

## Spain: Basque, Navarre & Rioja Wine Regions

### Bike Vacation + Air Package

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

- 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
- 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:** 17 - 40

**Average Cycling Time:** 01:30 - 04:00

**Group size:** 22 max

## 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 3.0, Jun 2.0, Jul 1.0, Aug 2.0, Sep 2.0, Oct 3.0

## DAY 1: Depart from the United States or Canada

All you have to do is get to the airport. On our Air Packages, we'll take care of the rest, handling all the logistics, so you can travel with peace of mind. Spend your first night aloft and arrive refreshed for an unforgettable trip.

## DAY 2: Arrive in Bilbao / Travel to San Sebastián

Start off your first day right by having a VBT representative greet you at the Bilbao airport. A complimentary car service will whisk you to your centrally located San Sebastián hotel. From here, you are perfectly positioned to explore this charming city at your leisure.

## DAY 3: VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Warm-up ride / Welcome reception and dinner

After an included breakfast, 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 journey 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 Itxasperri, 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

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.

Cumulative Distance Range: 38 km (24 miles)

Accommodation: Gran Hotel La Perla, Pamplona

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## 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.

Today's Ride Choices

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.

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

Accommodation: Gran Hotel La Perla, Pamplona

Included Meals: Breakfast

## 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 it's recommended that you email the hotel well in advance to make a reservation.

#### Today's Ride Choices

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.

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

Accommodation: Echaurren Gastronomic Hotel, Ezcaray

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **DAY 6: 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 pastures. 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

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.

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

Accommodation: Echaurren Gastronomic Hotel, Ezcaray

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 7: 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

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.

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

Accommodation: Hotel Palacio Tondón, Briñas

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 8: 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 travelling 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.

#### Today's Ride Choice

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.

Cumulative Distance Range: 45 km (28 miles)

Accommodation: Hotel Palacio Tondón, Briñas

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 9: Travel 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.

Accommodation: Miró Hotel Bilbao, Bilbao

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **DAY 10: Departure**

After an included breakfast this morning, complimentary transportation to the Bilbao airport (an approximately 30 minute drive, depending on traffic) for your departing flight.

Included Meals: Breakfast