

BASQUE FAMILY BONDS

*Farm-to-Family Adventures in the
Deep Heart of Basque Country*



2014 Departures: July 27 and August 17 -- or as a private family departure any time

Eight days exploring deep Basque Country, including: Bilbao, Ordizia, Mutriku, Zumaia, San Sebastian, Beizama and Bidegoian

Trip Overview

The first things that come to mind when asked to conjure up Basque Country may be the glittering Guggenheim or San Sebastian's cult of culinary superstars. And while world class art & architecture and Michelin-starred restaurants are indeed fascinating features of this remarkable region, it's the fierce independence of the region's proud people, the dramatic diversity of its landscapes and the supreme importance placed on family, food and friends that leave their indelible mark on us.

And through this lens of family-focused adventure, discovery and connection, we'll enter deep into the heart of Basque culture. Whether milking sheep & making cheese on a small farm, navigating Bilbao from the perch of a paddleboard, hiking to a 17th C. farmstead for a home-hosted meal or gathered around the rustic wooden table of a cider house, we'll experience Basque Country accompanied by local friends, exploring its natural grandeur and experiencing its most cherished family traditions.

We've crafted this trip with families and their shared experience at its core. We've controlled the tempo, minimized travel times & hotel changes, built-in plenty of unstructured time and have even arranged for a parents' night out. After all, at the heart of our Basque team are families that love to travel together, too – from my own, to our trip leader's, to our favorite Basque ambassador and host, Pello, and his beautiful three generations of family that we're fortunate enough to meet along the way. From our family to yours, this is the heart of the Basque spirit we look forward to sharing with you!

Signature Experiences

- **Paddle Past the 'Gugg'.** Experience Bilbao's iconic Guggenheim and other landmarks from a uniquely adventurous perspective -- balanced atop a stand-up paddleboard in the *Nervion* River!
- **Bilbao by Bike.** Enjoy a leisurely, guided two-wheeled spin through Bilbao's historic center and park-lined waterfront districts.
- **Hermitage Hike.** Traverse coastal paths and climb 231 steps across the craggy islet of *Gaztelugatxe* to the tiny hermitage dedicated to San Juan the Baptist. A picnic lunch and incomparable views of the Cantabrian coast are a well-earned reward.
- **Pint-Sized *Pintxo* Class.** Craft miniature masterpieces at the side of a prize-winning *pintxo* chef in a hands-on culinary class created for the whole family.
- **Quincentenary Market.** Visit a weekly market that has been operating continuously for over 500 years. From fresh produce to flowers, from nutty cheeses to hearth-baked breads, regional and seasonal specialties overflow the stalls of this picturesque mountain town.
- **Coast, Karst & Flysch.** Explore Basque Country's jaw-dropping geological features, first by foot through the black *flysch* of Mutriku, then by private boat to Zumaia.
- **Morning Milking.** Shadow a shepherd on his morning rounds. Try your hand at milking or feeding sheep then roll up your sleeves to help make some fresh cheese for which this region is famed.
- **Heritage Mountain.** Share history and a home-hosted afternoon with a former Basque engineer who, after learning that his family's pig-farming roots date back to at least 1575, re-dedicated his life to developing a market for the region's last remaining heritage breed.

Thumbnail Itinerary



Sunday, Day 1: Paddle Past the ‘Gugg’

Our driver greets you upon arrival and transfers you to our cozy Bilbao base a stone’s throw from the Guggenheim. After time to drop bags and freshen-up, enjoy a true nautical adventure on the Nervion River. Bilbao’s iconic landmarks are magically transformed when viewed balanced aboard your very own stand-up paddleboard (lessons / instructors available for kids & adults alike). (Meals: D)

Lodging for three nights in Bilbao is at *Hotel Miro* (or similar) a small city hotel with understated style, a clean, modern design and a brilliant location. For a preview, visit: www.hotelmiro.com

Note: we’ve reserved Jr. Suites at *Hotel Miro* - ideal for families.

Monday, Day 2: Bilbao by Bike

Bilbao is the perfect town to explore by bike. Our leisurely, guided visit will take us through the park-lined waterfront district and into the medieval *Casco Viejo*. After lunch we’ll switch gears, so to speak. Our local Bilbao guide is a specialist in family visits to the Guggenheim. At the same time, our trip leader will convene a kids’ club in the park adjacent to the museum for the youngest amongst us or for anyone who wants to burn some extra energy on the swing sets, slides and sandboxes. (Meals: B, L)

Tuesday, Day 3: Hermitage Hike + Pint-Sized *Pintxo* Class

We’ll drive north this morning for an invigorating hike along coastal trails. Our destination is a tiny hermitage dedicated to San Juan the Baptist perched on the rocky islet of San Juan de Gaztelugatxe and reached via 231 stairs over a small footbridge from the mainland. Our effort is rewarded with a family-style picnic with incomparable views of this natural paradise. (Meals: B, L, D)

Afternoon at leisure in Bilbao

Early evening activity: craft miniature masterpieces at the side of a prize-winning *pintxo* chef in a hands-on culinary class created for the whole family. *Pintxos* are N. Spain’s artful version of *tapas*.

Wednesday, Day 4: Quincentenary Market + Cider House Rules

The weekly market in the picturesque town of *Ordizia* is reason enough to come to Basque Country. Held each Wednesday since 1512, it is the oldest weekly market in *Gipuzkoa* (one of the three semi-autonomous Basque provinces). There, *alubias* (beans) hold a place of honor in the pantheon of fresh produce which overflows the market stalls. Smoky, nutty cheeses such as *Idiazabel* are also on fragrant display as are flowers, fresh basked breads, nuts and other regional & seasonal specialties. We’ll gather food from the market for a picnic lunch, which we’ll enjoy together on the lush grounds of our hotel. (Meals: B, L, D)

Afternoon at leisure in Bidania

Early evening activity: Enjoy a fun, family evening at a traditional Basque cider house. We’ll learn how apples are processed to make sparkling cider and enjoy a shared, family-style meal together. Keep an ear open for when the chef yells “txotx” indicating that a stream of effervescent cider is to be released from the barrel. These rustic cider houses are warm, welcoming places for families!



Lodging for four nights in Bidania is at the peaceful oasis *Iriarte Juaregia*, a lovingly restored 17th C. country palace named one of Spain's 25 best small hotels. For a preview: www.iriartejauregia.com
Note: we've reserved suites at *Iriarte Juaregia* - ideal for families.

Thursday, Day 5: Coast, Karst & Flysch

Today we'll explore the dramatic geological features of the Basque coast & countryside, including a morning walk through mountain meadows past towering karst formations and a late afternoon, private boat excursion along the coast to observe dramatic striated flysch rock formations from Mutriku to Zumaia. (Meals: B, L)

Early afternoon at leisure in Bidania

Friday, Day 6: San Sebastian & Hit the Beach + Kids Club & Parents' Night Out

The beautiful seaside city of San Sebastian is less than 40 minutes away from our base in *Bidania*. This morning, head for a guided stroll through its *Belle Epoque* historic center, the fish market, Mount Igueldo, La Concha beach and its colorful old quarter, filled with pintxo bars and cafes. (Meals: B, L)

Afternoon at leisure in San Sebastian - bring your swimsuits and hit the beach!

Evening activity: we'll arrange for a supervised *Kid's Club* at our hotel. We'll eat pizza, play games and show a movie for the kids, while parents can enjoy a night out in San Sebastian. If you've been eyeing one of the famed Michelin starred restaurants in town, tonight is the time to enjoy it!

Saturday, Day 7: Morning Milking & Heritage Mountain

Shadow a Basque shepherd on his morning rounds through rolling mountain meadows of Beizama. Try your hand at milking a sheep and roll up your sleeves to help make some fresh cheese curd. Also, enjoy a tasting of the nutty Idiazabal cheese for which this region is famed.

We are also joined in our morning foray by Pello, a former Basque engineer who, after learning that his family's pig-farming roots date back to at least 1575, re-dedicated his life to saving & developing a market for the region's last remaining heritage breed, *Euskal Txerria*. Pello is very active in the Slow Food movement and many of the farmers at the market are friends & colleagues.

Trek an hour through the Basque countryside from Beizama to Bidegoian where Pello invites us to an unforgettable afternoon at his family's 18th century stone farmstead. See firsthand Pello's rare *Euskal Txerria* pigs with their signature long, floppy ears. Three generations of Pello's family join us for a home-hosted lunch that includes some of the sublime cured ham produced on his farm. Enjoy exquisite homemade food, warm conversation and laughter in equal measure around Pello's cozy hearth and in the family's garden. There's no better place to raise a glass to celebrate our new-formed family bonds in Basque Country (Meals: B, L, D)

Sunday, Day 8: Homeward Bound

Transfers will be arranged to Bilbao or San Sebastian for your homeward bound flights. (Meals: B)

Cost & Details



8 Day Farm-to-Family Basque Country Adventure

Program cost for 8 to 14 travelers = \$3,190/pp (sgl. rm. add \$595)

Program cost for 4 to 7 travelers = \$3,490/pp (sgl. rm. add \$595)

Children under age 15 staying in same room as parents = \$2,690/pp*

***Child pricing based on sharing room with two adults**

Included:

- Our Bilbao-based, multilingual trip leader will accompany our travelers throughout this Basque family adventure. A teacher and anthropologist by training, our trip leader is passionate about sharing the culture & living traditions of this region and when not traveling with his own family, continues to share his insights through photography, sound recordings and blog posts.
- Specialist guides, innovative chefs, a shepherd and cheese maker, a Basque pig breeder and Slow Food activist and other cultural ambassadors meet & accompany us throughout our journey
- Culture Xplorers' *Signature Experiences* listed in the itinerary
- Lodging: double or family occupancy in charming boutique hotels and lodges brimming with local flavor, color & character. These include: a chic city hotel and an artfully restored country palace.
- Meals: breakfast & lunch daily, plus four (4) dinners during our eight day journey
- Private ground transportation throughout
- All entry fees to included museums, national parks, monuments and ruins
- Stainless steel eco-water bottles and purified water provided throughout the journey
- Airport pick-up and drop-off coordinated for any time on day of arrival & departure
- Comprehensive pre-departure planning materials

Items not included and estimates:

- International air to / from Bilbao, Spain. Budget \$1,000+ (coach)
- Approximately (3) meals during our eight-day journey. Budget \$25/pp+ per meal
- International departure tax in Bilbao. Note: most airlines now include this tax into the fare
- If you opt for a single room, add \$595 for 7 nights.
- Tip to Culture Xplorers trip leader (\$4 to \$7/pp/day) and specialist guides (\$3 to \$4/pp/day)
- Traveler's medical and emergency evacuation insurance (recommended)

Details:

- Maximum travelers: 14 (4 travelers minimum)
- Minimum age: 7 years and up
- Trip length: 8 days / 7 nights, plus international travel
- Activity level: Active. Participants must be able to walk comfortably and unassisted for up to one hour at a time & up to two hours per day on terrain that will include: cobblestones, flagstones, unpaved dirt & gravel roads, meadows, plus mountain and coastal footpaths.