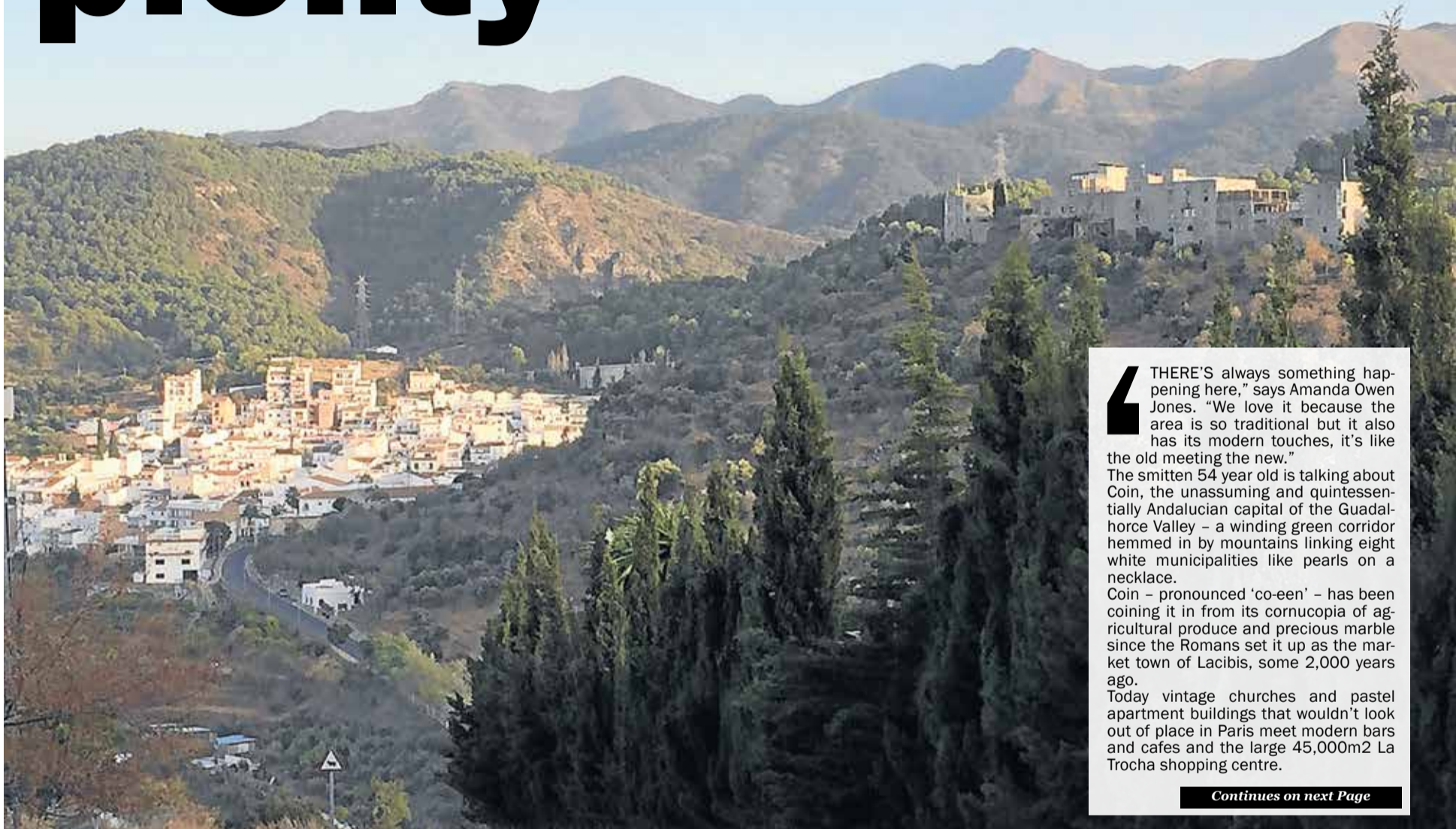


# Valley of plenty

**A food truck fiesta reminds Laurence Dollimore that the settlements of the Guadalhorce Valley have fed, watered and fascinated visitors since Roman times**



**T**HERE'S always something happening here," says Amanda Owen Jones. "We love it because the area is so traditional but it also has its modern touches, it's like the old meeting the new." The smitten 54 year old is talking about Coin, the unassuming and quintessentially Andalusian capital of the Guadalhorce Valley – a winding green corridor hemmed in by mountains linking eight white municipalities like pearls on a necklace. Coin – pronounced 'co-eeen' – has been coining it in from its cornucopia of agricultural produce and precious marble since the Romans set it up as the market town of Lacibis, some 2,000 years ago. Today vintage churches and pastel apartment buildings that wouldn't look out of place in Paris meet modern bars and cafes and the large 45,000m2 La Trocha shopping centre.

*Continues on next Page*

**SPLENDOUR:** The recently renovated Castillo de Monda lords itself over the nearby town and (inset) Roman columns in Alhaurin

PHOTO BY JON CLARKE

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# Villages waiting to be explored

From previous Page

A weekend food truck festival was in full swing when I pitched up at the centre, where you will find the likes of Dunnes stores and other chains.

A garish yellow American school bus, rigged with a booming sound system and a stage for live performances, marked the entrance to this pop-up feast lining the main square.

There were burgers and pizzas, American hot dogs and Asian wok dishes, cocktails and ice cream.

Families dressed to the nines came in their droves to eat, drink and laugh the night away with friends.

"And this is nothing compared to some of the other events here," says Amanda, who flits back and forth between Coin and Wales with hubby Trefor, 60. "We always do New Year here, when 4,000 people fill the streets in fancy dress, it's absolutely amazing."

The couple have owned a house in the nearby hills for a decade, some 20 minutes walk from the centre, getting the best of both worlds.

"We are not really Marbella people, we like things quiet but we also like to have a good time, which is why it's great here," says Trefor. "It's family-orientated and safe and there is always something exciting going on."

Indeed, the food trucks wouldn't have looked too out of place in Roman Italicis on market day. As well as being the Romans and later Moors' fruit and veg basket, Coin was a transition point for the minerals being quarried five kilometres to the south, in the Sierra Blanca.

Marble from these quarries was used to construct the amazing Roman town of Italica, near



**GLORIOUS:** Church tower in Yunquera, Arab tower in Alora (above, right) and Coin fountain

Sevilla, birthplace of the mighty Emperor Hadrian in 76AD.

But like many parts of Spain, Coin fell to the Moors in the 900s before being reconquered by the Christians in the late 15th century.

The city buckled under the pressure of a siege in which, according to legend, the great New World explorer Christopher Columbus took part. Four centuries later, a certain Captain S.E. Cook of the Royal Navy visited Coin and the surrounding towns of the Guadalhorce valley and was clearly as impressed as residents today.

"These villages are on rising ground above the river and, in beauty of situation and cultivation, cannot be excelled," he wrote.



"They afford a specimen of the whole country when possessed by the Moors, being surrounded by gardens with orange, lemon and palm trees."

Every town in the valley sprouts different varieties of fruit trees - living motifs to represent their valley of plenty.

Alhaurin el Grande to the east was described by the Romans as being blessed by the gods for its fertility, minerals and sunny climate.

The bustling town, carved into the Sierra de Mijas, has had quite the tumultuous history.

After the Romans, the Visigoths descended, and then the Moors who brought it up to date, built a fort to keep enemies out and changed its Roman name from Lauro Nova to the more appropriate Alhaurin, meaning Garden of Allah.

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Like the Romans before them, they linked it to another neighbouring community by name, distinguishing the two townships as Alhaurin el Grande (The Great) and Alhaurin de la Torre (of the Tower).

Alhaurin the Great lived up to its name, seeing off waves of invaders, epidemics of plague and even an earthquake in 1680. During the Peninsula War of 1808-14, it was occupied for four years by French troops and suffered considerable bombardment.

It is even more remarkable, then, that traces of its ancient past still survive. A 12th century Moorish archway remains firmly in place while the Plaza del Ayuntamiento displays five Roman columns excavated close by.

From the plaza you get an amazing bird's eye views of the valley. Combined with narrow streets and colourful terraces, you can't help but feel you've discovered the Spain every visitor comes to find.

"You can live in a beautiful and authentic setting while being just 30 minutes from the coast," says Antonio Alvarez, an Alhaurin-born Spaniard.

"If you want a taste of the real Spain this is where you come, it's so peaceful and there's such a community spirit, which is getting harder and harder to find these days.

"Things are also a lot cheaper up here," he adds.

Take a ride out of Coin heading north and you will soon be heading into the pretty villages that line the stunning Sierra de la Nieves natural park. Take your pick from Tolox or Casarabovela, or Yunquera and Alozaina for wonderful mountain scenery and walks.

The most isolated town is El Burgo which sits in its own hidden valley a few kms east of Ronda.

From here you can take the most bone-shaking windy pass to Ronda, or head north to Ardales. Nowhere is that authentic Spanish flavour more piquant than in Alora, a typical pueblo blanco that shines like a white light on the mountain.

Set between three rocky spurs and topped

with an ancient castle, Alora is known as the 'Crown of the Guadalhorce' and its most famous resident - Cervantes, who allegedly lived here from 1587-93 - is practically royalty in Spain.

First built by the Phoenicians, expanded under the Romans, almost obliterated by the Visigoths and rebuilt by the Moors, Alora is still reeling from the shock of yet another invasion - tourists. They come, these days, in their thousands for one reason: to take the Caminito del Rey challenge.

Once known as the world's most dangerous walkway, the 'King's Little Path' has become the biggest attraction in the valley and is known all over the world.

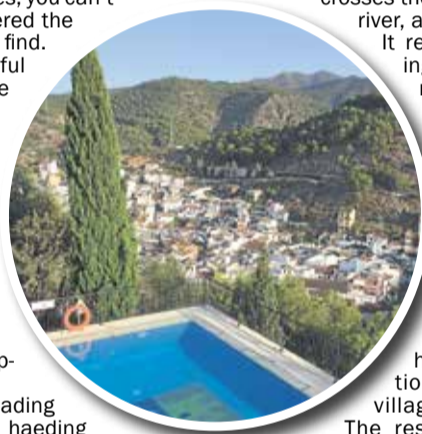
Built into limestone rock face, the three-kilometre route offers heart-stopping views as it crosses the Gaitanes gorge over the river, a giddy 100 metres below.

It reopened last year following four years of extensive repairs and renovations, and is now attracting adrenalin junkies from Tokyo to Timbuktu who are looking for their next kick or daredevil selfie.

The architectural marvel has just been awarded a €10 million cash injection from the European Union to help bolster the attraction and its surrounding villages.

The reservoirs in the region - around El Chorro - also draw tourists to the 'Malaga Lake District', as it has become known.

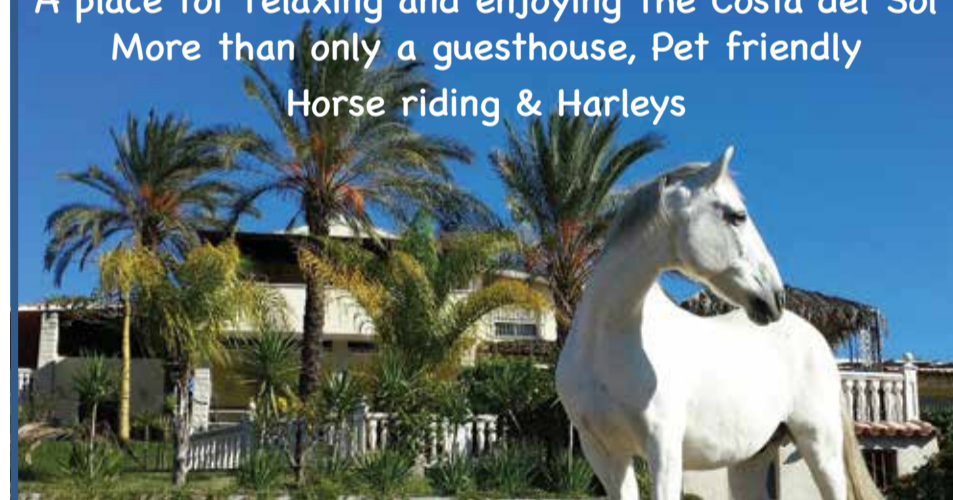
With crystal blue waters and plenty of secluded spots along the shore to lay out your towel and picnic, it's the perfect alternative to a day on a crowded Costa del Sol beach. Waterside restaurants keep the spot popular in winter too, with blazing log fires and barbecues offering a warming welcome after a bracing walk around the lake shores. If you're looking for a break from the hustle and bustle of the coast, the authentic white villages of the Guadalhorce valley are within easy reach and waiting to be explored.



RESIDENTS: Antonio and friends and Jones (right) while (above) Alhaurin church

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## Andalucia's own 'bread basket'

THE Guadalhorce Valley is 804km<sup>2</sup> in size, and home to around 150,000 permanent residents, while many more own second homes there.

It has always been known for its citrus production, with orange and lemon plantations stretching out in every direction from the valley's towns.

Of the eight municipalities, Coin is the biggest. But towns such as Alhaurin El Grande, Alora and Cartama are also immensely popular with expats.

While first colonised by the Romans, it was the Moors who have had the largest influence on the area.

Everywhere there is evidence of their work, which tamed the tumbling streams into irrigation systems and brought fertility to the



whole of the valley. But while the region has been termed one of the bread-baskets of Andalucia since Roman times, the locals have long struggled with fluctuating rainfall, which can still bring devastating floods to the whole of the valley or leave the land parched for months on end.

## Moving inland

BUILDING a rural retreat to escape to at weekends opened up a new business opportunity for property professional Richard Woodland.

After moving to Spain almost 15 years ago, he initially worked for H2O Countrywide as an IT manager before setting up the Property Overseas Group, which concentrated on property sales along the coast.

"Having spent several years living in Marbella I was then attracted to the inland lifestyle and energy so I bought some land and constructed my own finca in Coin," explains Richard.

"Initially this was intended as a weekend retreat, but it wasn't long before I'd moved in permanently and then started my next building project in Monda".

He soon gained experience of the country property market and, alongside his coastal operation, he now has a thriving inland office in Coin.

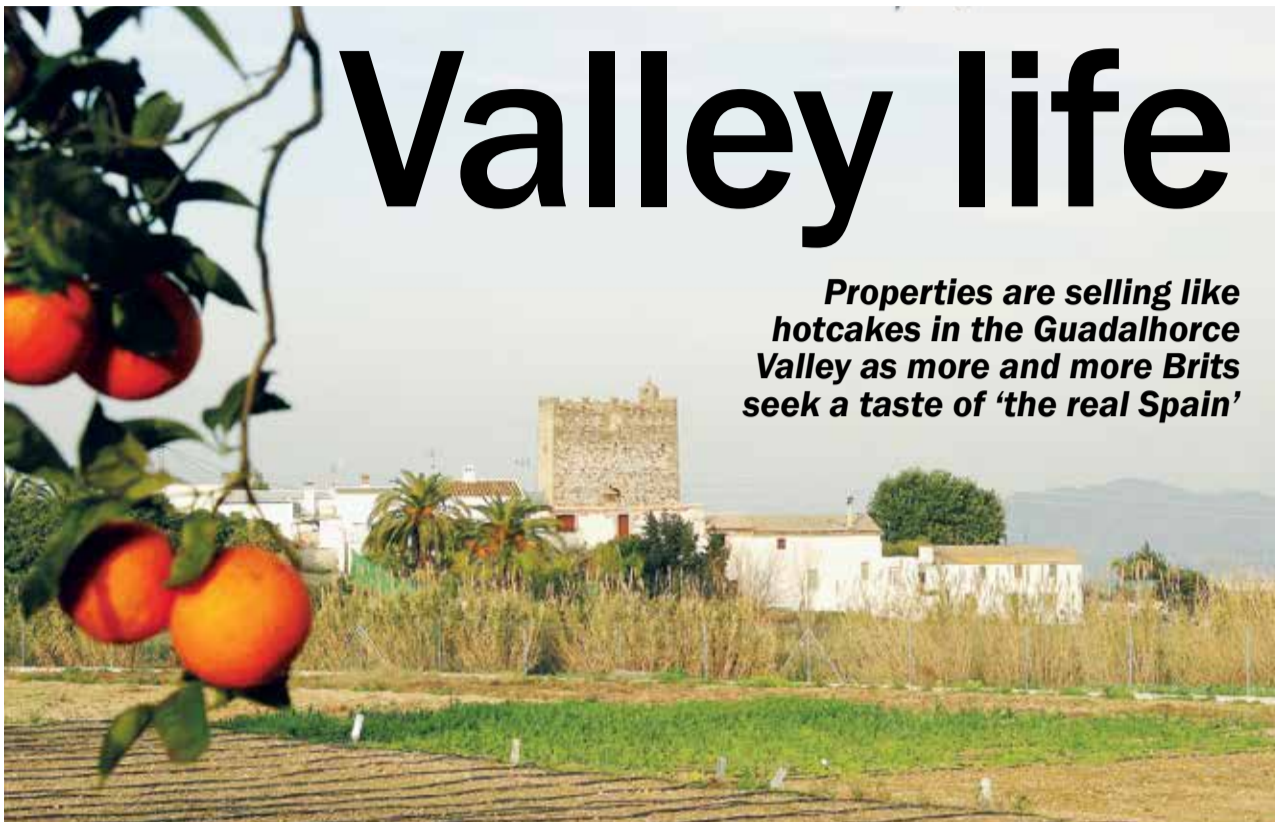
Richard works closely with local architects, lawyers,



**IN THE KNOW: Richard**

gardeners and builders, such as Coín Gardens, to provide a complete property service in the area. Situated opposite La Trocha commercial centre in Coin, Property Overseas Group deals with sales and rentals in the town & its neighbouring villages of Monda, Guaro, Tolox & Alhaurin el Grande.

**Contact Richard on 952 814 780 or visit [www.propertyoverseasgroup.com](http://www.propertyoverseasgroup.com)**



# Valley life

**Properties are selling like hotcakes in the Guadalhorce Valley as more and more Brits seek a taste of 'the real Spain'**

**T**HE sun is still shining on the bright pueblo blancos of the Guadalhorce valley.

From expansive fincas in the hills to pastel-coloured townhouses in the villages, the property market is reaping the rewards for offering a sought-after quality; a life in the real Spain.

"It is incredibly busy right

now," says David Laver, owner of Ideal Country, who has been selling 'lifestyles' in the valley for the past 10 years.

"People are buying a new life," he says, "They want a serious change and are attracted by the fact that all the great bars and restaurants stay open after the summer season."

"It is an all year-round community with great schools and healthcare, so it is always going to be attractive."

And the prices help too.

"Your money goes a lot further up here than down on the coast," says Jo Wood, co-director of Grapevine Properties.

"You can probably get a detached property with a private pool for the same amount as an apartment on the coast, which is only a 20 minute drive away." Demand is so high in the



**FOR SALE: Property Group Overseas, €775,000, Alhaurin**

valley that Jo admits she is scrambling to find more properties for her clients.

"We have made a lot of sales this summer so we are looking for both big houses in the hills and the smaller town houses in the villages, but we never fail

to find a house for our clients."

And it's not a strictly British affair, with many clients coming from elsewhere in Europe.

"We have a strong English base but right now we are seeing an increase in dutch



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## Business as usual



IT has been an exciting year for Alora's leading agent Margaret Mitchell.

The boss of Alora Properties, who has been based in the area for 18 years, has had another fantastic year since moving to their new office last December. Setting up just a few doors along from the former office, Alora Properties is going from strength-to-strength.

"We've had a great year," Scot Margaret explains. "So far Brexit doesn't seem to be affecting us and sales are good."

"We have moved offices but it is business as usual and we are working hard."

But things have not always be such smooth sailing. Between 2008 and 2012, Margaret saw 12 agencies close in the area as Spain was slow to get out of the economic crisis.

But things have turned around and are continuing to be on the up.

"The area is popular as ever," Margaret says. "With the opening of the Caminito del Rey, a lot of business is coming to nearby towns such as El Chorro and that is good for buying or selling property."

With properties across the Guadalhorce Valley, Alora Properties also collaborates with agents in England and Belgium as well as the Costa del Sol.



For more information visit [www.alora.properties](http://www.alora.properties)

**HARD-WORKING: Alora team**



**FOR SALE: Grapevine Properties, Alhaurin, €368,000**

clients," says Jo, who has been selling in the valley for ten years

"But we have so many different nationalities, Italian, German, Scandinavian, everyone in Europe appreciates what is on offer here, beautiful greenery, outstanding views, its very own Lake District and a priceless traditional Spanish neighbourhood."

Even Brexit was unable to put a chink in the armour of this property magnet.

"It has not made a single difference in the market," claims David.

"Most people want to move to the valley long-term and so to them it is not about making money or having a holiday home for two weeks in the year, and that's how you are guaranteed a



**FOR SALE: Ideal Properties, Alhaurin el Grande, €795,000**



**FOR SALE: Grapevine Properties, Alhaurin el Grande, €1.95m**

friendly and inclusive community."

And property veteran Richard Woodland agrees.

"It has definitely bounced back from Brexit," says Richard, 50, who has owned Coin-based Property Overseas for the past eight

years. "Things have recovered nicely and have picked up from a more uncertain summer, but you will always have the interest here because of the value for money and accessibility to the coast."

## Tall story

IS it a castle? Is it a folly? Or a piece of redundant scenery from a movie set?

The origin of the brick tower standing tall on the hillside above Alhaurin, has been the subject of heated debate, for years. Many thought it was a Medieval castle, rumours did the rounds that the Moors built it and there were even whispers that it was a glorified tourist information cen-



**CASTLE IN THE SKY: In Alhaurin**

tre. Some people even remember it from the opening credits to the ill-fated BBC soap opera, Eldorado.

Now the Olive Press can settle the score once and for all by definitively reveal it was built as a water tower, cunningly disguised as an ancient castle to fit in with the region's surroundings.

Although it turns out it was a bit of a folly after all - constructed to provide irrigation water for a golf course that never happened.

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**How long does it take to climb two of Malaga's tallest mountains and row across its celebrated lake district? Just the one back-breaking, breath-taking day, discovers Jon Clarke**

**A**FTER scrambling heroically to the top of one of Malaga's highest peaks, I was more than ready to toast our success and call it a day. But despite providing stunning panoramic views, a fleeting opportunity to forget the stresses of life and the chance to negotiate some tough, almost virgin, mountain terrain, the Two Peaks and a Paddle trail does not offer a cable-car back to the start. With hindsight I'm glad, because although the summit was stunning, it was only the beginning. We hadn't even had breakfast yet. To rewind, we had been invited to climb two 1000-metre plus mountains and row five km across a lake in the stunning El Chorro region. It's not an official route, but we were told it was one of the best. The only catch was that it all had to be done in one back-breaking, awe-inspiring 17-hour day.

**Scramble**

Therefore, the crucial aspect of the trail is timing. The first peak must be reached in time to enjoy the sunrise and the second must be triumphantly conquered to enjoy the same day's sunset. We met our guide Martin Levien in Ardales at 5am. He ensured the pace was brisk and our four-strong group had to scramble to the top of the first mountain La Huma, which towers over the lake district below in around two hours. A word of warning to would-be trekkers - I highly recommend wearing trousers, even in hot weather, as the army of thistles will have their evil way with your shins - a lesson I learnt the hard way. We quickly realised as we ascended the mountain that our grand plan to reach the summit as the sun rose would be largely scuppered by a band of uncharacteristic grey clouds. Yet, after a strenuous scramble, our spirits were anything



**Two peaks and a paddle**

but dampened by the low-lying cloud that greeted us when we arrived. It was a surprisingly cold morning at the summit which meant we were thankful for having brought precautionary jumpers, woolly hats and rain jackets. Martin, the keen organiser, had the inspiration to bring a flask of hot coffee accompanied by a generous amount of chocolate. This was the first real break for two hours and when the clouds occasionally parted we had the most breathtaking views over the unspoilt beauty that Andalucia can offer. The descent back down was easily more challenging

than the journey up. While Martin was on the slope, my legs were amusingly tired. But in between progress. But in between progress. But in between progress. The sun was shining between the small parts of the sky. The point to watch

PHOTOS BY JON CLARKE

LONG WALK: Setting off to the other side and (above, right) paddling on lake

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# Two Peaks and a Paddle



**BEGINNING IN SIGHT: Martin points to start (right)**

turney up.  
 in - in his late 50s - practically ran down the  
 technique consisted of falls, trips and skids,  
 the group and holding up their more assured  
 between my regular stumbles I was still left  
 by the surrounding mountains that tow-  
 us.  
 would intermittently break out from be-  
 clouds to send rays of divine light onto  
 ts of the landscape. We stopped at one  
 atch a partridge with her chicks and then

stumbled across an ancient cave house.  
 As Martin explained, this was a practically forgotten  
 path, which crisscrossed ravine and dale en route to  
 our breakfast stop at restaurant El Mirador beside  
 Lake Guadalhorce.  
 After a few tough hours of tackling slippery slopes  
 and biting shrubs we eventually arrived at the El  
 Conde de Guadalhorce dam, near the once forbid-  
 den Caminito del Rey begins. The bright blue river  
 gushing 100m below and stunning vertical cliff faces  
 are a wondrous sight and signalled the first third of  
 the day was complete, so we celebrated with a hearty

and much-needed breakfast of bacon and egg  
 butties.  
 After a short break to recharge our batteries we  
 carried our canoes, which were conveniently wait-  
 ing at the cafe, down to the lake side. You can also  
 easily rent canoes from the cafe (and a few other  
 nearby spots).  
 And then, with consummate timing,  
 the sun came out for good as we  
 began to row lazily across the tran-  
 quil lake, which stretches for miles,  
 all the way to Ardales, our destina-  
 tion.  
 Having suffered a few hairy moments  
 on the earlier hike, the canoes her-  
 alded the arrival of a very welcome  
 relaxed stage to the day.  
 After a good two-hour row we arrived  
 at our landing point, complete with Martin's jeep  
 ready and waiting for us to load up and head onto a  
 late lunch at the simple La Cantina, also by the lake.  
 A few beers in, I must confess there were serious rum-

blings about some of us stopping our day here. But a  
 bit of geeing up later and we quickly agreed to embark  
 on the final challenge at 7pm.  
 Our weary legs eventually set off to conquer Mt Capara-  
 in, which looms some 1,300 metres above sea level.  
 We determinedly soldiered up the much gentler, bet-  
 ter maintained and marked mountain  
 path that twisted and turned towards  
 the summit.  
 As dusk descended we reached a pla-  
 teau that was adjacent to the elusive  
 peak we had been striving to conquer  
 all day.  
 With an almighty push we fought past  
 the remaining rocks and bramble to  
 arrive at our promised land - just in  
 time to witness the sun pass behind  
 low-lying cloud!  
 With now customary timing Martin fished out some  
 still cold beers from his rucksack and we toasted the  
 Two Peaks and a Paddle Trail... one of Andalucia's very  
 best. And that's saying something.

**With an almighty push we fought past the remaining rocks to arrive at our promised land**



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 centre of town. With shops, bars  
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# White-washed and wonderful



**A**WAY from the hustle and bustle of vibrant Coin and Alhaurin, a sleepy, white-washed Andalusian pueblo sits waiting to be explored.

Despite keeping its fascinating history to itself with unwarranted modesty, Alora has blossomed into a hive of cultural activity.

Marked out by its stunning Arabic castle atop Cerro de las Torres hill, the sprawling streets are brought to life through Moroccan and Roman influences before them.

However, the castle is even older and was originally built by Phoenicians, before being expanded under Roman rule. And later destroyed by Visigoths in the fifth century before the Moors finally came and rebuilt it.

The Muslim minaret is still clearly visible today, protruding defiantly from the elegant and immaculately preserved castle.

Built in 1462, from local history expert and museum worker, Maria Jose says.

"You can see evidence of all the different ages of the castle, it is so interesting and such a shame that so few people come and see it."

It is a wonderful place to visit, but

## Unashamedly modest, travel back in time in alluring Alora



### HISTORIC: Castle

unfortunately the castle is not often open to the public.

A short walk down narrow traditional streets leads to the town's lowest-lying square. Here stands the impressive 17th century Catholic church of La Encarnacion, which somehow appears to be even larger on the inside. Adjoining the church is the municipal museum, complete with ancient pottery, historical displays and intense mustiness.

It is a Mudejar construction dating from the 16th century and supported by stone pillars and columns.

"Alora is such a wonderful town, there

is so much culture to see in the artists, history and of course, the best food in the region is here," explains local tour operator Kora Buggel, who is hoping to organise tours of the castle and village.

Hidden right in the heart of the town is an old molino, where olive oil was traditionally produced but it is now used for the occasional concert.

Various small museums and bars have sprung up in the centre since the turn of the century, as this town continues its legacy as one of the most important settlements in the Guadalhorce Valley.

It is certainly a fairly bustling place, much busier than most of the valley's pueblos.

One of the highlights is the small bodega belonging to José Miguel Pérez Hidalgo, which produces a range of wines from the Guadalhorce Valley's vineyards, and offers tasting sessions to organised groups.

At the foot of the hill on which Alora rests is a railway station, and it was here, just three years ago, where the

houses were struck by a terrible flood, killing livestock and destroying homes.

From the castle it is easy to see where the river ripped apart a bridge, separating Barriada Estacion from neighbouring Barriada del Puente.

David McGovern, owner of Manhattan bar opposite Alora train station, recalls the water flooding all of the surrounding buildings, reaching metres high.

"It was awful, several people lost all of their possessions and were left homeless for 18 months," he said.

"I gave my Nike trainers to a man who lives just across the river from us, and he's still wearing them now!"

But the area has recovered and risen again, with hourly trains bringing visitors up to the town from Malaga.

And those who travel when the sun goes down continue to be treated to one of Alora's most stunning sites. The castle, lit up like a halo, is utterly alluring at night... A sight not to be missed.



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### CHARACTER PROPERTIES COTTAGES TO CORTIJOS



**AP851:** This traditional Spanish country house has been tastefully refurbished using high quality materials to transform it into a very attractive and comfortable county villa.

The accommodation offered comprises of a large lounge with French windows leading out to the expansive front terrace, a separate dining room or second sitting room, a lovely, bright, double aspect, quality fitted kitchen, 3 double bedrooms and a full bathroom.

Mains water & electricity are connected.

**ATTRACTIVELY PRICED - 199.000 €**

### TOWNHOUSES RANGING IN PRICE FROM 27.500 €



**APA27:** Traditional village house located in the historic centre of Alora pueblo. The accommodation is distributed over 4 levels and has the advantage of having access from 2 parallel streets.

The property offers a reception room, second sitting room with fire place, 3 bedrooms, kitchen, bathroom, 2 terraces and a sun room.

The upper terrace hosts fabulous views of Álora castle. Mains services connected.

**BARGAIN PRICE: 53.500€**

### GOOD SELECTION OF COUNTRY VILLAS



**AP793:** A pretty country house set in 5,600m<sup>2</sup> of almond grove in a rural location.

The house offers a bright lounge/dining area, kitchen, 3 double bedrooms, 1 with en-suite facilities and a family bathroom. 120m<sup>2</sup> built. Outside there is a covered terrace, 2 store-rooms and a 7x4m swimming pool with terraced area. Well water is connected. Access is via a country track.

The house has been renovated in recent years but requires some finishing touches. An ideal property for those seeking peace and tranquillity.

**REDUCED TO: 99.000€**



# All about **G**uadalhorce Valley

## Castle in the sky

**Crumbling remains on top of Cartama's hilltop offers a trip back in time**

**C**ARTAMA castle at night is a magical juxtaposition of ancient and modern. The crumbling hilltop remains are bathed in floodlights at night, recently installed by the Town Hall. Even in daylight, no other vantage point in the vicinity offers such far-reaching views of the Guadalhorce Valley.

Cartama spreads out below, at the head of the Guadalhorce river, where a restored iron bridge connects the town with its train station. A rocky path zig-zags up from the main square to the castle, meandering beneath shady pine trees, with benches placed at intervals for much-needed breathers. At the top stands a pretty shrine to the town's patron

## Money matters

QUICK, efficient and effective... there really is only one place to go in the Guadalhorce Valley for all your financial needs. Speed Financial Solutions in Coin offers expert advice on everything from inheritance tax to planning for retirement. With over 30 years of experience, company principal Andrea Speed is a Fellow of the Chartered Insurance Institute and Chartered Financial Planner. With experience working in both the UK and Spain she is ideally placed to assist on key areas of financial planning in both countries.

"Our business focuses on what is important to our clients, our services are bespoke and we take our role as advisers very seriously," Andrea says.

"Informing clients of any legislation changes is part of our commitment to providing an ongoing high level of service. "Our independence means we have no conflicts of interest with your investment choices."

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saint - the Ermita de Nuestra Señora de los Remedios. Built in the 17th century on top of the original 15th century building, the sanctuary was restored as re-



cently as 2007. Inside you can still see the ornate ceiling with its crystal chandelier, the elaborate decoration contrasting with the spartan wooden benches that seat the congregation. Above the shrine are the remains of the 10th century Moorish castle. The crumbling walls are all that's left of the impenetrable fortress that originally boasted ten watchtowers, but the views are still to die for.



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## WHERE TO EAT

WITH a fabulous range of local produce it is no surprise you can eat well in the Guadalhorce Valley.

One of its true stars though is Jaap Schaafsma, 30, at the **Castillo de Monda** ([www.castillodemonda.com](http://www.castillodemonda.com)), who wouldn't be out of place in Marbella and indeed spent many years cooking in some of the best restaurants back home in Holland.

It is definitely a welcome return for the friendly Dutchman, who previously cooked up a storm at the popular nearby Santa Fe restaurant in Coin, before heading home to the Netherlands for a few years.

He has definitely come back stronger and his small team is creating one of the most exciting menus I have tried this year in Andalucía and will deservedly appear in our sister website [www.diningsecretsofandalucia.com](http://www.diningsecretsofandalucia.com) when it relaunches later this month. Combining a range of styles from around



There's a decent mix of places to eat in the Guadalhorce Valley, writes Jon Clarke

# Grubs up



DREAM TEAM: Jaap (centre) from Castillo de Monda

the world, there is a fabulous take on cerviche, with seabass, coriander and grapefruit and a superb salmon sashimi. Doffing his hat at local dishes too there are quails in bacon, chives and honey and a rack of lamb with aubergine and tarragon.

But also expect plenty of vegetarian dishes and salads, while his vanilla creme brulee with orange sorbet left me with a smile on my face. For another amazing dining spot head to **Finca La Mota** ([www.fincalamota.com](http://www.fincalamota.com)) on the outskirts of Alhaurin, which

sits in its own secret valley. Also Dutch owned, you dine on a candle-lit terrace at night surrounded by mature pine, orange and avocado trees. A classic rural idyll, the diners are spoilt with a great mix of international dishes, with a slant on the oriental, Moroccan

and Thai. Its best offering is an amazing starter or main course of red king prawn, which is as succulent as lobster and comes care of owner Kees, new company Norcrab (see below).

Meanwhile you must try herring on brown bread, the chicken satay and a splendid 'zarzuela', which has a top mix of shellfish, rosada and langoustines. The Thai prawn and chicken curry came in red, green or yellow depending on your preference for spice. The apple strudel was a sure fire winner to end the meal. If you are looking for Gallic flair then look out for stalwart **El Postillon** ([www.elpostillon.com](http://www.elpostillon.com)), where you eat on a fantastic terrace overlooking a leafy garden and with views into the nearby Sierra de Mijas.



ENTERPRISING: Reuben and Kees

## A FISHY COTTAGE INDUSTRY

ALWAYS looking for a new way to keep his regulars happy, **Kees de Cock** jumped at the opportunity to serve up red king crabs from the north of Norway. And so impressed were his clients at **Finca la Mota**, in Alhaurin, last year, that he decided to set up a company to import the huge crustaceans, via a client, a fisherman, who has a holiday home nearby.

"This chap has been fishing them deep from the ocean for years and reckoned we should give it a try here," explains Kees, a former Spanish and Moroccan tour guide. "They are better than lobster and they went down so well we decided to set up a company to import them." Served up as a starter with rose

island sauce, they arrived from Norway having been cooked and then frozen.

The business [norcrab.es](http://norcrab.es) has been so successful that it has now expanded into quality naturally smoked salmon and other fishy delights.

He and his son Reuben have invested in a van and are now delivering up and down the Costa del Sol.

"We have no idea it was going to take off," adds Kees (left with chef). "But it definitely has."

The pair are now gearing up for Christmas which they expect to be busy.

"We have the large size Norwegian King Crab (5L) and we can deliver to your home at €52 per kg."

For more information visit [norcrab.es](http://norcrab.es) or call 609301035



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WHERE TO STAY

# Valley of dreams

The region is full of charming rural retreats, writes Jon Clarke

You will be spoilt by the cooking from Xavier Sierra, who after working in his parents' restaurant in France and studying at the best cooking school in Bordeaux packed up his kitchen utensils and headed to Spain 20 years ago.

"I am passionate about cooking and I want to share that passion," he says. "Cooking is my life. My parents owned a restaurant and I was all but born in a kitchen."

As one would expect his foie gras is excellent, as is his lovely seafood 'gratin' with prawns and scallops, not to mention a fresh sea bream.

Over in Coin, you must look out the adventurous and highly romantic, **Bohemia** restaurant.

The owner Pedro Trillo has incredible talent both for his interior design, food and original tapestries which line the walls. His food is classic soul food with a heavy emphasis on vegetables and, in particular, I loved the aubergines layered with salmon, parmesan, chives, caviar and cherry tomatoes. The courgettes stuffed with goat's cheese were amazing too and the portions are of an excellent size.

Finally, also in Coin, check out **Casa Paco** which has an amazing range of fresh fish and seafood and has been running since 1985 with current owner Juan starting to work there at the ripe old age of 16.

A livewire, he works extremely hard and this is one of the genuine 'dining secrets' of Andalusia.

The hot conchas finas are incredible, while the razor shells are as fresh as could be.

There are some amazing places to stay in the Guadalhorce Valley, where peace and mountain landscapes merge.

One of the best established is **Finca la Mota** ([www.fincalamota.com](http://www.fincalamota.com)), in Alhaurin el Grande, that was once one of the biggest estates in the entire valley.

The 350-year-old farmhouse sits in its own secret valley, surrounded by stunning countryside and with views to match. Run by Dutchman Kees and his two sons Reuben and Danny, you enter into a classic patio Andaluz with a huge pool and its own terrace restaurant.

Inside it is charming with comfortable rooms and a separate dining area. A lovely shady pool and views to match make up the scene.

Best of all, it has a highly rated restaurant, perfect for shady dining by day and charming atmospheric dinners at night.

Fancy staying in a castle? Well now you have a chance following the amazing renovation of the soaring **Castillo de Monda** ([www.castillodemonda.com](http://www.castillodemonda.com)).

Not just lordling over the village of Monda, but the entire valley, with mountain views in all directions, it is little surprise that it has been nearly fully booked since opening in the Spring.

Taken over by three talented Dutchmen, the place not only counts on spacious bedrooms, replete with four poster beds, jacuzzi baths and private terraces, but it also has a spa.

Best of all, one of the trio, Jaap Schaafsma, who is in charge of the kitchen, has worked among Holland's best restaurants, a few of them with Michelin star status.

Looking for somewhere up in the true hills, away from the maddening crowd, then few places beat **Cortijo la Pura** ([www.bed-breakfast-cortijo-lapura.es](http://www.bed-breakfast-cortijo-lapura.es)).

In the hills above Alozaina and Casarabonela, this beautiful place, over 200 years old in age, sits in total silence, and counts on wonderful grounds and views. Run by a worldly well travelled Dutch couple, it has four well appointed rooms, each with minibars, air conditioning and terraces. Plus three nights a week your hosts cook an evening meal for guests.

And finally close to Coin, look out for **Finca La Luna Azul** ([www.la-luna-azul.eu](http://www.la-luna-azul.eu)), which has recently been taken over by a couple of friendly Germans, from Hamburg, who love their horse riding and Harleys, the perfect mix.

It's a splendid good value B&B with guests having a chance to ride horses, go on nearby hikes, or simply hang out by the fabulous pool.



STUNNING: La Pura and (below) Castillo de Monda



## DINING SECRETS of Andalusia



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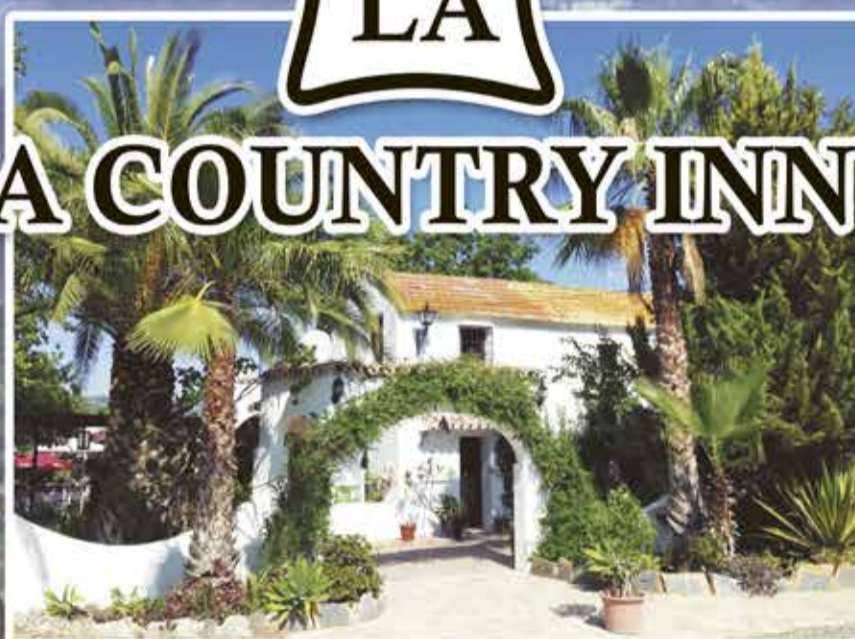
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The restaurant serves international cuisine using flavours from around the world. Kitchen open from 12 till 22 hours. 7 days a week.

Tel: + 34 952 490 901 [www.fincalamota.com](http://www.fincalamota.com) [info@fincalamota.com](mailto:info@fincalamota.com)  
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# All about Guadalhorce Valley

October 12th - 25th



THEY come from as far as Cyprus and Italy to learn how to groom dogs by Rachel Goutorbe.

With an international reputation spanning over two decades, it is perhaps little surprise. Her thriving business Posh Pets, which she runs with husband Les, literally treats its guests - that is, its pampered pooches and cats better than most human "hotels".

The fortunate pets that end up getting groomed here, or who come to stay, come from as far as Nerja and Gibraltar, and end up looking squeaky clean with big smiles on their faces.

"They absolutely love it in here, running around playing together, their tails wagging," explains Rachel, who has been running the upmarket kennels since 2004.

"A lot of the dogs that stay are ex rescue dogs and you can see how they unwind and relax here particularly in the Pet Sensory Garden.

"The Garden helps build up their confidence as well as to tantalise all their senses, plus it helps them to interact with their surroundings and provide physical and mental challenges to help enrich their lives."

With a sensory herb garden and a sandpit with treats hidden in it... could there be a pet hotel in

# Heavy petting



PAMPERED: Pooch

Students from all over Europe come to Andalusia's poshest pet hotel to learn how to groom, writes Jon Clarke



BLOW DRY: Lucky dog

Spain quite as posh?

The Pet Sensory Garden/Playground named "The Red Wreck" sits in a half acre grove of mature citrus trees and is a riot of smells and colours.

Cleverly thought out, there is a big range of self-medicating plants such as valerian, often selected by anxious dogs for its calming effect, and marigolds, often se-

lected by animals that are experiencing grief or emotional stress. Then there is lavender to encourage scar tissue regeneration, wheat grass for animals that are nervous, as well as peppermint which is good for its cooling properties and often selected by animals with skin irritations. It can also be used as an aid for training.

The garden also boasts a water feature, a wendy house, illusion mirrors and crazy daisies, which spray the dogs with water, keeping them cool in summer.

The fantastic adjacent dog hotel has its kennel rooms named after Coronation Street characters and each comes with its own pink sun bed. The dog Hotel was even mentioned in the original "Coronation Street" blog!!

Aside to this there is a spacious boutique cattery away from the boasting large individual rooms complete with climbing frames, cat trees, toys and music. Each cat has a 360 degree view.

"Our grounds are fully secure with CCTV and we live on site so there is peace of mind," continues Rachel, who now trains up students, who come from as far as Greece, Holland and even the United Emirates.

Regularly photos of the pets on their holiday are posted on the Facebook page POSH PETS SPAIN.

And clients that live some distance from Alhaurin can be picked up by a licensed Pet Pick-up service too. On top of this the company runs a fully licensed pet transportation service to and from the UK and Europe.

Finally, the Grooming Salon & Groomers training centre is fully equipped and caters for all breeds & crossbreeds as well as cats.

Courses to learn how to groom last two or three weeks and next year the courses take in pet first aid, canine massage and how to make your own holistic pet products.

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