

Spain: Basque, Navarre & Rioja Wine Regions

Bike Vacation Only

Follow pilgrimage routes through river valleys and mountains as you cycle the dramatic landscapes of northern Spain. The Ebro, Ulzama, and La Oja rivers guide you on your journey as you traverse pastoral landscapes, explore charming villages, and cruise through mountain hamlets. 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), a prehistoric burial site with magnificent alpine panoramas. Follow the Camino de Santiago into pilgrimage towns, stop at the best *bodegas* (wine houses), and feast on creative fare in Michelin-starred restaurants. Along your Spanish wine tour, you'll visit family-run cellars to learn about age-old wine-making traditions and sample the finest bottles the region has to offer.

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: 7 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 17 - 40

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: VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Warm-up ride / Welcome reception and dinner

Meet your VBT local guide and the rest of the group in the lobby of our San Sebastián hotel (Hotel de Londres y de Inglaterra, Zubieta 2, phone +34 943 440 770) 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. If your arrival at the hotel is scheduled later than 8:45 a.m. or if you are delayed, please contact the Hotel de Londres y de Inglaterra and the staff will pass your message on to your VBT local guide.

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 Ixasperi, 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. 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.

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 38 km (24 miles)

Morning

Warm-up Basque country: 38 km (24 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. Today's warm-up ride may be longer than what you have experienced on other VBT tours, however, the VBT support vehicle is available at any point if you prefer less cycling today.

Accommodation: Gran Hotel La Perla, Pamplona

Included Meals: Dinner

DAY 2: 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.

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 27 – 38 km (17 – 24 miles)

Morning

Pamplona Loop: 27 km (17 miles)

Pamplona Loop Plus: 11 km (7 miles)

What to Expect: This morning's ride will begin outside Pamplona's 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.

Accommodation: Gran Hotel La Perla, Pamplona

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3: 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.

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 22 – 37 km (13 – 22 miles)

Morning

La Poblacion to Laguardia: 22 km (13 miles)

Laguardia Extra Loop: 15 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.

Accommodation: Echaurren Gastronomic Hotel, Ezcaray

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4: Oja Valley / Santo Domingo de la Calzada / 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. Continuing through the Oja Valley you will ride downhill on an easy bike path 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. Enjoy lunch on your own in one of the town's many cafes before shuttling or cycling back to your hotel.

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

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 39 – 56 km (24 – 35 miles)

Morning

Ezcaray to Santo Domingo de la Calzada: 39 km (24 miles)

Afternoon

Santo Domingo de la Calzada to Ezcaray: 17 km (11 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. Later trace the Oja river downhill riding a scenic bike path on a former railroad track and a two-lane road to the town of Santo Domingo de la Calzada. In the afternoon the long option is a ride returning to the hotel.

Accommodation: Echaurren Gastronomic Hotel, Ezcaray

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 5: Village of Banares / Haro / Wine Tasting

After another hearty breakfast, cycle out of the Oja Valley along the banks of the river that gives its name to this region of Spain—*La Rio Oja*. Your scenic route leads you once again through Santo Domingo de la Calzada. Continue riding 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. Enjoy lunch at leisure during your exploration of Haro.

Later, 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. Alternatively enjoy additional afternoon riding through the vineyards to your hotel. Once at the hotel spend time relaxing before sampling some local wines in your hotel's wine cellar followed by dinner at one of the village's restaurants.

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 54 - 65 km (34– 41 miles)

Morning

Ezcaray to Haro to Brinas: 54 km (34 miles)

Afternoon

Haro to Labastida to Brinas: 11 km (7 miles)

What to Expect: You will depart your hotel on bikes this morning and ride to the nearby bike path following the scenic 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 before cycling to your hotel in Briñas.

Accommodation: Hotel Palacio Tondón, Briñas

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 6: Ebro River Valley / Vineyard lunch and wine tasting / Farewell dinner

After breakfast, enjoy a scenic shuttle into the nearby foothills of the Miranda de Ebro in the Burgos province. This morning's downhill reels will refresh and revitalize while our uphill climbs will reward you with majestic views of the Ebro River Valley.

Cycling back into the Rioja region you will cross the Ebro river and the Canyon of Billibium also known as the *Conchas de Haro*. Since Roman times this geographical barrier has been a strategical protection point to the entrance of the Ebro River into the Rioja region. Later, you will coast into flat farmlands that are fed by the Ebro River, second longest river on the Iberian Peninsula. Following vineyard roads ride to one of the 100-year-old wine bodegas before transferring to their vineyards for a memorable lunch served in the middle of their vineyards.

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.

Accommodation: Hotel Palacio Tondón, Briñas

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 45 km (28 miles)

Morning

Berganzo to Haro: 45 km (28 miles)

What to Expect: After your shuttle you will ride on country roads through the Ebro River Valley before reaching the Canyon of Billibium also known as the *Conchas de Haro*. Continue cycling on quieter country roads for the most part but there will be some heavier traffic as you near the end of your ride at the winery outside the town of Haro.

DAY 7: 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. Please note: So that you may fully enjoy the Guggenheim Museum tour, which ends at 1:00 p.m., we recommend that you plan to depart Bilbao no earlier than 3:00 p.m.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Hotel Gastronomico Echaurren (Days: 3,4)

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: 1,2)

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 Palacio Tondon (Days: 5,6)

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.