

PRIME TRAVELER

San Sebastián, They Count Your Toothpicks

The self-serve pintxos system nobody explains, the highest concentration of Michelin stars anywhere, and a language older than Spanish itself.



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01

They Count Your Toothpicks

Walk up to a pintxos bar here for the first time and nobody takes your order. You simply help yourself directly from whatever is laid out along the counter, and at the end, the bartender tallies what you owe by counting the toothpicks left on your plate.

This Genuinely Runs on the Honor System

Nothing about this is tracked electronically or written down as you go. You take what looks good, eat it, and keep the toothpick. When you're ready to settle up, you simply show your plate.

Nobody hands you a menu here. The bar itself is the menu, and your plate becomes the bill.

Hot Pintxos Work a Little Differently

Cold pintxos sit out on the counter ready to take. Hot ones are usually made to order, you'll ask the bartender directly for those specifically rather than grabbing them yourself.



Basque Country, Not Just Spain

This region has a distinct cultural and linguistic identity, presented here as fact rather than opinion on any political question, the same approach taken with Catalonia elsewhere in this catalog.

Euskara Is One of Europe's Oldest Languages

The Basque language, Euskara, predates the arrival of Spanish and other Romance languages in the region entirely, and it's a genuine linguistic isolate, meaning it isn't related to Spanish, French, or any other known language family. Street signs and place names throughout the region reflect this directly.

A Real, Visible Regional Identity

The Basque flag, the ikurriña, and the region's own strong cultural traditions are genuinely visible throughout daily life here, similarly to Catalonia, and worth understanding as context rather than being surprised by.