

Post



Scott Farnsworth

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Three squares in one day - May 26, 2025

Updated: May 30, 2025

SUMMARY

A fun morning and early afternoon of eating and urban hiking. At 1:00 we meet up with Anouk as planned, the actual meeting time being the only thing we know about what we'll be doing with her. She takes us to the market where we purchase some supplies and get some education about things Spanish. Afterwards, we're off to a nondescript doorway and down into the building's basement where we learn that this is one of the many Secret, Invitation Only clubs in town. We eat our market purchases plus cider and some other goodies, thank Anouk and waddle out. A few hours later we begin our Secret Foodie Tour with

guide Javier. This involves a lot more pintxos eating and wine drinking but also the history of San Sebastián and some Spanish political scandals. Quite fun and filling! - Karen

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DETAIL

We wake to another beautiful day with blue skies. We've either been pretty lucky with the weather this trip or spring in Europe is delightful. We head back to where we had breakfast yesterday but don't eat. We've eaten enough of late. I'm pleased to find that my smart phone remembers how to connect to the restaurant's WiFi, woo hoo! Karen and Liz realize they're matching black and white outfits, albeit with a switch in 'color' between the pants and shirt.

As has become our, er my, obsession, the tide is out. Tidal rivers are interesting. The river's water is rushing towards the sea, the ocean waves (held back by the gravity of the sun and moon) gently lapping, as best they can, at the very point where the ocean and river meet.

Again we start our day with a long walk, but this time we go up one side of the tidal river and then across to go re-visit the Good Shepherd Cathedral. Eventually we head back through 'new' town to Old Town, to Cafe Sport, for a "light lunch". The place is too crowded (inaccessible) during normal business hours, but they're open from like eleven a.m. to one a.m., so we're able to split food there (between four of us). Sliders and fries and fried foie gras (nothing but healthy food for us). I have a beer so I can "check in" on my Tapp'd app (essentially Facebook but for beer drinkers).

We do a bit more walking in the shady streets of old town before we head to our 1 o'clock meeting back at the children's playground with Anouk. First stop, the big city market. It should be above ground, in a beautiful stone building, but that's being refurbished. Right now the whole thing is below ground, underfoot, and totally out of sight. No wonder we missed it. We've walked on top of it many times.

Down the long escalator we buy cheese and olives and Jamón Ibérico. Anouk directs the purchases and we pay, as it should be. She explains why we'd choose this versus that, where it all comes from, what the different options are, etc. It's fun. We also do a quick look towards where the fish mongers normally sell from, but it's quiet as today's Monday.

We inspect the old Auction Clock (like in Amsterdam for their reverse auctions but for fish rather than flowers) and then push on towards the underground secret society kitchen where she (a Belgian and a female, touch pearls!) is a member. We meet a few other people there, finishing up. We take the rustic wooden stools off the solid, rustic wooden table and install ourselves. We sit all on one side so we can all see the action in the kitchen.

Anouk explains how the secret society works. It's not so much secret as private and by invitation only. Early on it was all men, where they could cook, drink, talk, and smoke, all without the interference of women. It's all on the honor system. There's airplane bottles of hard liquor and a fridge full of wine and cider. There's other foods in a pantry and others in a second refrigerator. Anouk selects a bottle of cider and opens it. We note down (on a pre-printed piece of paper) everything we consume. We also document who was here and when. All this information, plus the necessary cash to pay for it, goes into a used quart ziplock baggie and is dropped into a lockbox on the wall.

We unpack our food from the shopping trip and lay it out for eating. From the stove nearby another lady serves up some yummy small chorizo sausages and bacalao (rehydrated salted cod) with a sauce and anchovies. She gives Anouk a peck on the cheek, waves goodbye to us and is gone.

We eat (and eat and eat), and drink and talk. The cider is poured from the bottle using a special cork from an unadvisable height. This is to aerate the cider to improve the flavor and add some bubbles. After sliders and foie gras an hour earlier we're crazy to be stuffing more high fat food into any available nook or cranny.

At the end of the meal we settle up, leave the dishes by the sink, put the table and chairs back as we found them, and express our gratitude to Anouk. Such an unexpected and special treat.

We waddle back towards our hotel and find, as expected, it's now high tide. The river is full, like a cake that's fully risen. We cross the bridge and inspect another beach, this one facing the Atlantic (i.e. not part of a bay). Being so exposed there are big (ok, bigger) waves and oodles of surfers. We compare the word 'surfers' to the word 'fishermen' who aren't called 'catcher-men', they're mostly fishing, not catching. Similarly the surfers are mostly watching and only occasionally catching that one elusive good wave.

After some hang (read “digest”) time in our room we head back out for more calorie ingestion. First stop is the nicest hotel in town, The Maria Christina. We’ll later hear about the annual film festival here, like in Cannes or Venice, but one tier down. When it’s going on, actors and actresses stay here, paying 1,000 euros a night and more for their rooms. We get cocktails and pay as much for one round as we’ve been paying for a big, nice dinner. Oh, well.

We’re also trying out some new toys that Liz purchased for “the boys”. They’re tiny rubber chickens that we shoot at each other off our fingers. They seem strangely out of place in the hallowed halls of this fancy hotel.

Time for more food, sure! Why not a full, multi-hour foodie tour!? What bad planning is this? We meet Javier at The Good Shepherd Cathedral and start our voyage through the foods of Spain and the Basque region we’re in. We learn a ton about this history and culture. He’s knowledgeable, eloquent, funny, and irreverent. He initially doesn’t know if he can speak freely about the American President but soon he’s clued in and doesn’t hold back.

We're nervous that we're going to be trying the same things we've been eating at the same places, but we don't. We don't go near the old town but eat where the locals eat, which is wonderful. We learn how to pick a good pintxos bar and what to order. In theory you can't just get a glass of wine, cider or beer and hang out on the street. The neighbors don't like the noise. The law says anyone doing that must have a table and chair. The laws of business say that doing that wouldn't let the bars and restaurants stay open, so everyone looks the other way.

We do have some of the same things as before, but many others. One is a secret until we've all eaten all of it. The name is in Spanish but translates to Tripe, Lips, and Feet (veal intestine, veal lips, and pied de cochon - pig's feet). We're all surprised but it was actually good. It's Monday and so many places are closed. As such Javier has to change his game plan. What that means for us is four stops instead of the usual five. At the last place we're relieved that the end is in sight. Not so fast there, porky pig. At our last stop we have three big glasses of different wines each and many plates of food. Groan. We say our thanks, tip Javier and he's gone. We walk home late at night with still some evening twilight in the sky. Off to bed for eight hours of digestion.

Photos



Liz and Karen, dressed the same but different.



Breakfast tried to nab us but we were able to resist.



Saw and loved (but didn't buy) these umbrellas.



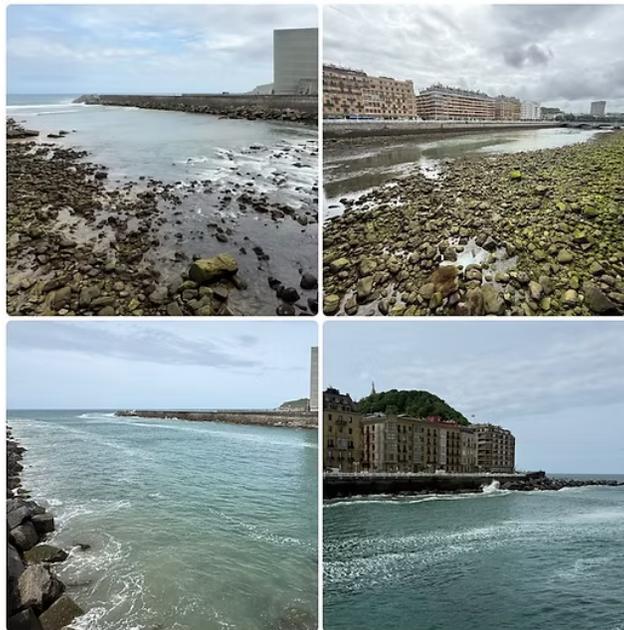
Noon snack: sliders and fried foie gras.
Good but not low fat.



Loved these kids. They're all holding on to a wide strap with handles for each with teachers 1 and 2 holding either end.



Liz gets into the 'pictures in a mirror' craze.



Low and high tide.



Anouk taking us to their secret (society) lair.



Downstairs in the secret society. Not such a secret now.



The secret stoves. Well appointed!



So much good food. Learning more about food of the region.



Surfers and Nancy headed to take a closer look.



Drinks at the Maria Christina. They alone cost as much as most of our dinners.



Javier, our foodie tour guide. Very knowledgeable and entertaining.



On our foodie tour. So much good food.
Too much.



Two last dishes. Beef cheeks and
mushrooms stuffed with foie gras. Argh,
we do not need this at 10 pm (but we eat
it).

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