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An Insider's Look at the Basque Cider House

April 8, 2013 By [Marti Kilpatrick](#) [2 Comments](#)



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*This coming weekend I head to Navarra for #ruraltrip, an initiative to highlight all that Navarra has to offer visitors. One thing I am really hoping is on the itinerary? **A cider house**. Today Marti Kilpatrick of the fantastic food blog [Blank Palate](#) shares with us a bit about Springtime institution that is the Basque cider house. Luckily, the cider house season runs through May, so you still have time to go north and experience one of Spain's best food trips for Spring.*



As a resident of **San Sebastián** who also happens to be deep in the food scene, I get many requests for help with the dining side of visit planning. This can be tricky, and imply lots of questions... Did you bring rainboots or high heels? How much secret info should I divulge? Are these visitors willing to walk through a wooded forest to get to a dirty bar with the best seafood around? Typical Basque quandaries. But from the months of December to May, I know one culinary to-do that belongs at the top of everyone's list: **the cider house.**

It's debatable whether Spanish cider originated in Asturias (probably) or Basque Country (Basques say so), but **Basques have definitely perfected the experience.** In Astigarraga, a town right down the street from San Sebastian, there is a cider house every third of a mile. That's one for every 200 inhabitants, and they are all buzzing this time of year.

So how does it work? Call, make a reservation, and consider a light fast the day you are going. Because upon arrival, it's all-you-care-to-drink, and always accompanied by the generous traditional menu. First comes the *tortilla de bacalao*, which is more of a French omelette than a [typical Spanish tortilla](#), studded with salt cod. Next arrives a steaming plate of chunks of bacalao, piled high with caramelized peppers and onions. Then the meal gets serious: out comes a steak, maybe two pounds of meat and bone, always nearly bleeding in the center. Don't care much for meat? Think big steaks are for unsophisticated male diners? I leaned along those lines but the **Basque cider house txuleta is what changed my mind forever.** Dessert is a simple end to the festivities: Idiazabal cheese, apple paste and walnuts that you crack yourself, which I am convinced are included not only as a local, in-season product, but as a way to entertain guests who are now in a state somewhere between very happy and very drunk.



A perfect tortilla to start the meal.



The mythical txuleta.



And, of course, the cider.

In summary, this is a guaranteed good time and a tradition that any wintertime visitor to Basque Country would be mistaken to miss. Oh, so you want a cider house recommendation, too? I can't give away my most secret of spots, but I can tell you one of my favorites, whose cider is always the highest quality and whose tortilla is myth-worthy. On egin!

Sidrería Zapiain

Astigarraga, Spain

<http://www.zapiainsagardoa.com/>

Have you ever been to any Basque cider houses? Where?

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1. [Cat of Sunshine and Siestas](#) says:
[April 8, 2013 at 10:57 pm](#)

I have an Asturian mother-in-law, so I adore cider houses. There's a really great Basque one in the outskirts of Zaragoza. Erjoy, lady!

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2. [Jared Romey](#) says:
[April 9, 2013 at 3:21 am](#)

Yum, yum, yum. I really gotta get back to Spain.

Jared

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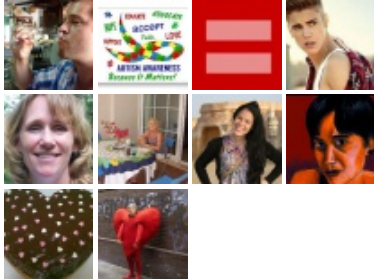
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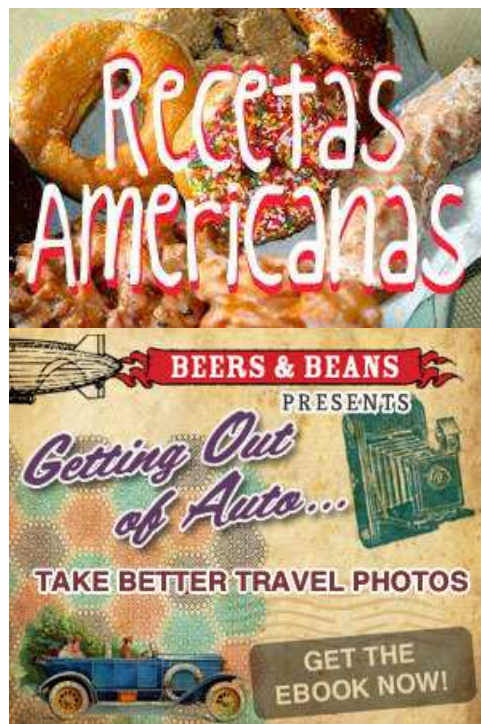
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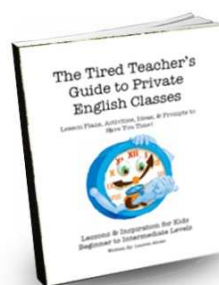
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