

BILBAO'S LEGENDARY PINTXOS



People in Bilbao enjoy their pintxos as they practice the art of 'poteo' which can be roughly translated as a pub crawl.

All you have to do is write down what to order and where!

This is a land where people love eating and drinking; gastronomy is one of our hallmarks and it goes without saying that going from bar to bar and enjoying pintxos along the way is one of Bilbao's favourite daily activities.

If you're here on a visit, you simply have to go out [for pintxos](#). There's nothing quite like enjoying these miniature gastronomic delights in a beautiful bar with counters full of pintxos, where you can find everything from lifelong classics to authentic gems of haute cuisine that delight locals and tourists alike. Today, we are going to focus on more traditional dishes - pintxos that are relatively simple but full of flavour and guaranteed to be a success.

No matter where you go in our town, no matter what neighbourhood you find yourself in, you're bound to find a bar - or bars - where you can enjoy a good pintxo washed down with a glass of txakoli, or a coffee if you prefer. But undoubtedly the Casco Viejo, Bilbao Centro and Bilbao La Vieja is where you'll find more bars and restaurants which explains why the locals tend to meet up with their friends in these areas to socialise as they move from one hostelry to another.

BILBAO'S 'POTEO' DISTRICTS

In the Casco Viejo, Bilbao's Old Quarter, Plaza Nueva, Calle Unamuno, Calle Jardines and Calle Santa María are the poteo streets par excellence. This is where you'll find the best places to have a drink and a pintxo. You'll find everything from legendary tascas, taverns, to innovative gastronomic proposals. But if you cross the estuary to explore Bilbao La Vieja, you'll come across an even more extensive offer in the spectacular terraces that line Calle Marzana and in the bars and restaurants on Calle Aretxaga and Calle San Francisco.



Marzana

If you're in the Indautxu neighbourhood in the centre of the city, Calle Pozas and its nearby streets, such as Calle García Rivero, are traditionally a place of pilgrimage to enjoy a few glasses of wine and a few pintxos; and on match days, when Athletic Bilbao is playing at San Mamés, it becomes the nerve centre of the fans and the entire city.

And what can we say about Calle Ledesma, a pedestrian street that is a hive of activity at midday and in the late afternoon, or Calle Diputación? Of late, the area around Calle Heros area has blossomed and now boasts numerous bars and top-class proposals.

Which pintxos should I order?

Today we're going to treat ourselves to some of Bilbao's most traditional pintxos, those that are emblems of our poteo tradition and indeed part of our city's heritage. Although they look deceptively simple, they are in fact so delicious that they have captivated several generations and have legions of followers. This list includes such appetising and 'humble' morsels as potato omelettes, tuna rolls, grilled txanpi mushrooms, sandwiches, croquettes, Russian salad... suggestions that may not be surprising but that never disappoint - if you know where to go for them.

That follows, then, is an invitation to enjoy a route through the bars and taverns of Bilbao Centro, Casco Viejo and Bilbao La Vieja, tasting these small delicacies that are suitable for everyone, along the way. Let's go!

CROQUETTES

Any bar worth its salt is going to have croquettes on the menu to satisfy your appetite as you follow the poteo trail. You'll find them made with ham, cod, cuttlefish... They can be coated in breadcrumbs, panko or even corn, with a béchamel sauce of varying consistency; the possibilities are endless. But if you're a croquette lover, you'll be sure to appreciate the ones they make at the Asador Indusi - the smoothness and flavour of their béchamel is second to none. The most popular versions are the ham or the mushroom croquettes.

INDUSI. Calle García Rivero, 7. Bilbao Centro

COD

If there is one food that Bilbao is famous for, it just has to be cod. It's prepared in several different ways: "a la vizcaína" (Biscay-style) "al pilpil" (with pil pil sauce)... But nowadays, cod is also prepared as a pintxo - so much so that they run a Cod Pintxo Competition in the Casco Viejo. The recent winner of the 7th annual competition, the Egurre Bar, offers a pintxo of cod in tempura, with citrus foam and smoked mayonnaise that can be eaten in one or two bites. **BAR EGURRE. Calle María Muñoz 6**



Pintxo de bacalao del Bar Egurre

TXORI AL INFIERNO

Glorious mushrooms! A simple grilled mushroom with a dash of sautéed vegetables, skewered on a slice of bread, is manna from heaven. You can find them in lots of bars, but the one that attracts people in droves is the 'Txanpi a

la gloria', cooked to order with a unique home-made garlic sauce. If you want to try the original, then the Bacaicoa Bar is the place to go. And to accompany it, nothing better than the house wine, harvested and produced in their own vineyards in La Rioja. **BAR BACAICOA. Plaza Miguel Unamuno, 2. Casco Viejo**



Txori al infierno del Bar Bacaicoa

TUNA SANDWICHES AND ROLLS

This delicacy is also on the menu at Bodega Indautxu, another traditional tavern that has won the first prize in the Bilbao Classic Pintxo Championship. Their tuna rolls, with or without chilli peppers (the Alegría Riojana variety), are always revered by their local clientèle, as are, for that matter, their anchovies with peppers or in batter. **BODEGA INDAUTXU. Calle Gregorio de la Revilla, 18. Bilbao Centro**

CHEESE

Lovers of this dairy product are in for a treat. We're going to take you to a bar where cheese takes pride of place on the pintxo menu. Its name in Basque is a real give-away: Gaztandegi actually means cheese shop! The problem arises when you have to choose a cheese pintxo. Now let me think... how about the Idiazabal millefeuille, or maybe the cheese gratin with onion... **GAZTANDEGI. Calle García Rivero, 10. Bilbao Centro**



Milhojas de Idiazabal

STUFFED MUSSELS

Another true legend of Bilbao gastronomy is the stuffed mussel pintxo they serve at Baste. When it's ready, the kitchen staff cry out *mojorrontxo!* But what makes it so special, I hear you ask? Well, I'll tell you all about it. First of all they steam the mussels, then they chop them up and sauté them with onion, tomato, sweet and hot paprika. Once they've stuffed the shell with this mixture and bathed it in béchamel sauce, they coat it with a mixture of flour, egg and breadcrumbs and fry it. Believe me, it's simply irresistible. There are lots of imitations out there, but you'll only find the real thing at Baste. **BASTE. Calle María Muñoz, 6. Casco Viejo**



Mejillón relleno de El Baste

PINTXOS MORUNOS (PORK KEBABS)



Pintxo moruno del Berebar

These marinated pork kebabs are another temptation that is hard to resist: their tantalising aroma is always enticing. Without a doubt, the most famous pork kebabs you'll find anywhere in the Botxo (that's the local name for Bilbao) are the ones they serve at Café Iruña, Bilbao's legendary Mudejar-style café. The Belkhir family has been making these slightly spicy lamb kebabs for decades. **CAFÉ IRUÑA. Calle Colón Larreategi, 13. Bilbao Centro**

The Berebar is also a great place for kebabs, but here they make them with lamb spiced with turmeric, cumin, sweet paprika, ginger, parsley, garlic and onion. It goes without saying that they are always cooked on a charcoal grill. You'll not be disappointed. **BEREBAR. Calle San Francisco, 65. Bilbao La Vieja**

BILBAINITO

Bilbainitos are the city's quintessential appetiser (referred to as a *banderilla*). They are made with hard-boiled eggs, prawns and mayonnaise, a simple trio that always goes down a treat at any time of the day or night. Lots of bars and taverns in the city serve this legendary snack but one of the best places is the Café Bilbao, where they make them on the spot and add an olive for good measure. **CAFÉ BAR BILBAO. Plaza Nueva, 6. Casco Viejo**

SANDWICHES

The most famous sandwiches in the city are the triangles and towers of

home-made bread that you'll find at Eme, a veritable institution in Bilbao. Their slightly spicy sauce - sorry, the recipe's a secret - has been winning over generation after generation of locals since 1950. Don't be surprised if you see long queues of people waiting to buy them. If you're visiting Bilbao, you can't go home without having tried them. **EL EME. Calle General Concha, 5. Bilbao Centro**

El Alameda holds the copyright to another of the town's legendary sandwiches: the *felipadas*, a triangle of anchovy with mayonnaise, lettuce and a touch of spice. A hallmark of this Bilbao bar since 1955. **ALAMEDA. Alameda Urquijo, 40. Bilbao Centro**



Sandwich de El Eme

"TXANGURRO" AU GRATIN



Txangurro gratinado de El Globo

One of the most acclaimed and exquisite pintxos on offer in Bilbao's pintxo bars is crab au gratin, but of all the establishments where you can try it, one that stands out: the El Globo Bar, which has just won the 2023 award for the

Best Pintxo in Biscay with this dish. Crab, carrots, onions, a few other ingredients and aioli, all baked in the oven for just a few seconds and then sprinkled with a little paprika... Get ready to enjoy a delicacy, one of the most unforgettable classic pintxos. By the way: they make more than 500 of these pintxos every day and there never seems to be enough. **EL GLOBO. Calle Diputación, 8. Bilbao Centro**

RUSSIAN SALAD

A *tapa* that is always sure to please is Russian salad (also known in English as Olivier salad). But if it just happens to be the best you can find anywhere in Spain, then just imagine what it must taste like! It's a veritable festival of flavours and there's no way we could leave it off this list. The salad they serve at La Villa de Henao has just won first prize in the 6th Spanish "Ensaladilla" Championship, organised by Gastronomika last autumn. As you would expect, the basic ingredients are potatoes, carrots and eggs, cut into large chunks, along with tuna from Bermeo, chopped peppers, olives, pickled onions and pea sprouts. They use Hellman's mayonnaise mixed with milk and EVOO until they get the desired flavour and texture. **LA VIÑA DE HENAO. Calle Henao, 27. Bilbao Centro**



Ensaladilla de La Viña de Henao

POTATO OMELETTE

Last but by no means least: we simply couldn't end our classic Bilbao pintxo route without recommending a place where you can enjoy a good, juicy, tasty potato omelette. There are bars that make really good omelettes, there's no doubt about it. But if we had to recommend just one, it would have to be La Cocina de Aitxu: people have been going crazy about their omelettes ever since it opened. Aitxu, one of the contestants in Spain's Master Chef 7 competition, offers us a menu with a varied selection of egg-based snacks, mainly omelettes. You can choose one with or without onions, or with

caramelised onions, with truffled potatoes, with chilli peppers (they use the 'Alegría Riojana' variety)... and of course, they are all made with free-range eggs and locally sourced potatoes. **LA COCINA DE AITXU. Calle Heros, 21. Bilbao Centro**



Tortilla de La cocina de Aitxu