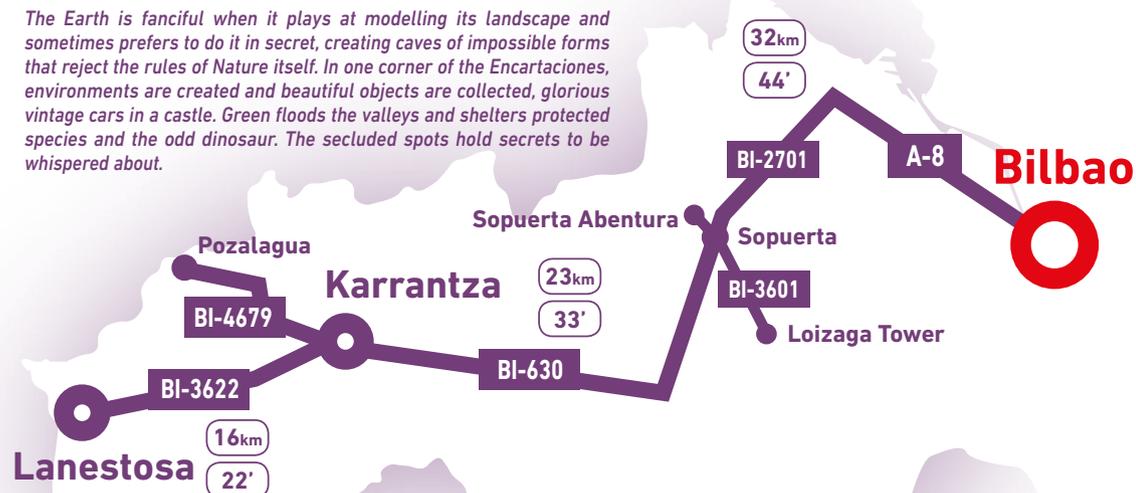


Route 5: Route of the hidden valleys

Nature and luxury

The Earth is fanciful when it plays at modelling its landscape and sometimes prefers to do it in secret, creating caves of impossible forms that reject the rules of Nature itself. In one corner of the Encartaciones, environments are created and beautiful objects are collected, glorious vintage cars in a castle. Green floods the valleys and shelters protected species and the odd dinosaur. The secluded spots hold secrets to be whispered about.



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This outing begins at the El Pobal Smithy, one of the last smithies left in Biscay. To get there from Bilbao, head for the A-8 on the Cantabrian Dual Carriageway and take the Muskiz/La Arena/Playa-Hondartza exit in order to continue on the N-634, then take the BI-2701 exit (Galdames/Sopuerta/Zalla/Balmaseda) until you reach the Pobal district. The smithy in El Pobal is a typical hydraulic one from the 13th to the 14th centuries. In the 18th century it was renovated and left as we know it today.

The collection can be visited and it includes the smithy itself, the Casa Palacio where the forgers lived, a small bread oven and a flour mill.

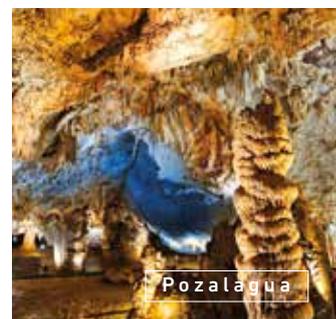
We continue on the BI-2701 to Sopuerta. Our next stop is Sopuerta Abentura, an adventure park in the trees for the whole family. Here, we find ten circuits, three of them with cable slides, with different sports



activities which can be done in the trees and with different levels of difficulty, from 1 to 21 metres above the ground.

After making the most of the outdoor activities in a unique and natural environment, head back onto the BI-2701 past Sopuerta and keep driving on the BI-3601 until you reach **Loizaga Tower**, a museum of old and classic cars. Nestled inside a medieval tower, this museum is home to a permanent exhibition of world-renowned classic cars and has a special private collection of Rolls-Royces which are in perfect condition.

We progress on our route on the BI-630 towards the **Karrantza Valley**. Before reaching this town, follow the sign to **Karpin Abentura**. This is a foster centre for wild animals and visiting it takes us back to the Jurassic era, following in the steps of the dinosaurs.



We continue our journey on the BI-630 to the turning which is signposted Ranero (BI-4679) and **Pozalagua Caves**. These were named as the Mejor Rincón de España (**Best Corner in Spain - Repsol Guide**

Award) in 2013, as they contain the highest concentration of eccentric stalactites on the whole planet. They defy gravity as they grow and imitate whimsical shapes which take on the appearance of roots.

This treasure, hidden in the depths of the Peñas de Ranero, was found by chance in 1957 by a dolomite demolition in the quarry. The path through the cave is a metal footbridge which will lead you to "the Versailles room" crossing a lake which is dried-up due to the mining activity. At the end, a viewing platform in the shape of a large dome (125 metres in length, 70 in width and 12 in height), allows you to dwell upon the beauty of the cave in all of its splendour.

In the middle of July, next to the caves, the natural auditorium of the old Pozalagua quarry is home to a Music Festival in the open air with prominent artists from Basque folklore. Additionally, the valley offers you the possibility of visiting the local cheese dairies and tasting some of the famous Carranzana sheep cheeses. You can find out more about these experiences and other activities at the Karrantza Tourism Office.

We leave the Pozalagua Caves on the BI-630 towards Karrantza and, at the junction, continue in the direction of Lanestosa (BI-3622). The beauty of its medieval quarter and its little cobbled streets never ceases to

surprise. With a guided visit we can appreciate how regal palaces of the 17th and 18th century stand amongst rural houses. The colonial mansions, which still stand, are also quite intriguing. Some of the tours include a visit to the Interpretation Centre of Cave Paintings, Kobenkoba. For more information: www.lanestosa.net

To return to Bilbao, take the N-629 in order to get back onto the A-8 towards Laredo/Bilbao.

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Karrantza Valley