

Bilbao



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OLD TOWN

Ministry of Industry and Tourism
Published by: © Turespaña
Created by: Lionbridge
NIPO: 086-17-054-7

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*FRONT PAGE: Bilbao Guggenheim Museum
BACK: Old Town
Photo: Bilbao Tourist Board*

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INTRODUCTION

▲ GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, BILBAO

Come to Bilbao and discover how the past, the present and the future blend in perfect harmony. A city which has been able to coordinate its rich industrial past with truly futuristic artistic trends.

With the **Bilbao Guggenheim Museum** as its flagship, the city's cultural attractions are immense. There are extraordinary colour changes caused by the natural light reflecting off the titanium façade onto the estuary and great works of contemporary art exhibited in its galleries.

You'll love the **Casco Viejo** or Old Town and the **Ensanche neighbourhood** with its broad, elegant streets. As you stroll about you'll have a chance to try the typical **pintxos**, aperitifs which are a gastronomic work of art, to be accompanied by a glass of **txakoli**, the

regional wine, before going on to one of the local restaurants, true culinary temples run by Michelin-starred *chefs*.

Nature is a prominent feature in a city surrounded by mountains and where you can go to the beach on the metro. The outskirts of Bilbao are full of green areas and wonderful lookout points with incomparable views of the city's skyline and the Cantabrian Sea.

Without leaving the Basque Country/ Euskadi, you can visit other fascinating cities like San Sebastián and Vitoria, learn about wine culture and enjoy the mountains and coastline.

The charms of Bilbao are a delight for all the senses.

BILBAO

DISCOVER BILBAO

NEIGHBOUR- HOOD BY NEIGHBOUR- HOOD

This friendly, hospitable city lies in the valley formed by two rivers, the Nervión and the Ibaizabal. You'll discover the main attractions in its most iconic neighbourhoods.

► SANTIAGO CATHEDRAL



CASCO VIEJO OR OLD TOWN

A walk through the pedestrian streets will lead you to beautiful lookout points, glass-fronted galleries and the façades of Baroque buildings with centuries of history. This is the city's oldest and most traditional district, also known as the **Siete Calles/Zazpikaleak** or Seven Streets. This is the real heart of Bilbao.

Tree-lined pathways lead you to the **El Arenal** gardens, where the flower market is held every Sunday. On one side you'll see the Neo-Baroque façade of the **Arriaga Theatre** and, on the opposite side, the **San Nicolás** Towers overlooking the 18th-century church of the same name and full of mementos of Basque fishermen and sailors.

Bilbao's old town is home to some of the city's most iconic monuments. The

Cathedral of Santiago is the oldest building, the nerve centre and meeting point for the residents of Bilbao. Inside there is a beautiful cloister surrounded by trees, an oasis in the heart of the Old Town.

From there, continue to the **Plaza Nueva**, an ideal spot for a snack in one of the charming cafés and bars.

You should also visit the **La Ribera Market**, which has reinvented itself just like the city. You'll see how the light reflects off the shop windows at sundown as you stroll along beside the estuary.

You'll discover beautiful little corners and squares in the narrow streets. To fully experience the culture of traditional **pintxos** and **poteo**, the best streets are those of Correo, Bidebarrieta, Artekale,

Somera and La Cruz. You'll also find a broad selection of shops. These include traditional establishments selling select handicrafts, as well as modern shops with an alternative feel.

In the Siete Calles area there are other iconic attractions like the 15th-century **Church of San Antón**, (with remains of Bilbao's original city wall under the altar) and the historical **La Bolsa** building, an 18th-century palace converted into a social and cultural centre.



▲ OLD TOWN

INDAUTXU AND ABANDO

Pleasant walks with extraordinary views and ground-breaking architecture. This is the essence of the elegant **Indautxu** and **Abando** neighbourhoods which make up Bilbao's Ensanche district. In this district, which lies mostly on the banks of the estuary, there are numerous industrial premises whose activity has declined considerably over the years. This gave rise to the '**Bilbao Ría 2000**' project with the aim of transforming this deteriorated area into what it has become today: modern, up-to-date and focusing on the tourist and services sector.

Here you can stroll along broad, grid-pattern streets which converge on squares like the Plaza Circular. Here you'll find the monumental **Sociedad Bilbaína**, an eclectic building, with an exquisite, English-style, exterior finish and home to Bilbao's most select and exclusive club. If you continue along the Calle Buenos Aires and cross the



▼ PLAZA CIRCULAR



Photo: MITXI/Bilbao Tourist Board

▲ VIEW OF THE TOWN HALL FROM THE OTEIZA SCULPTURE

estuary you'll come to the **Town Hall**, whose façade is decorated with wonderful sculptures.

Nearby you'll find the city's great icon, the **Bilbao Guggenheim Museum**, designed by Frank Gehry. Apart from its incredible exhibits, the building is a work of art in itself with sinuous lines and a titanium shell.

Modernism is one of the prominent styles in the Ensanche district of Bilbao. The **Casa Montero**, by the architect Luis Aladrén, is perhaps the most famous building in this style in Bilbao. Aladrén was also responsible for the project for the **palace housing the Diputación Foral de Bizkaia** (Vizcaya Regional Government), a supreme example of eclecticism in Basque architecture.

Then there's the **Conference and Music Centre**, better known as the Euskalduna Palace, in the strikingly recognisable form of a steel ship and which is well worth a visit.

📍 www.euskalduna.eus

Another way of exploring Bilbao is through the bridges which cross over the estuary. From both the **Pedro Arrupe** and **La Salve** bridges there are magnificent views of the city.

BEGOÑA

A prominent feature of this neighbourhood in the upper part of the city is the magnificent 16th-century **Basilica of Begoña**, built to commemorate **La Amatxu**, a term of endearment in the Bizkaia region for their patron saint, the Virgin of Begoña.

On her saint's day, 11 October, there is a lively pilgrimage with concerts, parades, children's activities, dancing and Basque rural sports. From the Plaza de Unamuno there is a historical stair-

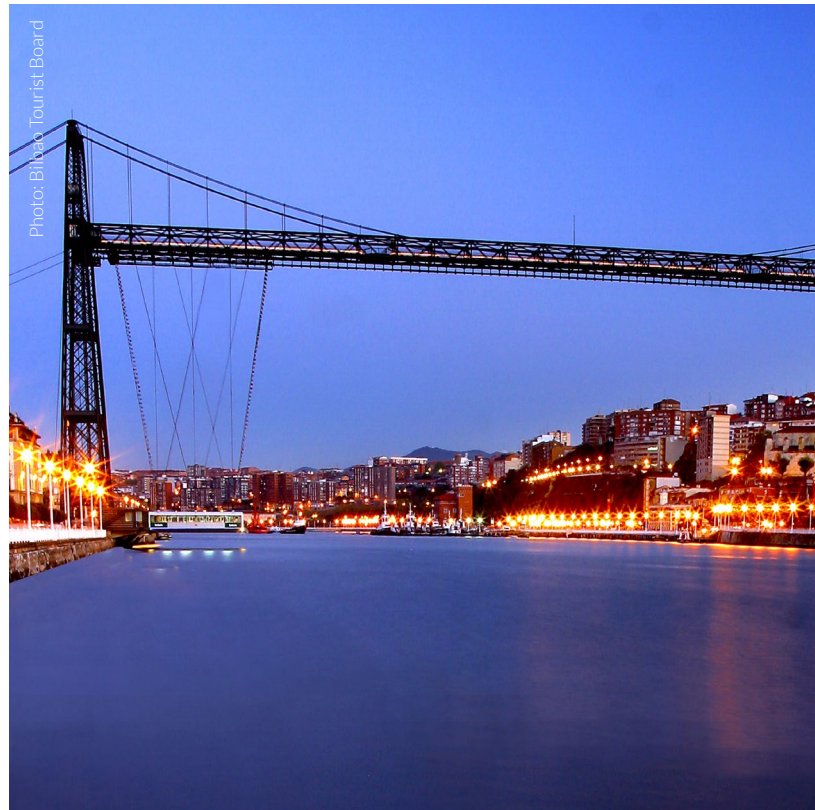
▼ GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, BILBAO





▲ BEGOÑA BASILICA

DISCOVER BILBAO NEIGHBOURHOOD BY NEIGHBOURHOOD



▲ BIZKAIA BRIDGE

way called **Las Calzadas de Mallona** leading from the Old Town up to this beautiful Gothic temple.

If you're feeling up to the challenge of climbing the 300 steps, you'll see a number of crosses which are a part of the city's old cemetery. You can take the tram or take the Mallona lift which will bring you out in the lovely Etxebarria Park, just a short distance from the basilica.

NEAR BILBAO

You really shouldn't miss the World Heritage Hanging Bridge/Bizkaia Bridge, the world's oldest metallic transporter bridge. This architectural colossus is one

of the most important connecting points between the towns of Portugalete and Getxo, located on either side of the Nervión River.

Portugalete is ideal for a day's excursion. In the historical old town with steep, medieval streets you'll find the Basilica of Santa María, the Salazar Tower and the Convent of Santa Clara. From Portugalete, you can also follow the cycle lane to reach the lovely La Arena beach. The town of **Getxo** is full of charm and architectural treasures. You can visit the Old Port of Algorta, the Las Arenas neighbourhood and enjoy a coastline interspersed with beaches and cliffs.



Photo: Bilbao Tourist Board

THE ARTS

A contemporary art museum which looks like something out of science fiction, beautiful galleries with masterpieces of painting and sculpture, spectacular venues for concerts and theatre... Bilbao's cultural agenda is endless.

◀ BILBAO GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

The **Bilbao Guggenheim Museum** is the flagship for a city renowned for design, modernity and a strong artistic vocation.

The surprising architectural structure with curved titanic plates is perfectly integrated into the city of Bilbao and its surroundings.

The museum has regular temporary exhibitions, an extraordinary permanent collection and two *mascots*: the floral Puppy and Maman, the spider-like work by Louise Bourgeois.

In the interior you'll find works like the series of pop images of Marilyn

Monroe by Andy Warhol and works by prominent international artists like Richard Serra, Anselm Kiefer, Gerhard Richter, Jean-Michel Basquiat... There are also sculptures by Basque artists like Eduardo Chillida and Jorge Oteiza.

① www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus

If you prefer a more classical gallery, then the collection in the **Fine Arts Museum** is one of the most important in Spain. Travel back in time with works in a number of different styles from the 13th century to the present day. There are over 10,000 exhibits including masterpieces by El Greco, Goya, Zuloaga, Francis Bacon, Miquel Barceló and Antoni Tàpies.

① www.bilbaomuseoa.eus

The modern facilities of the **Archaeological Museum** display the history of Vizcaya by means of the footprints left by its inhabitants from pre-history to recent times.

📍 www.bizkaikoa.bizkaia.eus

The **Azkuna Zentroa** is an extraordinary building designed by Philippe Starck which is used for holding all kinds of cultural activities. If you'd like to see a show, a concert or an opera, the **Euskalduna Palace** has a really comprehensive programme.

📍 www.azkunazentroa.eus

📍 www.euskalduna.eus

The theatre listings in Bilbao are fascinating. Check out the agendas for venues like the **Arriaga Theatre**, the **Sala BBK**, **Bilborock**, the **Campos Elíseos Theatre** and the **Sociedad Filarmónica** to find something you like.

📍 www.filarmonica.org

📍 www.teatroarriaga.eus

📍 www.salabbk.eus

📍 www.bilbaogazte.bilbao.eus/es/bilbarock

📍 www.teatrocampos.com



Finally, **Bilbao Art District** is essential for really getting to know the artistic scene in Bilbao. This initiative was designed to carry out art and cultural activities throughout the year.

📍 www.visitbiscay.eus/es/-/art-district-el-bilbao-alternativo





TASTING BILBAO

The displays in Bilbao's bars and restaurants are a spectacular blend of colours, scents and flavours. Here **pintxos** have almost a religious significance. These represent an extraordinary variety of exquisite aperitifs which you can try all over the city.

There is such a wide choice, from traditional to true avant-garde creations, although typically you'll find **gildas** (olive, anchovy and chilli pepper on a cocktail stick), grilled mushrooms, **txangurro** (spider crab), Spanish omelette and several recipes for cod which is a star feature of Basque cuisine.

▲ PINTXOS

There is also a wide variety of establishments. The Old Town, Abando and Indautxu are the neighbourhoods best known for these delicious Basque **tapas** which you'll find in a host of hundred-year-old taverns, modern bars, delightful cafeterias and restaurants. Almost all of them pay homage in their own way to these **pintxos**. They go best with a glass of **txakoli**, the local white wine. Now you're ready for a **txikiteo** or **pintxo-pote**, a traditional bar-crawl with wine and **tapas** in the Basque country.

The great selection of restaurants and grills has made Bilbao a culinary Mecca

in Spain. The city is proud to have several **Michelin-starred** restaurants.

Another fantastic way of discovering Basque cuisine first-hand is in one of the gastronomic markets. The **La Ribera Market**, next to the Estuary, is symbolic of the transition which has taken place in the city. Recently renovated, it and is now quite spectacular. Come and see how the light falls on its colourful windows at sunset while you walk along the Bilbao Estuary and try its careful selection of *pintxos*

and typical Basque dishes cooked to the rhythm of live music.

Another market dating back to the beginning of the last century and recently renovated is the **Abando**. It is small and charming with delightful stalls selling local delicacies like cheeses and cold meats. Meanwhile, the **El Ensanche Market**, located in the heart of the city, has preserved its traditional charm and is where the local people do much of their daily shopping.

▼ LA RIBERA MARKET



BILBAO



Photo: Jarno Gonzalez/123rf.com

BILBAO THROUGHOUT THE SEASONS

AUTUMN

On the last Monday in October you have the really popular **Fair of Gernika**, a beautiful town around 35 kilometres south of Bilbao. This is where you can experience the more traditional side of the Basque Country, with *bertsolaris* (people reciting improvised verses in the Basque language), ox competitions, games of the traditional Basque sports of *cesta* and *pelota* and the best local dishes.

WINTER

Traditional Basque rural sports are best enjoyed during the cold winter months: cutting tree trunks with an axe, lifting rocks, manual drilling through rocks, tug of war, races... These games are called *herri kirolak*.

In February and March there is the **Zinegoak**, or Bilbao International Festival of LGBT Film and Performing Arts, which has become one of the most important in Spain.

SPRING

Of all the possibilities for active tourism available in Bilbao when the weather is good (water sports, hiking in the surrounding area, cycling...), one of the most appealing must be a **round of golf** in the privileged natural environment of the nearby Txorierra valley.



▲ MARIJAIA

SUMMER

The pleasant summer temperatures are ideal for spending some time on the **beaches** near the city, including Las Arenas, Ereaga and Arrigunaga.

Summer in Bilbao means talking about its most important festival called **Semana Grande** (Bilboko Aste Nagusia in the Basque language). For nine days in the second fortnight in August, the Old Town and on both sides of the Estuary you'll find *txosnas* (stalls with music, food and drink), the heart and soul of these festivities which include traditional characters like the *Marijaia*, a doll with its arms in the air which represents the festivity and is burned as the closing event.



Photo: Bilbao Tourist Board

▲ DOÑA CASILDA ITURRIZAR PARK

BILBAO WITH CHILDREN

Bilbao is ideal for a family holiday. There is a wide selection of activities suitable for children. For example, a ride on the **Artxanda Funicular**, which runs from the town centre up to the mountain with the same name. From high up you'll have incredible views.

The **Doña Casilda Iturrizar Park**, known locally as "duck park", is a beautiful green area with plenty to do, like riding on a traditional merry-go-round, visiting the duck pond or just enjoying the fountains and sculptures.

If you'd like to explore the city from a different perspective and surprise the children at the same time, take a sight-seeing boat along the Nervión River and enjoy a memorable **river trip**.

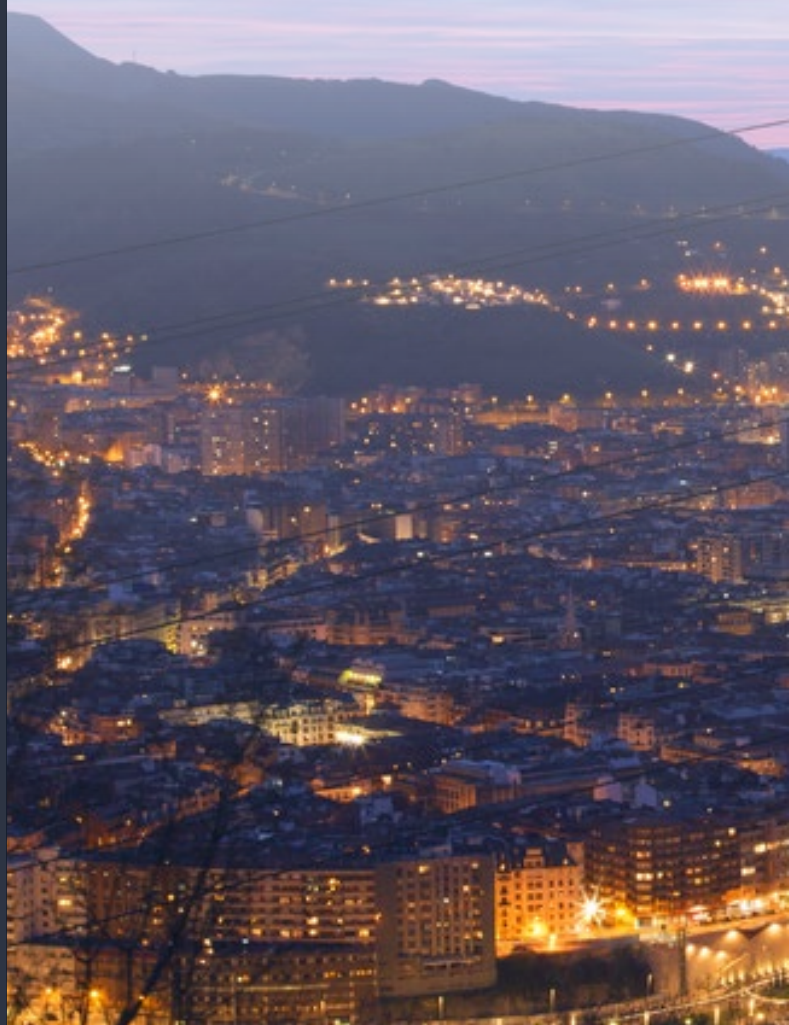
THE HIDDEN CITY

If you still have time, there are plenty of charming secrets in Bilbao for you to discover.

PARKS AND GARDENS

The prominent colour in Bilbao is green which is evident in the city's parks and the surrounding mountains. The largest is the **Etxebarria Park**, on the hill called Begoña. **El Arenal** is the garden area in the Old Town where the locals love to rest and relax, take a stroll or enjoy a picnic.

In the heart of the Abando neighbourhood, the **Albia gardens** are ideal for a stroll, looking at the architecture and taking a drink in one of the bars in the



surrounding area. And near Rekalde, what was formerly a railway yard has been converted into a splendid park, the **Parque Ametzola**.

These are just a few of the city's green areas, there are many more. In the **Miribilla**, **Bidarte** and **Europa** parks there are spacious grassy areas and interesting trails.

MONUMENTS

On a walk through Bilbao you'll see all kinds of iconic, monumental buildings. Apart from those which are well-known, you shouldn't miss **La Santa y Real Casa de Misericordia** and its romantic gardens, the majestic palaces of **Ibaigane** and **Chávarri**, the seat of the Bizkaia Government Delegation, and the **Bidebarrieta Library**, in the French eclectic style.

You could also go to a concert at the **Quiosco del Arenal**, designed by Pedro Ispizua, an architect from Bilbao. It is a circular music pavilion, with an overhanging roof and very expressionist, inspired by the shape of a shell.

Then there's the **San Mamés Stadium**, also known as the "Cathedral of Football", winner of a number of awards including the world's best newly-built sports facility at the 2015 World Architecture Festival.

The city is also proud of the architecture in its metropolitan railway network, designed by Norman Foster. The most spectacular station is Sarriko, also known as *The Spider* or the *Centipede* because of its extraordinary structure. Especially surprising are the entrances to the metro, known as **Fosteritos**, steel and glass awnings with very unusual designs.



BILBAO



Photo: Jose Maria Luis Marquez/123rf.com

SECRET MUSEUMS

There is an incredible number of museums in Bilbao. They go from local gems to internationally renowned facilities, covering everything from antiquity to the most state-of-the-art.

The **Vasco Museum**, in the heart of the Old Town, deals with the ethnographic and cultural legacy of the Basque Country. Nearby, you'll find the **Pasos de Semana Santa Museum**, the only one of its kind in this region. The equally interesting **Diocesan Museum of Religious Art** has one of Europe's best collections of precious metal objects.

The exhibits in the **Ría de Bilbao Maritime Museum**, in the Ensanche neighbourhood, display the maritime heritage associated with the estuary.

ROOFTOPS OF BILBAO

See the city in all its splendour from a different perspective. As you cross over the **La Salve Bridge** you get an amazing view of the city centre.

If you fancy taking a drink looking out over the rooftops of the city, climb up to the terrace of the **Azkuna Zentroa**, formerly a wine warehouse and refurbished by the designer Philippe Starck. A culture and leisure centre where everything imaginable is possible: exhibitions, concerts, swimming pool, restaurants, shops, cinemas...

At the top of the **Solokoetxe elevator** you'll feel like you're walking over the rooftops. A little further away, but just as incredible are the watchtower in **Etxebarria Park** and the **Artxanda lookout point**.

▼ ARTXANDA LOOKOUT POINT



ENJOY THE NIGHTLIFE

Bilbao has a lively nightlife with plenty to choose from. It is traditional to start out with a little **txikiteo** in the **Old Town**, the **Ensanche** or the **Ledesma** neighbourhood. Some of the terraces also have outstanding views.

Then you choose from among a wide choice of cosy, friendly bars, concert halls and clubs. The area surrounding the Albia and Mazarredo gardens is highly recommended. For something more alternative, your best option is the Ripa and Marzana quaysides.



TOURS AND WALKS

There are many different ways of exploring Bilbao. The city is quite compact, so you can easily get around **on foot**. Also **on wheels** as there is a fantastic bike lane alongside the estuary. On water you can choose between a canoe, *paddle surf* and *Big SUP* to get a different perspective of the city while getting a little exercise.

The wonderful blend of colours, textures, city and nature, make Bilbao fantastic for photo enthusiasts. There are a number of companies organising **photographic routes** around the city, but you can also simply go where you please and photograph whatever attracts your attention.

WHAT CAN YOU VISIT NEAR BILBAO?



▲ DONOSTIA/SAN SEBASTIÁN

DONOSTIA/ SAN SEBASTIÁN

This beautiful city is the capital of Guipúzcoa and is a perfect blend of architecture, gastronomy and the sea. Its white sandy beaches are the perfect place for sunbathing and long walks along the seafront. The different neighbourhoods are home to buildings in the style of the *Belle Époque*, like the **Victoria Eugenia Theatre** and the Town Hall.

The fishing port is a delight, as is **Mount Igueldo**, with Eduardo Chillida's "Wind Comb" sculpture ensemble at its feet.

📍 **Further information:**

www.sansebastianturismo.com

SAN JUAN DE GAZTELUGATXE

Rebuilt, this chapel dates back to the 10th century, and stands right on the Matxitxako Cape overlooking the sea on an islet and is only accessible via a stone bridge and a dizzying staircase.

An unforgettable image
which was used as a location
for several scenes of *Game of
Thrones*.

BILBAO



GERNIKA-LUMO

In **Guernica**, a city that was declared a "Symbol for Peace" by the UNESCO, you will get a sense of the town's history. It was totally destroyed by the German and Italian air forces during the Spanish Civil War, in 1937. This incident inspired the iconic painting by **Pablo Picasso** that bears the town's name. The Gernika tree is a symbol of the Basque people and a legacy of its fascinating past. The town also holds interesting fairs and markets always respecting tradition. The surrounding area of Urdaibai consists of unspoiled nature, declared a Biosphere Reserve by the UNESCO.

RIOJA ALAVESA WINE ROUTE

It's not every day you can sample wines aged in medieval caves. The wine-cellar in this region have successfully combined tradition with the avant-garde. You should visit the towns of **Samaniego**, **Elciego** and **Laguardia**, the capital of the Rioja Alavesa region, all towns set amongst vineyards.

📍 *Further information:*
www.rutadelvinoderiojaalavesa.com

VITORIA-GASTEIZ

The capital of both the Basque Country and the province of Álava is a charming city. Explore the **Ensanche** district, paying special attention to the Plaza de los Fueros and the **Paseo de la Florida**. The magnificent **historical old town** is the heart and soul of the city which features a broad selection of bars and restaurants.

📍 *Further information:*
www.vitoria-gasteiz.org



Photo: Mikhail Mandrygin/123rf.com

▲ MARQUÉS DE RISCAL WINERY
ELCIEGO, ÁLAVA

▼ PLAZA DE LA VIRGEN BLANCA
VITORIA



Photo: jortiso/123rf.com



HOW TO GET THERE

AIRPORT

Bilbao Airport is 12 kilometres from the city centre and has connections with the main cities in Spain and Europe.

① *Further information:*
www.aena.es/es/bilbao.html

TRAIN

From the **Bilbao-Abando railway station** there are daily connections to Madrid and Barcelona and the other main cities in Spain. There are also three suburban lines connecting Bilbao with its metropolitan area and the rest of the Basque Country.

The city is also part of the Costa Verde Express, Transcantábrico Gran Lugo and El Expreso de la Robla tourist train routes.

① *Further information:*
www.renfe.com/
www.renfe.com/es/es/experiencias/viajes-de-lujo

ROAD

The **AP-8 toll motorway** runs through the Basque Country from the French border to Bilbao and the toll-free A-8 highway runs along the rest of the Cantabrian coast to Galicia.

The **AP-68**, which runs through the Ebro Valley, connects you with **Barcelona**. The AP-68 also takes you south, directly to Burgos and from there to Madrid, Valladolid and Portugal.

HOW TO GET AROUND BILBAO

The **Bilbao Metro** has three fast, efficient lines connecting the city centre with the surrounding towns and villages (just like the suburban trains).

Bilbobus, the **municipal bus company**, has 44 lines (27 conventional lines, 9 **Auzolineas** using minibuses and 8 **Gautxoris** or night buses) and over 500 stops throughout the city. The conventional lines and the **Auzolineas** (for specific neighbourhoods) run from 6 am to 11 pm and the **Gautxoris** on Friday from 11 pm to 2:30 am and all night on Saturday.

You can also **rent a bicycle**, a healthy and sustainable way of getting around the city. Another eco-friendly option is to rent an **electrical vehicle**.

① *Further information:*
www.metrobilbao.eus
 ① www.bilbao.eus/bilbobus

CO-OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Two languages coexist in Bilbao: Euskera, the Basque Country's own language, and Castilian Spanish, the official language of the Spanish State. Most notices and signs are in Euskera with the Spanish translation underneath.



FURTHER INFORMATION

BILBAO TOURIST OFFICE

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