

# All about *The* Guadalhorce Valley

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## Ain't No Mountain High Enough ...

... but the peerless peaks of the Sierra de las Nieves could make you late for dinner, writes ...



**STUNNING:** Alhaurin and (left) Yunquera in front of the soon-to-be declared National Park

**F**INDING a red telephone box (below) at the top of a Spanish mountain peak makes you question whether you really left home at all.

It's a talking point in the courtyard of the Cerro de Hajar, one of the country's most isolated hotels, although you can't phone home on it. But as the clouds part and the deep green cleavage of the Guadalhorce Valley reveals itself, I realise what home has always been missing.

But don't just take my word for it. Spain's national government agrees.

The Sierra de las Nieves is currently on track to become Malaga's first national park...and only the third in Andalucia.

Parts have had natural park protection since 1989 and its heartland is a UNESCO biosphere reserve but now its status is set to soar.

Largely untouched by tourists, despite its close connections to the coast, it is a quick, hassle-free way to spend a weekend. The park's wealth of biodiversity, including the celebrated Pinsap fir trees, ibex and otter populations, are key components of its bid for the coveted title.

Approaching this would-be new kid on the national park block, it is best to go through Tolox, back door to this incredible mountain range.

If Coin sits at the foot of the Sierra de las Nieves, then Tolox is the toenail.

At this time of the year, the trees are auburn dimples burned into an otherwise seamless green and with the highest peak at 2,000 metres, there's plenty to go round.

But with eight municipalities to choose from, resting your head after long days walk can be a tough choice.

One place that is off the grid but very much in the centre of authentic Spain is Alozaina.

With arab archways running through the centre of town, it is a firm reminder of how far-reaching the Moors were.

At the top is the Iglesia De Santa Ana, a small church with a Romanesque tower glued onto the side. Inside, three Catholic women sit staring at a cross.

After spending €3 on bread, fried squid tapas and a beer at Bar de Olivo, I felt good.

Barman Hector Santos thinks the whole area will change if national park status is granted in mid-2018.



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"Yes, because it becomes something else, with another name," he says.

"I think it will be good thing if everyone respects the culture, the park, the rural environment, and I hope the younger generation look after it."

The 22-year-old is studying for a Bachelor in Philosophy on an Open University course and says the town's population is shrinking.

## Flea

"Ten years ago we had 2,500 people here, now it's much less. Three or four years ago there were only three births here."

Coin, the unassuming and quintessentially Andalusian capital of the Guadalhorce Valley has been a cultural centre since the Romans.

Its Sunday and the flea market is in full swing in the carpark of La Trocha, a giant commercial centre.

Stalls are selling everything from wooden toilet seats and portable heaters to spices, leathers, ceramics, silverware and cut glass.

In a hoarder's paradise it's either move or be moved as I bounce off the streams of people zig-zagging from one stall to another.

Reaching the end of the carpark I come across a stall selling antique cameras.

Carlos Diez, who runs it, says: "Antiques are like fashion. People only buy them when they become hot stuff."

The 49-year-old has done a string of



CASTLES AND CUSTOMS: A fiesta in Casarabanela and an old fort in Yunquera

# VALLEY LIFE

odd jobs and buys the antiques in auction in London and then transports them down to Spain.

As I speak to him he's shouting 'No that's 25. Yea ok, well we can do 30 but that's it.'

"This is great in the winter, always busy. I go to about three or four markets a week but I'd say the best is

probably Saturday in Fuengirola. That's a great market." Indeed, the Romans set up Coin

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## Of NATIONAL attraction

**T**HE Sierra de las Nieves, if chosen, will be Malaga's first national park and the third in Andalucia.

The mountain range east of Ronda contains some incredible karst formations and these natural skyscrapers have been bringing tourists back year after year. Parts have had natural park protection since 1989 and it is currently a Unesco Biosphere Reserve but if talks prove successful then the park will become one 'big kings walkway'. With Spanish fir, ibex and other populations there are more animals than there are trees. And with most tourists flocking to the Caminito del Rey, you can be confident that the mountains will be yours for the day. National Park status could be in place by mid-2018 so start booking soon if you want to be among the first to enjoy it.



as the market town Lacibis and would be proud that trade is still brisk today. Coin was also a transition point for the minerals being quarried five kilometres to the south in Sierra Blanca.

Marble from these quarries was used to construct the amazing Roman town of Italica, near Seville, the birthplace of the mighty Emperor Hadrian in 76AD. But like many parts of Spain, Coin fell to the Moors in the 900s before being reconquered by the Christians in the late 15th century. The city buckled under the pressure of a siege in which, according to legend, the great New World explorer Christopher Columbus took part.

Take a ride out of Coin, heading south, and you reach another new world: the Barranco Blanco (White Ravine).

A photographer's favourite, the

foothills are teeming with wildlife - including wild boar - and its aquamarine waters end in a magical waterfall.

Even the Nazi's succumbed to the area's enduring charm and you can still see a white building as you arrive that was used as a sentry point.

It is a reminder of the area's alleged use as a Nazi holiday camp during WW2, due to the affiliation between Hitler and Franco.

But if you're looking to escape the historical past, bring some proper shoes as it can be slippery walking upriver.

If you have more adventurous tendencies there's the Caminito del Rey, a huge hit with thrill seekers.

Once dubbed 'the world's deadliest walkway, and with 1,000 visitors a day, this high-adrenalin hike above the El Chorro gorge, is in high demand.



It was recently praised as a 'shining example' of a sustainable tourist attraction.

Director of tourism for the Costa del Sol, Arturo Bernal, said thousands have visited the site this year, while 'last winter saw visitors of 84 different nationalities flock from five different continents'.

Emerging at the other end of the Caminito in Ardales, you'll be hard-pressed to get in your car and leave.

Often called Andalucia's Lake District, with turquoise waters surrounding tree-lined islands, it's easy to see why.

The scenery is more akin to the cantons of Switzerland than anything found on the Costa del Sol.

With so many distractions in this modern age, a weekend spent gorging on this valley's stunning scenery will never go amiss and as the coast winds down for Christmas it's the perfect excuse to grab some me-time before the celebrations begin. In fact you may want to call home and say you'll be late for dinner.

**HISTORIC:** Everywhere around the valley you will find evidence of the Moors and the Romans

## Andalucia's own 'bread basket'

**T**HE Guadalhorce Valley is 804km2 in size, and home to around 150,000 permanent residents, while many more own second homes there.

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

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

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

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

But while the region has been termed one of the bread-baskets of Andalucia



since Roman times, the locals have long struggled with fluctuating rainfall, which can still bring devastating floods to the whole of the valley or leave the land parched for months on end.



DECADE OF SUCCESS: For John and Debbie

## Paper mountain

**T**HEY have certainly seen a fair few changes over the last decade.

Not just surviving the biggest ever recession in Spanish history, they have seen a complete revolution in the newspaper business.

Yet, Papeleria Cristina is not only still very much in business, but it has become one of the best established expat businesses in the Guadalhorce Valley. Cleverly going with the times, its friendly owners Debbie and John Gow, have introduced numerous other lines than just newspapers for sale.

The shop in the heart of Alhaurin el Grande has PO Boxes, all sorts of greetings cards, party supplies and sweets.

"We had no idea we would end up running the place for so long," explains John, a former civil servant, at the Department of Work and Pensions, in Liverpool.

"We literally decided to get married and moved six months later for a fresh start," added Debbie, whose mum was living here. "We were looking for a business and this looked ideal."

While John works shift work at the British consulate in Malaga, Debbie works around the clock dealing with a mountain of customers, who usually stop for a chat.

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## TOUCH OF HISTORY

**CHOOSING a house is one thing, turning it into a home is another.**

**Alora Antiques offers the best in the business for those looking to add an authentic decorative touch to their homes.**

**Sourced from Scottish auction houses, everything - including Victorian and Edwardian furniture, ceramics, and pictures - is driven here by Margaret Mitchell and her husband, who has more than 30 years of experience in the antiques trade.**

**The shop is the perfect compliments to her estate agency business, but more akin to a fashion boutique as people buy antiques according to what's trending.**

**"The good thing is that what's in fashion here is not necessarily in fashion in the UK," she says, citing wardrobes and cabinets that she can pick up for a song.**

**"And there's no shelf life, which is great," she adds.**

**With the roof over your head and the furnishings both catered for, it's the ideal one-stop shop.**



Unashamedly modest, travel back in time in alluring Alora

# White-washed and wonderful

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

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

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

fluences before them.

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

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

Built in 1462, from local history expert and mu-

## We are family, I got all my properties with me

BUYING a property is like having children. It takes time and is deeply personal.

That's where Margaret Mitchell comes in.

With over two decades of experience in the Guadalhorce Valley, she knows every nook and cranny like family and, most importantly, how to sell it.

Like all families, there have been ups and downs.

"Obviously we had the boom from 2003 to 2008 which was great but after the crash it was tough," she says.

"Before the crash there were 15 agents. That went down to two, now there are three."

The 58-year-old owner of Alora Properties has been positioned in the heart of the valley since 1998 and offers seemingly inexhaustive one-on-one sales advice, not just to would-be property owners but also to the town hall, banks, local schools and many other institutions.

Her company, the estate agents Alora Properties, ensures that all aspects of the community are profitable.

This personal rapport with her clientele is borne out of the international outlook her company adopts.

Mitchell said the Caminito del Rey has been a major pull for her clientele, particularly for the Dutch and Belgians.

But the location of Alora is its greatest asset.

"The best thing about Alora is that it is a very good



base for a day trip to any of the big cities.

"You can be at the airport in 45 minutes for €2.70, it's incredible."

Born in Faslane, home to Britain's Trident nuclear base, Mitchell honed her skills in pension management before coming to Spain for the unparalleled quality of life.

"I suppose the climate was the main attraction for me," she told *the Olive Press*.

And expats and holidaymakers have been following her here ever since.

"The landscape is so varied, you have the olive trees, the lemon trees and of course dramatic mountains encasing it all." Clearly, she loves her work and feels no need to pass the business down to her two daughters, one of whom was born in Malaga.

"I'm not looking to develop an empire," she laughs.

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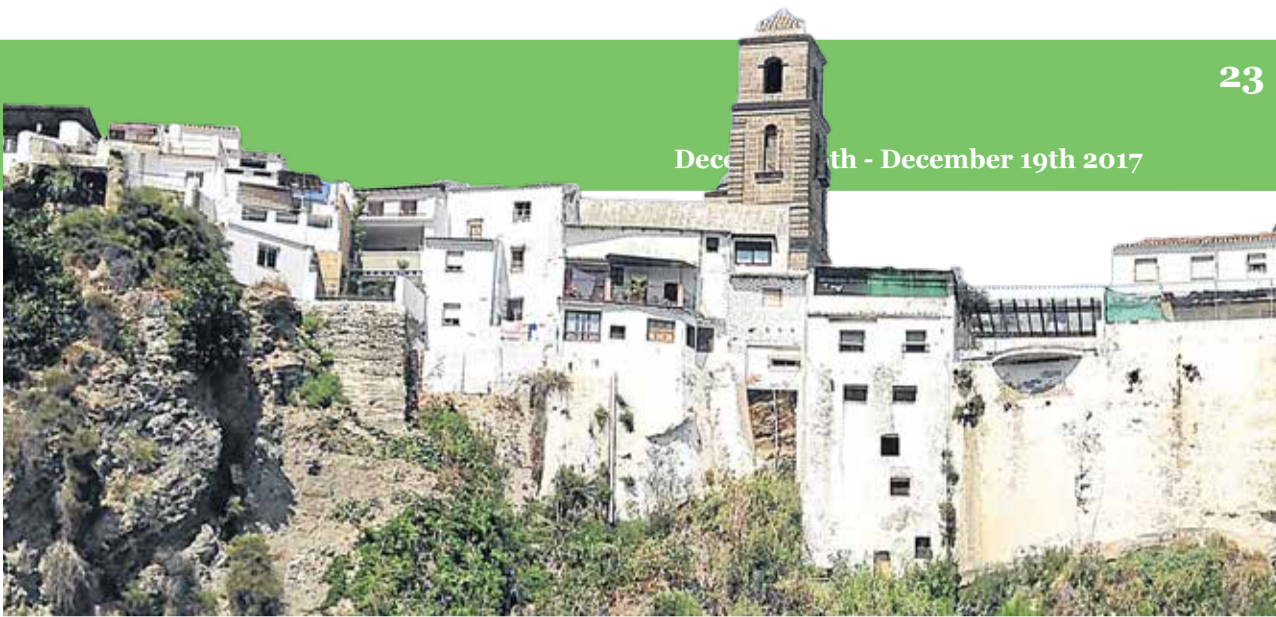
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seum worker, Maria Jose says.

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

It is a wonderful place to visit, but unfortunately the castle is not often open to the public.

A short walk down narrow traditional streets leads to the town's lowest-lying square. Here stands the impressive 17th century Catholic church of La Encarnacion, which somehow appears to be even larger on the inside.

Adjoining the church is the municipal museum, complete with ancient pottery, historical displays and intense mustiness. It is a Mudejar construction dating from the 16th century and supported by stone pillars and columns.

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

Hidden right in the heart of the town is an



**HISTORIC: Castle**

old molino, where olive oil was traditionally produced but it is now used for the occasional concert.

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

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

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

At the foot of the hill on which Alora rests is a railway station, and it was here, just five years ago, where the houses were struck by a terrible flood, killing livestock and destroying homes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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**APA130:** How is this for a view? Typical of many of the townhouses we sell.

This very stylish fully refurbished upper conversion of a traditional townhouse is located in a prestigious central street of Alora pueblo. The accommodation offered is a sitting room, a large bright double bedroom, a new high quality kitchen, a separate dining room or possible second bedroom and a very stylish bright modern bathroom and a glorious roof terrace from which the above photo was taken.

The price includes all furniture and fittings.

**PRICE: 72.000 €**

**PRESTIGIOUS COUNTRY  
VILLAS FROM 150.000 €**



**APA138 :** Quality built, newly refurbished, 150m<sup>2</sup>, 3 bedroom, 2 bathroom villa with separate, 60m<sup>2</sup>, 2 bedroom, 2 bathroom guest cottage set within 10,000m<sup>2</sup> of productive lemon grove. Although the property is connected to mains electricity and water, the installation of a sophisticated solar power system has resulted in the property being virtually self sufficient in terms of energy consumption. Stable block, tack room and hay shed are also available.

Many sunny & shady entertaining areas including a fabulous pool area. Excellent access directly off a quiet tarmac country road less than 10 minutes drive from Álora pueblo. **PRICE: 450.000€**

**CHARACTER PROPERTIES  
COTTAGES TO CORTIJOS**



**APA131:** A charming refurbished rural retreat set within 14.840 m<sup>2</sup> of almond grove between the pueblos of Pizarra & Álora. The accommodation offers of a large kitchen, a lounge with wood burning stove and two spacious bedrooms both with en-suite bathrooms plus laundry room and store room. Attractive combination of contemporary and traditional style. South West facing orientation and stunning views of the Andalusian countryside. Mains electricity and a private well. This property is offered in "walk-in" condition.

**PRICE: 145.000€**

## Help in heading to the hills

IF you're looking for authentic Spanish culture, head to the hills.

Having moved to Spain almost 16 years ago, property expert Richard Woodland says Coin and Alhaurin el Grande have retained their 'Spanish vibe,' while prices on the coast have sky-rocketed.

Its closeness to the coast is still a major pull for potential buyers as the stunning landscape sells itself.

But he does admit 'the condition of the country roads can put people off'.

Despite rocky roads the valley's outdoor activities, including biking, trekking and riding use this to its advantage.

"The announcement of Sierra de la Nieves as a National Park will generate a big increase in tourism," says Woodland, who runs the Property Overseas Group, which concentrates on property sales along the coast. With the Caminito del Rey awaiting tourists in Ardales, residents will be able to relax in their 'private plot, with a pool' enjoying a bit of downtime with the Sierra de las Nieves all to themselves.



**IN THE KNOW:** Richard

However he does recommend that buyers should not think they can build their own *finca* as town halls are not issuing any building licences for these types of buildings on rustic land. Most of all, Woodland says: "Be realistic with what's available within your budget and prepared to compromise on your requirements."

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

**Property Overseas Group**



# Truly Grande

**A** NEW chapter in the life story of the late British author Gerald Brenan is currently being penned.

It also marks a victorious new reign for the Queen of Los Angeles, Brenan's beloved Churriana villa where the world-famous Hispanist wrote many of his books.

A decade ago, the property at the bottom of the Guadalhorce Valley was in ruins, having been abandoned, looted, covered with graffiti and left to rot.

It looked like the writing was on the wall for Brenan's memory, too, until *the Olive Press* stepped in and started a campaign to save the historic site with an 11th-hour restoration that was completed three years ago.

When 'Don Geraldo' first set up his typewriter here, little was known about Andalucia, a region of back-

**Brenan was captivated by the villa's neo-classical style**

water villages and mule tracks. Brenan, widely hailed as the greatest expat writer to have lived in Spain, was drawn by the quiet charisma of Churriana when he made his home at Number 56, Calle Torremolinos.

Although run-down, Brenan was captivated by the villa's neo-classical style, with its soaring tower, romantic cobbled courtyard and fountain where pigeons splashed and cooed.

Bought for a mere £1,200 from a member of Malaga's wealthy merchant class, Don Carlos Crooke Larios, it was the ideal love nest

**Spain's greatest expat writer Gerald Brenan made the Guadalhorce Valley his home and now, thanks to an Olive Press campaign, his house the Queen of Los Angeles was restored to its former glory**

## HOMECOMING QUEEN



**MEMORIES:** Brenan at Casa Brenan

for Brenan and his new wife, American poet Gamel Woolsey, to begin their lives together.

But two years later, as the couple were finishing its transformation into a comfortable home, Civil War broke out.

Desperate for a safe place to lie low, the compassionate Brenan took in previous owner Don Carlos, formerly a Franco supporter,

although it put the lives of his household in jeopardy. Eventually, Brenan organised a pass for him on a British destroyer to get him out of the country. But the damage to the Brenans' reputation was already done.

Hounded out of the village for suspected right-wing sympathies, the author and his wife had no choice but to return to England.

It was here in 1943 that Brenan wrote his first Spanish masterpiece, *The Spanish Labyrinth*, a socio-political account of the run-up to the Civil War.

External forces kept the couple away from Spain for more than a decade but in 1949 they were returned to the dream home.

Ernest Hemingway and Bertrand Russell spent holidays there, drawn by the glamorous dinner parties, endless drinks and late nights spent setting the world to rights.

It makes it even more astonishing that this vital link to Andalucia's literary past was so casually cast aside.

At the packed inauguration, in October 2014, Silvia Grijalba, coordinator for Casa Gerald Brenan and journalist for *El Mundo*, said: "The restoration of this house owes the *Olive Press* so much. I am very grateful. People from Malaga will come here to see this centre and bring the life



**NEVER FORGOTTEN: Our front page campaign led to protection**

back to the town." Passing from owner to owner after Brenan left Churriana for nearby Alhaurin el Grande at the beginning of the 1970s, vandalism and neglect took their toll on its noble façade.

It was at this point, in September 2007, that *the Olive Press* first saw the sad ruin that the 200-year-old villa had become.

Shocked by the extent of the damage – including the theft of a wooden statue of the Virgin Mary from the side gate – this newspaper launched a campaign to save the house from its sorry fate.

National newspapers took up the call and, finally, the town hall realised that this historic national treasure was at risk of being lost forever.

Driven by the energetic force of Brenan's stepson, Carlos, the restoration began.

It can be visited from Wednesday to Friday.

See [www.casageraldbrenan.malaga.eu](http://www.casageraldbrenan.malaga.eu) for more information.

December 6th - December 19th 2017

**Alhaurin el Grande has been a market town for centuries but really blossomed under Moorish rule**

It was in Phoenician times that Alhaurin el Grande first developed its role as an important market town, as the already established Iberian tribes bartered their goods with new arrivals from Lebanon.

Later the town thrived under Roman occupation when a number of wealthy merchants from nearby Malaga made money from the rich mineral deposits in the nearby hills.

They built sizeable villas, such as Villa de la Mata, and labelled the town *Lauro Nova*. Evidence has been found in the numbers of coins, statues and pillars, a trio of which stand pride of place opposite the town hall today.

But it wasn't until Moorish rule that the town really blossomed, as the Arabs planted new crops in the wide fertile valley that is crossed by two rivers, the Fahala and Blas Gonzales.

They introduced acequias (or water courses) to irrigate the entire valley and built a number of important mills, such as the Molino Morisco de los Corchos.

An area of particular beauty – not to mention an extremely clement climate – it had soon taken on an appropriate new name, that of 'Garden of Allah', or Alhaurin.

Remnants of the eight centuries of Arabic rule can still be found, particularly at the Arco del Cobertizo, which was a gateway to the medina, that had a souk specialising in silk.

One of the last towns to be conquered by the Catholic kings in 1485, it was eventually merged with Alora, Cartama and Coin in 1666 to form a single entity known as the Four Towns.

Though it was anything but plain sailing for the united municipality and there were epidemics of plague and even an earthquake in 1680.

Later, Alhaurin was occupied for four years by the French during the Peninsular War in the early 19th century, which led to the inevitable destruction and upheaval.

Since then, apart from the turbulent period during the



civil war, the biggest threat to civil peace was an influx of English hooligans in the 1990s and early 2000s, who thankfully have now all but gone.

There is no doubt that Alhaurin el Grande has been through a dramatic transformation over recent years but there is a now a real swagger about the place.

Businesses are opening and the type of expat now coming to live here is more interested in integration, learning the language and enjoying the town's varied culture.



LUXURY: Inland expert Jo (right)



**NEED MORE HOMES**

**BEING bilingual is not just a skill, it's a way of life. That's why Jo Wood and her family moved out to Spain 15 years ago, to set up the Guadalorce Valley's luxury estate agency Grapevine Properties.**

**"Coming inland is different, because you're living in authentic Spain," Wood says before admitting, "we wanted our children to be bilingual, and to live in a safe environment."**

**The 49-year-old says the market has changed in the last year as Brexit has put the brakes on some buyers moving here.**

**"People feel a little bit unsettled and if they feel unsettled they're not going to make life-changing decisions," says Wood.**

**Despite that, they are short of homes to sell in the main towns of Alhaurin el Grande, Alhaurin de la Torre and Coin.**

**"We actually have quite a few buyers looking, but not enough properties there," added the mother-of-three.**



**Tel. 952 457 761**

**Students from all over Europe come to Andalucia's poshest pet establishment to learn how to groom**

**T**HEY come from as far as Cyprus, Italy and Iceland to learn how to groom and clip dogs by Rachel Goutorbe.

With an international reputation spanning two decades, it is perhaps little surprise. The Grooming Salon and Groomers training centre is fully equipped and caters for all breeds and crossbreeds as well as cats; the pets relish getting groomed here. Courses to learn how to groom last two to three weeks and some courses also take in first aid, canine massage and how to make your own grooming products.

The thriving business Posh Pets Spain, which Rachel runs with husband Les, literally treats its guests - that is, its pampered pooches and cats - better than half the hotels in the region.

The fortunate pets who come to stay, come from as far as Nerja and Gibraltar, they even have clients that fly their pets down from Madrid and Barcelona for their summer holidays.

"They absolutely love it, running around socialising together in the purpose built Pet Sensory Garden, all tails wagging," explains Rachel, who has been running her upmarket



# More than a dog's life!



**LUXURY:**  
Pampered  
pooch gets  
haircut



**SPACIOUS:** The salon team at work and Christmas display (right)



establishment since 2004. "Many of the dogs are ex-rescue dogs and you can see how they unwind and relax there". The sensory garden particularly helps to build up their confidence as well as to tantalise all their senses, plus it helps them to interact with their surroundings and provide physical and mental challenges

to help enrich their lives." With a herb garden aimed for dogs and a digging sandpit with treats hidden in it... could there be a pet hotel in Spain quite as posh? The Pet Sensory Garden/Playground sits in a half acre grove of mature citrus trees and is a riot of smells and colours. Cleverly thought out, there is a big range of self-medicating plants such as valerian, often selected by anxious dogs for its calming effect, and marigolds, often

selected by animals that are experiencing grief or emotional stress. Then there is lavender to encourage scar tissue regeneration, wheat grass for animals that are nervous, as well as peppermint which is good for its cooling properties and often selected by animals with skin irritations. It can also be used as an aid for training. The garden also boasts a water feature, a wendy house, wind chimes, sundecks, illusion mirrors and crazy daisies, which

spray the dogs with water, keeping them cool in summer.

The fantastic adjacent dog hotel has its kennel chalets named after Coronation Street characters and each comes with its own pink sun bed & toy box.

Aside to this there is a spacious boutique cattery at the far end of the orchard boasting large individual rooms complete with climbing frames, cat trees, toys and "soothing pet music" playing all day. Each cat room has a 360 degree view.

"Our grounds are fully secure with CCTV and we live on site so there is total peace of mind," continues Rachel.

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

Clients pets can be picked up by a licensed Pet Pick-up service too.

On top of this the company runs a fully licensed pet transportation service POSH PETS TRAVEL to and from the UK and Europe and has a small shop selling goodies such as natural treats, a range of Doggy Ice Cream in the summer and Natural Raw Dog Food.

**Visit [www.poshpetsspain.com](http://www.poshpetsspain.com) for more info or call 952 597 035**

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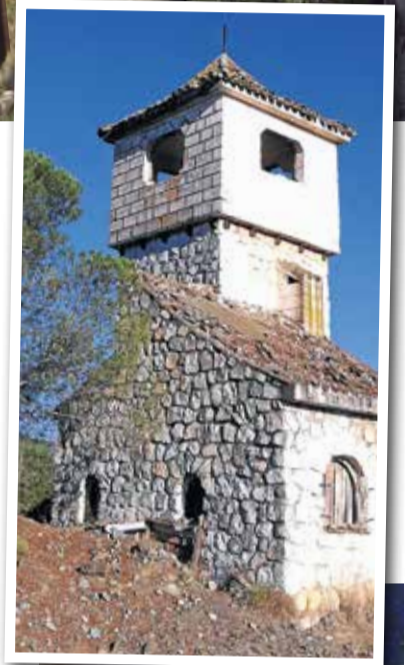


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# SECRET VALLEY WITH LINKS TO THE NAZIS



**MYSTERY: Secret waterfall and (inset) our investigation in 2010**

**Standfirst to come - Nusdaeriatem qui occum a dolupta tiumquas parum sum renimi, ad que nam dolorerum in pediam corro**

**L**IKE an illustration from a fairytale, the Barranco Blanco will enchant you - once you find it. But the search is more than worth it, for this serene spot (which means White Ravine in Spanish) is set in stunning woodland teeming with wildlife - including wild boars - and its river ends in a magical waterfall. Located in the foothills of the Sierra Alpujata between Coin and Alhaurin el Grande, it cannot be seen from the surrounding roads. These days it's a photographer's paradise and a hotspot for horseriding, mountain biking, walking and river swimming. But, just like the

stories by the Grimms brothers and Hans Anderson, it has a darker side, too. This beautiful spot was allegedly used as a Nazi training camp during the Second World War, due to Hitler and Franco's friendship.

### History

*The Olive Press* previously investigated the area's Nazi history in 2010. The remnants of their occupation are not obvious at first sight, as nature has done its best to erase Hitler's impact, but they are still there. Driving in from the main road, past

the water tower, the small white building on the left was originally a sentry point. Around the waterfall there are more houses, now in disrepair, which were formerly part of the Nazi military complex and home to SS soldiers. "There is certainly some truth to the links," says one Austrian resident. "It seems to spring back to a former SS officer who bought a lot of land here and eventually fled to South America." It is difficult to picture this wonderful valley as a cradle of evil, but it seems that even the Nazis were unable to resist Barranco Blanco's enduring charm.



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**Jon Clarke**  
reviews  
**Castillo de**  
**Monda**



TAKE a pinch of history, a splash of mountain views and a dash of Dutch talent and you've got the perfect ingredients for an exciting inland gem.

And that is certainly the case at the re-born Castillo de Monda.

Lording over the inland town that sits between Marbella and the Guadalhorce Valley, you could not ask for a better location.

But this stunning hotel also has a star chef Jaap Schaafsma, 32, who wouldn't be out of place in Marbella and indeed he is soon to open a second joint in the coastal town.

He previously cooked up a storm at fabulous Santa Fe, in nearby Coin, before cooking in some of the best restaurants back home in Holland for a couple of years.

The larger-than-life Dutchman has definitely come back stronger and his small but talented team is creating one of the most exciting menus I have tried in Andalucía.

His menu combines a range of styles from around the world, but is definitely seasonal, as local as possible and there are always a few specials.

You should definitely try his beautiful slow cooked mackerel fillet, with parsnip cream, beetroot and radish crisps and lemon foam, pretty as a picture served up on a black slate.

I am also a massive fan of his Galician oysters (right) as a starter, particularly the ice cold ones with saki, while his

## KING OF THE CASTLE



**TEAM: With Jaap (centre)**

ter, and there are three local breads from the village, baked fresh each morning.

Previously I had eaten a splendid 'picanton' wild chicken with panceta pork belly and lots of winter veg, while this time I dived into succulent strips of pork shoulder served with apsaragus and beetroot jus.

But that is not all. The service is really attentive, with our local waiter, Matthew, a former Surrey hairdresser, knowledgeable and efficient.

And the other real star is the location. Let's not forget you are in a castle and you have views for miles around.

Even better, you eat in a fabulous light chapel-like dining room, with stained glass windows and amazing photos on the wall.

The wine list was surprisingly in depth (Roda 1, Contino Reserva, etc), while I went for the excellent Vina Sastre Rioja, while there are a decent number of wines by the glass, most at just 3 euros.



**WARM: Fireplace and (right) delicious oysters**



take on cerviche, with seabass and coriander and a superb Salmon sashimi, was amazing. Doffing his hat at local dishes too there is a wild boar stew with papardelle pasta as a starter, as well as a venison fillet, with a mushroom *duxelles*, served with pistachio and cranberry foam. But also expect plenty of vegetarian dishes and salads, a few soups for win-

## WHERE TO EAT

ALL around the Guadalhorce Valley you will find vegetable gardens, orchards and fields of crops.

And with such a fabulous range of local produce it is no surprise you can eat well here.

Plenty of local chefs are starting to use the big range of vegetables, such as Samantha Birtwell, who recently opened the excellent **Health Kickchen**, with husband Luke, in Alhaurin. A true break from the norm, you will eat loads of excellent vegetarian and gluten-free dishes, while vegans are also catered for.

### Plenty

But, there is plenty there for the carnivores too, although 'it is all done as healthily as possible', explains Samantha, who previously worked in marketing at Unilever, in London.

I had a fantastic salmon wrap with cous cous salad, finished off with an amazing homemade avocado and chocolate brownie.

She and her husband, a civil engineer, arrived in the valley, via Dubai, and have ambitious plans to expand the business to the coast.

Another true star of the valley is Jaap Schaafsma, 31, who I first singled out a decade ago, for my book *Dining Secrets of Andalucía*, while working at the then-amazing Santa Fe restaurant in Coin.

# DINING

**In one of Andalucía's most productive agricultural hubs, it is no surprise you can eat well in the Guadalhorce Valley, writes Jon Clarke**



**WINTER WARMER:**  
**The fireplace at Finca la Mota and (top right) a dish at health kids club**

After it shut in the recession he headed back to his native Holland for a few years, but is now back at the helm at the excellent **Castillo de Monda** ([www.castillodemonda.com](http://www.castillodemonda.com)). It has, by far the most inventive menu in the valley and is soon to head south to Marbella, where he opens a new restaurant.

Calle de la Villeta 6, 29110 Monda (Málaga) España +34 952 45 98 36 [info@castillodemonda.com](mailto:info@castillodemonda.com)

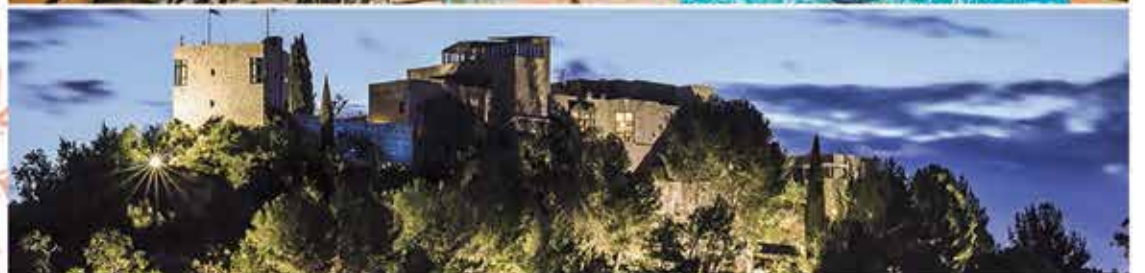
## CASTILLO DE MONDA

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December 6th - December 19th 2017

# DELIGHTS



## Pincer movement

Kees de Cock is a man going places.

He and his son Reuben provide some of the best quality fish and crab in the whole of Andalusia.

Coming from northern Norway this includes red king crabs and amazing fresh salmon.

They decided to launch the business after the crab did so well at their restaurant Finca la Mota, in Alhaurin, and have since signed up some of the coast's leading chefs including two Michelin-starred Dani Garcia.

Under the name Norcrab they provide dozens of restaurants on the coast.

But they should still be able to find a few pincers for anyone fancying something different this Christmas.

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



You will be spoilt by the cooking from Xavier Sierra, who after working in his parents' restaurant in France and studying at the best cooking school in Bordeaux, Ecole Hoteliere de Talence, packed up his kitchen utensils and headed to Spain 20 years ago. Over in Coin, you must look out the adventurous and highly romantic, **Bohemia** restaurant. The owner Pedro Trillo has incredible talent both for his interior design, food and original tapestries which line the walls. His food is classic soul food with a heavy emphasis on vegetables and, in particular, I loved the aubergines layered with salmon, parmesan, chives, caviar and cherry tomatoes. The courgettes stuffed with goat's cheese were amazing too and the portions are of an excellent size. Finally, also in Coin, check out **Casa Paco** which has an amazing range of fresh fish and seafood and has been running since 1985 with current owner Juan starting to work there at the ripe old age of 16.

Another great dining spot is **Finca La Mota** ([www.fincalamota.com](http://www.fincalamota.com)) on the outskirts of Alhaurin, which sits in its own secret valley.

Also Dutch owned, you dine on a candle-lit terrace at night surrounded by mature pine, orange and avocado trees.

A classic rural idyll, the diners are spoilt with a great mix of international dishes, with a slant on the oriental, Moroccan and

Thai.

Its latest offering is the excellent red king prawn, which is as succulent as lobster and comes care of owner Kees company Norcrab. He also does wild Norway salmon. Meanwhile you must try herring on brown bread, the chicken satay and a splendid 'zarzuela', which has a top mix of shellfish, rosada and langoustines. The Thai prawn and chicken curry

came in red, green or yellow depending on your preference for spice and was delicious. The apple strudel was a sure fire winner to end the meal. If you are looking for Gallic flair then look out for stalwart **El Postillon** ([www.elpostillon.com](http://www.elpostillon.com)), where you eat on a fantastic terrace overlooking a leafy garden and with views into the nearby Sierra de Mijas.

## WHERE TO STAY

# — Sleep tight —

Guadalorce Valley has some great rural retreats

**T**HERE are some amazing places to stay in the Guadalorce Valley, where peace and mountain landscapes merge.

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

The 350-year-old farmhouse sits in its own secret valley, surrounded by stunning countryside and with views to match.

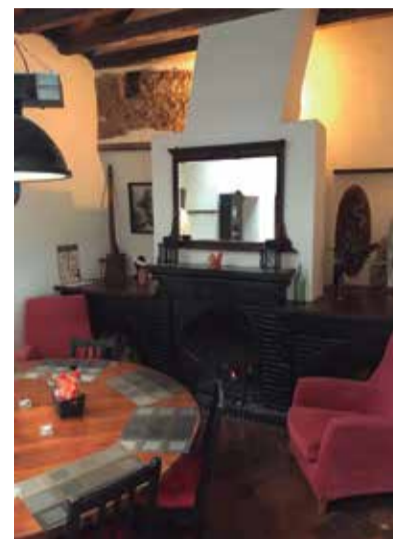
Run by Dutchman Kees and his two sons Reuben and Danny, you enter into a classic patio Andaluz with a huge pool and its own terrace restaurant. Inside it is charming with comfortable rooms and various dining areas, one with two roaring fireplaces.

A lovely shady pool and views to match make up the scene.

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

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

Taken over by three talented Dutchmen, the



COSY: At Finca la Mota

place not only counts on spacious bedrooms, replete with four poster beds, jacuzzi baths and private terraces, but it also has a spa. Best of all, one of the trio, Jaap Schaafsma, 31, who is in charge of the kitchen, has worked among Holland's best restaurants, a few of them with Michelin star status.

Finca La Mota was originally a farmhouse built over 350 years ago.

It is now a rustic Andalusian Inn full of charm and character both of which has been carefully maintained during its recent renovation. We are open for lunch, dinner or to stay in one of our 12 comfortable rustic rooms. The restaurant and bar are situated in the beautiful and picturesque garden by the private swimming pool offering a place to relax and dine in the Andalusian countryside. We also have an inside bar and restaurant. The restaurant serves international cuisine using flavours from around the world. Kitchen open from 12 till 22 hours, 7 days a week.

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