NAT HAB
CULTURAL JOURNEYS

Vibrant Traditions & Personal Connections



Northern Spain: Basque & Rioja

Renowned Wines, Celebrated Cuisine & Distinctive Cultural Traditions

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Trip Details:

Days
10 Days / May–Oct

Price
From $14995

Northern Spain: Basque & Rioja

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There are few places in the world where food, wine, land and culture meld as they do in northern Spain. Gastronomy is front and center on our journey through the vineyards of Rioja and the ancient homeland of the Basques, one of the world's most distinctive cultures. Hugging the Pyrenees Mountains and the Bay of Biscay, Basque territory is home to a proud, free-spirited people known for their globally celebrated cuisine, fishing traditions, folk dancing and unique language unrelated to any other on Earth. The landscapes are as vibrant as the people, where lush rolling hills meet limestone cliffs and golden sand beaches. Follow in ancient pilgrim footsteps on the Camino de Santiago. Stay on a private wine estate surrounded by vineyards. Throughout our journey, meet the keepers of tradition—fishermen and farmers, winemakers and cheesemakers—and taste the fruits of their labors in pintxos bars, wine cellars and a private Basque gastronomic society.

Trip Highlights

Stay on a Historic Private Wine Estate in Rioja

An invitation-only wine estate in Rioja Alavesa is reserved exclusively for our group, with private access to its vineyards, cellar and culinary traditions

Explore Hidden Villages on Spain's Rugged North Coast

Follow the Atlantic edge through fishing towns, rural hamlets, limestone cliffs and green hills, and walk a coastal section of the fabled Camino de Santiago

Indulge in Basque Gastronomic Traditions

Dine inside an intimate, members-only cooking society at the heart of Basque social life, and sample pintxos on a crawl through San Sebastian's lively bars



Northern Spain: Basque & Rioja Itinerary

Renowned Wines, Celebrated Cuisine & Distinctive Cultural Traditions

Itinerary at a Glance

Day 1	Arrive in Bilbao, the start of our northern Spain encounter
Day 2	Walk the rugged Basque coast and take a private boat cruise
Day 4	Go on a pintxo crawl in San Sebastian and dine at a private gastronomic society
Day 3	Meet Basque cheesemakers, enjoy a cider house lunch, and join an artist for dinner
Day 5	Walk a portion of the Camino, and stay on a luxurious invitation-only wine estate in Rioja
Day 6	Join a chef for a garden tour, visit Laguardia, and explore the estate's vineyards
Day 7	A final morning at Casa Cosme, with a return to Basque Country at Nafarrola
Day 8	From Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve to Guernica, the symbolic heart of Basque identity
Day 9	Explore Bermeo's fishing heritage and have lunch at a Basque gastonomic society
Day 10	Drive to Bilbao and Say Farewell at the Airport



Day 1

Arrive in Bilbao, the start of our northern Spain encounter

- Come together in Bilbao, gateway to Basque Country
- Gather with your Expedition Leader and fellow guests for a welcome presentation, drinks and dinner

Arrive in Bilbao and transfer to our hotel in the heart of the city. Our journey begins in Bilbao, gateway to Spain's Basque Country. Over a welcome presentation and drinks with our Expedition Leader, get oriented to the days ahead, anticipating the coastal landscapes, vineyards, food traditions and communities we'll encounter across Basque territory and the Rioja wine region. This evening, we sit down together for a welcome dinner, beginning our exploration of northern Spain through one of the themes that will connect the entire journey—its globally famous regional cuisine.

Day 2

Walk the rugged Basque coast and take a private boat cruise

- Follow the Flysch Route along the Atlantic Ocean on foot
- Cruise the coast by private boat near Zumaia
- Have lunch in a traditional borda, or mountain hut

Leaving Bilbao, we head toward the Basque Coast, where green hills and chalky limestone cliffs meet the Atlantic Ocean, and small fishing communities are inextricably tied to the sea. A coastal walk on the Ruta de Flysch, or Flysch Route, offers a close-up look at this dramatic landscape of lush headlands, jagged rock faces and sea-carved caves, part of the Basque Coast UNESCO Global Geopark. The path is named for the flysch formations, unique sedimentary rocks that comprise alternating layers of shale and sandstone, formed some 60 million years ago and exposed by erosion into layered strata. Sometimes called a "geological open book," the folds in the stone tableau reveals dynamic forces and crises that have shaped our planet, including one layer that marks the last of the five mass extinctions that have occurred throughout Earth's history.

Continue to the town of Zumaia, which lies at one end of the Flysch Route. In this Basque cultural stronghold, the native tongue—Euskera, one of the world's oldest living languages—is frequently heard. A special lunch awaits at our friend Alvaro's borda—a traditional stone and wood mountain hut in Basque Country. Afterward, board our private boat for a cruise from Zumaia, getting a different perspective on the striking coastline. This evening, we reach San Sebastian, where we spend the next three nights.

Day 4

Go on a pintxo crawl in San Sebastian and dine at a private gastronomic society

- Explore the heart of San Sebastian on a walking tour with our Expedition Leader
- Taste your way through the city on a pintxo crawl, with free time to explore independently
- Enjoy dinner at a private gastronomic society, a social staple of Basque life

Today is devoted to discovering San Sebastian and the cultural traditions that give the city its vital identity. Originating as a medieval fishing port on a protected bay in the 12th century, the town evolved over the centuries into a whaling center and export hub for iron, wool and maritime trade. Whaling ended in 1985, around the time local chefs were putting the city on the map anew with the New Basque Cuisine movement, turning it into a global culinary destination with one of the highest concentrations of Michelin-starred restaurants in the world.

Food is central to life here, and we experience that firsthand on a pintxo crawl through San Sebastian, joining our Expedition Leader on a walking tour as we hop between local bars to sample these small dishes for which the city is renowned. There's time to wander, shop, people-watch and explore on your own, too, before we reconvene for a most unique dinner experience that is a distinctive feature of Basque life: the *txoko,* or private gastronomic society. These members-only gathering places are an important part of the region's food culture and social traditions. This evening, we are welcomed inside one for a private dinner—an intimate introduction to an exclusive setting most visitors never experience.

Day 3

Meet Basque cheesemakers, enjoy a cider house lunch, and join an artist for dinner

- Visit a local farm for a cheese and shepherding experience
- Have lunch in a traditional Basque cider house
- Spend the evening with a local artist over dinner in his gallery

The countryside beyond San Sebastian is our focus today, starting with a visit to a local market to see the bounty of regional produce and fresh fare offered for sale. Next, we're hosted on a small farm where we learn about longstanding agricultural traditions, meet shepherds and get a close-up look at the cheesemaking process, with tastings. Lunch follows at a traditional cider house, highlighting another essential element of Basque food culture centered on its abundant apple orchards. Known as *sagardotegiak,* cider houses are traditional culinary institutions centered around tasting natural, tart, uncarbonated cider straight from giant wooden barrels. When a fresh barrel is tapped, "Txotx" (pronounced *chotch*) is called out, indicating the cider is ready for drinking. Guests line up with their glasses to catch a thin stream of cider poured from on high, aerating the beverage to release its sharp, natural fizz and aroma.

Our focus on special food experiences continues over dinner, where we are hosted in a stylish contemporary art gallery in the heart of San Sebastian featuring the work of Iñigo Manterola. In this intimate space, we join the artist, whose work spans oil painting, drawing and large-scale sculpture, to learn about his creative process, tour his studio, and enjoy a meal together surrounded by his work.

Day 5

Walk a portion of the Camino, and stay on a luxurious invitation-only wine estate in Rioja

- Walk a section of the famous Camino de Santiago
- Taste txakoli, a classic Basque white wine, over lunch
- Arrive at our private Rioja wine estate for a cellar tour and dinner

This morning offers a classic northern Spain experience: a chance to walk a section of the Camino de Santiago, the famous pilgrimage route that leads to the shrine of Saint James in the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia. Established in the beginning of the 9th century following the discovery of the relics of the apostle James, the “Way of Saint James” became a major pilgrimage route of medieval Christianity. Afterward, we stop for lunch accompanied by a classic Basque wine, *txakoli.* The slightly sparkling, very dry white wine with high acidity is typically served as a refreshing aperitif.

Continuing inland, the scenery transitions to wine country as we enter the vineyards of Rioja Alavesa in the Ebro River Valley. This subregion of the greater Rioja area is especially renowned for its Tempranillo grapes, a product of the clay-limestone terroir distinct to the area. The soil provides ideal growing conditions to produce the regional red wines famed for their strong body and structure. We’ll make a deep dive into Rioja wine culture during a two-night stay at La Casa Cosme Palacio, Spain's premier "by invitation only" luxury winery estate. This historic working enterprise and its fine lodgings are reserved exclusively for our group. After an introduction to the property, dinner is served in the impressive cellar as the estate’s fine vintages are paired with our meal courses.

Day 6

Join a chef for a garden tour, visit Laguardia, and explore the estate's vineyards

- Walk the estate's organic garden and harvest produce and herbs for our evening meal
- Explore the town of Laguardia, with its cellars beneath the streets
- Sample olive oil and artisan cheese, and tour the estate vineyards by 4x4 or on foot

Our immersion in Rioja continues with a closer look at the ingredients behind the region's cuisine. This morning, join a chef from the in-house culinary team at La Casa Cosme Palacio for a walk in the estate's organic garden to learn about the produce and local botanicals used in preparing the kitchen's acclaimed meals. Harvest seasonal produce and culinary herbs as we learn about sustainable farming methods integrated into the estate. The freshly picked ingredients are used to create the beautiful multi-course meals we enjoy during our stay.

After an olive oil tasting, head to nearby Laguardia, the center of Rioja Alavesa, whose streets sit above a network of historic wine cellars. Take a guided walk through the town with a private tour of the Church of Santa Maria de los Reyes. Construction on the church began at the end of the 12th century in Romanesque style, however, the sanctuary was not fully finished until the 16th century, adding layers of Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque elements. The magnificent polychrome portico is the church's most outstanding feature: Carved in stone in the 14th century and depicting Biblical scenes in extraordinary detail, it was embellished with color in the 17th century, making the intricate figures appear to come to life.

After some time to wander around Laguardia on your own, we return to the estate vineyards with the option to explore by 4x4 or on foot, learning more about the grape-growing and winemaking process. This evening, enjoy an artisanal cheese tasting with cheesemaker Alessia before a sumptuous dinner in the gardens.

Day 7

A final morning at Casa Cosme, with a return to Basque Country at Nafarrola

- Enjoy a leisurely final morning in Rioja and lunch at Casa Cosme before traveling north
- Arrive at Nafarrola, meet our local host and share txakoli and dinner together
- Wander wooded nature trails along the river on the Nafarrola estate

Enjoy a relaxed morning at our wine estate before gathering for lunch at Casa Cosme. Then it's time to leave Rioja and return to the Basque coast, traveling north to Hotel Nafarrola, our home for the next three nights. Located outside the picturesque town of Bormeo, Nafarrola offers boutique accommodations in an eco-friendly restored farmhouse built of stone, wood and plaster. Designed for a conscious, slower-paced stay, Nafarrola enjoys a private estate setting surrounded by nature, with a river flowing through the premises. Trails wind among centuries-old oaks and maritime pines, and wildlife like roe deer, wild boar, woodpeckers and cuckoos are fellow residents. Once we arrive and get situated in our rooms, we join our local host for a tour of the property and a glass of Txakoli made from grapes grown in Nafarrola's vineyards. Dinner is an intimate affair, featuring more outstanding Basque fare in the hotel's Michelin guide-listed restaurant.

Day 8

From Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve to Guernica, the symbolic heart of Basque identity

- Discover the estuary and wetlands of Urdaibai, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve
- Walk on the rocky promontory of Gaztelugatxe for dramatic coastal views
- Visit Mundaka for a beachside lunch before exploring the history of Guernica

Nafarrola is located in the heart of the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve, recognized by UNESCO In 1984 for its outstanding natural beauty and biodiversity. At its heart is the River Oka, born on the slopes of Mount Oiz, which flows to the sea in a productive estuary at Mundaka. These spectacular wetlands teem with birdlife, including fish eagles, spoonbills and Eurasian bittern, rarely seen elsewhere on the Iberian Peninsula. In this region, coast, estuary, fishing villages and countryside come together in a harmonious mosaic. Take a walk at Gaztelugatxe, a dramatic islet in the Bay of Biscay connected to the mainland by a footbridge. Its name in Basque means “castle rock,” and the cone-shaped promontory is one of the region’s most striking coastal settings, with sheer cliffs and pristine beaches below.

Continue to the village of Mundaka, once most prominent as a center for fishing and maritime trade but today renowned for the best surfing on the Basque coast. The estuary at the river’s mouth has created a perfect sandbar that forms hollow waves, including Europe’s best left-handed barrel wave, often reaching heights of 13 feet. After a beachside lunch, there may be time for swimming and relaxing on the shore before turning inland to Guernica, the traditional center of Basque history. On a hillside above the town is the historic symbol of Basque identity: the oak tree of Guernica, beneath which generations of Basque leaders and Spanish kings have sworn to respect this fiercely independent region. Guernica gained notoriety in April 1937 when this market town was obliterated in three hours of bombing by Nazi planes, allies of Generalisimo Franco’s fascists in the Spanish Civil War—the first total destruction of a civilian target from the air. International outrage included massive public demonstrations and the painting by Picasso, called Guernica, a copy of which still hangs outside the UN Security Council.

Day 9

Explore Bermeo's fishing heritage and have lunch at a Basque gastonomic society

- Meet people connected to Bermeo’s fishing traditions and visit an anchovy-processing factory
- Explore the old quarter before a local storytelling experience
- Savor lunch at a private gastronomic society, and enjoy a farewell dinner with a local family

Early risers may begin the day with an optional sunrise walk before we head to the nearby seaside town of Bermeo, the most important fishing port in the Basque region and home to one of Spain’s largest fishing fleets. Founded in the 13th century and steeped in maritime heritage, Bermeo is a picturesque town with brightly colored houses stacked on the hillside above the lively harbor. We delve into its seafaring traditions this morning, visiting with fishermen’s wives who tell us personal stories about their families’ connection to Bermeo’s main commercial enterprise. The main catches here are tuna, mackerel and anchovies, and we visit an anchovy-processing factory to learn how these small fish move from sea to table. Take a walk through Bermeo’s old quarter before gathering for a local storytelling experience with a colorful raconteur. For lunch, we return to one of the journey’s defining cultural traditions, sharing a meal in the intimate setting of a Basque gastronomic society. Our final full day winds up with a farewell dinner at the home of a Basque family.

Day 10

Drive to Bilbao and Say Farewell at the Airport

- Travel a short distance from Nafarrola back to Bilbao, where our journey concludes
- A transfer to the airport is included to meet departing flights or transportation for onward personal travel

After breakfast, our journey through Basque Country and Rioja winds to a close. Depart Nafarrola this morning and transfer a short distance to Bilbao, continuing to the airport where our tour concludes. Though we may be reluctant to leave this unique corner of the world with its dynamic and hospitable hosts, our hearts are full, with a rich experience of Basque Country and Rioja—a place where land, sea, food and culture have been inextricably intertwined for centuries.



Northern Spain: Basque & Rioja Accommodations

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The Artist Grand Hotel of Art

Directly facing Bilbao's Guggenheim Museum, this art-filled hotel features a soaring sculptural atrium, rooftop terrace with museum views and gourmet cuisine—within walking distance of the arts district.



Hotel Ur Bare

Overlooking Zarautz Beach, this restored 1940s villa features relaxed coastal interiors, a terraced hillside pool, and Basque cuisine on a dining terrace built around a mature magnolia tree.



La Casa Cosme Palacio

Set among vineyards below the medieval walled town of Laguardia, this invitation-only 1894 boutique estate features historic cellars, original stonework and an infinity pool overlooking the Ebro Valley.



Hotel Nafarrola

Set amid wildlife-rich oak forests in the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve, this restored 17th-century farmhouse features minimalist rooms with stone walls, Michelin-listed cuisine, and a wealth of sustainability initiatives.

For detailed descriptions, visit nathab.com/cultural-journeys/northern-spain-basque-country-rioja-tour/accommodations.

What Makes Cultural Journeys Different?

Northern Spain: Basque & Rioja

Our Cultural Journeys are built around meaningful encounters with the people, traditions and places that define a destination. In Spain's Basque Country and Rioja, longstanding local relationships take us beyond the usual visitor experience—into a private gastronomic society, onto an invitation-only wine estate, and alongside fishermen, farmers, cheesemakers and winemakers who share their lives and practices with us. Through food, wine, landscape and personal connections, we experience northern Spain not simply as visitors, but as welcomed guests.

1. **Personal Connections Open Doors**
   Many of this journey's most memorable experiences are possible because of relationships built over time. Friends welcome us into private homes, galleries and gastronomic societies, creating encounters that travelers could rarely arrange on their own.

2. **An Invitation-Only Stay in the Rioja Wine Country**
   Spend two nights on a historic working wine estate in Rioja Alavesa that is accessible only by invitation. Reserved exclusively for our group, the estate offers a private opportunity to explore its vineyards, cellar and culinary traditions.

3. **Three Nights as Josu's Guests at Nafarrola**
   Our stay at Nafarrola is much more than an ordinary hotel. Our friend Josu welcomes our group exclusively to his restored Basque farmhouse, introducing us to his community through local wine, fishing traditions and a special visit inside a private gastronomic society.

4. **Food Is Not Detached from the People Who Create It**
   Throughout our journey, the individuals who grow, catch, make and cook our food are part of our experience. Meet farmers, fishermen, cheesemakers, chefs and winemakers who share not only what they produce, but the stories and traditions behind it.

5. **Experience the Landscape That Feeds the Table**
   Northern Spain's food and wine are inseparable from the land and sea. From Rioja's vineyards and the green grazing hills of Basque Country to the farms, estuary and fishing ports of Urdaibai, we see firsthand how the land and sea influence what appears on our plates.

6. **An Inside Perspective on Basque Culture**
   Experience a centuries-old culture that remains deeply rooted in everyday customs and traditions, from txakoli wine and traditional dance to fishing communities, markets and members-only gastronomic societies. Local relationships give us a more personal window into the elements of daily life that define Basque identity.

7

A Small Group Creates a More Personal Experience

Limited to just 12 travelers, the intimate scale of our group facilitates visits to small farms, private estates, failyu kitchens, small artisan businesses, and spaces that cannot accommodate large bus tours. The result is more time for conversation, connection and genuine interaction with the people we meet.



Dates & Pricing Summary:

Price
From $14995

Group Size
Limited to 12 Travelers

Northern Spain: Basque & Rioja Dates, Pricing & Info

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2028 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Dates not confirmed for 2028		
May 22 - May 31, 2028	**$14995**	
Jun 19 - Jun 28, 2028	**$14995**	
Jul 17 - Jul 26, 2028	**$14995**	
Aug 7 - Aug 16, 2028	**$14995**	
Sep 25 - Oct 4, 2028	**$14995**	
Oct 9 - Oct 18, 2028	**$14995**	

2029 Departures

Departure – Return	Pricing	Notes
Prices and dates not confirmed for 2029		
May 21 - May 30, 2029	**From $15695**	
Jun 18 - Jun 27, 2029	**From $15695**	
Jul 16 - Jul 25, 2029	**From $15695**	
Aug 6 - Aug 15, 2029	**From $15695**	
Sep 24 - Oct 3, 2029	**From $15695**	
Oct 8 - Oct 17, 2029	**From $15695**	

See https://www.nathab.com/cultural-journeys/northern-spain-basque-country-rioja-tour/dates-fees for the latest pricing details.

Included

Accommodations at luxury properties, services of Nat Hab guides and staff, airport transfer to and from Bilbao airport, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on the final day, some wine and liquor at meals, private wine tastings and vineyard tours, some gratuities, all activities and entrance fees, all taxes, permits and service fees.

Not Included

Travel to and from the start and end point of your trip, some alcoholic beverages, some gratuities, passport and visa fees (if any), optional activities, items of a personal nature (phone calls, laundry, etc.), airline baggage fees, required medical evacuation insurance, optional travel protection insurance.

Important Information About This Trip

Our journey offers a rare opportunity to experience a more intimate side of Northern Spain that few travelers encounter. For those with an interest in regional culture and traditional ways of life, Basque Country offers a fascinating window into one of Europe's most distinctive cultural identities. During our trip, we stay in small, boutique accommodations, including an invitation-only historic wine estate and an exclusive stay at a restored luxury Basque farmhouse. Weather is generally mild and comfortable, though rain is possible throughout the season, even during the summer months—it's what keeps Basque Country's landscape so beautifully green! Please come prepared to spend time in variable weather.

Mandatory Insurance

Since the areas we travel to are remote and wild (that's why we go there!), we require that all guests have, at minimum, medical evacuation insurance for this program. This is for the safety of all guests. We require that your chosen independent insurance plan includes at least $250,000 in medical evacuation coverage.

To protect your investment and to provide peace of mind while you travel, we also strongly recommend purchasing comprehensive travel insurance. Plans may cover everything from medical treatment to trip cancellations and delays and lost luggage. Please contact our office if you would like more information about the medical evacuation and comprehensive travel

insurance policies we offer by calling 800-543-8917.

Getting There & Getting Home

This trip begins and ends in Bilbao. We recommend arriving in Bilbao the night before Day 1 so you can rest from your travels and begin the trip refreshed. If you plan to arrive on Day 1, you must arrive at Bilbao Airport by 4pm to join the group welcome orientation and dinner.

You may depart from Bilbao Airport any time after 12pm on the final day.

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