

Visit once and remain enchanted forever, the favourite 1960s package tour excursion still has mountains of charm writes Chloe Glover

# Magical



**A**SAPPHIRE sea twinkles from far below as lilting Andalusian guitars accompany flamenco dancers in their impassioned *bailes* in the grand plaza. The *al fresco* fiesta has been a free attraction in Mijas Pueblo every Wednesday at noon since anyone can remember. Everywhere along the flowerpot-adorned streets there are snapshots of typical village life: donkey taxis waiting patiently for their next fare, kids kicking balls, gaggles of elderly gents gently snoozing on shady benches.

Only a few kilometres downhill, the village's sibling coastal resorts of La Cala, Riviera del Sol and Calahonda create a different buzz with their trendy beach bars, fast improving restaurants and vibrant nightlife, adding up to a diverse destination with multiple layers of appeal.

The local population of 87,000 is equally diverse, swelled by a multicultural potage of expats who have come to enjoy a new life in the year-round microclimate provided by the towering Sierra de Mijas mountains.

## Enchanting

Mijas Costa, a 12-kilometre beach strip stretched between the borders of Fuengirola and Marbella, is a magnet for tourists and holiday home owners. Chris Tarrant and Ryan Giggs are frequent visitors, while Victoria Beckham discovered its spice from spending childhood summer holidays in Riviera. Lorraine Kelly and comedian Stan Boardman also have homes here.

But it is the whitewashed village in the hills where most day trippers begin their discovery of Mijas, a village steeped in heritage and culture.

Today the ancient Greek and Roman hill fortress welcomes an annual invasion of visitors from all over the world thanks to its timeless charm and enviable location, half an hour from Malaga and a short drive from the major tourist resorts of Fuengirola, Torremolinos and Marbella.

Spending just half an hour in its meandering maze of Moorish streets, where terraced restaurants with tiny darkened doorways lead onto expansive sun-filled patios with mountain views, is enough to understand its allure.

"There are so many reasons to stay longer," says Rudi Van Der Zalm, owner of Tuk Tuk Spain whose nippy three-wheel transporters now offer an alternative to the famous donkey taxis.

How right he is. As well as the world's first

**Continues on next page**

HIGH LIFE: Mijas village sits 400 metres up in the Sierra de Mijas (photo by Jon Clarke)

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# All about Mijas

April 12th - April 25th 2016

## From front page

100% electric Tuk Tuks, Mijas boasts Spain's only rectangular bull ring, original works by Picasso and Gaudi and, something no other resort can surely lay claim to, a miniature of the Last Supper painted onto a single grain of rice. Couple that with the friendly welcome from *baristas* and shopkeepers and if you've never visited Mijas before you'll wonder why not. The beautifully-kept main square of Plaza Virgen de la Pena is a good place to start exploring. A few strides away is the fascinating old village flour mill. Chiselled into the rock face, a faithfully reconstructed workshop with original machinery sits inside. A few paces down a slope lies the Virgen de la Pena grotto, a rugged little chapel excavated in the rock in 1548. Legend has it that it was here the Virgin Mary appeared to two children, bringing joy to the villagers. And it is impossible to miss the bright yellow building that houses the Carromato de Mijas museum.

## Weird

Once the private collection of hypnotist Juan Elegido Millán, this weird and wonderful treasure trove of miniature items gathered from around the globe makes Ripley's *Believe It or Not* seem tame. Take your eye to the magnifying glasses to admire everything from a microscopic version of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* and a painting of Abe Lincoln on a pinhead to a bal-

# IMMENSE



**STUNNING:** Mijas pueblo is home to the stars

lerina carved into a wooden toothpick. You'll also feel good to know your €3 entrance fee will go to Afesol, a Costa del Sol charity caring for people with mental health issues. Venture deeper into the village to find the non-conformist bull ring. "There was just no space to give it the traditional circular shape," explains Rudi who shares the villagers' pride in the rectangular arena and all the village's kooky at-

tractions. Mijas is also big on fiestas, both new and traditional. The pretty white Immaculate Conception church is the starting point for the popular Semana Santa religious parades while the open air auditorium opposite hosts al fresco concerts throughout the summer. The brief thigh-burning walk up to the Moorish tower is *vale la pena*, as the Spanish say, for 360 degree coast to mountain views

although photogenic vistas can be found at every twist and turn of the village streets. The picture postcard *calle*s were inspired by the north African settlers to keep the heat of the Mediterranean sun at bay and it's all too easy to lose hours discovering their devious charms. But you haven't 'done' Mijas until you've visited its ethnographic museum - a lovingly put-together two-floor exhibition that guides visitors through the village's past - and the Contemporary Art Centre for those Picassos and Gaudis. Those who have the energy should also take advantage of the numerous walking routes



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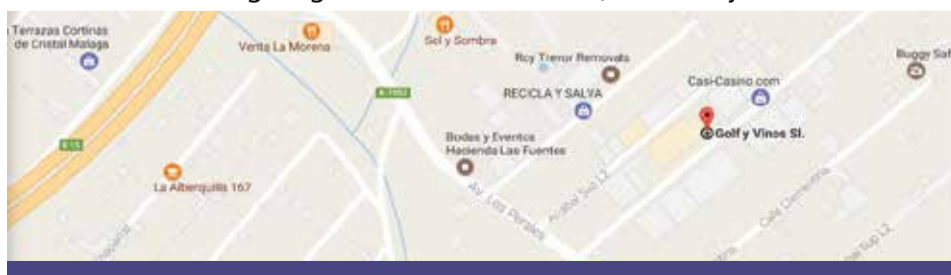


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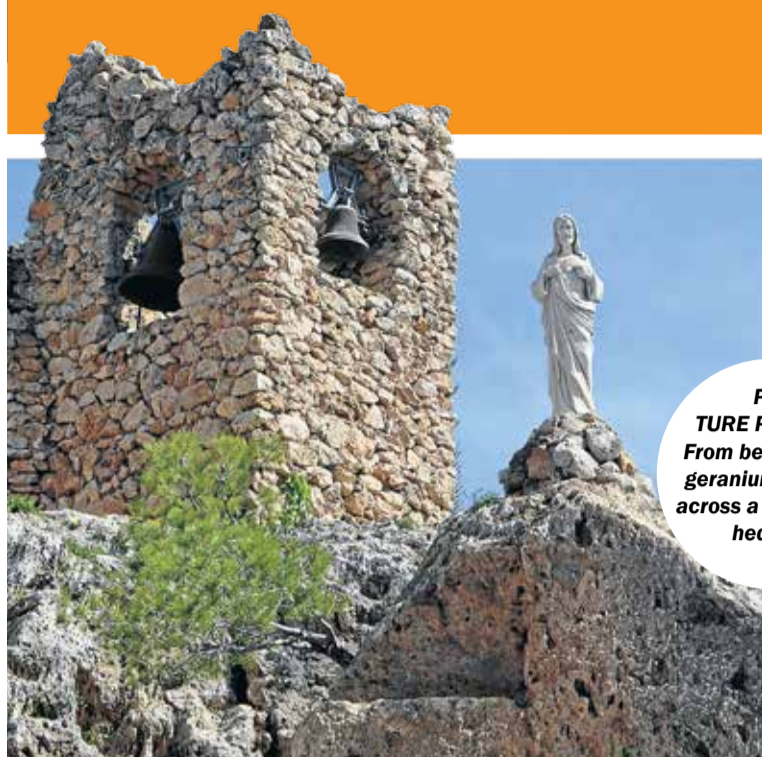
**RACE TO THE TOP:** The tuk tuks get visitors to the best views

# A WHEELY GOOD TIME

THE donkeys of Mijas are famous the world over. But Thai tuk tuks are the new way to scale the pueblo's vertiginous cobbled slopes, thanks to one enterprising local family. Rudi van der Zalm is one part of Tuk Tuks Spain, one of the only companies in the country to offer guided tours by the electric six-seater scooter carts. "We set up two years ago," said Rudi, 54, from the Netherlands. His family take people on 35-minute, eight

kilometre tours. "We saw them first while on holiday in Amsterdam and thought it would be a great idea for Mijas because they can scale the steep streets that the donkeys can't get to. "My daughter Miriam (24) took the idea on as a university project but it has blossomed into a real business with the help of Natalie (26), my other daughter," adds Rudi, who lives in the village with his Spanish wife Encarnacion.

April 12th - April 25th 2016



**PIC-  
TURE PERFECT:**  
From bell tower to  
geraniums spread  
across a white-washed wall



from town that zigzag up to the mountains and down to the coast.

"I feel so much pride for my village," says a beaming Rosalia Villatoro Alarcon, an ethnographic museum volunteer who has lived her whole life in Mijas.

"It has kept its character despite its growth in popularity and has not lost that neighbourhood feel which makes it such a friendly and enchanting place." Mijas is mouthwatering too. Multicultural cuisine is served alongside Andalu-



sian specialities in this very international pueblo, where Argentinian and Canadian restaurateurs vie for trade with the local Spanish spots. You can even make your own chocolate at the curiously-named Mayan Monkey Mijas, the only chocolate factory and shop for miles around - and a fantastically ethical one at that.

"It's the most fun job in the world and it's thanks to Mijas's continued appeal that I have it", said co-founder Jason Godwin, originally from Glossop.

He shares his passion for chocolate with tours and workshops and claims the Mijas

mountain air gives it a distinctive flavour.

One of his shop staff, Claudia, regaled us in a brilliant Blackburn accent with the story of how her mum found her forever home in Mijas after meeting her Malagueño husband.

"She was a tour guide and met him while he was working on a reception desk of a hotel nearby," says Claudia. "She fell in love with both him and Mijas at the same time."

Even if you're not tempted to put down roots yourself, you can take a piece of the village away with you from the many delis and speciality shops selling everything from exotically-flavoured honeys to pretty porcelain plates.

In a more modern and sophisticated way, the scene on the coast

is just as eclectic. One of the most profitable destinations on the Costa del Sol, Mijas Costa's swanky seaside urbanisations and hotels all offer sandy beaches and a great range of restaurants and water sports including jet skis, water-skiing, wakeboarding, windsurfing and parapenting. Las Lagunas on the fringes of Fuengirola offers retail therapy for shopaholics while the small, white-washed fishing village of La Cala has morphed into a popular resort town with over 20,000 residents, offering a complimentary if strikingly different charm to its antique sister pueblo in the hills.

Visit once and remain enchanted forever, Mijas is still one of the brightest stars on the Costa del Sol.

## Mijas by numbers

**12,500** - trees to be planted in the El Calvario area

**150,000** - Japanese tourists due to visit Mijas this year with tour operator Hankyu

**43** - Picasso's ceramic works in the Contemporary Arts Centre Mijas (CACMijas), the second most important collection of this type in the world

**254** - UNESCO world heritage sites, 255 if Mijas' application is successful

**11,000** - registered Britons living in the whole of the Mijas area

**2,920** - hours of sunshine enjoyed every year (243 days of sun)

**82,184** - the total population of Mijas

**2,920** - hours of sunshine per year (243 days of solid sunshine)

## Laura Duckett meets the British software entrepreneur trading in 'mega-bites' of sustainable chocolate

Making chocolate in a Mediterranean climate sounds like a sticky business.

But for Peak District-born Jason Godwin, the gamble he took five years ago has certainly paid off.

Today, from the tiny factory located in the heart of beautiful Mijas Pueblo, an extensive range of chocolate under the brand name of Mayan Monkey Mijas is distributed throughout Spain and Europe.

With its 'Made in Mijas' stamp, Mayan Monkey Mijas' chocolate is fast becoming as much of a must-buy as Jabugo jamon or Jerezano sherry.

Chocoholics from all over the world flock to the 'Happiness Lab' for tours, and to dabble in the art of making this sweet treat from scratch.

Jason puts the success of Mayan Monkey Mijas down to the quality (gastronomic and ethical) of its creatively-flavoured hand-crafted wares. In addition to the chocolate, this micro-company also makes ice cream, gluten-free baked wares and sugarfree treats, as well as cacao-based skincare.

The lip-smacking list of chocolate flavours include organic bee pollen, Mijas honey, salted almond and local lemons & oranges.

Another key selling point is Jason and co-founder and partner Eli McCarthy's ECO-centric philosophy.

"There are more slaves in the world today than at any other time in the past", Jason tells us



as we tuck into some dulcet dark chocolate buttons made with organic cacao. The beans used in this chocolate are fully traceable to farming communities in the Dominican Republic and Peru. The Ivory coast produces 70% of the world's cacao, most of which is used in the mass-production of chocolate. The dark side of this factoid is that the Ivorian cacao sector is characterised by exploitative working conditions, including indentured adult labour and even child slave labour. This is what allows most supermarket chocolate to be sold at artificially low prices.

Jason tells us that there are almost two million child slaves working in the the Ivory Coast's cacao plantations. Most children are trafficked from neighbouring countries so, because they don't speak Ivorian, they are unable to ask for help. Needless to say, the younger the child, the less resources he or she will have to understand what has happened, and to figure out how to get back home.

"Within 10 days of finding this out, we had changed our suppliers", Jason tells us.

"If the origin is not printed on the label, the majority of the time the chocolate will have originated in



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QUESTION: What is the "The Dark Side of Chocolate" about?  
All four winners will be notified by email by May 5.

western Africa," he goes on to explain. As part of an ongoing sourcing

mission focused on quality, Mayan Monkey Mijas has started to explore new supply avenues,



**CHOCCY HEAVEN:** Worker prepares the ovens, bars for sale (above) and OP girls Laura and Chloe with Jason



such as buying cacao beans that have been shipped from the Dominican Republic (the world's leading producer of organic cacao) to Europe aboard "Tres Hombrés", the Dutch sailboat - one of the very few engineless cargo ships in the world, and part of a new environmental growth movement known as "Fair Transport". Why a sail ship? Because commercial ships account for more sulphur dioxide pollutants than all the cars in the world, says Jason. And why from the Dominican Republic in particular? Because of the depth of flavour of their organic cacao beans and the farmers' fairer working conditions, he explains.

The beans are currently roasted in Amsterdam, pending refurbishment of a huge antique stone-

wheel mill (dating back to the 1890s), and a beautiful French coffee roaster, which is almost 100 years old.

The objective? "We want to make chocolate in a way that both reduces our carbon footprint and prioritizes the focus on flavour," says Jason. To this end, he and Eli are in the process of expanding the chocolate factory to include a "working museum" showcasing the production process of chocolate, its fascinating history, and the vital changes that are needed in order to ensure that the taste of chocolate is sweet not just for the consumer, but for everyone in the supply chain. For more information on ethically produced chocolate, visit: [YouTube: The Dark Side of Chocolate](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TheDarkSideofChocolate) - [www.slavefreechocolate.org](http://www.slavefreechocolate.org)

**French whiz in the kitchen Joffrey Charles is the latest celebrity chef adding gastro glam to La Cala's bubbling up culinary scene, writes Jon Clarke**

PRINCE Charles, Madonna and Kate Moss have already tasted a little bit of Joffrey.

But now everyone can sample the delights of French chef Joffrey Charles de Saint Georges (to use his grand full name) who has just opened a restaurant in La Cala.

Classy **Joffrey's Las Mimosas** is the realisation of a dream for the 27-year-old maestro who has gone into business with his vivacious partner and former Irish TV star, Lisa Burgess.

Despite having only opened its doors a month ago, it is already becoming the talk of the resort thanks to Joffrey's artistic flair and culinary passion.

"It's something we've always wanted to do together," said Lisa, who was the fashion expert for TV3's Ireland AM for a decade.

"Joffrey has been working as a chef since he was 15 in some of the best fine dining restaurants around Europe, including spells in Val D'Isere, Corsica, Dublin and London.

"He cooked for Prince Charles at a party of his in London and for Madonna and Kate Moss in Corsica.

"What Joffrey does is food art. His dishes look beautiful and he is so passionate about what he does."

It is this recent injection of flavour into La Cala that is further turning this coastal gem into a genuine gourmet hotspot.

There is a real buzz about the place, which is perhaps best epitomised by the wonderful early evening scene at classy



**HANGOUTS:** Jon Clarke with Elliott Wright, the scene at Pura Cepa and (right) Steven Saunders

# Ooh la la La Cala

wine bar **Pura Cepa** on the main drag.

Well-to-do Scandinavians rub shoulders with London hipsters, while Spanish foodies and Dutch *bon viveurs* debate the relative merits of the latest reserva from Toro or Somontano.

It is certainly no surprise to learn that owner Bernardo Diego Pullido (right), 31, has a number of vine-



yards of his own, one locally in Mijas no less and others in Ronda and even in Galicia, where he produces his own albarino Estrada Velho.

The winemaker, who studied the craft for five years, offers around 50 wines by the glass and also offers a decent mix of tapas.

An ambitious man he now plans to open a new sherry bar with no less than 300 wines by the glass just up the coast near Fuen-

girola. Called **Casa de Jerez** it will open in May.

Back in La Cala, the gourmet revolution continues at Steven Saunders excellent restaurant **Little Geranium**.

The former *Ready, Steady Cook* star has been cooking to a high level for decades and has served up for everyone from Lady Diana to Naomi Campbell.

With a very capable team, including a mix of Spanish, Nigerian and Ghanians, his dishes are spicy and rich and the

menu changes all the time.

This month, we tried a fantastic cauliflower soup with pumpkin seeds, along with a skillful anchovies escabeche that really got the taste buds going.

But it was the crispy duck slider with pomegranates and mayonnaise and chives that won the plaudits.

The place is run with genuine aplomb by beautiful wife Michelle, who handles the bookings and front of house, while Steven pops in and out of the kitchen with



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tips, advice and to doff his hat to customers, as well as pose up for the odd photo. Make sure to book.

Another famous local restaurateur who is not camera shy is Elliott Wright, he of TOWIE fame, at **Olivia's** on the beach front.

Already the star of his own show *Playa in Marbella*, it is little surprising that thousands of fans beat a trail to his door every month to say hello and get the obligatory picture with the amiable chap.

However, one must not be sidetracked from the main event; the cooking and the venue, which is beautifully designed, maximising light and sea views.

The kitchen itself is surprisingly good, with a great mix of dishes and plenty of oriental hits, inspired by Elliot's love of the Far East and his favourite restaurant in London, **Nobu**.

Last time I ate there I dived into a super starter of Maplewood smoked tuna, with Japanese tea noodles and organic black sesame with Wasabi foam.

There were scallops with lentils and dahl, pork spring rolls with shredded Asian vegetables, tempura prawns, and a great Miso cod, with pickled ginger imported from Japan.

Finally we had the pork belly, which comes out slightly spicy on a white platter, with cauliflower puree and Burgos black pudding.

And then there is more, with the addition of the fabulous northern European fish restaurant **the Blue Marlin**, just up the road in Torrenueva.

Almost unique to the coast, the fish here is unbelievably good with plenty of rich stews and dishes like seafood pasta, which is popular, not to mention the amazing clam chowder.

Run by Alison and Steve Hyatt, another couple, who have also appeared on a TV show *A New Life in the Sun* during their launch in the area.

They run a tight ship, if you'll excuse the pun, and everything works like clockwork from the time their first punters arrive around 6pm.

It is not really surprising, given that the pair ran restaurants back in Scotland, and chef Steve has worked in many places around the world and his family have been running inns as far back as 1760. Last but not least, no trip to La Cala would be complete without a meal at stunning **El Oceano**.

This amazing place right on the beach on the way towards Marbella has become one of the hippest, most luxurious hotels on the coast and has a brilliant restaurant to boot.

After a massive multi-million euro overhaul last year it is even more glamorous and the food is matched by the skills of new chef William Squires, 30, from Devon, who has worked around the world, including at Joel Valvason's seminal Aus-



**NEW TALENTS: El Oceano's Will Squires, Joffrey and (right) Allison and Steve Hyatt**



**QUALITY: Great shellfish at the seafood bar at Olivia's**

tralian restaurant.

The beef tartare is his tete de cuvee, marinated overnight, then rolled in peppercorns before being seared for 30 seconds and then rested in the fridge before being served.

I also liked the tempura prawns with wasabi, as well as the excellent scallops with ham, while my true winner was the original Manchego Aranchini, or rice balls seasoned with saffron.

"Things just keep getting better and better here in La Cala," explains local estate agent Emma Dellow, from La Cala Sales and Rentals. "**Olivia's** obviously made a big difference, and along with **Geranium** it has helped to up the game of the local Spanish places too.

"We really like local spots like **El Olivo** and **Albahaca**, which is run by a really nice older Spanish couple and the food is amazing."

**Hotel Carmen** owner Alvaro Corpas, 35, a local lad, agrees. "What I have noticed most is the big growth in variety and qual-



**NEW BROOM: Max at Jacqueline's**

ity and so much has to do with a better quality of tourist.

"All the place needs now is better nightlife so you don't have to go into Marbella or Fuengirola later after dinner."

Well, his wishes may about to finally come true, with the opening of a stylish new lounge bar **Jacqueline's**, in nearby Torrenueva.

Sitting right by the roundabout, about 100m from the beach, this is the brainchild of businessman Max Sustins, 27.

Full of great ideas, the place has a fabulous front terrace which will be the perfect place for cocktails, as well as pizzas, steaks and other dishes, and inside there is an amazing fully functioning nightclub.

"There is no doubt La Cala needs a place like this," says Max.

"Previously you had to go to Marbella or Fuengirola for a night out.

"Now you can come and visit us."

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## Star in the making!

By Chloe Glover

DYNAMIC duo Joffrey Charles and Lisa Burgess first met at a friend's chalet in Mont Blanc, deciding to head to the sun after a successful stint in Dublin.

"Joffrey had been working at the city's fine dining restaurant Marcel's but wanted to be his own boss, as did I after 10 years working for TV. So we decided to throw ourselves into the fire.

"We looked at many different destinations, from South Africa to France. The only thing we knew we wanted was somewhere in the sunshine.

"When we came to Spain we actually looked at Marbella first but when we came to La Cala fell in love with it straight away.

"It's very up and coming and is only 25 minutes from Malaga."

They acquired their venue last October, which is now almost completely unrecognisable from its previous guise as an old working men's cafe.

Since opening at the end of February, with Lisa's daughter Georgia as a waitress, their reputation has blossomed. "We've just been growing naturally by word of mouth," continues Lisa.

"Getting the restaurant open has been a real challenge and we've barely slept but the way things are going it's paying off.

"I will be happy just having a really good restaurant that does well but Joffrey already has his eyes fixed on getting a Michelin Star.

"I think it will take him two to three years but he is a real grafter and a believer, which is essential."



**JOFFREY: With wife Lisa**



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**GORGEOUS:** La Cala's enviable beaches and landmarks

**T**HESE days you would be hard pushed not to spot a famous face strolling along the boardwalk prom at La Cala de Mijas.

Celebrity restaurateurs like Elliott Wright of The Only Way is Essex and Playa in Marbella, plus TV chef Steven Saunders have made this pretty beach resort a magnet for the 'in' crowd.

Alongside a mix of well-heeled international tourists, keep your eyes peeled for British celebrities like Antony Worrall Thompson and Chris Tarrant, while the late-lamented Rick Parfitt of Status Quo fame was also a La Cala fan.

Now French chef Joffrey Charles, who counts Prince Charles, Kate Moss and Madonna among his customers, has added his own brand new restaurant to La Cala's glittering culinary scene.

Meanwhile *A Place in the Sun* has recently made stars of charming restaurant couple Alison and Steve at the excellent Blue Marlin fish restaurant.

Just up the coast, El Oceano hotel has stunning penthouse suites going at 600 euros a pop and mostly full of English VIPs and movers and shakers from Easter onwards.

Long gone are the days when gangland heroes like 'Mad' Frankie Fraser, Kray Twins minder George Dixon and the notorious Ronnie Knight gave the area its Costa del Crime label.

These days there is a distinct sense of glamour about the charming erstwhile fishing village which has become a genuine foil to buzzy Marbella. Thanks to its prime location

between Marbella and Fuen-girola, visitors can stay close to the urban action while reveling in the provincial charm of waterfront fishermen's cottages and timeless back-street bars.

The newly-restored 18th-century watchtower stands as a beacon to the history of a town where donkeys were the main form of transport until the 1970s!

Defiantly low-rise, La Cala de Mijas has preserved its Spanish charm while absorbing waves of tourists and smartening up its act with luxurious second homes, a splendid promenade and a hip resta-



**CELEBS:** Elliot Wright with fiancée and Steven Saunders

rant scene. With last year's opening of the beach boardwalk connecting it to the neighbouring resort of Riviera, there is all the more reason to strut your stuff in La Cala.

Fast becoming a little corner of Marbella in Mijas, *TOWIE* star Elliott Wright had the clarity of vision to choose La Cala over Marbella, investing three million euros in stunning restaurant Olivia's.

"The Only way is La Cala these days," he says bullishly. "Bit by bit it is getting more and more glamorous and upmarket."

"Forget Marbs, this is the place to hang out these days." Fellow restaurateur Steven Saunders, of *Ready Steady Cook* fame, agrees. "It is incredible how much this area has come up in the last couple of years."

"It has always been charming but now there is a real buzz

**Mijas Costa's celebrity-studded resort La Cala will leave you starry eyed, writes Chloe Glover**

about the place." The occasional Olive Press columnist has contributed to the upbeat vibe with his own restaurant, The Little Geranium. Sporting a trendy denim chef's jacket and a natty black trilby ('from the days where I had to rush between my 15 restaurants and a chef's hat got in the way'), Saunders personally explains each course of his seven-dish tasting menu to enthralled diners. The Little Geranium has certainly blossomed and has been full to bursting every day since he opened. Much has changed but not everything ... Irish bar Biddy Mulligan's has been a popular meet-up hub for many a year. It is rarely not rammed to the rafters.

The perfect place to watch sport or grab a Guinness, manager David Reilly reckons La Cala is still 'the best kept secret on the Costa Del Sol'. "It really is an amazing village with everything you could wish for - all within a short walk from each other," he says. "It has fantastic restaurants, a picturesque beach and a family friendly atmosphere."

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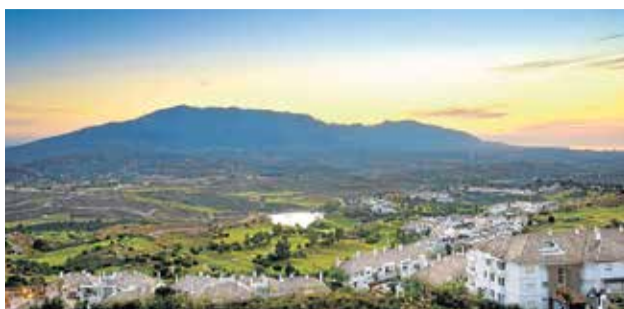
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# Season change and the rebirth of off-plan investment



**The Olive Press talks with property expert Peter Bowerman about the Mijas and Costa del Sol market**

It's the winter months that make living on the Costa del Sol so special for many of its residents, as when the cold northern winds, rain and snow take over most of Europe, the Costa del Sol is protected by its own unique mountain range. This natural protection holds back all the bad weather from the North, but still allows all the sunshine and warmth from Morocco and North Africa to grace its south facing Mediterranean coastline. The end result is the Costa del Sol has a warm winter climate with clear blue skies and just the occasional rain showers, similar to that of a British summer. This fabulous winter climate coupled with its amazing luxury infrastructure earned the Costa Del Sol the nickname "California of Europe" and is perfect for sun lovers, golfers, arthritis sufferers, and even winter sports enthusiasts as the Sierra Nevada Mountain range has its own fabulous ski resort/village running from November to April and just hosted the freestyle ski & snowboard world championships. The Costa del Sol is one of the only places in the world where you can sunbathe in luxury Mediterranean beach clubs and within two hours drive, be skiing on beautiful slopes in a proper ski resort.

But all the locals I'm talking with now are buzzing with excitement over the changing of the seasons. It's a lovely time of year right now, all the beaches are being cleared of stones, shells and drift wood ready for all the official opening parties of the Costa del Sol's beach clubs. This weekend we joined other families and chilled all afternoon



**HUGE VARIETY:** There is a large amount of new, high quality off-plan schemes coming available this Spring

in a lovely beach restaurant between Mijas and Marbella. It was sensational, eating *alfresco* and relaxing with a few jugs of sangria under the Spanish sunshine but still with the crystal clear winter views of the Moroccan Atlas Mountains across the Mediterranean. Life just doesn't get much better than that and you don't have to break the bank either, the coast is famous for catering to all budgets. We opted for a mid level establishment, one of many we love in the area, but on the same beach, restaurants varied from basic tapas right up to extreme luxury, so if you can't find a beach restaurant you absolutely love on the Costa del Sol, the chances are you won't find it anywhere!

There is also a lot of excitement over the property market this year, which is now slowly but steadily gaining speed, and for the third year running the current figures show increases across the board. Latest figures this year show sales are up around 20% year on year and house prices in January were up again by approx 1.7%. So since 2014 when the property market stabilised prices went up approx 4% in 2015 and

**“ The best place to see all the new off-plan projects, plans and price lists is the Overseas Dreams office in La Cala ”**

5% in 2016 with predictions of slightly larger increases this year of 6%. This is great news as we want steady progressive price increases which are sustainable in the long term.

The building trade is definitely flourishing again on the coast, now prices are going up. Owners are spending money refurbishing their villas and developers are starting new off-plan projects everywhere. We have three big refurbishment projects we are helping clients with at the moment and I'm wanting to develop my own villa before summer.

Being a well established Master Agent on the coast, I usually have the pick of the best 10 building firms on the coast for my personal or client projects. But they are now all getting busy, thankfully, there will always be a few of them that give us priority, so if you are wanting to refurbish or build a villa on the coast and want help finding the best firms to complete the project for you, let me know and I will try and guide you in the right direction.

In previous years, I was advising clients, avoid off-plan and buy luxury bank repossession or distressed sale deals instead. However, times have changed and bargain properties are getting harder to find, so now one of the best ways to secure a bargain is utilising the off-plan discounts builders offer when launching a new development.

We have exciting new developments coming up all over the coast especially; La Cala de Mijas, Nueva Andalucia and Estepona/Casares. La Cala de Mijas seems to be one of the favourite areas for development at the moment. La Cala is a real little gem of a beach town which is fast becoming one of the Costa del

Sol's property hot spots. We have 7 new luxury developments being built with the latest specifications and quality fixtures, all easy walking distance to the centre of the main La Cala Boulevard, shops, bars, restaurants and beach. We have them at various stages of construction with completions from 1-2 years.

The great news for the buyers looking right now, is we are selling the first batches of properties at heavily discounted off-plan prices. For example, yesterday we sold an off-plan luxury 3 bed apartment at around 75,000 euros less than if it was already finished. There are different payment schedules depending on the development, and it's now Law that all off-plan developments have bank guarantees in place to protect every payment you make. We can help arrange up to 70% mortgages on completion, subject to status. I've had a few clients worry they can't wait for off-plan, but it's not as if you can't enjoy the coast for two years, in fact most of our clients are planning on a number of visits before they get their keys and actually look forward to seeing their future investment and holiday home take shape whilst they enjoy a fabulous holiday in their favourite destination. Once completed, these brand new luxury properties will also be ideal for any "Buy to Let" Investors, as not only will they comply with all the latest renting regulations but will be preferred buy tenants.

So to summarise, you can now buy a 'state of the art' brand new luxury property in one of the Coast's hottest new beach locations, at heavily discounted prices and finally collect keys on a property (almost definitely) worth a lot more than you paid a year or two before. It really does seem a "no brainer" and I predict that many clients that thought about it but did nothing about it, will look back years from now kicking themselves.

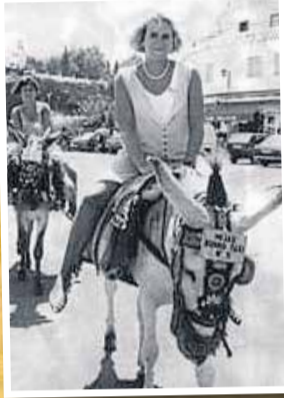
The best place to see plans and specifications on all seven projects, is our La Cala office which is situated in La Cala Boulevard, the main high street running through La Cala. We also take clients to the plots and construction sites, so they can choose the best locations and aspects.

Peter is one of the most published Costa del Sol property experts in both the UK & Spanish press, having spent most of his working life as a professional real estate agent and valuer. He is also the Managing Director of one of the most successful Master Estate Agencies on the Costa del Sol 'Overseas Dreams' with registered offices in both Marbella and La Cala de Mijas.

**For more information on buying or selling your property on the Costa del Sol, contact Peter or any of his team on Tel: (0034) 951 551 444 or email: [info@OverseasDreams.com](mailto:info@OverseasDreams.com)**



# ARTISAN TOWN



**CREATIVITY AND RESOURCEFULNESS:** Mijas workers created an industry around weaving of esparto grass, men picking it in the high mountains and women folk creating a range of baskets, hats and even shoes, with examples at the Mijas folk museum



**DAYS GONE BY:** A goring by a bull is just as painful today as it was in yesteryear, but don't tell that to this matador... and, my oh my, what a quaint place La Cala once was, all green fields. But what's that curving around it... yes an early version of the N-340 with a few less cars, mind you. Mostly people went around like this (left) and with appropriate sun hats, while (bottom left) ladies freshen up at a village fountain and (top) a view of the church of the Immaculada, and (bottom) a rowing crew



La Cala Sales and Rentals

Following a record sales period we are currently looking for new properties in La Cala de Mijas and the surrounding area for our client base. If we are not currently advertising your property we would be happy to do so on a no sale no fee basis. With our two offices in La Cala located in prime positions, excellent international web based advertising, access to the largest agency network on the coast as well as local press we provide the best opportunity to sell your property at the best price. Please contact us to arrange an appointment

La Cala de Mijas – Ref: R 285 9251

**Price: 599.000€**



3 BEDROOM, 3 BATHROOM  
BUILT 105m2, PLOT 441m2  
Completely reformed detached villa located only 50 meters from the beach and with easy walking distance of the village. Modern styling and finished to the very highest of standards. A must see property.

El Chaparrel – Ref R 213 7724

**Price: 275.000€**



3 BEDROOM, 2 BATHROOM TOWNHOUSE  
BUILT 144m2 TERRACE 26m2  
Immaculate townhouse located minutes from La Cala de Mijas. The large outside terrace boasts sea and golf views and allows you to make the most of the beautiful climate. The property is located in a secure community complete with 2 pools and a private parking space.

Miraflores Rancho A – Ref R 266 2100

**Price: 169.000€**



2 BEDROOM, 1 BATHROOM  
BUILT 75m2 TERRACE 10m2  
Recently reduced and located on the stunning Miraflores development. Motivated seller so serious offers considered for this ground floor apartment. Recently renovated and benefitting from a pool bar within the complex.

La Cala de Mijas – Ref: R 180 357

**Price: 199.000€**



2 BEDROOM, 2 BATHROOM  
BUILT 75m2 TERRACE 30m2  
**PRICE REDUCTION !!!!**  
Spacious corner apartment located only a couple of minutes' walk from the beach and all amenities. Includes air-con, private underground parking and modern bright kitchen. South facing with sea views.



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... must be seen.

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All about **Mijas**

**Palomino Properties  
is riding the  
international  
investment wave**

# Sister

**T**HEY often get mistaken for sisters. Mother and daughter Virginia Palomino and Carolina Vergara of Palomino Properties are one of the tightest knit teams around, proven by the success of their 27-year-old business. "My mum loves that people think we are sisters", said Carolina, 46, who joined her mum's property company fresh from school. "I can't believe how well we get along. "We can sometimes have different views

and we have different personalities but we have not fallen out once, we have a very strong bond, which is why we work so well together.

"We've gone through two recessions together but we're still here and things are getting better every month."

Virginia, 68, still heads up the firm, which specialises in properties for all budgets within an eight kilometre radius of Mijas.

"At the moment we're seeing lots more buyers than ever before from Norway and

## More popular than ever!

ESTABLISHED agent Susanne Teres has built up an unparalleled reputation on the Mijas property scene.

Originally going on holiday and falling in love with the whitewashed village over thirty years ago, Susanne has not looked back since and is still proud to call Mijas her home. In the early eighties she opened up Mijas Properties, a real estate business which offers everything from sales to holiday and long term rentals to property management. All her staff who speak English, Spanish and French share Susanne's enthusiasm and dedication to their clients. "Mijas is really on the map now," she explains. "I have watched the village grow over the last three decades and it is more popular than ever now! "Although we still have a lot of British



clients, we also have many other nationalities who are drawn to this part of Andalusia.

She adds: "It's also wonderful to have clients returning to us year after year and I am so grateful for their loyal support."

Mijas Properties' bright spacious offices have undergone recent refurbishment, and have fabulous panoramic views overlooking the sea. They are situated in the heart of the village, close to the town hall and next to Zurich Insurance offices.

As Susanne explains "It is the unrivalled views from Mijas Pueblo and the traditional charm of this white washed village that encaptures visitors with its magic."

**For more information visit [www.mijasproperties.com](http://www.mijasproperties.com)**



**Mijas Properties was established in 1984 by  
Susanne Terés. Specialists in Mijas Pueblo**

**and**

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Ref: V2102 ROL  
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2 beds \* 2 baths \* views



Ref: V2299TOR  
**Price: 750,000€**  
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4 beds \* 3 baths  
Fantastic sea views!



Ref: V.2279 JAC  
**Price: 849,500€**  
Impressive Villa close to Mijas!  
4 beds \* 4 baths  
Panoramic Sea views!

Here are just a few of the fantastic properties we have on the market – for more information on these properties and others available – please visit our website or pop in & meet us!

Located on the main street in Mijas Village, towards the Town hall, next to Zurich

If you are thinking of putting your property on for sale or rent, please do not hesitate to call us!

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# act

Belgium who are spending a lot of money here," said Carolina.

"British people are starting to look for properties again too following Brexit, which is good news. "A lot of people want typical Andalusian properties but with modern fittings so that they are ready to move straight in.

"Luckily, there are a lot of houses on the market here that combine both of these and have been renovated to a good standard." For Carolina, the allure of Mijas is obvious.

"I can't imagine anyone not liking Mijas, it's amazing," said Carolina, who lives in the Buena Vista development midway between Mijas pueblo and the coast.

"It's like the French Riviera or the famous Italian villages perched on the cliffs.

"The Mediterranean coastline is attractive to everyone, it's a little paradise. "There are great connections to boot, which means you only have to be on the road for eight minutes to get to the cinema and 15 minutes for the airport. Then there is the laid back atmosphere, the good food, wine and weather. If that doesn't do it I don't know what will."

For more information visit [www.palominoproperties.com](http://www.palominoproperties.com)

## SAYING BOO TO BREXIT AT HOMEFINDERS

LA CALA's access to both sides of Mijas' charismatic personality means it's a constant hub of activity. And the property scene is no different.

"If you talk about hot property, there is no place hotter than La Cala, mainly because of the climate and the Spanish feel," says Andrew Dodd from Homefinders. He explains that even after the Brexit vote, the amount of Brits buying up property here has increased beyond expectations, to the point where 90% of one development on pre-release stage has been snapped up.

He says the number of enquiries from UK buyers has decreased slightly, but he hasn't seen a decrease in buyers - Homefinders has actually sold more properties to Brits in the last eight months than it has in the past two years.

"The six months after the Brexit vote were our best six months since 2007. We have had a brilliant start to the year."

Increasing demands, naturally sparks a rise in prices. He says a property he would have sold for €140,000

or €150,000 three years ago would probably go for €250,000 now.

This means a lot of buyers are realising they have missed the boat, and are unable to afford property here.

But people still have their hearts set on having a holiday home in Spain, and there is still no better place close to the UK and accessible to it, he says.

[www.homefinders-network.com](http://www.homefinders-network.com)



**Unprecedented demand - and not the 'neon brigade' - means there is a shortage of properties in La Cala, writes Laura Duckett**

**L**A CALA is looking more and more like a goldmine as the years go on, even amid Brexit fears.

Its housing market has thrived above and beyond what many local estate agents expected, and a new boardwalk connecting La Cala to Fuengirola is attracting a slew of interest.

"We have sold more properties in the last three months than ever before," says Andrew Partridge, from La Cala Sales and Rentals.

A flourishing culinary scene in the area, with some Michelin-rated chefs, is partly to blame says Andrew, who lives in nearby Calahonda. But he puts the company's recent successes down to the proactive multilingual staff in the company's two offices.

He explains that a lot of the buyers are still Brits, but there are also Spanish clients, who are starting to buy more because of the stabilising economy.

## Gold dust

A lot of them are downsizing, he explains, and moving to Mijas from places like Barcelona in search of warmer weather and a family-oriented atmosphere.

"It's not the neon brigade, people don't come here for stag dos, it's more of a family location." Of course, this means that not only are prices creeping up, but the company is desperate for properties of which there are very few at the moment.

Plenty of new developments are being built, with up to 1,000 new units set to be completed within the next five years. And they're selling like hot cakes. If this year's figures are anything to go by, things will only get better.

Visit [www.lacalasalesandrentals.com](http://www.lacalasalesandrentals.com) for more information



**EXCITED:** Andrew and employee



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email: [info@homefinders-network.com](mailto:info@homefinders-network.com)



### 2A-2595: SUPERB APARTMENT WITH STUNNING SEA VIEWS 2 BED 2 BATH

The property is located within walking distance of the beach and the centre of la cala in the popular Jardin Botanico development. There are two terraces, both which have great views of either the sea or the Sierra de Mijas. Very spacious accommodation with large kitchen/utility, hallway, lounge, two bedrooms and two bath/showers. Large parking space and store room included. Best views and location at this price!

**245.000 Euros**



### 5V-0092: MODERN SPACIOUS VILLA 5 BED 3.5 BATH

This property is only 2 minutes walk to amenities and 5 minutes to the beach. Very well presented with the main accommodation over 2 floors and separate guest apartment and basement on a lower floor. All rooms are generously proportioned with good sized terraced areas from which you can enjoy sea views. Private and secluded pool area which has a south facing sunny aspect. Great property in a prime location - must be seen!

**595.000 Euros**



### 2TH-0055: CHARMING TOWNHOUSE 2 BED 1 BATH

Tastefully modernised and located just a few minutes away from la cala and the beach. Set within a typical andalusian style community that has a great pool area and plenty of amenities including bars and restaurants. The property itself has an open plan lounge leading to a bright kitchen and dining area. There is an office/study area and upstairs there are two double bedrooms, a re-fitted shower room and a large sunny terrace with great sea views

**185.000 Euros**



### 2A-2497: SUPERB LOCATION 2 BED 1 BATH

This bright two bedroom apartment enjoys excellent sea views. Literally 3 mins walk to the beach, 2 mins to nearest bars and shops and only 10 mins to the picturesque village of la cala. The apartment has a modern fitted kitchen with utility area, lounge / diner, 2 bedrooms, bathroom and a terrace which has been glazed in. Situated on a sought after and well kept community that has pool, mature gardens and communal parking.

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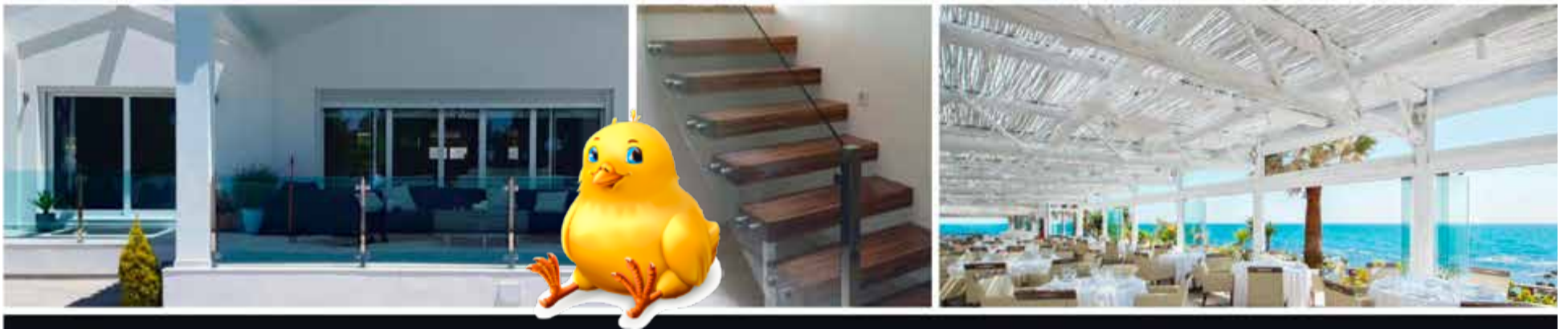


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**Run down business units see epic transformation following €500,000 investment, writes Laurence Dollimore**

## Trade surplus

A BRITISH expat couple have transformed what was once a dilapidated row of commercial units into a thriving business hub.

Livewires Chug and Karen - as they are known locally - first opened their shop Aladin La Cala in 2015. The one-of-a-kind second-hand shop created out of three empty units in the La Cala hills is now THE place-to-be for indoor furniture, as well as garden, lighting, kitchen, not to mention rugs, art, collectibles and bric-à-brac.

But €500,000 of investment on and the whole line of units is now rented out - not to mention a cashpoint - creating a microclimate of local commerce.

"I am happy to say that all units are now being rented by trading businesses," says Chug, "It's remarkable, this was a run down plot with no doors or roofs, and now it's buzzing!"

One of the recent additions is CK removals, which can shift your household items from the UK to Spain as well as offering local deliveries.

"It's an exciting time for CK as new delivery vans have arrived and it's really taking off," explains Chug. Joining them is the new Oasis café, offering everything from Sunday



**DYNAMOS:** Chug in front of Aladin and (below) Oasis bosses



lunch to fresh kebabs, but it's the eatery's fish and chips that brings the crowds, and it's no wonder, with its chefs having been trained by Welsh chippy expert of 40 years Ken Jones.

Tenants Laura and Soli lived in the UK for six years before arriving in Mijas.

"We love it here," explains mother-of-one Laura. "The area just keeps going up and up and Chug must take so much credit for what he has



**REVITALISED:** The new area and (right) local Van Herbert, 87 and (below) Taylors

done." Hardware store Taylor's - described as the English version of a Chinese shop - and LFS Interiors, which sells beautiful bed linens and more with everything made in the UK, have also set up shop here.

"There's a decent variety of things here now and a fantastic café to boot," explains expat Susan Van Herbert, 87, who has been living in Mijas area for 30 years. "It is really coming up here and a friendly local community."

And that is not the end of it.

After launching a petition last year Chug and Karen are happy to announce that plans for a zebra crossing across the road to St Anthony's College has finally been approved.

"We will now be that much easier to reach," explains Chug.

Now the businessman, from the Midlands originally, is working hard on an application to launch a car boot sale on Sundays.



"The plan is to run them between 10am to 3pm from April to October and give some proceeds to cancer charity Cudeca," he concludes. "We are just waiting on the town hall to finalise it all."

**Anyone interested should give Aladin a call on 951 314 074.**



Urb. Torre de La Cala Hills  
Calle Acebuche No 5, Local 6, 7  
La Cala Hills, Mijas Costa, 29650.



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New luxury bedding and textiles dept just opened by LFS INTERIORS





**Rummaging through its backstreet boutiques for artisan goods is one of the joys of shopping in Mijas**

MIJAS Pueblo is a genuine arts and crafts hub. That could be because its narrow streets aren't wide enough for huge delivery trucks but the town also attracts many creatives. Ceramics, leather goods, hand-made jewellery, eco-cosmetics ... there's so much on offer for those who like to buy local and

# Treasure hunting

know exactly where their souvenirs are made. That's not to say every item carries a Made in Mijas label but many of the products sold in its boutiques originated nearby. Saunter through the winding streets where the scent of leather clings to the air before stepping into one of the many air-conditioned jewelry bou-

tiques to browse dainty bracelets and necklaces inset with crystals excavated from nearby mountains. Check the artisan food stores with Mijas honey and saffron biscuits to gain an insight into some of the province's gastronomic delights. Also look out for the eco-cosmetics of local business dyna-



mo Thomas Weller, under the brand WE, and sold in various shops. However, no trip to Mijas would be complete, however, without appreciating some of the town's impressive ceramics. Many pieces are on display outside the shops, luring in visitors with their vivid colours and Gaudi-esque mosaic work which seem to take their inspiration from the pueblo's beautiful natural surroundings.

## 31 and still making waves



**S**OME three decades and three financial crises have been unable to sink Splash Pools in Mijas. The company has stayed afloat since opening in 1984, when owner Paul Cluett cleaned pools by day and ran a bar in Fuengirola by night. Eventually becoming a full time job, he was joined by his wife and now co-owner Sammi in 1991, and the business has continued to grow and grow by staying at the forefront of the industry's technology.



"The last crisis was the worst, but since last October business has increased a lot - and we have happily taken on new staff in the last few weeks," explains Sammi. "We are always trying things out and something that has been very successful is salt water chlorinators - the salt is turned into a softer form of chlorine that makes the water much nicer to swim in, it doesn't smell like normal chlorine and is very good for people with skin problems." She adds: "We are also lucky

to have great pool maintenance and construction teams, some have worked for us for over 15 years and the technician is often mistaken for Paul's son!" Sammi admits running a family business can be fraught, at times, but they have found their own unique methods to cool down. Paul escapes by playing the piano and saxophone while Sammi works it out in the gym. They also like spending time travelling, particularly in the Cadiz province.



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April 12th - April 25th 2016



MANAGER: Christine Trainor

**HomeCareontheWeb looks after over 500 rental properties along the entire coast, writes Jon Clarke**

**W**HEN it comes to property management and holiday rentals, there is not much Christine Trainor doesn't know.

Overseeing 500 properties along the Costa del Sol, she knows how a broken television, a shortage of sunbeds or no hot water can ruin a holiday.

General Manager for HomeCareontheWeb for eight years, she ensures every base is covered for holidaymakers before they arrive to collect the keys.

Based out of Mijas Costa since 2003 her multilingual team of 30 plus staff work with owners to ensure guests enjoy a memorable stay while helping owners to maximise rental income.

Covering the coast from Casares to Torremolinos, the HomeCareontheWeb team takes the stress out of renting and owning a property in Spain, helping to ensure that the owners' investment is being professionally looked after.

"But we need more quality proper-



TEAM: The talented and capable team are based out of the main office (right)



# TAKING CARE OF HOMES

ties," explains Christine. "We have so much demand right now for long term and holiday rentals...And I can guarantee that after signing up with us we will obtain owners a lot of bookings."

Keeping a close eye on all the new laws and trends regarding rental properties, hard-working Christine oversees a regular blog.

"There are so many conflicting regulations and stories being published, it is important to know which law applies to which area and which properties exactly," explains Christine, who is based at the company's modern office

by the main La Cala road junction.

"Too many rumours are circulating, claiming you need this or that, when in truth a lot is still to be finalised, but we are on top of this and are in regular contact with the relevant authorities".

And to keep a steady flow of bookings for clients, the company is partnered with Novasol, Europe's leading rental company, which has more than 12,000 agents and has been in the business for 40

years.

The HomeCareontheWeb Group has many different aspects, but it is al-

ways focused on delivering to owners and rental guests the very best care and service:

- HomeCareontheWeb focuses on the care, maintenance and rental of the property. Owners can view and update online calendars, monitor maintenance and housekeeping, view online financial statements and inspection reports and manage the property from abroad
- HomeRentalontheWeb services owners who choose to receive rental income from their holiday home through Long-Term rentals
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talontheWeb is a holiday bookings portal managed by a dedicated team. Holidaymakers seeking a self-catering holiday are assisted and cared for from the moment they book their holiday to the time they leave

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**LA CALA DE MIJAS: Edificio Comercial Urbanoria 1, Urbanización La Noria Golf, Mijas Costa, Málaga**



TEAM: German and Ivan

### Jon Clarke tests the stunning La Cala Resort and its Bodega restaurant

**Y**OU head over the hill past the motorway and half-built urbanisations and enter, quite literally, a paradise.

The secret valley is full of stunning country farms and estates and the backdrop is a rolling sea of hills.

It is here you will find La Cala Resort and spa, one of the coast's most exclusive hideouts and probably the best golf hotel in Spain. Counting on no less than three courses, it is little surprise to learn that its fantastic facilities have been used by England football teams, not to mention Everton, Steaua Bucharest and Zurich



LUXURY: Look out across the hills from the spa

# Secret valley

Grasshoppers.

There are grass football pitches, a large gym, but most importantly an overriding sense of nature and peace, with stunning views to far-away mountains and Mijas village in the distance.

The charming four star hotel has an amazing spa, reminiscent of the best in Thailand, and an excellent range of well appointed



TASTY: Two great tapas at Bodega

rooms, most with amazing views across the valley.

Even better, after a hard day's pampering - or activity - you don't need to go far to eat.

There is a great choice, ranging from the La Terraza restaurant to the more informal Bodega next door, where I tested the excellent new tapas menu, which couldn't



CHARM: A hotel view

be more complete, taking diners through the very best of Andalusian cuisine.

Prepared by a team of talented chefs, led by Ivan Alvarez and German Montes, there were some delicious standouts ... and even a few firsts for this seasoned food writer.

In particular I enjoyed the variation of two salad dishes, one with quails eggs and prawn, while the turbot with cod roe was really tasty.

The generous tapas came thick and fast and were washed down with a good mix of wines by the glass.

Cooking for hundreds of covers a day is a daunting business, which is why the two talented chefs - who have worked around Spain at restaurants including Arzak and EME Fusion - spend hours getting their planning right.

It is the third time I have run a rule over the food of head chef Alvarez, who I had checked out in his first month at the restaurant three years ago. And he has thankfully matured well.

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**What a few tourists and locals think about the cobbled streets of Mijas**

# Jewel of Andalusia

**Frank Glover, former mechanic, Manchester**



“ Mijas pueblo is a wonderful place to live in as it feels so authentic, you barely realise you are on the Costa del Sol. What's more, it feels really safe. There are too many things to list about why people should come to Mijas. But I especially like the summer tribute concerts and the free flamenco shows in the main plaza every Wednesday and Saturday.”

**Rosalia Villatoro Alarcon, 59, a Casa Museo volunteer from Mijas**



“ It's a special town and there are lots of places to visit here. Tourists can come to find an authentic Andalusian town with friendly people. It's an important place for people to visit, and it comes alive during festivals like Semana Santa. I am very proud of my town.”

**Steve, 57 and Michelle Peach, 55, from Plymouth**



“ Mijas is bigger than we expected. There is a lot to do here and it's very pretty. It's different from other towns I have seen in Spain - touristic but with lots of character. We are only in Spain for a week, but we're glad we came here.”



## Life's a beach

**F**ROM Fuengirola to Marbella, Mijas Costa's 12km stretch of golden sand is divided into several sections, each appealing to different types of holiday-maker.

El Faro's rocky, rugged coastline leads to a surprisingly sandy beach, with beach bars and restaurants, and sunbeds for hire in summer.

El Faro also offers the town's best fishing, and you can see the fishing rods set up along the shore late into the night. La Cala de Mijas, presented with an EU blue flag for quality, is ideal for children and its 2km long beach is a haven for families, with a huge range of facilities and services and the kids will love the huge play boat and swings.

At Butiplaya, sometimes referred to as Torrevieja Beach, you will find a fantastic 1.5km stretch of sand, which has also been awarded an official blue flag. Loungers and parasols are available to rent on this famously safe and family-friendly beach.

At El Cabo Rocos the rocks that line the water's edge make this the quietest of the Costa's beaches, with lots of nooks and crannies for peace-seekers to tuck themselves away.

The area just in front of Chiringuito Antonio is ideal for swimming, and the area around the rocks is the best on the coast for snorkelling.

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**Biddy Mulligan's**

**W**HEN entrepreneurs Thomas Weller and Hugo German found a hidden overgrown garden in the heart of Mijas pueblo, they knew instinctively what to do.

Clearing out the brambles and rubbish, they shipped in tables and turned it into a tea rooms with tapas and waited for the world to beat a trail to their front door.

But it wasn't until they changed the concept to an Argentinian-style bbq three years later that Aroma Cafe & Secret Garden started to make money.

"It was a very tough few early years," explains Argentinian Hugo, 54, an engineer, who first arrived in Mijas in 2004, via a short stint in Mallorca. "And it wasn't until we got the concept right that things started to work."

"Finally we created the bbq out of a recycled staircase and suddenly it went wild," adds the father-of-three, who moved to Spain when his agricultural business in Buenos Aires suffered during the deep recession of the late 1990s.

Since then they have invested more and more in the remarkable gardens, which are a must-visit, if only for a glass of wine or coffee.

"We wanted to create a sensation, something visual, not just a place to eat," Hugo, who met Thomas, while renovating a couple of shops for him.

The pair have since opened two more restaurants together, Meguinez Grapevine Patio in 2013 and Latitud 36 fish restaurant in 2014, with Canadian Thomas opening a tapas bar Tapintxos last year and a new Italian restaurant this May (which used to be Bana Bana).

Thomas himself is known for quite a few firsts of his own, co-pioneering the Costa del Sol's first ever sushi bar in 1998 and creating his own eco-cosmetic company WE Weller Ecology, which sells from his three shops in the town.

The 45-year-old father-of-one collectively employs around 60 local workers and is constantly on the move, looking to improve his products and restaurants.

"All our places offer good food, good service and simple, good ingredients. It seems to be a winning formula," he explains.

How funny then that he had never even heard of Mijas when he arrived from Canada to work in the Swiss Alps as a ski rep in the 1990s.

## Spotted

Literally coming across the old town centre by chance on a break, he quickly spotted a gap in the market and, along with business partner Hugo, had the gumption to go for it.

"We have been really lucky," says modest Weller, who gets his cosmetics made between workshops in Madrid and San Sebastian.

"Mijas' culinary scene is getting more and more exciting all the time. When I arrived here 20 years ago, there were a lot of over-priced places, charging tourists twice as much as the hidden away places but now there are a many great places to eat."

He was first enticed over here with an offer of setting up a photography company on the coast. The business was an enormous success, in particular taking pictures of golfers and golf courses.

Weller's first boutique venture was the opening of 'Mariposa' in 2001, a little shop that now nestles among the two further boutiques and clutch of restaurants that make up his business.

"The key to everything is being different. We're always looking for new designers, products and

# Get into the SECRET

**From humble beginnings the expat pair of Thomas and German have opened half a dozen restaurants in Mijas Pueblo in about as many years, writes Jon Clarke**



**DYNAMIC DUO:** Thomas and Hugo



**STUNNING:** The hidden garden and (below right) a mixed tapas



**FUN:** In the Secret Garden

names that don't exist here yet," he explains. He continues: "I remember being terrified at the idea of spending 75,000 pesetas (€450 euros) a month on a shop. It seemed like a huge amount of money at the time," he continues. Following the success of Mariposa, Weller opened the largest candle shop on the coast nearby and then a shop selling handbags and costume jewel-

lery.

He puts his ability to run so many businesses in one place down to being able to walk between them and his excellent team.

"I think it's good to be involved with lots of very different projects, and to always be taking on something completely different," he says.

"That way, if one thing starts to lapse you can always rely on the others."

Retail in Mijas did take a hit during the recession, but Weller maintains that across his businesses 'we were too busy for the crisis'.

He said: "We have been so busy throughout it here on the Costa, we have been very privileged but, of course, feel terrible for those who have been going through difficult times."

Weller insists he rarely makes concrete plans for the future, putting his success down to being fortunate with timing and working incredibly hard...

"Mijas is the best place on the Costa del Sol," he said. "I'm very proud to say that this little town stood up strong in the crisis, because of everything that it is."

"And despite the waves of foreigners that come and go, Mijas hasn't lost its soul or character. It's still just the same as when I first arrived."



**STEAK MASTER:** Hugo weaving his BBQ magic, Latitude team (right) and Tapintxos (left)





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**Mijas is fast developing a vibrant and exciting restaurant scene both in the village and coast, writes Dining Secrets of Andalusia editor Jon Clarke**

It is perhaps telling that global superstar Michel Roux Jr named Mijas as the town that inspired him to take on the world, tastebuds first. The Anglo-French owner of London's two-Michelin-starred Le Gavroche visited the pueblo with his family, where he tasted things he had 'never tasted before'. While on a summer holidays with his parents they drove all the way to Mijas, 'that's a heck of a long drive - but I remember tasting things I'd never tasted before'.

## Chunk

He continued: "I got a great big chunk of honey in the comb and was baffled as to how to attack it. I ended up just scraping and sucking it. I had orange juice, too - made with fresh, real, squeezed oranges."

It is a legacy that thankfully to this day has been continued, in particular in La Cala de Mijas, where three famous restaurateurs Steven Saunders, Elliott Wright and now Joffrey Charles are vying for top spot.

As occasional Olive Press columnist Saunders sums it up succinctly. "It is a very exciting change and well overdue to create a foil to the dining scene in Marbella."

Certainly the trio of Little Geranium, Olivia's and Joffrey's own name joint are getting better and better (see Ooh la la La Cala on page 21) by the month, and up in the village things improve at the same rate.

Up in the pueblo you have an equally exciting range of restaurants and new places seem to open by the month.

But one well established stalwart is *Restaurante La Reja*, which is charm personified and has an amazing dining terrace looking over Mijas and the far-away hills.

Run by Manolo and his wife, it has a simple good value menu, described as 'traditional An-



AMAZING: The Secret Garden and (right) tapas at Tapintxo



# TASTE ON HIGH



CONCENTRATION: Pedro carves a ham, while (right) Tapavino is getting busy

dalucian kitchen', and expect to eat delicious aubergines in honey, perfect steaks and the freshest fish.

Next door, look out for *La Bella Coppia*, an Italian, which has been run by Pedro for nearly three decades and just gets better and better.

The place has a great range of pasta and pizza dishes, but in particular specialises in steaks and quality meats, cooked on the amazing grill.

Also be sure to look out for the

oasis that is known as the *Secret Garden*, which sits behind its more typical white-walled sister restaurant *Aroma*.

This amazing garden is a delight to kick back and dine in good weather and the menu is a nice mix of authentic Iberian dishes alongside Argentinean fare - particularly steaks - thanks to co-owner Hugo.

Part of a group of restaurants owned by Hugo and his business partner Thomas Weller, make sure to look out for *Tab-*

*erna Meguinez* (which means 'Are you winking at me?') which has an excellent menu, as well as *Latitud 36*, a great fish restaurant.

You should also look out for *Tapintxo*, which is inspired by Thomas's love of the north of Spain and soon to open a new Italian.

Down on the coast there are some terrific places to eat (see La Cala article).

The most exciting new ones include *Joffrey's* and the *Blue*





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**HISTORIC: Manolo at La Reja and (right) Latitude and Tapavino**

Marlin. Classy Joffrey's involves the well travelled French chef Joffrey Charles, and a wonderful mix of exciting French inspired dishes, such as balls of foie served in a hazelnut crust with figs, and scallops served with slices of bacon, with capers. His bubbly partner Lisa Burgess and her daughter Georgia look after the guests with aplomb.

Having dipped into his turbot with fennel, and panna cotta with passion fruit I am going to put my neck out and say there is a very real chance, should everything go his way, that this man has Michelin star written all over him. You read it here first.

Just up the coast, check out the fabulously tasty *Blue Marlin* - the only 'northern European fish restaurant' in the area - run by Alison and Steve Hyatt, who are hard at it preparing stews and dishes hours before opening.

And there is more at wonderful *El Oceano*, a hotel restaurant right on the beach.

New chef William Squires has worked around the world, including at Joel Valvason's famous Australian restaurant and has a great repertoire, whether it be fish or meat, with his handling of Asiatic dishes skillful in the extreme. And of course you have *Little Geranium* which has been winning consistently good reviews since opening two years ago and no surprises, chef Steven Saunders being as passionate about food as he was when he served up celebrities including David Beckham, Rihanna

**Expect to eat fantastic stuffed red peppers and great salmon in a spicy dill sauce**

and even the Queen, when running a trio of restaurants in the UK a decade ago. He is a huge purveyor of organic produce and a firm believer in seasonal produce. Expect miracles with pork, tempura prawns in a Japanese dip and some magic with rice. Plus a lot lot more.

For a totally different experience head to *Olivia's*, the most stylish restaurant opening of the last year, just around the corner on the beach.

Here, TOWIE star Elliot Wright has invested three million creating the ultimate dining experience. With fantastic sea views, stun-



**TEAMWORK: Father and son team at Ole**

ning decor and a menu to match, this is an excellent addition to the Mijas dining scene and contrary to popular belief Elliot is actually a very experienced restaurateur and knows how to deliver.

For yet another completely different style, head 400 metres inland to find the fantastic family-style *Ole* restaurant, where Juan Gomez has been on the go for 23 years.

Juan is a charming host - speaking perfect English - while his son Victor is equally friendly and both put a great emphasis on fresh ingredients, much from their finca near Ronda. "I buy all the meat and fish and go shopping every day to the local markets to find the very best ingredients," explains Juan. "And price/quality is the key to my success."

Expect to eat fantastic stuffed red peppers, delicious lettuce hearts with anchovies, and great salmon cooked in a spicy dill sauce.

Looking for somewhere else new? Why not try the great wine and tapas *Tapavino*, which can be found up in Calahonda and is incredibly busy.

This is no surprise with Brit Craig Hyatt and Canadian wife Robynne running a tight ship that is not surprising given their hotel and restaurant background.

The pair worked for the Renaissance and Vintage Hotels groups in Canada and were frequently dealing in complex and detailed wine lists.

You'll find a good mix of tapas here to go with dozens of wines by the glass. Sit on the great dining terrace and watch the sun go down if you get here early enough.

Last but not least if credentials were needed to run a wine bar, owning your own vineyard would certainly help.

And the owner of *Pura Cepa* on La Cala high street Bernardo Diego Pullido, 30, has three, including one nearby in Mijas. What began as a wine shop is now one of La Cala's finest places to tapear and, of course, drink wine. There are always more than 40 wines by the glass and around a dozen fabulous tapas to dip into.

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