



Europe

Cava to the Coast with Ben Groundwater



trip highlights

Escorted by author, journalist and passionate food writer Ben Groundwater, whose curiosity and local connections bring each destination to life

Feast on flame-grilled calçots in the Catalan countryside - a smoky, seasonal tradition best enjoyed with good company and plenty of romesco

Balance indulgent meals with scenic walks through medieval hill towns, coastal paths and a section of the Camino del Norte

From cava and Jurançon to Txakoli, Rioja, Basque cider and craft beer, discover the drinks that define Catalonia, the French southwest and the Basque Country



Trip Duration	12 days	Trip Code: BGCC
Grade	Adventure touring	
Summary	11 nights in stylish and characterful hotels	



Cava to the Coast with Ben Groundwater



Single travellers are required to pay a single supplement when joining this adventure. Please refer to our website for the additional cost.

the trip

From the cava cellars of Catalonia, via the bistros of Toulouse, to the pintxos bars of San Sebastián, this relaxed food and wine journey traces a delicious path through northern Spain and southern France. Hosted by travel writer and devoted food lover Ben Groundwater, you'll travel from Barcelona to the Basque coast via Girona, Carcassonne, Toulouse and Saint-Jean-de-Luz - tasting chargrilled calçots in the Catalan countryside, sipping wines in family-run vineyards, exploring vibrant markets and dining in neighbourhood gems. Along the way, there are medieval hill towns to uncover, a stretch of the Camino del Norte to walk and seafood feasts by the Atlantic. In San Sebastián, a city Ben knows intimately, he'll share his favourite spots and personal connections, bringing this gourmet capital to life. Curious, convivial and always up for a great meal, Ben makes this an easygoing yet deeply satisfying way to eat, drink and explore your way through two of Europe's most flavourful regions.

about your leader/escort

Ben Groundwater is one of Australia's best-known travel and food writers, and someone who holds a deep passion for northern Spain after living for 18 months in the beautiful town of San Sebastian, and making frequent foodie adventures into southern France.

Ben is a newspaper columnist with the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age, a feature writer, a broadcaster, and the author of six books. He loves combining his twin passions - active travel and great food - and believes few places in the world do both better than Catalonia and the Basque coast. This is his kind of trip: fun, insightful, low on fuss and high on flavour.

at a glance

DAY 1	05 APRIL - ARRIVE BARCELONA
DAY 2	06 APRIL - DAY TRIP TO CAVA AND CALCOTADA COUNTRY
DAY 3	07 APRIL - ON TO GIRONA
DAY 4	08 APRIL - IN GIRONA
DAY 5	09 APRIL - DALI MUSEUM IN FIGUERES, ON TO CADAQUES
DAY 6	10 APRIL - TOULOUSE VIA CARCASSONNE SATURDAY MARKET
DAY 7	11 APRIL - COOKING CLASS IN TOULOUSE
DAY 8	12 APRIL - TO ST JEAN DE LUZ
DAY 9	13 APRIL - ON TO THE JEWEL OF SAN SEBASTIAN
DAY 10	14 APRIL - WALK ON THE CAMINO DEL NORTE
DAY 11	15 APRIL - FINAL FEAST IN SAN SEBASTIAN
DAY 12	16 APRIL - TRIP CONCLUDES IN SAN SEBASTIAN

what's included

- Hosted by Ben Groundwater
- 11 nights in stylish and characterful hotels
- 4 dinners and 6 lunches showcasing ingredients and traditions of the regions
- 11 breakfasts
- Hands on cooking class in Toulouse
- Basque wine tasting at a local San Sebastian bar
- Visit to San Sebastian market with a local chef
- Guided tours in Girona and at the Dali Museum in Figueres
- Wine tour and tasting in a Cava cellar and a Jurancon winery
- Private transport days 2 through 9

what's not included

- Travel to Barcelona and from San Sebastian

Cava to the Coast with Ben Groundwater



trip dates

2027 05 Apr - 16 Apr

fast facts

Countries Visited:

Spain

Visas:

Please check visa requirements with your reservations consultant*

Singles:

Single travellers who are unable to be matched with another single traveller of the same gender, must pay a single supplement on this trip.

- Travel insurance (compulsory)
- Single supplement - payable when staying in your own room
- Public transport in San Sebastian (allow EUR30)
- Meals & drinks not noted on itinerary
- Tips

detailed itinerary

DAY 1 05 April - Arrive Barcelona

Benvinguts a Barcelona, where Catalan culture gives Spanish classics its own proud twist, and where a glass of chilled cava - or perhaps a vermut - is never far from reach. Vermouth hour is a ritual here, enjoyed with olives or anchovies before lunch. This is also where "tapas" quietly become platillos - small, beautifully considered dishes that reflect Catalonia's identity, shaped by both the Mediterranean and the mountains beyond. In the evening, join Ben and your fellow travellers for a festive welcome dinner, where we'll toast the journey ahead and dive into the flavours of the city.

Overnight: Hotel Astoria, Barcelona (or similar)

meals: D

DAY 2 06 April - Day trip to Cava and Calçotada country

We head west from the city into the gently rolling hills of Penedes, one of Europe's most celebrated wine regions. Just under an hour from Barcelona, the landscape shifts to rows of vines, stone farmhouses and cellar doors tucked into the hills. Here we visit a family-run cava producer where the traditional method - the same secondary fermentation in bottle used in Champagne - has been practised for generations. After learning how Catalonia turned sparkling wine into a point of regional pride, we sample a selection of vintages. Lunch is devoted to one of Catalonia's most joyful seasonal traditions: the calçotada. Calçots - a sweet, tender variety of spring onion grown only in this region - are grilled over open flames until their outer layers are blackened and caramelised. Peeled by hand and dipped generously into nutty romesco sauce, they are messy, communal, smoky, and absolutely delicious, which is why we've timed this journey to catch them at their peak. Later, we return to Barcelona for a free evening, there are plenty of options for wine bars or walks through Barcelona's arty streets.

Overnight: Hotel Astoria, Barcelona (or similar)

meals: B,L

DAY 3 07 April - On to Girona

Northward we go, trading Barcelona's buzz for the old-world elegance of Girona, a compact city where medieval walls, Romanesque churches and riverside houses set a magical scene. Girona's ancient quarter is a maze of stone steps, arched alleys and cobbled laneways, many of which might familiar as Game of Thrones was filmed here. Girona shines on the plate too, with a strong culinary reputation. For lunch, we dine at a restaurant from the celebrated Roca brothers, whose family name is synonymous with Girona's gastronomic rise.

Overnight: Hotel Historic, Girona (or similar)

meals: B,L

DAY 4 08 April - In Girona

Our day begins just steps from our hotel at Girona's Lleó Market, a lively neighbourhood institution where locals shop for the day's produce - seasonal

Cava to the Coast with Ben Groundwater



vegetables and freshly caught seafood from the Costa Brava, it's a window into everyday Catalan cooking. From the market, we make our way to Girona's Cathedral, a blend of Romanesque and Gothic architecture with sweeping views across terracotta rooftops and church towers, before we continue on a circular walk through the old quarter and up to the Mirador de Can García. This gentle 6km/4mi loop takes us along sections of the medieval walls and through quiet residential lanes, eventually opening onto one of the finest viewpoints over the city and surrounding hills. Lunch today celebrates one of Spain's most beloved culinary traditions: rice. In Catalonia, rice dishes reflect both sea and land - and this is a delicious way to understand that balance. The afternoon is yours to explore further, browsing artisan shops or lingering over coffee in one of Girona's elegant squares.

Overnight: Hotel Historic, Girona (or similar)

meals: B,L

DAY 5 09 April - Dali Museum in Figueres, on to Cadaques

Travelling east toward the Costa Brava, our first stop is Figueres, birthplace of surrealist artist Salvador Dali, and home to the mind bending Dali Theatre Museum. Designed by the artist himself, it's a kaleidoscope of bizarre architecture, dreamlike art and theatrical design. On to the whitewashed fishing village of Cadaques, with its pretty blue shutters and fishing boats. The light here is famously beautiful, and it's easy to see why artists like Dali, Picasso and Miro were drawn to its palette. Lunch celebrates the flavours of the Catalan coast in the historic centre of Cadaqués, at a restaurant founded by chefs who trained at the legendary elBulli. Expect refined yet unfussy cooking that honours local seafood, olive oil and seasonal produce. The afternoon is free to soak up the scenes of Cadaques. You might choose to follow a section of the Camí de Ronda - the old coastal footpaths that trace the cliffs and offer sweeping Mediterranean views.

Overnight: Boutique Villa Gala Hotel, Cadaques (or similar)

meals: B,D

DAY 6 10 April - Toulouse via Carcassonne Saturday market

Today we cross the border into France, to Carcassonne. We arrive in time for the Saturday market - a quintessential French ritual. Stalls brim with ripe cheeses, crusty baguettes, seasonal fruits and charcuterie, and we gather provisions for a picnic lunch. From the market, we step into the fortified citadel of Carcassonne, its stone walls, turrets and drawbridges seem lifted from a storybook. In the afternoon we continue to Toulouse, set along the Garonne River, the elegant "Pink City," named for the warm terracotta bricks that glow in the late afternoon light. This evening we settle into a classic bistro-style dinner - an exploration of southwest France.

Total driving time: 5 hours

Overnight: Hotel de Brienne, Toulouse (or similar)

meals: B,D

DAY 7 11 April - Cooking class in Toulouse

We step into the kitchen for a hands-on cooking class focused on the cuisine of southwest France. We'll learn techniques and traditions that define this region before sitting down together to enjoy the fruits of our labour. The afternoon and evening are free to explore Toulouse.

Overnight: Hotel de Brienne, Toulouse (or similar)

meals: B,L

Cava to the Coast with Ben Groundwater



DAY 8 12 April - To St Jean de Luz

We journey southwest toward France's Pays Basque and rolling foothills beneath the Pyrenees. Our first stop is Pau, gateway to the Jurançon wine region. Sheltered by Atlantic breezes and mountain air, Jurançon is best known for its aromatic whites made from the Gros Manseng and Petit Manseng grapes. At a local domaine, we'll learn how altitude, ocean influence and traditional harvesting methods shape these expressive wines before enjoying a guided tasting overlooking the vineyards. On to the coast, we arrive in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, where French elegance meets the salty sea air of the Atlantic. The town is known for its distinctive Basque architecture - white façades trimmed in deep red or forest green - and its lively harbour lined with fishing boats. This evening is free to wander the colourful harbour, perhaps stopping for oysters, local Basque cider or a glass of Irouléguay wine as the sun dips over the bay. Total driving time: 5 hours

Overnight: Parc Victoria Hotel, Saint-Jean-de-Luz (or similar)

meals: B

DAY 9 13 April - On to the jewel of San Sebastian

This morning we explore the weekly market of Saint-Jean-de-Luz with Ben, a colourful showcase of Basque produce: glossy peppers, wheels of sheep's milk cheese from the Pyrenees, and the region's prized piment d'Espelette - a gently smoky chilli that finds its way into everything from stews to charcuterie. For lunch, we dine at a beloved countryside inn where Basque cooking is generous, seasonal and firmly anchored in tradition. Arriving in San Sebastián, the culinary capital of the Basque Country, set around the sweeping curve of La Concha Bay. Ben knows this city intimately, having lived here with his family and forged lifelong friendships over shared plates and good wine. Over the next three nights, you'll experience it not just as a visitor, but as a well-connected guest. This evening we head into the Parte Vieja (Old Town) for a brief introductory tour, before you're free to dive into San Sebastian's famous pintxos scene, with everything from anchovy-laced gildas, to slices of jamón ibérico, seared foie gras, silky cod and seasonal seafood creations served up in bustling bars.

Overnight: Hotel Niza, San Sebastian (or similar)

meals: B,L

DAY 10 14 April - Walk on the Camino del Norte

We lace up our walking shoes and step onto a section of the Camino del Norte, the northern pilgrims' route that has traced Spain's rugged Atlantic coastline for centuries. Beginning on the eastern edge of San Sebastián, the trail rewards us with sweeping views over the Bay of Biscay before winding along green headlands. The walk to Pasaia covers approximately 8 km (5 miles) and takes around 3 hours at a relaxed pace. The terrain is undulating, with some steady climbs and descents. We descend into Pasaia, a sleepy fishing village where a small local ferry carries us across the harbour. Lunch awaits at a seafood restaurant that has been serving fishermen and travellers alike since the 1880s. After returning by bus to San Sebastián, there's time for a traditional siesta or a quiet moment overlooking La Concha. The evening is yours to revisit a favourite pintxos bar or discovering a new one, with plenty of recommendations from Ben.

Overnight: Hotel Niza, San Sebastian (or similar)

meals: B,L

Cava to the Coast with Ben Groundwater



DAY 11 15 April - Final feast in San Sebastian

We begin the day with a truly insider experience, joining a local San Sebastián chef on her morning visit to the market. As we stroll the stalls, tasting along the way, we gain insight into how Basque chefs think about produce - freshness, seasonality and respect for ingredients above all else. The afternoon is devoted to the wines of the Basque Country. At a local bar, we enjoy a private tasting that explores the region's characterful styles - paired thoughtfully with a selection of pintxos. This evening, we gather for a memorable final dinner and celebrate everything we've tasted and experienced across Spain and France.

Overnight: Hotel Niza, San Sebastian (or similar)

meals: B,D

DAY 12 16 April - Trip concludes in San Sebastian

Our journey concludes today in San Sebastián. From cava in Barcelona to pintxos in the Parte Vieja, we've traced a path through some of the most compelling food cultures of Spain and France.

meals: B

This itinerary is subject to change with any change in Community regulations as well as Governmental changes and natural circumstances beyond our control.

dietary requirements

This is a food focussed itinerary and we want you to get the absolute best out of it so it's essential you let us know any dietary needs. These regions are unfortunately not well suited to those with a vegan or vegetarian diet. Pescatarian and gluten or lactose free can be accommodated. We are unable to guarantee a peanut-free or allergen-free trip, and therefore, we strongly encourage that travellers with life-threatening or severe allergies take all necessary medical precautions to prepare for the possibility of exposure. Group members must travel with all necessary medications for food allergies and be capable of self-administering these medications.

accommodation on the trip



A carefully selected range of boutique and historic hotels, each chosen for their superb location and distinctive character.

We have detailed our intended accommodations however these are subject to change, in which case a hotel or equal standard will be provided.

pre and post tour accommodation

Please ask our team if you will be arriving into Barcelona earlier, or staying on in San Sebastian and wish to book additional nights at the group hotels. We recommend booking this well in advance.

visas

Spain

****IMPORTANT NOTE****

Cava to the Coast with Ben Groundwater



ETIAS will be introduced in the last quarter of 2026. No action is required from travellers at this point.

The European Union will inform about the specific date for the start of ETIAS several months prior to its launch.

see https://travel-europe.europa.eu/etias_en

Until then, visas not required for citizens of Australia, Canada, USA and New Zealand for up to 90 days in a period of 180 days for all Schengen countries (see https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen-borders-and-visa/visa-policy_en . Please ensure your passport is stamped on arrival in the Schengen area. For all other nationalities and for longer stays in countries covered by the Schengen Agreement (Australian New Zealand, Canadian and US passport holders), please contact the relevant embassy. Stays of longer than 90 days in the Schengen area require a long stay visa for the country you are spending most time in. However long stay visas are unlikely to be issued unless there is a valid reason (eg. studying in country). Unfortunately we cannot assist in obtaining visas for long stays due to individual country visa requirements.

France

****IMPORTANT NOTE****

ETIAS will be introduced in the last quarter of 2026. No action is required from travellers at this point.

The European Union will inform about the specific date for the start of ETIAS several months prior to its launch.

see https://travel-europe.europa.eu/etias_en

Until then, visas not required for citizens of Australia, Canada, USA and New Zealand for up to 90 days in a period of 180 days for all Schengen countries (see https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen-borders-and-visa/visa-policy_en . Please ensure your passport is stamped on arrival in the Schengen area. For all other nationalities and for longer stays in countries covered by the Schengen Agreement (Australian New Zealand, Canadian and US passport holders), please contact the relevant embassy. Stays of longer than 90 days in the Schengen area require a long stay visa for the country you are spending most time in. However long stay visas are unlikely to be issued unless there is a valid reason (eg. studying in country). Unfortunately we cannot assist in obtaining visas for long stays due to individual country visa requirements.

how to book

Bookings can be made online at www.worldexpeditions.com

A non refundable deposit of AUD900 per person is required at the time of booking. This is higher than our standard deposit due to various deposits paid in advance to secure the accommodation, restaurants and tastings.

We are happy to quote on airfares and can book extra hotels nights at the group start and end hotels if you wish.