

# Bordeaux & Basque Country



WINE & CULTURE



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University of Illinois Alumni Association

**I**  
**ALUMNI**

April 23 – May 3, 2026

# I ALUMNI

## Dear EXPLORERS and Friends,

Come along on a delightful sojourn in Bordeaux and Basque Country, beautifully balanced with alluring landscapes, cultural outings and the satisfying pleasures of exemplary wines and tantalizing food. Over four nights in Bordeaux, France, and five nights in San Sebastián, Spain, you'll tour the must-see wine museum, La Cité du Vin, and the legendary Guggenheim Bilbao, plus set off on guided walks in Bordeaux, Saint-Émilion, Bayonne, Biarritz, San Sebastián and Laguardia. Along with delectable meals featuring enticing French and Basque dishes, you'll relish Bordeaux and Rioja Alavesa wines on exclusive tours, feast on fresh oysters on Arcachon Bay and sip cider made from tart Basque apples!

Throughout your travels, you'll come away with a deeper understanding of these fascinating regions of France and Spain, thanks to enriching insights shared by expert local guides and lecturers. And with an experienced Travel Director seamlessly handling all the details, you'll be able to relax and truly enjoy your surroundings. When you factor in the camaraderie of a small group, it makes for a remarkable adventure that's not to be missed. Reserve today to share in this incredible experience!

Sincerely,



David Bambrey  
President

The EXPLORERS program is open to alumni of the University of Illinois, their families, and friends.

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### UNESCO World Heritage

1. Bordeaux, Port of the Moon
2. Jurisdiction of Saint-Émilion
3. Routes of Santiago de Compostela in France

*Jurisdiction of Saint-Émilion*







# Discovery begins here



Savor the appealing charms of breathtaking Bordeaux and Basque Country, each lauded for their exceptional gastronomic traditions. You'll make your base in Bordeaux, France, and San Sebastián, Spain, two lively, inviting and culturally rich cities that beckon you to wander and explore. From there, set off to appreciate the centuries-old winemaking heritage of the Bordeaux region and the proud, ancient Basque culture that spans northern Spain and southwestern France!

Top: Bordeaux | Above: La Cité du Vin, Bordeaux  
 Cover: Vineyards, Rioja Alavesa  
 Mail panel: Biarritz | Harvested grapes

## Inspiring Moments



- Take in the cultural gems of stately **Bordeaux** and charming **Saint-Émilion**, both UNESCO World Heritage sites.
- Delight in **exclusive winery tours** in France's **Bordeaux** region and Spain's **Rioja Alavesa** region.
- Broaden your understanding of wine and its enduring traditions at **La Cité du Vin**, an interactive museum.
- Cruise **Arcachon Bay** on a traditional boat and sample its famous oysters.
- Discover beautiful **San Sebastián**, world-renowned for its dining scene.
- Explore the stylish French seaside resort town of **Biarritz**.
- Get firsthand perspectives on Basque life at a **dinner with residents**.
- Admire the art collection of the **Guggenheim Museum Bilbao**.



*Monolithic Church, Saint-Émilion*

**Day 1 | In Transit**

Depart for Bordeaux, France. 🌐

**Day 2 | Bordeaux, France**

Upon arrival, transfer 🚗 to the Renaissance Bordeaux Hotel. Tonight, meet your fellow travelers at a Welcome Dinner at a restaurant.

**Day 3 | Bordeaux**

**Enrichment: Viniculture & Traditions of Bordeaux.**

**Bordeaux Walking Tour.** Get acquainted with this dynamic wine capital on the Garonne River that brims with 18th-century architecture. See the Grand Théâtre, the Place du Parlement and the regal Porte Cailhau gate, then linger at the Miroir d'Eau, a wide reflecting pool before the handsome buildings of the Place de la Bourse. Relax over a delicious lunch with your group.

**La Cité du Vin.** Enjoy an enriching interactive experience at this modern museum devoted to wine culture and winemaking. Gain interesting insights on many facets, from wine's historical impact and influence on the arts to terroirs around the globe and the complexities of viticulture. Conclude with a glass of wine and scenic views overlooking the city.

**Day 4 | Saint-Émilion**

**Saint-Émilion.** Journey into the heart of the idyllic Bordeaux wine region to this splendid medieval town surrounded by lush vineyards. The Romans first cultivated grapes here, and by the Middle Ages, the region's many small estates had thriving vineyards. Take a guided

walk along Saint-Émilion's narrow lanes and then head into its impressive, underground Monolithic Church. Carved out of the limestone rock by Benedictine monks in the 12th century, it commemorates Émilion, the eighth-century monk who settled in a cave here, performed miracles and established a religious community. Relish lunch in town after your explorations.

**Bordeaux Winery Visit.** Draw upon your newly acquired wine knowledge as you sample fine vintages at a highly regarded winery.

**Free Time:** Your evening is at leisure.

**Day 5 | Arcachon Bay**

**Arcachon Bay.** This large, shallow body of water, called Le Bassin by locals, is ideal for oyster farming. On a jaunt aboard a traditional pinasse boat, soak up its picturesque beauty and landmarks such as Dune du Pilat, Europe's largest sand dune, and the cabane tchanquées, wooden cabins on stilts built by oyster farmers to watch over their farms. Finish with a tasting of fresh oysters and lunch along the shore.

**Free Time:** Set your own agenda in Bordeaux.

**Day 6 | Bayonne | Biarritz | San Sebastián, Spain**

Check out today and depart for Spain with stops in the French Basque Country.

**Bayonne.** France's Basque capital boasts the majestic Cathedral of Saint Mary of Bayonne, an important stop on the Way of St. James pilgrimage route during the Middle Ages. Walk through its stunning Gothic cloisters on a tour and stroll around Bayonne's historic center.





San Sebastián

Fill your glass right from the cask at a cozy Basque cider house during lunch.

**Biarritz.** A fashionable resort town since the 19th century, Biarritz is also regarded as one of France's great surfing spots. On a guided waterfront walk from St. Eugénie Church to the rugged rocks of Rocher de la Vierge, take in the old fishing port, the medieval watch tower and sweeping ocean views.

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

## Day 7 | San Sebastián

**San Sebastián.** Called Donostia in Basque, San Sebastián became known as a resort town when Queen Isabella II chose it as her summer seaside retreat in the mid-1800s. Spanish royalty and aristocrats followed, and the city expanded with grand Belle Époque buildings. See its highlights, including the 18th-century, baroque Basílica de Santa María del Coro, on a guided walk through the buzzing old town and along the waterfront promenade by spectacular La Concha Bay.

End at the San Telmo Museum, where you'll delve into the history of Basque culture.

**Free Time:** Your afternoon is at leisure.

**Enrichment:** *A History of Northern Spain.*

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

## Day 8 | Bilbao

**Bilbao & the Guggenheim Museum.** Hailed as a 20th-century architectural icon, the bold, striking Guggenheim Bilbao by architect Frank Gehry sparked an ambitious revitalization of Bilbao after it opened in 1997. View its modern and contemporary artworks with a guide, and then admire vibrant Bilbao on a panoramic tour, followed by lunch in town.

## Day 9 | Laguardia

Travel today to Laguardia in the Rioja Alavesa, part of Spain's celebrated Rioja wine region.

*San Telmo Museum, housed inside a 16th-century Dominican convent, San Sebastián*



Cabane tchanquées, Arcachon Bay





## Included Features



### Accommodations (with baggage handling)

- **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.

### Transfers (with baggage handling)

- Deluxe motor coach transfers in the Land Program.

### Extensive Meal Program

- 9 breakfasts, 6 lunches and 3 dinners, including a Farewell Dinner; tea or coffee with all meals, plus wine with dinner.

### Your One-of-a-Kind Journey

- **Small group:** Sized just right at 28 guests.
- **Enrichment by expert speakers** enhances your insight into the region.
- **Engaging excursions** showcase the local culture, heritage and history.
- **🕒 Elective** and free time to pursue your individual interests.
- **🌍 AHI Connects:** Local immersion.
- Welcome and Farewell Receptions to mingle with fellow travelers.
- A personal VOX headset to hear your English-speaking guide clearly.
- Tipping of guides and drivers.
- **🌱 AHI Sustainability Promise:** We strive to make a positive impact wherever we travel.

Laguardia

**Laguardia.** Founded in the 10th century, this lovely, compact walled town sits in the verdant Ebro Valley beside the Cantabrian Mountains. Feel immersed in its medieval ambience on a guided walk that features the 13th-century fortifications, the Romanesque church and the underground network of wine cellars.

**Riojan Barbecue & Winery Visit.** Enjoy a traditional Riojan barbecue lunch in Laguardia, then taste outstanding Rioja Alavesa wines at an excellent winery.

### Day 10 | San Sebastián

**Free Time:** The day is yours in San Sebastián! Perhaps you'll dive into its acclaimed culinary scene of restaurants and pintxos (tapas) bars. You can also opt for the Elective Activity.

**🕒 Elective | Pamplona.** Meander down the colorful streets famous for the Running of the Bulls. On a guided walk, see the bullfighting ring, Castle Square and Pamplona Cathedral. Celebrate your travels together at tonight's Farewell Reception and Dinner at a restaurant.

### Day 11 | In Transit

After breakfast, transfer ➡ to the Bilbao airport for the return flight ✈ to your gateway city.

Note: Itinerary may change due to local conditions.

✈ Flights and ➡ transfers included for AHI FlexAir participants.

🕒 Elective experiences available at an additional cost.

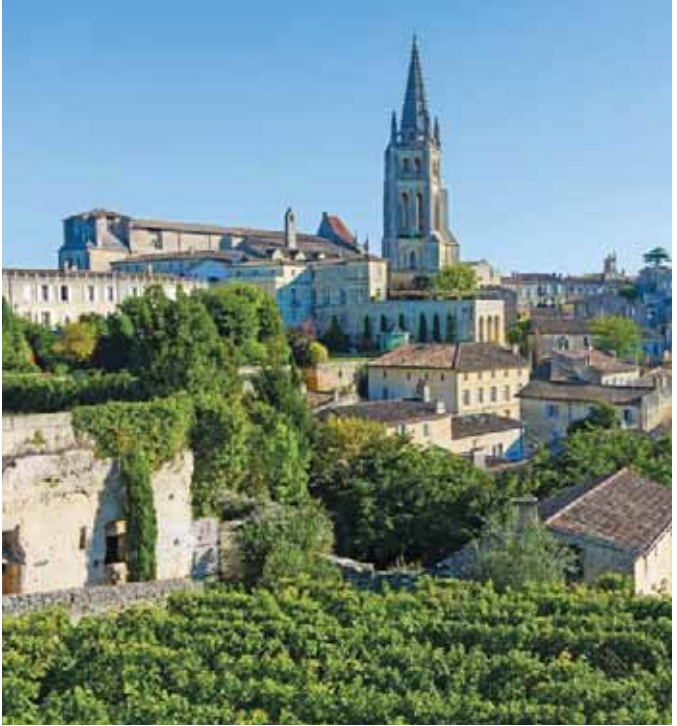
### Activity Level

We have designated activity levels for all excursions on this program. For more details, please call or visit our website.

#### Excursions on this itinerary require:

- walking on cobblestones, unpaved paths and/or uneven surfaces
- getting on/off motor coaches and boats





*Saint-Émilion*



*Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao*



*La Concha Bay, San Sebastián*



# 2026 | Departure Details

## Program Dates

**Travel dates** ✈ **April 23 – May 3, 2026**

✈ Travel dates include any overnights required for international travel. These dates may vary depending on air schedules.

**Tour dates\*** **April 24 – May 3, 2026**

\* Tour dates begin on the scheduled arrival date at your destination and end on the scheduled departure date from your destination.

## Land Program

**Full Price** **\$5,745**

**Special Savings** **\$750**

**Special Savings Price\*** **\$4,995**

**\*This Special Savings Price includes our \$250 Early Booking and \$500 Pay-in-Full discounts and is valid if you book by the date on the address panel and pay in full at booking.**

Deposit amount is \$750 per person.

Final Payment is due at least 120 days prior to departure.

Price includes applicable program taxes (such as VAT and port charges).

All prices quoted are in USD, per person, based on double occupancy and do not include air transportation costs (unless otherwise stated).

Special offers, promotions and discounts cannot be combined.

Single accommodations are an additional \$1,295 (limited availability).

**Please note:** Program-specific terms and conditions are available at <https://il.ahitravel.com/destinations/1937A?schoollid=69>.

## AHI FlexAir

### Let us arrange your flights

Our experts are ready to assist you in booking flights. Our personalized air program offers the following advantages:

- **price guarantee** to protect you from fuel surcharge increases after ticket purchase
- arrival and departure **transfers** on group dates
- **flexibility** to change or cancel your reservation before departure on most flights (Fees may apply.)
- **assistance** in the event of schedule changes or delays

## AHI Travel Expertise

**Travel Consultants** assist with the reservation process.

**Travel & Air Coordinators** offer their personalized assistance with flights, electives and special requests.

**Travel Information** provides pre-departure details and enrichment about your destination.

**Your Travel Director**, a seasoned, multilingual professional, manages daily logistics so you enjoy a seamless experience.

**Handpicked Expert Guides and Knowledgeable Lecturers** deepen your appreciation for the region and its history, culture and current events.



# Accommodations

Our travel experts have carefully chosen these first-class hotels for their prime locations and historic character. The chic Renaissance Bordeaux in the trendy Old Docks area features a dramatic entrance from transformed grain silos, while the elegant Catalonia Donosti, housed in a former 18th-century convent, offers amazing city views. Of utmost importance is the superior quality of their services, amenities and accommodations, allowing you to enjoy your stay fully.



**Renaissance Bordeaux Hotel** | Bordeaux



**Catalonia Donosti Hotel** | San Sebastián



*Fresh oysters, Arcachon Bay*



*Half-timbered architecture, Bayonne*



Book your journey today!

844-414-0369

<https://uiaa.org/explorers/>

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University of Illinois Alumni Association  
EXPLORERS Office  
Alice Campbell Alumni Center  
601 S. Lincoln Avenue  
Urbana, IL 61801

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