

ORIGINS: MOUNTAINS, IRON AND SEA

5 routes to discover the industrial and mining heritage of Enkarterri and Meatzaldea



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5 routes to discover the industrial and mining heritage of Enkarterri and Meatzaldea

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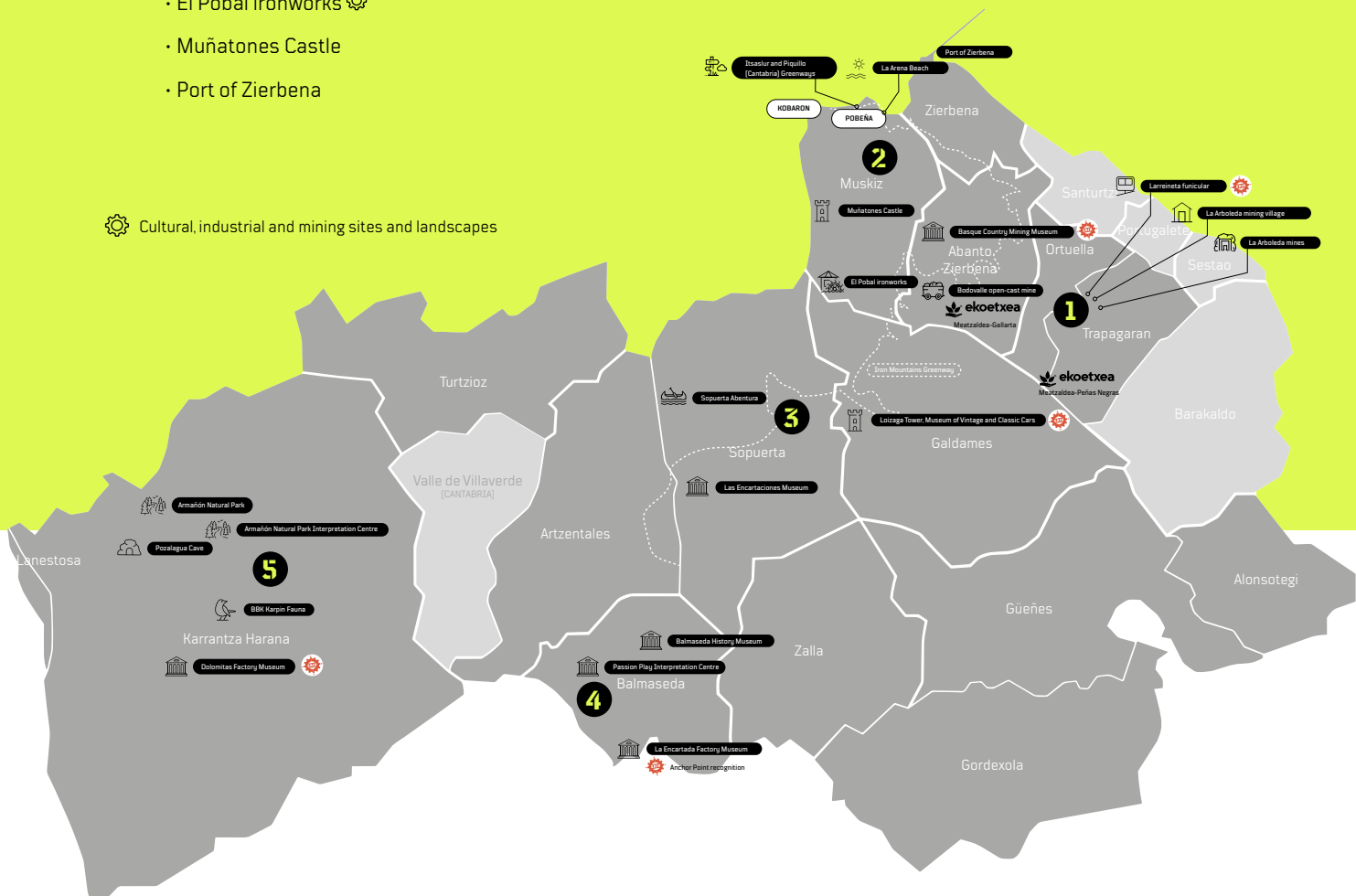
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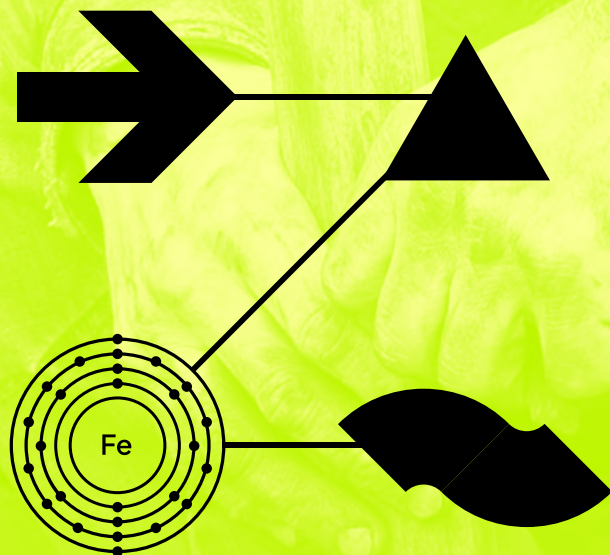
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 Cultural, industrial and mining sites and landscapes





Welcome to Enkarterri and Meatzaldea, the land of mountains, iron, water and sea.

This guidebook invites you on a journey through the industrial and mining heritage of Biscay, one of the historic territories of the Basque Country and the heart and origin of its industrialisation. You will delve into the rich industrial and mining history of this area through **5 routes, exploring beyond its breathtaking landscapes**.

As we venture through **iconic sites**, you'll be transported back in time, gaining valuable insights into a pivotal moment that left a lasting mark on the Basque Country. This moment has been decisive in shaping our present – who we are today.



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IRON AND MOUNTAINS

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IRON AND MOUNTAINS

The Triano Mountains area stands as a poignant symbol of the Basque Country's mining heritage, mirroring the industrious efforts that have shaped the landscape since the mid-19th century.

In the early 20th century, this corner of Meatzaldea (in Basque, 'the mining area'), which includes the towns of Trapagaran, Ortuella and Abanto-Zierbena, rose to prominence as one of Europe's most vital mining centres. Exploring these landscapes reveals a truly evocative space. Here, visitors can almost hear the echoes of the frenetic industrial activity, social life and passionate struggles of the early 20th century.

To explore the mining region near Bilbao (known as Meatzaldea), we recommend two unique routes that perfectly complement each other:

ROUTE 1:

> Larreineta funicular
> La Arboleda mining village > La Arboleda mines

The Triano Mountains have been known since Roman times for the abundance and quality of their iron, but it wasn't until the mid-19th century that the open-cast mines began to be exploited on a large scale. To discover these iron-rich mountains and their history, we recommend starting your journey at the Larreineta funicular (La Escontrilla station) in Trapagaran. You can get there by public transport, including Bizkaibus buses and the Renfe C2 suburban train line, or by car.

➔ Inaugurated in 1926, the **Larreineta funicular** linked the mining village of La Arboleda to San Salvador del Valle (now the municipality of Trapagaran). The steep climb, which takes about 10 minutes, used to take 1.5 hours by road. Because of this, the new transport **became essential for the families of the miners who lived in La Arboleda**.



Recognised as a **site of cultural interest**, the funicular stands out for its historical importance and social role. It was adapted to carry not only passengers but also mineral cargo and vehicles, making it unique in Europe. Beyond its functional aspects, the funicular is an attraction in itself, set in a picturesque natural environment, with a distinctive 1,198-metre route and a horizontal platform.

As you climb, breathtaking views will unfold. When you reach the Larreineta neighbourhood, **climb up to the terrace of the funicular station** for a **panoramic view**



Larreineteta funicular



of Meatzaldea, the mining area on the left bank of the Bilbao estuary, and even the city itself.

From the top of the funicular to the mining village of La Arboleda is a leisurely 20-minute walk. Alternatively, there's a shuttle bus for a shorter route if the weather is bad. The spectacular transformation of the landscape is evident from the first steps, as nature has reclaimed what was **a lunar landscape of mining pits a few decades ago**, turning them into tranquil lakes.

➔ Almost imperceptibly, you'll arrive at the **mining village of La Arboleda, the Basque Country's most representative historic mining site. Declared a monumental complex** in 2003, this remarkably preserved village stands as a testament to the area's intense mining activity. Today, La Arboleda is the Basque Country's most representative historic mining area.



La Arboleda mining village. 60s

In 1870, around 400 people lived in the area we now know as La Arboleda. Initially, **wooden barracks** were built at the foot of the mines to house the families in anticipation of their possible removal or relocation to meet the needs of the mining operations. Some of these original wooden dwellings are still standing today and can be discovered during a visit to the Mining Museum of the Basque Country.



The village grew, and in 1911 La Arboleda was described as a "jumbled settlement inhabited by 3,000 people". Various facilities were added, including a hospital, schools, an old people's home, a church, a cooperative shop, a Catholic Workers' Circle and the People's House. The urban layout follows a grid of streets surrounding a central square. This square served as a hub for various facilities: the parish church, a bandstand and the headquarters of trade unions, such as the aforementioned People's House.



After enjoying the hospitality and local cuisine of La Arboleda (including the famous bean stew with chorizo, morcilla and bacon – the so-called 'sacraments'), we invite you to take a leisurely **stroll around the mining pits (now a recreational area)**. Beyond the mining village, La Arboleda offers a spectacular natural and scenic environment. At the end of the 19th century, explosives were introduced for the open-cast mining of iron ore. In some areas, the water table was reached and pumps were needed to continue mining.



Typical landscape in La Arboleda

When mining stopped, the groundwater gradually filled the mines of La Arboleda – Hostión, Blondis and Parkotxa – transforming them into the fantastic lakes you see today. Explore these picturesque wonders of nature and discover the Meatzalde Goikoa **Sculpture Park**, with large-scale works by renowned artists such as Nestor Basterretxea.



A lunar landscape

What is now a haven of nature was, just a few decades ago, a veritable moonscape, teeming with mining operations.

Today, however, the vegetation has reclaimed its territory and the former mines have turned into lakes.



The **Hosti3n pit**, near La Arboleda, is the largest of the three. It covers the areas of the Mame, Carmen and Orconera mines. It takes its name from a Basque foreman who struggled with Spanish and would often say 'Yo dar hosti3n' (I'll give you a beating) as a threat to poorly performing miners.

In addition to exploring the village and the mines, we recommend that you complete your visit with a tour of the **Peñas Negras Environmental Interpretation Centre**. Located about 2.5 km from La Arboleda, it can be reached on foot (about 40 minutes), by bike (about 15 minutes) or by car (about 10 minutes). This centre offers insights into the transformation of the environment due to human industrial activity, seen through an 'environmental lens'.

ROUTE 2:

Basque Country Mining Museum and Bodovalle (Concha II) mine

This route is a perfect complement to the previous one, and it is highly recommended that you combine the two. The route takes you easily to Gallarta, in the municipality of Abanto-Zierbena, home to the **Basque Country Mining Museum**. These two must-see attractions are just 5 kilometres from the mining village of La Arboleda. However, public transport doesn't connect them directly, so you'll need a private car or bicycle to visit them in succession.



Inaugurated in 2001, the **Basque Country Mining Museum** unfolds its story in the renovated premises of the old slaughterhouse in Gallarta. Its mission is to present an outstanding collection of artefacts, tools, machinery and documentation curated since the 1980s by former miners and steelworkers from the rugged terrain and industrial havens. The museum also unveils a room dedicated to Dolores Ibarruri, known as Pasionaria ('The Passionate' or 'Passion Flower'), a famous political leader who was born here in 1895.



Mining pits in La Arboleda



Adjacent to the Basque Country Mining Museum is the massive **Concha II mine, also known as Bodovalle or Concha the 2nd**, which proudly claims to be the largest open-cast mine in the Basque Country. The mine began operations in 1968 and closed in 1983, unearthing a staggering 14 million cubic metres of earth in its wake.

To achieve this, the company that owned the land chose to demolish the old town of Gallarta, forcing the relocation of over 225 families to facilitate the extraction of the iron ore beneath the surface.



This endeavour gave rise to the Bodovalle open-cast mine, which created 50 kilometres of underground labyrinths that fed the local steel industry for decades. A fascinating scar of the industrial age, it has dramatically reshaped the landscape. Viewing this spectacle from the vantage point of the Ekoetxea Meatzaldea Environmental Centre is a must for any visitor.



Bodovalle open-cast mine - Gallarta



Declared a landmark in 2011, its dimensions are striking: a monumental inverted cone with a perimeter of 700 metres, a diameter of 350 metres and a depth of 150 metres, reaching its lowest point 37 metres below sea level.



Apold-Fleisner calcination furnaces

➔ A trip to **Ortuella** reveals the rich mining history of the Basque Country. This town was at the heart of it all, being the terminus of the first mining railway (the Triano Railway) and boasting the most extensive intermodal mineral transport network in Biscay. Ortuella served as a strategic hub for the Franco-Belga and the Orconera companies, the largest mining conglomerates of the time. Huge mineral deposits hummed with activity, and calcining furnaces blazed away, pre-treating the minerals. Once ready, these minerals were transported to the loading docks by a dedicated railway, either for export or to fuel the mighty Altos Hornos de Vizcaya, a giant in the world of metal production.



However, the true crown jewel of Ortuella's heritage is a revolutionary siderite calcination furnace. This masterpiece, built by the Franco-Belga mining company and known as the **Apold-Fleisner furnace**, stands out for its unique design. Declared a landmark of cultural interest in 2008, this European marvel revolutionised iron ore beneficiation between 1961 and 1975. Unlike its predecessors, it used clean-burning fuel oil instead of coal, achieving a perfect separation of pollutants from the ore and minimising air pollution thanks to its advanced exhaust system. Today, the Apold-Fleisner furnace has been reborn as a social, cultural and administrative centre. Beneath its surface are remnants of the past – the loading dock, the washers and a section of railway line where the ore wagons once started their journey.

Within the town, Otxartaga Park holds a monument honouring the town's miners. Another monument, located right by the Basque pelota court, celebrates the 'Barrenadores', known for their skill in a traditional stone drilling sport. Head down Estación avenue towards the RENFE station, and you'll find yourself in the town square. Here, the Town Hall stands proudly, while across from it, the Church of San Félix de Cantalicio, built in 1928, watches over the square, dedicated to the town's patron saint. As you continue along the street towards the station, look out for the intriguing calcination furnace of the Bilbao mine, built in 1958 between the neighbourhoods of Saugal and Bañales.

Another option is to explore the mining past through the **Orconera Greenway** (4 kilometres). This scenic route, perfect for cycling, runs between the towns of Ortuella and Trapagaran. It follows the route of the old mining railway and passes through six tunnels – so make sure you bring a torch! Along the way, three picnic areas offer stunning views of the towns on the left bank of the Bilbao estuary.

From Orconera, a leisurely walk or cycle takes you to the **Basque Country Mining Museum**. Once the two-toned bike lane ends, a quiet road with pedestrian and cycle markings (although caution is always advised) leads you to the Basque Country Mining Museum after 2 kilometres. The museum is located in the Campodiego neighbourhood of Gallarta.

HOW TO GET THERE

Both routes offer flexible starting points so you can tailor your day's adventure. They complement each other perfectly for a full day of exploration.

For Route 1, we recommend starting your journey at the Larreineta funicular station in the La Escontrilla neighbourhood of Trapagaran. You can get there by public transport, including Bizkaibus buses and the Renfe C2 suburban train line, or by car.

The Basque Country Mining Museum is also easily accessible by public transport. There are several Bizkaibus bus stops and a Renfe train station (on the C2 train line from Bilbao) in the vicinity of Gallarta. For cyclists, the Iron Mountains Greenway, a scenic route connecting the towns around the Bilbao estuary, passes close to the museum. It also links up with our other two industrial tourism routes: Iron and Sea and Iron and Water.



By bus

<https://www.bizkaia.eus/es/web/bizkaibus/lineas>



By train

Gallarta



[43.319196, -3.067443]:



<https://www.renfe.com/es/es/cercanias/cercanias-bilbao/horarios>

Trapagaran (Urioste stop)



[43.307582, -3.040183]:



<https://www.renfe.com/es/es/cercanias/cercanias-bilbao/horarios>



By private car

Of course, a private car offers the greatest flexibility, allowing you to explore the entire area at your own pace.

Basque Country Mining Museum



[43.311463, -3.070415]:



<https://maps.app.goo.gl/phpXFr1C91kFDxgHA>

Larreineta funicular



[43.301147, -3.042306]:



<https://maps.app.goo.gl/FryNGNNqU3dutHma6>

La Arboleda mining village



[43.285923, -3.053904]:



<https://maps.app.goo.gl/XYK7sgyXrzGlrSEL7>



RENT A BIKE AND GO CYCLING:

Beroutes <https://beroutes.com/>

Urgebi Bikes <https://www.enkarterribike.com/>

THE MUST-SEES



Don't miss the **Basque Country Mining Museum** and the **Ekoetxea Meatzaldea** – both in Gallarta, under the impressive Concha II mine. These facilities explore the mining history of the area and its dramatic transformation of the landscape. The museum displays a fascinating collection of mining artefacts, tools and machinery. It has a room dedicated to Dolores Ibarruri, La Pasionaria, a prominent political leader born in Gallarta in 1895. We recommend that you book a guided tour for a deeper insight into the museum's treasures.



Step back in time at La Arboleda, a remarkably well-preserved **mining village** and the pinnacle of the Basque Country's historic mining sites. Today, this picturesque town has undergone a surprising transformation. Mining has ceased completely and the groundwater has filled the abandoned **open-cast mines** (such as Hostión, Blondis and Parkotxa), creating beautiful lakes.

Explore this fascinating area with the expert guidance of **Lugorri**, professional tour guides, and the **Basque Country Mining Museum**.



Finally, take the historic **Larreineta funicular** railway, inaugurated in 1926. This funicular linked the mining village of La Arboleda to San Salvador del Valle (now Trapagaran) and played an important role in the lives of the miners. Declared a landmark of cultural interest, it's celebrated for its historical and social significance, as well as its unique design. Do not hesitate to take a trip to La Arboleda on this iconic transport!

TIPS



Wear comfortable walking shoes..



Respect the environment, local people and animals.



Enjoy nature without noise or haste.



If you're driving, remember that cyclists and pedestrians have priority.



Adhere to general traffic rules.



Be careful, especially in tunnels and viaducts.



If you're cycling, always wear a helmet and ride carefully on sections shared with vehicles.

LEARN MORE AT: www.visitenkarterri.com

IRON AND SEA

The Saint James's Way winds through Muskiz, a town bordering Cantabria that boasts some of the most stunning coastal scenery in Biscay.

Here, the pilgrimage route follows the Itsaslur and Piquillo Greenways, former railway lines that once served the area's thriving mining industry.

This stretch is of great cultural, environmental and scenic value. The Barbadun estuary in Pobeña is a protected Natura 2000 site, complemented by a spectacular coastal promenade.

> Itsaslur and Piquillo Greenways > El Hoyo - Ontón mining site

The Iron and Sea route is an easy 6-kilometre linear walk that can be accessed from either the Kobaron or Pobeña neighbourhoods of Muskiz. Starting from Kobaron is convenient but requires a car, although two large parks provide easy access.

➔ If you choose to start from **Pobeña**, you can get there by bike, public transport or car. Be aware, however, that the first part of the climb involves a steep staircase, a remnant of an old mineral transport system. It can be a challenge for those with mobility problems.

➔ Once you get over this hurdle, the path opens up to reveal breathtaking views of the **Barbadun estuary and La Arena Beach, a beautiful stretch of sand shared by the towns of Muskiz and Zierbena**.

Weaving through the route are eloquent remnants of mining, silent testaments to a bygone era. The imposing structures of the McLennan Mining Company stand out, a powerful reminder of their industrial might. Following the edge of the cliff, where the old mine railway once ran, two overgrown calcining furnaces are revealed on the way – remnants of the Amalia Vizcaína mine, built in 1900 in Kobaron. Equally remarkable is the monumental **El Castillo mineral loading dock**, once used by **McLennan** to transport iron from nearby mines to



Itsaslur Greenway

England. Although a violent storm tore away the metal structure in 2008, the impressive stone base of the dock remains.



Itsaslur Greenway - El Castillo mineral loading dock

This unique landmark offers not only a glimpse into mining history, but also breathtaking views over the sea. From **Kobaron**, extend your journey for 3 kilometres by following the Piquillo Greenway towards Ontón, in Cantabria. This section reveals more mining heritage belonging to the **El Hoyo - Ontón mining site**, including

recently restored structures from the **Josefa and Celedonia mines**, such as the sorting plant and the loading station. From the late 19th century until the 1970s, iron was extracted from these mines and transported by rail to the **Piquillo loading dock** in Ontón for export by sea.

HOW TO GET THERE

To start the route, you can arrive by car and park either in Kobaron, where there is plenty of parking, or in Pobeña. There is also a large car park at La Arena Beach, from where you can walk across the bridge to Pobeña. If you start the route in Pobeña, you can also get there by bike and public transport.

Cycling can be a very interesting option, as this area boasts an extensive network of cycle and pedestrian paths, seamlessly linking the left bank of the Bilbao estuary with the historic mining area of Enkarterri. Explore the plethora of cycling and hiking routes offered by this region to the west of Bilbao.



By private car

Kobaron

[43.347126, -3.143794]]:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/48Q5X0aoTuedAS9q6>

Kobaron

[43.350510, -3.143121]]:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/Dx9QZm99QAifv1Ho9>

Pobeña

[43.347126, -3.143794]]:

[https://maps.app.goo.gl/ntBKdv15y\]phDB7r7](https://maps.app.goo.gl/ntBKdv15y]phDB7r7)



By bus

<https://www.bizkaia.eus/es/web/bizkaibus/lineas>



RENT A BIKE AND GO CYCLING:

Beroutes <https://beroutes.com/>

Urgebi Bikes <https://www.enkarterribike.com/>

WHERE TO EAT?

For true gourmets, try the seafood restaurants in the port of Zierbena and Pobeña. Explore the variety of options in Kobaron or grab a bite with a view at La Arena Beach. Fresh catches and delicious seafood await you in all these places.

TIPS



Wear comfortable walking shoes..



Respect the environment, local people and animals.



Enjoy nature without noise or haste.



If you're driving, remember that cyclists and pedestrians have priority.



Adhere to general traffic rules.



Be careful, especially in tunnels and viaducts.



If you're cycling, always wear a helmet and ride carefully on sections shared with vehicles.

LEARN MORE AT: www.visitenkarterri.com

THE MUST-SEES



Once a bustling mining port that shipped iron ore across the Bay of Biscay and Urdax, **Pobeña** is now a charming neighbourhood. Like Kobaron, it makes a great starting point with plenty of bars and restaurants. Take a pleasant stroll along the Barbadun River towards the town centre, or continue further upstream for a 7-kilometre trek to the El Pobal forge. This route follows the banks of the river and offers a chance to get in touch with nature.



Cross the Pobeña bridge to **La Arena Beach**, the second largest stretch of sand on the Bay of Biscay coast, shared by the towns of Muskiz and Zierbena. It's perfect for relaxing walks, admiring the dramatic tides or catching some waves at the La Arena Surf Center. Don't miss the magical sunset from the right side of the beach – it's a real postcard moment!



Head inland to Muskiz and discover the imposing **Muñatones Castle**. It was built over a long period in the 14th and 15th centuries amid factional wars. Although technically a tower, it is considered a castle thanks to its outer walls. It has been declared a monumental ensemble. The castle is linked to the legendary Lope García de Salazar, a powerful local figure known for his military prowess as well as his literary contributions. For access, contact the El Pobal ironworks.



The picturesque **port of Zierbena**, a short distance from La Arena, retains its maritime charm with fishing boats bobbing in the harbour. The surrounding area is a haven of traditional restaurants and barbecues, where the tantalising aroma of grilled fish fills the air.



For panoramic views, hike to **Punta Lucero**, a 307-metre hill in Zierbena. The summit offers breathtaking views of La Arena Beach, especially at sunsets. The route to the summit is lined with remnants of war, such as bunkers, tunnels and cannons, part of the so-called Iron Belt – a horseshoe-shaped defensive line some 80 kilometres long, built to protect Bilbao and its surroundings from Francoist troops during the Civil War.

IRON AND WATER

As it winds through the municipality of Muskiz, the Barbadun River tells a remarkable story of industrial and mining heritage.

Nestled between iron-rich mountains, the river and its tributaries were the lifeblood of a significant industrial activity that flourished here from the 15th century onwards. The output of these ironworking complexes reached the sea through the now-vanished port of Lavalle in Muskiz.

To explore this route, follow the riverbed on foot from Pobeña and venture upstream to take in the natural beauty.

Alternatively, join the Iron Mountains Greenway and explore the area by bike.

> Iron Mountains Greenway

➔ The Iron and Water Route is a 28-kilometre route that follows the Barbadun **River upstream**. **The route starts at the mouth of the river in the municipality of Muskiz, goes to the El Bentorro neighbourhood in Galdames**, and finally joins the Iron Mountains Greenway to reach Traslaviña in Artzentales. Although the total distance is considerable, the route is of low difficulty and offers several access points. If you are coming from Muskiz, start your exploration in Pobeña or in the town centre. On the other end, you can enter the route from the Traslaviña train station located on the Iron Mountains Greenway itself. Alternatively, you can access the route from various intermediate points, such as the **El Pobal ironworks** (Muskiz), La Aceña (Galdames) or the town centre of Sopuerta.

➔ Muskiz offers easy access. From Pobeña, there is a pleasant 4-kilometre river walk (on foot or by bike) that follows the **San Julián neighbourhood** and

skirts the Petronor industrial complex. Alternatively, you can cycle (there is an extensive network of suitable paths) or take public transport (Bizkaibus, Renfe) from the centre of Muskiz. Ample parking is also available if you are driving. Specifically, there are two large car parks in Muskiz.



➔ Once in the San Juan neighbourhood, follow the **Barbadun River up the valley** for 3.5 kilometres to the impressive El Pobal ironworks, which is well worth a visit. After your visit, cross the nearby **El Pobal bridge** to the other side of the river.

A few metres from the bridge, a fork in the path offers you two options for continuing your journey: either the Iron Mountains Greenway, or the Barbadun River path, which will take you to the El Bentorro neighbourhood.

➔ If you choose the first option, prepare for a steeper climb as you join the Greenway. This section of the route overlaps with the **former Galdames mining railway**, the longest in Biscay. Inaugurated in 1876 by the British Bilbao River & Cantabrian Railway Company, it ran from La Aceña neighbourhood of Galdames, skirting the **Triano Mountains** and ending at the Benedicta loading dock in Portugalete. To reach **La Aceña**, follow the Iron Mountains Greenway for 5 kilometres. It's an ideal place to rest before continuing along the Greenway towards **Arenao and Sopuerta**.

If you decide to take the river path from El Pobal, be aware that it's not suitable for people with reduced mobility. However, it is a unique opportunity to explore a landscape that has remained virtually unchanged for centuries. Follow the river for around 4 kilometres and you will come across remnants of the past such as the **La Olla** and the **Valdibián iron mills**, in Galdames. From this point you can join the Iron Mountains Greenway in Arenao and head towards Sopuerta.



A defensive tower seemed the best choice to harbour this great collection – not to say the best in the world – of vintage luxury cars. The Rolls-Royces are the crown jewel of the collection, which includes every single model until 1998. This Antique and Classic Car Museum is located in an enchanting setting filled with beeches, oaks and a breeze from the near sea, and opens to visitors on Sundays and national holidays.

Loizaga Tower attests to the brutality of the side wars that ravaged the region in the Late Middle Ages. The feuding Loizaga and Achuriaga factions confronted each other with extreme violence. It's not a coincidence that these forts had a homogeneous – almost perfectly rectangular – contour that allowed for residency as well as for defensive purposes. Nestled in a strategic spot, Loizaga Tower has presided over the surrounding fields for centuries, standing out as an exceptional historic landmark in the town.





Pithead at the Cecilia mining site, Olabarrieta - Sopuerta

Sopuerta boasts a rich mining history, being one of the most important areas in Biscay during the 19th and early 20th centuries. This legacy is embodied by the **Alen and Saratxaga mining sites**, and by mining communities such as Las Barrietas. Industrialisation from the mid-19th century onwards profoundly changed the landscape, leaving behind an important heritage.

Within the extraction zone of the Saratxaga mining site, encompassing areas like La Linde, El Alisal, and Las Muñecas, stand the **Catalina mine's impressive calcination furnaces**. These are easily accessible. To get to the El Castaño neighbourhood, take the Greenway and turn right just after the caravan park. This route follows the dismantled Castro Urdiales-Traslaviña railway line to Las Barrietas. The furnaces themselves are quite picturesque, some 20 metres high, and remarkably well preserved despite having been abandoned in the 1970s when the mine became unprofitable. Built between 1955 and 1960, they are a testament to the area's industrial past. Although it is not open to the public, you can still witness the **Los Herreros Tunnel**. This monumental work of engineering, 2 kilometres long, was dug entirely with picks and shovels in the first half of the 20th century. The tunnel allowed the railway to cross the Las Muñecas pass and reach the valley of Otañes (Cantabria), where it finally connected to a magnificent cantilevered loading dock (no longer standing) that hung over the cliffs of Castro-Urdiales.

Continuing along the Greenway, a gentle climb takes you to the Las Barrietas neighbourhood,

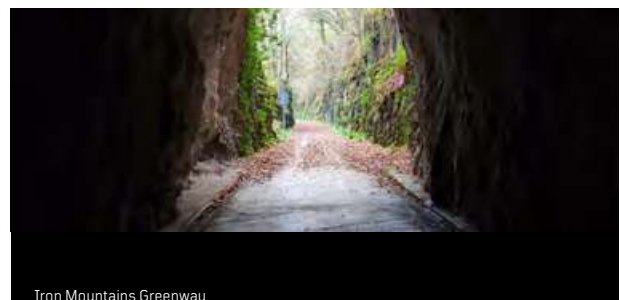
from where the road climbs to the **mining village of Alen**. A century ago, this village had more than 1,000 inhabitants who enjoyed a chapel, a school, an on-site general store and a Basque pelota court. Today, only the court and the chapel of San Luis remain. Remnants of the area's industrial heritage lie next to the Greenway. Two remarkably close pitheads, belonging to the María and Cecilia mines, stand like silent sentinels. The Cecilia pithead, built in 1898, is impressive in its scale. Imagine the hustle and bustle as ore descended 700 metres from the mines on Mount Alen to be loaded directly onto waiting wagons. The María pithead, of simpler design, received ore from the mine 300 metres above it via another inclined plane, after being washed with water from a nearby spring.

About 600 metres up the Kolitza River towards Artzentales are the **remains of the ancient Olabarrieta foundry**, which dates back to 1550. This well-preserved



Iron Mountains Greenway

complex offers a glimpse of the region's industrial past. Although the roof is missing and some of the stone walls have collapsed and become overgrown, the overall structure remains impressive.



Iron Mountains Greenway

Following the crystal-clear waters of the Kolitza River, the Iron Mountains Greenway winds its way towards its end in Artzentales. On this final stretch, be prepared to pass through two tunnels: one 147 metres long and the other 87 metres long.

THE MUST-SEES



Nestled in the heart of Biscay's mining region, alongside the Barbadun River, stands **El Pobal ironworks**. This historic hydraulic factory has been turning iron ore into a variety of tools and items since the 16th century. From ploughs and hammers to hoes and picks, El Pobal played an important role in the production of everyday objects. Built by the Salazar family, who ruled the region from their Muñatones Castle, the forge continued to operate until 1965.

Today, guided tours offer a glimpse into its fascinating past, the most spectacular of which includes a live blacksmithing demonstration every Saturday at noon.



The **mining village of Alen** boasts a rich history. Once home to some of the Basque Country's largest iron mines, Alen reached a population peak of 1,565 in 1900. Residents enjoyed amenities such as a bakery, butcher, co-operative shops, taverns, a chemist, a school and even a public army barracks. In 1892, a railway line was built to transport the iron mined in Alen and Artzentales to the port of Castro Urdiales (Cantabria).

This scenic route is now an ideal place for a peaceful stroll, with breathtaking views from peaks such as Alen and Betaio.



Perched on a hill in Artzentales, the **San Miguel neighbourhood** offers spectacular views of the valley. In the main square, next to the church of San Miguel de Linares, stands the mighty Council Oak, or **Rebollo del Concejo**. Its overhanging branches served as a natural canopy for the medieval councils of representatives from the Enkarterri valleys. Leaving the neighbourhood, a narrow street near the Basque pelota court leads through the Ribas neighbourhood. Here you'll find **San Antolín**, a unique complex of chapel and bullring that reflects the festive traditions of western Enkarterri, where bullfighting was often part of the pilgrimage.



At the top of a hill covered with txakoli vineyards in the Abellaneda district stands the old **Assembly House**. For centuries it was a symbol of the freedom of the Enkarterri region, granted by a charter authorising self-government. Today it houses the **Las Encartaciones Museum**, dedicated to preserving and sharing the region's rich history and heritage. A visit is highly recommended.



Discover the secrets of **txakoli**, the quintessential Basque wine, by visiting one of the wineries in Enkarterri. Guided tours by the producers will explain the traditional wine-making process and its history. During the visit, you'll explore the vineyards, tour the winery facilities and even indulge in a delicious txakoli tasting in a unique setting.



Have you ever dreamed of flying through the trees? **Sopuerta Abentura** makes it happen! This vast treetop adventure park, the largest in the Basque Country, offers a thrilling mix of adrenaline and fun. With eight trails ranging from one to 24 metres in height, including two beginner-friendly options, there's something for everyone. Challenge yourself with Tibetan bridges, ziplines, lianas and rope nets!

HOW TO GET THERE

The route can be accessed from different points. If you're coming from Muskiz, you can choose to start in the Pobeña neighbourhood or in the town centre, or from the Traslaviña train station (Artzentales), via the Iron Mountains Greenway.

There are also access points from various intermediate points, such as El Pobal forge in Muskiz, La Aceña in Galdames, the El Benterro neighbourhood and the centre of Sopuerta.



By private car

Sopuerta

[43.2744342,-3.1528667]:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/n97phzyAZzm3Ycoa6>

Muskiz

[43.320897,-3.123709]:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/3dyFPaQPBBQtekZRL7>

Galdames

[43.2728841,-3.11917]:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/4cpsySDPP8PP8rrse6>

Artzentales

[43.233204,-3.197804]

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/HXHLd8vbCyWyeoAr6>



By bus

<https://www.bizkaia.eus/es/web/bizkaibus/lineas>



By train

Muskiz

[43.321026,-3.112240]:

<https://www.renfe.com/es/es/cercanias/cercanias-bilbao/horarios>

Traslaviña

[43.233204,-3.197804]:

<https://www.renfe.com/content/dam/renfe/es/Comunicación-y-renfe-al-dia/sala-de-prensa/General/PDF-y-otros/20220703-MD-Horarios-R3f-Santander-Bilbao.pdf>



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Urgebi Bikes <https://www.enkarterribike.com/>

TIPS



Wear comfortable walking shoes..



Respect the environment, local people and animals.



Enjoy nature without noise or haste.



If you're driving, remember that cyclists and pedestrians have priority.



Adhere to general traffic rules.



Be careful, especially in tunnels and viaducts.



If you're cycling, always wear a helmet and ride carefully on sections shared with vehicles.

LEARN MORE AT: www.visitenkarterri.com

AN UNPARALLELED FACTORY

Born as a trading post on the medieval Wool Route, the town of Balmaseda boasts a unique blend of history and industry. A shining example of this is the La Encartada Factory Museum, a jewel of cultural heritage and one of Europe's leading industrial tourism attractions.

> La Encartada Factory Museum

Just outside Balmaseda, on the road to Burgos, lies a treasure of Basque industrial heritage: **La Encartada Factory Museum**.

➔ In 1892, five wealthy individuals who had made their fortunes in Mexico (known as indianos – people from Enkarterri who emigrated to the Americas and returned with riches) founded this textile factory. The factory thrived for a century. Specialising in wool, La Encartada produced everything from its signature berets (the traditional Basque txapela, its best-selling product) to blankets, fabrics, gloves and scarves.

A small working-class neighbourhood grew up around the factory, with houses, a chapel school, vegetable gardens and the manager's residence (now gone).



La Encartada Factory Museum

One of La Encartada's most impressive features is its collection of **late 19th and early 20th century machinery**, mainly from England.

Remarkably well-preserved, both in terms of its physical structure and the machinery it houses, the factory shows the entire production process, from the receipt of raw materials to the packaging of finished products. This technological integrity and exceptional state of preservation make La Encartada a truly unique museum experience.



Since 2007, La Encartada has served as an industrial museum managed by the Government of Biscay. The buildings, machinery and workers' dwellings form an evocative ensemble that takes visitors back to the dawn of the Industrial Revolution on the Iberian Peninsula.

In recognition of its outstanding heritage, the European Route of Industrial Heritage (ERIH) network designated La Encartada an Anchor Point in 2019, consolidating its importance on the European stage.

➔ After the visit to La Encartada, head to the centre of **Balmaseda**, the **first town in Biscay** and one of the oldest in the Basque Country. Its historic quarter, declared a historic-artistic site in 1996, reflects its rich past. Strategically located between Castile and the ports of the Bay of Biscay, Balmaseda flourished as an important commercial centre. Founded in 1199, the town retains its medieval layout and boasts architectural gems such as the Old Bridge and San Severino Square. As well as wandering the charming streets, you should consider climbing the old **Castle Hill**. Fortified



➔ in the 13th century, this strategic vantage point once housed a castle that surrounded the city. Thanks to virtual reality, you can also travel back in time and see the old town and castle come to life all these decades later, transporting you back to medieval Balmaseda.



THE MUST-SEES



La Encartada Factory Museum is the crown jewel. Founded in 1892, this wool textile factory thrived for a century, operating until 1992, before becoming a museum in 2007. It is a unique and singular example of European industrial heritage. A guided tour of the La Encartada Factory Museum takes visitors back to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. The museum preserves its original machinery and complete mechanical equipment, making it the best and most complete collection of textile machinery in all of Europe. The factory is remarkable for its state of preservation, as it retains its original layout and equipment. No other centenary industrial complex has this level of conservation and integrity.



The **Balmaseda History Museum** houses a vast collection of works of art, books, documents and ancient objects related to one of the oldest towns in the Basque Country. These vestiges of the past, its traditions and customs allow a better understanding of the historical evolution and peculiarities of Balmaseda.



Walk through the medieval streets of **Balmaseda** as if you were back in the 15th century. On this guided tour we will cross the Old Bridge, discover the monuments of the old town and see places that no longer exist, like the Casa de los Picos and the castle. Thanks to virtual reality goggles, these places come to life, revealing how they appeared to Balmaseda's historical residents. Don't forget to book your visit at the tourist office.



Balmaseda is the gateway to the **Kadagua River route**. To speak of the Kadagua River is to speak of Enkarterri. Its waters – witness and engine of history – have welcomed traders and pilgrims, turned red during the bloody wars of the Middle Ages, and witnessed the construction of majestic palaces and mansions. Today they lead us along a route full of secrets, charming corners and rich nature.



The **Santa Clara complex** (1675) is a remarkable architectural ensemble. Explore the restored convent, now the Hotel San Roque, the presbytery and the church. The church houses the Passion Play Interpretation Centre, as Balmaseda takes great pride in its famous procession, which culminates in a breathtaking crucifixion.



For mountain lovers, **Mount Kolitza**, the most emblematic peak of Enkarterri and beyond, is a must. At 879 metres, its summit offers a 360-degree panoramic view of Balmaseda and the surrounding valleys. Horns and bonfires lit on its summit, crowned by the Romanesque hermitage of San Roque, were used for centuries to convene assemblies under the famous Gernika tree.

HOW TO GET THERE

The easiest way to get here from Bilbao is by car on the Kadagua motorway [BI-634]. The journey takes about 30 minutes.



By private car

Balmaseda

[43.193471, -3.193503]:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/vyQFEYDX14avkDdN67r>

La Enkarta Factory Museum

[43.176862, -3.212290]:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/BfGU8Zp4trpYbk8y9>



By train

Balmaseda

[43.196255, -3.190118]:

<https://www.renfe.com/es/es/cercanias/cercanias-am/horarios>



By bus

<https://www.bizkaia.eus/es/web/bizkaibus/lineas>



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WHERE TO EAT?

Did you know that Balmaseda has a typical dish with surprising industrial roots? Imagine a time when steam trains rumbled through Balmaseda. At that time, the town was home to the central workshops of the FEVE railways. It seems that resourceful workers invented the putxera or railway pot. This ingenious device was a small stove chimney that allowed them to prepare hearty stews on the train itself, ensuring a hot meal. Fuelled by steam from the locomotive's boiler, the putxera proved

so popular that the train company reportedly requested the stove manufacturer to equip these devices with a special spout to release the steam easily. This tradition lives on. Every year on 23 October, the feast day of San Severino, the putxera takes centre stage. But you don't have to wait: you can enjoy this delicious dish in any of Balmaseda's restaurants throughout the year.

TIPS



Wear comfortable walking shoes.



Respect the environment, local people and animals.



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LEARN MORE AT: www.visitenkarterri.com

THE DEPTHS OF THE EARTH

Nestled in the westernmost corner of the Basque Country, Karrantza boasts a stunning rural landscape. This charming landscape also hides a significant industrial heritage, exemplified by the former Dolomitas factory, now a museum. This industrial site is inextricably linked to the record-breaking Pozalagua Cave, creating a unique coexistence. Today, both sites are living examples of how industrial heritage goes beyond machinery and production areas. It's the fusion of these elements with the landscape, the raw materials and, ultimately, the history of one of the Basque Country's industrial giants, Altos Hornos de Vizcaya.

> Dolomitas Museum > Pozalagua Cave

➔ Step back in time to the height of Basque industrialisation at the **Dolomitas del Norte** factory, located in the Ambasaguas neighbourhood of Karrantza. Founded in 1947, the factory produced refractory materials for the metallurgical furnaces of local industry, mainly for the mighty metallurgical company Altos Hornos de Vizcaya.

The exploitation of the Donosa quarry began in 1956, next to the Pozalagua Cave. The quarry was one of the best sources of hydrothermal dolomite in the area. The extracted dolomite was transported by aerial cableway to the Dolomitas del Norte factory in the Ambasaguas neighbourhood, about 8 kilometres away.



The Pozalagua Cave auditorium



Aerial cable cars were widely used in the mining industry as they significantly reduced distances and facilitated transport in difficult to access areas. This particular cable car covered a distance of almost 3 kilometres between the quarry and the factory. Suspended from 27 metal pillars, this system revolutionised transport in difficult terrain and remained in operation until the quarry closed in 1976. It was the last of its kind in Biscay.



Dolomitas factory

➔ The **Dolomitas Museum** is the only place in the Basque Country where you can see the huge pulley system used by these cable cars. The museum is located in the unloading station of the old factory, and was declared a site of cultural interest by the Basque Government in 2002.

➔ Just 100 metres away is the spectacular **Pozalagua Cave**. Pozalagua is a natural wonder, discovered by chance after a blasting operation carried out by the Dolomitas del Norte company. It boasts the world's highest concentration of eccentric stalactites, formations that defy gravity to form a dazzling mosaic.



After being stored in silos, the dolomite was transferred to rotary kilns where it reached temperatures of 1800° and was transformed into sintered dolomite. This material was used to make refractory bricks, which were essential for industrial progress as they lined the high furnaces of the great foundries. The sintered dolomite could withstand the high temperatures reached in these furnaces, eliminating the need to shut them down for constant repairs and helping to increase production.



The Pozalagua Cave

The visit gives us the opportunity to explore a significant part of our industrial history which, despite its importance, remains relatively unknown. What's surprising is that it takes place in such a spectacular natural and scenic setting; indeed, there are few places where nature is as magnificent as in the **Armañón Natural Park**. The park's peaks and forests are home to an endless network of trails and more than two hundred caves. The park's interpretation centre is located in the very station where the mineral extracted from the Pozalagua quarry was crushed and loaded for transport to the factory.



The proliferation of stalactites and formations of all kinds makes Pozalagua **a hypnotic place, a veritable underground cathedral**. The visit unfolds among columns, flowstones and a dry lake, with tens of thousands of eccentric stalactites seemingly erupting at random, forming an endless coral reef, a forest in the bowels of the earth. The tour culminates at a viewpoint where you can appreciate the grandeur and beauty of this subterranean corner in all its splendour. The temperature inside the cave remains around 13°C all year round, so it is advisable to wear suitable clothing.

THE MUST-SEES



The **Dolomitas Museum** recalls the history of this little-known factory, which was dedicated to producing the basic refractory material for the furnaces of the local industry, mainly for the Altos Hornos de Vizcaya metallurgical company. The raw material was dolomite, a mineral brought down from the Pozalagua area by cable car. It was during these mining operations that Pozalagua Cave was discovered, with its unique eccentric stalactites. Contact us in advance to arrange a guided tour.



About 7 kilometres from the museum, in the heart of the **Armañón Natural Park**, is the **Pozalagua Cave**. Unlike conventional stalactites, Pozalagua has eccentric stalactites that grow capriciously in all directions, forming magnificent figures as if they were roots or corals. Geologists consider Pozalagua to be the first in the world for the number of eccentric stalactites it has. All visits are guided. On Sunday mornings there is the Flashback experience, which allows you to enter the cave in the dark with the help of a headlamp, just as its discoverers did.



The interpretation centre of the **Armañón Natural Park** (called Parketxea or Park House in Basque) is located opposite the Pozalagua Cave, in the old loading facilities of the Dolomitas del Norte quarry. It is a three-storey building with a viewing terrace and a panoramic lift that leads to a 3D artificial cave.



Enkarterri boasts a record number of grand country houses and extravagant mansions, built by **indianos** (townspeople who made a fortune in the Americas before returning to flaunt their new-found wealth). Each boasts extensive gardens and groundbreaking architecture for its time. We recommend a guided tour of the mansions in the Concha neighbourhood of Karrantza, where we will tell you how they made their fortunes, their luxurious daily lives, their great charitable works and many other stories.



About 3 km away is **Karpin Fauna**. It is a shelter for wild animals who can no longer return to their natural habitat – victims of trafficking, illegal hunting, and abandonment. Here, they find a haven and the care they need.



Lanestosa the smallest municipality in Biscay in terms of area, is located about 13 kilometres from the Dolomitas Factory Museum. With barely two hundred inhabitants, it seems to have remained untouched by time. Its cobbled streets, flanked by large houses with balconies overflowing with flowers, have preserved the same structure since the 13th century.



JOIN A SHEPHERD AND HIS FLOCK... and discover the secrets of a trade with more than 4000 years of history! Take part in this experience, which is open to everyone, although it has been specially designed to be enjoyed by the youngest members of the family. The shepherd will take you on a tour of his cheese factory in Karrantza, showing you how he makes his precious handmade cheeses and showing you the sheep. Contact us to enjoy this incredible experience!

HOW TO GET THERE

The best way to get to Karrantza is by car. If you're coming from Bilbao, take the BI-630 regional road, which takes about an hour.

If you are coming from Cantabria via Colindres, take the CA-629 to Ramales.



By private car

Dolomitas

[43.239499, -3.358149]:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/pP1EmNkQFrwZPFgSA>

Pozalagua cave

[43.260131, -3.385324]:

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/sssYujidEK4VbQyV38>



By train

Karrantza

[43.238854, -3.357937]:

EVE railways / Timetables and fares / Consult timetables (renfe.com)



By bus

<https://www.bizkaia.eus/es/web/bizkaibus/lineas>



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Urgebi Bikes <https://www.enkartribike.com/>

WHERE TO EAT?

In Karrantza, the local cuisine pays homage to the land. This valley is famous for its farms and livestock, which provide us with a range of local products, such as the milk used to make the traditional sheep's cheese (don't forget to visit one of our cheese dairies and join the shepherds). Above all, Karrantza is a haven

for food lovers, who appreciate the use of fresh, local ingredients. Hearty food was a necessity to replenish energy after a hard day's industrial work, but in an era where health is paramount, there's no shortage of options to suit every palate.

TIPS



Wear comfortable walking shoes..



Respect the environment, local people and animals.



Enjoy nature without noise or haste.



If you're driving, remember that cyclists and pedestrians have priority.



Adhere to general traffic rules.



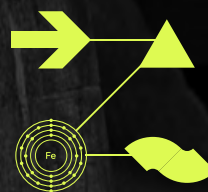
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JATORRIA; MENDIA,
BURDINA ETA ITSASOA
EL ORIGEN; MONTAÑA,
HIERRO Y MAR



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