

## Night Time is the Right Time For Bilbao Spain

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The undulating layers of fog blanketing the banks of the Nervion River in Bilbao Spain has all of the characteristics of a good horror movie, allowing glimpses of unidentifiable structures, concealing movements, and distorting otherwise undistinguishable sounds.

But there's nothing to fear in Bilbao Spain, especially the fog. Indeed, there is a great deal to embrace, explore and celebrate.

You see, the fog is man-made, a part of the outdoor art experience of the Guggenheim Museum, an addition to the city in 1997 that has almost single-handedly resulted in this city turning from dilapidated, economically-challenged ghost town to a energetic, creative European city.



Located on the Bay of Biscay on the northern coast of Spain, Bilbao is just 90 minutes from the French border and a half-day ferry ride from Portsmouth England. It's often said that Bilbao is the most British city in Spain, which may be debated. But as the capital of the Basque region, Bilbao is absent the Moorish and Mediterranean influences of Sevilla, Barcelona, Madrid and other well-known cities of Spain.

Bilboia is considered the Pittsburgh PA of Europe. For centuries, the economy was dominated by the shipbuilding industry, but as iron ore of the nearby Pyrenees became depleted, the once flourishing shipyards of Bilbao became a vacant, rusted eye sore, much like the decline in steel mills impacted Pittsburgh.

But the Guggenheim has been the basis of a huge cultural renaissance in the city that includes several new art museums and shopping centers, a Santiago Calatrava bridge and airport, and numerous parks and greenways that are the playgrounds for families, creative artists and young professionals.

However, the history and cultural influence of shipbuilding remains in Bilbao. The Guggenheim itself is shaped like a massive ship, thus the water and fog surrounding the exterior. The nightly waterfire show in front of the museum speaks to the foundries and steel mills that once dominated the city.

The Bilboa Maritime Museum, located on what was once the Euskalduna shipyard, also has a nautical design. And a rusted out crane in the middle of the river, purposefully left to identify the city's past, has become one of numerous public sculptures that dot the landscape.

Of course, nearby San Sebastian has always received the greatest attention as a culinary center, but Bilboa has nothing to be ashamed of. Cuisine is dominated by access to the ocean, earning Bilbao the nickname "Cod Capital of the World."

Food throughout the Basque country is engaging, featuring root vegetables, chorizo and pork in a variety of pintxos and entrees. Top it off with the red wines from Rioja in a café on the banks of the Nervion and discover why night time in Bilboa is indeed the right thing.

—Text and Photos by Diana Lambdin Meyer