

**Maribel's Guide to the Pays Basque ©  
Excursions into the Pays Basque - southwest France**



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## **Useful links for planning your Pays Basque vacation**

- [biarritz.fr](http://biarritz.fr)
- [bayonne-tourisme.com](http://bayonne-tourisme.com)
- [saint-jean-de-luz.com](http://saint-jean-de-luz.com)
- [guetary-france.com](http://guetary-france.com)
- [urrugne.com](http://urrugne.com)
- [touradour.com](http://touradour.com)
- [tourisme64.com](http://tourisme64.com) (French/Spanish only)
- [bearn-basquecountry.com](http://bearn-basquecountry.com)

## **Guide Books**

- Cadogan's Southwest France, Gascony & the Pyrenees
- Lonely Planet's Southwest France
- Hachette Vacances Southwest France
- Petit Futé Pays Basque (in French)
- Lonely Planet's Biarritz-Baonne et la Côte Basque (in French)

## **Travel Planning**

**Iberian Traveler** (beriantraveler.com) – American based company offering guided and self-guided small group tours in Spain, Portugal and southwest France. Specializing in custom designed wine and gastronomy packages in the Rioja, Navarra and the Basque Country, in addition to the Fiesta de San Fermin and the encierro, the running of the bulls, in Pamplona.

**Totally Spain** (totallyspain.com) - You can contact Irishman Ken Baldwin and Spaniard Belén Encina regarding hotel reservations and car hire throughout the country. They offer unbeatable personalized service. Highly recommended for easy travel planning throughout Spain.

If you're without a car and just want to dip your toes into the French side of the Basque Country at a more expansive and warmer beach, take the little yellow Marie-Louise ferry (navette) from the pier in **Hondarribia** across the bay of Txinguidi to the town of **Hendaye** for a nice beach day. The ferry departs daily on the half hour. From June 15-Sept. 15 it departs every 15 minutes from 10:00 am to 1:00 am. Across the border the town of Hondarribia is known as Fontarrabie.

If you have a car and want to venture over the Spanish border into the **Pays Basque**, it is about a 19 km (12-mile) drive via Irún on the border (be prepared for congestion due to heavy truck traffic). Once you cross the border, for the most scenic drive, take the coastal route, the *Corniche D912*, from Hendaye north to St.-Jean-de-Luz. If you have several days, couple the coast with wanderings in the lush, green, rolling hills of the bucolic Pays Basque countryside. The Pays Basque is rather small, with less than 200,000 inhabitants and can be easily explored in about four days if you have a limited amount of time.

## The Stars of the Côte Basque

### St-Jean-de-Luz

Or **Donibane Lohizune** as its called in Basque, is a charming, lively, sophisticated (but extremely busy in summer) tuna, sardine and anchovy fishing port-turned-tourist-draw, made famous as the setting of an historic royal event. In 1660 a twenty two year old Louis XIV married the daughter of Phillip IV of Spain, María Teresa, in the **Eglise St.-Jean-Baptiste**. After the royal wedding, the main church door was walled up forever. Don't miss seeing this lovely Basque church; with its 3-tiered wooden balconies, scale models of traditional sailing ships hanging from the ceiling and the most beautiful altarpiece in the entire Pays Basque. In summer there are often evening concerts offered by the Maurice Ravel Academy of Music (9:30 p.m.) in the church, and there are Basque choral CDs for sale at the information desk. You can also visit the **Maison Louis XIV** on a guided tour, beside the Hotel de Ville. It was built for a wealthy ship owning family, the Lohobiagues, and was used by the Sun King as his temporary residence in the days preceding the extravagant wedding. Open June 1 - 30 and September 1 - 30 from 10:30 - Noon, 2:30 - 5:30. Open from July 1 - August 31, 10:30 - 12:30 and from 2:30 - 6:30. Closed Sunday morning and holidays.

The principal shopping area is along the pedestrian, boutique-lined **Rue Gambetta**, which connects the fishing port to the beach. Unfortunately in and among the sophisticated shops, one will now find an abundance of tourist trinkets, and a July/Aug. day on the Rue Gambetta can mean complete gridlock. Nonetheless, there are lovely handicrafts and delicious Basque gourmet treats to be found. Look for caramels (*kanougas*) at the **Pariès** pastry shop (#9), all sorts of wonderful gourmet products at **Maison Thurin** (#32), white, red, and blue pottery and table linens of **Créations Jean Vier** (#37-with a another beautiful store next to the Wax Museum, Musée Grévin, at the port on 1 rue d l'Infante), or soft, cream colored **Helena** table linens and towels, robes, slippers (on rue Loquin #38), stylish t-shirts and casual sportswear at **64** (#79) and a branch of Bayonne's **L'Atelier du Chocolate** (rue Loquin #12). Try the world famous *macarons*, made here since 1660 at the **Maison Adam** on the main square, Place Louis XIV, (which for me, taste even better than at Laduree in Paris). These *macaron* were served at Louis XIV and María Teresa's wedding. The maison also sells a delicious *gâteau basque*. And next door on the Place, you'll find yet another enticing linens and handicraft shop, the **Maison Charles Larre**, which sells the very stylish Artiga brand.



Don't forget to visit the terrific covered **farmers' market**, Les Halles, particularly on Tuesdays, Fridays and on Saturdays in July and August when the purveyors of fine farm produce set up outside stands. Go

**early**, by 9:00, to be able to park in the lot across from the train station. Pick up some Ossau-Iraty cheese, and Iroulégué wine is available across the street at the **Nicolas** wine shop for a picnic. Take a walk atop the seawall on the Promenade Jacques Thibault. Survey the sardine boats in the harbor or stroll along the soft sandy beach, which is the very best way to appreciate the town's fine architecture.

The beach promenade runs from the end of Rue de la République to the elegant, Edwardian style Grand Hotel. St. Jean's beach is very family friendly with several children's beach clubs, plenty of tents and lounge chairs for rent and fine, soft sand, making for a perfect family beach day and safer swimming than you'll find in Biarritz. But go **very** early in July and August, as it will be packed with sun seekers. Or have afternoon tea in the elegantly restored **Grand Hotel de Luz**, which overlooks the beach. You can even have spa thalassotherapy (seaweed) treatments at **Helianthal** on the Place M. Ravel. And golfers can play at **Golf de Chantaco** (call 24 hrs in advance) €68 for 18 holes, €49 for 9, varies by season. Par 70. Call 48 hours in advance to reserve. Golf clubs and carts can be rented. 05 59 26 14 22

***Nota bene:** Although **St-Jean-de-Luz** has everything one could want in a Pays Basque coastal fishing village; pretty setting, interesting history, lovely beach with play areas for children, nice dining, upscale shopping, water sports, golf, spas, a lively market, painters at work on the leafy square, complete with bandstand, surrounded by outdoor cafes, little tourist train, cesta punta (jai alai) at the frontón, and on and on... it suffers **tremendous** crowds in July and August. It's the Laguna Beach of the French Basque coast. Go in early June or off-season! If you come into town during high season, the rue Gambetta will be as crowded as a wait to ascend the Eiffel Tower!*

If you come in to St. Jean to shop and for lunch during the high season, I highly recommend taking refuge from the hordes, far away from Rue Gambetta, the Place Saint Louis and the touristy, "restaurant row" Rue de la République. We like to lunch above the madness on the boulevard Thiers, #30, at **Olatua**. They offer a very good value 3 course prix fixe lunch for €18, or your choice of plat plus dessert (great desserts!) or entree plus plat for only €14. Highly recommended by us and by the red Michelin. Garden dining in rear, olatua.com. For more casual fare such as tapas, salads or plats complets (lunch platters) try the atmospheric **Bar Basque** on this same street, look for the pink façade and green awning. They also serve miniature haute cuisine tapas at the bar and lunches on an outdoor terrace. A local hangout that attracted Hemingway and Ravel in their days.

If you come into St. Jean for an evening concert, have an early (7:30 pm) dinner at a new, contemporary gastronomic restaurant tucked away from the fray, in a lovely mansion near the Musée Grévin (wax museum), the **Zoko Moko**, the "quiet corner" in Basque, at 6, rue Mazarin. In high season it's open for dinner only, except for Sundays and holidays. In low season, it closes Saturday lunch/Sunday evening and Monday. It offers a three-course menu for €24, two courses for €18 (mid-week only) and a la carte around €40. Receives a high rating from the French food guides. Phone: 05 59 080 123

If you're a fish lover, particularly of cod and hake, and want an authentic, hearty Basque meal away from the madding crowd, we enjoy the cute little Bistrot **Pil-Pil Enea** near the market and next to a girls' school at 3 rue Sallogoity. It serves the freshest fish in town.

Or if you want to escape the crowds of St. Jean entirely, drive across the water to Ciboure, home of composer Maurice Ravel, to the seafood "shack" on the Nivelle, **Arrantzaleak**, a bit hard to find at 18, avenue Jean Poulou, *chemin de halage de la Nivelle*. Superb grilled fish, particularly the *thon blanc*, white albacore tuna - a Patricia Wells favorite. Set weekday lunch menu for €25, for dinner count on €30 pp. Closed Monday evening and Tuesdays, October - June. Closed from mid-December to mid-January. Phone: 05 59 471 075

Or for something new, a charming Basque Bistrot serving fresh fish in the port of Socoa, just beyond Ciboure, head to the pretty, family run **Kaiatxu**, "little pier" in Basque, at 29, avenue de A. Passicot, right at the port, with an outdoor terrace. Open every day from mid-July to September. It serves a very generous and well priced 3-course meal prepared by the women chefs for €25. Recommended by Pays Basque magazine.

Read more about the city here: [saint-jean-de-luz.com](http://saint-jean-de-luz.com)

## Biarritz

A quick 15 minutes up the autoroute from St-Jean-de-Luz is the elegant, stately (and formerly very staid) international resort of **Biarritz**, the former playground of British and European aristocracy and the crown jewel of the Côte Basque with a climate similar to Carmel, California. It's now inhabited in the summer by a mix of old money of the Belle Epoque style, and a large contingent of young surfers of the bohemian persuasion making it less snobby, more friendly, hip and even affordable, if you know where to look. While it doesn't have as much true Basque flavor other than its Neo Basque architecture, it remains very posh, sophisticated and beautiful summer resort. Biarritz was first made famous in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Napoleon III and his Spanish wife, Empress Eugénie, and now it's adopting to its new claim-to-fame as the surfing capital of France, and golfing capital as well. It hosts an International Surfing Competition in July, after the International Bridge Competition in June. Think Cannes without the show biz glitz or Monte Carlo without the Grimaldis, mega yachts, and high-rise condos and heavy police presence. The long, immaculate beach of **Grande Plage** is one of Europe's best surfing beaches, but for a swim, one must be very aware of the tides. The former fishing port area, the Ports des Pêcheurs, has a small, secluded beach (for families, the beach of St. Jean de Luz is safer and easier). Below the Casino on the Grande Plage you can stop for an ice cream or a drink and survey the surfing scene at **Dodin** or **Café O** with fairly reasonable prices, considering the prime real estate. The more time we spend in Biarritz, the more we fall under its spell. While it can't boast the exciting nightlife of its Spanish cousin, San Sebastián, just an hour away, it is a small city of great style, with a gorgeous coastline and stunning Belle Epoque architecture.

### Biarritz Sightseeing

I always begin my Biarritz day with a 9:00 am visit to the animated covered market, **Marché Couvert Les Halles**, on the rue des Halles (open 7:30 am - 1:30 pm). I enjoy it far more than its rival in Bayonne, particularly during the busy summer months, when it buzzes with life. (An on certain days in July and August, the market opens at night). Here you'll find the finest in fruits, vegetables, fish, meats, including the famous Bayonne or Ibaïona ham at Maison Montauzer (or at Paqui, on the street outside the market), and delicious *gâteau basque* at the Luz Tourtière stand. I have delicious coffee and a slice of Spanish omelet or homemade cake at the **Bar Chez Etienne** at the western end, in the right corner-a tiny spot with only 6 bar stools but a faithful, well-heeled clientele and a friendly and amusing chef. It's Michelin starred chef Alain Ducasse's favorite spot for a snack, a Biarritz institution.

Be sure to include in your own tour a stroll over to the **Rocher de la Vierge**, Rock of the Virgin, an outcrop topped by a statue of the Virgin Mary, reached via a long iron footbridge. If it's a clear day, you'll enjoy views of the entire Basque coast.

Children will enjoy the **Musée de la Mer** on the Esplanade on the walk to the Rocher. Open daily in season, 9:30 - 12:30 and 2:00 - 6:30 but in June from 9:30-7:00, and in July and August from 9:30 - midnight! They feed the seals at 10:30, and again at 5:00. Admission is €7.50 for adults and €4.80 for children. There's a €3 English audio guide, and it's great fun for all. Check out of season schedule at museedelamer.com.

If you tire of walking there's also the **Petit Train de Biarritz** to take you around the compact downtown area (but only goes up to the lighthouse with groups). It departs from the Casino on the Grande Plage every 30 minutes. On your way to the Rocher, visit the charming neo Roman-Byzantine **Eglise de Sainte Eugénie**, facing the beach, which is the venue for weekly concerts in summer, of jazz, gospel and chamber music. The church is beautifully maintained-make sure to visit and check the performance schedules-tickets are sold at the door. Then stroll down to the former fisherman's quarter, the **Port-des-Pêcheurs** at the Port Vieux. You can have an exemplary outdoor seafood lunch looking up at the Eglise at the highly regarded **Chez Albert**—menus here start at €36.50. (Closed Wednesday except in July and August).

After lunch, take the longer walk up to the northern end of the city to the lighthouse, **Le Phare at La Pointe Saint-Martin**, for even more expansive views of the entire coast (and climb the 249 steps to the top for even more amazing vistas). On your walk to the lighthouse, past the opulent Hôtel du Palais, stop to visit the Russian Orthodox Church, **Eglise Orthodox Russe**, on avenue de l'Impératrice, 8. Open daily

from July – September, 2:30 - 7:00 only (but may currently be closed for renovation). In Biarritz's heyday as the aristocrats' playground, so many Russian czars and Grand Dukes came down by train from St. Petersburg that they found the need for their own blue-domed Byzantine church, which they built across the street from the Empress's villa.

In that neighborhood, if it's open, peek in at the **Chapelle Imperial**, on rue Pellot, an 1864 creation of Napoleon III and Empress Eugénie. Designed by Viollet Le Duc in a combination Roman-Byzantine, Hispano-Moorish style. (It opens from July 1 - August 31 on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from 3:00 - 7:00 only).

Museum lovers should include **Asiatica**, the city's Museum of Oriental Art, which displays 1,000+ works from Nepal, India, China and Tibet, and is considered one of the best oriental art collections in all of Europe ([museeasiatica.com](http://museeasiatica.com)). It's located on rue Guy Petit, directly opposite the Hôtel Louisiane. One can rent an audio guide in English. It opens from 10:30 - 7:00 Monday - Friday and 2:00 - 8:00 on Saturday and Sunday.

## Shopping

You'll find world class shopping radiating from the Place Clemenceau (park in the underground **Place Clémenceau** garage on Avenue Verdun) on the following streets: **Rue Mazagran, Gambetta, Espagne** and **Av. Edouard VII**.

There's a branch of Hermès, a Mephisto shoe store offering styles not seen in the U.S. (in shopping gallery on Av. M Foch 4) and a branch of Galeries Lafayette.

## For unique Basque gifts

Stylish linens are your best bet here – you have a vast assortment from which to choose: there's **Jean-Vier** (at 58 Av. Edouard VII and 25 rue Mazagran) and **Helena**, (also with two shops, at 27 Av. Edouard VII and 33 rue Mazagran), **Euskal Linge**, more rustic linens at 14 rue Mazagran, plus very chic, contemporary linens of the **Artiga** brand at the **Maison Charles Larre** across from the market on 1 rue des Halles. The super star Parisian chef, Alain Ducasse chose Jean Vier table linens to adorn the tables for his Auberge Iparla restaurant in Bidarray and Jean Vier bathrobes for the Hotel Ostapé. I purchase cream and white bath towels (collection blanc), robes, slippers and baby bibs from Helena, table linens from Jean-Vier and kitchen towels, *panieres*, trays and other accessories from Maison Charles Larre. Check their web sites below to compare styles and colors, see what most appeals and works best with your color schemes and convert the measurements of your dining table to the metric system. Although Jean-Vier does have a shop in Paris in the 7<sup>th</sup> arrondissement on the rue de Vaugirard, the selection is much better here and in the outlet store, Espace Jean-Vier & l'Ecomusée, in St. Jean-de-Luz. You can also purchase the very chic Artiga linens in their boutiques in Espelette, Bordeaux and La Rochelle.

[jean-vier.com](http://jean-vier.com) / [euskal-linge.com](http://euskal-linge.com) / [artiga.fr](http://artiga.fr) / [helena-lingebasque.fr](http://helena-lingebasque.fr)

For typical Basque artisan wares, head straight to **Zaleki, Produits Regionaux**, the “comptoir du Pays Basque”, which offers linens, regional costumes, pottery, Basque food products, wines and brandies. It's located at rue Gaston Larre, 5, in the Port Vieux quartier, just a short stroll from the Place Clemenceau.

## For Sandals

**Les Sandales d'Eugenie** – 18, rue Mazagran for lovely Pare Gabia espadrilles and sandals. ([paregabia.com](http://paregabia.com)) You'll find another boutique in Bayonne on rue Argenterie, and you can purchase this brand in 3 stores on the Rue Gambetta in St. Jean-de-Luz plus at Le Bon Marché, Printemps and Galeries Lafayette in Paris.

## **For Resort Wear**

**Boutique 64** - On rue Gambetta below the covered market: for very “in vogue” t-shirts and other casual sportswear items for men, women, children and babies. They represent perfectly the casual-chic Côte Basque life style, and the co. is named for the department 64 of the Pyrénées Atlantiques. They have shops all over the Pays Basque: in St.-Jean-de-Luz on rue Gambetta, in Bayonne on rue Espagne, in Guéthary (*home shop is on rue de l'église off the N10*) in Bordeaux, Lyon, Paris, in the 6th at 16, rue St. Sulpice, and in Madrid at 64, Hermosilla, corner Velázquez. You can see their styles at [teeshirt64.com](http://teeshirt64.com).

## **For Specialty Foods**

Be sure to visit both the fine gourmet shop, epicerie **Arostéguy** (the Basque Fauchon), and cheese store, **Les Mille et Un Fromages** across from each other, up from the Place Clemenceau on Avenue Victor Hugo at #5 and #8 respectively (don't miss!).

For chocoholics, you'll find great chocolates at **Daranatz** on du Marechal Foch, below the Clemenceau parking garage, on the left side, walking towards Place Clemenceau, plus **Henriet** and **L'Atelier du Chocolate** on the Place Clemenceau. For caramels (*kanougas*) and *mouchous*, a type of macaroon, there's **Pariès** on 1 Place Bellevue. ([paries.fr](http://paries.fr))

Biarritz also has a **Musée et Plaisir du Chocolate**, which offers 45 min. visits ending with sampling, at 14 Avenue Beaurivage (parking). Open Tuesday - Saturday and Monday during school vacations. Check the current hours at [lemuseeduchocolat.com](http://lemuseeduchocolat.com).

The **Celliers des Halles**, 8 rue des Halles, across from the market, has a great selection of Irouléguay wines plus Gaillacs and Cahors, and there's also a handy **Nicolas** wine boutique (as nationwide chain) at 6 Place Clémenceau (unbeatable prices).

## **For ceramics**

A father and son team at **Cazaux et Fils**, at 15, rue Larréguy, produces beautiful hand made ceramic vases, bowls and tiles in their trademark blue and lavender. ([cazaux-ceramiques.com](http://cazaux-ceramiques.com))

## **For a Shopping Break**

For an afternoon spot of tea or cup of hot chocolate with separate bowl of whipped cream, head straight to **Pâtisserie Miremont**, also on the Place Clemenceau. Very much a “ladies who lunch” type of spot, this elegant tearoom has large picture windows with lovely views of the beach scene below.

For nice lunch break, have the 25€ gourmet menu on the lovely terrace facing the ocean at **Le Galion**, attached to the Hotel Windsor (chef, Patrick Damman, son of the hotel's owner, is making headlines).

Or for a choice of tapas, *gambas* (grilled shrimp), *tortillas* (omelets) or *parrilladas* (grilled fish medley), cross the street from the market to the always-lively **Bar Jean**, 5, rue des Halles (great atmosphere and flamenco on the stereo at night).

Or for a simple salad as a main course head to the Place Ste Eugénie, next to the church and bandstand, to one of the outdoor terraces of the brasseries on the square.

If you stay for a few days, get a copy of “Biarritz Scope and Shops”, which as a calendar listing the myriad summer events, including music, jai-alai- rural Basque sports, etc. The tourist office is located on square d'Ixelles, above the avenue Edouard VII, open 8:00 to 8:00.

For more city information see [biarritz.fr](http://biarritz.fr)

## A short gastronomic road trip from Biarritz

Take the car and head the short distance beyond the train station in La Negresse quarter upward on the route to Arbonne. Before reaching Arbonne village, take a right at the sign marked Domaine de Bassilour (or Quartier Bassilour). When you reach the pink chateau, the Domaine, you'll see another sign left towards the **Moulin de Bassilour**. There you will find a wonderful 18<sup>th</sup> century (1741) working flourmill, which makes the area's very best *gâteau basque* (can purchase a whole *gâteau* or simply a miniature, choose from black cherry or pastry cream fillings), plus bread (*pains de campagne*), *sablés* (butter cookies), *méture* (corn bread) and *miches* (sweet, anise-flavored bread). Recommended by Patricia Wells of The Food Lover's Guide to France. Not to be missed. It's open daily from 8:00 – 1:00 and 2:30 – 7:00. In the same neighborhood you'll find the factory for the **Henriet** chocolates. You can watch them being made from Monday - Friday from 9:00 - 1:00 and again from 2:00 - 4:30.

## Bayonne

### The spiritual capital of the Pays Basque

For genuine, un-touristy Basque flavor, venture on from the elegant, bustling coastal resorts to the quintessentially Basque city of **Bayonne** (Baïona in Basque), the most important commercial port and the spiritual capital of the Pays Basque, straddling the Rivers Adour and Nive. Founded by the Romans, it is still protected by ramparts, complete with a fort built by Vauban, Louis XIV's military architect. Unlike Biarritz, Bayonne, with its hard working population of 40,000 does not "pretty up" for tourists. It is what it is, doesn't put on airs, and while the whaling merchants' 19th century mansions facing the river may very much need a fresh coat of paint, and the city still shuts down for siesta, it's a charming and totally authentic place to spend the day.



Bayonne has three major tourist attractions (besides the culinary ones of Bayonne ham, chocolates and Izarra liqueurs) that prove to be time very well spent. The first two are located in the old quarter, **Le Petit Bayonne**. To see them all, you should park in the municipal lot at the Place de la République (parking De

**Gaulle**) and walk back across the bridge to Petit Bayonne. You can also reach Bayonne from Biarritz by taking the number 1 STAB bus (the bus company that provides transportation in the metropolitan Bayonne-Anglet-Biarritz area), and from St. Jean-de-Luz via the ATCRB bus that runs along the coast. The bus trip from Biarritz should take 15-20 minutes, and from St. Jean-de-Luz, you should count on at least 35 minutes or more during the months of July-August.

Read more about the city at [bayonne-tourisme.com](http://bayonne-tourisme.com)

## **In Petit Bayonne**

### **Sightseeing**

First visit the city's fine arts museum, **Musée Bonnat**, a gift to the city from Leon Bonnat, a local 19th century salon artist. Inside you'll find paintings by Bonnat himself, Botticelli, Degas, Murillo, El Greco, Rubens (an entire room), Goya and Ingres. From May to October, open daily, except Tuesday from 10:00 to 6:30. From November - April from 10:00 to 12:30 and 2:00 – 6:00, closed Tuesdays. Open daily in July and August. ([musee-bonnat.com](http://musee-bonnat.com))

Afterwards see one of the finest and largest ethnographic museums in all of Europe, the **Musée Basque**, reopened in '01 after a 5-year rehabilitation. Allow at least 1-1/2-2 hrs for this amazing, twenty thematic room museum, which will educate you in the history, culture, religion and general way of life of the Basque people, explain how Basque society is organized and the role of the port of Bayonne in the 19th century. Explanations written in French, Spanish and Basque only, but you can buy an English guide (5€) at the ticket desk to help in your understanding. **This is a truly fascinating museum.** Open May - October Tuesday - Sunday from 10:00 - 6:30 and from November – April, 10:00 am - 12:30 and 2:00 – 6:00. In July - August open Monday as well, from 10-6:30. And in July-Aug., Wednesday evenings are free, from 6:30 - 9:30. You can purchase a combined ticket for both museums ([musee-basque.com](http://musee-basque.com)).

### **Food Shopping**

You'll find the best Bayonne ham artisan, **Pierre (Chabagno) Ibaialde**, at work in his shop on Rue des Cordeliers, 41, in Petit Bayonne. He gives a demonstration then a tour of the drying room, ending with a sample of his delicious wares. The Ibaiona hams come from year old pigs fed only cereal, and the ham is coated with a mixture of sea salt, garlic and ground red Espelette pepper powder before hung to dry. ([pierre-ibaialde.com](http://pierre-ibaialde.com))

The new “petit prince” of scrumptious Basque pastries and chocolates (and European pastry champion) is **Thierry Bamas** whose pâtisserie is located at 55, rue Pannceau at the southern end of Petit Bayonne. Closed Monday. ([bamas.fr](http://bamas.fr))

Also before leaving Petit Bayonne, stop on the riverside quai Corsaires at No. 52 for a sample at the **Loreztia confiture** shop, selling the best black cherry jams and honey in the Pays Basque.

### **Dining**

If you're a foodie, set aside some time for a splendid lunch in Petit Bayonne at the **Auberge du Cheval Blanc**, 68, rue Bourgneuf, considered to be the city's top table. Housed in a former pony-express mail relay station from 1719, it is well deserving of its 1-star Michelin rating, but is neither formal nor fussy. We loved the cuisine of Chef Jean-Claude Tellechea, the service, the relaxing ambience, the paintings by a local artist and our *menu entre amis* (currently priced at €52). We had a confit of anchovies in orange vinaigrette, a tuna steak and strawberry coup with raspberries in a sabayon sauce made of Jurançon wine with vanilla ice cream plus an Irouléguay rosé wine from Ilarria. There is also a €30 mid-week *menu du pays* consisting of Bayonne ham, duck confit and gâteau basque, plus a dish of petits fours. One of the best

values in haute cuisine in the Pays Basque! Closed Saturday at lunch and Sunday nights (except during August), Mondays, July 2-12, August 1-6, February 18-March 19. Tel: 05 59 590 133

If you don't wish to spend that much time or money on your dining, there are plenty of casual restaurants with outdoor terraces along the River Nive quai for an inexpensive lunch. Look for **Bayonnais** at 38 Quai Corsaires in Petit Bayonne, whose chef, Christophe Pascal offers a fine value lunch menu for 15€ (closed Sunday and also Mon. from Sept.-June)

Or the very Basque **Itxaski** across the river on Quai Jauregiberry in Grand Bayonne, the more lively quai. Great grilled sardines and salads at the latter.

Note regarding the Basque separatist movement: While visiting Petit Bayonne, you may notice posters and flyers protesting the treatment of ETA prisoners on the part of the Spanish government, as well as other pro-Basque independence propaganda. This area was once a haven for fleeing ETA terrorists, as their French Basque sympathizers protected them until the crackdown by the government and greater cooperation of the French police in routing them out and extraditing them to Spain to stand trial. But regardless of everything that has happened over the past few years, pro-independence fervor remains strong here in the old quarter of this historic city.

## **In Grand Bayonne**

Bayonne's third monument of note is its Northern Gothic, twin towered **Cathédral Sainte-Marie** with its enormous cloisters (great photo op from here) and beautiful stained glass, and the area immediately surrounding it, the small but atmospheric place Louis Pasteur. Bayonne's whalers funded the construction of the cathedral, as the bishops demanded from them one tenth of their profits. You may see modern day pilgrims here, as Bayonne's cathedral is a staging area for the trek down to St.-Jean-Pied-de-Port to begin the Road of Saint James, to Santiago de Compostela. It's a UNESCO World Heritage site. The view of the illuminated cathedral at night from the bridge to the St. Esprit quarter is lovely. The cathedral is open 7:30 - noon and 3:00 - 7:00 from Monday - Saturday and on Sundays from 3:30 - 6:30 except during Mass.

## **Shopping**

### **For Chocolates**

Stroll along the pedestrian **rue Port-Neuf**, Grand Bayonne's major thoroughfare, where you'll find Bayonne's most famous purveyors of fine chocolates. Bayonne in fact introduced chocolates to France and at one time had more chocolate artisans than all of Switzerland- and seven of the original chocolate artisan shops remain. While there are far better known chocolate cities in Europe, Bayonne is the "unsung capital of cacao". After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, the edict of Nantes allowed Jews in France to worship freely, and because Bayonne was a port city, the Spanish Jews, after taking refuge in Portugal, took refuge here, bringing their chocolate making skills and imported cacao from the New World, and began the chocolate industry in 1496, settling in St. Etienne, in the St. Esprit quarter, across the River Ardour, where a small synagogue still exists on #33 rue Maubec as well as a Jewish cemetery. The St. Esprit quarter became the Sephardic Jewish ghetto because Grand Bayonne was off-limits for residence by non-Catholics. The **Cazenove**, founded in 1854, and next-door **Darantz** chocolate shops, under the archways on rue Port Neuf, are world famous for their chocolate creations. The former will tempt you with their famous hot chocolate, *mousseux de chocolat*, made by beating the chocolate with fresh farm milk, and served along with thickly buttered toast, in Limoges china decorated with tiny pink roses. The latter is known for its chocolate bonbons filled with Cointreau, Cavados and Grand Marnier. The *Creole* is a dark chocolate filled with rum and ganache (mixture of cream and chocolate), and the *Moctezuma*, is flavored with Mexican spices and orange flowers. There's also a branch here of Biarritz's **Pariès** at #14 which is famous for its *kanouga*, a chocolate caramel created for the visiting Russian dukes in 1905, flavored with coffee, vanilla and hazelnut. The oldest chocolate shop in Bayonne, since 1775, is **Pâtisserie Barrere** at #41. Their specialty is *Tête de Ghat*, a chocolate head of a cat filled with almond praline. They also sell a

great *millefeuille*, and *gâteau basque*. Not to be missed! Most of the chocolate in Bayonne comes now from South America, whereas Belgian chocolate is imported from Africa. **Mauriac** is found at No. 23. Yet another of Bayonne's renowned chocolate shops, **Heynard** is found at 8, rue des Gouverneurs, a continuation of rue Thiers (parallel to Port-Neuf), heading up towards the cathedral. In Bayonne the unofficial "tasting hour" begins at 5:00.

### **For Specialty Foods**

Also make your way from the cathedral to **rue d'Espagne** to see the food shops, including the Pays Basque's leading charcuterie, **Pierre Oteiza**, at #68, where you'll find the finest in gourmet items (hams, cheeses, black cherry jams) plus Irouléguay wines, and at No. 66, the **Puyodebat**, with its amazing chocolate fountain in the store window. The charcuterie, **Maison Montauzer**, at rue de la Salie, 17, is yet another purveyor of the finest Bayonne hams.

And don't forget the **covered market** (Les Halles) along the quai Commandant-Rouquebert, open Monday - Friday, 7:00 – 1:00. Outdoor farmers' market day is Saturday. It's less lively than Les Halles in Biarritz, but worth a visit and coffee break nonetheless.

### **For Gifts**

For unique **scents** for both men and women: perfumes, lotions, soaps unique to this area, see **Parfums et Senteurs du Pays Basque** on #4 rue de la Salie. Their wares make nice gifts. ([parfumsetsenteursdupaysbasque.com](http://parfumsetsenteursdupaysbasque.com)) Their other branches are found in Ainhoa, Espelette and headquarters in La Bastide Clairence.

For traditional Basque **handicrafts**, linens, hand painted ceramic dish ware, music, bèrets, you'll find them all under one roof at **Atmosphere Basques**, on the rue Luc, which intersects rue d'Espagne.

There's also a small branch of the department store, **Galeries Lafayette** near the rue Port Neuf and also a handy **Monoprix** for Woolworth type, cheap five & dime shopping.

For beautiful Basque **espadrilles** and sandals, go to Pare Gabia on #1 rue Argenterie. ([paregabia.com](http://paregabia.com))

Monsieur Léoncini is one of the remaining three artisans who still hand make the famed *makhilas*, the Basque **walking stick** with concealed dagger. His shop can be found in the old quarter of Grand Bayonne at No. 37 rue Vielle-Boucherie, near Place Montaut, the street found at the top of the rue d'Espagne. If these walking sticks strike your fancy, and you'd like to make a purchase, you can do so online from the other famed makhila maker, the Atelier Ainciart-Bergara in the village of Larressore. ([makhila.com](http://makhila.com))

### **Festivals**

Bayonne celebrates a Chocolate Festival May 10 - 22, a Cider Festival May 29, a Ham Festival three days before Easter, a mid July Jazz on the Remparts Festival and their famous **Fêtes de Bayonne** (in '08 from August 6-10), riotous five day celebration with Basque brute strength sports, jai-alai matches, music, fireworks, parades of giants, bull running and bullfights, when the entire city dresses in red and white, ala Pamplona's San Fermín. If you're in Bayonne in July, all the store windows will be decorated in red and white, anticipating the festival. The official festival site is <http://fetes.bayonne.fr>

For more information about the city see [bayonne-tourisme.com](http://bayonne-tourisme.com)

## Drives into the lovely, bucolic Pays Basque countryside Full day excursion (if possible, divide into two days) which covers the Labourd and Basse-Navarre sections

From Hondarribia in Spain or from St. Jean-de-Luz or Biarritz, you can take an interesting daylong, country drive (or several) through dewy pastures and meadows, rolling hills, with the most handsome cream-colored cows in all of Europe, to the incredibly picturesque inland Pays Basque villages.

### Ascain

Your first stop should be at well-groomed and prosperous **Ascain**. Here as in all the other Basque villages, in the square you'll find the Holy Trinity of buildings: the pelota court (on this side of the border painted pink or salmon), the 17th century Basque church and the town hall, Mairie. Ascain's pretty church has typical two-story wooden balconies and a manicured, flower bedecked cemetery. In this, as in all the villages in the Pays Basque, the cemeteries are tourist worthy sights. Look for the unusual discoidal (round-headed) gravestones with what looks like a swastika, or four commas joined together, but is instead the ancient Basque symbol you'll see duplicated on Basque handicrafts on both sides of Euskadi, the Basque Lands. It's called the *lauburu*, the Basque cross, and represents the movements of the sun. Predating the Christian cross, it's now come to be used as a symbol of good luck and fortune. This symbol is also used, curiously enough, by Hindus and in North America by the Navajo tribe.

Note the beautiful porcelain flowers decorating the lovingly cared for tombstones. The two (or sometimes three) tiered balconies were the fiefdom of men only, being closer to God, while the women remained below, standing guard on the floor above the family tombstones.

In some Pays Basque churches you'll find sculpted tiles on the floor of the nave. Each tile represents a house of the village. During services, the women were responsible for standing on their own family tile and would melt wax over the tomb in memory of the house's dead.

*Etxea* means house in Basque. Traditionally, three generations of the family would live together under one roof, the family above, and the animals below. The eldest, either boy or girl, usually the first to marry, would inherit the home and take over the family affairs. The *etxea* was always given a name, which was frequently adopted by the family as its own. If you notice the names on the tombstones you'll see many begin with "Etche", such as Etchevery, Etcheverria or Etchegory.

For shopping at your first stop, **Le Confit d'Ascain** is a good place to pick up duck confit, foie and other gourmet items. If you happen to be in Ascain at lunchtime, treat yourself to a €25 menu on the courtyard terrace at **L'Atelier Gourmand** at the Place du Fronton. Every Sunday in July and August in Ascain, you can attend a "bullfight" in which the bulls, or cows in this case, are not fought to the death but instead "played with", jumped over by professional bull runners in a one-hour spectacle, the "Course de Vaches Royale". The animals aren't subjected to any cruelty or suffering, it's acceptable "theater" for children.



### Sare

After Ascain you head on the D4 for **Sare**, passing mid way through **La Rhune** ([rhune.com](http://rhune.com)), where there's a delightful open-car, wooden, cog-railway, built in 1924, that takes you 1,000 ft up the sacred mountain (elevation: 3,000 ft.) to an unforgettably scenic view point. The mountain of La Rhune has been considered sacred since the Stone Age, and since Empress Eugénie visited in 1859, it's been the most important tourist

attraction in the French Basque countryside. On the ride up to the summit, you'll pass shaggy horses, called *pottok*, which were once used in mining and now used only for pony-trekking. It's about a 35-minute ride on this four-kilometer route with train moving at only about 8 km per hour. **But** if you decide to take the train in the summer time, arrive *early, early, early and early* so as to be in line at the ticket office by **8:00 am**, to purchase your tickets when it opens at **8:30** for the first run up at **9:00**. We arrived "late" at 8:30 am with the line already formed and missed the first train but caught the second. By noon, all runs for the day can be sold out! It becomes extremely crowded during the summer with tour bus groups, hikers, and families. Most hikers go early, on the first or second runs, so that they can take the walk down while it's still relatively cool. Many hearty souls do prepare a picnic, take a backpack, plenty of water and after training up, walk back down on well marked trails, a trek of about two hours. Once atop the mountain, you'll be rewarded with sweeping views of Navarra on the Spanish side and St.-Jean-de-Luz and the coast. There's also a *venta* or "roadhouse" restaurant where one can have a quite decent lunch. This delightful train runs from March 19 thru Nov. 2.

On the road to Sare you'll pass the **Musée Gâteau Basque**, a typical Labouridan farmhouse, the Maison Haranea, where 80-minute demonstrations are given of how to prepare this traditional Basque dessert, with ample tasting during and after-of the delicious dough and the final product. The demonstrations are given only in French, but the pastry chef, Bixente Marichular, does speak very good English and will chat with you afterwards. We've sat through the French demonstration twice, understanding very little (missed most all the engaging chef's jokes) but enjoying the ample sampling and buying the special cake pans and a mini gâteau for our evening's dessert. Fantastic!

- From April 10 - May 6, visits at 11, Monday - Saturday and also at 2:30 pm on Monday – Friday.
- May 8 - June 30: visits at 11:00 am on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.
- July 6 - September 2, visits at 11:00 am Monday – Saturday, plus 3:00 and 4:30 pm Monday – Friday.
- Sept 4-Oct. 20: visits at 11:00 on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

Always **closed** Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday. [legateaubasque.com](http://legateaubasque.com)

*N.B.: While I firmly believe that Bixente Marichular bakes the best gâteau around, there are also two alternative and also fine sources, if the Museum is closed. In the Bidart countryside, in the Bassilour quartier, there's the **Moulin de Bassilour** (see above) and if driving through St. Pée-sur-Nivelle, stop at **Pâtisserie Pereuil** on the main road in front of the church. Their secret recipe dates from 1870.*

Another tourist attraction nearby in **Sare** are the prehistoric caves, **Grottes de Sare** which can be visited via a guided *son et lumière*, light and sound show tour lasting about an hr. It requires an easy ½ mile walk in this subterranean labyrinth, following a guide. While you won't see any Paleolithic cave paintings a la Lascaux or Altamira, it makes for an interesting visit, nonetheless. Visit starts with a 15 min. video, in French, about the tiny bats inhabiting the cave-these bats you won't see on your walk unless the guide points his flashlight into a crevice for you. Tour in French only, but an explanation sheet in English will be given to you at the ticket booth. Open February and March, November and December from 2:00 am – 5:00 pm and in April, May June and September from 10:00 am – 6:00 pm. July-Aug. from 10: am – 7:00 pm, October from 10:00 am – 5:00 pm. *Note: as of June '07, the caves have been closed due to flood damage, and a re-opening date has not yet been set.* ([sare.fr/grottes\\_sare.html](http://sare.fr/grottes_sare.html))

If you won't be visiting the superb Basque ethnographic museum in Bayonne, stop for a guided tour (alas, in French only) to a restored Basque farmhouse, circa 1660, the **Maison Ortillopitz**, 1 km off the road between Sare and Ascain, to get a sense of Basque rural daily life. It is open daily from April – October with hours in May – June from 2:00 – 6:00 pm, July - August, from 11:00 am – 7:00 pm and September - October from 2:00 – 5:00 pm. ([ortillopitz.com](http://ortillopitz.com))

*There is another 17th century Basque farmhouse, a "basseri" in Basque, la **Maison Labourdine** in Ustaritz, just 10 km from Bayonne that can also be visited. Guided one hour visits daily in July, August*

and September, 11:00 am, 1:00, 4:00 and 6:00 pm. ([lamaisonlabourdine.com](http://lamaisonlabourdine.com)) The village of Ustariz is found on the D 932 between Cambo-les-Bains and the autoroute 63.

But again, neither farmhouse is a really equal substitute for the truly impressive Museum of Basque culture in Bayonne.

The 3-flower village of **Sare**, one of “les plus beaux villages de France”, which became wealthy during the 19th century through the smuggling trade, or as the Basques called it, their “night work”, lies ahead along a road winding through the wooded countryside.

It's separated from Spain by the Pyrénées, but the mountains have never constituted a barrier. They've served as a private link between the Basque families on both sides and have over the years seen a constant movement of sheep, contraband, war-time refugees, both from the Spanish Civil War and World War II, even ETA terrorists in the seventies and eighties.

**Sare** ([sare.fr](http://sare.fr)) is picture postcard perfect with its two frontons and lovely white homes decorated with geraniums and bulls blood red, blue, green or brown shutters. There are also sweet-faced, gentle *pottoka* horses, breed only in the Basque Country, to ride at the Olhadea equestrian center. These ancient horses were formerly exported to Britain to work in the mines and were later saved from extinction, but only a few hundred still remain. There's a *pottoka* reserve in Bidarray to protect them. You can take a *promenade* in a caleche, a 40-minute carriage ride around the village during the summer. And you're sure to stumble upon some sort of festival during July or August; either a *pottoka* exhibition, a Basque brute (rural) sports contest, a *pelota* match, a choral concert or a performance by Basque dancers.

There are a number of nice shops here for Basque linens and gourmet products. I'm particularly fond of the hand painted Basque dinner wear in cream with red/green stripes, the “Amatxi” pattern, available at **Casa Piment** here in the village. The **Hotel Arraya** has a shop attached and even a stand on the street that sells its famous *gâteau basque* (but I believe the Musée bakes a superior one). The village tourist office upstairs on the square has a bounty of information about the surrounding area and a brochure listing all the summer festivals. The Eglise Saint Martin in Sare is quite pretty inside, and its cemetery with Basque tombstones is interesting.

If you visit the Sare environs during the fall, you may be witness to “*l'enfer des palombes*” or wood pigeon hell, between Sare and Bera, Spain, on the old smugglers' route. Miles and miles of nets are strung between the tress along the Lizarieta Pass. As the unsuspecting migrating wood pigeons swoop down through the pass, they're trapped, shot and roasted or preserved in glass jars and sold in the local boutiques.

If you arrive in Sare at lunchtime, your best dining will be in the lovely **Hotel Arraya**, located off the main square. We've had wonderful meals here (after having tried the competition across the street, we've decided this is the village's best and also most inviting and classy restaurant). In winter, ask for a table near the fireplace; in summer, dine shaded by the plane trees on the terrace. You will be warmly welcomed, and you will receive attentive service. We choose the inexpensive set menu for lunch. If you're given the regular menu, just ask for the set lunch menu (around €21), and it will be provided. The wait staff speaks good English. ([arraya.com](http://arraya.com))

## **Ainhoa**

After Sare, move on south to **Ainhoa**, which some say is one of the prettiest villages in all of France, and another 3-flower, “les plus beaux villages de France”, just a one street village of 17th and 18th century half-timbered homes with asymmetric roofs, many bearing the family name and the year constructed carved above the door lintels. Look for the “Gorritia”. The church is particularly beautiful with its two-tiered wooden balconies and graveyard of discoidal tombstones.

There's a very nice store here for Basque linens and handicrafts, the **Cerises et Piments** and a branch of **Pierre Oteiza** for gourmet items/wines. The **Arts Populaires** shop, as the name implies, sells a bounty of

Basque handicrafts, books, and music, including my favorite hand painted ceramic dinnerware in the “Amatxi” pattern—it’s located on the opposite side of the main drag, near the car park. There are Basque dances in the Place du Fronton from July 24-31. The annual village fete runs from August 15-18.

If it’s lunch time when you reach this 3-flower village, the **Hotel Ithurria** has a fabulous and elegant dining room with Parisian-formal style service, awarded with Michelin macaron (star), and a set mid-week menu for €35, if you’re up for a splurge. (Closed Wed. and Thurs. for lunch, except high season, also closed Nov.-April). Chef Isabel prepares the best *cassoulet* with red beans and duck confit you might ever have! The Ithurria is widely considered one of the best restaurants in the entire Pays Basque, and pre-booking for the weekends is essential (weekend set gourmet lunch will run around €50). ([ithurria.com](http://ithurria.com))

Or for something more moderate, the **Oppoca** on the Place du Fronton serves a delicious hearty Basque menu for €18.

## Espelette

Upon leaving Ainhoa, drive northeast to my favorite of all the Labourdian villages, the much photographed red pepper village of **Espelette**, (Ezpeleta in Basque) a colorful, captivating town of red, green and white. (You may want to save this destination for lunch at the wonderful **Hotel Euzkadi**). If you arrive in October the village will be a riot of red, as these peppers, which have their own AOC, are hung out in garlands to dry from hooks on the house facades. The pepper festival, Fête du Piment, is held on the last weekend of October, which attracts thousands for the traditional blessing of the peppers, the singing and the processions. These chili peppers were brought by the conquistadors from Haiti and Mexico and grow well here because of the hot, humid summers, typical of the immediate area. They were baked in the oven and ground into powder, initially used as an ingredient in chocolate. The pepper harvest season lasts for ten weeks, commencing in mid-August. These peppers are harvested by hand, and the peppers strung together in the traditional *cordes*, strands or garlands, or ground to make various and sundry condiments. The *piment d’Espelette* is as important an ingredient in French Basque country cooking as curry in India, and only ten villages in this area are allowed to produce it.

The town’s 17<sup>th</sup> century church has beautiful carvings inside and the customary Basque graveyard filled with discoidal grave markers. The tourist office is located in a small stone chateau on the edge of the town, and on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor you can see a photo exhibition of chili peppers from around the world.

## Shopping and tasting in Espelette

Kids will enjoy the free samples at **Atton Chocolatier**, one of the Labourd region’s best chocolate makers, open March 1-Nov. 15. Try their *ganache* made with Espelette pepper.

We buy our favorite slate blue, white and sand colored Basque linens at one of the two **Maison d’Artiga** stores ([artiga.fr](http://artiga.fr)) on the main street running through the village.

The local rustic yellow and red pottery can be purchased at **Agothea**, a small shop around the corner

Unusual perfumes and lotions, which make great gifts, can be sampled and bought at the **Parfums et Senteurs du Pays Basque**

You can pick up the red pepper Espelette powder and paste at any one of the grocery shops along the main street, or at the **Bipia** factory in the next village, Larressore, along the D 932 highway going south to Cambo (left side of road-closed weekends).

(Prices here are a fraction of what this expensive powder retails for in the US—the importer is IGO foods from San Francisco, operated by French Basque chef Gerald Hirigoyen’s wife Cameron)

You might want to hit Espelette on a Wednesday, which is market day (also Saturday in July and August).

If you visit on the last Tuesday or Wednesday in January, you will be able to witness the annual Pottok horse fair, where these shy, shaggy horses are bought and sold.

## **Larressore**

Before venturing southeast into the Basse Navarre, your next stop, a quick detour off the Espelette road, should be to **Larressore**, where you can visit and shop at the famous walking stick, or *Makhila*, studio of the Ainciart-Bergara family, who have been in business here for 200 years. These world-famous walking sticks first used by shepherds and pilgrims during the Middle Ages, have beautiful silver or gold handles that can be monogrammed with ones' initials and a motto of one's choice, and all are still made by hand from the wood of the medlar tree. The branch is cut and dried for up to **12** years to increase its strength. You can see the artisans at work, and a lady will give you an explanation in English. Famous makhila owners have been members of royalty, popes and current and past heads of state, including Reagan, Churchill and de Gaulle. Makhila in Basque means "death giver", as every makhila has a hidden blade in its handle. The lady, during her explanation, will unscrew the handle to reveal a tiny sharp spike. Some say the makhila was the inspiration for the Bayonne blacksmiths who invented the bayonet. One needs to have his makhila custom made. They'll take your measurements when you visit, but you'll have a 6-month wait before you receive your perfectly balanced walking stick. One can also order on the web. Prices **START** at €230, going up to €550! ([makhila.com](http://makhila.com))

## **Itxassou**

Leaving Larressore, you can head south on the D 918 with a quick detour to the right (west) to the small black cherry town of **Itxassou**. Not much to see here but a few inns (which all serve fine food) and the pink pelota court at the square, and the village's extremely pretty church with 3-tiered wooden balconies and lovingly tended, flower bedecked cemetery in the **lower town** (follow signs to Hotel du Chêne). We always stop on the way out of town at a local farm, the Ferme Atharri Xola, (follow the *ferme cerises noires* signs), to pick up a jar of the town's famed *confiture de cerises noires*, black cherry jam, and then at the Ferme Mirentxu Elissalde for Ossau-Iraty ewe's cheese. But there is a shop next to the church in the lower town selling these items and which is conveniently open on Sunday. The Hotel du Chêne next to the church in the lower village has a lovely shaded patio if you need a stop for a coffee or a *panaché* (beer cut with lemonade or sweet soda). Or if you land here for lunch, both it and the Hotel du Fronton in the upper village serve weekday set lunch menus for 18€ and both appear in the Michelin red guide.

## **Bidarray**

Continuing southeast on the D918 and crossing the boundary from the province of Labourd to Basse-Navarre, you follow the River Nive to **Bidarray**. In order to see the upper town, with its incredibly scenic views from town square, you must detour up to the top of the plateau, following signs to the Auberge Iparla restaurant in the heart of the village. This is well worth the detour for the vistas alone, plus a great lunch stop at a venture of Parisian super chef, Alain Ducasse, the **Auberge Iparla**. It has a handsome, casually elegant dining room and also outdoor terrace, and a gourmet chef, Alain Souillac (see review below). This has become THE destination for gourmets in the Pays Basque countryside outside of the Biarritz area. Bidarray's church is unusual, as it is 12th century, without the usual, 3-tiered wooden balconies that were built later on. It once served as a chapel for pilgrims on the road to Santiago de Compostela. It is surrounded by the usual cemetery with Basque crosses and has a stunning belvedere for fantastic views.

After Bidarray, you continue down on the D 918, following the course of the river Nive, past the **Poterie Goïcoechea**, famed pottery workshop in Ossès (look for the enormous clay water jugs outside). If you're

in the market for an attractive, hand painted clay wine cooler, this is the place to purchase it, or a hand painted vase. See their wares at [poteries-goicoechea.fr](http://poteries-goicoechea.fr). On the road here you'll also pass the **Arnabar** shop, which sells duck confit, foie gras, and other Basque delicacies. You can also visit their farm in neighboring Irissarry to see the ducks themselves on Mon. and Thurs. from 10-12, July through Sept. But don't make a stop here if it's Monday, as you'll see the Arnabar folks at the St.-Jean-Pied-de-Port outdoor market.

If you're in need of espadrilles, stop in Ossés at the shop and museum, **Don Quichosse**, to watch them be made by artisan Jean Jacques Houyou.

## **St-Jean-Pied-de-Port**

Then on to the pretty, but always annoyingly crowded **St-Jean-Pied-de-Port** or **Donibane Garazi** in the Basque language. Spanning both sides the river Nive, this classic and ancient village boasts pink sandstone walls, red roofs and wooden, geranium draped balconies. It is also an important way station on the Camino de Santiago, the route of Saint James, and the "gateway" to Spain. In the summer the village fills with modern day pilgrims, resting and getting their credentials and gear in order before starting off on their 800 plus mile journey, scallops shells, the symbol of St. Jacques, attached to their bags.

**Monday is the fabled market day**, and this *IS* indeed the day to visit, as all the major *bergers*, purveyors of farm products, set up their stands in the area above the main road, where "Donibane Garazi" is spelled on the hill with flowers. We find ample parking nearby on the hill. By hitting the town on market day, you need not stop at every farm along the route-the farmers handily come to you. It all ends around 1, so you'll need to get an early start to your day, or divide this driving tour into two, one for Labourd villages, another for the Basse-Navarre, which is my recommended manner of seeing all the delights of the Pays Basque countryside. This market is a real treat!

Aside from the market, you may not want to linger here because of the omnipresent crowds and summer heat, but with kids in tow, there's the 13th century Bishops' Prison, **la Prison des Evêques**. You can visit the cells and the dungeon on a 30-minute guided tour. Open Easter through October, 9:30 am – 7:00 pm. You may also want to stop in for a look at the Eglise Notre Dame and the Citadelle, another fortification built by Vauban, Louis XIV's military architect.

If you haven't had time to pick up gifts on the coast, across the bridge you'll find plentiful (but crowded) shopping along the rue d'Espagne. Look for Basque linens and bêtrets at **Helena** on the rue at #7, or **Jean Vier** on the main road, #17 Place Charles Floquet. Handcrafted espadrilles from the village of Mauleon are available at the **Maison de l'Espadrille** (rue d'Espagne #2), Irouléguy wines or spirits, eau de vie, pear, raspberry or prune brandy or delicious coffee liqueur (*liqueur de cacao a la Poire Brana*) can be found at **Domaine Etienne Brana**, on the way to this shopping street at #2 rue de l'Eglise.

For the kids, or for the kid in you, there's memorabilia of the Running of the Bulls at the local branch of **Kukuxumusu**, which means "kiss of the flea" in Basque, where you'll find amusing t-shirts and bull running- related stuff, just like the wares sold at their shops in Pamplona.

For Irouléguy wine sampling, the cellars of **Domaine Mourguy** are open to visitors in the suburb of Ispoure. The owners also offer donkey rides for the children through the vineyards.

For an informal lunch away from the hordes that descend on the town in the summer, 2 kms southwest of St. Jean-Pied-de-Port you'll find wonderful cider house, a *cidrerie*, in tiny **Lasse**, the **Auberge de Aldakurria**, a former pilgrims' inn. Lunch inexpensively on the terrace in summer with all the cider you can drink included in the price.

## St. Etienne-de-Bäigorry

From here you head due west for about 11 km to the even prettier and much more serene agricultural village of **St. Etienne-de-Bäigorry**, which means “beautiful view” in Euskara, the Basque tongue. The town sits in the heart of the very scenic Aldudes valley on the edge of the river. Here you can sample Irouléguay wines, France's smallest appellation (consisting of around 500 acres), at the **Cave d'Irouleguy wine cooperative** ([cave-irouleguy.com](http://cave-irouleguy.com)), which is to your left when entering the town. Nice sampling here of all the major producers, and one can also purchase an attractive, hand painted, clay wine cooler from Poterie Goichochea, if you miss the factory on the D918 in Ossés. Closed on Sunday from October - April. Open daily from May – September.

You can also sample these wines at the source in the tiny village of **Irouléguay** at one of the three wineries open to visitors: the **Ilarria**, run by Peio Espil, open 10 am to 12:30 pm and 2 pm to 7:30 pm. (look for Ilarria '04 or the Bixintxo '01), the **Arretxea**, run by the Riouspeyrour husband and wife team (here ask for the Arretxea '03), and the **Domaine Etxegaraya** (their Cuvée Lehengoa '03 gets top reviews). The rustic Tannat grape is the variety that reigns supreme in the production of Irouléguay, but it's sometimes blended with Cabernet Sauvignon or Cabernet Franc to give it more balance and softness. The June issue of Wine Spectator featured an article regarding Basque travel and these particular wines.

In **St. Etienne-de-Bäigorry**, drive on to the square to visit the lovely Basque church with its beautiful gold Baroque altarpiece and two-tiered wooden balcony with one very famous German Remy Mahler organ used in July-August for the Festival Musical de Basse-Navarre concerts by some of Europe's most renowned organists. On weekends services are sung in Basque. There are Force Basque (rural Basque “iron man” sports) competitions in July.

You may still be able to take a 45-minute guided tour of the **Chateau d' Etchaz** ([chateauinfrance.net](http://chateauinfrance.net)), open from April 1 – October 30 with tours Monday - Friday afternoons at 2:30 and 4:30. It has been turned into a 7-room hotel, member of Chateaux & Hotels of France, and guests can spend the night in the Charlie Chaplin room (he was a frequent guest of the family).

## A scenic drive through Les Aldudes

The home base of the charcuterie extraordinaire, **Pierre Oteiza** ([pierreoteiza.com](http://pierreoteiza.com)), can be found 15 km south of town on the Route d'Urepel in the heart of the Aldudes Valley. This is a *gorgeous* drive that should be taken even if you're not even vaguely intrigued by ham! The shop is open for visits from 8:00 am to 7:00 pm daily. We recently had a magnificent, but quite simple lunch here, the most memorable of our entire stay, in the adjacent dining room, consisting of a platter of the delicious ham and sausage, a platter of Ossau Iraty ewe's milk cheeses and rustic bread, along with a bottle of Irouléguay wine. Superb!! You can also visit the black hoofed pigs and piglets, resting or grazing in their fields below the shop. Although you can buy these products in Bayonne, St. Jean-de-Luz, Biarritz and even Paris, there is nothing quite like sampling them here.

*Extra: If you choose to overnight or spend several nights in this area, you have several other excursions and dining-in-the-country options:*

Southeast from St.-Jean-Pied-de-Port takes you on an equally scenic drive along the river Nive to **Estérençuby** to the **Xaltoinia** farm, which produces wonderful pure Brebis, ewe's milk cheese.

On this route, at St. Michel you can take a short detour northeast, up to the miniscule village of **Aincille** for lunch at the wonderful, family-owned **Hotel-Restaurant Pecoïtz**, “a little corner of Paradise”, says a noted French gourmet magazine. It's also a “Bibi Gourmand” in the red Michelin guide. Weekday lunch menus are offered for only 17€. It's open April 1 - January 1, but closed Thursday evening, Saturday mid-day and Friday, except for school vacations.

If that doesn't fit, continue on the Estérençuby road past St. Michel and past Estérençuby, 4 km down to Béherobie to **Les Sources de la Nive**, a hotel-restaurant right on the banks of the river. Closed in January and on Tuesday from November 15 - March 1. Also recommended in the red Michelin and by travel writers.

We've sampled many of the above food and wine recommendations from the culinary guide of Gerald Hirigoyen's French Basque cookbook, [The Basque Kitchen](#). Hirigoyen is the French Basque chef-owner of San Francisco's Bocadillos and Pastis.

## **A shortened version of inland Pays Basque tour**

### *For the garden and prehistoric sites lover*

**Ascain** to **Sare**, then **Ainhoa** and **Espelette**, the four prettiest villages of them all, before heading to **Cambo-les-Bains**, finishing in **La Bastide Clairence** and back to the autoroute to take you home.

## **Cambo-les-Bains**

In Cambo, visit Edmond Rostang's (author of *Cyrano de Bergerac*) **Villa Arnaga** ([arnaga.com](http://arnaga.com)), which is a lovely Neo-Basque villa decorated in Belle Epoque style with exquisite formal, Versailles-style gardens. We very much enjoyed our recent visit here, complete with strutting peacocks. One can take an independent tour of the home-takes an hour to see the entire estate. In July-Aug. one can also take guided tour, in French only, of the formal gardens on Mon. at 4:30 pm and Thursday at 11:00 am, but at any time, you can wander them at leisure. The home has been kept very authentic, with family furniture, a minstrels' gallery, newspaper clippings of Rostang's theatrical works, his letters, and pictures with stars of his day and visiting celebrities, such as Sara Bernhart. A theater festival is held here the second week in August.

Open daily from April to October 31. Hours - April May, June and September from 10:00 am - 12:30 pm, 2:30 - 7:00 pm, July and August from 10:00 am - 7:00 pm and October, 2:30 - 7:00 pm.

From Cambo head to humdrum Hasparren, passing through this somewhat dull town, then taking the D251 south, beyond **Isturitz** for a visit to the prehistoric, 40,000 year old caves, **Grottes d'Isturits-Oxocelhaya**. Open daily from mid-March to mid-November, but with an obligatory 40-minute guided tour in French only. An explanation sheet is given in English. Sadly, the prehistoric cave painting rooms are closed off. You can only see photographs of them, but the visit is interesting for its stalactites in human shapes.

March, April, May, October, and November: visits from 2-5, June & September: visits at 11:00 am, noon, then again from 2:00 - 5:00 pm and in July - August visits are from 10:00 am - 1:00 pm and 2:00 - 6:00 pm. ([grottes-isturitz.com](http://grottes-isturitz.com))

## **La Bastide Clairence**

After your visit to the caves, return to Hasparren to take the D123 north to **La Bastide Clairence**, another three-flower village, one of the prettiest and least discovered of all, which has become a rather funky arts & crafts center. This pretty hamlet lies just far enough east to be often missed by those touring on the Sare-Espelette-Ainhoa circuit. A tiny, one street place, it does have one of the most lovingly cared for cemeteries next to its village church that you'll see. And beyond the church cemetery, you'll find another, ancient, gated cemetery, the "cimetière juif", a Jewish cemetery dating back to the 1600s with a few simple, unmarked tombstones barely visible. The Jewish settlement in La Bastide Clairence was an adjunct to the Jewish colony that settled in the St. Esprit quarter of Bayonne, after the Jews fled from Portugal. These "Portuguese merchants" benefited from royal protection orders passed in 1550 and became a powerful economic group in the city. The first Jewish families buried here were "marranos", those who officially converted to Catholicism but in secret continued to observe their Jewish faith. During the 1700s practicing

Jews could be buried here due to the protection of the Dukes of Gramont. In 1941 the Nazis destroyed most of the cemetery.

There is a helpful tourist office behind which is an exhibition gallery where we've purchased some nice, reasonably priced watercolors by local artists.

From the village, you can also visit the nearby Benedictine **Abbaye of Belloc**, located off the main road (on the local D 510) from La Bastide Clairence to Urt, to purchase delicious Brebis cheese (sold in the US at Whole Foods) and religious memorabilia or Basque choral CDs sold by the monks in their shop. Follow signs to "le magasin" and ring the bell. Open Tuesday – Saturday, 10:00 - 11:45 am and 2:30 – 6:00 pm. On Sundays they open from 2:30 – 6:00 pm. But if you arrive when the monks are at prayer, there will be no one minding the store.

From La Bastide Clairence, you can return to your base in Hondarribia, Spain or on the French Basque coast via the A 64 west to Biarritz. Or you can continue east for an overnight in **Pau**, the capital of the Béarn.

*For those planning a visit of several days or even a week to the Pays Basque, below you'll find my list of recommended hotels, country inns and my favorite dining spots categorized from ultra deluxe to inexpensive:*

## **Lodging on the Pays Basque coast**

### **Accommodations in St. Jean-de-Luz**

#### **Luxury**

**5-Star Grand Hotel St.-Jean-de-Luz** - This is a stately, recently renovated Edwardian era building sitting right on the beach with every possible creature comfort and smaller (52 rooms), somewhat less stuffy, formal and expensive than the Hotel du Palais in Biarritz. And its Michelin starred Rosewood restaurant, with its large picture windows facing the ocean, is equally elegant, offering a 3 course set menu for 45€. A stay here will be costly, yes, but less so than at the Hotel du Palais, and it's perfect for families who can afford the tariff, as it directly faces the very family-friendly beach. The new Loreamar Thalasso Spa offers an added enticement with its heated indoor pool, hammam-sauna and fitness center and full range of spa treatments. The hotel receives 3 red gables for charm in the Michelin guide. Closed March and November 15 - January 31. ([luzgrandhotel.fr](http://luzgrandhotel.fr))

#### **Expensive**

**4-star Parc Victoria** - This Relais Chateaux property is complete with gardens and a pool, an oasis of tranquility. This 19th century villa is decorated in Art Deco style; the proprietors are warm and friendly with a proud collection of cats. This would be my romantic choice for couples during the frenetic high season, away from the tourist tidal wave. Receives 3-red gables for charm in the Michelin guide. **Closed** mid-November to mid-March. ([relaischateau.fr](http://relaischateau.fr))

**4-star Hotel Zazpi** - This is a rather new, hip, minimalist style, 7 room, design hotel related to the Marriage Freres tea company in the heart of town on boulevard Thiers. Zazpi means 7 in Basque, for the 7 provinces of the Basque lands. The principal attraction here is its **roof top pool**. It also sports **a/c**, a tea salon decorated in lime green with white modular chairs and an outdoor terrace. If you want to take your bedroom chair or your breakfast cup with you, everything here is for sale. Rates for these seven ultra chic rooms run quite high in summer, from 195 (for 25 square meters) to 450€ (for the 45 square meter Lapurdi room). Breakfast will be an extra 15€, covered garage parking goes for 10€. It's a very trendy-cool place for the really died hard fans of design hotels. Again, only book here outside of July-August if you don't enjoy tremendous crowds. ([zazpihotel.com](http://zazpihotel.com))

## **Moderate**

**3-star La Devinière** - 5, rue Loquin, is a 5-story house with charming, private interior garden and a cozy salon with 10 antique filled guest rooms location off the pedestrian shopping street of Rue Gambetta, but without an elevator, a/c., TV, or mini-bar. But it does have a tearoom. Bedrooms are decorated with fine fabrics, antiques, and lovely Basque beds. Excellent attention to detail! The living room has a highly polished piano for guests to play. Former guests have included Lorin Maazel and Herbert Von Karajan among other notable musicians. The owner's daughters' oil paintings grace the halls. Featured in Sawday's "Special Places to stay" and Karen Brown ([karenbrown.com](http://karenbrown.com)). Receives 2 red gables for charm in the Michelin guide. Closed for 2 weeks in January. As lovely as this home is, I would *only* stay here outside of July-August, as its location, on a heavily trafficked pedestrian street, gets virtually jammed during the high season. ([hotel-la-deviniere.com/](http://hotel-la-deviniere.com/)).

## **Upper budget**

**3-star La Marisa** - Located on a quiet street (this is important during the summer) very near the beach. This family run inn has 15 simple, pleasantly old-fashioned rooms with very reasonable tariffs ranging from 85-160€, depending on size and season. The welcome is friendly, the breakfast excellent (for an additional 10€) and the entire hotel non-smoking. Garage parking is available for only 9€ per day. The best room is #3. All guest rooms have wall mounted TVs, safes, free Wi-Fi, baths are equipped with tub/shower combos and hair dryers, and rooms are kept cool by ceiling fans rather than a/c. Recommended by Gourmet and well reviewed at Trip Advisor. Again, I suggest that you only consider a stay in the center of town outside of July-August. ([la-marisa.com](http://la-marisa.com))

## **Rentals**

**Villa Erogain** - Located in the heart of the village. [basquexplorer.com/villa-erdian.htm](http://basquexplorer.com/villa-erdian.htm)

## **Accommodations in next door Ciboure**

### **Inexpensive**

**Villa Erresinolettean** - 4, Rue de la Tour in Ciboure, is right across the bridge from St. Jean, beyond the blue gate, with panoramic views of the bay. It's a B&B run by Elaine Chardiet and has three bedrooms, terrace and a **pool**. The porcelains, fine linens and décor are worth the detour. The Hortensia room has a sitting area, TV, queen bed and shower. The Louis XIII has a lounge, TV, queen bed and shower for 80€, including breakfast. The Romantique has a queen bed, TV and bath. Again, Ciboure can get as busy as St. Jean de Luz during the July 15-August 31 high season, so if you're in search of tranquility, head inland or head to Biarritz, which is actually less congested. ([chardiet.com](http://chardiet.com))

## **Accommodations-Biarritz**

### **Super Luxury**

**Hotel du Palais** - With 124 rooms, 30 suites, it is among the most exclusive palace-hotels in the world with one of the most aristocratic pedigrees, the Grande Dame of Belle Epoque Biarritz. Prime real estate indeed, it sits in its own park, directly facing the beach, offering incomparable views of the entire coast. In 1855 Napoleon built an extravagant palace for his bride-to-be Eugénie de Montijo of Spain, and called it the Villa Eugénie, where the couple spent 16 summers. It was gutted by fire in 1881, the site was sold in 1893, and in 1912, and an equally grandiose red and cream building was christened as the Hotel du Palais. It has attracted a steady stream of movie stars, royalty, heads of state, aristocrats. The Second Empire, gilt-

and chandeliers-gastronomic Restaurant La Villa Eugénie has 1 Michelin star. It has a simply stunning pool area with private cabanas, plus a children's pool, also poolside dining at L'Hippocampe. The Restaurant La Rotonde offers Sunday brunch, lunch and dinner with music. And they have recently opened a 15 million euro Imperial spa, partnered with Guerlain, with indoor pool, Hamman, fitness room and lounge area. This is very dressy, very Old Europe. This is the hotel in Biarritz where you still may find ascot wearing, aristocratic gentlemen walking their poodles. Room 307 is a deluxe sea-view double with balcony that was featured in Conde Nast Traveler's "Room with a View". Room 132 has views of the lighthouse. Book a first or third floor room with balcony and fourteen-foot-high ceilings. Avoid the garden view rooms. Hotel will pick you up at the airport in a Bentley. The hotel now officially belongs to the city of Biarritz. The general director, who has been with the Hotel du Palais for 19 years, lives at the hotel and runs it very smoothly. It's a member Leading Hotels of the World. It was voted number 1 European resort hotel of '07 by the readers of the British Conde Nast Traveller. ([hotel-du-palais.com](http://hotel-du-palais.com))

### **Upper moderate**

**4-star Mercure Thalassa Regina et du Golf** - A Second Empire style, 73 room hotel on the road towards the lighthouse, above the Hotel du Palais, with sweeping views of the ocean and a golf course behind. It's a very good bet for golfing families, as it offers a pool and children's club for the kids, moms can indulge in spa treatments at the Sofitel Thalassa spa down the road (the two hotels share facilities and are connected by minibus), and it has an on site restaurant (with children's menu) plus room service and plenty of parking. The rooms, although "chain-like" are very pleasant, prettily furnished, well kept and fairly large, decorated in Edwardian style with safes, WiFi access (fee), a/c, satellite TV, video games, radio and minibar. It's a member of the Accor hotel group. ([accorhotels.com](http://accorhotels.com))

### **Moderate**

**Hotel Edouard VII** - Is a small and very attractive, sparkling clean and new B&B in a pretty, white, 19th century mansion with 18 rooms and is only a 5-minute walk to the beach and very near the covered market. This is a great location away from the fray. Homey, inexpensive, same rates all year, and unpretentious with a warm welcome, good English spoken and lots of info regarding the area. All the rooms are light and airy with immaculate baths, good a/c (a huge plus in hot July/Aug.), cable TV, internet access, safe and mini-bar. Room 114 has an ocean view. Garden view rooms for families have bunk beds and sunning/breakfast area. The king bedroom is huge. We stayed happily for four nights in July in the chambre 2 featured on web site (140€ high season) and have sent friends here. Yummy breakfast with superb croissants served on the terrace for an additional 9.5€. Caveat: street parking only. ([hotel-edouardvii.com](http://hotel-edouardvii.com))

**Hotel Clos Fontaine** - Located at 7, Avenue Maréchal Joffre, in a quiet upscale residential location near the Parc Mazon, opened in July '04. We inspected this charming, tiny place, a reconvered '30s mansion, close friends have happily stayed here, and it's also been well reviewed by the Biarritz tour company, Pays Basque Privilege, who use it for even their pickiest of clients looking for accommodations of value. It has only 7 rooms, doubles cost 115€ in high season, breakfast an additional 10€. Room #1, the largest, has a tub with hand held shower, #2 has shower only, #3 faces the back and is equipped with a shower. All rooms have satellite TV, safe and phone. Laundry service is also available. Downstairs guests can relax and read in the lounge, well supplied with touring information. The owner, Marc, does speak English. This little inn stands as a very good value for a city where accommodations are pricey, but it isn't equipped with a/c. As is the case of Hotel Edouard VII, there's street parking here only, which in both cases is often very challenging to come by. But if you need a car (and even a driver) for an excursion, Marc can provided one for you, which you can pick up right at the door. He will also arrange transportation to the train station or airport. ([hotelabiarritz.com](http://hotelabiarritz.com))

**Hotel Villavauréal** - 14, rue Vauréal, slightly north of the Clos Fontaine and Edouard VII, is a maison d'hôtes about 8 blocks from the market and a 10 min. walk to the Grande Plage, but only 50 meters from a beach. Featured in several French travel/interior design magazines, including Côte Sud. Don't judge a

book by its cover here, as it does not look particularly inviting from the street side. Only 5 rooms named for fruits, 2 double rooms (moderate) and 3 suites (mod. exp.) with large living room, 4 poster canopy beds, hardwood floors and decorative fireplaces. All rooms have kitchenettes with microwave. There is a 2-night minimum. Weekly rentals are possible at a reduced rate. It offers high-speed internet access. Parking is available for additional 5€ in July and August, or 3€ during rest of year. Breakfast, consisting of fruit, breads, cakes, croissants, homemade jams, freshly squeezed juice and coffee for an additional 8€ per person and can be taken in your room or in garden under the sycamore trees. Closed January. **No a/c.** ([villavaureal.com](http://villavaureal.com))

### **Luxury villa rentals with *pool***

- [justfrance.com/properties/satlcoast.html](http://justfrance.com/properties/satlcoast.html)
- [lamaisontamarin.com](http://lamaisontamarin.com)
- [touradour.com/towns/bidart/domdebassi/gb/conciergerie.asp](http://touradour.com/towns/bidart/domdebassi/gb/conciergerie.asp)
- [alternative-aquitaine.com](http://alternative-aquitaine.com)
- [villa-coriolan.com/en/villa.htm](http://villa-coriolan.com/en/villa.htm) (luxurious annex fantastic for group of 8-10)

### **Dining on the Coast**

*Nota bene: Restaurants in this resort area have different closing times, according to season. High season is generally considered mid-July, August to mid September.*

#### **Special dishes of the Basque Country**

- *Garbure*-a thick soup of cabbage, beans, potatoes, vegetables and sometimes duck or pork
- *Tripoxa*-a veal blood sausage dish in tomato sauce
- *Salmis de palombe*-wood pigeon roasted then simmered in a wine, shallot and onion sauce
- *Jambon de Bayonne*-the locally prepared ham
- *Toro*-a fish stew, which usually includes hake and monkfish, and well as tomatoes
- *Gâteau basque*-a layer cake filled with pastry cream or black cherry jam
- *Axoa*-a minced veal ragout with red Espelette peppers and onions
- *Poulet basquais*-chicken cooked with tomatoes, onions, peppers and white wine
- *Piperade*-scrambled eggs with Bayonne ham, peppers, onions and tomatoes
- *Merlu a la koskera*-hake with a sauce of peas, potatoes and asparagus
- *Tourons de Bayonne*-marzipan sweets with pistachios
- *Ardi gasna*-ewe's milk cheese

### **Dining in St. Jean de Luz**

**Le Kaiku** -the oldest, most “atmospheric” restaurant in this resort, located on Rue de la République 17, the town’s “restaurant row”. It’s noted for its fine shellfish such as lobster and prawns, plus squid and anchovies. They serve a set course menu here for 35€. It closes Tues and Wed. (except in summer) and from 2<sup>nd</sup> week in Nov. to end of Jan. Phone: 05 59 26 13 20

**La Taverne Basque** - also on the Rue de la République, across from Le Kaiku at number 5. Tables are fully booked daily, even after the tourist season. It’s Basque with a creative flourish with such dishes as merlu (hake), pumpkin soup and grilled eggplant with Spanish ham. The chef’s signature dish is confit de tomate for dessert, said to be better than Alain Passard’s tomato dessert at the 3-Michelin starred Arpege in Paris. Offers a selection of excellent local wines. Like Kaiku, it has a fireplace and heavy ceiling beams. But I avoid dining on this rue during the day in high season, as this street will be jammed, a mass sea of humanity. Better at night and more tranquil low season. Open Wed.-Sun. Closed January 15 - February 15. Phone: 05 59 260 126 ([latavernebasque.fr](http://latavernebasque.fr))

**Olatua** - On Boulevard Thiers, 30, is my favorite, a discovery from the Pays Basque magazine, and a block down the avenue from the Grand Hotel at the end of the beach. It was a true haven removed from the summer tourist hordes that invade St. Jean, and it offers a good value lunch menu du jour for only 18€, or for 14€, your choice of a plat & dessert (delicious desserts) or an entrée & plat. I had quenelles de morue (cod) and filets de perche with tiny mussels, and we enjoyed a bottle of Irouléguay red for 24€. It has a chalkboard wine list, and a pot lyonnaise (carafe) costs very little. The Guide Hubert gastronomic guide praises its high quality-price ratio. Non-smoking section. Garden dining. Never closes. Phone: 05 59 510 522

**Pil-Pil Enea** - Our favorite little place for fish, which Pays Basque magazine says serves the best *merlu* (hake) around, is a little hole in the wall bistro, filled with *pelota* and bullfight memorabilia. You can find it between the train station and post office, near the market below the girls' school on Rue de Sallagoiti. Has a terrific 3 course lunch menu for only 24€ per person, lunch plats for 8,50€ and a 2-course lunch *formule* for 12€ Huge portions! If you're not a fish lover, try the typical Basque veal stew, the *Axoa*. In season, closed Wednesday - out of season, closed Tuesday and Wednesday.

**Zoco Moko** - Its name means the "quiet corner" in Basque, and it's nicely located, away from the trodden tourist path, at 6, rue Mazarin. It offers creative cuisine and noteworthy desserts. A 3 course set menu can be ordered for 26€, 2 courses for 18€ (mid-week only) and a la carte around 40€. In high season it's open for dinner only, except for Sundays and holidays. In low season, closed Saturday lunch/Sunday evening and Monday. Receives a high rating from the French food guides. Tel: 05 59 080 123

## **Dining at the Port of Socoa**

**Chez Pantxua** - 37, rue de Commandant Pasicot, highly recommended by the Guide Hubert and the San Francisco Basque chef Gerald Hirigoyen, author of "The Basque Kitchen" and owner of Bocadillos and Pastis restaurants. It offers a 15€ lunch menu or more gastronomic menu for 35. Closed Tuesday (except for dinner in July and Aug), Monday night and Dec.-Jan. Phone: 05 59 471 373

**Kaiatxu** - "Little pier" in Basque, has a lovely Basque farmhouse décor with Basque linens and was recently featured in Pays Basque magazine. Specialties include grilled hake; squid filled with anchovies, shrimp, warm cod salad accompanied by aioli. Open for lunch and evenings meals from Wednesday to Sunday. You can plan on spending around 30€ for a 3-course meal.

## **Dining in Ciboure**

**Arrantzaleak** - Is a classic sea shack, or "fish house" on Avenue Jean Poulon 18, highly recommended in all the French gourmet guides and gourmet magazines and in Patricia Well's "Food Lover's Guide to France". It offers a weekday lunch menu for 25€. Closed Monday/Tuesday evening out of season Tel: 05 59 471 075

**Chez Dominique** - Sitting directly on the quai Maurice Ravel, 15, it is owned by George Piron, a former chef of Le Bristol in Paris. It offers a fixed price lunch menu for 21€, or count on 50€ if ordering a la carte. It closes Sun. night, Mon. and from Feb. 15-March 15. It's also a Patricia Wells favorite. Tel: 05 59 47 29 16

## Dining in the countryside between St. Jean and Biarritz-gourmet

### Expensive

**La Table des Frères Ibarboure** - This lovely dining venue owned by the Ibarboure brothers is housed in a contemporary hacienda, composed of 3 dining rooms, and an adjacent luxury hotel. It has received **one Michelin star**, 2-stars from Le Bottin Gourmand, 2-red *couverts* from Le Pudlo guide and a 16 in the Gault Millau ([freresibarboure.com](http://freresibarboure.com)). It offers several gourmet menus at 35€ for lunch, and 44€, 65€, 95€ for dinner in an elegant setting with refined service. The two Ibarboure brothers are the chefs. A tray of delectables is served with coffee, so you need not order dessert. And it boasts an exceptional wine list. The restaurant is closed on Wednesday. It is located off the D335 from Guéthary towards Ahetze. (It's adequately signed). Sheer perfection. Well worth the splurge. Tel: 05 59 548 164

**Le Moulin d'Alotz** – Housed in a Basque farmhouse dating from 1694, it is just off the road from Arcanges to St. Pée, on chemin Atotz-Errota. It has **one Michelin star**, a 14 rating from *Gault Millau* and a 15 rating from *The Gastronomic and Cultural Guide to the Basque Country*. San Francisco Basque chef Gerald Irigoyen also recommends it highly. The young chef Benoît Sarthou is earning the praise of the area's gourmands. Reservations are essential. Count on an average check of 50+ € pp. Closed Tuesday and Wednesday for lunch, also June 22 - July 5, November 14 - 29, January 2 - 31 Tel: 05 59 430 454

**Campagne et Gourmandise** - A former farmhouse with country décor complete with fireplace, this very well regarded restaurant is located just 10 minutes from downtown Biarritz on Avenue Alain Seeger (on the road towards Arbonne), next to the Hotel Le Chateau du Clair de Lune. It's family run by André and Annick Gauziere. The most economical way to experience Chef Gauziere's talent is to go for lunch midweek when a 44€ menu is served. It is closed Sun. nights (except during high season), Mon. lunch and all day Wed. Tel: 05 59 41 10 11

### Moderate

**L'Auberge Basque** - in Saint-Pée-Sur-Nivelle, on the old route to St-Jean-de-Luz. Chef/owner Cédric Béchade decided to keep the price of his meals reasonable so as to be affordable to everyone, especially those living nearby. This young chef trained for ten years with Alain Ducasse, who put him in charge of the garden restaurant of the Plaza Athénée in Paris, although he started his career at the Hotel du Palais, vowing that he would return someday to the Basque Country. He has returned with much fanfare and has created for himself a beautiful venue, restoring a 17th century farmhouse. ([aubergebasque.com](http://aubergebasque.com))



The restaurant, at one time a roadside inn offering simple food and lodging to travelers on the old highway to St. Jean-de-Luz, is one of only twelve gourmet restaurants listed in the Carnet Gourmand Guide for Aquitaine (Pays Basque). It offers a fixed price gastronomic menu for only 39€ and a la carte from 50€ to 70€. The open kitchen concept allows the guests to watch the chef at work, while also permitting Cédric to be an intricate part of your dining experience. The superb wine selection has been chosen by the former sommelier of La Maison de Marc Veyrat, the 3-star Michelin restaurant on Lake Annecy in the Haute-Savoie. Spain's foremost gastronomic critic, Rafael García Santos gave the restaurant a rating of 8/10 after only a few months in operation-a higher rating than he gives to Les Pyrénées in St. Jean Pied-de-Port, Villa Eugénie in Biarritz and Auberge de la Galupe in Urt. This chef is one to watch very closely!

The uniquely designed glass wall of the restaurant slides open, disappearing into the wall itself, offering a spectacular view of the Pays Basque countryside looking west toward the coast, St. Jean-de-Luz and La Rhune mountain. If you choose to dine in one restaurant outside of Biarritz or St. Jean-de-Luz, make sure

that you choose this one! But the restaurant is closed on Mondays and Tuesdays, and for lunch on Thursdays and Fridays. One must book ahead. Tel: 05 59 517 000

**Ferme Ostalapia** - on the route to the village of Ahetze, chemin Ostalapia, 2 km on the D855 from the RN10. It's a delightful country farmhouse restaurant, informal and charming, with red and white checkered tablecloths and chalkboard menu. It rates a "heart" from the Champerard guide, a perfect example of "Convivialité et bonhomie", serving traditional French and Spanish Basque cuisine. It has an inviting outdoor terrace facing the mountain of La Rhune for dining in summer al fresco, facing the mountain of La Rhune. It serves a weekday fixed price menu for 15€. Closed on Wednesday and Thursday (except Thursday night in high season), the last week of June and from Dec. 1-Jan. 15. Phone: 05 59 547 379 ([ostalapia.com](http://ostalapia.com)),

**Auberge Chez Maïté** - Located right on the village square in Urrugne, below St.-Jean-de-Luz. This is a country hotel-restaurant that for years has specialized in gourmet Basque cuisine, offering a weekday menu at lunch for 30€. Tel: 05 59 54 30 27 ([auberge-chezmaite.com](http://auberge-chezmaite.com))

## **Informal Beachside Dining - at a "guinguette"**

**Le Blue Cargo** - Frequented by Parisian vacationers, quite chic and preppy on the Plage d'Ibarritz in Bidart. This is the most elegant of the beachside restaurants. Recommended by Petit Futé and the Guide Hubert. Open May - September until midnight, offering drinks and dancing. Phone: 05 59 235 487

**La Plancha d'Ibarritz** - Also found on the Plage d'Ibarritz in Bidart. Recommended by the Petit Futé guide and the Guide Hubert. Go to La Plancha for food, Le Blue Cargo for drinks. Open all year. Phone: 05 59 23 44 95

**La Tantina de la Playa** - On the Plage du Centre in Bidart, open daily in season, and serving the usual grilled sardines, squid, anchovies, *daurade*, and salmon. Phone: 05 59 26 53 56

**Les Alcyons** - Follow the signs in Guéthary village past the train station, down to the "Plages" and the Jetée des Alcyons. It's a narrow, curving, one land road, traffic regulated up and down by a light. A typical "beach shack" that serves great grilled sardines, anchovies, *daurade*, tuna grilled before your eyes. Main courses go for 15€, as well as most wines, but they offer good value lunch platter specials for 11,50€. Phone: 05 59 26 55 72

**Etxe Terra** - Next door to Les Alcyons, down the same road. Open May 1 - September 30. Offers a lunch platter for only 15€, but compare the menus and ambiance at both before taking a table. Phone: 05 59 5481 64

## **Dining in Biarritz Gourmet**

*Although the formal dining room of the Hotel du Palais, the Villa Eugenie, has earned one Michelin star, I would personally rather travel one hour to the countryside outside of San Sebastián for my €100 + dining splurge, to Michelin 2 and 3 stars-either Mugaritz, Akelare or Martín Berasategui.*

**Sissinou** - 5, Avenue Maréchal Foch, a block from Place Clemenceau, may just be the most acclaimed restaurant in town right now. It has a very chic, contemporary décor, and Chef Michel Cassou-Debat offers highly creative cuisine that has just earned him his first Michelin star. Prices have crept up here since being discovered by the gourmet press, but his 3-course 44€ menu (with wine) is still a good value (and you can dine for less here for lunch during the week-38€). The chef honed his skills at Troigros, the Hotel du Crillon and Grand Vèfour in Paris and at the Mandarin Oriental Bangkok. Don't miss! Closed Sunday

and Monday (low season), closed for lunch in Aug., plus Feb. 18-March 3, June 3-11 and Oct. 28-Nov. 12.  
Phone: 5 59 225 150

**Le Clos Basque** - 12, Rue Louis Barthou, is a tiny family owned bistro in the historic center of Biarritz with a cozy dining room decorated with Spanish tiles and lovely, shaded outdoor patio. Chef-owner Beatrice Viateau prepares delicious, homey Basque cuisine and great *pain perdu* with Armagnac for dessert. This is one of the best values for fine dining in an expensive city. There is a fixed price luncheon menu for 24€, in the evening for 28€. We could dine here every night. It's a terrific value, and guests receive a warm welcome. And it's a Michelin Bibi Gourmand selection for its price to quality ratio. Also highly rated by Gault Millau, le Pudlo, Guide Hubert, and Petit Futé. Reservations required, as it is very, very popular. Closed Sunday night except from 1 July to 31 August 31, Mondays and for 10 days in June.  
Phone: 05 59 242 496

**Le Galion** - This is the restaurant of the Hotel Windsor at 17, boulevard Général-de-Gaulle. It represents an equally fine value for its unbeatable, gourmet, 3-course 28€ lunch with wine on the terrace under the shade of an umbrella with the Grand Plage at your feet! From Spain we've taken clients here for lunch to impress, and it always does. It closes Monday night (except in high season) and Tuesday for lunch, also Nov. 20-Dec. 5, Jan. 10-25. Phone: 05 59 24 20 32

**La Maison Blanche** - 58 Avenue Edouard VII, it is a fashionable new venue in the heart of town, in Le Tonic Hotel, stylishly decorated in white and earth tones. ([maisonblanchebiarritz.com](http://maisonblanchebiarritz.com)) The 30ish year old chef, Thomas Ainciart trained with Arrambide at Les Pyrénées and at the Crillon in Paris. He offers creative cuisine such as risotto of eggplant, pousses d'épinards, etc. and has a daily market driven menu, served on weekdays for 23€. Closed Sunday evening and Monday from November - March. Recently reviewed in Saveur. Phone: 05 59 245 858

## **Informal and fun**

**Café Cosi** - 9, rue Larralde, is the chic address that attracts the Who's Who of Biarritz, a contemporary bistro run by Laurence and Patrick Héau. Open daily, all year round from 9:00 am to 11:00 pm. You can stop in for breakfast, just a salade composée, a hot platter, a club sandwich, and an apéro at the bar or just a dessert. If you're looking for a chic snack spot, this is the place. Far nicer than the overpriced, tourist filled "brasseries" with outdoor terraces facing the Place Clemenceau.

**Bar Jean** - Located directly across from the covered market at 5, rue des Halles, is a lively bar/restaurant serving great value dishes, with bullfighting memorabilia decking the walls and flamenco on the stereo. It has a tiny front terrace. Always packed. Easy on the wallet and lots of fun! For dinner, you can enjoy tapas from 7:30 pm or dine on the regular menu starting at 8. Dig in to platters of paella, shrimp, and cod with chorizo, pork loin with Piquillo peppers or a seafood mixed grill. Where the locals hang out. From April – September, open 7 days a week for lunch and dinner.

**Cidrerie Hernani** - 27, Avenue Maréchal Joffre ([cidreie-hernani.com](http://cidreie-hernani.com)) is a very informal, very typical Basque cider house of the type found on the Spanish side. Dining on long, unadorned, wooden communal tables of 6€ - 8€ on fare such as anchovies, red peppers, mussels, chorizo, Serrano ham, gambas a la plancha (shrimp), chipirons (squid), Axoa (veal stew), rice pudding, crème brûlée, tarte tatin. Help yourself to cider from the huge vats adorning the walls, or have local or Spanish wines or sangría. Bullfight scenes decorate the large space. Low prices. It only open for dinner.

**La Tantina de Burgos** - Place Beurivage, on the back, beachside road to St.-Jean-de-Luz. Keep a look out for this small restaurant when driving up from the south on the D911 coastal road, otherwise you'll pass right by this square, on a roundabout. Not walk-able from the city center. It has a Spanish bodega look with a few outdoor tables. Spanish ingredients abound in the simple menu. Casual and inexpensive, but be there early because the kitchen closes before 2:00 pm. Recommended in le Pudlo guide and owned by a retired Rugby player.

## Accommodations on the coast near St. Jean and Biarritz

*Nota Bene: A car is absolutely essential! In high season, be prepared for extremely frustrating, bumper-to-bumper traffic!*

### Moderate

**3-star Villa L'Arche** - Is an attractive house **on the sea** in Bidart facing Les Embruns beach with 8 rooms, one suite, run B&B style, with simply stunning water views, right at the edge of the water, with white wooden chairs perched overlooking the ocean. There are eight large and elegant antique filled rooms with TV and mini-bar. Tubs have hand held showers. Rooms 4 and 5 have lovely sea views. Breakfast (additional charge) is served in the large and sunny dining area/lounge. Off the coastal road to Biarritz on a side street, Chemin Camboénéa, rather hard to find but it's signed. No pool, **no a/c**. Featured in Hunter Rivage "Charming Inns of France". Receives two red gables for charm in Michelin guide. ([villalarche.com](http://villalarche.com))

**La Maison Tamarin** - Lovely traditional Basque farmhouse with eight beautifully decorated rooms and pool, right outside of St.-Jean-de-Luz towards Biarritz in the Quarter Acotz on Chemin de la Ferme Kokotia, **overlooking the Bay of La Fitenia**, a five minute stroll from a great surfer's beach. English spoken. The room at the top of the house has a private terrace. Rates include breakfast. The house has high-speed internet access, and each room has phone and sat. TV. Laundry and dinner services are available upon request. In July-Aug. it's usually rented whole for the entire month. It's also available as a whole house rental on weekends. Featured in Karen Brown's "France, Charming Bed and Breakfasts" guide. ([lmaisontamarin.com](http://lmaisontamarin.com))

**3-star Chateau d'Urtubie** - is found below St. Jean-de-Luz, in Urrugne-a fortified castle built in 1341 under orders from England's King Edward III and enlarged in the 16th and 17th centuries, is located just south of Ciboure. The host, M. Laurent, is the direct descendant of the builder of the castle and opened it as a hotel in 1995. It also operates as a museum and can be visited via guided tour from 10:30 am -12:30, 2:00 - 6:30 pm. Somber, and historic monument-like, with period furnishings, but comfortable, offering nine rooms with blessed a/c and Internet access. Largest room is the "prestige" on 2nd floor. It's just a 5-minute walk from the beach. Featured in Sawday's "Special Places to Stay". And it's a member of Chateau & Hotels of France. The charming and unspoiled village of Urrugne, with its 17th century fortress type church and very pretty square is a "must see" when exploring this lower part of the coast. ([chateaudurtubie.fr](http://chateaudurtubie.fr))

**Flosean Baita** - Is an elegant manor home also outside the village of Urrugne, sitting in the countryside with views of the ocean, providing just 3 chambres d'hotes, B&B type accommodations. The "Venice" room with king bed faces the pool and offers TV, mini bar, ADSL and WiFi. Rates include breakfast. Two-night minimum stay required. ([floseanbaita.org](http://floseanbaita.org))

### Budget

**Irigoian** - 17th century white Basque farmhouse, the oldest along the coast, with traditional blue wooden shutters, is located outside of Bidart on Avenue Biarritz. From the A63 you take exit Biarritz then the N10 for 2 Kms. to the roundabout, then a right towards Biarritz. The house is 600 meters on the left and 30 meters from the beach, virtually on golf course and near riding stable. Very minimalist, but with pretty décor and absolutely lovely paintings by Uria Monzon decorating the upstairs halls. It has a sitting room and library downstairs. Upstairs are five huge, uncluttered, but very attractive rooms, each with a different color scheme, and called "the blue room", "pink room", etc. The rooms have parquet floors, mini-bars, phone, TV and nice baths. Gourmet breakfasts are served at a communal table. ([irigoian.com](http://irigoian.com)),

The owner, a Basque journalist, lives on the ground floor. He offers a guided tour of the Guggenheim in Bilbao via minibus on Thursdays and Saturdays. Every morning you'll find the special events of the day

written on a slate board in the breakfast area. The owner also offers his guests a little booklet of the best in dining, shopping, sightseeing in the area and organizes your week in the Basque Country for you. He's fluent in French, Basque, Spanish and English and is truly warm and delightful. A special place for those on a budget who still want a high level of comfort and style and enjoy this type of atmosphere. Featured in Sawday's "Special Places to Stay" and in Pays Basque magazine's "31 Maison d'hôtes de Charm".

**Le Mamelon Vert** - Located at 1, chemin de Laborde, on the outskirts of Bayonne, is an elegant B&B in a park with lovely pool and welcoming owners. It rents just **two** rooms with private baths- the "blue" and the "red", perfect if you're touring with another couple. The house also offers table d'hôte meals for 40€, including wine and coffee. ([mamelonvert.com](http://mamelonvert.com))

## **Accommodations in the countryside – car necessary**

### **Super Luxury – Very Exclusive**

**Hegia** - If only the most exclusive, most expensive, most talked about country lodging will do for you, then this is your place in rural Hasparren. It is fairly new, opened by the former Michelin star chef of Les Plantanes in Biarritz, Arnaud Daguin and his wife Veronique, in an 18<sup>th</sup> century typical Labourdian farmhouse ([hegia.com](http://hegia.com)), renovated in very minimalist, highly avant-garde style. It has been featured in Travel & Leisure, Food & Wine and has been lauded by Condé Nast Traveler as one of the world's most exciting new hotels. There are only 5 minimalist designed bedrooms. One takes meals here in communal style, with a market driven dinner menu that the chef changes daily. The whopping 600€ tariff includes your room, breakfast and dinner, while for 700€ you receive lodging, dinner, breakfast and a pintxos style lunch. A room alone with breakfast will cost you 480€, but what's the point?

**Ostapé** - Along those same lines but somewhat less pricey, is this isolated *auberge* created four years ago by super chef Alain Ducasse ([ostape.com](http://ostape.com)) in some exquisite countryside, on a 45 hectare estate, looking over the village of Bidarray, a full hour from Biarritz in Basse Navarre. Privacy is key here at the Ostapé, so you must follow signage very carefully to make your way to this hidden complex. Once you arrive, you leave your car at the entrance and are given a golf cart to get around the property. The hotel has a gourmet restaurant whose chef is Alain Souliac, and he offers a fixed price, 50€ daily changing menu of regional Basque dishes. The 22 very large bedrooms are divided among several farmhouses, all Basque style with white stucco and red tiled roofs, and are beautifully furnished with antiques. Suites have a living room with exposed timbers and either balcony or private terrace. All rooms have a/c, DVDs, CD players, mini bar and Wi-Fi for those who bring their own computers. The main manor home houses the reception area, library and restaurant. There is an large outdoor heated pool and massage rooms. The resort is a member of Chateau & Hotels of France, of which Ducasse is the director. It's also a JP Moser ([jpmoser.com](http://jpmoser.com)) and Inns of France ([innsoffrance.com](http://innsoffrance.com)) selection and a Karen Brown favorite ([karenbrown.com](http://karenbrown.com)).

Note: Ducasse was forced to pull out of the enterprise in '07, to resign from its board of directors after the property was targeted by separatists who planted a small bomb which broke a window and damaged a door. No one was hurt, but the hotel was fully occupied at the time. Extremists blamed Ducasse for "ruining" the area).

### **Expensive**

**\*L'Hostellerie des Frères Ibarboure** - Bidart-Guéthary is where you'll find this stunning 8-room paradise, 2-story, hacienda style salmon building with red tiled roof, next door to the famed Michelin starred **Tables des Frères Ibarboure** run by the Ibarboure brothers. Follow the D355 to the right off the N10, between Guethary and Bidart, heading towards Ahetze to Chemin de Ttalienea. Reserve at least 8 months in advance for high season! The salmon colored rooms are enormous and simply exquisite with highly polished wood floors, with huge, luxurious baths in gorgeous marble and Italian tile. Room No.4 is

a twin, 20' x 20' with 18' high ceiling, glass enclosed shower plus huge Jacuzzi tub, robes and slippers, wrap-around terrace facing the pool. Room No.3 is a large double with small terrace facing the pool. Lovely country setting is blissfully quiet and very private. Beautiful landscaped gardens. Has a/c. Plenty of parking. Elevator. Exceptional in every way! ([fresibarboure.com](http://fresibarboure.com)) The hotel is a member of the Relais du Silence group ([silencehotel.com](http://silencehotel.com)) and another Karen Brown favorite ([karenbrown.com](http://karenbrown.com)).

## Upper moderate

**L'Auberge Basque** - I have discovered many exciting properties during our explorations of the Basque



country, but this latest addition to our finds, L'Auberge Basque ([aubergebasque.com](http://aubergebasque.com)), open less than a year, is truly unique in many respects. The young chef/owner, only 30+ years of age, has distinguished himself in the culinary world of Alain Ducasse during his tenure in Paris at the La Cour Jardin restaurant of the hotel Plaza Athénée. He has now decided on a slightly different approach in his future as a chef and hotelier.

This exceptional property, a beautifully renovated 17th century Basque farmhouse and member of the Chateaux & Hotels de France, is located just outside Saint-Pée-Sur-Nivelle, only 15 minutes from the beach at St. Jean-de-Luz and a little over an

hour's drive north of Pamplona, Navarra. The farmhouse, once a simple roadside inn, has been stylishly transformed into a small, ultra sophisticated boutique hotel with nine spacious double rooms, two private suites sharing the top floor, with the added attraction of two, 2-bedroom, 1 ½ bath, fully self-contained apartments with kitchenettes (dishwasher, fridge, cooking utensils) that rent by the week, perfect for a family with children, or for two couples to share.

This beautiful rural hotel in Saint-Pée-sur-Nivelle has many outstanding features including exceptionally comfortable rooms and fine attention to detail. The guest quarters are decorated in tones of grey and cream, have antique parquet floors with black stone sinks and rain showers in the baths. The staff members, all in their thirties, are welcoming and helpful. The standard double rooms are priced at under €100/night, while the suites are offered at less than €250/night. Rooms 7 & 8 combine to make a suite. Room 5 is a dream, with its own private balcony. Room 6 has a private deck. Room 10 has a very large shower and costs only 130€ per night. Suite number 1 boasts a parlor and private deck, and breakfast is brought up to suites 1 and 2. And the entire hotel is air-conditioned. There is no seasonal adjustment in rates and no elevator.

**3-star Villa Catarie** - Is in the center of the charming red and white village of Guéthary across from the city hall and frontón. A member of Chateau Hotels of France, this charming 18<sup>th</sup> century Basque farmhouse ([villa-catarie.com](http://villa-catarie.com)) has been converted into a stylish, small, 3-star hotel with 14 rooms, 2 suites and an outdoor pool. There is an ample car park. Breakfast is taken in the garden for an additional 12€. The warm décor in soothing, soft pastels provides a lovely hideaway for 3 to 4 days to explore both the coast and inland. Rooms have sat. TV, mini bars, internet access. There is an elevator, but **no a/c**. It receives 2-red gables for charm in the Michelin guide and is a selection of [innsoffrance.com](http://innsoffrance.com).

## Moderate

**3-star Chateau du Clair de Lune** - Is a romantic 1902 country villa ([chateauclairdelune.com](http://chateauclairdelune.com)) with lovely views, in 8 hectares of park-like grounds (the lawn needed a good watering last time we were by).

Once owned by an American heiress married to a Frenchman, it is only 10 minutes from Biarritz. The poet Alan Seegar convalesced here and wrote the poem, "I have a date with death". He died a few months later on the WWI battlefield. Its 17 very large rooms were given poetic names, basil, vanilla and thyme and are individually decorated with antiques, lush fabrics, original art, pine floors, TV and mini-bars, but baths retain their original floors and sinks. There is an elegant dining room where breakfast (for an additional 10€ charge) is served communal style at the formal dining room table plus a grand salon with grand piano and fireplace and a shaded terrace overlooking the gardens and reflecting pool, where you can also take breakfast. Staff speaks very good English. This is an Old World type of lodging where loyal patrons return each year.

The Chateau doesn't have its own restaurant But right next door is **Campagne et Gourmandise**, a 1-star Michelin. I would request a room in the chateau rather than the Pavilion, hunting lodge annex (though annex rooms have terraces). **No a/c**. It's a member of Chateaux & Hotels of France, is represented by Inns of France, and it receives 2-red gables for charm in the Michelin guide. Located on Avenue Alan Seeger, on the road to Arbonne, just a few kms from the Biarritz train station.

## Upper budget

**3-star Hotel Laminak** - Located in Arbonne, this is a comfortable 18th century country cottage converted into a full service hotel ([hotel-laminak.com](http://hotel-laminak.com)) with twelve rooms but without a restaurant. It sits in a tranquil setting on a quiet road, Route de St. Pée, about 2 km. from the train station in Biarritz. The rooms are pleasant, some on the small side, individually decorated with floral patterns and stripes, antique pine furniture, carpeted floors, mini-bars, safes and TV. There's a fireplace in the sitting room and very friendly desk staff who speak very good English. The superior rooms are No.7, 10, 11 & 12 in the annex with outdoor sitting area facing the garden and pool, with beautiful views of the countryside. The attractively decorated and cozy living room has fireplace and leather furniture and plenty of brochures with touring advice. There is also a terrace and winter garden where breakfast is served. Owners run the place with a quiet, warm efficiency.

It's a member of Relais du Silence ([silencehotel.com](http://silencehotel.com)) and featured in Sawday's "Special Places to Stay" ([sawday.co.uk](http://sawday.co.uk)) and also highly recommended by the Petit Futé guide. Easy parking. Best rooms are No.7, with a sitting area, pictured on web page; No.11 in the annex has a private terrace. **No a/c**. Enjoy a continental breakfast for 10€. Meals prepared upon request, but there is plenty of fine country dining within a 5 to 10 minute drive.

**La Ferme Ostalapia** - This 17th century farmhouse and country restaurant ([ostalapia.com](http://ostalapia.com)) in Ahetze has five huge rooms, all with the original beamed ceilings and pine wood floors. The rooms are named for different Basque villages, some have terraces facing south toward the Pyrénées facing La Rhune mountain. The building was originally a pilgrims' inn before becoming a cider house, barn, and bakery. The "Arcangues" room has enormous terrace overlooking the valley. The "Azcaïn" room is an equally spacious Art Deco style room with a smaller terrace. Rooms on 2nd floor don't have terraces, but do have lovely views. Chef Christian Duplaisy, who has been featured in many gourmet magazines, offers a chalkboard menu of traditional French and Spanish Basque dishes. There are two seatings, one at 8:00 pm with the second at 10:30. **No a/c**, but a great value. All of the rooms have TV and nice private baths. Recently featured in Habitalia magazine's supplement, "Hotels with soul".

## Inexpensive

**Domaine de Bassilour** - A Napoleon III style mansion ([lafermedebassilour.com](http://lafermedebassilour.com)) surrounded by a large garden near the Hotel le Chateau Clair de Lune, but simpler in style, more B&B, a classic chambres d'hôtes, in a park like setting and within walking distance of the delightful Moulin de Bassilour, a 17th century mill famed for its gâteau basque. The mansion was built in 1870 by a nouveau rich explorer recently returned from Mexico as a gift to his childhood sweetheart. It has baroque ceilings, white marble

fireplaces and post impressionist paintings in its five rooms. Rooms are furnished with family antiques; baths have claw foot tubs, some with showers. Ample gourmet breakfast served for an additional cost.

You can also stay in the 16th century **Ferme**, which is run as a 3-star hotel. It has eight rooms, one duplex and a suite. No a/c. Featured in the Alistair Sawday guide and a member of Chateaux & Hotels of France and Chateaux and Country.

- [touradour.com/towns/bidart/domdebassi/gb/domaine\\_de\\_bassilour.asp](http://touradour.com/towns/bidart/domdebassi/gb/domaine_de_bassilour.asp)
- [chateauxandcountry.com/chateaux/bassilour/index.html](http://chateauxandcountry.com/chateaux/bassilour/index.html)
- [maisonsudouest.com/doc-loc/Basque/Bas1/intbas1.html](http://maisonsudouest.com/doc-loc/Basque/Bas1/intbas1.html)
- [chateauxhotels.com/public/phps/fiche\\_hotel.php?id\\_hotel\\_chf=441](http://chateauxhotels.com/public/phps/fiche_hotel.php?id_hotel_chf=441)
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## **Dining and Lodging in the País Basque heartland**

### *From Labourd to Basse-Navarre*

### **St-Pée-sur-Nivelle or *Sempere* in Basque (Labourd)**

#### **Inexpensive**

**Bidachuna** - Is a white 19th century country farmhouse with baby blue shutters, a beautifully manicured lawn sitting on 30 hectares of forested peace and quiet behind an electric gate-a haven of tranquility. There are only three rooms here, each with its separate entrance. The entire house is non-smoking. You can expect a large Basque breakfast consisting of breads, fruits, and cheeses served in sitting room or on the terrace. Pleasant and refined with beamed ceilings, fresh flowers, antiques and polished chestnut floors. The three bedrooms have private baths (but no showers), TVs, phones, separate entrance and gorgeous mountain views. Only 115€ or 105€ for a double, including breakfast! Rated a 4-epis, the highest rating for chambre d'hotes, by Gites de France. English spoken. Guests receive serious cossetting by owner Isabel Ormazabel. It's been featured in Sawday's Special Places to Stay - French Bed & Breakfasts ([specialplacestostay.co.uk](http://specialplacestostay.co.uk)), plus in "Chambres d'Hotes de Charme '07". Phone: 559 545 622 ([bidachuna.com](http://bidachuna.com)).

From the A63 at Bayonne take D3 to Arcangues then on to St. Pée, and then follow D3 towards Ustariz/Arcangues. It's 4.3 kilometers from the intersection of the D 3 and 925, follow the green Chambres d'hôtes Bidachuna sign, drive 1 km. down a private road to the house- about a 15 min. drive from Biarritz. 15 min. to the Spanish border.

### **Louhossoa lodging (Labourd)**

#### **Inexpensive-budget**

**Domaine de Silencenia** - 6 km past Cambo-les-Bains, a 25-minute drive from the beaches of Biarritz, and 700 meters from village square of Louhossoa, is a 19th century mansion in a 3-hectare estate by a spring water lake, with five pretty, but small bedrooms with canopied four-poster beds and private baths. The innkeepers offer a breakfast of fruit, eggs, crepes, and pastries, and convivial, family style dinners with wine for 30€ per person, upon request. Your hosts, Krystal and Phillipe are renowned for their table d'hôtes dinners and impressive wine cellar. Perfect for those traveling on a moderate budget and who speak French or Spanish. It's very reasonable at 80€ for a double, one of the more economical places to stay in a rather expensive area. It boasts a beautiful pool with marvelous country views plus a billiard room. A 3-epis Gites de France chambre d'hôtes also featured in "Sawday's Special Places to Stay - French Bed & Breakfasts". ([domaine-silencenia.com](http://domaine-silencenia.com))

## Sare dining and lodging (Labourd)

### Moderate

**Hotel Arraya** - This friendly and very pretty, 20-room family run 16th century inn with quaintly decorated cozy rooms, has a hidden garden in the back. Dining on the terrace under the plane trees is a delight. The beautiful antique and flower filled parlor with beamed ceiling makes an immediate welcoming impression. We recently had a spectacular 18€ 3 course lunch here, one of the best of our trip through the Pays Basque countryside. Don't miss their yummy gâteau basque, sold at a stand outside the hotel. They also have a nice gift shop next door for Basque lines, wines and gourmet items. It's a Karen Brown favorite and member of Chateau Hotels of France. No pool, no a/c. ([arraya.com](http://arraya.com))

### Inexpensive

**Maison Olhabidéa** - This equally lovely B&B belongs to the Fagoaga family, owners of the Arraya. It has just three lovingly decorated rooms, absolutely beautiful decor and marvelous views of the Pyrenees. It's a 4-epis Gites de France. Guillaume Fagoaga has now opened a restaurant in the home and from Wed.-Sun. offers table d'hotes "surprise" luncheon and evening meals for 35€ but for only 30 guests. Reservations are essential. Highly recommended by Pays Basque magazine and the Petit Futé guide, which claims it "a little paradise". ([olhabidea.com](http://olhabidea.com)),

**Aretxola** - Is a converted 19th century farmhouse on the route to the caves, but with only two charmingly decorated rooms, for an equally reasonable price, 75€ double, including breakfast. It is a 3-epis Gites de France Chambre d'Hôtes. ([aretxola.com](http://aretxola.com))

*The two B&Bs above are featured in "130 Chambres d'hotes en France" for under 35 € per person. They've also been included in Pays Basque magazine's "31 Maison d'hôtes de Charm".*

## Ainhoa dining and lodging (Labourd)

### Moderate to Expensive

**Hotel Ithurria** - A 400-year-old coaching inn ([ithurria.com](http://ithurria.com)) on the route to Santiago de Compostela, in this 3-flower village, is a destination for gourmands. Its gourmet restaurant boasts **one Michelin star**, and offers very refined service from white-jacketed waiters in a beautiful, antique-filled dining room with highly polished tile floors, wood beamed ceiling, salmon colored walls and salmon, flowered drapes, a grandfather clock and antique hunting rifles over the fireplace. Fine salmon colored linens and Bauscher china grace the tables. The *cassoulet basque aux haricots rouges* is a fantastic dish, as is the *Coupe à Stephane* for dessert consisting of homemade ice cream, meringue, almonds and warm chocolate sauce. It also has 26 nice rooms, some with balconies, and **rooms in the new wing have a/c**. There is a large **pool** behind the high walls plus fitness room and sauna in the pool house and ample parking. Have a drink on the terrace or in the front garden. Owned and run by the caring Isabal family. Open from mid-April to November. Restaurant closes Wed./Thurs. lunch except from July 1-Sept. 15, high season with fixed price menus of 33€ and 49€. Highly recommended!

## Itxassou dining (Labourd)

### Moderate

**Le Fronton-Hotel Bonnet** - Is in the upper section of this pretty, black cherry town, right at the frontón, offers menus from 17€ (during the week) to 28€. Chef-owner is Jean-Paul Bonnet. Reserve for summer

weekends. And make sure to ask for table on terrace, which has magnificent views of the countryside. The 2-star hotel has a garden and pool. [hotelrestaurantfronton.com](http://hotelrestaurantfronton.com)

**Hotel Le Chene** - In the lower town (follow the “eglise” sign), next to the lovely church with exquisitely cared for, flower filled cemetery, offers delicious gastronomic menus from 16€ to 28€, and is run by Chef Genevieve Salaberry. Rustic. Overlooking the mountains. One can also stop in for a café or panaché, as we recently did, on the covered porch or in the shaded garden. The upstairs rooms are quite modest and simply decorated, and I would choose another hotel for my country accommodations, but dining here is quite nice, and you can't beat the peaceful setting.

## **Espelette dining and lodging (Labourd)**

### **Moderate**

**Hotel Euskadi** - Is an extremely popular; value priced and very typically Basque hotel and restaurant, which everyone loves for its genuine Basque-ness. You can't get better food than this! Chef André Darraidou, the town's former mayor and founder of the pepper festival, offers the quintessential Basque country cuisine and has several different fixed price menu options (large portions) at 16€, 23€, 27€ and 31€. Everything about this inn is quintessentially Basque, down to the décor, linens and regional specialties like Piperade (scrambled eggs and peppers), atxoá (veal stew) and gabure (vegetable soup) plus the ubiquitous gâteau basque. Adorable. Oozes Basque-ness! Highly recommended for a totally authentic, delicious country Basque meal! The hotel is a 2 star Logis de France member.

### **Budget**

**Irazabala** - If you're a B&B fan, this chambres d'hotes can be found at the top of a hill, in the Quartier Laharketa, 1,5 km. from the village, offering a 360-degree view of the Pyrénées. There are only three beautifully decorated bedrooms with fine antique furniture. One, the “Artzamendia”, has a 4-poster bed. The sumptuous farmhouse breakfast is served on the terrace overlooking meadows with grazing Pottoka horses. Horseback rides are available nearby. Featured in “130 Chambres d'hotes en France a partir de 35€”. Marikita Toffolo-Fagoaga is the owner. English, Spanish and German are spoken. Double rates for 68€ A 3-epis Gites de France. The house has been featured in Pays Basque magazine's “31 Maison d'hôtes de Charm”. ([irazabala.com](http://irazabala.com))

## **Urt dining (Labourd)**

**Auberge de la Galupe** - If you're seeking a fabulous, unforgettable gourmet experience in the countryside, then head straight north towards Bayonne on the A 63/E 5, then west on the A64 to the exit for **Urt**, and make your way to the **Auberge de la Galupe** down past the town and right next to the Adour river (a *galupe* is a type of riverboat). It's a charming, whitewashed inn with blood red shutters and two dining rooms (one reserved for non-smokers) with fireplace, elegantly set tables with Limoges china, gracious service and well known throughout France, a member of Relais & Chateaux, a Relais Gourmand. Chef is Stephane Rouville from Normandy, who took over several years ago from Christian Parra, and he just regained the restaurant's Michelin star and is working on his second. The restaurant rates a high ranking of 15.5 in the Gastronomic and Cultural Guide to the Basque Country. We chose the well-priced simple three course *menu d'Aran* for 33€ (available only at lunch during the week), precisely because we wanted to try the chef's renowned *boudin noir* and the line caught *merlu* (hake), and we remember this as one of our most memorable meals *ever* in the French Basque Country, every bit on the par with Le Cheval Blanc in Bayonne, Les Pyrénées in St.-Jean-Pied-du-Port and Ithurria in Ainhoa. Must reserve, by phone

or on line. It is closed from Nov. to March on Tuesdays, and on Sundays except for July. But check their web page for the most current information. ([lagalupe.com](http://lagalupe.com)) Phone: 05 59 56 21 84

While you're in town, be sure to visit the lovely 16th century church on the square in the village. Market day is Wednesday.

## **Bidarray dining (Labourd)**

**Auberge de Iparla** - The Parisian multi-Michelin starred chef Alain Ducasse reopened this auberge here at the top of the village in '03 along with partner Christian Parra (formerly of the Auberge de la Galupe above). It has an elegant Basque farmhouse décor, filled with cooper pots and pans, flowers, and serves hearty Basque country cuisine, and its *boudin noir* (black pudding) is legendary. We dined here recently and loved both the cuisine and the great value. The hill top village has truly breathtaking views. Chef Cedric Roubin has recently taken over the kitchen. There are 80 different wines to choose from, including Irouléguy and Txakolí. Fixed price menu for 22€. It closes Wednesdays from Sept. 15-June 15, also closes in Jan. and Feb. Phone: 05 59 37 77 21. . Email: [iparla2@wanadoo.fr](mailto:iparla2@wanadoo.fr).

## **St.-Jean-Pied-de-Port dining (Basse-Navarre)**

**Les Pyrénées** - This 3 Michelin starred hotel and restaurant is located directly on the main road through the town is for throw-caution-to-the-winds haute cuisine dining. It was recently reviewed in Wine Spectator's guide to the French Basque Country. This is a Relais & Chateaux property run extremely smoothly by the Arrambide family. The father, Firmin, oversees the dining room while his son Phillippe stokes the fires in the kitchen. While an a la carte feast may run over 100€, a special 3 course menu, *menu du terroir*, choice of 2 starters, 2 mains and 2 desserts, is offered for 40€ at lunch-other menus for 70€ and 85€. The dining room closes Monday for dinner from Nov.-March and closes on Tuesdays from Sept 20-June 30. It also closes Nov. 20-Dec. 22, Jan. 5-28. But check the current closing dates at [www.hotel-les-pyrenees.com](http://www.hotel-les-pyrenees.com) or phone: 05 59 37 01 01

As wonderful as the dining experience is at Les Pyrénées, in high season I would not spend the night in this extremely busy town. For lodging with charm in a tranquil, stunning setting, I would move on just 11 kms west to St. Etienne de Baïgorry.

## **St. Etienne de Baïgorry dining and lodging (Basse-Navarre)**

**Hotel Arcé** - is a lovely, incredibly restful inn, which I highly recommend. It's less well known than Hotel-Restaurant Les Pyrénées, but delightfully Basque. St.-Jean-Pied-de-Port is a such a very busy, heavily visited place due to its serving as a major staging area for the pilgrimage to Santiago, and its being at the end of the road for the tourist train from Bayonne, plus is the "gateway" into Spain on the truck route. St. Etienne is much quieter, less overrun during the season. This country inn, which has been run by the same family for 5 generations, has a comfy, welcoming and prettily decorated flower-filled parlor with fireplace, antique-filled nooks, twenty simple, but pleasant rooms, a tennis court and pool that you reach by crossing a private bridge over the river Nive. There are three rooms below the terrace restaurant housed in an annex "villa", one that is a 2-bedroom suite with sitting room. It's set in the Aldudes valley surrounded by spectacular mountain scenery.

The cuisine is quite nice (brought to you by chef owner, Pascual Arce), and evening lantern lit dining on their pretty outdoor terrace shaded by plane trees is a special, peaceful, romantic treat. This is a real find! If you don't stay, please go for a meal, or just to see this charming, lovingly run place. It's a Karen Brown

favorite and receives two red gables for charm in the red Michelin and is featured in "Europe's Wonderful Little Hotels and Inns". Plus, it's well priced. Along with Les Pyrénées, the Arce was featured in the June, '07 issue of Wine Spectator, which states that the Arcé is a good destination "for families on a moderate budget and those seeking refuge from modernity". Phone: 05 59 37 40 14 ([hotel-arce.com](http://hotel-arce.com))

For something quite different:

Also, just above the village in a large park, there's the **Chateau d'Etchauz**, which dates from the 11th to 16th centuries, and is a historical monument open to tourists. It offers six rather expensive rooms; each named and decorated for an historical character and period, luxuriously appointed but strictly in period style. Don't choose the Bertrand d'Etchauz room with its small 500 yr. old 4-poster bed if you're tall. The King of Navarre suite has a standard size bedroom with enormous living room where the king held court. A must for history buffs, if not to stay, at least to visit. Charlie Chaplin was a guest here. It's a member of Chateau & Hotels of France. [chateauinfrance.net/](http://chateauinfrance.net/)

## **A recap of farmers' market days**

*Which open around 7:00 am and close at 1:00 pm*

- Bayonne – Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday
- Biarritz - covered market open daily
- St.-Jean-de-Luz – Tuesday, Friday and Saturday in July and August
- Ciboure - Sunday
- Urrugne - Thursday
- Ascain - Saturday
- Saint-Pée-sur-Nivelle - Saturday
- Espelette - Wednesday and Saturday only in July and August
- Cambo-les-Bains - Friday
- St.-Jean-Pied-de-Port – Monday

## **Local golf courses open for fee to non-members**

See [beam-basquecountry.com](http://beam-basquecountry.com) - offers links to all area golf courses and info on greens fees-click on "golfers' paradise"

Must reserve at least 24 hrs in advance.

- Golf de Chantaco, St.-Jean-de-Luz, 18 holes
- Golf du Phare, Biarritz, 18 holes (the second oldest course in France opened in 1888)
- Golf d'Ilbarritz, Bidart, 9 holes
- Golf de Chiberta, Anglet, 18 holes (reserve 48 hrs. in advance)
- Golf d'Arcangues, Arcangues, 18 holes
- Golf de la Nivelle, Ciboure, 18 holes

## **Thalasso(therapy (spa) treatments**

- Loreamar Thalasso Spa at the Grand Hotel Luz, St.-Jean-de-Luz ([luzgrandhotel.fr](http://luzgrandhotel.fr))
- Hélianthal Spa at the Hélianthal hotel, St.-Jean-de-Luz ([helianthal.fr](http://helianthal.fr))
- Thalassa Miramar in the Sofitel Miramar hotel, Biarritz ([sofitel.com](http://sofitel.com))
- Atlanthal in the Atlanthal Hotel in Anglet ([atlanthal.com](http://atlanthal.com))