



## SPAIN



Go with the flow in Bilbao with Annie Bennett's guide to two perfect days



IN BILBAO

PICTURE: ISTOCK

## » BASQUE IN REFLECTED GLORY

**E**ver since Frank Gehry's startling Guggenheim Museum opened in Bilbao in 1997, people have gone there just to see the shimmering titanium structure.

Then they stop for a glass or two of rioja and discover that the gastronomic scene in this city in the Basque Country on the north coast of Spain is one of the best in the world. And then they start wondering why they're not staying a bit longer.

Bilbao has been reinvigorated by bold development by top

architects including Norman Foster, Santiago Calatrava and Arata Isozaki, but the former industrial city has not lost an ounce of its character along the way.

A new twice-daily British Airways flight from Heathrow – which takes only about 90 minutes – makes Bilbao an attractive option for a short break. Clients can also fly from Gatwick with Vueling or from Stansted, Manchester and Bristol with easyJet. ►

[travelweekly.co.uk/destinations](http://travelweekly.co.uk/destinations)



Zubizuri bridge



Teatro Arriaga



**DAY ONE**

**10.00:** A visit to the **Guggenheim Museum** starts on the outside, trying to work out how the shiny, silvery chunks of Frank Gehry's building somehow look curvy and soft rather than jagged and rigid. Inside, exhibition areas swerve around a glass atrium with works by artists including Richard Serra,

Anish Kapoor and Anselm Kiefer. A retrospective of the work of Jeff Koons, whose gigantic floral Puppy sculpture stands outside the museum, runs from June 9 until September 27. [guggenheim-bilbao.es](http://guggenheim-bilbao.es)  
**12.00:** Emerging from the museum on to the bank of the Ria, the estuary that winds through

the city down to the sea, head towards Santiago Calatrava's **Zubizuri** footbridge, which looks like tightly strung threads of white cotton. Cross over the Ria and cut through to the Plaza Funicular. Take the funicular – which is celebrating its centenary this year – up Mount Artxanda, one of the green hills that virtually encircle Bilbao, for panoramic views across the city.

**13.30:** Back on the riverside, take the path past the 19th-century city hall until you get to the Arenal bridge and the neo-baroque Arriaga theatre. Turn left to reach Plaza Nueva, a porticoed square full of bars with outdoor tables. It is time to find out just how good the food is in the Basque Country.

You could start at **Victor Montes** with a glass of rioja alavesa (the part of the rioja wine region that is in the Basque Country) and whatever takes your fancy on the marble bar. The chunks of bread with tasty toppings are called pintxos and you will be eating a lot of them during your stay. Staying in the square, pop into **Bar Bilbao** for a prawn and monkfish brochette then grab a table at **Sorginzulo** for more local cuisine. [victormontes.com](http://victormontes.com) [bilbao-cafebar.com](http://bilbao-cafebar.com) [sorginzulo.com](http://sorginzulo.com)  
**15.00:** Leaving the square by the Bar Bilbao, you come to Plaza Unamuno, where it is worth going into the **Basque Museum** to get a quick idea of the

**TOP TIP**  
The Bilbao Bizcaia Card costs €35 for 48 hours and includes admission to sights and public transport [bilbaobizkaia.com](http://bilbaobizkaia.com)



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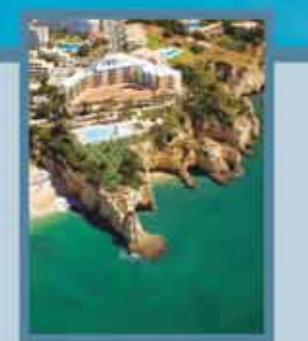
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**HOW TO ENTER**

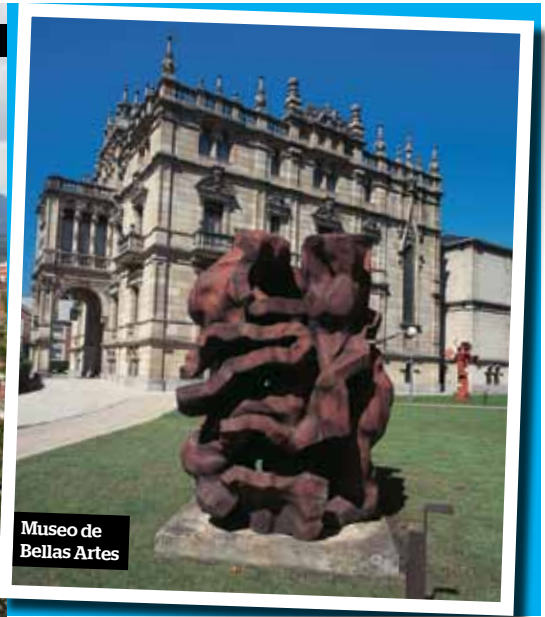
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TURISMO DE PORTUGAL **algarve**


**Bilbao's old town**

**Museo de Bellas Artes**

astounding history of the region. [euskal-museoa.org](http://euskal-museoa.org)  
**17.30:** Wander from the museum through the pedestrianised lanes of the **Casco Viejo** – the old town – which is packed with shops and bars. **La Queseria** (Jardines 10) is a great place to buy artisan cheeses. Have a look at **Santiago Cathedral**, parts of which date from the 15th century, then carry on down Belostikale street to **Ribera Market**, which is in a restored art deco building with magnificent stained-glass

windows. One glance at the stalls laden with seafood, fruit and vegetables and you'll understand why Basque cuisine is so renowned. Join the locals having a cold beer at the market bar and let afternoon slip into evening. [mercadodelaribera.net](http://mercadodelaribera.net)  
**20.30:** As the shutters come down on the shops, stay in the Casco Viejo for a pintxos trawl – known as a txikiteo – around the Siete Calles, as the seven parallel streets in the old town are called. Try the anchovies and the tortillas at the

traditional **Basaras** bar (Pelotas 2), the mushrooms with smoked cod at **Xukela** (Perro 2) or the duck with peanut sauce at **Irrintzi** (Santa Maria 8).

● **DAY TWO**

**10.00:** If you are in the mood for more art – but of the more traditional kind – you will love the **Museo de Bellas Artes**. It has one of the best collections in Spain, with paintings by many of the Spanish masters, including El Greco, Velazquez, Zurbaran

and Goya, as well as an excellent selection of Basque art. [museobilbao.com](http://museobilbao.com).

Also have a look around the **Azkuna Zentroa** – also known as the Alhondiga – a vast wine exchange that designer Philippe Starck transformed into a cultural and leisure complex with swimming pools, cafes, restaurants, exhibitions and a cinema. [alhondigabilbao.com](http://alhondigabilbao.com)

Alternatively, you may prefer to spend the morning soaking up the sunshine and learning more ▶



about the city on a bike tour with **Tourne Bilbao**. The easy routes suit even the rustiest of cyclists, and typically include a drink and a pintxo. Or you can just hire a bike from them and do your own thing. [tournebilbao.com](http://tournebilbao.com)

**13.30:** The more modern part of Bilbao is known as the **Ensanche**, with broad avenues lined with shops and restaurants. Raise your energy levels with a spot of lunch at **La Vina** on Diputacio street, either at the bar or sitting at a table. The Iberico ham toasts are very popular and the grilled tuna is really good too. **El Globo**, next door, is also excellent, as are **Lasa** and **Lekeitio** on the same street. There is no danger of starving in Bilbao.

[lavinadelensanche.com](http://lavinadelensanche.com)

**16.00:** You are right by the **Gran Via de Don Diego Lopez de Haro**, which is the main shopping street, with El Corte Ingles department store, Zara, Mango, Desigual and a lot more boutiques to tempt you. In

Plaza Moyua, look out for Norman Foster's metro station entrances, which look like giant prawns.

**18.00:** Take a break for a coffee – or a cheeky rioja – at one of the marble tables at **Cafe Iruña** (Jardines de Alba), which has been going for more than a century and is decorated with ornate tiles.

**21.00:** Book ahead for dinner at **Mina**, which has a Michelin star but is not at all stuffy or pretentious – and won't cost you an arm and a leg either. There are only seven tables, including one in the kitchen where you can watch chef Alvaro Garrido create magnificent dishes such as mussels with spicy tomato, coconut and lemongrass or black garlic pannacotta. [restaurantemina.es](http://restaurantemina.es)

**24.00:** Jump in a taxi to **Jigger**, a chic bar run by David Rios and his brother Jorge, who have won many accolades for their superb cocktails, and gin and tonics. [jiggerbilbao.com](http://jiggerbilbao.com) **TW**

## BILBAO: WHERE TO STAY

### SPLURGE

Go for classic glamour at the five-star **Hotel Carlton**, which was built nearly a century ago and is all chandeliers and sumptuous carpets. The handy location on the central Plaza Moyua means you can walk to sights, shops and restaurants – the airport bus stops nearby too. Double rooms from €132 including breakfast and Guggenheim tickets. [hotelcarlton.es](http://hotelcarlton.es)



### SPEND

There are views of the Guggenheim from some of the 50 rooms of the four-star **Miro**. The hotel was styled by the fashion designer Antonio Miro – known for his chic, minimalist clothes – and the look here is all clean lines, natural tones and bold artworks. Coffee and soft drinks are free in the bar, which is a nice touch. Double rooms from €99, including breakfast and Guggenheim tickets. [mirohotelbilbao.com](http://mirohotelbilbao.com)



### SAVE

The **Petit Palace Arana Bilbao** occupies a traditional building on the edge of the old town, right by the river and the Arriaga theatre, one of the city's main landmarks. Rooms are stylish and modern, and some have bunk beds for families. Bikes are available free for exploring the city. Doubles from €75 including breakfast. [petitpalacearanabilbaohotel.com](http://petitpalacearanabilbaohotel.com)



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