

Madrid to San Sebastian: Wine, Art & Gastronomy

A 7-night trip introduces you to Spain by way of the country's finest artworks, wines and cuisines as you cross the Iberian peninsula from Madrid to San Sebastian.

November 10th-17th, 2024

What to expect

This seven night tour introduces you to Spain by way of the country's finest artworks, wines and cuisines as you cross the Iberian peninsula from Madrid to San Sebastian.

We begin in the glow of the capital, with its promise of Spanish master paintings, old Castillian recipes, sparkling tapas bars and lesser-known wines of the central plateau. That deep red thread of viniculture leads us on to private bodega visits across Ribera del Duero – flourishing home of the tannin-rich tempranillo grape – and on toward the Mediterranean climate of La Rioja. There we'll stop at three iconic wineries and taste the rich results of their contrasting methodologies.

Our tour concludes in the Basque Country, where landscape and seascape converge into an extraordinarily fertile gastronomic culture. A deep dive into that heritage brings us to the fishing village of Getaria – a utopia for seafood – and the secret culinary world of a private txoko dining club in San Sebastian. Our adventure ends in that beautiful coastal city with dinner at Martin Berasategui's triple-Michelin-starred restaurant.

Winery Visits

- Winery visits in Ribera del Duero:
 - Dominio de Cair, known for delicate grapes drawn from old vines on small plots.
 - Bodegas Aster, with its signature vintage Finca El Otero and beautiful barrel room.
 - Bodegas Ismael Arroyo (ValSotillo), where house wines are aged in 16th-century tunnels.
- Winery visits in La Rioja:
 - Conde de los Andes, set inside Medieval mountain caves with Moorish design flourishes, and a vaulted wine cellar often referred to as the "Sistine Chapel of La Rioja".
 - Bodega Javier San Pedro, a modern winery with views across the Sierra de Cantabria, and a tasting lunch prepared by owners of Michelin-starred restaurant Ikaro.
 - Marqués de Murrieta, a defining 1850s landmark producing a Gran Reserva that has been ranked as the best wine in the world.

Highlights

- Gourmet tapas tour in Madrid with wine pairings
- Guided visit to the Prado and Reina Sofia museums with our award-winning art historian. Featured masterpieces include Picasso's monumentally powerful painting Guernica.
- Private tour and dinner at the world's oldest restaurant Sobrino de Botin, where the same clay oven has been roasting suckling pigs since 1725.
- A flamenco show at one of Madrid's best *tablaos*, where music, song and dance combine in fiery displays of passion, joy and melancholy.
- A day in the walled medieval town and fishing port of Getaria on the beautiful Basque coast, with visit to a gourmet anchovy workshop and a walk in txakoli vineyard,
- A private tour of Eduardo Chillida's sculpture garden, guided by the artist's own grandson Mikel.
- A tour of market stalls & *pinxto* bars in San Sebastian, led by Basque food expert Gabriella Ranelli
- Dinner behind closed doors with members of a private txoko social club for Basque chefs and gourmets: the Cofradía Vasca de Gastronomía
- Farewell dinner at 3* Michelin restaurant Martin Berasategui.

Your Host

JOANNA WIVELL Originally from Yorkshire, UK, Joanna has always felt a natural attraction to Spain. She lived in Madrid for 19 years, where she first worked in television for the lifestyle channel, Canal Estilo, and then the National Geographic Channel. For the last 15 years, she has been showing visitors Spain with a personal, insider's view through her company, Insider's Travel. Joanna has enjoyed walking on her travels through South America and in Europe. She has a love for flamenco dancing, which she studied when living in Granada as a student and equally enjoys discovering the joys of Europe's wine regions and the stories they tell. It is her mission to discover the real deal when travelling!

Experts joining us en route:

RAÚL ORANTES is a Spanish wine expert. Raul grew up in hospitality working in his parents' Madrid restaurant. Years later Raul takes hundreds of guests through Spain to understand why these wines taste like they do and meet the people behind them. Many of you already know Raul through from co-hosting our weekly wine tastings on zoom throughout lockdown. Raul lives and breathes the Spanish wine world and we can think of no one better to join us on our journey.

GABRIELLA RANELLI has been in the Wall Street Journal among the world's Top 10 Culinary Guides. Writer of the Arzak + Arzak cookbook and teacher at the Basque Culinary Centre, she also assisted the late, great Anthony Bourdain on his gastronomic wanderings in the Basque Country.

Trip Itinerary

Day 1. Sunday 10th November

Arrive in Madrid at your leisure and check in to the five-star Palacio de Tepa hotel, a renowned former mansion and literary salon with a grand facade by 19th-century master architect Juan Villanueva, located just off the Santa Ana Square in the historic centre of Madrid.

Meet your guide at 7:30pm for a local tavern tapas tour of the Spanish capital, stopping at our pick of the city's most authentic and beloved castizo taverns.

Hotel: [NH Collection Palacio de Tepa, Madrid](#)

Day 2. Monday 11th November

Meet our award-winning art historian to tour her personally selected highlights of the Prado and Reina Sofia Museums. Masterpieces on display at those neighbouring treasure houses of Spanish and European art include Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, a monumental expression of outrage painted in urgent, impassioned response to the bombing of the titular Basque town during the Spanish Civil War – and an image that will surely linger in your mind as we pass through the Basque Country later in the tour. Today's light lunch is at the adjoining Nubel, a vast and immensely stylish lounge designed by flamboyant French architect Jean Nouvel.

Free time

Spend the evening at Sobrino de Botín, listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's oldest restaurant. Founded by a Frenchman in 1725, it's renowned for cooking sucking pigs in a clay oven where the fire is said to have burned undimmed for almost three centuries. A private tour takes you behind the iconic wood-fronted facade and down to the brickwork cellar for a privileged peek into the medieval tunnels that run beneath. You'll also hear the richest anecdotes about the place and its mythic former patrons, from Goya to Ernest Hemingway and Jackie Kennedy, before sitting down to a tasting menu of the restaurant's classic dishes.

After dinner we'll take in a show at traditional flamenco club, a *tablaó*, where you'll see and hear how this vital Spanish performance art achieves its thrilling effects through masterful, semi-improvised synchronies of dancing, singing, and guitar playing.

Hotel: [NH Collection Palacio de Tepa, Madrid](#)

Day 3. Tuesday 12th November

Check out of the hotel and board a comfortable bus for a scenic drive into the Ribera de Duero wine region with our specialist guide Raul Orantes.

Our first visit of the day is to Bodega Dominio de Cair, a winery designed to the exacting standards of renowned producer Juan Luis Cañas. His operation is known for low-yield, high-quality grapes, grown from rigorously maintained old vines on the small plots that define the area. A full private visit tells you everything you need to know about the love and care that go into the resulting wines, which you then get to taste: La Aguilera, Tierras de Cair, Cruz de Pendón, and Pendón de Aguilera.

Next, it's on to Bodegas Aster, a magnificent estate with a romantic aspect similar to the wine-growing chateaux of the French countryside. Aster is a major player within La Rioja's essential winery group, Rioja Alta, which planted its flag here in Ribera del Duero in 2000. The distinctive vintage produced on this property, Finca El Otero, is sourced from a single high-altitude plot, which packs the wine with tannin-rich intensity. Taste for yourself over regional dishes in the private dining room that overlooks the vast and deeply evocative barrel room.

After lunch we make our way to Val Sotillo belonging to winemaker Ismael Arroyo, the frontier-like home base of a true pioneer in Spanish winemaking, and one of the founders of the Ribera del Duero appellation created in 1982. A family member leads us on a private excursion through deeply atmospheric 16th-century tunnels, which are used to age excellent house wines made exclusively with tempranillo grapes. While down there, we taste two of Arroyo's organically grown wines, a crianza and a reserva, then return above ground where the family owns 32 hectares of vineyards around the estate and town. There will be more wine and tapas later when we check into the gothic-style Hotel Landa with its unique 14th century tower.

Hotel: [Hotel Landa, Burgos](#)

Day 4. Wednesday 13th November, Ribera to La Rioja

The French put La Rioja on the world wine map. With their own vines perishing under the phylloxera plague of the late 1800s, they looked to the Spanish terrain of La Rioja to produce their wines and so maintain their export levels. They shared their know-how with local wine-makers and built a rail line from Haro to Bordeaux to maintain the supply chain. A handful of wineries around that train station went on to prosper, and remain premium producers today.

Conde de los Andes occupies subterranean caves carved into the Churrumendi mountains in the Middle Ages. An exclusive guided visit takes us from sumptuous surface rows of Tempranillo and Viura vines down into an underground cellar system bearing some of Spain's finest Moorish architecture. Some 400,000 bottles are stored in the Calado de las Grandes Añadas, or Great Vintages Cellar, which is known as the "Sistine Chapel of Rioja" and houses precious specimens that date right back to when the winery was founded in 1892.

Next, we stop at Bodegas Javier San Pedro Ortega, where Javier himself shows us around the winery he set up in 2018. Among the younger stars of the business in La Rioja, he's also a fifth-generation winemaker with centuries of combined ancestral experience to draw upon. His property occupies a prime location with painterly mountain views across the Sierra de Cantabria and the dreamlike design of neighbouring Bodega Ysisos. This tour includes tastings of Javier's premium wines and a lunch prepared by Iñaki Murua and Carolina Sánchez, owners of the Michelin-starred Ikaro in Logroño. We bid farewell to Raul and check into the Hotel Viura, with the option of more wine and tapa later.

Hotel: [Hotel Viura, Rioja](#)

Day 5. Thursday 14th November

Today we visit Marqués de Murrieta, whose Rioja Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva 2010 was rated by The Spectator magazine as the best wine in the world in 2020. This is one of the region's truly foundational wineries, dating back to the 1850s and known for pioneering the local use of French techniques to enhance the complexity and longevity of La Rioja's signature red grape, Tempranillo. A private tour of the bodega culminates with lunch paired to premium wines.

We'll then take a half hour drive upward to Laguardia, a medieval hilltop town ringed by stone walls and ramparts. The interior labyrinth of narrow cobbled streets twists around ancient Roman ruins and Renaissance churches before opening out onto the Balcón de Rioja for spectacular views across hillsides laced with vineyards. As the sun sets over that glowing Riojan landscape it's back to the Hotel Viura for an evening drink and tapa.



Day 6. Friday 15th November

After checkout, we leave behind the Castillian heartland and cross the Basque Country to the wild Atlantic coast, with its gorgeous contrast of brilliant blue ocean, deep green hills and brightly painted buildings. The geologic contours of this coastline are complimented here and there with public artworks by beloved Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida whose work we visit later in the day.

On a ridge above the Bay of Biscay stands Getaria, another walled medieval town rising out of a fishing port that hauls in some of the best seafood to be found off these storied shores. Perhaps best known as the birthplace of the immortally elegant Basque fashion designer Cristóbal Balenciaga, Getaria is also renowned for anchovies.

Here, we are joined by food expert Gabriella Ranelli who will be with us for the next two days. Gabriella takes us to see how the anchovies are prepared at a specialist workshop that represents the gold standard for gourmet tinned fish and supplies some of the world's top restaurants. Maybe anchovies aren't your thing, but these specimens are something else, and we've seen many doubters change their minds over a preprandial aperitif on a sunny terrace with a glass of *txakoli*. A bus to the top of the town leads us onto the grassy slopes where equally specialised vineyards grow the *ondarrabi zurbi* grape from which that signature sparkling white wine is made.

After a local lunch, we head to another Basque gastronomic landmark. The relatively small coastal city of San Sebastian has an outsized but wholly deserved international reputation for cuisine, and its own distinct tapas culture rooted in the sharing of *pintxos*. We stop first for our visit to Chillida-Leku, where the sculptor's own grandson Mikel accompanies us on a private tour of this farmhouse turned museum where his grandfather's striking statements in steel and granite seem to rise organically from the peaceful pastoral setting.

In the evening, we go behind the curtain to a members-only *Txoko* – one of those secret societies where Basque cooks come together in private to eat, socialise, and share new recipes. As friends and clients of Insider's Travel, you're invited (for one day only) to join the *Cofradía Vasca de Gastronomía*, a solemn brotherhood dedicated to defending and preserving regional cuisine. Your txoko dinner is set to a backing of live folk music led by a traditional Txistu piper and drum, for full multisensory immersion in Basque culture.

Hotel: [Hotel Lasala Plaza](#), San Sebastian

Day 7. Saturday 16th November

Saturday is market day in San Sebastian, one of the great shows of sheer affinity for food to be seen on the Iberian Peninsula. Our guide will point out the simple fresh ingredients and how they are transformed in a unique Basque style as we graze our way through a selection of favourite bars for those ever-satisfying snacks – often “spiked” onto skewers or toothpicks in endless variations and combinations that can range from simple, classic comfort food to artfully presented expressions of creative flair.

It's the last night of the tour, when we try to soften the sadness of the occasion by offering something extra-special to look forward to. In this case, it's the dinner of a lifetime courtesy of Martin Berasategui, the Spanish masterchef awarded more Michelin stars than any living peer.

Hotel: [Hotel Lasala Plaza](#), San Sebastian

Day 8. Sunday 17th November

After breakfast we end the tour and say our goodbyes.

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Price: €5,300 per person

Single Supplement: €700

Deposit: €500 per person

- ♥ 2 nights Hotel NH Palacio Tapa, Madrid 5*
- ♥ 1 night Hotel Landa, Burgos 5*
- ♥ 2 nights Hotel Viura, Rioja Alavesa 4*
- ♥ 2 nights Hotel Lasala Plaza, San Sebastian 4*
- ♥ Private transport by luxury coach
- ♥ Tour host & expert private guides
- ♥ Breakfast daily, starting in the morning of Nov. 11 & ending on the morning of Nov. 17
- ♥ Lunch & dinner daily, starting with dinner on Nov.10 & ending with dinner on Nov. 16
- ♥ Visits & entrances as per itinerary
- ♥ All applicable taxes

Not included: Airfare & flights; any meals not mentioned above; travel insurance, gratuities for guides

To book your place, please fill out [*THIS BOOKING FORM.*](#)

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