



# What a gem

**Polished Mijas pueblo shines bright like a diamond, casting its brilliance the length of the Costa del Sol, writes Iona Napier**

**T**HE classic Spanish hilltop town known from Chelsea to China for its chocolate box charm nails the quaint-small-town vibe at just a stone's throw from the coast. Discovered by the globe's more bohemian artists and writers in the 1950s and 60s, it was immortalised in Ronald Fraser's 1973 book, *The Pueblo*, and continues to cast a spell on visitors today. And it's still improving on perfection, ramping up attractions that go beyond the famous donkey taxis, colourful tourist tuk-tuks and zippy Segway-mounted

police. Mijas is flaunting a €4.7 million renovation which saw the main square transformed beyond recognition, with 70% coming direct from the European kitty. And the ways to get around are myriad, from the two dozen burro-taxis (€10 on a saddle, €15 in a carriage) to the white stallions bearing Cinderella-style carriages. Set just up above the square, Tuk-Tuk Spain is coming to the end of its third year and has been a major draw for thrill-seekers and anyone lack-

**Mijas is flaunting a €4 million makeover which saw its main square transformed**

*Continues on Page 20*

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From Page 19

ing the stamina to scale hilly Mijas. From the burro stables you can see what looks like a massive boulder to most newbies. The Ermita de la Virgen de la Pena is, in fact, an endearingly unpretentious little chapel.

Forget the checked tiles of Notre Dame or the Sagrada Familia's spiky, bejewelled interior. The hermitage was hollowed out by a single Carmelite monk in the 17th century. Outside, a stone gargoyle spouts water into a grand font. Inside, the candle light, bumpy floor, six ornate gold benches, fresh flowers and a small exhibition are a real treat.

Leaving the chapel, I see a pair of pale-skinned Japanese tourists huddled on a bench

hollowed out of the rock, using an umbrella to protect themselves from the late-March deluge.

Al fresco dining is the norm here, with - usually - not

**Al fresco dining is the norm here with not a table free near the Mirador**

a table free near the Mirador del Compas, where you can dine to the musical swoosh of water - provided by the charming fountain, not Handel!

"It may be busy today but Mijas is popular all year round, like diamonds," confides Francisco, a nut seller who has lived in the town all his life.

Rightly, he capitalises on the buzz to flog his delicious candied almonds which give me renewed strength to hit the ground running.

Mijas is designed for its multicultural tourist scene - with around 20,000 foreign residents and many, many more visitors. Signs



**EQUINE THRILLS:** Taking stirrup cup at the feria and (left) street scene

# HILLTOP HIDEOUT

appear in English and there is even an impressive machine vending t-shirts, maps and guides after trading hours. Welcome to the future, I chuckle.

And yet the human reception is second to none. Carmen in the Tourist Office, who

hails from Valencia, gives me the inside track on just about everything in immaculate English. In fact she offers maps and info in an incredible 16 languages!

Treats include free flamenco in the main square every Wednesday and Saturday

at noon, weather permitting, rivalling any you'll see at Sevilla's tobacco factory or in Granada's celebrated caves.

Let's not forget the countryside. There are beautiful hiking trails waiting to be explored. Sign up for 'senderismo' at the tour-

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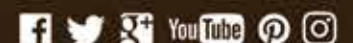
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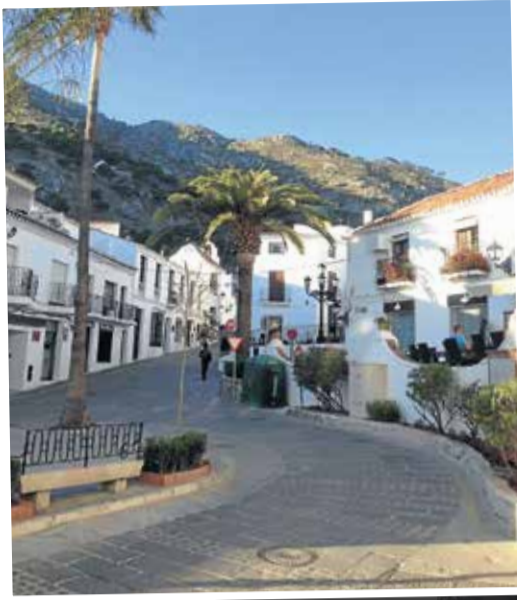
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## MIJAS BY NUMBERS

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

**50%** - ratio of male to female residents.

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

**4,000** flower pots damaged during road works will be restored.

**150,000** Japanese tourists visit Mijas each year.

**6,000** Brits are registered as living in Mijas.

**1,476** feet above ground - Mijas pueblo's location ensures hot summers and mild winters.

**82,184** - population of Mijas.

ist office for any one (or all) of three weekly routes.

Multilingual guides lead groups of up to 30 around paths of varying difficulty - an energetic and sociable affair.

"The biggest reason Mijas draws people in is because we are close to the biggest Costa towns yet a typical Andalucian pueblo blanco which people love, complete with donkeys and mountains," explains Carmen.

"While the centre of town is beautifully preserved, we are moving forward and modernising on the outskirts within easy reach of the coast."

Get a free town walking map that encompasses the key sites in a leisurely two hour stroll - providing you don't make too many watering-hole stops.

Several museums and plazas are worth a look-in, in particular, the oval-shaped bullring built in 1900 and the main town museum, adorned with speciality esparto products and fabulous photos.

On top of this is the intriguing miniatures museum, squeezed into a conspicuous yellow caravan, as well as the handsome town hall.

Rest your weary legs in the tranquil Plaza de los Siete Canos and poke a nose inside the eighteenth-century Ermita de Nuestra Senora de los Remedios before circuiting back to central Plaza de la Libertad via Calle Larga del Palmar and Calle San Sebastian.

The latter is 'officially' the pueblo's prettiest street and houses much of Canadian businessman Thomas Weller's restaurant empire, including Aroma Café & Secret Garden, Meguinez, and the Mariposa shop (Bana Bana and Latitud 36 are elsewhere).

Softly-spoken Weller can often be seen tearing between his numerous establishments. Bana Bana won Mijas' top tapas award in 2015 for the second year running, thanks to head chef Txelo's daffy duck confit and truffle milhojas with lemon ice cream!

There are tapas haunts and restaurants to suit every taste and budget in Mijas, while the open air auditorium becomes a great concert venue, often hosting tribute acts in the summer.



**EMBLEMATIC:** The ancient bullring held its first fight in 1900, when 'esparto' knitting was big business



Every local I meet seems to have lived here their whole life: sun-shrivelled Antonio, who cannot remember his own age, clutches my arm enthusiastically to lead me to the art museum while telling me about how town has changed.

We pass boutiques, delis and a baking dynasty that has been going since 1904, with grandson Francisco now in charge.

It's easy to fall in love with this enchanting pueblo. At a zapateria, fresh-faced shoe-seller Celia recalls how her Liverpool mother met an Andalusian in Ibiza in the 60s, married him, moved to Mijas and never left.

Shoe fetishist Nikki, who has pairs of alpargatas (espadrilles) in more than 30

colours - the sign of a true española - was similarly smitten.

"I went to Liverpool to study languages as my mum did," says the 34-year-old who is a perfect example of the cosmopolitan population in Mijas. "But I came back here to raise my daughter; it is the most wonderful place."

A cool glass of tinto de verano later and I feel so welcomed by Mijas Pueblo's residents that I'm reluctant to get back in the driving seat and head for the coast to the municipality's 'other half' - Mijas Costa.

But the welcome in La Cala is equally warm - restaurateurs, professionals and locals are all itching to tell me about their slice of paradise by the beach.

Be it a Sauvignon Blanc in Olivia's - run by TOWIE star Elliott Wright - or a pint of Guinness at Biddy Mulligan's - run by Davey from Ireland - there is somewhere for everyone to sit back and unwind.

**A cool glass of tinto de verano later and I feel so welcomed by Mijas pueblo**



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# Culture hub

In one way it's your typical white-washed Andalusian village branded with the characteristics of Spanish culture known throughout the world - flamenco, religious festivals, artwork from iconic Spanish artists and affable locals. However Mijas likes to go its own way, too. One of the most striking presences in the pueblo is its defiantly rectangular bull ring, a circle squared to save space in this compact town.

## Geometry

Striking for its elevation as well as its non-conformist geometry, it can be seen from points throughout Mijas, granting stunning views of pastures sweeping down to Costa Fuengirola. Needless to say, bull fights rarely speckle the events calendar here. Colourful festivities, concerts and theatre productions fill the rest of it. Semana Santa is a sight to behold, with elaborate floats bedecked with religious figures illuminating the labyrinthine streets. And you'll find no shortage of concerts taking place during the summer months. The open-air theatre Auditorio Municipal hosts dance festivals and tribute performances, along with the Span-

**Mijas is a living museum in microcosm, showcasing all the great Spanish traditions with a quirky spin that's quintessentially its own**



CULTURE: Picasso museum

ish Theatre Festival in August where talented actors weave intricate stories under the stars.

Art on a smaller scale appears at the Miniatures Museum of Max Carromato.

Founded 45 years ago by a hypnotist, its painstakingly microscopic artworks range from the astounding to the bizarre: faces carved into chickpeas, the last supper painted onto a grain of rice, fleas dissected and dressed, to name a few.

## Picasso

For artwork you don't have to squint to see, Cac Mijas Art Gallery has an important Picasso collection and two rooms of temporary exhibitions. This month from April 7 - 24, the town is celebrating its eighth Open Studio Weekends, giving visitors a chance to meet artists from all over the world on their home turf. Over these weekends, the painters, sculptors and photographers talk about and sell their work, sharing their own artistic perceptions of this enchanting pueblo the way they live it themselves.



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HISTORY: 18th century watchtower

# Fortress of fun

See stars in your eyes at La Cala de Mijas, the celebrity studded destination of Mijas Costa

THESE days you're hard pushed not to spot a famous face on a wander through star-studded La Cala de Mijas.

Well known characters such as Elliott Wright from The Only Way is Essex and TV chef Steven Saunders run their bustling restaurants with panache while Marbella's it crowd is never far away. Long gone are the days when the place was merely a haunt for gangland heroes, including 'Mad' Frankie Fraser, Kray minder George Dixon and notorious Ronnie Knight.

These days there is a distinct sense of glamour about the charming village, which has become a genuine foil to the buzz of Marbella.

Alongside a mix of well-heeled international tourists keep your eyes peeled for British celebrities including Antony Worrall Thompson, Chris Tarrant and Rick Parfitt of Status Quo who have been spotted there.

Thanks to the prime location between Marbella and Fuen-girola, visitors are close to urban action while revelling in the provincial charm of a waterfront fisherman's cottage or backstreet bar.

The eighteenth-century watchtower, recently restored, stands as a beacon to the town's history, with almost all local transport conducted by donkey up to the 1970s!

The defiantly low-rise La Cala de Mijas has preserved its Spanish charm while absorbing waves of tourists and smartening up its act in recent years especially. And with the boardwalk, completed a year ago, which connects the village with Riviera there is all the more reason to strut your stuff in La Cala.

It is fast becoming a little corner of Marbella in Mijas, with a booming property market, a splendid promenade and vibrant bar and restaurant scene. It was here that TOWIE's Elliot Wright chose to sink three million euros in stunning restaurant Olivia's,

rather than in the perhaps more obvious resort of Marbella.

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

"Forget Marbs, this is the place to hang out these days."

The central hub for many an expat in La Cala is Irish bar Biddy Mulligan's.

The perfect place to watch sport or grab a Guinness, manager David Reilly explains how La Cala is going from strength-to-strength.

"La Cala de Mijas is the best kept secret on the Costa Del Sol," he says. "It really is an amazing village with everything you could wish for - all within a short walk from each other.

"There are fantastic restaurants, a picturesque beach and a family friendly atmosphere."

La Cala's star really is in the ascendent and estate agent Andrew Dodd, at Homefinders, has the numbers to prove it.

"What we were selling for €130,000 two years ago is now easily selling for €170,000 and more," he reveals nonchalantly. "Our big

problem is high demand but very low supply: everybody wants to be close to La Cala, with a sea view and walking distance from the centre, and nobody wants to compromise."

The 48-year-old continues: "Most agents are receiving ten requests every day for long term lets here and there simply isn't the supply."

Dodd adds that as well as Brits, the Scandinavians and the Dutch are also coming in their droves.

Tourists are flocking to Mijas and it's easy to see why - a melting pot of glitz and glam and down-to-earth family values, La Cala is most certainly moving in the right direction.



## Treasure hunting

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, handmade jewellery, eco-cosmetics ... there's so much on offer for those who like to buy local and 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 boutiques to browse dainty bracelets and necklaces inset with crystals excavated from nearby mountains.

Check out artisan food stores touting 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 dynamo Thomas Weller, under the brand WE, sold in various shops.

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.

# PARTY PUEBLO

A calendar of colourful fiestas ramps up the movida in Mijas village year-round

HARDLY a month goes by without some kind of party animating the flower-pot strewn streets of Mijas Pueblo. And the residents have every reason to celebrate life in this quintessential Andalusian white village. Ingrained with southern Spanish traditions from a young age, the people of the pueblo celebrate with gusto, whether during the riot of Carnival, the passion of Holy Week or their bizarre Feast of St. Anthony.

**Cabalgata de los Reyes Magos - January 5**

Mijas is a wonderful place to watch the Three Kings parade at high altitude. A tradition throughout Spain, sweets are thrown to children in the streets as the kings pass through on colourful floats. The procession is an exciting build-up to January 6th, traditionally the day when Spanish children receive their main Christmas presents.

**Feast of St. Anthony - January 17**

**The sisterhood of spinsters traditionally looked forward to this quirky fiesta, when single women are invited to hurl stones at the statue of St. Anthony to try and change their marital status. But they need a good aim as only those who manage to hit poor St. Anthony's private nether regions will find love that year, according to legend. Those who miss can cheer themselves up at the feast (traditionally, stew, sugar cane and palm fruit) and bag themselves a dancing partner at the after-party.**

**Carnival - February**

Celebrating excess before the frugal rigours of Lent, the Spanish version of mardi gras gives residents and visitors the chance to don fancy dress and get involved in an iconic celebration. Prizes are awarded for the best costumes and there are other opportunities to join in the fun at La Cala and Las Lagunas, which hold their festivities over different weekends.

**Easter - March/April**

**Easter is one of the busiest times in Mijas, with a multitude of events in all zones. The hilltop village is undergoing extensive roadworks to ease the passage of the mobbed processions and extravagant golden thrones through its character streets.**

**International People's Feria - June**

Mijas celebrates world cultures on this day every year by inviting local folk from more than 20 countries to set out their stalls with traditional food, drink, handicrafts and clothing. Many countries also stage music and dance performances, with everything from Brazilian beats to Irish dancing.

**La Noche de San Juan - June 23**

**La Noche de San Juan sees coastal towns all over Spain lit up with beach bonfires to celebrate the longest night of the year. But landlocked Mijas Pueblo also gets in on the act, with a firework display and the burning of effigies held in Sebastian Street after sundown.**

**Flamenco dance festival - July**

This typically Andalusian art form is celebrated by Mijeños in July with a programme of flamenco guitar, singing and dancing by top local and national performers.

**Mijas Feria - September**

**Held around the first week of September, this is one of the highlights of Mijas' packed cultural calendar. Held in honour of the town's patron saint with most of the action taking place in her eponymous square, Virgen de la Pena Plaza - the ladies get glammed up in flamenco dresses, Andalusian thoroughbred horses strut their carefully-choreographed stuff and the sherry flows into la madrugada.**



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**The popularity of  
Mijas dates back  
to Greek and  
Roman times**

ITS whitewashed houses with low windows and tiny doorways are characteristically Moorish, typical of other Andalusian mountain villages. But Mijas Pueblo is a lot older than it looks. Founded in prehistoric times, it was previously occupied by Greeks and Romans who sought the area's rich minerals and resources: marble and agate excavated in the mountains, esparto grown for weaving baskets, espadrilles and hats and nutrient-rich soil which produces some of the best olives in the region.

**Harvest**

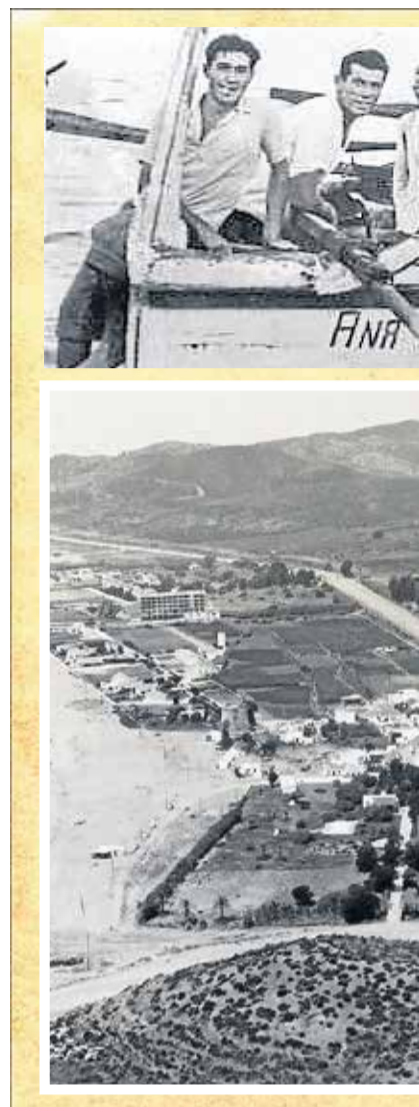
You can learn all about it at the town's Casa Museo ethnographic museum. "My family used to have five olives in our house," says Carmen Escalona Vega, a volunteer at the museum. She tells us her father had a small farm where he used to harvest olives and produce oil to fill these huge containers, preserving it for up to a year. "Back then we didn't have a fridge. We didn't need one," she says. A similar story rings true with many families in the area. Before the tourism boom of the 1950s and 60s, most people lived off the land and the donkeys which have become one of the

# Pueblo with a past



village's attractions had tougher jobs, transporting produce and powering flour mills. Caves dug into the mountains

were once used for storing tomatoes. Now it's the constant beat of tourist feet that feeds the town today.



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# Artisan town

**CREATIVITY AND RESOURCEFULNESS:** Mijas workers created an industry around the 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 (see right) meanwhile other snapshots of Mijas in days gone by include an underdeveloped La Cala in the 1960s



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# All going swimmingly

**After 32 years, Splash Pools is the definitive market leader on the coast**

**O**VER 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 Clueit cleaned pools by day and ran a bar in Fuen-girola by night.

Eventually becoming a full time job, he was soon 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.

A charming, well-travelled couple, who spend their weekends at their farm in Cadiz, they have hundreds of regular clients and also now build pools as well as look after them.

"The last crisis was the worst, but things have really increased a lot - and we have taken on new staff in the last few years," 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 saxo-



phone while Sammi works it out in the gym.

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# All about Mijas

## Spring in your step

SUMMER may be fast approaching but there is still time to lose those winter kilos. Bored with your exercise bike? There are tonnes of classes on offer at Mijas Fitness & Yoga at Cerrado del Aguila Golf.

Why not try the TRX? It's a 30-minute full body workout that's loved by celebs like J-Lo because it uses your own body weight instead of machines or dumbbells.

And Zumba is still one of the most popular and social programmes.

If you're one of the many who suffer from back problems, then core training is perfect for you, strengthening the abdominals and lower back muscles. Originally developed for dancers and boxers, Pilates also develops core strength, it will improve your posture and flexibility, while sculpting long, lean muscles.

If you want something more gentle and relaxing, yoga and Tai Chi are both fabulous for enhancing mental awareness, as well as developing coordination and ability to concentrate.

**Search Mijas Fitness & Yoga on Facebook for more information**

THE sun is really shining on Susanne Teres' long established agency Mijas Properties this Spring.

A string of offers on properties is keeping her and her team busy right into the Easter week.

"It's been a really busy year so far," explains the friendly agent, who has run her agency in the pueblo since the 1980s. She fell in love with Mijas on a holiday 40 years ago and soon made the village her home, along with mother, now in her 80s, and her daughter, who works with her.

### Dedicated

The business offers everything from sales to rentals and holidays to property management. Her staff operate in English, Spanish and French and all share Susanne's enthusiasm and dedication to their clients.

"Mijas is really on the map now," she explains. "I have watched the vil-

# Pueblo magic



lage 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 is 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 encapsulates visitors with its magic."

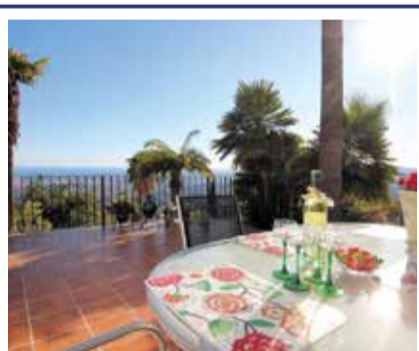
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# ON TARGET

“WE want to make your relocation a happy process.” That’s the mission of Target Estates founder Guillermo Morillas, who has been based in Mijas for three years. “We have a passion for making the client’s relocation a success and a happy experience, that’s what has been key to our success,” explains the bilingual Argentinian agent.

## No-brainer

The company has grown every year since setting up in the Pueblo, a location which for expat Morillas, was a no-brainer. “Mijas offers the Spanish feel while offering a great choice of restaurants and bars, it’s a great place to live and almost sells itself,” he says. “The pueblo in particular has some stunning architecture and beautiful views that make it a really hot market.” So hot that Target Estates is expecting nothing but another bumper year after three years of solid growth. “Properties are very in demand here and

**It’s been happy days since Guillermo Morillas opened his agency, Target Estates, in Mijas Pueblo**



**SUCCESS: For Guillermo Morillas**

tend to sell quickly, and it’s no surprise,” he adds. Brits are still the biggest buyers, although like most of the coast, the Swedish and Nordic markets are growing. “The British will never leave Mijas,” explains Morillas, “and yes the Nordic market is growing but there is room for everyone here, that’s what makes Mijas great.” Target Estates has built up connections in the area that gives it access to the very best properties available including hot opportunities, resales properties and new developments. The company has a proven track record for finding the right properties, be it a villa for sale, apartments for sale in the golf or a prime Mijas real estate such as a plot of land.

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This luxurious 5 bedroom all in suite bathroom + two separate toilets villa in the mountains of Mijas is all around breathtaking. Located in a high end community and spanning over 3,170 m2 of gardens, this magnificent panoramic sea view property is the dream home. This estate is a haven for gazing out at the Mediterranean sea and enjoying the picturesque views in every direction.

On the main floor entrance, there are two ensuite bedrooms with a hallway that leads to the back terrace and living room area. The living room area is a large

open space with vaulted ceilings and a double-aspect fire place. There are many windows including three full width concertina folding doors giving great access to the veranda creating a soothing atmosphere. The kitchen is astounding with top quality appliances and a large island looking out into a sea of bliss.

Each bedroom is filled with unique character and is very spacious. The master bedroom suite which is on its own separate level, complete with Walk-in dressing room, ensures privacy to the fullest. Off the bedroom is also your very own large private terrace.

The house is ready to move in with top quality furniture included in the price. Come ready to enjoy the sunshine and beautiful views this property has to offer!

The pool area is surrounded by lush gardens and palm trees to add to the beauty of this home. The stone architect of the pool and tiles are unique and add character to the home. The terrace area is great for enjoying the fresh summer days and perfect summer breezes in the evenings.

**Get full view of the property with our exclusive 3D virtual tour video, contact us now!**

The games room is a grand space for family fun and events with snooker table fully refurbished and – full movie theatre style room. The games room draws you into a relaxing layout made for entertaining. On this level, there are also three big bedrooms ensuite as well as bathrooms.

Recently refurbished, Casa Koala comes with everything included; quality furniture and furnishings, crockery and cutlery, cooking utensils, linen, TV’s pictures etc. All you need to bring is your own clothes.

You’ll also love the convenience of the location as it is near to many great shops, one of a kind bars and restaurants. Very easy access to the beaches and only 30 minutes from the Malaga International airport. The house is just minutes from the story book village of Mijas Pueblo. The village is filled with so much beauty and charm. This relaxed Spanish lifestyle is like a fresh breath of air. This beautiful home provides its very own resort style living. You must come and see for yourself!





**DYNAMOS:** Thomas and Hugo at Secret Garden

**JON CLARKE meets expats Thomas and Hugo, the key restaurateurs of Mijas Pueblo**

It is around the world in a dozen flavours for Thomas Weller and Hugo German most days of the week.

Everything from langoustines to Argentinian steaks and osso bucco to sushi, the pair have to keep their taste buds sharpened at all times.

With half a dozen restaurants between them in Mijas, not to mention quite a few shops and another eatery in Fuengirola, they are certainly never short of a meal!

It all started in 2004, when Argentinian Hugo, 55, first arrived in Mijas pueblo, via a short stint in Mallorca.

An engineer by trade, the father-of-three moved from Buenos Aires during the deep 1990s recession, looking to make a new life in Spain.

He had soon found his vocation working with fellow expat Thomas, 46, helping the Canadian entrepreneur build and kit out a series of shops in Mijas pueblo.

But things took a turn for the new when they found a hidden overgrown garden in the heart of the pueblo and knew instinctively what to do.

Clearing out the brambles and rubbish, they shipped



**NEW ORDER:** Hugo at his new joint la Cucine di Nico



**EVOCATIVE:** A magical surprise awaits diners at the Secret Garden

# Secret of s

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 Hugo. "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." 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," adds Thomas, who first arrived in Europe in the 1990s as a ski rep in the Alps.

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 trattoria this year (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



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OASIS: The pond in the Secret Garden, while (right) Hugo shows off his BBQ skills in the kitchen and (inset left) Latitud 36

# Success

"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 and very little quality. We have helped to change that."

He initially set up a photography company on the coast, taking pictures of golfers and golf courses, and opened his first boutique, Mariposa, in 2001, a little shop that now nestles among the two further boutiques nearby. "The key to everything is being different. We're always looking for new designers, products and 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 jewellery.

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."

bar in 1998 and creating his own eco-cosmetic company Weller Ecology, which sells from his three shops in the town. A new one has also just opened in Ronda, with others in the pipeline around Spain. He 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 sim-

ple, good ingredients. It seems to be a winning formula," he explains. He had only come across Mijas by chance on a break from the Alps and quickly spotted a gap in the market and 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.

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**CONTRASTS:** Inland dream at La Cala Resort and beach paradise at El Oceano

## WHERE TO STAY

**M**IJAS has a great range of places to stay, from good budget options to grand luxury.

The top end certainly includes *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, its fantastic facilities have been used by England football teams, not to mention Everton and Steaua Bucharest.

There are grass football pitches, a large gym, but most importantly an overriding sense of nature and peace, with stunning views to faraway 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 rooms, most with amazing views across the valley.

Even better, after a hard day's pampering - of 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.

Another super luxury place to stay is *El Oceano*, sitting on the coast just outside La Cala village. This stunning spot just gets better and better and after its multi-million refit of two years ago, is style personified.

# Sweet dreams

The suites are sumptuous and incredibly well appointed, each with their own balcony overlooking the rocky coastline.

Not for nothing they are full of celebrities and VIPs come the summer, many paying more than 500 euros a night.

Run by John Palmer and his wife Lorraine, plus son in law Glen, it has a real family feel about the place and its regulars just keep coming back. For a more economical option look out for *Hotel Carmen* in La Cala de Mijas, where you will find some excellent value rooms at great prices.

This two star place is well located for all the action and its rooms are spotless.

Meanwhile up in the village, look out for *Casa Tejon*, which is in a prime location and counts on a series of spacious apartments at a great value.

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## WHERE TO EAT

# Taste on high



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

**Y**OU blink and you'll miss a new restaurant opening in Mijas these days.

While Marbella may still be the culinary capital of the Costa del Sol, the white village and its coastal resort of La Cala is fast catching up.

It is perhaps telling that global superstar Michel Roux Jr (right) named Mijas as the town that inspired him to follow in the footsteps of his famous father at two Michelin star *Le Gavroche* in London.

The British-born star of *Masterchef* and *Gordon Ramsey's Hell's Kitchen* visited the pueblo with his family as a child and tried things he had 'never tasted before'.

"I remember tasting things I'd never tasted before. 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 has been continued to this day with the likes of London-trained chefs, such as Joffrey Charles and William Squires, at *El Oceano* restaurant.

"It's getting better and better here and there is a lot of competition," explains Squires, who worked for four years under famous Melbourne chef Joel Valvason.

"There are a lot of young chefs with new ideas and it's great to try new things then get back and do things with a new twist," he adds. Take a spin around La Cala these days and you will find the wonderful *Pura Cepa* wine bar, its creative neighbour *KonFusion*, Elliot Wright and his showbizzy, but surprisingly good haunt *Olivias*, the amazing fish restaurant the *Blue Marlin* - probably the best on the coast - and now the original **Utopia**.

It was here that I ate an amazing spread of healthy

tapas, including hummus, guacamole and a great burrata of mozzarella on a bed of rocket and cherry tomatoes, with shavings of parmesan on top. The brainchild of Pepe Villalba and Ana Romero, these two young local Andalucians are so welcome back on their own terra firma, having spent the last six years living and working abroad in Berlin and Bristol through the recession.

"We knew it was time to come back now the crisis is easing," explains Pepe, who is the whiz in the kitchen. "We found this spot and built it up from scratch brick by brick."

And now what was once a waste ground parking lot for cars is today a lovely hidden garden with a great funky atmosphere.

And yet there is more in La Cala, in particular with **Joffreys**, which is slowly becoming one of the true culinary references on the coast.

Classy French chef Joffrey Charles offers up a wonderful mix of exciting 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, who worked in TV for years, looks 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 again (as I did last year) and tip him for a future Michelin star.

Nearby, make sure to 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.

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.

They became famous from the TV show *A New Life in the Sun* and run a tight ship, if you'll excuse the pun, with hundreds of regulars swearing by their place.

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.

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

Head chef William Squires, 31, has worked around the world, including four years in Australia and three years in Ireland, and has built up a skillful repertoire with his handling of Asiatic dishes in particular.

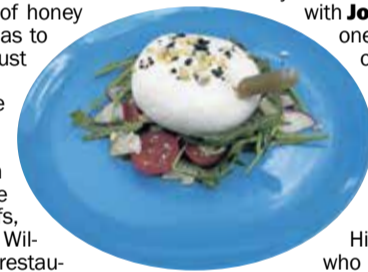
The beef tartare is his tete de cuvee, marinated overnight, then rolled in peppercorns before being seared for 30 seconds and then rested in the fridge before being served.

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

The restaurant sits in a wonderful spot right on the beach and after a multi-million euro overhaul it is even more glamorous than before.

The only place that can come near to matching them for style is **Olivia's**, where TV star Elliot Wright has invested over three million creating the ultimate dining experience.

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**HEALTHY:** Burrata special at Utopia



**DYNAMOS:** Alison and Steve at Blue Marlin

Continues on Page 32

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## From Page 30

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 an incredible 25 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.

Next up, 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 (see article over).

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. There is also an amazing list of gin and tonics, should you decide for something stronger.



**PURE-BREED:** Ronda chef Paco Flores at Pura Sangre made a name for himself with a stunning 'gaspachuelo' at Madrid Fusion in 2012. He now divides his time between his La Cala eaterie and a new restaurant, Fabrica, in Fuengirola, which used to be the legendary Toston.



**FAMILY FARE:** Juan and Victor at Restaurante Ole and (right) Tapavino

## PUEBLO REVOLUTION

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

There are some excellent wine bars and places to eat tapas, but few beat **La Bodega del Pintor**, which has a lovely hidden garden at the back.

Here you will find the charming spot, where its welcoming owner Amparo was actually born.

Sitting in a historic 300-year-old townhouse it is atmospheric in the extreme and serves up plenty of wines by the glass, alongside some delicious local tapas.

"I wanted to create the sense that you are dining in someone's home," explains Amparo, whose mother, 86, still lives upstairs.

"The whole family comes and goes and my brother even runs an apartment hotel at the back," she adds. Another excellent place to visit is **La Bella Coppia**, an Italian, which has been run by Pe-



**ELEGANCE:** At Pura Sangre

dro 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.

Make sure Pedro cuts you a few slices of his amazing ham.

Next door is the well established stalwart Restaurante **La Reja**, which is charm personified and has an amazing dining terrace looking over Mijas and the faraway hills.

Run by Manolo and his wife, it has a simple good value menu, described as 'traditional Andalusian kitchen', and expect to eat delicious aubergines in honey, perfect steaks and the freshest fish.

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 German.

Part of a group of restaurants owned by Hugo and his business partner Thomas Weller, make sure to look out for **Taberna 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 **Tapintxos**, which is inspired by Thomas's love of the north of Spain not to mention his new Italian **La Cucina di Nico**, where I ate some amazing osso bucco.

  
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Sherry House has one of the biggest collection of sherries in the world, writes Dining Secrets of Andalucía editor Jon Clarke



# Sherry good



**W**ITH 330 references it claims to have the biggest sherry wine list in the world.

Row upon row of fabulous amontillados, finos and olorosos line the walls of this fantastic new restaurant in Torreblanca.

Many of them are over 30 years in age and a fair chunk get 100 points from Robert Parker.

Welcome to Sherry House, the creation of Bernardo Diego Pullido, 32, a business dynamo, who also owns popular wine bar Pura Cepa in La Cala de Mijas.

"There is a restaurant in Japan with 290 different sherries," he explains. "But there is nothing like this in Spain."

If credentials are needed to run such a place, owning a vineyard or two certainly helps.

But, as far as Bernardo is concerned, his 2.5-hectare estate in Riax Baixas, where he produces his fine albarino Estrada Vello, is irrelevant. So is his local



**COLLECTION:** 330 sherry types and (right) Malvajo vineyard

But his new venture on the outskirts of Fuengirola is something else entirely. As well as its size, Sherry House sits in pole position overlooking the beach towards, appropriately, an offshore mussel farm.

The sort of menu you'd expect to find in Marbella or Madrid, there is an excellent mix of starters, including charcoal-roasted leeks with Nanthey cream, soft shell crabs and a fabulous crostini of pumpkin with ricotta cheese.

There is also a light tasting menu of seven courses at 39 euros, or a larger 11 courses at 59 euros. Both have the option of accompanying wines, a good few of them sherries, of course.

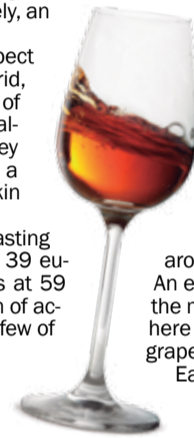
I went a bit off piste and tried a risotto of boletus mushrooms with truffle and shavings of parmesan, then a fantastic dish of roast sucking pig, in a rich gravy sauce cooked for an impressive 48

hours. I tasked the sommelier to bring me out two different glasses of sherry and no more (I was driving) and he came up trumps with an amazing amontillado from Williams and Humbert (appropriate for a guiri), followed by an unusual cream sherry Urium, which was delicious.

All that was left - after the superb 'Kinder egg' dessert - was to get in the car and take the ten minute drive up to their vineyard, Malvajo, which sits at around 300m above sea level.

An extraordinary spot, which is one of the most southerly vineyards in Spain, here Bernardo grows three different grapes, including Cabernet and Shiraz.

Easily the most interesting wine is tete de cuvee, Carnibal, a red, which sits for 28 months in French oak, and his extremely unusual chardonnay that is grown near Ronda. Sherry good indeed!



**BUFFS:** Bernardo and (right) manager Maria at the bodega

vineyard in the hills above Mijas, where he now produces no less than five different wines.

After all, he spent five years studying wine-making in Galicia (not to mention working in restaurants in London) before making the plunge and

opening his wine distribution business in Mijas, half a decade ago.


What began as the wine shop, Pura Cepa, is now one of La Cala's finest places to *tapear*.

There are always more than 40 wines by the glass and around a dozen fabulous tapas to dip into. There is also an amazing list of gin and tonics, should you decide for something stronger.



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**Joffrey Charles is the true Gallic star of the coast, writes Jon Clarke**

**M**ADONNA, Prince Charles and Kate Moss have already tasted a little bit of Joffrey.

As has the British ambassador, who popped in for lunch with a trio of local mayors on a whistlestop trip to Mijas this month.

But now everyone can sample the delights of French chef Joffrey Charles de Saint Georges (to use his grand full name) who is now in his second year in Mijas.

Classy Joffrey's Las Mimosas is the realisation of a dream for the 28-year-old maestro, who has royal roots from Normandy, alongside his vivacious former TV star partner, Lisa Burgess.

It is already becoming the talk of La Cala thanks to Joffrey's artistic flair and culinary passion.

"It's something we've always wanted



**ATTENTION TO DETAIL:** Joffrey and (left) with Lisa

# OH LA LA LA CALA

to do together," explains 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 restaurants around Europe, includ-

ing spells in Val D'Isere, 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 dish-



**OUR MAN IS HAPPY:** Ambassador Simon drops in

es look beautiful and he is so passionate about what he does."

The pair 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 spot two years ago, which is now almost completely unrecognisable from its previous guise as an old working men's cafe. Since opening last Spring their reputation has blossomed. "We've just



been growing naturally by word of mouth," continues Lisa.

And things really started to move when they became TV stars, appearing in Channel 4's *A New Life in the Sun* last month, with Lisa describing setting up a restaurant in Spain as 'like going three rounds with Mike Tyson'.

Since it first aired their reservations have gone through the roof and they are now having to regularly turn away dozens of diners each weekend.

"I had to turn 20 away last Sunday which was really upsetting," says Lisa. "So make sure to book early."

They are doing a set lunch nowadays at 20 euros, as well as various events including a Royal Wedding special (practically sold out), and a series of wine tasting lunches, plus a seven-course degustation menu.

**Visit [joffreyslasmimosas.com](http://joffreyslasmimosas.com)**



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*Joffrey Charles is a French chef born and raised in Normandy. He has worked, for the past decade, in fine dining restaurants in Mont Saint Michel, Val D'Isere, Corsica, Dublin and London. Joffrey recently featured in a 2018 Channel 4 programme about his cuisine & opening a restaurant in Spain.*





**Every cloth you can imagine is right on your doorstep in Mijas**

“ WITHOUT decoration a home is not dressed, it is only walls.”  
This is the motto of El Mundo de las Telas (or Fabric World), a 1000m2 shop which lives up to its name, located in Mijas. The one-stop shop for all things textile has been around for decades and is now owned by four staff members who rallied together to buy it from its former British owner who was retiring back to England. Walking into the shop, the eye is left bouncing from rail to rail, seeing luxurious handmade purple velvet on one and multi coloured pineapples on the next. When it comes to picking which one of the thousands of available designs to choose, the team offer a tailored service to find what is best for you. Whether you want the material to make cushions, a dress, curtains or even deck out your boat, there is something for all. As with fashion, interior de-

# Material girls



sign trends change but with new patterns arriving every day, El Mundo de las Telas always has its finger on the pulse. Each roll of fabric is handpicked

by the team, who speak excellent English, and comes from countries such as Italy, France and England to ensure the highest quality possible.

But quality doesn't automatically mean a high price tag. Upstairs is dedicated to discontinued designs or offcuts and start from a budget-friendly €2 a metre.

Even at this bargain price though, thread count and composition, which are the number one things the shop look for when buying in material, are never compromised.



**EL MUNDO DE LA STELAS  
A WORLD OF FABRICS**

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 mundodelastelas





## Fit for a king

MANUEL Leal, owner of Auto Quick, has mechanics in his blood. When other children were on holiday, Manuel was in the garage helping his dad.

It was inevitable then that he would set up his own company, which he did 22 years ago, and customers from those early days still continue to return. Starting from humble beginnings, with a mattress on the floor so he could offer a 24 hours service, his dedication to providing the best service has not waned.

He now boasts a team of seven highly skilled staff, whose passion keeps Auto Quick growing from strength to strength.

Anything and everything to do with cars, can be dealt with, from registration to punctures to purchasing. Priding themselves on trust and living by the words 'no job is too big or small' has given Manuel some interesting stories.

During the Granada to Morocco section of the Dakar Rally a few years ago, one of the racer's Fenders broke down.

Manuel immediately put his expertise to good use and fixed it using parts from his family's Range Rover, so they could continue the very next day.

And he once rescued King Fahd of Saudi Arabia's luxury motorhome from Aloha when it broke down in the middle of the night.

So if you need motoring services fit for a king, call visit [autoquick.es](http://autoquick.es) or call 952 49 39 97.

# Off the beaten track



### Discover Mijas Pueblo's rocky mountain highs

**D**ONKEYS and tuk tuks transport visitors through the vertiginous streets of the village but it would be a crime to visit Mijas without venturing into the surrounding hills by Shanks's Pony, aka your own two feet. Seven well-signposted routes deliver picturesque countryside and birds-eye perspectives of the Costa del Sol and stunning inland mountains. Totalling 19 kilometres in length, it is easy to traverse more than one multi-ability linear route in a day, and all can be accessed on foot from the village. Adrenalin junkies come to scale the Pico de

Mijas. Rising to a height of 1,150 metres, the view is jaw dropping.

Another trail leads to the Ermita de Calvario (hermitage), perched among pine groves on the mountain side.

**Rising to a height of 1,150 metres, the view is jaw dropping**

Walkers can read up on the history of these enchanting surroundings via information panels along the routes.

Guided walking tours are also occasionally offered and can be booked at the tourist information centre in Plaza Virgen de la Pena.

This is also the place to pick up a route map for your own self-guided journey of discovery.

## Bedder than the rest

AT The Bed Warehouse, we have over 40 years of experience in giving people the comfort they deserve at a price they can afford! Having previously owned our own successful bed company in the UK in which we manufactured our own beds on site; we can assist you in finding the ideal bed for YOU. We have now been established in Spain and Portugal for 10 years and as well as supplying other retail shops, you can buy direct from the warehouse at unbeatable prices! We specialise in bankrupt stock; supplying top name brands such as Sealy, Silentnight and John Lewis at a fraction of the retail price.

We also manufacture our own beds, enabling you to 'design your own bed' with a wide range of colours, fabrics and headboards to choose from.

All of our beds are from the UK and follow standard UK sizes- we specialise in Superking size and can even have beds and mattresses made to specific measurements. If you can imagine it, we can create it!

We also provide top-quality bedding, pillows and mattress toppers in all standard British sizes. But that's not all! We supply the best quality solid oak household furniture. All products come ready assembled, are 100% solid hardwood and made only using the finest cuts of timber - no chipboard, mdf or veneer! With 25 individual ranges, from traditional rustic to contemporary, you are sure to find the ideal surroundings for your home! And the best part? No sky-high shipping costs! We also supply a wide range of British sofas from popular brands such as DFS, Next and Sofaworks. From electric recliners to luxury corner units and sofa beds, we have something to suit all tastes and budgets. We have the largest amount of stock on the coast-so no need to wait! Delivery can be as soon as the same day! We supply the retail shops, so cut out the middleman and visit The Bed Warehouse directly to SAVE MONEY NOW!



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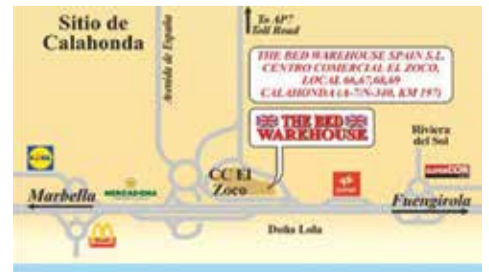
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# ÁNGEL NOZAL



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