Spain: Basque, Navarre & Rioja Wine Regions

Bike Vacation + Air Package

There is drama at every turn in the north of Spain. Rugged peaks draped in green encircle sweeping valleys. Medieval hamlets perch on hilltops. Devout pilgrims walk sacred pathways. Even the cuisine exudes dramatic flair as Michelin chefs and generations-old winemakers conjure world-renowned cuisine. Join VBT as we reel through Basque, Navarre, and La Rioja, tracing scenic rivers and lush vineyards to vibrant Pamplona, tiny Ezcaray, and rustic Briñas, pausing to drink in a dramatic and rich culture long the way, and ending each day in luxurious accommodations.

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 Michelin-star inspired dinner in your Relais & Chateaux gastronomic hotel
Pedal along the Way of St. James 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 68º/50º, Jun 73º/55º, Jul 77º/59º, Aug 78º/59º, Sep 76º/56º, Oct 69º/51º

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 and travel to 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.

Shuttle from the scenic coast to 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 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.

Note: for guests staying at the alternate hotel Pamplona Catedral Hotel – your welcome reception will be at your hotel, followed by dinner at a nearby restaurant.

Hotel: Gran Hotel La Perla
Alternate Hotel: Pamplona Catedral Hotel
Meals: B, D
Daily Options: 16 miles (25.4 km)

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 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

Alternate Hotel: Pamplona Catedral Hotel
Meals: B
Daily Options: 16.5 or 24 miles (26.6 or 38.1 km)

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.

Hotel: Echaurren Gastronomic Hotel

Meals: B
Daily Options:14 or 23 miles (22.5 or 36.7 km)

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 in the hotel's paradise of gastronomy inspired by the hotel's owner and Michelin-star chef.

Hotel: Echaurren Gastronomic Hotel
Meals: B, D
Daily Options: 21 or 42 miles (33.8 or 67.6 km)

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 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.

This evening dine 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: B, L
Daily Options: 25 miles (42.2 km)

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.

This evening, your small group gathers on the hotel's terrace (weather permitting) or in the wine cellar for a tasting of other Rioja wines. After, join your Trip Leaders for a festive farewell dinner and sample some more of the wines and wonderful culinary delights of La Rioja.

Hotel: Hotel Palacio Tondón
Meals: B, L, D
Daily Options: 21 or 35 miles (33.8 or 56.4 km)

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

VBT Air Package and Post-Trip Extension guests: 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: B

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: B

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.

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.