

Bilbao

Bilbao is a municipality and city in Spain, the capital of the province of Biscay in the autonomous community of the Basque Country. With a population of 353.187 as of 2010, it is the largest city of its autonomous community and the tenth largest in Spain. Bilbao lies within one of the most populous metropolitan areas in northern Spain, with roughly 1 million inhabitants. The Bilbao metropolitan area includes the Greater Bilbao (875.552) plus satellite towns, ranking the fifth largest in Spain.

Bilbao is situated in the north-central part of Spain, 14 kilometres (8.7 mi) South of the Bay of Biscay, where the estuary of Bilbao is formed. Its main urban core is surrounded by two small mountain ranges with an average elevation of 400 metres (1,300 ft).

Since its foundation in the early 14th century by Diego López V de Haro, head of the powerful Haro family, Bilbao was a commercial hub that enjoyed significant importance in the Green Spain, mainly thanks to its port activity based on the export of iron extracted from the Biscayan quarries. Throughout the nineteenth century and beginnings of the twentieth, Bilbao experienced heavy industrialization that made it the centre of the second industrialized region of Spain, behind Barcelona. This was joined by an extraordinary population explosion that prompted the annexation of several adjacent municipalities. Nowadays, Bilbao is a vigorous service city that is experiencing an ongoing social, economic, and aesthetic revitalization process, started by the symbolic Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, and continued by infrastructure investments, such as the airport terminal, the rapid transit system, the tram line, the Alhóndiga, or the currently under development Abandoibarra and Zorrozaurre renewal projects.

History

Remains of an ancient settlement were found on the top of mount Malmasín, dated around the 3rd or 2nd century BC. Burial sites were also found on mounts Avril and Artxanda, dated 6,000 years old. Some authors identify the old settlement of Bilbao as *Amanun Portus*, cited by Pliny the Elder, or with *Flaviobriga*, by Ptolemy. There are also ancient walls, discovered below the Church of San Antón, dated around the 11th century.

Bilbao was one of the first towns that were born with a great foundational impulse that happened in the fourteenth century, which originated approximately 70% of the Biscayan municipalities, among them Portugalete in 1323, Ondarroa in 1327, Lekeitio in 1335, and Mungia and Larrabetzu in 1376. The then lord of Biscay, Diego López V of Haro, founded Bilbao through a municipal charter dated in Valladolid on June 15, 1300 and confirmed by king Ferdinand IV of Castile in Burgos, on January 4, 1301. Diego López established the new town on the right bank of the Nervión river, on grounds of the *elizate* of Begoña and granted it the *fuero* of Logroño, a compilation of rights and privileges that would prove fundamental to its later development.

First engraving of the city, made by Franz Hohenberg in 1554 and first published in 1574. Many notable buildings can be seen, like the Santiago Cathedral, and the church of San Antón.

On 21 June 1511, queen Joanna of Castile ordered the creation of the Consulate of Bilbao. This would become the most influential institution of the city for centuries, and would claim jurisdiction over the estuary, improving its infrastructure. Under the Consulate's control, the port of Bilbao became one of the most important of Spain. This progress brought the first printing-press of the city in 1577, and was also here that in 1596, the first book in Basque was edited, entitled *Doctrina Christiana en Romance y Bascuence* by Dr. Betolaza.

In 1602 Bilbao was made capital city of Biscay, title previously held by Bermeo. The following centuries saw a constant increase of the city's wealth, especially after the discovery of extensive iron resources in the surrounding mounts. At the end of the 17th century, Bilbao overcame the economical crises that affected Spain thanks to the iron ore and the commerce with England and the Netherlands. During the 18th century the city continued to grow and almost exhausted its small space.

The Battle of Luchana.

The Basque Country was one of the main scenarios of the Carlist Wars, and the conquer of Bilbao, a liberal and economic bastion was of extreme importance for the Carlists. The city was besieged three times between 1835 and 1874, but all proved unsuccessful. One of the main battles of this time was the Battle of Luchana, when general Baldomero Espartero defeated the Carlists, freeing the city. Despite this, the city could prosper during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when it rose as the economical centre of the Basque Country. During this time, the first railway was built (in 1857), the Bank of Bilbao was founded (which later would become the BBVA), and the Bilbao Stock Exchange was created. Many industries flourished, such as Altos Hornos de Vizcaya in 1902. The city grew in area with the *Abando ensanche* and was modernized with new avenues and walkways, as well as with new modern buildings such as the City Hall, the Basurto Hospital and the Arriaga Theatre. The population increased dramatically, going from 11,000 in 1880 to 80,000 in 1900. Social movements also occurred, specially the Basque nationalism under Sabino Arana.

The Spanish Civil War started in Bilbao with small uprisings suppressed by the republican forces. On 31 August 1936, the city suffered the first bombing. On the next month, further bombings of German origin occurred. In May 1937, the Nationalist army besieged the city. The battle lasted until 19 June of that year, when Lieutenant Colonel Putz ordered to destroy all bridges over the estuary and the troops of the 5th Brigade took the city from mounts Malmasin, Pagasarri, and Arnotegi.

Bilbao in the 1950s.

With the war over, Bilbao returned to its industrial development, accompanied by a steady population grow. In the 1940s, the city was rebuilt, starting with the bridges. In 1948, the first commercial flight took off from the local airport. Over the next decade, there was a rebirth of the iron industry, which led to the rise of slums in the hillsides. In this chaotic environment, on 31 July 1959, the terrorist organization ETA was born in Bilbao, as a split of PNV.

After the fall of Francoist Spain and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, in a process known in Spain as the transition, Bilbao could be able to hold democratic elections once again. Against what happened in the republics, this time Basque nationalists rose to power. With the approval of the Statute of Autonomy of the Basque Country in 1979, Vitoria-Gasteiz was elected the seat of the government and therefore the *de facto* capital of the Basque Autonomous Community, despite Bilbao being larger and more powerful economically. In the 1980s, several factors such as terrorism, labor demands, and the arrival of cheap labor force from the abroad, led to a devastating industrial crisis.

Since the mid 1990s, Bilbao has been in a process of deindustrialization and transition to a service city, supported by investment in infrastructure and urban renewal, that started with the opening of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum (the so-called *Guggenheim effect*), and continued with the Euskalduna Conference Centre and Concert Hall, Santiago Calatrava's Zubizuri, the metro network by Norman Foster, the tram, the Iberdrola Tower and the Zorrozaurre development plan, among other. Many officially-supported associations, as Bilbao Metr poli-30 and Bilbao R a 2000 were created to monitor this projects.

Economy

Bilbao has been the economic center of the Basque Country since the times of the Consulate, mainly because of commerce in Castilian products on the city's port, but it was not until the 19th century when it experimented a big development, mainly based on the exploitation of the iron mines and siderurgy, which promoted the maritimal traffic, the portuary activity and the construction of ships. During those years also made their appearance *Banco de Bilbao* (Bank of Bilbao), founded on Bilbao in 1857 and *Banco de Vizcaya* (Bank of Biscay), which is established in 1901, also in Bilbao. Both entities merged in 1988 creating the BBV corporation (*Banco Bilbao Vizcaya*, Bank of Bilbao-Biscay). BBV merged with Argentaria in 1999, creating the current corporation, BBVA. The savings banks that were established locally, *Caja de Ahorros Municipal de Bilbao* (Municipal Savings Bank of Bilbao) in 1907, and *Caja de Ahorros Provincial de Vizcaya* (Provincial Savings Bank of Biscay) in 1921, would merge in 1990 and form Bilbao Bizkaia Kutxa (BBK). Along, the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Navigation of Bilbao and the Stock Exchange Market of Bilbao, founded in 1890.

After the dramatic industrial crisis of the 1980s, Bilbao was forced to rethink its very economic foundations. That is how it transformed in a successful service city. Bilbao is home to numerous companies of national and international relevance, including two among the 150 world's biggest, according to *Forbes* magazine: BBVA at #40 and Iberdrola at #122. The city's GDP per capita is of 26,225  in 2005, considerably above the country average of 22,152 . According to the official economic yearbook, the strongest sectors are construction, commerce, and tourism. The unemployment rate reached 14.4% in 2009, well below the national rate, of 18,01%. Nevertheless, it is the largest rate in the last ten years.

Port of Bilbao

The historical port was located in what today is an area called the Arenal, a few steps away the Casco Viejo, until the late 20th century. In 1902, an exterior port was built at

the mouth of the estuary, in the coastal municipality of Santurtzi. Further extensions led to a superport, that in the 1970s replaced the docks inside Bilbao, with the exception of those located in the neighbourhood of Zorrotza, still in activity.

As of 2010, the port of Bilbao is a first-class commercial port and is among the top five of Spain. Over 200 regular maritime services link Bilbao with 500 ports worldwide. It closed 2009 with cargo movements amounting to 31.6 million tonnes, being Russia, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries the main markets. In the first semester of 2008, it received over 67,000 passengers and 2,770 ships. This activity reported 419 million euros to the basque GDP and generates almost 10,000 jobs.

Mining and ironworks

Iron is the main and most abundant raw material found in Biscay, and its extraction is legally protected since 1526. Mining was the main primary activity in Bilbao and the minerals, of great quality, was exported to all over Europe. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century when ironworks industry was developed, benefited by the resources and the well communicated city. In the 20th century, both Spanish and European capitals imported around the 90% of the Biscayan iron. Although World War I made Bilbao one of the main ironworks powers, later crisis prompted a decline in the activity.

Tourism

The first notion of Bilbao as a touristic city came with the inauguration of the railway between Bilbao and the coastal neighbourhood of Las Arenas, in the municipality of Getxo in 1872. This way, the city became a modest beach destination.

However, the real touristic impulse would come with the inauguration of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in 1997, as shown in the increasing tourist arrivals since then, reaching over 615,000 visitors in the year 2009. A significant leap, considering that during 1995, Bilbao only received 25,000 tourists. Bilbao also hosts 31% of the total Basque Country visitors, being the top destination of this autonomous community, above San Sebastián. Most tourists come from within Spain, mainly from Madrid and Catalonia. International travellers come mostly from nearby France, but also from United Kingdom, Germany, and Italy. Tourism generates about 300 million euros for the Biscayan GDP. Bilbao is also an attractive destination for business tourism, mainly thanks to new venues such as the Euskalduna Conference Centre and Concert Hall, or the nearby Bilbao Exhibition Centre, in Barakaldo.

Climate

The proximity to the Bay of Biscay gives Bilbao an oceanic climate, with precipitation occurring throughout the year, without a well-defined dry summer season. This precipitation is abundant, and given the latitude and atmospheric dynamics, rainy days represent 45% and cloudy days 40% of the annual total. The most rainy season is between October and April, November being the wettest. Snow is not frequent in the city, while it is possible to see snow on the top of the surrounding mountains. Sleet is more frequent, about 10 days per year, mainly in the winter months.

Said proximity to the ocean also makes that the two most defined seasons (summer and winter) remain mild, with low intensity thermal oscillations. Average maximum temperatures varies between 25 °C (77.0 °F) and 26 °C (78.8 °F) in the summer months, while the average minimum in winter is between 6 °C (42.8 °F) and 7 °C (44.6 °F).

Extreme record observations in Bilbao are 42.2 °C (108.0 °F) maximum (on 13 August 2003) and −8.6 °C (16.5 °F) minimum (on 3 February 1963). The maximum precipitation in a day was 225.6 mm (9 in) in 26 August 1983 when severe flooding was originated by the Nervión river.

Climate data for Bilbao

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
Average high °C (°F)	13.2 (55.8)	14.5 (58.1)	15.9 (60.6)	16.8 (62.2)	20.1 (68.2)	22.6 (72.7)	25.2 (77.4)	25.5 (77.9)	24.4 (75.9)	20.8 (69.4)	16.4 (61.5)	14.0 (57.2)	19.1 (66.4)
Daily mean °C (°F)	9.0 (48.2)	9.8 (49.6)	10.8 (51.4)	11.9 (53.4)	15.1 (59.2)	17.6 (63.7)	20.0 (68.0)	20.3 (68.5)	18.8 (65.8)	15.8 (60.4)	12.0 (53.6)	10.0 (50.0)	14.3 (57.7)
Average low °C (°F)	4.7 (40.5)	5.1 (41.2)	5.7 (42.3)	7.1 (44.8)	10.1 (50.2)	12.6 (54.7)	14.8 (58.6)	15.2 (59.4)	13.2 (55.8)	10.8 (51.4)	7.6 (45.7)	6.0 (42.8)	9.4 (48.9)
Precipitation mm (inches)	126 (4.96)	97 (3.82)	94 (3.7)	124 (4.88)	90 (3.54)	64 (2.52)	62 (2.44)	82 (3.23)	74 (2.91)	121 (4.76)	141 (5.55)	116 (4.57)	1,195 (47.05)
Avg. precipitation days	13	11	11	13	12	8	7	8	9	11	12	12	128
Mean monthly sunshine hours	86	97	128	128	160	173	188	179	157	123	93	78	1,584

Source: [Agencia Estatal de Meteorología](#),^[57] [Aena](#)^[58]