

Tarifa – Tune In, Turn On, Chill Out!

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Spanish Tit-Bits



You might be forgiven that Marbella residents, with their enviable lifestyle and superb quality of life, do not suffer the same stresses and strains that those living in big cities or colder climes do. There are times, however, especially as Marbella turns into party central during the frantic summer months, when even the most laid back Marbelli feels the need to escape the madding and frequently maddening crowds. Somewhere with crystal clear waters, white powder beaches and vibe so laid back that it is practically horizontal.

The stressed out resident doesn't have to endure a long haul flight to Maui or Bali to kick back, however. Underlining the fact that Marbella is one of the best places on the planet to live, all he or she has to do is leap in the car (or VW Combi, if you must) – and in under an hour they will be in Tarifa.

Located on the stunning Costa de la Luz, Tarifa is the southernmost point of Europe, a fact that always stuns first time visitors as you pass the El Mirador roadside restaurant and they ask what the coastline is a few kilometres is to their left. "That? Oh, that's Africa" always draws a gasp as you inform them that at its narrowest point, Morocco is only 14 kilometres across the Straits of Hercules.

Then there is that first view of Tarifa as you head down. Or not so much Tarifa, but rather the beaches. Miles of them, all dotted with what look like tiny handkerchiefs. But more on that late...

Now the history bit. Being so close to Morocco and with a vitally strategic position where the Mediterranean Sea meets the Atlantic Ocean (There is a spot in town where you can have your photo taken between the two), Tarifa was frequently fought over and besieged.

The most famous defender was Guzman "El Bueno". In 1294, rebel troops arrived with Guzman's ten-year-old son Pedro as a hostage, who they threatened to kill if he did not surrender. On hearing this, Guzman threw his own knife from the ramparts, saying that if the boy was slain, they would bestow eternal the child, honour on Guzman and everlasting wrath on themselves.

The rebels carried out their threat on the unfortunate Pedro, but soon retreat and were eventually defeated. As a reward for his loyalty, King Sancho granted Guzmán the use of "el Bueno" as part of his name.

Needless to say, modern day Tarifa is somewhat more child friendly...

Tarifa has always been famous for its strong wind, and in the 70s, windsurfers, and later, kitesurfers, began to flock there in their thousands. Along with their boards they brought their lifestyle, and the first boho shops, camping sites and hotels were established. The best known amongst them are the Hurrricane Hotel and the Hotel Dos Mares, where the style is laid back chic. Forget the heaving beach clubs of Banus, Tarifa is all about feeling the sand between your toes and you sip a Mojito, watch the surfers do their thing and let your cares slip away.

The old town of Tarifa, guarded by the city walls that Guzman himself would recognise (there is a statue of the man himself in front of the castle), is now a bohemian maze of boutiques, bars and restaurants, as well as some sublime town house hotels – Hotel Misiana and The Riad are always popular. Although small, Tarifa is friendly, and one of the pleasures is exploring the narrow streets by night, grabbing a drink at a bar or finding a great steak place.

When morning comes around and you need to shake off that fuzzy head, make your way to Bolonia, famous for its huge dune and cows that walk along the beach, before plunging into the cooler waters of the Atlantic to freshen up.

As you pick out your sunbed spot for the day, you will begin to understand why a weekend in Tarifa feels like a two-week holiday somewhere else.

And even better, you can do it all again next weekend!