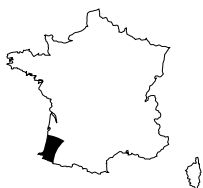


French Basque Country



Gently sloping from the western foothills of the Pyrenees into the deep sapphire-blue Bay of Biscay, the Basque Country (Euskal Herria in the Basque language; Le Pays Basque in French) straddles modern-day France and Spain. Yet this feisty, independent land remains profoundly different from either of the nation states that have adopted it.

The French side (or as it's diplomatically referred to here, the 'northern side'; 'Iparralde' in Basque) accounts for roughly 20% of the Basque country, and is famed for its glitzy beach resort, Biarritz. Bronzed surfers zoom around Biarritz's hilly coastline on mopeds, and oiled sun-seekers pack its beaches like glistening sardines.

Together with sprawling Anglet and Bayonne, 8km to the east, Biarritz forms an urban area often called BAB, with a population around 110,000. Biarritz, however, is the least Basque of the trio. Easily the most Basque is the French Basque Country's cultural and economic capital, Bayonne, whose authentically preserved old town is bisected by bridges arcing over its confluence of rivers. Traditional Basque music, sports and festivals are an integral part of Bayonne's local culture, and its good transport links make it an ideal base for discovering the region.

To the southwest of this conurbation is St-Jean de Luz, a delightful seaside township and working fishing port.

Up in the French Basque Country's lush hills, little one-street villages and green valleys traversed by hiking trails are easily explored from the walled town of St-Jean Pied de Port, an age-old pit stop for pilgrims heading over the border to Santiago de Compostela.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Discover just what makes the local chocolate so scrumptious during a behind-the-scenes factory tour in **Bayonne** (p691)
- Chug up the scenic mountainside railway, **Le Petit Train de la Rhune** (p704)
- Watch world-class surfers from fashionable café terraces or ride the waves yourself in and around **Biarritz** (p694)
- Taste traditional Basque dishes incorporating freshly caught seafood at **St-Jean de Luz** (p702)
- Browse local produce and handmade products at the farmers market in the age-old pilgrims' outpost, **St-Jean Pied de Port** (p704)



■ POPULATION: 600,000

■ AREA: 13,400 SQ KM



History

Recent DNA testing shows that the Basque people have inhabited the region for at least 30,000 years – the only people in Europe to have remained in their region for so long. This was made possible by the fact that the area was still inhabitable during the last ice age. Roman sources mention a tribe called the Vascones living in the area and it's attested that the Basques took over what is now southwestern France in the 6th century. The Romans never managed to conquer the area, however, as the Basques were able to shelter in the mountains and continue to live off fishing in the ocean. Converting to Christianity in the 10th century, they are still known for their strong Catholicism.

After resisting invasions, the Basques on both sides of the Pyrenees emerged from the turbulent Middle Ages with a significant local autonomy, which they retained in France until the Revolution. The French Basque Country, then part of the duchy of Aquitaine, was under Plantagenet rule from the mid-12th century until the mid-15th century.

Basque nationalism flourished before and during the Spanish Civil War (1936–39). Until the death of the Spanish dictator Franco, in 1975, many Basque nationalists and anti-Franco guerrillas from the other side of the Pyrenees sheltered in France. More recently, Spanish Euskadi ta Azkatasuna (ETA) terrorists have sought sanctuary in France. Failed negotiations mean trouble occasionally still flares up (such as the attack on Madrid airport in 2007 that killed two people), but it's a

small, extremist minority that doesn't reflect the peaceful nationalism that predominates in the region.

Getting There & Away

All roads and train lines lead to Bayonne, which is easily accessible from the rest of France.

Rail travel to Spain involves switching trains at the frontier since the Spanish track gauge is narrower. Take an SNCF train to Hendaye, where you can pick up the EuskoTren, familiarly known as 'El Topo' (The Mole), a shuttle train that runs regularly via Irún to San Sebastián.

Bus travel between Bayonne and Bilbao, Spain, via Biarritz, St-Jean de Luz and San Sebastián twice daily – see p693.

The airport (p693) serving Bayonne and Biarritz has domestic flights as well as services to the UK, Ireland and other European destinations.

BAYONNE

pop 44,200

Bayonne (Baiona in Basque) is defined by the so-name 'river junction' of the River Adour and the smaller River Nive, as well as by its compactness. Until 1907, it was forbidden to build outside the town's fortifications, resulting in the narrow, curved streets of Petit Bayonne, with riverside buildings clad in red and green shutters and shoals of waterside restaurants. Although you can cross the architecturally preserved town centre on foot in about 15 minutes, you can easily spend hours discovering its hidden laneways and staircases, and remnants of its medieval past.

In addition to its chocolates, Bayonne is famous for its prime cured ham, and for the *baïonnette* (bayonet), developed here in 1640 on rue des Faures ('Blacksmiths' Street').

History

Bayonne prospered from the 13th to 15th centuries under the protection of the Plantagenet kings who ruled Aquitaine. The town's subsequent 18th-century commercial prosperity was fuelled by Basque privateers, who landed cargoes much more valuable and sweeter scented than the tonnes of cod caught off the coast of Newfoundland by the substantial Basque fishing fleet. This already-lively town now buzzes even more with the recent opening of the city's new university.

LOCAL LINGO

According to linguists, Euskara, the Basque language, is unrelated to any other tongue on earth, and is the only tongue in southwest Europe to have withstood the onslaught of Latin and its derivatives.

Basque is spoken by about a million people in Spain and France, nearly all of whom are bilingual. In the French Basque Country, the language is widely spoken in Bayonne and the hilly hinterland. However, while it is an official language in Spain, it isn't recognised as such in France (although some younger children are educated in Basque at primary-school level). The language also has a higher survival rate on the Spanish (aka 'southern') side, which is more industrialised, hence its employment opportunities allow native speakers to stay in the area.

But you'll still encounter the language here on Basque-language TV stations, and the occasional sign reading '*Hemen Euskara emaiten dugu*' (Basque spoken here) on shop doors. You'll also see the Basque flag (similar to the UK's but with a red field, a white vertical cross and a green diagonal one) flying throughout the region, as well as another common Basque symbol, the *lauburu* (like a curly four-leaf clover), signifying good luck or protection.

Orientation

The Rivers Adour and Nive split central Bayonne into three: St-Esprit, the area north of the Adour; Grand Bayonne, the oldest part of the city, on the western bank of the Nive; and the very Basque Petit Bayonne quarter to its east.

To the west, Bayonne meets the suburban sprawl of Anglet (famed for its beaches, p694) and the glamorous seaside resort of Biarritz (p694).

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Elkar (☎ 05 59 59 35 14; place de l'Arsenal) A wealth of texts on Basque history and culture, walking in the Basque Country, maps and CDs of Basque music.

INTERNET ACCESS

Multimedia Services (☎ 05 59 59 00 32; 6 rue des Faures; per hr €4; ☎ 2-7pm Mon, 10am-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-noon Sat)

LAUNDRY

Hallwash (6 rue d'Espagne; ☎ 8am-8pm) Machines shut down and doors lock on the dot of closing time.

POST

Post Office (11 rue Jules Labat)

Post Office (21 bd Alsace-Lorraine)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist Office (☎ 08 20 42 64 64; www.bayonne-tourisme.com; place des Basques; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat Sep-Jun) Efficient, friendly office providing stacks of informative brochures and free bike rental (p694), plus

French-language guided city tours (€5; 10.30am Monday to Saturday mid-July to mid-September).

Sights & Activities

RAMPARTS

Vauban's 17th-century fortifications (see the boxed text, p65) are now covered with grass and dotted with trees, enveloping the city centre in a green belt. You can walk the stretches of the old ramparts that rise above bd Rempart Lachepaillet and rue Tour de Sault.

CATHÉDRALE STE-MARIE

The twin towers of Bayonne's Gothic **cathedral** (☎ 8am-noon & 3-7pm Mon-Sat) soar above the city. Construction began in the 13th century, and was completed in 1451; the mismatched materials in some ways resemble Lego blocks. Above the north aisle are three lovely stained-glass windows, the oldest, in the Chapelle Saint Jérôme, dating from 1531. The entrance to the stately 13th-century **cloister** (☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Jun-Sep, to 5pm Oct-May) is on place Louis Pasteur.

MUSEUMS

The seafaring history, traditions and cultural identity of the unique Basque people are all explored at the **Musée Basque et de l'Histoire de Bayonne** (☎ 05 59 59 08 98; www.musee-basque.com, in French; 37 quai des Corsaires; adult/student/under 18yr €5.50/3/free; ☎ 10am-6.30pm daily Jul & Aug, closed Mon Sep-Jun) through exhibits including a reconstructed farm and the interior of a typical *etxe* (home).

Treasures crammed in the **Musée Bonnat** (☎ 05 59 59 08 52; 5 rue Jacques Lafitte; adult/student/child



BAYONNE CHOCOLATE

Bayonne's long association with chocolate stems from the Spanish Inquisition, when Jews who fled Spain set up their trade in St-Esprit. By 1870, Bayonne boasted 130 *chocolatiers* (specialist makers of chocolate), more than in all of Switzerland. Today, 11 are still in business, including **Daranatz** (☎ 05 59 59 03 05; 15 rue Port Neuf); the 19th-century **Cazenave** (☎ 05 59 59 03 16; 19 rue Port Neuf), which does a sublime *chocolat mousseaux* (rich hot chocolate; €5.20); and **Andrieu** (☎ 05 59 25 72 95; rue des Carmes), which organises visits of its workshop. **L'Atelier du Chocolat** (☎ 05 59 55 70 23; www.atelierduchocolat.fr; 1 allée de Gibéléou; adult/child €5.60/2.80; 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun) including a historical overview of chocolate in Bayonne and, of course, tastings.

Tastings are also the highlight of the weekend-long **Journées du Chocolat** each May, when master chocolatiers set up the tools of their craft in front of their shops.

€5.50/3/free; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Wed-Mon May-Oct, 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Wed-Mon Nov-Apr) include canvases by El Greco, Goya, Ingres and Degas, and a roomful of works by Rubens.

A combined ticket (adult/student for €9/4.50) covers both museums.

Festivals & Events

Ham Fair During Easter week, the town hosts a Ham Fair, honouring *jambon de Bayonne*, the acclaimed local ham.

Journées du Chocolat May (see boxed text, above).

La Ruée au Jazz Four days of stompin' in mid-July, attracting jazz lovers from all over France.

Fêtes de Bayonne The town's premier fiesta is the five-day Fêtes de Bayonne, beginning on the first Wednesday in August. They do a 'running of the bulls', as in Pamplona, Spain, only here it's more benign; they use cows not bulls and most of the time participants are chasing the frisky heifers rather than vice versa. The festival also includes Basque music, bullfights, fireworks, a parade of floats, and rugby.

Sleeping

It's tough to find a bed from mid-July to mid-August and near impossible during the Fêtes de Bayonne.

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 05 59 58 70 00; www.hibiarritz.org; 19 rte des Vignes, Anglet; dm incl breakfast €16.30-17.30, camping incl breakfast €9.90-10.90; ☎ reception 8.30-11.30am & 6-9pm, to noon & 10pm Apr-Sep, closed early Nov-Mar; 📺 ☎) Anglet's party-hard hostel comes complete with a basement Scottish pub screening surf films. From the Mairie de Bayonne (Town Hall) bus stop, take bus 7 (C on Sunday and public holidays) to the Les Sables stop, from where it's a 500m uphill walk. Alternatively, from Biarritz train station, take bus 9 (C on Sundays and public holidays) to the Auberge de Jeunesse stop.

L'Héberge de la Nive (☎ 05 59 42 39 22; www.nivau.galop.com; chemin de Halage, Bassussarry; d €34, q €60, 6-person r €90) On the riverbank 5km from central

Bayonne, this basic but delightful two-storey farmhouse has an on-site restaurant (mains €7 to €11.90; open for lunch Wednesday to Monday) and a stable of horses (hour-long rides from €20) for guests and nonguests to saddle up.

Adour Hôtel (☎ 05 59 55 11 31; www.adourhotel.net; 13 place Ste-Ursule; r from €65) Just north of the River Adour and conveniently near the station, this friendly family establishment has bright, airy rooms decorated according to a Basque theme – bullfighting, rugby, chocolate, cuisine and more. Wi-fi is free.

Le Grand Hôtel (☎ 05 59 59 62 00; www.legrandhotelbayonne.com, in French; 21 rue Thiers; s €66-144, d €72-155; 📺) This old building was once a convent, though you'd never guess from the spacious cream-toned rooms and cosy on-site bar. Wi-fi and wheelchair-accessible rooms are available; parking's €13.

Hôtel des Arceaux (☎ 05 59 59 15 53; www.hotel-arceaux.com, in French; 26 rue Port Neuf; r from €79) These 17 spick-and-span rooms are decorated in a fresh palette of colours reflecting the Basque sky, green hills, warm earth and golden sands, and some can accommodate families.

Hôtel Loustau (☎ 05 59 55 08 08; www.hotel-loustau.com; 1 place de la République; s €80-115, d €90-130, tr €94-140; 📺) This tall 18th-century building in St-Esprit has spacious, comfortable and impeccably clean rooms with wi-fi. On the southern side of the building, twin sets of full-length French windows open out onto views of the lamp-lit bridge crossing the swirling River Adour. It also runs an excellent restaurant (*menus* cost €17 to €26).

Eating

Restaurants proliferate around the covered market and along quai Amiral Jauréguiberry as

well as quai Galuperie and quai des Corsaires across the River Nive.

ourpick La Criée (☎ 05 59 59 56 60; 14 quai Chaho; mains €8-13.50; 🍴 lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Tue-Sat) Decked out in marine colours, this unassuming little find does delicious Basque seafood specialities (such as *les chipirons à l'espagnole* – squid with sweet peppers served with finely ground rice), but you can also get fresh oysters, mussels and even fish and chips. For dessert, don't miss the *ardi gasna* (local cheese with cherry jam).

Restaurant Agadir (☎ 05 59 55 66 56; 3 rue Ste-Catherine; menu €16, mains €9-13; 🍴 lunch & dinner, closed lunch Mon) Shimmering with red and gold, this St-Esprit restaurant serves up mountains of southern Moroccan-style couscous.

Le Chistera (☎ 05 59 59 25 93; 42 rue Port Neuf; mains €10-16; 🍴 lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Thu-Sun) A local gathering spot, this aromatic, traditional Basque place is named for the *chistera* (basket) that

pelota players strap to their wrists, and is decorated with motifs from the sport, thanks to two generations of owners who are experienced professional players (see below).

Bar-Restaurant du Marché (☎ 05 59 59 22 66; 39 rue des Basques; menu €12.50; 🍴 lunch Mon-Sat) Run by a welcoming, Basque-speaking family, this unpretentious place dishes up ample home cooking using produce from the nearby market.

Ttipia (☎ 05 59 46 13 31; 27 rue des Cordeliers; menu €28; 🍴 lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Mon-Sat) Help yourself to unlimited cider direct from the huge barrels and take a seat at long communal tables to tuck into Ttipia's only offering, a set menu comprising an omelette with *morue* (salt cod) and *merlu* (hake) wrapped in paper, and salted pork with salad, followed by local cheese and nuts.

Auberge du Cheval Blanc (☎ 05 59 59 01 33; 68 rue Bourgneuf; menus €30-75; 🍴 lunch & dinner Tue-Fri,

PELOTA

Even in the tiniest of Basque villages, you'll find a church, a cemetery, a town hall and at least one *pelota* court.

The term *pelota* (*pelote basque* in French) is actually the generic name for a group of 16 different native Basque games. The courts differ, but all are played using a hard ball with a rubber core (the *pelote*), which is struck with bare hands (*mains nues*), a wooden paddle (*pala* or *paleta*), or a scooplike racquet made of wicker, leather or wood and strapped to the wrist (*chistera*). The latter is used in *cesta punta*, also known as *jai alai*, which, with its three-walled court, is the world's fastest ball game (up to 250km/h) and electrifying to watch.

The sport's evolution is equally intriguing, as Bayonne champion player Jean-Pierre Marmouyet explained:

My father played professionally, and sent me to the *jai alai* school. When I was 18, a talent scout from Spain came to see me play and gave me a contract, and I played professionally for over 20 years, including 14 years in the US. Now I'm in charge of a big school in Biarritz where I teach players aged 14 to 18. I want to give them the opportunities I was given.

Cesta punta is very big in America, especially Miami, but not many Americans play it. The reason is that it was mostly played in [the Basque province of] Biscaye and then in Cuba. Many of the 'high society' colonials came to Cuba from Biscaye; it was introduced as a form of gambling. Hemingway used to gamble a lot on *pelota* in Cuba. When Fidel came to Cuba, he closed the gambling, and it was brought to Miami by the people who could leave, the upper class. That's why it's mostly played by imported immigrant workers... It's like horse racing [the players being like jockeys]. When I played there I helped organise the players, like a union, for better conditions. But here [in the Basque Country] it's all about the sport.

The technique is very important. The legend is that the *chistera* was invented in the 1870s when a small boy, whose hand was too fragile to hit the ball, used a basket from the markets to catch and throw the ball instead. I like this legend and this object because it's like in every sport: little by little you find ways to play it more efficiently. In addition to teaching, I still play socially every week.

Throughout the French Basque Country matches are open to the public, with tickets generally costing around €10; see the Entertainment sections of this chapter for details.

dinner Sat, lunch Sun) This refined eatery with pastel tones and original artwork fully deserves its Michelin star for its mouth-watering and creative French cuisine.

SELF-CATERING

The turquoise-coloured **covered market** (quai Commandant Roquebert) sits on the riverfront. There are a number of tempting food shops and delicatessens along rue Port Neuf and rue d'Espagne. Pick up staples at **Monoprix** (8 rue Orbe).

Drinking

Petit Bayonne is awash with pubs and bars (all generally open from noon to 2am, Monday to Saturday), especially along rue Pannecau, rue des Cordeliers and quai Galuperie. In fine weather, rue Poissonnerie is completely blocked by the huge crowds spilling out of **Chai Ramina** (11 rue Poissonnerie). Other lively night-time spots include **Café-Bar Le Patio** (38 rue Pannecau) and **Massai Café** (14 rue des Cordeliers).

To sip (or buy to take home) no fewer than 380 different teas (reputedly the most in France), take a seat amid the metal canisters of the **Cafés Ramuntcho** (☎ 05 59 59 12 37; 9 rue du Pilori; cakes €1, menu €7; ☎ 9am-7pm Wed-Sat, noon-7pm Tue), established in 1920.

Entertainment

Upcoming cultural events are listed in *À l’Affiche* and the trimestrial *Les Saisons de la Culture*, both available free at the tourist office.

Every Thursday in July and August, there's traditional **Basque music** (admission free; ☎ 9.30pm) in place Charles de Gaulle.

Between October and June **Trinquet St-André** (☎ 05 59 59 18 69; rue du Jeu de Paume; tickets around €9) stages *main nue pelota* matches (see boxed text, opposite) every Thursday at 4.30pm.

In summer, bullfights are held at **Les Arènes** (☎ 05 59 25 65 30; 19 av du Maréchal Foch), 1km west of the city centre. The tourist office has details of upcoming corridas and also sells tickets.

Cinéma l'Atalante (☎ 05 59 55 76 63; www.cinema-atalante.org, in French; 7 rue Denis Etcheverry) screens art-house, nondubbed films.

Catch live jazz, salsa and tango evenings and concerts of world music at the alternative cabaret/theatre venue, **La Luna Negra** (☎ 05 59 25 78 05; rue des Augustins; ☎ 7pm-2am Wed-Sat).

There are no clubs in central Bayonne; booty-shakers should head for nearby Biarritz.

Shopping

To buy Bayonne's famous ham at the lowest prices, visit the covered market (left). For the best quality, visit a specialist shop, such as **Pierre Ibaialde** (☎ 05 59 25 65 30; 41 rue des Cordeliers), where you can taste before you buy. See the boxed text, p691 for shops selling the town's other gastronomic claim to fame, chocolate.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Biarritz-Anglet-Bayonne airport (☎ 05 59 43 83 83; www.biarritz.aeroport.fr) is 5km southwest of central Bayonne and 3km southeast of the centre of Biarritz. It's served by low-cost carriers including easyJet and Ryanair, as well as Air France, with daily domestic flights and flights to the UK, and regular flights to Ireland and other European destinations.

Bus 6 links both Bayonne and Biarritz with the airport (buses depart roughly hourly). A taxi from the town centre costs around €15 to €20.

BUS

From place des Basques, **ATCRB buses** (☎ 05 59 26 06 99) follow the coast to the Spanish border. There are nine services daily to St-Jean de Luz (€3, 40 minutes) with connections for Hendaye (€3, one hour). Summer beach traffic can double journey times. **Transportes Pesa** (☎ in Spain 902 10 12 10; www.pesa.net) buses leave twice a day Monday to Saturday for Bilbao in Spain, calling by Biarritz, St-Jean de Luz, Irún and San Sebastián.

From the train station, **RDTL** (☎ 05 59 55 17 59; www.rdtl.fr, in French) runs services northwards into Les Landes. For beaches north of Bayonne, such as Mimizan Plage and Moliets Plage, get off at Vieux Boucau (1¼ hours, six or seven daily).

Eurolines is represented by **Voyages Domejean** (☎ 05 59 59 19 33; 3 place Charles de Gaulle). Buses stop in the square, opposite this travel agent's office.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Among several rental agencies near the train station are **ADA** (☎ 05 59 50 37 10; 10bis quai de Lesseps) and **Avis** (☎ 05 59 55 06 56; 1 rue Ste-Ursule).

TRAIN

TGVs run between Bayonne and Paris' Gare Montparnasse (€75.60, five hours, eight daily).

There are five trains daily to St-Jean Pied de Port (€8.20, 1¼ hours) and fairly frequent services to St-Jean de Luz (€4.30, 25 minutes) via Biarritz (€2.30, nine minutes), plus the Franco-Spanish border towns of Hendaye (€6.40, 40 minutes) and Irún (€6.60, 45 minutes). For travel between Bayonne and Biarritz, however, buses (p699) are cheaper and more frequent.

There are also train services to Bordeaux (€28.80, 2¼ hours, at least 10 daily), Pau (€15, 1¼ hours, nine daily) and Toulouse (€37.30, 3¾ hours, five daily).

Getting Around

BICYCLE

Bayonne's tourist office lends out bikes for free (not overnight); you simply need to leave some ID as a deposit. For longer rental try Adour Hôtel (p691), which charges €16/23 per 24 hours/three days and also has weekly rates.

BUS

STAB buses link Bayonne, Biarritz and Anglet. A single ticket costs €1.20, while *cartnets* of five/10 are €4.75/9.50. Timetables are available from STAB's **information office** (☎ 05 59 52 59 52; www.bus-stab.com, in French; rue Thiers; ☎ 8.15am-noon & 1.30-6pm Mon-Sat). Buses 1 and 2 run between Bayonne and Biarritz about 50 times daily, stopping at the *hôtels de ville* (town halls) and stations of both towns. No 1, which runs every 15 minutes until 8.30pm, is the fastest and most frequent.

A free bright-orange *navette* (shuttle bus) loops around the heart of town.

For buses to/from the airport, see p693.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

There's free parking along the southern end of av des Allées Paulmy, within easy walking distance of the tourist office.

TAXI

Call **Taxi Bayonne** (☎ 05 59 59 48 48).

BIARRITZ

pop 30,700

As ritzy as its name suggests, this stylish coastal town, 8km west of Bayonne, took off as a resort in the mid-19th century when Napoleon III and his Spanish-born wife, Eugénie, visited regularly. Along its rocky coastline are architectural hallmarks of this

golden age, and the belle-époque and art-deco eras that followed. Although it retains a high glamour quotient (and high prices to match), it's also a magnet for vanloads of surfers, with some of Europe's best waves.

Orientation

Place Clemenceau, the heart of town, is just south of the main beach (La Grande Plage). Pointe St-Martin, topped with a lighthouse, rounds off Plage Miramar, the northern continuation of La Grande Plage, which is bounded on its southern side by Pointe Atalaye.

Both the train station and airport are about 3km southeast of the centre.

Information

Form@tic (☎ 05 59 22 12 79; 15 av de la Marne; per hr €4; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat) Bright, stylish internet café with full facilities.

Post Office (rue de la Poste)

Tourist Office (☎ 05 59 22 37 00; www.biarritz.fr; square d'Ixelles; ☎ 9am-7pm daily Jul & Aug, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Sep-Jun) Has internet access (€3 for every 15 minutes) and publishes *Biarritz Scope et Shops*, a free monthly what's-on guide. In July and August there are tourist office annexes at the train station, and at the roundabout just off the Biarritz *sortie* (exit) No 4 from the A63; annex opening hours vary.

There are central **laundrettes** (☎ 7am-9pm) at 11 av de la Marne and 4 av Jaulerry.

Sights & Activities

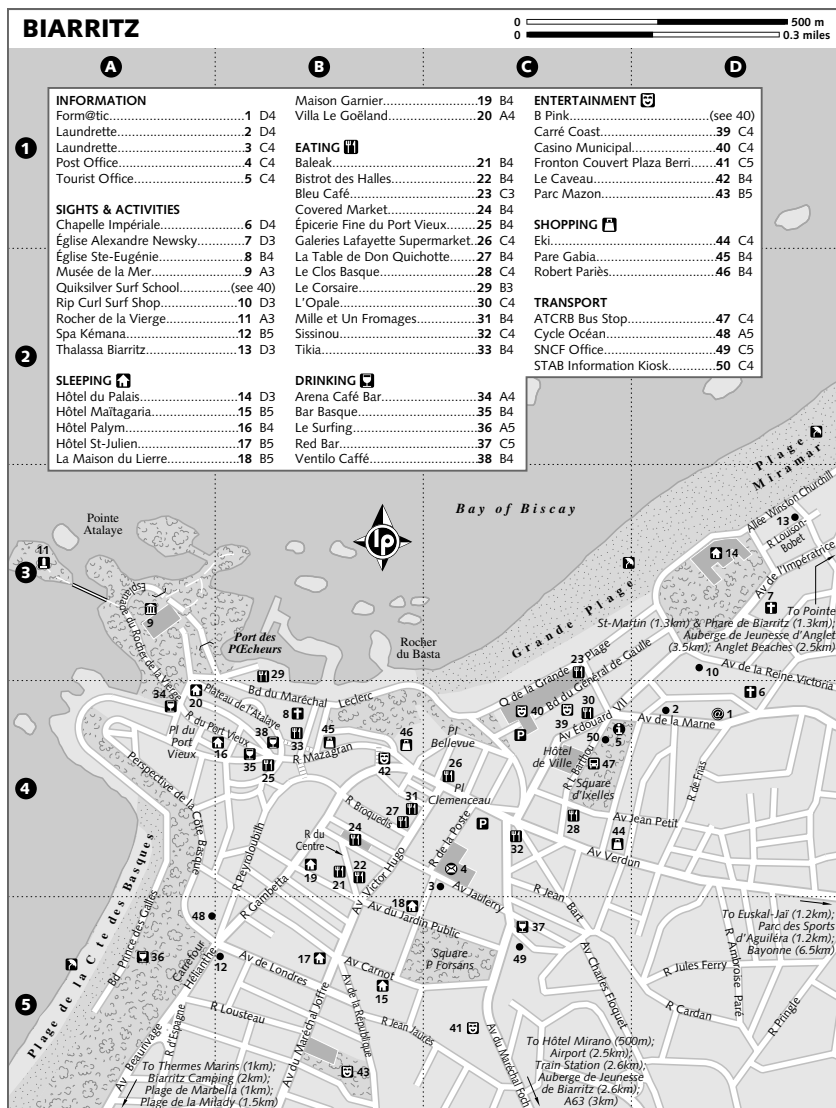
BEACHES

Biarritz' fashionable beaches, particularly the **Grande Plage** and **Plage Miramar**, are end-to-end bodies on hot summer days. North of Pointe St-Martin, the adrenaline-pumping surfing beaches of **Anglet** (the final *t* is pronounced) continue northwards for more than 4km. Take eastbound bus 9 (Line C on Sunday and public holidays) from the bottom of av Verdun (just near av Édouard VII).

Beyond long, exposed **Plage de la Côte des Basques**, some 500m south of Port Vieux, are **Plage de Marbella** and **Plage de la Milady**. Take westbound bus 9 (Line C on Sunday and public holidays) from rue Gambetta where it crosses rue Broquedis.

MUSÉE DE LA MER

Undergoing a rolling series of renovations over the next couple of years, Biarritz' **Musée de la Mer** (Sea Museum; ☎ 05 59 22 33 34; www.musee



delamer.com; Esplanade du Rocher de la Vierge; adult/child €7.80/5; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm, closed Mon Nov-Mar) has brand-new tanks seething with underwater life from the Bay of Biscay (Golfe de Gascogne), as well as exhibits on fishing and whaling, recalling Biarritz' whaling past. Tickets are €0.80 cheaper if you buy them at the tourist office.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

If the swell's big, you might get a drenching as you cross the footbridge at the end of Pointe Atalaye to **Rocher de la Vierge** (Rock of the Virgin). Named after its white statue of the Virgin and child, views from this impressive outcrop extend to the mountains of the Spanish Basque Country.

THALASSOTHERAPY

Thalassotherapy ('sea healing'), using the restorative properties of sea water (along with seaweed and mud), has been popular in Biarritz since the late 18th century and continues to serve as an antidote to 21st-century ailments such as stress and insomnia.

In Biarritz, put thalassotherapy's curative powers to the test – or simply bliss out – at the following:

- **Spa Kémana** (☎ 05 59 22 12 13; www.kemana.fr, in French; 3 carrefour Hélianthe)
- **Thalassa Biarritz** (☎ 05 59 41 30 01; www.acorthalassa.com; 11 rue Louison-Bobet)
- **Thermes Marins** (☎ 05 59 23 01 22; www.biarritz-thalasso.com; 80 rue de Madrid)

Once a lively fishing port, **Port des Pêcheurs** is nowadays a haven only to pleasure craft. Above it, the neo-Gothic **Église Ste-Eugénie** was built in the late 1800s for – who else? – Empress Eugénie.

Dominating the northern end of the Grande Plage is the 19th-century **Hôtel du Palais**, also built for Empress Eugénie and now a luxury hotel. Opposite is **Église Alexandre Newsky** (8 av de l'Impératrice), a Russian Orthodox church built by and for the Russian aristocrats who frequented Biarritz until the Soviet Revolution. Eugénie was also the inspiration for the nearby doll's-house-size **Chapelle Impériale** (☎ 3-6pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 3-6pm Thu & Sat Apr-Jun & Sep, 3-5pm Thu Oct-Mar), constructed in 1864.

Climbing the 258 twisting steps inside the 73m-high **Phare de Biarritz** (admission €2; ☎ 10am-noon & 3-7pm daily Jul & Aug, 2-6pm Sat & Sun Sep-Jun plus 2-5pm weekdays during school holidays), the town's 1834 lighthouse, rewards you with sweeping views of the Basque coast.

SURFING

The 4km-long stretch of Anglet's beaches ranks among Europe's finest surfing venues. No fewer than a dozen places around town offer gear and lessons; try **Rip Curl Surf Shop** (☎ 05 59 24 38 40; 2 av de la Reine Victoria) or the **Quiksilver Surf School** (☎ 05 59 22 03 12; www.biarritz-boardriders.com, in French) under the Casino Municipal.

For surf conditions, ring the French-language **Swell Line** (☎ 08 92 68 40 64) or check out www.swell-line.com (in French).

Festivals & Events

Major surfing competitions take place year-round including **Biarritz Mainer Arosteguy** (3 days, around Easter), and **Roxy Jam** (www.roxyjam.com; 5 days, mid-Jul), a major female longboarding championship on the ASP (Association of Surfing Professionals) circuit, with spin-off events like concerts.

Festival des Arts de la Rue Performance artists take to the streets for five days in early May.

Le Temps d'Aimer A two-week celebration of dance in all its forms, held in mid-September.

Sleeping

Inexpensive hotels are a rarity in Biarritz, and any kind of room is at a premium in July and August. Outside the high season, however, most prices fall by a good 25%.

BUDGET

Biarritz Camping (☎ 05 59 23 00 12; www.biarritz-camping.fr; 28 rue d'Harcet; camping €15-23; ☎ mid-May-mid-Oct; 📶) This camp site, 2km southwest of the centre, has spacious, shady pitches. Take westbound bus 9 to the Biarritz Camping stop.

Auberge de Jeunesse de Biarritz (☎ 05 59 41 76 00; www.hibiarriz.org; 8 rue Chiquito de Cambó; dm incl sheets & breakfast €17.10-18.10; ☎ reception 8.30am-11.30am & 6-9pm, to noon & 10pm Apr-Sep, closed mid-Dec-early Jan; 📶) Like Anglet's youth hostel (p691), this popular place offers outdoor activities including surfing. Rooms for two to four hostellers have an en-suite bathroom. From the train station, follow the railway westwards for 800m.

Hôtel Palym (☎ 05 59 24 16 56; 7 rue du Port Vieux; r with toilet only €40, r with bathroom €45-58; ☎ mid-Jan-mid-Nov) This welcoming 20-room, family-run place occupies a brightly painted town house on a street packed with hotels. Bedrooms, on the floors above the family's bustling restaurant, are colourful though the bathrooms are a squeeze.

Hôtel Maitagaría (☎ 05 59 24 26 65; www.hotel-maitagaría.com; 34 av Carnot; s €49-54, d €57-69, tr €76-90) Spotless modern rooms with art-deco furniture and immaculate bathrooms make this friendly place good value. Not least of its charms is its summer terrace opening off the comfy guest lounge, which is warmed in winter by a toasty open fire.

La Maison du Lierre (☎ 05 59 24 06 00; www.maisondulierre.com; 3 av du Jardin Public; r €56-139; 📶) This brand-new sister establishment of the *chambre d'hôte*-style La Maison du Lierre in Bordeaux (p674) has 23 exquisitely decorated

rooms named for local plants in the adjacent Jardin Public, and many of the rooms have garden views. Rooms have polished floors and beautiful printed fabrics; breakfast (€7.90 to €9.90) includes freshly squeezed juice.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hôtel St-Julien (☎ 05 59 24 20 39; www.saint-julien-biarritz.com, in French; 20 av Carnot; r €65-114, q €103-148) A bright shuttered facade graces this attractive late-19th-century villa, with original parquet flooring inside. Third-floor rooms have views of both mountains and sea. Wi-fi is available for €5 per day; parking is free.

Hôtel Mirano (☎ 05 59 23 11 63; www.hotelmirano.fr, in French; 11 av Pasteur; r €70-110) Squiggly purple, orange and black wallpaper and oversize orange perspex light fittings are some of the rad '70s touches at this boutique retro hotel, a 10-minute stroll from the town centre, with the 21st-century bonus of free wi-fi.

Maison Garnier (☎ 05 59 01 60 70; www.hotel-biarritz.com; 29 rue Gambetta; r €90-140) The seven boutique rooms of this elegant mansion are tastefully decorated and furnished in cool, neutral tones; those up at attic level are especially romantic.

Villa Le Goëland (☎ 05 59 24 25 76; www.villa-goeland.com; 12 plateau de l'Atalaye; r €130-280; ☎ ☒) This stunning family home with its château-like spires perches high on a plateau above Pointe Atalaye. Rooms, tastefully furnished with antiques, family photos and mementos, have panoramic views of town, the sea and across to Spain. There are only four rooms (opt for *chambre Goëland* with its huge 35-sq-metre private terrace), so advance booking is essential. Wi-fi is available.

Eating

See-and-be-seen cafés and restaurants line Biarritz' beachfront. Anglet's beaches are also becoming increasingly trendy, with cafés strung along the waterfront.

Bleu Café (☎ 05 59 22 34 53; Grand Plage; breakfast €9, dishes €7-9; ☎ 9am-midnight Jul & Aug, 9am-5pm Sep-Jun) Snag a seat on the terrace to sip Lavazza coffee or dine on Poilâne bread with fresh vegies while watching surfers battle the rollers.

Le Corsaire (☎ 05 59 24 63 72; Port des Pêcheurs; mains €11-23.50; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Down by the water's edge, sit out on the terrace to savour dishes like grilled cod with chorizo. On either side, the neighbouring seafood restaurants in this little harbourside set-

ting offer similar quality and prices, and are equally appealing.

Tikia (☎ 05 59 24 46 09; 1 place Ste-Eugénie; menus €12.80-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) The premises may be *tikia* ('small' in Basque) but the same can't be said of this rustic restaurant's giant *brochettes* (skewers) of duck, steak or seafood, accompanied by local wines and friendly service.

Bistrot des Halles (☎ 05 59 24 21 22; 1 rue du Centre; mains €14.50-17; ☎ lunch & dinner) One of a cluster of decent restaurants along rue du Centre that get their produce directly from the nearby covered market, this bustling place serves excellent fish and other fresh fare from the blackboard menu in an interior adorned with old metallic advertising posters.

Baleak (☎ 05 59 24 58 57; 8 rue du Centre; lunch/dinner menus €16/28, mains €16; ☎ lunch & dinner daily Jul-Sep, Tue-Sun Oct-Jun) Fish-lovers will be hooked by the fresh catches served in this trendy new place amid exposed stone walls. Great wine list, too.

Le Clos Basque (☎ 05 59 24 24 96; 12 rue Louis Barthe; menus €27; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) With its tiles and exposed stonework hung with abstract art, this tiny place could have strayed in from Spain. The cuisine, however, is emphatically Basque, traditional with a contemporary twist or two, such as sirloin with green mustard, or stuffed eggplant with saffron. Reserve ahead to secure a terrace table.

Also recommended:

L'Opale (☎ 05 59 24 30 30; 17 av Édouard VII; mains €18-28; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Sun low season) Adjacent to designer boutiques and opening onto the seafloor, serves seafood in ultrastylish surrounds.

Sissinou (☎ 05 59 22 51 50; 5 av du Maréchal Foch; mains €25; ☎ lunch & dinner) Gastronomic Basque cuisine in a sleek, streamlined space. One to watch.

SELF-CATERING

Just downhill from Biarritz' covered market, **La Table de Don Quichotte** (12 av Victor Hugo) sells all sorts of Spanish hams, sausages, pickles and wines. You'll find a tempting array of cheeses, wines and pâtés at nearby **Mille et Un Fromages** (8 av Victor Hugo). At sea level, **Épicerie Fine du Port Vieux** (41bis rue Mazagran) is another excellent delicatessen.

There's a good-size supermarket in the basement of the **Galeries Lafayette** (17 place Clemenceau) department store.

Drinking

There are some great bars on and around rue du Port Vieux, place Clemenceau and

the central food-market area. Places generally open from 11am to 2am unless noted otherwise.

Bar Basque (☎ 05 59 24 60 92; 1 rue du Port Vieux) This rustic-chic newcomer serves bite-size Basque tapas (€1.20 to €7) washed down with a fantastic selection of wines.

Le Surfing (☎ 05 59 24 78 72; 9 bd Prince des Galles) After a hard day's surfing, drop in to this memorabilia-filled surf bar to compare waves and wipe-outs.

Arena Café Bar (☎ 05 59 24 88 98; Plage du Port Vieux; ☎ 9am-2am daily Apr-Sep, 10am-2am Wed-Sun Oct-Mar) Tucked into a tiny cove, this beachfront hangout combines a style-conscious restaurant (mains €15 to €22) with a fuchsia- and violet-tinged bar with DJs on the turntables.

Red Bar (9 av du Maréchal Foch; ☎ Tue-Sun) You mightn't think a rugby bar would attract trendsetters, but this temple to Biarritz Olympique (their colours are red and white – hence the name), with reggae and '70s rock in the background, will make you think again.

Ventilo Caffé (rue du Port Vieux; ☎ Wed-Sun Sep-Jun, daily Jul & Aug) This revamped café continues to lure a young crowd and gets packed to the gills on summer nights.

Entertainment

Free classical music concerts take place in high summer at various atmospheric outdoor venues around town; the tourist office has the program.

Constructed in 1928, Biarritz' landmark **Casino Municipal** (1 av Édouard VII) has 200-plus fruit machines that whirr and chink until the wee hours.

Central clubs include **Le Caveau** (☎ 05 59 24 16 17; 4 rue Gambetta; ☎ 11pm-5am); **B Pink** (☎ 05 59 22 77 59; ☎ 11pm-5am Tue-Sat), within the Casino Municipal; and the sizzling new **Carré Coast** (☎ 05 59 24 64 64; Grand Plage; ☎ 11pm-5am), with a cool sea-facing lounge bar and some of the coast's hottest DJs spinning funk, house and disco – see who's hitting the decks at www.myspace.co/m/lecarrecoast.

SPORT

At the **Fronton Couvert Plaza Berri** (☎ 05 59 22 15 72; 42 av du Maréchal Foch), there's *pelota* (p692) virtually year-round; ask the tourist office for schedules. From July to mid-September, the open-air *fronton* (*pelota* court) at **Parc Mazón** has regular *chistera* matches at 9pm

on Thursdays. Admission to each venue is around €8.

Between mid-June and mid-September, **Euskal-Jai** (☎ 05 59 23 91 09; av Henri Haget) in the Parc des Sports d'Aguiléra complex, 2km east of central Biarritz, has regular professional *cesta punta* matches (admission €10 to €20) at 9pm. Bus 1 stops nearby.

Shopping

At **Pare Gabia** (☎ 05 59 24 22 51; 18 rue Mazagran), Vincent Corbun continues his grandfather's business, established in 1935, making and selling espadrilles in a rainbow of colours and styles (customised with ribbons and laces while you wait). A pair starts from €10. For Basque music, crafts and guidebooks, visit **Eki** (☎ 05 59 24 79 64; 21 av de Verdun). **Robert Pariès** (1 place Bellevue) will test your willpower with scrumptious chocolates and Basque sweets.

Getting There & Away

AIR

To reach Biarritz-Anglet-Bayonne airport (p693), take STAB bus No 6 or, on Sunday, line C to/from Biarritz' *hôtel de ville*. Each runs once or twice hourly, from 7am to about 7pm.

BUS

Nine daily **ATCRB buses** (☎ 05 59 26 06 99) and buses to Spain (p693) stop just near the tourist office beside square d'Ixelles.

TRAIN

Biarritz-La Négresse train station is about 3km south of the town centre, although walking to the centre isn't advised due to busy roads without footpaths; buses 2 and 9 (B and C on Sundays) connect the two. **SNCF** (13 av du Maréchal Foch; ☎ Mon-Fri) has a town-centre office. Times, fares and destinations are much the same as Bayonne's (p693), a nine-minute train journey away. Between Bayonne and Biarritz, however, buses run far more frequently (opposite) and work out much cheaper, as you'll pay the same to get from Biarritz' train station to its town centre as you will to get from Bayonne to Biarritz directly on the bus.

Getting Around

BICYCLE

Cycle Océan (☎ 05 59 24 94 47; www.cycleocean.com; 24 rue Peyroloubilh) rents out mountain bikes (€12 per day) and scooters (from €31).

BUS

Most services stop beside the Hôtel de Ville, from where route Nos 1 and 2 (€1.20, about 50 daily) go to Bayonne's Hôtel de Ville and station. **STAB** (☎ 05 59 24 26 53) has an information kiosk adjacent to the tourist office.

For buses to Biarritz-Anglet-Bayonne airport, see p693.

TAXI

Call **Taxis Biarritz** (☎ 05 59 03 18 18).

ST-JEAN DE LUZ & CIBOURE

pop 13,600

If you're searching for the quintessential Basque seaside town – with atmospheric narrow streets, a sheltered bay, good surf nearby and a lively fishing port pulling in large catches of sardines, tuna and anchovies that are cooked up at authentic restaurants – you've found it.

St-Jean de Luz, 24km southwest of Bayonne, sits at the mouth of the River Nivelle. The town and its long beach are on the eastern side of Baie de St-Jean de Luz.

Its sleepy, smaller alter ego, Ciboure, is on the western curve of the bay, separated from St-Jean de Luz by the fishing harbour. Several timber-framed whitewashed Basque houses, with shutters in green or ox-blood red, survive here just south of rue Agorette.

Information

Internet World (☎ 05 59 26 86 92; 7 rue Tourasse; per hr €6; ☎ 9am-9pm daily Jun-Aug, 10am-6pm Mon-Sat Sep-May) Friendly internet café.

Laverie du Port (place Maréchal Foch; ☎ 7am-9pm) Laundrette.

Post Office Ciboure (quai Maurice Ravel); St-Jean de Luz (cnr bd Victor Hugo & rue Sallagoity)

Tourist Office (☎ 05 59 26 03 16; www.saint-jean-de-luz.com; 20 bd Victor Hugo; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Sep-Jun) Runs an extensive program of French-language tours around the town and across the Spanish border; ask about English-language tours in summer.

Sights

A superb panorama of the town unfolds from the promontory of **Pointe Ste-Barbe**, at the northern end of the Baie de St-Jean de Luz and about 1km beyond the town beach. Go to the end of bd Thiers and keep walking.

BEACHES

St-Jean de Luz' family-friendly sandy beach sprouts bathing tents (€6.25 per day) from June to September. Ciboure has its own modest beach, Plage de Socoa.

Plage de Socoa, 2km west of Socoa on the corniche (the D912), is served by ATCRB buses (p703) en route to Hendaye and, in the high season, by boats (p703). See p701 for surf beaches.

CHURCHES

The plain facade of France's largest and finest Basque church, **Église St-Jean Baptiste** (rue Gambetta; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-7pm), conceals a splendid interior with a magnificent baroque altarpiece. It was in front of this very altarpiece that Louis XIV and María Teresa, daughter of King Philip IV of Spain, were married in 1660. After exchanging rings, the couple walked down the aisle and out of the south door, which was then sealed to commemorate peace between the two nations after 24 years of hostilities. You can still see its outline, opposite No 20 rue Gambetta.

In Ciboure, the 17th-century **Église St-Vincent** (rue Pocalette) has an octagonal bell tower topped by an unusual three-tiered wooden roof. Inside, the lavish use of wood and tiered galleries are typically Basque.



ÉCOMUSÉE BASQUE



Basque traditions are brought to life on one-hour audioguide tours of this illuminating multimedia **museum** (☎ 05 59 51 06 06; adult/student/child €5.50/5/2.30; ☎ 10am-6.30pm daily Jul & Aug, 10-11.15am & 2.45-4.45pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct), 2km north of St-Jean de Luz beside the N10. Three entire rooms are devoted to Izarra (Basque for 'star'), a liquor made from 20 different local plants, and the museum is one of 10 stops along the Route Gourmande de Basque (see boxed text, p701).

PLACE LOUIS XIV

This pretty, pedestrianised square is home to **Maison Louis XIV** (☎ 05 59 26 01 56; ☎ 10.30am-noon & 2.30-5.30pm Jun & Sep-mid-Oct, 10.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Jul & Aug), built in 1643 by a wealthy shipowner and furnished in period style. Here, Louis XIV lived out his last days of bachelorhood before marrying María Teresa. Half-hour guided tours (with English text) cost €4.80/3 per adult/child.

ST-JEAN DE LUZ & CIBOURE

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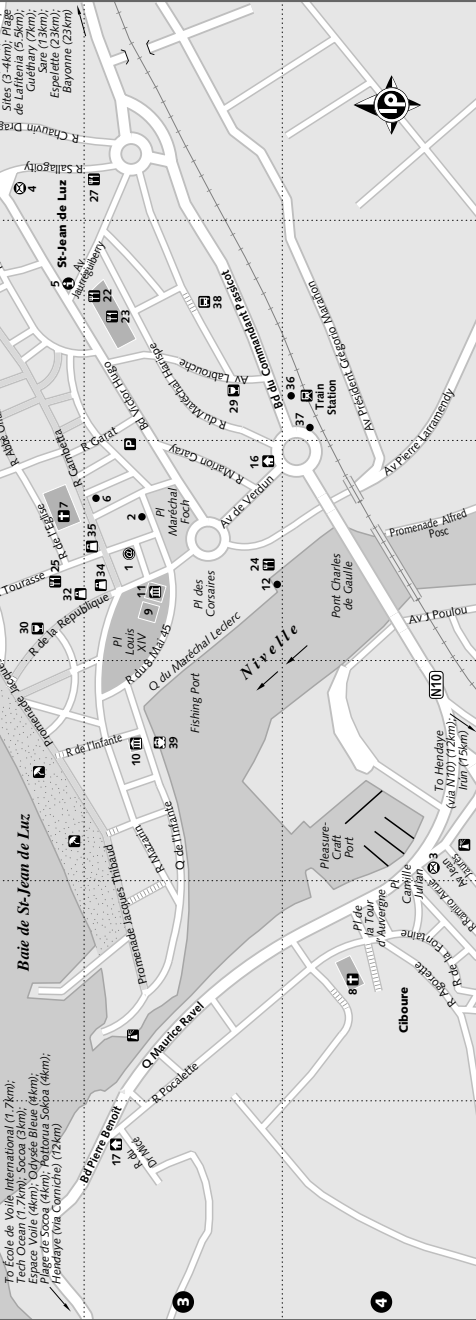
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- Fun Bikes.....37 E4
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- Macarons Adam.....32 D2
 Macarons Adam.....33 E2
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 Maison du Kanouga.....35 D3



To École de Voile International (1.2km);
 To Ech Ocean (1.2km); Socoa (3km);
 Plage de Socoa (4km); Portonua Socoa (4km);
 Hendaye (via Corniche) (12km)

ECO EATING & DRINKING

Artisan produce abounds along the **Route Gourmande de Basque** (Basque Gourmand Route; ☎ 05 59 54 56 70; www.route-gourmandebasque.com). The route links 10 producers over 126km, but if you're short on time you can cherry-pick among them. Along the way, you can learn about and taste Basque specialities including ham, trout, wine, cheese, chilli peppers, Basque cake, cider, Izarra liquor (see p699), chocolate and honey, all utilising traditional methods for minimal environmental impact and deliciously rich, natural flavours.

Alongside, and rather dwarfed by its more imposing neighbour, is St-Jean de Luz' **Hôtel de Ville**, built in 1657.

In the days before her marriage, María Teresa stayed in another shipowner's mansion, the brick-and-stone Maison Joanoenia, off place Louis XIV, nowadays called **Maison de l'Infante** (☎ 05 59 26 36 82; quai de l'Infante; adult/child €2.50/free; ☎ 11am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 2.30-6.30pm Mon mid-Jun-mid-Oct), which has fine architectural detail.

SOCOA

The heart of **Socoa** is about 2.5km west of Ciboure along the continuation of quai Maurice Ravel (named for the *Boléro* composer, who was born in Ciboure in 1875). Its prominent fort was built in 1627 and later improved by Vauban. You can walk out to the Digue de Socoa breakwater or climb to the lighthouse via rue du Phare, then out along rue du Sémaphore for fabulous coastal views.

Activities

Opportunities to get out on, in and under the water abound.

SURFING

For prime waves, head 5.5km northeast of St-Jean de Luz to **Plage de Lafitenia**; ATCRB's Biarritz and Bayonne buses pass within 1km (Martienia or Bubonnet stop).

Surf schools based in the **Youkoulélé** (H2O Surf School; ☎ 05 59 26 81 95; 72 rue Gambetta), **Quiksilver** (☎ 06 86 94 95 27; 64 rue Gambetta) and **Billabong** (☎ 05 59 26 07 93; 16 rue Gambetta) surf shops will

transport you to the waves. Two-hour lessons start at €40.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

École de Voile International (☎ 05 59 47 06 32) and **Espace Voile** (☎ 05 59 47 21 21) in Socoa offer windsurfing lessons and yachting courses. The former also rents out dinghies and motor boats and the latter, sea kayaks.

Diving schools in Socoa:

Odysée Bleue (☎ 06 63 54 13 63; hangar 4, chemin des Blocs)

Pottorua Socoa (☎ 05 59 47 1 7; 53 av Commandant Passicot)

Tech Ocean (☎ 05 59 47 96 75; 45 av Commandant Passicot)

From May to mid-September, the **Nivelle Trois** (☎ 05 59 47 06 24) leaves quai du Maréchal Leclerc for morning deep-sea fishing trips and afternoon cruises.

Festivals & Events

Festival de Film de Surf (International Surf Film Festival; www.surf-film.com) Four days of surf movies in mid-May.

Fêtes de la St-Jean Bonfires, music and dancing take place on the weekend nearest 24 June.

Régates de Traînières A weekend of boat races on the first weekend in July.

La Fête du Thon The Tuna Festival, on another July weekend, fills the streets with brass bands, Basque music and dancing, while stalls sell sizzling tuna steaks.

Danses des Sept Provinces Basques Folk dancers from all across the Spanish and French Basque Country meet in early summer.

La Nuit de la Sardine The Night of the Sardine – a night of music, folklore and dancing – is held twice each summer on a Saturday in early July and the Saturday nearest 15 August.

Sleeping

July to mid-September are packed; low-season prices can drop significantly.

Between St-Jean de Luz and Guéthary, 7km northeast up the coast, are no fewer than 16 camp sites. ATCRB's Biarritz and Bayonne buses stop within 1km of them all.

Hôtel de Verdun (☎ 05 59 26 02 55; 13 av de Verdun; r without bathroom €28, r with shower only €33-36, r with shower & toilet €45) Opposite the train station in St-Jean de Luz, this simple place is a popular staging post for Chemin de St-Jacques pilgrims. Rooms are relatively spacious, if plain. Good meals (*menu* €12) are available

CONSERVATION-CONSCIOUS VILLAS

Accommodation devoted to ecological principles is still a rarity in the French Basque Country (in part because it's pretty green to begin with). But St-Jean de Luz's **Hôtel les Goëlands** (☎ 05 59 26 10 05; www.hotel-lesgoelands.com; 4 & 6 av d'Etcheverry; s €50-64, s with shared bathroom €40, d €74-104, q €94-158; ♿) goes all out. In a pair of traditional Basque villas, this family-run, very family-friendly place not only scrupulously recycles, limits waste and conserves energy (including solar hot water) but also rents electric bikes to guests and cooks meals made from fresh local produce (half board is obligatory in July and August, starting from €72 per person). Driving might not be the most eco-friendly way to get here, but if you do come by car, parking is free.

onsite; half board is obligatory from July to September.

Hôtel La Caravelle (☎ 05 59 47 18 05; www.hotel.lacaravelle.com; bd Pierre Benoît; r €50-140, tr €70-140, q €70-150) In Ciboure, this nautical-themed place was originally two fishermen's cottages. Seven of its 19 light-filled, modernised rooms have beautiful bay views. Parking costs €10.

Hôtel Ohartzia (☎ 05 59 26 00 06; www.hotel-ohartzia.com, in French; 28 rue Garat; r low season €68-72, high season €79-89) Framed by cobalt-blue shutters, this flower-bedecked Basque house is just a few steps from the beach. Immaculate rooms are well furnished and equipped, and the welcome's friendly. The highlight is its oasislike garden courtyard. Wi-fi is available in the bar area, but alas, not in the rooms.

Hôtel Les Almadies (☎ 05 59 85 34 48; www.hotel-les-almadies.com, in French; 58 rue Gambetta; r €75-130; ♿) Four of the seven rooms at this family-run gem open to balconies overlooking St-Jean de Luz' pedestrianised shopping street, and all blend restrained countrified fabrics with contemporary furnishings (which are immaculate, thanks in part to the no-pets rule). The timber-decked breakfast room has a plumbed-in espresso machine and opens to a sunny terrace. Parking is €9, and wi-fi is free. It's closed for three weeks in November.

Hôtel de la Plage (☎ 05 59 51 03 44; www.hotelde.laplage.com; 33 rue Garat; r incl breakfast low season €88-138, high season €108-158; ♿) mid-Feb–mid-Nov & school holidays; ♿) This red-shuttered building overlooks the beach, with sea views from most rooms (many of which have small balconies). There's a great on-site bar-restaurant (also open to nonguests). Wi-fi is available. Valet parking costs €12.

La Devinière (☎ 05 59 26 05 51; www.hotel-la-deviniere.com; 5 rue Loquin; r €120-180) You have to love a place that forsakes TVs for antiquarian books (room 11 even has its own mini-library). Beyond the living room, with its piano and

comfy armchairs, there's a delightful small patio equipped with lounges. It's charming.

Zazpi (☎ 05 59 26 07 77; www.zazpihotel.com; 21 bd Thiers; r €160-280, ste €300-450; ♿) Seriously hip. In Basque, *zazpi* means 'seven', reflecting the number of rooms (including two suites) in this mansion-turned-designer-hotel, each named after one of the Basque provinces. It's fronted by a snazzy bar with lime and olive modular sofas and a tearoom (open 11am to 8pm) serving soups, salads and pastas (€12 to €17). Breakfast is a pricey €15; parking costs €10. It's wheelchair accessible and has wi-fi.

Eating

Tempting restaurants line rue de la République, rue Tourasse and place Louis XIV.

Grillerie du Port (☎ 05 59 51 18 29; quai du Maréchal Leduc; ♿) mid-Jun–mid-Sep) In this old shack by the port, join the crowds gorging on fresh sardines, salads and slabs of tuna steak fresh off the boat. It's informal and economical (prices depend on the day's catch but are always reasonable).

Buvette des Halles (☎ 05 59 26 73 59; bd Victor Hugo; dishes €7-14; ♿) 6am-2pm Tue-Sat Oct-May, 6am-2pm & dinner daily Jun-Sep) Tucked into a corner of the covered market, this minuscule restaurant serves goat's cheese, Bayonne ham, grilled sardines, fish soup, mussels and much more outside beneath the plane trees on the small square between June and September. The rest of the year, stop by for fresh, tasty sandwiches, but go early for the best pickings.

Pilpil-Enea (☎ 05 59 51 20 80; 3 rue Sallagoity; lunch mains €10-14, menus from €28, dinner mains €16-30; ♿) lunch & dinner Thu-Mon) Strung with fishing nets, this small, simple dark-timber and blue-and-white-checked restaurant is set apart from the tourist throng, and is a firm local favourite for its quality cooking.

Restaurant Ramuntcho (☎ 05 59 26 03 89; 24 rue Garat; menus €18-30, mains €11-15; ♿) closed Mon low

season) You can scarcely see the walls for the photos and posters of vintage vehicles and motorbikes at this lively place, which successfully blends the cuisine of southwest France with the owner's native Normandy. Duck and fish dishes feature prominently.

Le Peita (☎ 05 59 26 86 66; 21 rue Tourasse; mains €14.50-20, combination plates €12.50-14.50; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Dried Espelette chilli peppers and hams hang from the ceiling at this authentic place with crushed-silk tablecloths and friendly owners. For a taste of the local produce on display, order one of the combination plates accompanied by fresh local cheese.

Olatua (☎ 05 59 51 05 22; 30 bd Thiers; 2-course menus €33, 3-course menus €35, mains €25; ☎ lunch & dinner) This bright brasserie-style restaurant serves market-fresh fare like St-Jacques scallops with risotto and a cloudlike chocolate soufflé with pistachio ice cream for dessert.

SELF-CATERING

There's a food market every Tuesday and Friday morning inside the **covered market** (bd Victor Hugo).

Drinking & Entertainment

La Taverne de Nesle (☎ 05 59 26 60 93; 5 av Labrousche; ☎ 5pm-2am Wed-Mon Oct-Jun, daily Jul-Sep) This cheery neighbourhood pub has a DJ every Friday year-round (twice a week in July and August).

Pub du Corsaire (☎ 05 59 26 10 74; 16 rue de la République; ☎ 5pm-2am) Ten of nearly 100 different beers are on draft at this place, which also mixes some mean cocktails.

Mata Hari (☎ 05 59 26 04 28; 48 av André Ithurrealde; admission €10; ☎ varies) Although swarming with people in the high season, St-Jean de Luz has only three clubs, all outside town. This sophisticated spot, 2km east of the train station and open year-round (generally Thursday to Saturday; daily in July and August), is far and away the most popular.

Casino La Pergola (☎ 05 59 51 58 58; rue Dalbarade; ☎ slot machines 11am-3am daily, gaming 9pm-3am Tue-Sun) Bang on the beach.

SPORT

In July and August catch *cesta punta* at the **Jai Alai Compos Berri** (☎ 05 59 51 65 30; rte de Bayonne, N10), 1km northeast of the train station. Matches start at 9pm every Tuesday and Friday, and half-time is spiced up with music or dancing. Tickets are available at the tourist of-

fice and cost €8 to €18, depending on the crowd-pulling capacity of the players.

Shopping

Basque sweets at **Maison du Kanouga** (9 rue Gambetta) include *kanouga* – chewy chocolate cubes invented by the owner's grandfather – and more varieties of marzipan than you've imagined in your sweetest dreams. Equally tempting are the two branches of **Macarons Adam** (49 rue Gambetta & 6 rue de la République).

St-Jean de Luz is also a good place to purchase Basque linen – for example, at **Maison Charles Larre** (4 rue de la République).

Getting There & Away

BUS

Buses run by **ATCRB** (☎ 05 59 26 06 99) pass the **Halte Routière** bus stop near the train station on their way northeast to Biarritz (€3, 30 minutes, nine daily) and Bayonne (€3, 40 minutes, nine daily). Southwestward, there are around 10 services daily to Hendaye (€1, 35 minutes).

Also passing the Halte Routière is **Transportes Pesa** (p693), serving San Sebastián and Bilbao.

From April to October **Le Basque Bondissant** (The Leaping Basque; ☎ 05 59 26 25 87; www.basquebondissant.com, in French) runs buses to La Rhune (p704; including Le Petit Train adult/child costs €17/12) and the Grottes de Sare (p704; adult/child including admission costs €10.50/7.50). Buses leave from the Halte Routière.

TRAIN

There are frequent trains to Bayonne (€4.30, 25 minutes) via Biarritz (€2.70, 15 minutes) and to Hendaye (€2.70, 15 minutes), with connections to Spain.

Getting Around

BICYCLE

Based at the train station, **Fun Bikes** (☎ 06 27 26 83 01) rents out cycles (from €7 per half day) and scooters (from €21 per half day).

BOAT

The good ship **Le Passeur** (☎ 06 81 20 84 98) plies between quai de l'Infante and Socoa (€2 one way) every half-hour between June and September.

BUS

Between June and September, the Navette Intercommunale, run by ATCRB, provides a

local daily bus service, with a skeleton service during the rest of the year. From the Halte Routière, take Line A for Erromardie and the camp sites north of town, Line D for Socoa via Ciboure.

CAR

Car-rental companies at the train station include **ADA** (☎ 05 59 26 26 22).

TAXI

Call ☎ 05 59 26 10 11.

AROUND ST-JEAN DE LUZ

La Rhune

Symbolically, half of the 905m-high, antenna-topped mountain La Rhune ('Larrun' in Basque), 10km south of St-Jean de Luz, is in the French Basque Country, while the other half lies on the Spanish side. Views are spectacular from its peak, best approached from **Col de St-Ignace**, 3km northwest of Sare on the D4 (the St-Jean de Luz road). From here, you can take a fairly strenuous walk or hop on **Le Petit Train de la Rhune** (☎ 05 59 54 20 26; www.rhune.com; single/return adult €12/14, child €7/8). This charming little wooden train takes 35 minutes to haul itself up the 4km from col to summit. It runs from Easter to September with departures roughly every 35 minutes, and on Monday and Thursday during October at 10am and 3pm. Be prepared for a wait of up to an hour in high summer.

Grottes de Sare

Who knows what the first inhabitants of the **Grottes de Sare** (☎ 05 59 54 21 88; www.sare.fr/grottes_sare.html; adult/child €6.50/3.50; ☎ 10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-6pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-5pm Oct & school holidays, 2-5pm Nov-Mar), some 20,000 years ago, would make of today's whiz-bang technology including lasers and holograms during sound-and-light shows at these caves. Multilingual 45-minute tours take you through a gaping entrance via narrow passages to a huge central cavern. Follow the D306 6km south of the village of Sare.

Ainhoa

pop 599

'Un des plus jolis villages de la France', says the sign as you enter this, indeed, very pretty village. Only this being the Basque country, someone has painted over 'la France'...

Ainhoa's elongated main street is flanked by imposing 17th-century houses, half-timbered

and brightly painted. Look for the rectangular stones set above many of the doors, engraved with the date of construction and the name of the family to whom the house belonged. The fortified church has the Basque trademarks of an internal gallery and an embellished altarpiece.

For a memorable Basque meal, stop at the Michelin-starred **Ithurria** (☎ 05 59 29 92 11; www.ithurria.com; Ainhoa; s €89-100, d €120-150, menus €35-58; ☎ ☎ ☎), established by the Isabal family in an old pilgrims' hostel and now run by Maurice Isabal's two sons (one the sommelier, the other the chef). To make a night of it, its rainbow-hued rooms are equipped with mod cons, and to compensate for gastronomic overload, there's an on-site sauna and fitness room.

Espelette

pop 1879

The whitewashed Basque town of Espelette is famous for its dark-red chilli peppers, an integral ingredient in traditional Basque cuisine. So prized is *le piment d'Espelette* that it's been accorded Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) status, like fine wine. In autumn you can scarcely see the walls of the houses, strung with rows of chilli peppers drying in the sun. The last weekend in October marks Espelette's **Fête du Piment**, with processions, a formal blessing of the chilli peppers and the ennoblement of a *chevalier du piment* (a knight of the pimiento).

If you prefer sugar to spice, stop by for free tastings from specialist chocolate-maker **Chocolats Anton** (☎ 05 59 93 80 58; place du Marché).

The **tourist office** (☎ 05 59 93 95 02; www.espelette.fr, in French), within a small stone château, shares its premises with the **Hôtel de Ville**.

Chilli peppers star on the menu at the renowned **Hôtel Restaurant Euzkadi** (☎ 05 59 93 91 88; www.hotel-restaurant-euzkadi.com; r €51-68, menus €17-32; ☎) in dishes such as *axoa* (tender minced veal simmered with onions and fresh chilli peppers). Its comfortable rooms are a true bargain.

ST-JEAN PIED DE PORT

pop 1700

At the foot of the Pyrenees, the walled town of St-Jean Pied de Port, 53km southeast of Bayonne, was for centuries the last stop in France for pilgrims heading south over the Spanish border, a mere 8km away, and on to Santiago de Compostela in western Spain.

Today it remains a popular departure point for hikers attempting the pilgrim trail, but there are plenty of shorter hikes and opportunities for mountain biking in the area.

St-Jean Pied de Port makes an ideal day trip from Bayonne, particularly on Monday when the market is in full swing. Half the reason for coming here is the scenic journey south of Cambo-les-Bains, as both railway and road (the D918) pass through rocky hills, forests and lush meadows dotted with white farm-houses selling *ardi* ('cheese' in Basque).

Information

Bar Paris (☎ 05 59 37 01 47; 33 av Renaud; per hr €3; ☎ 7.15am-12.30pm & 3-8.30pm) Internet access; a few steps from the station.

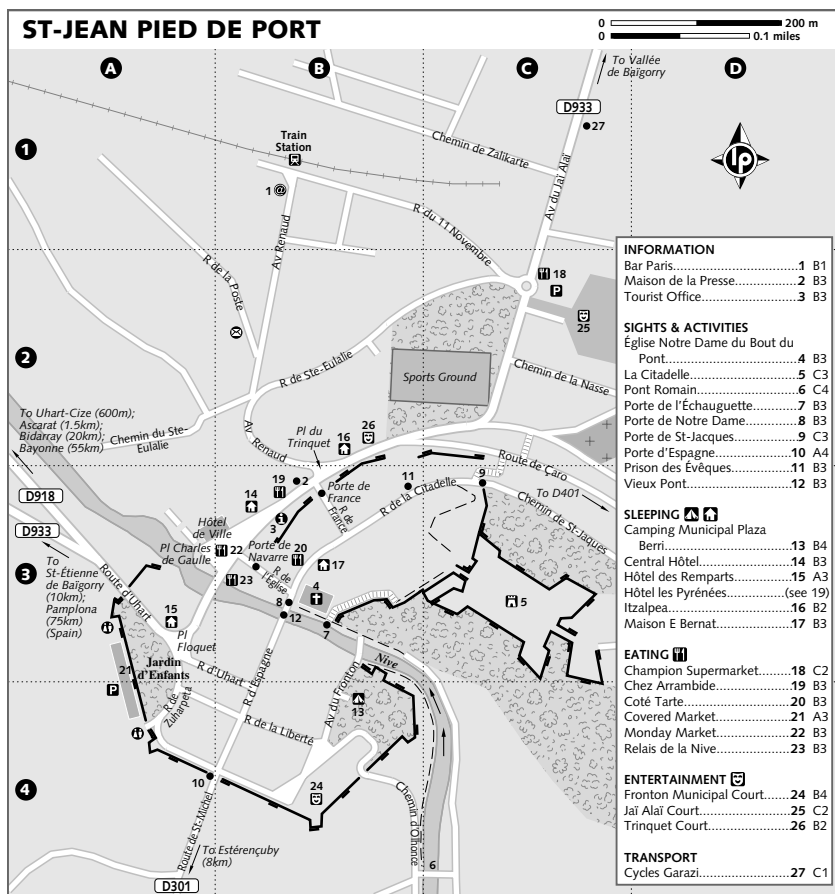
Maison de la Presse (place Charles de Gaulle) Carries a good selection of walking maps.

Tourist Office (☎ 05 59 37 03 57; www.pyrenees-basque.com; place Charles de Gaulle; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun)

Sights & Activities

OLD TOWN

The **Église Notre Dame du Bout du Pont**, with foundations as old as the town itself, was thoroughly rebuilt in the 17th century. Beyond **Porte de Notre Dame** is the photogenic **Vieux Pont** (Old Bridge), from where there's a fine view of whitewashed houses with balconies leaning out above the water. Fishing is forbidden where the River Nive passes through town,



and the fat, gulping trout seem to know it. A pleasant 500m riverbank stroll upstream leads to the steeply arched **Pont Romain** (meaning Roman Bridge, but in fact dating from the 17th century).

Rue de la Citadelle is edged by substantial, pink-granite, 16th- to 18th-century houses. Look for the construction date on door lintels (the oldest we found was 1510). A common motif is the scallop shell, symbol of St Jacques (St James or Santiago) and of the Santiago de Compostela pilgrims. Pilgrims would enter the town through the **Porte de St-Jacques** on the northern side of town, then, refreshed and probably a little poorer, head for Spain through the **Porte d'Espagne**, south of the river.

LA CITADELLE

From the top of rue de la Citadelle, a rough cobblestone path ascends to the massive citadel itself, from where there's a spectacular panorama of the town and the surrounding hills. Constructed in 1628, the fort was rebuilt around 1680 by military engineers of the Vauban school. Nowadays it serves as a secondary school and is closed to the public.

If you've a head for heights, descend by the steps signed *escalier poterne* (rear stairway). Steep and slippery after rain, they plunge beside the moss-covered ramparts to **Porte de l'Échauguette** (Watchtower Gate).

PRISON DES ÉVÊQUES

The so-called **Prison des Évêques** (Bishops' Prison; 41 rue de la Citadelle; adult/child €3/2; ☎ 10.30am-9pm daily Jul & Aug, 11am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Wed-Mon Easter-Jun, Sep & Oct), a claustrophobic vaulted cellar, gets its history muddled. It indeed served as the town jail from 1795, as a military lock-up in the 19th century, then as a place of internment during WWII for those caught trying to flee to nominally neutral Spain. And the lower section indeed dates from the 13th century when St-Jean Pied de Port was a bishopric of the Avignon papacy. But the building above it dates from the 16th century, by which time the bishops were long gone.

WALKING & CYCLING

Escape the summertime crowds by walking or cycling into the Pyrenean foothills, where the loudest sounds you'll hear are cowbells and the wind. Both the GR10 (the trans-Pyrenean

long-distance trail running from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean) and the GR65 (the Chemin de St-Jacques pilgrim route) pass through town. Outside the summer season, check with the tourist office or hostels for snow reports and possible rerouting, and plan your accommodation ahead as many places on the Spanish side close.

Pick up a copy of *55 Balades et Randonnées en Pays Basque* (in French; €8) from the tourist office, which maps walking and mountain-bike excursions.

To cycle the easy way while enjoying the best of Nive Valley views, load your bicycle onto the train in Bayonne – they're carried free – and roll back down the valley from St-Jean Pied de Port. If you find the ride all the way back to the coast daunting, rejoin the train at Pont-Noblia, for example, or Cambo-les-Bains. For local bike hire, see opposite.

Tours

In July and August, the tourist office organises tours of the old town and visits to the citadel in French and Spanish. Day tours cost €4.50; night-time tours are €7.

Sleeping & Eating

Much of the accommodation is geared for walkers, including *gîtes* and *chambres d'hôtes* further along on the pilgrim trail – the tourist office has details including seasonal closures. Check restaurant closing days (including those attached to hotels) as they can fluctuate seasonally.

Camping Municipal Plaza Berri (☎ 05 59 37 11 19; av du Fronton; per adult/tent/car/electricity €2.50/2/2/5.00; ☎ Apr-Oct) Beside the river, this smallish campsite has ample shade.

Itzalpea (☎ 05 59 37 03 66; www.maisondhotes-itzalpea.com; 5 place du Trinquet; s incl breakfast €48-58, d €56-76) This cosy *maison d'hôte* has five renovated rooms (some air-conditioned) and is set over a tea shop serving no less than 20 different types of teas.

Hôtel des Remparts (☎ 05 59 37 13 79; www.touradour.com/hotel-remparts.htm; 16 place Floquet; s €43.50-50, d €49-54; ☎ Feb-Sep) In a historic building dating from 1643, this hotel has functional, good-size rooms, and walkers and pilgrims swapping tips in the café-bar.

Central Hôtel (☎ 05 59 37 00 22; fax 05 59 37 27 79; 1 place Charles de Gaulle; r €60-71) Follow the gleaming polished timber staircase up to 12 old-fashioned but clean and ultraspacious rooms

at this eponymously situated hotel. The owners are welcoming and there's an on-site restaurant (*menus* €19.50 to €45) opening to a riverside terrace.

Ourpick Maison E Bernat (☎ 05 59 37 23 10; www.ebernat.com; 20 rue de la Citadelle; d incl breakfast €66-86, extra person €24; 📺) There are only four bedrooms in this welcoming 17th-century place with thick stone walls, but they're airy, well furnished and meticulously kept, and each has a double bed and a single bed. There's a great little restaurant on-site, spilling onto a tiny terrace (*menus* from €11), and the hosts run a program of gourmet-themed weekends.

Hôtel les Pyrénées (☎ 05 59 37 01 01; www.hotel-les-pyrenees.com; 19 place Charles de Gaulle; r €100-160, apt €185-250; 📺 mid-Jan–mid-Nov; 📺 📺 📺 📺) Some of the large, well-furnished rooms at this one-time coaching inn take in stunning mountain views from balconies.

Chez Arrambide (menus €40-85, mains €20-49) This twin Michelin-starred restaurant, the real reason to stop by Hôtel les Pyrénées, is where chef Firmin Arrambide does wonders with market produce, such as pan-fried duck breast with ginger and cinnamon or foie gras-stuffed hare. Wi-fi is available; parking costs €10.

Other dining recommendations:

Côté Tarte (☎ 05 59 49 16 78; 5 rue de la Citadelle; menus €14-16; 📺 9am-6pm Mon & Wed-Sat) Fresh, contemporary little place – all limed tables and coir carpets – specialising in delicious sweet and savoury tarts.

Relais de la Nive (☎ 05 59 37 04 22; place Charles de Gaulle; menus €20-23; 📺 lunch & dinner Fri-Sun Mar-Nov) Bar-restaurant with views of the Vieux Pont, perfectly reflected in the adjacent Nive river by day and floodlit at night.

SELF-CATERING

Farmers from the surrounding hills bring fresh produce – chilli peppers and local cheeses and much more – to the town's **Monday market** (place Charles de Gaulle). In high summer a weekly handicraft and food fair is held most Thursdays in the covered market.

Walkers can stock up at the **Champion super-market** (av du Jai Alai) near the train station.

Entertainment

Year-round, variants of *pelota* (admission €7 to €10) are played at the *trinquet*, *fronton* municipal and *jai alai* courts, including a bare-handed *pelota* tournament at the *trinquet* court at 5pm every Monday. Check schedules at the tourist office.

In high summer, catch Basque music and dancing in the *jai alai* court at 9.30pm on Thursdays.

Getting There & Away

Train is the best option to/from Bayonne (€8.20, 1¼ hours, up to five daily) since the irregular bus service makes a huge detour (and drops you at the station, rather than the centre of town, despite passing right through it – go figure).

Getting Around

Cycles Garazi (☎ 05 59 37 21 79; 32 av du Jai Alai) rents mountain bikes (per half day/day €10/15).

Parking is a real pain in summer. The car parks beside the covered market and by the *jai alai* court, both free, are the largest.

To order a taxi, call ☎ 05 59 37 05 00 or ☎ 05 59 37 13 37.

AROUND ST-JEAN PIED DE PORT

The village of **St-Étienne de Baïgorry** and its outlying hamlets straddle the Vallée de Baïgorry. Tranquillity itself after busy St-Jean Pied de Port and stretched thinly along a branch of the Nive, the village has, like so many Basque settlements, two focal points: the church and the *fronton* (*pelota* court).

Iroulégu (white, rosé and red) is the French Basque Country's only AOC wine – and most of it comes from the Vallée de Baïgorry. Just north of town, the **wine-growers' cooperative** (☎ 05 59 37 41 33; www.cave-irouleguy.com; 📺 closed Sun Oct-Apr) organises vineyard visits (€3) in July and August by reservation. It's open year-round for sales and tastings.

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