



Highlights of Northern Spain 2026

Which treasures lie in the pathways that follow rugged mountains, and through the alleyways of quaint towns with pretty names? This is a journey of two parts. The first: an interwoven ten-day adventure of Northern Spain, bursting with life and brimming with flavours that will stretch beyond your wildest imagination. And second: the discovery of something about yourself – whether it's a new favourite wine, or a town you'd never thought to visit that becomes your personal highlight. Are you ready for your next chapter?





About your tour notes

These tour notes contain everything you need to know before your tour departs – from where to meet your fellow guests and local guide to what essentials to pack for your journey. We recommend you print this document out and bring it with you on your tour. Give a copy to loved ones at home so they can follow your adventure, too.

Important: please refresh this document as close to your departure as possible to ensure you're equipped with the latest information available.

Hotel Catalonia Bilbao @ 18:00

Don Diego López Haroko Kale Nagusia,
73, Bilbao, 48011

Hotel H10 Universitat @ 16:00

Ronda de la Univ., 21, Barcelona, 08007



Expertly crafted small-group tours



Tour highlights

- ✓ Master the art of Spanish cuisine with a traditional cooking class in Pamplona
- ✓ Experience the coastal charm and gastronomical delights of San Sebastián
- ✓ Explore the magnificent Salt Mines of Cardona

More inclusions

- ✓ 9 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 4 dinners
- ✓ 9 nights in thoughtfully chosen accommodation
- ✓ Luxury minicoach

Currencies you'll use

- Spain - EUR



Included meals

Breakfast (B) is included daily.

Some of your lunches and dinners are also included, either in hotels or local restaurants. These are indicated by (L) and (D) in the itinerary.

Please note that drinks will not always be included.

We will do our best to accommodate any specific dietary requirements you may have. Please ensure to make these clear to us before your tour begins so we can communicate them to our hotels, restaurants and suppliers.

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Your itinerary

Day 1 | Bilbao (Spain)

¡Bienvenidos a España! And welcome to our first stop: Bilbao. It's a city of modern wonder, filled with sleek shapes and futuristic architecture with pieces your mind cannot fathom until you see them with your own eyes. Here is where we'll meet the group as well as our Tour Leader who'll guide us through this journey, describing moments from the past that've had a lasting impact on the culture we'll see. Gather for the group's first meal at a local restaurant – perhaps the city's famed *pinxtos* are on the menu!

Included today



Accommodation

Catalonia Gran Vía Bilbao
Hotel (or similar)



Meals

+ Dinner



Day 2 | Bilbao – San Sebastián

Start the day with a taste of traditional breakfast that includes *tostada con tomate* and a *café con leche* for a quick caffeine fix – we've got a locally guided city tour to get to! Stroll through Bilbao's Old Town (known as *Casco Viejo*) filled with an energy like no other. Trace your eyes across rainbow-coloured buildings as you wander through lantern-filled streets. Smell the complexities of rich and subtle flavours as the city's cuisine slowly comes to life. Let the warmth of the Spanish sun wrap around you in a gentle blanket. After filling our minds with tales of the past and traditions of the present, we'll reach our next stop in the city: Guggenheim Museum. For those interested in a unique education in art, you'll revel in not only the exhibitions inside, but the exquisite building itself.

If you missed out on *pinxtos* last night, now is the prime opportunity to fill your stomach (and your soul) with this local delight. There are plenty of places to try in Plaza Nueva – we suggest closing your eyes and pointing in any direction because each restaurant is as bountiful as the next! Tastebuds satiated, it's time to board the minicoach for the first time. Our destination: San Sebastián.

Glimpse out your window as the scenery changes from inland roadsides to glittering waters as we drive along the coastline where San Sebastián resides, and ready yourself for an evening stroll through this gastronomic capital of the world. There's plenty to discover – including tonight's meal. Will more *pinxtos* be on the menu, or will you try Basque favourites like baked spider crab or baby squid in ink? For dessert, we recommend La Viña for cheesecake – something sweet to end the evening with a smile!

Included today



Accommodation

Catalonia Donosti Hotel (or similar)



Meals

+ Breakfast



Day 3 | San Sebastián – French Coast (France) – San Sebastián (Spain)

We may be on a journey through Northern Spain, but that doesn't mean we can't drop in on our French neighbours for a small rendezvous, especially if the setting includes calm blue waters with a breeze that whispers to your soul. We'll begin with a walking tour with a local guide. Glide across wide bridges. Sweep through golden streets. View Bayonne Cathedral in all its Gothic glory. And feel the spirits of the past lingering in your footsteps. Then, we'll wind our way back to the minicoach – lunch is on the horizon!

After a spot of locally-sourced cuisine (perhaps squid or hake!), we're heading back to the coast for a short stop in Saint-Jean-de-Luz. Shades of aquamarine, turquoise and navy blue welcome you to this fishing port. Stroll along the waterfront and soak up the enthralling vistas that'll keep you pleasant company during our next drive.

We'll cruise back to San Sebastián for our second evening – why have one night when you can have two! Watch as the sky turns from fiery orange to lavender lilac to deep indigo as the sun sets over Concha Beach. Taste a classic Basque dish that doesn't involve cocktail sticks (we're looking at you *pinxtos*) such as Txuleton steak, carefully prepared over an open flame. And mingle among locals in the plazas as life flourishes around you.

Included today



Accommodation

Catalonia Donosti Hotel (or similar)



Meals

- + Breakfast
- + Lunch



Day 4 | San Sebastián – La Rioja – Laguardia

It wouldn't be a true tour of Northern Spain without the evocative taste of ruby red wine delicately blended in the region. During our visit to a winery owned by renowned Bodegas Riojanas Grupo, we'll pass through the stone door that's stood the test of time for over 135 years, wander through vast vineyards filled with fragrant smells at every turn and listen to spilled secrets from someone who expertly, passionately thrives in this environment. And then? We'll soak it all in even further with our tasting. From fresh, crisp tastes to full-bodied berried flavours – which will become your favourite of this unique journey?

Reverberating rings of church bells among whisperings of forgotten stories await in Laguardia – our next stop. As our expert Tour Leader introduces us to this medieval labyrinth, they'll share insight on its captivating past. Later, we'll gather for a group dinner at our distinctive hotel, nestled between vineyards and mountains. Take in the contrasting views as you savour seasonal Basque specialties.

Included today



Accommodation

Hotel Eguren Ugarte (or similar)



Meals

- + Breakfast
- + Dinner



Day 5 | Laguardia – Pamplona – Boltaña

After your morning coffee, or *zumo de naranja* (orange juice to you and I), we'll set our sights on the beating heart of Navarre. If you time your trip with the San Fermín festival in early July, beware of bulls running through the streets of Pamplona – an eclectic city where past meets present.

Your stomach should be sending signals after a slow meander through Pamplona's favoured landmarks with our Tour Leader. Luckily, today's main event is a cooking class! Over the next hour and a half, we'll roll up our sleeves as pans sizzle and the diverse scents of seasonal ingredients waft across the room, creating an atmosphere filled with smiles, laughter and dreamy food. Then? Of course, we'll devour our sumptuous plates of fresh asparagus or pochas, cod seasoned with garlic and paprika, finishing with a light dessert that crumbles as soon as your spoon slices it apart.

Perhaps a snooze on the minicoach is what you ordered as we venture to Boltaña. A village burrowed in a hillside, all manners of enchanted beings may reside here – or at least the ghosts of witches who used to meet in secret to practice black magic. During a quick stop, get lost through a maze of narrow streets as small gravel crunches under your footsteps and cast your eyes at the distant castle ruins, imagining a time of opulence and grandeur. Our accommodation follows the historic theme with its atmospheric 16th-century walls – slow the pace and embrace it all, this is exactly what we came for!

Included today



Accommodation

Hotel Monasterio de Boltaña
(or similar)



Meals

+ Breakfast
+ Lunch



Day 6 | Boltaña

Stretch your arms from the comfort of your bed, fling open the windows to smell that dewy morning air – today is completely at your leisure. Our hotel provides us with seasonal activities if you wish to take part. You could experience a morning visit to Aínsa. Homes built from large stones with green foliage lining narrow alleyways, this village is straight out of the pages of a classic fairytale you were told as a child. You might then discover the inner workings of how nature thrives within the Pyrenees and all its neighbours – from blooming forests to raging rivers – at the Pyrenean Fauna Ecomuseum.

Perhaps sampling light craft beer of the region is on the cards? Made with natural ingredients, grown especially from the earth's soil, you could compare which of Northern Spain's authentically created beverages you like best – will it be wine or beer? If we're lucky, a guided stroll through Boltaña's old town with a local could be an option, too! Depending on the time of year, you may also catch the last rays of sunset before returning to our hotel for dinner. Will it be ribs, cod or pumpkin this evening? *¡Disfruta!*

Included today



Accommodation

Hotel Monasterio de Boltaña
(or similar)



Meals

+ Breakfast
+ Dinner



Day 7 | Boltaña – Lleida – Cardona

Set your sights further east on a province not many will have heard of. Lleida (or Lerida in its Castilian name) dates back to the Bronze Age with cultural influences that span centuries. Spot these enriching gems on the path to La Seu Vella, a hilltop fortress-cathedral that looms in elevated glory over the city. Here, with a local guide, saunter through the Gothic cathedral, tilting your head up to face the intricate arches highlighted by sunlight that spills through large windows. Imagine all the people before us who climbed the steep hill to cross the medieval chapel threshold – giggles of children as they skipped and chatter between adults as the small bell chimed for mass. And shade your eyes from blue skies as you gaze at the tall bell tower wondering what secrets it holds.

Back below, set foot in the old town at your leisure. Amble along narrow alleys, glancing at homely buildings made of stone. Breathe in scents of their kitchens – perhaps you'll smell *cargols* (snails), sizzling in a pan of olive oil, or *pa amb tomàquet*, a simple Catalan dish made of tomatoes, garlic and toasted bread. Does your belly rumble at the thought? El Pla de la Seu contains a host of restaurants spilling with traditional recipes and fragrant wines from the nearby Costers del Segre region.

Our day wraps up in Cardona – home to Romanesque structures, one of the largest salt reserves in Europe, and surrounding forests poised to enchant locals and visitors alike with their spells. During our brief stop here, we'll explore Cardona Castle. We'll never know the number of stories that thread through the walls of this 9th-century stronghold, but we can certainly let ghosts of the past whisper to us through our guide. Tales learned, the rest of the evening is ours to do as we wish.

Included today



Accommodation

Hotel Bremon (or similar)



Meals

+ Breakfast



Day 8 | Cardona – Besalú and Siurana – El Port de la Selva

You didn't think we'd leave Cardona without seeing the salt mines, did you? Deep below Salt Mountain is an underground labyrinth filled with natural stalactites and stalagmites that glisten under the hum of golden spotlights. Saunter through low archways and wide grottos as a local guide reveals all. Then, onwards to Besalú: a medieval fairytale surrounded by calm moat waters. During your free time, let the cobbled streets lead you to your next Catalan discovery. Spot knitted socks all colours of the rainbow hanging from trees at the edge of the Monastery of Sant Pere. Uncover a *mikvah* – Jewish bathhouse – one of the three surviving in all of Europe! And try *embotits* – a platter of cured meats with bread and cheese and wash it down with a sparkling glass of cava.

From fairytales to farms, our next stop is Mas Marcè – home to six generations of shepherds who continue to create all manner of dairy goods. We'll wander the traditional farm (and greet a few goats) on a guided tour with a local employee. Don't worry, our expert Tour Leader knows the lingo, so you'll be kept in the loop with everything that's said! Following our tour, we'll gain insight into the factory to see how each product is made and... finally, taste the cheese ourselves! This is as fresh as it gets. Wash down each bite with a sip of wine, clinking glasses with your fellow travellers on another afternoon well spent.

Our last stop for the day is the seaside town of El Port de Selva. Breathe in the salty air, let the calm breeze wash over your skin and gaze at the tranquil, turquoise waters before you. For dinner, find a restaurant where outdoor seating allows you to witness the humble life of locals and tuck into recent catches from waters a few steps away.

Included today



Accommodation

Hotel Porto Cristo (or similar)



Meals

+ Breakfast



Day 9 | El Port de la Selva – Girona – El Port de la Selva

If you carry a pack of pocket tissues, now would be the time to share them among your tour mates. It's our last full day discovering what our journey brings in Northern Spain. First, all aboard the minicoach to Girona. In a word: vibrant. One of the city's established local guides will introduce us, teaching us about its charming history as they lead us to the astonishing Esglesia de Sant Feliu and Sant Pere de Galligants. Then, the city is yours to do as you please. Wander past the rainbow of coloured houses lining the riverside. Stare in awe at the Arab Baths that transport you back to medieval times. And amble through small squares dotted around the Jewish Quarter as sounds and smells trickle from neighbouring streets.

After a leisurely drive, we'll arrive back in El Port de la Selva where the scent of herbs, spices, meats and fish will lure us to a local restaurant. Here, we'll have our farewell dinner, cheering at an adventure that has certainly found home in our hearts.

Included today



Accommodation

Hotel Porto Cristole (or similar)



Meals

- + Breakfast
- + Dinner

Day 10 | El Port de la Selva – Cadaques – Barcelona

Taste the creamy goodness of a *café con leche* before we leave for the road one last time. We've got an appointment to keep with the Salvador Dalí Museum-House in Cadaqués. His home for over forty years, the artist described it as "*a real biological structure... Each new pulse in our life had its own new cell, its room.*" What started out as a cabin with a roof in poor condition, Dalí's home has certainly had a journey of its own – which you can now explore freely. Which of his works will inspire you most?

Our last drive will take us along the sun-kissed Costa Brava to Barcelona – where our tour will come to an end.

Included today



Meals

- + Breakfast



Travel advice

Finances

Changing money

Cash: Foreign money can be changed at banks, airports, some railway and tube stations, and at major hotels (though at a less favourable rate).

Credit cards: Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted. American Express is only accepted in some larger establishments.

Cash machines: ATMS are widely available.

Tipping

Tipping is entirely at your discretion. If you feel you have received exceptional service, it is recommended that you tip £1-2/€ per day for Drivers and £4- 5/€ per day for Tour Leaders.

Insurance

Before travelling with Back-Roads Touring, it is compulsory for all guests to take out comprehensive travel insurance. Please ensure your insurance covers medical expenses (including repatriation), cancellation cover, loss or damage to baggage and personal effects, money and personal liability.

We recommend you carry your insurance details with you at all times. You may be asked to provide details of your medical insurance or a payment guarantee in some countries before medical assistance can be provided.

For more information, please see our [FAQ page](#).

If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact our friendly Customer Service team [here](#).

Passports and visas

Please ensure your passport is valid for at least six months after the last day of your tour. Some countries will refuse entry if you do not have at least six months validity remaining on your passport after your departure date. Depending on your nationality, you may require a visa to enter certain



countries.

It is your responsibility to obtain visas prior to your tour's departure. To determine which visas you'll need, you can consult either your own government's website or the government websites of the countries in which you will be travelling.

Please note: Some visas can take up to six weeks to acquire, so don't leave it until the last minute. Also, bear in mind that the validity of a visa often runs from its date of issue rather than the date of entry into the country. Please check with the appropriate embassy/embassies prior to departure as requirements do change periodically.

We advise you to either carry a photocopy of your passport (and visa, if applicable) with you while abroad, or to ensure that you leave a copy with relatives back at home. This will enable the local embassy or high commission to arrange a replacement if the original should be lost or stolen. If you do take copies with you on your tour, please ensure that you keep these separate from your original documents.

Medication and mobility

Whilst on your tour, we want you to have the smoothest journey possible which requires x mobility conditions:

- You must be fit enough to get on and off the vehicle on a regular basis, and to walk around towns and villages or to attractions.
- You must be able to walk up and down stairs and use a shower over the bath.

Please note that, unfortunately, we are unable to accommodate mobility scooter or wheelchair users as we frequently stay in traditional-style hotels and the majority do not have lifts or ground-floor rooms.

If you take medicine for certain conditions, such as diabetes or heart problems, please carry it with you at all times.

Please declare any medical conditions you may have in advance of your tour. If you are in any doubt as to whether our tours are suitable for you, please contact our friendly Customer Service team [here](#).



Mental health and wellbeing

Culture shock, homesickness and periods of feeling down happen regardless of age. Be rest assured that if you're feeling low, your Tour Leader and Driver will do their utmost to make you smile.

Measures you can take to look after your mental health and wellbeing while on the road with us are:

- Call loved ones. Hearing a familiar voice whilst in an unfamiliar destination can help ground you and remind you you're not alone.
- Eat well. Nobody feels their best when they're hungry. There are plenty of nutritious culinary delights to be savoured along the road!
- Integrate with your fellow guests. The more you socialise with the group, the less likely you'll feel homesick.

Transport

We travel in premium mini-coaches equipped with comfortable seats, air conditioning and large windows for enjoying the view.

With far more flexibility than a standard-size coach, we're able to take the scenic route – winding through beautiful countryside to the heart of tiny villages and coastal towns.

Will I have regular access to Wi-Fi?

Most accommodation we stay in will offer free Wi-Fi as well as many restaurants and cafes you may visit. If you would like more regular internet access without large roaming fees, you can purchase a Back-Roads Touring eSIM [here](#).



What to Pack

Based on our experience, the following items are essential.

Please note, this is a general packing list for Back-Roads Touring tours. What you pack will depend on the countries you're visiting as well as the time of year you plan to travel.

Clothing

- | | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ✓ Sun hat | ✓ Long-sleeved tops | ✓ Light jacket |
| ✓ Sunglasses | ✓ Short-sleeved tops | ✓ Waterproof jacket |
| ✓ Sleepwear | ✓ Shorts/skirts | ✓ Trousers |
| ✓ Warm jacket | ✓ Socks | ✓ Swimwear |
| ✓ Underwear | ✓ Smart casual evening wear | ✓ Walking/comfortable shoes |

Other essentials

- | | | |
|---------------------------|--|--------------------|
| ✓ Multi-use adapter plug | ✓ Toiletries | ✓ Camera |
| ✓ Batteries | ✓ Sunscreen | ✓ Towel |
| ✓ Umbrella | ✓ Reusable water bottle | ✓ Insect repellent |
| ✓ Any personal medication | ✓ Basic medical kit (paracetamol, aspirin, plasters etc) | |

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How much luggage can I bring

As we travel in mini-coaches, luggage space is limited. Here's what you can take with you on tour:



1 x suitcase



1 x small carry-on bag
(backpack or handbag)

If you have more luggage, please make arrangements to store it prior to joining the tour. **We are unable to carry extra luggage on the mini-coach.**

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FAQs

What's the weather like?

The weather in northern Spain varies depending on the time of year. Generally, summers are hot and dry, and from mid-June to the end of August temperatures can reach 45°C (113°F), so sun hats and sunscreen are essential! Because of this, Spanish culture includes *siestas* where most businesses close their doors during the afternoon – something to embrace during this journey!

Which type of hotels will we stay in?

Our thoughtfully selected accommodation is full of charm and historic details – expect elegant country inns, grand town centre hotels and even the odd castle! For this reason, rooms vary in size, and most hotels don't have lifts – meaning you'll likely need to access your room via stairs. Porterage will be included wherever possible.

Although air conditioning is mostly unavailable in historic buildings, fans will be provided during hot spells. Most hotels have bathtubs with overhead showers (rather than walk-in showers), so you'll be able to enjoy a soak at the end of the day.

How long are our travel days – particularly from Laguardia to Boltana?

Travel days range from two to four hours of driving with the journey between Laguardia to Boltana lasting approximately four hours (including a stop in Pamplona).

That's everything!

We can't wait to welcome you on tour.

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