

All
about

Costa de la Luz

Issue 243

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July 6th - July 19th 2016



Rob Horgan takes a ride through the sunbleached 'fresh and natural' towns of the bright and breezy Costa de la Luz



Into the light



TROTting: Taking a ride along La Mangueta beach with Trafalgar lighthouse (also left) in the distance

AS the sun hitched a ride on my back and beads of sweat cascaded down my face, I began to think that my plan to conquer Europe's tallest sand mountain wasn't such a good idea after all. With *Eye of the Tiger* playing in my head and the image of Sylvester Stallone racing up the 72 stone steps outside Philadelphia's Museum of Art, I trudged wearily up the daunting dune at the edge of Bolonia's stunning beach. But in true Rocky fashion I conquered

my personal 'Everest' and made it to the top, lifting both arms into the air with a huge sigh of relief and wishing I'd brought an EU flag to plant in the sandy pinnacle. (Yup, I was Remain). From the top of the mound, the views over the dazzling white dunes fringing the crystal clear waters of Bolonia bay are well worth the effort. A popular watersports area (like almost everywhere along this coast), Bolonia has long been overshadowed by its 'hipper' neighbours at Tarifa, El Palmar and Conil.

However, the tide appears to be turning, with many 'domingueros' (local Sunday beach-goers kitted out with gazebo and picnic basket) banking on Bolonia to escape the crowds. Eddie Grannel, an Irish waiter who has worked here for the last five years, tells me the town has gone 'from Tarifa's shadows to people's first choice'.

"The transformation in the last five years has really been amazing," he says. "The village itself hasn't changed that much but its popularity has gone through the roof." He adds: "When I first started working here I was one of three waiters. Now, in the height of summer, there are up to ten of us rushed off of our feet."

The impressive ruins of Baelo Claudia are literally a Roman stone's throw from the beach and well worth a visit.

Free to EU citizens, which led to an awkward encounter with the receptionist as I handed over my driving licence, the day after Brexit. But after a lot of 'umming' and 'ahhing', I made my case that I am still an EU citizen (for now) and was allowed through.

One of the best-preserved Roman towns in Andalusia, Baelo Claudia boasts an impressive temple, forum, basilica, and fish-salting factory from which it once derived its wealth.



HISTORIC: Roman remains at Baelo Claudia include incredible statues

Fish still has a big part to play on the Costa de la Luz, with tuna tapas festivals held at the big four towns which still catch tuna the old Phoenician way, using trap nets out at sea: Tarifa, Conil, Barbate and the town that kick-started the whole gastro fest scene, Zahara de los Atunes (the clue is in the name).

These bleached-driftwood fishing towns give the Costa de la Luz a fresh-and-natural feel compared to the more contrived pleasures of the Costa del Sol, but you don't have to look far for something more sophisticated: take Vejer, which has styled itself as one of the best-kept hilltop *pueblos blancos*; and boho chic Tarifa, the epitome of cool, rammed with kooky cafes, funky surf shops and boutiques full of wind-bronzed thrill-seekers.

And with the ratio of dreadheads to skinheads set at approximately one to one,

my measly man-bun made me feel rather generic for once.

Flip-flops and swim shorts are the established dress code in a town where the easy-living, good-time vibe is infectious.

Tarifa was the first point of the Moorish invasion in 711 AD. But Sancho IV El Bravo, whose statue still keeps vigil below the battlements of Guzmán Castle, wouldn't recognise the town he reconquered in 1292.

Behind him, another fast ferry to Morocco is departing the port to join the daily traffic jam in the Straits, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

The 14-kilometre crossing to Tangier takes 35 minutes so you can do it easily in a day, and it's well worth it for the ultimate out-of-north-Africa experience.

If Tarifa is laid-back-cool by day, the pace heats

Continues Page 20

The **BEST** cocktails in Tarifa

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BEACH BEAUTIES



STUNNING: Drinks on the beach in Tarifa and (right) mojito heaven

From Page 19

up when the sun goes down as street performers, crowds of hipsters and beer-guzzling surfers turn out to strut their stuff around the vibrant bars and clubs of Calle Cervantes.

But while tourists continue to gravitate to Spain's windsurfing capital, the resident kitesurfing cognoscenti have their own secret places.

As local kitesurfer Carmen Gonzalez tells me, 'There is more to life than Tarifa'.

"Tarifa is the place to be in May, June and September when the weather is good, the winds are great and the tourists come at the weekends," she says.

"But come July and August, the beaches are rammed, the sea is full of part-time surfers and

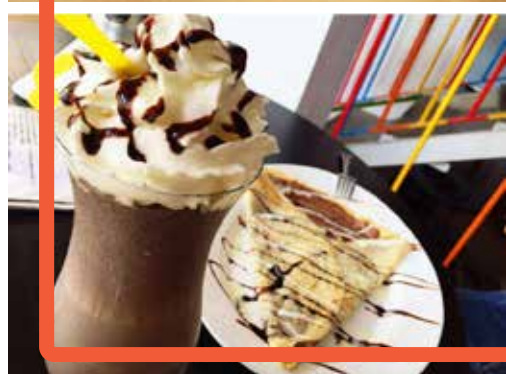
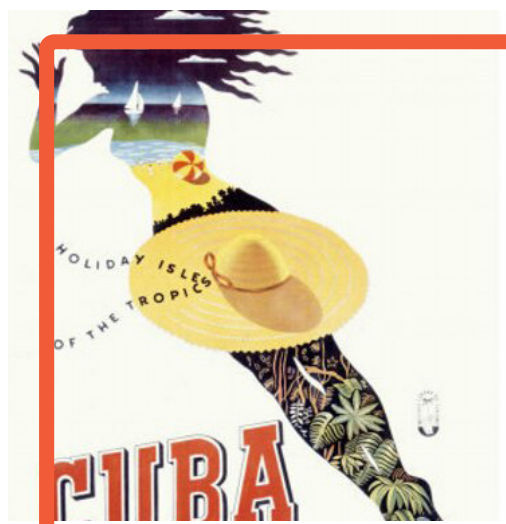
the town is packed.

"While this is great for business and great for night-life, as every bar is packed with friendly people, it is not so great for me. I want my space to kitesurf so, when it gets busy, I go down to Bolonia to hang out.

She adds: "The entire coast all the way up to Cadiz is stunning, with white sand, blue skies and happy people. You really are spoilt for choice."

I knew exactly what Carmen meant after my weekend mini-marathon along the 'coast of light', which took me all the way to Conil's Playa de los Bateles, the longest beach of six. It means Beach of Boats, not 'Battles' as it sounds although if you want warfare head back into the whitewashed streets for a

The coast all the way up to Cadiz is stunning, with white sand, blue skies and happy people



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BEAUTY: Bolonia beach and (inset) homemade gazpacho delivered to you on the beach

glimpse into the violent history which blighted the Costa de la Luz for centuries. The Torre de Guzman – a short, squat tower built by the town's official founder, Guzman El Bueno – offers my first clue to the coast's



swashbuckling military past. Founded by the Phoenicians, it was later inhabited by the Romans, Vandals, Visigoths and Moors, along with the Brits who smashed the French and Spanish Navies at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805.

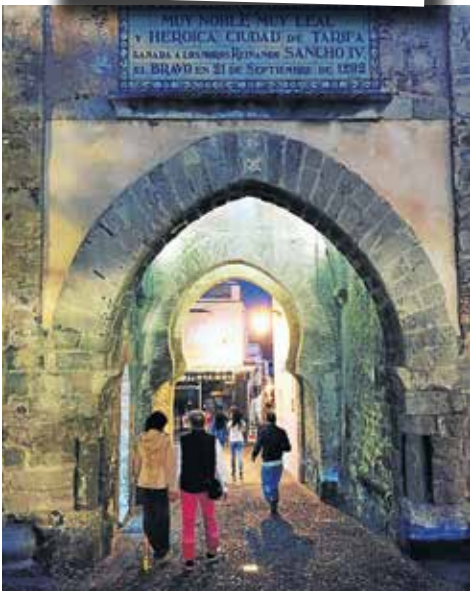
But today, all I have to subdue is my fluttering beach towel along this windy coast, in order to sit down and take in the view.

It's easy to see the attractions of Spain's 'wild west'. In both directions, as far as the eye can see, bronzed bodies are self-basting on the beach. A lot of them are campers who pitch up at El Palmar, attracted by the soft sandy beaches which stretch west to Torre del Puerco's panoramic lookout tower and east to Zahora, curving around the Atlantic at Cape Trafalgar lighthouse where Lord Nelson won the battle but lost his life aboard HMS Victory.

It is actually possible to walk the entire stretch of unbroken sand between Conil and Canos de Meca. But keep an eye out for dress code signs if you're an unrepentant 'textile' – the derogatory term naturists use for people (like me) who wear shorts. The numerous hidden coves certainly reveal more than you bargained for! 'Canos', as it's abbreviated, has its own nudist

beach at the foot of a steep cliff. And while this former hippie colony is, unfortunately, no longer teeming with women wearing flowers in their hair, it still has that 'edgy' laid-back surf dude vibe. The 15-minute drive from here through the Natural Park of La Brena to Barbate provides a spectacular change of scenery. The road slices through dense pine forest and motorists are treated to an orchestral concert of bird song emanating from the broccoli-shaped trees.

Barbate is a major fishing port, and more industrial than its neighbours. An arty tuna sculpture on the long wide promenade, and a tuna museum, are other testimonies to its key industry. Along with sun worshippers and watersports enthusiasts, the main beach is also a favourite arena for handball. Sitting down among the masses to watch four games being played simultaneously, it was way more stimulating viewing than watching England's performance at the Euros! As the sun began its downward descent to the horizon there was one more port of call to make: Zahara de los Atunes, famous for tuna. This quaint little town - the most upmarket on the coast - is filled with tapas bars and restaurants, each with their own artistic take on how to serve its namesake fish.



It only seemed right to try some so I ordered up a slab of juicy red tuna steak and ate it watching moonlight on water - a fitting finale to a weekend discovering the peachy beaches of the Costa de la Luz.

MURAL: Locals are asking if Banksy could have arrived in Tarifa over the last few weeks, after this ingenious painting appeared on a beachside wall



Photos by Jon Clarke



VEJER-Y NICE: Vejer (above) while Tarifa's bustling streets (top)



el placer de día



Bon appetit!

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All about Costa de la Luz



Where the wind blows

Sixteen years after her first taste of Tarifa, Iona Napier (above) returns to the windy capital of Europe for another taste of bohemian bliss

ALWAYS wear my billowing maternity-style dress in steaming summer temperatures, smugly satisfied that I'm 'cooler' than everyone else.

But, be warned! This style of outfit should come with an embarrassment warning on the Costa de la Luz, where I spent a day holding down the hem, while loosely resembling an inverted lampshade.

Welcome to Tarifa, wind capital of Europe where the naughty levante breezes can play havoc with a girl's dignity.

Luckily, no-one gives two hoots, as they get on with their day, shopping, surfing, kitesurfing and cultivating 'the look' of studied cool.

While the wind might be Beaufort Scale-busting blustery, the natives are as serene as a summer snooze, and the tourists (most of them) radiate a distinct sense of style.

The beach strip is a fashion catwalk for the Hawaii 5.0 set with their Billabong T-shirts and Rip Curl surfboard shorts. Watch them flexing their bronzed six-packs as they lug their unruly kite sails into the water to turn tricks above the waves like a circus act. It's the best free show in town!

But there's also a



CASTAWAYS: Bonfire on beach while (bottom left) the fort and (below) town centre

healthy population of everyday Spanish folk who keep Tarifa authentic and are happy to share it with the adrenaline junkies.

I meet some of the old guard as I scale a hilly Moorish passage in the old town and happen upon four cosy Spanish ladies gathered in a front room, which stinks of acetone.

I'm impertinent enough to stare and

Loli - lady of the house-cum-salon

- invites me in, plonks me down

and embarks on an unsolicited

(but much-appreciated) mani-

cure for the princely sum of

€4.

"It's just a chiringuito, really," she laughs, flummoxed when I ask the name of her homely salon, before baptising it on the spot: 'Salon de Marilu', after her daughter.

"We've lived here all our lives," explains Lola, "If I won the lottery maybe I'd get a place in Malaga for the winter, but summer here is magical."

Chattering with these women in their unpretentious hide-away gives me a behind-

closed-doors glimpse of the old Andalusia in a town that has seen huge changes over the last decade.

I too have a long affinity to the town, as it happens.

My first memory of Tarifa came in a series of aircon-deprived road trip holidays with my family, where we conquered a huge chunk of Spain's must-do

list. On one trip, aged nine and

deeply ensconced in *Harry*

Potter and the Prisoner of

Azkaban, I was oblivious to

the wondrous views as we

passed from Malaga into

Cadiz and dipped down to-

wards Tarifa's endless white

sand beaches, where the

Atlantic kisses the Mediter-

anean. I recall being bundled

out of the car on an overcast day - with

similar wardrobe malfunctions - to a greying, tired town swarming with 'looky-looky men'.

And things certainly looked up when I coerced my mother into buying me a turquoise handbag from a street stall, although I don't remember much else.

Fast-forward 15 years and, although the wind continues to buffet the town's ramparts, the sun has shone favourably on Tarifa.

Los Lances and Valdevaqueros beaches have become vast watersports amphitheatres and

you don't have to pay for tickets to watch the aerial acrobatics of colourful kitesurfers whizzing above the waves and windsurfers slicing through them.

Other high-adrenaline sports like scuba diving, quad biking and hang gliding, and the more gentle pursuit of whale watching, have ushered in a prosperous new age, creating a polyglot society.

I meet blues band 'Us': Bob from Los Angeles, Paco from Tarifa and Alberto from Buenos Aires serenade tourists in the bunting-festooned Plaza del Oviedo at dusk.

A wild night ensues, and I struggle to understand how such a chilled, sleepy-by-day town becomes such a pumping metropolis after dark in high season.

Next morning, bleary-eyed but upbeat at how many people you can meet here in just a few hours, I burn up the coast towards the capital of Cadiz through a kaleidoscope of colour.

Pale gold sands, turquoise waters, rolling green hills, neon lights and spinning white turbines flick through my peripheral vision at speed until I arrive at - officially - Europe's 10th best beach.

If Cadiz capital is intent on being the jewel in the Costa de la Luz crown, Tarifa is her jingly-jangly silver anklet - less precious, but unequivocally more rewarding in high winds. And talking of windswept, don't forget your Bridget Jones knickers if you're planning to wear a dress...



Advertorial



Learning the lingo

HAVING been in business for 27 years, it can rightfully claim to be one of the oldest language schools on the Costa de la Luz.

And that is no surprise, with Hispalense school, in Tarifa, having a successful knack of bringing pupils into contact with the real world.

Boasting eight highly qualified native teachers with Spanish as the focus (German, English and French is also available) pupils are encouraged to get out onto the beaches and into the sea in the afternoons after a morning in the classroom.

"The students love it because you can

be so active in Tarifa," says boss Gaspar Cuesta, who joined the school 25 years ago and has been at the helm for nine of those.

"From windsurfing and kitesurfing to wine-tasting and tapas tours, there's so much to do and we help to organise it all. And we make people feel at home with customized classes and lots of accommodation possibilities if they need it."

Class sizes are small with a maximum of eight students with a mix of adults and younger students from people studying for a few days to months at a time - everyone is welcome!

Visit www.hispalense.com

Between the sea and the sierra, the former outpost of Vejer de la Frontera lies waiting to be discovered

THE name says it all. Vejer de la Frontera, a hilltop fortress on the Costa de la Luz, was once a last frontier of Christian Spain.

The scene of invasions and bloodthirsty battles for hundreds of years, this much sought after strategic outpost changed hands numerous times, finally becoming part of King Ferdinand's Spain in 1248.

Later, in 1805, the sound of heavy gunfire could be heard again, as Admiral Nelson destroyed the unified French and Spanish Armada at nearby Cape Trafalgar.

The Civil War years were violent too, with calls for land reform from residents met by General Franco, sending 24 soldiers to occupy the town, killing anyone who stepped out of line.

Strategic

Nowadays, however, the only thing likely to knock you over are the stunning views from this delightful white village, exposed to the gusting Atlantic from its hilltop perch between the sea and the sierra.

An unmissable component of any visit to the Costa de la Luz, the medieval quarter oozes history, its castle walls intertwined with whitewashed homes discovered along twisty-turny, cobbled streets.

The Moorish castle - or *Alcazaba* - hides down a side-street lined with eucalyptus trees.



BRICKS AND MORTAR: Fortress and white gem streets while (bottom) bustling town square



Photos by Jon Clarke

HILLTOP HIDEAWAY

The jasmine-scented courtyard houses the den of the local scout group, who will happily show tourists around the ramparts of what is otherwise mostly residential now.

The streets all tend towards the town's central square, the highly picturesque Plaza de los Pescaitos with its exquisite, bright fountain decorated with 19th-century Triana tiles from Sevilla.

The plaza takes its name from the little goldfish - *pescaitos* - which used to swim in the fountain when it was built in the 1920s.

The surrounding streets and alley-



ways are a hive of activity, belying their sleepy appearance. There are hand-craft shops, art galleries and flamenco haunts, as well as cafes, bars and restaurants serving up the best produce from the turbulent Atlantic and encircling farmland and forests.

In particular look out for Pajarra, a shop that for over a decade has provided visitors to the Costa de la Luz with an amazing range of stylish, original, hand-printed t-shirts... right in front of your nose.

Above all, make sure to head up to the turreted walls, from where views spread out across cultivated fields to the moun-

tains and the 5,000 hectare Las Brenas Natural Park.

It's easy to see why this immaculate village was voted second Most Beautiful in Spain on *Trip Advisor*.

There is certainly something special about Vejer, which appears to lord it over its neighbouring fishing villages from its exalted hilltop eyrie, its white cubist houses tumbling down the hillside like tossed dice.

And it's a safe bet, if you're new to the Costa de la Luz, that you'll be leaving nothing to chance if you take a trip to the former final frontier.

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All about Costa de la Luz



Best the

MY bean bag offers a front row seat to one of the best shows in Andalucía. Parked above one of Spain's best beaches, I'm sat mesmerized by a profusion of colourful kites, as they bob up and down, almost in tune to the strains of reggae on the sound system. Welcome to Valdevaqueros, a beach bar/restaurant/all-round-hip-lifestyle venue, where anybody who wants to understand the unique Tarifa vibe needs to visit. With a green mountain backdrop and an azure sea in front, you can happily spend the day hanging out, enjoying the buzz, while grazing on fabulous food and superb smoothies. And, for those who feel active, the place also

serves as the home of ion's watersports centre and the launch pad of half of the world's best kitesurfers.

"While it used to be just for sporty types, the majority of people come here now because it is super-hip," explains Chris Ziaja, the boss of ion, formerly the Mistral centre.

"It's Mojitos from 3pm but it creates a great atmosphere and it is surprising how many people end up renting out paddle surfs or taking a kite-surf lesson."

It is certainly the spot to take up this fun, high-adrenaline sport, with current world champion Liam Whaley learning and basing himself here when not touring the world competing.

I recently gave it a go (See *Stung into action* on Page 26) and while the 40-knot winds wreaked havoc with my classes I still had a fantastic time.

But equally, it is a great place to just take to the waters, have lunch or an afternoon drink at the achingly hip Tumbao beach bar.

Here, boss David Alvarez Trevino, a butcher by trade, works hard to run a happy ship, by bringing in a mix of good DJs and flamenco groups, and serving up

the best burger takes to even The main res mo smoothie 'magic maca' Opened by D serving up ju decade.

"They are mos of minerals a which are gre Next door is v very epitome The story be three decade

Whaley made from his hom A keen winds on the windie sion to launch

It was 1984 (an Australian him open the Named 100% tel) - the sha clothes from l label Graffiti I

"It was a low well it was go "What we did fantastic, tota

The ions in the fire!



IT is easily the most professional kite and windsurf centre on the Costa de la Luz.

Its 16 teachers speak over half a dozen languages and have decades of experience of teaching kitesurfing and windsurfing between them.



Previously the Mistral centre, German brand ion took over the running last year and it has gone from strength to strength. "We have got the best products in the market and can offer very competitive prices," explains boss Chris Ziaja. The company also offers SUP classes and group outings, both in Tarifa and in Sotogrande, as well as day trips and longer excursions by yacht.

www.ionclubtarifa.com



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SURFER'S PARADISE: Kites and beach bums share the beach



Making more waves

The Whaley story is not over yet with the next generation already making waves.

Peter's son Liam Whaley is the world kitesurf champion and is currently competing in this year's competition.

Kiting since the age of nine, he lives and breathes the sport.

"There is never a shortage of wind here," he tells the *Olive Press*. "And it is one of the most fun places to live."

Travelling the world, he has his own sponsorship with Cabrinha and is closely linked to ion, which rents boards and kites at Valdevaqueros.



KITE KING: Jon Clarke meets Liam Whaley

st show on e coast

Valdevaqueros is the coolest place to hang in Tarifa, writes Jon Clarke

ers from his burger truck, which he ts around the country.

restaurant is also good, while the iZu-bar has some great drinks such as , which is delicious.

Daniela Di Placido, she has been vices around the world for nearly a

stly dairy free and I have a big range and vitamins I add to the drinks, at on the stomach."

the funky clothes shop Graffiti, the of cool.

ehind Valdevaqueros began over s ago when British adventurer Peter e an unscheduled stop off en route e in Ibiza to a holiday in Morocco.

surfer he unwittingly found himself st beach in Europe and had the vi- a business there.

and he had soon found a partner n board maker Barry Pussell) to help coast's first rental business.

% Fun (now a successful nearby ho-ack rented out windsurfs and sold his wife Terese's successful fashion biza.

key launch and we had no idea how ing to go," explains Peter today.

have was a great board maker and ally Spanish-made clothes."



VIBES: Some of the staff at Tumbao including Daniela (inset)



It was the spark to launch the wind revolution on the Costa de la Luz, an industry that now brings in tens of millions of euros every year.

But, Peter quickly realised that in order to keep the growing number of surfers happy they needed to offer accommodation, so the following year he and his brother Michael, a builder, bought an old ruined 12-room hostel just up the road.

A third brother James, a film director and producer from London, was also soon involved.

A big figure in the film business - as well as the manager of Adam and the Ants - it was little surprise that the Hurricane Hotel was soon to become one of Andalucía's hippest places to stay.

"I convinced my brothers that we would never make enough money from 12 rooms, so we obtained permission from the town hall to build an extra 23 and brought in an architect," explains James, who is very much still the life and soul of the Hurricane - and its nearby sister hotel Punta Sur.

He continues: "Once opened we converted the bricklayers into our staff, some becoming cooks, others waiters, others receptionists or gardeners. "I explained to the builders that making a cake was as easy as making cement. All you had to do was throw the right ingredients into a mixer and stick it in the oven at the right temperature for the appropriate amount of time," he continues.

As the local restaurants back then were basic, at best, the brothers installed a herb garden and started to plant and grow their vegetables. As James had lived in Italy he got a friend to send rucula, or rocket seeds, and the coast's best restaurant was also born.

"It just grew and grew organically," explains Peter, who still spends half the year in Ibiza, where he has a farmhouse. "But now we think we have just the right ingredients to continue to be successful for years to come."

Nowadays the group comprises four hotels - The Hurricane, Punta Sur, Valdevaqueros (100% Fun was sold five years ago) and a new hotel recently opened in Jericoacoara, Brazil, appropriately also a kitesurfing hotspot.

And it is not just Valdevaqueros that has the X-factor. Hotel Punta Sur not only has some of the most stylish, spacious rooms on the coast, it also has by far the best pool, massive and surrounded by lawns.

Well sheltered from the wind, it is perfect for families and with the addition of a tennis court and pool table, it has something for everyone.

Best of all, this year, the restaurant has added a special pizza oven, to keep the kids happy at mealtimes too.



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Jon Clarke takes his daughter riding along virgin Mangueta beach in El Palmar

Into the dunes

WE are trotting through sand dunes and eventually onto the beach...a beach that is difficult to beat anywhere in the world.

This is the Mangueta, one of the last completely unspoiled stretches of sand anywhere in Andalucía, in part nudist, in total; stunning.

Leading the way is my daughter, who hasn't stopped grinning since we walked out of the Mangueta stables, just outside El Palmar.

On a two-hour round trip, we take in fields full of sunflowers, while views stretch to distant hills and, of course, the shimmering sea.

This is the perfect activity for families looking for something to do on the Costa de la Luz.



SADDLE UP: Riding on the Mangueta

Rides are charged by the hour and can be long or short and are ideal for total novices too.

We start the evening stroll in the paddocks of the ancient estate owned by Luis, a charming Spanish gentleman, doing a few loops, before heading out onto sandy tracks and fields all the way to the beach, some 500 metres away. Aside from seeing your kids beaming for hours (actually days) afterwards, it is a good bit of exercise.

For more information visit www.cortijo-mangueta.com



HITTING THE WAVES: How it should be done and (left) Jon with with kite

IT'S gusting 45 knots and my lines have just got tangled with the only other kite-surfer within half a kilometre.

We're two metres deep in the briny and with the waves crashing over our heads it is impossible to hear the urgent instructions our teacher is barking from the beach. Could it get any worse?

Well for starters I am caught up with the only other student on my course – Stefan, a German, based in Zurich – and he is just as clueless as me. And second, just as I finally unhook the last of my four lines from his kite, I am jolted stiff from an electric shock from below.

Quite unsure what the hell is going on, in my panic I pull the red emergency cord, as I have been instructed to do.

The problem is it is not the emergency cord I have pulled, but the *emergency-emergency cord*, (the one you are NOT meant to pull) – and next thing we are watching my kite go shooting off towards Africa.

It's like Apollo One as within seconds the 3.5m comet is almost out of sight as it tumbles and somersaults its way south at

The sport of kitesurfing leaves Jon Clarke (above) in a tangle, after the first morning started with a nasty 'shock'

Stung into action...

a rate of knots - 45 to be exact. When we finally clamber out of the sea, our Slovakian instructor is completely beside herself. She has been screaming blue murder from the beach and is only marginally consoled that nobody has drowned. Luckily it is only a €250 beginner's kite and, luckier still, one of only a dozen brave souls daring enough to risk this particularly

crazy Tarifa morning (one of the windiest for months, I am told) zooms off after it. A 10-minute walk down the beach later and he has fished it out, rolled it up and delivered it to us on the shore, before calling us a complete bunch of losers and shaking his bloodied little finger - cut by one of my lines - as proof of his endeavour. Fair point.

TURMARES Tarifa



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COMING TO A SHORE NEAR YOU: Whales in Straits of Gibraltar, and (below) tuna half-eaten by orcas

Whale of a time

SUN-SEEKERS and surfers aren't the only ones who head to the Costa de la Luz every year.

Sharing the shores are pods of whales which can regularly be seen frolicking in the Straits of Gibraltar.

A number of local companies – such as the best established Turmares Tarifa – take guests on boat trips to see these mammals, with a slant on marine conservation.

The orcas are attracted to the sparkling Mediterranean by the large amount of tasty blue fin tuna, which occasionally brings them into conflict with local fisherman.

"Luckily for us, orcas come here each year to feed," Andre at Turmares explains.

"On the other hand, that's not so good for the presence of the Bluefin tuna."

Andre adds that despite the 'killer' name attributed to the most famous whale they are actually 'harmless to humans' although they do feed on 32 different mammal species.

Along with the killers, pilot, sperm and fin whales migrate from the Atlantic, as well as three different types of dolphins – common, striped and bottlenose.

All of which can be seen during boat trips, depending on your luck!

For more information visit www.turmares.com



July 6th - July 19th 2016

Not a happy bunny, our instructor Veronica is at least cheered up when I tell her about the sudden electric shock that had led to my disgrace.

It turns out I had stepped on a *leguado* (or sole), a flat fish that lurks on the rocks.

I feel marginally better about the whole fiasco and somehow pluck up enough courage to get back in the water later that afternoon, when the wind has dropped just a little bit.

I had volunteered to undertake a three-day kitesurfing course with the ion team at Valdevaqueros beach, in Tarifa, as part of this special activities pullout.

While some insisted it must be the start of my mid-life crisis, others just felt sorry for me. I, quite frankly, was terrified.

Everyone knows how windy it gets in Tarifa. The wind turbines along the coast are going full tilt on my drive from Algeciras, and even my walk through the centre of the charming town got a little gusty.

Enthusiastic

But nothing compares to the sensation you feel when you first walk onto the beach with the kite in one hand and your board in the other.

I was practically knocked off my feet as I stood on the sand, half of which had quickly got into every nook and cranny of my wetsuit not to mention eyes, ears and nose.

This is the windiest spot in Europe and has the best conditions for kite and wind surfing.

So strong is the wind my instructor told me how a friend's nine-year-old boy had been literally blown across their street earlier this year from one particularly enthusiastic gust.

It seemed somehow inconceivable that at the age of 45 I was opting for this intense sport, instead of quietly practising my golf swing.

But there are some challenges in life worth undertaking and by the second day I had finally found some rhythm.

Going through the discipline of rigging up your kite is all part of the learning process and the team at ion insists that the safety side of the sport is carefully explained.

You certainly feel more confident going out with a fully qualified instructor, even if our Eastern European belle had a bark on her worse than an East London fishmonger.

All aboard

IF you want to master the Atlantic winds screaming up the coast then Tarifa has to be the most thrilling spot for all ocean sport enthusiasts.

KitePassion has offered lessons in kitesurfing, windsurfing, conventional surfing and stand up paddle for over 10 years. They guarantee to tailor each lesson to the student, and have been named a Trip Advisor 'Excellent Experience.' Once students are confident in their skills, they can also purchase



equipment from KitePassion and begin enjoying their newfound skill on their own time.

For more information call 615 683 051 or visit www.kitepassiontarifa.com



PRO: An ion instructor

After two days of learning to effectively fly the kite, we were slowly introduced to the water, first getting dragged one way (out to sea) and then dragged back in by the wind. It instilled confidence and by the third day when the board was introduced I was raring to go.

Sadly though, it is not just jumping on-

board. With the wind still howling around the 35/40 mark and plenty of waves, it is anything but easy getting the board attached to your feet while lying in the water and trying not to sink, while still flying the kite.

That said, by the afternoon I was finally floating with the board on my feet and actually standing up (albeit for a brief few seconds) when I got the 'figure of eight' motion right.

But as experienced kitesurfer and Tarifa stalwart Tony Cassidy tells me, I'm not a million miles off.

"Once you've done your three days and you can finally stand up on the board, do another three lessons and get your confidence up," he advised me.

"You really need to get the lessons to get the confidence."

And as we all know, it's all about the confidence. So apparently I'll just need a few more hours of lessons and I'll be skimming across the waves with the best...

I can hardly call myself a kitesurfer, but one thing's for certain: when the autumn comes I'll be back for another go.

Kitesurfs can be rented from a number of well established companies in Tarifa including Kite Passion and ion.

Lessons start from around €200 for a 3-day starter course.

Visit www.ionclubtarifa.com

Hanging ten

JON CLARKE takes a surf class in El Palmar, the hippest resort on the Costa de la Luz

"NOW pull like crazy," shouted Miguelito, as a metre-high wave bore down on me at a rate of knots.

Head down, eyes fixed ahead, I did exactly what I was told and paddled my arms through the water like Michael Phelps on Red Bull... and 'aloha' in a split second I was standing up and riding the wave into the shore.

I'll confess, it wasn't my first day surfing and - being honest - my 11-year-old daughter probably catches more waves than me, but with Miguelito I was definitely getting somewhere.

We had started the day at 10am, doing yoga stretches and warming up, alongside an African trinket salesman, who was as bemused as me.

But this is a vital part of the lesson, insists Miguelito, from El Palmar Surf Academy, whose company also holds yoga classes, conveniently.

Lessons are based around the state of the tide and beginners are taken through the basics, if they haven't surfed before, but are quickly down on the sand.

Everyone gets a wetsuit and a rash vest before being sent like a line waddling ducks in pairs, carrying two surfboards between them (see right).

This is the only official surf school in Andalucía, working with Californian company O'Neill, and with three bases in Conil, Roche and El Palmar.

We are taking a couple of lessons at the latter, a beach that provides waves nearly all year round and has become one of the hippest places to hang out in summer, thanks to its bronzed surf dudes and obligatory hangers on.

There are literally dozens of surf schools plying their trade and there are as many



bars and restaurants with dance music at night. Teaching-wise you will be hard pressed to find anyone as good as Miguelito Argudo, a former professional, who has competed as far and wide as Indonesia, Thailand and Portugal.

A softly-spoken Jerezano he is excellent with kids and is genuinely nurturing towards them.

But, even with a klutz like me - some 20 lessons down - he starts to make some progress.

While I had finally cracked it standing up on an intensive three-day break near Sintra, in Portugal, last year, he works on my style and 'crouch' and gives me some tips on how to spot the ideal wave.

"It takes time and is almost a spiritual thing. You've either got it or not," he explains.

I may not have it (yet) but there are few things that give as much a buzz as riding a wave into shore, standing up or not.



SURF'S UP: Off for a lesson

For more information visit www.elpalmaracademy.es

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WHERE TO EAT

Feast for foodies

The Costa de la Luz has the most exciting mix of restaurants, writes Dining Secrets of Andalucía editor Jon Clarke

THERE are few delicacies in Spain that can't be sourced on the Costa de la Luz. Be it bluefin tuna, *retinto* steak or incredible seafood, foodies are spoilt for choice in the key towns of Vejer, Tarifa and Conil. But, there is something about the province of Cadiz that brings out the best in restaurateurs. A combination of style, creativity and, above all, positive vibes has created some of my favourite restaurants in Andalucía.

In Tarifa, the place to look out for is Paseo de la Alameda, where half a dozen fantastic places all vie for trade. Take **Petit Bistro** ([www.petitbistro-](http://www.petitbistrotarifa.com)

www.petitbistrotarifa.com) (inset), an idyllic shady spot, which just gets better and better.

Run by Benoit and Veronica, who have lived in the town for nearly 20 years, you get a fantastically creative menu by night and a good value, but tasty, set menu at lunch.

I particularly like Benoit's foie gras with quince chutney, as well as his excellent tuna salad with mango and beetroot.

Next door, look out for **Trattoria** (see *Veni, vidi, vici* on p29), run by ambitious Italian business magnate Luciano, from Naples.

With a fondness for his country's top ingredients - not to mention the excellent Slow Food Movement - his restaurant just gets better and better.

As does the fabulous fish restaurant of former architect and taste-master extraordinaire Victor at **La Pescaderia** (www.lapescaderiatarifa.com)

With his trademark scientist-style glasses, he designs plates, like he used to design houses, and they look as fabulous as they are tasty.

A massive tuna fan, he goes out of his way to prize the very best specimens out of the clutches of the Japanese... and always wades in to buy his own fish. "It is vital as our clients absolutely love it," explains the friendly Argentinian.



CREATIVE: Carlos at La Tajea (left) and (below) team at Pescaderia



Enjoy the separate tuna menu including a great carpaccio, sashimi and best of all tartare, all washed down by some excellent wines, including Guitian at just €16. Finally, you might consider the excellent **Pizzeria con Cucina**, which has consistently kept families happy for years, not to

mention the excellent father-and-son team of Daniel and Javier, whose restaurants **La Ternera Mimosa** and **Lola Mora** are highly rated.

There is however, one more fabulous place to look out for is **Silos19** (www.silos19.com), which is easily one of the most beautiful restaurants in Andalucía.

Stylishly created, it sits in a huge open-plan space with historic vaulted ceilings and an original clock that seeing is believing.


It also offers a varied international menu with such chestnuts as marinated tuna in Bloody Mary foam, and Thai beef cheeks with coconut foam.

Heading along the coast towards Bolonia, you will find one of the region's most alluring restaurants. Overlooking rows of vines and a sea of undulating umbrella pines, **'Tesoro'** - or Treasure - is one pot of gold that really is worth seeking out.

Aside from the fabulous food - including fresh langoustines and a classic 'retinto' steak typical of the region - the views over the Gibraltar straits to Africa are impossible to improve.

This is one spot to waste away an afternoon and owners Jesus and Juana could not be friendlier.

Heading up the coast if it is Atlantic bluefin tuna you are after, then head for **El Campero** in the workaday fishing town of Barbate. Here, Jose 'Pepe' Melero has created an amazing place, that usually serves well over 300 people for lunch alone.



PIZZERIA CON CUCINA

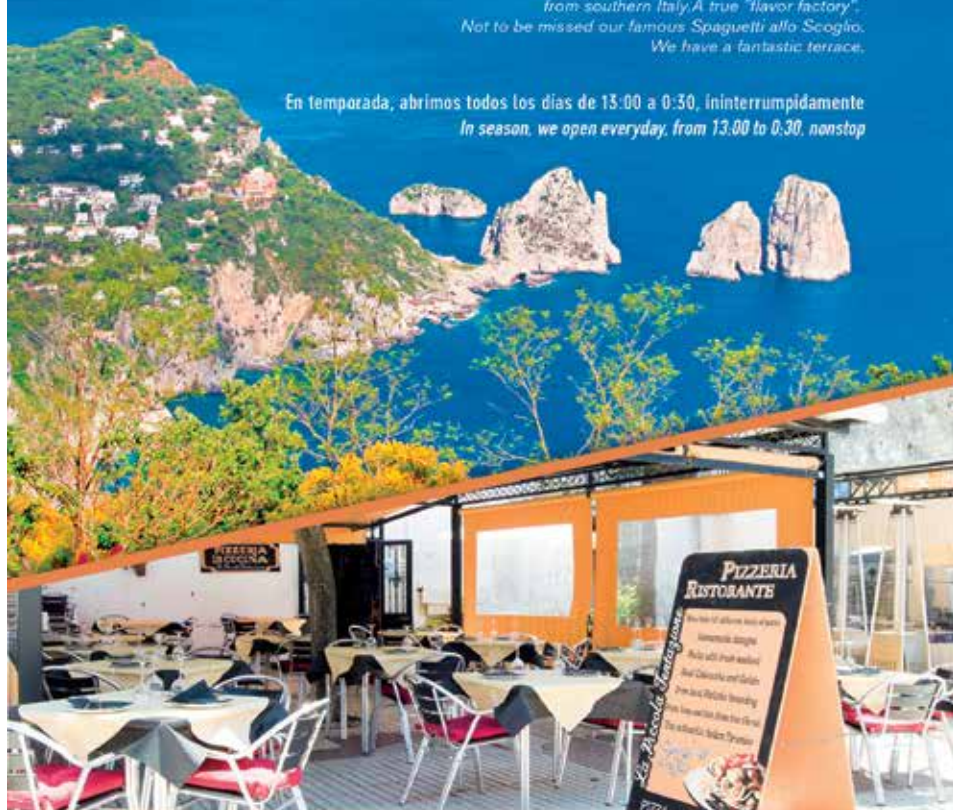
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WHERE TO STAY

Sleep breezy!

THE Costa de la Luz is literally crammed with hip places to stay from beachside gems to inland cortijos and from grand townhouses to campsites.

In Vejer, you would be hard pressed to beat the seminal **Casa de Califa**, in the town's loveliest square, surrounded by its best restaurants. The Moorish building sits around a charming central patio, where guests take breakfast and dine under candlelight each evening. Historic in the extreme, the building, and its sister **Las Palmeras de Califa**, which has its own amazing pool, oozes history and has been extremely well renovated.

If beach life is more your thing, then try **Madreselva**, in Canos de Meca, which is just a stone's throw from the beach and near Trafalgar lighthouse.

Set around a central courtyard and with a decent pool for the kids to splash in, Madreselva caters for families and hip surfers alike.

In Tarifa, the best established hotel is the **Hurricane**, which is now nearly three decades old and run by the coast's long-serving expats, brothers James and Peter Whalley, who also own the more luxurious **Punta Sur** across the road.

Both hotels have their own restaurants and both serve up a great range of activities on the beach and in the hotel, including pilates and yoga classes every day, plus a brand new spa.

Also in Tarifa is the stunning **Meson de Sancho** which caters from couples and families alike.

With 40 rooms including two-person and family bungalows, Meson de Sancho also boasts relaxing gardens, an outdoor swimming pool and a gymnasium to boot.

July 6th - July



TASTY: Corredera 55, Tesoro team and steak dish while (below) Patria and celery amuse bouche



But the highlight of any culinary journey to the Costa de la Luz, must be Vejer, which is a true foodie Mecca and one of the best in Andalucía. So it is no surprise to find someone of the calibre of Ellie Cormie, the former owner of five restaurants in Scotland - some with Michelin stars. At the helm of fabulous **Corredera 55** (www.califavejer.com), she has brought her own unique sprinkling of magic to the bustling, competitive local restaurant scene. Alongside owner James Stuart, the fabulous, good value menu, heavy on vegetables and fish, keeps getting better and better. Add in an adventurous wine list and the drive and panache of El-



STUNNING: Silos19

lie and you have a winner. In particular, I loved the rolled courgette slices, stuffed with goats cheese and rocket (above), with a smoked salmon paste, while the tuna sashimi with wakame salad and prawns was superb. A lemon cheesecake came as a great surprise. Another top joint is **El Jardin del Califa** (www.califavejer.com) reached through the labyrinthine corridors of the 16th century Califa hotel. Its exquisite palm courtyard is enclosed by ancient walls and is lit with Moroccan lamps after dark. If you aren't hypnotised by the scent of frangipani, jasmine and incense, wait until you try the menu, a heavenly harem of authentic flavours from north Africa and the Middle East: delights such as baba ganoush, shish taouk, pastela and tempting tagines. Outside of the town you are also spoilt for choice with some genuine dining secrets, including **La Nueva Tajeta**, sitting in idyllic hamlet of Santa Lucia. A charming spot in the extreme, you sit in a leafy garden or open terrace with views over green hills towards the classic white town nearby. Concentrating on meat dishes, brothers Francisco and Carlos have made the place look fabulous, in particular with Carlos' artistic creations on the wall.

Last but definitely not least, you must visit **Restaurant Patria** (www.restaurantepatria.com), where Danes Thomas and wife Ase are fast garnering a reputation as having some of the best food in Cadiz, let alone Vejer. This incredible couple have created an alluring spot, where you sit on an authentic flagstone veranda, with some of the best views in Christendom. Surrounded by vines, oleander and olive trees, its candlelit wooden tables and stylish interior draw you in further. And thankfully your hosts do not disappoint when it comes to the food. Split into a three-course menu of the month and a more detailed a la carte offering, you will be spoilt with lots of vegetables and almost all seasonal produce. As Thomas explains: "The joy of cooking is about what's in peak season. There is no need to import anything from far away." He raves, quite rightfully about the quality of the local produce, and adds: "We work around what our suppliers can provide us locally be it wild asparagus, rabbit or bulls' heart tomatoes. "It is all about being able to adjust, change and create." **For more detailed reviews, background and other Cadiz food articles visit www.dining-secretsofandalucia.com**

VENI, VIDI, VICI



BOSS: Luciano with brother Diego

HAVING run his own food distribution company in Italy, he knows a few things about ingredients. Aside from regularly importing the best cuts of meat and cheese from his mother country, he also has an amazing line of fresh produce, including delicious Vesuvio tomatoes from near Naples. But Tarifa restaurateur Luciano Fabricio, 44, is now branching out into more creative ways of cooking. After undertaking a course with Spanish masterchef Joan Roca, he has just introduced a 'bano thermostat' oven at his main restaurant Trattoria, where he is able to slow cook a leg of lamb or duck breast for up to 24 hours at a super low temperature. "It leaves the meat far more tender and better quality," he explains. "We are also doing a fabulous tender squid dish and I plan to introduce a lot more over the coming months." Brought up between Jordan and Nigeria, his father being an engineer, he has a worldly take on life and, thanks to an economics degree, is more than capable of running restaurants. "Above all though, I believe in quality, which usually wins out in the end," he explains. He ended up in Tarifa, where he met his Spanish wife, while taking a break from his Milan-based food distribution company 15 years ago. "I just fell in love with her and the place and couldn't bear to go back," he explains.



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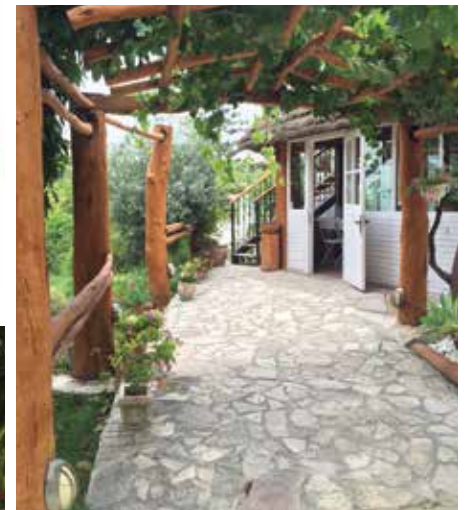
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