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## FACT SHEET: RIOJA AND ITS ENVIRONS

*The entire region of Rioja has had a culture of wine, food and hospitality since the Middle Ages when monasteries offered all three things to pilgrims traveling the Camino de Santiago. Today, ancient monasteries, historical villages, rustic and innovative restaurants, a world-class wine museum and even futuristic architecture are nestled among perfectly manicured vineyards and wineries, or bodegas. Highlights include:*

### Vital Statistics

- **Location:** north-central Spain, about 100 miles south of the city of Bilbao.
- **Largest city:** Logroño (population 145,000)
- **Population:** 300,000
- **Per Capita Income:** Among the highest in Spain
- **Vineyard area:** 143,318 acres
- **Average annual wine production:** 300 million bottles
- **Getting there:**
  - by air: Logroño-Agoncillo airport is located 10 miles east of Logroño, with service to Madrid twice a day and Barcelona once daily.  
  
Bilbao airport is located 80 miles north of Logroño, with daily flights to major Spanish and European cities.
  - by train: from Madrid, Logroño is a three and a half hour train ride on the RENFE.
  - by car: Rioja is 215 miles north of Madrid and 300 miles west of Barcelona and easily reached by the European network of divided highways.

## History

- Rioja is considered the birthplace of the Castilian language-the first evidence of written Spanish appeared in the margin of an ecclesiastical text in Latin and referred to ‘a glass of good wine.’
- ‘Rioja’ first appeared in writing in 1092 as ‘Rioxia.’
- Rioja has been successively invaded and inhabited by pottery-making proto-Celtic tribes, Romans and Arabs.
- The Romans, who eventually followed the proto-Celtic tribes and planted the first vineyards in the region, referred to these tribes as *Vascones* (makers of vessels) from which the name of the Spanish Basque region País Vasco just north of La Rioja is believed to have derived.
- A strong monastic and Catholic influence is credited with the further development of both the Rioja region and its vineyards.
  - Since 950 AD, the Camino de Santiago, or Pilgrims’ Way, has been a route for religious pilgrims traveling from France to the tomb and church of Saint James the Greater in Galicia in northwestern Spain. Considered one of Europe’s most spiritual pilgrimage routes, a good part of the Camino de Santiago traverses the entire length of La Rioja, with Logroño historically serving as a major crossroads.
  - According to Rioja authority John Radford, food was never consumed without wine during the Middle Ages, and the monasteries, where the Pilgrims often stayed, were among the most enthusiastic producers of wine. Riojans themselves credit the Camino de Santiago as perhaps the most important factor in the development of the region’s tradition of hospitality and the international reputation of its wine.

## Historical Logroño

*The crossroads of the Camino de Santiago and the political capital of La Rioja and the hub of the local wine trade, Logroño features both ancient and modern attractions, including:*

- **The Rúa Vieja** – one of the oldest streets in Logroño, in the original part of the city known as the San Juan district that also includes **the Shrine of San Gregorio** and the **Pilgrims’ Hostel**;
- **The Imperial Church of Santa María de Palacio** – also in the San Juan district, this church was built on the site of an old royal palace during the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century; its spire, similar to an imperial crown, is known locally as “the needle” – one of the city’s major landmarks – the church itself contains a rich collection of carvings and a 16<sup>th</sup> century altar piece by Arnaud of Brussels;
- **The Church of Santiago** – With its image of Logroño’s patron saint, Our Lady of Hope, this Renaissance building in the San Juan district was – and remains – an important stop on the Camino de Santiago;
- **The Parliament of Rioja** – Formerly the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Convent of La Merced, it is now home to Rioja’s Parliament, which fits into the old nave and cloister;
- **The Museum of La Rioja** – Known as the Palace of Espartero, this baroque palace offers a superb permanent collection as well as archaeological, artistic and ethnographic exhibits;

- **Plaza de Abastos** – Awarded the first “Foods from Spain” prize in 1994, this is a classic old world food market offering Rioja’s best produce and meats;
- **Portales** – A 15<sup>th</sup> century street featuring a variety of shops making it one of the city’s commercial centers;
- **Plaza del Mercado** – A 16<sup>th</sup> century square which has been the site for fairs and markets;
- **The Co-Cathedral of Santa María La Redonda** – The unusual designation of “co-cathedral” refers to its relationship to the Cathedrals of Calahorra and Santo Domingo de la Calzada; the oven-shaped front façade is flanked by two spires – a landmark referred to locally as “the twins” – while the inside of the church contains works attributed to Michelangelo and Gregorio Fernández, among others.

### Modern Logroño

*Because of the outgoing and hospitable nature of Rioja’s people and the climate, Logroño encourages outdoor socializing, including:*

- **Calle Laurel** – This narrow cobblestone street in the old San Juan section is lined with small tapas bars, each of which serves a single specialty accompanied by a glass of Rioja;
- **The Municipal Golf Course** – An 18-hole links course, which is considered one of northern Spain’s best.

*In addition to its excellent restaurants, bars and cafés, Logroño also enjoys to distinction of having been named one of Spain’s Leading Shopping City in 1998.*

### Beyond Logroño

- **Haro** – the traditional wine capital of the region, Haro is home to most of the wineries founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century after French winery owners, whose vineyards had been devastated by *phylloxera*, came to the region in search of quality wines. Haro boasts more bars per capita than any town in Europe.
- **Calahorra** – founded by the Romans as Calagurris, this city in eastern Rioja is known as the center of a thriving fruit and vegetable producing region.
- **Laguardia** – this walled village perched on a hilltop in Rioja Alavesa houses two churches, one of which, Santa María de Palacio, has one of the best preserved gothic doorways in Spain. Laguardia hosts a lively bar, hotel and restaurant scene.
- **The Convent of Santa María la Real, Nájera** – burial place of many local and regional noblemen
- **The Suso and Yuso Monasteries, San Millán de la Cogolla** – the first written evidence of the Spanish language was found here.
- **Dinastía Vivanco Museum of Wine Culture, Briones** – This outstanding new museum features the history of wine culture, wine archives, a comprehensive collection of ancient winemaking artifacts, wine-related art that range from ancient Greek pottery to masters such as Miró and Picasso, and the largest display of corkscrews – 3,000 from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present – anywhere in the world.

- **Briones** – a picturesque village high above an oxbow in the Ebro river featuring a number of palaces with heraldic crests.
- **Rioja Alavesa** is famous for its prehistoric and pre-Roman ruins, including dolmens and the remains of a Celtic village at La Hoya.
- **Sierra de Cameros and Sierra de la Demanda** – in these picturesque and unspoiled mountains hunting, fishing, hiking, and mountain biking are popular activities enjoyed by Spaniards and international visitors alike.
- **Valdezcaray** – A ski resort near the 11<sup>th</sup>-century town of Santo Domingo de la Calzada.
- **Avant-garde Architecture** – the Rioja region is emerging as a capital of trend-setting architecture by innovative international architects like Canadian Frank Gehry, Spain’s Santiago Calatrava and English-Iraqi Zaha Hadid.
- **Restaurants** – Food and wine remain a constant theme when traveling throughout Rioja, a landlocked area where fresh produce and meats such as lamb and game are the basis for some of Spain’s best, most wine friendly cuisine. Restaurants run the gamut from the rustic to the world class, most notably El Portal de Echaurren – a “destination” Michelin-rated restaurant for Spanish and international gourmets – and its more traditional sister restaurant Echaurren in the picturesque town of Ezcaray.
- **Lodging** – Rioja’s tradition of hospitality provides that the region’s charming villages and towns offer a mix of quaint inns and modern luxury hotels, including lodgings in: Laguardia, Haro, Calahorra, Cenicero, Nájera, Santo Domingo de la Calzada, Briones, and Viana. Special mention is deserved by Hospedería Señorío de Casalarreina, Castillo del Collado and Posada Mayor de Migueloa.

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