

All about Sierra Nevada

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Spain's Costa del Snow turns flood-sick piste-off hack Chloe Glover (right) into a ski junkie



Winter wonderland

THE side of a mountain 2,100 metres above sea level doesn't sound like the most obvious location to find sun. And for a frigo-phobe who moved to Andalucia on the promise of year-round rays, being packed off to Spain's premier ski resort was not the travel assignment I had in mind. Add to the mix a limb-eye co-ordination akin only to Bambi's or the first efforts of the Cool Runnings team and you can see why I have never swapped my weekends by the beach for one in the snow.

But, s'no joke, just two days of snow-based fun and brilliant weather in Andalucia's only ski resort of Pradollano was enough to turn this piste-off hack into a ski holiday superfan. Stepping out of our car into glorious sunshine was the first welcome surprise after a fortnight of torrential rain on the so-called Costa del Sol. My colleague Laurence and I gleefully brushed the dust off our sunglasses, knowing that our home towns of Marbella and Estepona were facing the prospect of yet another damp weekend.

We hiked to the lookout point perched at the resort's summit and gazed down at the snow-topped chalet rooftops - a Christmas card scene sparkling in the dazzling light. But it was the sight of hundreds of zippy skiers zig-zagging down the majestic white peaks towering above us at 3300m that really took our breath away. It's hard to believe that 106,8 kms of pistes and 124 runs (75% open in mid December) lie just two hours from Marbella and half an hour from Granada.

It truly lives up to the marketing hype as a place where you can ski in the morning and sunbathe on the coast, pina colada in hand, by the afternoon. Madrileños drive the four-hour distance in their droves, while Portuguese powder addicts are more than happy to travel cross peninsular. Expert skiers treasure the snow which, particularly in springtime, is as soft as icing sugar and quite unlike the tightly-packed ice found in many European resorts. With 60 easy and very easy runs descending alongside the 57 hard-

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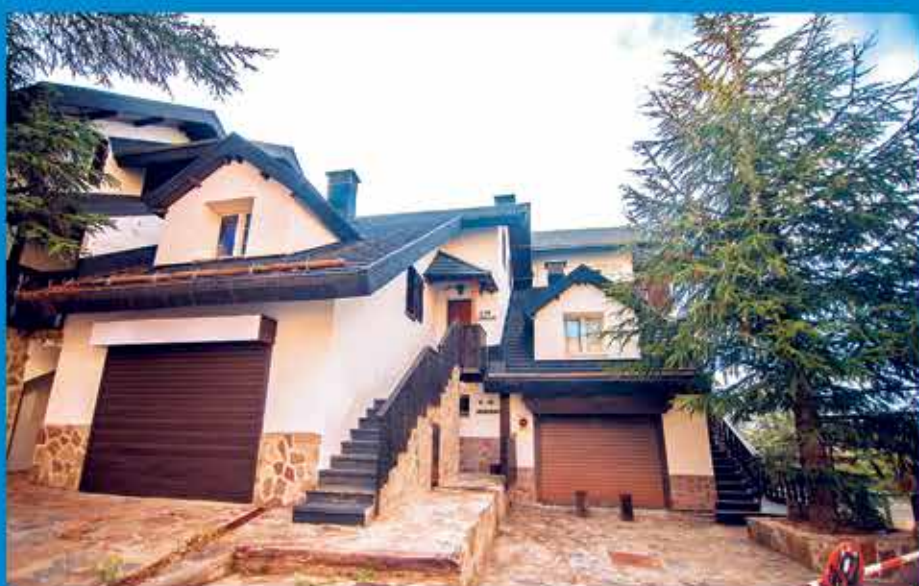
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All about Sierra Nevada

White washed



From previous page

est red and black ones, it is clear why the resort has such catch-all appeal.

Some ski fans even brave it in bikinis for the last day of the season in May (*la bajada en bikini*), an unmissable occasion charged with champagne, hedonism and near-nudity.

"Constant improvements and an ability to produce a lot of snow are just two of the strengths of our resort", said spokesman Santi Sevilla, who has been working at Cetursa, the resort's administrator, for seven years.

"Add to that the arrival of the Free-style Ski World Championship and Snowboarding here next March and the affordability of ski passes and you can see why it is one of the most attractive in Europe.

"One of my favourite new additions is the Pista del Mar in the heart of Borreguiles.

"This has been created to make a fun and safe area where families and beginners can enjoy the snow." Santi is far from the only skier smitten by Pradol-

lano's charms.

Today one million people visit the resort each year. That is an impressive achievement considering it was only constructed in 1964, making it a newbie in comparison to some of France's long-established resorts like Chamonix and Courchevel.

But perhaps its success is not altogether surprising, considering its many draws.

Along with accessibility, you'll get more bang for your buck.

While many other European resorts remain the preserve of the rich, the Sierra Nevada continues to be pocket-friendly.

This has been helped by a recent €3.1 million cash injection from the Andalusian tourist board, which means the price for passes at peak time has risen by only €2 in the last five years to €47.

Passes are a snip of those at France's big daddy resorts, especially when considering the availability of generous low season, spring and promotional tariffs.

Going midweek during the snow season can cost as little as €35.50 per day, while seven-day passes can

The Sierra Nevada continues to be pocket-friendly compared to other European resorts

Festive fun



MAGICAL: Three kings on the slopes and (below) ski jumper

The resort is one of the most festive places to be in Spain, and the Spaniards know it, as they descend in their droves for Christmas and New Year.

'Nochebuena' or Christmas eve, when the Spaniards celebrate the festive season with a huge family meal and lashings of turrón, is usually a sell out. Meanwhile 'nochevieja', or New Year's Eve, where massive screens show the countdown in Madrid's iconic Puerta del Sol, with grapes galore, is a riot. For the eve of the Reyes on Jan 5 the three kings duly arrive on skis. Kids will love it.

Carnival, from February 6-14, also sees a mass arrival for the fancy dress competi-

tion, snow-sport contests and spectacles from Granada University.



December 21st - January 3rd 2017



TIMELINE OF A SKI STATION

- Angel Ganivet, Spanish Consul to Helsinki, gave birth to the idea of turning Sierra Nevada into a ski resort at the end of the 19th century. He likened his Granada homeland to the 'Finland of Andalusia' in a local newspaper
- 1898 marked the creation of Diez Amigos Limited, a group that led skiing excursions around the area.
- Thanks to their continued success, the organisation was able to create the first youth hostel in the area not long after rebranding itself Sociedad Sierra Nevada in 1912
- The main road from Granada to Sierra Nevada and a cable car were both put in place at the beginning of the 1920s
- The boom years of the resort began in 1964, when Centros Turísticos S.A. (CENTURSA), was created, allowing its rapid development
- The station hosted the World Alpine Ski Championships in 1996
- In 2017, Sierra Nevada will host the FIS Snowboard and Freestyle World Championships



ON TOP OF THE WORLD: Skiers take to top of mountain while (right) end of season fun

be bought as cheaply as €187.

Package promotions for ski, snowboard and clothing hire help keep prices down, while accommodation can also be very reasonably priced, especially at lodgings located a little higher up in the hill resort. Turning to the skiing itself, the Sierra Nevada thrives on its all-abilities appeal, with the majority of the 124 runs at beginner or intermediate level: 19 green runs, 41 blues, 50 reds and 14 black and orange (the scariest).

Laurence wasted no time testing out the routes, carving paths alongside both pros and groups of all-ages beginners who were being put through their paces by experienced instructors. Families enjoyed themselves side by side with big groups of skiers, such as the 30-odd, 20-something American marines from Rota naval base on the Cadiz coast we bumped into (almost literally).

"I'm not very experienced but really have enjoyed myself", said one of them, Jonathan Richards from Louisiana.

"I've only ever been skiing before in the States. It's only early season but I'd give the skiing eight out of 10.

"I love the atmosphere here too.

"It's a lot more chilled out and friendly than the places I've been to before."

But there is much more to the Sierra Nevada than sliding down it on two planks of wood. You can tackle it by toboggan and snowboard, or on a snowshoe hike (akin to walking with a tennis racket strapped to each foot).

Family-oriented Mirlo Blanco park gives kids their adrenalin fix as they brave the star attraction, Trineo Ruso (Russian sled), which whisks riders around a several hundred metre track peppered with tight turns and a 550 metre descent.

A magic carpet slide and bouncy castles can also be found in the zone, along with mountains of snow for DIY fun.

And if that sounds like too much action, you can always swap icy snow for a hot steam bath and indulge in some me-time at one of several hotel spas.

All year round, the Sierra Nevada is paradise for fresh air fiends.

After 'the melt', the resort becomes a paradise for walkers, wildlife lovers and mountain bikers.

Get the best views by taking advantage of the ski lifts, which in summer carry both people and bikes to the summit to enjoy breathtaking routes back down.

Borreguiles, the resort's impressive ski bowl, boasts a bike park in the hotter months. Youngsters can test their strengths in the mini-olympiads zone or race against each other on the pedal car track.

Guided dawn and dusk walks and a bumper running and cycling race calendar are a magnet keeping the resort busy 12 months of the year. Awesome apres ski

Back in Pradollano at the end of an action-packed day, revellers congregate at the various bars, like Bar Ski and Crescendo, around the resort to share their successes and failures with joyful abandon.

Meanwhile, friendly down-to-earth restaurants, like Casa Blanca and La Mar Sala, do not mock their customers with ski-high prices. You can still find a cana for under €2, and tapas for €1.50 even on weekends at some places.

La Antorcha is a skier favourite thanks to its plentiful, juicy steaks at lip-smackingly good prices. Head to the drinking holes in the Edificio Mont Blanc centre or Plaza de Pradollano for oodles of atmosphere at pocket-friendly prices.

Hostels Yeti and Alburgue Interjoven are amongst the budget accommodation options and they don't skimp on warm, clean rooms. The same can be said for the wealth of self-catering apartments dotted around the resort.

Those with extra cash to splash can turn up the luxury at a cosy Alpine Hotel. Places like the Sol Melia and Kenia Nevada have spas for soothing all the aching muscles you never knew you had. Meanwhile, some of the finest haute mountain cuisine can be had at these giddy altitudes. Try Ci Vediamo, in particular, as well as stylish dishes at Tito Tapas and La Bodeguita.

And of course, nothing goes down better at this time of year than a steaming glass of *tinto de Invierno* - spiced, mulled wine. Salud!



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EVERYONE knows it's all about the apres ski, and the Sierra Nevada doesn't disappoint. Good-value tapas bars offer a Spanish dining experience with a fireside ambience, while dozens of bars and nightclubs keep the good vibes going until dawn. Brits flock to the various bars just off Pradollano's main square, including Bar Ski, La Bodeguita

Starry nights

and La Mar Sala which is a great starting point for revellers.

Others prefer the chilled ambience of Jaleo or Crescendo where specialist gin menus and 90's classics provide the perfect

alcohol-fuelled recuperation from a hard day's slog on the slopes. For the hard-partying crowd there are several nightclubs on offer but Mango's seems the place to be - a true discoteca with LED-flashing dance-floor and sprawling bar, packed to the gunnels from 1am onwards with ample opportunity to shake that bootie (aching butt muscles permitting).



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All about Sierra Nevada



**Rob Horgan slopes off to the Sierra Nevada to
conquer his personal Everest and finds his ski
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Bambi on ice



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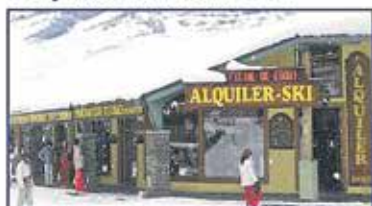
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SPREAD-EAGLED on the snow, the beginnings of a (still-painful) black eye pulsing beneath my sunglasses and skis nowhere to be seen, I knew what Walt Disney's stilt-legged fawn felt like when he first stepped onto ice.

Safe to say, my maiden downhill run on the Costa del Sol's ski slopes was more Eddie the Eagle Edwards than Ski Sunday.

With my five friends chuckling to themselves 10 metres downhill, I unleashed an onslaught of expletives as colourful as Joseph's dreamcoat as I tumbled to the floor for the sixth time in 20 seconds, no kidding.

(A PG translation would read something like: 'sod this, it's a stupid sport, I'm walking down'.)

As my fellow skiers wiped tears of laughter from their eyes, one true pal volunteered to take on the challenge of teaching this stubborn, unstable, six-foot city boy the rudiments of alpine skiing.

(It was in fact former Olive Press hack Iona Napier who took pity on me and assumed the role of my knight in shining ski-wear.)

With a core balance only rivalled by Bambi for ineffectiveness, I got myself back on two skis.

This in itself was somewhat of an achievement, as I found it virtually impossible to put the damn things on.

Thankfully Iona was there to point out that I had to wipe off the mounds of snow stuck to the bottom of my boots before placing them into the skis (who would've thought?!).

The light snow and heavy fog which greeted me in the morning at the holding area had cleared by the time I had battled my way onto the ski lift and reached the summit of the 'green' (as in rookie) slope.

Allegedly the 'easiest and least steep' of the lot, the journey south looked practically

vertical from where I was stood.

But after my initial paddy I was back on my skis and, with knees knocking and toes pointing inward in an awkward-looking snow plough, I had lift off.

Kids who looked too young to walk, let alone ski, whizzed past me as I cut diagonally across the slope in my first slalom turn. But I couldn't have cared less. I was skiing, at last.

Iona was keeping a close watch, shouting inaudible words of encouragement as I picked up speed.

'Turn right, turn right!' she bellowed as I headed towards the edge of the slope.

'Lean on the outside leg and tilt slightly down the hill,' I had been instructed earlier on.

Now, there's no two ways about it, leaning on your outside leg and tilting downhill does not make any sense at all but I tried it. However I failed to turn far enough and, to my immediate horror, found myself catapulting straight downhill.

With my speed picking up to a pace that (to me) felt worthy of World Alpine Ski Champion Marcel Hirscher, Iona's voice a distant cry behind me, I stopped my breakneck descent to certain injury, if not death, the only way I knew how, hurling my body into

the snow like a ship weighing anchor.

One ski had parted company from my boot a good 10 metres behind me while the other was wedged beneath my twisted body.

Runs two and three finished in similar style. But then, lo and behold, it started getting easier. By day two, my body aching and my mind weary, I made it down the slope without a fall.

Learning to ski in adulthood is as unnatural a process as I've ever experienced. But the white stuff on our doorstep has to be tried and, once you've got the hang of it, there's no better feeling!



STANDING TALL: Rob with pals

December 21st - January 3rd 2017

Fit for a king

EVEN Spain's royal family can't resist a skiing session on these beautiful slopes.

Despite having the means to splash out on more expensive resorts, the family have chosen time and time again to somewhere closer to home for their family's snowy adventures.

In May of this year, the CEO of Sierra Nevada Ceturza announced that King Felipe VI had accepted the honorary presidency of the World



ROYAL APPROVAL: King Felipe loves Sierra Nevada

Championships which are to be held there this coming year.

He follows in the footsteps of his father, Juan Carlos I, who held the same honorary position for the World Alpine Ski of 1996.

Other Spanish household names known to visit the slopes include bullfighting brothers Fran and Cayetano Rivera, who like to unwind at La Bodeguita and La Tinaja for a taste of apres ski.

THE BIG 3-0

The Sierra Nevada's biggest skiing school EOE has reached its 30th birthday

WHEN he first arrived on the slopes at the age of ten, it took well over an hour to get there from Granada and the ski lifts comprised one stretch of wire that dragged you about 200 metres.

"It was pretty artisanal and rudimentary to say the least," explains ski veteran Juan Luis Hernandez, who frequently came up to ski with his six older brothers.

"You couldn't rent skis and there was hardly anywhere to eat or stay, but there was something very special about being in the mountains," he continues.

He had soon bought his own set of wooden skis - which he still has today - and in the year 1969 came up to start his first job.

Some four decades later and the amiable Granadino is now running Spain's biggest ski school, the Escuela Oficial de Esqui, which is bigger than most of its counterparts in the Pyrenees.

Now, hitting its 30th anniversary this season, its dozens of instructors counts on numerous languages and hundreds of years of experience.

"We have around a dozen different nationalities and everyone is required to speak English," he stresses from his office by Borreguiles ski lift overlooking the resort's main square.

"In fact if they can't speak English we don't hire them."

This has become increasingly important



LEGEND: EOE boss Juan Luis with his first set of skis

over the last few decades with British being the second most important group of visitors to the slopes, alongside the Portuguese.

"And on top of this you have all the other northern Europeans who all speak English," he adds.

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THE CUSTOMER IS KING



IT is a classic family business.

Jose Antonio Lopez and his wife Montse are often joined by their two children at weekends when the resort gets busy.

But thankfully it's not too far, the family living in near-by La Zubia, just at the foot of the slopes.

In an excellent location, their shop Skisol has some of the best quality skis and snowboards to rent and customer service is the key to its success.

"We always put the customer first and have plenty of returning business," explains Jose Antonio, who has been renting out skis in the Sierra Nevada for 35 years. Best of all, the prices have not gone up for a decade, "And we don't just rent out any old equipment... we buy at least 50 new pairs of boots alone each season," he adds.

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EXPERIENCED: Skisol team and (left) happy clients



Telemark has been catering for families and adventurers on the snow since 1989, writes Jon Clarke

White World

THERE are not many inches of the Sierra Nevada that Luis Casanova and partner Jesus Fernandez

don't know.

Be it hiking, biking, cross country or off-piste skiing, they have slipped, slid or skidded down the lot for the last three decades.

Celebrated for their famous off-piste mountain adventures that last from a morning to two days, they are perhaps the most experienced and wisest pair in the Sierra Nevada.

But their ski and snowboard school, set up in 1989, is now focusing very

much on families and children.

"We have realised that our knowledge and know-how is perfect for families who want the perfect personal one to one skiing break," explains Casanova, who spends half the year in the resort and the other half in Africa.

The company also still runs amazing wilderness trips that literally end up in another world... the charming cobbled villages of the Genil valley, in the Alpujarras.

These one or two-day adventures take you through deep off-piste snow onto narrow mountain tracks.

"We try to put an emphasis on ecol-



FAMILY FRIENDLY: Skiing is for all ages and (left) Luis from Telemark



ogy and nature and it is impressive to see the typically old farmhouses in the area and how little they have changed," adds Luis, in perfect English.

"It is a real, fun adventure, something you will not forget.

"Best of all, a team of mules ends up helping to bring your stuff back to Pradollano," he adds.

The day trip costs just €100 per person and includes transport and lunch.

Another popular pastime for those,

who don't fancy risking life and limb on the pistes, is to have a day of cross-country skiing on two or three well established paths around the resort.

"It is great fitness and you do get to enjoy the fabulous views and nature at the same time," he adds.

The company can also help organise hard-core uphill climbing for mountaineers to a half day soft snow walking trip with snow rackets.

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BIG AND TALENTED: Rafa's team is one of the largest in the Sierra Nevada



With his restaurants **La Bodeguita** and **La Tinaja** and now a shop, **Snow Dream**, **Rafa Vigo** is one of the key entrepreneurs on the slopes

Top of the slopes

HE had been a visitor to the slopes for many decades when he decided to make a go at working in the Sierra Nevada.

Now dynamo Rafael Vigo, 38, is in charge of one of the resort's key restaurants, a wine bar next door, as well as a new shop. With nearly two dozen staff, thousands of clients each week and a number of big celebrity fans, including bullfighters Fran and Cayetano Rivera, he is understandably a busy man.

"We are probably the biggest restaurant in the Sierra Nevada," Rafa explains.

"At 400m2, we have a lot of space and we can serve over 200 people at once between the two restaurants in high season."

Based in the resort for eight years – and a weekend visitor for many decades – Rafa has owned and revived several restaurants in Pradolano. Having been 'brought up on the beach' in Almunecar, he applied the relaxed mentality to all his successful establishments, combining style with top quality food.

Overlooking the hustle and bustle of Pradolano's main square, it is little surprise that many of the resort's most famous après skiers make a beeline for this bar/restaurant



double act.

Like yin and yang, both offer a fabulous range of dishes and wines, with the fun part thrown in for free.

La Bodeguita alpine bar, with its beer barrel tables and magnificent pizza oven, is usually buzzing late into the night, while upmarket La Tinaja has one of the most sophisticated menu and wine lists in the resort.

The terrace at La Bodeguita is the perfect spot to luxuriate with a beer or glass of wine at lunchtime or at sunset.

Its outdoor braziers and attentive staff do a great job at making you comfortable and the excellent dishes include baked goat's cheese with caramelized apples and the amazing acorn-fed jamon and scrambled eggs with eels, prawns and potatoes.

La Tinaja has a more chic, formal vibe and a stunning mezzanine level with breathtaking views across the resort through floor-to-ceiling windows.

The most-ordered dish is charcoal grilled steak, served with green peppers and chunky chips.

The pizzas are also a hit, with Rafa's favourite a tomato, mozzarella, ham and egg concoction.

For the sweet toothed, the mango and custard apple mousse is a refreshing alternative to the decadent turrón cheesecake on a brownie base.

"We keep an incredibly high standard, with uninterrupted service from 1pm until 1am, at least 120 wines, so we can cater for everyone," Rafa continues.

He's right... even on a quiet day, this is the place to be seen and attracts people from all walks of life.

As well as welcoming celebs like the Rivera brothers, Rafa has even played host to Franco's millionaire descendants, the Bordiu family, not to mention the bosses of the Melia hotel chain.

"We're like a family here, and there's always a great atmosphere," he says.



FAMOUS FACES: Brothers Cayetano and Fran Rivera

Snow dream

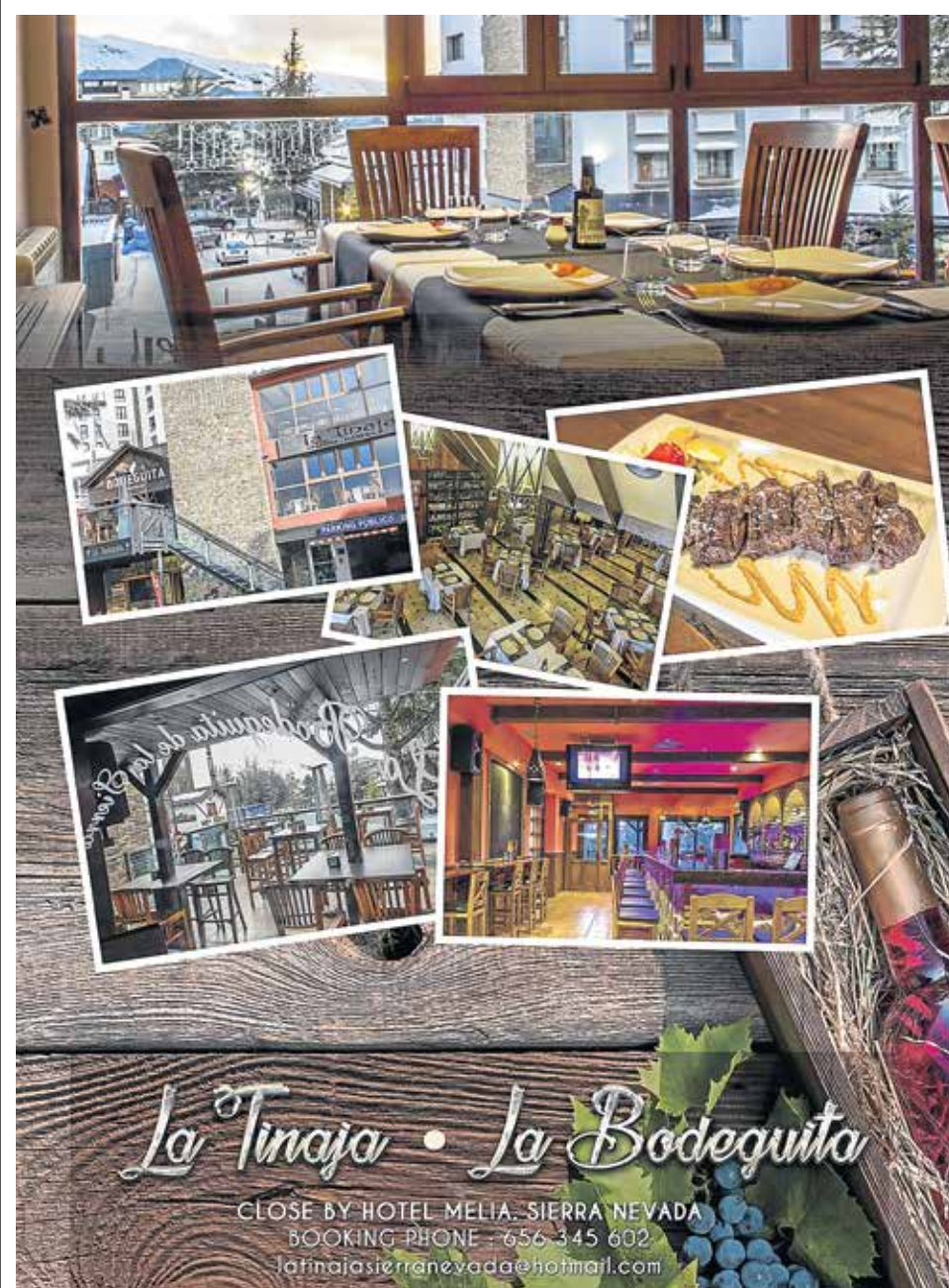
It is the latest new ski shop to open on the slopes, but **Snow Dream** focuses very much on fashion.

The new venture of **Rafa Vigo** features a big range of stylish outfits from many brands, including **Volcom** and **Head**. In the heart of the **Melia** hotel it is also stocking top of the range skis.

"I saw a great opportunity here, in such a good location," explains **Rafa**, who conveniently runs his two restaurants right next door.

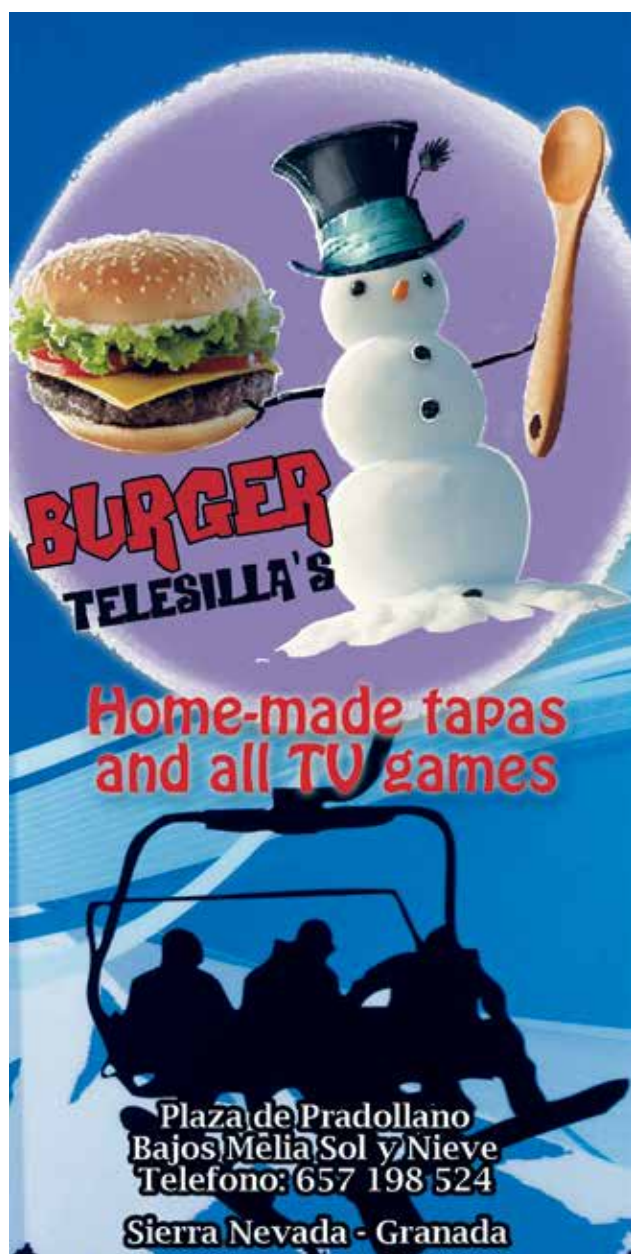


STYLISH: Rafa's new shop **Snow Dream** and **Rafa** (top)



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CARVE UP!



Snowboarders are well catered for on the Granada slopes, writes Chloe Glover



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LOCALS boast of its cream snow.

So it is no wonder the Sierra Nevada is a Mecca for thrill-seeking snowboarders, who come in their droves to take advantage of a soft and sumptuous ride.

For beginners and experts alike, Spain's highest resort is a glorious setting.

With its stunning scenery and top-class facilities, it is no surprise that it has won the bid to host the Freestyle Ski and Snowboard World Championships in March 2017.

One of the best places to catch them in action will be at Super-Park Sulayr, Europe's largest freestyle snowboard park.

Sitting at an altitude of 2,700 metres on Borreguiles, the famed snowboarding park houses the country's biggest permanent half-pipe.

Measuring an astonishing 165 metres in length with a height of six metres, the special design flattens the snow on the side of the half-pipe so boarders can jump on both sides.

Rookies will also find a place to carve their niche in the resort, thanks to the gentle gradients of central station, Borreguiles. Here, lifts deposit snowboarders on a smooth

and well-groomed area

they can hone their skills. Many professional snowboarders class Sierra Nevada as their home and a favourite place to specialise just in snowboarding.

These include the South Star, where Jeff Jones, his brother's passion for snow with running their own shop.

"It's a fantastic place for snowboarders, one of the best in Spain, in my opinion," he explains. "It has grown a lot in the last few years and we are always



THRILLSEEKERS:
Grinding and carving around the Sulayr park

December 21st - January 3rd 2017



BREATH-TAKING: Perfect snow and stunning views in the Sierra Nevada



NO EASY SPORT



THERE haven't always been gondolas, magic carpets and chairlifts to escort skiers and snowboarders up the slopes.

Back in the day, the only way to get to the top was to walk, or call in the help of a donkey!

Up until 1969, when the two main lifts, Borreguiles and Parador were built, the burro taxi was the best way up the hill.

The ski resort dates from 1912 when Spain's oldest ski club, the Sierra Nevada Society, was founded. It started to grow seriously in popularity from 1964 when lift pass company Cetursa was launched and a regular bus service came in.



All about Sierra Nevada

POCKET-FRIENDLY RESORT

THE Sierra Nevada is incredibly good value, blasting its international competition out of the water. A day ski pass is €47, while Colorado resort Beaver Creek charges a mind-boggling €131 per day, Whistler in Canada is €91 and Switzerland's Zermatt can set you back €92. And that's before ski-wear, accommodation and food is also great value, where French resorts can demand silly

money for the most bog standard of spaghetti Bolognese.

In the Sierra Nevada, the Spanish ethos of delicious food and alcohol at highly reasonable prices is exemplified across the resort. Xavi at Tito Tapas and Rafa at La Bodeguita are hospitable bosses with no sign of the ice queen reception to be expected in swankier resorts, and the Granada 'free tapas with your

drink' tradition exists in most establishments.

Try Tito Tapas' brie parcels and the goat's cheese with caramelised apple at La Bodeguita... before washing it down with a comforting, velvety hot chocolate on tap at Mama Goye's.

It's not just the food, drink and accommodation that are reasonable – the warm Spanish welcome sets them apart.



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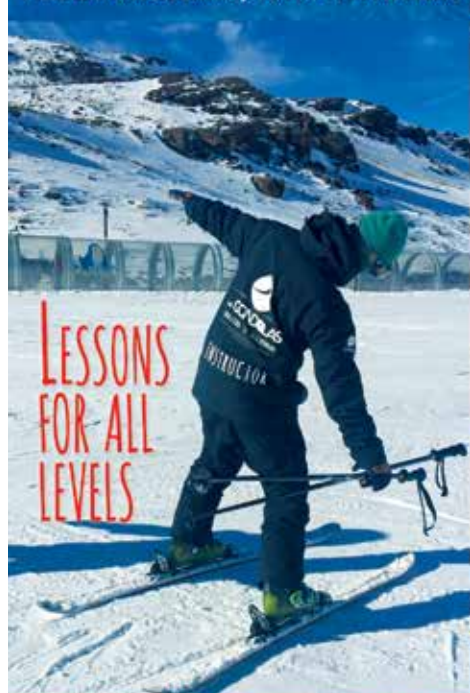
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Slope off to Granada



STUNNING: Alhambra views

When in the Sierra Nevada, don't bypass the provincial capital, writes Laurence Dollimore

As the last Moorish stronghold in Western Europe and one of the world's oldest cities, tourists flock from far and wide to see Granada's spectacular medieval sites.

For Sierra Nevada skiers, it's just at the bottom of the mountain road.

And if you really want to get to know this Andalusian gem like a local, ditch the pricey bus tours and let your intuition lead the way. Start at the stunning Alhambra, one of the most visited monuments in Spain with gardens most horticulturists can only dream of. (If you want a tour, it's best to pre-book.)

From here, walk down towards the city to explore the narrow cobbled streets adorned with spice stores and drum-playing hippies.

En route, marvel at the grandiose cathedrals and churches which leave you wondering 'how did they build that?', before exploring the beautiful, narrow ascending streets of the Albayzín, and the tumbling white-walled house gardens of the Realejo quarter.

Once you reach the Mirador de San Nicolas, the steep climb is made more than worth it, offering a bird's eye view of the city and the Alhambra, a scene unrivalled on a bluesky day.

So whether you stop off on your way up to the slopes or drop-in on your way home, be sure to spend a couple of hours exploring this elegant and edgy city.



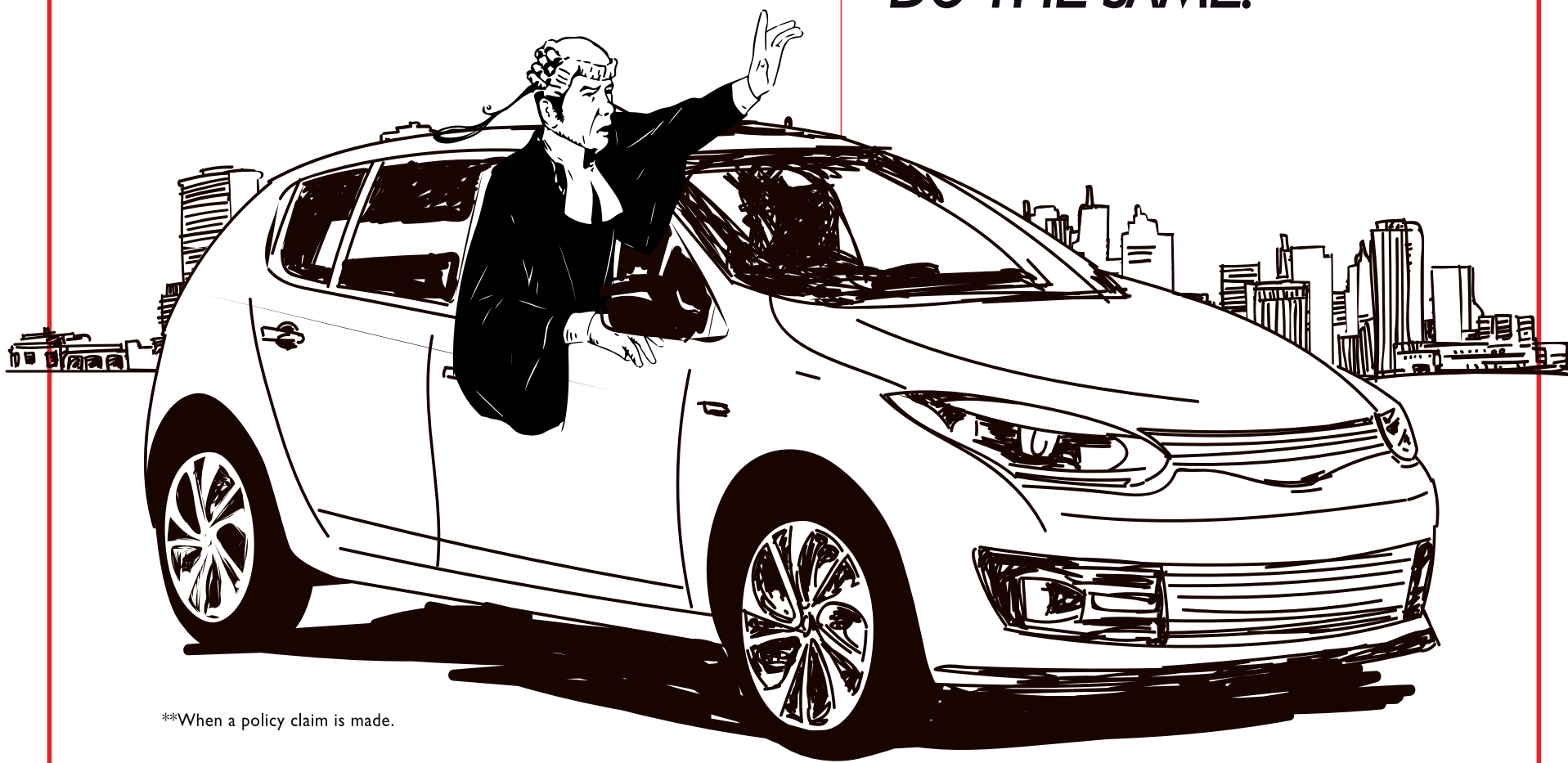
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Brits on the piste!

It's two decades since intrepid expats Giles Birch and Jonathan Buzzard started working in the Sierra Nevada, writes Jon Clarke

WANT to find the cream of British skiing talent in the Sierra Nevada?

Well look no further than seminal Crescendo bar at the foot of the slopes, where Jonathan Buzzard and Giles Birch met over two decades ago.

This is their second office and where you will find them propping up the bar after a hard day's teaching on the slopes, which they know like a fox in a fox hole.

Step back to 1996, a boom time in Spain, and Giles was looking for the ideal transport rep to help him grow his travel business, working with the likes of Neilson Ski alongside First Choice and Thompsons, that had just launched in Granada.

Jonathan had all the right traits with his long flashers mac, 'big hair' and a friendly, outgoing persona.

"I had no idea what was going on but

had been told that Crescendo was the place to find the Brits and the reps-in-the-know," he recalls.

"Next thing in walks Jonathan with just the right attitude and he was soon helping me deal with the three to four flights

we regularly dealt with on a Sunday."

The pair are still working together, collectively running the extremely successful British Ski Center from their base near the resort.

Great mates, they both now teach, as well as sort out holidays for hundreds of clients each year.

"Of course things are completely different to back then," explains Jonathan, who lived in Marbella in the golden years before it was ruined by corrupt leader Jesus Gil.

"Sierra Nevada used to see in thousands of foreigners every week, but after a couple of dry years in the 1980s the resort's reputation suffered badly

and things all began to change.

"Luckily the snow came back, albeit not yet this year, but these days it is all independent travellers and the agencies have all but disappeared."

Of course there have been some bad years such as 1995 when Jonathan recalls cycling up Borreguiles run on a mountain bike in shorts on Christmas Day. This year however, is one of the best. "But generally it is as good as most

other international resort and the range of skiing and schools is hard to beat," explains Giles, who is now in his benchmark 21st season in Granada.

Since arriving he has married (a Portuguese girl), had three children and taught literally hundreds of clients.

So what makes the Sierra Nevada so special, according to him?

One aspect is the length of the season. We start in late November and stay

open until early May while other resorts don't open until mid December and end their season in April."

This is partly due to the resort's altitude and the quality of the snow which is constantly worked on during the night.

"That's why you'll never see slush even in the latter part of the season," he adds.

Visit www.britishskicenter.co.uk for more info.



DECADE DUO: Jonathan and Giles



ON AND OFF THE SLOPES: Team in the bar and on their skis



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PLATING UP: Hearty fare at Casablanca and La Mar Sala

Sierra Nevada has so much more than raclette and gluvine, writes Jon Clarke

Munching for moguls

WHERE TO EAT

If you were thinking that all the Sierra Nevada had to offer was raclette and gluvine, think again.

The depth of quality and variety of restaurants in Pradolano is almost as good as nearby Granada and as good as many popular towns around the region.

Every year new restaurants open on the slopes, making the existing band of eateries up their game.



Few places show this improvement as well as **Ci Vediamo**, which is nearly a decade old.

Run by a hip young team under Stevie Silva, a professional snowboarder, and his girlfriend Luna Coronado, every year a raft of new exciting dishes are added to the menu.

The most exciting this season is his trio of cerviches,

each with its own unique flavour, and including my favourite of razor-sliced scallops in a Bloody Mary sauce.

On a Michelin-starred trip, you will also enjoy a tartare of prawns and a sashimi of tuna, not to mention fabulous duck rolls with ginger, guacamole, tuna and soy sauce.

And let's not forget the 'gambas pil pil' hamburgers, the Nero spaghetti with champagne sauce and king prawns, and some of the best pizzas around, including the original Iberian ham and baby broad beans number.

The wine list is also original, hand picked by Stevie and with some exclusive rarities, such as the Fonte dei oro, which only produces 700 bottles a year, and at 18 euros a snip. Further plaudits go to Luis and Javier at **Tito Luigi**, who keep improving their two Italian joints, in line with their hip opening of **Tito Tapas**, two years ago.

It's a cool spot with great food and wine and perfectly complements their other places,



PALS: Team at Ci Vediamo, while (left) two cerviches and (below) Antorcha

which are always packed at night, serving up fantastic food, including pizzas, salads and pasta dishes, with my current top pick: the amazing squid-ink spaghetti with prawns.

In particular punters love the historic 'cave' at the back, which counts dozens of famous guests including the former king. The photos are there to prove it.

Another long term fixture is **Bodega Casablanca** run by Jose Carlos Villanueva, who grew up on the slopes, with his father opening one of the first hostals in the 1960s.

The historic photos add to the atmosphere (as does a framed Olive Press article!) and the heart-warming soul food is always excellent, and includes stews, lentils as well as prawns wrapped in potato with a soya mayonnaise



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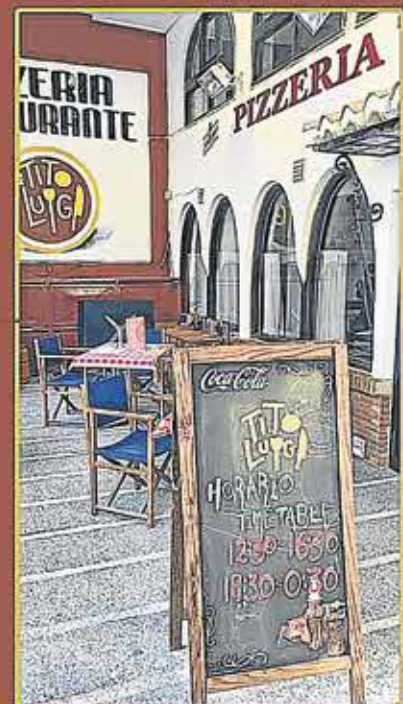
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All about Sierra Nevada



CHUMS: Javier and Luis at Tito Luigi

Continues from previous page

and lovely lamb chops with whisker-thin wild asparagus. As stalwarts go, few top busy **Antorcha**, which sits by the Kenia Nevada hotel.

Run by Antonio and Maite for a decade, each table gets its own 'sausage tree', while its speciality of the house is the 'hot and spicy platter' on which you can cook your own rump steaks, up to 400gr. Newer and really leading the charge food-wise is **La Mar Sala**, where Carlos has created an ambient spot, perfect for tapas and wines by the glass. This prime spot by the Melia hotel is normally filled to the rafters and counts on some excellent wines by the glass and the very best seafood from Motril, including boquerones, cigalas and conchas finas. A genuine find.

Meanwhile, meat-lovers will seriously rate **La Muralla**, run by brothers Luciano and Gonzalo, which has some of the resort's best tapas and wines by the glass. Apart from the amazing steaks, a real highlight are the 'tostas', which come in various guises and a milhoja of foie gras. And don't forget the brothers' other bustling spot **Las Gondolas**, right in the heart of the town and perfect for some apres ski light bites, a hot drink or a beer.

The cool sounds playing to the terrace attract a cool crowd and you will struggle to find a seat on many days. Another excellent place overlooking the slopes is **Tia Maria**, which has a good mix of dishes and is a great place for break-



TASTY: A tapa at Muralla and (right) chef at Vertical



ORIGINAL: Telesilla Burger and (right) Carlos at Tia Maria

fast. Run by Carlos, the brother of Tito Luigi's Javier, this is an institution and place to while away the day.

For coffee, breakfast, and in fact just about everything, **Vertical** is hard to be beaten and also has a great range of snacks and light bites, including hot dogs for the British clientele.

For seafood look no further than **La Lonja**, which is a great place to eat seafood and the selection of marisco is impressive and there are always fresh lobsters waiting to be cooked. Three decades serving skiers, boss Antonio began life as a waiter in Granada, and counts another restaurant in Sanlucar de Barrameda and unsurprisingly stocks its famous langoustines.

Bodegas Mazon is also a real gem, tucked away at the back of Edificio Mont Blanc (see box right) and with an amazing wood oven and the most authentic ski resort ambience. Next door, **Bar Ski** will not disappoint if you want to have the real mccooy, local Granadino food and banter.

This is THE place to hang out and have fun and the owner, Michi, is, as they say in Spanish 'a crack'.

For fast food and hamburgers - and football on a big screen, including Premiership games - look no further than **Telesilla Burger**, which is a popular place for locals and expats alike. Cleverly designed using ski lifts as tables, you can get everything here at excellent prices, thanks to clever boss Maria Rosales Donaire, who does not miss a trick.



BOYS: At Barski

WHERE TO STAY

Snow dreaming

IT is hard to describe Pradollano as an authentic mountain village. But, with a metre of snow on the ground and the sun finally out, it certainly has its charms. There are lots of places to stay but easily one of the most charming has got to be the authentic Hotel Kenia Nevada (www.kenianevada.com), which is well located near the centre of town and open most of the year.

Run by the friendly Don Pedro - who used to ski for the country as a youngster - it is clean, well run and serves up one of the best breakfasts in Spain.

It also has a gym and spa, with an in-house masseur, and plenty of communal areas, filled with charming old furniture.

If you are looking for somewhere to rent then Sierra Nevada Alquileres (www.alquileressierranevada.es) is a good bet, with the company having over 100 places on its books. Boss Antonio is knowledgeable and friendly.



DREAM DIGS: At Kenia Nevada

Marvellous Mazon

IT'S toasty warm and I am being serenaded by Iglesias and Serrat over a warm caldo soup and some splendid anchovies from Santona.

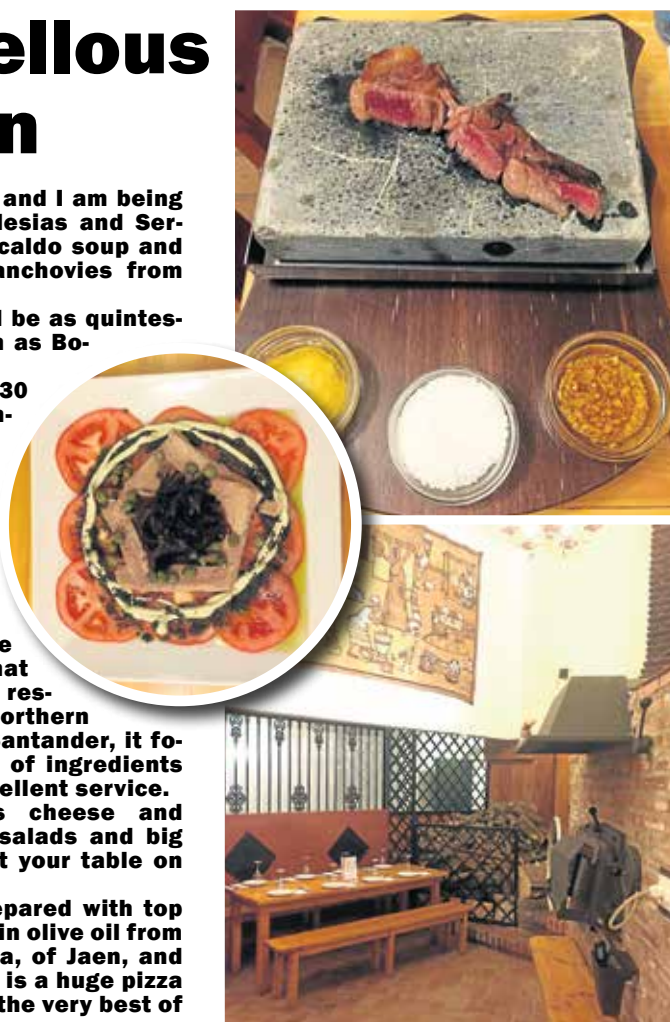
Few places could be as quintessentially Spanish as Bodegas Mazon.

Still going after 30 years, this wonderful hidden spot opens out from a tiny front door into a palace of veritable good taste.

Quality

Owned by the same family that runs a sister restaurant in the northern Spanish city of Santander, it focuses on quality of ingredients tradition and excellent service. Expect fabulous cheese and ham, wonderful salads and big steaks cooked at your table on a hot stone.

Everything is prepared with top quality extra virgin olive oil from the Sierra Magina, of Jaen, and to top it all there is a huge pizza oven, serving up the very best of Italian-style pizzas.



- Restaurant - BODEGAS MAZÓN

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