



The Guggenheim Museum of Bilbao

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The three of us, my wife, me and a friend, had travelled by bus from Barcelona to Bilbao. The journey took 7 hours and 15 minutes but was very pleasant. The luxurious coach was very comfortable and it left Barcelona punctually and arrived at Bilbao Bus station punctually at 0700 hours. We got to the city centre by Metro. After depositing our luggage in a hotel in Casco Viejo, the old quarters, we had a quick breakfast and boarded a tram for the Guggenheim Museum beside the Nervion River.

Bilbao is situated on the north coast of Spain facing the Bay of Biscay. This 707 year-old city is still in the process of reinventing itself after the collapse of its traditional industrial base in the 1980's and 1990's. Many steel mills and shipyards have been transformed into conference centres and luxury flats. The

world famous Guggenheim Museum, opened in 1997, is one of the major projects to give Bilbao a new lease of life. Its opening has sparked a tourism boom.

We were attracted to Bilbao by the Guggenheim Museum, not so much by its exhibits but rather by its unique architecture. Designed by Frank O. Gehry, the same architect who also designed the Walt Disney Centre of Los Angeles, the museum is a gargantuan sculpture whose sensual titanium curves glimmer like running water in the sun. The museum has been developed in cooperation with the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, and provides a European showcase for the Foundation's unparalleled collection of 20th-century art. The permanent collection, which rotates between Bilbao and the Foundation's other museums in New York and Venice, includes works by all

the major modern and contemporary figures, including Picasso, Cezanne and Chagall, just to name a few.

Admission to the museum was 10 euros each, after a 25% discount off the regular rate (given because some of the exhibition rooms on the 3rd floor were closed for changing exhibits) and adding 1 euro for visiting the 2 Cubes next to the museum. The exterior of the Cubes is covered with special prism panels that reflect and refract light, giving them a rainbow spectrum of colours varying with the angle of the sun and the position of the viewer. Their Japanese designer, Hiro Kamagata, calls this "Quantum Field - X³".

On the following day, we visited Guggenheim Museum again, at night. With the lights shining on them, the Cubes were brilliantly multi-coloured and mesmerising. ■

