

A SOLAR ECLIPSE IN SPAIN AUGUST 2026

In August I headed to northern Spain, on of a tour organized by Astro Trails of the UK. I was supposed to precede it with three days in San Sebastian/Donastia but because of the forest fires in southern and central France the trains were cancelled. So, I flew instead to the meeting point in Bilbao.

Those who did get to San Sebastian had positive things to say about the ambiance and easy walking, although the food was a little on the expensive side. In this part of Spain tapas are known at pintxos.

Bilbao was one of my major objectives of the trip especially the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum by architect Frank Gehry. Its curving exterior clad in Titanium (a first such use) follows the Nervion River bank accompanied by a reflecting pool and outdoor sculptures.



The spider sculpture is ironically called Ma Mere!

The galleries are larger and more numerous than Gehry's Foundation Louis Vuitton museum in Paris so there were several current exhibitions. I especially appreciated South African textile artist El Anatsui's Rising Wave made up of thousands of crushed bottle caps which undulated against the wall. He has a large team to execute his works.

Another textile artist Igshaan Adams, also from South Africa, displayed large hanging tapestries deeply textured and beautiful on both sides.





The Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama had a tiny room of mirrors and lights where small groups were permitted for 40 seconds at a time. Infinity Mirrored Room – A Wish for Human Happiness Calling from Beyond the Universe was created in 2020. She is now in her 90's.



The major retrospective was of Jasper Johns who isn't one of my favorites so I didn't spend much time there but I did appreciate new acquisitions by James Rosenquist and Andy Warhol's 150 Marilyns.



The temporary exhibit of Ruth Akawa displayed not only her wire sculptures (including miniatures she created as she began to worry about losing her eyesight in her 60's) but also



works from her early career after attending Black Mountain College in North Carolina. She was among Japanese families that were interned in the US during WWII.

I loved the floral Puppy by Jeff Koons at the entry.

Bilbao is an industrial city but has highly varied architecture (and interesting sculptures



on the banks of the river extending out of the city to Biscayne Bay. Steel mills and ship building are major industries and iron ore was historically hauled on barges pulled by women as memorialized in Doris Salazar's sculpture Las Sigueras.



At one point the steep hillside supports four modes of transport each at its own level: pedestrian, auto, bus and train.

The Old Town was flooded in 1983 up to the second floor of buildings and not only were many buildings never repaired but many businesses fled. However, the Place



Bernia remains lined with pintxos restaurants. My friends traveling on another Astro Trails tour and I ate twice at Victor Monces there, the first night sharing fabulously succulent roast suckling pig with a crackling skin.



An afternoon boat tour took us to Biscayne Bay where we saw the two cruise ships in port for the day. The UNESCO Heritage Bizkaia Transfer Bridge dates from 1893 and was the first



of eight put into service worldwide. At 40 meters (130') elevation the largest ships can pass underneath to the mills while it ferries cars across the river in a Dulles Airport-like transfer car suspended on cables. People can take the elevator to the top and walk across. No thank you!!!! A more pleasant way to cross is on the beautiful Zubizuri pedestrian bridge.



To reach the Guggenheim from the right bank of the river you can also take an elevator up to the Pont la Salve car bridge with street art below and excellent views as you walk across.



This region is very mountainous and a funicular operates to the Artxanda view point offering sweeping views over the city.



A full day Basque country trip took us from Bilbao to the dramatic coast overlooking islands (including one with a still occupied church) and the fishing port of Bermeo with its former convent and traditional fishing boat under restoration.



The women were considered especially stalwart since they basically ran everything as the men were often gone as long as three years fishing. And if a fisherman died at sea without a body

returning there was no support given to the family. When Spain joined the EU they were

limited to 30 vessels so now they have much larger boats and supposedly catch 1/3 of the world's commercial tuna. Bermeo proclaims itself World Tuna Capital.

We then traveled through the Urdaibai valley which is a UNESCO biosphere designated for harmony of history, man and nature. The land is still farmed traditionally with many families producing the full range of its food. I noticed that almost all the house roofs were at the



same angle.

Caves show the area was inhabited 15,000 years ago and some local residents share DNA from that time.

We then visited
Bodega Berroja
Txakoli vineyard

with its steep hand-picked harvest of primarily hondarrabi zuv grapes where the local soils and the Atlantic coastal climate combine to create outstanding white wines.

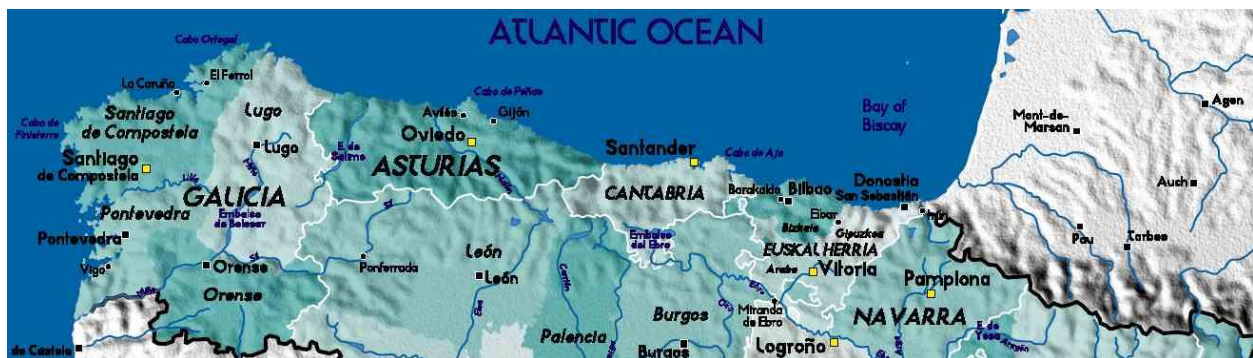


The day finished with a moving visit to Guernica where the Spanish dictator Franco in August 1937 authorized Hitler to bomb the city (because it was a center of Republican and Basque forces during the Spanish Civil War). In a matter of 3 hours in three raids the Germans destroyed 90% of the city and killed over 300 civilians. In preparation for the visit, I had done the Metamorphosis of Guernica virtual reality immersion into Picasso's creation of Guernica currently playing at the Picasso museum in Paris. A replica of the painting is in Guernica. He created it at his studio at 7 rue des Grands Augustins in Paris.

Picasso directed that Guernica should not be displayed in Spain until the country was a democratic republic. It toured widely and was protected at MOMA New York. It finally returned to Spain in 1981 and is now at the Musee Reina Sofia in Madrid.



From Bilbao in the Basque region we traveled southwest to Burgo de Osama in Soria Province in Castille & Leon Region. On the remainder of the trip we will also spend time in Asturias and finish in Galicia. I learned that each region has its own cuisine, customs and even language. The Douro River, whose source lies north in the snows and glaciers of Pic d'Urbrom, meanders through Soria. I know it best from its Porto vineyards in Portugal on its route to the Atlantic.



This is one of the least densely populated regions in all of Europe. The Cathedral museum in Burgos exemplifies this as a major part of its exhibits are from churches throughout the region that are now closed. When there is a local celebration the community temporarily borrows back its altar pieces etc.

The plan for August 12 total eclipse day is to travel to Gormaz Castle after a four-course lunch of local specialties. Starter course of pig ribs, black pudding and calamars. Then a salad of maches with walnuts and gazpacho soup. Then if you still had room there was hake in tomato sauce and super tender beef steaks with red peppers and potatoes. Red and white wine flowed copiously and there were apple tart and chocolate mousse for dessert!

The temperature was approaching 100° F and the climb to the castle and wait for the eclipse seemed beyond my capacity. Fortunately, our tour leader had discovered that a perfect view could be had in town. So, I stayed behind even though I would miss the comradery of 30 eclipse chasers who take these trips all over the world (next up Luxor 2027 and Australia 2028).

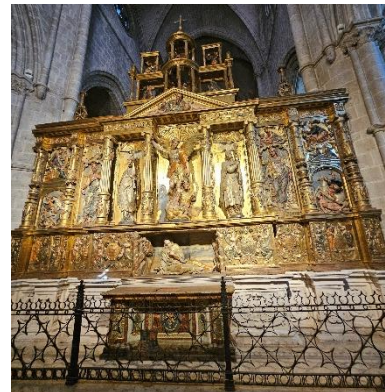
Gormaz Castle sits on a hilltop where a castle existed from the 8th C. The current ruins are of the castle built in 965. At that time it was probably the largest military castle in Europe with a 1 km circumference of its walls. It was built by the Moors, a generic name given to the Muslim Arabs and Berbers from North Africa, who ruled parts of the Iberian Peninsula from 711 to 1492. (Photo courtesy of Wikipedia)



As we traveled around the region we saw many watchtowers and I learned that the square ones were Moors and the round ones were Christian.

I was happy I had plenty of time for a nap after that lunch before my afternoon Cathedral visit and the eclipse. The Cathedral was cool and quiet and unlike other Cathedrals there is no large central nave. Built from 1000 to

1800 the main attraction is the successively added chapels.



The eclipse started at 19:34:49.6 and was fascinating to watch through the special glasses. There were a few families at my watching spot but no large crowd! Totality occurred just under one hour later at 20:29.2 and lasted just one and one half minutes. Enough time to take this photo.

Sunset was at 21:16 so the moon was still covering part of the sun but now the sun was very orange/red as it approached the horizon instead of the yellow it had been before. At totality my camera caught the



Baily's Beads pink spots that my eyes didn't. They are bits of sun passing through valleys on the moon.

The next day I took an excursion north to Laguna Negra, an alpine lake at 1700 m elevation. Although the path was advertised as PMR (personnes de mobilite reduit) accessible it was anything but! Happily, with persistence and encouragement from others in the group I



arrived. (This might be the first selfie I have ever taken!) However, the lake is currently green due to the extraordinary hot weather producing algae bloom. You could see fish struggling for breath. The lake was formed by receding glaciers and is now normally black due to the shale rock. It is replenished only by snow melt. Legends of the lake are that it empties to the sea or has monsters, both of which are false.

A very good interpretive center illustrates life in the region and we were lucky to see the oxen that still do hauling work. There is a system of manned fire watch towers throughout the area.

This is a managed pine forest which is clear cut when the trees are 140 years old.

Replanting occurs by scattering seeds mixed with sand and after 28 years the trees are thinned out and again at 60 and 100 years. The forest is community-owned so

everyone has a stake in the maintenance and resulting income from timber sales. The pine trees shed their lower branches which are gathered by the management company and undergrowth is eaten by animals. The pine tree has darker bark near the bottom of the trunk.



An annual local festival in August features cutting down and de-branching the tallest tree possible and then the local men having to raise the trunk to a vertical position using only poles.

Then the women celebrate

with dances in their traditional garb.



This area is so rural that most villages don't have a shop, there are only 15 high schools in a whole province to which students are bussed over long distances resulting in twelve hour days for them. The government is providing subsidies to encourage people to move in, open shops, etc. Jobs are scarce, recently a local plywood production company closed its doors. Soria is the least populated province in Spain with only 90,000 population.

Most families have enough grapes to produce their wine for the year and have either a cellar in their house or separate cellars we saw dotted around the landscape.



At our lunch stop in Vinuesa (population 1057) roaming guitar players were animating the crowd with singing and dancing resulted. Very local.



Burgos was preparing for its festival. In addition to our

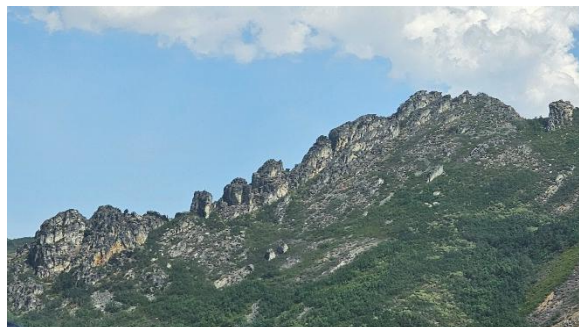
beautiful traditional hotel and Renaissance buildings, I found some street art and enjoyed the humorous nature of their festival poster.

After a day of return travel north to the Atlantic coast we were in Gijón in Asturias Province.



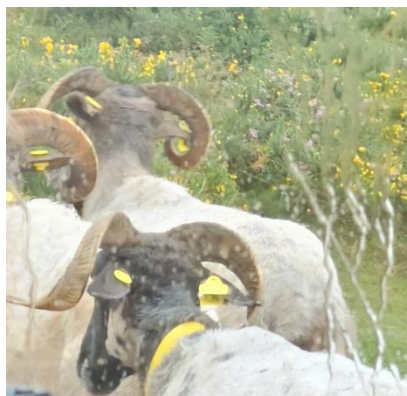
Since I had chosen an excursion into the Picos de Europa region the next day, I never expected a city of 280,000 people! (photo from the visitor guide)

Here are some photos of the Picos d'Europa which we traversed traveling north. Parts are a National Park in Spain.



The next day, true to the 250 days of rain received per year, we were completely fogged in. So I chose to not even hike up to the Enol lakes.

The cows, sheep and goats are brought to the mountain meadows for the summer. One of



Asturia's claim to fame is its **Gamonéu** cheese. There remain a few shepherds who live all season on the mountain where they milk the animals daily. "**Gamonéu PDO**. Gamonéu del Puerto is a seasonal cheese made in high mountain huts, while

Gamonéu del Valle is made year-round in the valleys and is the variety most likely to be exported to the U.S. Made from 80 percent cow's milk, 15 percent goat's milk, and five percent sheep's milk, the cheese is smoked before it is aged in natural caves for at least 60 days. Unlike many blues, it is not pierced, so any veining is just under the rind, rather than throughout the cheese. The flavor is earthy and rich with hints of smoke and spice."



Here is one of the shepherd's huts.

The area also has a history of mining for magnesium in caves.

The Covadonga Sanctuary is set among the magnificent scenery, and we visited the sacred cave with its Madonna (no photos permitted). You enter through a long passageway inside the cave. Mass was just beginning. So here is a stock photo of the

Madonna, except she was dressed in blue the day we visited. The church is also beautiful.



The Celtic origins of the people here are very evident in both the language and symbols.

We followed the Selle river which hosts salmon and was active with kayakers. And there were huge densely populated campgrounds, contrasting with the nearby mountains!



Small fact, this region has the highest density of pastry shops in Spain!

We sadly left Asturia, wishing for a deeper taste, to head to Santiago de Compostela.

We are in a modern hotel ~ 1 1/2 km from the center of Old Town. As it was a Sunday my first mission was to find food (most businesses are closed Sunday in Spain). When I previously visited on September 1, 2013 I was fortunate to see a local parade. My memory of mass in the Cathedral was to be thankful for the huge swinging thurible with incense because the church was packed wall to wall with unwashed pilgrims' bodies!





I took the tourist train which revealed the city to be a major university hub. A highlight, however, was just hanging out over a glass of wine (almost always accompanied gratuit by potato chips and olives!) watching the world go by. And



a group of drummers came by twice and performed music on their assorted drums!

At a friend's suggestion I toured the Cathedral Museum, especially the tapestries. Those on the second floor of the Chapter House were so striking I thought they were three



dimensional creations.

The next day I had reserved a bus tour through Get Your Guide along the Costa del Morte to Fisterre.

Turns out there are pilgrimage routes that start from Santiago de Compostela headed to Fisterre. Because this is only 80 km and a pilgrimage requires a minimum of 100 km the trip adds 20 km to Muxio with its church dedicated to the Virgin of the Boat who was delivered across the rocks in a stone boat

to inspire courage in the apostle James.



This coastline is very



dangerous for boats, hence the name Costa del Morte.

Unfortunately, in 2002 a massive oil spill affected the area and volunteers spent two years cleaning it.

Our first stop was in Muros, a fishing port where mussels and oysters are harvested.



We stopped in Carnaty to view grain storage buildings known as Horeos that we had seen dotted throughout the region. They are protected structures and some date to the 13th C.



The waterfall Ezaro may be unique as it flows directly into the salt water of the Atlantic. It is dammed upstream but is required to always flow. The hydro generated



supports a nearby steel mill.

Our lunch stop in Finisterre was fun because people from our Astro Trails tour had booked three different tours for the day, all of which converged on Finisterre at the same time. We shared the freshest fish I have had in a long time. I had the stuffed scallops (symbol of the Camino).



It was a milestone to visit Fisterre, furthest western point in continental Europe – spelled Fisterre in Spanish- but from the Latin Finisterre, end of the earth. The lighthouse has a horn but today's navigation aids don't really require it.



As a final stop we visited Ponte Maceira, a stone bridge and village billed as one of the most beautiful villages in Spain.



On my last day my flight wasn't leaving until evening so I took a long uphill walking detour to visit the Museum of the Galician People. And although everything was in Spanish I did learn a lot about this region that was also fishing based and had very interesting structures for dwellings.

At the airport I encountered my first robot trash collector.



Other than in Bilbao and Compostela very few non-Spanish tourists visit this region and I can highly recommend it for a variety of experience, food and hospitality.