

All about Vejer

& COSTA DE LA LUZ



May 2009



Vejer de las Fashionistas

With Damien Hirst, Darryl Hannah, Jude Law and Paul Weller (left top to bottom) regular visitors, it was only a matter of time before a Cabinet Minister got in on the Costa de la Luz's best kept secret, all expenses paid of course

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Ask Paul Weller, Jude Law, or Hugh Cornwell, from the Stranglers, all regular visitors to the town.

Vejer has just the right balance of restaurants, chic boutiques and nearby unspoilt beaches on the delightful Costa de la Luz.

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See overleaf



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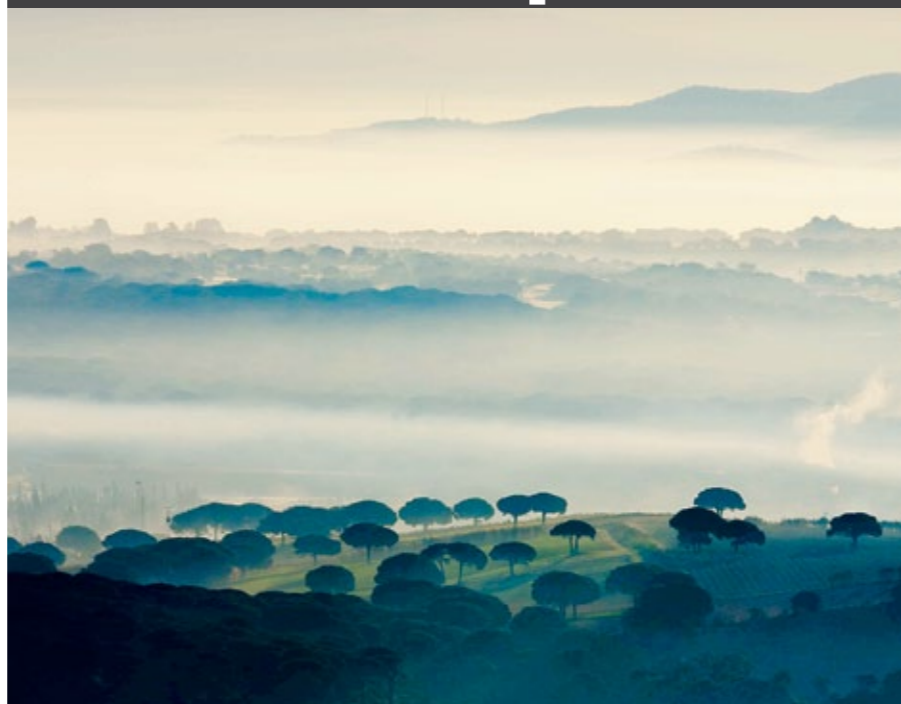
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2 Vejer & Costa de la Luz special

From previous page

offering live Premiership football, no lager louts and no British tourists walking around bare chested showing off tattoos. It is no surprise then, to discover that a female Cabinet Minister has recently luxuriated at one of the many stunning hotels in Vejer. Pampering herself at the stunning 180-euro a night Casa la Siesta, set in classic bull rearing territory to the north of the town, she enjoyed the infinity pool and the wonderful food provided by hosts Lee Thornley and Amelia Gordon, who previously ran trendy UK catering company Mange Tout. "It was not too much of a surprise to have a minister staying," explains Lee, who worked as a barrister for the UK government, before moving to Spain four years ago. "What did make my ears prick up was when this big MP expenses scandal broke in the UK and the news talked about a minister putting her recent Spanish holiday on expenses. "It didn't say where she had stayed, but I can tell you the one who stayed here certainly paid with a House of Commons credit card. Whether it was her own personal one I couldn't say."

Visiting a very well kept secret on 'secret' expenses



Picture by: NEIL BUCHAN-GRANT

BREATHTAKING: The views from Vejer towards Montemedia

There is no doubt that Vejer has become the fashionable place to stay on Spain's southern coast (it is actually 10km inland). Since being widely plugged at the 'in place' to visit in the British papers half a decade ago, the sparkling white town, half way up Cadiz's Costa de la Luz, has had something of a mini boom. Virtually unknown in 2000, the dazzling old Moorish redoubt has been 'restored and polished to a burnished brilliance', in the words of celebrated UK journalist Robert Elms, who has had a home in Vejer for a decade. It is full of narrow windy streets, cavernous white-washed palaces, and patios reminiscent of those so famous in Cordoba. It is a beautiful place to wander around and get lost. Cascading down one side of a steep hill (the other a practically sheer drop) the

authenticity of the place has very much survived, and late in the evening, or early morning, when the old town centre is sleepy and quiet, it is easy to find yourself back in the fabled Islamic caliphate of *Al-Andalus*. First used as a hilltop fortress by the Phoenicians, and later dubbed *Besipo* by the Romans, it was the Moors that really made the place what it is today. Naming it *Bekkeh* (which sounds remarkably similar to the Spanish pronunciation of Vejer), it became a key agricultural centre on the western frontier of the Kingdom of Granada, until seized by Fernando III in 1250. "Vejer is the jewel in the crown of the Costa de la Luz and is the antithesis of the Costa del Sol," explains Tanya MacRae, who has

turned a 10 acre plot inside the nearby Marisma del Barbate natural park into a delightfully sustainable, low-water use escape called El Sueno. "Vejer has somehow escaped the worst ravages of corruption and overdevelopment. Sure there has been new construction, but it has been done quite carefully, and the old town has hardly changed and, if anything, is cleaner and more charming." MacRae, who is a cousin of the Duchess of York, continues: "It is a place for a romantic weekend and has a

lovely selection of boutique hotels and wilder country retreats." There is no doubt that this huge range of places to stay has really helped to keep its upmarket allure. But, it was completely by accident and 'a fair bit of luck' that the place got its cache, claims Spaniard Antonio Roldan, who moved to Vejer from Jerez, via London, 25 years ago. "It certainly had nothing to do with the authorities," insists the former sherry boss, who runs a restaurant Antonio in the town. "It was all done by a small group of private entrepreneurs, all outsiders, who had a vision to conserve and look after what is here."

One of these is James Stewart, a 47-year-old father-of-two, who fell in love with the wild, rugged Cadiz coastline over two decades ago. Now owning various hotels in the area – the Casa de Califa, without a doubt one of the town's key buildings – he has worked hard to bring to the area a more

Cascading down one side of a hill the authenticity of the place has very much survived

Short hop to Africa

FROM the Arabic archways of Vejer, to the African beats in Canos de Meca, there is no escaping the closeness of the Costa de la Luz to Africa. And you can get there in under an hour door to door from Tarifa. Make sure to use the services of Gina Hinteregger, who takes small groups of up to six people every week. Whether you want a short one day excursion or a longer three day trip taking

in the Rif mountains and Chefchaouen, make sure to give Gina a call to get a run down on prices and what to see. "Since visiting in 2003 I have felt very at home in Morocco," she explained. "Since then I have been everywhere and it never ceases to delight me. "I try to make my trips as individual and authentic as possible." Visit www.maroc-tours.net for more info.

3



UNSURPRISED: Lee and Amelia at Casa la Siesta were unsurprised at Cabinet Minister stay. (Right) typical square

cultured, intelligent clientele, while still managing to keep the prices down. "We have had so many famous people pass through our restaurant and hotel over the years," he says, reeling off a list of names like a Who's Who and including politician Michael Portillo, Spanish minister Magdalena Alvarez, comedian Keith Allen, socialite Athina Onassis, actors Daryl Hannah ("she kissed me") and Javier Bardem and Talking Heads singer David Byrne.

Sadly the chiringuitos have now all gone by the swish of a pen from the town hall

His favourite though was Damien Hirst, the artist, famous for pickling sharks. "I really wanted him to trash a room and then sign it for future guests," he jokes. "But he was actually really well behaved and a great guy. We had a fantastic time. I even ended up taking his Californian wife out surfing." Stewart embodies the type of erudite expatriate to have settled in the area. Respectful of local nature and a lover of the famous surf



scene (and more recently kite surfing), he understands how vital it is to the area to maintain its near virgin coastlines. "I keep trying to stress upon the local mayor and his councillors how important it is to protect the remaining coast. "They keep planning these big hotel projects for the coast, which will bring in all these jobs, etc (see story on page 18). But if they just cleaned up what there already is, put in proper pavements, signposts, bins, information boards and cleaned the streets, more people would come and the existing hotels and rental houses would be fuller for more of the year. "What I keep trying to stress is that what tourists really want is the virgin coastline, of which there is so little left in Spain." For now at least, with the recession in full swing, the wonderful nearby beaches at

El Palmar and Canos de Meca stay relatively unscathed. While a host of illegal homes have sprung up over the years behind the beaches they are almost exclusively low rise and nothing like the scale of say, nearby Chiclana, or Marbella. Sadly the *chiringuitos* (beach restaurants) have now all been removed at the swish of a pen from the town hall, in large due to one main offender, which held infamous late night beach parties or raves for years. But there are still some excellent restaurants along the coast road and the beaches are clean, with white sand, and the place is about as peaceful as it gets out of season. Back in Vejer, take a wonder around the old town taking particular notice of the lovely balconies, patios and wrought iron *rejas*, or window grills. Look out for the castle, which is Moorish in origin, but rather disappointing to visit, with remarkably little to see or do, unless of course you want to take a dance class at the local dance school. It was actually remodelled in the 15th century to become a summer holiday retreat for the dukes of nearby Medina Sidonia.

Nearby is the church of Divino Salvador, a 16th century rebuild over an earlier mosque whose minaret now serves as its tower. Take a wander up Calle Rosario, perhaps stopping for a drink or meal at 12th century Casa Rural Leonor, and

take a peek inside at its lovely Moorish arches (set alongside one of the 20th century's best inventions, the microwave). Then head next door to have a look inside the oldest church in Vejer, which has now been converted into a flamenco venue, firing on all cylinders on weekend nights, particularly Saturday for the next two months, with heats for a national Flamenco competition taking place from 10.30pm. Make sure to wonder down to the charming Plaza de Espana, the circular square where the Triana-style fountain and palm trees guarantee a pretty picture. From here you should stroll back to La Plazuela along the Paseo de la Corredera, which has delightful views in all directions to the sea and inland to Medina Sidonia. Just make sure to keep your camera handy and don't just look at the landscape. You never know you might spot Hazel Blears, if not Kate Moss.

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A sharpeye



Neil Buchan-Grant, a UK based travel photographer, stumbled upon Vejer de la Frontera in 1998 and eventually ended up buying a house in the village. As well as working for Berlitz and Insight Guides he sells images to the travel trade. For his personal work he favours landscapes and natural light portraits. His newly published book "Costa de la Luz" focusses mainly on Vejer but also features images from Tarifa to Cadiz. The book is a combination of landscapes and travel images, featuring many scenes from the stunning coastline as well as candid portraits of life in the towns. The profits go to a local children's charity. It can be ordered at: www.blur-b.com/book-store/detail/615688



ESCAPE: A local family at feria time (and inset) the same pair at book launch for Buchan-Grant's new book. (Left) a view of Vejer




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FROM Vejer one gets a real sense of Andalucía's unique position - firmly part of Europe, and yet in near touching-distance of Africa. While the town itself is a real gem, so richly evocative of its Muslim past, nearby is a unique art venue that takes one into one of the most beautiful Spanish landscapes.

Amid Mediterranean pines, on the site of a former army barracks, close to Vejer, is a park for contemporary art that taps into this special location, drawing artists' responses to its rich history, and its geographical and climatic beauty. The Montenmedio Foundation for Contemporary Art (NMAC) is one of Andalucía's prime showcases of work by established and emerging artists from across the world. Mostly made specifically for the park, the pieces are either dotted carefully around a the forest or, in the case of film, video or photographic works, found in converted former barracks buildings.

Sculpture parks are found all over the world, but the Foundation's shrewd selection of artists makes it one of the best of its kind. Some works leap out at you, while others take more searching. The American minimalist artist Sol Lewitt's *Cinderblock* is a huge construction of concrete blocks which are staggered to form a kind of pyramid about the height of the trees surrounding it. In these surroundings it calls to mind a building reflecting a lost culture or civilisation. Shen Yuan's *Puente/Bridge* couldn't be more different; a delicate ceramic bridge recalling both the Islamic pottery commonly found throughout Al Andalus, and the ceramics of Yuan's native China. A work by controversial German artist Gregor Schneider stands nearby. *Cube Cádiz* is built to the same dimensions of the sa-

NMAC-ulate conception



FEELGOOD: Doggie film by Cristina Lucas, with (right) Bridge by Shen Yuan

cred central shrine in Mecca, the Ka'ba, prompting us to think about the now distant Muslim past of this land, the sacred Islamic buildings that once stood on it, and, just as importantly, the resonance this has for today's global situation.

The bricks face in all directions, reflecting the forest, the sky and the sun

The Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson, shows two of the best works at NMAC. The first, amid the pines, is a curved wall made up of specially shaped bricks, with

mirrored surfaces on one side. The bricks face in all sorts of directions, reflecting the forest, the sky and the sun, to hypnotising effect. Meanwhile, in one of the barracks buildings, Eliasson has created a system similar to a pinhole camera which, in a dark room, seemingly creates an image of the idyllic landscape outside the building; a pond surrounded by verdant grass and trees. When you look through the pinhole, you realise that what you thought was water is in fact a mirror, an optical illusion. Another highlight in the old army buildings is a video made by Cristina Lucas, which takes as its starting point Virginia Woolf's lament in a 1928 lecture about a comment that "a woman's composing is like a dog's walking on its hind legs". The film, shot in the narrow winding streets of Vejer, stirring and hilariously features several dogs doing just that, and with delicious aplomb. The very absurdity of this feelgood video reflects the ridiculousness of the original comment. NMAC has a strong commitment to the environment and to education, and as well as simply offering a chance to see its collection of art, it offers workshops, courses and family activities. If you are looking for an introduction to contemporary art outside the sometimes intimidating, hallowed space of the art gallery, NMAC is a great place to start.

Visit www.fundacionnmac.com for more info.



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6 Vejer & Costa de la Luz special

The many faces of Vejer



HISTORY AND TRADITION:
(Clockwise from top left) Three young bulls on the Medina Sidonia road, children enjoying Semana Santa, a pair of nuns en route to church, stirrup cup at Montenmedio's celebrated horse competition, the fountain in Plaza Espana is the perfect place for a paddle and on old boy with his morning brandy. Pictures by Jon Clarke and Neil Buchan-Grant

Artisans, shops and organic produce

It is immediately apparent wandering around the back streets of the old town of Vejer that it has some of Cadiz's most interesting shops.

As well as some excellent local artisans there are plenty of small shops selling stylish jewelry, bags and T-shirts. As Carmen Sanchez, who runs the El Telar de Vejer weaving and knitware shop, explains: "There are some excellent quality producers here and prices have not gone up for five years."

Her shop opposite the main church sells beautiful silk and cotton scarves that she makes in the shop, as well as merino wool scarves, bedspreads and curtains to order. "It really is not expensive here to buy good quality products and the variety is excellent compared to other towns on the Costa de la Luz."

This is certainly the case with Sarah Sender, who opened



STYLE: Leather creations at Piel del Toro (left), T-shirts at La Pajara and Gusto's eclectic mix of fashion and foodstuffs (right)



her fashion and foodstuffs shop Gusto last year, wanting to offer people in the area something different. "I wanted to give people things they couldn't find elsewhere. Things that are hard to find around here." The stylish shop in Calle Juan

Relinque - which was set up with her mother Katy, who moved to the area eight years ago, after working as the marketing director for London's Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) - is full of interesting items. As well as exclusive ranges of

chocolates and biscuits from the likes of Prince Charles' Duchy Originals to Pancreacio chocolates, there are various Asian foods, such as Thai curry pastes and coconut milk. It all started though with clothes from her fashion designer friends Emily and

Finn, from London. "We sold out the entire first range within a month. The clothes were perfect for the summer and we expect them to do as well this year." A video editor based in London before moving with her partner Camden and children to Spain nearly four years ago, she is still finding her feet as a shopkeeper. "It is our first year so we are still working things out," she explained. Other shops that are worth visiting include the amazing La Piel del Toro leather shop, just above Plaza de Espana, where French couple Rene-Paul Zeller and Dominique Gatti, design some of the most stylish handbags and accessories in Andalucia. In the business for 35 years they used to import the bags all around Europe, but now mostly concentrate on the local market. A few doors up is another ex-



ARTISAN: Carmen showing off one of her weaves at El Telar de Vejer

cellent place La Pajara, which prints cotton T-shirts in dozens of different styles, and in any colour you fancy, with hundreds of prints to choose from. Not far away in Calle Ntra. Sra. de la Oliva is one of the most stylish jewellery shops

around. Casa de la Buen Gusto - the House of Good Taste - is certainly that, as well as gold and silver jewellery, you will find cultivated pearls. Looking for some good wine, one of the best wine shops on the coast can be found in

Vejer in Calle Juan Relinque. Stocking wines from around the world - and providing many of the local hotels and restaurants - the wine shop Vina y Mar is an excellent place to also pick up all sorts of goodies from homey to Fair Trade coffee.

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8

Vejer & Costa de la Luz special

New battle of Trafalgar



LANDMARK: The famous lighthouse

'Robinson Crusoe-style' resorts, golf courses, and an influx of German tour operators, a new frontline is being drawn up along the Costa de la Luz, between developers and nature lovers.
By Jon Clarke and Jenny Keane

VISIT El Palmar and beaches around the Trafalgar lighthouse on any weekend, and you will find surfers, kiteboarders and the young and old relaxing on the sands. Look more closely and among them you will find a smattering of captains of industry, politicians and celebrities enjoying one of the final frontiers of unspoilt coastline left in Spain.

Lined with a handful of thatched restaurants and bars, the fronds of the beaches are tree-lined and devoid of concrete expanses, unlike most of Andalucía. It's a relaxed 'vibe' that attracts people who precisely don't want five-star luxury, and the usual bingo halls and golf resorts that come with it.

But alarmingly that lifestyle is under threat with a whole raft of plans on the drawing board for luxury hotels, housing projects and even, of course, golf courses. Not dissimilar to what has happened up at Chiclana to the west, if the plans go ahead a "Robinson Crusoe-style" resort is to be built for German package tourists, while at least six huge four and five star hotels might pockmark the wonderful stretch of unspoilt coastline between Conil and Barbate. The historic Trafalgar lighthouse, off which the famous naval battle was once waged, will be at its epicentre.

"The mayors of Vejer and Barbate want to bring in a different kind of tourism – more upmarket with plenty of new hotels," says Thierry Lopez of Hostal La Gallega, in El Palmar. "But four and five-star hotels would completely alter the character of the place."

"This is one of the last places left on the whole Andalusian coastline that isn't entirely built on, so it is incredible to think – after what has been done everywhere else – that they will make the same mistake again."

So what exactly is being

planned for El Palmar and Trafalgar? And how likely is it to happen? It is not good news, if you are a nature lover. At the northern end of El Palmar, beside the Castilnovo tower, for example, permission was given for two hotels with up to 580 rooms each, a nine-hole golf course and a spa in 2007.

The promoters dangled the carrot that it will bring 300 jobs to the area

The development by the Riera Marsá company was given the green light after several years of consultation and environmental studies that formed part of the planning process.

The plans were strongly opposed by local environmental groups, including Ecologistas en Acción, Agaden and Conil-based heritage group La Laja, which collected 11,000 signatures for a petition to save the area. They claim that Castilnovo is home to important species of flora and fauna which need to be protected. The Junta's environment minister replied by saying that while parts of the coast were already protected the rest had nothing that merited special measures.

La Laja has condemned the plans to build the hotel as "the first attack on what constitutes an important virgin space." Of course, the promoters insisted it would be good for the area, dangling the normally used carrot that it will bring 300 jobs to the area. They claimed it was a sensitive, low-level development of only two storeys and be-

9
Vejer & Costa de la Luz special



Don't strangle El Palmar!

Ex-Stranglers frontman Hugh Cornwell explains why Costa de la Luz is so special to him

"I've been coming to El Palmar for around 20 years and I love it. I stay in one of the local hostals right on the beach front and the whole reason I like it is because it isn't developed. It's just in its natural state and so peaceful. The idea of this hotel being built here is just abhorrent. At least the people who've put up their houses illegally in El Palmar haven't built anything like that –

they haven't ruined it. If people want to go to big smart hotels, there are plenty elsewhere on the coast – why do they want to put more here?"

"There are so few places that are left untouched; this is an absolute gem and they just shouldn't mess with it. It's a special place – and after all, you don't sell off the crown jewels, do you?"



UNSPOILT: The dunes are ideal for those seeking unspoiled coastline... and for a golf course and technology park

ing "at right angles to the beach", there would be large areas of green space.

But José Manuel Herrera of the local environmental group Agaden is less convinced of its benefits. He insists the authorities should be encouraging a different kind of tourism – one that is not bound up with big hotel complexes.

"A development of this kind could spoil the very things which they should be using to sell the area," he explains.

This month his wishes came true when it was announced by the developer (see front page) that the project had been scrapped due to problems of raising the finance. But this however, does not mean that another developer might not move in. Indeed, the local town hall is still hoping this is the case. There are similar problems elsewhere. Further south, at Trafalgar – in the area between the famous lighthouse and the hamlet of Zahora – another deal has been the subject of serious squabbles over recent months.

The huge area of coastal land was acquired from the local Castro family for around 10 million euros eight years ago. A scheme was soon put

forward to Barbate council to build two four-star hotels with 950 rooms.

To be built by German-based tour operator TUI, alongside Spanish group Hipotels, the scheme would have led to the "metamorphosis" of Trafalgar, according to one local newspaper. But the scheme quickly ran into trouble on environmental grounds because the area is a local beauty spot. Eventually, after numerous modifications were proposed, the regional government gave the green light for a project in 2007, something of a black year for the Costa de la Luz in environmental terms.

However the Hipotels group soon pulled out with Junta restrictions reducing the scheme to 600 bedrooms and lowering the building density from 72,000 to 45,000 sq metres.

Tui however have soldiered on and the project aimed at the German market is still likely to take place next to virgin sand dunes right opposite the lighthouse.

Said to be some sort of "Robinson Crusoe-type" hotel, it has recently come a little unstuck, according to sources, with the Junta insisting that the number

of rooms per metre must be lowered yet again. As James Stewart, of nearby Madreselva hotel explained: "They have been told to build even less rooms and TUI are now insisting that the price of the land must come down if the scheme is to be viable. It has caused a massive squabble."

This is a really important area in terms of habitat for birds, and plants

Barbate council has also earmarked another large piece of land called La Yeguada further inland for a second hotel development, but according to sources within the town hall, while there is "plenty of interest" there has so far been no deal struck.

Also nearby, between Zahora and El Palmar, lies another rural zone at risk. Known as the Mangueta, a large tract of land has been bought up by a consortium, said to include the former Real Madrid president, Florentino Pérez.

No formal proposal has yet been put forward, but the initial draft of Vejer's general town plan (PGOU) – still a long way off being approved – makes provision for various hotels and an 18-hole golf course in this area.

Plans are also underway to urbanise 1.5 million square metres of land in El Palmar (or the equivalent of around 1,500 homes) with the possibility of a further one million square metres later. There is even – incredibly – the possible provision for a technology park.

The move has been strongly attacked by green group Ecologistas en Acción as "the triumph of illegality over the need for planning". "El Palmar is one of the few unspoiled beaches on this part of the coast," said spokeswoman Lola Yllescas.

"They say these hotels will only have two floors – but any buildings in this area will have a huge impact. This is a really important area in terms of habitat for birds and plants."

"As for this argument about bringing jobs and money into the area – we've heard it all before, for 20 years we've been given this line and it's

not true. Look at the big hotels in Novo Sancti Petri, for example; of the 13 hotels there, only five stay open all year round. So for the majority of the year, these huge buildings are lying empty, unproductive, certainly not offering any employment.

"If the authorities want to boost the economy of the area, why don't they put more money into the traditional sectors like agriculture and fishing?" The last words appropriately go to Hugh Cornwall of huge British band the Stranglers. "I like it at El Palmar precisely because it isn't developed. It's just in its natural state and so peaceful."

"The idea of hotels being built here is just abhorrent. At least the people who've put up their houses illegally in El Palmar haven't built anything like that – they haven't ruined it. If people want to go to big smart hotels, there are plenty elsewhere on the coast – why do they want to put more here?"

"There are so few places that are left untouched; this is an absolute gem and they just shouldn't mess with it. It's a special place – and after all, you don't sell off the crown jewels, do you?"

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- How many rooms has Casacinco got
- Which golden beach is Vejer's local beach
- What famous naval battle took place off the town's nearby coast

Hip hotels and chic dining

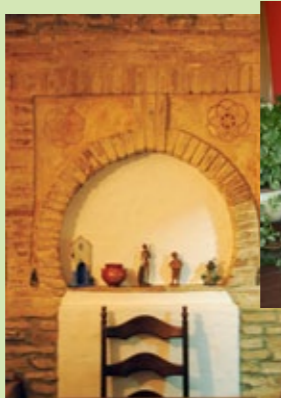
WHERE TO STAY

WITHOUT a doubt there is nowhere on the Andalusian coastline that has as many hip and trendy hotels as Vejer. Its sheer range of cool boutique hotels, is only matched by its numerous laid back hippy chic retreats in the nearby countryside and on the Costa de la Luz, ten minutes away. In town there is everything from the spacious ultramodern V Hotel, to the beautifully-designed Casa-Cinco. On top of this is the popular stalwart Hotel La Casa del Califa, and its well known restaurant, as well as sister hotel No.1 Triperia, which is worth checking out. Califa is easily one of Cadiz's most beautiful buildings. Its main doorway adorned with a shell, is breathtakingly pretty and the former church owned property has been well preserved, while its warren of passageways goes back to the days of the Moors – and before. Having grown

in a peacemeal sort of way, it now comprises ten buildings based around a charming central patio where guests dine under candlelight by night and under shady trees by day. There is also great value Casa Leonor, based in a 12th century Moorish townhouse and if you are on a real budget and looking for a deal try Apartamentos Rey San. In the country nearby you will be blown away with the taste of the owners at Casa La Siesta and marvel at the wild, low-water use garden at El Sueno. Looking for laid back hippy chic, what about Canos de Meca and its excellent Madreselva, or the nearby Casas Karen, which has been around for years. On the beach in El Palmar have a look at Hostal Gallego, an eccentric, but comfortable place to stay. In the other direction is the excellent value Hotel Sindhura, which has a superb stand alone restaurant and amazing views.



STYLE: (From top left clockwise) Casa La Siesta, Casa Califa, Hotel V, Sindhura and Casa Leonor



WHERE TO EAT

FOODWISE you will also be spoilt in Vejer, with half a dozen top notch places to dine. The main battle ground is on Plaza Espana, where on one side you have the charming pavement tables of Trafalgar, and on the other the historic candle-lit patio restaurant inside Casa Califa. Food could not be different so take your pick, before also taking a wander up the hill through the lovely arch to French restaurant La Vera Cruz, set in the splendour of a 16th century chapel, complete with arches, and a chef who has trained under Michel Roux, no less. Then if you fancy somewhere really different, somewhere to really make your heart soar, head out to the leafy hamlet of Santa Lucia, up a dead end road, where you will find Juan Valdes' delightful terrace restaurant Castillera. Not far from here, in La Muela you will find another great little dining secret, called Patria, run by a delightful Danish couple the Donsos. In town, less formal dining can be found at the charming Antonio's, run by a Jerezano and always serving a great, fresh menu at excellent prices. Then there is always Felafel and other vegetarian cuisine at Juan Relinque, 14. A few doors up don't miss the Ice Cream parlour Mastren. Over on the beach in El Palmar you will be spoilt for choice. But style-lovers will definitely go for La Chanca, which can be found in an ancient 150-year-old tuna factory, while fish restaurant Casa Francisco is Michelin-rated. On the road to Canos de Meca a friendly place with good value food is Venta Alfardia.



TASTY: La Chanca (above), with Vera Cruz (right) and (inset) Juan Valdez

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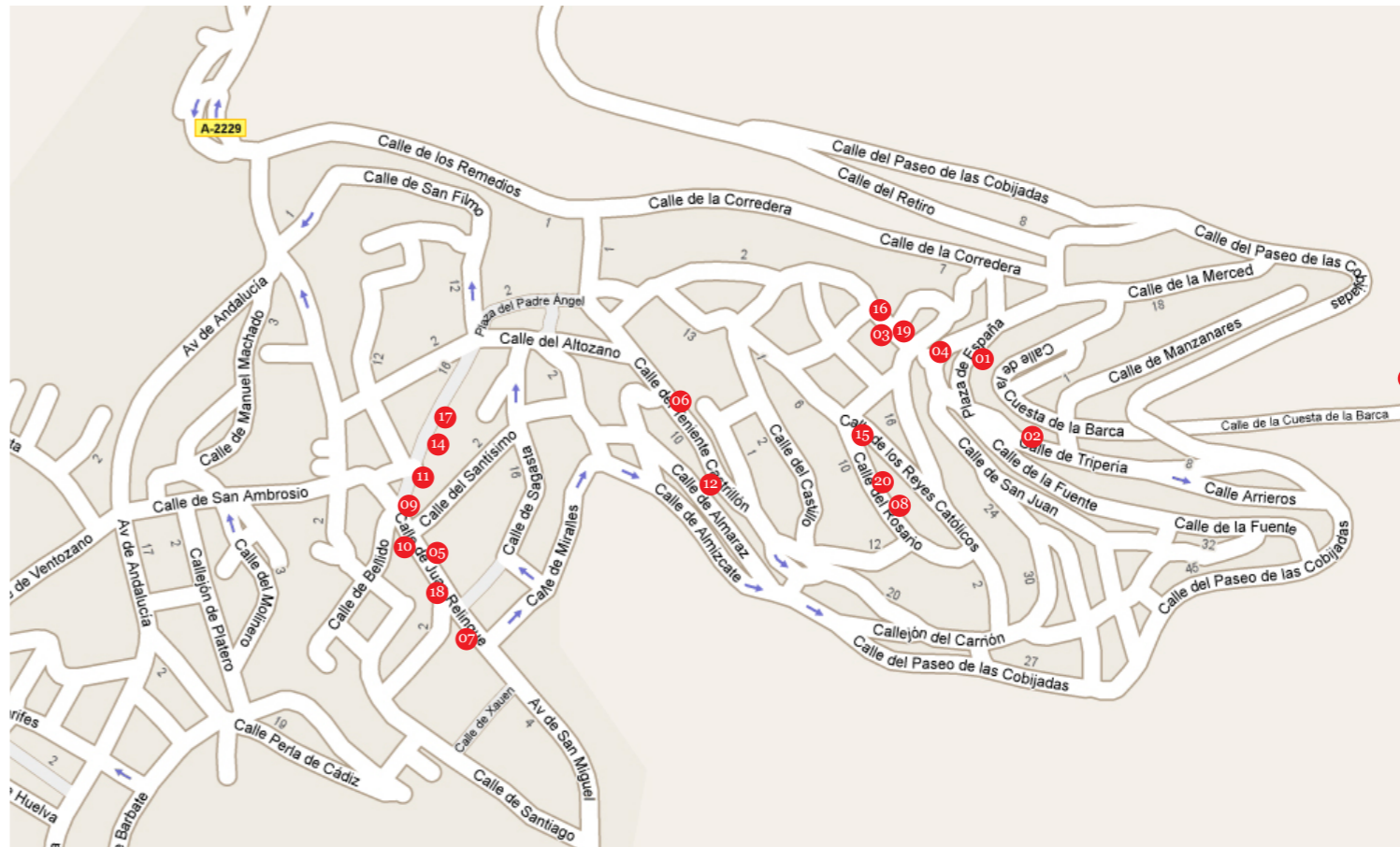
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