

# *Winter in the Basque Country*

*December - January*



By: BASQVIUM food, culture & luxury experiences

## Winter in the Basque Country

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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 two Basque teams playing La Liga: Athletic of Bilbao and Real Sociedad. 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 16.12.2021 to 06.01.2022**

Christmas Artisan Fair “Lan ta lan”  
*Vitoria - Gasteiz*

**Desde 16.12.2021 hasta 05.01.2022**

Gabonart Christmas Artisan Fair. Exhibition and sale of handicraft products  
*Bilbao*

**21.12.2021**

Saint Thomas Fair - Agricultural and Traditional Products  
*Bilbao and San Sebastian*

**24.12.2021**

Parade of Olentzero, the Christmas character of the Basque Country  
(a simple-looking charcoal burner)  
*All around the country*

**24.12.2021**

Festival of gifts and shepherds' dance  
*Labastida*

**24.12.2021**

Traditional Bread Day - Agricultural and Traditional Products  
*Galdames*

**31.12.2021**

New Year's Eve Festivity  
*All around the country*

**05.01.2022**

Three Kings Cavalcade  
*All around the country*

**15.01.2022**

Beginning of the Maskaradak, the ancient and traditional Carnival  
Festival of Carnival in Zuberoa  
*Maule – Lextarre (French Basque Country)*

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**11.01.2023**

*Start of the cider season  
Astigarraga*

**18.01.2022**

San Antón Fair - Traditional and Agricultural Products  
*Mungia*

**20.01.2022**

*San Sebastian's Day. 24-hour drum parade with gastronomy and  
leisure activities.  
San Sebastian*

**20-30.01.2022**

Festivities of San Vicente. Culture, gastronomy and leisure activities  
*Barakaldo*

**21.01.2022**

*San Antón Fair - Traditional and Agricultural Products  
Amurrio*

**22.01.2022**

Second performance for Maskaradak  
*Atharratze (French Baque Country)*

**29.01.2022**

Third performance for Maskaradak  
*Pagola (French Baque Country)*

**28-29.01.2022**

Carnival in Sunbilla and Leiza  
*Sunbilla and Leiza*



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[Short video of the San Sebastian Day - Drum Parade](#)

## CULTURAL ACTIVITY PROGRAM

### During December

Christmas Choral Concerts  
*Church of the Good Shepherd - Bilbao*

### From 03.11.2022 to 05.01.2023

“Norabideak. En el Arte de entreguerras”. Exhibition  
*Kafe Antzokia - Bilbao*

### From 01.12.2022 to 08.01.2023

Nativity Scene Exhibition  
*Different places in Bilbao*

### 22, 23.12.2022

Christmas concert - Bilbao Orkestra Sinfonikoa  
*Euskalduna - Bilbao*

### 22.12.2022

Concert “Neguko Distirak”  
*Principal Antzokia Theater - Vitoria-Gasteiz*

### 22.12.2022

Christmas concert  
*Congress center - Donostia-San Sebastián*

### 27.12.2022

Performance for families  
*Guggenheim Museum - Bilbao*

### 29, 30.12.2022

Concert Fito & Fitipaldis  
*Euskalduna - Bilbao*

### 29.12.2022

Christmas rock concert  
*Covent Garden - Donostia-San Sebastián*



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**30.12.2022**

Closing session "Zinetxiki" international children's and youth film festival.

*Guggenheim Museum - Bilbao*

**30.12.2022**

Concert Ara Malikian

*Mendizorrotza - Vitoria-Gasteiz*

**05, 06.01.2023**

Concert Fito & Fitipaldis

*Euskalduna - Bilbao*

**07.01.2023**

Concert Izaro

*Vitoria - Gasteiz*

**25.01.2023**

Municipal Band of Music

Principal Antzokia Theater - *Vitoria - Gasteiz*

## SPORT ACTIVITY PROGRAM

**22.12.2022**

Saski Baskonia - Bologna  
*Buesa Arena - Vitoria-Gasteiz*

**27.12.2022**

Bilbao Basket - Real Madrid  
*Bilbao Arena - Bilbao*

**29.12.2022**

Saski Baskonia - Real Madrid  
*Buesa Arena - Vitoria-Gasteiz*

**31.12.2021**

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

**31.12.2022**

Real Sociedad - Osasuna  
*Reale Arena - San Sebastian*

**07.01.2023**

Alavés - Burgos  
*Mendizorrotza - Vitoria - Gasteiz*

**08.01.2023**

Saski Baskonia - Valencia  
*Buesa Arena - Vitoria-Gasteiz*

**08.01.2023**

Bilbao Basket - Murcia  
*Bilbao Arena - Bilbao*

**09.01.2023**

Athletic Club Bilbao - Osasuna  
*San Mames - Bilbao*

**14.01.2023**

Real Sociedad - Athletic Club Bilbao  
*Reale Arena - San Sebastian*

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**15.01.2023**

Saski Baskonia - Joventut  
*Buesa Arena - Vitoria-Gasteiz*

**19.01.2023**

Saski Baskonia - Barça  
*Buesa Arena - Vitoria-Gasteiz*

**22.01.2023**

Athletic Club Bilbao - Real Madrid  
*San Mames - Bilbao*

**22.01.2023**

Alavés - Racing de Santander  
*Mendizorrotza - Vitoria - Gasteiz*

**27.01.2023**

Saski Baskonia - Andalu Efes  
*Buesa Arena - Vitoria-Gasteiz*

**28.01.2023**

Bilbao Basket - Joventut  
*Bilbao Arena - Bilbao*

**Nearly every weekend**

Basque Rural Sports Exhibition  
*Different locations*





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