10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT BASQUE CULTURE
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01. Bilbao has been a shining example to the world of urban transformation. Pictured right is the Zubizuri bridge, designed by Santiago Calatrava, with the Iberdrola Towers rising at back. Photo: Tanya Chuvpylova, Unsplash.

02. On the Basque Coast, the intense blue waters of the Bay of Biscay meet green mountains that descend to the sea, forming a coastline dotted with fishing villages, beaches and steep cliffs. Photo: Carles Rabada, Unsplash.

03. The Basque Country is a popular destination on the international and European surfing circuit. Photo: Yann Bervas, Unsplash.

LAND

LAND OF THE BASQUE LANGUAGE

Euskal Herria, which means ‘land of the Basque language’, is located in southern Europe, at the western end of the Pyrenees. It straddles both sides of the mountain range, through valleys and plains to the wild Cantabrian Sea. This ancient land boasts an extraordinary culture, and a language unlike any other in the world. The Basque Country, also known as Euskadi or Euskal Herria, is inclusive and welcoming, and everything is within easy reach. Having adapted to change, this modern society leads the way in Europe in terms of quality of life and sustainable development.
EUSKARA, AN ANCIENT LANGUAGE OF UNKNOWN ORIGIN

Euskara is the oldest living language in Europe. Its origin remains a mystery and it bears no resemblance to any other family of languages. It has survived for centuries, and in so doing, the Basques have preserved a rich, unique culture. A case in point is the robust health enjoyed by the Basque art of improvised verse (bertsolaritza), a formidable force in Basque culture today. Currently, some 900,000 people speak Basque. The language also enjoys a strong presence in the educational, cultural, social and digital spheres.
A LAND OF Authenticity

This is a land of deep roots and unique traditions, folklore, and mythology. Together with the language, they occupy a prominent place in the collective imagination. But more than just a way of interpreting the past, our heritage serves as a basis on which to forge our future. Ours is a modern land where tradition and modernity live together in harmony.

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04

**FILM**

**THE GOLDEN AGE**

Basque language film production has flourished in the wake of the recent success of ‘Loreak’, ‘Amama’ and ‘Handia’. Basque cinema has grown over the last fifty years, from ‘Ama Lur’, an ode to the Basque Country (N. Basterretxea and F. Larruquert, 1968) to the latest generation of film directors (Cobeaga, Garaño, Arregi, Vigalondo, Goenaga, Altuna, Esnal, etc.), the Kimuak short film programme, and acclaimed directors the likes of Medem and Alex de la Iglesia. With the San Sebastian Festival as its flagship, the Basque Country enjoys a rich cinematic culture.

More about Basque cinema
basqueculture.eus/en/the-land-of-basque/cinema

Basque Film Archive
filmoteka.eus
Music is an important driver of Basque cultural life. Historically, this has always been the case. Prominent Basque figures in the music world include composer Maurice Ravel, violinist Pablo Sarasate and harpist Nicanor Zabaleta. Ainhoa Arteta is one of the most acclaimed sopranos on the world stage today. Basque choirs and the Basque National Orchestra enjoy an excellent reputation internationally. Today, the country hosts a number of music festivals, including rock (Azkena Rock Festival and Bilbao BBK Live) and jazz (Vitoria-Gasteiz, San Sebastian and Getxo). From the moving lyrics of folk artist Mikel Laboa, to the pulsating rock of Berri Txarrak, to the electronic wizardry of Belako, Basque music is making its mark.

More about Basque songwriting and classical music
basqueculture.eus/en/the-land-of-basque/music
Basque National Orchestra
euskadikoorkestra.eus
It would be impossible to understand Basque art without considering the vital legacy of Jorge Oteiza and Eduardo Chillida. Apart from the international dimension of their work, the two sculptors had enormous influence on several generations of Basque artists (Txomin Badiola, Cristina Iglesias, Peio Irazu, Angel Bados), and co-founded Gaur, ('Today' in Basque), a group of local artists, in the 1960s. Esther Ferrer is a pioneer and leading representative of performance art. The Basque Country also boasts numerous art museums and cultural centres (Guggenheim Bilbao Museum, Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, Artium Museoa, Tabakalera...), and Basque art can be enjoyed around the world thanks to artists such as Itziar Okariz, Sergio Prego, Maider Lopez, Asier Mendizabal and Jesus Mari Lazkano.

More about Basque art
basqueculture.eus/en/the-land-of-basque/art
Artium Museoa
artium.eus
07

LITERATURE

THE LEGACY LIVES ON

Basque literature is more robust than ever. Many Basque novels are translated into other languages, some have won awards and others have been made into films. With the end of the Spanish dictatorship in 1975 came a surge of publishing houses. Writers such as Bernardo Atxaga, Ramon Saizarbitoria and Arantxa Urretabizkaia are largely responsible for giving Basque language literature a well-deserved boost. Over the last few years, a group of up-and-coming writers, led by Eider Rodriguez, Kirmen Uribe and Harkaitz Cano, are poised to continue this legacy. Other local writers, including Ramiro Pinilla, Fernando Aramburu and Dolores Redondo, have enjoyed success with works in Spanish over the last few decades.

More about Basque literature
basqueculture.eus/en/the-land-of-basque/literature
PERFORMING ARTS

TRADITION AND AVANT-GARDE

From traditional dance to avant-garde theatre, the Basque world of performing arts offers a wide range of highly unique work. Despite profound social changes, traditional dance has survived in the Basque Country. Classical, traditional, theatrical and contemporary dance are often blended into fusion productions. Local ballet stars, Lucia Lacarra and Igor Yebra, currently belong to large international ballet companies. In addition to multiple independent venues, the Arriaga Theatre in Bilbao, the Victoria Eugenia in San Sebastian and the Principal in Vitoria-Gasteiz are responsible for keeping the acting flame alive.

More about Basque dance and theatre
basqueculture.eus/en/the-land-of-basque/performing-arts

OLKukai, one of the most outstanding dance companies of recent years, won the Spanish National Dance Award in 2017. Photo: Gorka Bravo.
A WAY OF LIFE

For the Basques, gastronomy isn’t just food. It’s a way of life. Pintxos, delicious mouthfuls of miniature cuisine enjoyed in a casual setting, have become one of the hallmarks of Basque food culture. The Basque Country is also home to hundreds of ‘gastronomic societies’ private clubs where friends get together to cook and socialize over a meal. Basque cuisine is a leading international force and has spearheaded several culinary revival movements. San Sebastian boasts more Michelin stars per capita than virtually any other city in the world.

More about Basque cuisine
basqueculture.eus/en/the-land-of-basque/food
Basque Culinary Center
bculinary.com

01. Grilled fish is one of the specialities of traditional Basque cuisine. Photo: Elle Hughes, Unsplash.
02. Chefs at work at Mugaritz, recognised as one of the best restaurants in the world. Photo: Oscar Oliva.
03. The Basque Culinary Center in San Sebastian was inaugurated in 2011 as the first faculty of gastronomic sciences in Europe. Photo: Basque Culinary Center.
The Basques are famous for their adventurous and innovative spirit. Prominent figures such as Juan Sebastian Elcano, the first man to circumnavigate the globe, or Saint Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, have left their mark on the world. Universal Basques can be found in every corner of society: fashion couturiers Balenciaga and Paco Rabanne; writers Miguel de Unamuno, Pío Baroja and Bernardo Atxaga; and sculptors Eduardo Chillida, Jorge Oteiza and Cristina Iglesias. In the business world, the modern, innovative Basque cooperative model has been the subject of praise and study by world-renowned economists.
BEAUTIFUL WORDS IN BASQUE

Amona | literally “good mother” | Grandmother
Auzolan | “neighbourhood work” | Voluntary work done for the benefit of the local community
Basamortu | “death forest” | Desert
Ekialde | “the side of the sun” | East
Erditu | “split in half” | Give birth
Erizain | “the earer of the sick” | Nurse
Eskutitz | “hand-written word” | Letter
Eztabaida | “action of yes and no” | Discussion
Haurdun | “with a baby inside” | Pregnant
Herrimin | “sick of your country” | Homesickness
Hilerri | “town of the dead” | Cemetery
Ilargi | “light of the dead” | Moon
Itsasargi | “the light of the sea” | Lighthouse

Jakinmin | “pain for knowing” | Curiosity
Laztana | “caress” | Darling
Maiteminduta | “hurt by love” | In love
Muxutruk | “in exchange for a kiss” | For free
Ogibide | “way towards bread” | Job
Ortizimuga | “border of the sky” | Horizon
Ötsaila | “month of wolves” | February
Sorgin | “creator” | Witch
Sukalde | “the place next to the fire” | Kitchen
Sumendi | “mountain of fire” | Volcano
Txapeldun | “the one wearing the beret” | Champion
Urtarrila | “new years month” | January
Uztaila | “moth of the harvest” | July
Zoragarri | “what drives you crazy” | Wonderful
This brochure has been produced by the Etxepare Basque Institute, a public agency dedicated to promoting Basque language, culture and creative talent internationally, and to building lasting relationships with other countries and cultures in these areas. To this end, we foster quality artistic activities and support the mobility of artists and cultural industry professionals, as well as teaching Basque language and culture. We also encourage collaboration with international stakeholders in both the cultural and academic fields, working closely with the official Basque delegations abroad.


www.etxepare.eus
Europeans share a rich cultural heritage from centuries of trade and migration. Linguistic and cultural diversity is one of Europe’s main assets, each of us contributing with our uniqueness. BASQUE is a window into a land (the land of the Basque language, Euskara), a history, a way of seeing the world. It is the expression of a culture proud of its heritage, a people that have learned to embrace difference to create a new vision for tomorrow. BASQUE opens a new door to Basque culture and contemporary creation through music, dance, theatre, cinema, literature, art ... and the Basque language. It is a place open to creativity, to sharing ideas, building bridges, sparking new conversation, and fostering dialogue between cultures.