

Spain: Basque, Navarre & Rioja Wine Regions

Bike Vacation + Air Package

Follow pilgrimage routes through valleys and mountains as you cycle the dramatic landscapes of northern Spain. Rugged peaks blanketed in lush nature swallow sweeping valleys. Devout pilgrims walk sacred pathways. And alpine panoramas unfurl to beautiful meadows and pasturelands. During this magical Spanish wine tour, learn about Basque history and culture as you coast into small mountain hamlets and spin through scenic river valleys. Take a stroll through Pamplona, following in the footsteps of daredevils who have run with the bulls. Explore *La Chabola de la Hechicera* (The Witch's Hut), one of Spain's largest prehistoric burial sites. Along the journey, dine on creative fare from Michelin chefs, sample rich wines from generations-old winemakers, and stay in some of the most highly-rated accommodations in the region.

Cultural Highlights

Cycle along the scenic rivers of Ulzama and La Oja on easy bike paths

Explore beautiful Pamplona and enjoy the weekly *juevintxo* event, a Thursday-night feast of *tapas*

Visit one of the largest and best-preserved prehistoric dolmen, or burial sites, set in the middle of a vineyard

Roam the medieval lanes of Laguardia and sample wines in one of the village's few remaining underground wine cellars

Indulge in a dinner created by a Michelin-star chef in your Relais & Chateaux gastronomic hotel

Pedal along the Way of St. James, or Camino de Santiago, pilgrimage route

Sample Rioja wines in a *bodega* wine house near the 10th-century town of Haro

Savor a memorable lunch in the middle of a scenic vineyard

Enjoy a guided tour of the world-renowned Bilbao Guggenheim Museum

What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain mixed with many downhill rides and some uphill rides as well and is ideal for beginning and experienced cyclists. The rides are on a combination of bike paths, less traveled country roads and very few trafficked roads near or in cities. Our VBT van support shuttle is always available for those who need assistance.

Tour Duration: 10 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 15 - 25

Average Cycling Time: 01:30 - 04:00

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 68°/50°, Jun 73°/55°, Jul 77°/59°, Aug 78°/59°, Sep 76°/56°, Oct 69°/51°

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 3, Jun 2, Jul 1, Aug 2, Sep 2, Oct 3

DAY 1: Depart from home / Fly overnight to Spain

Depart from home for Spain. The particulars of your arrival overseas are detailed with your flight itinerary.

DAY 2: Arrive in San Sebastián

Upon arrival at Bilbao's airport, claim your luggage and clear customs. If your luggage is lost, fill in a PIR form before leaving the customs area: VBT representatives are not allowed into the customs area. Please make certain that your VBT luggage tags are affixed to your bag so your VBT representative can identify you. After exiting customs, enter the arrival hall and look for your VBT representative who will be holding a VBT sign and will make arrangements for your transfer via car or van to your San Sebastián hotel (transfer time is approximately 90 minutes, depending on traffic).

The rest of the day is free to settle in and explore the city. VBT provides you with City Information that includes recommendations on what to see and do in San Sebastián during your stay. Dinner tonight is on your own in this gastronomic haven; based on Michelin stars per capita, San Sebastián ranks second among the world's best dining cities.

Please note: If you arrive early, your hotel room may not be available until 3:00 p.m. You may store your luggage at the reception desk while you explore.

Hotel: Hotel de Londres y de Inglaterra

DAY 3: VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Warm-up ride / Welcome Reception & Dinner

Meet your VBT local guide in the lobby of your San Sebastián hotel at 8:45 a.m. Please be dressed in your biking garments as you will have a warm-up ride after meeting your trip leaders later this morning.

Your Spanish wine tour begins with a scenic ride into the verdant inland hills of the Basque region. Your

local guide will introduce you to Basque history and culture during your one-hour transfer to a small mountain hamlet in the Navarre region of Spain. Here you will meet your trip leaders, who host an overview of your upcoming week and a safety and bike-fitting session. During a warm-up ride, you will mostly coast downhill on quiet country roads that traverse lovely pasture lands. Take a break at the small 13th-century Romanesque Church of Santiago de Itxasperi, a stopping point on the world-renowned Way of St. James pilgrimage. Continue your spin through the scenic Larraun & Araquil River valleys until you reach the convergence of these two rivers in the quaint town of Irurtzun, situated at the foot of rugged hills.

Enjoy lunch on your own in this scenic setting before shuttling to our hotel in the nearby city of Pamplona—capital of the Navarre Region and infamous for its annual Festival of San Fermín and the Running of the Bulls event. Ambitious riders may opt to cycle to Pamplona. Spend the remainder of the afternoon relaxing in an inviting café; your hotel is conveniently located on Pamplona's main town square of Plaza Castillo.

Tonight, gather with your trip leaders and travel mates for a welcome reception at our historic hotel, one of Spain's oldest. Many celebrities such as Orson Welles, Charlie Chaplin, and Ernest Hemingway have resided at this 5-star property. After, you venture out for an evening stroll, following in the footsteps of the brave daredevils who have run with the bulls. Enjoy a delicious and festive dinner at a nearby restaurant.

Hotel: Gran Hotel La Perla

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 25.4 km (15.8 miles)

Morning

Warm-Up Basque country: 25.4 km (15.8 miles)

What to Expect: The ride follows quaint country roads through scenic valleys and gives you a chance to get acquainted with your route notes and Ride with GPS and get comfortable with your bicycle, checking your brakes and playing with your full range of gears.

DAY 4: Pamplona bike paths / Explore Pamplona

This morning, enjoy a short walk through Pamplona, passing its ancient walls to the starting point of today's loop rides. Extensive bike paths thread their way through the city and into the surrounding countryside. Pedal along an easy path tracing the Ulzama River before cycling into rolling hills. As you

gain elevation, lovely views of Pamplona stretch before you. Soon, you will follow small country roads through fertile farmlands. Today's journey delivers you to typical small Navarre towns such as Orrio and Cildoz before looping back to Pamplona. Our longer option leads further into the countryside and over rolling hills before circling back to the city. For lunch on your own today, you may stop in one of the small country towns or find a spot in Pamplona. The remainder of your afternoon and evening are free.

Pamplona's cuisine is among the most tantalizing in Europe. Since you are here on a Thursday night, you may partake in the city's weekly *juevintxo*. Weekly, many of the small cafés and bars offer a glass of wine or beer with a *pintxo*, a small appetizer, for only 2 euros. Some of Pamplona's best *pintxo* bars are on Calle Estafeta behind your hotel and Calle San Nicolás near the Plaza del Castillo, where your hotel is located. This is a unique and mouthwatering opportunity to make the most of this Spanish wine tour as you dine as a local, sampling a *pintxo* with a glass of house wine or a *caña*, a small house beer on tap.

Hotel: Gran Hotel La Perla

Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 26.6 – 38.1 km (16.5 – 23.5 miles)

Morning

Pamplona Loop: 26.6 km (16.5 miles)

Pamplona Loop Plus: 11.5 km (7 miles)

What to Expect: This morning's ride will begin outside Pamplona walls just steps from your hotel. You will follow a well-maintained paved bike path before departing Pamplona and continuing on quieter country roads. As you return to Pamplona you may encounter some traffic at the end of your ride.

You will begin on the same ride as your fellow riders in the morning but once in the countryside you will have the option to venture further into the surrounding hills for a longer ride before looping back to Pamplona.

DAY 5: Laguardia / Wine Tasting in a medieval cellar

After breakfast, shuttle approximately two hours to the Rioja wine region. In a small hilltop village, begin the day's ride with an invigorating downhill coast to the valley below. Along the way you may stop to explore one of Spain's largest and best-preserved dolmens, or prehistoric burial sites: *La Chabola de la Hechicera* (The Witch's Hut). Located within a thriving vineyard, it comprises three large stones holding

up a larger stone like a tabletop. Ponder its meaning as you take in magnificent views of the valley and the distant Sierra Cantabria mountain range. Continue cycling through vineyards and up some challenging hills before you arrive in the hilltop fortified town of Laguardia.

The pedestrian-only medieval town is remarkably preserved and surrounded by rugged mountain ranges. There'll be time to explore by foot and to enjoy lunch on your own. Later, meet your Trip Leaders at one of Laguardia's few remaining working wine cellars. The San Pedro family has been producing wines here for over 500 years. Their traditional winery, housed in one of the town's numerous underground tunnels, is 300 years old. Learn about the family's age-old wine-making traditions and savor the opportunity to taste from some of their finest bottles.

Later this afternoon, shuttle to the charming town of Ezcaray, our home for the next two nights. This red-roofed village, a gem of La Rioja, is nestled in the vivid green Oja Valley. The San Lorenzo peak soars into the sky nearby, host to ski resorts. Our Relais & Chateaux hotel is centrally located for easy exploration. Dinner is at your leisure at one of the nearby restaurants. Please note: The hotel's small two-starred Michelin El Portal Restaurant is booked months in advance so its recommended that you email the hotel well in advance to make a reservation.

Hotel: Echaurren Gastronomic Hotel

Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 22 – 36.7 km (13 – 22 miles)

Morning

Lapoblacia to Laguardia: 22 km (13 miles)

Laguardia Extra Loop: 14.7 km (9 miles)

What to Expect: This morning's ride will begin in the mountains where you will ride mostly downhill on a 2-lane country road. You will have time to stop along the way to see the prehistoric dolmens before continuing your ride to the medieval town of Laguardia. There is a short climb at the end of the ride to our meeting point outside the city's wall.

Upon nearing Laguardia you will have the option for a longer ride into the countryside before looping back to Laguardia where you will meet up with your fellow travelers.

DAY 6: Oja Valley / Ezcaray / Michelin-star inspired dinner

After a leisurely breakfast, set off on a loop ride from your hotel into the lush Oja Valley. Enjoy the pace of an easy uphill climb as spectacular vistas unfold around you: Alpine panoramas unfurl to beautiful meadows and pasturelands. You may return to the hotel after a short loop or opt for a more challenging ride to the nearby ski resort of Valdezcaray. This ascent of about 8.5 miles showcases the beauty and vastness of the Oja. Once at the top, take time to linger, then thrill to a rewarding downhill spin. Enjoy lunch on your own in Ezcaray this afternoon. Shoppers may visit the boutiques specializing in haute-couture mohair scarfs, clothing and cashmere blankets.

This evening, join your trip leaders for a delicious dinner prepared by the hotel's Michelin-star culinary team.

Hotel: Echaurren Gastronomic Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 32.7 – 60.5 km (20.3 – 37.6 miles)

Ezcaray, Posadas and Urdanta: 32.7 km (20.3 miles)

Valdezcaray: 27.8 km (17.3 miles)

What to Expect: You will start today's ride directly from the hotel where you will ride through town before heading up the Oja Valley on a scenic two-lane road. You will follow the same road downhill back to the hotel.

After completing the morning loop ride continue cycling uphill (approximately 8 miles) to the ski station of Valdezcaray. There's potential for heavier traffic on this longer option. After your vigorous ride uphill enjoy the beauty of the downhill ride back to the hotel.

DAY 7: Santo Domingo de la Calzada / Camino de Santiago / Haro winery / Vineyard lunch and wine tasting

After another hearty breakfast, cycle out of the Oja Valley along an easy bike path tracing the banks of the river that gives its name to this region of Spain—*La Rio Oja*. Your scenic route leads you to the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage town of Santo Domingo de la Calzada, situated on the river's banks. In town, you will follow a segment of the French Way, part of the Way of St. James. This route is popular among those who walk the path from France, passing pilgrims with their scallop shells, the symbol of St. James. After, ride tree-lined country roads through the village of Banares with its beautiful 12th-century church, historic Casalarreina, and tiny Cihuri with its ancient Roman bridge. Your morning ride concludes in the 10th-

century town of Haro, home to Rioja's best *bodegas*, or wine houses. Visit one of the most renowned for a tasting, then savor a special private lunch in the middle of a nearby vineyard.

After lunch, you may continue cycling to the neighboring village of Briñas, a small jewel dating to Roman times, and our next hotel on the banks of the Ebro River. If you prefer, you may shuttle here. Enjoy time to relax before, dining on your own at the hotel or at one of the village's cafés. Or venture into nearby Haro to sample one of its numerous restaurants.

Hotel: Hotel Palacio Tondón

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 42 km (25 miles)

Morning

Ezcaray to Haro: 42 km (25 miles)

What to Expect: You will depart your hotel on bikes this morning and ride to the nearby bike path following the scenic La Rio Oja river to the historic town of Santo Domingo de la Calzada. Here you may follow the Way of St. James pilgrimage path through town on cobblestone pedestrian alleyways. After departing town you will continue your journey on tree-lined country roads to your destination of Haro and today's winery visit.

DAY 8: Ebro River Valley / Picnic lunch in a *cuadrilla caseta* / Farewell dinner

After breakfast, enjoy a scenic shuttle into the nearby hills. This morning's downhill reels will refresh and revitalize while our uphill climbs will reward you with majestic views of the Ebro River Valley. Later, you will coast into these flat farmlands that are fed by the second longest river on the Iberian Peninsula.

Our destination is in the foothills above Miranda de Ebro. This city is best known for the festivities of San Juan del Monte which date back to the Middle Ages. Organized by the Brotherhood of San Juan del Monte and various *cuadrillas*—or groups of Basque friends—the events have long drawn pilgrims from all over Spain and beyond. Some of the participating *cuadrillas* have built *casetas*, or huts, in the forests below the summit of San Juan del Monte, and they are the venue for our delectable picnic lunch today, prepared by your Trip Leaders. Later, those wishing for more riding challenges may pedal a portion of the route to the San Juan del Monte summit, following the path of the annual *Vuelta a Burgos* cycling competition. Alternately, coast downhill back to your hotel.

During the final evening of your Spanish wine tour, join your trip leaders and fellow travelers for a festive farewell dinner and sample some more of the wines and wonderful culinary delights of La Rioja.

Hotel: Hotel Palacio Tondón

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 33.4 – 56.5 km (20.8 – 35.2 miles)

Morning

Berganzo to San Juan del Monte: 33.4 km (20.8 miles)

Afternoon

San Juan del Monte to Brinas: 23.1 km (14.4 miles)

What to Expect: After your shuttle you will ride on country roads through the Ebro River Valley before reaching the forested foothills of the San Juan del Monte summit.

After your morning ride and lunch continue uphill towards the San Juan del Monte summit before looping back and riding downhill to your hotel. The scenic afternoon ride follows quieter country roads for the most part but there will be some heavier traffic as you near your hotel.

DAY 9: Transfer to Bilbao / Guggenheim Bilbao Museum tour / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends

This morning, you shuttle to Bilbao, an intoxicating blend of modern and historic. Upon arrival, enjoy a 90-minute guided tour of its centerpiece—the world-renowned Guggenheim Museum, designed by acclaimed architect Frank Gehry. Your tour will include information about the building's architecture and the current exhibits. After your visit, walk across the street to the Miró Hotel Bilbao and check in for your overnight stay in Bilbao.

The remainder of the day is free for you to explore this vibrant city at leisure. VBT provides you with City Information, which includes recommendations about what to see and do in Bilbao.

Hotel: Miró Hotel Bilbao

Meals: Breakfast

DAY 10: Depart for home

After breakfast* this morning, you will transfer to the airport for your departing flight **. Please ensure that you are ready in the hotel reception area at the designated time.

*Please note: For guests with early-morning departures, breakfast at the hotel may not be available. Please check with the front desk to verify the times that breakfast is served.

**VBT recommends that you check your transfer time in your Transfer Reminder. VBT transfer times and departure points are finalized in advance and cannot be modified for individual guests. Transfer times are about 30 minutes to the Bilbao airport. If you extend your stay beyond the scheduled program dates, return transportation to the airport will be at your own expense.

Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Hotel Gastronomico Echaurren (Days: 5,6)

Owned and operated by the same family for over a century, this exclusive 4-star Relais & Chateaux property is a gastronomic delight. The hotel's claim to fame is El Portal restaurant, the first La Rioja restaurant to earn an acclaimed Michelin star. It has held 2 Michelin stars since 2013, earning it an honored place as one of the best gastronomic restaurants in Spain. Each contemporary guest room provides ample amenities, including a flat-screen satellite TV and a welcome gift of snacks and a bottle of wine.

Gran Hotel La Perla (Days: 3,4)

One of the oldest and most historic hotels in Spain, the 5-star Gran Hotel La Perla is located in the heart of Pamplona on the main square, Plaza del Castillo. Charlie Chaplin, Orson Welles, and Ernest Hemingway are among its past illustrious guests. The renovated 300-square-foot guest rooms overlook the Calle Estafeta, which is on the Running of the Bulls route. Bathrooms are large and luxurious and feature hydro-massage showers and all the amenities of a 5-star retreat.

Hotel de Londres y de Inglaterra (Day: 2)

This 4-star, luxury, 19th-century hotel—completely renovated in 2013—is located directly on the seaside promenade of San Sebastián, putting the beach and scenic La Concha Bay right outside your door. The

historic district lies within easy walking distance. The hotel's grand Belle Époque style transports you to an age when San Sebastián was one of Europe's most glamorous retreats, luring the likes of Mata Hari to its doors; a special suite here is named for the notorious spy. Savor Basque cuisine at the Mari Galant Brasserie and relax with a cocktail with beach views at the elegant Swing Bar. Guest rooms were designed with inspiration from the classical style and offer modern amenities such as flat-screen TVs, free WiFi, and minibars. We have secured ocean-view rooms for our guests.

Miro Hotel Bilbao (Day: 9)

Located between the Guggenheim and Fine Arts Museum, the exquisite, 4-star boutique Miró Hotel Bilbao is ideal for exploring Bilbao. Created by fashion designer Antonio Miró, its artful spaces are complemented by a magnificent collection of contemporary photography. In the lobby library, cozy up with a book on art, Bilbao, and its environs. Before heading out to dinner, enjoy a relaxing drink at the bar, exclusive and complimentary for hotel guests. Each elegant guest room is functional and contemporary in design and offers views of the magnificent Guggenheim Museum and city.

Hotel Palacio Tondon (Days: 7,8)

Located on the banks of the Ebro River, this newly opened 4-star hotel occupies a renovated 16th-century *palacete*, or mansion. Nestled amidst the manor houses of Briñas, it enjoys views of the vast Tondón vineyards and soaring mountains of La Rioja. Contemporary rooms feature modern amenities.