



The Railways Around Bilbao

8 Days | 12 - 19 October

We invite you to join us on a seven-night stay in the modern, attractive Basque capital, Bilbao.

Based in the new four-star Hotel NYX Bilbao, centrally located near the Old Town, tram, metro and railway, we will have time to discover the best of Bilbao as well as exploring other parts of the Basque Country.

Our tour includes two cruises, one on the river from Bilbao city centre to the river mouth, and a second along the scenic coastline at Bermeo, three funiculars, including the oldest in the Basque Country, and scenic rail journeys to Bermeo, San Sebastian and Miranda de Ebro. We also visit the famous Vizcaya Transporter Bridge, including a guided tour over the top of the bridge.

Highlights

- Travel to Bilbao by air, land or sea
- Scenic rail journeys
- Vibrant city
- Some meals included
- Centrally located hotel
- River and sea cruises

Bilbao itself is no longer the grey industrial city it once was. Nowadays the Basque capital is a modern, vibrant city with many attractions for visitors, most famous of all being the Guggenheim Museum. But it still has a typical Old Town, and indeed our hotel is conveniently located in this part of the city.

Transport-wise, Bilbao has an excellent integrated transport system, consisting of buses, a tram line, a metro and the Euskotren metre-gauge railway. Other suburban trains are operated by RENFE and FEVE, so for rail fans, there is no shortage of lines to explore! While central Bilbao is quite flat, the suburbs are hillier, so you will find several railway stations connected to the suburbs they serve by modern lifts and funiculars.

We will fly into and out of Bilbao Airport, but it is also possible to travel overland (additional overnight stays en-route may be necessary) and even by sea, with routes connecting Cork, Plymouth and Portsmouth to Santander and Bilbao.

If you haven't explored Bilbao and the Basque Country, you are in for a very pleasant surprise.

Your Tour Manager for this trip will be Marion. If you have any questions about the itinerary, please feel free to contact him at marion@ptg.co.uk.

From: Stansted, Bristol, Manchester, Edinburgh, London St Pancras

Day 1, Thursday 10 October, 2024

We have flights from Bristol, Gatwick and Manchester to Bilbao, from where we transfer to our city-centre hotel, our home for the next seven nights. Overland by rail from St Pancras is also available.

Day 2, Friday 11 October (B,L)

This morning we take the metro to the suburbs of Bilbao to visit the famous Vizcaya Transporter Bridge. Passengers and vehicles are carried across the river on a gondola suspended from a girder and it is an important transport connection between the city of Bilbao on one side of the river and the community of Portugalete on the

other. As part of our visit we will cross the river on the gondola, but we will also have a guided tour across the top of the bridge.

We reach the top by lift, and as the top is fully enclosed, it is perfectly safe! The guide will explain the history and operation of the bridge, and we also have excellent views of the riverside area. When we have finished our bridge visit, we have our welcome lunch in a restaurant overlooking the bridge and the river. After lunch we return to the city centre and ride on our first funicular, the Artxanda Funicular.

Originally opened in 1915, it has had a chequered history, suffering bomb-damage during the Spanish Civil War and flood damage, but it has always survived and continues to serve the city. At the top is a lovely park with great views over the city and beyond.

Day 3, Saturday 12 October (B)

Today we have a full day in Bilbao beginning with a short tram ride to the pier where we will begin our two-hour cruise from the city centre to the river mouth and back. We pass the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao FC's stadium and of course sail under the Vizcaya bridge. On returning to the city centre, we break for lunch, then meet up again for our walk around the Old Town led by a local guide.

Day 4, Sunday 13 October (B, L)

This morning we travel by coach to the Basque Railway Museum at Azpeitia. Here we find a wonderful collection of narrow-gauge locomotives, carriages, trams and even an ex London Transport trolleybus. There is also a steam crane which is still operational, and they run one of the trams along a very short section of track. After time to look around this excellent museum and ride on the tram, we join our steam-hauled train for a trip along the 5 km line to Lasao station.

Though short, the line has nice views of the River Urola which we follow for much of the journey. At Lasao the loco runs round and we head back to Azpeitia. Lunch in a local restaurant is included, then we return to Bilbao, with a trip on the Larreineta Cable Car, which takes us up to 400 metres above sea level, giving spectacular views across the city. After travelling back down, our coach will



take us back to our hotel.

Day 5, Monday 14 October (B)

Our destination today is the attractive fishing port of Bermeo, reached by train along the Euskotren metre-gauge branch line.

On arrival in Bermeo, we walk to the harbour, where we join our boat for a cruise from Bermeo towards Ogoño. We can see the entrance to the marshes, Mundaka and Laida beach. Following that route, we arrive at Laga Beach and the Caves of Ogoño. We can also see Izaola Island from all perspectives. The route ends in the picturesque port of Elantxobe, to return to Bermeo.

As the cruise ventures out to sea, it is dependent on having suitable sea conditions! Free time for lunch and to explore Bermeo, one of the most important fishing villages in the Basque Country. The town has a long maritime tradition and, for centuries, the bermeotarras (as locals from Bermeo are called) were famous whalers. Even today Bermeo's economy is heavily based on the fishing industry. One of the most picturesque corners of Bermeo is its beautiful old port, an area with slender houses painted in a myriad of colours that is full of bars where locals stop for a drink and a pintxo.

While in Bermeo, you should walk around the steep old part of town located behind the old port, and, if you are interested, it is also possible to visit the museum dedicated to the lives of the arrantzales (Basque fishermen), located in the Ercilla Tower. Bermeo is situated in the corner of the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve, a protected area that features some very beautiful and unique natural landscapes. Return to Bilbao by train at the end of the afternoon.

Day 6, Tuesday 15 October (B)

Our hotel is just seconds away from Zazpikaleak railway station from where we catch our Euskotren train to San Sebastian, or Donostia as it is called in Basque.

The journey itself is worth doing just for the scenery, as we travel through a mix of open countryside and narrow river valleys, in particular alongside the River Deba. This is the day we see the Basque Country at its best, and

at the end of the journey, one of Northern Spain's most beautiful cities, San Sebastian.

You'll have free time to explore this resort city, with a bay and beach stretching for over 2 km. At one end there is the old town and the castle, and at the opposite end of the bay is Monte Igueldo, reached by Monte Igueldo Funicular. To the delight of locals and visitors, this endearing funicular still works daily with the same equipment and vehicles from its inauguration on 25th August 1912.

The coaches, with the exception of some minor modifications, still have their original wooden bodywork. The Monte Igueldo Funicular is considered the best-preserved funicular in Spain. For those interested, David will lead a walk along the bay to the funicular, and a chance to see San Sebastian from the viewpoint at the top of the hill. We return from San Sebastian by train in time for dinner.

Day 7, Wednesday 16 October (B, D)

This is a free day to explore all that Bilbao offers, be it the range of museums and art galleries, not least the Guggenheim, or the network of tram, metro and rail lines.

For anyone who wishes one last scenic rail journey, Marion will lead a morning trip on the RENFE broad-gauge line to Miranda de Ebro and back, a line that winds its way up and over the mountains that lie to the south of Bilbao. At the end of the day, we meet up for our farewell dinner.

Day 8, Thursday 17 October (B)

We return to the UK today by air from Bilbao airport. Overland and sea options available.

This is a moderately active tour, and there will be some walking, such as from railway stations to cruise piers or funiculars.



Holiday Prices (per person)

- From London Gatwick: £1,675
- From Bristol (Easyjet): £1,675
- From Manchester (Easyjet): £1,675
- From Bilbao: £1,450
- From St Pancras (Eurostar/TGV): £2,125

With flight prices might increase for late bookings. Overland travel - if booked early enough we include a Interrail pass which gives you free travel from, and back to, your home station.

Options

- Single supplement: £120 (alternative hotel), £520 (main hotel)

Deposit

- £500 (joining in UK), £300 (joining in Bilbao), £1,000 (overland)

