Life in the laid-back East (of the Costa del Sol) has never seemed more appealing, writes ‘West End Boy’ Laurence Dollimore

“WELCOME to the most beautiful town in Spain,” toothless local Jorge calls out in broken English as I wipe the sweat from my brow. (OK, so I still look like a tourist, despite four years in Spain.)

I had just hiked up to the top of Frigiliana which has indeed been crowned one of the country’s most picturesque pueblos, as plaques through the village will tell you at every turn. A 10-minute drive up from the coast from Nerja, it’s the pearl in a string of white-washed villages glistening in the hills of the Axarquia and its nearby Granada neighbour, the Costa Tropical. Either way, this is the very laid-back eastern end of the Costa del Sol, and boy, take it from me a westie based near Marbella, it really is a breath of fresh air.

“This is our little paradise,” beams grandfather Jorge, who has lived here...
his entire life. “We have a great local community, amazing food and sunshine, what more do you need?”

Some of the views inland wouldn’t look out of place in Jurassic Park - minus the dinosaurs - and hidden in that jaw-dropping landscape is a whole world of stunning mountain villages, underground caves and beautiful, unspoilt hidden coves.

Jorge recommends a visit to the outer walls of this old Moorish fortress town, and a break at his friend’s tapas bar, but it’s 300 metres back down the ancient cobbled street.

I opt for the closer Las Chinas, having just toiled up the Everest-steep slope in searing heat, the car parked a good kilometre down the road.

The food didn’t disappoint: a dorada as meaty as chicken, the whole three-course menu del día typically for the region, cheap as chips.

For something sweeter, head to the only sugar cane factory still functioning in Spain. Still chugging out deliciously sticky molasses (treacle), the El Ingenio miel de cana factory operates from the magnificent 16th century Nuestra Señora del Carmen mansion in the heart of Frigiliana.

Delve deeper into its maze of whitewashed alleyways - maybe after a restorative caña or two - and you can sense the pride here, with abuelas tending to their prize-winning geranium pots and not a scrap of rubbish blowing down the streets.

It’s a recipe that’s repeated across the hills of this region - fantastic food, incredible views, charming villages with Arabic ruins and just as friendly people - just ask the expats, who have set up in Sayalonga, Comares, Compeña or Salobreña.

If you’re not set on staying quite so rural, Vélez-Málaga the Axarquia’s capital, which offers a faster pace and its own brand of charm. On arriving, there’s only one direction to go – and that’s up!

From the ruined Moorish castle you can map the town with its busy roads, coffee shops and bars and a historic quarter typical of so many white hilltop villages embedded throughout a region that was once a jewel of Islam.

The route to the castle will

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take you to the Jardín de los Remedios, a park that sits parallel to the castle and overlooks a church with a spire that protrudes from the white-washed Lego-stacked houses below. With its streams, miradors and benches, the park is the perfect escape from the bustling centre, offering up fisheye lens views from the Med to the mountain tops. The entire city played a part in defending the mighty Arabic Nasrid Kingdom of Granada. Although parts of the building date back to the 10th century, its heyday came 400 years later, when it was one of a chain of watchtowers for a glimpse into the Moorish past which shaped the Axarquia region. Each has a wonderful crop of white houses stacked higgledy-piggledy around quaint plazas and along treeless cobbled streets. But no trip to the Axarquia is complete with seeing the charming Nerja. It's famous Balcon de Europa jutting out into the Med offers theatrical views while the popular town has managed to retain its Andalucian credentials and its rocky coves, sandy beaches and pueblos blancos are the envy of its more westerly Costa del Sol rivals. Nerja was left untouched by the massive tourism development boom which hit the likes of Torremolinos and Marbella from the 1950s onwards. But that all changed when five boys on a bat-hunting trip stumbled upon the opening to a cave on a hillside above the tiny fishing village of Maro, a few miles east of Nerja. Vast caverns were revealed, with spectacular rock formations showing evidence of Paleolithic man. General Franco himself came to view the ‘Cueva de Nerja’ and coach-loads of visitors subsequently followed suit. And when Nerja was chosen as a location for the 1980s TV series, Verano Azul, its future as a tourism destination was set. The series left an indelible mark. Now, wherever you go in Nerja, you'll come across the name, which means blue summer. There is a Verano Azul travel agency, bus company, park, block of apartments ... you may even find a bar serving a Verano Azul cocktail. But if you want to get away from it all - the disco bars, the tourist shops and the bustle - head for one of the small coves just below the town, or nearby in Maro. Nerja’s beaches are cut off from the town and roads, backed by sheer cliff face. You can sit on the sand for hours in solitude, lose track of time, without seeing a sign of civilisation, just coastline colliding with blue sea in both directions. It is just so un Costa del Sol! But then again, I am from the western end. And, sitting alone on my rock, toes in the sea, watching the sun set over Malaga, the sleepy, do-nothing lifestyle of the laid-back ‘East’ has never seemed more appealing.
All about the A
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The sugar-canes rattled like bones on the wind, and the dark-blue mountains stood close around, sharp and jagged, like a cordon of police'

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STUNNING: The coastline is much more rugged than the Costa del Sol
The first village encountered heading east out of Nerja is La Herradura, on a beautiful horseshoe bay. Until tourism arrived it was one of the poorest villages on the coast. These days it’s a charming spot, sitting on a pretty stretch of coastline and with an attractive low-rise feel to it. Plenty of expensive homes dot the Punta de la Mona area, and include that of Spain’s celebrated guitarist Andrés Segovia, who had a house here.

Make sure to head into town to see the seafront monument that recalls Spain’s biggest naval disaster. It occurred in 1562 when the families of soldiers from Málag to Orín on the African coast took refuge here from a storm. The wind turned, with extreme violence, trapping the fleet between two headlands, Cerro Gor- do and Punta de la Mona. Altogether, an incredible 25 vessels sank leading to 5,000 people losing their lives. Moving along, we come to the other key resort of the Costa Tropical, Almuñecar.

When Laurie Lee trekked across Spain in 1935 — vividly recorded in his book As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning — he came to a halt in ‘Castillo’, a village backed by a band of mountains and fronted by a strip of grey sand which some hoped would be an attraction for tourists. Castillo was in fact Almuñecar, Lee changed the name to protect his friends. Today modern apartment blocks line the coast here, but fortunately the old town, crowned by castle ramparts, has been preserved. It is an attractive labyrinth of narrow streets. While large numbers of north Europeans visit in winter, it attracts mainly Spanish visitors and retains its Spanish character. Behind the town thousands of tropical fruit trees flourish in the sheltered Río Verde and Río Seco valleys. The unique micro-climate allows the growth of mangos, custard apples and avocados. Sadly though, 1000 years of sugar production on the southern coast of Spain came to an end in 2006 when the last auquacero (cane refinery) closed at nearby Salobreña.

Few towns are as impressive on first sight as Salobreña. Its diverse history as a town, bay, fortress and beach is evident all over. Doubly so in the old town’s narrow streets, lined with well-preserved traditional, whitewashed houses. It’s a charming place to visit in winter, it attracts mainly Spanish visitors and retains its Spanish character. Behind the town thousands of tropical fruit trees flourish in the sheltered Río Verde and Río Seco valleys. The unique micro-climate allows the growth of mangos, custard apples and avocados. Sadly though, 1000 years of sugar production on the southern coast of Spain came to an end in 2006 when the last auquacero (cane refinery) closed at nearby Salobreña.

When Mathilde Haalstra decided her team needed a new, higher profile office to service the Costa Tropical area, she thought big. Very big. Rather than look for something in the heart of town, or on an industrial estate, the boss of Villas Colores Spain decided to buy an entire building.

The fact that it was a hotel - perhaps the best in Salobreña - was an added bonus. Now Hotel Mibao on the main road above the stunning resort doubles up as her company’s new base, as well as a totally new business opportunity for the ambitious Dutch businesswoman.

“I realised it was a win-win straight away,” she explains. “Our last office had no window space for our properties to rent or sell and it was also out of the way.”

She has spent the last six months improving the menu, decor and quality of the rooms at the hotel, but still has plenty more ideas for the summer ahead.

It also serves as the perfect reception area for clients of the two dozen holiday villas her team rent out on the Costa Tropical, as well as house-hunters visiting the area.

“And looking after hotel clients is the same as with the villas,” she adds. “It’s all about attention to detail and good service.”

Haalstra moved to Spain from Holland, where she ran a busy town hall, three years ago. Since then she has turned Villas Colores into one of the leading rental companies on the Costa Tropical. All the villas are carefully managed by the office and cleaning team of 20.

“We don’t just rent them, we make sure they are carefully managed and run to perfection,” explains the mother-of-three from Utrecht.

“In summer they get fully booked but in the winter and spring they are perfect for holidaymakers looking to be near the beach, golf courses, as well as the ski slopes. Granada and Malaga are both less than an hour away.”

To rent a villa or enquire about their property management services contact the team at +34 958612027 or rentals@villascoloresspain.com or visit www.villascoloresspain.com

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HISTORIC: The Costa Tropical is steeped in history, with centuries old buildings at every turn

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June 2019

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Continues on Page 26
A traditional part of meals along the coast and in the Alpujarras is the Vino del Azúcar, a hearty rosado. Until recently the region’s wines never roused much attention from connoisseurs. Today, however, half a dozen bodegas are making serious attempts to produce quality vintages by introducing new grape varieties and modernising their methods and making some fine reds and whites.

Conditions are unique, as the Tempranillo, Garnacha, Cabernet Sauvignon and native vines are wafted by breezes from both the Sierra Nevada and the Mediterranean. Definitely worth a little exploration.

David Baird is the author of the best-selling East of Malaga - Your guide to the Axarquia and Costa Tropical. He has lived in the area for decades and also written about the infamous rebels who fought against Franco after the civil war in his book Between Two Fires - Guerrilla war in the Spanish sierras, much of it based in the Costa Tropical.

Q: What has Nerja got to do with Trivial Pursuit?
A: It invented it

It is possibly the most successful board game of all time, with over 100 million units sold in 26 countries and in at least 20 languages... and it was born in the Axarquia.

It happened after two young Canadian journalists stayed in Nerja in the winter of 1980, having quit their jobs to work on the game and persuade investors to part with their money. Chris Haney, a high-school dropout, had been working as a picture editor in Montreal while his friend David Abbott was a sportswriter. The pair lived at El Capistrano, a villa resort where Haney’s parents had a house, and they allegedly worked 16 hours a day thinking up questions for their game - fuelled by San Miguel. And lots of it.

But while they enjoyed the paella, the beer and strolls along the Balcon de Europa, they struggled to find investors for ‘Six Thousand Questions’, as it was originally called.

Just one Nerja resident decided to invest, a Canadian barman. He is now a millionaire. The game went unnoticed for two years. They lost money on every copy they sold and it looked to be a disaster. But then once the first cheques started rolling in they never stopped.

Within months it was selling by the million and in 1984, Time magazine called it ‘the biggest phenomenon in game history’. And it is still incredibly popular, with Nerja’s first Trivial Pursuit tournament currently being planned for this year.
POWERING to almost 1000m the rugged massif of El Fuerte provides a stunning backdrop to the pretty village of Frigiliana, just inland from Nerja. The mountain played a dramatic role in the region’s history at the time of the last Morisco uprisings. The Moslems who stayed on after the Reconquest knew they were living on borrowed time yet were loathe to abandon this exquisite swathe of Al Andalus. Taking refuge atop the rocky pinnacle of El Fuerte their last stand against de Zuarzo’s Christian troops is one of the most evocative incidents of the Morisco rebellion. When you get to the top of this dramatic pinnacle of rock you’ll appreciate why they chose the mountain as a last refuge.

OVERVIEW
This is a relatively easy and emblematic walk, taking up to three hours. The path that leads up from Frigiliana is well marked and easy to follow even if you have some 650m of fairly steep climbing to negotiate. But the extraordinary panorama that awaits at the top more than justifies the effort. Returning by the same route is just as much of a treat: the vast views along the way make this itinerary an absolute must-walk.

The Nitty Gritty
Starting point: La Plaza del Ingenio at the entrance to Frigiliana
Grade: Medium
Distance: 8.5kms
Time: 3hrs
Total Ascent/Descent: 730m

One of Andalucia’s most rewarding mountain adventures lies in wait among the olive trees, inland from Nerja, writes Guy Hunter Watts

To the Moors’ last stand!

The Moslems who stayed on after the Reconquest knew they were living on borrowed time yet were loathe to abandon this exquisite swathe of Al Andalus. Taking refuge atop the rocky pinnacle of El Fuerte their last stand against de Zuarzo’s Christian troops is one of the most evocative incidents of the Morisco rebellion. When you get to the top of this dramatic pinnacle of rock you’ll appreciate why they chose the mountain as a last refuge.

The Route
The walk begins in Frigiliana in the square at the entrance of the village, La Plaza del Ingenio next to a round hut containing a puppet theatre. From here head up the cobbled road beneath El Ingenio passing a row of ceramic plaques. Continue along Calle Real then opposite house no.9A cut right up a cobbled stair-case at a sign Barrio Morisco-Mudéjar. At house no.13 pass beneath an arch then bear right at a sign Panoramicas. Reaching the fabulous Garden Restaurant the path divides. Carry straight ahead passing above the restaurant. After 100m the path narrows then loops steeply upwards. Reaching a tiled bench head straight on following a sign El Castillo. You pass several sculptures, the work of a resident expat. Zigzagging higher you will love the views across the village and east towards the Higuérón valley. Climbing through a swathe of young pines you pass a dilapidated mirador. Passing a second mirador you reach a bluff from where you’ll see a large water tank down to the left. Cut left on a narrow path which zigzags down to a track (15mins) where, angling right, head past the water tank then cut right up a cobbled staircase that passes a mill then zigzags up to a pylon. Here bear left. After climbing steeply the path angles left into a group of pines, descends for a few metres, then resumes its ascent. The trees thin out as views open out towards the Mediterranean. The path runs on towards the northwest, parallel to a ridge which is now to your right. Bearing right it climbs more steeply as views briefly open out to the north. Soon the path adopts its former course to the left of the ridge before passing an old calera (glos-sary) (55mins) then runs on towards the towering massif of El Fuerte. Passing through a breach in the rocks angle left then continue to the summit of El Fuerte (976m) where you reach a trig point and a sign Fin de Sendero (1hr 40 mins). Return by the same route back to the start point of the walk (3hrs).

SITTING PRETTY: Guy Hunter Watts at the top

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**Don’t be warded off by the ‘phantom’**

In 1959, five local lads discovered a large cave complex in the province of Granada. They were officially opened to the public in the summer of 1960. No tropical downpour can dampen the delights of Motril and Almuñécar, towns with different pasts whose Costa Tropical location makes them siblings under the skin, writes Laurence Dollimore.

Despite enormous crowds at peak times, within seconds of descending the stairs you are in an extraordinary place, where one drink alone can cost the equivalent of my entire lunch bill. It’s one of many food bars you’ll find in this ancient town, where tapas is often provided free of charge, especially with every drink – not so different from the likes of Marbella, where frequent rebuilings make the site more impressive.

The ‘phantom hall’ in particular – so called because of the ghoul-like appearance of its structures – is astounding. A marvelous glistening underworld of stalactites and stalagmites, with each flight of stone steps the eerie caverns get more impressive. Despite enormous crowds at peak times, within seconds of descending the stairs you are in an extraordinary place, where one drink alone can cost the equivalent of my entire lunch bill. It was off to Da Nicola’s pizzeria, owned by friendly British expat Nigel, who moved to the seaside village 12 years ago after more than 20 years in Lanzarote. “Life is just so much more tranquil here,” he told me, “there’s a great international community too, mostly British, Swedish and German.”

The businessman set up his restaurant just over two years ago. “People move here for a relaxed way of life and they definitely get that, it’s not as chaotic as the Costa del Sol and there’s still a nice buzz about the place, especially in summer.” An hour’s drive from Benalmadena, Almuñecar is a more famous known as an important setting in British writer Laurie Lee’s account of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. His book – As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning – is referred to the town as ‘Cas-tillo’, in an attempt to disguise people’s identities. But Almuñecar’s history goes much deeper than the Civil War.

It was originally called Sexi when it was founded as a colony by the Phoenicians around 800 BC – a fact not lost on some residents today, who still refer to themselves as Sevillanos. Over the next 600 years it would become an important port and town with a large fish salting and curing industry that was a major supplier to Greece and Rome. The Romans took over the town during war with the Phoenicians in 218 BC. Almuñécar thrived and was recognised for its loyalty to Rome in 49 BC thanks to its fishy forte. Evidence of this was uncovered during excavations in the Majuelo Botanical Gardens in the 1980s, a large section of which is still on display. The Romans are believed to have been the first to fortify the Castle of Saint Miguel, although frequent rebuilding has destroyed most of its very extensive fortifications. Just below the castle on the landward side is the Cueva de Siete Palacios, although it is less a cave and more the largest remnant of a Roman palace yet found in Almuñecar. It survived for hundreds of years as ‘social housing’ until the ‘cave dwellers’ were

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**WHAT A VIEW:** You can see from the coastline to the snowy mountains from the Castillo de San Miguel
Sister act re-housed in the 1970s. Only then did its true origins become apparent and it now houses the town museum. It means there is lots to do and see if you need to pass the time on the very few rainy days here. In summer, you can head to one of over a dozen beaches that play host to thousands of tourists every year. And if you’re looking for more of a city vibe, drive 20 minutes east to Motril, Granada’s second biggest town and the capital of its coast. Here you’ll find great food at great prices, and of course, the legendary free tapa per drink. Once the sugar refinery capital of Andalucia and, arguably, Spain there are still eight old sugar refineries standing tall today. They were once seen as the future of the city, now they are legacies. The Nuestra Señora de la Cabeza is another vestige of the town’s commercial heritage. Both a refinery and a distillery, it sits next to the public swimming pool and the Parque de las Américas.

A SLICE OF HISTORY: The leftover Roman ruins from as far back as 1AD in Almuñécar (right)

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Welcome!
One-eyed bandit!

David Baird follows in the footsteps of the bandoleros, who made the Axarquia infamous

A

BOUT the biggest hazard you will meet on the back roads of the Axarquia is a herd of goats, a lorry overloaded with farm produce or a hootersy inviting you to dally for a lazy hour or so. But it was not always so. Bandoleros, or bandits, were once a major feature of life in this area. Colourful types though they were, it did not make the experience of having your valuables purloined at the point of a blunter than any pleasanter.

In the years following the Napoleonic Wars, so lawless were the roads that the English writer Richard Ford advised travellers to bring along “a decent bag of dollars” to appease any highwaymen you might meet. He also suggested carrying an impressive-looking watch, noting: “The absence of a watch can only be accounted for by a premeditated intention of not being robbed of it, which the ladrón considers as a most unjustifiable attempt to defraud him of his right.”

One of the most notorious 19th-century bandits was El Bizco (the one-eyed bandit). They remember him in his birthplace, El Borge. Take a ride up there and witness how the landscape becomes steeply undulating, clothed in olive groves and vineyards.

Several streets are named after revolutionary heroes such as Che Guevara, the legacy of a lethal, anti-monarchy major who often made headlines with his controversial decisions. The Mudéjar-Renaissance Rosa- rio church is impressive, with im- mense pillars supporting its three naves. Look for two holes in the weather-vane atop the church. They were allegedly made by El Bizco’s shotgun. The Same has never worked but— after he blasted away—it functioned perfectly.

Otherwise El Bizco’s record is pretty gruesome. With his comrades in crime, Fracisco Antonio and Manuel Mejones, he terrorised the whole area. At times, these cut-throats were used by unscrupulous ‘escoceses’, powerful land-owners, to sway local elections.

Wander down a maze of narrow streets and at the bottom end of the village you find the olive mill where El Bizco was born. It has been converted into the Posada del Bandolero, combining an attractive hotel, restaurant and museum. At the side of the bar you can see the original mill-stones and a deep well.

El Bizco’s chum, Mejones, meanwhile is said to have committed one of his most daring crimes in Frigiliana (six kilometres inland from Nerja). Disguised as a priest, he entered the Ingenio, the mansion owned by the Counts of Frigiliana, pointed a pistol at the manager and made off with around 100,000 pesetas. Today the Ingenio houses the last factory in Europe producing miel de carúa (molasses), on sale in local shops.

Frigiliana was a flash point in the 1940s when anti-Franco guerrillas based in the adjacent sierra sought to provoke a general revolt. In a bid to dislodge them, Franco’s tightly controlled media labelled them ‘bandoleros’.

If you hike into the mountains with their abrupt inclines and deep gorges riddled with caves, you can see how difficult it was for the Civil Guards to track the guerrillas.

High up, near a pass called the Río de la Miel valley, a de-lightfully peaceful valley to their bases in the moun- tains, claims to be the oldest in Andalucia. At this inn was a welcome rest stop for the guards.

The village you find the olive mill was: “In Spain the king rules, but in the sierra I do.”

They recognised him as El Tempranillo, Andalucía’s most notorious bandit, whose claim was: “In Spain the king rules, but in the sierra I do.”

On the back roads of the Axarquia, the king rules by his agents. They were forced to chew their wooden spoons. On other occasions, El Tempranillo was more galling. Always courteous, if he stripped a lady of her best jewellery, he would kiss her hand and assure her: “Such a pretty hand needs no adornment.”

Truth to tell, those bandits were hardly a bunch of Robin Hoods. Most would have robbed their own grandmothers given the chance. But time has cast a romantic aura over them, popular mythology has embroidered their characters and their memories have been enshrined in everything from museums to the names of gourmet dishes.

Perhaps most famous for its association with the lawless past is a lonely inn standing on a cross-roads at one of the highest points of the Axarquia. To reach it, you take the old road from Málaga to Granada, the A6103. It weaves its way through the forested Montes de Málaga, then past limestone crags to the Venta de Alfarnate.

First opened in 1691, this inn, standing beneath the rocky buttes of the Tejó de Gomer, claims to be the oldest in Andalucia. But it gained its fame as “guingueros’ (trippers) tuck into roast kid, partridge and pork.

In the past all manner of traveller stopped here. A plaque notes: “In this Venta on April 21, 1850 the Mail on the way to Málaga was stolen by a group of 12 armed men. The bandits took particular care to secure a packet of Government prosecutions and criminal lawsuits coming from the Granada courthouse.”

On one occasion in the 19th century, a horseman rode up, the customers were tucking into gazpacho from a common bowl. Said there were no spoons left, he used the crust of a loaf to scoop up the cold soup—then produced a pistol.

“Now,” he commanded, “do the same as I do. Eat your spoons!”

Just east of Nerja, the forested sierra i do”.

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Today the Ingenio houses the last factory in Europe producing miel de carúa (molasses), on sale in local shops.

Frigiliana was a flash point in the 1940s when anti-Franco guerrillas based in the adjacent sierra sought to provoke a general revolt. In a bid to dislodge them, Franco’s tightly controlled media labelled them ‘bandoleros’.

If you hike into the mountains with their abrupt inclines and deep gorges riddled with caves, you can see how difficult it was for the Civil Guards to track the guerrillas.

High up, near a pass called the Río de la Miel valley, a de-lightfully peaceful valley to their bases in the moun- tains, claims to be the oldest in Andalucia. At this inn was a welcome rest stop for the guards.

The village you find the olive mill was: “In Spain the king rules, but in the sierra I do.”

They recognised him as El Tempranillo, Andalucía’s most notorious bandit, whose claim was: “In Spain the king rules, but in the sierra I do.”

On the back roads of the Axarquia, the king rules by his agents. They were forced to chew their wooden spoons. On other occasions, El Tempranillo was more galling. Always courteous, if he stripped a lady of her best jewellery, he would kiss her hand and assure her: “Such a pretty hand needs no adornment.”

Truth to tell, those bandits were hardly a bunch of Robin Hoods. Most would have robbed their own grandmothers given the chance. But time has cast a romantic aura over them, popular mythology has embroidered their characters and their memories have been enshrined in everything from museums to the names of gourmet dishes.

Perhaps most famous for its association with the lawless past is a lonely inn standing on a cross-roads at one of the highest points of the Axarquia. To reach it, you take the old road from Málaga to Granada, the A6103. It weaves its way through the forested Montes de Málaga, then past limestone crags to the Venta de Alfarnate.

First opened in 1691, this inn, standing beneath the rocky but- tress of the Tejó de Gomer, claims to be the oldest in Andalucia. But it gained its fame as “guingueros’ (trippers) tuck into roast kid, partridge and pork.

In the past all manner of traveller stopped here. A plaque notes: “In this Venta on April 21, 1850 the Mail on the way to Málaga was stolen by a group of 12 armed men. The bandits took particular care to secure a packet of Government prosecutions and criminal lawsuits coming from the Granada courthouse.”

On one occasion in the 19th century, a horseman rode up, the customers were tucking into gazpacho from a common bowl. Said there were no spoons left, he used the crust of a loaf to scoop up the cold soup—then produced a pistol.

“Now,” he commanded, “do the same as I do. Eat your spoons!”

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RUINED: An old mill in the Río de la Miel valley once used by smugglers
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Property Reference FR538
Price: 215,000€

Property Reference FR539
Price: 195,000€

Property Reference FR514
Price: 345,000€

Property Reference: FR528
Price: 485,000€
It really is all about the location, at the stunning award-winning holiday property complex overlooking Lake Vinuela.

If is certainly corny to use ‘location, location, location’ in a property description, but one exception must surely be this unusual complex in the Axarquia, which has just come up for sale. There are ten cottages and a restaurant complex, overlooking the reservoir of Lake Vinuela, with its turquoise waters and stunning views. Cantueso is a holiday destination that has over the last 12 years developed a reputation for its cozy cottages and family friendly facilities. The Guardian newspaper has listed it in its top ten European self-catering family holiday destinations. And for those days when mum doesn’t want to cook, there is an on-site restaurant which has been number one on TripAdvisor for many years. The landscaped gardens surrounding the cottages are admired for their colourful diversity throughout the year, and visitors love to pick figs, oranges, or a lemon to go in their gin and tonic. There are also interesting plants and shrubs such as the Coral Tree, Pineapple Guava, Kumquats and of course the ubiquitous olive. The site has been developed very much with children in mind and all the cottages have individual terraces and the large pool is securely fenced with self-closing gates. The swing park, football field, mini golf course and trampoline provide lots for active youngsters, and babies and younger children are not forgotten with a host of items available to make travelling families’ lives easier. Not least, having large items such as buggies available to save costly excess baggage fees, and the Cantueso policy of allowing arrival and departure to be on any day, can lead to cheaper air fares. Make sure to visit our website www.cantueso.net, as it not only describes the cottages and restaurant in great detail, but also has masses of tourist information, excellent photographs and videos of the complex and surrounding area. There is an associated blog which regularly adds items of current interest, and a live webcam overlooking the lake which attracts thousands of hits each week. Nearby Periana village, which sits at 450m above sea level, is surrounded on three sides by mountains and has lake views to the south. Just under an hour from Malaga airport it attracts nature lovers, photographers, cyclists and walkers who enjoy the subtropical climate and marvel at the myriad of springtime wildflowers. In summer there is often a welcome breeze with thermal currents over the lake attracting eagles and other birds of prey. Although the village only has 3,500 inhabitants they certainly know how to enjoy life, and throughout the year there are many fiestas and events, some which last several days! Only for sale due to personal reasons, in total the site covers about 18,000 sq m and has ample scope for further developments.

Holiday Complex FOR SALE

An unusual commercial opportunity to buy the freehold and business of a well established family friendly holiday complex in Andalucia, comprising ten self catering cottages, a restaurant (rated number one in area) with 50 covers inside and 50 outside, and owner’s apartment. The whole site is tastefully landscaped with an area of over 18,000 m² and is surrounded by olive groves. There are wonderful views to the south over Lake Vinuela and mountain ranges on other aspects.

BELIEVE THE HYPE

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- Beautiful holiday location
- 10 air-conditioned cottages
- Well known on-site restaurant
- Rural location with spectacular views
- Landscaped gardens

Cost of the freehold and business: 2,500,000€
THE Axarquia and the Costa Tropical are slowly developing a varied dining culture after decades of meatballs and goat stew. Led by a string of outsiders, many of them expats, a drive towards experimentation has seen a growth of creative cuisine.

In Nerja there is a great melting pot of places to eat, with one of the best being Carabeo, whose setting could not be improved sitting on desirable Calle Carabeo overlooking the sea. Up in the nearby village of Frigiliana you would be mad to miss the amazing Garden restaurant, which consistently produces some of the freshest, most varied (read spicy and original) food in the Axarquia (see next page).

A varied menu with plenty of original dishes sits in a lovely back street with the best views in the entire region. Possibly the best food in inland Axarquia is to be found at Hotel Vinuela, which has got better and better since opening 20 years ago. Combining a great mix of local ingredients and creative Mediterranean cuisine, you will not be disappointed.

The menu is detailed and includes such joys as rabo de toro spring rolls with lettuce hearts, as well as an excellent cress salad with cured beef and foie shavings. There is even a Moroccan tagine as a main course, while fresh fish is always on offer. In good weather you dine outdoors overlooking the lake reminiscent of the Days of the Raj, and it is no surprise that the King is said to have eaten here.

Also close to the Vinuela lake you will find the unusual boutique hotel/restaurant Las Orquideas, with one of the best backdrops in Spain, overlooking Vinuela Lake and Maroma mountain. Not far away in the charming village of Archez, you will find one of the most alluring new restaurants in the region. Called Meson Mudejar, it was recently taken over by a Polish couple, who have turned it into a Vegan restaurant with rooms. A charming spot in the extreme, you sit and take an early evening drink in one of the sleepiest town squares imaginable, alongside one of the Axarquia’s most evocative church towers, which was built in Arabic times.

The meson itself sits around a charming cobbled patio and counts on its original beams, old doors and windows and numerous other features. The menu is varied and interesting, particularly for a carnivore like me.

Continues on Page 30
WHERE TO EAT

Spicy mix

I wasn’t sure what to go for but was steered to the de-licious spicy onion fritters, as well as the cauliflower wings, and raw sushi rolls, which had carrots, nori seaweed, leeks and cas-hew nuts all rolled in cour-gette slices.

A light vegetable curry was splendid, while a ‘Beyond meat’ burger from Califor-nia was a surprise indeed, having zero meat but plenty of flavour.

In Compara, try the highly rated El Pilón, which is very much the stand-out restaurant in the area. A popular social hive, the bar area is great for tapas, while the restaurant itself is a must try.

Close by is the wonderful Bentomiz restaurant, si-tting in the same name vineyard, in Sayalonga, which has won internatio-nal awards for its wines for a decade.

Mixing its wines in a fa-bulous food setting, this is one hell of a place for lunch, with incredible views and stylish flourishes to boot.

Up in Comares there is a
good variety of places to eat, including, Atalaya, where you can also stay the night.

Finally, another excellent inland place is Cantueso, which has been serving the Periana area for over a de-cade.

A holiday complex, rated by the Guardian as within the Top Ten best in Europe, the restaurant is normally full at lunch and frequently busy at night.

Costa Tropical restaurants

There is a big mix of good places to eat on the Costa Tropical as well.

By far the most emblematic must be legendary Restau-rante el Penón, which sits in pole position literally built on the famous rock below Sollobrena town.

The name was on various occasions over the last two decades and rarely been disappointed, not just with the excellent ambience and views, but also by the servi-cce.

Professionally run, by two lo-cal friends, it focuses on top quality fish and seafood, in-cluding lobsters, and has an excellent wine list to boot.

Next door is Restaurante La Bahía, which is anything but your usual fried fish affair, and apart from the cool jazz music, there were a number of interesting di-shes.

These included the so-called ‘quesad bien’, a clam and langoustine stew, which was delicious, as well as an excel-lent value rich and creamy fish soup at just €6.

Another place worth chec-king out here is Hotel Níbar above the town, where the menu keeps getting better and better, since it was taken over by the new owners from Villas Colores.

Another place in Salobre-na is Arais which is the creation of Francisco ‘Paco’ Izquier-do, an ambitious chef, who has not only cooked since his teens, but also makes his own rum, from a factory in the town.

Dubbing his food as ‘an ad-venture’ his place is certainly well outside of the ordinary.

Beautifully decorated, it is split into two parts, a bust-ling bar area, full of creative furniture and lighting, and a stylish dining room next door.

Up in La Herradura, another splendid restaurant is the wonderful beach restaurant La Sardina, which has a splendid setting and excel-lent staff.

The fish was incredibly fresh as was the seafood and the
owner, now well into his 70s, is regularly about bossing the team.

Also look out for English chef Mark Parris at No.20, who along with business partner Laurent Hue is doing a great job.

Mark, from Kent, has consi-deorable pedigree in the kit-chen, having trained under Albert Roux at Le Gavroche in London, before doing stints at the Oxo Tower, Har-vey Nichols and Souffle.

I was very impressed with the attention to detail and the lovely mix of flavours in original starters, which come (sort of) in combos.

At the top of the road a great bar to hang out in and grab some tapas and a decent range of beers is Hideaway.

Finally for a charming inland spot look out for el Naci-miento, in Velez de Bena-udal.

This is one trip well worth the journey, particularly to take in the Museum of Olive Oil, en route.

Hidden up a tiny track on the edge of the village, you will find this charming spot overlooking a maize, olive tree and waterfall.

Once an olive mill, it is a great place for lunch or din-ner and the menu is a good range of dishes typical from the Granada region.

STUNNING: Both the winemaking skills of Clava and cooking of Andre impresses at Bode-gas Bentomiz.

A comp
dream

WITH stunning views across emble-matic Vinuela lake and up towards the unforgettable peak of Mount Ma-romo, Hotel Vinuela is one of the most scenic places to stay in Andalucia.

With stylish bedrooms, an amazing restau-rant and peaceful grounds, it is hardly sur-prising that it is already the stand out place to stay in the Axarquia.

Now 20 years old, this four-star spot has the region’s most exclusive spa and mas-sage centre.

Set in the hotel’s grounds with views across the lake, the Mei Wellness & Spa is a new concept in exclusive well-being therapy.

Perfect for individuals or for couples, the spa - which counts on a jacuzzi, sauna and hammam - is rented out privately by the hour.

“You will experience feelings of complete serenity and harmony, a unique and unpa-ralleled experience that you will never for-get,” promises hotel manager Maria Herre-ro, of the B&B chain.

The company has also recently taken over another amazing hotel Cortijo Bravo near the coast near Velez-Malaga.

This wonderful place was once one of the homes of the Larros family, who grew sug-ar cane for their rum factories along the coast.

The converted mansion is style personified and each room offers lovely views inland towards the mountains or along the coast.

Now a boutique hotel, many of its 21 rooms count on four poster beds and balconies.

In Nerja you are spoilt for choice for good places to stay. In pole position is Hotel To-baco, which couldn’t be in a better loca-tion in the heart of town by the emblematic Balcon de Europa.

The rooms are fantastic in size and you are right next to the excellent Cochrane’s Irish restaurant and bar, which is good for a lo-cal meal and has the best terrace in Nerja.

You might also check out Hotel Carabeo
WHERE TO STAY

The Axarquia and Costa Tropical have a great selection of places to stay, discovers Jon Clarke

In one of the best parts of the town. Looking to stay in a charming inland village, look no further than Meson Mudejar, in Archez. Recently taken over by a charming Polish couple, it is a sleepy spot with simple, clean rooms, that sit above the vegan restaurant downstairs. It’s good value and you can head out for a range of walks from the door as well as enjoy experiencing the typical Axarquia life.

Along the Costa Tropical perhaps the best place to stay is the recently renovated hotel Miba, in Salobrena. This wonderful eight-room hotel, recently taken over by the team at Villas Colores, perches on an escarpment overlooking Salobrena town. Every inch of this modern hotel maximises on the incredible views, be it to the breathtaking nearby town, which soars up like a wedding cake from stage left, or stage right to the snow-capped Sierra Nevada mountains. The rooms are spacious and each have their own private terrace. It also has an excellent restaurant and rooftop bar and swimming pool with stunning views up the coast. This is a great place for an evening cocktail Up in Motril look out for casa de los Bates, which is an amazing 19th century Italianate mansion, with sumptuous bedrooms and well appointed dining and sitting rooms. The places ooze history and the family home, now owned by two charming brothers Borja and Inaki, is full of antiques and photos of its illustrious guests, which have included Nelson Mandela and the King of Spain.

B{ }bou Hotel La Viñuela & Spa is one of the most special boutique hotels on the Costa del Sol, located in a natural environment of the most beautiful in Andalusia, on the shores of Lake La Viñuela and at the foot of the Sierra de Tejada and Almijara, a few minutes from the beach, a unique location.

Everything adds up so that your stay at B{ }bou Hotel La Viñuela & Spa is a mixture of emotions and sensations to be enjoyed, surrounded by 15,000 m2 of beautiful gardens, in 37 exclusive rooms, with two swimming pools and a private spa, among many others services. Savoring the best traditional cuisine in the area, in its rooms or terraces, is an incomparable experience.

B{ }bou Hotel La Viñuela & Spa draws a gastronomic route through Andalusia, which starts with the fresh fish and seafood from Málaga, continues with the important tropical mango and avocado from the Axarquia, as well as the incomparable goat from Canillas. A unique Mediterranean traditional cuisine, a delight for the palate and the senses.

It will be a pleasure to receive you.

B{ }bou Hotel La Viñuela & Spa, a place to lose yourself and meet again ...

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SLEEP WELL: At Hotel Miba (above)
RETREAT: At Vinuela Spa and (left) Cortijo Bravo

LA VIÑUELA & SPA

B{ }bou HOTELS

B{ }bou Hotel La Viñuela & Spa
This fantastic townhouse is located in Corcoya, a tranquil town, with all the local amenities close by and surrounded by stunning Andalucian countryside whilst only being a short 5 minute drive to the large busy town of Alameda. Benefits from amazing patios, pool and stunning views.

This townhouse is close to all the local amenities shops, bars and restaurants and within walking distance to the beautiful flamingo lake and nature reserve. The property is accessed by a private gated entrance to the front patio and the main entrance.

This lovely property is set just a short drive from Aguilar de la Frontera and has a private gated entrance leading to a front courtyard garden and onto a walkway that runs down the side of the property giving easy access to the rear garden. It has a private swimming pool a spacious patio area with summer kitchen.

This well presented 184m2 build 3 bedroom, 2 bathroom Townhouse boasts a private courtyard and a sun terrace, ready to move in to, is situated in the popular large town of Alcaudete in the Jaen region of Andalucia. Located on a wide level street with on road parking right outside the property.

This lovely property is set just a short drive from Aguilar de la Frontera and has a private gated entrance leading to a front courtyard garden and onto a walkway that runs down the side of the property giving easy access to the rear garden. It has a private swimming pool a spacious patio area with summer kitchen.

This rural chalet is situated near to popular Castillo de Locubin in the Jaen region of Andalucia, with a generous level 2.866m2 plot. It includes a magnificent swimming pool and large private terraces all with panoramic views over your land, olive groves, the countryside and to mountains beyond.

This rural detached 3 double bedroom Spanish cortijo boasts spectacular mountain views. The countryside home comes with a generous 805m2 plot and has mains electricity and town water connections, in need of updating. priced to sell giving you the opportunity to create a large family home.

This rural detached 3 double bedroom Villa property is located on the popular urbanisation of Lomas de Sabato in the Malaga region of Andalucia, with outstanding mountain views and parts of the lake, plus only being a 4 minute drive to all shops, restaurants and amenities.

Located in the tranquil town of Mondron, 5 minutes from Periana. Although on the outskirts, it’s only a 25 minute drive to the coast town of Torre del Mar, where the beach and chill out chiringuitos are. It has 2 floors, a patio and an underground garage, which can be accessed by the rear end of the house.