



Ecotourism guide

for the Biosphere Reserve
and Geopark of the island of El Hierro

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Geopark of the island of El Hierro



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Index

El Hierro, the island of the Meridian	6
The Biosphere Reserve of El Hierro	10
An island protected by Natura 2000	16
Geopark of El Hierro	20
Flora and vegetation of El Hierro	26
Fauna of El Hierro	34
The marine environment	40
Archeological heritage	44
Artisanry, celebrations and traditions	48
An example of a man and the biosphere	60
Hiking trails	64
Whale watching	68
Bird watching	72
Night sky. Astrotourism	78
Gastronomy	82
How to photograph the nature of the Biosphere Reserve	86
Active tourism: diving, paragliding, mountain biking	90
The eco tourist's charter	94
What you cannot miss	96



EL HIERRO, **The island of the Meridian**

When you come to El Hierro for the first time, you realize that you are in a very special place, you can feel the immensity of the ocean and the power of the volcanoes at every step. This island in the Atlantic was the last known land in Western Europe since the second century, when Ptolemy placed the Prime Meridian at the Punta de Orchilla, where it

remains until 1884, before it was moved to his present location in the English city of Greenwich. That is why El Hierro is known as the island of the meridian.

It is the smallest island, the least populated and the least affected by tourism of all the Canary Islands.

We invite you to enjoy the treasures you will find here. It is the result of a respectful relationship between the human being, the land on which they live, and the sea that surrounds these shores.

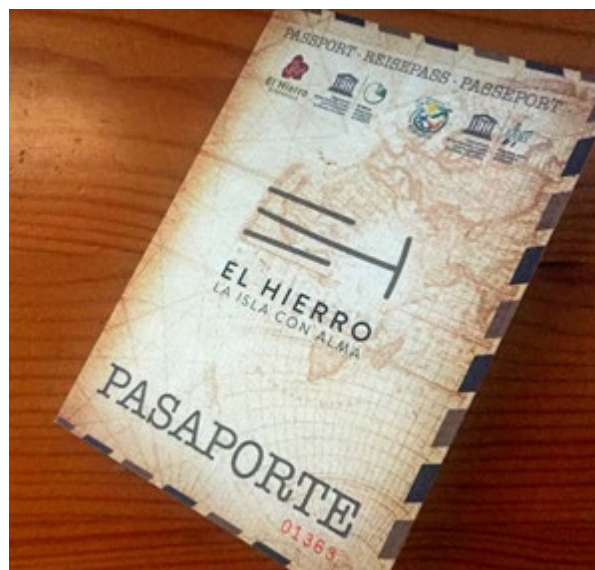
A relationship that continues through a collective conscience that has converted the residents of the island to its main defender: this made of El Hierro the first energetically sustainable island in the world that does not allow large hotel resorts, that preserves sometimes an unsteady landscape and beside that a landscape in perfect harmony with agriculture, livestock, fishing and the nature

El Hierro is the world's first island that is both a Biosphere Reserve and a Geopark. With a flora and vegetation that will make you enjoy the landscapes that seem to be from another world, with unique trees such as Garoé or Savin, symbols of this little island. And with a very special fauna of vertebrates and invertebrates, the fruits of the evolution in an isolated environment.

“**El Hierro is the world's first island that is both a Biosphere Reserve and a Geopark.**”

But El Hierro is not just what we see from the surface of the ocean. It is also what is under his waters.

The marine reserve Punta de La Restinga Mar de Las Calmas is the major reference for European divers. It is a dream destination for thousands of people who come every year to explore the abundant underwater volcanic formations and the impressive life.



"El Hierro" passport

i

EL HIERRO Passport

In order to get to know the different visitor centers around the island, we recommend you the El Hierro Passport, which gives you access to them to a reduced price. The sights you can access with the passport are:

- **Ecomuseum of Guinea and Lagartario**

The village of Guinea is built on a Bimbache settlement, one of the oldest on the island, from which the volcanic tubes (Juaclos) were used as housing and cattle stable. The Lagartario is dedicated to the recovery and breeding of the giant lizard of El Hierro.

- **The Interpretation Center of the Biosphere Reserve**

It is the reference site for knowledge of the biodiversity, landscapes and ecosystems of El Hierro.s

- **Cultural Park Julian**

The Cultural Park Julian is one of the most important treasures of Canary Aqueology, both because of its impressive engraving as well as the large quantity of bimbache remains at this place.

- **Interpretation Center of the Geopark of El Hierro**

It consists of two buildings and an interpretive path that runs between them leading through a volcanic area. The first building is dedicated to the Canarian volcanism and especially to the one that formed the island of El Hierro. In the second one, the visitors enjoy an audiovisual show reproducing the eruption in La Restinga.

Such as:

- **Ethnographic Museum Casa de Las Quinteras**

- **Viewpoint of La Peña**

- **The Interpretation Center of El Garoé**

You can purchase the passport in the Ecomuseum of Guinea, in the Viewpoint of La Peña, in the Cultural Park Julian, in the The Interpretation Center of El Garoé, in the Interpretation Center of the Biosphere Reserve en los centros de Interpretación de El Julian, El Garoé y Reserva de la Biosfera El Hierro and in the Tourism offices in Valverde and at the airport.



THE BIOSPHERE RESERVE of El Hierro

While you are on El Hierro, you should know that you are on an island that in its whole of 278 square kilometers is a Biosphere Reserve and was declared as such in the year 2000. What does it mean?

According to UNESCO, it is a place promoting solutions to combine the conservation of the biodiversity with the sustainable use of the land, the economic development, research and education. It is a kind of laboratory of sustainability that respects human and nature. The Biosphere Reserve consists of three interconnected zones that fulfill three functions reinforcing each other:

- **The core zone** is a strictly protected ecosystem and contributes to the preservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variations. In El Hierro it consists of the Strict Nature Reserve of Los Roques de Salmor, the Special Nature Reserve of Tibataje, the Strict Nature Reserve of Mencáfete and the Strict Marine Reserve of Punta de La Restinga with a total of 1.219 hectares.s.

- **The buffer zone** surrounding or adjacent the core zone, where activities are organized in accordance with environmental practices that contribute to research, monitoring, training and scientific education. Activities such as environmental education, recreation, ecotourism, applied research and basic research are hold in this area.

In the buffer zone are the Frontera Rural Park, the Natural Monument of Las Playas, the Protected Landscape of Ventejís - a Special Protection Area for birds (SPA) - the Protected Landscape of Timijiraque, the coastal areas, the Malpaís, the volcanic cones and the remaining Marine Reserve (about 13.148 hectares).

- **The transition zone** is the strip of the reserve, where a larger number of activities are permitted to promote a sustainable economic and human development from a social, cultural and environmental perspective. It is considered as a multi-use area where activities for the sustainable use of resources can be carried out, such as agriculture. The rest of the island is cataloged as a transition zone.

The archaeological, ethnographic, cultural, folkloristic, volcanological, botanical, landscape and faunistic heritage were key to the inclusion of El Hierro in the world's Biosphere Reserves, making it a popular destination for nature lovers and friends of sustainable development. To learn more about this distinction, visit the Interpretation Center of the Biosphere Reserve in the town of Isora housed in the Casino, a former meeting place to read the newspaper, to enjoy theater and dance, where friendship and love relationships were formed, always under the watchful eye of an elder.



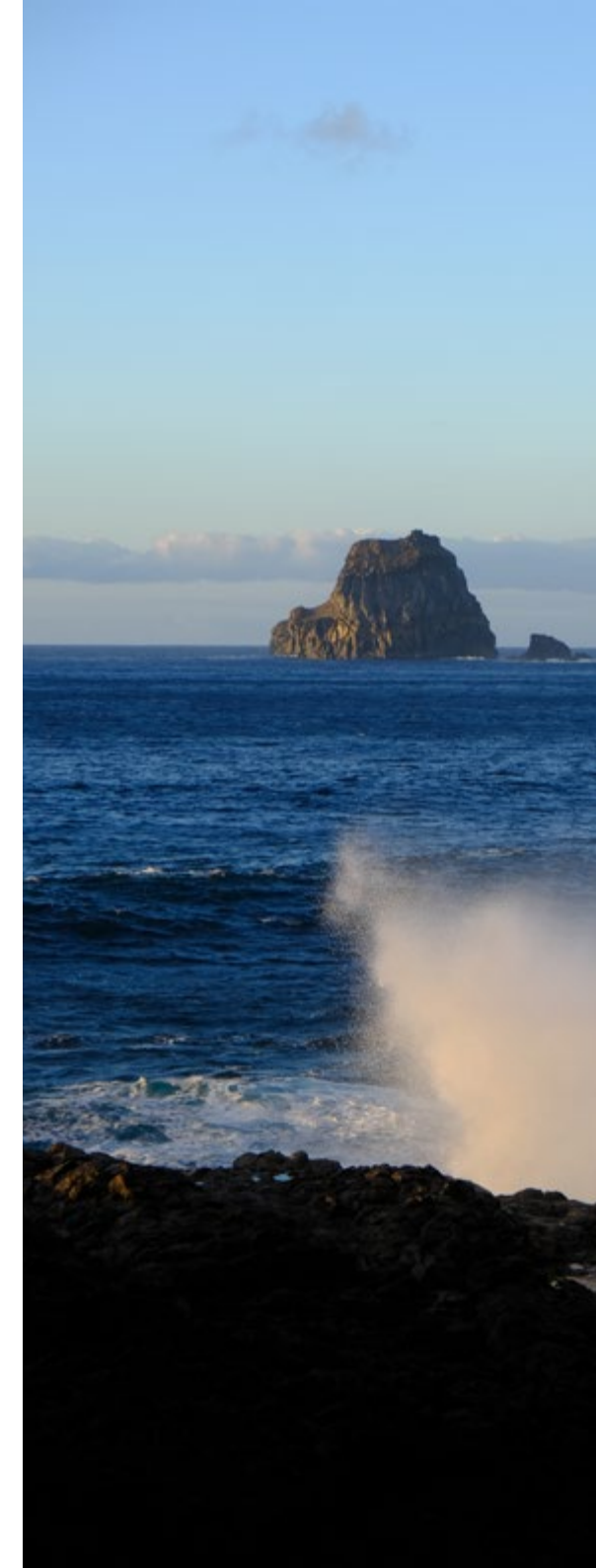
Malpaís de Tamaduste and Roque de Las Gaviotas.

Visit the website of the Observatory of the El Hierro Biosphere Reserve to learn more about its sustainability:

www.observatorioelhierro.es



“**A popular destination for nature lovers and friends of sustainable development**”

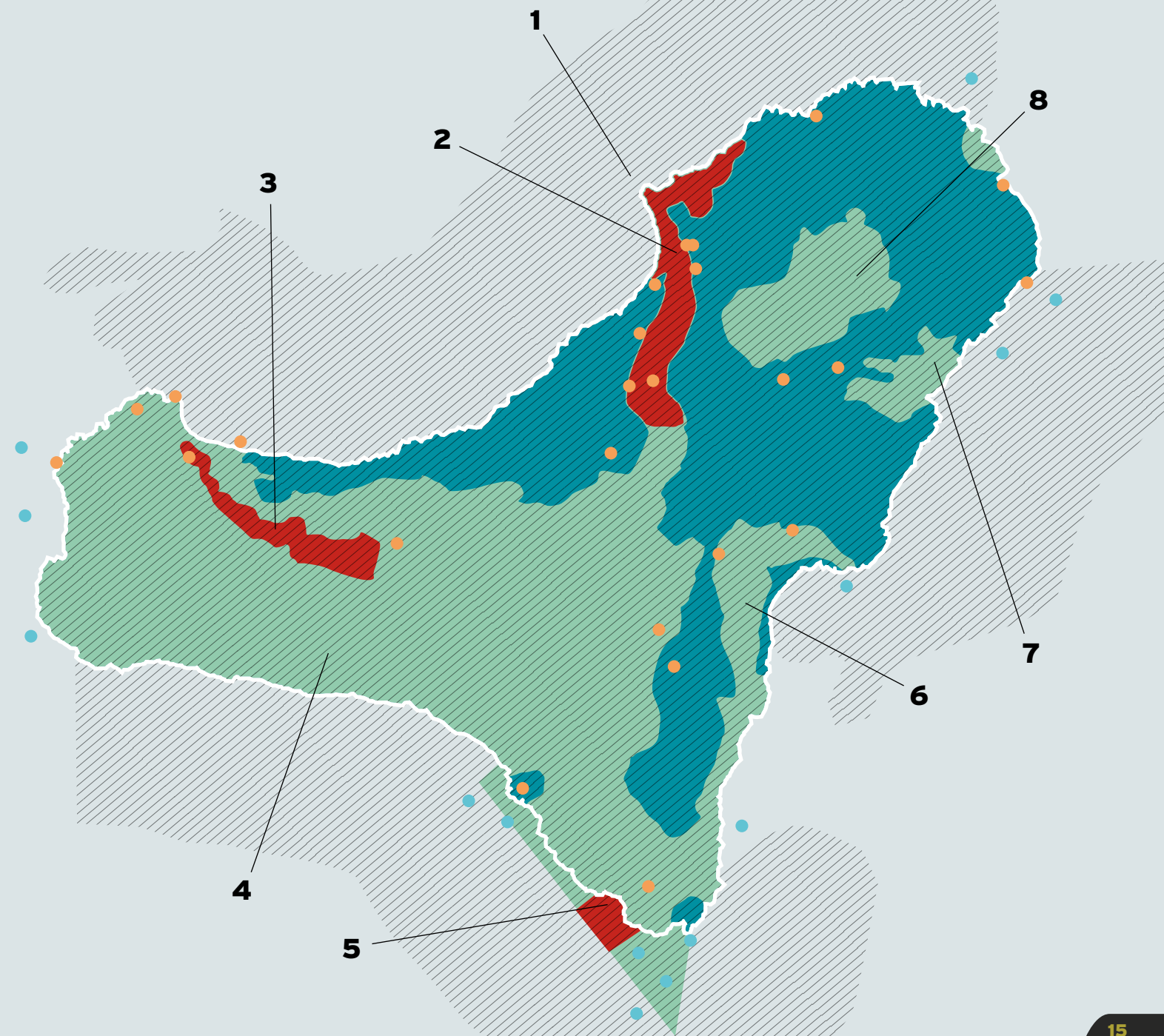


EL HIERRO

Map of the areas of the Biosphere Reserve and the Geopark of El Hierro

- The core zone
- The buffer zone
- The transition zone
- ▨ Geoparks
- Geosites
- Marine geosites

- 1** Strict Nature Reserve of Roques de Salmor
- 2** Special Nature Reserve of Tibataje
- 3** Strict Nature Reserve of Mencáfete
- 4** Frontera Rural Park
- 5** Strict Marine Reserve of Punta de La Restinga
- 6** Natural Monument of Las Playas
- 7** Protected Landscape of Timijiraque
- 8** Protected Landscape of Ventejís



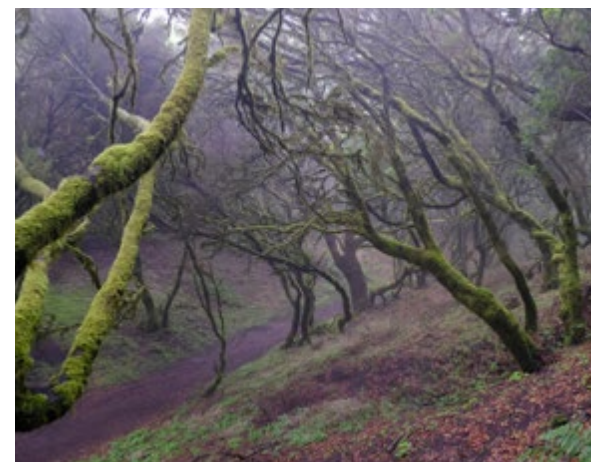


An island protected by **NATURA 2000**

El Hierro is not only a Biosphere Reserve in its entirety, but it also has 58% of its territory legally protected by the Canary Islands Nature Conservation Act. Furthermore it is one of the hot spot of the Natura 2000 network, a European ecological network of nature protection areas. It is the main framework for the conservation of nature in the

European Union. It aims to ensure the long-term survival of species and wildlife habitat in Europe to contribute preventing the loss of biodiversity.

On El Hierro you will find yourself, practically at every step, in an area that deserves the consideration of any kind of protection due to its natural values variety. Below is a brief explanation for each of them, so you can understand why they deserve our attention and respect for their conservation.



Monteverde Forest on the island of El Hierro.

- **Strict Nature Reserve of Mencafete:** It is one of the best specimens of juniper and evergreen rainforest in the archipelago. Here you can discover Laurisilva Herreña by following the path that leads to the fountain of Mencafete.

- **Strict Nature Reserve of Roques de Salmor:** Its main value lies in the importance for the marine avifauna, where you can discover several endangered species of sea birds like the Bulwer's petrel (*Bulweria bulwerii*), the Macaronesian Shearwater (*Puffinus Baroli*), the Atlantic European Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) and the Madeiran storm petrel (*Oceanodroma Castro*). From the Mirador de la Peña you can enjoy one of the reserve's most spectacular maritime-terrestrial landscapes.

- **Special Nature Reserve of Tibataje:** In this area lives the only natural population of the famous El Hierro giant lizard (*Gallotia simonyi machadoi*). The cliff profile will delight lovers of geomorphology and is the perfect place to admire the precious landscape. Frontera Rural Park: This is the largest protected natural area in which you will find most of

the forest mass of the island, and this area is also crucial for certain endangered species. The Rural Park has much to offer, including the impressive slopes of Julian, which drop towards the sea of Las Calmas, or the famous Sabina de El Hierro, which was formed by the prevailing trade winds and has become the symbol of the island.



Las Playas

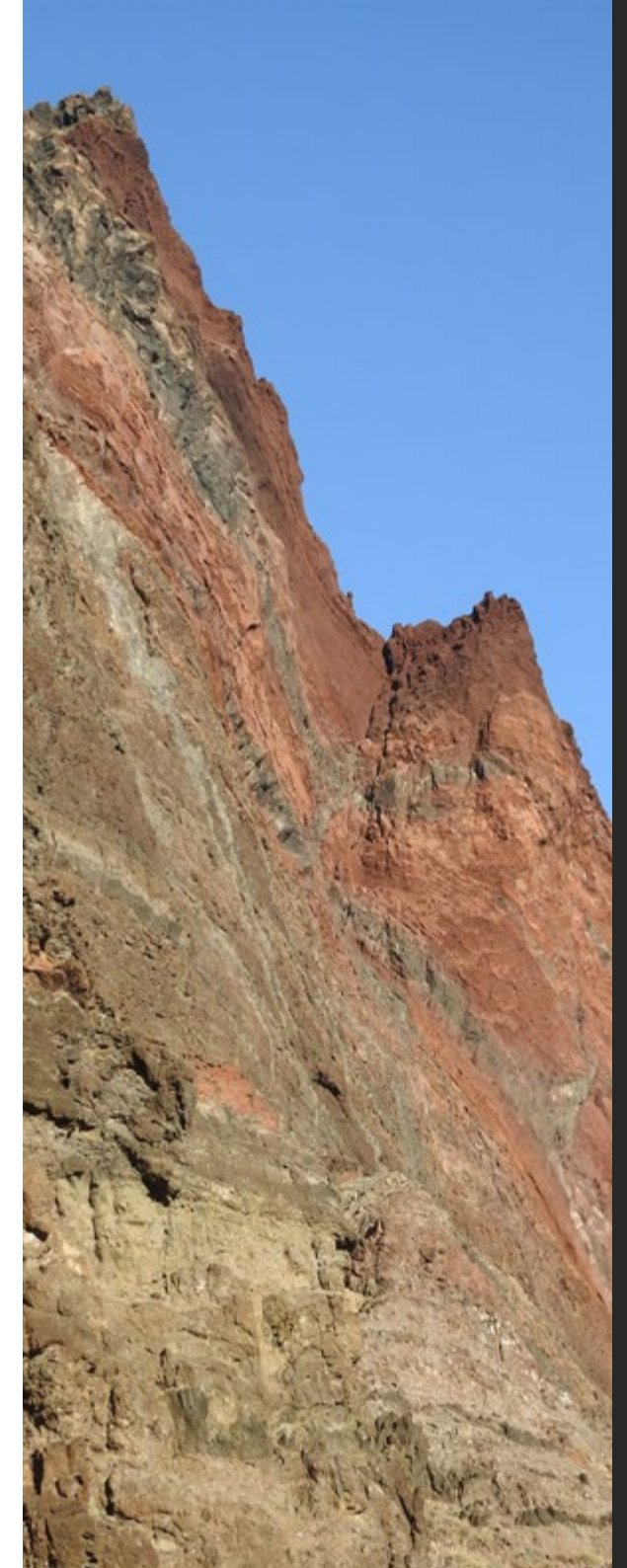
- **Natural monument of Las Playas:** It is one of the most impressive landscapes of El Hierro, it is the result of several landslides that have led to a large amphitheater that now can be admired. From the viewpoints of Las Playas and Isora you have different perspective that you will love because of its immensity and tranquility.

- **Protected landscape of Ventejís:** It is a rural landscape that represents the survival of man on this island. Here you will find the plains of Nisdafe with a landscape dominated by typical dry stone walls which are so characteristic for El Hierro.

In addition, there is the Garoé, the mythical tree that repeatedly saved the bimbaches from thirst or supplied the invaders in drought periods

- **Protected Landscape of Timijiraque:** In this area you can observe the outcrops of the ancient geological series of the island. If you are interested in geology or landscapes that seem to be from another planet, this will be one of your favorite places, as they are hardly affected by humans and house the main populations of Canary Island spurge (*Euphorbia canariensis*) of the island, as well as some plant rarities such as the *Polycarpaea smithii*.

+ information
About Protected Landscapes





El Hierro is the youngest island of the Canary archipelago. The origins of its formation date back to about 1 million years ago by the volcanic activity in this area of the planet, following the same pattern than the other Canary Islands. Its formation is not finished yet.

Its origin lies in the bulge of the oceanic crust due to the pressure imposed by the upper mantle. The magma that broke through the oceanic crust created a crack through which lava began to flow under the sea. This rupture in the Earth's crust has the shape of a "Y".

In these areas, after several centuries of constant eruptions and stacks, caused that the accumulated material reached the surface of the ocean. Subsequently, a triangular subaerial structure with three ridges arose, on which a series of volcanoes emerged, which contributed to the formation of the island. The resulting lava flows led to the most diverse geomorphological formations that are still visible today.

The point of greatest volcanic activity was concentrated where the three ridges met, which presumed a growth similar to a pyramid.

Due to this rapid vertical growth in relation to the surface of the island, the formation collapsed on its northern flank some 50.000 years ago, leading to a macro-landslide that led to the creation of the El Golfo Valley. Millions of cubic meters of land were moved towards the sea, forming a concave semicircle with an approximate extension of approximately 14 kilometers.

This phenomenon generated a tsunami that could have hit the islands of La Gomera and La Palma, and probably reached the coast of the American continent. In addition, there were other large landslides on the island such as Las Playas, El Julan and the one that led to the San Andres Fault - all places of undeniable scenic beauty. This volcanic activity has contributed to make of this island with the smallest area, the island of the archipelago with the highest concentration of volcanoes: more than 500 visible craters and 300 covered by recent lava flows and where a wide variety of volcanic geomorphology formations exists.

Historically, two eruptive activities are known, a subaerial one, with the eruption of Lomo Negro in Playa Verodal (1793) and in 2011 an underwater eruption in the southwest of the island that formed an underwater cone in depth, but without reaching the surface.

GEOMORPHOLOGY

After getting to know the formation process of the island, we will see the most important morphological structures of this significant volcanic enclave.

The El Golfo valley, located on the northern slope, is approximately 14 kilometers long and is one of the most representative geological formations of the island. In its superior arch, the highest altitude of 1.501 meters is reached at the Malpaso peak, which is located in the central area. This morpho-structure has vertical faces at its southern end, marking the rupture zone leading to the landslide that provoked the formation of this slip valley, while the slope of the terrain was mitigated by the recent lava flows that have contributed to the formation of lowlands.

The central zone of the northwest-southwest ridge has a height between 900 and 1.300 meters, with a relatively flat terrain limited in the northwestern zone to the El Golfo sink, from where the southern slope, known as El Julán, arises. There has recently been volcanic activity in

this area and its morphology corresponds to a slope that moves towards the sea. At its eastern end is the north-facing ridge (from El Golfo and Las Playas to La Restinga), where you can find the largest concentration of volcanic edifices of subhistoric activity on the island of El Hierro, strewn by the large extensions of lava flows, results of the eruptions of calmer nature that produce areas known as Lajiales on the Canary Islands.



El Golfo Valley.

Los Lajiales have a morphology similar to that at the time of their formation, as the lava flows cooled off, littered with a multitude of volcanic cones, from where the lava that led to this type of landscape broke out. This place is characteristic for the multitude of formations existing on its surface, which are determined by the type of lava (aa and *pahoehoe*), the different cooling of each one, the distance reached by the lava flows and the irregularities of the ground which led to the different volcanic geomorphologies while it runs through the existing asperity, such as rope lava, the presence of volcanic tubes, Tumuli, the Lajiales themselves (*pahoehoe* lava) and the Malpaís (aa lava).

Following the alignment of the north-south ridge, it is evident that this is an unstable area due to the high presence of volcanic edifices and for being the area where in 2011 a volcanic reactivation occurred, which led to a submarine eruption, only a few kilometers from the coast of La Restinga.

In July of that year, an important seismic activity was registered north of El Golfo, it moved to the south of the island following the line of the fault. In October 2011, the volcanic activity began, which in

its early stage had an explosive character emitting volcanic bombs and low density fragments with high porosity forming rocks floating on the ocean surface. They are called pumice or "Restingolitas" in Spanish. How these rocks are created is a mystery to science. They are unique and can be viewed in the Interpretation Center of the Geopark of El Hierro.



El Julán.

GEOPARK

In 2014, El Hierro was classified as a Geopark, due to the geological potential of a place as characteristic as the island of El Hierro, which is an important resource contributing to the economic and social development of its inhabitants. This body is an innovative model for local development, supported by UNESCO, which in a holistic way makes it possible to manage the elements of cultural and natural heritage, and in particular for biodiversity, in order to improve the quality of life, since El Hierro fulfills the necessary requirements for its implementation. This institution opens up new opportunities for socio-economic development for the island, creating its own and differentiated tourism model complemented by scientific research in the field of volcanism.



Interpretation Center.

Interpretation Center of the Geopark of El Hierro



The Interpretation Center consists of two buildings and an interpretive path that runs between them leading through a volcanic area. The first building is dedicated to the Canarian volcanism and especially to the one that formed the island of El Hierro. The technology gives the visitor a unique experience thanks to the large interactive wall showing various volcanic landscapes.

Thanks to a motion detector, a Kinect system will be activated and large charts with texts and pictures will be shown on the screens.

Meanwhile in the second building, the visitors enjoy an audiovisual show reproducing the eruption in La Restinga.

The sound and images take the visitor to a unique natural phenomenon that begins with a slight bubbling before carrying him to the ocean floor, where submarine cracks emerge, where gas starts release, accompanied by an alarming whistle.

The whistle shifts into a powerful roar and the eruption begins.

This visit is included in the passport.

● **Open from Tuesday to Sunday from 10:00 to 18:00.**



THE FLORA AND VEGETATION of the island of El Hierro

Although it is the "smallest" island of the Canarian archipelago, El Hierro treasures large abundant vegetation. It is extraordinary that in such a small area, there is such a large diversity of plant landscapes, of which many have been formed by a population that, though it was never numerous historically, has profoundly changed the island territory.

The phytodiversity on El Hierro is probably undiscovered in its totality. So far, about 670 species have been detected, of which about 23 are exclusive endemic species on El Hierro.

For its unique beauty, the *Echium hierrense*, several species of marguerites or "magarzas" (such as the beautiful *Argyranthemum adauctum erythrocarpon* with its blood red fruits) or the sea-lavender (*Limonium macropterum*), an everlasting of enormous ornamental value.

The island is generally a rugged and rough territory with considerable recent lava fields, vertical cliffs and stone walls built by man. These places are shelters for some of the island's greatest botanical treasures. The group of Crassulaceae ("sanjoras" and "beyes" for the local population) finds its maximum expansion here, being represented by more than ten species.

Three of them are island endemics (*Aeonium hiérrense*, *Aeonium valverdense* and *Aeonium canariense longithyrsum*) and together with the sow thistles (*Sonchus hierrensis* and *Sonchus gandogeri*) they characterize these communities.

In them are endangered species such as the *Silene sabinosae* and the *Cheirolophus duranii*, restricted to

populations with a very poor number of individuals. If we pursue the complete ascent through its 1500 meters of altitude marked by large slopes, we can perfectly observe how several communities or altitudinal zonation (Canary Island spurge and common spurge (cardonales and tabaibales), juniper trees, Monteverde, heather (fayal-brezal) or the pine forests) are changing in relation with temperature and precipitation variations determined by the height.

An alteration in the distribution of plant species for which it would be necessary to travel many miles to appreciate it in continental areas. This fact makes El Hierro a unique place, a "continent" in miniature.

Dare to pass through it, taking great care because of its high coastal cliffs, allows you to discover the presence of species resistant to the high salinities of these rocky areas, such as sea-lavender (*Limonium pectinatum solandri*), sea heath (*Frankenia ericifolia*), nymph umbel (*Astydamia latifolia*) and bird's-foot trefoil (*Lotus sessilifolius villosissimus*) among others.

While we move away from the sea and walk through the low areas of the island, the vegetation of succulent plants in this

place helps us to understand the character of the islander. Like the plants, he had to become strong to adapt himself to the harsh conditions of insular life in the lower areas, where rains are scarce and the insolation is very high.

The world of euphorbias finds its maximum expression here, from the Canary Island spurges (*Euphorbia canariensis*), whose leaves have been transformed into thorns and their trunks similar to candelabrams perform photosynthesis, protagonists in walls of the low regions of the ravines in the east of the island to the balsam spurge (*Euphorbia balsamifera*) whose specimens grow to enormous dimensions between

the lava fields that surround the road to the lighthouse of Orchilla at the end of the world and the numerous *Euphorbia lamarckii obtusifolia* with flower umbels and toxic sap. The pastoral use of these area has favored the expansion of species such as thatching grass (*Hyparrhenia sinaica*), which for example grows abundantly next to the ancient meeting point of the aborigines of el Hierro, the bimbaches, on the hillside of El Julian. Together with *Kleinia neriifolia* and *Periploca laevigata*, these large insular areas are dominated by other shrub species, excellent pioneer species, which in El Hierro maintain

the original denomination by the primitive inhabitants of the island, for example the iramas (*Schizogyne sericea*), calcosas (*Rumex lunaria*) or sórames (*Lavandula canariensis hierrensis*).

While we ascend in altitude, the more abundant rainfall allows arboreal life forms to prosper. None is more important than the juniper (*Juniperus thurbinata canariensis*), the natural symbol of the island and the protagonist of a massive nature spectacle in the Sabinar of La Dehesa. In this place, of traditional communal use for cattle grazing, stand majestic junipers with twisted trunks whose capricious forms remind us of their eternal fight against the relentless wind, which practically never stops in this area. It is a place to get lost and enjoy these astonishing life forms, which grow next to *Rubia fruticosa*, incienso (*Artemisia*), marguerite (*Argyranthemum hierrense*), *Euphorbia lamarckii* and a type of wallflower called “jazmín” by the inhabitant of El Hierro (*Erysimum heritieri hierrense*).

Elsewhere on the island, the presence of these trees of Mediterranean origin has been diminished by human action. However, the presence of shrubs such as Canary Islands St. John's wort (*Hypericum canariense*), *Sideritis ferrensis* and broom (*Spartocytisus filipes*, *Retama monosperma*), together with other trees such as wild olive trees (*Olea cerasiformis*),

Monumental trees on the island of El Hierro



- **Juniper of Machín**
El Sabinar, La Frontera.
- **Dragon tree of Guarazoca**
Guarazoca, Valverde.
- **Piloto pine-tree**
Guillén lowlands, El Pinar.
- **Juniper of Tacorón**
Finca Cábanas, El Pinar.
- **The faya herreña of La Llanía**
La Llanía, Valverde.
- **Pine Gordo of the Morcillo**
Hoya de El Morcillo, El Pinar.
- **Old pine of the Morcillo**
Hoya de El Morcillo, El Pinar.
- **The Picconia excelsa of Jinama**
Los Corchos, camino de Jinama, La Frontera.
- **The Visnea mocanera of the shadow**
Los Corchos, camino de Jinama, La Frontera.
- **The Visnea mocanera of the pigs**
Los Corchos, camino de Jinama, La Frontera.
- **The laurel of Ramón**
Mequena, Los Gramales, La Frontera.
- **The dragon treen of the conde**
Valverde.



Juniper of El Hierro



Aeonium hierrense.

only growing in the area of La Frontera, help us to recognize where woods should have existed.

If we move higher up north, we reach the most humid area of the island, where you will find charming and magical woods. During the journey on the different paths (La Peña, San Salvador, El Crés...) to the valley of El Golfo, also used by the inhabitant until very recent times, we can observe the best selection of rain forest on the island. Some of these places are worthy to be highlighted. One of them is the Bailadero de las Brujas, the place where a small ovate-leaf faya called faya herreña (*Morella rivas-martinezii*) was discovered, although today it is also known in La Gomera and La Palma.

Another place is Mencafete, it is famous for its source and beside this a stronghold for numerous species of ferns such as the sumptuous *Dryopteris oligodonta* or the *Ceterach aureum*. But maybe it is the path of Jinama where this kind of vegetation shows its entire splendor. Along the way you can enjoy the vision of magnificent specimens of *Picconia excelsa* and *Visnea mocanera*, accompanied by other trees such as laurels (*Laurus novocanariensis*), small-leaved holly (*Ilex canariensis*) and barbusanos (*Apollonias barbujana*), along with tree heath (*Erica arborea*) and firetrees (*Morella faya*).

We can also find endemic species such as *Bencomia* (*Bencomia sphaerocarpa*), the col de risco or matocumbre (*Crambe feuillei*) or the flowers of the beautiful *Canarina canariensis*. If we ascend the South facing slopes or the Riscos de las Playas, we find another amazing forest with huge specimens of Canary Island pine (*Pinus canariensis*), of unrelenting resistance to the most cruel wildfires. Many of them have their own names (Guasimo Pine, Pilot Pine) reminiscent in the memory of the inhabitants of the place of life and

death stories. Its undergrowth is poor in bushes due to anthropogenic activity, but rich in herbaceous species such as sweet peas (*Lathyrus* spp.), vetches (*Vicia* spp.) and clovers (*Trifolium* spp.), giving a touch of color after the winter rains. As we continue our journey to the peak of Malpaso, the highest place on the island, *Micromeria hierrensis* and *Echium aculeatum* are constantly present.

These species, able to live from the plains to the highest peaks, show us here that we reach the areas



Tree houseleeks (Aeonium)

extensively covered by organic sand on the youngest dorsal of an island with constant volcanic activity. Along this journey from the sea to the summit we will not only pass through natural landscapes of high-value, but also through rural areas of enormous importance and beauty. The transformation of El Hierro by livestock and agricultural activities offers us impressions of unequal beauty, such as the Nisdafe grassland in spring, where a palette of colors would delight the impressionist painters. The yellow of the thistle of the aster (several herbaceous species of the family Asteraceae), "gurmanes" (species of the genus *Andryala* and *Tolpis*) and the flowers of the white mustard (*Sinapis alba*) mixed up with the red of the papaver and the Tangier pea (*Lathyrus tingitanus*), the white of the insular endemism *Pericallis murrayi*, the green contributed by the numerous species of existing grasses and the purple touch of the flowers of the paterson's curse (*Echium plantagineum*) and the omnipresent Arabian pea (*Bituminaria bituminosa*), compose a perfect symphony of exquisiteness and harmony.

In the plains, the landscapes is vegetated with fig trees (*Ficus carica*), almond trees (*Prunus dulcis*) and vines (*Vitis vinifera*) combined with the recent plantations of pineapple (*Ananas comosus*), it shows us an island

whose economy always goes linked to the primary sector. Therefore, a trip to this green "continent" allows us to discover rich natural, rural and cultural heritage always in combination with plants.

Hopefully they will all be conserved and enjoyed by future generations.



The Garoé

i The Garoé

We cannot miss to mention the Protected Landscape of Ventejís where, for an island so historically depending of water for subsistence, the "legend" of El Garoé becomes a reality.

The chronicles tell of the existence of a tree in this place from which water flowed, which was collected in basins for the subsistence of all the inhabitants of the island before the Castilian conquest.

Thanks to the illustration of the engineer Torriani, we know today that it was a til (*Ocotea foetens*), which disappeared around 1610 and which was finally replaced by another til more than half a century ago. However, this "miracle" of water does not depend as much on the tree as on the area: an almost permanent sea of clouds loaded with humidity allows the condensation of water on the surface of any plant, as on the fronds of the Killarney fern (*Trichomanes speciosum*), a plant with a translucent plant body growing exclusively in this place of El Hierro.

“When the Spaniards conquered the mentioned island, they were surprised and admired in no finding either running waters or springs or puddles. Thereupon asking the inhabitants where from they get the water to drink, they answered they collect the rainwater they needed in vats. However they had previously obscured this amazing mystery of nature with canes and other objects, to easier banish the Spaniards from the island in the case they do not find any water on the whole island. But an indigene woman, who fell in love with a Spaniard, revealed the use and showed him how it works entirely. The man reported it to his captain and told him how the facts were. The captain laughed a lot and took the report for a fable, but this did not hold him to solve it and finally to discover the tree. And he saw that it was neither invented nor imagined, but the pure truth. The noble indigenes of the island, betrayed by that woman of the secret of the water tree, ordered to kill her privily.

The first written reference of the legend of the "Árbol Santo", collected by Theodore de Bry in 1597.



FAUNA of the island of El Hierro

El Hierro, as the youngest island from the geological perspective and the furthest from the continent, is the poorest of the Canary archipelago in number of species of fauna, but many of these species are exclusive on this island, making of it a unique place on the planet.

Among the vertebrates, the most numerous are the birds, with more than half a hundred species breeding on the island, including the two exclusive subspecies, the African blue tits of El Hierro (*Cyanistes teneriffae ombriosus*) and the Common chaffinch of El Hierro (*Fringilla coelebs ombriosa*).

There are also four endemic species of the Canary Islands, such as the Canary Islands chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus canariensis*), the Tenerife goldcrest (*Regulus teneriffae*), the Laurel pigeon (*Columba junoniae*) and Bolle's pigeon (*Columba bollii*). In addition they are four endemic species of Macaronesia, such as Berthelot's pipit (*Anthus berthelotii*), plain Swift (*Apus unicolor*), the Atlantic canary (*Serinus canaria*) and the Macaronesian Shearwater (*Puffinus baroli*).

Amongst the birds, the most pertinent are the seabirds, some of them with small populations at European level. To navigate between the islands during the summer months or the observation with telescope from headlands can reveal us pleasant surprises such as Cory's shearwater (*Calonectris borealis*), Macaronesian Shearwater and Manx shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*). In addition to Bulwer's petrels (*Bulweria bulwerii*) and several species of storm petrel, such as the Madeiran storm petrel (*Oceanodroma castro*) and the European storm petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*).



Atlantic canary

The most famous vertebrate of the island is the symbolic El Hierro giant lizard (*Gallotia simonyi machadoi*), one of the most endangered reptiles in the world.

It has already been told about the presence of this saurian on the island more than 500 years ago. The first reliable citation of the existence of the giant lizard on El Hierro date back to the 15th century in the French chronicles, when the island was conquered: "Huge lizards as big as cats, they do not

have poison, they do not hurt and they are disgusting to see". This reptile has been on the verge of extinction, due mainly to the wild cats and to the collectors. The finding of fossils confirms that they almost lived on the entire island. It was a goat herder, Juan Machín, with his grandson, who captured a pair of lizards in the area known as Fuga de Gorreta in 1974. This confirmed the presence of the reptiles on the island and that the species was not extinct. Currently there is a program for its conservation; you can discover it by visiting "El Lagartorio" located in the ecomuseum of Guinea.



Mammals are also represented on the island, mainly by animals introduced after the arrival of man, such as goats, rabbits, rats and others. The bats are the only mammals that came to El Hierro naturally, 4 species are present, the Madeira pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus maderensis*), the Savi's pipistrelle (*Hypsugo savii*), the Canary big-eared bat (*Plecotus teneriffae*) and the European free-tailed bat (*Tadarida teniotis*). Regarding the invertebrates of El Hierro, there are around

1.500 terrestrial invertebrate species known, a list that is clearly incomplete as the number of new discovered species grows year after year. And that regardless of the fact, that it is the smallest area of the Canarian archipelago and that it is relatively young from the geological perspective.

El Hierro is a place admired for the clarity of its waters, its underwater landscapes and the possibility of encountering large pelagic fish, such as devil rays and sharks.



Canary red admiral Butterfly

The village of La Restinga is the place with the highest density of diving centers. It is the gateway to the Marine Reserve of Mar de las Calmas and its magnificent diving sites. The communities of aquatic invertebrates are equally rich and diverse, with the presence of rare cataloged species from the coastline to the ocean depths. Populations of brown spiny lobster (*Palinurus echinatus*), dense black coral formations, forests of Red Gorgonian (*Leptogorgia ruberrima*) and Callogorgia verticillata, sea whips (*Ellisella paraplexauroides*, *Viminella flagellum*) and colonies of white coral stand out. Among the most common fish are groupers, Island groupers, octopuses and also crustaceans.

However, if observed carefully, it is possible to discover a large number of flatfishes and even magnificent seahorses. With luck, you can see devil rays, turtles and even sharks: blue sharks, hammerhead sharks, tiger sharks or even dive with whale sharks. Other species of interest are migratory such as tunas (*Thunnus* spp.), Amberjacks (*Seriola* spp.) and wahoo (*Acanthocybium solandri*).

The most commonly sighted cetaceans are the Atlantic spotted dolphin (*Stenella frontalis*), the short-finned pilot whale (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*), the common bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) and the Blainville's beaked whale (*Mesoplodon densirostris*). This last species maintains a population established in El Hierro that lives in deep waters and that has been observed for several years.





The sea that surrounds the island of El Hierro is well known for its submarine volcanic landscapes, its crystalline waters, the great variety of different species of fishes, crustaceans, sharks, local cetaceans, and for the migration of animals such as devil rays, whale sharks, large rorquals or sea turtles.

The small population, the absence of industry and of large hotel resorts and the commitment to renewable energy, make these waters one of the cleanest of the Canary Islands. Thanks to the water temperature varying between 18° C and 25° C, you can enjoy the sea in many different ways throughout the whole year, whether swimming, snorkeling on the surface or making deep dives in search of the most precious underwater treasures for divers from all over the world. This is one of the best known reasons to visit the island of El Hierro.



Zebra sea bream in the depth of Los Bocarones.

THE MARINE RESERVE PUNTA DE LA RESTINGA MAR DE LAS CALMAS

The Marine Reserve Punta de La Restinga Mar de Las Calmas is located in the southwestern part of the island, in front of the town of La Restinga and includes 1.180 hectares of marine surface. It was created in 1996 by a request from the fishing sector, because of the permanent good meteorological conditions in this area, it is possible to fish practically all year round, which meant that there was a risk of overfishing.

Furthermore here is the warmest water of the archipelago, which makes it possible to find rare tropical species difficult to see in the waters of the other islands. There is a zoning within the reserve, which serves to regulate the uses allowed in it. The zones are marked by poles on the coast.

Apart of it is a strict nature reserve, delimited by plastic buoys, in addition to it they are two areas of restricted uses where only professional sea fishing with rod and tuna fishing is permitted. In the rest of the reserve, professional fishing by local fishermen is authorized. The reserve is an ecological and socioeconomic success, serving as a natural nursery for species that from this protected zone

expand towards the nearby waters and renew the populations of those more vulnerable areas.

It is also a pillar for artisanal fishing, whose catches for personal consumption or for local trade are guaranteed. And as if this were not enough, the preservation has allowed this place to become one of the most desired spot for scuba diving, to discover under its waters the perfect scenery and the most impressive biodiversity of the Canary Islands.



Moray in El Bajón.

DIVING IN THE RESERVE

El Hierro is an internationally recognized diving sanctuary for both amateur and professional divers, underwater photographers and novices who are looking to begin diving. Its underwater world is home for a diversity of landscapes and a very attractive fauna. After the underwater volcanic eruption that occurred in 2011, the waters were enriched with new nutrients, leading to an even greater biodiversity, with a unique landscape full of life, perfect for all kind of scuba diving. Given to its volcanic origin and its small insular platform, great depths can be reached a few miles from the coast. Furthermore the clarity of its waters allows you to dive with great visibility, counting with some of the best diving areas in Spain, such as the Restinga diving area. El Hierro has more than 10 diving spots, which stand out for its volcanic geography among other things. Those spots are the scenery for one of the best known underwater photography competitions in Spain, the “Open Fotosub por la Biodiversidad Isla de El Hierro”, which brings together some of the best photographers in this specialty.

If you want to venture into the depths of the sea surrounding El Hierro, you have several diving centers to your disposition in La Restinga, which have a lot of experience and all the necessary diving material for courses and baptisms - they are absolute professional and safe.



Diving in El Bajón.



Diving spot

If you want to get to know the diving spots existing in El Hierro, we recommend you to visit the following website:



elhierro.travel/descubre/practica-el-buceo-volcanico/

You can also download the “Diving in HD” app to access to all the diving spots on the island and throughout the Canary Islands:



Android



Itunes



ARCHAEOLOGICAL Heritage

Bimbache or bimbape is the name by which the first inhabitants of El Hierro are named. Of Berber origin, some philologists translate it as "Children of the children of Tenerife". The age estimation made so far determine that the bimbaches settled on the island at least since the fourth century of our era.

Stock farming was the main economic activity, so the Normans note when they arrived: "there were a lot of animals, namely pigs, goats and sheep". The hunt was an important economic supplement, supported archaeologically by finding remains of crows, pigeons and lizards in digestive residues. Also gathering of vegetables, fruits, etc. was a common practice on all the islands. Fishing and collecting shellfishes must have been done intensively, as the shells are the most notable archaeological repercussion. Actually they are more than twenty sites with shells known throughout the island. Agriculture is the cause of an intense debate, as the French chronicles are the source that expressly mention the practice of this activity: «(...) and they have beans and wheat and other cereals in abundance; and they have stock farming with pigs ». Another author, G. Fructuoso, recounts that "the king ordered to bring gofio together with milk, because they had barley that they toasted and grounded between stones and floor ". It also mentions the way they cultivated, that "it was that they worked with burnt sticks."

Archaeological findings on the island show two types of housing: the juaclos, natural caves, spacious and

sheltered from the wind, which were used for the bigger part of the year. However, this type of housing was not the most common, the caves that offer the necessary requirements for living were not frequent and so they had to build houses, which are practically not preserved. Whether they are caves or houses built, it seems that the houses had a single multifunctional space for dormitory, kitchen, workshop, stable, etc. The ceramic is characterized by its bad quality, homogeneity, grayish or blackish coloration and poor decoration, which in general, are usually incisions and impressions, it seems the ceramic was designed from a functional perspective.

Bone was the most used raw material to fabricate objects such as punches, needles or amulets. The preserved remains are limited to some polished bone tubes, attributed to punch cases, although sometimes it gives the impression that it is the unfinished work of beads manufacturing.

The skins used to be from the most appreciated cattle, from goats and sheep and were the raw material, of which clothes and shoes were made. Woodwork was common for objects such as canes, containers, combs, punches, etc.

However, the organic nature of the material has not allowed its conservation, only a few grazing rods, called bordones or tomasaques, several funerary planks or chajasco and a few containers were determined archaeologically.

In general, the lithic repertoire is poor. As in the other islands, trachyte and phonolites utensils carved and polished on basalt have been reported, as well as grinding objects such as hand mills. One of the most unique aspects of bimbache culture are pictographs and petroglyphs. Many of them are known since the 18th century. Usually the basalt walls of the ravines

served as surface, like in the case of La Candia, lava flows as in El Julian (Los Letreros y Los Números), or even the interior of volcanic tubes, as in the case of the Cueva del Agua. The motifs that have been registered are grouped into alphabetic forms, in Libyco-Berber script, geometric ideograms and figurative ones, with figures of humans and animals. Through the chronicles of the conquest, it is known that the corpses were deposited in caves, covered with stones to protect them. It is unknown how they were deposited (position, placement, orientation ...).

Most of them have been affected by pillage, landslides, etc., however, they do appear with some grave goods (jars, stone tools, ...) in which a belief of continuing to live on "in the beyond" is intuited.



El Julian.

Cultural Park of El Julian

The Bimbaches left numerous petroglyphs. The largest and most significant are found in "Los Letreros de El Julian", where we can also see the remains of an old meeting place called "Tagoror".

The visit is structured in two parts: The visitor center and a guided tour to the archeological site, which always must be accompanied by a guide.

Open from Tuesday to Sunday from 10:00 till 18:00.

- **Archaeological visit of the site**

Mandatory reservation at least one day before the visit by email eljulan@gmail.com or by phone 922 558 423 (from Tuesday to Sunday from 10:00 till 18:00) (Not included in the Passport).

- **Tour times**

Walking: Every day at 08:00 am.
15 people maximum.

By car: Every day at 09:00 am.
8 people maximum.



Centuries-old folklore together with the various traditions, customs and celebrations has given life to the smallest island of the archipelago. A legacy passed on from generation to generation and that has defined the identity of El Hierro.

In municipalities such as Sabinosa, El Pinar, Frontera, Valverde, El Mocanal or Guarazoca, local crafts are still a booming activity.

The artisan work of converting sheep wool into fabrics is one of the oldest traditions of the island. The women of El Hierro, although fewer and fewer are doing it, continue spinning by hand and weaving wool or other yarns with looms to elaborate bedspreads, blankets, tapestries and the traditional bags or panniers. In order that the woven pieces are of quality, the process of preparation of the wool is important, it begins in March with the shearing of the sheep, then the wool is washed and dried, after that it is lengthened and combed, it is spun and twisted on the spinning wheel and then wound on the spindle and finally, after washing it again, it is woven in the loom. Making wool and transforming it into different fabrics has always been done in El Hierro. This technique of manufacturing the wool, possibly arriving to the island with the conquerors in the 15th century, is in danger of disappearing due to the advanced age of the people working in it, and the absence of young people who want to dedicate themselves to this laborious handicraft.

Other typical crafts of the island are the El Hierro drums. These drums are made of wood and kid leather, they have a rope and a metal plate. After welding the metal plate to give form to the drum, the rings of canary pine wood are prepared and fixed in the upper and lower part to give the final size to the drum. Once assembled, the lower and upper rings get painted in green and the metal plate in brown. Then the drum is stretched over with kid leather, which first must be softened in water, and finally the ropes are set in form of "Y" to span the leather drumhead.



Drum artisan on El Hierro

The basket makers also have an important role in the craftsmanship of the island. The weaving of baskets or wicker trays is a very laborious work. To be able to work the wicker it is necessary to soften it in sea water for weeks. Good quality raw material is used for its elaboration. Its origins are related to the daily use of baskets for centuries. Wicker basketry is characteristic for the towns of El Pinar, Tiagaday, Erese and El Mocanal. With the wood of black mulberry, beech, pine and chestnut trees the artisans from El Hierro carve utensils such as bowls and

ladles, they also make barrels for wine, tweezers to catch cactus pear and chácaras, the name given to the castanets on the island. In the localities of Valverde, Guarazoca and El Pinar, potters are still working. They work with potting clay from the island and with imported argil to produce works of ancient forms, especially aboriginal potteries. There are more artisans on the island which are specialized in forge, embroidery, crochet, leather goods and other branches.



Woman spinning by hand and weaving on loom.



Ethnographic Center Casa de Las Quinteras.

Ethnographic Center Casa de Las Quinteras

In this center, visitors can discover ethnographic exhibits of the island, distributed in four rooms for workshop, blacksmith and loom, textile crafts, wood and pottery. At the same time, the center hosts part of the important collection of which the ethnographic funds of the El Hierro Cabildo is composed.

With the aim of promoting and increasing the artisanal production on the island, the center has a shop where you can find a variety of pieces made by artisans from El Hierro.

- **Open from Monday to Saturday from 9:00 till 15:00**
Closed on Sundays.

THE CELEBRATIONS

Celebrations are very popular on El Hierro. One of the most important festivities is the “Bringing down of the Virgin of the Kings”, considered of tourist interest, which is celebrated on the first Saturday of July every 4 years. The origin of this celebration comes from the drought suffered on the island in 1749, which caused the loss of crops and the death of the cattle by hunger and thirst. The pastors led the Virgin to the capital to dedicate a novena. After that the rain arrived and in return for it they began to take the Virgin on a pilgrimage. The patron saint of the island is accompanied by procession along nearly 29 km, from her hermitage to the city of Valverde, by dancers dressed in traditional costume and colourful hats, to the rhythm of chacaras (castanets), drums and pitos (a flute species). This celebration attracts thousands of people who come from all over the island and even visitors coming from anywhere else. This El Hierro festivity lasts a whole month while the Virgin is brought to the most important towns of the island. La Dehesa, in Frontera, every 24th of September, the eve of the day of the Virgin of the Kings, welcomes hundreds of faithful who arrive from all localities of the island carrying lanterns, in memory of the lights carried by the pilgrims to light the way they traveled until they reached the Patroness.

This festivity is also named after the Fiesta de Los Faroles (celebration of the lantern).

Another traditional celebration is the carnival of Los Carneros de Tigaday, whose origins are related to the pastoral life of the island. The legend tells that the old shepherds that lived in higher areas, moved with the whole herd to the plains of the Valle del Golfo in the month of February. In the ceremony participate the rams and "El Loco", a shepherd that leads the flock to persecute to all the people in the streets to sow panic between them. This celebration, which has been declared an Asset of Cultural Interest, is part of the Carnival in Tigaday every Sunday and Tuesday.



The rams of Tigaday.



TRADITIONS

La Apañada is a cattle fair, going back centuries, held every first weekend of June in the town of San Andrés. In the plains of the Albarrada the farmers met every year bringing the best of their cattle to make business and trade animals with other farmers. Once the trade was made, if the acquired animal was unhealthy or had a defect, there was no turning back "te la apañabas", you had to accept it and to keep the defective cattle. Hence the name of this fair that attracting hundreds of visitors every year. This ancestral tradition is still celebrated today with the cattle exhibition; many farmers compete for different prizes, still making some business beyond that.

One of the already disappeared traditions of the island are the mudadas or mudas, the move of the inhabitants on the island. Whole families moved with the belongings and the cattle, from the mountain to the coast looking for better pastures for the stock, better climatic conditions or because of the sowing times or the harvest. The "mudadas" were mainly realized in the wintertime until the second half of the 20th century.

And although the "Lucha Canaria", Canarian wrestling is a sport, it is also part of the El Hierro traditions, as its origin goes back to the aboriginal population. Today it is the most

popular sport on the island. It is usually performed in a team where strength and skills are needed. Fights are hold inside the "terrero", a circle of sand, involving two wrestlers who face each other aiming to throw the opponent off balance. The first one touching the ground with some part of the body loses. It is practiced by both children and adults, who are part of teams and clubs. There is an Insular Federation of Lucha Canaria, which is based in Valverde. It was presented at the Olympics in Barcelona in 1992 as an exhibition sport. El Hierro has one of the most emblematic figures in the Universe of Canarian Wrestling, like Francis Pérez, known as "El Pollito de La Frontera" and without forgetting Don Juan Barbuzano and Ramón Méndez.

The El Hierro people pay tribute to their best wrestlers in the Museum of La Lucha Canaria in the municipality of La Frontera, located in the calle del Hoyo, open from Monday to Friday from 9:00 to 15:00.



Celebrations calendar

In the different municipalities of the island other festivities also take place throughout the year. All local saint patrons have celebrations in their honor:

- January 17th
Fiesta de San Antonio Abad
El Pinar
- First Sunday of February
Fiesta de Ntra. Sra. de la Candelaria
Los Llanillos, Frontera
- February - March
Carnivals
Valverde and Frontera
- March 19th
Fiesta de San José
Isora
- April 25th
Fiesta de los Pastores
La Dehesa
- May 3
Fiesta de la Cruz
El Pinar
- May 15th
Fiesta de San Isidro
Valverde
- May 19th
Fiesta de La Caridad
San Andrés
- June 24th
Fiestas de San Juan
La Restinga, Las Puntas, Tamaduste and Pozo de Las Calcosas
- June 29th
Fiesta de San Pedro
El Mocanal
- July 16th
Fiesta de la Virgen de El Carmen
La Restinga and San Andrés
- July 19th
Fiesta de Nuestra Señora de Fátima
Isora
- First Sunday of August
Fiesta de San Salvador
Frontera
- August 10th
Fiesta de San Lorenzo
Frontera
- August 15th
Fiesta de La Candelaria
Frontera
- September 8th
Fiesta de Ntra. Sra. De Los Remedios
San Andrés
- September 12th
Fiesta de La Paz
El Pinar
- September 14th
Fiesta de San Telmo
Echedo
- September 24th
Fiesta de Nuestra Señora De Los Reyes
The previous day takes place the "Fiesta de Los Faroles", with a night walk from all places to La Dehesa
- October 19th
Fiesta de Nuestra Señora De La Peña.
El Mocanal, Erese and Guarazoca
- October 28th
Fiesta de San Simón
Sabinosa
- November 30th
Fiesta de San Andrés Apóstol
San Andrés
- December 8th
Fiesta Nuestra Señora de La Concepción
Valverde

THE FOLKLORE

The smallest island of the Canarian archipelago has a varied and rich musical folklore. In the traditional El Hierro folklore we can find different genres characteristic to the island, highlighting the following:

The El Hierro Tango is one of the most emblematic and popular things of the island. It is supposed it has its origin on the Spanish mainland due to the similarity it has with some dances from the Extremadura region. In this dance stand out the passivity of women's movements in contrast to the jumps and the variety of steps the men originally done to rival each other.

The "Baile del Santo" is a sung dance in accordance with the drumbeats, between a man and a woman, as well as between a man and a man or a woman and a woman. The strophes that are sung have different themes; romantic relationships, religious themes and, above all, picaresque encounters. While they are singing, they are not dancing and the spectators wait curiously to the ingenious occurrences of the two protagonists. In the past it took place in village festivities, in the "velas de paridas" (the eve of the baptism), in the "descamisadas" (harvest reprocessing), in the weddings... It is a pilgrimage sung, it is referred to San Antonio Abad, patron of Taibique, in El Pinar.

The dance of the Virgin is a dance of religious character that the inhabitants of El Hierro dedicate to their patron saint, the Virgin of the Kings. It consists of more than twenty different short dances with own music with castanets, played by the dancers, accompanied by flutes and drums. Some of the pieces which are played are juyona (cheerful), Santo Domingo, short, long, without accompaniment of vocal etc. It is danced during the "Bringing down of the Virgin of the Kings" by groups of the different localities through which it passes until the end of the tour.

Once the patroness arrives at her destination, the waiting people joins the celebration dancing and with instruments.

The colorful dress the dancers use makes this dance even more unique, being totally different from other islands. In the past, it was a dance of men dancing in a row with complicated forward/backward moves.

The "Baile del Flaire" is another folkloric dance of the islands. The men dance in front of the women accompanied by the rhythms of the drum. Formerly the woman who sang and played the drum was known as "danza". She sang stopping after the first two verses of "Flaire", the woman who was left alone could take out the dancer she wanted, and when the



last two verses ended, the man who continued to dance could choose the woman he wanted to dance with. Thus they danced as long as they could. This traditional folk dance was forgotten in the 1920s but rediscovered in the late 1970s.

The "baile del Conde de Cabra" was a game of children singing in a circle that has been converted into an adult dance, although sometimes also for children. A circle is formed and in the center is the "danza" (woman playing the drum) while the men and women around her dance, changing the rotation direction every time the stanzas changed.



Bringing down of the Virgin of the Kings.

Throughout the archipelago working songs for figs ploughing and leaves cutting are well known, but on the island of El Hierro there are still others that have disappeared on the other islands like working songs for ploughing, cutting, milling or ballads and the "Loas", popular poetic compositions of oral transmission that are recited to the Virgin of The Kings during the procession or along the pilgrimage. Considering that it is an island with a limited population and geographical extension, El Hierro has a rich repertoire of ballads.



Illustration of Valentina la de Sabinosa.

Valentina la de Sabinosa

One of the legendary voices of Canarian folklore was the one of Valentina Hernández, known as "Valentina la de Sabinosa", born in Sabinosa, Frontera in 1889. With her drum she marked the rhythms of the lyrics of the songs and the dances. She taught the young people the songs and dances of her island, the heritage of her parents and grandparents. In February 1972 she recorded in the Aires studios in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, under the tutelage of Elfidio Alonso, the disc "Doña Valentina la de Sabinosa. Cantos y bailes herreños. Folklore de las Islas Canarias", with Tango, El Santo, Romance de la Serrana de la Vera, el Conde de la Cabra, el Vivo, Baile de la Virgen, Romance, La Meda, el Canto del Güeyero (La siega y la trilla) and the well-known lullaby Arrorró, which although it was part of the popular music of El Hierro, became well known in the rest of the archipelago after this version of Valentina. Thanks to this El Hierro folklorist, the working and farl labour songs "Moliendo", "Arando", "Tejiendo"... are still preserved and have been passed on to the new generations. In 1976 the artist died leaving us her rich musical legacy.

An extract of MAN AND BIOSPHERE

THE MAN WHO MILKED THE CLOUDS

By Ander Izagirre

Four days before turning 97, Don Tadeo Casañas remembered the night of 1948 when he saved the inhabitants of El Hierro from thirst.

Sitting on the sofa in his house, he asked me to forgive him because he confounded the stories, because he recounted them half, because he went again and again to the dead, to the multitude of dead he saw lying in the battle of the Ebro, he went back to the trench in which he slept next to a companion who turned into another dead man in the dawn of the following day, then went back to the girlfriend he had then in Sant Sadurní d'Anoia, in whose house he sometimes stayed. She went to sleep with her mother and woke up with me - he told me three times in October 2015, and laughed all three times. He asked me to forgive him because he confused stories, otherwise there were some he narrated fully. Those who persist in his memory, at 97, although the others have dissolved, are

war stories, love stories and the story of thirst. In 1948 it did not rain a drop. The wells of the island of El Hierro dried up, the land cracked, the fruit trees withered, the cows and sheep died. The humans did not die, because a tanker brought water from Tenerife and a truck distributed it house by house, but many families were ruined. The drought forced to the great emigration to Venezuela: twelve thousand Canarian wedged in 94 sailboats to cross the Atlantic between 1948 and 1950. I had a shotgun. A bad one, but a shotgun, Don Tadeo told me. When he did not speak, he would shrink on the sofa with his eyes almost closed, tired by a century. When he spoke, he leaned on his hands, stood up and opened his eyes like an owl. I went up to the land owned by my in-laws, in the upper part of the island, to see if I could hunt a pigeon.

We had sheep there, but that year they died. I built myself a hut and went to sleep, to go hunting in the



Sea of clouds on the slopes of El Golfo.

dawn. I made the roof with heather branches. One night I woke up because it was trickling inside the hut. It was the fog, which condensed on the heathers and dripped. Don Tadeo had an idea. He cut several hard, fluted leaves of the agave long side and mounted a rustic aqueduct from the roof of heather to a cistern which was used to collect rain and which had been dry for months. In a few hours it was filled with the dripping of the fog. I told my neighbors that I would bring water to their homes, if they gave me some zinc plates, which they used for the roof of the stables.

He mounted the plates to collect more water from the heather, installed a pipe given by the City Council and got the water coming down from the mountain to the village of Tiñor: it gave 14 liters per minute. In the midst of drought, Don Tadeo milked the fog and saved his neighbors.

THE SACRED TREE OF THE BIMBACHES

Don Tadeo insisted that he had not invented anything. He just observed clouds and read books. They call me the sage of El Hierro and I am a very big ignoramus. I am dying now, but I annoy people with questions because I always want to know a little more. I almost did not go to school, I just learned to read and the four rules of numbers. But I read a lot, especially Don Quichote and the history books. I knew that the bimbaches obtained water from the fog. It was told by the first European conquerors, the Normans Bethencourt and La Salle, and many took it for a joke. At the beginning of the 15th century they reported that on the island of Ezero, today El Hierro, the bimbache aborigines had "a tree on which every afternoon a white cloud sits, which distills water through the leaves below, from which the neighbors drink and all their cattle". The Castilian chronicles, one hundred years later, recounted the same history of the island "dry and sterile" to which God had provided a "miraculous tree" that gave water. The natives called the tree garoé and they dug reservoirs at its base to accumulate the water. But El Hierro was the most western island, the end of the known world, an almost mythological territory. And the story of the miraculous tree

sounded like so many stories of the newly discovered worlds: pure invention, for rationalist authors like Feijóo.

It was not magic, it was not a legend. It is physical, simple and beautiful: the trade winds collide with the north face of El Hierro, the humid air rises up the slope and forms a sea of clouds. The Garoé tree grows in a perfect location: at a thousand meters of altitude, in the highest part of the Tigulate ravine, a channel through which the fog rises from the coast to the mountain. It is a tilo with a wide open branched trunk: ideal to collect the moisture from the fog, which condenses on the branches and begins to drip. The tree is always soaked, bathed in moss, on a moist, soft, odourous ground. And at its base you could see the reservoirs dug by the bimbaches, three till four meters deep, where the water of the miraculous tree accumulated and where it continues to accumulate. A wind storm tipped the legendary garoé in 1610 over. The current tilo was planted on the same site in 1949, shortly after Don Tadeo's experiment with heather. There were other clouds milkers in the following years, who observed the mists, chose the right trees, and dug up reservoirs next to them. In his book Garoé, the engineer Isidoro Sánchez, tells about the juniper of the shepherd Juan Bartolo, who obtained abundant water for his flocks, or the juniper of

the guardian Zósimo Hernández, who collected thousands of liters in two tanks, to offer water to the hundreds of pilgrims who cross the island every four years dancing and carrying on their shoulders the Virgin of the Kings.

THIRST, A POLITICAL CONSEQUENCE

The people of El Hierro depended on the ingenuity of a shepherd or a guardian to avoid thirst. And it did not have to be like that. Thirst was a political consequence, consequence of a certain social organization, according to the geographer Carlos Santiago Martín. In the middle and high zones of El Hierro it rains as much as in Pamplona, Burgos or Huesca. But the island is very young: a pile of volcanic rocks that have just emerged, a land that has not been compacted yet, and the waters drain through the cracks to the subsoil.

There are no rivers, no lakes, but enough wells to extract abundantly subterranean water. Martín explains that the great land owners of El Hierro never wanted to invest in hydraulic technologies and negated any engagements from public authority. With the few wells that they controlled, they had

enough to maintain their own livestock and crops, even for selling water to the farmers.

"Water possession is an extraordinary instrument of power," writes Martín. In the 1970s, when some land owners wanted to expand the production of bananas for export, the first large wells were drilled.

Until then, the inhabitant of El Hierro faced it with rudimentary methods: they collected water in the hollows of the trunks, in small ponds in the mountains, in the courtyards of the houses. And when a dry year arrived, we had to walk down with a carafe to the source of Timijiraque, which is next to the sea, fill it up and walk back - told me an old woman at Casa Goyo, a bar near Don Tadeo's house, in the town of San Andrés, a thousand meters above sea level, a thousand meters above the source.



HIKING trails

One of the activities El Hierro is well known for, is hiking, it is the perfect place for it. The diversity of habitats existing on the island, due to the differences in altitude and orientation, make that it counts with a multitude of different landscapes with endless possibilities for the practice of this

popular activity that will allow you to discover the island by the rhythm marked by nature.

In El Hierro there is the highest density of volcanic cones on the Canary Islands, in the midst of a landscape dominated by the immensity of the Atlantic Ocean, with gravitational landslides that are a kind of open-air geology class. Laurel forests that will transport you back to other climatic times, when this vegetation dominated the Mediterranean basin. Fire-resistant pine forests fruit of a millennia-long evolution, which has left its mark on its trunks and contrasting colors almost impossible to imagine. Excursions along the coast full with puddles, swimming areas and natural pools where you can calmly enjoy the blue of one of the most coveted seas by divers from all over of the world. Junipers shaped by the powerful Trade winds, which have led navigators from one side of the Atlantic to the other for centuries. And places where their inhabitants will make you a warm welcome. These are some of the reasons why El Hierro is a first class hiking destination. There are surely many other paths you will discover in some of the 41 official trails of long, medium and short length, marked and approved that are found on the island: circular or linear routes, with large height differences, for families, coastal or mountainous, downhill or uphill - there are trails for everyone.

Here we present you the five essential trails, but if you want to see all existing routes and decide which suits best to you, visit the following link:

[elhierro.travel/themes/custom/
elhierro2018/includes/files/
Mapa-de-Senderos.pdf](https://elhierro.travel/themes/custom/elhierro2018/includes/files/Mapa-de-Senderos.pdf)



**Camino de La Virgen
GR 131**



Length: 37,7 km
Ascent height: 1850 m
Descent height: 1875 m
Difficulty: Alta
Type of route: Linear
Duration: 11:45 hours

**La Llanía
SL EH1**



Length: 7,5 km
Ascent height: 230 m
Descent height: 230 m
Difficulty: Baja
Type of route: Circular
Duration: 2:20 hours

**Camino de Isora
PR EH3**



Length: 15 km
Ascent height: 1100 m
Descent height: 1100 m
Difficulty: Media
Type of route: Circular
Duration: 7:00 hours

**Ruta del agua
PR EH11**



Length: 16 km
Ascent height: 690 m
Descent height: 690 m
Difficulty: Media
Type of route: Circular
Duration: 5:25 hours

**Camino de Jinama
PR EH8**



Length: 3,4 km
Ascent height: 815 m
Descent height: 815 m
Difficulty: Alta
Type of route: Linear
Duration: 3:00 hours

**La Restinga - El Pinar -
Sabinosa PR EH1**



Length: 22,5 km
Ascent height: 1400 m
Descent height: 1000 m
Difficulty: Media
Type of route: Linear
Duration: 9:00 hours





WHALE watching

The waters of the Canary Islands are internationally known for being one of the best places in the world to observe cetaceans, having identified 30 different species in their waters so far, which make these islands one of the places with the most diversity in the North Atlantic. These species are in some cases stable populations, and in others they are

migratory species taking advantage of these waters to feed on for their long oceanic journeys.

The sea that surrounds El Hierro is an international reference in terms of the biodiversity it houses. The quality of its water and the recent submarine eruption makes of it, especially of the Mar de Las Calmas, a place with an exceptional richness, an obligatory stop for numerous cetaceans in their annual migratory journey. Bryde's whales, orcas, herds of striped, common and bottlenose dolphins, sperm whales, short-finned pilot whales and Risso's dolphins are some of the species that can be spotted regularly. One of the exceptionalities of these waters is the presence of resident populations of the less known beaked whales, namely the Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*) and the Blainville beaked whale (*Mesoplodon densirostris*). These mysterious animals live here all year round, where they find the ideal conditions for their food. The beaked whales can hold up to two hours underwater and are expert hunters diving at depths of between 500 and 3000 meters, where they find and pursue their prey by echolocation. El Hierro is the place in the world where these two mysterious species of cetaceans could have been studied intensively.

In La Restinga are numerous diving centers that also offer boat trips, with explanatory chats about the geology and biodiversity of the site, making stops for diving with the possibility to spot some of the cetacean species frequenting the waters of El Mar de Las Calmas. An experience difficult to forget that will link you with the freedom of these great travelers.



Atlantis Spotted Dolphin.

COMMON CETACEANS

of the Biosphere Reserve and Geopark of
the island of El Hierro



1



2



3

1. Cachalote / Sperm Whale
Physeter macrocephalus

2. Rorcual tropical / Bride's Whale
Balaenoptera edeni

3. Rorcual común / Fin Whale
Balaenoptera physalus

4. Zifio de Blainville / Brandville's Beaked Whale
Mesoplodon densirostris

5. Calderón gris / Risso's Dolphin
Grampus griseus

6. Zifio común / Cuvier's Beaked Whale
Ziphius cavirostris



5



6



7

7. Calderón tropical / Short-finned Pilot Whale
Globicephala macrorhynchus

8. Delfín mular / Bottle Nose Dolphin
Tursiops truncatus



8



11



9



10



7

9. Delfín listado / Striped Dolphin
Stenella coeruleoalba

10. Delfín común / Common Dolphin
Delphinus delphis

11. Delfín moteado / Atlantis Spotted Dolphin
Stenella frontalis



BIRD watching

The observation of the birds is a relatively easy activity to realised on the island of El Hierro, just by carrying some field glasses and a bird guide in your backpack, you will be able to enjoy the fascinating world of birds all year round.

Spring is the best period to observe nesting birds, in that time they show the most beautiful plumages and sing the most conspicuous songs to attract the females and reproduce. In the summertime the countryside is full of birds, as the recently born chicks leave their nests for the first time. In autumn you will enjoy yourselves observing mixed groups of different species that roam from one place to another in search of food and with some luck after some strong storm you will be able to observe rarities coming from North America. The winter months are the most interesting to know the wintering migrants that wander from northern Europe to El Hierro. The forest birds are one of the most attractive groups of the island, the Tenerife goldcrest, the Canary Islands chiffchaff, the European robin and the local subspecies of the African Blue Tit and of the Common chaffinch are some of the most attractive species. All of them can be observed on the Jinama trail, the Mencafete forest trail or at the La Llanía source. With luck you will also see some of the Canary Islands endemic laurel pigeons: Bolle's pigeon or the much smaller white-tailed laurel pigeon.

In the agricultural areas of San Andrés, Isora and especially in Nisdafe, several species of birds used to this type of environment can be observed all year round with a certain degree of ease, especially the stone-curlew, the corn bunting,

the Barbary partridge, the common quail and the Common raven.

Some of the most estimated species by bird watchers are the birds of prey, the most interesting being the Barbary falcon. Although on the island also breed the Eurasian sparrowhawk, the common buzzard, the sea hawk, the common kestrel and two species of nocturnal birds, such as the long-eared owl and the Western barn owl.



Corn bunting.

Another interesting group of birds for observers are the seabirds. The island of El Hierro hosts important colonies of this group of birds specialized in life in the ocean. Macaronesian shearwater, Bulwer's petrel, Madeiran storm petrel are the rarest and scarce, otherwise the appearance of the Scopoli's shearwater is very abundant during the summer months, when thousands of them approach the breeding colonies, performing pitiful songs during the night.

In recent years, with the warming and tropicalization of the marine environments of the islands, some bird species of tropical waters have begun to be observed frequently, among them the red-billed tropicbird (*Phaethon aetereus*), which has recently begun to reproduce on the island. The presence of migratory birds is scarce although it is still a fact of interest for many bird watchers, since the island has registered several species of birds considered national rarities, species for which there are few reliable observations on the Spanish territory.



Common chaffinch of El Hierro.

The best time of the year to observe migratory birds are the months from February till April, especially the days of warm weather, with prevailing southeasterly winds. These winds bring the birds, migrating from Africa to Europe along the Saharan coast, to the islands in search of food and rest. Species such as the barn swallow, common swift, European bee-eater and woodchat shrike are frequent migratory birds appearance on the island. Also during the winter months you can observe some small common sandpiper, ruddy turnstone, little egrets, grey herons and whimbrels, mainly in the coastal areas. The best months to observe rarities are from September till November, the time in which the hurricane season in the Caribbean overlap with the migration of some of the birds that had breed in North America and now fly back to their wintering grounds in the south of the continent.

Where you can watch birds

i

- 1 Mencafete forest trail**
Monteverde birds and laurel pigeon.
- 2 Plains of Nisdafe**
Agricultural environment and steppe bird.
- 3 La Llanía source**
Monteverde birds.
- 4 Reservoirs of La Frontera**
Migratory birds.
- 5 Orchilla Lighthouse**
Seabirds.
- 6 Jinama trail**
Monteverde birds and birds of prey.
- 7 Harbour of La Restinga**
Migratory birds and seabirds.
- 8 Plains of San Andrés**
Agricultural environment and steppe bird.
- 9 Recreation área of Hoya del Pino**
Monteverde birds.

COMMON BIRDS

of the Biosphere Reserve and Geopark of
the island of El Hierro



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12

1. Common kestrel / *Falco tinnunculus*

2. Sea hawk / *Pandion haliaetus*

3. Cory's shearwater / *Calonectris borealis*

4. Common tern / *Sterna hirundo*

5. Stone-curlew / *Burhinus oedicnemus*

6. Western barn owl / *Tyto alba*

7. Canary common raven / *Corvus corax canariensis*

8. Bolle's pigeon / *Columba bollii*

9. Canary Islands chiffchaff / *Phylloscopus canariensis*

10. Sardinian warbler / *Sylvia melanocephala*

11. Berthelot's pipit / *Anthus berthelotii*

12. African Blue Tit / *Cyanistes teneriffae ombriosus*



Night sky. **ASTROTOURISM**

The observation of the sky, its planets, galaxies and stars has fascinated the human being since ancient times. There are many enigmas that surround the sky and many of them have found their answer by studying and observing. A night of stargazing can become a very special night, in which with the help of a good night sky map or even with a simple

mobile application you will understand some of these enigmas that enclose the celestial vault.

Have a moment full of curiosities and beauty, which will help you to get a perspective of our place in the universe, in an exceptional setting such as the most western piece of land of the Canary Islands and of Spain. El Hierro, thanks to the absence of light pollution, the orography of the island and the prevailing winds, is located in one of the most privileged places on the planet for the observation of the night sky.

Our recommendation is to go to the highest points of the island always, which are above the influence of the Trade winds, there is less humidity in the atmosphere, which bears on in a much clearer sky with less light pollution. At the top of the island, at 1.354 meters above sea level, is the Las Asomadas Observatory, managed by the Grupo Astronómico de El Hierro and open to anyone wishing to observe the Universe from one of the most transparent skies in the world. You can visit the Observatory on Saturdays, the most appropriate time to arrive is at sunset, and this time varies throughout the year so it would be announced in advance on the website of the Grupo Astronómico de El Hierro:

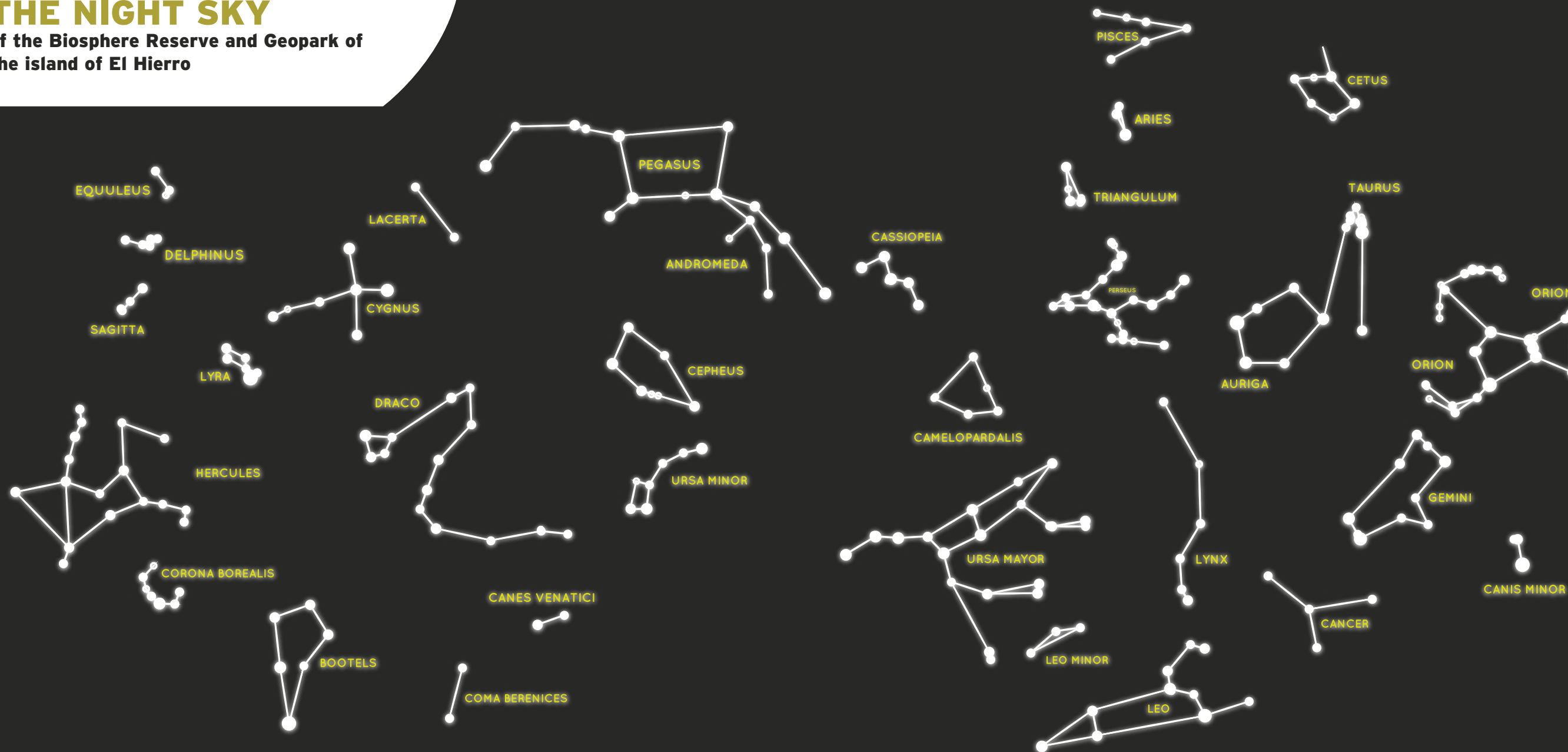
If you are going to make an observation in the summit of the island, either in the Observatory or in any other place, you should know that it is usually cold. At these altitudes you will come upon low night temperatures, especially outside the summer months. Therefore, you should wear appropriate warm clothing, since the activity is without much physical effort, which makes the thermal sensation even lower. Other places on the island, especially on its southern slope with the absence of cloudiness, are also appropriate for star gazing, even at sea level. One of the most popular places is the Orchilla Lighthouse, the most western point of the Canary Islands and of the national territory, where you can enjoy one of the most spectacular sunsets that can be seen on the Canary Islands and after that when it gets completely dark you can perfectly observe the night sky. An experience you might never forget.



grupoah.ddns.net:8080

THE NIGHT SKY

of the Biosphere Reserve and Geopark of
the island of El Hierro





GASTRONOMY

The island of El Hierro is not only known for its traditions and landscapes of cliffs, volcanoes and an incomparable underwater world, it also has a great gastronomic and winemaking tradition.

The cuisine of El Hierro is a mix of tradition and of the influence of other cultures, with local ingredients characteristic of its land that make its dishes tasty and varied. Fish dishes occupy the main place, due to the great diversity of species in the waters surrounding the island.

It is usually fried, stewed or grilled, accompanied by "papas arrugadas" (small potatoes boiled in salt water) and mojos rojos y verdes (red and green sauces), typical of the islands. The inhabitant of El Hierro enjoy all kinds of meats, but especially rabbit, kid and goat meat, always accompanied by a good sauce or the typical mojo. The "potage", the "puchero" and the "rancho", typical Canarian stews, cannot be missing on the dining table either. The gofio is a fundamental element in the El Hierro kitchen. Since ancient times this kind of flour obtained from roasted cereals, mainly corn and wheat, is typical for the gastronomy

and the food of the islands. It can be prepared for breakfast, sweet or to accompany dishes.

Cheese is another product having a lot of presence on the plates of El Hierro. Made with goat, cow or sheep milk, it is one of the most important export good together with wine. It is also the basis for many typical recipes of the island, including the caldo de queso (cheese soup) or the famous quesadillas (cheese cake), typical of the island.



Cheese selection from El Hierro

“ **A great gastronomic and enological tradition** ”

THE WINES OF EL HIERRO

In El Hierro, the vineyard has been cultivated since the 16th century, thanks to the Englishman John Hill, who planted the first vineyard on the island. It obtained the Denomination of Origin in 1994, existing at that time only a couple of wineries on the island. Although the cultivation on El Hierro is more difficult than on the other islands due to the volcanic landscape and the climatic conditions, the production of wine grape with Denomination of Origin comes from an extension of 208 hectares of registered vineyard. The great part of the vineyards is at low altitude, between 200 and 700 meters above sea level, in rough terrain with steep slopes, where the grapes rip very rapidly. The great part of the soils where the grapevine is cultivated are sandy and the vineyards extend in the valleys and hillsides of the mountains, the places of greater production are the Valle del Golfo oriented to the north, Sabinosa, Echedo and finally, El Pinar, where the vines are at a higher altitude, with southeast orientation and subjected to the winds.

This type of crop has been called heroic viticulture due to the harsh conditions of exploitation. The majority of wines produced are white. Among the varieties that are cultivated, predominates Vijariego Blanca, known on

the island as Verijadiego, as well as other varieties such as Listán Blanco, Pedro Jiménez, Baboso and Gual.

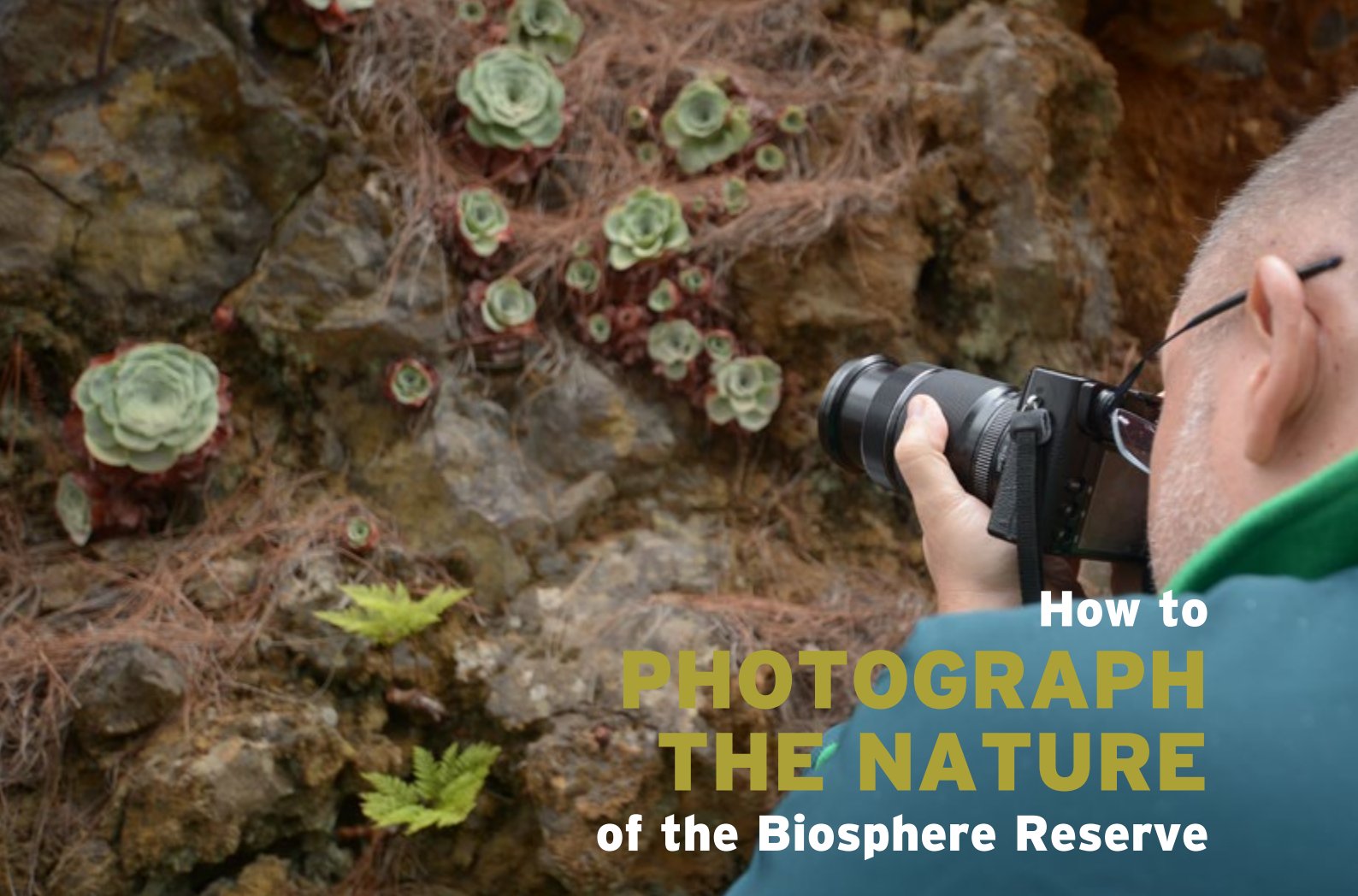
The white grape variety of Bermejuelo also stands out for its peculiar aroma reminiscent the fine herbs of the mountain. Among the red varieties, we find Listán Negro, Negramoll, Baboso Negro, Vijariego Negro and Tintilla.



Wines of the island of El Hierro.

It is also worth to highlight the increase of monovarietal wines on the island. Wine is not only one of the most exported products of the island and another economic activity only, but a tradition that has been part of the island's culture for a long time. The families made their own wine, you can still find some old family wineries and many of the island's families own small plots of vine. There are still many artisan winemakers who continue to process the grapes in a traditional way to make the must. In the different restaurants and bars of the island you can degustate all these culinary delicacy, an authentic paradise of flavors for the palate.





How to **PHOTOGRAPH THE NATURE** of the Biosphere Reserve

The island of El Hierro offers countless possibilities for nature photography enthusiasts, the diversity of flora and fauna, some of them unique species; the variety of environments is an attraction for all those who like to photograph natural landscapes; and the location of the island

within the archipelago, where the sun goes down, gives the possibility of taking photos of sunsets using warm lights and backlights.

The possibility of diving in the waters around El Hierro during the whole year, gives underwater photographers the opportunity to take pictures in places having a rich and varied diversity of marine flora and fauna, while some of those species have very small populations in the rest of the archipelago.

During the night, the low incidence of light pollution on the summits and on the west side of the island allows us to make beautiful pictures of the Milky Way, of the different constellations, of the shapes of the rocks after the sunset and even of the silhouette of the mountains and vegetation.

For wildlife photographers, birds are the main attraction, with around fifty species of nesting birds. On the island you will find some of those true winged jewels, unique on the



Close-up of the *Pericallis webbii* flower

Canary Islands or on El Hierro, such as Bolle's pigeon, the Canary Islands chiffchaff, the Tenerife goldcrest or endemic Macaronesia species such as Berthelot's pipit, the Canary or the fast plain swift.

The reptiles with three species, the mammals with more than half a dozen and a whole army of terrestrial invertebrates

offer the photographer plenty of reasons to walk this place with the camera in hand.

In El Hierro you can take excellent photos throughout the year. Numerous subjects can be found from the summit to the coast. The clean winter skies allow giving intensity to the predominant greens and blues at this time. Spring is the time

with the greatest color diversity, hundreds of plants bloom of which a multicolored rainbow is resulting. It is also the best period for macro photography using the flowers or the invertebrates on it as a subject.

The summer, especially the months of June and July, are the best for bird photography with telephoto lenses of 300 mm, 400 mm or even more. It is the time when the countryside is full of young birds having left the nests recently and flying for the first time, a time in which we must take extreme precautions to not perturb them.

Brown and ochre colors dominate in fall, it is the ideal season to photograph mushrooms and natural still life, taking advantage of dry branches, fallen leaves or other dead elements in the middle of the forests.

In short, with light equipment, you can take excellent pictures in a unique place, a true luxury setting to enjoy photography, but which needs to be taken care of for future generations. For this reason, you should apply extreme caution, comply with the regulations, apply the ethical code of the nature photographer and request the necessary authorizations to photograph wildlife within the protected natural areas of the island.



Berthelot's pipit photographed with telephoto lens.





ACTIVE TOURISM: diving, paragliding, mountain biking...

El Hierro, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, has a great diversity of landscapes full of colors and life. With a great variety for active tourism that the island offers, you have the possibility of being able to fly like a bird over volcanoes, mountains, ravines and leafy mountains; to dive into the clearest water to discover the great richness in biodiversity

hidden under the sea surface or to ride on two wheels from the north to the south of the island, breathing nature and the purest air.

DIVING

The island of the Meridian has one of the most interesting underwater worlds on the planet and the best diving spots of the entire national territory. The natural wealth of the island with its rich underwater fauna and flora, its calm waters and its warm climate, with average temperatures above 20 degrees Celsius, make it to one of the main destinations for diving on the Canary Islands, allowing its practice 365 days a year. Due to the short continental shelf of the island with depths of up to 200 meters not far from the coast, you can make dives, difficult to find in other coastal regions of Spain. Some diving places of the island are El Arco, Los Corales, Roque de Bonanza and La Caleta, but the most attractive spot for diving is in the south of the island, in Mar de las Calmas, which has been declared as a Marine Reserve in 1996 where you will find various diving places.

Mediterranean parrotfishs, tunas, groupers or barracudas, ornate wrasses, even in some periods of the year dolphins, rays, whales and sharks, are some of the species that can surprise you when you dive in these paradisiacal waters.

If you want to enjoy a day of diving, feel free to contact one of the many professional companies on the island dedicated to this activity.



Diving in La Restinga.

PARAGLIDING

For the most daring and adventurous, paragliding is one of the best ways to enjoy the island's landscapes. It is a different way to appreciate the spectacular scenery: from a bird's eye perspective, enjoying the breathtaking views of the sea and the mountains. The combination of the trade winds and the mild temperatures, together with the terrain, provide upwind that allows you to enjoy the flight to the fullest. One of the best areas to appreciate it is the Valle de El Golfo due to its large to the Northwest open hillside that offers the possibility of flying up to 1.500 meters. You also have the possibility to fly over the lava fields of the Julan or over the Valle de Tacorón, in the south of the island.

An international paragliding meeting is hold on the island since more than 20 years, with pilots from all over the world, a true show of air acrobatics that not only attracts fans but also visitors from everywhere.

MOUNTAIN BIKE

Mountain bikers have the possibility to ride from an end to another end of the island on the different trails crossing it.

On a bicycle, you can pedal to the most hidden places of El Hierro to enjoy the incredible views and a silence that connect you with the nature and that can be found in very few places only.



Mountain biking tour.

HIKING

Thanks to the peculiar orography of El Hierro, hiking is another of the active tourism sports practiced by many visitors seeking the direct contact with nature. This small island invites hiking lovers to discover the island walking through the trails network, enjoying the diverse landscapes that can be found from north to south. The contrast of these landscapes in such a small area makes of El Hierro a perfect place for this activity.



Hiking.

Sport events calendar



- January - February
Maratón del Meridiano
Mountain Running.
- March
Duathlón Cross Garoé Duo race
Mountain Running and mountain biking.
- April
Magma Bike Maratón
Mountain biking.
- April
Concentración Internacional de parapente de El Hierro
Paragliding.
- April
Encuentro de senderismo isla de El Hierro
Hiking.
- September
Travesía a nado mar de Las Calmas
Open ocean swimming.
- October
El Hierro FotoTrek
Hiking and fotografie.
- October
Open Fotosub El Hierro
Diving and fotografie.



Ecotourism is not only a form of tourism, but also establishes a philosophy and proposes a model of sustainable development that respects local resources. In this way, and given the guidelines of the World Tourism Organization, we propose the following Decalogue to you to become a true ecotourist.

THE ECO TOURIST'S charter

- 1.** Enjoy the natural and cultural resources that you visit in a respectful and sustainable way.
- 2.** Hire services that integrate educational, informative and interpretation elements of the cultural heritage into the tours.
- 3.** Hire small local companies that work with small groups.
- 4.** Avoid leaving your mark on the natural and cultural resources of the area.
- 5.** Contribute to the conservation of the natural, cultural and ethnographic resources of the place.
- 6.** Avoid unnecessary travel and compensate your emissions by planting trees.
- 7.** Consume local, ecological and natural products.
- 8.** Stay in rural houses, camping or hotels managed by local companies or communities, legalized and with quality certifications, respecting the environment.
- 9.** Take the time to talk to the local population and to discover other ways of life.
- 10.** Respect the rules for the conservation and the public use of the protected natural areas.



What you **CANNOT MISS**

- 1** Enjoy a sunset from the **Orchilla lighthouse**, the last land sign that the navigators saw before leaving for America.
- 2** Degustate some of the precious **wines of El Hierro**, fruit of the hard work of the people of the island.
- 3** Discover **the Garoe** tree, protagonist of the legend that telling how the bimbaches survived times of drought thanks to the water that flowed from its branches.
- 4** Walk on one of the **trails** that lead from the sea to the summit.
- 5** Listen to the plaintive singing of the **Scopoli's shearwater** during a summer night in Tacorón, Tamaduste, La Caleta or Las Playas near the coast.
- 6** Go for a swim, snorkel or dive in the waters near the **marine reserve of mar de Las Calmas**, one of the clearest waters with a great visibility on the planet.
- 7** Taste a fresh fish in one of the restaurants in **La Restinga**, and for dessert, a quesadilla, the symbol of the traditional pastry of the island.
- 8** Let the wind blow in your face while you watch the majestic **junipers of La Dehesa**, an authentic plant symbol of the island.
- 9** Visit the locality of **Guinea** and the **Lagartario** to see where the scarce Giant Lizard of El Hierro lives.
- 10** Visit the Interpretation Center of the **Geopark of El Hierro** to learn more about the last eruption that took place on the island: the submarine volcano Tahoro.

Ecotourism guide

for the Biosphere Reserve
and Geopark of the island of El Hierro

