

Donostia San Sebastián

Donostia-San Sebastian is renowned worldwide for its very special charm. It's a different type of city: strikingly beautiful, packed with contrasts, both traditional yet firmly embracing the future – while always maintaining that cosmopolitan ambiance that has characterized it through the annals of history. Due to its proximity to France and to having been the European nobility's preferred holiday destination down the years, Gipuzkoa certainly exudes an international air.

It is a city where visitors feel at home as soon as they arrive; where they feel privileged to have had the smarts to pick this magical place as their holiday destination. On the seaside, yet close to the mountains, it combines, world-class culture, exceptional cuisine and breathtaking architecture to offer a truly unique experience for all. Welcome!

Eneko Goia
Alcalde de Donostia / San Sebastián



From The *Belle Époque* To Present Times

The city's tourism industry took off in 1885, with the death of King Alfonso XII, when his widow, Queen Regent Maria Cristina chose San Sebastian as her summer holiday destination. In doing so, she transferred the entire court to the city, and took up residence at Miramar Palace. Two years later, in 1887, a casino was built with the intention of entertaining the royal holiday-goers. The plan was a success: the number of summer visitors skyrocketed.

In an effort to consolidate itself as an international summer holiday destination, San Sebastian set out on implementing many new initiatives over the turn of the century. These included creating parks and recreation areas (Ulia, Igeldo, Ondarreta beach, purchasing the Urgull fortress and more), and expanding construction works to the surrounding area during the 20s, with the golf course, the Lasarte car racing circuit and the Zubieta racecourse.

By the time World War I broke out, San Sebastian had become the most cosmopolitan city in Europe. All the prominent figures of those times were ushered through the world-famous San Sebastian Casino: Mata Hari, Leon

In the foreground, La Concha beach at the height of summer; behind it, the building that houses Donostia / San Sebastián city council, the former casino.

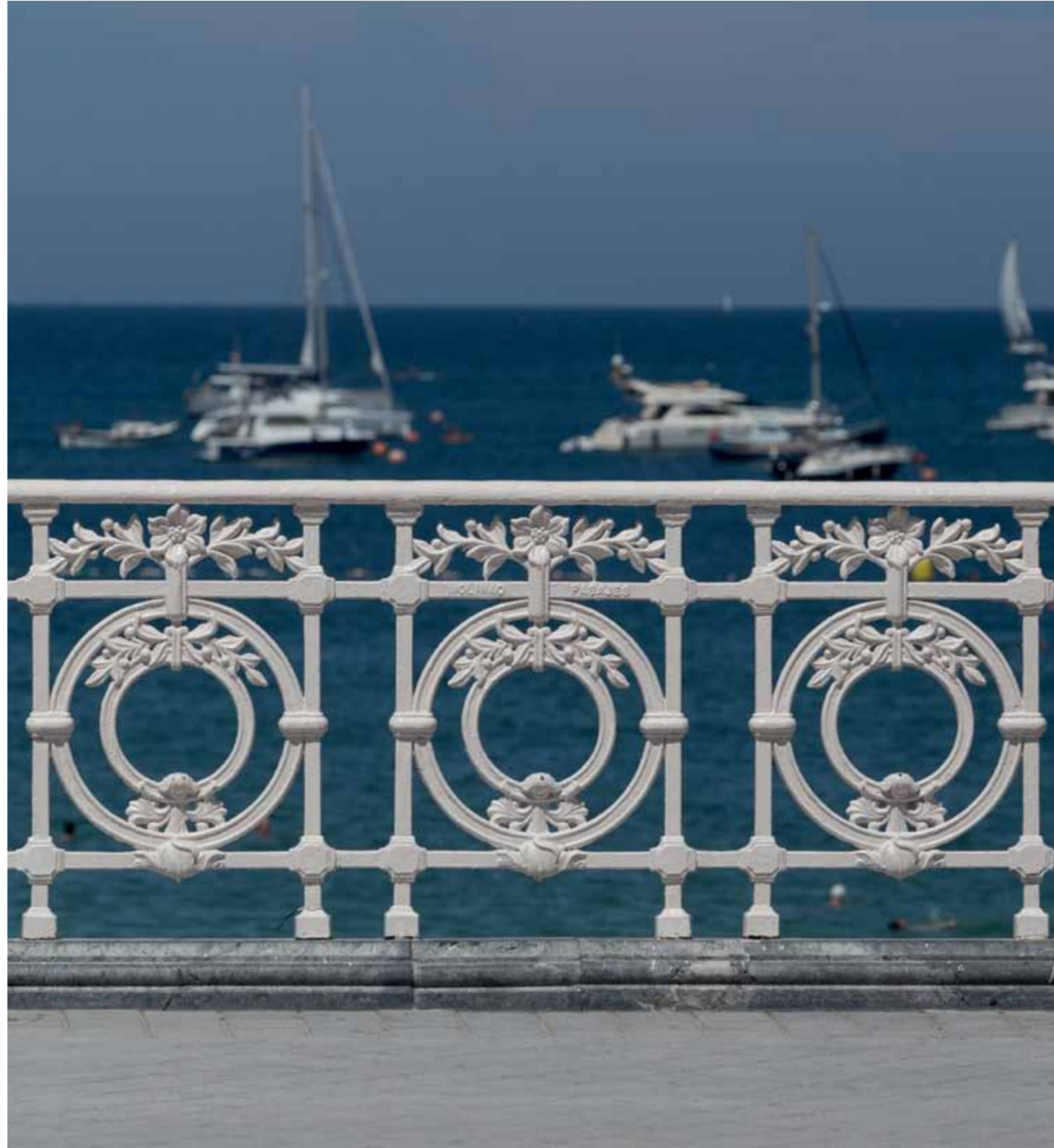
Trotsky, Maurice Ravel, Count Romanones and even Pastora Imperio. San Sebastian blossomed during the *belle époque*, and the French operetta company, the Russian ballet, opera singers and many other famous artists were regular headliners in the city.

Nevertheless, gambling was forbidden in 1925 and the casino was forced to shut down its gambling tables – leading to a steady decline of the city’s tourism sector. From that point on, locals demonstrated that they do know how to adapt to the passing of the times: they created a brand new range of entertainment for its visitors that included festivals, cultural events and much more. They also focused their efforts on architecture and construction, which has helped the capital of Gipuzkoa maintain its positioning as a stand-out destination for international tourists to this very day.

La Concha Bay, situated between the hills of Urgull and Igeldo, is without a doubt the best-known view of the city, and certainly the most popular destination for visitors - the classic snapshot of Donostia-San Sebastian.

Visitors will easily recognize the famous balustrade as they stroll down the promenade, the great promotional landmark of the city. Miniature replicas

The railings at La Concha, a local icon, created by the San Sebastián municipal architect Juan Rafael Alday.



of its rounded lamps are handed out as awards at the city’s famous Film Festival. Strollers will come across two ramps, easily visible next to the “clocks”, which lead visitors towards **La Concha beach**. Other sights include La Perla: an entertainment and leisure area where a host of thalassotherapy centres, sporting facilities, as well as dining and lodging options, can be found, the **Pico del Loro** (or “Parrot’s Beak”) where the Miramar palace stands and which separates La Concha and Ondarreta beaches, and *El Peine del Viento*, the Wind Comb designed by the famous sculptor from the city, Eduardo Chillida.

Right in the middle of the bay lies the renowned **island of Santa Clara**, a local trademark. A small boat regularly makes the short journey between the harbour and the island. Highlights of a visit include the lighthouse, the footpaths dotted with tables to have a picnic and the terrace of the island’s bar, offering incredible views of Donostia-San Sebastian! The island’s jetty is locally known as the city’s “fourth beach”.

In La Concha Bay there are two beaches, La Concha and Ondarreta, separated by the Pico del Loro. La Concha runs a kilometre and a half from San Sebastian town hall to the Pico del Loro, and is considered one of the top city beaches in Europe. Perched on the Pico del Loro is the **Miramar palace**, built as a holiday residence for the royal family, who decided to spend summer in San