



All about Sierra Nevada

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COSTA DEL SKI



Jon Clarke (right) returns for his 15th season in southern Europe's top skiing resort



WHILE it's foggy in the Pyrenees and they're shivering in the Alps, I'm taking the sun near the top of Spain's second highest mountain.

It's early December and yet the Sierra Nevada still remains warm during the day. Some people are skiing in t-shirts and everyone is looking tanned.

Even better, my elevenses of a croissant, apple and a Coke come to less than €10 euros... and that is at a restaurant halfway up the slopes!

"Here we sell the weather, not the number of kilometres," explains Juan Luis Hernandez, boss of EOE ski school. "And the prices have hardly gone up for years." On top of that you are just over an hour from the beaches of Almunecar and half an hour to the celebrated Alhambra. That is hard to beat.

What is certainly changing in the Sierra Nevada though is the dedication to move forward.

Believe me, I've been coming for 15 years... and this is the 10th anniversary of the Olive Press' special supplement on the resort.

New kilometres of pistes are added every year and this year - by amazing fortune - it snowed so heavily in November, the resort opened a week earlier than expected, with a record 40,000 skiers enjoying the De-

Continues on next page

LIGHTING THE WAY: A new lighthouse on the kids play park area and (main pic) the slopes lit up at night

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From Page 20

cember 6 bank holiday 'puente' weekend. There were 50km of runs open by mid December - while much of Europe was mostly still 'brown' - and by the time the season really kicks in there will be over 100kms of pistes open for all the family.

This includes the celebrated Laguna valley, for expert skiers, as well as the excellent Superpark Sulayr, Europe's largest freestyle snowboard park. This includes the fabulous 165 metre long 'half pipe', amazing for snowboarders.

And then there is the famous 'Rio' run that leads right down to the resort of Pradollano, which sits at 2,100 metres. You can bomb down that to get your first off piste beer!

At the same latitude as Cyprus and just 30 miles from the beaches of the Costa del Sol, it is nothing short of amazing really that you can ski here through to May.

This is all to do with the altitude of the Sierra Nevada, which has its highest peak in Mulhacen, a staggering 3,482m above sea level.

Named after a 15th century Arabic king Muley Hacen (Abdul Hassan Ali), who is said to have been buried at the top, this is the highest peak in mainland Spain. From the top of the highest ski lift, at 3,300 metres, the views make the Mediterranean below look like a small pond, with half the coastline of Morocco clearly in view.

It is an amazing place, although it can be a little nippy up there with the wind whistling past, so make sure to bring a coat and jumper.

From here, competent skiers are spoilt with the amazing runs of the Laguna de las Yeguas area, including the celebrated Olympic run, which is full of twists and turns. Here, you can sometimes find yourself skiing alone midweek for five to 10 minutes and the sheer nature and landscape are spectacular.

It is incredibly easy to have a day or two's skiing in Europe's most southerly skiing resort.

Just two hours from the Costa del Sol, you head up to the resort of Pradollano, 20 minutes above Granada, where you can park easily in the underground car park right below the main square.

Staying longer - or on a budget - take the turning left, marked 'albergues' just before you arrive and head uphill through a pine forest, before taking a right



THE LIFE: Sunbathing over lunch and (below) punters at friendly Bar Ski



towards the resort.

Drive down a long windy road through the resort, keeping your eyes peeled for a free space, but beware 'gruas' are out in force and you will be towed away if you park badly.

From here, you are a five or ten minute walk down to

the centre of the resort, where you will find dozens of places to rent skis and buy your 'forfait' (or ski pass) from a machine using your credit card.

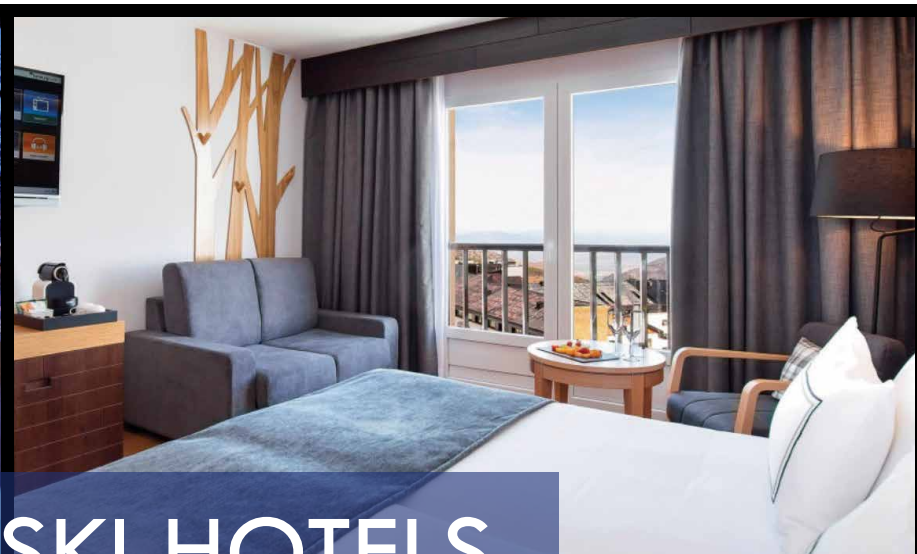
It is not cheap at between €37 and €48 for a day's skiing, but it's much cheaper than the Alps and you can get a half day for €36 kicking off at 1pm and chil-

dren get decent discounts, while those in their 70s get free passes.

It certainly pays to pick your days with Christmas and Semana Santa seeing the resort rammed, with sometimes big queues for the ski lifts.

Then there is *Semana Blanca* (literally 'white week')

SKI CENTRA



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– or half term at the end of February – when school children can learn how to ski, while bank holidays can also be very busy and getting up to the resort can be slow. That said, problems can be missed by arriving by 8.30am or by waiting till midday when prices come down.

While a modern resort, Pradollano itself is a pleasant place to simply take in the air or a spot of lunch, and there is a fair amount for children to do, with entertainers and Disney figures wandering around, particularly around Christmas.

It has also, rightfully, got a good reputation as being a resort for fun, with the famous apres ski being some of the best in Europe.

The resort really started to evolve quickly from 1995 when the World Skiing Championship was scheduled to be held there (it actually took place the following year due to poor snow).

"Since then the infrastructure changes were huge and it is now a big resort," explains resort marketing boss Santiago Sevilla, who has worked there for over a decade. "When the weather is favourable, and that is most of the time, this is a fantastic place to be skiing." Giles Birch, who runs the British Ski Center,

estimates that Pradollano has one of the longest seasons in Europe, opening at the start of December and often going through to mid May.

"There have even been snowfalls in June and when the snow and weather are favourable, which is more often than not, the openness of the ski terrain provides some of the most exhilarating off piste skiing to be found anywhere."

He continues: "Off piste skiing here has made a great name for itself with easily accessible zones all over the terrain, very little avalanche risk and wide open expanses for all to enjoy."

And then there is the famous adage that it is easy to have a morning's snow ploughing in the Sierra Nevada followed by an afternoon on the beach.

A few years ago local Granada newspaper *Ideal* decided to try it out the theory, picking a sunny day in May and a couple of foreign students based in Granada. Picked up in Granada at 8am they were skiing on the slopes from 9am to 1pm, before taking the 75 minute drive down to the Costa Tropical resort of Salobreña. "It worked perfectly and by 3pm they were settled in eating a paella on the beach," explains Sevilla, whose company Cetursa has run the resort for de-

acades. "Then by 9pm, not content to call it a day, they were having a tapas crawl around the Albaicin of Granada just to add the icing on the cake," he adds.



Old age pleasures

THEY have been coming to the Sierra Nevada for decades from their home in Almeria.

And, best of all, retired expats (above) Martin and Brenda Carney, 72 and 70, now get their ski passes completely free of charge.

"All we have to do is rent our gear and we have been using the same shop Ski Sol since we first came," explains former UK hotelier Brenda. "We love it up here and the snow is usually excellent."

Shop boss Montse (pictured with them) explains that they have dozens of clients in their 70s, and one Norwegian in his NINETIES.

"He's been coming down here for years," she reveals. "He is amazingly fit and I think skiing really helps him stay that way." Many of the local business owners still ski every day, well into their sixties.

They include Jose Carlos, at Bodega Casablanca, and EOE skiing school boss Jose Luis Hernandez, 64, who explains: "It's a great sport, using almost all your muscles, your arms, your legs and your dorsals, not to mention the heart."

"My brother Manolo still skis and he's in his 80s and I intend to ski when I'm 90."

Statistically 2.7% of skiers in the Sierra Nevada are over 60 years old.

All year sports for all sorts

There is much more to the Sierra Nevada than sliding down it on two planks of wood. You can tackle it by tobog-

gan and snowboard, or on a snowshoe hike (akin to walking with a tennis racket strapped to each foot). And if that sounds like

too much action, you can always swap icy snow for a hot steam bath and indulge in some me-time at one of several hotel spas. All year round, the Sierra Nevada is paradise for fresh air fiends.

After 'the melt', the resort becomes a paradise for walkers, wildlife lovers and mountain bikers.

Get the best views by taking advantage of the ski lifts, which in summer carry both people and bikes to the summit to enjoy breathtaking routes back down.

Borreguiles, the resort's impressive ski bowl, boasts a bike park in the hotter months. Youngsters can test their strengths in the mini-olympiads zone or race against each other on the pedal car track.

Guided dawn and dusk walks and a bumper running and cycling race calendar are a magnet keeping the resort busy 12 months of the year.

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SMALL ACORN: First bar, (right) Muralla Burger and (below) La Muralla food

With half a dozen businesses on the slopes, including a new burger joint, the Funes family are going places

COMING together for Christmas is what families are all about.

And the Funes' know this more than anyone, building one of the Sierra Nevada's most dynamic and bustling businesses. Under the parent name of Las Gondolas, they have a supermarket, ski hire company, a school and three restaurants in the resort of Pradolano.

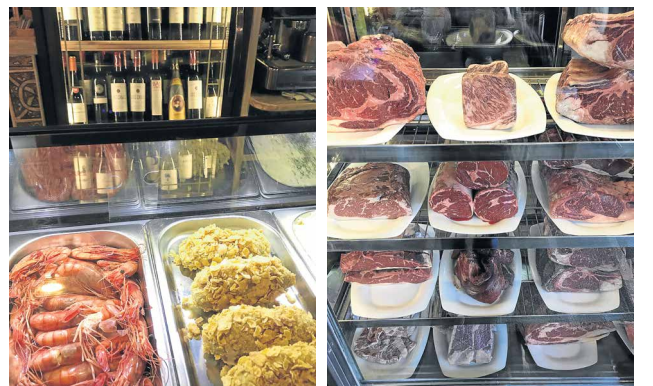
The Argentinian family all do their bit, with the three children Lorena, 41, Gonzalo, 39 and Luciano, 37, doing the daily graft.

It was their father who brought them over from Argentina two decades ago, wanting to come back to his natural home of Granada (he was born nearby in Lanjarón).

They had run a supermarket in south America, so it was perhaps natural that their first business in the Sierra Nevada was a similar type of shop.

It did so well, they had soon opened a bar and restaurant next door, before expanding across the street

Beefed up



with a ski rental business.

To this, they have now added a ski school - run by Luciano's girlfriend Simone, a super friendly Austrian - as well as two more restaurants, the celebrated La Muralla and the brand new La Muralla Burger.

Together they have become a force

of nature in situ with Sierra's stunning scenery.

"The key to our success is quality and excellent service and we bend over backwards to help our clients," explains Gonzalo, who takes particularly pride in the amazing steaks on offer at his main restaurant La Muralla.



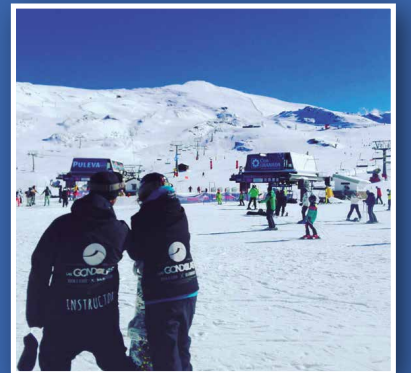
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Icy blast
from the
past



CHILD'S PLAY: It's fun for kids on the slopes... but not if their dads are teaching them

Going downhill fast

Jon Clarke on the
terrors of teaching your
children how to ski

If there's one golden rule of skiing it's DON'T teach your children how to do it.

It was a lesson I learnt the hard way when I found myself flailing down a green run in the Sierra Nevada with both my youngsters in tow a few years ago.

Enthusiastic and fearless - like their dad - they had somehow persuaded me to take them up for a couple of runs before their scheduled lesson was set to begin at 11am.

But when we all fell over in the first lift queue I got the hint that I might have been a touch foolhardy.

Pulling them both up again we finally alighted the chair only for Alfie, my then five-year-old, to fall off the other side, stopping the lift for him to be scooped up by the lift operator.

Within 30 seconds of moving again came the first cry of cold and then the announcement that he was 'not going to ski down'.

And after falling over again as we got off the lift, I felt pretty certain he was going to have to be carried down.

However, he suddenly got his ski legs and we took off - well tumbled really - down the slope.

I had tried to get their skis into the classic snowplough position and told them to head sideways not straight downhill.

But, of course, it doesn't work like that and while Alfie went left, Maia, then eight, shot off to the right, screaming blue murder.

A horrible moment having to decide which of your two children to save, I plumped for the youngest, a daredevil, with no fear, but no sooner had I picked him up, I skidded off after Maia, who was by now on a totally different run 100 metres away and in floods of tears.

We regrouped and I attempted to get them to follow me down in a zig zag with promises of bravery medals and hot chocolate at the bottom. After five falls each and a shout from an angry teacher, when we bombed straight through his class sending the pupils tumbling, they made it to the bottom with, guess what, huge smiles on their faces.

It was a lesson in damage control and I just about passed, but I vowed to leave the job of training them to the professionals.

The rest of the hour before their lesson was spent on the very, very nursery slope (and its bizarre 'magic carpet' tunnel), luckily with a Dutch friend and her daughter, who was an equal novice.

Up there on the one degree slope practically nothing can go wrong, and it was a huge relief when I handed them over to the very capable teachers at the Las Gondolas ski school, whose patience apparently knows no bounds.

So why on Earth am I so keen for my youngsters to learn to ski?

Horribly having to decide which child to save, I plumped for the youngest

The unselfish reason is I want them to develop a skill that will keep them fit and that they can enjoy for years to come.

The selfish reason is that I want an excuse to go to the Sierra Nevada as much as possible throughout the season.

For there is nothing as lovely as taking in the mountain air and breathtaking views of the Sierra Nevada. Bright sunshine, a gentle breath of wind and a glass of Veuve Cliquot in the champagne bar on the way down.

Now something of a winter ritual since moving to Andalucia 16 years ago, a day or weekend away in the Granada skiing resort is always great fun.

Heading up with friends, there are usually between 50 and 100kms of runs in a good year and the choice of places to eat in the resort is surprisingly good, not to mention good value compared to the normal skiing resort prices.

Then, of course, you get the health benefits. All that fresh air and movement for hours at a time has got to be good for you. My search engine produces millions of results when the keywords 'health benefit' and 'skiing' are entered.

A random look at one describes it as so 'Pure zingy mountain air contains lower levels of oxygen than we are generally used to... the body becomes more efficient in its circulation and oxygen delivery... which is great for sluggish desk-bound types! Quite.

It goes on to talk about stress-busting, facing fears and overcoming frustrations.

And so ultimately came as a lovely surprise that after one of the most exhilarating mornings skiing I could remember, I picked up my kids with huge smiles on their faces.

I proposed lunch down in the resort with their mother to which, they screwed up their faces and insisted it should be a *bocadillo* and chips at the top, followed by an afternoon's skiing with dad.

I can tell you it got better. And by the end of the second day, these two tornadoes were hooked. It made my year, and we have been coming back ever since.



IN SAFE HANDS: Jon finally hands kids over to a teacher



NO TUNNEL VISION: Maia and Alfie on the way up



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Plaza de Andalucía, Edificio Montebajo, Local 1,
18196, Sierra Nevada National Park

Timeline of a ski station

- Angel Ganivet, Spanish Consul to Helsinki, gave birth to the idea of turning Sierra Nevada into a ski resort at the end of the 19th century. He likened his Granada homeland to the 'Finland of Andalusia' in a local newspaper.



- 1898 marked the creation of Diez Amigos Limited, a group that led skiing excursions around the area.
- Thanks to their continued success, the organisation was able to create the first youth hostel in the area not long after re-branding itself Sociedad Sierra Nevada in 1912.



The main road from Granada to Sierra Nevada and a cable car were both put in place at the beginning of the 1920s, which allowed more people to discover the joys of snow-oriented fun.

The boom years of the resort began in 1964, when Centros Turísticos S.A. (CETURSA), was created, allowing its rapid development.

- Sierra Nevada is the southernmost ski station in Europe and sits at the highest point in Spain. The station hosted the World Alpine Ski Championships in 1996. It has also welcomed several Alpine Ski World Cup events, with the first in 1977. In addition, it has been the main venue for the Winter Olympics.



- In 2017, Sierra Nevada will host the FIS Snowboard and Freestyle World Championships (see poster right), a major international contest put together by the board of the International Ski Federation

It used to be a two hour bus ride from Granada and then a donkey up the slope

THE only way to get to the top of the slope was to walk... or take a friendly donkey!

Indeed, until the first two ski lifts (Borreguiles and Parador) were built in 1969, this was the preferred route.

The resort actually dates back to 1912 when Spain's oldest ski club, the Sierra Nevada Society was founded.

However, it was not until the 1920s - with the modernisation of Granada's roads - that the Sierra Nevada started to become known.

By the last 1950s a bus used to chug its way up to the slopes, while cars would turn up in their dozens at weekends.

Visitor numbers slowly grew



CHUGGING UP: An old bus takes skiers up the slopes

from then and, in 1964, Cetursa, a business dedicated to reserving ski tickets, was founded.

It was around then that the resort was at its most glamorous with the likes of Principe Alfons Hohenlohe, the owner the Marbella Club hotel, regularly bringing up friends, including Sean Connery to ski.

The best selection of old pictures, not just some of the vintage visitors to the resort, can be found in the charming Tito Luigi restaurant, which has been open for 30 years and counts the King as an occasional visitor.

"We have had them all in here," explains owner Javier, who heralds from Menorca. "Spain's best footballers, bullfighters and its leading politicians... everyone loves to ski in the Sierra Nevada."

One of the longest-established workers in the resort Jose Carlos Villanueva remembers the 1960s well.

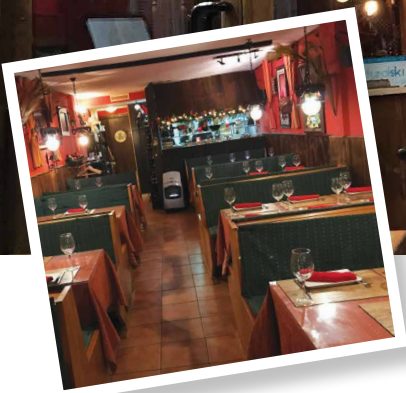
"I actually had my first communion on the slopes wearing ski boots and a jersey. I was the only one in Spain," he explains pointing at a photo of him as a child, with his sister. He had arrived there in 1961 when his father got a job running the 'alberge' one of just three



COMPETITION: There have been tournaments here since 1950

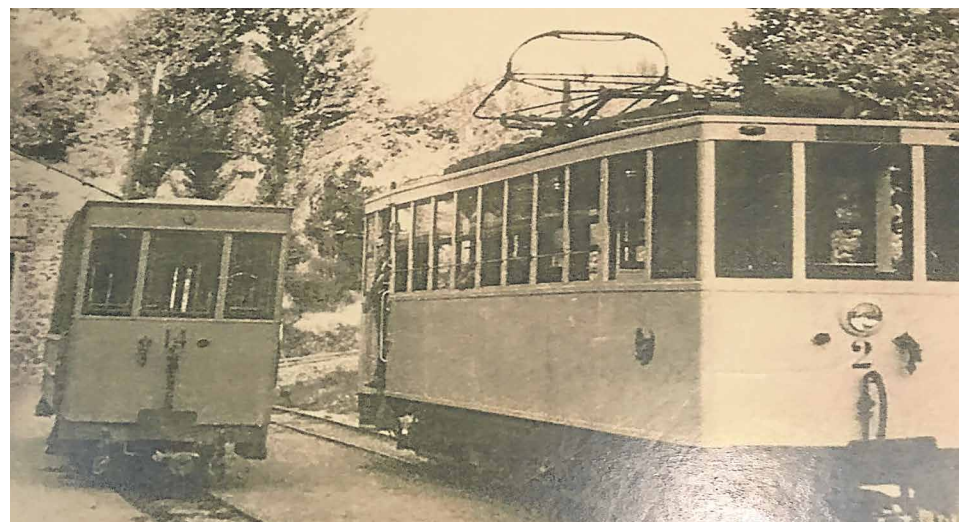
buildings in the resort back then. Living there for five years, it was no surprise that he always had a strong urge to return and at the age of 15 he became a ski

teacher. Now, appropriately - after 38 years teaching and an incredible 50,000 students - Jose Carlos is running the charming bar Bodega Casablanca.



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WHEELY MISSED: A tram used to rattle up from Granada

top



PUSH: Helping get a bus up the slopes and (below) a donkey lift and cars on slopes



Jetting in!

World champion Jet Skier David Selles has set up on the slopes

HAVING whizzed around the world as a professional jet skier David Selles has slid onto the Sierra Nevada slopes with an exciting new business. The seven-times World Champion, from Benidorm, has opened a ski shop and school in the heart of Pradollano.



HOT SEAT: David with team and (top) after winning jet ski title



Be Snow is the culmination of a three-year search for the perfect way to make a living on the slopes. "Since buying a home nearby some years ago, I haven't stopped looking," Selles, 48, tells *the Olive Press*.

And when decades-old ski shop Pascual Ski, in Plaza Andalucia, came up for sale he jumped at the option. Now half a year later he has finally opened with a stylish new urban look, with a few of the former staff and with tens of thousands of euros of brand new equipment.

"We've got 650 new pairs of skis and 800 pairs of brand new boots," he boasts. "It is the most important thing for anyone wanting to guarantee to have fun on the slopes."

"Top class skis with fantastic edges and the most comfortable boots you can find. We can promise that." It has been an exciting couple of decades for the father-of-two,

whose Brazilian wife, Alyne, often helps out in the shop.

After growing up in Finistratt, near Benidorm, he took up the sport of jet-skiing and won his first world championship in Crete in 1997.

He then competed around the world in countries as diverse as Japan, Canada, Alaska and Chile, before winning his final championship in Marbella in 2008.

It was a pretty full on two decades and, technically, he was not allowed to ski during all the time as a professional. "Contractually my sponsors would not allow it, but - of course - I couldn't resist and came quite a few times incognito," admits the businessman, who first skied in Candanchu at the age of eight. "Now I couldn't be happier. This is my passion, not a business. I get to ski every day and make a living at the same time," he concludes.



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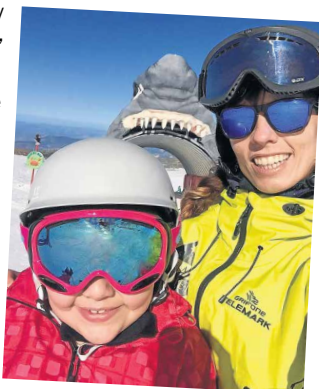


Telemark has been catering for families and adventurers on the snow since 1989, writes Jon Clarke

White world

THERE are not many inches of the Sierra Nevada that Luis Casanova and partner Jesus Fernandez don't know.

Be it hiking, king, cross country or off-piste skiing, they have slipped, slid or skidded down the lot for the last three decades. Celebrated for their famous off-piste mountain adventures that last from a morning to two days, they are perhaps the most experienced and wisest pair in the Sierra Nevada. But their ski and snowboard school, set up in 1989, is now focusing very much on families and children.



"We have realised that our knowledge and know-how is perfect for families who want the perfect personal one to one skiing break," explains Casanova, who spends half the year in the resort and the other half in Africa.

The company also still runs amazing wilderness trips that literally end up in another world... the charming cobbled villages of the Genil valley, in the Alpujarras. These one or two-day adventures take you through deep off-piste snow onto narrow mountain tracks.

"We try to put an emphasis on ecology and nature and it is impressive to see the typically old farmhouses in the area and how little



FAMILY FRIENDLY: Skiing is for all ages and the Telemark team are famous for looking after all ages

they have changed," adds Luis, in perfect English.

"It is a real, fun adventure, something you will not forget."

"Best of all, a team of mules ends up helping to bring your stuff back to Pradollano," he adds.

The day trip costs just €100 per person and includes transport and lunch.

Another popular pastime for those, who don't fancy risking life and limb on the pistes, is to have a day of

cross-country skiing on two or three well established paths around the resort.

"It is great fitness and you do get to enjoy the fabulous views and nature at the same time," he adds.

The company can also help organise hard-core uphill climbing for mountaineers to a half day soft snow walking trip with snow rackets.

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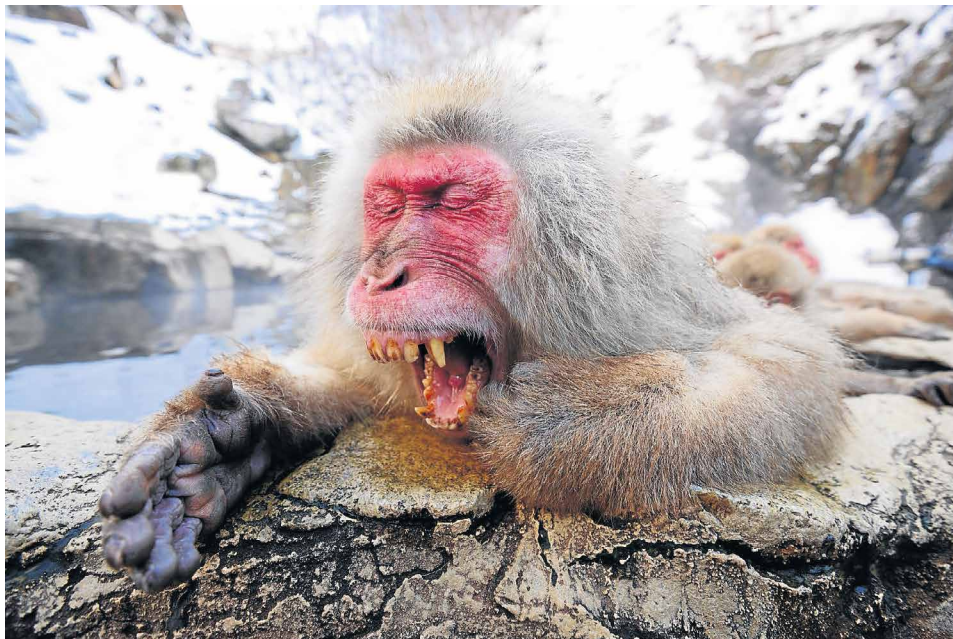


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WHEN BOOKING LESSONS



MONKEYING AROUND: But the Mono Careto warns against this

Urban legends

TO local Granada folk, the Sierra Nevada mountains are hugely important - and not only as a source of tourism and pride. Their snow-capped peaks are the setting for many legends and urban myths. The stories, designed to help explain tragic events and natural phenomena like avalanches, have been passed down over the centuries and remain classics to this day. Below are the two most famous.

The Sierra Nevada's treacherous nature has created a land of myth and folklore

The mono careto

The literal meaning is 'monkey face' but the mono careto may be a magical monkey or a mystical fairy, depending on who is telling the story. The small, hairy creature is blamed for many of the ills that befall the local populace, including the 'la malafolla

'granaina', a bad mood that makes you snappy towards others.

It has also been fingered for causing avalanches which have buried mountaineers, cutting climbers' ropes and throwing rocks at visitors. The cheek critter is believed to have been created as a metaphor for how dangerous the mountains can be if you don't treat them with respect.

The Devil's Broom

LEGEND has it that there was once a wealthy lord who lived with his beautiful daughter in a remote castle in the Alpujarras, on the southern slopes of the Sierra Nevada.

The lord planned to marry his daughter off to a fellow landowner, and kept her hidden away from the world so she could not meet anyone else. But unknown to him, she had been sneaking out of the house at night and had already fallen for a local shepherd.

When the lovers learned of her father's plans, they decided to elope north through the treacherous, snow-bound mountain passes, even if it meant their deaths.

On his way to meet her, the shepherd bumped into the devil who offered him a broom to hide his tracks in the snow.

Pursued by the rich lord, the couple fled until they reached the 3,371-metre peak of Mount Alcazaba, just a few metres short of the mighty Mulhacen (3,482m).

But when they dropped the broom it began to sweep by itself, causing an avalanche and burying their pursuers. The story goes that the broom was left there forgotten, where it still sweeps, causing landslides to this day.



DID YOU SNOW?

Do you know all these facts about the Sierra Nevada ski resort?

- The Mulhacen peak is 3478 metres high and is the highest point of continental Spain.
- There are 66 plant species and 80 animal species native to the Sierra Nevada National Park.
- Sierra Nevada has been part of La Vuelta a España with the final stage of the cycling race ending there on several occasions.
- At 1200 metres it has the largest difference in gradient in any resort in Spain.
- Night skiing is held at Pradollano on weekends, weather permitting
- The Super parque Sulayr has a 165 metre Half Pipe for freestylers and snowboarders and is Europe's largest freestyle snowboard park.
- It is the most Southern ski resort in Europe and 80% of its days are sunny during season.
- Sierra Nevada ski station hosted the Alpine World Ski Championships in 1996 and the 2015 Winter Universiade, the world university games.
- The name Sierra Nevada means 'Snowy Range' in English
- Sierra Nevada has 107km of skiable slopes, with 115 runs (40 blue, nine black, 50 red and 16 green as well as cross-country ski trails).
- The resort's ski lifts can carry 45,555 skiers every hour.
- In case of a lack of snow, there are 353 artificial snow cannons which cover 35km of piste.

DID-YOU-KNOW?



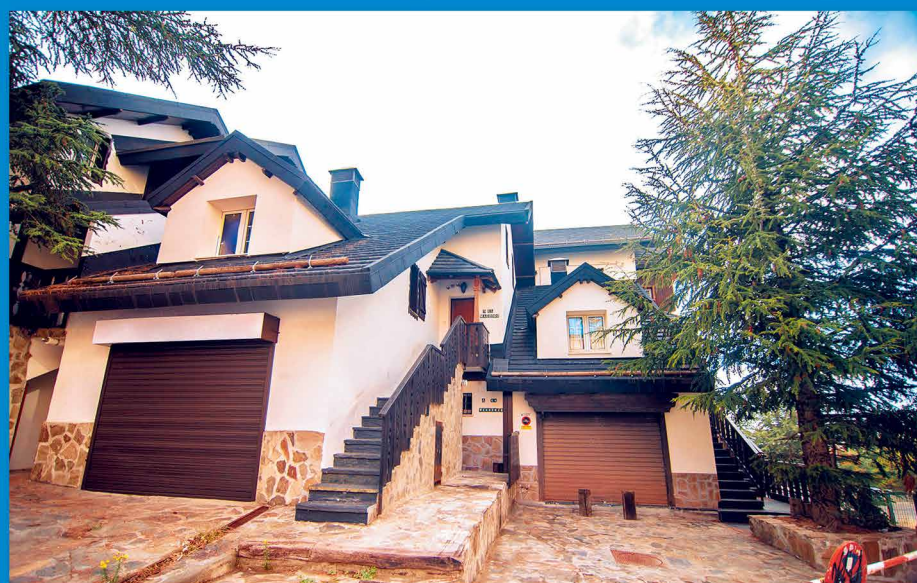
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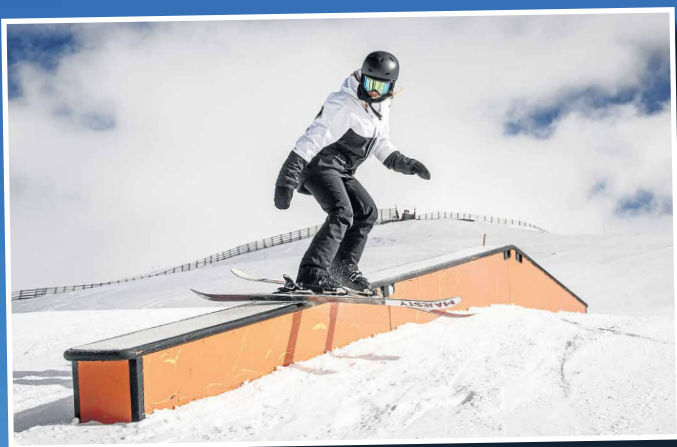


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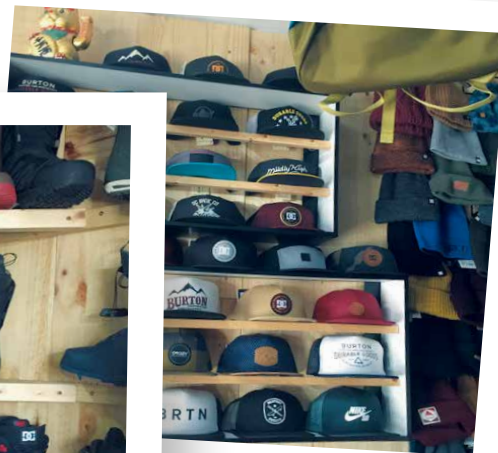
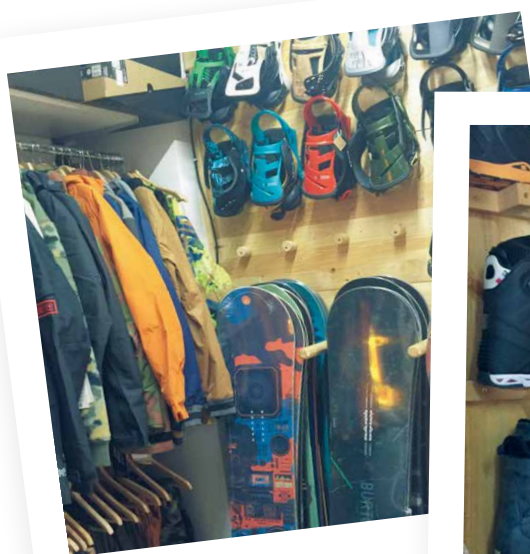


WE'RE FLY

The Sierra Nevada is fast becoming a natural haven for Spain's top snowboarders



'Your snowboarding centre in the Sierra Nevada'



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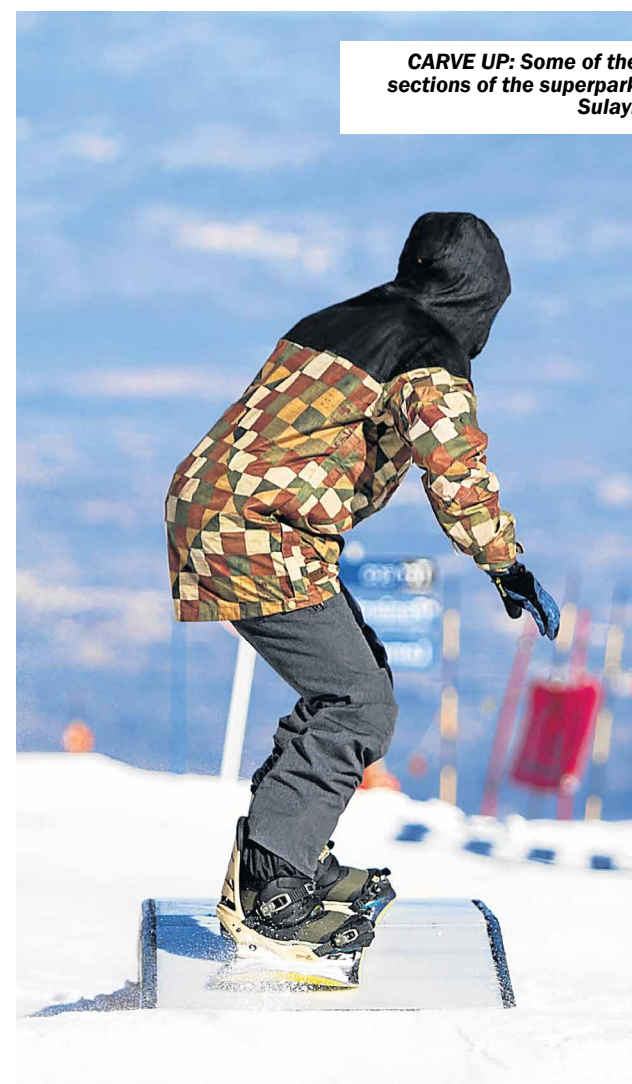
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LOCAL PRO: Jesus at South Star shop, the Mecca for snowboarders

YING

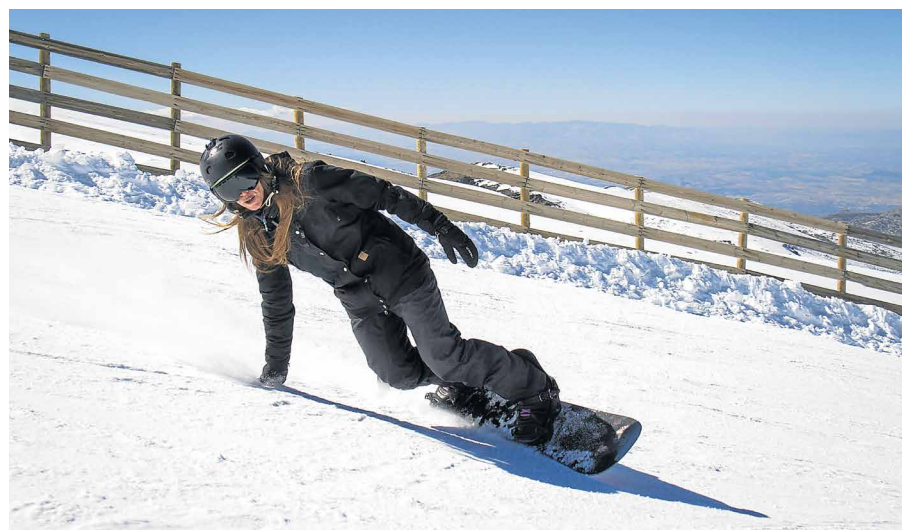


CARVE UP: Some of the sections of the superpark Sulayr



LOCALS boast of its cream snow. So it is no wonder the Sierra Nevada is a Mecca for thrill-seeking snowboarders, who come in their droves to take advantage of a soft and sumptuous ride. For beginners and experts alike, Spain's highest resort is a glorious setting. With its stunning scenery and top-class facilities, it was no surprise that it won the bid to host the Freestyle Ski and Snowboard World Championships last year. One of the best places to catch the top riders in action is at SuperPark Sulayr, Europe's largest freestyle snowboard park. Sitting at an altitude of 2,700 metres on Borreguiles, the famed snowboarding park houses the country's biggest permanent half-pipe. Measuring an astonishing 165 metres in length with a height of six metres, the spe-

cial design flattens the snow on the side of the half-pipe so boarders can jump on both sides. Rookies will also find a place to carve their niche in the resort, thanks to the gentle gradients of central station, Borreguiles. Here, lifts deposit snowboarders on a smooth and well-groomed area where they can hone their skills. Many professional snowboarders class Sierra Nevada as their home and a few shops specialise just in snowboarding. These include South Star, where Jesus and his brother juggle their passion for the snow with running their own two shops. "It's a fantastic place for snowboarders, one of the best in Spain, if not Europe," explains Jesus. "It has grown loads over the last few years and we are always busy."



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BRITS ON THE PISTE

WANT to find the cream of British skiing talent in the Sierra Nevada?

Well look no further than seminal Crescendo bar at the foot of the slopes, where Jonathan Buzzard and Giles Birch met over two decades ago.

This is their second office and where you will find them propping up the bar after a hard day's teaching on the slopes, which they know like a fox in a fox hole.

Step back to 1996, a boom time in Spain, and Giles was looking for the ideal transport rep to help him grow his travel business, working with the likes of Neilson Ski alongside First Choice and Thompsons, that had just launched in Granada.

Jonathan had all the right traits with his long flashers mac, 'big hair' and a friendly, outgoing persona.

"I had no idea what was going on but had been told that Crescendo was the

place to find the Brits and the reps-in-the know," he recalls.

"Next thing in walks Jonathan with just the right attitude and he was soon helping me deal with the three to four flights we regularly dealt with on a Sunday."

The pair are still working together, collectively running the extremely successful British Ski Center from their base at the resort. Great mates, they both now teach, as well as sort out holidays for hundreds of clients each year.

"Of course things are completely different to back then," explains Jonathan, who lived in Marbella in the golden years before it was ruined by corrupt leader Jesus Gil.

"Sierra Nevada used to see in thousands of foreigners every week, but after a couple of dry years in the 1980s the resort's reputation suffered badly and things all began to change.

It's over two decades since intrepid expats Giles Birch and Jonathan Buzzard started working in the Sierra Nevada, writes Jon Clarke



ON AND OFF THE SLOPES: Team in the bar and on their skis

"Luckily the snow came back, albeit not yet this year, but these days it is all independent travellers and the agencies have all but disappeared."

Of course there have been some bad years such as 1995 when Jonathan recalls cycling up Borreguiles run on a mountain bike in shorts on Christmas Day. This year however, is one of the best.

"But generally it is as good as most other international resort and the

range of skiing and schools is hard to beat," explains Giles, who is now in his benchmark 21st season in Granada.

Since arriving he has married (a Portuguese girl), had three children and taught literally hundreds of clients.

So what makes the Sierra Nevada so special, according to him?

One aspect is the length of the season. We start in late November and stay open until early May while other

resorts don't open until mid December and end their season in April." This is partly due to the resort's altitude and the quality of the snow which is constantly worked on during the night.

"That's why you'll never see slush even in the latter part of the season," he adds.

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A massive investment puts Rio Sport at the very peak of ski technology

THE Sanchez del Rio family have been working on the slopes for well over five decades.

First in Australia and more recently in Spain their company Rio Sport has been ahead of the game in terms of quality of equipment and expertise. Set up originally by Alfonso and wife Joan in the Sierra Nevada in 1988, the business is now run by son Phillip, 41, while brother Alexander is regularly found on the slopes too.

Based out of two locations, both just yards from the main ski-lifts, they have cleverly cornered the expat and foreign market that makes up around 20% of the resort's clientele.

"Around 70% of our clients are foreign and probably about half of those British and Irish," explains Phillip, who loves his job, particularly as he gets to ski almost every lunchtime.

"I put our success with expats down to giving good service and offering good quality products," he continues.

"We were also the first expat business here, now open for 30 years, so that counts for a lot," he adds.

The company, which has around 20 staff, including teachers, particularly specialises in the quality of its boots.

Indeed, Riosport is one of only a few dozen places in the world where you can get the top quality, personalised Strolz make of ski boots and a special



ALL CHANGE: Phillip has overseen a huge investment at Rio Sport this year

list Fischer machine fits your feet. Custom-fitted for the most tricky customers, they almost guarantee not to give you pain. Phillip can even make personal footbeds for ski boots. "They are perfect for any foot," Philip explains. A huge expensive refit of the main shop has made it one of the most modern-looking in the resort.

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WHERE TO EAT

FROM PISTE TO



The Sierra Nevada is becoming one of Andalucia's best places to eat, writes Dining Secrets of Andalucia boss Jon Clarke (left)

AT least two kings of Spain have eaten at Javier and Luis's seminal restaurant **Tito Luigi** in the heart of Pradollano. Take a look on the walls and

you'll find evidence of the Spanish royal family's many sojourns down to the golden slopes of the Sierra Nevada... and plenty more aside.



HISTORIC: Tito Luigi and owners Javi and Luis



Indeed, over the last three decades, this wonderful restaurant has provided tucker for bullfighters, Hollywood stars and politicians.

And it's perhaps not a surprise for a joint that consistently provides for 250 covers at night during the busy season... and it won't cost you an arm and a leg.

Specialising in good Italian fare, it serves up great pizzas, pasta dishes and my favourite squid-ink spaghetti with prawns.

The pair have another, hipper restaurant **Tito Tapas** just up the road and a third more formal restaurant up the hill in the middle of the resort.

One thing for sure, since I first came to review the restaurant scene of the Sierra Nevada a decade ago, things have changed substantially.

While this may not be San Sebastian, the sheer variety of restaurants in Pradollano is as good as anywhere in Andalucia... and the quality keeps getting better. Much of this is thanks to a strong influx of foodie restaurateurs in recent years, with the latest including an excellent Japanese, **Shimbuya**, the buzzy **Mar Sala** and the excellent **Braseria**.

"You really need to have your specific niche and I really like to do things differently," Yolanda, from Braseria told me.

This certainly rung true when she brought out a delicious starter of thinly sliced foie gras

with mango and strawberries and a rocket salad, followed by a churrasco de ternera served with a ripe melon and brown sugar!

The trendy joint is the second place she and partner Jaime have opened after working for seven years at the nearby **La Fondue de Noa** restaurant, which is a more traditional place, but really popular with punters on the slopes.

With its classic Alpine look, it is hard to miss, but be warned, there are a few modern twists on the food including the half dozen different ways to have a fondue. One is a Mexican-style called 'Chingona' and another is called 'Curry House' which is obviously a hit with the Brits.

But, without a doubt, still leading the way in the creativity stakes is Stevie Silva and his hip young team at **Ci Vediamo**.

I met him and his charming girlfriend Luna Coronado, who runs the restaurant, exactly a decade ago,

and their success could not be more deserved.

Opening just as the worst recession in Spain's history kicked in, they did anything but contemplate their navels and came out fighting with new dishes by the week and a new look every season.

Former professional snowboarder Silva loves to experiment in the kitchen (much of this after his regular trips abroad in the autumn to places like Indonesia, Mexico and Brazil) and he changes his menu by the day

You really need to have your specific niche and I like to do things differently

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HIP: Tito Tapas has great wines by the glass

PLATE



CREATIVE: Inaki and (inset) bosses Stevie and Luna at Shimbuya

depending on what he can find in the markets. And after the success of various Asiatic dishes - such as uzukuri of turbot with yuzu and kimchi and an amazing soft crab tempura - it was perhaps no surprise that he would attempt to branch out further. And the result of this is the fabulous new restaurant **Shimbuya**, an Asiatic-fusion joint, which he and Luna have created in one of the coolest spots,



Continues on next page

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Top of the pile

From previous page

halfway up the resort on Calle Virgin de las Nieves.

Staying faithful to the Japanese style of minimalism, it has electric blue tiles on the wall and lots of plain wood and even a slot machine at the door.

This is a must-visit on a trip to the Sierra Nevada to try out its great sushi, made by Stevie and his team, in particular Inaki, from Pamplona, on the spot. The version of a California Roll I tried was simply amazing with a king prawn, salmon and sesame seeds.

While up here, you must also consider trying the excellent **Swell** next door.

This is one of the coolest places to eat, where many of the locals go and with a great mix of dishes, such as salads and woks.

I had some superb gyozas and a great burger, which ticked the box, particularly as I watched a Champions League game on the big screen on one side.

Another great new place to try out is **La Carigüela**, which is the sister restaurant (but the complete opposite) of the resort's most popular tapas joint **Bar Ski**, set up by Nichi nearly two decades ago.

Here you will find Nichi's partner Fatima running a classic soul kitchen concentrating on excellent quality fish and the resort's only Moroccan dishes, including a delicious chicken tagine.

This is a classic local place, warm and friendly, where service is at a premium and where you will eat some of the resort's best food, including my personal favourite the tartare of bluefin tuna with avocado, apple, cucumber and caviar.

In particular, stop to chat to Fatima's son Mohamed, who is a livewire of information and at 21 as amiable as anyone I've met in the Sierra Nevada.

Back down in the main part of Pradollano there are plenty of other good places to look out for.

These include **La Muralla**, run by Argentinian Gonzalo Funes, and appropriately with the best steaks in the resort, not to



TRENDY: Swell



HOT: La Mar de Buena and boss Carlos

mention excellent wines by the glass.

The 'tostas' are also great and come in various guises, while I loved the milhoja of foie gras.

He and his brother Luciano also run the brand new **Muralla Burguer**, almost next door,



which specialises in the best quality burgers on the slopes.

It's a lovely spot and makes a great addition to what is easily the most competitive run of restaurants in the Sierra Nevada.

And don't forget the brothers'

other bustling spot **Las Gondolas**, right in the heart of the town and perfect for some apres ski light bites, a hot drink or a beer.

The cool sounds playing to the terrace attract a cool crowd and you will struggle to find a seat on many days.

Just up from here, look out for the amazing **Bodega Casablanca** run by Jose Carlos Villanueva, who grew up on the slopes, with his father opening one of the first hostals in the 1960s.

The historic photos add to the atmosphere (as does a framed Olive Press article!) and the heart-warming soul food is always excellent, and includes stews, lentils as well as prawns wrapped in potato with a soya mayonnaise and lovely lamb chops with whisker-thin wild asparagus.

Newer and really leading the charge food-wise is **La Mar Sala**, where Carlos has created an ambient spot, perfect for tapas and wines by the glass.

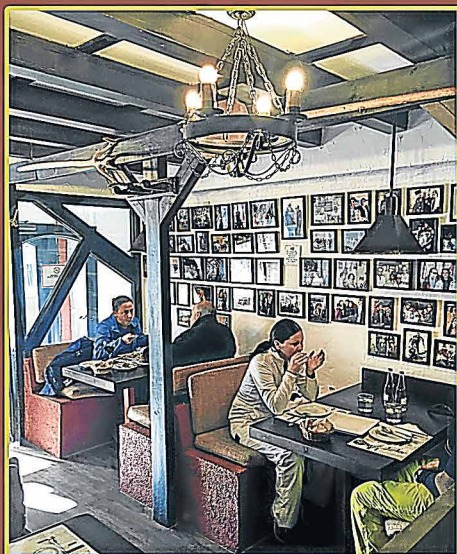
This prime spot by the Melia hotel is normally filled to the rafters and counts on some excellent wines by the glass and the very best seafood from Motril, including boquerones, cigalas and conchas finas. A genuine find. He has also just opened ano-



SOUL FOOD: Fatima's La Carigüela and (right) Carlos at Tia Maria



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ther place called **La Mar del Bueno**, which is a very stylish place and promises to be a true winner this winter, with a decent, creative looking menu. Another excellent place overlooking the slopes is **Tia Maria**, which has a good mix of dishes and is a great place for breakfast. Run by Carlos, the brother of Tito Luigi's Javier, this is an institution and place to while away the day. Next door, you will find perhaps the most scenic place to take lunch in Spain. Recently opened, **Al Dente** has a superb mix of Italian and Spanish dishes. My tomato, mozzarella

See next page



LENTIL TIME: At Bodega Casablanca and (below) team at La Visera



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TEAM: At Croissanteria

From previous page

bruschetta with basil and black olives was original, while I particularly loved the Saltimbocca, which is fillet steak stuffed with ham and with a rich ricotta sauce. There were some delicious 'niscalo' mushrooms added for extra measure.

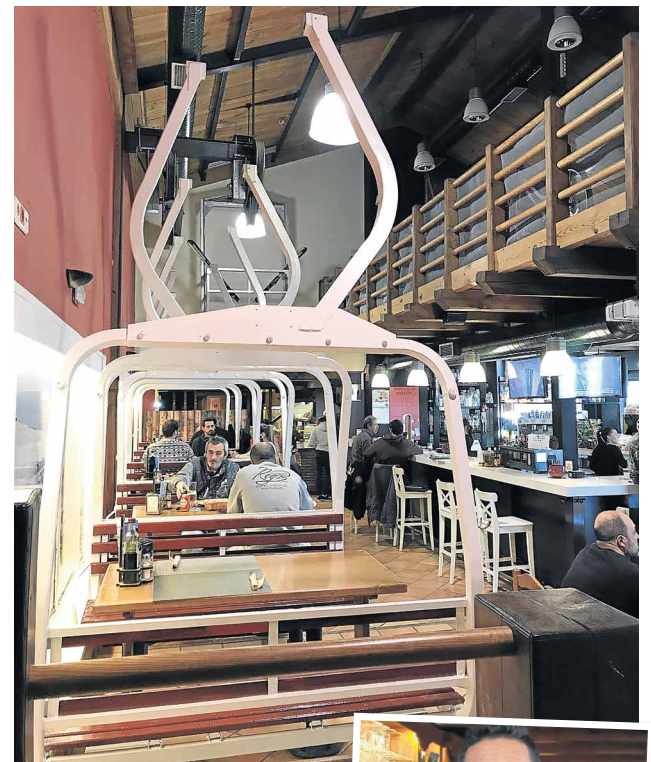
Recently opened by a friendly Granada lawyer Antonio, his team are knowledgeable and service is crisp.

He also co-owns the well established **La Visera** next door, along with chef Pepe, who is a very capable chef and always leading the charge in the kitchen.

An excellent spot for great value lunches or dinner is **Burger Telesilla's**, which does exactly what it says on the tin... excellent burgers in particular.

By far the most originally-designed eatery on the slopes (see right), you can also have a mean club sandwich and a nice range of salads.

For coffee, breakfast, and in fact just about everything, **Vertical** is hard to be beaten and



also has a great range of snacks and light bites, including hot dogs for the British clientele.

Another brilliant option, particularly for great coffee and amazing pastries, is **La Croissanteria**, in the heart of the main square.

Run by friendly Argentinians Cristian y Jessica, service is very much with a smile and there are even a couple of unusual south American chestnuts I had never tried before.



TALENTED: Boss at Vertical and (top) original Burger Telesilla's

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WHERE TO STAY



COMFORT: Kenia Nevada, Melia (below) and Hotel GHM (right)



Alpine dreaming!

It is hard to describe Pradolano as an authentic mountain village.

But, with a metre of snow on the ground and the sun out, it certainly has its charms. There are lots of places to stay but easily one of the most charming has got to be the authentic **Hotel Kenia Nevada**, which is well located near the centre of town and open most of the year. Run by

the friendly Don Pedro – who used to ski for the country as a youngster – it is clean, well run and serves up one of the best breakfasts in Spain.

It also has a gym and spa, with an in-house masseur, and plenty of communal areas, filled with charming old furniture. Another good budget option is the **GHM Monachil**, which is well located right by the slopes and has had a massive upgrade over the last couple of years and continues with the rooms now. It has an excellent breakfast buffet and a big car park, which costs just €10 a day for guests. You could also go upmarket and splurge on one of the two wonderful Melia hotels, right in the heart of the resort. The rooms at the **Melia Sierra Nevada** have been recently renovated and the New Premium rooms have been built on floors 7 and 8.

Meanwhile the nearby **Meliá**

Sol y Nieve hotel offers The Level experience, which is the hotel group's most exclusive commitment to luxury and personal service.

Another excellent option is to rent an apartment in the resort, of which there are many. Be careful, of all the many deals on the likes of airbnb and booking you could be in for a shock when you arrive, being stuck out in Babylon or find the place much smaller and dirtier than it initially looked in photos. A much better option is to trust the long-time local specialists, **Sierra Nevada Alquileres**, which has a massive 150 apartments on its books. The company is always busy but its boss Antonio (pictured left) always has time for a chat if around and will always find you a good deal.

Visit www.alquileressierranevada.es for more information.

