

# 10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT BASQUE CULTURE

**BASQUE.**

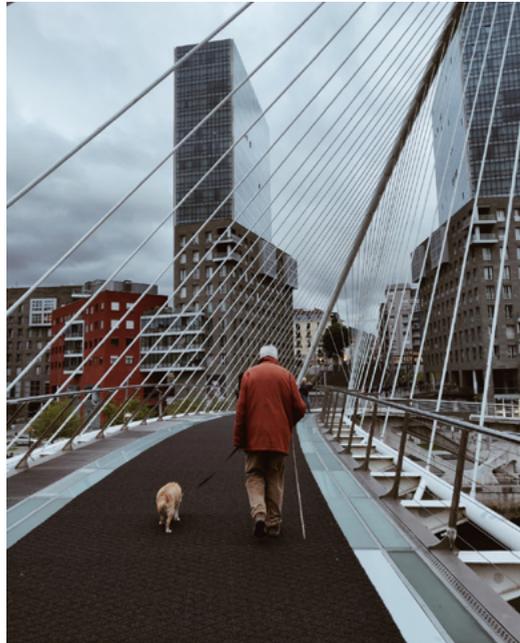


ETXEPARE  
EUSKAL  
INSTITUTUA

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- # BEAUTIFUL WORDS**



**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 Isozaki 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.*



# 01

## LAND

# LAND OF THE BASQUE LANGUAGE



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

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.

## 02

## LANGUAGE

**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.

**More about Basque language**  
[basqueculture.eu/en/the-land-of-basque/language](https://www.basqueculture.eu/en/the-land-of-basque/language)

**Euskaltzaindia, The Royal Academy of the Basque Language**  
[euskaltzaindia.eu](https://www.euskaltzaindia.eu)

**01.** The Basque language (Euskara) is spoken on both sides of the Western Pyrenees in both Spain and France. Below: Graffiti in Basque. Photo: Dmitry B, Unsplash.

**02.** Euskara plays a prominent role in the linguistic landscape of the Basque Country. Photo: Etxepare Basque Institute.



**01.** The San Sebastian rowing regattas were first organised in La Concha Bay in 1879; women have been competing since 2008. Photo: Santiago Farizano.



# 03

TRADITIONS AND SOCIETY

## 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.

**More about Basque traditions**  
[basqueculture.eu/en/the-land-of-basque/society-and-traditions](https://www.basqueculture.eu/en/the-land-of-basque/society-and-traditions)

**01.** 'Handia' (2017), directed by Aitor Arregi and Jon Garaño, and filmed entirely in Euskara, premiered at the San Sebastian Film Festival and won 10 Goya Awards in 2018. *Photo: San Sebastian International Film Festival.*

# 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.eu/en/the-land-of-basque/cinema](https://www.basqueculture.eu/en/the-land-of-basque/cinema)

**Basque Film Archive**  
[filmoteka.eu](https://filmoteka.eu)



**01.** Berri Txarrak is recognised internationally as one of the most important groups on the Basque music scene. The band's last concert tour in a 25-year career was one of the most popular cultural events in the Basque Country in 2019. *Photo: Tom Hagen.*



# 05

## MUSIC

### DRIVER OF CULTURE

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](https://www.basqueculture.eus/en/the-land-of-basque/music)

**Basque National Orchestra**  
[euskadikoorkestra.eus](https://www.euskadikoorkestra.eus)

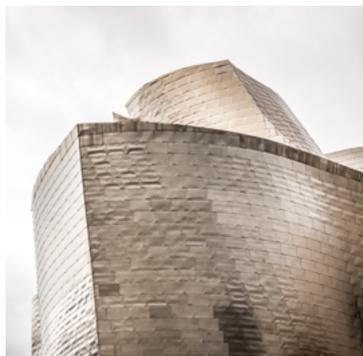
## 06

## ART

## UNIVERSAL ICONS

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.eu/en/the-land-of-basque/art](https://www.basqueculture.eu/en/the-land-of-basque/art)  
**Artium Museoa**  
[artium.eus](https://www.artium.eus)

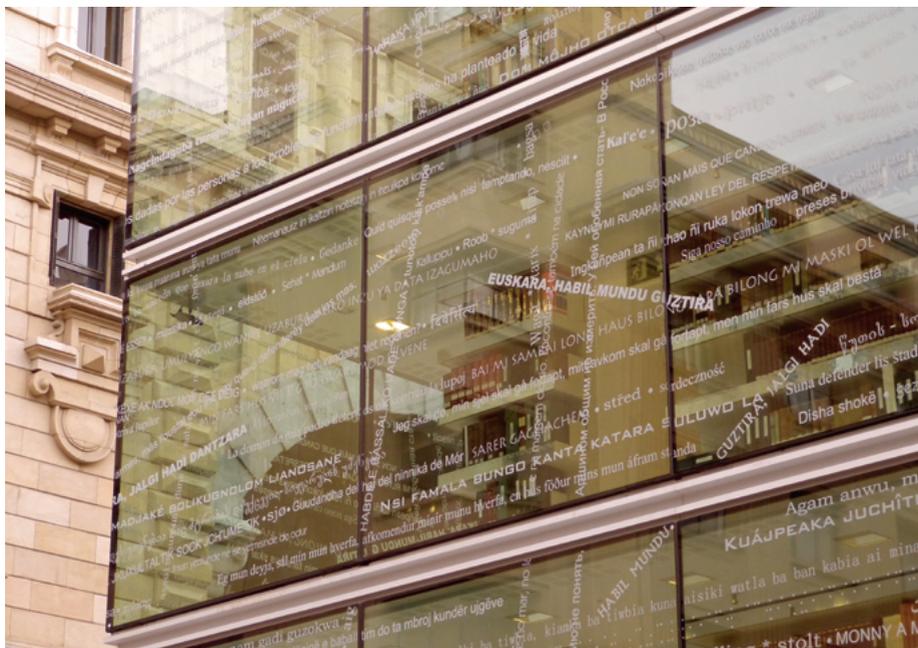


**01.** The Guggenheim Bilbao, designed by Frank O. Gehry and opened in 1997, has become an icon of contemporary architecture. *Photo: Bernard Hermant, Unsplash.*

**02.** The Sanctuary of Arantzazu, inaugurated in 1950, is a magnificent example of Basque avant-garde architecture, with works by Jorge Oteiza, Eduardo Chillida and Nestor Basterretxea, among others.

**03.** Basque artists Itziar Okariz and Sergio Prego exhibited their work at the 58th International Art Exhibition in Venice. *Photo: Fernando Maquieira, AC/E.*





# 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.



**01.** Façade of the regional library of Bizkaia, located in Bilbao. Photo: Amaia Garcia, Bookhunterblog.

**02.** A growing body of Basque literature is being translated into other languages. The number of books written in Euskara and enjoyed by an international readership is also on the rise. Photo: Etxepare Basque Institute.

**03.** 'Linguae Vasconum Primitiae', written by Bernat Etxepare and published in 1545, is the first book printed in Basque. Photo: Mito.

**More about Basque literature**  
[basqueculture.eu/en/the-land-of-basque/literature](http://basqueculture.eu/en/the-land-of-basque/literature)

## 08

## 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](http://basqueculture.eus/en/the-land-of-basque/performing-arts)

**01.** Kukai, one of the most outstanding dance companies of recent years, won the Spanish National Dance Award in 2017. *Photo: Gorka Bravo.*



## 09

## FOOD

**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](https://www.basqueculture.eus/en/the-land-of-basque/food)

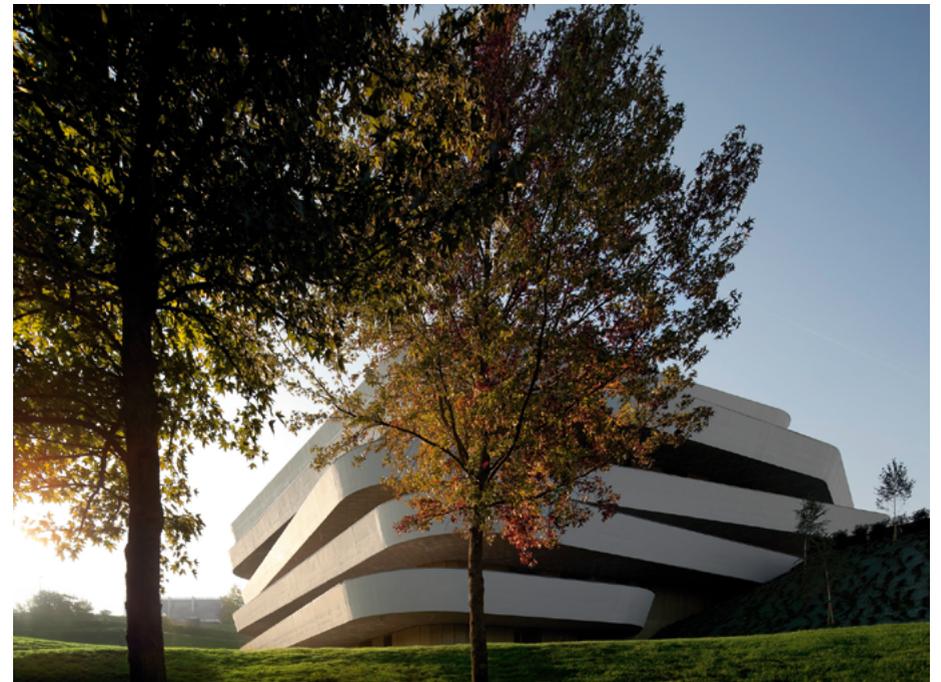
**Basque Culinary Center**  
[bculinary.com](https://www.bculinary.com)



**01.** Grilled fish is one of the specialties 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.*





**01.** Cristobal Balenciaga was an internationally acclaimed fashion designer. The dress pictured above is on display at the museum dedicated to his life and work, located in the couturier's hometown of Getaria. *Photo: Mito.*

**02.** The Basque iron and steel industry has a long history and many sculptors have found ways to create their work in the industry. Pictured below: workers at the Patricio Echevarria factory shape one of the pieces of Eduardo Chillida's 'Peine del Viento' (Comb of the Wind). Photograph courtesy of the Eduardo Chillida Estate and Hauser & Wirth. © Zabalaga Leku. Sen Sebastian, VEGAP, 2022. *Photo: Catalá Roca.*



# 10

## PEOPLE

## LAND OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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, Pio 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.

### Basqueculture.eus

Official website designed for international audiences, focusing on various aspects of Basque culture, art, creativity, heritage and language. [basqueculture.eus](https://www.basqueculture.eus)

# BEAUTIFUL WORDS IN BASQUE

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

<b>Jakinmin</b>	“pain for knowing”	<b>Curiosity</b>
<b>Laztana</b>	“caress”	<b>Darling</b>
<b>Maiteminduta</b>	“hurt by love”	<b>In love</b>
<b>Muxutruk</b>	“in exchange for a kiss”	<b>For free</b>
<b>Ogibide</b>	“way towards bread”	<b>Job</b>
<b>Ortzimuga</b>	“border of the sky”	<b>Horizon</b>
<b>Otsaila</b>	“month of wolves”	<b>February</b>
<b>Sorgin</b>	“creator”	<b>Witch</b>
<b>Sukalde</b>	“the place next to the fire”	<b>Kitchen</b>
<b>Sumendi</b>	“mountain of fire”	<b>Volcano</b>
<b>Txapeldun</b>	“the one wearing the beret”	<b>Champion</b>
<b>Urtarrila</b>	“new years month”	<b>January</b>
<b>Uztaila</b>	“moth of the harvest”	<b>July</b>
<b>Zoragarri</b>	“what drives you crazy”	<b>Wonderful</b>



ETXEPARE EUSKAL INSTITUTUA

## **EUSKARA. KULTURA. MUNDURA.**

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.

Eskuorri hau Etxepare Euskal Institutuak sortu du. Eusko Jaurlaritzaren erakunde publiko honen helburua da nazioartean euskara eta euskal kultura eta sorkuntza sustatu eta ezagutzera ematea, eta horien bidez, beste herrialde eta kulturekin harreman iraunkorrak eraikitzea. Horretarako kalitatezko jarduera artistikoak sustatu, eta sortzaile, artista eta kultura-sektoreetako profesionalen mugikortasuna bultzatzen dugu, baita euskararen eta euskal kulturaren irakaskuntza ere. Halaber, nazioarteko eragileekin elkarlana bultzatzen dugu eremu kultural eta akademikoan. Zeregin horietan guztietan Euskadiko kanpo ordezkariak gertuko bidelagun ditugu.

**[www.etxepare.eus](http://www.etxepare.eus)**



**BASQUECULTURE.EUS**  
THE GATEWAY  
TO BASQUE CREATIVITY  
AND CULTURE

# **BASQUE.**

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.

**EUSKADI**  
BASQUE COUNTRY

 **ETXEPARE**  
**EUSKAL**  
**INSTITUTUA**