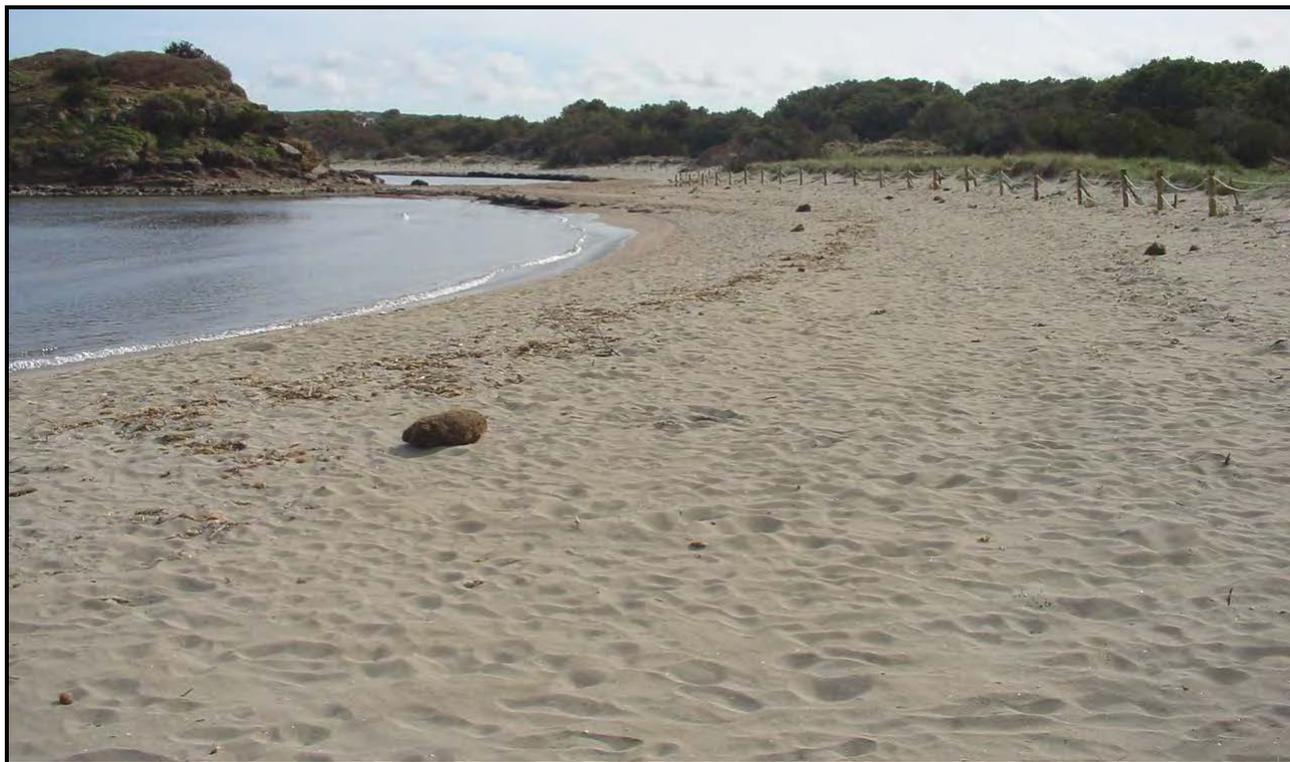


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ES GRAU

**GEOGRAPHICAL AND PHYSICAL DATA:**

Municipality: Mahon

Other place names: unknown.

Associated urban areas: es Grau.

Access: by road, from the Me-5 road to the centre of Es Grau. The beach has associated parking.

Beach location: east.

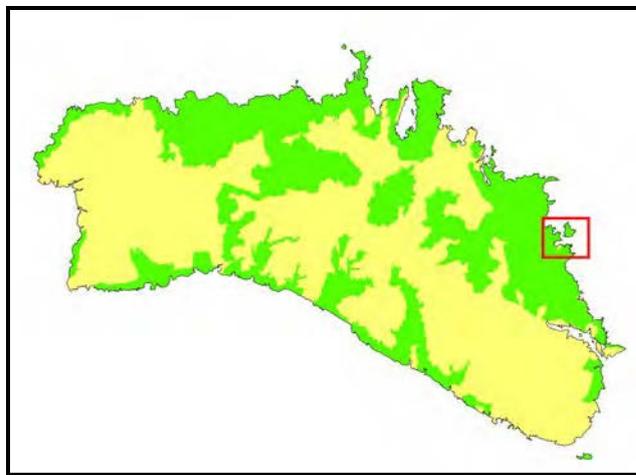
Surface area of the beach: 7,750m².

Length of the beach: 600 m.

Average width of the beach: 14 m.

Beach's level of occupation: medium, in high season.

Geology of the surroundings: bay bottomed beach, surrounded by carboniferous materials.



Composition of the sand: of organic carbonated origin (+90%), with a high proportion of medium-sized, grey grains.

Natural protected area: included in the Natural Park of s'Albufera des Grau, in the Natural Area of Special Interest Me-7 and the Nature Network 2000. The marine part is also Natural Park and Nature Network 2000.

SERVICES AVAILABLE ON THE BEACH::

Beach classification according to the CIME: type B beach (natural with road access).

Distance to car park area: parking adjacent to the beach.

Lifeguard service: permanent lifeguard service.

Other services: WC and changing rooms associated with the car park. Hire service of kayaks, windsurfs and surfboards at the foot of the beach. In the urban area we can enjoy restaurants, shops and supermarkets. The beach has public transport connection to the centre of Mahon.

SURROUNDINGS AND LANDSCAPE

Es Grau beach is the biggest beach of the Natural Park of s'Albufera des Grau and one of the longest of the north coast of Menorca. It is a long, semicircular beach with shallow, calm waters due to the layout of the cove entrance and the protection of l'Illa d'En Colom. This, together with the fact that it is very close to the centre of Es Grau and parking, eminently makes this a family beach. The beach is divided into two by a projecting rock called Marver Rock, and is bounded on the north by a road leading to other beaches of the park ([see the following two photos](#)).



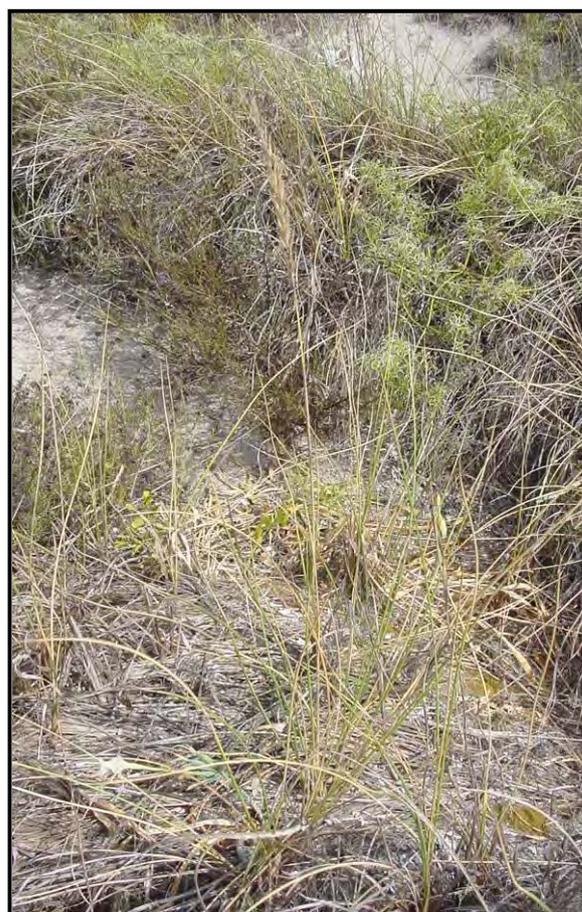
The beach forms part of a well developed dune system and demonstrates a state of optimum conservation throughout. This dune system, the forest and the woody mass of associated pines (fruit of a restocking carried out at the beginning of the XX century) make up a sand bank of vegetated sand which separates the sea from the wetlands behind the beach (see previous photo). The sand extends 500 m inland and with its variety of shape and history it causes a variety of dune environments. For example, it continues in a southerly direction, beyond the road and back through the hills or intertwining with the wetlands, causing small flooded depressions.

S'Albufera des Grau, the largest wetland of Menorca, gives its name to the Natural Park and is the core of the Biosphere Reserve of Menorca. Even though it is not possible to directly observe the lagoon from the beach, you can detect its presence through an opening of water right next to the car park at the entrance of the beach: Sa Gola de s'Albufera (see the left part of previous photo). This is the communicating path between the lagoon and the sea and it is 500 metres long. It can carry freshwater to the sea or salt water to the lagoon, is full almost all year round, but can easily be crossed thanks to a mobile wooden bridge. S'Albufera is a salty lagoon with a layer of water of 72.5 ha, it is 1.7km long and has an average width of 900m. Its depth is remarkable: 1.5 metres on average but at certain points can reach 3 metres, although this depends on the time of year as the lagoon water comes from torrents, which only carry water when it rains. Therefore, the lagoon water is harder and saltier in summer months, due to strong evaporation and lack of rain. As is any wetland, s'Albufera des Grau is an important source of biodiversity of both plants and animals that live or feed there. It is also an important part of the migratory route of birds that stop to rest or gain strength there before continuing their journey.

PLANTS AND VEGETATION

Dune vegetation is highly sensitive to disturbances, especially those involving erosion or morphology modification. At the same time however, its high dynamism allows the establishment of measures to stop degeneration. This beach is a good example of how a simple closure limiting the entrance of people to the dune system was sufficient to achieve significant regeneration of the vegetation.

Thanks to this recuperation, nowadays in the dunes one can see a well constituted plant community. The most typical plants to be found are sea bindweed (*Calystegia soldanella*), sea daffodil (*Pancreatium maritimum*), sea holly (*Eryngium maritimum*), sea spurge (*Euphorbia paralias*), spotted burelover (*Medicago marina*) and beach grass (*Ammophila arenaria*) (see photo on the right). More inland, where the sand is more set, these plants give way to more woody ones such as phoenician juniper (*Juniperus phoenicea*), *Phillyrea*



media or fragrant virgin's bower (*Clematis flammula*). You can also see a wood of aleppo pine (*Pinus*

halepensis), although it must be said that its origin is due to human intervention and in its place, naturally, should be sabines.

Despite the present good state, this beach is not free from threats, for example invading species. In the last few years golden dodder (*Cuscuta campestris*) has spread. This is a parasitic plant of American origin and in Menorca it shows a certain preference for dune systems (see photo on the left of [bolitx bord](#)).

ANIMALS

Thanks to the floristic wealth, dunes are an ideal place to observe insects or other invertebrates. Within this group attention is drawn to lepidopteran rophaloceros, or butterflies. There is a great variety of species which specialize in living in dune environments, a few of which are present in Menorca. For example, one can see: the common blue (*Polyommatus icarus*), painted lady (*Cynthia cardui*) (see photo), cleopatra (*Gonepteryx cleopatra*) and gatekeeper butterfly (*Pyronia cecilia*).



The wetland behind the beach (s'Albufera des Grau) hosts a huge variety of birds that use the lagoon to build nests in spring, or as a place to hibernate for aquatic birds from north Europe, making this the ideal place to birdwatch.

One of the most spectacular sights is the osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) - a Mediterranean bird of prey - making dips to find fish in the lagoon waters. It is easier to see aquatic birds that breed in the lake such as: little grebes (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*) or coots (*Fulica atra*), the latter being the more abundant in Albufera. You can also observe elegant little egrets (*Egretta garcetta*) and grey herons (*Ardea cinerea*) - they are present all year round in the lagoon but they do not breed -, as well as numerous species of broad billed birds that can be seen when they eat at the edge of the lagoon.

IN THE SEA

This floor of this cove is practically sandy, with a few areas of seagrass (*Cymodocea nodosa*) (see adjacent photo) and neptune grass (*Posidonia oceanica*) which are very worn down due to the continuous anchorage and scraping along the river beds of boats being moored during the summer. In July and August, this cove practically becomes a port made up of small (and not so small) pleasure boats.

Marine species live near Sa Gala de s'Albufera which are capable of growing in freshwater, like green seaweed *Enteromorpha intestinalis* and sea lettuce (*Ulva lactuca*) or small mussels (*Mytilus galloprovincialis*).

On more extensive coastlines, algae of the *Cystosiera* genus can be found, which require increased atmospheric quality in order to grow. It is curious that the red algae *Rissoella verruculosa*, is also found in abundance, as this grows on well trodden lands, not very common in Menorca.



HISTORY AND PECULIARITIES

Es Grau town (see adjacent photo) was born as the centre of second homes for the people of Mahon and other villages of Menorca. With time, some houses have now become first homes but have never become the core of

tourist homes, resulting in the majority of houses having typical Menorcan architecture. The history of Es Grau has always been linked to fishing and nowadays there is still a great deal of fishing activity, although most of it is recreational. There are numerous traditional boats (llaüts) that go out to fish in the early mornings of long summer days, *a la fluixa o al volanti* from the small dock of Es Grau.



This is not the only fishing that has been done in Es Grau, as for many years the lagoon waters of s'Albufera des Grau have been used to fish. In this case, fishing was directed towards mullet and eels which, even though not highly appreciated in Menorca, served for outside markets such as Mallorca. The method of fishing in s'Albufera was based on a complex system of floodgates that caused fish leaving or entering the lagoon via la Gola to become trapped. Although this fishing method is no longer used, you can still see the floodgate system and the built walls, as they are used for water management of the lagoon (see adjacent photo, the two bridges where the

floodgate system is found, at the left of the image, above and below; and the main wall that surrounds part of the lagoon, above right of the image).