

## *Dining well for less in Donostia-San Sebastián European Capital of Culture in 2016*



*A few of the selections from the menús del día you'll find in Donostia*

### **EATING YOUR WAY THROUGH SPAIN'S GASTRONOMIC CAPITAL, ON A BUDGET**

Although the Michelin Guide for Spain/Portugal has bestowed the dining scene in San Sebastián and its environs with no fewer than 16 of its prestigious stars, not all dining in the Basque Country's most beguiling city need be enjoyed at a gourmet temple. While diners can easily part with €170, or more, per person at one of these wonderful, internationally acclaimed Michelin starred restaurants, from Arzak and Akelarre to Mugaritz and Zuberoa, there are also fine dining bargains to be had that happily don't break the bank. Some of these lesser known gems are supervised by Michelin-starred chefs themselves and some headed up by a group of young rising stars.

Below are just a few fine dining venues that Iberian Traveler has recently enjoyed, all which serve up a true gourmet experience but accompanied by a less stratospheric final tab.

#### **FEATURES:**

- The Parte Vieja - Donostia's Atmospheric old town
- Gros Quarter
- La Concha Beach
- El Antiguo

**IN THE PARTE VIEJA - DONOSTIA'S ATMOSPHERIC OLD TOWN**

Chef **Paco Loureiro Rodil**, formerly of Branka, and a member of the Association of Young Chefs of Gipuzkoa, "Sukatalde", last year reopened and remodeled the classic **Casa Urola** (since 1956) in the pedestrianized Old Quarter, at Kalea Fermín Calbetón 20, making it a "must stop" on any culinary tour of the city. Lo Mejor de la Gastronomía guide has given the restaurant a 7.5 rating and named chef Loureiro one of the Basque Country's best *parrilleros*, or grill masters, along with internationally acclaimed chef Bittor Arguinoniz of Vizcaya's famed Etxebarri.

In addition to his masterpieces of the grill, he offers very stylish, creative *pintxos* sure to impress from a chalkboard menu in the downstairs bar, such as *taco de foie sobre crema de pochas*, a grilled foie gras over a white bean cream sauce, one of the house specialties. One can enjoy his creations in the small upstairs dining room or at the 5 or so tables below, adjacent to the bar. Closed Sunday night and Tuesday.



The chalkboard menu at Casa Urola

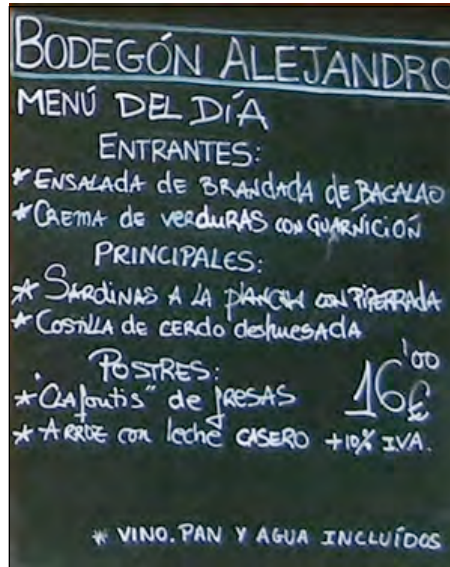


**La Muralla**, housed in what remains of the city's 12th century walls at Embeltrán 3, provides a particularly good value, especially for its unbeatable fixed price, 3-course, €24 *menú del día*, as does its equally cozy and charming sister restaurant, **La Fábrica**, at Puerto 17, near the fishermen's quarter. Both are owned by brother-sister duo, María Eugenia and Inaki Bozal.

In addition to their €24 lunch and dinner menus served during the week, both restaurants offer a €35, 3-course weekend menu, again with at least six options for each course, and which includes bread, wine, water and coffee.

La Muralla is closed Tuesday and Wednesday nights and all day Sunday. La Fábrica is closed Sunday nights.

The atmospheric, subterranean, **Bodegón Alejandro**, at Fermín Calbetón 4, now belongs to the IXO Group, headed by Michelin starred chef **Andoni Luis Aduritz** of **Mugaritz**, Restaurant Magazine's "number 4 best restaurant in the world". It served as the launching pad of 3-Michelin starred chef, Martín Berasategui, where he honed his skills at his family's former restaurant. The cozy basement dining space offers the same high quality of service and care with presentation for which the other members of the IXO group are noted, and it tempts with a truly bargain priced, 3-course lunch *menú del día*, although it is a set menu with only two choices for each course.



We recently sampled this hard-to-beat value and enjoyed our summer lunch of creamy vegetable bisque, cod brandade salad, grilled sardines with piperade, boneless pork ribs, strawberry Clafoutis and rice pudding, along with a shot glass *aperitivo*, house wine, water and bread, all for the princely sum of €16/person.

This *menú* is not served at night or on weekends. However, in the evening or at lunch diners can opt for the restaurant's more ambitious 6-course, small plates tasting menu for only €38.50 (with wine pairings for an additional €14). Very high quality at a very affordable price. Closed Sunday night and all day Monday.

**Kokotxa**, Campanario 11, near the church of Santa María del Coro, boasts a Michelin star but continues to offer a most affordable three-course daily lunch menu, Tuesday-Friday, for the non-Michelin starred price of €40.



Each day around noon, prospective diners can peruse the daily menu's choices posted on the front window. The set menu starts with an *aperitivo* then a first course, the chef's creation of the day, then diners choose either a meat or a fish

main course and end with a set dessert. This is a most affordable way to sample San Sebastián's celebrated Michelin star cuisine at lunchtime.

At night only the degustation menu is served and priced at €78 (plus wine & coffee).

The cooking of young chef **Dani López** simply gets better and better each year. His wife, Estela Velasco, acts as the maitre and sommelier. Kokotxa is a rather diminutive, understated space, with white walls simply adorned with black and white photographs of the city at the turn of the century. Iberian Traveler continues to affirm that for lunch, this may be the most impressive one Michelin star bargain in all of Spain.

Kokotxa receives a 7/10 rating in *Lo Mejor de la Gastronomía* and has also been awarded one Repsol "sun", the Spanish equivalent of a Michelin star. It's closed Sunday night and all day Monday.

## IN THE GROS QUARTER, ACROSS THE PUENTE ZURRIOLA FROM THE PARTE VIEJA

At the eastern end of the Rafael Moneo designed Kursaal Performing Arts Center, on Avenida Zurriola, is [Ni Neu](#) (meaning "I Myself" in Basque), now also very competently in the hands of chef Andoni Luis Aduritz of Mugaritz and his Grupo IXO.

It's a gastronomic destination designed for versatility, to provide something for all types of diners; a downstairs bar open for breakfast, for sandwiches, *pintxos*, for large plates and mini plates, and express lunches. There is also a terrace for cocktails, along with an upstairs dining space with picture windows facing the river and sea.

We enjoy stopping here for a pre-lunch *aperitivo*, and if blessed with a sunny day, we grab a tray and take our treats out to the terrace, as there is no table service; terrace tables are free for the taking to enjoy creative fare and soak up the lovely water views.

For those who wish a full meal, Ni Neu offers a 3-course *menú del día* for €25.40, which includes water, a glass of wine and artisan bread. It also offers more ambitious tasting menus, the Tantak

and the Xortak, for €32 and €38.50 respectively, which must be ordered by the entire table. And service here is first-rate, as befits a restaurant supervised by the brilliant Andoni Aduritz.



The bar opens at 10:00 am and closes Tuesday & Wednesday at 8:00, Thursday-Saturday at 11:00 and Sunday at 9:00. The restaurant serves lunch from 1:00-3:30 and dinner from 8:30-11:30 on Thursday-Saturday only. Closed Mondays.

Directly across the avenue from the Kursaal center and Ni Neu, visitors will find [Viento Sur](#), a lounge-like, contemporary design spot for *pintxo*-style meals with a decidedly Andalusian touch. The fish, especially the exceptional sea bream and red tuna, is brought up from the Costa de la Luz in the Cádiz province.

Viento Sur has a great vibe, is handy for a late night drink after a Kursaal performance, or one can have a proper sit down meal in its restaurant with open kitchen. It boasts a varied and reasonably priced wine list, and dishes are available in half portions. As an added bonus, it's open daily, from 11:30-11:30.

For those doing a budget *pintxos* crawl, it offers a *pintxo-pote*, which is its *pintxo* of the day accompanied by a house wine, all for the bargain price of €2. (A "pote" is a drink in bar parlance.)

Our own favorite *pintxo* here is the *presa Ibérica con salsa Roquefort y patatas* (a grilled pork tenderloin with Roquefort sauce and potatoes).

Viento Sur, along with Casa Urola, is one of twelve bars participating in the new [PintxoBox](#) marketing scheme.

**ADJACENT TO LA CONCHA BEACH**

Now conveniently relocated on the **Paseo de la Concha** in the basement space of the Hotel Niza, in front of La Concha beach and La Perla Spa, you'll find **Narru**. This up-and-coming gourmet spot receives our award for the non-Michelin star, overall "best value" in gourmet dining.

The Wall Street Journal in 2010 chose thirty-year old **Chef Iñigo Peña** as one of the top best young chefs in Europe. On Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, he dishes up a stylish, market-driven, fixed price lunch and dinner for only €26, which includes a bottle of wine, bread and coffee.

A constant on this menu is his signature dish, *secreto ibérico cocinado a baja temperatura*, a special and delicious cut of Iberian pork.

The a la carte menu is also quite reasonably priced for its high quality. This is a spot that always lures us in during our visits to the city.



## FURTHER AFIELD IN ARISTOCRATIC EL ANTIGUO

**Restaurante Xarma**, Avenida de Tolosa, 123, in the university neighborhood, near the Hotel Hesperia, is another one of our favorite gourmet destinations on the rise, with Michelin-star aspirations. Run by a talented young couple, **Aizpea Oihaneder** and **Xabier Díez Esteibar**, who met at Arzak and later honed their skills and earned one Michelin star at the now closed luxury Monasterio Rocamador in Extremadura. They've received glowing reviews from Spain's professional gourmet critics and earned a Repsol sun and a 7 rating from *Lo Mejor de la Gastronomía* guide.

Oihaneder and Esteibar are also members of *Sukatalde*, the Association of Young Chefs of Gipuzkoa, the new generation of future superstars.

Xarma is quite a small space, so reservations are essential.



The executive menu, *menú de mercado*, available for lunch Tuesday-Friday and for dinner on Wednesday and Thursday, is bargain priced at only €25 and includes wine, coffee and tax. Their 8-course Xarma Tasting Menu costs only €65. Closed Sunday night and all day Monday.



Just a short walk from Ondarreta beach and directly behind the NH Hotel Aránzazu, at Vitoria-Gasteiz 6, you'll find a hidden gem of a gastro-bar, **Bernardina Vinoteca**, Iberian Traveler's favorite small plates, wines-by-the-glass, dining venue, where one can feast on terrific small dishes at high tables around the lively bar or dine more formally in one of the two cozy brick-lined dining rooms.

This is a classy, unpretentiously elegant and sophisticated space, superbly run by owners Amaya Arzalluz and Coro Beristain, who extend to newcomers a warm welcome and very attentive service. Bernardina serves the best quality Iberian ham, Joselito, from which their irresistible croquettes are made, along with the best *ensaladilla de la abuela* (Spanish potato salad), we've ever tasted, plus mini hamburgers, baby vegetable tempura and individual Spanish omelets.

Stand out selections from their regular menu include a velvety rice with truffles, grilled octopus with a potato foam and warm goat cheese salad. Closed Sunday night and Wednesday.