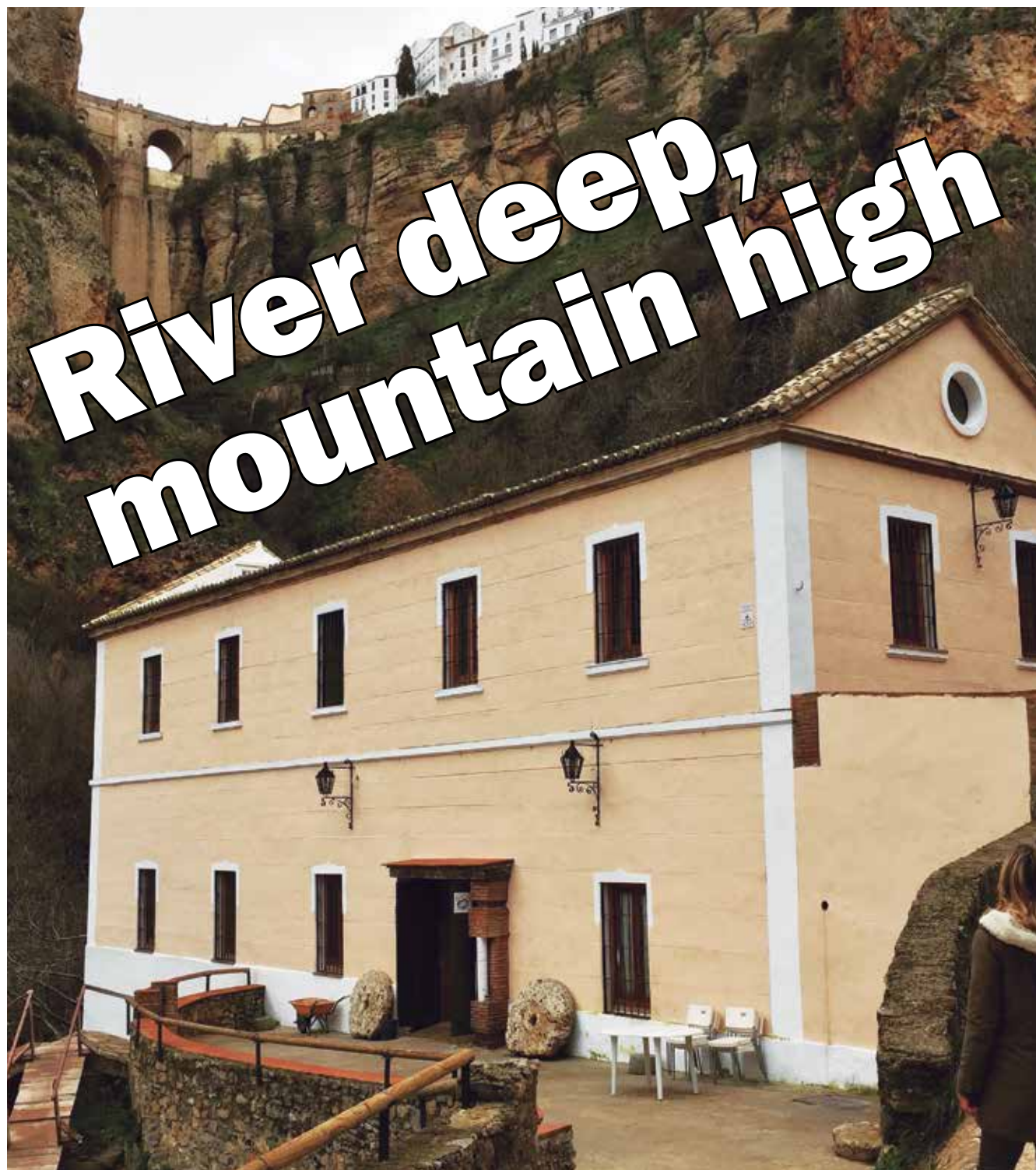


# All about **Serrania de Ronda**

**ALL ABOUT**  
*Andalucia*  
THE OLIVE PRESS INSIDER'S GUIDE

Vol. 10 Issue 251 [www.theolivepress.es](http://www.theolivepress.es)

October 26th - November 8th 2016



**SOARING HIGH:** The view up to the city from the Tajo gorge and (top) a typical town scene



**Rob Horgan goes native in the Serrania de Ronda and discovers the backroad gems of the Genal Valley**



**T**HERE are few places in the world where you can drink beer with an army general ... and even fewer where the general stands all the rounds!

Ronda, however, is one of those places. Celebrating a recent promotion with friends in quintessential bar El Porton, an olé away from Spain's oldest bullring - Spanish Legionnaire Carlos Velo is eager to include me in the party. After introducing me to the town's signature tapa - jamon and quail eggs - Carlos (above) regales me with tales from tours to Iraq, Afghanistan and Bosnia before explaining why Ronda is the 'best place in the world'.

"I have been all over the world and seen many things," he says, taking a swig from his cana and pushing his glasses back into his face. "But Ronda is the best place I have ever been to."

Originally from Madrid, Carlos moved to Ronda some 35 years ago when he joined the Spanish Legion, which has one of its two national bases here, counting on around 800 legionnaires at present.

"The quality of life in Ronda is like nowhere else in Spain. I can live like a gentleman here, in Madrid I would just be like everyone else."

"Everything is affordable, if you like you can spend the day going from tapas bar to tapas bar and you will still have change in your pocket."

"And the scenery is breathtaking," he adds. "The walks

*Continues on next Page*

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## 20 All about Serranía de Ronda

### City of dreams

From previous page

**CRAFTY:** Ronda ham cutter expertly slices his jamon and (below) chestnut sellers are just part of the area's typical rural mix



around Ronda are spectacular. I used to walk for hours on end around the Serranía. Nowadays I leave the walking to the youngsters." Visitors are drawn to Ronda for its iconic El Tajo gorge alone, a fearsome crevasse plummeting 120 metres down to the river from the Puente Nuevo bridge above.

This 18th century causeway, which took 42 years to build, connects the sleepy historic Old Town to the bustling new town which is always jam-packed with scores of tourists skipping between bars, restaurants and top retailers such as Frik-ing and Zara.

Once described as a 'cono moment' by celebrity chef Jean Christophe, the gorge has had more pairs of eyes on it this year than ever before after a bumper tourist season.

One hotel manager, Jaime Coronel, tells me that he has been full every day this summer.

"Summer no longer lasts for July and August, this year the summer season has been going since April and it is still going now," he says. "Compared to last year we are up 11% and that goes for all the hotels and restaurants here. Ronda is booming."

It's the same story at the stunning Al Lago hotel and restaurant in nearby Zahara de la Sierra where owner Stef tells me that he has been overrun with bookings this year.

Rightly named one of the top outdoor terraces by *Dining Secrets of Andalucia*, Al Lago is still bustling with guests in October as the rush to Ronda spills out beyond its historic centre. But it is not just the hospitality industry that is



**DREAM WEAVER:** Ronda artisan

happy to see the influx of tourists, as British expats Elaine and Malcolm Moore tell me.

"Ronda is one of these places where everyone is welcome," says Londoner Elaine.

"We moved here 16 years ago after nearly 20 years on the coast and we have loved every day.

"In fact, we wish we had moved here sooner."

She adds: "It is great to see so many people here at the moment. It has given the bars a new lease of life."

"We go out to live music events three or four nights a week, the town is absolutely buzzing."

But despite the tourist invasion, Ronda retains the charm that enticed the likes of Ernest

**Ronda retains the charm that enticed the likes of Ernest Hemingway and Orson Welles**

Hemingway and Orson Welles and inspired a whole library of literary figures, including James Joyce and German poet Rainer Maria Rilke.

More recently, US first lady Michelle Obama and ex-Prime Minister David Cameron have toured Ronda's sights.

Even Bill Gates came on a secret visit two years ago and Madonna infamously shot her music



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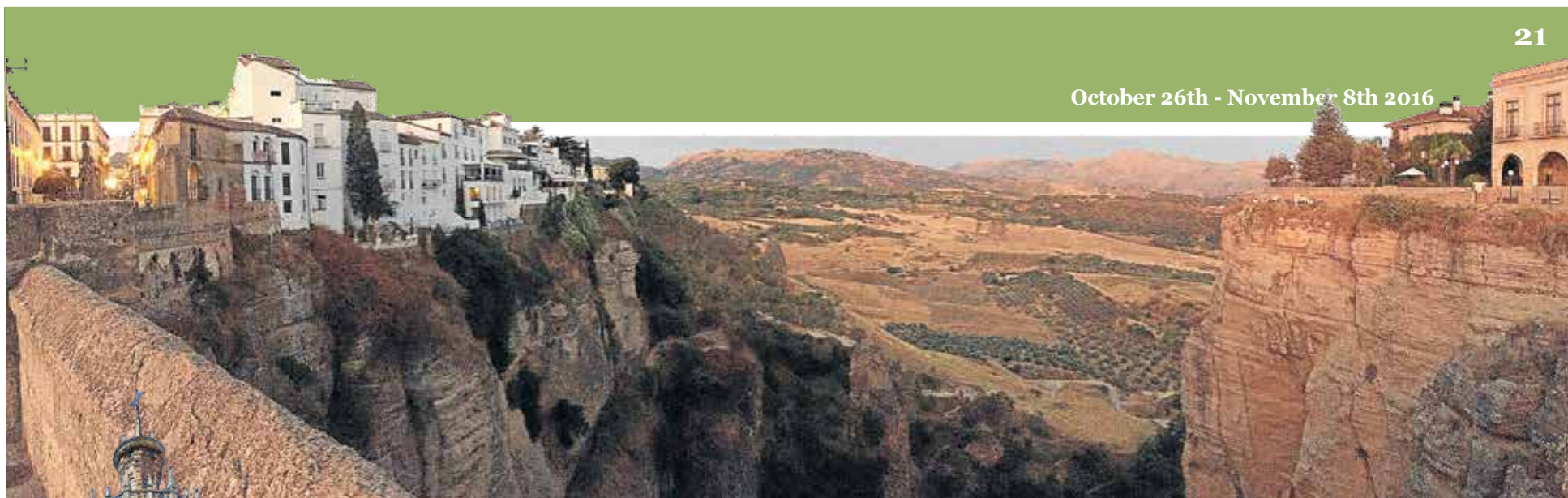
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October 26th - November 8th 2016



**VIEWS: (From top)**  
Described as the  
'coño moment' by  
chef Jean Christo-  
phe Novelli; the  
old mosque is now  
a cathedral; boss  
of Friking and hor-  
se and carriage



video, *Take a Bow*, in the bullring on a windy, wet November day in 1994.

The *plaza de toros* is on everyone's agenda - a distinguished classical building that was home to Spain's first corrida some 231 years ago. Outside, a statue of local lad Pedro Romero (born 1754) stands in welcome.

Dubbed the 'father of the corrida' for introducing bullfighting on foot and the matador's balletic style, he killed over 5,000 bulls and passed his skills down the line. The Romero family has provided Spain with over three generations of bullfighters.

September's annual Goyesca bullfight in 18th century costume pays tribute to Romero and Goya's matador paintings and is famous the world over. During the festival the bullfighters are led out into the street on the shoulders of their *cuadrillas* (assistants).

The bullring and its museum showcasing etchings by Goya is one of Ronda's top 30 sights. The cathedral-sized 15th century Santa Maria church is another, and you'll never tire of wandering Ronda's sepia-toned cobbled streets to discover them.

And when you've ticked those boxes, there are three natural parks to explore. Ronda is encircled by the Sierra de las Nieves, the Sierra de Grazalema and the Alcornocales, where you can indulge in rugged outdoor pursuits like hiking, horse riding or a 4x4 romp.

The A-397 up from San Pedro is the quickest route to the City of Dreams, as writer Rilke once christened Ronda. It snakes through rugged 'cowboy country' to the vertiginous mountain town which pierces the clouds at 750 metres above sea level - giddy limits that have been an inspiration to so many.

En route, a trip to Juzcar - the white village that was famously painted blue for *The Smurfs* movie - is well worth a visit.

But to truly appreciate the Serrania de Ronda, a trip up the old road through the Genal Valley is well worth the extra time for the views, as Harley Davidson owners will testify. This is their favourite mountain track for a burn up so keep an eye on those rear-view mirrors.

Every curve and bend reveals another cluster of white-washed houses stacked on top of each other like Lego cubes. Surrounded by verdant green oak trees and glimpses of bright orange cliff face, a patriotic Irishman might say the tricolour had been plastered on the side of Andalucía's mountains.

My first stop along 'Ronda's backstreet' - and everyone else's too, as it turns out - is the mountaintop village of Jubrique. On a sunny Sunday afternoon in autumn I am joined by lycra-clad cyclists, bikers in leather and daytrippers by the

**Syrian prince Abu'l-Fida (1273-1331)**

"Elegant and lofty city in which the clouds serve as a turban and its towers as a sword belt"

**Irish novelist and poet James Joyce (1882-1941)**

"Ronda with the old windows of the houses, the eyes which spy out hidden behind the latticework so that their lover might kiss the iron bars."

**Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986)**

"It is here, in Ronda, in the delicate penumbra of blindness, a concave silence of patios, leisure of the jasmine and the light sound of water, which summoned up memories of deserts."

**American author Orson Welles (1915-1985)**

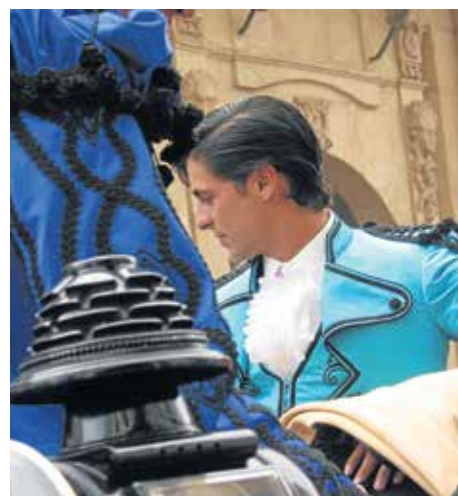
"A man is not from where he is born, but where he chooses to die."

## Trailblazers

**The word on the street from some of Ronda's famous visitors...**

**German poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)**

"The spectacle of this city, sitting on the bulk of two rocks rent asunder by a pickaxe and separated by the narrow, deep gorge of the river, corresponds very well to the image of that city revealed in dreams."



**MATADOR: Ronda torero and (right) horse riding**

coachload as I tuck into my Spanish fish and chips - gambas pil pil and patatas bravas.

Brothers Jaime and Juanmi from Algotocin tell me they have been cycling through the valley almost every weekend for 25 years.

"The valley is so beautiful," Juanmi says. "The cycle from Ronda to the coast is for riders who appreciate the beauty of the valley."

"Traffic on the road is so quiet that it is ideal for us."

Five minutes from Jubrique where the valley

meets the Genal river, a scenic walk winding past abandoned mills is accessible from the Venta San Juan, a former Guardia Civil checkpoint during the early Franco era.

Genalguacil takes the prize for most picturesque village in the Genal. Surrounded by pines and oaks, its impressive church proud-

I y overlooks the valley while an open air art gallery of curious sculptures and murals lining the white-washed streets reveals a pueblo that has gone completely art-mad.

During the first two weeks in August, artists get creative for the festival of Los Encuentros de Arte del Valle del Genal, and their prize-winning works of art go on permanent public display throughout the town.

The best valley views are reserved for the village of Algotocin which offers a 180 degree panorama.

Closer to Ronda, the Roman Castillo de Benalid - now a cemetery - offers a glimpse into the region's rich past.

Let the tourists take the high road. They might be in Ronda before you but the back road will show you the real beauty of the Serrania de Ronda.



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# Secret Serrania

*From bandit hideouts to Roman wine cellars, there is so much to  
see and do close to Ronda, writes Jon Clarke*

**R**ONDA is surrounded by two natural parks,  
the Sierra de las Nieves and the Sierra de  
Grazalema, not to mention its very own  
breathtaking Serrania.

These surrounding hills are creaking with won-

derful walks and pretty towns and villages to  
visit, all easy to reach in the car and most with  
their own excellent places to stay and eat.  
Here are *the Olive Press* top ten picks for a trip  
out of Ronda.



## Bandit territory

The Serrania was once a major stronghold for bandole-  
ros (bandits) and the tiny towns of Benaolan and Monte-  
jaque were famously where many holed up. But there  
is much more, such as the Cueva de la Pileta, near  
Montejaque (right), which has the oldest cave paintings  
in Spain, while Benaolan is the centre of the ham and  
sausage industry. There is also a fabulous walk from  
Benaolan Estacion down the river to Jimena de Libar,  
from where you can get the train back. At each end is  
a great lunch spot, with hotel Molino del Santo ([www.molinodelsanto.com](http://www.molinodelsanto.com)) the obvious pick.



## Castle hop to Jimena

It is now believed that Jimena  
may have once housed one  
of Europe's most important  
Roman fortresses. While ex-  
cavations currently go on,  
the existing castle itself is a  
real eye opener with amazing  
views and features. The town  
is also a gem and, best of all,  
has a great place to stay in  
Hostal El Anón ([www.hos-  
talanon.com](http://www.hos-<br/>talanon.com))



## Roman Ronda

**A 15-minute drive from Ronda  
takes you to the ancient city of  
Acinipo, where the Romans built  
their ancient town. The highest  
hill for miles around, it still has  
much evidence of their skills with  
a large part of its amphitheatre  
intact and a lot more to look at,  
not to mention the views. The  
visitor centre is only open for the  
morning, but one can always climb  
up to the amphitheatre out of  
hours.**

## Cavemen colony

The historic Roman town of Setenil  
de las Bodegas is a real eye opener  
and amazing for photography. Nes-  
tled in the rolling landscape, 20 mi-  
nutes out of Ronda, it was built around  
a series of caves, which served to  
keep the wines of the Romans cool  
in summer, hence its name. It is best  
to leave your car outside the town,  
wander up to the old fortress before  
heading down to the famous over-  
hanging cave for a fine tapas lunch.



## Preaching the blues

**While it's about as  
stunning as any of the  
pretty villages around  
Ronda, there is one  
big difference with  
Juzcar... it's blue. This  
is thanks to the Smurf  
movie that in 2011 de-  
cided to use the tiny  
village as the mythi-  
cal base of the tiny  
creatures. It has been  
used a handful of  
times since and vot-  
ed to stay blue some  
years back. But apart  
from the many attrac-  
tions for kids, based  
around the movie, it is  
also the perfect place  
for a walk and to see  
Griffon vultures and  
crag martins.**

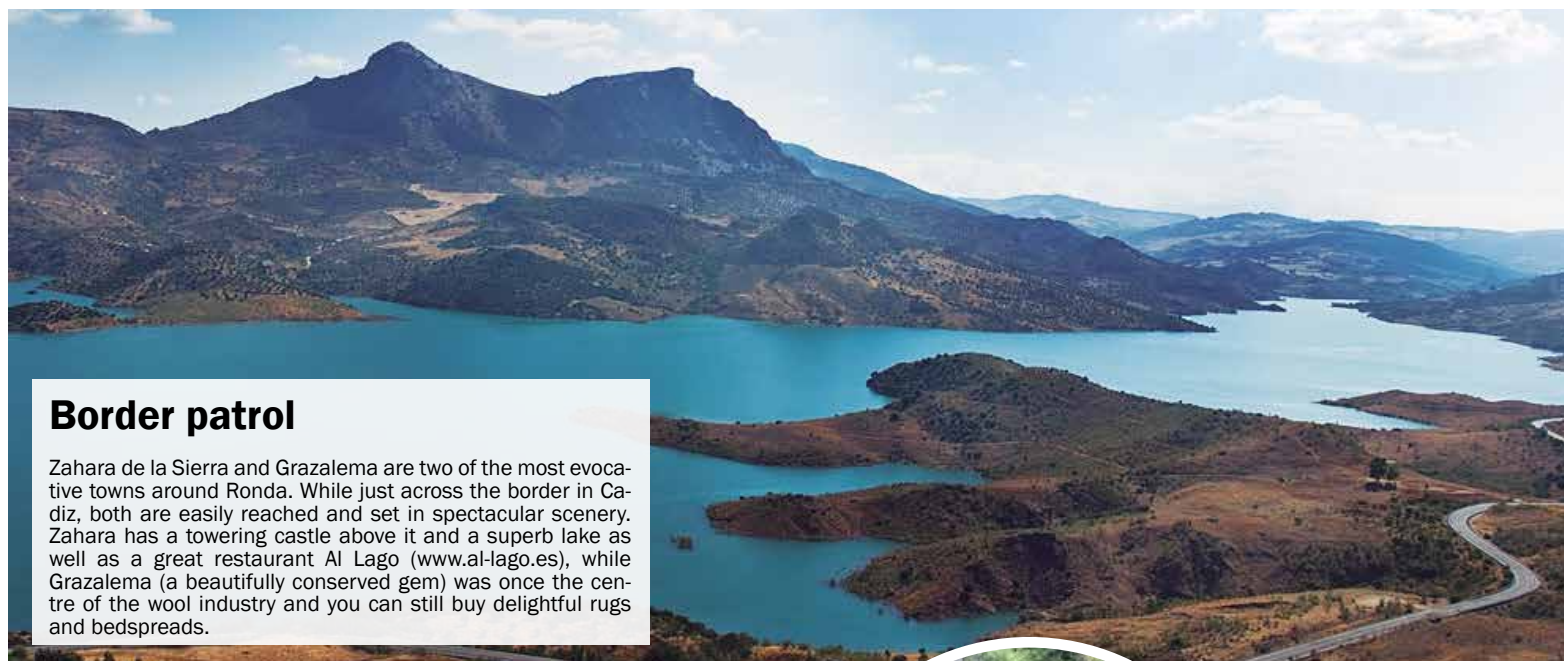


## Prehistory kept alive

For anyone wanting an idea  
of what life was like in Ron-  
da 5,000 years ago, head to  
Algaba, a short drive out of  
Ronda. This wonderful es-  
tate has recreated a prehis-  
toric village showing clearly  
how the area's forefathers  
lived, how they ground their  
bread, decorated their  
homes and what they did  
with their dead. There are  
also lots of rare breeds of  
cows and goats and you  
can even stay in the nearby  
finca if you fancy it.

**Visit [www.algabaronda.com](http://www.algabaronda.com)**





## Border patrol

Zahara de la Sierra and Grazalema are two of the most evocative towns around Ronda. While just across the border in Cadiz, both are easily reached and set in spectacular scenery. Zahara has a towering castle above it and a superb lake as well as a great restaurant Al Lago ([www.al-lago.es](http://www.al-lago.es)), while Grazalema (a beautifully conserved gem) was once the centre of the wool industry and you can still buy delightful rugs and bedspreads.



## Fanning its fortune

An hour walk out of Ronda will take you to one of the most stunning natural sites, the Cueva de Abanico (or the Fan Cave). Near here celebrated flamenco star Estrella Morente, and husband bull-fighter Javier Conde are about to build a hotel and it is no surprise why. This is one of the most beautiful walks imaginable, with bits of Roman road to discover, ruined towers and then the amazing cave and river at the end.



## The secret valley

Most people spend their time in the famous Ronda Tajo, but few take a stroll up the fabulous historic valley walk above the charming village of Arriate, just ten minutes out of Ronda. Well signposted, the Arroyo de la Ventilla hike heads up into an almost tropical leafy gorge, perfect for hot sunny days being mostly in the shade. Kids will love it in summer with the river forged creating a natural splash pool, with swings and an organic picnic spot.

## Glorious Gaucin

It's not hard to see why Gaucin is called the Balcony of the Serrania. Perched on a hilly outcrop, surrounded by stunning mountain scenery, the views across Gaucin stretch forever, on a clear morning well into north Africa. A town popular with expats, due to its easy access to the Costa del Sol, this is where the likes of Fatboy Slim, the Sainsbury family and even Lady Diana are said to have holidayed. Artistic and creative, you can easily spend a day poking around its charming corners



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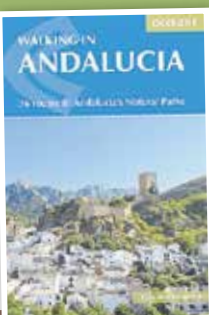
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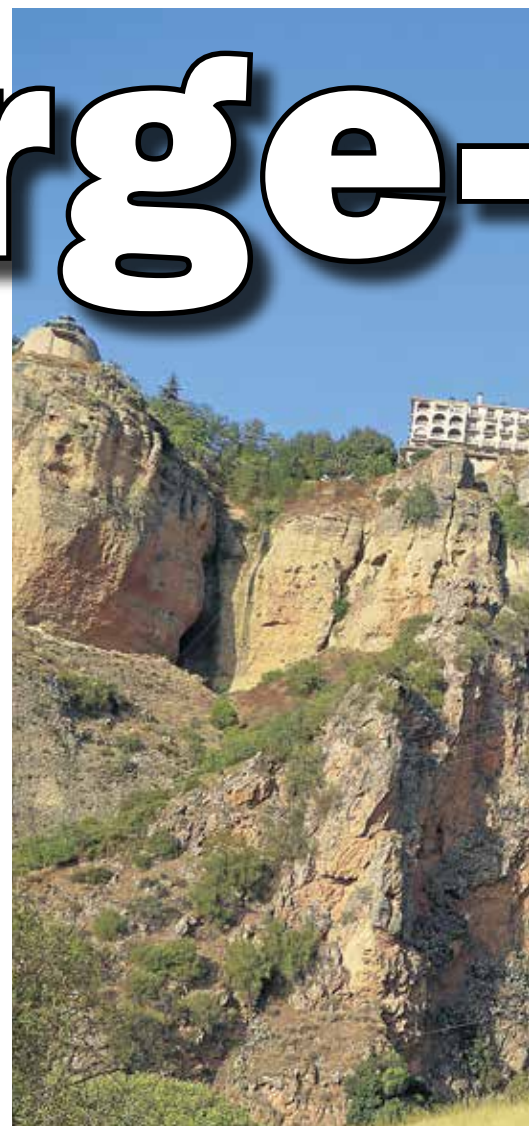


EXPERT: Guy with hiking partner

# Gorge-

**Take a hike beneath  
one of Andalucia's  
most dramatic  
landmarks with local  
walking expert Guy  
Hunter-Watts**

**T**HIS short circuit gets you up close to the dramatic cliffs and spectacular gorge and bridge whose beauty have made Ronda one of Europe's most popular tourist destinations. After leaving the town along a sandy footpath close to the cliff's edge, you follow a winding country lane across the bowl of the valley past numerous small holdings and country houses before climbing steeply back up to Ronda's historical centre via a cobbled footpath hugging the gorge's spectacular eastern flank. From here the views of El Puente Nuevo are simply mesmerising.



GLORIOUS: Ronda's stunning bridge over a gorge

## The route

The walk begins in front of the Parador on the western side of the Puente Nuevo. With your back to the Parador turn left and leave the square along Calle José Aparicio. At the end of the street turn left again. Passing the bullring you reach busts of Orson Welles and Ernest Hemingway. Here, cut right along the Paseo de Orson Welles. Passing in front of Ronda's ugly municipal theatre, you reach the small park of La Alameda. Cut right along the park's central walkway; then, reaching a statue of Pedro Romero, angle right and exit the park. Turn left then, passing right of the Iglesia de la Merced, continue along Calle Jerez. After passing Hotel Reina Victoria the street angles right past a statue of the Virgen del Rocío, then once more left, before reaching a roundabout. Here keep left, sticking close to the cliff edge. After 200m, an-

## Orson and O

**Orson Welles was a frequent  
visitor to Ronda during the  
late 50s and early 60s, at  
a time when he struck up a**

**lasting friendship  
with bullfighter Antonio  
Ureña. Two years after  
Welles's death**

gle left away from the road along a dirt track, following a sign for Bodega Descalzos Viejos. Running close to a wall topped by a fence, the surface of the track changes to tarmac as it leads past the entrance to Descalzos Viejos. Maintain on your same course along a sandy track which, passing a green gate, narrows to become a footpath that runs gently downhill, close to the edge of the cliff and parallel to a stone wall. Angling right, the footpath drops



## Gateway to his

*It's been a key Andalusian city since the time of the Roman Empire. In the Middle Ages, Al Andalus, Ronda was a key stopping off place for travellers. Today, when you feel like you have stepped back in time in the cobbled streets, you are surrounded by historic palaces and townhouses. Around every corner you will find historic palaces and townhouses with their own original entrances. And some are guarded by dangerous dogs. Others lead to emblematic squares (right)*

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# ous



## The nitty gritty

**Start/finish point:** In front of the Parador on the western side of the Puente Nuevo  
**Grade:** Easy/Medium  
**Distance:** 6kms  
**Time:** 1hrs 35mins actual walking time so allow 2hrs 30mins

## rdonez

ship with the **tonio Ordonez.** ter his death, s were scat- **tered at the Recreo de San Cayetano, a farm belonging to the Ordonez family just to the north of Ronda.**

down to meet with a tarmac road. Here turn left following a sign Ronda GR141, GR249. Passing through a breach in the mountain (El Puerto de las Muelas, 35mins) the road bears left before descending towards the valley floor. Reaching the gates of Hacienda Puerto de las Muelas, angle left following the sign Haza del Batán and follow a winding lane on past the gates of Haza del Batán where twin statues of Christ on the Cross and the Virgin are enclosed

in a glass case. Descending through groves of olive and walnut trees you reach a fork. Here, angle right. Reaching gates marked 21 the lane veers once more right, then winds on downhill, closer now to Ronda's majestic south-facing cliff face. Crossing a bridge over the river Guadalevin, the road loops steeply upwards before descending to reach a junction with a cobbled track (1hr). Turn right and climb up past a building marked 'Molinos del Tajo'.

After passing twin signs for 'Albergue Los Molinos' the track reaches a second set of signs for 'La Hoya del Tajo', one depicting birds that can be seen in the gorge. Leave the track here and follow a narrow path that climbs steeply up the eastern side of the Ronda gorge before passing through a narrow opening in the wall that, in Moorish times, served as Ronda's lower line of defence.

Beyond the gap you're treated to a stunning view of the Puente Nuevo that spans the gorge. Angling right, head on up a path parallel to the wall, then cut left up a flight of steps and follow a path that zigzags up to Ronda's historic quarter and the Plaza María Auxiliadora. Here, turn left and exit the square along Calle Tenorio. After passing Casa Don Bosco you reach another small square. Here, pass left of three wrought-iron benches to reach a junction and a ceramic mural (Ronda y Los Viajeros Románticos). Turning left and, crossing the Puente Nuevo, you return to the start point of the walk (1hr 35min).

Guy Hunter-Watts is the author of *Walking in Andalucía* and *Coastal Walks of Andalucía*. Newly revised, 2016 editions of both books are available from [www.cicerone.co.uk](http://www.cicerone.co.uk) Guy's latest Cicerone guide *The Mountains of Ronda and Grazalema* will be published in 2017.



## story

s and back in the days of s. It's no wonder then that streets of Ronda old town. houses, each with their very s creatures (left), while

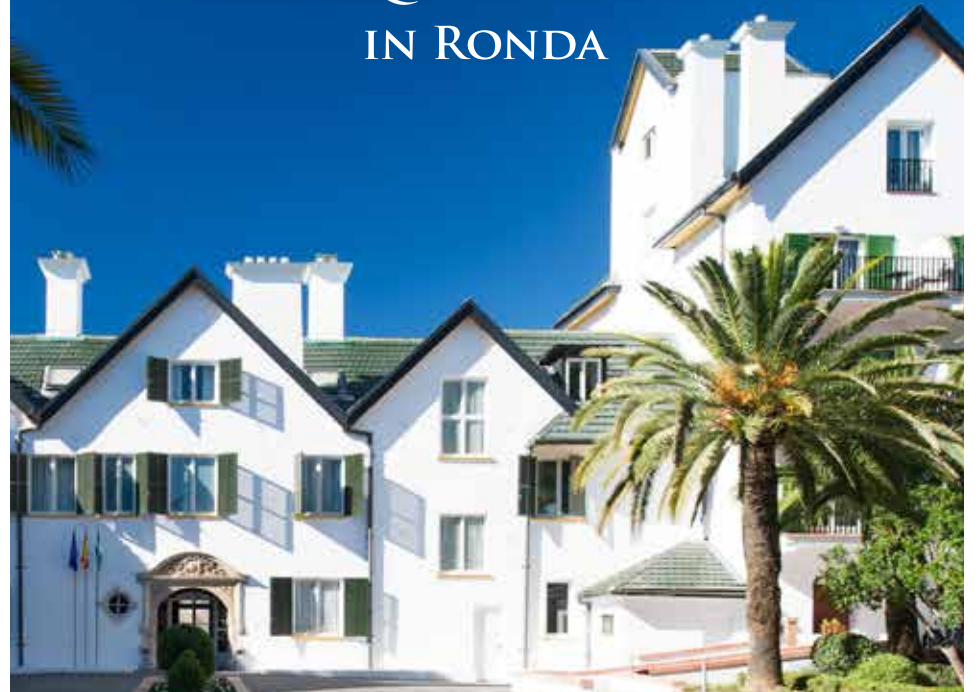


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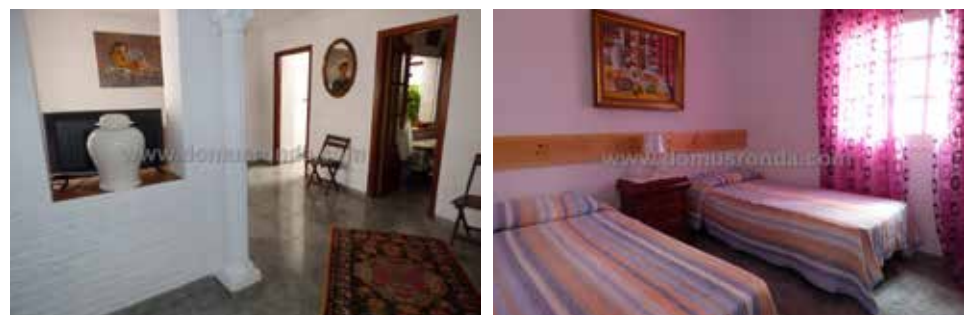
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A forward thinking, contemporary Estate Agency, Ronda Properties takes pride in its personal service and professional practice with a track record of successful sales. Our portfolio of clients include expats, Spanish, Scandinavians, central Europeans and overseas investors.

The natural setting of Ronda is quite stunning surrounded by the majestic mountain ranges of the Sierra de Grazalema, Sierra de Las Nieves and

the beautiful Genal Valley. It benefits from clean air, a quiet and traditional environment and offers a good standard of living with easy access to the Costa del Sol, main cities and International Airports. Whether you are looking for a small village house, finca or a large country estate Thorwald and Irene offer an extensive knowledge of the local area and property market, and aim to meet your wishes on both a personal and a professional level.

Their aim is to make buying a property in rural Andalucía a pleasant experience and to help you find the right property at the right price. The web site features only a selection of the properties listed in our portfolio and we have a wide range of inland properties that could suit your criteria. Spanish and English are spoken.

**For more info call 952 18 7313 or visit [www.rondaproperties.com](http://www.rondaproperties.com)**

## World wide web

**DIGITAL marketing consultancy ArayoWeb may no longer have a head office, but it is going stronger than ever. With clients based all over the country and abroad, British boss Dawn has found that having a remotely based team helps to respond better to clients from any parts of the globe.**

"All our business is now done via video calls over Skype, instant messaging and chat, as well as the old fashioned email and phone of course," she says. "We truly are in essence a digital business."

She adds: "This year we have created the online store for one of the biggest leather fashion brands in Spain, Daviletto, who also manufacture bags and purses for famous global brands such as Guy Laroche, Peirre Cardin and Victorio & Lucchino."

"We are also marketing their business online and we are very excited to be working with this new client." After many years in the industry Dawn and her team know how to get results from a fully integrated digital approach will.

No longer just web designers, ArayoWeb is now a complete digital marketing consultancy which is set to become one of the most forward thinking agencies in the country.

**For more info visit [www.arayoweb.com](http://www.arayoweb.com)**



**MAJESTIC:** Ronda's mountainous scenery is easy on the eye, if not the legs



## Joe Duggan's be-spoke trip into the heart of hilly Andalucía

**A** THIRD weetabix is a must if you're planning to cycle to Ronda from base camp San Pedro de Alcántara.

The 48 km ascent to this mountain eyrie is a tour de force on a Tour de France scale but 'vale la pena', as they say here in Spain.

And with my cyclist's antennae twitching over tales of Roman amphitheatres, gorge dwellings and underground cave systems hidden around Ronda, I wasn't going to sit and spin the wheels on my 18-gear Rocinante. Those embarking on the climb are offered spectacular views. Pedal past Los Arqueros Golf Club's gilded gates and Zagaleta, home to the rich and famous. To your right, La Concha's awe-inspiring peak points the way. The A374 twists past thick green canopies of fir trees carpeting the landscape.

A 'Welcome to the Serrania de Ronda' sign greets me 22km up, as do warning signs for snow. I push on through and take a detour to Parauta, one of Andalucía's famed white villages, guard-

# WHEELS AND HILLS

ing the gateway to the majestic Sierra de las Nieves.

A thin ribbon of road leads to this tiny village in the valley, built around the 16th century Iglesia de la Inmaculada Concepcion, cobbled streets and steaming chestnut braziers adding to its charms.

It's a sharp climb back to the main road, but this is the home straight. The fading sunlight deepens the landscape's burnt ochres and vivid emeralds as I power on to Ronda, serenaded by the gentle toll of cow bells. Ronda's old town bustles with Friday evening revelers, but I can't linger for too long over El Tajo's swooping splendour. I'm meeting a man who knows a thing or two about cycling.

Jesus Rosado is a born-and-bred Ronda cycling legend who battled his way to Paris in the 1990 Tour de France after honing his skills in his hilly homeland. He opened his bike shop on Plaza del Ahorro 22 years ago but he loves to recall the glory days.

"It was like a dream. I was 23 years old; a year before I was cycling in competitions, and suddenly I was cycling in the Tour de France with my idols; Miguel Indurain, Greg LeMond. It was an incredible experience," he says.

"This region's unique climate certainly helped me become a good cyclist." Not even the angels are stirring as I leave heavenly Ronda next day at first light. I cycle towards Arriate, the countryside's gold and

green parading its Saturday morning best.

Arriate's emigrant monument recalls leaner times, but the town, which has grown in recent years to 4,000 residents, is now home to quality shops.

Its train station, built on one of Europe's steepest track gradients, is part of Mr Henderson's Railway, the 1890 brainchild of British engineer John Morrison and financier Sir Alexander Henderson.

It's a punchy climb from here to Setenil de las Bodegas, burrowed into a gorge carved out by the River Trejo, its houses embedded into the rock like Hobbit homes.

After refuelling with café con leche and a thick slab of pan con tomate on Calle de las Cuevas, the sinuous climb out of Setenil gives way to a flat road lined with olive trees leading to the Roman ruins of Acinipo.

The 2,000-capacity Roman amphitheatre, completed

## The fading sunlight deepens the landscape's burnt ochres and vivid emeralds



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STEP aside San Miguel, catch a ride Cruzcampo, there's a new brewery in town! With its beers already stocked in thousands of bars around Spain, craft brewery Rondena is leading the way for artisan beers in Andalucía.

Set up in June 2015 by former Ronda car parts salesman Celedonio Arias, Rondena is going from strength-to-strength.

"Spaniards are really enjoying their craft beers now," Celedonio explains. "I started this after watching videos on youtube. There was a gap in the market for really well-made beers."

He added: "I do everything from fermenting the beer to bottling the product, it has been a lot of hard work but it is paying off."

Stocked in bars along the coast from Malaga to Cadiz, Rondena beers are also making an appearance in watering holes in Granada, Sevilla and in Barcelona.

The brewery makes three types of beer: a refreshing blonde which Celedonio recommends as a pre-prandial aperitivo; a full pale ale designed to be supped over

## Ale 'n' arty

food; and a chocolatey stout that's the perfect after-dinner drink (and my personal favourite).

And Celedonio means the business. As well as continuing to expand his brewery he wants to open a bar at his headquarters to serve up his beers for locals to enjoy.

Gift sets are also available and make the perfect birthday or Christmas present.

**For more info visit [www.cervezas-deronda.com](http://www.cervezas-deronda.com) or call 648 743 083**



**AT WORK:** Boss Celedonio



**PEDAL TO THE METAL:** Joe on way to Parauta, and (left) Tour de France local hero Jesus Rosado



circa 200 AD, crowns the escarpment, offering stunning views.

From here, black asphalt, untroubled by the rumble of cars, cuts through golden sunflower fields as craggy mountain peaks serrate the horizon. It's a stunning section of the ride.

Disaster strikes as my lower gears malfunction. But help is close to hand and the three bells of the Iglesia de la Virgen del Carmen ring me into Montecorto, where the 450 inhabitants are also gearing up for their first Independence Day celebrations. Bougainvillea climbs white-washed walls and a fresh mountain spring meanders through the village. A khaki-fatigued hunter, rifle slung over shoulder, strides past. Also here to greet me is Claire Higgins, who has run Andalucian Cycling Experience with her husband Ash-



**BUSTED:** Joe's bike

ley for 10 years. The company organises cycling holidays and accommodation around Ronda. Not only has Ashley mapped my route but Claire attends to my bike's gear issues (finding a mechanic is like divining water in a des-

ert to the stranded cyclist). "We fell in love with Ronda," says Claire. "It's got good mountain-biking, there are flat rides for families and some really big climbs for those who want to test themselves."

As I say goodbye, the clouds burst (October and November are Ronda's wettest months). I seek sanctuary in a nearby restaurant before braving the elements and the steep climb towards southern Europe's oldest subterranean cave system, the spectacular Cueva del Gato. Its waterfall and natural pool make a refreshing stop for the summer cyclist. And it's not all downhill from here. If you're feeling a little saddle sore, head to Benaolan-Montejaque station where a train will speed you and your bike back to Ronda for a well-earned beer.



**READY TO RIDE:** Andalucian Cycling Experience crew

## TOURING WITH THE PROS

**THE** Andalucian Cycling Experience team have been guiding riders through Ronda's stunning scenery for more than 11 years. Husband and wife owners Ashley and Claire Higgins' business caters for all ranges of biking ability from their base in the picturesque village of Montecorto. And they sort everything out from the bikes to accommodation to food.

From novices and families to budding Chris Froomes, the British expats' expert tours will take cyclists into the heart of one of Spain's most stunning settings.

"We have a range of road bikes for hire and we even have children's chariots and kids' seats so the whole family can come along," says Ashley.

"If there are people on the coast, they can come up and join us for a day's riding, or they can come up and spend three days to a week."

Ashley and Claire set up the business after swapping the UK 'rat race' for the hills of Andalucia.

They fell in love with Montecorto after two years scouring Malaga and Ronda for the perfect base.

Mountain biking along trails or road cycling with will take riders through hidden gems like Zahara, Setenil and the Roman ruins of Acinipo.

Accommodation ranges from fully-furnished villas with swimming pools that sleep 4 to 6 people to comfy townhouses - perfect to relax in after a day's riding.

A fully qualified mechanic is on hand - with a van to scoop up anyone finding the going tough and 40% of bookings are from recommendations or satisfied customers returning for another holiday.

Visit [www.andaluciancyclingexperience.com](http://www.andaluciancyclingexperience.com) or call 952 184 042



## Hands in the Aire!

**WITH** an enormous glass of gin and tonic in one hand and a huge smile slapped across his face, the mayor of Arriate celebrated the 11th edition of the town's Fiesta en el Aire as energetically as anyone.

Not your average alcalde, Melchor Conde Marin shook hands and danced with dozens of happy constituents as he joined thousands of residents - and numerous tourists - to toast yet another successful al fresco fest.

Rows of food and drink stalls lined the streets and artisan games were dotted about for kids to enjoy during the three-

day fiesta.

Started in 2005, the weekend bash is rounded off with a live music concert in the town square.

Colourful art sculptures featuring umbrellas hanging between the streets and wooden chairs stacked atop of one another were another highlight of this year's event.

The town is one of the most authentic in the Serrania and counts on one of the best restaurants in Andalucia, El Muelle ([www.elmuelle-arriate.com](http://www.elmuelle-arriate.com)), as well as a superb rural hotel Arriadh ([www.arriadhhotel.com](http://www.arriadhhotel.com)).

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## WHERE TO STAY

# The city for dreaming

You are spoilt for choice with romantic and hip places to stay around Ronda

THERE is an unsurprisingly good choice of places to lay down your head in the 'City of Dreams', as Dutch poet Rilke once described Ronda.

In the heart of the city though few places are as emblematic as the **Reina Victoria** ([www.hoteles-catalonia.com](http://www.hoteles-catalonia.com)), which was built over 100 years ago by British builders when the train line first arrived here from the coast.

Standing in an enviable spot overlooking the gorge (see pic, right) this upmarket hotel is a place to lie back and luxuriate, relax and enjoy the best views in Christendom.

Completely upgraded into a modern four star hotel by the Catalonia group four years ago, its rooms are stylish and comfortable and its gardens impressive, counting on a fabulous pool and no less than 70 palm trees.

Those looking for a more budget offering should try the central **Hotel Morales** ([www.hotelmorales.es](http://www.hotelmorales.es)), which sits in the heart of the town, perfect for the shops, and the main transport links. However, it is out in the Serrania countryside itself that you will be really spoilt for choice.

Close by, check **Hotel Arriadh in Arriate** ([www.arriadhhotel.com](http://www.arriadhhotel.com)), which counts on some of the best views anywhere in Spain.

Often described as 'zen-like' the clean lines and maximising of light and views is all thanks to the talents of Dutch couple John and Wilfred.

Excellent value, it has an amazingly peaceful garden and a splendid infinity pool.

Another option in the authentic village of Arriate is



**Villa Ignacia** ([www.villaignacia.com](http://www.villaignacia.com)), which sits in the most peaceful valley with amazing views. Good value, it is run by a Dutch woman, who knows the area well.

Also close to Ronda by a meandering river is the charming converted mill **Molino del Puente** ([www.hotelmolinodelpuente.com](http://www.hotelmolinodelpuente.com)), basically a restaurant with rooms, thanks to chef Ian Love, who has been producing tip top tucker for decades. Alongside his wife Elaine Love, this historic spot is very popular with visitors from the coast and, best of all, is well connected, while being very peaceful. Over in Benaolan you should check out **Molino del Santo** ([www.molinodelsanto.com](http://www.molinodelsanto.com)), a classic rural retreat, which has been serving the area for three decades.

Run by Pauline and Andy, the hotel has the knack of keeping guests happy with just the right mix of comfort, good food and character.

Regularly topping Trip Advisor for all of Andalucia, the historic mill sits by a raging stream, that emerges as a spring above the hotel.

Meanwhile, across the border in Cadiz province you will find one of the most amazing towns in Andalucia. Best of all Zahara de la Sierra has a splendid hotel restaurant **Al Lago** ([www.al-lago.es](http://www.al-lago.es)) where Mona and Stefan Crites do a wonderful job feeding and pampering guests, particularly with their stunning new suites, with roll top baths and views to die for.

Last, but not least, why not try out **Hostal Anon** ([www.hostalanon.com](http://www.hostalanon.com)) over in Jimena, which is a great place for a romantic break. It's been a classic stopover for travelers for decades and the rooms have a Spanish rustic feel, while the outside intertwining terraces have a Moorish décor.



FAMILY AFFAIRS: At El Pino and (top) Siempre Igual

## WHERE TO EAT

It's a true melting pot from authentic to creative cuisine in the Serrania de Ronda, writes Dining Secrets of Andalucia editor Jon Clarke

AFTER a day's sight-seeing or a bracing mountain walk there is nothing better than a fabulous restaurant or tapas tour.

And Ronda has the lot, from authentic tapas bars to creative restaurants, burgeoning with the celebrated local produce, including amazing cheeses, mushrooms, fruits, nuts and vegetables.

The best, include long-standing winners, such as **Pedro Romero, Casa Santa Pola** and soulful **Almobar**, while the rural delights of **Molino del Santo, Molino del Puente** and **El Muelle** continue to take the biscuit.

Up in Ronda check out authentic **Porton** – an institution – run by two friends Javier and Pepe for the last 40 years. Here, you will find my favourite Ronda tapa, the

wonderful quails egg with ham on toast.

Across the bridge in the emblematic town hall square look out for **Meson El Sacristan** run by friendly Antonio. It has Roman ruins in the basement and easily the best steaks in the town, cooked on a wood-oven.

For history and tradition head to **Pedro Romero**, opposite the bullring, which is wall to wall in bullfighting photos and posters. Run by brothers, including Tomas, one of Spain's top sommeliers, you should try the fantastic *rabo de toro* and let him select the wine.

For views and ambience **Casa Santa Pola** comes out tops, sitting literally in the famous tajo gorge. Run by livewire Catalan chef Ignacio you will always be spoilt for top quality ingredients and some magical



IDYLLIC: The dining terrace at Molino del Puente



## MARVELLOUS MILL

Ian and Elaine Love have been charming diners at La Cascada for a decade now

YOU sit in the heart of an ancient olive mill or outside on a shady terrace, beside a river with weeping willows and birdsong as accompaniment.

Yes, La Cascada at **Molino del Puente** is the very epitome of the Andalusian vernacular. This centuries old molino has been carefully renovated by expats Ian and Elaine Love, who are constantly upping their game.

Stone walls, candles and wooden dining tables, poke around and you will find plenty of evidence of the building's history, including mill stones outside. After a decade on the coast in Cabopino, they upped sticks for this rural idyll for a more authentic life and to bring up their three daughters.

The menu is full and includes plenty of local favourites such as mountain trout and fresh grilled asparagus, not to mention some of the best Jamon Iberico I've tried in ages. Then there are Ian's fantastic Atlantic mussels with green chilli, coriander and coconut milk.

There are plenty of veggie dishes, including a pastry tart filled with courgettes, aubergine and topped with parmesan and pesto and there is even a Thai prawn curry on the list for those looking for something a little spicy.

I went for the fantastic special of the day, seasoned cardo mushrooms,

that had just arrived from a local supplier following the first rains of autumn.

Cooked to a tee, laden on crusty bread and drizzled with olive oil, food doesn't get much better.

For a main I went for the fabulous lamb puff pastry tart, in a red wine reduction.

A genuine labour of love (I'd watched Ian prepare it earlier) it not only looked delicious, it was. A true winner.

My pudding of peach cheesecake went down well with its edible flowers, not to mention creme fraiche and a scoop of vanilla ice cream for good measure.

The wine list was a little thin and I had expected a few more local wines and a bit more variety.

That said the **El Nino Leon**, by local bodega Conrad, rarely lets you down and at 19.50 it was fairly priced. The next door vineyard of Los Frutales provides its Vizcondesa at 14.50.



### HOTEL MOLINO DEL PUENTE & LA CASCADA RESTAURANT

The well known Hotel Molino del Puente & the highly acclaimed La Cascada Restaurante are now taking bookings for Christmas and New Year

Only a 5 minute drive from Ronda, in the stunning Andalusian countryside. Take all the stress out of Christmas & New Year and enjoy delicious food and luxury accommodation in this converted olive and flour mill.

Treat yourself to a wonderful festive break at Molino del Puente

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For further information visit [www.hotelmolinodelpuente.com](http://www.hotelmolinodelpuente.com) or call 952874164

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**RONDA FACTS:** Frank at El Muelle, Antonio at Sacristan, Ignancio at Santa Pola, Monolo at Almocobar and brothers at Pedro Romero

# Foodie paradise

cooking skills.

Another great new place is **Simple Igual** in the new town where an entire family keeps up the standards.

Another long-term stalwart is the three decades old **Almocobar**, a true Dining Secret ([www.diningsecret-sofandalucia.com](http://www.diningsecret-sofandalucia.com)), which ticks just about every box for atmosphere, service, food and wines, including just about every Ronda wine, some two dozen at least.

Meanwhile, ex-Almocobar stalwart Antonio has moved to the charming, authentic spot **El Pino** in a nearby side street. A classic hole in the wall local, Antonio is charm personified and his tapas, including an amazing spinach and chicken burger, were fabulous.

Outside Ronda a number of great places stand out. At La Cascada, at hotel **Molino del Puente**, you will find chef Ian Love, who has been winning plaudits for his tasty creations for many years.

## Charming

It's a charming spot with an amazing terrace in good weather and atmospheric inside for cold winter nights. Another genuine success story is **El Muelle**, in Arriate, which finds clients driving for hours just for lunch. For many years 'Number One' on TripAdvisor in Andalusia (out of nearly 20,000 restaurants, although the algorithm has now changed), a trip to this converted train storeroom is an absolute must.



**BREATHTAKING:** Molino del Santa and (below) team at Porton



Dutchman Frank Rottgering is the perfect host, while local chef Isa from nearby Alcala del Valle, is a whiz in the kitchen, creating stunning food at fabulous prices. Another amazing rural spot is **Molino del Santo**, which

comes out tops in so many ways, for views, location, food and service. And it's hardly surprising, counting on 30 years hard work from owners Pauline and Andy, who are constantly improving its offering and never scrim on



**HOSTESS:** Mona at Al Cago

quality.

Meanwhile, local chef Alberto just keeps getting better, and the menu changes by the week and there are always plenty of twists and flourishes.

Expect excellent local wines, mostly local and seasonal produce and easily the nicest outdoor dining terrace one can imagine. Booking is essential.

Another amazing restaurant, **Al Lago**, sits just over the border in Cadiz province. Set up by talented chef Stefan Crites, from America, and his wife Mona, from the UK, you will be spoilt for local ingredients, including venison, wild boar and mushrooms and the views across the stunning Zahara lake are very difficult to beat.

[www.diningsecretsofandalucia.com](http://www.diningsecretsofandalucia.com)



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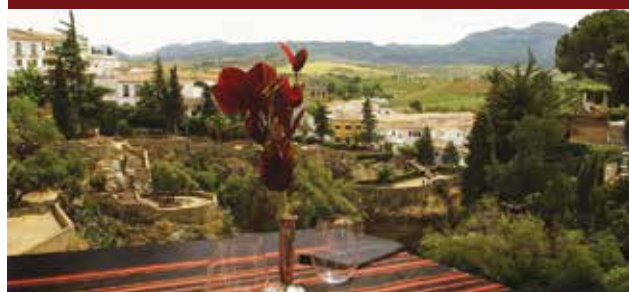
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### HISTORIC SPANISH CORTIJO

Beautiful, historic Cortijo, flat land, pool, stables, outbuildings and spectacular views. Architecture dating from 1835, and a wonderful, original stone courtyard. Partially renovated the Cortijo has beautiful living accommodation in a 2 storey building, including first floor with 5 spacious bedrooms.

Bedrooms: 9  
Bathrooms: 4  
Build: 2,850m<sup>2</sup>  
Plot: 542,000m<sup>2</sup>

**Ref: 65018**  
**€3,000,000**



### RENOVATED VILLAGE HOUSE

Charming 2 storey village house. The house is fully renovated and has outstanding views. Comprises spacious accommodation, sitting-room-diner and good fitted kitchen. High ceilings and attractive Spanish style arches give the house a distinctive look.

Bedrooms: 3  
Bathrooms: 1  
Build: 90m<sup>2</sup>  
Plot: 0m<sup>2</sup>

**Ref: 80410**  
**€56,000**



### GRAND HISTORIC HOUSE, RONDA

Small Palace of great architectural and artistic value located in the heart of the old quarter. The Palacete is built over 2 floors with 3 entrances, the main entrance opening onto a splendid interior patio, an outstanding feature of the house with a fine domed glass roof and handmade tiles.

Bedrooms: 7  
Bathrooms: 4  
Build: 800m<sup>2</sup>  
Plot: 0m<sup>2</sup>

**Ref: 78501**  
**€2,500,000**



### HISTORIC QUARTER

Character property – delightful renovated townhouse on 3 floors. The property comprises 3 bedrooms, bathroom, sitting-room-diner, fitted kitchen and enclosed terrace. Set on a pretty cobbled street in a quiet area and only 5 minutes on foot from the centre.

Bedrooms: 3  
Bathrooms: 1  
Build: 70m<sup>2</sup>  
Plot: 0m<sup>2</sup>

**Ref: 80577**  
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