

## Puerto de Santa María



Directly opposite Cádiz on the mainland is the charming city of El Puerto de Santa María, and a neat way of getting there and back is on the *El Vapor del El Puerto* ferry boat that sets sail from Cádiz harbour.

If pushed for time, however, it might be more convenient to just drive around the peninsula and stop in El Puerto on the way back to Carmona.

El Puerto de Santa María has signs of settlements that date back to the Inferior Paleolithic age and, currently, excavations are ongoing of a Phoenician town from around the 4th to 3rd centuries BC. Over a millenium later the Moors beat the defending Visigoths at the nearby Battle of Guadalete, beginning their march through Spain. It wasn't until 1260 that King Alfonso X reconquered the city, naming it Santa María de Puerto and giving out land rights. Coming under the rule of the lordship of the Medinacelli family a period of wealth ensued. It was that family which hosted Christopher Columbus between 1483 and 1486, and assisted him plan his voyages and outfit his vessels. In the 16th and 17th centuries El Puerto de Santa María became the winter quarters and base of the Royal galleys and HQ of the Captaincy General of the Ocean Sea. This, effectively, made it an important base for preparing military naval expeditions. In the early 18th century its status changed when, upon the assumption of the thrown of Felipe V it asked to come under, and was given, effective as of May 31st, 1729, the protectorate of the Crown. The 18th century, also, was one of prosperity, but the beginning of the 19th century brought with it problems, as El Puerto became the headquarters of the invading French army besieging Cádiz during the Wars of Independence. Various other changes marked the city during that century and the first part of the next, culminating in the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s. El Puerto is renown for its mansions, many of which date from the 17th and 18th centuries when, after the Chamber of Commerce was transferred to nearby Cádiz from Sevilla, the

trade with the Americas brought great wealth to the area. And along Luna it is shown in the presence of the Palacio de Medinaceli and the Ancient Fish Market, now a restaurant, and the Plaza de Cristobal Colón is so named as it is across from the explorers own home.

El Puerto doesn't really have too many attractions that are open to visit, and the most dominant is the **San Marcos Castle**



whose silhouette looms on the site of an old Mosque. It was first fortified after the reconquest El Puerto by Alfonso X in the middle of the 13th century and it became the church/fortress of Santa María by the 14th and 15th centuries, and known as the castle of San Marcos. At the end of the latter century extensive transformations were overseen by the then ruler, the duke of Medinacelli. It was the seat of the town council up until 1729, was used as church until the 19th century and was later converted for housing. In the middle of the 20th century it underwent the renovations that saw it resembling its original state. Open daily 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., with a free guide service every 30 minutes, entrance free.



The Cathedral of El Puerto de Santa Maria

However, it is a charming, typically Andalucian town and a pleasure just to stroll around the central area close to the water. What it is also, though, with 13.5 miles (22 kms) of beach is a major resort in the summer.

Almost every other Spanish city has its own *feria*, of varying length, and bullfights *corrida de toros* are held daily, but not so in El Puerto de Santa María. Here, to attract visitors El

Puerto holds its corridas on different days throughout the summer and, sometimes, two in the same day with the second not beginning until 11:30 p.m.



Whoever comes here though, there is another attraction that everyone who visits El Puerto de Santa María looks forward to tasting – seafood and shellfish. Of the many restaurants one chain with many restaurants here is a tradition in town, and where you should most definitely head for lunch.



**Romerijo**, Plaza de la Herrería, 1, epitomizes, if not symbolizes, popular seafood and shell restaurants in El Puerto.

Open plan, even with a separate fried fish take away *Cocedero* section, these are not sophisticated in any way with one, albeit very important, exception: the selection to choose from.

### Mariscadas

Their plastic coated menus show the widest range of dishes - from a single oyster up to a large plate covered with every type of shellfish and seafood imaginable. Besides being a culinary delight, it's also a fun place to eat for all the family.

### Tourist Office

The **Oficina de Turismo**, ( 54- 24-13, fax 54-22-46 or [www.elpuertosm.es](http://www.elpuertosm.es), Luna, 22, is open Monday to Sunday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., and in the afternoons in the winter from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

### Getting Back

From El Puerto de Santa María take the E-5/A-4 and follow it through Sevilla all the way back to Carmona.