

Winter in the Basque Country

December - January



By: BASQVIUM food, culture & luxury experiences

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Euskal Herria, The Land of the Basques in the local language, is a fascinating destination which comprises in a relatively small piece of land a great diversity of sceneries from the ocean to the mountain range and from modern cities to countryside and vineyards.

Nestled in a mountainous corner of Atlantic Europe, the land of the Basques is still wrapped in a mystery and legend story.

The origin of this people is uncertain, whose language – Euskera - is said to be the oldest living language in Europe and unrelated to any other spoken in Europe, or indeed the world. Euskera's mysterious origins have fuelled too the debate about, whether the Basques can boast the oldest European culture.

Anytime is a good time to visit The Land of the Basques, even in winter when the cold comes and snow settles on the mountains.



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In the rural tradition of the Basque Country, winter meant the end of the harvest and the coming back of the animal flocks to the farm houses.

Only fishermen dare to go into the sea, when the Cantabric Sea allowed, as in winter there is a wide range of fish in season, being hake one of the most valued.



After the traditional slaughter of pigs and cows in November to provide enough meat for the Winter, the Market of Saint Thomas Day (21st December) marks the beginning of Christmas. In many villages this agricultural and typical products show, brings together the people of the Basque Country in an annual commemoration of the day, when peasants came to the town to pay their taxes and sell their best-quality produce.

Christmas in the Basque Country is heralded by Olentzero, a rather rascally, simple-looking charcoal burner who was the first to hear the good news, and who reminds us of similar characters of pre Christian Europe.

Without forgetting the Three Wise Men Parade that is celebrated every 5th of January.



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Winter is time for some of the most valued and well-known typical dishes too, with preference for stews, as they warm up and are full of flavour, like Porrusalda, made from potatoes, leeks, pumpkin and carrots or the delicious kidney beans, made with love, over a low heat, accompanied always by meat such as ribs, blood sausage, chorizo and pickled green chillies.



But let's not forget about seasonal vegetables, like Artichokes, Endives and Brussels sprouts that can be prepared in countless ways; a wide range of fish in season (Hake, Mackerel, Sea Bream, Sea Bass) to make typical winter creams and soups, to finish with typical winter dessert like Intxaursalsa, a type of custard made with walnuts or carnival fritters, made with stale bread, milk and cinnamon.

And of course after September Harvest, with the beginning of the new year comes time to uncork our delicious Cider – Euskal Sagardoa and Txakoli White Wine.

The first historical reference to Sagardoa (Cider in Basque, that literally means apple wine), dates from more than 1.000 years ago in the surrounding area of San Sebastian.

Nowadays this area still contains the majority of the Cider Houses of the Basque Region, where you can taste the Cider directly from big oak barrels, following the traditional rule of “txotx”.

Perfect time to visit one of the traditional Cider Houses, with their typical menu composed by cod omelette, fried cod with peppers, grilled beef steak and cheese and nuts.

On the other hand, Txakoli or Txakolina is a fruity and sometimes slightly sparkling, young white wine produced in the Basque Country.

Originally, txakoli was home-made in Baserris, which are Basque Farm Houses, but nowadays it competes in quality among the best white wines.

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And although winter invites to stay longer hours at home, several important Festivals are hold; from Saint Anton Festival in the village of Mungia (18th January) and the San Sebastian day (20th January) where drums conquer the city of San Sebastian for 24 hours, to the Carnivals between February and March, that in case of the “Maskaradak” in the French Basque Country starts in January and lasts till April!



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As we get closer to the high point of the winter, it is celebrated the return and rebirth of the Light and the first visible signs of Life with the festival of February.

In many countries of the European continent and Isles, this time of the year is much related with the Irish Goddess Brigid, even in its modern form of St. Brigid.

However, in the Basque Country the attention is focused on Saint Agathe, patroness of the Basque Country, in honour of whom a very famous pilgrimage and procession is organized.

In the rural environment, in February, the benefits of the November slaughter were scarce. The Carnival or "Inauteria" was the last chance of the winter so that the young people could make a charity collection with whose benefits they were given a great banquet.

As in most of Europe, in the territory of the Basques, there was a need for food, and the festivities were used to eat after having performed rites and songs.

And although the origin of this situation does not exist today, many of these traditions are revived in our Carnivals, which comprises a great mixture of tradition and mythology.



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And if you are keen on sports, the Football League goes on with the regular season with three Basque teams playing La Liga: Athletic of Bilbao, Real Sociedad, and Alavés. That means, every week we will find the chance to see high level matches in our cities. Winter season also is the right time for bike and running competitions.

Related to the traditional basque sports, this is the season for Basque Hand Ball Double Championship.

And winter also brings us the opportunity find the biggest waves for surfing and for mountain lovers to step the snow in solitary footpaths.

As you can see, winter is full of traditions and perfect time to enjoy The Land of the Basques, far away from the crowds of peak tourist season time.

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We wait for you!



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TRADITIONS AND FESTIVITIES CALENDAR

From 17.12.2021 to 06.01.2022

Christmas Crafts Fair
Vitoria - Gasteiz

From 17.12.2021 to 05.01.2022

Gabonart Christmas Crafts Fair. Exhibition and sale of handcraft products
Bilbao

21.12.2021

Big Saint Thomas Fair - Agricultural and Traditional Products Show
Bilbao and San Sebastian

24.12.2021

Olentzero Parade, the Christmas character in the Basque Country (a simple-looking charcoal burner)
All over the country

24.12.2021

The shepherds' gifts and dance festival
Labastida

24.12.2021

Traditional Bread Day Show - Agricultural and Traditional Products Show
Galdames

31.12.2021

Year End Festivity
All over the Country

05.01.2022

Three Wise Men Parade
All over the country

07.01.2022

Beginning of the Maskaradak, the ancient traditional Carnival Festival in Zuberoa
Muskildi – Zuberoa (French Basque Country)

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Date to be confirmed

Cider Harvest Festival in Araba
Zuatzu Kuartango

Date to be confirmed

Saizar Cider Season Beginning
Usurbil

Date to be confirmed

Cider Harvest Festival in Hernani
Hernani

14.01.2022

Cider Harvest Festival in Gipuzkoa
Astigarraga

14.01.2022

Second Performance for Maskaradak
Pagola – Zuberoa (French Basque Country)

17.01.2022

Getariako Txakoli New Harvest Uncork Festival in Gipuzkoa
Getaria

17.01.2022

Big Saint Anton Fair - Agricultural and Traditional Products Show
Mungia, Getaria

20.01.2022

San Sebastian Day. 24 hour Drum Parade with Gastronomy & Leisure activities.
San Sebastian

21.01.2022

Big Saint Anton Fair - Agricultural and Traditional Products Show.
Amurrio

Date to be confirmed

Cider Harvest Festival in Bizkaia
Zornotza

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22.01.2022

Saint Vincent Festival. Culture, Gastronomy & Leisure activities
Barakaldo

21.01.2022

Third Performance for Maskaradak.
Atharratze – Zuberoa (French Basque Country)

27.01.2022

Fourth Performance for Maskaradak.
Ainharbe – Zuberoa (French Basque Country)

29-31.01.2022

Carnivals of Sunbilla and Leitza
Sunbilla and Leitza

31.01.2022

Famous Rural & Ethnic Carnivals of Ituren and Zubietza
Ituren and Zubietza



Short video of the San Sebastian Day - Drum Parade

CULTURAL ACTIVITY PROGRAM

From 17.09.2021 to 06.02.2022

Alice Neel - people first - exhibition
Guggenheim Museum - Bilbao

From 22.10.2021 to 27.02.2022

Abstraction women - exhibition
Guggenheim Museum - Bilbao

From 04.11.2021 to 27.02.2022

Sharon Lockhart - Rotación Notación exhibition
Guggenheim Museum - Bilbao

From 05.11.2021 to 13.03.2022

Mariana Castillo Deball - Amarantus
Artium Museoa - Vitoria - Gasteiz

From 25.11.2021 to 23.01.2022

Eric Baudelaire - Un Film Dramatique
Artium Museoa - Vitoria - Gasteiz

From 03.12.2021 to 06.01.2022

Belen Monumental, composed of more than 200 human figures, buildings and hundreds of animals and accessories
La Florida Park - Vitoria - Gasteiz

From 21.12.2021 to 09.01.2022

Christmas in family with BBK - games, workshops and shows
Guggenheim Museum - Bilbao

23.12.2021

Mikel Urdangarin - concert
Kafe Antzokia - Bilbao

23.12.2021

Musika Kalean 2021
Vitoria - Gasteiz

27.12.2021

Natalia Lacunza - concert
Stage Live - Bilbao

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27.12.2021

The nutcracker - Royal Russian Ballet
Kursaal - San Sebastian

31.12.2021

BIME PRO 2021
Euskalduna - Bilbao

01.01.2022

Johan Strauss Great New Year Concert
Euskalduna - Bilbao

04.01.2022

Johan Strauss Great New Year Concert
Kursaal - San Sebastian

03-04.01.2022

Musika Kalean 2021
Vitoria - Gasteiz

02, 23.01.2022

The Swan Lake - Royal Russian Ballet
Kursaal - San Sebastian

13-14, 20.01.2022

Orquesta Sinfónica de Bilbao
Euskalduna - Bilbao

16.01.2022

The Sleeping Beauty - Royal Russian Ballet
Kursaal - San Sebastian

21-22.01.2022

Sara Baras - dancing show
Kursaal - San Sebastian

22-31.01.2022

La Clemenza di Tito - opera
Euskalduna - Bilbao

29.01.2022

C. Tangana - concert
BEC - Barakaldo

SPORT ACTIVITY PROGRAM

22.12.2021

Athletic Club Bilbao - Real Madrid
San Mames - Bilbao

31.12.2021

Saint Sylvester race
Beasain, Bilbao, Galdakao, Rekalde, San Sebastian, Sodupe, Vitoria - Gasteiz

29.12.2021

Bilbao Basket - Unicaja
Bilbao Arena - Bilbao

30.12.2021

Saski Baskonia - Burgos
Buesa Arena - Vitoria-Gasteiz

02.01.2022

Alavés - Real Sociedad
Mendizorrotza - Vitoria - Gasteiz

08.01.2022

Real Sociedad - Celta de Vigo
Reale Arena - San Sebastian

09.01.2022

Alavés - Athletic Club Bilbao
Mendizorrotza - Vitoria - Gasteiz

09.01.2022

Bilbao Basket - Andorra
Bilbao Arena - Bilbao

11.01.2022

Saski Baskonia - Anadolu Efes
Buesa Arena - Vitoria-Gasteiz

21.01.2022

Saski Baskonia - Bayern
Buesa Arena - Vitoria-Gasteiz

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23.01.2022

Saski Baskonia - Murcia
Buesa Arena - Vitoria-Gasteiz

23.01.2022

Bilbao Basket - Real Madrid
Bilbao Arena - Bilbao

23.01.2022

Alavés - Barça
Mendizorrotza - Vitoria - Gasteiz

23.01.2022

Real Sociedad - Getafe
Reale Arena - San Sebastian

30.01.2022

Saski Baskonia - Barça
Buesa Arena - Vitoria-Gasteiz

Nearly every weekend

Basque Rural Sports Exhibition
Different locations



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