



48 HOURS IN

San Sebastian

TASTE · DISCOVER · LINGER

San Sebastián, Spain

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San Sebastián has more Michelin stars per capita than almost anywhere on earth, and it earned that reputation without ever losing its pintxos-bar soul — the same city with three-star temples like Arzak also has narrow Parte Vieja streets where a full, excellent meal costs the price of a few small plates and a glass of txakoli, eaten standing at a zinc counter.

What most first-time visitors miss: La Concha, the city's shell-shaped bay beach, is genuinely one of the best urban beaches in Europe, not just a postcard backdrop — locals swim there daily, spring through autumn. Monte Igueldo's funicular has been running since 1912 and gives a better view than the more-visited Monte Urgull. And the city's Basque identity — its own language, its own food culture, its own sporting traditions like pelota — is distinct enough from the rest of Spain that it rewards paying attention rather than assuming it's simply a beach town with good tapas.

Best time to visit	June, September
Airport	San Sebastián Airport (EAS) · 20 min; or Bilbao (BIO) · 1.5 hr
Safety rating	Very safe — one of Spain's safest cities
Solo dining	Exceptional — pintxos bar culture is built entirely for it
Language	Spanish and Basque (Euskara); English common in tourist areas

Your 48 Hours

DAY ONE — PARTE VIEJA · LA CONCHA · MONTE URGULL

9:00 AM La Concha Beach

A near-perfect shell-shaped bay beach in the middle of the city, consistently ranked among Europe's best urban beaches, framed by Monte Urgull and Monte Igueldo at either end.

INSIDER TIP — Walk the full curved promenade early, before the beach fills — the ornate 1910 railing along the walkway is itself a small piece of Belle Époque design worth noticing.

10:30 AM Parte Vieja (Old Town) Walking

The dense old quarter behind the port, all narrow streets, pintxos bars, and the twin towers of the Basilica of Santa María del Coro. Rebuilt after an 1813 fire that destroyed nearly the whole city.

INSIDER TIP — Visit the Basilica's baroque facade in the morning light — it's one of the most photogenic corners of the Old Town and far quieter before the bar crowds arrive.

12:30 PM Pintxos Crawl: Parte Vieja

San Sebastián's pintxos culture centers on this neighborhood — small, excellent bites at bar counters, one or two per stop, moving between four or five bars over a couple of hours.

INSIDER TIP — Order whatever's freshly laid out on the counter rather than asking for a menu — the best pintxos bars operate on visible, rotating display, not ordering from a list.

3:00 PM Monte Urgull

A forested hill directly behind the Old Town, topped by the Castillo de la Mota and a large statue of Christ, with free walking paths and genuinely good harbor and bay views.

INSIDER TIP — The walk up is free and shaded — a good counterbalance to a heavy pintxos lunch, and quieter than Monte Igueldo's more commercial summit.

5:00 PM San Telmo Museum

The Basque Country's oldest museum, housed partly in a 16th-century former monastery, covering Basque history, culture, and identity through art and ethnography.

INSIDER TIP — The building itself — a modern extension grafted onto the old monastery — is as much the story here as the collection inside.

7:00 PM Sunset at La Concha

Return to the beach promenade for sunset, when the bay's shape catches the light in a way that explains why this specific beach became so famous.

INSIDER TIP — The stretch near the Miramar Palace, on the promenade's eastern curve, tends to be less crowded than the central beach access points.

9:00 PM Dinner: Gros Neighborhood

Cross the Urumea river to Gros, a less touristy neighborhood with its own excellent pintxos scene and a younger, more local crowd than Parte Vieja.

INSIDER TIP — Gros is also the city's surf neighborhood — Zurriola Beach right behind it means a genuinely different, more casual atmosphere than the historic Old Town.

DAY TWO — MONTE IGUELDO · FINE DINING · BASQUE CULTURE

9:00 AM Monte Igueldo Funicular

A funicular railway running since 1912 to the summit of Monte Igueldo, at the western end of La Concha, with panoramic views over the entire bay and coastline.

INSIDER TIP — Go up early for the clearest light and thinnest crowds — the vintage amusement park at the summit is a charming bonus, not the main reason to come.

11:00 AM Peine del Viento (Comb of the Wind)

Eduardo Chillida's iconic iron sculptures anchored into the rocks at the western tip of the bay, where the waves crash dramatically through carved stone channels below.

INSIDER TIP — Time your visit with higher tide or rougher seas if possible — the sculpture's interaction with crashing waves is the entire point, and it's underwhelming on a dead-calm day.

1:00 PM Lunch: Mercado de la Bretxa

A historic covered market in Parte Vieja, with fresh Basque produce, seafood, and several small counters serving lunch alongside the stalls.

INSIDER TIP — Eat at one of the market's own counter bars rather than a sit-down restaurant nearby — it's faster, cheaper, and the ingredients are literally steps away.

3:00 PM Kursaal Congress Centre

Rafael Moneo's striking twin glass cube buildings at the mouth of the Urumea river, home to the San Sebastián Film Festival each September and a genuine piece of contemporary Basque architecture.

INSIDER TIP — Walk around the full exterior at different times of day — the glass cubes change character dramatically depending on the light.

4:30 PM Chillida Leku (Optional Half-Day)

Eduardo Chillida's sculpture garden and former farmhouse, about 20 minutes outside the city, showing his large-scale outdoor works across rolling grounds. A genuine half-day commitment if included.

INSIDER TIP — Only add this if you have the time — it's excellent but requires a taxi or bus and meaningfully reshapes the rest of the day's itinerary.

7:30 PM Dinner: Fine Dining Splurge

San Sebastián's Michelin-starred restaurants — Arzak, Akelarre, and others — represent some of the best fine dining in the world, if you're willing to book well ahead and pay accordingly.

INSIDER TIP — Book months ahead for the most famous names; several offer a shorter tasting-menu lunch option that's more accessible than the full evening experience.

9:30 PM Nightcap: Parte Vieja Late

Return to the Old Town's bars for a final round of pintxos and local Basque cider or txakoli, in the neighborhood where the whole day's food culture began.

INSIDER TIP — The bars nearest Plaza de la Constitución tend to be liveliest late — a good default if you don't have a specific spot in mind.

San Sebastián's Table

12:30 PM Pintxos Crawl (Parte Vieja)

Small bar-counter bites moving between four or five stops.

1:00 PM Mercado de la Bretxa

A historic covered market with counter-style Basque lunch options.

7:30 PM Michelin-Starred Splurge

Arzak, Akelarre, and others — some of the best fine dining in the world.

9:00 PM Gros Neighborhood Pintxos

A less touristy, more local pintxos scene across the river.

9:30 PM Late Pintxos & Txakoli

A final round near Plaza de la Constitución with local Basque cider or wine.

Is San Sebastián Safe?

San Sebastián is one of Spain's safest cities. Violent crime against visitors is very rare; the realistic risk is limited to occasional pickpocketing in the busiest Parte Vieja bars and on the beach during peak summer.

AREA	RATING	NOTES
Parte Vieja (Old Town)	■■■■■	Very lively and generally safe; watch belongings in the densest bar crowds.
La Concha / Centro	■■■■■	Elegant, well-patrolled, and uneventful at all hours.
Gros	■■■■■	Relaxed, local, and safe — including late evening.
Monte Urgull / Monte Igeldo	■■■■■	Safe throughout opening hours; well-trafficked walking paths.
Egia (near train station)	■■■■■	Fine by day; standard station-area awareness at night.

Full situation-by-situation guidance, emergency numbers, and a dedicated solo-women section are in the companion Safety Guide.

Planning Your Trip

SEPTEMBER — FILM FESTIVAL

The San Sebastián International Film Festival brings crowds and energy — book accommodations well ahead if attending.

JUNE — BEST OVERALL

Warm, dry, and green, just ahead of the peak summer crowds.

SEPTEMBER (POST-FESTIVAL) — SECOND BEST

Warm sea temperatures with noticeably thinner crowds after the festival ends.

JULY — AUGUST — PEAK SEASON

Hot, busy, and the beach at its best despite the crowds — book restaurants well ahead.

Navigating San Sebastián

On foot	Free	Parte Vieja, La Concha, and Gros are all comfortably walkable from each other.
DBus (city bus)	€1.75/ride	Covers the full city, including areas beyond the walkable center.
Topo train	Varies	A regional line connecting to nearby coastal towns along the Basque coast.

Connections

Bilbao — About 1 hour by bus or car — the Guggenheim Museum makes an easy day trip or onward stop.

Biarritz, France — About 45 minutes by car or bus — a straightforward cross-border day trip.

Madrid — About 5 hours by train, or a short flight — the more common overland option is via Bilbao or a direct high-speed connection.

Before You Go

- ☐ Book Michelin-starred restaurants months ahead if that's a priority
- ☐ Try the tasting-menu lunch option at fine-dining spots for better availability
- ☐ Time Peine del Viento with rougher seas for the best experience
- ☐ Book accommodations well ahead if visiting during the September film festival

GoingSolo.Life

Your interactive map is one scan away.

All locations from this guide, colour-coded by day, open on your phone.



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