

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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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

Desde 15.12.2023 hasta 05.01.2024

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

21.12.2023

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

22.12.2023

Santamas Fair - Agricultural and Traditional Products
Arrasate - Mondragón

24.12.2023

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

24.12.2023

Festival of gifts and shepherds' dance
Labastida

24.12.2023

Traditional Bread Day - Agricultural and Traditional Products
Galdames

24.12.2023

Christmas Eve
All around the country

25.12.2023

Christmas day
All around the country

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26.12.2023

Zoroperi day
Zestoa

27.12.2023

Christmas Fair
Oridizia

31.12.2023

New Year's Eve Festivity
All around the country

01.01.2024

New Year day
All around the country

05.01.2024

Three wise men Parade
All around the country

06.01.2024

Epiphany of the Lord
All around the country

07.01.2024

New Year's Market
Deba

08.01.2024

"Little Donkey" Market
Lazkao

15.01.2024

Agricultural market
Sestao

16.01.2024

Beginning of the cider season
Astigarraga

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17.01.2024

San Antón Day - Txakoli Harvest Launching
Getaria

18.01.2024

San Antón Fair - Traditional and Agricultural Products
Mungia

20.01.2024

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

21.01.2024

Beginning of the Maskaradak, the ancient and traditional Carnival
Festival of Carnival in Zuberoa
Pagola

22.01.2024

Cider day
Zarautz

20-30.01.2024

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

27.01.2024

Second performance for Maskaradak
Ezpeize

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

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CULTURAL ACTIVITY PROGRAM

During December

Christmas Choral Concerts
Church of the Good Shepherd - Bilbao

From 17.12.2023 to 07.01.2024

PIN - Children Christmas park
Bilbao Exhibition Center (BEC)

From 01.12.2023 to 07.01.2024

Nativity Scene Exhibition
Different places of Bilbao

21.12.2023

Basque Women Filmmakers "The last Summer"
Artium - Vitoria Gasteiz

21.12.2023

Bilbao Symphony Orchestra - Christmas Concert
Euskalduna Palace - Bilbao

22.12.2023

El traje - Theatre
Ermua

22.12.2023

Freskure - Fresh Music of Bilbao
Bilborock - Bilbao

22.12.2023

Pirritx, Porrotx eta Marimotots - Child Theatre
Barakaldo

27.12.2023

Ara Malikian - Concert
Euskalduna Palace- Bilbao

28.12.2023

Gospel Chorus Mississippi - Concert
Congress Palace - Donostia San Sebastian

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30.12.2023

Nogen - Concert

Dabadaba - Donostia San Sebastian

01.01.2024

Grand New Year's Concert by the Strauss Orchestra

Euskalduna Palace - Bilbao

02.01.2024

Izaro - Concert

Euskalduna Palace - Bilbao

03-04.01.2024

Izaro - Concert

Congress Palace - Donostia San Sebastian

03.01.2024

Basque Country Youth Orchestra - Concert

Principal Theatre- Vitoria Gasteiz

11-12.01.2024

Bilbao Symphony Orchestra - Concert

Euskalduna Palace- Bilbao

20.01.2024

Gatibu - Concert

Santana 27 - Bilbao

21.01.2024

"A tu lado" - Musical

Arriaga Theatre - Bilbao

28.01.2024

Basque Country Orchestra - Concert

Federico García Lorca Theatre- Vitoria Gasteiz

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SPORT ACTIVITY PROGRAM

21.12.2023

Alavés - Real Sociedad
Mendizorrotza - Vitoria - Gasteiz

22.12.2023

Bilbao Basket - Bàsquet Girona
Bilbao Arena - Bilbao

23.12.2023

Christmas race
Santutxu - Bilbao

23.12.2023

Olentzero Trail Run
Zaramillo

24.12.2023

Belatxikieta Climb
Amorebieta

29.12.2022

Saski Baskonia - Real Madrid
Buesa Arena - Vitoria-Gasteiz

30.12.2023

Final of the championship of Remonte by couples
Galarreta fronton

31.12.2021

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

02.01.2024

Real Sociedad - Alavés
Reale Arena - San Sebastian

03.01.2024

Saski Baskonia - Panathinaikos
Buesa Arena - Vitoria-Gasteiz

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07.01.2024

Bilbao Basket - Manresa
Bilbao Arena - Bilbao

07.01.2024

Saski Baskonia - Real Madrid
Buesa Arena - Vitoria-Gasteiz

14.01.2024

Athletic Club Bilbao - Real Sociedad
San Mames - Bilbao

21.01.2024

Saski Baskonia - Andorra
Buesa Arena - Vitoria-Gasteiz

From December to February, every monday

Eusko Label Winter Series
Bilbao, San Sebastian, Pamplona, Durango, Gernika, Eibar and more

From December to March, every weekend

Eskupilota (basque hand ball) couple championship
Bilbao, San Sebastian, Pamplona, Durango, Gernika, Eibar y más

Nearly every weekend

Basque Rural Sports Exhibition
Different locations



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