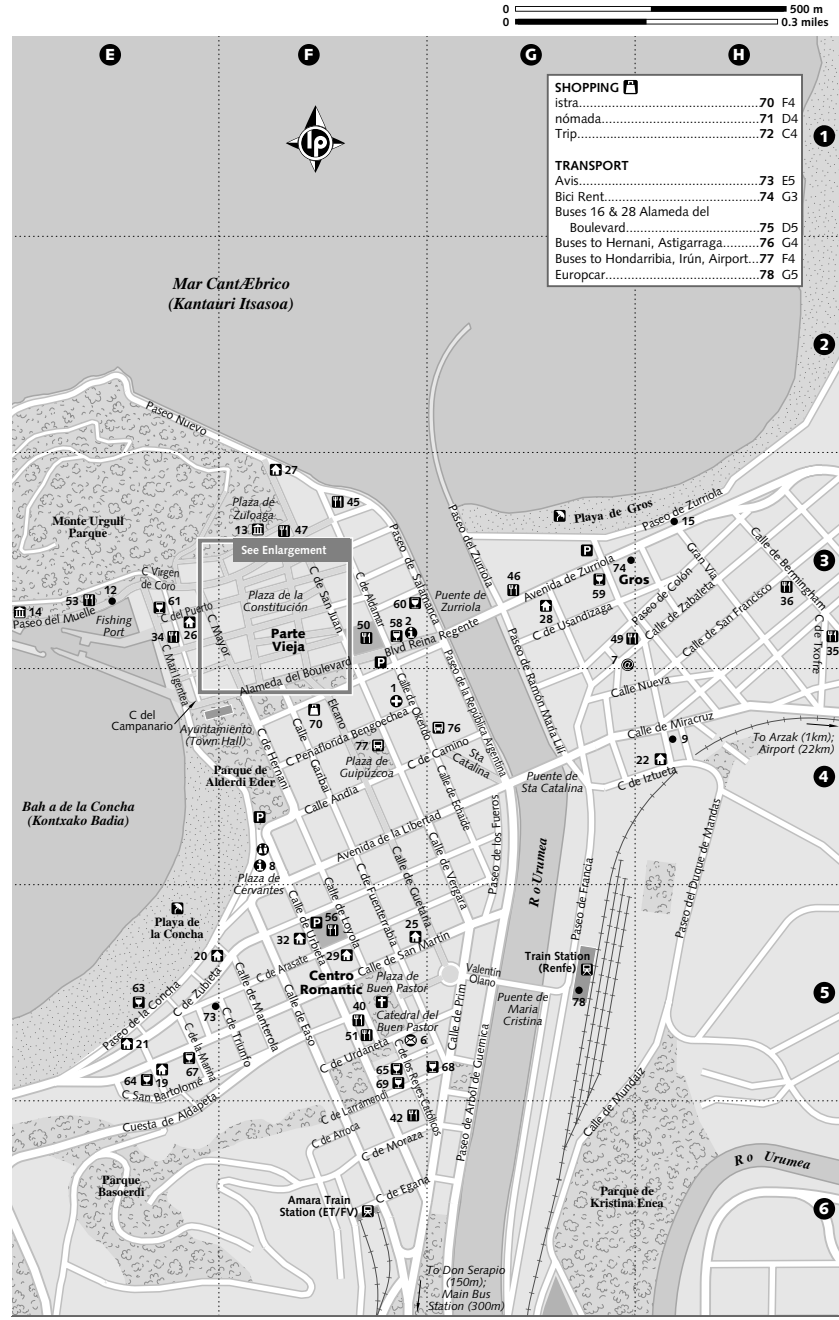
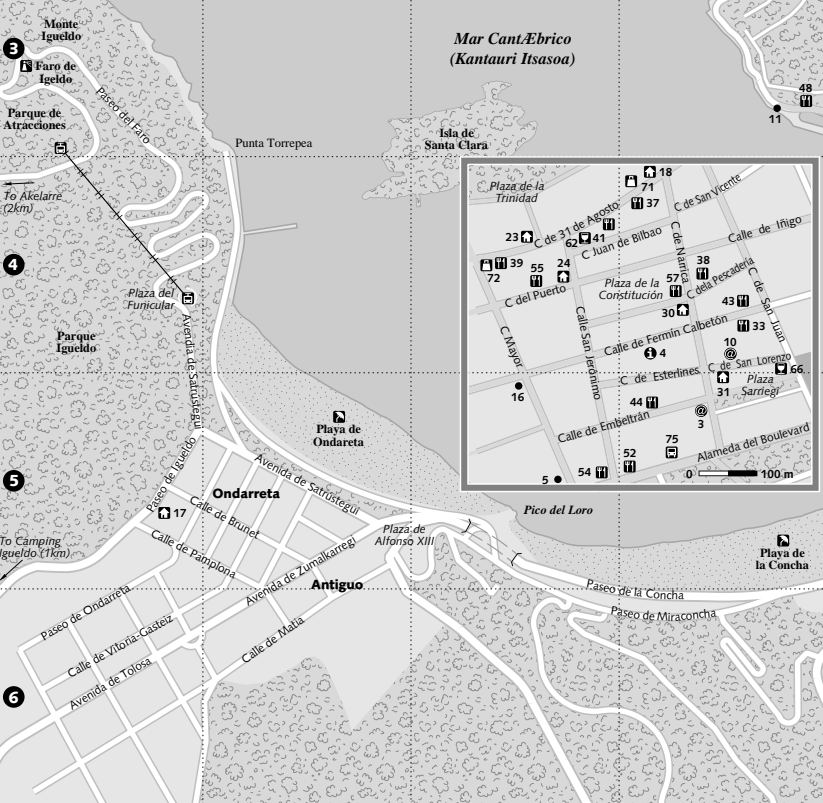
### EMERGENCY

**Medical Emergency** (☎ 112)

**Policía Nacional** (☎ 091)

**SAN SEBASTIÁN**

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9 Sibbibo.....	9	D4		
10 Soho.....	10	E5		
11 Soma 107.....	11	G5		
12 Uda.berri.....	12	F5		



BASQUE COUNTRY, NAVARRA & LA RIOJA

BASQUE COUNTRY, NAVARRA & LA RIOJA

**INTERNET ACCESS**

**Donosti-Net** (☎ 943 42 94 97; Calle de Narrica 3; per 10min/1hr €0.90/3.30; 𠄎 9am-11pm) The best place for internet access. Also doubles as a super-savvy travellers' information centre, offering everything from a left-luggage service to money transfers and car hire.

**Throw** (☎ 943 29 18 09; Calle de Zabaleta 10; morning €1.50, after 2pm €2.30; 𠄎 10am-10pm)

**Zarranet** (Calle de San Lorenzo 6; per hr €3; 𠄎 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, 4-10pm Sun)

**LAUNDRY**

**Wash'n Dry** (☎ 943 29 31 50; Calle de Iparragirre 6; 𠄎 8am-10pm) Just across the river in the Gros district, this is an excellent self-service laundry that has the bonus of an Australian owner who runs the place like a de facto tourist office. The full wash-and-dry treatment for an 8kg load costs €6 (€20 if done for you); the left-luggage service costs €3 per day; and the book exchange, useful notice board and local knowledge and advice come free.

**MEDICAL SERVICES**

**Casa de Socorro** (Calle Peñafloreda Bengochea 4) Free medical care.

**MONEY**

There are plenty of banks with ATMs throughout the city centre.

**POST**

**Main post office** (Calle de Urdaneta)

**TOURIST INFORMATION**

**Centro de Atracción y Turismo** (CAT; ☎ 943 48 11 66; www.sansebastianturismo.com; Blvd Reina Regente 3; 𠄎 8am-8pm Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, 9am-2pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Sat Oct-May, 10am-2pm Sun year-round) This friendly office offers comprehensive information on the city and the Basque Country in general. At the time of writing there was talk of a new location for the office, but no specific details were available.

**Tourist kiosk** (Paseo de la Concha; 𠄎 11am-9pm Jul & Aug) Operates at the city end of the Paseo de la Concha.

**Sights & Activities****AQUARIUM**

The city's **aquarium** (☎ 943 44 00 99; www.aquariumss.com; Paseo del Muelle 34; adult/student €10/7; 𠄎 10am-9pm Jul & Aug, 10am-8pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-7pm Mon-Fri & 11am-8pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar) is fairly pricey for what you get; but there is a chance to come face to face with some of the finny species that might be appearing on your plate later in the evening. There are also displays and exhibits about the Bay of Biscay.

**MUSEO NAVAL**

This **museum** (☎ 943 43 00 51; www.gipuzkoa.net/kultura/untzimuseoa; Paseo del Muelle 24; admission €1.20, Thu free; 𠄎 10am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) offers an in-depth look into the Basque sea-faring tradition, but will be best appreciated by those with at least basic Spanish-language skills.

**MUSEO DE SAN TELMO**

Housed in a former 16th-century monastery with an attractive cloister, this **museum** (☎ 943 42 49 70; Plaza de Zuloaga 1; admission free; 𠄎 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Tue-Sat Sep-Jun, 10.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 10.30am-2pm Sun year-round) features paintings ranging from the Renaissance and the baroque through to the 19th century, with a heavy emphasis on Basque painters. A highlight is the chapel, whose walls are decorated with frescoes by José María Sert chronicling Basque artisanship.

**MONTE URGULL**

You can walk to the top of Monte Urgull, topped by low castle walls and a grand statue of Christ, by taking a path from Plaza de Zuloaga or from behind the aquarium. The views are breathtaking.

**MONTE IGUELDO**

The views from the summit of Monte Igueldo, just west of town, are better still – a vast panorama of the Bahía de la Concha and the surrounding coastline and mountains of Guipúzcoa. The best way to get there is via the old-world funicular railway (return €1.80; 𠄎 10am-8pm Sep-Jun, 10am-10pm Jul & Aug) to the **Parque de Atracciones** (amusement park; ☎ 943 21 02 11; 𠄎 11am-6pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Fri, 11am-8pm Sat & Sun).

**BEACHES & ISLA DE SANTA CLARA**

The placid Playa de la Concha and its westerly extension, the Playa de Ondarreta, are among the best city beaches in Europe. For this reason, both get rather crowded in summer. The Isla de Santa Clara, about 700m from the beach, is accessible by boats that run to the island every half-hour from June to September (€2).

The Playa de la Zurriola (Playa de Gros), east of Rio Urumea, is popular (though less crowded) with both swimmers and surfers.

**SURFING**

Surf bums should drop by **Pukas** (☎ 943 542 72 28; shop@pukassurf.com; Calle Mayor 5; 𠄎 10am-1.30pm

& 4-8pm Mon-Sat), which rents surfboards (€20 per day), as well as wetsuits, boogie boards and fins. In summer it also offers a week-long beginners' surfing course (€60) from its shop and seasonal surf club, also known as **Pukas** (☎ 943 32 00 68; Paseo de Zurriola; 𠄎 10am-7.30pm Mon-Sat Jun-Oct).

**Tours**

**Donosti Tour** (adults/students & seniors/6-12yr/under 6 €10/9/5/free) is a one-day bus tour that allows you to hop on and off as often as you wish. Tickets, which include headphones for commentary in your choice of language, are sold on the bus. The main route stays close to the beaches and climbs Monte Igueldo. A second route operates from July to September, heading further inland along the river and visits the Museo Chillida Leku (p475). A combined ticket for the two routes costs €12/11/6/free. Check with the tourist office for times.

The **Centro de Atracción y Turismo** (☎ 943 48 11 66; Blvd Reina Regente 3) tourist office also provides an excellent audio-guide (€10) with a map that allows you to explore the city at your own pace.

**Festivals & Events**

Among San Sebastián's top draws is the International Jazz Festival, held in July. The 2006 headliner was Bob Dylan, giving a free concert on Playa de la Zurriola. The world-renowned, two-week **Film Festival** (www.sansebastianfestival.com) has been an annual fixture in the second half of September since 1957. Other major fiestas are the **Festividad de San Sebastián** on 20 January and **carnaval** in mid-February. The **Regatta de Traineras**, a boat race in which local teams of rowers race out to sea, takes place on the first two Sundays in September.

**Sleeping**

Accommodation in San Sebastián is generally good, but prices rise considerably in July and August (at some places from May to September). Booking ahead for June to September and at weekends is strongly recommended. High-season prices are listed below.

**BUDGET****Camping & Hostels**

**Camping Igueldo** (☎ 943 21 45 02; www.campingigueldo.com; Paseo del Padra Orkolaga 69; sites per 2 people, car & tent or caravan €27) This well-organised, tree-shaded camping ground is 5km west of the city and

is served by bus 16 from Alameda del Boulevard (€1, 30 minutes).

**Albergue La Sirena Ondarreta** (☎ 943 31 02 68; udala\_youthhostel@donostia.org; Paseo de Igueldo 25; dm under/over 25 with breakfast €15.35/17; 𠄎 i ) San Sebastián's HI hostel is near Playa de Ondarreta and Monte Igueldo. It's immaculate and very secure. The midnight curfew extends to 4am on weekends, June to September. Buses 5, 25, 33 and 16 from Alameda del Boulevard (€1) stop nearby.

**Hostales & Pensiones**

The Parte Vieja has plenty of excellent *pensiones*, most of which are combating the inevitable partying street noise with hefty double-glazing. Unless otherwise noted, rooms in this category come with shared facilities.

**Pensión Larrea** (☎ 943 42 26 94; Calle de Narrica 21; s/d €24/50; j ) An immaculate place, with an immaculate and kindly owner. Larrea has worked hard with its soundproofing and the shared bathrooms serve two rooms each.

**Pensión Aussie** (☎ 943 42 28 74; Calle San Jerónimo 18; dm €15, s/d €25/45) Run by an Australian expat, this budget place is popular with young travellers. At the time of writing, the owner was about to open another more modern place south of Centro.

**Pensión La Perla** (☎ 943 42 81 23; www.pensionla.perla.com; Calle de Loyola 10; s/d €30/50) Brisk, old-fashioned service and clean, fairly plain rooms, keep this well-located Centro *pensión* busy. It's right by Plaza del Buen Pastor and the cathedral and alongside the San Martín Centre, yet is very quiet at night.

**Pensión Urkia** (☎ 943 42 44 36; www.pensionurkia.com; Calle de Urbieta 12; s/d €25/50) Just around the

**AUTHOR'S CHOICE**

**Pensión Amaiur Ostatua** (☎ 943 42 96 54; www.pensionamaiur.com; Calle de 31 de Agosto 44, San Sebastián; s/d €35/56; j ) A great atmosphere backed by friendly and kindly owners makes this happy place, in one of the city's oldest buildings, an unbeatable option. You won't get sleek décor here, but there's plenty of character and quirky touches everywhere. The bathrooms are shared, but plentiful and are as well cared for as the rooms. You can also use the kitchens, where the friendly vibe makes for good connections for lone travellers – who are welcomed.

corner from La Perla and run by the sister of La Perla's proprietor. Pensión Urkia is similarly good value.

**Hospidaje Ibai** (☎ 943 42 62 53; Calle de 31 de Agosto 16; s/d €30/59) Just up and running at the time of writing, this cheerful place is on the quieter edge of the Parte Vieja and has bright and pleasant rooms.

**Pensión Loinaz** (☎ 943 42 67 14; pensionloinaz@telefonica.net; Calle de San Lorenzo 17; s/d €50/55; j ) Modern, small and immaculate, Pensión Loinaz is a very pleasant place, with friendly English-speaking proprietors, spotless bathrooms and bright rooms. A laundry service is available.

#### MIDRANGE

**Pensión Edorta** (☎ 943 42 37 73; www.pensionedorta.com; Calle del Puerto 15; s/d €50/80; j ) A fine *pensión* with lovely rooms that are full of character and charmingly decorated. Edorta is on the western edge of the Parte Vieja.

**Pensión Donostiarra** (☎ 943 42 61 67; www.pensiondonostiarra.com; Calle de San Martín 6; s/d €55/78) Close to the cathedral, Pens has pleasant rooms with polished dark-wood floorboards.

**Pensión Kursaal** (☎ 943 29 26 66; www.pensionesconencanto.com; Calle de Peña y Goñi, 2; s/d €58/76) This excellent place, full of light and colour, works in harness with Pensiones Aida and Itxasoa, and maintains a very high standard of service. It's located across the river in Gros, but is a mere stroll from the central areas.

**Pensión Aida** (☎ 943 32 78 00; www.pensionesconencanto.com; Calle de Iztueta 9; s/d €58/76) Near the train station in Gros and just a few minutes' walk from the Parte Vieja and Centro, the lovely rooms here have lots of exposed stone and bright woodwork.

**Pensión Itxasoa** (☎ 943 42 01 32; www.pensionesconencanto.com; Calle de San Juan 14; s/d €58/76) Just on the seaward edge of Parte Vieja, many of the attractive rooms here come with great sea views. In keeping with its partner *pensiones* the welcome is friendly and service is good.

**Hostal Alemana** (☎ 943 46 25 44; www.hostalalemana.com; Calle de San Martín 53; s/d from €55/93; j ) Smart, comfortable rooms are the style at this efficiently managed option that is effectively hotel standard. It's one of the few places with a lift, beyond a first flight of steps.

#### TOP END

**Hotel Niza** (☎ 943 42 66 63; www.hotelniza.com; Calle de Zubieta 56; s/d €102/128; p i ) A long established hotel right across from La Concha beach. The rooms are stylish and modern with a gentle nod to *belle époque* ambience in the public areas.

**Hotel de Londres e Inglaterra** (☎ 943 44 07 70; www.hlondres.com; Calle de Zubieta 2; s/d €167/205.50, with sea view €199/237; p a i ) An enduring favourite with well-heeled French and Spanish visitors this classic hotel oozes old-world charm to go with its great beachfront location.

#### Eating

San Sebastián has a growing reputation as a world leader in gastronomic innovation of the highest order – it also has the highest number of Michelin stars of any city in Spain.

#### PINTXOS

San Sebastián is *pintxo* heaven (see the boxed text, below). *Pintxos* generally cost €1.10 to €4, depending on their size and quality. Heated *pintxos* usually cost more than the cold, ready-to-eat variety.

#### PINTXO PARADISE

Just rolling the word *pintxo* (the Basque version of a tapa) ound your tongue defines the essence of this cheerful, cheeky little slice of Basque cuisine. The perfect *pintxo* should have exquisite taste, texture and appearance and should be savoured in two elegant bites. Tapas by any other name, the *pintxo* transcends the commonplace by the sheer panache of its culinary campness. In San Sebastián especially, Basque chefs have refined the *pintxo* to an art form.

Many *pintxos* are bedded on small pieces of bread or on tiny half-baguettes upon which towering creations are constructed, often melded with flavoursome mayonnaise and then pinned in place by large toothpicks. Some bars specialise in a seafood genre, with much use of marinated anchovies, prawns and strips of squid, all topped with anything from chopped crab to pâté. Others deal in mushroom delicacies, or simply offer a mix of everything.

Expect to pay just €3.10 to €3.50 for one *pintxo* and a glass of delicious *txakoli*, the young white wine of the Basque Country. The true art is sticking to just one or two *pintxos* per bar.

#### AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**La Cuchara de San Telmo** (☎ 943 42 08 40; Calle de 31 de Agosto) This is the 'Spoon' of San Telmo, an unfussy, stand-up bar, with a lively local clientele. It offers miniature *nueva cocina vasca* (Basque *nouvelle cuisine*) from a supremely creative kitchen, where chefs Alex Montiel and Iñaki Gulin conjure up such delights as *tempura de bacalao* (€3), a fine chunk of cod in exquisite light batter, or *pato 'Hembra'*; (€2.80, just ask for 'duck'). Feel them melt on the tongue. Treat yourself to a La Cuchara T-shirt too. Profits go to the worthy Fundación Vicente Ferrer charity.

**Bar Txepetxa** (Calle de la Pescadería 5) Txepetxa's fame is worldwide and its walls are covered in press cuttings to prove it. Anchovy *pintxos* are a speciality but there are other treats such as *champiñón al horno* (tiny towers of grilled mushrooms).

**Tamboril** (Calle dela Pescadería; r ) In a great position at the entrance to the arcaded Plaza de la Constitución this popular bar is noted for its *banderillas* (*pintxos* neatly skewered with a toothpick).

**Bikain** (Calle de 31 de Agosto 31) There's a great range of *pintxos* in this unassuming bar as well as filling *bocadillos* (filled rolls) and *cazuelitas* (minicasseroles).

**Bar La Cepa** (Calle de 31 de Agosto 7) The best *jamón jabugo* does not disappoint here and you eat beneath the blank eyes of a very large bull's head.

**Casa Valles** (Calle de los Reyes Católicos 10) Another meaty *pintxo* place beneath a forest of hung hams, this fine bar also does *raciones* (meal-sized tapas) and full meals (€13 to €30).

Across the river in Gros are several outstanding *pintxo* places.

**Bar Bergara** (Calle de Bermingham) A popular, award-winning bar where things get hectic after noon. The bar groans with splendid creations and even the barmen orchestrate in style.

**Bar Aloña Berri** (Calle de Bermingham 24) This is another award-winner with some seriously exquisite fish and seafood *pintxos*.

#### RESTAURANTS

**La Zurri** (☎ 943 29 38 86; Calle de Zabaleta 10; menú €8.30) Consistent good value, over in Gros, can be had at this friendly focus of Basque home

cooking where plenty of local regulars prove the point.

**Restaurante Portaletas** (☎ 943 42 42 72; Calle del Puerto 8; mains €12) Thickets of hanging hams set the tone at this popular local diner with its black wood-and-stonework décor. The *pintxos* and heftier dishes in the back restaurant are consistently good.

**Kaskazuri** (☎ 943 42 08 94; Paseo de Salamanca 14) Fairly new on the block this classy yet unpretentious restaurant has views to the sea and even better views on the plate. Bright, modern décor and good service accompanies a remarkable *menú* with a gorgeous choice for €13/16 lunchtime/evenings on weekdays and €20/30 lunchtime/evenings at weekends. Offerings across the board include starters of *jamón Ibérico* (ham from acorn-feed pigs) or *terrina de foie* (liver terrine) and mains of cod, hake and monkfish. Meat dishes are equally subtle and desserts are mellifluous. Booking well in advance is essential.

**Kursaal Restaurant** (☎ 943 00 31 62; Avenida de Zurriola 1) Another of top chef Martin Berasategui's outstations where you can enjoy a superb lunch *menú* of modern Basque cuisine for €15.70 on weekdays and €18.60 at weekends. The chic surroundings of the Kursaal Centre go with it.

**Arraitxiki** (Calle del Campanario 3; mains €13-17; ✓ ) It's not all writhing prawns and pierced *pintxos* in San Sebastián. This excellent vegetarian restaurant does a fine line in creative meals and everything is organically sourced. There's a *menú del día* for €13.

**Casa Urbano** (☎ 943 42 04 34; Calle de 31 de Agosto 17; menú €28) A comfy, old-fashioned dining room is the frame for excellent *jamón* (ham) and fish dishes here. The *lomo de merluza con almejas* (hake and clams) is delicious and traditional dishes such as *bacalao con tomate y pimientos* (smoked cod with tomato and peppers) are subtly done.

**Restaurante Pollitena** (Calle de San Jerónimo 3) Pollitena is notable for its *menú de degustación* (tasting menú; €41.50 for two), which is a great way to sample local specialities at a reasonable price.

**Arzak** (☎ 943 27 84 65; Alto de Miracruz 21; meals €100-160) With three Michelin stars, the acclaimed Chef Juan Mari Arzak takes some beating. Arzak is now assisted by his daughter Elena and they never cease to innovate. Signature dishes include the positively sculptural 'squid circle', a clever confection of delicious squid

pieces dressed with a classic Arzak sauce incorporating hints of bergamot tea, sarsaparilla, tartar, and with a final flourish of cocoa and ginger drapery. The restaurant is about 1.5km east of San Sebastián. Reservations, well in advance, are obligatory. The restaurant is closed for the last two weeks in July and last three weeks in November. Prices are high. This man cooked for the Queen of England.

In the Parte Vieja, **Izkiña** (☎ 943 42 25 62; Calle de Fermín Calbetón 4) and **Alotza Jatetxea** (☎ 943 42 07 82; Calle de Fermín Calbetón 7), across the street, both have a consistently good *menú* (around €12), as well as respectable *pintxos* selections.

For seafood by the sea, a handful of places have set up by the fishing harbour. Open from March until September, they include the following.

**Restaurante Mariñela** (☎ 943 42 73 83; Paseo del Muelle; mains €9-15)

**Restaurante Sebastián** (☎ 943 42 58 62; Paseo del Muelle; mains €9-15)

**La Rampa** (☎ 943 42 16 52; Paseo del Muelle; mains €12-22; 𠂆 lunch & dinner Thu-Mon, lunch Tue, closed Tue night & Wed)

#### QUICK EATS

**Reloj Berrí** (☎ 943 42 97 09; Alameda del Blvd 20) This is a great breakfast spot for a piping selection of coffees and croissants that are always fresh. Breakfasts cost from €2.20 to €3.70 at the bar, but prices rise at the terrace tables.

**Juantxo Taberna** (Calle de Embeltrán 6; bocadillos from €2.20) You won't find starchy cuisine here, but if you want rocket fuel then this much-loved bar offers rocket-sized *bocadillos* stuffed with tortillas and other great fillings.

**Caravanserai** (☎ 943 47 54 18; cnr Calle San Bartolomé 1 & Plaza del Buen Pastor; bocadillos from €3, meals from €7.50) does tasty burgers, sandwiches and pasta. It rubs shoulders in the cathedral plaza with the pleasant **Plaza Café** (☎ 943 44 57 12; Plaza del Buen Pastor 14; breakfast €2.50-6) popular with locals for a midmorning breakfast.

#### SELF-CATERING

**Mercado de la Bretxa** On the east side of the Parte Vieja, this market has an underground Lidl supermarket.

**San Martín Centre** (Calle de Urbietta 9) At the heart of Centro is this smart centre with a very big supermarket.

**Don Serapio** (☎ 943 46 96 77; Calle Sancho el Sabio 22) For Basque food there's none better than

this place. A couple of hundred metres up from the bus station is this long-established food emporium stocked with delicious Basque delicacies, *jamóns*, salt cod, fruit and vegetable preserves, cheeses, wines and much more.

#### Entertainment

The night is young at dawn in San Sebastián and the Parte Vieja is the place to start, as the sun goes down the night before the morning after. There's also a handful of attractive bars in Centro and across the river in Gros.

**Etkekalte** (Calle Mari Igentea 11) This great little bar near the harbour has a very together local crowd quietly chatting over drinks in the early evening. Things tighten up later and there's a downstairs dance space where visiting or local DJs ring the changes from funk to R & B.

**Bar Ondarra** (Avenida de la Zuriola 16) Head over to Gros to this terrific bar that's just across the road from the beach. There's a great mixed crowd – even the surfers drop in, trailing sand. In the rockin' downstairs bar, every kind of sound gets aired.

**Altzerri Jazz Bar** (Blvd Reina Regente 2; www.altzerri.com) This jazz and blues temple has regular live gigs by local and international stars. Jamming session's take over on nonguest nights. There's usually a cover charge from €5 to €10 for top guests.

**Herria Bar** (Calle Juan de Bilbao) Basque Donostia flies the flag with enthusiastic style in many of the bars in Juan de Bilbao. Drinks are fairly cheap here. Herria's name (the Nation) says it all, as do the sloganeering T-shirts for sale behind the bar.

**Be Bop** (Paseo de Salamanca 3) Top and tail the night in this cheerful place that's tricked out in bright red, green and cream and burnished by the evening sun. Enjoy some creative cocktails as pop anthems kick off the night. Later on there's a strong salsa kick.

**Sibbibo** (Plaza Sarriegi 8) Low, neony lighting and colourful décor suit the very cool sounds for a fairly energetic crowd at this popular bar.

**La Rotonda** (Paseo de la Concha 6) Be bright, beautiful and be ready to swerve well into the morning at this ultra-smooth dance venue, right at beach level below the Paseo. Nothing much happens until after midnight when things start strolling with soul followed by Spanish rock. By 4am harder techno House takes over.

**Molly Malone's** (Calle de San Martín 55) An Irish bar with a lively student crowd.

**Soho** (Calle de San Martín 49) Funky music and funkier décor attract a crowd right through to sunrise here.

The area round the junction of Calles de Los Reyes Católicos and de Laramendi has a great streetwise vibe and the action spills outside on summer evenings.

**Pokhara** (Sánchez Toca 1) A popular corner bar, Pokhara draws an under-30 crowd and is one of several mixed venues in the area with a gay clientele.

**Uda.berri** (Calle de Laramendi) In the same locale as Pokhara, this is a cool ground-floor bar, with a more boisterous scene downstairs.

**Soma 107** (Calle de Laramendi 4) Amsterdam in San Sebastián. Very laid-back venue where just hovering round the streetside hatch can get your mind drifting and where the creative interior is in keeping with the vibe.

#### Shopping

**Trip** (☎ 943 42 94 43; Calle de 31 de Agosto 33) For souvenirs that balance happily between kitsch and authentic, try this place.

**nomada** (☎ 943 42 61 52; www.nomada.biz; Calle de 31 de Agosto 24) For something really special check out the exquisite carpets and bags and other artefacts here, all ethically sourced by the proprietors. There are also superb art works on fabric by Basque painters and prices range from €20 for a colourful bag to €2000 for an antique carpet.

**istra** (☎ 943 42 83 79; Alameda del Blvd 15) For outstanding contemporary jewellery of great subtlety try this jeweller, where prices range from €30 to €1000.

#### Getting There & Away

##### AIR

The city's airport (☎ 943 64 12 67) is 22km out of town, near Hondarribia. There are regular flights to Madrid and occasional charters to major European cities. At the time of writing there was much talk of either extending the airport or establishing a new airport.

##### BICYCLE

You can rent bicycles and mountain bikes at **Bici Rent** (☎ 655 72 44 58; Avenida de Zuriola 22; per hr/day €4/16).

##### BUS

The main bus station, a 20-minute walk south of the Parte Vieja, is between Plaza de Pio XII and the river. Local bus 28 connects the

bus station with Alameda del Boulevard (€1, 10 minutes).

**Continental Auto** (☎ 943 46 90 74) operates services for Madrid up to 12 times daily (€25.85, 5¼ hours), with 10 going via Vitoria (€6.35, 1½ hours) and seven via Burgos (€12.60, 3½ hours).

**La Roncalesa** (☎ 943 46 10 64) has up to 10 buses daily to Pamplona (€5.98, one hour).

**PESA** (☎ 902 10 12 10) runs half-hourly services to Bilbao along the A8 *autopista* (tollway) from 6.30am to 10pm (€8.65, one hour). It also sends a few buses to Durango (€6.90), Elorrio (€6.20) and Oñati (€4.50), plus twice-daily buses to Hendaye (€2.65), St Jean de Luz (€4), Biarritz (€5.90) and Bayonne (€6.85) in France.

Interbus services to Hondarribia (€1.50), Irún and the airport (€1.50) depart from Plaza de Guipúzcoa; buses A1 and G1 travel to Hernani and Astigarraga (€1) from the stop on Calle de Echaide.

#### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The A8 *autopista* heads to Bilbao in the west and into France (where it becomes the A63) to the east. You can avoid the toll on the virtually parallel N634. The main route south is the A1, which runs to Madrid via Vitoria.

Driving in San Sebastián can be nerve-racking for visitors, especially midmorning. There are a number of underground car parks. Parking fees are €1.40 per hour, €18.30 per 24 hours.

#### Car Hire

Several major car-hire companies are represented by agencies in San Sebastián, including **Avis** (☎ 943 46 30 13; Calle del Triunfo 2) and **Europcar** (☎ 943 32 23 04) in the Renfe train station. A good place to ask for the best deal is the internet facility **Donosti-Net** (☎ 943 42 94 97; Calle de Narrica 3; 𠂆 9am-11pm).

#### TRAIN

The main Renfe train station (Paseo de Francia) is just across Río Urumea, on a line linking Paris to Madrid. There are seven services daily to Madrid (€34.50, six hours) and two to Barcelona (from €35.50, eight hours).

There's only one direct train to Paris, but there are plenty more from the French border town of Hendaye (€1.35, 35 minutes), which is served by the private company **Eusko Tren/Ferrocarril Vasco** (ET/FV; ☎ 902 54 32 10) on a railway line

nicknamed 'El Topo' (Mole). Trains depart every half-hour from Amara train station, about 1km south of the city centre, and also stop in Pasajes (€1.15, 12 minutes) and Irún (€1.35, 25 minutes). Another ET/FV railway line heads west to Bilbao (€5.70, 2¾ hours, hourly) via Zarautz, Zumaia and Durango.

## EAST OF SAN SEBASTIÁN

### Pasajes

pop 16,145

Pasajes (Basque: Pasaia), where Río Oiartzun empties into the Atlantic, is the largest port in the province of Guipúzcoa. The single street and the area immediately around the central square are lined with pretty houses and colourful balconies; it's accessible by road via the town of Lezo and Pasajes is on the El Topo railway line from San Sebastián (€1.15, 12 minutes, every half-hour) and is also served by regular buses from San Sebastián.

### Irún

pop 57,133

For travellers coming in or out of the Basque Country from France, Irún may not be the finest introduction, or farewell. But spare a thought; Irún was carpet bombed by the Nazis after Guernica and suffered for years as a bleak Francoist border post.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

The half-hourly El Topo train runs to Hendaye (€1) in France, from where up to 10 trains daily leave the SNCF station for Paris. Trains leave from the ET/FV station (Paseo de Colón) for San Sebastián (€1.35).

Frequent buses connect Irún with San Sebastián (Plaza de Guipúzcoa) and Hondarribia. Long-distance trains from the Renfe train station run to Madrid and Barcelona. Long-distance buses also depart from here.

## Hondarribia

pop 15,493

Cheerful, relaxing Hondarribia (Castilian: Fuenterrabía) has managed to preserve its charming Casco Antiguo (Old City) and has an appealing flavour of France, its near neighbour across the bay.

The tourist office (☎ 943 64 54 58; Calle de Javier Ugarte 6; 11 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) is between the Casco and La Marina, the central harbour area. It has excellent information in several languages. You enter the

Casco through an archway at the top of Calle San Compostela, just uphill from the tourist office, to reach the pretty Plaza de Gipuzkoa. Head straight on to Calle San Nicolás and go left to reach the bigger Plaza de Armas and the Gothic Iglesia de Santa María de la Asunción. The plaza is dominated by the sumptuous Parador El Emperador (below).

For La Marina, head the other way from the tourist office. This is Hondarribia's most picturesque quarter. Its main street, Calle San Pedro, is flanked by typical fisherfolk houses, with façades painted bright green or blue and wooden balconies gaily decorated with flower boxes.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Camping Faro de Higuera** (☎ 943 64 10 08; Paseo del Faro 58; sites per person/small tent €3.83/3.83; p s ) This pleasant camping ground is located about 6km west of the town centre.

**Albergue Juan de Elkano** (☎ 943 64 15 50; juv.hondarribia@gazteria.gipuzkoa.net; Foroko lgoera; dm under/over 30 with breakfast €9/14) About 500m west of the centre, this place offers discounts for HI cardholders.

**Hostal Txoko Goxoa** (☎ 943 64 46 58; www.txokogoxoa.com; Calle Murrua 22; s/d €43/60) A charming, family-run establishment on the quiet side of the Casco, this cosy place offers smallish but very pleasant and immaculate rooms. The entrance is round the back of the building in Calle Etxenagusia.

**Hotel San Nicolás** (☎ 943 64 42 78; Plaza de Armas 6; s/d €55/75) Overlooking Plaza de Armas, there's a charming period feel here, underpinned by modernised facilities and comfy rooms. The hotel also has a pleasant bar on the ground floor.

**Parador El Emperador** (☎ 943 64 55 00; www.parador.es; Plaza de Armas 16; s/d €166/217.60) Behind the imposing 12th-century façade of this one-time palace is a flower-bedecked inner courtyard and a swathe of luxurious rooms.

**Sebastián** (☎ 943 64 01 67; Calle Mayor 9; meals €39; 11 Tue-Sun) This one-time grocery store has retained much of its original landscape as a nice backdrop to classy food. Great fish dishes, especially *merluza* (hake), are complemented by equally fine meat and game dishes.

There is a swathe of popular restaurants serving up decent snacks and meals along Calle de San Pedro and the quieter Calle de Santiago, one block west.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses leave every 20 minutes from near the post office for Irún (€1, 10 minutes), San Sebastián (€1.55, 45 minutes) and occasionally across the border to Hendaye in France. In summer you can catch a boat to Hendaye (€1.50, 10 minutes).

## SOUTH OF SAN SEBASTIÁN

### Museo Chillida Leku

This open-air museum (☎ 943 33 60 06; www.edu.ardo-chillida.com; admission €8; 11 10.30am-3pm Wed-Mon Sep-Jun, 10.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-3pm Sun Jul & Aug) is the most engaging museum in rural Basque Country. Amid the beech, oak and magnolia trees, you'll find 40 sculptures of granite and iron created by the renowned Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida. Many more of Chillida's works appear inside the renovated 16th-century farmhouse. Guided tours (€5) should be booked ahead. A useful audio-guide in several languages, including English, is €3.50.

To get here, take the G2 bus for Hernani from Calle de Okendo in San Sebastián and get off at Zabalaga. If you're driving, take the A1 south from San Sebastián. After 7km, take the turn-off southwest for Hernani (GI3132). The museum is 600m along on your left.

## Walking in the Hills

Thirty kilometres south of San Sebastián and served by frequent buses, Ordizia is the best base from which to visit the hills to the east. A popular 1½-hour walk leads up to the top of Monte Txindoki, one of the highest peaks (1341m) in the Sierra de Aralar, and begins from the village of Larraitz, about 8km to the east (follow the signs for Zaldibia). A few buses make the run from Ordizia to Larraitz on weekends only.

More ambitious walkers can make for the Santuario de San Miguel de Aralar (p487), a good day's strong walking to the southeast in Navarra. You can also go south from Ordizia to Zegama and the hamlet of Otzaurte, picking up a stretch of the GR12 trail, a medieval pilgrim route, to the attractive Refugio de San Adrián (☎ 943 58 20 76). The *refugio* (mountain shelter) is supposedly open on Saturday and Sunday and in summer, but it's a little unreliable.

A daily train serves Otzaurte from Vitoria (€3.20, 40 minutes) and San Sebastián (€5.05, one hour).

## The Interior

The hills rising to the south between San Sebastián and Bilbao offer a number of appealing towns. There's plenty of *nekazal turismoas* (agrotourism homes – family homes in rural areas with rooms to rent).

## SANTUARIO DE LOYOLA

Just outside Azpeitia (12km south of the A8 motorway along the GI631) lies the portentous Santuario de Loyola (admission free; 11 10am-noon & 4-7pm), dedicated to St Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuit order. The sumptuous baroque façade gives way to a circular basilica laden with dark grey marble and plenty of carved ornamentation. The house where the saint was born in 1490 is preserved in one of the two wings of the *santuario* (shrine).

## OÑATI

Continue southwest from Azpeitia, along Río Urola and a delightful back road (GI3750), which winds through the hills to the rather scraggly town of Bergara. Push on down the GI627 to reach Oñati, one of the most delightful towns in rural Basque Country. Oñati contains a Renaissance gem in the Universidad de Sancti Spiritus, where for 350 years, alumni were schooled in philosophy, law and medicine until its closure in 1902. Highlights are the Plateresque façade and Mudéjar courtyard. There are guided tours during July and August. Ask for details at the tourist office. Nearby is the Iglesia de San Miguel, a late-Gothic confection whose cloister was built over the river. The church faces onto the main square, Foruen Enparantza, dominated by the eye-catching baroque ayuntamiento (town hall).

The tourist office (☎ 943 78 34 53; Calle San Juan 14; 11 10am-2pm & 3.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4.30-6.30pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar) is opposite the Universidad.

**Ongi Ostataua** (☎ 943 71 82 85; ongiostataua@latinmail.com; Calle Zaharra 19; s/d €42.80/57.80) is an excellent stopover, with big, bright rooms and business standard touches. Breakfast is €6 and prices drop by 25% at weekends. For rural luxury you won't beat Arregi (☎ 943 78 08 24; www.nekatur.net/arregi; Garagaltza 19; d €39.50), the splendid agrotourism home 2km south of town. There are also several good restaurants in town.

There are daily buses to/from San Sebastián, Vitoria and Bilbao.

## ARANTZAZU

About 10km south of Oñati, is the compelling **Santuario de Arantzazu**, a fabulous conflation of piety with avant-garde art. The sanctuary was built in the 1950s and free rein was given to such luminaries as Eduardo Chillida, Jorge Oteiza and Lucio Muñoz. The results were inevitably controversial, from the religious standpoint, but time has sanctified what are outstanding features. The complex is run by Franciscans.

The road up and the setting are worth the trip themselves, and the whole area lends itself to excellent walking – the Oñati tourist office has information on routes.

## VITORIA

pop 229,080 / elevation 512m

Be calm, be relaxed in Vitoria (Basque: Gasteiz); the city encourages it with its friendly, sophisticated ambience and its pedestrianised triumph over the motor car. Vitoria is the provincial capital of the southern Basque province of Álava (Basque: Araba) but also of the entire Basque Country. Mix in the medieval flavour of the city's old quarter – itself given a very Basque energy by the city's students – plus exciting art galleries and museums, countless great *pinxto* bars and restaurants and you have one of the happiest, most rewarding destinations in the Basque Country.

## History

Vitoria's name may well derive from the Basque word *beturia*, meaning height, a reference to the hill on which the old town stands. It was so named by the Visigoths. Sancho VI of Navarra settled things by founding a 'New Vitoria' in the 12th century. Thereafter, Vitoria bounced to and fro between the Castilian and Navarran crowns. The economic advances of the late 19th century triggered Vitoria's expansion, which carried over into the 20th century. The city's historic and well-preserved nature made it a good choice for becoming the capital of the Basque autonomous government in 1981. The University of the Basque Country also has its base here.

## Orientation

From the central adjoining squares of Plaza de la Virgen Blanca and the late-18th-century Plaza de España (Plaza Nueva to the Basques), the Casco Viejo (the medieval town), rises in a series of concentric ellipses, a spider's web

of narrow streets rising to the crowning glory of the 14th-century Catedral de Santa María (opposite). South of the plazas is Vitoria's 19th-century extension, which counts some wonderful parks and leafy promenades as complements to its grid of pleasant streets. The central Calle de Eduardo Dato, main artery of the evening *paseo* (promenade), leads arrow-straight to the Renfe train station. The bus station is right on the eastern edge of the Casco.

## Information

There are plenty of banks with ATMs in the newer part of town.

**elkar** (☎ 945 14 45 01; Calle de San Prudencio 7) For books, maps and music.

**Emergency** (☎ 112)

**Hospital de Santiago** (☎ 945 25 36 00; cnr Calles de la Paz & de Olaguibel)

**Main post office** (Calle de las Postas)

**Policia Nacional** Near the Hospital de Santiago.

**Tourist office** (☎ 945 16 15 98; www.vitoria-gasteiz.org/turismo; Plaza General Loma s/n; 11 9.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat Jul-Sep, 10am-7pm Mon-Sat Oct-Jun, 11am-2pm Sun year-round) Opposite the Basque Parliament Building.

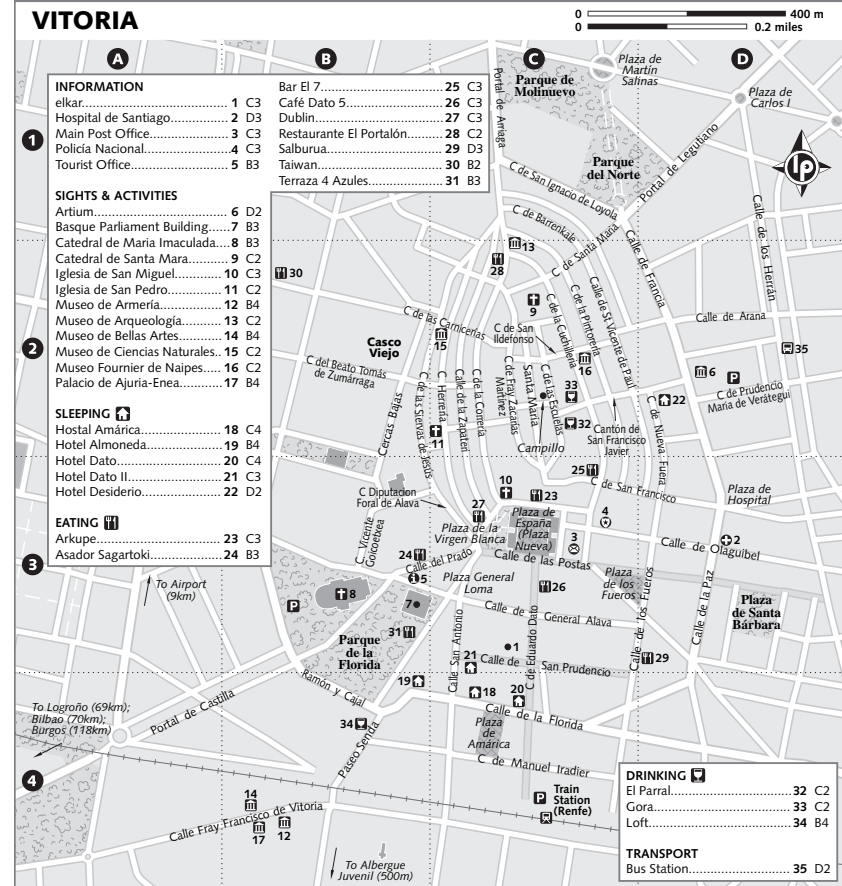
## Sights

As befits the Basque capital, Vitoria boasts some important buildings, essential administrative centres, but of great symbolic significance. They include the **Basque Parliament Building** (Calle de General Alava), built in 1853 in the Parque de la Florida, and the **Palacio de Ajuria-Enea** (1920) on Paseo Fray Francisco de Vitoria, residence of the *lehendakari* (president of the regional government).

## ART GALLERIES

The city's gallery of modern art, the **Artium** (☎ 945 20 90 20; Calle de Francia 24; adult/student €4.50/2.20, Wed free; 11 11am-8pm Tue-Fri, 10.30am-8pm Sat & Sun) is a powerful building; unsensational, but with great presence amid generally dull surroundings. Its collections have a robust, frontline ethos and surpass the Guggenheim for content. Big subterranean galleries are filled with engrossing works by Basque, Spanish and international artists. Major names include Picasso, Dalí and Miró. Temporary exhibitions of some fairly intense modernist work are staged throughout the year.

The absorbing **Museo de Bellas Artes** (☎ 945 18 19 18; Paseo Fray Francisco de Vitoria; admission free; 11 10am-2pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) has Basque paintings and sculpture



from the 18th and 19th centuries. The works of local son Fernando de Amara are given good space and reflect an engaging romanticism that manages to mix drama with great warmth of colour and composition.

## CHURCHES

At the base of Vitoria's medieval Casco Viejo is the delightful Plaza de la Virgen Blanca, which is lorded over by the 14th-century Iglesia de San Miguel whose statue of the Virgen Blanca lends her name to the Plaza below and is the city's patron saint.

The 14th-century Iglesia de San Pedro (Calle Herrería) is the city's oldest church and has a fabulous Gothic frontispiece on its eastern façade.

On the summit of the old town and dominating its skyline is the medieval Catedral de Santa María (☎ 945 25 51 35; www.catedralvitoria.com; 11 11am-2pm & 5-8pm). The cathedral is undergoing a lengthy, but much praised, restoration project unlikely to be completed for some years yet. There are excellent three-hour guided tours (€3.50) that give an insight into the excitement of restoration and discovery as well as giving some contact with the cathedral's interior.

The **Catedral de Maria Immaculada** (☎ 945 15 06 31; Cadena y Eleta s/n; admission free; 11 10am-2pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) in the new town is an impressive adventure in the Gothic style that began in the early 20th century. It houses a collection of sacred art.

## MUSEUMS

Vitoria has a sprinkling of interesting museums (admission free; 10am-2pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun), notably the brick-and-timber **Museo de Arqueología** (☎ 945 18 19 22; Calle de la Correría 116), which is housed in a former armoury. Also worth a quick visit are the **Museo de Ciencias Naturales** (Natural Science Museum; ☎ 945 18 19 24; Calle de las Siervas de Jesús 24), in the Torre de Doña Oxtanda, and the **Museo de Armería** (☎ 945 18 19 25; Calle Fray Francisco de Vitoria) for jousting fans. The **Museo Fournier de Naipes** (Card Museum; ☎ 945 18 19 20; Calle de la Cuchillería 54) is in the 16th-century Palacio de Bendaña, with an impressive collection of historic presses and playing cards, including some of the oldest European decks.

## Festivals & Events

The calm sophistication of Vitoria takes a back seat during the boisterous **Fiestas de la Virgen Blanca**, held from 4 to 9 August, with a range of fireworks, bullfights, concerts and street dancing. All of this is preceded by the symbolic descent of Celedón, a Basque effigy that flies down on strings from the Iglesia de San Miguel into the plaza below.

A jazz festival is held in July and a fairly new gig is the **Azkena Rock Festival** (☎ 944 15 45 51; www.azkenarockfestival.com) held at the end of August to early September. It features a fairly lively mix of Basque and Spanish bands plus headliners who have included Iggy Pop and Deep Purple in the past.

## Sleeping

**Albergue Juvenil** (☎ /fax 945 14 81 00; cnr Calles de Escultor Isaac Díez & Salvatierrabide; junior/senior dm €9/14) About 600m southwest of the train station, this well-kept, well-secured, red-brick building is the cheapest deal in town.

**Hotel Desiderio** (☎ 945 25 17 00; fax 945 25 17 22; Colegio San Prudencio 2; s/d €35/60) Dull décor, dull outlook, and overpriced, but you're only 50m from modern art at the Artium, 100m from the bus station and a mere stagger away from the streets of the Casco.

**Hotel América** (☎ 945 13 05 06; fax 945 13 05 48; Calle de la Florida 11; s/d with breakfast €35.40/52) Comfy rooms and a friendly welcome make this a good option. One or two rooms may feel slightly enclosed to some, but the overall charm makes up for it.

**Hotel Almoneda** (☎ 945 15 40 84; www.hotelalmoneda.com; Calle de la Florida 7; s/d Mon-Thu €62/99,

Fri-Sun €51/74) Confident atmosphere and business-level comfort and style draw you in at this fine hotel where rooms have a nice muted feel. Breakfast is included and prices drop at weekends.

There's great value at the comfortable **Hotel Dato** (☎ 945 14 72 30; www.hoteldato.com; Calle de Eduardo Dato 28; s/d/tr €33/46/61; 100m) and at its supplementary hotel, **Dato II** (Calle San Antonio). Both put the art into Deco with extravagant trimmings that include full-sized statues of nubile water nymphs and stags.

## Eating

Head for the west sides of Plaza de España and the adjacent Plaza de la Virgen Blanca for breakfast and morning coffee in the bright light of day. Switch to the east sides for afternoon sun.

**Terraza 4 Azules** (☎ 945 14 88 48; Parque de la Florida) A sweet little corner for alfresco coffee among the trees in Parque de Florida.

**Dublin** (☎ 945 28 67 62; Plaza de la Virgen Blanca) One of those wonderful places that seems to be at the crossroads of city life. It rings the changes from relaxed morning café through lunchtime *pintxo* place to a late-night drinking spot with great conversation.

**Taiwan** (☎ 945 22 91 47; Calle Badaia 24; dishes €12-15) For a change from Basque food, this friendly place does excellent dishes and is developing its Taiwanese cuisine also. There's a *menú del día* for €9.

**Arkupe** (☎ 945 23 00 80; Mateo Benigno de Moraza 13; mains €15-21) A great local restaurant, family-run and with a strong grip on traditional Basque dishes, Arkupe has comfy, intimate seating in which to enjoy classic dishes such as baked hake in a squid sauce or pork with a red wine sauce.

**Restaurante El Portalón** (☎ 945 14 27 55; Calle de la Correría 151; meals €55) El Portalón offers quality Basque cuisine in splendid timbered and vaulted surroundings, but you'll pay for the privilege and reservations are essential.

You can get *pintxos* and *mentés del día* at many of the bars in the Casco Viejo. A popular place to start is **Bar El 7** (☎ 945 27 22 98; Calle de la Cuchillería 3; menú €9.80), where they do no-fuss *pintxos*, *bocadillos* and a tasty *menú del día*. The *menú* racks up to €13.80 on Saturdays. **Café Dato 5** (☎ 945 14 94 20; Calle de Eduardo Dato 5) runs a *pintxo* for €1 deal. The top spot is **Salburua** (☎ 945 28 64 60; Calle de los Fueros 19), which has picked up several awards for its *pintxos*.

## AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Asador Sagartoki** (☎ 945 28 86 76; Calle del Prado 18; mains €17.60-19) A marvellous *sidrería* (cider bar) restaurant that has one of the most creative menus around and an atmosphere to go with it. The dining room stretches way beyond the busy front bar and the *pintxos* are sublime award-winners. Try the exquisite *pirulis de revueltos de champiñons*, wild mushroom 'lollipops' by any other name, or the *degustación de pintxos* (€16) for a selection of the best. There's a *menú sidrería* for €34 per person and mains of fish and meat as well as superb salads. Marvel as the bar staff, arms akimbo, orchestrate jets of cider from the big barrels to the glass in their outstretched hands; then try it yourself in the restaurant.

## Drinking

There's a strong politico-artistic vibe in the Casco Viejo where a lively student cadre keeps things swerving with creative street posters and action. The *campillo* (a covered, but open-sided, court used for games and other events) in Calle las Escuelas is often turned over to raucous band fests, rallies and political fairs. In Calle de la Cuchillería and Calle Herrería there's a swathe of hole-in-the-wall bars with no name.

**El Parral** (☎ 945 27 68 33; Cantón de San Francisco Javier) This is the 'grape arbor', though all the grapes are in the flowing wine that fuels lively discussion and late-night rock, reggae and Spanish pop.

**Gora** (☎ 945 12 14 52; Cantón de San Francisco Javier) This café-bar has smooth modern surroundings, but there's still a great Casco vibe. There's rockin' DJs and late sessions, especially at the weekend.

**Loft** (Paseo Senda s/n; admission €9; 11pm-late Thu-Sat) For later in the night, this is where House-music DJs ensure a packed dance floor on weekends.

## Getting There & Away

Vitoria's **airport** (☎ 945 16 35 00) is at Foronda, about 9km northwest of the city. Ryanair has daily flights from Stansted and there are internal connections to Madrid and Barcelona. There's an ATM and car-hire offices at the airport. Buses (€3) to town meet flights. Taxis cost €20.

There are car parks by the railway station, by the Artium and just east of the cathedral.

**Vitoria's bus station** (☎ 945 25 84 00; Calle de los Herrán) has regular services to Madrid (€21.50, five hours, up to 13 daily), Barcelona (€34.25, seven hours), Pamplona (€7, 1½ hours), San Sebastián (€6.75, 1½ hours) and Bilbao (€5.10, 50 minutes). Booking tickets, for Bilbao especially, is recommended at weekends.

Trains go to Madrid (€31.30, 5½ hours, eight daily), Barcelona (€34.50 seven hours,

one daily), San Sebastián (€8.10, 1¾ hours, up to 10 daily) and to Pamplona (€4.10, one hour, four daily). There's an ATM and an internet facility at the station.

## NAVARRA

Several Spains intersect in Navarra (Basque: Nafarroa). The soft greens and bracing climate of the Navarran Pyrenees lie like a cool compress across the sunstruck brow of the south, which is all stark plains, cereal crops and vineyards, sliced by high sierras with coxcombs of raw limestone. Navarra is pilgrim territory: for centuries the faithful have used the pass at Roncesvalles to cross from France on their way to Santiago de Compostela (see Camino de Santiago, p89).

Navarra was historically the heartland of the Basques, but dynastic struggles and trimming, due to reactionary politics, including Francoism, has left it as a semi-autonomous province with the north being Basque by nature while the south leans towards Castilian Spain. The centre hangs between and Navarra seems intrinsically uncommitted to the vision of a Basque future. The Navarran capital, Pamplona, tends to grab the headlines with its world-famous running of the bulls, but the region's real charm is in its peppering of small towns and villages, each one with a unique history and an iconography that covers every kind of architecture.

## PAMPLONA

pop 190,937 / elevation 456m Pamplona (Basque: Iruña), capital of the fiercely independent Navarra, can seem a touch austere at times, partly because of the dark stonework of its older buildings and partly because of a lingering reputation for Navarran reactionary politics. Yet Pamplona

is the home of Los Sanfermines (Fiesta de San Fermín) one of the most riotous and extreme festivals in Europe. At the heart of the festival is El Encierro, the Running of the Bulls (see the boxed text, p482), an activity that many other countries would have banned years ago because of the perceived cruelty to animals and danger to people.

All this apart, Pamplona is fascinating at any time. A fine cathedral is the jewel in the crown and there's much to be enjoyed by simply meandering along narrow streets or relaxing in the vast green belt on the western edge of the inner city. Pamplona's bars and restaurants have a growing reputation for superb *pintxos*, and a healthy Basque culture among young people enlivens things.

## History

The Romans called the city Pompaelo, after its founder Pompey the Great. They were succeeded by the Visigoths and then, briefly, by the Muslims. Navarra has been a melting pot of dynastic, political and cultural aspirations and tensions, ever since Charlemagne rampaged across the Pyrenees from France in 778. The city achieved great things under Sancho III in the 11th century and its position on the Camino de Santiago ensured its prosperity. Twentieth-century prosperity saw an expansion of the city.

## Orientation

The compact old-city centre is marked off to the north and east by Río Arga and what remains of the old defensive wall. To the west it's bordered by parks and Ciudadela, the former citadel. The main square is the enormous Plaza del Castillo, with its central bandstand. Its south side extends southwest through the wide Paseo de Sarasate roughly marking the division between the old town and the 19th-century Ensanche, the 'extension'. The train station is a kilometre northwest of the city centre. The main bus station is a few minutes walk south of Paseo de Sarasate.

## Information

There are several banks with exchange services and ATMs along Paseo de Sarasate and numerous ATMs throughout the newer part of town.

**elkar** (☎ 948 22 41 67; Comedias 14) Excellent branch of this chain bookshop with music and maps also.

**Emergency** (☎ 112)

**Hospital de Navarra** (☎ 848 42 22 22; Calle de Irunlarrea)

**Kuria.Net** (☎ 948 22 30 77; Calle Curia 15; per hr €3; 11 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-10pm Sun) A well-run place with good kit.

**Main post office** (cnr Paseo de Sarasate & Calle de Vínculo)

**Policia Nacional** (Calle del General Chinchilla)

**Telephone Locutorio** (Plaza de Castillo; 11 9am-11pm)

**Tourist office** (☎ 848 20 65 40; www.navarra.es; Calle de Esclava 1; 11 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) This extremely well-organised office has English-speaking staff and plenty of information about the city and Navarra.

## Sights

### CATEDRAL

Pamplona's main **catedral** (☎ 848 42 04 20; Calle Dormitalleria; guided tours adult/student €4.15/2.45; 11 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) stands on a rise just inside the city ramparts amid a dark thicket of narrow streets. The cathedral is a late-medieval Gothic gem spoiled only by its rather dull neo-classical façade, an 18th-century appendage. The vast interior reveals some fine artefacts, including a silver-plated Virgin and the splendid 15th-century tomb of Carlos III of Navarra and his wife Doña Leonor. The real joy is the Gothic cloister where there is marvellous delicacy in the stonework. The **Museo Diocesano** occupies the former refectory and kitchen, and houses an assortment of religious art, including some fine Gothic woodcarvings.

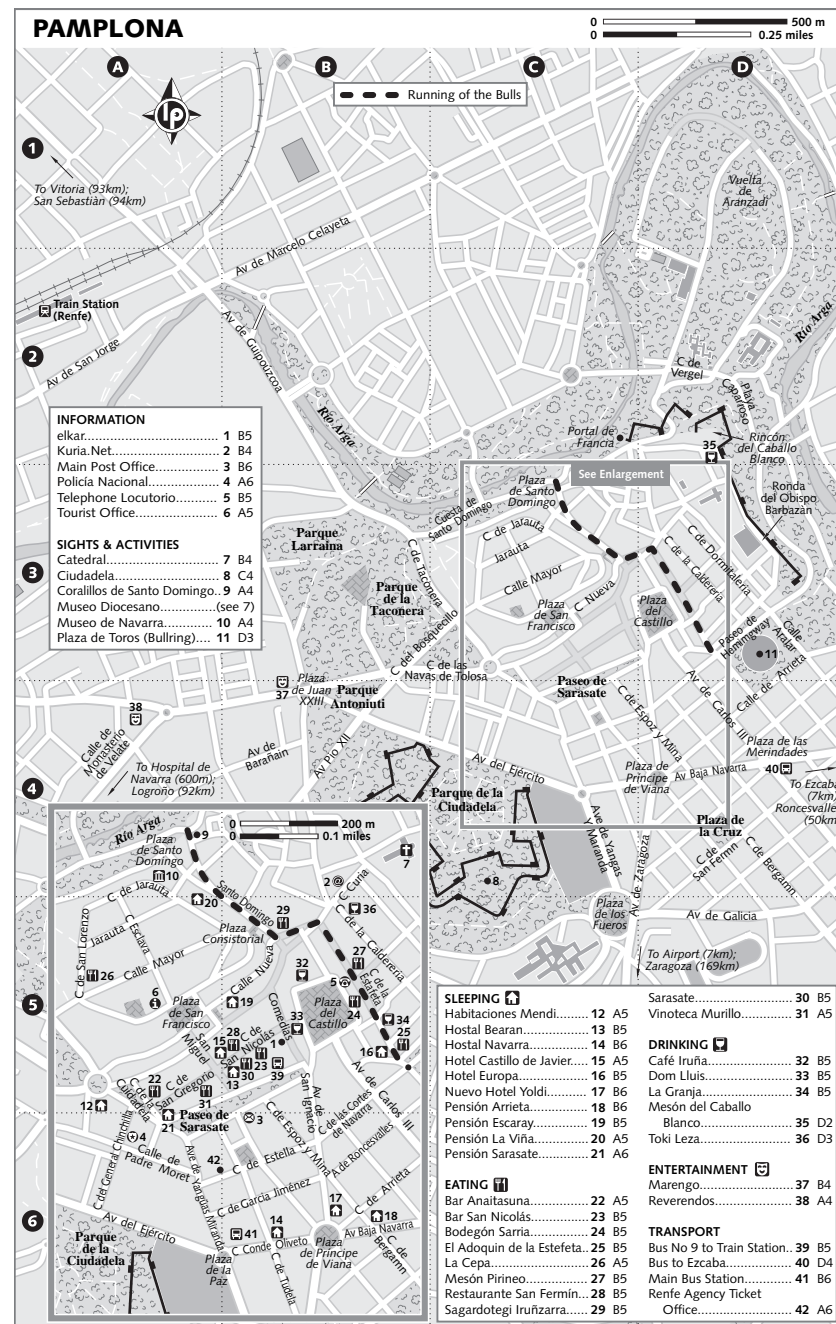
The cathedral, cloister and museum can be visited on three-hour guided tours at 10am and 4pm daily, except Saturday afternoon and Sunday.

### MUSEO DE NAVARRA

Housed in a former medieval hospital, this **museum** (☎ 848 42 64 92; www.cfnavarra.es; Calle Santo Domingo 47; adults/students €2/1, Sat afternoon & Sun free; 11 9.30am-2pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) has an eclectic collection of archaeological finds (including a Roman mosaic), as well as a selection of art including Goya's *Marqués de San Adrián*.

### CIUDADELA & PARKS

The walls and bulwarks of the grand fortified citadel, the star-shaped **Ciudadela** (Avenida del Ejército; admission free; 11 7.30am-9.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-9.30pm Sun), lurk amid the verdant grass and trees in what is now a charming park, the portal to three more parks that unfold to the north and lend the city a beautiful green escape.



## THE RUNNING OF THE BULLS

Liberated, obsessive, or plain mad is how you might describe aficionados (and there are many) who regularly take part in Pamplona's **Sanfermines** (Fiesta de San Fermín), a nonstop cacophony of music, dance, fireworks, processions – and the small matter of running alongside a handful of agitated, horn-tossing *toros* (bulls) – that takes place from 6 to 14 July each year.

El *Encierro*, the running of the bulls from their corrals to the bullring for the afternoon bullfight, takes place in Pamplona, every morning during Sanfermines. Six bulls are let loose from the Coraillos de Santo Domingo to charge across the square of the same name (a good vantage point). They continue up the street, veering onto Calle de los Mercaderes from Plaza Consistorial and then sweep right onto Calle de la Estafeta for the final charge to the ring. Devotees, known as *mazos* (the brave or foolish, depending on your point of view) race madly with the bulls, aiming to keep close – but not too close. The total course is some 825m long and lasts little more than three minutes.

Since records began in 1924, 13 people have been killed during Pamplona's bull run. Many of those who run are full of bravado (and/or drink), and have little idea of what they're doing. This is not an activity to be recommended, but if you're tempted, try to run with someone experienced. Above all don't get trapped near a bull that has been separated from the herd – a lone, frightened 500kg bull surrounded by charging humans can be lethal. Keeping ahead of the herd is the general rule. As part of your preparation, familiarise yourself with the course.

To participate you must enter the course before 7.30am from Plaza de Santo Domingo. About 8am two rockets are fired: the first announces that the bulls have been released from the corrals; the second lets you know they're all out and running. The first danger point is where Calle de los Mercaderes leads into Calle de la Estafeta. Here many of the bulls skid into the barriers because of their headlong speed on the turn. They can become isolated from the herd and are then always dangerous. A very treacherous stretch comes towards the end, where Calle de la Estafeta slopes down into the final turn to Plaza de Toros.

A third rocket goes off when all the bulls have made it to the ring, and a final one when they have been rounded up in the stalls.

The week winds up at midnight on 14 July with a candlelit procession, known as the *Pobre de Mi* (Poor Me), which starts from Plaza Consistorial. Another entertaining sideshow is the procession by protestors from the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, wearing as few clothes as possible, but without bulls behind them.

Concern has grown about the high numbers of people taking part in recent *Encierros*. The 2004 fiesta was considered to be one of the most dangerous in recent years with dozens of injuries, but no deaths. For the 2005 fiesta the authorities used a special antislip paint on the streets to cut down on bull-skid. There seemed to be just as many falls and there were several injuries, including four gorings. The 2006 event passed without serious injury to any of the runners, but with even greater demands on the authorities, including 145 fire alarm call outs and four stray cats collected; no stray bulls reported. For dedicated *Encierro* news check out [www.sanfermin.com](http://www.sanfermin.com).

## MUSEO OTEIZA

Around 9km northeast of Pamplona in the town of Alzuza, this impressive museum (948 33 20 74; [www.museoteiza.org](http://www.museoteiza.org); Calle de la Cuesta 7; adult/student/child €4/2/free, Fri free; 11am–7pm Tue–Sun Jun–Sep, 10am–3pm Tue–Fri, 11am–7pm Sat & Sun Oct–May) contains almost 3000 pieces by the renowned Navarran sculptor, Jorge Oteiza. As well as his workshop, this beautifully designed gallery incorporates the artist's former home in a lovely rural setting.

Rio Irati (948 22 14 70) has at least one bus a day to Alzuza from Pamplona's bus station.

If you're driving, Alzuza is signposted north off the NA150, just east of Huarte.

## Sleeping

During Los Sanfermines all hotels raise their rates mercilessly – some triple their normal rack rates, a few increase them by even more – and it can be near impossible to get a room without reserving several months in advance. Touts hang around the bus and train stations at this time of year, offering rooms in private houses. You take your chances on the quality.

## BUDGET

**Ezcaba** (948 33 03 15; [www.campingezcaba.com](http://www.campingezcaba.com); sites per person/tent/car €4.30/4.55/4.05) On the banks of Rio Ulzama, about 7km north on the N121, this is the nearest camping ground. Bus 4 runs four times daily (the earliest at 10.48am) from Plaza de las Merindades by the BBVA bank. Extra buses run during Los Sanfermines.

**Pensión La Viña** (948 21 32 50; Calle de Jarauta 8; s/d with shared bathroom €15/25) A decent budget option that's a mere skip, jump and heartbeat from the bull run. The outer door is plain metal and the *pensión* is an unnumbered door on the second landing.

**Pensión Escaray** (948 22 78 25; Calle Nueva 24; s/d with shared bathroom €20/40) Tucked away behind a vast doorway this is a marvellous period-piece *pensión* with polished floorboards and high ceilings. The welcome's charming also.

**Habitaciones Mendi** (948 22 52 97; Calle de las Navas de Tolosa 9; s/d €30/36) Mendi is a longstanding institution full of old Pamplonese style – creaky floorboards, Navarran chintz and crockery.

**Pensión Sarasate** (948 22 30 84; Paseo de Sarasate 30; s/d €35/40) Old-fashioned care and comfort is the mark of this excellent choice at the end of the *paseo* and right on the threshold of the old town. Plenty of traditional décor and polished wood add to the cosy atmosphere.

**Hostal Bearan** (948 22 34 28; fax 948 22 43 02; Calle de San Nicolás 25; s/d from €36/42) A well-organised and fairly formal management makes this a reliable place, although the rooms – and the welcome – are a bit dull.

**Pensión Arrieta** (948 22 84 59; Calle de Arrieta 27; s/d €32/38, d with bathroom €45) This is a more-than-adequate option, but with décor wearing a touch thin. Arrieta has decent-sized rooms in its main *pensión*. Across the way on the floor of another building is an annexe of much the same standard.

## MIDRANGE

**Hotel Castillo de Javier** (948 20 30 40; [www.hotel-castillodejavier.com](http://www.hotel-castillodejavier.com); Calle San Nicolás 50; s/d €42/58; j ) This relatively new hotel is smack bang in the middle of the old town. Rooms are standard business style, comfy and smart, and there are excellent facilities for those with mobility difficulties.

**Hostal Navarra** (948 22 51 64; [www.hostalnavarra.com](http://www.hostalnavarra.com); Calle de Tudela 9; s/d €48.15/64.20) An immaculate place, with delightful personal touches,

Navarra has stylish, comfy rooms and is only a few minutes from the Casco. The delicious breakfast is €6.

**Nuevo Hotel Yoldi** (948 22 48 00; [www.hotelyoldi.com](http://www.hotelyoldi.com); Avenida de San Ignacio 11; s/d €57/82; j ) Sleep with the macho memories of Hemingway and Anthony Quinn in this longstanding and excellent hotel. The very comfortable rooms have CD players and minibars to keep the ghost of Hemingway happy at least.

**Hotel Europa** (948 22 18 00; [www.hreuropa.com](http://www.hreuropa.com); Calle de Espoz y Mina 11; s/d €65/84; j ) There's business-standard comfort at this enjoyable central hotel, but with the usual stinting on room size for singles. Weekend rates plummet by 20%.

## Eating

**Bar Anaitasuna** (948 22 79 56; Calle de San Gregorio 58; menú €9.75) This is an ideal scrub-down for everything from breakfast to late drinking and with *bocadillos* and sandwiches starting at €3.50.

**Bar San Nicolás** (Calle de San Nicolás 13) Prices are a bit kinder here than in some nearby places, so try the Spanish standards, such as *paella* and *bacalao* (salted cod), as well as a Basque *menú* (€9).

**Sarasate** (948 22 57 27; Calle de San Nicolás 21; menú Mon–Fri/Sat & Sun €10/15; ✓ ) This bright, uncluttered vegetarian restaurant on the 1st floor offers excellent veggie dishes and also has a gluten-free *menú*.

**Bodegón Sarria** (Calle de la Estafeta 50; mains from €9, menúes €12.50) There's plenty of Pamplona tradition in this largely meat-based eatery. Meaty pics of Hemingway and assorted *toros* (bulls) hang on the walls to aid digestion.

**Mesón Pirineo** (948 22 20 45; Calle de la Estafeta 41; menú €15) One of Calle de la Estafeta's great *pintxo* bars, the selection here is really superb. It also does a good three-course *menú* for about €15.

**El Adoquín de la Estafeta** (948 22 68 41; Calle de la Estafeta 80; menú €12) This unassuming corner bar has delicious chunky *pintxos* such as *roquefort con salmon* and *setas con jamón* (mushrooms and ham).

For more options, wander west to Calle de San Lorenzo.

**La Cepa** (948 21 31 45; Calle de San Lorenzo 2; menú €10) There's a stylish pull to this high-ceilinged eatery with its red walls and wooden tables. There are filling meals and it's a good place for just drinks and snacks.

## AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Baserri** (☎ 948 22 20 21; Calle San Nicolás 32; menú €12.50) It's *pintxo* paradise at Baserri, where the bar groans with bright butterflies of food. A *menú degustación*, a sampler of *pintxos*, costs €18.50; or just pick away at such treats as venison with wild mushrooms or ostrich with Idiábal cheese. There are also gluten-free options.

**Sagardotegi Iruñazarra** (☎ 948 22 51 67; Calle de los Mercaderes 15) Beef up on solid Navarran meat dishes and trimmings for about €22 at this popular cider house. Included in the price is all the cider you can drink.

**Restaurante San Fermín** (☎ 948 22 21 91; Calle de San Nicolás 46) A fairly top-end place that produces classics such as *cogote de merluza* (tender neck of hake) or *centollo el horno* (baked spider crab).

**Vinoteca Murillo** (☎ 948 22 10 15; cnr Calle de San Gregorio & Plaza de San Nicolás; 11am-1.45pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat) A wine shop that fills 5L containers of good Navarran wine for under €6.

## Drinking

Pamplona's resident student population ensures a lively after-dark scene year-round. There's a strong Basque vibe in the bars around Calle Carmen and Calle Calderería and up towards the cathedral.

**Toki Leza** (☎ 948 22 95 84; Calle de la Calderería 5) This place has plenty of life and soul.

The cafés on Plaza del Castillo, with their French-style awnings, are good places to start or end the day.

**Café Iruña** (Plaza del Castillo 44) With frilly *belle époque* décor in need of re-gilding – although the faded look sits well – this is a perennial favourite for coffees or aperitifs.

**Mesón del Caballo Blanco** (Ronda del Obispo Barbazán) Country comes to town at this enduring favourite. It's in a converted church just inside the city wall to the north of the cathedral. Inside and out you have a charming sense of escaping claustrophobic city streets and the across-country views are refreshing. It also does decent food with dishes under €10 and has fairly good wine.

Other good bars include the intimate **Dom Lluís** (cnr Calles de San Nicolás & de Pozo Blanco) or the more modern **La Granja** (Calle de la Estafeta 71).

## Entertainment

Most of Pamplona's dance venues are a walk or short taxi ride south and west of the old city centre in the direction of the university. Doors at these places are usually open after 11pm Thursday to Saturday, and the cover charge tends to be around €6 to €10, depending on the night.

**Reverendos** (Calle de Monasterio de Velate 5; 11.30pm-6.30am) This is the big number for the 20 to 30 year-old dance and techno fiends.

**Marengo** (Avenida de Bayona 2) This venue gets the crowds going with Latin rhythms.

## Getting There &amp; Away

**AIR**  
Pamplona's airport (☎ 948 16 87 00), about 7km south of the city, has regular flights to Madrid and Barcelona. There's an ATM as well as car-rental desks. Bus 16 from the main bus station (€1, 25 minutes) drops you 300m downhill from the airport, so heavy cases are a genuine drag. A taxi costs about €13.

## BUS

From the **main bus station** (☎ 948 22 38 54; Calle Conde Oliveto 8) buses leave for most towns throughout Navarra, although service is restricted on Sunday.

Regular bus services travel to Bilbao (€11.60, 1¾ hours), Vitoria (€6.80, 1½ hours), Logroño (€7, 1½ hours), San Sebastián (€6.50, one hour), Soria (€11.10, two hours), Madrid (€24.29, five hours) and Barcelona (€33.50, five hours). Regional destinations include Olite (€2.85, 40 minutes, 16 daily), Javier (€3.75, one hour, two daily), Estella (€3.25, one hour, 10 daily), Tudela (€6.20, 1¼ hours, eight daily) and Puento La Reina (€1.70, 30 minutes, 10 daily).

## CAR &amp; MOTORCYCLE

The A15 *autopista* connects Pamplona with San Sebastián, although the N121 is a more scenic – and free – alternative. The N135 leads east into the Pyrenees, while the N240 heads west to Vitoria and Burgos and east to Aragón. For Logroño take the N111.

## TRAIN

Pamplona's train station is linked to the city centre by bus 9 from Paseo de Sarasate every 15 minutes. Tickets are also sold at the **Renfe agency** (☎ 902 24 02 02; Calle de Estella 8; 11am-1.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat).

Trains run to/from Madrid (€48.50, 4½ hours, three daily), Barcelona (€31, six hours, three daily), San Sebastián (from €18.30, two hours, three daily), Vitoria (€4.10, one hour, four daily) and Tudela (€12.50, 1½ hours, five daily).

## EAST OF PAMPLONA

Southeast of Pamplona along the road to Aragón (N240), there are a handful of interesting towns, and the grand Monasterio de Leyre in the foothills of the Pyrenees, which offer worthwhile stopovers.

## Sangüesa

pop 4750 / elevation 430m  
The whiff of history hangs happily around Sangüesa (Basque: Zangoza), although the more palpable whiff from a nearby paper mill represents the present. Sangüesa was once an important stop on the pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela. Top billing goes to the Iglesia de Santa María Real (adult/child €2/1), one of the finest examples of Romanesque religious art in Navarra. The fabulous portal has a busy crowd of saints, sinners and supporting acts depicting everything from the Last Supper to the Norse Sagas. Look for the opportunistic bird's nest while you're there.

All round Sangüesa you'll come across excellent information boards in several different languages.

Immediately opposite the Iglesia de Santa María Real is the **tourist office** (☎ 948 87 14 11; www.navarra.es; Calle Mayor 2; 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Easter-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun Nov-Easter).

**Cantolagua** (☎ 948 43 03 52; Camino de Cantolagua s/n; sites per person/tent/car €3.50/3.50/4; 11mid-Feb–Oct) is a well-equipped camping ground, while the most comfortable place in town is **Hostal JP** (☎ 948 87 16 93; www.ciberwebs.com/jp; Paseo Raimundo Lumbier 3; s/d €35/52), opposite the Iglesia de Santa María. **Pensión Las Navas** (☎ 948 87 00 77; Calle de Alfonso el Batallador 7; s/d €20/40) has cheap rooms and also does good, honest food, including a special *asado* (grilled meat) *menú* for €15 or a *menú del día* for €10.

Regular buses run daily to/from Pamplona (€3.15, 45 minutes). A minibus service runs to Sos del Rey Católico (€1, 15 minutes) in Aragón (see p441) at 8.30pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and at 1.45pm on Tuesday and Thursday.

## Javier

pop 77 / elevation 448m  
Javier (Xavier), 11km northeast of Sangüesa, is where the patron saint of Navarra, San Francisco Xavier, was born in 1506. The fairly dull town lies downhill from the quaint, Jesuit-owned **Castillo de Javier** (☎ 948 88 40 00; admission free; 11am-12.40pm & 4-6.40pm Apr-Sep, 9am-12.40pm & 4-5.40pm Oct-Mar), an evocative piece of medieval architecture that houses a small museum dedicated to the life of the patron saint, who was a missionary in the Far East.

A daily bus passes through from Pamplona and Sangüesa en route to Huesca; another heads up the Valle de Roncal.

## Monasterio de Leyre

pop 219 / elevation 559m  
Totally swamped with visitors on public holidays is the **Monasterio de Leyre** (☎ 948 88 41 50; adult/child €2/0.50; 11am-10.15am-2pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Fri, 10.15am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat & Sun), in an attractive setting in the shadow of the Sierra de Leyre about 4km from Yesa on the N240.

The early-Romanesque crypt has a three-nave structure with a low roof and the 12th-century main portal of the church is a fine example of Romanesque artistry.

Accommodation is available at the **Hospedería de Leyre** (☎ 948 88 41 00; www.monasteriodeleyre.com; s/d €36/70), which is housed in part of the monastery complex and also has a reasonable restaurant with a weekday *menú del día* for €16.50 (€17.50 at weekends).

There's an early-morning bus from Yesa to Pamplona, as well as one to Huesca. Virtually no buses run on Sunday, and there are none at all from Yesa to the monastery.

## WEST OF PAMPLONA

The N111 is the main route west out of Pamplona, winding gently to Logroño along the Camino de Santiago (p89). Dotted with a handful of charming villages and especially bursting with colour after the spring rains, it's one of the more enticing stretches for those walking the Camino. Buses travel between Pamplona and Logroño along this route.

## Puente la Reina

pop 2520 / elevation 421m  
The six-arched medieval bridge at Puente la Reina (Basque: Gares) throngs with the ghosts of a multitude of pilgrims. Over the centuries they approached from Roncesvalles to the

### NAVARRA'S CASAS RURALES

Navarra has an excellent selection of *casas rurales* (village houses or farmsteads with rooms to let) which are often well kept, beautiful houses in mountain villages. Reservations are recommended at peak periods. You can recognise the *casas rurales* by one of two small plaques: one has 'CR' in white on a dark-green background; the more modern one, in brown, olive green and white, displays the letter 'C' and the outline of a house.

A copy of the *Guía de Alojamientos* is available free from most tourist offices in Navarra, and it lists all the private homes and farmsteads that rent out rooms.

north and Aragón to the east, and then united to take the one main route west to Santiago de Compostela. Their first stop here was at the late-Romanesque Iglesia del Crucifijo, erected by the Knights Templar and still containing one of the finest Gothic crucifixes in existence. From here the narrow Calle Mayor leads to the Iglesia de Santiago, sporting an eroded Romanesque portal with Mudéjar touches; inside is an especially beautiful sculpture of the saint.

### Estella

pop 13,449 / elevation 483m

Never mind the traffic-packed approaches to Estella (Basque: Lizarra), this town was known as 'La Bella' in medieval times because of the splendour of its monuments and buildings and it's still a charming place today. During the 11th century, Estella became a main reception point for the growing flood of pilgrims along the Camino de Santiago. Today, the atmospheric older part of town is huddled on the west bank of tree-shaded Río Ega and the newer part of town is centred on the big, cheerful Plaza de los Fueros. Parking can be difficult, but an extension to the car park near the bus station at Plaza Coronación for the south side of town is planned for 2007.

The very helpful **tourist office** (☎ 948 55 63 01; www.navarra.es; Calle de San Nicolás 1; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat Sep & Easter-Jun, 10am-8pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Easter, 10am-2pm Sun year-round) is on the western bank of the river below the 12th-century Iglesia de San Pedro de la Rúa, the most important monument in Estella. Guided

visits leave from the tourist office seven times a day (€2.50, 30 minutes). Guided tours of the entire town, along with an English commentary, cost €4 and last for 1½ hours. You should check with the tourist office in advance.

Adjacent to the tourist office is the **Palacio de los Reyes** (☎ 948 54 60 37; Calle de San Nicolás 2; admission free; 11am-1pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sat, 11am-1pm Sun), a rare example of Romanesque civil construction. It houses an intriguing collection of paintings by Gustavo de Maeztu y Whitney (1887-1947), who was of Cuban-English parentage, but emphatically Basque in upbringing and identity. Landscapes, portraits and full-bodied nudes reflect Maeztu's engaging sensual romanticism. Across the river and overlooking the town is the **Iglesia de San Miguel** with a fine Romanesque north door.

Every year from 31 July to 8 August, Estella hosts a *feria* (fair) with its own encierro, the running of the bulls, although the 'bulls' are less potentially lethal heifers that have their horns padded. They're big enough, however, and the fun can be happily scary.

Decent hotels include **Pensión San Andrés** (☎ 948 55 41 58; Plaza Santiago 58; s/d with washbasin from €15/27, s/d/tr/q with private bathroom €23/35/40/50), with very simple, clean rooms; **Hostal Residencia Cristina** (☎ 948 55 04 50; fax 948 55 07 72; Calle Baja Navarra 1; s/d/tr €37/45/55), which overlooks the main square and has good rooms; and the central **Hotel Yerri** (1 948 54 60 34; fax 948 55 50 81; Avenida de Yerri 35; s/d/tr €31/60/66), which is very comfortable.

**Hotel Restaurante Yerri**, attached to Hotel Yerri has a *menú del día* for €10 and a heftier *menú* on Saturday for €22. **Restaurante La Cepa** (☎ 948 55 00 32; Plaza de los Fueros 15; mains €15-18.50) is noted for its excellent traditional kitchen and does a good *menú del día* for €12 on weekdays and €22.50 at weekends.

About 10 buses leave from the bus station (Plaza Coronación) for Pamplona (€3.25, one hour) Monday to Friday, and four on Saturday and Sunday.

### Around Estella

There are some fascinating monasteries in the vicinity of Estella. About 3km southwest of Estella, near Ayegui, the **Monasterio de Irache** (☎ 948 55 44 64; admission free; 1 9am-1.30pm Tue, 9am-1.30pm & 5-7pm Wed-Fri, 9am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Sat & Sun Mar-Oct, 10am-1.30pm & 4.30-6pm Tue-Sun Nov-Feb, closed 15 Dec-31 Jan) is an ancient Benedictine monastery with a lovely 16th-century Plateresque

cloister and the **Puerta Especiosa**, decorated with delicate sculptures.

Set in quieter country, the **Monasterio de Iranzo** (☎ 948 52 00 47; www.monasterio-iranzo.com; adult/child €2.40/1.20; 10am-2pm & 4-8pm May-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-6pm Oct-Apr) is backed by a wooded hillside about 10km north of Estella, near Abárzuza.

### The Road to Logroño

The road to Logroño continues past Los Arcos, with the **Iglesia de Santa María** and its impressive Gothic cloister, before winding through rolling country to **Torres del Río**, whose octagonal 12th-century Romanesque **Iglesia del Santo Sepulcro** is a little gem.

### NORTH OF PAMPLONA

#### Sierra de Aralar

One of Navarra's many natural parks the scenic Sierra de Aralar offers pleasant walking. From **Lekunberri**, the area's main town, which also has a **tourist office** (☎ 948 50 72 04; oit.lekunberri@cfnavarra.es; Calle de Plazaola 21), the NA1510 leads southwest through the most scenic countryside, culminating (after 21km) in the austere 9th-century **Santuario de San Miguel de Aralar** (☎ 948 39 60 28; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm), which lies in the shadow of Monte Altxueta (1343m) and has attractive circular naves and a 12th-century *retablo* (altarpiece).

**Lekunberri** has a number of hotels and restaurants. The best choice is **Hostal Ayestarán** (☎ 948 50 41 27; hotelayestaran@terra.es; Calle de Aralar 27; r €56) whose restaurant does a *menú del día* for €12.

Most buses between Pamplona and San Sebastián stop in Lekunberri, but you'll need your own vehicle to explore the sierra.

#### Valle del Baztán

This is rural Basque Country at its most typical, a landscape of reds and greens where the houses too are built of red stone. Minor roads take you in and out of charming little villages, such as **Arriaz** (known for the fortified **Casa Jaureguizar**) and **Ziga**, with its 16th-century church.

Just beyond Irurita on the N121B is the valley's biggest town, **Elizondo**, given a distinctly urban air by its tall functional buildings. It's a good base for exploring the area. There's accommodation at the comfortable **Hotel Bastán** (☎ 948 58 00 50; www.hotelbaskan.com; s/d €67/82; p s ), which has well equipped rooms. If you prefer a more rural setting, **Casa Jaén**

(☎ 948 58 04 87; d €27; p s ) is a tranquil *casa rural* with two delightful doubles in a chalet-style building not far out of town.

Buses go to Pamplona up to four times daily (€3.90), stopping in many of the smaller villages up and down the valley.

Beyond Elizondo, a particularly lovely road climbs eastwards through the pleasant villages of **Arizkun** and **Erratzu** to the French border-pass of **Puerto de Izpegui**. You'll find a good number of *casas rurales* (r €27-45) in Arizkun. There are more choices in Erratzu, as well as **Camping Baztan** (☎ 948 45 31 33; sites per person/tent €5.15/9.35).

The N121B continues northwards to **Puerto de Otxondo** and the border crossing into France at **Dantxarinea**. Just before the border a minor road veers west to **Zugarramurdi**, home to the **Cuevas de Las Brujas** (Witches' Caves; admission €3; 1 9am-dusk); once the scene of magnificent debauchery, according to the Inquisition, whose perverse masters promptly tortured and burned scores of alleged witches.

**Zugarramurdi** has plenty of *casas rurales* (d from €27). One bus daily (except Sunday) goes to Elizondo.

### SOUTH OF PAMPLONA

The roads south of Pamplona lead through indifferent country to the absorbing towns of Olite and Tudela.

#### Olite

pop 3265 / elevation 365m

Olite feels a touch too polished, yet is still a delightful place to linger. The exceptional medieval castle complex known as the **Palacio Real** (☎ 948 74 00 35; Castillo de Olite; adult/child €2.80/1.40; 10am-7pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Jul & Aug; 10am-6pm Oct-Mar), dominates the town. It was the residence of the Navarran kings until the union with the kingdom of Castilla in 1512. The centre-piece of the rambling crenellated structure is the **Gran Torre**, one of a straggle of round towers and annexes that offer fine views. Integrated into the castle is the **Iglesia de Santa María la Real**, which has a superbly detailed Gothic portal. There are guided tours of the church. Check with the tourist office for times.

Whether or not you're a wine fan the **Museo del Vino** (☎ 948 74 12 73; museodelvino@congresosnavarra.com; Plaza de los Teobaldos 10; adult/child €3.50/1.50; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Wed-Sun, 4.30-8pm Mon & Tue) is a fascinating trip with its display of the major wine labels of Navarra, the processes of grape

growing (1st floor), wine making (2nd floor) and wine appreciation (basement). There are interactive displays, and all descriptions are in English, French and Spanish. The entrance ticket to the Palacio Real entitles you to a €1 discount.

Olite has a friendly and helpful tourist office (☎ 948 74 17 03; oit.olite@cfnavarra.es; Calle Mayor 1; 11am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Easter-12 Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri & 10am-2pm Sat & Sun 13 Oct-Easter), in the same building as the wine museum.

Excellent stopovers include **Hotel Merindad de Olite** (☎ 948 74 07 35; www.hotel-merindaddeolite.com; Rúa de la Judería 11; s/d/tr from €51/66/100; 2 ) a charming place with masses of period style in a splendid old building and with its own restaurant. **Hotel Casa Zanito** (☎ 948 74 00 02; Rúa Revillas s/n; s/d from €59/72) is another charming option, that's family-run with elegant, cosy rooms. It too has a restaurant serving traditional cuisine. As with all paradores, the **Príncipe de Viana** (☎ 948 74 00 00; olite@parador.es; Plaza de los Teobaldos 2; d €128) is in a sumptuous, atmospheric class of its own.

Hourly buses run between Olite and Pamplona (€3, 40 minutes) and less regular buses run to Tudela (€3.10).

## Ujué

Some 18km east of Olite, the tiny medieval village of Ujué balances atop a hill overlooking the plains of southern Navarra. The village itself is quiet and pretty with steep, narrow streets tumbling down the hillside, but what gives it something special is the hybrid **Iglesia de Santa María**, a fortified church of mixed Romanesque-Gothic style. The heart of Carlos II is preserved here.

## Monasterio de la Oliva

The 12th century Monasterio de la Oliva was founded by Cistercian monks and is still functioning as a community. It lies 2km beyond the quiet backwater of Carcastillo, another side road to the east of the main Pamplona-Zaragoza highway. Its austere church gives onto a peaceful and pleasing Gothic cloister. There are two or three buses daily between Pamplona and Carcastillo.

## Tudela

pop 31,228 / elevation 243m

Tudela was in Muslim hands for some 400 years and the Islamic genius for serpentine street creation makes this ancient city a pleasure to wander through. There's an excellent

**tourist office** (☎ 948 84 80 58; oit.tudela@navarra.es; Calle de Juicio 4; 11 9.30am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Easter-mid-Oct, 9.30am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun mid-Oct-Easter) opposite the cathedral.

The brightly decorated, 17th-century **Plaza de los Fueros** has coloured panels high on its walls, depicting coats-of-arms and bullfight scenes from the days when the square was used as a bullring. Today plenty of cheerful cafés encircle the plaza. Storks nest happily on the high roofs and on the tower of the 16th-century **Iglesia de Santa María**. A short distance away is the **catedral**, a sombre 12th-century Gothic pile built of stone and brick. The western **Puerta del Juicio** is particularly striking, with its many sculpted figures looking decidedly uneasy about their participation in the Last Judgment and positively agonised on the right-hand side where little devils are boiling them in oil. The cathedral has undergone a long restoration but is due to reopen in 2007. There are some marvels inside, including the choir with its exuberant carvings, a handsome main altar *retablo* and a lovely cloister.

Of the other churches in Tudela, the **Iglesia de San Nicolás** still sports a fine Romanesque tympanum featuring lions above one of its doors; it's at the end of Calle Rúa. Take time to wander the streets as there are some fine old mansions, many with Aragonesé-style *aleros* (awnings) jutting out from the roof – the **Palacio del Marqués de San Adrián** (☎ 948 82 15 35; Calle de Magallón 10) is an impressive example.

**Hostal Remigio** (☎ 948 82 08 50; www.hostalremigio.com; Calle de Gaztambide 4; s/d €28/48) just off Plaza de los Fueros has sturdy, good-value rooms. Its old dining room does a filling *menú del día* for €14 and mains for €9 to €17.

At least five trains run daily to/from Pamplona (€12.50, 1½ hours). Buses to Pamplona (€6.20, 1¼ hours, eight daily) operate from next to the train station, southeast of the town centre.

## THE PYRENEES

Rolling hills, ribboned cliffs, forests and snow-plastered mountains make up the Navarran Pyrenees, a playground for outdoor enthusiasts and pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago. Trekkers and skiers should be thoroughly equipped at any time of the year and should note emergency numbers in case of difficulties: ☎ 112 in Navarra or ☎ 17 in Aquitaine (France).

## Walking

There are numerous walking trails of mixed lengths and difficulties while the GR12 long-distance trail from Burguete can be followed eastward for five days (80km) through some of the best scenery Navarra has to offer. A two-season sleeping bag and all-weather gear are needed even in summer. Further information can be obtained from the **Federación Navarra de Deportes de Montaña y Escalada** (☎ 948 22 46 83; www.fedme.es) in Pamplona.

Starting in Burguete, head north to Roncesvalles, cross the Puerto de Ibañeta and steer eastward to Fábrica de Orbaizeta. You may need to head south to the town of Orbaizeta where there are several *casas rurales* (r from €27).

The next day will take you through the Bosque de Irati to Las Casas de Irati; you may be able to stay in the *casa del guarda* (a kind of warden's house) but be prepared to camp (free). The following stage sees you climbing to the bare heights of the Puerto de Larrau (ask at the restaurant-bar, 4km south of the French border, about bunk beds). The trail then cuts across the Sierra de Abodi; you can reach the *Belagua refugio* (shelter) in about five hours.

The final trek takes you to the highest mountain in Navarra, La Mesa de los Tres Reyes (2438m), from where the easiest thing to do is descend to the town of Zuriza at the top end of the Valle de Ansó in Aragón.

## To France via Roncesvalles

As you bear northeast out of Pamplona on the N135 and ascend into the Pyrenees, the yellows, browns and olive greens of lower Navarra begin to give way to more luxuriant vegetation.

## BURGUETE

The main road runs tightly between neat, whitewashed houses with bare stone cornerstones at Burguete (Basque: Auritz) lending a more sober French air to things.

There's a supermarket, bank, ATM and some decent accommodation.

**Camping Urrobi** (☎ 948 76 02 00; www.campingurrobi.com; sites per person/tent €4.20/4.20; 11 Apr-Oct) is a few kilometres south. In the town itself, as well as a sprinkling of *casas rurales*, **Hostal Juandeaburre** (☎ 948 76 00 78; Calle de San Nicolás 38; s/d with washbasin €15/26) offers good old-fashioned value with a somewhat old-fashioned welcome, while just across the road is the more sophisticated **Hotel Loizu** (☎ 948 76 00 08; www.hotelloizu.com; s/d

from €46/61) whose upper rooms have attractive beams and exposed stone walls. The hotel restaurant offers a *menú del día* for €15.

**Restaurante Txikiopoli** (☎ 948 76 00 19; Calle de San Nicolás 52; menú €15), on the main road, has tasty mains and specialises in foie gras.

## RONCESVALLES

Mobbed by often desultory, bad-tempered visitors during busy holiday periods, Roncesvalles (Basque: Orreaga) is simply a **monastery complex** (admission to cloister, chapterhouse & museum €2.30, guided tours adult/child €4.50/2.30; 11 10am-1.30pm & 3.30-7pm) set within an atmospheric mountain pass, which for centuries has been a major Pyrenees crossing point for pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago. It's open shorter hours from October to March. The 13th-century Gothic church **Real Colegiata de Santa María** (11 10am-8.30pm) contains a much-revered, silver-covered statue of the Virgin beneath a modernist-looking canopy worthy of Frank Gehry. Also of interest is the cloister (rebuilt in the 17th century), and more particularly the chapterhouse, with its beautiful star-ribbed vaulting. This contains the tomb of King Sancho VII (El Fuerte) of Navarra, the apparently 2.25m-tall victor in the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, fought against the Muslims in 1212. Also nearby is the 12th-century **Capilla de Sancti Spiritus**.

A few steps away in an old millhouse is the **tourist office** (☎ 948 76 03 01; 11 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun).

**Albergue de la Juventud** (☎ 948 76 03 02; dm under/over 29yr €8/10) is a possibility for HI members. It's housed in an 18th-century hospital where pilgrims used to take respite and is fronted by an enormous square.

**Hostal La Posada** (☎ 948 76 02 25; s/d/tr with bathroom €42/52/57) has charming rooms. The bar and restaurant get fairly lively at busy times. Breakfast is €6.50 and dinner is €16.

The morning bus, which travels from Pamplona via Burguete daily, except Sunday, stops in Roncesvalles (€4.10) and returns in the late afternoon.

## PUERTO DE IBAÑETA & VALCARLOS

From Roncesvalles the road climbs to the Puerto de Ibañeta, from where you have magnificent views across into France. The last town before the frontier is Valcarlos (Basque: Luzaide), a sleepy but quite pretty spot. Of the numerous *casas rurales* in town, the tree-framed **Casa Etxezuria** (☎ 948 79 00 11; www.etxezuria.com; d €30),

on the main road heading towards France, has pleasant rural décor and furnishings.

### THE ROADS TO OCHAGAVÍA

Happy wanderers on wheels can drift around a network of quiet country roads, with pretty villages along the way, in the area east of the main Roncesvalles road. A couple of kilometres south of Burguete, the NA140 branches off east to Garralda. Push on to Arive, a charming hamlet, from where you could continue east to the Valle del Salazar, go south along Río Irati past the fine Romanesque church near Nagore, or perhaps take a loop northeast through the Bosque de Irati forest, which again would eventually bring you to the Valle del Salazar, at Ochagavía. The forest, full of elms, beeches and lime trees, is one of Europe's most extensive, inviting you to ditch your vehicle and head off for a hike. If you stick to the NA140 between Arive and Ochagavía, Abaurregaina and Jaurieta are particularly picturesque. Most villages along the route have *casas rurales*.

### Ochagavía

This charming Pyrenean town lying astride narrow Río Zatoya sets itself quite apart from the villages further south. Grey stone, slate and cobblestones dominate the old centre, which straddles a bubbling stream (crossed by a pleasant medieval bridge). The town's sober dignity is reinforced by the looming presence of the Iglesia de San Juan Evangelista.

This is a popular base for walkers and even skiers, so there are plenty of *casas rurales*. For a list of options and hiking opportunities in the region, visit the Centro de Interpretación de la Naturaleza (☎ 948 89 06 80; oit.ochagavia@cfnavarra.es; 10am-2pm Mon-Thu & Sun, 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Fri & Sat). **Camping Osate** (☎ 948 89 01 84; www.osate.net; sites per person/tent €4/4) also has two-person cabins from €55.

### HEADING NORTH

To reach France, take the NA140 northeast from Ochagavía into the Sierra de Abodi and cross at the Puerto de Larrau (1585m), a majestically bleak pass. Four kilometres short of the border there's a seasonal restaurant and bar for skiers.

### Valle del Salazar

If you've made your way to Ochagavía, a good choice for heading south is the Valle del Salazar, many of whose hamlets contain gems of medieval handiwork with quiet cobbled streets

and little plazas. Esparza, with its mansions, medieval bridge and restored Iglesia de San Andrés, is particularly rewarding, while Ezcároz, Sarriés, Güesa and nearby Igal (off the main road) are also worth an amble. A daily bus runs the length of the Valle del Salazar between Pamplona and Ochagavía.

### Valle del Roncal

Navarra's most spectacular mountain area is around Roncal and an alternative route for leaving or entering the Navarran Pyrenees is this easternmost valley. One bus leaves Pamplona at 5pm Monday to Friday (1pm on Saturday), passing through all the Valle del Roncal towns on its way to Uztárroz. It returns early in the morning. For details of *casas rurales* in the valley, visit the Roncal-Salazar (www.roncal-salazar.com) website.

### BURGUI

The gateway to this part of the Pyrenees is Burgui. Its Roman bridge over Río Esca, combined with its huddle of stone houses straddling the river, is an evocative introduction to the rural Pyrenean towns further upstream. **Hostal El Almadiero** (☎ 948 47 70 86; almadiero@jet.es; Plaza Mayor; d with breakfast €60) has bright, pleasant rooms in the heart of the village.

### RONCAL

A gurgling river flows alongside the main road at Roncal and the village's cobblestone alleyways twist and turn between dark stone houses. Roncal is renowned for its Queso de Roncal, a sheep's cheese that's sold in the village.

The **tourist office** (☎ 948 47 52 56; www.vallederoncal.es; 10am-2pm & 4.30-8.30pm Mon-Sat mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-2pm Mon-Thu, 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Fri & Sat mid-Sep-mid-Jun, 10am-2pm Sun year-round), on the main road towards the Isaba exit from town, has an excellent interpretation centre (€1.20) and although information is in Euskara and Castilian, it is still visually satisfying for non-speakers of the languages. There's a bank with an ATM in the village.

Across the river on the southern exit from Roncal is the reasonable and large **Hostal Zaltua** (☎ 948 47 50 08; Calle de Castillo 23; s/d €30/45), some of whose rooms have good views over the valley.

### ISABA

The village of Isaba is another popular base for walkers and skiers, lying above the confluence of Ríos Belagua and Uztárroz, which together

flow into Río Esca. There are a few banks with ATMs and a **tourist office** (☎ 948 89 32 51; 10am-2pm & 4.30-8.30pm Mon-Sat mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-2pm Mon-Thu, 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Fri & Sat mid-Sep-mid-Jun, 10am-2pm Sun year-round).

There are plenty of sleeping places, but many are block-booked during the skiing season. For standard modern service there's **Hotel Isaba** (☎ 948 89 30 00; hotel\_isaba@ctv.es; s/d from €45/70), part of the Husa chain. For much more character, the tall, stone-built **Casa Catalingarde** (☎ 948 89 31 54; d €40) is possibly the pick of the *casas rurales* in the village. **Camping Asolaze** (☎ 948 50 40 11; www.campingasolaze.com; sites per person/tent/car €4/4/4) is at Km6 on the road to France.

## LA RIOJA

Get out the *copas* (glasses) for La Rioja and for some of the best red wines produced in the country. Wine goes well with the region's ochre earth and vast blue skies that seem far more Mediterranean Spanish than the green Basque Country to the north. The bulk of the vineyards line Río Ebro around the town of Haro, but extend also into neighbouring Navarra and the Basque province of Álava. Long before the vine, prehistoric La Rioja was a major stomping ground of dinosaurs, with much fossilised evidence still in existence (see the boxed text, p496).

### LOGROÑO

pop 137,614

There's an air of brisk contentment about Logroño and although the town is surrounded by urban sprawl, at its heart lies a typical Spanish town of tree-studded squares with a Casco Viejo, an old quarter, of narrow streets and hidden corners. There are few monuments, but there are some fine restaurants and *tapas/pintxos* bars in plenty, while the citizens are unfailingly friendly. You leave with that feeling of contentment – and it's not just the wine.

### Orientation

If you arrive at the train or bus station, first head up Avenida de España and then Calle del General Vara de Rey until you reach the Espolón, a large, parklike square lavish with plane trees. The Casco Viejo starts just to the north and the main area here is the pedestrianised Calle de Portales with the cathedral as its focus.

### Information

There are two tourist offices in Logroño, a regional office and a relatively new office run by the town council. Both have enthusiastic, friendly, well-informed staff and both issue a huge amount of excellent information about the town and the region.

**Main post office** (Plaza de San Agustín 1) In the old town. **Oficina de Información Logroño** (☎ 941 27 33 53; www.logroturismo.org; Calle de Portales 39; 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Easter-Oct, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-2pm Sun Nov-Easter) The town office. **Tourist Office of La Rioja** (☎ 941 29 12 60; www.lariojatourismo.com; Paseo del Espolón; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Sat, 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Sun) The regional office.

### Sights

The **Catedral de Santa María Redonda** (Calle de Portales; 10am-1pm & 6.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat) started life as a Gothic church, a fact easily overlooked when your gaze is caught by the extravagant churrigueresque towers, late-baroque features added in the 18th century. Storks like them too. The impressive main entrance to the 13th-century **Iglesia de San Bartolomé** (Calle de Rodríguez Paterna) has a splendid portico of deeply receding orders and a lively collection of statuary.

A stroll around the old town and down to the river is a pleasant diversion. The **Museo de la Rioja** (☎ 941 29 12 59; Plaza de San Agustín; admission free; 10am-2pm & 4-9pm Tue-Sat, 11.30am-2pm Sun) is housed in a grand, 18th-century building. Amid the engaging Gothic gloom is a lovely 12th-century wooden statue of Christ.

### Festivals & Events

Logroño's week-long **Fiesta de San Mateo** starts on 21 September and doubles as a harvest festival, during which all of La Rioja comes to town to watch the grape-crushing ceremonies in the Espolón and to drink ample quantities of wine. The **Feast of San Bernabé** is held on 11 June and commemorates the French siege of Logroño in 1521.

### Sleeping

**Hostal La Numantina** (☎ 941 25 14 11; fax 941 25 16 45; Calle de Sagasta 4; s/d €32/51) This is a very comfortable option with an attractive reception area and pleasant, comfy rooms. The location is handy for everything.

**Hostal Niza** (941 20 60 44; www.hostalniza.com; Calle de Capitán Gallarza 13; s/d €42.80/64) A real charmer of a place, with a different, bright colour scheme



on each floor, tea- and coffee-making facilities in the rooms and a lift. It's right at the heart of things.

**Hotel Marqués de Vallejo** (☎ 941 24 83 33; [www.hotelmarquesdevallejo.com](http://www.hotelmarquesdevallejo.com); Calle del Marqués de Vallejo 8; s/d €69.50/107) A classy choice in the old town, this well-managed hotel has high-standard, comfortable rooms and a sleek ambience.

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## Eating

Logroño's great tapas/pintxos streets are Calle Laurel and Calle San Juan, with Laurel and its tributary Travesía de Laurel the best of all.

**Bar Soriano** (Travesía de Laurel 2) Don't miss this bar, which has been serving up the same delicious mushroom tapa, topped with a shrimp, for more than 30 years. With wine it costs about €1.50.

**Lorenzo** (Travesía de Laurel 4-6) This place serves the delicious *tío agus* (roasted pork in a secret sauce), as well as great *pinchos morunos* (the Spanish version of kebabs), for about €0.75 a stick, and cheap Crianza (€1.10 a glass) and young Rioja wines (€0.75).

**La Taberna de Baco** (☎ 941 21 35 44; Calle de San Agustín 10) This place has a crackling list of tapas including *bombitas* (potatoes stuffed with mushrooms) and *rabas de pollo* (fried chicken slices marinated in spices and lemon juice). It has tables where you can order delicious casseroles, and salads, and has a great Rioja wine list.

**La Sacristía** (☎ 941 10 26 01; Calle de Portales 3; menú €9) This restaurant, which also doubles as an

excellent wine shop has an Andalusian touch to its many fish and shellfish dishes.

**Bar El Ángel** (Calle Laurel 12) offers tasty garlic mushrooms, while **La Taberna del Laurel** (Calle Laurel 7) serves tasty *patatas bravas* (potatoes in a spicy sauce). In Calle San Juan **Bar A Tu Gusto** (Calle San Juan 21) specialises in shellfish and **Bar La Travesía** (Calle de San Juan 10) is the place for tortillas.

## SELF-CATERING

**Mercado de Abastos** (Calle Peso) For self-catering there's this market, with a fish-and-meat section and superb fruit-and-veg shops.

There are countless wine outlets in town but two excellent wine shops, ideal for picking up wines that can be difficult to find outside La Rioja, are **Vinos san Agustín** (Plaza San Agustín 4; 11am-2pm & 6-9pm Tue-Sat), unassuming but definitely with the 'knowledge', and **Vinos El Peso** (☎ 941 22 82 54; cnr Calles Laurel & de Capitán Gallarza; 11am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat, 9am-2pm Sun), which also has a knowledgeable owner.

## BEST TAPAS, LOGROÑO HPETS312

- **Paté de olivas at Vinissimo, Calle San Juan** A generous pile of salty, black olive tapenade on a thick slice of bread. Wonderful with a glass of Riojan Crianza.
- **The best tortilla in Spain, hands down: Tortilla 'Mere'** I've eaten this dish everywhere in Spain, and the best I've ever had is at the *tortillería* on Travesía San Juan. It has the perfect ratio of egg to potatoes, isn't overcooked, and literally melts in your mouth. Order with *picante* for a kick.
- **Zapatillas at Bar Médula, Calle San Agustín** 'Zapatillas' means sandals or slippers, and the tapa gets its name because it's a long, thin piece of bread, rubbed with tomato, topped with *jamón serrano* (cured ham) and then grilled. Fold it in half for a crispy on the outside, gooey on the inside treat.
- **Setas at Bar Soriano (opposite), Travesía de Laurel** This bar is so popular that customers spill onto the street and order its garlicky mushrooms from the window outside. A stack of three perfectly tender mushrooms is topped with a tiny shrimp and pinch of crunchy sea salt.
- **Pimientos rellenos at Bar Charly, Calle San Agustín** Roasted red peppers stuffed with meat, battered and fried. Spicy, creamy and crispy, this tapa has it all.
- **Morunos at Paganos, Calle Laurel** Tender chunks of spicy pork skewered and roasted over coals. So good I always end up getting two.
- **Patatas bravas at La Taberna del Laurel (above), Calle Laurel** Like the tortilla, the best I've ever had in Spain: a perfectly spicy hot sauce and a creamy, secret-recipe white sauce over fried potatoes. You think you don't need bread until the potatoes are gone and you're using it to get every last bit of sauce.
- **Also recommended** Tender chunks of spicy octopus at Pulpería La Universidad on Calle San Agustín and *berenjena* (eggplant) at Casa Pali on Calle Laurel. Make sure you get a glass of Rioja wine (just order a *tinto*) at every stop!

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By train, Logroño is regularly connected to Zaragoza (€10.20, two hours), Madrid (€48.50, 3½ hours), Bilbao (€15, three hours) and Burgos (€14.50, 2½ hours).

## WINE REGION

La Rioja wine rolls on and off the tongue with ease, by name as well by taste. All wine fanciers know the famous wines of La Rioja (where the vine has been cultivated since Roman times). The region is classic vine country where vineyards cover the hinterland of Río Ebro. On the river's north bank, the region is part of the Basque Country and known as La Rioja Alavesa.

## Haro

pop 9813 / elevation 426m

There's not much of a heady bouquet to Haro, the capital of La Rioja's wine-producing region; but the town has a cheerful pace, and the compact old quarter, leading off Plaza de la Paz, has some intriguing alleyways with bars and wine shops in plenty.

The **tourist office** (☎ 941 30 33 66; Plaza de Florentino Rodríguez; 10am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Sep, 10am-2pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Sat Oct-Jun) is a couple of hundred metres along the road from Plaza de la Paz and has plenty of excellent information, including a list of wineries open to the public.

### IN SEARCH OF THE FINEST DROP

La Rioja is all about serious wine drinking as much as holidaymaking. Someone's got to do it. The best place to start your research is at the exceptional **Museo del Vino** (p487) in Olite. Also excellent are the **Museo del Vino** (above) in Haro and **Quaderna Via** (☎ 948 55 40 83; fax 948 55 65 40; admission free; 10am-2pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun), around 4km west of Estella, near Igúzquiza.

Wine categories in La Rioja are termed Young, Crianza, Reserva and Gran Reserva. Young wines are in their first or second year and are inevitably a touch 'fresh'. Crianzas must have matured into their third year and have spent at least one year in the cask, followed by a few months rested in the bottle. Reservas pay homage to best vintages and must mature for at least three full years in cask and bottle, with at least one year in the cask. Gran Reservas depend on the very best vintages, are matured for at least two years in the cask followed by three years in the bottle. These are the 'velvet' wines.

Experts have developed a classification system for the years in which the wine was particularly good. Five stars (the maximum) were awarded in 1982, 1994, 1995, 2001 and 2004. Four-star years include 1981, 1987, 1991, 1996 and 1998.

The tourist offices in Haro, Laguardia and Logroño are among those that have lists of bodegas that can be visited throughout the region, although it usually requires ringing in advance to arrange a time. One exception is **Bodega Muga** (above), which has set times for guided tours and tastings.

There are good wine shops in Logroño and Haro (above and p491).

The **Museo del Vino** (☎ 941 31 05 47; Bréton; admission €3, Wed free; 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), near the bus station, houses a detailed display on how wine is made and has helpful information in Spanish, French and English.

The winery **Bodega Muga** (☎ 941 31 04 98), just after the railway bridge on the way out of town, gives guided tours and tastings at 11am (English) and 4.30pm Monday to Thursday. The tour costs €5.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

On 29 June, the otherwise mild-mannered citizens of Haro go temporarily berserk during the **Batalla del Vino** (Wine Battle), squirting and chucking wine all over each other in the name of San Juan, San Felices and San Pedro. Plenty of it goes the right way down also.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Pensión La Peña** (☎ 941 31 00 22; Calle La Vega; s/d €30/36) Just off Plaza de la Paz is this family-run, slightly old-fashioned place, but the maze of rooms are clean and bright.

**Hostal Higüña** (☎ 941 30 43 68; losagustinos@aranzazu-hotels.com; Calle de Virgen de la Vega; s/d €46.65/58.30; 1 Apr-mid-Dec; 10am-2pm) An attractive seasonal place with spacious, carpeted rooms that are bright and comfortable, Higüña is under the management of the classy Los Agustinos Hotel across the road.

**Los Agustinos** (☎ 941 31 13 08; losagustinos@aranzazu-hotels.com; Calle San Agustín 2; s/d €78/97; 10am-2pm) As its name implies, this was once a monastery and the attractive cloister survives as part of the surroundings. The quality and service is gratifyingly high.

**Restaurante Beethoven I & II** (☎ 941 31 11 81; Calle de Santo Tomás 5 & 10; menú €16) These two restaurants face each other across the narrow street. Number II charges a few euros more, but both offer excellent La Rioja cuisine, all of it complemented by the very best local wines.

There are plenty of cafés and bars around Plaza de la Paz and the surrounding streets.

**Terete** (☎ 941 31 00 23; Calle Lucrecia Arana 17; meals €30) This is a real treat for meat fanciers and is straight out of rural La Rioja. It has a front-of-house oven for baking *cordero* (lamb) that's served upstairs on scrubbed wooden tables along with other meaty treats such as black pudding and liver.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Regular trains connect Haro with Logroño (€3.65, 45 minutes), and buses additionally serve Vitoria, Bilbao, Santo Domingo de la Calzada and Laguardia.

## Laguardia

pop 1500 / elevation 557m

Medieval Laguardia is a joy and is the loveliest of the Rioja wine-producing towns. It's strategic position, walled and on a rocky hilltop, against the stunning backdrop of the fortress-like cliffs of the Sierra Cantabrica, explains its origins as the 'Guard of Navarra'. The town is virtually traffic-free because of the maze of 300 or so wine bodegas only a few metres below ground. You don't go heavy-wheeled over sleeping wine. Handsome old mansions are scattered throughout the town. The **Iglesia de Santa María de los Reyes** has a breathtaking late-14th-century Gothic doorway, thronging with beautiful sculptures of the disciples and other motifs. The beautiful polychrome colouring is intact. The statue of Santa María de los Reyes has the looks of a heartbreaker. Just alongside the entrance to the church is a little plaza with a metal sculpture by the Vitoria artist Koko Rico, a delightful collection of casually displayed bags and boots.

Virtually every house in Laguardia has a basement wine cellar, and bars and bodegas serve local drinks for as little as €0.40 a glass.

There are several ATMs around the town. The **tourist office** (☎ 945 60 08 45; Plaza de San Juan; 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 5-7pm Sat, 10.45am-5pm Sun) is housed in a beautiful old building. Staff are very helpful and they have a list of bodegas that can be visited in the local area.

## SLEEPING & EATING

Laguardia has only a few places to stay, and if you are determined to stay here it may be wise to book ahead, especially at weekends and during holidays.

**Camas** (☎ 945 60 01 14; Calle Mayor 17; s/d €18/35) Quiet and pleasantly old fashioned, this is as cheap as it gets in Laguardia. Rooms are very clean and simple and have shared facilities.

**Hotel Pachico** (☎ 945 60 00 09; www.pachico.com; Calle Sancho Abarca 20; s/d €39/51) In a historic building, this *hostal* has comfortable doubles with TV and bathroom. The rooms at the back have sweeping views of the Riojan mountains.

**Posada Mayor de Migueloa** (☎ 945 62 11 75; www.mayordemigueloa.com; Mayor de Migueloa 20; s/d €77/99.50; 10am-2pm) For the ultimate in gracious La Rioja living, this old mansion-hotel is irresistible. The in-house restaurant offers fine local cuisine with meals starting at about €37.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Six slow daily buses connecting Vitoria and Logroño pass through Laguardia.

## Around Laguardia

Your own transport is essential for exploring here. There are several wine cellars that can be visited, contact the tourist office in Laguardia for details. **Bodegas Palacio** (☎ 945 60 00 57; www.cosmepalacio.com; Carretera de Elciego) is only 1km from Laguardia on the Elciego road. Tours are at 12.30pm and 1.30pm Tuesday to Sunday and cost €4. In Elciego itself, 6km southwest of Laguardia is **Bodegas Marqués de Riscal** (☎ 945 60 60 00; www.marquesderiscal.com) which has grabbed the future with both hands and commissioned Frank Gehry, of Bilbao Guggenheim fame, to design a new complex containing a visitors' centre, hotel and restaurant. At the time of writing the signature Gehry canopies, in viniculture colours of silver, light bronze and pinkish-rose, hung in the air above a dusty building site. An opening in 2007 is promised. Phone for information regarding tours.

**IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF BIG FEET**

Before wine, dinosaurs seem to have had a taste for La Rioja. Walkers on the GR93 (long-distance walking route), between the villages of Enciso (about 10km south of Arnedillo) and Cornego (about 22km southeast of Enciso) will find eight hefty fossil prints of dinosaurs signposted along the way, with explanations posted in Spanish. In Valdecevillo (2km southeast of Enciso), you can see footprints left by some enormous carnivorous biped. Other fossils are scattered about the area along different tracks, at a number of sites such as those at Virgen del Campo, Poyales, Navalsaz and Cornego itself. At sites such as Virgen del Campo walkways make it easier to view the dinosaur footprints. Griffon vultures wheel in the air above.

Before setting out stop off in the **Centro Paleontológico de Enciso** (% 941 39 60 93), or get the excellent *Footprints and Dinosaurs in La Rioja* (free) from any tourist office. Buses are rare in these parts, so it's best to explore the area with your own vehicle, or on foot.

**MONASTERIES WEST OF LOGROÑO****Nájera**

pop 7287 / elevation 506m

The main attraction of this town is the Gothic **Monasterio de Santa María la Real** (% 941 36 36 50; admission €2; 10am-1pm & 4-5.30pm Tue-Sun), in particular its fragile-looking early-16th-century cloisters. Inside the church you can see splendid choir stalls with imaginative carvings, and a pantheon of tombs containing the remains of various kings of Castilla, León and Navarra. It closes a little earlier in winter. Buses between Logroño and Santo Domingo de la Calzada stop in Nájera.

**San Millán de Cogolla**

pop 266 / elevation 733m

About 16km southwest of Nájera are the two remarkable monasteries in the hamlet of San Millán de Cogolla, framed by a beautiful valley. The **Monasterio de Yuso** (% 941 37 30 49; adult/child €3.50/1.50; 10.30am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10.30am-1pm & 4-6pm Oct-May), sometimes presumptuously called El Escorial de La Rioja, contains numerous treasures in its museum. Highlights are the lavishly decorated, barrel-vaulted sacristy; the library, with its rare manuscripts; and the church with paintings by Juan Rizzi.

A short distance away is the **Monasterio de Suso** (% 941 37 30 82; admission €3; 10am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-1.30pm & 4-5.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-May). Built above the caves where San Millán once lived, it was consecrated in the 10th century. Much of the original Mozarabic architecture survives. It's believed that in the 13th century, a monk named Gonzalo de Berceo wrote the first Castilian words here, although recent discoveries suggest otherwise (see p451). Buses go to Suso from Yuso every half-hour from 9.55am to 6.25pm (5.25pm October to May).

**Santo Domingo de la Calzada**

pop 5904 / elevation 630m

There's a general air of piety about Santo Domingo, but it's a fascinating place all the same; not least because of its pedestrianised old town and several fine old buildings. There are several excellent information boards in Spanish, French and English scattered around the town's rugged old mansions and churches.

The morose, monumental **cathedral** (admission €3, Sun free; 10am-6.30pm) is a mix of Romanesque and Gothic. Its eastern end has eight pilasters with splendid carved figures and the main altarpiece features some wicked grotesques. The cathedral's most eccentric feature is the Disneyesque white rooster and hen that forage in a glass-fronted cage opposite the entrance to the crypt. These two celebrate a longstanding legend, the Miracle of the Rooster which tells of a young man who was unfairly executed only to recover miraculously, while the broiled cock and hen on the plate of his judge suddenly leapt up and chickened off, fully fledged. Today, several cocks and hens do a monthly rota.

Beyond the cathedral is the huge Plaza Mayor, cobbled and surrounded by low buildings in honey-coloured stone.

Brace yourself for an early night at the excellent **Hospedería Sta Teresita** (% 941 34 07 00; Calle Pinar 2; s/d €29.50/50), a religious-run, modernised hostel, with clean, comfortable rooms. For the antithesis of piety there's always the palatial **Parador** (% 941 34 03 00; sto.domingo@parador.es; Plaza del Santo 3; d €149), which occupies the former pilgrim's hospice built by Santo Domingo himself.

There are a few lacklustre cafés and bars in the modern centre of town by the bus stop, but **Casa Madariaga** (% 941 34 01 30; Plaza de España 7;

menú €21.40) is a relaxed place for coffee or more substantial meals, including a tasty shellfish salad for €12.

Buses run to Burgos (€3.65, 1¼ hours, five daily) and Logroño (€2.50, 45 minutes, up to 13 daily on weekdays, fewer on weekends). The Logroño buses travel via Nájera (€1.15, 30 minutes). There are also two daily buses to Haro (€1, 25 minutes).

**SOUTH OF LOGROÑO**

For those with their own transport, heading south for Soria leads through some picturesque country. One route is along the N111 which, after a boring start, picks up as it follows deep canyon walls along Río Iregua into the sierras marking Soria province off from the flatlands of central La Rioja. Several pretty villages, including Villanueva de Cameros, line the lower half of the route. About halfway to Soria you could turn west for Montenegro de Cameros, and then drop south for Vinuesa and the Laguna Negra near Soria.

Another good route to Soria is to head south-east of Logroño to Calahorra, on the N232. Of

Roman origin, Calahorra overlooks Río Ebro and its tributary Río Cidacos, upon which dwells a moderately interesting Gothic cathedral. The sacristy, chapterhouse and museum are all worth a look. Free guided tours operate daily from 9am to 1pm and 5pm to 8pm. **Hostal Teresa** (% /fax 941 13 03 32; Calle de Santo Domingo 7; s/d/tr €20/30/45) has simple but adequate rooms. For a luxury option, there's a handsome, red-brick **Parador** (% 941 13 03 58; calahorra@parador.es; s/d €92/120).

From Calahorra, head southwest towards Arnedo, and then follow Río Cidacos through dramatic country. The small, traditional spa town of Arnedillo, gathered up in a fold of the valley, is a pretty location and the ideal place for spending a night or two if you plan to do a spot of walking in the area. The pleasant **Hospedería Las Pedrolas** (% 941 39 44 01; fax 941 39 44 01; Plaza Felix Merino 16; s/d €45/75; a ) has very pleasant rooms in a renovated 18th-century building.

The road starts to climb after entering Soria province and can be blocked by snow in winter.

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