

# All about Sotogrande

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## Paradise...on the quiet

**It's not a town or even a village, yet every summer this exclusive tree-lined urbanisation is a magnet for the global A-list set. Bradley Stokes and Olivia Burke set out to discover the attraction**



PICTURESQUE: La Reserva Beach

**R**ESPLENDENT in its beauty, secluded in its exclusiveness, Sotogrande is one millionaire's playground that doesn't like to boast about it.

If wealth and fame is spoken of at all, it's in a whisper. In Sotogrande they like to keep it, appropriately, 'sotto voce'.

What it does have a right to brag about however, is its low-density living, its stunning beaches and mountain backdrops, plus its amazing marina and golf courses.

Spain's largest privately-owned residential 'superstate' is a second home for the cream of European high society. Its privileged views to the Rock of Gibraltar and the Rif mountains of Africa are enjoyed by the likes of ex-UK PM Tony Blair, the British royal family and countless European celebrities, who

don't want to be spotted.

Internationally renowned for its polo, golf and sailing, as well as burgeoning gastronomic scene, this 'mini Monaco' of high net worth residents has all the hallmarks of a cosmopolitan resort but without the brashness and bling, as we discover on a trip around the hotspots.

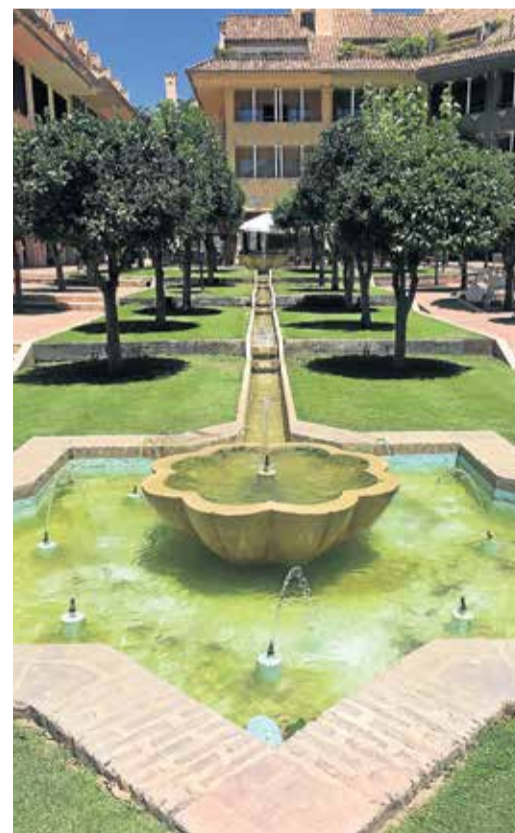
"It's a wonderful place for golfers, polo players, and people with boats," explains Paul Martin, 74, who moved to the privileged enclave from Bristol in 1988.

"After two dull summers in England in 1986 and 1987, I thought there must be a better climate than this! So it was chasing the sunshine that brought me, but the character of Sotogrande is what made me stay, as I had planned to begin here and venture out into the countryside."

But you would be mistaken for thinking that the residents are unapologetic in their privilege and wealth but on the contrary. Sotogrande is different to other 'celebrity' resorts: wealthy, yes but pretentious definitely not.

Community is such a strong theme in Sotogrande it almost outshines the summer sun, as 63-year-old Jane Waterhouse from Ascot confirms.

"What makes Sotogrande different from anywhere else is that it's a community, rather than a holiday destination."



LEAFY: The marina gardens and (above) La Reserva



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Continues on next page

## From front page

"People actually live here and work in Gibraltar mostly, so it's quite different from down the coast. There are plenty of beautiful restaurants and bars, and urbanisations all around, so there's a lot to do around here."

If year-round residents have a complaint, it's that the winter months can be very quiet, so they welcome the recent new investment in the area, thanks to the purchase of the resort by a huge American fund Orion over the last few years.

There has been a serious amount of investment in the extended port area, previously known as Blue Marlin, as well as in the hills up towards La Reserva golf.

There is a very real sense that the place has upped a gear in the last two years and all of Sotogrande's 2,500 hectares are being carefully planned and used.

"There's also very good internet now thanks to fiber optics, so people who used to have to commute to the cities can work from home," continues Jane Waterhouse. "The international school is a big draw for families too."

The Plaza Blanca and general envisions are a photographer's dream, one of the reasons 61-year-old Gerry Fagan is never seen without his camera. "The old structures and the landscapes here are perfect. I come here because I like the ambience, it's an escape, or as the Spanish would



**IDYLLIC:** Sand dunes and luxury homes where the Guadiaro river meets the sea, (right) the marina

say, *muy tranquilo*.

"There's also a nice mix of Spanish and English here, and most things are translated in English too... in a way you feel like you're at home, you feel like you fit in."

The Sotogrande story started

in 1962, when an American Filipino family invested millions into Sotogrande to make it what it is today.

Stanford University graduate Joseph McMicking and his Filipino family

were looking to find a suitable

**'The landscapes here are perfect. I come because I like the ambience, it's an escape'**



**WARES:** Marina market

place on the Mediterranean, when his cousin found what is known as Sotogrande today. Joseph McMicking set up the company Financiera Sotogrande del Guadiaro and submitted a plan to buy the 1,800 hectare estate, which was later approved by the Spanish authorities.

From there he commissioned Robert Trent Jones, a famous golf architect, to design the Royal Golf Club of Sotogrande.

Building on the success, in 1978 the International School of Sotogrande was founded to accommodate the growing international population.

In 1985, the polo fields of Río Sotogrande I and II were built as well as adding new fields in 1992, 1995, 2003 and 2008. In 1997, just before the Ryder Cup, the Guadiaro to Algeciras coastal highway dual-carriageway upgrade was completed and in 2002 the construction



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of AP-7 motorway helped visitors reduce their drive time to the resort.

Joseph McMicking continued to live out his later years in Sotogrande until his death in 1990.

One of longest-established residents Lucrecia Aldao, 60, from the Philippines, has seen nearly five decades of its transformation.

"I arrived here in 1968 and grew up in Sotogrande. Since then it's changed in so much as its grown. Sotogrande is a philosophy...it's a philosophy of family, of friends. It's a low key society, and everybody here is low key.

"You can run into some extremely rich, extremely famous people and nobody will bat an eyelid. The place itself may have changed, and is modernising, but the philosophy remains the same."

Much of Sotogrande's fame stems from its sporting firsts. Valderrama golf course was the first to host The Ryder Cup in Europe in 1997. And it's still a fairway to golfing heaven, according to golfer and former professional footballer Andy Gemmell, who has played some 40 courses in the area.

"Sotogrande isn't commercialised compared to other areas, which is a big draw but it's getting there. Every year there is a new twist and turn. I don't think Sotogrande will



ever lose its sparkle," he says. Plaza Blanca's commercial centre is a favourite meeting spot, with a shop to buy English newspapers and books and several independent clothes stores - one owned by Valeria Alfie. Her shop Calanit was one of the first in the area. "This is very good for small business people such as myself and everyone who has businesses here - real estate, restaurants.... I was one of the first shops in the Marina, and I have noticed it has got much busier, a lot busier than 14 years ago. It is changing slowly, but for the better."

Leaving Plaza Blanca, we move to the marina where the indulgence of wealth is something you cannot ignore: the chic waterfront is lined with a parade of sleek super yachts, glamorous sea-view apartments and



**BUZZING: In the marina and (above) the beach**

high end restaurants.

The profusion of yachts and kayaks reminds us again of Sotogrande's huge sporting links, not forgetting the polo.

Every August top polo players from around the world descend on Santa Maria Polo Club for the International Tournament, now in its 47th year. During the off-season, many football teams rent the polo pitches to train.

At the marina we run into former pro polo player Wytze Abels Velema enjoying a late afternoon white wine. "We moved here after living almost everywhere because I was heavily involved in the polo, which my granddaughter now plays," says the 75-year-old.

"It's extremely safe, there is no crime here. For me, it is the perfect place. The future of Sotogrande does not worry me." You only need to sit down at a quayside cafe here to overhear how international this place has become. Conversations are conducted in Spanish, German, French, Italian, Scandinavian - it's a veritable tower of

Babel. And so well kept. Grass verges are as immaculately manicured as the people, the streets are litter free, even the sea seems to be a cleaner blue. Complacency is something that does not exist here.

Gatecrashing El Molino del Conde's waterfront restaurant for a drink we meet 49-year-old Theresa Cohen, 49, who has just moved to Sotogrande from Oxford.

"Among friends we jokingly call it the new Marbella. Not in a flashy way but Sotogrande is how Marbella used to be before it got too commercialised," she tells us. "Here it is different, being a gated community I think helps that exclusivity. The restaurants in the area, I believe, are world-class: fine wines and the best seafood dishes around."

The marina is yet another highlight of Sotogrande where the welcome is warm, the hospitality outstanding and the sporting offer unequalled by anywhere else in the world that's not a town or a village but merely a gated community.

## How we see it

*Olivia Burke talks to a handful of locals to see what they think about life in Sotogrande*



**Paul Martin, 74, Bristol**

It's a wonderful place for golfers, polo players, and people with boats and I have seen plenty of royals such as the Duchess of York, who has holidayed here several years in a row.

**Gerry Fagan, 61, Liverpool**

I live in Gibraltar but come here because I like the ambience, it's an escape or, as the Spanish would say, muy tranquilo. It's a different pace from Gibraltar, and compared to the hustle and bustle of the UK it's a completely different lifestyle.



**Andy Gemmell, 72, Glasgow**

**It's a great place for families and is very safe, so it's perfect for children. Sotogrande isn't commercialised compared to other areas, which is a big draw.**



**Valeria Alfie, Sotogrande**

It used to be a more seasonal place, whereas recently people are opting to be here all year round. This is very good for small business people such as myself.



**Wytze Abels Velema, 75, Holland**

Sotogrande is a small community which has what everybody wants. To live here is unbelievable. It's extremely safe, there is no crime here.



### From small time polo to international golf

In the early days after polo left the beach for the green grassy fields, it was a common sight to see families with their picnics spread out next to the 'cancha', the local gardeners sitting with their families next to members of the British Royal Family.

Now it is an extremely well organised 5-star event, and amazingly still free to the public apart from The Gold cup Final on the very last day of the summer season. And Golf. After the huge success of the Ryder Cup, Volvo Masters and Amex World Championship at Valderrama we now have Spain's first Municipal course at La Cañada, as well as the amazing Real Club de So-

togrande course and new courses at San Roque, Almanara and La Reserva, rapidly climbing up the Top Ten chart in Spain.

Every year the quality of the regattas from Puerto Sotogrande are becoming more and more important.

On top of this, Sotogrande could soon become the Equestrian Show Jumping Centre for Europe as plans are going ahead to introduce top class competitions throughout the winter, when it is too cold and wet to celebrate events in Northern Europe. And most amazing of all, is the incredible new inland beach and mini ocean complex at La Reserva. Spain's most exclusive inland beach resort.

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**Sotograde is unrecognisable from its 1980s former self, writes British expat, teacher and jazz genius Mike Izatt**



# Grande changes

It was August, 1986. The overnight sleeper train from Barcelona trundled into Malaga station. My wife, myself and two young children achingly stretched our aching limbs, having failed miserably to doze on our overnight journey in an undersized sleeping compartment.

I approached a railway official to ascertain where we had to pick up our two old cars which had also travelled with us. I was fairly fluent in Spanish, albeit with a northern Catalan accent, but I did not understand a single word of the man's reply. I listened to conversations

around me, and realised that I was hearing Andaluz, a new language with no S's and words cut in half.

The drive from Malaga to Sotograde, where we were going to take up our new teaching posts at Sotograde International School took well over three and a half hours.

Yes, three-and-a-half hours through Torremolinos, Benalmadena, Fuengirola, Marbella,

San Pedro and Estepona with not a sniff of a dual carriage-way in sight.

Luckily, we fell in love with Sotograde immediately. Huge luxury houses, stunning established gardens, and palm lined streets with wonderful names. They included calle Beatriz la Suabia, Pedro el Grande, Isabel la Catolica, Alfonso el Sabio and a school in Paniagua (Bread and Water).

Being poorly paid teachers, we had to look outside Sotograde for a place to stay. We ended up in Playa de Guadiaro, a very peaceful area. Well, until gangsters infamously decided to kidnap five-year old Melody Nakachian and ask for a €9.5 million ransom. How were we to know that they were 'holed up' in the very next door apartment.

We actually slept through the police raid, the shooting, the arrests and the release of Melody. We learnt about it the next day at school. Yes, I would never have made a good journalist.

## Unattractive

Life was very different then. The Sotograde residents and the villagers in Guadiaro did not mix. Guadiaro was a pretty village with a couple of bars and a football team.

Torreguadiaro was a most unattractive string of buildings on either side of the main Malaga to Algeciras 'highway', with a couple of bars and a successful little beachfront hotel called Patricia. Pueblo Nuevo hardly existed.

There was of course golf at the celebrated Real Club de Soto-



MEAT FEAST: Early Argentinian BBQ

grande and Valderrama, and polo on the beach, minus the discotheques afterwards.

The school was situated in the beautiful, but now abandoned, buildings adjacent to Paniagua. The carpenters and local 'cantina' shared the venue.

The local church was within the school grounds. Every Sunday hundreds of well dressed Spaniards turned up at the church, which in itself was amusing as the church only had the capacity for 40 people.

The people inside the church were, I presume, interested in the ways of the Lord, but the 'flock' outside was heavily involved with discussing last night's football game, or the clothes worn by Senora Fulano at the recent Golf Ball Dinner.

Our arrival coincided with a huge boom in construction in the area. Teachers had to make sure they were out of the Urbanisation from 5.45am to 6.30pm when it was virtually impossible to leave Sotograde as the queue of construction workers trying to join the two lane N 340 stretched from the exit to the beach.

With the explosion of new homes being built, Pueblo Nuevo sprung to life. Builders mer-

chants, plumbers, electricians, offices for architects and notaries suddenly appeared, and being in Spain, the need for new bars was also catered for. Fantastic new night spots also opened in Puerto Sotograde. In 1990 we welcomed Ke Bar, which joined Midas as the 'place to be seen'.

The clientele was a mixture of aristocratic Spaniards, Madrileños who wished to be seen as aristocracy, the upper class from Gibraltar and successful local businessmen.

The 90s was a very exciting decade as the cultures mixed and businesses flourished. The beach clubs of Sotograde were a wonderful place to go in the summer, if you could afford the membership

Sotograde school mainly catered for the offspring of wealthy Spanish businessmen, and some UK and other European entrepreneurs. It followed the Spanish way of life with classes starting at 10.00 and finishing at 16.30. The students had their lunch provided for them in the cantina, with children of the wealthy sitting and eating on one side, and the construction crews in their filthy overalls, sipping their wine and puffing on their cigarettes, on the other side.



EARLY DAYS: Mike and family at Cucuruchu Beach Club in the 1980s

## Markets galore

IT has been one of the most popular additions to summertime in Sotograde.

And the regularly night market - or *mercadillo nocturno* - will stay open every Wednesday and Thursday until the end of August.

Running from 8pm to 01:00am, it claims to offer 'everything you want' and is certainly the perfect place for an evening stroll.

## Vintage

As well as stores featuring jewellery, local handmade items, crafts and artwork, there are clothes and toys and a variety of food trucks and entertainment for children.

The Vintage Market meanwhile, is held on Fridays in the summer from 10am until 3pm, selling antiques and secondhand goods.

Finally, the Mercado del Levante, held in the summer from 12pm to 2am, has plenty of food trucks, live music, and a craft market.



## Bazaar night

THE Hope and Joy Foundation returns for the 11th edition of the Charity Bazaar at El Octógono Beach Club on August 8 to raise funds for its projects in India.

The Charity Bazaar is open free to the public from 11am to 9pm.

There will be more than 20 stalls featuring craft items from India, jewelry, cosmetics, costume jewelry and authentic Indian accessories.

Keeping with tradition, there will also be a charity raffle in which several gifts will be raffled off, such as two flamenco classes with Antonio La Soleá, or dinner for two at Gigi's Beach in Sotograde.

## JUMP TO IT

SOTOGRADE is the home of one of Andalusia's best jazz bands the New Orleans Jumpband.

The group of expats have played for the King of Spain, the opening of Real Madrid's training facility and played festivals in France, Spain and the UK.

On top of this Seve Ballesteros and Darren Clark have sung with them and they have played with Lonnie Donegan and Jools Holland, as well as backed Kenny Ball on a Spanish Tour.

Its story began in 1987 when music teacher Dave Gorodi, a graduate from the Royal Academy of Music, decided to set up a group.

Sadly the only two people he knew who had an inkling about music were Nick Lee, a very talented flute player who played a bit of guitar, and Mike Izatt, a singer and harmonica player who had just left his well known Heavy Rock

band in Barcelona. Mike also played a bit of guitar.

Nick agreed to play bass and Mike agreed to play guitar. David played piano with his left hand, trumpet with his right as well as operating the Yamaha drum machine which sat on top of the piano. They all sang!

The audience however, seemed to prefer the Jazz and they had soon become The New Orleans Jumpband, and found a drummer, and a pianist, and a saxophonist.

As a five piece, (Trumpet, Trombone, Clarinet, Sousaphone and Banjo), their fame spread and they have had countless musicians and celebrities sing with the band over the last few decades.

Their most recent gig was at the Birmingham International Jazz Festival this year, where they were doing a very special farewell performances after 30 years at the sharp end.



ON TOUR: The New Orleans Jump Band in Birmingham

## A great education!

The community spirit grew, and Sotograde school invited Guadiaro to participate in sporting events. After a few incidents including insults, spitting and stone throwing, things soon quietened down, and it wasn't long before a couple of Sotograde boys were playing for Guadiaro Football team.

Soon, the ever-increasing influx of Northern Europeans chasing the life in the sun, was joined by the first appearance of eastern Europeans, as well as city-style traders working in Gibraltar but residing in Spain. The traders have now been replaced by online betting company employees.

As polo became more and more popular we welcomed the arrival of many Argentinians who introduced us to beautifully cooked steaks at their barbecues.. and soon after at their newly opened restaurants.

Torreguadiaro has suddenly sprung into life and has a wonderful variety of tapas bars and restaurants.

Beach life has never been better and offers great food, drink and entertainment at chiringuitos such as Bahia Limon, Chambao, Gigi's, Trocadero and the Bunker.

The 'small community spirit' that met us long ago has been replaced by, well, the amazing place we have today!



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## New builds and numbers



**Local agent Consuelo Silva analyses prices and new developments in Sotogrande**

It is two decades since Consuelo Silva set up her estate agency in Sotogrande.

Having worked for a number of years for Sotogrande SA she was in a good position to help both buyers and sellers in the upmarket enclave.

Nothing has changed on that front, except for the prices that have gone up considerably.

"The average buyers are in the 300,000 to 500,000 euro bracket and you rarely find anything cheaper than that in Sotogrande," explains the friendly Peruvian, who firstly moved to Spain in 1986.

"You can get a two-bedroom apartment in the marina for that price, but plenty of homes are well over the €2 million mark and prices are rising," she adds.

Much of this is due to the distinct lack of new developments in Sotogrande.

### Quality

"We only have three on the go right now, the main one in La Reserva, Senda Chica just below and La Finca, being developed by Kronos," she explains.

She is also expecting a new one from Taylor Wimpey in the autumn, as the British homebuilder has recently opened a small office there. In particular, she is a huge fan of the La Reserva development, where her daughter has been working in a landscaping capacity.

"It's one of the last bits of available land so it is lucky it is being developed really well, of a really high quality," she says, adding that the Beach has added a new dimension to the enclave.

The well-spoken, elegant mother-of-two is well settled in the resort and her agency is doing well.

"It is vital these days to be up early to deal with enquiries that may have come in during the night," she adds.

It means getting up at the crack of dawn to deal with enquiries at home, before she goes off to the gym, arriving at her office in the Paniagua centre around 10am.

A keen bon viveur with a love of wines (particularly French rosés), she enjoys travelling, loving visits to European cities as well as more exotic destinations like India.

# BOUNCING BACK

**Sotogrande's property market has got over the recession and the Brexit blip, estimates Holmes' Ben Bateman**

**B**EN Bateman can remember the exact moment he knew the worst recession in Spanish history had finally kicked in for the Sotogrande property market.

It was appropriately April 13th 2008 when he got a call from a client telling him he would have to sell an option he had on a building plot.

"He said I would rather lose 10% today than 50% the day after completion, I need you to sell it for me," he recalls over coffee at his office, in Paniagua, one of the true nerve-centres of Sotogrande. He was not yet at the reins of his four-decades-old family business Holmes Sotogrande, but he knew exactly what this meant.

"It was the first of many and it just went downhill from there," explains the personable father-of-four, who was in for five very tough years, which almost put the agency, set up by his father in 1979,

out of business.

Things didn't pick up until late 2012/ 2013 and it was only one deal in February 2012 that kept their heads above water.

He remembers it well.

"It was February 16 and I got a call from a fellow agent in Estepona informing me that a sale agreement on a €4m house could go through much earlier than expected. The buyer's company's stock options had bounced back to a certain level that morning, that allowed them to proceed..

"I made a call and incredibly 15 minutes later €1 million had been put across to the developer so they could get on with building the home.

"Without the commission on that sale we would have been unable to pay our staff that month. From that point on the market began to turn around and we were able to keep our heads above water."

It had certainly been a very tough recession, with many agents going under, or at the very least going underground.

"But we never stopped believing in Sotogrande and we kept marketing and looking for clients... I think we helped keep the market alive by continuing to maintain our levels of advertising."

His faith and investment has been returned with Holmes being the best known and longest established agency in Sotogrande.

"We have buyers from all over Europe and we have definitely got over the Brexit blip of 2016," he continues. "We are very optimistic that we will end this year very well, and we have, Span-



**PROPERTY EXPERT: Ben Bateman**

ish, French, Italian, Belgian, Dutch and a few German buyers.

"The Scandinavians in particular are strong and for them it is all about climate, climate and climate and curiously they come here out of season and not in the summer when they stay back home."

He is also happy to report that the British market is strong again, but not like it was before the recession in 2008 when up to 35% of buyers were from the UK.

"Today it is a healthy 15% to 20%, which brings the perfect balance," he insists.

"What I don't want is for the pound to strengthen too much too quickly again to 1.25 or 1.3 euros mark.

"If it did go up by 15% to 20% it would mean the British once again outbidding all the other nationalities and, in my opinion, would create an imbalance. The key to ongoing success is the 'casual elegant' charm of Sotogrande, with its well manicured streets, a down-to-earth feel and upmarket nature which is hard to beat. "You can walk around in flip flops and a t-shirt and feel comfortable here, or dress to the nines and not look out of place, it's truly a world of its own." And once you add that to its facilities, it's unrivalled. "For example, of the five golf courses in Sotogrande three of them, Real Club Sotogrande, Valderrama and La Reserva are world-class championship golf courses and among the best in Europe," he says.

**To contact Ben and the team, visit [www.holmesotogrande.com](http://www.holmesotogrande.com) or call 956 795 340**

**The British market is strong again although not what it was before**

## Reason to smile

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🏠: 7 🛏: 7  
 🏠 3.423 m<sup>2</sup>  
 🏠 1.015 m<sup>2</sup>  
 🏠 337 m<sup>2</sup>  
 2.950.000 €  
 Ref.: HSS2-1197



🏠: 6 🛏: 5  
 🏠 2.080 m<sup>2</sup>  
 🏠 868 m<sup>2</sup>  
 🏠 70 m<sup>2</sup>  
 2.395.000 €  
 Ref.: HSN3-1100



### Villa / SOTOGRADE COSTA CENTRAL



🏠: 4 🛏: 4 🏠 1.087 m<sup>2</sup> 🏠 528 m<sup>2</sup>  
 Ref.: HSS4-1115 1.395.000 €

### Penthouse / RIBERA DEL DELFÍN



🏠: 3 🛏: 3 🏠 427 m<sup>2</sup> 🏠 237 m<sup>2</sup>  
 Ref.: DEL-834 895.000 €

### Apartment / RIBERA DEL MARLÍN



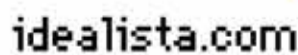
🏠: 3 🛏: 3 🏠 224 m<sup>2</sup> 🏠 63 m<sup>2</sup>  
 Ref.: MAR-1626 825.000 €

### Apartment / VALGRANDE



🏠: 3 🛏: 3 🏠 296 m<sup>2</sup> 🏠 95 m<sup>2</sup>  
 Ref.: VAL-918 595.000 €

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# DRESSING DOWN

**A playground for royals, footballers and politicians, Diana Tang gives a run around of the high-class resort**

**S**OTOGRAÑDE is about understated elegance and quiet, unshowy glamour.

The polar opposite of Puerto Banus, it is the perfect destination for captains of industry, royals and refined celebrities in the know, of all nationalities. Inside its exclusive gates and hedges, everyone from golf pros to royal princes and A-list models to footballers can come and go without being pursued by cameras and autograph hunters.

This is a family-friendly resort for the sporty set, with sailing, fishing and horse riding trumping bar crawling and clubbing.

If Porches and handbag pouches are status symbols in Marbella, Landrovers and labradors are more to the taste of the unshowy Sotogrande set.

If it rained a bit more it would be green wellie country.

But while the community oozes influence and affluence, it is anything but snobby. People come here to leave their high powered life behind and live like ordinary folk, even though many of them are quite the opposite.

You don't hear too much about the resort's celebrity scene and that's the way they like it so you may be surprised at some of the names on our list of well-known public figures who either holiday or have a des res in Sotogrande.

They include former British prime minister Tony Blair (right), who is said to own property in the enclave and has been

spotted on various holidays there, as well as current Gibraltar leader Fabian Picardo and former leader Peter Caruana, who reportedly invested in Sotogrande to indulge his passion for golf. The Botin family, who own Santander bank, are said to own property in Sotogrande, as well as the wealthy Ayala family, who own their own private polo field.

It is here that you might well spot the Duchess of York (below) or one of the young British royals, enjoying dinner at super exclusive Cancha Dos restaurant, while British princes Harry and William have played polo in the annual summer tournaments at Santa Maria polo club. Their father Charles did too.

On the subject of royals, keep your eyes peeled for French aristocrat Louis Alphonse de Bourbon, Duke of Anjou, who brings his wife María Margarita Vargas Santaella and three children to Sotogrande to enjoy the opulent paradise.

They are big fans of polo and spend a lot of time at Santa Maria Polo Club, especially in August when you could find them clapping from the VIP sidelines during the International Tournament. Spanish TV celebrities, such as Ana Rosa Quintana, are regularly seen at the polo events in the



**LUXURY: Glenn Hoddle's property**

resort as well as the many restaurants. British actors, meanwhile, such as Mike Gwilym, formerly of the Royal Shakespeare Company, is often seen in the resort, while DIY SOS presenter Nick Knowles bought a property in the marina a few years ago.

Footballers have long been well represented in Sotogrande, and have included Glenn Hoddle (above), the former England manager and former Liverpool star Glen Johnson (left), while Irish motorsport legend Eddie Jordan has a villa there.

A long time visitor, he fittingly described the place as the 'nicest urbanisation in Europe' with some of the 'best weather'. Golfer Tony Jacklin owned the land on the river estuary where Jordan now lives, having bought here in 1983.



## Bucking the trend

**SOME 80,000 people are descending upon Sotogrande for the annual World Polo Tour circuit event at Santa Maria Polo Club. For a month, the 'Wimbledon of polo pitches' is hosting ten teams of 50 horses and 200 staff, along with spectators, who include the Brunei and British royals.**

**Four of the tournament's championship cups are classified as World Tour cups, signifying the event's prestige. And equally prestigious is the host club.**

**The club's PR manager Pilar de la Puente told the *Olive Press*: "Sotogrande is the known as 'the cathedral of European polo.' It's the best club in Europe and the ranked third in the world."**

**Though the tournament is unsurprisingly posh, with such high-end sponsors as Maserati and Cartier, it does have one**

**bit of demo- For every match except the final, attendance is open and free to the public, with crowds usually growing above 50,000, and this year is promising to be the biggest yet.**



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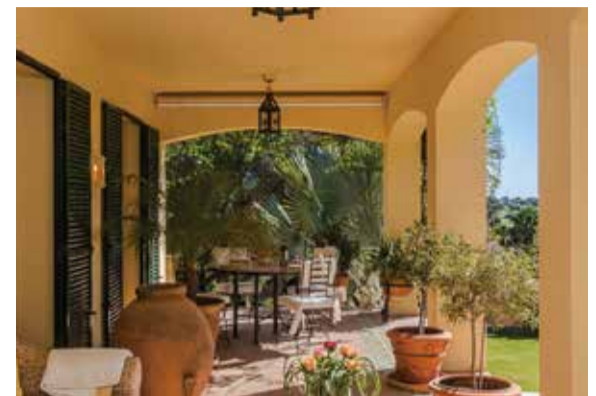




## ENCHANTING VILLA SOTOGRA NDE ALTO

Ref. 66-2002

Bedroom: 4 Bathroom: 2 Build: 261m<sup>2</sup> Plot: 2046m<sup>2</sup>  
**1,100,000€**



VILLA SOTOGRA NDE ALTO – 750,000€

Ref. 65-2000

Bed: 3 Bath: 3 Build: 332m<sup>2</sup> Plot: 1317m<sup>2</sup>



VILLA SOTOGRA NDE ALTO – 980,000€

Ref. 66-961

Bed: 4 Bath: 3 Build: 367m<sup>2</sup> Plot: 2382m<sup>2</sup>



VILLA SOTOGRA NDE ALTO – 750,000€

Ref. 23-2049

Bed: 4 Bath: 4 Build: 339m<sup>2</sup> Plot: 1649m<sup>2</sup>



VILLA SOTOGRA NDE ALTO – 1,490,000€

Ref. 65-2068

Bed: 4 Bath: 4 Build: 506m<sup>2</sup> Plot: 1618m<sup>2</sup>



MARINA DUPLEX APARTMENT – 575,000€

Ref. PV-2041

Bed: 3 Bath: 3 Build: 274m<sup>2</sup>



MARINA TOWNHOUSE – 950,000€

Ref. ARQ-948

Bed: 4 Bath: 4 Build: 343m<sup>2</sup>



MARINA DUPLEX APARTMENT – 325,000€

Ref. CA-747

Bed: 3 Bath: 3 Build: 130m<sup>2</sup>



TORREGUADIARO COUNTRY HOUSE – P.O.A.€

Ref. TG-1177

Bed: 7 Bath: 5 Build: 480m<sup>2</sup> Plot: 2765m<sup>2</sup>

**Sotogrande's property market is driving forwards fast, explains key agent James Stewart of Savills**

“LAST year was our best year since 2008,” explains James Stewart, one of the stalwarts of the Sotogrande property scene. “And this year is looking excellent too.”

These are encouraging words from an agent who lost four sales on the day after the Brexit referendum two years ago.

“We were very affected by Brexit, but now things are back to normal and I even expect things to go up a gear in Sotogrande.”

“There is still a bit of uncertainty in the UK but if you are looking for a second home it makes little difference,” he continues.

“And there are so many French, Belgians and Spanish buyers to pick up the slack. The Spanish, mostly from Madrid and the North, are very much back.”

He is particularly excited about the La Reserva area, where some homes are over €10 million, and which is developing fast.

“The new Beach area is brilliantly done. There are only four in the world, in Tahiti, Miami, Venice and Macao. It has added a new dimension to the area.”

“It's great for kids and the area has been developed carefully and well, along with the golf course which is now in the top four or five in Spain, alongside Valderrama.”

“It is a very secure area and could be perhaps more private even than

# MOSTLY FAIRWAY AHEAD



Zagaleta.” He is certainly someone to trust on such matters having swung the irons with Spanish golf legend Seve Ballesteros, shared Valderrama's greens

with US President George Bush Snr and teed off with Prince Andrew. Around his office are scattered various photos of his meetings, including his favourite with Seve, and he



**MEMORIES:** James Stewart with golf champ Ballesteros

is happy to retell the story of how he helped bring the Ryder Cup to Spain for the very first time in 1997.

A member of Valderrama for over 30 years, his love-affair with the club dates back to the early 90s when club owner Jaime Ortiz-Patiño brought him in to help bring the Ryder Cup to the club.

“It was a great honour for me and I got to meet some top players,” he says. “Seve was by far my favourite, a true gentleman and ambassador

to the sport.”

He adds: “I'll never forget playing in the Volvo Masters Pro Am in 1997 with Seve and Zimbabwean pro Mark McNulty.”

“On the 18th I had the putt to win the tournament and Seve and Mark both took turns at lining me up. I felt huge relief when the ball fell in the hole.”

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## Golf glorious golf

**Sotogrande is home to more top-notch golf courses than you can shake a nine-iron at**



It would not be unfair to call Sotogrande the home of Spanish golf.

After all, it has some of the oldest courses in the country and has even hosted the Ryder Cup.

Indeed, anyone with half an interest in sport will remember the fantastic last few holes of the 1997 Ryder Cup, when Colin Montgomery played the best round of his life.

That was at Valderrama, now viewed as one of the must-play golf courses in Europe, beautifully maintained, pricey and, some say, a touch too challenging.

Golfers up for a change should try Alcaidesa, claimed to be the only Links golf course in southern Europe.

Seaside courses require a different style of play from your standard 18 and if the ball lands in the water, forget it!

As an added touch, Alcaidesa may be the most scenic of all the Sotogrande courses, with breathtaking coastal views to Gibraltar and North Africa.

It might explain why the course entices a serious number of high-quality events to its doors each year, from parties to society weddings.

There are, of course, half a dozen more courses on the Sotogrande circuit.

Real Club de Golf de Sotogrande, a.k.a. the 'Old Course', was the first to be built in the area and said to be a dream to play after tricky sister course, Valderrama. It was here that so-called Bermuda grass was first introduced into Spain.

Almenara Golf, designed by Ryder Cup champion turned respected course architect David Thomas, is up in the hills where celebrities Glenn Hoddle and Glen Johnson have homes.

La Canada, La Reserve and San Roque complete the 'famous five'.

“There are few places with such a high concentration of great golf courses,” says Ian Bateman, of Holmes estate agents.

“When you add the fabulous tennis facilities and polo club, with its 11 full size courses, the facilities in Sotogrande are second to none.”

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**11**  
AGOSTO

**ELEGANT: Patricia**

## Gala success

**IT was probably the most glamorous night of the year.**

**Over 400 guests enjoyed a luxurious evening at the Santa Maria polo club for the II Sotogrande Charity Gala, organised by Patricia Darch.**

**Raising money for the Arturo Darch foundation and the Josep Carreras foundation, the From Broadway to Hollywood music extravaganza, was a huge hit.**

**"It was a wonderful night, a lot of hard work, but it raised a lot of money for the two causes," said Patricia.**

## Full circle

IT is one of Sotogrande's most iconic structures.

Now the cone atop the Trocadero beach club has been returned to its original colour: baby blue!

Long known as El Cucurucho, it has been various colours over recent years, including beige, bright red and even with a sketch of a polo player on it.

Now, after various complaints from locals the icon has gone back to its original shade.



**Take a trip to through the 60s, 70s and 80s at this year's Sunset Valley Festival**

# Good old days

**T**HE Sunset Valley Festival is returning to Sotogrande after its successful debut last summer.

Described as one of the most anticipated events on the Costa del Sol, the festival will be held on August 10 and 11 at the Santa Maria Polo Club.

The two nights will be themed, with the first dedicated to Spanish pop of the 80s while the second will celebrate the immortal Beatles and the flower power era of the 60s and 70s.

### **August 10: 80s pop night**

The festival will kick off with Nacha

Pop and Modestia Apart, two iconic acts from the Spanish pop scene during the 80s and 90s.

Nacha Pop has claimed icon status following his debut album Efecto Inmediato in 1987.

Meanwhile Modestia Apart are celebrating 30 years in the business. They are most known for their hits Things of the age and How you move.

### **August 11: 60s / 70s Flower Party**

Known as one of the best Beatles tribute acts in Europe, The Flaming Shakers will be leading you down memory lane on the second

day.

So good are The Flaming Shakers that band members have actually played with TWO of the original Beatles members.

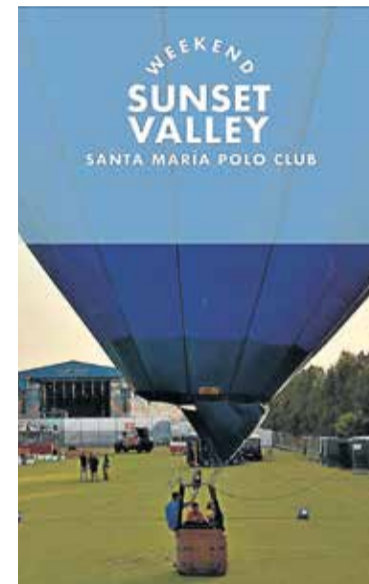
The Flaming Shakers will take you through the classics while allowing the new generations to discover how the Beatles' music would have sounded live.

The tribute meticulously focuses on getting the Beatles' looks and gestures down to a tee, using the same instruments and wearing the same suits while rocking the famous Beatles hairstyle - the Top Mod.

Tickets can be purchased through the Ticketbell platform from €29 euros.

In both concerts, in addition to general admission, two special packages are offered for those who wish to live the Sunset Valley experience to the fullest. The Gold package includes VIP parking, access to a premium area and a welcome cocktail. The more exclusive Platinum option includes premium parking, access to the platinum area, a special welcome cocktail plus a complimentary glass of cava.

Doors will open at 8:30pm before the music kicks off at 10pm.



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## HOLY SITE



AT WORK: Marco Augusto carving a masterpiece

**H**IS works can be seen all around Andalucia, as well as Madrid. However, it is Marco Augusto's sculptures in the Vatican in Rome that are earning him a global reputation. Stacked up with commissions for years to come, he works out of a studio in Sotogrande with his partner Kate Finley of the Chalk Room, which specialises in fair trade furniture and stocks the Annie Sloan paint range.

## Where to eat

## On the up

Sotogrande has a wealth of places to eat, writes Dining Secrets of Andalucia editor Jon Clarke

**G**IVEN the demands for quality in Sotogrande, it is perhaps not surprising that to survive, its restaurants have had to follow suit. And there is no doubt, that the quality - and range - of food on offer has improved dramatically over the last few years. As well as great tapas restaurants and some exciting new eateries, the more established joints go from strength to strength.

One of the most exciting changes of the last year or two has been the development of the Blue marina area.

## Authentic

Thanks to some clever investment by Orion the area has truly come alive and now counts over half a dozen places to eat. It's a veritable hive in the evenings of summer with

hundreds of punters fighting for the best waterside tables.

One of the best, is **Don Diego**, which is a great mix of Spanish dishes fused with Asian and south american cuisine. Run by friendly local restaurateur Juan, you choose from, for example three ceviches, five soups and half a dozen salads. Much of its quality is due to recent signing Ben, the clever Thai/American who has been leading the charge at nearby La Finca for years.

I loved his Thai spring rolls and Miamg Kham in particular, while his fish curry was splendid.

"But it's not just down to me," he insisted. "we are one big family of Japanese, Peruvians and Filipinos."

His previous place, as said, is the emblematic **La Finca** ([www.lafincafusion.com](http://www.lafincafusion.com)), which sits next to **La Casita** campsite in

San Roque.

In summer you sit around a leafy courtyard, a riot of colours and candles, while in winter you dine inside the authentic farmhouse with stone floors and fireplaces.

The other direction you will find **Milla de Plata** ([www.hotelmilladeplata.com](http://www.hotelmilladeplata.com)), just outside Torreguadiaro, which sits on



a headland overlooking a rocky cove and with views to die for.

Its restaurant Mar Sana is a charming spot for an evening meal and heavy on fresh fish, with its own



AL FRESCO: Don Diego's bright terrace and a dish (below)

special tuna menu. Also try **il Sono** ([www.ilsono.es](http://www.ilsono.es)), on Cala Sardiña, which has been voted Spain's greenest restaurant and has a genuine focus on the environment.

If you are looking for a chiringuito a little closer to the resort, then head for wonderful **Gigi's Beach** ([www.gigisbeach.com](http://www.gigisbeach.com)), sitting just outside the marina by the sailing club.

The creation of Georgina 'Gigi' Taylor, her youthful hard-working approach to style and taste, makes this a surefire winner, not just for local foodies, but international business-man alike.

Inside the marina, the real standout place to

eat is the **Hairy Lemon**, which has got better and better since chef Lorenc and number-crunching wife Liz took the helm a couple of years ago. This is the genuine hive for expats and has a sister The Lemon, next door, which is a bit more formal in style.

A great place for families, kids can happily run (or bike or scoot) around the square by the fountains and the children's menu is great value.

Finally, looking for delicious bread and pastries? Find that at **Jan Staels**, in the Blue marina who also has freshly-made ice cream every day, guaranteeing that the kids will also love his joint.

# Don Diego

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**Jon Clarke gets an early first taste of La Reserva Beach, the hippest new addition to the Andalusian scene**



It is the very epitome of understated glamour. Hidden in the folds of the Sotogrande foothills, it has become in just a fortnight one of the most talked about new venues in southern Spain this summer.

Taking over two years to create, La Reserva Beach is as eye opening as it is exclusive. And despite being quite a few clicks from the sea, it gives St Tropez and anything in Ibiza more than a run for its money.

The statistics, as ever, are everything. Dubbing itself as the 'only private beach in Spain', it counts on 2,800 square metres of shoreline and nearly a dozen activities for all the family.

Surrounded by a sea of palm trees, you lounge on well appointed sunbeds and hammocks or just hang out by the shore, dipping your feet in the cool, azure water.

In the backdrop is a children's play area alongside a pair of food trucks, while next door you'll find the achingly stylish restaurant, which cleverly uses wood and light and a collection of natural earthy products.

Nothing is left to chance and there is a legion of 88 staff, including nine life guards and a dozen waiters dressed in white, a dozen chefs dressed in black and the maitres be-speke in beige.

In short, you are waited on hand and foot in the sort of classic top-end, five-star luxury that the neighbouring resort and golf course has become known for over recent years.

The quality of the food is also quickly evident. The menu is creative enough, without being intimidating or pretentious, and comprises a healthy mix of Mediterranean (mostly Spanish) dishes with a few Asiatic and south American twists.

It is also good value for what and where it is, and particularly the various wines by the glass that weigh in from just €3.



**STYLISH: Use of wood, glass and concrete**



**VARIETY: Sushi and prawn carpaccio**



Broken down into easy sections, there are plenty of salads and soups - mostly cold this year unsurprisingly - plus starters, meat and fish.

For starters, I particularly liked the tuna tacos with black olives and tender sprouts with a chili salmorejo, as well as the carpaccio de gambas, a dish as pretty as it tasted. The smoked sardines with guacamole also worked brilliantly, as did the ceasar salad, however the lobster sandwich (basically in a bao) was a little heavy on the sauce. Some splendid sushi made up for this and the lemon meringue pie was veritably a winner.

La Reserva Beach is the latest chapter of the Orion Capital revolution that arrived in Sotogrande four years ago. Funded by the big European real estate fund that took over the private

resort run by Sotogrande S.A. in 2014, it has been carefully created with the concept of privacy and space to the forefront. "It's open to the public now, but we envisage it being private and just for residents eventually," explains Sotogrande CEO Marc Topiol over lunch.

"A lot of people doubted it would ever happen and it has taken a long time to build," he admits. "But it took over a year to get planning permission and technically it was very important to get it right."

Getting it right, he certainly has, and not only in the execution and delivery... with plots for sale around the beach, already going up in price by two even three times in as many years.

Some, I was amazed to discover, are selling for upwards of €7m, putting them among the most expensive in all of Spain.

An erudite Parisian, who has worked around the world in the hotel and golf sector for decades, Topiol is widely credited with turning around the enclave and driving it forwards. Some three or four local business owners have sung his praises to me

for his vision and he is surprisingly approachable and friendly in the flesh. It is perhaps little surprise, given that he describes himself as a 'doctor' ensuring that 'everyone is having a good time' while on holiday or living in

the resort. The father-of-three works six days a week during the summer months and spends most of Sunday sleeping, he tells me.

But, most importantly, he completely gets the positioning and uniqueness of Sotogrande as a resort and place to live.

He describes it using a French word 'desuet', which literally means 'out of fashion, but doesn't translate perfectly into English'.

"Basically Sotogrande is not a hip or trendy place, but it offers a unique

lifestyle different to anywhere else," he explains.

He is certainly not short of jobs to undertake, with two hotels, three golf courses, most of the marina and various plots and developments to manage.

There are also various plans to carefully utilise 1,400 hectares of protected green spaces, with new hiking routes, horse riding trails and some 'glamping' accommodation for families.

But for now, he is clearly delighted with what has perhaps, surprisingly, become the coolest beach hangout this summer.



**FUN: Food trucks, mojitos and smoked sardines (top)**



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