

All about

# Costa de la Luz

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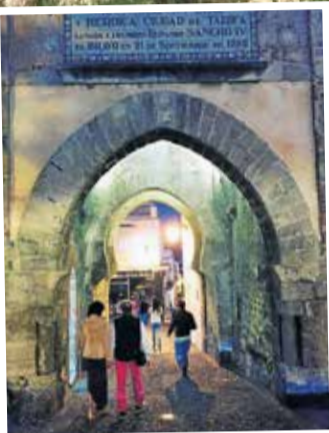
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Photos by Jon Clarke



## SEEING THE LIGHT

**MOORISH:** Tarifa gate and El Palma beach

**T**HE journey from Zahara de los Atunes to Barbate is one of the most scenic in Andalucia... and a tardis between two worlds.

Zahara is the quintessential home of affluence; a golden magnet for wealthy tourists and a flotilla of Cayannes and Q7s come weekends and peak holiday season.

In contrast, Barbate is a new town created by dictator Franco, pockmarked with ugly 1960s tower blocks and afflicted by

**Jon Clarke takes a trip along the Costa de la Luz of Cadiz, Andalucia's most unspoilt, if sometimes breezy, coastline**

one of the highest unemployment rates in Europe.

What they share though, is privilege.

For what surrounds them is a canvas of colours and contours, a backdrop of Africa, all illuminated by an almost unique changing light.

Long, unspoilt beaches, windswept sand

dunes, umbrella pines and the smell of rosemary and mimosa.

This is the Costa de la Luz - the Coast of Light - and a million miles away from its nearby cousin the Costa del Sol, indeed the costas in general.

Continues on next Page



**JOURNEY:** A creek between Zahara and Barbate and (below) sunflowers and turbines near Zahora



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## 10 All about Costa de la Luz



From previous Page

BREATHTAKING: View from Torre del Tajo and fish in Barbate

This is a coastline of castles and carpaccios, coves and corvina (one of its best local fish)... the perfect blend of nature and its best ingredients.

This is a coastline of gems; historic Tarifa, the bridgehead for the Moors in Spain and a crossing point for centuries and beautiful Vejer de la Frontera, with its cobble streets and restaurant scene.

This is a coastline of laid back, low rise resorts; Roman Bolonia and the biggest sand dune in the world, entertaining El Palmar, with its party crowd and surf, and quirky Canos de Meca, with its alternative feel.

But what best sums up this long stretch of coastline for me are the views you get while taking lunch at places like Tesoro above Tarifa or, sitting, for example, on the terrace of your hotel suite at Califa in Vejer.

For spreading out in front of you are uninterrupted ten-mile vistas of rolling fields all the way down to white sandy beaches, with very little built on them.

An incredible sight, this patchwork quilt of greenery and long, unspoilt beaches is sadly practically unique to Spain these days, but what much of Andalucía's coastline would have looked like 50 years ago.

The Costa de la Luz is only matched in beauty by Cabo de Gata in Almería but there is something intrinsically different about the Costa de la Luz: Laid back and unshowy, its friendly, unfussy locals complement the breathtaking scenery and distinctive vibe.



### COAST WITH THE MOST

THE Costa de la Luz officially stretches for around 200kms all the way up into Huelva and to the border with Portugal. Split in two by the stunning Donana National Park, the coastline also includes the so-called 'sherry triangle' or 'Cadiz coast' towns of Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Rota, Chippingona and El Puerto de Santa María. It also includes the cities of Cadiz and Huelva.

The coastline is, without a doubt, for the more discerning tourist and, in particular, for lovers of fine food.

Vejer, in particular, has an incredible mix of stylish boutique hotels and probably the highest concentration of top restaurants per capita of anywhere else in Andalucía.

This is a true food capital and over the last few years, I have found at least a dozen

great places to eat within a ten mile radius of the town. Tarifa has an altogether different feel. This is a party town, particularly in summer, when the back streets are heaving with lively bars well into the early hours.

But its stylish mix of shops and restaurants added to its melting pot of worldly Spaniards and interesting expats make for a distinct Tarifa scene, not dissimilar to the one you find in Ibiza and it is one of the few places - thanks in the main to its breezes - that still has enough going on through the winter.

The Moors would never have had it so good on arriving in Tarifa in 710AD.

While later dubbing Andalucía 'paradise', it was certainly anything but peaceful when they used the town as their bridgehead into southern Spain.

This is quickly obvious wondering around Tarifa, its historic ramparts littered with statues and references to stirring catholic heroes such as Sancho El Bravo and Guzmán el Bueno.

If you have never taken a ride to these shores, the other side of the Rock of Gibraltar and around Cadiz you are in for a surprise.

This is Europe's true deep south, and aside from the austere 'cubist' towns, which were built by the Moors who ruled this land for nearly 800 years, you will be spoiled by the numerous sites from the famous Trafalgar lighthouse - off which the key naval battle once took place - to the historic fishing village of Sancti Petri, near Chiclana.

Then there are the excellent Roman ruins at Bolonia and hidden gems, like Zahora



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## Coupon kings

A NEW coupon booklet is offering dozens of discounts across tens of businesses in Tarifa. Called Tarifun, the coupon collection gives away special offers in water sports, land activities, retreats, accommodation, food and drink, shopping or even co-working in an office.

"It's for active people who want to make the best out of their stay in Tarifa," explains creator Timi Trimmel, "and those who are keen to discover how many exciting adventures this windy capital offers for everyone."

The booklet is valid till the end of 2017 and can be used at any time.

"Most of the coupons are valid for a group of friends or family, which makes it more valuable," adds Trimmel, "Tarifun could be a perfect gift for everyone who lives in Andalucía and comes to Tarifa from time to time. So if you don't know what to buy for your friend's or relative's birthday, go for the booklet!"

There is also a €10 discount for Olive Press readers if they send an email to hello@tarifun.com to request their booklet. Visit www.tarifun.com for more info.



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**ENERGETIC: Tarifa is the kite capital of Europe**

and exclusive Roche, where Madrid's captains of industry take their holidays. My favourite spots though include the secret beach, a half an hour walk from Bolenia, where you will find just cows, the celebrated brown retinto cows of the region. I also love the amazing walk through umbrella pines to the Torre del Tajo, high above Barbate, which finally gives out one of the best views in Christendom. And then there is the ancient dovecote at El Palomar de la Brena, plus the historic inland gem of Medina Sidonia. But best of all it is the restaurants and food that make this region so very special.

**I also love the amazing walk through umbrella pines to the Torre del Tajo**

There is literally everything here from the historic converted townhouses, like Silos 19 and Califa, to the evocative dining terraces at Patria and Castilleria. And above all there are the ingredients... the amazing tuna, local vegetables and the amazing beef from the aforementioned cows. And then up the road you have Jerez, its history and its sheries, not to mention the incredible historic gem of Cadiz and its nearby towns of Sanlucar and Puerto de Santa Maria and the true lungs of Andalusia, the celebrated Donana National Park. Oh the incredible lightness of being!



**HISTORIC: Cobble streets of Vejer**

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## A shore thing

Manuel Caminero was a high-flying art director in Australia before he quit his day job to become a fine art photographer of the seas. Now he spends his mornings chasing sunrises on Tarifa's famed coast. "One day I went to Tarifa and I fell in love. Since then, I have shot Tarifa from every angle - by helicopter, while swimming in rough waves and battling the strongest wind storms.," he said. His gallery, Atlas Beach, is the only one in Europe which concentrates 100% on photography of the sea and beaches, and not just in Tarifa, but of far reaching coastlines in remote coasts across the globe with photos taken during his intrepid travels every year. Having visited hundreds of galleries in Berlin, Paris, London, and other cities, he is convinced the quality of his photos matches the best seen in some of the top London galleries. And after starting the business from humble beginnings in the form of a blog, he is certainly riding on the waves success.



**PRESERVED:** A Roman statue stands proud by dozens of pillars at Bolonia, while (right) Tarifa statue

**T**HE pungent scent of tuna is wafting down the street from the salting factory, while toga-clad townsfolk make their way to the forum to shop and socialise. It's mid morning, and maybe later - in the heat of the day - they will duck for cover and chill out at the town's spa, punish a few slaves and then treat the wife to a show at the theatre. Picture the scene at Baelo Claudia 1,800 years ago, at that time one of Spain's most important Roman settlements.

The ruined Roman city on the beachfront at Bolonia, a ten minute drive west of

# Romans and moor!

**Roman ruins, pristine beaches, cool kitesurfers ... Tom Powell is blown away by Tarifa and nearby Bolonia**

Tarifa, had a booming economy back in 2AD, based on its fish salting industry.

Today, at this reconstructed living museum, you can walk the cobbled streets, explore old Roman villas or declaim a few stanzas by Seneca from the stage of the ancient amphitheatre. Shut your eyes and you can almost believe you've been beamed back a couple of centuries.

Stepping through the town gate and exploring this once magnificent Roman city is more than enough to set the imagination racing. The Iberian Peninsula's biggest Roman city - complete with walls, aqueducts, baths, temples, forums, villas and more - is a rather special place. It is designed to be taken slowly, at a stroll, while breathing in the fresh Atlantic air as the wind wafts you gently through the ruins.

Baelo's main road - decumanus maximus - runs from east to west, connect-

## BIGGEST DUNE IN EUROPE

**Bolonia's iconic, giant sand dune is the texture of icing sugar, its waters Caribbean blue.**

**The largest on the Continent it dares to be climbed, just to see what lies beyond.**

**While there is no secret cove or crock of gold at the end it is a lovely slow transition into a cool, scented pine forest.**

**And the stunning views from the top are a reminder of how all coastal Andalusia once was.**

**Nearby look for Cala del Picacho, for some therapeutic mud-baking.**

**The mud treatments are popular and you smash up some wet slate stone to create your own mudpack, before letting it dry off (See inset pic below).**



ing two large town gates. From here a well-signposted route leads you around the Roman settlement, with plenty of information in English to accompany the strikingly well-preserved ruins.

The town had really started growing in 2AD, after a product, known as garum, made in Baelo, took off among the chattering classes of Rome.

Made out of fish guts it was a pungent, but allegedly tasty addition to any meal and the whole area became dedicated to its production, with Roman ships arriving and departing on a daily basis for Italy, loaded up with the magic product.

Nowadays its big sister Tarifa makes its money from a different sort of natural produce: the wind!

'Breathtaking' and 'windy' are certainly two adjectives often used to describe trendy Tarifa - the wind and kitesurf capital of Europe. Glimpsing its long crescent beach of pristine white sand atop the winding up-hill road from Algeciras,



**CREATIVE:** A mural being created on the beachfront

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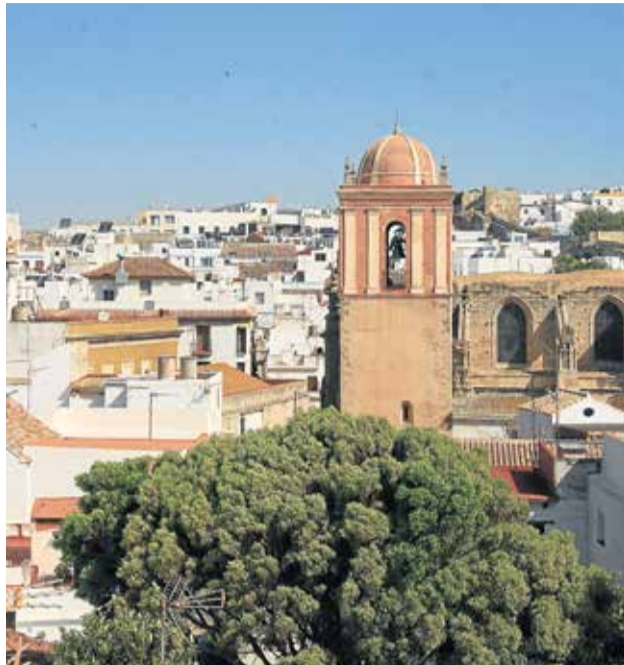


**ACTIVE CROWD:** A kitesurfer off Los Cancos beach

flanked by battalions of flailing wind turbines, it's not hard to see why. Here, where the Atlantic meets the Mediterranean, kitesurfers dominate the skyline. It's clearly these water sports lovers who create the laid-back vibe that makes Tarifa a favourite party town. Its pretty, cobbled streets

teem with life and the place comes into its own after dark, when twinkling bar signs light up like stars on every corner. One of the best things about Tarifa is the view of the Gibraltar Strait, hemmed in between Europe and Africa, with the beautiful Mediterranean to the east and the vast, wild Atlantic to the west.

**This little fishing town was the first point of the Moorish invasion in AD 711**



**STUNNING:** Roof terrace views across the old town

Take a walk along the narrow walkway separating the two waters out to Isla de las Palomas and then stroll up Los Lances beach to enjoy a drink or supper at one of its hip chiringuitos. It is not just the wind that attracts tourists to this kite-surfing Mecca. There are whale watching and scuba diving trips and oodles of opportunities for retail therapy.



**PARTY SCENE:** In centre

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

**Whale ahoy!**

**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' al-



though 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](http://www.turmares.com)



But the focal point is Calle Alameda, a lively Spanish walkway lined with good restaurants, including the newly-refurbished Petit Bistro for classy French cuisine. There's frequently live music here, and an extensive book market to peruse. Across the road the refurbished grand fort, overlooking the bustling harbour, has recently reopened to the public, providing wonderful views of the Strait. This little fishing town was the first point of the Moorish invasion of southern Spain in AD711, when the Berber chief landed from Ceuta with 400 foot soldiers and 100 horsemen. They built the fort later, in 960AD. It is a lovely ride from here to Bolonia, through stunning undeveloped countryside and pine fringed beaches, with kites bobbing up above on windy days. There is a great selection of fantastic hotels here, the oldest and most established being the Hurricane.

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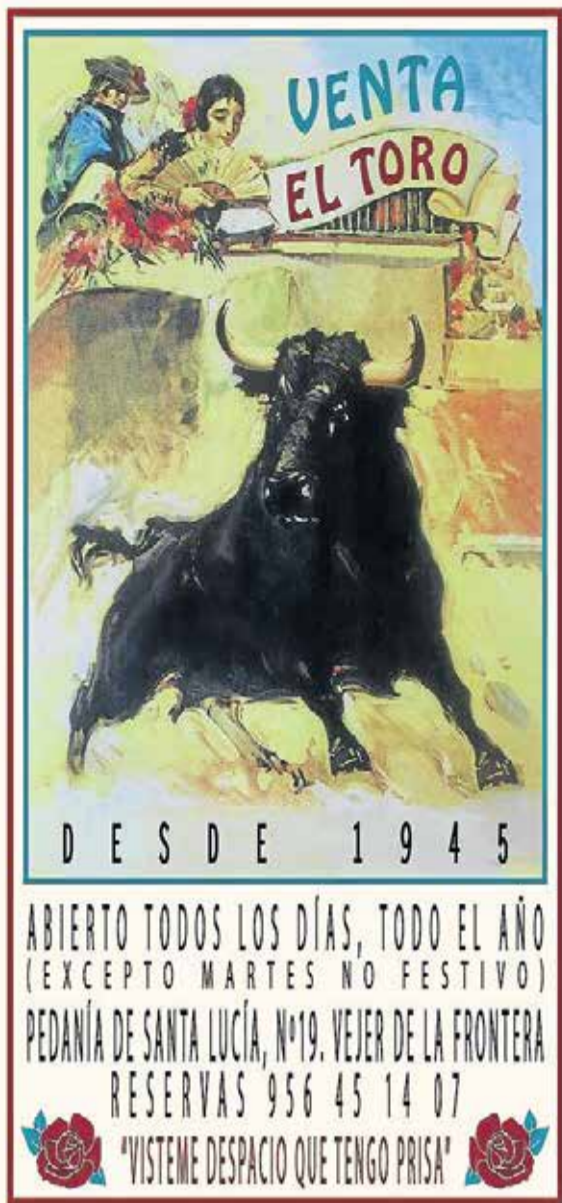
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**Between the sea and the sierra, Vejer is the genuine outpost of Spain's wild frontier, with a remarkable restaurant scene as part of the mix, writes Jon Clarke**

It is in a sleepy backwater, up a dead end road close to Vejer de la Frontera that I found one of the last redoubts of quintessential Andalusia. Tricky to find and easy to miss even when right outside, there are few places left in the region that are quite so unpretentious. Authentic in the extreme and little changed for decades, Venta el Toro is where those locals-in-the-know go for a dose of nostalgia and a darn good tapas lunch.



**AUTHENTIC: Boss Nono at Venta el Toro and tourist enjoys lunch at La Torre**

It is here that you will find local hoteliers escaping their clients and lovers heading for a secret rendezvous. Slowly becoming something of a magnet for foodies, the hamlet of Santa Lucia now boasts three good restaurants, including the amazing Cas-

stantly evolving for a decade. All part of greater Vejer, which is arguably Andalusia's food capital, within ten minutes of here you can find easily a dozen good places to eat. It has been a remarkable turnaround for a place that two decades ago you would probably only stop at for a coffee or maybe

a venta lunch if you couldn't make it to Tarifa or nearby Conil in time. The name Vejer de la Frontera, however, says it all... a hilltop fortress, seen for miles around, 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.

**A hilltop fortress, seen for miles around, was once a last frontier of Christian Spain**

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**ART: On the streets of Vejer**

Nowadays, however, the only thing likely to knock you over in Vejer is the wind. That and 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 white-washed homes discovered along twisty-turny, cobbled streets. The Moorish castle - or Alcazaba - hides down a side-street lined with eucalyptus trees.



**CHANGING LIGHT:** Sunset approaches in centre of the town

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 Espana - known locally as '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 alleyways 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 providing visitors to the Costa de la Luz with an amazing range of styl-



**DETAIL:** Stunning doorway at Califa hotel

ish, 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 mountains 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.



## Juice on the loose

**Celebrated restaurant Patria in Vejer has launched a new business, Patria Pura, which is a wonderful mix of delicious fresh juices.**

**They come in a mix of flavours, including fresh mango, lemon and ginger, strawberry lemonade, and are for sale in up to a dozen places around the nearby region.**



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**PRIVILEGE:** The El Jardin restaurant comes with peacocks

## The Hurricane group has a brand new restaurant and some important new additions to the team, discovers Jon Clarke

SITTING on the shady verandah looking across rows of palms and up to a peak covered in umbrella pines, feels like something reminiscent of the days of the Raj. Peacocks scream in the distance while in front of me are a dozen beautifully laid tables, each with candles and starched white tablecloths. This is El Jardin, the newest, most exciting garden restaurant on the Costa de la Luz. With talented chef Alfonso Burgos at the reign and some of the most demanding hoteliers on the coast behind him, it was always going to succeed. Set in the stunning, almost tropical grounds of Tarifa's Punta Sur hotel, diners are well sheltered from the famous winds of the nearby coast. A long time in coming, the new menu while largely Mediterranean in flavour, also reflects

the various places that chef Alfonso has worked, including Indonesia and the Galapagos islands. In his new post he not only has a command of the very best ingredients the Costa de la Luz has to offer, but he also has an amazing new kitchen. I would particularly recommend the Thai salad as a light lunch treat, coming with Vermicelli noodles, prawns, mango, peanuts and zucchini strips, in a chili sauce, while the locally grown tomatoes 'alindados' were crisp and fresh and served with pearls of Mozzarella. For dinner you might plump for the wonderful steamed clams with Iberian ham, while the bluefin tuna tartare was splendid. A fabulous fillet steak from the local Retinto cattle was perfect as were the baby back pork ribs in barbecue sauce. This is all part of a masterplan struck between

the Hurricane group's owners the Whaley brothers and two Whaley youngsters, George, 23, and Sophie, 24, who are, in their words, 'working on the aesthetic' of the hotel, re-designing the bedrooms and, best of all, revolutionising the menu. It certainly seems to be working with the amazing hotel more comfortable and stylish than ever before, not to mention its pool, by far the best on the coast.



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**TRANSFORMATION:** Of the rooms, but not the swimming pool at Punta Sur

**The Whaley story is not over yet with the next generation making plenty of waves of their own, not just in the hotel and restaurant stakes. Peter's son Liam Whaley is looking set to win the world kitesurf champion again and currently sits in the**

## Flying high

**lead. Kiting since the age of nine, he lives and breathes the sport and first won the world championship in 2015.**

**"There is never a shortage here," he tells the Olive Press. "It is one of the most fun places to live." Travelling the world, he has sponsorship with Cabrinha, which is closely linked to him, who boards and kites at Valdeva-**

It is a similar, yet contrasting story, at the family's second hotel the Hurricane, which has served the world's cognoscenti for over three decades now. Slap bang next to the beach, but again in exotic gardens, it is still the flagship of the group, who now have a new

hotel in Brazil to boot, as well as their incredibly hip, Valdevaqueros beach club, just up the road. The story behind the Hurricane group began over three decades ago when British adventurer Peter Whaley made an unscheduled stop off en route from his home in Ibiza to a holiday in Morocco. A keen windsurfer he unwittingly found himself on the windiest beach in Europe and had the vision to launch a business there. It was 1984 and he had soon found a partner (an Australian board maker Barry Pussell) to help him open the coast's first rental business. Named 100% Fun (now a successful nearby hotel) - the shack rented out windsurfs and sold clothes from his wife Terese's successful fashion label Graffiti Ibiza. "It was a low key launch and we had no idea how well it was going to go," explains Peter today.



**HIP CLOBBER:** At graffiti

"What we did have was a great board maker and fantastic, totally Spanish-made clothes." 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 - who also speaks an incredible seven languages - also got 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 Andalucia's hippest places to stay. "I convinced my brothers that we would never make enough money from 12 rooms, so we



**TEAM:** Sophie and George Whaley and James Whaley



**CHILLING:** Hurricane sofa in front row seat



**DREAM RIDE:** With Hurricane Hipica

## Amazing mounts

**HORSERIDING** along the bright, wind-swept Costa de la Luz is a wonderful adventure. Hurricane Hipica, in Tarifa, has established itself as an equine epicentre, offering rides that take you over breathtaking beaches and forested mountains. Run by world-class Dutch equestrian Klaartje Muijser, the horses are incredibly well looked after, living shoe-free in open fields. For more information, check out [www.tarifahip.com](http://www.tarifahip.com) and [www.elindiviso.com](http://www.elindiviso.com)





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wife and  
haley



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 own 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 six years ago) and a new hotel recently opened in Jericoacoara, Brazil, appropriately also a kite-surfing hotspot. "It is coming along really well," explains James. "We are just about to open the second phase and it has become a very popular place to stay." Visit [www.hotelhurricane.com](http://www.hotelhurricane.com)



CHILLING: At Jumbao and (top) walkway onto the beach

## HURRICANE HANGOUT

THE walkway down onto the white sandy beach below offers a runway to paradise. Down here the view goes on for miles, as far in fact to Africa and the nearby rocky peaks of Punta Paloma to the west. And if the beach is windy, well no worries, take a few paces back and unwind at Valdevaqueros, the hippest hangout on the Costa de la Luz. Take a few, most likely a world sport, with current Liam Whaley learning and basing himself here when not touring the world competing. But equally, it is a great place to just take 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 burgers from his burger truck, which he takes to events around the country. The main restaurant is also good, while the iZumoo smoothy bar has some great drinks such as 'magic maca', which is delicious. Opened by Daniela Di Placido, she has been serving up juices around the world for nearly a decade. "They are mostly dairy free and I have a big range of minerals and vitamins I add to the drinks, which are great on the stomach." Next door is the funky clothes shop Graffiti, the very epitome of cool, with some great new lines added every season.



PICTURE PERFECT: At Valdevaqueros

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**DREAMY: A prawn dish with wine**

I AM sucking the brains from half a dozen crimson red 'carabinero' king prawns, while sipping on a splendid Rosso di Montalcino.

In front of me 100 kites bob up and down, almost in time to the strains of cool Brazilian music, while all around hipsters and hotties chow down and sip on cocktails.

Backed by umbrella pines and overlooking miles of stunning sand dunes - not to mention a backdrop to one half of the legendary Pillars of Hercules in Morocco - could anywhere beat Osteria del Sole for lunch?

With a splendid list of fresh pasta made every morning, an amazing selection of fish dishes and an Italian wine list to put three quarters of Tuscany's eateries in the shade, I was in foodie heaven.

I would happily have eaten lunch and dinner here, after a tour of the kitchens, where a team of female chefs were beavering away in preparation for lunch service.

Everything is made from fresh and the team of trendy waiters, all bearded up in jet black uniforms, were enthusiastic as me.

I had been tipped off from my pal James Whaley, owner of the nearby Hurricane hotel, that this was the best new spot to eat and he rarely gets it wrong.

Nor did manager Stefano, from Bologna (the Italian one, not the nearby village of Bologna), who is extremely knowledgeable on the local food scene, and more or less chose my lunch.

He guided me first to the wonderful 'ahumados de Barbate' starter, which at first didn't appeal, but on arrival sent shivers of joy up my spine. Beautifully served with crusty bread and three delicious home-made butters of lemon, black garlic and onion, this blackboard-and-slate combo included smoked tuna, cod and sardines.

Another starter Crescentine, a fried flat bread, was tasty, while the tartare



**AS EASY AS ONE, TWO, THREE:** Fresh pasta is hand-made each morning at Osteria del Sole, ready for the plate come lunchtime

# Enriching the sole!

Dining Secrets of Andalusia editor Jon Clarke reviews the stunning new Tarifa restaurant Osteria del Sole



Photos by: Jon Clarke and Thomas Williams (@thomaswill / @luproducciones)

**TEAMWORK:** The staff at Osteria are knowledgeable about the dishes, including a king prawn tartare (far left)

of carabineros from Galicia, served with capers and a small salad can only be described as 'de puta madre', or 'the bollox' in English, to coin an appropriate term given the owners (see Hey Papa! below). Each dish is carefully explained and the pasta menu was broken down into sections of spaghetti, passatelli,

ravioli and mezze maniche. Again I was led to the Tagliatella del Corsaro which came with Italian speck, cream and a tabasco sauce, all flambeed with vodka. And again plaudits to Stefano, who got it spot on. There was a decent mix of fresh fish and meat dishes, but I was mostly

blown away, being the operative word here in Tarifa, by the amazing wine list, easily one of the most complete in the Tarifa area. In total, there were over 100 wines from Italy alone, including a number from the legendary Antinori stable, coming in at a small fortune, but equally there are some good value chestnuts among the list, as well as a fair few Spanish bottles.

I had a splendid Rosso di Montalcino Pian delle Vigne and a Pazo Senorans Albarino, from Galicia, for under 20 euros. Recently set up by the capable Italian/Chilean partners behind Papagayo in central Tarifa, it's a stylish spot, all wood and clean lines, with plenty of glass to keep the invasive wind out.

With the right music, wine and food, it is bound to succeed. In fact, it's a no brainer really.



**DREAM LOCATION:** Right on the beach



**HOT STONE TREATMENT:** Cook your own at Papagayo

## HEY PAPA!

**WHEN** the owners of three trendy bars in Barcelona decided to expand, it was obvious that Tarifa was right at the top of the list.

With a similar vibe to back home and an equally demanding crowd of bon viveurs and style-meisters, it had just the right feel.

Add to that a love of kitesurfing and it was obvious that Francesco, Seba, Max and Sergio had the perfect spot. Now in its third year, Papagayo has gone from strength to strength and be-

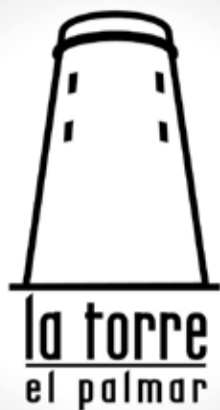
come one of the key hangouts for those-in-the-know on the Costa de la Luz.

The trio of Italians and one Chilean (Seba) have worked hard to get just the right mix of quality fast food and cool atmosphere.

## Papagayo Beach Bar

Papagayo focuses on decent fresh food, hot stone cooked steaks and fresh salads, and there are loads of great cocktails, it being a fun place to head for at night to boot. The group have three bars in central Barcelona, The Bollocks and two Neverminds, a clever play on the Sex Pistols eponymous album.





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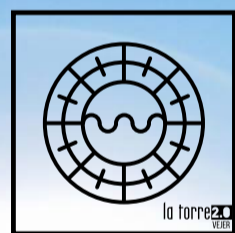
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# Coast with

The Costa de la Luz has one of the most exciting mix of restaurants in Spain, writes Dining Secrets of Andalusia editor Jon Clarke



LEADERS: Melero and team and (right) Castillera's Juan with Jon Clarke



## WHERE TO EAT

**S**TANDING at the pass with half a dozen chefs on one side and a dozen waiters on the other, it is somewhat amazing that Jose Melero looks so relaxed.

Directing his team with Zen-like calm, it is perhaps not surprising that this seasoned chef turned down a career in the air force to run his famous fish restaurant **El Campero** ([www.restauranteelcampero.es](http://www.restauranteelcampero.es)) in Barbate.

And military precision is what he needs with his team serving up to 400 people in a busy summer sitting... and over the three months of summer up to 20,000 meals.

Without a doubt this is THE place to eat tuna, in about 30 different guises, even including tuna lasagna and various types of tuna salad, and you will be hard pressed to find a better fish restaurant in Spain.

Saying that, just up the road, in Zahara de los Atunes, you will find **Antonio** ([www.restaurantean-toniozahara.com](http://www.restaurantean-toniozahara.com)), a restaurant certainly as good and in an even more enviable position, on one of the most amazing beaches in Spain.

Having just undertaken a remarkable transformation, it is the very epitome of style, while also maximising on the incredible light and views.

**Antonio** also has a fabulous self-contained tuna menu, which is a stunning trawl of the very best of this wonderful local fish. And there are some good value tapas dishes, such as the amazing tuna tartare on toast at just five euros, or the 'mollete' bun of squid with mayonnaise.

Tarifa is the town with the fastest growing number of decent places to eat and the quality of cooking gets better by the year.

Slowly catching up on Vejer, you have half a dozen excellent places to eat.

One of the most exciting spots is the recently opened **Mic Moc** ([www.facebook.com/micmoc-tarifa](http://www.facebook.com/micmoc-tarifa)), where friendly Hernan and his Belgian wife have created a wonderful space, with an exciting and creative menu.

All cooked from fresh they pride themselves on their homemade sauces, many of them spicy, and the sheer mix of ingredients in most dishes.

I tried it when it first opened a year ago and it is still going strong, no surprises with dishes like its samosas served with amazing mango chutney and its Russian salad, that came with crab, wakame, broc-

## Perfect mix

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 Andalusia.

The one thing you have to try is the bluefin tuna, which is caught twice a year along the coast at half a dozen specific spots, with very strict quotas and, of which, 90% is exported.

It is like no other tuna you will every have eaten and what is left can be eaten at a handful of fabulous joints, including Antonio, in Zahara and El Campero, in Barbate.

coli, prawns and sesame oil, with cumin and cloves. I dipped into the 'Qi of the wok' section for a main and had a pad Thai, which was so full of goodness, I felt enlivened for the rest of the day, while the 'matcha' Japanese cheesecake was one of the most beautiful creations imaginable, with well over a dozen ingredients, even including popcorn.

Another splendid place foodwise is **Silos 19** ([www.silos19.com](http://www.silos19.com)) in the heart of the old town, in what must be one of the most beautiful buildings on the Costa de la Luz.

This 18th century space has been stylishly converted, in a huge open-plan space with historic vaulted ceilings and an original clock that seeing is believing. Owners Valentina and Chilean chef Pablo Martínez Piumarta have conjured up a stunning spot to hide-out from the wind.

They have a varied international menu with such stunning dishes as the marinated tuna 'cervichado', with ginger, red onion, cilantro, quinoa and even caviar and turnips.

I also loved the scallops with 'trompos de la muerte' mushrooms and stips of panceta, while the Thai beef cheeks with coconut foam were excellent and the duck in ginger, succulent and spicy.

Another excellent place to eat is **Petit Bistro** ([www.petitbistrotarifa.com](http://www.petitbistrotarifa.com)), an idyllic shady spot, which has just been through a big renovation.

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** ([www.latrattoriatarifa.com](http://www.latrattoriatarifa.com)), run by ambitious Italian magnate Luciano Fabricio, 45, from Naples.

With a fondness for his country's top ingredients - not to mention the



ALL CHANGE: Incredible renovation at Antonio and tuna tapa



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# the most!



**NEW BROOMS:** Herman at Mic Moc and (right) Pacha Mama

excellent Slow Food Movement - his restaurant just gets better and better.

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 low temperature.

He has another excellent, simpler spot **Pizzeria con Cucina**, nearby, while the fabulous fish restaurant of former architect and taste meister extraordinaire Victor at **La Pescaderia** is also well worth checking out if you are looking for fish.

Also nearby are **Lola Mora** and **la Ternera Mimosa**, run by father and son team of Xavier and Daniel Lasagabaster (see inset *Like Father, like sun*).

Another recently opened spot is **Oficina del Sabor** in a side street, opposite Tarifa's castle. Set up by Maria Jose and Paolo, who used to work at **Trattoria**, it is a wonderfully nice spot to chill out and relax. If it is a good beach spot near to the town, take a wonder to **Papagaya**, where you can eat some amazing fresh food on a hot stone as well as great cocktails (see Page 26)

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.

Nearby on an incredible peak of the road to Bolonia look out for **El Tropezon**, which is run by a friendly



**AUTHENTIC:** Tesoro

Italian and counts on a nice garden and a typically authentic feel.

Also along this stretch of coast look out for the famous **Hurricane Hotel** and its superb lunch buffet, as well as the recently opened **El Jardin** restaurant at the **Punta Sur** hotel (Garden of Eden, p24), which is an amazing place to chill out and eat incredibly well.

You must also consider dropping in to **Pacha Mama** ([www.pachamamatarifa.com](http://www.pachamamatarifa.com)), which has recently changed hands, and is better than ever.

In a wonderful sheltered garden, with plenty of shade and an excellent pool for the kids to play in, you will be spoilt for choice, with excellent wood-fired bbq treats and pizzas, not to mention the amazing homemade Italian ice creams.

A recently opened place is the excellent **Osteria del Sole**, which has incredible fresh pasta and an amazing Italian wine list right on the beach (see review on page 26).

## Vibrant Vejer

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 Andalucia.

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](http://www.califavejer.com)), she has brought her own unique sprinkling of magic, much of it taken in via four years in Asturias, 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.

The menu changes regularly and is always fresh and healthy with wonderful dishes such as the cauliflower fritters, with turmeric and coriander, as well as an amazing mint and pea gazpacho, with wild basil. A tuna sashimi with wakame salad and prawns was superb, while for theatre go for a 'salad jar' shaken on the spot. The fruits of the forest summer crumble with whisky mascarpone, cream and toasted oats, says it all. Amazing.

Also consistently good - and essential to book - is **El Jardin del Califa** ([www.califavejer.com](http://www.califavejer.com)) reached

*Continues on next page*

## LIKE FATHER, LIKE SUN

WHEN he finally retired from a 12-year career as a professional snowboarder Xavier Lasagabaster, 40, perhaps predictably put down roots in Tarifa.

While he had travelled the world with his job ('everywhere apart from Japan'), Tarifa ticked numerous boxes for someone as active and fun-loving as him.

And, best of all, his father Daniel had already made the move from his rainy hometown of Mondragon, in the Basque Region, to a new life

in the sun.

Indeed, it was in 2003 that his restaurateur father Daniel opened his restaurant Lola Mora, which had previously been the oldest fisherman's bar in the town.

Closed for 16 years it needed a lot of work, but is now one of the best places to eat in Tarifa, as is his son's spot, La Ternera Mimosa, literally right next door.

Opened in 2010, it is big on steaks, has a lovely dining terrace and incredibly friendly service.



**FAMILY:** Xavier with parents



**TALENTS:** Valentina and Pablo with tuna dish at Silos 19, while (above) Maria Jose at Oficina del Sabor



**TALENT:** Benoit at Petit Bistro



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**HOST WITH MOST: James Stuart at Corredera 55 and (below) Califa**




From previous page

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 filled with chicken, almonds and cinnamon and tempting tagines. Meanwhile, their new spot **Califa Tapas**, just up the road on Calle Corredera, is getting more and more popular, with its special mix of dishes and amazing views to match. Talking of views, **La Torre 2.0**, also on Calle Corredera, is impossible to beat, sitting as it does over-

# Magic of Vejer

looking one of the best views in Christendom, overlooking the beautiful Janda landscape. The recently opened sister restaurant of the **La Torre**, in **El Palmar**, is the most exciting opening in Vejer this year. It has a great menu created by head chef Paco Rodriguez, from nearby Puerto de Santa Maria, who has worked around Spain and most recently with two Michelin starred Dani Garcia in Marbella. I particularly liked his fresh plate of thinly sliced courgette carpaccio with salted sardines and with shavings of payoya goats cheese on a bed of local sliced tomatoes and onions. Meanwhile his cerviche of corvina with fresh avocado and creamy seafood sauce was a fresh and a delicious squid tail cooked in three cycles with mash was a surefire winner. Around the corner, with easily the best wines on of-



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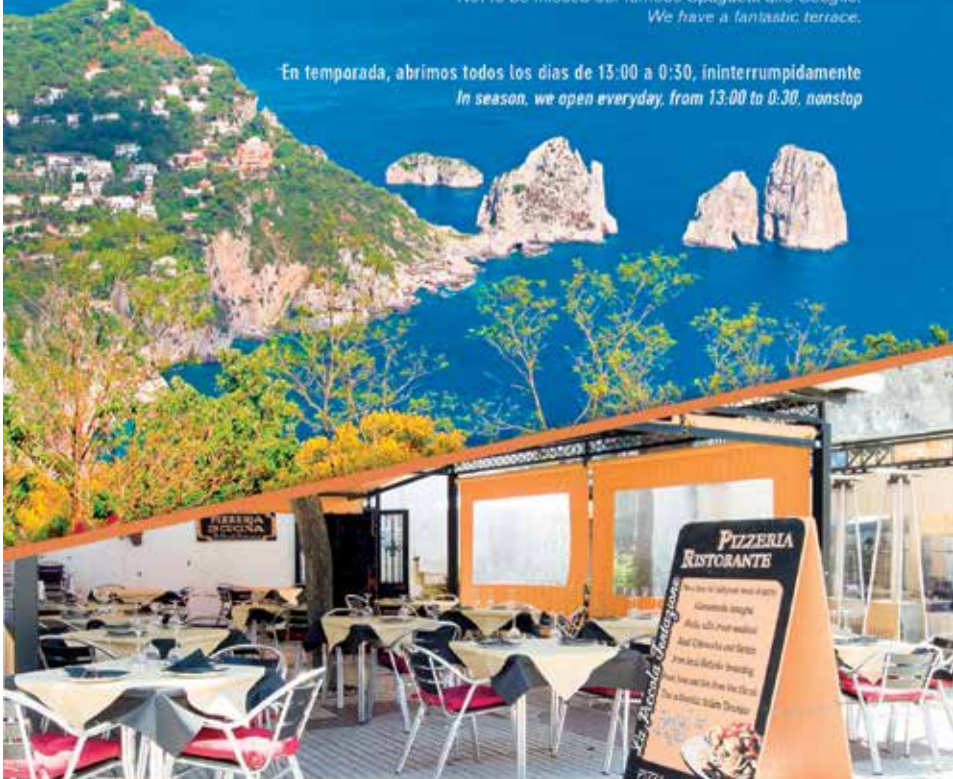
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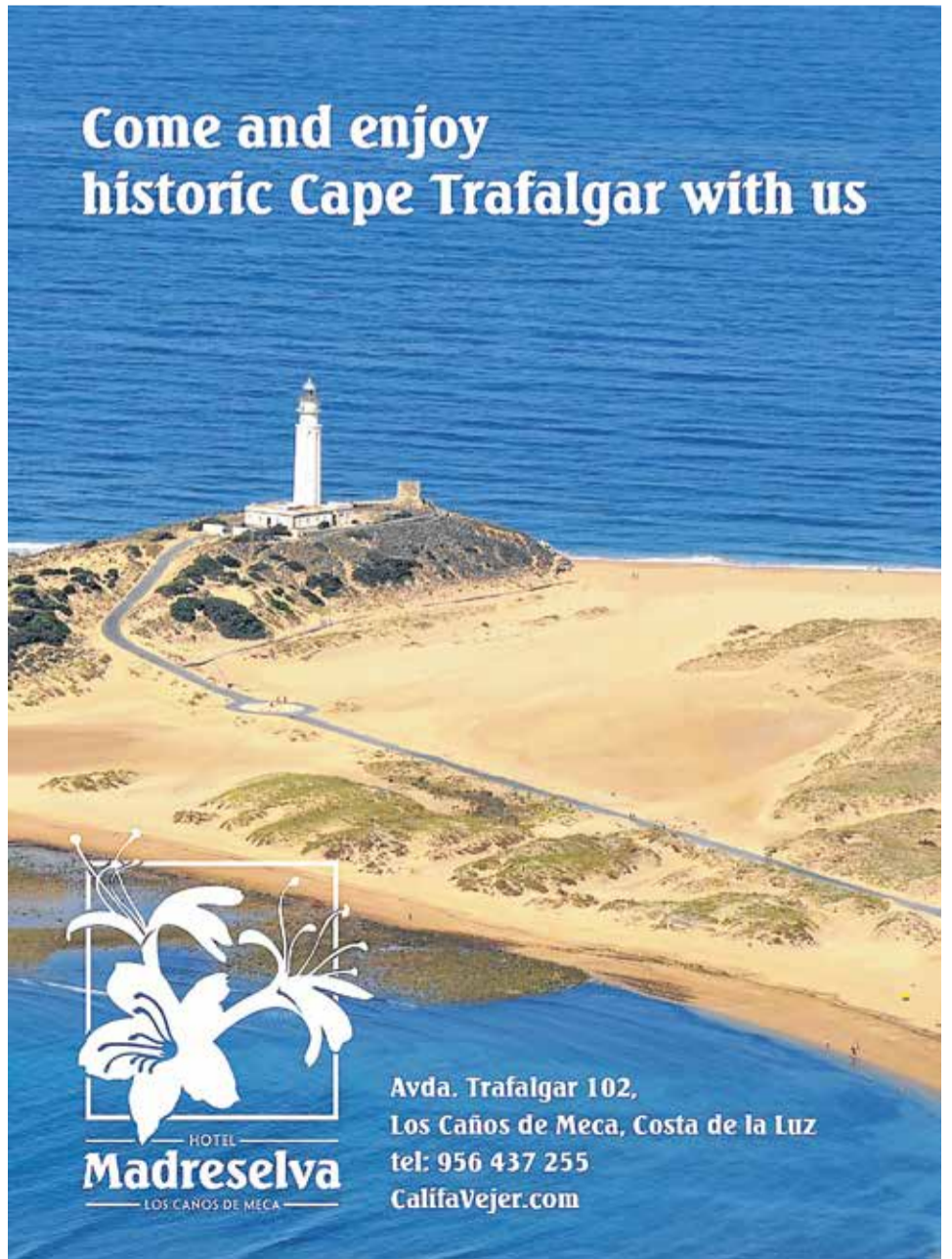
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**NEW STAR: Paco at La Torre 2.0 and (right) La Torre, in El Palma**

fer, is **Vina y Mar**, run by Ramon for the last decade. It's a great spot to hang out at and the tapas get better by the year, while there are loads of wines by the glass, including dozens of sherries.

Outside of the town you are also spoilt for choice with some genuine dining secrets, including **Castilleria** ([www.restaurantecastilleria.com](http://www.restaurantecastilleria.com)), sitting in the idyllic hamlet of Santa Lucia.

A charming spot in the extreme, you sit in a leafy garden and eat the best steaks available in Spain. Broken down into the different types of meat, the steak menu is broken into 8 to 12 months, 4 to 6 years and even 9 to 11 years.

The place just gets better and better and is definitively where the wealthy and privileged go for lunch and dinner. You will need to book. It is very popular. If you cannot get a table then you may just be in luck by visiting **Venta el Toro**, just down the street, which has been picked by the *Guardian* newspaper as one of the most charming restaurants in Spain.

And if it is charm you are looking for, few places beat **Restaurant Patria** ([www.restaurantepatria.com](http://www.restaurantepatria.com)), in the hills near Vejer, where Danes Thomas and



**STUNNING: Terrace at Patria**



wife Ase consistently serve up some of the tastiest dishes on the coast.

This incredibly creative couple, who have recently launched their own juice business **Patria Pura**, run this stunning dining secret, surrounded by vines, oleander and olive trees.

The stone terrace is always beautifully candlelit at night and your hosts do not disappoint when it comes to the food, which is almost all locally sourced.

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."

Last, but not least, in **El Palmar**, look out for the amazing **La Torre** restaurant, which is the only one that sits right on the beach, with amazing views in both directions.

Set up by a local vegetable growing family, that sells its produce around Spain, it is based in the old Guardia Civil barracks.

Son Rafa is in charge of the restaurant and has done a good job with the menu, making it increasingly fresh and vibrant.

Try the plate of local tomatoes in salsa Mery, made from their own parsley, garlic and olive oil, or the fresh tuna tataki salad with mesclun and alfalfa.

**For more detailed reviews, background and other Cadiz food articles visit [www.diningsecretsofandalucia.com](http://www.diningsecretsofandalucia.com)**

## WHERE TO STAY

THE Costa de la Luz is literally creaking 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** ([www.califavejer.com](http://www.califavejer.com)), 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**, oozes history and has been extremely well renovated.

Nearby, right on the beach, in Canos de Meca, is **Madreselva**, set around a central courtyard and with a decent pool for the kids to splash in.

Also in Canos, just a short walk to the Trafalgar lighthouse is evocative **Casas Karen** ([www.casaskaren.com](http://www.casaskaren.com)), a super chilled retreat, sitting in a wild spot with the natural park behind as a backdrop.

Between pinewoods and beach, the collection of chozas (straw huts) and traditional Andalusian farmhouses, blends perfectly into the landscape.

It is also one of the greenest hotels around, with all waste being recycled and water is drawn from a well. Massages and yoga can be arranged, or guests can simply relax in a



## WHERE SLEEPING IS A BREEZE!

Mexican hammock.

In Tarifa you have an equally good group of stylish hotels.

On the beach, the best established is the **Hurricane Hotel** ([www.hotelhurricane.com](http://www.hotelhurricane.com)), which is now nearly 30 years 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.

Another great new option in

the centre of the town itself is **Riad Lolita** (see pic above) ([www.riadlolitatarifa.com](http://www.riadlolitatarifa.com)) a stunning spot, with one of the most beautiful apartments on the top floor.

Stylishly renovated, the views are amazing and it is comfortable in the extreme. Last, but definitely not least, if you are looking for one of the best beachside escapes then **Hotel Antonio** ([www.antoniohoteles.com](http://www.antoniohoteles.com)) in Zahara de los Atunes is wonderful. Sitting right on one of Andalusia's top beaches, this is a professionally and great value run simple hotel with an amazing restaurant to match.

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