

Route 8: The Durangaldea Homage to stone and magic

Bilbao

The Goddess Mari inhabits the bare rock. She wanders aimlessly amongst beech trees, protects and wards off. The great mass of stone crushes us to the ground, mere mortals. Urkiola is the magic, the pagan and Christian rituals, the final refuge for beings created by the fears of the Euskal Herria people. The noble villas at its feet hide palaces and secrets, the peaks upon high enclose the greatness of this earth, the yearning for freedom of its people, and the hospitality of its valleys.



Urkiola

From Bilbao, towards Donostia/San Sebastián, the AP-8 takes us to **Durango**, a town in a natural environment of great beauty and full of possibilities for lovers of outdoor activities. In its urban centre you can discover emblematic elements and buildings such as the Cross of Kurutzia, the Santa María de Uribarri Basilica, the noble palaces, a tour of the remains that were left after the town was bombed in 1937 and the "Espacio para la Memoria" (Space for Remembering), a monument which was erected as a reminder of the terrible occurrence. The Basque Book and Record Fair of Durango is celebrated in December and is the most important cultural fair in the Basque Country.

If you love green spaces we suggest that you visit the **Urkiola Natural**

AP-8

33 km

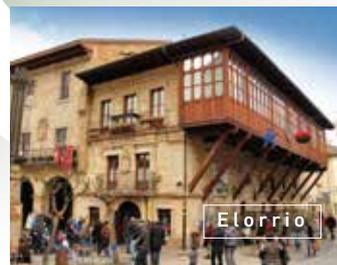
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Durango



Park. From Durango, taking the BI-623, you can take in the extraordinary landscape on offer at this Natural Park where you can find mountain ranges and white limestone rocks, gullies and deep valleys, intricate forests and soft pastures. You can also practise mountaineering, climbing, rappel or hiking.

At the top of this Natural Park, on a hillside, is the Sanctuary of the Santos Antonios (Abad and



Elorrio

De Padua). Surrounded by ash, eucalyptus and beech trees, its history is linked to the origins of Christianity. Opposite the sanctuary there is a stone which, according to popular belief, is a meteorite and possesses special virtues: in order to find a husband quickly, the maidens of marrying age simply had to circle it. Nowadays it also works for young lads. All of this is complemented with several inns, huts and restaurants.



Argiñeta



Durango

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Having returned to Durango, we set off towards **Elorrio** on the BI-636, but we can pause our journey and stop off at **Atxondo** if we feel like a quiet stroll, ideal for families, along the old train trail Durango-Arrazola. **The Arrazola Greenway**, hidden amongst the imposing stone walls of Anboto is a path which is completely flat and which stretches across 10 km, there and back, which can be completed in two hours. The trip can also be completed by car, taking the BI-4332, a parallel road. This way we can enjoy the greenest and most rural Biscay.

From here, there is another recommendable visit, the climb to

Betsaide. At El Tope, the end point of the Arrazola Greenway, leave the car and, after a gentle climb along a signposted path, you will reach the summit where you will be faced with incomparable views and be able to relax in the silence of the mountain. It is the exact point where the three Basque Country territories meet: Araba, Gipuzkoa and Biscay. A monument marks this geographical milestone.

We go back to our point of departure in Apatamonasterio (Axpe Atxondo) and join the road again, first via the N-634 and then the N-636 until we arrive in Elorrio. This town stands out due to the high value

of its historical patrimony: palaces and stately homes of robust stone and carved masonry, the Santa Ana Monastery, the Basilica de la Purísima Concepción, the door of Don Tello, the Tola palace and the remains of the medieval wall. In the outskirts of Elorrio, we can access the necropolis of **Argiñeta** on the BI-3321, one of the most important Basque Country funerary monuments constructed in the Early Middle Ages.

To return to the capital of Biscay, we retrace our steps along the path to Elorrio via the N-636 to Durango and finally, take the AP-8 to Bilbao.