Aste Nagusia, a Basque word which means Long Week or Big Week, is the main festival of Bilbo, and lasts for nine days.

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Toro de Fuego (The Bull of Fire) is one of the most popular events during the festival. Many years ago, firecrackers or other flammable materials were tied to the horns of a live bull that was tied to a post. After the fire was lighted, the rope was cut and the animal was allowed to run loose among the crowd. In this photograph, firecrackers were attached to a wooden frame resembling a bull. A man, who remained underneath it, then proceeded to run back and forth charging the crowd that was surrounding the bull, and the crowd responded by charging the bull as well. During this week-long festival, the wooden bull was lighted two to three times each day. Chaos reigned, and the crowd continued to come back for more.

Upper right:
Aste Nagusia also includes sports. In this picture we can see the traditional Basque game which goes by the name of jai alai. Today this sport is played in several different countries, including the USA, Brazil, Philippines, Indonesia, and Italy.

Lower right:
During the festival, photographs of incarcerated Basque political prisoners were placed on banners and hung throughout the city. Below these photos is the sentence “Euskal Herria Askatasuna Behar Du” which means “The Basque Country needs Freedom.” These kinds of political demonstrations were present throughout Bilbo during the entire week in 2008. However, the Spanish Government forbade these displays during the 2009 celebration.

On the bottom:
Marijai has been the main symbol of the week-long festival since 1978 when it was created by the Basque artist Man Puri Herrera, and can be seen everywhere on the streets and on posters during the festival. On the last day of the festival of Aste Nagusia, Marijai is taken on a boat to the Nervión River, or as the Basques prefer to call it, the ibai, and is set on fire. This event marks the end of the celebration. In 1997, Kepa Junkera, a renowned Basque musician, created Badartor Marijai (Marijai is Arriving), a song that came to be the unofficial anthem of the celebration. Click on the speaker to listen to this song.