

THE WALKING PARTY

and introducing Minette Constant MW

ITINERARY FOR A TASTE OF THE BASQUE PYRENEES

Distance: 55 kilometres Walking: not too difficult



James Tamlyn moved to his 18th century farmhouse in France 30 years ago, enthused by the romance and beauty of the area. James' love of the flora and fauna combined with his fascination for the food, wine and local traditions and personal contacts make the week a special experience that you could not enjoy as an individual traveller.

Minette Constant is a British Master of Wine and a family friend. Minette lives with her family in the Béarn, overlooking the Pyrenees. She will be delighted to introduce you to the wonderful variety of wines from this corner of France as well as enjoying more general wine conversation, naturally with a good bottle or two!

Day 1 After meeting James and the rest of the group at Biarritz airport you will be driven to a beautiful manor house standing in undulating countryside overlooking the Pyrenees. This is a very pretty eighteenth century private manor house with a wonderful swimming pool and with nine spacious bedrooms all with bathrooms en suite. The owner is a friend and was a Parisian interior decorator so it really is very beautiful inside and out! The house overlooks the distant Pyrenean peaks. If there is time we will walk into the tiny village. Dinner at a local restaurant in a local village.

Day 2 We set off in the vehicles for a drive to be dropped off for a beautiful walk back to the Manor House for a picnic lunch. There are lovely views of the Pyrenees as we wander along the lanes. Lunch at the Manor House before an optional afternoon walk into the medieval village of Sauveterre to see the old witch's bridge. Return to the house by car for a wine tasting with Minette Constant who will show you the diversity of wines from south-west France. Dinner in a local village with James and Minette. *Walk: 9km*

Day 3 We drive for a walk to take us from the Béarn into the Soule country. This is a small region half way between the Béarn and the Basque which claims to be part of neither But is in fact Basque! The walk takes us for a little bit of up and down before we find ourselves ready for an open air picnic just outside the village of Lohitzun. After a picnic lunch with rugs and cushions and chairs we return to the manor house for a relaxing afternoon swimming or reading or another optional walk before we leave for the Pyrenees the next day. *Walk: 9km*



Day 4 We leave Betouzet and drive to St Etienne de Baigorri and its beautiful church. We will talk about the vineyards of Irouleguy before we have lunch near St Etienne de Baigorri. After lunch a drive for a walk in the hills with lovely views. We shall visit the famous trout farm favoured by Alain Ducasse the great French chef before continuing then by car to Sare where we stay at the four star Arraya hotel for our next two nights situated to the side of the central square of this pretty Basque village. Here we are in the heart of the Basque surrounded by Pyrenean peaks. *Walk: 12km*



Day 5 After breakfast we walk out of the hotel and the central square of Sare to walk towards the village of Ainhoa. A little up and down in the small hills between the two villages in this almost crater like bowl before arriving in another classic Basque village dotted with red and white painted houses and with wonderful charm. Lunch in Ainhoa before a voluntary walk up-hill to a tiny chapel for outstanding views over to the Atlantic and the foothills as a whole, known locally as the Pyrenankles. Dinner outside in the square. *Walk: 11km*

Day 6 Again up in the morning for another lovely French breakfast of dark black coffee and freshly baked croissants before we set off into the mountains for Spain! This is not too difficult a walk as there is a lovely way through the mountains to or picnic spot. Here we have some delicious Spanish wines and fantastic Basque ham (this is the ham that comes from the free roaming pigs that feed on chestnuts which lends it the delicious characteristic sweet flavour). You then return to Sare by car to pick up the luggage and continue to San Sebastian on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees for a fabulous dinner of Spanish Basque character! In fact

this is one of my favourite fish restaurants on the bay. San Sebastian is a very special city in a perfect setting with the Concha bay holding a small island in the middle of its pincer edges. San Sebastian has fabulous food. You will be staying your two nights with views overlooking the bay at the Niza hotel. Walk: 14km



The Guggenheim, Bilbao. *The Guggenheim Museum was designed by Frank Gehry and sponsored by the Solomon Guggenheim Foundation. This museum was specifically built to house exhibitions of monumental works and is I think one of the most beautiful buildings of C20th in Europe. Frank Gehry designed it around the idea of boat lines and fish and it has a wonderfully curvilinear and scaly quality to it with a tremendous sense of light. The fact that Jeff Koons' 15 metre puppy guards it like Cerberus is an added bonus of floral contrasting with metallic.*

Day 7 A very cultural day ! After breakfast looking over the sea we drive off to Bilbao to see the Guggenheim museum. We will spend the morning wandering around this extraordinary building in and out before we continue on foot to a beautiful *mudejar* style restaurant. A *paella* or salad lunch in this famous café where Unamuno and other early twentieth century intellectuals would eat before we drive back to San Sebastian for the most delicious tapas followed by our last dinner in the hussle and bustle of Las Gandarias restaurant ... another of my favourites.

Day 8 We leave San Sebastian for the famous French port of S Jean de Luz. A moment to shop in the pretty streets and see the wonderful church where Louis IV married the Infanta of Spain in 1654. A small light lunch in the town before leaving for Biarritz airport.

NOTE: *The itinerary is subject to change according to local conditions. All mileages shown are approximate.*