

Landcruising in Spain - Bilbao & San Sebastian, May 2019



Ever since I saw pictures of the stunning modern architecture in Bilbao I had wanted to visit this city. But this Basque city (pop. 353,567), spread across both banks of the Nerion River (with its great promenade) is far more than that, and has a wonderfully quirky 700 year old "Old Town" with very unique architecture quite unlike anything else in Spain, or anywhere else for that matter. They like colour! What they also love are their "pintxos" or Basque tapas. Every bar and café worth their salt lays out a huge range along the bartop every lunchtime and evening and you just pick out a selection (1-2.50 euros each) with your drink and get stuck in!



Vegetarians look away now- this is the land of land of smoked ham – excellent, exclusive & very expensive!



The Guggenheim Museum – it's what put Bilbao on the world map and kick-started the city's transformation from a dirty, old industrial port to a world-class cultural mecca. Symbolizing a ship on the banks of the River Nerion, it is stark and simple, constructed of glass, limestone and 33,000 wafer-thin titanium scales cladding the exterior, reflecting the changing colours day & night. It was built using software conceived for the aerospace industry. "Best building of the second half of the 20 century".

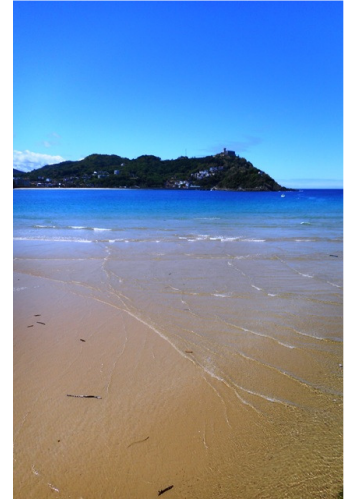


Designed by Spanish architect, Santiago Calatrava Valles, Bilbao Airport (largest in N. Spain/over 5 million passengers p.a.) is another example of breath-taking modern design. The terminal building, set in peaceful, rolling farmland - seemingly in the middle of nowhere - seems to lift upwards as if trying to take off, earning itself the nickname of "The Dove".



And if you think that's amazing, check out his other creations all over the globe online for some truly gob-smacking architecture.

And from there on to San Sebastian- what a surprise! This place rocks! It's grand, elegant and sophisticated – with its huge beaches of golden sand framed by lush hillsides. Again, a Basque city and considered one of the best places to eat in the world! Once the the favourite destination of Spanish royalty, it is still full of pristine elegant art-nouveau buildings, ornate bridges, parks and plazas. And the charming old harbor and narrow, cobblestoned streets of the Old Town are buzzing with life – the bars are crammed with families enjoying a lunch of lavish pintxos“ – each bar trying to outdo the next, and we have never seen or tasted anything like it! Lamb, cured meats, chrimp, crab, goat's cheeses, peppers, artichokes, aubergine, anchovies...take your pick. They are all delicious. And reasonable. This northern coast is full of wonderful, small villages near the Rioja district and we'll definitely come back and see more one day.



Above: Two of the many elegant gentlemen, formerly of the "koffardi" (merchant navy) taking a stroll in the elegant square of the old town. And an impromptu street performance by a choir visiting from Bilbao – and what voices! All in all, a great trip and start to the season. Time to leave Moissac and cruise eastwards back along the Canals de la Garonne and Midi, the way we came last year.....