



Culture of a Kingdom

From Ancient Music and Classical Theatre Festivals; Spain's great "Running of the Bulls" and the San Fermin Festival; Santiago de Compostela—the route of one of Europe's most famous medieval pilgrimages; Hemingway's paradise and the stage for several of his novels; a location between Spain's Rioja and France's Bordeaux and sharing culture from both places; with Medieval villages, castles, fortresses, monasteries and museums.

This is cultural Navarra. This is the Navarra you need to know.

Pamplona's San Fermin Festival – "running with the bulls"

Navarra's capital, Pamplona, is famous for its festival of San Fermin and the running of the bulls through its ancient historic center. In this week-long festival, the city comes alive with hundreds of thousands of people, all celebrating a history and shared experience that goes back more than a thousand years. And while the early morning running of the bulls is the signature event of the San Fermin Festival, it lasts only a few minutes. Far more time is spent in parks, plazas, and streets of Pamplona, singing the traditional songs of Navarra, dancing to the sounds of the traditional bands, and drinking the rich wines of the region. It is a true social expression of a local culture.

Music and Theatre Festivals

The Tierra Estella region is filled with beautifully preserved fortresses, castles and noble houses from the Middle Ages spanning out from the culture-rich town of Estella. Each year an ancient music festival in Estella pays homage to Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque music.

It starts to get a little warmer in the Ribera Alta region. Dotted with cozy villages, castles and monasteries, this region lies in central Navarra and extends south towards Ribera Baja. With streets laid out in Medieval Times and a grand Royal Palace, the town of Olite is home to the Festival of Classical Theatre celebrated each year in open-air stages with an awe-inspiring castle as its backdrop. The whole town has been declared a national monument. Olite is also home to Spain's most advanced viticultural and enological-based research center.

Special treat: The King of Navarra, Carlos the Noble, had his summer home in Olite and visitors can slumber in his castle—filled with historic artifacts, stained glass, and gothic arcades—for the price of a motel in the United States!

Santiago de Compostela

Stunning monasteries and cathedrals line the Santiago de Compostela or "Saint James Way" – one of Europe's most famous medieval pilgrimage routes. The region of Valdizarbe is the ancient center on this route and many of the monasteries of the region were built by Monks who discovered the beauty of Navarra while making their pilgrimage. Especially during the Crusades, Navarra and its capital, Pamplona, became an important gathering point on this pilgrimage route.

The steady traffic of religious visitors from all over Europe gave Navarra exposure to many different cultures and traditions, including contact with winemakers in the major wine regions of France. And in turn, twelfth century guidebooks recommend the wine of Navarra to pilgrims making this momentous journey.

During their dedicated travel, the pilgrims were treated to a welcoming sight near the Monastery in Irache. Behind the Castillo de Irache winery there were two outdoor spickets for thirsty travelers -- one for water and one for wine.

Hemingway's Navarra

Hemingway became fascinated with Pamplona's San Fermin festival and its running of the bulls during his first visit to Navarra in 1923, revisiting several times. The author is said to have not only watched, but in several hair raising events, even participated in runs. His intrigue spread rapidly through English-speaking countries as readers of his novel, The Sun Also Rises, experienced the festival and the bull running through the eyes of Hemingway's characters.

Hemingway also loved to fish, and in the same novel, readers can follow the footsteps of the author as his characters depart the San Fermin festival to fly fish in the Pyrenean valleys—in Navarra's Irati River.

In addition, the setting of Hemingway's novel, For Whom the Bells Toll, is in northern Navarra, in the mountainous Pyrenees.

In Literature and Song

During Charlemagne's rule of the Kingdom, the legendary knight Roland fought his epic battle that has been immortalized by the *Chanson de Roland* (Song of Roland), one of the oldest known works of French literature. Historical accounts of the battle were told as early as 840, with a song bearing similarities to Roland's story being sung to Norman warriors in 1066. The poem is based on the Battle of Roncevaux Pass in 778. A commander in Charlemagne's army, Roland, and his Frankish army were attacked and killed by a guerilla band of Basques. This epic poem was enormously popular in the 12th through the 14th centuries, and it is the most famous example of a flourishing literary form of the time—called *chanson de geste*-- which celebrated heroic deeds.

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