

*“Look down the ocean,
between the damp North and the West,
to the Canary Islands, paying
special note to Hierro;
where Nature works with a lack of water,
and birds, animals and people
drink water from a tree, distilled
in a well-carved wide basin.”*

Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga in “La Araucana”

EL HIERRO

AND ITS PARADOR

Every corner of these Islands known as Fortunate have always rightly enjoyed, and continue to enjoy, the fact that they are located in the middle of nowhere. They float between oceans, excellently located between Europe, Africa and the Americas.

And here they remain: tranquil, impassive, welcoming. These inter-continental sister islands are capable and generous; generous in sharing customs, languages, cultures, cuisine, rituals and ceremonies; capable of sharing languages, rituals and coexistence.

What would have become of the many adventurous caravels without the support of these ancestral Fortunate Islands, safe ports to aid and provision them? They were all adventurers, fortune-seekers who risked their lives, families and scarce possessions for what was then known as “making the Americas”.

This was something like the myth of El Dorado, an impossible mirage, an era of utopianism, but also of debatable and indisputable cultural significance. And so it was: the proud Spanish adventures overran the rudimentary cultures of the few indigenous peoples from the southernmost tip to the northernmost point of the newly discovered archipelago.

El Hierro Island is the most westerly of the Fortunate Islands, and also the smallest. Its shape is almost a perfect triangle not more than three dozen kilometers in length, and a third less in width. It is a good place for an unhurriedly visit at a relaxed pace. The coastline is steep, with incredible reefs. The highest point, known as Montaña de Tenerife (Tenerife Mountain) or Malpaso, is some 1,300 meters above sea level.

The islands first native inhabitants were light-skinned, blond and blue-eyed. They were known as Bimbaches and used a language similar to or deriving from Arabic. Their religion had a different divinity for each sex: the male was called Eraorhanan, and the female Moreiba. A curious fact: they had a sacred pig as a sort of mascot.

Given the extreme scarcity of water, the islanders sometimes became desperate when drought made it impossible for them to drink or give their animals the water they needed to survive. When this occurred, people and animals met around a group of large stones facing a flat open area which sometimes served as their square.

Together they asked or desperately begged for the great miracle of rain. It appears that if they did not achieve their goal, they would all remain there for several days.

If it still had not rained after three days had passed, they changed their supplications, now directing their prayers to the evil spirit.



PARADOR DE EL HIERRO: THE PRODIGIOUS POND

*“This pond, this tiny pool of water,
which lapping at the pockets of the rock,
left the tide on earth.”*

Pedro Garcia Cabrera



They were led by the Faycan, a priest whom they followed in procession to a distant cave where the pig was kept, penned especially for the occasion. Only the Great Faycan could feed the pig, because it represented the spirit of evil.

When the ceremony was finished, the Great Faycan took the pig and hid it amongst his clothes. Again leading the people, they reversed the pilgrimage, back to the high stones and the improvised square. Tradition has it that there, amidst cries, shouts and prayers, they waited as long as necessary.

The men of El Hierro married as many women as they could keep. The only proviso was that those who had the most head of cattle could choose the best. They ate the roots of ferns, which they ground into a sort of flour, and all the fish they could catch along the coast. They also ate what meat was available to them, goats, pigs and sheep.

Water has always been tremendously scarce on the island, and there were very few reservoirs or wells. They drank a strange wine made from various fruits, and an amazing liquid they distilled from the garoe, also known as the Holy Tree. They say that hundreds of years ago the drought was so great that goats and sheep died of thirst.

As regards their clothing, the history books tell us that they used skins to keep themselves warm. The Bimbaches did leave us some petroglyphs for visitors to see, but to date it has not been possible to decipher them. Anyone interested should definitely visit the Letreros de El Julian area.

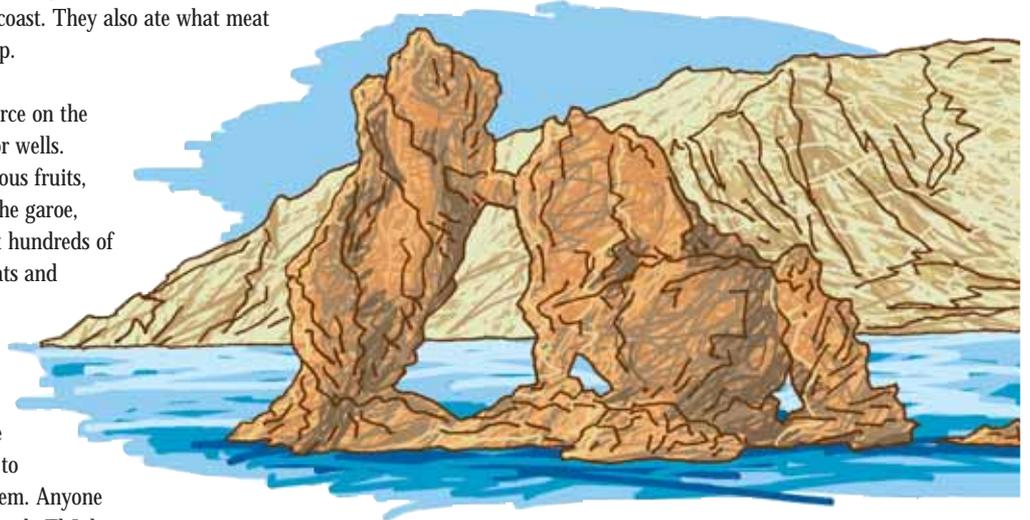
Juan de Bethencourt came to El Hierro Island twice in 1403, the first visit to do reconnaissance, the second to make contact with the inhabitants. At that time, the island was ruled by a tribal chief known as the Armiche. Just two years later, Bethencourt took the island, subjugating it and populating it with his own people.

After years of disputes, Fernán Peraza “the Great” and his wife Inés Peraza de las Casas took control of the island as sole holders of the legal rights to possess it.

El Hierro Island never lacked special visitors. In 1493 Christopher Columbus stopped at the port of Naos on his second voyage, with a squadron made up three large vessels and fourteen caravels. Centuries later, in 1762, an English pirate attacked the island at the port of Naos.

Learned figures assure us that it is on El Hierro Island that the purest Castilian of all the Canary Islands is spoken.

As could not be otherwise, the Parador de la Isla de el Hierro looks to the sea, that ocean which so sweetly protects the Fortunate Islands.



The enclave is a paradise, far from the multitudes decorating the beaches of the mainland, an area of intense blue and silence which we have virtually forgotten.

The water is ready, the only thing left for us to do is make a choice: sea or pool? Or perhaps one and then the other, why not? In any event, these exotic black sand beaches occupy the westernmost point in Spanish territory.

And on an essentially volcanic island, what else but a garden of volcanic stones? The plants that populate the garden – dragon trees,

coconut palms and a profusion of exotic species – highlight the landscape. A swim in the garden's pool will transport you to another world. And this place, which we may unreservedly state is unique, is close, so close to us.

The climate on El Hierro is humid and caressed by moderate winds. Locals believe the wind to be very beneficial as a relief from the heat. At the island's high points, the trade winds may produce a damp fog which blurs the contours of the landscape. This is not very common, as El Hierro Island receives so very little rain. For visitors who enjoy buying local products, we should mention that in El Monacal, you can find pieces made from walnut wood.

In Las Casas, the workshop of Aurora Quintero should be a pleasant surprise and interesting visit. In Frontera, you can choose attractive blankets or bedspreads. At Museo De Panchillo in Taibique there is wide variety of objects to choose from. For visitors interested in music, it will not be difficult to find chácaras (an instrument similar to castanets), bandurria mandolins or flutes, just ask any local.

The island has few inhabitants, and they enjoy an unhurried lifestyle to which we are not accustomed. The best things about El Hierro are its location, its size, its people and its different rhythm of life.

The traveler will undoubtedly find the beneficent Atlantic breezes a welcome surprise: they create a weather which is kind, generate bountiful crops and make unexpected climates possible. They also allow for and welcome arts and handicrafts which, above all, have successfully maneuvered the unusual symbiosis of European and American influences.

For these unusual islands have always been celebrated as the inevitable jumping-off point for ambitious seafaring adventurers. They sought and found gold and glitter, they conquered tribes and cultures. This was the redoubt of nobles of dubious nobility.

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UNIQUE TABLES AND TABLECLOTHS

The Canary archipelago enjoys, but also suffers, an ancient isolation. Halfway between the continents, it welcomes and shares its mix of habits and customs with tastes and habits from the coast of Venezuela, or nearby Africa.

At the Parador, which was inaugurated in 1981, guests can enjoy the food of these faraway lands, a magnificent local soup, and for lovers of local fish, **Alfonsino with Periwinkles**.

SOUPS AND STEWS

Among the local soups, the king is that made with **Thistles**. You will also find **Watercress Soup**, possibly with **Beans, Pork and Corn** on the **Cob**. Fish broth is often made with grouper and chunks of bread are added.

The Parador's seasonal specialties include: **Meat Stews, Fish Soup, Mediterranean Moray Eel** in sweet and spice **Salmorejo Pepper Sauce**, and any number of **Mojo Dipping Sauces**, including tomato.

And for dessert, **Fruit Syrups** and **Cheeses** made with pasteurized goat's and sheep's milk cooked very little.

El Hierro wine is normally red and heavy, as the experts say, "*a wine with personality*". Important technological advances have made it possible to get the most out of the native grapes: **Red Negro Muelle** and **White Vijiriego**.

As with all tropical locales, the locals are very fond of sweets, but this is not a sophisticated or affected selection. They like very sweet things such as sweet **Morcilla Blood Sausage, Gofio Cornmeal Bread Nougat, Yams, or Pumpkin and Almond Cakes**. Very sweet desserts include **Frangollos**, a creamy concoction made with eggs and maize flour; **Curd Pudding Cakes; Almendrados, Almond Macaroons with Raisins; Alfajor Cakes, and Marzipan**. It is a good idea to just forget about any diet, and not deprive yourself of the opportunity to try these delicacies, part of the island's charm, like Carnival and the many different habits and customs which proudly lead to a gala celebration.

THE SECRET RECIPES

ZANCOCHO

A unique dish based around meat stewed with potatoes and sweet potatoes. It is accompanied by green or red *Mojo* sauce, depending on your preference and taste, and of course by *gofio* bread (generally made with cornmeal or sometimes wheat).

LA VIEJA

This delicious white fish is only found in significant numbers around the Canary Islands. It may be fried, steamed or prepared in any number of ways. It is almost unimaginable for a native of any of the islands that a visitor might return home without having at least once tried the favorite and most highly appreciated fish of the islanders: **La Vieja**.

FROM THE PARADOR

*"And it was she, it was the sea,
it was this eternal blue sphinx
with the silver mane,
that was the cradle of life."*

Miguel de Unamuno

Some 100 million years ago began the geological epoch of this islands. Experts maintain that the ocean floor began to deteriorate due to the uncontrollable force of the mantle, until the crust broke, cracking in a star shape.

It was then that the magma began to flow. As the result of successive eruptions and the accumulation of lava, the structure of the island rose until it emerged from the ocean, a triangular pyramid crowned by the volcano.

The cracks of its beginnings became routes for lava, which created three dorsal mountain ranges with volcanic cones. At the same time, the cooling magma in the conduits created basalt walls. The island would continue to grow because of volcanic activity.

Given the size of El Hierro, visitors can organize their own unique visit to the island to suit individual tastes. There is no possibility of getting lost. Surely this paradise's greatest attraction is that visitors do not have to follow the preconceived instructions of others, but can discover it for themselves.

The information provided on El Hierro uses the coastline of the island for orientation purposes. The island's size makes it easy to freely choose the route to follow.



The Northeast Coast

We start in the lowlands of **Guillermo** and head south, after going around **Punta Norte**. The first part is filled with cliffs. The **Tamaduste River** appears, formed by volcanic lava. **Tesoro Peak** is a jewel.

We should note that in **La Restinga** and **El Golfo** there are sports diving areas which general opinion regards as fascinating. The marine fauna of El Hierro will be of great interest to more experienced divers.

Following the coast we come to airport, and nearby, an old fishing village known as **La Caleta**. After another section of cliffs, we reach **Puerto de Estaca**, the only sea port on El Hierro. It is located in a volcanic cone, and has long since forgotten its splendid years of transporting thousands of tons of goods and many species of captured fish. Just ten kilometers from the airport sits **Valverde**, the island capital.

Santa Maria de Valverde

The city, capital of this exceptional island, lies six hundred meters above sea level on the slopes of a former volcanic caldera, facing **El Teide**. It is the only capital in the Canary Islands which is not on the coast. It is believed to have been founded in the 15th century on the site of the Bimbache settlement of **Amoto**.

The center is a chaotic and scattered, with steep streets and an abundance of two-story houses. The first church must have been in **Pólvora Cave**. The apse of the **Church of Nuestra Señora de la Concepción** faces the sea. Or perhaps you would prefer a stroll along the streets, and maybe a taste of the local wine in one of the bars?

Close to the capital, you will find **Tiñor**, in the **Zaofa** region, an agricultural and ranching area. If the season is right, you can enjoy the spectacle of flowering heather.

Near the limits of **Tigulahe** was born, grew and lived the magical garoe, the holy tree of the islanders. It performed the miracle of providing them with water in times of extreme need.

Fans of Cesar Manrique should visit the fairytale location of **Mirador de la Peña**, nine kilometers from **Valverde**. From the viewpoint can make out **El Golfo**, **Roques del Samor** and the summit. It was inaugurated by the brilliant artist in 1989, and the design based on El Hierro vernacular architecture. This is truly a luxurious privilege for the visitor!

Returning to the coast, from **Las Tijereta** the **Tijimiraque** coast begins, lined with many cliffs. Today a nature reserve runs to **Punta del Fraile**, along coasts without beaches.

We should note that in the reserve, the vegetation forms mosaics, and experts believe that it has the best fields of cardon cactus on the island.

Between **Punta del Fraile** and the viewpoint, we find the so called **Riscos de las Playas** (beach crags). At last! We have reached the beaches, lovely beaches with low cliffs.

There is maximum pleasure and enjoyment for tourists who visit this paradise, perhaps the first opportunity you will have to swim in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. This swim will undoubtedly be different from any other you keep in your memories.

At **Punta de San Miguel** we reach the town limits of **Frontera**, which extends to **Roques de Salmor**. A large protected area begins at **Cantadal Beach**: the **Hierro Nature Reserve**, with an area of around twelve thousand hectares.

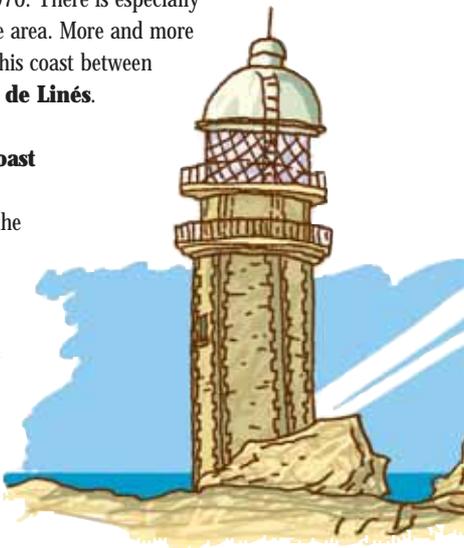
It has forty miles of coastline, and according to islanders, meadows containing the best collection of savins, or dwarf juniper, on the island.

From **Punta del Miradero** the coast is reclaimed from the sea and geomorphically homogenous.

This area, known as **La Restinga**, has a breakwater built in 1970. There is especially generous fishing in the area. More and more tourists are choosing this coast between **Puentito** and **Punta de Linés**.

The Southeast Coast

This area includes the coast of **El Julán** and the **Dehesa Peninsula to Punta Orchilla**. The coastal cliffs are laid out in a concave arc. This is followed by an area reclaimed from the sea by eruptions during the Quaternary Period, following by another windy and uninhabited section.



On the **Dehesa**, also known as **Isla Baja del Barbudo**, we find the curious site of ancient savins bent by the wind. For the most curious, a trail leads to **Letreros del Julán**, an archeological area with petroglyphs carved in the lava by the **Bimbache**. It is estimated that they have been there for quite a bit longer than two thousand years.

From **Punta de Palos**, the protected area leaves the coast at **Pozo de la Sabinosa** until reaching **Punta de Salmor**. A visit to **Sabinosa** is highly recommended. In the opinion of many, it is the most picturesque town on El Hierro Island.

Even today, some of the houses retain the vernacular architectural style of El Hierro, with dried-earth walls roofed with vegetable fibers, and of course, a small interior courtyard. There are old presses once used to make wine, which can be visited.

Let us not forget the thermal spring **Pozo de la Salud**, where Count de la Vega Grande de Guadalupe came to take the waters in 1843. They say that his ailments improved noticeably.

Today we are assured that the mineral medicinal properties of the waters are highly beneficial for treating stomach, urinary and skin ailments and locomotor system problems.

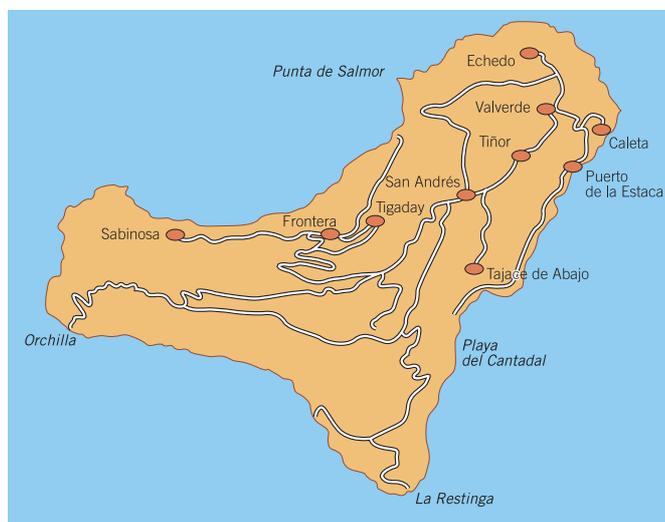
The Northwest Coast

Between **Baja de Peje** and **Punta de Salmor** there is another concave arc. The coastal cliffs shelter no beaches. There was once a jetty in **Punta Grande**, near **Roques**, but it has long since disappeared.

The northeast area is a nature reserve. It is made up of **La Fuga de Goneta**, **Los Riscos de Tibataje** and **Los Roques de Salmor**. The protected area extends beyond **Salmor** to **Punta de la Papelera**.

This park is the home of the "giant lizard of El Hierro", which you will no doubt hear of on your visit to the island. You will also find a magnificent display of laurisilva on **Mount Jinamar**.

The coast continues through cliffs and the traces of volcanic eruptions. **El Pozo de las Calcosas** is a clear example: the lava flow has given the coastline some 150 additional hectares. In El Pozo de las Calcosas you will find primitive houses with stone walls and straw roofs. Close by there are two large natural pools.



PARADOR DE EL HIERRO

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