

French Basque Country

I took this trip over Easter weekend with my mother and grandmother who were visiting. Be sure to book well in advance if you plan to travel in or from France during a long weekend as everyone is looking to get away at the same time. We were amazed at how much variety there is in a very small geographic area: we saw beaches, rocky cliffs, seaside towns, small mountain villages, countryside, a couple of mid-sized cities and even took a short excursion into Spain, and only used ¼ tank of gas for the whole three days. Several days in the Basque Country makes for a good escape from the city for those who live in Paris, or an excellent complement to a trip to Paris if you are just visiting.

Sat, April 23—Train to Bayonne, night in Saint-Jean-de-Luz

Sun, April 24— Explore Basque Country, night in Ainhoa

Mon, April 25— Explore Basque Country, train back to Paris

Date	To	Cost (total for 3)	Flight/Train/Hotel Details
Sat, April 23	<p>Train to Bayonne (from Montparnasse)</p> <p>Explore Bidart, Guéthary, Saint-Jean-de-Luz</p> <p>The train from Paris to Bayonne is just over 5 hours. I prefer the train whenever possible but flying is another option and may at times be cheaper than the train—both Easyjet and Air France fly to Biarritz.</p> <p>We had to take a taxi to the Hertz agency (less than €10). Avis and Europcar are right by the station but both were going to be closed until 14h for lunch as we arrived on a Saturday, so we opted for Hertz instead.</p> <p>Thanks to recommendations from my officemate and his parents who live in Pau and visit the Basque Country often, we made reservations well in advance at three restaurants that are unquestionably top-notch (yet reasonably priced by Paris standards). Lunch at La table des Frères Ibarboure was one of the best meals I have had in France. They advertise a €37 “coup de coeur” lunch menu as a lighter option, and it may well be compared to the €61 and €108 menus, but it was by no means light: 3 courses, 2 <i>amuses bouches</i> and a second dessert. The grounds of the restaurant/hotel are beautiful.</p>	<p>€188.70 (train)</p> <p>€159 (hotel)</p> <p>\$121.39 (car)</p>	<p><i>Train:</i> 07h15 PARIS MONTPARNASSE 1 ET 2 Train #2967 12h17 BAYONNE</p> <p><i>Car rental:</i> Hertz Ave Du Grand Basque - Esso Station Avenue Du Grand Basque Bayonne, 64100 Phone: 05 59 55 48 07 Fax: 05 59 55 48 07 Hours of Operation: Mo-Sa 0730-2000, Su 0830-1200 1700-2000</p> <p>Lunch in Bidart 13h45: http://www.freresibarboure.com La table des Frères Ibarboure, Chemin de Ttalienea, 64210 Bidart. Tables : 05.59.54.81.64</p> <p>Visit Guéthary</p> <p><i>Hotel in Saint-Jean-de-Luz:</i> Hotel Villas Les Goelands 4 et 6 avenue Etcheverry Saint Jean de Luz, 64500 +33 5 59 26 10 05 hotel.les.goelands@wanadoo.fr www.hotel-lesgoelands.com Hotel Villas Les Goelands is a friendly place with spacious rooms. It’s about a 5 minute walk to the beach and a 10 minute walk to the old center of town, but being just a slight bit away from the pedestrian center means free parking (well worth it). The €7.50 breakfast was also well worth it.</p> <p>Dinner at Le Kaiku at 20h00 17, rue de la République Tél 05 59 26 13 20 Le Kaiku is another exceptional restaurant, in the heart of the old center. I just wish we had more room in our stomachs after our huge late lunch.</p>

Date	To	Cost (total for 3)	Flight/Train/Hotel Details
Sun, April 24	<p>Explore Ascaïn, Sare, night in Ainhoa</p> <p>Sunday morning we decided to take a side-trip to San Sebastián, Spain, which is only about 30 minutes from St. Jean-de-Luz. It's a beautiful seaside town with a large beach and promenade. And it was worth the 30-minute drive for a decent cup of coffee! Something I have a hard time finding in France....</p> <p>We only drove through Ascaïn but we stopped for a while in Sare, a beautiful village that (along with Ainhoa, where we stayed Sunday night) has been named one of the most beautiful villages in France (<i>Les Plus Beaux Villages de France</i>).</p> <p>In Ainhoa, I highly recommend a drive up the mountain behind the Argi Eder. Follow signs for "oratoire", following the large white crosses that represent the stations of the cross, to a small church that overlooks the town (bring your camera!) It takes about 10 minutes to drive (4WD would be nice, but our rental car did make it!) or hike up if you're trying to make room for dinner.</p>	€161.68 (hotel)	<p><i>Hotel in Ainhoa:</i> ARGI EDER ROUTE DE LA CHAPELLE 64250 AINHOA (FRANCE) +33 (0) 5.59.93.72.00 argi.eder@wanadoo.fr http://www.angi-eder.com</p> <p>The Argi Eder is a wonderful hotel: in a tranquil setting with expansive grounds and a swimming pool, yet only a 5 minute walk from the center of town. The building is quite old, in the traditional Basque architectural style, but the rooms are spacious and modern.</p> <p>Dinner at http://www.ithurria.com/francais.html Hôtel Ithurria, 64250 Ainhoa Téléphone : 05.59.29.92.11 - Mail : hotel@ithurria.com We enjoyed Easter dinner at the Hôtel Ithurria, a gourmet restaurant with a fixed-price menu that is well worth the money (€38).</p>

Date	To	Cost (total for 3)	Flight/Train/Hotel Details
Mon, April 25	<p>Explore La Bastide-Clairence, Biarritz, Bayonne</p> <p>Train back to Paris</p> <p><i>Just past Ainhoa, is the adorable town of Espelette, famous for its red peppers. We were lucky and hit it on a Monday morning for the market.</i></p> <p><i>La Bastide-Clairence is another of <i>Les Plus Beaux Villages de France</i>. The picturesque town is worth a visit, but the drive from Ainhoa to La Bastide-Clairence is worth the trip alone. We followed the GPS's directions and it took us down windy, narrow roads through beautiful countryside.</i></p>	€90.70 (train)	<p><i>Train:</i> 18h53 BAYONNE Train #8590 23h50 PARIS MONTPARNASSE 1 ET 2</p> <p>Overnight in Paris</p> <p>We only spent a couple of hours in Biarritz and a couple of hours in Bayonne but we were able to get a feel for the cities without feeling rushed. We dropped the car off at Hertz and called a taxi back to the train station (For a taxi in Bayonne call 01 47 77 71 60).</p>

Budget (for 3 people)

€180 round trip train (total for 3 people)
 €100 for car
 €100 for gas & tolls
 €60/day/person (food & drinks) = €40
 €21 (hotels)
 =€1,541

In the end, we spent almost exactly what we had budgeted—about €500 per person.