



El Hierro

922 / POP 10,690

Includes »

Valverde.....	195
Echedo.....	199
Tamaduste & La	
Caleta	200
Mirador de la Peña	200
Isora.....	201
El Pinar	202
Hoya del Morcillo &	
Around.....	202
La Restinga.....	203
El Golfo	203
Las Puntas.....	204
Tigaday.....	205
La Frontera.....	206
La Dehesa.....	207

Why Go?

El Hierro is an island where the impenetrable cliff-lined shores and location in the middle of the Atlantic make it both literally and figuratively remote. It was once even considered the end of the world until Columbus famously sailed the ocean blue in 1492.

Although the 21st century has connected this small island to the rest of the planet, El Hierro will always feel remote. Of course, that's exactly what is so addictive about this place. It's impossible not to be entranced by the island's slow pace and simple style; by its craggy coast, where waves hurl themselves against lava-sculpted rock faces; by the pretty farmland and flower meadows of the interior; by the eerily beautiful juniper groves; and by the desolate volcanic badlands that stretch out like moonscapes in the south. The least-known of the Canary Islands, El Hierro is unique – so much so that it was declared a Unesco biosphere reserve – and utterly captivating. Don't miss this journey to the end of the world.

Best Places to Eat

- » Restaurante Don Din 2 (p205)
- » Casa Guayana (p200)
- » Meson del Norte (p199)
- » La Maceta (p204)
- » Casa Juan (p203)

Best Places to Stay

- » Hotel Villa El Mocanal (p224)
- » El Sitio (p225)
- » Hotel Puntagrande (p225)
- » Parador Nacional (p224)

When to Go

El Hierro is a year-round destination, but the meadows of the highlands are ablaze with poppies and other wild flowers in spring (March) and hiking is a delight. For life at lower altitudes June to early July and September are perfect for lazing around the numerous natural swimming pools or diving into La Restinga's undersea paradise. And for cultural interest, if you're on El Hierro in late April, be sure not to miss the Fiesta de los Pastores, a colourful religious procession in honour of the Virgen de los Reyes (Virgin of the Kings).

History

Geographically speaking, El Hierro is the youngest island in the archipelago. Through the millennia, volcanic activity built up a steep island with a towering 2000m-high peak at its centre. But, about 50,000 years ago, the area was hit by an earthquake so massive that one-third of the island was ripped off the northern side. The peak and the surrounding land slipped away beneath the waves, creating the amphitheatre-like coast of El Golfo. The event would have been impressive and the ensuing tsunami may have been more than 100m high. Although El Hierro's last eruption was 200 years ago, volcanoes are still the island's defining feature. It is littered with around 500 cones, with many more underneath the lava flows and volcanic rocks that blanket much of the island.

The island's original inhabitants, the Bimbaches, arrived from northern Africa and created a peaceful, cave-dwelling society that depended on agriculture, fishing, hunting and gathering. They may have called the island Hero or Esero, possibly the origin of its modern name. Bimbaches have left interesting petroglyphs (geometrical etchings) on rocks and cave walls throughout the island; the most interesting is at El Julán.

After the Spanish conquest in the 15th century, a form of feudalism was introduced and Spanish farmers gradually assimilated with those locals who had not been sold into slavery or died of disease. In the subsequent quest for farmland, much of El Hierro's forests were destroyed.

In the 20th century many Herreños were forced to emigrate to find work. The island's economy has since recovered and is now based on cheese, fishing, fruit-growing, livestock and, increasingly, tourism. Many emigrants have returned. The struggle now is balancing the need to conserve the island's unique, Unesco-protected natural beauty with the need for economic growth. More than 60% of the island is classified as protected land, limiting growth options. That's great for conservationists, but as young islanders are forced to move away to study and find jobs, many see it as a problem.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The island's small **airport** (☎922 55 37 00) is 12km outside Valverde. Interisland airways **Binter Canarias** (☎902 39 13 92;

ROAD DISTANCES (KM)

La Restinga	24			
Tigaday	15	41		
Las Playas	11	43	26	
El Pinar	16	11	27	16
	Valverde	La Restinga	Tigaday	Las Playas

Approximate distances only

www.binternet.com) connects El Hierro to Tenerife and Gran Canaria and then onward to the rest of the archipelago. At the airport you'll find car-rental offices, a bar and a shop selling maps and local products.

BOAT

El Hierro's spiffy new Puerto de la Estaca, built courtesy of the European Union, gets little traffic.

The **Fred Olsen** (☎922 62 82 00; www.fredolsen.es) ferry (€47, two hours) runs between Los Cristianos in Tenerife and El Hierro. It arrives at 12:30pm and departs at 4pm every day, except Saturday.

Specialising in cargo, though also accepting passengers, the **Naviera Armas** (☎922 55 09 05; www.naviera-armas.com; Muelle de la Estaca s/n) ship used on this route is decidedly less flashy and much, much slower than other Naviera Armas ships. It sails to Los Cristianos in Tenerife (€24, four hours, 6am Tuesday and Thursday, 7.30pm Sunday). The boat continues onto Santa Cruz de la Tenerife but only truck drivers stay on-board as it takes about five times as long as driving.

VALVERDE

POP 1630

The only landlocked Canary capital, Valverde is a rather unremarkable town set atop a windy mountain ridge overlooking the Atlantic. Its low white houses aren't as scenic as those balconied mansions of the other capitals, but when clouds don't interfere, the town offers some pretty valley views. On rare clear days you can see Tenerife's El Teide and La Gomera perfectly from the town centre. Even if you don't stay here, you'll probably have to pass through, as it's the island's centre of commerce and services.

History

Though Jean de Béthencourt conquered the island in 1405, Valverde only really came