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PUNTA PRIMA

**GEOGRAPHICAL AND PHYSICAL DATA:**

Municipality: Sant Lluís

Other place names: Playa del Aire.

Associated urban areas: Punta Prima, Son Ganxo.

Access: by road from the Punta Prima area. There is parking near the beach.

Beach location: south east.

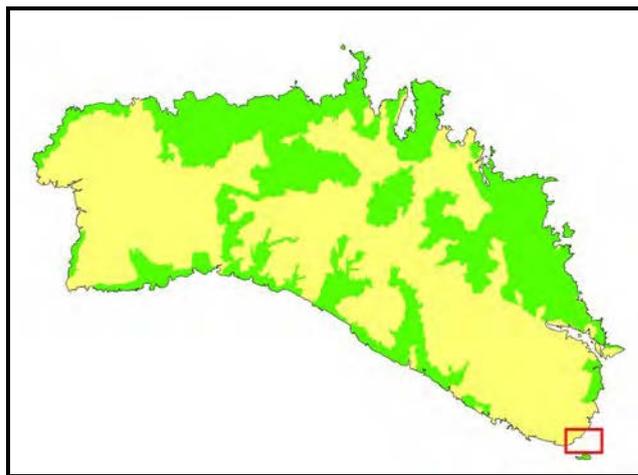
Surface area of the beach: 7,400 m².

Length of the beach: 225 m.

Average width of the beach: 40 m.

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

Geology of the surroundings: flood plains, made of white limestone, are located on the carbonated upper Miocene platform.



Composition of the sand: of organic carbonated origin (+90%), with a high proportion of fine, white grains.

Natural protected area: not included in any natural protected space.

SERVICES AVAILABLE ON THE BEACH:

Beach ranking according to the CIME: type A beach (urban).

Distance to parking area: 50 m.

Lifeguard services: there is a permanent lifeguard service and a watch tower.

Other services: hire of parasols, sunbeds, and windsurfs. Restaurant services within walking distance of the beach, within the urban area. Public transport service with connection to the centres of Sant Lluís and Mahon.

SURROUNDINGS AND LANDSCAPE:

Punta Prima beach is a completely urban beach and, as the Spanish name suggests, it is found in the most extreme south east point of the the island of Menorca. The build up of sand on the beach is created due to a small sea entrance and not to the presence of a ravine, as in other beaches of the south. For this reason, this is not a narrow, closed beach, but a wide one open to a sea of fine, clear sand. Directly behind the beach is an urban area.

It is divided into two parts; a larger one and a small sandy beach separated by a rocky area on the east side ([see adjacent photo](#)). The rocks surrounding the beach are chalky and do not form large cliffs but emerge gradually from the sea and are characterized by their curious shapes caused by erosion.



Even though the beach surroundings are not natural owing to the residential area and the large number of visitors in peak season, we can still find the presence of dune formations generally associated with small patches of vegetation ([see adjacent photo](#)). Similarly, this beach offers one of the most paradisiac views of Menorca. Just in front of the beach, a little more than a kilometre away, you can find one of the various small islands surrounding the island of Menorca, la Illa de l'Aire. This is the second largest of these small islands, with a surface area of some 30 hectares. It

is an uninhabited island but has a lighthouse, an old fishermen's refuge and a pier. The sight of this island from the beach is spectacular, and the sea takes on an even bluer colour between the beach and the island, thanks to its sandy bottom and shallowness.



PLANTS AND VEGETATION

Like other surrounding beaches, the increased number of human visitors has caused the disappearance of a large part of the dune's vegetation which should be found on this beach. A simple pilot study carried out demonstrated the relative ease with which this flora can be retrieved.

Despite this, what can be seen nowadays are a few species around the edges and small shrub covered lands that remain in the most inner part of the beach. In this situation it is practically impossible to distinguish the division of areas, and the species thus appear in a dispersed and disorganized manner. The plants that can be seen range from the more pioneering such as sea rocket (*Cakile maritima*) or knotweed (*Polygonum maritimum*), to the more persistent ryegrass (*Sporobolus pungens*), bird's foot trefoil (*Lotus cytisoides*), sea daffodil (*Pancratium maritimum*), sea holly (*Eryngium maritimum*), sand viper's gloss (*Echium sabulicola*) or sand couch (*Elymus farctus*), and to those which show nitrification of the sand and human presence: tree mallow (*Lavatera arorea*) (see photo), fat hen (*Chenopodium album*), sow thistles (*Sonchus tenerrimus*). Also not lacking are the exotic *Aster squamatus* or *Xanthium strumarium*, both of American origin.



ANIMALS

Being an urban beach, the possibilities of seeing a wild animal walking along the sand are few. However, Illa de l'Aire, little more than a kilometre away, is a very interesting island from an ecological point of view, for both flora and fauna, despite its small size.

This small island is an important stopping and resting point for cross-sahara migrating birds. These birds spend the winter in the sub-sahara area and they have to overcome two large geographical barriers during their return journeys to Europe: the Sahara desert and the Mediterranean sea. The role that these small islands play in these great migratory journeys is being studied thanks to the international project *Piccole Isole*. Illa de l'Aire has housed one of these study and ring fixing stations since 1993 and in this time they have fastened rings to more than 40,000 birds of more than 90 different species. Due to this, they have collected very valuable information for the advance in the study of all that affects the migratory routes of the birds. However, there are birds in Illa de l'Aire that are not just passing through but that live or breed there all year. For example, marine birds such as the common shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*), shearwater (*Puffinus mauretanicus*, an endemic species of the Balearics) seagull (*Larus michahellis*) and the rarer Andouin's gull (*Larus audouinii*), identifiable by being smaller in size and its grey feet and red beak (see photo).



The great importance to fauna offered by this small island is due to the presence of the Balearic lizard. This is an endemic species of Balearics that has been wiped out of the large islands and that is only found nowadays in some small coastal islands and Cabrera. For this reason it is a protected species and has prioritized conservation. Living in Illa de l'Aire is the sub-species *Podarcis lilfordi lilfordi* that is characterized by its larger size and its iridescent black colour. Unlike other small islands, the species here is found in an acceptable state of



conservation and of increased population. The main threats to the lizard are other predatory vertebrates and the frequent visitors to its surroundings, especially during summer months.

IN THE SEA



The floor of this beach is practically rocky and covered with photophilous algae, especially *Acetabularia acetabulum*, *Dilophus fasciola* and *Padina pavonica*. (In the adjacent photo you can see a close up of a red Mullet (*Mullus surmuletus*) swimming through the algae, see *Padina pavonica*, in fan-shape). *Acetabularia acetabulum* (green algae in the shape of an umbrella) form very dense and spectacular meadows in small areas. In the rocky coastline and especially in the east of the cove, brown seaweed *Cystoseira stricta*, grows in abundance and forms very diverse and interesting communities, which are, however, threatened by the presence of sea urchins, herbivorous animals of great voracity. In the western part of the cove, the floor is sandy with clumps of neptune grass.

HISTORY AND PECULIARITIES

Nowadays, you can still appreciate a group of *casetes de vorera* (see photo on the right) with their very particular architecture, above the beach, to the east. This consists of a group of old huts built in the 1960's to store small boats, together with a small ramp (to push boats into the water) and two piers. At the end of the 1960's they were also used



as a holiday spot for different families of Mahon. They are still used today, although no longer for boat storage, and the ramp and pier can only be imagined by the remains left on the rocks in front.



From the beach you can also admire the Torre de Son Ganxo, a defence tower of Spanish origin dating back to 1785, now converted into a youth hostel (see photo on the left).