

TASTE & TRAVEL

INTERNATIONAL

OKTOBERFEST
GERMANY

FALLING FOR
THE KAWARTHAS

PINTXOS
SAN SEBASTIAN

FOOD AND DRINK
SHANGHAI

ON THE TRAIL
CHAMPAGNE

Expand your culinary horizons

PLUS

DUBAI

PUERTO

MORELOS

LONDON

ISTANBUL

IRELAND

Ottawa
COOKS

ISSUE 23 Autumn 2016



CAD/US \$6.95



FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO *read*, LOVE TO *eat* AND LOVE TO *travel*

LETTERS FROM THE EDGE

SPAIN



WHERE ON EARTH

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE FROM
TOP LEFT Servers at a pintxo bar; Pintxo selection; Pintxos were originally served as snacks to accompany drinks; Pouring cider; Sea urchin; Spanish peppers; Bar with pintxos; Regional produce at the market. **MAIN PHOTO** Night scene in San Sebastian.

San Sebastian



LAURA SUTHERLAND



SANSEBASTIANURISMO

LAURA SUTHERLAND



by LAURA SUTHERLAND

Pintxos!

LAURA SUTHERLAND



SANSEBASTIANURISMO





PHOTOS THIS SPREAD FROM LEFT

Eating at the pintxos bar;
La Vina crowd; Skewers
help to tally the bill.

« **THREE LANES OF PLATTERS** piled with skewered snacks curved down the long highway of bar: fat shrimp smothered in garlic; coin-sized slices of bread topped with curls of Iberian ham; stacks of plump mushrooms covered with melted Idiazabal cheese, a local sheep's milk specialty. Behind the bar, Basque bartenders poured local cider from bottles held high above their heads so it frothed and bubbled into the glasses below.

Our pintxos guide, Esther, threaded her way through the crowd and returned with small plates of the bar's famous *solomillo* — a miniature sirloin steak topped with green peppers perched on a sliver of crusty bread.

Pintxos (pronounced *peenchos*) from the Spanish word *pinchar* — meaning to skewer — are like tapas, in that they were originally meant as a bite to accompany a glass of wine or cider to keep patrons satiated so they would continue buying drinks. San Sebastian is the epicentre of Basque pintxos culture, especially in the elegant old town known as Parte Vieja where dozens of pintxo bars line the cobblestone streets.

Many pintxos are still skewered, like the popular *anchoas y guindillas*, or anchovy with guindilla peppers and olives. The toothpicks hold the pintxos together but they also act as currency to help you keep track of how many you have eaten so you can pay at the end.

Esther pointed to the platter holding the garlic shrimp next and something down the row we didn't recognize. "We have many more places to visit," she warned as we eagerly slurped down the shrimp and bit into a tiny, flaky crab tart at Gardenarias Jatetxea. "So pace yourselves and save some room for Basque cheesecake."

Since it's important to know where to eat as well as what to eat, a pintxos tour with a knowledgeable guide is a great way to get started. You can hire a private guide like Esther, or go on a group tour arranged by the tourist office or a food-oriented outfit like San Sebastian Foods. Your guide knows which bars specialize in the most delectable dishes and you'll learn how to order, how to pay, and what to drink, like *sidre*, the local cider, or *txakoli*, the tangy green wine of Basque coastal villages.

At our next stop, La Cepa, we sidled up to the bar under a fringe of ham legs hanging from the ceiling. Esther spoke a few words to the barman and plates magically appeared: a spear of tuna decorated with red pepper, grilled octopus flavoured with sweet Spanish paprika, and whisper-thin slices of the ubiquitous Spanish ham, *jamon iberico*, on bread. "This is my favourite place for *jamon*," Esther told us, "and if you are only going to have one pintxo in San Sebastian, always order ham."

San Sebastian, known as Donostia in the native Basque (and signs are in both Spanish and Basque), has a long history of fine food. After Spain's Queen Isabell II started spending summers here lounging at the beach with her court in the mid-19th century, the

town became the oceanside playground for the royal, rich and famous. Its location on the white sand beaches of the Bay of Biscay provided a variety of fresh seafood, while mild weather and nearby farms and mountains have long provided produce, game and delicious local cheeses. The wealthy and sophisticated clientele demanded fine dining and the best chefs flocked here to comply.

Fine food is still an important part of the culture and there are more Michelin-starred restaurants in San Sebastian and environs per square metre than just about anywhere else on the planet, including Paris. You can sample artistic tasting menus from different star-spangled menus every night for a week or more.

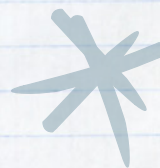
But if you can't get a reservation or your pocketbook doesn't match your culinary aspirations, San Sebastian's exuberant pintxos scene is a tantalizing alternative and benefits from some of the same forces that inspire the star-bedecked restaurants — competitive chefs wanting to dazzle their customers, creative presentations on small plates, and local seasonal ingredients elevated to haute cuisine.

To see what the culinary artisans might be serving later in the day, go early to La Bretxa, the local market near old town, to see chefs in street clothes and elderly ladies in wool suits squeeze the tomatoes, eyeball the onions and delicately sniff seafood like hake, tuna and barnacles, to decide what to cook. There are all kinds of spices, including the beloved Spanish pimenton, plus local cheeses, meats, the ubiquitous ham, and honey.

SANSEBASTIANURISMO



...San Sebastian is the epicentre of Basque pintxos culture...



Ester had pointed out the hake in the market to us, so we were glad she ordered palm-sized plates of fried hake and anchovies at our next stop — La Vigne — followed by their famous airy Basque cheesecake. Before she left us on our own she recommended a few more pintxo bars. "Be sure to go to A Fuego Negro," she advised. "It's one of San Sebastián's most adventurous pintxo bars — I call what they serve 'new wave pintxos.' And don't miss Zeruko, another arty place."

The next day after breakfast we found ourselves riding a 100-plus-year-old funicular to an 18th-century tower and amusement park atop Mt Igeldo overlooking San Sebastian's beach-fronted bay. We could see surfers on one side of the bay where the water is rougher and swimmers on the other side where the beach is protected by an enormous rock. It looked inviting, so after exploring, we headed down the mountain to Concha Beach and sunbathed and swam until hunger struck again.

Curious to sample Ester's recommendations, we wandered over to A Fuego Negro for dinner. It was four-deep with people, and when we finally got to the front we were surprised that there were no pintxo-filled platters atop the bar, only a blackboard with a handwritten menu, all in Spanish. But it was easy to guess the bar's specialties by looking around: bite-sized wagyu beef burgers on sesame buns; *pajaritos*, or tiny roasted birds; and calamari rings dyed black in their own ink and ringed around the handle of a fork stabbed into a chunk of wood. They looked like an edible ring toss game.»

Cook
it

SPAIN



MAKES 12

Spanish Ham on Tomato and Garlic Topped Bread

FOR A DRAMATIC presentation, use long wooden skewers.

Crusty Baguette 12 slices

Garlic 1 large clove, halved

Serrano Ham 6 slices, halved lengthwise

Ripe Tomatoes 4

Extra Virgin Olive Oil 2 Tbs, more for brushing

Salt and Freshly Ground Black Pepper to taste

Wooden Skewers 12


- USING** a box grater placed on a plate, grate the tomatoes leaving behind the skin. Drain the pulp in a sieve. Put the tomato pulp in a bowl and mix with 2 Tbs olive oil.
- BRUSH** the bread slices with more olive oil and toast or grill until golden. Rub one side of the bread with the cut side of the garlic clove. Before serving, spoon tomato on each slice, top with a piece of ham, skewer and sprinkle with black pepper and salt.



SANSEBASTIANURISMO

«We dashed next into Zeruko and ordered as much as was sensible — including several of our favourite: foie gras sandwiched between two slices of fried onions — and decided we'd better walk to our accommodations. Back at Hotel Astoria 7, a converted cinema with rooms themed around film stars and directors who have won awards at the town's famous film festival, we took in the street scene from their pintxo bar, sipping glasses of refreshing txakolí and red wines from the nearby Rioja region.

On our final morning we took a half-day cooking class at San Sebastian Foods and learned to make paella Valencia style—with chicken and rabbit. We made a few pintxos too, like a *brocheta de langostinos* and the classic *anchoas y guindillas* where we interwove the anchovies, peppers and olives on the skewer just so.

Before leaving for the airport we walked around the old town one last time past dozens of pintxo bars we hadn't tried and sampled a few of the culinary creations on their counters. Next time we'd definitely use a different strategy — stay longer so we could eat more. 

Click
it

A Fuego Negro
www.afuegonegro.com

Esther Vazquez Arribas
esther.v@apite.eu

Gandarias Jatetxea
www.restaurantegandarias.com/en

La Bretxa Market
www.cclabretxa.com

La Ceba
www.barlacepa.com/en

La Vigna Zeruko
www.barzeruko.com

San Sebastian Food
www.sansebastianfood.com

Hotel Astoria 7
www.astoria7hotel.com/en

LAURA SUTHERLAND is a travel writer based in Northern California. You can contact her at LauraSutherland.net and follow her @WanderandTaste

SANSEBASTIANURISMO



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD FROM TOP LEFT
The pinxtos scene spills onto the streets; Streets in San Sebastian's old quarter are lined with bars.



Cook

to

MAKES 4

Brocheta de Langostinos

A RECIPE FROM San Sebastian Foods, a cooking school and tour company focused on the region's culinary attractions.

- Fresh Prawns** 12, peeled
- Bacon** 4 slices, quartered
- White Onion** ½, diced
- Mild Green Chile Pepper** 1 small, diced
- Garlic** 2 cloves, crushed
- Extra Virgin Olive Oil** 4 tsp
- Lemon Juice or Vinegar** 1 tsp
- Wooden Skewers** 4 soaked in water

- 1 MAKE** the vinaigrette by combining the onion, chile pepper and garlic together in a bowl and stirring in the olive oil and vinegar.
- 2 ASSEMBLE** the prawns and bacon onto the skewers, alternating each item.
- 3 PLACE** the skewers in a hot, oiled pan for two minutes on each side until golden brown and cooked through.
- 4 PLATE** the skewers and top with the vinaigrette.

SPAIN