



Juan Muga

My San Sebastián

Situated on Spain's northern coast, it's a gastronomic hotspot with plenty of high-end dining and drinking. A local resident from one of Rioja's top wineries guides us to some of his favourite venues

SAN SEBASTIAN HAS always been a central part of my life, as much at the professional level as the emotional. After several years living outside Spain, I decided to come back to the city of my birth – and I have my wife María to thank for that.

My family started as wine-growers in 1590, and my grandparents, Isaac Muga and Aurora Caño, founded Bodegas Muga at Haro in 1932. The tradition was continued by my father Manuel, and my uncle and aunt, Isacín and Isabelita. Now the third generation is at the heart of the business, with my brother Manuel and I in the commercial section, cousins Jorge and Isaac on the technical side, my brother Eduardo managing financial matters, and my sister Ana and cousin Eva in consultancy roles.

Haro is not too far from San Sebastián, only about 140km inland to the southwest. My grandparents took regular holidays in San Sebastián from the 1940s, and ever since our whole family has been closely linked to this beautiful city. I attended the Lycée Français and Marianistas school, and still have many great friends here.

With its sandy beaches facing out into the Bay of Biscay, San Sebastián is synonymous with good living. A city of just 170,000 people, not only does it boast more Michelin stars per resident than any other in the world, but it

Born in San Sebastián, Juan Muga is co-manager at Rioja producer Bodegas Muga, family-owned and run since 1932

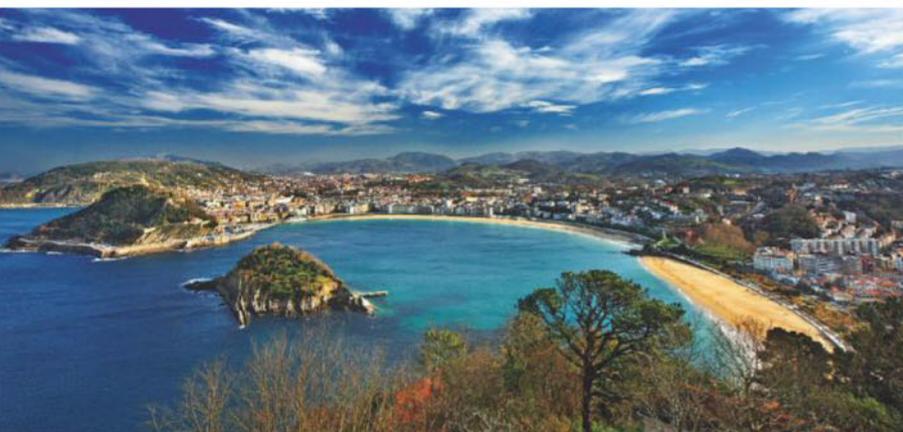
also has three restaurants with three stars each: Arzak*, Martín Berasategui in Lasarte-Oria (www.martinberasategui.com) and Pedro Subijana's Akelarre (www.akelarre.net). Added to that are other great restaurants such as that of our family friend Txomin Rekondo*, which has a great European wine list; or Portuetxe* and Txokolo (www.asadortxokolo.com), serving traditional dishes; or La Venta de Curro (+34 943 45 60 87) with its wonderful oxtail stew.

Nowadays, San Sebastián is a showcase for the image of the nation's products: it's the cradle of gastronomy in Spain. The Old Town area alone is famed for its pintxo bars, where you'll find both a huge selection of the local speciality – pintxos are tapas-like snacks served in typical Basque style, usually on a skewer or toothpick (a pintxo) – and also a wide choice of wines that offers much greater variety than is usually found in Spain. You have to experience the mushrooms or a txangurro pie at Ganbara*, grilled crab at Bare Bare (+34 943 42 07 03), the seafood at Ubarrechena, a T-bone steak at Bar Néstor* or Gandarias*, the variety of pintxos at Bar Martínez (www.barmartinezdonosti.com) and A Fuego Negro (www.afuegonegro.com), or finish with the legendary cheesecake at La Viña (www.lavinarestaurante.com). Beyond the Old Town, enjoy the star pintxo La Delicia at La Espiga*, or cross the street (San Martzial Kalea) to sample wild mussels at Sansse Bar (+34 943 43 49 22).

San Sebastián is one of the most elegant and cosmopolitan cities. Just something as simple as walking its three beaches – from Ondarreta up to Zurriola, taking in La Concha in between – is hard to describe in words. I love to ride my motorbike around downtown San Sebastián, and it is impossible not to feel the thrill of it every day. To fall in love with my beloved city is an easy thing to do. **D**

**For further details of venues marked with an asterisk, see opposite page*

Below: a panoramic view over Donostia-San Sebastián





1 Rekondo

I have wonderful childhood memories of the great friendship between my father Manolo Muga and Txomin Rekondo – a reference in Basque cooking who has one of the greatest wine cellars in the world. Try the rice with clams here. www.rekondo.com

5 Elcano, Getaria

This one-star Michelin restaurant – now run by Aitor, son of the late founder Pedro Arregui – has the best fish in the area (with its neighbour Kaia-Kaipe). The turbot reigns supreme. www.restauranteelcano.com



8 Bar Néstor

Arrive early to secure your place here, as it's always overbooked. Justly famed for its tomato salad and the txuleta – T-bone steak. www.barnestor.es

2 Arzak

Father and daughter Juan Mari and Elena set a worldwide standard. The inventive cooking and three Michelin stars speak for themselves. They have a spectacular cellar of wines too, managed by the great Mariano. www.arzak.es



4 Kaia-Kaipe, Getaria

Located close to the harbour and serving the best grilled turbot I have tasted anywhere (along with nearby Elcano). The dishes are complemented by an outstanding wine list. www.kaia-kaipe.com

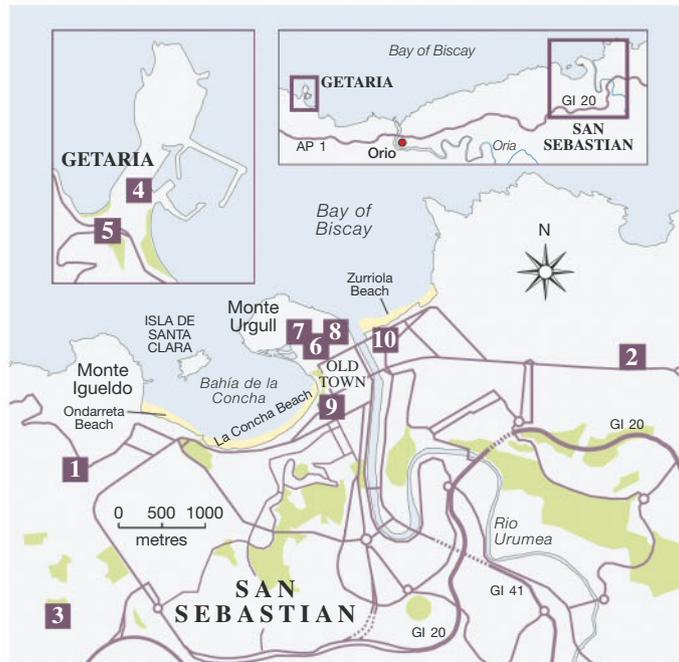
3 Portuetxe

A reliable choice on the western outskirts of the city. Known as one of the best steakhouses in the Basque Country, but also serves fine seafood. Don't miss the txuleta de vaca – aged T-bone steak. www.portuetxe.com



7 Gandarias

The best option in San Sebastián to enjoy a good lamb chop at any time of day, as the kitchen here stays open until midnight. www.restaurante-gandarias.com



6 Ganbara

The txangurro (crab) pie and the selection of mushrooms make this an essential call. www.ganbarajatetxea.com



9 La Espiga

One of the best bars in San Sebastián – don't miss the pintxo La Delicia (pictured left), which is made with anchovy, egg, onion and parsley. [+34 943 42 14 23](tel:+34943421423)



10 Bodega Donostiarra

Has a deservedly high reputation based on the sheer quality of its raw ingredients. The pintxo completo (baguette of tuna, anchovy and pickled green peppers) is a must, and the tortilla is also an excellent choice. www.bodegadonostiarra.com

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