

Getting To St Jean Pied de Port

The final routes to St Jean Pied de Port resolve down to four. From the South, Spain, by road from Roncevalles (Ronceveau). From the North and East by road along the D933 from Junction 7 of the A64 (The East - West French toll road which traverses the foothills of the Pyrenees from Bayonne to Perpignan via Toulouse) . From the North and West by road along the D932/918 from Bayonne, Anglet, Biarritz (BAB) and by rail from Bayonne St Esprit. The rest of this page examines the various routes from Northern Europe and from Spain that will get you to one of those points. I'm also working on the basis that many of you won't have a car available, although if more than one person is travelling a one way hire maybe your cheapest option.

From Spain

The whole question of getting to St Jean Pied de Port from Spain is difficult, the problem is historic. After the Napoleonic War the Spanish had very little liking for communicating with their neighbours to the North, in fact they went out of their way to make it difficult by building their railways to a different gauge and not building many roads. Franco made it worse because he hated the Basque people, starved the whole region of development and it was only after his death that transport links began to be built. Most of them were roads, the railways are still a work in progress.

Enough history. The best and cheapest way to get to St Jean Pied de Port is by train from St Esprit Station in Bayonne (See Timetable) . If you are flying in via the UK or Northern Europe that's not too difficult because there are flights into Biarritz and the STAB no 6 bus goes direct to the station for under €2. It's when you come in via Madrid that your problems start. A recent change is that EasyJet have now started a service from Madrid to Toulouse at reasonable prices and from there it is easy to get to Bayonne St Esprit. You can get a train from Madrid Atocha to Irun or Pamplona. The service to Irun takes over seven hours and it's almost impossible to make the journey in one day because the connections don't happen. If you choose to go via Irun/Hendaye then you will need to take a train from there to Bayonne St Esprit which is only a half hour journey. You can get the train into Pamplona, then the bus to Roncevalles and then the taxi to St Jean Pied de Port but again it's a long day. Or you can fly to Pamplona, get the number 21 bus into the town centre, then the bus to Roncevalles. To get from Roncevalles (Ronceveau in French) you need to go to the Express Burricot website where you can email

Caroline or just mail her using this address:- apcaroline@hotmail.com. She speaks some English or use Google translate, or you can call her on 0033(0)5 59 37 36 28 (that is also a fax line or on a mobile 0033(0)6 61 96 04 76. Caroline is now offering transport from Pamplona Airport direct to St Jean Pied de Port and, once again, it is best if you contact her and make arrangements. Two other alternatives come up.

The first is to book flights into San Sebastian (Hondarriba) from Madrid, if you do this when you make your booking into Madrid and specify a 'round trip' you can get these flights for as low as \$50 each way. The second suggestion is to hire a car and drive from Madrid to the same airport San Sebastian (Hondarriba). The Spanish car hire companies of National/Atesa do one way hire with no pick up charge for leaving the car at Hondarriba and this is probably the cheapest route if there is more than one person making the trip. Once at Hondarriba Airport get a taxi to the SNCF station at Hendaye, it's no more than three miles, just across the border in France, from there it's a 25 minute train journey to Bayonne and the train up the valley to St Jean Pied de Port.

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I flew into Madrid, then took the Continental Autobus to San Sebastian and stayed the night. In the morning, at approx. 9:30, there is a bus to Bayonne which drops you in a nice park. It's a 20 minute walk over the bridge to the train station with plenty of time before the 13:00 train leaves for St. Jean. San Sebastian is a superb town and well worth stopping in for the night. If you are trying to research bus travel try Movelia . It's difficult to find a site that combines bus and rail travel in Spain because the rail system Renfe is state owned and all the many bus companies are independently owned, there may not be a single site that integrates both.

From Northern Europe.

There are three airports with good transport links from each one to Bayonne and the train up the valley of the Nive to St Jean Pied de Port. They are:-

Biarritz.

This is the favourite because as stated earlier in this article you can get a STAB bus straight to the Station in St Esprit Bayonne. If your bus connection isn't good you can get a taxi which is still reasonably priced.

Pau

To the East of St Jean Pied de Port but still in Department 64 (Pyrenees Atlantique) and served by flights from the UK, Holland, Belgium and France. On point to beware, unusually for France this airport has no bus service into the town and you have to take a taxi. The train connection is direct to Bayonne St Esprit and takes about 1 hour 20 minutes.

Toulouse

Again to the East of St Jean Pied de Port. This is a very busy airport Toulouse being one of the largest cities in France, and home to Airbus. There are flights from Germany, UK, Holland, France, Ireland, Spain (see note) Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, Portugal, Greece, and North Africa. The Spain Madrid flight is of interest because EasyJet have now started a service from there to Toulouse and prices are reasonable. There is a regular bus service (Navette) to the town centre and to the station and a service taking 3 and a half hours from there to Bayonne St Esprit.

There are many linked train services from all over Northern Europe to Bayonne St Esprit and it's probably best to research using one of two sites DB Bahn the website of the German national rail system and Euro Rail . After that I'll leave it to you.

Finally please note that at the time of writing the information given was correct but that flights times and destinations change, as do train and bus times and destinations. If you find a better way or an alteration in any of this information on how to get to St Jean Pied de Port please mail me and I will update this article.

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