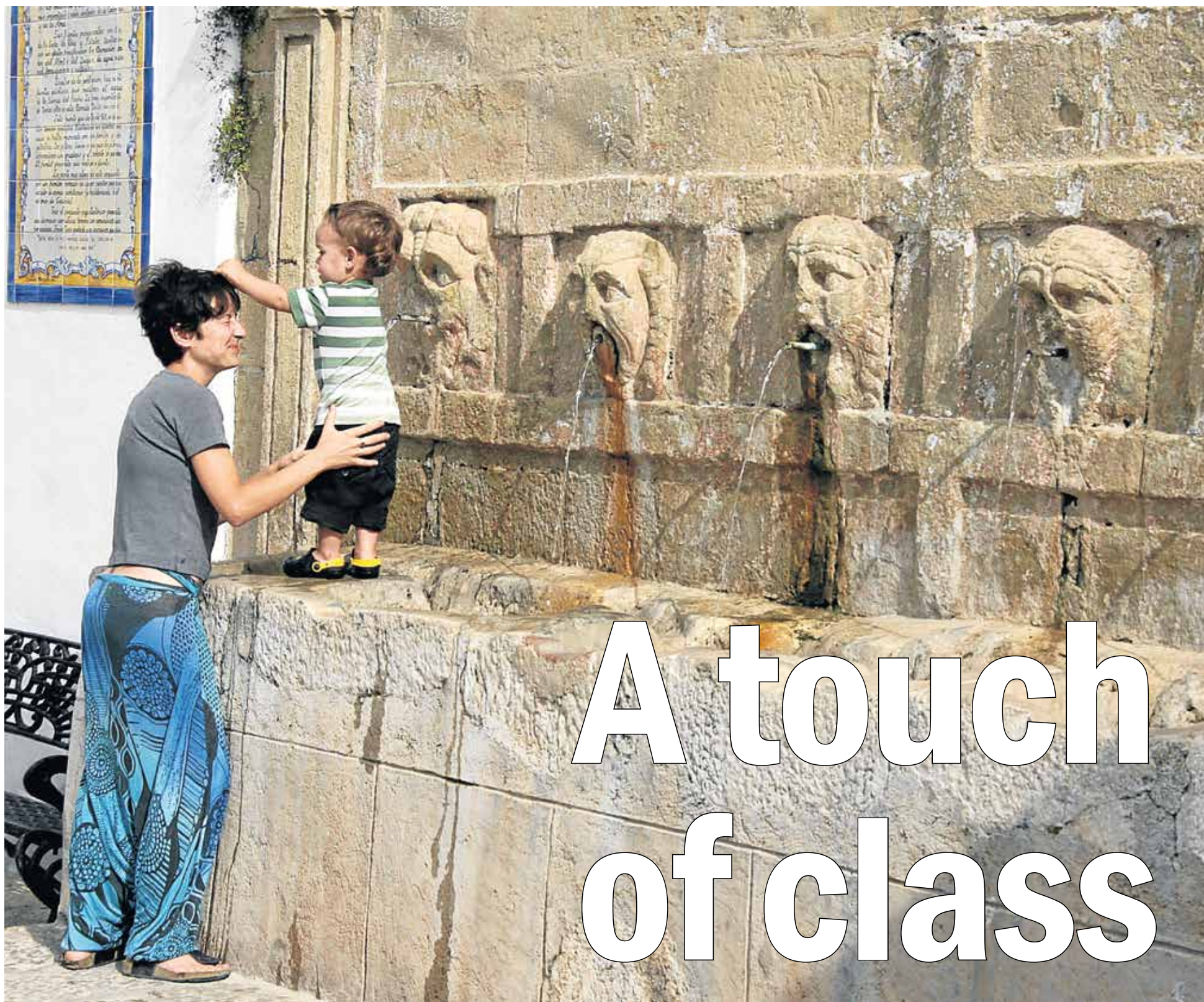




All about Gaucin

19

August 15th -
August 28th
2018



A touch of class

HAIRY bikers and sporty mountainbikers hug the curvy road like a well-loved woman but if you're a motorist going to Gaucin, wear a seatbelt! The 'Camino de Gibraltar', as the old road was known, was built by the Romans to provide access to Gibraltar and the sea from Ronda. And not a great deal seems to have changed, judging from the potholes. But brave the long and winding road to this classic white village and your courage will be rewarded as you arrive in a picturesque pueblo which seems to collapse in on itself. Colloquially referred to as 'El Balcon de la Serrania' (Balcony of the Serrania de Ronda), Gaucin has a foothold halfway into one of Andalucía's most stunning mountain ranges. Originally settled by the Romans and extended into a military fortification by the Moors,

With its picture postcard villages and lush landscape, watered by the cleanest river in Europe, the Genal Valley has been called The Cotswolds of Spain. Gaucin, perched on the Balcony of the Serrania, is its crowning glory

the village is rich in history. The Camino de Gibraltar, which runs through the village, made Gaucin a popular rest stop for Roman soldiers and, later, British artists such as David Roberts, a painter from the 19th century Romantic school. However one of the most infamous historical dates that stands out in the minds of Gaucin natives today is the 1808 invasion of the French during the Napoleonic Wars. A heavy loss was suffered when the village was pillaged, and nearly all of its inhabitants murdered.

Gaucin was eventually reconquered by the Spanish in a triumphant battle that is reenacted by the locals annually, wearing authentic French military uniforms. Today Gaucin is more famous as one of Andalucía's most sought-after chill-out destinations – an artists' enclave full of character and charm. If you're looking for a relaxed holiday, away from the bright lights of the Costa del Sol, Gaucin is made to measure. Ask Fatboy Slim and his wife Zoe Ball who have been a couple of times, ask Jamie Oliver,

or the Sainsbury family who frequently come in summer... and above all, ask Gordon Ramsey who has spent a week filming a TV show in the town at the now defunct Granada Divino restaurant.

Sleepy and slow-paced but not devoid of life, you only have to plug into the breathtaking views to recharge your batteries: a panorama encompassing the Rock of Gibraltar and Morocco on one side, and the sweeping valleys of the Ronda mountain range on the other.

To appreciate these views at their best, strap on your walking shoes and get ready for some invigorating but very doable hikes along the old Camino de Gibraltar itself, following in Roman footsteps...

Finding the path is easy as it is very clearly sign-posted in the village. Just don't forget your water bottle!

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From front page

To see the valleys, pay a visit to the Castillo del Aguila (Eagle Castle), a Roman castle now in ruins that watches over Gaucin like a sentinel. It's easy to find from the northern side of the village and well worth the trip. Throw in the mountainside church and high-rise cemetery, and the adjoining history museum, for the complete experience.

Lounge lizarding

If you just want to kick back and play lounge lizard, Gaucin can help with that too. Or at least, that's according to one British couple holidaying in the village. When asked what there was to do in Gaucin, their reply was succinct: "Sleep."

But while, it can certainly be a quiet restful place for a break, you can also enjoy the buzz in summer hanging out at one of the pavement cafes.

Gaucin is bursting with personality, so hanging out in town is an entertainment. Excellent cafes, restaurants, shops and hotels are scattered throughout, and in summer the population of 2,000 inhabitants, grows manifold.

Although distinctly Spanish, Gaucin also bears the hallmarks of an expat invasion.

As you browse the artisan shops and trendy clothing boutiques, look out for the hand-painted ceramic lizards that adorn the walls of almost every



street.

These 'salamandres,' as they're known, were created by a couple of locals as a marketing ploy to give Gaucin identity.

Though no one knows why the salamander was chosen, they became wildly popular (400 went up in total) through a competition among local art-

ists to create the most original lizard.

On the subject of artists, the town has perhaps the most important collection of artists on

the Costa del Sol, with dozens having studios in the town.

This all becomes abundantly clear when twice a year the group organise their Art Gaucin

weekends during which they throw open their doors and sell dozens of paintings.

In between retail therapy and lizard spotting, make sure you seek out the centuries.



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Guy Hunter-Watts describes his favourite route to discover the best of Gaucin's scenery



This route makes for a great half-day walk out from Gaucin. It's easy to follow, the views change with every turn in the path and the ancient cork oaks which you pass are home to abundant bird life.

Be prepared for a steepish haul first thing as you head up the north-eastern flank of El Hacho and another at the end of the walk when you head back up to Gaucin.

After following a narrow, somewhat overgrown path early in the walk - you may feel more comfortable in long trousers - there's a longish section of forestry track mid-walk where you can abandon yourself to the soaring views out towards the Sierra del Pino and the Sierra del Libar: your feet take care of themselves at this point. During the winter months you may come across teams of cork cutters: the oaks are particularly memorable when seen after their nine-yearly cut.

El Hacho

The walk begins at the Campsa petrol station on the outskirts of Gaucin, to one side of the A-369. Just before the entrance of the petrol station (at the northern end) head along Calle Camino del Montorio. Reaching house no.16 cut hard left and pick up a path which runs to the left of a line of eucalyptus trees. The path climbs steeply between two fences, past groves of olives and almonds. Ahead you'll now spot the path you'll soon be following, cutting across the northern flank of El Hacho.

When you reach a fork, keep left and continue to climb. Shortly the path swings hard right, running parallel to a track which is just above you. It becomes more overgrown as it passes just beneath a large, statuesque rock where it divides. Take the left fork and continue climbing. The path becomes clearer as it passes a post with white and yellow P.R. waymarking then runs up to a pylon at the top of the ridge. (20 mins)

Here pass through a wire-and-post gate then, bearing slightly left, follow a narrow path which winds down through thick undergrowth beneath the oaks and conifers. It soon becomes clearer and leads to a fence and another wire-and-post gate. Beyond the gate the path continues to wind on through thick undergrowth before angling right and descending towards a pylon. A few metres before you reach the pylon cut left and continue along the narrow path that snakes through cistus, gorse and oaks then, descending, runs past a calera - an old lime kiln. Passing beneath overhead cables it soon descends to another gate with a sign for Coto Privado de Caza.

Go through the gate and bear left along a more clearly defined path. You shortly come to a rocky pass to the left of the path. Bear left here, following the path through the breach in the hillside. The path runs on beneath a green-posted fence, descends, then crosses a (dry) stream, then loops hard to the right. You now lose the fence and shortly

The walk of the cork cutters

The Nitty Gritty

Distance: 11 kms

Time required: 4/4.5 hours

Rating: Medium

Map: 1:50000 Cortes de la Frontera (1064/14-46)

Water: No springs so take plenty

come to an indistinct fork. Here bear left. The path winds steeply down then crosses another (dry) stream. Just beyond the stream the path divides. Take the lower, right hand fork and drop down the hill parallel to the stream that you have just crossed. After crossing the second of two small (dry) streams the path angles away from the fence then runs uphill and meets with a track leading towards a newly-built house. Here angle right and drop down the track towards a pylon. Just before reaching the pylon (1 hr) you come to a junction with a broader track. Here arc hard right and head along a broad forestry track: you'll be following the track for the next 40 minutes so you can forget these notes at this stage.

Lazy contours

The track gradually descends as views open out to the west. Passing a quarry, then a farm where pigs and goats are raised, you reach a junction. Carry straight on, ignoring a left fork down towards Finca La Capellania. Continue along the main track ignoring a smaller track which you'll soon see leading up to the right. The track

contours lazily round the valley and eventually Gaucin comes into sight. Soon the track loops sharply left, crosses a tributary of Garganta de las Palas then a few hundred metres further crosses the Garganta de las Palas itself. The track now bears hard left, crosses a cattle grid, then runs on for about 600m and crosses a third stream bed. Careful! 225m past this stream look for a small white sign Camino de Gaucin a Cortes in a tree to the right of the track. (1 hr 45 mins) It's easily missed but you should also spot cairns - man-made piles of stones - to the left and right of the track. Here bear sharply right away from the track and follow a path steeply up through the heather, gorse and lavender. The path winds on up through the cork oaks and eventually passes through a gate made from an old bed base where it broadens before meeting with a better-defined track by a green metal gate.

Bearing right you eventually pass by a group of modern buildings then come to the Ronda-Gaucin road. Turn right. Just past a bandstand cut left along Calle Queipo de Llano following a sign for Centro urbano. After passing a small roundabout head straight on along Calle Los Bancos then arc right into

Calle del Corral. Continue past the Unicaja bank then cross the street and, passing right of Modas Teresa, head to the end of the Calle Barrio Alto. Here bear right and, having passed

the Guardia Civil HQ, you reach the Ronda-Gaucin road, the A-369, and your point of departure. (2 hrs 30 mins)

The Walk of the Cork Cutters is taken from Walking in Andalucia

by Guy Hunter-Watts. The book is available via amazon.co.uk, ISBN: 978-84-89954-92-2. The author welcomes feedback about any changes you may encounter via guy@rondatejar.com



TRECK: The road to Gaucin

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My Gaucin

One of the first expats to live in the area, Mary Beker remembers what Gaucin was like when she moved...



It all started with an advert in *The Observer*.

Mary Beker, 67, originally from Warrington, moved to the town on a permanent basis in 1975 when Franco was still in charge.

Here she tells the *Olive Press* about her early years there. "I saw an advert offering a free weekend in nearby Jimena where they would show you properties around the area. I hadn't really thought about moving here, I just fancied the free weekend.

But I just fell in love with the place. It was a bit of an adventure as it was a long way from everywhere. At the time there was no road to the coast and no ring road bridge, so you had to really want to come here, it wasn't convenient.

There are a lot of English there now but the foreigners that were there before were quite adventurous.

We were very involved with the Spanish, and they kind of adopted us. I was always 'their

foreigner' and because I had a car I would get invitations to weddings and pig slaughters 'Matanzas' because I could take people.

They used to call people who had been as far as Ronda munditos because they had seen the wide world.

Most of them had never been to the coast, had never been to the beach even though they could see the sea from Gaucin. Of course, back then there were only three cars in the village.

Because there wasn't much space to park I used to leave the keys in the car and someone would move it if they needed to. There was no concern about anybody stealing it and there still isn't.

Women didn't go in bars in those days and I had to change the way I dressed. All the other women still wore black. Now some of the teenagers seem half naked.

It really has changed tremendously, but still, without a doubt, one of the most beautiful villages in Europe.

Ancient roots

Gaucin was once one of the most fought over towns in southern Spain

ALONG with Gibraltar, the town of Gaucin has served as a key gateway from the south into Europe. Ruins and architecture in this mountain town nestled in Serranía de Ronda tell the rich history of great powers grappling for control of Gaucin, a stepping stone to extend their empires further into Europe. The Castillo del Aguila (Eagle's Castle), a military base of great strategic value, has been under the reign of numerous powerful regimes, from the Romans to the Moors.

Caesar

Roman troops took advantage of Gaucin's decisive location to access the Ronda mountain range. Laying the foundation for the town, they build a wide network of roads, some of which are still intact today. Gaucin was



MAGESTIC: Castillo del Aguila nestled in the hills of Gaucin

used as an intermediary rest stop for soldiers after the Battle of Munda between Julius Caesar and the Optimates in the Roman Republic.

While the Romans built the first castle, the original construction has been completely replaced by the traces of the following rulers: the

Moors.

After the Moors invaded Spain in 714 and captured Gaucin, the castle was expanded into a grand fortress. During their reign, the castle was called the 'Zajra Guazan', derived from an indigenous word 'zajra' for rock and an arabic term 'gauzan' for strong.

Pirates

Gaucin was finally handed over to the Christian rule in 1457 during the reign of King Enrique IV and the Christian domain was firmly established by 1483. The first Gaucin governor was Captain Pedro del Castillo, who led the troops of Enrique IV in the battles leading up to the capture of Gaucin. Through seizing command over this strategically important location, the Christians were able to protect its lands and keep the Moorish pirates out.

Now, white-washed walls and terracotta tiles welcome visitors to this picturesque destination, belying the tumultuous history of the former military hotspot.

Smugglers' path

In the 19th century, Gaucin continued to serve as a path of covert agendas and interactions. Long gone were the days of the Romans and the Moors, replaced by smugglers and robbers transporting contraband cigarettes and alcohol from Gibraltar to Ronda. The narrow, winding road they took through the hills is now dubbed 'The Smugglers Path,' a popular trek for hikers and curious passerby alike.



HAIR RAISING: The road to Ronda

Into the valley

THERE are few regions as evocative and unspoiled as the Genal Valley near Gaucin.

Spread over 42,000 hectares between the coast and Ronda, the valley is a paradise for walkers, wildlife lovers and those who just want to get away from it all.

It even boasts one of Europe's cleanest rivers. It is made up of a collection of 16 villages within the Serranía de Ronda, some of which are literally off the map.

Moreover, while Gaucin, by far the biggest town in the valley, may have attracted an influx of expats in recent years, few have ventured further into the valley.

It remains quintessentially Spanish and for

every few cars, there seems to be a donkey. In fact, taking a trip through the Genal valley is almost like taking a step back in time.

"Life here goes on the same," explains Ana Martínez who runs El Quejigo in Algotocin, selling local hams and cheeses in addition to typical artisanal crafts from the area.

"There are less people these days, it is quieter but it hasn't really changed much over the years."

Certainly tourism is not generally developed in the Genal Valley. But this is brilliant for those that still venture into it, with each authentic village exuding a sense of the 'real Spain' or at least, how it used to be when people lived simpler and slower paced lives.

Dream big

After upping sticks and building a dream property Geoffrey Banham, Director at Andalucía Country Houses, is helping expats find their perfect home in Spain



A MOMENT of madness back in 1995 saw me purchase a plot of land on a hillside near the village of Casares.

There I built a little villa overlooking the sea and like so many before me, my love affair with Spain began! Turning my back on my city trader life in London, I wanted a different type of life. My experience of building a house in Andalucía led me to buy small village houses in the region, developing them and selling them on to expats in search of a similar dream to my own.

In time I expanded into estate agency, specialising in country property, which is a specialist subject as rules and regulations are always changing.

The greatest satisfaction is helping people achieve their own dream of owning a home in Spain and giving them the guidance and sup-

port I wish I had received all those years ago! Are we different? Maybe we are different from some agencies, maybe not. Like all serious businesses we want to offer our expertise, give good customer service, listen to our clients' needs and respond in the best way we know how.

My small, dedicated team help in every way possible, whether it is with holiday rentals, property management, listings, viewings we are a team that go above and beyond.

Throughout Andalucía we list any type of rural tourism businesses. We specifically cover Casares, Gaucin, Jimena de la Frontera, Ronda and the Campo de Gibraltar.

Come in and see us, drop us an email, or give us a call and see if we can find the solution for you whether you are buying or selling.



IDYLLIC: Geoffrey Banham built his dream home in Andalucía

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