

TRAVEL

“Basque” in the Glory of Northern Spain This Year

Often called the “Costa Verde” or “Green Coast,” northern Spain is a land of contrasts, boasting beautiful scenery, dramatic landscapes and snow-covered mountains, all set against the backdrop of the Atlantic Ocean. Having already visited southern Spain, I was fascinated to discover its northern-most tip.



Mira Temkin

Guided Tour or Fancy Free?
Is it better to see Europe on a group

tour or go it on your own? I’ve done both and traveling with a company that specializes in European vacations is preferred. When I had an opportunity to visit Europe with Insight Vacations, I was packed and ready to go.

Insight Vacations has been taking guests across Europe for more than 35 years, covering 43 countries. I found their itinerary, choice of upscale hotels in the heart of the cities and authentic experiences brought the magic of Spain to life.

I loved the “whispers” – special audio phones that let me hear the guides no matter where I was standing. Other “little flourishes,” as tour guide Toni called them, included candy made in the area, a magnet or other special touches. Exclusive wine tastings, cooking demos and local expert guides also made my experience all the richer.

Madrid, Barcelona and Off the Beaten Path

Insight’s tour of Northern Spain features

cultural treasures, medieval towns and World Heritage Sites. We started in Madrid, with stops in Santiago de Compostela, Bilbao, San Sebastian, Pamplona – known for the “Running of the Bulls” – Barcelona and other Basque cities. By providing a perfect balance between touring and free time, it allowed me to explore these fascinating destinations and contribute to the local economy!

In Madrid, I saw the Cervantes monument in Plaza de Espana. I gazed at the statues of Don Quixote with his sidekick Sancho Panza, still moved by thoughts of “the impossible dream.” Our itinerary also included the world-famous Prado, with magnificent works from Goya and Velazquez.

Moving north, I found that some Spanish customs were different. Castilian Spanish is spoken with a different accent. Traditional tapas were replaced by “pinchos,” spiked with a toothpick and bread. Toni always pointed out the best places to enjoy them. “It was like having a friend in a foreign land,” he said, and he was right.

Historic Pilgrimage – The Way of St. James

Tradition has it that the remains of St. James were found and brought to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, an architectural wonder of Romanesque, Gothic and Baroque design. For thousands of years, this site was a famous pilgrimage route.

Today, travelers begin their spiritual journey from their front doorstep on foot, bicycle, even horseback. Many walk just for the experience, converging on the city as a celebrated accomplishment. Everywhere we went, we saw “pilgrims with backpacks.” Some stay for a day or two, others for months. Insight arranged for us to have dinner



MIRA TEMKIN

The Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela – started in 1075 and completed in 1211.

in the historic parador in the town square, (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), which over time served as a hospital, prison and orphanage. With its many nooks and crannies, you could sense the history that played out here...and the meal was fabulous.

Bilbao’s Guggenheim

The icon of Bilbao is represented by the Guggenheim Museum, but standing in front of it simply takes your breath away. Designed by Frank Gehry, this titanium-covered building has received accolades worldwide and literally put Bilbao on the map. Walking through the three stories, I discovered contemporary works by both Spanish and

international artists with exhibits that were truly “experiential.”

Spain’s Proud Heritage

When it was time to return home, I reflected on the total experience Insight Vacations had created – showcasing artistic splendor, fascinating culture and Spain’s historical significance...memories that will stay etched in my mind forever. *Insightvacations.com*; 888-680-1241.

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KIM’S KITCHEN

Grilling Swordfish – The “Steak of the Sea”

It’s over! I’m talking about the snow, the slush and the frost. Time to break out the grills and enjoy this oh-too-short season. Midwesterners only get about four months to really enjoy the great outdoors. I don’t even want to talk about the other eight right now.



Chef Kim Bisk

So, let’s celebrate the grill all season long. Starting this month, and continuing for the next few months, I’m going to do a great sauce and main course that will enhance your grilling experience,

sending your taste buds into orbit! This first recipe is really easy and very healthy. I call swordfish “The Steak of the Sea.”

Grilled Swordfish with Mango Salsa

- 2 fresh mangoes (skinned, seeded and diced small)
- ½ cup red pepper (diced small)
- 4 tbsp red onion (minced)
- ¼ cup green onions (chopped)
- 1 tsp hot sauce (optional)
- 1 tbsp cilantro (chopped – optional)
- 1½ tbsp fresh lime juice
- ½ tsp salt (to taste)
- 4-6 oz. swordfish (one inch thick)
- ¼ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp pepper
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 lemon (wedged)

[1] Mix the first eight ingredients together in a large bowl, and chill for at least an hour. Letting it set overnight is even better, giving

- all those amazing flavors time to mingle.
- [2] Before grilling, take out your salsa, and let come to room temperature (unless you want it cold).
- [3] When you’re ready to grill, make sure you’ve got a good high heat going. I usually brush my grill with an olive oil-soaked paper towel to give it a good base.
- [4] Season each piece of swordfish with salt and pepper.
- [5] Brush with the olive oil right before you place them on the grill. This will assure that you get some really great grill marks.
- [6] Grill for about two minutes. Then turn the fish about a quarter way round (same side down). This makes that diamond pattern you see in the restaurants.
- [7] Now flip it over, and repeat. After your last turn, reduce the heat and continue cooking for about six minutes, or until the fish is cooked all the way through. It should be completely white inside – no pink.
- [8] Top with the mango salsa at time of serving, and enjoy. You could also chop the fish and do a really fun fish taco!

Chef Kim Bisk and her husband Ellory own and operate Kim & Ellory’s Kitchen – providing personal chef and catering services to northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. They offer everything from large event catering to in-home gourmet dinners. Visit them at kimandellory.com.





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