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[Living in Basque Country: What I Love and What I Hate](#)

Posted by Christine on Jun 13, 2013 in Basque Country, Expat Life | 29 comments



Living in Basque Country: What I Love and What I Hate

I've been **living in Basque Country** for awhile now, and I am so happy I'm here! While there are definitely some **things I miss about Andalucía**, I have felt more at home in Euskadi in a few months than I ever did in the 3 years I spent in Spain's south. **I think every expat has their region in Spain**, the place that claimed their heart and is like a second home, and mine is definitely Basque Country. My years in Andalucía were a huge learning experience for me, full of lots of ups and downs, and moving was just what I needed to reignite my love for Spain all over again. From the people, to the natural beauty, to the Basque culture, **here's why I'm absolutely, positively enamored with Euskadi:**

The Landscapes

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San Sebastián's La Concha Beach

Rolling green hills, miles and miles of pristine coastline, snow-capped mountains, lush valleys, lakes, rivers, forests...do you realize how stunning this region is? Of course, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but nobody would dare call Basque Country ugly.

The Lifestyle: El Txikiteo



Sampling pintxos in a Basque bar.

I've already written about *El Txikiteo*, the Basque tradition of bar-hopping for pintxos and small sips of wine and beer. I love this about the lifestyle here, and that people of legal drinking age to retirement take part. It's such a defining part of **Basque culture**, where the *cuadrilla* (group of friends) gets together, rain or shine, to enjoy each other's company over fast-paced consumption of food and drink.

The People Walk with a Purpose

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Most people here walk at a "normal" pace.

Andalucía, I love you, but (the vast majority) of your people walk ***painfully slow***. I don't expect speed-walkers, but I was constantly stuck behind someone going at a turtle's pace; conveniently when I had somewhere to be. Blame it on the heat, blame it on the "mañana" attitude, but if you're in a rush, prepare to be dodging lots of slow-pokes on the street. Meanwhile, here in Basque Country, while you'll still get the *ancianos* teetering along the sidewalks, most people walk with a purpose. My kind of people!

The Cheap Public Transportation



I wish THIS was my form of transportation!

Bilbao easily has the best Metro I've ever seen; it's clean, there are minimal weirdos hanging around, and it's fast and efficient. Basque Country is also really well-connected by buses and trains, and the best part is that it's cheap—

especially if you're staying within the same province. To cross Bizkaia on **Bizkaibus** will set you back about 3€.

The Basque Cider House (Sagardotegia)



A Basque Cider House

I am thrilled to be living in a region that celebrates the **Basque cider season** by cramming lots of hungry people in a cider house, plopping juicy steaks in front of them, and allowing them to fill their glass with cold cider as they please. I went to my first **Sagardotegia** earlier this year, and can't wait to repeat this annually.

The Grandpas in Hats



I heart the adorable Basque grandpas!

Studies show that there is no higher concentration of grandpas in *berets* (known here as *txapelas*) than in Basque Country. 😊 I think the *abuelitos* are just darling in their hats, wouldn't you agree? [My blogging amiga Kaley does!](#)

The Food & Wine



A glass of crisp, white wine.

This doesn't require much explanation: I'm living in what's arguably **the nucleus of haute cuisine**. And even if it's not accompanied by a Michelin star, **Basque food and wine** is damn good, whether it's traditional or contemporary. No complaints here!

The Basque Language & Culture



The Basque flag!

I LOVE that I'm living in a region with such a rich history and culture. It

sometimes feels like I've moved to a different country rather than just a different part of the same country. I'm discovering new things daily, from local fiestas to **Basque folk dancing**!

The Hiking



Hiking in Basque Country

There are so many excellent **hikes throughout Basque Country** and I'm happily exploring the trails one by one. You can take the girl out of the Pacific Northwest, but you can't take the Pacific NW out of the girl!

...and What I Hate About Living in Basque Country

I'm going to be honest here. There is really, truly nothing I *hate* about living in Basque Country. **Really!** There are a few things I would change if I could, but we can't have everything, can we? Without further ado:

The Rain

I knew what I was getting into by moving here, but the incessant rain is slowly getting to me. We're in mid-June and it's still raining over here! Even my hometown of Seattle tends to get its act together by this time of the year.

Not Knowing Euskara

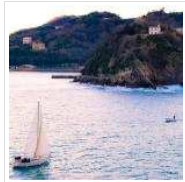
Just when I felt like I was getting somewhere with my Spanish, I moved to a place where I'm enveloped in Euskara! While in the big cities, there's much more Spanish spoken than Basque, where I live, it's definitely more Basque than Spanish. I'm tempted to start learning the language (I know a whopping 15 words/phrases or so) but they say **learning Basque** is like learning Japanese...that's not intimidating *at all*! Anyway, this is by no means anyone else's fault but mine.

The People Who Smoke in Bars

Ok, ok, you got me. This one I HATE. I'm really sensitive to cigarette smoke (makes me nauseous and bitchy) and every time I go out, there's some jerk lighting up inside the bar, like he's above the law or something. This drives me crazy! I would change this in a heartbeat.

Photo of Cider House via [Johnny Hunter](#) and photo of Basque grandpa by a friend.

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29 Comments



Michelle Matthews June 13, 2013

Yes, Yes, Yes, I agree with everything. Each time I visit Gipuzkoa I need to see see/smell three things before I feel like I've really arrived. 1. The strong and frequent smell of weed in the air, 2. The girls with the uncommonly short, blunt fringes (bangs) and 3. The old men in their black berets.

If you like cider then check out Astarbe near Donostia. They celebrated 450 years of continuous operation last month. Now that was a party!

[REPLY](#)



Christine June 13, 2013

Haha, the infamous Basque bangs! That's how you really know you've arrived 😊

REPLY



bnanno June 20, 2013

And those bangs are associated in my part of the Basque Country with certain parts of the political spectrum!

REPLY



Christine June 25, 2013

I imagine!

REPLY



Vanessa June 13, 2013

I was in San Sebastian and was completely taken! I love it there. I do agree that the rain is a bummer. All the rest is amazing though! loving your fotos and blog 😊 thanks for sharing...!

REPLY



Christine June 14, 2013

Thanks! I can deal with the rain, I just have to tell myself the rain is why it's so stunningly green here! 😊

REPLY



Cat of Sunshine and Siestas June 13, 2013

I've been dying to get back to the Basque country – it's been 5 years!
Cat of Sunshine and Siestas recently posted... [Technicolor Córdoba: The Colorful Little Sister City](#) ❤️

REPLY



Christine June 14, 2013

Come back!

REPLY



Liz June 14, 2013

Love love love this! I definitely agree with you about the rain-it get super depressing, especially when you go weeks without seeing the sun. But it's definitely worth it once you see all that green. And as for Euskara, one of my friends there who was taking classes said you have to pass 13 levels in order to be certified fluent! Crazy! My bf taught in Lekeitio and picked up a fair amount in 2 years, but it's really, really challenging. You'll get there!

Liz recently posted...[Favorite Pics From My Time in Spain](#) ❤️

REPLY



Christine June 14, 2013

It's so worth it for the green! And it IS possible to get tired of the sun. I know I missed the rain after living in Andalucía all those years. I didn't realize your bf taught in Lekeitio! I didn't realize they assigned auxiliares positions here.

REPLY



Richard June 14, 2013

Hi, Just wondering about the surfing. Is it very crowded? What is the water temp range? Best time to go for a wave? Great piece and photos by the way! Rich

REPLY



Christine June 14, 2013

I'm not a surfer, but I do know that the Basque Country has some great surfing spots. The most famous are Mundaka and Zarautz. As for best time to go/water temps, no idea I'm afraid!

REPLY



Katherina June 14, 2013

Ah... I hate the smoking in bars thing, too! It makes me feel tired and everything just smells like cigarette (hair inclusive).
With regards to the hiking, I've heard it's amazing – I really need to make my way over there soon!

Katherina recently posted... [Vila de Gràcia \(Barcelona\) – A Black & White Tribute](#) ❤️

REPLY



Christine June 14, 2013

That's the worst..having the smell get in your hair! Yuck. Please let me know if you plan a trip here, I'd love to meet up!

REPLY



Veronica June 14, 2013

I adore the Basque Country too. I was very curious as to what you would find to hate about it. But yes, the rain is a bit of a problem! There's a reason why no Basque ever goes out without a big black umbrella.

If I lived there I'd definitely want to learn at least some Euskara, but we found that Basques are generally very cool about speaking Castellano to strangers, unlike in some parts of Spain ::cough::Catalunya::cough::

And the Basque haircut! I love it 😊 It's everywhere, viz:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/larecettedujour/5404396163/in/set-72157625946683572>

Veronica recently posted... [Pot-roasted wild boar](#) ❤️

REPLY



Christine June 14, 2013

It's hard to find anything to not like about living here, but those are all minor things that I can put up with. Basques are really cool about speaking in Castellano with foreigners. I've never once had a complaint.

REPLY



Barry O'Leary June 14, 2013

Hey Christine,

Sounds like you're having fun up north. I've been in Sevilla for about 8 years now and there's a few things I hate, mainly the heat, closed minded and generally moany locals, and the taxi drivers! I've been up north a few times, loved Santander, Oviedo, Gijon, and La Coruna and I'd easily live up there. Agree with you about the slow walkers of Seville...especially coming from London. Funny watching them wait at the traffic lights even when no cars are coming. Anyway, great blog. Love the layout too.

Thanks

Barry

Barry O'Leary recently posted...[Living the Dream in Oaxaca](#) ❤️

REPLY



Christine June 15, 2013

Thanks, Barry! I was in Algeciras for a few years...so you can imagine how it was.

REPLY



Matthew Hirtes June 16, 2013

Yes, the weather's crucial. Seem to remember a UK chat show host Jonathan Ross, who's also a renowned film critic, interviewing a Hollywood star who had some connection with Seattle. Ross, "Seattle would be the most beautiful city in the world if it wasn't for its climate." Hollywood star, "You're not wrong, Jonathan." I paraphrase rather than quote.

Matthew Hirtes recently posted...[Playa del Ingles](#) ❤️

REPLY



Christine June 16, 2013

Couldn't have said that better myself! The rain is worth it though, because summer in Seattle is perfection!

REPLY



Travelogged June 16, 2013

I love that you listed "The People Walk With a Purpose." I live in NYC, and we

walk VERY fast here. Guess I'd fit right in... San Sebastian looks so beautiful!
Travelogged recently posted...[The Bay's Best Bites and Sips: Dining and Drinking Like a San Francisco Local](#) ❤️

REPLY



Christine June 25, 2013

I doubt it's NYC-fast, but it's a huge improvement from the south of Spain! 😊

REPLY



Eduardo@Andaremos June 17, 2013

The smoking issue really bothers me. I have walked out of Madrid restaurants before because the tables around were behaving like the Vatican's chimney. I was hoping that the law would have changed this by now.

Looks like I will get to know el Pais Vasco this year. I am headed to Bilbao, San Sebastian, and St Jean de Luz in September.

Eduardo@Andaremos recently posted...[The Travel Photographer's Dilemma – what lens to take](#) ❤️

REPLY



Christine June 18, 2013

It bothers me too. It's actually been outlawed here for a few years, but people just tend to not have a lot of respect for this particular law in smaller towns. That's awesome that you're coming here! You'll love it, I'm sure.

REPLY



Patti June 17, 2013

Timing is everything – I just watched a portion of Rick Steves' Hidden Europe series and he visited the Basque Country and then I came across your post. Maybe the universe is trying to tell me something?!

REPLY

Christine June 18, 2013



The universe is definitely trying to tell you something. Come! 😊

REPLY



Lauren @ roamingtheworld June 25, 2013

I agree! There is something especially charming about the North that I've fallen in love with both Asturias and Euskadi. I like Andalucia but there is something I can't quite put my finger on that I just love. It's different and maybe that's why Basque's would say Basque Country isn't España...lol. Though, I didn't fall for Vitoria-Gasteiz I liked the surrounding provinces and would love an opportunity to live in Bilbao or San Sebastian!

Lauren @ roamingtheworld recently posted...[How do you deal with Naysayers?](#) ❤️

REPLY



Christine June 25, 2013

You didn't fall for Vitoria? Aww 😊 San Sebastián is on my "must live in" list! 😊

REPLY



AboutBC June 25, 2013

Nos ha encantado tu blog. Zorionak!!!!

Christine: La mirada enamorada de una norteamericana sobre The Basque Country

Read more: <http://blog.aboutbc.info/2013/06/25/christine-la-mirada-enamorada-de-una-norteamericana-sobre-the-basque-country/#ixzz2XDYl6OQL>

REPLY

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