

Northern Spain & the Pyrenees



Visit the fortified hill top town of Laguardia in Rioja Alavesa

NEW
FOR
2017

17 Sensational Days Madrid to Barcelona

From the rich, rolling vineyards of the Rioja region, follow Spain's Costa Verde to elegant San Sebastian. Explore the mighty French Pyrenees and stay in the walled city of Carcassonne. Ride high in mountain cable cars, relax by the Canal du Midi and sip wine and dine as the lucky locals do!

SANTANDER

Days 5, 6 & 7

- Stay 3 nights on the Atlantic Coast at Santander in a grand period style hotel
- Visit the old medieval heart of Vitoria in the Basque Country
- Follow part of the 'Pilgrims Way' to San Vicente de la Barquera
- Drive through the wild La Hermida Gorge to Potes and enjoy a traditional 'Fabada' mountain lunch
- Take the spectacular cable car ride up to the summit of the Picos de Europa
- Enjoy time to explore the exciting city centre of Santander
- View the Altamira Paleolithic cave paintings
- Visit beautiful Santillana de Mar with its noble palaces & romanesque church

SAN SEBASTIÁN

Days 8, 9 & 10

- Stay 3 nights in Spain's culinary capital of San Sebastián
- Visit scenic Castro Urdiales harbour on the Costa Verde
- Explore Bilbao and enjoy lunchtime in the grand old quarter
- See the world famous Guggenheim Museum
- Enjoy the view of San Sebastián from Monte Iguelo
- Discover the famous tapas bars in San Sebastián
- Visit Saint Jean de Luz and the dramatic French coastal resort of Biarritz

CARCASSONNE

Days 13, 14 & 15

- Stay 3 nights in the heart of historical Carcassonne
- Visit the medieval time capsule of Mirepoix
- Enjoy a visit to the Abbey of St Hilaire in Limoux
- Sip bubbly where it was actually first invented
- Explore the ramparts and old town of Carcassonne
- See the ancient Cathar citadel of Minerve
- Relax in Le Somail by the beautiful Canal du Midi

Atlantic Ocean



RIOJA REGION

Days 2, 3 & 4

- Stay 3 nights in an 800 year old Parador hotel in the charming town of Santo Domingo de la Calzada
- Visit 'El Cid's' cathedral in Burgos
- Explore the old city of Logroño
- Travel along the wonderful Rioja Alavesa wine road
- See the walled medieval city of Laguardia and beautiful Haro
- Relax in the famous 'bull running' city of Pamplona
- Enjoy a tasting at the fabulous Marques de Riscal winery

MADRID

Day 1

- Stay 1 night in Madrid
- Meet and get to know your Tour Manager and fellow travellers over dinner

TARBES

Days 11 & 12

- Stay 2 nights in Tarbes in a first class hotel in the heart of town
- Stroll along the boulevard in Pau or ride the funicular to the Château
- Visit the pilgrimage city of Lourdes
- Drive along part of the 'Tour de France' route over the Col du Tourmalet – the highest mountain pass in the French Pyrenees
- Catch the cable car up to the extraordinary observatory on top of the Pic du Midi to take in the massive views along the breadth of the Pyrenees

BARCELONA

Days 16 & 17

- Spend your final night in the very heart of Barcelona
- Visit Figueres, once home to Salvador Dali
- See Gaudi's astonishing Sagrada Familia Cathedral on a panoramic drive around Barcelona
- Enjoy a splendid Spanish farewell dinner

AVERAGE KMS PER DAY | 142

- Tour commences
- Overnight stays
- Included excursions
- UNESCO World Heritage Listed visits



Message from the Mo

A peek at two peaks!!

Why do we include 2 cable car rides on this trip? Because the days are so different. You see, it is not just about the dramatic views from the top of each, it is about the journey, the mountain experience – it is about the whole day itself. Take the Picos de Europa ride. First stop is in San Vicente de la Barquera, by the sea, with the dramatic Picos mountains rearing up behind. This builds anticipation for our journey through the dramatic gorges and villages, deep into the wild Picos National Park. Here we also enjoy a 'Fabada' mountain lunch (included, of course, after all this is Albatross). So the cable car itself is not the destination, but an excuse for a great day out. And in the Pic Du Midi, in the French Pyrenees? Much higher, much bigger views, and a huge observatory at the top like something out of a James Bond movie. And the journey? We follow a part of the famous Tour de France bicycle route over the Tourmalet Pass, an experience enhanced by the struggling cyclists we pass up hill. Albatross always include those extra days to really experience additional, unusual, sensational sights. There's more to travel than simply ticking highlight cities off a list. There's also the experiences. Whether travelling from peak to peak, or visiting the cliff top citadel of Minerve or the cafés by the canal du Midi, we do these extra things because they simply can't be missed!



Follow the 'Pilgrims Way' to San Vicente de la Barquera

DAY 1 Madrid

Your tour commences this evening in Spain's cosmopolitan capital city, Madrid. Join us tonight for a welcome drink before dinner in your hotel. This is an ideal chance to meet, and get to know, your Tour Manager and fellow travellers.

Meals: D

Enjoy your first night in Madrid



STAY
1
NIGHT

Stay in the heart of the Rioja region

STAY
3
NIGHTS



Your Rioja hotel – Parador de Santo Domingo de la Calzada As defined by the Paradores Hotel organisation, a 'Parador' is a "kind of luxury hotel, usually located in a converted historical building such as a monastery or castle". Our first class hotel for these three nights, the Parador de Santo Domingo de la Calzada, will not disappoint. Dating back to the 12th century and sitting in the heart of the old town, this former hospital building was built to house pilgrims on the Way of St James. It now boasts stone gothic archways and magnificent lounges and grand hallways. See www.parador.es/en/paradores/parador-de-santo-domingo-de-la-calzada

DAY 3 Rioja Region

This morning we will visit the city of Logroño, the capital of La Rioja. Steeped in history, and mentioned in the 1000 year old Pilgrim's guide book – the 'Codex Calixtinus', Logroño became an important trading and commercial capital for the whole region. After free time to explore the heart of the old city we will enjoy a scenic drive through the famous Rioja wine region. Our first stop is in the fortified hill top town of Laguardia in Rioja Alavesa, a walled medieval town with spectacular views across the Sierra de Cantabria. Later we will stop at Haro, one of Rioja's most famous wine producing towns with its beautiful square and wonderful baroque churches. Meals: B



Explore the streets of Carcassonne

DAY 2

Rioja Region

Travelling north, we soon reach Burgos, the historical capital of the Castile and León region, which was one of the four ancient kingdoms of Spain. This stunning medieval city is a masterpiece of Spanish Gothic architecture. We have included a guided tour of the UNESCO World Heritage Listed cathedral, where you will find the tomb of the famous, 11th century warrior, El Cid. Later we enter the famous Rioja region of Spain where we stay three nights in the charming town of Santo Domingo de la Calzada. Set on the banks of the river Oja, this town sits astride the Pilgrims Route to Santiago de Compostela – the Way of St James. The network of medieval streets within the old city walls are declared as a National Historic Site. The rich soil of the Rioja has also enabled the town to become famous for its gastronomy and local wines. Meals: B,D

DAY 4 Rioja Region

Today we visit the ancient town of Pamplona, in the Navarre Province. Whilst Pamplona is famous for its annual 'Sanfermines festival of the bulls', it actually has a rich and proud history dating back 2000 years. After time exploring the traditional historical centre, make sure you relax in a restaurant or café in one of the many squares, and sample the local Navarre cuisine with food drawn from the surrounding, fertile, Arga plain. In the afternoon we will make a special stop at the flamboyant Marques de Riscal vineyard. On approach the winery is a sensational sight with a design looking more like a giant chocolate box covered with huge wild colourful ribbons. Here we enjoy a vineyard tour and tasting.

Meals: B,D

DAY 5 Santander

First stop of the day will be in Vitoria, the capital city of the Basque Country. An elegant city of parks, gardens and a beautiful main square, this is also the site of the battle in which the Duke of Wellington defeated Napoleon in the Peninsular War. In the afternoon we reach Santander, capital of the Cantabria region, on the Atlantic Coast. Famous for its wide sandy El Sardinero beach and glamorous hotels, we stay here the next three nights. Meals: B,D



Your Santander hotel – Hotel Hoyuela

This elegantly designed 4-star hotel is conveniently located nearby the beach, and within walking distance of the Magdalena Palace and all the other notable sights. Hotel Hoyuela offers unbeatable service and facilities. The guest rooms are comfortable and well-equipped.

Visit www.hotelhoyuela.es/en

DAY 6 Santander

There is nothing like a day in the mountains! Heading west we enjoy a relaxing morning stop in the old fishing port of San Vicente de la Barquera with its colourful boats and impressive 16th century stone bridge which crosses the estuary with 28 arches. Maybe visit the Castillo del Rey (King's Castle) which offers stunning 360 degree views along the coastline and into the Picos de Europa, northern Spain's highest mountains. Later we venture into these mountains through the La Hermida Gorge to Fuente De, a dramatic pass in the wild mountains. Here we will enjoy a spectacular cable car ride which will take you high up into the jagged mountains, offering terrific views across this remote national park. Early afternoon we return to the small mountain town of Potes, where we relax and enjoy a typical Picos lunch of 'Fabada' – the local mountain stew with beans and sausages, and a glass of Orujo schnapps. Meals: B,L

DAY 7 Santander

This morning is at leisure to go shopping and explore the exciting city centre. Maybe take a walk to the Magdalena Palace on the headland with its lush green gardens and sweeping views across the beach and estuary. In the afternoon we will take a drive along the coast to visit the Altamira Caves museum with its stunning 'neocave' (replica), on the site of the original UNESCO World Heritage Listed cave system. A local guide will join us to explain how the actual original cave structure and paintings of bison, wild horses deer and other animals have all been accurately reproduced, using the original painting techniques and materials. A unique and fascinating visit! Later we will enjoy a relaxing stop nearby in one of Spain's most beautiful towns – Santillana de Mar – with its private noble palaces and romanesque church. The town is also famous for its local handy craft and local produce. Your evening is at leisure. Meals: B

DAY 8 San Sebastián

Following the Costa Verde or 'Green Coast' we enjoy a morning stop at Castro Urdiales with its colourful fishing fleet and Knights Templar castle. Later we continue to Bilbao, one of Spain's largest cities, to enjoy lunchtime in the charming Casco Viejo – the old quarter. Here you have the chance to see the world famous Guggenheim Museum, designed by Frank Gehry, with its extraordinary swirling, groundbreaking design. Leaving Bilbao behind, we will cross the lush green hills of the Basque country to reach the chic coastal city of San Sebastián, one of Spain's most elegant cities.

We will spend three nights here. Meals: B,D

Relax over 3 nights in San Sebastian



Your San Sebastián hotel – Mercure Monte Igueldo

Set on Mount Igueldo overlooking the Bay of La Concha, this modern 4-star hotel is connected to the city by a fully functional 100-year-old funicular railway. The air conditioned guest rooms are spacious and functional. Enjoy panoramic ocean views from the hotel's restaurant which specialises in Basque cuisine. Visit www.accorhotels.com/gb/hotel-1987-mercure-san-sebastian-monte-igueldo/index.shtml

DAY 9 San Sebastián

This morning an expert local guide will join us to bring San Sebastián to life. First, we will drive up to the famous Monte Igueldo to take in the amazing views across the horse shoe bay, and the city ringed by mountains. Following that our guide will take us on a guided walk through the narrow streets and old port, before introducing us to the city's famous tapas bars. San Sebastián is noted as the gourmet capital of Europe so it is a perfect time to really focus on enjoying some Pintxo, the local name for tapas, washed down by a glass of local white wine called Txakoli. The rest of the day is free to explore and shop in this lively, cosmopolitan city. Meals: B

continued



Discover the narrow streets of San Sebastian



AUTHENTICALLY ALBATROSS

The UNESCO World Heritage Listed Altamira Caves date back up to 35,000 years, and are said to be the highest quality cave art found anywhere in all of Europe. So perfect, that when discovered, archaeologists doubted they were actually genuine. To preserve the astonishing cave art depicting bison, horses, wolves, and more, the caves have been sealed but we can still see and admire them in the amazing replica cave built beside the cave entrance, as part of a fascinating museum. So close, so real, our local guide will breathe life into the ancient story. See Day 7.



Catch the cable car to the top of Pic du Midi



AUTHENTICALLY ALBATROSS

Everyone thinks 'bubbly' was invented in the Champagne region. Not so! A full 100 years beforehand, the monks of St Hilaire Abbey created this celebratory brew, and they did it so well too! Known as 'Blanquette de Limoux', it tastes terrific. Maybe that is because the abbey and cloisters where it is made is a 600 year old jewel of Romanesque architecture, or maybe because sipping it, where bubbly was first invented, adds dreaminess and nostalgia to the flavour. Or maybe because it is just so good! See Day 13.



DAY 10 San Sebastián

Crossing the border into France our first stop of the day will be in the town of Saint Jean De Luz where Louis 14th, the 'Sun King', married Maria Theresa of Spain in the 17th century. Just across the harbour you will be able to see the small town of Ciboure, birth place of the famous composer Ravel. Later we will continue to the elegant seaside resort of Biarritz, on the Bay of Biscay. Patronized by European royalty since the 1800s Biarritz is still a very chic and thriving beach resort. With the Atlantic waves rolling in, it has a big surfing influence and combined with its distinctly French feel, Biarritz is an excellent place to spend a few hours exploring the shops and cafés on the seaside promenade. Tonight we enjoy dinner in a local restaurant. Meals: B,D

DAY 11 Tarbes

Crossing into Aquitaine in France we reach the city of Pau where we enjoy a morning stop. Time to take a stroll along the Boulevard des Pyrenees or, take the free ride in the old wooden funicular up to the Château de Pau, birthplace of France's King Henry IV. On a clear day the views of the Pyrenees are excellent. In the afternoon we will also make a stop in the pilgrimage city of Lourdes where in 1858 a vision of the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared before Bernadette Soubirous in the Grotto of Massabielle. Later we reach Tarbes where we will stay the next two nights. Meals: B,D

Relax at the Observatory on Pic du Midi



Your Tarbes hotel – Le Rex In a fantastic location right in the heart of town, 'Le Rex' is a superb first class, modern designer hotel. See www.lerexhotel.com

DAY 12 Tarbes

Today we drive into the heart of the Hautes-Pyrenees and classic Tour de France country. At 2115 metres high, the Col du Tourmalet is the highest paved mountain pass in the French Pyrenees, and one of the most famous climbs on the Tour de France bicycle route. As we climb up higher and higher we see bike signs showing the distance to the top, and the gradient over the next kilometer! Often passing struggling cyclists we will make a stop at the large statue of the famous rider Octave Lapize, gasping for air as he struggles to make the climb. On the top of the pass at La Mongie, we will board a large cable car which will take us up even higher to the summit of the Pic du Midi de Bigorre. At 2877 metres or nearly 10,000 feet the views are stupendous. Because of the reliable, clear, blue skies they built a massive white observatory up here, and it is like a scene from a science fiction movie. Here there is also an observatory museum, restaurants and deckchairs to sit in and relax and enjoy the panoramic views – one way down onto the broad French plains and the other along the massive Pyrenees into Spain. Memorable! Meals: B

DAY 13 Carcassonne

A leisurely start today as we head across the vine covered hills to enjoy lunchtime in the perfectly preserved time capsule of Mirepoix. Without doubt this is one of the most beautiful medieval town squares in Europe, with its colourfully painted, half-timbered houses that date back to between the 13th and 15th centuries. Sitting atop centuries old wooden rafters carved at the ends with monsters, animals and gargoyles, these rows of shuttered houses provide shady covered walkways for cafés and shops. We are now in the 'Pays Cathare', or Cathar country, in the lovely Languedoc Roussillon region. Just south of Carcassonne near Limoux we will make a special visit to the Abbey of St Hilaire, a jewel of Romanesque architecture. Originally dating back possibly 1300 years, the more recently added Abbey church and 14th century cloisters are a delight. The Benedictine monks of the Abbey are also credited with inventing the sparkling wine known as Blanquette de Limoux, a full century before their counterparts created 'bubbly' in Champagne! Our stay for the next three nights is right in the very heart of the massive, UNESCO World Heritage Listed, walled city of Carcassonne. Meals: B,D

Relax in the old town in Carcassonne



Your Carcassonne hotel – The Best Western le Donjon* This 4-star, authentic, medieval hotel is spread within three medieval buildings they call the Donjon, the Ramparts and the Count Roger. It is wonderfully located within the ramparts, amongst the winding cobbled streets of the old town, close to the Count's Castle. A perfect place to immerse yourself in this magical fortress town. See www.hotel-donjon.com

*12 July departure stays at Mercure Carcassonne Port de la Cite Hotel

DAY 14 Carcassonne

Dating back to Roman times, the existing 13th century fortress city of Carcassonne is an extraordinary timepiece. This morning we are joined by a local guide as we explore the ramparts and old town of Carcassonne. This medieval castle, with its gigantic double walled fortifications and 53 watchtowers, is the 2nd most visited site in France outside of Paris. We have also included entrance into the château of the Counts of Carcassonne. The rest of the day is completely free to wander amongst the cafés, shops and boutiques within this exceptional town. Meals: B



Relax in Somail by the beautiful Canal du Midi



Explore the walled city of Carcassonne

DAY 15**Carcassonne**

A leisurely start as we crisscross the Canal du Midi and then head into the Languedoc hills, to the dramatic gorge and perched, stone village of Minerve. In 1210, during the Cathar Crusade, Simon de Montfort destroyed this village strong hold and burned alive 140 'heretics'. Today Minerve boasts a small, sleepy, 12th century church surrounded by cobbled streets and narrow alleys, craft shops and restaurants. Perched by the ravine, the town is delightful and the scenery dramatic. Make sure you walk down to the Cassiere River and through the cavernous tunnel which drills right under and through the hillside. Later we descend through the vineyards of the Minervois region to stop and explore the picturesque hamlet of Le Somail, sitting astride the Canal du Midi. Take time to relax in a canal side café and enjoy an aperitif, and cross the humped back bridge to the massive antique library on the far tow path. Delightful! Dinner tonight will be in a local restaurant. Meals: B,D

DAY 16**Barcelona**

Heading into Spain we reach the Girona province where we will enjoy a morning stop in Figueres. Time to stroll amongst the shops of the tree lined Rambla, the city's shaded central avenue, and stop in one of the café filled squares. Make sure you visit the Placa Gala, with its Dali statutes and the Salvador Dali museum housed in the old municipal theatre. In the afternoon we reach the vibrant, cosmopolitan city of Barcelona. On arrival we will enjoy a panoramic drive past many of its famous sights, including Gaudi's incredible Sagrada Familia Basilica. Tonight we will enjoy a Spanish farewell dinner in a local restaurant. Meals: B,D

Spend your final night in Barcelona

**Your Barcelona hotel – Crowne Plaza**

Barcelona Fira Center This 4-star hotel is situated in the heart of Montjuic, one of the most cultural areas of the city. The air conditioned, spacious guest rooms offer modern décor and facilities. Visit www.ihg.com/crowneplaza/hotels/us/en/barcelona/bcnrcp/hoteldetail

DAY 17**Barcelona**

Your tour ends today after breakfast. Meals: B

Outstanding Value Inclusions**Over \$1,700 value of extras already included**

- Fully escorted by our experienced Tour Manager
- Travel in a first class air-conditioned touring coach
- 16 nights specially selected hotel accommodation
- Hotel portage (1 bag per person)
- Breakfast daily (B)
- 'Fabada' mountain lunch in Potes (L)
- 10 dinners including welcome and farewell dinners, local restaurant dinners in San Sebastián, Carcassonne and Barcelona (D)
- All excursions, scenic drives, sightseeing and entrances as described
- Special Highlights - cable car rides Picos de Europa and Pic du Midi
- Local guides as described in the itinerary
- Personal audio system whilst on tour
- Free WiFi available on most coaches and at hotels
- End of tour tips to Tour Manager and Driver, tips for local guides

NO additional 'on tour' costs!**Uniquely Albatross**

- Small group size – average 22, maximum 28
- Longer stays, with NO 1 night stops on tour
- Genuinely inclusive, with NO additional on tour costs
- Stay in authentic, character style hotels
- Tours designed specially for you – Australians and New Zealanders

2017 Dates & Prices

17 days from \$6,339pp twin share

Land only prices in Australian dollars

Book and pay
your deposit before
15 JAN 2017
and
SAVE \$300pp
Further discounts may
apply – see pages
22-23

Starts Madrid	Ends Barcelona	Per Person Twin Share	Single Supplement
17 May	2 June	\$6,339	\$1,489
14 June	30 June	\$6,339	\$1,489
12 July	28 July	\$6,839	\$1,689
16 August	1 September	\$6,439	\$1,539
6 September	22 September	\$6,339	\$1,489

Book our tours with confidence!

If you book and deposit on any of our tours, as long as there are just 10 or more people travelling on our designated group departure, we guarantee it will travel.

Pre and post tour accommodation

If you would like to arrive a few days ahead of your tour, or extend afterwards, we can often arrange accommodation at the same hotels used on this tour. Please contact us for details.