



Costa de la luz



Looking for a southern Spanish break without the Costa high-rise clutter? We recommend six good bases – with things to see and do – for a memorable holiday in the ‘Coast of Light’

Still largely unspoilt, the Costa de la Luz offers a sunny Spanish holiday with a refreshing difference. Along with traditional beach-based pursuits, whale and bird watching can be enjoyed to a greater or lesser extent throughout the year and for a dose of culture, the Andalusian hilltop towns peppered around the coast are layered with remarkable Moorish and Christian sights.

However, it’s the beaches that are the main pull for visitors. There are some soulless hotel-dedicated resorts along the coast, but in the main, the white sandy beaches are backed by pinewoods, marshland or mountainous wandering dunes and stretch for mile upon unbroken mile.

Unless you enjoy basking in baking temperatures, the ideal seasons to visit this corner of Spain are late spring and early autumn. The Atlantic coastline lies between Portugal and Gibraltar and includes some of the country’s hottest spots.



GETTING THERE

Flights to Faro and Malaga can be taken from many international UK airports. Flights to Seville are served by Gatwick (Liverpool and Stansted airports).

GETTING AROUND

By car

The best way of exploring the 200-mile long strip of coastline and inland villages and towns is by car. The three airports of Faro (Portugal), Seville and Malaga are well represented by car hire companies. Check out www.travelsupermarket.com.

By train

Cádiz, Huelva and Jerez can be reached by train from Seville. For timetables and fares go to www.renfe.es/ingles/index.html.

By coach and bus

Long distance coaches link many towns and villages in Andalusia. For further details visit www.andalusia.com/travel/bus/home.htm.

GOOD THINGS TO SEE AND DO

1

Jerez

Bodegas Tradición

www.bodegastradicion.com

After a guided tour of this family-run sherry producer's cellars, guests are introduced to the bodega's four types of sherry and top-notch brandy. Guided tours and tasting €15.

The Alcázar

Visit the restored castle with mosque and baths.

Admission €3. Climb an ancient Alcázar tower for the camera oscura (€5.50).



2

Cádiz

International designer clothes shops rank alongside boutiques in Cadiz swanky shopping street of calle San Francisco.

The Cathedral

Climb the tower for the view and descend to the crypt for the surprising vibrato echo. Tower entrance €4, admission to the cathedral crypt and museum is €4.

Museo de Cádiz

Includes a fantastic array of artefacts from Cádiz' Phoenician, Etruscan, Greek and Roman periods. Entrance free.



3

Vejer and Arcos

Along with beverages and beaches, Cádiz is also known for its inland medieval hilltop towns where Andalusian Arab architecture known as *mudejar* meets high Gothic. Arcos and Vejer are probably the most striking in the region.

Vejer Explore the town's winding streets that follow ancient Moorish contours and where, until recently, women wore veils to conceal their faces.

Arcos The tourist office provides a mapped walk of the historic sights, and there are ceramic shops for souvenir hunters.

4

Tarifa

Tourist office

www.tarifa.costasur.com/en/index.html

This pretty walled town overlooking the straits of Gibraltar has a plethora of souvenir shops, bars and fish restaurants lining its winding streets. The protected sweeping bays and windy conditions make the sea here ideal for windsurfing. The best and broadest beach is Tarifa beach, which is six miles from the town in an extensive bay called Ensenada de Valdevaqueros. For whale watchers, Pilot, Fin and Killer are among the whales seen here. Check the website above for more details.

5

Aracena

La Gruta de las Maravillas

www.aracena.es

Gigantic seed pods, soaring phallic columns, ice crystals and even toes are some of the strange lime mineral shapes you will come across as you are guided through the caverns. Admission € 7.50 for a one-hour guided tour.

Minas de Riotinto

Visit the museum to learn the history of the once British owned mines before taking the rattling clunking train around the vast open-cast mines. The train runs along the river bank of the fast flowing Río Tinto on a journey through the devastated area.

6

La Rábida

Muelle de las Carabelas

Replicas of the three Columbus ships are anchored on the Río Tinto estuary. Admission to see ships €3.30.

Monasterio de la Rábida

Visit the 14th-century Mudejar Monastery, where Columbus stayed while planning his voyages to the 'New Worlds'. Admission is €3, with audioguide included.



ESSENTIAL INFORMATION



Time difference UK + 1 hour

International dialling code 0034

Exchange rate £1 = €1.38

Day-to-day costs

Beer €2, litre of petrol €1.

When to go Spring and autumn are the best seasons to visit the Costa de la Luz. Hotel prices are low and the weather is pleasant.

Recommended guidebook

Lonely Planet Andalucía, £12.99, 2006 (ISBN 978-1-74059-973-3)

Recommended map

Euro Map: Costa Del Sol Andalucía, Costa de la Luz, Gibraltar, Ceuta, £5.99 (ISBN 13:978-3-575-03189-1)

Spanish Tourist Board (London)

Tel 0845 9400 180
www.tourspain.co.uk

GOOD PLACES TO STAY

Prices are for the cheapest double rooms including breakfast, unless otherwise stated, in May 2008.

1

Jerez

Casa Grande

Tel 956 345 070
www.casagrade.com.es

This beautifully designed hotel in the centre of town was put together and is now run by convivial Monica Shroeder. Tastefully furnished rooms radiate off a cool central courtyard. Plush lounges and a homely bar are on the ground floor, while the sizeable attractive bedrooms are positioned on the two upper levels. Lovely views of the town can be enjoyed from the rooftop sun terrace.

● Room £66, breakfast £6 per person

2

Cádiz

Las Cortes de Cádiz

Tel 956 220 489
www.hotellascortes.com

On the main pedestrian shopping street and close to the principle town squares, this bijou hotel is perfectly sited. The marbled-floor atrium lounge and breakfast rooms are elegantly furnished with decorously placed pot plants and intricate wrought iron edging. Each pleasing room is individually themed to an event or characters from the Cádiz Parliament of 1812. The rooftop sun terrace also houses a small gym.

● Room £72 B&B

3

Vejar

La Casa del Califa

Tel 956 447 730
www.lacasadelcalifa.com

Just off the main square, the modest cottage of Casa del Califa drops down at the rear to a gorgeous courtyard planted with orange trees which leads to a smart restaurant with a barrel-vaulted ceiling and stone-exposed walls. Attractive bedrooms are small and attractively furnished, although they can be on the dark side.

● Room £68 B&B

4

Tarifa

Posada La Sacristia

Tel 956 681 759
www.lasacristia.net

Tucked away within a maze of tiny streets behind the cathedral, the 17th century white stucco posada exudes arty good taste. The café's glass floor protects conical amphora basins and the old atrium has become a chic plant-lined restaurant. Bedrooms are homely and classically furnished.

● Room £80 B&B

5

El Rompido

El Rompido Golf

Tel 949 024 330
www.sethotels.com

With views of the pretty estuary and coast, this extensive well-equipped all-inclusive is corporate-smart, yet luxurious. Golf links surround the hotel and a ferry takes guests to the excellent beach.

● £88 B&B



6

Aracena

Finca Buen Vino

Tel 959 124 034
www.fincabuenvino.com

Four miles from Aracena town, this gorgeous farm is hidden away in an oak forest. After an exhausting day's touring you will be plied with good wine, good food and bonhomie.

● Room £150 B&B.
Dinner with wine £28



TIPS

■ Most sights in Andalucía close for around three hours during lunchtime, usually between 12noon to 3pm or 1pm to 4pm. State-run museums are usually closed on Monday.

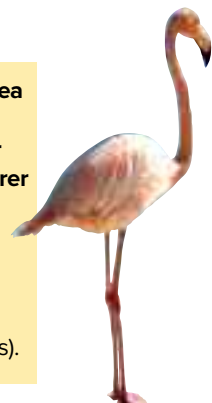
■ The best way of exploring the 200-mile long strip of coastline

and inland towns and villages is by car. The roads are generally good, although some of the minor roads occasionally become little more than unsurfaced tracks.

■ The sea along the Huelva coast tends to be clean though silty – five great river systems

drain their waters into the sea along this side of the coast. On the Cádiz side the water becomes progressively clearer the further east you go and more suitable for diving.

■ If in doubt about sea conditions, ask for advice at the tourist office (or the locals).



GOOD PLACES TO EAT

1

Jerez

La Carbona

Calle San Fransisco de Paula 2,
11401 Jerez
Tel 956 347 475

A vast old, vaulted sherry bodiga has been transformed into an atmospheric restaurant with an army of waiters serving imaginatively prepared dishes. For the adventurous, try the quail breasts filled with rose petals and pâté dribbled with brandy sauce. Cost €10.



2

Jerez

El Almacen Hojaldre

Calle Catorre 4, 11403 Jerez

On a narrow street this old-fashioned traditional Jerez bar is a great place to while a way a few hours tucking in to the mouth-watering tapas while sipping cold, dry sherry. If the moody atmosphere inside is too sombre, there is a row of tables on the street front.

The savoury pastries here are delicate but rich. At €7 you can't go wrong with the short crust pastry pie filled with duck pâté and apple sauce.

3

Cádiz

El Ajibe

Calle Piacia, 11006 Cádiz
Tel 956 266 656

This snug family-run restaurant has dining areas that are divided into four intimate parts. A warm salad of melted cheese and anchovies, followed by lamb chop with chestnuts with a muscatel sauce and a glass of house wine comes to €26.



4

Tarifa

La Casa Amarilla

Calle Sancho IV El Bravo 9,
Tel 956 680 705

In the town centre this large eatery doesn't seem to know whether it wants to be formal or informal. True enough, the waiters are smart and the tables formally set, but the loud background music and exceptionally friendly staff contradicts the stiff image. This is a place to linger over a meal while enjoying the buzzy party atmosphere. A main meal with a glass of wine will cost around €30.

5

El Rompido

Doña Gamba a Marisqueria

15 Cocedero Rio Piedra

With tables set out around the church square, close to the promenade, this simple café serving cheap seafood is perfect if you want a quick tasty lunch. Portions are generous so take it easy on the number of dishes you order. A plate of shellfish comes at around €9.

6

Mazagon

Restaurant las Dunas

Avenida Conquistadores 178
21130 Playa de Mazagon
Tel 959 376 259

Close to the marina, it's no surprise that this seafood restaurant is a favourite among the sailing fraternity. But people don't flock here to admire the view to the marina. The dishes served by friendly helpful waiters are excellent. A main dish that includes perfectly prepared fish costs around €40.