

MARIBEL'S GUIDE TO HONDARRIBIA ©

This fishing village in Gipuzkoa is widely considered one of the most picturesque and classic coastal villages in all of Spain with its charming and colorful La Marina quarter and the much photographed fishermen's homes of Calle San Pedro with their green, blue and red shutters and geranium bedecked balconies. The historic walled medieval quarter, partially encircled by ramparts, overlooks the city and is filled with palaces with their heraldic shields still intact and the 10th century Castle/Parador Carlos V. The wide, family friendly well maintained beach winds along the river to the coast. The broad waterfront promenade is lined with restaurants and cafés the face its French counterpart of Hendaye across the Bay of Txinguidi, which can be reached via a five minute ferry ride.

This makes an excellent and inexpensive small town base where you can spend several days exploring the Pays Basque, the lush valleys of Navarra and inland Gipuzkoa. Whether you decide to stay in grand style at the Castle Parador or opt for something simple, but comfortable, in one of the Agro Tourist homes, you'll be rewarded with lovely views, fantastic food, a lively fishing quarter for tapas in the evening, nice shopping and a friendly populace.

AGROTURISMOS**Great for budgeters or those who want to “sleep cheap and eat well”**

These rural B&Bs, called agroturismos or casas rurales, are approved and inspected yearly by the Basque government, and Hondarribia is blessed with some of the nicest of

these properties in all of Spain. In the Basque Country these homes belong to an association, Nekazaturismoa, whose web page, www.nekatur.net gives detailed information and provides pictures of all of the member homes in their network, which is constantly expanding. To see the 8 properties in Hondarribia, click on alojamientos, then choose Bajo Bidasoa, the tiny area in the far upper right hand corner of the Basque Country map.

The guest quarters in these homes have private baths, most provide hair dryers, and all serve breakfast. Best of all, one can stay in these small inns for very little money- in high season most charge €60 (double) per night with breakfast for only an additional 5€/person. For your savings, what American style creature comforts you must do without are a/c, TV in rooms and Wi-Fi (although some properties in the Vizcaya province provide those 3 amenities).

To stay at these properties, however, a car is essential, as they are not located on a bus line. None is located “in town” but rather in the countryside, only 2 minutes from the center of Hondarribia as the crow flies, but 7 minutes down very narrow, country roads that you’ll share with farm tractors and villagers out for a walk. It’s best when booking to ask the owners to send you a detailed little map, or have them meet you at the Hondarribia airport to guide you to the properties. Although there are now small yellow road signs that aim to guide visitors to each one, do not attempt to find them at night. You may be able to pick up directions to all of these homes at the Hondarribia Tourist Office. Below I list our favorites:



I highly recommend the friendly and warm **Iketxe**, a farmhouse that the owner built entirely from scratch. It has only 5 rooms, but they’re spacious, filled with handmade country furniture, pleasantly decorated with kiln rugs on polished wood floors, private baths, with hair dryers. Room 3 on the ground floor has its own large private terrace, while room number 1 has an enclosed sitting area. Downstairs you’ll find a sitting room-library loaded with books and brochures about the region, a kitchen where owner Patxi prepares breakfast and with fridge where guests can store food and wine, plus the breakfast room-living room with TV for guests’ use only. The outgoing Patxi speaks no English but his wife, Fátima, does speak some English and is fluent in French.

Doubles here in high season go for €60, a real bargain. The house has been featured in many Spanish travel magazines and in Alistair Sawday's Special Places to Stay/Spain, plus it is a selection of Secret Places; thus, it has become extremely popular. For high season, please book several months in advance.

For a family of four (or six) or for two (or even three) couples traveling together, I can also highly recommend the **Artizarra**, where we recently spent two delightful weeks with friends. The lovely Basque farm house décor, the warm and friendly owner, Lurdes (who speaks English) and the beautiful views made our stay extremely memorable. Since then, we have recommended this house to friends, who have also enjoyed the family's hospitality and the very comfortable accommodations.

This traditionally styled farmhouse, called a *caserio*, is newly built and lovely. The downstairs guest quarters consist of two bedrooms, each having its own bath (with shower only) that open on to the charmingly decorated living room with two sofas, table covered with brochures about touring the area, picture windows looking out to the garden (spectacular views), a little dining area to the side where breakfast is served, where you'll find a small microwave and mini-fridge. Upstairs there is one very spacious bedroom with its own little balcony (and chairs) plus room for a sofa, a rocking chair, a round table and two chairs, which we used for our writing and travel planning. The furniture here is handmade, including the armoire, which serves as the closet. The large dormer bath has a shower only. At the top of the stairs leading to this large bedroom, there is a small alcove with a fold out bed which could sleep two small children, or where one could put a crib. (We used this area to store our luggage).

While the house is not air conditioned, the proprietress will provide standing fans for each floor, but they usually aren't necessary. A picnic table and lounge chairs are found in the front garden, which we used every evening when returning from our touring. We bought our dinner provisions and wine at the Solbes market, our bread at the Ongi bread shop, our Iberian ham at the local charcuterie and dined outside watching the sunset. We also enjoyed salads prepared with ingredients from the garden.

Our stay at the **Artizarra** proved to be very inexpensive and spacious lodging for our two weeks, as the entire house rental cost only €168 per night, and we split this cost with the couple traveling with us. We had our own private, 3-bedroom, 3-bath farmhouse (complete with pelota court), yet we didn't have to bother with cleaning. Our hostess, Lurdes, also changed bed linens and towels daily. She also prepares a bountiful breakfast for only €4.20/person, but we only partook of it a few times, as we chose to have coffee and pastries in town. Again, this makes a perfect base for friends traveling together or for a family. (If you need just one room, I would book at the Iketxe, as the downstairs rooms have their own private terraces). See the house here: artizarra.com

For couples traveling alone, in addition to the Iketxe, another very nice, new option is the **Higeralde**, located in the same Semisarga neighborhood as the Artizarra, also with beautiful views. We have not yet stayed at the newest B&B in Hondarribia but have placed it first on our list to try during our next visit when traveling by ourselves. And like the Artizarra, the traditional Basque furnishings are hand made or antiques with

armoires serving as closets, and the highly polished floors are terra cotta. The Higeralde offers 4 double-bedded rooms with private bath. Guests share a sitting area and breakfast room. The upstairs bedrooms have small balconies. High season rates run €65 per night. English spoken. See it at www.higeralde.com

If the above are full consider the immaculate Maidanea (but no English spoken here), or the 17th century **Arotzenea**. See both at www.nekatur.net These have also been featured in Special Places to Stay/Spain. At the Arotz Enea request the largest and nicest room, No. 4, with a balcony or the cozy attic room-the remaining three do not have as much charm, but here the rooms do come equipped with TV, the house has internet access, the proprietor, Agustín will look after you very well, and very nice breakfasts are served in the garden. See more pictures and guest comments at www.toprural.com

IN THE OLD QUARTER

The castle/fortress **Parador de Carlos V** (www.parador.es) dates from the 10th century; it has an imposingly austere, defensive façade and 8 ft. thick walls and sits directly on a pedestrians only square. Ferdinand and Isabella and their son Charles V, the Holy



Roman Emperor once resided here. One of the most atmospheric castle Paradors in the system, (and one of the most popular) it's filled with antiques, suits of armor, tapestries. Reserve a room with view of bay below. Baths are predictably large, Parador-style. The "special room", Room 301, the Reina María Cristina, has views of the bay and the Old Quarter and has a sitting room, attic and 2 balconies, available in '07 for €269 per night, rising to €275 in '08. This Parador has a total of only 36 rooms. Like the Parador in Limpias, Cantabria, this parador supposedly has a resident ghost who makes his appearance during the quiet months of January and February. Ask the Director, Pilar, about the smiling Celedonio.

If booking in high season, do so several months in advance, as this Parador fills up very quickly and is actually quite popular year round. Tariffs are steep here and do not vary-in '08 the rate will be 205€ all year long, but the rate does include breakfast.

Breakfast can be taken in the beautiful interior courtyard or on the terrace. This Parador is seldom available in high season through the Parador discount programs, such as the 5 night or Golden Age plans. These discount rates are available here only during the winter, bringing the tariff down to €135 per night on the Sunday-Thursday 5-night Plan. In addition to the high tariffs, the other disadvantage to staying here is that the gated parking lot is located below the main entrance, requiring guests to carry their bags up a steep flight of steps. And the Parador has no restaurant, but fine dining abounds in town and in the immediate area. You will be only 20 km away from San Sebastián, the premiere dining capital of Spain. If you are not a Parador guest and drop in for a drink, your access is limited to the lobby and adjacent bar only.

The 15th century archbishop's mansion, the 3-star **El Obispo** (www.hotelobispo.com), has 17 rooms with décor done by the designers of Artespaña. Rooms have TV, mini-bar and pretty views of the estuary. The best room is No. 202 in yellow with a black wrought-iron headboard and two French carved wooden chairs. Room 204 is also very pleasant. There is a cheerful breakfast room and also a 14-person dining room only open in summer. To me, the Obispo seems lighter, airier, less dark and gloomy than its

neighbor, the Pampinot because it is set on an open square. There are a few free parking spaces at the entrance and an outdoor terrace below. It is a JP Moser selection. This is my boutique hotel of choice in Hondarribia. Owners are friendly, they provide a warm welcome, prices are moderate, and they respond to emails quickly. Owner: Victor Alza Lekuona. Breakfast is extra.

Another palatial mansion, the **3-star Pampinot** (www.hotelpampinot.com), housed Maria Teresa before her wedding to Louis XIV. It has an austere stone façade but the reception is a spacious area with massive stone floor and exposed stonewalls with 2 huge altarpieces. There's also a little bar tucked into what was once the fireplace and a dramatic staircase leads up to the 8 bedrooms, 4 on each level, each decorated differently, all with antiques. But the décor may seem too dark and heavily ornate for your taste. It is a selection of Secret Places, as is the above-mentioned Iketxe. It is also handled by Inns of Spain. Buffet breakfast is offered but at a steep €15 per person-same price as the Parador's. Owner: Olga Alvarez. Breakfast is extra.

Those who need to watch their budget closely may want to consider a sweet little hotel, very inexpensive, on Hondarribia's prettiest plaza of the Old Quarter, Plaza de Gipuzkoa, the **Hotel Palacete** (www.hotelpalacete.net). This bijoux, 9-room property is a renovated mansion, with doubles going for €68 (low) to €95 (high season). The hotel also offers 3 single rooms and one which is handicapped accessible. Breakfast is served on terrace for €7. Rooms come with satellite TV, Internet access, safes, baths with hair dryer, but no a/c. Book the largest room with wall of windows facing the square.



IN MODERN HONDARRIBIA

Within walking distance of the village

Hotel Jaizkibel

This 4-star minimalist design, but very attractive hotel (www.hoteljaizkibel.com), offers very comfortable, modern rooms for at moderate price. In low season the very spiffy doubles are often available for under €100.

There is private parking, a restaurant, bar and all the modern conveniences. It's located in a quiet, upscale residential neighborhood but within walking distance of the center of town. If you're looking for a full service hotel, this fits the bill nicely and at a lower tariff than the Parador.

Family Apartments

Hotel Jauregui

This hotel (www.hoteljauregui.com), a member of the Husa chain, down in the port, on C/Zuloaga, has apartments on the top floor of the hotel that can be rented by the day or week. Nothing fancy but good for families on a budget who want to be within walking distance of the beach.

DINING

Moderate

Restaurante Gran Sol

In the fishermen's quarter on pedestrianized Calle San Pedro, has become our favorite place for informal dining in Hondarribia (www.bargransol.com). It was opened fairly recently by the owners of the fabulous pintxos (tapas) bar next door, which has become phenomenally popular. We always have lunch here during the week. From Tuesday to Friday they serve a set menu for lunch (with several choices for each course) for a bargain €16. This can be creative cuisine at its best, three courses including bread and a beverage (water, cider, wine).

If you want to sit on the outdoor terrace, reserve a few hours in advance (there is a €1.00 supplement for a terrace table). On Saturday and Sunday an a la carte menu is served only. Closed Sunday night and Monday. Do not miss trying the wonderful fare at Gran Sol, either sitting on the terrace or standing at the pintxos bar next door.

Hermandad de Pescadores

On the main street directly across from the wharf, La Lonja, is a rustic, bustling, convivial place for impeccable seafood that is rushed over from the docks to the restaurant's grill, couldn't get any fresher. You'll dine at communal wooden tables, but you'll need to reserve ahead of time, particularly on weekends when the French arrive in droves via the ferry from Hendaye. Try the merluza en salsa verde (hake in green sauce), the house specialty.

Don't opt for the menú del día as it's far less interesting. You'll find it inexpensive, fun and informal. Closed Tuesday nights, all day Wednesday, December 24 - February 1, one week in May and 1 week in October. Average check: €40 per person.

Arraunlari

On the boardwalk, facing the sea, Paseo de Butrón 3, is a fine choice with outdoor terrace affording views of neighboring Hendaye, France across the bay (www.arraunlari.com). It serves a menú Bidasoa for a reasonable €25. Not quite a gourmet temple but not your average casa de comidas either. average casa de comidas either. It has an excellent reputation among the local cognoscenti.

Arroka-Berri

For something less well known but very nice, serving traditional Basque cuisine with a creative twist, my new Hondarribia favorite is the Arroka-Berri (www.arrokaberri.com), in the upper town on the right side of the road to the Cabo Higer lighthouse at Higer Bidea, 6. It's housed in a salmon colored, typical Basque farmhouse, recently remodeled. There's ample car parking across the street.

GOURMET-EXPENSIVE

Alameda

For fine dining, this Michelin star treat, choose the family run Alameda, across from the road leading up to the Old Quarter and the Parador. Considered by gastronomic critics as one of the finest spots in all the Basque Country. The owner / chef, Gorka Txapartegui, is one of the country's rising stars. If you can dine in only one of Hondarribia's fine restaurants, splurge on the Alameda (www.restalameda.com).

The chef offers a 4-course set menú Gartzinea for €35, a longer menu Hondarribia for €50 and a degustation menu for €80. It receives one sol (sun) from the prestigious Campsa guide, a rating of 15 (very high) from the Guía Gastronómica y Cultural del País Vasco and a 7/10 from The Best of Spanish Gastronomy. It closes Sunday nights, Monday and Tuesday plus 2nd week of June, 1st week of October and for 3 weeks around the Xmas holiday season. Tel: 943 642 789.

Ramón Roteta

For a more formal and traditional haute cuisine meal in an elegant setting try Ramón Roteta. The restaurant is housed in a pretty villa with a lovely terrace for alfresco dining and can be found on the main road leading into town. Tables boast beautiful china and crystal.

The food is refined, and the chef creates fine desserts, particularly homemade ice creams. But expect an average check of €85 per person. (Alameda is a much better value). Closed Sunday nights, Tuesdays except during the summer. Closed the last 2 weeks in February and last two weeks of November. Tel: 943 64 16 93

Restaurante Sebastián

For something in between, choose restaurante Sebastián, Calle Mayor, 11, in the Old Quarter (www.sebastianhondarribia.com). It's on the way to the Parador, on your right past the town hall.

This restaurante is in a former tobacco shop and has a cozy downstairs dining room with open beams and a fireplace with walls covered with paintings by local artists. The chef is Miguel Soto, and he offers a tasting menu for only €42. It closes Sunday nights and Mondays, and 1st two weeks of November. Tel: 943 640 167.

PINTXOS BARS

There are several great pintxos (tapas) bars located in the fishing quarter. The first, **Gran Sol**, is located along the pedestrian C/San Pedro, which is one short block behind the main street. The bar, run by two young men, has won numerous gastronomic awards for its creative pintxos. Every dish is a little work of art and holds its own with the very best pintxos bars of San Sebastian. Go early because the pintxos disappear quickly and kitchen closes before 11:00 pm. If you arrive at 7:00 pm, you'll find the bar covered with cold pintxos but you must wait until 7:30 to order the delectable hot pintxos from the kitchen.



One member of your party must order their Hondarribia, made with foie. During the summer, the bar and terrace become mobbed very quickly. I suggest you grab a spot at one of the barrel tables on the outdoor terrace (no chairs-this is stand up dining) and send one member of your party inside to order and then to wait at the bar. The bartender will ask for your name and call you when your order from the kitchen is ready. No waiter service. It's survival of the fittest here, but you simply should not miss these highly inventive treats.

The second bar, found on C/Zuloaga, the main street, is **Yola Berri**, a local hangout with long wooden tables and benches, and a bar covered with pintxos from 11:00 am on. Hot pintxos are also available from the kitchen. It's across the street from the Hotel Jauregui at San Pedro, 22.

The **Jauregui hotel** (www.hoteljauregui.com) has its own fine pintxos bar, the Enbate, which is very handy for late night dining, as the kitchen doesn't close until 11:30 pm. This bar was a finalist in this year's Euskal Herria pintxos competition.

Two other bars that we enjoy on pedestrianized C/San Pedro, are **Bar Ignacio**, No. 20, look for the green and white façade, (www.barignacio.com), which serves yummy potato omelets. You can sit at bar or at tables, and it's a local classic, plus **Bar Alcanadre**, at No. 26, which also serves a good value menu del día.

BREAKFAST AND MID-MORNING COFFEE

Have an inexpensive breakfast (tostadas topped with orange marmalade and ladrillos) at Cafeteria Kai-Alde, on the main drag, C/Zuloaga, across from the magazine & newspaper shop (that sells the IHT).

GOURMET SHOPPING

Although we pick up grocery staples at the handy Eroski supermarket near the airport, we head to the specialty shops downtown for our gourmet items. We shop first at the gourmet delicatessen Solbes, located across the street from the tourist office, for their nice selection of wines, their fresh fruits and their prepared foods.

Then we head to pedestrians only C/San Pedro, 45, in the fishermen's quarter to the charcuterie, Urdai-Azpikoak, Jon Alzaga, which sells a great selection of Iberian hams and Pyrenees cheeses.

Finally, we buy some of the best baguettes we've ever tasted at Ogi, Artesanos del Pan, also on Calle San Pedro, between the Gran Sol and the laundry-dry cleaners, lavandería.

FOR CHILDREN-TEENS

There is a very modern indoor sports complex, a yacht harbor and new fishermen's pier, with restaurant, on the way to the very clean, well-maintained family beach, as well as several children's playgrounds.

NIGHTLIFE

Hondarribia offers little in terms of nightlife compared to San Sebastián, but one can have a nightcap in the pretty garden of the popular bar and dance club, Truck, located on the road that leads to the city's beaches.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

The San Sebastián airport is located in Hondarribia and offers service to Madrid, Barcelona, Málaga and Sevilla.

Public busses depart from several downtown stops to San Sebastián every 20 minutes.

One can take a little ferry, *navette maritime*, the Marie Louise, from the old pier/parking lot area in downtown Hondarribia to the port of neighboring Hendaye, just across the Txingudi Bay in France, where you can walk to the expansive family beaches. The ferry departs every 30 minutes.