











Museums and Fortified Houses Route

Aiara/Ayala – Artziniega

Euskadi, auzolana, bien común

EUSKO JAURLARITZA
GOBIERNO VASCO

AIARALDEA
HELMUGA PAISAIA DA
EL DESTINO ES EL PAISAJE

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Preferential Action Areas with funding from the Basque Government

The territories of Aiaraldea and Alto Nervión uniquely combine historical richness and natural beauty.

This route invites you to discover the area's cultural legacy, exploring its majestic fortified houses, authentic architectural gems that tell stories of power and defence in the Middle Ages, and a network of museums that preserve and explain traditions, art and unique flavours. From the everyday life of illustrious families to the development of artistic styles and the essence of the local liqueur, every stop is a window on the past to connect it with the present. Set out on this journey and let yourself be amazed by the heritage that makes the Alto Nervión area unique!

info+




Artziniega
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1 Atelier-Museum Santxotena







Barrataguren neighbourhood –ARTZINIEGA–
www.santxotena.org



Guided tours | Accessible | Parking

The Atelier-Museum Santxotena not only displays the work of the sculptor Santxotena (a disciple of Oteiza) but shows us the studio where the artist created his work.
This studio-museum is a modern art space, but at the same time rooted in the archaic. As well as Santxotena's pieces, it has temporary areas and exhibitions, creating a different experience every time you visit.



The sculptor Xabier Santxotena himself welcomes you and explains the whole process of creating a sculpture. During the visit the question always comes up: Who are the Agotes (or Cagots)? Because Xabier is an Agote.

2 Mendieta Tower

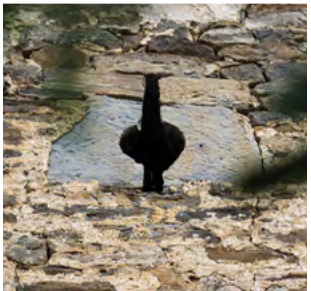


The Mendieta Tower is a fascinating construction that mixes features of a defensive tower with those of a residential palace. On the one hand, it has features like arrow slits and casemates that suggest a military function, though in this case they are more a status symbol than actually defensive. On the other, it has large lintelled windows and a coat of arms that give it a more elegant, residential air. The real star of the building is the crest of the Mendieta family, dating from the 16th century, which stands out as testimony to the history and nobility of the family.

It is not until the 17th century that we have documentary evidence of its owners, Don Felipe de Doyega and Doña Casilda de Berganza, who in 1624 mortgaged the house and tower in which they lived. In 1654 most of the building burned down.

Mendieta entity –ARTZINIEGA–





Get there on foot | Paths | Museums | Children's play area | Barbacoas

Artziniega Religious Art Museum 3

The Museum of Sacred Art of Nuestra Señora de la Encina houses valuable religious pieces of considerable artistic interest, both in the museum and in the sanctuary church. Its principal treasures include the majestic Flemish gothic-style altar screen, as well as the 16th-century paintings of the Last Judgement and those that decorate the vault.







2 Arteko Aldapa Street –ARTZINIEGA–

P Parking

Church









In the museum is a polychrome wood carving of the Virgin with the baby Jesus, one of the oldest figures in the Basque Country.

De la Cámara Orive-Salazar Tower 4

The De la Cámara Tower was built in the late 16th century by Don Lope de la Cámara and Doña Ana de Oribe Salazar, who also had the local church built. In 1723, the *Actas de Ayala* record that Don José Melchor de Molinillo Velasco y la Cámara, resident in Artziniega, was the owner of the building and of an adjacent house that was divided between Ayala and Artziniega, with a tenant in each part. This was because Sojoguti, the locality where it stands, was a "split" locality: one part belonged to the Ayala lands and the other to the town of Artziniega, which meant the parish was split between two different authorities. The church, close to the house, was commissioned by the same family that built the fortress, adding a touch of history and tradition to this unusual place.



Soxoguti entity —ARTZINIEGA—



The disappearance of some of the stones, the splitting of others and even the cracks in the walls were caused by a fire that totally destroyed the interior of the building in the second half of the 19th century. The missing stones in the entrance are, however, due to theft.

Get there on foot

Church

5 Molinillo de Velasco Fortified Tower

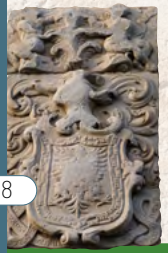


This fortified house was built in 1592 by Don Diego Ortiz de Molinillo Velasco and Doña María Tomasina de la Cámara, supposedly after their fortified house in Sojoguti burned down. During the 1st Carlist War it was used by both liberals and carlists, and in 1836 it was fortified on the orders of the carlist commander José María de Aguirre.

On the second storey of the building there is a balcony with a lintel bearing an inscription which means roughly "Neither say what you know nor do what everyone else does." There is a pair of crests on either side of the lintel: the one on the left shows an eagle with its wings spread and the arms of the Velasco family, crowned with a helm and flanked by lions. The one on the right also has an eagle beneath a helm, in this case accompanied by two cyclops figures. These features not only decorate the balcony, but also give clues to the history and lineage of those who lived in this place.



Dorreko Aldapa street —ARTZINIEGA—



Get there on foot | Centre | Bars | Frontón court | Former bowling alley | Museums

Bengoa Fortified Tower 6

The Bengoa Tower, located in Artekale, is one of the most ancient buildings in the old town, dating from the 15th century. While it conserves several features typical of mediaeval fortified town houses, some experts believe that its main role was not so much as a fortress and more that of a grand residential house. The first mention of the house is from 1640, when Don Martín de Bengoa, the owner, mentioned it in his will, assigning it to the foundation of a chapel in the Augustinian convent.



Artekale street –ARTZINIEGA–



While today it is divided into residential flats, it conserves a rather special 15th-century family crest. Instead of the usual design, the crest has two wolves and two crossed keys, making it unique. Also, the windows in the house have arches decorated with fine details including carved lines, giving an idea of how old it is and how well it has been kept up over time. It is as if the house were telling us about its history when we just look at these details!



Get there on foot | Centre | Bar | Frontón court | Former bowling alley | Museums

7 Artziniega ethnographic museum









12 Arteko Aldapa street –ARTZINIEGA–
www.artziniegamuseoa.eus

Guided tours | Accessible | Parking

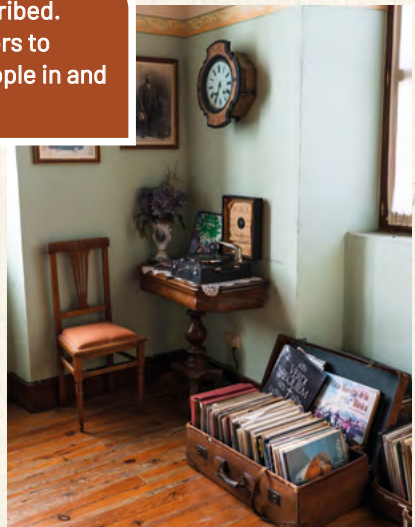


The Artziniega ethnographic museum focuses on traditional rural life in Álava province, with an emphasis on agriculture, livestock and everyday life. It displays objects and tools from the past that reflect the customs, work and way of life of the local inhabitants. The museum not only preserves the material heritage of Artziniega, but also offers a rich educational experience concerning the traditions and ways of life in the rural past of the Basque Country.



All the rooms can be used for the themed purposes described. It has a country kitchen and an old school, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the past and experience how people in and around Artziniega lived in days gone by.





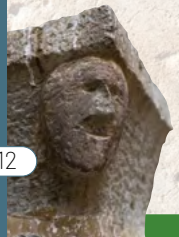


8 Monumental Site of Kexaa-Quejana

Check calendar of visits



Kexaa entity —AIARA—





Parking

Guided tours

The location of the Ayala family seat in Quejana was not chosen at random. It stands at a strategic point, at the meeting of old roads linking Castile to the Las Encartaciones area in Bizkaia province and to the Cantabrian coast. Documents confirm that Quejana already existed in the year 1095, when it is mentioned in an agreement between the people of Ayala and the bishop of Nájera, Pedro Nazar.
In 1378, Fernán Pérez de Ayala founded the convent of San Juan for the nuns of the Dominican order, and in 1399 his son, the Chancellor, founded the chapel of Our Lady of the Hair, making a generous donation to the nuns on his release from prison following the defeat at Aljubarrota in 1385. In 1566 the convent was destroyed by a fire, though fortunately the other buildings on the site survived.





Since it was acquired in 2023 the Monumental Site of Kexaa-Quejana has belonged to the Álava provincial authority. It is a "Qualified Cultural Asset", a valuable example of civil and aristocratic heritage in its design and state of conservation.





The chapel is the burial place of the Chancellor and his family, and was designed to include a range of artworks (architecture, sculpture, painting and precious metalwork) with a single idea behind them: its founders' desire for immortality.
The tomb of the Chancellor and Leonor de Guzmán was carved in alabaster by the Ferrand González studio in Toledo. The dead are idealised and formally stylised. He is equipped as a warrior and she is dressed in fine robes and jewellery. Both are accompanied by dogs, symbols of conjugal fidelity.
The plinth has medallions with portraits of saints and prophets.
The original altar screen dates from 1396, and shows scenes from the life of Jesus and the Virgin Mary, as well as portraying three generations: the Chancellor and his wife, their children and their grandchildren. An inscription and family crests surround the whole.
It is currently conserved in the Chicago Art Institute. A replica made in 1959 is displayed in the chapel.

9 Murga Tower

Visits by arrangement only



The Murga Tower was built in the mid-14th century, to control the territory and its resources. This is reflected in its design, which had a more strategic purpose. When the palace was built in the 16th century, the tower was not joined to it as they usually are, but both buildings stood separately, being the medieval tower surrounded by the 16th century palace and completing the current image of the building. Even so, it remained largely unchanged on the outside, maintaining the essence of its original structure.

Among other owners, this tower belonged to the famous Basque explorer José María de Murga, better known as El Moro Vizcaíno, who was also Deputy General of Biscay.

Murga entity —AIARA/AYALA—





Private parking

Guided tours