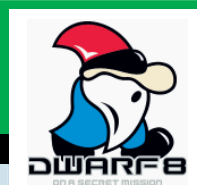


All about Costa de la Luz

June 03, 2010



Seeing the light

Jon Clarke takes a ride down Andalusia's most alluring, unspoilt coastline the Costa de la Luz – or the 'The Coast of Light' of Cadiz

FROM our luncheon spot, high on a ridge jutting out of the classic white town of Vejer de la Frontera lies a view, unlike almost any other in southern Spain.

For spreading out in front of us is an entirely interrupted ten-mile vista of rolling fields all the way down to the white sandy beaches of El Palmar and Canos de Meca.

An incredible sight, this patchwork quilt of greenery and long, unspoilt beaches in the distance is part of the Cadiz coastline, known as the Costa de la Luz, or The Coast of Light.

This is what the majority of Andalusia's coastline would have looked like 50 years ago so it is heartbreaking to discover that there are concrete plans to do the same again here. More of which later.

This is Europe's true deep south; a windswept flood plain, fringed by long dune beaches and

Turn to Page 14



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NEW GUEST HOUSE IN VEJER



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Costa de la Luz

SOS our coast

From Page 13

crowned by a series of austere 'cubist' towns, which were built by the Moors who ruled this land for nearly 800 years.

Indeed, their bridgehead was at Tarifa, easily one of Spain's most atmospheric towns.

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

From Tarifa in the north there are literally miles and miles of mesmerizing and largely unspoilt white, soft and sandy beaches.

The Costa de la Luz is, without a doubt, for the more discerning tourist

But it is not just ideal for a bucket-and-spade-breakaway from the over-built, high-rise monstrosities the other side of the Rock.

There are numerous sites to see, from the famous Trafalgar lighthouse - off which the crucial naval battle once took place - to the historic fishing village of Sancti Petri and from the Roman ruins at Bolonia to the twisting, white-washed streets of Conil.

And then there are the hidden gems, like exclusive Roche, where Madrid's captains of industry take their holidays, and Zahara de los Atunes, the sleepy fishing village, which is fast garnering a reputation for its food.

And the, of course, are the two main gems of the coastline, the historic fortress town of Tarifa - a Mecca for windsurfers from around the world - and hip, alluring Vejer, where cabinet ministers and celebrities rub shoulders.

And still there is more, with El Palmar claiming to have the best surfing waves in Andalucía and Bolonia, with Europe's largest sand dune, at over 30-metres in height.

And don't forget Caños de Meca - the fun capital of the region - or gritty Barbate, whose fish restaurant El Campero is among the best in Spain.

English lawyer Carmen Atkins, who moved to the area from Sevilla with her family nearly two decades ago, insists she could never go back.

"You drive down to the coast to see this incredible expanse which is like nowhere else around. It is the great mix of coast and hills and these lovely towns that hold a lot of the old Spain in them."

"Now we live here I could nev-

ALLURING: The amazing view east from hip Vejer



er go back.

"My husband and I are also long-time fans of the area and always favour the longer two hour drive down to the Costa de la Luz from our home in Ronda, over a short 45-minute trip to the Costa del Sol."

"The coastline is only matched in beauty by Cabo de Gata in Almería and there is something incredibly haunting about the stunning windswept beaches, particularly around El Palmar."

"While not exactly aficionados of its famous watersports, our children love the beaches and we love the vibe of the area,

its laid back, unshowy style, its friendly, unfussy locals and, above all, the incredible colour and scenery."

The Costa de la Luz is, without a doubt, for the more discern-



CONCERN: (From left), Maria Malo, Beat Steffan and Carmen Atkins

Costa de la Luz special

15

GIANT: Bolonia's 30m dune, with (inset) party capital Canos de Meca



THE COAST WITH THE MOST

There is so much to be found on the Costa de la Luz, which 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, Chipiona and El Puerto de Santa María. It also takes in the cities of Cadiz and Huelva, but that is another story, to be covered in later editions of the paper.

For now we are focusing on the three main towns you reach after passing the Rock, Tarifa, Vejer and Conil.

ing tourist, and, in particular, the hotels in and around Vejer are some of the most sophisticated in Spain. Carmen adds: "We also love the stylish mix of shops and restaurants in Tarifa, its a melting pot of worldly Spaniards and colourful expatriates, that bring it so much diversity." It is here that a disproportionate number of fashion labels have been born in Spain, from the now sadly defunct Indian to the still thriving Mala Mujer and trendy French boutique Babachic, which now has five shops in Spain.

"The good news is that young people seem to be against the project"

There is 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 does not completely shut down through the winter. Maria Malo, who has been running her fashion empire Mala Mujer out of the town for nearly a decade, explains: "There is something incredibly creative about the town and coastline. The scenery is so special and is very inspiring." But alas, all is not well on the Costa de la Luz. Just as is the danger in the Cabo de Gata natural park in Almeria, the economic pressures on cashing in from tourism are making inroads here.

It has already happened in the sprawling, ugly development of nearby Novo Sancti Petri, whose endless roundabouts, golf courses and luxury condos give a flavour of the nearby Costa del Sol. But there are all sorts of other daft plans on the horizon, including a crazy idea to build a huge apart-hotel development on virgin land, right

by the beach alongside the stunning Trafalgar lighthouse. While not yet confirmed, there have been whispers of a nine-hole golf course and, before you know it, of course, there will be the obligatory villas, then commercial centres, etc, etc. (see story on page 32) "It would be crazy to allow all this to happen," says Maria Malo. "This is

one of the very last unspoilt coastlines left in Spain."

Lawyer Carmen agrees. "The politi-

cians here just don't have any foresight. All they think about is jobs, but they haven't figured out yet the quality of tourism that comes here can continue to grow.

"The good news is that young people at least seem to be against the projects so we will have to hope they can make themselves heard."

Equally alarming, is a mad scheme to increase the size of the Tarifa harbour by up to ten times.

According to critics of the project – that would cause a massive increase in the number of ferries – it would "turn the town into Algeciras, 'one of Spain's most polluted'."

"The new port will completely ruin Tarifa if it is allowed to go ahead," says Swiss Beat Steffan, whose company Dwarf 8, is carving out a niche as Andalucía's hippest new drink.

"It is all to do with allowing Algeciras to grow as a container port to compete with the fast-expanding Tanger Med port in northern Morocco.

"But why should Tarifa – and for that matter other parts of the coast – be ruined in order to aid financial gain elsewhere?"

It is a question that all nature lovers should be asking themselves around Andalucía today.

Either way, make sure to come down and see the still stunning Costa de la Luz before the politicians and planners get their wicked way.



HOLY FISH: The tuna fountain in the heat of Conil

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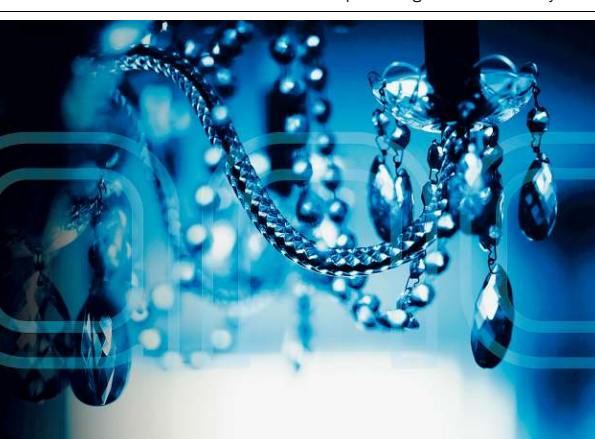
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16 Costa de la Luz special

BRIDGEHEAD: Tarifa was
a short hop for the Moors



Magic from Mecca

*From Arabic stronghold to a
hive for wind and kitesurfers,
today Tarifa has become one
of Andalucía's hippest towns*

By John
Clarke

THERE is an incredible buzz in the heart of the old town of Tarifa. And it is not just the whistling of the wind.

Little by little the historic town, that was the bridgehead for the marauding Moors in the eighth century, is becoming a haunt for style and fashion lovers. Trendy shops and bars are opening every month and the range of hip places to stay is comparable only to Vejer, a short hop up the coast.

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 and welcoming when they used the town as their entry point into southern Spain.

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

But while their heroics in finally ousting the Moors in the 13th century are celebrated today, curiously Tarifa gets its

name from its original Arabic conquerer *Tarif ibn Malik*.

There is certainly a very ancient feel about Tarifa. Once through the evocative Arabic gateway Puerta de Jerez, you are quickly in a different world.

While there are few stand out buildings, aside from the odd church, the narrow streets of white-washed houses, replete with *rejas* and old wooden doors, feel very lived in.

It is a feeling that novelist Paulo Coelho catches well in his book *The Alchemist*, about a shepherd boy who stops in Tarifa on his way to Morocco.

When writer Rose Macaulay travelled here in 1949, she found Tarifa overwhelmingly Moorish, while curiously London wine merchant Tommy Layton was pestered by "grotesques, beggars and *inalfabeticos* (illiterates)" when he visited in 1959.

These days, while it certainly still has an edge, largely due to its port, which ferries passengers to and from Morocco, it is much more a Mecca for watersport enthusiasts, in particular kite surfers



ORNATE: Grand doorway

and windsurfers. There can certainly be little debate over its frequent and steady winds. Both the Levante coming from the east and the Poniente coming from the west blow for



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Costa de la Luz special ¹⁷



ARCHWAY TO ARABIC TIMES:
The main entrance to the old town, while above Tarifa Records and (here) the owners of Babachic Maxime and Ivana

much of the year.

It is said to be a contributing factor behind the town's allegedly high suicide rate, and has led to the hills above the town becoming a prime spot for some of Europe's most productive wind turbines.

Whirling away for most of the year, the Olive Press recently reported how on one day last year 43 per cent of Spain's total electricity demand was produced in Cadiz province, much of it from Tarifa.

Back in the town, take a walk up the main drag Batalla del Salado, which is full of surf shops, like Art of Surfing, Dragon and Hot Stick.

In the early evening bronzed blonde-haired surf dudes hang outside their respective shops, while willowy northern European girls vie for their attention and walk their dogs.

It gets even hipper in the old town, particularly on summer evenings with its boutiques

It gets even hipper in the old town, particularly on summer evenings, with its range of trendy boutiques. There is a shoe shop that doubles as a bar, a boutique Babachic literally full of Indian beads, and a shop for Tarifa's very own bespoke record label.

Then, of course, is its fabulous access to Africa, Tarifa being by far the easiest way to get to Morocco. Being just 11 kilometres to Tangier, the fast hydrofoil ferry run by FRS takes just 35 minutes and these days you can even go through the customs procedures en route.

And before you ask, thesedays it is a lot easier to get on in Morocco, whether on a day trip or heading for a longer break.

How things have changed since award-winning American writer Truman Capote gave advice to visitors to Tangier in 1950.

He wrote: 'Before coming here you should do three things: be inoculated for typhoid; withdraw your savings from the bank; say goodbye to your friends - heaven knows you may never see them again...' Back in Tarifa you are more likely to lose your friends in one of the many bars or restaurants.

'While it may be a small town there are so many good bars, with live music and food,' explains Gaspar Cuesta, a local Tarifeno and owner of the 21-year-old Hispalense language school.

'The place gets more and more fashionable by the year. It used to be busy here just in July and August, but now the season runs from March till November.'

This is much to do with the large amount of activities to do in the area.

Aside from the windsurfing, shopping, eating and drinking, one of the town's most popular activities is going whale and dolphin watching. Three different types of dolphin as well as Pilot, Sperm and Orca whales are regularly to be found in the straits. In particular Pilot whales, who feed on squid, are the most likely to be spotted, as they live here all year round. A number of firms ply their trade around the town, including *Whalewatchtarifa.net*, who more or less guarantee that you will encounter the mammals.

There are also numerous good walks to be had in the area, and if you are looking for more culture you might take a ride up to Bolonia, where one of Spain's most interesting Roman ruins, *Baelo Claudia*, is well worth a visit.

And failing that, you might just want to hole up in one of the many trendy and comfortable hotels in the town, or up the coastline west, and simply relax and recharge your batteries. Who knows the wind may even abate for long enough to get an hour or two's sunbathing on the beach.



Stylish apart-hotel in the centre of the old town

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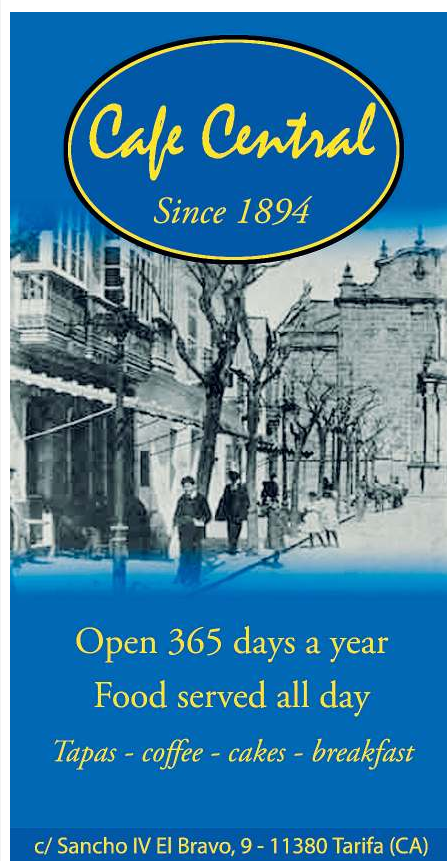
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18 Costa de la Luz

True fashion frontier

Cabinet ministers, celebrities and barons... is it any wonder Vejer de la Frontera is Andalucía's hottest, secret retreat

By Jon Clarke

HE rattles off a list of names like a chapter out of Who's Who, including politician Michael Portillo, comedian Keith Allen, socialite Athina Onassis, Talking Heads singer David Byrne and actors Daryl Hannah ("she kissed me") and Javier Bardem. But hotelier James Stuart's favourite would have to be the enfant terrible of the

British art scene Damien Hirst, famous for the pickling of sharks.

"I really wanted him to trash a room and then sign it for future guests," jokes the 48-year-old owner of Vejer's buzzing Califa hotel. "But he was actually really well behaved. He was pleasant and polite and I ended up taking his Californian wife out surfing."

It is also the perfect hideout from the long lenses of the UK paparazzi

They are just the sort of cultured, intelligent clientele, who regularly make a bee line for the stunning white town, which perches ten miles inland from the Costa de la Luz.

It is hardly surprising that

ARABIC: Old Moorish archway

Vejer is THE secret, in-the-know destination in southern Spain.

It is also the perfect hideout from the long lenses of the paparazzi, with one former UK cabinet minister allegedly taking an 'all-expenses-paid' trip to the town early last year, just before the famous expenses scandal blew up in his face.

Off the beaten track, exclusive and with the appropriate number of stylish and upmarket hotels, Vejer is the perfect location for a romantic tryst, or a retreat from the rat race.

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 of the delightful Costa de la Luz.

"It is a great mix," explains

Jean van Gysel de Meise, a French/Belgian Baron, no less, who bought and converted a townhouse into the stunning V Hotel three years ago.

Having made his fortune in finance and property in the US, the 43-year-old spotted the opportunity to open a chain of boutique hotels in Europe.

But rather than starting in London, Paris and Rome, where he is currently in the process of buying properties, he opened his first in tiny Vejer.

"It is the perfect place for a boutique hotel and I already knew the area well after my parents bought an old mill above Bolonia beach 40 years ago.

"This seemed a logical next step and while it was a bit tricky at first we are now doing well in our third year." Since being widely plugged



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BIRD'S EYE VIEW: Shot of Vejer from the air

Costa de la Luz special ¹⁹

Pictures by NEIL BUCHAN-GRANT



TRADITIONS: Young boy learns how to ride while paraglider zooms in (right)

as the 'in place' to visit in the British papers over recent years, the sparkling white town has had something of a mini boom.

Virtually unknown a decade ago, 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.

Full of narrow windy streets, cavernous whitewashed palaces, with 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 ten-acre plot inside the nearby Marisma del Barbate natural park into a delightfully sustainable, low-water use escape called El Sueno.

She continues: "It is a place for a romantic weekend and has a lovely selection of boutique hotels and wilder country retreats."

Take a ten-minute drive towards the wonderful nearby beaches at El Palmar and Canos de Meca, which (for now) stay relatively unscathed.

While a few 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 Chicla-na, 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. The place is about as peaceful as it gets out of season.

Back in Vejer, take a wander 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 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 stroll up Calle Rosario, perhaps stopping for a drink or meal at 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 wander 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.

The beaches are clean, with white sand, and the place is peaceful



Romantic terrace in the heart of the old town. French chef, Daniel, serves the freshest meat and fish 'al la brasa'

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HISTORIC: The old castle is in good shape

Get in *tuna* with Conil

Jon Clarke spends a day in historic Conil and takes the last few paces up the coast towards Sancti Petri and Cadiz

IT looks rather like a huge, white wedding cake almost melting into the sea.

And Conil de la Frontera is one of those towns that manages to surprise and satisfy in equal measures. A true beach resort, unlike its near neighbours of Tarifa and Vejer, it has some of the best white sandy beaches in all of southern Spain. But, the biggest surprise of all is its charming, laid back historic centre, which once inside can keep you occupied for a whole morning. Full of interesting, historic buildings and timeless corners, there are some great hotels, restaurants and shops to entice you to

stay longer. But, more than anything Conil is a bustling town with a true economic heart.

"With 20,000 people it is more than able to support itself," explains Pedro Alba Amaya, owner of charming hotel Casa Alborada in the heart of the old town.

"But, most importantly, tourists need to realise there is as much going on in Conil as up the coast.

"It is a very attractive place to visit, particularly in the historic Barrio de los Pescaderos and the restaurants are very good quality."

Fellow hotel owner artist Maria Polblador Peces is in agreement.

The Madrilenio, who opened the Princesa y el Guisante hotel with her artist brother Juan Antonio exactly a year ago, was seriously swayed by the amount of fashionable stuff going on in the centre.

"There is a great range of shops here in the centre and the nightlife is also su-

perb," she explains.

But the beaches are the real reason to visit Conil, and there are two great beaches right in front of the town.

The best of these is the lovely Playa de la Fontanilla, where you will find a couple of great restaurants, two side by side, La Fontanilla and Francisco, run by two competing cousins.

Even better is to the east where the town hall - unlike its near neighbour of Vejer - has handed over its part of the stunning Playa de los Bateles beach to the environment department to be

completely protected from development.

This is a wonderful stretch of beach, sand dunes and scrubland

This is a wonderful stretch of beach, sand dunes and scrubland that can be accessed by a bridge across the River Salado, that snakes in from up near Benalup.

From here, you will firstly find a stunning old white finca followed by a celebrated naturist area.



ARTIST: Peces

After that you have a more or less uninterrupted walk all the way to El Palmar and the famous Cape of Trafalgar, off which Lord Nelson achieved victory but lost his life on October 21, 1805.

The town is also famous for its tuna fishing method - when a huge fishing net is slowly tightened and the fishes, when beaten to death collectively, turn the sea crimson.

Known as an *almadraba*, which means literally 'place for hitting', the endangered blue fin tuna, that weigh



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ATMOSPHERIC: One of Conil's typical, old town squares

Costa de la Luz 21



EXPANSE: The huge, unspoilt Playa de la Bateles is priceless

around 200 kilos, are caught between April and June as they return from the Atlantic to reproduce in the Med.

After two months of being forbidden to catch them (there is much evidence to suggest a complete ban for some years) they are caught again in September when they return to the Atlantic.

The ancient method, which is likely to date back to Phoenician times, is still being used in Zahara de los Atunes, Barbate and Conil and is a major source of income.

Now is certainly a good time to visit Conil as early June sees the town celebrating

the 'Ruta del Atun' in which dozens of restaurants participate in the 'ruta gastronómica'.

In total this year 21 establishments will offer a variety of special dishes until June 13.

Further up the coast to the north you will uncover the exclusive enclave of Roche, which has some of the most expensive houses on the coast, not to mention a couple of excellent beach restaurants.

From here you are just a short walk into the much sprawling development of Novo Sancti Petri, which has its obligatory golf courses, resort hotels and tacky shops and restaurants.

However, if you can be bothered to navigate your way around its numerous roundabouts and identical, ugly developments, there is one more surprise to be found on the Costa de la Luz... that is before you reach the stunning city of Cadiz itself.

For, tucked away in this car-buncle, is the pretty fishing village of Sancti Petri, which is surrounded by marshes and sand bars.

The old village, which still has its charms, is worth exploring for an evening stroll or morning coffee.

Just offshore though is the real jewel in the crown, the now ruined 13th-century castle of Sancti Petri, where the Phoenicians built an important 1BC temple to their god Melkaart.

The Romans later turned this into a shrine for Hercules, while both Hannibal and Julius Caesar have said to have been visitors.

The next step was one noted poetically in Laurie Lee's seminal book on Spain *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning*.

"Cadiz, from a distance, was a city of sharp incandescence, a scribble of white on a sheet of blue glass, lying curved on the bay like a scimitar and sparkling with African light," he wrote.

Tempting, for sure. But we will save that for another day.

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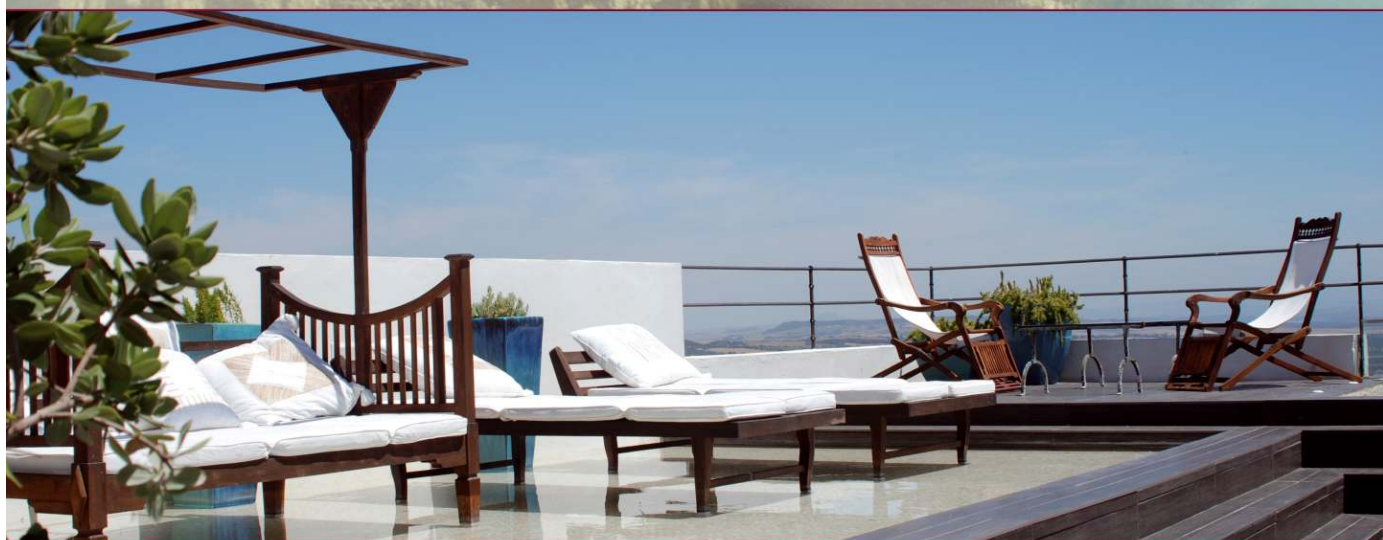
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WHERE TO SHOP

Chic and cheerful

FOR such a small area it is amazing how many influential shops can be found on the Costa de la Luz.

Within the historic heart of both Vejer and Tarifa, in particular, you will find a superb array of interesting places to shop.

In Tarifa, look out for the ultra-hip Babachic, a bead and jewellery shop that started in Tarifa, but now has three shops in Andalucía (there is another in Conil and a third in Marbella), as well as 70 outlets for its Moodywood jewellery range around Europe, including Paris, Milan and soon London.

"It all started from our first shop in Tarifa four years ago though," explains Frenchman Maxime Bougerol, who owns the chain with his wife Ivana.

VARIETY: From El Telar to Zoco Flamenco and (top right) Babachic

MIX: Carmen at Adara (right), beautiful Tarumba (far right)



The couple import the colourful, hand-made wooden beads from a remote part of India.

"We began by simply selling the beads at market stalls, but now it has really taken off and we are now doing really well," says Bougerol, who lives in Tarifa.

Another unique shop in the old town is Tarifa Records, in Calle Jerez, where a former Ibiza DJ mixes up the unique soundtracks that can be found in most of the area's hippest hotels and restaurants.

A stylish shop, with cool posters, the mixes are varied and can be found all around the world.

Heading up the coast to Vejer you will find some excellent local artisans and plenty of small shops selling stylish jewellery, bags and T-shirts.

As Carmen Sanchez, who runs the El Telar de Vejer weaving and knitwear 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.

A short walk away you will find her daughter's shop 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.

The presentation is excellent and they are doing their best to look after the environment.

Another great shop in the centre is Tarumba, where sculptor Bryony Persson is producing some of the most beautiful porcelain dishes and other designs from her pottery studio at the back of the shop.

Run by Bryony and her American partner Wanda Miller, who previously lived in Madrid, they bring a slice of urbane sophistication to the town.

Not far away is another stylish shop, the Zoco de Flamenco, where you will pick up a cornucopia of flamenco collectables and clobber.

As well as a series of beautiful wraps, scarves and dancing shoes, there are a series of CDs and even old records. The vintage dresses, in particular, are stunning.

Just over the road don't miss the brand new shop Adara, recently opened by Carmen, who comes from Barbate, where she has another shop.

The place is a huge collection of interesting items and you are bound to find something worth wearing.

Likewise up the road at Shahrzad you will find a more ethnic mix of stuff.

Last, but not least is the excellent new shop D2 run by Angeles Fernandez in Avenida Andalucía.

The graduate of Sevilla's fashion school, Angeles sells a range of lovely dresses and jewellery from her shop, as well as designing a range of flamenco accessories.

In particular, she won an award at this year's Passarela Flamenco 2010 for her beautiful styles.



VIBRANT: Angeles' D2 designs



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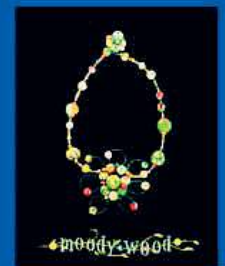
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26 Costa de la Luz special

The wind and so much more

TAKE a ride down the N340 out of Tarifa to the west and you will see one of the most spectacular of sights.

Look towards the shore and, chances are, you will see hundreds of huge colourful kites bobbing up and down in the prevailing winds. Zoom in and you will soon realise that practically the whole coastline (well at least the 10km stretch to Punta Paloma) is being taken up by the latest hip sport of kitesurfing.

It has literally taken the area by storm and over the last decade the traditional sport of windsurfing has been massively blown away by the new fashionable discipline.

"These days about 99 per

The area around Tarifa has become the kitesurfing and windsurfing capital of Europe... but there are so many other activities at your fingertips

cent of our clients rent kitesurfing equipment," says Miri of Dragon shop and kite school, based in the town. "It has become so incredibly popular over the last few years."

Both Dragon and other shops like Hot Stick and Art of Surfing rent out the kit from just 50 euros a day.

"It has certainly become one of the economic dynamos of the town over recent years," says Tilo, who opened his shop Hot Stick in 2003.

"It brings in a lot of income and helps to make the town an all-year round holiday destination."

Famed as 'the Wind Capital' of Europe, it is unsurprising that Tarifa's Valdevaqueiros Beach is a Mecca for windsurfing and kiteboarding, even playing host to the World Championships last year.

Alongside Diamond Head in Hawaii and Fuerteventura in the Canaries, there are no other places that rival it for constant winds, either the Poniente from the west or Levante from the east.



HIGH VIEW:
Bolonia beaches

The best wind for kitesurfing is the Poniente, which comes in from Portugal. It

Over the last decade windsurfing has been massively blown away

Beaufort scale and brings in a cooler breeze from the sea. It also happens to be the dominant wind in Tarifa. The best wind for windsurf-



ers is the Poniente, which comes from the south east from Africa. It normally builds up for a few days and at its peak - when everyone gets sent mad - it can reach up to eight or nine on the Beaufort scale. "Either way the winds here in Tarifa are extremely constant and it is rare to get a week with no winds," says Sebastian Lang, of Liquid Force (see in-depth feature on page 29).

But what also makes Tarifa extra special, is its unique geography, making it an ideal spot for all things outdoors.

Winters are exceptionally mild and dry, even by Mediterranean standards, and it nestles near the borders of two national parks, with terrific walking terrain, and boasts some breathtaking scenery.

"Tarifa is truly magic be-

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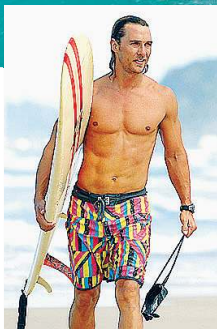
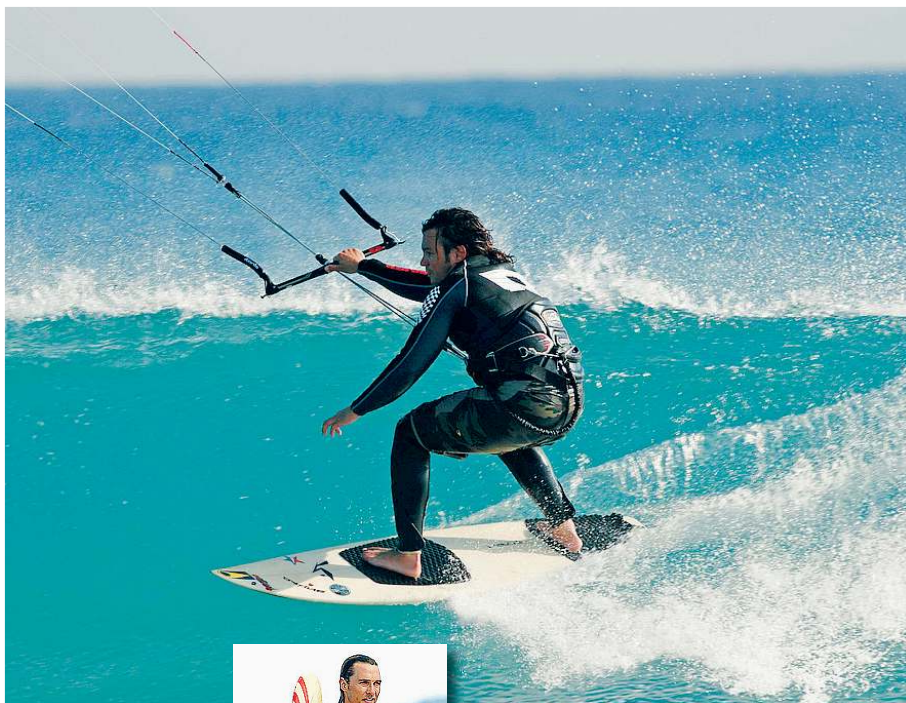
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Costa de la Luz special ²⁷



EXTREME: Kitesurfing is adrenaline hit

cause of the contact here with nature," says Bruno Muchada Suarez from activities company Art Of Surfing. Having moved to Tarifa seven years ago, Bruno has a real passion for sports, nature and culture. His company, based on the main road into Tarifa, offers everything from mountain bikes to climbing equipment. This is immediately obvious visiting his shop, where at the entrance is a 30-foot-high climbing wall for anyone to use. "We don't charge for it and we will even lend you the equipment free if you fancy

a go," says Bruno. "We can't do better than that." A variety of other companies organise activities, including Yellow Sub, which

arranges a variety of diving trips around the straits. Whale watching is another fabulous sport to enjoy and Tarifa is its focus with a number of companies offering trips most mornings. As well as seeing whales, you will almost certainly see dolphins, and the companies try their best to be as respectful to the mammals as possible. Three different types of dolphins inhabit the recently established Natural Park of the Strait of Gibraltar: Common, Striped and Bottle-

Turn to Page 28

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28

Costa de la Luz special

On the up and up

From Page 27

nose. They share the same habitat with Pilot whales, while you may also see Killer Whales, Sperm Whales and Fin Whales who migrate through the Straits from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea, and vice versa. You might want to try www.whalewatchtarifa.com for more information.

Numerous other activities for all ages and fitness levels can be found in Tarifa. These include mountain biking, orienteering, trekking, climbing, canyoning, fishing, sailing, 4x4 trips, quad routes, horse-riding, paddle surf...the list just goes on.

In terms of hiking routes there are lots of places to head to. One short, yet adventurous trek takes you up into the Paraje Betijuelo mountains west of Tarifa.

From here, you have views across stunning landscape in all directions, in particular inland towards the Los Alcornocales Natural Park.

The walk starts from Punto Paloma, which is well signposted around four kilometres on the road out of Tarifa westwards. From here the signs are easy to follow.

It is a stunning walk, and those that take it are rewarded with one of the most beautiful beach views in Andalucía, that of Bolonia.

Last but not least, don't underestimate the ornithological importance of Tarifa as the migratory gateway between Europe and Africa.

Throughout the year over 200 species use the tip of Tarifa as a reference point in their journeys north and south. These include Griffon Vultures, Bustards and Golden Orioles.

From here, you have views across stunning landscape in all directions



ON THE EDGE: 'Free' climbing wall at Art of Surfing

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Tarifa hideouts

Living in the heart of Tarifa for four years, restaurant owner Scott MacNaughton gives some tips on where to go when the wind gets too strong

I HAVE been asked 20 or so times over the course of the last year why we picked Tarifa to be our hometown.

Usually I launch into a long soliloquy about how I was dis-enfranchised with my life in Dublin, where I used to DJ at U2's famous Clarence Hotel, and how the Celtic tiger economy had become an extremely ugly thing, etc, etc. But the truth is when my business partner Mervyn and I came over the hill from Algeciras in January 2005 we were shell-shocked that there was a fascinating little town so close to the continent of Africa that was for the most part unfazed by the ups and downs of the two worlds that surround it. Four years later, we are very much residents, and with our business now in its second successful year my love for this town continues to

grow.

I hope to put an event on in September to reflect the diverse cultures that exist here. It really interests me that you can walk around the streets in Tarifa and easily hear as much Czech as you do English.

A friend of mine once told me that before you fall off the face of the earth you end up in Tarifa.

The wind scatters certain people to Tarifa and keeps them there

The wind scatters certain people to the edge of Europe and keeps them there. And what about that wind?

Approximately eight days out of every month the 'levante' comes in from the med, and holds the town to ransom for its duration. It keeps certain people coming and keeps others away. This is a good thing. Tarifa's police and town hall have a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to noisy drunkenness, although public nudity

in terms of Playa Los Lances (or the Atlantic beach) has recently been legalised for the first time.

There are many hiding places to shelter when the wind gets too strong if you know where to look.

In the day, I send people to 100 % Fun or Tres Mares (which is opposite the famous 'spin-out' kite school). They are both groovy boutique hotels with gigantic loungers, pool-side fun and an all-day menu.

Some six kms closer to town though is the mighty Pachamama with its own pool, cracking barbeque and cocktails. Your main man Guido will more than look after you.

As night falls you will have to avoid most outdoor restaurants, so I suggest (prepare for shameless plug) you find us on Calle San Francisco. Our La Cueva family will happily feed, water and entertain you until the wee small hours.

Just be careful walking home, as you might just fall off the edge of the earth.

BUSINESS PROFILE

Sebastian Lang, the face behind Liquid Force, fell in love with Tarifa after moving here to kitesurf five years ago



Force to be reckoned with

HE is the new, young kid on the block and his Liquid Force kitesurf shop is like no other in Tarifa.

But Sebastian Lang, 25, from Hannover, in Germany, is looking for a lot, lot more.

Apart from planning to start competing again in the sport that he was forced to give up due to a bad shoulder injury a few years ago, he has started a wake board school in Sotogrande, as well as organising parties.

"I love organising parties and am doing a few bashes this year in between competing in Portugal, Lanzarote and Morocco in the World Cup," he explains.

While he is not expecting to win, it is amazing that he can even compete again, after suffering a nightmare injury during training a couple of years ago.

"I don't really know what happened, but my shoulder broke," he recalls. "It really hurt and meant I was unable to compete again for a long time."

Luckily it has now healed again and he tries to go out kiting at least once a day, usually at lunchtime, when he shuts his minimalist shop on Calle Batalla de Salado, the only shop authorised to stock the ultra-trendy American brand Liquid Force.

Lang, who grew up in Germany moved to Spain five years ago after "falling in love" with a local Spanish girl.

While the relationship didn't last long, he fell for the country – not to mention its wind – and ended up taking a job, initially, in business administration in Madrid.

Kitesurfing has really exploded in the last year and it is a major part of the economy

But he longed to be beside the sea, and as soon as the opportunity came up to open a shop and kite school he jumped at the chance. Lang estimates that up to 50 per cent of the town's income from tourism is now coming from the sport and there are more schools in Tarifa than in Hawaii.

"Kitesurfing has really exploded in the last year and the development is huge," he explains. "Not everyone realises it is a major part of the economy and is helping to boost the town."

The statistics are quite remarkable. Not only are three out of the world's top five kitesurfers based in Tarifa, but the female freestyle champion Gisela Pulido, 17, is born and bred in the coastal town.

"The Spanish have really taken to the sport and Gisela is amazing. She is young, completely fearless and a great credit to the town."

VEJER IS ABUZZ

THE beauty of Vejer is the sum of all its parts. Some may say Ronda has greater monuments, Arcos; a more spectacular cliff, Zahara de la Sierra; wider more majestic vistas, but what Vejer has, is all three in abundance; the views, the monuments and the location.

The town is somehow both remote and approachable at the same time and its proximity to fabulous beaches gives the town a real buzz in summer while the rest of the year binoculars, walking boots and guide books are the norm. Vejer's old town residents are proud of its pristine whitewashed streets and the town hall has managed to conserve the integrity of the town's architectural legacy with strict conservation policies.

At weekends the place becomes a haven for well off townies, largely from Jerez and Sevilla, many of whom have bought and restored the classic patio houses in the historic heart back to their former glories.

A stroll at sunset and a trip to the hamlet of Santa Lucia are Vejer resident James Stuart's top tips

But whatever the day, the local ladies still water the geraniums on their balconies and sweep the street in front of their houses every day.

My favourite time for walking around Vejer is that 'golden hour' as the sun drops to the west and the fortified walls and castle glow in the evening light. As the sun sets, Vejer's well-designed public lighting (no nasty orange glow here!) comes into play showing off the towns strictly cubist image of tall windows, angular houses and blue-white façades.

Drop in to La Bodeguita or La Ventana for tapas in the shadow of the Mudejar-influenced church, before taking a stroll into the palm filled Plaza de España, which will inevitably be buzzing.

Here, you might sip a 'fino' sherry outside Trafalgar restaurant to the tune of the tinkling fountain before taking dinner in the labyrinth that is my hotel La Casa del Califa and its surprising secret garden.

People constantly ask me to recommend places to visit nearby. I always tell them Trafalgar light-house and Vejer's lovely beaches at El Palmar, while the stunning umbrella pine forest and cliffs of the Las Breñas Nature Park are fabulous.

My favourite spot though, is the hamlet of Santa Lucia, with its restored Roman aqueduct. This small community has been living with water for centuries with streams flowing through the hamlet and children playing under the waterfalls below the ruined mills.

Enjoy a relaxed beer and a plate of good cheese at the thatched Venta El Toro or a barbecue meal to remember at the first class La Castillera.



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TALENT: Casa Milan

WHERE TO EAT

AS a crossroads for Europe and Africa it is fitting that Tarifa has a good mix of good restaurants.

The best are, without a doubt, on the Paseo Alameda, which fans out of the port, where you are spoilt for choice with good restaurants.

Here, in particular you will find the excellent Italian La Trattoria, where Paolo and his gang knock up a great range of pizzas in a classic wood oven, plus a lot, lot more, and with great wines to boot.

Next door you would be foolish to miss the genuine real McCoy French restaurant run by husband and wife team Benoit and Veronica.

Showing all the usual flair of a good French restaurant, Santa Fe has a fabulous dining terrace for a sunny day, while inside it is cosy on cold winter nights.

Committed to fine, high quality ingredients, they cook up specials by the day alongside a menu including scrumptious tartiflette of potato, cream, bacon and onion, as well as an intriguing wine fondue.

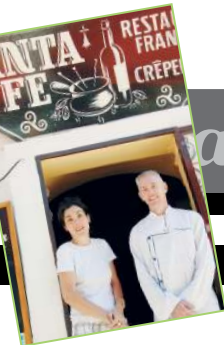
Only a stone's throw further up you will find another great duo, the two restaurants of the father and son team behind Entre dos Aguas and Lola Mora.

A charming pair, the two restaurants both have superb terraces for the summer and are perfectly placed for the tourist office and new theatre that is being built in the town.

Both have a Mediterranean flavour, while Entre dos Aguas is slightly better value and slightly faster food.

Finally, for a more budget option, but with an equally nice terrace, is Restaurante Alameda, literally directly opposite the port and the perfect place to wait for your ferry to Africa.

On the other side of town, the charming La Oca da Sergio has recently opened and serves up a truly great mix of Italian dishes in a charming



GREAT TEAMS: Santa Fe, Entre dos Aguas and La Trattoria

Fine dining

atmosphere.

The owner, Sergio, is a well travelled man, with a love of cycling and is happy to chew the fat about Andalusian wine, weather or women.

If burgers are your thing, you could do a lot worse than bowl up at La Cueva, which was recently opened by an engaging Irishman.

You make up your own menu

of place you might not want to leave for a while.

Another great spot is Tesoro, a secret hideout in the hills, in Betijuelo, near Bolonia.

The same can also certainly be said for Pacha Mama, the hippest, chill out spot on the coast.

Run by a friendly Italian Guido Archetti, it has a great mix of dishes and light snacks, not

Asturian, previously trained at Michelin-starred Akelare in the Basque region, certainly knows how to cook.

Another brilliant spot in the centre, Asador la brasa de Sancho, is run by French chef Daniel, who trained with Michel Roux, no less.

Stylish in the extreme, it can only be matched by the charms of the wonderful Casa de Califa down in the main square.

Casa Varo is an interesting option with a great mix of foods and wine and a superb terrace just underneath the main church in the old town.

On the way out of town in the delightful hamlet of Santa Lucia you must ensure to visit the domain of Juan Valdes, whose terrace at Castilleria is one of the most romantic in Spain, and whose grilled meats from around the country are raved about.

Last, but not least, over in Conil you will find the brilliant Casa Milan, run by a very capable Croatian host, who knows a thing or two about cooking, not to mention wine.

Overlooking the wild expanse all the way to the Trafalgar lighthouse, this superb trattoria is a true dining secret to discover.

And then there is one final place, a well established, personal favourite, one I always love to stop at in the mountains above Tarifa en route to the Costa de la Luz.

That of Meson de Sancho, with its fabulous menu del dia that never fails to disappoint.



VIBRANT: The team at Gadir in Vejer

and the 100 per cent beef burgers are simply superb.

Finally, and it hardly needs a mention is Cafe Central, which has been serving breakfast and coffees in the heart of the town for over a century.

Outside Tarifa, en route to Vejer, you have a couple of excellent options for lunch, the first being Venta el Tito, a short five-minute drive from the town.

With plenty of character and a stunning garden, it is the sort

to mention one of the coolest ambiances around.

Over in Vejer is an equally good range of options.

The most exciting is the recently-opened Gadir, which sits on its own above the town with some of the best views around.

Run by a young team of chefs and local whizzkids, including Chispa, a live-wire indeed, there have been no corners cut either in the style or food stakes.

The chef Roberto Cabezal, an

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WHERE TO STAY

Hip hotels

I OPENED my curtains to one of the best views in Christendom, stretching over 20 miles to Medina Sidonia to the east.

It was enough to make me want to spend the day on the roof terrace of the amazing Hotel V, in the heart of Vejer. But people to see, places to go, and all that.

The boutique hotel, owned by a French/Belgium baron, is one of a number of amazing places to stay in the town, which also include the beautifully-designed Casa Cinco, which has a slant towards good quality 'deli' food, to the bijoux, stylish No.1 Triperia nearby. Then, of course there is the stalwart Hotel la Casa de Califa, which is easily one of Cadiz's most striking buildings, its main doorway adorned with a shell.

The Moorish core has now been added to with ten new buildings all based around a charming central patio, where guests dine under candlelight each evening.

Also in the centre is a fabulous new offering, the beautiful Siete Balones, which has been well designed by the artist from nearby Tarumba pottery shop.

The hotel has four spacious rooms set around a central courtyard and a superb roof terrace with marvellous views.



BREATHTAKING: Hotel V and 100% Fun

Just outside the town there are a number of great places to stay, but few beat the Madreselva in trendy Canos de Meca right by the sea. Over in Tarifa there has also been a huge explosion of good places to stay over the last few years.

In the centre of the town there are a couple of superb options including the super cool Posada la Sacristia, which is full of stylish touches and has a great open-plan dining area with a shop selling clothes and jewellery.

Another superb chestnut is central, well-established Misiana which has a particularly buzzing vibe around the clock.

Fronted by a hip cocktail lounge bar, with its own soundtrack and DJs every evening, it is very much at the hub of the Tarifa scene.

That said, the minute you get in the lift you are transported to a quiet, magical escape.

Another interesting place in the centre is historic Hostal Asturiana, right on the main road, while other good value options include Hostal Alborada, which has good wifi and clean rooms.

A final option, but anything but your last, should be Koala

Tarifa, a hidden gem up a back street, which has incredibly quiet and well appointed rooms.

Just up the coast there are a couple of other fabulous places to stay. In particular, 100% Fun, set up over 30 years ago, is the ultimate chill out relax hotel. Recently taken over by a charming Russian, Evgeniy Terekhov - a more laid-back kitesurfing fan you could not expect meet - it has seen a range of positive changes and this summer could well be THE place to stay in Tarifa.

With a new emphasis on 'chill out', the father-of-two has also worked hard to improve on the landscaping and rooms, not to mention the restaurant menus.

Nearby, en route in the hills above Facinas you will find another completely different spot, the original and stunning Banos de Carmen.

Half nature reserve, half organic retreat, the four-bedroom rental house is really something else, and its owners are keen to promote it as a holistic place, where you can undertake various therapies, chill out in their yurts or swim in their natural reed pool.

Over in Conil meanwhile you should certainly think about staying in the stylish hotel la Princesa y el Guisante - or Princess and the Pea - which is one of the most original hotels in Andalusia. You walk into a foyer, with massive chandelier and a wall covered with a huge poem by Hans Christian Andersen (the Princess and the Pea, of course).

Also in Conil you might want to try the Casa Alborada, a stylish, beautifully converted old town house in the heart of the old quarter.

And last but not least if you are looking for somewhere good to stay en route to or from the Costa de la Luz, you would be hard pressed to miss Meson Sancho on the main road to Algeciras. Literally right on the main road you will find the hotel surprisingly calm and there are a great selection of bungalow suites, not to mention great views towards Africa.

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32 *Costa de la Luz* special

"SITTING on the beaches, looking at the peaches," went the rasping chorus of one of his most famous songs *Peaches*.

But now Stranglers front man Hugh Cornwall is more interested in saving, what he believes could be one of Spain's last true peaches; the beach at El Palmar.

The 60-year-old has become part of a growing, angry movement hell-bent on opposing plans to develop the sleepy hamlet, near Vejer. He believes the project to build two apartment hotels of more than 600 units just 400 metres from the shore, close to the famous Trafalgar lighthouse, is completely unnecessary.

"I've been coming to El Palmar for around 20 years and the whole reason I like it is precisely 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.

"If people want to go to big smart hotels, there are plenty elsewhere on the coast - why do they want to put more here?"

It is a question that local

Don't strangle the Costa de la Luz!

Robinson Crusoe-style hotels, 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



Vejer mayor Antonio Verdu puts down to the simple answer of employment. Claiming the scheme by Grupo Tarje is the ideal way

to create more jobs in the area, he believes it will also help to clean up what he believes is a scruffy area and bring positive development.

"But he is simply missing the point and does not really understand that it will change the whole feel of the area," insists local lawyer Carmen Atkins.

"The project consists of apartment hotels with their own kitchens, which means most of the tourists will end up cooking their own food and will not even eat in the local restaurants or help the local economy.

"He is also failing to take into account the type of quality tourism that comes here already. That will all be under threat."

Her husband James Stuart, who owns the Califa hotel, is unsurprisingly one of the staunchest opponents of the scheme.

"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. 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."

The moves have also 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 Ylleras.

"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?"

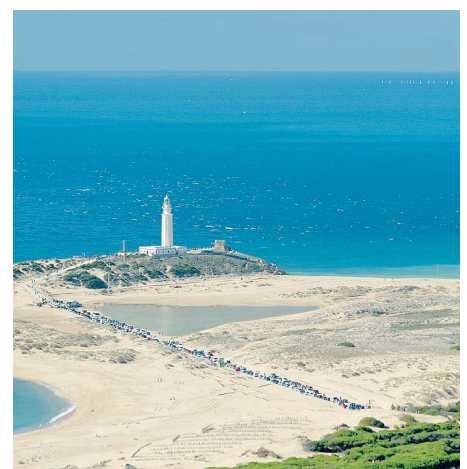
Fortunately, a strong campaign has now been undertaken by local protest group PELP (or the Platform against the hotel megaproject of El Palmar), who have so far managed to get 67,000 signatures for a petition against the project.

"What I keep trying to stress is that tourists want virgin beaches"

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COSTA TRAFALGAR: Must be preserved

Costa de la Luz 33

WHAT ELSE IS BEING PLANNED?

Robinson Crusoe

Further south, in the area between the famous lighthouse and the hamlet of Zahora - another deal has been the subject of serious squabbles over recent months.

Land was acquired from the local Castro family for around 10 million euros eight years ago when a scheme was 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 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 unstuck, according to sources, with the Junta insisting that the number of rooms per metre must be lowered again.

As James Stuart, owner of Califa hotel explains: "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."

La Yeguada and La Mangueta

Another development has been earmarked by Barbate council on a large piece of land called La Yeguada, further inland.

But while there has apparently been "plenty of interest" so far no deal has been struck.

Nearby, between Zahora and El Palmar lies a further 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 addition of a technology park.



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Supported by Ecologistas en Accion, Greenpeace and local green group La Laja, they have produced a superb 20-page booklet outlining their opposition.

Last week, the group appealed directly to the Junta to make the whole zone a protected area, an idea, which has initially been turned down (see story on page 2).

A spokesman for the group explained: "What we have in El Palmar is a national treasure, which is going to be put in danger by this project."

"Putting a 600-unit hotel here is anything but sustainable and will seriously alter the area. Surely the mayor and politicians can see that our group of tens of thousands of people from around Spain and Europe are right."

He has certainly got a point. Visit El Palmar and the beaches around the Trafalgar lighthouse on any weekend, and you will find surf-

ers, kiteboarders and the young and old relaxing on the sands.

Look more closely and among them you will find a smattering of industry bosses, 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 Andalusia. 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.

This lifestyle is now under threat with not just the plan for the apartment hotel, but various other luxury hotels, housing projects and even, of course, golf courses (see above).

Not dissimilar to what has happened up at Chiclana to the west, if the plans go

ahead a "Robinson Crusoe-style" resort could still be built for German package tourists.

On top of this, sources insist there are provisional plans to build a further six huge four and five star hotels on this 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 last words appropriately go to Hugh Cornwall (pictured above)

"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?"

Visit www.salvarelpalmar.es to sign the petition

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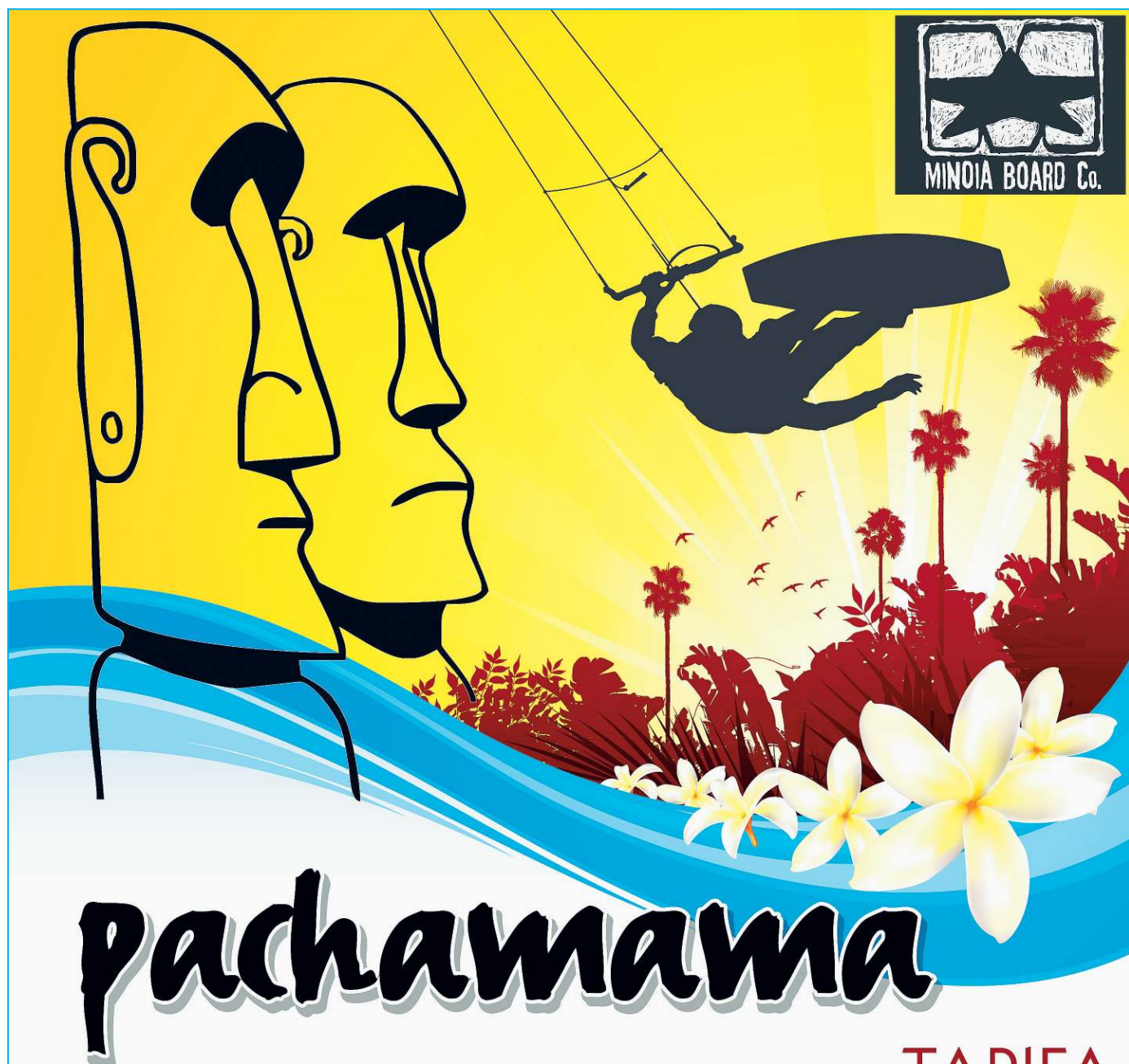
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