University of Illinois Alumni Association

Duration
10 days

Activity Level
Moderate

Journey Type
Land

Bordeaux and Basque Country: Wine & Culture

April 15-25, 2027

Starting from $6,045/pp

Savor the appealing charms of celebrated Bordeaux and Basque Country, each hailed for their exceptional gastronomic traditions, on this nine-night journey featuring four nights in Bordeaux, France, and five nights in San Sebastián, Spain. Take in Bordeaux's elegant, 18th-century architecture, and broaden your wine knowledge at La Cité du Vin, a fascinating, interactive museum. Spend a pleasant day in the vineyard-lined Bordeaux countryside during a visit to the medieval village of Saint-Émilion and an exclusive winery tour. Relish a boat ride in picturesque Arcachon Bay and fresh oysters by the shore. In Spain, explore beautiful San Sebastián , renowned for world-class cuisine, and delve into Basque culture at a dinner with residents. In the lovely Rioja Alavesa wine region, stroll through medieval Laguardia, enjoy a barbecue lunch, and sample fine wines at a winery. You'll also admire the art collection of the iconic Guggenheim Museum Bilbao!

Day-by-Day Itinerary

Bordeaux & Basque Country: Wine & Culture

Air Program – 11 days/ 10 nights (includes 1 air night)

Land Program – 10 days/ 9 nights

Breakfasts: 9 | Lunches: 6 | Receptions: 1 | Dinners: 3

B | L | R | D denotes included breakfasts, lunches, receptions and dinners.

A special note about air: If you have purchased only the Land Program, please book flights that arrive on Day 2, the first day of the Land Program. The date is listed at the top of your Reservation Confirmation.

- This itinerary is subject to change due to operational conditions.
- Activity Level ratings indicate each excursion's physical expectations. To make the best personal choice, please evaluate each excursion's rating and your ability to meet the tour's physical demands. Excursions on this program require: walking on cobblestones, unpaved paths or uneven surfaces; and getting on/off motor coaches and boats. Mild – Walk under 1 mile on mainly flat terrain; navigate under 50 stairs; stand under 1 hour
- Moderate – Walk 1–3 miles on flat/uneven terrain; navigate 50–100 stairs; stand 1–2 hours
- Active – Walk 2+ miles on flat/uneven terrain, including up and down inclines; navigate 100+ stairs; stand 3+ hours
- Depending on the excursion, more leisurely alternatives may be available.

Day 1 | Depart gateway city

AHI FlexAir passengers depart for Bordeaux, France. Please check your luggage from your gateway city to your arrival city. Your claim checks should have the following airport code: BOD.

Day 2 | Bordeaux, France

Renaissance Bordeaux Hotel

D

Arrive at Bordeaux–Mérignac Airport. Proceed through immigration to the baggage claim area and retrieve your luggage. After completing customs, AHI FlexAir passengers traveling on flights that qualify for the group arrival transfer and Land Program passengers who have purchased seats on the group transfer should exit the baggage claim area and proceed to the designated meeting spot, where an AHI Travel representative will meet you. The meeting location will be provided with your final documents.

Transfer to the Renaissance Bordeaux Hotel. Please note that if you arrive before check-in time, your room may not be immediately available.

This evening, meet your fellow travelers during a Welcome Dinner at one of Bordeaux's fine restaurants.

Day 3 | Bordeaux

Renaissance Bordeaux Hotel

B | L

Enrichment: Viniculture & Traditions of Bordeaux. A local expert introduces you to the rich winemaking heritage of this celebrated region.

Bordeaux Walking Tour. Get acquainted with the history and beautiful architecture of this dynamic wine capital on the Garonne River. Originally inhabited by Celtic tribes around 300 B.C. and called Burdigala, Bordeaux later served as the capital of the Roman province of Aquitania. In the 12th century, after Eleanor of Aquitaine's husband was crowned King Henry II of England, the region became English territory and remained under English rule for three centuries. Following the Hundred Years War (1337-1453) between England and France, the French regained control of Bordeaux. By the 18th century, Bordeaux's lucrative wine trade and advantageous location had transformed it into one of Europe's largest and most prosperous ports, known as the Port of the Moon due to river's crescent-shaped curve. The city of Bordeaux flourished and expanded with grand boulevards, elegant public buildings and the private mansions of wealthy bourgeois families.

With your guide, stroll past the Grand Théâtre designed by Parisian architect Victor Louis; the regal, 15th-century Porte Cailhau gate, the Place du Parlement and other landmarks of this UNESCO World Heritage site. Before the handsome buildings of the Place de la Bourse along the river, take in the expansive Miroir d'Eau, or Water Mirror, a wide reflecting pool built in 2006 that's become a popular spot to linger. In the last two decades, the waterfront area has been revitalized with the development of new parks, a pedestrian-friendly promenade and a tramway. (Moderate)

Relax over lunch at a restaurant with your group.

La Cité du Vin. Experience a fascinating interactive journey through all facets of wine culture and winemaking at this modern museum, which opened in 2016. Learn about wine's historical impact, its influence on the arts, terroirs around the world, the complexities of viticulture and more. Afterward, enjoy a glass of wine complemented by scenic views over Bordeaux in the museum's Belvedere room. (Moderate)

Free Time: Select a wonderful spot for dinner in town. Throughout your journey, your Travel Director can offer dining recommendations and assist with reservations.

Day 4 | Saint-Émilion

Renaissance Bordeaux Hotel

B | L

Saint-Émilion. Journey into the heart of the breathtaking Bordeaux wine region to Saint-Émilion, a medieval town surrounded by lush vineyards. The Romans first cultivated grapes here, and by the Middle Ages, vineyards were thriving on the region's many small estates. The growth of the wine business was helped by the town's proximity to the Way of St. James pilgrimage route and the establishment of a special jurisdiction in the 12th century under English rule that ensured the quality of Saint-Émilion wines. Today, the Jurisdiction of Saint-Émilion has been recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site for its idyllic vineyard landscape, historic architecture and continued cultural tradition of winemaking.

Learn about Saint-Émilion's interesting history on a guided walk through its charming, winding lanes. Named after an eighth-century monk from Brittany who settled in a cave here and performed miracles, Saint-Émilion evolved into an important religious community over time. During your explorations, head down into the impressive Monolithic Church with subterranean sections that were carved out of the limestone hillside in the 12th century. (Moderate)

Take a break for a delicious lunch in Saint-Émilion.

Bordeaux Winery Visit. After lunch, travel to a highly regarded winery and draw upon your newly acquired wine knowledge as you sample fine French vintages. (Moderate)

Free Time: Return to Bordeaux for an evening at leisure.

Day 5 | Arcachon Bay

Renaissance Bordeaux Hotel

B | L

Arcachon Bay. Delight in the natural beauty of this picturesque bay, known as Le Bassin by locals, featuring shallow waters that are ideal for oyster farming. Take a pleasant jaunt aboard a traditional wooden pinasse boat to see local landmarks like Dune du Pilat, Europe's largest sand dune; Cap Ferrat and its lighthouse; and the cabane tchanquées, wooden cabins on stilts built by oyster farmers to watch over their farms. Finish with a tasting of fresh oysters by the shore and lunch afterward at a waterfront restaurant. (Moderate)

Free Time: Make your own plans back in Bordeaux later today.

Day 6 | Bayonne | Biarritz | San Sebastián, Spain

Catalonia Donosti Hotel

B | L

This morning, after breakfast, check out of the hotel. Depart for Spain with stops in the French Basque region.

Bayonne. This lovely gem at the confluence of the Adour and Nive rivers is France's Basque capital. During the Middle Ages, its majestic Cathedral of Saint Mary of Bayonne was an important stop for pilgrims traveling along the famous Way of St. James route to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Visit this stunning church and walk through the Gothic cloisters, then stroll around Bayonne's historic center with your guide. (Moderate)

Relish lunch at a cozy Basque cidrerie, or cider house, where you can fill your glass right from the cask.

Biarritz. A fashionable resort town since the 19th century, Biarritz is also regarded as one of France's great surfing spots. On a guided walk along the waterfront, start at the Church of St. Eugénie and make your way to the rugged rocks of Rocher de la Vierge, an outcrop connected to the shore by a bridge built by Gustave Eiffel. A statue of the Virgin Mary stands atop the rock. From the southern side, you can see San Sebastián on a clear day. Visit the old fishing port and the medieval Atalaye watchtower, where fishermen kept an eye out for whales. (Moderate)

Cross the border into Spain and check in to the Catalonia Donosti Hotel in San Sebastián.

Day 7 | San Sebastián

Catalonia Donosti Hotel

B | D

San Sebastián. Known as Donostia in Basque, San Sebastián rose to prominence as a resort town in the mid-1800s when Queen Isabella II, following advice from her doctor, chose it as her summer seaside retreat. Spanish royalty and aristocrats followed, adding a touch of glamour, and the city expanded with grand Belle Époque buildings that reflected its new status. Take a walking tour along the narrow lanes of the buzzing old town to see its highlights, including the 18th-century baroque Basílica de Santa María del Coro. Then, stroll on the waterfront promenade for spectacular views of La Concha Bay, known for its beaches like Concha and Ondarreta. Conclude with a visit to the San Telmo Museum, focused on the history of Basque culture. (Moderate)

Free Time: The afternoon is yours to explore San Sebastián on your own.

Enrichment: A History of Northern Spain. For thousands of years, the Basque people have inhabited this mountainous region and preserved their distinctive culture and their language, Euskara, one of Europe's oldest. Delve into the story of this alluring corner of Spain, known as Euskadi, or Basque Country.

AHI Connects | Meet the People . Join a diverse group of residents for dinner and conversation about life in the Basque region.

Day 8 | Bilbao

Catalonia Donosti Hotel

B | L

Bilbao & the Guggenheim Museum. Visit the acclaimed Guggenheim Bilbao along the Nervión River, regarded as one of the most important buildings of the 20th century. Designed by architect Frank Gehry, the structure's stunning, curvy exterior is clad in thin sheets of titanium and features glass and limestone elements. After it opened in 1997, it was the catalyst for an ambitious revitalization of Bilbao. View the museum's striking modern and contemporary art collections with a guide. Afterward, enjoy a panoramic tour of the city's top sites, followed by lunch and some free time in Bilbao. (Moderate)

Free Time: Make your own plans for dinner in San Sebastián. When it comes to food, this vibrant city has a culinary reputation second to none! Its exceptional gastronomic scene draws visitors from around the globe looking to enjoy its bevy of Michelin-starred eateries and innovative pintxos (tapas) bars. Each pintxos bar usually offers different bites. Platters of cold pintxos line the bar, but you'll have to order the hot dishes. Many people have a drink and a few pintxos at one spot, then head to the next place for another round of drinks and dishes. See your Travel Director for recommendations and help with reservations.

Day 9 | Laguardia

Catalonia Donosti Hotel

B | L

This morning, depart for Laguardia in Spain's renowned Rioja wine region. Straddling both sides of the Ebro River, the Rioja is divided into three subregions, and Laguardia is the capital of the Rioja Alavesa subregion.

Laguardia. Founded in the 10th century, this pretty, compact walled town sits in the verdant Ebro Valley beside the Cantabrian Mountains. Feel immersed in its medieval ambience on a guided walk down its pedestrian-only lanes. Take in the 13th-century fortifications and entrance gates; the Romanesque church; the Plaza Mayor and its clock; and the underground network of wine cellars beneath town. (Moderate)

Riojan Barbecue & Winery Visit. Savor a barbecue lunch in Laguardia, then try outstanding Rioja Alavesa wines at an excellent winery. (Moderate)

Free Time: Set your own agenda after returning to San Sebastián.

Day 10 | San Sebastián

Catalonia Donosti Hotel

B | R | D

Free Time: Your final day is yours to plan! If you'd like, choose to join the Elective Activity.

Elective Activity | Pamplona . Journey to the capital of the Navarra region, known as Iruña in Basque. Ernest Hemingway brought worldwide attention to Pamplona's signature event, the chaotic Running of the Bulls, in his novel, "The Sun Also Rises." With a guide, meander down the town's atmospheric streets, where crowds throng each July during the weeklong festival of San Fermín. See the bullfighting ring, Castle Square and the Gothic Santa Maria Cathedral before enjoying lunch on your own in town. (Moderate) Available at an additional cost.

This evening, raise a toast to your delightful sojourn with your fellow travelers at a Farewell Reception and Dinner at a restaurant.

Day 11 | Depart for gateway city

B

After breakfast, AHI FlexAir passengers traveling on flights that qualify for a group transfer and Land Program passengers who have purchased seats on the group transfer depart for Bilbao Airport for your return flights home. Your Travel Director will provide the details.

What's Included

Program Overview

- Small group: Sized just right at 28 guests.
- 4 nights in Bordeaux, France, at the first-class Renaissance Bordeaux Hotel.
- 5 nights in San Sebastián, Spain, at the first-class Catalonia Donosti Hotel.
- AHI Connects: Local immersion.
- AHI Sustainability Promise: We strive to make a positive, purposeful impact in the communities we visit.
- Complimentary travel mementos.

Meal Program

- 9 breakfasts, 6 lunches, 1 reception and 3 dinners.
- Welcome and Farewell Dinners and Farewell Reception to mingle with fellow travelers.
- Tea or coffee with all meals, plus wine with dinner.

On-site Features

- Deluxe motor coach transfers during the Land Program with baggage handling.
- Enrichment by expert speakers enhances your insight into the region.
- Engaging excursions showcase the local culture, heritage and history.
- Elective activity to pursue your individual interests.
- Tipping of guides and drivers.
- A personal VOX headset to hear your English-speaking guide clearly.

FlexAir Travel Program

Need assistance booking your travel arrangements? Our experts are here to help. Our air program offers the following benefits.

Trip Transportation

- Assistance in the event of schedule changes or delays
- Arrival and departure transfers on group dates

Price Guarantee

- Price guarantee to protect you from fuel surcharge increases after ticket purchase

Travel and Hotel Accommodations

Catalonia Donosti Hotel

Housed in a former 18th-century convent, this contemporary hotel offers the comfort, luxury and modern amenities of a boutique property complemented by historic character. Restaurants, shops and landmarks are an easy walk from its prime location. Head to the rooftop terrace and pool for gorgeous views over San Sebastián and Concha Bay. The Aldapeta Gastrobar serves innovative takes on traditional Basque dishes and a hearty breakfast buffet. Feel rejuvenated at the spa, featuring two pools and a steam bath, or the well-outfitted fitness room. Wi-Fi is complimentary.

Tripadvisor

Renaissance Bordeaux Hotel

From the moment you enter this modern property's impressive lobby set inside converted grain silos, you'll delight in a marvelous stay marked by style and comfort. Located in the Old Docks area, a hip neighborhood along the Garonne River, the Renaissance Bordeaux Hotel offers easy access to the city center via a handy tramway. Unwind each night in smartly furnished, comfy guest rooms with convenient amenities like complimentary Wi-Fi. When you want to hang out, head up to the rooftop, where you can swim and admire panoramic city views from the pool or dine at Gina's Restaurant & Bar, featuring tasty Italian cuisine and delicious cocktails and mocktails.

Tripadvisor

Pricing

$250 Full Payment Discount expires November 16, 2026

Trip Price (USD)	
Base Price	**$6,045**
Full Payment Discount *	**-$250**
Special Price	**$5,795**
You Pay	**$5,795 per person**

Package rates are per person based on Double occupancy from Land Only. Prices include all service charges; port charges when applicable; U.S. government taxes and fees. The minimum deposit is $1000.00 per person. To view Program Terms and conditions please click here. Some airlines may impose additional charges if you choose to check any baggage. Please contact your airline or refer to its website for detailed information regarding your airline's checked baggage policies.

*Full Payment Discounts are only available at the time of booking with initial payment 150+ days prior to departure. This offer only applies to full payment at the time of reservation. Details on how to qualify for this savings will be included when your reservation request is confirmed.

Bordeaux
Saint-Émilion
Arcachon Bay
FRANCE
Bay of Biscay
Biarritz
Bayonne
San Sebastián
Bilbao
BASQUE COUNTRY
Elective
Pamplona
Laguardia
SPAIN