



# eUSTHOMASIAN

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After over a a year of preparation, the USTMAAA Cruise of a Lifetime XI finally got underway. Coming from five different areas of embarkation in the United States, the party of 95 pilgrims boarded their planes and flew across the Atlantic to meet in the Basque region of Northern Spain in the city of Bilbao. There was not much



Bilbao Airport

time wasted as the group almost immediately headed for the Guggenheim Museum, a modern architectural wonder of the world. The fatigue that was caused by the long journey and lack of sleep

was wiped out by the awesome view of the beautiful



Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Basque Region, Northern Spain



building from all angles. Even a small mishap did not dampen the enthusiasm and sense of camaraderie that the newly formed tour group enjoyed.



The two buses full of now exhausted travelers wound through the scenic mountains of the Basque region as they crossed the French border north of the Pyrenees mountain that formed a natural

border between France and Spain. A short trek south to the foot of the mountains brought the now excited group

to the City of Lourdes by nightfall, perhaps too late and too dark to enjoy the scenery but rejuvenated by the thought of warm food and even a bottle of red wine served at each table.

The task of orienting everybody of what is to come tomorrow followed. Badges and Cruise pamphlets were distributed and various housekeeping chores were attended to. Then it was time to bring the baggages to the rooms using small and relatively slow elevators that took forever to get done.

Just when one would think everybody would go straight to bed, eight indefatigable souls wondered out to see the tail end of the evening processsion at the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes. There were not as many durable people thereafter so that queuing to get close to the grotto was much easier and faster. That was quite a treat, at the end of two long days. I wonder what tomorrow brings?

