



## Way of St. James - Oarsoaldea

### The coastal route

Paths, particularly ones with as much history as the Way of St. James, not only guide us through different places but, with a bit of curiosity and imagination, take us on a journey back through time to a distant, mysterious past.

In Gipuzkoa we know of the existence since ancient times of an important route coming from Aquitaine, which was part of one of the main European routes leading towards the peninsula, and which from Olaso –today's Irun– continued to the meseta. From here, making its way alongside the River Bidassoa, was another traditional route running along the coast, though somewhat more difficult to distinguish. These ways evolved with the passing of time, at one point becoming part of two different roads to Santiago, the much-used port of destination of hordes of pilgrims since the 9th century. In the Late Middle Ages the prevailing manorial structure based on self-sufficient economy led its way to new ranks formed by the middle classes and tradesmen, and thus a commercial and monetary economy took over thanks to the return of trade. This gradually strengthened the routes of communication and commercial exchange between towns, and in particular the Way of St. James.

Both routes have been retraced of recent date and can now be easily followed. Today they link countless places of important religious, cultural or natural interest. Each itinerary is clearly signposted and normally stands back from the road. The route is also accessible by mountain bike, with the occasional recommended detour for stretches less suited to pedalling. Lastly, we should mention that other alternatives, such as the Ardituri cycle lane in Oiartzun, link the two itineraries, allowing us to take the route of our choice.

#### A. The path running along the side of Mount Jaizkibel

This easier route runs along the south face of Mount Jaizkibel and also offers continuous beautiful views of the Bidassoa region and Pasaiá Bay.

#### B. The path running along the top of Mount Jaizkibel

Running along the crest of Mount Jaizkibel, this is the most adventurous and strenuous option. However, it also affords the best views of the coast and inland Gipuzkoa. The path, dotted with 19th century defensive towers and megalithic monuments, comes to its highest point of 543 m at the summit.

On the other side of the estuary, we come to the district of San Pedro with its ancient main street, also dotted with ancestral homes, one of which is the birthplace of the famous sailor Blas de Lezo (17th century). The Parish Church of San Pedro (18th C) can be found nearby. Continuing along the path, we will come to the foot of La Plata lighthouse, proudly standing watch over the entrance to the port. Built in 1855, the lighthouse stands like a castle on the imposing cliffs above the fierce waters of the Bay of Biscay.

We continue on our way until coming to the historical centre of Pasai Donibane, a handful of houses built along the port. Many of them are ancestral homes dating from the 16th-18th centuries, once belonging to illustrious seafaring families. Examples are the Arizabalao and Villavicosa houses, close to the house where Victor Hugo stayed in 1843 and which now houses the tourist office – the Arkupe house, and the town hall. This typical sea-side neighbourhood is also home to the "Ontziola" centre, dedicated to building and exhibiting traditional boats, and organising excursions. Other interesting constructions are the Parish Church of San Juan and the Hermitage of Santa Ana, dating from the 17th and 18th centuries. We mustn't forget to mention the little 16th century shrine dedicated to the Pieta at the jetty, where pilgrims would stop and pray. The boat continues to offer the service allowing pilgrims and visitors to reach the other side of the bay.

From here on the landscape sharply contrasts as we approach the industrial port of Pasaiá. This bay has been the most important port in Gipuzkoa since the Middle Ages. An exponent of this, in the area now occupied by the power plant, was the 16th-17th century Astillero Real de Bordaborda dockyard, from which ships set sail to seas the world over.

Having taken the boat across the River Bidassoa from Hendaye, the first stretch of St. James' Way in Gipuzkoa starts in Hondarribia. Founded in 1203, this walled town is the second oldest in the province. Outside its walls we will come to the Hermitage of Santa Engrazi, beside which is the path making its way up to the Hermitage of Santiago or Santagotxo, standing among farmhouses and ancestral homes.

From here, the path gradually makes its way up the hillside to the 16th century Sanctuary of Guadalupe, where the locals come to pray to the image of the black virgin of the same name, the patron saint of Hondarribia. Not far from here is Guadalupe Fort, an enormous and partially buried fortification built in the early 20th century as part of the border defence line. The path forks shortly afterwards, offering us two options for continuing on our way:

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