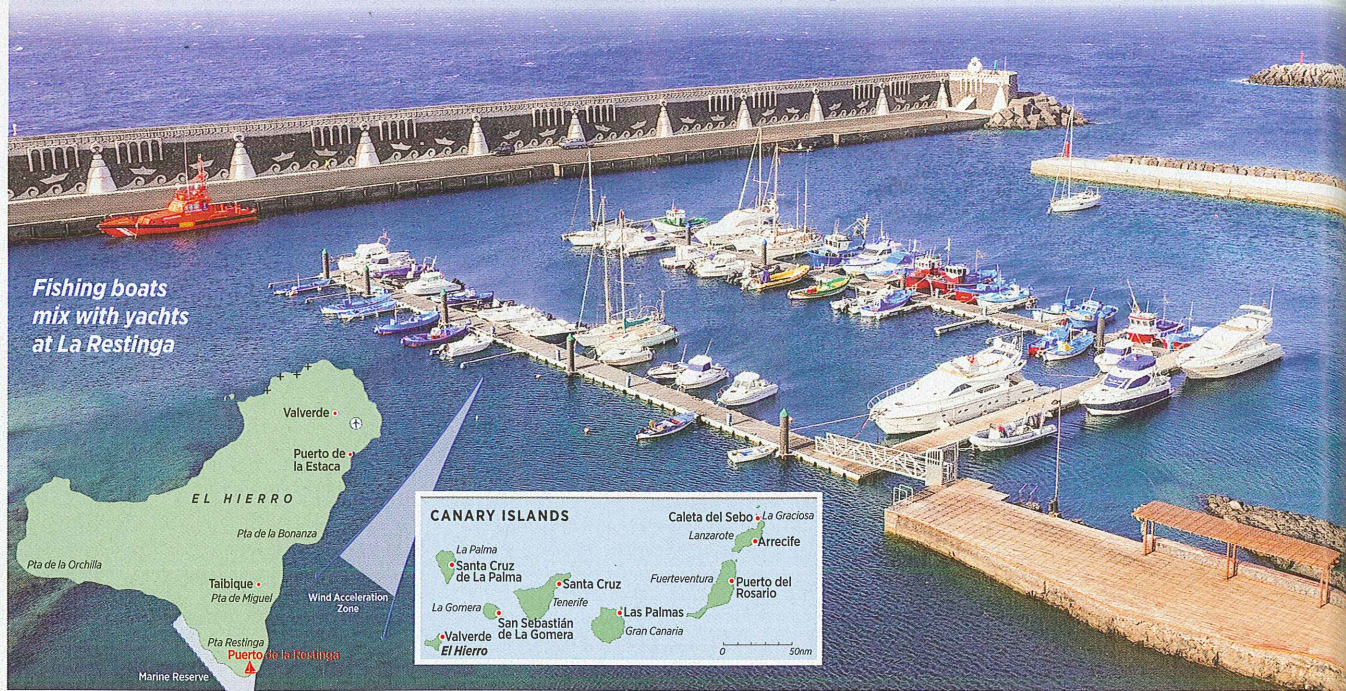
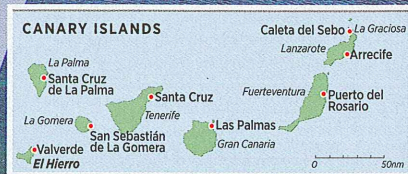


El Hierro: the world's end



Fishing boats mix with yachts at La Restinga



This small island at the edge of the Canaries is a UNESCO reserve and contains many delights for visitors, say Mike Westin and Oliver Solanas Heinrichs

El Hierro was once thought to be the end of the world until Columbus headed west from here in the 1490s. Over 500 years on it retains a feel of being on the edge of things. Its isolation means that it is not a well-trodden tourist path, but it is popular with sailors. Lying at the south-western end of the Canaries, downwind of the other islands, makes it a perfect starting point for an Atlantic crossing. The island also attracts divers and hikers.

It is the second smallest of the Canary archipelago (La Graciosa is the smallest), covering an area of just 270sq km (104sq miles) and is 30km (19 miles) long.

The island has been a UNESCO

biosphere reserve since 2000, with 60 per cent of its territory protected. El Hierro's varied terrain ranges from the volcanic, like Lanzarote, to evergreen woodlands and juniper and pine forests. The marine geopark covers the whole of the coast. The last volcanic eruption took place five years ago, when a submarine volcano appeared about two miles south of La Restinga on the south coast.

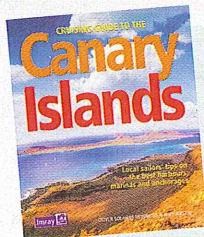
Valverde in the north-east is the largest settlement, with a population of about 5,000, and is the only inland capital of the Canary Islands. With its traditional whitewashed houses and museums, it is well worth a visit.

The island has two marinas – at La Estaca and La Restinga. La Restinga is popular with the island's few tourists and here you can snorkel in the marine reserve, which starts in the Mar de las Calmas (Calm Sea) just outside the harbour. All marine life is protected on the island and it is forbidden to anchor.

The 'calm' part of the name reflects the fact that the acceleration zone on the east coast ends here. However, strong gusts do sometimes find their way into the snug marina, which has a few berths for visiting yachts. Here in this peaceful place it does indeed feel like the end of the world.

Essential facts

- **General:** The 110-berth marina at La Restinga on the south coast is a good place to visit for diving and exploring the marine reserve
- **Approach:** VHF Ch 09
- **Facilities:** Cold showers in little cabins. WC. New showers and toilets have been built but are yet to open
- **Fuel:** The Cofradía may sell diesel if asked (mornings only)
- **Electricity/water:** Blue three-pin EU-socket (type B). 20mm inside water connection. Water on the island is very good and is potable. Some comes from desalination
- **Security:** The entrance is usually locked. You will get a key from the harbour master. Security guards patrol 24/7
- **Internet:** No. Some bars on the waterfront have WiFi or you can use the internet at the harbour-master's
- **Eat & drink:** La Vieja Pandorga is a nice restaurant but can get busy.
- **To do:** Diving, snorkelling. Kayak and bike hire is available
- **Don't miss:** The natural swimming pools at La Caleta
- **Contact:** Email; puertolarestinga@puertoscarios.es. Book through: solicitudestf@puertoscarios.es and/or through webpage www.puertoscarios.es, Tel (+34) 922 55 70 81. Address: Esplanada del Muelle s/n. La Restinga, 38917 El Pinar del Hierro



Cruising Guide to the Canary Islands, by Oliver Solanas Heinrichs & Mike Westin. Imray, £29.50.

This is a handy guide for those who want to explore the Canary Islands in depth or simply pass through on their way across the Atlantic.