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By [Jamie Rennie](#) on May 31, 2014 in [Europe](#), [France](#), [Regions](#), [Spas & Pampering](#), [Speciality Travel](#), [Western Europe](#) - Read 4156 times

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Pays Basque and 'exclusive' aren't staple bed fellows. But mention Biarritz and more exotic images creep in. There's a reason for this: it's a lesser known land filled with culture, language and character. To miss it

is to deprive yourself of one of life's 'richest' destinations. Read on for five reasons why the Pays Basque still tops the exclusive Summer destination list.

1. Picturesque landscape

'A mountain in the middle of a sea' is how Victor Hugo described the Pays Basque in 'Travel of the Pyrenees.' It's a pretty good description of an area that offers simply breathtaking vistas which includes the 3,500m long gorges of the Kakuetta canyon and the great depths of the La Verna cavern.



The Basque country is host to several stunning historical monuments too. The Abbazia castle on the cliffs of Hendaye overlooks the ocean and dates back to the 1800s. Meanwhile, Château d'Urtubie offers six centuries of history. A fortified but elegant landmark on the Basque coastline, the Château has belonged to the same family since 1341 and symbolises the tradition, heritage and culture of the area.

2. Rich and striking Basque culture

With thousands of years of tradition, the Basque culture is certainly an ongoing discovery! From the places, people, Izarre liquer tasting, artistry in the village square, social life and traditional dances there is a great story to tell. With a background of rich ancient culture the Basque country holds generations of tradition and belief, a culture which is truly unique and quite striking in contrast to neighbouring communities.

3. Surprisingly excellent gastronomy

The Basque Country might not be at the forefront of your mind when it comes to desired gastronomic destinations but it's surprisingly rich with several Michelin star restaurants squeezed into the region while local dishes are a refreshing combination of textures and flavours from both French and Spanish cuisine. The food is heavily influenced by its geography, with coastal areas serving up the most delicious seafood dishes of monkfish, hake and tuna. Nearer the mountainside, free-range farming supports local delicacies of Bayonne ham, Basquaise chicken and veal axoa.

Pintxo, however, is not to be missed. Similar in style to tapas, expect a small base layer of bread topped with fish, crustacean and vegetables. Pop to any of the local festivities and gatherings around the country, and join families, friends and neighborhoods to share the delights of Pintxo!

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4. Surf and turf time

Between the coastline and the mountains, the Pays Basque hosts a variety of sporting activities. The hot, windy coastline provides a strong swell and the perfect combination of beach and reef breaks to create a surfer's paradise in summer. And with lots of competitions, events and social activities, you can even enjoy the surfing as a spectator.



Rugby is another Basque passion. The Biarritz Olympic Basque and Aviron Bayonnais are in the country's top 15 and compete in the World Championships. Each town and village have their own club. Kids are coached from a young age and encouraged to play for the competing teams in the top of the league. In short, the standard of the sport warrants a visit.

5. Relaxation and thalassotherapy

If relaxation is what you're after, fitness and wellbeing is well catered for across the coast. In particular the region is known for its use of thalassotherapy, the use of seawater, sea products and shore climates for medicinal purposes.

With five thalassotherapy centres between Anglet and Hendaye, who knows...you might just find the holy grail of age defying, beautiful, glowing skin which has been cleansed, healed and enhanced by nature itself!

So, if you are looking for one of the most idyllic settings (truly spectacular), with an abundance of activities and adventures bursting with historical culture then you don't need to look any further. The Pays Basque is a country of numerous fascinations and endless history and with so much still to be discovered it is clear why it still tops the list as one of the most exclusive summer destinations.

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Jamie Rennie is Director at [Le Chardon Mountain Lodges, Val d'Isere](#).

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1.  [David](#) says:
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Agree completely, this area of Spain/SW France is relatively undiscovered. Perhaps due to a lack of airlift. Its very much worth the effort of getting there however.

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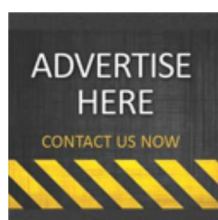
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