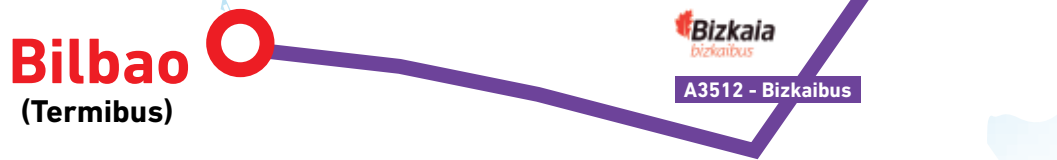


Route 5: Lea-Artibai

The beauty of the coast and tradition

Lekeitio is a pretty fishing town in the district of Lea-Artibai. Part of the beauty of this town lies in its privileged geographical location next to the mouth of the river Lea, which forms the beaches of Isuntza and Karraspio, leaving the isle of San Nicolás in between. It is a privileged tourist location which combines the coast, nature, culture, seafaring tradition and respect for the sea. A town where the activity was always directed at fishing... until the arrival of tourism.



To reach the town, take the **Bizkaibus A3512** (Bilbao-Lekeitio by motorway) which leaves **every hour** from the Termibus station in Bilbao. **Lekeitio** is a town with long tradition of fishing and the undisputed prominence of seafarers: whalers, fishermen, sailors, explorers. But this all changed in the 19th century when the first tourists reached the beaches of Lekeitio. These were high-ranking tourists including Queen Isabel II and the Empress of Austria-Hungary, Zita. Since then, peaceful and relaxed in the winter, it wakes up and becomes a much visited, busy and lively town in the summer.

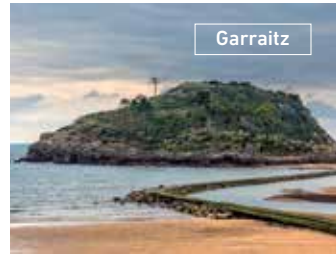
The old quarter of Lekeitio has a civil heritage replete with palaces such those of Uriarte, Oxagoiti, Uribarri and Abaroa, tower houses and former seafarers' houses. The religious aspect is represented by the Asunción de Santa María Basilica, with its magnificent gold-plated Gothic altar piece, thought to be the third largest in Spain.

Another building worthy of a visit is **Santa Catalina lighthouse**, still in service and the headquarters of a Technology and Navigation Interpretation Centre. Open to the public at the weekend, it aims to keep the fishing tradition alive. This is the perfect place to watch the sun go down, as it is just twenty minutes walking from the Old Quarter. Other interesting walks include the climb to Mount Lumentza (approx. 15 minutes), from where it used to be possible to sight whales, and the Lea path.



Sta. Catalina lighthouse

The isle of San Nicolás, also known as **Garraitz**, is another of the tourist highlights of the town. This is a truly



Garraitz

special spot, as it can be visited when the tide is out. Legend says that it was used as a leper colony in the past to prevent infection along the coast.

As for beaches, Lekeitio has three. Isuntza is the main beach, close to the port and the Old Quarter, perfect for families with children. Karraspio, in Mendexa, is the longest at 500 m. It is possible to walk to the Isle of San Nicolás from either of these beaches at low tide, although preferably along the beach from Karraspio. The smallest beach is La Salvaje, but this is only uncovered at low tide.

We return to Bilbao on the same bus that brought us here, the **A3512**.



Lekeitio